

IT'S NOT
ABOUT
YOU



**Media, Entertainment & Arts
Alliance Guidelines for Reporting
on LGBTQIA+ Issues**



Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance Guidelines for Reporting on LGBTQIA+ Issues

These guidelines are designed to be read alongside the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics

Under the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics (the Code) members engaged in journalism commit themselves to Honesty, Fairness, Independence and Respect for the rights of others.

MEAA has created these guidelines to help members abide by the Code and to apply ethical conduct to their work to prevent the publishing or broadcasting of transphobic, homophobic, queerphobic and/or other harmful or stereotyping content and misinforming the public. This document covers a variety of cultural groups under the acronym LGBTQIA+ which is the internationally used term for the community.

These guidelines may be referred to during investigations of alleged breaches of the Code.

These guidelines were developed in collaboration with relevant organisations and individuals, to be easily used in a newsroom context with clear language and sections on terminology, best practice, resources, key organisations and anti-discrimination legislation.

Language, terminology and its use will evolve over time. This is a living document that will be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect this. It accompanies the MEAA Guidelines on Reporting Hate Speech and Extremism on racist attitudes.

We encourage users to think carefully and critically about the story before they start writing and whether it is relevant to refer to gender or sexual orientation at all.

If you feel uncomfortable about being instructed to cover, broadcast or publish an anti LGBTQIA+ perspective on any platform or medium including social media, seek advice from MEAA.



FURTHER INFORMATION

w: meaa.org

p: 1300 656 513

fb: facebook.com/withmeaa

tw: twitter.com/withMEAA

Terminology

Community/population terms

LGBTQIA+

Initialism for ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Plus’. Other identities are covered by the + symbol. This term is the internationally used term for the population. As this document covers a variety of cultural groups, this document uses this term to refer to the general population.

LGBTIQA+SB

Initialism for ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual + Sistergirl and Brotherboy.’ This term includes Australian First Nations gender identities and is used within an Australian context to address the community/population. Other identities are covered by the + symbol.

Queer

While this term has been reclaimed for some people, this term is not accepted by all and should not be used as a catch-all term. It should only be used by people wishing to identify as queer. This term should also not be used when referring to people with intersex variations.

Community or population

The existence of a single community envisions a homogeneous group with shared goals and characteristics. It fails to account for individuals who lack agency or community connectedness, or communities and populations with distinct characteristics, goals and concerns. The term population can be helpful in avoiding some of these presumptions of homogeneity and singular shared interests.

Pride

Celebration of LGBTQIA+ culture and an ongoing movement campaigning for equal rights for LGBTQIA+ people.

Marriage Equality

The global campaign for anyone to choose and be legally married to their partner regardless of their legal, stated or personal gender identity or sexual orientation. Legal marriage allows partners to not just celebrate a union but to have the right to be present at their partner’s deathbeds and sickbeds, be listed as beneficiaries and in some cases to inherit and access services that would otherwise be denied to them. These will differ depending on location and jurisdiction.

Same Sex Marriage is also a term often used interchangeably for this campaign.

Sexual orientation

Lesbian

A woman who is attracted to women. Some may also use the term **Gay** to describe themselves.

Gay

A man who is attracted to men.

Bisexual

A person who is attracted to people of their own gender and genders different to their own. The degree of attraction may vary.

Pansexual

A person who is attracted to people regardless of their sexual orientation/gender.

Takatāpui

Traditional Maori word used for an intimate partner of the same sex and is now an umbrella term for LGBT Maori people. Do not use it for non-Maori people.

Asexual and Aromantic

Asexual (“Ace”)

A person who has little or no sexual attraction to anyone. This occurs on a spectrum.

Aromantic (“Aro”)

A person who has little or no romantic attraction to anyone. This occurs on a spectrum.

Demisexual

The person does not feel sexual attraction unless they have first established a strong emotional connection with someone.

Grey-Ace (“Grey-A”, “Greysexual”)

The person does not normally experience sexual attraction but may experience it rarely. The experience is so rare that they prefer to identify as Grey-Ace over any other orientation.

Gender identity

Cisgender

A person whose gender is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth.

Transgender, trans

A person whose gender is different to the gender that they were assigned at birth. Do not use transsexual or transgendered. When using trans ensure it is written as an adjective with spacing as follows: **trans person, trans man, trans woman**.

