

Argumentation and Representation:  
A Case Study of How Political Arguments are Represented in Print News

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## Abstract

This thesis is an in-depth case study that examines how major policy speeches containing extended arguments are condensed and reported in written news sources, specifically looking at what claims and evidence are omitted and how such omissions might affect media consumers. Kathleen Jamieson's seminal study, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, documented how radio and TV "shrink" political discourse, but less is known about this process for newspapers. Although newspapers and digital publishing platforms typically have more extended coverage than radio or TV, they nevertheless engage in accommodations that require omitting key components of more extended political arguments.

This study focuses on two instances of political argumentation and their subsequent news media representations: President Obama's ABC News interview in which he came out in support of same-sex marriage in May 2012 and Obama's address to Congress on the need for health care reform from September 2009. In each case, the argument is broken down into its major claims, then traced through a variety of liberal and conservative mainstream and independent news sources, selected because of their large readerships. The analysis shows that news outlets excluded major claims from these political arguments, instead choosing to highlight simply the overall position or focusing solely on the anecdotal evidence provided with the argument. For example, of the six major claims in Obama's same-sex marriage interview, news outlets tended to directly report an average of 1.8 main claims (30.5% of the claims), while sometimes indirectly including one or two of the others. Many media outlets also chose to exclude claims that individuals on both sides of the political spectrum might agree on, therefore contributing — and perhaps escalating — the controversy surrounding these issues.

## I. Introduction

There is no question that the mass media is a hugely influential force in American political discourse. Most people hear political arguments in some way, shape, or form from the media — not straight from the mouths of politicians (Graber 562). But what happens to arguments when they are condensed and reported in the news?

This study seeks to address that question, focusing on what parts of extended oral arguments are left out of news reports. My analysis will be based on two case studies: the same-sex marriage controversy and the debate over health care reform. I will center these case studies on the reports of President Barack Obama's ABC News interview (May 9, 2012), in which he came out in support of gay marriage, and Obama's speech to a joint session of Congress (September 9, 2009), in which he presented his plan for health care reform. Both cases include a wide range of arguments and propositional claims, from claims based in religion to personal anecdotes to claims about the nature of equality. Both instances of political argumentation analyzed here were widely covered in the media when they occurred, and it is no secret that journalists and editors must usually condense information from original sources — although occasionally newspapers will carry the full text of important speeches. That was not the case in either of the case studies here, however, raising the following questions: What parts of the arguments were left out of news reports? Are there any patterns in what was omitted?

Many others have analyzed writing from sources and how writers transform original sources in their own work. Writing from source texts has been studied extensively in the field of education, for example, in Nancy Spivey's "Transforming Texts: Constructive Processes in Reading and Writing." In this article, Spivey reviews the research literature and develops a model of how student writers transform original texts through organizing, selecting, and

connecting as they recontextualize the source material. According to Spivey, writers frequently follow the organizational patterns of a source text, in particular “when the writer’s purpose is to compress the text to its gist—its central and essential propositions” (Spivey 265). Especially interesting for this study is Spivey’s discussion of the selections that writers make. According to Spivey’s review, writers select propositions from sources based on perceived importance or relevance, often influenced by the text structure and the task (271). In addition, selections can be influenced by a writer’s beliefs, attitudes and motives and even habitual ways of responding to texts of particular types (273). Although Spivey does not discuss news reporting in her review, reporters tasked with covering a long speech or interview and also presumably engage in similar processes.

Much of the research that looks at writing from sources in print news focuses on issues of framing (for example, Robert Entman’s “Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm”) and recontextualization (for example, Per Linell’s “Discourse across boundaries: On recontextualizations and the blending of voices in professional discourse”), and while I am less concerned with those issues in this study, the major concepts are certainly related. Controlling frames or the perceived demands of genre could possibly influence what claims journalists select to include from original sources (Entman 51-58; Linell 143).

Many detailed studies of news reports in relation to sources have been done in linguistics. For example, a paper by Susan MacDonald analyzes the sources of sensationalism in relation to the news reports about hormone replacement research in 2002. MacDonald’s study, and others like it, is focused at a linguistic level, looking at syntax of attributions and specific word choices in reports (MacDonald 275-297). This type of analysis, although generating important

insights, does not analyze more macro discourse structures, such as claims and arguments for claims.

There is, however, a body of work directly in the area of how the media report claims in political arguments. These studies deploy a methodology pioneered by Beyeler and Hübscher called "claims analysis," that codes for whether a proposition is or is not included in a news reports, along with other propositional attributes, such as the actor. The methodology, however, has a more quantitative focus (e.g., how many propositions were included) and does not trace particular claims in detail, as done in the study reported here.

Most closely related to my own work is work by Jeanne Fahnestock, "Accommodating Science: The Rhetorical Life of Scientific Facts," which analyzes how scientific papers written for experts in the field are accommodated for a mass audience (330). My study differs, however, in that it analyzes how the media accommodates political arguments rather than scientific ones, arguments that are already presumably designed for a mass audience rather than arguments that were originally designed for an expert audience and are accommodated to a mass audience.

This study also builds upon Kathleen Jamieson's seminal study, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, which documented how radio and TV "shrink" political discourse (Jamieson). But less is known about this process for print and digital news sources.

Clearly, there has been much significant work in closely related fields, all of which informs the methodology and contribution represented in this study. Despite the vast amount of research, however, scholars studying political arguments have not studied qualitatively what claims are included and excluded from news reports.

## II. Methodology

This analysis traces two examples of oral political arguments through written news sources, both print and online, including mainstream press outlets and alternative media. The study excludes oral television and radio news reports due to the fact that television and radio media accommodations have already been extensively studied. It includes digital due to the rise of digital publishing formats in recent years ("In Changing News Landscape, Even Television is Vulnerable"). The news reports analyzed came from the following mainstream news sources: ABC News (online), CBS News (online), CNN (online), FOX News (online), New York Times, USA Today, The Washington Post, and The Huffington Post (online), selected because of their wide readership ("The State of the News Media 2013"). Alternative news sources Mother Jones, The Nation, Newsmax, and The National Review were also included for comparison and were chosen based on their online and/or print popularity and diversity in political outlook (Pressman).

For both case studies presented here, I chose to analyze articles published on the day of or the day after the original argument. These time constraints were to set so that the articles analyzed were those that first reported on the argument and were likely the first that media consumers who monitor the news would have been exposed to.

