

Original Research Paper

# A History of the Present: The Impact of Newspapers' Constructions of Maltreatment in an Irish Nursing Home

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**Abstract:** Since the publication of Ireland's policy on elder abuse, structural, practice, policy and research advances have occurred. However, a significant catalyst to in raising the public consciousness was the impact of an undercover broadcast of maltreatment in Leas Cross nursing home in 2005. This broadcast has had an enduring and significant impact on nursing home care until the present day. Consequently, this study provides insights into newspaper editorial rhetorical representations following the broadcast of an undercover television expose of sub-standard care practices in Leas Cross. Data collection involved the examination of editorial coverage in four national newspapers following the television broadcast, *Primetime Investigates: Home Truths* (Radio Telivis Eireann (RTE) in 2005). Using three methods within the tradition of critical discourse analysis, the study reveals how typical unmitigated understandings of elder abuse were rendered visible through the construction of subject positions and identities. Furthermore, the consequences of these editorials are considered. Findings show that particular typified narratives were used to present a selected reality and there are distinct differences in broadsheets and tabloid publications. The broadcast's exposure of this substandard care is seen to have an enduring impact on both the establishment of the Irish Health Information and Quality Authority in 2007 and on current standards of regulations in nursing care.

**Keywords:** Long Term Care, Elder Abuse, Newspaper Coverage

## Introduction

As part of the programme of research in the National Centre for the Protection of Older People, a study was undertaken to examine newspaper representations of elder abuse following a covert television investigation of care practices in a residential facility for older people (Phelan, 2009a). Within mass media cultures, social issues such as elder abuse have key reference points which attract concentrated coverage of a topic and carry influential associations in public perceptions (Kitzinger, 2000). Such events are described as 'media templates', which provide contextual understandings and serve as catalysts to political and social change and guide narratives for discourses (Kitzinger, 2000).

Mass media is a powerful vehicle which contributes to the construction of hegemonic perspectives in social reality (Landau, 2009) particularly in relation to 'informed citizenry' (Kumar, 2001: 285). Newspapers constitute a major media platform, representing a powerful way of constructing and sustaining public opinion and identities

(List, 1985; Barak, 1988; Richardson, 2007; Landau, 2009). Newspaper coverage of events do not mirror reality but construct particular versions of selected reality (Stamou, 2001; Frewin *et al.*, 2009). As such, newspaper reports can be positioned to establish, challenge and affirm existing relations of dominance and inequality (Fairclough, 1995; Bell and Garrett, 1998; Richardson, 2007). Newspapers are a particular powerful medium in Ireland, which has the highest average newspaper readership time in Europe (Elvestad and Blekesaune, 2008). This study examines how meanings and identities of elder abuse were spoken of in newspapers within a particular timeframe and the consequences of this. The timeframe is purposefully selected as a critical period which generated considerable Irish media discourses on the topic of elder abuse. The paper focuses on the ways in which dominant texts are presented, dropped, constrained and perpetuated through Irish newspaper coverage for the period. This represents a watershed moment in Irish regulation of nursing home care and has been seen as a

reference point in subsequent scandals related to residential care of vulnerable adults.

### *Background to the Primetime Investigates Programme*

Elder abuse is recognized as a complex, nebulous social phenomenon (Phelan, 2013). In Ireland, public awareness of elder abuse was minimal until an undercover television programme portraying sub-standard care practices in a North Dublin nursing home was broadcast on 30 May 2005. The *Primetime Investigates*<sup>2</sup> programme examines issues of public concern and involves contributions and interviews from politicians, experts on the focused topic and lobbyist groups. The one-hour broadcast was televised and was based on sixty hours of undercover film footage taken by a healthcare attendant who was employed in the nursing home for an eight-week period during March and April 2005. This resulted in a plethora of newspaper, television and radio coverage focusing on unacceptable care practices in residential care for older people. The Health Service Executive (HSE) subsequently assumed management of the care home, but the nursing home eventually closed in August of 2005. Public outrage in the media was so intense that questions were raised in the Irish Parliament and two subsequent public reports were commissioned on Leas Cross (O' Neill, 2006; DoH, 2009) with a further report detailing the appropriateness of a patient transfer to the facility (Dignam, 2010).

