

Resources for Editors when Covering the LGBTQ Community



Highlights

- Pronouns: Ask what pronouns a source prefers, and respect “non-traditional” pronouns, like *they* as a singular pronoun or *ze*.
- Ask: Does this text respect its subjects’ preferences about how to describe their identities? If not, why not? Is this intentional?
- It’s not always necessary to talk about trans identity depending on the story.
- Avoid the traditional trans narrative. Examples: “Born in a _____ body” or the idea that transition must include medical procedures.
- Avoid showing typical “transformations,” like putting on makeup or binding. An identity is not dependent on this.
- Avoid publishing birth names of trans people unless they’ve specifically asked you to do so. Do not ask for birth names or “before” photos.
- Avoid prescriptive grammar. Language in marginalized communities develops uniquely and is often cast as “bad” or “improper.” Rethink how you view language. Who is the keeper of language and how do they tie into oppression?
- Ask what other identities are important. Intersectionality between LGBT identities and other identities (religious, cultural, professional, etc.) can really change the narrative.
- Avoid (unless subject explicitly prefers): *transgendered*, *a transgender* (n.), *tranny*, *transsexual*, *transvestite*, *he-she*, *shim*, *gender-bender*, *it*, *sex change*, *pre-operative*, *post-operative*.
- Avoid assuming that someone “came out” when they talk about their sexual orientation. All you know is that they’re talking about it, not that they were hiding it. Avoid using language that implies deception.
- Avoid using *opposite sex*. Men and women are not opposite; there is more variation and range within one sex than between sexes. If you use *other sex*, it also creates space for more than two sexes.
- Recognize the possibility of nontraditional relationships when editing. Do not automatically assume that your audience is male or heterosexual. It’s a big turnoff to be excluded.
- When there is resistance to using LGBT terminology, focus on its accuracy; fairness is a byproduct of accuracy.

- LGBT style guides from media/journalists organizations and advocacy groups differ. Choose one that resonates. You're going to offend someone, so don't let not offending anyone be your ultimate goal.
- Don't make decisions about how you'll handle LGBT language issues on deadline. Make them in advance.
- Remember that the best thing you can do is to ask questions, educate yourself and simply try your best to do justice to the stories of the people you cover, regardless of LGBT status.
- "All words are made up, y'all!"—Josey Herrera

Basic Terminology for Use in Mainstream Media

asexual, ace: Spell out on first reference for clarity. An asexual person does not experience sexual attraction. Not synonymous with *celibate*.

biphobia: Intolerance or prejudice against bisexual people, often including inaccurate associations with infidelity, promiscuity, and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. Alternative: *anti-bisexual bias*.

bisexual, bi: Spell out on first reference for clarity. A bisexual person experiences emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction regardless of biological sex. *Bisexual* is often used as an umbrella term to encompass multiple identities on the bi spectrum and can refer to attraction to more than one gender identity or gender expression, inclusive of nonbinary genders.

cisgender, cis: A cisgender person identifies with the gender marker assigned to them at birth. Acceptable: *cisgender person/woman/man, cis person/woman/man*. Avoid *ciswoman, cisman*. See *transgender*.

closeted: Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Preferable: *not openly bi, not openly gay*.

coming out: Do not assume that a gay or bisexual person is "coming out" when they mention their sexual orientation or same-sex relationship. To assume that all LGBT people are, by default, "closeted" casts same-sex relationships in a negative light, something inherently shameful and distasteful. While it may be common language, be sparing in your use of the term. It may be more linguistically neutral to say someone is open about their LGBT status.

gay: Gay people have the capacity for emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction to one sex or gender. Though *gay* is often used to refer to gay boys/men and *lesbian* is used to refer to gay girls/women, you can say *lesbians and gay males/boys/men* to be more clear.

gay lifestyle: An outdated term used to stigmatize gay people and suggest that their lives should be viewed only through a sexual lens.

gender expression: The way a person outwardly manifests masculinity and/or femininity. Traits, desires, appearances, and behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity vary from culture to culture. This can include clothing selection, hairstyle, appearance, speech, behavior, movement, etc. It can sometimes be an extension of gender identity, but don't assume that it is.

gender identity: A person's internal sense of cultural associations with gender. Do not assume gender identity based on gender expression.

homophobia: Intolerance or prejudice against lesbians and gay males. Alternative: *anti-gay bias*.

homosexual: Do not use in nonmedical contexts. See *gay*.

intersex: An intersex person was born with anatomy or genetics that don't correspond with typical definitions. Avoid *hermaphrodite, third sex*.

