

Stop, think and feel
*Keeping intersectionality in mind
when reporting*

What LGBTQ+ journalists
think you should know
A roundtable discussion

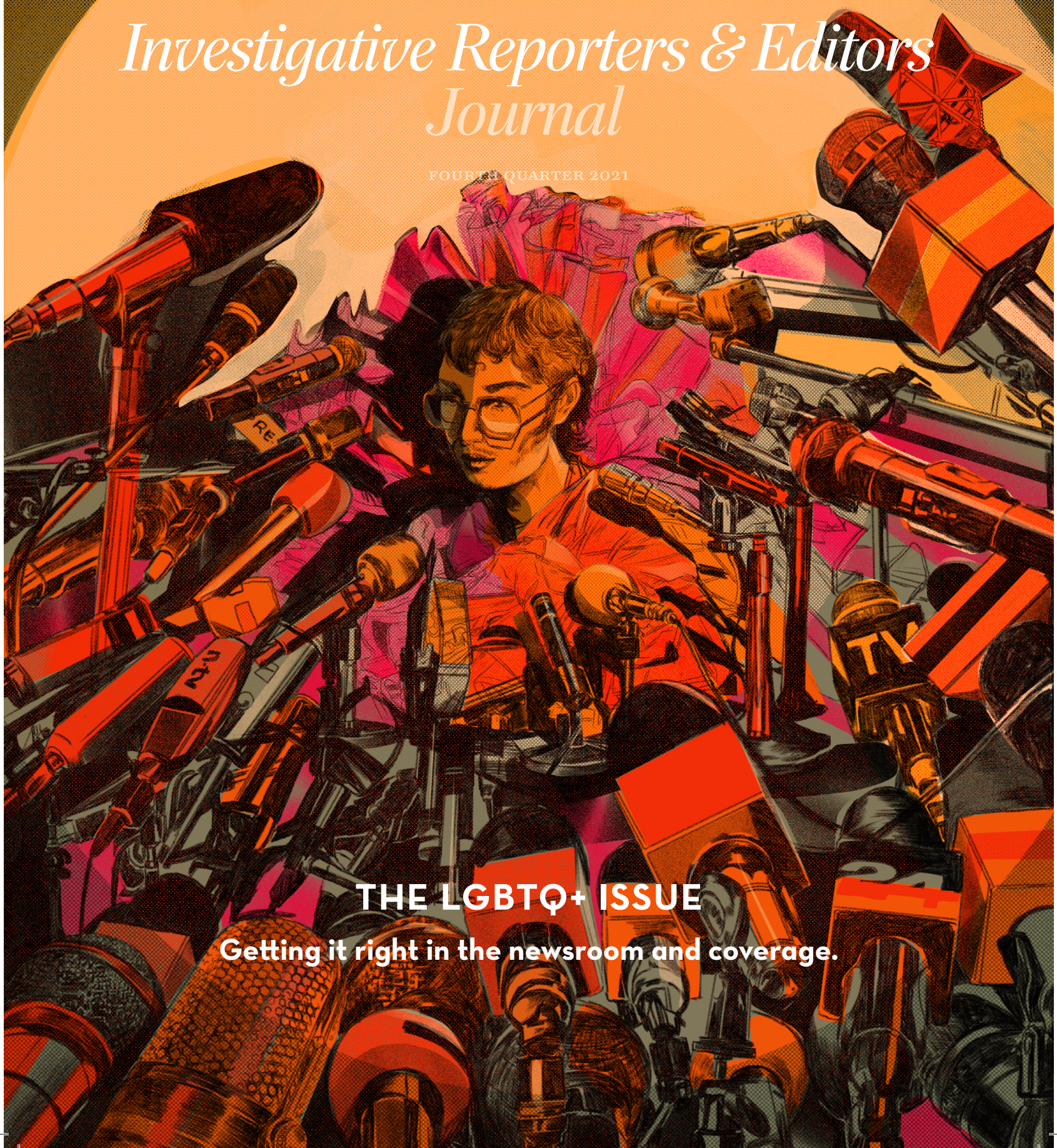
It starts with you
*Tips on changing the workplace culture
to be more inclusive*

The Investigative Reporters & Editors Journal

FOURTH QUARTER 2021

THE LGBTQ+ ISSUE

Getting it right in the newsroom and coverage.





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IRE Journal

FOURTH QUARTER 2021



Sex Freedom League members picket the Army Induction Center in New York City in 1964.

LGBTQ+ ISSUES

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Cover Illustration

Nicole Rifkin (she/her they/them)

"I'm happy to do work about the representation of LGBTQ+ people in media," Rifkin said. "The more work that is done now, the more varied and vibrant the representation will be in the future."

What's in this issue

First, let me say that the idea of doing an IRE Journal featuring LGBTQ+ issues in the journalism industry and in news coverage was the easiest sell so far during my time at Investigative Reporters and Editors.

The idea first came up during a meeting with IRE's Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Francisco Vara-Orta, and The Pudding's Jan Diehm. We were on a Zoom call discussing the recent IRE member survey on LGBTQ+ programming (bit.ly/lgbtqsurveypresentation) and how to best move forward from those results. The idea of doing a journal issue dedicated to the movement came up, and I latched on to the prospect.

When I moved the idea up the ladder to IRE Executive Director Diana Fuentes and Deputy Executive Director Denise Malan, it was a short conversation with a resounding "Yes!" as an answer.

But we started running into roadblocks when cultivating the content for this issue. LGBTQ+ inclusion touches virtually every aspect of journalism: every newsroom meeting, every beat, every story. So, how could we get at all of those topics in fewer than 40 pages?

As a cis, straight white woman, I relied heavily on Vara-Orta's guidance during this issue. He helped me brainstorm initial ideas, reach out to folks and answer questions that came up during the editing process. You will find the roundtable he facilitated diving into intersectionality on race and gender on Page 18, which is truly the heart of this issue and worth the eight-page read.

This issue also includes a tipsheet on how to respectfully report on LGBTQ+ issues — even if you aren't a member of the community. See Crystal Paul's writeup on Page 26 to gain knowledge from her experience in covering the community and to get a verbatim script on how to phrase certain questions that might sometimes feel uncomfortable.

Learn how to get your LGBTQ+-centric story approved from skeptical editors and keep these issues in the forefront of political coverage. Lauren McGaughy of the Dallas Morning News and Christine Hatfield of Wisconsin Public Radio give tips on Page 32 of how to keep people at the center of your political coverage and what resources to tap into.

On Page 30, Melissa Davlin of Idaho Reports details how she has been able to take guidance from previous IRE panels and use those as tips in her own management style and in cultivating an inclusive team.

IRE's work in facilitating conversations around LGBTQ+ inclusion in the newsroom and in news coverage is growing. This journal issue is one of many conversations and trainings to take place in IRE's programming, and we hope that, regardless of your role in journalism, you'll be active in helping us add to the conversation on these issues. ♦



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Mark your calendars for NICAR22!

IRE is gearing up for its annual data journalism conference, which will take place March 3-6 in Atlanta, Georgia.

This will be IRE's first in-person event since the COVID-19 pandemic. Attendees can expect hands-on data classes, panels and discussions, and opportunities to network with fellow data journalists.

More information on rates and registration will be coming soon. Visit ire.org/nicar22 for updates, and sign up for the NICAR22 email updates list at bit.ly/nicar22email.



IRE hires first director of diversity and inclusion

Investigative Reporters and Editors hired its first director of diversity and inclusion in September: trainer and veteran journalist Francisco Vara-Orta.

Vara-Orta joined the IRE staff in February 2019 as a training director. While working as a trainer, he has conducted sessions on managing data and investigative reporting for journalists across the United States and internationally.

"Francisco has been instrumental in developing and advancing IRE's goal of helping its members better reflect the communities they serve and helping newsrooms be more inclusive and welcoming," IRE Executive Director Diana R. Fuentes said. "In his new role, Francisco will broaden that work as well as provide us with essential, informed guidance as IRE itself continues to move toward becoming a more diverse and welcoming organization."

Vara-Orta has already started reviewing IRE's extensive curricula through an equity lens, rewriting some courses and creating new



ones. He also will be bolstering IRE's relationships with partner organizations and offering support to journalists working to be more culturally competent in their reporting, hiring and retention approaches.

"All of us who care about a more fair and just world share in our mission at IRE to make our work — and work environments — better and more inclusive to those who feel they haven't always had a seat at the table," Vara-Orta said.

Vara-Orta can be reached at francisco@ire.org.

Tools for better coverage of the queer community

A guide to the guides

When journalists share stories including LGBTQ+ issues and people, they need to give these stories the thought and space they deserve. As a gender identity revolution marches forward, journalists should adjust their approach to interviewing folks within the LGBTQ+ community. Dozens of resource guides exist, but IRE compiled a list of some of the organizations dedicating space to queering the craft.



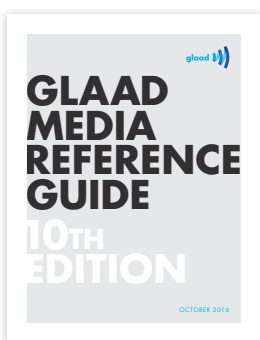
EJC and Freedom House Guide

bit.ly/ejcguides

Free

The European Journalism Centre and Freedom House guide, “LGBTQ+ Communities: A reporters’ guide,” looks at LGBTQ+ issues and news coverage across Europe. It includes media ethics, sourcing, safety and data verification techniques.

This reporter’s guide also includes a terminology section that details important terms within the community, focusing on terms that are more common in Europe. It also details interviewing techniques when talking to sources from the LGBTQ+ community. Similar to TABOOM’s guide, this handbook also includes a “Myth vs. Reality” section and does a deeper dive into science and medicine and how it intersects with the LGBTQ+ community.



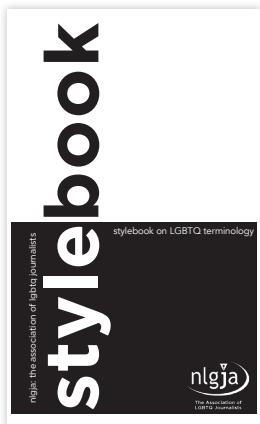
GLAAD Media Reference Guide 10th Edition

glaad.org/reference

Free

The “GLAAD Media Reference Guide 10th Edition” lays out commonly used terms like lesbian, gay and bisexual while also defining words that build the acronym LGBTQIA. Words like intersex and asexual, which build the “I and A” in LGBTQIA. Aside from its glossary of terms, GLAAD also shares a “Terms to Avoid” section. This allows journalists to cross-check their word choice with GLAAD’s preferred terminology. For example, instead of using the term homosexual relationship, the organization recommends using the word relationship.

GLAAD provides guidance on covering different communities and how those intersect with other aspects of life such as marriage, religion, laws and more. The guide also includes a directory of community resources.



