



Conceptualising 'queercide': a quantitative exploration of the technical frames used in online reports on lesbian murders in South Africa

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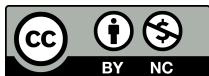
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Abstract

South Africa remains one of the most dangerous places for women – lesbians in particular – to live freely and safely, where a culture of patriarchy and a lack of socio-economic opportunity are ubiquitous throughout its communities. While the Internet has given journalists a wider platform to provide insights about issues plaguing lesbians, there is very little information regarding the elements used in these online reports. This is not only due to the lack of language required to contextualise lesbian issues, but also persistent institutional and societal homophobia. This article describes the technical frames used in the online news reporting of four case studies of 'queercide'. Using a thematic coding sheet, data was collected from 70 online articles purposively selected based on a *priori* population characteristics. The study found technical elements, such as the length of online reports, credible sources used, and 'code-driven' and 'user-driven' elements identified in the coded online articles. The conclusion uncovers some clear trends enabling the construction of a Venn-type diagram, which presents insights into how the murder of lesbians (referred to as a sub-section of 'queercide' in the article) *is* being reported by online news media compared to contemporary theoretical discussions on how these cases *should be* reported on. This article situates 'queercide' within a conceptual framework for future studies, while the findings demonstrate how online articles on the killing of lesbians lack self-regulatory and sharing features that would improve their legitimacy in the minds of their readers.

Keywords

frames; journalism; lesbian murders; online; queercide

INTRODUCTION

Rejection by family and community members, intolerance which is often abusive and violent, and misrepresentation in the media is a reality for most members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex community, and those who identify as part of the queer community, as well as a "+" for those for whom LGBTQ does not accurately capture or reflect their identity (LGBTIQ+) (PFLAG, 2022; Igual, 2018). Women who experience gender inequality in more conservative communities are the most vulnerable to violence. This is due to a failure to empower them by addressing patriarchal behaviour such as homophobia (Araújo & Gatto, 2022). Kinama (2011) argues that it is because of social, economic, and cultural subjugation that lesbians are one of the groups with the highest risk for violent attacks. Even though the South African Constitution is quite progressive regarding human rights and protecting the rights of gays and lesbians, such as the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 (Masweneng, 2018), the number of cases of lesbians raped and/or murdered increased by 146 from 2017 to 2018. This, despite interventions from advocacy organisations, protesters and officials engaged in promoting salience for lesbian issues on the social agenda (Sicetsha, 2018a). There is a lack of accurate figures and statistics around the killing of lesbians in South Africa due to limited funding, expert human resources and, frankly,

interest. This problematises the conceptualisation of violence against lesbians as an urgent part of the public agenda and fails to inform preventative or intervention policies (Tschalaer, 2021)..

According to Human Rights Watch (2020), some of the most prolific acts of violence perpetrated against lesbians include 'corrective rape,' which is an attempt by a heterosexual male or female to rectify what they consider to be abhorrent and amoral behaviour, as well as 'queercide,' a neologism referring to the killing of individuals identified as LGBTIQ. These acts of violence are attributed, in part, to a combination of abstract and patriarchal morality norms. These norms are assigned by religion, acculturated, and unreliable reporting systems, such as the timeous and accurate presentation of statistics, which may be used to legitimise interventions (Sicetsha, 2018b). For this study, lesbians, "L" in LGBTIQ+, who are murdered and reported on are the case studies and a subsection of 'queercide'. To assume that the violence perpetrated against gay men, or trans-persons, or even bisexual individuals is somehow homogenous would be inaccurate and dangerous. Even without an official reporting body to record and publicise the cases of lesbian murders, non-profit organisations such as Luleki Sizwe (2013) have confirmed the increasing number of 'queercide' cases being observed.

