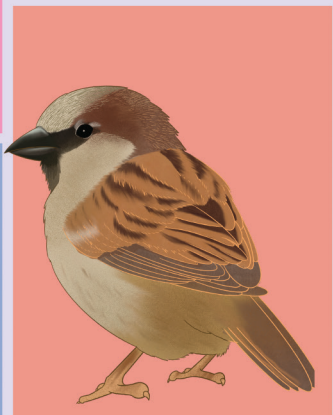
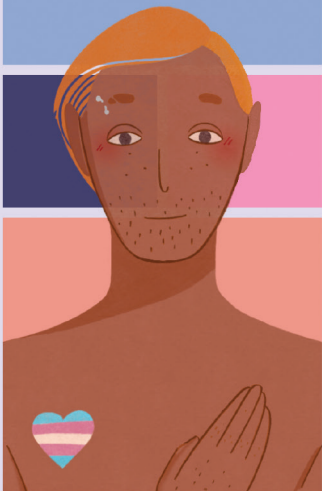




INCLUSIVE NEWSROOMS

LGBTQIA+ Media Reference Guide



INQ LUSIVE NEWSROOMS

குயர் சென்னை க்ரோனிக்கிள்ஸ்
Queer Chennai Chronicles

The NEWS Minute

Supported by
Google News Initiative

Inqlusive Newsrooms

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First Edition: June 2023

Published by: Queer Chennai Chronicles and The News Minute

Supported by: Google News Initiative

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The 5 Ws and 1 H

What is this book?

This is a media reference guide for journalists and newsrooms reporting, writing, or editing stories about LGBTQIA+ communities, persons, and issues. We have a glossary of terms to use (and to NOT use), and several chapters on various beats. This book has detailed, easy-to-follow instructions for what journalists should do when reporting, editing, or shooting stories and opinion pieces about LGBTQIA+ individuals, communities, and issues.

This LGBTQIA+ Media Reference Guide has been produced by The News Minute and Queer Chennai Chronicles, and is supported by Google News Initiative.

Why are we doing this?

The representation of LGBTQIA+ persons in the news media in India is often incorrect, derogatory, ignorant, and lacking in perspective. When LGBTQIA+ persons point out mistakes to journalists, however, one of the common responses we get is that they didn't know what the right terms to use were, and/or that they didn't realise certain depictions were problematic.

We've made this guide so that journalists who want to get the representation of LGBTQIA+ communities, persons, and issues right, will have a resource that'll help them.

Who will find this useful?

Any reporter, writer, editor, photo journalist, video journalist, or producer, who is planning to write/edit/produce a story or visuals on LGBTQIA+ communities, persons, or issues. This is not an academic thesis. This is a practical guide for journalists, and is written as such. No long paragraphs without commas, and as many bulleted lists as possible.

When can you use this?

You could be at a protest, and have a question about the ethics of photographing a queer person. You could be writing a story about healthcare, and wondering how to ask sensitive questions. You could be editing a crime story where an LGBTQIA+ person is the perpetrator and want to ensure the report is sensitive, not sensational. You may have received a pitch from a freelancer, and not know whether you should accept it or not.

In short, this guide is made keeping in mind your work and dilemmas. You can use it any time you have a question about covering LGBTQIA+ issues and don't know who to ask.

How legitimate are the creators?

Queer Chennai Chronicles (QCC) is an independent publishing house and literary forum. QCC was started with the aim of highlighting LGBTQIA+ writers, translators, and authors, and to make the existing literary space and media reporting queer inclusive. QCC is the organiser of India's first Queer LitFest, which brings together allies and queer literary personas. QCC also works with various media houses and corporations to create inclusive guidelines on reporting, workplace inclusion strategies, and implementation processes.

The News Minute (TNM) has been at the forefront of reporting sensitively on LGBTQIA+ issues in the country for the past nine years. The organisation has a queer person in an editorial leadership position, and has carefully cultivated best practices for reporting and editing on LGBTQIA+ lives and rights. The editorial team at The News Minute is one of the most diverse in the country, and one of our editorial policies is to platform the voices that society ignores.

The **Google News Initiative** works side-by-side with publishers and journalists to build a more sustainable, diverse, and innovative news ecosystem. At GNI, we partner with industry leaders as they tackle the most pressing issues facing journalism, cultivating a diverse, innovative, and inclusive community with a common goal: build a stronger future for news.

Most people who have contributed to writing this guide are queer, and many are also journalists. We understand the concerns of the LGBTQIA+ communities in India, and we know how newsrooms function and what challenges journalists face on a daily basis.

Where can you contact us if you have questions?

Email: news.inq@gmail.com

Instagram: [@news.inq](https://www.instagram.com/news.inq)



Queering the news: A note from The News Minute

At a time when the Indian English news industry was highly centralised, with most newsrooms operating either from Delhi or Mumbai, The News Minute (TNM) was launched with the mission to cover south India, from south India. The founders of TNM felt a need for a voice that is connected with the people of the five states in south India - Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. In the last nine years, TNM has evolved as a feminist news organisation that spearheads sensitive journalism on gender, sexuality, and caste.

And we have been able to do that because we believe in an inclusive newsroom - a newsroom with diverse voices and a strong culture of speaking truth to power. The News Minute's leadership is made up of Dalit, Muslim, Christian, and queer leaders working along with our founders on our mission of a free press that breaks the status quo.

Since our launch in 2014, The News Minute has been doing sensitive coverage of LGBTQIA+ issues, and within a few years of our launch, in 2016, we ran a series called *Let's Talk LGBTQIA+*, which centred the voices and stories of queer Indians. The series went on to win the Laadli Award for gender sensitivity. By early 2017, we had a style guide for our team on how to cover LGBTQIA+ issues so that every new person who enters the newsroom understands our values, and is equipped with the right language and perspectives.

The idea for this guide first came up in 2021 when Queer Chennai Chronicles (QCC) conducted their Chennai Queer LitFest. This edition of the fest was online owing to the pandemic, and TNM's Ragamalika Karthikeyan was on a panel on how media reports queer issues. During the panel discussion, she spoke about TNM's guidelines for our team on how to cover LGBTQIA+ issues. The question of whether newsrooms in general have style guides for covering queer issues came up, and as far as we could tell, there was no such resource that was detailed.

The logical next step was for QCC and TNM to join hands and create the resource. We started with an outline for a Media Reference Guide, and from the beginning, we wanted to do it in

English and in Tamil. We decided that the first step would be to put together a glossary, and mapped out the chapters this guide would have.

This was around the time the Madras High Court was hearing the case of a lesbian couple seeking protection from their families, and the court was giving several progressive orders to help LGBTQIA+ communities - including a direction to the Tamil Nadu state government to come up with a list of dignified terms in Tamil that the media could use. We had already started work on our glossary, and we decided to speed that process up, got together with other community organisations and individuals, and sent our glossary in English and Tamil to the court. Long story short - the Tamil Nadu government published a glossary in the state gazette, and 90% of it is what we - the community - came up with.

Along the way, we found more partners, including Google News Initiative, and this made us dream bigger. A Media Reference Guide in English and Tamil, yes. But also in Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, and Hindi. Training sessions across the country in three languages. Fellowships for good journalism about queer lives. Supporting the creation of a dream media ecosystem. We're doing it all now.

One of the things queer persons hear from journalists and newsrooms when we point out mistakes and misinformation in stories about LGBTQIA+ lives is - "We didn't know." We didn't know what the right language was. We didn't know how to tell this story more sensitively. We didn't deliberately make any mistakes - and we want to learn.

Well, here's a guide that you can refer to, a guide that will help you learn and unlearn. The objective of the guide is to educate journalists and newsrooms about the right language to use for LGBTQIA+ persons and communities, with chapters addressing questions that journalists in different roles have. From general news reporting and editing, to writing opinion pieces, covering sports, crime, entertainment, business, politics, education... The guide has over 20 chapters - and bulleted lists that a journalist can quickly and easily refer to while working on a story.

So read on!



Queering language: A note from Queer Chennai Chronicles

Queer Chennai Chronicles (QCC) is an independent publishing house and literary forum. QCC was started in 2017 with the aim of highlighting LGBTQIA+ writers and translators, and to make existing literary spaces and media platforms queer inclusive. Over the years, QCC has had its natural growth, adapting and launching initiatives that furthered our vision and mission. We started as an independent publishing house, and organised India's first queer literature festival - the Chennai Queer LitFest - in 2018 to keep the conversation going.

In the decades that the founding members of QCC have been active in public life, we have witnessed a number of queer individuals interact with the media for the sole purpose of voicing our opinions, demanding our rights, and reaching out to the general public. However, many LGBTQIA+ persons do not understand how the media works. There are numerous times when queer persons who speak to the media are misquoted, our experiences twisted to suit the predetermined editorial narrative. Some of us have given up on interacting with the media because this labour brings more trauma, and journalists and newsrooms continue to make the same mistakes despite our efforts.

There is ignorance about LGBTQIA+ communities and identities in the media at large, and there are several preconceived notions - both positive and negative. We are now at a stage where only the stereotypes about us are consumed as news - and, as most queer persons will tell you, even these stereotypes are far off the mark. The diversity of our communities is erased. When reporters call us for stories, there is always a niggling suspicion in our minds that they've already written what they want to, and only want to fit in our quotes to make their articles more credible. We are 'characters' in the story that has already been plotted out.

This is not to discount the fact that there has been a noticeable change in the last few years in the way the media is reporting about queer lives. Things can always get much, much better though - especially when journalists and newsrooms have to balance the need for sensitivity with the business needs of readership and viewership, and have to optimise for short attention spans.

QCC is spearheaded by queer persons from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds - we are professionals from the fields of literature, art, advertising, technology, and the development sector. Most importantly, each QCC team member has more than a decade of experience in working with queer communities at the grassroots.

When we designed the first queer literature festival in 2018, we decided to have a panel focused on media reporting of queer issues. Our aim was to include conversation around news and media because the media plays an important role in defining and narrating queer lives for the society at large. Over the years, our focus has been to highlight stories of queer lives that go beyond NGO reports, sensational news articles, and misinformation about our personhood and lives. In the 2021 edition of the Chennai Queer LitFest, we had another panel that focused on news reporting. This panel eventually led to us to formalise our work with the media in the form of this Inclusive Newsrooms LGBTQIA+ Media Reference Guide. This was also an opportunity for us to expand the Tamil queer glossary that we curated and hosted on our bilingual webzine - paalpathumai.com.

The QCC glossary built along with The News Minute (TNM), other community collectives, and individuals was highlighted by the Madras High Court in the S Sushma vs Commissioner of Police case (the Sushma-Seema case) in 2022. The High Court asked the Tamil Nadu state government to adapt our glossary to come up with a government approved list of LGBTQIA+ terms for the Tamil media. The state government followed through, and in 2022, they published a glossary in the state gazette. Around 90% of this list of terms were taken from the QCC-TNM community glossary.

This motivated us further to focus on the LGBTQIA+ Media Reference Guide. This was a voluntary initiative by Queer Chennai Chronicles and The News Minute - an initiative spearheaded by queer individuals, that brings together the experience of QCC's grassroots work and TNM's media experience, for a resource that will help the entire media ecosystem in India.

We are happy to present the Inclusive Newsrooms LGBTQIA+ Media Reference Guide. This, for us, marks the next milestone in our journey to create an inclusive world. Through this guide, we hope to bring about change, one newsroom at a time.

Queer Chennai Chronicles was started in Chennai with people from across Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. When we started, our focus was on Tamil and English literature and media. Over time, our work in Tamil has reached Tamil speaking queer persons both in India and beyond the country's borders. With this media reference guide, we are expanding our reach to four other Indian languages - Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, and Hindi.

And the journey will continue in more languages very soon.



Foreword

Words matter. Who speaks them matters even more.

We were taught a nursery rhyme in school - 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.' Now that one thinks about it, nothing could be further from the truth. This proverb, probably written by a cisgender, upper-class white man, underplayed the effect that words can have on the psyche of the person at their receiving end. Bullying in school, for instance, often starts with taunts and slurs before graduating to physical violence in some cases.

This bullying often extends from the playground to the real world, though it may mutate its form. Even the best-intentioned editors and journalists can often use language that is insensitive and demeaning to a queer person. This may not stem from a desire to hurt, but perhaps from a lack of awareness of the lived experience of a person from a sexual and/or gender minority. Language that may seem 'normal' or inoffensive to an ear that is not attuned to hearing the metaphor of discrimination may enter the discourse and cause great harm to vulnerable sections of the audience, particularly children. Therefore, there is a great need for a guide of the sort that is being published. It would help those who sincerely want to do safe reporting use language that does not end up diminishing the lives of any member of the audience.

In the case of opinion pieces, being aware of who writes the piece and the extent of their knowledge and sensitivity is imperative. We live in an era when television spews out opinions of talking heads at an alarming rate. In the polarities of views that the ratings demand, the quiet knowledge of the domain expert is silenced. Opinion pieces that are supposed to offer serious thought and reflection ought not to become a copy of shrill televised debates. This guide will assist in ensuring that they do not. The aim should not be to promote only one view, but to ensure that whatever view is being put forward is conveyed in a fair manner.

In the end, though, this guide is not just about language. It is equally about an attitude. A commitment to the cause of mutual respect and dignity that our Constitution demands and society deserves. I hope that using this guide would not only be a reflection of responsible

journalism, but also an acknowledgement that the speaker, the author, or the editor, is a believer in the golden thread of equality that binds us all.

Saurabh Kirpal

Advocate, Supreme Court of India



Responsible journalism must be attentive to power hierarchies

by **Kavita Krishnan**

News media has power. And in equal measure, it has responsibility.

It does not simply disseminate information or opinion. The language used to tell us what's 'news,' also communicates many other more subtle messages. Whether intentionally or not, every word, every phrase, is as loaded with meaning as glances or expressions on a person's face. Even the dullest report imperceptibly tells us a dramatic story, where a word here or there tells us which character is trustworthy and which is not, or what is the most relevant information about a character.

The language of news media (we may omit overt propaganda media from this category) aims to achieve a degree of restraint and objectivity. But nothing is more dangerous than bias that appears objective.

To those who purvey propaganda, these questions are of no concern.

But those who aim to be responsible journalists, reporters, editors, and camerapersons know that the responsibility is not an abstraction. The answers can only lie in the details: in trying one's best to be intentional in the choice of every word, every image, every name, and every piece of information.

How best to be responsible not only to one's readers and viewers, but perhaps most of all, to the subjects of each story? Your power over the subject of your story is very often disproportionate. Your story might become the defining story of a person or a community. Yours could be the story that is most widely heard, that is most indelible, that becomes the only historical record left of its subjects. Those subjects may lack the social, economic, or political capital required to effectively challenge your version and tell their own.

We live in a world where instantaneous visibility on social media also distorts every story. Social media can indeed allow marginalised voices to get past barriers and make themselves heard, or to take back their own stories. But there too, various forms of unseen social power do help decide whose voice goes viral and whose does not; who is remembered as the hero of a story and who remains unseen. And, because social media appears ‘unmediated’ and authentic, these impressions tend to stick. Increasingly, news media too is under pressure to take its cue from social media trends.

But no story is un-media-ted. Whether it is the mobile phone or the huge media vans, a social media post or a printed story, there are conscious decisions taken by someone or the other that shape how the story is received.

Responsible journalism, rather than striving for an abstract ‘objectivity’, would do best to be aware, and make its audience aware, of exactly how every story is media-ted. Responsible journalism ought to be aware of how power and hierarchies work in our world, and it is that gentle, compassionate awareness that needs to be communicated to its audience, in every breath of the story.

Throughout its history, journalism has been made better every time its authority has been challenged by the marginalised; everytime those at the receiving end of bias, prejudice, bigotry, and exclusion challenged stories that claimed to be authoritative storytelling. We do journalism a favour when we have high expectations of it; when we demand better from it. Journalism has had to acknowledge higher standards of racial, caste, or gender justice; higher standards of responsibility towards acknowledging new forms of injustice and bigotry, and therefore correcting for bias in its work.

Today, however, there is a powerful political effort worldwide to turn back the clock. Responsible language is mocked as an imposition of ‘political correctness’ on ‘the people’, by a ‘liberal elite’. In many parts of the world, anti-democratic politics has singled out LGBTQIA+ persons as the softest target for what it claims is a struggle to be ‘free’ from the ‘censorship’ of ‘political correctness’.

If such politics were plainly rightwing, openly bigoted towards marginalised communities, or openly hostile to the principles of justice, it would be easier to recognise and resist. It is in reality far more insidious. The lines are made blurry by the fact that many whose politics is known for its commitment to justice, lend credibility to the effort to make bigoted and dehumanising speech seem normal, and speech that replaces bigotry with respect seem like a ridiculous affectation.

This phenomenon is perhaps most apparent when it comes to transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming persons. Former United States President Donald Trump vilifies affirmations of their dignity and humanity by describing these as manifestations of “leftwing

gender insanity”. Most notably, he attacks transgender persons by accusing them of waging a “woke war on women”.

It is well-known that Russian President Vladimir Putin accuses Ukraine of being “Nazi” in character; what is lesser-known is that he defines modern-day Nazism as the supposed forcible imposition of LGBTQIA+ rights on the majority of people in the Western countries and the whole world. And the phrase Putin uses in this regard is “cancel culture”, one that is common in the West, the right, and some liberal, feminist, and left quarters as well. Comparing ‘cancel culture’ to the Nazi book burnings in Germany, he referred to author JK Rowling as someone who had been “cancelled” because her views did not align with the dictates of “fans of so-called gender freedoms.”

While Rowling distanced herself from Putin’s politics on Ukraine and against Russian political opposition, she remains one of the most visible and powerful figures to allege that the language that reflects the non-binary nature of gender is part of a conspiracy to ‘erase’ or ‘cancel’ women.

It may seem startling that inclusive pronouns seem to generate such disproportionate emotion. Like the assertions of “sex is real” and “biology is real” by Rowling, “grammar is real” is another familiar theme. Putin attacked the Church of England for advising the use of gender-neutral terms for God instead of exclusively masculine terms. Language is a key feature of being human. And conversely, to exclude from language is to exclude from humanity.

Like grammar, professional training for journalists also has needed to refresh itself, to keep pace with demands for visibility from sections of humanity that had till recently been kept invisible.

