

CHAPTER NINE

DIVERSITY

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Covering communities from the outside



BY ANDRE PICARD

► R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

You have probably heard Aretha Franklin belt out that soul classic many times. It is also a credo that should guide journalists in their work, particularly when they venture into unknown territory.

Every day reporters are called upon to cover communities from the outside. They are dropped into strange places with a variety of people who are as likely to be hostile as friendly.

In the battlefields of Ethiopia, the pines of Kahnésatake, the dressing room of the Montreal Canadiens, a vigil for battered women or a meeting of the Haitian Students' Association, your status is the same.

You are an outsider — be it politically, culturally, linguistically or geographically. Your job is to become informed and, in turn, inform your public.

Whether you are writing for a student, community or national daily newspaper, the task is identical. Get in, get the story, and get out so you can tell it. The variables are turnaround time, and preparation. Your deadline can be hours, days or weeks away.

Time is always your biggest enemy, but preparation can be your greatest ally.

More often than not, reporters setting out on an assignment, even seasoned veterans, are woefully ignorant of the facts. When you have the added burden of entering a community as an outsider, the situation is only exacerbated.

There is, unfortunately, no magic for-

mula. What follows is simply a series of tips to help and pitfalls to avoid — most of them acquired by messing up.

The key to it all is your state of mind as you approach the people and documents you meet in your research. Keep that Aretha Franklin tune in your head. Respect your subjects. Respect the environment you are thrust into. Respect the words you write. Respect yourself, your strengths and your weaknesses.

WHO'S ZOOMIN' WHO?

The ever-present question that you should hold in your mind when you are covering communities from the outside is whether you have the ability, or even the right, to do so. Should straight people write about queer culture? Can a middle-class white cover the First Nations? Should a Christian student be allowed to interpret the actions of an Islamic student society? Should only poor women cover protests about welfare reform and only rich men cover annual meetings of transnational corporations?

In the real world, from understaffed student newspapers to giant dailies, these philosophical questions are usually a moot point. Practical and financial limitations mean that the closest warm body usually gets the assignment of the moment, whatever and wherever it is.

Pay attention to the inherent biases, though. The results can include:

- A business student who normally does record reviews being sent to cover an emergency student council debate on the loaded question: "Is Zionism racism?"

- An editor bursting out of his office 10 minutes before deadline, pointing to you and saying: "They're saying Ben Johnson took stan-something. Find out what it is — now!"

- A boring assignment, trying to make sense of a highly technical and dizzyingly bureaucratic CRTC ruling becoming a discovery of a fascinating language and culture — that of deaf people in Canada.

- Heading off to a remote Cree settlement to gather information for a feature and spending a week living in a tepee in the dead of winter.

These are all adventures into "outside communities" that occur daily. Nothing can adequately prepare you for the range of situations you will face, but lots of things can make them easier to deal with.

Do not lose sight of the fact that a reporter's role is to take a mass of information, make sense of it, condense it, and present it to your readers.

To do so, you have to be well-grounded in the basics of research and interviewing. You have to know how to find information and how to talk to people.

•[See: Ch 4. Research, Ch 2. Interviewing]

A few minutes' reading can save you several hours of interviews. Talk to a community member or an academic before hand, if you can, to get some background on a new subject. It can open doors that would otherwise be slammed in your face, literally and figuratively.

But don't ask key people for background

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you can get elsewhere. It reduces the time you'll be able to spend talking about more specific issues.

There has to be a recognition that when you come into a community from the outside, some of the rules go out the window and some of the simplest tasks can become very complex. We assume, for example, that in interview situations people will be able to speak the same languages, but what happens when you are trying to locate someone in an Arctic community where there are no telephones? What do you do when the meeting you are attending is being conducted in American Sign Language?

When you are covering an outside community, something new, you have to be a good listener. You cannot be judgmental. You have to be resourceful.

People involved directly in a controversy are often too close to a subject to speak objectively to a reporter who is new to an issue. They tend to make a lot of assumptions, they use jargon and they lack perspective. In short, they can confuse the hell out of you.

