



American Television, News

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Until quite recently, gay people and issues pertaining to them have been inadequately covered by American television news. Some of the reasons for this under-reporting have to do with the nature of television news in general. The medium favors highly dramatic, visually exciting content (fires, tornadoes, car chases, and so on) over substantive reportage and reasoned analysis. Television's inherent conservatism can also be blamed. After all, the medium's primary function is not to inform, or even entertain, viewers, but to deliver an audience to advertising sponsors.

Apart from those occasions when prominent women such as Ellen DeGeneres, k.d. lang, and Rosie O'Donnell have publicly acknowledged their homosexuality, lesbians have been even less visible in television news reports than their gay male counterparts. Unfortunately, this, too, is unsurprising, given America's patriarchal culture, in which women are all too often not paid serious consideration.

For most of television's history, news coverage of gay people and relevant issues, if it existed at all, was usually negative. Frequently, gay achievement was ignored; it was not unusual, for example, for television news reports of the 1973 election of Elaine Noble to the Massachusetts state legislature to fail to identify her as an openly lesbian politician. Even major news stories such as the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic were downplayed. By the beginning of 1983, the three major networks combined had dedicated a total of only thirteen minutes to this escalating international health crisis.

More recently, however, as gay and lesbian issues have become mainstream and the struggle for equal rights has assumed national and international importance, American television broadcasters have increased coverage of these issues. Moreover, a number of gay and lesbian television journalists have come out and in doing so increased the level of coverage of gay and lesbian news.

Important First Steps

In the 1960s and 1970s, the bulk of the attention paid to gay people in television news reports was in sensational documentary specials. Few openly gay individuals appeared on-camera, and when they did, it was customary for their faces to be obscured. In a 1966 Florida television news program aired on Miami's WJTV, Richard Inman purported to represent the gay viewpoint, but said he had given up homosexuality four years earlier and giggled when asked if he thought gay couples could live happily together over a long term.

A special episode of *CBS Reports*, aired on March 7, 1967, almost certainly exposed the largest television audience up to that time to the existence of openly gay people. Hosted by Mike Wallace, "The Homosexuals" was the product of two years' work and debate by members of the CBS news staff. The first version of the documentary was extensively revised for fear that it could be construed as an endorsement of homosexuality.



Activists Frank Kameny (left), Jack Nichols (center), and George Weinberg feted at a New York City GLBT Pride Parade. Footage of protesters including Frank Kameny was included in a 1967 episode of the news program *CBS Reports* in 1967 in which Jack Nichols was interviewed. George Weinberg coined the term "homophobia." Courtesy Jack Nichols.

In the end, the CBS report mainly represented the traditional view of homosexuality as an illness, and emphasized the outsider status of gay people. However, it at least suggested that other viewpoints were possible. Still, nervous advertising sponsors would not touch it; the commercial breaks were filled by public service announcements.

"The Homosexuals" showed footage of Washington activists Frank Kameny, Jack Nichols, Lilli Vincenz, and others picketing in front of the White House and at other strategically chosen locations. In an interview segment, Nichols appeared under an alias ("Warren Adkins") to spare his father embarrassment.

"Adkins" was one of a few positive gay role models who appeared in the documentary to declare their satisfaction with their own homosexuality. Unconsciously anticipating later arguments by gay activists that homosexuality is not a choice, "Adkins" said he couldn't conceive of renouncing his homosexuality and compared it to the color of his hair or skin.

The day after "The Homosexuals" aired on CBS, Nichols was fired from his job in a Washington hotel. Most viewers agreed with psychiatrist Charles Socarides, who opined for the camera that homosexuality precluded the possibility of living a happy, productive life. (Years later, Socarides's own son, Richard, would become an openly gay staff member in the Clinton White House and, later, a frequent guest on television news shows.)

"The Homosexuals" remains a landmark of American television news because of its articulation, however minimal, of dissenting views. James Braxton Craven, a federal district court judge from North Carolina, appeared on the program to question the legal sanctions against those who engaged in consenting homosexual acts. "The Homosexuals" also addressed gay influence in the arts.

Noted author and political commentator Gore Vidal defended gay playwright Edward Albee's 1962 classic, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Along with his fellow dramatists Tennessee Williams and William Inge, Albee had been criticized in *The New York Times* and elsewhere for writing women characters who were supposedly gay men in drag. Vidal countered this nonsense by emphasizing the popularity of Albee's play. "Obviously it's popular because what he has to say about married couples speaks to everybody," Vidal told Mike Wallace.

An (Unwitting?) Agent of Backlash

As gay people began to demand their rights, television news often became an agent of backlash. Gay protesters were frequently defined, often unintentionally, as troublemakers or--at best--as embattled parties to ludicrous "debate." Television news clips showed Anita Bryant denouncing homosexuals as unfit for the company of children. (It has frequently been observed that no other minority group is ever subjected to such defamatory characterizations on television news programs.)

