

STIGMA, PREJUDICE, AND SYMPATHY:
British Press Coverage of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the changing British newspaper coverage of the HIV/AIDS epidemic from the 1980s into the early 1990s. An immense amount of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination characterized the beginning of the epidemic in Britain. As young, primarily gay, men began dying in the early 1980s, British newspapers harshly condemned and blamed them for the spread of the deadly illness. Previous scholars have criticized the British press for sensationalizing the crisis and accused them of fostering the moral panic surrounding HIV/AIDS, highlighting some of the more shocking and homophobic articles. However, scholars have yet to undertake a methodical analysis of British newspaper coverage of the epidemic. By analyzing articles about the illness in five primary newspapers, the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times*, I will demonstrate the nuances between newspaper depictions of the illness, arguing that the newspapers' approaches to reporting on HIV/AIDS both reflected and influenced public perceptions of the illness.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse examine l'évolution de la couverture médiatique de l'épidémie VIH/SIDA par les journaux britanniques des années 1980 au début des années 1990. Une grande quantité de préjugés, d'intolérance et de discrimination a caractérisé le début de l'épidémie en Grande-Bretagne. Lorsque les jeunes hommes, principalement homosexuels, ont commencé à mourir au début des années 1980, les journaux britanniques les ont sévèrement condamnés et reprochés pour la propagation de cette maladie mortelle. Des historiens ont déjà critiqué la presse britannique pour avoir sensationnalisé la crise et l'ont accusée d'avoir encouragé la panique morale entourant le VIH/SIDA, soulignant certains des articles les plus choquants et homophobes. Cependant, les historiens n'ont pas encore entrepris une analyse méthodique de la couverture de l'épidémie par la presse britannique. En analysant les articles sur la maladie dans cinq journaux principaux, le *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, et *The Times*, je démontrerai les nuances entre les représentations de la maladie dans les journaux, en soutenant que les approches des journaux en matière de reportage sur le VIH/SIDA ont à la fois reflété et influencé les perceptions publiques de la maladie.

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INTRODUCTION

On December 3rd, 1986, Lynda Lee-Potter's column in the *Daily Mail*, entitled "Why the AIDS tragedy may be our salvation," posed a critical question to readers: "If you had been told seven years ago that a terrible plague would sweep the country and annihilate a vast proportion of promiscuous homosexuals wouldn't you have sneered at the absurdity of that? But both Nature and God have devious ways of protecting us from the worst aspects of our instinctive leanings towards destruction."¹ On February 3rd, 1987, the *Daily Mirror* published an article describing the hiring practices at Dan Air: "A British airline refused to recruit men as cabin crew because the company feared they would spread AIDS, it was revealed yesterday. Dan Air said that at least one in four men who wanted to be airline stewards were homosexuals."² Even four years after the first AIDS-related death in Britain, and at least three years after scientists concretely debunked the myth that only gay men could contract and transmit HIV/AIDS,³ British newspapers and British society in general continued to harshly condemn and blame gay men for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

As an already marginalized group and the first to die from HIV/AIDS in Britain in the early 1980s, gay men faced an immense amount of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination. A number of scholars have singled out, and criticized, the British press media for how it depicted and responded to the epidemic. For instance, Jose Catalan, Barbara Hedge and Damien Ridge explain that "public attitudes to HIV were largely formed by media reports that were generally aimed at stoking fear, and rarely acceptance of those with the virus."⁴ Richard Davenport-Hines

¹ Lynda Lee-Potter, "Why the AIDS Tragedy May Be Our Salvation," *Daily Mail*, December 3, 1986, 7.

² Terry Pattinson, "AIDS fear sparked air ban on men," *Daily Mirror*, February 3, 1987, 7.

³ Richard Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment: Attitudes to Sex and Sexuality in Britain since the Renaissance* (New York: Fontana Press, 1991), 331; Anne Karpf, *Doctoring the Media: The Reporting of Health and Medicine* (London: Routledge, 1988), 146.

⁴ Jose Catalan, Barbara Hedge and Damien Ridge, *HIV in the UK: Voices from the Epidemic* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 20

argues that “as few people in Britain have experience of AIDS, perceptions have been nurtured by press coverage which offers inflammatory phrases like ‘Gay Plague’, ‘Gay Menace’ and ‘Gay Killer Bug.’”⁵ Additionally, Simon Watney notes that “Aids reportage tells us far more about journalism than it does about Aids.”⁶ Watney further argues that “the British media cares as much about our health as Der Sturmer cared about that of the Jews in the 1930s,” and explains that “newspapers like the *Observer*” failed “almost invariably to behave responsibly or with any compassion whatsoever for the situation of the two million or so gay men.”⁷ These scholars suggest that British newspapers’ primarily discriminatory and inflammatory coverage of HIV/AIDS strongly influenced public perceptions of the illness.

Other forms of media, such as televised news reports and television shows, did not perpetuate the same biases as British newspapers in their own representations of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. For instance, British television began to depict and discuss gay men in more sympathetic lenses in the 1980s. A fourth television channel, Channel 4, launched in November 1982 in order to provide for previously underserved communities, such as the LGBTQ+ community.⁸ John Ranelagh, one of Channel 4’s first commissioning editors and employees, describes how “at an early programme meeting it was accepted that one person in five is homosexual and that we should make programmes by, for and about homosexuals.”⁹ Television

⁵ Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment*, 333-334.

⁶ Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 80.

⁷ Watney, *Policing Desire*, 3, 2.

⁸ Peter Catterall, ed., *The Making of Channel 4* (London: Routledge, 1999), xvi, x; Colin Clews, *Gay in the 80s: From Fighting for Our Rights to Fighting for Our Lives* (Market Harborough, Leics.: Matador, 2017), 11.

⁹ John Ranelagh, “Channel 4: A View from Within,” in *The Making of Channel 4*, ed. Peter Catterall (London: Routledge, 1999), 57.

networks in general began to portray more gay characters in the 1980s as well, especially in soap operas, which were considered “institutions in many households.”¹⁰

Regarding HIV/AIDS more specifically, Anne Karpf explains that British television and radio were “less explicitly inflammatory” than the newspapers in reporting on the epidemic.¹¹ For example, BBC and ITV, the owners of the other three television channels, implemented special programming to address the epidemic and increase public awareness of the illness. Karpf explains that the BBC and ITV “unprecedentedly cooperated” in February and March of 1987 to present a nine day special series called AIDS Television Week.¹² Furthermore, in a study on British television news coverage of HIV/AIDS between 1986 and 1990, David Miller and Peter Beharrell note that “television news rarely accessed and reporters rarely endorsed overt homophobia.”¹³ Although they acknowledge that it is difficult to argue that television news was either “uniformly negative” or “objective,” they do conclude that television news “very largely marginalised the views of the moral right.”¹⁴

This thesis will focus on HIV/AIDS coverage in British newspapers precisely because the newspapers offered a less neutral perspective on the epidemic. In order to examine the stigma and prejudice in the British press that may have influenced public perceptions of the illness, this thesis will analyze HIV/AIDS coverage in five primary newspapers: the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times*.¹⁵ Understanding the extent to which mass media

¹⁰ Sebastian Buckle, *Homosexuality on the Small Screen: Television and Gay Identity in Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 130.

¹¹ Karpf, *Doctoring the Media*, 143.

¹² Karpf, *Doctoring the Media*, 226; Keith Alcorn, “AIDS in the Public Sphere,” in *Taking Liberties: AIDS and Cultural Politics*, eds. Erica Carter and Simon Watney (London, UK: Serpent’s Tail, 1989), 193.

¹³ David Miller and Peter Beharrell, “AIDS and Television News,” in *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation and Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 89.

¹⁴ Miller and Beharrell, “AIDS and Television News,” 89.

¹⁵ The *Daily Mirror* changed its name in the 1980s, to just the *Mirror* and then back to the *Daily Mirror*. This paper will refer to the newspaper as the *Daily Mirror* throughout to avoid any confusion.

might influence social attitudes towards an emerging health crisis is critical in order for governments, society, and public health officials to form more effective and unified responses. Social biases and prejudice continue to impact national responses to epidemics. For instance, as people in the US, and across the world, blamed China for the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, xenophobic and racist attacks increased against those perceived as Asian.¹⁶ These prejudices may have also affected public health policies, most notably at the beginning of the pandemic.

This study will analyze the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, two tabloids that became the most popular newspapers in Britain in the 1980s after the *Sun* (which, for reasons of accessibility, is not included in this study), and three broadsheet newspapers, the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times*.¹⁷ This research will periodically include other newspapers as additional points of comparison, such as the *Independent* and *Daily Express*, but will concentrate primarily on the five newspapers to limit and focus the scope of the paper.

Scholars and historians have previously analyzed the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Britain from a variety of different angles, although none have completed a systematic survey of the different representations of HIV/AIDS in British newspapers. For instance, a number of scholars have studied prejudice and social attitudes during the epidemic in Britain. Erica Carter and Simon Watney compile a collection of articles about cultural, political, and ethical issues relating to HIV/AIDS in the US and British contexts.¹⁸ Richard Davenport-Hines, writing in response to

¹⁶ Roger Yat-Nork Chung and Minnie Ming, “Anti-Chinese Sentiment during the 2019-nCoV Outbreak,” *The Lancet* 395, no. 10225 (2020): 686; Natalie Escobar, “When Xenophobia Spreads like a Virus,” *National Public Radio*, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/02/811363404/when-xenophobia-spreads-like-a-virus>; Holly Yan, Natasha Chen, and Dushyant Naresh, “What’s spreading faster than coronavirus in the US? Racist assaults and ignorant attacks against Asians,” CNN, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/20/us/coronavirus-racist-attacks-against-asian-americans/index.html>.

¹⁷ Jeremy Tunstall, *Newspaper Power: The New National Press in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 42, 49, 52.

¹⁸ Erica Carter and Simon Watney, eds, *Taking Liberties: AIDS and Cultural Politics* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1989).

AIDS, examines the history of sexual oppression in Britain since the fifteenth century, and discusses the negative consequences of the blame attributed to gay men.¹⁹ Peter Davies et al. examine the social aspects of HIV/AIDS, specifically sexual behavior, in their book based on a study entitled *Socio-sexual Investigation of Gay Men and AIDS*.²⁰ Simon Watney analyzes the structure of AIDS commentary relating to pornography, the law, television, and the press, looking primarily at the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Mirror*.²¹ Matt Cook studies trends in data from 1987 Mass Observation Project directives to examine social attitudes surrounding AIDS, emphasizing the importance of understanding emotions.²² Jeffrey Weeks traces the history of sexuality from 1800, and discusses the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a moral panic.²³ Jose Catalan, Barbara Hedge and Damien Ridge explore the human aspect of health care, and the medical system's response to HIV/AIDS and its effect on the progression of the epidemic, drawing on interviews with activists, politicians, doctors, and people living with HIV.²⁴

Research has also been undertaken analyzing how mass media has discussed health and medicine, as well as focusing specifically on the media's response to the AIDS epidemic. Anne Karpf analyzes how the British media has reported issues of health and medicine, and includes a chapter that discusses AIDS as a moral panic in media coverage.²⁵ David Miller, Jenny Kitzinger, Kevin Williams, and Peter Beharrell examine the role of the British media during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, focusing on the relationship between the government, the media and the

¹⁹ Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment*.

²⁰ Peter Davies et al, *Sex, Gay Men, and AIDS* (London: Falmer Press, 1993).

²¹ Watney, *Policing Desire*.

²² Matt Cook, "AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 2 (2017), 239–72; Matt Cook, "'Archives of Feeling': the AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987," *History Workshop Journal* 83, no 1 (Spring 2017), 51–78.

²³ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018).

²⁴ Catalan, Hedge and Ridge, *HIV in the UK*.

²⁵ Karpf, *Doctoring the Media*.

public.²⁶ Peter Beharrell also separately studies the major variations in news coverage of AIDS in Britain, focusing on the media's presentation of the risks of transmission and contradictory images of Princess Diana's involvement with AIDS.²⁷ Deborah Lupton analyzes AIDS in the media, primarily focusing on newspaper articles from Australia, while also often referencing broader social trends that affected Britain as well.²⁸ Additionally, Terry Sanderson analyzes British newspaper coverage of stories relating to LGBT issues, including HIV/AIDS, in his "Mediawatch" column published in *Gay Times* from 1983 until 2007. Sanderson, writing as a journalist as opposed to a scholar or historian, highlights specific articles and events discussed by the mainstream media.²⁹

Although these studies offer important insights into government policy and personal experiences relating to HIV/AIDS, references to newspaper coverage of HIV/AIDS and the media's role focus primarily on the most extreme and homophobic articles that emerged during the epidemic. By analyzing coverage of HIV/AIDS in five newspapers across the political spectrum, this paper will bring to light new information about the extent to which news media might have perpetuated prejudice and intolerance, as well as whether newspapers tried to counter the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and gay men. This study will also challenge certain assumptions and previous conclusions about coverage of HIV/AIDS in the British press, examining the differences between, for example, discussion of the epidemic in a right-leaning tabloid, such as the *Daily Mail*, and a left-leaning broadsheet, like the *Guardian* or *Observer*.

²⁶ David Miller, Jenny Kitzinger, Kevin Williams and Peter Beharrell, *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation and Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998).

²⁷ Peter Beharrell, "Chapter 9: AIDS and the British Press," in *Getting the Message: News, Truth, and Power*, ed. John Eldridge (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1993. ProQuest Ebook Central).

²⁸ Deborah Lupton, *Moral Threats and Dangerous Desires: AIDS in the News Media* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994).

²⁹ Terry Sanderson, "Introduction to Mediawatch," *Terry Sanderson's Mediawatch*, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://gtmediawatch.org/>.

The primary questions of this thesis are: how did British newspapers depict stories about HIV/AIDS and gay men? Did this depiction change over the course of the epidemic? Did the newspapers' format, target audience, or political views affect how they presented HIV/AIDS? And how did the newspapers' approaches to discussing HIV/AIDS influence public perception of the epidemic and gay men?

In order to answer these questions, this thesis will begin by providing context and background for both the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the five newspapers assessed in this study. Chapter One will then examine notable sections of each newspaper, including the front pages, columns, and editorials, and how they discuss HIV/AIDS. Chapter Two will subsequently analyze in greater depth the newspapers' use of various misleading terms to describe HIV/AIDS and those living with the illness. Finally, Chapter Three will compare differences between the newspapers' approaches to presenting important events relating to HIV/AIDS, such as celebrities' deaths and notable speeches.

To fully understand the impact of newspaper coverage of HIV/AIDS, it is important to contextualize the epidemic, and to examine the basics of the illness and evolution of its discovery. This paper will primarily refer to HIV and AIDS together (HIV/AIDS) because general discourse often failed to distinguish between HIV and AIDS, assuming they were synonymous, and the stigma applied to both terms equally. As Susan Sontag explains in 1989, "testing positive for HIV [...] is increasingly equated with being ill."³⁰ Nevertheless, an important distinction exists between HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). HIV is a virus that, unlike most other viruses, specifically attacks the body's immune system and the cells that help fight infections.

³⁰ Susan Sontag, *Illness As Metaphor* and *Aids and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador USA, 2001), 120.

Transmitted through certain bodily fluids including blood, semen, and vaginal fluids that can be shared during sexual activity, blood transfusions, or needle sharing, some people can experience flu-like symptoms for a couple of weeks after infection. However, these symptoms typically do not last long and therefore it is common for someone to not realize they have become infected. Over time, HIV leads to a decreased ability to fight off infections and can, but does not always, lead to AIDS, the last stage of an HIV infection. AIDS refers to the condition when patients' immune systems are so badly damaged from the HIV virus that their body becomes extremely vulnerable to other severe illnesses, also called opportunistic infections, such as tuberculosis and pneumonia. Several years can pass before someone with the HIV virus develops AIDS.³¹

In the early 1980s, however, as doctors grappled with the emergence of rare medical conditions and unusual deaths in young patients, scientists and the general public in Britain did not yet understand the differences between HIV and AIDS, or even, at the very beginning, know that HIV/AIDS existed. In 1981, US medical professionals identified similarities between clusters of rare medical conditions and linked them to the sexual identity of their male patients, describing these conditions as Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID). British mainstream media latched onto this connection between gay men and the new illness, advertising the existence of a “gay plague.”³² In 1982, scientists coined the term AIDS, to replace GRID, and Britain experienced its first known death from an AIDS-related disease with the passing of Terry

³¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “HIV Basics: About HIV/AIDS,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/whatishiv.html>; U.K. National Health Service, “Overview: HIV and AIDS,” accessed October 12, 2022, <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hiv-and-aids/>; Mary Ellen Ellis, “HIV vs. AIDS: What’s the Difference?” Healthline, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://www.healthline.com/health/hiv-aids/hiv-vs-aids>.

³² Samuel Hallsor, “A Comparison of the Early Responses to Aids in the UK and the US,” *Res Medica* 24, no. 1 (2017), 59.

Higgins on July 4th. Scientists isolated the HIV virus in 1983, identifying it as the cause of AIDS, and reliable testing to detect HIV became widely available in health clinics by 1985.³³

Researchers and clinicians, however, only developed an effective and long-lasting treatment for HIV/AIDS in 1996,³⁴ which meant that during the 1980s and early 1990s, people with HIV/AIDS did not have effective options to combat the virus or halt the development of AIDS. At the time, an HIV-positive result could feel like, and was, a death sentence for many. Accounts from Peter Tatchell and Oscar Moore point to the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS in Britain. Gay rights activist Peter Tatchell, who lived in the UK during the 1980s, describes how the epidemic was “like living through a war [...] people I knew were dying and there was no hope.”³⁵ Oscar Moore’s autobiographical novel about a man living with HIV/AIDS reflects similar sentiments. Moore, who later died from HIV/AIDS, writes that “nobody would tell him anything. They thought he thought he was going to live. But Hugo had buried too many friends to delude himself.”³⁶ The emergence of a deadly illness, with unknown modes of transmission and which seemed to primarily affect an already marginalized population, served as a dangerous formula for the proliferation of misinformation, fear, and biases surrounding HIV/AIDS.

The intensity of the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS meant that people living with HIV, especially gay men, faced social ostracization and prejudice in addition to a deadly and often painful condition. For example, British life insurance companies began to refuse coverage for gay or bisexual men because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, designing questionnaires to specifically

³³ Watney, “Taking Liberties,” in Carter and Watney, *Taking Liberties*, 14-15; Matt Cook, Robert Mills, Randolph Trumbach, and H.G. Cocks, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007), 195-196; Catalan, Hedge and Ridge, *HIV in the UK*, 18.

³⁴ José Zuniga, *A Decade of HAART* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), introduction.

³⁵ Peter Tatchell, quoted in *Hating Peter Tatchell*, directed by Christopher Amos (Australia: Wildbear Entertainment and Chrysaor Productions, 2021), 30:00 to 33:00.

³⁶ Oscar Moore, *A Matter of Life and Sex* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 231.

ask about applicants' sexual identity.³⁷ Members of the association of British insurers also considered refusing mortgage insurance to young men trying to buy a house together, in case they were "homosexual and high-risk."³⁸ Simon Watney further examines the social stigmatization and ostracization that occurred, explaining that "the widespread resistance to acknowledging the long-established fact of heterosexual transmission is not simply an example of 'ignorance' or 'misinformation': it stems directly from the ideological construction of AIDS as emblematic of otherness."³⁹

As a deadly disease with no known treatment in the 1980s, the perception that HIV/AIDS only impacted gay men also influenced Britain's response to the epidemic. British actor Stephen Fry explains that "it seemed that the world was doing nothing about it [the AIDS epidemic] and that [...] discrimination was being allowed."⁴⁰ Notably, the British government, headed by Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, did not appropriately or effectively respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic until it became clear that heterosexual couples and families could also become infected.⁴¹ The blame attributed to gay men and the prejudice against them also led to increased discrimination by employers, and augmented discrimination and violence against gay men in Britain.⁴² This thesis intends to determine the extent to which British newspapers might have exacerbated the blame and prejudice against gay men during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and whether the newspapers later attempted to combat this stigma.

³⁷ David Worsfold, "A Question of Personal Lifestyle," *Guardian*, August 1, 1987, 23; see also Peter Hildrew, "Insurers Refuse Cover for Aids Carriers," *Guardian*, March 19, 1987, 2.

³⁸ Martin Fletcher, "MPs Pull No Punches in Aids Inquiry," *The Times*, November 18, 1986, 2.

³⁹ Watney, "Taking Liberties," in Carter and Watney, *Taking Liberties*, 19.

⁴⁰ Stephen Fry, quoted in *Hating Peter Tatchell*, directed by Christopher Amos (Australia: Wildbear Entertainment and Chrysaor Productions, 2021), 29:00 to 31:00.

⁴¹ Virginia Berridge, *AIDS in the UK: The Making of Policy, 1981-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

⁴² Cook et al., *A Gay History of Britain*, 199, 205-206.

Background of newspapers

The *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* targeted and appealed to different audiences, reflecting differences in their ownership and political views. The *Daily Mirror*, a down-market newspaper, attracted a younger readership from lower social classes.⁴³ A survey from 1995 indicates that the overwhelming majority of *Daily Mirror* readers, 81 percent, supported the Labour Party, while 9 percent supported the Liberal Democrats, 6 percent supported Conservatives, and 1 percent supported another party.⁴⁴ The *Daily Mirror* aligned itself with the Labour Party, becoming more “anti-Conservative” than “pro-Labour” in the later 1970s. Owned by Reed International beginning in 1970, the paper was bought by Robert Maxwell in 1984, who served as its owner, “hands-on publisher,” and editor-in-chief until 1992.⁴⁵ Maxwell demonstrated some support for combatting HIV/AIDS during the epidemic, as he donated £250,000 won from an unrelated libel suit to AIDS research, and chaired a controversial and relatively unsuccessful fundraising committee for the National AIDS Trust from 1987 to 1989.⁴⁶ This suggests that the *Daily Mirror* might have published articles with less contempt or misinformation about HIV/AIDS.

The *Daily Mail*, on the other hand, was a mid-market newspaper that appealed to an older, middle-class readership.⁴⁷ Owned by Lord Vere Rothermere,⁴⁸ the *Daily Mail* attracted readers from a wider range of the political spectrum than the *Daily Mirror*. Forty-five percent of its readers supported the Conservative Party in 1995, with 37 percent supporting the Labour

⁴³ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 93; Michael Bromley and Hugh Stephenson, *Sex, Lies and Democracy* (London: Longman, 1998), 2-3.

⁴⁴ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 242.

⁴⁵ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 242, 38; Nicholas Coleridge, *Paper Tigers* (London: Heinemann, 1993), 261.

⁴⁶ Edward Vale and John Jackson, “£250,000 whack in the Eye for Lord Gnome,” *Daily Mirror*, November 22, 1986, 1-2; Berridge, *AIDS in the UK*, 189-190.

⁴⁷ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 93; Bromley and Stephenson, *Sex, Lies and Democracy*, 3.

⁴⁸ Coleridge, *Paper Tigers*, 268.

Party, 16 percent supporting Liberal Democrats, and 2 percent supporting another party.⁴⁹ The *Daily Mail* empathized with the “aspirational British middle class” and emphasized family values, while also attacking the left and liberal policies in the 1980s, including liberals’ support for gay rights.⁵⁰ These views reflected those of the *Daily Mail*’s editor from 1971 to 1992, David English, who strongly supported Margaret Thatcher. Rothermere described English as the “perfect *Daily Mail* reader,” in other words someone “aspirational, enterprising, family-minded and conservative.”⁵¹

Nicholas Coleridge, in his 1993 in-depth analysis of newspaper barons across the world, argues that the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* “resemble their owners.” Coleridge explains that the *Daily Mirror* is “as inconsistent and bombastic as its owner,” and the *Daily Mail* is “family minded, instinctively conservative but Establishment only up to a point.”⁵² These differences between the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* suggest they might have relied on different approaches to address the epidemic, with the *Daily Mirror* likely publishing an inconsistent variety of perspectives on HIV/AIDS, while *Daily Mail* coverage remained more conservative.

The *Guardian*, meanwhile, appealed to a younger, upmarket readership with similar political views as the *Daily Mirror*. In 1995, 81 percent of the *Guardian*’s readers voted for the Labour Party, with 10 percent supporting Liberal Democrats, 6 percent supporting Conservatives, and another 3 percent supporting other parties.⁵³ By the 1970s, Jeremy Tunstall argues that the *Guardian* “had developed a strong niche as the only left-of-centre broadsheet daily.”⁵⁴ The newspaper’s owner, the Scott Trust, was founded to maintain the *Guardian*’s

⁴⁹ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 242.