Deadname

A name held by a trans person prior to transition that should never be used.

Non-binary, nonbinary

A person whose gender does not fit within a binary of male and female gender identities. Many nonbinary people also label themselves **trans** but this is not universal.

Agender

A person who does not identify as being or having any gender.

Genderqueer

A person whose gender does not fit within male or female identities. Many labels are used by different people for genders not within male or female boxes. It is important to ask someone what labels apply to them.

Genderfluid, genderflux

A person whose gender changes often or is constantly in flux. Many other gender labels are used by trans people and what someone goes by may differ according to context — ask.

Gender expression

The external presentation of one’s gender as expressed through one’s name, clothing, behaviour, hairstyle or voice, and which may/may not conform to socially defined behaviours and characteristics typically associated with specific genders.

Gender nonconforming

General descriptor of voluntary actions & presentations that do not match a cis-normative perspective of a person’s gender.



Culturally specific terms

Note: Culturally specific terms are not direct analogues for identities and orientations listed previously.

First Nations specific terms

Sistergirl

Sistergirl is considered to be a culturally as well as socially accepted term to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander transgender people who identify as female (who were assigned male at birth).

Brotherboy

Brotherboy is considered to be a culturally as well as a socially accepted term to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander transgender people who identify as male (who were assigned female at birth).

New Zealand specific terms

Fa'afafine

Samoan term for males who perform traditional female roles. Does not necessarily identify people as transgender but is a historically and currently used word within Polynesian communities.

Takatāpui, takataapui

The Māori word meaning a devoted partner of the same sex.

Tangata ira tāne

Someone born biologically female who has a male gender identity.

Whakawahine, hinehī, hinehua

Terms describing someone born biologically male who has a female gender identity.

Broader Pacific Island terms

Akava'ine (Cook Islands)

Mahu (Tahiti and Hawaii)

Vakasalewalewa (Fiji)

Palopa (Papua New Guinea)

Other cultural terms

Hijra

General and legally recognised term in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan for a person identifying as a third gender, asexual or transgender. Also referred to as **Kinnar** among other terms or, in Urdu, **Khawaja Sira**. Ask what a person identifies as.

Two-spirit

An umbrella term for gender identity and sexual orientation variation for First Nations Americans/ Native Americans defined in the 1990s. Always ask and opt to use the specific Native American cultural term for the person referred to rather than this term.

Variations in sex characteristics

Intersex people, also termed people with innate variations of sex characteristics, people with intersex variations, or people with disorders or differences of sex development ('DSD').

These are innate (congenital) traits where physical characteristics are perceived to differ from norms for female or male bodies creating risks or experiences of stigma and discrimination.

Many different traits exist including androgen insensitivity, 5-alpha reductase deficiency, 17-beta-hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase 3 deficiency, sex chromosome variations, gonadal dysgenesis, micropenis, and many others.

It is better to be as specific as possible about the population you are covering or referring to when reporting. Always ask individuals what terminology they prefer.

The population of people with these variations includes infants, children, adolescents and adults.

Having an intersex variation should never be taken to imply gender transition or identification with any particular sex or gender categories, sexual or gender identities.

Evidence suggests that most people with intersex variations identify with the sex observed or assigned at birth. A history of association of intersex traits or 'DSDs' with third sex categories makes disclosure difficult for many people, particularly those who do not wish to have their social and legal status contested.

Relationships

Monogamous

A person who chooses to be in a single relationship at a time.

Polyamorous

People who choose to be in multiple romantic relationships with different people simultaneously. Do not use the term polygamous as an alternative.

HIV/AIDS terminology

HIV

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus that attacks the human immune system and can be transmitted by bodily fluids such as blood or semen. There is currently no cure, but there is pre- and post-exposure preventative medication.

AIDS

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome encompasses a range of conditions that occur when a person's immune system is seriously damaged by HIV infection. Someone can be HIV-positive without having developed any of the illnesses that constitute AIDS.

Do use: *person living with HIV, HIV-positive person, HIV infection, HIV-positive, HIV/AIDS, HIV test, affected communities, high-risk behaviour, risk of HIV infection.*

Don't use: *AIDS virus, AIDS victim, HIV sufferer, AIDS sufferer, AIDS patient, AIDS carrier, AIDS-infected, high-risk group, risk of AIDS.*

Explanatory note:

Journalists should avoid language that is derogatory or perpetuates myths or stereotypes about HIV, people who live with HIV or communities most affected by HIV.