Among activists, there was an increasing dissatisfaction with the inadequate representation of gay people on television news. Mark Segal, a young gay man from Philadelphia, staged several high-profile protests of shows such as *Today* and news figures such as Walter Cronkite, typically chaining himself to a desk or a camera. At his 1974 trial for trespassing, Segal seemed to make some headway with Cronkite; and coverage of gay news by CBS, Cronkite's employer, increased in the following year.

Subsequent news documentaries on the subject of homosexuality, however, were even more problematic. In 1979, ABC News *Close-Up* presented an hour-long documentary (again, with no sponsors) emphasizing gay promiscuity and suicide. In April of 1980, *CBS Reports* took a step backward from "The Homosexuals" when it aired "Gay Power, Gay Politics." An ostensible look at the influence of the gay voting bloc in San Francisco, the program emphasized sadomasochism (using footage shot at a heterosexual club) within the gay community.

Dianne Feinstein, then mayor of San Francisco, told the CBS news crew to leave her office after she was asked, "How does it feel to be mayor of Sodom and Gomorrah?" Less than six months after "Gay Power, Gay Politics" aired, the National News Council cited CBS for dubious news practices such as stereotyping and false implications in connection with the program. This, of course, was less widely reported.

Winds of Change

In 1978, PBS offered an unprecedented look at the breadth and diversity of the gay community when it aired the documentary *Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives*. Peter Adair and the Mariposa Film Group spent five years making this sensitive work, which explored gay history and options for the present.

There were other occasions for hope, including several episodes of Phil Donahue's talk show, on which openly gay guests were invited to speak out on issues and entertain questions from viewers. (In October, 1982, noted activist Larry Kramer was one of Donahue's guests.) At their best, Donahue's shows took on the seriousness and importance, if not the nominal mantle, of television news, giving viewers access to information that remained unavailable elsewhere.

As they had done many times before, frustrated gay people took matters into their own hands and, in 1992, created *In the Life*. Although it began as a variety entertainment show, *In the Life* soon became more news-oriented, offering informed reports on protest marches, the ongoing AIDS epidemic, and other issues. Produced by a not-for-profit agency, the series was offered free of charge to all public television stations.

When it began airing in 1992, *In the Life* was broadcast on six stations. In the early years of the new millennium, it was airing on 120 stations. However, many stations still refuse to carry it despite the fact that its production values rival the best of television news anywhere.

When this article was first posted, public television surpassed the networks in the quality of its depiction of gay people and their concerns. Although it does not command an audience as large as the networks--each episode of *In the Life*, for example, is seen by an estimated million viewers, as compared with the multiple millions who tune in to the commercial networks--PBS is more than equal to network television in importance.

For example, an extraordinary documentary by openly gay filmmaker Arthur Dong, titled *Licensed to Kill*, aired on public television in 1998. In this hard-hitting work, Dong traveled to various prisons to interview inmates who had been convicted of murdering gay men. By asking a varied group of killers why they targeted homosexual men, Dong highlighted the pernicious influence of religious and political figures who have used their prominent positions as bully pulpits from which to denounce homosexuality.

All too often, such "leaders" have been allowed to make their damaging statements in forums provided by television news programs. Media watchdog groups such as GLAAD (the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), however, have been increasingly effective in educating news organizations about issues involving the gay community.

One sign of the winds of change that could be discerned in the new millennium was apparent in ABC's episode of *Primetime Thursday* that aired on March 14, 2002, featuring Rosie O'Donnell and the issue of gay adoption. While the show included the obligatory anti-gay spokesperson, this time a Florida state representative who opposes gay adoption, the host Diane Sawyer subjected him to a withering cross-examination.

Moreover, the show exposed the dubious credentials of such "experts" on the issue as anti-gay activist Paul Cameron, the author of discredited studies that purport to demonstrate the unfitness of gays and lesbians as parents; and countered those studies with more respectable sociological research. Most importantly, it not only offered a forum for O'Donnell, but it also portrayed positively the loving household of gay parents

Steven Lofton and Roger Croteau, who--because of Florida's ban on gay adoption--feared having a ten-year-old boy taken from them despite their having raised him from infancy.

Perhaps the most important harbinger of change was the growth of niche broadcasting, especially the development of television that caters particularly to glbtq audiences. For example, Q Television Network, which launched in 2005, offered original programming that included queer perspectives on news and culture. LOGO, a channel of MTV that launched in 2005, also offered a range of original series, documentaries, and specials, and teamed up with CBS News to cover glbtq news stories in a "professional and authentic voice."