⁵⁰ Coleridge, *Paper Tigers*, 271; Ivor Gaber, “The ‘Othering’ of ‘Red Ed’, or How the Daily Mail ‘Framed’ the British Labour Leader,” *Political Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (2014), 471–79.

⁵¹ Coleridge, *Paper Tigers*, 293, 286.

⁵² Coleridge, *Paper Tigers*, 24.

⁵³ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 93, 242.

⁵⁴ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 52.

independence, and Peter Preston served as its editor during the 1980s and early 1990s, suggesting a consistency in the *Guardian*'s articles and approach to discussing major stories throughout this period.⁵⁵

The *Observer* attracted an upmarket readership as well, with the upper middle and middle classes constituting 48 percent of its readers, and another 28 percent of readers coming from the lower middle class.⁵⁶ The *Observer* strongly identified with liberal values, exemplified by Lord Rothermere's failed attempt to buy the paper in 1976. Coleridge explains that the newspaper's liberal stance, in addition to "hostility from the *Observer*'s journalists who considered Rothermere politically too right-wing" and the existence of a rival competitor, prevented Rothermere from purchasing the paper.⁵⁷ The Lonrho conglomerate, headed by Tiny Rowland, owned the paper during the 1980s, until the *Guardian* acquired it in 1993, and its editor Donald Treford retained his position from the 1970s until the acquisition occurred.⁵⁸ Notably, conflict arose between Rowland and Treford, with the most significant of these disputes occurring in 1984 when Treford published a report revealing atrocities committed by the Zimbabwe government, a country in which Lonrho heavily invested. They eventually resolved the dispute, and these clashes did not seem to affect the *Observer*'s coverage of HIV/AIDS, especially as the disputes focused more on Lonrho's interests overseas as opposed to Britain's domestic policies.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Tara Conlan, "Guardian Owner the Scott Trust to Be Wound up after 72 Years," *Guardian*, October 8, 2008, accessed September 8, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/oct/08/theguardian.theobserver>; Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 132.

⁵⁶ Bromley and Stephenson, *Sex, Lies and Democracy*, 42.

⁵⁷ Coleridge, *Paper Tigers*, 290.

⁵⁸ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 133.

⁵⁹ James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain* (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), 128; Bruce Hanlin, "Owners, Editors and Journalists," in *Ethical Issues in Journalism and the Media*, eds. Andrew Belsey and Ruth Chadwick (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), 42.

Unlike the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, *The Times* cycled through a number of editors during the 1980s, relying on five different editors from 1981 to 1992. Additionally, while *The Times* appealed to younger, upmarket readers like the *Guardian*, *The Times*' readership split between supporting the Conservative and Labour Parties. Forty-five percent of readers supported the Labour Party and 37 percent supported Conservatives in 1995, with the remaining 18 percent supporting Liberal Democrats and other parties.⁶⁰ Acquired by Rupert Murdoch in 1981, the "world's most famous newspaper owner" and owner of the *Sun*, the paper itself "broadly supported Mrs Thatcher and the Conservatives" in the 1980s.⁶¹ Notably, *The Times* also had a strong connection to the *Daily Mail*, implying that both newspapers may have presented similar approaches to discussing the epidemic. As Tunstall explains, in the 1980s, *The Times* employed a number of *Daily Mail* journalists in more senior positions, and "there was a continuing effort to liven up *The Times* with some tabloid news presentation skills."⁶² Furthermore, *The Times*' editor between 1985 and 1990, Charles Wilson, came from the *Daily Mail* and became the first "non-upmarket journalist" to edit the newspaper.⁶³

The following chapters will analyze how these differences between the newspapers' target audience, political affiliation, and format as either a tabloid or broadsheet, influenced their coverage of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the degree to which they perpetuated, or attempted to combat, the prejudice surrounding the illness and gay men.

⁶⁰ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 242.

⁶¹ Coleridge, *Paper Tigers*, 478; Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 384, 253.

⁶² Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 163.

⁶³ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 134.

CHAPTER ONE

Newsworthy: Evidence From Front-pages, Columns, and Editorials

Initial front page headlines about HIV/AIDS, as well as the columns and editorials that focus on the illness, reveal how the newspapers approached the emergence of the epidemic and how they thought about HIV/AIDS and the stigma surrounding the illness. The timing of front-page coverage of HIV/AIDS demonstrates when and why each newspaper began to consider HIV/AIDS an important and serious story, while the opinions they supported and published through columns and editorials indicate the newspapers' own sentiments. An analysis of initial front-page headlines, columns and editorials reveals notable similarities and differences between how the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times*, discussed and presented the HIV/AIDS epidemic, its stigma and association with gay men, to readers.

I. Front-pages

HIV/AIDS coverage in British newspapers began slowly, with only a handful of front-page articles published in 1983 and 1984, and then suddenly exploded in 1985, peaking in 1987 for the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, and *The Times* (there was insufficient data to form concrete conclusions about the *Observer* as it was only published one day a week). Peter Beharrell suggests that this “initial reluctance” among newspapers to report on HIV/AIDS arose “largely because of its associations with gay men.”⁶⁴ The nature of early coverage on HIV/AIDS in these papers supports Beharrell's argument, as initial articles about the epidemic, especially on the front pages, tended to avoid focusing on gay men.

⁶⁴ Peter Beharrell, “News Variations,” in *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation and Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 48.

Front page headlines and articles form an important section of a newspaper, as they serve to attract readers and highlight the most significant stories of the day. Yung Soo Kim and Deborah Chung argue that “perhaps the most important location to find such representations of society’s most critical events is a newspaper’s front page.”⁶⁵ The events that newspapers choose to spotlight on a front page, and the tone and approach they use in relaying these stories, also vary depending on the newspapers’ positionality and target audience.

HIV/AIDS did not appear on the front page of the *Daily Mirror* until February 1st, 1985, with a large headline titled “Boys’ jail chaplain dies of AIDS,” and on the front page of the *Daily Mail* on November 19th, 1984, with the headline “AIDS Virus Kills Man in Britain” and sub-headline “patient catches disease after blood transfusion.”⁶⁶ The absence of HIV/AIDS from front pages in the early 1980s implies that the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* did not consider HIV/AIDS a noteworthy subject that might entice readers. Additionally, even though HIV/AIDS primarily affected gay men in Britain in the early 1980s, neither of the articles focus on a gay man with HIV/AIDS, instead highlighting a story about a clergyman and a man with hemophilia. The articles also analyze the sexual identity of the men who died, with the *Daily Mirror* including a quote stating that “it is not for us to say that he was a practising homosexual” and the *Daily Mail* explaining that the man who died was not homosexual or addicted to drugs.⁶⁷ The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* seem to have only considered HIV/AIDS an important story once it threatened a group that was not overtly or openly homosexual (chaplains and hemophiliacs). Following these initial articles, HIV/AIDS continued to consistently appear on the *Daily Mirror*

⁶⁵ Yung Soo Kim and Deborah S. Chung, “Anatomy of Front Pages: Comparison Between *The New York Times* and Other U.S. Major Metropolitan Newspapers,” *International Journal of Communication*, v. 11 (2017), 949.

⁶⁶ Peter Kane, “Boys’ Jail Chaplain Dies of AIDS,” *Daily Mirror*, February 1, 1985, 1; John Illman, “AIDS Virus Kills Man in Britain,” *Daily Mail*, November 19, 1984, 1.

⁶⁷ Peter Kane, “Boys’ Jail Chaplain Dies of AIDS,” *Daily Mirror*, February 1, 1985, 1; John Illman, “AIDS Virus Kills Man in Britain,” *Daily Mail*, November 19, 1984, 1.

and *Daily Mail*'s front pages throughout the later 1980s, although these reports still generally focused on stories that highlighted children, doctors, hemophiliacs, and celebrities with HIV/AIDS. This indicates that neither newspaper seemed to care, or think their readers would care, about a deadly virus if it only affected gay men.

Front-page coverage in the *Guardian* and *Observer* began two years prior to the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*. The *Guardian* first published a front-page article about HIV/AIDS on May 3rd, 1983. Titled "Extra £30m Could Have Kept Out Aids," the article criticizes the British government for its inaction, arguing that "health ministers in Britain were warned two years ago of the danger of importing contaminated blood products from the US, but they refused to put enough money into NHS services to make Britain self-sufficient."⁶⁸ The *Observer*'s initial front-page article about HIV/AIDS, while also appearing in May 1983, introduces a very different approach and tone than the *Guardian*. The *Observer*'s article, "Killer Disease Alert Over Gay Blood Donors," directly links gay men to the spread of HIV/AIDS, explaining that "a propaganda campaign may be launched in Britain soon to discourage homosexuals from donating blood because of the risk of spreading the mystery disease AIDS."⁶⁹ While the *Guardian* focuses on and blames the British government for the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission through blood products, the *Observer* instead highlights a story that blames gay men for HIV/AIDS transmission through blood. Notably, however, similar to the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian* and *Observer*'s initial front-page articles both focused on a potential health risk, contaminated blood, that affected the entire population, not only gay men.

Diverging from the *Guardian* and *Observer*'s focus and timing, *The Times*' first front-page article about HIV/AIDS highlights the same story, on the same day, as the *Daily Mail*. Even

⁶⁸ Andrew Veitch, "Extra £30m Could Have Kept Out Aids," *Guardian*, May 3, 1983, 1.

⁶⁹ Annabel Ferriman, "Killer Disease Alert Over Gay Blood Donors," *Observer*, May 1, 1983, 1.

though *The Times* published a shorter article than the *Daily Mail*, *The Times* still imitates the *Daily Mail*'s focus on the patient's sexual identity. Published on November 19th, 1984, the article titled "Newcastle Patient Dies of Aids" explains that "blood plasma from Britain and the United States was used to treat Mr Terence McStay, aged 33, who suffered from haemophilia but was not a homosexual."⁷⁰ Similar to the previous newspapers' initial articles, *The Times* does not address the impact of HIV/AIDS on gay men, instead highlighting the death of a man with hemophilia. Additionally, the distinction between "suffering from hemophilia" and "being a homosexual" suggests that the manner in which *The Times* reported the man's death depended on his sexual identity.

The *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* all continue to report on HIV/AIDS on their front pages throughout the 1980s, with coverage decreasing in the early 1990s. Front-page coverage in the *Guardian* generally highlighted important developments concerning HIV/AIDS, such as the "firsts" in the epidemic (first transmission through blood, first child victim), government funding or lack thereof, and the increasing number of cases. *The Times* also focused on new developments regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with slightly more emphasis on sensationalist or shocking news, such as an abortion proposal for mothers with HIV/AIDS, and the detection of a second "Aids virus" in Europe.⁷¹ Meanwhile, the *Observer*'s front page articles seemed to discuss more "scandals" surrounding the epidemic, with the publication of articles titled "Aids: Abortion Scheme for Army Wives," "Red Faces over Union's Aids Boycott," and "Aids Scandal as NHS Fails to Trace Carriers."⁷²

⁷⁰ "Newcastle Patient Dies of Aids," *The Times*, November 19, 1984, 1.

⁷¹ Thomson Prentice, "Abortion Proposed for Aids Mothers," *The Times*, November 17, 1986, 1; "Second Aids Virus Detected in Europe," *The Times*, February 14, 1987, 1.

⁷² Ian Mather, "Aids: Abortion Scheme for Army Wives," *Observer*, January 11, 1987, 1; Paul Routledge, "Red Faces Over Union's Aids Boycott," *Observer*, April 19, 1987, 1; Annabel Ferriman, "Aids Scandal as NHS Fails to Trace Carriers," *Observer*, June 28, 1992, 1.

II. Columns

In addition to front page stories, the columns sections of these newspapers also reflect some of their prevalent attitudes towards HIV/AIDS. Jeremy Tunstall points to the power of columnists, explaining that “a national newspaper column provides a platform envied by many” and “the successful columnist’s platform seems to be there for life; editors, Prime Ministers, and many others come and go, but columnists march onwards through the decades.”⁷³ Although the opinions expressed by a columnist may not always directly correlate with the newspaper’s views, the newspaper still affords the columnist the space and freedom to write their opinions, and might reject a columnist because their views do not sufficiently align. For instance, columnist George Gale lasted only a short period with the *Daily Mirror*, because he was “too right wing,” before the *Daily Mail* employed him as a columnist.⁷⁴

Overall, *Daily Mirror* columnists did not often address HIV/AIDS, apart from Keith Waterhouse who discussed the illness in two of his satirical columns. Notably, Waterhouse seems to direct his sarcasm towards those spreading panic and misinformation about HIV/AIDS. For example, Waterhouse, writing from the United States in his July 4th, 1983 column, states that “every day there is a new rumour. You can pick up the disease from restaurant food handled by an AIDS sufferer (you can’t).”⁷⁵ Waterhouse uses the medically accurate term “AIDS,” as opposed to “gay plague,” and includes correct information that does not dramatize how HIV/AIDS spreads. Another column from Waterhouse in 1985 examines the “very silly disease AIPS – AIDS-induced Panic Syndrome,” and he determines that “there is as yet no firm evidence it can be contracted from reading The Sun.”⁷⁶ Waterhouse sarcastically critiques the panic

⁷³ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 180.

⁷⁴ Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 174.

⁷⁵ Keith Waterhouse, “Sodom, Gomorrah, Islington and Paris,” *Daily Mirror*, July 4, 1983, 10.

⁷⁶ Keith Waterhouse, “The Silly Sickness,” *Daily Mirror*, February 21, 1985, 10.

surrounding HIV/AIDS, calling out the *Sun* for its panic-inducing reports, which seems to indicate some sympathy for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Articles from *Daily Mail* columnists sharply diverge from the *Daily Mirror's* sarcastically-veiled sympathy, as *Daily Mail* columnists seemed to capitalize on the chance to emphasize HIV/AIDS' link to morality and gay men. The *Daily Mail* columns contain some of the most explicitly homophobic and prejudiced statements in the newspaper. For example, Lynda Lee-Potter's column "Why the AIDS tragedy may be our salvation," follows a "moral" argument that suggests God created HIV/AIDS because of "sinful" and "promiscuous" sex. In this text, Lee-Potter laments how children are "now being taught the potential terrors of a promiscuous life," promotes marriage and monogamy, and hypothesizes that "Nature and God" created HIV/AIDS as a way of protecting "our instinctive leanings towards destruction."⁷⁷ Although Lee-Potter does not explicitly name gay men, her language implies that she blames them for the existence of HIV/AIDS and that, in her view, HIV/AIDS seems to be an "acceptable" consequence. George Gale's January 29th, 1988 column "Gay rights, and wrongs" even more explicitly blames gay men for the spread of HIV/AIDS. In response to the Terrence Higgins Trust's statement "AIDS is the result of a virus and is no one's fault," Gale argues that "AIDS is certainly not the fault of those who have got it from blood transfusions or were born with it. But equally certainly, when someone who knows the danger continued to practise promiscuous homosexuality and anal intercourse, then it is his fault if he catches or transmits the disease just as clearly as if it were gonorrhoea or syphilis he was catching or transmitting."⁷⁸ Similar to Lee-Potter, Gale suggests that he believes HIV/AIDS is an appropriate consequence for "irresponsible" behavior. The *Daily Mail* also published this article later during the epidemic,

⁷⁷ Lynda Lee-Potter, "Why the AIDS Tragedy May Be Our Salvation," *Daily Mail*, December 3, 1986, 7.

⁷⁸ George Gale, "Gay Rights, and Wrongs," *Daily Mail*, January 29, 1988, 6.

after the emergence of clear evidence of heterosexual transmission of HIV/AIDS, yet Gale does not suggest all men and women should change their sexual behavior to avoid transmitting HIV/AIDS, only gay men.

The tone of the columns from the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* reflect the newspapers' general political views and reputation. The *Daily Mirror*'s more left-leaning columnist seems to sympathize with people with HIV/AIDS and critiques the false information and panic surrounding the illness, while the *Daily Mail* columnists amplified the panic and blamed gay men for HIV/AIDS. George Gale's employment history exemplifies this dichotomy between the two newspapers, as his far-right views led to a short-lived position with the *Daily Mirror* but blended in with other *Daily Mail* columnists.

Additionally, *Daily Mail* columnists' approach to HIV/AIDS reflected columns from other conservative newspapers, such as the *Daily Express* and *Sun*. For example, George Gale wrote columns with similar blaming and stigmatizing language for both the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*. Gale's column in the *Daily Express* published on August 30th, 1985, spreads misinformation about HIV/AIDS by proposing that "homosexuals who are not promiscuous are no more at risk than the rest of us," and blames "those who choose promiscuity and unnatural methods of sexual gratification" for contracting and transmitting HIV/AIDS.⁷⁹ Gale's first statement is inaccurate, because a man with only one monogamous male partner can still contract HIV/AIDS if the partner has HIV/AIDS.⁸⁰ The second quote closely mimics Gale's column in the *Daily Mail* analyzed in the paragraph above, which blames those who "practise promiscuous homosexuality and anal intercourse." Furthermore, as Peter Beharrell argues, columnists from both the *Daily Mail* and *Sun* "vociferously backed the editorial view that the [government

⁷⁹ George Gale, "AIDS – And Those Who Have a Right to Know," *Daily Express*, August 30, 1985, 9.

⁸⁰ Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment*, 335.

education] campaign should be aimed at male homosexuals and drug injectors as ‘high-risk groups.’”⁸¹

While the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* columnists mirrored the newspapers’ political stances, the columnists at the *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* often diverged from their newspapers’ political views. For instance, the *Guardian* did not have many prominent columnists who discussed HIV/AIDS. Polly Toynbee wrote a few columns that did address the crisis, two of which were published in 1987. The first from 1987, “Aids and the Man,” praises the British government’s actions, explaining that “looking back it seems extraordinary that the Government [...] has acted with such speed and good sense in the face of this threat” and that it did not follow “its first instinct – to bury its head in the sand.”⁸² Toynbee’s unusual stance supporting the British government’s response to the epidemic distinctly contrasts with the *Guardian*’s typical condemnations of the government’s actions. Toynbee’s second column from 1987, published just nine months after the first, reverses her previous opinion, and strongly critiques the government. This second column states that “if the disease, as the Moral Majority claims, was sent as divine retribution, it was not sent to strike down drug addicts and gays. It was sent to test the values of a whole society,” and claims that “the richest, most powerful, most scientifically advanced nations in the world have been tried, tested and found grievously wanting.”⁸³ Although most of the column focuses on HIV/AIDS in the US context, Toynbee still seems to criticize the British government as well for being “tried, tested and found grievously wanting.”

Whereas the *Guardian* presented inconsistent and sparse opinions about HIV/AIDS in its columns, the *Observer* published a number of homophobic columns from columnist Richard

⁸¹ Beharrell, “Chapter 9: AIDS and the British Press,” 204.

⁸² Polly Toynbee, “Aids and the Man,” *Guardian*, March 9, 1987, 12.

⁸³ Polly Toynbee, “The Aids Babies,” *Guardian*, December 3, 1987, 11.

Ingrams in the late 1980s and early 1990s, seemingly conflicting with the *Observer*'s more liberal political stance. An article written in 2014 from the *Guardian* further describes his bigoted views, noting that Ingrams' "hostility to homosexuality is certainly longstanding."⁸⁴ For instance, on June 26th, 1988, Ingrams explicitly supports the *Daily Mail*'s conservative columnist George Gale, arguing that "George Gale very sensibly commented recently that if the Government wanted to launch an effective anti-Aids campaign, then the slogan 'Sodomy kills' would make a good start."⁸⁵ Ingrams also writes that "the Government has deliberately avoided targeting any campaign at homosexuals, the group which is most at risk. Instead, it has tended to promote that we are all of us just as likely to become infected."⁸⁶ This statement fosters an "us" versus "them" mentality, ostracizing gay men from the general public, and seemingly pitting the column's readers against them. Another column by Ingrams published in 1990 states that "despite the Aids scare, homosexuality has become respectable, as has pornography, which is now on sale in all the best bookshops," and argues that Thatcher has "done nothing to oppose these trends."⁸⁷ Ingrams insinuates that homosexuality should not be considered "respectable," and that the government should have acted to ban or regulate it. Additionally, Ingrams compares homosexuality, a sexual identity, to pornography, an often illicit written or visual material deemed unsuitable for children, implying that he considers them as equivalent and in need of the same restrictions. Ingrams acknowledges his own biases in a June 3rd, 1990 column, writing that "in writing about these matters I shall be accused of something called 'homophobia.'"⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Stuart Jeffries, "Richard Ingrams: 'I have lots of enemies, some of them enduring,'" *Guardian*, June 8, 2014, accessed September 13, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/jun/08/richard-ingrams-oldie-private-eye>.

⁸⁵ Richard Ingrams, "Richard Ingrams," *Observer*, June 26, 1988, 12.

⁸⁶ Richard Ingrams, "Richard Ingrams," *Observer*, June 26, 1988, 12.

⁸⁷ Richard Ingrams, "Richard Ingrams," *Observer*, March 4, 1990, 20.

⁸⁸ Richard Ingrams, "Richard Ingrams," *Observer*, June 3, 1990, 18.

However, the flippant and glib language he uses indicates that he does not believe in “homophobia,” and certainly does not care about being accused of it.

Even some of *The Times*' columns promoted more accepting and tolerant views than the *Observer*'s Richard Ingrams. For instance, Bernard Levin's column from December 28th, 1987, condemns the panic surrounding HIV/AIDS and gay men, arguing that “this country seems to be in the grip of a galloping frenzy of hate, where homosexuals are concerned, that will soon, if it is not checked, lead to something like a pogrom.”⁸⁹ Levin still blames a “small minority of homosexuals” for their promiscuity and spreading HIV/AIDS, although he notes that this “does not justify what is happening now.”⁹⁰ Similar to the *Observer*'s Richard Ingrams, Bernard Levin also acknowledges his own perspective and background while discussing HIV/AIDS, writing that “perhaps we should not think in terms of ‘homosexuals’ at all, much less of a ‘homosexual community’. That, I recognize, is easy for a heterosexual to say.”⁹¹ Levin's approach, however, differs from Ingrams, as he concedes the limitations of his perspective and background, while Ingrams had preemptively attacked those who might question his credibility.

While *The Times* did provide space for Bernard Levin's opinions, it also published columns that perpetuated the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS and gay men. For example, Barbara Amiel's column on February 18th, 1987, supports discriminating against gay men. In response to a case brought against Dan Air for banning male flight attendants because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Amiel argues that “so long as an individual's or groups' actions do not contravene our criminal laws we have to understand that a faithful Christian, for example, may find homosexuality an abomination and that it offends his beliefs to hire such people.”⁹² Amiel's

⁸⁹ Bernard Levin, “Bring On The Gaystapo,” *The Times*, December 28, 1987, 8.

⁹⁰ Bernard Levin, “Bring On The Gaystapo,” *The Times*, December 28, 1987, 8.

⁹¹ Bernard Levin, “Why Gays Must Not Create a New Ghetto,” *The Times*, April 28, 1986, 12.

⁹² Barbara Amiel, “Don't Treat On Our Prejudices,” *The Times*, February 18, 1987, 9.

statement promotes discrimination against gay men based on their sexual identity, and suggests that “homosexuality” and “faithful Christianity” are inherently at odds with each other. In another column published on February 12th, 1988, Amiel proposes mandatory testing of “blood users, drug users and homosexuals,” and argues that “it seems mad to remove the stigma of a disease by allowing its spread.”⁹³ Amiel’s proposal promotes the misconception that one’s sexual identity, as opposed to sexual practices, determines their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, and seems to ignore how the stigma itself surrounding HIV/AIDS and gay men allowed the spread of the virus.

Even though the *Guardian* and *Observer* both presented themselves as liberal, reputable newspapers, the tone of their columns about HIV/AIDS suggest that neither actually employed liberal columnists who regularly wrote about the crisis, with the *Observer*’s columns presenting a more conservative and prejudiced perspective. *The Times*, meanwhile, employed columnists that both condemned and condoned the panic and stigma associated with the virus and gay men. Compared to the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* seemed to employ columnists and publish columns about HIV/AIDS that conflicted with the newspapers’ typical political stances.

