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Katherine Nerses April 8, 2017

A History of Social Perceptions of HIV and AIDS in Atlanta, GA: A Print Media Analysis

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Abstract

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Media has been described as both influencing and reflecting social perceptions of reality. What the media chooses to and not to publish, and how those issues are addressed, can be reflective of social discourse around the subject. This study functions as an exploration into how HIV and AIDS were positioned in the context of local print media discourse in order to inform an analysis of larger public conversations around the illness. Three different local newspapers were used in this analysis – *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Atlanta Inquirer* and *Creative Loafing* – with each one catering to different sub-populations within Atlanta and characterized by distinctive publishing capacities. The language in and the frequency of reports on HIV and AIDS were used as proxies to determine public attitudes towards and the import of the epidemic in local discourse. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with local physicians and researchers to provide a context through which the results can be interpreted into local perceptions. Textual analysis shows that the frequency of reporting on HIV and AIDS across different newspapers were mediated by the perceived risk that their readers had of contracting HIV. The nature of the discussions of HIV and AIDS in the articles can be grouped into four chronological stages designated by overarching conceptualizations asserted in the newspapers: othering the illness to at-risk populations, reinforcing the risk that HIV/AIDS poses to everyone, differential levels of attention to global versus local epidemics and generalized lack of discussion about HIV/AIDS. The four stages of newspaper reporting are evidence that, just as the epidemiological manifestations of HIV/AIDS have changed over time, so too have people's understandings of the illness and those living with it. This study further surmises that the discourse around HIV and AIDS in local newspapers cannot be disentangled from the historical and cultural context of metropolitan Atlanta and the south-eastern region of the United States.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Significance of The Project

I developed the concept for this project after reading an article published in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in regards to Atlanta's newest standing on a ranked list of cities in the United States: cities with the highest incidence rates of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection. According to the article, Atlanta has the fifth highest incidence rate of HIV in the country (Redmon, 2015). Redmon went on to explain that many people living with HIV in Atlanta do not know they're infected, in part because people are not getting tested (Redmon, 2015). I began to think about social perceptions as intangible structures that manipulate people's ability to act on individual free will, otherwise identified as a constraint of agency (Palmisano, 2001). Fear of stigmatization over status can be enough to make a task which seems reasonably easy, incredibly difficult. However, this line of thought brought me to the realization that perceptions are not static; they do not exist in one place in time. As a result, I felt that to understand socio-cultural conceptualizations of HIV and AIDS it would be necessary to look back at the cultural history and public discourse around this epidemic in Atlanta. It has been over thirty years since the first cases of AIDS were reported and the epidemic has changed considerably since then. I set out to understand not only the social perceptions of HIV and AIDS in our time but throughout the history of the epidemic in Atlanta.

The intent of this thesis is to begin to understand the social constraints on agency of those living with HIV and its related illness, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in the

southeastern part of the United States. The word “begin” is utilized here in the most conservative way because this research is an exploration into one of a myriad of ways in which social discourse is expressed. My background in anthropology drove me to ask why HIV is still spreading in the South and why a significant portion of those infected do not know their status. Social perceptions are a foundation of social constraints and a starting point to begin answering those questions. Tracing the cultural history of Atlanta, Georgia exposes the framework for people’s conceptualizations of HIV and AIDS. The cultural history does not take into account, however, the drastic changes that have been manifested in the distribution of the illness across populations in Atlanta and public discourse regarding HIV and AIDS during the last thirty years. In order to address these changes, I am creating a timeline of changes in the characteristics of the epidemic layered with discourse analysis of the illness. Public discourse, specifically people’s perceptions of HIV and AIDS, are not easy to define and vary drastically across subpopulations. Reporting of HIV and AIDS in local newspapers is a proxy for social perceptions and, as many proxies are, is not necessarily representative nor a complete picture of the social and cultural realities of the region.

Media, particularly print media, is an extension of the socio-cultural environment it is produced in. As a result, the amount of attention a subject receives and the language used to describe it can be a strong proxy for social perceptions in public discourse. From my research, I have found that shifts in media portrayal of HIV and AIDS can be grouped into four chronological stages that correspond to major shifts in the epidemic itself. Within these four stages, as a result of cultural interactions and biomedical innovations, the frequency of media reports and the terminology used to describe the epidemic changed with varying degrees

across newspaper platforms. These shifting trends in reporting may be indicative of local perceptions of HIV and AIDS, as well as the changing position of the epidemic within local public discourse.

Brief Introduction to the Epidemic of HIV and AIDS in the United States

> "What AIDS is doing, with an ever quickening pace, is to challenge basic assumptions about the relationship between culture and deviance, sexuality, drug injecting, HIV transmission and unsuspecting forms of disease spread" – Gilbert Herdt, *The Time of AIDS*

The AIDS epidemic garnered a global level of social consciousness regarding marginalization and stigmatization. The AIDS epidemic in the United States was a unique and, for some, traumatizing experience. The AIDS outbreak in San Francisco in 1981 was the first time Americans became aware of the existence of an acquired immune deficiency. It incited a level of public activism around treatment and research that had not been seen before (Packard, 2004). AIDS was the first disease to be debated on the floor of the United Nations General Assembly (Department of Health, 2016). AIDS also re-exemplified social divisions and discrimination occurring throughout the country (Herdt, 1992). In the United States, social consciousness of AIDS can be traced back to five cases of pneumonia in 1981.

In June of 1981, researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a case report in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). The report described five cases of *Pneumocystis* pneumonia (PCP), a rare form of lung infection related almost exclusively to cases of severe immunosuppression, in otherwise healthy, gay, young men (CDC, 1981). The incidence was puzzling particularly because none of the men showed

clinically apparent symptoms of immune suppression (CDC, 1981). In the following weeks, more reports of PCP and a rare form of skin cancer, Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS), were filed with the CDC from other areas of California and New York – all the patients were identified in clinical reports as gay men (Department of Health, 2016). The CDC published another MMWR report on the new cases of PCP and KS, prompting the New York Times to release their first article on AIDS: "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals" (Department of Health, 2016). The article made note of the fact that there appeared to be no threat of contagion to the "non-homosexual" community (Altman, 1981). The *New York Times* article was the first report in a national newspaper about the illness that would soon come to be known as AIDS.

In 1981, the term "gay cancer" emerged in public discourse and was occasionally used by people who were diagnosed with KS, such as activist Bobbi Campbell (Wright, 2013). For the first year and a half, the term "Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID)" was used by researchers to describe this medical phenomenon before the CDC suggested the term "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome" (Department of Health, 2016). The early terminology created a strong, persistent connection between the gay community and AIDS. Later reports on transmission of AIDS linked the illness to individual behaviors believed to increase a person's risk of exposure: unprotected sex, injecting drugs and sex work. The higher prevalence of HIV infection among socially marginalized communities, as well as its modes of transmission shrouded AIDS in a socio-cultural taboo. When talking about AIDS, people believed they were talking about homosexuality, sex and drug use, which all stood opposed to strongly held social norms of the period. In a crude sense, AIDS was described as a "natural experiment to gauge societal reactions" (Herdt, 1992). AIDS was socially significant not only because it highlighted

regressions from social norms but also because it preyed upon the historical social and political systems of marginalization. Misconceptions of transmission led to further marginalization as people feared the symptoms of the illness, as well as its social implications. AIDS was seen by some as a manifestation of attempts to upend social order, prompting discourse to begin on a large-scale public stage.

Within public discourse, AIDS has been described using an amalgamation of the prejudices around transmission routes and identities of people living with the infection. It brought together illness stigma and pre-existing prejudice, creating another set of complications due to emotional and mental stress (Deacon, 2006). People who inject drugs, men who have sex with men and sex workers are known to be at high-risk for contracting HIV. With risk groups formed on the basis of behaviors, identity became overshadowed by engagement in activities that placed people at higher risk of infection. People who engaged in these behaviors were, and still are, impacted by discrimination because the behaviors are deemed to be violations of social norms.

High risk groups were consistent features of public health communications and, as a result, those behaviors and those who engaged in them became inextricably associated with HIV and AIDS (Smith, 1996). Some people who contracted HIV from other transmission methods, such as blood transfusions, chose to conceal their status for fear that others would assume they had contracted it by these high risk methods. Those who did engage in these behaviors experienced a layering of social stigma relating to the behavior and their HIV status. Discrimination towards high risk groups were quite consistent prior to the AIDS epidemic, but there are indications that discrimination and prejudice increased after the AIDS epidemic

began. The layering of prejudice and disease stigma is a concept that will be expanded upon in later discussions on how historically black newspapers in Atlanta reported on HIV and AIDS. HIV and AIDS heightened public discourse by triggering previously held prejudices, but it also roused public fascination through its mystique.

AIDS was undoubtedly an antagonist that called into question the morality of having a social hierarchy, but its presence in public discourse was motivated by far more than that. A lack of information regarding HIV and AIDS made them intriguing topics of public debate. Particularly in the first fifteen years of the epidemic, researchers were searching furiously for a cause, an appropriate disease definition and a cure. It was not clear at first that the virus could not be transmitted through casual contact. Since those discoveries took time, the people had the opportunity to put forward alternate causation and transmission theories for debate in a public sphere. Bemmel, in his article on public discourse of nodding syndrome in the Uganda news cycle, claimed that mystery evokes attention (Bemmel, 2016). When phenomena cannot be explained, they become objects of questioning and fascination. As humans, we desire to know and explain what is going on around us, usually by using narratives or creating constructs to define them. However, just as this desire for understanding can drive innovation and progress, it can also hinder it. It was in part a drive for understanding HIV and AIDS that heightened its prevalence in public discourse (Packard, 2002). The biological agent of AIDS – HIV – was not discovered until 1984, three years after the first cases were reported in California (Department of Health, 2015). Given that scientific research remained inconclusive or inconsistent for so long, cultural constructions of the illness were especially powerful for the public (Herdt, 1992). Triechler, in her book *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*, contends that

people's constructions of the HIV and AIDS dominated their knowledge of them (Triechler, 1999). Despite the local presence of the CDC, which had been publishing reports on AIDS throughout the epidemic, misconceptions of transmission and stigma still took a strong hold over residents in Atlanta, which will be discussed in further detail later on in the paper.

The socio-cultural context of HIV and AIDS is important to understanding how people who are living with HIV and AIDS experience their illness. Previous research has indicated a fear of the unknown interlaced with previously held prejudices resulting in discrimination towards those diagnosed with AIDS and those who were HIV positive. Many who were and are at a higher risk for contracting HIV compared to the general population often experienced a layering of stigmatization from the identities they held as members of high risk groups and their HIV status, if they did contract the virus. The intention of this paper is to draw attention to social perceptions of HIV and AIDS, particularly those resulting from stigmatization and discrimination, because they can have a significant influence on the health-seeking behaviors of those with the illness and those who believe they may be at risk.

Cultural Context of the start of the AIDS epidemic in Atlanta, GA

It is important to note that, while nationally AIDS seemed to violate societal norms, the normative values of geographic locations vary widely. Therefore, it is important to understand the cultural history of Atlanta and the societal norms that are unique and shared in its location within the United States. Atlanta is regarded as a liberal city in a more conservative American south and, as a metropolitan area, has a higher diversity of residents from religious, socio-economic, racial and sexual identities than surrounding localities. The location of Atlanta in

Georgia, a “Deep South” state, is a fascinating case study of culture conflicts and epidemic distribution.

Conservatism in the South

After World War II, the cultural ideology of the Southern states became more socially and fiscally conservative. There are many factors that impact this regional culture with the most distinctive being political conservativism, history of slavery and strong ties to religion. Pew conducted a study on religious beliefs in Georgia. 79% of participants identified as Christian, the plural majority of which identified as Evangelical (Pew, 2014). 84% of participants said that religion played some degree of importance in their daily lives (Pew, 2014). Religion is strong component of culture and it directly impacts people’s conceptualization of world order and determination of existence. For many people in the gay community, religious orders were a threat to their lifestyle. Often, religious communities would reject people who were gay or use pastoral counseling as a method of “curing” people of their sexual identity (Cotton, 1996). The pastor of an Atlanta United Methodist Church, Reverend Jean Jones, said, “it is the alienation caused by the church’s rejection of gay, lesbian and bisexual people that is contrary to the reconciling and healing ministry of Jesus Christ” (Cotton, 1996). Indeed, it felt as though many religions were retracting their staunch doctrines of compassion and acceptance from the gay community. In a city and state where religion plays a large role in cultural identity, the alienation of the gay community goes far beyond the walls of a place of worship; it becomes a part of the cultural system of beliefs.

In the political sphere, there is a common ideology that, to an extent, influences the way the government acts and impacts its citizens. Southern states trend toward a traditionalist

ideology, which stipulates that the true purpose of government is to maintain law and order. Government's power is small and libertarian ideologies are more effectively carried out. The South, as a voting bloc, has consistently voted Republican in presidential elections since World War II. Voting politics is one area in which Atlanta is exceptional to the rest of Georgia. In the presidential elections, while Georgia as a state has been solid red, Fulton County – which includes the metropolitan area of Atlanta – has voted blue in the past 5 presidential elections. This could indicate a shift in political ideology both as to the role of government and the

History of the Gay Community in Atlanta

The gay community across the country started to mobilize in their own movement for civil rights and a city that had a past of supporting civil rights movements seemed like a refreshing change from the strong conservatism of the Deep South. Similar to the Castro in San Francisco, the gay men converged on Midtown neighborhoods and remained fairly isolated from the other communities (Chenault, 2010). The demographics were also fairly similar to the Castro, in that most of the men were white and financially well off. Atlanta became a haven though, as many cities did, for a sexually active lifestyle for people who desired confidentiality that they could not get in their home towns (Chenault, 2010). Throughout the Deep South, gay men would settle in Atlanta in order to more freely express their identity or to find an accepting community in situations when they were not accepted by theirs. The civil rights aspect was important as well because it gave the gay community a historical platform to voice their own concerns regarding gay rights and the treatment of the gay community in America. This was spurred by the AIDS epidemic as well.

With the backdrop of civil rights and social revolutions, religion comes to play an interesting role. Religion is usually associated with orthodoxy and conservatism. However, in Atlanta, and other parts of the South, religions are can be a source of progressive ideas and movements. For example, the Presbyterian and Baptist churches were actively involved in the civil rights movement and the advancement of people of color in the United States (Patterson, 1996). Methodist churches, particularly in Midtown, were communal centers for the gay community, particularly in the 1980s (Patterson, 1996). They also conducted many HIV and AIDS-related health intervention programs (Patterson, 1996). The gay community developed their own religious sects to create a safe space for worship and communal gatherings (Cotton, 1996). The duality of religion in Atlantian social movements is unique to this city and presents a different cultural aspect than is to be expected of a city in the "Deep South."

The institution of the Church has many different cultural implications to different people. Among African Americans in Atlanta, the Black Church has long been central to the experience of the black community. An article published in the Atlanta Inquirer stated, "The black church remains today as one of the most respected institutions born within the black experience in Atlanta" (Neeson, 1984). Historically, the Black Church and communal ties that it fostered allowed for the rise of institutions such as schools, clinics, banks and the like (Lincoln, 1990). The Church has also historically been a cultural center, providing an outlet for the arts and encouraging political engagement (Lincoln, 1990). The influence of the Black Church could be seen in the civil rights era with the leadership of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., among other church leaders, and the dominance of the Southern Christian Leadership (Lincoln, 1990). Not only has the Black Church been a force behind social reform, but it has also played a role in

providing for the health and wellbeing of its members, filling discriminatory gaps in the formalized healthcare system (Levin, 1984). The importance of the Black Church, both religiously and culturally, is crucial to interpreting the significance of community advances towards addressing the AIDS epidemic.

