

Invisible at the Intersection: Media Representation of Homeless Gay Veterans in CNN and Fox News

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Abstract

Homelessness among gay veterans represents a significant yet underrepresented social issue at the intersection of sexual orientation, military identity, and housing insecurity. Although the United States has made substantial progress in reducing veteran homelessness and expanding benefits for service members previously affected by the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, gay veterans may continue to experience distinct forms of marginalization and housing instability. Drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality, this study examines how the intersecting identities of homosexuality and veteran status affect media representation of homeless gay veterans in the United States. Using a qualitative content analysis, the study analyzes ten news reports published after 2020 by CNN and Fox News, with five articles selected from each outlet. The findings reveal a significant lack of explicit representation of homeless gay veterans. While CNN primarily frames veteran homelessness through housing policy, government responsibility, and the experiences of homeless veterans, Fox News places greater emphasis on military service, patriotism, honor, and institutional perspectives, with occasional references to gay veterans. However, neither outlet directly and consistently addresses homelessness as an issue specifically affecting gay veterans. The findings suggest that intersectional communities may be absorbed into broader dominant identity categories, such as “veterans” or “LGBTQ+ individuals,” rather than being represented through the combined experiences created by multiple identities. Furthermore, the different ideological orientations and editorial priorities of the two media outlets may contribute to this marginalization by emphasizing separate aspects of identity while overlooking their intersection. This study contributes to research on intersectionality and media representation by demonstrating how the absence of explicit representation can itself function as a form of marginalization. Future research should examine a larger sample of media outlets and news reports to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how intersectional identities are represented in discussions of homelessness and veteran welfare.

Keywords

Intersectionality; Media Representation; Gay Veterans; Veteran Homelessness; LGBTQ+; CNN; Fox News; Content Analysis

Introduction

In May 2026, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released the results of its 2025 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count. According to the report, 32,495 veterans experienced homelessness on a single night in January 2025. This figure represented a decrease of 1.2% compared with 2024 and a decline of 56.1% since 2010 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs). Despite this overall downward trend, homelessness and housing instability remain significant concerns for some groups of veterans. In particular, LGBTQ+ veterans face higher rates of homelessness or housing instability than heterosexual veterans. Haigh et al. (2024) found that 10.3% of LGBTQ+ veterans experienced homelessness or housing instability, compared with 5.4% of heterosexual veterans. The historical experiences of gay veterans provide import-

ant context for understanding this disparity. Under the U.S. military policy known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT), homosexual service members were prohibited from openly disclosing their sexual orientation. Approximately 14,000 service members were discharged under this policy because of their sexual orientation. Many received unfavorable discharge statuses, including “Other Than Honorable” (OTH) discharges, which could limit their access to veterans’ benefits and services, including housing assistance. Although DADT was repealed in 2011 and the Department of Veterans Affairs later expanded access to benefits for some veterans affected by discriminatory discharges, institutional changes do not necessarily eliminate broader social marginalization.

Public understanding of social issues is also influenced by media coverage. According to the agenda-setting theory

developed by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw (1972), the media may not determine what people think, but it can significantly influence what people think about. Media representation therefore plays an important role in connecting social issues with public attention and shaping the visibility of particular communities. As gay veterans constitute a recognized social group and their experiences of housing instability have been identified as a social concern, media coverage may influence whether this intersectional issue becomes visible within broader public discussions of homelessness and veteran welfare.

This study addresses the following research question: To what extent do intersecting identities affect how American media outlets report on homelessness among gay veterans? To answer this question, the study conducts a case study of two major American media outlets, CNN and Fox News. Through a search for news reports related to gay veterans and veteran homelessness, ten articles published after 2020 were selected, including five articles from CNN and five from Fox News. A qualitative content analysis was then conducted to examine how these outlets represent the relationship between sexual orientation, veteran identity, and homelessness.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of this study is Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Crenshaw originally developed the concept to explain why the experiences of Black women could not be fully understood by examining racism and sexism as separate forms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality emphasizes that individuals who belong simultaneously to multiple social groups may experience forms of disadvantage that differ from those experienced by individuals identified with only one social category.