A World Health Organization (WHO) survey among LGBTIQ+ participants in 2016 found that 41% of respondents knew of someone who had been murdered because of their gender identity or sexual orientation (AgendaFM, 2018). As the world observes a definitive move away from the view that being gay or lesbian deviates from normative sexual orientation, there is an increase in violence against LGBTIQ+ persons. More popular political and social moves include New Zealand's proposal to formally ban conversion therapy (Menon, 2022) or American President Joe Biden's call for Federal civil rights protection based on gender identity, and proclaiming 31 March 2021 Transgender Day of Visibility (Biden, 2021). Even with these significant gains in support and visibility, violence against the LGBTIQ+ community is on the increase.

Responding to the fatal stabbing of a KwaZulu-Natal lesbian, the Director of the South African KZN LGBT Organisation, Hlengiwe Buthlezi said: "Our people still die like their lives are meaningless" (Mabuza, 2021). This emphasises how LGBTIQ+ people are still perceived and provides an observation of the beliefs which motivate this unique type of violence. Do the technical frames used in the online reports on these types of occurrences appear to be the same or different from other online reports? If so, in what ways?

Ha: The technical frames used in online reports on 'queercide' are different from those used in 'good' online reports

Although the technical quality of writing by reporters of online content might not ensure the inclusion of an issue in the audience's collective consciousness, the mere scrutiny of these online reports can provide insights into the ongoing discussion about journalism and reporting on online platforms with reference to how these relate to 'queercide'. To this end, the aim of the study is to uncover the technical frames used in the online reports on four case studies of lesbian murders (as a sub-section of 'queercide') by exploring, not comparing, these articles, and building an outline that could support journalists and online report writers when reporting on this phenomenon. The secondary purpose of this study is to conceptualise 'queercide' as the deliberate killing of LGBTIQ+ people, which includes the murder of lesbians, to aid future research in this field, as it is important to name a phenomenon that is on the increase (Balani, 2018; Mabuza, 2021) to identify, describe, organise, and tame it. Although there is no clear intersection of *technical frames and queercide* in terms of how identifying frames is key to defining 'queercide,' according to Löbner et al. (2021), frames such as "Length of an online article" or the "Share" or "Comments" function included in online reports, can have a strong impact on the exploration of new knowledge representations in linguistics and has utility in creating concepts, for example, 'queercide' as a neologism. This idea is further supported by Edwards et al. (2022), who also state that frames used in the philosophical perspective of *functional contextualism* can result in the emergence of new concepts, such as 'queercide,' from contextual cues presented in background knowledge. Both arguments from Löbner et al. (2021) and Edwards et al. (2022) on the prevalence of frames linked to theoretical concepts

were, in part, inspired by the seminal work by Barsalou (1992), which describes how frames intersect with concepts and conceptual fields. Where frames and framing used by journalists or online reporters overemphasise stereotypes, platitudes and blatant inaccurate information when writing about LGBTIQ issues, it then pays marginal attention to the realities of this community and does a disservice to queer persons (Sorice, 2022).

PREVIOUS LITERATURE

'Queercide' is a recent neologism and homosexual portmanteau, first coined by Antje Schumann, a Senior Lecturer in Political Studies at the Centre for Diversity Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, in her presentation *Shooting violence and trauma: Traversing visual and social topographies in Zanele Mhohli's work* (Schuhmann et al., 2015). This term refers to the targeted killing of gay, lesbian and transgender people. Ratele (2014) explains how transgenderism and lesbian issues intersect by proposing that analyses of gay, lesbian, and 'other' sexualities are vital for a deeper understanding of how hegemonic forms of masculinity are formed in Africa. Incidences of 'queercide' are commonplace in the LGBTIQ+ community (Taylor 2009) and based on a content analysis of serial killings in South Africa, Hodgskiss (2003:39) found that "violence in South Africa [was increasing] against the backdrop of a highly mobile population and a great increase in urbanisation". When media coverage has an agenda-setting effect on the salience of issues that appear to be newsworthy (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), this applies to the online reporting on 'queercide'; it imbues those reports with frames for audiences to influence their understanding and positioning of the issue. Other naming conventions and descriptions for 'queercide' include 'trans-murder' and 'murder of lesbians' (Transgender Europe & Balzer, 2019); however, for the purpose of this article 'queercide' will specifically refer to lesbian murders.