History of Race in Atlanta

The history of slavery in the South and its economic ties also have a strong influence on the culture in the South. Georgia was one of many states in the South that adopted Jim Crow laws which segregated people by race to maintain "social order." Tate, lamenting the fall of Southern agrarianism, claims that the new state of Southern economics, one without the use of slave labor, will alter the environment in the region from "indignation" to "violence" (Langsdale, 51). This segregation took place in many different ways, but the most striking and impactful was physical segregation, particularly through housing. In 1960, Atlanta had a segregation score of 94 out of 100, with 0 indicating no physical racial segregation and 100 being total physical racial segregation (New Encyclopedia, 149). Race became embodied in the social psyche with a physical othering of dark skinned bodies by housing policies and white mobility. While the civil rights movement in the 50s and 60s resulted in landmark desegregation cases, discrimination was still a prominent feature of culture. It was often included in the conservative platforms of politicians.

Although Atlanta was termed a "Black Mecca" by Ebony Magazine in the 1970s, this term held a connotation of racial integration and equality that was not true for black residents. An article in the Chicago Tribune challenged this term. While there are a higher proportion of African Americans in the Atlanta area, there is nothing equal about their situation. Black

residents in Atlanta were making less, on average, than other cities and the public schools in the city, of which the student body was about 90% black, ranked near the bottom of most performance measures (Kirby, 1997). However, what *Ebony Magazine* could have been hinting at was that the racism in Atlanta was different than most other places in the South, in that it was not as blatant. They said that black residents could communicate more effectively with white people and they had deemed themselves the "City too Busy to Hate." Kirby argues that they were not necessary less hateful towards other races, they used a tactic associated with communities in the North to avoid interaction: white flight (Kirby, 1997). This is only one of many striking dissimilarities of culture in Atlanta compared to the rest of the "Deep South."

Social Perceptions and Health-Seeking Behaviors

Social perceptions are important in understanding the progression of an epidemic because they can alter the likelihood that people seek prevention, diagnosis and care. Perception of risk can be a critical driver of health seeking behavior and understanding people's perceptions of the risk posed by HIV and AIDS could increase understanding of reactionary behaviors. A study on crime reports and local perceptions of risk found that the more crime was reported on in the media, and the closer the proximity of the incident, the more likely people were to feel unsafe (Heath, 1984). Reporting on an illness exclusively in other communities, such as AIDS and the gay community in the 1980s, can reduce the perception of risk among people who do not identify as gay (Packard, 2004).

But the way an illness is reported on does not always relate to risk. It may also relate to perception of discrimination. A study on HIV/AIDS reporting on television and HIV testing in African Americans showed that the more HIV was reported on, the less likely African Americans

reported being tested (Hornik, 2014). Hornik hypothesized that this was a result of perceived discrimination. For example, if the reports contain language that perpetuates discrimination of infected individuals, then people may be dissuaded from testing (Hull, 2013). These papers, which draw much more distinctive connections between media behavior and social behavior, indicate that the way HIV and AIDS was reported on in local papers could influence the behaviors of their readers and those in the general public.

However, the extent of the impact is likely dependent upon the influence of media sources on the general population in regard to reporting on the AIDS epidemic. The role of media as an extension of socio-cultural belief systems becomes muddled in regard to the news because of its assumed function as a nonbiased resource. Newspapers are a form of print media that are socially understood to contain facts about phenomena that are occurring. The perception of objectivity and reliability can lead people to be more accepting of the information published in newspapers (Bandura, 2001). A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 61% of young adults reported getting the majority of their information about HIV/AIDS from media (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2011). However, these studies refer to media in a general sense, so it can include television, internet and print forms of media. My project focuses specifically on newspapers as a form of print media. In the earlier years of the epidemic, newspapers were relied upon to disseminate accurate information about HIV and its primary modes of transmission (Garrett, 1988). The use of media as a reputable source for information on HIV and AIDS may increase the influence of the socio-cultural ideologies within the reports. However, the significance of newspapers has decreased over the time period researched in this study, especially with the rise in social media as a free platform for the dissemination of

information. Presently, the Pew Research Center found that only 20% of participants in a nationwide survey cited that they often receive their news from newspapers compared to 38% who said they often read the news online (Mitchell, 2016). Some local newspapers have struggled with the change in consumer behavior. The changing socio-cultural significance of print newspapers as a source of health information will be addressed in further detail in the limitations section of the paper. Given the timespan of this paper, which begins far before the inception of the internet, print media seemed to be a consistent medium for information dissemination in the area, which is why I felt that it would be the most appropriate proxy for this historical analysis. This paper will go on to explain print media's role as an extension of culture and its significance in understanding the social perceptions of HIV and AIDS in Atlanta.

Chapter 2

The Significance of Print Media

Media and its Relationship to Social Perceptions

Media are important means of communicating socio-cultural systems of thought and has existed in some form or another for quite some time. Media come in many different forms: print, online, television, radio, podcasts, etc. Although there is a long tradition of written texts, print media did not come into its modern state until the invention of the printing press in the 1400s (Peterson, 2003). The importance and influence of print media have increased through innovations in technology (Peterson, 2003). Through the print format, media can be an extension of culture by using words to imitate pre-existing ideas and understandings of topics or concepts. Kramsch describes language as a series of signs that have a particular meaning in certain contexts. It is used to express, symbolize and embody cultural reality (Kramsch, 1998). Therefore, the use of language is just another avenue to communicate beliefs and attitudes to others. If language is communication, then media is the mode of that communication.

It is the platform through which language can express cultural systems, and the characteristics of that platform can be important to its influence in social contexts. The medium through which language is used is essential to conveying cultural reality because it creates different conceptualizations in the groups it is being consumed by (Kramsch, 1998). For example, the United States has historically placed value on newspapers, which are a form of print media. According to a study conducted by, The Kaiser Family Foundation in 1999 over 80% of people reported receiving health information from newspapers across racial groups (Brodie, 1999). The degree to which people's reliance on newspapers for health information has

changed over the period that this research encompasses. Media's function makes it a vehicle for expressing cultural representations, thereby giving it potential to broadcast social perceptions as well.

As print media channels perceptions from public discourse, it can also actively engage with these larger discussions by influencing the public agenda and terminology used to define topics of interest. The manipulation of public discourse allows print media to go beyond merely embodying perceptions and ideologies, but it can also replicate them by manipulating social interactions. Bandura theorizes that there are two main ways through which media can influence someone's conceptualizations and perceptions (Bandura, 2001). The first is through a direct appeal to an individual. Intentional use of syntax and terminology can be used to diffuse messages through the narratives in print sources, which can have a particularly powerful effect on people who were not initially familiar with the subject (Bandura, 2001). Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) asserts that people look to others for verification of their ideas of reality, so the individual and social interaction with media representations can be particularly effective at introducing new or verifying prior beliefs. If people are seeking out perceptions that match their own, then challenging those views would be resigned to discussions within the public domain. However, Bandura asserts that media has a role to play in that context as well.

The second route brings in the social dynamics of discourse in a community. Media can indirectly influence perceptions by stimulating larger social conversations. Rather than reading an article directly, a person may discuss the content of the article with social networks and active learning mechanisms can allow the messages to pervade in these networks (Bandura, 2001). This route expands the reach of media sources beyond simply their readership and

influences the way in which a topic is discussed in public domain. These socially mediated processes allow for cultural ideologies and social perceptions in media to be replicated without direct interaction with the media source. Through these two pathways, media functions as a mechanism for communicating socio-cultural beliefs and ideologies to a larger public audience.

Social Cognitive Theory develops a framework to explain how media can have an influence on public discourse. Conversely, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) includes a theoretical framework to determine the extent to which public dialogue manipulates media messages via power relations in a population. The purpose of CDA is to study the use of language to determine how social dynamics and discourse can manifest in its replication within a text, such as a news report (Blommaert, 2000). CDA focuses on power dynamics within societies and how they are represented through specific terminology. Power is an important theme in the manifestation and progression of the AIDS epidemic in Atlanta in part because it influenced the visibility of the epidemic in the public domain. Power dynamics can determine the relative importance of a topic in public discourse, but also the way in which that topic is discussed (Blommaert, 2000). Media can be dominated by the ideology of those with authority to control and express it within that medium. Therefore, reporting can be viewed and analyzed as an expression of perceptions of those with enough social power to express it. Different newspapers may espouse different attitudes based on the communities they cater to, which is why multiple newspapers were included in the media analysis I conducted. The Atlanta-Journal Constitution is not necessarily representative of discourse among the different sub- populations in Atlanta. It is the power dynamics of publishing and consuming media that determine how and how often a subject will be reported on.

Power Relations in the Publishing and Consumption of Media

Peterson used a dual circuit model to explain how media is developed. One pathway is maintained by media producers, those who are taking from their socio-cultural contexts and discourse and reporting them through media (Peterson, 2003). The other pathway is maintained by consumers who are selecting media sources and topics whose ideologies they can identify with (Peterson, 2003). I believe this model overly simplifies the number of players that are involved in the creation of media and it overlooks the various degrees of influence they play on reporting. Ultimately, I have defined four actors that make up the web of media development: executives, authors, readers and the general public.

Media executives, such as editors, chief executive officers and owners, can be a powerful determinant of the media agenda. When I discuss the media agenda, I am referring to the day-to-day decisions being made by journalists and management on what to report motivated by the perceived importance of the topics (Shaw, 1992). Media executives can determine the ideologies of the newspaper and what issues may or may not be appropriate to publish in the paper. These agendas are developed through engagement with the public agenda and either public or individual perceptions of import on an issue (Shaw, 1992). They may not be involved in day-to-day publishing decisions, but their influence may be seen in larger ideological threads of decision making. While the topics on the media agenda and their relative importance are significant in pervading public discourse, what is left off the agenda is also critical. Censorship highlights what is important and hides away issues from public discourse and the mind (Peterson, 2003). Although this research concerns itself more with what was published, it is important to remember that that the lack of discussion on certain topics and a smaller rate of reporting is also significant.

As an aside, it is important to note that executives are not omnipotent in their control over the media agenda. Their motivations are not only influenced by their preconceived notions of what is important, but also by the necessity to gain attention and sales. Their intention to make money also puts them under the influence of their reader base, as well as the general public if they are attempting to expand (Moores, 1990). The demographics and ideologies of the consumer base, then, help to shape the agenda. They determine what is important but within the context of public discourse, which is why critical discourse analysis becomes important to my methodology.

The authors retain the closest connection in the development of print media texts. Authors are the ones who may choose topics and write the stories to be published in a newspaper. Their role is crucial because their interpretation of a topic is what forms the bridge between media producers and the public. This role also affords them the power and ability to articulate, through language, cultural systems of beliefs. Whoever is writing the articles and choosing what to publish in the paper has an inherent bias towards their way of conceptualizing a subject or portraying a situation (Peterson, 2003). Their socio-cultural conditioning influences how they interpret a situation, but they are in a unique position to be able to replicate that system through the language of their reports. Therefore, when a consumer reads an article, they are learning about a topic through the perspective of the author.

The consumer or reader, which is a sub-group of the general population that directly reads a news report, can be overlooked as merely a passive recipient of information. However, the way a person interprets what they are reading can be drastically different depending on the socio-cultural context of the reader (Gee, 2000). The reader can decide which stories are of the

most importance or interest to them, thereby self-censoring the information they choose to digest. They are also the link described in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory – the one's receiving information and disseminating it to others within the context of the media source they are reading it from. The ability to interpret puts power in the hands of the reader, the consumer of media, and their interpretation can then have an effect on the type of language used in reporting. The capability of the author to directly change the way a topic is portrayed expands on the role of consumers in Peterson's model. People are not only passive consumers of information, but they have the power to interpret and assign value to what they are reading based on their own socio-cultural beliefs.

This type of influence is also wielded by the general public, not simply the consumer base of a publication. As mentioned before, many newspapers in the United States are companies that operate for-profit. Executives must continually look for larger markets in order to maintain or increase revenue. As a result, executives and authors need to be aware of other audiences that they may be catering to. The relative importance and discourse around a topic may be different than their usual consumer base. Particularly given the technologic expanse of media coverage, there is a larger public to cater to but also a larger public agenda. The selection of topics for media attention becomes a more competitive process and stories are often chosen for publication based on their ability to attract attention (Garrett, 1988). This is not only economically powerful in regards to subscriptions sold, but also potential revenue from the selling of advertisement spaces, which increases with a larger readership. Sensationalism can develop from this type of economic system, almost ensuring that the complexity of a story or object of discourse gets lost in crude, concise headlines. Treichler asserts that dips in media

coverage of AIDS after the 1980s was related to the loss of sensationalism (Treichler, 1999). Since people were no longer dying of a mysterious disease with no cure, they did not find as much fascination with the illness (Treichler, 1999). The assertion is that the social visibility of HIV and AIDS was related to how the media and the public assigned importance to the issue after the 1980s, which is a stance that I assume in my media analysis.

My research focuses on the outcomes of these power relations within media development. The frequency of which HIV, AIDS or both are mentioned in articles from local newspapers are a proxy for the media agenda. The relative importance of the epidemic in the agenda should play out in the number of times stories are allowed to be published in the newspaper. The terminology used to describe HIV, AIDS and people living with HIV is an important indicator of the socio-cultural contexts from which authors are writing and consumers are interpreting. Just as public discourse may influence the language in and frequency of reports, so to may they influence the local public discourse.

Chapter 3

Methodology

As an outsider to Atlanta, my methodology was geared towards analyzing proxies for social perceptions of a relatively taboo topic. Given my positionality as a white woman with few social ties to the greater Atlanta metro area, many groups that I would have preferred to speak to in-person about their social experiences with HIV and AIDS were inaccessible, both on account of the limitation of my social network and the intrusiveness that such an endeavor would have posed to these communities. Simultaneously, I felt my research question best fit the temporally static nature of print media: previous articles cannot be altered throughout time and thus provide a chronologically sound overview of the changes that societal perceptions undergo. The resulting methodology is a result of the negotiating the boundaries of what is necessary to answer the research question and what is possible from my position as a student at Emory.

Developing a Timeline

To understand the historical context of the newspaper reports, my research first focused on developing a timeline of the AIDS epidemic in the United States. This timeline focused on the events that occurred in the across the country, in Georgia and in Atlanta. Online resources such as AIDS.gov and Frontline provided detailed timelines and were very helpful foundations to build on. Other events were gleaned from books and newspaper articles to gain a more complete picture of the history of the AIDS epidemic. A summary of events that I found to be particularly important or indicative of the reality of the AIDS epidemic are included in each chapter as a reference and are specific to the time periods covered in each section.

Historical events provide a one-dimensional perspective of the epidemic and to create a context for identifying social perceptions of HIV and AIDS, I also developed a cultural history of Atlanta and the southern region of the United States. My cultural history delved into political ideology, religious beliefs, social justice movements, discrimination and the political economy of health. A cultural map is large and complex with coverage of the topic spanning many volumes of books—many of which I consulted for the purpose of developing it for my research. For the sake of brevity, aspects of the history in Atlanta that provided the most relevance to the newspaper data are outlined in the ensuing chapters. Identity politics is a foundational theme in my results and thus historical concepts that drew connections to it were given favor in the representation of Atlanta's cultural history.

News Sources

The newspapers used in this study include the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (AJC) and *Atlanta Inquirer*. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* is currently the largest-circulating local newspaper in the greater Atlanta metro area (Perry). The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was initially two separate newspapers: The *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution* (Perry). Although the two papers merged their staff in 1982, they continued to print as two separate newspapers until 2001 (Perry). The dual printing of the papers made it difficult to capture complete frequency data from both of them during the period from 1982 to 2001, which will be described later on. The political leaning of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* is relatively unclear. While the *Atlanta Journal* historically had a more conservative lean, the *Atlanta Constitution* provided a more center-left perspective (Perry). Recent reports suggest the newspaper has shifted to the center in response to readership requests for "balanced" reporting and stopped

printing editorials as a result (Folkenflik, 2010). The newspaper itself is printed daily with the largest circulation occurring on Sundays to a population of 176,000 and 410,000 respectively (Burress, 2013). It also requires a paid subscription although its online platform, the AJC.com, can be viewed for free. The online platform, which was initiated as recently as 2007, is considered a separate publication from the newspaper itself (Henry, 2007). Previously, the Atlanta-Journal Constitution was circulated statewide, but has had to limit its circulation in recent years (Burress, 2013). The paper caters to a middle to upper income audience with a majority (about 65%) of readers identifying as white (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 2003).

