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Critiquing Bias of Transgender Communities

Transphobia is not a new problem, and unfortunately it does not seem to be going anywhere anytime soon. However, most of the information we receive about this community comes through the internet, whether it is a news article, a blog, a social media post, etc. That being said, sometimes these articles can be misleading. Even if they are reporting on a troubling topic, they may be contributing to biases of the trans community at the same time. This topic is very important to me and many others right now as the community's civil rights are being targeted. This analysis compares two articles covering the same news event, one that marginalizes the trans community through biased language and misleading information, and another that provides a more factual and empathetic perspective by portraying the full story, and data that contributes to it.

The first article I am analyzing was published in the *New York Times* on May 9, 2023, by Patricia Mazzei, a journalist working for the newspaper. The *Times*, actually, has received a lot of public scrutiny recently for publishing transphobic and misleading articles regarding the trans community. This article, unfortunately, is no different. Mazzei reports on the bill passed by Ron DeSantis in Florida that prohibited gender-affirming care for minors and restricted it for adults in the state in 2023. The language in this article is what first strikes me as biased. Instead of using “gender-affirming” care, which is a common term used for the subject, Mazzei says “gender-transition” care. This is misleading as it excludes the vast number of different forms of

care under this term, reducing it to just gender-transition. The article then immediately notes that in the previous year, similar policies were adopted by the Florida Board of Medicine and Board of Osteopathic Medicine, but neglects to include that this was only due to the DeSantis administration's influence. Additionally, the article addresses the new bills that punishes "businesses that admit minors to 'adult live performances' such as drag shows," and goes on to include that the Legislature "defined 'adult live performances' in part as those depicting or simulating 'nudity, sexual conduct, sexual excitement or specific sexual activities,'" (Mazzei). I think the inclusion of this definition and addressing drag shows as "adult live performances" in the first place is very misleading to readers. If someone doesn't have any experience with drag shows, they will picture this "lewd" sexual conduct that minors are being invited to as the article emphasizes. However, this is not the case and contributes to a lot of misinformation and negativity this community faces. The article then goes on to explain how many other states are considering passing a similar legislature, which makes it appear as common and therefore okay, and quotes some more misleading quotes from DeSantis that frame the bills he has passed as a positive. The quotes included make it clear he thinks this form of care "sexualizes children" and emphasize that he is just trying to protect children. The inclusion of these quotes instead of many others that explain why DeSantis' new bills were being criticized at the time makes the article more focused on justifying the bill's passing as opposed to reporting in an unbiased manner.

In the article's defense, it does include two personal stories from celebrities about how they disagree with the new legislature. However, it does not use language that humanizes the people being affected. Overall, this article does include biases and excludes a lot of context that would add to the readers' perception of this event. Not only does it fail to present the severity of this bill being passed for many people living in Florida, it also fails to communicate several other

pieces of information that are very relevant, which I will get into in a little bit. The article excludes a lot of context and highlights quotes from DeSantis, who passed the bill, that make him appear right. It lacks any real medical data, most likely because the data collected on the subject has been found to support gender-affirming care, and also the article fails to humanize those affected. Through language and framing, Mazzei's article not only adds to the trans community's biases, but also contributes to the negativity and hate they receive by not accurately reporting the situation. The author's, Patricia Mazzei's, unfortunately does appear to be biased towards the trans community, based on her writing in this article. All news articles should be unbiased reports of the facts, but this is a high standard. At the very least, they should not be misleading readers through what they choose to write about in a report of an event and what they choose to exclude in the report.

The second article contrasts from the first one in many ways. Published on the Human Rights Campaign organization website on April 4th, 2023, this article also reports on the new Florida legislature banning gender-affirming care for transgender youths and restricting it for adults. However, it is very different from the first. Most strikingly, in the information provided. This article includes a lot more relevant information that gives context and the full story to the bill's passing. For example, it includes that the Florida Board of Medicine and the Board of Osteopathic Medicine's new rules regarding gender-affirming care was due to DeSantis and even includes that at the time, there were already several lawsuits to challenge it from families directly affected. Another big difference from the first article is that the only time it even mentions the anti-drag bills is in one bullet point of what has happened so far. It reads that the HRC is tracking "more than 85 curriculum censorship bills and 40 anti-drag performance bills," and leaves it at that, while the previous article felt the need to define the drag performances as "adult live

performances” that showcase “lewd sexual conduct” (HRC). The article ends with unbiased data points about how many bills have been passed recently that are anti-LGBTQ, and then concludes with factual data about how many Americans support LGBTQ+, despite the recent legislature. This article is a fully formed piece that gives the facts in unbiased, complete form. The only thing it could have included to be even more supportive of the trans community would be personal accounts, but that’s not even necessary due to the supportive language and context throughout.

The difference in the portrayal of this bill passing, a devastating legislature for so many families in Florida, is very clear. While the HRC article composes a clear picture of what is going on, the *Times* article omits crucial context and information to portray transgender people as over-sexual and harmful to children, guiding readers to think DeSantis is saving the youth from being sexualized. This is evident from the language used, the context and information omitted, and the quotes from DeSantis himself that the writer, Mazzei, chose to include.

Articles like the *Times* one analyzed in this paper have incredibly harmful implications for members of the transgender community. Not presenting all of the facts robs readers of the right to choose for themselves what is good and just, and this prevents so much support the trans community could have received following this bill’s passing. The *New York Times* is a huge publication with millions of people viewing their articles. This is a massive pool of people to decide to sway based on personal biases or judgements, and it is very harmful to paint a whole community negatively to that many readers, who will end up being voters. The transgender community is a very marginalized group right now amid the new Presidential change, and articles like these have more sway than we give them credit for. This is why it is so important to represent members of marginalized communities in an unbiased light.

Works Cited

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