One of the pioneers in producing news shows aimed at glbtq audiences was QTV Newsmagazine, which debuted in 1995 as a local San Francisco public access offering. QTV Newsmagazine soon moved to Comcast cable channels and also became available via the Internet. Hosted by Executive Producer Rahn Fudge, the newsmagazine offered programs that originated both in San Francisco and in Key West, Florida.

Recent Developments

In recent years, especially since the advent of the 2008 Presidential campaign, mainstream coverage of glbtq topics and issues has vastly improved.

More and more, television news shows, both national and local ones, present news about homosexuality straightforwardly and with an understanding that such news is of interest to an increasingly wide and general audience.

This improvement is related to the fact that glbtq issues have themselves become increasingly mainstream and part of a national dialogue. For example, the quest for marriage equality and the end of Don't Ask, Don't Tell could hardly be ignored. Moreover, increasing acceptance and support for glbtq causes have also propelled fairer and more sympathetic coverage of glbtq people and issues.

As the political struggle for gay rights has intensified, more and more gay people have come out and demanded that they be portrayed fairly in the media. Their efforts have been supported not simply by the traditional media watchdog, GLAAD, but also by other organizations that monitor the depiction of glbtq issues, especially the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association, which works within the news industry to foster fair and accurate coverage of glbtq news, and Equality Matters, a group that monitors the depiction of gay issues in the news and corrects anti-gay misinformation.

In addition, the proliferation of gay political blogs has also contributed to increased and fair coverage of gay issues on television news. Because so many glbtq political blogs are linked to each other, the gay blogosphere has become an echoing chamber in which blogs have the potential to reach large audiences and sometimes to make local stories into national ones that cannot be ignored by the mainstream media.

A story posted on one blog often goes "viral" when it is picked up by other blogs and reposted on still more until the mainstream media is forced to give it attention, often by linking it to a larger glbtq issue such as employment discrimination or bullying of gay youth.

Moreover, the mainstream media, especially the 24-hour national news channels, have come to mirror more clearly the country's ideological divisions, with "forward leaning" MSNBC regarded as liberal, CNN as moderate, and Fox News as conservative.

One effect of this development, in which a particular news channel deliberately appeals to a particular ideological demographic, is that advocacy of glbtq rights has become routine (or, to use the favorite word of homophobes, *normalized*) at least on liberal and moderate channels. And even on a conservative channel like Fox News, gay issues cannot be avoided, even if they are typically presented negatively and unfairly.

Finally, the recent proliferation of openly gay or lesbian television journalists is both reflective of a new level of acceptance of homosexuality in television news and a source of greater knowledge and increased sensitivity as to how glbtq people and issues are presented.

Openly Gay and Lesbian Television Journalists

Among the handful of openly gay national television news anchors, commentators, and reporters are Thomas Roberts (MSNBC), Don Lemon (CNN), Rachel Maddow (MSNBC), Jason Bellini (CBS), Jonathan Capehart (MSNBC), John Yang (NBC), Jeffrey Kofman (ABC), Miguel Marquez (ABC), Manuel Gallegus (CBS), Steve Kmetko (E!), Josh Barro (Bloomberg Television and MSNBC), Richard Rodriguez (PBS), Jane Velez-Mitchell (CNN), Dan Kloeffler (ABC), Steve Kornacki (MSNBC), Jenna Wolfe (NBC), Stephanie Gosk (NBC), Anderson Cooper (CNN), and Robin Roberts (ABC), to say nothing of Pete Williams (NBC), who was outed in 1991 by Michelangelo Signorile, when Williams was a Pentagon spokesman charged with defending the ban on gays in the military.

By virtue of his outing in 1991, **Pete Williams** (b. 1953) is the senior openly gay national television news journalist, though it is not clear that he has any particular commitment to gay rights. Williams, a native of Wyoming, joined the Washington, D. C. staff of Congressman Dick Cheney in 1986 and followed him to the Pentagon when Cheney became Assistant Secretary of Defense in 1989. He joined NBC News in 1993, where he covers the Justice Department and the Supreme Court of the United States.

Jeffrey Kofman (b. 1959) built a reputation as a correspondent for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Toronto. During his 11 years at CBC, he hosted an award-winning weekly current affairs program, anchored the CBC's Toronto newscast, and contributed to the CBC's nightly network newscast, *The National*. He won several major Canadian journalism awards, including the National Media Human Rights Award for a ground-breaking 1987 CBC documentary on AIDS discrimination.

Now an American citizen, Kofman came to the United States in 1993 to work as a correspondent in CBS's New York bureau. He joined ABC News in 2001. He has been a notably versatile reporter for ABC, reporting on such domestic stories as hurricanes and other natural disasters, as well as on stories from Latin America and the Middle East.