The *Atlanta Inquirer* is a black-owned newspaper in the Atlanta area. The newspaper has been in circulation since August 1960 and it caters to the black community in Atlanta. The newspaper was originally founded by black leaders in Atlanta for the expressed purpose of being a voice of people of color during the civil rights movement (Russell). The paper is published weekly with a circulation of about 40,000 copies and reaches about 72% of the African Americans in the metro Atlanta area (Echo Media). The paper has multiple distribution sites, and they also distribute in bulk to local churches (Echo Media). The staff size of the paper is considerably smaller than that of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and it remains mainly a print source with a small degree of web presence. The *Atlanta Inquirer* also has a specific journalist charge attributed to it. The paper, at the time of its founding, was intended to provide information specific to the black community. it also became a medium to assist the advancement of African Americans in Atlanta and highlight areas of progress, as well as areas of improvement for the community. The intentions behind the publication of this newspaper are

important to the development of its media agenda and the topics of the articles that are published.

Creative Loafing is considered an "alternative" newspaper in Atlanta. It currently has the second highest circulation of local newspapers behind the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The newspaper focuses on news, culture and the arts in Atlanta (Creative Loafing, "About"). The layout of *Creative Loafing* is more stylized and it utilizes editorials and magazine style article formats rather than the more mainstream style of news articles. The newspaper can be viewed in print and, recently, online at no cost. It has a circulation of about 75,000 papers (Creative Loafing, "About"). As an alternative newspaper, *Creative Loafing* caters to wealthier residents of the metro Atlanta area and finds a niche with the LGBT community in the area (Echo Media).

These sources were chosen intentionally as proxies for social perceptions of different social and cultural groups in Atlanta. While they may not be entirely representative of the communities they cater to most, their circulation within them suggests that it may have some impact on the discourse within them. By comparing and contrasting reporting across these various media sources, I hoped to uncover and analyze different conceptualizations of HIV and AIDS in across different communities in Atlanta.

Media Analysis

My analysis of media sources tracked two indicators that required different methodologies. One indicator is frequency, measured by the number of articles that mentioned HIV and AIDS within each newspaper. The same five search terms were used to identify relevant articles for online searches: "AIDS," "HIV," "HIV/AIDS," "Gay-Related Immune Deficiency," and "gay cancer." In order to search all articles written about HIV and AIDS in each

newspaper, multiple online databases were used in order to cover the 35-year time span of the epidemic. The details I present here can also be found summarized in Table 1 below. Articles for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* were found online through LexisNexis® Academic Universe and provided articles from January 1st, 1991 to the present. ProQuest Newsstand was used to search the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* archives from 1989 to 1991, although it only provided citation and abstract coverage. The Newsbank Access World News database was also used to find articles from the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* between 1985 and 1989. The ProQuest archive on the Atlanta Journal-Constitution website was used to compile articles from the Atlanta Constitution from 1981 to 1984.

Table 1: The databases used to find articles from each newspaper and the coverage of each database.

Newspaper	Archive and/or Database	Time Span Coverage
Atlanta Journal-Constitution	ProQuest Archiver	1981-1984
	Newsbank Access World News	1985-1989
	ProQuest Newsstand	1989-1991
	LexisNexis® Academic Universe	1991-2016
Atlanta Inquirer	ProQuest Ethnic NewsWatch	1991-2006
	Georgia State University Library Print Archives	1981-1986 (excluding 1983) & 2006 - 2015
Creative Loafing	Creative Loafing Online Search	2000-2016

ProQuest Ethnic NewsWatch Current provided articles from the *Atlanta Inquirer* from 1991 until 2006. The in-print archives at Georgia State were also used to cover the period from 1982 to 1990 and 2006 to the present. There were some gaps in coverage in the *Atlanta Inquirer* archives, such as the year 1993 and the period from December 1986 to October 1990.

In my search of online databases, I could not find archive records of *Creative Loafing* Atlanta. Although the paper has been in circulation since the 1970s, a search of their archives page on the *Creative Loafing* Atlanta website only returned articles from 2000 to the present. Online databases were accessed using the Emory University licensing agreements that I was allowed access as a result of my status as an enrolled, full-time student.

The term "HIV" was not as effective in identifying articles in the early decades of the epidemic because the term was not used as often as AIDS. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* had not undergone its merger until 1985, so searches also covered the *Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution*. The number of articles were tallied in an Excel spreadsheet by month. The sample size was 922 articles from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and 400 articles from the *Atlanta Inquirer*. This was completed for both the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the Atlanta Inquirer. The *Creative Loafing* archives were not complete enough to undergo this level of analysis with a return of only 224 related articles that only dated as far back as 2000. The decade long gaps would have led to a significant bias in the data collected. Therefore, *Creative Loafing* was not included until the critical discourse analysis stage.

After tallying the number of articles published by month, I determined the total counts for each year. In order to account for the difference in publishing frequency and capacity of the two papers, I decided to present the data as a rate of publishing per 1000 articles. This would show how often HIV and AIDS was reported on in proportion to the capacity of each paper. I counted the number of articles published in the main section of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* each day for one week and counted the number of articles in 7 issues of the Atlanta Inquirer. I took the average of these numbers to determine how many articles the

papers published per issue. I found that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published about 25 articles per issue and multiplied that number by 365 to determine the total number of articles published by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* per year, as it is a daily newspaper. I found that the *Atlanta Inquirer* publishes about 30 articles per issue and I multiplied that number by 52 to determine the total number of articles published per year as the *Atlanta Inquirer* is a weekly newspaper. After completing this calculation, I found that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published, on average, 9216 articles per year and the *Atlanta Inquirer* published about 1560 articles per year. I set the number of articles published about HIV and AIDS per year divided the total number of articles published per year equal to a proportion out of 1000 articles to determine the rate of publishing articles regarding HIV and AIDS.

The second phase of the media analysis was a qualitative form of analysis based on the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, which identifies terms or phrases in media and determines the socio-cultural implications of their use. I felt that random sampling and coding of a representative sample of articles from my frequency analysis would not only take too much time, but it would also prevent me from being able to properly illustrate the social atmosphere that was create by other articles in the newspapers. I found this to by particularly true during my research of the in-print *Atlanta Inquirer* archives. Even though I did not identify a mention of HIV or AIDS until 1984, I noticed many articles prior to this time that discussed behaviors and conditions that are related to HIV and AIDS, such as sex, sexuality, family planning, drug use, racism and poverty. I felt that the attitudes that were expressed through these articles impacted the way I interpreted articles that mentioned HIV and AIDS. Therefore, I used a purposive, or intentional, sampling method to identify articles for continued scrutiny. As I

searched articles relating to HIV and AIDS, I often looked at articles that reported on topics that were HIV and AIDS. I made note of the article, its publishing date, the author and the type of article. I also made note of the terminology and phrases that stood out to me in these articles. This reveals a much clearer picture of the social perceptions that are being reproduced in these articles and how they vary based on decade and newspaper.

Interviews

In conjunction with the media analysis portion of the study, interviews were conducted in order to solidify the cultural history of the AIDS epidemic in Atlanta and human experiences with the social discourse around the illness. While I strived to carry out interviews with 20 people, only five individuals participated. The implications of this small sample size are reviewed in the limitations section of this paper. All of my interviewees were physicians and researchers – many from the same institution. Some of them have been deeply involved in local efforts to address HIV and AIDS since the epidemic first officially began in 1982. The frequent interaction of these individuals in local public discourse around HIV and AIDS make them good informants as to the perceptions that they were encountering and the cultural atmosphere around the discourse. Ultimately, their testimonies were helpful in developing the historical context of HIV and AIDS in Atlanta, particularly from a biomedical perspective.

My interview research plan was approved by Emory University's Internal Review Board on October 10th, 2016. I utilized convenience sampling to identify the first cohort of interviewees who had been deeply connected with HIV and AIDS in the region. Participants were sought out based on their occupations and level of involvement in the local epidemic. Specifically, I selected for physicians, researchers, activists, non-profit administrators and

journalists. The snowball sampling method was used to recruit participants in the study. Initial contact was made via email and participants received a copy of the informed consent document before the interview. Participants names were coded with specific identifiers determined by the researcher to protect anonymity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants that ranged from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours. The interviews covered their work, what they believed the milestones of the epidemic were, how the epidemic has changed over time, how people's perceptions of HIV and AIDS have changed over time and what challenges they faced from the local community in their work. Samples of interview questions are included below. Interviews were recorded to allow for later transcription and more accurate portrayal of informant remarks. Follow-ups were conducted for clarification, if necessary.

Chapter 4

Stage I: The "Gay Plague"

The first chronological stage of Atlanta's media trend is termed the "Gay Plague," after a striking newspaper headline published by the *Philadelphia Daily News* in 1982 (Clews, 2017). At the beginning of this period, media reports were dominated by a consistent and unwavering connection between AIDS and the gay community. Recognition that AIDS impacted populations other than gay men was not fully realized until 1983 and, even then, the illness was the subject of "othering" both geographically and socially. Moralizing discourse that criminalized those who are HIV positive further alienated affected communities and increased stigmatization of those infected with HIV and living with AIDS. HIV and AIDS were reported on quite often in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* relative to the *Atlanta Inquirer*, bringing about a discussion of how the media producers and communities engaged with these publications perceived the importance of the epidemic.

The Beginning of the Epidemic: AIDS in the 1980s

The symptoms of AIDS were first noticed by health officials in 1981 after multiple cases of pneumonia (PCP) and Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS) were observed in healthy gay men. The effect of AIDS on the gay community was devastating. By 1986, 70% of all reported cases of AIDS in adults presented in gay men and the case fatality rate was 56% (Center for Infectious Disease, 1986). Before 1986, those proportions were likely higher.

The high levels of mortality among gay men had a powerful social impact on that community. One interview participant, Dr. Patrick Sullivan, said, "an older generation [of gay men] and my generation were largely traumatized by the HIV epidemic" (P. Sullivan, personal

interview, Nov 11, 2016). Dr. Sullivan, currently a professor and researcher at Emory University, joined the Epidemic Intelligence Service at the CDC in the mid 1990s and worked closely on HIV/AIDS surveillance, specifically within the gay community. Although the effect of AIDS was especially salient in the gay community during the 1980s, there was a large-scale ignorance of the extent of the epidemic among the general public. Another interview participant, Dr. James Curran, remarked, "It wasn't like everybody could feel this. But the infectious disease community and the public health community recognized it as a serious problem…and [the deaths due to AIDS] kept increasing" (J. Curran, personal interview, Nov 17th, 2016). Dr. Curran coordinated the CDC's first task force addressing the AIDS epidemic in 1981 and continued to work in HIV/AIDS prevention before assuming his current position as Dean of Emory's Rollins School of Public Health. His remark reveals differential experiences of the AIDS epidemic between the gay and non-gay communities that inform trends in reporting that are identified in this chapter.

A quest for knowledge characterized the first nine years of the epidemic. What is AIDS, what causes it, how can it be spread and how can we treat it? Those were all questions that inspired research, policy and public discourse during this period of time. There were some major events in the progression of the AIDS epidemic that occurred between 1981 and 1989. In order to help contextualize the epidemic in this period, Table 2 is a timeline highlighting these important events which can be used for chronological reference as I mention the events in my analysis.

Table 2: Major events in the AIDS epidemic from 1981-1989

YEAR	MAJOR EVENTS
1981	- The CDC published the first MMWRs on cases of PCP and KS among gay men in California and New York.
1982	- The CDC developed a Task Force to investigate the epidemic - The CDC coined the term "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome" (AIDS)
1983	- Health officials realize that the microorganism that causes AIDS is in the national blood donation pool
1984	- Department of Health and Human Services announces the discovery of the cause of AIDS – Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) – by Robert Gallo
1985	- Actor Rock Hudson dies of complications due to AIDS - Ryan White, a teenager who contracted HIV from a blood transfusion, is barred from attending school because of his AIDS diagnosis - President Ronald Reagan mentions "AIDS" publicly for the first time
1986	- U.S. Surgeon General Everett C. Koop issues a report dismissing myths of AIDS transmission through casual contact and calls for more education and prevention programs
1987	- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves zidovudine (AZT)as the first drug for treatment of AIDS - Congress passes the Helms Amendment requiring all federally-funded sex education materials to stress abstinence and forbidding publications that "promote" homosexuality and drug use
1988	- Surgeon General Koop mails 107 million copies of an HIV/AIDS education booklet, *Understanding AIDS*, to American homes - ACT UP, an AIDS activist organization, protests the slow drug approval process at the FDA
1989	- Dazon Dixon Diallo founds the first HIV/AIDS organization for women in Atlanta, GA – SisterLove Inc.

Frequency of Mention: 1981-1989

The trend of reports during the early years of the epidemic paints a striking picture of how people in Atlanta conceptualized the epidemic. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, which at this point was functioning as two separate papers during the week and a combined one on the Sundays, did not begin to show significant coverage of the epidemic until 1983. Prior to then, they published articles in accordance with CDC reports of a rare cancer becoming more

common among gay men in California and New York. After that time, they published on the subject quite often relative to the behavior of the *Atlanta Inquirer*. For the most part, the paper remained fairly silent on the subject. However, archives are incomplete during the 1980s, which at least four whole years of articles missing, making it difficult to make strong conclusions on the reporting frequency in the *Atlanta Inquirer*. The trends in reporting can be seen below in Figure 1 and note that records for the *Atlanta Inquirer* are missing for the years 1983, 1987, 1988 and 1989. Other "missing" bars for the years 1981, 1982 and 1984 indicate that I did not find any reports published on AIDS during that time.

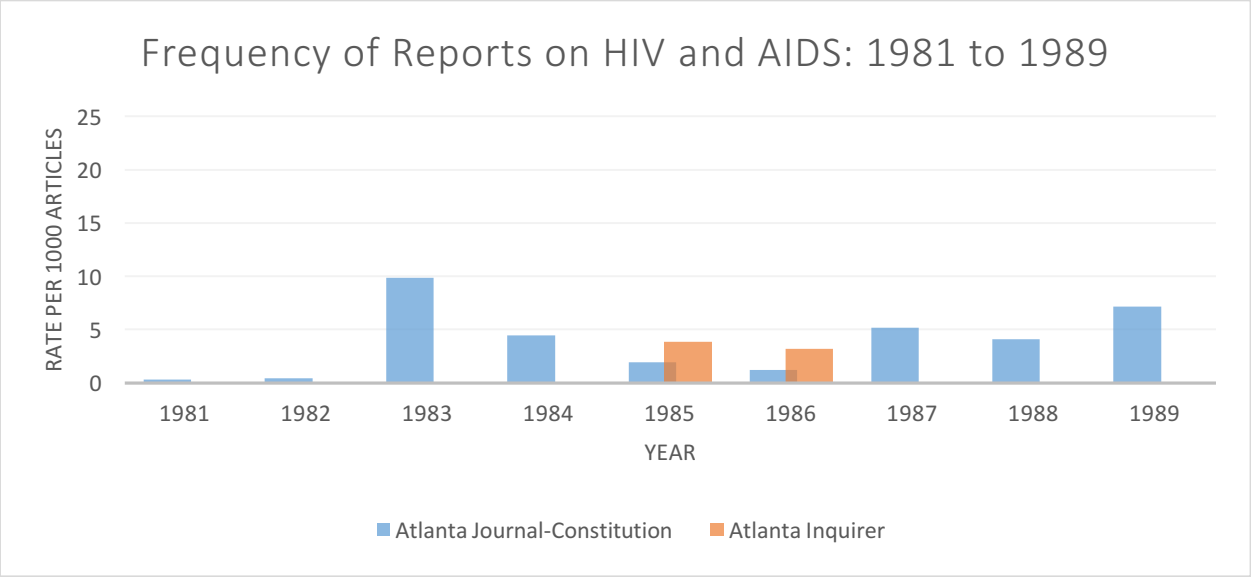

Figure 1 depicts the number of articles mentioning HIV or AIDS reported in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution and the Atlanta Inquirer from 1981 to 1989. Data for the Atlanta Journal and Constitution was collected from the AJC's ProQuest archive for the years 1981 to 1984 and Access World News for the years 1985 to 1989. Data for the Atlanta Inquirer was collected from in print archives at the Georgia State University Library, but data was missing for the years 1983, 1987, 1988 and 1989.

