

ON WHETHER 'BULLYING' INDEXES SEXUALITY, AND WHETHER IT OUGHT TO

New Ways of Analyzing Variation 40
Georgetown University
Panel: Sexuality in Language

Robert J. Podesva
Stanford University

Andrew D. Wong
California State University,
East Bay

INTRODUCTION

- **Language, Gender, and Sexuality**
 - Considerable work on how sexist ideologies marginalize women by casting masculine linguistic forms as unmarked
 - ‘man’ and ‘he’ to refer to men and women
 - ‘gay’ to refer to gay men and lesbians
 - Much less work on how heterosexist ideologies marginalize sexual minorities in similar ways
- We argue that the term ‘bullying’ (and morphologically related forms), though brought to national attention following a series of suicides by LGBT youth, has only a weak association with sexual minorities.
 - Draw on a qualitative and quantitative corpus study of news articles
 - Discuss implications for efforts to prevent LGBT bullying

STRUCTURE

- **Description of Corpus**
- **Quantitative Study: ‘bullying’**
 - Investigation of strength of relationship between ‘bullying’ and LGBT youth across periodicals
- **Case Study: Tyler Clementi**
 - Analysis of relationship between ‘bullying’ and LGBT youth
 - Content Analysis of Topics and Headlines
- **Implications**

STUDY

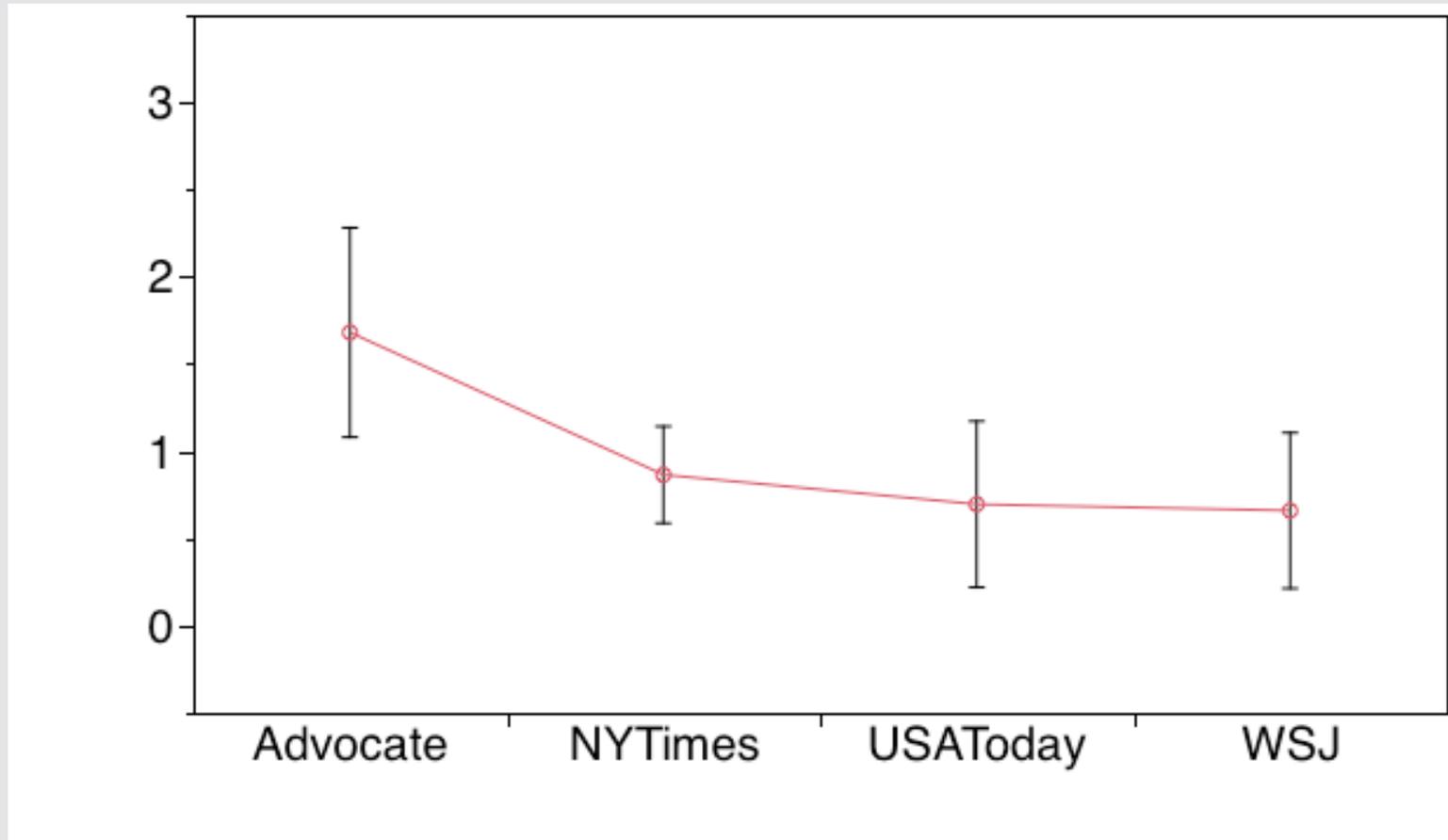
- Sources (articles between August 2010 and May 2011)



