

**“Don’t Say Gay” : Critical Discourse Analysis on  
Discursive Structures and Ideologies in U.S. News  
Coverage of Florida’s “Parental Rights in Education”  
Bill**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis examines the discourse in U.S. online newspapers about the Parental Rights in Education bill, which passed Florida legislation in March of 2022 and took effect in June of the same year. The bill is labelled as controversial by many media and criticised for being anti-LGBT+. This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis and focuses on the social issues of comprehensive sexuality education and media impact and transparency. Using corpus-collected data of 50 online news articles, this thesis aims to find out what kind of language elements related to sexuality education and related legislation are found in the data and what ideologies these elements indicate. The study also examines directness and indirectness in the language.

The methods of the study are modelled and modified after the works of Reisigl and Wodak and van Dijk. The analysis is done manually by reading the data and applying techniques of close reading and examining the language and its broad meanings. The study aims for a triangulated perspective, meaning that the analysis considers not only the findings but also theoretical background and situational, political, and cultural context.

The findings of the study show that ideologies are present in the news discourse. Considering the social issue, this thesis argues that comprehensive sexuality education is vital for children’s well-being, and media reporting about such topics have power in how they are perceived, as well as how topic-related laws are interpreted.

**Key words:** Critical discourse analysis, Ideology, Florida, LGBT+, Don’t Say Gay, Parental rights in Education, News on the Web Corpus

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# 1 Introduction

On Tuesday, the 8th of March 2022, a seven-page bill called *Parental Rights in Education* passed the Florida Senate, and was signed by Governor Ron DeSantis 20 days later, on March 28th. On the website of the Governor of Florida, the bill is said to “[reinforce] parents’ fundamental rights to make decisions regarding the upbringing of their children” (Governor of Florida, 2022). Various media, however, have criticised the bill, which targets to ban “[c]lassroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity” from kindergarten through grade 3 (Florida HB 1557, 2022). This is widely seen as targeting sexual and gender minorities, and the bill was even labelled *Don’t Say Gay* by a wide range of media covering the topic. The bill is actually called *Parental Rights in Education*, but in the news, its nickname “Don’t Say Gay” is more prevalent and more commonly used. This thesis aims to research the language used in the media coverage of the bill and how it might reflect ideologies and opinions, regardless of whether they come from the writers or the media. Examining the discourses surrounding this topic in the media, this study focuses on micro-level discourse structures, such as language elements, and how they are connected to macro-structures, such as meaning on a societal and social level. This study uses the term language element for words, phrases, and structures in the language that convey meaning in the context of this research. Also, although they partially overlap, societal level refers to groups, communities, group customs, and rules, whereas social level refers to people, persons, personal relationships, and personal views.

The primary data for the study come from the News on the Web corpus (NOW from here on), and it consists of 50 randomly selected news articles. Since the issue and the bill itself are focused on news from the United States of America, only U.S. news are analysed in this study. This thesis discusses news covering the bill instead of the bill itself mainly due to two reasons: firstly, the part of the bill that is relevant for this study is brief, and there is thus little text to analyse. Secondly, mass media is generally more widely read than legal texts. News about bills and laws generally reach a wider audience than the legal texts themselves. Accessibility-wise, one could argue that mass media and the news they put out are more accessible to readers than legal texts, not only because news are easy to find but also because the text is often simplified and shortened from legal texts. This study aims to focus on the domain of media discourse and its power instead of legalese discourse and its power.

The topic of this thesis as a whole is mainly motivated by three different factors, the first one of which being media neutrality and the power that (mass) media can have. Various sources, including the Council for Mass Media in Finland and the Society of Professional Journalists, list ethical principles for journalism, goals for objectivity, informativity, accuracy and so on. In contrast, research on media bias has also been conducted for decades, including Groseclose and Milyo (2005), and Hamborg et al (2018). The social and ideological power media have is very significant and is introduced in Section 3.1.2.

The second reason behind the topic choice is the importance of versatile education and representation for children. For example, Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt (2017) showcase benefits of inclusive sexual education, and how it can help reduce homophobic and transphobic bullying, thus increasing the well-being of LGBT+ students. Moreover, Luk explains that identity, referring to sense of self and who we are, is also discursively constructed (2008, 121–124). Luk makes the points that language in the classroom with the teacher-student-dynamic can have a significant role on students' identity and self-image (ibid.), and this study makes the argument that those are connected to students' well-being.

The third and final motivator for the topic is its currency. The Don't Say Gay bill was introduced in 2022 and deemed harmful and targeting LGBT+ people by different actors – see, for example, American Civil Rights Union (ACLU) 2023. Since the bill, though, hundreds of similar bills have been introduced in the U.S. General discriminatory legislation is part of the social issue this study discusses. With these reasonings for the topic and study, the research questions for this thesis are as follows:

1. What kind of micro-level and macro-level structures and language elements related to sexuality education and the legislation related to it can be identified in U.S. news coverage of Florida's *Parental Rights in Education* bill?
2. What kind of ideologies do they indicate?
3. How does directness or indirectness feature in these choices, and what is its significance?

Through these research questions, the purpose of this thesis is to take a critical viewpoint to how online newspapers in the U.S. present discourse related to the Don't Say Gay bill (henceforth DSGB). The study discusses media impact in these matters and the significance of whether discourse considering minority issues is presented directly by the news sources or

indirectly through quoting or citing. Through examples, the aim is to present and discuss elements of language as well as both direct and indirect messages, ideologies, and meanings. Ideologies were chosen as a focus for a variety of reasons, as they, for example, can serve as a basis of discrimination (see, for example, van Dijk 1998 for reference). Directness of discourse is discussed in the analysis because it is a significant factor not only in how media convey their messages but also in how it is interpreted by receivers – in the case of this study, readers. Information that is interpreted as coming from a news source has a different impact than information that the news source is merely quoting. With a social issue that relates to media transparency, a perspective on their directness is thus relevant. Meaning, in the context of this thesis, refers to the broad meaning, including both literal meaning of words and sentences as well as sense and communicative meaning.

Section 1 has introduced the topic, its motivators, and the research questions and purposes of the study. Section 2 provides general background information which is necessary for understanding the social and political issues of the topic. The section briefly introduces Florida politics highlighting LGBT+ issues, the DSGB itself, sex education in the U.S. and general information on anti-gay curriculum laws. Following this, Section 3 introduces the theoretical background of the study. The approach is based on Critical Discourse Analysis, which is introduced with focus on terms and concepts that are key for this study: ideology, power, and discursive strategies. Section 4, then, presents the data and methods. Since the study at hand is corpus-based, the NOW Corpus is introduced, as well as methods of selecting and processing the data. The articles are read manually, and methods are adapted from Reisigl and Wodak 2017, but also van Dijk 1997, 1998 and 2001. Section 5 handles the analysis, which is done as systematically as possible, one language element at a time, although they overlap in much of the data. Section 6 presents results of the study and discusses them, and Section 7 concludes findings and connects them to the social issue at hand.



## 2 General background

This section of the study introduces a part of the Parental Rights in Education Act, explaining what it literally says and what it can be argued to mean. Furthermore, it provides a brief overview of Floridian politics, as well as some insight into sex education and sexuality education in the U.S. and Americans' attitudes towards it, specifically such education concerning LGBT+ people. The Center, an "LGBT community center in New York" (The Center, n.d.), states that LGBTQIA+ is "an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more" (The Center, 2023). In these definitions, the plus sign often refers to "and more" or "others". Adapting this, this thesis uses the term LGBT+ to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other sexually or gender diverse people, as it is more comprehensive than the abbreviation LGBT, which is used in some of the studies and articles surrounding this topic, but considerably easier to read and say than the longer abbreviations, such as LGBTQIA+.

### 2.1 Florida politics: a brief overview

When analysing such a narrow scope of discourse – in one country, about one bill, in only the form of news articles – context is vital. As van Dijk puts it (1997, 11), "[i]n the study of discourse as action and interaction, contexts are crucial". Going further into the topic of contexts, it should be noted that the impact of contexts on discourse or understanding discourse can be subjective to some extent. Van Dijk explains that contexts are not objective in the sense that they would be understood and considered in the same way by all participants of discourse, but rather related to mental constructs and models (1997, 16).

In order to understand the social and political contexts of the DSGB and why it is viewed the way it is, a brief overview of the politics of Florida, highlighting LGBT+ issues, is necessary. Analysing the discourse in complex settings, such as the news, elaborate social, political, and cultural conditions may play a crucial role (van Dijk 1997, 4). Salka and Burnett suggest that "each state is best viewed not as a homogeneous group for residents adhering to a single, unified state political culture", but rather as diverse groupings of residents, which, then, hold varying attitudes on various issues, such as demographic and political ones (2012, 60–61). Hence, this section aims to separate what kind of political groups, perhaps even opposing ones, might be affiliated with the examined discourse.

As for political parties, in the bi-party-system of the U.S., Florida has had more active registered Democrats for decades – from 1972 until 2020, to be more specific – and only in the last two years, the registered active Republicans have been the majority (Florida Division of Elections 2023). However, in presidential elections, considering electoral colleges, Florida has voted for a Republican candidate victorious in seven out of the last ten elections, and when voting for Governor, a Republican candidate has been elected in eight out of the last ten elections (270toWin 2023). These results suggest that Florida is politically more Republican than Democrat, these being the two major parties in the U.S. The governor who signed and thus passed the DSGB, too, is Republican, as well as the at-the-time house representative who first initiated the bill.

After being initiated, the bill needed to pass the voting of the Florida House of Representatives in order to advance to the Florida senate. The House of Representatives passed the bill with votes 69–47 (The Florida Senate, 2022), with 68 Republicans and 1 Democrat voting for, and 40 Democrats and 7 Republicans voting against it (ibid.). After this, the Florida senate passed the bill with votes 22–17 – here, all 22 for-voters being Republican, and against-voters consisting of 15 Democrats and 2 Republicans (ibid.). See Tables 1 and 2 illustrating the voting results below. These results indicate that there is a clear political polarisation on this topic, Republicans siding with the bill and Democrats being against it. This is to be noted when examining the discourse and the potential political bias within. The reason the political parties are highlighted in introducing the background is that they are some of the most visible groups that can be seen in the data, and political orientation or choice of party seemed to be a relatively significant divider in ideological questions.

**Table 1** Republicans’ voting results on the DSGB, according to the Florida Senate.

Republicans	House of Representatives	Senate
<b>For</b>	68	22
<b>Against</b>	7	2
<b>Not voting</b>	3	-
<b>Total</b>	78	24
<b>Percentage of for-voters</b>	87%	92%

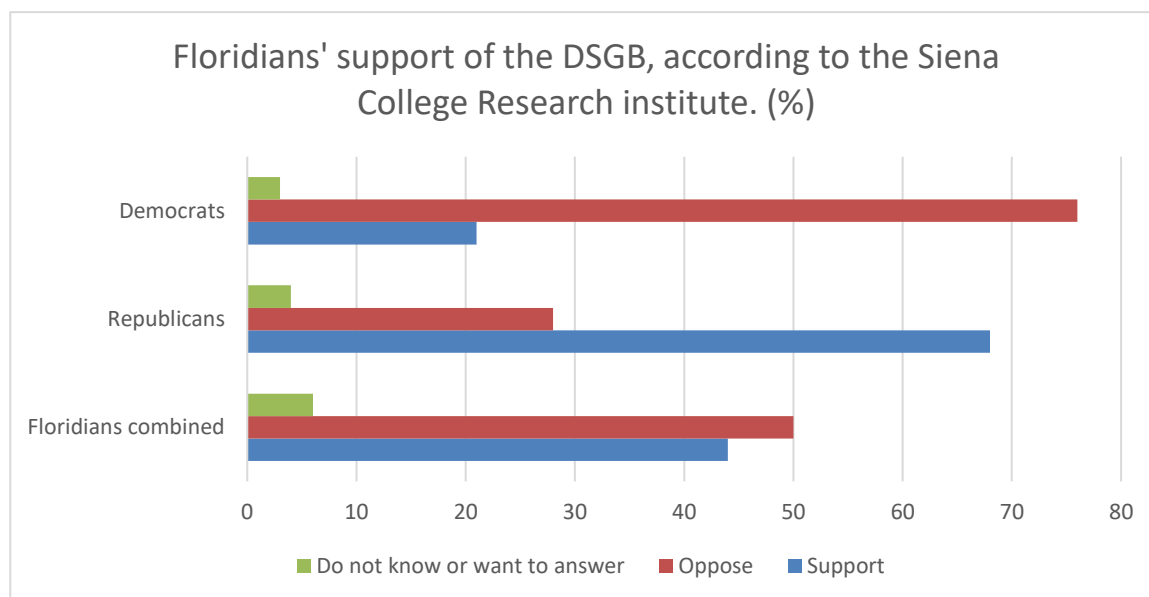
**Table 2** Democrats' voting results on the DSGB, according to the Florida Senate.

