

Media's Positive and Negative Frames in Reporting Celebrity
Deaths From Illegal Drug Overdoses Versus
Prescription Medication Overdoses

By

Michelle Wood

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Chairperson Muger Geana,
Assistant Professor

John Broholm, Associate Professor

Crystal Lumpkins, Assistant Professor

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The Thesis Committee for Michelle Wood certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Mugur Geana, Assistant Professor

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Abstract

This study compared the celebrity illegal drug overdose deaths of River Phoenix, Chris Farley, and Brad Renfro to the prescription drug overdose deaths of Anna Nicole Smith, Heath Ledger, and Brittany Murphy. This research used quantitative conceptual content analysis of news articles from The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, People, and Entertainment Weekly. This research discovered whether media used in this study framed prescription drug deaths more positively than illegal drug deaths, which was proved to be true. It also determined media did not employ socially responsible frames when reporting on these deaths. The last question in this research discovered if the type of drug involved in the celebrities' death influenced the way media portrayed the celebrities' character. This research proved that, when reporting on negative drug overdoses, media framed celebrities' perceptions negatively but found no evidence of positive celebrity perceptions when reporting about prescription drug overdoses.

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Though drug-related deaths among Hollywood celebrities are nothing new, a thought-provoking trend seems to have surfaced in recent years—that of celebrities overdosing on pharmaceutical drugs. This study compared the celebrity illegal drug overdose deaths of River Phoenix in 1993, Chris Farley in 1997 and Brad Renfro in 2008 to the prescription drug overdose deaths of Anna Nicole Smith in 2007, Heath Ledger in 2008 and Brittany Murphy in 2009. Using a quantitative content analysis of news articles from *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *People*, and *Entertainment Weekly*, this study attempted to discover whether media used in this study framed illegal drug deaths more negatively than prescription drug deaths, and if journalists employed socially responsible frames when reporting on these deaths. A final goal of this research was to discover if the type of drug involved in the celebrities' deaths influences how media portrayed the celebrities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why Celebrities?

Celebrities are an entity of popular culture and dominate many headlines every day. One study (Boon & Lomore, 2001) “found that 75 percent of young adults have a strong attraction to a celebrity at some point in their lives, with musicians and movie stars being the most popular recipients of adulation” (Shaw, Whitehead & Giles, 2010). Although the majority of participants in that study reported that their idols were a positive influence, an overriding concern in this field is that celebrities can act as advocates for undesirable behaviors (Shaw et al., 2010).

Additionally, the International Narcotics Control Board, a group that implements the United Nations' drug control conventions, claimed that celebrities who use drugs can have a large influence on young people's thoughts, attitudes and behaviors toward drug abuse (International

Narcotics Control Board, 2008). The primary concern here is that young people will attempt to emulate celebrities' behavior and engage in the risky behaviors of drug use and abuse.

Additionally, people sometimes see celebrities as if they are friends or even family (Gibson, 2007; Kearl, 2011; Terry, 1999). With increasing media platforms for people to interact with celebrities, fans can now, more than ever before, feel a sense of intimacy with their idols. It is also ironic that, just as audiences come to know public figures and celebrities through media, the audience's best outlet to mourn fallen stars is through media (Kitch, 2000). When a celebrity dies, media creates a community of collective mourning and provides an outlet to experience and share in the same grief many others feel (Gibson, 2007; Terry, 1999). In this way, media outlets become "national healers" (Kitch, 2000). The strangers that comprise these communities of mourning have common characteristics: "a powerful identification with a celebrity or world leader — someone they believe in, trust, or admire because of the work they do or simply because of who they are" (Gibson, 2007, p. 1). So when celebrities die, some individuals view the death as they would view the death of a friend (Kearl, 2011). Media feed off this phenomenon and create news headlines, stories, programs and products to earn a profit (Gibson, 2007; Signorile, 1999).

In death "it is a commonplace to represent dead celebrities...through this 'ordinary' lens" (Thomas, 2008). Kitch (2000) contended that the best accolade media can provide when reporting on celebrity deaths is to make the celebrity "common," therefore, connecting the celebrity directly to readers. Media uses narratives through which readers are given a consistent theme—a theme that the celebrities are "one of us" (Kitch, 2000, p. 171). Celebrities become characters that media use to create identities and memories. Furthermore, "American journalists use public figures to explain the national character, telling an instructive tale in which the lives

of the famous express the values of ‘everyone’” (Kitch, 2000, p. 172). In reporting about celebrity deaths, “it has also been argued that mediated mourning can be useful in giving people knowledge of the rules about when and how it is appropriate to express grief” (Thomas, 2008, p. 370).

The celebrities in this research were chosen because all were prominent figures in Hollywood, each one of them with a solid fan base. River Phoenix, Chris Farley and Brad Renfro all died as a result from using illegal drugs, while the deaths of Anna Nicole Smith, Heath Ledger and Brittany Murphy were caused by prescription medications. With the exception of Phoenix who died outside a nightclub, the others died within the comfort of their apartment, home or hotel room. Another factor relating the actors and actresses is that all the deaths were ruled accidental. Phoenix’s death came as a surprise to many because of his previously clean-cut image. Farley struggled with drug addiction and had sought treatment 17 different times (Nashawaty, 1998); Renfro had a history with drug addiction, beginning at age 15. However, circumstances leading up to Ledger’s, Smith’s and Murphy’s deaths were slightly different. Ledger used his prescriptions to treat insomnia, depression and anxiety. Smith and Murphy suffered from flu-like symptoms in the days before their deaths, which led to their use of prescription medications.

Why is this research important?

Although the media sometimes reports on celebrities’ drug habits, “the fondness celebrities have long had for cocaine, prescription painkillers and other dangerous substances goes largely unreported until someone ends up in rehab or dies of an overdose” (Goodman, 2008). This research aimed to find out when media does report on celebrity deaths from drugs,

whether it frames the cause of death and the celebrity's perception positively or negatively and if media used socially responsible frames in reporting about these deaths.

It seems that, no matter celebrities' transgressions in life, their death forgives them of these transgressions and casts celebrities in a new light. Celebrities are almost glorified in death—prominent examples being Michael Jackson and Ted Kennedy. Despite Jackson's legal troubles and child molestation allegations and Kennedy's controversial involvement in the death of a young woman in the 1960s, the public largely did not focus on these issues after their deaths (Marche, 2009). Celebrity deaths are “an occasion for the celebrity's media image once more to be recast, so that his or her ‘final’ cultural meaning is magnified” (Kitch, 2000, p. 176). This research also sought to explore if media's portrayal of celebrities' character was influenced by the type of drug—illegal or prescription—involved in their deaths.

It is also important to look at how media framed these deaths because there is not always an identifiable villain that caused the deaths. The public wants a villain and media gives that villain to them—“even the celebrities who overdosed died from something greater” (Kitch, 2000). In cases such as these, sometimes the drugs are the villains, which take fault away from the drug users. As celebrities continue to die from illegal and prescription drug overdoses, some believe that reporting on celebrity drug usage could help assuage this problem. Dr. Drew Pinsky, a board-certified addiction specialist and host of *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew*, contends that “the media have a moral responsibility to start reporting on celebrity drug abuse” (Goodman, 2008). This contention comes particularly in the wake of Ledger's death. Pinsky claims that, until media begin reporting on the extent of the drug-addled Hollywood scene, celebrity deaths from drug overdoses will continue to increase. However, some media correspondents and journalists find this difficult to do. They say the public will likely dislike a journalist for

reporting such things rather than believe the celebrity they idolize is a drug addict (Goodman, 2008). *Los Angeles Times* blogger Elizabeth Snead said she attempted to write about Renfro's inebriated behavior at a classy Hollywood party, but that portion of her article was edited out of the newspaper she worked for at the time (Goodman, 2008).

Pinsky claims that, not only media keep quiet on celebrity drug and prescription drug use during their lives, but they are even more reluctant to report about such use after the celebrity's death (Goodman, 2008). This research was not a call for media to become increasingly open about celebrity drug culture, but an exploration of how selected media report about celebrity deaths from illicit drug and prescription drug overdoses. The goal was to define how these mediums frame the deaths and the celebrities' perceptions, whether positively or negatively and if media employed socially responsible frames in educating the public about the dangers of illicit and prescription drugs.

Framing Theory

Framing theory is an "idea that people use sets of expectations to make sense of their social world and media contribute to those expectations" (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 282). Erving Goffman first introduced the framing concept in 1959 (Goffman, 1959) and further developed this research throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Goffman, 1974). In the 1970s and early 1980s, the framing theory became more widely accepted as a legitimate way to look at how individuals make sense of their social world. It states that individuals create frames based on their involvement and experience with events, particularly social events, and choose aspects of their perceived reality to make sense of their world (Druckman, 2001; Entman, 1993; Entman, 2007; Goffman, 1974; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). This was not an attempt to decipher the structure of

social life, but the “structure of experience individuals have at any moment of their social lives” (Goffman, 1974, p. 13). Furthermore, this theory applies to mass media because media has a large impact on the construction of reality due to its ability to “spin” stories. However, people still construct meaning for themselves based on preexisting experiences (Scheufele, 1999).

Primary frameworks are those that people employ when they see an event and apply a framework, or several frameworks, to interpret that event. In other words, primary frameworks give meaning to things that would otherwise be meaningless (Gamson, et. al., 1992; Goffman, 1974; Scheufele, 1999; Tuchman, 1978). Furthermore, studies have shown that framing influences the way audiences find meaning in news events, particularly ongoing coverage of events (Ryan, Carragee & Meinhofer, 2001; Valkenburg & Semetko, 1999). The ongoing coverage of celebrity deaths fits this description because in all the studied celebrities, investigations and toxicology tests occurred after their deaths.

Motive and intent are also additional factors that help users choose which framework to apply to a situation or event. Additionally, primary frameworks not only help people describe social events, but constitute the central elements of particular social groups’ cultures (Gamson, 1989; Goffman, 1974). The frame of the activity is people’s “understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting” (Goffman, 1974, p. 247).

Goffman (1979) extended his theory that frames influence what audiences see, hear and think to the field of mass media through his study of advertisements. He posited that women in advertisements reinforced how women are framed in daily life (Goffman, 1979). As the theory was adapted to journalism (Tuchman, 1978; Gitlin, 1980), such research revealed that news stories “reinforce socially accepted and expected ways of seeing the social world” (Baran &

Davis, 2009, p. 320). Shoemaker and Reese (1991) also applied framing to media and stated that individuals should compare media reality with social reality. In contrast to social reality, which is what society knows about itself, media reality is influenced by inside and outside factors (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). If media gives consumers the “reality” outside of what consumers experience for themselves, than the consumers’ “reality” can be constructed through the media (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991; Tuchman, 1974). Framing directs audiences’ “attention to the details of just how a communicated text exerts its power” (Entman, 1993, p. 55-56). It is impossible for one source to cover all realities, just as it is impossible for consumers to have access to every source. Consequently, there are numerous information sources that provide different realities, causing individuals’ realities to differ.

Some contemporary researchers (Gamson, 1989; Gamson et al., 1992) argue that individuals and groups create and endorse frames that further their interests in promoting certain ways to see the social world. These individuals and groups are often part of activist movements. These movements can spark changes in society and alternate frames, but the groups need to specifically state their views. However, in order for these frames to be effective, the movements must persuade journalists to present their stories in a manner that expresses those frames. Framing does not focus on the selection of issues that media cover, but on how those issues are presented (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

A challenge to the framing theory arises when a long-standing tenet of journalism is added to the equation—objectivity. Rather than promoting objectivity in journalism, the framing theory implies that journalism should be used as a forum to openly discuss ideas about the social world (Baran & Davis, 2009; Tuchman, 1978). Journalists may write objectively but can still, whether consciously or unconsciously, include a dominant frame in the news text that does not

allow most audience members to make balanced assessments of a situation. Some researchers contend that journalists do not fully understand framing so they often allow media manipulators to impose dominant frames in the news (Entman, 1989; Entman, 1993; Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). Furthermore, frames can be so powerful that they may guide public opinion (Entman, 1993). As a way to identify frames, researchers need to look at the interpretive commentary, such as metaphors, catchphrases or other symbolic devices, that surround news rather than focus on news content alone (Gamson, 1989; Matthes, 2009).

Several powerful institutions can effectively influence and structure news coverage and are able to advocate frames that reinforce existing social values. Both inside and outside factors influence media's content. Studies (Scheufele, 1999; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978) list factors that may potentially influence the way journalists frame issues. This list includes "social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressures of interest groups, journalistic routines, and ideological or political orientations of journalists" (Scheufele, 1999). Frames call attention to certain aspects, while simultaneously directing attention away from other aspects. The exclusion of frames is just as significant as the inclusion of frames in media (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1989).

