

# “Bathroom Bill” Myth

Debunking the

Accurate Reporting on  
Nondiscrimination:  
A Guide for Journalists

Updated April 2017





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President & CEO of GLAAD
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# Message from Sarah Kate Ellis

President & CEO of GLAAD



For more than two decades, GLAAD has been committed to improving media coverage of transgender people and the issues they face. We work with local journalists, national news outlets, TV networks, film studios, and Spanish-language media to identify and amplify real-life stories about transgender people, as well as ensure fair and accurate portrayals in scripted film and television.

Despite the growing number of positive depictions of transgender people in the media, myths and stereotypes continue to appear in news stories, particularly when it comes to the vital legal protections that transgender people - and the larger LGBTQ community - still lack in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Without a federal nondiscrimination law, these protections are only explicitly provided when states and municipalities have LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination laws and ordinances.

Meanwhile, we are now living in a new political reality that cannot be ignored. LGBTQ people are under attack like never before in Washington, DC, and in this age of "alternative facts" and "fake news," it's more important than ever for journalists to have factual, objective information to inform their readers, viewers, and listeners.

Multiple studies show that transgender people face heightened discrimination that leads to disproportionately high levels of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, inadequate medical care, incarceration, and violence.<sup>1</sup> These issues especially impact transgender people of color. These times of uncertainty and misinformation under a markedly anti-LGBTQ presidential administration require increased effort to portray the reality that transgender people face and preserve what progress has been made, both locally and nationwide.

The media play an important role in shaping the attitudes and ideas of the public. By reporting without bias and challenging inaccurate representations of transgender people, journalists can help ensure that voters have accurate information and are able to make informed decisions on public policies that affect the lives, health, and well-being of transgender Americans.

As we saw in 2015 in Houston, Texas and last year in North Carolina, important legal protections are far from secure and can be taken away when the public is misled with false information. The Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO), which protected people from discrimination on the

basis of sex, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, familial status, marital status, military status, religion, disability, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity, and pregnancy, was repealed in November 2015 by a disappointingly wide margin of voters.<sup>2</sup> The misinformation used in the campaign against HERO exploited outdated stereotypes and fears about transgender people, and falsely suggested that the law would put women and children at risk. Making matters worse, many local news outlets repeated these messages, often without questioning the validity of the claims, thereby providing free airtime and a veneer of legitimacy to claims that were easily proved false.<sup>3</sup> In North Carolina, the legislature and the governor rushed through House Bill 2 invalidating a nondiscrimination bill passed by the Charlotte City Council which protected LGBTQ people in the city.

This resource guide will help ensure that media professionals have the tools to report fairly and accurately about LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination laws and ordinances - with a particular focus on how those legal protections (or lack thereof) impact transgender people.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Kate Ellis".

**Sarah Kate Ellis**  
President & CEO, GLAAD

# Executive Summary



Only 19 states and approximately 200 cities explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Nondiscrimination laws typically include employment, housing, and public accommodations. Public accommodations protections include any public space such as restaurants, movie theaters, shopping malls, public transit, etc.

Multiple studies show that transgender people face heightened discrimination that leads to disproportionately high levels of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, inadequate medical care, incarceration, and violence.





Those who oppose nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people often reduce nondiscrimination protections to a conversation about public restrooms. In fact, nondiscrimination laws cover much more than public restrooms and are necessary in order for LGBTQ people to be treated fairly and equally in employment, housing, and public spaces.

Bills like HB2 in North Carolina and SB6 in Texas seek to overturn LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination laws in local cities within the state, and take it a step further by attempting to legislate that transgender people must use the restroom that matches the sex on their birth certificate. These laws unfairly target transgender people for discrimination, and make it very difficult for transgender people to simply go about their daily lives.



It is imperative that media professionals report fairly and accurately about LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination laws and ordinances – with a particular focus on how those legal protections (or lack thereof) impact transgender people. People who oppose equal protections for transgender people promulgate misinformation, stereotypes, and fear-mongering claims about the safety of women and children. It is important that the media does not repeat these claims when they are unfounded, and the media should instead present clear and factual information in their place.

## About

# Nondiscrimination Laws & Ordinances

Nondiscrimination laws and ordinances may exist at the federal, state, city, and county levels. They simply ensure that a person may not be discriminated against based on any number of characteristics, such as race, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, and more.