The Inclusive Newsrooms LGBTQIA+ Media Reference Guide is an invaluable field guide for mediapersons to walk through the gender, sexuality, and media terrain with a new and more inclusive vantage point. It ought to become a mandatory part of journalism courses, and should be available in all languages spoken in India to orient every new mediaperson.

It is also an engaging and eye-opening read for laypersons. We may not be media professionals, but as we read its chapters, we see how the question of gender fluidity is no abstract intellectual or cultural ‘war’. It is simply a question of respect for the dignity and humanity of everyone. Reading it is also a great lesson in understanding all the levels at which decisions and choices are made before the final media story reaches us, the reader or the viewer.

Reading it is essential not only to being a better journalist but also to being a better citizen and a better human being.

As someone who is a part of many people’s movements, I hope that this book will be read not only by media professionals but also by those who produce media for movements. Movement media would do well to hold itself to the same standards as professional media.

Kavita Krishnan is a feminist activist and author of *Fearless Freedom*, published by Penguin.



A glossary of LGBTQIA+ terms

Part 1:

Terms related to sex

Sex

‘Sex’ refers to the biological makeup of a person, based on external or internal body parts, hormones, sex chromosomes, etc.

Sex characteristics

‘Sex characteristics’ refer to an individual’s physical sexual/reproductive features that are formed on the basis of their sex. This includes genitalia (vagina/uterus or penis/testicles etc.), sex chromosomes (XX, XY, XXY, XYY, XO, etc.), dominant sex hormones present in their body (estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, etc.), and secondary sexual features (breasts, facial hair, deep voice, etc.), among others. Sex characteristics may influence a person’s gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, or sexuality, but are not the cause of it.

Intersex

Intersex persons have innate sex characteristics that do not fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies. These can include external or internal reproductive parts, chromosome patterns, and/or hormonal patterns. Being an intersex person can make one vulnerable to stigma, discrimination, and harm.

Note: It’s wrong to assume that all intersex persons are transgender. Intersex persons also have diverse intersections of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality. Like any individual, intersex persons are the only ones who can determine their gender identity, sexuality, and sexual orientation.

Another note: Several intersex children are forced into surgical procedures by doctors and parents/guardians, to make their bodies conform to a binary sex. This is unethical

and should be called out in stories. These enforced and non-consensual surgeries can also eventually result in trauma, health conditions, and other complications.

Part 2:

Terms related to gender

Gender

Gender is how society perceives people, based on the norms, behaviours, and roles associated with the sex assigned at birth.

For instance, a person who is assigned male at birth is expected to grow up to be a ‘man’ and be powerful and assertive; a person assigned female at birth is expected to grow up to be a ‘woman’ and to be sweet and nurturing. It is a social construct, and what each gender is expected to do changes from society to society, and over time.

Gender identity

‘Gender identity’ refers to how an individual defines their own gender. It depends on a person’s deeply felt internal experience of gender. It need not correspond to the sex assigned to the person at birth, and the expectations that society has from this assigned sex or associated gender. Gender identity is self-determined - that is, every individual has the right to determine their gender identity, and this right is theirs alone. There is no ‘medical test’ for gender identity.

For instance, if an individual is a transgender man, or a transgender woman, or a non-binary person, they are the only one who can decide what their gender is.

Gender expression

Gender expression is how a person expresses or presents their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearances such as dress, hair, make-up, body language, and voice.

A person’s chosen name and pronouns are also common ways of expressing gender.

Gender expression does not automatically correspond to one’s gender identity.

For instance, a woman may dress in pants and shirts and have short hair - generally related by society to a ‘man’s’ gender expression.

Another example: A person assigned male at birth who wears a saree isn’t automatically a transgender woman. They may still identify as a man, or as non-binary, or with any other gender identity.

Gender non-conforming person

Gender non-conforming persons (adults or children) are those who do not conform to either of the binary gender definitions of male or female, as well as those whose gender expression may differ from standard gender norms.

In some instances, individuals are perceived as gender non-conforming by other people because of their gender expression. However, these individuals may not perceive themselves as gender non-conforming.

Gender expression and gender non-conformity are clearly related to individual and social perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Transgender person

A transgender person is someone whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. People assigned male or female at birth, and intersex persons, can be transgender.

A person is transgender whether or not such a person has undergone gender affirmation procedures such as hormone therapy or surgery. This is reaffirmed in the NALSA vs Union of India verdict by the Supreme Court of India in 2014 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

Note: Do not use the term ‘transgenders’ or ‘a transgender’, i.e., do not use the word as a noun. The word ‘transgender’ has to be used as an adjective. The correct usage is transgender person, trans person, transgender woman, trans woman, transgender man, trans man, etc. depending on the context.

Do not use the term ‘third gender’ to describe a transgender person - unless they specifically request that usage. Gender identities are not stacked in a hierarchy.

Trans woman or transgender woman

‘Transgender woman’ refers to a person who was assigned male at birth, but whose gender identity is that of a woman. ‘Transgender woman’ can be shortened to ‘trans woman’ (two words).

Trans man or transgender man

‘Transgender man’ refers to a person who was assigned female at birth, but whose gender identity is that of a man. ‘Transgender man’ can be shortened to ‘trans man’ (two words).

Gender non-binary person

‘Non-binary’ refers to a gender identity that doesn’t subscribe to the woman-man binary. A ‘non-binary’ person is someone who does not identify as a man or a woman.

Gender dysphoria

Gender dysphoria is the psychological distress that results from an incompatibility between a person's self-perceived gender identity, and the gender they are associated with by society based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

All trans persons may not experience gender dysphoria. Many may experience gender dysphoria from childhood, while others may experience it later in life - such as after puberty.

Gender incongruence

Gender incongruence is a marked and persistent incongruence between the gender felt or experienced by a person, and the gender associated by society with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender affirmation procedures

Gender affirmation procedures help an individual affirm their gender identity. These include social procedures (wearing clothes perceived to be closer to the gender of choice, attempting to 'live as the gender'), medical procedures (surgery, hormone therapy, laser therapy), and legal procedures (changing their name and gender in official documents).

Gender affirmation surgery

Gender affirmation surgery is surgery of external sex characteristics that help an individual affirm their gender identity, or 'look how they feel on the inside.' It is recommended to use this term instead of 'sex reassignment surgery' (SRS), which was used in the past.

Deadname

A deadname is the name that was given to a transgender person by their family, and one by which they were once identified. However, the transgender individual may no longer use that name.

This is the name a transgender person has 'left behind' or 'killed'. Usually, deadname refers to the name they were given by their parents/guardians.

Note: While reporting, do not ask for a person's 'old name' or 'original name' or deadname. It is not an important detail that society needs to know, and mentioning a person's deadname in a story is disrespectful. Similarly, descriptions like 'the man became a woman' or 'the woman became a man' should be avoided. You must stick to the name they give you in all published reports.

Gender fluidity/ Gender-fluid person

'Gender fluidity' refers to a person's experience of not having a fixed gender. A gender-fluid person may identify with all genders, multiple genders, or two genders (bigender). (See also: 'Gender non-binary person')

Cisgender

A cisgender person is someone whose gender identity conforms with the gender corresponding to the sex assigned at birth. A person who is not transgender or non-binary is cisgender.

Part 3:

Terms related to sexuality

Sexuality

‘Sexuality’ refers to a person’s behaviours, desires, identity, and attitudes related to sex and physical intimacy with others.

Sexual orientation

‘Sexual orientation’ refers to the person(s) and/or gender(s) an individual is attracted to - physically, emotionally, and/or romantically. For instance, ‘heterosexual’ orientation refers typically to attraction between a man and a woman. ‘Homosexual’ orientation refers to attraction between two men or two women.

Just like a cisgender woman can be heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual (straight, bi, or lesbian), a transgender woman, too, can be heterosexual, homosexual, or any of a wide variety of sexual orientations.

Note: ‘Sexual orientation’ is different from ‘gender identity’.

Heterosexuality/ Heterosexual

‘Heterosexuality’ typically refers to the sexual attraction between men and women. A ‘heterosexual man’ or ‘straight man’ is a man who is attracted to women. A ‘heterosexual woman’ or ‘straight woman’ refers to a woman who is attracted to men. ‘Heteroromantic’ is a term that refers to romantic/emotional attraction, and not just sexual attraction. This applies to cisgender and transgender persons.

Homosexuality/ Homosexual

‘Homosexuality’ refers to sexual attraction to a person of the same gender as oneself. A homosexual man or a gay man is a man who is attracted to men; a homosexual woman or lesbian is a woman who is attracted to women.

Homoromantic

A homoromantic person is someone who feels romantic/ emotional attraction to persons of the same gender as them. This applies to cisgender and transgender persons.

Bisexuality/ Bisexual

‘Bisexuality’ refers to attraction towards persons of one’s own gender, and persons of another gender. In the past, bisexuality has been defined as attraction to men and women. But as our understanding of gender and gender identity evolves beyond the man/woman binary, the definition of bisexuality is also evolving. ‘Bisexuality’ need not imply an equal degree of attraction to both genders - just significant attraction to both.

Pansexuality/ Pansexual

‘Pansexuality’ refers to attraction towards persons of multiple genders/all genders, or attraction irrespective of gender. A pansexual person feels attraction towards persons of all genders or multiple genders. However, ‘pansexuality’ need not imply equal attraction to all genders.

Asexual/ Aromantic (Aro-Ace)

An asexual person is someone who does not feel sexual attraction towards anyone. An aromantic person is someone who does not feel romantic/ emotional attraction towards anyone.

Note: A person can be both asexual and aromantic at the same time; or they can feel only sexual attraction, or only romantic attraction, and not the other.

For example, a person can be asexual, but at the same time feel romantic attraction towards persons of the same gender, or vice versa.

Another note: While reporting about an aro-ace person or talking to them for a story, even if their sexuality is relevant to the story, do not question it or try to look for reasons behind it. Do not ask questions like “Did you turn asexual because of a bad sexual experience?” Also, do not ask intrusive questions about their romantic/intimate relationships. As a rule of thumb, if you think a question about an intimate relationship is too intrusive to ask a heterosexual person, then that applies to aro-ace persons as well.

Romantic orientation

‘Romantic orientation’ refers to an individual’s romantic/ emotional attraction, independent of their sexual attraction. People can be ‘homoromantic’, ‘heteroromantic’, ‘panromantic’, ‘aromantic’, etc. A person’s romantic orientation need not correspond to their sexual orientation.

For instance, a person who is pansexual - that is, someone who is sexually attracted to people of all genders - can be homoromantic, which means they want to have romantic/emotional relationships only with persons of their own gender.

Part 4:

Umbrella/ Collective terms

Queer

‘Queer’ is an umbrella term used to refer to diverse sex characteristics, genders, and sexualities that are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. It is a ‘reclaimed’ word - the word was used as a slur for people who did not align with societal assumptions of gender and sexuality in the past. However, the LGBTQIA+ community has now claimed ownership of the term and uses it to describe themselves.

Note: As much as possible, journalists who are not queer must avoid using the term in their work, unless identifying a queer individual or quoting them.

LGBTIQA+/ LGBTQIA+

LGBTIQA+/ LGBTQIA+ is a term used to collectively refer to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual people, and people of other non-cisgender identities and non-heterosexual orientations. The term is sometimes shortened to LGBT, or LGBTQ, or LGBTQ+ as well.

Part 5:

Other terms used by LGBTQIA+ communities

Coming out

‘Coming out’ refers to the process of disclosing one’s LGBTQIA+ identity to others. Usually, LGBTQIA+/ queer persons come out multiple times throughout their lives in different interactions with different people. That is, it’s not a one-time event.

Note: There is criticism and discourse around the fact that LGBTQIA+ persons have to come out at all - because the assumption in society is that everyone is, or ought to be, cisgender, and straight. While working on stories about a person coming out or mentioning ‘coming out’ in a story, please do so with an understanding that this should not have to be the norm for queer persons.

Ally

An ally is a person or organisation supportive of the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons and communities, and uses their privilege/position in society to promote LGBTQIA+ rights, communities, and causes.

Note: An ‘ally’ should ideally be identified by the LGBTQIA+ community/communities based on their actions. Self-declaration of allyship does not mean much if the person’s actions and words end up hurting the communities they claim to support. Take the self-declaration of allyship by cisgender and heterosexual persons with a pinch of salt, and while reporting, try to confirm with LGBTQIA+ communities whether this person is actually seen as an ally by the communities in question.

Queer Pride parade/ Rainbow Pride parade

‘Queer Pride parades’ or ‘Rainbow Pride parades’ or ‘LGBTQIA+ Pride parades’ are events celebrating LGBTQIA+/ queer culture and asserting self-respect in these identities. These events are often used as a method for visibility for queer groups, as well as platforms to raise demands for the rights of queer communities.

Conversion therapy, SOGIE change efforts

‘Conversion therapy’ or SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression) change efforts are practices that aim to ‘change’ or ‘convert’ people from queer to heterosexual, from trans to cisgender, or gender non-conforming to gender conforming. Some of these attempts stem from superstitions and religion-based beliefs.

These are unethical, illegal, and unscientific efforts that have been banned and declared as professional misconduct by the National Medical Commission (NMC) based on a directive from the Madras High Court.



Basics for reporters

This chapter details what reporters must keep in mind while reporting on a story concerning LGBTQIA+ persons and/or communities. Bear in mind that reporters should be responsible to ensure that their stories don't lead to discrimination or hatred against vulnerable communities.

- **Names and pronouns:** Reporters are usually under tight deadlines, but that is no reason to forget being respectful towards the people you interview. As a reporter, you must be professional and also build trust with your sources. Reporters should always tell stories with accuracy and integrity, and protect their sources. This doesn't change when interviewing an LGBTQIA+ person.

It is imperative for reporters to ask a person's name and pronouns and use them correctly while quoting the person, writing about them, or speaking about them publicly. Do not assume anything in this case, and always ask politely:

- **What is your name?** This may not be the legal name of the person, but reporters must stick to the name the person gives.

Note: If the person wants to remain anonymous, use naming conventions for pseudonyms used by your organisation, keeping the gender of the pseudonym consistent with the name of your source.

- **What are your pronouns?** Don't use the term 'preferred pronouns' - just 'pronouns'. A person's pronouns can be he/his, she/her, they/them, ze/zis, he/she/they, etc. If a person prefers not to use any pronouns, stick to their name in the report.
- **Do not ask** a person about their deadname (refer to Glossary) or use it anywhere without their consent. A deadname is what a person formerly used or was previously addressed by. The use of a deadname is considered highly disrespectful and dismissive of a person's gender identity.

- **An LGBTQIA+ identity is not clickbait:** A person's gender identity or sexual orientation should only be mentioned if it is pertinent to the story.
 - For instance, if a theft has been committed and the person accused is gay, there is no reason to reveal this in a news report. We don't usually talk about a straight thief's sexuality in our reporting, so why focus on it only for LGBTQIA+ persons?
- **LGBTQIA+ persons are more than their gender and/or sexuality:** When quoting an expert who is an LGBTQIA+ person, whose identity is relevant to the story, ask them how they would like to be designated.
 - For instance, if ABC is a writer and a lesbian, she can be designated as:
 - ABC, a writer; or,
 - ABC, a lesbian writer; or,
 - ABC, a lesbian woman who is a writer; or,
 ABC, a writer who is a lesbian woman.

When in doubt, pick the last option.

- **Protect the identity of minors:** When reporting about a minor person who is queer, gender non-conforming, or trans, ensure that you protect their identity the same way you would protect the identity of any other minor. Refer to relevant Indian laws such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, etc.
- **Think about whom you're quoting for your story:** If you are writing about an LGBTQIA+ person who has died, for instance, are you prioritising the voices of their biological family instead of speaking to their chosen family/friends, who may be able to give a more correct picture of the deceased person?
- **Be mindful of complex barriers within LGBTQIA+ communities:** An LGBTQIA+ person could be further disadvantaged due to their caste, religion, economic status, etc. It is important to be cognisant of the privilege of the person you are talking to, which becomes important when deciding which stakeholders to feature in a story.
 - For instance, when you write about sex workers, it is necessary to talk to people who come from this background, and those who are related to the workers, and not just someone who lives abroad and does research on sex workers. Not following this principle will be a reflection of class and caste bias.

- **Reporting about transgender persons and communities:** When reporting and writing about transgender persons, please remember the following -
 - The word 'transgender' is to be used as an adjective. That is, don't use the terms 'a transgender' or 'transgenders'. Always use transgender person(s), trans person(s), transgender woman, trans woman, transgender man, trans man, etc. as per context.
 - Do not use phrases such as 'born a girl' or 'born a boy'. 'Sex assigned at birth' is the correct phrase to use.
 - Example: 'XYZ is a transgender man.'
 - If readers need more clarification, say: 'XYZ was assigned female at birth and began transitioning at the age of 20.'
 - Do not say:** 'XYZ was born a woman.'
 - Avoid asking questions about a transgender person's body and genitals. If your story is about healthcare, then stick to open-ended questions and let the trans person guide the conversation in terms of how much they want to share.
 - Avoid using the term 'sex change' or 'sex reassignment surgery'. Instead, use 'gender affirmation surgery' if speaking about surgical transition. 'Transition' or 'gender affirmation procedures' can be the term used for medical, social, and legal transition.
 - While covering stories about transgender persons and communities, it is important to go beyond their personal journey, and not just focus on surgeries and gender affirmation procedures. These topics may get readership/viewership from a place of curiosity; however, there are many issues trans communities face such as police brutality, discrimination, exclusion from public healthcare, education, work and living opportunities, which are topics that reporters must focus on.



Basics for editors

This chapter deals with what editors (sub-editors, fact-checkers, and proofreaders) must keep in mind while editing a story about LGBTQIA+ persons and/or communities. Commissioning editors, especially those dealing with opinion pieces, can refer to the 'Commissioning and writing opinion pieces' chapter.

