Evaluation of a Public Awareness Campaign to Prevent High School Dropout

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Published online: 29 June 2016
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Abstract Many advocacy organizations devote time and resources to increasing community awareness and educating the public in an effort to gain support for their issue. One such effort, the Dropout Prevention Campaign by America’s Promise Alliance, aimed to increase the visibility of the high school dropout problem and mobilize the community to take action. The objective of this paper is to evaluate the framing of the Dropout Prevention Campaign in television news media. To evaluate this campaign, television news coverage about high school dropout in 12 U.S. communities ($N = 982$) was examined. A content analysis of news transcripts was conducted and coded to determine the definition of the problem, the reasons for dropout and the possible solutions. Findings indicated that the high school dropout problem was most often framed (30 % of news segments) in terms of the economic and societal implications for the community. Individual student factors as well as broader societal influences were frequently discussed as possible reasons for dropout. The most commonly mentioned solutions were school-based interventions. News segments that mentioned America’s Promise Alliance were more likely to frame the issue as a crisis and to use statistics to illustrate that point. Solutions that were more likely to appear in America’s Promise segments promoted community and cross-sector involvement, consistent with the messages promoted by the Dropout Prevention Campaign. The findings suggest that a media content analysis can be an effective framework for analyzing a prevention campaign.

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Keywords Media campaign · Dropout prevention · Content analysis · Television news

Introduction

In the United States, high school graduation rates hovered around 75 % from the 1970s through 2008 (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). Although this rate increased to 80 % for the class of 2012 (Balfanz et al., 2014; Stetser & Stillwell, 2014), some groups continue to graduate at substantially lower rates, including young men of color, youth in urban areas, and students from low-income families (Balfanz et al., 2014). These students are missing the benefits of earning a high school diploma, which increase job prospects as well as opportunities for post-secondary training and education (Settersten & Ray, 2010). To address this issue, a national nonprofit organization, America's Promise Alliance, set a goal of raising the national high school graduation rate to 90 % by 2020 and embarked on its Dropout Prevention Campaign (<http://www.americaspromise.org/dropout-prevention-campaign>).

The goal of this campaign was to raise awareness of the dropout issue and mobilize the community to take action. The campaign acted at the local, state, and national levels. The components included the release of a national report on high school dropout, called *Cities in Crisis* (Swanson, 2008, 2009); emphasis on cross-sector collaborative action in 12 cities, called the Featured Communities Initiative (Bai, Corra, Gifford, & Wells, 2015); and a series of Dropout Prevention Summits held in cities across the United States (Evans & Gifford, 2011). America's Promise supported 105 summits—one in each state and one in 55 major cities. America's Promise selected these cities because they contained at least one of the nation's "dropout factories"—a term used to describe schools where 60 % or fewer of the ninth graders were graduating within 4 years (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

The Dropout Prevention Campaign could be considered a "public will" campaign, that is, an attempt to increase the importance of a social problem in the public's eye (Coffman, 2002). The objectives of a public will campaign are to: increase the public's awareness of an issue; affect perceptions of who is responsible; increase awareness about solutions; influence criteria to evaluate programs and policies; and engage and mobilize the community to take action (Coffman, 2002). Media coverage is one of the factors that influences public awareness of an issue (Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Smith, 1987; Yanovitzky, 2002). Further, the way in which the topic is presented to the public has the potential to influence the public's awareness (Fan, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Although national campaigns focused on public education are fairly new (e.g., Common Core State Standards), campaigns that focus on public health issues have a long history of media advocacy. For example, public health media campaigns have focused on combatting obesity (Campo & Mastin, 2007), reducing smoking rates (Bero & Kennedy, 1999), and reducing incidences of drunken driving (Yanovitzky, 2002). In the case of high school dropouts, changing the narrative about who is responsible for the problem and who is accountable for the solutions are among the goals for raising public awareness and mobilizing the community to take effective actions.