Take, for example, the Oka crisis. In the summer of 1990, a standoff between a Mohawk tribe in Quebec and law enforcement resulted in a clash over land claims in the town of Oka. The standoff lasted nearly three months and one police officer was shot dead. Eventually the Canadian military was called in to disperse the protesters.

At the outset, there were, on the most basic level, two sides: the Mohawk Warriors and the Sureté du Quebec. Both were extremely emotional, dogmatic and rhetorical. Worse yet, the armed men on each sides of the barricades

knew nothing of those on the other side and very little about the institutions the others represented or the historical baggage they carried.

The danger was to start viewing events in the same way as the main players who were trapped in the fish bowl. The challenge for the reporter was to step back and see the big picture and to refrain from making judgments after collecting the various versions of the facts.

Some of the most knowledgeable people were those who were never quoted: a professor studying Mohawk history, an aboriginal person away from the conflict at his home in Alberta and a police officer in Ottawa. These were people who could give insight into those communities without being caught up in the daily conflict.

In that respect, student journalists are in an enviable position. University and college campuses have people with all manner of expertise in obscure fields readily available. They can always provide the background information that can prepare you to stroll more confidently into a community where you are obviously an outsider.

However, remember that these people are often not actually members of the communities they study. Their background information should also be checked and balanced with more intimate accounts.

COMMON-SENSITIVE

Aside from being prepared with information, a reporter's challenge in entering an outside community is to be as unobtrusive as possible. This is particu-

larly important when covering a minority community.

A white reporter who shows up at an African Students' Association meeting will stand out. As such, they have an obligation to explain why they are there.

This is when doing your homework pays off. If you have taken a couple of minutes to read the minutes of a previous meeting or to talk to the association president, it can pay off big time.

In essence, you have to earn the respect of people you are covering. You do not have to apologize for who you are, or try to be someone you are not. But you do have to be ready and willing to deal with a situation which may be alien to you and do it with an open mind.

Constantly ask yourself if you are making value judgments based on your biases. When you go into a new community, leave as much of your baggage as possible at the door. You can pick it up again when you leave, if you still want it.

Linguistic and cultural respect are important factors. Every effort should be made to interview people in the language of their choice (using translators if necessary) and in surroundings where they feel comfortable. Aside from being a basic courtesy, it always gives you a better story.

Whenever possible, you should experience the conditions you are writing about. If you are writing about poverty on an Indian reserve, you should live it, for as long as possible — but not if doing so means that you become a burden to your hosts. Never imagine that you have become a member of a commu-

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nity while covering it.

Remember that the reason reporters are welcomed into communities from the outside is to be conduits of information. The people involved should always be quoted telling the story because they are the story.

In covering outside communities, reporters can also be too soft, paint a phony picture or fail to question contradictions in the name of solidarity. Oka, once again, provides a good example. There was tremendous pressure on journalists to present the conflict as an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ situation and to ignore any deep divisions within the Mohawk community.

•[See: Ch 3. Peace journalism]

Those who did write about the internal conflicts, even though they were mentioned in the context of the larger confrontation, were denounced and ostracised. But, in the end, the stories were better for it, and the underlying causes — land claims and self-determination — were better served because the agenda was not set by any one faction.

You cannot be afraid to tell the truth. No matter how much you care about a subject, you have an obligation to expose it fully, warts and all.

Do not underestimate your readers. If your concern is phony, if you are hiding something or are ill-informed, it will be glaringly obvious. If you really care about an issue, it will show and your underlying message will be conveyed.

In other words, do what is virtually impossible, and do it every time you write

a story: be fair.

Be prepared, listen carefully, sympathize, analyze and then tell readers what you have learned. When you are dropped into a strange place to cover an unknown topic in an impossible time frame, do it twice as well. ◀

Andre Picard was president of Canadian University Press in 1984-85 and Ontario fieldworker in 1983-84. He was also editor of The Fulcrum (University of Ottawa).