Kofman may be best known for his extensive reporting from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In July 2003 Kofman reported on the declining morale of U. S. troops in the region as their tours of duty kept getting extended. The story was picked up by outlets around the world when one soldier called on Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to resign. Attempting to blame the messenger, a conservative columnist, thinking he was discrediting Kofman, "revealed" that he was gay. Inasmuch as Kofman had been openly gay for years, the revelation not only had no effect on his career, but also made the conservative columnist look foolish as well as vicious.

Kofman's work for ABC News has earned him numerous journalism awards, including an Edward R. Murrow Award, a duPont Award, and a share in a special Emmy Award for ABC's coverage of the attacks on September 11, 2001.

Another war reporter is ABC News correspondent **Miguel Marquez** (b. 1967), who has also reported extensively from Iraq and other areas of the Middle East, as well as on a variety of domestic stories, including the California wildfires. Before signing on at ABC, he worked for CNN and spent a brief time as an anchor on CNN's Headline News channel.

In 2007, Marquez explained to James Hillis that his decision to be open about his sexuality is directly related to the circumstances in which he works. The extreme situations of war zones, hurricanes, and

wildfires make reporting "a weirdly intimate business," he said, and being open helps him find a comfort level where he does not have to worry about keeping secrets. Besides, he added, "I'm in a business that's all about truth and honesty, and to some degree I'm responsible to be honest as well."

A similar devotion to honesty has motivated NBC News correspondent **John Yang** (b. 1958) to be open about his sexual orientation. Yang, who made a reputation as an excellent journalist at the *Washington Post*, came to television news in 1999, when he accepted a job at ABC News. He covered the 2000 Presidential election and the 2001 terror attack on the Pentagon for ABC News.

In 2003, he was offered a coveted assignment in Jerusalem, as ABC News's Middle East correspondent. He told James Hillis that his being gay may have helped him attain the position. He was offered the job by the late Peter Jennings, who told him that he would bring to the reporting from the Middle East an insight into "people who are marginalized." He is not certain whether Jennings was referring to his being Asian or being gay or perhaps both.

Yang, who joined NBC News in 2007, chooses to be candid about his sexual orientation because, like his racial identity, his sexual orientation is an immutable characteristic. "There are certain things about myself that are immutable, and some of them are obvious," Yang told Hillis. "I'm Asian. I mean, anyone who sees me on the air or hears my last name knows that. . . . And in a way, I felt that I can't pass as not being Asian, so why should I pass as being straight?"

Manuel Gallegus is a New York-based correspondent for CBS News and CBS Newspath, the network's 24-hour news service for CBS stations and broadcasters throughout the world. He joined the network in 1994 and has reported a wide variety of stories both in the United States and abroad, including the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the same-sex marriage debate in California, and the shootings at Fort Hood military base in Texas.

Gallegus was initially reluctant to come out on the job. But as he became more secure in his position and met other gay people at CBS, he found the environment in the newsroom an accepting one. "I realized that I had nothing to worry about. And it hasn't been any issue at all," he told James Hillis.

Steve Kmetko (b. 1953) and **Jason Bellini** (b. 1975) may have had a somewhat less difficult time in coming out as newscasters because they have been identified with entertainment news, rather than--as in the case of Marquez and Kofman--war reporting or politics though both have also done their share of such serious reporting.

Kmetko is best known for his long association with the E! cable network reporting on celebrities, but he had extensive experience as a news anchor in local markets before specializing in entertainment news. He came out on the cover of *The Advocate* in 1999, then considered a brave if not exactly foolhardy thing to do.

He told Sean Kennedy that he saw no damage to his career as a result of his decision to come out publicly and has never regretted it. "Quite frankly, age is more of a hindrance at this point in my career than being gay," he observed.

Bellini, who worked as a CNN news correspondent from 1998 until 2005, is now best known for his stint as the lead news anchor for CBS News on Logo from 2006 to 2008, where he reported primarily on gay stories. He was openly gay in press interviews almost from the very beginning of his career at CNN. In 2003, he was the youngest embedded newsman during the initial American invasion of Iraq.

Bellini's explanation of his decision to be out on the job is similar to that given by Marquez and Yang: a matter of honesty. He told James Hillis, "Skirting that issue [of sexual orientation], saying it's nobody's business, I think that's disingenuous. Because if people are interested in you outside of the parameters of your job itself, and you ignore [being gay], then you're ignoring an important part of yourself. And that's not

honest."

Richard Rodriguez (b. 1944) and **Jonathan Capehart** are regular contributors to news broadcasts, but are not themselves television correspondents, and both were out before they were hired as contributors.

