

A STUDY OF THREE NATIONAL NEWS MAGAZINES'  
COVERAGE OF AIDS/HIV VICTIMS COMPARED  
WITH GOVERNMENT AIDS/HIV STATISTICS

By

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

Along with the ruins of their great cities, their artwork and their mythologies, civilizations appearing along the timeline of human history have left us with tales of their plagues. Their historical records tell the gruesome tale of the impact of epidemic disease on their populations.

The Greeks, with their account of an outbreak that researchers believe must have been measles, chronicled the first recorded epidemic in 430-429 B.C. (Conner, 14). Even the great Roman Empire, at its peak in 165 A.D., lost as much as one-third of its population to what might have been smallpox (Conner, 14). Later, in 251, and again in 542, Rome suffered plagues that left it crippled, underpopulated and unable to defend itself against the Visigoth and then the Muslim armies (Conner, 15).

Of course plagues are not a thing of the ancient past. In this century, humanity has already seen the pandemic of Influenza that killed more than 20 million people worldwide. Then there was the poliovirus epidemic, that killed thousands of American children. According to researchers Fann, Conner and Villarreal, "improvement in hygiene and sanitation occurring in developing societies at the time of the epidemic actually predisposed young adults from the highest socioeconomic class

to the paralytic form of polio by delaying exposure to the virus until they were young adults, when it is most damaging to the nervous system" (Conner, 19).

Fann, et al, believe that the reaction of the American people to this epidemic, which stole their most prized members, demonstrates the effect that social behavior can have on the course of an epidemic (Conner, 19). According to the researchers, this epidemic had a profound effect on the American consciousness, as seen by the highly visible crusades during the first half of the twentieth century (the March of Dimes)" (Conner, 19). Clearly, the nature of the victim (there were about 50,000 total deaths from polio in the first half of the century) can influence a society's perception, and response, to a disease.

In 1993, with more than 169,000 people in the United States dead, more than 249,000 Americans infected with the deadly virus and millions worldwide infected or dead, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS, has yet to stir as strong a reaction from the American public as its paralytic predecessor (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 17).

Why the slow response? Perhaps the answer can be found by examining a similarly transmitted disease, syphilis. Like syphilis, AIDS/HIV is sexually transmitted and, similarly, many blamed the disease on a break-down of social values, implying that all that was needed to stop its spread was abstinence from any sexual contact that was not marital and monogamous (Conner, 20).

To that same scenario, AIDS added the weight of two of the greatest American taboos, homosexuality and drug use. Unlike the victims of polio, its victims aren't the most valued in society, but perhaps ironi-



cally, some of its least valued members: homosexual men and intravenous drug users.

Whether hardened by bigotry or misled by media apathy during the first few years of the epidemic, the American public hardly perceived a need to react to the disease with a campaign reminiscent of the one used to stop polio. Instead, as with syphilis, many people originally saw AIDS victims as people who "deserved" to be sick. Obviously syphilis was not brought under control by a return to idyllic values, but rather by the combined efforts of medical professionals (assisted by the advent of new antibiotics), government and the media in a national education campaign (Conner, 21).

Indeed, by their own admission, media professionals have a responsibility to help the public understand the truth about matters of public well being. A good example of the press' attempt to regulate its behavior is the report of the Hutchins Commission shortly after World War II. According to J. Herbert Altschull, "The most enduring of the commission's demands was that the press not only present the facts in a meaningful context, but that it must also disclose the truth about the facts" (Altschull, 283).

This study, a content analysis, attempts to track the progress of one of the media during this current crisis. This type of analysis, according to researchers Lawrence Frey, et al, is used to gather data from which the "underlying motivations of the texts' producers and the effect of the texts on consumers" can be extracted (Botan, 213).

Reflecting on the research of Alan Gaspar Nyitray in his 1984 report, A Study of Print Media Coverage of AIDS Victims and Virus Carriers Compared With Government Statistics, this study examines three

national news magazines, Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report, for a two-year period. Specifically the period for this study is January 1991 to December 1992. By comparing the make up (i.e., the risk groups) of individuals with AIDS/HIV who appear in the news magazines during the study period with actual instances of infection by risk group as reported by the United States Centers for Disease Control, it is possible to determine whether the news magazines were presenting their readers with an accurate picture of the disease's victims, thus avoiding unnecessary, or underestimated, fear of infection.

Specifically, the objectives of this study were to determine:

(a) Is there a significant difference between the demographic make up (i.e., risk group) of individuals with AIDS that appear in the combined coverage of Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report and the demographic make up of individuals with AIDS/HIV as reported by the Centers for Disease Control?

(b) Is there a significant difference among the three news magazines in the demographic make up (i.e., risk group) of individuals with AIDS that appear in their articles?

(c) How frequently do explicit statistical references to risk groups affected by AIDS/HIV appear in articles related to AIDS/HIV in the three news magazines? And does the frequency of the inclusion of explicit statistical references differ depending on the risk group that is the subject of the reference?

This chapter presented background information about the purpose of this study, as well as relevant questions related to the media's coverage of the AIDS epidemic. Chapter II reviews the academic research and popular literature relevant to this study. Chapter III presents the

methodology used in this study. Chapter IV describes the study's findings. Finally, Chapter V presents a discussion of the findings and suggests future research topics related to this study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since its commonly recognized debut in 1981, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS, has turned a spotlight on a myriad of American taboos. With its embryonic development in the gay community, its spread through the ranks of intravenous drug users and finally its attack on the heterosexual population, the disease has brought once unmentionable sexual behavior out of the closet and onto the front pages of newspapers and magazines nationwide. This brief introduction presents an overview of press coverage of AIDS in the mainstream media.

