LGBTQIA+

MEDIA REFERENCE GUIDE

PART 1

The 5 Ws and 1 H

What is this document?

This is a media reference guide for journalists who are reporting, writing, or editing stories about LGBTQIA+ communities, persons and issues. In Part 1 of the guide, we have a glossary of terms to use (and to NOT use), a chapter on the basic things a reporter needs to keep in mind when covering LGBTQIA+ stories, a chapter on how to cover crime when LGBTQIA+ persons are involved, and a chapter on writing LGBTQIA+ opinion pieces.

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, that they didn't realise certain depictions were problematic.

During the Chennai Queer Literature Festival, 2021, one of the panel discussions was on the depiction of LGBTQIA+ persons in news media. The speakers — Ragamalika Karthikeyan from The News Minute and Ranjitha Gunasekaran from The News Indian Express — spoke about why it's important for newsrooms to have style guides on how to write about LGBTQIA+ people. Following this discussion, Queer Chennai Chronicles and The News Minute decided to get together to make a media reference guide in English and Tamil, that will help news organisations across the country. We called on queer journalists to volunteer for the same.

Meanwhile, the panel discussion was quoted by the Tamil Nadu government in in the Madras High Court when Justice Anand Venkatesh was hearing a petition on the need for widespread reforms across sectors when it comes to LGBTQIA+ communities; and Justice Anand Venkatesh asked the government to come up with a glossary of terms in Tamil for the media to use. The Tamil Nadu government did come up with a glossary in February 2022, however, the QCC-TNM Media Reference Guide team, as well as several other Tamil LGBTQIA+ persons, believed that the glossary was problematic in parts, and not representative of the actual terms the LGBTQIA+ communities in Tamil Nadu use for themselves. We then submitted a glossary together, deriving from the work we had already started doing on the media reference guide, and several other resources. This [glossary was preferred](#) over the glossary submitted by the Madras High Court, and the English part of the glossary is part of this guide.

TL;DR: We're making 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 you want to ensure the report is sensitive, not sensational. You may have received a pitch from a freelancer, and don't 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 has been at the forefront of reporting sensitively on LGBTQIA+ issues in the country for the past seven 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 the society ignores.

Every person who has contributed to writing this guide is 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?

You can email us: moulee@queerchennaichronicles.com, or ragamalika@thenewsminute.com
You can tweet to us or send a DM: @QCChronicles, @thenewsminute, @BumpAhead, @rgmlk

Glossary

*This is a part of the **Glossary of LGBTQIA+ Terms for English and Tamil Media** that was developed by Queer Chennai Chronicles, Orinam, The News Minute and Individual Contributors in January 2022. In his [February 2022 order](#), Justice N Anand Venkatesh of the Madras High Court asked the Tamil Nadu government to consider the glossary presented by LGBTQIA+ community members, as it is more dignified and inclusive than the one presented by the government. Read more [here](#).*

Part 1: Terms related to sex

Sex
Sex refers to the biological make-up 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), secondary sexual features (breasts, facial hair, deep voice etc), among others. Sex characteristics may influence a person's gender identity, expressions, sexual orientation or sexuality, but are not the cause of it.

Intersex
Intersex people 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 intersex can create risks or experiences of 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.
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 result in trauma, health conditions and more later.

Part 2: Terms related to gender

Gender
'Gender' is how society perceives persons, based on the norms, behaviours and roles associated with the sex assigned at birth. For instance, a person assigned male is expected to grow up to be a 'man' and be powerful and assertive; a person assigned female 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, only an individual has the right to determine what their gender identity is. There is no 'medical test' for gender identity. For instance, a transgender man, or transgender woman, or a non-binary person, are the only ones who can say what their gender is.

Gender expression
Gender expression is how a person expresses or presents their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance 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 any other gender identity.

Gender non-conforming person
People (adults or children) 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 with 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 like hormone therapy or surgery. This is re-affirmed in the Supreme Court NALSA verdict (2014) and Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act.
Note: Do not use the term 'transgenders' or 'a transgender', i.e. as a noun. The word 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.

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 ascribe to the woman-man binary. A 'non-binary' person is someone who does not identify as a man or a woman.

Gender dysphoria
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.

Not all trans persons may experience gender dysphoria. Many may experience gender dysphoria from childhood, while others may experience it later - such as after puberty.

Gender incongruence
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
Procedures that help an individual affirm their gender identity, including social (wearing clothes perceived to be closer to gender of choice, attempting to "live as the gender", medical (surgery, hormone, laser), and legal (changing their name and gender on paper) procedures.

