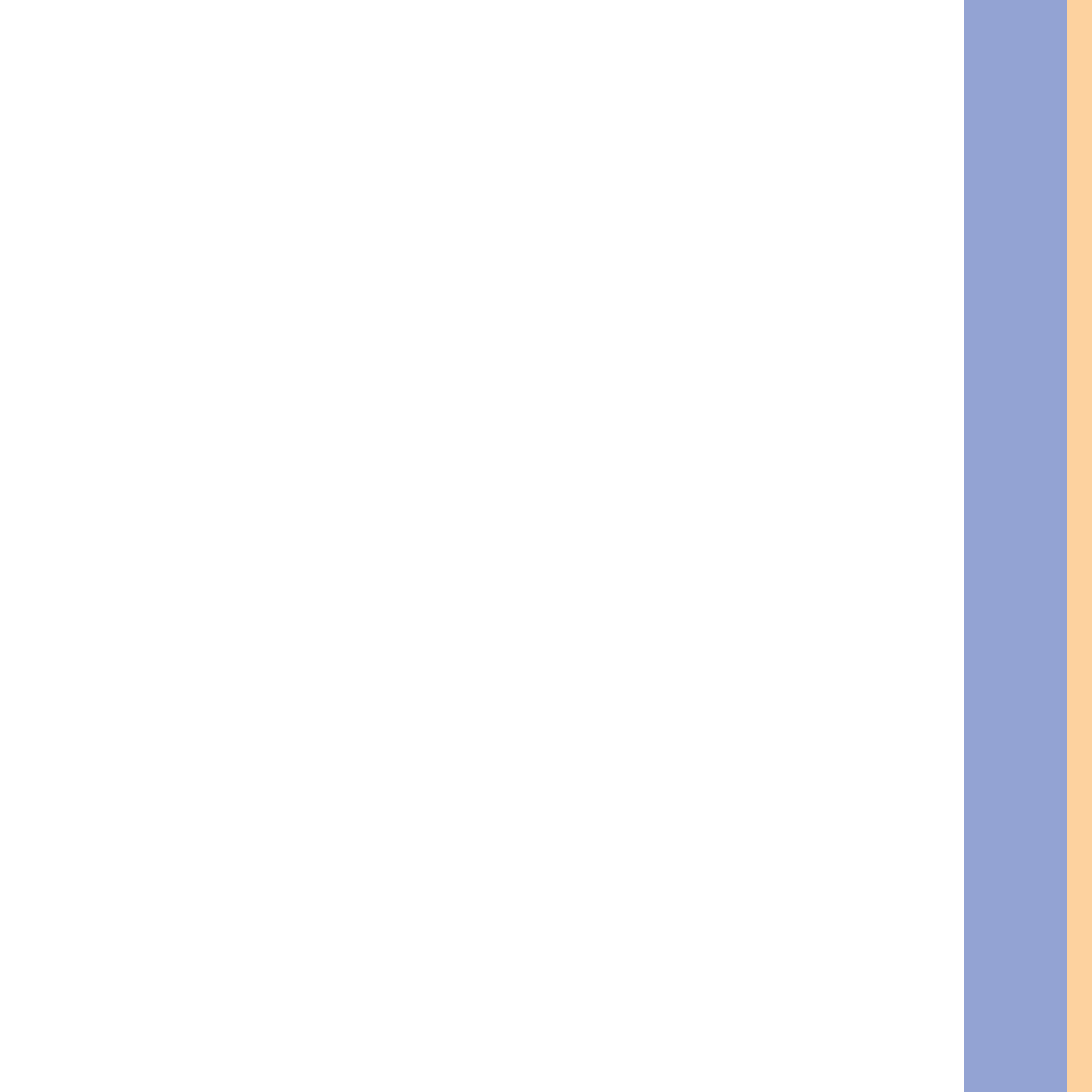


A Media for Diversity

**LGBT in the news – a guide
for better reporting**



Contents

Introduction	4
Background briefings	9
Sweden	10
Lithuania	15
Latvia	22
Friendly, unfriendly media	25
What do the media want?	27
Tips and tricks for LGBT activists	30
Types of media information	37
Tips and tricks for media professionals	47
Glossary	51
An example of good practice (Sweden)	58
An example of bad practice (Sweden)	60
Resources	62

Introduction

Well-organised media relations can be of great importance to many organisations and movements, and the LGBT movement is certainly no exception. A working relationship with the mass media can be used to disseminate information, argue on behalf of issues, conduct outreach to those who may be seeking the LGBT community, but do not know where to find it, and, most particularly, to educate the broader society – something that is very necessary in many countries of the world which have only recently instituted democratic systems and created more open societies. The Baltic States are by no means any exception to this.

In this regard, post-Soviet society is perhaps 25 to 30 years behind the democracies (though by no means all of them) of Western Europe and North America. **Of course, it can be argued that positive media treatment of LGBT issues depends in large part on the existence of a sufficiently visible and vibrant LGBT community.** In the wake of the so-called Stonewall riot of June 1969, *The New York Daily News* headlined its story about the protest thus: “Homo Nest Raided: Queen Bees Stinging Mad”. The more staid *New York Times* had the headline “4 Policemen Hurt in ‘Village’ Raid.”* Six years earlier, the *Times* had published a story marvelling at “the city’s most sensitive open secret – the presence of what probably is the greatest homosexual population in the world and its increasing openness.”** In 1967, when Columbia University in New York chartered America’s first gay and lesbian student organisation, only the university’s own newspaper initially reported that fact. An activist recalled that “the world ignored us for a week, then somebody at the *New York Times* saw the [university newspaper] story and decided it was news, never mind that they had ignored my

* See “Stonewall and Beyond: Lesbian and Gay Culture”, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/exhibitions/sw25/case1.html>.

** Quoted in Eisenbach, D. *Gay Power: An American Revolution*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers (2006), p. 1.

press release. A front-page story began with the headline: 'Columbia Charters Homosexual Group.' The *Times* decides what is news. That afternoon the *World Journal Tribune* did a big, sensational story. All the TV stations, radio stations suddenly were doing stories, the next couple of days were frantic as media which had all ignored the press release suddenly wanted the information I had already given them. The story spread abroad: incoming mail told us of an article in Paris' *Le Monde*, various London papers and newspapers in Australia, Japan and other distant points."* By August 1970, the *Times* found itself publishing an article titled "Homosexuals in Revolt."** Five months later, early in 1971, it printed a groundbreaking seven-page essay by the author Merle Miller that was called "What it Means to be a Homosexual."***

By the early 1970s, and in some places earlier than that, most Western European and North American countries had a visibly present gay and lesbian community. Of importance was certainly the fact that the civil rights movement in the United States and the women's liberation movement throughout the Western world had both created an atmosphere for the presentation of demands by previously ignored or oppressed groups and had also taught new groups something about activism that could attract media attention. Activists in New York adapted from radical leftists a process known as the "zap" – a sudden appearance at events such as political debates or local government meetings to present loud demands for homosexual rights and, inevitably, to attract media attention. Soon enough activists were being invited to appear on television talk shows.

Media attention to the LGBT community developed gradually over the subsequent decades. The appearance of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s shifted the dynamic. Often the mass media were loath to cover what was widely perceived as a "gay disease": "The mainstream press was so slow to cover the crisis that most Americans remained ignorant of its seriousness until the mid-1980s. [...] A reporter

.....
* *Ibid.*, p. 60.

** Quoted at <http://www.aarongayinfo.com/timeline/Ftime70.html>.

*** *Ibid.*

at the *Wall Street Journal* found his stories on AIDS rejected repeatedly by the editors. Only after he changed tack and submitted an article about twenty-three heterosexuals, mostly heroin users, who were discovered to suffer from AIDS, did the disease make the newspaper with the largest circulation in the United States. Like the other newspapers, the *Wall Street Journal* began giving substantial coverage to AIDS only after it struck people who were not gay.”*

The entertainment industry was a different matter. Where television programmes had always presented homosexual people either as villains or as people doomed for a gruesome death, the appearance of the early LGBT movement encouraged some producers to look for more positive characters. The groundbreaking American television comedy “All in the Family” had its bigoted chief character find that a long-time football playing friend was gay – a fact which even attracted the attention of US President Richard Nixon (“I don’t mind homosexuality. I understand it. Nevertheless, goddamn, I don’t think you glorify it on public television, homosexuality, even more than you glorify whores. We all know we have weaknesses. But goddamit, what do you think that does to kids? You know what happened to the Greeks! Homosexuality destroyed them!”**)

Today, of course, the situation with media relations is vastly different. On the one hand, television now routinely presents LGBT characters in what is certainly not an offensive way (“Queer as Folk”, “Will and Grace”, “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy”, “L Word”, etc.). It is also true that many major media outlets in large western cities have reporters who keep track of what is happening in the LGBT community. The Internet has opened up vast new opportunities for public communications that do not require the intermediation of the traditional mass media.

On the other hand, LGBT people are not the only ones who have learned to put the media to their own use. So have the community’s enemies. This is something that is of particular concern in the post-Soviet part of the world.

* Eisenbach, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

** Quoted in Eisenbach, *op. cit.*, p 144.

This book is picking up on the practical implications of this. The media can indeed be a very useful, if not to say invaluable tool for LGBT activists to gain publicity, spread awareness and achieve social acceptance. On the other hand, it can also, especially in some countries, play an active part in sustaining social alienation and exclusion of LGBT, be it by utter ignorance or misrepresentation of the issues, or simply by blatant homophobia. In the latter case, the media not only constitutes a vehicle for the continuation and even escalation of homophobic and gender-stereotypical attitudes. The way in which the media could be used positively – and educationally – in order to change public opinion, loses out.

