

A reference guide for media  
practitioners and news outlets

# Media Guide



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And we would also love to thank fraycollege for their insights and inputs in the creation of this guide and also for their support in changing narratives with the publication of 5 media pieces in each partner country.

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# Media and Reference Guide for Media Practitioners

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# Foreword

Society's freedom and dignity is reflected in how our journalists report on the most vulnerable, and state accountability. There are many indicators to consider when assessing media freedom – some of these are editorial independence that holds no fear or favour with the State, religious groups or with business.

Ordinary people rely on journalists to convey stories, news, and debates be it through radio, television or print. From far rural areas to large cities, people want to hear from journalists. Surely, we would believe a journalist before we would believe the story of a politician. Why so? Because we believe that journalists ensure that their stories are verified, checked, and that human interest and accountability comes before any propogandist agenda.

Unfortunately, within Africa, this has not always been the experiences of LGBTI+ persons, rather, we know that journalists have intentionally outed LGBTI+ persons merely to harm them, we have a record of a trans womxn that was killed in Tanzania after a tabloid published her photograph on the front page. Her family believed this brought shame to them and poisoned her. A trans man in Malawi was brutally attacked, his home and car destroyed after he had an interview on national television. So, even when media has good intentions we know that we have so much more to do when it comes to changing public mindset and this is often difficult when governments use media platforms to fuel hate against LGBTI+ persons.

Over the past two years, Iranti embarked on a courageous journey of bringing LGBTI+ organisations in five southern African countries together and pairing them with journalists within their countries to engage on how authentic, accurate and human-interest stories can help change hearts and minds in Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. No easy call to make as this project occurs over a period in which most of the countries embarked on their national elections. A time when the moral debate becomes the smoke screen for state accountability on non-service delivery and increased poverty. LGBTI+ persons become vigilant and safety plans were made to ensure safety in this time.

This amazing project, although small in terms of its reach made a significant difference to creating journalism language for reporting and creating collective empathy on bringing important stories back to the people.

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Journalists asked for a guide and we responded. This guide will always be a work in progress, but we hope it's a start to creating journalism that matters and leading in shaping public interest.

Iranti will continue working with our partners, Wings to Transcend in Namibia, LEGABIBO in Botswana, LITE in Malawi, TREAT in Zimbabwe, and Intersex South Africa

We trust you will use the guide as a media resource. Let's continue to centre authentic human-interest stories and ensure that media freedom and independence prevails.

Let us all fight to ensure that all people have safety, dignity and freedom.



**Jabulani Chen Pereira**  
Executive Director.

# Glossary of terms

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**Agender:**

A person who does not identify with any gender, or intentionally doesn't follow expectations of gender; does not determine gender expression. (see below).

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**Ally:**

A term for people who are supportive of LGBTQI+ social movements and rights but do not identify as LGBTQI+.

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**Androgynous:**

A person with both masculine and feminine qualities.

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**Aromantic:**

People who do not experience romantic attraction.

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**Asexual:**

An adjective used to describe people who do not experience sexual attraction (For more information, visit [asexuality.org](http://asexuality.org).)

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**Assumed gender:**

The gender a person is assumed to be by society, based on their sex assigned at birth and/or their gender presentation.

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**Bisexual:**

A person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional connections with those of the same or another gender. People may experience this attraction in differing ways and degrees over their lifetime. Bisexual people need not have had specific sexual experiences. In fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual. Do not use a hyphen in the word "bisexual," and only capitalise bisexual when used at the beginning of a sentence.

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**Biphobia:**

Fear of bisexuals, often based on stereotypes, including inaccurate associations with infidelity, promiscuity, and transmission of sexually transmitted infections. Intolerance, bias, or prejudice is usually a more accurate description of antipathy toward bisexual people.

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**Butch:**

Someone who identifies and presents themselves as masculine. While it's most often used to talk about masculine lesbians, butch can also describe masculine queer men or queer people of other genders.

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**Cisgender:**

A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender. "Cis-" is a Latin prefix meaning "on the same side as," and is therefore an antonym of "trans-". A more widely understood way to describe people who are not transgender is simply to say non-transgender people.

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**Closeted:**

Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation. Better to simply refer to someone as "not out" about being LGBTQI+. Some individuals may be out to some people in their lives, but not to others, due to fear of rejection, harassment, violence, losing a job, or other concerns.

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**Coming out:**

A lifelong process of self-acceptance. People forge an LGBTQI+ identity first to themselves, and then they may reveal it to others. Publicly sharing one's identity may or may not be part of coming out.

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**Cross-dresser:**

While anyone may wear clothes associated with a different sex, the term cross-dresser is typically used to refer to men who occasionally wear clothes, makeup, and accessories culturally associated with womxn. Those men may identify as heterosexual. This activity is a form of gender expression and not done for entertainment purposes. Cross-dressers do not wish to permanently change their sex or live full-time as womxn.

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**Dead name:**

The name given to a transgender person at birth, which they often change when they transition. It should not be used to refer to them. Use the person's chosen name instead.

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**Female to male/FTM:**

A term used to talk about transgender men, who were assigned female at birth and have since transitioned to male.

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**FTX:**

Describes someone who is assigned female at birth and identifies as nonbinary/genderqueer/GNC\*/etc., and who may also be medically transitioning and/or presenting their gender in a way that is not in congruence with their assigned sex at birth. It is in the same family as the FTM and MTF labels, but provides non-binary/genderqueer/GNC/etc. folks space to identify themselves (and their transition) outside the aforementioned binary options. \*see below.

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**Gay:**

The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). Sometimes lesbian (n. or adj.) is the preferred term for womxn. Avoid identifying gay people as homosexuals, an outdated term considered derogatory and offensive to many lesbian and gay people.

