Constructive Advocacy: Positivity and Solutions-Based Information in Activist Communication

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Article Information	Abstract
	Drawing from positive psychology and journalism studies, this article proposes constructive advocacy as a theoretical and methodological arena for public interest communications. Through a case study of a transnational advocacy network, this research employs a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 40 activists, exploring positivity and solutions-based information for social change. This study contributes to the new body of literature on public interest communications, opening up theoretical and methodological arenas in understanding how activists plan and execute strategic communication.

Introduction

Advocacy and activism are critical sites of inquiry that historically have not received much traction in strategic communication research. Although they may not have formal training in communication fields, activists often provide strategic functions, working on behalf of social, political, economic, and/or environmental issues. Extant research in strategic communication, however, says little about how local activism emerges and engages with global forces or how, through public relations practices, activists define themselves in relation to these forces. This

research builds off the premise that activists function as strategic communicators and is a qualitative inquiry into the strategic planning and implementation of a transnational effort. It contributes to the growing body of literature on activism in strategic communication and how activists employ digital technology. Additionally, this examination of the intersections of activism and strategic communication works to advance the area of public interest communications, exploring how advocacy and public relations create positive change for public good.

While activist and advocacy organizations engage in and execute strategic communication, to date, little research in public relations has examined non-corporate communication (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007). Through a case study of a transnational advocacy network,[1] this research employs a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 40 activists involved in the collective. Through an analysis of transnational activism, this article is a response to scholars' calls for additional research on the role of activism and activists in public relations theory (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000). Applying the concept of constructive journalism to strategic communication, this article is a bridge that connects the intersections of advocacy and public relations within the developing area of public interest communications to build theory and identify empirical opportunities.

Literature review

Public interest communications

Public interest communications is a unique area of practice and is an emerging academic discipline, drawing from strategic communication (advertising, public relations, and marketing), political science, sociology, and social psychology. Fessmann (2016) was the first to offer a definition of public interest communications:

> The development and implementation of science-based, planned strategic communication campaigns with the goal of achieving significant and sustained positive behavioral change or action on an issue that transcends the particular interests of any single organization. (p. 16)

According to the University of Florida's Ann Christiano, Chair of Public Interest Communications, and Annie Neimand, Research Director for the Center for Public Interest Communications, to be effective at promoting social change, public interest communications as a practice relies on four elements: (1) identification of key publics, (2) creation of compelling messages with calls to action, (3) development of a theory of change, and (4) proper message

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[1] A transnational advocacy network is a collective of "strategically linked" activists who are connected by "visible ties and mutually recognized roles in pursuit of a common goal" across a diffuse network (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 6).

channels (Christiano & Neimand, 2017). Christiano and Neimand write: "To truly drive change, we have to consider the science that shows there is a more strategic, effective, and focused way to drive social change" (2017, p. 36). From an academic perspective, research in public interest communications addresses and examines the intersections of communication, social sciences, and the public good. Scholars in the field strive for public interest communications to join the spheres of communication theory and social good, where research contributes to practical applications that contribute to policy and/or behavior change (Brunner, 2017). Activists' aims often include changing public opinion and policy, making activism a ripe area of inquiry for public interest communications. The following section briefly outlines research in public relations on activism.

Activism and public relations

Although evidence suggests activists have been engaging in strategic communication for more than a century, little research has explored activists' use of public relations strategies and tactics. Like organizations, activists use strategic communication to develop campaigns around issues and identities to shape public opinion and influence policy. Activists employ public relations, strategically developing content that aims to impact public opinion and policy (Ciszek, 2017).

Activism is a powerful social and cultural agent, and research suggests that activists have been employing strategic communication for at least 100 years. However, in much public relations literature, activists have historically been considered "obstacles to corporate objectives that trigger the need for public relations" (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 352) rather than strategic communicators themselves. Public relations is not just a corporate function, as activists also use strategic communication to shape public opinion and influence the public sphere (Greenberg, Knight, & Westersund, 2011). Yet, for years, these activities have not been recognized by scholars as such because they originated from activists.