Framing studies also take salience into consideration. Salience is the act of making information more prominent, noticeable, meaningful or memorable in order to enhance the probability that the receivers of a message will process it and remember it (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). Frames "introduce or raise salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way" (Entman, 2007, p. 164). Frames in articles about celebrity deaths from illegal drugs and

prescription medication overdoses could potentially shape the way audiences feel not only about the drugs but about the celebrities' perception, as well.

Furthermore, Iyengar (1991) showed that news media have the ability to frame questions of responsibility, which lead audiences to determine the causes of social problems and the solutions to such problems. Social and cultural norms are just some of the influences over the way news media frame issues. When reporting on social issues, however, "the media tend to portray society as fundamentally sound, attributing most social problems to irresponsible or unfortunate individuals" (Kim, Carvalho & Davis, 2010, p. 564). Discussions on responsibility in media have two main viewpoints. The first view states that social problems are caused largely by individuals and thus, change efforts are concentrated on the individuals with the problematic behavior (Kim et al., 2010). The other view states that social problems primarily stem from social and environmental factors and reform efforts aim at changes in government policies and business practices (Kim et al, 2010). Kim and Willis (2007) found this claim to be true in news coverage concerning obesity. The media focused on the individuals' problems rather than mentioning the obesity as a societal problem because concentrating on the individual fit the strong individualism so present in American culture (Kim & Willis, 2007). Although this study focuses on drugs rather than obesity, the same principles are applicable.

One study (Fan, 1996) found that, when writing about drugs, media's discussion fell into five main topics: "1) politics including legislation, 2) legal issues including drug users' problems with the law, 3) the drug supply including both production and sales, 4) social problems including discussion of drugs as being harmful to society, and 5) problems for individuals rather than to society at large" (Fan, 1996, p. 1414). Fan's study concluded that a correlation between drug coverage in the media was a major influence on public opinion that drugs were the

country's most important problem at the studied time—1980-1994 (Fan, 1996). The most significant contributor to this opinion was media's coverage of drugs as a crisis. These findings are relevant to this study because it shows that media's coverage of drugs can influence the public's perception, whether positively or negatively, of the drugs themselves but also of the celebrities whose death was caused by drugs whether illegal or prescription.

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping theory “describes the powerful process through which events are covered by mass media, explaining how and why certain information either passes through gates or is closed off from media attention” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. i). Countless amounts of information exist in the world and it is mediators who put this information into manageable amounts and decide which messages are disseminated to the public. Furthermore, the process of gatekeeping influences the way in which the audience defines its social reality (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Before media messages even reach the audience, however, they must go through the gatekeeping process. While the first communication study to apply gatekeeping (White, 1950) contended that journalists' personal evaluation of items was the largest influence when determining which items became news, another study (Gieber, 1956) posited that personal subjectivity was not as important as mechanical constraints of news operations, such as time and printing constraints. As the theory became increasingly applied to communication, Westely and MacLean (1957) proposed what became the popular model. This model stated that some information is rejected and changed by media gatekeepers and that individual media workers collectively act as “one gatekeeper, presumably following a set of rules” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 17). Researchers (Condit, 1994; Janis, 1983; Shoemaker & Reese, 2009; Soley, 1992)

began to look at the different factors and levels of analysis that influence gatekeepers, such as routines or practices of communication work, organization and social institution hierarchies, and social systems.

Additionally, Nisbett and Ross (1980) coined the cognitive approach to gatekeeping, which stated that humans are more likely to remember vivid information than pallid information. Consequently, vivid information is more likely to make it through the gates. Additionally, news items that deviate from societal or cultural norms are more likely to pass through the gates (Shoemaker & Reese, 2009). In this research, these news items included the illegal drugs and prescription medication overdoses. Celebrities and other prominent public figures are outside the mundane social reality of most people, so this topic is interesting to gatekeepers, thus, the reason for the development of tabloids and gossip columns (Shoemaker & Reese, 2009). Although celebrities may exist outside the social reality of most people, media helps connect celebrities' reality with the audiences—it is through media that the public can transcend its own reality and enter celebrities' realities. This topic transcends the notion that only newsworthy events become news items because “if people are prominent enough, however, even routine activities can leap tall gates and result in an astonishing number of news items” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2009, p. 25), such as overdose deaths of celebrities. The way this information is framed by the selected media sources is not only telling of how media create meaning for the audience through positive or negative frames but also what positive or negative information made it through the gates, in order to shape this meaning.

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility theory of the press states that media has an obligation to benefit society. The theory contends that media should be self-regulating, possess high standards for and maintain professionalism, objectivity, truth, and accuracy. It also states that media should portray diversity of the cultures it represents (Coleman, 2009; Pitner, 2009). Social responsibility of the press developed when influential publishers became unpopular with the public. Although the media had codes of ethics, the public still remained suspicious of media's agenda. During World War II, Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines, asked Robert Hutchins, president at the University of Chicago, to gather a commission to investigate the appropriate function of media in democracies (McQuail, 2002; Rivers et al., 1980). Four years later in 1947, the Hutchins Commission, formally called the Commission on Freedom of the Press, released its final report called *A Free and Responsible Press*. It stated that the press had an obligation to consider society's needs when making journalistic decisions. It proposed that media embrace social responsibility as a means to increase its standards, provide the public with the information it needs as to govern themselves and to serve as a watchdog for the government (McQuail, 2002; Siebert et al., 1963).

Journalists and news organizations apply ethical standards in helping them determine their definition of social responsibility. The American Society of Newspaper Editors had its Code of Ethics since the beginning of the 20th century; this Code was adapted for use by journalists in 1926. The most recent revision of the Code of Ethics for the Society of Professional Journalists was adopted in 1996. However, corporate social responsibility does not seem to adequately counterpart the sole foundation of businesses: to make a profit (Gerald, 1963). Media moved from trying to educate and inform the public to basing news content

decisions to which news stories would generate the largest profit (Gerald, 1963). Social responsibility can also serve as a watchdog over powerful corporations. This theory applies to media because, as the “watchdog of society,” it is important for media corporations, particularly those who have the most power, to operate in a socially responsible manner (McQuail, 2002). Social responsibility as applied to the press is particularly important because mass media provides the majority of the information the public receives (Gerald, 1963). For this research, I postulate that media provides information about celebrities’ deaths from overdoses and it should use socially responsible frames. These frames could include information about the potentially harmful effects of illegal and prescription drugs. By abiding to its stated role, the public expects media to serve its needs and provide a credible and trustworthy service that gives meaning to the days’ events (Gerald, 1963; Rivers et al., 1980).

An overriding criticism of this theory is in defining *what* is considered socially responsible. Various publishers and journalistic organizations try to provide and agree on a definition, but because social responsibility is subjective, an agreement upon definition has not ever been, nor will probably ever be reached (Rivers et al., 1980). This is also why each media organization creates its own code of ethics. Media is meant to carry information and to experiment with and improve its own practices as to become more self-critical and advance the system in general (Gerald, 1963).

Social responsibility is pertinent in this study because the public’s perception of illicit drugs and prescription drugs is different—prescription drugs are considered to be safer than illicit drugs (Ashburn, 2010; Compton & Volkow, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Maxwell, 2006; O’Callaghan, 2010; Winkel, 2010). However, “from a pharmacological perspective, prescription drugs fit into the same drug classes as the usual illicit drugs” (Compton & Volkow, 2006).

Stimulant prescription drugs like Ritalin and Adderall, commonly used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and increase energy and concentration levels, fit into the stimulant category where illicit drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine also reside (Compton & Volkow, 2006). Other prescription drugs, such as hydrocodone and oxycodone, commonly prescribed to help relieve pain, are classified in the opioids category, along with heroin (Compton & Volkow, 2006). This means that the same risks for “abuse and addiction to non-prescription drugs apply to prescription drug abuse” (Compton & Volkow, 2006). Furthermore, media participate in defining what the public considers “drugs” because it focuses on illicit drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, and ecstasy, as the drugs contributing the most to the “drug problem,” while rarely mentioning alcohol and tobacco as part of the problem (Murji, 1998). Therefore, the media conditions “public attitudes about the ‘drug problem’ and what the response to it should be” (Murji, 1998). Although the commercial model—an alternative media approach that focuses on the audience’s ability to filter, interpret, deconstruct and reconstruct messages, and morph these messages into something different than the original message producer’s meaning (Morley, 1995)—has not been applied to media reports about drugs, it has been used in studies of drug prevention (Dorn, Murji, & South, 1992). In a later study, Murji contends “that prevention messages and campaigns are resisted by the audience, or may even increase audience interest in experimenting with the very drugs that they are being warned about and against” (Murji, 1998). Medias’ social responsibility becomes increasingly important in this respect because it is their duty to report on the potentially harmful effects and risks of taking illicit or prescription medication in news articles rather than solely in anti-drug campaigns.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse conducted the “Monitoring the Future Survey” (2006) and concluded that “illicit street drugs such as ‘ecstasy’...and cocaine are decreasing in

popularity, where as the nonmedical use of certain prescription drugs is on the rise” (Friedman, 2006). One reason for the decrease in illicit drug use is due to negative media attention focused on these illegal drugs (Friedman, 2006). However, a reason for the increase in non-medical use of prescription drugs results from the inundation of prescription medication advertisements in newspapers, magazines, television and the Internet (Friedman, 2006). These advertisements make prescription medications a normal part of everyday life and the negative side effects are usually written in the fine print in newspaper and magazine ads or read quickly on television or radio ads, thus a significant dissociation between the prominence of benefits and the obscurity of potential adverse reactions. Considering the above, media should serve the public by addressing the potential for both types of drugs to have harmful effects on users.

Celebrities

River Phoenix

The eldest child of bohemian parents John Lee Bottom and Arlyn Dunetz and named after the river of life in Hermann Hesse’s book *Siddhartha*, River Jude Bottom was born on August 23, 1970 in Madras, Oregon. At age two, River’s parents moved to South America and joined the Children of God, a religious cult (imdb.com; Associated Press, 1993; Mydans, 1993; Turner, 1993; BBC, 2003; A&E Television Networks, 2008). After seeing a news article in which Children of God’s founder wore elaborate jewels and was shrouded in black garments and surrounded by beautiful women, the Bottoms moved back to the United States in 1977 (Turner, 1993). The Bottoms changed their last name to Phoenix to symbolize rebirth (Associated Press, 1993; Turner, 1993). By this time, the family had added four more children: son Joaquin and daughters Rain, Liberty and Summer.

Acting Career. Phoenix's parents encouraged the children to become part of the entertainment industry and the family moved to Los Angeles. Arlyn found the children an agent and by age 10, Phoenix was acting in commercials. His first major role was in 1982 as the youngest brother in the TV series *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (Associated Press, 1993; BBC, 2003; A&E Television Networks, 2008). Phoenix's film debut was alongside Ethan Hawke in 1985's *Explorers*. However, his true breakthrough came just one year later in Rob Reiner's *Stand By Me* (1986), a film about four friends searching for the body of a deceased teenager. Phoenix's performance as "a confused and abused teenager was widely praised for its honesty and lack of pretension" (Turner, 1993).

Phoenix continued acting in several films, including *The Mosquito Coast* (1986) with Harrison Ford, and in three films in 1988: *Little Nikita*, *A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon*, and *Running on Empty*. Phoenix received his only Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor for *Running on Empty* (imdb.com; Associated Press, 1993; Turner, 1993; BBC, 2003; A&E Television Networks, 2008). Phoenix appeared as a young Indiana Jones in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), and then tried his hand at comedy in *I Love You to Death* (1990), starring Kevin Kline, William Hurt and Keanu Reeves. Phoenix worked with Reeves, with whom he became close friends, again in Gus van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) in which Phoenix earned rave reviews for portraying a narcoleptic male prostitute searching for his mother. In 1992, Phoenix acted opposite Robert Redford and Sidney Poitier in *Sneakers*, a comedic thriller. Phoenix was working on *Dark Blood* (1993) when he died and the film was never completed.

Personal Life and Death. Phoenix was more than a talented actor, he was also an activist. He became a vegetarian at age eight (A&E Television Networks, 2008), something that

he remained strict about throughout his life. Phoenix was an avid environmentalist and animal rights activist and became a member of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Phoenix also had a passion for music. He learned to play guitar at an early age and formed a band, Aleka's Attic, with his sister Rain.

On the night of his death, Phoenix was partying with brother Joaquin, sister Rain and girlfriend Samantha Mathis at the Viper Room, a nightclub co-owned by actor Johnny Depp (imdb.com; Mydans, 1993; A&E Television Networks, 2008). Although not known precisely when, at some point in the evening, Phoenix took drugs and became ill (A&E Television Networks, 2008). Phoenix, who according to friends had been "acting strange" (Associated Press, 1993), was helped outside the club where he began having seizures and fell to the ground. When emergency personnel arrived, they attempted to resuscitate him, but were unsuccessful. Phoenix died at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center at 1:51 a.m. on October 31, 1993 (Associated Press, 1993).