- Corpus 1: articles on ‘bullying’ and morphologically related forms (N=123)
 - *bullying*: any kind of repeated aggressive behavior against a person
- Corpus 2: articles referring to Tyler Clementi’s death (N=131)
- Quantitative Measures
 - Sexuality Index: # terms referring to sexual minorities / word count * 100
 - Silence Index: # articles that do not mention sexuality / total # articles

RESULTS

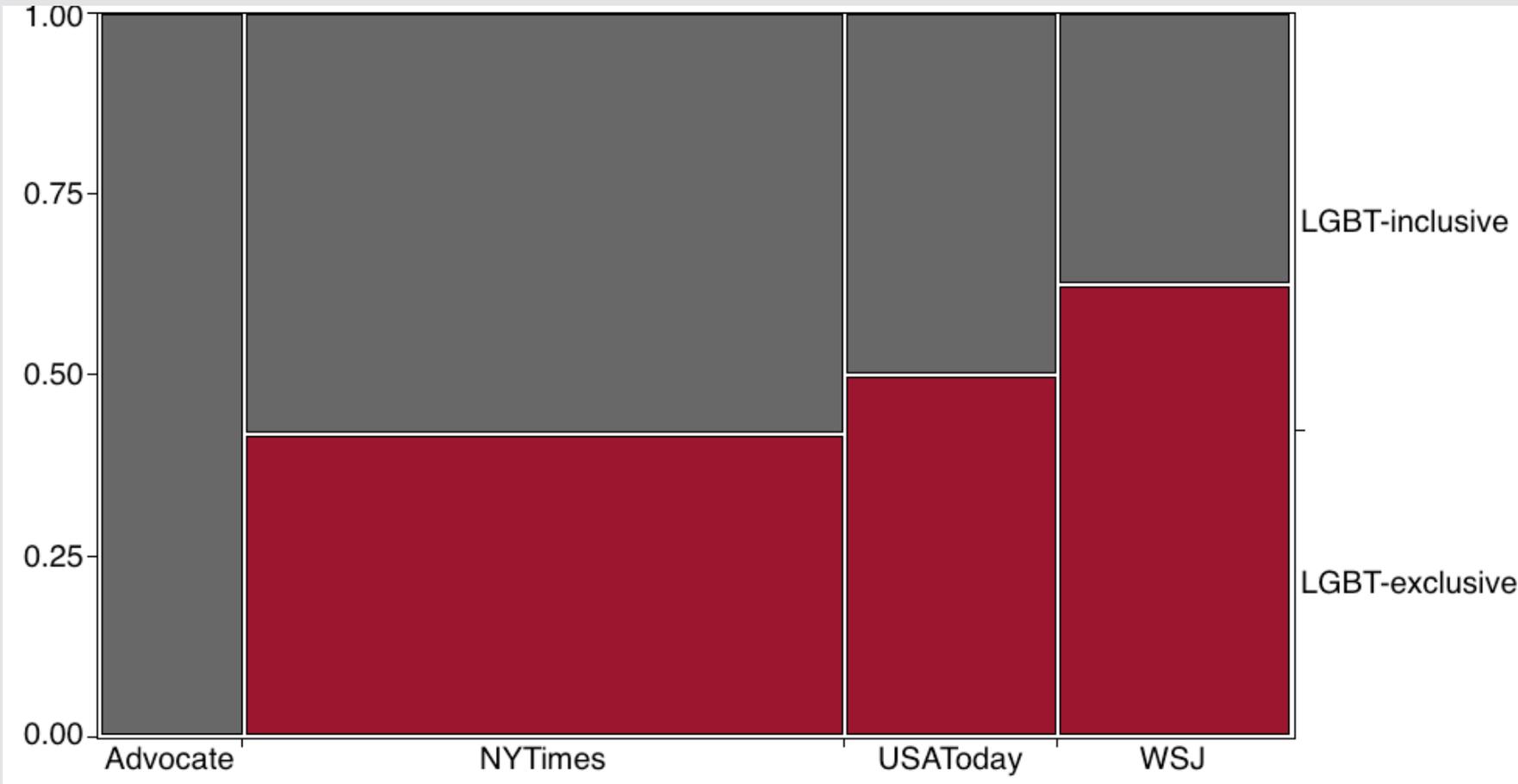
SEXUALITY INDEX ACROSS PERIODICALS



$F(3,119) = 3.0992, p < .0294$

RESULTS

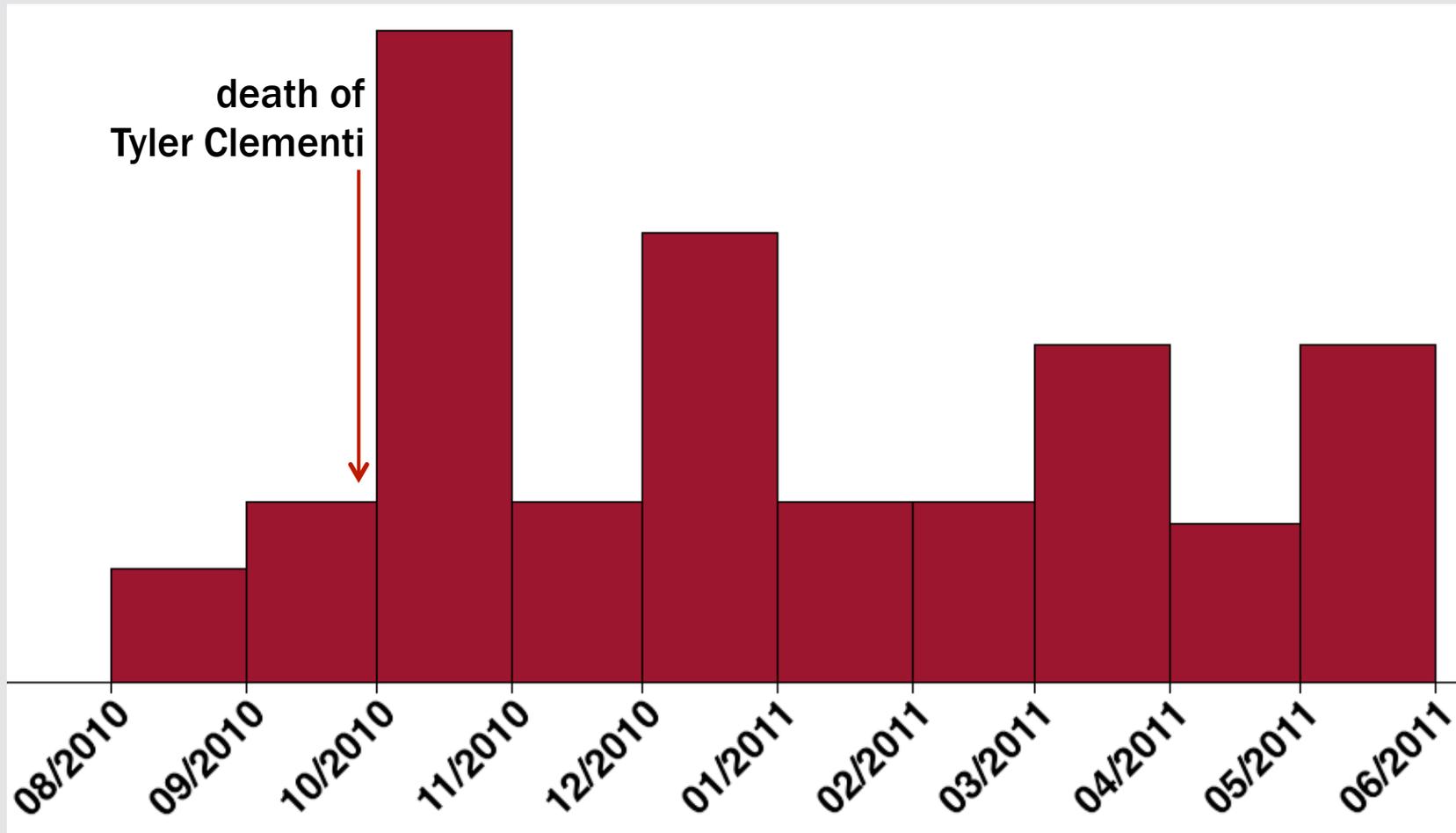
SILENCE INDEX



$\chi^2=20.984, df=3, p<0.0001$

RESULTS

NUMBER OF ARTICLES OVER TIME