However, not all state and local laws include protections based on gender identity (which protect transgender people) or sexual orientation (which protect lesbian, gay, and bisexual people) – and there is no federal law that explicitly protects LGBTQ people from discrimination.

Nineteen states\* and more than 200 municipalities (including places like Kansas City, MO; Gainesville, FL; and Kalamazoo, MI) have passed laws that protect LGBTQ people from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Two additional two states (New Hampshire and Wisconsin) protect citizens based on sexual orientation, but not gender identity. Utah protects transgender people in employment and housing, but does not include public accommodations.<sup>4</sup>

These laws only cover approximately 48% of the American LGBTQ population, leaving an unacceptable majority of LGBTQ people vulnerable to lawful discrimination.

In 2016, the issue of extending nondiscrimination protections to LGBTQ people, and defending the laws already in place, became a topic of national conversation.

On February 22, 2016, the city council in Charlotte, North Carolina approved amendments to the city's nondiscrimination ordinance which added marital and familial status, sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity to the list of protected characteristics in the existing ordinance, which already prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, and national origin. In response, the North Carolina legislature passed House Bill 2 (HB2) which expressly prevents municipalities in the state from enacting nondiscrimination protections that are broader than the statewide law (which does not include sexual orientation or gender identity), and requires that people in North Carolina use the restroom that matches the sex on their birth certificate. The bill has cost the state of North Carolina an estimated \$630 million in lost business,<sup>5</sup> it is fighting in the courts about the bill's constitutionality, and Governor Pat McCrory, who advocated for the bill, lost to Roy Cooper in the November 2016 election. While Attorney General, Cooper stated that he believed HB2 was unconstitutional and he would not defend it in court. On March 30, 2017, North Carolina technically

repealed HB2 but immediately replaced it with HB142 which prohibits cities from passing nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people through December 1, 2020, and forever bans anyone in the state from adopting a policy that would allow transgender people to use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity.

Unlike North Carolina, Massachusetts and Cleveland, Ohio passed bills that protect transgender people from discrimination in public spaces.

On July 7, 2016, the Massachusetts Legislature added gender identity to its statewide public accommodations nondiscrimination law, ensuring full nondiscrimination protections for transgender people in the state. However, opponents gathered enough signatures to place an initiative to repeal it on a 2018 ballot. On July 13, Cleveland, Ohio's City Council unanimously voted to remove language from the city's public accommodation nondiscrimination law which allowed businesses to dictate which restroom a transgender person could use, making Cleveland's law fully trans-inclusive.

## The importance of nondiscrimination protections for transgender people

A startling percentage of the transgender population has encountered some form of discrimination. The recently released "2015 U.S. Transgender Survey," conducted by The National Center for Transgender Equality, is the largest survey of transgender people, with over 27,000 people participating.

Almost one-third (30%) of respondents who had a job in the past year reported being fired, denied a promotion, or experiencing some other form of mistreatment related to their gender identity or expression, and 77% of respondents took steps to avoid mistreatment in the workplace, such as hiding or delaying their gender transition or quitting their job. One-third (33%) of respondents experienced at least one type of mistreatment in the past year in a place of public accommodation, such as retail stores, hotels, and government offices. One in five (20%) reported they did not use at least one type of public accommodation in the past year because they feared they would be mistreated as a transgender person. Over half of respondents (59%) reported that they had avoided a public restroom in the last year because of fears of confrontation, 31% reported avoiding eating or drinking so they would not need to use a public restroom, and 12% reported being harassed, attacked, or sexually assaulted in a bathroom in the last year.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, since transgender people are represented across every race, religion, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, and nationality, the type of discrimination they experience differs depending on the intersections of a transgender person's identities. For example, transgender people of color, those with disabilities or who are undocumented suffer from poverty, violence, and incarceration at rates much higher than others within the transgender community.<sup>7</sup>

Under nondiscrimination laws that include gender identity, transgender people gain protection from discrimination where they work, where they live, and as they go about their daily lives.

## The importance of fair and accurate reporting

In recent years, transgender people and their stories have been highlighted in media more than ever before. Coverage is becoming more respectful, and an increasing number of media outlets now approach transgender advocates and leaders for their perspectives and experiences when covering transgender-related stories. However, this is not always the case, and stories which repeat unfounded myths and misinformation, and which dehumanize transgender people, are still far too common.