Indeed, according to the most recent survey of LGB people and social exclusion in Lithuania, as much as 45% considers media to be the third biggest actor sustaining homophobia (politicians and the Catholic church being number one and two); 49% of the respondents think that a media free from heterosexism and homophobia would be the main factor in promoting equality of LGBT.* Moreover, the European Broadcasting Union recently developed a set of recommendations for broadcasters which emphasise the role public service providers play in promoting diversity. The recommendations include not only eliminating stereotyping and degradation, but also an active strife to make broadcasts mirror the diverse society in which we live.

This publication and guide is an initiative along the same lines. It aims to provide journalists and activists alike with a tool for better reporting, put in an enlightening context of the need for it.

The book is made up of contributions from Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden. For the purpose of the guide, the contributions are not presented as separate entities, but have been integrated so as to make out a structured and multi-faceted account for the general context and need for better relations between LGBT and the media, and the ways to go about establishing them.

Even though the problem of blatant homophobic press is much more of a problem in the Baltics than

* *Nematomi Piliečiai – apie homoseksualių žmonių teises ir homofobiją Lietuvoje*, Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2007.



in Sweden, the fundamental problem is still the same. Good and fair media representation of LGBT is far from taken for granted even in an LGBT-friendly country like Sweden. An ill-informed journalist reporting on LGBT-relevant matters, though perfectly innocent, might still reinforce stereotypes and continuing ignorance. Well-informed and educated journalists are highly sought-after, also for the simple reason that, as the Swedish contributors to this report state, “a journalist who is confident about the subject is more likely to write, than a journalist who is not.”

Moreover, this publication is not meant to tackle the most homophobic media outlets head-on. It is, first and foremost, meant as a guide for media professionals who are, or could be, willing to write about LGBT issues in a fair way, and for LGBT activists to learn how to make the best use out of them. Primarily, this guide aims to serve the purpose of strengthening, expanding or simply continuing good media representation of LGBT.

This guide is, furthermore, itself a product of the awareness among us activists that improving the quality of reporting of LGBT-matters is a mutual responsibility. **The bottom line is that media professionals need to take on board the importance of fair and representative presentation of LGBT in the news, and how to cooperate with LGBT organisations in order for this to happen. Activists, on the other hand, as the main source of LGBT expertise, need to know how to work with the media in the best possible way.**



Background briefings

The situation in Sweden

Swedish society and Swedish people has come a long way in changing attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons. Protective and supportive legislation is in place, and the “politically correct” opinion is that LGBT persons are entitled to equal treatment and the same respect, as all other citizens. Almost every Swede would agree that it is a fundamental human right to live, work and love in accordance with your true identity. Nevertheless, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity is still a problem. Homophobia and harassment, even to the extent of violence, do occur in Sweden. In fact, the number of reported hate crimes has increased in the last couple of years.

Even if they don't face violence, every LGBT person has to face so-called heteronormativity. To talk about heteronormativity is a way to describe the norm that tells us that being heterosexual is the only “normal” way to be. Everybody is perceived to be heterosexual and in addition to this, “real” women and “real” men are supposed to express themselves in certain ways. The norm also includes the assumption that men and women feel attraction to and love for each other. There is a clear power perspective connected to the norm. Those who live and act according to the norm has the power to decide who is OK and those who live outside the norm are considered to be strange, different and of less value.

One consequence of the norm is that gays, lesbians and bisexuals often are made invisible in the workplace and in society—either by their own choice as a safety precaution or because other people do not want to recognize their existence. A Swedish study conducted by the National Institute for Working Life shows that as many as 50 % of non-heterosexual people hide their sexual orientation in the workplace*. The study also shows that both physical and emotional health problems can be

* Working Conditions and Exposure – The National Institute for Working Life (2003)

the outcome of not being able to be open about your sexual orientation. A person who is not open is actually 30% more likely to suffer from bad health than someone who has come out. Obviously, not only the norm, but also the risk of exposure to homophobic violence is important when LGBT persons decide whether or not to be open about who they are. And even those who decide to be open in everyday life might hesitate to be openly exposed in media.

The heteronormativity that causes homophobia and discrimination must be challenged. There will not be a change towards openness and mutual respect unless awareness is raised through strategic work on every level of society. The responsibility to raise the issue lies not only with individuals, but also with employers, trade unions, policy makers and political institutions.

Swedish Anti-Discrimination Legislation

The legislative situation in Sweden is fairly good regarding sexual orientation. There is a law against discrimination in employment; students in higher education are protected against discrimination, as are pupils in lower grades such as primary school. Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is also prohibited in the area of goods and services. This means that a landlord can't deny a lesbian couple to rent an apartment, and a health care centre can't deny a gay man treatment just because he is gay*.

The protection of transgender persons is not as clear in Swedish law as the protection of gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Instead of being addressed in specific legislation, trans-issues are considered gender equality issues, and covered in the Equal Opportunities Act.

* Swedish Anti-Discrimination Legislation: Sexual Orientation Discrimination (Employment) Act (1999:133); Equal Treatment of Students at Universities Act (2001:1286); Discrimination (Goods and Services) Act (2003:307); Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment of Children and Pupils Act (2006:67).

In Sweden, there will be new anti-discrimination legislation in place in the near future. Most likely, all discrimination grounds will then be incorporated in the same law, and two new discrimination grounds will be added: age and gender identity.

Homophobic Crime

Homophobic crime is addressed in the Penal Code, where for example there is a law covering incitement to hatred (chapter 16, section 8). However, recent cases show that it is extremely difficult to win a hate speech case, since—it is argued—this legislation is in conflict with the freedom of expression.

Legislation Concerning Relations and Family

Same sex relations are acknowledged in Swedish Family Law through the Registered Partnership Act and the Cohabitation Act. Most likely, the Swedish Marriage Act will be made gender neutral in the near future. A parliamentary marriage and registered partnership inquiry (SoU 2007:17) that proposes introduction of gender-neutral marriage legislation was presented in spring 2007. A new legislation may be in place in 2009.

Same sex couples have equal right as other couples to apply for adoption, and same sex female couples are entitled to medically assisted insemination.

The Swedish Ombudsmen

To deal with discrimination and support equal treatment in Sweden, there are four different so-called “Ombudsmen”. These equality bodies are publicly funded but work independently from the state. Two of the Ombudsmen are of special interest for LGBT people. *The Ombudsman Against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation* (HomO) is the government authority that works against homophobia and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. *The Equal Opportunities Ombudsman* (JämO) is the authority that works against discrimination on the grounds of gender.

When the new anti-discrimination legislation (mentioned above) is in place, the Ombudsman system will also be changed. Most likely, all Ombudsmen will be re-structured into one single Ombudsman, covering all discrimination grounds.

The organisation RFSL

RFSL (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights) is a non-profit organisation that works with and for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. It is non-partisan and not affiliated with any religious organisation. Founded in 1950, RFSL is one of the world's oldest LGBT organisations. It currently has 28 branches throughout Sweden, from Piteå in the north to Malmö in the south, and over 6,000 members.

RFSL's vision and ultimate goal is a society that is characterised by respect for and acceptance of people's differences. RFSL's objective is that the same rights, opportunities and obligations will be applicable for LGBT people as they are for everyone else in society. The organisation works to improve the quality of life for LGBT people through political lobbying, information dissemination, and the organisation of social and support activities. Internationally, RFSL works with the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and also collaborates with other LGBT organisations in neighbouring countries.

It is an important standpoint for RFSL to challenge heteronormativity. This includes raising awareness on inequalities that sometimes—with a normative perspective—seem natural and fair, until another perspective is shown. Awareness of a problem is the first step in a process towards improvement. The development can involve change of legislation but also change of discriminatory structures or change in attitudes, as well as increased motivation to learn more about LGBT in order to offer e.g. adequate health care, equal treatment in the workplace or good service at the travel agency.

It is of utter importance for RFSL to motivate and support media to give a relevant LGBT perspective in every field of society, both within the political area and the social area.

The local branches sometimes handle local media contacts, but all strategic work with media, and most of the media contacts, is handled at the federation's head office in Stockholm. One officer, the press secretary, has an overall responsibility to coordinate and analyse media activities and media exposure. This coordination is essential to secure success in working with media.



The Situation in Lithuania

Legacy of Criminal law

Independent Lithuania inherited Soviet legislation on homosexuality and the taboo surrounding it. Despite the existence of constitutional guarantees of equality and privacy, consensual gay male sexual acts remained criminalised for three years following Lithuania's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1990. Lithuania was last among the three Baltic countries to abolish severe penalties for consensual homosexual acts. The repeal of the sodomy law on 11 June 1993 was passed by the Parliament without any public discussion. It was achieved following international pressure from homosexual groups in Western Europe and the insistence of the Council of Europe that Lithuania conforms to basic human rights standards, in order to gain membership.

Anti-discrimination law

The new Penal Code enacted in 2003 bans discrimination on a wide range of grounds, including sexual orientation. This is the first time in Lithuania's legal history that "sexual orientation" has been mentioned in the law. The first draft of the new Penal Code, published in 1996, offered no protection from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Vigorous lobbying by the Lithuanian Gay League, the leading national NGO for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights, with media support, resulted in the new ground-breaking legislation.

In 2005 sexual orientation discrimination was included in the Equal Opportunities Law and the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman Office mandate was expanded to deal with LGB people complaints. The law provides a mechanism for equal opportunities and the protection against discrimination in the public sphere. Still, many LGB people are afraid to use it – very few complaints are submitted. Under the new amendment, it is provided that NGOs will have the right to represent victims of discrimination in court cases.