Writing without bias

BY BRYNA HALLAM

- ▶ Bias is how we cover stories, the people we choose to talk to, and the language we use to describe them. It can be difficult to analyze. Most people, after all, aren't aware of their biases. Below are some general tips and guidelines on approaching stories and language use.

Since situations will differ from place to place, it's a good idea to have some local resources. If you're not sure about the appropriateness of a term, or how to approach a story, try contacting a local group to get their perspective. Many campuses have a women's centre, pride office, disability resource centre, students of colour collective, etc. They are fantastic resources.

Try for a diverse range of interview subjects. According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (2006), women make up 21 per cent of news subjects. In the early 1990s, the media watchdog Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) surveyed the makeup of the guests on ABC's Nightline. It found that 80 per cent were professionals, 89 per cent were male, and 92 per cent were white. The world isn't mostly white, professional, non-disabled, straight men. Interviewing people who don't fit this mold can bring different insights and opinions to your articles.

Use words and phrases that describe appropriately and do not offend. Ask how people identify themselves, and how they would like to be identified in your story.

Be aware of words and situations that suggest that all or most members of a group are the same. Stereotypes may lead to assumptions that are un-

portable and offensive. They cloud the fact that any attribute may be found in all groups and individuals.

Avoid qualifiers that reinforce stereotypes. A qualifier is information added that suggests an exception to the rule. For example, an account of an event could read, "The intelligent black students were guests as part of an orientation program . . ." Under what circumstances would someone write, "The intelligent white students . . ."? Or make reference to a "straight lifestyle"? Try imagining a sentence with the word "white" in place of "black" or substitute an Anglo name for an Asian one. Bias is subtle. The more deeply it has been assumed, the more difficult it is to uncover.

Don't mention race, ability, sexuality, etc, unless it is essential. Few situations require it. Diversity topics need not be the hidden subject of every piece that happens to include reference to a person who is a minority/LGBTQ/has a disability.

Be aware of the meaning of words, their origins and connotations. Don't refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual people as "alternative," which implies they are not normal or regular. One person cannot represent their race, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.

Try to represent the varying views and opinions of people. Not all lesbians, for example, have the same politics or are "progressive."

Be careful in referring to the "[insert X here] community" — a term that assumes that there is in fact a cohesive X community. There may well be a "Muslim community" in your city, but that

Don'ts and Dos

- Don't use "victim of," "victim," "afflicted with," "suffers from," "stricken with."
Do write, "has" (or "had") if relevant to story; otherwise, don't use at all.
- Don't use "confined to a wheelchair."
Do write, "in a (uses a) wheelchair."
- Don't use "wheelchair-bound," "prisoner of," "abnormal," "defective," "invalid."
Use nothing; no term is needed.
- Don't use "special" bus, "special" bathroom.
Do write, "separate bus," "segregated bathroom."
- Don't use "physically (or mentally) challenged."
Do write, "person with a disability" or "disabled person."
- Don't use "inconvenienced."
Do write, "person with a disability" or "disabled person."
- Don't use "handi-capable."
Do write, "person with a disability" or "disabled person."
- Don't use "deaf-mute."
Do write, "deaf" or "hearing impaired."
- Don't use "in spite of disability."
Avoid the concept altogether.
- Don't use "overcame her handicap."
Avoid the concept altogether.
- Don't use "handicapped parking."
Do write, "accessible parking."
- Don't use "disabled seating."
Do write, "seating for viewers in wheelchairs."



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doesn't mean that every Muslim person holds the same opinion about any given subject.

References to the gay community may not speak to others under the LGBTQ umbrella. Don't generalize or portray a group/culture as speaking in one voice or holding one opinion.

Emphasize the person, not their traits. Do we need to know what a female politician is wearing, or what colour her hair is? When including these details, ask: is this information necessary? If it were someone else (a male politician, for example), would you include it? References to appearance, family, etc. are rarely made in reference to men.

Don't refer to people with a disability by their disability. Put the person first (person with a disability, not a disabled person). But that said: ask how people would like to be described.