Democrats	House of Representatives	Senate
<b>For</b>	1	0
<b>Against</b>	40	15
<b>Total</b>	41	15
<b>Percentage of for-voters</b>	2%	0%

Movement Advancement Project or MAP ranks the “LGBTQ equality” of each U.S. state annually on a scale of negative, low, fair, medium, or high overall policy, and in its most recent report, Florida ranks low (MAP 2023). MAP uses a wide variety of criteria to rank states in different areas of equality, including legislation-related questions such as marriage for same-sex couples and LGBTQ-inclusive definitions of spouse or partner in state jurisdiction (ibid.). Other examples include laws and policies for LGBTQ youth and in relation to healthcare. In the overall tally, the state racks points of 4,25 out of a maximum of 42,5 and places low on the scale (ibid.). On a nationwide scale, 14 states score lower than Florida and 35 states higher. A Public Region Research Institute poll, however, found in 2021 that 80 percent of Floridians were in favour of a non-discrimination jurisdiction covering sexual orientation and gender identity (Public Region Research Institute, 2021). A result this clear is contradictory with the fact that, according to a poll by Spectrum news and Siena college, 44% of the state population supports the DSGB and only 50% oppose it, with 6% answering “don’t know or refuse to answer” (Siena College Research Institute, 2022). The support and opposition are illustrated by Figure 1 below. Here, however, a clear distinction between the two major parties can be made, as 68% of Republicans supported the bill, whereas for Democrats the number was only 21% (ibid.). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the combined statistic also includes persons independent from parties and persons belonging to other parties than the two major ones.

The Republican party of the U.S. is generally seen as more conservative, and Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt (2017, 217) argue that strong heteronormative beliefs, or beliefs that see heterosexuality as a norm and a standard, correlate with higher levels of religious belief

and/or political conservatism, reinforcing the results relating to conservative perspectives being for the DSGB, indicated in this Section.



**Figure 1** Floridians’ support of the DSGB, according to the Siena College Research Institute.

## 2.2 The Florida Parental Rights in Education Act: Don’t Say Gay

On March 28th, 2022, Governor of Florida Ron DeSantis signed the Florida Parental Rights in Education Act (PRiEA from here on). On the website of the governor of Florida, the bill is said to reinforce “parents’ fundamental rights to make decisions regarding the upbringing of their children” (Governor of Florida, 2022). The controversial bill is often called Don’t Say Gay, as it “prohibits classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through 3rd grade and prohibits instruction that is not age-appropriate for students”, among other things. The paragraph that is evidently the most talked about in media and that is arguably targeting LGBT+ people reads:

Classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards. (Florida HB 1557, 2022).

This specific part is what earned the DSGB the nickname, *Don’t Say Gay*. Supporters of the bill tend to argue that it ‘does not ban the word "gay"’ (Fox News 2022), but what is criticised about this in many media and other sources is that “[t]he bill doesn't specify how "age-appropriate" and "developmentally appropriate" would be defined (NPR news 2022). The

language of this bill is thus a controversial topic: the ambiguity of these terms, such as age-appropriate, leaves a lot up for interpretation. This, then, can lead to subjective decision-making when it comes to cases in which this law is appealed to. Furthermore, the argument that the law does not ban the word “gay” has been debated. Opponents of the bill make the argument that straight, heterosexual, and cisgender (that is, not transgender) people are the majority and thus the naturalised, normalised group in society, and talking about them is not seen as ideological as easily as talking about minorities is.

Online newspapers, which are studied in this thesis, have a significant impact on how the DSGB is perceived and what kind of information about it spreads. As of April 2023, when searching for “Don’t Say Gay”, search engines such as Google provide millions of results, and the top ones are articles from online newspapers. These articles are likely the first thing many people find when looking for information about the DSGB. Additionally, reading a familiar newspaper might seem more appealing to a reader than looking for a legal text or an objective analysis. Thus, online news articles have a vital role in how information about the DSGB – or similar legal texts – is spread and received.

The Parental Rights in Education act, the DSGB, took effect on the first of July 2022.

### **2.3 Sex education in the U.S.**

LGBT+ people are a minority in the U.S.: Conron and Goldenberg estimate that 4,5% of the adult population in the U.S. identifies as LGBT (2019, 1). The definition of LGBT, however, is not the most comprehensive one, which is why the term LGBT+ is used in this thesis to cover all sexual and gender minorities. This, then, could also lead to errors in the numbers of what the research considers “non-LGBT” people. However, the percentage is so low that even with a margin of error it clearly indicates that LGBT+ people are a minority. Kann et.al., though, conducted a nationwide study, which indicated that 14,6% of high school students did not identify as heterosexual (2018, 8). Comparing this to the nationwide results of all adults, it can indicate many things, for example younger generations being more open about their identity, or more informed and educated about LGBT+ topics. This, then, could be related to sex education and sexuality education becoming more comprehensive over the years.

Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt state that sexuality education is generally education about “sexual anatomy, reproduction, birth control, sexual health and well-being, sexual orientation, gender identities, and gender roles” (2017, 216). They provide a wide perspective to sexuality

education, indicating that it has raised questions, controversies, and debates in various countries (ibid.). Furthermore, Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt introduce common misconceptions about LGBT+-comprehensive sexuality education and provide counterarguments to some perspectives that are against it (2017). These arguments also show benefits of comprehensive sexuality education: for one, they state that:

[C]hildren who participate in inclusive sexuality education have a chance to understand that sexual orientation and gender identity have deep biological roots. This understanding can contribute to a more accepting attitude toward peers showing gender nonconformity, which, in turn, can improve the mental health of school children whose behavior is gender atypical and deviates from heteronormative standards. (Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt 2017, 217).

These results argue for inclusive sexuality education being beneficial for students' well-being, which can universally be argued to be important. A further argument of Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt is that "sexual minority students are more likely than heterosexual students to suffer from cyberbullying [...], emotional abuse [...], physical abuse and neglect [...], sexual abuse [...], and weapon assault" (2017, 218). They elaborate, explaining that "LGBT students" thus face a higher risk of social isolation; of being absent from school to avoid bullying, abuse and assault; of using substances to compensate for their sufferings; of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases; of suffering depressive symptoms; and of thinking of or attempting suicide (ibid.). Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt once again provide a selection of studies, arguing that a safe school environment and more inclusive sexuality education programs can help battle such issues and lessen minority students' harassment (ibid.). The research topic and angle of this thesis are widely based on the argument that inclusive sexuality education is beneficial for children.

The rights of sexual and gender minorities have also been a topic of social discussion in the U.S. for decades, reaching from the start of the reform of same-sex legislation and sodomy laws (that is, laws criminalising private consensual behaviour between adults, particularly gay people) in 1961 all the way to this day, an example being a bill providing "statutory authority for same-sex and interracial marriages" (U.S. Congress, H.R.8404, 2022), which was signed by U.S. President Joe Biden in December 2023. The next Section of this thesis provides some insight to Anti-gay curriculum laws.

### 2.3.1 Anti-gay curriculum laws

Anti-gay curriculum laws are not a brand-new concept – in research literature discussing the topic, they are often called anti-gay, because, as Rosky (2017, 1463) explains, LGBT+-discriminatory laws often mention things such as “homosexuality”, “homosexual lifestyle” and “homosexual relationships”. In discussing the law that is the topic of this thesis, I use the more accurate and comprehensive term anti-LGBT+, as the PRiEA refers widely to sexual orientation and gender identity instead of homosexual people specifically. Rosky (2017, 1463) names characteristics of anti-gay curriculum laws, multiple of which can be recognised in the PRiEA, arguably the most accurate one being prohibiting teachers from “promoting homosexuality” and “suggesting that some methods of sex are safe methods of homosexual sex”.

The nickname Don't Say Gay is also not new as far as phrases or slogans are concerned: in his 2017 article, Rosky mentions that anti-gay curriculum laws were often referred to as "'no promo homo' or 'don't say gay' laws' (1464). Anti-gay curriculum law is a term introduced by Rosky (2017) to accurately describe the features of laws that meet the specific criteria which make them anti-gay. Such laws have been debated about for decades and scholars have been arguing whether or not they cause conflict in legal matters related to equal protection and free speech (Rosky 2017, 1517). These topics have arisen in the media very recently, too, with the PRiEA – or the DSGB of Florida taking effect in 2022.

Examining linguistic elements in the media coverage of the bill is relevant for many reasons, the most prevalent one of which is the importance of versatile education and representation for children. Rosky explains that anti-gay laws have been found to “injure” and “stigmatise” lesbian, gay and bisexual people’ and making them unequal (2017, 1519). He elaborates, explaining cases of anti-gay laws which have been found to “humiliate” the children of same-sex couples’ (ibid.).

The importance of sexuality education and knowledge for children and adolescents is one of the biggest motivators for this thesis. Inclusive sexuality education is widely seen as important by researchers, as Haberland and Rogow demonstrate (2014, 15–16). They present multiple notable national and international organisations which support and promote versatile and comprehensive sexuality education. Comprehensive sexuality education is an approach that is increasingly accepted as the most beneficial way for students’ sexual well-being. Among others, Vanwesenbeeck’s research supports this: “empowerment-directed, rights-

based approaches [...] have an enormous potential to enable young people to develop accurate and age-appropriate sexual knowledge, attitudes, skills, intentions, and behaviors that contribute to safe, healthy, positive, and gender-equitable relationships” (2020, 1). She elaborates, arguing that sexuality is a “central aspect of being human, encompassing sexual behaviors, gender identities, sexual orientations, eroticism” and crucial for children’s development (ibid.). In their clinical report for the American Academy of Pediatrics, Breuner and Mattson state that “[s]exuality education has been shown to help to prevent and reduce the risks of adolescent pregnancy, HIV, and sexually transmitted infections for children and adolescents” (2016, 1). Additionally, Aivadyan et.al. conducted a study in 2023, the results of which indicate that “state legislation affecting equality for sexual minorities may differentially affect risk for suicide attempts among [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning] adolescents in the United States” (2023, 77). Furthermore, their findings make the argument that it is not identifying as a sexual minority that is a risk factor in suicidality, but rather the social stigma and discrimination they face (ibid.). Their study thus suggests a need for comprehensive suicide protection, including societal factors such as legislation that supports “LGBTQ equality and inclusion” (ibid.).

This thesis makes the arguments that comprehensive information about sexuality education and LGBT+ people should be noted in jurisdiction for the sake of children and adolescents’ well-being, and that media and other public sources covering such topics should be well informed, yet still received with a slightly critical perspective.



### 3 Theoretical background

The aim of this thesis is to examine ideologies, hidden beliefs and indirect messages that are shown in the news coverage of the DSGB and study how they appear. The analysis is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is used to identify and label elements of discourse that may showcase beliefs and agendas in the text. CDA provides a framework to analyse discourse and social factors critically, and it was chosen for this thesis, as the goal is to critically examine the discourse of the primary sources and the messages they directly or indirectly convey. This section of the thesis introduces CDA and specific approaches and concepts relevant to this study: power, ideology, and discursive strategies.

#### 3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is arguably not an inherently objective branch of linguistics as it takes a critical and social approach to discourse and language. This provides a suitable framework for this thesis, as the purpose is to examine news texts and their semantics, messages, and ideologies, and whether they are direct or indirect. Many scholars working with CDA agree that there is no one unified process or method of conducting CDA or putting it into practice. Van Dijk defines CDA as “discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (2015, 466). He elaborates that critical discourse analysts want to “understand, expose, and ultimately challenge social inequality”, and that CDA might be characterised as “a social movement” (ibid.). These definitions fit the aims and approaches of this thesis, as its purpose is to critically study media data. This thesis aims for objective research and results with a critical perspective, which is why it should not be regarded as a critical, but rather an entirely neutral, research work. It targets the social matter of inclusive sexuality education as a tool for children’s well-being and makes the argument that understanding media bias via discourse studies improves the understanding of the matter at hand. Critically examining news about the DSGB is one current perspective to this.

As Hamborg et. al. state, media bias, with which they refer to internal bias exhibited by media coverage, can have a significant impact on public perceptions of media topics (2018, 391). Thus, media coverage on topics with large social significance, such as a law considering state-wide sexuality education, can be argued to have a strong impact on the decisions that are made over the covered topics. They add that “[i]deological bias is present if an outlet biases

articles to promote a specific opinion on a topic” (2018, 392), which is something this thesis analyses, as ideologies are a key theme. In the analysis section, some focus is also on whether the potential media biases seem direct or indirect. This study aims to target the social issues of media bias and inclusive sexuality education – ideally combined – thus, critically analysing media that might impact their readers’ opinions on the DSGB. Van Dijk argues that how discourse is understood and interpreted depends on the underlying mental model structures which are further enhanced with the overall existing social attitudes and ideologies (2013, 26), to which the media can be argued to contribute. This perspective, however, is noteworthy also when considering the potential subjectivity of discourse analysis.