Rodriguez is best known as a writer, especially a memoirist. But as a regular essayist for PBS's *Newshour*, he has gained a large audience of appreciative fans of his thoughtful and nuanced analyses of topics in the news. He frequently discusses the experience of Latinos in the United States. Although homosexuality is not his most frequent topic, he does not shy away from the issue; and he typically positions himself as an outsider in America, not merely because of his ethnicity but also because of his sexuality.

Jonathan Capehart is a regular contributor to MSNBC shows, including *Morning Joe* and other day-time news shows. He is a member of the *Washington Post* editorial board and writes about politics and social issues for the newspaper. Before joining the *Post* in 2007, he was a member of the *New York Daily News* editorial board, where he shared the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing.

Capehart has been a prominent gay journalist for many years, writing for *The Advocate* and *Out* magazine and serving as a correspondent for the gay television newsprogram *In the Life*. He is active in the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. Clearly, his openness has neither harmed his career nor compromised his professionalism.

Josh Barro, who writes for *Business Insider* and other economic magazines, appears frequently on Bloomberg Television and on MSNBC. An articulate commentator on economic affairs, Barro is also an eloquent supporter of same-sex marriage and gay rights. A Republican who is sometimes described as a "neo-liberal," Barro is frequently critical of Republican stances regarding equal rights.

Among other recent additions to the handful of openly gay newscasters are Dan Kloeffler, Steve Kornacki, Jenna Wolfe, and Stephanie Gosk.

In the wee hours of Sunday morning October 16, 2011, **Dan Kloeffler**, co-anchoring ABC's *World News Now*, reported on the coming out of actor Zachary Quinto, who had told a *New York* magazine interviewer that he felt obligated to come out because of the recent spate of gay youth suicides. Kloeffler added, "He's 34, I'm 35. I'm thinking, I can lose my distraction about dating actors." Kloeffler's casual coming out on national television mimicked the actor's casual coming out but also reflected the increasingly accepting climate in television newsrooms.

In his ABC News blog, Kloeffler elaborated on his decision to come out on air: "I've never shared that I'm gay on-air, even though I've been out to my family, friends and co-workers for years. In fact, an old boyfriend--now best friend--has always given me a hard time about not doing so. But for the same reason that Zach decided to come out, I too, no longer wanted to hide this part of my life."

Kloeffler added: "As a journalist, I don't want to be the story, but as a gay man I don't want to stand silent if I can offer some inspiration or encouragement to kids that might be struggling with who they are."

Another recently out television news anchor is **Steve Kornacki** (b. 1979). Kornacki first came to national attention as a political writer. He published articles in the *New York Observer*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Daily Beast*, among others, did a stint as host of a political news show for a New Jersey television station, and reported for *Roll Call* before becoming senior political writer at Salon.com.

In 2011, Kornacki came out in a moving, though painful essay in Salon.com, which recounted his difficulties in identifying as a gay man. In 2012, he became a co-host of *The Cycle* on MSNBC with political strategist Krystal Ball, pop-culture commentator TourÃ©, and conservative columnist S.E. Cupp. On March 19, 2013, it

was announced that Kornacki would also host another MSNBC program, *Up*, which airs on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

On March 27, 2013 NBC news reporters **Jenna Wolfe** and **Stephanie Gosk** announced not only that they have been a couple for three years but that they are expecting a baby in August 2013.

Wolfe (b. 1974), is a correspondent for NBC News and serves as the weekend news anchor for the *Today* show. Before joining NBC in 2007, she was a sports anchor for WABC in New York City and had previously worked as a sportscaster for television stations in Binghamton and Rochester, New York.

In announcing her pregnancy and relationship with Gosk, Wolfe said in a coordinated *People* magazine story that she decided to go public because "I didn't want to bring my daughter into a world where I'm not comfortable telling everyone who I am and who her mother is."

Gosk, who is a foreign correspondent for NBC News, joined NBC in 2006. She was based in London until 2012. Her reports are featured on all the platforms of NBC News, including NBC Nightly News, MSNBC, and *Today*.

Their baby was born on August 21, 2013.

Perhaps the most prominent openly gay television news journalists are the news anchors Anderson Cooper (b. 1967), Thomas Roberts (b. 1972), and Don Lemon (b. 1966); and the hosts of their own television news shows, Jane Velez-Mitchell (b. 1955) and Rachel Maddow (b. 1973). The co-host of ABC's *Good Morning American*, Robin Roberts, has also recently come out.

Jane Velez-Mitchell is a veteran newscaster who currently hosts her own show on CNN's Headline News channel, *Issues with Jane Velez-Mitchell*. She has covered a wide variety of stories over the years, but is especially associated with high-profile court cases.