Use inclusive language: spokesperson, chairperson, fire fighter, police officer, etc. Some styles will use the gendered versions when the gender is known, but not as the default term. ◀

Bryna Hallam was features bureau chief in CUP 67, western bureau chief in CUP 68, and national bureau chief in CUP 69.



Covering social issues

► Our society is made up of economic, sexual, racial, regional and cultural differences. The result is a powerful drive toward identity politics: Jose sees himself as a Latin American immigrant and successful lawyer; Tristan is proud to be a lesbian, teacher and mother of two; Justin tells friends he is a working class boy from Northern Ontario who lives in Victoria. People are constantly defining and redefining themselves according to various identities. The question, “who are you?” has as many answers as faces. As student journalists, we must recognize and work with this.

Reporters must also understand the factors that affect a person’s place in society. For instance, unemployment is not an economic problem that occurs in a vacuum. As every business writer knows, there is a direct link between the decisions made in a corporate boardroom and a worker’s ability to purchase groceries. Equally, it would be foolish to cover LGBTQ issues without considering homophobia.

These two subject areas — the way people see themselves, and the social factors that affect them — can be placed under the broad category of social issues. This beat includes everything from racism and disability rights, to the women’s movement and homelessness. Below are some tips to help when you report on social issues.

WRITING ON WOMEN’S ISSUES

There is really no such thing as an issue that concerns or affects only females. Our society as a whole — women, men and children — must live with the effects of sexism, violence against women, inaccessible birth control and sexu-

al discrimination in the workplace.

Take abortion, for instance. Women are not alone in the abortion debate, but women are more significantly impacted when it comes to issues like access to government-funded abortion services, the pro-choice/pro-life movements and legislation concerning reproductive rights.

Likewise, women are more likely than men to be victims of sexual harassment, domestic violence and eating disorders. They are also dramatically affected by developments in birth control, the images of women in advertising and popular culture and access to childcare.

As members of society, women are also affected by every other social issue. Therefore, you can write a story from a woman’s perspective on issues that affect us all — peace and disarmament, the environment, free trade, taxation and unemployment.

Be proactive when covering women’s issues

Sit down as a group and have a brainstorming session. Come up with a list of ideas that you want to cover throughout the year. Post the list in the office and have people add to it as things come up. Integrate these ideas into regular weekly list of assignments.

Find the student angle

It is usually easy to localize an issue to your own campus. For instance:

Sexual harassment: Are students, staff, faculty affected? Does your university or college have adequate policies in place? And if no, why not?

Birth control: Do students have access

on campus? Is birth control mentioned in material given out during frosh week? What is the administration’s position in regards to condoms? Who pays?

Women in sports: Do women’s teams get the same exposure and funding as men’s teams? Who are some of the school’s leading female athletes? Do they get as much coverage, exposure, or scholarship money as the male athletes?

Feminist perspectives: Are they introduced in the classroom? Does your school have any women’s studies courses? If yes, is the curriculum adequate? And if not, why?

Employment and pay equity: Do women professors have a harder time attaining tenure than men? Does pay equity exist among faculty and other university employees? How many female professors have been hired in the last 10 years in comparison with men? How does this compare with other staff or administrators?

Avoid tokenism

Some papers publish a special supplement, or a whole edition, to commemorate International Women’s Day, while others run a series geared towards gender issues. This special coverage should be part of a year-round effort, not just a one time attempt at covering women’s issues. To ignore half the population for most of the year and attempt to make up for it with a supplement in March is just bad journalism.

Ethnic/racial bias

The various racial and ethnic minorities in Canadian society present complex challenges for print and broadcast media. Be aware of words and situations



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that suggest all or most members of a racial or ethnic group are the same. For instance, a writer may unconsciously assume that all minority employees or community members are “poor” or “deprived,” when actually many are well off and highly-educated, just as in the population at large.

Avoid racial identification except when it is essential to communication. Few situations require it. For example, announcing the appointment of a company’s first black executive vice-president might be appropriate in some circumstances, but don’t continue to refer to race in subsequent articles unless such information is an important part of the message. Race need not be the hidden subject of every piece that happens to include reference to a person of minority heritage.