The concept of *critique*, as it is seen in this thesis, could be characterised by two aspects of critique listed by Reisigl and Wodak (2017, 88): firstly, *text or discourse-immanent critique*, which aims to discover textual elements, such as “inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the text-internal or discourse-internal structures” (ibid.). Secondly, the aspect of *socio-diagnostic critique*, as Reisigl and Wodak call it. This aspect of discourse critique, according to them, deals with persuasive or manipulative characteristics of discourse, makes use of contextual knowledge and “draw[s] on social theories as well as other theoretical models [...] to interpret the discursive elements” (ibid.). Critique is considered via these perspectives in this thesis, as the study focuses on the language elements, the societal elements, and their connection. Through discourse critique, this study also aims to raise the question of media literacy skills in its readers, and ultimately even give tools for critical thinking with regard to news articles.

Van Dijk lists some general characteristics of critical research on discourse, explaining that it focuses primarily on social problems and political issues rather than out-of-context discourse, that it is often multidisciplinary analysis, that it tries to not only describe discourse structures but also explain them with context to social interaction and social structure, and that it focuses on the relationship between discourse and power abuse (2015, 467). He differentiates the *micro-levels* and *macro-levels* of social order, stating that CDA approaches can “bridge the well-known ‘gap’” between the micro and macro (2015, 468). This is a perspective also adapted in this thesis, as the discourse elements, which van Dijk classifies into the micro-level, and power and ideologies within and between groups, which van Dijk classifies into the macro-level (ibid.), are closely related to each other in the topic of this thesis. Another perspective that is strongly present in this study is that of Reisigl and Wodak (2017). Some of their theories and methods are fitting for the study at hand, as they, in their discourse-

historical approach, consider language elements in detail, but also social questions, as well as discuss field of political control (ibid.). Moreover, important principles in their approach include orientation towards problem-solving (Reisigl and Wodak 2017, 94), and, considering methodology and executing the analysis, they state that “[c]ategories and tools are not fixed once and for all” but rather need to “be elaborated for each analysis according to the specific problem under investigation” (2017, 96). This is an approach also utilised in this thesis, as the method of analysis is adapted largely from Reisigl and Wodak, and the categories used are adapted to each news article studied. Not all of their approach fits the scope of this thesis, though: for example, they they introduce detailed political subgenres that can be analysed (2017, 91) and also study speech-related language elements, neither of which are applicable to this study. Their selection of discursive strategies, though, functions as a base for the methods of this study, introduced in Section 4.2.

Reisigl and Wodak suggest that *critique*, *ideology*, and *power* are three concepts “constitutive for every approach in CDA” (2017, 87) – this section has covered the concept of critique, and the concepts of power and ideology in the context of discourse are introduced in more detail in the following subsections.

### **3.1.1 Ideologies**

Ideologies are a significant factor in discourse, shaping how we both form and understand discourse, and they are introduced in this Section. A key concept for the study at hand is ideology as a system of beliefs, as Van Dijk puts it. His very general definition of ideology is that they are “the fundamental beliefs of a group and its members” (2007), and that they “establish links between discourse and society” (1997, 7). Ideologies are thus a key element in the connections between the micro and macro levels of discourse, which are analysed in this thesis. Identifying ideologies in the data, this study aims to recognise possible groups and their characteristics based on language in context, examining the ideological differences. Regarding groups and their carried identities, van Dijk states that “ideologies monitor how language users engage in discourse as members of [...] groups or organisations, and thus also try to realize social interests and manage social conflict” (1997, 7). This is something to note when examining the data of this thesis: returning to the research questions, group ideologies are some of the most significant ones to search for, and perhaps some of the more recognisable ones. For example, since the topic, the DSGB, is a political matter in many senses, it brings out the context of political group division: the group that support the bill and

the group that do not support it. In the two-party politics of the U.S., this is seen quite strongly in the party division, as explained in section 2.1 of this thesis.

Republicans and Democrats are some of the ideology-built groups the characteristics of which are sought for in the data. In this study, though, ideologies are separated from singular issues, such as a political effort to achieve a specific goal, but rather are seen as a wider concept that can cause such efforts. They are, however, seen on different levels. For example, considering the topic of the study, the hypothesis is that pro- and anti-LGBT+ ideologies will be identified in the text, but also ideologies related to equal rights. These, then, overlap to some extent, as widely supporting equal rights would mean supporting LGBT+ rights, but supporting LGBT+ rights does not necessarily mean supporting other aspects of equal rights. Other ideologies that could hypothetically be found in the data include those of conservatism and liberalism. This is noteworthy, because it is also related to the political polarisation of the topic, and the differences in their values relate to it, too; for example, Morgan et.al. state that “conservatives tend to emphasize individualistic values such as self-discipline and self-reliance more strongly than do liberals (e.g., Feather, 1984), whereas liberals tend to emphasize egalitarian values such as tolerance more strongly than do conservatives” (2010, 1242).

Considering the possible group ideologies for this thesis, an overview of group ideologies’ structures is necessary. Van Dijk states that “if ideologies need to represent the interests and self-definition of each group, they should exhibit a group schema, featuring the mental counterparts of the social categories we postulated above to describe such group identity: membership, activities, aims, values, position and resources” (1997, 29). Reisigl and Wodak, studying the discourse-historic approach, explain that ideology is often seen as a “one-sided perspective or world view composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group” and serves as a means of executing unequal power relations through discourse (2017, 88) – an example of which is hegemonic ideologies. Such occurrences of ideology are an example of what this study examines in the data: a group identity or opinion, demonstrating difference or superiority to another group on a societal level, via language elements.

If an ideology has strong or even close to unanimous support and is seen as a norm, it can become *naturalised* – Fairclough describes naturalised ideologies as “seen as non-ideological ‘common sense’” (1985, 739). Naturalisation of ideologies can occur intentionally or unintentionally, and a goal of critical discourse analysis can be to ‘denaturalise’ naturalised

ideologies (ibid.), which means applying critical or challenging perspective to things society might see as natural. This also relates to how ideological positions and beliefs can be hidden. Naturalised ideology in the context of the DSGB can, for example, mean that the DSGB and its purposes are implied to be natural and normal, ‘common sense’, or that sexual education is seen as ‘common sense’, and the bill is prohibiting it. Enforcing natural ideologies, though, takes *power*, a concept into which Section 3.1.2 provides more insight.

### 3.1.2 Power

Power is a common concept in critical discourse analysis, as discourse analysts have studied many kinds of power and their impact on discourse. According to Reisigl and Wodak, power relates to “an asymmetric relationship among social actors who assume different social positions or belong to different social groups” (2017, 88). In the case of the media discourse surrounding this bill, one concept of power is worth naming and defining: *hegemony*. Van Dijk states that hegemony is “often used to refer to social power: hegemonic power makes people act as if it were natural, normal, or simply a consensus” (1997, 19). Exercising such hegemonic power, van Dijk explains that a powerful group controls such mental things as knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies of groups, largely through discourse (1997, 20). Power appears through multiple means. Reisigl and Wodak explain that it is exerted through grammatical forms but also a person’s [or a group’s] control over a social occasion or a text or over access of public spheres (2017, 89). One means for this kind of controlling discourse is indeed the mass media, such as news articles, which are the focus of this study. Van Dijk elaborates on the complexity of analysing the power of media and how they can control groups and be controlled by groups (1997, 20), including the power of decision-making over published texts – though this thesis does not aim to analyse specifics of media structures, but rather what kind of messages they convey and what power they might carry in the data, since mass media reach a wide range of audiences.

Hegemonic power can strongly relate to society on a wide scale and even what is approved in society. Moreover, having this kind of power over what is seen as normal or natural can be argued to have a significant impact on the discussion on minority groups’ rights: if a dominant group – in this context, meaning socially or politically dominant – has an ideology of what they see as normal or even preferable, this can become a naturalised ideology, and anything outside of this ideology or group preference can be seen as abnormal or even bad.

Power, being on a macro-level of society, can be executed through language elements, an example of which is discursive strategies.

### **3.1.3 Discursive strategies**

Ideologies, being a part of group identity, are often communicated and conveyed via various discursive strategies. Reisigl and Wodak (2017, 94) define discursive strategies as: “[m]ore or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim”. Discursive strategies are a language act that can have a significant role in the connection between the language elements and the societal meanings like ideologies. However, when analysing group ideologies and their characteristics, it is noteworthy that discourse and its forms can be simultaneously influenced by multiple groups and identities of a person, as well as other factors, and it is therefore not always justifiable to assume that some specific discourse choices or elements are consequences of belonging to a specific group. Van Dijk states that “language users are members of different social groups and may exhibit conflicting group identities and allegiances in their talk and text, [...] depending on context” (1997, 31), indicating that a person can even belong to multiple groups contradictory ideologies or beliefs. These notions of ideology are considered throughout the analysis, and the discursive strategies studied in this thesis are introduced in Section 4.2 below.

## 4 Data and methods

The data section of this thesis provides an overview of the data used in this thesis. The data are collected using the News on the Web corpus, which is introduced in the next subsection. Following this, the study provides insight into the methods used in the analysis, which are partially drawn from van Dijk 1997, van Dijk 1998, and Reisigl and Wodak 2017, and adapted to fit the materials and aims of the study a hand.

### 4.1 Data: The News on the Web corpus

A suitable and accessible way to study news articles from the U.S. is the NOW Corpus, which is why it was chosen to provide the primary source material for this thesis. The NOW Corpus “contains 16.7 billion words of data from web-based newspapers and magazines from 2010 to the present time” (The NOW Corpus). It is updated very frequently, growing by about 300 000 news articles monthly (ibid.), containing various and diverse materials. The corpus provides many tools for a comprehensive analysis, such as a randomised sample tool, links to the actual news articles (instead of just a few lines of text), and information about the articles’ country of origin – which is useful, of course, when looking for results from a specific country.

The data for this thesis was conducted from the NOW corpus with the search phrase [do n’t say gay] from the time frame of January 1st to May 31st of 2022, as this was the most active time of the news coverage of the DSGB, and also because this time period covers most of the results for this search. For the sake of objectivity, the search [parental rights in education] was also examined, but left out of the actual analysis, as it most often appeared in articles that also mentioned [do n’t say gay] – see here in example (1):

(1) “Florida recently passed the Parental Rights in Education bill (tendentiously called the “Don’t Say Gay” law by detractors)” (Los Angeles Times, 2022).

The NOW Corpus provides 2774 samples with the search of [do n’t say gay] and 769 with [parental rights in education] in January–May. The reason for using the media-given nickname is to get diverse results, as it is the more commonly used name for the bill in media discourse and often mentioned no matter what the political or social opinion towards the bill might be. In examining the results, the potential political bias is still considered.

In the United States alone, the search [do n't say gay] provides 2262 results within the given time frame. In addition to the geographical and local relevance, another reason for limiting the sample to the U.S. is that the setting of international news could impact the analysis of discursive elements in the news, such as groupings of people and pronouns like “us” and “them” – these are explained in more detail in section 4.2 and Table 3. Out of these 2262 results, a sample of 50 randomised articles were studied. What is perhaps noteworthy is that out of the first 50 articles the NOW corpus sample provided, two required purchasing an account for the site and were thus replaced with search result articles 51 and 52. Additionally, one of the 50 units analysed was stated to be a column and another one an opinion. They were hence replaced with result numbers 53 and 54, as columns and opinions are a different genre than articles and might thus contain, for example, structures and opinions that could alter the results of the study. The data were analysed manually: the upcoming section 4.2 introduces the methods, illustrated by Table 3 and examples. Furthermore, key words or phrases are highlighted with boldface in some examples.

## **4.2 Methods**

This thesis studies the relationship between the discourse in the primary data and the ideologies and their meanings. Section 5 of the thesis thus introduces the means of identifying these discourse elements and connecting the micro- and macro-levels of discourse, ideologies, and social aspects. Naturally, on the micro-level of discourse, there are countless things to analyse, from lexical words to grammatical structures, meaning, and context. Hence, deeming which micro-level elements are relevant is somewhat subjective. In this thesis, those micro-level elements that could carry meanings relevant for ideology-identifying are considered and prioritised. However, the reader as an individual sees and interprets different meanings in micro-level structures, too. An example of this could be intertextuality, as in referencing to another text within a news article, or a metaphor which is meant for a specific audience to understand. If a news article contains very specific references related to U.S. politics, for example, a Finnish reader might not understand them and might not be able to take them into consideration when analysing the overall tone and context of the text. If an article uses a slogan of a company or a politician the reader is not familiar with, they might not understand the reference – and so on.