1983 was an important year not only because it marked a change in the number of reports by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, but because it also indicated a year of new discoveries. This was the year in which the number of populations impacted by AIDS continued to grow and blood donations became a source of concern. In 1983, the *Atlanta Journal-*

Constitution's reporting seemed to mimic the widespread panic that originated from the discovery that people were contracting HIV from blood transfusions. Compared to the years before, the number of reports on AIDS – which had been identified as such by this point – increased almost ten-fold. Some articles followed CDC reports, but others covered theories from other sources, such as physicians and researchers. The stories, which addressed causal theories from voodoo to pigs, reflected general uncertainty, even among the professional community, about AIDS (*Atlanta Constitution*, 1983; *Atlanta Constitution*, 1983). The sporadic jump from each theory and study, accompanied by internal contradictions are near reminiscent of a stream of consciousness. It also appears that during this period of increased reporting, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* had placed a science writer on the staff who was responsible for writing many of the articles regarding AIDS in the coming years.

The graph shows that the years following 1983 resulted in a decrease in the number of articles relating to HIV and AIDS. This could be a result of scientific uncertainty, but during this period HIV was officially recognized as the cause of AIDS (1984) so that theory does not entirely account for the decrease in reports. Another theory is that gaps in archives could make the number of reports seem smaller during this time than they actually were. Interview participants commented on the fact that it was difficult to get newspapers to report on AIDS for some time because the perceived risk was still small. "Major newspapers wouldn't cover it…you didn't see anything in the AJC," said Dr. James Curran as he recalled the CDC's efforts to disseminate information in the first couple years of the epidemic, until about 1983 (J. Curran, personal interview, Nov 14, 2016). Indeed, in proportion to the total number of articles published per year, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* rarely publish on the subject until 1983. A reduction in

panic following blood screening measures could have allowed for a sense of complacency to take on.

In contrast to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *Atlanta Inquirer* remained fairly quiet on the topic of AIDS in the years for which there were complete archives. However, the rate of publishing when I noted the existence of articles was about the same as the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The articles published in the *Atlanta Inquirer* were a reflection of a consistent struggle among the black community in Atlanta to overcome racism and structural violence that persisted even after the civil rights movement. Therefore, HIV and AIDS may not have been perceived less important as other topics on their media agenda, particularly because AIDS was not seen as a problem in among African Americans during this time. The *Atlanta Inquirer* is also a smaller newspaper than the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, with a lower quantity of papers in circulation. Therefore, they likely did not have the resources to hire a science writer dedicated to covering AIDS, as it appears the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* did.

It is important to note that there was a considerable lack of data from the year 1983 and the years 1987 through 1989. These large gaps in coverage align with some of the most critical periods of the early stages of the epidemic. For example, 1983 was a year that incited a considerable amount of anxiety about the virulence of HIV (or AIDS because at the time HIV was still not recognized). Political mobilization began to take form in 1987 and 1988 with the passage of the HOPE Omnibus bill that set aside funding for AIDS research and some treatment services. This makes it very difficult to compare between the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and understand exactly how these national changes impacted the community that the Atlanta Inquirer serves. However, in 1988, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published an article about

perceptions of AIDS among African Americans. The Fulton County Commission Chairman was quoted in the article claiming that the black community was doing very little to acknowledge and stop the spread of AIDS, despite the already apparent disparity in prevalence of AIDS between minorities and white communities (Durcanin, 1988). By this point in 1988, national statistics showed that only 57% of people living with AIDS were white and 26% of people living with AIDS were black (Center for Infectious Diseases, 1988). Specifically, he criticizes the clergy of black churches for shying away from conversations around sex and sexuality, which he frames in such a way that insinuates it has larger implications for silence on these topics in the black community (Durcanin, 1988). If the claims made by the Chairman are true, then the perception of AIDS as a gay disease or a disease associated with taboo topics could explain the apparent silence in the *Atlanta Inquirer*.

Frame of Discussion: 1981-1989

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the *Atlanta Inquirer* may not have printed many articles on HIV and AIDS at the beginning of the epidemic in Atlanta. They did, however, publish many articles related to sex and homosexuality that shows their attitude towards the subject and the populations disproportionately impacted by HIV and AIDS.

One thing that is important to note is the way the newspaper addressed relevant topics because it contributes to the tone of the newspaper and the social conceptualizations it is reflecting. There were many instances of reports on the gay community in Atlanta around the time that AIDS was growing in media coverage that gave a glimpse into community attitudes towards people of that identity. There had been a few reported incidents of a gay church in Midtown being vandalized (Ingle, 1982). The growth of the gay population was also a topic of

interest in the newspaper and the titles for the articles were not entirely positive. One says "Gays a growing force in Atlanta life" (Taylor, 1982). The use of the word "force" introduces a power dynamic and insinuates that gay men are gaining some time of social or political power in the city. By insinuating that power is changing hands, people might feel in some way threatened as they perceive their power to be waning. A year prior, an article titled "Report says homosexuals really aren't different from other people" was published citing a recent study by the American Psychological Association that determined homosexuality did not lead to "decadence" or "moral decay" in communities (*Atlanta Constitution*, 1981). The perceived importance of that information provides insight into social attitudes towards the gay community at the time, a belief that they were somehow different from the heterosexual population. Therefore, it is understandable that there was an othering of HIV and AIDS in the area. Not only was this othering keeping the epidemic at a distance in other cities, but also among other communities in the city.

In the context of the gay community, AIDS was devastating, both physically and emotionally. The pain of losing close friends and loved ones and the fear of death, were only made worse by discrimination. "There were actually restaurants in Atlanta that had predominately gay waiters and people stopped going to them," Dr. Curran recalled. "There were episodes at Grady Hospital where people were afraid to bring food trays into the rooms of people with AIDS…they were just so scared" (J. Curran, personal interview, Nov 14, 2016). These examples demonstrate how the fear of HIV and AIDS, paired with intense misconceptions of risk, only strengthened pre-existing prejudices. Although I discuss othering to a great extent in this section, it is important to remember that, during the 1980s in particular, the gay

community was disproportionately affected by AIDS. Therefore, discussing AIDS in the gay community was, in some ways, a positive recognition of the effect that the epidemic was having on them. However, relegating the disease to strictly the gay community, and other high risk groups, allowed the readership of these papers to overlook the epidemic until it affected them in particular.

In an interesting shift in terminology, one headline in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* discussed the "Homosexual Cancer" that was impacting California and New York (*Atlanta Constitution*, 1982). However, two weeks later when the first report of immune deficiency in non-gay populations was published, the headline called AIDS an "infectious epidemic" (*Atlanta Constitution*, 1982). Therefore, while early reports strongly tied the new syndrome to the gay community, those explicit associations became subtler after the discovery that it was not confined to the gay community. After 1983, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* made it clear that AIDS was not just a disease that impacts the gay community in isolation. The newspaper published many articles with updated research findings about HIV in among people who identify as heterosexual, racial and ethnic minorities, people who are incarcerated and children – none of which were identified as high risk groups by the CDC in the early years of the epidemic. This is not to say that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was necessarily progressive in their thinking that AIDS could impact other communities. Rather, they were reporting on studies that the CDC and other research institutions were producing regarding the wider breadth of the illness, and their focus on the epidemic in these communities may have been a result of the representation in their readership, rather than the impact AIDS was having on those populations. Although there were few explicit associations made between the gay

community and AIDS in general, there were still indications that this might be the case in the minds of those in Atlanta.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* may have been more willing to publish articles that stressed the wide impact that AIDS can have across populations in Atlanta, news stories with locals contradicted the openness expressed in the articles. For example, in 1986, the Georgia Board of Human Resources recommended that all convicted sex workers (called "prostitutes" in the original publication) should be tested for HIV and, in 1988, HIV testing did become mandatory in Georgia state prisons but with very little funding (Hopkins, 1996 & Wallace, 1988). In 1988 as well, Georgia's House of Representatives passed legislation stipulating up to 10 years in prison for people who are convicted of "reckless conduct," which is defined as engaging in sexual intercourse with a person without alerting them to one's HIV positive status (Bronstein, 1988). This was one of many HIV criminalization laws to be enacted in Georgia that made it illegal to commit certain acts believed to transmit the virus. This divide between what the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was publishing and what people in the Atlanta community were acting on could be due to the role of newspapers in educating the public on AIDS. Although the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was publishing quite a bit of information about HIV and AIDS during this time, a poll in the 1988 found that, of Atlantans that said they heard "a lot" about AIDS, only 39% were getting their information from newspapers (Sternberg, 1988). Therefore, the engagement of newspapers in social discourse may not have been as strong during the 1980s as assumed by the design of this study.

In the *Atlanta Inquirer*, there were very few overall mentions of HIV and AIDS that I was able to record. In part, this could be due to incomplete records of newspaper volumes, but

there are also indications that there were topics on the media agenda that took precedence for this paper. In the wake of the civil rights movement, which is when the paper first began circulation, the black community in Atlanta was still facing explicit and implicit forms of racism. For example, within a month of the first report on AIDS by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, one of the headlines for the Atlanta Inquirer was in regards to increased efforts to crack down on Klu Klux Klan activity (Sturrup, 1981). As it had done during the civil rights movement, the *Atlanta Inquirer* continued to publish articles regarding the state of race in Atlanta and topics important to the advancement of the black community.

The paper often focused on social problems that were disproportionately impacting the black community at that time. According to one article published in 1984, the priorities for the black community were "education, solid economic base, political power, law enforcement and media image" (Neeson, 1984). There was clearly a strong recognition of the pervasive effects of centuries of racism on the black community in Atlanta, but the recognition of the role that AIDS plays in highlighting that does not come about until many years later. The *Atlanta Inquirer* showed a dedication to making their readers aware of situations of racism and corruption, giving them avenues to take action against injustice and lauding those that were perceived to have done good work in their communities. For example, almost every edition of the paper included mention of accolades that distinguished African Americans were receiving from universities and organizations, such as the United Negro College Fund or the United States Department of Labor (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 1982). Columns provided advice that went beyond lifestyle tips, with one article offering advice on federal taxes (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 1982). With a

great deal of attention being drawn to day to day issues experience by African Americans in Atlanta, AIDS may not have been considered as important in these early years of the epidemic.

Once again, looking at the reporting of related topics shows an interesting tone for the discourse around HIV and AIDS. While sexuality was not mentioned much during the 1980s, sex was. Usually, it was mentioned was in the context of teen pregnancy and was strongly tied with religiously motivated morals. One article titled "Children Having Children: A Serious Threat to the Future of Black America," calls for open conversations about the issue of teen pregnancy through churches, schools and other support systems (Neeson, 1985). While the article strikes a well-meaning tone in its plea to keep young mothers from facing the potential of school dropout and the potential for less earnings over time, it places individual sexual behaviors at the center of a community problem. This bears a striking resemblance to the arguments raised in favor of closing gay bath houses to hinder the ability to engage in sex with multiple partners during this period of the AIDS epidemic. Teen pregnancy not only indicated a violation of safe sex practices, but of social norms of abstaining from sex at those ages. One article debunking common perceptions of teen pregnancy addressed the thought that people who become pregnant as teenagers are being punished for misdeeds (Edelman, 1985). This communal hostility to sex may make conversations around sexually transmitted infections, like HIV, harder to start.

The first time I came across an article discussing AIDS was in the April 20th, 1985 edition of the paper and the headline was "Everybody's Disease" (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 1985). As my first encounter with AIDS in this paper, it became a fascinating frame for me because it provides a bit of insight into the conceptualizations of AIDS at that time. The article begins by stating that

although AIDS was previously believed to only impact gay men, the illness does not in fact remain partial to certain sexualities, races or genders (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 1985). This article draws attention to the effect that AIDS was having on a larger population in the Atlanta area. This article, however, overlooks the intersection of gay and black identities in the community. The article also does not explicitly mention that the disease can be sexually transmitted, although it does make a note of the possibility that it can be transmitted with semen (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 1985). The lack of clarity may be partially due to the lack of decisiveness in the scientific community, but the article seems to insinuate that blood transfusions are the reason that the disease is seen among people who identify as heterosexual by stating, "Hundreds of AIDS victims…have contracted the disease through a blood transfusion. With that in mind, it becomes clear that anybody can catch the disease" (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 1985). Although there were not many articles that I was able to access from the Atlanta Inquirer during this period, the articles on other topics relating to HIV and AIDS help to provide an understanding of the how their readers were reacting to the burgeoning epidemic.

Chapter 5

Stage II: "AIDS Does Not Discriminate"

By the beginning of the 1990s, a shift in the discussion around HIV and AIDS indicated that there was a growing acceptance of the risk to all people, not just gay men. This period, which spans from 1990 to 1998, is also characterized by a large number of well-known people sharing their HIV status. In Atlanta, Emory University and other research institutions were slowly initiating studies on AIDS in the local community. The 1996 Olympics caused a major uproar when the International Olympic Committee allowed athletes living with HIV to participate.

The frequency with which the newspapers published on HIV and AIDS was more consistent than the previous period and the way the epidemic was talked about changed. As the connection to gay men started to give way to a broader understanding of high-risk groups, fear of transmission from non-official forms of transmission increased in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. However, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* also increased the educational value of its articles on HIV and AIDS by including information about the known modes of transmission and places to get tested. The *Atlanta Inquirer* maintain relatively low coverage of HIV and AIDS and their articles lacked educational information while creating a moralizing discourse around drug use and sex. Before the results of the media analysis are broken down, important dates and discoveries need to be laid out to understand the context of the reports.

Historical Context: AIDS Epidemic in the 1990s

The new decade started off with a key political move on the part of the new Bush administration. The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act was

passed in 1990 with overwhelming, bi-partisan support in Congress. This legislation marked a drastic change in the political atmosphere around HIV and AIDS that had characterized the 1980s but still centered political support around “innocent victims,” ones who were not gay or injecting drug users. The Reagan administration’s period of relative silence was now giving way to immediate federal government action. The Ryan White CARE Act appropriated funding that was intended to provide healthcare services for those living with AIDS by issuing grants to cities that were severely impacted by the epidemic, health clinics around the countries and non-profit organizations providing services to those living with HIV and AIDS. It also provided more money for medical research. While it was a large step forward, the money did have stipulations, such as a ban on its use to fund needle exchange programs. The money for research also fell short of requests made by the National Institute of Health and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Despite these fallbacks, it set a precedent for further federal legislation addressing the AIDS epidemic. In 1998, the Supreme Court held that people living with HIV and AIDS were protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (Department of Civil Rights). This decision not only prevented doctors from withholding services from patients who are HIV positive, but it also granted protections in housing and job sectors.

The 1990s were also characterized by new scientific discoveries that would change the face of the epidemic in the coming years. In 1993, the CDC changed its guidelines for the AIDS case definitions to include opportunistic infections that impacted more women, injecting drug users and people of color in response to increasing activism around the effects of AIDS on these communities (Castro, 1992). The expansion of the guidelines formalized a trend that the CDC had been reporting on for years before this. The 1990s also brought about a new and effective

treatment for AIDS called Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Treatment or HAART. HAART was approved for use in 1996 and required taking multiple, highly toxic medications several times a day (Gavett, 2012). The drugs were a monumental turning point in the epidemic because it transitioned AIDS from an acute, fatal disease to a chronic illness[1]. Those being diagnosed with HIV were no longer faced with a looming death sentence. However, the cocktail was associated with severe side effects and it cost $20,000 per year (Gavett, 2012). The Ryan White CARE Act provided funding for low-income individuals to access HAART, which helped the drug become more widely available to those in need of it.