Agenda Setting and Framing

Awareness of an issue can be influenced by what the field of mass communications refers to as *agenda setting* (McCombs, 2010). News coverage that provides information concerning what one should think about is considered the first level of agenda setting. In the second level of agenda setting, specific attributes of the issue are given more salience (McCombs, 2010; Weaver, 2007). Media framing is similar to level two agenda setting in that it influences ways of thinking about an issue. In framing, how an issue is presented can influence how people think about that issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The framing of an issue highlights some aspects while allowing others to “fade into the background” (Graber, 2002, p. 173). Media frames influence public perceptions by building on the audience’s pre-existing knowledge (Cohen, 1963; Clawson, Nelson, & Oxley, 1997). According to Entman (1993), framing includes both selection and salience. Entman (1993) outlines four types of frames: how the problem is defined, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and solutions or treatment recommendations.

Issue Definition

How the media defines an issue can influence the audience’s perceived importance of the issue. For example, a study of drug-related news coverage found that coverage that called drug use a “crisis” was more likely to increase public concern and increase the number of people who agreed that drugs were the biggest problem facing the country (Fan, 1996). Presenting statistics is another tool for framing the urgency of an issue. Accurate and reliable statistics provide a logical way for the public to determine a problem’s severity (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). National or community-specific data, along with the media’s choice of words to describe the data (such as “crisis”), can highlight the severity of the problem.

Attribution of Responsibility

News coverage can influence whether responsibility for the problem is assigned to certain individuals or groups or to the larger society. When the coverage describes events in general terms, as in a public will campaign, the responsibility for providing a solution typically falls on society at large. Public will campaigns emerged as an alternative to individual behavior-change strategies that have been criticized for “blaming the victim” (Salmon et al., 2003). In an individual behavior-change approach, each person is responsible for his or her own circumstances and must make personal changes to solve the problem. Public will campaigns, on the other hand, recognize that many problems are the result of social conditions that require societal-level changes.

Current Study

Although evaluations of public will campaigns are more common in the fields of public health and political science, issues related to the educational field can also be evaluated using this framework. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine

agenda setting and framing of the high school dropout issue in local television markets. For this study, we coded and analyzed coverage of the high school dropout issue in U.S. media markets of the 12 communities that participated in the America's Promise Alliance Featured Communities Initiative. The research questions explored in this paper include:

1. How did television news coverage frame the high school dropout issue?
2. Did television news coverage of the high school dropout issue that referenced America's Promise Alliance differ from coverage that did not reference America's Promise Alliance?

Methods

Sample

Local television news coverage from the 12 featured communities in the U.S. was retrieved from Critical Mention (<http://www.criticalmention.com/>), a broadcast monitoring service. America's Promise Alliance selected these 12 communities, in part, because of their strong local connections with national non-profit agencies in addition to high dropout rates. Non-profit partners, including the Boys and Girls Clubs, Communities in Schools, YMCA, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the United Way in each of the 12 featured communities, worked together to catalyze collaborative action to address the high school dropout problem.

The sample for this study consists of every television broadcast news segment in these 12 media markets during 2009 that contained the terms “dropout” or “drop out” or the phrase “high school completion.” The sample included 982 segments from any of the local news programs or local talk news shows. Previous media analysis studies (Chapman, Du, Hinchcliff, Ivers, & Senserrick, 2010; Hinchcliff et al., 2012) have employed similar methods. The majority of the news segments aired during either the morning hours from 5 to 11:59 a.m. (41 %) or during the evening hours from 5 to 11:59 p.m. (41 %). Some news segments aired in several time slots during the day, such as the 6 a.m. news, the 12 noon news, and again during the 6 p.m. news. The sample included each of these segments because the various news programs likely reached different audiences.

Coding Procedures

We coded television news transcripts using QDA Miner (Provalis Research, 2008), a qualitative data analysis software program. QDA Miner facilitates hand coding of content by allowing researchers to tag sections of news segments with the relevant code and allows for testing inter-coder agreement. We created the codes using a two-step process. First, we read a sample of about 10 % of the television news transcripts to determine their content and the ways in which dropout was framed, using Entman's (1993) media frames as described above of problem definition,

causal interpretation, and treatment recommendations as a starting point. We developed subthemes based on a close reading of the sample of transcripts and the messaging points promoted by America's Promise Alliance.

Then trained coders (including the authors and four undergraduate research assistants) read all 982 television news segments in their entirety and coded them for primary themes and subthemes in QDA Miner. To develop a shared understanding of the codes, coders underwent an initial training and had three subsequent training meetings. Coders discussed any discrepancies among themselves until they reached a consensus.