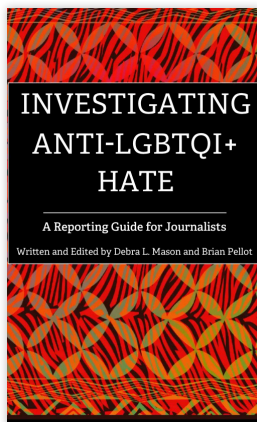
NLGJA Guide

nlgja.org/stylebook

Free

NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists is an organization working to foster inclusive coverage of LGBTQ+ issues. This stylebook is intended to assist individual publications as well as The Associated Press Stylebook. This guide is also available in Spanish through a partnership with the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. This stylebook contains terminology, definitions and guidance on referencing HIV/AIDS.

In addition to providing more resources, this stylebook also includes sections on specific guidance for pronoun use, transgender reporting and getting balance in reporting on controversial issues.



TABOOM Guide

bit.ly/taboomguide

Free

“Investigation Anti-LGBTQI+ Hate: A reporting guide for Journalists” is focused on the reporting of hate groups within the U.S. and takes a look from a historical context. Its terminology section encourages people to give their LGBTQ+ friends space to identify themselves through interaction before trying to fit them into an identity category. The guide’s “Myth from Fact” section debunks common myths and assumptions created about the LGBTQ+ community.

TABOOM also juxtaposes religion and the LGBTQ+ community in its guide. It identifies individuals and organizations who encourage LGBTQ+ hate. The guide includes a map compiling 49 anti-LGBTQ+ hate groups in the U.S., courtesy of the Southern Poverty Law Center. This guide also offers ways to investigate groups and nonprofit organizations that push anti-LGBTQ+ hate campaigns.

TJA Guide

transjournalists.org/style-guide

Free

The Trans Journalists Association (TJA) is a journalism organization that advocates for the trans community. Its style guide emphasizes the importance of accurate media coverage on trans topics and how they shape public understanding and thinking about transgender people. TJA points out that most of the public’s first experience with trans topics occurs with media coverage.

The TJA Style Guide gives tips for improving trans coverage in newsrooms, terms and phrases to avoid and a glossary of terms. The organization believes the best way to improve trans coverage is to hire trans journalists. Transgender people have lived experiences and have a deeper understanding of trans issues and gender.

Data and LGBTQ+ communities

A look at how to track queer stories when data isn’t always readily available

INTERMEDIATE Kate Sosin (they/them), *The 19th**

Transgender people face barriers in the most visible parts of their communities. But their fight for dignity deepens behind bars. As Kate Sosin learned, lived gender is largely ignored by the regiment of bureaucracy running the nation’s justice system.

LGBTQ+ reporter Kate Sosin undertook a two-year long investigation that was eventually published by NBC to reveal how prisons across the nation housed transgender people. They began their work after reporting on the case of Lindsay Saunders-Velez, a transgender woman allegedly assaulted at least three times while in a male prison, according to Sosin’s 2018 story.

“What was so shocking to me was that despite

everything, despite the abuse and despite the fact that she had transitioned, she wasn’t being allowed to be rehoused,” Sosin said. “I just kept wondering why.”

It was during conversations with Saunders-Velez’s attorney that the idea for a nationwide investigation began.

“She was like, ‘I bet you for every department of corrections in the country, we find that none of them are doing this,’” Sosin said. “I was like, ‘I’m going to do that. That is the data that we need.’”

Across those two years, Sosin filed 20 Freedom of Information Act requests per month through a MuckRock subscription. They eventually filed requests representing all 50 states and D.C. MuckRock organized the FOIA responses as it received them. Sosin said the website laid out the data, which was a big help. Once MuckRock organized the data, it was easy for Sosin to read and identify where transgender people were and were not being housed according to their gender identity.

Sosin learned that among 5,000 transgender people documented by the FOIA requests, only 15 were housed according to their lived gender.

Once they had a telling sample of data, Sosin started to pitch the story for publication. With national backing, Sosin’s story earned more notice from sources.

NBC News supported Sosin’s story across the finish line. They helped Sosin visualize a sophisticated graphics package for the digital story, shot photos and produced a micro-documentary.

“I felt like they helped me to dream that and really added some new ways to think about that story that were very powerful,” Sosin said.

Tools
MuckRock

Link
bit.ly/
transincarceration

| | A | B | C | D | E |
|----|---------------|------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | | Total Trans Population | Trans Women | TW Housed W/ Women | Trans Men |
| 2 | Alabama | | | | |
| 3 | Alaska | | | | |
| 4 | Arizona | 113 | 111 | | 2 |
| 5 | Arkansas | 14 | 12 | 0 | 2 |
| 6 | California | 1,203 | | | |
| 7 | Colorado | 163 | 159 | 0 | 4 |
| 8 | Connecticut | 26 | 16 | 0 | 10 |
| 9 | Delaware | 24 | 15 | 0 | 9 |
| 10 | Florida | 235 | | | |
| 11 | Georgia | 119 | | | |
| 12 | Hawaii | 10 | 9 | 0 | 1 |
| 13 | Idaho | 91 | 87 | 0 | 4 |
| 14 | Illinois | 110 | | 1 | |
| 15 | Indiana | | | | |
| 16 | Iowa | 26 | 22 | 1 | 3 |
| 17 | Kansas | 38 | 33 | 0 | 5 |
| 18 | Kentucky | 135 | | | |
| 19 | Louisiana | 36 | | | |
| 20 | Maine | 13 | 8 | 1 | 5 |
| 21 | Maryland | 28 | 25 | 0 | 3 |
| 22 | Massachusetts | 58 | 31 | 0 | 27 |
| 23 | Michigan | 113 | 111 | 0 | 2 |
| 24 | Minnesota | 24 | 22 | 0 | 2 |

ADVANCED Jan Diehm (she/her), *The Pudding*

In the emerging 20th century, gayborhoods were a safe haven for LGBTQ+ people. Now, increasing acceptance, changing laws and increasing real estate costs have put the traditional gayborhoods at risk of going away.

Jan Diehm, a senior journalist-engineer with The Pudding, set out to capture the gender differences in queer enclaves in the United States. The struggle, though, is there is not a running tally kept of the LGBTQ+ identifying people living in any specific area.

“There’s still no definitive question to track queer populations in the census,” Diehm said, which was also true for the 2020 Census. “So, part of this project is figuring out a proxy to kind of get at those things.”

Those proxies were a hodge-podge of data sources. Diehm used the U.S. census and tax filing information, but also business information, like LGBTQ+-friendly businesses on Yelp and Pride parade routes.

Overall, it took Diehm a month to assemble the data. It was her first big data project by herself, and she was not sure what to expect. She said a month is now the average for a project of this size at The Pudding.

She used a JavaScript library called Scrollama to visually tell the story. Scrollama is a tool that lets users plot pieces of a story relative to each other and control movement of a webpage as the reader scrolls. Diehm used the library to chart a one-of-a-kind depiction of gayborhoods in the United States.

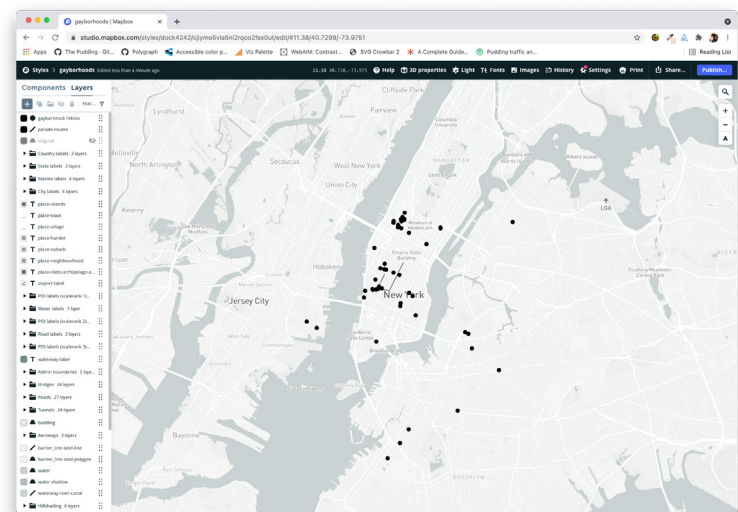
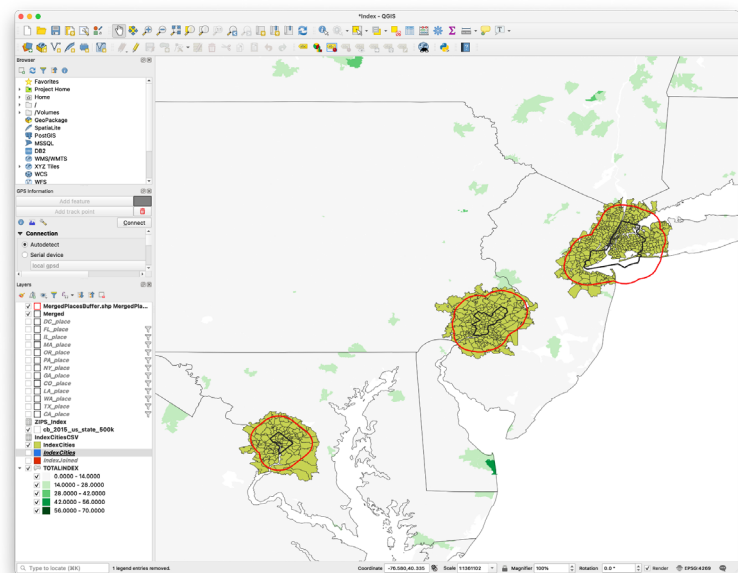
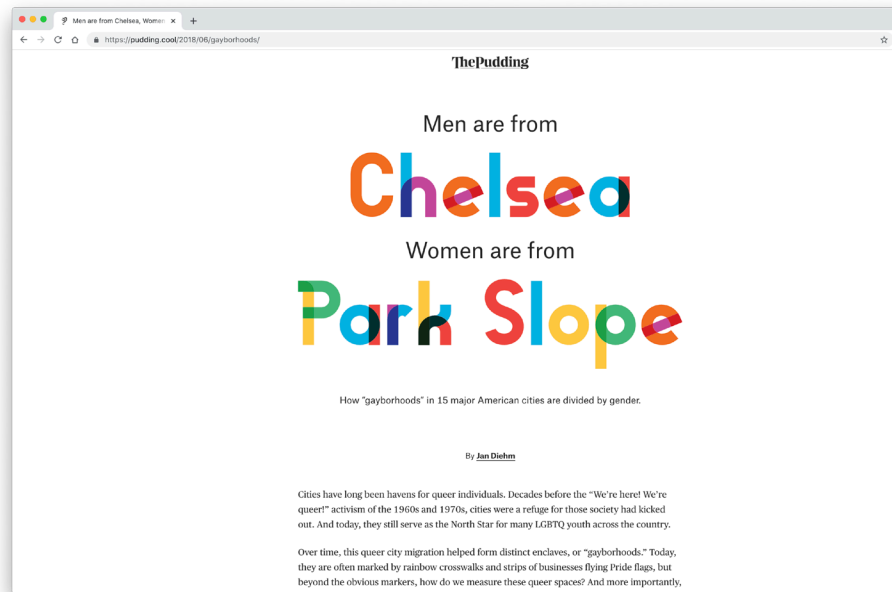
“I’d seen some maps and charts here and there, but hadn’t seen anything that tried to do it in a hyper visual way,” Diehm said about the distinction between her project and what already existed.