- **Dignity over sensationalism in headlines:** The headline is the first thing a reader or viewer sees - sometimes even the only thing that gets read. In a highly competitive media landscape, an editor is usually placed with the responsibility of ensuring that the headline is 'interesting' enough to get people to read a piece. However, that is no reason to ignore editorial responsibilities of sensitivity and causing no harm. If it's a choice between a sensational headline and a sensitive headline, always pick the sensitive one.
 - For instance, in a story about theft, if the accused is a queer person but their identity has nothing to do with the crime, there is no need to focus on their identity in the headline. It is not of value to the story, and it does nothing beyond bringing voyeuristic pleasure to a reader.
- **Double-check names and pronouns:** The media has, for a long time, used deadnames (refer to Glossary) of transgender persons in stories, and has treated transgender persons as 'items' of curiosity, with 'before and after' narratives taking centrestage. This is insensitive and editorially unnecessary. If a reporter or writer has quoted or mentioned an LGBTQIA+ person, double-check with them for the correct name and pronouns of the person, and use what has been given by the person consistently in the article/script. Internalised biases and typos can show up in a story despite a writer's best intentions; an editor must ensure that they check and correct these errors.
 - Note: Some queer persons might use multiple pronouns for themselves - such as She/They, He/They, He/She, or He/She/They. Depending on the story and after checking with the person concerned, take an editorial call to either use all of these pronouns in

different places in an article, or stick to one that the person has chosen in that instance. The first time their name is written, mention what pronouns they use and how they will be referred to in the story to give clarity to the reader.

- Refer to Glossary to use the right terms in the right context: Consider a situation where your reporter has written about an LGBTQIA+ person or community in a story, but does not have clarity on what terms to use. In such a scenario, the correct course of action would be to check with the source on how they should be addressed. If that is not possible for whatever reason, or the situation requires you to expand on some concepts, refer to the Glossary in this guide for the right terms to use, and to understand the definitions of these terms. Use it like you would a style guide.
 - For example, if a minor has been bullied in school because of their gender expression, and is unavailable to speak for themselves, avoid using terms and phrases such as ‘effeminate’ or ‘acted like a girl’. Instead, say that according to a source/sources, the child is ‘gender non-conforming’. Do not assume the gender identity of the child, as you don’t know whether they identify on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum.
- **Verify quotes with your source:** In detailed stories and interviews, it is good editorial practice to send quotes and bytes of a source back to them. This is to ensure that they haven’t been misquoted and nothing is lost in translation. Follow this practice with LGBTQIA+ persons as well, especially because many have poor experiences of dealing with the media. While no editor or organisation will agree to run an entire story by a source, there is no sensitivity issue when it comes to sending their own quotes to them for a check. This will also build trust with the source.
- **Ask LGBTQIA+ persons to do sensitivity checks:** If you are working on a complicated story that could have context you might miss because you’re not an expert on the subject, it’s good practice to reach out to a subject matter expert - either in-house or external - to do a sensitivity check of the content. Build professional relationships with LGBTQIA+ activists and journalists who can be sensitivity editors for your stories. However, ensure that they are not personally a part of the story in question, to maintain objectivity.
- **Safety first:** In many cases, an LGBTQIA+ person would want anonymity, as revealing their identity could lead to violence and discrimination - at home, at the workplace, or in public. Ensure that their identity is properly hidden in such cases. Journalism should not cause harm to someone who is in a vulnerable position.
 - For example, if a transgender person is a whistleblower in a case of corruption at their workplace, revealing their gender identity will in most cases end up revealing who they are to their employer as the organisation may not have too many trans persons. In such a scenario, ensure that their gender identity is also hidden, along with their name and other identifying details.

- Suppose a gay man has reported being blackmailed by someone on a dating app. Revealing their name could reveal their identity to their family, who may not know about their sexuality. In such cases, too, ensure anonymity of your sources.
- **Ensure diversity of voices in stories:** It's important for an editor to notice if a reporter tends to quote the same two or three activists in every story. As an editor, you must ensure reporters cultivate diverse sources. As with most communities and social justice movements, LGBTQIA+ persons also belong to an intersection of identities, which privilege and disadvantage them to different degrees. Caste, class, geography, gender, access to education, and language are all factors that can privilege or further marginalise an LGBTQIA+ person. Ensure that the voices quoted in the media are not always the most privileged in LGBTQIA+ communities.
- **Content warnings:** Give appropriate content warnings at the beginning of stories and videos that contain graphic descriptions of violence, assault, harassment, or queerphobic comments that might be a trigger for anybody reading them.



Commissioning and writing opinion pieces

This chapter covers opinion pieces on the intersection of culture, arts, advocacy, law and policy, politics, education, healthcare, human rights, science, sports, etc. and LGBTQIA+ identities and issues.

The first thing a commissioning editor should consider is: Who is writing the piece? And what makes them eligible to write it? Before commissioning them to write the piece, ask the following questions:

- Are they queer-identified?
- Do they have subject matter expertise?
- What is their track record in writing about LGBTQIA+ persons?
- What is their track record in writing about human rights in general?

If they are queer-identified:

- What is their community involvement? What is their work at the grassroots?
- Are they professionally qualified to write/talk about the subject? For instance, if they are talking about mental health from an expert's point of view, are they a psychiatrist/psychologist/counsellor/therapist? If their opinion sounds controversial, get a second opinion from a trusted expert source.
 - For example, if they are promoting something like self-harm, or a controversial therapy, then get a second opinion on whether this is prudent to publish.
- Are they taking a problematic position in terms of supremacy w.r.t. caste, class, gender, sexuality, race, religion, language, etc.? Just because someone is queer doesn't mean they are not privileged in other ways, and doesn't mean they cannot hold problematic/fascist views.

- For example, if a powerful LGBTQIA+ identified person supports majoritarian violence, their queer identity is not a reason to refrain from calling them out.
- Another example: If a queer-identified person from a privileged caste makes casteist remarks about an LGBTQIA+ person from a marginalised caste, there is no problem with an opinion piece by a marginalised caste person calling out such remarks.
- Understand that one queer person cannot be the self-proclaimed representative of all queer communities/persons. So while commissioning and editing opinion pieces, be wary of such claims.
- LGBTQIA+ persons can also be bigoted towards fellow queer persons, or towards other identities inside the umbrella. Don't give a platform for bigotry.
 - For example, if a cis lesbian woman pitches a piece questioning the lesbian identity of transgender women, it is not an acceptable subject for 'discourse', and should be considered problematic. The gender and sexuality of a person is self-identified, and cannot be decided for them by anyone else, including other queer persons.

If they are NOT queer-identified:

- Are they taking a stand on lived experiences of queer persons? If yes, don't commission the piece.
- If they're a subject matter expert, are they sticking to the subject matter, or going into issues that are best commented upon by queer persons?
 - For example, if a lawyer is writing about marriage equality, are they sticking to case law, constitutional definitions, etc. or are they making assumptions about the lived experiences of queer persons? The former is ok, the latter is not.
- If they are a subject matter expert, but are taking a stand that is seemingly controversial or problematic, get a second opinion from a trusted community source.
 - For example, if a mental health professional wants to comment on the 'causes' of queerness, and this language is hiding behind scientific jargon, ensure that you run the piece by an LGBTQIA+ mental health expert before you take a call.
- Are they a person who routinely occupies space meant for queer persons? Check out their prior credentials, including their public social media activity. If they centre themselves in narratives about queer persons, this is a red flag. It amounts to appropriation of identity, and responsible media should not give space for it.
- Do not accept pieces that are bigoted towards or belittle a community inside the LGBTQIA+ umbrella, while claiming to be in support of another community inside the umbrella.

- For instance, a career feminist (subject matter expert) may write a piece supporting cisgender lesbians while spreading misinformation about how trans women are dangerous. Such feminists are known as TERFs - Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists. This is a problematic stand, and such pieces are best refused.
- If a person claims to be an activist working for queer communities/persons, and is pitching a piece that could directly help give credibility to themselves or their organisation (NGO), ensure that you do a background check on the person before publishing them.
- For example, if a cis person running an NGO says they are running a helpline for queer persons, speak to community members in the city/state where they operate to check whether the helpline is genuine, and is not a scam to get funding.

Additionally,

- Apply the same standards that you would for opinion pieces on cisgender women's issues to pieces on LGBTQIA+ communities.
- For instance, if you will not platform a person accused in MeToo, use the same standards to not platform someone who has been accused of homophobia/transphobia/queerphobia.
- When commissioning an opinion piece on comments or statements made by an individual, ensure that the piece does not misrepresent the statement in question, like considering only a part of it in order to outrage. Apply regular editorial standards when it comes to LGBTQIA+ issues as well.
- If an opinion piece reveals the personal identities of people that are being commented on, for statements made in private without a public record, use your discretion in accepting it.
- If an opinion piece is likely to cause harm to LGBTQIA+ persons/communities, reject them.



Photos and videos

This chapter deals with taking photos and videos of LGBTQIA+ persons, publishing photos and videos of LGBTQIA+ persons, using representative visuals (including illustrations) for stories about LGBTQIA+ persons and issues, and captioning images.

Photojournalism is perhaps one of the most powerful tools that will help bring the reader/viewer as close to the subject as possible, in the process of which a journalist/organisation can invoke a myriad of emotions. It is important to strike a balance between conveying the essence of the story authentically and portraying the subject of the photograph in a dignified manner. When it comes to photographing LGBTQIA+ persons and related events, journalists need to be tactful about protecting the subjects' identity if needed, as their safety could often be at stake.

- Make sure you have the informed consent of LGBTQIA+ persons/groups before photographing/videographing them. Explain what media you hope to collect for your assignment, how it will be used, the overarching theme of the piece, and the publication expected to carry it. Take a few moments to chat with your source and ensure they are comfortable, and consent to being captured on camera. Further, explain possible risks that come with being featured, such as going viral, receiving unsolicited networking requests, being the subject of criticism, or receiving more attention online and offline than they may be used to. Also, be mindful of the fact that there is a real risk of outing people - revealing their LGBTQIA+ identity - to those they did not intend to come out to.
- For example, a person might have revealed their identity to a set of people, like their friends, but not to their family or colleagues. If you publish an image of them participating in an LGBTQIA+ event with or without a caption, it might put that person at risk.
- While photographing or videographing queer events such as a Pride march, a conference, a play, a party, or a gathering of LGBTQIA+ persons, or taking photos and videos for specific stories that are about the lives and issues of LGBTQIA+ persons, check with the event organiser about the photography policy of the event, and whether they have a method for

identifying those who have consented to being in photos and videos and those who haven't. One way in which organisers can do this is by providing stickers/lanyards that those who consent to being photographed can wear.

- When selecting representative images, understand the context of the story before deciding on what photos/visuals to use. Avoid using file photos from Pride events where LGBTQIA+ persons can be identified as representative images for other stories. Firstly, the person has not consented to their photo being used outside of that specific context. Secondly, this could pose a professional/personal risk to the person. You can use photos/visuals where faces/identities are not visible.
 - For example, if a story is about the challenges LGBTQIA+ persons experience in accessing healthcare, use a photograph that reflects that context. It could be a picture of a queer person (face or other identifiers may or may not be shown) who is trying to access healthcare. If you don't have that kind of photograph, try using an illustration. But please don't use a rainbow flag or queer persons' photos/visuals taken in a different context.
- Capture your LGBTQIA+ source on camera with the same courtesy and dignity you would extend to non-LGBTQIA+ persons. Do not expect or ask them to present themselves in a certain way, as this is essentially asking a person to 'perform' their identity for you, and amounts to stereotyping. Ensure these standards are applied to representational images as well.
 - For example, do not ask an LGBTQIA+ professional dressed in a suit to show you tattoos or piercings if they do not volunteer to do so.
- When featuring photos/videos of transgender and/or non-binary persons, do not use before-and-after gender-affirming procedure photos, unless the subject of your story insists on being represented that way.
- Do not show LGBTQIA+ persons in a depressing, sad, or violent manner unless the behaviour shown in the photo directly relates to the story.
- Try to pick images that show diversity - in religion, age, gender, class, body size, disability, etc.
- If a person's LGBTQIA+ identity is relevant to the story and it is in the public interest for you to include these details, proceed with sensitivity and respect. Ask for pronouns, and enquire what is the best way to photograph/videotape them. In the case of celebrities, make an effort to reach out to managers or publicists for this information, if it is not publicly available. Mention this in the report.
 - For example, you might need to take a photograph of an intersex person who is facing health issues due to an unconsented surgery performed on them. Instead of taking a

photograph that compromises their dignity in any way, you can take a photograph that shows their other interests - like reading a book, playing a game, talking to someone, etc.

- Ensure that photographs/visuals are only used on the platform for which the person concerned has given consent.
 - For instance, you work for Organisation A, and have photographed Person X for a story for Organisation A. Organisation B then decides to cross-publish the piece. When Organisation B approaches Organisation A for such republication, ensure that you also get the consent of the person who has agreed to the publication in Organisation A, before letting Organisation B use that photo.
- The rainbow/rainbow flag as a representative image is 'safe,' but also clichéd. Before using an image with a rainbow, ask yourself - if you were writing the same story about cisgender-heterosexual folks, what images would you use? How is a rainbow/flag relevant to a story that isn't about the rainbow/flag? Get to the core of the story for answers on how best to illustrate it without rainbow-washing it.
 - For example, if you're writing a story on gender-affirming care, ask yourself whether a flag is relevant to healthcare. For some trans folks, gender-affirming healthcare is a part of our daily lives. Rather than viewing it from the lens of 'murkiness', try viewing it from the lens of the 'mundane'. If estradiol, testosterone shots, and top surgery scars are part of everyday life, how can you portray them as that, rather than from a sensationalised lens? If you're working on a story on education, show how LGBTQIA+ folks navigate classrooms, reach school, finish homework and so on (while, of course, protecting their identity).



Image 1



Image 2

- Alt text or alternative text is the text added to an image describing what the image portrays. It is an important accessibility tool. For representative images, describe the image. Do not focus on the identity of the person if the image has a human in it. The purpose of the alt text is to provide accessible user experience to people, particularly those with vision-related disabilities.

- For example, the Alt text for Image 1 could say, “A photo of photojournalists gathered at the Chennai Rainbow Pride parade, covering the participants at the event. All of them are holding cameras, and are focusing on a subject at the centre.” Don’t just say, “A photo of photojournalists covering LGBTQIA+ persons in the Chennai Rainbow Pride parade.”
- The Alt text for Image 2 could say, “Picture of a large crowd walking in the Chennai Rainbow Pride parade with rainbow flags and placards,” instead of “Lesbians, gays and transgenders gathering at the Chennai Rainbow Pride parade.” (Check Glossary for correct usage of LGBTQIA+ terms.)
- While subtitling a video, use the appropriate terms from the language that you are subtitling in. If there are terms or identities that are cultural and do not have an equivalent in the language you are subtitling in, retain the term from the original language. Similarly, when you provide voice-over for a video, do not mimic the speaker but focus on the messaging.
- For example, if a person you are providing voice-over for has a stammer/lisp, do not mimic the stammering/lisping in the voice-over messaging only to match the original speaker.



Pride and other LGBTQIA+ events

This chapter covers reporting on Pride marches, Pride month/Queer History month, and events for LGBTQIA+ persons outside of Pride month/Queer History Month.

- A **‘Pride event’** is any programme that has a focus on LGBTQIA+ lives, issues, literature, films, etc. It doesn’t necessarily have to be conducted during Pride month or Queer History Month (June). Pride events act as both cultural spaces and also spaces that bring together queer communities and individuals. Pride events are organised by queer individuals, groups, collectives, and organisations that work for the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons. If you’re a reporter covering a Pride event, here’s a basic checklist to start off with.
 - Check with the organisers if they have a press release for the media. This will give clarity on who the organisers are, and what the stated goal of the event is.
 - Most Pride events have a vision and a story behind them. Make sure to get enough information for a holistic view of the event. For example, ask for information about similar past events, past speakers, what was achieved in the previous editions, what is the focus of the event this year, etc.
 - Check with the organisers for pictures that can be used with your story. If you’re photographing the event, ask if there is any way to know which participants have consented to being photographed for media use. Even if an event is open to the public, be mindful that there is a real risk of outing people - revealing their LGBTQIA+ identity to their family or employers - by publishing their pictures.
 - Focus on the subject of the event rather than the ‘queerness’ alone. For example, if the event is related to cinema, focus on the films themselves from an LGBTQIA+ perspective.
 - Pride events might often be the only safe spaces for queer persons. If someone refuses to be quoted or to talk to the media, respect their decision.

- **When covering a protest or demonstration** organised by LGBTQIA+ individuals or groups to put forth their demands for justice, to oppose policies, court judgements, etc., focus on the demands and perspectives of the protesters, and the reasoning behind their agitation. Don't fixate on the protesters' LGBTQIA+ identities.
 - Look at policies and judgements holistically when there are protests against them. Speak to a diverse set of sources from within LGBTQIA+ communities on how and why the said policy or judgement will affect their lives.
 - While covering protests and demonstrations in public spaces, be mindful of the privacy of LGBTQIA+ individuals and seek their consent before taking their photographs. (For more details, refer to the 'Photos and videos' chapter.)
- While covering Pride parades, understand the motivation behind them. Depending upon the geographical or legal context, Pride can be an act of protest, a celebration, or both.
 - A Pride parade can have multiple organisers. Talk to them to figure out the parade's focus for the year and ask for a press release with their quotes etc.
 - Know that the LGBTQIA+ community is diverse and that people can have multiple intersecting identities. Speak to LGBTQIA+ persons with diverse identities to understand what Pride means to them and why they have participated in the event.
 - While covering Pride, avoid headlines, stories, or opinion pieces that focus only on the grandeur or celebratory aspect of the event.
- **While covering performances, festivals, or cultural events by or about LGBTQIA+ persons**, approach the event as you would any other such programmes. Speak to the organisers and diverse participants to understand the reason behind organising the festival.
 - Do not assume that all the speakers, writers, artists, performers, and technicians are LGBTQIA+ individuals.
 - Do not limit the identities of the speakers, writers, artists, and performers to their queerness. Learn about their works, lives, and achievements in their field.
- **Job fairs:** LGBTQIA+ persons frequently face discrimination in work and at workplaces. However, this doesn't mean that LGBTQIA+ focused hiring drives have a low bar for queer persons. Job fairs that focus on LGBTQIA+ talent have been organised by various community organisations, NGOs, Human Resources consultancies, and corporates to attract a diverse talent pool.
 - While covering a job fair, speak to various job-seekers and understand their perspective about the event and their expectations in the workplace.