Velez-Mitchell came out in mid-life, in the midst of a struggle against addiction of various kinds. Although late to recognize her homosexuality, she has no regrets about coming out. Indeed, she told Laurie Pike of *The Advocate* that coming out, along with getting sober and becoming a vegan, "was definitely right up there" among the best things she has done.

The immediate impetus for her coming out on the air was her reporting on homophobic Senator Larry Craig's arrest for solicitation in a men's room. "Opinionating about Larry Craig and his apparent hypocrisy, it would have been hypocritical for me not to be honest with the listeners about who I am," she told Sean Kennedy. "So I just came out and said it: 'I want to be honest. I live with a woman and have been in a relationship with a woman.'"

Don Lemon is a notably versatile newsman. He has reported on some of the most significant news stories of our time, including the D.C. snipers, Hurricane Katrina, and AIDS in Africa. He got his start with NBC News, serving as a correspondent for *Today* and *NBC Nightly News* and an anchor for *Weekend Today* and MSNBC. After stints in Philadelphia and Chicago, he moved to CNN in 2006, where he anchors the prime-time weekend version of *CNN Newsroom*.

In 2010, while interviewing members of the Atlanta church pastored by Bishop Eddie Long, who had been accused of molesting young men, Lemon revealed that he was a victim of sex abuse as a child. In *Transparent*, a memoir released in 2011, he publicly acknowledged his homosexuality and discussed homophobia in the black community.

Lemon was motivated to come out because of his belief in transparency and also because he was moved by the suicides of Rutgers freshman Tyler Clementi and other gay youth. He wanted to assure young people in

despair because they were bullied that they were not alone. He wrote his book in the hope that "in being honest, I can help others, too."

Thomas Roberts, after 15 years as a television news reporter and a stint on CNN, was named a full-time anchor on MSNBC in 2010. In addition to anchoring his own news show, he frequently serves as substitute newsreader or host on such shows as *Today* as well as on several MSNBC programs. In 2014, he will become host of MSNBC's *Way Too Early* newsshow and a member of the *Morning Joe* team.

Roberts came out publicly in 2006, after joining the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association in 2005. When he appeared as a member of a panel entitled "Off Camera: The Challenge of LGBT TV Anchors" at the association's September 2006 meeting in Miami, his homosexuality became public knowledge. In 2007, he revealed that he had been molested by a Roman Catholic priest when he was in high school.

Roberts is regarded as a major talent in American television news. Since coming out, he has emerged as a visible symbol of new opportunities for openly gay people in society generally, as well as in journalism in particular.

Although Roberts does not hesitate to allude to his homosexuality in his news broadcasts when it is relevant, he remains thoroughly professional when reporting on glbtq issues. Refreshingly, however, his professionalism does not preclude a certain level of activism, especially through his participation in the National Lesbian & Gay Journalism Association and his contribution of a heartfelt video to the "It Gets Better" campaign.

On September 8, 2008, **Rachel Maddow** became the first out lesbian to host a prime-time television news program when *The Rachel Maddow Show* premiered in the 9:00 p.m. weekday slot on MSNBC.

Maddow became a rising star of political commentary during the protracted 2008 presidential campaign. Widely noted for her keen intelligence, self-deprecating wit, and ever-present kindness and good cheer amid the often belligerent world of cable television, Maddow has distinguished herself as an important voice in American political commentary.

Her willingness to confront anti-gay activists, including those responsible for promoting the Ugandan "kill the gays" legislation, which would make homosexuality a crime punishable by death, has made Maddow a champion of the left generally, but especially of glbtq political wonks.

The most influential openly gay television journalist is **Anderson Cooper**, whose homosexuality was an open secret for years, but was only confirmed in 2012, when he came out in an e-mail to his friend Andrew Sullivan.

Cooper is anchor of the CNN news show *Anderson Cooper 360* and also hosts a syndicated daytime talk show, *Anderson*. He is also a correspondent for the CBS news program, *60 Minutes*. He has won several Emmy Awards for his reporting and was the recipient of the coveted Peabody Award for his coverage of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

After his graduation from Yale in 1989, Cooper got his journalistic start as a fact checker for the small news agency Channel One, which produces a youth-oriented news program that is broadcast to many junior high and high schools in the United States, and then graduated to reporting from exotic locales, often in war-torn areas such as Burma, Vietnam, Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda.

In 1995, Cooper became a correspondent for ABC News, eventually rising to the position of co-anchor on its overnight *World News Now* program on September 21, 1999. He also contributed segments to ABC's *20/20*.

Cooper moved to CNN in 2001 to co-anchor with Paula Zahn on *American Morning*. In 2002 he became CNN's

weekend prime-time anchor and on September 8, 2003, he was made anchor of *Anderson Cooper 360*.