III. Editorials

Newspapers’ editorials provide another lens into understanding their opinions regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and how they presented these views to readers. For example, the *Daily Mirror*’s initial editorial about HIV/AIDS published in February, 1985, claims that “gross overcrowding [...] encourages homosexuality,” and that “homosexuals” are “the primary source

⁹³ Barbara Amiel, “No Ethics at Risk,” *The Times*, February 12, 1988, 17.

of AIDS.”⁹⁴ This editorial reacts to HIV/AIDS as though gay men had invented the virus, and perpetuates homophobic sentiments related to HIV/AIDS. After blaming gay men for the spread of HIV/AIDS, *Daily Mirror* editorials tended to avoid focusing on gay men. Subsequent editorials primarily concentrated on critiquing the government’s inaction, arguing, for instance, that the epidemic “needs immediate and urgent actions. Not another committee meeting.”⁹⁵

Another editorial published on November 15th, 1989, asserts that “the men, women and children infected with the AIDS virus through blood transfusions are victims. Innocent victims” and should be awarded compensation from the government.⁹⁶ While the *Daily Mirror* might be trying to push for compensation for those who contracted HIV/AIDS as a consequence of the error of Britain’s health services, the editorial relies on a misleading term, “innocent victim,” that paints other people with HIV/AIDS as “non-innocent” and at fault for contracting HIV/AIDS. Unlike the newspaper’s columnists, *Daily Mirror* editorials did not demonstrate a strong effort to combat the prejudice associated with HIV/AIDS and gay men, and even reiterated some of the stigma and stereotypes.

Daily Mail editorials, similar to *Daily Mirror* editorials, often criticized the British government for its response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, the *Daily Mail*’s criticisms hinged on demanding an increased focus on targeting gay men as opposed to the government’s warnings aimed at the entire population. For example, the *Daily Mail* editorial published on October 13th, 1987, argues against the government’s advertising campaign and states that “AIDS is selective in the overwhelming majority of those it afflicts. That is not an Act of God. It is a

⁹⁴ “Tided of Fear,” *Daily Mirror*, February 18, 1985, 2.

⁹⁵ “Plague of Apathy,” *Daily Mirror*, November 12, 1986, 2; see also “Counter Action on AIDS,” *Daily Mirror*, September 22, 1986, 2; “The Killer in Our Midst,” *Daily Mirror*, November 10, 1986, 2.

⁹⁶ “Quality of Mercy,” *Daily Mirror*, November 15, 1989, 2.

clinical fact.”⁹⁷ HIV/AIDS, however, is not “selective,” as the virus cannot and does not choose whom to infect, and the editorial could mislead readers into believing that those not part of the “overwhelming majority,” in other words not gay men or drug abusers, are “clinically” unlikely to contract HIV/AIDS. The *Daily Mail* editorials’ specific criticisms of the British government mimicked the criticisms in other conservative newspapers as well, with *Daily Express* and *Sun* editorials arguing that the government needed to focus its attention and advertising solely on gay men.⁹⁸ Jenny Kitzinger notes that the consistent attacks against the British government’s education campaign in *Daily Mail* editorials “is a distinctly political stance which is not reducible to ‘tabloid journalism’” because the *Daily Mirror* did not oppose the education campaign in the same manner.⁹⁹

Daily Mail editorials consistently used stigmatizing and prejudicial language regarding HIV/AIDS, and often supported measures that would discriminate against gay men. For instance, an editorial from 1986 declares that mass screening for HIV/AIDS should become routine, and that those with the virus should be told “so that sufferers can receive all the medical help available and carriers can be left in no doubt of the lethal consequence to others of their own promiscuity.”¹⁰⁰ The focus on “promiscuity” indicates that the *Daily Mail* is not considering those who contract HIV/AIDS through blood or needle-sharing, but rather intends for these screenings to control and regulate gay men. Another *Daily Mail* editorial published on April 15th, 1988, further supports discrimination against gay men by insurance companies. In response to a Zurich life insurance company increasing premiums for all young men because of the HIV/AIDS

⁹⁷ “AIDS: The Panic and the Reality,” *Daily Mail*, October 13, 1987, 6; see also “Crisis Point for AIDS,” *Daily Mail*, November 29, 1986, 6; “Plague and Perspective,” *Daily Mail*, January 23, 1987, 6.

⁹⁸ Kitzinger, “Resisting the Message,” 201-203.

⁹⁹ Kitzinger, “Resisting the Message,” 205.

¹⁰⁰ “Counter-offensive to Contain AIDS,” *Daily Mail*, November 5, 1986, 6.

epidemic, the *Daily Mail* argues that only “homosexuals, bisexuals and intravenous drug abusers” should have increased premiums, and that “those who choose these life styles should be required to declare the necessary facts on any insurance application and the company be free to accept or reject them.”¹⁰¹ In addition to calling for discriminating against gay men based solely on their sexual identity, the editorial implies that gay men “choose” their sexual identity and assumes that all gay men inherently share the same habits and behaviors. These editorials mesh homophobic stereotypes and assumptions with news and opinions about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, pointing to some of the ways in which prejudice became intricately tied to HIV/AIDS.

Guardian editorials circumvented the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*'s stigmatizing and biased approach to HIV/AIDS by highlighting the failures of the British government, society, and the press, instead of instantly and indiscriminately blaming gay men. As soon as reports about HIV/AIDS emerged in British newspapers in 1983, *Guardian* editorials began to denounce the prejudice surrounding the illness, arguing that society should consider gay men as “potential casualties” as opposed to stigmatizing and ostracizing them: “But America’s Aids dilemma incites anxiety, even though the homosexual population here and in the US should now be regarded as potential casualties and not victims of prejudice.”¹⁰² The editorial also condemns the government’s “slow and insufficient” response to “what may prove a major medical and social problem.”¹⁰³ Criticisms of the government’s reaction to HIV/AIDS continue throughout the 1980s, with editorials labelling its response as “ineffectual, insufficient and irresolute.”¹⁰⁴ An editorial published on November 4th, 1986, denounces the government for only acting once it realized HIV/AIDS affected heterosexuals: “Things are only beginning to move now (to the

¹⁰¹ “Insuring for AIDS,” *Daily Mail*, April 15, 1988, 6.

¹⁰² “Panic and the Blood,” *Guardian*, November 2, 1983, 10.

¹⁰³ “Panic and the Blood,” *Guardian*, November 2, 1983, 10.

¹⁰⁴ “AIDS: Needed a Resolute Response,” *Guardian*, November 6, 1985, 12.

extent that it has) because there is a wider recognition that Aids affects heterosexuals as well as homosexuals. If a more serious approach had been taken two years ago, lives could have been prolonged.”¹⁰⁵

Guardian editorials accused Fleet Street as well, the location of major newspaper publishing centers and synonymous with the British press, and British society more generally for the misconceptions and stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. For instance, an editorial published on August 11th, 1986, blames the British press for coining and popularizing HIV/AIDS’ misleading nickname “gay plague:” “Public opinion surveys show that people are keenly aware of the disease’s existence and power, but that they mistakenly believe that Aids is simply a ‘gay plague,’ as Fleet Street has dubbed it.”¹⁰⁶ Another editorial titled “Aids and a caring society” suggests that society needs to improve its response to HIV/AIDS, stating that gay men need “all the support and understanding that a supposedly caring society can provide.”¹⁰⁷ The *Guardian* editorials reversed the common narratives of the time that blamed gay men for the spread of HIV/AIDS, and instead attributed this blame to society, the government, and the British press. The *Guardian* attempts to hold the whole of society accountable for the spread of HIV/AIDS, an approach that editorials in other British newspapers did not seem to imitate.

Even the *Observer*, which mirrors the *Guardian* more closely than the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, or *The Times* in terms of its target readership and political stance, does not compare to the *Guardian*’s focus on addressing and countering the stigma and prejudice. Moreover, the *Observer*’s editorials did not overtly discuss HIV/AIDS. Out of the 716 *Observer* editorials published between 1980 and 1990, none of them directly address the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and

¹⁰⁵ “Only a Start in Aids Fight,” *Guardian*, November 4, 1986, 14.

¹⁰⁶ “The Scourge of Doing Nothing,” *Guardian*, August 11, 1986, 10; see also “The Real Plague is Panic,” *Guardian*, February 19, 1985, 12.

¹⁰⁷ “Aids and a Caring Society,” *Guardian*, January 21, 1985, 10.

only a handful discuss gay men more generally. One of these editorials, “An Assault on the Civilised Society,” published on January 31st, 1988, condemns the government introduction of Clause 28, which targeted gay men and women, and prohibited the “promotion of homosexuality” by local authorities (this included banning books in schools and libraries that showed images of families with gay partners in a positive light). The editorial argues that “in the interests of justice, tolerance and above all common sense, Clause 28 must be dropped.”¹⁰⁸ Two other editorials from 1982 and 1984 acknowledge the general prejudice against gay men in British society, with the former discussing “how schizophrenic our attitude to homosexuals in public life remains,” and the latter recognizing that “domestic law-makers have little time” for “homosexuals.”¹⁰⁹ Even though these editorials seem to support gay men, the lack of comments on HIV/AIDS suggests that the *Observer* did not consider the illness or the stigma associated with it important enough to provide the newspaper’s opinion to readers. Similar to the *Observer*’s columnists, editorials in the *Observer* thus seem to diverge from the newspaper’s more liberal political position by not addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the stigma surrounding the illness, or its impact on gay men.

The editorials published in *The Times*, on the other hand, clearly correlate with the newspaper’s conservative political stance. While *The Times* editorials critique the government’s response to HIV/AIDS like the *Guardian* and *Daily Mirror*, *The Times* follows the *Daily Mail*’s approach, and criticizes the government for not focusing its attention solely on gay men. For example, an editorial published on February 19th, 1985 states that the government has a “duty” to explain to the public “the nature of the infection” to reiterate “those elementary rules of personal

¹⁰⁸ “An Assault on the Civilised Society,” *Observer*, January 31, 1988, 10.

¹⁰⁹ “Our Policemen Are Not So Wonderful,” *Observer*, July 25, 1982, 10; “Britain’s Via Dolorosa,” *Observer*, August 5, 1984, 8.

hygiene,” but later clarifies that “much of this information must be addressed to practising male homosexuals.”¹¹⁰ *The Times* later argues that government advertisements about HIV/AIDS should primarily target gay men, writing that “the theme of much public health advertising – that Aids is not a ‘gay disease’ – may be medically true but, for the moment at least, it is statistically misleading.”¹¹¹ Another editorial condemns the government’s promotion of safe sex guidelines, claiming that their message “may actually encourage the sexual promiscuity which is a major means of AIDS transmission.”¹¹² Even though the editorial overtly critiques the government, the nuances of the term “sexual promiscuity” and the tone of the statement seems to blame those engaging in sexual relationships, primarily referring to gay men, for contracting and transmitting HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, *The Times* editorials about HIV/AIDS consistently rely on homophobic biases. For example, an editorial from 1984 fosters and antagonizes prejudiced sentiments against gay men, claiming that “the infection’s origins and means of propagation excites repugnance, moral and physical, at promiscuous male homosexuality.”¹¹³ Terry Sanderson argues that this “scaremongering” editorial overlooked the “fact that gays are the *victims* not the originators of AIDS.”¹¹⁴ Another editorial published in 1985 states that “this disease is capable [...] of dissolving the trust on which social life is built, the trust which allows us to separate and tolerate private conduct, even of an immoral or exotic kind, from the public business of society. Homosexuals thus have a double interest in impeding the disease.”¹¹⁵ The editorial seems to consider homosexuality as “immoral” or “exotic,” only acceptable or tolerable when out of the

¹¹⁰ “Indiscipline Over Aids,” *The Times*, February 19, 1985, 13.

¹¹¹ “Acting On AIDS,” *The Times*, January 6, 1987, 13.

¹¹² “Taking AIDS Seriously,” *The Times*, November 11, 1986, 21.

¹¹³ “Life-Blood, Or Death?,” *The Times*, November 21, 1984, 19.

¹¹⁴ Terry Sanderson, “Mediawatch,” *Gay Times*, January 1985, 16.

¹¹⁵ “Indiscipline Over Aids,” *The Times*, February 19, 1985, 13.

public view, and places the blame and responsibility for stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS on gay men. *The Times* editorials do not attempt to combat the stigma or prejudice surrounding HIV/AIDS and gay men, instead ostracizing gay men and, even while critiquing the government, blaming gay men for the spread of HIV/AIDS. Even though *The Times*' columns seemed to attempt to present different perspectives on the epidemic, its editorials clearly point to the newspaper's actual beliefs.

Editorials from other right-leaning newspapers similarly adhered to conservative views. For instance, the *Sunday Times*, *The Times*' sister-newspaper since 1966,¹¹⁶ published an editorial that blamed gay and bisexual men for spreading HIV/AIDS. The editorial states that “we know that homosexuals and drug abusers who use infected needles are most at risk,” and subsequently explains that “the virus can easily spread from male to female and from female to male through normal vaginal intercourse and that bisexual men have played a major part in spreading the disease into the heterosexual community.”¹¹⁷ Although the editorial clarifies certain misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission, it also blames an entire sexual identity for spreading HIV/AIDS and seemingly pits the “heterosexual community” against gay and bisexual men. Another editorial from the *Daily Express* reiterates *The Times*' approach to blaming and vilifying gay men for HIV/AIDS, questioning ““why on earth should homosexuals (the main carriers, whose sexual practices and promiscuity are tailor-made for transmitting the disease) regard themselves or be regarded by others, as victims?””¹¹⁸ The editorial perpetuates bigoted beliefs about gay men, and even explicitly argues against supporting gay men in responding to the epidemic.

¹¹⁶ *The Times and The Sunday Times*, “About Us,” accessed September 14, 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/static/about-us/>.

¹¹⁷ “Ignorance, Fear and Aids,” *Sunday Times*, November 16, 1986, 26.

¹¹⁸ *Daily Express*, January 28, 1988, quoted in Terry Sanderson, “Mediawatch,” *Gay Times*, March 1988, 21.

The initial front-page headlines, columns, and editorials from the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* provide insight into how these papers thought about and presented the epidemic to readers. Although the timing of their front-page stories about HIV/AIDS varied, none of these newspapers seemed to consider HIV/AIDS an important or relevant story until it became clear heterosexuals were at risk as well. Regardless of the newspaper's political stance, these initial front page headlines focused on "non-sexual" transmission of HIV/AIDS, suggesting that British society in general did not really take notice of HIV/AIDS until they realized the entire population could be affected. The approaches and tone of their columns and editorials, on the other hand, point to some of the notable differences between the newspapers, and how their political stances might have affected their coverage of HIV/AIDS. The *Daily Mail* and *The Times* overall presented politically conservative views on the epidemic, with columnists and editorials often relying on prejudice and biased language while discussing HIV/AIDS that contributed to the stigma surrounding the illness and gay men.

The left-leaning newspapers, meanwhile, demonstrated a more inconsistent approach to presenting the epidemic. The *Daily Mirror* published columns sympathetic to those with HIV/AIDS and critiqued the panic and stigma surrounding the illness, while *Daily Mirror* editorials reiterated some of the same stigma. The *Guardian*'s columns and editorials both presented a liberal perspective on the epidemic, combatting the prejudice and biases associated with HIV/AIDS and gay men. The *Observer*, however, seems to be an outlier in this group of more liberal newspapers, with the publication of explicitly homophobic columns from Richard Ingrams, and the lack of editorials addressing the epidemic, suggesting perhaps that the political opinions of those employed at the *Observer* did not correlate with the newspaper's own political

stance. Additionally, while the *Observer* may have intended to broaden the newspaper's readership by publishing Ingrams' columns, the newspaper did this at the expense of those living with HIV/AIDS and those who depended on the newspaper for less prejudiced and more liberal news coverage.

Overall, these newspapers presented either a prejudiced or indifferent point of view regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the biases surrounding the illness. Except for the *Guardian's* editorials and certain *Daily Mirror* columns, the newspapers did not publish columns or editorials that consistently supported gay men and addressed the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. These attitudes did not seem to change over the course of the 1980s, even with the emergence of more information about the illness.

CHAPTER TWO
Beyond the Headlines: Language Used to Describe HIV/AIDS

While headlines showcase the most important, attention-grabbing stories of the day, and editorials and columns reveal newspapers' opinions, the language used in articles about HIV/AIDS is equally important as it reflects newspapers' awareness of the homophobia and stigma surrounding the epidemic. British newspapers relied on a number of misleading phrases to refer to HIV/AIDS and those with the illness, including "gay plague," "high-risk," and "innocent victim." The prevalence of these terms in the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* demonstrates how each newspaper may have perpetuated prejudice associated with HIV/AIDS by relying on these medically inaccurate terms that had implicit blaming and homophobic connotations.

I. "Gay plague"

For example, "gay plague" implies that all gay men, and only gay men, are at risk of contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS, and therefore blames them for the epidemic. As Simon Watney notes, the phrase "gay plague" suggests that HIV/AIDS was "a direct function of a particular sexual act – sodomy – and, by extension, of homosexual desire in all its forms."¹¹⁹ This fosters a sense of "othering," which sequesters the risk of HIV/AIDS and responsibility of preventing its spread solely to gay men. The blaming implication of the term adds to the ostracization of gay men, and hinders appropriate responses to the epidemic. Richard Davenport-Hines argues that "blame, in all its forms, has only negative results: it spreads confusion and victimizes the weak. Blame helps no one and nothing except the spread of the virus."¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Watney, *Policing Desire*, 12.

¹²⁰ Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment*, 331.

Additionally, “plague” recalls a period of panic, with a highly contagious and unstoppable disease – a flawed assessment of a virus that spreads through specific and uncommonly shared bodily fluids. Peter Beharrell further explores the medical inaccuracy of this term, stating that “the earliest representations of AIDS as a ‘plague’ or as a ‘gay plague’ suggested that AIDS was being made to carry a heavy burden of meanings and connotations quite extraneous to the virus itself and more to do with unresolved fears about sexuality and social order.”¹²¹ Furthermore, the phrase’s correlation between “gay” and “plague” portrays homosexuality itself as contagious and deadly, introducing, as Davenport-Hines suggests, “the characterization of homosexuality as a lethal contagion.”¹²² The *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* all used the misleading and distorted phrase, referring to HIV/AIDS as a “gay plague” throughout the 1980s, although at different times and with differing frequencies.

The *Daily Mirror* refers to HIV/AIDS as a “gay plague” more frequently than the *Daily Mail*, using the term approximately twenty-eight times from 1980 to 1990 as opposed to the *Daily Mail*’s ten times. However, while both newspapers labeled HIV/AIDS as a “gay plague,” the *Daily Mirror* published a number of articles arguing against using the term. For instance, a short article titled “AIDS ‘not a gay plague’” explains that “blaming victims for their lifestyles was like saying mini-skirted women deserved to be raped.”¹²³ This article appeared on page three of the *Daily Mirror*’s September 6th, 1985 issue, indicating that even during the explosion of news and the panic about HIV/AIDS, the *Daily Mirror* made an effort to publish articles that addressed the stigma and blame surrounding the virus. The *Daily Mirror*’s “Mirror Diary”

¹²¹ Beharrell, “Chapter 9: AIDS and the British Press,” 193.

¹²² Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment*, 334.

¹²³ “AIDS ‘Not a Gay Plague,’” *Daily Mirror*, September 6, 1985, 3; see also “4,000 Are ‘Doomed to Death’ by AIDS,” *Daily Mirror*, January 9, 1987, 5.

section also discussed a newspaper campaign to stop referring to HIV/AIDS as a “gay plague” on June 21st, 1985: “Thus we welcome a campaign, just launched, to stop racist and sexist stereotyping in newspapers. Examples given to avoid include [...] ‘gay plague.’”¹²⁴ The campaign did not seem successful, however, as the *Daily Mirror* continued to use “gay plague” while discussing HIV/AIDS. An article from 1988 about HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe states that “it is not a gay plague here [...] It is death passed between men and women doing what comes naturally,” implying that HIV/AIDS is a “gay plague” elsewhere, such as in Britain, that emerges from “unnatural” activities.¹²⁵

Daily Mail stories, on the other hand, that referred to a “gay plague” did not address the inaccuracy of the term until October 1986, and even then failed to explicitly state that the term should not be used to describe HIV/AIDS. The article from October 1986, discusses a television program about a family who contracted HIV/AIDS heterosexually and warns that “AIDS is a heterosexual disease and not just a so-called ‘gay plague,’” with a headline above the article title stating “TV report warns: It’s not only a ‘gay plague.’”¹²⁶ By claiming that HIV/AIDS is not *only* a “gay plague,” the article presents the illness as something *more* than a “gay plague,” for instance as a “gay plague” that also affects heterosexuals. Instead of explicitly stating that HIV/AIDS is not a “gay plague,” the *Daily Mail* allows readers to continue to consider HIV/AIDS as a primarily “gay” illness. Even though the *Daily Mail* itself did not often use “gay plague” to refer to HIV/AIDS, the newspaper also did not attempt to counter or confront the flaws of the term. The exact wording of the article above highlights the *Daily Mail*’s approach to discussing the misconception of HIV/AIDS as a “gay plague.” Readers of the *Daily Mail* could

¹²⁴ Bryan Rostron, “Mirror Diary,” *Daily Mirror*, June 21, 1985, 9.

¹²⁵ Barry Wigmore, “Africa’s Agony,” *Daily Mirror*, April 7, 1988, 9; see also Roger Todd, “Nurse Sues Hospital After Catching AIDS,” *Daily Mirror*, February 3, 1986, 19.

¹²⁶ Adam Chadwick, “AIDS Love Tragedy,” *Daily Mail*, October 23, 1986, 21.

easily continue to consider HIV/AIDS a “gay plague,” sequestering blame and responsibility for the illness solely to gay men, without encountering counter-arguments or clarifications of the inaccuracy and bias of the term.

Similar to the *Daily Mirror*, the *Guardian* often used the term “gay plague” in articles about HIV/AIDS, with the phrase appearing in the newspaper approximately twenty-four times between 1980 and 1990. However, apart from two television listings from 1983 and 1984, *Guardian* articles consistently clarify that HIV/AIDS is not a “gay plague” and argue against using the term.¹²⁷ Even as early as 1984, the *Guardian* pointed to evidence that refuted the term “gay plague,” explaining that “objections to the portrayal of Aids as the Gay Plague may be right” in an article published on October 31st, 1984.¹²⁸ Articles from the later 1980s referring to a “gay plague” inserted descriptors such as “erroneously” and “dangerously dubbed” ahead of the phrase to negate its implications, indicating that the *Guardian* recognized the inaccuracy of the term.¹²⁹ The *Guardian* also blamed conservatives and tabloids for popularizing the term, arguing that “law-and-order conservatives” in the United States “have exploited [HIV/AIDS] as a ‘gay plague,’” and that, in an article titled “When the real disease is press distortion,” the “use of the words ‘gay plague’ is dangerous.”¹³⁰ The *Guardian*’s approach to the term “gay plague,” highlighting its inaccuracy and danger, does not indicate that all articles referencing a “gay plague” unflinchingly combatted the stigma and prejudice surrounding the illness. Nevertheless, these articles demonstrate a clear stance against indiscriminately using the term “gay plague,” and indicate that the newspaper attempted to combat the stigma associated with the phrase.

¹²⁷ Andrew Britton, “Street of Shame,” *Guardian*, February 8, 1985, 17.

¹²⁸ Andrew Veitch, “The Aids That African Could Do Without,” *Guardian*, October 13, 1984, 13.

¹²⁹ Hugh Canning, “Sharpening the Clause,” *Guardian*, March 15, 1988, 18; see also Bryony Coleman, “A 24-hour Phone-in,” *Guardian*, May 2, 1989, 17.

¹³⁰ Alex Brummer, “A Model for The World’s Struggle,” *Guardian*, November 6, 1985, 23; Nicholas de Jongh, “When The Real Disease Is Press Distortion,” *Guardian*, April 14, 1986, 15.