A growing body of literature focuses on strategies that enable advocacy and strengthen social movements (Leitch & Neilson, 2001; Smith & Ferguson, 2010). Activist communication efforts are driven by objectives that are "not that different" from other organizations that use public relations to pursue strategic goals and maintain the organization (Smith, 2013, p. 7). Reber and Kim (2006) argue effective activism depends on relationship building among those who share a common goal, as well as on building alliances with organizations that have similar objectives. Similarly, Taylor and Sen Das (2010) argue contemporary activists work to create advocacy networks to generate support for interrelated issues within a social movement. Ciszek (2017) found that activists produce strategic communication for social change at local and global levels.

Scholars have noted the potential for the Internet to transform activists' strategies and tactics (Cozier & Witmer, 2001; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001), and research has demonstrated how activists around the world use online media to communicate with publics, mobilize collective action, influence the media, and execute campaigns. Some scholars argue activists have the

power, often by way of new technologies, to influence social change (Hallahan et al., 2007; Karlberg, 1996; Stokes & Rubin, 2010). Activists were using online tools long before corporations recognized their value (Coombs & Holladay, 2007), and digital media have been a "boom" to activists (Heath & Palenchar, 2000, p. 181), providing low-cost communication resources. Overwhelmingly, however, digital activism research has focused on communication platforms rather than content (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Obar, Zube, & Lampe, 2012; Petray, 2011). This article argues for the need to explore activist discourses, with specific attention to the strategic shift of messaging and advocacy to incorporate elements of positive psychology and solutions-based approaches.

Constructive journalism

Although public relations scholarship often accounts for journalism, few theories from studies of journalism have been applied to strategic communication. This article draws from the concept of constructive journalism, making the case for constructive advocacy within the context of strategic communication for social change. This section briefly outlines the development of constructive journalism and suggests a solutions-based approach as one area of theoretical and practical significance to public interest communications research.

Inspired by positive psychology, which focuses on the prospering of individuals, groups, and societies (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), constructive journalism distances itself from the negativity bias that characterizes contemporary news reporting, instead framing stories constructively (Gyldensted, 2015). In this vein, journalists are encouraged to present solutions for issues that arise in their stories, shaping social welfare (Gyldensted, 2015). According to this framework, journalists report on possible solutions to negative events, favoring the presentation of positive aspects of news stories (McIntyre, 2015). Challenging journalists to create engaging and productive stories, constructive journalism draws from various disciplines, including positive psychology, sociology, and neuroscience (see Gyldensted, 2015; McIntyre, 2015). Constructive journalism, or solutions-based reporting, is an approach that "investigates and explains, in a critical and clear-eyed way, examples of people working toward solutions" in order to "provide valuable insights about how communities may more effectively tackle serious problems" (Solutions Journalism Network, n.d.).

The two foundations for constructive journalism include the incorporation of positive emotions in negative stories and solutions-based reporting. Positive coherent resolution, or the "construction of a coherent and complete story of a difficult event that ends positively, conveying a sense of emotional resolution or closure," provides audiences with a sense of narrative completion, which may diminish the negative emotional impact of a story (Pals, 2006, p. 1082). Through the presentation of hope for the future (Gyldensted, 2015; McIntyre, 2015), this solutions-based reporting may in turn positively impact societal well-being (McIntyre, 2015). Additionally, solutions may provide mobilizing information that can inspire audiences to act (McIntyre, 2015). Secondly, in the conceptualization of constructive journalism, according to

the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001), positive emotions are able to expand an individual's thought-action repertoire, which is the range of potential actions one's body and mind can engage in. Positive emotions, in turn, may be beneficial for communities and groups, because they can advance interpersonal relationships, while negative emotions can limit thoughts and actions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). Within journalism, this situation suggests reporting should contain more positive rather than negative emotions (McIntyre, 2015), focusing on and including, for example, the perspectives of survivors rather than victims. Researchers hypothesize that constructive journalism improves emotional responses to news and creates a sense of emotional resolution (Kleemans, Schlindwein, & Dohmen, 2017). When presented with a solutions-based ending, readers reported higher levels of inspiration and willingness to learn about the issue, as well as higher levels of sharing, commenting on, and discussing the issue (Curry & Hammonds, 2014).

Although constructive journalism has been used by practitioners since the 1990s (Benesch, 1998), it recently has garnered attention from journalism scholars (Kleemans et al., 2017; McIntyre , Dahman, & Abdenour, 2016). To date, strategic communication research has not considered constructive journalism and what it can lend to studies of public relations. Although much research on constructive journalism focuses on audiences, the present study looks at the producers rather than the consumers of content, applying the concept to advocacy through a case of transnational activism. Therefore, this research is guided by the following questions:

RQ1: What are the intended goals of the transnational advocacy network?

