

## **THE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE LEGALISATION IN NEW-YORK IN 2011 IN THE USA MEDIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study presents the analysis of mass media texts concerning the peculiarities of media coverage of same-sex marriage legalization process in New York in 2011. For the analysis two periodicals were chosen: the quality magazine Newsweek and the tabloid The New York Sun. Their articles dedicated to this event in New York were scrutinized in terms of social assessments, lexis and artistic features. The history of the same-sex marriage in general was studied. Using this database we monitored quantity of texts and anatomized them. Then we compared similarities and differences and identified the main trends in the coverage of same-sex marriage topic in the USA. We got following conclusions: first, the views of the periodicals are absolutely different – the former tried to support the new initiative, the latter strongly expressed his indignation; second, quantity and quality of the articles are very eloquent about media attitude to the situation: third, words and expressions used by the authors about gay marriage are different in Newsweek and The New York Sun. All these facts allow us to get a picture of the media segregation on this issue in the USA.

**Keywords:** *Same-sex marriage, same-sex marriage legalization, homosexuality, homosexual, gay.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

For centuries homosexual relationship didn't have an official recognition. The first step on the way to the emergence of the official Institute of same-sex marriage was the appearance of so-called civil partnerships.

The history of the official Institute of same-sex marriage started only in the XXI century. Same-sex marriage is a marriage between two persons of the same sex. The fact of marriage grants the couple a variety of specific rights, like the right to joint property, the inheritance rights, the right to co-parenting and other rights which unregistered couples do not have.

The phenomenon of same-sex marriage has both opponents and supporters. The former believe that marriage as an alliance is only possible between a man and a woman, and the provision of such an unprecedented right to gay people is absurd. The latter defend the rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community to marry, saying that it is just another confirmation of equality in society, and it is a bigotry and a discrimination to deprive homosexuals of the opportunity to formalize their relations officially. Currently same-sex marriage is legalized in 20 countries.

## **METHODS**

We chose the following media as an empirical basis: the quality periodical Newsweek and the tabloid The New York Sun.

Having analyzed both editions in terms of their attitude to the subject of gay marriage legalization in New York in 2011, we studied the publications in these periodicals from May the 26th to July the 24th of 2011. Newsweek addressed the topic 44 times, but the most comprehensive author's position on the subject was in 8 of them, and this number was selected by us for subsequent analysis. The New York Sun covered the subject 5 times, and we analyzed all of them.

The following methods were used during the study:

1. The monitoring of articles gave us an opportunity to reveal the interest of each periodical in the subject;
2. The lexical and stylistic analysis of articles helped us to identify the attitude of each periodical to the topic of gay marriage in New York .
3. The comparative analysis of the obtained results allowed us to find similarities and differences between the magazine and the tabloid ways of topic representations and to make a general conclusion.

## **RESULTS**

Same-sex marriage, despite the controversy of the subject, is interesting for society as a part of the social life of many countries. Following the public interest to the topic the media cover it extensively.

Based on a data of Russian researchers V. Zwick [1] and V. Melnik [2], as well as American researchers G. D. Lasswell [3] and T. Peterson [4], who defined media functions, we have chosen those which are more suitable for subject of homosexuality and gay marriages. As a result we have come to the following conclusions:

1. Media should be involved in the problems of sexual minorities;
2. Media should bring the issue into the public space;
3. Media should take an active role in the changing of the oppressed people's position;
4. Media should provide the informational support to sexual minorities after the changing of the rules in society.

In practice, all the media, regardless of their socio-political orientation and form of ownership, can be divided into three groups. The first group includes media that actively advocate the rights of sexual minorities. The second group includes media, which are neutral to the government initiative of same-sex marriage legalizing. The third group includes the media, which oppose the gay marriage, despite the fact that the gay marriage is legalized in their country. Researchers of the homosexuality from sociological, psychological, anthropological points of view and members of the public are divided into groups in the same way. An American sociologist Alfred Kinsey in his work 'Sexual Behavior in the human Male'

rejects the version that homosexuality is a pathology. He states that ‘males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. (...) Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separate pigeon-holes’[5]. On the other hand, Russian psychotherapist G. Kocharyan in his article ‘Homosexuality: a study by Alfred Kinsey’ argues with American researcher. He believed that the frequency of identified homosexual contacts among men was obviously significantly higher than their true prevalence, which, in its turn, was significantly more than the percentage of persons with a homosexual inclination (homosexuals) [6]. We also have studied an article of José Ignacio Pichardo Galán ‘Same-sex couples in Spain. Historical, contextual and symbolic factors’, which helped us to identify the features of family life and cohabitation of homosexuals from the point of view of sociology [7].