For both cases in this study, the main argument (i.e. the speech or interview) was broken down into its main position, overarching propositional claims, and instances of those propositional claims. Instances of overarching claims could be anecdotes, examples, or related statements. Nancy Spivey, whose work I discussed earlier, traced hundreds of "content units" from source texts to accommodated texts (student reports) and reported on them quantitatively (Spivey 274). My methodology is similar, tracing propositions through both the original source and news reports, with the tracing distinguishing between direct and indirect inclusions. Direct

inclusions refer to direct quotations from the original argument. Indirect inclusions refer to paraphrased or summarized claims or instances of claims, or claims that were mentioned without any direct quotation to support them. Unlike Spivey, however, I have grouped those specific propositions into overarching claims: From the many individual propositions presented throughout the oral arguments, I induced overarching claims that could subsume the instances, which allows me to discuss the claims qualitatively (Yin).

### **III. Case 1: Same-Sex Marriage**

On May 9, 2012, the Obama administration arranged for a last-minute interview with ABC News to discuss the issue of same-sex marriage. A few days earlier Vice President Joe Biden had announced his personal support of same-sex marriage, challenging Obama's previously stated "evolving" views on the issue. In the interview with Robin Roberts, ABC News broadcaster and host of *Good Morning America*, Obama came out in support of gay marriage, detailed his reasons for supporting the cause, and discussed a few foreign policy points as well.

Throughout the interview Obama employed many argumentative techniques to make a number of claims related to his views on same-sex marriage. Obama's interview featured six main claims: Same-sex marriage is an issue of equality, states should decide on the issue at their own pace, same-sex couples share the same values as heterosexual couples, civil marriages are separate from religious sacraments, the decision to support same-sex marriage came from an evolving personal journey, and the decision to support same-sex marriage came from Christian values. His claims were primarily supported by anecdotal evidence, as I will discuss in the following sections.

These claims supported Obama's position statement: "At a certain point, I've just decided that for me personally it is important to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married." This statement was directly included in eight of the 12 sources (ABC, New York Times, USA Today, Washington Post, Fox, Huffington Post, The Nation, and Newsmax). It was not included in any of the other articles, although his position seems clear in those because of the other claims that were included.

For each of Obama's six claims supporting his position, I will analyze the type of information that was generally included and excluded in the news reports. For each claim, I include a table summarizing the key quotations from Obama's argument, to what degree each source included the claim, and the most commonly quoted portion of Obama's argument.

*Claim 1: Same-sex marriage is an issue of equality.*

The first of Obama's main claims in his ABC News interview was that the same-sex marriage debate is an issue of equality. Table 1 shows the various instantiations of the overarching claim from the interview; which news sources included one or more of those specific instantiations directly, indirectly, or not at all; and which quotation was most often directly included.

As the table shows, Obama supported his claim most often through the use of anecdotes, including one very frequently cited story about his daughters not understanding why their friends' same-sex parents might be treated differently. These anecdotes, in particular the story about his children, were widely popular with the news media and that story was directly included in 8 of the twelve sources (all except the New York Times, Mother Jones, The Nation, and The National



Review). This claim was not indirectly included in any other sources; the remaining four left it out entirely.

**Table 1: Quotations and coverage of Claim 1**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
<p>"Some of this is also generational. You know, when I go to college campuses, sometimes I talk to college Republicans who think that-- I have terrible policies on the-- the economy or on foreign policy. But are very clear that when it comes to same-sex equality or, you know-- sexual orientation that they believe in equality. They're much more comfortable with it."</p> <p>"You know, Malia and Sasha, they've got friends whose parents are same-sex couples. And I-- you know, there have been times where Michelle and I have been sittin' around the dinner table. And we've been talkin' and-- about their friends and their parents. And Malia and Sasha would-- it wouldn't dawn on them that somehow their friends' parents would be treated differently. It doesn't make sense to them. And-- and frankly-- that's the kind of thing that prompts-- a change of perspective. You know, not wanting to somehow explain to your child why somebody should be treated-- differently, when it comes to-- the eyes of the law."</p> <p>"If a soldier can fight for us, if a police officer can protect our neighborhoods-- if a fire fighter is expected to go into a burning building-- to save our possessions or our kids. The notion that after they were done with that, that we'd say to them, "Oh but by the way, we're gonna treat you differently. That you may not be able to-- enjoy-- the-- the ability of-- of passing on-- what you have to your loved one, if you-- if you die. The notion that somehow if--if you get sick, your loved one might have trouble visiting you in a hospital."</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <p>None</p> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common:</p> <p>"You know, Malia and Sasha, they've got friends whose parents are same-sex couples. And I-- you know, there have been times where Michelle and I have been sittin' around the dinner table. And we've been talkin' and-- about their friends and their parents. And Malia and Sasha would-- it wouldn't dawn on them that somehow their friends' parents would be treated differently. It doesn't make sense to them. And-- and frankly-- that's the kind of thing that prompts-- a change of perspective."</p> <p>(8/12)</p>

*Claim 2: States should decide on the issue at their own pace.*

The second of Obama's overarching propositional claims was that states should decide on the issue at their own pace. At multiple points in the interview he made statements about not wanting to federalize the issue, as shown in Table 2 below. This claim was less consistently

reported than Claim 1 (equality), showing up indirectly in 5 of the twelve sources (ABC, CNN, Fox News, The Nation, and The National Review) and not at all in the rest. In this case, all inclusions were paraphrased versions of the claim. For example, the article from CNN read, "The president said he supports the concept of states deciding the issue on their own, ABC News reported." Additionally, three of the five news sources that indirectly included the claim did so with a qualifier like "According to ABC News..." or "He reportedly said..." This was true in the CNN article, the article from The Nation, and the article from Fox News, which read, "He also reportedly said he still thinks states should be able to decide the issue."