Readers of the *Guardian*, therefore, might begin to avoid only associating HIV/AIDS with gay men because of the *Guardian*'s consistent denunciation of "gay plague," and they might be more inclined to consider that the entire population should respond to and share responsibility for stopping the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The *Observer* used the term "gay plague" more frequently than the *Guardian*, with approximately twelve references between 1980 and 1990 (considering that the *Observer* only published once a week). Initial reports referring to a "gay plague" in the *Observer* neglected to address the limitations and biases of the term. For instance, the *Observer* published an article on November 14th, 1982, titled "No Defence Against Gay Disease," using an alternative to "gay plague" that still emphasizes a link to gay men. The article later states that "references to the 'gay plague' in the 'straight' press" are "resented by gays [...] though the gay press has used, and may have originated, this term."¹³¹ Even though this article notes the pushback against using the term "gay plague," it blames gay men for inventing the stigmatizing term, seemingly absolving British newspapers for subsequently popularizing and emphasizing the phrase. Subsequent reports beginning in 1983 and 1984 referring to "gay plague" follow the *Guardian*'s approach, criticizing the use of the term and arguing that HIV/AIDS is "not a 'gay plague.'"¹³² The *Observer* also preemptively addresses the inaccuracy of the term by prefacing "gay plague" with a clarifying statement, such as explaining that HIV/AIDS was "at first dismissively dubbed 'The Gay Plague.'"¹³³

¹³¹ Christine Coyle, "No Defence Against Gay Disease," *Observer*, November 14, 1982, 25.

¹³² Hugh Davenport and Olivia Timbs, "Gays 'Not to Blame for AIDS,'" *Observer*, December 23, 1984, 2; see also Nicholas Wapshott, "New Morality and The Sexual Time Bomb," *Observer*, December 28, 1986, 8.

¹³³ Martin Amis, "Mother Nature and The Plague," *Observer*, May 1, 1983, 36; see also William Scobie, "'Gay Plague' Sets Off Panic," *Observer*, June 26, 1983, 10; DJ West, "We Need to Rationalise Our Sex Laws," *Observer*, April 28, 1985, 10.

Similar to the *Guardian* and *Observer*, the *Independent*, another left-leaning broadsheet newspaper, established in 1986, argued against the use of the term “gay plague” from its inception. For instance, the first article that references a “gay plague,” an editorial published in November, 1986, explains that “Aids is no longer an overwhelmingly ‘gay plague’ and it would be foolish to pretend otherwise.”¹³⁴ An article from the following year notes that “there is a real danger that people will simply regard it [HIV/AIDS] as a media blitz, a gay plague, or something that happens in San Francisco.”¹³⁵ This suggests a common recognition among left-leaning, broadsheet newspapers of the pejorative implications of the term “gay plague,” and a desire to emphasize these to readers.

The Times, on the other hand, diverges from the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *Independent*’s approaches by neglecting to consistently or appropriately address the flaws of the phrase throughout the 1980s. Although *The Times* uses “gay plague” less often than the *Observer*, approximately sixteen times between 1980 and 1990, it presents an inconsistent attitude regarding the term, even within the same article. For instance, an article published in 1985 states that “AIDs is not the ‘gay plague’ – not just in medical but in social terms. We are all living with it,” suggesting that the whole population is at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and should respond accordingly.¹³⁶ However, the article poses a series of questions following this statement which clearly and directly associates gay men with HIV/AIDS: “What can you touch, eat, drink? If a designer is homosexual will his clothes perhaps carry AIDs? Can a gay hairdresser threaten his clients? Can you play contact sports? How safe are the showers after squash? If the questions seem irrational it is simply because of distance [from California].”¹³⁷ The emphasis on a

¹³⁴ “The Truth about a Social Disease,” *The Independent*, November 4, 1986, 16.

¹³⁵ Kristy Milne, “The Straight Plague,” *The Independent*, March 3, 1987, 11.

¹³⁶ Douglas Thompson, “Aids: The American Nightmare,” *The Times*, August 12, 1985, 8.

¹³⁷ Douglas Thompson, “Aids: The American Nightmare,” *The Times*, August 12, 1985, 8.

“homosexual” designer and “gay hairdresser” suggests that *The Times*’ statement “we are all living with it” is actually implying that “we are all living with gay men” who could spread HIV/AIDS. Even though the article clarifies that HIV/AIDS is not a “gay plague,” the subsequent questions suggest that *The Times* still strongly considers HIV/AIDS as primarily affecting gay men and blames them for its spread. *The Times* continues to use “gay plague” in the later 1980s, often referring to the public’s belief that HIV/AIDS is a “gay plague.”¹³⁸ *The Times* only begins to address the inaccuracy of the term in 1990, with articles stating that “this is no longer the ‘gay plague’ that was originally and shamefully mis-diagnosed” and describing “the myth of the ‘gay plague.’”¹³⁹ Overall though, throughout the 1980s, *The Times* did not clarify to readers the implications of considering HIV/AIDS a “gay plague.”

Notably, the *Sunday Times*’ approach to using the term “gay plague” differed from *The Times*, with the *Sunday Times* beginning to discuss the inaccuracy of the phrase as early as 1985.¹⁴⁰ Subsequent articles mentioning a “gay plague” often explained that readers should not consider HIV/AIDS a “gay plague.” For example, an article published on June 21st, 1987, states that “the time has come to throw off the outdated gay plague sensibilities and tackle the epidemic as an emergency threatening untold thousands of lives.”¹⁴¹ This suggests that not all conservative newspapers, even sister papers, presented the same approach to using stigmatizing terms to refer to HIV/AIDS .

¹³⁸ Caroline Phillips, “No Sex Please, We’re Skittish,” *The Times*, May 13, 1987, 11; see also Sally Brompton, “A Sister for the Dying,” *The Times*, January 7, 1987, 9; Jill Sherman and Michael Dynes, “Love in a Chilling Climate,” *The Times*, November 5, 1986, 14.

¹³⁹ Sheridan Morley, “Scents and Sensibility,” *The Times*, February 23, 1990, 16; Thomson Prentice, “Aids: This Time Send the Right Message,” *The Times*, October 17, 1990, 12; see also Charles Bremner, “Aids Victim’s Death Moves a Nation,” *The Times*, April 13, 1990, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Tim McGirk, “One Man’s Fight Against Aids,” *Sunday Times*, August 11, 1985, 15.

¹⁴¹ Neville Hodgkinson, “Why Everyone Should Take the Aids Test,” *Sunday Times*, June 21, 1987, 27; see also Henry Porter, “Time for a Last Fling?,” *Sunday Times*, October 26, 1985, 48; Brian Deer, “AIDS: No Time for Complacency,” *Sunday Times*, January 31, 1988, 45.

While *The Times* and *Daily Mail* use “gay plague” less often than the more left-leaning newspapers, neither newspaper addresses the inaccuracy and stigma of the term as rigorously as the *Daily Mirror*, *Guardian*, and *Observer*. This suggests that readers of the *Daily Mail* and *The Times* could comfortably peruse the newspapers without encountering contradictions to their perceptions of HIV/AIDS as a “gay plague,” and could continue to sequester the epidemic, its spread and risk, to gay men. Even though the *Guardian* and *Observer* used the term “gay plague” more often, because they consistently addressed and combatted the stigma and misconceptions surrounding the term, readers may have been more likely to understand that HIV/AIDS was not a “gay plague.” The *Daily Mirror*, on the other hand, presented itself as an outlier, with articles that argued against referring to a “gay plague,” as well as stories that uncritically used the term. Peter Beharrell notes that when another British newspaper, the *Sun*, retired the use of “gay plague,” it began referring to HIV/AIDS instead as a “homosexual disease” in the later 1980s,¹⁴² a shift and substitution that the newspapers analyzed in this study did not undergo.

II. “High-risk”

Similar to the term “gay plague,” the newspapers’ references to “high-risk” groups that included “homosexuals” and “bisexuals” amplified the idea that gay men were inherently at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS because of their sexual identity. These “high-risk” categories seemed to assume that all gay men engaged in “promiscuous” casual sex, that children could not be “homosexual,” and that all men participating in same-sex sexual relations identified as “homosexual” or “bisexual.” Additionally, Carter and Watney argue that instead of being considered at high risk of contracting HIV, gay men were “widely regarded as constituting a high

¹⁴² Beharrell, “Chapter 9: AIDS and the British Press,” 201.

risk to other people,” further contributing to the blame assigned to gay men.¹⁴³ Newspapers’ “high-risk” categories also listed hemophiliacs and drug users alongside gay men as “high risk.” However, a person’s sexual identity differs greatly from a sexual act and the use of drugs, and, as the following section will further analyze, hemophiliacs were widely considered the “innocent” victims of HIV/AIDS.

The *Daily Mirror* referred to “high risk” categories related to HIV/AIDS infrequently, about twelve times between 1980 and 1990, and the phrase typically appeared in reports about medical trials, medical experts’ opinions, and blood donations. An initial article from the *Daily Mirror* in 1985 discussing “high risk” categories clearly sequesters gay men, and only gay men, to a “high risk” group. The article, titled “Gays Still Giving Blood,” explains that “some homosexuals are still giving blood despite fears of AIDS being passed on. A recent check by the North London Transfusion Centre uncovered blood samples from 38 ‘high risk’ donors.”¹⁴⁴ While the latter statement does not specify which “high risk” donors, the previous sentence and the article’s title clearly single out gay men as the “high risk” donors, and blames them, as opposed to the government or health system, for the transmission of HIV/AIDS through blood products. Subsequent articles avoid solely focusing on gay men, and labels haemophiliacs, drug users, and their sexual partners as “high-risk” as well. For instance, a report from 1987 notes that “for the present donors are asked not to give blood only if they are homosexuals, haemophiliacs, or drug users, or have sex with partners in these high risk groups.”¹⁴⁵ The *Daily Mirror* continues to rely on “high-risk” categories into 1988, with articles stating that “those most at risk from

¹⁴³ Watney, “Taking Liberties,” in Carter and Watney, *Taking Liberties*, 20.

¹⁴⁴ Ronald Bedford, “Gays Still Giving Blood,” *Daily Mirror*, March 8, 1985, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Jill Palmer, “AIDS: We’re Wrong, Say Doctors,” *Daily Mirror*, January 8, 1987, 5.

AIDS are homosexuals, drug addicts and haemophiliacs,”¹⁴⁶ although the newspaper seems to retire the use of the term following 1988. While the *Daily Mirror* did use “high risk” categorizations that singled out and blamed gay men for the HIV/AIDS epidemic, they did not excessively rely on it and eventually seemed to stop using the misleading and prejudiced phrase.

Unlike the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Mail* liberally applied “high risk” labels to gay men, using the phrase approximately thirty-six times between 1980 and 1990. The first five articles discussing “high risk” categories, published from 1983 to 1985, all address blood donations and blame gay men for the transmission of HIV/AIDS through blood products. A report from 1984 exemplifies the newspaper’s views, with the article’s subtitle stating “Gay Blood Donor Blamed for Tragedy,” and the body of the article claiming that “leaflets have been issued to all blood transfusion centres urging those at high risk of the disease not to give blood, though some homosexuals have ignored the appeal.”¹⁴⁷ The newspaper’s initial focus on gay men as “high risk” solely in relation to blood products also supports Carter and Watney’s argument, indicating that the *Daily Mail* focused on gay men as a “high risk” to others as opposed to demonstrating concern over gay men themselves contracting HIV/AIDS. Articles in the latter half of the 1980s referring to “high risk” categories shift focus from HIV/AIDS transmission through blood and begin to liberally use the categorization to isolate the risk of, and deaths from, HIV/AIDS to specific groups. For example, an article published in 1987 titled “AIDS Still Mainly in the High-risk Groups” explains that “the risk of AIDS spreading beyond high-risk groups is minimal,” and that “of the 268 cases [of transmission through heterosexual intercourse], 21 per cent – mostly women, said they had sex with someone from a high-risk group, probably a bisexual man or an

¹⁴⁶ “It Could Be Us Next,” *Daily Mirror*, April 2, 1988, 5; see also Jill Palmer, “Warning! AIDS,” *Daily Mirror*, December 1, 1988, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Richard Shears, “AIDS Alert After Three Babies Die,” *Daily Mail*, November 16, 1984, 2.

intravenous drug user.”¹⁴⁸ The *Daily Mail* did not significantly diminish its use of “high risk” categories in the later 1980s, with references to “high risk” groups continuing into 1990.¹⁴⁹

The *Guardian* followed the *Daily Mail*’s example and referred to “high-risk” groups throughout the epidemic, with approximately twenty-three references between 1980 and 1990. Similar to the *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian*’s early reports focused on gay men as the primary “high risk” group, concentrating on their “high risk” to others. An article from 1983 explains that “apart from ordinarily promiscuous gays, said the specialist, the high risk groups are those who saved up their money for a sexual binge in cities [...] and affluent travelling businessmen and professional men who pick up boys” and that “each of those initial carriers may by now have passed on the disease to more than 100 others.”¹⁵⁰ The article clearly blames gay men for the spread of HIV/AIDS, neglects to consider their own experience, and seems mostly concerned about their risk to others. Later articles also introduced drug users alongside gay men as “high risk.”¹⁵¹ Notably, the *Guardian* continued to refer to “high risk” categories that included gay men even after publishing two reports that encouraged discussing “high risk practices” or “activities” as opposed to groups. The first report, published in 1985, notes that “Dr Peter Willis, a GP, said prevention depended largely on people avoiding high-risk practices such as anal intercourse,”¹⁵² while the second article states that a motion “to delete the words ‘high risk groups’” was passed “after argument that there were no longer high risk groups, only high risk activities.”¹⁵³ The

¹⁴⁸ Jenny Hope, “AIDS Still Mainly in the High-risk Groups,” *Daily Mail*, October 13, 1987, 10; see also “Broadmoor Man Killed by Aids,” *Daily Mail*, May 10, 1988, 9.

¹⁴⁹ See Jenny Hope, “Diana’s Words Comfort Women Victims of Aids,” *Daily Mail*, December 4, 1990, 5.

¹⁵⁰ Andrew Veitch, “The Lurking Killer Without a Cure,” *Guardian*, November 2, 1983, 13/

¹⁵¹ Alex Comfort and Andrew Veitch, “How to Avoid Catching Aids,” *Guardian*, November 21, 1986, 21.

¹⁵² Andrew Veitch, “Aids Plea by Gay GPs,” *Guardian*, October 3, 1985, 2.

¹⁵³ “Aids-infected Haemophiliacs ‘Should Receive Compensation,’” *Guardian*, September 17, 1987, 4.

Guardian, however, did not seem to seriously consider these views, as the newspaper continued to publish articles referring to “high risk” groups in a derogatory manner into 1990.¹⁵⁴

Similar to the *Guardian*, the *Independent* also presented an inconsistent approach to using the phrase “high risk.” For instance, it published a number of articles referring to “high risk activities,” as opposed to “high risk” groups, in the 1980s.¹⁵⁵ However, articles in the *Independent* continued to refer to “high risk” groups, which included “homosexuals,” into 1990.¹⁵⁶ This implies that while certain writers at the *Independent* may have recognized the harm of referring to gay men as a “high risk” group, the newspaper itself did not have a uniform understanding or interest in the negative connotations of the term.

The *Observer* did not frequently discuss “high risk” groups, publishing only six articles that used the categorization between 1980 and 1990. The *Observer* also did not cease its use of the phrase during this period, with articles referring to “high risk” categories appearing throughout the 1980s and into 1990. For example, an article published in 1990 singles out gay men as part of a “high risk” group, specifying that “high risk groups such as homosexual men have responded well [...]”¹⁵⁷ However, this example does not employ the term in a negative or stigmatizing tone, suggesting that, although the *Observer* continued to refer to the classification, the newspapers may have altered how it used “high risk.” Nevertheless, unlike the *Guardian*, the *Observer* did not report on efforts from the public and medical professionals to focus on high-

¹⁵⁴ See Andrew Veitch, “‘Second Wave’ of Aids Spreads Beyond Risk Groups,” *Guardian*, February 9, 1988, 5; Chris Milhill, “Heterosexual Cases of Aids Nearly Double,” *Guardian*, October 16, 1990, 2.

¹⁵⁵ See Oliver Gillie, “Heterosexuals Get Guidelines to Cut Risk of Spreading Aids,” *The Independent*, November 10, 1986, 5; Oliver Gillie, “Aids Report Highlights Biggest Risk for Gays,” *The Independent*, December, 1986, 4; Nicholas Timmins, “Doctors Vote to Allow Aids Tests Without Permission,” *The Independent*, June 17, 1988, 3.

¹⁵⁶ See Celia Hall, “Heterosexual Aids Cases Double,” *The Independent*, October 16, 1990, 1; Sue Fieldman, “Spread of Aids Prompts Insurance Rate Review,” *The Independent*, October 20, 1990, 20.

¹⁵⁷ Emily Bell, “Aids: Sex, Lies and Red Tape,” *Observer*, February 11, 1990, 47.

risk activities instead of identities or groups, indicating that its readers may not have fully understood the inaccuracy and implications of the “high risk” categorization.

The Times’ use of “high risk” groups seemed to combine how both the *Daily Mail* and *Guardian* approached the issue, as it frequently referred to “high risk” categories, about thirty-six times between 1980 and 1990, and published reports arguing for the discussion of “high risk” behaviors as opposed to groups. *The Times*, however, seemed to diverge from the previous newspapers by initially labelling a number of different groups as “high risk” and then later focusing more on gay men and drug users. For instance, an article from 1983 describes “the high risk categories” as “homosexuals/bisexuals, intravenous drug abusers, haemophiliacs, Haitians, female partners of any of these, infants of such females,” while an article from 1984 classifies “homosexuals, some exceptionally active heterosexuals, drug addicts using intravenous injection and Haitians” as “high risk,” and a report from 1985 explains that “more than three quarters of sufferers belong to the main ‘high risk’ category: homosexual men.”¹⁵⁸ Similar to the *Guardian*, *The Times* published articles about demands to stop referring to “high risk” groups, yet continued to do so in their own paper. For example, a report from March, 1986, states that the intention of government advertisements “is to draw attention to high-risk types of behaviour rather than to high-risk groups,” and another article published two months later describes how “doctors are anxious to draw attention to high-risk types of behaviour rather [than] high-risk groups of individuals.”¹⁵⁹ *The Times* evidently did not agree with these views, as the newspaper continued to pejoratively refer to “high risk” groups into the late 1980s and 1990.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Duncan Fallowell, “AIDS is Here,” *The Times*, July 27, 1983, 8; Roger Boyes, “Soviet Block Scare at Reports of Aids,” *The Times*, February 28, 1984, 8; Thomson Prentice, “What Experts Know about Aids,” *The Times*, February 21, 1985, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Thomson Prentice, “Campaign on Aids to Cost £2.5m,” *The Times*, March 14, 1986, 5; “Aids Cases in Britain Double in 10 Months,” *The Times*, June 14, 1986, 20.

¹⁶⁰ See Thomas Stuttaford, “French Aids Fear,” *The Times*, November 24, 1988, 15; Charles Bremner, “Bedtime Story on Sex, Lies and Aids,” *The Times*, March 16, 1990, 12.

The *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* all discussed “high risk” groups that included gay men in relation to HIV/AIDS and its spread. With the exception of the *Daily Mirror*, the newspapers seemed to unabashedly continue to refer to the “high risk” categories throughout the 1980s and into 1990. The categorization based on a sexual identity perpetuated stereotypes and biases about gay men, their sexuality and sexual relationships. Labelling all gay men as “high risk” ostracized them from the “general population” and singled them out as potential carriers of HIV/AIDS, regardless of any other factors. Furthermore, the focus on HIV/AIDS transmission through blood in many of the articles that classified gay men as “high risk” indicates that the newspapers exhibited more concern over gay men as a “high risk” to others, as opposed to concern over the risk of gay men themselves contracting HIV/AIDS. Instead of including all gay men in this categorization, the newspapers could, and should, have discussed high-risk activities, such as unprotected anal or vaginal sex, which would have lessened the biased association between gay men and HIV/AIDS.

III. “Innocent” victim

In addition to the “high risk” categories, discussion of “innocent” victims of HIV/AIDS in British newspapers further perpetuated the stigma and blame surrounding the illness and gay men. The “innocent” victim category, which included hemophiliacs, children, and wives, relegated gay men to an implied “non-innocent” grouping, suggesting that they were at fault for contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS. The dichotomy between “innocent” and “non-innocent” also justified homophobic moral arguments for the existence of HIV/AIDS. As Jeffrey Weeks explains, “James Anderton, Chief Constable of Manchester, found justification for his moralistic endeavours in this crisis. The spread of AIDS was, as he inimitably put it, the result of people’s

‘degenerate conduct’ [...] AIDS was thus seen by the moralistic right as a product of the permissive society. Some were ‘innocent victims’ (such as haemophiliacs); others had brought the disease upon themselves.”¹⁶¹ British newspapers became complicit in this type of “moral” prejudice by dividing people with HIV/AIDS into “innocent” and “non-innocent” categories. While overall the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times* did not often refer to “innocent” victims of HIV/AIDS, slight differences in the frequency and tone of their articles addressing “innocent” victims point to notable differences in how each newspaper approached the biased label.

The *Daily Mirror* only mentioned “innocent” victims of HIV/AIDS approximately three times between 1980 and 1990, primarily in relation to women and children with the illness. For instance, an article from 1986 titled “Innocent Wives in AIDS Tragedy” explains that “two women have died from AIDS in the same hospital – both innocent victims of making love to their husbands.”¹⁶² While the *Daily Mirror* referred to “innocent” victims infrequently, the newspaper’s use of the term did not stop or decrease over the course of the 1980s, publishing one of the reports discussing “innocent” victims in 1990.¹⁶³

The *Daily Mail* discussed “innocent” victims more frequently than the *Daily Mirror*, using the descriptor about ten times between 1980 and 1990. For example, the *Daily Mail* published an article in 1986 explaining that a new law in California “would also hit hardest those innocent victims of Aids – those who contract it through a transfusion of contaminated blood,” and a front-page article from 1987 states that “the devastating tragedy of the innocent victims of AIDS was highlighted yesterday with the disclosure that in one family alone eight haemophiliacs

¹⁶¹ Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 324.

¹⁶² “Innocent Wives in AIDS Tragedy,” *Daily Mirror*, October 24, 1986, 5.

¹⁶³ Mark Dowdney, “£16m for AIDS Boy Alex, 5,” *Daily Mirror*, June 4, 1990, 13.

have been infected with the virus.”¹⁶⁴ Similar to the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Mail* did not diminish its use of the classification, with reports mentioning “innocent” victims published in 1989 and 1990.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, neither the *Daily Mail* nor the *Daily Mirror* addressed issues with the phrase or its prejudiced and biased connotations.

The *Guardian*, on the other hand, did touch on some of these issues and negative connotations related to the term “innocent” victim. Out of the approximately five times the *Guardian* refers to “innocent” victims of HIV/AIDS between 1980 and 1990, two of the articles, both published in response to Princess Anne’s prejudiced speech about the illness, consider arguments against using the term. One of the articles notes that “others were concerned that her reference to innocent victims would only serve to stigmatise those infected through sexual activity,” while the other explains that “specialists and gay groups avoid classifying Aids sufferers as guilty or innocent for fear of driving the disease underground.”¹⁶⁶ However, these reports did not prompt the *Guardian* to stop using the term, with the newspaper publishing a first person narrative a few months later that broadcast the existence of “innocent” victims. The author of the article, a woman concerned that she contracted HIV/AIDS from her male partner, whom she suspects “just might be bisexual,” describes her experience going to a clinic for testing. A large phrase printed in the center of the article states “Had I been HIV positive, I would have been an innocent victim,” and the author writes that “some of the Clinic’s patients are as confused and ignorant as I was but most are people who put themselves deliberately at risk.”¹⁶⁷ The author blames some individuals with HIV/AIDS, presumably gay men, for

¹⁶⁴ Peter Sheridan, “The Vote to Turn AIDS Victims into Lepers,” *Daily Mail*, October 17, 1986, 6; Jenny Hope, “Eight People in One Family are Hit by AIDS,” *Daily Mail*, October 14, 1987, 1.

¹⁶⁵ Reginald Murley, “Phoney Face of the War on Aids,” *Daily Mail*, November 7, 1989, 6; Bob Graham, “Loving Care the Only Medicine,” *Daily Mail*, July 12, 1990, 17.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Veitch, “Princess Anne Calls Aids ‘Own Goal,’” *Guardian*, January 27, 1988, 2; “Discrimination Helps the Virus, Says WHO Chief,” *Guardian*, January 27, 1988, 2.