- Speak to the employers at the job fair to understand if their workplace policies and benefits are inclusive of LGBTQIA+ persons.
- Where possible, highlight what employers are looking for to fill specific positions during such drives, so that LGBTQIA+ persons looking for work can reach these employers.
- News coverage about the job fair before the event is also important as it will help reach more LGBTQIA+ persons.
- **Traditional events and festivals:** These include religious and community-based rituals such as the Koovagam and Kulasekarapattinam festivals in Tamil Nadu, the Jogappa festival in Karnataka, etc. While many of these cultural festivals attract trans and gender non-conforming persons, non-queer persons also take part in these rituals and festivals.
 - While many of these festivals are focused on queer identities, it is important to understand that the spaces are not always welcoming to queer pilgrims. Focus on the various hindrances that queer persons face to be a part of such festivals.
 - While covering news about queer persons in the festivals, do not focus on their private life and respect their boundaries.
- **Queer representation in mainstream events:** While covering events that cater to society at large, remember that LGBTQIA+ persons are also part of society, as are other marginalised persons. For instance, a nationwide series of protests against certain policy decisions perhaps includes LGBTQIA+ voices.
 - If there is participation of LGBTQIA+ persons as performers in these events, focus on their body of work instead of focusing on their identity alone.
 - Speak to the organisers about steps taken to include LGBTQIA+ persons in the event as performers and/or audience members.



News and current affairs

This chapter covers the language used in general news reporting, news reports quoting LGBTQIA+ persons, and the challenges and best practices involved in general news reporting that involves LGBTQIA+ persons, communities, or issues.

- LGBTQIA+ persons are part of the larger population, and issues that affect people at large are also bound to affect LGBTQIA+ persons and communities. When covering general news, it's important to keep this in mind, and look at how a news event affects LGBTQIA+ persons, and be inclusive of their concerns in your reporting.
 - For instance, if a city is flooded, look at how LGBTQIA+ persons are affected in general and specific ways. Are there gender-neutral restrooms at flood shelters? Are queer persons facing discrimination when it comes to rehabilitation schemes? Also, don't forget the agency and leadership of LGBTQIA+ persons - how are they involved in rescue and relief efforts? How are they organising to provide support to communities they are a part of?
- Marginalised and minority communities are affected by the larger policies of governments, and it's important to remember this while reporting. Speak to LGBTQIA+ persons and community leaders to understand the issues they face and highlight them.
 - For example, a policy like demonetisation affects the country at large. However, marginalised persons suffer in specific ways, as they are denied access to financial systems because of their identities. Reporters should ask how trans communities, for instance, are dealing with such a situation.
- When reporting on LGBTQIA+ issues, journalists should take care to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes, or sensationalising events for clickbait. They should also be aware of the legal and social risks that LGBTQIA+ individuals face, and take steps to protect their sources and interviewees from harassment or persecution.

- For example, when reporting the death of an LGBTQIA+ person who was a public figure, avoid speculating on the cause of death based on unsubstantiated talk. While this applies to all celebrities and sensationalised crimes, queer persons are frequently subjected to a voyeuristic gaze which journalists must consciously avoid.
- Another example: If you're writing a story about gay men facing extortion or fraud on dating apps, do not make any assumptions about dating culture among gay men or their reasons for using such apps. If these elements are essential to your story, talk to multiple gay dating app users and try to include diverse perspectives, instead of generalising based on one or two persons' accounts.
- Another example: If you are covering a protest against a government policy that affects the wider population, it is common to encounter LGBTQIA+ persons among the protesters. Do not out their queer identity in your reports without their consent.
- When reporting on hate crimes or discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals, journalists should use the right adjectives and descriptors for the incident, making it clear that what has happened is unacceptable. Don't try to 'both sides' a hate crime or incident of discrimination - just like you wouldn't 'both sides' an incident of murder, sexual harassment, or burglary.
- For example, if an LGBTQIA+ person has been attacked by a stranger in public for their gender expression, don't publish justifications for why the attack happened. Describe the attack itself, and get the reaction of the victim if possible. Do not say, "The attack was provoked by the victim's clothing and make-up." Additionally, you can quote community leaders who condemn such attacks and emphasise the harmful effects it has on LGBTQIA+ communities.
- When quoting LGBTQIA+ persons in news reports, respect their identities and experiences. This means using their correct pronouns and names, and avoiding language that might suggest that their identities are abnormal or deviant.
- For example, if you interview a non-binary person who is an expert on finance, focus on their expertise while using the name and pronouns they give you. You don't have to focus on their identity unnecessarily.
- It is also important to recognise that LGBTQIA+ persons are not a monolithic group and that their experiences and perspectives may vary widely. Journalists should make an effort to include a diversity of voices in their reporting, including people of different ages, castes, classes, genders, and other socioeconomic backgrounds.
- For example, if you're reporting about education policy, look for voices of LGBTQIA+ students who are marginalised on account of their queerness and their caste. Their experiences will be different from that of a queer person from a privileged caste, or an older queer person who is not currently in an educational institution.



Health journalism – Undoing and unlearning harmful rhetoric around queer persons' health

by Azeefa Fathima

It is hard, in public imagination and popular media, to separate queer identities and persons from health scares and moral panic about mental health. However, it is important as journalists to present empathetic and just stories that highlight concerns without indulging in scaremongering and clickbait.

LGBTQIA+ persons, like any other section of society, have health concerns. Some of their interactions and encounters with doctors and healthcare providers are based on their specific needs as queer persons. A significant portion of popular conceptions of queer identities, especially transgender identities, are informed by outdated and debunked medical models and pseudoscience. It is important as a journalist to understand where these perceptions come from and present your audience with truthful and sensitive stories.

When a story deals with gender-affirming surgeries or other medical procedures for transgender persons, or HIV/AIDS care for queer persons, it is important to have a qualified and queer-friendly medical expert balance out the misinformation and negative perceptions that are often shared on social media or in sensational press. There are many LGBTQIA+ persons in the medical field, and they may be able to present better and more nuanced ideas and information. It is important to highlight their voices where possible.

Here are some additional points to keep in mind:

HIV/AIDS reporting

When reporting on HIV/AIDS, two significant aspects have to be borne in mind. The first thing to remember is that we have come a long way from the 1980s, and that an HIV positive person can lead a healthy life.

In the year 2012, the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) approved the combination of emtricitabine and tenofovir disoproxil fumarate to be used as a pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medication for HIV positive individuals. Four years after this, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) approved this to be used as PrEP in India, in 2016. PrEP is the use of an antiretroviral medication to reduce the risk of acquiring HIV. Regular intake of PrEP, along with other safe practices, is proven to substantially reduce the risk of HIV in high-risk groups. While this is a preventive measure, people who test positive for HIV and take antiretroviral therapy (ART) as prescribed can keep a very low level of viral load and will not transmit HIV through sex. Thus, the disease is not as scary as it was four decades ago.

The terminology used by HIV/AIDS workers is often highly stigmatising. Wherever possible, listen to affected LGBTQIA+ persons directly and present terms that they prefer.

The second thing to note is the usage of the term ‘MSM’, which stands for ‘men who have sex with men’. In the 1980s, when the US started reporting HIV/AIDS cases, it was called ‘Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID)’ just because the medical community thought it affects only gay individuals. Later, it was discovered that women and persons in heterosexual relationships can also get infected with the virus, and that it can be transmitted to a child through pregnancy.

The term ‘men who have sex with men’ dates back to at least 1988, while the abbreviation ‘MSM’ came into usage only in 1994. While the medical community claims that the abbreviation is used to differentiate a person’s sexual orientation from sexual activity, the community members strongly believe that the term is dehumanising and disrespectful.

It is also crucial to note that till date, workers and officials involved in HIV prevention work use the term ‘MSM’ to refer to gay, bisexual individuals, and also trans persons in many cases. Again, this comes from a stigmatising belief that it is only these people that engage in a particular sexual activity, which is the common public imagination. Thus, it is important to rectify wild imagination that is focused on a queer person’s sexual activity and strips them of any other humaneness, and instead focus on what their needs are and how they want them to be articulated in their stories.

We should also bear in mind the importance of the identity of persons we report, especially when it comes to reporting on HIV/AIDS. In India, it is prohibited to disclose the identity of a HIV patient without their informed consent.

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 (HIV/AIDS Act)

According to this Act, the HIV status of a person cannot be disclosed by anyone, including a healthcare professional, without the informed consent of the patient. The law clearly states that “no healthcare provider, except a physician or a counsellor, shall disclose the HIV-positive status of a person to his or her partner.” An exception can be made only in certain circumstances, which are:

- if the partner of the HIV positive person is at risk of transmission of HIV from the patient
- if the patient has been counselled to inform their partner
- if the healthcare provider is sure that the patient will not inform their partner
- if the patient has been informed about the disclosure

So, it is an offence if we, as journalists, disclose their HIV status during the course of our reporting.

Mental health reporting

When it comes to reporting on mental health, a lot of us think about reporting guidelines on suicides. However, mental health reporting also covers the overall systemic oppressions faced by LGBTQIA+ persons and the outcome of the same.

There are two main aspects when it comes to covering mental health related to LGBTQIA+ persons: the actual mental health issues faced by the people, and how the bureaucracy labels queerness as mental illness and tries to ‘treat’ queer people.

There is another important rule of thumb that we should bear in mind during the course of reporting/editing - all identities are about self-determination and none of them are in any way related to mental illness. There are no tests to determine a person’s gender identity or gender expression or sexuality. We should always respect and believe in a person’s identity as stated by them. If anybody, be it an expert, doctor, or psychologist, claims that a person is queer because of ‘childhood trauma’ or a person is gay/lesbian because of ‘sexual abuse’, or claims to have ‘treated’ gayness, we should know that it is not true.

Pop culture and the media often gives space to doctors who claim that queerness is ‘just in a person’s head’. There have been many films and characters that show queer people in a bad light, which in turn shape public opinion.

Declassification of queerness from DSM

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental disorder as follows: “A mental disorder is characterised by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotional regulation, or behaviour”. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines mental illness as “health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behaviour (or a combination of these).”

It is the American Psychiatric Association that publishes the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - popularly known as DSM - which is a handbook used by healthcare professionals in many parts of the world. Based on several descriptions, symptoms, and other criteria, the DSM classifies and diagnoses several mental disorders. Since 1952 - the year when DSM-1 was published - homosexuality had been listed as a ‘mental illness’. DSM-1 described being gay as a “sociopathic personality disturbance”. The entire logic was based on the premise that any sex that was non-procreative in nature was ‘unnatural’.

From the 1960s onward, LGBTQIA+ activists started protesting against the APA’s classification, and started participating in seminars and conferences opposing the APA’s stand. At an APA convention in 1972, Dr John Fryer - a gay psychiatrist - appeared in a panel discussion on LGBTQIA+ issues for the first time. Wearing a mask and using a voice-distorting microphone to disguise his identity, Dr Fryer presented himself as “Dr Henry Anonymous”, and asserted that being gay was not an illness.

In 1973, the APA asked all the convention members to vote to decide if homosexuality should be removed or retained in DSM; 5,854 psychiatrists voted to remove it, and 3,810 to retain it. That is how homosexuality was declassified as a ‘mental illness’. However, it was still mentioned in the DSM as a ‘sexual orientation disturbance’ till 1987.

It took another three years for the WHO to remove homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) in 1990. And it was only in 2019 that WHO stopped categorising ‘transgender’ as a “mental disorder”. In its revised edition, ICD-11, “gender identity disorders” was changed to “gender incongruence”.

Reporting on suicide

Suicide prevention is a major public health problem in India. According to the WHO, there are approximately 8,00,000 suicides globally every year, and India accounts for 36.6% of the global suicide deaths. Suicide is a complex psychological, cultural, and social problem with no one specific factor having a cause-and-effect relationship. Risk factors can range from mental health problems, financial burden, poverty, trauma, abuse, unemployment, discrimination, emotional distress, crises in one’s life, chronic physical illnesses, lack of support, lack of access to healthcare, etc.

According to global research, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to suicidal ideation - especially lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. Studies of bullying in schools suggest that suicidal behaviour may be more common among LGBTQIA+ youth, due to elevated exposure to stigma, threat, and isolation. A meta-analysis of studies from ten countries found that LGBTQIA+ youth had a higher risk of suicide attempts compared with their heterosexual peers.

Actual suicide rates among LGBTQIA+ persons are not known because sexual orientation and gender identity are not reported in death records. Research has found that most risk factors stem from the stress created by living as a stigmatised individual in society.

The media plays an important role in suicide prevention given its strong influence on the attitudes, beliefs, and values of individuals and communities. For example, appropriate media portrayal of suicide is one of the effective universal strategies to prevent suicide. Positive and responsible reporting of suicides promotes help-seeking behaviour and increases awareness of suicide prevention. At the same time, irresponsible reporting can result in people imitating suicidal behaviour. A vulnerable person identifies with the person depicted in the suicide story/report and may 'copy' or 'imitate' their suicidal behaviour, and eventually die by suicide.

The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 states that every person who attempts suicide will be presumed to be under severe stress and will not be tried under Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860 (which criminalises attempt to suicide). The Union or state government has the duty to provide care, treatment, and rehabilitation to a person who was under severe stress and attempted suicide - to reduce the risk of recurrence of attempts.

An analysis of reporting on suicides of LGBTQIA+ persons in India showed that a majority of the news reports discussed gender (93.3%), the reason for suicide (73.3%), and life events (60.7%) in the title of the news article. Most reports also mentioned the person's name, age, gender, occupation, method of suicide, location of suicide, and life events. Detailed steps of suicide were described in 23% of reports, while suicide pacts and suicide notes were mentioned in 20% and 28.2% of news reports, respectively. Relatively few news reports (<20%) included helpful reporting characteristics. Between English and local language reports, the latter fared significantly worse in terms of adherence to WHO's media guidelines for reporting on suicides. None of the local language reports discussed suicide-related statistics, prevention of suicide, or contact details of suicide support services.



Health

This chapter deals with reporting and writing about healthcare for LGBTQIA+ persons and communities, including gender affirmation procedures, HIV/AIDS, etc.

When it comes to health reportage involving LGBTQIA+ persons, a large number of stories focus only on gender affirmation surgeries - mostly botched-up surgeries. While it is important to write and have conversations about surgeries, it is also imperative to look at the overall healthcare options available and policies devised and implemented, as well as to foreground the needs of the community members. It is also imperative that we report and write using a language that the person(s) concerned is comfortable with. These are some of the pointers to keep in mind, especially when we report/edit health stories pertaining to LGBTQIA+ communities:

- Do not treat the person you are speaking to as a victim or as if they are ignorant about the subject they are talking about. Journalists should remember that lived experiences are valid, and many LGBTQIA+ persons spend a lot of time and energy researching their health conditions because most doctors and healthcare professionals have little knowledge or experience in dealing with queer bodies.
- While reporting on the health issues of LGBTQIA+ persons and their access to health services, a journalist may come across information that they were previously unaware of; you might have questions on how to write about the topic. In such situations, it makes sense to pause, take time to understand the subject before writing about it, and seek clarification from your sources and experts. However, asking questions in a respectful manner and without intruding on anybody's privacy is of paramount importance.
- It is important to note here that the questions should be related to the story at hand, and not based on the curiosity that the general public harbours about the bodies of LGBTQIA+ persons or their personal relationships. Never ask intrusive questions that you, personally, would not like to be asked.

- For example, do not ask your source questions about their genitals. If a question seems too insensitive or intrusive when posed to a cisgender woman, it is too insensitive or intrusive for an LGBTQIA+ person as well.
- Be aware of the boundaries within which you are engaging. Ask your source beforehand if there are some topics they would rather not talk about, and respect these boundaries. Do not push if the person stops talking or visibly shows signs of not wanting to talk. Let the person sharing their experiences take the lead in the conversation.
 - For example, if you are speaking to a trans person about a botched surgery or a poor healthcare experience, ask open-ended questions and allow them to lead the conversation. If, for instance, the person does not want to go into details about the difficulty faced after surgery, do not press further. Let them choose what to talk about and what not to.
- Ask for consent from the person when it comes to writing about their personal details.
 - For example, a person might share their experience of an intimate medical examination with a journalist to ensure the journalist understands the situation, but might not want it published in as much detail. Always run what you are writing about your source by them before publication.
- Avoid publishing graphic images of a person's body or genitals when reporting on a health issue related to that aspect. (Refer to the 'Photos and videos' chapter for more information.)
- While reporting an instance of medical misbehaviour or abuse, it is important for journalists to balance the need for accurate details from sources with avoiding causing harm to them. Only ask for details that are not triggering to the survivor, as far as possible, and give your interviewee time and space to process their words while speaking to you. If the exact details of the medical procedure/surgery/health condition are not going to add value to the story, do not insist that the queer person share it with you.
- Never misgender a person. While this rule of thumb fits everywhere, it's extremely important to remember and apply this especially while reporting health-related stories.
 - For example, when reporting about a trans man undergoing a gender-affirming procedure, do not say, "She is undergoing surgery to become a trans man."
 - Note: A person should be identified and addressed as a trans person if they say so, no matter how many medical or surgical interventions they have undergone, or if they have undergone such procedures at all. The Supreme Court, in its NALSA vs Union of India verdict in 2014, has upheld individuals' right to self-identify their gender. Do not say, "Person X will soon become a trans man," or "Person Y is set to become a trans woman."

- Remember that gender affirmation surgery is just one part of the medical interventions. Do not fixate on it while reporting health stories.
- Do not use the pronoun of a person within single or double quotes. Example: Do not write, “Person X, a biological woman, was undergoing treatment to become a trans man, and paused ‘his’ treatment after ‘he’ got pregnant.”
- While reporting on any health-related issues, like complaints about unwanted/botched surgeries or deaths due to medical treatment, it is important to talk with the community members and family/friends as much as possible, and to avoid carrying medical professionals’ version alone. If required, find medical professionals who are themselves LGBTQIA+ and ask for their views. While it is true that doctors can explain the medical issue in better terms, it is the community that the person lived with who knows what exactly happened, and gives us a view into the person’s world before the medical intervention.
- When choosing experts to talk to regarding LGBTQIA+ persons, you can ask the community members who the reliable experts are. As in, any healthcare professional can claim to be an expert or can be an expert, but they need not necessarily be connected with the community at all. Hence, you should identify experts who work on the ground, for which guidance can be sought from the community members.
- For instance, a gay person who is considered to be an expert within their community might have problematic views about the trans community.
- Another example is when you are talking to medical professionals - it is easier to find doctors who are/who claim to be experts in performing gender affirmation surgeries, but the community members might not prefer that particular doctor for multiple reasons. In addition to having the expertise, the doctor must also be in touch with the community members.
- Avoid stigmatisation of LGBTQIA+ persons while reporting on diseases that might spread through sexual contact, such as HIV, monkeypox, etc. Special care should be taken while reporting on HIV, given that a lot of medical history related to HIV blames the gay community, and there are a lot of stigmas associated with the viral illness.
- Use the language preferred by the community members and avoid medicalisation of individuals. Here also, a lot of the words used stem from the history of HIV/AIDS. (Refer to the ‘Health journalism – Undoing and unlearning harmful rhetoric around queer persons’ health’ chapter for the history of HIV/AIDS and medicalisation of queer persons.)