### *Methodology: Newspapers as a Discursive Medium*

The media is a particularly important focus for discourse analysis as it has an important role as 'discourse-bearing institutions' (Bell and Garrett, 1998). The media can be viewed as a vehicle of democratic public debate which informs the public, or as a powerful monopoly which tacitly supports vested interests (Thomas and Wareing, 1999; Li, 2009). Furthermore, the media is a crucial catalyst in presenting culture, politics and social life; it contributes to the character of society (Bell, 1998; Fairclough, 1995). As a key media outlet, newspapers function as 'papers of record' in society (Cotter, 2001) making speech durable over time, therefore forming a historical record of events. Newspapers bridge two speech contexts: The situation of speech reception and the situation of speech production (Reisigl and Worak, 2009). Moreover, newspapers enable a gauging of public opinion and consequently, public discourses (Bell, 1998; Talbot, 2007) and their influence cannot be understated (Fairclough, 1995; Le, 2003; McNeely and Cook, 2007).

In an attempt to connect with concerns of the public, newspapers can use sensationalism (Sorenson *et al.*, 1998) to increase sales in a competitive market and

content can be mediated by issues of newspaper ownership (Chomsky, 2006). Consequently, media events such as the reportage following the *Primetime Investigates* programme are subject to a transformative process (Fairclough, 1995). Moreover, newspapers themselves are subject to particular tensions between information and entertainment, agreement and persuasion, as well as negotiating the domains of public and private spaces (Fairclough, 1995). Accounts within newspapers have been shown to recontextualise reality using the following patterns (a) distortions, (b) artificial constructions of reality, (c) systematic overkill and (d) media consumption (Friedrichs, 2006). Furthermore, the social reality presented in newspapers is influenced by a myriad of factors such as constraints of time and space (Tardy, 2009), relevance or importance (Bell, 1991), financial constraints and sales (Conboy, 2006; Frewin *et al.*, 2009) and ideological standpoints or what Fairclough terms 'authoritarian populism' (Fairclough, 1989). These factors persuade the reader that the views of the speaker, within the newspaper, represent the views of the readers.

Within the plethora of media discourses, newspapers affect what ordinary people think as well as reflecting public opinion therefore giving particular viewpoints popular currency and navigating dilemmas of society (Hodgetts and Chamberlain, 2003a; Van Dijk, 1991; Machin and Mayr, 2007; Payne, 2008; Payne *et al.*, 2008). The media also provides central understandings of social issues through 'regimes of representation' (Hall, 2001: 338) and identifies legitimate responses to these issues (Hodgetts and Chamberlain, 2003b), including policy formation (Davidson *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, events are not only cognitively constructed in a timeframe contemporaneous to the media template, but influence memories of the topic (Frewin *et al.*, 2009). In the case of Leas Cross for example, newspapers continue to echo its impact even years after its broadcast (O' Cionnaith, 2011a; 2011b; Cullen, 2014; Flanagan, 2014), particularly in connection to HIQA reports and other residential care mistreatment scandals. The examination of newspapers also allows a critique of those responsible for the perpetuation of particular views and, therefore, social inequality (Van Dijk, 1993) although Teo (2000) argues that newspapers also have the power to resist and challenge socially accepted norms.

### *Elder Abuse in Newspaper Coverage*

In conducting a literature review of elder abuse in newspapers, it is obvious that there is scant attention paid to this issue. Only six published studies were located (Beard and Payne, 2005; Mastin *et al.*, 2007; McNeely and Cook, 2007; Payne *et al.*, 2008; Sharma Bhattarai, 2014; Jönson, 2016). Four studies were based on newspaper coverage in the United States (US) within one based in Nepal (Sharman Bhattari,

2014) and one in Sweden (Jönson, 2016). Findings of the six studies indicated that only some types of elder abuse were reported and elder abuse was generally presented in the context of criminal justice as episodic editorials (those based on concrete events) rather than thematic events (those which were issue orientated) with particular people identified as morally responsible (Jönson, 2016). Such coverage has been termed 'news making criminology' (Barak, 1999) but more recently 'news making victimology' (Beard and Payne, 2005). Moreover, in reporting elder abuse, the US studies indicated that newspapers predominantly focused on the nursing home setting, although prevalence studies indicate that elder abuse is more common in the domestic setting (Phelan, 2009b) and newspaper reports from Nepal predominantly look at abuse outside of residential care.