Although detectives immediately ruled out homicide, they did not release details of the cause of death until after an autopsy was performed (Associated Press, 1993). The Los Angeles County Coroner's Office concluded that Phoenix's death "was caused by 'acute multiple drug intoxication' involving lethal levels of cocaine and morphine" (Mydans, 1993, p. 18).

Chris Farley

Chris Crosby Farley was born on February 15, 1964 in Madison, Wisconsin to parents Mary Anne and Thomas Farley, Sr. Farley had four siblings: Tom Jr., Kevin, John and Barbara. From the beginning, Farley established a reputation as the class clown and his behavior regularly got him in trouble. However, as a summer camp counselor at Red Arrow Camp in Wisconsin, this behavior made him popular among the campers. Farley later attended Marquette University,

where he received his degree in communications and theater. While performing as a comedian at Chicago's Second City Theater, *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) Producer Lorne Michaels befriended Farley and announced him as a cast member in 1990.

Acting Career. Farley was a member of *SNL* for five seasons, where he frequently collaborated with Chris Rock, David Spade, and Adam Sandler. Farley was particularly known for his comic physicality and his memorable characters included a Chippendale's dancer, a lunch lady, and Matt Foley, a motivational speaker who constantly reminded everyone that he "lived in a van down by the river" (Anderson, 2008). However, it was during his time on *SNL* that Farley began engaging in serious drug and alcohol habits.

Farley also had a film career outside *SNL*, but he still collaborated with some of his cast mates. Farley had cameo appearances in *Wayne's World* (1992), *Coneheads* (1993), and *Billy Madison* (1995). He also starred in movies of his own, including *Tommy Boy* (1995), *Black Sheep* (1996) and *Beverly Hills Ninja* (1997). These movies experienced success at the box office, but even more success on home videos. *Tommy Boy* and *Black Sheep* were relatively low-budget comedies that each raked in \$32 million in the domestic box office (Box Office Mojo, 2011).

Personal Life & Death. As Farley was becoming a bigger comedy star, his personal problems were increasing, as well. Farley struggled with inner-demons for most of his life. From early on, Farley did whatever it took to get a laugh from his audience and maintained this mentality throughout his career. His comedic physicality established him as the fat guy who danced and fell down a lot. This image was not one Farley necessarily wanted, but this comedic style generated audience reactions, so he continued to play this role (Anderson, 2008). Many of his friends acknowledge that this self-destructing mentality was one of the causes of Farley's

premature death because it led to excessive drug and alcohol use. Farley believed that he needed to be high or drunk to be accepted (Tresniowski, 1998).

Acceptance was something Farley constantly sought. Even in high school and college, acquaintances said when Farley was dared to do something, he did it without hesitation because he desperately wanted people's approval. Farley particularly wanted approval from his father, who was a devout Catholic, but provided alcohol to his teenage sons, was morbidly obese and did nothing to help control his, or his son's, vices (Anderson, 2008). In fact, comedian John Belushi, who died from a speedball (mix of cocaine and heroin) overdose in 1982, was Farley's idol because Farley saw his dad explode with laughter at Belushi's character in *Animal House* (1978). Farley was obsessed with Belushi and wanted to emulate his comedy and lifestyle.

After a meeting set up by actor and friend Tom Arnold in 1992, Farley entered rehab and stayed sober for three years. However, Farley replaced his drug and alcohol addictions with food and hookers (Tresniowski, 1998). Soon after the third anniversary of his sobriety, Farley relapsed and was never again successful at staying sober. On December 18, 1997, Farley's brother John went to Chris' apartment on the 60th floor of the John Hancock Building in Chicago and discovered his brother dead in the entryway. His cause of death was determined to be an accidental speedball overdose (CNN, 1998). Even to his death, Farley's actions mimicked his idol Belushi's—both died of a speedball overdose at age 33.

Brad Renfro

Brad Barron Renfro was born in Knoxville, Tennessee on July 25, 1982 to parents Angela and Mark Renfro. Renfro's parents separated when he was a toddler and his maternal grandmother began raising him at age 5. Renfro attended Fountain City Elementary School in Knoxville and, ironically, played a drug dealer in a DARE anti-drug production, a role which

would foreshadow the rest of his life. Renfro was an underprivileged, streetwise child, which helped him get cast in director and producer Joel Shumacher's adaptation of John Grisham's novel, *The Client* (1994).

Acting Career. At age 10 Shumacher's casting agent discovered Renfro. Renfro and his grandmother were flown to Hollywood for a screen test where Renfro won the part and was cast in *The Client* (1994). The film also starred Susan Sarandon and Tommy Lee Jones. Renfro was lauded for his performance in *The Client* and his acting coach said he was a naturally talented actor (imdb.com). Renfro went on to star in *Apt Pupil* (1998) and won The Hollywood Reporter's "Young Star Award." He was also nominated as *People* magazine's "Top 30 Under 30" (imdb.com). Renfro won a second "Young Star" award for his performance in *The Cure* (1995). Renfro starred in a number of other films including *Tom and Huck* (1995), *Sleepers* (1996), and *Ghost World* (2001).

Personal Life & Death. Renfro had a troubled life from an early age. He was first arrested at age 15, along with his 19-year-old cousin, for possession of cocaine and marijuana. He entered a plea agreement to undergo random drug testing in return for dropped charges. Renfro again found himself in trouble while filming *Bully* (2001) for attempting to steal a yacht. He was arrested for grand theft and sentenced to two years probation and had to pay damages caused to the yacht and dock. While on probation from this incident, Renfro was pulled over in his hometown for underage drinking but avoided jail time for violating his probation because he tested negative for drugs and alcohol (imdb; Yahoo! Movies). Again in Knoxville, in 2002, Renfro was charged with public intoxication and driving without a license, which also violated his probation. Renfro served time in jail and was ordered to a three-month substance abuse program after his release.

In 2005, after returning to acting and while living in Los Angeles, Renfro was arrested, along with 14 others, in a sting operation and was charged with attempted possession of heroin (Yahoo! Movies). A photo of him in handcuffs was featured on the front page of *The Los Angeles Times*. Renfro admitted to the police that he was using heroin and methadone. Renfro pleaded guilty in court and received three years of probation. Renfro was arrested once again in 2006 and spent 10 days in jail for driving under the influence and attempted possession of heroin.

After a night of drinking, Renfro was found dead in his apartment on January 15, 2008. Friends reported hearing Renfro snoring early in the morning but when his girlfriend tried to wake him for his audition, she could not (Breuer & Lehner, 2008). The Los Angeles County Coroner ruled his death an accidental heroin overdose (Huffington Post, 2008; Yahoo! Movies).

Anna Nicole Smith

Born Vickie Lynn Hogan on November 28, 1967 in Harris County, Texas, Smith was the only child of Donald and Virgie Mae Hogan. After her parents' divorce, her mother married Donald Hart and Vickie changed her name to Nikki Hart (Stoddard & Rinaldi, 2007). During Nikki's freshman year of high school, she was sent to live with her mother's sister in Mexia, Texas. Nikki failed her freshman year at Mexia High School and dropped out during her sophomore year (Stoddard & Rinaldi, 2007). She worked several jobs, including as a waitress at Jim's Krispy Fried Chicken and at Red Lobster, but when she became a stripper in 1991, she started taking modeling and voice lessons. In October of that year, Nikki auditioned for *Playboy Magazine* (South Florida Sun-Sentinel & The Washington Post, 2007).

Career. Less than a year later, Hugh Hefner, *Playboy* founder, chose her to appear on the cover of the March issue of the magazine, and was then listed as Vickie Smith. Smith's goal was

to be the next Marilyn Monroe (“Anna Nicole Smith,” 2007). Smith was larger than typical *Playboy* models, but became one of its most popular. By the time she was chosen as Playmate of the Year in 1993, she had settled on the name Anna Nicole Smith (“Anna Nicole Smith,” 2007; South Florida Sun-Sentinel & The Washington Post, 2007).

Smith began modeling for Guess jeans, where she was compared to sex symbols Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield. Her ad campaign for Guess featured black and white photos reminiscent of Mansfield (imdb.com; South Florida Sun-Sentinel & The Washington Post, 2007). Her distinguished curves and sultry gaze made for memorable photographs.

Smith appeared in a few movies, including *Be Cool* (2005), starring John Travolta, and had her own reality show on E! for two seasons, *The Anna Nicole Show* (2002). However, her role as the spokeswoman for the diet supplement TrimSpa was perhaps her most memorable role in the last years of her life.

Personal Life & Death. While working as a waitress at Jim’s Krispy Fried Chicken, she met her first husband, Billy Wayne Smith, with whom she had her first child, Daniel Wayne Smith, on January 22, 1986 when she was just 17-years-old. The two were divorced in 1993.

Before the divorce was finalized, Anna Nicole moved to Houston, where she became a stripper and met her next husband—oil tycoon J. Howard Marshall, who was 63 years her senior (South Florida Sun-Sentinel & The Washington Post, 2007; Stoddard & Rinaldi, 2007). Smith married Marshall on June 27, 1994. This relationship brought harsh criticism from the media, as well as Marshall’s family, claiming that Smith only married Marshall for his fortune (ABC News, 2005; Stoddard & Rinaldi, 2007). Marshall died 14 months after their marriage and an ongoing battle over his \$1.6 billion estate ensued between Smith and Marshall’s son, E. Pierce

Marshall (imdb.com; Stoddard & Rinaldi, 2007; Stout, 2006). The legal battle was not settled at the time of her death more than a decade later.

Smith was also involved with her long-time lawyer, Howard K. Stern for some time. In fact, when Smith's daughter Dannielynn Hope was born September 6, 2006, Stern was listed as the father on the birth certificate ("Anna Nicole Smith," 2007). However, former boyfriend and photographer Larry Birkhead claimed he was the biological father (CNN Entertainment, 2006). Although Smith claimed Stern was Dannielynn's father, a 2007 DNA test proved Birkhead was Dannielynn's biological father (The New Zealand Herald, 2007).

Only three days after Dannielynn's birth, Smith's 20-year-old son, Daniel, collapsed in his mother's hospital room (imdb.com; South Florida Sun-Sentinel & The Washington Post, 2007). A private autopsy showed an accidental combination of methadone and two antidepressants in Daniel's system (Associated Press, 2006; Olbermann, 2006; South Florida Sun-Sentinel & The Washington Post, 2007). Smith was devastated after her son's death and just five months later, Smith died in her hotel room at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Hollywood, Florida.

In the days preceding her death, Smith endured the "stomach flu, a 105-degree fever, pungent sweating and an infection on her buttocks from repeated injections" (Associated Press, 2007). Smith was found unresponsive in her hotel room and her private nurse notified hotel workers at 1:38 p.m. on February 8, 2007 (CNN Entertainment, 2007). Smith's bodyguard performed CPR before rescue workers arrived. Smith was taken to Memorial Regional Hospital at 2:10 p.m. where she was pronounced dead upon arrival at 2:49 p.m. (Ryan, 2007). An autopsy concluded that Smith's death was due to an accidental overdose from at least nine prescription drugs (Associated Press, 2007). Some of the drugs found in her system were for the treatment of

anxiety, depression and insomnia, along with the seldom-prescribed chloral hydrate, a sedative which contributed to Marilyn Monroe's death (Associated Press, 2007).

Heath Ledger

Heath Ledger was born to Sally Ledger Bell and Kim Ledger on April 4, 1979 in Perth, Western Australia. His parents' divorce when Ledger was 11 forced him to split time between both parents (People; A&E Television Networks, 2009). Ledger took an interest in chess at an early age and won Western Australia's Junior Chess Championship at age 10 (A&E Television Networks, 2009). It was also around this time that Ledger became interested in acting, despite his father's want for him to be a racecar driver (Lipsky, 2006; A&E Television Networks, 2009). After completing his early graduation exams at age 16 (A&E Television Networks, 2009), Ledger moved to Sydney, Australia to begin his acting career.

Acting Career. Ledger landed a role on an Australian TV series called *Sweat* (1996), in which he played a gay cyclist, but the show was quickly canceled (imdb.com; People). Ledger believed, in order to be recognized as an actor, he needed to take unique roles. After accepting small roles in various films, it was his work in *Roar* (1997), a medieval fantasy, which brought him recognition in the United States. Ledger then moved to the United States to find an American agent (A&E Television Networks, 2009). Ledger's breakout role was in *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), a loose adaptation of Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew." However, after his roles in *Sweat* and *10 Things I Hate About You*, Ledger disliked the fact that he was being typecast as a heartthrob (imdb.com; People; Luscombe, 2008). Soon, Ledger began accepting roles in more serious films.