Mental health and suicide

This chapter deals with covering mental health issues and illnesses, suicide, and the mental health requirements that trans and intersex persons are expected to comply with for gender-affirming procedures.

- When reporting on suicides, do not narrow it down to one particular reason. Instead, you can broaden it and look into how the system treats the community, and how it has caused them distress over the years. As it is an accepted fact that a majority of suicides are not caused by just one reason, journalists have to look into the various reasons behind a person's decision. You must ask what can be changed in the system and society so that such deaths can be avoided, and how to eliminate the stressors in the lives of LGBTQIA+ persons.
- For example, do not say, "A trans woman in Place X dies by suicide after being cheated by her boyfriend," or, "Queer person found dead after fight with partner/family." This narrows down the reason for suicide to just one event that happened in their life immediately before their death. While it might be the trigger point for them to take the decision, there are often several reasons - including discrimination, lack of family support, harassment, etc. - that build up the tension in their minds.
- Historically flawed definitions and understanding of queerness among health practitioners has resulted in a continued obfuscation of queerness and mental illness. It is on this premise that LGBTQIA+ individuals are often subjected to 'conversion therapy'. 'Conversion therapy' is a harmful and ignorant practice that attempts to 'suppress' a person's queerness through several practices, including prayers, exorcism, violence, depriving the person of basic needs, and in some cases, even sexual violence.

When covering news or stories related to 'conversion therapies', it is pertinent to understand the history of how the bodies and minds of LGBTQIA+ persons have been medicalised for decades. 'Conversion therapy', though aimed to 'cure' a person's queerness, only subjects the

individuals concerned to intense emotional and mental turmoil. It is, therefore, important to exercise caution and sensitivity while talking about such instances in a person's life.

- For example, we should never say, "Person X, a queer person, was taken to the doctor for conversion therapy to cure them." This is an affirmative statement. Instead, we can either use the word 'allegedly' or use scare quotes ("Person X was taken to 'conversion therapy' to 'cure' them.")
- When looking at any statistics or data indicating a high risk of mental health issues among LGBTQIA+ persons, remember that it is not just personal issues that cause the mental health problem - there are complex reasons such as generational trauma, stigma in society, attempts to erase their identity, targeted violence towards their community, and other disadvantages that contribute to the issue. Therefore, while it is important to look into the mental healthcare system and the facilities available to LGBTQIA+ persons, it is also important to look into other contributing factors and how to mitigate them.
- During the course of reporting, if you have to talk to a mental health professional (MHP), there are two things to keep in mind. Firstly, all MHPs are legally bound not to divulge information about their clients, so if you are not able to get some details, it means they are confidential and you can rethink if your story absolutely needs that element. Secondly, any detail shared by an MHP should be published or written about **only with the consent** of the person concerned. If you are not able to get their permission due to various reasons, you should not be writing it.

Covering suicide:

- Focus on suicide prevention as the overall approach to reporting suicide.
- Report the story in the same way as you would any other non-queer person's, without sensationalising.
- Do not use language that sensationalises, normalises, or oversimplifies suicide. Suicide reporting must avoid the use of sensationalising phrases such as 'suicide epidemic', 'successful suicide', or 'political suicide'.
- The phrase 'committed suicide' should not be used because it implies criminality, thereby creating stigma experienced by those who have lost a loved one to suicide and discouraging suicidal individuals from seeking help. Use phrases such as 'died by suicide' or 'took his or her or their life'.
- Evaluate the 'newsworthiness' of the story/report in the context of its impact on people (potential harm or positive outcome).

- Consider the impact of reporting suicide on individuals, including persons who have attempted suicide and survived the same; family members including chosen family, friends, and LGBTQIA+ community peers of the person who has attempted suicide or died by suicide.
- Do not reveal the name, photographs, suicide note (if any), chats, sexual and gender identity, or any other personal details of the deceased person or the person who has attempted suicide without the informed consent of the family members, including chosen family or the person who has attempted suicide.
- Focus on personal stories about overcoming suicidal thinking which will promote hope and encourage others to seek help.
- In every suicide story/report, it is crucial to provide help-seeking information about support resources with a message that vulnerable persons must reach out and seek help. The information should be prominently placed either at the beginning or end of the suicide story/report. Support services can include suicide prevention centres, emergency departments in hospitals, 24/7 crisis helplines, self-help groups, mental health professionals, and rehabilitation centres.
- Family members - including chosen families - or friends who have been bereaved by the suicide of an LGBTQIA+ person could be at increased risk of self-harm or suicide, especially during the grieving period. Such persons must be interviewed sensitively and with extreme caution. Consider delaying the interview if they are not able to talk.
- Do not romanticise or glorify suicide by an LGBTQIA+ celebrity. This may result in imitative suicidal behaviour among vulnerable persons.
- Do not provide intricate details of the suicide - the method, location, etc. - or publish their suicide note. Simplistic reasons or explanations should not be given for a person's suicide.



Crime

This chapter deals with reporting, writing, and editing stories about crimes against LGBTQIA+ persons and communities, and crimes committed by LGBTQIA+ persons.

- The first thing to remember about crime reporting is that the police - often the primary sources of information - are members of society and therefore are likely to bear the prejudice, bias, and ignorance that the rest of us do. However, as they are in positions of power, the repercussions of their biases often have a far-reaching impact, especially on marginalised communities.
- In crime reporting, one may encounter a member of the LGBTQIA+ community as a victim or an alleged perpetrator. If an LGBTQIA+ person is the victim of a crime, remember the following:
 - Consider the role their marginalised position may have played in making them vulnerable to violence.
 - Just because a victim is an LGBTQIA+ person, that does not mean rape is not rape - even if the law treats them differently.
 - Focus on the criminal misconduct rather than the victim's identity, unless it is relevant to the case.
 - In the case of violence meted out in reaction/response to the victim's identity, look at how responsive authorities and police have been in taking action.
 - In reporting based on FIRs, which may use a person's deadname and describe their gender incorrectly, go by what the victim prefers - or if deceased, by how they identified themselves in life.
 - For example, let's consider a case where the mother of a trans woman allegedly arranged to have her daughter's limbs broken, but ended up causing her death. Police

used the deceased's dead name and referred to her by her sex assigned at birth. While the victim's identity was clearly a factor in the violence against her, in reporting the case, one can simply refer to the name she'd chosen and her gender identity as a woman. Rather than referring to the accused's "dismay at her son becoming a woman," one could say, "the accused was upset at her child's gender identity."

- If there is a case in which LGBTQIA+ persons are being blackmailed because of their identity, it is important to avoid outing someone - revealing their LGBTQIA+ identity to their family or employers - thereby endangering them while reporting the crime. Protect the identity of the complainant when necessary, and add other details/quotes to make the story more grounded and authentic.
- Sometimes, there may be cases in which LGBTQIA+ persons are being harassed by police, family, etc. In such cases, consider whether your report will help them or make them more vulnerable. If the latter holds true, avoid or hold off until it is safer for the person.
- LGBTQIA+ persons are vulnerable to sexual violence because of their identity. However, Indian laws either do not recognise some forms of sexual violence against LGBTQIA+ persons, or view it less seriously than similar crimes against non-queer persons. This should not be a reason for a journalist to do the same.
 - For instance, in the case of widespread sexual harassment and violence at an educational institution in Chennai, some of the complainants were cisgender men; however, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) does not provide any recourse for sexual harassment faced by cisgender men. In the case of penetrative sexual assault or rape, a case can be filed under Section 377 of the IPC (which was decriminalised by the Supreme Court in 2017 for consensual sex). However, in the case of sexual harassment and molestation, which is what the complainants in the case alleged, the law does not recognise it as a crime as most sexual violence laws in India only protect cisgender women. As a journalist, it is important that you handle the sometimes conflicting needs of various groups (men vulnerable to sexual violence and cisgender women in this case) sensitively while looking at questions of justice.
 - Note: While Section 376 of the IPC says the punishment for raping a (cisgender) woman is a minimum of seven years, and can go up to life imprisonment and even the death penalty in some cases, the punishment for raping a transgender person, according to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, is only six months to two years.
- If the LGBTQIA+ person is an alleged perpetrator, remember the following:
 - When an LGBTQIA+ person is booked or arrested or announced as the accused in a case, it is important to ask, while reporting, if their gender identity and sexual orientation

are relevant to the case. If they're not relevant, there is no need to mention or focus on them in the report, just because the police may have mentioned it in the FIR or while sharing information about the case.

- Example: If an alleged chain snatcher is queer, their queer identity is not relevant to the case at hand and is therefore unnecessary to mention in a story.
- If the person is accused of committing an act of sexual violence against a minor of the same sex, the police - or even you - might believe sexuality is relevant. Such crimes have often been reported using terms such as “attempted to have homosexual relations/gay sex”. However, in such cases, there are two reasons why this should be avoided:
 - Under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, all sexual contact with a minor is a crime. Language that suggests consent (had gay sex/homosexual relations) is wrong, as under the law, a child is incapable of giving consent.
 - Inferences on a person's sexuality cannot be drawn based on their victim's sex. This is because a person may assault a minor for various reasons, including opportunity and access. There is a long history of homosexuality being conflated with paedophilia, which has harmed LGBTQIA+ persons and communities. It is important not to feed into such stereotypes while reporting crime.
- If the person is accused of sexually assaulting an adult, the language to use here is of sexual assault or assault, although the section invoked might be something like Section 377 of the IPC (sodomy). [Note: The Supreme Court has decriminalised consensual sex under Section 377 of the IPC. The law can still be used in cases of sexual assault.]
- Similarly, when both accused and victim are of the same sex, there is no need to resort to a phrase like “forced Person X to have homosexual relations” or “tried to make Person X have homosexual relations.” You can instead use the phrase “attempted to sexually assault Person X.”
- Even if an LGBTQIA+ person is the accused/perpetrator, while reporting, it is important to remember their rights to due process and dignity. (It is important to remember this with regard to every accused, of course).
- Avoid resorting to moralising terminology if reporting about a person engaged in sex work. Police/NGOs have been known to use language like “rescued them from sex work and gave them other jobs” etc. People engage in sex work for a variety of reasons, and what is seen as “rescue” from one side could be seen as harassment/violence/constricting from the other. In such situations, use neutral rather than morally-loaded language.



Law and courts

This chapter covers judgements, arguments in court, petitions including Public Interest Litigations and habeas corpus petitions, and lists out important judgements, resolutions, and conventions that journalists covering LGBTQIA+ issues must know about.

- While reporting on any official judgement or legal arguments raised in a case concerning or involving LGBTQIA+ persons and/or communities, remember to use the right language. Language is a potent tool through which societal power relations are established and reinforced. Hence, it is of utmost importance that the media critically engages with the language used by the judiciary, which plays a decisive role in the attainment of the rights and dignity of LGBTQIA+ persons. Even while quoting directly from an official court document, remember the following points:
 - If any judgement contains outdated or problematic usages, replace them with affirmative terms for your report.
 - For instance, if an official court document says, “The petitioner was born a boy...and underwent sex reassignment surgery,” you can avoid directly quoting the document and instead correct the sentence as: “The petitioner was assigned male at birth and underwent gender affirmation surgery.” (Refer to Glossary for correct terminology.)
 - If the term transgender is used as a noun, be sure to add “person(s)” or “community”, as appropriate.
 - For example, if a judgement states that “certain directions were issued for providing reservations to transgenders,” correct that to, “certain directions were issued for providing reservations to transgender [persons].”
 - Do not directly quote words or sentences that are phrased in a way that invalidates a person’s gender identity.

- For instance, if the document says the “petitioner is claiming to be transgender” in a case that doesn’t directly concern any perceived ambiguity in their gender identity, avoid repeating such usage. Phrases such as these can insinuate that the person concerned is ‘falsely’ identifying as an LGBTQIA+ individual, and can have harmful repercussions.
- Do not mention a person’s deadname or misgender them in your report, even if the official court document does so. They may or may not have been able to obtain a government-approved name change, but you should quote the person’s chosen name. It is preferable to directly ask the individual concerned what their name and pronouns are, if you are able to get in touch with them. The second option is to reach out to their counsel or people close to them. It is to be noted that biological family members of LGBTQIA+ persons are often not supportive, and hence may not be the best sources to approach for such details. In case you have used a person’s deadname in your report, please correct the mistake and issue an apology to the person concerned.
- While covering landmark verdicts or other judicial proceedings that are expected to affect large sections of LGBTQIA+ communities, be sure to critically examine all aspects of the verdict. Include voices from across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum while doing so, rather than depending on the most easily accessible queer activists’ opinion.
 - For example, the NALSA vs Union of India judgement - historic as it is for finally recognising that the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India apply to transgender persons as well - was criticised for conflating varying identities such as Hijra, Kothis, Aravanis, intersex, etc. under the umbrella term “transgender”.
- Reporters should be prudent about the angle they pursue while covering criminal cases where an LGBTQIA+ person is either a complainant or an accused. Sensationalisation of such cases is low-hanging fruit and can have far-reaching and harmful consequences, including boycotts and physical violence against the queer person. (Refer to the ‘Crime’ chapter for further pointers.)
- Never mention the sexual orientation of a person while reporting on a civil dispute, unless they specifically want you to, or it is relevant to the case.
 - For example, if one of the parties involved in a land ownership case is a gay man, his sexuality has little to do with the case, and hence does not warrant a mention. This is unless the person raises the concern that he is being discriminated against by the other party because of his sexual orientation and wants this to be addressed.
- It is very common to see parents file habeas corpus petitions in courts alleging the ‘abduction’ of their adult offspring, despite being aware that they are in a consensual non-heterosexual relationship with their partner. There have also been instances in which an LGBTQIA+ person has filed a petition against their partner’s family for forcibly detaining

them after coming to know of their relationship - for example, the Kerala High Court case concerning lesbian couple Adhila and Noora. If a court delivers a verdict in favour of the LGBTQIA+ couple in such a case, it is important to record it as a precedent. But it is even more crucial to report an unfavourable verdict, as it can serve as a call for action, or at the very least a mark of protest. Either way, do not report on such cases without knowing the couple's version of the story.

- If you are covering a court case in which an LGBTQIA+ person is a concerned party, be sure to respect their right to privacy and safety. Do not mention their name or any personal details that can compromise their identity without consulting them first, even if these details are mentioned in publicly available court documents. This is also applicable to public figures, as well as people you may have named in previous reports.
- If an LGBTQIA+ person is a concerned party in a case, examine court records to check if the counsel, the prosecution, or even the judge is pursuing a line of questioning or making an observation that targets the person's gender, body, or sexuality. Are they asking offensive or sexually coloured questions about the individual's body or sexual preferences? Are attempts being made to dehumanise them with loaded remarks and questions on the morality of the relationships they maintain? If so, it is necessary to call them out in your report.
- While examining judgements and arguments, keep an eye out for inaccurate, misleading, or stereotypical statements.
 - For example, in a report by the International Commission of Jurists, an activist recalls a court hearing involving two lesbian women who sought to live together in Kerala. The prosecutor apparently kept repeating that “there are no lesbians in the state of Kerala,” and the activist says the judge made no effort to contest this claim.
- Any journalist working on LGBTQIA+ issues should be aware of the rights that queer persons in the country are currently entitled to, and international precedents and principles. Briefly, here are some key court judgements and laws, and their impact on the LGBTQIA+ rights movement:
 - **Naz Foundation vs Govt of NCT of Delhi:** The 2009 Delhi High Court judgement in ‘Naz Foundation vs Government of NCT of Delhi’ was one of the first cases in India to acknowledge that adults engaging in consensual same-sex sexual activity in private were not committing a crime, and that considering it a crime would violate their fundamental rights. The judgement came in the wake of a petition filed in 2021 by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Naz Foundation along with another NGO, Lawyers Collective, challenging the constitutional validity of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which criminalises “carnal intercourse against the order of nature.”
 - **Suresh Kumar Koushal vs Naz Foundation:** The Supreme Court on December 11, 2013, however, overturned the Delhi High Court judgement, thus re-criminalising

homosexuality. While issuing the verdict, the bench also claimed that “lesbians, gays, bisexuals or transgenders [sic]” comprised a “minuscule fraction of the country’s population” and that the issue did not call for judicial intervention. The judgement received widespread condemnation for overlooking the basic human rights of LGBTQIA+ persons.

- **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) vs Union of India:** The 2014 NALSA judgement, which declared a person’s right to self-identify their gender within or outside the male-female binary, was groundbreaking in India’s fight for trans rights. The judgement allowed trans persons to change their gender on documents without having to undergo a gender affirmation surgery, besides giving them a constitutional right to identify and register themselves as male, female, or ‘third gender’. The term ‘third gender’, however, has been criticised for its indication that ‘male’ and ‘female’ were the default genders. (Refer to Glossary.)
- **Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India:** On September 6, 2018, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Section 377 of the IPC is unconstitutional as it infringes on a person’s fundamental rights, further decriminalising homosexuality by reading down Section 377 to exclude consensual intercourse between adults of the same sex/gender. The court stated that a person’s sexual orientation is an inherent part of their identity, and that its invalidation is tantamount to denying their right to life.
- **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:** The Lok Sabha passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill on August 5, 2019, with the stated objective of protecting trans persons’ rights by prohibiting discrimination against them with regard to employment, education, healthcare, etc. The Bill, however, was vehemently opposed by the country’s transgender community, who alleged that it exposed them to further institutional oppression. It was further criticised for attempting to conflate intersex and transgender identities for the purpose of administrative ease.