RQ2: How do activists make use of solutions-based communication?

Method

This exploratory research examined the *It Gets Better International Project*, a global grassroots activist network[2] that began in 2011 to address issues important to LGBT youth around the world. As of June 2018, the project has affiliates in 17 countries/regions: Australia/New Zealand, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Greece, India, Italy, Mexico, Moldova, Paraguay, Perú, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland. Over the course of six years, LGBT activists within the project have constructed a digital infrastructure with an online following of approximately 1.2 million. Although the project was started by staff in the United States,

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[2] The *It Gets Better Project* began when internationally syndicated columnist Dan Savage and husband Terry Miller uploaded an eight-and-a-half-minute-long video talking about their struggles as young people in response to a string of gay youth suicides. Their original YouTube video incited an international movement "travers[ing] national boundaries" (West, Frischherz, Panther, & Brophy, 2013, p. 51), resulting in thousands of user-generated video submissions from individuals, celebrities, organizations, corporations, religious groups, universities and colleges, and politicians from around the world.

international affiliates have adopted and adapted the project's mission and vision in ways that are specific to local needs.

Participants for this study were members of the international affiliate network and were identified through snowball sampling (Manning & Kunkel, 2014), starting with the international coordinator for the *It Gets Better Project*. Forty activists (see Appendix A), ranging from volunteers to directors of the affiliate organization, participated in semi-structured, in-depth Skype interviews between July 2013 and November 2015. To ensure participants were asked the same questions and comparable data were gathered, an interview guide (see Appendix B) was used to facilitate the conversation (Cresswell, 2007). Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, were digitally recorded to ensure an accurate representation of the participants' remarks, and were transcribed in full. Prior to data collection, all human subjects protocols were followed, and IRB approval was obtained.

Theory-driven, deductive thematic analysis was used to examine the content of the in-depth interviews. A deductive a priori approach (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) is useful for organizing and describing data in accordance with a predetermined theoretical framework—in this case, constructive journalism (McIntyre, 2015).

Findings and discussion

Findings illustrate the prevalence of positive information and solutions in advocacy work. This section ties the concepts of positivity and solutions-based information with data from this study, developing theoretical avenues that emerged from this study.

Positivity: A discourse of hope

Participants described the vision of the project as an optimism-building campaign, creating a culture of hope for LGBT young people through positive messaging. The Director of Education and Global Programming believes the role of the affiliate network is bringing a message of hope that historically "was really lacking from the movement," signaling a shift in movement rhetoric. Several international affiliates believe optimism is the key to the success of the organization, and it is through this optimism that the project gets noticed. One activist in Spain described his role as a "messenger of good news," noting the affiliate network is just "another piece in the puzzle" of helping sexual and gender minorities around the world.

Through positive messaging, the activist network shares a cohesive goal and creates a united front: it gets better. All affiliates subscribe to a unified brand position, guided by the same mission, adopting the same tagline, using the same color schema, and employing many of the same tactics. This coherence makes local affiliates recognizable as part of a global project.

Participants spoke about the power of being linked to a larger network of international activists, discussing how a strategy of optimism cut across local nuances and carried global strength.

The Executive Director in the United States stated that the project "engag[es] an audience about a dialogue that is not necessarily all about what the problems are, but about the joy that one can experience when they get through the tough times and live openly, and openly in acceptance of who they are." He emphasized focusing on the future and not dwelling on the realities of the immediate. In Ecuador, one participant noted that her advocacy work is geared toward a better tomorrow. Her messaging aims to instill the belief that "with time, everything will get better," ultimately to "create a different feeling, something more positive," which she believes has been very successful. In Portugal, a Project Coordinator discussed past approaches to LGBT advocacy when LGBT issues only got media attention when something bad happened, like homophobic hate crimes or a young person's committing suicide. He added: "We created the project to change that."

Positive messaging is a way to get people to slow down and pay attention to the issues LGBT youth are facing. Several participants emphasized the importance of staying on message. Deviation from themes of hope and optimism might otherwise be detrimental to the project's success. Although anyone can upload a video to YouTube and label it "It Gets Better," it is clear from the interviews that activists serve as gatekeepers, deciding which videos will actually be featured on their affiliate's website and social media sites. The U.S. Media Manager noted how he works with staff to create safe messaging guidelines or what he described as a "kind of rule book of what to look out for." The messaging guidelines are based on leading publications about suicide and bullying. He noted everything the organization does "has a science behind it" and is "not just arbitrary."