However, most of the rights remain on paper and difficulties still exist when it comes to their implementation in practice. It is still impossible to exercise the right of assembly for gays and lesbians, because local governments keep acting against the constitution and the laws, forbidding their public campaigns. Moreover, lesbians and gays are being discriminated at work, but many of those incidences remain latent and undetected.

Family law

The Civil Code explicitly bans same-sex marriage by Article 3. 12.

Vice-Minister of Justice, Rasa Budbergyte, stated in 1999 that Lithuanian society is not ready to accept same-sex marriages. "*The majority of people in Lithuania are Roman Catholics and maintain an antagonistic attitude towards homosexuality*", she told BNS.*

The recent discussion in media about the right of gay people to adopt children following the Strasbourg court decision in the French lesbian adoption case shows that these attitudes still prevail and are strongly supported by Church officials.

Same-sex couples and single LGBT persons have no near future prospect of being able to adopt.

There is one known Lithuanian case where a divorced husband used his ex-wife's openly lesbian partnership to win custody rights over the couple's child.

The social situation -

Public opinion

European research on human values from 1991 revealed that Lithuanian citizens have the lowest rate of acceptance of homosexuality in Europe. The researchers used a scale of 10 points to measure the tolerance for homosexuality. In 2000, Lithuanian citizens rated 1.9 points only and remained among the most homophobic in Europe together with the inhabitants of Latvia and Romania. The poll in

* BNS: Baltic News Service, news agency

2003 showed that 68 percent of Lithuanian respondents did not want to live in a neighbourhood with gay people. The most recent representative research on homophobia conducted during the EU-sponsored EQUAL project “Open and Safe at Work” reflects the same negative attitudes four years later – 70 percent of respondents oppose homosexuals working in schools. Every third respondent is likely to justify sexual orientation discrimination at workplace.

Negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men are particularly strong amongst older, nationalist and Catholic citizens. Unfortunately this outlook is reflected in the policies of social institutions, particularly the education and health services, which for the most part deny the very existence of lesbians and gay men in the society.

Lesbians and gays are relegated to the margins of society, where they are not represented in public life, thus allowing stereotypes to be perpetuated.

Education

Education and information about homosexuality in schools is very limited. Though negative images may well be promoted, more usually it is by their omission from the curricula that homosexuals are invalidated.

Sexual education is poor for everyone, and frequently absent altogether. There are no education programmes at Lithuanian universities concerning gay men and lesbians. A small number of students of sociology are doing some research into the various aspects of homosexuality.

Church and religion

In this overwhelmingly Catholic country, both gay rights activists and many of their opponents claim that the church is anti-gay. Following the Pope’s stance on homosexual love, local Catholic church officials publicly condemned a 1997 symbolic marriage ceremony of two gay men in one of the biggest churches in the capital Vilnius.

Lesbian and gay organisations

The gay movement in Lithuania started in 1991 with several groups holding social gatherings in Vilnius. Community building was prevented by the Ministry of Justice, which denied the registration of the first national lesbian and gay association in 1992 by reference to the then existing sodomy law. At the 1994 ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association) Eastern European Conference, Lithuanian representatives presented a model for organising local lesbian and gay human rights groups. This development and co-operation was continued with the 1995 ILGA anti-discrimination project. The first Lesbian and Gay Centre opened in Vilnius on 20 January 1995. Unfortunately, it had to close after 18 months due to a lack of funds.

Two publications „*Naglis*“ and *Amsterdamas* hit the streets in 1994 but were soon deemed “erotic and promoting violence” and banned from distribution through public press outlets. The ban led to the financial bankruptcy of the publishers.

Since its official registration in May 1995, the Lithuanian Gay League is the only national organisation visibly involved in lesbian and gay human rights issues. It is a mixed organisation with a family group, Homozygotes, and a youth section. LGL runs the web-sites www.lgl.lt and www.atviri.lt.

There is only one gay disco, open on weekends in Vilnius. Local communities in the other major cities of Kaunas and Klaipeda socialise in small bars on weekends only. Internet sites are the most visible signs of a lesbian and gay sub-culture and vital resources of information and communication.

Organised sexual minority groups are excluded from the social and cultural agendas of municipalities.

The media

The first positive stories of LGL activists Irena Vanglikaite, Ausra Chopaitė, Vladimir Simonko and Eduardas Platovas coming out were published on the front pages of the biggest national daily *Lietuvos rytas* in October 1995 to commemorate the international coming-out day. The private media covers international lesbian and gay news. Local TV talk shows usually conceal the identity of the individuals concerned when discussing homosexuality, after LGL members who appeared openly suffered from violence and harassment after coming-out on air.

“Not private enough?” A documentation of bad exposure of LGBT in the Lithuanian media

In 2007 the Lithuanian social scientist Artūras Tereškinas conducted a study of patterns of “injurious speech”, or the trend to ridicule or assign a subordinate place to LGBT, in the Lithuanian media (a selection of dailies, tabloids, TV programs and internet portals).* The findings, accompanied by illustrative examples, are summarised below. They are being presented here for the simple reason that it is necessary to understand what is wrong, before one can make it right.

Artūras’ findings, moreover, indicates that there are different aspects of demeaning reporting. First and foremost, there is the seemingly enthusiastic, and of course completely uncritical, quoting of outrageously homophobic statements by various officials. This, combined with another tendency, namely the usage of blatantly degrading language such as “pervert” and “capon” when describing especially gay men, seems to stem from a fundamental attitude of disgust towards gay people. On the other hand, ridiculing and degrading LGB can also be done in order to create a catchy or humorous story which, because

* Artūras Tereškinas “Not Private Enough?” *Homophobic and Injurious speech in the Lithuanian Media*, Vilnius, 2007

of the general lack of respect for the community or the latent homophobia of the public rather than of the reporter/editor/presenter, will be well-received. Not only is this somewhat ironic; it also makes it especially obvious how big a part the media could play if it set out to change attitudes as opposed to sustain the already existing ones.

"Homosexuality as a disease and an unnatural deviant practice"

As mentioned above, this seemingly reflects a fundamental attitude, even among the journalists, of despise and disgust for LGBT. When referring to LGBT, words like "pervert" and "capon" are often used with ease even in the headlines:

"Perverts do not attract the attention of the police" (about the gay club Men's Factory, from the tabloid *Vakaro Zinios*, November 7, 2006)

Another illuminating example is the reportage by a TV programme on the controversial events in May, 2007. Artūras writes: *"the host of the show called the events "funny marvels" and recited excerpts from some internet encyclopedia in which homosexuality was regarded as a perversion along with zoophilia, pedophilia, necrophilia and others."*

"Conspiracy theories"

There is trend in the attitude to and rhetoric about LGBT that they are involved in global gay conspiracy, as if plotting to overtake the world; even more dominant is the attitude that LGBT is destroying the nation and, particularly, the family; in other words, LGBT as a threat. This may first and foremost be a political standpoint, but can often be reflected and even reinforced in the media, by uncritically quoting homophobic officials or by making up value-based headlines:

"The influence of gays in Lithuania is increasing" (from the daily *Respublika*, May 7, 2007). The article elaborates on the fact that prestigious positions are nowadays more often occupied by gays than "normal" heterosexual people

"Homosexuality and the issue of privacy and publicity"

The fact that many people see the expression of homosexuality or bisexuality as "a private matter", having to do with "what one does in the bedroom" helplessly results in that LGBT-relevant news are not taken seriously neither by the reporters or the reader.

"Homosexuality as something exotic and strange"

This is done by focusing on the exaggerated aspects of public LGBT. Showing shocking images from gay Pride parades, and thus both trivialising and sexualising a serious political event, is common.

"News on LGBT as unimportant and often irrelevant"

There is a tendency of making LGBT issues into "light humour and entertainment", such as in the headline "Folktales about Gays and Lesbians for Children" (from the biggest daily, *Lietuvos Rytas*, March 15, 2007)

"The issues of LGBT as related to controversy and scandal"

The press often presents LGBT issues in association with sex and sensation, and in the context of controversy and deviance. One example of this is the headline:

"Fight and Intrigues in the Lesbian Community" (*Lietuvos Rytas*, Oct 2, 2006)

"Homosexuality as linked to criminality"

Especially gay men are often associated with pedophilia, something which is not only often reinforced in the media but sometimes also exaggerated, either because of the views of the journalists or because of a desire to create a shocking story.

The Situation in Latvia

People who lived in the rigidly moralistic country that was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics often joked that there was no sex in the Soviet Union at all. Certainly there was nothing even remotely reminiscent of an LGBT movement. When the Soviet Union collapsed and new freedoms were instituted, the community had to form from scratch. Latvia's Parliament decriminalised homosexuality during a wholesale revision of the Soviet-era criminal code in the early 1990s, but it really was not until the middle part of the first decade of the 21st century that a serious LGBT organisation was created.

In the absence of a structured community, there was initially also an absence of much anti-gay sentiment in the country. This author, who grew up in the United States, was for many years the only publicly known person in Latvia who was open about his homosexuality, and he can say that he recalls no negative instance at all in the first half of the 1990s.