Tools

Scrollama, Mapbox Studio, QGIS

Link

bit.ly/puddinggayborhoods



Intro to LGBTQ+ census data

For decades, datasets on LGBTQ+ demographics have been few and far between. But, for the first time ever, the Census Bureau has included three questions involving gender identity and sexual orientation in a population survey.

Since their debut in the Household Pulse Survey on Aug. 11, these questions and their biweekly results have provided real-time data regarding the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTQ+ households.

Recent stories from newsrooms including NBC News, The 19th* and more, have only just begun to demonstrate how this new data can elevate coverage of disparities faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

IRE talked with **Dallas Morning News computational journalist Madi Alexander (she/they)** to gather tips on how you can do the same.

1. Start with the Basics

As with any dataset, it is important to start by reading the documentation. Ask key questions like, “What is the margin of error? The sample size? The method of data collection? The frequency?” All of these variables impact the survey’s accuracy. The Pulse Survey’s quick biweekly turnover leads to a small sample size overall and even smaller sample sizes for subpopulations within the LGBTQ+ community. “Be cautious about drawing big conclusions,” Alexander said. “But comparisons over time will probably lend themselves to interesting stories and unique story ideas.”

Health Table 2a. Symptoms of Anxiety Experienced in the Last Two Weeks, by S
Source: U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, Week 37.
Note: These data are experimental. Users should take caution using estimates based on su
Total Population 18 Years and Older

| Select characteristics | Not at all |
|---|------------|
| Total | 89,143,535 |
| Age | |
| 18 - 29 | 7,761,941 |
| 30 - 39 | 11,932,446 |
| 40 - 49 | 12,745,299 |
| 50 - 59 | 16,819,652 |
| 60 - 69 | 21,402,715 |
| 70 - 79 | 14,231,385 |
| 80 and above | 4,250,097 |
| Sex at birth | |
| Male | 50,008,978 |
| Female | 39,134,557 |
| Gender | |
| Cisgender male | 48,831,803 |
| Cisgender female | 38,286,695 |
| Transgender | 309,187 |
| None of these | 825,964 |
| Did not report | 889,885 |
| Sexual orientation | |
| Gay or lesbian | 1,537,401 |
| Straight | 82,369,919 |
| Bisexual | 1,226,958 |
| Something else | 1,029,216 |
| I don't know | 1,314,655 |
| Did not report | 1,665,384 |
| Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender | |
| Yes | 3,030,662 |
| No | 81,380,147 |
| Other | 2,523,455 |
| Did not report | 2,209,270 |
| Hispanic origin and Race | |
| Hispanic or Latino (may be of any race) | 12,543,985 |



2. Find the ‘Little Nuggets’

The Household Pulse Survey touches on a variety of specific topics and measures that can speak to trends that go unnoticed otherwise. By identifying these “nuggets” of information, you can find angles to stories on issues separate from the census entirely.

For example, the survey asks, “In the last 7 days, have you worked or volunteered outside your home?” Combined with income level, gender identity and sexuality these results could lead to a story about who is returning to in-person work and who has the privilege to continue working remotely.

Other “little nugget” topics could include housing, food shortages, education opportunities, unemployment, income level and more.

3. Talk to a Topical Expert

Once you know what topic or trend you intend to focus on and what related data you have, take it to an expert. Tools like Women Also Know Stuff (womenalsoknowstuff.com) and Expertise Finder (expertisefinder.com) can be useful in tracking down postgraduate researchers or doctors who specialize in even the most niche of topics.

If you are looking at data involving increased demonstrations of depression and anxiety in transgender individuals, take the data to a psychology or gender studies expert. Ask questions like, “What might be the root causes of the trend? And what could be a potential solution?”

“Dig deep into the why,” Alexander said, “not necessarily just who is being harmed, and what sort of harm they’re experiencing, but why is it happening, and what can be done to prevent it?”

4. Add Anecdotes

Finally, give the story a voice. This might even come before the data has been gathered. We often first observe systemic oppressions and inequities in the lives of individuals within our communities. Data helps to quantify these observations, but it is important to add the human element back into the story.

“I think (the Pulse Survey) gives us a way to quantify a lot of stuff that we know is already anecdotally true or has been seen in academic studies and medical research in particular,” Alexander said. “Use this data as your starting point to go find the people who are being impacted by what we’re seeing here.”

Employment Table 4. Work and Volunteer Status Outside the Home in the Last 7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, Week 37.

Note: These data are experimental. Users should take caution using estimates based on su
Total Population 18 Years and Older

| Select characteristics | Total |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Total | 250,265,449 |
| Age | |
| 18 - 24 | 21,873,448 |
| 25 - 39 | 65,751,790 |
| 40 - 54 | 63,415,067 |
| 55 - 64 | 43,519,997 |
| 65 and above | 55,705,147 |
| Sex at birth | |
| Male | 121,078,275 |
| Female | 129,187,174 |
| Gender | |
| Cisgender male | 115,724,754 |
| Cisgender female | 124,103,127 |
| Transgender | 2,126,066 |
| None of these | 4,236,270 |
| Did not report | 4,075,232 |

Food Table 1. Food Sufficiency for Households, in the Last 7 Days, by Select Cha

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, Week 37.

Note: These data are experimental. Users should take caution using estimates based on su
Total Population 18 Years and Older

| Select characteristics | Total |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Total | 250,265,449 |
| Age | |
| 18 - 24 | 21,873,448 |
| 25 - 39 | 65,751,790 |
| 40 - 54 | 63,415,067 |
| 55 - 64 | 43,519,997 |
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| Cisgender female | 124,103,127 |
| Transgender | 2,126,066 |
| None of these | 4,236,270 |
| Did not report | 4,075,232 |
| Sexual orientation | |
| Gay or lesbian | 7,727,389 |
| Straight | 215,713,622 |
| Bisexual | 10,504,528 |
| Something else | 4,999,774 |
| I don't know | 5,818,035 |

CONTINUING

IRE Executive Director R. Diana Fuentes reflects on the organization's diversity efforts, looks toward the future

When Investigative Reporters and Editors got its start in 1975, it was designed for like-minded newsmen — and a handful of newswomen — to exchange ideas and information in support of their day-to-day investigative reporting.

In the years since, the organization has grown into an impressive network of smart, tenacious journalists who know how to handle numbers, follow the money and conduct deep investigative work that has opened the eyes of the public, changed state and national laws and won more than a few prestigious journalism awards.

We teach each other the latest advances in data analysis and new tricks of the trade, brainstorm and share ideas, and overall help each other do our jobs better.

Today, IRE is often cited by newsrooms as the gold standard for investigative reporting and data journalism training.

But the organization hasn't always set the same high standard for equity and inclusion as it has for professional expertise. We have been roundly criticized for a lack of diversity and having blinders to the marginalized and historically underrepresented areas of the communities our members serve.

It's tough to be rebuked in public, but our board, staff and members took the criticism to



**Diana R. Fuentes
(she/her)**

is the executive director at IRE and NICAR. You may reach her at diana@ire.org.

heart and began taking steps to ensure IRE's great work extends to all journalists and to all communities.

Of course, it's not just race and ethnicity that contributes to diversity; gender, sexual orientation, abilities, age, belief systems and geography, among other factors, contribute to the rich texture of a community.

That's a broad range to cover.

It was slow-going at first, but there has been real change. And the pace of change is accelerating.

The board was once predominately comprised of white men; it's now more often than not predominately women, and the membership frequently elects people of color.

Last year, IRE conducted its first survey of its LGBTQ+ community to help determine how we handle coverage of LGBTQ+ issues, what we can do to make IRE more inclusive and create safe spaces for networking and what we can do to help make our industry a more equitable environment.

We first presented the findings of the survey at NICAR21. At IRE21, we addressed the issues raised by the survey and had a session on how to be an LGBTQ+ ally.

Despite the difficulties created by the continuing coronavirus pandemic, we've had a year of other notable firsts.

I was hired as IRE's first executive director

THE CONVERSATION

of color to lead the staff, and we recently named Francisco Vara-Orta as our first director of diversity and inclusion.

We also just completed our first symposium focused on diversity, belonging, equity and inclusion, covering everything from how to make investigative journalism accessible to people with disabilities and avoid stereotypes when reporting on the LGBTQ+ community to investigating inequities in education and how to cultivate equitable spaces for a diverse newsroom.

And you're reading the first edition of *The IRE Journal* dedicated to LGBTQ+ issues.

The IRE board has maintained and expanded its diversity. This year, the IRE board once again elected a Black colleague as president — Mark Walker — following in the footsteps of Cheryl W. Thompson, IRE's first Black president, who served an unprecedented three terms and continues as the ex-officio Chair of the Board. We have two other Black board members: vice president Kat Stafford and past vice president Mark Rochester. Also on the board are Barbara Rodriguez, a Latina; Neena Satija, an Indian-American; and Josh Hinkle, an out gay man, all elected by the membership.

Nine of the 13 elected members are women. We have people from California, Indiana, Michigan, Texas, New York and Washington, D.C. Our Board of Directors is comprised of editors and reporters from print, broadcast and online media

representing local and national outlets, as well as journalism educators.

IRE also is intensifying efforts to seamlessly integrate diversity at every opportunity. Trainers are encouraging participants in our workshops and conference sessions to look for diverse sources for stories that aren't about diversity and inclusiveness. Quoting a Black economics professor to help explain the latest Federal Reserve decision or having a Native American physician comment on vaccine protocol helps promote diversity innately.

In addition, we are increasing the diversity of presenters at annual conferences and workshops across all topics.

We're doing more than talking. We are taking action.

We know there are those who think we're not moving fast enough. But doing things right takes time — and courage. Not every effort will work out, but we can't let fear of failure stop us from moving toward our goal of true diversity and inclusiveness. Our future depends on it.

This is where you come in. We need your feedback and your ideas. We want to know what you think is working and what needs improvement. Drop us a line at diana@ire.org or francisco@ire.org.

I'm optimistic about the future because there's much we can achieve together. I'm looking forward to hearing from you! ♦

INCORPORATING INCLUSIVITY

*IRE board member Josh Hinkle outlines
the future of LGBTQ+ programming at IRE*

I remember what it was like, growing up closeted in rural Oklahoma, quietly worried about what the next day would bring. Bullies, humiliation and the fear of being different. I never imagined back then I'd someday be in a position in life where being gay would give me the chance to help others in my profession.

When I campaigned for the IRE Board of Directors this year, I told members this organization should be welcoming and inclusive — a place where anyone can have a seat at the table. Today, as an out gay journalist, I know this isn't what always happens in our industry. But the decisions our leaders make have the power to bring about real change for the LGBTQ+ community. Now elected to the board, I'm excited to be part of that future progress in IRE.