Avoid using ethnic clichés — Too frequently, communicators reach to make a connection that is trite or inappropriate. Do more homework. Don’t let ethnic clichés substitute for in-depth

material.

Avoid patronizing and tokenism with regard to any racial or ethnic group — minorities should not be presented as if they are a burden to the rest of the world. Rarely are blacks or Asian volunteers, for example, depicted ministering to old, ill, or poor whites. Non-white Canadians are often asked, “How long have you been here?” or told “You speak English very well.” The assumption is that all non-whites are foreign-born. This denies the history and contribution made by non-whites in Canada.

Grant equal respect to people in visual media, without regard to racial or ethnic group. No matter how subtle, the implication in many visual representations is that certain groups belong in particular roles. Be careful with the dynamics of photographs and other graphic images.

COVERING QUEER ISSUES

On each college and university campus there are hundreds and maybe thousands of lesbians, bisexuals and gay men, many of whom are not “out of the closet.”

We as student journalists have an obligation to cover the issues that are of particular interest to these readers. We also have an obligation to recruit lesbians, bisexuals and gay men to write for our papers and to ensure that there is a positive working atmosphere in our offices.

To isolate what is a gay issue is difficult since there isn’t one “community.” Bisexuals, lesbians and gay men are not all white, male and middle class. Everyone comes from and comprises all race, religious, gender and class stratas.

This does not limit what student journalists can write about. Instead it broadens and makes more accessible to everyone the issues which are impor-

Queer Definitions

BY LINA HARPER

Asexual: Asexual people generally refrain from sexual contact with their love partners.

Bisexual: A term for men or women who sleep with both the same and the opposite sex.

Community: An overused term in most articles dealing with sexual minorities. A queer community is not bound by sexual ties. Communities normally begin with shared geographical location and a common interest. There is no monolithic “queer” community.

Dyke: According to Webster, it is “a bank, usually of earth, constructed to control or confine water.” A dyke is also a woman who likes to have sexually intimate contact or a romantic relationship with other women. A dyke is always someone who is out. This is usually a self-referential term so ask before you apply it in a story.

Gay: A term of self-definition often designed to reject the more clinical “homosexual.” Both men and women can be called gay, thus the terminology “lesbians and gay men” is noteworthy.

Gender-neutral language: When talking

about a trans person, you can forego pronouns. It’s a good idea to ask the subject which pronoun they prefer and then proceed with that. Sometimes subjects will indicate their preference for “ze” or “hir.” This will come down to a style decision on the part of your editorial board. If you decide to use only the traditional she or he, see if you can avoid using either.

Het: A catch-all, playful term that describes heterosexual people.

Heterosexism: Describes institutional policies and laws that establish heterosexuality as the socially dominant norm.



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tant to the gay communities.

On occasion there are glimpses into queer lives in the mainstream media but they are more often found in the arts section of a major daily than on page one news. By writing stories about lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, your staff and paper will begin to break one of the major barriers in our lives: invisibility.

A starting point for your paper might be to see if bisexuals, lesbians and gay men have basic legal protection in your province's human rights legislation. If your province or territory does have such protection, is it providing a useful tool for the gay communities to counteract discrimination?

Does your campus have a sexual harassment officer? Would that person be willing to expand her role to include discrimination on the basis of sexuality? How do students, including your

medical and nursing school students, perceive HIV and AIDS?

If you are in a major city, chances are good that there will be a lesbian and gay film festival this year, a series of theatre productions, major art shows. Directors such as Melvin Riggs, John Greyson, and many from the National Film Board's Studio D provide intriguing commentary about bisexuals, lesbians and gay men. See if you can find young and emerging filmmakers in this line of thought in your community.

There are tons of books being published each year that your paper could review.

Ask your local LGBTQ group questions about organizing for gay rights, whether they get support from other community groups, how they feel about public events like pride parades, and what would they like to see done.