**Table 2: Quotations and coverage of Claim 2**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
<p>"Now-- I have to tell you that part of my hesitation on this has also been I didn't want to nationalize the issue. There's a tendency when I weigh in to think suddenly it becomes political and it becomes polarized. And what you're seeing is, I think, states working through this issue-- in fits and starts, all across the country. Different communities are arriving at different conclusions, at different times. And I think that's a healthy process and a healthy debate. And I continue to believe that this is an issue that is gonna be worked out at the local level, because historically, this has not been a federal issue, what's recognized as a marriage."</p> <p>"...different states are coming to different conclusions. But this debate is taking place-- at a local level. And I think the whole country is evolving and changing. And-- you know, one of the things that I'd like to see is-- that a conversation continue in a respectful way."</p> <p>"I've got an opponent on-- on the other side in the upcoming presidential election, who wants to-- re-federalize the issue and-- institute a constitutional amendment-- that would prohibit gay marriage. And, you know, I think it is a mistake to-- try to make what has traditionally been a state issue into a national issue."</p>	<p>Direct inclusion: <i>None</i></p> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul> <p>Most common: <i>All inclusions were indirect (paraphrased versions of the claim).</i></p>

*Claim 3: Same-sex couples share the same values as heterosexual couples.*

Obama's third main claim was that same-sex couples share the same values as heterosexual couples. He primarily supported this with anecdotes about raising children, the importance of monogamy and commitment, and individuals who are members of the armed forces. Table 3 below shows these statements in more detail. This claim was either included directly or not at all. Six of the 12 sources directly included this claim (ABC, CBS, Fox News, Huffington Post, The Nation, and Newsmax), and all six of them quoted the same passage, as shown below in Table 3. The remaining six sources did not report on this claim.

**Table 3: Quotations and coverage of Claim 3**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
<p>"But I have to tell you that over the course of-- several years, as I talk to friends and family and neighbors. When I think about-- members of my own staff who are incredibly committed, in monogamous relationships, same-sex relationships, who are raising kids together. When I think about-- those soldiers or airmen or marines or-- sailors who are out there fighting on my behalf-- and yet, feel constrained, even now that Don't Ask, Don't Tell is gone, because-- they're not able to-- commit themselves in a marriage."</p> <p>"I meet gay and lesbian couples, when I meet same-sex couples, and I see-- how caring they are, how much love they have in their hearts-- how they're takin' care of their kids."</p> <p>"...And I think they're concerned about-- won't you see families breaking down. It's just that-- maybe they haven't had the experience that I have had in seeing same-sex couples, who are as committed, as monogamous, as responsible-- as loving of-- of-- of a group of parents as-- any-- heterose-- sexual couple that I know. And in some cases, more so."</p> <p>"And, you know-- if you look at the underlying values that we care so deeply about when we describe family, commitment, responsibility, lookin' after one another-- you know, teaching-- our kids to-- to be responsible citizens and-- caring for one another-- I actually think that-- you know, it's consistent with our best and in some cases our most conservative values, sort of the foundation of what--</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <p>None</p> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common:</p> <p>"But I have to tell you that over the course of-- several years, as I talk to friends and family and neighbors. When I think about-- members of my own staff who are incredibly committed, in monogamous relationships, same-sex relationships, who are raising kids together. When I think about-- those soldiers or airmen or marines or-- sailors who are out there fighting on my behalf-- and yet, feel constrained, even now that Don't Ask, Don't Tell is gone, because-- they're not able to-- commit themselves in a marriage."</p>

made this country great."

(6/12)

*Claim 4: Civil marriages are separate from religious sacraments.*

The fourth major claim presented by Obama was that civil marriages are separate from religious sacraments. He explained why he had hesitated on the issue and cited New York State as an example of a well-executed change in policy around same-sex marriage. This claim was not cited very clearly: Four of the 12 sources (CNN, New York Times, Fox, and Newsmax — all direct inclusions) cited the passage about why Obama had hesitated on same-sex marriage instead of what the actual claim was (i.e. that civil and religious marriage were separate). The remaining eight sources did not include this claim at all.

**Table 4: Quotations and coverage of Claim 4**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
<p>"And I had hesitated on gay marriage-- in part, because I thought civil unions would be sufficient. That that was something that would give people hospital visitation rights and-- other-- elements that we take for granted. And-- I was sensitive to the fact that-- for a lot of people, you know, the-- the word marriage was something that evokes very powerful traditions, religious beliefs, and so forth."</p> <p>"And-- you know, one of the things that you see in-- a state like New York that-- ended up-- legalizing same-sex marriages-- was I thought they did a good job in engaging the religious community. Making it absolutely clear that what we're talking about are civil marriages and civil laws. That they're re-- re-- respectful of religious liberty, that-- you know, churches and other faith institutions-- are still gonna be able to make determinations about what they're sacraments are-- what they recognize. But from the perspective of-- of the law and perspective of the state-- I think it's important-- to say that in this country we've always been about-- fairness. And-- and treatin' everybody-- as equals. Or at least that's been our aspiration. And I think-- that applies here, as well."</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <p>None</p> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common:</p> <p>"And I had hesitated on gay marriage-- in part, because I thought civil unions would be sufficient. ... I was sensitive to the fact that-- for a lot of people, you know, the-- the word marriage was something that evokes very powerful traditions, religious beliefs, and so forth." (4/12)</p>

*Claim 5: The decision to support same-sex marriage came from an evolving personal journey, not as a political move.*

Obama also put forth the major claim that his decision to support same-sex marriage came from an evolving personal journey and not as a political move. While he never explicitly said this, he supported it by talking about how the politics of the issue were not clear-cut and by reinforcing that this was his own personal view on the issue, as shown in Table 5 below. This claim was indirectly cited in seven of the 12 articles (ABC, CBS, CNN, Washington Post, Mother Jones, The Nation, and The National Review) and was not included in the others. All of these inclusions were indirect, and many were simply a mention of his “evolving” position, not the supporting reasoning for why the position was not political. For example, Mother Jones reported, “President Barack Obama's evolution ended today, when he told ABC News one of the worst kept secrets in Washington: he's good with gay marriage.” Similarly, ABC News reported, “the president described his thought process as an ‘evolution’ that led him to this decision.”