Do not use terms such as *HIV risk group*, which implies that membership of a particular group rather than behaviour is the significant factor in HIV transmission. This has been used historically for LGBTQIA+ people and is incorrect.

Discrimination and hate-speech related terminology

Homophobia

The irrational hatred, intolerance and fear of anybody same-sex attracted.

Transphobia

The irrational hatred, intolerance and fear of transgender or gender diverse people. Do not term transphobia as TERF or gender critical by default.

Aphobia

The irrational hatred, intolerance and fear of anybody who identifies as asexual or aromantic.

Biphobia

The irrational hatred, intolerance and fear towards bisexuality and bisexual people.

Gender critical

A term for people who academically critique the social construct of gender. Do not automatically conflate this term with TERF unless the person is both gender critical and a TERF, which can occur.

Endosex, endosexism

An antonym or opposite of intersex. Discrimination against people with intersex variations is sometimes termed endosexism. Like the term intersex itself, this term is not well understood. Individuals with intersex variations may experience homophobia or transphobia (including by association with LGBTQIA+ populations) but also body shaming and ableism.

TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist)

This is not an umbrella term for anyone who is transphobic and is not part of a feminist movement. These are people, most commonly women, who deny that trans people exist (they are instead ‘deluded’ or ‘mentally ill’), or believe that trans people are deceitful, and/or predatory and so TERFs fight for the denial/erasure of trans people’s rights. These views are broadly incompatible with radical feminism. The term TERF may be perceived as pejorative.

Forced marriage

Forced marriage can occur when a community, group or sometimes a state will force a person to marry against their will. This can occur when someone does not identify as a perceived appropriate sexual orientation and removes a person’s right to choose whom they marry. It can also occur at a young age.

Corrective rape

The crime of sexual assault of a person in order to ‘correct’ that person’s sexual orientation.

Conversion practice

The practice, usually by religious institutions, of attempting to ‘cure’ a person of their gender identity and/or sexuality, through psychological and/or sexual abuse. Avoid using conversion therapy where possible as it conflates with legitimate therapeutic practice.

Misgender

To refer to someone (especially a transgender person) using a term, pronoun or form of address that does not correctly reflect the gender that they identify with.

Gender dysphoria (experience)

The experience of distress or unease from being misgendered or not treated as the correct gender.

Gender dysphoria (diagnosis)

A DSM-5 diagnosis characterised by a marked incongruence between one’s experienced gender and physical characteristics, and a strong desire for medical affirmation.

Notes

While some aspects of being LGBTQIA+ can be explained by referring to “identities” or “communities”, there are also other aspects better explained by terms like “bodies”, “attributes”, “populations” and “characteristics”. Always discuss with your source what term is best and seek advice from the appropriate organisations.

This is not an exhaustive list of definitions or terminology. Please check the resources section for links to updated lists and definitions.



Guidelines

Under the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics members engaged in journalism commit themselves to Honesty, Fairness, Independence and Respect for the rights of others.

Clauses 1, 2, 4 and 11 of the Code require that reporting is presented fairly, accurately, without bias or distortion and that journalists must respect personal privacy.

These guidelines help members understand how their work and their practice can align with the Code when it comes to reporting on people and issues within the LGBTQIA+ population.

It is recommended that you provide your sources with a copy of these guidelines for their information.

Identification

Different views on terminology will exist amongst and within various generational and socio-cultural sectors of the community. Always ask a person for the terms they use.

Allow people with variations of sex characteristics to state what terminology they use as not all may use the term intersex.

Avoid referring to or 'outing' anyone's sexuality, sex characteristics or gender in an article/broadcast/piece of work without their permission. When in doubt, ask the person how they want to be identified.

It is acceptable grammatically to use the singular 'they', 'them' and 'their' in a story if these are the person's pronouns. Do not assume pronouns. Always ask any source what their pronouns are. Xe/xem/xyr/xir are also valid pronouns ('neopronouns').

Do not use the term "preferred pronouns." "Pronouns" is sufficient.

Refer to people using their current names not their deadnames.