Ledger received high acclaim for his role in the Revolutionary War drama *The Patriot* (2000) and proved his leading-role ability in *A Knight's Tale* (2001). These roles also brought

Ledger recognition as a serious, up-and-coming actor (Altman, 2008; People). In 2005, Ledger took on what would be the defining role in his career—*Brokeback Mountain* (2005), a film that remains highly controversial and was touted “The Gay Cowboy Movie” (People). The role earned Ledger two Best Actor Awards, a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actor in a Drama, and an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor (imdb.com; Adler, et al., 2008; Marikar, 2008; A&E Television Networks, 2009).

Ledger’s recognition as a critically acclaimed actor continued with his role as the Joker in Batman sequel, *The Dark Knight* (2008), which shattered box office records the summer following Ledger’s death. The role earned Ledger over 30 posthumous awards, including a Golden Globe and an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor (imdb.com; People; A&E Television Networks, 2009).

Personal Life and Death. After dating several of Hollywood’s leading ladies, Ledger met actress and co-star Michelle Williams on the set of *Brokeback Mountain*. The two, who were together for more than two years but eventually split, had a daughter, Matilda Rose, in 2005. Ledger told the *Boston Globe* that he loved his new role as a father (CBS, 2008; People). However, in spite of loving fatherhood and having a family, Ledger faced other struggles.

In an interview with the *New York Times*, Ledger said he was taking Ambien, a sleeping aid, to help with his insomnia. Ledger told reporters he only slept an average of two hours a night, and would take two Ambien only to wake up shortly after with his mind still racing (Lyall, 2007). Ledger fully immersed himself into the role of the Joker, whom he described as a “psychopathic, mass-murdering, schizophrenic clown with zero sympathy” (Lyall, 2007). Some believe it was this role that led to Ledger’s death.

Ledger's housekeeper found him lying naked on his bedroom floor on January 22, 2008 inside his apartment in SoHo, a neighborhood of Manhattan (Feyerick, et al., 2008). Bottles of various prescription pills, such as sleeping pills and anti-anxiety medication, were found nearby (imdb.com; Adler, et al., 2008; Altman, 2008; CBS, 2008; Feyerick, et al., 2008; Marikar, 2008). Emergency personnel arrived, but were unable to revive him. Ledger was declared dead at 3:36 p.m. in his apartment (A&E Television Networks, 2009). Autopsy reports revealed the cause of death was from an accidental prescription drug overdose (Barron, 2008; Tedmanson, 2008).

Brittany Murphy

Brittany Anne Murphy was born on November 10, 1977 in Atlanta, Georgia to parents Angelo Joseph Bertolotti and Sharon Kathleen Murphy, who divorced when Brittany was two years old. Brittany and her mother moved to New Jersey, and at age four she began training in singing, dancing, and acting at the Verne Fowler School of Dance and Theatre Arts (Piazza, 2009). At age 13, she and her mother moved to Los Angeles so Brittany could pursue her acting career (Weber, 2009).

Acting Career. Murphy's career began in the early 1990s as many actors' and actresses' do—in television series and commercials. Her first television role was on *Blossom* (1990). She also made appearances in *Fraiser* (1993), *Boy Meets World* (1993) and *Party of Five* (1994). However, her breakthrough performance was in her first major film role as Tai in the high school comedy *Clueless* (1995). Murphy played a new, uncool high school student who is transformed into a beautiful and popular girl. Her performance was touted as “absolutely perfect” (Bradshaw, 2009).

Murphy proved her versatility as an actress in such drama films as *Girl, Interrupted* (1999) opposite Angelina Jolie, *Don't Say a Word* (2001) starring Michael Douglas, *8 Mile*

(2002), the critically acclaimed *Sin City* (2005) and in romantic comedies like *Just Married* (2003) with Ashton Kutcher and *Little Black Book* (2004). Murphy was also a voice actress, lending her voice to characters in the television series *King of the Hill* (1997) and the family film *Happy Feet* (2006). Film critic Roger Ebert claimed Murphy's talent was above many others and she had the natural ability to draw audiences' attention (Ebert, 2004).

Personal Life and Death. Murphy had a few Hollywood romances, including a six-month romance with *Just Married* co-star Ashton Kutcher. Murphy was engaged to Jeff Kwatinetz, the CEO of The Firm, a Hollywood talent agency, but ended their engagement in 2004 (Fleeman, 2007). She was also engaged to Joe Macaluso, a crew member for *Little Black Book*, but they ended their engagement in August 2006 (Fleeman, 2007; Ingrassia, 2006). However, in May 2007, Murphy married British writer and director Simon Monjack, a man 12 years her senior (Fleeman, 2007).

Monjack and Murphy were married for three years before Murphy's mother found her collapsed on the bathroom floor of Murphy's and Monjack's Hollywood Hills home at 8 a.m. on December 20, 2009 (Benet, 2009; Dore, 2009; Weber, 2009; Wheaton, 2009). The Los Angeles Fire Department responded to a "medical request" made from Murphy's and Monjack's home and attempted to resuscitate Murphy (Helfand, 2009; Weber, 2009). She was transported to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and was pronounced dead on arrival at 10:04 a.m. after going into cardiac arrest (Weber, 2009; Wheaton, 2009). Authorities said Murphy's death "appeared to be natural" (Weber, 2009). An autopsy report found that Murphy died from pneumonia, multiple prescription drug intoxication and anemia (Greenblatt, 2010; Lee, 2010). Her death was ruled an accident (Greenblatt, 2010; McCartney, 2010).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: Does media frame prescription drug overdoses more positively than illegal drug overdoses when reporting on celebrity deaths?

RQ2: Do media outlets employ socially responsible frames while reporting on celebrity deaths from prescription overdoses and illegal drug overdoses?

RQ3: Is media's portrayal of a celebrity's character influenced by whether the celebrity died from a prescription overdose or an illegal drug overdose?

METHOD

Population

The publications chosen for this research were *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Entertainment Weekly* and *People*. This selection allowed for the inclusion of credible daily newspapers and entertainment magazines. This research focuses on young actors and actresses, so it was important to have varied media sources with different target audiences. This study used articles from the aforementioned media from the day the celebrities died to six months following the actors' and actresses' deaths. This time period was selected as to include any possible ongoing investigations into the deaths, such as autopsy results.

Additionally, these publications were chosen because all are among the largest circulations in the United States in their respective categories. *The New York Times*' total weekday circulation is slightly more than 875,000 with that number increasing to more than 1.3 million for its Sunday edition (The Associated Press, 2010). Only *The Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* have higher average weekday and Sunday circulations. Following *The New York Times* on this list is the *Los Angeles Times*, which has a weekday circulation of just more than

600,000 and a Sunday circulation of more than 900,000 (The Associated Press, 2010). As for magazines, *People* has the largest circulation at nearly 3.75 million (Goldsmith, 2006).

Entertainment Weekly's circulation is 1.8 million (Pearson Education, 2007).

The New York Times' readership is 51% female and 49% male. The median age is 50 (MRI, 2010). The median household income is just more than \$109,000 and 65% of its readership has a college degree (MRI, 2010). *The Los Angeles Times* shares the same figures as *The New York Times* for male and female readership, but the median age is younger than *The New York Times* at 42.1 (Scarborough, 2006). The median household income is slightly less at \$56,000 and 23% of readers are college graduates (Scarborough, 2006). *People*'s readership is 70% women, the median readership age is 41 and 61% of the readers have some college education (MRI, 2008). The median household income for *People* readers is a little more than \$67,000 (MRI, 2008). Women predominantly read *Entertainment Weekly* and make up 61% of the magazine's readership (MRI, 2010). The median age is 36.9, the median household income is almost \$65,000 and 60% of readers have at least some college education (MRI, 2010).

The readership numbers constitute a range of audiences, from household incomes of more than \$100,000 (*The New York Times*) to almost half of that amount (*The Los Angeles Times*) and median ages from 50 (*The New York Times*) down to 36.9 (*Entertainment Weekly*). This means that the publications' readership is diverse enough to reach many types of audiences, and thus, has the potential for large societal impact. Additionally, according to *Entertainment Weekly*'s Media Kit, the potential influence rate is staggering. The magazine estimates that, with an audience of 11.1 million when figuring in more than six readers per copy plus its online presence, if readers tell 10 people about the shows they watch, the potential influence reaches

111 million others (MRI, 2010). This is important because it shows that media's influence reaches beyond the circulation facts and figures.

A credibility survey (Fischhoff, 1996), which included *The Los Angeles Times* and *People* concluded that, whether reporting soft news or hard news, *The Los Angeles Times* and *People* are among the highest credibility rankings in the study. Therefore, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Entertainment Weekly* and *People* are, in this study, considered to be credible information sources. Credibility in its simplest sense “can be defined as ‘believability’” (Fogg, 1999; Tseng & Fodd, 1999). Additionally, “credible sources are described as ‘trustworthy’ and having ‘expertise’” (Self, 1996). As information is passed along, credibility has a strong influence on the message's impact (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Thus, credible sources will have a large impact on the audience.

Sample

The sample for this study was articles about the studied celebrities from the day they died until six months after their deaths. An online search of the publications' archives—www.nytimes.com, www.latimes.com, www.people.com, and www.ew.com—was used to find and retrieve the articles used in this research. The search terms included the celebrities' first and last names and an advanced search was used to select the specific date range (from the day the celebrities died to six months after their deaths). This resulted in finding all articles containing the celebrities' names, even if the articles were not necessarily about their deaths. The articles were broken down into paragraphs, which served as the unit of analysis, in order to manageably quantify the instances of positive and negative frames within each paragraph. Paragraphs are defined as units of cohesive and contextually related sentences that share complete thoughts on a subject. This unit of analysis was chosen in order to be able to intimately quantify data for the

study, and to provide a large enough sample to be able to be analyzed using statistical methods. For example, in an article about Phoenix's death (Kennedy, 1993), the first paragraph mentions that Phoenix's image when he died was not one of a drug-user and that it did not seem likely that he would die in the "live fast, die young" fashion. However, later in the article, Kennedy writes about Phoenix frequenting a club that was known to have ample supplies of heroin and other drugs. It is examples such as this that justifies breaking the articles into paragraphs to quantifiably determine the journalist's framing as positive or negative.

Method of Analysis

Content analysis "is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Berelson, 1952, p.14). Content analysis forces researchers to be highly conscious about what they are looking for and why they are looking for it—also sometimes called the frame of reference (Carney, 1972). Content analysis allows researchers to ask questions in such a way that is conducive to quantifiable results. Additionally, this method can help identify intentions and focus of individuals, groups or institutions and determine attitudinal and behavioral responses to communication.

Conceptual analysis "can be thought of as establishing the existence and frequency of concepts in a text" (University of Texas). The positive or negative message framing are two of the concepts explored in the present study. This conceptual analysis also looks at how the drug that contributed to the celebrity's death, either illegal or prescription, is reported, and whether if socially responsible frames are used in the report. For example, articles about Farley's death may mention heroin and cocaine as the cause of his death and may or may not mention the negative effects illegal drugs can cause. If media mentioned the possible harm illegal and prescription drugs can have, a socially responsible frame was used and vice versa for no mention of the

drugs' harm. This procedure was used to determine whether mediums analyzed in this study employed social responsibility when reporting on the celebrities' deaths. One study (Smith, Twum & Gielen, 2009) examined 166 television and print articles concerning celebrities and drunk driving. The study found that the bulk of the articles focused on jail time and potential damage to the celebrities' reputations, but most did not mention the potentially harmful effects of substance abuse (Smith, Twum & Gielen, 2009). Additionally, few articles in Smith et al.'s study interviewed health professionals, but instead focused on interviews with law enforcement. The method used by Smith was applied to this research to explore if a similar trend in the failure to use socially responsible frames manifests in articles about celebrities' deaths from an overdose.

The positive and negative words and phrases used in this study and their justification can be found in Appendix A. The codebook provides details on what words and phrases constitute a positive or negative frame. The words "tragic" and "talent" were determined to be positive because tragedies are seen as the result of an uncontrollable force (Ramadhana, 2005). The use of the word talent adds focus on losing individuals who will be missed because of what they offered through their talents. Any phrase containing the words "accident," "prescription," and "medication," was considered positive because of their connotations. Accident removes blame from victims; therefore, their deaths were not intentional. Prescription and medication carry a positive connotation because they are physician-approved and as several studies show, are viewed as safer than illegal drugs (Ashburn, 2010; Compton & Volkow, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Maxwell, 2006; O'Callaghan, 2010; Winkel, 2010). Conversely, the words "trouble" and "problem" carry negative connotations when writing about celebrities' lives. Trouble and problem indicate that something in the celebrities' lives was awry and thus, was determined to be negative. Phrases including the words "intoxication," "abuse," "addiction," and "illicit" were

decidedly negative because of the connotations each carries, as well. Intoxication and addiction indicate a loss of control and abuse alludes to improper use of something, in this case, drugs. Illicit was considered negative because its meaning implies something that is not socially acceptable and prohibited by law.