Gender Affirmation Surgery
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
The name that was given to a transgender person by their family, and one by which they were identified. However, the transgender individual may no longer use that name.
The name a transgender person has 'left behind' or 'killed', Usually, this 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 the 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.

Genderfluidity / Genderfluid person
'Genderfluidity' refers to a person's experience of not having a 'fixed' gender. A 'gender fluid' person may identify with all genders, multiple genders, or with two genders (bigender). (Also see: non binary.)

Cisgender
A person 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 relating 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 which 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' refers to attraction between two men or two women.

Note: 'Sexual orientation' is different from 'gender identity'.
Example: Just like a cisgender woman can be heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual (straight, bi or lesbian), a transgender woman, too, can be heterosexual, homosexual or can have any of a wide variety of sexual orientations.

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' refers to romantic/emotional attraction, beyond just sexual attraction. This applies for cisgender and transgender persons.

Homosexuality / Homosexual
'Homosexuality' refers to an sexual attraction to a person of their same gender. A 'homosexual man' or a 'gay man' is a man who is attracted to men; a 'homosexual woman' or 'lesbian' refers to a woman who is attracted to women.
'Homoromantic' refers to a person who feels romantic/emotional attraction to persons of the same gender. This applies for 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 both 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 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. 'Pansexuality' need not imply equal attraction to all genders.

Asexual / Aromantic (Aro-Ace)
'Asexual' refers to a person who does not feel sexual attraction towards anyone. 'Aromantic' refers to a person 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.

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. Romantic orientation need not correspond to a person's sexual orientation.

For instance, a person who is pansexual – that is, they are 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 to the societal assumptions of gender and sexuality in the past. However, the LGBTIQA+ 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+ is a term used to collectively refer to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual people and people of other non- cisgenders and non-hetero sexual 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' is 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 doing 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
A person or organisation supportive of the rights of LGBTIQA+ 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 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 LGBTIQA+/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 demand for the rights of queer communities.

Conversion Therapy, SOGIE-change efforts
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 by the Madras High Court.

Basics for reporters

This section details what reporters must keep in mind while reporting on a story concerning LGBTQIA+ persons and/or communities. Please bear in mind that reports must be responsible and must not produce stories that could lead to discrimination or hatred in society.

Names and pronouns

Reporters are usually under tight deadlines, but that is no reason to forget being respectful towards the people you interview. Do bear in mind that as a reporter, your job is to be professional, and also to build trust with your sources. It is the job of a reporter to tell stories with accuracy and integrity, and to protect your sources. This shouldn't change when you are 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. Please do not assume anything in this case, and always resort to asking — politely:

☐ **What is your name?** This may not be the legal name of the person, but stick to the name they give you in your reports.

☐ **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.

☐ Please **do not ask** a person about their deadname or use it anywhere without their consent. A deadname is what a person formerly used or was addressed by. The use of a deadname is considered highly disrespectful and dismissive of the person's gender identity.

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.
For example: "Ravi is a transgender man."
If readers need more clarification, say: "Ravi was assigned female at birth and began transitioning at the age of 20."
Do not say: *"Ravi 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". Instead, use "gender affirmation surgery" if speaking about surgical transition. 'Transition' of 'gender affirmation procedures' can be medical, social, legal etc.

☐ While covering stories about transgender persons and communities, it is important to go beyond their personal journey and their medical changes. There are many issues the community faces such as police brutality, discrimination, exclusion from public healthcare, education, work and living opportunities.

Other things to keep in mind:

☐ 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 your report. We don't usually talk about a straight thief's sexuality in our reporting, so why focus on it only for LGBTQIA+ people?

☐ If you are quoting an expert in your story who is an LGBTQIA+ person, and their identity is relevant to your story, ask them how they would like to be designated. For instance: If Neha is a writer and a lesbian, she can be designated as: Neha, a writer; or, Neha, a lesbian writer; or, Neha, a lesbian woman who is a writer; or, **Neha, a writer who is a lesbian woman**. When in doubt, pick the last option.

☐ If you're 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.

☐ Think about who 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?

Writing and commissioning opinion pieces

This section covers opinion pieces on culture/arts, advocacy, policy, politics, education, healthcare, human rights, etc.

The first thing a commissioning editor should consider is: who is writing the piece? Is the person eligible to write the piece? These are some of the questions the editor must seek answers to before a piece is commissioned:

- ☐ Are they queer identified?