**Table 5: Quotations and coverage of Claim 5**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
<p>“I've been going through an evolution on this issue.”</p> <p>“And-- I think it'd be hard to argue that somehow this is-- something that I'd be doin' for political advantage-- because frankly, you know-- you know, the politics, it's not clear how they cut. In some places that are gonna be pretty important-- in this electoral map-- it may hurt me. But-- you know, I think it-- it was important for me, given how much attention this issue was getting, both here in Washington, but-- elsewhere, for me to go ahead, 'Let's be clear. Here's what I believe.'”</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <p>None</p> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul>

	Most common: <i>All Inclusions were indirect (paraphrased versions of the claim).</i>
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*Claim 6: The decision to support same-sex marriage came from Christian values.*

The last of Obama's major claims was that his decision to support same-sex marriage grew from his Christian beliefs. He supported this claim with anecdotal evidence about talking to his wife Michelle Obama and by citing the "Golden Rule" (Table 6). This claim was directly included in four articles (ABC, CBS, New York Times, and Fox News), indirectly included in the Washington Post and Newsmax, and left out of the other six sources. The indirect inclusions both suggested that Obama was keenly aware of the political consequences of his position. For example, Newsmax wrote, "Acknowledging that his support for same-sex marriage may rankle religious conservatives, Obama said he thinks about his faith in part through the prism of the Golden Rule — treating others the way you would want to be treated."

**Table 6: Quotations and coverage of Claim 6**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
"This is somethin' that-- you know, we've talked about-- you know, over the years. And-- and she -- you know, she feels the same way that-- she feels the same way that I do. And that is that-- in-- in-- in the end, the-- the values that I care most deeply about and she cares most deeply about is-- is how we treat other people. And-- you know, I-- you know-- you know, we-- we're both-- practicing Christians. And-- and obviously-- this position may be considered to put as at odds with-- the views of-- of others. But-- you know, when we think about our faith, the-- the thing—you know, at-- at root that we think about is not only-- Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf-- but it's also the golden rule, you know? Treat others the way you'd want to be treated. And-- and I think that's what we try to impart to our	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• Fox</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common: "We're both-- practicing Christians. And-- and obviously-- this position may be considered to put as at odds with--</p>

kids. And-- that's what motivates me as president. And-- I figure the more consistent I can be-- in being true-- to-- to those precepts-- the better I'll be as a dad and a husband; and-- hopefully the better I'll be as a president."	the views of-- of others. But-- you know, when we think about our faith, the-- the thing—you know, at-- at root that we think about is not only-- Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf-- but it's also the golden rule, you know? Treat others the way you'd want to be treated." (4/12)
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Overall, news reports about Obama's same-sex marriage argument directly included an average of 1.8 (S.D. 1.3) main claims (30.5%) and indirectly included an average of 1.2 (S.D. 0.8) claims. The coverage of Obama's major claims was extremely varied, though the same passages were quoted in many articles. The framing of the articles varied also, with many emphasizing the political landscape around the issue and the political ramifications of his statements.

The data showed a major difference in inclusions by mainstream and alternative media sources (Table 7). Mainstream news sources (ABC, CBS, CNN, New York Times, USA Today, Washington Post, Fox, and Huffington Post) directly included an average of 2.3 of the main claims and indirectly included an average of one main claim. Alternative news sources (Mother Jones, The Nation, Newsmax, National Review), however, on average directly included just one of the main claims and indirectly included an average of 1.5 main claims.

The article published by The National Review was difficult to classify. Both of the claims that were "included" (claims 2 and 5) were buried in heavy partisan language. For example, the indirect inclusion of Obama's second claim (that states should decide at their own pace) reads, "His claim that he believes that states should decide marriage policy is also impossible to credit." The indirect inclusion of the fifth claim (that his decision was based on a personal evolution) reads, "There is no reason to believe that Obama's long-advertised 'evolution' on marriage is now complete." In both cases, the claims presented by Obama were mentioned only so the

writers could refute them, and it is difficult to ascertain what Obama actually said from the brief inclusions.

**Table 7: Same-sex marriage summary**

	Claim 1: Issue of equality	Claim 2: States' rights	Claim 3: Same values	Claim 4: Civil vs. religious	Claim 5: Evolving journey	Claim 6: Christian values
ABC	D	I	D		I	D
CBS	D		D		I	D
CNN	D	I		D	I	
NYT				D		D
USA	D					
WaPo	D				I	I
Fox	D	I	D	D		D
HuffPo	D		D			
MJ*					I	
Nation*		I	D		I	
Newsmax*	D		D	D		I
NR*		I			I	

*Note: "D" denotes direct inclusion and "I" denotes indirect inclusion. Alternative media sources are marked with an asterisk (\*). News source abbreviations are as follows: NYT=New York Times, USA=USA Today, WaPo=Washington Post, HuffPo=Huffington Post, MJ=Mother Jones, NR=National Review.*

As Table 7 shows, there were clear patterns in which claims were included directly or indirectly. Claims 1, 3, 4 and 6 were almost always directly included or entirely excluded, while Claims 2 and 5 were included indirectly or not at all. Every news source (row) excludes at least one of Obama's major claims.

The two most often excluded claims were Claim 2 (states should decide on the issue) and 4 (separation of civil and religious marriages). It is interesting to note that these two claims seem like the two least controversial claims presented in his argument and the two that individuals on both sides of the political spectrum might agree on. Based on these exclusions, it seems that the media tends to exclude claims that everyone might agree on — perhaps because they are not exciting or controversial enough to capture readers' attention.



#### IV. Case 2: Health Care

On September 9, 2009, President Obama delivered a 47-minute speech to a joint session of Congress about his plan for health care reform. In it, Obama presented five major claims supporting his call to action: Bipartisanship is needed to create long-term solutions to health care problems; his proposal is a moderate reform; reform will help everyone (those with insurance, the uninsured, and the elderly); health care reform is an issue of fundamental American values; and the health care problem is the deficit problem. For each of Obama's five claims supporting his position on health care reform, I will analyze the specific instantiations that were generally included and excluded in the news reports. For each claim, I include a table summarizing the key quotations from Obama's argument, to what degree each source included the claim, and the most commonly quoted portions of Obama's argument.

*Claim 1: We must work together through bipartisanship to create long-term solutions to health care problems.*

The first of Obama's main claims was that bipartisanship is needed to create long-term solutions to health care problems. In his speech, he stressed both the potential for a bipartisanship compromise on health care reform (positive slant) as well as the drawbacks of the partisan divisions that had guided the debate to that point (negative slant). Obama supported his claims about the potential for positive compromise with statements about following in a long line of presidents to address health care reform and broader, inspirational affirmations of hope for meeting the challenge: "We did not come to fear the future. We came here to shape it. I still believe we can act even when it's hard. I still believe we can replace acrimony with civility, and gridlock with progress. I still believe we can do great things, and that here and now we will meet

history's test." On the negative side of his claim — that partisanship has delayed reform for far too long — Obama reprimanded both political parties for their actions and positioned himself as a mediator who would not tolerate further ideological battles (Table 8). While his main claim overall emphasized a positive message, the focus of his discussion was negative.