Positive and negative phrases and the frequency of each of these phrases were tallied for each paragraph on the coding sheet. The frequency of the concepts listed in the code book was used to infer whether articles about the celebrities' deaths were framed in a positive or negative manner. Composite indexes for "positive" and "negative" framing were created by adding the positive or the negative concepts for each paragraph. The scales for the composite indexes were from zero to four for "positive" and from zero to three for "negative." These indexes provide a more complex image of framing within each paragraph and were used as dependent variables for the comparison between coverage of street versus pharmaceutical drugs. A sample code sheet is located in Appendix B. The totals were computed for each celebrity and for each publication and the data was used to assess whether the selected media framed the celebrities' cause of death positively or negatively, used socially responsible frames, and how the drug involved in the celebrities' deaths influenced media's perception of the celebrities.

This approach has been previously used: One study (Block & Keller, 1995) focused on whether, when media use public service messages concerning health, positive or negative frames are more effective in deterring the public from engaging in risky behavior. Block & Keller (1995) cite a study (Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy, 1990), which concludes that positive and negative frames are actually two different ways of representing the same information. For example, "positive frames present the positive consequences of adherence to the message recommendations (e.g. 'If you quit smoking, you reduce the risk of developing lung cancer.'),

whereas negative frames describe the negative consequences of non-adherence (e.g. ‘If you don’t quit smoking, you increase the risk of developing lung cancer’)” (Block & Keller, 1995, p. 193). The present research applied a similar approach in using positive and negative frames, in that media can present the same issue in a positive or negative manner. For example, an article about Ledger’s death may focus on the fact that his death was not caused by illegal drugs, rather than concentrating on the fact that the prescription medications found in his system proved to be a lethal combination. In this research, this article would be considered positive because of the focus on the absence of illegal drugs. However, if the article concentrated on the fact that Ledger’s combined use of prescription drugs caused his death, the article would be negative because of its focus on Ledger’s misuse of prescription medications.

Non-parametric statistics was used to explore if the observed differences in positive versus negative coverage are statistically significant. For example, if articles about deaths due to pharmaceuticals overdose contained more positive words and phrases than articles about deaths caused by street drugs overdoses, and this difference is statistically significant, it may be concluded that media framed prescription drug deaths more positively than death caused by illegal drugs.

Additionally, media’s perception of the celebrity’s character was coded using conceptual content analysis. The way media portrays celebrities’ perception as either positive or negative because of their causes of death could show how media’s frames have the potential to influence the audience’s attitude toward these celebrities. As stated earlier about the influence of media portrayals on audiences, if media frames celebrities in a positive or negative manner because of their use of illegal or prescription drugs, the audience may adopt media’s views of celebrities or their behavior, as well.

In addition to the quantitative analysis conducted on the dataset created through the content analysis, a qualitative textual analysis was conducted on the most relevant articles addressing celebrities' deaths. The purpose of this analysis was to facilitate a better understanding of the framing process, and to provide the arguments needed to discuss and exemplify the results of the quantitative analysis.

Data Validation

The codebook for this research is in Appendix A. The codebook served to eliminate any discrepancies among the coders and provided instructions on what is a codable unit and how the coders differentiated between positive or negative words and phrases. The coders coded for whether the celebrity's cause of death was positive or negative and determined if the articles framed the celebrity's character as positive or negative. As mentioned previously, positive phrases carry connotations that are viewed as socially acceptable, such as prescriptions and medications, and include phrases that remove the blame from the celebrity for cause of death, such as the word accident. Negative phrases include phrases that allude to something that is not socially acceptable, such as abuse, addiction, and illicit. The researcher went through the codebook phrase by phrase with the two coders and answered questions and cleared any ambiguity the coders found. The researcher also trained the coders on how to use the code sheet and ensured the coders understood the categories and how to tally and total for each research question. For example, if the phrase "substance abuse" appeared in paragraph two of an article, coders found the intersecting cell of the "substance abuse" column and the paragraph two row and placed a tally in the box.

In order to calculate intercoder reliability, the two coders coded a combined ten percent of the articles used for this research. A random sample from each source and for each celebrity

was used; the coders coded articles independently. Intercoder reliability is the degree to which, when coding messages independently, coders reach the same conclusion. This ensures that more than the coders used in this study could use the same codebook and code sheet and reach similar results. Intercoder reliability was calculated using a percent agreement, which is “a simple percentage, representing number of agreements divided by total number of measures” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 149). The method used for this research was Holsti’s method (1969) whose formula is

$$PA_o = 3A/(n_A+n_B+n_C)$$

where PA_o represents “‘proportion agreement, observed,’ A is the number of agreements between three coders, and n_A , n_B and n_C are the number of units coded by coders” A, B and C respectively (Neuendorf, 2002 p. 149). The range for this agreement was .00 for no agreement to 1.00 for perfect agreement. For this study, an intercoder agreement of .848 was calculated, indicating a high reliability among the coders, and is considered acceptable in most situations (Neuendorf, 2002).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, Chi-Square tests and independent sample T-tests were used to analyze the data. The tables containing the descriptive statistics are below in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

Table 1. *Frames for Cause of Death*

Independent Variable	Type of Drug	Dependent Variable	
		Positive	Negative
	Illegal	51	74
	Prescription	339	52

Table 2. *Frames for Social Responsibility*

Independent Variable	Type of Drug	Dependent Variable	
		Positive	Negative
	Illegal	9	5
	Prescription	52	10

Table 3. *Frames for Celebrity Perception*

Independent Variable	Type of Drug	Dependent Variable	
		Positive	Negative
	Illegal	97	166
	Prescription	541	175

Independent samples T-tests were used to analyze which types of deaths get more positive or negative framing, as well as comparing framing for each type of drugs covered.

Chi-Square tests were used to calculate the statistical significance of positive and negative frames for social responsibility and celebrity perception. Two Chi-Square tests for social responsibility frames were computed using 2x2 tables. The first explored the positive socially responsible frames in the paragraphs for both illegal drugs and prescription drugs. The second Chi-Square test calculated the negative social responsibility frames in the paragraphs gathered. Two 2x2 Chi-Square tests were also used for RQ3 concerning celebrity perception. The first test calculated the positive frames in celebrity perception from both illegal drug overdoses and prescription drug overdoses. The second test analyzed the negative frames in celebrity overdoses from street drugs and prescription drugs. The independent variables for both

the independent samples T-tests and the Chi-Square tests were the types of drug—illegal or prescription—and the dependent variables were conformity with social values.

RESULTS

This research analyzed a total of 3,826 paragraphs in four publications—*Entertainment Weekly*, *People*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times*. The breakdown of these totals by publication is below in Table 4.

People yielded the most paragraphs and constituted 38% ($n=1,456$) of the total paragraphs, while *The Los Angeles Times* had the fewest number of paragraphs and comprised 11% ($n=438$) of the total paragraphs. No *Los Angeles Times* articles were found for Phoenix and Farley. *The New York Times* had the second-highest number of paragraphs and comprised 34% ($n=1,327$) of the total paragraphs used in this study. *Entertainment Weekly* had the third highest amount of paragraphs at 15% ($n=605$) of the total.

Table 4: *Number of Paragraphs Studied by Publication*

Publication	Frequency	Percent
<i>Entertainment Weekly</i>	605	15.8
<i>People</i>	1456	38.1
<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	438	11.4
<i>The New York Times</i>	1327	34.7

The breakdown of the number of paragraphs used for each of the six celebrities used in this research—River Phoenix, Chris Farley, Brad Renfro, Anna Nicole Smith, Heath Ledger, and Brittany Murphy—is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Number of Paragraphs Studied for Each Celebrity*

Celebrity	Frequency	Percent
River Phoenix	400	10.5
Chris Farley	193	5.0
Brad Renfro	163	4.3
Anna Nicole Smith	1031	26.9
Heath Ledger	1459	38.1
Brittany Murphy	580	15.2

The celebrities whose deaths were linked to prescription drug overdoses comprised the majority of the paragraphs studied. Articles about celebrities who died from illegal drug overdoses made up 19% ($n=756$) of the total paragraphs while articles concerning celebrities whose death involved prescription drugs comprised 80% ($n=3070$) of the total paragraphs studied. Ledger generated the highest number of paragraphs at 38% ($n=1,459$) of the total paragraphs. Smith had the second highest amount of paragraphs and comprised 26% ($n=1,031$) of the paragraphs studied. Articles about Murphy's death made up 15% ($n=580$) of the total paragraphs. The celebrities who died from illegal drug overdoses had the lowest amount of total paragraphs. Phoenix had the fourth highest total paragraphs at 10% ($n=400$) and the highest number of paragraphs among the celebrities who died of illegal drug overdoses. Farley was next

with 5% ($n=193$) of the total paragraphs studied and Renfro had the lowest number of paragraphs at 4% ($n=163$) of the total paragraphs. Ledger had a much higher amount of articles because *The Dark Knight* was to be released the summer after his death and his performance was sparking Oscar buzz. Another reason for the discrepancy, at least for Phoenix and Farley, may be due to the development of the Internet and the increase in “celebrity cult” coverage that the ability to constantly update stories and multiple mediums coverage has generated in the first decade of this century.

RQ1 dealt with the positivity and negativity of the selected media’s frames when reporting on celebrity deaths from illegal drug overdoses and prescription drug overdoses. The results proved RQ1 to be affirmative—the selected media uses more positive frames in articles concerning prescription drug overdoses and more negative frames in articles about illegal drug overdoses. This research resulted in 756 paragraphs about illegal drug overdoses. Negative frames were used more in paragraphs about illegal drug overdoses ($M=.14$, $SD=.41$) than in paragraphs about prescription drug overdoses ($M=.02$, $SD=.15$). An independent samples T-test revealed a significant relationship for negative frames in articles about illegal drug overdoses, ($t(805) = 8.15$, $p<.001$). Thus, the selected media framed celebrities’ deaths from illegal drug overdoses more negatively than deaths from prescription drugs.

Prescription medication overdoses resulted in a higher amount of paragraphs at 3,070. Positive frames in street drug overdoses were not as prominent ($M=.10$, $SD=.32$) as positive frames for prescription drug overdoses ($M=.13$, $SD=.39$). An independent samples T-test proved this relationship to be significant ($t(-1.98) = 1351.32$, $p<.05$). Therefore, media in this study framed celebrities’ deaths from prescription drugs more positively than deaths from street drugs.

Table 6. *Independent Samples T-test RQ1*

Drug	N	Frame (M)	
		Positive	Negative
Illegal	756	.10*	.14**
Prescription	3070	.13*	.02**

** $p < .001$.

RQ2 asked whether the chosen media used socially responsible frames while reporting on celebrity deaths from illicit drug overdoses and prescription medication overdoses. Chi-Square tests for positive socially responsible frames revealed no statistical significance ($\chi^2(1,3826)=2.27, p > .05$). Furthermore, the findings for negative frames involving social responsibility were lower still. Only .7% ($n=5$) of the paragraphs about celebrities' illegal drug overdoses used a negative socially responsible frame while .4% ($n=13$) paragraphs about prescription medication overdoses used a negative frame for social responsibility. Chi-Square tests for negative social responsibility frames were not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1,3826)=.73, p > .05$).

Table 7. *Chi-Square Test RQ2*

Frame	Drug		Chi-Square
	Illegal	Prescription	
Positive	11	72	2.27
Negative	5	13	.73

Note. $df=1$ for all Chi-Square Tests

RQ3 asked whether the selected media's portrayal of the celebrities was influenced by whether the celebrity died of an illegal drug overdose or a prescription drug overdose. While 18% ($n=141$) of paragraphs about celebrities who died from illegal drugs carried a positive celebrity perception, 21% ($n=656$) of the paragraphs about celebrities who died from prescription drugs included positive celebrity perceptions. Chi-Square tests proved no statistical significance ($\chi^2(1,3826)=2.71, p > .05$). Therefore, the type of death (illegal drugs or prescription drugs) did not statistically significantly influence the positive celebrity perception.

