

glaad  **media reference guide**

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INTRODUCTION

Fair, Accurate & Inclusive

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 LGBT people has 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 LGBT 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 GLAAD are committed to providing timely and accurate resources for journalists. GLAAD 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.

GLAAD's Media Reference Guide is intended to be used by journalists reporting for mainstream media outlets and by creators in entertainment media who want to tell our stories fairly and accurately. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive glossary of language used within the LGBT community, nor is it a prescriptive guide for LGBT people.



Sarah Kate Ellis
President & CEO
GLAAD

AP & NEW YORK TIMES STYLE

In recent years, the nation's leading media style books have published guidelines for language and terminology use when reporting on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives, issues and stories.

The Associated Press and *The New York Times* both restrict usage of the term "homosexual" - a word whose clinical history and pejorative connotations are routinely exploited by anti-gay extremists to suggest that lesbians and gay men are somehow diseased or psychologically and emotionally disordered. Editors at the AP and *New York Times* also have instituted rules against the use of inaccurate terminology such as "sexual preference" and "gay lifestyle."

Following are the LGBT-related editorial guidelines from The Associated Press and *The New York Times* as they appear in their respective style guides.

Associated Press (2013)

gay

Used to describe men and women attracted to the same sex, though *lesbian* is the more common term for women. Preferred over *homosexual* except in clinical contexts or references to sexual activity. Include sexual orientation only when it is pertinent to a story, and avoid references to "sexual preference" or to a gay or alternative "lifestyle."

lesbian

See *gay*.

husband, wife

Regardless of sexual orientation, *husband* or *wife* is acceptable in all references to individuals in any legally recognized marriage.

transgender

Use the pronoun preferred by the individuals who have acquired the physical characteristics of the opposite sex or present themselves in a way that does not correspond with their sex at birth. If that preference is not expressed, use the pronoun consistent with the way the individuals live publicly. See *transsexual*.

transsexual

A person who changes gender by undergoing surgical procedures. See *transgender*.

New York Times (2013)

bisexual.

Do not use the slang shorthand *bi*.

homosexuality.

See bisexual; gay; lesbian; sexual orientation.

gay (adj.)

is preferred to *homosexual* in most references. Generally confine *homosexual* in specific references to sexual activity or clinical orientation. *Gay* may refer to homosexual men or more generally to homosexual men and women. In specific references to women, *lesbian* is preferred. When the distinction is useful, write *gay men and lesbians*. Do not use *gay* as a singular noun. As a noun, the plural *gays* is acceptable, but avoid the singular *gay*. *Also see sexual orientation.*

gay rights.

Advocates for gay issues are concerned that the term may invite resentment by implying “special rights” that are denied other citizens; the advocates prefer phrases like *equal rights* or *civil rights for gay people*. But the shorter phrase is in wide use and often indispensable for confined headlines. When it occurs, define the issues precisely.

homosexuality.

See bisexual; gay; lesbian; sexual orientation.

lesbian

(adj. and n.). Lowercase except in the names of organizations. Lesbian women is redundant. *See sexual orientation.*

AP & NEW YORK TIMES STYLE

L.G.B.T.

Except in quotations and organization names, seek alternatives to this cumbersome abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. (Take care, however, not to inadvertently exclude relevant information; for example, if antidiscrimination legislation specifically applies to bisexual and transgender people, avoid suggesting that it only affects gay people.) If the abbreviation is necessary as a first reference, deftly explain it at some point. Note that some groups use G.L.B.T. instead. Do not use other, less familiar variations that include additional categories.

same-sex marriage, gay marriage.

Both terms are acceptable, though the former is sometimes preferred to make clear that the expression covers both gay men and lesbians. Normally use *wife* or *husband* for people who are legally married. (*Spouse* is also accurate for either partner in any legal marriage, but do not use it simply to avoid *husband* and *wife* for same-sex couples.)

sex changes.

See *transgender*.

sexual orientation.

Never *sexual preference*, which carries the disputed implication that sexuality is a matter of choice. Cite a person's sexual orientation only when it is pertinent and its pertinence is clear to the reader. *Also see bisexual; gay; lesbian; straight.*

sexual preference.

Use *sexual orientation* instead.

straight,

meaning heterosexual, is classed as slang by some dictionaries and standard by others. Avoid any use that conveys an in-group flavor. But use the term freely (adj. only) in phrases drawing a contrast with *gay*: *The film attracted gay and straight audiences alike.*

transgender

(adj.) is an overall term for people whose current identity differs from their sex at birth, whether or not they have changed their biological characteristics. Cite a person's transgender status only when it is pertinent and its pertinence is clear to the reader. Unless a former name is newsworthy or pertinent, use the name and pronouns (*he, his, she, her, hers*) preferred by the transgender person. If no preference is known, use the pronouns consistent with the way the subject lives publicly.

Transgender is generally preferable to the older *transsexual*. Do not use the offensive slang *tranny*.

transvestite

is outdated and often viewed as offensive. Use *cross-dresser* instead to describe someone of either sex who sometimes dresses in clothing associated with the opposite sex. Note that cross-dressing does not necessarily indicate that someone is gay or transgender.

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GLAAD is dedicated to promoting and ensuring fair, accurate, and inclusive representation of people and events in the media as a means of eliminating homophobia and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

For the latest updates, visit GLAAD's Media Reference Guide at www.glaad.org.