Journalists seek to report stories objectively, which may lead to the inclusion of opinions from those who oppose transgender-inclusive nondiscrimination policies. However, often these opponents' claims are repeated and legitimized, often without any critical analysis of the veracity of the claims, and without commentary from transgender people themselves.

For example, according to a study conducted by Media Matters for America, the misinformation and "bathroom panic" messaging about Houston's HERO ordinance - spread by opponents of the ordinance and repeated without challenge by the local television media - contributed to a widespread misunderstanding about HERO and the protections it provided.<sup>8</sup> The study found that 40% of all HERO coverage by local television media discussed bathrooms or included B-roll footage of bathrooms, with less than 10% of coverage mentioning that HERO would outlaw discrimination based on characteristics other than sexual orientation or gender identity.

When reporting on stories about this issue, fact-checking the claims of both sides is essential; as is talking directly to transgender people. By including transgender voices, voters and public policy makers can hear directly from transgender people about the effects of allowing lawful discrimination. Because housing, employment, and public accommodation discrimination especially impact members of the trans community living at the intersections of various marginalized identities, it is important to include diverse transgender voices in order to most accurately convey the scope of the issues at hand.

As discussions about nondiscrimination protections grow across the country, GLAAD has created this reference guide for journalists to help ensure that they can report on these policy issues and the experiences of transgender Americans in fair and accurate ways.



## Houston 'bathroom bill': Voters reject LGBT ordinance



## South Dakota Could Be First State to Pass Transgender 'Bathroom Bill'

The Washington Times

## Houston council moves transgender 'bathroom bill' to November ballot

FORTUNE

## *Houston Voters Reject Broad Anti-Discrimination Ordinance*

The New York Times

## Schools fear legal costs if transgender bathroom bill becomes law

Argus Leader

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK



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# The Myth of "Bathroom Bills"

Public discussions about protecting LGBTQ people under federal, state, and local nondiscrimination laws are often sensationalized. While LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination protections usually cover employment, housing, and public accommodations, opponents of these protections typically focus on generating fears about bathrooms, falsely claiming that such laws will make it legal for sexual predators to enter women's restrooms. They imply or overtly claim that transgender women are not women, and therefore they should not be allowed to use the women's restroom. (It is also often implied that transgender women are in some way deviant and predatory.)<sup>9</sup> This is despite a lack of evidence to support their claims that transgender people put anyone in danger while in the restroom that aligns with the gender they live every day.<sup>10</sup>

These claims are simply untrue. It is important to note that nondiscrimination protections for transgender people do not change long-standing laws that make it illegal for anyone to enter a public restroom for the purpose of harassing or harming another person, or invading their privacy. Some statewide nondiscrimination laws even expressly state that gender identity may not be asserted for an improper purpose. Police use current public safety laws to keep people safe, make arrests, and hold perpetrators accountable. The oft-repeated claim by opponents of nondiscrimination laws that public safety will be compromised if these laws include and protect transgender people is simply false. Journalists may cite the 19 states and 200 municipalities with explicit transgender protections, none of which have shown an increase in public safety incidents.

If journalists repeat the characterization of LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination laws as "bathroom bills," or overly focus on the application of these far-reaching policies to the narrow issue of bathrooms, they impair the public's understanding of how these laws protect people from discrimination, harassment, unfair treatment, and more. While these laws often allow transgender people to use the restroom which matches the gender they live every day, the benefits of nondiscrimination laws are much more extensive, typically covering employment, housing, education, jury service, credit, and more.

Additionally, any effort to defame or malign transgender women must be vigorously challenged. Just as many old, ugly stereotypes about gay men

**Nondiscrimination protections for transgender people do not change long-standing laws that make it illegal for anyone to enter a public restroom for the purpose of harassing or harming another person, or invading their privacy.**

(e.g., claims that gay men are pedophiles) have been thoroughly debunked, similar claims about transgender women must be pointed out as false. These gross stereotypes have been refuted by the American Psychiatric Association,<sup>11</sup> the American Psychological Association,<sup>12</sup> and other medical authorities.<sup>13</sup> Journalists can hold anti-transgender activists accountable by asking them to verify their statements, and by including the voices of transgender people whose lived experiences differ greatly from the defamatory stereotypes used to dehumanize them.