Of Obama's five major claims in the health care speech, this one was the most consistently reported. Many of the articles focused on the ideological divide and Obama's many claims against such a "partisan spectacle." Eleven of the 12 sources focused on the lack of bipartisanship, with all except The National Review including direct or indirect references to this effect. Here, the most commonly included quotations were, "The time for bickering is over" (included in 7 of the 12 sources) and "I will not waste time with those who have made the calculation that it's better politics to kill this plan than improve it" (included in 6 of the 12 sources). Seven of the 12 sources (CBS News, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Fox News, The Huffington Post, The Nation, and Newsmax) included instantiations (either directly or indirectly) on the positive side of Obama's claim. Of these, the most commonly included quotation was, "I am not the first president to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last."

**Table 8: Quotations and coverage of Claim 1**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
<p><i>POSITIVE SLANT:</i></p> <p>"I am not the first President to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last."</p> <p>"We did not come to fear the future. We came here to shape it. I still believe we can act even when it's hard. I still believe we can replace acrimony with civility, and gridlock with progress. I still believe we can do great things, and that here and now we will meet history's test."</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• The Nation</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CNN</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common:          "I am not the first president to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last" (5/12)</p>
<p><b>NEGATIVE SLANT:</b></p> <p>"The time for bickering is over. Now is the season for action. Now is when we must bring the best ideas of both parties together, and show the American people that we can still do what we were sent here to do. Now is the time to deliver on health care."</p> <p>"But what we have also seen in these last months is the same partisan spectacle that only hardens the disdain many Americans have toward their own government. Instead of honest debate, we've seen scare tactics. Some have dug into unyielding ideological camps that offer no hope of compromise. Too many have used this as an opportunity to score short-term political points, even if it robs the country of our opportunity to solve a long-term challenge. And out of this blizzard of charges and counter-charges, confusion has reigned."</p> <p>"But know this -- I will not waste time with those who have made the calculation that it's better politics to kill this plan than improve it. I will not stand by while the special interests use the same old tactics to keep things exactly the way they are. If you misrepresent what's in the plan, we will call you out."</p> <p>"It's worth noting that a strong majority of Americans still favor a public insurance option of the sort I've proposed tonight. But its impact shouldn't be exaggerated -- by the left, the right, or the media. It is only one part of my plan, and shouldn't be used as a handy excuse for the usual Washington ideological battles."</p> <p>"To my progressive friends, I would remind you that for decades, the driving idea behind reform has been to end insurance company abuses and make coverage affordable for those without it. The public option is only a means to that end -- and we should remain open to other ideas that accomplish our ultimate goal. And to my Republican friends, I say that rather than making wild claims about a government takeover of health care, we should work together to address any legitimate concerns you may have."</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• The Nation</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common:          "The time for bickering is over" (7/12)</p> <p>"I will not waste time with those who have made the calculation that it's better politics to kill this plan than improve it." (6/12)</p>

*Claim 2: Obama's proposal is a moderate reform.*

Obama's second overarching claim was that his proposal was a moderate reform, and one that included ideas and policies from both sides of the political spectrum. I have separated this claim from Claim 1 (bipartisanship) because Claim 1 is focused on members of both political parties working together to find a solution, while this claim is focused on the actual compromises in policy that will result from that cooperation. Obama proposed this claim by highlighting evidence of Republican ideas in his plan — for example, malpractice reform — and by embracing an idea originally proposed by former presidential election opponent Senator John McCain (see Table 9). Four of the 12 sources included Obama's nod to Senator McCain.

This claim was included either directly or indirectly by nine of the 12 news outlets (all except The Nation, Newsmax, and The National Review). The most common inclusion was Obama's statement, "I don't believe malpractice reform is a silver bullet, but I have talked to enough doctors to know that defensive medicine may be contributing to unnecessary costs." This claim was directly quoted in five sources and indirectly cited in two more. An example of an indirect inclusion of this claim was the New York Times article, which reads, "He announced a new initiative to create pilot projects intended to curb medical malpractice lawsuits, a cause important to physicians and Republicans."

**Table 9: Quotations and coverage of Claim 2**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
<p>"I don't believe malpractice reform is a silver bullet, but I have talked to enough doctors to know that defensive medicine may be contributing to unnecessary costs."</p> <p>"And it's a plan that incorporates ideas from Senators and Congressmen; from Democrats and Republicans – and yes, from some of my opponents in both the primary and general</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Fox</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> </ul>

election."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> </ul>
"In the meantime, for those Americans who can't get insurance today because they have pre-existing medical conditions, we will immediately offer low-cost coverage that will protect you against financial ruin if you become seriously ill. This was a good idea when Senator John McCain proposed it in the campaign, it's a good idea now, and we should embrace it."	<p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common:          "I don't believe malpractice reform is a silver bullet..." (7/12 included this point, although 2 of those were indirect)</p> <p><i>4/12 included Obama's shout-out to McCain</i></p>

*Claim 3: Reform will help everyone.*

Obama's third overarching claim was that health care reform would help everyone, and he focused specifically on three major groups of people: those who already have insurance, those who are uninsured, and the elderly. Obama reassured those with insurance that his plan would provide "security and stability" and that nothing in the plan would require them to change their doctors. For the uninsured group, he clarified his view of the public option, stressed the importance of providing an option for people who can't afford health care coverage, and provided anecdotal evidence. To the elderly, he promised that he would protect Medicare and that the plan would not be paid for by money from the Medicare trust fund (Table 10).

Overall, every source (with the possible exception of The National Review, which I will discuss later) included something from Obama's major claim of health care reform helping everyone. Within that category, however, the coverage was inconsistent and frequently included just one or two of the three groups of Americans that Obama discussed in his speech. For example, The Washington Post article reported, "I will not back down on the basic principle that if Americans can't find affordable coverage, we will provide you with a choice," but did not include any of Obama's statements about helping those with insurance or the elderly. Obama's

points about helping the uninsured were the most widely covered and were included either directly or indirectly in nine of the 12 sources (all except The New York Times, The Nation, and The National Review).