#### Criticism of Media AIDS Reporting

On June 5, 1981, the Centers for Disease Control published the first report on the epidemic. The report, published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), was based on cases of Pneumocystis that had been diagnosed in Los Angeles (Shiltz, 68). The report was tailored to hide the link between the disease and its victims' sexual orientation, according to investigative reporter Randy Shiltz (Shiltz, 69). Shiltz said CDC staffers debated how to present the report in such a way that it would not "offend the gays and (not) inflame the homophobes" (Schiltz, 69).

Apparently their sensitivity was not unwarranted. Both the homosexual press and the mainstream press have been criticized for their sluggish response. Noted gay physician and writer Lawrence Mass commented on the reticence of both the mainstream and homosexual press to write about the disease. Mass said that the "early resistance of the mainstream press to covering AIDS was in part due to homophobia and prejudice, whereas the initial reluctance of the homosexual press was in part denial and in part ambivalence about the implications of AIDS for sexual liberation" (Panem, 124).

By April 2, 1982, the disease had accumulated a variety of names — among them, Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID) (Shiltz, 120), Community Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (CAIDS) and Acquired Community Immune Deficiency Syndrome, (ACIDS) (Shiltz, 138). Whatever it was called, by then it had spread across nineteen states and seven countries (Shiltz, 138). Of the 300 cases in the United States, 242 were gay or bisexual men, 30 were heterosexual men, 10 were heterosexual women, and 18 were men of unknown sexual orientation (Shiltz, 138).

In the May 12, 1982, edition of the MMWR an article entitled "Generalized Lymphadenopathy Among Homosexual Males" informed the media that hundreds of cases of the disease had been identified (Kinsella, 18). None of the information in the article sparked any coverage. In fact, it wasn't until Fall of 1982 that the media took notice of any victim.

The first America heard from the mainstream media about AIDS was a report about a twenty-month-old boy who contracted the disease during a blood transfusion. This report catapulted the disease into national news. According to James Kinsella, a writer for the *Los Angeles Herald*

*Examiner*, this young victim circumvented the media's prejudice and bias, and allowed a previously wary press to present the American public with a "worthy" victim (Kinsella, 19).

Unfortunately that report was only the start of an avalanche of incomplete or misleading reports about AIDS. A good example of the type of misinformation brought to the public in those early reports was David Brinkley's June 18, 1983, report on ABC's "World News Tonight" (Kinsella 122). Brinkley reported that "The terrible new disease, AIDS, first seen among homosexuals, drug users, Haitians and hemophiliacs, is now appearing among people who are none of these. A study in the New England Journal of Medicine says apparently the disease can be spread by contact between heterosexuals -- and there's no cure in sight" (Kinsella 122).

Kinsella points out that when Brinkley's report aired, the American public recently had been scared by an inaccurate report from the Journal of the American Medical Association that reported the disease could spread through casual contact.

Kinsella asks, "Was this more proof of that? And what exactly did Brinkley mean by 'heterosexuals'? Weren't most hemophiliacs, Haitians and drug users heterosexual (Kinsella, 122)?"

In fact, had Brinkley reported the information as it appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine, he would have inserted the word "sexual" before "contact between heterosexuals (Kinsella, 122)," and avoided sparking unfounded fear in an already alarmed public.

Clearly, the most notable turning point in coverage of the disease came in July and August of 1985. In July, after weeks of fending off rumors about his obviously failing health, actor Rock Hudson announced through his press agent that he had AIDS (Kinsella, 143). Finally cover-

age of the epidemic flourished. Many daily papers and magazines in middle-America wrote about the disease for the first time (Kinsella, 144). A month later, Ryan White, a 13-year-old hemophiliac who contracted the virus from contaminated blood products, dominated media coverage and turned the nation's attention to adolescents with AIDS (Chang, 12).

Writing for the April 1991 issue of Journalism Monographs, Everett Rogers, et al, explained, "Even though the Hudson and White stories were quite different in important ways, they gave the American public a definite perception that AIDS was a matter of general concern" (Chang, 13).

The article goes on to say that the impact of these events on the subsequent media coverage of AIDS was "enormous" (Chang, 13). But was that coverage giving the public the "real" picture of potential victims?

In a survey of TV portrayals of people with AIDS done in 1987 by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, heterosexuals were eight times more likely to be shown than homosexuals, although there were about eight times as many homosexuals with the disease (Kinsella, 135). These results were certainly consistent with the results of Alan Nyitray's 1984 study of print media coverage of AIDS victims and virus carriers compared with government statistics. Having examined several national newspapers and magazines, Nyitray found that "while government statistics reveal that homosexual men comprised 72 percent of the disease's victims...an individual with AIDS reported in the media was three times as likely to be from a risk group other than the homosexual risk group (Nyitray, 76).