Furthermore, it should be noted that analysing discourse elements from text lack certain aspects that, for example, a speech or a face-to-face discussion contains, and it is thus more



dependent on reader interpretation, at least to some extent. The study aims for a triangulated perspective, in this context meaning that in the analysis, not only findings and observations of discourse are considered, but also linguistic theories and general background information of societal and political aspects related to the state and country. (See, for example, Reisigl and Wodak 2017, 89 and 93 for reference, and see Section 2 of this thesis for general background information). Thus, context is a significant part of the news articles analysed. Although the data is collected from a corpus, the entire articles are accessible and thus broader textual contexts is available to read. Longer articles also occur in the data, though, and in them, only the parts which are found relevant for the topic are examined, and the parts that deal with other potential topics are largely omitted – for example, some of them cover multiple topics in one article, and thus the paragraphs that seemed irrelevant for the DSGB, its context, or related ideologies were not included. The backgrounds or the political affiliations of the media are not studied in this thesis.

Forming a concrete method of analysis for ideologies, it needs to be decided and defined what language elements to search. Van Dijk states that there are “hundreds, if not thousands, of relevant units, levels, dimensions, moves, strategies, types of acts, devices and other structures of discourse” (2001, 98), listing some categories in which they can be classified (2001, 99). He elaborates, explaining that a complete discourse analysis is impossible to conduct, and choices of studied structures and elements must be made (*ibid.*). Having a scope of methods that is comprehensive yet specific enough is thus a challenge in any study with an approach like this.

Van Dijk lists language elements that may be susceptible to speaker control, many of these relating to speech situations, though (*ibid.*). Some of these are relevant for the data of online news articles too, though, such as rhetorical figures. The ones that seem relevant regarding the research questions of this thesis and applicable regarding the data are considered as a basis of constructing the methods. Moreover, in their article, Reisigl and Wodak introduce a selection of discursive strategies and how they are implemented in discourse. They name five strategies, their objectives, and their devices – that is, what they aim for and how they are implemented. The list is quite comprehensive as it is, but it includes elements drawn from historical and sociological approaches (2017, 94-96), and even some discursive questions that do not fit the scope of this thesis and its data – for example, details related to speech acts or gestures. The approach they introduce, though, has parts relevant for this study, too, and are part of the base of the methods.

Hence, analysing the discourse elements in the data and ideologies through them, this study examines five specific discourse elements in the data, drawn and adapted from van Dijk 1997, van Dijk 1998 (specifically 245–246), van Dijk 2001 (specifically 99) and especially the devices of discursive strategies in Reisigl and Wodak 2017 (90–95). The themes, which are referred to as elements in this thesis, are listed below with respective questions of objectives and elements relating to them in the language. These elements introduced in detail in Table 3, are as follows:

- 1) Persons and groups
- 2) Phenomena, events, and actions
- 3) Arguments
- 4) Perspective
- 5) Rhetoric elements

**Table 3** Discourse elements and their reference questions (modelled and modified from Reisigl and Wodak 2017, 95; Table 4.1: *a selection of discursive strategies*)

<b>Element</b>	<b>Concrete questions of discursive strategies</b>
<b>Persons and groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there membership or group categorisation?</li> <li>- Referring to people and groups: what kind of pronouns are used, what kind of groupings are made?</li> <li>- What kind of tones of lexical words are used?</li> <li>- Is there separation of “us” and “them” and are there differences in how these groups are referred to – positive or negative?</li> </ul>
<b>Phenomena, events, and actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are phenomena, events, and actions described, and how much detail and what kind of lexical words are used?</li> <li>- Are there evaluative attributions of the phenomena, events, and actions?</li> </ul>
<b>Arguments and claims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there direct or indirect arguments in the discourse?</li> <li>- Are there evaluative attributions of the bill? Are they negative or positive?</li> <li>- Are there fallacies?</li> </ul>

<b>Perspective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is the discourse from a clear perspective of a specific person or group member, do they refer to themselves?</li> <li>- Can an indirect perspective be seen?</li> </ul>
<b>Rhetorical elements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there detectable emphasis?</li> <li>- How are elements such as comparisons, metaphors, euphemisms, metonyms, and repetition used?</li> <li>- Does the discourse express emotion or appeal to values?</li> <li>- Are there implications or presuppositions?</li> </ul>

*Persons and groups* is the most common category, as all of the articles refer to either people or groups in at least one occasion. It is also a significant one, because this study suggests beliefs and opinions about persons and groups can often indicate that there is an ideological motive. Elements of persons and groups are identified manually: a mention of a person or a group is deemed noteworthy if they seemed to have a significant role in the text and the message, and presented in a topic-relevant context, rather than just a background mention. Referring to persons and groups is examined via questions which can refer to ideologies: firstly, examining belonging to a group and generally referring to groups, thus studying group ideologies. Secondly, including the question of tone: the tone of lexical words used can indicate beliefs and ideologies. And, finally, if there is juxtaposition of two groups and thus their ideologies. This type of setting is studied widely in the field of CDA, however it is often examining the positioning of “us” and “them”, as discussed by van Dijk (1997), for example. In the data of this thesis, the approach is often slightly different, since the news articles analysed are usually written from a seemingly neutral or outsider perspective, not placing the writer or the newspaper in either of the groupings present. This, however, does not mean that no ideological bias is shown.

The second examined element is referring to *phenomena, events, and actions*. They were also identified manually, similar to persons and groups, and analysed in relevant context and when carrying meaning. In the context of this study, phenomena and events mainly relate to the DSGB, similar laws in history, whereas actions mainly relate to what has been decided or said about such laws and related topics. Examining them is done mainly through examining descriptive language, such as lexical choices, as well as together with perspective – for example, if the writer positions themselves close to or distanced from an event. Actions

overlap with persons and groups relatively often, as actions almost always have an actor introduced in news articles.

Thirdly, *arguments and claims* in the text are examined. Arguments were identified with help from Pylkkänen (2008), who introduces some basic argument structures: for example, a statement or claim with a causer in the subject position of a sentence and a following occurring event (2008, 3). Furthermore, Reisigl and Wodak also describe their objective as “justification and questioning” (2017, 95). Only simple structures of arguments are included in this thesis, since the scope of analysis cannot fit studying complex structures of implicit arguments, for example. Identifying relevant arguments in the data proved a bit challenging since the grammatical structure of arguments and claims that are made in the text is very similar to that of statements that are factual, such as background information, and not argumentative. To solve this problem, semantic context is vital: if the purpose of the sentence is deemed to be justifying, arguing, or claiming for some related issue, it is seen as an argument or claim.

Direct arguments are not present in all of the data, but when they are, they often indicate an ideological or otherwise opinion-based ideology. Moreover, they are often citations, not arguments made by the author of the article. Examining arguments, the study focuses on the questions of what kind of a stand the argument takes, and if there are fallacies within the argumentation. Fallacies, in this study, are considered logically invalid reasonings or lack thereof; claims that can be proven false; and claims with no evidential support. Example (2) showcases a fallacy: Florida Governor DeSantis says that Disney leadership bought into a false narrative about the legislation, not providing any evidence or information to back this statement up. Considering general properties of argumentation, this thesis draws from van Dijk 1998 for characteristics of arguments and van Dijk 1992 for some argumentation tendencies in the press when considering minority topics.

(2) DeSantis said Tuesday he will sign Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill “[relatively] soon,” adding that Disney leadership “bought into a false narrative” about the legislation. (Politico.com, 2022).

Fourthly, *perspective* is studied. Identified via the positioning writer’s point of view and expressing involvement or distance (Reisigl and Wodak 2017, 95), the question of perspective studies whether or not the text or the writer show their own ideological, political or some

other perspective – in other words, if they indicate belonging to a group or having some other identity, from the perspective of which they are writing.

And, finally, *rhetorical elements*. Studying them, the focus is on the semantics of language – actual meaning, that is. Since countless types of rhetorical elements exist, and they are also somewhat dependent on the interpretation, this study only lists some that occur in the data and can be detected in some of them. Rhetorical elements is the one element that overlaps the most with the others, as they can be used when referring to persons, groups, events, or phenomena, as well as in argumentation or in showing perspective. They are identified simply through occurrences of strategies listed in Table 3.

In general, too, it is noteworthy to mention that some of these elements overlap in the data, and that interpreting plays a slight role in some of them. Despite this, these five discourse elements are studied in the data qualitatively in Section 5, as the linguistic elements are examined on a micro-level of meaning. The meanings of the discursive choices are then applied and compared to the macro-level of societal constructions, connected to potential ideologies in the text. As mentioned, ideologies are sought mostly through possible group identities, as they often strongly relate to group, knowledge of the group's existence, and social beliefs in general (van Dijk 2017, 28), but also personal identities, opinions, and other aspects that might occur when analysing the data.

The analysis is done by going through the sample articles one by one and searching for discursive strategies. The articles are read twice: first, gathering an overview, and second, analysing the language elements introduced above. Analysing the meaning of the language elements in the texts, techniques of close reading are applied. Close reading, according to Brummett (2010, 2) is “the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understand its meanings”. Especially the technique of narratives, as introduced by Brummett (2010, 58) is relevant for the topic, since it explores tensions, alignments, and oppositions of narratives, for example, and these are all relevant in the narration of the news and how they might be perceived.

Following this, the study aims to recognise what macro-structure or societal thing the discourse is connected to. Via these connections, the aim is to recognise ideologies. All of this is discussed via examples in Section 5. Although the main focus is qualitative, the study does also introduce a quantitative element by introducing some relative frequencies of the most common elements found. These are introduced briefly in Section 6.

### 4.2.1 Research ethics

As the materials of this thesis are public news articles, there are few privacy questions of ethics that need to be considered. In some of the articles, potentially sensitive topics regarding personal lives and experiences of people were presented. These were chosen not to be introduced in detail in this study, although it may have added to some of the articles. Objectivity, on the other hand, is a significant focus point in ethics when the perspective of the study is critical. In order to maintain an ethical study as far as results are concerned, this thesis follows these principles of ethical interpretation of results in qualitative research:

Researchers should [...] try to be as ethical as possible when interpreting the study results. Researchers should do their best to not over-interpret or misinterpret the data and represent the possible conclusions as closely as possible. To do so, researchers can use triangulation techniques or corroborate their conclusions with the participant themselves through interviews and other techniques proposed in qualitative methodologies. (Dooly et.al. 2017, 351).

Triangulated perspective is applied to this study via social, political, and cultural aspects, but it is nevertheless worth noting here again that the approach is critical and thus naturally aims for a critical, yet objective, study.

## 5 Analysis

This Section handles the data of 50 news articles. The research questions the analysis aims to answer are:

1. What kind of micro-level and macro-level structures and language elements related to sexuality education and the legislation related to it can be identified in U.S. news coverage of Florida's *Parental Rights in Education* bill?
2. What kind of ideologies do they indicate?
3. How does directness or indirectness feature in these choices, and what is its significance?

It should once again be mentioned that studying the ideologies in the data, the results are partially subject to interpretation – that is, examining ideologies via discursive elements does not show a unified, objective truth. The analysis introduces the examples and work one element in focus at a time, as this seems like the more logical and structured approach, compared to introducing the data one news article at a time. The findings on each element, then, are discussed in Section 6.

### 5.1 Persons and groups

The first element of discourse studied is persons and groups, which are some of the most common in the data, as every article in the data handles a person or a group in one or more ways. Persons and groups are referred to in seemingly neutral ways on many occasions, such as Governor DeSantis is referred to in example (3), but also negatively, as DeSantis is referred to in example (4), and positively, as DeSantis is referred to in example (5).

(3) When asked if he plans to make any changes that would impact Disney's operation in the state, **DeSantis** said it's not his decision (Hollywood Reporter 2022).

(4) **Florida's governor claims** some districts have been 'racially gerrymandered.'  
(ABC News 2022)

(5) **DeSantis** defended the prohibition Monday as **helping parents control their children's education** (USA today 2022)

Such tones can be recognised with lexical choices, for example. To elaborate, the verb *claim* in example (4) can carry a connotation of disagreement, perhaps indicating that the writer disagrees with said Florida's governor, whereas in example (5), the discourse appeals to values that are generally seen as good, mentioning helping parents and children's education. This kind of positioning of a person in positive or negative light can be argued to indicate an ideology or a belief, especially when referring to a person with such a significant political role as the governor of Florida, and when considering a matter that is as politically polarised as the DSGB. It is noteworthy that the persons and groups mentioned the most in the data were also most often presented in an ideological or contrasting way. For example, DeSantis was the most mentioned individual person in the data, and he is referred to either positively or negatively in most of the cases. As can be expected, this seemed to also correlate on ideologies aligning with DeSantis' ideologies; for example, articles referring to DeSantis or a group of his positively presented pro-DSGB ideologies more often than articles that had a critical or negative tone towards DeSantis or a group of his. Similar connections could be generalised to other persons who are strongly connected to either pro- or anti-DSGB ideologies.