This changed with the emergence of an extremist nationalist movement in the latter half of the decade, which took as its "principles" not just nationalism, but also racism, anti-Semitism and, perhaps inevitably, homophobia. In 2002, one of the more visible organisations in this movement, the Latvian National Front, published a book called "Homosexuality: Humanity's Disgrace and Ruin", which included essays from the Roman Catholic cardinal and Lutheran archbishop of Latvia. In advance of the 2006 parliamentary election, a businessman-turned-politician established a new political party, the First Party of Latvia (LPP), which has been described as "Latvia's first religiously-focused political party."* The LPP has cultivated links to the so-called "evangelical Christian" movement which has appeared in the post-Soviet territory in the last several years, focusing

* O'Dwyer, C. and K. Z. Schwartz. "Return to (Illiberal) Diversity? Anti-Gay Politics and Minority Rights After EU Enlargement", paper prepared for the Post-Communist Politics and Economics Workshop, Harvard University, March 19, 2007. See

particularly on a church, New Generation, whose controversial pastor has said in the past that God has sent him to earth to do battle against “liberals and homosexuals.”* A staunchly homophobic member of the LPP, astonishingly enough, was elected by Parliament to chair its Human Rights Commission. In 2005, the party got Parliament to amend the Latvian Constitution to define marriage as a relationship exclusively between one man and one woman.

In the mass media, Latvia has several newspapers which are institutionally homophobic, chief among them the weekly *Rītdiena*, which often writes about “pederasts”; the very yellow *Vakara Ziņas*, and one of the country’s daily newspapers, *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, which sees LGBT rights as part of a wider attempt by westerners to inculcate values into Latvian society which are unacceptable and out of line with “Latvian” thinking. The newspaper *Diena*, by contrast, which is another daily, is friendly toward the LGBT community.

Institutional homophobia is also deeply ingrained into religion in Latvia. Both of the aforementioned church leaders, the Catholic cardinal and the Lutheran archbishop, have made severely critical statements about the movement. The cardinal has defined homosexuality as “total corruption in the sexual sphere and an anti-natural form of prostitution.” The archbishop has declared the LGBT people are not welcome to receive Holy Communion in the Latvian Lutheran Church and has sacked several Lutheran ministers for alleged or actual homosexuality.

This triad of political, media-based and religious examples of homophobia has not been without resonance in society. The first pride parade in 2006 was attacked by a mob which threw various items, including bags of faeces, at marchers. In 2007, when the pride event took place in a fenced park, a father and a teenage son lobbed explosives across the fence. At their trial, the father was asked by a lesbian activist what would have happened if the explosives had hit her, and he calmly responded that if he had meant to hit the activist, he would have done so.

* Dzērve, L. “Ļedjajeva aicinājumi – draudi cilvēktiesībām un demokrātijai” (Ledjajevs’ Call – a Threat Against Human Rights, Democracy), *Diena*, 18 January 2007.

Homophobia is also vividly present on the Internet, where any article about LGBT issues attracts huge and usually highly negative attention among those who believe that they are anonymous when they publish hateful comments on the Net. Anti-gay organisations, including one set up specifically to oppose the LGBT movement and any of its public manifestations, also use the Internet to spread their views and their hatred.

This is the background against which the Latvian organisation of LGBT people and their friends, “Mozaika”, must think about its relationship to the media, what a good relationship to the media means and how an LGBT organisation can seek to improve its media relations.



The image features a central blue rectangular area containing white text. This central area is flanked by vertical orange bars on both the left and right sides. Below the central blue area, the background consists of a series of horizontal stripes that alternate between light blue and orange, creating a striped pattern that spans the width of the image.

**Friendly,
unfriendly
media**

Much of the Western world no longer has media outlets which are institutionally homophobic. Some may treat homosexual issues as freakish sensations, but when Elton John married David Furnish in 2005, British papers did not bat an eye. In Latvia, by contrast, there are media outlets which are thoroughly homophobic. In conversation, a leader of “Mozaika” has told this author that interviews with the gossip newspaper *Vakara Ziņas* are inevitably twisted and have little to do with what has actually been said. The daily newspaper *Neatkarīgā* occasionally publishes anti-gay screeds, not so much by its own staff as by well known homophobes in society. A weekly, *Rītdiena*, has railed extensively about “pederasts”, helped to organise a “pro-family” rally to counter an LGBT pride event, and has generally posited homophobia as one of its cornerstones. This is not necessarily, however, an automatically negative situation. For one thing, hysterical homophobia will “turn off” readers of the relevant news outlets who have a more contemporary and cosmopolitan view of life. Second, the contrast between homophobic and LGBT-positive news media can be used to point out that homophobes are wrong to claim universal support for their positions. And finally, it must be remembered that the news media in post-Soviet society do not have the history of western news media. They were created virtually from scratch after the collapse of the Soviet system, and where homophobia (as well as sexism, racism, etc.) have disappeared from the annals of western journalism over the course of years and decades, **the Eastern European media are still in their comparative infancy. It is likely that most, if not all hysterically homophobic news outlets employ people who are embarrassed by what their employers print, and they can sometimes be approached at least to provide information, if not to begin a process of effecting change.**

What do the
media want?

The first thing that must be understood by any LGBT organisation (or, for that matter, any issue-based group) is that not everything that is of interest to it will be of interest to the mass media. Indeed, it can be said with some certainty that comparatively little of what is of interest to the LGBT community will be interesting to a mass-market newspaper, magazine or broadcast programme. It must be remembered that the LGBT community does, after all, represent a small share of society, and even though the broader questions of tolerance, inclusiveness and human rights are ones which should be shared by all people, specifically LGBT issues will not always attract much attention.

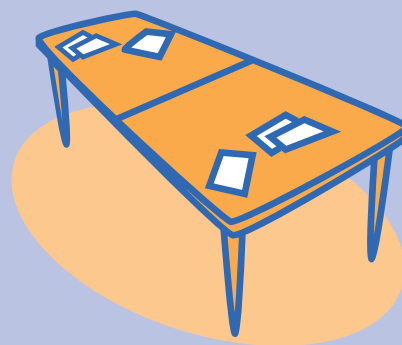
It is also absolutely true in Latvia that most people can continue to believe that the LGBT movement is made up of a small group of people who have arrived in Latvia from abroad and are trying to disrupt public order and “morality”. The number of publicly known LGBT people who have spoken publicly about their sexuality remains very, very low, and this certainly allows the mass media to argue that the community is even more a fringe group than it could be considered if there were large numbers of openly LGBT people in the country.

This means that almost automatic media focus on the LGBT community occurs only when there are problems or conflicts. The annual LGBT pride event, known in Latvia as “Friendship Days”, has always attracted attention well in advance, mostly because opponents of the event start to mobilise and because state and local government officials must decide whether to permit the event in the first place (this is an issue which has been resolved by the courts, which have ruled that

freedom of assembly prohibits any such ban), as well as how to protect participants against attacks.

A second case in which the LGBT community can expect media attention is when legislation concerning the community is considered by governments or parliaments. During the aforementioned process of amending the Latvian Constitution to define marriage, there was considerable media attention, particularly in the pro-tolerance newspaper.

That does not, however, mean that LGBT organisations cannot expect media attention in other cases. When, for instance, there are outreach programmes aimed at educating the public, well-timed announcements of them can lead to coverage. There can be profiles of lesbian or gay couples, although in Latvia's case only a few have been willing to speak out publicly. LGBT organisations and activists can have a say on more general matters of public integration, tolerance, anti-bigotry efforts, etc. In Latvia, good links have been established between "Mozaika" and a number of other organisations, including the Afro-Latvian Association, a women's rights organisation, as well as Latvia's Public Integration Fund, which is a quasi-governmental structure.





Tips and
tricks for
LGBT
activists

Establishing Contact

The emergence of an LGBT community, the “coming out of the closet” of prominent LGBT individuals and the establishment of LGBT organisations will usually attract media interest automatically, if not always in an entirely positive light. **LGBT activists will do well to make note of those journalists who write about their issues, whether in a positive or a negative way. If journalists have written about the issues without contacting anyone from the relevant organisation, the organisation should contact them to thank them for positive coverage, to attempt to counter negative coverage, but most importantly, to establish a future relationship.**

It is unlikely, if not entirely out of the question, that comparatively small and under-funded news outlets in Eastern Europe will have the capacity to devote a reporter specifically to LGBT issues. Indeed, the LGBT community in such countries is unlikely to be diverse and vibrant enough to warrant such coverage. There should, however, be reporters who write about the broader range of social issues, and relationships with such journalists should be cultivated. **An LGBT organisation should designate a specific person who is available to journalists on a regular and ongoing basis – someone who is authorised to speak on behalf of the organisation and is sufficiently familiar with the work of the organisation and the broader community to be a good source for the journalist.** An occasional phone call or E-mail just to say “hi” will not hurt. Providing the journalist with international LGBT contacts can be useful also, helping the journalist to find sources of information and people to interview on international issues such as European Court of Human Rights rulings on LGBT matters, approval (or denial) of “gay marriage” rights in various countries, etc. **It is certainly useful to encourage Eastern European journalists to look at the big picture so that audiences in such countries can be made aware that parochially homophobic attitudes are not universal in Europe or the world.**

Friendly (and even not-so-friendly) journalists should be invited to attend LGBT community events such as annual meetings, planning events, etc. Of course, LGBT organisations, like any other, do things which are not meant for the public eye, but the ability of a journalist to observe not just

the special events, but also the day-to-day operations of the organisation will help to deepen understanding.

The LGBT person who is designated as the organisation’s spokesperson should be available, within reason, at all times. His or her contact details should be provided and updated as warranted. It must be remembered that many journalists work on deadline, and the information which they need cannot wait until “sometime early next week.”

A specific issue for LGBT activists in the former republics of the Soviet Union is that in most, if not all countries, there will be both indigenous-language and Russian-language news media. As the first generation for which Russian language studies are not mandatory is growing up and coming to the fore, thought will have to be given to providing information in Russian, as well.