Be aware that your sources may have experienced trauma regardless of how they choose to identify or the terminology they use.



Do not use 'alleged' in referring to identities or characteristics. Sexual and gender identities and physical characteristics are real and valid.

Only use umbrella terms such as "LGBTQIA+" when referring to a broader community/population, not an individual.

When creating headlines avoid using "gay" "trans" or "queer" as a synonym for all LGBTQIA+ people.

Some terms are only to be used by those within the community as it is part of reclaiming former slurs. Even if the reporter is part of the community, it is best not to use these terms when communicating to a wider, more varied audience.

In the rare case that you must refer to it, it is best to say a person was designated/assigned a gender at birth and has transitioned. Use their current name not their deadname. Do not state that they were “born a male/ female”.

Avoid asking for “before” and “after” images to demonstrate transition.

Bias

Wherever possible, strive for accuracy and check your quotes and facts with your subjects and sources prior to publication or broadcast.

Avoid referring to sexual, gender and other characteristics as trends or movements. Never imply that anyone’s sexuality or sexual identity is a phase or a deception.

Avoid mentioning a person’s sexuality, sex characteristics or gender if it is not relevant to the story.

Avoid conflating a person’s relationship with their sexuality, sex characteristics, gender or other attributes. Avoid conflating the intersex community with the LGBTQIA+ community as not all will identify this way and intersex does not automatically mean that they are part of it. Avoid using stereotypes to describe appearance and behaviour.

Diversity of sources within the LGBTQIA+ community is important. Using the same sources does not convey the variety of opinions, attitudes, experiences and ideas within the population and one person cannot speak for all others. It is important to create and maintain a diverse network of sources.

Avoid using tone or statements that portray those in the LGBTQIA+ community as victims or needing saving. Stories about the LGBTQIA+ community do not need to focus on victimhood – people have varied life experiences and can be successful in different aspects of life. Stories also do not need to focus on coming out and surgeries or the right to marry.

Avoid stories that frame a person as the “first openly X person to do Y” if possible. People prior to the person in the story may have chosen not to be public or explicit about their identities or may not use terminology that we recognise.

Safety & minimising harm

If a person’s sexuality, sex characteristics or gender are to be identified, confirm that you have permission to publish details such as their name, workplace or hometown/neighbourhood/suburb, and where possible, opt not to do so.

Allow a source to use an alias/pseudonym for safety when discussing issues relating to sexual orientation, sex characteristics or gender identity.

Avoid using photographs or imagery of LGBTQIA+ people without their permission and always consider the risk of unauthorised images endangering vulnerable people.

Do not pressure a person to be part of a story, or speak to or introduce family members for the sake of a story. Relationships may be complicated and people may not be out to family members for safety or other reasons.

Consider the potential response to any story you write, publish or broadcast including those within the comment section and on social networks. Where possible, consider including resources for support services and organisations for people who may experience distress. Also consider disabling the comment section on particular stories.

Whenever suicide is mentioned as part of a story, please consider disabling any comment sections and include links and information for support services.

If the subject of a story is a minor, both the subject and their family must be given editorial input to prevent or avoid any long-lasting trauma occurring.

Independence

It is inappropriate to ask a transgender person questions about surgeries they may or may not have had. Being transgender is also not a medical disorder and is not recognised as one by medical professionals.

If you must use a medical expert as a source to comment on transgender issues, where possible use someone who identifies as transgender themselves or someone who works with and is trusted by the community. It is important to verify that they are allies. A link to a list is in the resources section.

Language around intersex issues used by the medical community and the courts may be experienced as stigmatising or motivated by a perceived need for medical treatment. Surgeries on preschool children in Australia have been described as “genital enhancement” operations, or, in other cases, as necessary for “appropriate urination”, a phrase used to describe the idea that boys need to be able to stand to urinate. These interventions may be described as “functional”, despite reflecting social and cultural stereotypes. Australian clinical reports continue in 2020 to refer to “surgical options” in determining sex assignment in cases of doubt.

Governance

Know your discrimination legislation

The rights of LGBTQIA+ people are protected under a range of Commonwealth and State laws. Journalists must respect and follow them closely, including when reporting and quoting the public statements of others.

Anti-discrimination legislation in Australia and New Zealand has expanded in recent times to define a wide range of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics.