During the 1990s, AIDS hit the "mainstream" in much more ways than one. Not only were various celebrities publicly declaring their HIV status, whether voluntarily or coerced, but AIDS became a subject of pop culture discussion. Salt-N-Pepa, a famous duo, changed the words to their famous song "Let's Talk About Sex" to "Let's Talk About AIDS" to raise money for research and debunk common myths (Gavett, 2012). The TV show ER featured a character who reveals they have HIV (Gavett, 2012). The famous TV sitcom, Will and Grace was the first show to feature a gay man as a leading character (Myers, 2014). It helped normalized the gay identity and supported decades-long efforts to foster acceptance of homosexuality in the cultural landscape. Also, during this period, many well-known celebrities revealed their HIV status. When Magic Johnson held a press conference to declare that he was HIV positive in 1991, arguably, the conversation around HIV and AIDS expanded to include people who did not

[1] Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy consisted of a "cocktail" of different drugs to prevent the replication of HIV. Each class of drugs targeted a specific step in the replication process and using multiple drugs in concert would prevent the retrovirus from becoming resistant to one class of drugs (Palmisano, 2011).

identify as gay. It paved the way for Salt-and-Pepa's song, the movie *Philadelphia* and other nationalized forms of cultural discourse. The power of his announcement was evident in the surge of demand for HIV testing across the United States (Sims, 1991). In that same year, Freddie Mercury, lead singer of the band Queen, died of AIDS. Other celebrities who were revealed to be HIV-positive during the 1990s were Pedro Zamora, Mary Fisher, Arthur Ashe, Eric Wright (Eazy-E), Greg Louganis, and Rudolf Nureyev – to name a few ("A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," 2016). People across the United States now knew more and more individuals who were living with HIV or died of AIDS. The epidemic was impacting people from all social sectors, and it's rising prominence in everyday life was not strictly a consequence of these high profile cases.

During the 1990s, the effect of AIDS could be felt across the nation as it became the leading cause of death among men ages 25 to 44 in 1992 ("A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," 2016). In 1994, it became the leading cause of death for all Americans ages 25 to 44 ("A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," 2016). By October 1995, half a million cases of AIDS – not HIV— had been reported in the United States ("A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," 2016). These statistics are a snapshot of the effect that AIDS had on the nation during this time. With these rising figures came an influx of activism around HIV and AIDS. The Red Ribbon Project was started in 1990, and the ribbon continues to be a visual representation of the fight to prevent new cases of HIV and AIDS ("A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," 2016). Movements around the inclusion of women and people of color in clinical trials resulted in a policy shift for the NIH and broader guidelines for diagnosis set by the CDC ("A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," 2016). The surge in activism and other important events during this period are summarized in Table 3. These movements foreshadowed a demographic shift in the national epidemic that did not become apparent until the end of my defined era. By

1996, statistics showed that a larger proportion of AIDS cases were reported among African Americans that whites (amfAR, 2011). This is the same year that the incidence of AIDS decreased for the first time since 1981 ("A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," 2016). It is easy to see that this demographic shift may have gone unnoticed in the media at that time, due to the positive implications of the decreasing AIDS incidence rate. However, in 1998, one year after HAART becomes the standard for HIV care, reports show that African Americans are almost ten times more likely to die of AIDS-related complications than their white and Latino counterparts ("A Timeline of HIV/AIDS," 2016). Overlapping with this trend in epidemiology is a shift in media reporting that digresses from the trend in the early 1990s.

Table 3: Major events in the AIDS epidemic from 1990 to 1997.

YEAR	MAJOR EVENTS
1990	- Cases are reported in Florida of patients contracting HIV after undergoing procedures conducted by an HIV-positive dentist - The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act is passed following the death of Ryan White - ACT UP protests the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for more drug trials including women and people of color
1991	- The Red Ribbon Project begins - Basketball player Magic Johnson announces he is HIV-positive and singer Freddie Mercury dies of an AIDS-related opportunistic infection
1992	- AIDS becomes the number one cause of death for men ages 25 to 44 in the US - The International Olympic Committee announces that HIV-positive athletes will be able to compete in the games
1993	- The CDC expands the AIDS case definition to those with CD4 counts of 200 or less - The film *Philadelphia*, which stars Tom Hanks as a lawyer who is fired because of his HIV status, is screened in theaters
1994	- AIDS is the number one cause of death for all Americans age 25 to 44 - The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) requires grant applications from the NIH to stipulate the appropriate inclusion of women and people of color in future studies

1995	- The FDA approves the first protease inhibitor drug which is used in a cocktail regime for HAART - President Clinton holds the first White House Conference on HIV and AIDS
1996	- *TIME* Magazine names Dr. David Ho "Man of the Year" for his research on HAART - The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) begins operations
1997	- The CDC reports that AIDS-related deaths declined nationally by 40% since 1996 - President Clinton sets goal to find an HIV vaccine in 10 years

Frequency of Mention: 1990-1997

The 1990s marked a changed in the way the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* discussed HIV and AIDS. Figure 2, shown below, shows the frequency data for reports in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Atlanta Inquirer*. It is important to note that records from the *Atlanta Inquirer* were missing for the year 1990, which is why no bar appears on the graph. This is not to say that reports were not made in regards to HIV and AIDS during that time. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* records the highest number of reports on HIV and AIDS, during this particular time period, in the year 1990. Given the brief historical summary presented earlier in the chapter, there are a few factors that may have influenced the prominence of HIV and AIDS in media discourse. During this year, Congress passed the Ryan White Act and Ryan White, who had become a national AIDS activist, passed away due to AIDS-related complications. This drastic shift in policy, which reached across both party platforms, was sure to attract public attention. In 1990, a debate over testing healthcare providers for HIV erupted after a report cited possible transmission of HIV from an infected dentist to his patient in Florida. In the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, articles, editorials and op-eds were dedicated to the subject – should healthcare providers be required to be tested, reveal their status to patients or be convicted for negligence

as a result of failing to do these things. 1990 was also the year in which Atlanta was announced as the host city of the 1996 Olympics. While this was largely a positive event, questions were raised as to whether HIV-positive athletes should and would be able to participate. These events likely stirred enough public debate to impact the overall number of reports in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

The rate of reporting in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* became more consistent during this period in comparison to the previous stage of the epidemic. This consistency may be a reflection of a reduction in the general panic, which was seen in 1983 and the latter half of the 1980s. It could also be related to the fact that there were treatments available during this time

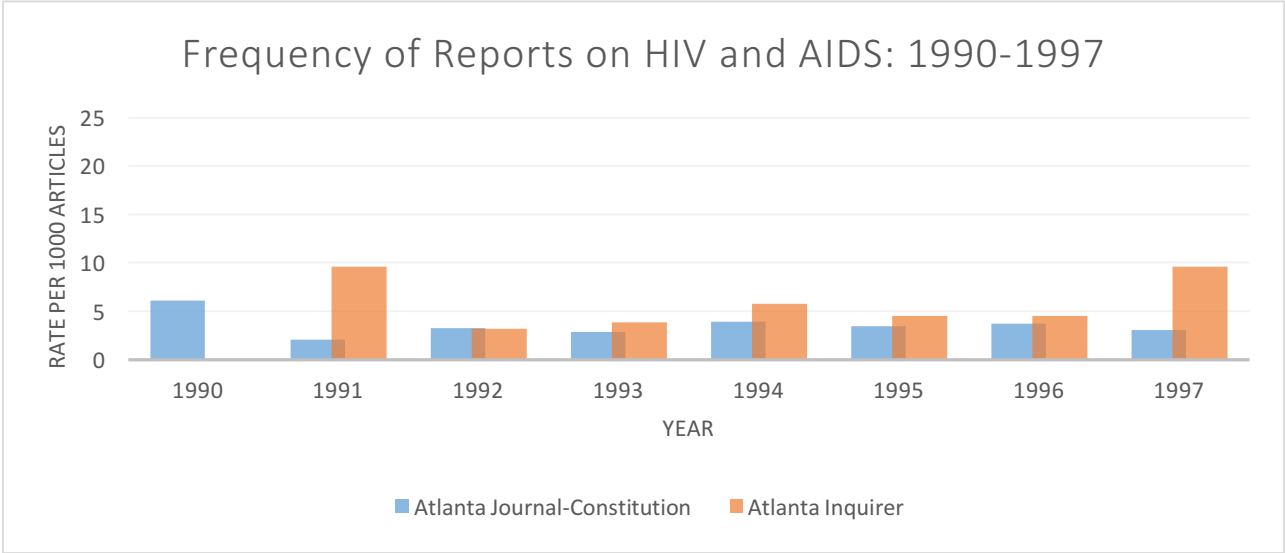

Figure 2: The frequency of reports on HIV or AIDS in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution and the Atlanta Inquirer from 1990 to 1997. Data for the Atlanta Journal and Constitution was collected from ProQuest Newsstand for the year 1990 and LexisNexis Academic for the years 1991-1997. Data for the Atlanta Inquirer was collected from in print archives at the Georgia State University Library for the years 1990 to 1994 and ProQuest Ethnic NewsWatch for the years 1995 to 1997. It is important to note that data was missing from the Atlanta Inquirer for the year 1990.

and greater information from continuing research. It is clear that the number of reports on HIV and AIDS concerning the total number of articles published in the paper each year is fairly small. With the exception of 1990, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was reporting on HIV and AIDS at a rate of fewer than five articles per 1000 total articles published.

The *Atlanta Inquirer*, on the other hand, continued to publish very few reports on HIV and AIDS. The major increase in 1991 seemed to stem from the announcement by Magic Johnson, which sparked a conversation among communities of color about their true risk for contracting HIV. His reveal sparked conversations about the moral framework through which rejection of people living with HIV and AIDS had been positioned in up until that point. Reports in the Atlanta Inquirer had already declared that it was a growing problem in the community, but a high profile and culturally significant case such as Magic Johnson seemed to revive those conversations.

Frame of Discussion: 1990-1997

At the beginning of the 1990s, the conversation around AIDS in the Atlanta Inquirer changed around the same time that the impact of the illness on the black community was being realized. Articles were addressing a lack of attention among the black community to the illness. In one article, the author states "we found that most people regarded it (AIDS) very lightly because we were led to believe the persons most likely to contract the disease were homosexuals" (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 1991). A general social othering of the 1980s had succeeded in creating an atmosphere of complacency in largely heterosexual communities. This quote is also relevant because it insinuates that people who identified as gay were not seen as being part of the author's community and is indicative of a broader social stigma around sexual identity. An article in the *Atlanta Inquirer* about a radio show interview with a group called Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays reported that many callers "expressed hesitation with accepting their lesbian or gay child because of their religious beliefs" (Lamar, 1990). This quote indicates that homophobia and religious beliefs in the community were likely interrelated. This quote

also identifies a pathway through which religious affiliation could have also influenced perceptions of HIV and AIDS among African Americans. Although the *Atlanta Inquirer* did not speak much on the impact of AIDS on black, gay men, they did engage in more discussion of its impact on black women.

There were a considerable number of articles focusing on the disproportionate impact that AIDS was having on black women at the time, but the overemphasis on this connection framed women as the only ones carrying the burden of the illness. One article insisted that the disproportionate rates of the illness among women was due to female sexual promiscuity (Head, 1994). There were very few mentions of the effects among men or the impact of male sexual activity on the spread of AIDS. Here we see the transition from silence when AIDS most affected gay, white men to slightly more vocalization but gendered perceptions of who is affected by the illness.

During this period, the *Atlanta Inquirer* honed in on three "societal ills" that it believed was impacting the black community: violence, sex and drugs. Sex was mentioned, more often than not, in relation to teen pregnancy rates just as it had been in the 1980s. Drugs and violence were framed as morally wrong, and all three were deemed to be threats to the community. This is evidenced by a cartoon that appeared in numerous issues of the *Atlanta* Inquirer over multiple years, which depicted a child slaying a snake representing "drugs and guns" with "home training, prayer and bible study" (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 2013). The cartoon is a reinforcement of the power that religion is perceived to have in confronting social issues. There was even a weekly column called "Child Watch" dedicated to talking about the degree to which kids were engaging in these behaviors and the effects it may have on them. HIV and AIDS were

not always explicitly mentioned in these conversations, but one article specifically listed AIDS as one of the social ills (Atlanta Inquirer, 1995). Speculatively, the strong condemnation of these social ills suggest that, if the readers of the paper held these norms, then people living with HIV and AIDS could have been experiencing a degree of stigmatization stemming from a perceived violation of social norms or engagement in deviant behavior.

There also became a noticeable pattern in the nature of the articles that Atlanta Inquirer reported on HIV and AIDS. More often than not, AIDS was mentioned in editorial articles in the *Atlanta Inquirer*, which included less information about HIV and AIDS and more commentary on social mobilization around the illness. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* did publish editorials on this subject, but the degree to which AIDS was mentioned in that format was not as striking as in the *Atlanta Inquirer*. While some *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* articles walked through statistics and methods of transmission, *Atlanta Inquirer* editorials drew attention to its presences and threat to the community but left gaps in information regarding transmission, testing and treatment. One article was written about a general lack of knowledge regarding AIDS in the black community. In that article, the only mention of transmission was in regards to sexual contact and blood transfusions with a recommendation to practice safe sex (Lamar, 1991). While this information is accurate, it overlooks the risk of transmission through sharing needles and does not give information about next steps people can take if they believe they may be at risk. That same article suggests that education on HIV and AIDS should be a focus of local churches and schools (Lamar, 1991). This insinuates that newspapers were either seen as a pre-existing form of information on AIDS or that their role was not as important to health educators as that of other local institutions. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, it is

important to note that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* had a science writer on staff that appeared to have connections with the CDC, which likely gave them more access to this informational material than the *Atlanta Inquirer.* This was possibly a result of the larger staffing capacity of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* compared to the *Atlanta Inquirer* – a circumstantial gap in information rather than intentional ignorance.

The reporting of HIV and AIDS also changed in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* during this period. The fact that AIDS impacted more populations than just gay men was becoming more apparent in the journalistic writing. However, so did concerns that HIV could be spread through various other sources. For example, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* spent a considerable amount of time covering the case of five people in Florida who contracted HIV from their dentist (Seabrook, 1992). This incident sparked a national conversation about the intimate connection between healthcare workers and the AIDS epidemic as well as the ethics of mandatory testing for healthcare professionals. This story was followed by concerns of hosting the Olympic Games in Atlanta due not only to the high incidence of HIV and AIDS in the community but the perceived threat of transmission by athletes (Rochell, 1995). These discourses had little to do with sexual orientation marking a deviation in framing of AIDS as an illness of strictly gay men. While the understanding that HIV can infect anyone is crucial to breaking down stigma, it also led to a heightened fear of causal transmission of HIV. The concern of contracting HIV in a medical setting or sporting event are examples of a multitude of anxieties that continued to circulate in the public discourse around HIV. When my interview participant Dr. Sullivan joined the CDC in 1994, he was specifically tasked with researching cases of unusual HIV transmission. “It’s hard to imagine but, In the mid-1990s, we were still thinking

about mosquitoes and sharing razors…rare modes of transmission," he said (P. Sullivan, personal interview, Nov 11, 2016). The CDC's continuing focus on unusual transmission routes further emphasizes the general fear of acquiring HIV through casual contact or other modes that were not identified by the CDC.

