



reporting on
LGBT ISSUES

A GUIDE FOR JAMAICAN JOURNALISTS

2014 JFLAG

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J-FLAG

J-FLAG advocates for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Jamaicans to contribute to the country's social and economic development.

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Women for Women (WfW)

WfW aims to create safe spaces for lesbian and bisexual and transgender women through education, community building and recreation programme.

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Colour Pink

An organisation that works with gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men who are displaced and/or living on the streets.

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National Anti-Discrimination Alliance (NADA)

An organization that protects the rights of those most discriminated in our society.

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Contents

	Page
■ Introduction: Fair, Accurate & Inclusive	4
■ The Interview: Disclosure and Appropriateness	5
■ Glossary of Terms/Language	7
■ Offensive Terms to Avoid	14
■ Contact	16

Introduction:

Fair, Accurate & Inclusive

Increasingly fair, accurate and inclusive news media coverage has played an important role in expanding public awareness and understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) lives. However, many reporters, editors and producers continue to face challenges covering these issues in a complex, often rhetorically charged climate.

Media coverage of our community has become – and continues to become – increasingly multi-dimensional, reflecting both the diversity of our community and the growing visibility of our families and our relationships. As a result, reporting that remains mired in simplistic, predictable “pro-gay”/“anti-gay” dualisms does a disservice to readers seeking information on the diversity of opinion and experience within our community. Misinformation and misconceptions about our lives can be corrected when journalists diligently research the facts and expose the myths (such as pernicious claims that gay people are more likely to sexually abuse children) that often are used against us.

There continues to be a need for journalists to distinguish between opposing viewpoints on LGBT issues and the defamatory rhetoric that fuels prejudice and discrimination. While defamatory comments may be newsworthy, they should no longer be used simply to provide “balance” in a news story.

Unfortunately, anti-gay individuals and organizations continue to see their incendiary rhetoric and inaccurate, sensationalistic distortions of gay and lesbian lives legitimized through stories, features and profiles. Such inclusion, despite the best efforts of reporters striving for fair and accurate coverage, devalues the quality of journalism.

In an era when gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender lives increasingly intersect with mainstream media coverage of family, faith, the economy, health care, politics, sports, entertainment and a myriad of other issues, we at J-FLAG are committed to providing timely and accurate resources for journalists. J-FLAG believes the best news coverage allows readers, viewers and listeners to form their own conclusions based on factual information, compelling stories and appropriate context. We ask that you help give them that opportunity in your coverage of LGBT issues.

Taken from GLAAD Media Reference Guide, 4th Edition <http://www.glaad.org/files/MediaReferenceGuide2010.pdf>

The Interview:

Disclosure and Appropriateness

When is it appropriate to ask a subject to disclose his/her sexual orientation for a story? Is it ever? How do you ask if someone is gay without prying?

First and foremost, be sensitive. Realize that some LGBT people are out and proud and some are very much secretive about their non-heterosexual orientation (closeted). It is a personal decision and it isn't ethical for a reporter to pass judgment on someone else's decision or journey.

Second, think about why you want to know and why a reader would want to know about the individual's sexual orientation. Does it add to the story? Is it important to telling the person's own story? Would it seem out of place if you omitted it? Would it seem out of place if you added it?

Reasons to ask:

- It adds context to the story. Are you interviewing the person specifically because s/he is a member of the LGBT community? If so, ask to confirm and ask how s/he identifies.
- It is central to the story. Would it seem out of place if you didn't mention it? For example, if you are covering same-sex marriage, anti-discrimination laws, it's relevant to include that the person is or could be directly impacted by the events.
- If it isn't central to the story, what is your motivation for asking? Are you trying to add diversity to your story or highlight how different populations might be impacted differently?

Reasons to avoid asking or telling:

- It would cause harm to the subject.
- It's merely for prurient reasons or to sensationalize the story.
- Would you include the information if the subject were heterosexual? If yes, include it for an LGBT person. If not, think about why you want to include it: It needs to be relevant.

How to Frame the Question

If you aren't sure how to ask, here are two approaches. Use what is appropriate depending on your reporting style, the story and the subject.