In reality, all people, including people who are transgender, are concerned about privacy and safety in public restrooms. Unfortunately, multiple studies show that transgender people often report experiencing denial of access to facilities, verbal harassment, and physical assault when attempting to use public restrooms.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, focusing on opponents' false claims about bathrooms distracts from other injustices that transgender people face, such as the fact that in a majority of states, transgender people can be fired from their jobs or denied a place to live simply because of who they are - a fact that is often overlooked or unreported when coverage becomes fixated on opponents' false claims about bathrooms.<sup>15</sup> The discrimination that transgender people face in all aspects of their lives has been documented in multiple studies.<sup>16</sup>

# Best Practices in Media Coverage

## Interview transgender people

The best sources to talk to about anti-transgender discrimination are the people who experience it firsthand. Hearing from transgender people clarifies and humanizes the issues they face and debunks discredited and harmful falsehoods. It's also important to talk to the family members and co-workers of transgender people. They can provide readers and viewers with a greater understanding of how the discrimination transgender people face also impacts their friends and family.

## Include stories from a diverse array of local transgender people about the effects of nondiscrimination on their own lives

As with the general population, the effects of discrimination vary for transgender people based on race, gender, class, nationality, ability, and so on.<sup>17</sup> Including multiple accounts from diverse demographics within the transgender community helps to illustrate most accurately the devastation that discrimination can cause.

## Use accurate and appropriate language

Using accurate terminology is a form of basic respect that is often denied to those in the transgender community. Media outlets and consumers of media may be unaware of best practices regarding terminology and pronoun usage. Up-to-date terminology and its usage can be found in GLAAD's Media Reference Guide for journalists (see Resources section on page 12).

## Avoid reducing the complexity of the policy down to a "bathroom bill"

Refer to these laws or ordinances as the nondiscrimination law/ ordinance, or call them by their name (for example, Houston Equal Rights Ordinance or HERO). The term "bathroom bill" is an inaccurate phrase created by those who oppose nondiscrimination laws that protect LGBTQ people. The term is designed to, among other things, incite panic and fear at the prospect of encountering a transgender person in a public restroom. It is also inaccurate, because most of these bills address a far v range of discrimination protections than restroom access. Accurate reporting will discuss all of the various areas of life in which LGBTQ

people will be protected, from fairness in housing, to equal opportunity in the workplace. If a bill explicitly addresses the use of restrooms and locker rooms within its public accommodations provisions, it is important to contextualize it within the larger issue of anti-transgender discrimination.

## Mention the many places that have trans-inclusive nondiscrimination protections

The first trans-inclusive nondiscrimination ordinance was passed in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1975. Since then, 19 states and over 200 municipalities have enacted laws and ordinances protecting transgender people from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. And two additional two states (Utah and Massachusetts) protect trans people in employment and housing, but do not include public accommodations. In the places where transgender-inclusive protections exist, there has been no increase in public safety incidents. Journalists can reference these places as examples when opponents falsely claim that chaos will ensue if transgender people are protected under the law.

## Emphasize what these laws and ordinances do not do

Nothing in nondiscrimination protections changes the fact that it is illegal to enter a restroom to harm or harass people, or invade their privacy.<sup>19</sup> Any person who tries to enter a women's restroom for an illegal purpose would be subject to arrest and prosecution. Rather than repeating the inflammatory rhetoric of these laws' opponents, draw attention to existing laws that prohibit harassment or assault in public spaces and point out that nondiscrimination protections do not change those laws. It's important to point out that transgender people are also concerned with privacy and safety in public restrooms, and often experience a lack of both when they try to access public facilities.<sup>20 21</sup>

## Avoid using bathroom images and B-roll when discussing nondiscrimination policies

Using bathroom footage or images of bathrooms in a story about nondiscrimination laws narrowly focuses viewer attention on one issue,

rather than on the broad impact these laws have. It also has the effect of reinforcing and legitimizing false claims about bathroom safety. Nondiscrimination ordinances protect people in a wide variety of situations and spaces besides restrooms, but the bathroom images chosen by some media outlets makes it harder to understand what these policies do. Using bathroom images does not accurately represent the scope of the legislation. A study from Media Matters for America<sup>22</sup> found that local media coverage about the HERO frequently included bathroom B-roll footage, with two media outlets in particular including this footage in more than half of all of their coverage. Only 10% of news coverage from local media outlets in Houston ever mentioned that HERO protected people from discrimination based on characteristics other than sexual orientation and gender identity. With most of the messages from those who oppose nondiscrimination ordinances focused on the bathroom, it is up to media outlets to bring fair and accurate coverage of these laws to voters.