¹⁶⁷ Jenny McKay, “Chance in a Million,” *Guardian*, October 12, 1988, 20.

contracting the illness, and seems to suggest that they knowingly became infected with HIV/AIDS. At the same time, she absolves herself of responsibility by describing herself as an “innocent,” “confused,” and “ignorant” victim. While the *Guardian* did offer alternate viewpoints that argued against using the term “innocent” victim, the newspaper still provided the space for articles that emphasized the separation of “innocent” and “non-innocent” victims and that stigmatized certain people living with HIV/AIDS.

In contrast to the *Guardian*'s approach, the *Independent* published an article in 1988 that demonstrates an alternate method to presenting a first-person perspective on contracting HIV/AIDS. The article, written by a woman who contracted HIV through her husband, argues against distinguishing between “innocent” and “guilty” victims. The author explains that “I was aware at times of a differences in attitude towards me [...] of being labelled ‘innocent’. The implication was that gays are guilty. But it is a virus and no respecter of persons. Anyone who is sexually active can catch it.”¹⁶⁸ The *Independent*'s article diverged from the *Guardian*'s approach by avoiding stigmatizing other groups living with the illness and by instead confronting some of the biases attached to HIV/AIDS.

The *Observer*, meanwhile, very rarely mentioned “innocent” victims in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with only one significant article discussing it. The article, titled “Slaughter of the Innocents,” reports on the babies dying of HIV/AIDS in Romania, and does not use the term “innocent” in the body of the article.¹⁶⁹ This suggests that the *Observer* may have recognized the implications of the term and concurred with some of the arguments against using the phrase.

¹⁶⁸ “My Husband Gave Me HIV,” *The Independent*, November 29, 1988, 15.

¹⁶⁹ Bob Wylie and Murdo MacLead, “Slaughter of the Innocents,” *The Independent*, June 24, 1990, 12.

Similar to the *Daily Mirror* and *Guardian*, *The Times* did not frequently refer to “innocent” victims of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, using the label approximately four times between 1980 and 1990. Two of these articles emphasized some of the biases and misinformation surrounding HIV/AIDS and gay men. The first article, published in November 1986, attacks “sexual libertarians,” and argues that “once it became clear that it [Aids] also indirectly threatens heterosexuals and people wholly innocent of promiscuity, the disease was quickly seen as providing a new opportunity” for sex educators and “libertarians” to communicate sexually explicit messages.¹⁷⁰ While the article does not explicitly state the existence of “innocent” and “non-innocent” victims, it still clearly considers those engaging in “promiscuity,” often associated by newspapers with gay men, as guilty or responsible for contracting HIV/AIDS. The second article, published a month later, offers three answers to the question “Why have I got this disease?,” with the third and most heavily “moral” answer explaining that ““unless you are a haemophiliac or some other kind of innocent sufferer you committed a sin, and it is the wrongness of your action that has brought you to this plight.”¹⁷¹ The article does not state which answer is correct, but it also does not criticize the consideration of “innocent sufferers.” The article later states that certain “private sexual activity [...] may, like cigarettes, be acknowledged to be ‘injurious to your health.’”¹⁷² In a story about HIV/AIDS, morality, and sex, this statement clearly blames gay men for contracting HIV/AIDS through sexual activity.

Apart from the *Daily Mail*, the newspapers in this study did not often categorize people with HIV/AIDS as “innocent” or “non-innocent.” Nevertheless, they still perpetuated the biased belief that gay men could be blamed for the epidemic as the creation of an “innocent” group of

¹⁷⁰ Ronald Butt, “Making Capital Out of Aids,” *The Times*, November 20, 1986, 20.

¹⁷¹ David Watt, “Aids: Boobytrap for Politicians,” *The Times*, December 19, 1986, 16.

¹⁷² David Watt, “Aids: Boobytrap for Politicians,” *The Times*, December 19, 1986, 16.

victims strongly implied that some individuals, notably gay men, were not innocent, and therefore at fault for contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS. Additionally, the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Observer* and *The Times* did not address the stigma of the term, as they referred to “innocent” victims throughout the 1980s without pointing out to readers its negative connotations or the arguments against using the phrase. Even the *Guardian*, which mentioned some of the controversies surrounding the “innocent” victim label, still published articles supporting the use of the term. Similar to the “high risk” categorization, the newspapers did not seem to recognize the prejudiced implications of referring to “innocent” victims of HIV/AIDS, and did not attempt to significantly or obviously change their use of the term, instead continuing to rely on stigmatizing and ostracizing language to refer to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and those with the illness.

The *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times*’ differing uses of the phrases “gay plague,” “high-risk” and “innocent victim,” suggests that readers would have encountered significantly different approaches to, and discussion of, the stigma and biases surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic depending on which primary newspaper they read. The conservative newspapers, such as the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*, relied on the misleading terms with greater frequency and in more stigmatizing articles, without considering their prejudiced connotations nor offering readers alternative options or opinions. Meanwhile, the more liberal newspapers, the *Daily Mirror*, *Guardian*, and *Observer*, did not use these phrases in a consistent manner. For instance, the *Guardian* published articles arguing against the use of the term “gay plague,” but continued to categorize gay men as “high risk” and refer to “innocent” victims of the epidemic. These newspapers also addressed the terms differently depending on their

categorization as either a tabloid (the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*) or a broadsheet newspaper (the *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times*). The tabloids generally presented a less tolerant and more prejudiced tone, referring to the stigmatizing terms more frequently and addressing their flaws less frequently. Readers of a conservative tabloid therefore would have absorbed, and likely regurgitated, more stigmatizing language that implicitly blamed gay men for the HIV/AIDS epidemic than readers of a liberal broadsheet newspaper. Nevertheless, all of the newspapers relied on stigmatizing and prejudiced language to refer to HIV/AIDS to some extent throughout the epidemic, suggesting that there existed a considerable amount of confusion, misconception, and prejudice across the political spectrum.

CHAPTER THREE

Different Perspectives: Differing Coverage of the Same Stories

While the exact language the newspapers used offers insight into how each paper separately discussed HIV/AIDS, analyzing newspapers' coverage of the same stories provides a way to directly compare the differences between their approaches to reporting on the epidemic.

This chapter, therefore, will examine newspaper coverage of some of the notable events that occurred in the first decade of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, including the AIDS-related deaths of three celebrities, Rock Hudson in 1985, Liberace in 1987, and Freddie Mercury in 1991; the inflammatory and stigmatizing remarks of Manchester police chief James Anderton in 1986; Princess Diana's visit to a London hospital's AIDS ward in 1987; and the implementation of Clause 28 of the Local Government Act in 1988. This list is not exhaustive, but rather provides an overview of some of the important events, deaths, and speeches, that some, or all, of the newspapers covered extensively. Differences in the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times*' discussion of these stories will reveal whether some newspapers exhibited more sympathy for gay men and those living with HIV/AIDS, as well as how the newspapers' attitudes might have shifted over the course of the epidemic.

I. AIDS-related Deaths

Coverage of the deaths of Rock Hudson, Liberace, and Freddie Mercury from AIDS-related illnesses provides three points of comparison during the 1980s and into the 1990s, with clear differences emerging between the tabloids and broadsheet newspapers' articles. Overall, the tabloids tended to sensationalize their deaths and presented a more stigmatizing attitude, while the broadsheet newspapers focused more on the celebrities' life and accomplishments.

Newspapers' approaches to addressing these AIDS-related deaths could set a precedent for how others might be treated upon disclosing their HIV/AIDS diagnosis, because of the importance of celebrities and the large number of readers engrossed with their stories – if the newspapers present a stigmatizing and ostracizing reaction to the death of a famous and beloved celebrity from an AIDS-related illness, this could provide a standard, or pattern, for how people react to their colleagues, family members, or even friends living with HIV/AIDS.

With regards to Rock Hudson's death in 1985, Terry Sanderson explains that "all the old clichés were wheeled out 'Living a lie', 'secret torment', 'bizarre lifestyle' and so on."¹⁷³ Hudson, the "Hollywood ideal of American masculinity in the 1950s and 60s," was the first well-known celebrity to die from an AIDS-related illness,¹⁷⁴ and British tabloids seized upon the chance to tear down his image of "ideal masculinity."

The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* published front-page headlines about Rock Hudson's death that underscored the changes in his physical appearance and how he had "deceived" the public. They highlighted his "gaunt" appearance, publishing front-page photographs of him with the caption "the 6ft 4ins Hollywood he-man, weighed just seven stone when he died" in the *Daily Mirror*, and the description "devastated by AIDS...a gaunt Rock Hudson" in the *Daily Mail*. The *Daily Mirror* article describes him as "a wasted seven-stone shadow of the square jawed hero" while the *Daily Mail* notes that he "died a living skeleton."¹⁷⁵ The *Daily Mail*'s quote above the headline stated that "he died a living skeleton – and so ashamed," implying that people with HIV/AIDS should feel ashamed. However, as Matt Cook notes, "the paper deftly displaced and justified its judgement by suggesting that this is what Hudson felt

¹⁷³ Terry Sanderson, "Mediawatch," *Gay Times*, September 1985, 16.

¹⁷⁴ John Mercer, *Rock Hudson* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 1.

¹⁷⁵ John Jackson and Douglas Thompson, "Final Hours of Tragic Rock," *Daily Mirror*, October 3, 1985, 1; Baz Bamigboye and Peter McKay, "The Last Days of Rock Hudson," *Daily Mail*, October 3, 1985, 1.

himself.”¹⁷⁶ Both articles focused primarily on his “dishonesty,” arguing that by not revealing his sexual identity he had “deceived” his fans and the general public. The *Daily Mirror*’s ad for the continuation of the article reads “the Hollywood legend who lived a lie,” and the *Daily Mail*’s headline for its subsequent story on page three is “Hollywood made the legend, Rock Hudson lived the lie.”¹⁷⁷

The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* also emphasized a link between gay men and HIV/AIDS, with the *Daily Mirror* writing that Hudson “had the dreaded ‘gay plague,’” and the *Daily Mail* explaining that “the disease, which was introduced to the country [the United States] by ‘gay’ men, was spread through sexual contact between homosexuals.”¹⁷⁸ Simon Watney contrasts these depictions of Hudson with US coverage of his death, noting that “even in the depths of Baptist Oklahoma” press coverage presented Hudson as a “‘white knight in shining armour’” whose courage and disclosure that he had HIV/AIDS might spur “worldwide efforts to find a cure.”¹⁷⁹ Instead of using the death of a celebrity from HIV/AIDS to increase the public’s knowledge about the virus and its transmission, the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* both reinforced the stigma and bigotry surrounding the virus by sensationalizing Hudson’s death and by associating shame, dishonesty and betrayal with gay men and HIV/AIDS.

Other tabloids used a similar approach as the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, with the *Sun* publishing a two-page spread about Hudson’s death titled “The Hunk Who Lived A Lie: He loved only Mum.” The *Sun*’s article also claimed that “thankfully the only woman he ever loved – his mother, Kay – never lived to know her son had AIDS,”¹⁸⁰ as though parents of children

¹⁷⁶ Cook, “‘Archives of Feeling’: the AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987,” 69.

¹⁷⁷ John Jackson and Douglas Thompson, “Final Hours of Tragic Rock,” *Daily Mirror*, October 3, 1985, 1; Baz Bamigboye and Peter McKay, “The Last Days of Rock Hudson,” *Daily Mail*, October 3, 1985, 1.

¹⁷⁸ John Jackson and Douglas Thompson, “Final Hours of Tragic Rock,” *Daily Mirror*, October 3, 1985, 1; Baz Bamigboye and Peter McKay, “The Last Days of Rock Hudson,” *Daily Mail*, October 3, 1985, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Watney, *Policing Desire*, 90.

¹⁸⁰ Charles Catchpole, “The Hunk Who Lived a Lie,” *Sun*, October 3, 1985 quoted in Watney, *Policing Desire*, 88.

living with HIV/AIDS should feel shame. Simon Watney argues that “the role of the press in ‘shaming’ the parents of gay people with Aids is perhaps the single most nauseating aspect of Aids commentary.”¹⁸¹

Unlike the tabloids, the *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* did not foreground Hudson’s appearance or his public “deceit,” and instead focused more heavily on his life and career. For instance, the *Guardian*’s front-page article highlights Hudson’s contributions to research on HIV/AIDS, noting that “there are already reports that the star had planned to leave his fortune for research into the condition,” and captions a photograph of a younger Hudson with “Rock Hudson: gave \$250,000 to groups seeking cure.” Additionally, a statement addressing his changing appearance suggests a sympathetic attitude, as the *Guardian* explains that “his gaunt, haggard appearance, juxtaposed with earlier pictures, first caused rumours about his health which proved sadly accurate.”¹⁸² A longer tribute to Hudson on page ten, expanding on his success as a movie star, notes that “ageing was to become him in surprising ways. His drink, heart and other medical problems – which only later we learned was AIDS – virtually remodelled him into a leaner, more haggard, more sympathetic character actor,”¹⁸³ which seemingly introduces a positive aspect to his changing appearance. The *Guardian*’s articles largely ignore Hudson’s sexuality, apart from a small note that “sadly, we now know he saved those risks for his private life.”¹⁸⁴ Although this statement suggests that engaging in sexual relations with other men was “risky,” playing into the often stigmatizing “high-risk” categorizations, the *Guardian* overall presented a sympathetic report on Hudson’s death, which emphasized his successes as opposed to the circumstances surrounding his death.

¹⁸¹ Watney, *Policing Desire*, 88.

¹⁸² “Film Star Rock Hudson, Victim of Aids, Dies Aged 59,” *Guardian*, October 3, 1985, 1.

¹⁸³ Clancy Sigal, “Tribute to Rock Hudson,” *Guardian*, October 3, 1985, 10.

¹⁸⁴ Clancy Sigal, “Tribute to Rock Hudson,” *Guardian*, October 3, 1985, 10.

The *Observer*'s article about Rock Hudson after his death seems to introduce an ominous perspective, with the article title "Kiss of Terror in Tinseltown" and the first sentence stating that "Hollywood has become a place of fear and accusation since it learned that Rock Hudson had AIDS – which killed him last week."¹⁸⁵ While the article continues to highlight the "heightened fears" and paranoia in Hollywood after Hudson's death, the story also clarifies misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. For instance, the article notes that "the AIDS virus can sometimes be detected in a sufferer's saliva, although there are no known cases of infection from kissing."¹⁸⁶ The article subsequently explains that "despite all medical evidence to the contrary" 80 percent of Californians think HIV/AIDS is spread through casual contact, but clarifies that "in fact, it is spread in two ways only: by sexual contact, or by exposure to contaminated blood."¹⁸⁷ Notably, the *Observer* does not single out gay men while discussing the transmission of HIV/AIDS, presenting a less stigmatizing and homophobic article about his death.

The Times also describes Hudson's death with a more neutral approach, focusing on his life and contributions to combatting the HIV/AIDS epidemic. *The Times* notes that "much of Hollywood rallied around him" in a front-page article titled "Aids Victim Rock Hudson Dies in His Sleep Aged 59."¹⁸⁸ In the same article, however, *The Times* states that "for the past two months popular newspapers have reported almost daily the details of his illness, his unhappy marriage [...] and the truth of his rumoured homosexuality," without clearly condemning the reports.¹⁸⁹ This suggests that *The Times* might have actually supported the popular newspapers' reports, but refrained from mimicking their approach because of its reputation as a broadsheet

¹⁸⁵ William Scobie, "Kiss of Terror in Tinseltown," *Observer*, October 6, 1985, 16.

¹⁸⁶ William Scobie, "Kiss of Terror in Tinseltown," *Observer*, October 6, 1985, 16.

¹⁸⁷ William Scobie, "Kiss of Terror in Tinseltown," *Observer*, October 6, 1985, 16.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Binyon, "Aids Victim Rock Hudson Dies in His Sleep Aged 59," *The Times*, October 3, 1985, 1.

¹⁸⁹ Michael Binyon, "Aids Victim Rock Hudson Dies in His Sleep Aged 59," *The Times*, October 3, 1985, 1.

newspaper. Similar to the *Guardian* and *Observer*, *The Times*' front-page article and obituary about Hudson avoid emphasizing his appearance, with the obituary simply stating that "when in 1985 he made his first public appearance for some time, the formerly handsome star looked emaciated and haggard, and soon afterwards it was disclosed that he was suffering from Aids."¹⁹⁰

Whereas the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, as well as the *Sun*, sensationalized Rock Hudson's death, claimed that he had "deceived" the public, and continued to emphasize a link between gay men and HIV/AIDS, the *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* presented a more neutral and objective perspective that overall did not stigmatize Hudson or others living with HIV/AIDS. Additionally, the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*'s front-page articles about Hudson's death included photographs of him that emphasized changes in his appearance, whereas the *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times* avoided publishing photographs of Hudson from later in his life. The distinction between these two approaches correlates with the differences between British tabloids' general sensationalism of, and obsession with, celebrities and the broadsheet newspapers' position as alternate, reputable sources of news.

The newspapers' coverage of Liberace's death two years later presented a different tone than coverage of Hudson's death, with some of the newspapers blaming Liberace's doctors, as opposed to Liberace himself, for concealing an HIV/AIDS diagnosis. Liberace, an American pianist and entertainer, died from pneumonia because of complications from HIV/AIDS in 1987, although his doctors attempted to conceal the circumstances of his death by falsely, and illegally, stating on his death certificate that he died of "cardiac arrest due to heart failure."¹⁹¹

Additionally, while Liberace did not publicly discuss his same-sex relationships during his life,

¹⁹⁰ "Obituary: Rock Hudson, Popular Hollywood Leading Man," *The Times*, October 3, 1985, 16.

¹⁹¹ Brett L. Abrams, "Liberace," in *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History in America*, ed. Marc Stein (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004), 176.

many newspapers strove to “expose” his sexuality. For instance, Liberace successfully sued the *Daily Mirror* in the 1950s for suggesting that he was homosexual in a column published in 1956 (during a time when Britain still criminalized homosexuality).¹⁹² This likely affected the *Daily Mirror*’s reporting on his death, which seemed more stigmatizing and critical than the *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *The Times*.

News of Liberace’s death appeared twice on the front page of the *Daily Mirror*. In the first instance, a phrase in bold letters at the bottom of the page states “Liberace Dies: Fans’ Sad Vigil Page 2, Candelabra King Center Pages,” without a corresponding article, photograph, or other information on the front page.¹⁹³ Six days later, however, after confirmation that his death was related to HIV/AIDS, the *Daily Mirror* published a large image of Liberace in a wheelchair, proclaiming that “frail and gaunt, Liberace sets out on his final journey. Within 48 hours he was to die of AIDS. This is the last photograph taken of the legendary entertainer. And despite the brave smile, the contrast with his Hollywood heyday is sadly stark.”¹⁹⁴ The photograph and corresponding description seem to reduce Liberace to his HIV/AIDS diagnosis. Additionally, the *Daily Mirror* had already published a report on the AIDS link to Liberace’s death the day before, with a short article on page two explaining that “flamboyant entertainer Liberace DID die of AIDS, American coroner Raymond Carillo ruled yesterday.”¹⁹⁵ This implies that the *Daily Mirror* intentionally waited to publish a front-page article about Liberace’s AIDS-related death until they had a photograph of Liberace that could serve as visual “proof” that he had HIV/AIDS.

The *Daily Mirror* also published an editorial about Liberace, on the same day as the large, front-page photograph of Liberace in a wheelchair. Titled “Any chance of a refund?,” the

¹⁹² Abrams, “Liberace,” 176; “Mirror Comment: Any Chance of a Refund?,” *Daily Mirror*, February 11, 1987, 2.

¹⁹³ “Liberace Dies,” *Daily Mirror*, February 5, 1987, 1.

¹⁹⁴ “Liberace: The Final Picture,” *Daily Mirror*, February 11, 1987, 1.

¹⁹⁵ Ian Black, “Liberace Did Dies of Aids,” *Daily Mirror*, February 10, 1987, 2.

editorial addresses Liberace's death and HIV/AIDS diagnosis with distinctly stigmatizing language and relies on false misconceptions about HIV/AIDS and gay men. The *Daily Mirror* demands a "refund" from Liberace's successful libel suit against the tabloid, and reprints their 1956 description of Liberace as "deadly, winking, sniggering, chromium-plated, scent-impregnated, luminous, quivering, giggling, fruit-flavoured, mincing, ice-covered heap of mother-love."¹⁹⁶ The editorial states that "Liberace was the most outrageous entertainer of his age. He was what everyone suspected and what he always denied and it has finally taken a coroner's inquest to prove it. Liberace's sexual bent, if we may so describe it, was part of the history of this newspaper."¹⁹⁷ The *Daily Mirror* clearly believes that Liberace's HIV/AIDS diagnosis "proves" that he was gay. The editorial does not sympathize with Liberace, or his experience in 1956, and re-emphasizes to readers the dangerous and stigmatizing misconception that HIV/AIDS only affects gay men.

Similar to the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Express* also discussed Liberace's death in a stigmatizing tone that mirrored British tabloids' coverage of Rock Hudson's death. For instance, the *Daily Express* did not wait for confirmation that Liberace had HIV/AIDS, publishing a front-page article on February 5th that stated that "star-spangled pianist Liberace – Mr Showbiz – died last night after a two-year battle with AIDS which he wanted to keep a secret to the grave."¹⁹⁸ The continuation of the front-page article on page thirteen titled "Dying Shame of Mr Showbiz," with the headline "AIDS kills Liberace, the star who kept his sex life secret," focuses on Liberace's "secrets" and "shame."¹⁹⁹ This emphasis on Liberace's "secret life" mimics tabloids'

¹⁹⁶ "Mirror Comment: Any Chance of a Refund?," *Daily Mirror*, February 11, 1987, 2.

¹⁹⁷ "Mirror Comment: Any Chance of a Refund?," *Daily Mirror*, February 11, 1987, 2.

¹⁹⁸ "Liberace is Dead," *Daily Express*, February 5, 1987, 1.

¹⁹⁹ "Dying Shame of Mr Showbiz," *Daily Express*, February 5, 1987, 13.

coverage of Rock Hudson's death, implying that the *Daily Express* did not change or adapt its attitude regarding HIV/AIDS and gay men in the years following Hudson's death.

Apart from the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*, however, the other newspapers analyzed in this study addressed Liberace's death using a more neutral, and at times sympathetic, approach. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, significantly changed the tone of its coverage since Rock Hudson's death, using less stigmatizing language and less sensationalism. Headlines and article titles about Liberace's death appear tame compared to Hudson, with the front-page headline "Liberace the glittering showman dies" announcing his death and another article discussing the upcoming AIDS test titled "Liberace check."²⁰⁰ The article about his death from page two, titled "Showbiz Mourns Gentle Liberace," celebrates his admirers and his compassion for both people and animals, noting that a portion of his fortune "will go to charities – notably the Liberace Foundation of the Performing and Creative Arts."²⁰¹ The article also includes a somber picture of a more gaunt Liberace, but the photograph's caption does not emphasize his appearance, instead stating "Liberace: So generous."²⁰² Additionally, the *Daily Mail* does not blame Liberace for his posthumous HIV/AIDS diagnosis, but instead blames Liberace's doctors for lying about his cause of death in an article titled "Liberace Doctor's AIDS 'Lie.'"²⁰³ The *Daily Mail* still links HIV/AIDS specifically to gay men in an article about testing Liberace posthumously for HIV/AIDS, noting that the illness "has claimed the lives of large numbers of homosexuals," and directly connects Liberace to Hudson: "The sequined showman was reported yesterday to have

²⁰⁰ "Liberace the Glittering Showman Dies," *Daily Mail*, February 5, 1987, 1; John Hiscock, "Liberace Check," *Daily Mail*, February 7, 1987, 10.

²⁰¹ "Showbiz Mourns Gentle Liberace," *Daily Mail*, February 5, 1987, 2.

²⁰² "Showbiz Mourns Gentle Liberace," *Daily Mail*, February 5, 1987, 2.

²⁰³ "Liberace Doctor's AIDS 'Lie,'" *Daily Mail*, February 11, 1987, 10.

had an affair 30 years ago with Rock Hudson, who died of AIDS.”²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the *Daily Mail* overall presented unbiased coverage of Liberace’s death.