However, when considering negative celebrity perception, the findings for celebrities who died as the result of illegal drug use were found to be statistically significant. Paragraphs concerning illegal drugs had 30% ($n=229$) negative perceptions while 7% ($n=224$) of the paragraphs concerning prescription medication had a negative celebrity perception. Chi-Square tests proved this to be true ($\chi^2(1,3826)=307.29, p < .001$)

Table 8. *Chi-Square Test RQ3*

Frame	Drug		Chi-Square
	Illegal	Prescription	
Positive	141	656	2.72
Negative	229	224	307.29*

* $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

Media has the power to influence its audience and can do so through frames. These frames may cause individuals to adapt their actions to their understanding of such frames. As stated earlier, prescription medications are perceived as safer than illegal drugs despite their

potentially harmful, and even lethal, effects. When haphazardly combined, the danger of illegal drugs and prescription drugs only increases. With the exception of Renfro who died from a heroin overdose, the other celebrities had multiple drugs in their systems at the time of their deaths. Furthermore, how media chooses to depict these deaths can frame not only the audience's perception of the drugs themselves, but also celebrities' public perception. These celebrity deaths also provide media with an opportunity to educate the audience about the potentially harmful effects—from abuse to overdose—of any type of drug, whether illegal or prescription. It is simply a matter of whether media chooses to be socially responsible in these situations. This research was an attempt to discover how media treated these issues.

Only print media—*The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *People*—were used in this research because of their credibility among the public, as Fischhoff's (1996) study concluded, and the availability of content. Online searches of each of the publication's archives using the celebrities' first and last names was conducted from their dates of death until six months after their deaths as to include autopsy reports and toxicology tests.

RQ1 asked whether articles in the selected media framed overdoses concerning prescription drugs more positively than articles about overdoses from illegal drugs. The findings proved this to be true. When writing about celebrities who died from prescription drug overdoses, the selected media used more positive frames than negative frames.

Framing & Illegal Drugs. When writing about celebrities who died as a result of using illegal drugs, the selected media used more negative frames; thus, framing illegal drugs in a negative manner. Although some stories about celebrities' deaths from illegal drugs yielded positive frames in certain paragraphs, most of these positive frames were attributed to the words “tragedy/tragic” and “talent/talented/talents.” For example, one article focused on the fact that

Phoenix's promising career was tragically cut short and mentioned his talent as an actor throughout the article (Levitt, 1993). This article also focused on Phoenix's clean-cut image and the fact that he died from an illegal drug overdose was unexpected. Only one paragraph about Phoenix's death mentioned that the coroner ruled his death an accident (Mydans, 1993). This is an important finding because, although his death was attributed to his use of cocaine and morphine, most of the selected media did not include that his death was ruled accidental, which could change the way audiences view the cause of his death. Phoenix's articles focused more on the circumstances surrounding his death and how he attended nightclubs that celebrities frequented and drugs were a prominent part of the scene. Additionally, his death from illegal drugs contrasted with his PETA-advocating and vegan lifestyle, which is why media repeatedly mentioned his death as a shock. Media concentrated on the abruptness of his death, his contrasting image and his possible substance abuse problems that were well hidden to most. Although Phoenix generated the most positive frames out of the celebrities who died from illegal drugs, the negative frames for the cause of his death from an illegal drug overdose still outnumbered the positive frames.

Whereas Phoenix's death was unexpected, the chosen media in this research reported that Farley's death from drugs was expected, it was just a matter of when it would happen. Again, paragraphs about Farley's death contained a higher number of negative frames than positive frames. Most of the negative frames were attributed to the words "problem/problems," and the phrases "substance abuse" and "drug overdose." Like Phoenix, only one paragraph mentioned that his death was ruled an accidental drug overdose. Even while writing about Farley's life, the articles mentioned his substance abuse problems and included witness accounts of Farley frequently looking haggard in nightclubs. *Entertainment Weekly* comprised the majority of the

negative frames about his death and focused on his everyday problems—from his obesity to drug problems to desperately seeking acceptance in whatever form he could get it. The articles did not mention that his death was tragic or that his talent would be missed as much as media did in reporting Phoenix's death, therefore, Farley did not have as many positive frames as Phoenix.

Furthermore, although Renfro's death was attributed to a heroin overdose, like Phoenix and Farley, the coroner ruled his death an accident (Silverman & Aradillas, 2008). Whereas only one paragraph each for Phoenix and Farley mentioned an accidental overdose, it was mentioned in seven paragraphs about Renfro's death. However, this fact was mentioned in nearly every article about the celebrities who died with prescription medications in their systems at their time of death. Therefore, in articles about Renfro's death that did mention it as an accidental overdose, those paragraphs earned a positive frame; but the negative frames from the numerous mentions of his personal problems—from arrests to drug addiction—outnumbered the positive frames. Like Farley and unlike Phoenix, the selected media focused on Renfro's personal problems and legal troubles, beginning at age 15 when he was arrested for cocaine and marijuana possession. *People* magazine had the highest amount of negative frames for Renfro because of its focus on his personal troubles.

When reporting on celebrity deaths from illegal drug overdoses, the media used in this study seemed to **focus on the celebrities' substance abuse and personal problems, which is one reason more negative frames for the cause of death were found.** Although some paragraphs did mention the stars' talent, the concentration on the illegality of their actions outnumbered the positive frames. Additionally, the mention, or lack thereof, of the deaths being accidental is also telling of the selected media's frames because rarely did media emphasize or even indicate that the deaths were accidental. The lack of mentioning the coroner's report that

the deaths were accidental contributed to the lower number of positive frames. As will be explained later, in nearly every article—after the toxicology results were revealed—about celebrities who died from prescription drug overdoses, their overdose deaths are prefaced with “accidental.”

Framing & Prescription Drugs. When reporting on celebrity deaths from prescription medication overdoses, the chosen media used more positive frames than negative frames. Most of the positive frames were found in the words and phrases “tragedy/tragic,” “talented/talent,” “prescription medication” and “prescription pills.” However, negative frames also existed within these articles with most negative frames attributed to “drug overdose” and “multiple drug intoxication.” Drug overdose was found mostly in paragraphs about Ledger’s death while multiple drug intoxication in all but one instance was included in paragraphs about Murphy’s death.

The majority of positive frames concerning Smith’s death were “tragedy/tragic,” “accidental overdose” and “prescription pills” and most appeared in *People* magazine. One reason “tragedy/tragic” had a high count was because of the last five months of her life. The articles mentioned the tragic death of her son from an accidental drug overdose just days after she gave birth to her daughter. Then, when Smith died, her story was viewed as an even bigger tragedy, which contributed to the positive frame total. The articles focused on the tragedy that Smith’s daughter would be raised without her mother rather than the world living without another celebrity, as was emphasized in articles about Phoenix’s death. Additionally, prescriptions played a large role in Smith’s death, which also added to the positive frame total. Smith suffered from flu-like symptoms in her last days and was taking medications to quell her sickness. She was also taking multiple prescriptions for anxiety, depression and sleeping

problems. Although the frames within the articles were concentrated on Smith's prescriptions, some negative frames existed, as well. The negative frames found included drug and substance abuse speculations, mainly from Smith's mother, but these were not prominent enough to outnumber the positive frames.

Like Smith, the majority of Ledger's positive frames came from "tragedy/tragic" and "prescription pills," but also from "talent/talented/talents." Like Phoenix, articles about Ledger's death focused on the tragedy of losing a talented actor who was gaining respect and recognition from fans around the world and critics in the movie industry. Additionally, articles mentioned Ledger's death as tragic because he also had a daughter who will grow up without a father. Like articles about Smith's death, the publications focused on the prescription pills that were found near and around Ledger when his body was discovered. The articles noted that no illegal drugs were found in his apartment and emphasized the prescriptions, which included medications for pain, depression, anxiety and insomnia. A note of importance is that, although his death was ruled accidental, not many paragraphs noted that it was an accident from abusing prescription medications, but focused on the "accidental prescription drug overdose." The lack of mentions for prescription abuse not only kept the negative frame total low, but also figures into celebrity perception, which will be discussed below.

Although Murphy had the fewest amount of paragraphs for the celebrities who died from prescription drug overdoses, she still had a significantly higher number of positive frames ($n=55$) than negative frames ($n=17$). Most of Murphy's positive frames came from "tragedy/tragic," "talent/talented/talents" and "prescription medication." Murphy had been sick the days preceding her death. Her death was later primarily attributed to pneumonia so she took medication to quell her symptoms, which the articles focused on. However, articles did contain negative frames, as

well. Twelve of the 17 negative frames were from the phrase “multiple drug intoxication.” This is a more technical term for Murphy’s cause of death but this phrase was not emphasized as much as the prescription drugs found in her system. The fact that media used in this study focused on prescription drugs rather than multiple drug intoxication contributed to the much higher positive frame counts in paragraphs about her death.

Social Responsibility & Illegal Drugs. Although the findings for RQ2 were negative, some paragraphs contained socially responsible frames, but the majority of paragraphs did not include these frames. As mentioned earlier, one study (Fan, 1996), found that, when reporting on drugs, media’s discussion has five main topics—one of them being the discussion of social problems and drugs’ harm to society, not just the individual. Only two articles used in this research concerning celebrities who died from illegal drug overdoses mentioned that there was a lesson to be learned from the deaths. In a *New York Times* article about Phoenix’s death (Mydans, 1993), the author quotes Phoenix’s spokeswoman who said she hoped his death can be instructive and serve as a wake up call for those engaging in the same deadly activities. This serves as an acknowledgement that Phoenix’s actions were harmful and, for him, proved lethal and others may suffer the same fate. This acknowledgement gives hope that something positive may result from Phoenix’s death and perhaps others will recognize the potentially lethal consequences of their actions. Clearly, the media in this study did not facilitate the aforementioned discussion. Rather, media focused on the individuals’ problems and not the larger societal impact.

Social Responsibility & Prescription Drugs. As mentioned earlier, according to several studies (Ashburn, 2010; Compton & Volkow, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Maxwell, 2006; O’Callaghan, 2010; Winkel, 2010), prescription drugs are generally viewed as safer than illegal

drugs. However, prescription drugs are potentially just as harmful as illegal drugs, especially when combined with other drugs, as evidenced by all the celebrities used in this study who died of prescription drug overdoses. In the cases of Ledger and Smith, further investigations were conducted into how the celebrities obtained the amount and kind of prescription medications they had in their possession. Some of the prescriptions found in Smith's system were prescribed to her boyfriend, Howard K. Stern, and in Murphy's case, her husband admitted that the prescription medications found in her system were prescribed to him. Mentioning investigations and admissions that some of the prescriptions were not written for the celebrities who died from them is a sign that some wrongdoing may have been or was committed somewhere. This will also factor into celebrity perception which will be discussed below.

Few paragraphs used socially responsible frames, but when it was mentioned, nearly all of the frames were found in paragraphs about Smith, Ledger and Murphy. Although two paragraphs in articles about Smith's death claimed that her death carried no lessons and that her life and death were not cautionary tales (Bierly, 2007; James, 2007). Thus, these articles did not employ socially responsible frames. However, other articles (Davis & Silverman, 2007; Goodnough, 2007) recognize the harm of combining the drugs Smith consumed because of unpredictable and dangerous side effects. Another article (Hammel, 2007) states that Smith could have been saved if only she had gone to a doctor to treat her sickness. If for no other reason, her prescription drug use would have been controlled.

Like in Smith's articles mentioned above, several paragraphs about Ledger's death (Barron, 2008; Chan, 2008; Dowd & Silverman, 2008; Egan, 2008) included warnings about the lethal combination of prescription drugs. One article (No Author, 2008) included a statement from Ledger's father in which he said that the combination of drugs his son consumed proved

lethal, even though they were prescription medications. This inclusion is of note because it hints that prescriptions are generally viewed as safe, but as Ledger's death demonstrated, prescriptions can be as deadly as illegal drugs. One *New York Times* article (Chan, 2008) interviewed two physicians who provided further evidence that it Ledger's death was solely caused by the combination of prescriptions found in his system. The doctors interviewed gave credibility to the author's article because, although the doctors routinely write prescriptions, they recognized that either the prescriptions were used improperly, without medical guidance or those who prescribed the medications were careless.

As in Smith's case, the prescriptions found in Murphy's system at the time of her death were not prescribed to her. However, unlike Smith and Ledger, media did not focus on the lethal combination of prescriptions, but concentrated on the fact that her death was preventable (KTLA News, 2010; Lee, 2010, "Brittany Murphy had"; Lee, 2010; "Coroner"; Silverman, 2010; Tauber & Mascia, 2010). One article (Greenblatt, 2010) makes this point more obvious by raising the topic that, rather than going to a doctor, Murphy self-medicated—much like Smith did—and these actions proved deadly. This mention was framed positively for a socially responsible frame because it emphasizes the importance of seeking proper medical care.

Nevertheless, this study found a negative result for RQ2 concerning whether the selected media used socially responsible frames, this finding being consistent with previous research on this topic.

The lack of socially responsible frames provides evidence that these media sources reported as usual and concentrated on reporting what the audience wanted to read. One article quoted the editor in chief of *US Weekly* as saying that, when reporting Ledger's death "people walked on eggshells trying to strike the right tone...public sentiment for Heath Ledger

factored into our coverage” (Williams, 2008). This revelation shows that publications are sensitive to what readers want to see and whether the publication’s tone and sentiment matches their own. Since Ledger had a powerful following and was well-liked by many, coverage about his death was generally positive. This admission about factoring in public sentiment may also be one reason why socially responsible frames were not included more throughout the articles.