We've made strides to advance diversity in recent years — largely with race and gender. Sexual orientation is a more recent focus for IRE. Our latest annual conferences — including this fall's inaugural DBEI Symposium — have featured panels diving into LGBTQ+ topics, support and coverage tactics. And last year's IRE Conference marked the first time in the organization's 45-year history for an official meetup for LGBTQ+ members. Past word-of-mouth meetups could appear exclusionary, so the sanctioned event was a promising step toward inclusion.

A plan among board members and staff is underway to collect data on IRE's LGBTQ+ membership to better know the scope of who to serve.

By
Josh Hinkle
(he/him),
KXAN

Josh Hinkle is director of investigations & innovation at KXAN-TV in Austin, Texas. He also hosts a statewide politics program called State of Texas and teaches broadcast journalism at St. Edward's University. He was elected to the IRE Board of Directors in 2021 and chairs the organization's newly formed Training Committee. Twitter: @hinklej

In 2020, IRE shared an informal survey with its members to understand the organization's LGBTQ+ makeup, and the insights gathered were telling. Essentially, the results showed that IRE feels like a non-threatening space but doesn't always feel inclusive or intersectional. And there is no substitute for connecting with those who have shared experiences.

IRE's newly formed Training Committee will focus on training beyond the annual conferences, and I look forward to working with the committee members on a variety of goals like ways to enhance training opportunities surrounding LGBTQ+ members and issues. These could include how to cover this community better, revamping training materials to be more LGBTQ+ relevant, and increasing representation by tapping more LGBTQ+ journalists to lead training events not necessarily just related to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Training Committee also wants to promote more opportunities to train LGBTQ+ newsrooms and enhance partnerships with other journalism organizations like NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists and the Trans Journalists Association. This fall, I was honored to represent IRE, leading a virtual workshop on "Managing the Investigation" at the NLGJA National Convention, and we hope to take on more opportunities like that soon.

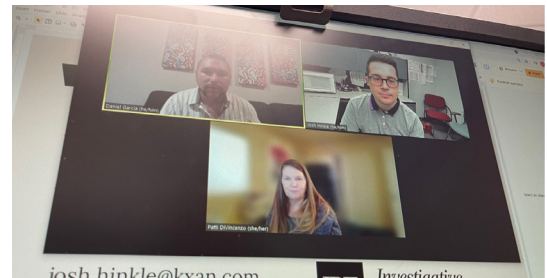
As a member of this community and a leader in IRE, I want others to know I'm here to listen and advocate for improvement. We can do better. And together, we will. ♦



The IRE Board of Directors meets in person for the first time since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Chicago on Aug. 7, 2021.



IRE Board member Josh Hinkle, board President Mark Walker and board member Brian Rosenthal attend the IRE Board retreat in Chicago on Aug. 7, 2021.



IRE board member Josh Hinkle leads an IRE bootcamp panel at the virtual NLGJA National Convention.

A look at past LGBTQ+ representation in newsrooms



Sex Freedom League members picket the Army Induction Center in New York City in 1964. PHOTO COURTESY,/ RANDOLPH WICKER

'A MATTER OF SHAME'

By **Edward Alwood, Ph.D. (he/him)**,

University of Maryland, College Park

Editor's note: This story includes graphic language used in historical context regarding the LGBTQ+ community. Reader discretion is advised.

In the spring of 1895, readers of The New York Times would have been baffled by a vague article describing the conviction of playwright Oscar Wilde in a London court. Wilde was found guilty of “committing acts of gross indecency with a certain male person,” but there was no mention of this in the Times story. Wilde was sentenced to two years of hard labor and banished from London society just as the term ‘homosexual’ was banished from the pages of tasteful journalism.

Six years later, The Times told of a city politician, revealing that the man had been a woman living in male disguise. “Murray Hall Fooled Many Shrewd Men,” read the headline. The tantalizing article described how Hall had “masqueraded as a man for more than a quarter century.” He was portrayed in The Times and elsewhere as a freak of nature akin to a performer in a circus sideshow. The term ‘transgender’ was unknown at the time.

As today’s “new media” have found, journalism can be a difficult, exhausting, frustrating task, and sometimes even the most experienced journalists at the highest profile news outlets miss the mark of reporting truth. This has been especially true of coverage of the LGBTQ+ community for a variety of reasons. As the late Washington Post columnist Richard Harwood observed, the images painted by news organizations have been “disturbing and embarrassing.”

Before World War II, media references to homosexuality were rare, limited to occasional mentions in African American newspapers and neighborhood tabloids in major cities. During the war, mainstream newspapers cheered efforts by military psychiatrists to expunge gay men from the ranks under the premise of protecting troop morale. “They want to weed out the epileptics, homosexuals, alcoholics, mentally deficient, those who have traces of a conflict in their personality,”

the Washington Evening Star reported in 1943.

Investigative journalist Nelly Bly is revered for her daring undercover exposé of brutality and neglect at a women’s asylum in New York City in 1887. But there was no investigation of lesbians who were subjected to hysterectomies and estrogen injections to “cure” them of homosexual tendencies or of gay men who were convicted of sodomy and punished with chemical castration. For decade upon decade, homosexuality was “the love that dare not speak its name” throughout the news media. Newspaper publishers and editors feared that any discussion of the subject would offend families at the breakfast table. The silence left them vilified and demonized.

After Alfred Kinsey estimated in 1948 that as much as 10 percent of the population had engaged in homosexual acts, fear prompted Sen. Joseph McCarthy to target gay men and lesbians as a threat along with Communists during the Red Scare of the 1950s. “3750 Perverts Hold U.S. Jobs in Capitol, Senate Probers Say,” a Washington Post headline told readers. A headline in The Atlanta Constitution read, “1,500 Sex Deviates Roam Streets Here.” The Miami Herald said, “Beach Police Round up 35 in Pervert Crackdown.” In a letter to the editor, a reader suggest-





ed, “Just execute them all.”

Perpetuating the stereotype even further, newspapers reported on police entrapment of gay men. “The police sent these guys into these men’s rooms where they would sort of lollygag around to see if anybody would make a pass at them,” recalled Ben Bradlee, who began his legendary career at The Washington Post as a police reporter. “We had little one-paragraph stories that had no news value, of course, but that’s what it was.” Psychiatrists officially adopted the military’s classification of homosexuality as a mental illness in 1952.

Journalists have been taught for generations to adopt terminology and characterizations from sources under the misguided belief that in doing so, they are absolved from bias. But the news media fed antigay hysteria by publishing the names of the men arrested, along with their addresses and the names of their employers. In many cases, the exposure amounted to journalistic punishment that cost the men their jobs and, in some cases, their homes.

In 1963, openly gay activist Randy Wicker of-

Activists protest at the Army Induction Center demonstration in New York City in September 1964. PHOTO COURTESY / RANDOLPH WICKER

ferred a New York Times writer a tour of the city’s burgeoning community of gay men and lesbians. It resulted in the first mention of the subject on page one of the Times, “Growth of Overt Homosexuality In City Provokes Wide Concern.” Wicker felt betrayed by the alarmist tone that cast gays as a “problem.”

A 1967 report — “CBS Reports: The Homosexuals” — broke through the silence of network television. Correspondent Mike Wallace characterized gay men by saying: “The average homosexual, if there be such, is promiscuous. He is not interested in nor capable of a lasting relationship like that of a heterosexual marriage. His sex life — his ‘love life’ — consists of chance encounters at the clubs and bars he inhabits, and even on the streets of the city. The pickup — the one-night stand — these are characteristic of the homosexual relationship.”

When asked about his description nearly 30 years later, Wallace said: “Well, I said it. That is — God help us — what our understanding was of the homosexual lifestyle a mere 25 years ago because nobody was out of the closet and because

that's what we heard from doctors ... it was a matter of shame."

Indeed, it was shame-filled homosexuals who sought psychological treatment, but journalists looked no further to find well-adjusted gay people. Most LGBTQ+ people were deeply closeted to escape public derision. Wallace acknowledged that he and his wife had gay friends who did not fit that description. "But," he said, "I thought they were the exception to the rule."

When gay men and transgender individuals rioted outside the Stonewall Inn in 1969, it marked the beginning of the modern gay rights movement. The New York Times relegated a brief account to the inside pages where the headline emphasized that four policemen were injured. In contrast, The New York Daily News carried a cheeky story on its front page. "Last weekend the queers had turned commandos and stood bra-strap-to-bra-strap against an invasion of the helmeted Tactical Patrol Force," it said. San Francisco newspapers ignored a similar riot by transgender individuals outside Compton's Cafeteria three years earlier.

In 1974, newspapers announced that the American Psychiatric Association had recategorized homosexuality; it was no longer classified as a mental illness. That same year, the Los Angeles Times published a feature that referred to homosexuals as "winos, pimps, and fags and whores." Journalist Greg Kilday sat at his typewriter in the newsroom and pounded out a memo to his editors. "As a homosexual," he wrote, "I find it troubling and frustrating to read a newspaper that on some of its pages treats homosexuals with interest and respect and on others dismisses them as faggots."

Despite fleeting breakthroughs and advances in coverage, news media generally were unprepared when the public health crisis known as AIDS arose in the early 1980s. The most visible exceptions came from journalists on the health beat. David Perlman at The San Francisco Examiner wrote in June 1981 that a mysterious pneumonia was striking gay men. A short time later, The San Francisco Chronicle hired the first openly gay reporter in mainstream journalism to cover a gay beat. Randy Shilts had studied journalism at the University of Oregon six years earlier. He struggled to find employment until AIDS struck San Francisco. He went on to set a new standard, showing that LGBTQ+ individuals were legitimate subjects of respectful coverage. Once he

contracted AIDS himself, Shilts wrote from a personal point of view. He was joined in that endeavor by journalists at other news outlets who had also contracted AIDS, including Jeffrey Smalz at The New York Times and Bill Cox at the Honolulu Star-Bulletin. Cox wrote, "I have spent my career trying to shed light in dark corners. AIDS is surely one of our darkest corners. It can use some light."

The death of actor Rock Hudson in October 1985 and the death of 18-year-old Ryan White one month before his high school graduation changed public perceptions of AIDS as a disease of Haitians, homosexuals and heroin addicts. As it became clear that AIDS was a life-and-death issue for the broader community, activists formed The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). It began in New York City with a small group of journalists and writers on November 1985. The nascent organization helped organize a protest later that year outside of the New York Post building of almost 1,000 people demanding responsible coverage of the AIDS epidemic and the LGBTQ+ community generally.

AIDS also became a catalyst for organizing LGBTQ+ journalists. Former Oakland Tribune Editor Leroy Aarons formed a group in 1990 that would become The Association of LGBTQ Journalists. Aarons had been asked by the Society of Newspaper Editors to conduct a study of gays in newsrooms. The findings indicated that newspapers generally were doing a poor job of covering gay issues because closeted gay and lesbian journalists were unwilling to openly acknowledge themselves, thus, they were robbing their publications of a valuable resource.