To establish inter-coder agreement, we double coded approximately 20 % of the America's Promise Alliance news sample ($n = 16$) and 20 % of the non-America's Promise Alliance news sample ($n = 181$). Coders were considered to be in agreement if they coded the same subthemes for a given news segment. For the America's Promise Alliance sample, the overall inter-coder agreement was 98.1 %, with a per code range of 93.8–100 % (Scott's $P_i = 0.945$; Craig, 1981). The overall inter-coder agreement for the non-America's Promise Alliance news sample was 99.2 % (Scott's $P_i = 0.961$; per code range of 97.1–100 %). Once the coding was complete, we exported the codes and codebook to a dataset for further analysis using STATA release 13.

Coders categorized news segments as related to America's Promise Alliance if the segment mentioned America's Promise Alliance, Colin or Alma Powell (the founder and chair of the board of America's Promise Alliance), or a Dropout Prevention Summit. In addition, news segments that aired within 2 days of April 22, 2009, and that cited a new national report on high school dropout were assumed to be referring to *Cities in Crisis*, a report released on that date, and were also categorized as related to America's Promise Alliance. We also examined the number of words per segment in the analyses to determine if longer news pieces were the reason that the America's Promise Alliance segments included more of the explanatory codes.

Coding Categories

The primary themes that coders identified included problem definition, reasons for dropout, and solutions. Table 1 contains examples of how coded news segments map onto each theme and subtheme. These themes are similar to Entman's (1993) media frames of problem definition, causal interpretation, and treatment recommendations. To generate subthemes, coders read a sample of the transcripts and categorized the ways in which the issues were presented. The *problem definition* code described how high school dropout was discussed in the coverage. For example, high school dropout was referred to as a problem that needs to be addressed immediately, as an issue that has implications beyond not finishing school, or as an area where improvements are being made. This category also included whether local or national data were used to further explain the urgency of the problem. Subthemes within the *problem definition* code included: economic/societal impact, such as increased unemployment or poverty; use of statistics; crisis or

Table 1 Coding themes, subthemes, and examples from television news coverage on dropout

Theme	Subtheme	Example
Problem definition	Economic/societal impact	<i>During his address to Congress last month, the president declared that America's high school and college dropout rates were a recipe for economic decline; and just yesterday, his press secretary emphasized that fixing education is part of fixing the economy (KTVU [Fox], San Francisco/Oakland, 3/10/2009).</i>
	Use of statistics	<i>One student every 26 s drops out... It is a large issue. It is not isolated to two or three cities across the country (WTTG [Fox], Washington, D.C., 4/23/2009).</i>
	Crisis/need to act urgently	<i>The education crisis in this country is worsening. The number of high school dropouts has reached a staggering rate, and lawmakers are struggling to find new ways to tackle this national problem (WKRN [ABC], Nashville, 5/13/2009).</i>
	Hopeful/improvement	<i>Well, here is some good news. The dropout rate is going down in some big cities, including Chicago. While the problem is still bad, cities like Philadelphia, Tucson, and Kansas City have made huge gains (WFLD [Fox], Chicago, 4/22/2009).</i>
Reasons for dropout	Student	<i>Students skipping class is one reason for a 29 % dropout rate this year in that school district (KTVU [Fox], San Francisco/Oakland, 3/23/2009).</i>
	Societal	<i>When you hear high school dropouts, you may think of kids who do not want to be in school, but experts say our faltering economy is forcing even motivated students to drop out because they're homeless (KTRK [ABC], Houston, 10/3/2009).</i>
	Parent/family	<i>Families aren't what they used to be, a lot more divorce and blended families, so the kids don't have the support mechanism from their homes and communities (WISH [CBS], Indianapolis, 9/20/2009).</i>
	School	<i>If this district took care of business the way our children deserved that they had taken care of business, we would not have a dropout rate that I believe is much more than 27 % (WDIV [NBC], Detroit, 6/29/2009).</i>
	Expectations	<i>It's time to expect more from our students... and prepare every child everywhere in America to outcompete any worker anywhere in the world (WAGA [Fox], Atlanta, 3/10/2009).</i>
Solutions	School-based program/initiative	<i>We need to make our high schools more compelling for students. We need to do a more effective job of understanding why they drop out, how we can retain them in school (WLS [ABC], Chicago, 5/10/2009).</i>
	Parent and/or individual activities	<i>The parents need to get involved and encourage your kids to stay in school. Your first teachers in life are your parents (WNYW [Fox], New York, NY, 2/26/2009).</i>
	Policy and government solution	<i>...adopting a \$2 billion incentive program that provides matching federal money for dropouts who go back to school (WSB [ABC], Atlanta, 5/10/2009).</i>
	Community program/initiative	<i>Communities in Schools prides itself on partnerships. We are a 30-year-old organization working to keep kids in schools (KRIV [Fox], Houston, 9/5/2009).</i>
	Community and cross-sector involvement	<i>City politicians will join educators, business and community leaders, and child advocates... they hope to develop an action plan for increasing the area's high school graduation rate (WLBT [NBC], Jackson, 3/3/2009).</i>