Identify your allies and enemies

In Sweden, the fortunate situation is that most journalists are positive or at least neutral to LGBT issues. **This means that LGBT activists in Sweden can put their main efforts into attracting and supporting journalists with facts and knowledge, in order to make them write relevant articles of high standard rather than writing articles without knowing the subject, or not writing at all.** Only few resources have to be allocated to handle extremely negative press. From time to time, there are negative opinions expressed in fundamentalist publications. At those occasions, the president of RFSL and the press secretary decide whether or not to reply. Depending on the subject, they consider whether it serves the cause best not to reply at all, or whether it is necessary to challenge the “enemy” and make a statement to the advantage of LGBT people.

Before thinking about *how* to contact media, you need to think about *whom* you want to contact. By reading and analysing earlier publications, you can find out who your allies are and what kind of expertise they possess—and at the same time you will find out how you can support them with new

knowledge. Help them to get the language right by providing them with adequate tools.

A glossary, for example, explaining words and concepts like sexual orientation, LGBT, transgender and heteronormativity, will be of great help. **A journalist who is confident about the subject is more likely to write, than a journalist who is not.**

You need to find allies among journalists, but you should also try to find other allies that are willing to work with you. If you can find “objective” voices, to help you express your opinion in media, it will help you spread your word. Most effective is to find “unexpected allies”, people who are respected and whom the public (or certain groups) are used to listen to, and make these allies support you. A well-written article signed by somebody considered to be neutral in LGBT issues and respected in society, is likely to influence the opinion of many people.

It is also important to find out who your competitors/enemies are. You need to keep track of their activities, analyse what harm they can do, and compile a list of arguments to use in articles and debates when they criticise your work through expressing negative attitudes and opinions.

Another way to combat negative media exposure is to get more positive media coverage; more positive attention will mean that negative media will cause less harm.

Consider personal contacts

There are, of course, several different ways to make contact with media. It is often successful to make personal contact with a journalist. **One benefit of personal contacts is that you can choose to give your information only to journalists that you know are your allies. Another advantage is that giving “exclusive information” just to one source is a way to make the information attractive and thus make it more likely that your story gets published.** It goes without saying, that a promise of exclusiveness should never be broken; if you promised your story to one journalist, you

can't break your promise and give it to another, no matter how good reasons you may have. Doing so will prove you are not reliable, and it will take a long time for you to rebuild the trust.

...or use a press list

The backside of personal contacts is that you lack the opportunity to get your story widely spread. You could of course contact more than one journalist personally, not using the argument of exclusiveness, but your resources will not allow you to contact more than a handful personally. In Sweden, the fortunate position is that there are a lot of journalists and press centres that may have an interest in your story, given that it is interesting enough.

A larger group may be reached through press releases, distributed to your own list of journalists either by post, fax or e-mail. Be sure to make your own press list well in advance. Keep the list updated. Also think of the possibility to use a selective press list, depending on the subject of your story.

If you succeed to "sell" your story to a news agency (in Sweden for example TT, Reuters, AFP), your news will be widely spread through their channels.

Agree on the message

It is important that everybody who talks as your representative agrees on the message, and expresses the organisation's view in a similar way. In every organisation, it should be made clear who is authorised to speak on behalf of the organisation. This is a way to make sure that there is continuity in what is expressed, and that the message is expressed in the right way. In addition, this is also a good way to give your organisation "a face". It does not necessarily mean that every statement has to come from one single person; there could be several persons with different areas of expertise. Hence, media representatives could be directed to a person who has relevant knowledge, and knows the standpoint of the organisation.

It is also vital that everybody who speaks on behalf of the organisation realise that it is not possible to express any personal view that differs from the organisation's standpoint. When representing the organisation, you have to put aside all personal opinions.

“Off the record” does not exist

There is no such thing as speaking “off the record” with a journalist. Be aware of the fact, that everything you say may be published.

Keep to the truth

Another basic standpoint, one that could never be negotiated, is that any statement or information that is based on facts should be true, and without a doubt pass any scrutinising by critics. You are of course allowed to elaborate and draw conclusions in a general way, but **any fact that could be quantitatively or qualitatively checked up, should be true. This is crucial. Your credibility depends on it** and you can be sure that your enemies will use any opportunity to discredit you and your organisation, if given the chance to do it.

How to raise interest for your cause

When a journalist gets your story or statement in his or her hands, you want the immediate reaction to be positive interest, not irritation over yet another uninteresting e-mail. Therefore, **you may want to be selective in your contacts with journalists, keeping in mind the special focus of that particular newspaper or magazine.** Turn to trade unions' and employers' publications when the story has to do with employment; turn to daily newspapers with news that are relevant for people in general.

Every journalist wants a story that makes news. It is easier to get media attention if your story contains information saying that something is new, has recently happened (or will happen in the near future). To use statistical facts or “top lists” will help you get attention.

Your story should be short and simple to comprehend, and it should be obvious that the message is of relevance to a specific target group. For example, a press release commenting on hate crime statistics may be written from a general, national perspective, but media in different cities or regions will be much more likely to publish an article about their own situation. To achieve this, the press release should be locally adapted, so that the situation in xx city is highlighted in a press release sent to media in that particular city and so on. A topic that is of relevance to a lot of people, something that is easily understood as a common concern, is of course easier to get published, than a story that affects only a few.

Avoid bad stories through a lot of feedback

Even allies among journalists may write bad stories, if they lack insight into the subject. One very common mistake is to, without being aware of it, express the norm in different ways. The story may victimise LGBT persons or it may be written in a way of “we and the others”, making LGBT people something strange and different. In the long run, you can avoid this by giving constructive feedback to journalists.

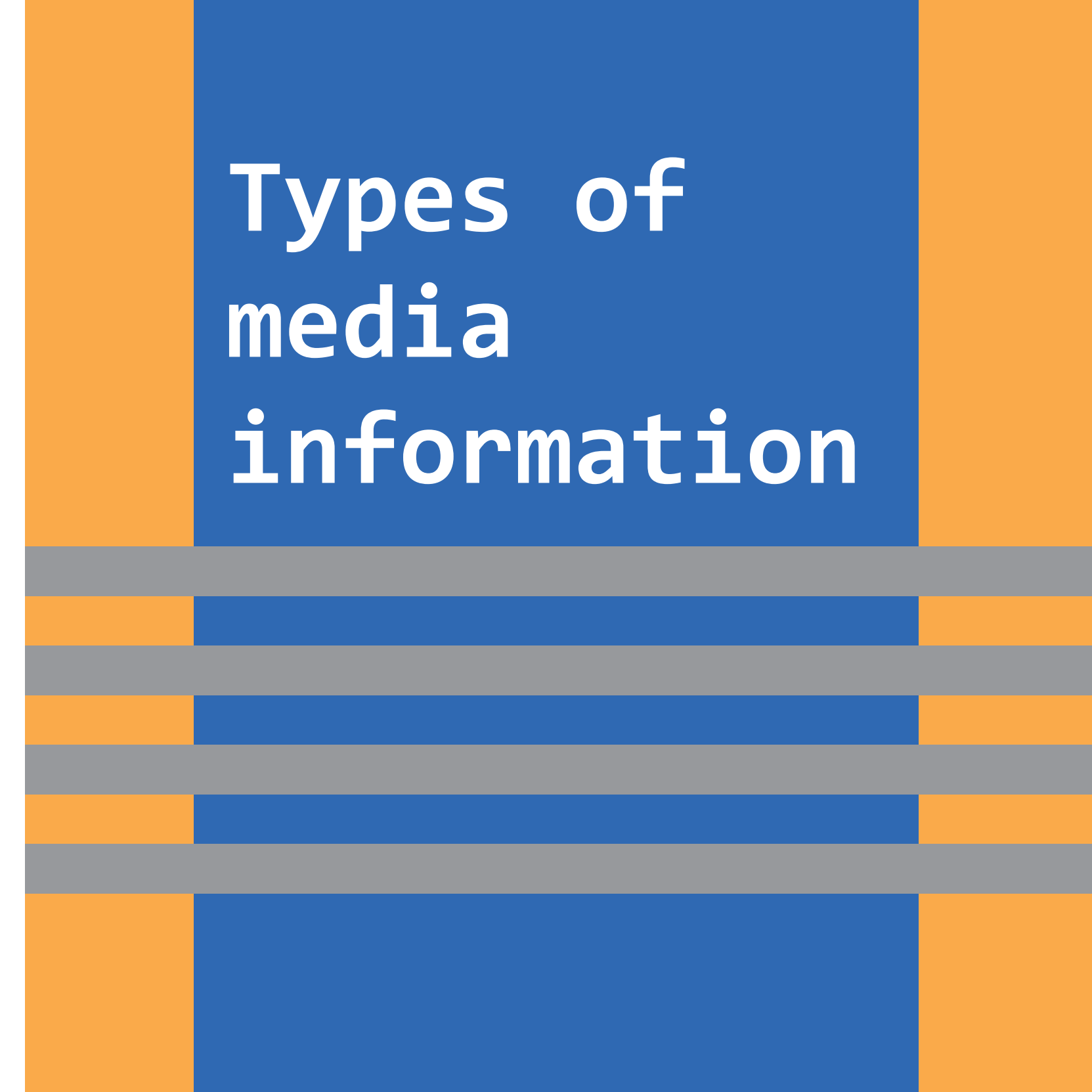
Develop a long-term plan

To be successful in working with media, you need a concrete long-term plan. Analyse what you want to do. Think about good media opportunities in the future.