The emergence of the same-sex unions Institution confirms the fact that the society headed by the government elite has become more tolerant. However, the use of ‘marriage’ as a term towards the same-sex unions is still in doubt. In the scientific work of Edward Westermarck ‘The History of Human Marriage’ [8] marriage was defined as a union of one or more men with one or more women, which was recognized by law and which generated certain rights and obligations of the participants. This definition did not include same-sex relationships recognized by society. In the Oxford English Dictionary the definition of same-sex marriage was introduced in 2000.

As we can see, despite the fact that the gay marriage is already legalized in many countries, the attitude of media – the society voicer – is questionable. We decided to consider the differences and similarities of media attitude to the subject of gay marriage and we chose the US press, where freedom of speech is declared in the Constitution. We have chosen the legalization of gay marriage in New York in 2011. We have done it for two reasons: first, that time the same-sex marriages were not allowed in all states of the USA, and many members of the public and government officials were strongly against the initiative; second, such a resonant event in one of the largest cities of the world could not be ignored by the press. To have more complete picture, we chose two periodicals of different categories: the quality socio-political periodical Newsweek [9] and the tabloid The New York Sun [10]. The topic of gay marriage is covered by both media. In 2015 the Newsweek published 39 articles about it, and The New York Sun – just 10.

Analyzing both periodicals in terms of their attitude to the subject of gay marriage in New York in 2011, we studied publications in these media from the 26th of May to the 24th of July, 2011. The aim of our research was to identify the attitude of these periodicals to the events in New York. The objectives were:

- To identify editions’ attitude to gay marriage;
- To identify similarities and differences between these attitudes.

To do it we used monitoring, stylistic and lexical analysis and comparative analysis.

New York Sun covered the legalization of gay marriage in New York in 2011 five times, Newsweek did this more often. We analyzed 8 of them.

The both periodicals mentioned this event for the first time on the 27th of May, 2011. They did it as a reaction to the New York mayor Michael Bloomberg speech. Newsweek wrote: ‘New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg called on state lawmakers to approve a bill allowing same-sex marriage during a speech across the street from the site of Abraham Lincoln’s historic address on slavery. (...) “Today, a majority of Americans support marriage equality, and young people increasingly view marriage equality in much the same way as young people in the 1960s viewed civil rights”, Bloomberg said’. Then

Newsweek quoted the part of speech where Bloomberg compared the right to same-sex marriage with the right to freedom, which means that periodical agreed with the mayor opinion.

On the same day, The New York Sun also responded to the mayor's speech, but did it differently. Newsweek clearly highlighted the best moments of the speech and presented them proudly, but the tabloid was strongly skeptical about the necessity of this bill. Since it couldn't explicitly express negative emotions in its statements, it expressed dissatisfaction with the rhetorical questions: 'Does the mayor really have enormous respect for religious leaders who hold with orthodox teachings? Or does he regard them as he regards defenders of the evil of slavery or as he regards opponents of the civil rights movement?'

The next text in Newsweek was released on the 13th of June, 2011 with the headline 'Gay Marriage Gains Steam in New York'. Article was dry and unemotional. The author stated that gay marriage could be legalized soon. He gave the layout of the number of votes 'for' and 'against' and said that the bill had to have six more voices to be passed and it looked that it would get them - several members of the Republican Party, who had voted against the bill two years before, said that they didn't decide yet. It was a short article, but it made it clear that even in the government there were serious changes in attitude to the same-sex marriage - if before this kind of initiative had been unanimously rejected, now it would be likely adopted.

On the 15th of June an article 'Religious New Yorkers at Risk of Government Action Under Same-Sex Marriage Law, Professors Warn' appeared in The New York Sun. The article caused an obvious great social resonance and appeared precisely because of dissatisfaction of the new bill by citizens. It stated that 'religious exemptions in Governor Cuomo's bill have fallen far short of what the religious community had been praying for'. The reason was a letter signed by many intellectuals and sent to a senator. It said that 'without adequate safeguards, many religious individuals will be forced to engage in conduct that violates their deepest religious beliefs, and religious organizations will be constrained in crucial aspects of their religious exercise'. The letter itself was also published and was available for free downloading. And judging by the fact that they published it completely, they were ready to subscribe to every word of the document.

On the same day an article 'NY Assembly Passes Gay Marriage' was published in Newsweek. The National Assembly, as the article reported, approved the bill of same-sex marriages 'late Wednesday evening'. The Senate who were going to consider the bill had not made up their mind yet - the Republicans still didn't know how they would vote. By the time the article was released, the bill had the support of 31 out of the 62 votes – it lacked only one vote 'for'. 'Passage would make New York the most populous state yet to allow gay marriage.'