Concerns were also raised that the Union government completely disregarded public participation while passing legislation that had the potential to significantly alter people’s lives. Even when the deadline for suggestions was extended for the first draft due to widespread opposition, and later for the second draft as well, only a fraction of community members and allies were equipped to submit their suggestions (owing to the limited time allowed in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic). Eventually, despite several protests and representations, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules came into effect on September 25, 2020.

- **UN resolutions and conventions:** The United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) and General Assembly have passed several resolutions related to violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics. These include a mandate of independent experts on the protection of LGBTQIA+ persons, an

HRC resolution concerning their human rights, and a number of General Assembly resolutions against extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

- **Yogyakarta principles:** Penned in 2006 by a group of human rights experts from across the globe in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, ‘The Yogyakarta Principles’ is a comprehensive guide concerning the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. The principles were expanded upon in 2017 as ‘The Yogyakarta Principles plus 10’, in a bid to recognise the “distinct and intersectional grounds of gender expression and sex characteristics.”
- Journalists should be mindful that LGBTQIA+ persons are as vulnerable to exclusion and discrimination in court spaces and other judicial forums, as with any other institution. Journalists can help ensure that judicial premises become inclusive and safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ persons. If you come across any particular instance of discrimination or harassment faced by an LGBTQIA+ person on court premises, ask if the affected person wants their story told. Investigate if there are more persons from the community who have been affected by similar incidents. The report by the International Commission of Jurists quotes two persons from Kerala - a trans man and a trans woman - who said everyone, including the judge, used to laugh at them whenever they appeared in court for a case. Such incidents may seem minor, but they further contribute to the systemic exclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons.
- The presence of LGBTQIA+ persons in the judicial workforce is abysmal, like most spaces of employment in India. Journalists need to keep track of the diversity within judicial bodies, especially when it comes to people in decision-making capacities. Instances such as the Bar Council enrolment of Padma Lakshmi, who is now Kerala’s first out trans woman lawyer, should be covered as precedents.
- Hold judicial bodies accountable for the lack of infrastructural and administrative measures inclusive of LGBTQIA+ persons on their premises. In a February 2023 order proposing the conversion of Tamil Nadu’s public toilets for persons with disabilities to gender-neutral ones, the Madras High Court had pointed out that even its own premises did not have a gender-neutral toilet yet. Take note of these acknowledgements as well.
- When favourable actions are taken by judicial bodies, acknowledge them, while simultaneously leaving space for critique. Consult with LGBTQIA+ persons who are likely to be impacted by these measures. For example, in 2022, the Supreme Court released a judiciary sensitisation module on the LGBTQIA+ community. While covering such events, examine if any person from the community was a part of the panel that wrote the module, and if there is room for improvement.



Politics

*This chapter covers political parties' stances on LGBTQIA+ issues, LGBTQIA+ persons in politics, political campaigns that help/hurt LGBTQIA+ persons, and political messaging around LGBTQIA+ persons. Under each section are listed events/issues that should be covered by the media, as well as detailed pointers on **how** they should or should not be covered.*

- Reporters/media houses should aim to cover appointments of LGBTQIA+ persons to government agencies. This becomes a historical record, and can act as a barometer for how progressive and/or inclusive governments are.
 - Example: The appointment of a transgender person to a consultative post to the government.
- When you write about laws, Bills, Ordinances, Government Orders, Rules, etc. concerning LGBTQIA+ persons, consider the following:
 - Is there consultation with the community before these laws, rules, etc. are drafted?
 - News reports must bring in the voices of LGBTQIA+ communities on such laws, rules, etc. and not just praise the government without any critique or opinion on how this will affect these communities.

For example, the usage of 'third gender' as a term by some governments may look 'inclusive' at first glance, but it does not reflect the positions and realities of trans communities and the language used by them, and also insinuates that there is a hierarchical order of genders

- Is the government putting its money where its mouth is? For instance, if a minister in public makes statements in support of LGBTQIA+ communities, is it being

reflected in what the government is doing on the ground for the rights of LGBTQIA+ communities and individuals?

Example: Some ministers may make comments in support of LGBTQIA+ communities in interviews and public appearances. However, when it comes to the government's stand on issues that are important to the communities, they stay silent, although they are a part of the government.

- When it comes to implementation of policies/laws/schemes, look into the following:

Is the implementation done in consultation/coordination with LGBTQIA+ community leaders/organisations/groups?

Are enough funds being allocated for policies/schemes, or is it only a 'good-looking' policy on paper?

Journalists must follow up on how policies/schemes announced by governments are actually implemented on the ground.

Example: Several states have announced policies for transgender persons, which are received with fanfare in the media. However, follow-ups show that these policies are not working well, or have fallen through the cracks.

- When covering a political party's manifesto, consider the following:

- Does the manifesto drafting committee have LGBTQIA+ representation?

- Does a political party's manifesto have something specific for the rights and welfare of LGBTQIA+ persons/communities?

Example: Are they promising housing, reservation, or other particular rights?

- Is the larger politics of the manifesto inclusive of LGBTQIA+ persons?

Example: Is the language sexist/homophobic/transphobic, or is it inclusive?

- Does the manifesto have anything that is discriminatory towards LGBTQIA+ individuals/communities, or is against their rights?

Example: Does it speak against community living? Does it take into account criticism of policies from LGBTQIA+ persons, or is it parroting a cis-het narrative?

- Is the public/media posturing of the party and its members in congruence with what is finally put down on paper in the manifesto?

- Journalists who want to cover politics from an LGBTQIA+ lens must also look at the manifestos of unions, political movements, etc. and how they are evolving with respect to LGBTQIA+ rights.
- When covering speeches/comments of political leaders:
 - Journalists must highlight problematic speeches by politicians and leaders about LGBTQIA+ persons, including an explanation of why the statement is problematic. Include voices of queer persons while reporting on such speeches. This should also include comments made during TV panel discussions and/or interviews, and statements, bytes, and press conferences by politicians and leaders.
 - If a problematic statement is made on social media by a politician/leader, treat it the same way a public speech would be. If a negative comment is gathering a lot of support, talk about how the politician/leader is inciting discrimination and hate towards LGBTQIA+ communities and persons, as the case may be. Do not ignore the reactions.
 - If a speech/comment is made in a semi-public or private setting by a politician or leader, what is the purpose of coverage? Is it for gaining TRPs/clicks while giving such speeches and comments undue coverage, thereby making them more popular than they would have been organically? Or is the journalism being done to hold such leaders accountable?
 - Example: A political leader made homophobic comments at a wedding he attended. This was highlighted by a section of the media; however, he was never asked a follow-up question or explanation, or held accountable in any manner.
 - Is the speech/comment made by a leader/politician intrinsically queerphobic, so much so that it's against all other politics they profess?
 - For instance, if a rationalist politician who has never spoken about 'culture' and 'religion' in their life suddenly claims that LGBTQIA+ relationships are 'against culture', then it is a news point worthy of being called out.
 - It is also important to call out such statements as queerphobic statements in the news reports. While it is important to make a record of the phobic statements made by any politicians or leaders, we should add that the statements are phobic in nature and are hateful towards a group of people.
- When writing/talking about LGBTQIA+ persons starting/leading political organisations and movements:
 - Like with any party/organisation/movement, focus on writing about their stands, work, and politics, instead of simply focusing on their identity.

- Focus on LGBTQIA+ persons leading political movements that are ‘mainstream’ and not only related to LGBTQIA+ rights.
 - Example: Dalit trans activist Grace Banu was part of the Jallikattu movement in Tamil Nadu, but she was not credited as a leader of the movement who is also transgender.
 - Another example: Several queer groups and individuals were part of anti-CAA [Citizenship (Amendment) Act], anti-NRC (National Register of Citizens) protests across the country, but their leadership as queer persons was hardly highlighted.
- Be careful about crediting someone as the ‘first’ person to start a party, movement, etc. In general, be wary of saying something is happening for the ‘first time’ about anything that cannot be known for certain or verified.
- While writing/talking about LGBTQIA+ persons contesting elections:
 - When an LGBTQIA+ person contests an election, don’t put the focus only on their identity; also look at their previous work, what they promise on doing if they win, what their professed politics is, etc. Do not scrutinise their personal life or unrelated work from the past for the purpose of covering their political work and ambitions.
 - Example: If a trans woman is contesting elections, and she has done sex work in her life, a moralistic view of the work she has done is irrelevant. However, her experience of interacting with or navigating the police state, patriarchy, gender-based violence, the unorganised work sector, etc. are important to her credibility and knowledge as a leader.
 - When political parties talk about supporting LGBTQIA+ rights in public, scrutinise whether they give opportunities to LGBTQIA+ candidates in elections - just like how media reports scrutinise how many (cisgender) women contest elections from major parties.
 - If a party is giving tickets to LGBTQIA+ candidates, look at whether these candidates are given tickets where they have a chance to win, or only in seats that the party knows it’s going to lose and therefore wants to get brownie points by fielding LGBTQIA+ candidates there.
 - Further, look at whether an LGBTQIA+ candidate is given the same support and resources as other candidates from the party - including money, endorsements, campaign support, etc.
 - Is the candidate given a ticket in a reserved constituency (women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribe, etc.) or a general constituency? Why? What are the local political reasons for it?

- Like with any other candidate, report the pulse of the constituents when there is an LGBTQIA+ candidate contesting from their constituency. Ask people about their views on the candidate and the work they have done in the constituency in the past, what they know of the candidate's work etc. This will also be a historical record of how the public views LGBTQIA+ candidates, and will help future LGBTQIA+ candidates work on their outlook and outreach.
- How are opposing candidates/parties talking about LGBTQIA+ candidates in their constituency? Are they being discriminatory or are they looking at them as equals?
- When covering statements made by LGBTQIA+ persons about politics (policy/movements/issues or parties), keep the following in mind:
 - Sometimes, an LGBTQIA+ individual may endorse a party or a politician. This does not mean that all LGBTQIA+ communities in the country are in favour of the said party or candidate. Do not assume that one individual or one organisation is representative of all queer persons and communities in the country/state. Credit such an endorsement specifically. "Person X endorses Politician Y" is fine, but not "Indian LGBTQIA+ communities endorse Politician Y"
 - Just like cis-het persons, queer persons also have various political leanings and thoughts. Clubbing everyone together in connection with the statements and views of one person is not correct.
 - When an LGBTQIA+ person or group supports a political party, look at whether they're supporting them on the basis of the party's stand on LGBTQIA+ issues, or on the basis of other issues/positions taken by the party that affect some other aspect of their identity.
 - For instance, is an LGBTQIA+ person's support for a party based on their gender/sexuality, or their religious identity, or their caste identity?
 - It is also important to probe whether LGBTQIA+ persons and groups are endorsing a party with an intersectional approach - that is, are they only supporting a party because they make promises about LGBTQIA+ rights, even if the party's positions on other issues that affect people at large (employment, religion, caste, etc.) are problematic?
- Journalists must also try to cover the following:
 - Government drives and campaigns targeting LGBTQIA+ persons, e.g., a drive for voter enrolment.
 - Queer persons working with governments on campaigns to help LGBTQIA+ communities, e.g., implementation of housing and welfare schemes.

- Political campaigns by LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities, e.g., a campaign demanding reservations.
- Political initiatives by parties for LGBTQIA+ persons, e.g., a professional forum of LGBTQIA+ persons in a party.
- Political parties running events or campaigns that are against LGBTQIA+ rights, e.g., a poster campaign against marriage equality.
- Political messaging around LGBTQIA+ persons. In doing this, look at the language used by leaders and politicians - whether it is rooted in 'charity' or 'rights'.



Education

This chapter covers education policy, reservation, curriculum (including sex education), access and discrimination (including toilets, school uniform, nutrition, continuing education, admission process including name and gender change hassles, etc.), housing, bullying and ragging, support groups, educational achievements of LGBTQIA+ persons, and LGBTQIA+ persons as educators.

- If a government/government entity comes up with a specific new education policy, journalists covering the same must look at whether the policy and/or aspects of it are inclusive of LGBTQIA+ persons.
 - For example, if a government is coming up with a bus pass policy for female students, does it include trans and gender non-conforming individuals as well?
- In national or state-level policies that are wide-ranging, have the framers looked at LGBTQIA+ persons and communities as stakeholders?
 - For instance, if the Union government is coming up with a new National Education Policy, have they considered reservations and questions of access for LGBTQIA+ persons and communities as a policy issue? Have they consulted with LGBTQIA+ persons, organisations, and communities, in an open and transparent manner, before the policy is finalised?
- Do education budgets presented by governments focus on LGBTQIA+ communities as marginalised groups that need special attention?
 - For example, the Union Budget for the Education Ministry has separate allocations for educational initiatives catering to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes communities. Journalists can look at and question whether similar schemes are implemented for LGBTQIA+ communities, and whether sufficient funds are allocated for the same.

- Are policies and schemes for teacher training inclusive of LGBTQIA+ persons? Look at whether recruitment notices specifically welcome LGBTQIA+ applicants, and whether the process makes accommodations for LGBTQIA+ persons.
- Are an educational institution's policies on uniform/clothes exclusionary to LGBTQIA+ expressions? Is gendered clothing (e.g., skirts for girls, pants for boys) imposed on all students, and is relaxation given to students on the basis of their personal preference?
- Many transgender persons face difficulties in changing their name and gender markers on paper for their higher education. Journalists must look at whether educational institutions and authorities have policies in place to make this simpler, including taking this into account in their admission and/or application forms. Focus on this as a systemic issue, rather than looking only at an individual instance.
 - For example, if writing a story about an individual's struggle to get their name and gender markers changed in university/school documents, refer to judgements and policies on the issue, and talk to activists and community members about how this is a recurring problem.
- Education coverage must also focus on whether institutions are providing toilet facilities to gender non-conforming (GNC) students, either with separate infrastructure or with policies that allow students to access whichever toilet they prefer. Such policies and infrastructure must also go hand in hand with sensitisation of students and staff, so that GNC students don't face further harassment.
- When there is coverage related to denial of mid-day meals in school, look at whether GNC students are also being denied access.
- When on the lookout for stories on dropout rates, continuing education, etc., journalists must also look at these issues from an LGBTQIA+ perspective. Are institutions doing enough to ensure GNC students don't drop out for various reasons? Are the underlying issues addressed by institutional policies? Or are only stopgap measures taken in particular instances?
- Residential institutions must take into account GNC students, LGBTQIA+ students, and students who may be questioning their gender identity, when they build and allot hostels. Journalists looking at housing issues in educational institutions must also look at what policies are followed, and whether there is a good balance of gendered and gender-neutral spaces so that all students can find a safe space according to their personal comfort. Are individual rooms available for GNC students at nominal rates, if they want a safe space?
- Journalists looking into housing provided for students by governments must also look into whether these spaces consider provisions for GNC students.

- For example, if a GNC student is availing hostel facilities for SC/ST students, how is the accommodation provided to them?
- Are anti-bullying and anti-ragging policies of institutions inclusive of gendered bullying, homophobia, transphobia, queerphobia, etc.? Are these policies in compliance with existing government laws? Journalists covering bullying/ragging in institutions, or self-harm of GNC students, must ask these questions beyond just looking at the specifics of the individual case.
- While covering a bullying incident, ensure that the self-identification of victims is respected. Do not make assumptions about their gender or sexuality, and if the victim is available to speak to, ensure their consent is taken on how they are represented.
- When covering bullying/ragging in institutions, don't assume the sexuality of a perpetrator just because the harassment is sexual in nature.
 - For example, if a male-identified student bullies and sexually harasses another male student, it does not mean that the perpetrator is gay.
- Journalists covering staff terminations that may be due to homophobia, queerphobia, transphobia, etc. must question what the institution has done to ensure it is a safe space for LGBTQIA+ staff and students, and whether there is sensitisation across the board, and policies in place to take up complaints of bullying and discrimination over gender and sexuality.
- When covering issues in the education sector, please remember that some of the staff (teaching or non-teaching) could be LGBTQIA+ identified; some students could also be GNC and not visibly so. Ensure that their voices are represented when covering larger issues affecting the educational institution or the education sector.
 - For example, in a story about systemic violence in an educational institution - about sexual harassment, for instance - consider that it is not only cisgender women who are targeted, but also GNC and LGBTQIA+ persons. However, ensure that you are not conflating abuse with gender or sexuality. A person who abuses a man or genderqueer person does not automatically become gay - and the problem is not their sexuality, it is their abuse of power.
- When covering campus politics, highlight the contributions made by LGBTQIA+ leaders to campus movements.
- When covering/profiling student unions, look at whether they are inclusive and intersectional in their leadership, including with regard to LGBTQIA+ identities. Is their campaigning homophobic, transphobic, queerphobic, etc.?

- Are student unions, campus groups, and support groups that claim to support LGBTQIA+ persons and communities putting their money where their mouth is? Are they taking up issues of LGBTQIA+ persons on priority? Do they have LGBTQIA+ persons in their leadership? Or are they simply posturing? Journalists must examine such claims by ‘support groups’ by talking to LGBTQIA+ individuals with intersectional identities inside the campus.
- It is important to note that while covering stories about reservation for trans communities, journalists must be aware of what demands trans communities have been historically making across India in various states. As per the Constitution of India, the Union government and the state and Union Territory governments are allowed to set quotas in admission, employment, etc. for socially disadvantaged and backward groups.

Historically, trans communities in India have been demanding reservations in education, employment, etc. under their community categories. That is, a quota within quota for trans persons who are from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), and separate trans reservation under the general category. While the NALSA verdict of 2014 has suggested that trans persons be provided reservations under the OBC category, this has been criticised as inequitable, as trans persons come from different castes and communities, and are marginalised not just on the basis of their gender but also based on their caste and religious identities.

- For example, it was reported in September 2021 that the Union government was considering adding trans persons under the OBC category for reservations in higher education and employment. Simply reporting this as a statement would make it seem like this was a move to provide rights to trans communities which is welcomed by them. However, with no quota within quota, this would essentially mean that all trans persons, including those who come under SC and ST categories, will have to compete with the larger OBC pool.
- When reporting on curriculum proposals and changes, be inclusive and seek inputs from LGBTQIA+ activists, academicians, and communities.
 - For example, in January 2023, a manual was published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) for ‘gender inclusive’ training. Many outlets covered this as ‘news’ without getting inputs from LGBTQIA+ activists who have pointed out that this manual is riddled with misinformation and stereotypes about transgender and intersex persons. It is important for journalists covering education policy to point out problematic guidelines instead of simply repeating what a document says.