Your paper could decide to take on a news campaign or do a few stories from different angles including cases of discrimination in your region or town, interviewing gay people about their coming out process, exploring gay culture in your town or city through theatre, art and films. When you have exhausted this list or would like other examples, check with the CUP national office for more. You could also scan your regional or national gay publications for more story ideas.

Each city, each major town and every college and university in this country has a lesbian and gay group. You're a reporter, go to them and ask some questions. Sit in on a few sessions. Then, while you're at it, go to your local HIV/AIDS or feminist group and ask around there, too.

Heterosexual Privilege: Describes the society in which we live. Everything around us, from advertising in newspapers to who kisses who on television, reflects and reinforces the dominance and preference of heterosexuality.

Homophobia: Describes the unfounded negative personal prejudices and attitudes against lesbians and gay men.

Homosexual: A term used to define women who love women and men who love men.

Lesbian: Named after a Greek poet who lived on Lesbos island in ancient Greece who wrote poems to and about other women. It is a self-defining term for women who love women.

Lesbophobia: Similar to homophobia, but

that term too often invokes only images of men. Lesbophobia describes and reclaims the invisibility of hatred directed at women who love women.

Pansexual: People who like to have multiple sex partners across gender lines. Someone who is not heterosexual or homosexual, but simply sexual.

Sexual minorities: Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. The term also includes the BDSM community, sex workers and other lifestyle or professional roles.

Sexual Orientation: A term which encompasses heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality and is often used to soften the impact of the words "lesbian and gay" — it creates invisibility and ambiguity and therefore should be avoided.

Transfolk: Refers to transsexuals, transgendered persons or transvestites. This third category of gender identification allows for more inclusion than the simplistic male/female categories.

Transgendered: Individuals who self-identify differently than the gender given to them at birth.

Transsexual: A person born male or female who has taken hormones and received the appropriate breast and genital surgery to become another sex than the one they were born with.

Transvestite: A cross dresser who neither desires to permanently change their sex nor identifies as another gender. Simply about the outward gender appearances. ◀



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ANTI-LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL BIAS

Long standing members in the court-rooms, kitchens, newsrooms and schools of every community, it boggles the mind how lesbian, gay and bisexual issues are ignored by media. Gay bashings go unchallenged and same-sex marital support unmentioned.

Take on the homophobia and celebrate the gay, lesbian or bisexual voice in your community.

Distinguish between the gay and lesbian communities. References only to the gay community will not necessarily speak to both groups.

Disregard stereotypes that imply all gays are sex-crazed, all lesbians are either butch or femme, all gay men are effeminate and vice-versa, all dykes are into folk music, all lesbians hate men, etc.

Don't refer to the gay community whenever you write about AIDS, or vice-versa. That being said, don't ignore the special devastation of AIDS in the gay community either.

Don't refer to lesbian, gay and bisexual lifestyles as 'alternative.' 'Alternative' implies that it is not normal or regular. Similarly, don't call someone an 'avowed' homosexual (unless you refer to all straights as 'avowed hets'), and don't make reference to sexuality where it's irrelevant.

Represent varying views and opinions amongst gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Don't assume they all have the same politics or are 'progressive.' ◀

With files from Padraic Brake, Beth Ryan, by Krishna Rau.



Queering stories

BY MARCUS McCANN

- ▶ Twenty years ago, the main issue facing the queer community was underreporting. The most common complaint was that queer issues were invisible. In fact, one of the main reasons for the pride parade movement was to make the culture more visible.

While underreporting is still an issue, a new complaint has become more prominent: niche reporting. Queer and trans issue have made their way into mainstream reporting, but its form has mostly found itself in gay-niche stories as if “queer stories” were a kind of beat on their own.

In order to make queer culture more mainstream and reduce the portrayal of an insular community, it can help to bring queer themes and angles to more traditional stories.

QUEER THESE FEATURES

Moving away from home/moving into residence: coming out to your residence roommate, examining campus anti-discrimination policies, information about police services/campus protection services, ally programs, how to be gay positive (for straight students).

