

MISSING VOICES

a study of religious voices in mainstream media reports about LGBT equality
glaad.org/missingvoices
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SIGNIFICANCE

3 out of 4

of the messages with some religious identification were communicated by people affiliated with faith groups that have formal church policy, religious decrees or traditions opposing equality for LGBT people.

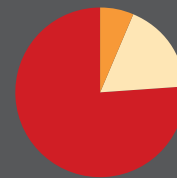
A three-year study of mainstream news coverage about the intersection of religion and issues affecting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community¹ showed that media outlets overwhelmingly quoted or interviewed sources from Evangelical Christian and Roman Catholic organizations to speak about LGBT lives, and the messages from those sources were significantly more negative than positive, resulting in a 'religion versus gay' framing.

By persistently reducing a diverse range of religious voices, intra-denominational progress, and public policy debate on LGBT issues to a 'religion versus gay' frame, the news media is largely omitting a pro-LGBT religious perspective and ignoring individuals who identify as both LGBT and religious, particularly those who identify as Christian. As a result of this binary framing, it is likely that media consumers have distorted views of the relationship between LGBT people and religion.

- Media outlets persistently quoted sources from Evangelical Christian organizations to speak about LGBT issues, and the messages those sources conveyed were significantly more negative than positive.
- Individual Evangelicals are consulted at a higher rate than their presence in the population would warrant (34% of media coverage versus 26% of the U.S. population).
- Evangelical Christian² organizations comprise 50% of all religious organizations that are cited.
- Furthermore, Evangelical Christians account for almost 40% of all the negative statements about LGBT issues made by religiously identified spokespeople. Spokespeople for the Roman Catholic hierarchy account for another 12%.
- Over half of Catholics consulted presented negative messages about LGBT issues, which is inconsistent with the majority view (71% of American Catholics support civil marriage equality and 73% of lay Catholics support anti-discrimination laws that would protect LGBT people in the workplace and in public accommodations³).
- Pro-LGBT or LGBT-identified sources are predominantly presented without any religious affiliation, thus reinforcing the mainstream media framing of 'religion vs. gay'.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Messages Presented by Religious Spokespeople



evangelical christian
total messages: 125



roman catholic
total messages: 108



mainline protestant
total messages: 63



black church
total messages: 41



jewish
total messages: 20



other
total messages: 9

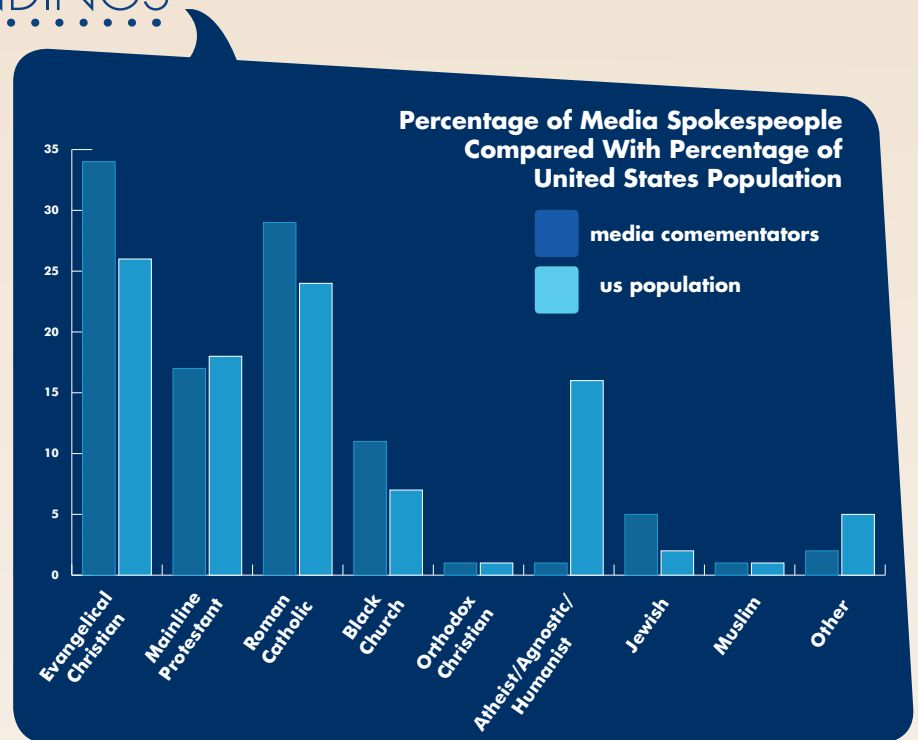


muslim
total messages: 4

negative
neutral
positive

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- The mainstream media used far fewer religious sources from Mainline Protestant, Jewish, or other religious sources whose messages were predominantly positive.
- 16% of the U.S. population identifies as Humanist, atheist, or agnostic, yet only 1% of people quoted in the media are identified as such.⁴
- The vast majority of positive messages in stories about LGBT issues were from sources with no religious affiliation identified.



Mainstream media must make more consistent use of LGBT-affirming religious sources, instead of turning to more negative or non-affirming religious voices. By overlooking LGBT-affirming sources, journalists can contribute to – and even perpetuate – the idea that those who are religious are, by definition, opposed to LGBT equality. In looking specifically at the organizations represented among religious commentators, we find a common profile: culturally conservative entities seeking to influence the political debate, with overt reference to “Christian” or “biblical” values, and often with the explicit endorsement of currently serving political figures.

The media must be fair and accurate in how religious voices are represented. Disproportionately favoring the voices of Evangelical Christians and Roman Catholics – who are more likely to present negative messages about LGBT people – is neither fair, nor accurate, nor balanced coverage. The mainstream media must pull apart the assumptions about values, religiosity, sexuality, and the intersection of church and state underlying these voices and their influential presence in the news. Despite their underrepresentation, there are LGBT-affirming religious voices cited in the mainstream media, some of whom even identify as LGBT themselves. Many of these voices come from affirming religious groups with a significant presence in the United States.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FACT SHEET PRODUCED BY

GLAAD in conjunction with the University of Missouri Center on Religion & the Professions.

AUTHORS

Debra Mason, PhD, & Cathy Ellen Rosenholtz, MDiv,
University of Missouri Center on Religion & the Professions
Thaler Pekar, Thaler Pekar & Partners
Josh Baran, Baran Communications
Ross Murray, Director of Religion, Faith, & Values, GLAAD
Miriam Lazewatsky, Faith & Campaigns Fellow, GLAAD

NOTES:

1. This content analysis study assesses the use of the “gays vs. religion” frame in news media coverage of LGBT stories from Aug. 1, 2008 through July 30, 2011, by examining the use of sources, particularly religious sources, to speak for or against LGBT issues.
2. In accordance with the definition used by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “Evangelical” Christian is defined as people who self-identify as either Evangelical or Born-Again within the Christian tradition.
3. Data on lay Roman Catholic positions on LGBT equality is taken from the Public Religion Research Institute’s report “Catholic Attitudes on Gay and Lesbian Issues” published March 22, 2011.
4. Religious demographic data comes from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life’s U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, taken in 2007.