Celebrity Perception & Illegal Drugs. This research found a positive answer for RQ3 concerning the celebrities’ perception in the articles, but only for negative perception for those celebrities whose death resulted from illegal drugs. Despite mentioning talent in articles about Phoenix and Farley, the overall sentiment of the paragraphs still resulted in a negative celebrity perception overall. Articles about Phoenix’s death attempted to analyze when Phoenix began using drugs and how often he did so. Since drugs appeared to be such a counter to his lifestyle, articles began to focus on the type of people he surrounded himself with and the types of nightclubs he frequented. Articles focused on the fact that Phoenix visited places where drugs were prominent. Phoenix’s association with these places and the drugs found within them sheds a negative light on his perception.

Articles about Farley’s death focused on his struggles with depression, obesity, and drug and alcohol addiction. Despite mentioning that Farley attended Mass regularly, his overall perception was of a morbidly obese actor who constantly abused drugs and alcohol. His battle with depression further enhanced his use of such drugs because he constantly sought acceptance. Articles also gave several witness accounts of Farley in nightclubs in haggard conditions, only to return the next night for the same routine. Furthermore, articles mentioned Farley’s 17 attempts at rehab and his lack of success for staying sober. Farley’s perception in this study was shaped by

his substance abuse problems, as well as for depression and weight issues rather than focusing on his career as a comedian who entertained millions.

Like Farley, articles about Renfro's death emphasized his troubled personal life. Another main discussion topic found in Fan's (1996) study, linked drugs to legal issues and users' problems with the law. From his first arrest at age 15 for possession of cocaine and marijuana, to attempting to steal a yacht a few years later, Renfro's perception was influenced by his personal life rather than his acting career. Renfro's struggle with sobriety was much like Farley's—unsuccessful. However, media reports used in this study did not delve much deeper into his legal issues, but simply stated the facts that he was constantly in and out of trouble.

Celebrity Perception & Prescription Drugs. Media's portrayal of celebrities who died from prescription drug overdoses did not influence the celebrities' perception. Although it was determined that celebrities involved with prescription medication yielded more positive frames, these frames did not influence their overall perception.

Many articles about Smith's death concentrated on her personal life and legal issues, particularly her decade-long court battle with her ex-husband's family about what should happen with the man's fortune after his passing. Smith's marriage to this man was much talked about from the beginning, as he was 63 years her senior. Her motives for marrying him were constantly questioned. Smith also struggled with weight issues, depression and anxiety, particularly after her son died. These problems, added with the paternity dispute as to who was her daughter's biological father and where her body would be buried, received more attention than her actual death. The media used in this study focused on the drama in Smith's life.

Contrasted to articles about Smith's death, more of Ledger's articles made his successful career a large point of contention. His Oscar nomination for his role in *Brokeback Mountain* was

regularly mentioned, as well as his role as the Joker in *The Dark Knight*. However, some articles mentioned his drug use. Although the articles studied only brushed the surface of this topic, it was mentioned. Again, public sentiment factors into media reports about celebrities' deaths and mentioning this negative aspect of Ledger's like may not have been popular with the audience. Furthermore, in a *People* article about Renfro's death (Silverman & Aradillas, 2008), the authors also mention Ledger's death since the two died exactly one week apart. The article states that Renfro's death was an accidental heroin overdose but makes a point at the end of the article to state that Ledger also died from an accidental overdose, but emphasizes that prescription drugs caused Ledger's death. When contrasted with a heroin overdose, this downplays the severity of a prescription drug overdose and makes Ledger's death appear more socially accepted.

Articles about Murphy's death ranged from focusing on her bubbly disposition to drug use and eating disorder rumors. Although Murphy and her family adamantly denied she used drugs or had an eating disorder, the issues were still raised and speculation circulated about what involvement these factors may have had on her death. Another issue raised, although not as frequently as the drug abuse rumors, was Murphy's relationship with her husband. Articles quoted unnamed friends of Murphy who contended that Murphy's husband was controlling and a negative influence on Murphy. However, others commented that Murphy was a pleasant person who was a joy to be around. Again, like Ledger, Murphy's perception was focused more on her career and personality, while Smith's perception was influenced by her personal and legal troubles. However, it could not be concluded that prescription medication overdoses influenced media's portrayal of these celebrities.

Limitations. One limitation to this study is the time frame it included. The media landscape changed drastically from the time Phoenix and Farley died, in 1993 and 1997, to the

time when Smith, Renfro, Ledger and Murphy died in 2007, 2008 and 2009. Most notably is the evolution of Internet news, audience's access to this information, and the way audiences can interact with media, whether commenting on online articles or interaction through social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter. Media can post and update stories frequently online, whereas in 1993 and 1997, media outlets were primarily print, television, and radio, so the release of information was contingent on these media's formats, publication dates and broadcast times.

Additionally, in the late 2000s, with the development of the Internet and social media, nearly anyone can act as a potential news source or newscaster, because they have the ability to spread information at a rapid pace and on a variety of platforms. When first created, gatekeeping was described as the way media put countless amounts of information into manageable forms, but along with the media landscape, it too has changed. The ability for people to access these countless amounts of information and to seek out the information that adheres to their beliefs is possible, mainly because of the development of the Internet. Evidence of this developed in December 2009 when Google began customizing its searches to predict which results users would most likely click, rather than showing the most popular searches (Pariser, 2011). This change was a dynamic shift in the way Internet users consume information because it limits search results and the way users share information. Whereas the first gatekeepers were media outlets, today, the Internet—and ultimately each user—acts as a gatekeeper, or as mentioned above in the Google example, a piece of software that automatically makes selections may be one of the most important gatekeepers today. This shift also contributes to the large change in the media landscape from 1993 and 1997 when Phoenix and Farley died, to 2007 through 2009 when

the rest of the celebrities died. Thus, if all subjects had died within a few years of each other, the media landscape would have been ideally more comparable.

Another limitation related to the above is the number of paragraphs gathered for each celebrity. All the celebrities that died from prescription drug overdoses—Smith, Ledger and Murphy—generated a significantly higher number of paragraphs than Phoenix, Farley and Renfro, who all died from illegal drug overdoses. Ideally, the amount of paragraphs found for each celebrity and from each source would have been closer to the same amount to allow for a more similar data set for each celebrity. The discrepancies of coverage was the main reason why this study only uses aggregated data, and no comparison between celebrities was attempted.

However, this can also be telling of the way media reported the deaths, particularly concerning social responsibility. In finding many more articles about prescription overdose deaths than illegal drug overdoses, media gave more exposure in general to prescription overdose deaths. Knowing public sentiment toward illegal drugs is more negative than prescription medication, media choosing not to report illegal drug deaths as heavily as prescription drug deaths may be seen as media's solution to providing readers with what they want to read, rather than what would most benefit society. Overall, the public knows illegal drugs are dangerous and can lead to addiction and abuse, but because it also believes prescription drugs are safer, news of prescription drug overdoses has a higher news value than illegal drug overdoses to the audience because it displaces that commonly held belief. Although socially responsible frames were not a significant part of the paragraphs studied, the uneven amount of paragraphs found could give further evidence of media downplaying the prevalence of illegal drugs and their harm, thus not adhering to socially responsible standards.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore how mediums used in this study framed celebrity deaths from illegal and prescription drug overdoses. Prescription drug abuse is increasingly becoming a problem and part of this reasoning may be because prescription drugs are generally viewed as safer than illegal drugs (Ashburn, 2010; Compton & Volkow, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Maxwell, 2006; O'Callaghan, 2010; Winkel, 2010). I researched how media applied positive and negative frames to celebrities' causes of deaths, celebrity perception, and if media used socially responsible frames for different reasons. Framing theory is not concerned with *what* information is disseminated, but *how* the information that is disseminated is framed. Media can shape audiences' thinking and understanding about a subject and in this research, how the media used portray celebrity overdose deaths from illegal drugs and prescription drugs.

Media clearly employed positive and negative frames when reporting on celebrity deaths. These frames can influence the way media's audience understands and interprets these events. Media's influence can shape how viewers perceive subjects, events, and even the celebrities themselves. This research found prescription drug overdoses to be framed more positively than illegal drug overdoses. This implication may contribute to the view that prescription medication is inherently safer than illegal drugs. In not finding socially responsible frames to be a significant finding in this research, the positive frames found for prescription drugs are the only information audiences can interpret, thus, they may adopt the belief that prescription medications do not have the same harmful effects of illegal drugs. This misconception is increasingly becoming a problem. The findings in this research support the claim that media aids this perpetuation.

Celebrities are influencers and the way media frames their perception as positive or negative can affect the audience's view of these celebrities. In framing the celebrities who died

from illegal drug overdoses negatively, the audience may infer that their behavior was not socially acceptable and avoid illegal drugs, and consequently, this negative perception, as well. This research was not able to conclude a positive correlation between positive frames in prescription drug overdoses and celebrities' perception. Further research on audience's perceptions of illegal drug and prescription drug overdoses could also reveal how media's frames have a direct effect on audiences.

APPENDIX A CODE BOOK

For RQ1 concerning positive and negative frames within article paragraphs for each celebrity's cause of death, coders will code for the positive and negative words and phrases, which are defined below. Coders will place a tally on the code sheet each time one of the words or phrases appears in the article. The article is broken into paragraphs, so each tally will be placed in the corresponding paragraph's row. For example, if the word "tragic" appears in the second paragraph of the article, coders will place a tally mark where the "Tragedy/Tragic" column intersects the "Paragraph 2" row.

The only positive single words coders will tally are "tragedy/tragic/tragically" and "talent/talents/talented." The only negative single words coders will tally are "problem/problems" and "trouble/troubles/troubled." The other words listed are part of phrases that will be coded positively or negatively and are defined below. For example, if "accidental overdose" appears in an article, coders will mark that positively and place a tally mark as explained above. After the article is read and coded, coders will total the number of tallies in each column.

The total tallies for positive frames will then be written in the "Positive for Cause of Death" column and the total tallies for negative frames will be written in the "Negative for Cause of Death" column. For example, if one paragraph contains the word "talent/talented/talents" and the phrase "accidental overdose," a 2 should be written at the intersection of the paragraph number's row and "Positive for Cause of Death" column.

For RQ2, coders will code for socially responsible frames within each paragraph. If paragraphs include information about the harmful effects of illegal drugs and potentially harmful effects of prescription medications, particularly when combined, the paragraph is considered to have a positive social responsibility frame and will mark a tally in the "Positive for Conforming to Society's Values" column. If paragraphs mention that no lesson was learned from the celebrity's death, a negative social responsibility frame will be coded and tallied in the "Negative for Conforming to Society's Values" column. The tally system is the same as explained above only now it applies to the "Positive for Conforming to Society's Values" and "Negative for Conforming to Society's Values" columns.

For RQ3, coders will code for positive and negative celebrity perception to determine whether the cause of the celebrities' deaths, whether from illegal drugs or prescription medications, influenced how the selected media portrayed the celebrities' characters. Positive celebrity perception frames will include focusing on the celebrity's acting or personal accomplishments and talents, positive reputation and persona, and positive public sentiment. Positive perception

will be marked in the “Positive for Celebrity Perception” column. Negative celebrity perception frames will include media’s focus on an unsuccessful film career or individual roles, personal and legal problems, negative feedback and/or opinions about the celebrity’s reputation and persona, and negative public sentiment. Negative perception will be tallied in the “Negative for Celebrity Perception” column.

Further Instructions:

In articles that are not directly related to the celebrities’ deaths, such as “Sundance Diary: Days 6 and 7 (or: Man, it just got cold!),” which focuses on the Sundance Film Festival but also mentions Ledger’s death, only those paragraphs that mention Ledger’s death will be used. The code sheets list the number of paragraphs to be coded so this will also ensure that the coders code the correct paragraphs. Additionally, when celebrities are mentioned in “Table of Contents,” “Passages” “Mailbag,” and “Monitor,” only the paragraphs mentioning the celebrities used in this study will be included. Headlines, sub-headlines, and photo captions will not be included in the analysis.

The codebook is divided into six sections:

- Positive Words
- Words Used in Positive Phrases
- Positive Phrases
- Negative Words
- Words Used in Negative Phrases
- Negative Phrases

The words used in positive and negative phrases sections were included to break down the phrases into individual words and provide justification for why the words are considered positive or negative.