Summer job search: dealing with discrimination, trans issues in the workplace, queer-friendly employers, outing in the workplace.

Volunteering in your community: listing queer charities, volunteer opportunities in sexual health or diversity, interviewing queer volunteers for the story, how to cite queer work experience on resumes (since you're not obligated to

include details that would reveal your orientation).

Bar/nightlife guide: list of gay bars, nightclubs, queer social groups, gay friendly bars, homophobic bars/locations, cruising parks, safe sex.

Alternative CD distribution methods for indie bands: consider including minor-label and independent queer artists in with your analysis of other artists — there are dozens out there and will be a more holistic examination of independent music in your community.

There are queer or queer-friendly additions that can be made to almost anything that your newspaper chooses to profile: parenting (same sex parents or queer kids), drugs/addiction (crystal meth in gay clubs), hazing (homophobic/homosocial hazing activities, queer athletes), camping (gay outdoors groups), boat cruises, skiing and books/publishing.

So get out there and find a queer angle for some of your features this year.

PITCHING YOUR QUEER STORY

Be prepared for ‘frank’ discussions
To the newly liberated or the conservative at heart, the language used by many middle aged gay men can be off putting. During my job interview, my prospective employer let loose some, er, colorful vocabulary. Prepare yourself and match your tone to theirs.

Pitch opinion

Many of Canada's biggest queer publications devote significant space to opinion and columns. In addition to hard and soft news or arts stories, bring

along your opinion pitches — the more offbeat the better. If you can find a quirky entry point to the classic discussions (e.g., how to spot an assimilationist versus a liberationist by their shoes), all the better.

Play up the ‘youth angle’

While you might be tempted to minimize attention on your relative age and experience, older editors need younger writers to write for and about their generation. Don't be afraid to pitch stories that make you sound young (e.g., turning a bar pick up into a regular booty call through MSN), and don't be afraid to say ridiculous things like “My generation is . . .” and “Young people today . . .”

It's okay to bring hetero clippings

Editors like to see that you have written about their niche before. For gay newspapers, that means local queer reporting. But don't sweat it if you don't. I brought gay-themed clippings, but my editor also read my 3,000-word feature about planning for a new university centre, and that story has allowed me to pick up features writing, even though I'd never written queer features before.

Oh my god, just do it

Do a little research. Find local queer stories that will be relevant for the next three months, and e-mail the editor to ask for a meeting. It's really that simple. Many of Canada's finest have worked at gay papers during or right after university. You can too. ◀



Disability issues

- ▶ People with disabilities who attend university and are integrated into the community are not heroic. They are just claiming a right that other members of society have always had — the right to take control of their lives and make their own decisions.

According to “No News Is Bad News,” a report by the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons, media portray people with disabilities as either heroes (Rick Hansen, Terry Fox) or as victims.

They are neither victims nor heroes. They are people who face a different set of problems, but they also have some of the same problems. They still have to pay bills, line up at the bank and buy groceries. Part of what fuels that hero-or-victim image, or a result of the image itself, is the type of coverage disability issues receive.

Media tend to focus on charity events for disability causes rather than on issues faced by people with disabilities. For example, the Jerry Lewis Telethon for Muscular Dystrophy gets a lot of media coverage, but what about the transportation and housing problems people with muscular dystrophy face in their daily lives? What happens to these people the rest of the year? Those issues often get ignored. There also seems to be a strong perception that the term ‘disability’ only refers to people who use wheelchairs. While theirs are the most visible, other disabilities such as hearing and visual impairments, and learning disabilities also raise specific concerns. Remember that there is a wide range of disabilities — some of which are invisible.

ISSUES

Physical Access

Most students decide what they want to study, which university offers their program of choice and then they apply for admission. For students with a disability there is the added step of finding out whether the university offers the support services they need. What kind of support does your university offer to students with disabilities? Is it adequate? How accessible is your campus?