Be matter of fact. Just ask, are you a member of the LGBT community? Or, are you gay? Or, do you have a partner? Treat it the same way you would someone's age or occupation – a normal aspect of a person that you can competently cover.

Be discreet and sensitive. If there is potential harm, or the person is a victim of a crime, use good judgment. Don't further victimize the person.

Here are a few ways to phrase the question:

- Some people reading or watching this might wonder if you have a personal stake in this issue. How do you define your sexual orientation?
- Do you mind if I ask, are you a member of the LGBT community?
- If you are comfortable telling me, do you identify as gay or lesbian?

A note of caution about asking transgender individuals to self-identify: Because transgender individuals often face higher rates of discrimination, proceed here with extreme caution. Make sure you have a strong inclination the subject identifies as transgender before you ask and only ask if it is absolutely relevant and necessary.

- Do not ask about hormones or surgery unless that is the story focus.
- Be very careful not to sensationalize interviews with transgender people.
- Use the name and personal pronouns that are consistent with how the individual lives/identifies publicly. When possible, ask which pronoun or term the subject prefers.

Glossary of Terms/Language

- AIDS:** Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, a medical condition that compromises the human immune system, leaving the body defenseless against opportunistic infections. Some medical treatments can slow the rate at which the immune system is weakened. Do not use the term “full-blown AIDS.” Individuals may be HIV-positive but not have AIDS. Avoid terms such as “AIDS sufferer” and “AIDS victim” because they imply powerlessness. Use “people with AIDS” or, if the context is medical, “AIDS patients.” *See HIV*
- biphobia:** Fear, hatred or dislike of bisexuality or bisexuals. May be harbored by lesbians, gays and transgender people in addition to heterosexuals. *See bisexual*
- bisexual:** As a noun, an individual attracted to both sexes. As an adjective, of or relating to sexual and affectional attraction to both sexes. Does not presume nonmonogamy. *See biphobia*
- buggery:** British English term. Buggery is very close in meaning to the term sodomy, and is often used interchangeably in law and popular speech.
- civil union:** A civil union provides same-sex couples some rights available to married couples in areas such as state taxes, medical decisions and estate planning. See commitment ceremony, domestic partner, marriage, relationships.
- closeted, in the closet:** Refers to a person who wishes to keep secret his or her sexual orientation or gender identity.
- coming out:** Short for “coming out of the closet.” Accepting and letting others know of one’s previously hidden sexual orientation or gender identity. *See closeted, outing*
- commitment ceremony:** A formal, marriage-like gathering that recognizes the declaration of members of the same sex to each other. It may be recognized by a religion but is not legally binding. *See civil unions, domestic partner, relationships, marriage*
- cross-dresser:** Preferred term for person who wears clothing most often associated with members of the opposite sex. Not necessarily connected to sexual orientation. Not synonymous with transgender or drag queen. *See transvestite, transsexual, transgender*
- cruising:** Visiting places where opportunities exist to meet potential sex partners. Not

exclusively a gay phenomenon

- domestic partner:** Unmarried partners who live together. Domestic partners may be of opposite sexes or the same sex. They may register in some municipalities and states and receive some of the benefits accorded to married couples. “Domestic partner” and “domestic partnership” are terms typically used in connection with legal and insurance matters. *See partner, relationships*
- downlow:** Usually refers to men who secretly have sex with men, often while in relationships with women, but do not identify as gay or bisexual. Sometimes abbreviated as DL. Use with caution, as people generally do not identify themselves with this term. *See MSM*
- drag:** Attire typically associated with the opposite sex.
- drag performers:** Entertainers who dress and act in styles typically associated with the opposite sex (drag queen for men, drag king for women). Not synonymous with transgender or cross-dressing.
- dyke:** Originally a pejorative term for a lesbian, it is now being reclaimed by some lesbians. Offensive when used as an epithet.
- “ex-gay” (adj.):** Describes the movement, mostly rooted in conservative religions, that aims to change the sexual attraction of individuals from same-sex to opposite-sex. Generally discredited in scientific and academic circles.
- fag, faggot:** Originally a pejorative term for a gay male, it is now being reclaimed by some gay men. Still extremely offensive when used as an epithet.
Other examples: *battyman, fish*
- families:** Proper term for identifying families led by LGBT parents. Identify parents’ sexual orientation only when germane. Do not use “gay families.” Mention genetic relationships or conception techniques only when germane. *See parent*
- gay:** An adjective that has largely replaced “homosexual” in referring to men who are sexually and affectionately attracted to other men. Avoid using as a singular noun. For women, “lesbian” is generally used, but when possible ask the subject which term she prefers. To include both, use “gay men and lesbians.” In headlines where space is an issue, “gays” is acceptable to describe both. *See lesbian*