During this time, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* continued to utilize its journalistic platform as a means of educating the public about HIV and AIDS. From reports on AIDS risk for teenagers to growing infection rates in adults over 50 and the epidemic in rural Georgia, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported on the widespread reach that AIDS demonstrated. However, articles tended to assign blame to people living with HIV because of perceived engagement in high-risk behaviors. For example, one article states "because heterosexuals continue to have unsafe sex and because injecting drug users continue to share dirty needles, AIDS cases grew 3%" (Rochell, 1995). The assignment of blame fails to recognize the limitations of agency that may be influencing the behavior of those contracting HIV. Another article suggested that an "act of heterosexuality" resulted in a lower probability of transmission than what I presume to be an "act of homosexuality" (Hendrick, 1994). The article is likely trying to differentiate between the risk of transmission during vaginal sex in comparison to anal sex. However, anal sex is not an act that is strictly confined to the gay community and such broad generalizations about the behaviors of a group of people perpetuate the flawed connection between a person's sexual identity and disease.

Chapter 6

Stage III: Attention Goes Global

The third part of my media analysis relates to how attention from AIDS shifted abroad. Now that HAART and other forms of antiretroviral therapy (ART) could effectively treat AIDS and funding through sources such as the Ryan White CARE Act made it widely accessible, fewer people in the United States were dying from complications due to AIDS. As the mortality rate related to AIDS declined in the United States, so too did the attention of more mainstream media outlets, such as the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Instead, their focus shifted to the AIDS epidemic in other regions of the world. However, while general trend analysis of HIV/AIDS indicators seemed optimistic, they masked the increasing health disparities by race and income.

Historical Context: Changes at the Turn of the 21st Century

Throughout the two stages I discussed previously, AIDS cases were being diagnosed in all regions of the world. However, there were very few mentions of the global nature of the AIDS epidemic until the latter part of the 1990s. By 2000, 50 million people around the world were infected with HIV, and about 21.8 million people had died of complications due to AIDS (Engel, 2006). Sub-Saharan Africa was impacted the most by the AIDS epidemic with 63% of the world's cases reported in that region in 1996 (Simmons, 2011). The demographics of those who were disproportionately affected in sub-Saharan Africa was also different. In 1994, Women constituted over half of the total number of deaths attributed to AIDS and children accounted for 30% of deaths related to AIDS (Simmons, 2011). Accessibility of the expensive, arduous HAART regime for those who needed it was much lower in other regions of the world than in North America, leaving them with a greater burden of morbidity and mortality due to HIV and

AIDS (Simmons, 2011). Millions of people were dying around the world, and that drew considerable attention and funding from individuals in the United States who perceived their local threat of HIV infection to be waning.

At this point, the incidence of HIV infections and AIDS were decreasing in the United States. In 1998, the mortality rate due to AIDS was 5.9 deaths for every 100,000 Americans, showing a significant decrease from its highest rate at 15.6 deaths per 100,000 Americans (Engel, 2006). The graph below was published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly report and shows how the mortality rate from AIDS in the United States began declining after 1995, indicating a positive trend in health outcomes going into the turn of the century (CDC, 2001).

FIGURE 1. Estimated AIDS incidence*, deaths, and prevalence, by quarter-year of diagnosis/death — United States, 1981–2000

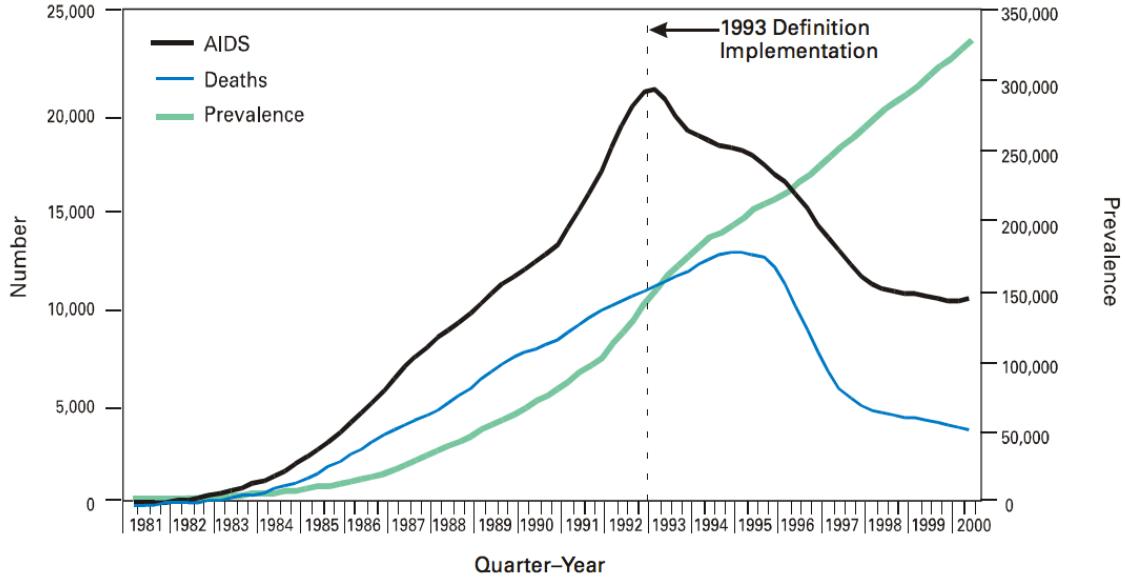

Image 1: The graph depicts the estimated incidence, mortality and prevalence of AIDS in the United States from 1981 to 2000. The graph was retrieved from the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report published on June 1st, 2001 (CDC, 2001).

While many pointed at these new, more promising statistics from the CDC as evidence of the beginning of the end of the AIDS epidemic, some statistics were being overlooked. For example, the incidence of HIV was still increasing among people of color, particularly young black

women. In 1999, African Americans constituted 14% of the nation's population, but 45% of AIDS cases (Engel, 2006). Black leaders responded by declaring a "state of emergency" in 1998 and founding the Minority AIDS Initiative within the Department of Health and Human Services to strengthen and expand HIV-related programs for minority communities (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2016). There was also a significant disparity between the incidence of HIV among high income populations and low income populations: as the former decreased, the latter continued to increase (Rubin, 2010). The statistics were not telling the whole story, but the startling statistics from abroad seemed to overshadow the numbers that the CDC was publishing.

The severity of the AIDS pandemic in other regions of the world drew significant attention from the public health community and general public in the United States. Under President Clinton, the United States began channeling resources to address the AIDS pandemic (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2016). The turn of the century sparked a massive international mobilization to support AIDS relief efforts across the globe. The United Nations Security Council declared HIV and AIDS as threats to security and the World Health Organization includes reversing the spread of HIV in their Millennium Development Goals (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2016). By the year 2000, international organizations were committing over $1 billion a year to fund anti-AIDS campaigns and increase accessibility to treatments around the world (Engel, 2006). The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was founded in 2002 to provide funding for health interventions targeting these diseases around the world (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2016). In 2003, President George W. Bush established the Presidents Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that provided bilateral and multilateral financial support for target

countries around the world (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2016). That program alone allocated $15 billion for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria relief efforts over a five-year period (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2016). Even organizations in the Atlanta area shifted their focus globally, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Table 4 highlights important events that occurred during the AIDS epidemic from 1998 to 2007.

Table 4: Major events of the AIDS epidemic from 1998 to 2007.

YEAR	MAJOR EVENTS
1998	- In Bragdon v. Abbott, he Supreme Court rules that protections in the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to people living with HIV and AIDS - African American leaders declare a "state of emergency" for the AIDS epidemic in the black community
1999	- The Congressional Hispanic Caucus holds a Congressional hearing on HIV/AIDS in the Latino community
2000	- UN Security Council deems HIV/AIDS as a security threat - The Millennium Development Goals adopted by the WHO include stopping the spread of HIV
2001	- National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is observed for the first time in the US
2002	- The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is established
2003	- The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is established by President George W. Bush - National Latino AIDS Awareness Day is observed for the first time in the US
2004	- AIDS becomes the leading cause of death of in black women aged 24 to 34 years
2005	- CDC report finds that 46% of people living with HIV in the US are African American
2006	- This marks 25 years since the start of the AIDS epidemic in the US
2007	- WHO announces that the global HIV prevalence has levelled off

Frequency of Mention: 1998-2007

During this period of time, there were starkly opposing trends between the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the Atlanta Inquirer. The frequency counts from *Atlanta Journal-*

Constitution showed an even further decline in the number of articles published on HIV and AIDS in comparison to the total number of articles published in the paper. The average number of articles per year dropped from 32 in the period from 1990 to 1997 to 24 after 1998. On the other hand, the frequency of articles referencing HIV and AIDS in the *Atlanta Inquirer* began to increase after 1998, with the rate of reporting reaching the highest levels since the 1980s. The differential trends are depicted in Figure 3. This difference is significant because it shows that the AIDS epidemic became such an important topic to the *Atlanta Inquirer* during this time that they were willing to dedicate more space in their paper to its discussion. The rates at which the *Atlanta Inquirer* was reporting on HIV and AIDS during this time were far higher than the Atlanta *Journal-Constitution's* rates not only during this stage, but the two stages prior. This is quite a feat considering the *Atlanta Journal- Constitution* is a much larger paper than the *Atlanta Inquirer*. These opposing trends in reports mirror opposing trends in the incidence of HIV among each predominant reader base.

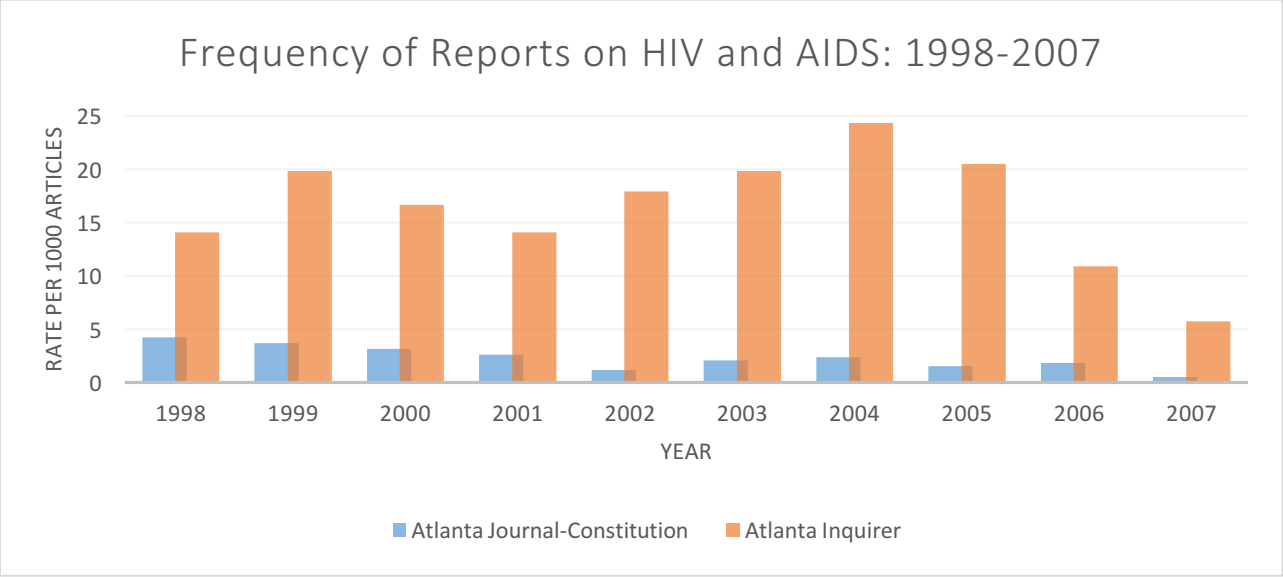

Figure 3: The number of articles on HIV and AIDS in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Atlanta Inquirer from 1998 to 2007. Data from the Atlanta Journal-Constitution was retrieved from LexisNexis Academic for the years 1998 to 2007. Data for the

Atlanta Inquirer was retrieved from ProQuest Ethnic NewsWatch for the years 1998-2006 and the in print archives at the Georgia State University Library for the year 2007.

Once again, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*'s readership is predominately white and the majority of the *Atlanta Inquirer* readership is African American. With the racial disparity in HIV incidence becoming more apparent, the *Atlanta Inquirer* dedicated many more of their articles to discussions around HIV and AIDS. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, on the other hand, reported on it far less which could be related to the decreased risk that the majority of their readership faced according to the most recent health statistics. Prior to this stage, it could have been plausible that the discrepancies in total number of reports between the two newspapers was due strictly to differences in the size of the organizational structures and consumer base. The mobilization of resources to report on HIV and AIDS at this level is an indication of how important the topic was to the readership of the *Atlanta Inquirer*.

Frame of Discussion: 1998-2007

In the interviews with my study participants, researchers and physicians clearly noted a difference in public sentiment around HIV and AIDS at the turn of the century. "Complacency" was a commonly used phrase to describe it, specifically in relation to the perception that the disease did not carry the same degree of risk to the general population as it had in previous years. "As treatments have gotten better thankfully people are living longer lives and the side effects aren't as bad as they used to be. I think there's some lessening of the urgency," said Dr. Sullivan (P. Sullivan, personal interview, Nov 11, 2016). Dr. Carlos del Rio, who directs the Center for AIDS Research at Emory University, echoed that sentiment and added, "I think the epidemic has lost its interest" (C. Del Rio, personal interview, Dec 2, 2016). While frequency reports support the idea that complacency was beginning to develop within the *Atlanta*

Journal-Constitution, the articles that were published strongly associated HIV and AIDS with the black community and other countries abroad creating a second wave of "othering."

"From the Frontlines" was an interesting one-time feature that published on the work that local Atlanta organizations were doing abroad. From stories of CDC program partnerships with labor unions in South Africa to CARE's health promotion interventions in Mozambique, this piece is indicative of local institutions shifting their focus globally (Allen, 2003; Mokhochane, 2003). In these articles, and many others regarding the global nature of the AIDS epidemic, AIDS becomes geographically bound to the continent of Africa. With titles such as "Aiding Africa" and "AIDS in Africa: A continent of orphans," the newspaper focused much of its media agenda on the impact that AIDS was having on another continent (Poole, 2002; Roughton Jr, 2000). Although the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* continued to report on the epidemic in Atlanta, they dedicated a much larger portion of the relatively small number of articles they published on HIV/AIDS to its global context.

When the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* did publish articles on HIV and AIDS in Atlanta, they focused on the epidemic within the black community. As the health statistics showed, racial minorities were disproportionately impacted by HIV and AIDS compared to their white counterparts, so it is not surprising that these articles honed in on the racial disparity. However, these articles often assigned blame to individuals for contracting the disease and the black community as a whole for allowing the epidemic to continue. In the article, "HIV 'devastating' black community," the author attributes the low levels of HIV testing among African Americans to either a fear of knowing one's status or a naïve belief in invincibility (Guthrie, 2005). Some believed that African American men who have sex with men but do not identify as gay, referred

to as being “on the down low,” were responsible for the high prevalence of HIV in African American women. Other articles attribute the racial disparity in HIV-related health outcomes to homophobia, ignorance and generalized embarrassment of the impact the AIDS epidemic is having on the black community (*Atlanta Constitution*, 1999; Tucker, 2004). All these explanations insinuate that these behaviors are uniquely present in the black community to such an extent that it has led to differential rates of HIV incidence. They fail to recognize socio-contextual determinants of health that would have a more significant impact on racial disparities in health outcomes, such as vestiges of slavery and Jim Crow resulting in residential segregation patterns that limit social networks or the possibility of facing discrimination for one’s racial identity as well as their HIV status.