Coverage of AIDS and other gay-related topics, including adoption, same-sex marriage, equal employment and service in the military, have proved that readers and viewers are not so offended that they would turn away in disgust as editors had feared. Parents are not so worried about what their children might see in the morning paper. Moreover, newsrooms large and small have awakened to the fact that LGBTQ+ journalists are not only talented writers, editors and reporters but also provide a valuable resource. Today, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of self-identified LGBTQ+ journalists who are willing to identify themselves and help in the production of truthful, responsible journalism. ♦

Edward Alwood, Ph.D., is a former CNN correspondent and the author of "Straight News: Gays, Lesbians, and the News Media." He teaches at the Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland - College Park.

WHAT LGBTQ+ JOURNALISTS THINK YOU SHOULD KNOW

Members of IRE's LGBTQ+ community gathered at a roundtable to discuss problems in the industry — and how to overcome them.

We've always been around inside newsrooms and in the communities we all cover, but journalists who identify as LGBTQ+ have a lot to say when it comes to how we could be better as a field. It's work that needs to happen — not just in how we cover the queer community but also in how the industry treats those from such communities working in our spaces. In recent years, trans and queer journalists of color have also started to make more inroads on being heard and published, being at the intersections of societal change that challenges media practices. Visibility isn't the only challenge here — many might think the media industry is queer friendly — but that only can go so far in sustainably overcoming problematic behavior in how the LGBTQ+ community is treated inside our newsrooms and in our coverage.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Editor's note: This story includes graphic language regarding the LGBTQ+ community.
Reader discretion is advised.



**Francisco
Vara-Orta (he/
him)**

IRE & NICAR, director
of diversity & inclusion



**Karen K. Ho (she/
they)**

Business Insider,
senior reporter,
sustainability



**Femi Redwood
(she/her)**

1010 WINS Radio,
podcast host and
manager; CBS News,
correspondent;
co-chair of NABJ
LGBTQ+ Task Force
& NLGJA: The
Association of LGBTQ
Journalists board
member.



**Kae Petrin (they/
them)**

Freelance data
journalist &
Trans Journalists
Association, founding
member

Francisco Vara-Orta (IRE & NICAR): What have been your experiences around being an out person or being a visible queer person in your newsroom spaces?

Karen K. Ho (Business Insider): I continually have to come out over and over again. (There's the assumption) that people are straight in the newsroom. That's the lens in which being queer has allowed me is to remind people that their automatic assumptions about our audience, or even what that norm is, it is worth reconsidering all the time. And I think that's helpful.

Femi Redwood (1010 WINS Radio/CBS News): Straight people see me, and they assume I'm straight. So, what that means for a reporter like me who does a lot of "in the field work" is there might be, (for example), a conversation with a councilman, and he starts ranting about something transphobic. And so then I'm like, 'Well, guess what? I have a wife.'

The other thing I have to think about realistically, if we're being completely honest here, is if I tell this person my identity, does that mean this person isn't going to give me the future interview that I need? You know, maybe this is the one person who has expertise in this specific area. So, is this person going to prevent me from being able to do my job in the future? It's literally mental gymnastics. I'm going through my mind — do I identify, or do I not identify?

This is really where newsrooms just have to be better. It's important for not just local newsrooms to be better, but corporate has to be better. Because often, when issues are escalated in the newsroom, it goes to corporate, and the corporate folks just kick it back down to the local newsroom.

Kae Petrin (TJA): I've been out as someone who everybody assumes as a lesbian, and then as a trans person, as well. And I think newsrooms (have) sort of an assumption where we're good at queer issues, right? But then a trans person enters the newsroom. And there's a lot of stumbles or things they just aren't thinking about, that they don't want to really have to start thinking about.

Some of these issues start to overlap, because I think there's a lot of space for white queer people who look a certain way in newsrooms and newsrooms are like, 'Oh, we're great, because these people are out and having a good time.' But then, as soon as you start overlapping that with other identities, it gets more complicated, and newsrooms are not doing as well as they think they are. Often, the response where you really see the weaknesses is in existing policies and existing managers' knowledge.

As a trans person, I do think (some in newsrooms) assume that coverage and the newsroom experience (for LGBTQ+ colleagues) are separate. But if you're in edits with somebody, and they're misgendering your trans source, there are other trans people in the newsroom who are trying to decide whether or not they want to come out, (and they) are going to hear that, and that's going to reflect on how they feel about their own safety and their workplace. Or, if we respect these sources when we're only in front of them. And when we need something from them. Are we respecting them? So, I think there is a feedback relationship there that I think is stronger than a lot of people realize.

Francisco Vara-Orta (IRE & NICAR): I have definitely struggled with this in how I speak and dress because I feel like people have certain images of what a gay man, and one of color especially, looks like and what an investigative journalist looks like, and those images don't match. I also really felt — and this is something I think is under-explored — that I don't think gay men are always taken seriously as investigative reporters. I don't really see a lot of visibility of us in the data journalism world. So, for me, that was also alienating. I knew more investigative journalists of color than I did men who identified as queer or LGBTQ+, and that intersectionality was really important.

I had one gay Latino mentor tell me how far we have come in my role at IRE considering that when he wanted to cover the police in the '70s, an editor laughed and said no one would take "a faggot seriously" to his face. In some newsrooms, I felt like I could never bring any of this up because it would make people think I couldn't take the tougher aspects of the job, but now I feel like many of us are vocalizing these experiences, and I think of so many who never had that opportunity.

Next question: When it comes to being not just part of the newsroom, but also being a consumer of content, even from organizations that you aren't a part of, how do you think we have been doing covering LGBTQ+ issues?

Femi Redwood (1010 WINS Radio/CBS News): I'm going to jump in and say we have failed, not just in covering LGBTQ+ issues, but also just including LGBTQ+ issues in coverage about non-LGBTQ topics. So, we have a tendency of putting our guests and our characters in these little boxes as LGBTQ+ people.

Kae Petrin (TJA): There have been a lot of failures. Sometimes, you look at internal style guides at large organizations, and you're appalled by the ways that they are requir-

ing their reporters to describe and write about trans people. It's been really heartening to work with the Trans Journalists Association, because we're getting emails from people who do want to adopt our style guide and who do want to understand it and learn from that. But other organizations have been really resistant to changing anything.

Francisco Vara-Orta (IRE & NICAR): We've talked a little bit about this here, but how do we guide our colleagues on getting better at this work — even though the responsibilities shouldn't always be ours? What do you think are some of the best ways to go about those kinds of conversations?

Kae Petrin (TJA): I think the way that I've often started those conversations has been, you know, 'Oh, I saw you're covering X issue, or this is sort of in the news cycle, who's covering it?' And just sort of offering myself as a resource, and also encouraging people to ask more questions than they might normally. I think one of the things that happens with LGBTQ+ issues broadly, not just trans issues, is that reporters sometimes feel a little awkward about asking some of the more specific questions about 'How do you identify' and 'What does that mean for you?' Because they don't want to overstep. Or they're asking really invasive questions in the wrong directions.

Questions that are very centered on people's experience, such as asking LGBTQ+ people instead what do they want you to understand about them — (that's what) I'm encouraging colleagues to start thinking about more, and in turn (they might) feel more comfortable asking questions that they usually feel a little awkward about.

I don't believe it is up to LGBTQ+ people in the newsroom to always educate their counterparts, because sometimes people just don't have the mental bandwidth. And that's OK. Because there are so many resources out there.

Karen K. Ho (Business Insider): 'I'm not Wikipedia,' sometimes is a really good answer. I try to normalize it just like anything else. The thing that I've learned, especially being part of AAJA, is you cannot guess what is a person's racial or ethnic background, based on appearance alone. And my default is not interviewing cisgender, straight white men. My default is to actually try to interview women and people of color first.

Newsrooms have to incentivize (that), whether with performance or with pay incentives, to make this a normalized thing. There should be incentives also for the work of being part of the Trans Journalists Association or also providing training regarding DBEI should be recognized just as much

If a former police-officer-turned-journalist covers a police story, we don't question whether or not they are too close to the story.

This only really happens with marginalized groups.

– Femi Redwood

When it comes to intersectionality, I want people to stop treating queer people of color like they're a zoo exhibit.

I know more about what's going on in certain parts of Brooklyn than about how queer people who are Asian are dealing with hate crimes, because they were already dealing with hate crimes before.

– Karen K. Ho

in your performance reviews.

I think it's also just about signaling. I am really looking to a lot of younger union organizers to say explicitly, "This is something that's important to us, not just for ourselves, but for new and future staff."

Francisco Vara-Orta (IRE & NICAR): What would be your advice to someone who's had to navigate some readers, viewers, even colleagues, questioning the integrity of our work because of our identity? You can either be tokenized or prohibited based on the bias of your managers as a queer person, or generally as a person from a historically marginalized community.

Femi Redwood (1010 WINS Radio/CBS News): Whenever we have these conversations about a reporter of a marginalized group being too closely connected or unfair in their coverage, we don't hear that about white men or white women. If a woman wants to cover a story about Equal Pay Day, you don't hear news directors or their co-workers questioning whether or not they're too close to the story. If a former police-officer-turned-journalist covers a police story, we don't question whether or not they are too close to the story. This only really happens with marginalized groups. And I think that's what newsrooms need to evaluate. Why is it that they (managers) only ask these questions about people of color, about women, about LGBTQ+ people? Why is it only these marginalized groups where these questions exist? But also there's nothing wrong with having expertise or lived experience, because that undeniably helps you understand a story better, and it helps you cover a story better. So if a person is too close to the story, that doesn't mean they're not going to cover the story fairly.

I think organizations are really good to rely on for support, and NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists, they have a Quick Response Task Force. So, if you don't feel like you can handle these things, go to an organization like that and let them handle it on your behalf. I have an agent. Should there ever be an issue in my newsroom, I'm going to allow my agent to handle it because she is better equipped to handle it. So, if a queer journalist has an issue in the newsroom where they want to cover these things, but they are afraid of retribution or any of that, allow these large organizations to come in and fight for you on your behalf, because that's what we're here for.

Karen K. Ho (Business Insider): I used to have people ask me if I was worried about being pigeonholed for writing about the Asian community, and I had to remind them that

just in the United States, that population would be equivalent to the third largest state after California and Texas. And you know, it's the same thing, and that just like anything else, the queer community is not monolithic. Just like the Latino community or the Black community or the Asian community or even women at large. You know, I think that's the thing that I remind people of over and over again.

The other thing that's really hard, especially when it comes to investigative journalism, is how bad the U.S. is at forgetting the rest of the world exists. ... And I think when it comes to IRE specifically and investigative journalism, I think the thing is, we have to look at what are the opportunities that are not being given to queer journalists, because of preexisting standards and expectations for experience for things like internships.

Kae Petrin (TJA): Push back against this idea — from some newsrooms — that you need to be really present on social media and open with your life. I think there's (sometimes) an expectation that LGBTQ reporters are talking about queer issues on their Twitter timeline. And that's part of their role as a reporter covering these issues. Push back against that. Don't put emotional energy in that (for an employer).

Talk to your employer about how they handle harassment and what their policies are for protecting reporters from harassment and attacks online and doxxing. Can they pay for trainings to help protect your identity and extra time to take your information offline? Create ways you can be less stressed out as an online queer reporter.