The six studies reported that newspapers could draw on particular representations of older people such as being lonely, infirm, socially isolated and bereft of family monitoring of care delivery. In addition, staff are positioned as morally bereft in perpetrating the abuse or, alternatively, could be victims of a dysfunctional system. Such ageist representations are also particularly demonstrated in one of the studies which compared editorials of child protection with those of elder abuse and found that coverage and priority were higher for child abuse cases. Several reasons are enumerated for differing priority such as difficulties in understanding elder abuse, a higher value on youth and a lack of elder abuse in the criminal justice system as opposed to child abuse cases (Payne *et al.*, 2008).

## Methodology

A central aim of this study was the examination of the social construction of elder abuse through a particular form of media discourse, that of newspapers. Social construction is a critical method of examining the way in which social reality is perceived (Burr, 2003). Furthermore, social construction challenges the neutrality of knowledge. It is argued that knowledge is produced and sustained within both historical and cultural contexts, which cohere to make sense of the world (Phelan, 2008; 2009b). To view the world through a social constructionist lens encompasses the critical investigation of discourses which underpin how versions of truth are established. These versions of truth are important as they sustain the way we see the world, thus, providing a catalyst to social action and social practices (Gee, 2014). Critical discourse analysis transcends description to an explanation of how and why particular discourses are produced through an awareness of the important role enacted by the social forces within the dialectical relationship within discourse (Teo, 2000). As such, critical discourse analysis focuses on discursive exchanges which describe 'unequal encounters' or

practices which appear mundane or disinterested (Teo, 2000). As the language in newspapers is never neutral (Fowler, 1991), critical discourse analysis offered a useful method of revealing the fallacy that newspapers' reportage is neutral and disinterested (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). While much of the reportage may seem anecdotal, this is precisely the point. The stereotypical constructions of older people become so familiar that they become taken for granted and undisputed. This is where critical discourse analysis is important as it deconstructs the hegemonic interests and identifies stereotypical text to allow readers to question such 'truths'.

### *Methodological Approaches used in this Study*

This study used three approaches to examine the data (Fairclough, 1995; 2003; Wetherell, 1998; Gee, 2014). The advantages of these methodological approaches are that they allow analysis to focus on the form newspaper texts are presented, the function of these texts (Richardson, 2007) and the possible consequences in the macro perspective of social life. Fairclough (1995; 2003) is concerned with the social effects of texts. Newspapers can contribute to forming public opinion through particular selected reportage which shapes identities although such a relationship does not infer causality (Fairclough, 2003). In particular, ideological stances can be identified in texts (Fowler, 1991). Texts are concerned with generating meaning and careful analysis focuses on intertextuality and interdiscursivity. The critical discourse analysis of newspapers allows a review of specific genres which demonstrate socially ratified ways of using language in relation to a social activity (Fairclough, 1995). The text in newspapers is examined for how legitimacy is constructed within the reportage which rationalises editorial stances. The examination of newspaper articles, therefore, involves a careful review of orders of discourse, where the choice of language produced is socially structured through genre, styles and discourses.

Wetherell (1998) provides a cogent account of a useful methodology with particular reference to identity construction. Personal identity allows an individual to belong to a social identity as 'we perceive ourselves as a member of a social group and as someone with the characteristics of that social group' (Brown, 1996: 33). Identity involves the constant readjustment of making sense of the world through available narratives and subject positions. Identity is engendered in almost all textual forms in the way it addresses the reader (Hodge and Kress, 1988) although specific identifying positions accommodate differing contexts and interpretations (Holmes *et al.*, 1999; Matheson, 2005; Gee, 2014) and contribute to social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Benwell and Stoke, 2006). Thus, in this research, identity is a dual construction: The self-identity of the newspapers and the identity the newspapers narratives' construct of the

social actors in the newspaper reports. Newspapers target the idealised readership in using specific social identities to create ‘communities of practice’ (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999). However, Mullany (2002) suggests that it is necessary to acknowledge discourse in constructed contexts which do not facilitate physical interaction (such as newspapers) and therefore redefine phenomena within a ‘synthetic community of practice’ (Mullany, 2002: 7). Thus, journalists produce narrative genres in a way which allows the readership to experience mutuality and group identity.

Gee’s (2005: 1) discursive approach focuses on ‘a theory and method for studying how language gets recruited ‘on site’ to enact specific social activities and social identities’. This methodology uses particular strategies to examine text. Analysis focuses on the identification of the ‘building tasks’ and tools which underpin the construction of the text. For Gee, building tasks and tools are simultaneously ‘cognitive achievements, interactional achievements and intertextual achievements’ (Gee, 2005: 104). In combining these three methodological approaches, a multi-dimensional perspective was elucidated which enriched understandings of the consequences for particular discursive representations within the study data.