Studying example (3) in context, the article in Hollywood Reporter uses relatively neutral language and relatively balanced groupings. The article includes interviews from a Democrat and a Republican politician, showing some juxtaposition between the two groups, but not visibly siding with either. Other groupings made are related to the topic of the article: Disney, which has made a public statement about the DSGB; and Florida taxpayers, which relate to Disney's position in the state and as a taxpayer. The article does not make direct arguments and only shows perspective that is outside the groups of Disney and outside of Florida legislation, generally not showing strong ideologies.

Example (4) from ABC News has widely different context, as Disney and the DSGB are not the main topic of the article. It is also showing more perspective in many ways: Governor DeSantis is referred to multiple times, showing potential disagreement between the writer's and DeSantis' ideologies. The writer uses phrases such as "his controversial redistricting plan", and tone-showing lexical choices such as "DeSantis has claimed [...]". They also make groupings, such as the common division of Republicans-Democrats in the data, and also ones such as "Black lawmakers", "Black advocacy groups" and "voting rights activists". Such language use can be argued to indicate ideologies of equal rights and anti-racism. In covering the DSGB, too, the article provides a pro-LGBT+ quote from a Disney employee, reinforcing



the assumption of pro-equality ideology, which is generally aligned more with the Democratic party of the U.S., too (see, for example, Democrats.org for the values of the party). Example (5) from USA today, then, has complex textual context. The article groups the opposers of the DSGB as “opponents” whose activities are described with words such as “derided”, but gives neutral background information from an “LGBTQ advocacy organization”, not taking a clear side in the debate. In the context of news articles, discourse in which strong tones and lexical choices are present but not a clear side is taken can simply be a choice to appeal to readers as interesting text.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis was the most commonly referred to individual person in the data, mentioned in 33 out of 50 articles. DeSantis was also often connected to various groups. This occurred in two ways: groups siding with DeSantis, as in example (6), and groups opposing DeSantis, as in example (7). Examples of these most often include political groups, such as “Republican Lawmakers” in example (6), and “Democrats”, such as in example (7). These, then, often indicated either political agreement or disagreement.

(6) Backed by **Gov. Ron DeSantis**, some **Republican lawmakers** have called for the repeal of a 1967 law [...] (Hollywood Reporter 2022)

(7) Democrats **vilified DeSantis** over the law, which **they** labeled the "Don't Say Gay" bill, **accusing** it of being anti-LGBT. (Fox News 2022)

In example (7), we can once again see strong lexical choices associated with the groupings made: Democrats are referred to with “they”, and meaningful lexical verbs “vilified” and “accusing” are indicating that Democrats are somehow bad and wrong. The Fox News article handles sexuality education curriculum in a specific school and takes a relatively clear stand against it. They present strong-opinionated quotes from Republican politicians, calling LGBT+ education “appalling”, providing misinformation and stating that Florida’s DSGB is “necessary”. With a perspective that distances the writer and the readers from Democrats and LGBT+ education, the article is showing siding with Republican ideologies, with the DSGB, and even anti-LGBT+ ideology. The text is presenting Republican, conservative mindsets as naturalised ideologies, or as the right ones.

Table 4 below showcases the most common groupings in the data, often appearing in pairs and in a juxtaposition. This occurs in the data both directly, an example of which is the Democrats-Republicans-division, and through connections, for example the Democrats-

DeSantis-division, in which DeSantis represents the group of Republicans and their group ideologies – as shown in example (7) above. A more detailed analysis could be conducted on how these groups occur, but some trends are visible just through close reading of the data: for example, students and children are always referred to in a positive tone or context, and Disney almost always in a negative one. Disney is so significant and present in the data because of its statements about the DSGB in spring of 2022, as well as lack thereof. Many of the articles covered Disney’s relation to the bill and Florida politics and Florida economy in general. All in all, Table 4 is meant to visualise examples of the kind of groupings studied in the data. They might be significant to illustrate what the focus of articles discussing the DSGB is, and what kind of groups media coverage considers relevant.

What is worth mentioning considering the goal of students’ well-being is that LGBT+ students and children were not mentioned in any of the articles that seemed to indicate a pro-DSGB ideological belief – rather, these articles usually just referred to children or students. Similar separation was seen with sources referring to Disney’s employees and Disney’s LGBT+ employees. In the analysis, in addition to groupings of people based on age, political party, or relation to the DSGB, groupings were also made through ideological beliefs or assumptions, such as “woke”, “conservatives”, or “liberals”. These were often connected to the political divisions seen in the data.

**Table 4** Common or otherwise significant groupings mentioned in the data.

Group	Occurrences	% of occurrences in the data
Republicans	20	40%
Democrats	14	28%
Disney	33	66%
(Florida) lawmakers	14	28%
Opponents/Critics	17	34%
Supporters	2	4%
Students/Children	16	32%
LGBT+ students/children	11	22%
LGBT+ people/community	25	50%

Terms such as conservatives and Republicans are sometimes used interchangeably within an article, but sometimes using one over the other appeared to be an intentional choice, too – perhaps to avoid mentioning parties or to highlight the conservative ideology. Conservatives and liberals were left out of Table 4 due to them overlapping with Republicans and Democrats irregularly. In the other categories, then, some groupings are under one term: “students”, “kids” and “children” occurred in such similar contexts that they are together here. LGBT+ students/children were also described with different terms in the data – sometimes “queer kids”, sometimes “gay kids”, but because the context was so similar, they are all under the same grouping here.

When studying groupings in the data, it appeared that certain groups were mentioned more neutrally, whereas others most often had an attributive word – most often an adjective – occurring with them. For example, “Republicans” and “supporters” [of the DSGB] were used alone, but “critics” and “opponents” were often coloured with words such as “liberal” or “woke”.

What is worth mentioning is that in the data, sometimes a group of people are personified as one person – for example, Governor Ron DeSantis was very present in the data – in 66%, more specifically – and he and his actions could be seen as a representation of entire groups, such as Republicans. All in all, the subjectivity of methodology is noteworthy here – as the data is examined manually, it could be that another reader would have deemed other mentions of persons or groupings meaningful.

## 5.2 Phenomena, events, and actions

The second element – phenomena, events, and actions – is the other most common one, as almost every article mentions or refers a phenomenon or an event in the context of the DSGB. The connections to ideologies were identified mostly via lexical choices and potential positive or negative tones used (see example (8), and also relating to arguments and perspectives (see example (9))).

(8) DeSantis **mocked** the company as being too “woke” a day after having a private discussion with Disney CEO Bob Chapek during which Chapek expressed concerns over the bill. (Tampa Bay Times, 2022)

(9) Already in 2022, more than 300 anti-LGBTQ bills are pending across state legislatures, according to the pro-LGBTQ Human Rights Campaign. At least six states

have banned transgender women and girls from competing on sports teams consistent with their gender. Arizona, Alabama and Texas have all moved to ban **gender affirming care for transgender youth** this year, with Alabama making it a felony for doctors to provide such **care to minors**. (ABC News, 2022)

As example (8) illustrates, lexical verbs have an impact on the tone of an action and actor when they are connected – “mocked” describes the action quite differently than a more neutral word choice, such as “called” or something similar, would. This can indicate opinions of the actor or place them in a certain light for the reader. Such choices, then, can be intentional efforts to impact the reader, or alternatively unintentional. Example (9) shows a more detailed description of a phenomenon, hundreds of “anti-LGBTQ bills” advancing in the U.S. legislative systems. Phenomena, events, and actions that are described with more detail can be seen as somehow more important or significant, whereas only briefly mentioning or even leaving out something can be a conscious choice of what the reader is exposed to. Moreover, the lexical choices and details chosen here in example (9), such as minors being denied gender affirming care, indicate ideological beliefs that see these things as positive and hence the DSGB as negative – even though the article does not make this claim in direct words. Detail can be argued to indicate importance – in other words, more detailed can be seen as more important, worth of describing in detail.

In contrast to detailed description indicating importance, in example (10), Disney CEO Bob Chapek’s opposition to the DSGB is only mentioned very briefly and softened with the word “some”, perhaps an intentional choice by the writer to diminish Chapek’s actual opposition or efforts. Additionally, even if the choice is not intentional, the amount or lack of detail is worth noting because it, of course, affects the reader’s experience.

(10) Although he expressed **some opposition** to the bill, [Disney CEO] Chapek said a corporate statement on the matter would be ineffective (msn.com, 2022)

As far as evaluative attributions in the context of phenomena, events, and actions were concerned, they were most often shown in text indirectly, as illustrated by example (11) below: here, the article demonstrates critique towards Disney from “critics” and how Disney has received a poor equality review from an outside source: GLAAD, “the world’s largest Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) media advocacy organization” (glaad.org, n.d.).

(11) **Critics say** Disney hasn't done enough in its representation. Disney has received a "failing" or "poor" grade from GLAAD each year since 2014 in the media monitoring organization's report on LGBTQ+ inclusion (msn.com, 2022)

Such indirect evaluative attributions are something to note when analysing language in the news. Direct evaluations from the writer's or the media's perspective are clear indications of opinion and potentially beliefs and ideologies, but including specific indirect evaluations can also imply a belief or ideology: here in example (11) and the article it is from, one could argue that the writer or the media has a pro-LGBT+ ideological view, as they present evaluations on LGBT+-related actions in a critical light. These kinds of evaluations are worth noting and are discussed more in Subsection 5.4 through the question of perspective.

### 5.3 Arguments and claims

Examining arguments and claims, one noteworthy distinction needs to be made: few articles in the data make direct arguments that are clearly intended to show the opinion or side of the writer or the media, such as examples (12) and (13), but most of them contain indirect arguments, which, in this context, means that the article presents an outsider's arguments on a topic, as in example (14).

(12) Disney can't seem to get it right. (Yahoo! Sports, 2022)

(13) The effort to unwind Disney's privileges **appears** to be a clear act of retaliation [...] for the company's opposition to the governor's **anti-LGBTQ** law. (Vanity Fair, 2022)

(14) "The decision of The Walt Disney Corporation to promote the introduction of age-inappropriate sexual material in kindergarten classrooms, including radical gender ideology, [...] jeopardizes the financial future of the company and its shareholders in service of an extreme political agenda," **AFL President Miller told** FOX Business. (Fox Business, 2022)

Example (12) showcases a direct structure of Disney as a wrong-doer, whereas example (13) softens its first argument with the lexical choice "appears", but then calls the DSGB an "anti-LGBTQ law", which Republican politicians have claimed not to be the case. On the other hand, although example (14) is not an argument made directly by the writer or media, it is still presented by them. Referring to van Dijk (1992, 101) – although these things in the media

have changed since van Dijk's study – considering sensitive topics, related to discrimination of minorities for example, minorities are “seldom heard in a credible, authoritative way”. In media presenting such polarised topics, this study argues that not including comments or opinions from both sides can be seen as an ideological choice. This is visible in much of the data with one-sided indirect arguments presented. Evaluative attributions of the DSGB itself are present as both direct and indirect structures, though the latter are more common in the data – see example (15), in which Disney CEO Bob Chapek is quoted, expressing his disapproval of the DSGB and using a rhetoric strategy: appealing to a naturalised ideology, basic human rights.

(15) [Disney CEO] Chapek posted a statement online and emailed staffers on Friday, saying Disney was wrong to stay silent as the Republican-majority Florida legislature greenlit a bill he called “yet another challenge to **basic human rights**” (The Guardian, 2022).

One discursive characteristic found in the data is painting minorities as problems, also introduced by van Dijk (1992, 100). This strategy is seen in multiple of the articles, mostly either ones that indicate anti-LGBT+ or pro-DSGB ideologies, or ones quoting politicians with such ideologies; see example (16). It can be seen as an indirect argumentation strategy. Additionally, the writer is presenting transgender athletes as a distant group by repeating the pronoun “they”.