Nyitray went on to say that the data he collected suggested that

readers of the publications involved in the study were not seeing an "accurate, proportional representation of the people whom AIDS has dealt its most severe blow" (Nyitray, 77). This type of reporting, Nyitray said, caused conflicting messages for readers and inhibited their ability to receive clear information about AIDS. He wrote:

Granted, the image of a small baby or young student dying of AIDS is a compelling news story to both reporter and reader. But this aspect of the AIDS epidemic should not dominate media AIDS coverage to the extent it warps the public's picture of the disease and the risk groups most affected. To rectify this image, the media could easily have reported available government statistics about the groups that comprise a large majority of the AIDS cases. But seldom was an explicit reference made about the large numbers (or high percentage of total AIDS case load) of homosexual men and intravenous drug users who have this disease. (Nyitray, 78)

#### The Current State of The Disease

Five years later, the disease has taken on a new face. At the end of 1992, the Centers for Disease Control reported a total of 253,448 people had been infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 9). Of that number, 169,623 persons have died (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 17). It is important to note here that these numbers do not actually reflect the number of persons who are infected with HIV, but rather only those who have been reported to the CDC. According to AIDS and Women: A Sourcebook, "fewer than 30 states require reporting of those who test positive for antibodies to the HIV virus" (Laurich, 2). The CDC estimates that the number of people in the United States who are HIV positive from all causes is actually somewhere between 1 million and 1.5 million people (Laurich, 2).



Where demographic lines were once primarily drawn between victims on the basis of sexual orientation, they are now drawn by race and gender. A report published in the November 30, 1990, issue of the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report stated, "AIDS incidence is also projected to continue to increase through 1993 among each of the principal racial/ethnic groups, as well as among both men and women" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 31). The proportions of AIDS cases among blacks, Hispanics and women have increased since the first half of 1987 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 31). The focus of the contemporary MMWR reports reflect the change in the way the medical community tracks the disease.

The increase of HIV infection in women in particular poses some serious problems, since the women who are most likely to be infected are also the most likely to give birth (Gwinn, 1706). The American Medical Association estimated that 6,079 births occurred to seropositive women in the U.S. in 1989 (Gwinn, 1706). The journal article goes on to say that this occurrence implies thousands more reproductive-age women in the U.S. are also infected with HIV (Gwinn, 1706). Race-specific rates from this report consistently reveal higher HIV seroprevalence in black women, "a pattern resembling that observed among women and children with AIDS" (Gwinn, 1706).

The pictures of infected and potentially infected persons that women, particularly minority women, see in the media is very important in light of the recognized progress of the disease in this demographic group.

## The Public's Perception of AIDS

According to Mindy Fullilove, M.D., of the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at Columbia University, "Women don't perceive themselves to be at risk. Even if they understand that there are dangerous behaviors, they haven't translated those dangers to themselves...they say, 'I'm not at risk because AIDS is something men get (Garrigus, 174).'"

A study released by the National Center for Health Statistics in May 1991 found that 29 percent of the unmarried women participants didn't think, or weren't sure whether a symptomless, healthy-seeming man could even transmit the virus (Garrigus, 174).

More insight into public perception of risk emerged in 1989 when the National Center for Health Statistics released two studies entitled "Changes in Adult Attitudes About AIDS" and "More Changes in Adult Attitudes About Adult AIDS Transmission" (Laurich, 51).

The first study examined the percentage of adults surveyed who thought that selected statements about AIDS were true. Eighty-five percent of the respondents said that the statement, "There is no cure for AIDS at present." was true. Sixty-three percent knew that AIDS is an infectious disease caused by a virus, but only 56 percent knew that a person can be infected with the AIDS virus and not have the disease AIDS (Laurich, 51).

The second study produced estimates of the percentage of adults who thought it very unlikely or definitely impossible to become infected with HIV in selected ways.

Eighty-three percent of the respondents believed that one could

not become infected simply by living near a hospital or home for AIDS patients. Sixty percent agreed that it is not possible to become infected by using public toilets. Only 47 percent of the respondents thought it was unlikely that one could become infected by sharing plates, forks or glasses with someone who has the AIDS virus, and even fewer (42 percent) indicated that they understood that mosquitoes and other insects cannot transmit the virus (Laurich, 51).

Another "risk" category that seems to have emerged with a disproportionate amount of media attention is called "Health-care workers." Benjamin Freedman, writing for Perspectives on AIDS, concluded that the risk, although present, is very small. He explained, "Even those who are exposed are very unlikely to be infected; perhaps one in two-hundred needlestick exposures from known HIV carriers will seroconvert (Overall, 92). Coverage related to this group during 1991 and 1992 is reported in this study.

#### Theoretical Basis For Concern

In AIDS the Second Decade, the Committee on AIDS Research and the Behavioral, Social and Statistical Sciences reported (Miller, 39) that in the U.S. "the primary target of the disease is the nation's most productive population - 20- to 40-year-old adults (Miller, 39). The Committee reported, "In this country, gay men still bear the burden of most of the illness related to AIDS. But as the epidemic progresses and the number of persons who are at risk increases, changes in disease prevalence are becoming apparent" (Miller, 39).

Considering some of the fundamental theories of the press, it becomes clear that an accurate, comprehensive media picture of AIDS victims seems more important than ever.

One of the most important functions of the media is its "agenda setting function." In their book, Theories of Mass Communications, Melvin DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach recall the landmark work of Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (Ball-Rokeach, 259). Lippmann concluded that how the press interprets an event can "radically alter people's interpretations of reality and their consequent patterns of action" (Ball-Rokeach, 259).

Lippmann concluded that people act not on the basis of what truly is taking place or has occurred, but on the basis of what they think is the real situation obtained from depictions provided to them by the press - meanings and interpretations that often have only a limited correspondence to what has happened. (Ball-Rokeach, 260)

The observations that led Lippmann to his theories of media influence are dated, but they are relevant to the AIDS epidemic. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach recalled Lippmann's observation that when on November 6, 1918, the press falsely reported an armistice (five days before it actually became a reality), people were rejoicing on the basis of a falsely constructed depiction of reality. Meanwhile several thousand young men died on the battlefields.