### Sampling

Within the sampling frame, consideration was given to which newspapers were analysed and this choice was based on issues such as geographical spread, target audience, audience size and type and publication time (daily or weekly). Four newspapers comprised the sample: *The Irish Times*, *The Independent* and the *Irish Daily Sun* (dailys) and *The Sunday Independent* (weekly). Readership figures are detailed in Table 1.

Bell’s (1991) sampling method involved a clear delineation of the data. Pragmatic choices were made to constitute the research question but concurrently reduce data to manageable proportions. Anything other than advertising was identified as editorial (Bell, 1991). Editorial was further reduced to hard news, headlines, feature articles, by lines and sub headings. Opinion was treated separately from news reporting.

Table 1. Readership Figures (2008) for Irish Newspapers in this study (NNI, 2009)

| Newspaper (Daily)  | *Estimated Readership numbers in 000 s | *Percentage who read particular paper |
|--------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| The Irish Times    | 317                                    | 9.00%                                 |
| The Independent    | 520                                    | 14.70%                                |
| Irish Daily Sun    | 301                                    | 8.50%                                 |
| Newspaper (Weekly) |  |                                       |
| Sunday Independent | 941                                    | 26.70                                 |

\*Based on random probability sample of 7000 people as extrapolated to general Irish population

### Data Collection

Archival searches were conducted using the University College Dublin newspaper archives, Lexis-Nexis and the newspaper records at the National Library in Dublin. Newspapers were searched using the phrases elder abuse and the nursing home name. Two phases constituted the data collection. Firstly, each newspaper was searched for a period prior the *Primetime Investigates* (RTE 30 May 2005) programme to establish general newspaper coverage of elder abuse prior to the emergence of the media template of the nursing home (30 January 2005-28 February 2005). The second phase involved a newspaper search for one month following the *Primetime Investigates* programme (31 May 2005-30 June 2005). This ensured that the newspaper debates which constituted legitimate print coverage in the sampled newspapers could be comprehensively examined during the contentious period following the *Primetime Investigates* programme. Two inferences or direct references to elder abuse were contained in phase one. However, following the *Primetime Investigates* programme (31 May 2005-30 June 2005), extensive newspaper editorial was located in each of the sample newspapers, totalling 114 separate articles.

### Findings

Findings are presented using sample extracts from the newspapers. Data is grounded in issues which legitimate and provide particular persuasive arguments which target each newspaper’s community of practice. Phase one findings of the newspaper coverage pre-event (30/1/05 - 28/2/05) constituted two letters to the editor of the *Sunday Independent* (30/1/05) under the demand heading of ‘State should repay money it took illegally’. Letters to the editor are symbolic, as they are perceived as including the ‘voice’ of readership and often provide the context for resistance to social events and social practices. The activity of the first letter was argumentative on the grounds that ‘Political platitudes for concern for the weak would ring hollow if a great injustice is to be resolved by payment of a paltry €2,000 to people from whom both money and dignity were stolen’. The statement was framed in a hypothetical modality to enhance the tentative nature of only paying €2000. The subject position of the HSE was placed akin to a thief as the letter categorically claimed that ‘very many residents have had tens of thousands of euro taken...’, yet only €2000 is to be repaid. The letter built up the connections between this and additional events by summarizing other ‘scandals in the political and financial sectors’ which reminded readers that this alleged injustice is part of greater intrinsic failings of an incompetent government. The letter acknowledged that ‘Statements of profound regret have been issued and

promises to make amends have abounded', however this transparency was framed as tokenistic as the narrative 'All will have been in vain if the State fails to make full restitution...'. In signing the letter in the Irish language, 'Is mise le meas' the author reinforced his nationalism and his desire to represent the Irish people.

In the second letter, there was a direct reference to a previous article in the *Sunday Independent* (some weeks earlier) which examined care of older people in a particular nursing home. This was seen as a significant prompt to the author's letter. The narrative focused on an experience where an older relative had been victimized in her home by 'so-called masked raiders'. The use of this description built up a frightening scenario in readers' minds and its 'profound effect' was validated by the subsequent need for the older lady to firstly, move in with her daughter and subsequently be admitted to a nursing home. However, the older woman was further distressed when the nursing home subsequently closed and this distress was afforded further legitimacy as 'thousands of other elderly people' had been placed in a similar position. The intertextual work in this letter was visible as the author cited his efforts to lobby political domains by writing to 'each of the 25 European prime ministers appealing to them all to support my campaign'. In doing so the genres of government were connected, from the locality of the author's experience to the national experience to the European agenda.