(16) “**They’re** trying to **undermine the integrity** of the competition, and **they’re** crowning **somebody else** the women’s champion.” [Florida Governor Ron DeSantis on transgender athletes competing] (Politico, 2022)

Van Dijk explains that “the conservative and right-wing press tends to focus on the problems minorities and immigrants are seen to create [...], whereas the more liberal press (also) focuses on the problems minorities have [...]” (1992, 100). Such juxtaposition is present in much of the data, and the perspectives to these contrasting settings can stem from ideological beliefs. This is visible in the groupings, too, which can be seen in Section 5.1 and Table 4; the articles that express concern for LGBT+ people’s and children’s well-being seemed to reflect more liberal ideologies, whereas ones that arguably painted LGBT+ people as a problem only did not present concern for their well-being. On the contrary, when LGBT+ people were painted as the problem, the DSGB was often presented as something that would be helpful of beneficial for them, as example (17) below showcases. This is an argumentative strategy that

van Dijk calls apparent empathy (1998, 173). Apparent empathy aims to “make negative actions or decisions seemingly less harsh to emphasize that they are in fact beneficial to the victims” (ibid.).

(17) “I believe an idea that creating boundaries at an early age at what is appropriate in our schools, when we are funding our schools, is not hate. It’s actually providing boundaries and it’s fair to our teachers and our school districts to know what we expect,” [Republican Florida Rep. Joe Harding] said. (Syracuse.com, 2022)

Lastly for arguments, the argumentative move of *reversal* is identifiable in some of the data – see example (18) below. As van Dijk says (1998, 173), reversal is an argumentative move often found in texts about minorities, and van Dijk describes its characteristics as “not they, but we, are the victims; not they, but we, are discriminated against” (ibid.). Here, Mackey diminishes the issue of not being able to discuss LGBT+ issues by stating that heterosexuality can also not be addressed. Arguing against Mackey’s view, heterosexuality is the most visible and common one and can be seen as a naturalised ideology. Thus, discussing anything contrary might be deemed as ideological or opinionated more easily.

(18) “I think it’s kind of a misnomer, in my opinion,” [Alabama state superintendent Eric Mackey] said, “to call it ‘don’t say gay’ because it’s also don’t say straight.” (Al.com, 2022).

In conclusion, various argumentative strategies are identifiable in the data, and direct arguments made by the writers of the articles are less common than cited ones from interviewees or politicians. This, then, leads to the next language element analysed: perspective.

#### **5.4 Perspective**

Perspective is another element that overlaps largely in the data with the other elements. A perhaps significant notion made is that especially perspective and argumentation combined can be seen as an indication of ideology – see example (19) for reference:

In (19) The governor's press secretary, Christina Pushaw, went so far as to suggest that critics of the legislation were either "a groomer or at least you don't denounce grooming of 4–8 year old children." Accusing someone of "grooming," in which a sex

abuser builds a relationship with their victim, has a long and ugly history in the context of LGBT rights in American politics. (Business Insider, 2022).

In example (19), the perspective of the writer is already indicating one that is away or opposing the Governor and his press secretary – for example, by using the phrase “went so far as to”, which perhaps indicates that the writer found the measure extreme. Further, they do not directly make the argument that press Secretary Christina Pushaw is wrong in her claim, but through lexical choices such as “accusing” as well as describing phenomena related to “LGBT rights in American politics” in a LGBT+-positive tone, they seem to take a stance against such suggestions of grooming.

Perspective in the data was most often taken by indicating either similarity or difference of views with a person or a group. With persons and groups connected to ideologies and beliefs, this then often indicates ideology from the writer – not always, however. In example (20) below, the writer is indicating that they are not in the group of Republicans as they seem to be following Republicans’ actions from the outside. Yet, they do not directly condemn nor condone said actions.

**(20) Republicans show no signs** of backing away from the proposal, which prohibits teachers from leading classroom discussions on sexual orientation and gender issues for students in kindergarten through third grade. (Politico, 2022) [24]

On the other hand, other context in the same article indicates potential disagreements between the writer and Republican ideologies considering the DSGB. Examples of this include providing information on pro-LGBT+-themes in contexts where Republican politicians had argued against them. In the data, the writers of the articles who are distancing their perspectives from those of specific groups did not always indicate opposing ideologies of their own. However, there seemed to be some correlation with these two phenomena, but this potential connection is not studied in more detail here.

Perspective was also presented indirectly in some cases. Example (21) demonstrates how indirect perspectives of non-named persons were introduced in the text.

**(21) One speaker from the public** likened homosexuality to sins like stealing, lying and murder. Another said sexual orientation is a preference. (Tampa Bay Times, 2022).



Showcasing indirect perspectives is noteworthy in studying ideologies because some articles in the data do not directly present an ideology or a belief of their own, but indirectly present one-sided perspective – meaning, for example, that an article only presents pro-DSGB ideological quotations. What is an issue in studying this, though, is that it cannot be confirmed whether these are intentional choices and what their purpose is. However, one-sided quoting and indirect argument presenting seemed to correlate with pro-DSGB views that the writer or the media presented on their own account. This is not studied in detail, though, as the ambiguity of whether views are intentionally presented as one’s own or not could mislead the results. However, there were also some articles that had a seemingly pro-LGBT+ perspective but presented one-sided quoting from anti-LGBT+ views. In these cases, the quotes were often shown in a slightly critical tone, based on lexical choices, and detailed background information on LGBT+ rights was provided. In general, means of identifying perspective in the data are not unambiguous nor definitive, and there are many elements to consider.

## 5.5 Rhetorical elements

Rhetoric, which Suddaby and Greenwood call “art of persuasion” (2005, 39) has many aspects and levels that could be studied in the context of a related study. For the sake of balanced analysis, only rhetoric elements that could be identified with relative ease are studied. Furthermore, this study does not reach far to the branch of rhetorical analysis, which also has multiple subbranches, but rather remains at a relatively simple level. Examining rhetorical elements, as they are studied in this thesis, is focused on both the semantic meaning and the structure of the language. Examples (22), (23) and (24) below demonstrate different types of rhetorical elements: example (22) shows a metaphor with the lexical choice “injecting”; example (23) shows emphasis with sentence structures, where “[i]t made no difference” is made its own sentence; and example (24) shows a presupposition and a comparison, neither of which is supported by evidence.

(22) “If you are out protesting this bill, you are by definition putting yourself in favor of **injecting sexual instruction** to 5- 6- and 7-year-old kids,” DeSantis said. (Politico, 2022).

(23) Gay legislators spoke of their own experiences as they discussed how one education bill could make life harder for LGBTQ children. **It made no difference.** (Tampa Bay Times, 2022).

(24) DeSantis and Republican lawmakers **blamed the media and Democrats for distorting** the content of [the DSGB]. His spokesperson, Christina Pushaw, said anyone against the bill was “**probably a groomer**,” a term for sexual predators. (Tampa Bay Times, 2022)

Context-wise, it is noteworthy that examples (23) and (24) are from the same article. The former is using a rhetorical element to highlight LGBT+ issues, and the latter presenting a quotation from an apparently anti-LGBT figure.

Types of ideologies that could be seen from use of rhetorical elements vary. In example (25) below, New York City mayor Eric Adams uses repetition to emphasise his city, and implications in saying that the city he lives in is harassment- and abuse-free, which, in context, implies that Florida, the other city in the discussion, is not.

(25) "This is the city of Stonewall," [New York City mayor Eric] Adams told reporters. "This is the city where we are proud to talk about how you can live in a comfortable setting and not be harassed, not be abused -- not only as adults but also as young people." (Business Insider, 2022).

One rhetorical element detected in the data is appealing to family values and traditional values, some that could be seen as naturalised ideologies. In the data, though, the juxtaposition of values is clearly visible, and seems to widely follow the juxtaposition of the political parties: Republican values include “preserving American values and traditions, and restoring the American dream for every citizen of this great nation” as well as defending the nation “[a]s the left attempts to destroy what makes America great” (The Republican National Committee, n.d.). The Democratic party, then, state that “Democrats believe that the economy should work for everyone, health care is a right, our diversity is our strength, and democracy is worth defending” (Democrats.org, n.d.). The focus points of the party ideologies can be seen in these summaries, and they seem to be reflected in the data as well – specifically considering the contrast of traditional values on the Republican side and diversity on the Democratic side. Some values, though, are ones that appeal to all groups. Example (26) below showcases a common such value: protecting children.

(26) Action had to be taken, and a campaign to limit the legal rights of LGBTQ people — all in the name of protecting children — was enacted. (NBC News)

As mentioned in Subsection 5.1, children were a common group mentioned in the data, and the context was most often either about protecting children or concern over them and their education. Protecting children is a goal or a value that surely most communities prioritise – but it appeared differently in the data. Some of the data referred to the DSGB or similar legislation being introduced as a means to protect children, whereas others were concerned for the well-being of children whose life, identity, or family would be restricted by the legislation. This is noteworthy as the opposing opinions both appeal to ideologies or values that are naturalised or seen as the norm within their group, but they were contradictory with ideologies of the other group. Here, it might be worth mentioning again that none of the discourse that overtly considered the DSGB as a positive thing in order to protect children did not mention protecting LGBT+ children or their well-being even once. A similar trend could be seen with mentioning LGBT+ people in general, as it was rarely done at all in a context that was pro-DSGB.

Although rhetorical elements were also used by the writers of the articles, they, too, were more present in quotes and citations than in the writers' own texts. In example (27), the writer uses a metaphor, and in example (28), the cited Democrat politician, Arizona state Rep. César Chávez, is addressing the reader with the pronoun “you” and repeating it for emphasis.

(27) Disney's DeSantis **Headache** Just Got A Lot Bigger (TheStreet, 2022).

(28) “**You** can say that **you** support a community, **you** can say that **you're** alongside the community, but unless **you're** actively seeking to change the route of this kind of legislation, those are just words,” Chávez said (Politico, 2022). [36]

In conclusion, most of the elements and structures of discourse analysed were more common in cited text. The writers and media rarely presented their own ideologies overtly, but when done, it seemed like an intentional, direct choice. What can be drawn from this analysis is discussed in Section 6 below.

## 6 Results and discussion

The analysis presented connections between language elements and ideologies. Contrary to pre-analysis expectations, though, these connections were not very definitive nor clear, and identifying ideological language in the data is up to the interlocutor, the reader. Some trends and correlations could be quite clearly seen in the data, but some were too ambiguous to say definitely. For instance, anti-DSGB language correlated with pro-LGBT+ ideologies in the text and vice versa: pro-DSGB language correlated with anti-LBGT+ ideologies. Also, only two articles in the data refer to the DSGB primarily by its actual name, Parental Rights in Education, both of these articles also indicating pro-bill stances and anti-LGBT+ ideologies. However, to confirm these kinds of occurrences as correlation, a wider sample of articles would be necessary. To elaborate, some connections or correlations that seemed to appear could well be individual cases: argumentative fallacies, or arguments that were justified with misinformation or false facts, first seemed to correlate with quotations supporting the DSGB. However, this only occurred twice in the data, and can thus hardly be seen as correlation. Perhaps a wider sample would have contained more such cases, but with the data at hand, such connections can only be speculated.

In contrast to the non-generalisable results, though, the qualitative results are still significant. Even singular cases from mass media sources that contain language with harmful views can have a strong impact. Moreover, the results presenting discriminatory and harmful views in many different ways can be seen as indication that they occur in even more ways, not studied in the analysis of this thesis. Also, considering again the information about the DSGB and how it reaches its audiences, one online article may well be enough information for a person who wants to find out what the DSGB is, and hence one article can have a negative impact if it uses harmful ideological language. Media are responsible for what they present and widely also how it is received and what kind of damage it can do.

The research questions for this study examined what kind of micro- and macro-level structures the news discourse around the DSGB contains, what ideologies they indicate, and whether or not these choices can be recognised as direct or indirect. Unsurprisingly, most identifiable ideologies in the data were related to LGBT+ people, either for them or against them. In some contexts, this could be seen on a wider scale, with general ideological anti-discrimination or pro-equality beliefs. Other related ideologies identified were those of conservatism or liberalism, strongly relating to the political division discussed in this study

and seen in the data. Additionally, news relating to Disney and other corporations, such as Apple, often indicated ideological beliefs relating to capitalism or anti-capitalism. Other ideologies could be seen as well, but they were less clear and less frequent.

Returning to the last research question, some discourse choices considering ideologies could be recognised as direct or indirect, but others could not. In some cases, it was clear that the quoted person or the writer of the article wanted to convey their ideological purpose, but in others, ideology presenting was ambiguous, even to the point that it could not be considered. Ambiguity or intention was a challenge in interpreting ideologies.

Having identified ideologies in the text through micro-level language elements, they must then be connected to the social issue of this study. The purpose of this thesis is to highlight different aspects of media discourse, specifically in the context of sexuality education and minority rights. The analysis demonstrates that different ideologies impact news discourse, and this study argues that a this can influence the reader, and media should hence be well informed in two ways: fact-wise what they write about; and socially what kind of consequences their output can have. In the context of the DSGB or similar legal efforts, media covering the topic should consider the impact of these bills and, for example, the importance of comprehensive sexuality education for children.