Grozelle (2014) argues that the limited information about online reporting on LGBTIQ+ issues continues to contribute to the caveat in understanding how lesbian topics such as 'queercide' are reported. Grozelle (2014) explains that the *length* of an online article provides insights into the quality of its representation when reporting on cases of 'queercide'. Therefore, short articles (0 – 400 words), medium (401 – 800 words) and long (more than 800 words) may be indicative of their quality or efficacy. Medium length online reports, including those with a "...more" option, are required to properly contextualise incidences of violence involving lesbians (Grozelle, 2014).

With just over 30 million Internet users in South Africa (approximately 53% of the country's population), more people are consuming digital content and the number of platforms they use is set to grow (Ngobese, 2019). The active user growth of online as well as social media platforms, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak, in conjunction with the shrinking newsroom, has affected the quality of journalism. Thus, the content of many online reports lacks vigour and substance (Ornico, 2018). Online media platforms have the potential to trend and set agendas for subversive groups and their realities by saving time, shortening publication delays experienced in print media, connecting people to ideas (and ideas to people), and improving the affordability of knowledge acquisition. However, the utility of the medium through the content it provides, needs to be vigorously and continuously scrutinised to understand its influence and impact. The decentralisation of the online content production process increases the potential for harmful media content as it is bound by very little censorship and positions the responsibilities of journalists against their professional autonomy in writing about issues for public awareness, or the interest of niche groups such as the LGBTIQ+ community. These challenges dilute online reporting's cultural significance in terms of representation and diversity, the protection of identity, and its emancipatory role for minorities (Hamelink, 2015).

Unpopular issues to report on include the rights of lesbians and 'queercide' (Sicetsha, 2018), as they do not receive as many revenue-generating click-throughs, as, for example, a publicised racist event, or reports on a political scandal. Little has been written about how online media report on the killing of South African lesbians, or lesbians globally. When violence against the LGBTIQ+ community is researched, it focuses on traditional media, such as the study done by Webber and Ester (2022) on same-sex partner violence reporting in newspapers. Research also tends to foreground issues such as mental

health concerns because of violence, such as the study conducted in Kenya by Jauregui et al. (2021), or societal and legal inclusivity of LGBTIQ+ people, such as the global study done by Newman et al. (2021) regarding human rights in Thailand. There is a gap in literature on 'queercide' as a theoretical concept to designate the premeditated (whether in the moment or because of institutionalised homophobia) killing of LGBTIQ+ people, of which the murder of lesbians would be a sub-category, as well as the technical frames used by online media to report on this phenomenon.

In terms of online reporting on 'queercide', there is a need for writers to understand the gravity of their reporting (Mabuza, 2021). The general way in which lesbians and lesbian issues are portrayed in online spaces – through omission or misinformation – may influence audiences' understanding of the relevance of these issues (Hubbard & Schulman, 2014). Gitlin (1980) first described the concept of frames in his analysis of how media trivialised New Left student movements in the 1960s. Altheide (1997:21) supported this approach by stating that "frames and formats shape mass media content as communication and media formats enable audiences to recognise various connotations which provide a general definition of the information they are consuming". In this study, technical frames refer to the way reports are constructed; what technical elements the writer used to develop the report, and/or what mechanisms of the chosen online publishing platform are observed or omitted from each report? Narratives and frames presented in media on lesbian issues, such as 'queercide', are often challenged in terms of their authenticity, accuracy, and credibility. They create a context in which confusion and a lack of salience result in lacklustre "couch activism" and inconsequentiality. More particularly, the way South African media have reported on 'queercide' remains underexplored (Balani, 2018), and the frames used to present it to online audiences are unknown. This sentiment is shared by Estes and Webber (2021) who describe how there is under-reporting of same-sex intimate partner violence and media's use of heterosexual, male, upper-class frameworks in newspapers.