### Challenge politicians and pundits with accurate information about transgender people

People who oppose equal protections for transgender people promulgate misinformation, stereotypes, and fear-mongering claims about the safety of women and children. Note the distinction between these fears and the facts by presenting clear and factual information in their place. If you want more information on anti-LGBTQ activists, visit [www.glaad.org/cap](http://www.glaad.org/cap) and [www.glaad.org/tap](http://www.glaad.org/tap). The GLAAD Commentator Accountability Project (CAP) aims to put critical information about frequent anti-LGBTQ commentators into the hands of newsrooms, editors, hosts, and reporters. The Trump Accountability Project (TAP) includes anti-LGBTQ statements and rhetoric, discriminatory actions, and exclusionary worldviews of the Trump administration.

**Rather than repeating the inflammatory rhetoric of these laws' opponents, draw attention to existing laws that prohibit harassment or assault in public spaces and point out that nondiscrimination protections do not change those laws.**

# Definitions & Terms to Know

## Sex

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

## Gender Identity

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

## Gender Expression

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

## Sexual Orientation

Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a straight woman.

# Transgender Terminology

## Transgender (adj.)

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

## Transsexual (adj.)

An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have permanently changed - or seek to change - their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike *transgender*, *transsexual* is **not** an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as

transsexual and prefer the word transgender. It is best to ask which term a person prefers. If preferred, use as an adjective: transsexual woman or transsexual man.

## Trans

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

## Transgender man

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

## Transgender Terminology (con't)

### Transgender woman

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

### Cross-dresser

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

**PLEASE NOTE:** Transgender women are not cross-dressers or drag queens. Drag queens are men, typically gay men, who dress like women for the purpose of entertainment. **Be aware of the differences between transgender women, cross-dressers, and drag queens. Use the term preferred by the person.** Do not use the word "transvestite" at all, unless someone specifically self-identifies that way.

### Transition

Altering one's birth sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition can include some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on

legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person. **Avoid the phrase "sex change."**

### Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)

Also called Gender Confirmation Surgery (GCS). Refers to doctor-supervised surgical interventions, and is only one small part of transition (see transition above). Avoid the phrase "sex change operation." Do not refer to someone as being "pre-op" or "post-op." Not all transgender people choose to, or can afford to, undergo medical surgeries. **Journalists should avoid overemphasizing the role of surgeries in the transition process.**

### Gender Identity Disorder (GID)

*outdated, see Gender Dysphoria*

### Gender Dysphoria

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

## Other terms you may hear

You may hear the following terms when doing research on transgender issues or speaking to an interview subject. As they are not commonly known outside the LGBTQ community, they will likely require context and definition if used in mainstream media.

### Cisgender

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

### Gender Non-Conforming

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

### Non-binary and/or genderqueer

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

# Names, Pronoun Use & Descriptions

## Always use a transgender person's chosen name.

Many transgender people are able to obtain a legal name change from a court. However, some transgender people cannot afford a legal name change or are not yet old enough to legally change their name. They should be afforded the same respect for their chosen name as anyone else who uses a name other than their birth name (e.g., celebrities).

## Use the pronoun that matches the person's authentic gender.

A person who identifies as a certain gender, whether or not that person has taken hormones or undergone surgery, should be referred to using the pronouns appropriate for that gender. If you are not certain which pronoun to use, ask the person, "What pronouns do you use?"

## If it is not possible to ask a transgender person which pronoun they use, use the pronoun that is consistent with the person's appearance and gender expression or use the singular they.

For example, if a person wears a dress and uses the name Susan, feminine pronouns are usually appropriate. Or it is also acceptable to use the singular *they* to describe someone when you don't wish to assign a gender. For example: "Every individual should be able to express their gender in a way that is comfortable for them."

## Some people use the singular they to reflect their non-binary gender identity.

In 2015, *The Washington Post* updated its style guide to include the singular *they* to describe people who "identify as neither male nor female." It is increasingly common for people who have a non-binary gender identity to use *they*/*them* as their pronoun. For example: "Jacob writes eloquently about their non-binary identity. They have also appeared frequently in the media to talk about their family's reaction to their gender expression."

## It is never appropriate to put quotation marks around either a transgender person's name or the pronoun that reflects that person's gender identity.