- gender identity:** An individual's emotional and psychological sense of being male or female. Not necessarily the same as an individual's sex at birth.
- gender transition:** The preferred term for the process by which transgender people change their physical, sexual characteristics from those associated with their sex at birth. May include change of name, clothing, official documentation and medical treatments based on individual needs, which may include hormone therapy, hair removal and surgery. Not synonymous with sex reassignment. Avoid the antiquated term "sex change."
See sex reassignment, transgender
- heterosexism:** Presumption that heterosexuality is universal and/or superior to homosexuality. Also: prejudice, bias or discrimination based on such presumptions.
- HIV:** Human immunodeficiency virus. The virus that causes AIDS. "HIV virus" is redundant. "HIV-positive" means being infected with HIV but not necessarily having AIDS. AIDS doctors and researchers are using the term "HIV disease" more because there are other types of acquired immune deficiencies caused by toxins and rare but deadly diseases that are unrelated to what we now call AIDS.
See AIDS
- homo:** Pejorative term for homosexual. Use only if there is a compelling reason.
- homophobia:** Fear, hatred or dislike of homosexuality, gay men and lesbians. Restrict to germane usage, such as in quotations or opinions. Use "LGBT right opponents" or a similar phrase instead of "homophobes" when describing people who disagree with LGBT rights activism.
See biphobia, transphobia
- homosexual:** As a noun, a person who is attracted to members of the same sex. As an adjective, of or relating to sexual and affectional attraction to a member of the same sex. Use only in medical contexts or in reference to sexual activity.
For other usages, see gay, lesbian
- husband:** Acceptable term for a male, legally married partner of a man. Ask which term the subject prefers, if possible.
See lover, partner, wife
- intersex (adj.):** People born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia or an internal reproductive system that is not considered standard for either male or female. Parents and physicians usually will determine the sex of the child, resulting in surgery or hormone treatment. Many intersex adults seek and end to this practice.
- lesbian:** Preferred term, both as a noun and as an adjective, for women who are sexually

and affectionately attracted to other women. Some women prefer to be called “gay” rather than “lesbian”; when possible, ask the subject which term she prefers.

LGBT: Acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” Useful in headlines.

lifestyle: An inaccurate term sometimes used to describe the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Sexual orientation may be part of a broader lifestyle but is not one in itself, just as there is no “straight” lifestyle. Avoid usage.

See sexual orientation, sexual preference

lover: Term preferred by some individuals for a gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual person’s sexual partner. “Girlfriend,” “boyfriend” and “partner” are acceptable alternatives.

See husband, relationships, wife

MSM: Acronym for “men who have sex with men.” Term used usually in communities of color to describe men who secretly have sex with other men while maintaining relationships with women. Not synonymous with “bisexual.”

See down low

marriage: Advocates for the right to marry seek the legal rights and obligations of marriage, not a variation of it. Often, the most neutral approach is to avoid any adjective modifying the word “marriage.” For the times in which a distinction is necessary, “marriage for same-sex couples” is preferable in stories. When there is a need for shorthand description (such as in headline writing), “same-sex marriage” is preferred because it is more inclusive and more accurate than “gay.”