On the 16th of June The New York Sun proving its position published next article. In contrast to the dry and laconic story in Newsweek, which simply gave the facts, this article claimed to be analytic and sensational. According to the author, the bill wasn't perfect, because by protecting the clergy it put under risk other members of society: 'New York legislators should allow religious individuals with a traditional view of marriage to step aside so long as it does not cause a substantial hardship for same-sex couples'. The author concluded the text with the phrase: 'Just as Big Religion needs protection — and gets a lot of it in Mr. Cuomo's bill — so do ordinary individuals. So, Governor, is this all you can do for the little guy?'. The article was resonant, absolutely 'tabloid', because in addition to the facts gave the reader negative attitude of the author towards the bill - and it was obvious that he was angered not by homosexuals but by the proactive governor.

On the 23rd of June, in the midst of discussion about same-sex marriage legalization, The New York Sun published the article with a self-explanatory name 'A cowardly way to conduct the public's business'. It

said: ‘Governor Cuomo gave the public the first glimpse of his bill last week, and he behaved as if he expected it to pass within a matter of days, even though it radically changed a sacred contract that had existed for hundreds of years’. And the author directly expressed himself in this passage: ‘It’s just shocking that all this is being done in secret, without hearings. Law professors who specialize in civil rights and marriage have been reduced to writing to individual senators to warn them of the legal jeopardy Mr. Cuomo’s bill would represent for religious New Yorkers who want to obey religious law in their own lives and their own businesses, churches, mosques, synagogues, and charitable institutions.’

Newsweek on the 24th of June reported that the New York had voted for the bill, but Republicans postponed the vote again, as they hadn’t been able to make decision. Obviously, an author of the text sincerely sympathized to the governor, who achieved the goal to pass the bill ‘after weeks of stalemate.’

On the 25th of June Newsweek wrote: ‘New York has legalized same-sex marriage, becoming the sixth state to do so and by far the largest. Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the bill into law Friday night. "I am very proud of New York and I'm very proud of the statement we made today," he said’. In the same evening this article was released again with the addition to the title: ‘Latest News and Photos’. And this text contained a large number of details – photos of happy faces, information about festivals from all over the state.

On the 22nd of July Newsweek headlined a short story “Rick Perry: Gay Marriage OK in New York’. The article began with the words: ‘Same-sex marriages officially begin in New York on Sunday—and conservative Texas Governor Rick Perry is just fine with that’. The magazine emphasized that even the most traditionally minded statesmen with time began to treat same-sex marriage more tolerantly.

On the 24th of July Newsweek published an article about the first homosexual marriage: ‘New York Gets Hitched!’. The magazine also reported that in the near future 823 couples were going to get married. The article told about weddings and was illustrated with colorful pictures of honeymooners.

It is worth noticing that all articles of Newsweek had photos with smiling mayor or happy couples. Each publication had a picture or even a set of pictures. At the same time, The New York Sun was providing almost no photos, just authors or articles characters faces.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of our study confirm the opinion of A. Kinsey: ‘Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separate pigeon-holes’. We have made sure that each edition can label representatives of any social group and form an attitude of the audience.

Based on the list of media functions made by us, we can agree with media researchers V. Zwick, V. Melnik, G. Lasswell and T. Peterson. We have figured out that both of media were involved in the problems of sexual minorities and brought them into the public space, but each of them made it in its own way. The Newsweek sincerely tried to change the gays’ position making their positive image in its articles. So, it was a great informational support for married homosexuals. By contrast, The New York Sun covered the issue from the negative point of view. We can conclude that the latter accomplished only two first functions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- 1) The phenomenon of same-sex marriage and homosexuality in general is perceived by society with mixed feelings: some people support same-sex unions, while the others actively boycott them. Following these trends, the media are divided into three categories: the active lobbyists of gay marriage, the outspoken opponent of this phenomenon and those who adhere to neutrality.
- 2) Newsweek and The New York Sun treat same-sex marriages quite differently. Both periodicals have been covering gay-marriage legalization in New York since it became an object for public discussion, but the tabloid's attitude to this initiative was clearly negative, whereas the magazine obviously agreed with it. Newsweek was continuously covering all more or less important facts, whether indecisiveness of Republicans or the New York Assembly moves, and up until the resolution of the issue - the first same-sex marriage. The New York Sun also immediately reacted to the Michael Bloomberg speech, however it wasn't very interested in the issue itself – it was looking for conflicts and controversies and collecting data against the new bill. Four articles were devoted to inaccuracies in the draft law, and reporters couldn't help beginning to judge Cuomo and his supporters. They used the same argument over and over again. However Newsweek with its sympathy to homosexuals was objective, we could only speculate about its views by the positive headlines and quotes, while the authors of The New York Sun talked more from themselves, only reinforcing their words with quotations.

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