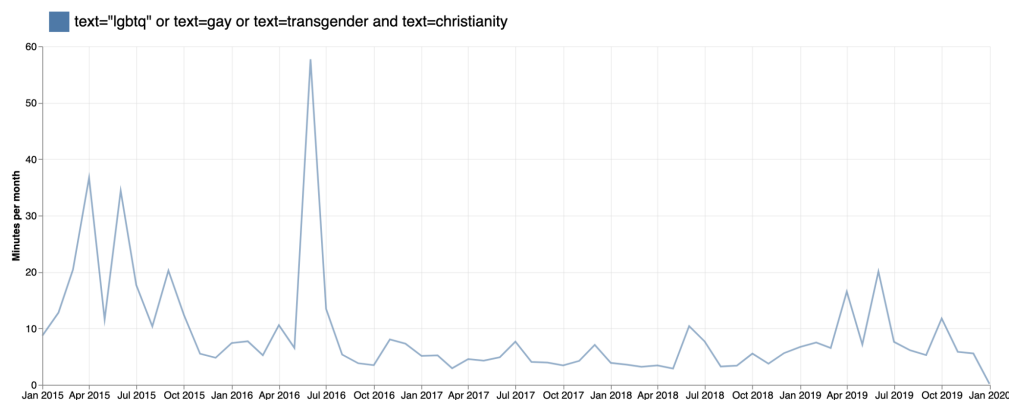


LGBTQ+ community faces skewed media attention, representation

By: Alexis Santoro and Zachary Carmosino

Representation of the LGBTQ+ community in the news media differs greatly, especially when taking into account the political affiliation of the major news source. However, the coverage on all mainstream news sources differs from the reality of the thoughts and opinions of the community. When looking at major moments for the community such as when same-sex marriage was legalized and the highly divisive conversations that surrounded political debates in 2016. The spikes in coverage can be seen surrounding large events within the community. This analysis focuses on the peaks in June 2015 and April 2019. The attention that the community received as well as their representation in the media during each of those times are important points of analysis when it comes to understanding the way the media reports on the community.



The peaks in July 2015 and April 2019 display peaks in coverage surrounding LGBTQ+ news as a political debate. The peak seen in July of 2016 is representative of the increased coverage from the Pulse Nightclub shooting.

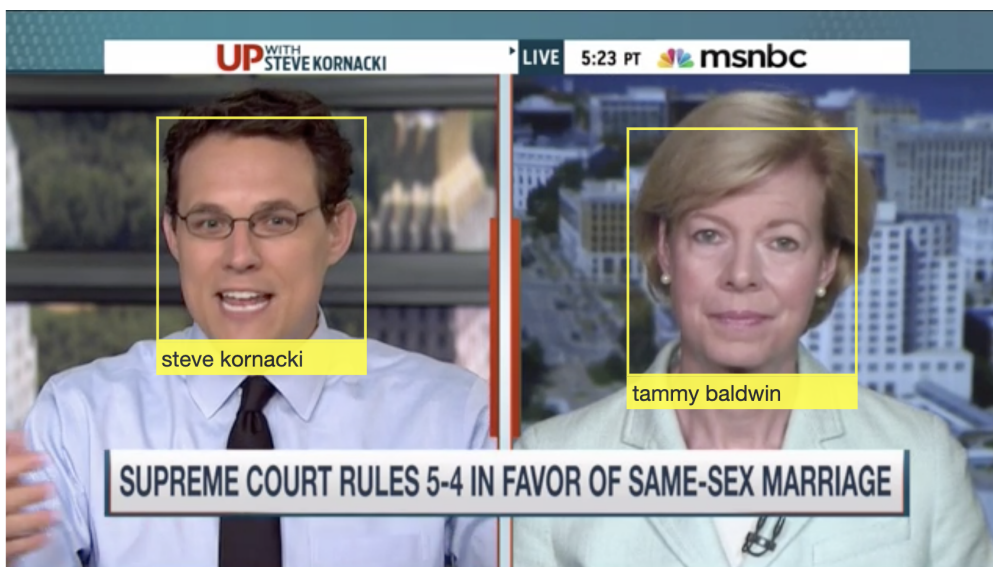
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On June 26, 2015, same sex marriage was legalized in the United States. This historic decision marked a turning point in the long fight for equality for members of the LGBTQ+ community. The decision received widespread media attention becoming the main headline in the news. Television news in particular devoted much of its attention that day to reporting on the legalization of same-

sex marriage. Many also took to Twitter to share their opinions and emotions about the decision. On each platform different debates presented themselves.