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**Gender dysphoria:**

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association released the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), which replaced the outdated entry "Gender Identity Disorder" with gender dysphoria, and changed the criteria for diagnosis. The necessity of a psychiatric diagnosis remains controversial, as both psychiatric and medical authorities recommend individualised medical treatment through hormones and/or surgeries to treat gender dysphoria. Some transgender advocates believe the inclusion of gender dysphoria in the DSM is necessary in order to advocate for health insurance that covers the medically necessary treatment recommended for transgender people.

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**Gender expression:**

External manifestations of gender, expressed through, among others, a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice, and/or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to align their gender expression with their gender identity, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth.

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**Gender identity:**

A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity of man or womxn (or boy or girl). For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices (see non-binary and/or genderqueer below). Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.

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**Gender marker:**

The identifier which classifies a person within a particular sex category.

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**Gender non-conforming:**

A term used to describe people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. Please note that not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender; nor are all transgender people gender non-conforming. Many people have gender expressions that are not entirely conventional – that fact alone does not make them transgender. Many transgender men and womxn have gender expressions that are conventionally masculine or feminine. Simply being transgender does not make someone gender non-conforming. The term is not a synonym for transgender and should only be used if someone self-identifies as gender non-conforming.

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**Gender-fluid:**

Someone for whom gender identity and presentation is a spectrum. A gender-fluid person doesn't confine themselves to one gender, or even a few. Instead, they may fluctuate between presenting as feminine, masculine, neither, or both.

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**Hate crimes:**

When specific groups are targets of crimes involving physical and mental abuse, like rape, assault and name-calling/defamation.

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**Heteronormative:**

Promoting heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation.

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**Heterosexism:**

Promoting heterosexuality as superior or assuming that all people are heterosexual.

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**Heterosexual:**

An adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also "*straight*".

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**Homophobia:**

Fear or hatred of homosexuals or homosexuality. Homophobia is a human-made construct often fed by political, religious, legal and even pseudo medical justifications. Intolerance, bias, or prejudice is usually a more accurate description of antipathy toward LGBTQI+ people.

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**Homosexual:**

An outdated clinical term for queer people, considered derogatory and offensive.

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**Intersex:**

An umbrella term describing people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female. Those variations are also sometimes referred to as Differences of Sex Development (DSD.) Avoid the outdated and derogatory term "hermaphrodite". While some people can be intersex and also identify as transgender, the two are separate and should not be conflated.

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**LGBTQI(A)+:**

Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and more (+). The term "gay community" should be avoided, as it does not accurately reflect the diversity of the community. Rather, LGBTI+ community is preferred.

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**Lesbian:**

A womxn whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other womxn. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay womxn. Avoid identifying lesbians as "homosexuals," a derogatory term.

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**Male to female/MTF:**

A term used to talk about transgender womxn, who were assigned male at birth and have since transitioned to female.

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**Misgender:**

When someone uses the wrong pronoun or term to refer to a person, such as calling a transgender boy "her" or a transgender girl "him."

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**Non-binary/gender-queer:**

Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and womxn. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and womxn, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for transgender and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer. Non-binary is sometimes shortened to enby or NB.

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**Openly gay:**

Describes people who self-identify as gay in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. Also openly lesbian, openly bisexual, openly transgender, openly queer. While accurate and commonly used, the phrase still implies a confessional aspect to publicly acknowledging one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

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**Out:**

Refers to a person who self-identifies as LGBTQI+ in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. Preferred to openly gay.

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**Outing:**

The act of publicly declaring (sometimes based on rumour and/or speculation) or revealing another person's sexual orientation or gender identity without that person's consent. Considered inappropriate by a large portion of the LGBTQI+ community.

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**Pansexual:**

A person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional connections with any person, regardless of gender identity.

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**Pass/passing:**

Refers to the ability of an LGBTQI+ person to go out into society and be assumed to be either straight or cisgender. Feminine queer womxn, for example, often pass for straight and transgender people may pass for cisgender at some point after their transition.

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**Queer:**

An adjective used by some people, particularly younger people, whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual (e.g. queer person, queer womxn). Typically, for those who only identify as queer, the terms lesbian, gay, and bisexual are perceived to be too limiting and/or fraught with cultural connotations they feel don't apply to them. But many people identify as both queer and another sexual orientation (e.g. queer and a lesbian). Once considered a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBTQI+ people to describe themselves; however, it is not a universally accepted term, even within the LGBTQI+ community. The Q in LGBTQI+ typically means queer and, less often, questioning.

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**Questioning:**

The process of seeking information and support when uncertain of one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

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**Safe space:**

A positive environment that enables all persons, including sexual and gender nonconforming individuals, to be free to express themselves without fear of discrimination or violation of their rights and dignity.

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**Sex:**

The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy. (This is what is written on the birth certificate.) A person's sex, however, is actually a combination of bodily characteristics, including chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.

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**Sex reassignment surgery:**

Sex reassignment surgery (SRS), also called gender confirmation surgery (GCS), refers to doctor-supervised surgical interventions, and is only one small part of transition. Avoid the phrase "sex change operation." Do not refer to someone as being "pre-op" or "post-op." Not all transgender people choose to, or can afford to, undergo medical surgeries.

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**Sexual orientation:**

Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a straight womxn. Avoid the offensive term "sexual preference," which is used to suggest that being gay, lesbian, or bisexual is voluntary and therefore curable. People need not have had specific sexual experiences to know their own sexual orientation; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all.

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**Sodomy laws:**

Laws that prohibit consensual sexual acts among consenting adults. Such acts are seldom fully defined but can include anal and oral sex. Sodomy laws are most often used to target men who have sex with men, but also apply to womxn in many jurisdictions. "Sodomy" should never be used to describe same-sex relationships or sexual orientation.

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**SOGI(E):**

Acronyms used to refer to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression(s) (for example, "SOGI(E) related discrimination").