Maybe you should refrain from contacting media at a certain point, even though it seems like a good idea in a short-term perspective. It might be better to wait until later, or to focus on another subject that will be on the agenda in the near future. In the plan, consider all different channels to spread the word. Do not forget to use your webpage.



Types of media information

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The news release

A news release is used to present specific information to the media. A news release can be issued, for instance, to report on the election of a new organisation board, to announce plans for an event, to describe an LGBT activist's achievements, etc.

In thinking about news releases, the first thing to remember is that news outlets are literally bombarded with such documents on a daily basis. News releases will be issued not just by non-governmental, but also by governmental and, particularly, commercial organisations. This means that the news release should be saved for particularly important occasions, remembering that most journalists are easily capable of differentiating between “real news” and everything else. Routine matters can be communicated to journalists by E-mail or on the phone. Indeed, in a country in which newsworthy LGBT events are uncommon and coverage of LGBT issues is scanty, there may be very few instances in which a press release is necessary.

In those cases in which that is not true, however, here are a few things to remember about **writing a release**:

- 1) Decide exactly what you want to say, because that will help you to keep the document concise. Journalists receive lots of information each day. They will not read a four-page treatise.
- 2) Make sure the journalist knows what he or she is receiving – the words “NEWS RELEASE” should appear prominently at the top of the document. Preferably the document will be printed on your organisation's letterhead, complete with your logo. Try to make the document appear as professional and visually interesting as possible.
- 3) Write a headline that states specifically what you wish to communicate. “New Board Elected” is specific. “Fresh Breeze, New Blood at Organisation” is not.
- 4) Use the body of the release to provide specific information about what you wish to communicate, offering data and statistics if necessary. But again, keep it short. If the journalist is interested in the subject, he or she will contact you for more information.
- 5) Include one or more quotes from your organisation's representative about the subject at hand:

“This is a big step forward for us,” said LGBT Club president Roberta Johnson. “We believe that it will help us to achieve the goals which we have defined for ourselves this year.”

Quotes of this type help to personify a release and identify those persons who might be contacted for more information.

- 6) Never forget to put contact information at the bottom of the release for those journalists who wish to conduct an interview or gather more facts as a result of the document. No professional journalist will ever print a news release as it is. The contact person can be the press contact person discussed above, or, if the issue is specific to some other member of the organisation, then it can be that other person. Contact information should include both fixed and mobile telephone numbers and an E-mail address.

The first destination for a news release should be your country’s news agency or agencies. These are organisations which do tend to report on everything which they receive, and they are clearinghouses of information for print and broadcast media outlets. You may also send the release to print and broadcast outlets individually, particularly focusing, of course, on those which are friendly and receptive to your message. Also think about sending the release to partner organisations with which you have worked, both to keep them informed about what you are doing and to increase the dissemination of your message.

The news conference

The news conference is used to disseminate information in person and to numerous journalists at once. Again, this is a process which should be used sparingly. Sometimes a news conference can be used to impart important information – plans for a pride event, for instance, or a response to what has happened during such an event. Other times a news conference can be an annual event, scheduled once a year to inform the public about what the organisation is doing.

When planning a news conference, make sure that you have facilities that are large enough to accommodate journalists and, particularly, the equipment of broadcast journalists. Modern

camera equipment is no longer particularly bulky, but camerapersons will need a sight line to the table where the organisers will be sitting, as well as room to move about. Be aware that they will turn on very bright lights. If there are members of your organisation who are wary of publicity, they should not be in the room at all. People attempting to hide their face from the cameras will not send a positive message to the audience. Be aware, too, that almost every journalist will have a microphone or recording device to place on the table in front of you. Make sure that there is room for that.

Who should take part in a news conference? That depends on what is being discussed, but usually the chairperson or president of the organisation will do most of the talking, with other members or officials addressing issues that are specific to them. Avoid the temptation of putting your entire board or council in front of journalists – a news conference is not a panel discussion. Like the news release, it is meant to disseminate specific information.

The proceedings of a news conference can be conducted by the chairperson or by the organisation's media representative. If there are numerous journalists, it is advisable to ask them to raise their hands before asking a question, rather than letting everyone speak at once. It is not out of line to ask journalists to identify themselves before they ask a question in those cases when they are unfamiliar to the speakers. Usually a news conference will start with a brief statement presented by the central speaker, followed by questions from journalists.

Think in advance about what questions might be posed, particularly if you expect hostile journalists to attend the news conference. It might be a good idea to sit down in advance and discuss what might be asked and what the best response would be to various questions. It is important not to get angry at journalists, because they have a larger audience than you do, and it is never wise to turn a journalist against yourself. Keep your cool. You should have thorough information about the subject that is being discussed. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and promise to deliver the information later. That is much better than pretending to know an answer and actually disseminating falsehoods. The journalists in the room are one thing, but their

audience is quite another, and if you make a mistake or inadvertently tell a lie, many people will read, see or hear it.

Be aware that journalists will often wish a separate interview in addition to what has been said in the news conference. This may be because a journalist has a specific or narrowly focused interest, or perhaps because the journalist simply does not want his or her question to be heard by everyone. Make yourself available for such interviews.

It is a good idea to prepare written materials for journalists to take with them, particularly if the news conference has involved a discussion of numbers (the organisation's budget, attendance at events, etc.). During an annually scheduled conference, you may also want to distribute your organisation's annual report and similar documents.

Being interviewed

There will be times when a journalist will ring your organisation with a request for an interview. Often it will be sufficient just to speak on the telephone. A journalist may simply wish to solicit your views on something that is happening in society, or perhaps to get your response to something that has occurred or that someone has said about your organisation or about LGBT people in general. On other occasions a journalist will ask for a face-to-face interview, sometimes to discuss something specific, other times to conduct a broader interview with the aim of preparing a broader publication or broadcast about the organisation and/or its members. There will also be occasions when a radio or television programme will invite someone from your organisation to appear.

Here, as in the case of a news conference, the key thing will be to be prepared. There is nothing wrong with asking the journalist to inform you about what types of questions he or she will be asking. Journalists will often be resistant to this, because they will believe that a question for which you are unprepared may get a more interesting answer out of you, but you are well within your rights to say that you would simply like to prepare any specific information which the journalist might require.

When being interviewed, keep a few things in mind. First, listen carefully to what the journalist is asking and try to respond thoroughly. A well trained journalist will ask supplementary or follow-up questions if he or she feels that the response has not offered all of the information that is needed.

Keep eye contact with the journalist while you're speaking. That is both a matter of politeness and a way of gauging how the journalist is reacting. You can often see scepticism or dislike in a person's eyes, and that can help you to direct your comments in the relevant direction. Here, again, if you do not know something, do not pretend to know and thus tell the journalist something that is false. Here, too, avoid getting angry or snappish if the journalist proves to be hostile to a greater or lesser degree. Sometimes journalists will try to provoke you into saying something angry or hostile yourself, and while you may feel negative things about homophobia and its presence in society, it is important not to lash out and certainly not to sink to the level of those who seek to attack the community. A journalist can easily present you as hysterical or too hostile, and that is certainly not the image that you wish to project.

There are two things that you can do to make sure that your interests in the process are protected. One – record the interview yourself. There is no reason why you should not have a recording device in addition to the one which the journalist brings. Then you have a record of what was actually said. That is particularly important if the journalist does not bring a recording device and simply takes notes on paper. **Second, it is not unknown in Latvia for people who are interviewed to ask to see the resulting interview before it is published.** Not all news outlets will agree to this, and professional journalists will be taught not to do so, because that is a process which casts aspersion on their ability to do their job professionally. If, however, your experience has been that journalists do not quote you precisely, twist what you say, or simply misstate your position, then you are well within your rights to ask that you see what is being printed before it actually is printed.

When you are invited to appear on a radio or television programme, it is again advisable to inquire as to the planned topic at hand. You have every right to ask whether you will be appearing alone or with others. If the latter is the case, you have the right to know who those others will be.

Please remember that journalists often seek to present opposing views which are as opposite as possible. Sometimes that will mean looking for the most radical homophobe that they can find to debate with you. You have every right to refuse such an invitation, but please keep in mind first that this will allow the programme host to say that you were asked, but declined to present your views, and second that even with the most hostile fellow guest you can not only get your point across, but can also appear very sane and logical alongside hysteria and just plain silliness and stupidity. Appearing on radio, let alone television, can be a nerve-wracking process, and it is certainly not appropriate for someone who is shy and retiring. You must be prepared to participate actively in the discussion and to speak up if you feel that you are being slighted or that your point has not been made. When thinking about who in your organisation will be the media representative, this is something to consider, as it is when you are choosing the organisation's chairperson. Journalists will wish to speak with the "boss", and the "boss" should therefore be prepared to speak to journalists in all settings, including on television.

In all interview situations, decide in advance the message that you wish to convey, and make sure that you convey it. To be sure, that does not mean that you will not answer other questions that are posed by journalists, but an interview situation does allow you to present your views, and it is good to have a firm sense of what those views are going to be. Be calm and positive, and treat journalists with respect even if they are not extending the same courtesy to you. But also be firm in stating your message even if the journalist tries to ask about it in seven different ways to see if you trip up. Also remember that often journalists will interview you with a specific angle in mind. Many times the interview will be to ask for your response to something. It is also entirely possible that in preparing a report, the journalist has already found someone who says negative things about LGBT issues and simply "needs" someone to say positive things in order to strike a balance in the report. Some journalists will really only need you to say something specific. That is their problem, not yours.

Remember, too, that you are being interviewed because you are seen as someone who can address the relevant issue. That should give you some confidence.

When speaking to journalists on the telephone, remember that they cannot see you, and that means that you must speak a bit more slowly and more deliberately. Think about how much information you pick up just by looking at a partner in conversation and his or her gestures. All that is lost when you are speaking on the phone.