Cooper gained particular prominence for his reporting from New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. His hard-hitting questioning of politicians and officials in the aftermath of the disaster made him a superstar journalist.

In his reporting for CNN, Cooper often tackles gay issues, and has evinced particular interest in the bullying of young people. He won a GLAAD Award in the category of "Outstanding TV Journalism" in 2001 for a 20/20 segment he did on high school athlete Corey Johnson.

Although Cooper consistently spoke out in favor of fairness and equal rights, and seemed clearly to be living the life of an openly gay man, for years he resisted calls for him to make a public statement regarding his sexuality, saying that he did not want to be the focus of news stories and that he preferred to stay in the background.

Finally, however, in an email to Andrew Sullivan, published on July 1, 2012, Cooper confirmed the rumors. "The fact is," he wrote, "I'm gay, always have been, always will be, and I couldn't be any more happy, comfortable with myself, and proud."

The revelation came as a result of Sullivan asking Cooper for feedback on a story in *Entertainment Weekly* about gay people in public life who come out in a matter-of-fact way.

In response, Cooper explained that he has attempted to maintain some level of privacy for both personal and professional reasons. "Since I started as a reporter in war zones 20 years ago, I've often found myself in some very dangerous places. For my safety and the safety of those I work with, I try to blend in as much as possible, and prefer to stick to my job of telling other people's stories, and not my own. I have found that sometimes the less an interview subject knows about me, the better I can safely and effectively do my job as a journalist."

But, Cooper continued, "I've begun to consider whether the unintended outcomes of maintaining my privacy outweigh personal and professional principle. It's become clear to me that by remaining silent on certain aspects of my personal life for so long, I have given some the mistaken impression that I am trying to hide something--something that makes me uncomfortable, ashamed or even afraid. This is distressing because it is simply not true."

He also noted that there is value in being visible. "I've also been reminded recently that while as a society we are moving toward greater inclusion and equality for all people, the tide of history only advances when people make themselves fully visible. There continue to be far too many incidences of bullying of young people, as well as discrimination and violence against people of all ages, based on their sexual orientation, and I believe there is value in making clear where I stand."

After disavowing any intention of becoming an activist, he declared forthrightly that he is gay, happy, proud, and that "I love, and I am loved."

If Anderson Cooper is the most prominent out journalist, **Robin Roberts** (b. 1960) is probably the best-loved. On December 29, 2013, the *Good Morning America* co-host came out in an end-of-year Facebook message that casually included her longtime partner Amber Laign among those who helped her through a trying year during which she recovered from chemotherapy and a blood marrow transplant. In her first public acknowledgment of her ten-year relationship with Laign, Roberts expressed gratitude to all who supported her in her battle against the blood disorder that threatened her life.

Roberts' burying what she certainly knew would make big news across the country in the middle of the message is typical of the recent practice of closeted celebrities choosing to come out in a very low-key

manner in which the information is presented matter-of-factly. Rather than calling attention to itself, the fact that Roberts has a longtime girlfriend is presented simply and straightforwardly as one of many relationships that she enjoys.

Roberts did not give her partner's last name, but media outlets quickly identified her as Amber Laign, a licensed massage therapist from the San Francisco Bay area who has a private practice specializing in patients recovering from injuries.

Roberts' sexual orientation was something of an open secret. It was known to friends and family and associates and suspected by many of her viewers and fans. Nevertheless, her coming out was significant because Roberts is among the most beloved public figures in America.

Long admired for her intelligence and grace and good humor, she attracted the respect and deep affection of millions as a result of the courage she exhibited during her well-publicized illness.

A native of Pass Christian, Mississippi, one of four children of a Tuskegee airman and his wife, Roberts grew up in a close-knit and high-achieving family. She was an outstanding basketball player at Southeastern Louisiana University, where she received a degree in communications. After college, she pursued a career as a sports reporter and anchor at local television stations in Hattiesburg, Biloxi, Nashville, and Atlanta.

In 1990, Roberts joined ESPN as a sportscaster and host of *Sportscenter*, where she earned a reputation for her wide-ranging knowledge of sports trivia and news. While still at ESPN, she made frequent appearances as a reporter on ABC News and on *Good Morning America*.

In 2005, Roberts became co-anchor with George Stephanopoulos of *Good Morning America*. With them at the helm, GMA soon became the number one ranked morning news show in the country.

Her emotional reports from Mississippi in 2005, following the destruction wreaked by Hurricane Katrina, earned her respect as a journalist.

On May 9, 2012, when President Obama decided it was time to announce that he had evolved on the issue of marriage equality, he summoned Roberts to the White House for a hastily arranged interview in which he declared, "It is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."