The *Guardian* used a similar approach as the *Daily Mail* to report on Liberace’s death, although with a slightly more upbeat tone. The *Guardian*’s front-page article about Liberace’s death, titled “Liberace Dies Amid the Hysteria of Faithful Fans,” includes a photograph of a younger, smiling Liberace. The front-page story describes the “scenes of fan hysteria and media attention” that “the flamboyant entertainer would probably have enjoyed.”²⁰⁵ A subsequent article on page eight celebrates his career and personality, explaining that “Liberace blazed the trail for many younger performers,” such as “Elton John, Elvis Presley, and David Bowie,” and that “his camp style continued to be a frequent target for ridicule, but he conceded nothing to his critics.”²⁰⁶ When news of his positive HIV test emerged, the *Guardian* avoided fixating on its results by relegating the article to page six and by contextualizing the test, explaining that “this did not necessarily mean the pianist had developed the disease, or that it killed him.”²⁰⁷ Additionally, the *Guardian* did not seem to have published any reports confirming Liberace’s death from an AIDS-related illness.

The *Observer* did not publish a major story about Liberace’s death, although the articles that do refer to his passing celebrate his life, and do not emphasize or sensationalize the circumstances of his death. A few months after his death, the *Observer* published an article about a “service of thanksgiving” attended by two hundred elderly women that honored Liberace’s life and work. The article seems to criticize how the tabloids reported on his death, stating that his

²⁰⁴ John Hiscock, “Liberace Check,” *Daily Mail*, February 7, 1987, 10.

²⁰⁵ Christopher Reed, “Liberace Dies Amid the Hysteria of Faithful Fans,” *Guardian*, February 5, 1987, 1.

²⁰⁶ W.J. Weatherby, “Showbiz Glitter That Was Liberace,” *Guardian*, February 5, 1987, 8.

²⁰⁷ Christopher Reed, “Liberace Aids Test ‘Positive,’” *Guardian*, February 9, 1987, 6.

death occurred “last year amid a blaze of lurid headlines.”²⁰⁸ The article also introduces the possible consequences of focusing on his AIDS-related death by quoting the president of the Liberace Fan Club of Great Britain, who explains that the lack of mention of HIV/AIDS at the service “was deliberate. ‘Nobody must say it [...] All anybody remembers about Rock Hudson is that he died of it. They forget his work. That must not happen to Liberace.’”²⁰⁹ The article includes a photograph of a smiling Liberace as well, with the caption “greatest talent.”²¹⁰

Similar to the *Observer*, the *Independent* primarily published very short articles, borrowed from another news agency, about Liberace’s death.²¹¹ The *Independent* did publish one front-page article about the “cover-up” behind Liberace’s death, although the article seems more concerned about the doctors’ lies as opposed to Liberace himself.²¹² The *Independent*’s coverage of Liberace’s death reflects the tone of articles from the *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, and *Observer*, as the newspaper did not stigmatize or sensationalize his death. The *Independent* did, however, diverge from the previous newspapers’ approaches by publishing an opinion piece that criticized the intense scrutiny over Liberace’s HIV/AIDS diagnosis. The author of the article, Olivia Timbs, argues that the public did not need to know whether Liberace had contracted HIV/AIDS, and states that “confidentiality is vitally important for those with Aids” because “if patients are afraid of being exposed to ridicule or having their houses burnt, as has happened to some Aids victims, then the disease will be driven underground.”²¹³ The article seems to take advantage of the press’ focus on Liberace’s HIV/AIDS diagnosis to argue more broadly for the rights of those living with the illness, an approach that the other newspapers in this study did not use.

²⁰⁸ Tim Walker, “High Camp and Low Church as Fans Remember Liberace,” *Observer*, September 13, 1987, 3.

²⁰⁹ Tim Walker, “High Camp and Low Church as Fans Remember Liberace,” *Observer*, September 13, 1987, 3.

²¹⁰ Tim Walker, “High Camp and Low Church as Fans Remember Liberace,” *Observer*, September 13, 1987, 3.

²¹¹ See “Liberace ‘Grave,’” *The Independent*, January 29, 1987, 10; “Liberace ‘Near Death,’” *The Independent*, February 3, 1987, 8; “Liberace Probe,” *The Independent*, February 7, 1987, 5.

²¹² Alexander Chancellor, “Coroner Reveals Aids Cover-up on Liberace,” *The Independent*, February 11, 1987, 1.

²¹³ Olivia Timbs, “Private Rights of Liberace,” *The Independent*, February 10, 1987, 13.

The Times' approach to reporting on Liberace's death remained unbiased and informative, with the publication of articles that avoided stigmatizing or vilifying him. The front-page headline announcing his death simply states "Liberace Dies of Anaemia," and notes that a "spokesmen denied a report that he had Aids."²¹⁴ The continuation of the front-page story on page nine describes his ill health, death, and funeral arrangements, and includes a large photograph of Liberace performing, with the caption "Liberace, the glittering showman who entertained millions around the world, displays one of his many flashy costumes."²¹⁵ Subsequent stories about Liberace's HIV/AIDS diagnosis used medically accurate explanations to discuss the illness. For instance, a report from February 9th states that "Liberace was exposed to Aids but it is not certain whether he died from it," and an article published the following day notes that "Liberace died of a disease caused by Aids."²¹⁶ Similar to the *Daily Mail*, *Guardian* and *Observer*, *The Times* reported on Liberace's death without embellishing his death or relying on misconceptions about HIV/AIDS.

Coverage of Liberace's death in 1987 in the *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, the *Independent* and *The Times* suggests a changing approach to the newspapers' discussion of HIV/AIDS, celebrities, and gay men since Rock Hudson's death two years earlier. These newspapers do not overtly speculate about his sexuality, or blame him for "deceiving" the public, and generally present sympathetic and informative reports on his death. The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*, however, demonstrate that this change did not occur in all British tabloids, regardless of their political affiliation, as they both published articles that reinforced stigmas and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. Additionally, although the difference between coverage of

²¹⁴ "Liberace Dies of Anaemia," *The Times*, February 5, 1987, 1.

²¹⁵ Ivor Davis, "Liberace in Coma for Last 24 Hours," *The Times*, February 5, 1987, 9.

²¹⁶ "World Summary: Liberace Was Exposed to Aids," *The Times*, February 9, 1987, 7; "World Summary: Aids Killed Liberace," *The Times*, February 10, 1987, 6.

Liberace and Rock Hudson's deaths could be attributed to the fact that Liberace died before the confirmation of his HIV/AIDS diagnosis, the *Daily Express*' articles demonstrate that there existed enough speculation for newspapers to exaggerate and sensationalize his death. Notably, however, the newspapers, and even tabloids like the *Daily Mail*, did not latch onto that speculation and avoided stigmatizing Liberace.

Coverage of Freddie Mercury's death from an AIDS-related illness in 1991 provides one final example that indicates a persistent split in British newspapers' attitude on reporting on HIV/AIDS and celebrities. Jose Catalan, Barbara Hedge, and Damien Ridge suggest that a change in attitudes did occur, explaining that "AIDS was frequently in the news, and not always in a negative context. Celebrities dying as a result of HIV infection no longer provoked widespread fear [...] but by 1991, as seen with Freddy Mercury's death in the UK in 1991, created some public sympathy towards HIV."²¹⁷ Terry Sanderson, however, writing in 1992 for the *Gay Times* newspaper, describes a different, more negative, view on newspapers' treatment of Freddie Mercury: "Britain's 'ignorant and lazy' newspaper commentators gave Freddie Mercury 24 hours to rest in peace before they proclaimed him the filthiest, vilest, most corrupt creature that ever walked the face of the earth. And why did they all think this? Because Mr Mercury was supposed to be a 'promiscuous homosexual'. They were all agreed that Freddie deserved all he got."²¹⁸ The newspapers' reporting of Mercury's death confirm both of these opinions to a certain extent. Similar to articles about Rock Hudson's death in 1985, a split between tabloid and broadsheet newspaper coverage of Mercury's death emerged, with British tabloids continuing to sensationalize and stigmatize his death while the broadsheet newspapers exhibited a more sympathetic and humanizing approach.

²¹⁷ Catalan, Hedge and Ridge, *HIV in the UK*, 152.

²¹⁸ Terry Sanderson, "Mediawatch," *Gay Times*, January 1992, 10.

For instance, *Daily Mirror* articles about Mercury's death consistently focus on his changing appearance and sexual relationships. The *Daily Mirror*'s front-page article about his passing includes a large photograph of Mercury with the insensitive caption "The Last Picture: AIDS-ravaged Freddie looks gaunt and frail in this picture from two months ago."²¹⁹ The continuation of this article highlights Mary Austin's loyalty as his "platonic girlfriend," but criticizes Mercury, stating that he was "so close to Mary but [had] so many gay affairs."²²⁰ The *Daily Mirror* seems to express more sympathy for Mary Austin than Mercury himself, with another article noting that Mary Austin "regarded herself as Freddie's 'wife' despite his string of gay lovers."²²¹ The *Daily Mirror* also unnecessarily discusses Mercury's visits to a club in New York, stating that "the star loved New York, particularly a club called The Mineshaft [which] is notorious for violent gay practices," which stigmatizes Mercury and gay relationships more generally.²²²

Furthermore, while a *Daily Mirror* editorial does celebrate Mercury as a "a champion" who "broke fresh grounds" with his music,²²³ the newspaper also published an extremely prejudiced column from Joe Haines attacking Mercury two days later. Filled with homophobic, intolerant and bigoted remarks, Haines' column states that Mercury was "sheer poison, a man bent – the apt word in the circumstances – on abnormal sexual pleasures, corrupt, corrupting and a drug taker," and that "his private life is a revolting tale of depravity, lust and downright wickedness."²²⁴ Haines' dehumanizing statements target both Mercury and gay men more generally, and his claim that "for his kind, AIDS is a form of suicide" blames gay men for

²¹⁹ Christian Gysin, Mike Towers and Geoff Sutton, "Rock Star Freddie is Dead," *Daily Mirror*, November 25, 1991, 1.

²²⁰ Geoff Sutton, "Girlfriend Stayed Loyal as Tragic Freddie's," *Daily Mirror*, November 25, 1991, 4.

²²¹ Geoff Sutton, "Freddie: The Last Moments," *Daily Mirror*, November 26, 1991, 1.

²²² Geoff Sutton, "Girlfriend Stayed Loyal as Tragic Freddie's," *Daily Mirror*, November 25, 1991, 4.

²²³ "Mirror Comment," *Daily Mirror*, November 26, 1991, 2.

²²⁴ Joe Haines, "Dark Side of Freddie," *Daily Mirror*, November 28, 1991, 20.

contracting HIV/AIDS, and insensitively suggests that they willingly contracted the illness.²²⁵ Even some *Daily Mirror* readers strongly condemned the column, and the powerful trade union, the National Association of Local Government Employees, sent a letter within a day of the column's publication, stating that "we regard it as displaying blatant prejudice and condemn the Editor of the *Daily Mirror*, a supposedly progressive newspaper which supports the Labour movement, for allowing this column to appear."²²⁶ The tabloid's political affiliation, however, did not seem to ameliorate its coverage of celebrity deaths, as the *Daily Mirror* consistently used stigmatizing and homophobic language to report on Hudson, Liberace, and Mercury's deaths.

The *Daily Mirror* was not the only newspaper to publish a stigmatizing column about Mercury's death, as opinion articles in other tabloids mimicked Haines' blaming approach. For instance, Peter McKay wrote in the *London Evening Standard* that "Freddie's life was consumed with sodomy. He died from it," and John Junor from the *Mail on Sunday* stated that "If you treat as a hero a man who died because of his own sordid sexual perversions aren't you infinitely more likely to persuade some of the gullible young to follow in his example?"²²⁷

Daily Mail coverage of Mercury's death used stigmatizing language similar to the other tabloids, and primarily focused on his sexual relationships, changing appearance, and the exact circumstances of his death, instead of his accomplishments. For example, the front-page article announcing his death focuses on his last visitors and how his appearance and personality changed in recent months, with only two sentences acknowledging his "millions of fans" and

²²⁵ Joe Haines, "Dark Side of Freddie," *Daily Mirror*, November 28, 1991, 20.

²²⁶ B. White and NALGO Staff, "Outrageous Attack on Mercury," *Daily Mirror*, November 29, 1991, 27; see also Paul Naylor, "A Vicious Slur," *Daily Mirror*, December 2, 1991, 24; "Don't Be So Cruel," *Daily Mirror*, December 2, 1991, 24.

²²⁷ Peter McKay, *London Evening Standard*, November 28, 1991, quoted in Terry Sanderson, "Mediawatch," *Gay Times*, January 1992, 10; John Junor, *Mail on Sunday*, December 1, 1991, quoted in Terry Sanderson, "Mediawatch," *Gay Times*, January 1992, 10.

some of his famous songs.²²⁸ Even the full page obituary neglects to highlight Freddie Mercury's successes, and instead discusses his different lovers, claiming that "real friends suspected that his promiscuity sprang from loneliness," and dedicates the last section of the obituary to Mary Austin.²²⁹ Additionally, the obituary states that "it was a supreme personal tragedy that he could not produce a grand finish for himself. Instead, he died almost a recluse, with the world discussing not his talent but the manner of his death."²³⁰ This seems to irrationally, and unsympathetically, fault Mercury for not being able to control the manner of his death, while also suggesting that he caused the newspapers to focus on his death. A response from a *Daily Mail* reader points to some of the obituary's shortcomings, as the reader questions its "emphasis on the manner of his death and his lifestyle when so many of his achievements went unmentioned," and points to some of his accomplishments, "such as the pioneering concerts in South America, or the way the band stole the show at Live Aid."²³¹

In contrast to the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, coverage of Mercury's death in the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times* introduced a sympathetic and relatively impartial approach, with articles about his death focusing on his life and musical career. The *Guardian*'s obituary for Mercury highlights his important role in Queen, explaining that "the group's towering international success could have never been achieved without Freddie Mercury," and mourns his death by describing how "Mercury's addition to the dismal roll call of Aids' casualties ends a chapter in rock music."²³² The *Observer*'s article about his death describes how Mercury "made his name with 'Bohemian Rhapsody' [...] which proved the longest running British number one

²²⁸ Michael Streeter, "Queen Star Freddie Mercury is Dead," *Daily Mail*, November 25, 1991, 1.

²²⁹ Shaun Usher, "Eclipse of a Pop Star," *Daily Mail*, November 25, 1991, 17.

²³⁰ Shaun Usher, "Eclipse of a Pop Star," *Daily Mail*, November 25, 1991, 17.

²³¹ Mark Butler, "Letters," *Daily Mail*, November 27, 1991, 45.

²³² Adam Sweeting, "Parody, By Innuendo," *Guardian*, November 26, 1991, 35.

record for 20 years,” while *The Times*’ notes that “Mercury made a pivotal contribution not only as singer, pianist and one of the group’s principal songwriters, but also in defining the group’s image.”²³³ These newspapers further emphasized Mercury’s life and success by publishing photographs of him mid-performance, as opposed to images of him in more recent months. For example, the *Observer*’s article about his death includes a large and powerful image of him performing with the caption “Heyday: Freddie Mercury in familiar pose at a Wembley concert in July 1986.”²³⁴ These photographs would likely remind readers of his incredible musical career and recall memories of watching him perform. Readers might then begin to sympathize with Mercury while reading these articles, relating to his music and performances, instead of focusing on his HIV/AIDS diagnosis.

Nevertheless, similar to their coverage of Rock Hudson’s death, the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times* continued to use contentious language that cast a negative light on his relationships with other men. The *Guardian* referred to Mercury’s relationships as “his gay affairs,” which does not seem to value the legitimacy of his same-sex relationships.²³⁵ The *Observer* describes Mercury as “an admitted bisexual,” as though his sexuality should be shameful and hidden.²³⁶ *The Times*’ obituary on Mercury states that “Mercury’s renowned bisexual proclivities made him the target of sustained speculation when the Aids epidemic began to take its toll,” which seems to unnecessarily reiterate misconceptions about HIV/AIDS only affecting gay, or bisexual, men.²³⁷

²³³ Barry Hugill, “Queen Singer Mercury Dying of Aids,” *Observer*, November 24, 1991, 3; “Freddie Mercury,” *The Times*, November 26, 1991, 16.

²³⁴ Adam Sweeting, “Parody, By Innuendo,” *Guardian*, November 26, 1991, 35.

²³⁵ Adam Sweeting, “Parody, By Innuendo,” *Guardian*, November 26, 1991, 35.

²³⁶ Barry Hugill, “Queen Singer Mercury Dying of Aids,” *Observer*, November 24, 1991, 3.

²³⁷ “Freddie Mercury,” *The Times*, November 26, 1991, 16.

Notably, none of these newspapers addressed Mercury's death in a tone as sympathetic or as de-stigmatizing as the *Independent*. For instance, the *Independent*'s article that announced Mercury's death highlights his efforts to combat the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. The report notes that the announcement of his diagnosis "won him plaudits for helping to remove the stigma surrounding Aids," and calls attention to other prominent celebrities living with HIV/AIDS by explaining that Mercury "was the latest in a series of celebrities to have gone public about suffering from Aids in order to raise public awareness. Two weeks ago, the American basketball player Magic Johnson revealed that he had the HIV virus."²³⁸ The *Independent* later published a fairly optimistic article, titled "Mercury's Death May End Stigma," that described how "campaigners are hoping that the death of the Queen singer could help remove the stigma surrounding the disease."²³⁹ These examples indicate that certain British newspapers went further than simply reporting on Mercury's death in an unbiased and impartial tone, as the *Independent* used his death as an opportunity to combat the stigma and prejudice associated with HIV/AIDS.

The tone of newspaper coverage of Rock Hudson, Liberace, and Freddie Mercury's deaths from AIDS-related illnesses depended on the newspaper's form as either a tabloid or a broadsheet, as celebrities' deaths seemed to serve as a prime opportunity for the tabloids to sensationalize and stigmatize the factors surrounding their passing, while the broadsheet newspapers maintained a more reserved approach. Notably, the newspapers' political associations did not seem to significantly change how they reported on Hudson, Liberace, and Mercury. The *Daily Mirror* exemplifies this distinction, as the tabloid, although left-leaning, published some of the most stigmatizing and homophobic articles about their deaths.

²³⁸ Kathy Marks, "Freddie Mercury, the Ultimate Showman, Dies of Aids," *The Independent*, November 25, 1991, 2.

²³⁹ David Lister, "Mercury's Death May End Stigma," *The Independent*, November 26, 1991, 8.

Additionally, while coverage of Liberace's death suggested that at least some of the newspapers changed their approach to HIV/AIDS, reports on Freddie Mercury's death indicate that the same biases and stigmas were present in the newspapers into the 1990s. For instance, the newspapers seemed to celebrate Mercury's relationship with a woman, but disparaged his relationships with other men. Tabloid coverage, however, did shift to some extent, as the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* lessened their emphasis on linking gay men and HIV/AIDS with regards to Liberace and Mercury's deaths. The strong distinction between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers' coverage of the same event, however, did not hold true for other incidents, such as the Manchester police chief's ignorant and bigoted speech about HIV/AIDS.

II. Anderton's Speech

During a conference on policies regarding people living with HIV/AIDS in 1986, Manchester police chief James Anderton launched into a moralistic tirade against gay men, drug users, and sex workers for supposedly spreading HIV/AIDS.²⁴⁰ With vastly different responses from the newspapers, coverage of Anderton's comments reveal a clear divide between the right-leaning newspapers, which highlighted and applauded Anderton's remarks on their front pages, and the left-leaning newspapers, which relegated articles about his speech further inside their issues. As Terry Sanderson suggests in an article from the *Gay Times* in 1987, "Anderton's speech has certainly lit the sparks of intolerance, hatred and violence, and now the fascists of the press are anxious for those sparks to be fanned into a conflagration."²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Tom Sharratt, "Anderton May Be Disciplined for Aids Gibe," *Guardian*, December 18, 1986, 2; Ian Smith, "Anderton Crusade Against Aids," *The Times*, December 12, 1986, 1.

²⁴¹ Terry Sanderson, "Mediawatch," *Gay Times*, January 1987, 16.

Articles from the *Daily Mail* and *The Times* about Anderton's speech amplified the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS and gay men by prioritizing, and seemingly supporting, his prejudiced and discriminatory statements. The *Daily Mail* published a front-page story covering the speech, dedicating the entirety of the article to repeating his remarks, with only a short note that his outburst "was bitterly attacked."²⁴² Some of the quotes include "homosexuals, drug addicts and prostitutes were 'swirling around in a human cesspit of their own making,'" and "innocent people were in danger from those who dismissed the risks and contracted AIDS as a 'self-inflicted scourge.'"²⁴³ These statements stigmatized and ostracized those living with HIV/AIDS, blaming them for contracting and spreading the illness and suggesting that they posed a "danger" to society. Highlighting Anderton's speech on a front-page article without condemning his comments, or including quotes and opinions arguing against his speech, suggests that the *Daily Mail* endorsed his prejudiced beliefs.

Additionally, a few days after reporting on Anderton's speech, the *Daily Mail* printed a full page story on readers' support for Anderton, claiming that "Daily Mail readers have swamped us with hundreds of letters of support and congratulation for Mr Anderton – and we have not received one single letter of protest."²⁴⁴ The *Daily Mail* published some of the readers' letters, including ones that promoted homophobic and prejudiced opinions. For example, one letter explains that the writer "can understand a man of Mr Anderton's calibre being unable to remain silent when he sees so-called civilisation turning itself into a modern version of Sodom and Gomorrah," while another states that "so long as gays and drug addicts destroy only themselves, society is not harmed, but when the innocent are infected, it becomes a different

²⁴² Margaret Henfield, "Police Chief in AIDS Fury," *Daily Mail*, December 12, 1986, 1.

²⁴³ Margaret Henfield, "Police Chief in AIDS Fury," *Daily Mail*, December 12, 1986, 1.

²⁴⁴ "Your Verdict on Anderton," *Daily Mail*, December 16, 1986, 18.

matter.”²⁴⁵ The *Daily Mail* celebrated the support from readers, and the newspaper seemed to fully support Anderton as well. While the *Daily Mail* might not be able to control letters readers send to the newspaper, they do have the power and ability to choose what to publish, and the *Daily Mail* did not attempt to redirect or counter readers’ biased comments that targeted gay men and those living with HIV/AIDS.

Articles from *The Times* about Anderton’s speech similarly prioritized quotes and disregarded contrary opinions. For example, *The Times* published a front-page story that focused on repeating Anderton’s statements, and only included a short quote that opposed his views in the continuation of the article on page twenty-two.²⁴⁶ *The Times’* second front-page article about Anderton, published the following day, highlights public support for Anderton, explaining that “the outspoken condemnation of Aids by Mr James Anderton, the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, won public plaudits yesterday but immediately brought the threat of disciplinary action from his own police authority.”²⁴⁷ The article also blames liberals for pushback against Anderton’s comments, without considering the possible significance or accuracy of the condemnation: “Feelings about his description of the disease were so hostile, particularly among left-wing supporters of the socialist-dominated authority, that a fresh collision seemed inevitable.”²⁴⁸ Furthermore, an article about ministers’ dismissal of Anderton’s speech seems to insert *The Times’* own opinion about how the government should act: “Mr Anderton had said that Aids was a self-inflicted wound. People at risk, such as homosexuals, drug abusers and prostitutes were ‘swirling around in a human cesspit of their own making’. Instead of urging

²⁴⁵ Dudley Bourhill, “Your Verdict on Anderton,” *Daily Mail*, December 16, 1986, 18; D.H. Buchanan, “Your Verdict on Anderton,” *Daily Mail*, December 16, 1986, 18.

²⁴⁶ Ian Smith, “Anderton Crusade Against Aids,” *The Times*, December 12, 1986, 1; Ian Smith, “Anderton’s Crusade Against Aids,” *The Times*, December 12, 1986, 22.

²⁴⁷ “Job Risk to Police Chief in Aids Row,” *The Times*, December 13, 1986, 1.

²⁴⁸ “Job Risk to Police Chief in Aids Row,” *The Times*, December 13, 1986, 1.

people to wear condoms, the authorities should be challenging such behaviour.”²⁴⁹ This seems to incorrectly consider homosexuality as constituting a singular “behavior,” and evidently does not support gay men or the possibility of safe sex.