See civil union, commitment ceremony, domestic partner, relationships

obituaries: When reporting survivors, list partners of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender deceased in an order equivalent to spouses of heterosexual deceased.

openly gay/lesbian: As a modifier, “openly” is usually not relevant; its use should be restricted to instances in which the public awareness of an individual’s sexual orientation is germane.
Examples: Harvey Milk was the first openly gay San Francisco supervisor. “Ellen” was the first sitcom to feature an openly lesbian lead character. “Openly” is preferred over “acknowledged,” “avowed,” “admitted,” “confessed” or “practicing” because of their negative connotations.

outing
(from “out of the closet”): Publicly revealing the sexual orientation or gender identity of an

individual who has chosen to keep that information private. Also a verb: The magazine outed the senator in a front-page story. *See coming out, closeted*

parent: In general, along with “mother” and “father,” the proper term for a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person, whether single or in a relationship, raising a child or children. Because of the blended nature of many families led by LGBT parents, ask the subject which term he or she prefers, when possible. Mention a parent’s sexual orientation, genetic relationship to the child or conception technique only when germane. *See families*

partner: term for a person in a committed gay or lesbian relationship. *See husband, lover, relationships, wife*

pink triangle: Now a gay pride symbol, it was the symbol gay men were required to wear in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. Lesbians sometimes also use a black triangle. The pink triangle is part of J-FLAG’s logo.

practicing: Avoid this term to describe someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Use “sexually active” as a modifier in circumstances when public awareness of an individual’s behavior is germane.

Pride

(Day and/or march): Short for gay/lesbian pride, this term is commonly used to indicate the celebrations commemorating the Stonewall Inn riots of June 28, 1969. *See Stonewall*

queen: Originally a pejorative term for an effeminate gay man but often used acceptably as slang among LGBT people. Offensive when used as an epithet.

queer: Originally a pejorative term for gay, now being reclaimed by some gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people as a self-affirming umbrella term. Offensive when used as an epithet. Use only if there is a compelling reason.

rainbow flag: A flag of six equal horizontal stripes (red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet) symbolizing the diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.

relationships: Lesbian, gay and bisexual people use various terms to describe their commitments. Ask the individual what term he or she prefers, if possible. If not, “partner” is generally acceptable. *See husband, wife, lover, partner*

- safe sex, safer sex:** Sexual practices that minimize the possible transmission of HIV and other infectious agents. Some publications prefer “safer sex” to denote that no sexual contact is completely safe.
- sex change:** Avoid this antiquated term. *See gender transition, sex reassignment*
- sex reassignment:** The preferred term for the medical process by which transgender people change their physical, sexual characteristics to reflect their gender identity. May include surgery, hormone therapy and/or changes of legal identity. Often used with “surgery.” Synonymous with gender reassignment. Avoid the antiquated term “sex change.” *See gender transition*
- sexual orientation:** Innate sexual and/or emotional attraction. Use this term instead of “sexual preference.” *See lifestyle*
- sexual preference:** Avoid. Politically charged term implying that sexuality is the result of a conscious choice. *See sexual orientation*
- special rights:** Politically charged term used by opponents of civil rights for the LGBT community. Avoid. “LGBT rights,” “equal rights” or “gay and lesbian rights” are alternatives.
- Stonewall:** The Stonewall Inn tavern in New York City’s Greenwich Village was the site of several nights of raucous protests after a police raid on June 28, 1969. Although not the USA’s first gay civil rights demonstration, Stonewall is now regarded as the birth of the modern gay civil rights movement across the world.
- straight (adj.):** Heterosexual; describes a person whose sexual and affectional attraction is to someone of the opposite sex. As a noun, use “heterosexual” or “straight person.”
- tranny:** Often a pejorative term for a transgender person, it is now being reclaimed by some transgender people. Offensive when used as an epithet and should be avoided except in quotes or as someone’s self-identified term.
- transgender (adj.):** An umbrella term that refers to people whose physical, sexual characteristics may not match their gender identity. Some female and male cross-dressers, drag queens or kings, female or male impersonators, and intersex individuals may also identify as transgender. Use the name and personal pronouns that are consistent with how the individual lives publicly. When possible, ask which term the subject

prefers. As a noun, use “transgender people.”