The references to frames and framing in reports are essentially based on the works of Gitlin (1980), Entman (1991), De Vreese (2005), Chong and Druckman (2007), Grozelle (2014) and Jewkes (2015) as these offer the most comprehensive collection of work that is relevant to understanding the technical frames in online reports on 'queercide' in the four selected case studies. For example, Grozelle (2014), who writes about the newsworthiness of hate crimes perpetrated against lesbians, states that articles should consist of 400 – 800 words for readers to receive contextually sufficient information. For this article, this became a technical frame to describe online reports on the murder of lesbians as a sub-category of 'queercide'. The purpose of this article is to identify the technical or structural frames online reporters of 'queercide' used when constructing their reports. From the readings included in this article, there is no information on the technical elements of length, inclusion of features, reference of sources, or regulation frames present in online reports on 'queercide'. This is a problem, as the lack of knowledge of online reports on LGBTIQ+ issues in general and 'queercide' being written to certain standards will play a pivotal role in whether it will constrain or promote this LGBTIQ+ issue as part of the public agenda.

METHOD

An online search of cases in South Africa in which lesbians were murdered, yielded scores of distinct victims and victimology with thousands of reports, ranging from mere references to actual reports on each case. Quotation marks enclosing search phrases, such as the terms "lesbian murder" and "South Africa" were used to identify online reports. The result is that the population in this study consists of 10 800 online reports, which are the online articles related to the four selected cases of 'queercide'. Two online articles described as "good" based on their critical recognition (Sicetsha, 2018) are selected as a control baseline. The sample is calculated by applying a timeline to each case: online reports which appeared from the date of the killing until the date of the suspected killer(s) appearance in court, while diversity of victimology is applied to enable a valid focus on technical frames used in online reports on 'queercide'. Ultimately, four case studies are selected, where five South African lesbians were murdered, to provide breadth and depth to the investigation of how online reporters structure their writing. Of these cases, one victim was a prominent sporting figure, one woman was a young, single mother attacked at a

local shebeen, another woman was abducted, tortured, and killed, and another case involved a married couple, which sparked a manhunt for a few weeks before their charred remains were found.

The article does, however, recognise that online platforms themselves may contribute to the inclusion and/or omission of certain frames, and therefore proposes the technical frames observed in online reports, and not, exclusively, how online reporters write. Case study 1 yielded 11 online articles, case study 2: 15 online articles, case study 3: 34 online articles and case study 4: 10 online articles. The sample, therefore, is 70 online reports on 'queericide'. Each unit of analysis is characterised by identifying the South African victim and had to meet the inclusion criteria of a 'murder of a lesbian or lesbian couple', the 'suspected perpetrator(s) is known and has appeared in court', 'has appeared online within the specified timeline' and is 'published on a credible online news platform'. In this approach, a longitudinal time dimension is applied to ensure all articles within the set parameters are included. Relevant principles and concepts from theoretical perspectives provide probative insights into the technical frames used in online reports on 'queericide' compared to those used in two "good" online articles. The "good" articles are embedded within the crime genre of news and events in South Africa. The online reports were 401 – 800 words in length, received at least one award for journalistic quality and/or investigative prowess, included a 'Share' option, as well as a rating scale and/or 'Comments' section.

This positivist study used a quantitative approach with the aim of exploring and identifying the technical elements within the online reports on four case studies on 'queericide'. The events around the murder of a victim identified as lesbian, in case study 1, occurred in 2018, while case study 2 occurred in 2017, case study 3 at the end of 2016, and case study 4 in 2008, when the reporting on the violence perpetrated against lesbians was different from the 2010s (Muholi, 2012). The researcher made use of a coding sheet developed from a priori elements, identified through recent studies on online reporting and journalism as well as industry-specific presentations (Grozelle, 2014; Theo, 2017). This provided the technical themes to investigate the mechanics and identifiable elements of each online report. The coding sheet is tested through an intercoder reliability and validity process for the data collection instrument, where $2*M/(N1+N2) = 0.93$, which translates to a high agreement between coders (where **M** is the total number of points the two coders agreed on, and **N** is the number of points made by each coder respectively). Variations between coders are scrutinised and the coding sheet is adjusted accordingly.