**Table 10: Quotations and coverage of Claim 3**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
<p><i>TO THOSE WITH INSURANCE:</i></p> <p>"These are not primarily people on welfare. These are middle-class Americans."</p> <p>"Nothing in this plan will require you or your employer to change the coverage or the doctor you have."</p> <p>"It will provide more security and stability to those who have health insurance."</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• National Review (<i>buried in commentary</i>)</li> </ul> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul> <p>Most common: <i>Reassuring those with insurance that they will not be required to change their doctors. (3/12 + National Review)</i></p> <p>"Security and stability" (3/12)</p>
<p><i>TO THE UNINSURED:</i></p> <p>"[This plan] will provide insurance to those who don't."</p> <p>"I will not back down on the basic principle that if Americans can't find affordable coverage, we will provide you with a choice."</p> <p>"Now, if you're one of the tens of millions of Americans who don't currently have health insurance, the second part of this plan will finally offer you quality, affordable choices. If you lose your job or change your job, you will be able to get coverage. If you strike out on your own and start a small business, you will be able to get coverage."</p> <p>[On the public option] "Let me be clear -- it would</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CBS</li> </ul> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common: "I will not back down on the basic principle that if Americans can't find affordable coverage, we will provide you</p>

<p>only be an option for those who don't have insurance. No one would be forced to choose it, and it would not impact those of you who already have insurance."</p> <p>"One man from Illinois lost his coverage in the middle of chemotherapy because his insurer found that he hadn't reported gallstones that he didn't even know about. They delayed his treatment, and he died because of it. Another woman from Texas was about to get a double mastectomy when her insurance company canceled her policy because she forgot to declare a case of acne. By the time she had her insurance reinstated, her breast cancer more than doubled in size."</p>	<p>with a choice." (3/12)</p> <p><i>Clarified public option (3/12)</i></p>
<p><b>TO THE ELDERLY:</b></p> <p>"Not a dollar of the Medicare trust fund will be used to pay for this plan"</p> <p>"Don't pay attention to those scary stories about how your benefits will be cut - especially since some of the same folks who are spreading these tall tales have fought against Medicare in the past, and just this year supported a budget that would have essentially turned Medicare into a privatized voucher program. That will never happen on my watch. I will protect Medicare."</p> <p>"The only thing this plan would eliminate is the hundreds of billions of dollars in waste and fraud, as well as unwarranted subsidies in Medicare that go to insurance companies."</p>	<p>Direct inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• USA Today</li> </ul> <p>Indirect inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother Jones</li> </ul> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Huffington Post</li> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common: <i>Varied inclusions, but all around the same point of protecting Medicare.</i></p>

*Claim 4: Health care reform is an issue of fundamental American values.*

The fourth overarching claim in Obama's speech was that health care reform is an issue of fundamental American values. Here, Obama made an emotional appeal to individuals' patriotism and quoted portions of a letter to him from the late Senator Edward "Ted" Kennedy. Kennedy was known for his dedication to health care reform, and Obama noted his dedication to that reform including bipartisan compromise. Obama used key phrases from Kennedy's letter to emphasize his point, including calling health care "that great, unfinished business of our society"

and saying, "What we face is above all a moral issue; at stake are not just the details of policy, but fundamental principles of social justice and the character of our country" (this was directly included in 5 of the 12 sources). Obama also made statements to support this claim in his own words, including, "Improving our health care system only works if everybody does their part" (Table 11).

This claim was indirectly mentioned in one source (The Huffington Post) and directly quoted in nine sources (all except Newsmax and The National Review), though the parts that were quoted varied greatly. It is worth noting, however, that the mention by The Huffington Post was extremely brief: "Vicki Kennedy, the widow of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., was also on the guest list. Kennedy, who died last month, had made health care a career-long cause, and Obama spoke movingly of his efforts." Although it is very summative and loses much of the propositional content of the claim, this was counted as an indirect inclusion because it suggests Kennedy's legacy of fighting for health care reform and suggests the emotional appeal that Obama employed.

**Table 11: Quotations and coverage of Claim 4**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
"Improving our health care system only works if everybody does their part."	Direct inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• USA Today</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• Mother Jones</li> <li>• The Nation</li> </ul>
"One of the unique and wonderful things about America has always been our self-reliance, our rugged individualism, our fierce defense of freedom and our healthy skepticism of government."	Indirect inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huffington Post (<i>very brief</i>)</li> </ul>
"When fortune turns against one of us, others are there to lend a helping hand,"	Most common: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "What we face is above all a moral issue; at stake</li> </ul>
"A belief that in this country, hard work and responsibility should be rewarded by some measure of security and fair play; And an acknowledgment that sometimes government has	



<p>to step in to help deliver on that promise."</p> <p>"Everyone in this room knows what will happen if we do nothing. Our deficit will grow. More families will go bankrupt. More businesses will close. More Americans will lose their coverage when they are sick and need it most. And more will die as a result. We know these things to be true. That is why we cannot fail. Because there are too many Americans counting on us to succeed — the ones who suffer silently, and the ones who shared their stories with us at town hall meetings, in e-mails and in letters."</p> <p>"The danger of too much government is matched by the perils of too little."</p> <p>QUOTING FROM KENNEDY LETTER:</p> <p>"What we face is above all a moral issue; at stake are not just the details of policy, but fundamental principles of social justice and the character of our country."</p> <p>"That great unfinished business of our society"</p>	<p>are not just the details of policy, but fundamental principles of social justice and the character of our country." (5/12)</p>
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*Claim 5: The health care problem is our deficit problem.*

The last major claim in Obama's speech was that the health care problem is our deficit problem. Of his five claims, this was the least specific: Obama made statements about the total cost of the proposed plan — \$900 billion — and spoke broadly about where that money would come from, but no specific details were provided (Table 12).

The coverage of this claim was also spotty and vague. The financial aspect of the plan was not a focus of any of the 12 articles, though some mention of it was included either directly or indirectly in eight of the articles (all except Fox News, The Nation, Newsmax, and The National Review). Six of the articles included that the plan would not add to the deficit or that there would be spending cuts if the savings that Obama predicted did not materialize. For

example, the Mother Jones article reported, “He maintained the measure would not add to the deficit,” but the article did not include any other details of the financial aspect of the plan. Similarly, CBS News only included, “the president called for a provision to require more spending cuts if the savings promised do not materialize.” Only five of the articles (CBS News, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Fox News, and The Huffington Post) included the \$900 billion cost of the plan.