In 2012, Roberts was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), a disease of the bone marrow. In October 2012, she took a leave from *Good Morning America*. Her sister, Sally-Ann Roberts, a beloved television anchor in New Orleans, donated the marrow for a transplant. In February 20, 2013, Roberts returned to *Good Morning America*.

The episode in which she was welcomed back to GMA received a 2012 Peabody Award. The Peabody citation credited her with "allowing her network to document and build a public service campaign around her battle with a rare disease" and "inspir[ing] hundreds of potential bone marrow donors to register and heighten[ing] awareness of the need for even more donors."

In 2012, Roberts was inducted to the Basketball Hall of Fame. At the 2013 ESPYs, the awards show sponsored by ESPN, the sports network awarded her its Arthur Ashe Courage Award.

In addition to these openly gay journalists, national television news shows also frequently feature openly gay commentators when gay topics are discussed. Joe Solomonese, Andrew Sullivan, Keith Boykin, Dan Savage, John Aravosis, Richard Socarides, Hilary Rosen, and David Mixner are just a few of the openly gay men who are frequent guests on news shows.

There are also a number of openly gay and lesbian television journalists in local markets. It is well to remember that the late **Randy Shilts** pioneered as among the first openly gay journalists in San Francisco, where he worked for both newspapers and television stations.

Perhaps the dean of openly gay local television newsmen is **Randy Price** of Boston. He came out in the early 1990s in an interview with a New England gay periodical, which was then picked up by a mainstream paper. Rather than hurting his career, his honesty seems to have helped it. As Sean Kennedy observed, "Today he's not only Boston's most popular news anchor but one of its most admired public figures."

Another veteran openly gay local television newsman is **Henry A. "Hank" Plante**, who worked for KPIX-TV in San Francisco for 25 years before retiring in 2010. Plante won several local and national Emmys, as well as the prestigious George Foster Peabody Award as part of CBS 5's "AIDS Lifeline" reporting team in 1986. He was also awarded GLAAD's Pioneer Award and the James R. Harrison Award from the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. He was named "Reporter of the Year" by the Associated Press and inducted into the Emmy Silver Circle by the National Television Academy. In 2010, he was inducted into the LGBT Journalists Hall of Fame.

Charles Perez first achieved notice as the host of a nationally syndicated talk show, *The Charles Perez Show*, which aired from 1994 until 1996. He was co-host of a syndicated news show, *American Journal*, from 1997 until 1998. More recently, he became a weekday reporter and weekend anchor at WABC-TV in New York City. From 2006 until 2009, he was the evening anchor for Miami's ABC affiliate, WPLG. In 2009, he was fired from that position after he filed a lawsuit alleging discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. In 2011, he published an autobiography, *Confessions of a Gay Anchorman*, in which he is very critical of several of his former colleagues.

Conclusion

The recent improvement in the representation of glbtq people by American news channels is palpable. News of the struggle for equal rights is now generally, if not invariably, presented straightforwardly and even sympathetically, sometimes by reporters and anchors who themselves identify as gay or lesbian and is often contextualized by gay commentators.

Nevertheless, problems remain. Too often television news programs continue the practice of giving a platform to representatives of hate groups, who are allowed to spout misinformation and sometimes unadulterated vitriol. While no responsible news program would feature openly racist or anti-semitic guests, many have no qualms about giving voice to homophobes.

They grant this platform in the name of fairness, and defend their practice by saying that every controversy has at least two sides. Yet they frequently fail to vet the bona fides of these homophobes and their "facts" and too often permit them to cite discredited studies by people who are charlatans.

Two of the most ubiquitous guests on news programs who pontificate about glbtq people are Bryan Fischer of the American Family Association and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council. The organizations represented by Fisher and Perkins have both been designated as hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center, and both Fischer and Perkins unabashedly engage in inflammatory and untruthful rhetoric.

The presence of openly gay and lesbian newscasters and informed commentators means that the most outrageous claims of the opponents of equal rights are now often challenged on the more responsible networks and cable channels. But, on some media outlets, such as Fox News and the Christian Broadcasting Network, they are not.

Indeed, some of these channels, conspicuously including Fox News and several religious programs on cable networks, have staked out a position of hostility toward equal rights for glbtq citizens.

In one of the most disgusting examples of this hostility, Dr. Keith Ablow, a psychiatrist who is a Fox News contributor, took the occasion of the announcement that Chaz Bono would appear on ABC's *Dancing with the Stars* to warn parents not to let children watch the show because seeing Bono dance with a woman might somehow cause a child to become transgender. Like much of the commentary on Fox News about glbtq people and issues, Ablow's remarks were both malicious and ignorant.

Notwithstanding the great progress that has been made in recent years in presenting glbtq issues and individuals fairly on American television journalism, more needs to be done.

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