The technical frames include *length of online report* (Frame 1), inclusion or exclusion of a 'Share' feature (Frame 2), *whether sources are acknowledged* (Frame 3), *whether 'Comments' sections are included and self-regulation* such as "report this article for false or irresponsible information" or "rate this article" (Grundlingh, 2017:6) (Frame 4), and *industry or critical acknowledgement* (Frame 5). Applying the coding sheet to online articles selected on the four cases of 'queericide' as well as online articles considered "good" as a control group found on a desktop search of *Google News*, yielded 112 data points. The data points were captured on a basic Excel spreadsheet to generate line graphs for the purpose of comparison to illustrate patterns or highlight areas of significance. In the data analysis, a combination of SPSS software, carried out univariately with frequency distribution, and descriptive statistics to organise and summarise data in a meaningful way, are used (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All 70 articles analysed from the four selected case studies appeared online. The following section will use *reports* or *articles* to assume *online reports* as this was one of the artefact characteristics applied in the study. In case study 1, the length of each report varied from the largest number (46%) that contained between 401 and 800 words, without the "[...more]" option, followed by 27% that contained between 0 and 400 words, without the "[...more]" option. The remaining reports varied between 0 and 400 words, with the "[...more]" option (9%), 401 and 800 words with the "[...more]" option (9%), and more than 1 000 words (9%). Analysing the reports, 91% did not have a "Share" feature. All these reports acknowledged either one or more sources (100%); however, none of them (0%) included a feature where readers could report or comment on the quality of reporting or their contribution regarding the content nor any other form of self-regulation. The two articles used to compare frames in the reporting on lesbian killings included a

"Share" option, and the choice for readers to access "[...more]" information related to the article. From the research conducted on the 11 articles for case study 1, none received industry acknowledgement in the form of awards or any other form of critical promotion. In this article, "[...more]" refers to an article with this technical element observable; the article was modified for length and appears as the initial version; however, if the reader is interested in reading more about the event(s) described in the report, they have the option to read the expanded version by clicking on the "[...more]" link (which usually appears at the bottom of the visible article).

In case study 2, the length of each of the 15 reports varied from the largest percentage (47%) that contained between 0 and 400 words without the "[...more]" option, followed by 35% containing between 401 and 800 words without the "[...more]" option. The remaining reports contained between 0 and 400 words with the "[...more]" option (9%) as well as more than 1 000 words (9%). Of the articles, 59% included a "Share" feature, while 82% of the reports credited at least one source. In 82% of the reports, there were no self-regulatory options, while 18% included a "Comments" feature, while none of the reports (0%) received any industry acknowledgements. In the 34 reports on 'queercide' for case study 3, 27% of the articles contained between 0 and 400 words with the "[...more]" option, while 27% of the reports contained more than 1 000 words, 20% had between 401 and 800 words without the "[...more]" option, 13% contained between 0 and 400 words without the "[...more]" option, and 13% had between 401 and 800 words with the "[...more]" option. The "Share" feature was absent from 87% of these reports, while 60% acknowledged at least one source. In 20% of the reports for case study 3, a "Comments" feature was included, and in 80% of these no self-regulatory elements were identified. None of the reports (0%) from the readings included in the study, showed that any accolades or awards recognition were received.

In case study 4, which included 10 articles, 40% of these contained 0 to 400 words without the "[...more]" option, and 40% contained more than 1 000 words. Only 20% of the reports contained 401 to 800 words without the "[...more]" option. Of these reports, 30% included the "Share" feature, while 60% acknowledged at least one source. For 80% of the articles, self-regulatory features, such as a "commentary on the accuracy of the information contained in the report" (Grundlingh, 2017:24), were absent, while in 20% of these a "Comments" feature was identified. None of these (0%) reports (see Table 1) received any industry recognition in the form of awards, incentives, local or international citations, or critical appellations (Somdyala, 2019). The technical frames used in the reports of each of these case studies confirms that they deviate from those used in "good" reports in most of the frames.