- ☐ Do they have subject matter expertise?

- ☐ What is their track record on writing about LGBTQIA+ people?

- ☐ What is their track record on 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?

  Note: If their opinion sounds controversial, get a second opinion from a trusted expert source. 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, does not mean they are not privileged in other ways, and does not mean they cannot hold problematic/fascist views.

  Example: A brahmin trans woman expressed support for building the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and has taken problematic stands on issues of religion frequently.

  Another example: An upper caste trans woman blamed working class trans women for spoiling the community's name.

- ☐ Understand that one queer person cannot be the self proclaimed representative of all queer communities/persons. So while editing, be measured when such claims are made.

- ☐ LGBTQIA+ people can also be bigoted towards fellow LGBTQIA+ persons, or towards other identities in the umbrella. Don't give a platform for bigotry.

If they are NOT queer identified:

☐ Are they taking a stand on lived experiences of queer persons? If yes, don't take 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?

Example: If a lawyer is writing about same gender marriage, are they sticking to case law, constitutional definitions etc, or are they commenting on societal aspects of the issue? The former is ok, the latter 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.

Example: If a mental health professional is batting for conversion therapy, make sure the piece is run by someone in the community before you take a call.

☐ Are they a person who routinely takes up spaces which are meant for queer persons? Check out their prior credentials, including their public social media activity, and 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 take 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.

Example: A career feminist (subject matter expert) may write a piece supporting cisgender lesbians while dog whistling about how trans women are dangerous. Such feminists are known as TERFs — Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists. Don't take such pieces without consultation from a trusted source within the community.

☐ 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 organisations (NGOs) — ensure that you do a background check on the person before publishing them.

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 for funding.

In general:

☐ If you're a commissioning editor for opinion pieces, apply the same standards you would for issues around cisgender women, their rights and violence against them, to opinion 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.

☐ If the opinion piece is based on statements/comments made by someone else, then have they taken the entire statement/comment into account, or are they criticising something piecemeal? Is the

comment taken out of context? Apply regular editorial standards when it comes to LGBTQIA+ issues as well.

☐ Does the piece reveal personal identities of people that are being commented on, for statements made in private, without a public record? Use your discretion in accepting or rejecting such pieces.

☐ Is the piece going to do harm to LGBTQIA+ persons/communities? If yes, don't publish it.

Crime and 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 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 the LGBTQIA+ person is a victim:

☐ When the member of the community is the victim of a crime, consider the role their marginalised position may have played in making them vulnerable to violence.

☐ Remember that just because a victim is an LGBTQIA+ person, does not mean rape is not rape — although the law may treat it differently.

☐ Remember to focus on the criminal misconduct rather than the victim's identity unless relevant to the case. In the case of violence meted out in reaction/response to that 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 — of if deceased — by how they identified themselves in life.

  Example: Recently the mother of a trans woman allegedly organised for her to have her limbs broken, but ended up causing her death. Police used the deceased's deadname and referred to her sex assigned at birth, etc. 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 had chosen and her gender identity as a woman. Instead of 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 and endangering them while reporting the crime. One could write the report while protecting the identity of the complainant, and add other details/quotes to make the story more grounded/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 may make them more vulnerable. If the latter, avoid or hold off until it is safer for the person.

If the LGBTQIA+ person is a perpetrator:

☐ If 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 it is not relevant, there is no need to mention or focus on it in the report, just because the police may have mentioned it in the FIR or while sharing information of the case.

Example: If an alleged chainsnatcher identifies as queer, is it in any way relevant to the case at hand?

☐ 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 been reported as "attempted to have homosexual relations/gay sex, etc". However, in these cases, there are two reasons why this should be avoided. First, under the POCSO Act, 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. Second, 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, that 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 (sodomy). Similarly, when both accused and victim are of the same sex, there is no need to resort to a phrase like "forced xyz to have homosexual relations" or "tried to make abc have homosexual relations." One can either use "attempted to force abc to have sex" or "attempted to sexually assault" etc.

☐ 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.

What's coming up

This is only Part 1 of the LGBTQIA+ Media Reference Guide. The full guide will contain chapters on the following subjects as well.

- Basics for editors
- Photojournalism and videography
- News and current affairs reporting
- Reporting Pride
- Legal reporting
- Health reporting
- Mental health reporting
- Education
- Politics
- Entertainment
- Faith
- Science & Technology
- Business
- Sports

If you have any questions or concerns that you would like addressed in these chapters, do write to us:

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