As the number of reports in the *Atlanta Inquirer* increased during this period, so too did calls for continuing awareness that HIV and AIDS were still concerns for African Americans in Atlanta. Some articles showed the increased mobilization of certain institutions, such as the Black Church and the Congressional Black Caucus, to address the epidemic within the black community in Atlanta and across the country (Atlanta Inquirer, 1998; Kondwani, 2001). The newspaper remained conscious of the problems facing other countries in their struggle with AIDS, but articles often maintained focus on the issues faced by local communities. One particular article stated, “while the Peace Corps has taken steps to combat the problem in Africa, here in Atlanta local groups recently sponsored an HIV Testing Day” (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 2000). This created an effect of solidarity with communities around the world battling their own AIDS epidemics rather than the othering expressed by articles in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Articles in the *Atlanta Inquirer* also indicate that there was a larger mobilization of the black community to encourage testing, treatment and prevention. A large number of articles focused on the engagement of local community organizations, like Positive Impact, as well as renowned national organizations, such as the NAACP and the Congressional Black Caucus (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 2001; *Atlanta Inquirer*, 1998; *Atlanta Inquirer*, 1999). Notably, articles reference the growing role of the Black Church in battling HIV and AIDS. Churches were seen as potential centers for health education and promotion for local communities (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 2000). A couple of articles mention conferences for pastors and reverends that educated them on HIV prevention methods and the HIV-related health needs of African Americans (*Atlanta Inquirer*, 2002; *Atlanta Inquirer*, 2003). The engagement of the Church, a strong cultural institution among the black community in Atlanta, in addressing the AIDS epidemic could suggest a move away from socially conservative norms that had hindered some from addressing the impact of the illness sooner.

I was able to access articles from *Creative Loafing* until the year 2000, but the difference in the style of writing, as well as the audience the paper caters to, creates a striking difference in the way that HIV and AIDS are discussed in comparison to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and Atlanta Inquirer. *Creative Loafing* immediately shows a shift in perspective that sympathizes with the gay community and their struggles with the AIDS epidemic in Atlanta. During this period, the paper publishes quite often about the 1980s and early 1990s. The articles functioned as flashback to the AIDS epidemic when it was at its height in the community. One article talks about body culture in the gay community and how “butching up,” emphasizing muscle growth, became a reaction to the wasting of AIDS during the 1980s

(Bostock, 2004). Local plays and movies mentioned in the paper all focused on the experience of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s from various perspectives. One plausible reason for this is that, as HAART and other new treatments extended the life expectancy of those living with AIDS, leading younger gay men to become complacent about the disease that had once struck fear in the hearts of many in the gay community. The number of gay men who reported wearing a condom “every time” dropped from 69.6 to 49.7 from 1994 to 2000 across the United States (Engel, 2006). The flashbacks to the 1980s could have been a memorial for those who lived through it and a warning for those who never knew it.

Chapter 7

Stage IV: AIDS Assumes Social Invisibility

Since 2008, there have been signs that the epidemic in the United States is still rising, particularly in one geographic area – The South. Atlanta has the fifth highest rate of HIV incidence compared to other metropolitan areas and, in Georgia, one-third of people newly diagnosed with HIV have already progressed to AIDS (Hagen, 2015). These striking statistics solicit a larger question which is, if the epidemic in the South is so severe, why is no one talking about it? Recent statistics show having sex with someone who is HIV-positive and sharing needles with someone who is HIV positive are the most common forms of transmission of HIV in Atlanta (AIDSVu, 2014). There is also an increased recognition that social factors, such as poverty, discrimination and healthcare accessibility increase a person's risk of contracting HIV (Office of Population Affairs, 2016). These are supported by the disproportionate impact of AIDS on African Americans, particularly women, men who have sex with men and people who use drugs (Simmons, 2011). Despite the relatively high medical prevalence of HIV in the population, newspaper records indicate that the topic remains socially "invisible."

Historical Context: AIDS Epidemic in the Recent Past

This time period saw a shift in political party control of the White House with the election of President Barack Obama. With the new administration came a new strategy to address AIDS in the United States. President Obama's set of goals, outlined in his National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States, sought to shift attention and resources back to the United States (Yehia, 2011). Specifically, his plan aimed to reduce the rate of new HIV infections, improve access to care and health outcomes for those living with HIV and AIDS and

reduce health disparities related to HIV and AIDS (Yehia, 2011). These goals not only addressed the proximate cause of the continuing spread of HIV but also the socio-contextual determinants that disproportionately allocated the burden of morbidity to racial minorities and people of lower incomes.

Although HIV and AIDS remain relatively absent in popular culture, the biomedical sphere continues to research new forms of prevention and treatment for HIV and AIDS. The Strategic Timing of Antiretroviral Treatment (START) study finds that the earlier someone with HIV begins treatment, the less likely they are to progress to AIDS (NIH, 2015). Other studies showed that early initiation of antiretroviral treatment (ART) reduced the risk of transmission of HIV to uninfected sexual partners (NIH, 2015). Advances were also made in drug development, particularly the development of pre-exposure prophylaxis. Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PreP, was found to reduce the risk of contracting HIV by 44% among uninfected gay men and was approved by the FDA in 2012 ("A Timeline of AIDS," 2016). These important advancements demonstrate that we are continuously progressing to more effective health interventions to use against the spread of HIV in the United States and around the world. Table 5 below summarizes some of the major events in the AIDS epidemic that occurred during this stage.

Table 5: Major events in the AIDS epidemic from 2008 to 2016.

YEAR	MAJOR EVENTS
2008	- A CDC study identifies gay and bisexual men and African Americans to be populations at the highest risk for contracting HIV
2009	- Congress loosens a federal ban on funding for needle exchange programs
2010	- President Barack Obama signs the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act - President Obama announces his National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the US

2011	- The CDC reports that the results from two new studies show that daily antiretroviral therapy (ART) can be used to prevent new infections in HIV negative individuals
2012	- A survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation and *Washington Post* finds that a quarter of Americans did not know that HIV could not be transmitted via drinking from the same glass - FDA approves the drug Truvada® for pre-exposure prophylaxis
2013	- The film *Dallas Buyers Club***,** based on the story of Ron Woodroof who smuggled HIV drugs from Mexico in the 1980s, premieres in theaters
2014	- Provisions of the Affordable Care Act are enacted - A report from the Pew Charitable Trust identifies the South as the epicenter of the HIV and AIDS epidemic
2015	- Studies show that early initiation of ART can reduce the risk of HIV transmission to sexual partners and reduce the risk of AIDS - Congress reinstates ban on federal funds for clean needle exchanges
2016	- The CDC reports that an estimated 50% of adolescents with HIV do not know their status - The White House, NIH and National Institute of Mental Health host a meeting on HIV stigma

In the context of this stage of the media analysis, it is also important to note the perceived waning in newspaper circulation during this period as the internet continued to gain popularity as a platform for dissemination of the news. Nation-wide, revenues and circulation of newspapers across the country declined in the wake of the Great Recession (Barthel, 2016). As I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was recently found to have one of the lowest daily readership percentages in the country. This national and local shift in readership behavior has likely had both implicit and explicit impacts on the reporting of HIV and AIDS in the local newspapers.

Frequency of Mention: 2008-2016

In this period, the number of reports on HIV and AIDS remains low in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and declines in the *Atlanta Inquirer*, depicted in Figure 4. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* continued publishing at a rate of less than 5 articles pertaining to HIV and AIDS per 1000 articles, but the number of reports in the *Atlanta Inquirer* decreased from the previous time period. Despite the reduction in then rate of reporting on HIV and AIDS in the *Atlanta* Inquirer, they still published more often than the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* given their differential capacities. The relative silence around the topic of HIV/AIDS is striking given

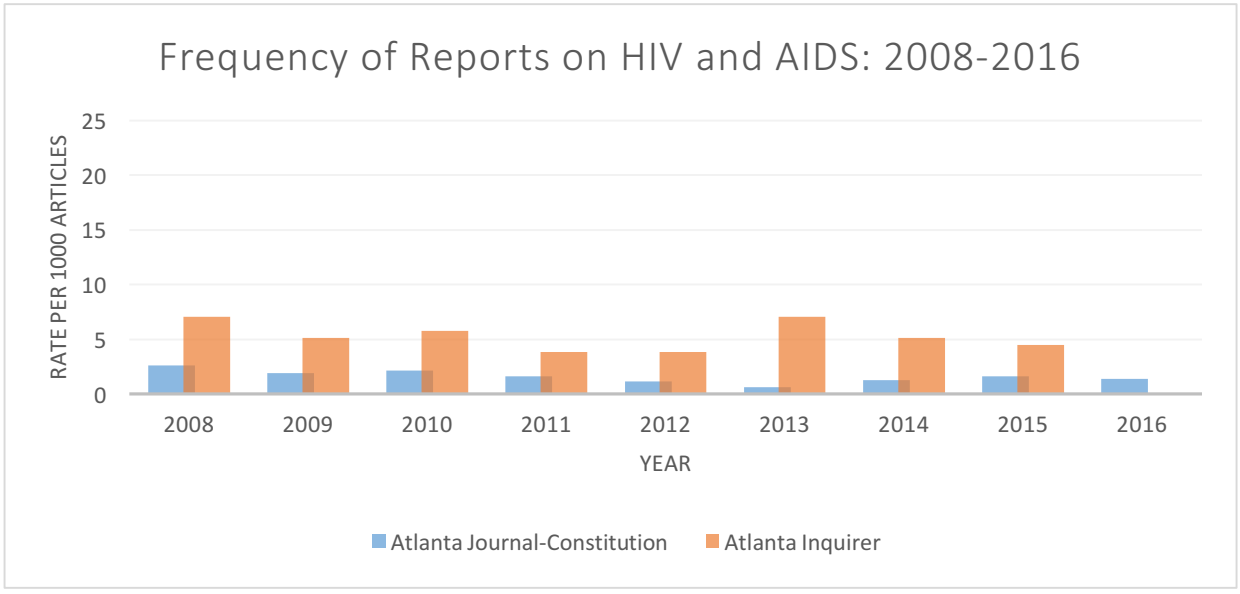

Figure 4: The frequency of reports on HIV and AIDS in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Atlanta Inquirer from 2008 to 2016. Data for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution was retrieved through their ProQuest Archive and data for the Atlanta Inquirer was retrieved from the in-print archives at the Georgia State University Library. Data from the Atlanta Inquirer was missing for the year 2016, which is why there is no bar on the graph for that year.

What both of these trends show is that, although the incidence of HIV and AIDS in the Atlanta is currently increasing, the prevalence in the general population remains low and, as a result, socially invisible. One interview participant, Dr. del Rio asserted that the reason why the epidemic does not receive as much media attention in the newspapers is because it is

predominantly an “epidemic of the poor and underserved and because advances in therapy most people think that the problem has been solved” (C. Del Rio, personal interview, Dec 2, 2016). In reference to the demographic characteristics of the newspapers presented in the Chapter 3, the readership between the two newspapers is predominantly people of middle and upper income levels. As previous trends seem to indicate, if there is little risk to the readership demographics of the newspapers, they have less incentive to report on it. The concentration of the epidemic among populations that are commonly

Frame of Discussion: 2008-2016

Despite the relatively low number of articles published about HIV and AIDS, I noticed that all three papers began to focus on socio-cultural issues that have an impact on the spread of HIV, whether or not it was explicitly mentioned. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* began to report on more issues that impacted the local community than the years prior. The paper published articles about the current impact of HIV criminalization laws and local organizations alleviating homelessness among LBGT youths (Armstrong, 2014; Suggs, 2014). The newspaper also reported on local discourse regarding sex education and its impact on health of adolescents. Despite the controversy around abstinence only sex education as an effective form of health education, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that schools in the area are still mandating this form of education despite criticisms from teachers (French, 2015). Discomfort around discussing sex was highlighted by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* again when Governor Deal refused to include questions about recent sexual activity in a CDC survey for middle and high school students (Bluestein, 2013). The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* did publish articles more explicitly on the state of the AIDS epidemic in Georgia and even highlighted specific areas

also seems to be aware of the importance of HIV testing in the current setting of the AIDS epidemic in Atlanta as many still do not know their HIV status (Badertscher, 2015). The demonstrated awareness still does not quite extend to a commonly expressed understanding of the prevalence disparity of HIV among racial and socio-economic groups.

In the *Atlanta Inquirer*, the conversation around HIV and AIDS also changes to reflect a deeper awareness of social factors that influence the spread of HIV and AIDS. The paper, which had many socially conservative tendencies, began to run editorials that advocated for more open stances on social policies. One article in 2009 reports on the ineffectiveness of abstinence-only education in schools (McNulty, 2009). An editorial regarding the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy contains a call to action to end discrimination against people who identify as gay in the black community (Mathis, 2010). Another editorial, written by a gay reverend, advocates for acceptance of gay marriage (Shuenemeyer, 2012). Before these articles, homosexuality was rarely mentioned in the newspaper. The reversal of their stance on the LGBT community could be signaling a socio-cultural shift in perceptions of gay men in the black community. Not only were previously expressed notions of the gay community reversed, but also of people who use drugs. One article called on members of the community to look beyond the behavior of an individual and see people who use drugs as human beings (Calhoun, 2015). This concept of putting personhood before behavior has further implications on perceptions of many high-risk groups other than people who inject drugs. These examples demonstrate a maturation in an understanding of the social factors that manifest in higher rates of HIV in among African American men and could be part of a call to action mentioned in the paper. In 2011, The *Atlanta Inquirer* reported that it would be joining a coalition of other black-owned newspapers,

black churches and Historically Black Colleges and Universities to make a greater concerted effort to address the AIDS epidemic among the African American community (Hawkins, 2011). The article cites that the mobilization is a result of being "silent for too long" (Hawkins, 2011). The call to action and shifts in attitudes highlighted here may be indicative of changes in the social discourse around HIV and AIDS despite the relatively small number of articles mentioning HIV and AIDS in the paper overall.

Creative Loafing included the perspectives of those who did not seem to be heavily represented in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the *Atlanta Inquirer*. Specifically, the paper presented the views of people who use drugs and black, gay men, which may relate to the fact that *Creative Loafing* does cater to a larger LGBT audience. These are the two groups that are currently disproportionately impacted by HIV and AIDS and yet they do not seem to be acknowledged, outside of statistics, by the other two papers. In 2014, *Creative Loafing's* World AIDS Day article went about highlighting all the different research and outreach initiatives in Atlanta for gay and bisexual black men: from the work of the National AIDS and Education Services for Minorities and the Evolution Project (Wheatley, 2014). The inclusion of voices from gay and bisexual black men is significant because these people are often overlooked in reports within the other two newspapers despite the fact they account for the highest proportion of new cases of HIV. In an article highlighting the work of the Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition[2] (AHRC), the paper included narratives from guests of the AHRC in their report to highlight the

[2] A harm reduction model of care is one which aims to reduce the negative outcomes of certain behaviors by providing education and tools for ensuring safety while engaging in them. Harm reduction models have been applied to many public health interventions related to HIV and AIDS, including advocating for condom use and needle exchange programs (Canadian Pediatric Society, 2008).

necessity of programs that reduce the harm of using drugs (Carmichael, 2013). The stories they told underscore agency constraints that people who use drugs often struggle with when trying to protect their health – a facet of HIV prevention that is often overlooked (Carmichael, 2013). Similar to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Creative Loafing* also took on the topic of HIV criminalization, looking into the actions of local activists in their campaign to repeal laws that stipulate jail time for people living with HIV that do not disclose their status before sexual intercourse (Keenan, 2016). In all three papers, the stories that relate directly to HIV and AIDS or social determinants of HIV and AIDS could be signs of social progression in conceptualizations of the epidemic in Atlanta.

Chapter 8

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion of Results

When I approached this research, my initial hypothesis revolved entirely around the relevance of HAART and effective AIDS treatment in changing the conversation around HIV and AIDS. My question had framed the initiation of effective AIDS treatments as the only major event in the AIDS epidemic that led to a widespread shift in perceptions of HIV and AIDS. What I did not previously understand about the AIDS epidemic in Atlanta, and the social context of Atlanta, was the importance of identity politics in discourse around HIV and AIDS. The connection of a person's identity to systems of power and privilege in Atlanta allowed some groups of people to stand removed from the epidemic, while it deeply affected others. Differential interaction based on identity changed as the demographics of the affected population changed. Although the epidemic began in 1982, the social reaction to its emergence and spread cannot be disentangled from the history of identity politics in Atlanta and the southern United States.