The *Daily Express* as well published front-page reports on Anderton’s comments that uncritically highlighted Anderton’s bigoted remarks, targeted gay men, and blamed liberals for the controversy. The *Daily Express*’ front-page story highlighted a quote, above the headline about Anderton, which stated “‘Gays must stop their obnoxious practices.’”²⁵⁰ Another front-page article from December 13th claimed that “a bid to gag police chief James Anderton after his controversial AIDS outburst was launched by Left-wingers last night [...] But police switchboards throughout the country were yesterday flooded with calls supporting his views.”²⁵¹ The language used in the article implies that the *Daily Express* also supported Anderton, as the story emphasizes widespread approval of his comments and suggests that only the “Left-wingers” disapproved.

In comparison to the *Daily Mail*, *The Times*, and *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mirror* article about Anderton’s comments, relegated to page eleven, incorporates only a couple of quotes from the police chief, provides context for his statements and background, and includes responses from gay community organizations. The article describes Anderton’s background as a “former Methodist lay preacher who has since become a Roman Catholic,” and explains that his “outburst provoked fury from organisations fighting the killer disease,” quoting spokespeople from the Terrence Higgins Trust, London’s Gay Switchboard, and the Labour Opposition who denounce Anderton.²⁵² Only two other stories in the *Daily Mirror* address Anderton’s speech, a

²⁴⁹ Nicholas Wood, “Ministers Dismiss Anderton’s Tirade,” *The Times*, December 13, 1986, 3.

²⁵⁰ Carole Newton, “Cesspit! Police Chief in AIDS Outburst,” *Daily Express*, December 12, 1986, 1.

²⁵¹ Carole Newton and Harry Cooke, “Police Chief in AIDS Gag Row,” *Daily Express*, December 13, 1986, 1.

²⁵² “AIDS Fury Over Top Cop’s ‘Cesspit’ Jibe,” *Daily Mirror*, December 12, 1986, 11.

column by Anne Robinson and a column by George Gale, both published on the same day. While Robinson's column sarcastically argues against Anderton's opinions, Gale's column supports Anderton, and perpetuates stigmatizing and homophobic beliefs by claiming that HIV/AIDS "is an entirely avoidable disease. Homosexual sex has caused its spread."²⁵³ Nevertheless, juxtaposed with reports in the *Daily Mail*, *The Times*, and *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mirror* presents a significantly more unbiased and neutral coverage of Anderton's speech. The *Daily Mirror* included quotes and opinions both for and against Anderton's views, and did not prioritize his bigoted remarks or highlight his speech on the front page.

The *Guardian* and *Observer* also avoided focusing on Anderton's speech, as the few articles that refer to his speech discredit his comments. For example, the *Guardian* filled the latter half of a short article discussing Anderton's remarks with quotes from the head of virology at Saint Mary's Hospital London, the Manchester city council's Labour group leader and the Terrence Higgins Trust that condemned Anderton. Additionally, the *Guardian* published the article on page thirty-two, and its title, "Preacher Anderton Thunders Against the Gays," does not highlight Anderton's important and respectable position as police chief of Manchester, but rather seems to mock his background that may have influenced his speech.²⁵⁴ An editorial addressing Anderton's speech seems to taunt Anderton as well, writing that "the accordion-playing Chief Constable is out of tune with public policy. The Government has now begun a commendably pragmatic and unmoralising campaign on Aids prevention."²⁵⁵ The editorial then points to the consequences of his speech, explaining that "what they [Anderton and certain tabloids] say is dangerous – and is getting more so. It begins to legitimise new forms of

²⁵³ Anne Robinson, "For God's Sake," *Daily Mirror*, December 17, 1986, 9; George Gale, "The Real Sickness," *Daily Mirror*, December 17, 1986, 10.

²⁵⁴ Tom Sharratt, "Preacher Anderton Thunders Against the Gays," *Guardian*, December 12, 1986, 32.

²⁵⁵ "Prejudice and the Chief Constable," *Guardian*, December 13, 1986, 12.

discrimination against a group of people who are more the victims of Aids than its perpetrators.”²⁵⁶ Although the *Guardian* did print a front-page story referring to Anderton’s speech, the article focuses on the government’s response, and notes that the Social Services Secretary, “responding to the controversy raised by Mr James Anderton,” stated that the “Government does not have time for the luxury of a moral argument about Aids.”²⁵⁷

The *Observer*, meanwhile, did not even publish a story directly addressing Anderton’s speech, and the articles that refer to his comments seem to take a dim view on his opinions. For instance, one report describes Anderton’s comments as “outrageous pronouncements,” and a second one explains that “force morale has also been harmed by Mr Anderton’s remarks describing Aids as a moral scourge.”²⁵⁸ Another article states that “tabloid editors are often more keen on the dotty views of policemen like James Anderton than the reasoned views of archbishops,” which implies that the *Observer* considered Anderton’s views as foolish and irrational compared to archbishops.²⁵⁹

The *Independent* followed the *Guardian* and *Observer*’s example by avoiding publishing front-page reports that repeated Anderton’s remarks. Notably, Terry Sanderson commended the *Independent* in the February, 1987, issue of the *Gay Times*, writing that “perhaps, the most cheering headline of the month was in THE INDEPENDENT (13 Jan) ‘POLICE FEELING MOUNTS THAT ANDERTON MUST GO.’”²⁶⁰

Coverage of Anderton’s controversial speech in the newspapers reveals an important divide between them. Anderton’s comments polarized the newspapers according to political

²⁵⁶ “Prejudice and the Chief Constable,” *Guardian*, December 13, 1986, 12.

²⁵⁷ John Carvel, “No Time for Aids Moralising,” *Guardian*, December 15, 1986, 1.

²⁵⁸ Jonathan Foster, “Stalker Frozen Out of Office by Anderton,” *Observer*, December 21, 1986, 3; Jonathan Foster and Paul Lashmar, “Detectives in Crisis Talks Over Anderton,” *Observer*, December 28, 1986, 3.

²⁵⁹ Nicholas Wapshott, “New Morality and the Sexual Time Bomb,” *Observer*, December 28, 1986, 8.

²⁶⁰ Terry Sanderson, “Mediawatch,” *Gay Times*, February 1987, 18.

affiliation, with the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*, as well as the *Daily Express*, highlighting Anderton's comments in front-page articles that supported his views, while the *Daily Mirror*, *Guardian* and *Observer* published articles critical about his speech. Widespread coverage and consistent condemnation of Anderton's views would have implied a common attitude regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic, gay men, and indicated an increasing intolerance for bigotry and prejudice. However, the sharp distinction between the newspapers' coverage, dependent on their political party, suggests that, at least in 1986, the newspapers did not have similar views, and their political stance significantly affected how they reported on events and news relating to HIV/AIDS.

III. Princess Diana

Princess Diana's visit to an HIV/AIDS unit at the Middlesex Hospital in London in April 1987 represented another important moment in the epidemic, which the newspapers reported on with varying degrees of interest. Jose Catalan, Barbara Hedge and Damien Ridge describe the importance of her visit, explaining that Princess Diana's visit to the AIDS ward, in which she spoke to and touched people with HIV/AIDS without gloves, was "the most widely reported and most influential promotion" of the message that social contact did not spread HIV/AIDS.²⁶¹ They further note that "it has been claimed" that her gesture, shaking hands with the patients, "played a critical role in reducing stigma and increasing the acceptance of PLWH [People Living With HIV]."²⁶² However, not all the newspapers included in this study covered Princess Diana's visit with the same attention or support of her message.

²⁶¹ Catalan, Hedge and Ridge, *HIV in the UK*, 36.

²⁶² Catalan, Hedge and Ridge, *HIV in the UK*, 36, 148.

For example, although both the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* published front-page stories about Diana's upcoming visit and her intent to calm the panic surrounding HIV/AIDS, the *Daily Mirror* included a longer discussion about HIV/AIDS stigma and patients' fears of being recognized in photographs.²⁶³ The day after her visit, the *Daily Mirror* did not discuss the event on its front page, but instead published a full page article on page five titled "Di's Hand of Hope." The article describes Diana's sympathy towards patients with HIV/AIDS, the importance of her visit in decreasing stigma, and her denunciations of discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS.²⁶⁴ The *Daily Mail*, on the other hand, incorporated the story on its front page, with a photograph of her handshake with a patient and the title "Magic Touch in the AIDS Ward – Diana Breaks the Fear Barrier." This article also discusses her sympathy and intent to "show that the disease cannot be caught through ordinary social contact." However, the article that continues on page two has a note about a "move to change the law" that would allow businesses to fire employees with HIV/AIDS and ban them from the premises (see figure 1).²⁶⁵



Figure 1. Image of *Daily Mail* article. Richard Kay, "Diana shakes AIDS myth," *Daily Mail*, April 10, 1987, 2.

²⁶³ Jill Palmer, "AIDS Victims Snub Diana," *Daily Mirror*, April 2, 1987, 1; Andrew Morton, "Princess to Visit AIDS Sufferers," *Daily Mail*, January 10, 1987, 1.

²⁶⁴ Jill Palmer, "Di's Hand of Hope," *Daily Mirror*, April 10, 1987, 5.

²⁶⁵ Richard Kay, "Diana Breaks the Fear Barrier," *Daily Mail*, April 10, 1987, 1-2.

Without contextualization or condemnation of this intent to change the law, the *Daily Mail* seems to subtly include a perspective that counters Princess Diana's visit while avoiding directly contradicting or disputing her. Even though the *Daily Mail* displays Diana's handshake on the front page, the article presents a more ambiguous discussion of her visit than the *Daily Mirror*.

The *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times* did not publish as many articles reporting on Princess Diana's visit as the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*. The *Guardian* and *The Times* relegated information about her upcoming trip to the end of other stories about HIV/AIDS, with short statements such as "the Princess of Wales is to open the £350,000 Aids ward at Middlesex Hospital, London, on April 9."²⁶⁶ Both the *Guardian* and *The Times* published front-page stories following her visit, with photographs of her shaking hands with one of the patients, which highlighted her intent to decrease the stigma and prejudice surrounding HIV/AIDS. For example, the *Guardian*'s front-page story, titled "A Royal Helping Hand," explains that Princess Diana's visit "was welcomed by doctors there as helping to explode myths surrounding the disease," and quotes Professor Stephen Semple, head of the department of medicine at the hospital, stating that "she was very concerned about the hysteria that has been generated."²⁶⁷ *The Times*' front-page story on Diana's visit only includes the photograph of her shaking hands with a patient. The continuation of the story on page eighteen, however, similarly describes how Princess Diana "made known her condemnation of prejudice and discrimination towards Aids victims after meeting nine homosexual men suffering from the disease in a London hospital."²⁶⁸ The *Observer*, meanwhile, did not seem to publish any articles about Princess Diana's visit and

²⁶⁶ Peter Hildrew, "Doctor Reassures on Rate of Aids Cases," *Guardian*, January 10, 1987, 2; see also Thomson Prentice, "Deaths Could Rise to 10,000," *The Times*, January 10, 1987, 3.

²⁶⁷ "A Helping Royal Hand," *Guardian*, April 10, 1987, 1; Martyn Partridge, "Stephen John Greenhill Semple," Royal College of Physicians, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://history.rcplondon.ac.uk/inspiring-physicians/stephen-john-greenhill-semble>.

²⁶⁸ Thomson Prentice, "Royal Visit Helps Combat Aids Fears," *The Times* April 10, 1987, 18.

opening of the AIDS ward. The *Observer* might have avoided reporting on her visit because it occurred on a Thursday, and the other tabloids and broadsheet newspapers would have already covered the event by the time the *Observer* would publish its weekly Sunday issue, although the absence of any comments is unusual.

The newspapers' approaches to discussing Princess Diana's visit to the AIDS ward in 1987 might indicate a changing atmosphere within the media regarding HIV/AIDS and gay men, as they generally presented sympathetic and unbiased reports on her trip. However, newspaper reports on the infamous Clause 28 suggest otherwise, with notable differences between how each one responded to the implementation of the clause.

IV. Clause 28

The Thatcher government's implementation of Clause 28 in the 1988 Local Government Act targeted homosexuality while also impeding the distribution of information about HIV/AIDS and safer sex. Clause 28 states that: "A local authority shall not — (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship."²⁶⁹ In addition to fostering prejudice and stigma against gay men, Clause 28 also implied that schools, libraries, and local authorities could not distribute or stock materials about safer sex options for same-sex relationships that might prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS.²⁷⁰ The tone of the newspapers' coverage of this clause seemed to depend on both their format, as either a tabloid or a broadsheet newspaper, and their political alignment.

²⁶⁹ The National Archives, "UK Public General Acts: Local Government Act 1988," accessed September 8, 2022, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted>.

²⁷⁰ Cook, *A Gay History of Britain*, 205.

The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, for instance, did not publish many articles about the implementation of the clause. As Terry Sanderson explains in an article from the *Gay Times* in 1988, “we know that the papers are usually obsessed with homosexuality but the tabloids were curiously silent in the days in the run-up to the debate on the notorious amendment to the Local Government Bill.”²⁷¹ Even with the strong connection between Clause 28 and HIV/AIDS, the *Daily Mirror* did not publish substantial reports about the clause or the response to it, with only a handful of short articles mentioning the clause. One of these articles explains that “Gay EastEnders star Michael Cashman claimed yesterday that the Local Government Bill banning the promotion of homosexuality by local councils attacked human rights,” while another reports on a protest in the House of Lords against the clause, and a third article notes that the Pet Shop Boys “are backing the fight against the controversial Clause 28.”²⁷² Although these articles focus on protests against the clause, the lack of stories about Clause 28 implies that the *Daily Mirror* did not consider the clause or its potential impact on HIV/AIDS important enough to thoroughly examine or condemn it.

While the *Daily Mail* similarly did not publish many stories specifically about Clause 28, the articles that do address the clause seem to approve of its intentions. One of these articles highlights a government minister’s “withering attack” on the “failures of moral leadership of the Church of England in general, and the Archbishop of York in particular” for protesting the clause.²⁷³ Two other columns addressing Clause 28 both declare support for its implementation. Keith Waterhouse’s column mocks those concerned about the implications of the clause, and endorses the “real object of Clause 28” to ban books that show gay or lesbian couples as “a

²⁷¹ Terry Sanderson, “Mediawatch,” *Gay Times*, January 1988, 20.

²⁷² “Gay Mike’s Plea,” *Daily Mirror*, January 26, 1988, 6; Sheree Dodd, “Gay Lib Girls in Tarzan Raid on Lords,” *Daily Mirror*, February 3, 1988, 5; “Pets Go into Battle,” *Daily Mirror*, February 11, 1988, 15.

²⁷³ Steve Doughty, “Gummer Hits Out at ‘Condom Culture,’” *Daily Mail*, February 9, 1988, 9.

normal married couple.”²⁷⁴ George Gale’s column, published the following day, argues that “the government is absolutely right to require local authorities not to promote homosexuality.”²⁷⁵

Additionally, the *Daily Mail*’s main, front-page article that discusses the clause focuses on negative portrayals of gay men and those opposing the clause, implying that the *Daily Mail* does not approve of resistance to the clause. The story, titled “Death Threat to 28 Peers,” with the sub-headline “Police alert as gay activists demand: Vote for us or you die,” reports on letters sent to members of the House of Lords demanding the withdrawal of Clause 28.²⁷⁶ The *Daily Mail*’s few articles that report on Clause 28 diverge from the *Daily Mirror*’s approach by only focusing on stories that supported the clause, and negatively portrays those who objected to its enactment.

In contrast to the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times* published significantly more articles about Clause 28, its implementation, and protests against the clause. For example, the *Guardian* highlighted a number of protests against the clause, with one article titled “Thousands Join Protest Against Section 28 Curb on Gay Rights” explaining that “Britain’s biggest-ever gay rights rally protested in London on Saturday at the passing of section 28 of the Local Government Act.”²⁷⁷ The more surprising and notable protests appeared on the *Guardian*’s front page as well, such as three women abseiling into the House of Lords to object against the clause. With the article title “Rope Trick Ladies Drop in on the Lords,” the *Guardian* seems to present a humorous perspective on the event.²⁷⁸ Another front-page report about a protest includes a quote from a spokeswoman stating that “the mass protest against the clause in the last six months has barely been mentioned by the press, but we refuse to be silenced

²⁷⁴ Keith Waterhouse, “Clause for Thought,” *Daily Mail*, January 28, 1988, 7.

²⁷⁵ George Gale, “Gay Rights, and Wrongs,” *Daily Mail*, January 29, 1988, 6.

²⁷⁶ David Williams and David Gardner, “Death Threat to 28 Peers,” *Daily Mail*, May 3, 1988, 1.

²⁷⁷ Nicholas de Jongh, “Clause 28 ‘Witch-hunt,’” *Guardian*, January 26, 1988, 3.

²⁷⁸ Alan Travis, “Rope Trick Ladies Drop In on the Lords,” *Guardian*, February 3, 1988, 1.

and we are not going away.”²⁷⁹ The *Guardian* described protests against the clause in sympathetic and positive tones, implying that they supported the disapproval.

In addition to reporting on the protests, the *Guardian* published articles that emphasized the prejudice imbedded in Clause 28, and alerted readers to its limitations. One of these reports notes that “witch-hunts, violence against homosexuals and the banning of important artistic works could result from Clause 28,” and another, titled “Fear Not Clause 28, Only the Prejudice Behind It,” argues that “there is a crucial distinction between ‘promoting homosexuality’ and promoting tolerance towards homosexuals.”²⁸⁰ The latter article also states that Clause 28 “has little or no effect on teaching which heads deem necessary or appropriate to counter ignorance or hatred of homosexuals.”²⁸¹ The *Guardian* continued to emphasize the limitations of the clause’s implementation, notably with a front-page article that explained that “the Association of London Authorities has told school governors there is nothing in the law to stop teachers helping pupils overcome gay prejudice.”²⁸² The *Guardian* even published an editorial opposing the clause, which asserted that “homosexuality is a fact of human existence and society, in the Conservative Party as much as anywhere else.”²⁸³

The *Observer*’s coverage of Clause 28 mirrors the *Guardian*’s approach, with the publication of articles that focused on the negative consequences of the clause and its limitations. For example, an article from the review section on arts and books states that Clause 28 is “a civil rights issue” that “affects all readers,” and another article emphasizes the risks to gay men, explaining that “homosexuals fear a concerted attack on gay targets by well-funded American

²⁷⁹ Maeve Kennedy, “News Team Repels Invaders,” *Guardian*, May 24, 1988, 1.

²⁸⁰ Nicholas de Jongh, “Clause 28 ‘Witch-hunt,’” *Guardian*, January 26, 1988, 3; Geoffrey Robertson, “Fear Not Clause 28, Only the Prejudice behind It,” *Guardian*, June 1, 1988, 19.

²⁸¹ Geoffrey Robertson, “Fear Not Clause 28, Only the Prejudice behind It,” *Guardian*, June 1, 1988, 19.

²⁸² Patrick Wintour and David Gow, “Clause 28 Note Irks MPs,” *Guardian*, May 20, 1988, 1; see also Alan Travis, “Section 28’No Bar to Gay Issues,” *Guardian*, July 26, 1988, 4.

²⁸³ “Will They Be Populist, or Principled?,” *Guardian*, December 9, 1987, 12.

right-wing groups if Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill becomes law.”²⁸⁴ A report from May 1988, further states that, according to lawyers, Clause 28’s specific wording makes it “unworkable,” and explains that the clause “is being written off as a non-starter by lawyers.”²⁸⁵ The *Observer* also published an editorial protesting against the clause, arguing that the Lords’ debate on the clause “will be contemplating the darker side of Thatcherism.”²⁸⁶ The *Observer*’s articles and editorial addressing Clause 28 clearly indicate the newspaper’s stance against the clause, and its attempt to keep readers informed on the clause’s implications and limitations.

While *The Times* also published a significant number of articles about Clause 28, the newspaper primarily focused on the clause itself as opposed to resistance to its implementation. *The Times*’ articles about Clause 28 provided a detailed explanation of the different changes in the clause’s wording,²⁸⁷ with very few reports on protests against the clause. Only one front-page article about protestors abseiling into the House of Lords seems to recognize public opposition to the clause, although this article blames the left and all gays in the room for the protest. The article states that “a Labour peer signed the passes of gay rights protesters who abseiled into the chamber,” and then claims that “it was common knowledge among homosexual spectators in the gallery that a demonstration would take place at some stage.”²⁸⁸

Furthermore, *The Times*’ editorial addressing Clause 28 implies that the newspaper supported its use in schools. The editorial argues that not “all the opposition” to the clause is incorrect, as the clause “is mainly directed at preventing the promotion of homosexuality in state schools. But it has been clumsily drafted. It might be taken to refer to other places under the

²⁸⁴ Black Morrison, “An Even Bigger Splash,” *Observer*, January 24, 1988, 22; Victor Smart, “Gays Fear a US-funded Legal Attack,” *Observer*, January 31, 1988, 3.

²⁸⁵ Christian Wolmar, “Anti-gay Law ‘Is a Legal Non-starter,’” *Observer*, May 22, 1988, 9.

²⁸⁶ “An Assault on the Civilised Society,” *Observer*, January 31, 1988, 10.

²⁸⁷ See Sheila Gunn, “Peers May Alter Gay Clause,” *The Times*, January 26, 1988, 3; “Peers Throw Out Amendment to ‘Gay Clause,’” *The Times*, February 2, 1988, 4.

²⁸⁸ Sheila Gunn, “Security Row after Gays Abseil into the Lords,” *The Times*, February 3, 1988, 1.

control of influence of local authorities – including public libraries and certain theatres.”²⁸⁹ The editorial does not argue against the use of the clause in schools, and seems more concerned about censorship of the arts. Another article from *The Times Diary* does protest the clause, although the language again suggests more concern for the arts than schools or children: “...the single most terrifying decision I have come across in 20 years of arts reporting: if their Lordships seriously believe [...] that Clause 28 should be allowed to stand as a ban on any council sponsorship of entertainment or art which could ever be remotely considered as ‘promotion’ of homosexuality.”²⁹⁰ Even “The Times Review” from 1988 indicates more concern about a protest than the clause itself. “The Times Review” highlights the most important news stories of the year, and includes the event “Five female Gay Rights activists abseiled to Commons floor in protest over Clause 28,” but nothing about the implementation of Clause 28.²⁹¹ This demonstrates that *The Times* considered the protest against the clause as more important and significant than the implications and consequences of the actual clause.

An editorial published in the *Sunday Telegraph* indicate that other British conservative newspapers also supported Clause 28. Terry Sanderson explains in his “Mediawatch” column that “ALTHOUGH Peregrine Worsthorne was on holiday for the 15th January issue of *The Sunday Telegraph*, his defence of Section 28 is upheld by someone else writing the editorial that week.”²⁹²

The *Sunday Times*, however, seemed to present a different perspective on Clause 28 than *The Times* and the *Sunday Telegraph* with the publication of two opinion pieces that opposed the clause. An article titled “Little Clause May Send Gays Back to the Shadows,” written by a gay

²⁸⁹ “Promoting Hysteria,” *The Times*, January 27, 1988, 13.

²⁹⁰ Sheridan Morley, “Times Diary,” *The Times*, February 4, 1988, 12.

²⁹¹ “Times Review of 1988,” *The Times*, December 30, 1988, 10.

²⁹² Terry Sanderson, “Mediawatch,” *Gay Times*, February 1989, 21.

man, argues that the clause “is a giant step back.”²⁹³ The author, the actor Simon Callow, explains that Clause 28 “seemed expressly designed to drive a barrier between the homosexual and the heterosexual population, to deny the happily straight majority knowledge of the life and art of the happily gay minority.”²⁹⁴ Joan Bakewell wrote another opinion piece a year later, noting that Britain became “less tolerant” with the implementation of the clause, which the government “passed into law at a time when worries about Aids fuelled the hostility to homosexuals.”²⁹⁵ While the *Sunday Times*’ editorial addressing the clause similarly calls for its elimination, noting that the clause “is clearly a retrograde step” and that “many [...] are genuinely afraid that clause 28 is only the first step in a new, official intolerance towards them,” the editorial also demonstrates support for the original intention of the clause.²⁹⁶ The editorial explains that “we have no complaints about the intention behind the government’s legislation. Some of the pro-homosexual literature put out for schoolchildren at the ratepayers’ expense was certainly insidious and possibly even corrupting.”²⁹⁷ This suggests that, even though the *Sunday Times* made space for other perspectives and overall opposed the implementation of the clause, the newspaper itself still seemed to mirror *The Times*’ support for the use of the clause in schools and did not approve of children accessing favorable images of gay men.