This claim was the most often excluded claim out of his main five. This could be the result of a couple of reasons: First, this was Obama’s least specific claim, and beyond stating that he wouldn’t add to the deficit, his propositions were vague, so it makes sense that reporters would not include them. Alternatively, however, we can interpret these exclusions the same we interpreted the exclusions of Claims 2 (states should decide on the issue) and 4 (separation of civil and religious marriages) in the same-sex marriage case. That is to say that this claim is one that individuals on both sides of the political spectrum might agree on, because most parties agree — and there is much data to support — that the current American health care system is extremely expensive and is a major contributor to the nation’s debt. Therefore, news reports that are interested in pitting one side of the debate against another, or in escalating the controversy, might not include this claim since it contains common ground.

**Table 12: Quotations and coverage of Claim 5**

What Obama said	Coverage in news reports
“Our health care problem is our deficit problem. Nothing else even comes close.”	Direct inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABC</li> <li>• New York Times</li> <li>• USA Today</li> </ul>
“And it will slow the growth of health care costs for our families, our businesses, and our government.”	Indirect inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CBS</li> <li>• CNN</li> <li>• Washington Post</li> </ul>
“I will not sign a plan that adds one dime to our	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huffington Post</li> </ul>

<p>deficits — either now or in the future. Period. And to prove that I'm serious, there will be a provision in this plan that requires us to come forward with more spending cuts if the savings we promised don't materialize."</p> <p>"Most of this plan can be paid for by finding savings within the existing health care system — a system that is currently full of waste and abuse."</p> <p>"Add it all up, and the plan I'm proposing will cost around \$900 billion over ten years — less than we have spent on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and less than the tax cuts for the wealthiest few Americans that Congress passed at the beginning of the previous administration."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother Jones</li> </ul> <p>Not included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fox</li> <li>• The Nation</li> <li>• Newsmax</li> <li>• National Review</li> </ul> <p>Most common:  <i>6/12 included something about the plan not adding to the deficit OR there will be more spending cuts if the savings don't materialize</i></p> <p><i>3/12 included \$900 billion price tag</i></p>
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Overall, articles about Obama's health care address directly included an average of 3.1 of the 5 major claims (61.6%), though what specifically was included varied. The most incomplete coverage came from The Nation (2/5 included + 1 indirect mention), Newsmax (1/5 included + 1 indirect mention), and National Review (0/5 included + 2 indirect mentions). The National Review article, in particular, obscured Obama's argument to the point where the "mentions" could easily be overseen (see discussion below). The most complete coverage came from ABC News (5/5 included), CBS News (5/5 included), and USA Today (5/5 included, though in less detail). CNN, New York Times, Washington Post, Huffington Post, and Mother Jones all also covered all 5 claims in some combination of direct quotation and indirect inclusion. A summary of these findings can be seen in Table 13 at the end of this section.

The analysis indicated an important difference in inclusions by mainstream and alternative media sources. Mainstream news sources (ABC, CBS, CNN, New York Times, USA Today, Washington Post, Fox, and Huffington Post) directly included an average of 3.9 of the 5 main claims and indirectly included an average of one main claim. Alternative news sources

(Mother Jones, The Nation, Newsmax, National Review), however, on average directly included just 1.5 of the main claims and indirectly included 1.5 main claims.

Also similar to the first case study, the article by The National Review about Obama's health care argument was challenging to analyze. While it did touch on Obama's claims about bipartisanship (Claim 1) and health care helping everyone (Claim 3), the article itself was heavy in partisan rhetoric, and it was nearly impossible to parse out Obama's argument without having heard or read the speech itself. For example, the closest the article came to including one of Obama's major propositional claims was when the writer said, "In a pattern that has become familiar, lip service to bipartisan compromise was gratuitously mixed with some of the most polarizing rhetoric ever heard in a joint session of Congress." In this quotation, we see the writer pointing to both the positive and negative aspects of (bi)partisanship in the health care debate, but it is shrouded in an attack on Obama that makes it hard to parse out what Obama specifically said or implied in the speech.

The National Review's inclusion of Claim 3 is also debatable. As was the case with the first major claim, the article's inclusion of this claim was so buried in political commentary that it's unclear what the original statement was. The direct quotation from the article reads, "Obama can repeat ad nauseam his 'if you like your doctor' line, but it won't prevent doctors from retiring early or opting out of an Obamacare system, and it won't preclude businesses from dropping their coverage and forcing their workers into the public plan." In this excerpt, the writer notes Obama's statement that those with insurance would not have to change doctors, but it is not reported in a direct way, making it unclear if Obama actually said that in the speech.

**Table 13: Health care summary**

	Claim 1: Requires bipartisanship	Claim 2: Moderate reform	Claim 3: Will help everyone	Claim 4: American values	Claim 5: Deficit problem
ABC	D	D	D	D	D
CBS	D	D	D	D	D
CNN	D	D	D	D	I
NYT	D	I	D	D	D
USA	D	D	D	D	D
WaPo	D	I	D	D	I
Fox	D	D	I	D	
HuffPo	D	I	D	I	I
MJ*	D	I	D	D	I
Nation*	D		I	D	
Newsmax*	I		D		
NR*		I	I		

Note: "D" denotes direct inclusion and "I" denotes indirect inclusion. Alternative media sources are marked with an asterisk (\*). News source abbreviations are as follows: NYT=New York Times, USA=USA Today, WaPo=Washington Post, HuffPo=Huffington Post, MJ=Mother Jones, NR=National Review.

Table 13, above, shows some clear patterns in coverage of the health care argument. For example, 8 of the 12 sources included all 5 overarching claims either directly or indirectly, and 3 of those 8 directly included all 5 claims. Claims 1, 3, and 4 were most often directly included in the news reports, while Claims 2 and 5 were just as likely to be directly included as they were to be indirectly included.

## V. Discussion

The news reports published following both of Obama's arguments were extremely varied in content and depth, though all left out key components of his arguments. This is understandable if we consider the point of view of the reporter: space constraints, the need to get to the point quickly in an article, and appealing to readers' interests are all easily identifiable reasons why a journalist would include some parts and not others. It does, however, also have serious implications for readers. Leaving out parts of Obama's arguments likely left many readers

unaware of some of his key claims about the issues. Obama's arguments and their subsequent coverage in the news can be looked at through many different lenses, and this section will address some of those interpretations both on an argument level and at a broader controversy level.