Figure 5 shows a compilation of all the frequency data collected from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and Atlanta Inquirer over the last 35 years of publishing. The yellow lines are meant to distinguish between the stages of reporting that I identified in the previous chapters. The peaks and valleys can be interpreted as visual representations of public interest in the AIDS epidemic over time. It is accompanied by data regarding the incidence of AIDS in the metro Atlanta area from 1982 to 2014. The juxtaposition of this general trend in the AIDS epidemic in Atlanta with the reporting trends of the two newspapers offers a 32-year span of

comparison between the reality of the epidemic in the city and attention it was given through this medium of public discourse.

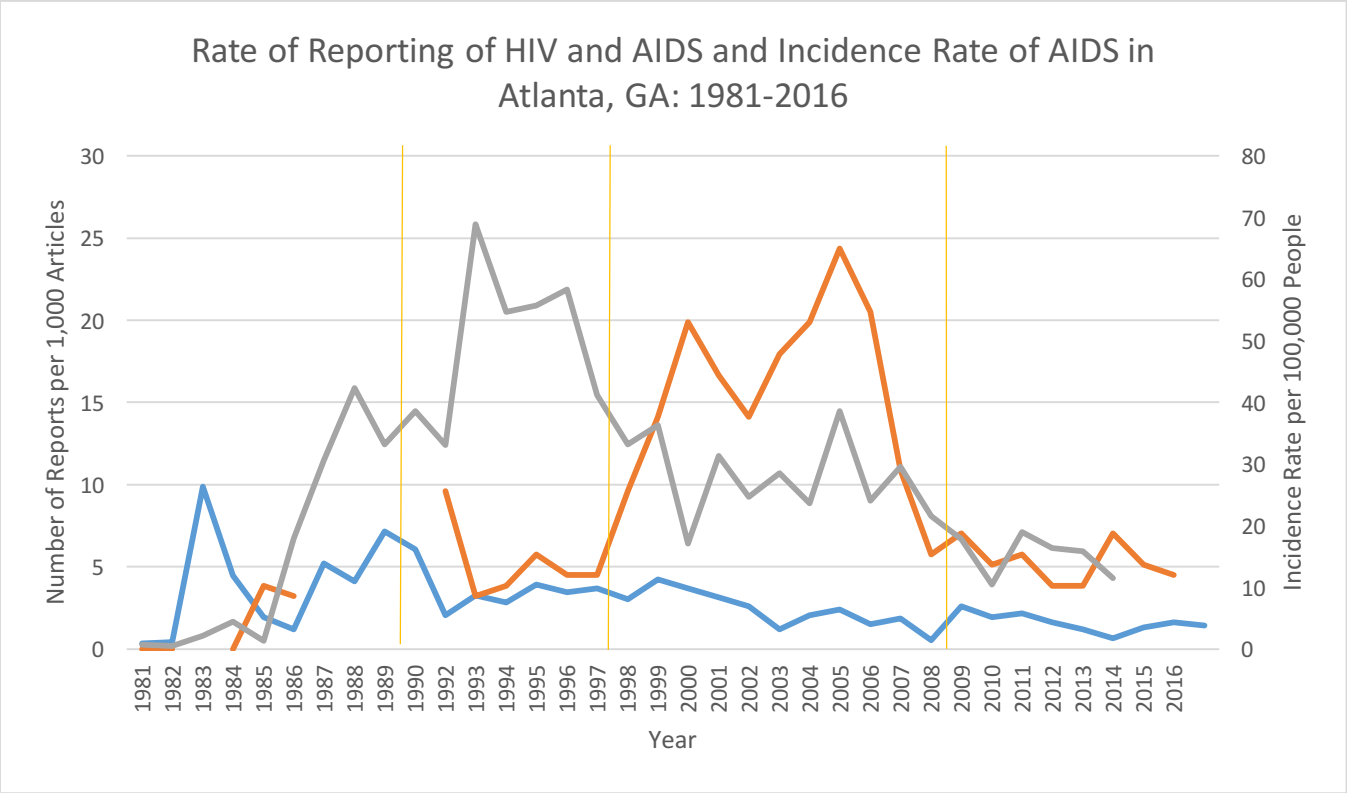

Figure 5: Compilation of all the data presented in the previous chapters on the frequency of reports in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Atlanta Inquirer from 1981 to 2016. It suffers from the same gaps in data from the Atlanta Inquirer in 1983, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 2016. The graph also depicts the incidence rate of AIDS in the Atlanta metro area with population estimates from the United States Census Bureau Decennial Census 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 and AIDS incidence estimates from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention HIV Surveillance data (CDC, 2017; Social Explorer, 2017).

The frequency trends, placed within the historical and cultural context of their publishing, provide evidence that local newspapers in Atlanta functioned as extensions of culture and mirrored the social dynamics among their readership. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, which is the newspaper with the largest circulation in Atlanta, reaches a predominantly white middle and upper-class audience. The frequency data demonstrates that the highest number of articles came as the risk to these demographic groups was perceived to be highest. The frequency trends in *Atlanta Inquirer* reports also seemed to reflected positive

relationship between the number of reports perceived risk in their community. This trend is most striking between 1998 and 2007 when the overall incidence of AIDS in Atlanta declines as well as the rate of reporting on HIV and AIDS in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, but the rate of reporting in the *Atlanta Inquirer* increases significantly. What remains unclear is the extent to which the rate of reporting on the epidemic in newspapers reflects a similar level of interest among consumers of these two newspapers.

The terminology used in reports on HIV and AIDS is also significant because it may indicate the position that each newspaper assumed during the 35 years of the epidemic. During the 1980s, a stage I named "The Gay Plague", the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* utilized the capacity of their science writers to act as an intermediary method of communication between physicians and scientists with the local public. While their reports were initially laced with a sense of public panic because of the discovery of HIV in donated blood, this subsided soon after screening measures were put into place. Their messages were often informative about HIV transmission, treatment options and the experience of living with AIDS. The Atlanta Inquirer, on the other hand, spent relatively little space on the subject but rather continued to raise awareness of systems of racism and segregation that were still pervasive in the area. The paper's mission to protect and provide opportunities for advancement for African Americans may have contributed to the relative silence on the topic of AIDS during a time in which it was not seen as a threat to this community.

Going into the 1990s, the stage termed "AIDS does not Discriminate," grassroots activism and political mobilization sent signals that the spread of the illness was a problem for everyone, not simply people placed in behaviorally-defined, "high-risk" groups. The *Atlanta*

Journal-Constitution began to publish about HIV and AIDS at a more consistent level than prior years. Their articles were mostly educational with an emphasis on the fact that anyone could potentially be infected with HIV and that risk should be addressed through behavioral changes. Some articles often asserted the view that contraction of HIV was due to an individual's poor choices without drawing upon socio-contextual constraints on agency in Atlanta. The *Atlanta Inquirer* focused on issues such as teenage pregnancy, drug use and violence, but posed them as "societal ills." Although these articles did not explicitly link this terminology to the AIDS epidemic, they created an atmosphere of social disapproval around some behaviors that put people at risk of contracting HIV. It seems as though the articles were well intentioned, trying to raise awareness of particular problems that the staff felt was hindering the advancement of their community.

In the third stage, the frequency results from my media analysis demonstrated a complacency among the general population, but mobilization of subpopulations in Atlanta that remained at a disproportionately high risk of contracting HIV. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported less frequently on the topic of HIV/AIDS and many of those articles "othered" the illness, making it synonymous with the continent of Africa or African Americans in the United States. The articles often blamed the prevalence of HIV and AIDS among these groups on individual behaviors while remaining ignorant of the different socio-contextual determinants of health. During this time, the *Atlanta Inquirer* published significantly more articles than in previous years and far more than the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, given the more limited published capacity of the *Inquirer*. This trend is possibly a result of the increased burden of morbidity on the consumer base of the newspaper. While there was a degree of awareness of

the global pandemic, articles in the *Atlanta Inquirer* tended to focus on local mobilization of organizations to tackle issues related to HIV among African Americans. *Creative Loafing*, with its unique, counter-cultural niche, published many articles looking back at the experience of living with HIV and AIDS in the early years of the epidemic. The stories were reminders of the devastation of the gay community as a result of AIDS, possibly as a warning to combat complacency in a new generation of gay adolescents who had not experienced the same fear of the illness.

In the last stage of the epidemic that I identified in this paper, the results indicated that AIDS has taken on a social invisibility among reporting in local newspapers. The relative frequency of reports in both the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Atlanta Inquirer* was low, indicating that it was a topic that may not have seemed relevant to their audiences. This trend is surprising, especially for the *Atlanta Inquirer*, because national trends in this stage appear to indicate that federal resources and attention were being directed towards alleviating racial health disparities in the domestic AIDS epidemic. Despite frequency trends that suggested a continuing complacency about HIV and AIDS, the substance of articles that were published during this period suggest that there was a greater awareness of socio-cultural conditions that can manifest in poor health outcomes, such as increased risk of contracting HIV. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Atlanta Inquirer* and *Creative Loafing* tackled homophobia, criminalization and layered stigmatization in various reports during this period which could signal progression in social perceptions of people living with HIV and AIDS as well as those who are at risk.

Conclusions and Future Research

The research I have presented four distinct stages of reporting on HIV and AIDS that coincide with changes in the progression of the AIDS epidemic. The stages mirror shifting trends in politics, medicine and popular culture in the local Atlanta and broader national context. The strongest transformations in reporting styles seem to reflect changes in demographics that are disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS.

The research also shows that reporting on HIV and AIDS was different between local newspapers. The differences between the frequency of reports in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Atlanta Inquirer* were distinctive in the data I presented. The issues they chose to focus on in these discussions also differed and may provide greater insight into the experiences of the epidemic in the communities the papers cater to. The reasons why these dissimilarities are observed in the data from this study can only be speculated based on previous literature and cultural context of Atlanta.

This research is an exploration in to how media coverage of the AIDS epidemic in Atlanta over the last 35 years can identify possible trends in local perceptions of HIV and AIDS. There were many questions raised that remain unanswered by the methodology and data collected from this study. As previously mentioned, it is still unclear why trends in reporting differ between newspapers. Prior literature indicates that identity politics, which cannot be removed from Atlanta's history, has led to differing experiences and discourse around HIV and AIDS within and between subpopulations within this city. However, the data collected from this study was not sufficient to make any causal statements regarding the variances.

The study was also unable to determine the degree to which the characteristics of media reports reflect actual local perceptions. The interviews, which according to methodology

were already sparse, did not present a representative picture of social perceptions of HIV and AIDS in Atlanta. While they were informative in an interpretive context, they cannot accurately be used to make conclusions about the real perceptions of Atlantans. Further research should include qualitative methods reaching across a large sample of the general public and community leadership.

Further, the implications that this research has on health seeking behaviors is surface level. While the literature supports the theory that social perceptions constrain the agency of individuals in health-related choices and the assertion that newspapers can be an extension of attitudes, this study cannot draw direct associations between newspaper reporting and the engagement of locals in Atlanta in prevention measures. However, the intention of this research was not to draw these direct conclusions. It was to ignite a larger conversation about the historical and cultural context of the AIDS epidemic and how that impacts the general environment that people living with or potentially living with HIV and AIDS engage with. What the historical media analysis has contributed is a preliminary timeline, not of events of the AIDS epidemic, but of thoughts and feelings around HIV and AIDS in Atlanta. It has visually and linguistically represented shifts in perceptions that can have a significant impact on how people choose to perceive their risk of contracting HIV and the relative importance this risk carries in relation to engaging in preventative behaviors. Future research into the impact on health-seeking behaviors would require conversations with a much larger and more representative population in Atlanta and people living with HIV and AIDS in the area. It would also require an in-depth analysis of changes in health seeking behaviors related to HIV and AIDS, such as condom use, HIV testing and adherence to treatment regimens.

This research was meant to contribute to a growing body of literature that examines how portrayals of topics via media sources can influence the socio-cultural conceptualizations and discourses around them. The results of this study may help to shed more light onto print media as a historical and, to some extent, present-day influence of social perceptions of HIV and AIDS.

Limitations

There were a significant number of limitations in this study that need to be taken into account when reviewing the results of the research. The first limitation is the concern of data collection. To track the number of stories regarding HIV and AIDS, many different databases were used to cover all 35 years of the epidemic. However, the use of multiple different databases means that there were likely repetitions in the stories that resulted from my searches. LexisNexis Academic, for example, contained some articles that repeated, even after selecting the mode that is intended to correct for similarities. In the 1980s, when the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published as two separate papers during the week, the search results in Access World News would present the same exact article under the two different titles given to it by each newspaper. I am confident that I was able to identify most of these repetitions and, in these scenarios, I counted both articles as one input in my frequency data. In print archives of the Atlanta Inquirer were incomplete, leaving sizable gaps in the data. Many of these gaps occurred during the years that were not available in the ProQuest online archives, which only accounted for the period from 1991 to 2006. Finally, the total number of articles is small compared to the number of years that were included in my analysis, leading me to believe that

there were likely articles that were unintentionally left out of my data set as result of the mixed methods of data collection and the time constraints of this project.

Further limitations of my data collection methods include the potential of confirmation bias. To represent social conceptualizations of HIV/AIDS, related behaviors and associated identities, I chose to identify articles that represented larger trends I observed in the discourse around these topics. This sampling method is a more subjective measure of demonstrating trends in discourse allowing for the possibility of confirmation bias on the part of myself, as the researcher, to influence the articles I include in the study. Many of the articles I used, particularly for the *Atlanta Inquirer*, were also editorials and op-eds. Op-eds, in particular, are not always written by the staff of the newspaper and are often presented is disclaimers as not associated with the opinions of the paper. Therefore, it is unclear to what degree these pieces are reflective of the author or the larger community that author is reaching through his or her written work. Since I did not distinguish between editorials, op-eds and news articles, it is not clear how the more open dialogue of editorials and op-eds would have influenced the trends in discourse that I identified in this study. Similarly, the articles were not differentiated based on their origin – whether or not they originated from an Atlanta office or one from a national news source – which could have allowed national discourse to obscure the nuanced reality of local discourse on this subject.

The intention to include papers that catered to different communities in the Atlanta area was undermined by the relatively little inclusion of article from *Creative Loafing*. The reasoning for the lack of inclusion was a direct result of the inaccessibility of archives. There were no identified databases that provided extensive archived articles from the paper, which

rendered me incapable of feasibly including a long-term frequency count as I did for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Atlanta Inquirer*. The search of their online archive turned up few results and only presented articles dating back to 2000 at the latest. Therefore, it was only feasible to include their articles in the data analysis section of the third and fourth stages.

I use print media as a proxy for city-wide conversations around HIV and AIDS. Unlike, information from surveys and interviews, it is unaffected by recall, chronology and interviewer bias. Newspapers were also popular platforms for disseminating and obtaining health information at the start of my analysis in the 1980s. Unlike online newspapers or social media sources, newspapers were consistently used to replicate public discourses throughout the 35 years that were covered by this study, allowing for a long-term chronological tracking of reports. While these aspects make print media more desirable than surveys or interviews for inspection of social attitudes, it lacks some crucial elements. As mentioned earlier, decisions on what to print and how stories are described in newspapers are made by a considerably small group of people whose beliefs are not necessarily representative of the entire city of Atlanta. The use of multiple newspaper sources with different audiences and executive teams was intended to correct for these avenues of misrepresentation. Using a static source, such as a newspaper also makes it difficult to capture the nuances of human perceptions of HIV and AIDS that could be crucial in informing how and why they may have changed over time.

Also, as mentioned in my conclusions, participation in the interviews was another major limitation of my study. There was a general lack of diversity amongst the participants in the interviews that I believe was related to the lifestyle characteristics of the population I was attempting to reach. In particular, there was a complete lack of racial, economic and

occupational diversity among the interview participants. Many of the people I attempted to recruit into my study are professionals in their field and, as a result, do not have much free time in their schedules. Some willing participants could not be interviewed due to scheduling conflicts. For others, requests for participation and follow-ups on those requests went unanswered. Those included in the interview portion were closely related to my mentors and advisors, thereby more willing to make time in their busy schedules for an interview. I am extremely grateful to those who participated in the study as I am well aware of the constraints they were under in making time for an interview.

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