Francisco Vara-Orta (IRE & NICAR): Kae mentioned that it can be harder for those in the journalism industry who have to navigate two identities, alluding to the intersectionality of being a queer journalist of color. How do we get better at covering these intersections and what frustrates you about how we do it?

Karen K. Ho (Business Insider): I think it's hard enough just to cover the intersection of race and gender often. And then the second demographic is usually about class and income. So often what happens is coverage regarding queer people of color is only during tragedy, or in regards to a protest.

When it comes to intersectionality, I want people to stop treating queer people of color like they're a zoo exhibit. I know more about what's going on in certain parts of Brooklyn than about how queer people who are Asian are dealing with hate crimes, because they were already dealing with

hate crimes before. It's an opportunity to think of new angles, but at the same time, I think the imagination is so low, regarding stuff like that. We're doing such a bad job doing the first four levels, like education, income, race and gender, that it often ends up becoming a low priority, or no priority about that intersectional level.

Femi Redwood (1010 WINS Radio/CBS News): I don't think we think about intersectionality unless the story is about something that's intersectional. I mean, you can pull up the front page of any news website, and it's likely that at least 80 percent of the stories are missing that intersectional element because it's just not something that newsrooms are thinking about — unless the story specifically revolves around that.

Part of the problem of why we don't cover intersectionality is because newsrooms are still very uncomfortable talking about these issues. But also because there's this fake colorblindness. Many people, regardless of whether or not they're a journalist, they walk through the world telling themselves that they are colorblind, and that goes into every other sphere. So, if you are the type of person who says, "I don't see color," then you're probably going to tell yourself that you also don't see the difference between you and the gay couple next door, if you have a gay couple next door. All of those things combined and then the fact that for the most part, journalists never make as much money as they would in a different field. The type of people that can typically afford to do these (journalism) jobs, they come from a white wealthy or middle class background, they come from a background where they will have parental support that will help them while they are making \$30,000 a year even though that \$30,000 doesn't cover rent, a car note, car insurance, health insurance, etc. And so when you are only plucking people from these communities, of course they're not going to think about things in an intersectional way because they don't have the lived experience of living in several identities.

Francisco Vara-Orta (IRE & NICAR): What are some more critical things for folks in our newsrooms to think about around these issues if you had their ear?

Kae Petrin (TJA): I think investigative reporting is often so driven by records, and the records on queer and trans people are often so bad that reporters just end up never covering issues related to us. And I think it's really important to start thinking about ways to cover that absence of records as a problem and cover around those gaps and find creative ways to source things and find investigative stories.

As far as managers, I think the number one thing I wish managers understood is that they have more people in their newsrooms who are LGBTQ+ than they realize. And I think there's sort of an assumption, like, if there's not someone with an undercut in your newsroom, managers will think, 'Oh, we don't really have to worry about all this.' There's a lot of assumptions about what queer people look like and how to identify them while you're hiring them and working with them. And managers should stop making those assumptions and build their newsroom on the assumption that they have people working there already of all LGBTQ+ identities, and that many of the people that they could be hiring and attracting might not be interested in their newsrooms because they're not seeing that work being done actively.

Karen K. Ho (Business Insider): You have to create an environment of psychological safety and trust for this discussion to even happen. I think that's the really important thing: a larger conversation regarding psychological safety and trust. There has to be a long-term relationship regarding communication. Managers who are reading this, I want them to think about if their staff would feel comfortable talking to them being like, 'Hey, I'm getting a lot of really bad messages on Twitter or Facebook after I post a story that is unrelated to my identity, but they're making comments or slurs regarding my LGBTQ+ identity or my appearance.' What is the company's public policy regarding things like harassment?

Femi Redwood (1010 WINS Radio/CBS News): I will say, there's a lot of work that newsrooms need to do. It doesn't just fall on LGBTQ+ journalists, it doesn't fall on the employees. I think a lot of it certainly falls on managers and corporations. It is easy to say 'Happy Pride' and put up a rainbow flag during Pride Month. It's a lot harder to ensure that the coverage is inclusive, it's fair, and it's as rich as it could be. But at the same time, undeniably, I am hopeful. Even the fact that IRE is this major journalism organization, and the fact that we're even having this conversation, it wouldn't have been anything I imagined five years ago. We're having the conversations and newsrooms are beginning to see the value in telling our stories. And that is incredibly inspiring, and it makes me super happy. And it makes me super hopeful. The next new generation of queer journalists are going to have such a better and more inclusive newsroom. And that just makes me incredibly happy. So, I am hopeful. But it's not time to pat ourselves on the back yet, we still have a lot of work to do. ♦

I wish managers understood ... they have more people in their newsrooms who are LGBTQ+ than they realize. There's sort of an assumption if there's not someone with an undercut in your newsroom, managers will think, 'Oh, we don't really have to worry about all this.'

– Kae Petrin



Randy Ford, a choreographer, dancer and creative in Seattle, is the center of a story for The Seattle Times focused on how Black LGBTQ+ Seattleites navigate their identities. **ERIKA SHULTZ / THE SEATTLE TIMES**

STOP, THINK AND FEEL

Reporting on the intersectionality of LGBTQ+ stories

By **Crystal Paul (she/her)**, The Seattle Times

“I’m not just one thing.” That’s the quote we ran on the cover of The Seattle Times features section in August 2019 for an enterprise story on how Black LGBTQ+ Seattleites navigate their identities in a city with a reputation for being LGBTQ+-friendly.

The quote came from Randy Ford, a Seattle dancer and choreographer, interviewed for the story.

If you ask her about her identity, she might stretch out a long list of words that feel right in the moment, practically singing some of the words joyfully and proudly, as she did in our interview: “Black, queer, nonbinary, pansexual, transfeminine, orisha, goddess, dance-educator, daughter, auntie, sister.”

“(Identity) means everything,” Ford said. “I spent a lot of my life — probably 19 years — as another identity that I wasn’t fully comfortable with.”

Ford’s understanding of identity as evolving, multi-faceted and crucial is, perhaps, the most important lesson one can learn as a journalist covering any marginalized community, but certainly LGBTQ+ communities.

For most of the Seattle residents interviewed for that August 2019 story, Seattle’s reputation as an LGBTQ+-friendly city didn’t hold up. Seattle isn’t as friendly to its Black residents, they said, and Black LGBTQ+ Seattleites can’t (and shouldn’t have to) separate their Black identities from their queer identities.

When reporting stories about people who inhabit marginalized identities, it’s crucial to acknowledge that everyone carries multiple identities and to learn about the ways those identities intersect and craft their unique experiences in the world.

On the communities beat, considering intersectionality and the nuances of identity in even the smallest local communities has been vital to not just getting the most accurate and honest story, but also for establishing trust with communities that have often been under- and mis- represented in media for centuries.

Below are some tips for sharing the stories of the LGBTQ+ communities you cover. It is by no means comprehensive, but it’s a good place to start.

Share the love, too

While walking around the monuments of the new AIDS

Memorial Pathway in Seattle this summer, former Seattle City Councilmember Tom Rasmussen stopped to show me an issue of Seattle Gay News that he had kept from the 1980s. Inside, several pages were covered with the names of those lost to the AIDS crisis in Seattle. Rasmussen ran his hands down the pages and recalled several of his friends whose names were on that list.

We took a moment to be quiet together, before heading to the main monument of the Pathway — a sculpture made of big speakers in the shape of an X, called “andimgonna-misseverybody.” Here, Rasmussen recalled the joy of those same dark days that took the lives of many of his friends. He spoke of the inspiring mutual aid, the overwhelming warmth of community and the blissful party nights at LGBTQ+ dance clubs around the city.

Not all stories about those who identify as LGBTQ+ are about trauma, hate and identity crisis. There is also joy, love and community, and sometimes, maybe even most times, these seemingly contrasting notions are all mixed up together.

So, even when specifically covering trauma and hate, look for the nuance, look for the pride in being who they are, look for stories of support and love in the mix, too.

Interviewing sensitively to avoid retraumatizing

Still, there is an epidemic of murders of Black trans women throughout the U.S. State and federal legislation continues to threaten the rights and personhood of trans and LGBTQ+ people, and Black and Indigenous LGBTQ+ people in this country are targeted by police at higher rates than other groups.

LGBTQ+ people in the U.S. endure discrimination in many forms at the intersections of race, disability, sex and socioeconomic status, a fact that leads to disproportionately facing challenges in the arenas of health, education, housing and employment.

When working with people who have experienced trauma, remember that they carry that trauma with them at all times, even after many years, even if they are not always outwardly emotional about it.

If you are reporting about traumatic or difficult experiences in the lives of those sharing their stories or about legislation that could cause harmful impacts in their lives, how do you report on these topics sensitively, without causing more harm?

Do your homework

Approach every story with as much information as possible. Of course, this applies to all stories, and it's as important when covering communities whose histories and nuances you are unfamiliar with. Being aware of some of the

issues mentioned above is a start.

People with marginalized identities spend a great deal of their time educating others about their identity, being objectified and problematized, fielding intrusive questions about their identities, and on the receiving end of discrimination and hate. Doing your homework on the specific communities you're working with respects their time and boundaries, creates a stronger trust between you and your sources and enriches your stories.

Local LGBTQ+ organizations can often guide you to the resources you're looking for, or can be a resource themselves. Remember, there are people who get paid to answer some of the questions you have. Ask them rather than putting that onus on your subjects.

And, of course, read everything you can.

Prepare your source before you ask

Rather than simply launching into a potentially triggering question, let your source know that you are about to ask a potentially sensitive question and that they don't have to share if they don't feel comfortable. For example, “I'm going to ask a question about (sensitive subject). Feel free to let me know if you are not comfortable sharing about that right now.”

Ideally, this question would come up somewhere in the middle of the interview, after you've already spoken a bit, established trust and determined that they seem ready to talk about more difficult topics. It should also come before the end of the interview so you are not leaving them with the difficult feelings brought up by the question. In the best scenario, of course, you are gently guiding them to sharing the difficult stories on their own because they feel it is important to share them, which leads to the next tip ...

Ask yourself if it's important to your story: If you are considering raising a topic you know will be difficult for your story's subject, first ask yourself if it's necessary and important for your story. Why do you want to include this in your story? Who is this story for? Will it help others with similar experiences? Is it important for establishing the urgency or importance of an issue?

Build in a support system

If you know well in advance that the interview will be primarily focused on sensitive or potentially triggering issues,

Suggested reading

- “A Queer History of the United States” by Michael Bronski
- “Queer (In)justice: The Criminalization of LGBTQ+ People in the United States” by Joey L. Mogul, Andrea Ritchie and Kay Whitlock
- “Zami: A New Spelling of My Name” by Audre Lorde
- “Black on Both Sides” by C. Riley Snorton
- “Borderlands/La Frontera” by Gloria Anzaldúa

let them know in an email or in your initial call. Or if that's not possible, ask if they'd like to have a support person join in the interview. That could be a lawyer, parent, partner, friend, etc. If your story allows for it, consider conducting a group interview with people who share similar backgrounds or who have a strong relationship to help people feel supported and share a sense of camaraderie as they share their experiences.