In its August 3, 1991, issue, Time magazine reported that the World Health Organization says at least 30-million people around the world could be infected with the AIDS virus by the year 2000 (Thompson, 30). It is clear that "falsely" reported pictures of victims can mislead people into believing that they are not candidates for HIV/AIDS infec-

tion. The purpose of this research was to investigate whether the national media are offering the public false or true pictures of AIDS/HIV victims.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Selection of Units of Analysis

This study was a content analysis of three national news magazines, Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report, for the period from January 1991 through December 1992. The primary purpose of the analysis was to examine three national newsmagazines' coverage of AIDS victims and HIV/AIDS virus carriers compared with government statistics related to infected persons.

According to media scholars Lawrence Frey, et al, in Investigating Communication, content analysis is "a systematic, step-by-step procedure used to answer research questions." They go on to say that this procedure is an adequate "technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (Botan, 213). These inferences can include such things as the "underlying motivations of the texts' producers and the effects of the texts on consumers" (Botan, 213).

Some advantages of content analysis are that it is an "unobtrusive technique" because the texts already exist and researchers do not have to solicit texts. Another advantage of this type of research is that, unlike interviews and questionnaires, content analysis studies data as they appear in their original context (Botan, 213).

Frey, et al explain that content analysis procedures involve selecting texts, determining the units to be coded, developing content

categories, training observers to code units, and analyzing the data. Among those procedures, Frey indicated that the selection of categories carried the greatest weight. He wrote, "The value of content-analytic study rests on developing valid categories into which units can be classified" (Botan, 215). Fortunately the categories for this study were selected to reflect the exhaustive categories created by the Centers for Disease Control.

The relevant content analysis procedures for this study are explained below.

#### Selecting Texts

The three magazines, as well as many of the research methods in this study, were chosen to reflect those used by Alan Gaspar Nyitray in his 1984 thesis project: A Study Of Print Media Coverage Of AIDS Victims and Virus Carriers Compared With Government AIDS Statistics.

The weekly magazines were also chosen because of their national distribution and because it is possible to examine the entire universe of issues from the study period.

#### Selecting Articles

Each article of each issue was scanned for any mention of AIDS/HIV, or an AIDS/HIV related issue. As Nyitray found earlier, "News magazines were less likely to use 'hard' headlines for stories. In other words, stories about AIDS occasionally had headlines that seemed to have little connection to the AIDS epidemic" (Nyitray, 25).

During the scanning process, key words that indicated a coder should read an entire article were:

AIDS	HIV	Sexually Transmitted Disease
Gays	Homosexual	Bisexual
Lesbian	Heterosexual	Tests
Drugs	Addicts	Needles
Children	Infants	Medical
Disease	Medicine	Blood
Cure	Hospital	Patient
Condom	Researchers	Gene
Rights	Caregiver	Haitian

Two portions of the news magazines, advertisements and opinion letters, were not included in the study because they were not considered indicative of the magazines' news product. All other portions (hard news, features, text that accompanied photographs and editorials) were included.

#### The Coding Process

##### Risk Groups of Individuals

Every specific individual with AIDS/HIV featured in the selected articles was coded for the categorical variable "Risk Group." The eight categories used for this variable included the six single mode of exposure categories used by the National Centers for Disease Control (CDC): men who have sex with men; injecting drug use; hemophilia/coagulation



disorder; heterosexual contact; receipt of transfusion of blood, blood component, or tissue; and other/undetermined. According to the CDC, "other" refers to the health-care workers who contracted AIDS after occupational exposure to HIV-infected blood and to patients who developed AIDS after exposure to AIDS within the health care setting. "Undetermined" refers to patients whose mode of exposure to HIV is unknown. In this study, "undetermined" also included those individuals cited in the selected articles whose risk group was not identified.

The seventh category for this study was "multiple modes of exposure." The reports of the Centers for Disease Control divide this category into 24 combinations of two or more modes of exposure, with the number of AIDS cases attributed to all combinations of multiple modes of exposure being 6 percent (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 10). Examples of the combinations of exposure modes identified by the CDC are: "men who have sex with men; injecting drug use," "injecting drug use; hemophilia; heterosexual contact" and "hemophilia; heterosexual contact."

For ease of reference the seven categories used for this study are listed below. Shortened names for some of the categories are used in the remainder of this report and are indicated in parentheses.

1. men who have sex with men (homosexual/bisexual)
2. injecting drug use
3. hemophilia/coagulation disorder (hemophiliac)
4. heterosexual contact
5. receipt of transfusion of blood, blood component, or tissue  
(blood receiver)
6. multiple modes of exposure

#### 7. other/undetermined

Each individual coded was placed in only one category.

As in Nyitray's study, only individuals with AIDS or HIV were coded. Aggregate references were not coded since the study focused only on specific individuals with AIDS/HIV who were presented in one of the three news magazines.

An example of an aggregate reference is: "All seven of the men at Saint Joseph House, a residence for persons with AIDS, have full blown AIDS." Another might be, "Three of the women, all mothers of babies with AIDS, didn't know they carried the disease until their babies were born." This aspect of the coding process is explained in the "Limitations" section later in this chapter (Nytiray, 29).

#### Explicit Statistical References

Explicit statistical references are references to government statistics related to the impact of AIDS/HIV on one of the designated risk groups. An example might be, "Less than one percent of all persons infected with AIDS/HIV were infected as a result of a contact with an infected health care worker." Another might be, "67 percent of all persons infected with AIDS/HIV are homosexual men." These explicit statistical references were included in this study, as in Nyitray's study, to get a picture of these publications' inclusion of government statistics.