Table 1 continued

Theme	Subtheme	Example
	Early intervention	<i>A new survey shows that most Americans are unaware of the impact they can have on a child's life just by reading to them. Three to five year olds that are not read to are likely to later drop out of high school (KTVU [Fox], San Francisco/Oakland, 09/17/2009).</i>
	Business involvement	<i>Educators say extra involvement from businesses is a key component in the effort to keep kids in class (WLBT [NBC], Jackson, 3/31/2009).</i>

need to act urgently; and evidence for hope or improvements in addressing the dropout problem.

The *reasons for dropout* code included problems such as a lack of rigor in schools, teen pregnancy, home life disruptions, low expectations for students, and societal factors such as poverty. The subthemes for the reasons for dropout were categorized into: expectations, societal factors, parent/family, schools, and students.

The *solutions* code included approaches such as school curriculum and policy, community involvement, student and parent engagement, and various programs and initiatives. The code is similar to Entman's *treatment recommendations* and includes possible ways to address the dropout problem, such as: school-based programs or initiatives; parent and/or individual activities (including student-focused solutions); policy and government solutions; community programs and initiatives; community and cross-sector involvement; business involvement; data tracking; early intervention; and other interventions. For example, a mentoring program was coded as "community programs and initiatives" if it was based with an agency outside the school, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs. A program that provided mentors in a school setting was coded under the "school-based program/initiative" code.

Analytic Strategy

To answer the first question about how the high school dropout issue was framed in television news, we used proportions tests to compare the proportion of new segments that mentioned each primary code (problem definition, reasons for dropout, and solutions). In addition, we used proportions tests to compare the frequency of each subtheme to the frequency of the other subtheme within that frame (i.e., subthemes within problem definition, reasons for dropout, and solutions). The unit of analysis was a television news segment.

To answer the second question of whether television coverage of the high school dropout issue that referenced America's Promise Alliance differed from coverage that did not mention America's Promise Alliance, we used both bivariate and multivariate analyses. First, proportions tests were used to compare the relative frequency of each subtheme in America's Promise Alliance and non-America's

Promise Alliance segments. Second, we used logistic regression to model each subtheme. The primary variable of interest was a binary variable that indicated “one” if the news segment was an America’s Promise Alliance news segment and “zero” otherwise. The model also included a continuous variable to control for the length of the news segment (number of words divided by 100). The total number of words in the television segment was included because longer segments would have a greater possibility of mentioning each code. The model also controlled for the clustering at the city level to account for non-independence by including a random error term for city (Guo & Zhao, 2000).

Results

Framing of the High School Dropout Issue

Table 2 describes the sample and compares the occurrence of each subtheme by whether or not the segment mentioned America’s Promise Alliance. The sample consisted of 982 television transcripts (79 America’s Promise and 903 non-America’s Promise) that aired during 2009 in the 12 selected cities and were related to dropout or high school completion.

Problem Definition

Fifty-six percent of television segments included at least one of the four subthemes for problem definition. The problem definition subtheme most frequently used in the television news coverage of high school dropout was economic or societal impact (30 % of the news segments). The next most common means of defining the problem was the use of local and/or national statistics (21 %), followed by crisis (15 %), and the least frequently used of our subthemes was hopeful/improving (8 %). Tests of proportions revealed that the relative frequency of each subtheme was significantly different: economic/societal impact versus use of statistics ($z = 4.583$, $p < 0.001$); use of statistic versus crisis ($z = 3.561$, $p < 0.001$); and crisis versus hopeful/improving ($z = 5.091$, $p < 0.001$).