The *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times* presented notably different information to readers about Clause 28. Although neither the *Daily Mirror* nor *Daily Mail* published a substantial number of articles discussing the clause, a clear difference emerges between their coverage: the *Daily Mirror* highlighted opposition to the clause, while the *Daily*

²⁹³ Simon Callow, “Little Clause May Send Gays Back to the Shadows,” *Sunday Times*, January 31, 1988, 29.

²⁹⁴ Simon Callow, “Little Clause May Send Gays Back to the Shadows,” *Sunday Times*, January 31, 1988, 29.

²⁹⁵ Joan Bakewell, “The Offensive Face of Censorship,” *Sunday Times*, January 22, 1988, 47.

²⁹⁶ “Put Clause 28 Back in the Closer,” *Sunday Times*, March 13, 1988, 26.

²⁹⁷ “Put Clause 28 Back in the Closer,” *Sunday Times*, March 13, 1988, 26.

Mail focused on stories that approved of the clause. A similar distinction developed between the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times*, with the *Guardian* and the *Observer* supporting protestors and notifying readers of the consequences and legal limitations of the clause, whereas *The Times* vilified protestors and supported the implementation of Clause 28 in schools. However, even with these different approaches, none of the newspapers seemed to link the clause with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, or address its possible implications on the response to the epidemic.

The differences between the newspapers' coverage of important events that occurred during the 1980s and into the 1990s, including the deaths of three prominent celebrities, the Manchester police chief James Anderton's homophobic and prejudiced speech, Princess Diana's visit to an AIDS ward, and the implementation of Clause 28, highlight the significant amount of nuance in how each newspaper reported on these stories. British newspapers did not present a singular, uniform approach to reporting on these events. Depending on the event, a split emerged between the newspapers' approach according to their format, political affiliation, or both. For instance, the tabloids, regardless of their political stance, sensationalized and often stigmatized celebrities' deaths from AIDS-related illnesses, while Anderton's speech polarized left-leaning tabloids and newspapers on one side, opposing his comments, and right-leaning tabloids and newspapers on the other, supporting his remarks. Analysis of the varying coverage of these stories demonstrates that some newspapers, such as the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, did consistently present sympathetic perspectives and stories on the HIV/AIDS epidemic and gay men that likely would have reduced the stigma and prejudice. However, this chapter also indicates that, at least in the first decade of the epidemic, British newspapers overall did not significantly change how they reported on stories about HIV/AIDS and gay men. For instance,

the *Daily Mail* continued to publish articles that perpetuated stigma and prejudice against gay men and those living with HIV/AIDS throughout this period, even printing articles that seemed to oppose Princess Diana's visit to an AIDS ward. This insinuates that British newspapers may have adhered to their initial perceptions of the illness, and did not adapt or change their point of view as the epidemic evolved and more information about HIV/AIDS emerged.

CONCLUSION

The British newspapers analyzed in this thesis differed in their format, political affiliation, and target audience, all of which significantly influenced how they reported on HIV/AIDS. Despite these differences, the newspapers also exhibited important similarities in their coverage of the epidemic. For example, Chapter One revealed that none of the five newspapers in this study published front-page articles about HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s when the epidemic first emerged. Initial front-page reports did not begin to consistently appear until 1985, and they focused on potential risks to heterosexuals as opposed to gay men, the group most affected in Britain at this time. This suggests a common reluctance to present HIV/AIDS as a significant and relevant story until evidence clearly indicated that the illness affected the entire public, as opposed to an already marginalized and stigmatized minority. This also implies that the newspapers did not consider gay men an important part of their audience, indicating that their approach to stories about HIV/AIDS may not have prioritized gay men or their experiences.

Chapter One pointed to notable differences between the newspapers as well in their columns and editorials. The right-leaning newspapers, the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*, presented primarily conservative opinions that perpetuated the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS and gay men, and that promoted discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS. This implies that conservative opinions on HIV/AIDS became quickly established and entrenched. The left-leaning newspapers, meanwhile, published more inconsistent views about HIV/AIDS that did not necessarily align with their political stance. For instance, although *Daily Mirror* columns promoted sympathy for people living with HIV/AIDS, the newspaper's editorials reiterated biases and prejudice against the illness and gay men. The *Guardian*'s columns and editorials both presented liberal views on the epidemic that tried to dismantle some of the stigma, while the

Observer published columns from the notably homophobic and prejudiced columnist Richard Ingrams, and only a few of the newspaper's editorials tried to combat the stigma.

Differences between the newspapers identified in Chapter Two followed a similar trajectory as Chapter One, with right-leaning newspapers presenting a consistently conservative and stigmatizing approach, and left-leaning newspapers exhibiting more inconsistency. For example, the *Daily Mail* and *The Times* more heavily relied on misleading phrases used to describe HIV/AIDS and those with the illness, such as "gay plague," "high risk" groups and "innocent" victims, and did not often discuss the negative implications of the terms. Meanwhile, the *Daily Mirror* did not take a strong stance against using any of these terms or categorizations, and the *Guardian* argued against using "gay plague," but continued to refer to "high risk" groups and "innocent" victims. The *Observer* either argued against or avoided using "gay plague" and "innocent" victim, but did not portray a strong stance on the "high risk" categorization. Chapter Two additionally pointed to some of the separations that developed between tabloids and broadsheet newspapers' coverage of HIV/AIDS, as the tabloids seemed less tolerant and less likely to address the prejudiced connotations of the phrases.

The final chapter of this thesis further demonstrated how the newspapers' format and political affiliation influenced their coverage of notable events that occurred during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. For instance, a split emerged between the tabloid and broadsheet newspapers' reporting on celebrity deaths from AIDS-related illnesses, with both the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* sensationalizing and stigmatizing Rock Hudson, Liberace, and Freddie Mercury's deaths. Additionally, the broadsheet newspapers' coverage of more politically-charged events, such as James Anderton's speech and the implementation of Clause 28, sharply diverged depending on their political stance. Even though *The Times* published neutral and fairly

unbiased articles about Hudson, Liberace and Mercury's deaths, as well as Princess Diana's visit to an AIDS ward, the newspaper presented more staunchly conservative articles about Anderton and Clause 28. The *Guardian* and *Observer*, meanwhile, seemed to consistently publish more sympathetic accounts of the same events.

This analysis of the nuances between the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian*, *Observer* and *The Times*' reports on HIV/AIDS expands on, and challenges, some of the arguments from previous scholars. For example, Watney's argument from his text first published in 1987, noted in the introduction of this thesis, does not seem to consider all the angles of British newspaper coverage of HIV/AIDS. Watney argues that "for gay men with Aids there seems nothing but hatred, fear, and thinly veiled contempt,"²⁹⁸ which suggests that British newspapers presented a uniform approach to reporting on HIV/AIDS that perpetuated prejudice and discrimination.

However, as this thesis has revealed, British newspapers exhibited a variety of different approaches and perspectives, including ones that sympathized with those living with HIV/AIDS and that tried to combat the stigma surrounding the illness and gay men. Notably, the *Observer* published a significant number of reports that confronted this prejudice, with stories criticizing the use of the term "gay plague," correcting misconceptions about the illness, and highlighting the harmful consequences of the implementation of Clause 28. Additionally, as another example, *The Times* did not take advantage of Hudson, Liberace, or Mercury's deaths from AIDS-related illnesses to promote prejudice, and instead presented neutral and objective reports on their deaths. Terry Sanderson even applauds certain newspapers, including the *Observer*, in his "Mediawatch" column in the *Gay Times*. Sanderson commends the *Observer* in 1985 for "a BEAUTIFULLY argued (and equally well-written) piece on Aids by Martin Amis," and later

²⁹⁸ Watney, *Policing Desire*, 3.

writes in 1988 that the “*Guardian, Independent and Observer*” were “honourable exceptions” to other newspapers’ publication of anti-gay views.²⁹⁹ Newspaper coverage of the epidemic was not as “clean-cut” as Watney suggests, and a number of newspapers, notably the *Guardian, Observer, and Independent*, did publish articles, columns, and editorials throughout the epidemic that tried to confront the stigma and prejudice associated with HIV/AIDS and gay men.

Even the *Daily Mirror*, which often reiterated stigmatizing views on HIV/AIDS and gay men, published a front-page article in 1989 that seemed to celebrate a gay relationship in which one of the men had HIV/AIDS. The article explains that the television series “This is Your Life” will include “an astonishing public tribute to actor Alec McCowen’s gay lover who died from AIDS,” after McCowen became upset that the show did not mention “his close companion Geoff Burridge.” The article then praises McCowen’s decision to share his relationship with the public, writing that he “courageously refuses to keep his lover secret.”³⁰⁰ The front-page article presents a respectful and sympathetic perspective on McCowen’s relationship, and does not stigmatize him, his partner, or others living with HIV/AIDS.

The differences and nuances in newspaper coverage of the epidemic seem to reveal some of society’s general beliefs and understandings of HIV/AIDS. For instance, the inconsistency among left-leaning newspapers identified in Chapter One and Chapter Two implies that there existed a significant amount of confusion and ignorance across society as a whole about how to respond to the epidemic appropriately and without perpetuating stigma. Additionally, the clear and sharp differences between left-leaning and right-leaning newspapers, notably regarding the use of misleading phrases and coverage of certain events related to the epidemic, likely indicates

²⁹⁹ Terry Sanderson, “Mediawatch,” *Gay Times*, July 1985, 16; Terry Sanderson, “Mediawatch,” *Gay Times*, February 1988, 20.

³⁰⁰ Tony Purnell and John Peacock, “This Is My Gay Life,” *Daily Mirror*, October 13, 1989, 1.

a general split in society. The differences between the Fox News, MSNBC and CNN depictions of news stories in the United States provides a fitting example of this occurrence, as the United States' political and social polarization mirrored the division between left-leaning and right-leaning news media. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, right-leaning media such as Fox News spread misinformation about the origin and treatment of the virus and downplayed its threat, and a Pew Research Center report found that 14 percent of MSNBC viewers, 23 percent of CNN viewers, and 39 percent of Fox News viewers believed the unverified accounts that COVID-19 was developed in a lab.³⁰¹ Similarly, the differences between left-leaning and right-leaning British newspapers' coverage of the epidemic points to a significant divide between liberal and conservative opinions on the virus.

However, the greater popularity of conservative newspapers indicates that negative and stigmatizing information about HIV/AIDS would have become more widespread than left-leaning newspaper articles that tried to confront the prejudice. Tunstall explains that after the 1970s, conservative newspapers “dominated at all three market levels,” which meant that “pro-Conservative papers day after day [...] were leading the news agenda for the press.”³⁰² Furthermore, downmarket papers that often sensationalized news stories were more popular than mid-market and upmarket papers. A study from the Audit Bureau of Circulations notes that downmarket circulation peaked at 9.8 million in 1984, 62 percent of the total newspaper circulation that year, while mid-market and upmarket newspaper circulation made up the rest, at 3.8 and 2.3 million respectively. This trend continued into the later 1980s, with downmarket

³⁰¹ Matt Motta, Dominik Stecula and Christina Farhart, “How Right-Leaning Media Coverage of COVID-19 Facilitated the Spread of Misinformation in the Early Stages of the Pandemic in the U.S.,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 2 (2020), 335; Mark Jurkowitz and Amy Mitchell, “Cable TV and COVID-19: How Americans perceive the outbreak and view media coverage differ by main news source,” Pew Research Center, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/04/01/cable-tv-and-covid-19-how-americans-perceive-the-outbreak-and-view-media-coverage-differ-by-main-news-source/>.

³⁰² Tunstall, *Newspaper Power*, 214.

circulation totaling 9.1 million in 1988, mid-market circulation at 3.9 million, and upmarket circulation at 2.6 million.³⁰³ The dominant popularity of right-leaning tabloids like the *Daily Mail* implies that the public would have been more likely to read news stories about HIV/AIDS that promoted stigma, prejudice, and discrimination against gay men and absorb those attitudes. Even though certain newspapers, such as the *Guardian* and *Observer*, may have tried to combat the biases and misinformation surrounding the illness, their lesser readership would have limited the reach and influence of these articles.

The preeminence of conservative newspapers and tabloids would have likely significantly impacted overall public perception of HIV/AIDS as well. The Pew Research Center report addressed in the previous paragraph points to the potential influence of the media on public perceptions of an emerging health crisis, as viewers of Fox News were more likely to believe and perpetuate misinformation about COVID-19. With regards to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Dorothy Nelkin, writing primarily in a US context, describes how “in areas where newspaper readers or television viewers have little information or preexisting knowledge to guide an independent evaluation – as was the case of AIDS in the early 1980s – the media were the major, and often the only, sources of information.”³⁰⁴ Richard Davenport-Hines highlighted a similar occurrence in this thesis’ introduction, explaining that British press coverage of the epidemic “nurtured” public perceptions of HIV/AIDS because few people in Britain had personal experience with the illness.³⁰⁵ The proliferation of primarily conservative newspapers with stigmatizing and prejudiced articles about HIV/AIDS and gay men would have strongly influenced initial understandings and attitudes of the epidemic. Nelkin also argues that “the media, in effect, make

³⁰³ Bromley and Stephenson, *Sex, Lies and Democracy*, 43.

³⁰⁴ Dorothy Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media.” *The Milbank Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (1991), 303.

³⁰⁵ Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment*, 333-334.

problems such as AIDS visible and define a ‘frame’ or context within which related events can be interpreted and understood.”³⁰⁶ In the British context, newspapers initially framed the illness as a “gay plague,” which defined the structure of subsequent stories on HIV/AIDS. Even though some newspapers tried to argue against this framing, articles from more popular tabloids, such as the *Sun*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*, continued to emphasize the link between HIV/AIDS and gay men throughout the 1980s. For example, the *Sun*, following an inaccurate and misinformed speech by a Labour member of the House of Lords, Lord Kilbracken, published an inside page report in 1989 with the headline “‘STRAIGHT SEX CANNOT GIVE YOU AIDS – OFFICIAL.’”³⁰⁷ This consistent framing of the illness as a “gay plague” minimized the risk and responsibility of heterosexuals to respond to the epidemic and instead relegated the blame and obligation to combat HIV/AIDS to gay men, which likely would have assuaged heterosexuals’ concerns about HIV/AIDS and increased anti-gay sentiments for allegedly spreading it.

Furthermore, a study analyzed in Horst Stipp and Dennis Kerr’s article about the determinants of public opinion on HIV/AIDS suggests that “anti-gay attitudes constrain the ability of the media to effectively communicate information about risk factors and how the disease is transmitted.”³⁰⁸ In conjunction with Nelkin and Davenport-Hines’ points, the study implies that newspapers’ initial reports perpetuating prejudiced beliefs about HIV/AIDS and framing the illness as a “gay plague” would have hampered later efforts to correct the misinformation. This further highlights the harmful implications of newspapers’ reiteration of

³⁰⁶ Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media,” 303.

³⁰⁷ Beharrell, “News Variations,” 49; “Straight Sex Cannot Give You Aids—Official,” *Sun*, November 17, 1989, quoted in Beharrell, “Chapter 9: AIDS and the British Press,” 195.

³⁰⁸ Horst Stipp and Dennis Kerr, “Determinants of Public Opinion About AIDS,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 1989), 99.

stigma and anti-gay attitudes at any point in the epidemic, as it would have decreased the effectiveness and influence of articles promoting accurate and unbiased information.

Data from the British Social Attitudes survey provides evidence for the detrimental impact of newspaper coverage of HIV/AIDS, as general prejudice against gay men consistently increased during the early to mid-1980s. The percent of the population that agreed with the statement that same-sex relations between two adults was “always wrong” increased from 50 percent in 1983 to 59 percent two years later, peaking at 64 percent in 1987, and only returning to 50 percent in 1993. Meanwhile, the belief that these relations were “not wrong at all” fell from 17 percent in 1983 to 11 percent in 1987, before gradually increasing to 18 percent in 1993.³⁰⁹ The intensification of anti-gay attitudes correlates directly with the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the surge of news stories about HIV/AIDS. Notably, the peak in negative attitudes corresponds with the peak in front-page stories about HIV/AIDS, as the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *Guardian* and *The Times* all published the highest number of front-page stories about the epidemic in 1987. This suggests that British newspapers had a substantial impact on public perception of HIV/AIDS and attitudes towards gay men more generally, and that the more popular tabloids’ focus on stories that blamed gay men for HIV/AIDS likely significantly contributed to generating a backlash against gay men.

Documents and evidence from Mass Observation, a social research project in Britain that also serves as an indicator of social attitudes, further demonstrates how newspaper coverage reflected and influenced public understandings of HIV/AIDS. Matt Cook’s analysis of responses to HIV/AIDS in Mass Observation notes that “there was only limited consensus” between

³⁰⁹ A. Park, C. Bryson, E. Clery, J. Curtice, and M. Phillips, eds, “British Social Attitudes: The 30th Report,” *NatCen Social Research*, 2013, accessed September 12, 2022, <https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/personal-relationships/homosexuality.aspx>.

respondents, and explains that “if most MOers saw themselves as ‘normal’ or ‘ordinary,’ it is evident that there was not a shared sense between them of what these things might mean in terms of attitudes toward AIDS and homosexuality.”³¹⁰ Another article from Cook examining Mass Observation similarly argues that the HIV/AIDS epidemic was a “more nuanced and complex story.”³¹¹ The nuances and complexity that Cook identifies within social responses to HIV/AIDS reflect the nuances within press coverage of the epidemic, as the newspapers did not present a uniform approach to reporting on HIV/AIDS. Cook additionally states that respondents to Mass Observation “consistently reinscribed the axiomatic divide between ‘them’ and ‘us.’”³¹² Reminiscent of the “us” versus “them” rhetoric that many newspapers used in articles about HIV/AIDS and gay men, Cook’s conclusion suggests that the newspapers likely produced, or at least exacerbated, the “othering” of gay men that seemingly divided the public between heterosexuals and gay men and sequestered the risk and blame for HIV/AIDS solely to gay men.

British parliamentary papers from the 1980s indicate that the newspapers’ approaches to presenting stories about HIV/AIDS affected the political realm as well as general public perceptions of the epidemic. Members of Parliament and the Lords clearly read and engaged with information from British tabloids and broadsheet newspapers. For example, in a House of Commons debate on March 9th, 1988, about Clause 28, Labour Member of Parliament Tony Benn stated: “The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross used vivid language, which no doubt will guarantee him a place in *The Sun* tomorrow. [Interruption.] Of course it will; he knows it well. He is expert at getting himself into the newspapers on sexual matters.”³¹³ Benn’s

³¹⁰ Cook, “AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn,” 249-250.

³¹¹ Cook, “‘Archives of Feeling’: the AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987,” 55.

³¹² Cook, “AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn,” 251.

³¹³ United Kingdom, *Hansard Sessional Papers*, House of Commons, 6th ser., vol. 129, March 9, 1988, cc. 382; Nicholas Fairbairn, the Member for Perth and Kinross and affiliated with the Conservative party, had said, among other statements, that “Leonardo da Vinci was a homosexual. So was Peter Pears. The fact that a person has this morbid squint is not a reason to condemn him for all else that he does. In wartime, lots of people indulge instincts of

statements point to the existence of close ties between Members of Parliament and the Lords and the newspapers, and suggest that they were cognizant of how the newspapers might portray them. In this same debate, Labour Member of Parliament Allan Roberts stated that “the only evidence that has been presented by Conservative Members relating to the promotion of homosexuality in schools and its abuse has been quotes from particular newspapers—the *Evening Standard* and *The Daily Telegraph*.”³¹⁴ This indicates that, in addition to generally supporting Clause 28, conservative newspapers themselves also provided evidence that assisted in the implementation of the clause. Evidently, how newspapers discussed and reported on different events significantly influenced political debates surrounding HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, in another Commons debate about HIV/AIDS on November 21st, 1986, Labour Member of Parliament Frank Dobson argued that “until recently, Ministers have not been prepared to speak out authoritatively to counter the lying hysteria of some of the newspapers on which they depend for political support.”³¹⁵ Dobson suggests that, in addition to being concerned about how newspapers might depict them, Members of Parliament also worried about damaging their relationship with a politically-affiliated newspaper by speaking out against the misinformation published. The newspapers’ decisions to approach stories about HIV/AIDS by relying on “hysteria” and sensationalism in turn seemed to determine how Members of Parliament responded to and discussed the epidemic.

British newspapers’ approach to discussing the epidemic amplified negative public perceptions of HIV/AIDS and gay men. Although certain newspapers attempted to challenge the

aggression and sadism which they keep in control if they are not given the opportunity to exercise them [...]Sodomy and buggery are not natural alternative sexual acts. They are perversions. They result from deep-seated psychopathological perversion” (cc382-383).

³¹⁴ United Kingdom, *Hansard Sessional Papers*, House of Commons, 6th ser., vol. 129, March 9, 1988, cc. 403.

³¹⁵ United Kingdom, *Hansard Sessional Papers*, House of Commons, 6th ser., vol. 105, November 21, 1986, cc. 857.

stigma, the increased popularity of tabloids meant that prejudiced perspectives on HIV/AIDS and misinformation about the illness became more widespread and influential. If the newspapers had initially responded with articles that promoted sympathy, distributed accurate information, and actively tried to avoid stigmatizing the illness or gay men, they would have significantly improved public perception of HIV/AIDS and response to the emerging epidemic, creating more compassion and understanding for gay men and those living with HIV/AIDS. As Nelkin argues in regard to the epidemic in the US, “both the tone and substance of public communication are critical, for they will ultimately affect our ability to respond to this disease with dignity, insight, and compassion.”³¹⁶ A combined response among British newspapers to HIV/AIDS that did not stigmatize or blame gay men might have even prompted the government to act more quickly and to mount an appropriate response to the epidemic that did not discriminate against gay men.

Media coverage of emerging health crises continues to impact public perception of illnesses. For example, the study on Fox News addressed earlier in this conclusion suggests that misinformation spread by the news network increased the likelihood of its viewers believing in false information about COVID-19. Additionally, the emergence of a new viral disease, monkeypox, has heightened anxiety over repetition of the stigma and prejudice against men who have sex with men that arose during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. A news alert from CNN on August 3rd, 2022 points to the potential recurrence of these biases. The alert noted that “many techs at major US labs are refusing to draw blood from possible monkeypox patients, raising concerns about discrimination and testing delays.”³¹⁷

More specific to the British context, an article from the *Guardian* published on August 10th, 2022 reveals that the right-leaning media has revived some of the stigmatizing language and

³¹⁶ Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media,” 306.

³¹⁷ CNN News Alert, “Battling Monkeypox Stigma,” August 3, 2022.

attitudes evident during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The article, titled “Rightwing Media Embraces Aids-era Homophobia in Monkeypox Coverage,” explains that right-wing commentators on television have begun blaming men who have sex with men for contracting monkeypox, similar to the newspaper articles that blamed gay men for contracting HIV/AIDS. The article also describes how the “aggressive stigmatization of monkeypox – reminiscent of the homophobic response to HIV/Aids in the 1980s – poses a serious challenge to public health advocates and community leaders” trying to connect with those most at risk.³¹⁸ This indicates that the stigmatization of monkeypox has already begun to hamper efforts to combat the illness, echoing the ways in which the prejudiced reaction to HIV/AIDS impeded the development of an effective and compassionate response to the epidemic.

Press coverage of developing health crises significantly affect the creation and endurance of public attitudes towards illnesses. The conclusions in this thesis regarding newspaper coverage of the HIV/AIDS epidemic reveal important lessons that should be considered during the emergence of epidemics today and in the future. Even with the nuances between newspaper coverage of HIV/AIDS and attempts by certain newspapers to combat the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS and gay men, evidence still indicates that overall newspaper coverage perpetuated prejudiced opinions and negatively influenced public perceptions of the epidemic. There was, and still is, a crucial need for initial, unprejudiced news coverage of novel illnesses and, for instance, public health education campaigns launched at the beginning of epidemics, instead of after the formation and cementation of public attitudes towards these illnesses.

³¹⁸ Wilfred Chan, “Rightwing Media Embraces Aids-era Homophobia in Monkeypox Coverage,” *Guardian*, August 10, 2022, accessed September 8, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/10/monkeypox-homophobia-lgbtq-rightwing>.

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