This portion of the study differs from Nyitray's study. In his study, "Only an explicit reference to homosexuals or intravenous drug users as the risk groups most infected with AIDS was coded" (Nytiray 30). The rest of the risk groups were included for the current study.

Once all of the articles related to AIDS were examined, the number of articles that included at least one explicit statistical reference was compared to the number of articles that did not include any explicit statistical references.

Nyitray cited Warren Burkett's research (1986) that supported his idea that "in science and medical reporting, people can be led to erroneous decisions when they are given distorted or inaccurate information. Erroneous decisions also occur when important information is left out of a news story" (Nyitray, 78).

"This analysis of AIDS coverage," Nyitray wrote of his findings, "indicates the national print media were not including information that could have put the disease in better perspective" (Nyitray, 78).

Every specific statistical reference to the incidence of infection in a population of persons with AIDS/HIV featured in the selected articles was placed in one of the seven risk group categories identified above. Once compiled, they were examined to see if there was a difference between the number of articles with a statistical reference and the number of articles without a statistical reference. Also, the references were compared to see if there was a difference among the risk groups in terms of which risk groups were more likely to be featured in explicit statistical references.

#### Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were differences in the demographics of individuals with AIDS/HIV that appeared in three national news magazines during 1991 through 1992 and actual demo-

graphics of people with AIDS/HIV as reported by the Centers for Disease Control in its February 1993 report, HIV/AIDS Surveillance. Another purpose was to determine if there was a difference among the three magazines in the type of individuals with AIDS/HIV featured in their coverage during 1991 through 1992.

The following research questions were developed to guide the research:

#### Research Question One

Did the demographic make-up (i.e., risk group) of the individuals with AIDS who were featured in the coverage of the following news magazines during 1991-1992 reflect the demographic make-up of individuals with AIDS/HIV as reported by the Centers for Disease Control: 1) Time alone, 2) Newsweek alone 3) U.S. News & World Report alone, 4) Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report combined?

#### Research Question Two

What were the most significant disparities in the coverage of risk groups compared to the government statistics?

#### Research Question Three

How frequently did explicit statistical references to risk groups affected by AIDS/HIV appear in articles related to AIDS/HIV in the following news magazines: 1) Time alone, 2) Newsweek alone 3) U.S. News & World Report alone, 4) Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report combined?

#### Research Question Four

Did the frequency with which explicit statistical references were included differ depending on the risk group that was the subject of the reference?

#### Limitations

All research studies have limitations that prevent the researcher from getting a "complete" picture. However, by noting all of the identifiable limitations, both the researcher and the reader can weigh the conclusions against the limitations.

Often researchers talk about validity in terms of "external validity" and "internal validity." External validity relates to the generalizability of the findings (Botan, 118). In other words, can the research conclusions be applied to other publications? The researcher in this study sought to create external validity by choosing national magazines that reflect the "trends" of AIDS coverage in all publications. This assumption, of course, does not guarantee that the sources do reflect coverage in other national or regional publications.

Internal validity is related to the accuracy of the conclusions (Botan, 118). One of the factors that most affects internal validity is the randomness of the samples chosen for examination. Since this study includes the entire universe of issues published during the period of the study, internal validity is very strong.

This study, like Nyitray's, confronted a limitation presented by the exclusion of aggregate references. Since the coding procedure only allows the recording of references to individuals, groups of two or more

are not included in the results. This action means that parts of the picture of persons infected with AIDS/HIV covered by the news magazines are not presented.

Also, although individual references give readers a more concrete idea of how the disease is affecting people in their risk category, the absence of individual and statistical references from an article does not automatically imply that coverage is inadequate. For instance, an article about proper condom use may occur without individual or explicit statistical references to people with AIDS/HIV. In that case, the article would not have been included in the present study but certainly contributes to the education of readers from every risk group.

All of the above limitations should be considered when drawing conclusions based on the data collected during this study.

### Reliability

One of the threats to the reliability of research is bias on the part of the researcher. The researcher's perceptions of the articles or individuals in the articles could be influenced by his/her unintentional expectancy of a certain result (Botan, 126).

This type of bias is of less concern in this study because the coders were not required to make subjective judgements about whether to code an individual featured in an article. The coding process was simply a matter of counting the individuals with AIDS and placing them in the appropriate risk group. It is more likely that coding error occurred because a coder did not see an existing reference than that a reference was placed in the wrong risk group.

The researcher and one other person followed standardized proce-

dures for identifying and coding appropriate references to individuals with AIDS/HIV.

A test of coder reliability was conducted using three consecutive issues of *Time* from 1990. Both the researcher and the coder examined the issues and coded references to individuals with AIDS/HIV according to the variables mentioned earlier in the "Risk Groups of Individuals" and "Explicit Statistical References" sections.

The following equation was used to calculate the reliability measurement:

$$R = 2M/N_1 + N_2$$

In this case, "R" expresses the percentage of agreement between coders; "M" is the number of coding decisions on which the two coders agree; "N<sub>1</sub>" is the total number of coding decisions by coder #1; and "N<sub>2</sub>" is the total number of coding decisions by coder #2.