The Manager of Global Partnerships believes the premise of "it gets better" is to give young people hope, but in some cases and in some parts of the world, things are not getting better for LGBT youth; they are taking steps backward. He described having to turn down opportunities that do not reflect the message of the project. In East Africa, for example, activists wanted to join as an affiliate program; however, in those parts of the developing world the message is needed, but it is not yet applicable to the time or setting. Although these activists were not able to become an official affiliate, the network worked with them to develop a strategy for action to propel social change.

In the United States, the Director of Education and Global Programming pointed to a 60% increase in calls to the Trevor Hotline, a suicide hotline for LGBT youth, after the *It Gets Better Project* started. He was quick to note that the affiliate network does not suggest problems go away; instead, it gives young people the courage to say, "Ok these are my challenges and maybe I need to go about finding help to work out solutions to these challenges." Many participants hold on to anecdotal evidence about hope, confident their efforts are saving lives and assured what they are doing is working. An activist in Moldova is confident the impact of the affiliate network is huge, especially among supporters of LGBT people. He recalled how family members and allies who recorded messages for the project later became targets of some homophobic

abuse, but this did not stop them from recording messages or withdrawing the video, despite pressure they received. The following section discusses the findings in relation to theoretical connections.

Discussing positivity: Theoretical applications

As a strategic communication concept, positivity generates an alternative discourse to dominant narratives of bullying and suicide that have surrounded LGBT youth in academic literature and mainstream media. The capacity to imagine a future shapes human cognition, emotion, and motivation (Imagination Institute, 2013). As this case demonstrates, a strategy of positivity shapes advocacy efforts on a global scale. Optimism produces a new possibility for social change by mobilizing social and psychological resources for translating belief into action and for actualizing positivity. As a discursive construct, hope is ambiguous, culturally contingent, and politically powerful. The strength of positivity is that audiences can interpret optimism in ways that fit with their localized understandings and their particular contexts at multiple micro, meso, and macro levels.

A discourse of positivity appeals to multiple levels—the structural, the institutional, the social, and the individual. As such, this research puts forth a conceptual model for constructive advocacy (Figure 1): an inverted pyramid that captures the emphasis participants placed on structural top-down hope that trickles through institutional and civic levels down to the individual level.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of constructive advocacy
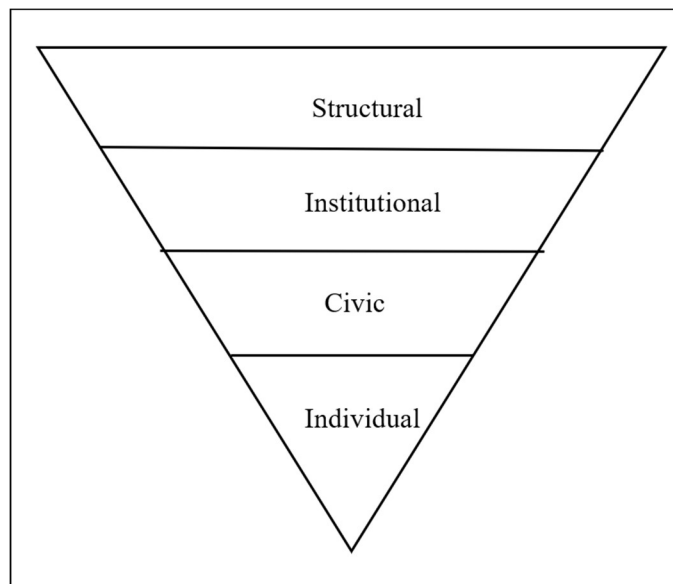
Structurally, positivity is a tool to create social, political, and economic change. For many activists, hope manifests at this macro level, even though the face of the campaign is a youth-centered, individual level of hope. In the United States, for example, corporations including Doritos, Uber, Converse, and Adobe have become partners of the *It Gets Better Project*, publicly supporting the movement through fundraising and product launches that benefit LGBT youth advocacy.

Institutionally, optimism infiltrates social systems, such as family, education, and law. Within the affiliate network, members see hope as a utopian promise: faith in a future where LGBT people have access to the same institutions, such as marriage, as their heterosexual counterparts.