Table 1. Technical frames as theoretical standard identified in online reports of four case studies on 'queercide'

	<i>Number of online reports</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Frame 1: <i>Length of online report (401 – 800 words)</i>	25	36%
Frame 2: <i>"Share" feature included in online report</i>	26	37%
Frame 3: <i>Sources acknowledged or credited in online report</i>	54	77%
Frame 4: <i>"Comments" and self-regulatory features included in online report</i>	11	16%
Frame 5: <i>Industry acknowledgement of online report</i>	0	0

Source: Sample of original online reports from online news platforms (n = 70)

Pertaining to the length of reports as a technical frame and understandings that may be gleaned from it, no clear trends can be identified for the articles selected in the four case studies. There is, however, a

tendency for the reports on 'queercide' to be shorter than the standard required, according to Grozelle (2014). Only case study 1 achieved 66% of its reports including a length of 401 to 800 words with "[... more]" options. All the other case studies' reports included articles of less than 401 to 800 words, with case study 4 meeting this standard in only 20% of its reports. Grozelle (2014) cites the importance of an appropriate length for reports as an important determinant of quality as it provides readers enough detail and will prevent reading fatigue. Grundlingh (2017) echoes this determination as well as the importance of suitable headings, monikers, and photographs (which is a frame not included but could be of significance in further studies on this topic). Considering the importance of the "Share" feature for reports, Almgren and Ollson (2016) claim that this provides audiences with an opportunity to engage with the information in a way that is not possible in traditional media. Jewkes (2004) and Grundlingh (2017) describe the significance of the "Share" feature as part of 'user-driven journalism' and 'real reporting' as the Internet has an interactivity feature to engage and galvanise audiences. For Frame 2, from the 70 reports across the four case studies, there appears to be no clear trend, although, as with Frame 1, the trend skews to low representation. None of the reports from the four case studies reflected more than 59% (case study 2) representation of this standard, followed by case study 4 (30%), case study 3 (13%) and case study 1 (10%).

A clear trend is observable as it relates to reporters consulting and acknowledging their sources. In case study 1, 100% of the reports referred to at least one source, while case study 2 showed 82% representation of reports including the referencing of sources, and case studies 3 and 4 showed 60% representation each. Byerly (2018) explains that sources must be included in articles to establish credibility for the reader and shows a high level of media literacy. Butler (2020) explains how epistemic insights from a subjective source on subversive topics can contribute to better conscientisation by [media] audiences through their ability to empathise with an "other" group. Although the type of source was not an area of focus in the study, it provides descriptions of the frames used in reports on 'queercide'. There was also a clear trend in terms of the "Comments" feature and self-regulatory components attached to the reports. Amarasekara and Grant (2019) describe how new media technology and content have the potential to discuss gender in an open manner if self-regulation structures, such as rating scales and reporting options, are put in place. Sicutsha (2018) further explains that the "Comments" feature allows content to evolve from one-directional channels of information reporting to a platform geared towards discussion and inclusivity, while on its website *Media24* (2021) insists that all quality reports must include a feedback mechanism for audiences to engage with.

There were no "Comment" features or self-regulatory elements included in any of the reports for case study 1 (0%), 20% of reports included a 'Comments' section and/or an element of self-regulation for both case studies 3 and 4. Merely 18% of reports on 'queercide' in case study 2 included these elements. In the final frame (Frame 5), a clear trend that emerged from the data is that none of the 70 reports across the four case studies received any industry recognition. Somdyala (2019: 4) explains that the benefit of awards for reports is that it creates a barometer for the quality of journalistic writing as applicants are subjected to screening and judging processes by respected and registered panellists. Ngobese (2019) offers a different perspective on attaching industry recognition to reports by highlighting the importance of distinguishing "good" reports from "bad" ones by viewing their citations. He explains how competition criteria counteract the lack of directives reporters must subscribe to, and that awards may provide a visible testament to the quality of the technical execution of writing.