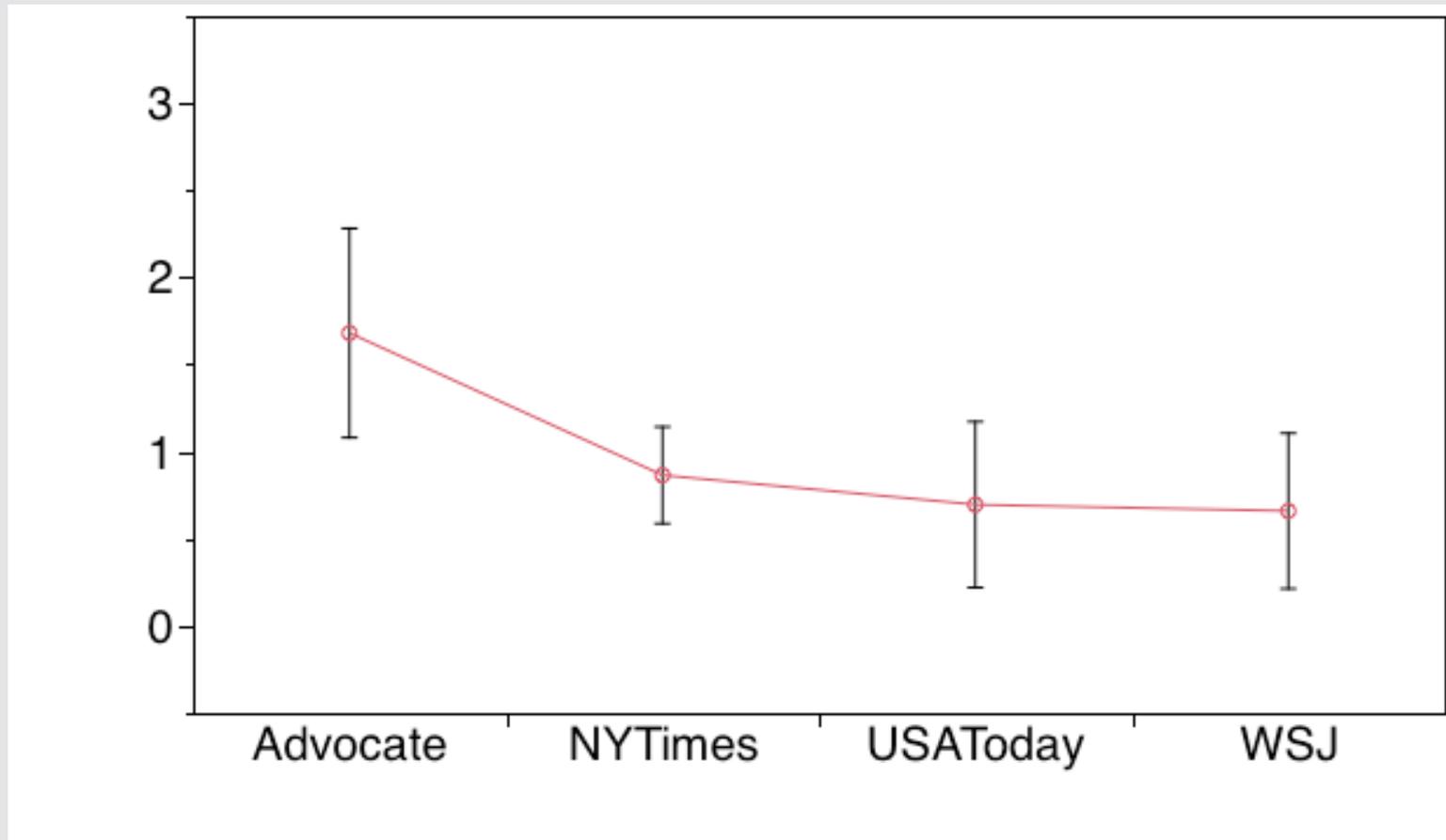
TYLER CLEMENTI



- 18-year-old Rutgers University student who jumped to his death after his roommate videostreamed Clementi kissing another man over the internet
- Put the bullying phenomenon in the national spotlight
- Presents opportunity to investigate news reports about a specifically LGBT case of bullying

