



Celebrating and supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members of the National Union of Journalists

NUJ Guidelines on LGBT reporting

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and its members are committed to ethical journalism and promoting the highest standards in the media. In our view, most poor and unethical reporting relates to news outlets where the union has relatively few members, or is not recognised by employers, making it harder for journalists to take an ethical stand. The NUJ therefore proposes that journalists' contracts of employment should contain a conscience clause which will make it easier for journalists to challenge the excesses of editors and media proprietors.

These guidelines are intended for all media workers creating and handling editorial material. The term *reporting* is used to cover any forms of journalism work, including writing, content creation, subediting, headline and caption writing, whether in print, digital and broadcast media. The guidelines are also applicable to journalism training and public relations.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have the right to fair, accurate and inclusive reporting of their life stories and concerns. As with all members of society, the media should treat LGBT people with fairness, integrity and respect.

Significant progress has been made in recent years, but there remain areas of concern, particularly in respect of discrepancies in the media's treatment of different sections of the LGBT community. There are also various opinions expressed regarding the use in the media of certain LGBT-related terms. The following guidelines were drawn up in consultation with representative LGBT organisations.

General guidelines

- Before any reporting of LGBT people and issues ask yourself whether labels such as “gay”, “lesbian” or “bisexual” are appropriate. If they are not necessary and relevant to the story, do not include them. A person's sexual orientation or gender identity status should only be mentioned if relevant to the story. Intrusion into people's private lives is only justified by overriding considerations of public interest and journalists should not produce material which is likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Adhere at all times to the NUJ's code of conduct for journalists:
<http://www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-code/>
The NUJ's equality council and ethics council can help - contact details are available on the NUJ website: www.nuj.org.uk/contacts
- Strive for diversity, balance and accuracy in reporting, especially when it comes to sensitive social issues. There are excellent examples of LGBT people featured in news reporting around all manner of issues.

- Remember that not all organisations campaign for all LGBT people. Stonewall, for example, does not campaign for transgender people, just as Trans Media Watch does not concern itself with matters of sexuality.
- While ever mindful of the need to facilitate free and open public debate, avoid publishing letters, online comments or phone-in contributions that contain gratuitously offensive and possibly illegal statements and attitudes concerning LGBT people.

Guidelines on terminology

- While some LGBT groups and individuals have in an intentionally subversive manner adopted words generally regarded as demeaning if not downright hateful, such as “*queer*” and “*dyke*”, you should only include them in your work if they are used by the person being reported or quoted. Even then, use such terms with due consideration of context and audience.
- Take care when using the word “*homosexual*”. Outside of scientific and clinical discourse, the word has outdated and discredited connotations of psychological disorder. When discussing homosexuality and transgender issues in social contexts, the preferred and more widely accepted terms are “*LGBT*”, “*gay*”, “*bisexual*”, “*lesbian*” and “*transgender*”.
- Note that this is not an issue of political correctness. Rather, it is about the need to relate personal stories in ways that are clear and unambiguous, and reflect as far as possible the prevailing social consensus.
- The words “*gay*” and “*transgender*” should not be used as nouns. Another example: “*lesbian*” is gender specific, so while “*lesbian couple*” is grammatically correct, the term “*lesbian woman*” is both unnecessary and tautological.
- Similarly, avoid using such terms as “*homosexual relationship*”, “*homosexual couple*”, etc. Better to simply use “*relationship*”, or if necessary and directly relevant to the story, “*sexual relationship*”. Likewise, “*couple*”, or again if necessary and relevant, “*gay couple*”.
- The term “*sexual preference*” is discouraged, as it does not reflect the scientific consensus on the balance between nurture and nature in sexual development. The preferred term is “*sexual orientation*”. The term “*sexual preference*” suggests that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a free choice. In some cases this may be true, but the term has been adopted by anti-LGBT individuals and organisations seeking to “*cure*” LGBT people of their “*preference*”.
- “*Gay lifestyle*” and “*homosexual lifestyle*” are most often used in a pejorative sense. The lifestyles of LGBT people are as diverse as those of other folk, in which case the above terms are nonsensical.
- “*Admitted homosexual*” and “*avowed homosexual*” are loaded with subjective judgement. To those concerned, the terms are downright offensive, given that the words “*admitted*” and “*avowed*” suggest that being gay is somehow shameful or secretive. If one must qualify the description of a person's sexuality with its degree of public visibility, the preferred terms are “*openly lesbian*”, “*openly gay*”, “*openly bisexual*”, or simply “*out*”, as in “*an out gay man*”. However, the latter assumes an appreciation of the term “*come out of the closet*”.
- Try to avoid political shorthand such as “*gay agenda*”, “*homosexual agenda*”, or even “*LGBT agenda*”. These terms are used by some to create the perception of a co-ordinated, negative and sinister conspiracy, rather than the pursuit of equality for LGBT people. Better to use specific descriptions of the social issues concerned, such as the promotion of civil equality, and the tackling of workplace bullying and discrimination.

- This applies similarly to terms such as “*special rights*”, when “*equal rights*” or “*equal protection*” is a more accurate description of the LGBT issues involved.
- Some anti-LGBT people and organisations (including governments) continue to peddle a false association between LGBT people and child abuse. This is deeply offensive and dangerous, and on a logical level entirely inaccurate.

Transgender

Transgender people are those for whom their current gender identity differs from that declared at birth, whether or not they have later undergone surgical gender reassignment (i.e., a sex-change operation). The term transgender also covers *intersex* people. That is, individuals who naturally possess both male and female biological characteristics.

- As with lesbian, gay and bisexual people, a person's transgender status should only be mentioned in journalistic reporting if it is pertinent. Similarly, a journalist should not investigate a transgender person's life just because they have declared themselves to be transgender. This includes investigating the private life of a transgender person just because they work in a position which carries a high degree of public responsibility. The same respect for privacy and the relevance of a person's personal life in investigating and reporting should be applied to transsexual people as other members of society.
- Care should be taken in the use of “*sex change*”, “*pre-operative*” and “*post-operative*”. Unless, that is, you are referring specifically to the personal impact of surgical gender reassignment on the individuals concerned. Otherwise use “*transition*”. Don't assume that a transgender person has undergone or intends to undergo sex-change surgery. It is also inappropriate to emphasise surgery when reporting on transgender people, as to do so underplays the breadth of their real-life stories.
- As with lesbian, gay and bisexual word “*transsexual*” should not be used as a noun. Also, take care when using it in adjectival form. Its contemporary relevance is restricted largely to scientific and medical discourse.
- In your reporting, always refer to a transgender person's chosen name, and ask them which personal pronoun they would prefer to be used to describe them. If this is not possible, use the pronoun consistent with the person's appearance and gender self-expression. Avoid putting quotation marks around a transgender person's name or pronoun.
- When referring to gender identity, use unambiguous terms. That is, a person who is born male and transitions to become female is a “*transgender woman*”, whereas a person who is born female and transitions to become male is a “*transgender man*”. Within the transgender community, members often refer to themselves using the shorthand ‘trans’.

More information



We refer you to the media guidelines published by Trans Media Watch:
<http://www.transmediawatch.org/>

The above guidelines are all in accordance with the NUJ's rule book and the NUJ code of conduct. <http://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-code-of-conduct>

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