## The Associated Press Stylebook provides guidelines for journalists reporting on transgender people and issues.

According to the AP Stylebook, reporters should "use the pronoun preferred by the individuals who have acquired the physical characteristics of the opposite sex or present themselves in a way that does not correspond with their sex at birth. If that preference is not expressed, use the pronoun consistent with the way the individuals live publicly."

## When describing transgender people, please use the correct term or terms to describe their gender identity.

For example, a person who was assigned male at birth and transitions to live as a woman is a *transgender woman*, whereas a person who was assigned female at birth and transitions to live as a man is a *transgender man*. If someone prefers a different term, use it along with an explanation of what that term means to them.

## Avoid pronoun confusion when examining the stories and backgrounds of transgender people prior to their transition.

Ideally, a story will not use pronouns associated with a person's birth sex when referring to the person's life prior to transition. Try to write transgender people's stories from the present day, instead of narrating them from some point in the past, thus avoiding confusion and potentially disrespectful use of incorrect pronouns. For example, "Prior to her transition, Caitlyn Jenner won the gold medal in the men's decathlon at the Summer Olympics held in Montreal in 1976."

# Terms to Avoid

**Problematic:** "transgenders," "a transgender"

**Preferred:** *transgender people, a transgender person*

*Transgender* should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, "Tony is a transgender," or "The parade included many transgenders." Instead say, "Tony is a transgender man," or "The parade included many transgender people."

**Problematic:** "transgendered"

**Preferred:** *transgender*

The adjective *transgender* should never have an extraneous "-ed" tacked onto the end. An "-ed" suffix adds unnecessary length to the word and can cause tense confusion and grammatical errors. It also brings transgender into alignment with lesbian, gay, and bisexual. You would not say that Elton John is "gayed" or Ellen DeGeneres is "lesbianed," therefore you would not say Chaz Bono is "transgendered."

**Problematic:** "transgenderism"

**Preferred:** *none*

This is not a term commonly used by transgender people. This is a term used by anti-transgender activists to dehumanize transgender people and reduce who they are to "a condition." Refer to *being transgender* instead, or refer to *the transgender community*. You can also refer to *the movement for transgender equality*.

**Problematic:** "sex change," "pre-operative," "post-operative"

**Preferred:** *transition*

Referring to a "sex-change operation," or using terms such as "pre-operative" or "post-operative," inaccurately suggests that one must have surgery in order to transition. Avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people or the process of transition.

**Problematic:** "biologically male," "biologically female," "genetically male," "genetically female," "born a man," "born a woman"

**Preferred:** *assigned male at birth, assigned female at birth or designated male at birth, designated female at birth*

Problematic phrases like those above are reductive and overly-simplify a very complex subject. As mentioned above, a person's sex is determined by a number of factors - not simply genetics - and a person's biology does not "trump" a person's gender identity. Finally, people are born babies: they are not "born a man" or "born a woman."

**Defamatory:** "deceptive," "fooling," "pretending," "posing," "trap," or "masquerading"

Gender identity is an integral part of a person's identity. Do not characterize transgender people as "deceptive," as "fooling" or "trapping" others, or as "pretending" to be, "posing" or "masquerading" as a man or a woman. Such descriptions are defamatory and insulting.

**Defamatory:** "tranny," "she-male," "he/she," "it," "shim"

These words dehumanize transgender people and should not be used in mainstream media. The criteria for using these derogatory terms should be the same as those applied to vulgar epithets used to target other groups: they should not be used except in a direct quote that reveals the bias of the person quoted. So that such words are not given credibility in the media, it is preferred that reporters say, "The person used a derogatory word for a transgender person." Please note that while some transgender people may use "tranny" to describe themselves, others find it profoundly offensive.

**Defamatory:** "bathroom bill"

An inaccurate phrase created and used by far-right extremists to oppose nondiscrimination laws that protect transgender people. The term is meant to incite fear and panic at the thought of encountering transgender people in public restrooms. Simply refer to the nondiscrimination law/ordinance instead.