On MSNBC just days after the decision, segment host Steve Kornacki and guest, Senator Tammy Baldwin, discussed the debate of religious freedom, analyzing the feelings of the religious community in the country. In looking at the religious perspective Kornacki raised the question, "Should the bakery owner have to make the cake for the gay couple getting married?" Baldwin responded saying "I think there are clear limits that have been set in other contexts and we ought to abide by those in this new context across America."

When analyzing her comment and the attitude across the entire segment the voices of the LGBTQ+ community are drowned out which misrepresents what the story is actually about which is the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community members finally gaining the right to same-sex marriage. The main idea of this portion of the segment is basically that people in the United States, specifically in the religious community are pretty much stuck in their ways and their limits prior to the decision should be abided by even in the new context of the legalization of same sex marriage.



Screenshot from MSNBC coverage with out Steve Kornacki and Sen. Tammy Baldwin following the legalization of same sex marriage.

Fox News, an organization known for its right-leaning reporting, also focused on the debate of the opinions of the religious people in the country, however within the debate there was more of a regard for the LGBTQ+ community. Fox and Friends co-host Clayton Morris pushed back on then-Governor of Texas Rick

Perry on his view of the legalization. Perry's explanation can be summarized by his opinion that the "one size fits all" law is not conducive to states being the "laboratories for democracy." His analysis basically implying that same-sex marriage should not have been legalzied in every single state because of the opinions within the religious community. Morris, however, brings another vantage point to the conversation stating the struggle for the community and sharing a little about what it was like for couples to worry about crossing state borders because of the difference in laws.

CNN, known for its left-leaning coverage, reported on the story from a more neutral standpoint, putting the emphasis on the people in the community, showing the Pride celebration and person-on-the street interviews at the celebration. As the report continued there were still mentions of the politics surrounding the decision, which does not accurately represent the issues that were most important to the community affected by the court decision.

The broad overarching coverage across many of the major news organizations, not just the three in the aforementioned examples, discuss the decision and then analyze the decision from a political perspective. While some, like CNN, report from a more human standpoint, in the end each looked at the legalization of gay marriage from a politically devisive perspecitve.

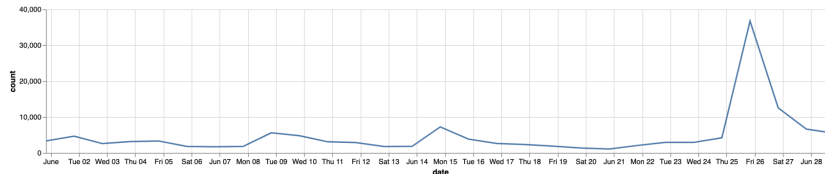
The conversation was much different on Twitter. While people were tweeting about the triumph of the decision, boosting the hashtag #LoveWins and joining in on the celebration and happiness within the community. Many users shared about their longing for the decision and spreading congratulations among those in the community.

Among those tweets, the conversation also became so much more with the hashtag #MoreThanMarriage trending. One tweet from **@WholeWomans** <<https://twitter.com/WholeWomans/status/615596382041309188>> said "LGBTQ issues are Okay #MoreThanMarriage – include poverty, mental and physical health disparities."

Another user, **@Calebreesee27** <<https://twitter.com/CalebReese27/status/614830219355099137>> tweeted, "The fight for the LGBTQ isn't over just because same sex marriage is now legal, there is still discrimination and it needs to end." Other Twitter users opened the conversation to rights for more members such as those who are Transgender.