Positive Words

Tragedy/Tragic/Tragically

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines tragedy as “a disastrous event; misfortune” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines tragedy as “an event causing great suffering, destruction, distress, such as a serious accident, crime, or natural catastrophe” (Oxford Dictionary, 2011). As such, those affected by tragedy are victims suffering from uncontrollable social forces (Ramadhana, 2005). The word victim also takes the blame off the people affected by tragedy because the tragedy occurred outside their control; thus, they did not choose their fate, rather the tragedy befell them.

Tragedy began as a literary concept, “but social commentators and the media now use the word to talk more often about the destruction brought about by a natural disaster or the suffering involved in a shocking transgression against innocent people” (Hamilton et al., 2009, p. 59). Hamilton et al. go on to state that the term tragedy is used as justification for unexplainable disasters (Hamilton, 2009). Additionally, anyone’s death could be considered tragic, but particularly so if the death could have been avoided, such as some of the cases being studied in this research (Hamilton et al., 2009).

In stating that the deaths were tragic, the audience sees the deaths as unfortunate losses that claimed talented young celebrities, resulting in a positive perception.

Talent/Talents/Talented

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines talent as “a characteristic feature, aptitude, or disposition of a person...the natural endowments of a person...general intelligence or mental power” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines talent as “natural aptitude or skill” (Oxford Dictionary, 2011). This word is used throughout many of the articles to describe the celebrities’ acting abilities. Talent connotes a natural-given gift and it is used to reinforce that, through their deaths, the world is now deprived of people who may have continued to share their talents with the world. The fact that media reports these individuals as talented hints at a sense of lost potential because these celebrities were using their talents to entertain.

Words Used in Positive Phrases

Accident/Accidental/Accidentally

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines accident as “an unforeseen and unplanned event or circumstance...an unfortunate event resulting especially from carelessness or ignorance...an unexpected happening causing loss or injury which is not due to any fault or misconduct on the part of the person injured but for which legal relief may be sought” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines accident as “an unfortunate incident that happens unexpectedly and unintentionally, typically resulting in damage or injury...an event that happens by chance or that is without apparent or deliberate cause” (Oxford Dictionary, 2011).

Prescription/Prescribed

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines prescription as “a written direction for a therapeutic or corrective agent; specifically: one for the preparation and use of medicine” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines prescription as “an instruction written by a medical practitioner that authorizes a patient to be provided a medicine or treatment...a recommendation that is authoritatively put forward” (Oxford Dictionary, 2011).

Medicine/Medication

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines medicine as “a substance or preparation used in treating disease...something that affects well-being” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines medicine as “a compound or preparation used for the treatment or prevention of disease, especially a drug or drugs taken by mouth” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011).

Pill/Pills

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines pills as “usually medicinal or dietary preparation in a small rounded mass to be swallowed whole” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines pills as “a small round mass of solid medicine to be swallowed whole” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011).

Untimely

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines untimely as “at an inopportune time; before the due, natural, or proper time: prematurely” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines untimely as “(of an event or act) happening or done at an unsuitable time; (of a death or end) happening too soon or sooner than normal” (Oxford Dictionary, 2011).

Positive Phrases

Accidental overdose

The term accident is used multiple times throughout many of the articles studied, even in articles where the celebrity died of an illegal drug overdose. Accident is “not the result of chance or fate, and moreover, it is not intentional (meaning it is not the result of a conscious desire to cause damage)” (Neira & Bosque, 2004, p. 188). Furthermore, accident removes the person from the sequence that caused the injury, thus making “it impossible to analyze the actions that led to the unsafe behavior” (Neira & Bosque, 2004, p. 188). This is important to this research because the term accidental removes blame of the death from the celebrity. In removing the blame from celebrities, they become victims in a sense because the event happened by chance and was not intentional. Even those that die from illicit drug overdoses become victims (Murji, 1998).

Although, when used alone, overdose would be considered negative because it carries harmful and, in this research, lethal implications, the phrase accidental overdose is positive because, as discussed above, accident removes blame from the deceased.

Accidental drug overdose

Although this phrase is close to the above phrase, the addition of the word drug needs to be addressed. The definitions listed above include both prescription and illegal drugs so it is important to note the context in which the word is used in the articles. This phrase is still

considered to be positive because of the word accidental preceding the terms drug and overdose. As seen later in the codebook, this word in another context will be determined negative.

Accidental prescription drug overdose

Again, this phrase is similar to the above two phrases but the addition of the word prescription makes this phrase positive, as well. Although “from a pharmacological perspective, prescription drugs fit into the same drug classes as the usual illicit drugs” (Compton & Volkow, 2006), they are not always perceived in the same light as illicit drugs. Since prescriptions come from a licensed physician and are approved by the Federal Drug Administration, they are viewed as safer than street drugs (Ashburn, 2010; Friedman, 2006; Maxwell, 2006; O’Callaghan, 2010; Winkel, 2010). Therefore, with the addition of the term prescription, this phrase becomes increasingly positive.

Prescription drug overdose

Although this phrase does not include the term accidental, it is still considered positive because of the aforementioned connotation of prescription.

Accidental heroin overdose

This phrase only applies to Brad Renfro’s death, but since the coroner’s office ruled his death an accident, it will be telling to see how many articles mention this fact. As with the term overdose, it is important to look at the context in which heroin is used as evidenced later in the codebook when it is used with the word addiction.

No illegal drugs

This phrase was determined to be positive after several control articles were read because the articles mention the absence of illegal drugs either noted in the autopsy report or found at the scene of the death. This is an important inclusion in the articles as a means to clear any speculation that some of the celebrities died from, or were using, illegal drugs at the time of their deaths.

Prescription medication

Again, prescription medication connotes a more positive sentiment because, as justified above, prescription medication is seen as safer than illicit drugs because it is prescribed by a physician and FDA approved. Prescription medication is also used to treat legitimate illnesses which some of the celebrities were suffering from at their time of death.

Prescription pills

This phrase is positive for the same reasons as prescription medication but needed to be included because the phrases can be used interchangeably in the articles.

Ruled an accident

This phrase comes mainly from the coroners' reports on the celebrities' deaths. The coroners' reports give legitimate reasoning to the celebrities' cause of death. The important word here is accident, which is explained above as carrying a positive connotation.

Untimely death

As with the term tragedy, this phrase is considered positive because it alludes to the celebrities' unfortunate passing and the sense of loss of potential and talent that accompanies the death.

Negative Words*Problem/Problems*

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines problem, as related to this research, as "a source of complexity, distress, or vexation" (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines problem as "a matter or situation regarded as unwelcome or harmful and needing to be dealt with and overcome... a thing that is difficult to achieve" (Oxford Dictionary, 2011). Although some of the articles used in this study regard the celebrities as talented, some articles also recognize the personal and legal struggles of some of the stars. By including the celebrities' personal and legal battles, some with illegal drugs and some with prescription drugs, the media acknowledges that these substances and medications caused problems in their past and could have been a contributing factor in some of the celebrities' deaths. In this way, mentions of the word problem will be considered negative.

Trouble/Troubles/Troubled

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines trouble as "to agitate mentally or spiritually: worry, disturb... to put into confused motion... to become mentally agitated" (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines trouble as "difficulty or problems... effort or exertion made to do something, especially when inconvenient... a particular aspect or quality of something regarded as unsatisfactory or as a source of difficulty... a situation in which one is liable to incur punishment or blame... be distressed or anxious about" (Oxford Dictionary, 2011). Similar to the term problem in this research, troubled is used throughout some of the articles to discuss the celebrities' personal struggles. The Oxford definition of the word mentions being distressed or anxious about a situation, which several of the stars used in this research were at the time of their deaths. Whether struggling with illegal drug abuse or using prescriptions to treat various illnesses, the celebrities all had extenuating circumstances that seemed to lead to their prescription or illegal drug use. Again, like the word problem, trouble is considered negative in this regard because their troubles could have led them to use drugs and may have been contributing factors in their deaths.

Words Used in Negative Phrases

Overdose

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines overdose as “too great a dose... a lethal or toxic amount (as of a drug)... an excessive quantity or amount” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines overdose as “an excessive and dangerous dose of a drug” (Oxford Dictionary, 2011).

Drug/Drugs

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines drug as “a substance used as a medication or in the preparation of medication... something and often an illegal substance that causes addiction, habituation, or a marked change in consciousness” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines drug as “a medicine or other substance which has a physiological effect when ingested or otherwise introduced into the body... a substance taken for its narcotic or stimulant effects, often illegally” (Oxford Dictionary, 2011).

Heroin

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines heroin as “a strongly physiologically addictive narcotic... more potent than morphine and that is prohibited for medical use in the United States but is used illicitly for its euphoric effects” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines heroin as “a highly addictive analgesic drug derived from morphine, often used illicitly as a narcotic producing euphoria” (Oxford Dictionary, 2011).

Illicit

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines illicit as “not permitted: unlawful” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines illicit as “forbidden by law, rules, or custom” (Oxford Dictionary, 2011).

Intoxicate/Intoxication/Intoxicated

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines intoxicate as “to excite or stupefy by alcohol or a drug especially to the point where physical and mental control is markedly diminished” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines intoxicate as “(of alcoholic drink or a drug) cause someone to lose control of the faculties or behavior” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011).

Abuse/Abused

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines abuse as “a corrupt practice or custom; improper or excessive treatment: misuse” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines abuse as “use (something) to bad effect or for a bad purpose; misuse; make excessive and habitual use of (alcohol or drugs, especially illegal ones)” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011).

Addiction/Addicted/Addict

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines addiction as “compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance (as heroin, nicotine, or alcohol) characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal; persistent compulsive use of a substance known by the user to be harmful” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary defines addiction as “the fact or condition of being addicted to a particular substance, thing, or activity” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011).

Negative Phrases*Multiple drug intoxication*

Not only does this phrase connote loss of control as a result of drug use, in the case of this research, it also means a lethal combination of more than one drug.

Acute drug intoxication

Although this phrase may not carry as negative of a connotation as multiple drug intoxication, the fact that it still mentions drug intoxication makes it negative. As mentioned earlier, intoxication refers to the loss of physical and mental control and is consequently used as a negative frame.

Drug abuse

Drug abuse is a negative phrase because abuse connotes excess and misuse. Excess also hints that users may not have control over their use of drugs, which leads to such abuse and potentially addiction.

Substance abuse

Substance abuse is considered negative for the reasons listed in drug abuse, but some articles use substance and drug interchangeably, so it was necessary to include this phrase.

Drug overdose

Drug overdose is a negative phrase because, not only does drug emit a negative connotation, but overdose suggests overindulgence and a dangerous excess. Excess can lead to increasingly harmful and even lethal effects, particularly when drugs are involved.

Drug addiction

This phrase is considered negative because drug addiction is a harmful condition that can lead to numerous health problems and death. According to the definition of addiction given above, addicts know their addiction is harmful, but are controlled by their disease, which leads them to use drugs, sometimes not considering the consequences.

Heroin addiction

As mentioned above, drug addiction is negative because of its harmful effects. Heroin, as an illegal drug, is considered a negative phrase in this research for the same reason.

Cocaine addiction

As mentioned above, drug addiction is negative because of its harmful effects. Cocaine, as an illegal drug, is considered a negative phrase in this research for the same reason.

Prescription drug addiction

Although prescription drugs was considered a positive phrase above, when combined with addiction, it becomes negative since addiction implies dependence on a substance known to have potentially harmful side effects if the user becomes addicted.

Illicit drugs

Illicit drugs is a negative phrase because illicit is generally considered against what is socially acceptable. Illegal activities, and in this study illegal drugs, are seen as deviant to society's standards, and thus produces a negative frame in this research. Illicit drugs in general "are seen by health professionals to be risky, although to drug users themselves they may be seen as nothing more than mundane everyday occurrences" (Aggleton, p. 127).

APPENDIX B

CODE SHEET

1	Paragraph number
2	Coder
Michelle River Phoenix	Celebrity
The New Death	Publication
The New Death	Article title
11/12/93	Date
35	Word Count
	Tragedy/Tragic
	Talent/Talented/Talents
	Problem/Problems
	Trouble/Troubles/Troubled
	Accidental Overdose
	Accidental Drug Overdose
	Accidental Prescription Drug Overdose
	Prescription Drug Overdose
	Accidental Heroin Overdose
	No Illegal Drugs
	Prescription Medication
	Prescription Pills
1	Ruled An Accident
	Untimely Death
1	Multiple Drug Intoxication
	Acute Drug Intoxication
	Drug Abuse
	Substance Abuse
	Drug Overdose
	Drug Addiction
	Heroin Addiction
	Cocaine Addiction
	Prescription Drug Addiction
	Illicit Drugs
1	Positive for Cause of Death
1	Negative for Cause of Death
	Positive for Conforming to Society's Values
	Negative for Conforming to Society's Values
1	Positive for Celebrity Perception
1	Negative for Celebrity Perception

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