LGBT: Initialism for *lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender*. Do not use *LGBT* in the title or headline if the article only talks about gay people. The *Q* in *LGBTQ* can mean *queer* or *questioning*. Letters are continually being added as the conversation continues, such as *I* for *intersex* and *A* for *allies* or *asexual*. Befriend Google.

misgendering: Incorrect identification of a person's gender identity, including the use of pronouns and names a person does not use for themselves.

openly gay/bisexual: Use "He is openly bi." Avoid "He admitted/claimed to be bi."

queer: Use with caution, depending on audience. “Although once a pejorative term, young people have reclaimed it and often use it as an umbrella term for lesbian women, gay men, and bisexual women and men. It is appropriate to use the term queer.” (Source: APA)

same-sex marriage: Use *marriage* without adjectives or modifiers when sexual orientation is irrelevant. A bisexual person who marries does not change sexual orientation, so *same-sex marriage* avoids the biphobic assumptions in *gay marriage* and *straight marriage*.

same-sex, female-female, male-male, male-female, different-sex: Accurate terms which do not require assumption or knowledge of orientation. If gender identity is unknown, ask.

sex reassignment: Preferred term for medical process by which transgender people change physical, sexual characteristics to reflect gender identity. May include surgery, hormone therapy, and/or changes of legal identity. Avoid *sex change*.

sexual orientation: Innate sexual attraction.

sexual preference: Avoid this politically charged term implying that sexuality is the result of a conscious choice. See *sexual orientation*.

transgender, trans: Spell out on first reference for clarity. An umbrella term for some people whose outward gender expression may not match their inner gender identity. Some transgender persons may identify as drag kings/queens or cross-dressers, but do not assume that all transgender persons identify as any one of these. Acceptable: *transgender person, transgender woman, transgender man; trans person, trans woman, trans man*. Avoid *transgendered, transvestite, tranny, transwoman, transman*. Also avoid *biologically female, biologically male*. See *cisgender*.

transition: Accurate term that does not fixate on surgeries, which many transgender people do not or cannot undergo. Avoid *pre-op, post-op, sex change, sex-change operation*.

A Guide to Gender-Neutral Pronouns

1	2	3	4	5
e/ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
he	him	his	his	himself
[name]	[name]	[name]'s	[name]'s	[name]'s self
per	per	pers	pers	perself
she	her	her	hers	herself
sie	sir	hir	hirs	hirself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
ve	ver	vis	vers	verself
zie	zim	zir	zirs	zirself

(Source: LGBT resource center, University of Milwaukee, via *The New York Times*)

*Caveat: “Themself” is not as accepted as the singular *they* in general; many prefer *themselves* even when the referent is singular.

Sources

- Conscious Style Guide (links to various style guides and helpful articles):
<http://consciousstyleguide.com/gender-sexuality/>
- National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association:
<http://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/>
- GLAAD Media Reference Guide (includes many “in focus” articles on specific coverage issues, such as LGBT parenting and conversion therapy):
<http://www.glaad.org/reference>
- Movement Advancement Project:
<http://lgbtmap.org/talking-about-lgbt-issues-series/>
- The Gender Book (in-depth illustrated resource on explaining gender past cis-normativity):
<http://www.thegenderbook.com/the-book/4553374748>
- The Gender Unicorn (illustrated visual aid to help explain gender identity, expression, attraction, and sex assigned at birth):
<http://www.transstudent.org/gender>
- The Asexual Visibility & Education Network
<http://www.asexuality.org/>
- The Gender Centre (Intersex terminology):
<http://www.gendercentre.org.au/resources/polare-archive/archived-articles/the-terminology-of-intersex.htm>
- American Philosophical Association Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language:
<http://www.apaonline.org/?page=nonsexist>
- National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association Stylebook:
<http://www.nlgja.org/files/NLGJASylebook0712.pdf>
- National Center for Transgender Equality Terminology List:
http://transequality.org/Resources/TransTerminology_2014.pdf

Food for Thought

- Storify by Josey Herrera with suggestions from queer and trans folk about covering their community:
<https://storify.com/ReporterHerrera/community-speaks-covering-the-trans-community#publicize>
- Article by Lauren Klinger on doing justice to trans people’s stories:
<http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/229120/nine-ways-journalists-can-do-justice-to-transgender-peoples-stories/>
- Article by Sarah Grey on transgender language issues:
<http://www.greycopyediting.com/what-editors-need-to-know-about-the-transgender-community/>
- A first-person article on how non-binary identities clash in professional environments:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jacob-tobia/genderqueer-professional-_b_5476239.html
- Article on what society considers “ghetto” names mean, an interesting piece to think about perception and language:
<http://www.buzzfeed.com/sheridanwatson/did-you-really-name-your-kid-that#.wiRqyBeZe>
- Article by *Copyediting* which discusses how *transgender* is preferred but arguments against *transgendered* are not grammatically sound:
<http://www.copyediting.com/gender-blunder>

Speakers at the “Language of the LGBT Community” panel at ACES 2015

- **Sarah Grey**, editor/owner, Grey Editing LLC • @greyediting
- **Josey Herrera**, media producer, Chancellor’s Diversity Initiative, University of Missouri • @reporterherrera
- **Brady Jones**, lead features designer, Omaha World-Herald • @modernangelo
- **Lauren Klinger**, interactive learning producer, Poynter • @laurenklinger
- **Karen Yin**, founder, AP vs. Chicago and Conscious Style Guide • @apvschicago, @consciousstyles