At the civic level, hope is a collective force that brings communities together, unites people, and mobilizes them around protection of sexual and gender minorities. For example, in Ecuador, activists aim to engage in dialogue with state officials, such as the state defense and the human rights office, to garner their support and implement new laws and policies. Additionally, several affiliates work with media institutions to influence representations of sexual and gender minorities. In Moldova, the affiliate has organized trainings for journalists regarding fundamentals of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and how to speak and write about LGBT issues.

At the individual level, hope is about personal growth and development: living a better life. The Media Manager in the United States noted that the organization gets many submissions with accompanying notes saying, "This project saved my life. It helped me so much. It helped me feel more confident about myself and find community." Hope is a universal emotional state that anyone, regardless of age or sexual orientation, can relate to.

Positivity is a powerful strategy because it operates at macro, meso, and micro levels; it is a big, broad, and malleable concept. Optimism can be emotional, encompassing, and ambitious; it can also be fluid, ambiguous, open to interpretation, and difficult to pin down. However, as the literature notes, positive emotions must be paired with solutions-based reporting to constitute constructive journalism. Similarly, constructive advocacy needs solutions-based information to change public opinion, influence public policy, and impact social change. The following section discusses solutions-based information within the transnational advocacy network.

Solutions-based information

Early in its development, the *It Gets Better Project* was critiqued by activists and scholars for focusing on the future and not offering immediate solutions. Researcher and scholar Mary Gray believes the efforts were problematic because messages of futurity and perseverance suggest "time, rather than social action, is the most effective weapon that protects us from anti-queer violence" (2011, para. 3). Although the project contains the conceptual components (structural, institutional, civic, and individual) to execute constructive advocacy, at the time data were collected, it lacked solutions-based work. Like solutions journalism that encapsulates "rigorous

reporting about how people are responding to problems" (Solutions Journalism Network, 2016, para 1), in order to be constructive, advocacy needs content that centers on responses and remedies to social problems. Efforts such as the transnational advocacy network need road maps to social change where messages of positivity are paired with solutions-based information. Goltz (2013) noted: "Queer critiques of the project and its founder, Dan Savage, were quick to challenge the privileged and homonormative investments from the outset of the campaign, rejecting the campaign as passive, impractical, homogenizing, and exclusionary" (p. 1). This present research does not suggest throwing the baby out with the bath water; rather, the next phase of this advocacy work, and others like it, must encapsulate a solutions-based strategy.

When analyzing and theorizing advocacy, practitioners and scholars must consider what discourses of positivity suggest about a global past, present, and future for sexual and gender minorities. The transnational affiliate network serves as a productive starting point for reimagining the narratives around LGBT lives that have prevailed around the globe, but to actualize the promise of constructive advocacy, the network needs more strategic planning and execution of solutions-based work. The rhetoric of "it gets better" begs the question: how? Scholars and practitioners need to critically engage with how to apply positive techniques to advocacy work and how to implement techniques that can drive constructive change.

Rather than vilifying the ideological tenets of a society, activists focused on shifting the narrative that LGBT people have historically told about themselves. According to the Movement Advancement Project, a U.S.-based research think tank, LGBT organizations "need to identify their priority audiences, develop compelling messages, select and train spokespeople, target the right media, and take other steps to communicate effectively" (Effective Messaging, 2018, para. 2). Christiano and Neimand (2017) note that it is important to "craft campaign messages, stories, and calls to action that do not threaten how an audience sees itself or its values" (p. 39). As this research demonstrates, activists work to shape public opinion and influence policy change by shifting discourses, norms, and values, often through strategic communication.

Through symbolic work, activists, like public relations practitioners, have the potential to challenge and redefine cultural discourses through images and narratives. Activism is a relational process, focused on making connections among cultural components such as religious institutions, media institutions, and ideological frameworks. This case reveals the employment of constructive elements of positivity and solutions-based content, in contrast to the discourses of negativity and problem-based content that have traditionally represented sexual and gender minorities. Table 1 presents an overview of constructive and nonconstructive elements that emerged from the data.