Serious penalties can apply to journalists who break the law and publish discriminatory content. Harassment, intimidation or incitement of violence against LGBTQIA+ people are recognised as serious crimes that can result in a prison conviction.

Regulatory organisations

The Australian Human Rights Commission has statutory responsibilities under various Federal Acts to investigate breaches of Anti-Discrimination laws. It provides useful advice and guidance to the public at humanrights.gov.au/complaints/information-people-making-complaints.

The Human Rights Commission of New Zealand plays a similar role and publishes guidance at hrc.co.nz/news/commission-encourages-people-engage-justice-ministries-hate-speech-consultation/.

In addition to the federal legislation, each state and territory in Australia has equal opportunity and anti-discrimination agencies, with statutory responsibilities for their local laws. Journalists should ensure they consider the rules for these jurisdictions.

Complaints against MEAA members are also subject to investigation by the National Ethics Committee, which can apply a range of sanctions for breaches of the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics.

What to do under editorial pressure?

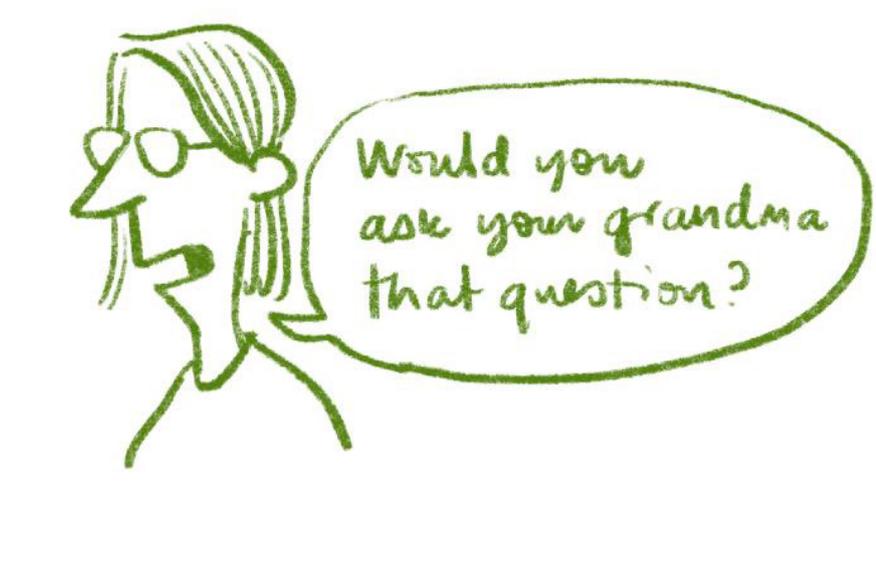
Speak up and have a conversation with colleagues whenever you feel a story is being pushed the ‘wrong way’. Nine times out of ten, they can help solve the problem.

Always seek direct guidance from a qualified legal adviser if you are instructed by editors to report in a way that may offend, harm, humiliate or intimidate LGBTQIA+ people and breach the laws and guidelines you follow.

Keep a private record of the advice and conversations you have in the newsroom around contentious stories in case your work is subject to a complaint.

Ring your union for confidential support if you encounter sustained editorial pressure to report the wrong way. MEAA has a network of activists to help and provide guidance.

If all else fails, as a last resort you have the right to email your editor and ask that your byline is removed from a story you are not comfortable with. Keep this email as a legal record of your objection to their approach.



Appendix

Useful resources for journalists

Transhub's list of medical professionals

transhub.org.au/find-a-doctor

Transcend Australia's list of terminology

transcendaus.org/terminology-inclusive-language/

Transhub's glossary for language and terminology

transhub.org.au/language

ACT Aces: Asexual Experiences Survey

diversityact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ACT-Aces-Asexual-Experiences-Survey-Final-Report.pdf

Black Rainbow's glossary for language and terminology

blackrainbow.org.au

MEAA would like to thank the following organisations and groups for their contributions to these guidelines

- ACON
- Black Rainbow
- Transcend Australia
- Intersex Human Rights Australia
- Australian Asexuals
- First Nations Rainbow
- Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations

Illustrations by Cathy Wilcox

Published November 2021

Authorised by Paul Murphy, Chief Executive, MEAA, 245 Chalmers Street, Redfern NSW 2016