Reasons for Dropout

Overall, 32 % of television news segments included at least one reason for dropout. Responsibility for the problem—i.e., reasons for dropping out of high school—was more frequently framed as either stemming from students (14 %) or societal factors such as poverty (12 %). Results from the proportions test indicated that the proportion of news segments mentioning either of these two subthemes was not significantly different ($z = 0.941$, $p = 0.347$). The next most common subtheme was school factors (8 %) which was significantly different from societal factors ($z = 3.400$, $p = 0.001$). This was followed by parent or family factors (5 %) which was mentioned in fewer news segments than school factors ($z = 2.515$, $p = 0.012$). Finally, the low expectations code was the least commonly used subtheme in our

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and logistic regression results of television news segments: comparison of America's Promise versus non-America's Promise segments

Themes and subthemes	Descriptive statistics				Logistic regressions ^b Odds Ratio of APA versus Non-APA (SE)
	Total (<i>N</i> = 982)	America's Promise Alliance (APA) (<i>n</i> = 79)	Non- America's Promise Alliance (<i>n</i> = 903)	Test of Proportions of the Comparison Between APA and Non-APA ^a <i>Z</i>	
Problem definition	553 (56 %)	55 (70 %)	498 (55 %)	2.487*	2.46 (1.33)
Economic/societal impact	299 (30 %)	20 (25 %)	279 (31 %)	1.034	1.03 (0.47)
Use of statistics	210 (21 %)	35 (44 %)	175 (19 %)	−5.181***	3.77 (1.91) **
Crisis	149 (15 %)	20 (25 %)	129 (14 %)	−2.621**	2.63 (0.94) **
Hopeful/improving	77 (8 %)	25 (32 %)	52 (6 %)	−8.208***	8.86 (5.48)***
Reasons for dropout	312 (32 %)	16 (20 %)	296 (33 %)	2.293*	0.68 (0.31)
Students	134 (14 %)	2 (3 %)	132 (15 %)	3.001**	0.19 (0.19)
Societal factors	120 (12 %)	6 (8 %)	114 (13 %)	1.309	0.71 (0.48)
Schools	75 (8 %)	4 (5 %)	71 (8 %)	0.898	0.80 (0.36)
Parent/family	48 (5 %)	6 (8 %)	42 (5 %)	−1.164	2.99 (2.10)
Expectations	28 (3 %)	5 (6 %)	23 (3 %)	−1.937	4.34 (3.95)
Solutions	687 (70 %)	48 (61 %)	639 (71 %)	1.860	0.81 (0.37)
School-based	251 (26 %)	23 (29 %)	228 (25 %)	−0.755	1.36 (0.76)
Parent and/or individual	203 (21 %)	10 (13 %)	193 (21 %)	1.834	0.66 (0.32)
Policy and government	202 (21 %)	4 (5 %)	198 (22 %)	3.556***	0.21 (0.14) *
Community programs and initiatives	98 (10 %)	6 (8 %)	92 (10 %)	0.737	0.87 (0.71)
Community and cross-sector involvement	87 (9 %)	28 (35 %)	59 (7 %)	−8.671***	10.24 (5.41) ***
Other interventions	86 (9 %)	3 (4 %)	83 (9 %)	1.626	0.46 (0.27)
Early intervention	44 (4 %)	0 (0 %)	44 (5 %)	2.007*	–
Business	30 (3 %)	2 (3 %)	28 (3 %)	0.282	0.88 (0.76)
City					
Atlanta, GA	52 (5 %)	2 (3 %)	50 (6 %)	1.144	
Chicago, IL	65 (7 %)	10 (13 %)	55 (6 %)	−2.251*	
Detroit, MI	104 (11 %)	0 (0 %)	104 (12 %)	3.190**	
Houston, TX	153 (16 %)	2 (3 %)	151 (17 %)	3.335**	
Indianapolis, IN	53 (5 %)	18 (23 %)	35 (4 %)	−7.132***	
Jackson, MS	65 (7 %)	15 (19 %)	50 (6 %)	−4.611***	
Louisville, KY	53 (5 %)	2 (3 %)	51 (6 %)	1.175	
Nashville, TN	52 (5 %)	13 (17 %)	39 (4 %)	−4.619***	