This study argues that biased or one-sided news coverage should be avoided, and that regarding news, readers have the power and responsibility of interpretation. Van Dijk explains that “in most democratic societies, [...] controlling the media and its public discourses is much more indirect and subtle [than media owners or other actors telling the editors what (not) to publish]” (1997, 20). He elaborates, explaining that manipulating journalists or writers is a common and more effective way of executing power over news coverage (*ibid.*). However, media and journalists also have executive power of their own. Why this is relevant for this study is related to one analysis aspect in particular: directness of ideologies in the text. In other words, whether ideologies in the text are presented of the writers’ own accord, and further, whether they are presented as opinionated or ideological – or, in contrast, naturalised, indirect, or hidden ideologies. Intentionally hidden ideologies can be an act of manipulation on media’s part. Hence, critical media reading skills are vital.

A further question to consider is what ideologies mean or aim for on the macro-level or, in the context of this study, on a societal level. This thesis considers semantic macro-level structures – that is, general overall meanings of discourses. On one hand, the topic of this thesis is quite

political, and so are most of the ideologies that were analysed and identified. These ideologies in the text, then, could have a political purpose or agenda. Whether on an interviewee's ideology that they present to a media, hoping to introduce it to readers, or the writer's or media's ideology that they choose to present, ideologies are often visible in discourse and have power. Politicians presenting their views is surely expected, too, but media indirectly taking a stand might have a different impact on the reader.

This, then, brings out one potential theme for further studies: is there a difference in how openly political media and media that claim not to be political present ideologies? For this study, too, a further aspect could have been to study backgrounds of the media in the data. On one hand, examining how the media present themselves and whether they convey having a political agenda or political leaning could bring more insight into the directness of their discourse choices and thus help the reader interpret politically biased text as politically biased. This could, for example, mean comparing media that call themselves conservative or liberal to ones that make no such distinction for themselves. On the other hand, there are third parties that, for example, place U.S. media on a left-right political spectrum or evaluate their neutrality. Considering these kinds of internal and external assessments would provide more results on what kind of ideological discourse is displayed by different media. This thesis makes the argument that media presenting opinions and ideological text as factual or naturalised can have a strong impact on the reader and even spread harmful misinformation. In the context of this thesis, for example, some opinions are presented as facts in the data although they do not have the necessary evidence or information to support them. For example, supporters of the DSGB describe it with false facts or intentionally misleading language. This is seen through fallacies, as introduced in Section 5.3.

## **6.1 Upcoming research**

Having conducted this study, multiple themes and approaches for future studies have arisen. They are discussed in this subsection. Motivations for these new studies are similar as the ones for this thesis, relating largely to media transparency or neutrality; political polarisation and ideology conveying in news coverage; and sexuality education.

For studies with similar material, a wider scope of analysis could be utilised. Scholars agree that discourse and text can contain more than just text. Considering news, this is evident in illustrations, headings, and subheadings. Additionally, though, there are visual textual elements to consider: for example, words and phrases can be highlighted with boldface,

cursive or other choices, and important or interesting parts of the article can be displayed multiple times in different sizes for emphasis. Furthermore, hyperlinks with text can be embedded in online news articles, and these can both contain text and also lead to related articles with relevant issues – sometimes leading the reader to a specific direction from related news, sometimes strongly polarised or opinionated articles. Text-wise, more detail could be found in grammatical elements, too, and how structures are used in these different contexts.

Studying the content of these news could also contain the aspect of what they cover and what they leave out, or in other words, what they choose to display even if it does not come from them. Even news with similar headings sometimes contained different details, quotations from different people and so on. These results could be compared to the potential politicalness of the media and whether what they choose to present correspond with their political conviction or not. Moreover, since the data for this study was a randomly selected sample from the NOW corpus, a different, more comparative result could be achieved if the sample of news was hand-picked or alternatively randomly selected from unique news sources: in the data for this thesis, multiple articles from some media were included. This could also have an impact on the results and possible patterns that occurred.

Another approach could be to consider lexical words and their collocations. Studying the political division regarding the bill, some connections seemed to arise, such as “liberals” often occurring with attributive words such as “woke” and “radical” in the discourse. In general, too, examining terms which seem to have different tones could provide significant search results: based on the primary data of this study, comparisons between terms such as “advocates” and “activists” could provide insight into ideologies in text. Lexical words with strong meanings and tones might also appear more in other genres of news discourse; while collecting the data for this thesis from the NOW corpus, a few units were omitted due to them being columns or other articles clearly marked as not news. These types of texts would also provide something different due to different display of opinions and beliefs. Studying such texts, research ought to aim for a different goal, too.

## **6.2 Topicality**

At the time of writing, the topic of the study is extremely current. The American Civil Liberties Union or ACLU is mapping “attacks on LGBTQ rights in U.S. state legislatures” (ACLU 2023), and they state that they are currently tracking “435 anti-LGBTQ bills in the U.S.”. These bills and legal efforts have rapidly increased in frequency during the past year or

so, and discourse related to them and covering them in the news has a big part on how they are perceived by people. This was also visible as intertextual references to such other bills in the data, as illustrated in example (29) below.

(29) The group says that Disney's lack of real action in response to Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill will have a ripple effect for similar legislation in Texas, Tennessee and other states. (Hollywood Reporter, 2022)

These bills, similar to the DSGB, are covered widely in U.S. news. They receive a lot of support and a lot of criticism. Critique for these bills focuses widely on their language: with some of them being formulated quite loosely, a lot is left for interpretation. This has also been one of the aspects criticised about the DSGB: it does not define what "age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate" is, which leaves room for subjectivity in executing legal decisions relating to the bill. Considering critique that is and has been presented about the bill, media should once again be examined in whether or not they also present this sort of critique and how they do it. With these bills being so acute, wide-spreading, and topical, media language truly has a vital role.

In March 2023, Florida Republicans have introduced a new parental rights rule: rule number 6A-1.09414, a new rule which is scheduled for a vote of the state Board of Education in April, would expand the ban of instruction related to sexual orientation and gender identity from third grade, as it currently is with the DSGB, up to 12th grade (Florida HB 1223). The topic, hence, is socially more current than perhaps ever.



## 7 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the social issues of importance of comprehensive sexuality education, media transparency, LGBT+ equality, and discriminative legislation. The research questions set for this study were:

1. What kind of micro-level and macro-level structures and language elements related to sexuality education and the legislation related to it can be identified in U.S. news coverage of Florida's *Parental Rights in Education* bill?
2. What kind of ideologies do they indicate?
3. How does directness or indirectness feature in these choices, and what is its significance?

The micro-level structures studied and identified in the text consisted of different language elements: persons and groups; phenomena, events and actions; arguments and claims; perspective; and rhetorical elements. All of these were found in the text to some extent, most frequently persons and groups. These were analysed in relation to meaning, or the macro-level structures. These related to societal things, such as political stance, and social things, such as relationships between people. The analysis indicated different kinds of ideologies, the most prominent of which were those of pro- or anti-LGBT+ and conservatism or liberalism.

The most notable issue with the analysis is the subjectivity of interpretation. Scholars interdisciplinary and almost unanimously agree that interpreting meaning is affected by various factors, including the background and cognition of the individual interpreter – or, in the context of news texts, reader. This being said, this thesis aimed for a critical yet objective study and result. The results showed some correlation with ideologies and language elements, such as anti-DSGB attitudes correlating with being pro LGBT+, and a wider sample could confirm more similar results.

The study at hand did not focus on a hypothesis, but some ideology-related ones were introduced in Section 3.1.1. As hypothesised, ideologies relating to LGBT+ rights, equal rights, conservatism, and liberalism were identified in the data. On the other hand, some of the results seem surprising; for example, most ideological discourses that were identified were from interviews and other quotations. Studying this news thus showed relatively little ideological discourse directly by the writers of the newspapers, but analysing what they chose

to present and what they chose to leave out could have been a significant thing to examine in even more detail.

To conclude, the results of this thesis show ideological language. The media in the data make direct and indirect choices in conveying their messages. The topic of LGBT+ rights in the U.S. is arguably more current and topical than in a long time, at least when considering legal issues. Media have a large power in what kind of messages their audiences receive relating to such legal efforts, and it is thus important to examine media language critically. The purpose of this study has been to introduce ideological language, increase the critical reading of ideological media language, and to present the effects of media language.

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## Appendix 2. Tables, figures and abbreviations

### List of Tables and figures

**Table 1** Republicans' voting results on the DSGB.

**Table 2** Democrats' voting results on the DSGB.

**Table 3** Discourse elements and their reference questions.

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**Figure 1** Floridians' support of the DSGB.

### List of abbreviations

DSGB	Don't Say Gay Bill
PRiEA	Parental Rights in Education Act
The NOW Corpus	The News on the Web Corpus
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
LGBT+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other sexually or gender diverse people; Sexual and gender minorities
ACLU	American Civil Rights Union
MAP	Movement Advancement Project

### Appendix 3. Finnish summary

#### Johdanto

Seksuaalinen suuntautuminen ja seksuaalikasvatus ovat olleet tärkeä teema viime vuosina. Yhdysvaltain osavaltio Floridan senaatti ja kuvernööri hyväksyivät vuoden 2022 maaliskuussa *Parental Rights in Education* -lakialoitteen (suomeksi *vanhempien oikeudet koulutuksessa*). Lakialoite sai paljon kritiikkiä varsinkin yhdestä kappaleestaan, jota pidettiin laajalti vähemmistöihin kohdistettuna ja syrjivänä. Lakialoite saikin eritoten mediassa lempinimekseen *Don't Say Gay* (suomeksi *älä sano homo tai älä puhu homoudesta*). Laissa kielletään seksuaalisesta suuntautumisesta tai sukupuolesta puhuminen päiväkotiasteelta kolmanteen luokkaan asti. Median kritiikistä huolimatta laki astui voimaan kesäkuussa 2022.

Tämä tutkimus käsittelee Yhdysvaltalaisten sähköisten uutisartikkelien diskurssia *Don't Say Gay* -laista (tästä eteenpäin DSGB). Yksi pääsyy tutkimusaiheen valintaan oli monipuolisen seksuaalikasvatuksen tärkeys lapsille ja nuorille. Esimerkiksi Gegenfurtner ja Gebhardt (2017) esittelevät monipuolisen ja kattavan seksuaalikasvatuksen etuja, ja muun muassa sitä, kuinka seksuaalikasvatus vähentää homofobista ja transfobista kiusaamista, täten parantaen opiskelijoiden hyvinvointia. Luk (2008, sivut 12–13) kertoo tutkimuksessaan identiteetistä ja siitä, kuinka diskurssi vaikuttaa sen kehitykseen. Monipuolinen kasvatus siis vaikuttaa lasten ja nuorten kehitykseen ja kasvuun. Toinen syy tutkimusaiheen valintaan oli median vaikutusvalta lukijoihinsa: valtamedioilla on suuri vaikutus siihen, miten niiden lukijat kokevat niiden käsittelemät asiat. Uutisartikkelit puolestaan valittiin tutkimuksen materiaaliksi, koska valtamediolla on suuri voima (*power*) ja vaikutusvalta lukijoihinsa. Lisäksi uutiset ovat saavutettavampi tekstin lähde kuin lakitekstit, sillä teksti on usein paitsi helpommin löydettävissä, myös yksinkertaisempaa. Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan paitsi uutisten välittämää viestiä, myös sitä, onko se suora (*direct*) vai epäsuora (*indirect*). Suora viesti on uutisen kirjoittajan tai uutislähteen oma viesti ja esitetään myös sellaisena, kun taas epäsuora viesti voi esiintyä esimerkiksi lainausten, sitaattien tai muun retoriikan kautta.

Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan uutisten elementtejä ja rakenteita, jotka liittyvät seksuaalikasvatukseen tai DSGB:hen. Keskeinen käsite tutkimukselle on ideologia (*ideology*). Van Dijkin mukaan ideologia on uskomusten järjestelmä (*a system of beliefs*), erityisesti ryhmän ja sen jäsenten perustavanlaatuisista uskomuksista (van Dijk 2007). Tutkimus keskittyy laajalti juuri ideologioihin tekstissä, sillä esimerkiksi vähemmistöjä käsittelevissä aiheissa juuri ideologiat ovat usein syrjinnän taustalla.

Tutkimuskysymykset ovat:

1. Millaisia seksuaalikasvatusta ja siihen liittyvää lainsäädäntöä koskevia mikro- ja makrotason rakenteita ja kielellisiä elementtejä on tunnistettavissa Yhdysvaltojen Parental Rights in Education -lakia käsittelevissä uutisissa?
2. Millaisia ideologioita ne osoittavat?
3. Miten viestin suoruus tai epäsuoruus näkyy näissä valinnoissa, ja mikä sen merkitys on?

