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## Same-Sex Marriage

### Introduction

The media has a big influence on how people view the world around them. Media bias is a global issue and is mostly caused by the underlying political perspectives. News reporting should be balanced since most Americans are not in a position to recognize bias and propaganda in the news served. This makes them unable to make knowledgeable decisions since they rely on biased information. Arguably, same-sex marriage is believed to be among the most divisive issues in the United States. The liberals think that all individuals have a right to marry irrespective of their sexual orientation. They support same-sex marriage and thus are opposed to the view that marriage should be between a male and a female. Americans with liberal beliefs maintain that gays, lesbians, transgender, and bisexual persons have a legal right to marry, and so barring them from marrying is denying them their civil right. On the other hand, the conservatives do not support marriage between people of the same sex.



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Americans with conservative views assume that same-sex relationships undermine the institution of marriage. This paper seeks to analyze two news media sources with different political perspectives. The first source is *New York Times* article by the Associated Press with a liberal view on same-sex marriage. The second one is a *Fox News* article by Bill Mears and Judson Berger with a conservative opinion on the same issue. Media bias in the reporting of same-sex marriage has contributed to national polarization.

### **Detecting Bias**

There is bias by omission in these two articles. The news sources provide one side of the story and fail to give facts that disapprove the claim. Markedly, the *New York Times* article supports liberal assertions and ignores to give facts on conservative beliefs. The article by the Associated Press emphasizes the need to protect civil rights of same-sex couples (n.p). The case described in the newspaper is about a woman who declined a request to offer flower services to a gay wedding due to her faith. The author cites that the lady committed an offense by breaking the state's anti-discrimination laws. This source points out that people use religious beliefs to justify discrimination. According to the Associated Press, same-sex couples are entitled to equal rights as other members of the society (n.p). The writer ignores the rights of the lady as outlined in the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). The reporter should have cited both the anti-discrimination laws that protect same-sex partners alongside DOMA that gives people a right not to recognize same-sex marriage.

Bias by omission is also evident in the *Fox News* article. The news source supports conservative beliefs on same-sex marriage. It presents a case of a baker who won a court case for refusing to offer services to a same-sex wedding. The article emphasizes that the baker had a right to exercise his religion freely and should not do anything that is against his religious beliefs. Mears and Berger argue that Christian beliefs on marriage are protected in the constitution (n.p). Although the authors quoted some words of the complainants about



equal access to business services to all people, they do not give facts to disapprove the conservative claim. Therefore, the story can be considered to be one-sided since it leans on the side of religious liberty. For the reporting to be considered balanced, it should give equal facts on both sides of the case.

The two articles have bias by placement. Precisely, the headline of the stories coincides with either the conservative or liberal beliefs. Notably, the *New York Times* headline “Justices Won't Hear Case of Anti-Gay Marriage Florist” can be said to be liberal. The headline of a report displays how the author considers the story. The reader of the newspaper is likely to be attracted by the headline depending on his/her political views. For the story placement to be considered fair and balanced, it should not downplay the conservative view. The placement of facts within the story should give equal weight to both sides. The placement of news in this source is biased and indicates support for same-sex marriage. On the other hand, the *Fox News* article headline has a conservative view and thus downplays the liberal perspective. Most of the story presented in this media source is about religious freedom. The authors do not address the issue of gay rights in an equal measure; they only included few quotes from the plaintiffs.

There is also the bias of story selection in both media sources. This can be defined as presenting news stories that coincide with the beliefs of either the liberals or conservatives while ignoring those that conform to the opposing view. The *New York Times* Article covers a story about anti-discrimination laws that protect gay couples and hence coincides with the liberal view while ignoring equal coverage of the conservative view. Besides, the article by Mears and Berger highlights the rights of people to exercise religion and fails to provide equal coverage of gay rights. For the two articles to be considered unbiased, they should have equal coverage of both the liberal and conservative claims.



### Fact-Checking

One claim evident in the *New York Times* article is that the constitution gives same-sex partners a right to form a marriage union. This is mostly true. There are three landmark US court decisions made in 2003 that confirm that gays have a constitutional right to marry (Cahill 1). In one of the rulings, the judges argued that gays and lesbians have a right to marry as this does not harm the rest of society. Another truth in the article is that people use religion to prejudice gays. This is false. On June 26, 2003, the U.S Supreme Court declared that gays should not be discriminated because of moral disapproval (Cahill 2). The *Fox News* source claims that people of different faith have a right to express their beliefs. This is true. Cahill argues that the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) protects people who do not recognize same-sex marriage (p. 9). This legislation identifies marriage as a union between two people of opposite sex. Asking citizens to recognize other forms of marriage violates their religious beliefs since they believe in traditional marriage. Another fact presented in this article is that gays have equal access to business services just like any other person. This is true. Limiting benefits to same-sex couples violates the constitution since it guarantees individual liberty and equality. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruling of November 18, 2003, described marriage as a voluntary union between two persons (Cahill 4).

### Analysis

Following the landmark court rulings of 2003 that gave gays and lesbians a right to form a marriage union, Americans developed an interest in the issue and started to follow media news closely to get further developments. Same-sex marriage was in the media spotlight for quite some time. Moreover, people viewed same-sex marriage from different perspectives. Some were displaying support for gay rights while others believed same-sex relationships undermine traditional marriage. The conservatives of this issue have offered to support the amendment of the constitution to modify the description of marriage. Since 2004,



same-sex marriage has become a significant campaign issue in the United States (Brewer & Wilcox 600). A survey conducted by *CBS News/New York Times* in 2004 indicated that 40 percent of the study participants would not vote for a candidate who disagreed with them on this controversial topic (Brewer & Wilcox 605).

The media sources discussed in the essay demonstrated bias in the way information was presented. From the findings of the two, it can be argued media bias on reporting same-sex marriage makes it hard for the reader to make a rational decision concerning this highly debated matter. The authors did not present equal perspectives. One article was more liberal while the other was more conservative on the matter. This has contributed to polarization since citizens are divided, particularly along partisan lines. Although the controversy surrounding same-sex relationships may have been settled legally, it still remains volatile politically. Political events tend to expose citizens to arguments that coincide with their beliefs and hence become more polarized. Americans who oppose same-sex marriage base their arguments on religious grounds. Therefore, many religious groups in the United States do not support it. Those who support this issue consider religious opposition as a form of prejudice. When media covers on one side of this controversial issue without providing equal coverage of the opposing view, it increases polarization. A fair and balanced presentation of news is vital for American democracy.



Works Cited

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