Table 2 continued

Themes and subthemes	Descriptive statistics				Logistic regressions ^b Odds Ratio of APA versus Non-APA (<i>SE</i>)
	Total (<i>N</i> = 982)	America's Promise Alliance (APA) (<i>n</i> = 79)	Non- America's Promise Alliance (<i>n</i> = 903)	Test of Proportions of the Comparison Between APA and Non-APA ^a <i>Z</i>	
New Orleans, LA	50 (5 %)	0 (0 %)	50 (6 %)	2.147*	
New York, NY	132 (13 %)	2 (3 %)	130 (14 %)	2.965**	
Washington, DC	78 (8 %)	8 (10 %)	70 (8 %)	−0.748	
Oakland, CA	125 (13 %)	7 (9 %)	118 (13 %)	1.076	
Average # of words in each segment (in 100 s) (standard deviation)	2.73 (2.43)	1.67 (1.31)	2.82 (2.48)	6.792*** ^a	

SE standard error

^a The difference in the average # of words in television segments between America's Promise Alliance and non-America's Promise Alliance articles was tested using a *t* test with unequal variances (degrees of freedom = 981) whereas all other tests are *z* values from tests of proportions

^b Each subtheme served as the dependent variable in a logistic regression model. The models controlled for whether or not the segment was associated with America's Promise Alliance, the length of the news segment (number of words divided by 100), and a random error term to account for the clustering at the city-level

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

sample. Low expectations was mentioned in fewer news segments than were parent or family factors ($z = 2.340$, $p = 0.019$).

Solutions

Overall, 70 % of television segments included at least one of eight subthemes of solutions for high school dropout, the most frequent code in this study. Twenty-two percent of television segments included two or more solutions. The most frequently mentioned solutions to dropout were school-based (26 %). The proportion of news segments that included school-based solutions was significantly higher than those that focused on the parent and/or individual (21 %; $z = 2.569$, $p = 0.01$) and on policy and government (21 %; $z = 2.625$, $p = 0.009$). The proportions of news segments that used the subtheme of parent and/or individual did not differ significantly from the proportion of news segments that used the subtheme policy and government solutions. Three subthemes were tied for the next most prevalent solution: community programs and initiatives (10 %), community and cross-sector involvement (9 %), and other initiatives (9 %). Less frequently mentioned subthemes included early intervention (4 %) and business involvement (3 %).

The difference between other initiatives and early interventions was significantly different ($z = 3.812$, $p < 0.001$).

In summary, the most common primary theme in the news segments was a solution for the dropout issue (70 %). The proportion of news segments that mentioned a solution was significantly different ($z = -6.268$, $p < 0.001$) than the second most frequent theme—definition of the problem (56 %). Finally, the proportion of news segments that mentioned a problem definition was significantly different than the percentage of news segments that mentioned a reason for dropout (32 %; $z = 10.954$, $p < 0.001$).

Television News Coverage of America's Promise Alliance

To answer the second research question, we examined the television news segments that mentioned America's Promise Alliance as compared to other news segments about dropout that did not mention America's Promise Alliance.

Problem Definition

According to both the bivariate and multivariate analysis, how the high school dropout problem was defined differed in television news segments from America's Promise Alliance relative to non-America's Promise Alliance. While similar proportions of television segments included the subtheme economic or societal impact (25 vs. 31 %, $z = 1.034$, $p = 0.301$), America's Promise Alliance television segments had a higher odds of using statistics ($OR\ 3.77$, $p = 0.009$), describing the problem as a crisis ($OR\ 2.63$, $p = 0.007$), and/or using the subtheme hopeful/improving ($OR\ 8.86$, $p < 0.001$).

Reasons for Dropout

In general, America's Promise Alliance and non-America's Promise Alliance coverage did not differ as to the use of subthemes related to reasons for dropout. While bivariate tests of proportions indicated that non-America's Promise Alliance news segments were more likely to use the subtheme that placed the blame on students themselves (15 vs. 3 %; $z = 3.001$, $p = 0.003$), this difference was not statistically significant after controlling for segment length and adjusting for city-level clustering.

Solutions

America's Promise Alliance and non-America's Promise Alliance television news segments differed in their use of two subthemes for solutions. Relative to non-America's Promise Alliance, America's Promise Alliance television news segments had a 79 % lower odds of mentioning policy and government solutions ($p = 0.022$) and were 10 times more likely to include the subtheme community and cross-sector involvement ($p < 0.001$).