- While covering news related to curriculum around sex education provided by various educational bodies and institutions, see if the curriculum is inclusive of diverse genders and sexualities. Go beyond a heteronormative lens when talking about sex education.
- When covering the achievements of an LGBTQIA+ student or teacher, ensure that you are not patronising. Do not reduce a story about an achievement to a person's gender or sexuality - this is only a part of who they are.
- For example, if a queer person has cleared the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examination with a high rank, avoid headlines that attribute a 'firstness' to them. It is highly likely that several LGBTQIA+ persons have not come out to the media and have also cleared the same exam. A visible achievement acts as a fillip to other LGBTQIA+ persons and communities and normalises our presence in the larger society. However, obsessing about their queer identity rather than their skills is patronising.



Historical queerphobia and underrepresentation of LGBTQIA+ persons in science

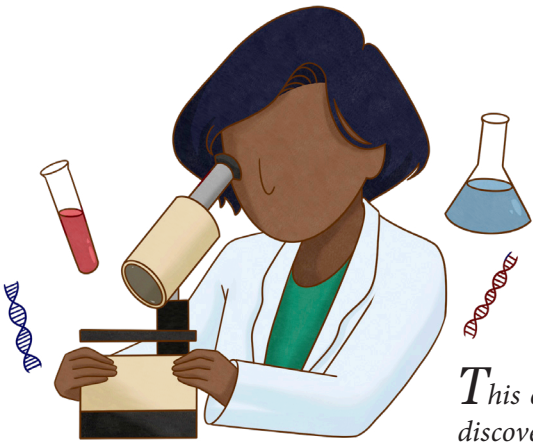
Widespread public opinion is that science and academia are unbiased, but many researchers have pointed out that this may not always be the case because science is done by people, and people can have conscious and unconscious biases. Apart from historically deep-rooted queerphobia in scientific institutions that creates an unsafe environment for LGBTQIA+ scientists, researchers' bias can also reflect in scientific studies.

A significant percentage of studies about gender and sexuality in humans and animals have been identified as biased, compelling some research groups to start efforts to raise awareness about this issue. There is a need for an LGBTQIA+ affirmative research approach, which adopts a spectrum view on gender and sexuality. Boxing people into rigid societal roles of gender, sex, and sexuality are detrimental to both science and social justice.

For example, a study published in the *Journal of Environmental Management* in 2021 was criticised for its queerphobia, attributing environmental damage to gay people and their activities on a dunefield in Spain. The study was retracted following social media outrage.

Many medical textbooks still describe homosexuality as a sexual deviation and/or a punishable offence. Until 1974, the textbooks of the American Psychiatric Association categorised homosexuality as a “sociopathic personality disturbance”. There is an ongoing struggle across the world to eradicate queerphobia in medical literature. An advisory issued by the National Medical Commission of India in October 2021 directed medical universities, colleges, and institutions to not approve curriculums and books if they contain unscientific, derogatory, or discriminatory information about virginity, or LGBTQIA+ communities and their sexuality. The advisory referred to a Madras High Court judgement pointing out rampant queerphobia in medical education. Though this is a welcome change, queerphobia still persists in medical and other scientific studies.

Newsrooms need to be cautious of existing biases against LGBTQIA+ persons in the scientific community and literature while reporting stories about science and technology.



Science

This chapter deals with scientific research, publications, discoveries and inventions, and technology in relation to LGBTQIA+ persons.

- Avoid sensationalism while reporting science and tech stories involving LGBTQIA+ persons. Clickbait titles like “A man who became pregnant” and “A man who menstruates” are not just inaccurate but also queerphobic and tend to use the lives of queer people as fodder for sensationalism.
- Avoid talking about ‘conversion therapy’ unless the article directly discusses the queerphobia involved in it.
- Keep in mind that the articles you are reading can be based on pseudoscience where scientific jargon is used to mask unscientific information about queer persons and gender. Check the credibility of these articles with a queer resource person, preferably a queer researcher, before citing them.
- Usage of expressions like ‘third gender’, deadnaming trans persons, and heteronormative perspectives can be used as pointers to identify hidden queerphobia and bias in scientific articles. (Refer to Glossary for correct terminology.)
- Some scientific journals and medical textbooks could have queerphobic or negative concepts about LGBTQIA+ persons. Reporters should consult with queer resource persons before using any information from these texts in their stories and video productions.
- Medical and/or scientific articles about topics such as ‘conversion therapy’, sodomy, origin of homosexual tendencies, prevalence of a particular behavioural trait among queer people, etc. are usually biased and queerphobic. Avoid quoting from them.
- It is important to check the queer politics of the resource persons you quote in your stories. Though we acknowledge that it is nearly impossible to find someone who is politically

perfect, it is vital that reporters check their perspectives on queer rights and intersectionality to avoid perpetuation of social biases against LGBTQIA+ persons.

- A logical-sounding argument about queer persons in a scientific article or a scientific talk by a resource person does not automatically mean that the argument is a scientifically sound and inclusive principle.
 - For example, the opinion that “women who have been sexually abused develop an aversion towards men and become lesbians” could sound logical to some people, but this notion is unscientific, incorrect, and perpetuates misinformation about lesbians/queer persons.
- Understand that gender and masculinity/femininity norms are arbitrary social constructs. Perpetuating them through words and/or visuals reinforces the binary rigidity of gender roles, which undermines the gender spectrum.
- Avoid gendering non-gendered entities such as animals, elements of nature, and human-made objects.
- Consider applying queer theory while reading a scientific article to identify whether the article is queerphobic or not.

Resources for sensitive reporting on science

- *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, Annamarie Jagose, 1997.
- *Evolution's rainbow – Diversity, Gender and Sexuality in Nature and People*, Joan Roughgarden, 2009.
- *Queerphobic Immunopolitics in the Case of HIV/AIDS: Political Economy, the Dark Legacy of British Colonialism, and Queerphobia in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Linda Roland Danil, 2021, Sexuality & Culture.



Entertainment

This chapter is a guide for journalists covering cinema, music, theatre, arts, dance, folk performances, television programmes, and literature.

Entertainment activities regarding queer persons can be divided into two categories:

- Creations by LGBTQIA+ persons with their full involvement
- Creations about LGBTQIA+ persons by others

As in other chapters of this guide, the larger point to keep in mind is to give queer persons the dignity that is rightfully theirs, and to ensure fair and just reporting.

- **Creations by LGBTQIA+ persons:** Entertainment creations by LGBTQIA+ persons could be about queer persons or others. When critiquing or producing stories about such creations, consider them equal to other creative projects. The stories have to go beyond the creator's identity, and the creation should also be critiqued the same way. However, it is not a bad idea to note, if such is the case, that queer persons may have a larger and more intense struggle to produce their work and therefore must be appreciated for their perseverance.
 - If the story of how the creator made a mark for themselves in the creative field due to their identity is important, ensure you get their consent before mentioning the same.
 - Even in creations by LGBTQIA+ persons, separate the art from the artist. For example, a heterosexual director's creation will be considered beyond their identity. Be sure to extend the same protocol to LGBTQIA+ creators.
 - If an LGBTQIA+ writer has written a fictional work with a queer person as the main protagonist, the character must be considered a fictional creation. Avoid comparing the character's journey with the author's and do not write the story or critique based on such assumptions.

- If the work is an autobiography or if the play/movie is based on the author's life, it is acceptable to reveal the gender/sexual orientation identity of the creator. In all other cases, the creator's consent is important. However, it is important to reveal such information in a sensitive and empathetic manner without using derogatory terms. (Refer to Glossary for correct terminology.) It is also a good practice to inform the creator of the art that your stories will contain such information.
- **Creations about LGBTQIA+ persons and their lives:** As LGBTQIA+ persons are underrepresented in the entertainment industry, most creations about LGBTQIA+ persons are created by non-LGBTQIA+ creators.
 - Just because a creation includes LGBTQIA+ characters, it is not a great work of art or an accurate one.
 - When LGBTQIA+ persons raise concerns about the indecent or dishonest portrayal of LGBTQIA+ characters, it is morally right to critique said content from their perspective.
 - It is the responsibility of the journalist/video creator to analyse thoroughly if the queer identities were genuinely required for the story or if they were used only for comic relief or tokenism.
 - It is also an important responsibility of the journalist/video creator to call out entertainment content portraying the activities, body language, and make-up of queer persons in a derogatory manner.
- **Folk arts**
 - Apart from mainstream cinema, television shows, and literature, queer persons contribute to many aspects of folk arts. For a long time, folk performances such as Karakattam, Therukkoothu, and stage dances have been performed by queer persons in small towns and villages.
 - These performances should be viewed and responded to as with any other folk performance, and the stories should have a neutral tone.
 - If it is relevant and useful, inform your readers and audience about the history of LGBTQIA+ persons' involvement in the folk art being covered, and acknowledge their contribution to the development of the art form.
 - Sometimes, crimes occur in performances where queer persons are involved due to inadequate legal protection. These criminal events should be approached like any other. (Refer to the 'Crime' chapter for further details.)
 - When collecting information about queer persons in the entertainment industry, ensure that the information collected or the collection method does not affect the livelihood of the queer artists concerned.



What science says about transgender and intersex athletes

by Sayantan Datta

In 1985, Spanish athlete Maria José Martínez-Patiño went to participate in the World University Games in Kobe, Japan. There, she underwent her second “femininity test”: a few cells swabbed from her inner cheek that would be analysed for their chromosomal composition to confirm whether she had two X chromosomes. The night before her race, the doctor informed her that there was a “problem” with her test, which would bar her from participating in the race the next day.

Two months later, the results of her test travelled a long way to the sports federation in Spain. In a declaration that would bring her world crashing down, instead of XX - as declared by her earlier test - her karyotype was found to be XY.

In 1986, when she finished first in a hurdle race, her story was leaked to the press. Martínez-Patiño was barred from racing in the future, her sports scholarship was revoked, and her running times were erased from athletic records. Foreboding these consequences was one belief - that her chromosomal constitution offered her an undue advantage over other women (those who had a karyotype of XX).

Whither testosterone?

The Y chromosome in human beings is the site of a gene called the “sex-determining region of Y”, often shortened as sry. In a developing foetus, this gene codes for a protein that leads to the development of testes, which then produce what is often called the quintessential “male hormone”: testosterone.

Testosterone levels typically peak during puberty, leading to “larger and stronger bones, greater muscle mass and strength, and higher circulating haemoglobin as well as possible psychological

(behavioural) differences.” In effect, peaking testosterone levels in male bodies are said to render a competitive advantage over female bodies in athletics and sports.

There is, however, one problem with this assumption. Testosterone, like many biological molecules, requires another set of proteins - called receptors - to act. In fact, it has been reported that people with male bodies whose muscle mass increases the most after 12 weeks of strength training are not those who have the highest testosterone levels, but those with the highest levels of these receptors to which testosterone binds (called “androgen receptors”).

Martínez-Patiño, in contrast, had a condition called androgen insensitivity, i.e., her androgen receptors did not respond to testosterone. Thus, except for letters on a medical report, her chromosomal composition meant little in terms of determining her sex. Owing to support from scientists, activists, and journalists, her situation changed two years later, in 1988, when she was permitted to run again by the International Federation for Athletics.

One thing, however, remained unchanged: the belief that testosterone provides those with higher levels of it in their bodies an unfair advantage in competitive sports. This belief continues to exclude transgender women, people with intersex variations, and cisgender women whose testosterone levels fall outside the accepted range, from athletic events.

Martínez-Patiño’s case reminds one of Santhi Soundararajan, an Indian sprinter who in 2006 became the first Indian woman to win a silver medal in the Doha Asian Games. However, she was subject to a “sex test” - which she failed - and, eventually, stripped of her medal and barred from competing in sporting events.

Soundararajan, like Martínez-Patiño, was androgen-insensitive.

What does science say?

Undergirding both Soundararajan’s and Martínez-Patiño’s fall from grace - and those of others like Pinki Pramanik and Dutee Chand - are two contentious, yet popular, beliefs: that an individual’s sex can only be either male or female, and that the maleness or femaleness can be quantified distinctly in terms of chromosomal and hormonal composition.

In her book *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* (2012), biologist and feminist Anne Fausto-Sterling deconstructs the different layers of biological sex, as proposed by physician and sexologist John Money in the 1950s and 60s. According to this model, called “layers of sex”, each individual starts their life with a “chromosomal sex”, i.e., a specific composition of ‘sex chromosomes’ (X and Y). However, for about 8-12 weeks of their foetal life, the individual has an “indifferent sex”, and only when expression of particular genes on the sex chromosomes begins, the gonads are formed within its body. This, according to Fausto-Sterling, is the “foetal gonadal sex”.

The gonads then produce what are called “sex hormones”, which grant the foetus a “foetal hormonal sex”, which in turn leads to the formation of internal reproductive organs (e.g., fallopian tubes, ovaries, uterus, seminal tubes, etc.), at which point the foetus is said to have acquired an “internal reproductive sex”. Around the fourth month of foetal development, the genitals are formed, thus granting the foetus a “foetal genital sex”.

In a similar fashion, as levels of sex hormones peak during puberty, the individual gains a “pubertal hormonal sex”, which plays a role in shaping the morphology of their body (“pubertal morphological sex”, per Fausto-Sterling).

Fausto-Sterling is careful to mention that these layers do not necessarily agree with, and may develop independently of, each other. Androgen insensitivity is one such case, where the chromosomal sex and the foetal hormonal sex does not align with the other sex layers in the individual.

Thus, biological sex is neither plainly determined by chromosomes, nor by gonads and hormones. When all the sex layers align with each other, individuals are said to be conventionally “male” and “female”; however, when these layers combine in ways that are not conventional, they result in the birth of intersex individuals.

Per estimates, there have been over thirty different kinds of intersex variations that have been reported. In the case of androgen insensitivity, the chromosomal sex of an individual is usually XY. However, depending on how insensitive/immune they are to testosterone, the foetal genital sex, the internal reproductive sex, and the pubertal morphological sex may vary significantly among individuals.

In April 2023, Republicans in the United States Congress voted to ban transgender women and girls from participating in athletic events “designated for women”, The New York Times reported. While the report claims that the Bill has “no chance” of being passed by the Senate or ratified by the President, this is one of the many additions to controversies surrounding transgender women’s participation in the category that aligns with their gender identity.

Recognising that transgender women who undergo hormone replacement therapy - which typically includes a combination of a testosterone blocker and estrogen supplementation - have their circulating testosterone levels stabilised at drastically lower levels (and often within the clinical range for cisgender women), the International Olympic Committee (IOC) gave a landmark ruling in 2004 that allowed transgender athletes to participate in the Olympics.

For transgender women looking to participate, the guidelines were as follows: they needed to have undergone gender-affirmative surgery, obtained legal recognition of their gender by “official authorities”, and undergone at least two years of “verifiable hormone replacement therapy”, Science reported in 2018.

Despite these guidelines, the assumption that transgender women who have been exposed to testosterone previously have a competitive edge over their cisgender colleagues, even with hormone replacement therapy, continues.

In 2021, doctors from two US-based hospitals published a study that claimed to demonstrate that after two years of “feminising therapy” (i.e., hormone replacement therapy), transgender women showed no more “athletic advantage” in performing push-ups and sit-ups as compared to their cisgender colleagues. However, they appeared to be 12% faster, despite two years of testosterone blockers and estrogen supplementation.

While this study might fuel the conclusion that prior exposure to testosterone indeed confers an irreversible competitive advantage to transgender women in athletic sports, there is a possibility that the results are confounded by several limitations, which the authors themselves acknowledge in their paper. Most notable of these is that the researchers did not have a control group of transgender athletes who were not on hormone replacement therapy; thus, their findings might simply reflect the changes in performance due to the passage of time rather than the residual effects on testosterone on transgender women’s bodies.

A 2021 review study, the lead author of which is Joanna Harper, an athlete who is also a transgender woman, posited that hormone replacement therapy reduces the levels of haemoglobin - the molecule in blood that carries oxygen - in transgender women to the levels recorded in cisgender women. Yet, Harper et al. claim, measures for strength, lean body mass, and muscle area remain above those observed in cisgender women, despite undergoing a significant reduction from the values recorded prior to the start of hormone replacement therapy.

Importantly, as a report published in Science in April 2023 points out, “...lab studies of athletes’ hemoglobin and muscle mass say nothing about whether trans women can run faster, jump higher, or throw farther.”

A few years back, in 2015, Harper had published the first ever study on the performance of athletes who were transgender women. In the study, deemed “groundbreaking” by a researcher not associated with the study, she found that transgender women undergoing hormone replacement therapy “did no better in a variety of races against [cisgender women] than they had previously done against male runners.”

That is, transgender women on hormone replacement therapy demonstrated no specific competitive advantage over their cisgender colleagues.

If the predominant belief is that those with higher circulating levels of testosterone are at a competitive advantage in athletics and sports, then what about transgender men who might be taking testosterone as a part of their hormone replacement therapy?

Despite their testosterone intake, transgender men are believed to not have any particular physiological advantage over their cisgender colleagues. This reflects in the revised 2015 guidelines from the IOC, wherein transgender men “who transition from female to male are eligible to compete in the male category without restriction.”

This is contrary to evidence provided by the 2021 study mentioned above, which found that after a year of testosterone intake, transgender men on average fared better than cisgender men in sit-ups.

Thus, more than testosterone or scientific data - which is currently a contested terrain in itself - the issue at heart seems to be the familiar spectre of a weaker female body and a stronger male body. More importantly, the discourse around testosterone and competitive advantage might be an attempt at fortifying these perceptions as biological and, hence, natural.

In fact, data points other than those derived from biological measurements may help delineate whether transgender athletes have any specific competitive advantage over their cisgender counterparts. For example, while one may argue that swimmer Lia Thomas - an athlete who is a transgender woman and who, in 2022, won America’s top trophy in university sports - might have a competitive advantage over her cisgender competitors, it has been previously noted that her swimming times, while impressive, are not record-breaking in any way.

Similarly, Laurel Hubbard, a weightlifter who is a transgender woman, and who competed in the women’s category in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, was out of the race early on, when she couldn’t complete any of her three lifts.