The text in both letters illustrated the commitment of the authors to the political management of older people. Descriptions built up the narratives' significance through categorical statements and value commitments. The subject positions in both letters pointed to the helplessness and vulnerability of older people and the lack of political impetus to respond appropriately to their needs. Consequently, particular identities were established.

### *Phase two Findings: Newspaper Coverage Post-Event*

Following the broadcast of the *Primetime Investigates* programme on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2005, newspaper reports were part of a complex chain of events which provided the catalyst to extensive media scrutiny of a nursing home. The chain of events is constituted by a covert television investigation of the nursing home, an attempt through the Irish High Court to grant an injunction to the *Primetime Investigates* programme, the consequent failure of the legal injunction, the television airing of the programme, the subsequent media coverage of the programme, Dáil questions, inquiry reports (O'Neill 2006; DoH 2009) and professional guidance documents (ABA, 2009). The newspaper accounts encompassed the power to summarise a particular version of reality as recontextualisation occurred, transforming other social practices and impacting on everyday life.

The relationship between the newspapers and social events is mediated as meaning is moved from one social practice to another (Silverstone, 1999). Journalists used particular sources to constitute the newspaper articles resulting in building up a story and the sequence of events. The high degree of newspaper coverage reflected the event as one of great social magnitude and significance. The editorials were typically of a mixed genre, which used summarisations, direct quotations and pictorial genre mixing. Consequently, the newspaper articles are developed into conventional newspaper reports and commentaries which predominantly represented a knowledge exchange. Moreover, the editorials selectively filtered worked as a regulatory device for selecting and privileging some narratives over others.

### *The Interdiscursive Nature of Newspaper Articles*

The nursing home exposé resulted in a plethora of newspaper coverage as public opinion and media coverage intensified. In the days following the television broadcast, national newspapers presented concrete lead editorials or narratives on the social event, which constituted the media template of the nursing home. Newspaper editorials reduced complex events, imposing narrative order which was constituted as a heavily interpretative and constructive process. Although reportage included many statements of fact, Fairclough (1995: 85) points to the 'referential function' of newspapers which makes them open to questions about the stories, the nature of events described and truth value. Thus, in recontextualisation, facts may become exaggerated or rendered vague according to the journalistic intent.

An informative persuasive genre was used in all newspapers sampled which combined different content (text and photos). Within the narratives, identities and subject positions were developed for a number of social actors, namely the individual paper, the nursing home staff, the older residents, the relatives, the public and the HSE.

Editorials on the nursing home offered interpretations and summaries of the *Primetime Investigates programme* and also provided a genre of government by establishing relations between the local (the nursing home) and the national. For example, the *Irish Times* (1/6/05) cites incidences of other nursing homes which had caused concern, while the prevalent nature of concerns regarding nursing home abuse provide the 'inside story for the *Sunday Independent* 5/6/05). The headline 'Scandal of two more nursing homes that failed our elderly' functioned to relate genres of governance in linking different scales of connections.

In all articles, the regulation of newspaper space was a journalistic and editorial decision resulting in particular selections, inclusions and exclusions, (for example who

was represented). Although substantial debate on the nursing home occurred in other media forms (radio, television), the newspaper coverage was highly regulated as print, is a one-way mediated form which is subject to a selective process. Another influencing factor is that newspaper coverage is always limited by commercial pressures in selling newspapers through sensationalism and reputation. As the issue of nursing home abuse was considered a legitimate (and sensational) story, the legitimacy of coverage was underpinned by vivid description accounts of the nursing home abuse in the public interest.

### *The Nursing Home Newspaper Headings*

Newspaper articles frame headings to attract the reader. Consequently, headings were typified by statements such as the *Irish Independent* (31/5/05) 'Documentary exposes 'appalling' nursing home'. On some occasions, headlines used a question to attract the readers' attention. For example, the *Irish Independent* (4/6/09, Review section) asks "Who can we trust now?" On other occasions, pun or rhetoric was employed. *The Sunday Independent* (5/6/05) used the headline 'Roll up for the latest Shocking Horror Show, which has a resonance of the musical *The Rocky Horror Show*, based on a surreal horror fantasy. Such imagery reflects the narrative of the nursing home experiences.