Coder reliability for the first dependent variable in this study was 1. Coder reliability for the second dependent variable was also 1. Again, it is not surprising that the coder reliability was high, since the coders were not being asked to make subjective judgements.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results reported in this chapter are the product of a content analysis of articles selected from three national news magazines, Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report, for the period from January 1991 through December 1992. The primary purpose for this analysis was to examine three national newsmagazines' coverage of AIDS victims and AIDS/HIV virus carriers compared with government statistics related to infected persons.

To obtain raw data for this study, two coders examined all of the issues of these magazines published during the study period. They searched for any mention of an individual with AIDS or HIV, and any explicit statistical references to people with AIDS or HIV. When the coders encountered an individual with AIDS or HIV, they placed that individual into one of seven categories related to modes of exposure developed by the Centers for Disease Control. Explicit statistical references to the incidence of AIDS/HIV were also analyzed using these categories.

In this chapter, a description of the data and subsequent analysis, using frequency counts and frequency tables, are presented in response to two research questions related to individuals infected with AIDS or HIV and two research questions related to explicit statistical references to people with AIDS or HIV.



## Research Questions: Analysis

### Research Question One Analysis

Did the demographic make-up (i.e., risk group) of the individuals with AIDS who were featured in the coverage of the following news magazines during 1991-1992 reflect the demographic make-up of individuals with AIDS/HIV as reported by the Centers for Disease Control: 1) Time alone, 2) Newsweek alone, 3) U.S. News & World Report alone, 4) Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report combined?

The demographic make-up (i.e., risk group) of the individuals with AIDS who were featured in the coverage of the following news magazines during 1991-1992 did not reflect the demographic make-up of individuals with AIDS/HIV as reported by the Centers for Disease Control in Time alone, Newsweek alone, U.S. News & World Report alone or Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report combined.

Actual Centers for Disease Control statistics related to incidence of AIDS/HIV in each risk group can be seen in Table I on page 28.

A total of 310 issues from the three news magazines were examined. Of those issues, 67 percent contained at least one article that mentioned AIDS or HIV. As seen in Table II on page 29, a total of 393 articles that mentioned AIDS or HIV were examined for this study.

U.S. News & World Report contained 135 articles. Newsweek contained 144 articles. And Time contained 114 articles. As seen in Table III on page 30, of those articles examined, 121, or 31 percent contained at least one reference to a specific individual with AIDS or HIV.

TABLE I  
ACTUAL INCIDENCE OF AIDS/HIV (BY PERCENTAGE)  
IN EACH RISK GROUP

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Other/Undetermined	4%
Gay/Bisexual	57%
I.V Drug User	23%
Heterosexual	7%
Blood Recipient	2%
Hemophiliac	1%
Multiple Modes	6%

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\* Actual incidence of AIDS/HIV in risk groups taken from HIV/AIDS Surveillance, U.S. AIDS Cases Reported Through December 1992, published by the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, 1993.

TABLE II  
 NUMBER OF ARTICLES THAT MENTION AIDS/HIV  
 BY MAGAZINE AND TIME PERIOD

Issues In Study Period	Number Of Articles That Mention AIDS/HIV In Each Month			
	US News	Newsweek	Time	All
January 1991	5	2	1	8
February 1991	2	1	1	4
March 1991	1	2	3	6
April 1991	2	3	4	9
May 1991	4	4	4	12
June 1991	8	8	5	21
July 1991	4	5	9	18
August 1991	5	4	3	12
September 1991	4	8	8	20
October 1991	3	3	8	14
November 1991	9	7	8	24
December 1991	8	9	5	22
January 1992	2	2	4	8
February 1992	5	4	10	19
March 1992	2	4	4	10
April 1992	5	6	4	15
May 1992	13	1	4	18
June 1992	7	8	5	20
July 1992	8	7	4	19
August 1992	10	14	11	35
September 1992	1	9	2	12
October 1992	13	11	2	26
November 1992	8	17	1	26
December 1992	6	5	4	15
<b>TOTAL ARTICLES FOR 24 MONTHS</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>393</b>

TABLE III  
 SUMMARY OF ISSUES, ARTICLES, AND REFERENCES  
 INCLUDED IN THIS STUDY

	Time	Newsweek	US News	All
# of issues in study	104	106	104	312
# of issues with articles	72	67	70	209
# of articles with references to individuals	39	52	30	121
# of references to individuals	54	100	55	209

\* The number of issues for Newsweek is greater because of two special issues published in 1991.

The total number of references to individuals infected with AIDS or HIV was 209. 54.1 percent of those individuals were not categorized as being in any of the risk groups identified by the Centers for Disease Control. These people were placed in the other/undetermined category. Also included in that category were individuals who contracted HIV or AIDS from their doctor, dentist or another health care worker, since the CDC includes these occurrences in this category. (See Table IV, located on page 32)

#### Research Question Two Analysis

What were the most significant disparities in the coverage of risk groups compared to the government statistics?

There were some significant disparities in the coverage of risk groups compared to government statistics. The number of individuals in the other/undetermined category who appeared in the news magazines (62%) was greater than the number of individuals in the other/undetermined category as reported by the CDC (4%). When the news magazines identified the risk group of an individual, they were more likely to identify a risk group other than the homosexual/bisexual risk group, even though that risk group accounts for 57 percent of all reported AIDS cases, according to the CDC (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 11).