Table 1. Constructive Versus Nonconstructive Elements

Constructive	Nonconstructive
LGBT people in empowering scenes *Positive image*	Victims of homophobia/ transphobic crimes *Negative image*
Family and friends supporting LGBT people *Positive, solutions-based*	Journalists reporting on statistics regarding verbal and physical harassment of LGBT people *Negative, problem-based*
Optimism, hope, and inspiration *Positive emotion*	Anguish and sorrow *Negative emotion*
Creating awareness, empowering political action, self-efficacy *Solutions-based*	Youth bullying and suicide *Problem-based*

Although this case represents the first component of constructive journalism's inclusion of positive emotions, it overwhelmingly reflects a lack of providing solutions-based information in its campaign content. Objective solutions are not fundamental, as not every situation can be resolved; however, according to the tenets of constructive journalism, the goal is "releasing people from the overly negative emotions they may experience by giving them a sense of narrative completion" (Kleemans et al., 2017, p. 784; see also McIntyre, 2015). Activists in this study are constructing, contesting, and reorienting discourses and manifestations of LGBT activism in local contexts. As part of a transnational collective, activists construct and promote a particular discourse of LGBT that is simultaneously grounded in universality and specificity.

Historically, gay and lesbian activists have employed strategic communication to advocate on behalf of key social and cultural issues (Alwood, 2015). Media have been central to LGBT advocacy, and increasingly, digital technologies help LGBT activists advance their objectives (Ng, 2017). For marginalized groups, the Internet has become a key resource for collective action and empowerment (Mele, 1999). The development of the Internet has revolutionized activist communications, providing a means for LGBT activists to bypass social and cultural barriers, compress geographic distances, and overcome institutional hurdles (Ayoub & Brezinska, 2015).

In addition to technological advances, the dominant narratives of LGBT advocacy have shifted. Amid a climate of homophobia and in the shadows of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, discourses from LGBT movements have historically been clouded in narratives of anguish and sorrow. Pullen (2009) argues LGBT individuals around the world are now engaging in "new storytelling" (p. 229), creating new discourses that cross national borders and are part of cultural and social exchange, as demonstrated within the *It Gets Better* international affiliate. For LGBT populations, transnational media connections present different outlooks and opportunities across nations (Pullen, 2012) for global advocacy work.

Conclusion

A theory of change: Constructive advocacy

Like constructive journalism, constructive advocacy brings positive emotions and solutions-based content to strategic communication. Such an emphasis on positivity and solutions has several benefits. First, for non-LGBT audiences, a focus on positivity takes the burden of homophobia off publics and may enhance engagement with the movement, moving them from being supporters to advocates. Problem-based activism may make audiences feel helpless. A solutions-based approach to activist strategic communication can present examples for how audiences can work to remedy the problem, encouraging engagement and action.

Given the complexity of issues their organizations and communities face and address, practitioners obviously cannot ignore negativity that arises. But as this case demonstrates, a focus on positivity may shift the narrative that has historically defined the issues and cause. In the past, LGBT movements have emphasized negative narratives: fighting the criminalization of homosexuality, die-ins during the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1990s, boycotts, homophobic and transphobic hate crimes, and homicide. This transnational movement shifts the narrative 180 degrees to hope, positivity, optimism, and futurity. This movement embraces elements of constructive advocacy, distancing itself from the negativity that historically has dominated the discourses of this social movement.

Similar to constructive journalism, constructive advocacy is not about focusing solely on positive messages; rather, it is about framing content in more positive ways (Gyldensted 2015; Haagerup, 2014; McIntyre 2015). An emphasis on optimism gives audiences a sense of narrative completion (Pals, 2006), which may enhance one's sense of well-being as well as societal well-being (McIntyre, 2015). Applying this to strategic advocacy and activism, solutions-based strategic communication can provide a narrative of survival and hope for the future that may be socially, politically, and commercially viable.

Importantly, however, as testimonials of lived experience travel, discourses and symbols coalesce and create recognizable signs of LGBT, which can foreclose possibilities by replicating and legitimating particular political and social projects. As scholars and practitioners, we should be critical of what possibilities a strategy of optimism forecloses. Media have been used to increase visibility for contemporary issues; however, such visibility comes at a cost (Ng, 2017) and needs to be problematized. Within the advocacy organizations and campaigns, such as the *It Gets Better* international network, what is the cost of this increased global visibility?