### *The Nursing Home Editorials*

The narratives in the nursing home newspaper articles used characteristic formats to present editorials. Characteristically, the introductory paragraph gave a description of the event, followed by elaborative, sequential paragraphs (satellites) which focalized the narrative within textual positions of importance. Reports used linguistic devices of additives, temporal relationships, concessive relationships and conditional hypothetical to present reports. Typically, final paragraphs reflected a summarization of the nursing home event and an indication of ongoing further activities related to the event.

Within the context of reportage, certain filtering strategies were used which privileged particular discourses. Such techniques generally supported journalistic commentary in a dialogical context, for example, the narratives of the relatives of older people in the nursing home. In particular, direct quotation was textually interwoven into editorials. Such quotations are not transparent but represent constituted (re)interpretations of events and power relations. Quotes were elicited from authoritative speakers, for example, the leader of the Seanad Éireann, (Ireland's upper house of parliament), Mary O'Rourke, used specific discursive strategies to build up the significance of the revelations from the *Primetime Investigates* programme:

I thought of man's inhumanity to man and all we had about Dachau and all the various events of the last World War and yet what was happening here in this city- and I am sure in other places around the country-was tat awful. It's not just unkindness, it's just vandalism the way people were treated (Irish Times 1/6/05).

In building up the comment, lexical metaphor was textually interwoven in two ways. Firstly, a line from the Burns (1994) poem, *Man was made to Mourn: A Dirge*, 'man's inhumanity to man' is used. This poem speaks of 'regret, remorse and shame' which makes 'countless thousands mourn'. Further on in the commentary, a direct reference is made to Dachau, Nazi Germany's first concentration camp. Both metaphors convey particular identities to the nursing home experiences and to older people. The nursing home events are projected as 'not just unkindness but vandalism' but beyond this, the concentration camp imagery engenders the imprisonment, torture and helplessness of older people whilst the connections are referenced that it is a cause for sorrow.

### *Constructing Elder Abuse in Newspaper Reportage*

The construction of elder abuse in the newspapers focused on the sub-standard treatment in the nursing home. Elder abuse was discussed as neglect, for example, not receiving proper care skin care, staff asleep during night shifts (*Irish Independent* 31.05.05; *Irish Times* 1/6/05; *Sunday Independent* 5/6/05), environmental issues such as cleanliness (*Sunday Independent* 5/6/05), patient safety (*Irish Times* 22/6/05) and psychological abuse (*Irish Independent* 31/5/05; *Irish Independent* 1/6/05; *Irish Daily Star* 5/6/05). Moreover, elder abuse was inferred as hidden and could only be found out through unscheduled visits which would capture the reality of care for older people in nursing homes. Consequently, authoritative speakers, such as the then Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister), Mr Bertie Ahern (*Irish Times* 1/5/05) and the then Minister for Older People, Mr Sean Power (*Irish Times* 1/5/05) commented, through direct quotation, on the 'bizarre' nature of making appointments for HSE inspection visits.

### *Tabloids Versus Broad Sheets*

The editorials demonstrated a generic structure based on the argument that older people should be treated with respect and dignity and this argument overwhelmingly exhibited shock at the activities exposed by *Primetime Investigates*. Fundamentally, narratives demonstrated a chaining of events, through explanatory intention, which sought to make sense of events by drawing them into a relation, incorporating a particular point of view. However, there was a difference in tabloid and broad

sheet editorials. Both had differing referential, predicational strategies. The *Irish Daily Star*, for example, commonly employed a conversational but strongly moral evaluative, protagonist and argumentative narrative which assumed commonality in perspective within readers. This type of textual arrangement (populist lexis) seeks to express solidarity with the audience. Fairclough (1995) describes this as democratization, which, in the tabloids, typically reflected a shift towards increased informality in language as opposed to the objective authoritative voice, which is more prominent in broadsheets such as the *Irish Times*. Tabloid reporting demonstrated a higher degree of conversationalisation, wherein public discourse was transformed into private language through the use of linguistic features from ordinary conversation (Fairclough, 1995).