Since its introduction, intersectionality has expanded beyond its original focus on race and gender. It has been applied to a wide range of social identities and positions, including ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and other forms of social difference (Bauer et al., 2021). Recent research has increasingly connected intersectionality with the experiences of sexual minorities. As Russell et al. (2023) note, research on LGBTQ+ populations has paid growing attention to structural forms of intersectionality, as well as the ways in which stigma and discrimination affect specific subgroups within sexual minority communities. These studies demonstrate the importance of examining social experiences through multiple and overlapping identities rather than treating marginalized groups as internally homogeneous.

Intersectionality is particularly useful for understanding the social position of gay veterans. Their experiences cannot be fully explained through either sexual orientation or veteran status alone. As veterans, they may have

faced exclusion from benefits and services because of discriminatory policies related to their sexual orientation. Although such policies have been abolished or revised, the consequences of past discrimination may continue to affect their access to resources and their broader social experiences. At the same time, compared with heterosexual veterans, gay veterans may experience discrimination based on sexual orientation, while their military identity may also shape their relationship with broader LGBTQ+ communities.

This intersectional position may create a complex form of social marginalization. Gay veterans may not be fully represented by the dominant image of the "veteran," which is often separated from discussions of sexual minority identity. Similarly, their military background may distinguish their experiences from those of other LGBTQ+ individuals. Their identities therefore intersect in ways that may create experiences not fully captured by either community alone. This makes intersectionality an appropriate theoretical framework for examining how gay veterans are represented in discussions of homelessness.

Although intersectionality has been widely applied to research on sexual minorities, the intersection between sexual orientation and veteran identity remains an area that requires further attention. In particular, there is limited research examining how media outlets represent gay veterans and how the intersection of their identities affects the visibility of homelessness as a social issue. This gap provides the basis for the present study.

Findings and Discussion

After conducting a qualitative content analysis of the ten selected news reports from CNN and Fox News, several similarities and differences emerged. The most significant finding was the limited explicit representation of homelessness among gay veterans. Although the selected articles discussed veteran homelessness and, in some cases, gay veterans, none of the ten reports consistently addressed homelessness as an issue specifically experienced by gay veterans.

Among the five selected CNN articles, none explicitly focused on homelessness among gay veterans. Instead, CNN primarily framed veteran homelessness through housing policy, government responsibility, and conflicts between homeless veterans and public institutions. Terms and themes related to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), HUD, housing, eviction, and the availability of additional accommodation appeared frequently throughout the selected reports. For example, one report examined the potential consequences of a HUD policy that would move away from a "Housing First" approach and place greater emphasis on mental health and substance abuse treatment (Todd & Robertson, 2026). The article discussed the possible effects of this policy on homeless veterans through

the perspectives of both veterans and staff members at an organization providing support to people experiencing homelessness.

More broadly, the CNN reports gave considerable attention to the experiences and voices of individual homeless veterans. Several articles also examined the potential effects of proposed or newly implemented policies on veterans. Overall, CNN's coverage tended to present veteran homelessness primarily as a policy and social welfare issue. The reports emphasized questions of housing provision, institutional responsibility, and the need for government action. However, this focus did not extend to an explicit discussion of how sexual orientation might affect veterans' experiences of homelessness or housing instability.

The five selected Fox News reports demonstrated a somewhat different pattern. These articles placed greater emphasis on veteran homelessness in relation to military service, patriotism, honor, and institutional recognition. One article specifically discussed gay veterans who had been forced out of the military because of their sexual orientation under the DADT policy. Across the selected articles, phrases and themes related to "ending veteran homelessness," military service, and honor appeared prominently. The coverage often connected assistance for homeless veterans with the broader idea of respecting military service and recognizing veterans' contributions.

Compared with the CNN articles, the selected Fox News reports also relied more frequently on statements from institutional representatives and authoritative figures. For example, one article on veteran homelessness extensively quoted the chief executive of Mission Roll Call, a veteran advocacy organization. Another report connected veteran homelessness with the broader political context of a presidential campaign. Although the selected Fox News articles occasionally addressed the experiences of gay veterans, they did not explicitly examine homelessness among gay veterans as a distinct social issue. In one article, a rainbow flag was visible outside the tent of a homeless veteran, providing a possible visual reference to LGBTQ+ identity. However, this image was not accompanied by a detailed discussion of the relationship between sexual orientation and homelessness.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate a significant absence of explicit media representation. None of the ten selected articles directly and consistently identified "homeless gay veterans" as a distinct intersectional community. Rather than clearly representing the combined experiences associated with sexual orientation and veteran status, the reports generally categorized individuals within broader identity groups, such as "veterans," "homeless people," or "LGBTQ+ individuals."