If these two cases are not enough, one can also look at the recent London Marathon, where Glenique Frank - a transgender woman who competed in the women’s category - ranked 6159. Despite Frank’s fairly average performance, media organisations chose to highlight the ~14000 women who were behind her, rather than the ~6000 who were ahead.

The belief that the inclusion of transgender persons in sports - especially when they choose to compete in the gender category they identify with - is unfair towards their cisgender colleagues, therefore, appears to be discriminatory at its worst and misguided at its best.

The use of circulating testosterone levels as a determinant for one’s biological sex does little to point out who is at a competitive advantage in the context of athletic sports; instead, it puts many people - cisgender women included - at an unfair disadvantage.

For instance, in 2021, Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi, two 18-year-old sprinters from Namibia, were banned from running in the Olympics because of “natural high testosterone levels”. Per a report from the American Civil Liberties Union, their ban reinforces the “harsh reality that the policing of who counts as a ‘woman’ has always been deeply racialised.”

Despite the widespread belief that black people - male and female - have higher testosterone levels than their white counterparts, a 2013 study in the journal *Cancer Causes & Control* found that this is not true, at least in the case of black men.

Thus, testosterone is not just a hormone, but a dinosaur that carries the racialised and gendered burdens of the past. It is perhaps why philosopher Cordelia Fine called her third book, which questions the belief that testosterone is the essence of masculinity, *Testosterone Rex*. It is not just any dinosaur, but one that is predatory.

If testosterone levels continue to be used to define womanhood, we'll be left with a definition that includes only one kind of women: those who are cisgender and white. All other forms of womanhood will continue to be policed, and black and transgender women will continue to be required to change their bodies to fit into this rather narrow definition of who is a woman.

Glimmers of hope

In 2015, the IOC revised its guidelines for participation of athletes who are transgender. Rather than two years of hormone replacement therapy, the new policy required transgender competitors to have undergone only one year of the therapy. Additionally, transgender athletes were no longer required to have undergone gender-affirmative surgery.

Preceding this, in the same year, sprinter Dutee Chand had won a landmark case against the Athletics Federation of India at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), a Switzerland-based independent institution that mediates disputes related to sports. In this case, Chand in 2014 had challenged her suspension due to alleged “hyperandrogenism” (i.e., increased levels of testosterone and other “male” hormones). The CAS ruled in Chand’s favour in 2015 and suspended all hyperandrogenism regulations in sports for a period of two years.

Last year, recognising the lack of scientific consensus around the effects of testosterone on athletic performance, the IOC released yet another set of guidelines that declared the following: “Policies that aim to verify the sex of an athlete put ALL athletes at risk of facing abuse and this affects ALL women” (emphasis retained). Instead of “policing the bodies of athletes”, the IOC recommended that regulators identify ways in which “all women” are included and that some athletes are not at an “unfair disadvantage”.

Yet, bans on athletes who are transgender continue. Science that is shaky at its best and shady at its worst continues to be used as a trojan horse for perpetuating patriarchal myths about male and female bodies, and excluding many who do not fit the conventional cisgender ways of being from athletics and sports. With their bodies and privacy violated, athletes who are transgender continue to contest not just their colleagues, but also deep-rooted practices that call on them to change themselves to fit deeply flawed mythologies.

Even against these odds, athletes who are transgender continue to run, sprint, and race towards their dreams.

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Sports

This chapter deals with covering LGBTQIA+ persons in sports.

- Don't dissect queerness or transness as an anomaly in sports. A queer, intersex, or trans athlete's body is not an invitation to grapple with so-called objectivity. How often do we talk about the straightness or cis-ness of an athlete in their sport?
- Don't ask invasive questions about transitioning.
 - For example, don't ask if someone is going to start hormone therapy or is getting gender-affirming surgery done. We need to move away from our obsession with the bodies of LGBTQIA+ folks.
- Avoid treating someone's identities as groundbreaking. For them, it's an everyday lived reality. Headlines such as "the first Indian trans woman to participate in the Olympics" are often a product of perpetuated marginalisation.
 - For example, when New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard became the first out trans woman to compete in the Olympics, it was quite clear that she didn't want her transness to be glorified. Yet, most stories started and ended with treating her identity as breaking news, and we hardly got to learn who Hubbard is as an athlete, or what weightlifting means to her. Being trans isn't breaking news.
- Critique sports through a queer and trans lens, while centering the perspective of how LGBTQIA+ athletes navigate these constricting cis-heteronormative spaces.
- Explore how sports culture suppresses and erases identities, and how there is little space to have conversations about the gender norms the culture is entrenched in.
- Go beyond stories about individuals coming out. This limited coverage misses out on how queerness can transform sports into a space that celebrates rather than scrutinises differences in how folks play a sport or approach athletics.

- Explore how sports impact and shape the way athletes navigate other aspects of their lives within and beyond the gender-essentialist restrictions repeatedly imposed on their identities.
- Read the room: Some LGBTQIA+ athletes may view their identity as an athlete as separate from their other identities. Rather than forcing a conversation on gender and sexuality, explore how they prefer to interact with sports.
- Explore how sports can be transformed into a space of comfort where someone's interaction with the game is celebrated rather than scrutinised through a strip-search that is increasingly violent against athletes with intersecting marginalised identities.
- Ask what it takes to move sports away from a place where what's underneath your clothes doesn't crassly determine who you play with, how much you get paid, and what your worth is.
- Tell stories of how sports can become a space where toxic masculinity and patriarchal femininity are dissolved rather than enhanced.
- In your reporting, ask what potential sports possibly holds to become a template for gender equity.



Business

This chapter deals with covering LGBTQIA+ persons in various businesses, professions, and workplaces.

Even in the most sedate industries, a place of work or business can be fraught with challenges, tensions, annoyances, or even dangers. This is amplified when it comes to LGBTQIA+ professionals or employees who are trying to make a living in a business where they have to hide their identity - or identities - in order to remain safe and continue their employment in peace.

So what is a business? There is a tendency to imagine a boardroom filled with executives, but in reality, a business includes a diverse range of workplaces and professional spaces ranging from private offices and government offices to your home or other people's homes.

Business stories do not just revolve around hirings, firings, mergers and acquisitions, or PR nightmares. Editors often forget that sanitation workers, sex workers, domestic workers, activists, etc. are also engaging in business. Journalists covering the stories of LGBTQIA+ persons in these situations need to go beyond the headlines to not just report the facts with accuracy, but also report them with sensitivity, journalistic rigour, and nuance.

This section delves into some basic policies that journalists and editors should be familiar with when reporting on LGBTQIA+ persons in professional settings, regardless of whether they are called workers, employees, specialists, business icons, migrants, influencers, or expats.

- There is a common misconception that journalists reporting/editing stories related to LGBTQIA+ persons in professional settings do not have to worry as much about legal restrictions on their reporting when compared to crime news reporters. However, business settings also require utmost sensitivity and respect for LGBTQIA+ identities. Remember that your sources may not have revealed their identity to their co-workers, subordinates, bosses, clients, etc. The impact of accidentally outing them can be highly distressing if not dangerous. It is a journalist's duty to protect their sources, be it on a battlefield or in an office.

- Note that it is also challenging to call out homophobia, queerphobia, or transphobia in corporate or institutional settings where offenders may have more social and financial capital. For this reason, journalists need to be able to operate with empathy and confidence as they work with LGBTQIA+ contacts and sources. In short, this is not an assignment for inexperienced reporters.
- Before beginning an interview with an LGBTQIA+ source or even asking them a question, here is a list of tasks you must complete: introduce yourself, state the publication you represent, note down your interviewee's name and age (ensure that you get them to spell their name for you), your interviewee's pronouns, and your interviewee's professional role. Ensure that they are comfortable and have enthusiastically consented to speak with you, and to answer any follow-up questions later.
- It is of paramount importance to establish and confirm in writing whether you are speaking to your source as a private individual, or as a representative of their workplace/company/sector/industry etc. This can drastically affect how the piece is interpreted. Furthermore, ensure that your source is aware of their company's media policies so that they know if they are adhering to workplace regulations or consciously breaking them by giving you quotes. Ask your source if their PR department has approved the interaction. While this is not necessary if the report is in the public interest or if your source does not wish to do so, taking such a step is an added level of safety for both the journalist and the source.
- Avoid falling into tropes such as 'feel-good' stories or 'rags-to-riches' narratives when writing about LGBTQIA+ professionals. The lives of marginalised people are rarely so simple, and reports should reflect the same level of nuance.
- Do not assume that an LGBTQIA+ professional does not face hardships simply because their employment is secure or because they have numerous career/business-related achievements.
- Be aware that LGBTQIA+ identities also intersect with class, caste, skin colour, religion, disability, mental health, financial background, etc. Does your report focus overly on one aspect of your source's personality and eclipse everything else about them? Gather enough information about your source so as to capture their complex personality instead of reducing them to a single label or identity.
- If you are developing a news report or feature story that involves an LGBTQIA+ professional, question whether their queer identity is truly relevant to the story. Further, consider whether or not it is in the public interest to reveal that a professional referenced in a news story is queer.
 - For example, does a standard merger/acquisition or hiring/firing story truly need you to focus on a person's queer identity? Would it be strange if you treated a cisgender

heteronormative source's identity in the same manner? If the answer to the latter question is yes, then desist from doing this to an LGBTQIA+ professional.

- When covering negative news stories involving LGBTQIA+ professionals, again consider if a news subject's LGBTQIA+ identity is in any way relevant or linked to the accusations levelled against them. (For more information about reporting on sexual assault involving either survivors or accused individuals who are queer, refer to the 'Crime' chapter.)
- In essence, do not overinflate the importance of a queer person's identity when this adds no value to the report in question or detracts from the main topic at hand.
- Protecting confidential sources is arguably the founding principle of journalism. When interacting with LGBTQIA+ sources who are not yet out, keep in mind that their current and future employment could be permanently jeopardised if you fail to protect their identity. Take all steps necessary to maintain anonymity where it is legally or ethically required.
- Do not communicate with your confidential sources via business accounts, business email addresses, or office phone numbers.
- Ensure that referring to your source's identity will not inadvertently expose them. This is a huge risk when dealing with smaller company structures where people know each other well and can guess the anonymous source.
- Come up with strategies beforehand so that you and your source can meet safely and securely.
- Ensure that your confidential source has given you their informed consent and understands the risks, such as facing possible suspicion at their company, being questioned, being outed, being ostracised, being sent legal notices, etc. even if their cover remains intact.
- Explain the limits of 'off the record' comments and quotes to your source. Both parties must agree on these conditions before proceeding.
- It is of vital importance that you approach corporate, institutional, or government-linked Pride events with caution and a critical mindset. Failing to do so means that a report meant to be accurate, impartial, and written in good faith could end up becoming a press release of sorts for the organisers of the event in question, excluding the voices of those who are marginalised not just by their queer identity but in terms of skin colour, caste, religion, disability, etc. as well. Corporations are not worthy of praise for simply giving visibility to their queer employees. Journalists should investigate to see if their policies and implementation truly reflect these inclusive values.

- As far as possible, refrain from publishing a report on a corporate Pride or LGBTQIA+ event unless you have spoken to multiple stakeholders, including but not limited to the event's organisers, its intended audience, and its participants.
- Ensure that those with lived experience of a company's LGBTQIA+ diversity, equality, and inclusion policies are platformed and given the space to express themselves first. Avoid letting expert comments overshadow the voices of those closest to the issue.
- Obtain consent before asking LGBTQIA+ professionals about their personal lives and/or LGBTQIA+ partners or family members. Make it clear whether the details they reveal are 'off the record' or not.
- Obtain written consent in case your source discusses subjects such as personal trauma, abuse, or domestic violence where legal restrictions on reporting may apply.
- Exercise caution when speaking to LGBTQIA+ professionals who are students or minors. Inform them of the risks of being featured in the news. For sources below 18 years of age, obtain written permission from a parent or guardian - but be aware of the risk of outing your source. Do not reveal the identity or photograph/video of a minor source.
- Are you and your source aware of the risks of going viral and/or receiving heavy reader-attention? Are you both prepared to face such developments without having to pull down the report? Ensure you have your source's informed consent before drawing attention to their professional or private lives.
- Make sure that your LGBTQIA+ source's identity and personal life matters do not overshadow the professional or business-related angle you are assigned to cover. (Exception: If you are writing a personal profile and your source gives you their consent and shares personal information willingly, this is acceptable.)
- Ensure that your report about an LGBTQIA+ professional does not inadvertently end up outing their family members, friends, fellow employees, acquaintances, present and past partners, etc.



Faith

This chapter covers faith and religious dogmatism related to LGBTQIA+ persons, organised religion, LGBTQIA+ persons' relationship with their faith, religious mythology and its association with LGBTQIA+ persons, cultural events and practices majorly adhered to by LGBTQIA+ persons and their leanings towards faith, quoting LGBTQIA+ persons of faith and the limits, and faith and majoritarianism.

Reporting on faith and people of faith - especially from a critical or questioning lens with regard to their attitudes towards political topics such as LGBTQIA+ issues - can be challenging, as it needs to account for the sensitivities of the subjects and readers without disregarding prejudicial attitudes and their material impact on queer persons. Balancing religious sensitivity, secular ideals, and protection of religious minorities while also upholding LGBTQIA+ rights can be a delicate task.

When reporting on LGBTQIA+ persons of faith and how they associate with their faith, you may have to deal with situations where an individual's belief systems are inherently against their own gender and/or sexual identity. It is, thus, necessary to tread carefully and understand what their faith means to the person, and their individual beliefs and preferences.

- When reporting on any faith system, it is important to interview people of that particular faith. It is important to narrate how multiple LGBTQIA+ individuals associate with the same belief system, and draw parallels and differences. Making generalised inferences for the whole community might be problematic.
- For example, during a court hearing on a particular issue concerning queer persons - marriage equality, for instance - certain religious groups might speak against or in favour of LGBTQIA+ communities. While covering such reactions, especially those opposed to LGBTQIA+ rights, it's important to also include diverse voices of queer persons of that particular faith - from their opinion on the issue at hand to their response to the

religious group's stand - and explore how it ties into their relationship with their faith (especially in the case of religious minorities).

- While reporting on religious and other belief systems is important, it is imperative to set a boundary when it comes to the propagation of majoritarianism under the guise of faith. Though this boundary is extremely narrow, setting the tone of your reportage might help navigate this conundrum.
- For example, while reporting a particular LGBTQIA+ individual/group's critical comments on other individuals/groups within their religious community, you must get voices from both sides. It's also important to be mindful of each side's intersectional identities and power positions, and not simply report both sides' views as value-neutral.
- Most organised religions (especially Abrahamic religions, and certain East Asian faith systems) have scriptures with content that is often interpreted as opposed to LGBTQIA+ persons and their rights. Often, representatives of these faiths cite their dogma and claim that LGBTQIA+ communities' existence is against their sanctified faith. Whether you are covering a protest by such a group or interviewing them, always talk to LGBTQIA+ individuals of the same faith, and see if you can highlight how the same faith and its principles might have helped them find sanctuary, or how they might have reinterpreted their faith to accommodate or accept their queer identity.
- For example, during a Pride event in Chennai a few years back, a collective of Christian organisations conducted a counter-rally protesting the Pride march. Many news reports covered the counter-rally unilaterally, without getting quotes from LGBTQIA+ individuals. It's essential to include voices of queer persons in such reports, particularly those of the same faith (Christian queer persons, in this instance), if possible.
- In recent years, there has been a rise in the formation of faith-based LGBTQIA+ groups or collectives. Some existing queer collectives have also begun to subtly or overtly lean towards particular faiths. While reporting on such organisations formed by LGBTQIA+ persons, get their perspective on why they felt the need for such a collective and how they differ from other existing faith leaning collectives.
- There are many cultural events involving queer persons in different parts of India that are rooted in local folk cultures or indigenous faiths, or have come to be associated with organised religions. It's good to cover such events from an LGBTQIA+ perspective - especially while delving into the cultural context and talking about how the event adds value to queer persons' lives - but be wary of taking an overly celebratory tone, and try to also focus on the difficulties that queer persons face to be a part of such festivals. (Refer to the 'Pride and other LGBTQIA+ events' chapter for more information.)

- For example, Koovagam, an annual festival that takes place at the Koothandavar temple in Tamil Nadu's Kallakurichi district in the Tamil month of Chithirai, gets wide news coverage every year. There are many such events of celebration, mourning, etc. relevant to queer persons that can be covered. However, instead of merely fixating on the myths associated with the event, focus on the queer participants and attendees and what the event means to them.
- While reporting on any crime or incident of violence against LGBTQIA+ persons motivated by religious beliefs, it is important not to stigmatise the entire community and faith when talking about the individual instance. Such reports should include the hardships and trauma that LGBTQIA+ persons suffer due to such violence. If your story is about a rising or general trend of recurring violence against queer persons by persons or groups of a particular faith, the subject must be handled with nuance - include diverse voices, try to understand the root cause of contemporary events and attitudes, and avoid painting the entire community or faith with a broad brush.
- For example, self-styled 'godmen'/'godwomen' who lead religious cults are often accused of various crimes including sexual assault. It's important to remember that the sexual orientation of the alleged perpetrator or that of the survivor is not the reason for such an assault. (Refer to the 'Crime' chapter for more information.) Also remember that the perpetrator doesn't represent the entire religious community or faith that they claim to profess



Credits

Media Reference Guide

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Glossary

A version of this glossary with inputs from Queer Chennai Chronicles, The News Minute, Orinam, and individual contributors was published as the Glossary of LGBTQIA+ Terms for English and Tamil Media in January 2022, and given to the Madras High Court. In his February 2022 order, Justice N Anand Venkatesh of the Madras High Court asked the Tamil Nadu government to adapt that list for their official glossary.

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The Inclusive Newsrooms LGBTQIA+ Media Reference Guide is a joint effort by The News Minute and Queer Chennai Chronicles, supported by Google News Initiative. This guide offers journalists and newsrooms who want to report sensitively about LGBTQIA+ individuals, communities, and issues, the knowledge to do so. How do you refer to a transgender person in your stories? What does 'coming out' mean? How should one write about a lesbian woman entering politics? The guide provides answers to such questions that a journalist may have.

With 20 chapters focusing on different beats, including politics, education, health, business, crime, sports, and science & technology, the guide has been written by queer journalists, writers and activists, and offers not just the 'what', but also the 'why'.

By

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Queer Chennai Chronicles

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