RESULTS

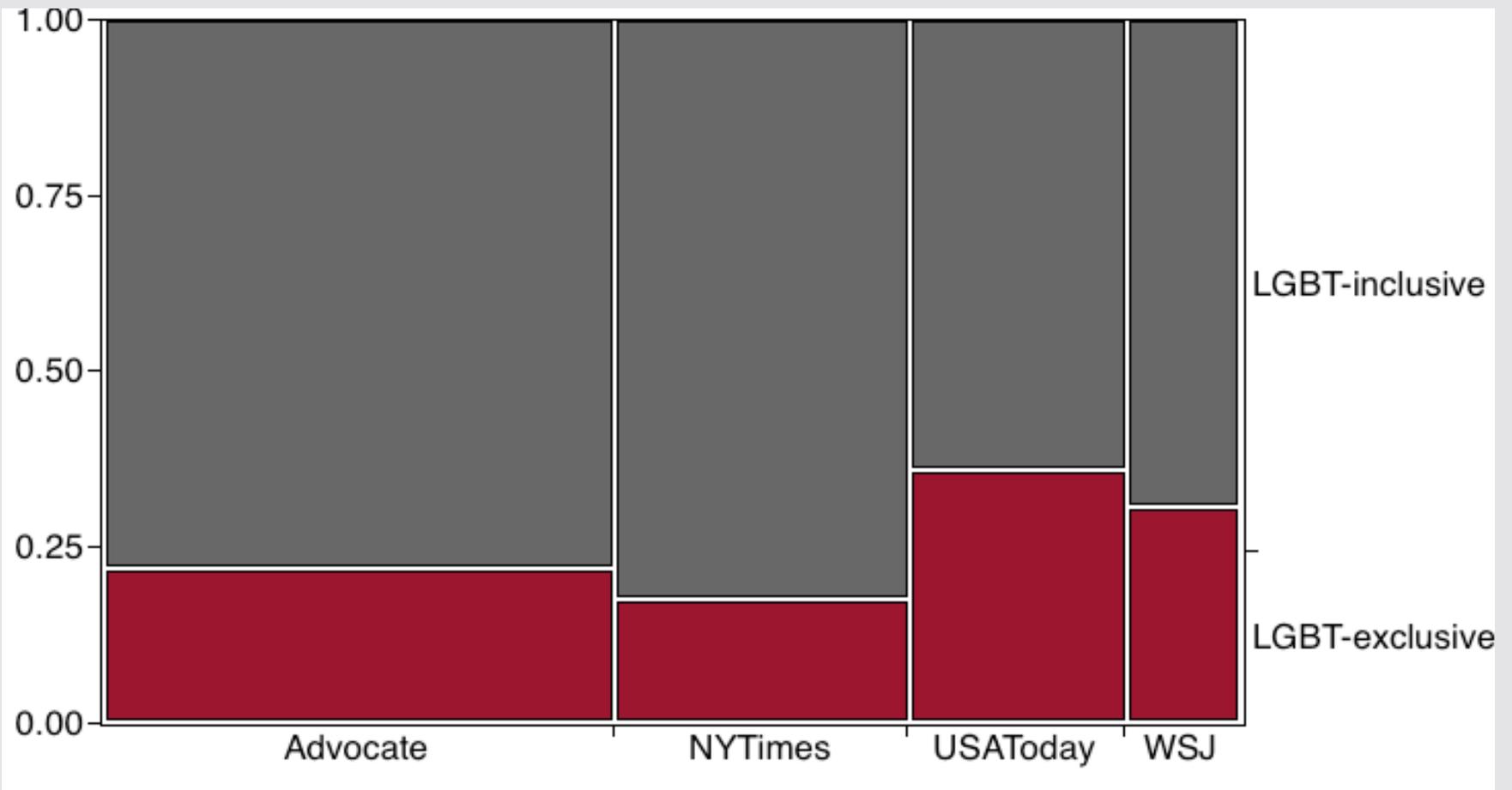
SEXUALITY INDEX ACROSS PERIODICALS



$F(3,127) = 3.5991, p < .0154$

RESULTS

SILENCE INDEX

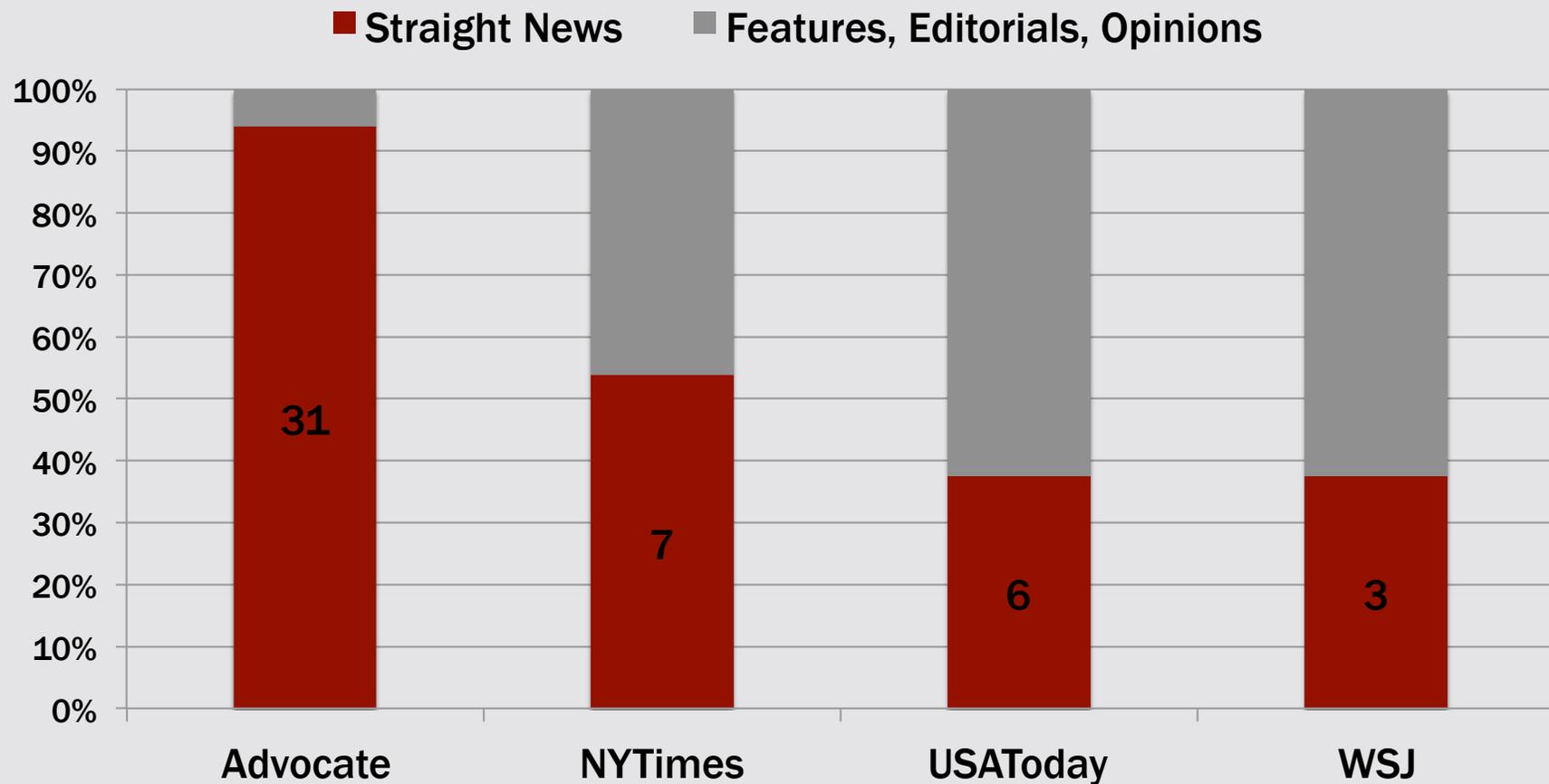


$X^2=3.028$, $df=3$, n.s.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

- Closer look on articles referring to Tyler Clementi's suicide published between September 22, 2010 and November 30, 2010.
- Goals
 - To compare how this incident is discussed in the four publications.
 - Investigate the extent to which this incident is understood as a case of bullying and specifically, as a case of LGBT bullying.

CONTENT ANALYSIS



$\chi^2=21.34$, $df=3$, $p < 0.0001$

FEATURES, EDITORIALS, OPINIONS

- Many of these articles discuss how Tyler Clementi’s suicide sheds light on issues that are of interest to the general public (e.g. online privacy, suicide prevention, mental health).

USAToday	Oct 4	“Suicide shows need for civility, privacy online”
USAToday	Oct 4	“Privacy no more? Tyler Clementi’s death should rattle us all”