From the perspective of intersectionality theory, this pattern is significant. Individuals with intersecting identities may experience social conditions that cannot be fully understood through a single category. In this case, gay vet-

erans may experience housing insecurity in ways shaped by both their sexual orientation and their military history. Historical discrimination, including unfavorable discharges and restricted access to veterans' benefits, may have created experiences different from those of other veterans. At the same time, their experiences may differ from those of other LGBTQ+ individuals because of their relationship with military institutions.

When media coverage places gay veterans primarily within the broader category of "veterans," the role of sexual orientation may become less visible. Conversely, when they are discussed only as members of the LGBTQ+ community, their specific experiences as veterans may also be overlooked. As a result, the intersection between these identities may disappear from public discussion. The absence of explicit representation is therefore important because it may contribute to the marginalization of an already intersectional group.

The differences between CNN and Fox News may also help explain this pattern. Based on the selected sample, CNN placed greater emphasis on housing, social welfare, policy, and the experiences of individuals affected by homelessness. Fox News placed greater emphasis on military service, patriotism, honor, and institutional perspectives. These editorial priorities highlight different aspects of veteran identity, but neither outlet consistently integrated sexual orientation and veteran status into a single discussion of homelessness. Moreover, each media's political representative exacerbates the process of marginalization. According to the selected ten articles, CNN is inclined to the liberal side, while FOX NEWS prefers the conservative side. News articles from CNN focus more on livelihood issues and pluralism, and FOX NEWS promotes patriotism and military honor. Homeless gay veterans, as a community that includes people of both pluralism and patriotism, is in the middle of the two media outlets' preferences. As a result, since neither of the two media outlets' preferences can fully represent the community's components, it is more likely to be excluded.

Therefore, the findings suggest that the marginalization of homeless gay veterans is not necessarily caused by a complete absence of coverage of either gay veterans or homeless veterans. Instead, the issue lies in the limited representation of the intersection between these identities. Media outlets may report on each identity separately while failing to recognize the distinctive social experiences produced by their combination. This finding supports the central argument of intersectionality theory: social identities cannot always be adequately understood when they are separated into independent categories.

Conclusion

This study examined how intersecting identities affect media representation of homelessness among gay veterans

in the United States. Using intersectionality theory as its theoretical framework, the study conducted a qualitative content analysis of ten news reports published by CNN and Fox News after 2020.

The findings indicate that homelessness among gay veterans receives limited explicit representation in the selected news reports. CNN primarily frames veteran homelessness as an issue related to housing policy, government responsibility, and social welfare, while Fox News places greater emphasis on military service, patriotism, honor, and institutional perspectives. Although some of the selected articles discuss either gay veterans or veteran homelessness, neither outlet consistently addresses the intersection between sexual orientation, veteran status, and homelessness.

The study therefore suggests that intersectional communities may become marginalized when media coverage relies on broader and more dominant identity categories. Gay veterans may be represented as veterans without attention to their sexual orientation or as members of sexual minority communities without sufficient attention to their military experiences. In either case, the distinctive experiences produced by the intersection of these identities may remain invisible.

This study has several limitations. First, the selection of ten articles was not random, meaning that other researchers may select different reports and reach different conclusions. Second, the content analysis was conducted by a single researcher. Decisions regarding article relevance, themes, and interpretation were therefore influenced by individual judgment, which may affect the replicability of the findings. Finally, the sample size was relatively small. Five articles from CNN and five from Fox News cannot fully represent the overall coverage of these outlets or the broader American media environment.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the discussion of media representation and intersectional identities by highlighting the importance of examining not only who is represented in the media, but also how multiple identities are represented together. The findings suggest that gay veterans experiencing homelessness may be excluded from public discussion when their identities are separated and incorporated into broader dominant categories. Future research should examine a larger number of articles and include additional media outlets to provide a more comprehensive and reliable understanding of how intersectional identities are represented in discussions of homelessness and veteran welfare.

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