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**They/their:**

The singular "they" pronoun can be used to describe someone who identifies as neither male nor female. It is increasingly common for people who have a non-binary gender identity to use they/them as their pronoun. For example: "Jacob writes eloquently about their non-binary identity. They have also appeared frequently in the media to talk about their family's reaction to their gender expression." It can also be used when you don't want to assign a gender to someone. For example: "Every individual should be able to express their gender in a way that is comfortable for them."

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**Trans:**

Used as shorthand to mean transgender. Includes a wide variety of identities under the transgender umbrella. Because its meaning is not precise or widely understood, be careful when using it with audiences who may not understand what it means. Avoid the term, unless used in a direct quote or in cases where you can clearly explain its meaning in the context of your story.

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**Transfeminine:**

Someone who was assigned male at birth but identifies and presents as feminine. This person may or may not identify as a womxn.

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**Transgender:**

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms — including transgender. Some of those terms are defined in this glossary. Use the descriptive term preferred by the person. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures.

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**Transition:**

A complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition can include some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) at least one type of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person. Avoid the phrase "sex change."

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**Transmasculine:**

Someone who was assigned female at birth but identifies and presents as masculine. This person may or may not identify as a man.

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**Transgender man/trans man:**

People who were assigned female at birth but identify and live as a man may use this term to describe themselves. They may shorten it to trans man. (Note: trans man, not "transman.") Some may also use FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male. Some may prefer to simply be called men, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term a person prefers.

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**Transphobia:**

Emotional disgust, fear, anger and/or discomfort felt or expressed towards people who don't conform to society's gender expectations, which often results in violence against transgender people.

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**Transsexual:**

An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have permanently changed — or seek to change — their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word transgender. It is best to ask which term a person prefers. If preferred, use as an adjective: transsexual womxn or transsexual man.

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**Transgender womxn/trans womxn:**

People who were assigned male at birth but identify and live as a womxn may use this term to describe themselves. They may shorten it to trans womxn. (Note: trans womxn, not "transwomxn.") Some may also use MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female. Some may prefer to simply be called female, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term a person prefers.

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**ze/hir/hirs:**

Gender-inclusive pronouns that some transgender, gender-fluid, and non-binary people choose to use instead of binary gendered pronouns, like she/her/hers and he/him/his.

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# Why do we need this guide?

Homosexuality is still criminalised in 72 countries worldwide; in 45 of these this applies to womxn and men. In Africa, we still see criminalisation in 32 countries.

Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) activists argue that they are still being victimised by language used by the media. Media reports can have an immense impact on the broader public's perception of LGBTIQ+ people, and as a consequence may affect how they are treated. As a result, it is important to approach reporting on LGBTIQ+ issues and people with great care. Sensationalist reporting can increase marginalisation, discrimination and violence towards LGBTIQ+ people, whereas fair, accurate, respectful and inclusive media coverage may promote respect and understanding.

“In general, journalists, subeditors and editors sit in an incredibly powerful position, with no experience of being othered. Because of this position, they are willing to let a set of essentially random style rules overrule an individual's dignity and right to dignity in the way in which they wish to be addressed and identify,” they say.

– Dean Hutton, Mail & Guardian, 2017

To move away from problematic reporting, journalists and editors first need to be made aware of what constitutes hate speech, offensive terminology and defamatory language. It is important for journalists and editors to make a conscious effort to use language that is fair, inclusive and accepted by the LGBTIQ+ community, and to avoid reporting on LGBTIQ+ issues in a problematic, insensitive, sensationalised manner.

Iranti, in partnership with fraycollege, has embarked on the Safety, Dignity and Freedom (SDF) project to educate and promote inclusive, accurate, respectful and fair media coverage of the LGBTIQ+ community.

The two-part project consists of:

- 1) an investigative study conducted by Iranti across five African countries, namely South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi and Zimbabwe, which explores LGBTIQ+ representation in the media, with the intention of placing five pieces in mainstream media in each country.
- 2) the compilation of this handy Media Reference Guide to assist journalists and editors to create media content that accurately represents LGBTIQ+ people.

We trust that this tool will help to dispel myths and educate media practitioners and the broader public about LGBTIQ+ people, and create a platform for dialogue and engagement, hopefully leading to a safe, dignified and free society for all.

“The media should be more like a weapon to educate or to inform people. You [the journalist] are the one who has the power to either destroy or build.”

– Journalist, SDF Study

# Hateful Language

"We're voicing out the use of the derogatory words by media because for us, as the LGBT community, and I, as an activist from the organisation that represents LGBT in South Africa, we feel that the media still uses these words that are very offensive to the LGBT community. So today we had a dialogue where we have to discuss and maybe come out with other more suitable words that we feel will be ok to use in print, television or radio."

- Sibongiseni Khumalo at a seminar facilitated by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in 2019

## LGBTIQ+ Hateful Language

"faggot," "dyke," "homo,"  
"sodomite," "isitabane/stabane,"  
"moffie," "ongqingili," "usis-bhuti".

Associating LGBTIQ+ people with paedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality, bigamy, polygamy, adultery and/or incest. Being LGBTIQ+ is neither synonymous with, nor indicative of, any tendency toward paedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality, bigamy, polygamy, adultery and/or incest. Such claims, innuendoes and associations often are used to insinuate that LGBTIQ+ people pose a threat to society, to families, and to children in particular. Such assertions and insinuations are defamatory and should be avoided.