When appearing on television (and, really, whenever contacting with journalists), it is important to present a neat and professional appearance. Even if you are not a person who normally wears a suit or a dress, viewers of a television programme will judge you on your appearance, and it will certainly not be comfortable to be wearing a T-shirt when the host of the programme is in a three-piece suit. It is also important not to be wearing things that will distract attention from your message – loudly patterned clothing, clunky jewellery, etc. Also be aware that the television station will put makeup on you before you go on air. Trust that this is for your own good.

Another thing to remember in a television situation is that you are speaking to a journalist, not to the camera. It will be best to ignore the camera or cameras that will be circling you, because that can make you nervous. If you have something that you want to say directly to the audience in the form of a plea or invitation, you can speak directly into the camera, but such instances should be very rare.

And finally, relations with the news media in a potentially hostile societal environment can recall the old saying “fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me.” If a journalist or a media outlet has proven to be systematically homophobic or hostile, there is no reason for not refusing to speak to that individual or that outlet. Of course, as noted above, there is reason to maintain at least some link to even the most hostile outlets, because there is hope that eventually they will change for the good, but sometimes there is every reason just to give up on someone.

Creating your own media

The LGBT community in Latvia, and presumably also in the other Baltic States, is not sufficiently extensive and vibrant to support a proper LGBT newspaper of the type that is published in large cities

in Western Europe, North America, Australia and elsewhere. That does not, however, mean that it is entirely impossible to create media of your own.

One possibility is to publish your organisation's newsletter. Such newsletters are usually meant primarily for internal use, and if you have a small membership, you may well not need one.

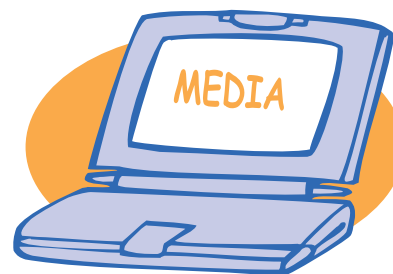
Newsletters can also be used, however, to disseminate information outside the organisation.

Perhaps your organisation might want to prepare facts about what has been happening inside and to the LGBT community in the last month, quarter or half year, and prepare a newsletter of facts relating to the relevant issues. **Modern computer technologies make it easy to produce very professional-looking documents, indeed.** The chief problem will be finding people to actually write and edit a newsletter or similar document. It will generally be the case that all of the work will be done by just one or two people.

Computers, however, also offer what is certainly the most available medium for the dissemination of LGBT information, and that, of course, is the Internet. **Today, there is really no excuse for an organisation of any size not to have a homepage on the Internet.** A homepage can be as simple or ornate as the skills of your organisation's computer person has. It can have separate sections for members and non-members. It can present information in numerous languages. It can be used to make announcements. It can be used for interactive purposes if readers are given a chance to post their own comments. Be aware that in that case you will almost certainly attract radically homophobic individuals, but your Web page administrator will know how to block their access. **Should written homophobia be a particular problem, you can eliminate interaction as such, but please remember first of all that there are people who will want to post kind or thoughtful comments on your page, and second, that homophobic posts offer a written record and written evidence of the problem of homophobia. Most countries will have laws about incitement of hatred, and sometimes such written evidence can lead to legal proceedings against those who are most hostile.**

Web pages can also be used for fundraising. Travellers on the Web will know that many Web sites now solicit donations via PayPal or some similar system which makes it easy to donate

money with just the click of a button. Investigate such possibilities, but keep in mind that if you are going to be asking for credit card information, your Web page is going to require a substantial amount of security, and in that case you will need people who truly are specialists in the field. An important thing to remember about a Web page is that its quality will depend in large part on how often it is updated. This again means finding individuals who have the time and the willingness to work on this aspect of publicity on an ongoing and energetic basis. People will quickly grow weary of a Web page which has the same information today which it had three months ago. Of course, your organisation may well not have something new to report each and every day, but that doesn't mean that there can't be something new on a regular basis. There are interesting reports about LGBT events and people all around the world, and (with permission, of course), such can be reprinted on your Web site. You can also ask people to create blogs on your page and to contribute their thoughts on an ongoing basis. One other thing to think about is contacting local radio stations and asking whether they would be willing to offer some airtime once a week or month for a radio programme about LGBT issues. Again, of course, that would require people to do the work, but a radio programme can be as simple as one person interviewing another, and although that requires the skill of asking good questions for 15 or 30 minutes, it does not require much in the way of technologies. A better programme, of course, will have produced segments with interviews and reports. That may be beyond the means of LGBT organisations in the post-Soviet region, but it is something to consider as a future project.



**Tips and
tricks
for media
professionals**

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How to make contact with LGBT people

It might seem hard to get in contact with LGBT organisations if you aren't part of them. You might wonder where to find them and which one is the most suitable one to approach. Here is a short and quick checklist for you to consider:

- **What is the aim with your contact?**

On the basis of the answer to this question you might then decide which organisations that can be of interest to contact. If the topic concerns LGBT people at university the best option is probably to get in touch with a student LGBT organisation, for correct information and statements. For questions concerning younger LGBT people, an LGBT youth organisation would be the most effective contact to make.

- **Study the organisation's homepage.**

Does it appear to have a media service? Are there other ways to get in touch with the organisation? Is there a spokesperson?

- **Do you have difficulties to know where to turn?**

It might be a good start to begin with the biggest organisation, or alternatively the most visible organisation. The probability that they have a network of contacts and knowledge that can facilitate is appreciably higher.

- **Is there no organisation that suits your purpose?**

Friends and acquaintances can at this point be of good help.

- **Are there places that LGBT-people visit?**

E.g. cafés, clubs, restaurants or other places. Are you able to place an advertisement?

- **Are there LGBT-media that you can contact or perhaps advertise with?**

E.g. media concerning LGBT-people, or web communities purely for LGBT-people. Consider if there is scope and time for you to advertise or to make contact via these forums.

How to make interviews

In addition to normal rules and objectives for you as a journalist there are some situations and aspects worth mentioning. Here are some basic but crucial issues for you to consider:

Before the interview

As a journalist and through your article or publication you function as an interpreter for the general public. Consider your target group and the level of their knowledge. Using too advanced terms and language might result in the message being lost on the reader.

At the same time it is important to describe the context in an accurate way. Are you uncertain of what terms or how to use them, ask! There are no better experts to ask than the persons effected.

During the interview

Keep in mind that LGBT-people are a group exposed to hate crimes. Always double check that it is ok to use names and pictures, and gender expressions. Dare to ask.

If you are used to meeting LGBT people or if you are aware of the situation, the quality of the interview might be enhanced if you make this clear to the interviewee. But don't pretend! This will always harm you and your purpose.

Always discuss any consequences of total openness and full exposure in the media. There is a risk that articles containing anonymous pictures signal that the person in them would or should be ashamed. This could have a counterproductive effect.

Consider that the interviewee in most cases is not used to being interviewed. Arrange your questions accordingly and make sure that you understand each other. This will help you to achieve the best possible result.

If you don't understand or if you find the answers too vague, ask them again and ask the interviewee to rephrase.

After the interview

- **Is your set of goals fulfilled?**

Are you familiar with the terms and are they understandable for a larger majority? If not, you might want to check them with someone familiar with them.

- **Will the interview be anonymous?**

Many LGBT-people is still finding it impossible or unpleasant to stand out publicly. Unfortunately there is still a risk for the individual in the form of discrimination and harassments.

Many editorial staff can still make material and pictures anonymous out of consideration. Check with your source what they prefer. However, it is a two-way process. In line with that attitudes are changing reporting can become more open, and vice versa. If we want to achieve an open society, we can't hide.

E.g Dagens Nyheter, one of Sweden's biggest newspapers, no longer publicise news that contain interviews with anonymous persons. They consider that the absence of personification in itself creates bigger problems and negative consequences. A stamp of shame or the need of it is imposed on the person.

Use correct words and language – and explain their meaning

Consider – what do we mean with the word "gay"? Is it mainly a homosexual man or can it also refer to a homosexual female? Is a woman that lives with another woman immediately lesbian? What is held in the concept "transgender person"? Can we use words like gay or butch? How do prejudices work in the hidden?

Certain words are offensive for one group, but work for others. It is important to choose your words with care. Words are incredibly powerful.

Incorrectly used concepts or words do not only create allusions but also might reinforce prejudices and stigmatisations.

Glossary

Bisexual

A person who falls in love with and/or is sexually attracted to people regardless of their sex

Butch

A female who dresses and/or behaves in a traditionally masculine way

Coming Out

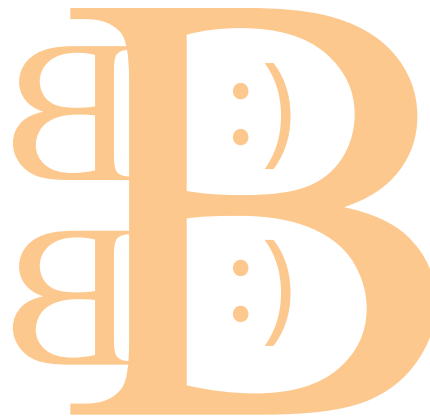
Telling other people that you differ from the heteronorm. This is a process that is ongoing throughout one's entire life. The expression is often used together with the word "closet" as in "coming out of the closet".

Drag King/Queen

A person who dresses like a member of the opposite sex, often with the aim to entertain and/or play with sex roles and/or sexual expression

Femme

A female who dresses and/or behaves in a traditionally feminine way



Glossary

FTM

“Female to male” is used to describe transgender people who want to change/have changed sex from being biologically female to being male.