Näiden tutkimuskysymysten avulla tutkimus ottaa kriittisen näkökulman Yhdysvaltalaisen lehtien verkkoartikkelien viestintään. Tutkimuksessa käytettävät teoreettiset viitekehykset perustuvat kriittiseen diskurssianalyysiin (*Critical Discourse Analysis*), jonka lähtökohtana on usein jokin yhteiskunnallinen ongelma tai kysymys. Tässä tutkimuksessa niitä ovat tasapuolisen ja monipuolisen seksuaalikasvatuksen tärkeys, seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen oikeudet ja median rooli DSGB:n esiintuomisessa.

### Taustatietoa

Monipuolisen ja objektiivisen näkökulman saavuttamiseksi tutkimus ottaa huomioon paitsi datan ja analyysin tulokset myös artikkelien tekstuaalisen kontekstin, tilannekontekstin sekä historiallisen, sosiaalisen ja poliittisen kontekstin. Tämä tarkoittaa sitä, että uutisartikkelien teksteissä huomioidaan muutkin asiat kuin tekstiotteet, jotka käsittelevät DSGB:tä.

Monipuolisen perspektiivin huomioiseksi ja ymmärtämiseksi tutkimuksen taustatietona esitellään Floridan politiikan pääpiirteitä, itse DSGB:n, seksuaalikasvatusta Yhdysvalloissa sekä LGBT+-ihmisten vastaisia lakeja opetussuunnitelmissa (*anti-gay curriculum laws*).

Tutkimus esittelee lyhyesti ne Floridan poliittiset pääpiirteet, jotka ovat tutkimusaiheen kannalta olennaisia. Yhdysvaltain politiikka on hyvin kahtiajakautunutta, sillä lähes poikkeuksetta kaksi suurinta puoluetta kilpailee vallasta ja valtaapaikoista. Tämä on selvästi nähtävissä datassa ja myös olennaista analyysin kannalta. Republikaanien ja demokraattien vastakkainasettelu heijastaa omalta osaltaan myös tutkittavia ideologioita ja mielipiteitä: DSGB:n hyväksyivät republikaanivoittoiset osavaltion edustajainhuone, senaatti ja republikaanikuvernööri. Poliittiset ideologiat ovat laajalti samassa linjassa puolueen kanssa DSGB:n suhteen.

LGBT+-ihmiset, eli seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöt, ovat vähemmistö Yhdysvalloissa. Heitä koskevat oikeudet ja lakiasiat ovat olleet melko näkyviä mediassa viime vuosina ja vuosikymmeninä. Yhdysvalloissa, sekä kansallisesti että osavaltion tasolla, opetussuunnitelmissa on ennenkin ollut homovastaisia (*anti-gay curriculum laws*) tai yleisemmin LGBT+-ihmisten vastaisia lakeja (*anti-LGBT+ curriculum laws*). Tällaisten lakien on tutkittu satuttavan ja stigmatisoivan seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjä ja asettavan heidät epätasa-arvoiseen asemaan (Rosky 2017, 1519). Kuten todettu, medially on suuri valta siihen, miten tieto vastaavista laeista leviää ja miten ihmiset suuntautuvat niihin. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena onkin perspektiivi, joka huomioi kaikki nämä näkökulmat.

## Teoria

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys perustuu kriittiseen diskurssianalyysiin eli CDA:han. CDA:n toteuttamiseen ei ole yhtä yhtenäistä linjaa. Van Dijk luonnehtii CDA:ta yhteiskunnalliseksi liikkeeksi, joka haluaa ymmärtää ja haastaa sosiaalisia epäoikeudenmukaisuuksia (2015, 466). Myös tämä tutkimus soveltaa tällaista näkökulmaa. Siksi on myös tärkeää mainita, että kuten useimmat muut CDA-tutkimukset, tämäkin tutkielma ei ole täysin neutraali. Näkökulma on kriittinen ja perspektiiviin vaikuttavat jo mainitut yhteiskunnalliset ongelmat. Tarkoituksena on tarkastella kriittisesti erityisesti sitä, miten tutkittavat mediat esittävät DSGB:hen liittyvää diskurssia, mutta kuitenkin toteuttaa tutkimus mahdollisimman objektiivisesti. Yksi tutkielman pitkäaikaisista tavoitteista on saada mahdollinen lukija ymmärtämään sitä, miten mediat voivat käsitellä aiheita ja esittää ne tietyissä valoissa.

Van Dijk erottelee yhteiskunnallisen mikro- ja makrotason kielellisessä kontekstissa (2015, 467–468). Mikrotason elementeillä tarkoitetaan jokapäiväisempiä asioita, kuten kielellisiä valintoja ja elementtejä. Makrotaso puolestaan tarkoittaa sosiaalista ja yhteiskunnallista tasoa. CDA:ssa tutkitaan näiden tasojen yhteyttä; tämän tutkielman kontekstissa se tarkoittaa, että tutkitaan kielellisten elementtien yhteyttä ideologioihin ja yhteiskuntaan. Tärkeitä käsitteitä tutkimukselle ovat muun muassa ideologia (*ideology*), voima (*power*) ja diskurssistrategiat (*discursive strategies*). Ideologiat ovat tärkeä tekijä diskurssissa, sillä ne muovaavat sekä sitä, miten muodostamme ja luemme diskurssia, että sitä, miten ymmärrämme diskurssia. Van Dijkin mukaan ideologiat muodostavat yhteyden kielen ja yhteiskunnan välille (1997, 7), ja ovat tärkeä osa mikro- ja makrotasojen yhteyttä. Tässä tutkimuksessa ideologioita tunnustetaan ennen kaikkea ryhmäidentiteettien sekä yhteiskunnallisten mielipiteiden kautta.



Ideologia on tärkeä osa ryhmän arvoja ja järjestelmää, mikä näkyy myös ryhmän diskurssissa sekä ryhmään liittyvässä diskurssissa. Esimerkkejä ovat seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöihin liittyvät ideologiat.

Toinen tärkeä termi on *voima*. Tutkimus käsittelee sitä, millaista voimaa media käyttää ja millaista voimaa sillä voi olla, sekä sitä, miten ideologiat voivat vaikuttaa voimankäyttöön. Kolmas olennainen termi on *diskurssi*strategiat. Reisiglin ja Wodakin mukaan diskursiiviset strategiat ovat kielellisiä toimia, joilla saavutetaan tietynlaisia tavoitteita (2017, 94). Ne voivat olla näkyviä tai piileviä sekä suoria tai epäsuoria, ja niillä toteutetaan esimerkiksi sosiaalista voimankäyttöä.

### Materiaalit ja menetelmät

Tutkimusaineisto koostui News on the Web -korpuksesta kootuista lehtiartikkeleista. Korpuksen kautta kerättävä data on saavutettavaa ja sattumanvaraista, joten se oli otollista tähän tutkielmaan. News on the Web -korpuksessa on lähes 17 miljardia sanaa nettilehdistä koostuvaa dataa viimeisen 13 vuoden ajalta (The NOW Corpus). Tätä tutkimusta varten korpukselta kerättiin 50 artikkelin sattumanvarainen otos Yhdysvaltalaisista lehdistä. Hakutuloksena käytettiin [do n't say gay], mikä valittiin lain oikean nimen sijaan siksi, että se on mediassa huomattavasti käytetympi nimi. 50 artikkelista neljä oli korvattava hakutuloksissa seuraavalla, sillä osaa artikkeleista ei voinut lukea ilman maksusuoritusta ja osa oli merkitty kolumneiksi tai mielipidekirjoituksiksi.

Tutkimuksen toteutuksessa käytettiin lähiluvun tekniikoita ja analysoitiin materiaalia manuaalisesti. Analyysissa etsittiin niitä mikrotason kielielementtejä, joilla saattoi olla tutkimusaiheen kannalta olennainen merkitys. Analyysia toteutettaessa huomioitiin artikkelien konteksti eli se, mistä muussa tekstissä puhuttiin ja millaisen viestin se välitti. Tutkimuksessa ei kuitenkaan käsitelty lehtien omia kantoja ja poliittisia, vaikka sellaiset olisivat olleet löydettävissä ainakin osalle lehdistä.

Mukauttaen Reisiglin ja Wodakin tutkimusta (2017, 95), tutkimus keskittyi analysoimaan viidenlaisia kielielementtejä: 1) Ihmiset ja ryhmät; 2) Ilmiöt, tapahtumat ja teot; 3) Argumentit ja väitteet; 4) Perspektiivi; ja 5) Retoriset keinot. Kielellisiä elementtejä tutkittaessa esiintyi luonnollisesti päällekkäisyyksiä, kun niitä tutkittiin laadullisesti nettiartikkeleissa.

Ideologioita etsittiin ryhmäidentiteettien kautta, ja muita kielellisiä elementtejä ja niiden esiintymistä vertailtiin ideologioihin.

## Analyysi ja tulokset

Analyysissa dataa tutkittiin yksi kielielementti kerrallaan. Analyysiosio käsitteli aineistoa esimerkkien kautta, havainnollistaen kielellisten elementtien esiintymistä ja tutkien sitä, millaisia yhteyksiä niillä oli. Tietynlaiset ihmiset ja ryhmät esiintyivät tietynlaisissa konteksteissa ja esimerkiksi jotkut ihmiset olivat usein rinnastettavissa joihinkin ryhmiin. Tietynlainen argumentointi tai argumenttivirheet saattoivat korreloida joidenkin ideologioiden kanssa. Tutkimuksessa todettiin useaan otteeseen, että yleistettävämpien tutkimustulosten saavuttamiseksi aineisto-otoksen tulisi olla laajempi. Myös tietyt perspektiivit korreloivat ryhmäidentiteettien ja niiden ideologioiden kanssa.

Tutkimustuloksista oli huomioitava, että suurin osa lehdistä esitti vahvoja ideologisia mielipiteitä lähinnä epäsuorasti, eli esimerkiksi haastatteleamalla ja siteeraamalla muita ihmisiä. Tutkimustulokset viittaavat siihen suuntaan, että myös tällainen ideologioiden epäsuorakin esitys on vaikutusvaltaista ja voimallista kieltä, joka vaikuttaa lukijaan. Toinen huomionarvoinen asia analyysissa oli ideologioiden monitulkintaisuus: joissakin tapauksissa ei voitu varmaksi sanoa, millaista ideologiaa teksti implikoi tai ei implikoinut. Suurin osa artikkeleista kuitenkin toi esiin jonkinlaista selkeästi ideologista diskurssia.

## Johtopäätöksiä

Kuten todettu, monipuolinen seksuaalikasvatus on kiistatta olennaista lasten ja nuorten hyvinvoinnille. Lisäksi massamedioilla ja uutislähteillä on paljon vaikutusvaltaa siten, miten ihmiset saavat tietoa esimerkiksi lakiasioista, ja myös siihen, miten he reagoivat vastaaviin asioihin. Uutisten lukijana tai muiden medioiden kuluttajana on myös kannattavaa ottaa hieman kriittistä näkökulmaa siihen, miten mediat esittävät asiansa. Median diskurssia on hyvä tutkia kriittisesti ja medioita pitää vastuussa kielellisistä ja ideologisista valinnoistaan.

Tutkimusaihe on kenties ajankohtaisempi kuin koskaan, sillä Yhdysvalloissa on tälläkin hetkellä satoja seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen vastaisia lakialoitteita.

Tutkimusmateriaalissa oli myös jonkin verran intertekstuaalisia viittauksia muihin viimeaikaisiin lakialoitteisiin. Näistä lakialoitteista uutisoidaan laajalti Yhdysvalloissa, ja ne ovat hyvin kiistanalaisia. Osavaltioiden välillä on melko paljon jännittyneisyyttä, sillä jotkut kokevat, että tällaiset lakialoitteet ovat ihmisoikeusrikkomuksia, mutta toisissa osavaltioissa ne hyväksytään laeiksi. Lakeja on kritisoitu paitsi ihmisoikeusvastaisuudesta myös epäselvyydestä: esimerkiksi Floridan DSGB-laissa puhutaan melko epätarkasti ikäsopivasta

tai kehitystasolle sopivasta keskustelusta seksuaalisuudesta, mikä jättää paljon tulkinnan varaan. Floridassa esitettiin maaliskuussa 2023 lakialoitejatke, joka laajentaa DSBG:tä kolmannelta luokalta 12. luokkaan asti. Floridan opetuslautakunta hyväksyi lain huhtikuussa 2023. Ajankohtainen tutkimus näistä laeista ja niiden haitoista on siis tarpeellista ja olennaista.