## Trans-specific Hateful Language

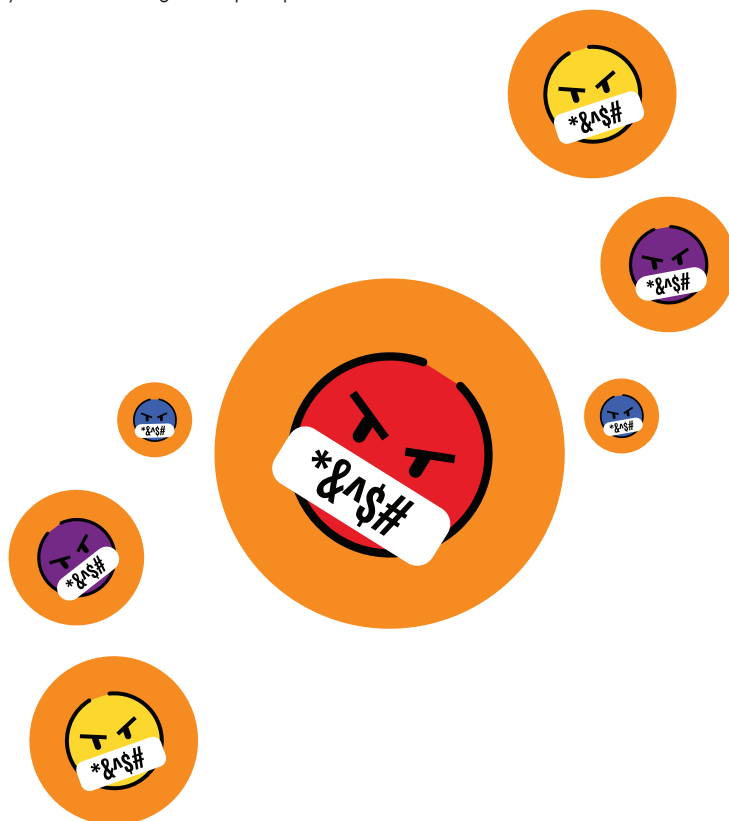
"deceptive," "fooling," "pretending,"  
"posing," "trap," or "masquerading".

Gender is an integral part of a person's identity. Do not characterise transgender people as "deceptive," "fooling" or "trapping" others, or as "pretending" to be, "posing" or "masquerading" as a man or a womxn. Such descriptions are inaccurate, defamatory and insulting. (See "passing" and "stealth" as offensive terms above.)

"tranny," "she-male," "he/she," "it,"  
"shim".

These words dehumanise transgender people and should not be used in mainstream media.

In order to ensure that the above terms are not given credibility in the media, it is preferred that reporters say, "The person used a derogatory word for a lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer person."



# Offensive Terms vs Preferred Terms

Avoid Saying	Say instead	Why?	Example
Hermaphrodite	Intersex	Hermaphrodite is a stigmatising, inaccurate word with a negative medical history.	How are the rights of intersex children being protected?
Born female, Born male, Female bodied, Male bodied	Assigned female/male at birth	"Assigned" language accurately depicts the situation of what happens at birth. "Bodied" language is often interpreted as pressure to medically transition, or invalidation of one's gender identity.	Some people do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth, and go through a transition process to align themselves with the correct gender identity.
A gay, A transgender	Gay person, Transgender person	Transgender should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, "Tony is a transgender," or, "The parade included many transgenders."	"Tony is a transgender man," or, "The parade included many transgender people."
Homosexual relationships/relationship, Homosexual couple, Homosexual sex, etc.	Relationship, couple (or, if necessary, gay/lesbian/same-sex couple), sex, etc.	As a rule, try to avoid labelling an activity, emotion, or relationship gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer unless you would call the same activity, emotion, or relationship "straight" if engaged in by someone of an other 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.	Mark and Andy have been named "Favourite Couple" for the 3rd year running!
Sexual preference	Sexual orientation	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 queer people, as well as straight men and womxn.	An individual's gender is not a determining factor of sexual orientation, and at times, sexual orientation is not fixed.
Gay agenda, Homosexual agenda	Accurate descriptions of the issues	Anti-LGBTIQ+ extremists frequently characterise equal protection of the law for LGBTIQ+ people as "special rights" to incite opposition to such things as relationship recognition and inclusive non-discrimination laws. As such, the term should be avoided.	"LGBTIQ+ rights should extend to inclusion in existing non-discrimination laws, securing equal employment protections, etc."
Admitted homosexual, Avowed homosexual	Openly gay man, Openly lesbian womxn, Openly queer person	The words "admitted" and "avowed" suggest that being attracted to the same sex is somehow shameful or inherently secretive.	Somizi is an openly gay man a style icon and an influencer from South Africa.
Transgenderism	Being transgender.	This is a term used by anti-transgender activists to dehumanise transgender people and reduce who they are to "a condition."	Being transgender sometimes (but not always) involves a process of transition.
Ladies and gentlemen	Everyone, Folks, Honoured guests, etc	Moving away from binary language is more inclusive of people of all genders.	"Good evening, everyone, and welcome to this event..."
Both genders, Opposite sexes	All genders	"Both" implies there are only two; "Opposite" reinforces antagonism amongst genders.	All genders were represented at the convention.
"It" when referring to someone (e.g., when pronouns are unknown)	They	"It" refers to objects, not people.	I will need to find out how they identify.

# Tips for Interviews

Language is a powerful tool in which queerphobia and heteronormativity are entrenched. As such, using accurate terminology is an essential part of creating a respectful story about LGBTIQ+ people. Please consult the Glossary, Offensive terms and Hateful Language sections of this guide for a clear and concise understanding of correct language usage and inappropriate/offensive language, when writing about LGBTIQ+ people.

“Media reflects society, but also plays a part in shaping how society views certain topics or communities. Media is very influential. How media portrays groups such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) sector influences what society thinks.”

– Out in The Media (2006)







# Basics of writing a transgender story

“Someone mentioned that when we are writing stories to do with this sector [LGBTIQ+] we are using negative or wrong terms. That can only be solved if we are properly trained. Do you think that’s the journalists that are to blame or it’s the editors? I’ve heard from other journalists where they have used the correct terms, and just before it goes to print, the editors will change things and then the journalists will take the blame, but they had initially used the correct terminology. Sometimes the editor will see my story – for example, I’m writing about a transgendered womxn, and say that correctly – the editor will ask me why I used transgendered instead of gay. I will have to convince him and teach him. Sometimes the editor will say it’s fine, and other times he will say I must use gay because it is newsworthy, and the people will buy the paper and read the story.”