In summary, news segments that mentioned America's Promise Alliance were more likely to include statistics about the dropout problem, refer to the problem as a

crisis, and state something hopeful about the issue. In addition, news segments that referred to America's Promise Alliance were more likely to mention community-based solutions.

Discussion

According to agenda-setting theory, the media can influence the public's perception of issues through its decisions about what issues to cover (McCombs, 2010). The media may also highlight some aspects of the issue relative to others (which is known as the second level of agenda-setting, or issue framing) and thereby influence public opinion (McCombs, 2010). Although public health campaigns have been evaluated based on the content of media coverage, the effects of educational campaigns are less often examined in this manner (see Center for Media and Public Affairs, 2009, for a notable exception). To begin to fill this gap in the literature, our first research question examined how television coverage framed the high school dropout issue. Over half of the television news segments in this sample included information to define the dropout issue. In about a third of the news segments, the dropout issue was framed in terms of the economic or societal effects of dropout on the community. In 21 % of the segments, the dropout issue was framed as a crisis or needing urgent attention. This is important because, according to previous research on substance use, framing an issue as a crisis is more likely to increase public concern (Fan, 1996). Although the percentage of students graduating from high school has been rising in recent years (Balfanz et al., 2014; Stetser & Stillwell, 2014), the "crisis" highlighted the importance of the issue and its societal and economic impact.

In a public awareness campaign, responsibility for this issue is another important frame. In deciding what aspects of an issue to highlight, media coverage implies a definition of the problem and offers potential solutions. A variety of reasons for dropout were found in this television news sample. Students themselves were most often cited as responsible for dropout due to skipping class, teen pregnancy, or low motivation. Too narrow of a focus on individual reasons could inhibit collective action, as individualistic explanations for problems often do not attract strong support for change (Wright, 1993). An almost equal number of news segments highlighted societal influences that may be related to dropout, such as a "faltering economy," as specified in Table 1.

The majority of television news segments mentioned solutions or, in Entman's (1993) terms, *treatment recommendations*. The solutions pointed to an array of potential actors in the community. Not surprisingly, the most common solutions mentioned were school-based. This mirrors national, state, and local attention to improving curriculum, improving teacher quality, and improving teacher pay. Other fairly common solutions to the dropout issue were solutions based on parental and/or individual change and policy and government solutions. While some coverage suggests that students themselves or their parents should be the focus of the solution, an equal number of news segments mentioned policy and government solutions such as providing federal funds for programs that bring dropouts back to school.

While this study was among the first to examine education messages in television news segments, future research should also consider other forms of media—particularly social media. Social media, through sites such as Twitter[®], Facebook[®], and even blogs and comment sections on news coverage, offer community organizations, community leaders, and members of the public an opportunity to express their opinions on a given topic. Such live interaction and involvement may have a powerful role in mobilizing community.

Conclusions

The results of this study provide preliminary evidence that the America's Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Campaign shifted how the media framed the dropout issue. For example, news segments related to America's Promise Alliance were more likely to frame the dropout issue both as a crisis and as improving, or that the situation was hopeful, than when the news segments were not related to America's Promise Alliance. Similarly, America's Promise coverage was more likely to use statistics to highlight the severity of the dropout issue, which is consistent with the goals of the Dropout Prevention Campaign. Furthermore, television news segments referencing America's Promise Alliance were much more likely to include community or cross-sector solutions for addressing high school dropout. The emphasis on cross-sector work by America's Promise Alliance is evident in the selection of hosts for dropout summits, which often included the mayor's or governor's offices or a local nonprofit (Evans & Gifford, 2011).

The America's Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Campaign has generated television news coverage with messaging that promotes the idea that dropout is a crisis and that the entire community—not just the individuals directly affected—are responsible for the solutions. The overall television news coverage of the dropout issue is positioning dropout as a problem in need of action at the individual, community, and policy levels. These messages are consistent with a public will campaign (Coffman, 2002) and may support community action to create programs and policies to prevent high school dropout.

Acknowledgments Funding for this study was provided in part by America's Promise Alliance. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of America's Promise Alliance.

Compliance With Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors conducted the data collection for this paper with the support of an evaluation contract with America's Promise Alliance.

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