Information is power

When working with populations who are institutionally and socially disempowered and marginalized, it's important to remember that media institutions have also historically marginalized and contributed to the disempowerment of these populations. As journalists, we have powerful institutions with lawyers, money and reputations behind us, and sometimes, those we're writing about are well aware of that. In order to level the playing field and ensure that we are sharing their stories with respect and accuracy, make sure your sources are informed about your story and process.

Before the interview, let them know what your story is about, what you're looking for from them, how you typically interview, whether or not you're recording, what "on the record" means versus "on background" and "off the record."

After the interview, let them know how the process will work from interview to editing to publication, when and how you'll be in contact with them throughout that process. Ask if they have any questions for you or if they have any particular concerns about the process or the story. Give them your contact information and make yourself available to them if they have anything they'd like to add or any concerns they'd like to raise before your deadline.

Evolving identities

One of the ways that media platforms have and continue to further marginalize LGBTQ+ sources and subjects is by misidentifying, misnaming and misgendering them.

How to ask LGBTQ+ people how they want to be identified in a story:

"How would you like to be identified for this story?" If further explanation is needed, offer examples of ways others have answered this question (e.g. "for stories like this I've done in the past, people I've spoken to use their occupation or use identifiers like 'queer, bisexual or trans.'")

"What pronouns would you like to use for this story?" Pronouns are personal, and for some, it can take many years of self-exploration. Pronouns can also change over time, so be sure to ask each time you interview a source, not just the first time. Do not mention former pronouns or dead names in parenthesis either.



Former Seattle City Councilmember Tom Rasmussen discusses the pages of the Seattle Gay News issue with the names of those lost to AIDS in Seattle. CRYSTAL PAUL / THE SEATTLE TIMES

This can happen when a journalist assumes what a person's pronouns are, when a journalist uses the "dead name" (a former name that the person no longer uses or identifies with) of a trans or non-binary person, or when a journalist uses LGBTQ+ identifiers that their source or subject does not identify with.

To avoid doing that, directly ask people you are interviewing how they would like to be identified in the story and double-check those details with them before you print. Try to ask identity-related questions in a way that allows them to use their own words and acknowledges that their identities may have evolved or changed since the last time you spoke with them.

Be sensitive, not first

When covering communities historically and presently marginalized in the ways the LGBTQ+ communities around the U.S. are, it's usually more important to get our coverage right than to be the first out the gate with the news. If you don't feel you are adequately prepared to cover a topic sensitively and respectfully, then press your editors to hold the story until you can cover the story right, rather than just first. Because we don't just write news, we're telling people's stories, we're writing about issues that impact people's lives. That's worth doing right. ♦

Crystal Paul is a features reporter for The Seattle Times, covering the stories about the communities that the news impacts. Her coverage spans across the arts, race & culture, and travel & outdoors, and highlights marginalized communities.

IT STARTS WITH YOU

Tips on changing workplace culture to become more inclusive

The Idaho legislature was the first to put forth a bill banning transgender girls and women from competing on teams that align with their gender identity.

The bill, called the Fairness In Women's Sports Act, was signed into law in March 2020, and has since served as a blueprint for similar pieces of legislation elsewhere in the United States. Lawmakers in our state have also criticized public broadcasting multiple times for its portrayal of same-sex couples and their families in children's programming.

The Idaho Reports team is a small one in a conservative state. We have covered these issues accurately and fairly over the years, though I've been increasingly concerned about my LGBTQ+ colleagues, both at my station and in other newsrooms, who couldn't just ignore current events when they felt uncomfortable or upset about what was being said about people like

By **Melissa Davlin**
(she/her), Idaho
Reports

them and their loved ones. Initially, I wasn't sure how to bring up my concern for them, or if it was even appropriate to ask how they were feeling. But that didn't feel like the right approach.

At its annual conference in June, IRE offered a panel called "How straight journalists can support LGBTQ+ coverage and colleagues," with Francisco Vara-Orta, Oliver-Ash Kleine and Jan Diehm. Here's some of what I took away from that session and from subsequent conversations I had with my coworkers.

Shoulder some of the burden

Don't put the entire responsibility of covering LGBTQ+ issues solely on colleagues who publicly identify as being part of the community. And along those lines, if you're covering issues about trans people, make sure you talk to trans people.

Check in

Hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people and

anti-trans legislation can be difficult, or even traumatizing, for some reporters to cover. A simple acknowledgment that it sucks can go a long way. Ask how they're doing, and if you're able, offer to give them a break from that coverage. (This advice holds true for any reporter covering difficult events or trials or topics, by the way. Check on your people.)

Listen to LGBTQ+ journalists

Don't just listen to people in your circle, however large it might be. Follow more reporters on social media and read what they write. Pay attention to what they're saying and don't get defensive when they point out holes and blind spots in coverage. Be receptive to feedback, even if it's critical.

*Don't put
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Educate yourself about LGBTQ+ style guides

(See IRE's *Guide to the guides* on Page 4).

Know that not everyone's experience or viewpoint will be identical

A cisgender gay white man is likely going to have a different lens than a nonbinary person of color. Keep this in mind when covering LGBTQ+ issues.

Also keep in mind how LGBTQ+ issues intersect with other topics you're covering, whether it's immigration, higher education or public health.

Be mindful

Not everyone in your newsroom will feel comfortable being public about their identity. Unsafe communities and situations are still, unfortunately, all too common.

If you're privileged enough that a colleague confides in you about their orientation or identity but isn't ready to be out, be supportive and make it clear that you are there for them. Follow their lead, and don't pressure them to be more public about their personal life. There are so many complex reasons why someone may not be ready to be out, and none of them are your business. Support your coworkers where they are, at their comfort level.

Along those lines, don't assume you know all your colleagues' orientations or identities. Consider this in newsroom conversations. Don't allow casual misogyny against trans women or homophobic remarks to skate by. Correct coworkers when they misgender someone. You don't know how it's affecting people who are listening. ♦

Melissa Davlin is host and lead producer of Idaho Reports on Idaho Public Television. She is also vice president of the Idaho Press Club. She has won multiple awards for her work, including Idaho Broadcast Reporter of the Year, the IPC First Amendment Award for her public records work, and a regional Emmy for her documentary "Forgotten Neighbors: Idaho's Chinese Immigrants." Follow her on Twitter at @davlinnews.



COVERING THE COMMUNITY

How to jump hurdles in queer political coverage

By **Lauren McGaughy (she/her)**, Dallas Morning News
& **Christine Hatfield (she/her)**, Wisconsin Public Radio

Lauren McGaughy covers back-to-back press conferences for the Texas Legislature in April 2019. “The room was packed with journalists, lawmakers and staff, and I wanted to be able to ask a question,” McGaughy said. “So, I sat on the floor in front of the TV cameras to be visible once Q+A started.” **ALEXIS AMENSON / TEXAS SENATE MEDIA SERVICES**

Convincing editors of the importance of regular, consistent coverage of the LGBTQ+ community was fairly difficult at legacy media outlets even a decade ago. Issues especially important to non-heterosexual, non-cisgender folk were still considered niche topics, reserved for legislative debate most often when there was a court decision or scandal that pushed them to the forefront.

After the Obergefell v. Hodges ruling made same-sex marriage legal nationwide, however, conservative politicians have pushed back with a new wave of measures meant to chip away at the rights of LGBTQ+ Americans, their spouses and children. They've given more legal cover to adoption agencies that turn away prospective parents who aren't straight or cisgender, blocked public benefits from the spouses of gay civil servants and attempted myriad other tactics.

The post-Obergefell backlash has fallen most publicly on the transgender community. From the so-called bathroom bills of a few years ago to the current target placed on the backs of trans kids, the politics of the LGBTQ+ community has, at least in the national psyche, become synonymous with transgender rights.

Like many civil rights beats, covering LGBTQ+ rights has its own set of challenges, especially if you're doing so as a member of the community. We've figured out how to research, pitch and publish political stories about our community that go far deeper than the daily grind would seem to allow.

Here's some advice we can reasonably say will work because we've put it into practice ourselves. Like most good journalism, covering LGBTQ+ politics well requires focusing on real people, being tenacious and standing up for yourself.

Center individuals personally touched by the politics of the day

Stories about LGBTQ+ politics are a dime a dozen these days. It's almost impossible to page through a newspaper or flip the channels without stumbling over a piece on transgender athletes or gay rights. So, with the glut of stories out there, the key to covering LGBTQ+ politics well has become less about finding a story and more about finding the right story. The key is centering real people.

Too often, especially with the pandemic making on-the-ground reporting more difficult and dangerous, political reporters rely on quotes from university experts, advocates and lobbyists. This tendency inadvertently ignores the non-politically connected people whose everyday lives will change if a ballot measure or bill becomes law.

A story about, say, a bill to allow trans people to change

their name on their marriage certificate should include trans people affected by that issue. It sounds like common sense, but too often, it doesn't happen.

Finding real people affected by an issue doesn't have to be hard. Oftentimes, that advocate source of yours can suggest someone. You can look up the names of people who testify at city council meetings or legislative hearings. Even reaching out to local-level LGBTQ+ groups can help you find someone who's willing to talk. They might know just the person to talk to.

Keeping up relationships with these sources — and not just tapping them when you need them — is key. When a transgender woman was shot six times in Dallas, Lauren McGaughy tapped into her network to locate the woman in the hospital and be the first to interview her.

There are also a handful of policy groups doing stellar work on LGBTQ+ issues. The Williams Institute at UCLA Law focuses solely on LGBTQ+ rights, policy and the law. Its studies on everything from gay parents to mental health among LGBTQ+ children are often localized, at least to the state level, and once you dig into the data, matching the findings to real people on the ground can result in remarkably powerful storytelling.

For example, they have demographic data on each state's LGBTQ+ population, which includes income, race and how many are raising children. They've recently released studies on workplace discrimination, LGBTQ+ renters and eviction risk and LGBTQ+ Latinx folk.

Images matter

A decade ago, many legacy media outlets had never (knowingly) put someone transgender on their front pages. Showing readers the faces of those affected by abstract policies brings more depth to our coverage.

Another important tip is to quote LGBTQ+ sources — like advocates, experts and politicians — in stories that have nothing to do with LGBTQ+-specific policies. Gay politicians, for example, work on more than just LGBTQ+ rights bills. Ask them about those proposals.

It's also important to focus on ensuring the subjects of your stories reflect the community at large, and to ensure you're not just writing about one sliver of it. In other words, if you're checking the privilege of others, make sure to check your own, too.

For McGaughy's 2017 series on the Texas bathroom bill, "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made," she wanted to hold up the voice of a trans person of color who was getting involved in the political process for the first time.

In the process of finding the Black trans man she eventually featured, McGaughy met countless other people who became the focus of future stories.

Get happy

A major complaint we hear, especially from the trans community, is that they are only featured in stories when they're on the defensive. Publishing positive pieces, by contrast, about LGBTQ+ folk lessens stigma and shows we are thriving.