– Journalist, SDF Study

## Language is important.

This cannot be stressed enough! See the above point in Tips for Interviews. Please also consult the Glossary, Offensive terms and Trans-specific Defamatory Language sections of this guide for a clear and concise understanding of correct language usage, and proper use of pronouns and names when writing about transgender people.

## From a man to a happy bride - TheVoice

Example of an inappropriate and offensive headline from "TheVoice" in Botswana

## Moving beyond the coming out narrative.

People who have just come out publicly as transgender are considered newsworthy, but they are often not ready for media attention, nor are they ready to speak about larger issues facing a diverse transgender community. Consider interviewing people who have chosen to take leadership roles in the community. Furthermore, the “coming out” or “transition narrative” has been covered thoroughly. Just as coverage of the LGBTIQ+ community now focuses on many different aspects of being gay, lesbian, or bisexual, the media is encouraged to look for stories about transgender people that go beyond, “When did you know?” and, “What surgeries have you had?”

## Avoid focusing on medical issues.

It is inappropriate to ask a transgender person questions about their genitals or other surgeries they may or may not have had. Typically, those questions are only asked out of

## Spotlight

### Issues facing transgender people

**Transgender people, particularly transgender womxn, who are Black, Coloured and Indian, are disproportionately affected by hate violence.**

While the Constitution guarantees transgender people the right to equality and the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender, the reality is that transgender people face violence and harassment from officials and private citizens. South Africa has been identified as a “hot spot” for hate crimes against LGBTIQ+ people.

### Transgender people face high levels of discrimination and inequality.

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 (“the Equality Act”) was enacted to give effect to section 9 of the Constitution – to prevent unfair discrimination and harassment:

- Section 6 states that “[n]either the State nor any person may unfairly discriminate against any person.”
- Section 8 prohibits unfair discrimination on the grounds of gender.
- Section 11 states that “[n]o person may subject any person to harassment.”

### Access to healthcare is extremely limited for transgender people.

Section 27 of the Constitution states that everyone has the right to have access to healthcare services – including reproductive healthcare. Section 27(3) states



prurient curiosity. They also distract the journalist and the viewer from seeing the whole person, and from focusing on larger issues that affect transgender people, like discrimination, poverty, and violence. Do not characterise being transgender as a mental disorder or condition.

### **Describing the fact that someone is transgender.**

The term “transgender should always be used as an adjective. For example, “Susan is a transgender womxn.” If your audience needs clarification about what that phrase means, you can explain that, “Susan was assigned male at birth and began her transition 15 years ago.” Avoid, “Susan was born a man.” People are born babies and a doctor decides the sex, based on a quick look at the baby’s external anatomy. A transgender person’s gender is much more complicated than a simple glance at external anatomy. A person’s biology does not trump their gender identity, and oversimplifications like “born a man” can invalidate the current, authentic gender of the person you’re speaking about.

### **Disclosing birth names.**

When a transgender person’s birth name is used in a story, the implication is almost always that this is the person’s “real name.” However, many people use names they have chosen for themselves, and the media does not mention their birth name, such as Lady Gaga, Demi Moore, and Whoopi Goldberg. Transgender people should be accorded the same respect. When writing about a transgender person’s chosen name, do not say, “She wants to be called,” “She calls herself,” “She goes by Susan,” or other phrases that cast doubt on a transgender person’s identity. Do not reveal a transgender person’s birth name without explicit permission from them. If the person is not able to answer questions about their birth name, err on the side of caution and do not reveal it.

### **Illustrating your story and headlines.**

In almost every instance it is unnecessary to show before and after pictures of the person being profiled. Often these images are simply included to satisfy the invasive curiosity of readers or viewers, and in most cases, they add nothing substantive to the story. Similarly, avoid clichéd images of transgender womxn putting on make-up, wigs, or pantyhose, and shots of transgender men shaving. These types of photos connote that being transgender is simply a superficial, external matter. Being transgender is not about, or limited to, physical appearance. With headlines, it is often necessary to save space and simplify; however, journalists and editors should not resort to clichés and offensive language. It is easy to ruin a well-written, nuanced story with a sensationalist headline. Avoid phrases like “sex change” or “born a man” in headlines (and in general).

### **Bringing in expert opinion.**

Be cautious of inviting non-transgender guests to talk about transgender people. Transgender people are the experts to talk about transgender people. You don’t always need a medical or psychological “expert” to speak about transgender people, but if you’d like a medical or psychological perspective, there are many transgender doctors and psychologists who can speak with experience and authority.

### **Integrating transgender people into non-trans stories.**

While it is true that there are many social issues that must be addressed before transgender people are treated equally, it is also true that transgender people live day-to-day lives just like everyone else. When being transgender is just one of the many traits that make someone unique, we will move closer to full acceptance. If you are doing a story about womxn in tech or Mother’s Day, consider including a transgender womxn in those stories. Transgender people can also be booked to talk about issues that are not trans-specific.

that no one may be refused emergency medical treatment.

The National Health Act 61 of 2003 does not include transgender and intersex people as a vulnerable group, although the Act does have specific provisions protecting healthcare users’ confidentiality. South Africa’s National Strategic Plan on HIV, STIs and TB 2012-2016 includes MSM, sex workers and transgender individuals in its definition of key populations.