# Additional Resources for Journalists

## GLAAD Resources

- GLAAD Transgender Media Program [glaad.org/transgender](https://www.glaad.org/transgender)
- GLAAD Transgender Resources for Media Professionals [glaad.org/transgender/mediareources](https://www.glaad.org/transgender/mediareources)
- GLAAD Commentator Accountability Project [glaad.org/cap](https://www.glaad.org/cap)

## Research & Reports

- [National Center for Transgender Equality, "2015 U.S. Transgender Survey"](#)
- [The Williams Institute, "Gendered Restrooms and Minority Stress: The Public Regulation of Gender and its Impact on Transgender People's Lives"](#)
- [Fenway Health and the Center for American Progress, "State Anti-Transgender Bathroom Bills Threaten Transgender People's Health and Participation in Public Life" Policy Brief](#)

## Organizations

- Center for American Progress (CAP) [americanprogress.org](https://www.americanprogress.org)
- Equality Federation [equalityfederation.org](https://www.equalityfederation.org)
- Freedom for All Americans [freedomforallamericans.org](https://www.freedomforallamericans.org)
- Media Matters for America [mediamatters.org](https://www.mediamatters.org)
- Movement Advancement Project (MAP) [lgbtmap.org](https://www.lgbtmap.org)
- National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) [transequality.org](https://www.transequality.org)
- Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) [srlp.org](https://www.srlp.org)
- Transgender Law Center (TLC) [transgenderlawcenter.org](https://www.transgenderlawcenter.org)
- Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund (TLDEF) [tldef.org](https://www.tldef.org)



# GLAAD Spokespeople



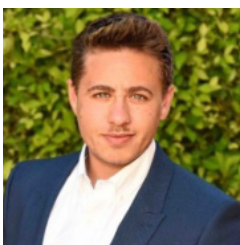
## Sarah Kate Ellis

Sarah Kate Ellis was named the President & CEO of GLAAD, the world's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer media advocacy organization, in January 2015 after a successful career as an award-winning media executive and communications strategist. A forceful spokesperson for LGBTQ acceptance, Ellis' commentary and statements have appeared in influential media including *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *TIME*, *Vanity Fair* and hundreds of other outlets. Ellis has appeared on *ABC News*, *Bloomberg*, *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *Entertainment Tonight* and scores of other broadcasts. Ellis co-authored a memoir with her wife, Kristen Ellis-Henderson, titled *Times Two, Two Women in Love and the Happy Family They Made*, released by Simon & Schuster. Ellis and her wife are the proud mothers of two adorable children.



## Nick Adams

Nick Adams is the Director of the Transgender Media Program at GLAAD. He joined GLAAD's staff in 1998 and, as a transgender man, has been deeply committed to improving the quality and quantity of transgender media images for the past 18 years. In 1998 he created the transgender section of GLAAD's Media Reference Guide, which included best practices for reporting on the transgender community – standards that the Associated Press and The New York Times subsequently used to improve their own style guides. He has worked with dozens of television shows to help them create more realistic, multi-dimensional transgender characters, and conducted trainings on how to fairly and accurately portray transgender people to high-level executives at Viacom Networks, FOX, CBS, MSNBC, E!, Bravo, Oxygen, and other networks.



## Alex Schmider

Alex Schmider is the senior strategist of GLAAD's Transgender Media Program. He received his Bachelors of Science degree in Psychology with a minor in Media & Communications from Tufts University in 2013. Prior to joining GLAAD's team, he began his transition and started work as the Communications Coordinator at the Los Angeles LGBTQ Center, the world's largest provider of LGBTQ programs and services. Since joining GLAAD in 2016, Schmider was selected as one of Forbes 30 Under 30 in the media category, has worked with Tinder to launch its trans-inclusive update, and provided media trainings and consultations to news and entertainment networks on how to fairly and accurately cover transgender people. For the past three years, Alex has volunteered as a camp counselor for Camp Aranu'tiq—a camp for transgender and gender non-conforming youth.

For journalists interested in speaking to any of these experts, please contact Matt Goodman, Associate Director of Communications, at [mgoodman@glaad.org](mailto:mgoodman@glaad.org)

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GLAAD wishes to thank the following for providing consultation on the contents of this guide:

**Equality California**

[eqca.org](http://eqca.org)

**Freedom for All Americans**

[freedomforallamericans.org](http://freedomforallamericans.org)

**The Gill Foundation**

[gillfoundation.org](http://gillfoundation.org)

**Movement Advancement Project**

[lgbtmap.org](http://lgbtmap.org)

**National Center for Transgender Equality**

[transequality.org](http://transequality.org)

**Transgender Law Center**

[transgenderlawcenter.org](http://transgenderlawcenter.org)



GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBT acceptance. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love.

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