NYTimes	Oct 17	“Little brother is watching”
USAToday	Oct 19	“In our social media world, is empathy dying?”
USAToday	Oct 4	“After recent string of suicides, authorities aim for prevention”
WSJ	Sept 30	“Rutgers suicide highlights mental health challenges at college”

- The articles use Tyler Clementi’s suicide as an example to discuss issues that are of interest to non-LGBT readers, with issues pertinent to LGBT people appearing at the end of the article.

FEATURES, EDITORIALS, OPINIONS

- In several *USA Today* and *WSJ* articles, the Tyler Clementi incident is used to discuss cyber-bullying in general.

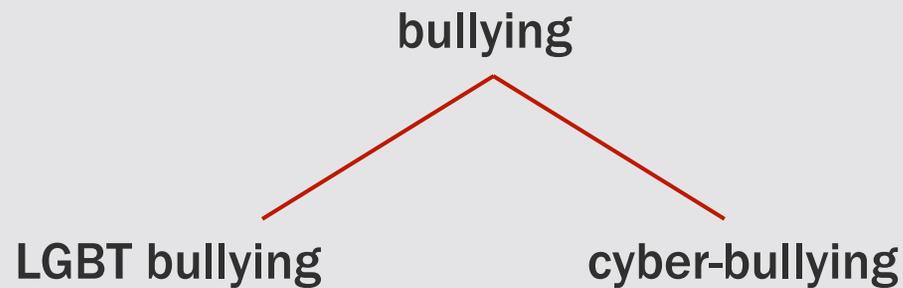
USAToday	Oct 6	“Shame the cyber-bullies”
WSJ	Sept 30	“Cyberbullying goes to college”

- By contrast, the *New York Times* devotes more attention to the kind of cyber-bullying that LGBT people endure.

NYTimes	Oct 1	“Online musings point to student’s state of mind before a suicide”
NYTimes	Oct 3	“Bullying, suicide, punishment”
NYTimes	Oct 4	“Several recent suicides put light on pressures facing gay teenagers”
NYTimes	Oct 9	“Gay harassment and the struggle for inclusion”
NYTimes	Oct 23	“At a Long Island middle school, a course in what unites and divides”

MEANING OF 'BULLYING'

- LGBT bullying seems to be subsumed under the umbrella term of 'bullying' in *USA Today* and *WSJ*.



IMPLICATIONS

■ Practical

- The explosion of public discourses on bullying has no doubt increased awareness of and attention to the bullying phenomenon.
- However, characterizing LGBT bullying in general terms diverts attention from the unique challenges faced by LGBT youth.
- Striking differences across the periodicals suggest that greater care should be taken to report news about LGBT bullying in a socially responsible manner.

■ Theoretical

- LGBT people are represented only when their interests coincide with hegemonic interests.
- We hope further research will uncover how other linguistic taxonomic hierarchies are used to sustain power relations.