### **Gender Transitioning Resources.**

In principle, individuals can begin hormone replacement therapy when they turn 18. However, the State has not yet formalised the systems and capacity to offer hormone treatment and monitoring widely in a public primary healthcare setting. Patients can access private care but there are still only a few providers, who are mostly based in urban areas. Except for sporadic ex gratia payments, medical aids generally do not cover surgical procedures as they are seen as cosmetic. Gender reassignment surgery is carried out mainly at two public hospitals: Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town and the Steve Biko Academic Hospital in Pretoria. However, both these facilities only do four operations a year, resulting in a long waiting list for gender reassignment surgery. Transgender individuals often go overseas to have surgery if they can afford it

# Writing about bisexual people

Issues pertaining to the bisexual community are often under-reported or poorly reported by mainstream and LGBTIQ+ media, leading many people who are bisexual to feel misunderstood, isolated, and depressed. Multiple studies have shown that people who identify as bisexual are more likely to binge drink, engage in self-harm, and have suicidal thoughts.

The Mail & Guardian (2017) references Lynch (2013) which found that bisexual people are six times less likely to come out than lesbian womxn or gay men because they feel like outcasts in the LGBTIQ+ community.

“Many bisexual individuals are confronted with distrust in lesbian and gay spaces and are subsequently excluded from potential sources of support within these communities.”<sup>1</sup>

The media can help eliminate some of the misconceptions and damaging stereotypes bisexual people face on a daily basis by fairly and accurately reporting on people who identify as bisexual.

## Identify individuals accurately.

If someone clearly states that they identify as bisexual, do not identify them as gay, lesbian, or straight instead. Simply because a person is currently in a relationship with someone of the same sex, that does not negate the person's bisexual orientation. Similarly, if a person is in what appears to be a heterosexual relationship, that also does not negate the person's bisexual orientation.

## It's not a phase or a deception.

Do not imply that being bisexual is a phase and that bisexuals are “on their way” to being gay or lesbian. People who self-identify as bisexual are not confused, indecisive, or lying. Studies consistently show that bisexuality, and the numerous identities under the bisexual umbrella, are distinct sexual orientations and not experimental or transitional stages.

Bisexual does not mean promiscuous. A common stereotype is that bisexual people do not want to be, or cannot be, monogamous. This is simply not true.

Other terms you might hear: Some people who have the capacity to be attracted to people of any gender may consider themselves part of the bi+ community and/or choose other words to describe their sexual orientation, such as: pansexual, polysexual, omnisexual, fluid, queer, and more. Some people prefer to avoid any label at all. Given the lack of understanding of even the word bisexual, it's best to only use alternate words if someone specifically self-identifies that way and asks for their preferred term to be used.

“All countries displayed minimal coverage in mainstream media of bisexual people. This absence could be explained by these individuals falling either into gay- or lesbian specific media coverage.”

– extract from SDF Study

## Statistical Breakdown

According to a 2016 study by OUT LGBT Well-being, 12.3% of South Africans identify as bisexual. Of this 12.3%, only 21% are completely open, while 13% are completely not open. 61% of bisexual people in South Africa fear discrimination based on their sexual orientation – this discrimination occurs in schools, in the healthcare sector, and in the general public.

Discrimination may be in the form of verbal insults, threats of physical violence, being chased or followed, being beaten up, sexual abuse and rape, and damage to personal property, amongst others. Furthermore, the fear of discrimination often prevents people from reporting incidents to police as they may be told that the offence is not serious enough; they also worry that they would be abused or harassed by the police, or that they would face repercussions from the offender.

(1) Lynch, Ingrid. (2013). Erased, elided and made invisible? South African bisexual relationships and families.

# Reporting on the intersex community

Intersex people, like all people, may identify as male, female, gender non-binary, or gender non-conforming—and they may express their gender in different ways. Similarly, intersex people may be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, or identify in another way. Some (but not all) intersex people use pronouns other than “he” or “she,” or “they”. Always allow intersex people to identify what pronouns they would like you to use.

“I think the biggest thing is language because [it is] much easier when I say ‘sex chromosomes and genetics,’ and, “This is what happened,” and describing intersex, the varieties and everything... But the thing is, that granny sitting on her stoep crocheting, when you say ‘chromosomes,’ it doesn’t go. When we hear of intersex stories, it’s always of the bad omen, or the child that was killed, or midwives encountering these kinds of things. There’s always these hidden stories and they’re taboo and having to describe that as well is a bit difficult, and I don’t even know how.”

– Anonymous, SDF Study

## Language is important.

Using accurate terminology is the first step toward creating a respectful story about LGBTIQ+ people. Please consult the Glossary, Offensive terms and LGBTIQ+ Defamatory Language sections of this guide for a clear and concise understanding of correct language usage, and proper use of pronouns when writing about intersex people.

## Avoid focusing on medical issues.

It is inappropriate to ask an intersex person questions about their genitals or the surgeries they may have undergone. Typically, those questions are only asked out of prurient curiosity. They also distract the journalist and the viewer from seeing the whole person, and from focusing on larger issues that affect intersex people, like discrimination, surgical violations (Intersex Genital Mutilation – IGM) and lack of access to information such as medical records.

## Bringing in expert opinion.

Be sure that the people you interview are qualified to speak on the subject matter and cite their expertise in your reporting. You don’t always need a medical or psychological expert to speak about intersex people, but if you’d like a medical or psychological perspective, there are many intersex doctors and psychologists who can speak with experience and authority.

## What we’re saying is...

(1) We need recognition and affirmation of human diversity (human rights): people come in a wide variety of bodies, sexes, gender identities and gender expressions – we need to value this, not reinforce the myth that bodies and genders come in just two forms.

(2) We need recognition of bodily autonomy and bodily integrity (SRHR). Every person should be free to control and define their own bodies and healthcare choices – this promotes overall physical, psychological and social wellbeing.

“As a government, we do recognise that being intersex is a sexual characteristic and not a medical condition. But at the same time, we recognise that there are still practices where surgeries are being performed on new-borns and young children, which are harmful... So we are now beginning a process in its early stages to acknowledging that such surgeries performed at a very young stage are harmful and that it needs to stop.”