In contexts where LGBT voices have been silenced, marginalized, and stereotyped, activists in this study employ digital platforms for knowledge production to challenge and rewrite narratives of sexual and gender minorities. While this research spans five years of a digital media movement, there is a need to go beyond a single articulation of advocacy by tracing the activist media ecology over time (Treré & Mattoni, 2016). Future research is needed that looks at constructive activism within other social movements and how it contributes to the broader field

of public information communication. This case is based upon a global collective that was founded on and propagates an ideological shift in LGBT activism and representations of sexual and gender minorities through digital and traditional media.

Importantly, the risk here is a glorification of digital media. New media are part of the larger strategic and tactical toolbox activists draw from. The online realm becomes a "mediator for local, situated configurations" (Kaun & Uldam, 2018, p. 6), that represent the contextuality and bounds of activism. Grassroots collectives like *It Gets Better* emerge from and use digital media to achieve organizational goals and objectives in ways that reappropriate and revise predigital articulations of activism. Groups such as the transnational advocacy network construct and disseminate symbols and images, challenge preexisting narratives, and employ discursive strategies to reconstruct social and collective identities of LGBT.

Advocacy and public interest communications

This study contributes to the new body of literature on public interest communications, opening up theoretical and methodological arenas in understanding how activists plan and execute strategic communication. Constructive advocacy is a promising avenue for practical and theoretical work in public interest communications. Positivity and solutions-oriented strategy provide new lines of inquiry that can propel the practice and theory of strategic communication for social change.

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Appendix A

Organizational Member Chart

Name	Country	Organizational Title
Feri	Austria	Director
Felipe M.	Brazil	Executive Coordinator
Felipe V.	Chile	Executive Director
Julio	Chile	President
Monse	Chile	Development Coordinator
Lina	Colombia	Clinical and Educational Director
Diana	Ecuador	Spokeswoman
Luis	Ecuador	President
Chiara	Italy	Director
Enrique	Latin America	Supporter, activist
Alex	Mexico	Regional Coordinator
Carlos	Mexico	Supporter, activist
Eli	Mexico	Supporter, activist
Felipe B.	Mexico	Volunteer
Fernanda	Mexico	President
Francisco	Mexico	Supporter, Founding partner of ADIL, CEO of Matrimonios LGBT
Gerardo	Mexico	Volunteer, activist
Karla	Mexico	Supporter, sexologist
Mario	Mexico	Event planner
Miguel	Mexico	Supporter, activist
Ruben	Mexico	Supporter, Founder LGBT Confex
Samm	Mexico	Digital Communication
Artiom	Moldova	President
Diego	Paraguay	President
Ana	Peru	Vice President
Marianella	Peru	President
Diogo	Portugal	Project Coordinator
Alvaro	Spain	Communication Coordinator
Gonzalo	Spain	Secretary
Sergio	Spain	President (2013-2015)
Victor	Spain	President
Ulrika	Sweden	Supporter
Clay	Switzerland	Director
Basak	U.S.	Board of Directors member

Brett	U.S.	Media Manager
Elliot	U.S.	Director of International Affiliates (2013-2015)
Julie	U.S.	Consultant
Justin	U.S.	Director, Education and Global Programming
Seth	U.S.	Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Ted	U.S.	Executive Director

Appendix B

Interview Guide

1: Please tell me briefly about how you became associated with the affiliate network.

        How long have you been affiliated with the It Gets Better Project (IGBP)?

        Why did you decide to join the IGBP?

            Describe your involvement with the IGBP. What exactly does your job entail?

            What sort of rules do you have to your job? What about resources? What sort of resources do you have available to you to do your job?

        What does the IGBP mean to you?

2: Tell me a bit about the aims of the project.

        What does the campaign represent?

        Tell me what you think this campaign means at this current time in history.

3: Tell me a bit about the international affiliate program.

        Can you tell me about the role of the IGBP American program and how it works with the international affiliates? How does it all work?

4: How do you think legal and cultural regulations impact the efforts of the IGBP international affiliate?

5: Tell me about the social and cultural obstacles that the project faces. What sort of cultural or social norms does the project face?

        Tell me about any resistance you have faced for the It Gets Better Project.

        Can you tell me about a time when a criticism of the project was very hard for you?

6: What are your goals for the international affiliate program? Long/short?

7: Tell me about the effectiveness of the project.

      What are the goals of the campaign?

            Probe: Can you tell me about a time that you saw a goal of the project achieved?

            How about a time when it was not achieved?