To analyze this data on the argument level, it is helpful to look back at the general inclusions and exclusions. In the same-sex marriage case, all news reports included at least one aspect of his argument other than simply his position, but they all left out one or more of his major propositional claims. Looking at the argument at this level allows us to see just how little of Obama's argument made it into the news reports. The same results were generally true of Obama's health care argument; while all news articles included more than just his overall position (i.e. that the country needs to reform health care), the data reveal that many propositional claims and instances of those claims were left out of the reports.

On a broader scale, there are also important differences to note about the two cases analyzed here. While both instances of political argumentation were complex arguments about social issues, the same-sex marriage argument was Obama arguing for his position (i.e. providing supporting arguments for why he supports same-sex marriage) while the health care argument was Obama arguing for a particular set of policy changes (i.e. arguing for a legislative action on his proposal). This difference may account for some of the difference in coverage of the two arguments. With the health care argument, there were more specific points and claims for the media to pick up on, and the case analyses above show that that indeed happened; the news articles published in this case directly included an average of 61.6 percent of the main claims, while in the same-sex marriage case that percentage was only 30.5.

This variation in coverage raises the question of whether or not the end goal of the

argument affects how the media reports on it. In the same-sex marriage case, the end goal was for the American people to understand Obama's personal stance on the issue. In the health-care case, the end goal was legislative action. More research would be needed to draw any definitive conclusions from this, but in this analysis we saw that twice as much of the health care argument than the same-sex marriage argument was included in news reports, suggesting that the media pays more attention to the details of policy arguments than position arguments.

At the broadest level — that of the overall controversy — journalists themselves might act as participants in public controversies, participants who actively contribute to the situation. For example, a study by Peter Cramer identifies two ways in which the news media affects the trajectory of a news story: First, journalists routinely help shape public controversy by “repeating discourse attributed to a public official” (188). Secondly, they help motivate the news story in the first place (In the case he studies, they did this by publishing an article a few days early that motivated some of the comments Mayor Giuliani made) (188-189). While this second part is not true for every news story, it can be applied elsewhere. In the same-sex marriage case studied here, Vice President Biden's vocal support for the cause just a few days earlier and the news reports speculating on Obama's position thereafter certainly influenced Obama's decision reveal his personal position. It's hard to say whether or not the news reports published prior to the interview influenced the propositional content of his argument, but it is not out of the realm of possibility

## **VI. Limitations and Conclusion**

The research presented here is limited and more research is necessary to draw any definitive conclusions. In further studies, it would be interesting to expand this beyond print and

digital news and into television and radio reporting, as those mediums rely more on short snippets of text or sound to get a point across (compared to the relatively lengthy quotations included in many written articles). This analysis has also been focused more at the argument level, but the differences we saw in mainstream versus alternative news outlet reporting are hard to ignore and raise further questions about media inconsistencies and biases.

By analyzing what types of claims and evidence journalists leave out of their reports, we have a better understanding of how arguments are interpreted by the media. This is important because it could, in the future, help speakers better articulate their arguments, tailored to their audience of media outlets, so that news reports include more of their actual arguments. Understanding what types of claims and evidence are included in news reports can help speakers ensure that the media reports their arguments more fully and accurately.

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, Fahnestock has examined media reconstructions of scientific findings (written for expert audience), but her study focused on what changed from a report meant for experts to a report meant for the masses. Political arguments for the masses and how they are interpreted and condensed by the media have yet to be studied. Her findings are certainly related, though. Discussing one example in her paper, Fahnestock asserts, "the true accommodation involves finding points of interest in a topic that will appeal to readers who are not apologetists or even specialists in any life science" (335). Certainly this is true also for reports of political arguments: Reporters or journalists must find the "points of interest" that will appeal to all readers (in this case, not solely those who are well-versed in the discourse surrounding same-sex marriage).

As I have stated throughout this paper, however, this accommodation has important implications for readers who rely on the media for their information, as many individuals do. By



selecting only the most interesting or most sensational parts of an argument, journalists do not tell the whole story. A study on the media coverage of presidential debates by William Benoit and Heather Currie came to similar conclusions: "Evidence suggests that the news media does not provide voters with an accurate depiction of the debates. This means that news reports about the debate have the potential to foster the inaccurate impression that the debates are mostly negative (when intact debates are mostly positive)" (Benoit and Currie 37). While their study focused specifically on presidential debates, it is hardly a stretch to see that their findings can apply to any political argument. Presidential debates are, as Obama's ABC News interview and address to Congress were, directed toward the general population. Therefore the media's accommodation of the debates is likely similar its accommodation of Obama's arguments. My data seems to back up what Benoit and Currie found in their study: that news articles rarely provide a full and accurate report of a political argument, frequently leaving out important claims or using misleading wordings (as in the case of *The National Review*).

This should not be surprising, however, because studies have shown that the news is hardly consistent or reliable (Benoit and Currie; Franzosi). Beyond the actual news story, professional journalists have many other considerations when writing an article, and this makes selection of data key. One study by Roberto Franzosi raised issues regarding the collection of event-data from newspapers: "Selectivity has been seen as the product of the professionalization of journalists, with their own standards of objectivity reinforced by autonomous criteria for training, recruitment, and promotion—commercial imperatives, time and space constraints, and limitations imposed by the organizational structure of the newsroom" (6). The articles studied in my analysis, indeed, varied greatly in length, depth, and content, and that is just the most apparent way that these considerations play out.

Further research would be necessary to draw any definite conclusions, as I have only examined twelve news reports of two political arguments. However, based on my findings, it appears that media outlets rarely include all of the major propositional claims from an argument. The media also seem to favor claims that are more extreme or exciting, as they generally leave out moderate or widely acceptable claims.

As Benoit and Currie concluded their paper, "Voters are well-advised to watch the debates for themselves, rather than rely on the extremely fragmentary and skewed reports provided by television and newspapers" (38). Based on the data from my study, I, too, would encourage media consumers to get their information directly from the mouths of politicians — by watching full interviews or speeches — as it is clear that the news media allow numerous claims to fall through the cracks and rarely provide the complete picture.

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## Appendix A: Same-sex marriage case documents

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## Appendix B: Health care case documents

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