Obvious as it might sound, sometimes taking the positive angle will mean going outside the Statehouse, like when Christine Hatfield spoke with some of the authors of a book focusing on LGBTQ+ art and the experiences they've gone through in figuring out who they are. Certainly, these stories can be guided to a point by the struggle LGBTQ+ people still face — but it helps for those to not always be the main focus.

We say all of this with the caveat that not everyone can live openly. Undocumented people, sex workers and victims of attack also want to tell their stories but might not want to come forward publicly. That's why it's important to know your outlet's anonymity policies and tap them when appropriate.

The importance of fact checking

Journalists have to be ready to push back against the misinformation and false talking points politicians might resort to as they're advancing a piece of legislation.

If a politician calls a bill to update sex education standards to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ people something akin to “perversion” (which happened in Illinois' last legislative session), it falls to us to, at bare minimum, go into some detail about the objections people would have to that rhetoric.

Knowing where these talking points come from is key and can shed light on the true origins of a policy. What advisors are politicians tapping? What phrases are they using, and where have you heard them before? Who donates to them after advancing a policy that affects the LGBTQ+ community?

In 2017, some of the most infamous anti-LGBTQ+ organizations were tapped to help craft the Texas bathroom bill. Exposing that the men crafting the legislation had called the LGBTQ+ community “sinful,” “unnatural” and “unhealthy” peddlers of destructive behavior

helped counter politicians' insistence that the bill was not an attack on transgender Texans.

Ask, ask and ask again

It's important to note, too, that politicians aren't often asked to explain why they advance measures that might put LGBTQ+ folk in the cross-hairs. So, ask. And if they don't answer, ask again. If they still don't answer, report that they won't answer questions about who, how or why they are pushing a specific policy.

Tackling conflict of interest claims

Unfortunately, even in 2021, it is not uncommon that an out reporter will be discouraged from reporting on LGBTQ+ issues for fear of it being a conflict of interest. In fact, it's happened to both of us.

The truth is, as LGBTQ+ people, we are probably better equipped than anyone else to cover these topics, whether it's because we've experienced these issues first-hand or because we know who — and how — to properly and accurately talk about an issue.

But what do you do when an editor stands their ground?

The best way to gain the confidence of a skeptical boss is to earn it. Make sure your coverage is fair, while also being sure to call out falsehoods when you can.

For a story on a bill to ban so-called conversion therapy, for example, McGaughy spoke at length with the most prolific man still doing this work in Texas. He was the lead to the story and provided invaluable insight into why this debunked practice still has a foothold in some places. Don't shy away from digging into these stories, even if they can be uncomfortable.

Tap your outlet's LGBTQ+ resources — or become one yourself

It's also important to know your outlet's diversity, equity and inclusion policies and tap them if need be. While a good editor will always call out reporters if their biases are affecting their work, banning them from covering a topic solely because of their identity is unacceptable.

If your outlet doesn't have a DEI council, starting one could be an option. If you work for a



union shop, you can talk to your steward about what protections there may be in your contract. If you feel you don't have a contact like this in your newsroom, contact the Trans Journalists Association or NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists.

If you feel comfortable, we also urge LGBTQ+ reporters to be a resource for colleagues — both those in and outside of the community. If you are not LGBTQ+ but have a colleague who is and has made themselves available, don't shy away from reaching out.

Being out in the newsroom also shows other journalists, aspiring or current, that your outlet is a safe space. Sometimes, just being visible is the most impactful thing we can do, whether for our colleagues or for our audiences. ♦

Lauren McGaughy is an investigative reporter based in Austin for the Dallas Morning News. She previously covered state politics and policy for The News, The Houston Chronicle and The New Orleans Times-Picayune. She has twice been nominated for a GLAAD award for her coverage of the transgender community in Texas. She loves cats and comic books and makes a mean steak. She identifies as queer or bisexual. Ask her about her wig collection!

Christine Hatfield talks with local businesses at Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum on July 28, 2021.

ANGELA MAJOR / WPR

RESOURCES

- Trans Journalists Association - The TJA, which was launched last year, has a great style guide and advice on how to properly center trans voices.
- NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists also has a style guide, published in English and Spanish. Their annual conference was a huge source of comfort to McGaughy when she was first coming out as a queer reporter. They also recently launched a student conference and offer scholarships to journalists at all stages of their professional development.
- The Williams Institute – UCLA Law
- National Center for Transgender Equality
- IRE DEI trainings

Christine Hatfield is currently the Milwaukee-based Second Century Fellow for Wisconsin Public Radio. A 2021 graduate of University of Illinois Springfield's Public Affairs Reporting master's degree program, she's previously reported for public radio stations WGLT, WCBU, WNII and Indiana Public Radio. Her reporting specialties include state legislature business and LGBTQ+ issues. Outside of journalism, she enjoys board gaming, video gaming and 80s music. She is a queer transgender woman.

Working with limited data

Getting the numbers on the LGBTQ+ community

At least 38 transgender or gender non-conforming people have been killed in 2021 so far, many whom were Black and Latinx transgender women, according to Human Rights Coalition data tracking efforts. But that is most likely an undercount.

If the data is not there, there is a risk of being overlooked, and, in turn, a greater risk of being underserved.

Although government surveys and administrative records collect large amounts of data about the general population in the U.S., these efforts have historically excluded demographic questions about the LGBTQ+ population. Here are some tips to help navigate:

How is LGBTQ+ population defined?

How do we define a group of populations that are pushing categorical boundaries, challenging gender norms and constantly using evolving terminology? The approaches listed below capture dimensions of who might be classified as LGBTQ+.

For a glossary of terms: bit.ly/lgbtqglossary

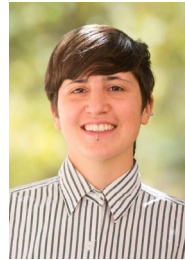
For research on best practices for data collection: bit.ly/ucladatacollection.

Sexual orientation

- Identity — most common when looking to find the number of LGBTQ+ people
- Behavior — useful when looking at health related outcomes for specific populations
- Relationships — useful for data that does not have LGBTQ+ specific questions, but still allows for identifying those who are in same-sex relationships

Where to find existing data?

For demographics and population estimates of the LGBTQ+ community, you might have to settle for capturing only a portion of the community in your data analysis. Surveys and administrative questionnaires must include questions that capture one or more dimensions of the LGBTQ+ community. Many collection efforts still lack these demographic basics.



By
Angeliki Kastanis
(they/them),
The Associated Press

Angeliki Kastanis is a data journalist at The Associated Press, where they acquire, vet and crunch numbers as part of the AP Data Team to uncover compelling, hard-hitting stories. They previously worked as a data analyst at the Williams Institute-UCLA School of Law, a research center focusing on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy.

Census data (bit.ly/lgbtqcensusdata) — The data from the U.S. Census Bureau only represents a small portion of the LGBTQ+ community because it uses the “relationship” question to capture households that include a same-sex couple.

- Decennial Census
- American Community Survey
- Current Population Survey
- Household Pulse Survey (bit.ly/pulsesurvey-data) As of July 21, 2021, the HPS became the first population survey sponsored by the Census Bureau to ask about sexual orientation and gender identity.

Gallup Daily Tracking survey (bit.ly/galluptracking) — The data from this survey includes individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. They ask respondents, “Do you, personally, identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?”

U.S. Transgender Survey (2015) (bit.ly/transgendersurvey) — This survey is the most comprehensive report to date on the transgender population.

Health data

Some federal and state-level surveys with a focus on health provide information on a portion of the LGBTQ+ community, such as: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, National Health Interview Survey, and National Survey of Family Growth.

Research institutions that provide data on LGBTQ+ populations and policy areas

- The Williams Institute — UCLA Law (bit.ly/lgbtqpop)
- Pew Research Center (bit.ly/lgbtqpopulation)
- Movement Advancement Project (lgbtmap.org)

Issue areas where social science research has identified disparities in LGBTQ+ populations

- Experiences of school-age youth (bit.ly/glsen-survey)
- Foster care system
- Houseless populations
- Prison and juvenile justice system (bit.ly/prison-system-data). ♦

Pushing boundaries

Reflecting on newsroom dynamics

In the mid-1990s, I had just started a new journalism job when one of my colleagues asked me to lunch. Once our food had arrived, the colleague told me how excited she was to get to know me. She had never known a gay activist.

I responded with some gentle conversation about how being out didn't mean I was an activist.

Early on, being out could have — and likely did — damage my prospects in some newsrooms. Data journalism certainly was a way to earn my spot on an investigative team when most of those teams were male and white.

But making clear sense of the hurdles is difficult. Was that editor who leered at me over the top of my computer monitor and suggested that I could always find a job at a strip club a sexist, a gay-phobic boss or both? Did it hurt or help that I corrected a senior editor who used the term sexual preference and suggested the correct word usage was orientation?

Being out was so fraught that I joined the inaugural Texas chapter of the National Association of Lesbian and Gay Journalists (now named NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists). It created a way to out myself to my bosses without having to delve into the personal.

Opinions by some newsroom leaders that were acceptable back then would have swift repercussions today. For instance, one top editor likened my request for an announcement in the newspaper of my pending “holy union” (pre-legal marriage days) to opening the door for people who might want to marry a dog — and this at a gathering of gay and lesbian journalists.

Over my career, some editors made choices that limited what I could cover, or whether I and others could attend or participate in a Pride event. And then there was gay marriage. Is it being activist to ask to be married? Gay and lesbian journalists held meetings with editors to persuade. We questioned decisions and pushed newsroom traditions and boundaries. We offered advice to those covering our community, and also covered it ourselves.

For every editor or colleague who didn't know



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the right words (sexual preference instead of orientation, for example) or even for those who seemed to have a clear bias, there were also those who worked to understand the issues. Of course, some of those very same people made newsroom calls with which I disagreed. Still, with a few notable exceptions, I think those calls were made in good faith even if they sometimes also fell on the wrong side of history.

Not long after that comment about the holy union, the entire bureau of my newsroom attended that event, bringing flowers and gifts. The staff photographer took our photos at no cost, and another reporter baked the cake. I still imagine what the impact could have been if the newspaper's leaders had published that holy union announcement as a matter of fairness. Instead newsroom decisions to publish similar announcements trickled out across the country, from one liberal community to another while other editors waited for public opinion to shift. For me, that wait would take a decade.

In 1994, asking for the publication of my holy union in the newspaper was quickly rejected as pushing the envelope too far. In 2004, after our legal wedding in Canada, my newsroom turned out to help my wife and I celebrate. But this time around, a top editor in my newsroom asked me to write about our marriage. The paper published that first-person essay. It wasn't a hard-hitting piece of investigative or data-driven journalism, but it remains one of my favorite published pieces.

Welcoming our fellow journalists who push boundaries inside the newsroom is what will change the makeup of our investigative teams, our data teams, and our accountability teams. With that, our coverage will shift and improve as well.

When I reflect on my career, it occurs to me that my colleague from an earlier time was right. Being out was being an activist. And she was right to be excited. ♦

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