– Zane Dangor, Department of Social Development

## Spotlight

### Intersex People and Sexual Rights & Human Rights (SRHR) Violations

#### Intersex people suffer severe violations as adults and children.

In most regions of the world, including South Africa, when an intersex variation is visible at birth, it may result in infanticide, child abandonment and the stigmatisation of families.

#### Intersex people suffer severe violations in medical settings.

In addition, what used to be called “normalising” surgery, to make very young children look more typically male or female, has been standard practice for decades. A more accurate term is intersex genital mutilation (IGM). IGM practices have been described as non-consensual, medically unnecessary, irreversible, cosmetic genital surgeries, and/or other harmful medical treatments that would not be considered for so-called “normal” children, without evidence of benefit for the children concerned, but justified by societal and cultural norms and beliefs.

#### Access to information, especially medical records, is one of the biggest challenges for South African intersex persons.

The Promotion of Access to Information Act 2000 gives everyone the right of access to records held by either public or private bodies for legitimate purposes. In the latter case, people should be allowed access to “any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights”.

# Writing about lesbian womxn

(Trigger Warning: mention of rape)

The reality of reporting on lesbian womxn, in South Africa especially, is that the majority of reports are centred around violence and murder. Given that this is such an important aspect that needs coverage, the language used often presents the story in a misconstrued and problematic manner. LGBTIQ+ people have identified other areas that need coverage to raise awareness about the community.

Do not refer to rape as “corrective” or “curative”. Using the terms “corrective rape” or “curative rape” when referring to sexual violence against lesbians suggests that rape can be justified in certain instances, and also incorrectly implies that one’s sexual orientation needs correcting. This needs to be addressed through changing the discourse and speaking instead of “homophobic rape”, as a means of acknowledging the punitive and hateful elements of the crime.

23-year-old killed in an alleged homophobic attack

Example of an appropriate headline

Soweto womxn killed in a suspected ‘corrective’ rape attack.

Example of an inappropriate headline

## Language is important.

Use accurate terminology. Please consult the Glossary, Offensive terms and LGBTIQ+ Defamatory Language sections of this guide for a clear and concise understanding of correct language usage. It is important to also ensure you use the correct pronouns, name and sexual orientation descriptor when writing about lesbian womxn.

**Moving beyond the coming out narrative.** Journalists are encouraged to write more stories that go beyond “When did you know?” Other worthy topics include violence and hate crimes, legal issues (same-sex marriage, adoption, etc.), religion, ongoing discrimination, despite constitutional protection, and how to challenge the issues that LGBTIQ+ people face daily.

## Let stories be told from the perspective of the subject.

To an extent, some content surrounding lesbian perspectives should be mainstreamed, as lesbian womxn are affected by the same issues that have an impact on society as a whole. Issues such as health, HIV/Aids and education are not separate issues for lesbian womxn and heterosexual womxn, both cis and trans. However, there are issues that are particular to the community and which need to be addressed as such – for example, how to practise safe sex as a lesbian, and other health issues.

## Move away from essentialising masculine-presenting lesbians.

When lesbian identity is mentioned in a media report, it is often focused on masculine-presenting or butch lesbians (such as sports stars). Try to move towards a more inclusive, balanced style of representation. This can be achieved by including reports on more of the following:

**Individual and collective achievement(s).** Positive representations of relatable experiences could serve as great encouragement for young lesbians who may be fearful about coming out. Include stories and interviews about positive role models.

Furthermore, reporters should include stories about the multi-faceted, ordinary, happy, everyday lives of lesbian womxn to reduce the fears of expressing lesbian identity in public spheres. More diverse coverage can also help to normalise lesbian identity in the broader society

# Things to consider when compiling a report

The stories produced about LGBTIQ+ people affect these individuals and society at large. Like any other topic, journalists should be aware that their stories affect how LGBTIQ+ people are perceived and treated. Above all, perhaps, journalists' words affect their subjects psychologically. Therefore, journalists should consider the following in their reporting:

- Avoid mentioning LGBTIQ+ status when such information is not directly relevant to a story.
- Carefully consider word choice and framing around sexual and gender minorities and followers of different faiths. Use sources' preferred terminology.
- Allow marginalised people to speak for themselves and in their own voices.
- Are you doing the story to stir emotions, or will it improve knowledge and well-being? Sensationalised depictions are often full of false or exaggerated information and lead to the public being misinformed, which can have long-lasting effects and serious security implications.
- Coverage of LGBTIQ+ issues should reflect the true state of the community, and the use of sensational or abusive language should be avoided.
- Aim to educate and inform. A story should be newsworthy and useful to your audience. While some media aim to entertain, it is unfair to trivialise the lives and stories of minority groups.
- Always report facts that can be backed up by evidence. Avoid adding your opinions.



Constructive stories	Incomplete stories	Negative stories
Voices of LGBTIQ+ people	Lack of voices of LGBTIQ+ people	Lack of voices of LGBTIQ+ people
Challenges stereotypes	Fails to address stereotypes	Perpetuates stereotypes
Variety of sources	Uniformity of sources	Lack of sources
Fairness in approach to issue: no open prejudice, no ridicule, no moralising	Failure to address tendency for biased coverage or provide con-text	Biased coverage of the issue: moralising, open prejudice, ridicule, etc.
Simple, accessible language	Inaccessible language, lack of context	Full of jargon or stereotypical, biased language
Provides research, history, con-text	Lack of research, history, con-text	Lack of research, history, con-text
Inclusive language to refer to LGBTIQ+ people	Lack of inclusive language	Discriminatory language ("the homosexuals," "gays," etc.)