The results from the four selected case studies show that there are patterns in the technical way reports on 'queercide' are constructed. From the theoretical contributions to the discussion on standards for reports by Jewkes (2004), Smith (2005), Murphy (2007), Grozelle (2014), Almgren and Ollson (2016), Namusoga (2016), Grundlingh (2017), Byerly (2018), Sicutsha (2018), Amarasekara and Grant (2019), Ngobese (2019) and Somdyala (2019), a Venn diagram can illustrate how journalistic and reporting frames relate to those written about 'queercide' as a specific LGBTIQ+ issue.

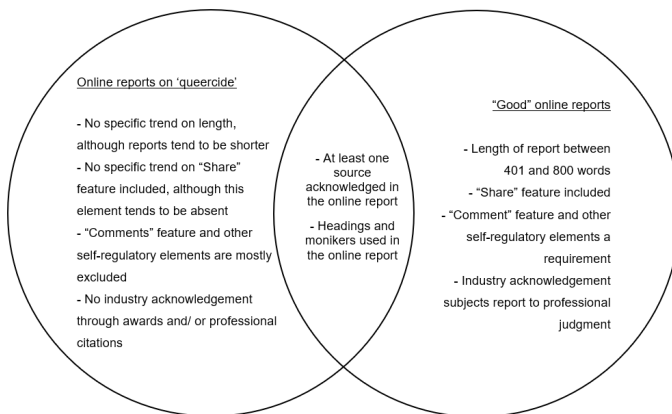


Figure 1. Venn diagram showing the relationship between online articles on 'queericide' and those (theoretically) considered as "good"

The Venn diagram summarises key patterns from the descriptive statistics of the 'queericide' reports as well as the two articles considered "good". The diagram provides insight to address the lack of knowledge on which technical frames are used in reports on 'queericide' as well as which frames should be used when compared to other articles. By focusing purely on the technical aspects of article content, the study can highlight deviations and similarities of reports on 'queericide' and thereby show that articles on this subject, for the most part, use different technical frames. The diagram further summarises what those technical frames are as well as those which appear to be similar; for example, the univariate data of both 'queericide' articles as well as the control reports is the use of headings and monikers identifying victims, and the use of at least one source in the report. From the Venn diagram, a guide for journalists and online reporters writing on the issue of 'queericide', especially recording the story about the murder of lesbians as a sub-category of this, is to:

- Keep the length of online reports on 'queericide' between 401 and 800 words;
- Include "Share" and "Comment" features so that the online report on 'queericide' benefits from economies of scale and can be open to corrections and criticism to improve its validity; and
- Submit online reports on 'queericide' for industry and/or community awards to receive feedback and gain exposure.

Simpson and Coté (2006) add the following advice for journalists and online reporters of violence against women and the LGBTIQ community:

- Be quick and be sensitive – the backbone of doing pioneering work, such as writing about the escalating cases of violence against lesbians in South Africa, is to cross cultural boundaries and conduct empathetic interviews; and
- Remain objective and independent – while journalists and online reporters writing, for example, about 'queericide' are constrained by their management mandates and policy, they must find ways to connect with the police, social workers, those who were present at the frontlines of the story, as well as a traumatised LGBTIQ community.

CONCLUSION

Mpalirwa (2015) suggests the media adopt a gender-neutral, rights-based framework to accurately capture the power nuances of the murder of lesbians to engage stakeholders. The use of frames provides researchers with valuable insights into the way audiences, as important stakeholder groups, are introduced to topics. Although there is an increase in visibility of LGBTIQ+ persons (Biden, 2021; Menon, 2022) and exposure of their realities and issues online (Sicetsha, 2018), the violence perpetrated against lesbians is on the increase. More lesbians are murdered now than at any other time in our history (AgendaFM, 2018; Mabuza, 2021). It becomes important, then, to better understand the role online reports