Gay

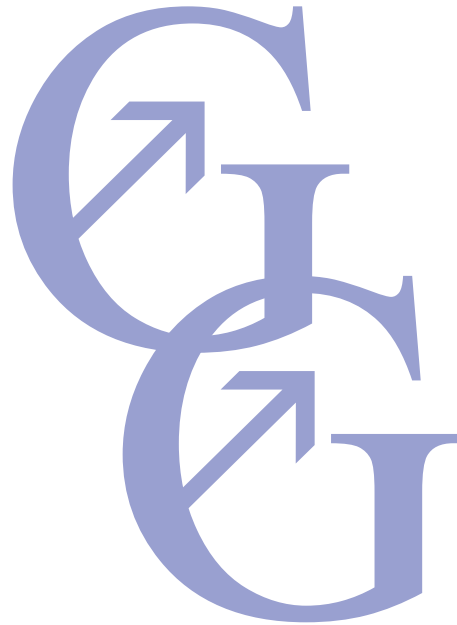
A person who falls in love with and/or is sexually attracted to people of the same sex. The term can be used for both homosexual men and women, though it is most often used to describe male homosexuals.

Gender

An academic term that is used for the description and theoretical education of sex and sex roles

Heteronorm/Heteronormativity

A norm that takes for granted that there are two separate biological sexes and that we are born into one of them. According to the heteronorm, there are certain behaviours and sex stereotypes that everybody has to follow. The norm also takes for granted that everyone is heterosexual.



Glossary

Heterosexual

A person who falls in love with and/or is sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex

Homophobia

Irrational fear or dislike of and discrimination against LGBT people

Homosexual

A person who falls in love with and/or is sexually attracted to people of the same sex

Intergender

A person who is intergender feels that he/she stands between or beyond the traditional sex categories

Intersexual

A person whose biological sex is hard to categorize as male or female



Glossary

Lesbian

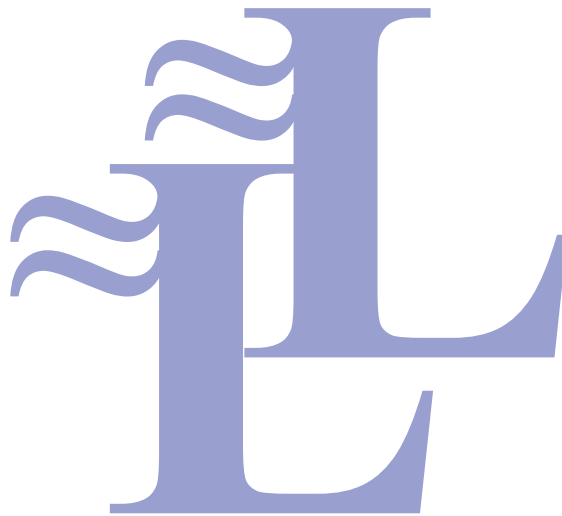
A female who falls in love with and/or is sexually attracted to other females

LGBT

Abbreviation that stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender”

MTF

“Male to female” is used to describe transgender people who want to change/have changed sex from being biologically male to being female.



Glossary

Out

Being “out” means you have told others about your non-heterosexual orientation. To “out” someone means telling others about that person’s sexual orientation without their permission.

Polyamory/Polyamorous

The ability to fall in love with and/or want to live with more than one person at the same time

Queer

Originally an English swearword that meant weird, perverse or different. Today the term is partly used as an identity term for LGBT-people and partly as a questioning of norms. A person who is queer questions heteronormativity and does not want to follow traditional categorizations.

Queer Theory

An academic theoretical education about society’s views and norms

Rainbow Family

Collective term for same-sex families, with or without children



Glossary

Rainbow Flag

The international symbol of LGBT-solidarity. It was designed during the 1970s by artist Gilbert Baker.

Sex

Either of the two traditional forms of individuals that are distinguished respectively as female or male

Sexuality/Sexual Orientation

A person's expression of his/her physical attraction to others

Straight

See Heterosexual/Heterosexuality

Transgender

A collective term that describes individuals whose sexual identity and/or sexual expression partly or always differs from the norm of the sex that they have been assigned at birth. The term includes transsexuals, transvestites, and intergender people.



Glossary

Transsexual

People that are transsexual define themselves by a sex other than the one assigned at their birth, and often undergo hormone therapy and operations in order to change their physical sex.

Transvestite

A person who sometimes, often or always dresses or uses attributes that traditionally belong to the opposite sex

Terms to avoid:

Talking about sexual orientation as “**sexual preference**”.

This generates an assumption that the sexual orientation is something that the person has chosen, and is thus able to “unchoose”.

Use: sexual orientation

“**Special rights**”. LGBT-rights are not special rights, but equal rights. The terms “special rights” is often used by those with a lack of understanding of equality issues.

Use: equal rights, equal treatment



Good media exposure

RFSL's Municipal Survey 2006

The RFSL's Municipal Survey 2006 was published in May 2006 and compares how LGBT-friendly Sweden's municipalities are. Only 3% of the municipalities reached an acceptable level of counteracting discrimination of LGBT people in their day-to-day operations.

The survey was followed by a comprehensible and strategic launch of the results. The report included simple summaries of the regional scores. The response was massive. All Swedish media reported about the discouraging results.

Moreover, the report included a simple and general glossary and explanations of terms and expressions. It proved to be very useful, and appreciably simplified the work for both RFSL and the journalists.

The report had been preceded by solid preparation by RFSL. All branches were informed about the report and its conclusions. Journalists thus had the possibility to receive comments from local branches along with clear

local policy requests. Furthermore, each region appointed one or two LGBT representatives to meet journalists and give them a personal perspective. The report could thus be reflected in these private persons and through this impersonate the situation in the region.

The report generated the biggest impact in reporting history of RFSL, not only in terms of direct news coverage but also of follow up articles and analysis of the situation of LGBT in Sweden. Still today, two years later, the report is quoted in the media and by politicians in their endeavour to achieve a more equal society.

The big response and impact had never been achieved without all the preparations that were done before the launch. Access was a keyword in these preparations. Analysis and statements were prepared both to create and respond to publicity and reaction.



Bad media exposure

TT and Stockholm Pride

As Stockholm Pride 2006 opened, RFSL launched a report along with the national unions of teachers in Sweden. The launch was accompanied by a debate article in Dagens Nyheter, Sweden's biggest newspaper and leading debate arena. The report concerned teachers' ignorance of how to handle homophobia and discrimination in the school and education, and how the teachers could talk about these matters with the students. The impact was huge and TT, a Swedish News Agency, published a big follow-up. It included an interview with RFSL's president.

The interview took a long time to conclude and the reporter was not well informed. On several occasions the president had to correct the reporter and to point out the delicacy in the matter. In the subsequent news release from TT that summarised the article and the report, RFSL's president was said to have claimed that "homophobia is widespread among teachers".

None of the organisations involved was pleased with the reporting, as it was directly incorrect. What had in fact been said and pointed out to the

reporter was that teachers neither are more nor less homophobic than the rest of the population. This nuance had disappeared in the process of reporting, and the disaster was a fact.

The news spread quickly over the entire country and was soon published by almost the majority of the country's newspapers and radio stations.

After a crisis meeting with the actors involved a public correction was made. Subsequent work was focused on minimising the damage and ensuring that correct information was published. The development was eventually turned around and the cooperation between the involved could continue.

In retrospect, it was obvious that the reporter had not understood the significance or the context of the report. Terms had been used without being explained sufficiently and the quotations had not been checked thoroughly enough. The reporter had not considered her own deficiencies in understanding the context and had used terms that she was not familiar with. She had

furthermore not been observant of some remarks during the interview and in subsequent discussions.



Resources

To read:

Open Up Your Workplace: Challenging Homophobia and Heteronormativity

This book reflects on experiences from practical project work. Here you will find tips and tricks on how to get started regardless of whether you are an employer, employee, trade union representative or just someone with an interest in the subject.

© RFSL 2007 ISBN 978-91-976096-6-1 (*to order, visit www.ytan.se*)

Norms at Work: Challenging Homophobia and Heteronormativity

This book provides more in-depth knowledge on how norms and prejudice work, and how we can make them visible in order to change them. It has been written by four researchers who have collaborated within the TRACE partnership.

© RFSL 2007 (*to order, visit www.ytan.se*)

Equal at Work—Easy Access Guide for Practitioners

This handbook is directed at people who meet individuals who have been subject to discrimination in the workplace. It focuses on discrimination based on sexual orientation, disability or age.

It is written for a European reader and is available in English (pdf and printed), French (pdf), Spanish (pdf) and German (pdf).

© RFSL 2006 (*to download, visit www.accesstojustice.se*)

Training tools:

What Lies Beneath the Surface?

In school everyone is assumed to be heterosexual, and the heteronorm affects what happens in both the teachers' lounge and the classroom. What Lies Beneath the Surface? contains short film sequences, discussion questions and other material that can be used to make school a working environment where everyone is met with respect regardless of their sexual orientation.

© RFSL 2007 (to order, visit www.ytan.se)

All Clear 2.0—Gay, Lesbian, Bi & Hetero at Work

This handbook, including a dvd provides ideas and new methods on how to create open places at work where everyone, regardless of sexual orientation is welcomed and respected. This is a training tool to help raise awareness and change attitudes

© RFSL 2007 (to order, visit www.frittfram.se)

“Not private enough?” Homophobic and Injurious Speech in the Lithuanian Media

Artūras Tereškinas

www.lgl.lt

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