Similarly, heterosexuals make up only three percent of the actual population of people with AIDS/HIV (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 11), yet they account for 12 percent of the references to individuals with AIDS/HIV in the news magazines. Intravenous drug users, who make up 23 percent of the actual population of people with AIDS/HIV

TABLE IV  
 NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF REFERENCES WITH AND WITHOUT  
 RISK GROUP IDENTIFICATION IN EACH NEWS MAGAZINE

	Time		Newsweek		US News		All	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Other/Undetermined	(36)	67%	(51)	51%	(43)	78%	(130)	62%
Gay/Bisexual	(4)	8%	(25)	25%	(4)	7%	(33)	16%
I.V Drug User	(0)	0%	(5)	5%	(0)	0%	(5)	2%
Heterosexual	(6)	9%	(13)	13%	(5)	9%	(24)	12%
Blood Recipient	(4)	8%	(2)	2%	(1)	2%	(7)	3%
Hemophiliac	(4)	8%	(3)	3%	(1)	2%	(8)	4%
Multiple Modes	(0)	0%	(1)	1%	(1)	2%	(2)	1%
Number of references	54		100		55		209	

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 11) only make up 2 percent of the population of persons with AIDS/HIV who appear in the news magazines.

Among the magazines, Newsweek was much more likely to cover individuals with AIDS or HIV. Newsweek was also more likely to cover persons in the two most populated CDC categories, the gay/bisexual category and the intravenous drug user categories, than either Time or U.S. News & World Report. During the study period, Newsweek included information about 100 specific persons infected with AIDS/HIV in articles that mentioned AIDS/HIV. Time and U.S. News & World Report presented information on only 54 and 55 individuals respectively. Likewise, 24 percent of the individuals in Newsweek were in the gay/bisexual category, whereas only 8 percent in Time and 7 percent in U.S. News & World Report fell into that category.

Five percent of the individuals in Newsweek contracted AIDS/HIV through intravenous drug use. Neither Time nor U.S. News & World Report included any persons from that risk group.

### Research Question Three Analysis

How frequently did explicit statistical references to risk groups affected by HIV/AIDS appear in articles related to AIDS/HIV in the following news magazines: 1) Time alone, 2) Newsweek alone, 3) U.S. News & World Report alone, 4) Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report combined?

Each of the 393 articles that mentioned AIDS/HIV found in the three magazines was also coded for the inclusion of explicit statistical

references. As seen in Table V on the following page, the number of articles without an explicit statistical reference (355) was greater than the number of articles with an explicit statistical reference (38). Time published 20 articles with an explicit statistical reference. Newsweek published 8 articles with an explicit statistical reference. U.S. News & World Report published 10 articles with an explicit statistical reference.

#### Research Question Four Analysis

Did the frequency with which explicit statistical references were included differ depending on the risk group that was the subject of the reference?

The frequency with which explicit statistical references were included differed depending on the risk group that was the subject of the reference.

Although only two patients have been documented who developed AIDS after exposure to HIV within the health care setting (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 11), that group received the greatest percentage (18 percent) of the explicit statistical references. Health care workers infected while performing health care tasks were next in line for the greatest number of explicit statistical references. Although they account for only 1 percent of persons infected, they received 16 percent of the explicit statistical references. As mentioned earlier, these statistical references were placed in the Other/Undetermined category, since they are placed in that category by the CDC.

Among the magazines, Time published more explicit statistical



TABLE V  
 NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF EXPLICIT STATISTICAL REFERENCES  
 IN EACH NEWS MAGAZINE BY RISK GROUP

	Time	Newsweek	US News	All
Other/Undetermined*	(6) 26%	(5) 42%	(6) 43%	(17) 35%
Gay/Bisexual	(2) 9%	(1) 8%	(1) 7%	( 4) 8%
I.V Drug User	(4) 17%	(1) 8%	(2) 14%	( 7) 14%
Heterosexual	(4) 17%	(3) 25%	(3) 22%	(10) 21%
Blood Recipient	(4) 17%	(0) 0%	(1) 7%	( 5) 10%
Hemophiliac	(1) 4%	(2) 17%	(1) 7%	( 4) 8%
Multiple Modes	(2) 9%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	( 2) 4%
Number of references	23	12	14	49

\*According to the CDC, "other" refers to the health-care workers who contracted AIDS after occupational exposure to HIV-infected blood and to patients who developed AIDS after exposure to AIDS within the health care setting. "Undetermined" refers to patients whose mode of exposure to HIV is unknown. In this study, "undetermined" also included individuals cited in the selected articles whose risk group was not identified.

references (23) than either Newsweek (12) or U.S. News & World Report (14). Of those explicit statistical references published, Time was more likely to publish explicit statistical references to risk groups other than the Other/Undetermined group. Of Time's explicit statistical references, only 26 percent were coded in the Other/Undetermined group. Of Newsweek's explicit statistical references, 42 percent were coded in the Other/Undetermined group. Of U.S. News & World Report's explicit statistical references, 43 percent were coded in the Other/Undetermined group.

When it came to the risk group most affected by AIDS/HIV, the Gay/Bisexual risk group, the magazines published about the same percentage of explicit statistical references related to this group. Two of Time's references were to the Gay/Bisexual group. Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report each followed with one reference to that group.

The next most affected group, the I.V. Drug User group, fared a little better in terms of the number of explicit statistical references it received in the magazines. Time published the most references to this group with 17 percent of total references being credited to this group. U.S. News & World Report and Newsweek followed with 14 and 8 percent of their total references given to the I.V. Drug User group respectively.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

This study was a content analysis of three national news magazines, Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report, for the period from January 1991 through December 1992. It was conducted to analyze three national news magazine's coverage of AIDS/HIV victims compared with government statistics related to infected persons.

More than 169,000 people in the United States have died as a result of HIV/AIDS infection since the disease was identified in 1981 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 11). And although shocking, this number is believed to be remarkably small compared to the number of people on the planet who are actually infected with the disease.