Hortatory reports (Fairclough, 2003) were revealed intertextually, which functioned in a strategic way by shocking the public on the basis of the nursing home revelations and persuading particular courses of practical action. For example, specific moral evaluative descriptions were used to describe the care worker 'Ollie' who appeared in the broadcast. On the 5/6/05, the headline reads "Wicked Ollie just couldn't care less". Particular ways to positioning the care worker were used through descriptions such as 'bullying', 'burly' and 'intimidating' which contrasted his physical appearance with a later description of a resident as a 'defenceless' woman. In using the term 'shameless', the narrative implied that the public should not excuse or try to understand the care worker's activities. This story is supported by seven pictorial frames from the *Primetime Investigates* programme which reinforce the abusive behaviour. By contrast, broadsheets such as the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* avoided emotive language and employed a more 'objective' use of words. Thus, the outcome is less conversational and more objective. For example, in the *Irish Times* (1/6/05), the opening paragraph reads: 'A litany of poor practice in several private nursing homes across the State, including instances of dinner food being recycled for use on another date, has been found by inspector'. In this excerpt, the facts are stated in summarisation, which interwove a particular connecting instance of poor practice through elaboration. All newspaper articles demonstrated a specific discursive activity and the hierarchy of purpose focused on a strong objection to the sub standard care. The demand for action was demonstrated within a specific chain of genres in the narratives, which included interviews and political commentary.

Differences in reportage were observed in relation to the subject positions. For example, some politicians were singled out as the object of public disdain within a parody in the tabloids. For example, Minister Sean Power, the then Minister of State with responsibility

for Older People, was subject to a comparison to 'Father Dougal', the blundering priest in a well know Channel 4 (United Kingdom) television comedy 'Father Ted' (Star Sunday 5/6/05). This article builds up this metaphor using comments such as 'Well, aren't you the bright spark?' when referring to Mr. Power's comment that advance notification of HSE visits to nursing homes was the norm. This contrasts with the more objective reporting of the broad sheet *The Irish Times* (1/5/05) who simply reported on the commentary of Mr. Power related to the nursing home. Consequently, although both commentaries refer to the same person, very different constructions are made available in the text.

Reportage focused on the accentuation of difference, delineating the sub standard care as opposed to good standards. A prominent feature of representation and identity of older people was that of the need to be protected. Accordingly, the state was positioned in a paternalistic role to safeguard vulnerable people. Therefore, a central discourse in the reports of the newspapers was that of social democracy. The newspapers tacitly advocated and, in some cases, demanded state regulation and transparency to counteract the apparent social injustice to older people. Particular forms of accountability and transparency were advocated. An example can be observed in the *Irish Independent* (10/6/05) which used direct quotes from Ms Emily O'Reilly (Information Commissioner):

"There is a very significant public interest in members of the public having information relating to the welfare, quality of care and level of security and dignity provided for older, more vulnerable members of society resident in institutions".

In using such authoritative statements which commit the speaker to the truth of the 'demand', the reportage legitimizes the call for increased public inspection and regulation of nursing homes and this is reinforced with reference to the public interest.

However, media constructions could engender resistance due to their perceived one-sided coverage (*Irish Times* 1/6/09) with reports from one resident that such coverage was 'nonsense' (*Irish Daily Star* 22/6/05). Some relatives' quotes indicated counter polemic dispositions towards the nursing home. For instance, the *Irish Daily Star* (1/6/05) reported that one relative stated: 'We're upset because we were very happy with the care here'. However, it is noteworthy that there were some remarkable absences from reportage, which included a lack of voices from representatives from the nursing profession, the medical profession and the nursing home management.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine newspaper discourses of elder abuse and their impact following a *Primetime Investigates* television exposé of care practices in a nursing home. This exposé has been a seminal point in Irish society's response to abuse in nursing home care and has had an enduring memorialisation in the context of subsequent discourses in newspapers related to abuse in residential care facilities (O' Cionnaith, 2011a; 2011b; Cullen, 2014; Flanagan, 2014). Four Irish national newspapers were examined for related editorials in the subsequent period (31/5/05 to 30/6/05). This study used three approaches within critical discourse analysis. The power of the media, of which newspapers constitute a prominent force, can be seen in the public and political outcry which resulted in multiple public expressions of anger, whilst this became an issue for questions raised in the lower House of Parliament in Ireland, (Dáil Eireann). Subsequent public and state concern led to two formal inquiries (O' Neill, 2006; DoH, 2009) and the Gardaí (Irish Police). This response is typical, as Kosberg *et al.* (2003) notes that public inquiries have often resulted from the discovery of scandals in large institutions.