Much of the conversation on Twitter was centered around the idea that the fight for equal rights for the LGBTQ+ community did not end with the legalization of same sex marriage. One user, [@VitaeCaecus](https://twitter.com/VitaeCaecus) <<https://twitter.com/VitaeCaecus/status/614442968653647872>> tweeted, "While this is certainly excellent news, marriage equality is not the end-all and be-all of LGBTQ rights." This tweet summarizes well the overall attitude of community members on Twitter.

Attention Over Time



This graph from Glimpse shows the peak in attention surrounding the LGBTQ+ community and religion between June 25 – 17 after same-sex marriage was legalized in the United States.

These opinions and experiences, however, were not mentioned in most of the mainstream news media coverage, thus showing the stark differences between coverage from news media conglomerates versus the actual feelings and opinions of the community. The news focused on the political debate sparked from the decision while Twitter users showed the human rights perspective. These trends in the news media and social media uncover the issues with these larger news organizations and the severe lack of reporting on the actual human experience associated with the ruling.

Problems that mainstream television news has in covering LGBTQ community and Christianity came to light again in April 2019. It involved a fight between former Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, then the Mayor of South Bend, Indiana who had recently declared his candidacy for the Democratic nomination in the 2020 election.

Buttigieg is an openly gay man who married his husband in an Episcopal church in South Bend. His drew upon his own Christian faith in criticising Pence, an evangelical Christian whose time as governor of Indiana was often marked by his anti-gay rhetoric.

With headlines like "Mayor Pete Takes on the Veep" (MSNBC) and "Pence and Buttigieg Feud over Faith" (CNN), its coverage focused overwhelmingly on the "horse-race" elements of political coverage that Americans overwhelmingly say

they dislike. Their content focused on the personal attacks the two men made on each other.

Though they approach this issue from very different perspectives, the two men share quite a few similarities. Like Pence, Buttigieg is a white man and a government executive. In short, Buttigieg is more privileged than much of the LGBTQ community.

The biggest problem with this coverage is that it fails to contextualize it within the wider context of Christianity and the LGBTQ community. In fact, it may not even be relevant for a majority of people affected in this issue.

A **Glimpse** < <https://glimpse.office.dataculturegroup.org/> > search shows that the vast majority of tweets from April 2019 about religion and the gay community had nothing to do with this exchange. Many concerned the ostracization of the gay community in Christian communities in the developing world. Others focused addressed their own experiences with discrimination, or offered affirmations for LGBTQ people.

Only a handful of retweets constituted most of Twitter's attention to Buttigieg and Pence.

Positive coverage of the gay community and Christianity remains virtually nonexistent. A Reddit post from April 14, 2019 titled "FIFTEEN LGBT CHRISTIANS ON WHAT BEING QUEER HAS TAUGHT THEM ABOUT FAITH" shows that at the same time CNN and MSNBC were covering Buttigieg and Pence, gay people online were sharing positive stories about their faith and sexuality.

Though a vibrant LGBT Christian community exists, the Stanford Cable TV News Analyzer shows that it has received scant attention from the major networks.

It is concerning that the little television news coverage of Christianity and the LGBTQ community is so disconnected from what interests people about this issue. Mainstream media networks have given diminishing coverage of this issue since the Obama years, and what attention it does give religion and Christianity represents some of the worst instincts of the TV news industry.

After analyzing TV news media coverage as well as developing a clearer understanding of the thoughts and feelings of the LGBTQ+ community through social media it is clear that the community did not get proper attention or representation in the media. In TV news reports the thoughts and feelings of the

community were often omitted, not giving the members a chance to actually share their viewpoints on the story. From a representation standpoint, the reports on TV overlooked the issues still present within the community and chose to focus on the politics of the issues showing the stories as political issues rather than debates of human rights. Social media sites like Twitter and Reddit are more indicative of the reality of the “news” surrounding a story, centered around human experience.

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