Since 1981, the media have been heavily criticized for their treatment of information about the progress of the disease, with most of the criticism focused on the media's reluctance to report on the disease's victims because of their sexual orientation.

In 1984, Alan Gaspar Nyitray conducted a study entitled A Study of Print Media Coverage of AIDS Victims and Virus Carriers Compared With Government AIDS Statistics to determine if the national news media were presenting a false picture of the disease's victims. He found that indeed persons looking to the print media for an idea of who is affected

by AIDS would get a skewed picture of which risk groups are being most affected.

Nyitray found that the two groups most affected by the disease, homosexuals and intravenous drug users, were not the most likely to be featured in the news magazines. "In fact," Nyitray reported, "an individual with AIDS reported in the print media was three times as likely to be from a risk group other than the homosexual risk group." (Nyitray, 76)

This study, conducted five years later, attempted to see if the media have made any progress in presenting a more accurate picture of AIDS victims. The publications used in this study were examined to see if the make up of the population of victims who appeared in the magazines reflect the actual incidence of infection, by risk group, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control in 1992.

#### Conclusions

Five years after Nyitray's study, the national news magazines used in this study, Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report, were still presenting an inaccurate picture of the demographics of AIDS/HIV victims as compared to government statistics. Homosexual/bisexual males, notably the most affected risk group, make up 57 percent of all victims (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 10), yet they account for only 16 percent of the individuals with the disease identified in the news magazines. This compares with 28 percent of the individuals with the disease identified as homosexual in the newsmagazines during Nyitray's study (Nyitray, 67).

Even more striking than that, however, is the disparity between the government's report of the percentage of persons in the "Other/undetermined" category and the percentage of persons from the newsmagazines that falls into that category. While the government reports only four percent of all victims are in the "Other/undetermined" category, the content analysis of the news magazines placed 54 percent of individual victims in that category. This compares with 7 percent of the individuals with the disease placed in the "Other" category in the newsmagazines during Nyitray's study (Nyitray, 67).

Regardless of whether media representatives are trying to protect the privacy of individuals with AIDS/HIV by not reporting the mode of exposure, or are assuming that readers already know the mode of exposure for a certain individual (for instance, Magic Johnson, a high-profile professional basketball star who is reported to have contracted HIV through heterosexual contact was mentioned without an accompanying risk group 17 out of the 25 times he was featured) or are simply responding to their own or their readers' homophobia, they are denying readers accurate information about their own chances of contracting the disease through their most likely mode of exposure. The large numbers of references which do not stipulate one mode of transmission are lost opportunities for readers to identify personally with an infected individual.

The "Other/undetermined category" also received a disproportionate amount of coverage as a result of coverage given to persons who became infected with HIV as a result of medical treatment. In CDC records this group consists of only two people (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 10). One of those people, Kimberly Bergalis, a woman who contracted the disease during a routine dental treatment, was featured

13 times in the news magazines, giving her almost seven percent of all of the coverage given to all victims in the magazines.

Bergalis' coverage was part of a larger trend in the magazines. The magazines gave 20 percent of their coverage of individuals with AIDS to four people, none of them from either of the two most affected risk groups: homosexual/bisexuals and intravenous drug users. Magic Johnson, a heterosexual, received 12 percent of the coverage. Ryan White, a hemophiliac, and Arthur Ashe, a blood recipient, both received 1 percent of the total coverage.

By concentrating heavily on these individuals, the magazines missed opportunities to focus on individuals from the two most affected risk groups.

Although there was no apparent difference among the magazines in the number of articles that mention AIDS/HIV, as in Nyitray's study (Nyitray, 77), Newsweek identified more individuals with AIDS.

Having pointed out these short-comings in the news magazines' coverage of AIDS, there are some important points to consider before passing judgement on their creators. The media, like everything else, do not exist in a vacuum. They are not immune to the pressures of time, finite space or the pressures of some societal mores and norms. And, certainly, the "odd" or "unusual" catches readers' eyes, and pocket-books, more than the "normal" and "mundane." These pressures may account for some of the continuing absence of gay individuals and intravenous drug users from the pages of the magazines, and perhaps those instances should be excused.

But clearly, the continued disparity between CDC figures and magazine content causes confusion in the public perception of the epi-

demic. This type of confusion can ignite mis-directed public action and government policy. Regardless of outside pressures, monetary or otherwise, the media have a responsibility, even by their own admission (MacDougall, 81) to "serve the truth."

The code of ethics adopted by the Society for Professional Journalists in 1973 asserts that the purpose of distributing news and enlightened opinion is to serve the general welfare (MacDougall, 81). When journalists bow to the pressure of their own, or their readers, discomfort with the individuals affected by AIDS or HIV, they jeopardize the very freedom of the press that they are entrusted to "guard as an inalienable right of the people in a free society" (MacDougall, 81).

Civilization's battle with AIDS is hardly over. Unfortunately, Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report will have ample opportunity to bring their reports more in line with actual incidence of the disease.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

This study examined only three news magazines for a two-year period. Examining other magazines, perhaps even magazines with a more specific target audience, may produce different results. Also, this study only examined individuals on the basis of mode of exposure. As the disease continues to spread quickly through minority communities it would be timely to conduct a similar study on the basis of race, gender or socioeconomic group.

Also, it may be useful to design a study to determine what types of articles (i.e. feature, straight news, etc.) are most likely to communicate accurate messages about AIDS/HIV.

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