Although abuse of older people constituted minimal journalistic media focus in phase one of the study, in phase two, there was a plethora of editorials which provided a media template of public understandings of abuse within nursing homes. Elder abuse was constructed within typologies which were directly drawn from observations of the *Primetime Investigates* programme or commentaries elicited from nursing home reports or relatives of older people in nursing home.

Particular ideologies of protecting older people and responding to abuse were replete within editorials, however, it can be seen that there were discreet differences in genre in order to satisfy readership (tabloid versus broad sheets). Such editorials may be engendered in issues of forecasting particular readership consumption and competition with other media outlets (Sumpter, 2000) as well as speaking the language of the common man (Wasserman, 2008). In all cases, credible authorities were interwoven into the textual presentation to support the thrust of the narratives. Such narratives had powerful consequences in positioning and providing identities for the social actors, including older people, the state and the public (Bell, 1991; 1998; Conboy, 2006). The propensity was to categorise particular ideologies and support existing frames of reference, which when established, can be enduring and difficult to alter (Teo, 2000). The newspaper accounts served as an important source of knowledge exchange and were recontextualised to make such knowledge accessible to readers.

The examination of the four newspapers allowed insights into the ideological debate regarding nursing

home care. As language is never neutral (Fowler, 1991), editorials used persuasive arguments to represent and position genres; these arguments were inevitably supported through strategic metaphors and commentary from credible authorities (Fairclough, 2003). Quotation patterns also served to enhance and endorse the status of those who were quoted while concurrently minimising or excluding those who remained silent. Such depictions continue to have a significant impact on the public perceptions of nursing homes in general. Newspapers careful selection of intertextuality demonstrated the construction of subject positions and identities. The structure of news articles (particularly tabloids) dichotomised opinion in so far as the nursing home and the HSE were predominantly portrayed as the irresponsible entities, whilst, the public was established as the righteous defenders of older people through the medium of journalistic intent. In particular, the evaluative descriptions summarised the ineffectual nature of the public scrutiny of the private nature of nursing homes. Consequently, the sensationalist nature of the nursing home reportage had the ability to mobilise strong public reaction in the form of demands for investigation, retribution and sanctioning. As such, this media template has continued to provide powerful reference points and associations in public consciousness regarding sub standard care in nursing homes despite its relative low newsworthy nature in previous Irish newspaper reportage.

However, despite the selective nature of newspaper reportage, acknowledgement must be given to the social and political impact of the *Primetime Investigates* broadcast and subsequent reports (O' Neill, 2006, DoHC, 2009). Such debates had the effect of capitulating maltreatment in nursing homes into public consciousness and led to the public regulation of nursing homes within an independent body constituted the first regulatory standards established by Ireland's HIQA (2009), thus adding to the spectrum of formal responses to the challenge of elder abuse. The impact of such discourses is enduring as even years after the event, its significant remains in public policy, practice and societal narratives (O' Cionnaith, 2011a; Cullen, 2014).

## Conclusion

Although an important mode of whistle blowing (Phelan, 2015), this study has revealed the prevalence of stereotypical interests in newspaper coverage which contribute to hegemonic representations in the case of elder abuse in Leas Cross nursing home. In reviewing the newspaper template of the nursing home, findings reveal that reportage is produced in a complex and multi-dimensional way. Newspapers create specific and selective identities both for themselves and for the referential social actors in the editorials. Although the rhetoric of 'free press' underpins an Irish democratic ethos, particular constructions within the media can



have consequences which have continued to the present day. However, the need to lead opinion and to reflect opinion can become blurred. In the practice of emotive reportage, newspapers must accept responsibility in over-sensationalisation resulting in raised levels of public anxiety. However, it is acknowledged that editorial decisions will always be swayed by particular factors including economic considerations in terms of generating sales. Editorials would also benefit from a balance of concrete and thematic coverage so that more neutral, informed information is presented to the public, particularly in the context of Leas Cross where the event is reproduced as a point of significance in regulation of and standards in long term care for older people. In this way, events, such coverage following the *Primetime Investigates* broadcast can be rendered less biased and represent all social activities and social actors in a fair way. This paper demonstrates the intense coverage of maltreatment by one form of media, that of newspapers, significantly contributed particular frames of reference which influenced public opinion and political discourses and had an enduring legacy in Irish regulatory care of older people.

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### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this paper.

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