**LGBTI  
PROTECTION  
FROM  
DISCRIMINATION**

#recogniselegabibo

   
**EQUALITY  
BEFORE  
THE  
LAW**



# Resources

2018 National Intersex Meeting Report: <http://www.justice.gov.za/vg/lgbti/2018-NationalIntersexMeetingReport.pdf>

Covering Sexual and Gender Minorities & Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Reporting Guide for Journalists: [https://za.boell.org/sites/default/files/\\_print\\_final\\_4\\_web\\_1.pdf](https://za.boell.org/sites/default/files/_print_final_4_web_1.pdf)

Gender Dynamix Guide for Journalists: How to Write About Transgender Issues: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1B0AD8DMczJ00xi-y1KuyxQgPHGoJmB0iV>

Gender Dynamix Guide for Media Participation for Transgender People: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1WUU3hyf0gNeq9trXLKJ0qM-7fcDwDvjq5>

GLAAD Media Reference Guide 10th Edition: <https://www.glaad.org/reference>

Hate Crimes Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in South Africa, 2016: <https://www.out.org.za/index.php/library/reports?download=30:hate-crimes-against-lgbt-people-in-south-africa-2016>

Intersex 101: South African Human Rights Commission Intersex Presentation

Laws and Policies Affecting Transgender Persons in Southern Africa: <https://www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Transgender-rights-in-South-Africa.pdf>

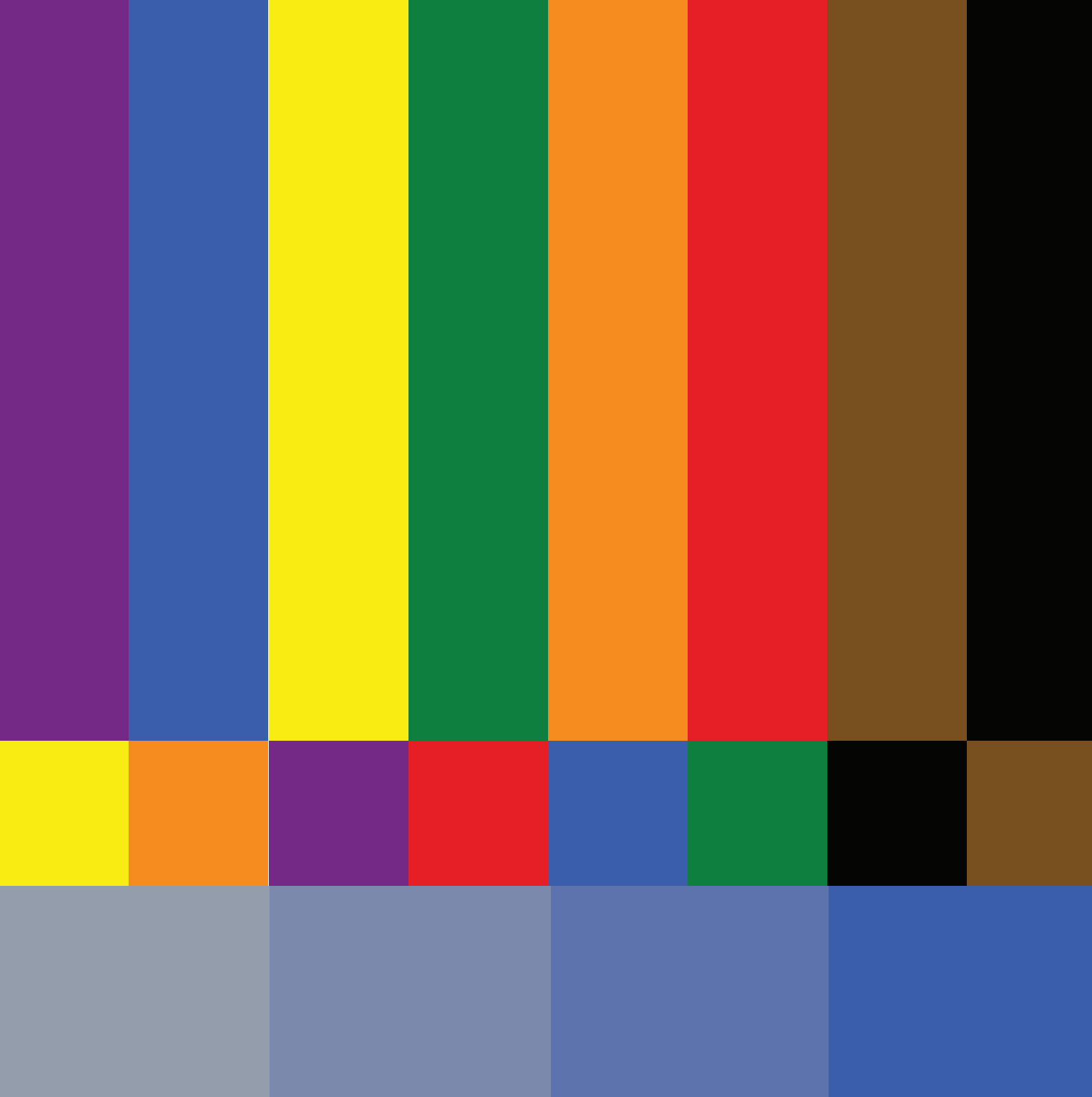
Lynch, I. (2013). Erased, elided and made invisible? A critical analysis of research on bisexual parenthood and families. *Home affairs: Rethinking same-sex families and relationships in contemporary South Africa*, 68-88.

Refinery29 Gender Nation Glossary: <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/lgbtq-definitions-gender-sexuality-terms>

Tamale, S. (2014). Exploring the contours of African sexualities: Religion, law and power. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 14(1), 150-177.

The Safe Zone Project: LGBTQ-Inclusive Dos and Don'ts Handout: <https://ayr1as72ag-cddsn3cyd41uu9-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/LGBTQ-Inclusive-Dos-Donts.pdf>

Walter, D., & Ndlovu, N. (2006). *Out in the Media?: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of the Media Towards Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Issues and Stories*. Community Media for Development [CMFD] Productions for Gay and Lesbian Archives [GALA].



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