play in the exposure of 'queercide'. The issue of 'queercide' as a part of the history of violence in South Africa is framed and represented on the Internet, which junctures with online audience perceptions of queer issues. Here, the audience is led on how to recognise and think about the phenomenon. Knowing which technical frames are used in online reports on 'queercide' provides data to evaluate the lack of attention the violence against lesbians receives (Balani, 2018). If media can mobilise the collective consciousness of those who consider themselves morally righteous, and Internet content has become functionally ubiquitous for creating awareness, scrutinising the frames used to construct online reports on socio-cultural, socio-political, and gendered agendas require investigation. The article accomplishes its purpose of identifying the structural and technical frames used by online news platforms when posting reports on four case studies of 'queercide'.

A limitation of this article, however, is that the term 'online reports' and 'online reporters' are not problematised, as it only focuses on the technical frames that are presented to the online reader without prejudice. Online platforms are full of content authored by professional journalists and non-professionals with different ethical orientations. This limitation may be further investigated in future studies on the topic. There is a further need for a more qualitative analysis of the frames used in online reports on lesbian murders (as a sub-category of 'queercide') to achieve a more exhaustive overview of the nuances that exist in technical frames such as 'headings' and sourcing practices.

In both online reports on lesbian murders (as a sub-category of 'queercide') and articles considered "good" (that is, those which meet the criteria including ideal report length, sharing features and industry recognition), it was found that none of the online reports on 'queercide' received any industry recognition, such as nominations, rating scales, or awards, while 100% of the "good" online reports were acknowledged in some way; both articles received awards for excellence in journalism. Similarly, both "good" online reports provided an opportunity for readers to give their feedback, while only 20% of online reports for case studies 3 and 4, 18% for case study 2 and none for case study 1, were made available. Results from the investigation into technical frames used in online reporting on the murder of lesbians (as a sub-category of 'queercide') therefore alludes to more *critical recognition being required in judging and trending these cases*. Think about, for example, how the Academy Awards have a positive impact on the box office performance of the films that get acknowledged (Krauss et al., 2008). The study also proves that *sharing and self-regulatory features are necessary for readers to drive these stories further* (Grundlingh, 2017), and that lesbian murders which occur in low-income, conservative black communities where the media serve the interests of those constituents, appear to be less eager to actively report on these cases; therefore, *more resources need to be made available to journalists reporting on LGBTIQ+ issues in those areas* (Paradies, 2018). The research concludes that sourcing practices of online reporters on lesbian murders need to include more persons with an emotional investment in these cases, such as family members and partners, who will provide a better overview of the impact the events have than those with an administrative interest, such as police officers and lawyers (Seelman et al., 2017).

This article presents the argument that sources are used to establish credibility for both test and control samples, and headings and referenced monikers are used as staples; however, there are significant ways in which online reports on 'queercide' deviate from reports considered "good". It is in these technical deviations that we get to understand the ways reporting of LGBTIQ+ issues online, specifically the murder of lesbians (as a sub-set of 'queercide'), are wanting. The article discusses what is known about technical frames and highlights what is not known or what future studies on the issue of media reports on 'queercide' may include by providing key takeaways from the study.

Finally, the article also proposes which technical frames should be used to improve the profile of 'queercide' by comparing the sample group findings to two "good" online reports. It achieves this by acknowledging that there is no clear correlation between presenting frames – for example, the "...more" reading options in online articles, or the inclusion of "Share" and "Comment" features when reporting on the murder of lesbians – and the mental models required for building concepts; however, frames do include basic assumptions about the underlying meaning and significance of theoretical categories. Frames help to develop hypotheses about the relationship between concepts (such as being *queer* (including

lesbian, in this case) and the act of *homicide*), which generates new insights into the phenomenon of lesbian murders and provides readers and scholars with a common language to help build a better understanding of the issue. Therefore, the technical frames used in this article are key to defining the concept of 'queercide' as they enhance our understanding of the issue.

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