See gender transition, intersex, sex reassignment

transgender man: A person who was considered female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. Transgender people sometimes use the acronym FTM, or female to male. Sometimes shortened colloquially to trans man. Use in news stories only when transgender status is germane; otherwise, identify a news subject as a man.

See transgender

transgender

woman:

A person who was considered male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. Transgender people sometimes use the acronym MTF, or male to female. Sometimes shortened colloquially to trans woman. Use in news stories only when transgender status is germane; otherwise, identify a news subject as a woman.

See transgender

transphobia:

Fear, hatred or dislike of transgender people or transsexuals. May be harbored by gays, lesbians and bisexuals in addition to heterosexuals.

See transgender, transsexual

transsexual

(n. and adj.):

Avoid this antiquated term in favor of “transgender” and “transgender people.” Some individuals prefer it, but it can carry misleading medical connotations.

See transgender, gender transition, sex reassignment

transvestite:

Avoid this antiquated term. Synonymous with cross-dresser.

wife:

Acceptable term for a female, legally married partner of a woman. Ask which term the subject prefers, if possible.

See husband, lover, partner, relationships

Offensive Terms To Avoid

Offensive: "homosexual" (n. or adj.)

Preferred: "gay" (adj.); "gay man" or "lesbian" (n.); "gay person/people"

Please use "gay" or "lesbian" to describe people attracted to members of the same sex. Because of the clinical history of the word "homosexual," it is aggressively used by anti-gay extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered – notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Please avoid using "homosexual" except in direct quotes. Please also avoid using "homosexual" as a style variation simply to avoid repeated use of the word "gay."

The Associated Press, The New York Times and The Washington Post restrict use of the term "homosexual".

Offensive: "homosexual relations/relationship," "homosexual couple," "homosexual sex," etc.

Preferred: "relationship" (or "sexual relationship"), "couple" (or, if necessary, "gay couple"), "sex," etc.

Identifying a same-sex couple as "a homosexual couple," characterizing their relationship as "a homosexual relationship," or identifying their intimacy as "homosexual sex" is extremely offensive and should be avoided. These constructions are frequently used by anti-gay extremists to denigrate gay people, couples and relationships.

As a rule, try to avoid labeling an activity, emotion or relationship "gay," "lesbian" or "bisexual" unless you would call the same activity, emotion or relationship "straight" if engaged in by someone of another orientation. In most cases, your readers, viewers or listeners will be able to discern people's sexes and/or orientations through the names of the parties involved, your depictions of their relationships, and your use of pronouns.

Offensive: "sexual preference"

Preferred: "sexual orientation" or "orientation"

The term "sexual preference" is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured." Sexual orientation is the accurate description of an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and straight men and women.

Offensive: "gay lifestyle" or "homosexual lifestyle"

Preferred: "gay lives," "gay and lesbian lives"

There is no single lesbian, gay or bisexual lifestyle. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are diverse in the ways they lead their lives. The phrase "gay lifestyle" is used to denigrate lesbians and gay men, suggesting that their orientation is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured".

Offensive: "admitted homosexual" or "avowed homosexual"

Preferred: "openly lesbian," "openly gay," "openly bisexual"

Dated term used to describe those who are openly lesbian, gay or bisexual or who have recently come out of the closet. The words "admitted" or "avowed" suggest that being gay is somehow shameful or inherently secretive. Avoid the use of the word "homosexual" in any case

Offensive: "gay agenda" or "homosexual agenda"

Preferred: Accurate descriptions of the issues (e.g., "inclusion in existing non-discrimination laws")

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are motivated by many of the same hopes, concerns and desires as other everyday Jamaicans. They seek to be able to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love. Their commitment to equality is one they share with many allies and advocates who are not necessarily LGBT. Notions of a so-called "homosexual agenda" are rhetorical inventions of anti-gay extremists seeking to create a climate of fear by portraying the pursuit of equal opportunity for LGBT people as sinister.

Offensive: "special rights"

Preferred: "equal rights" or "equal protection"

Anti-gay extremists frequently characterize equal protection of the law for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as "special rights" to incite opposition to such things as relationship recognition and inclusive non-discrimination laws.

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