Academic access

Many of the students with disabilities went through a segregated school system where they were either in special classes or in special schools for students with disabilities. The academic instruction in these programs tends to be of lower quality than in mainstream programs. This means that students who choose to attend university are not always adequately prepared and sometimes have difficulty being admitted to their program of choice. Does your university admissions office take this into account?

Financial access

Full-time students are where the vast majority of government loans and bursaries are directed. Due to the nature of their disability, some students are not able to take a full course load. This, in turn, prevents them from getting the funding necessary to pay for their education.

Does your province’s loans and bursaries program discriminate against students with disabilities?

Transportation

For students with a mobility impairment, is there an on-campus transpor-

tation system to help get them from one building to another? What about getting from home to the campus? Is the municipal transit system adequately able to transport students to school?

Housing

Where do students with mobility impairments live? Are the university residences accessible? What about off-campus housing?

Tips

Remember that there is a wide range of disabilities, including sensory impairments, intellectual impairments, learning disabilities, psychiatric disabilities and mobility impairments.

Consider the individual differences of each person with a disability. Just because two people have the same disability does not necessarily mean they have the same needs.

Let people with disabilities speak for themselves. They are more qualified to speak about the everyday realities of having a disability than are government officials and spokespeople for social agencies.

Language

While “physically challenged” is one politically correct term to describe people with disabilities, it is unpopular among those it purports to describe. Use the term “people with disabilities.” Portray people with disabilities as individuals first.

Covering disability issues means leaving behind traditional perceptions of pity and charity and focusing on the issues they face dealing with the obstacles of living in a society made for non-disabled people. Above all, it means show-



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ing sensitivity and respect for their concerns and giving them a voice. Let them speak for themselves.

INTERVIEWING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

When interviewing a person with a disability, relax and conduct your interview as you would with anyone. Be clear and candid in your questioning and ask for clarification of terms or issues when necessary. Be upfront about deadlines, the focus of your story and when and where it will appear.

Etiquette

- Shake hands when introduced to everyone. People with limited hand use or artificial limbs do shake hands.
- Speak directly to people with disabilities, not through their companions.
- Don't be embarrassed using such phrases as "See you soon," "Walk this way" or "Got to run." These are common expressions and are unlikely to offend.
- If you offer to help, wait until the offer is accepted.
- Consider the needs of people with disabilities when planning events.
- Conduct interviews in a manner that emphasizes abilities, achievements and individual qualities.
- Don't emphasize differences by putting people with disabilities on a pedestal.

Hearing disabilities

- Attract the person's attention by tapping on his or her shoulder or waving.
- If you are interviewing someone with a partial hearing loss, ask where it would be most comfortable for you to sit.

- If the person is lip-reading, look directly at them and speak slowly and clearly. Do not exaggerate lip movements or shout. Do speak expressively, as facial expressions, gestures and body movements will help them understand you.
- Position yourself facing the light source and keep hands and food away from your mouth when speaking.

Vision disabilities

- Always identify yourself and anyone else who might be present.
- When offering a handshake, say something along the lines of "shall we shake hands?"
- When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat.
- Let the person know if you move or need to end the conversation.

Speech disabilities

- Ask short questions that require short answers when possible.
- Do not feign understanding. Try rephrasing your questions, if necessary.

Using a wheelchair or crutches

- Do not lean on a person's wheelchair. The chair is a part of their body space.
- Sit or kneel to place yourself at eye level with the person you are interviewing.
- Make sure the interview site is accessible. Check for: reserved parking for people with disabilities; a ramp or step-free entrance, accessible restrooms; an elevator if the interview is not on the ground floor; water fountains and telephones low enough for wheelchair use.

Be sure to notify the interviewee if there are problems with the location. Discuss what to do and make alternate plans.

Source: www.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ntl_interview



Gender issues for men

BY MATTHEW LAWRENCE

- ▶ Sexism is nasty and it pervades every facet of society. As members of the student press, however, we can take some initiative and help work towards gender equality. Whether it's looking at the atmosphere in your office, the stories you cover and the way you cover them, or attendance at regional and national conferences, there's a lot that student journalists can do to help Canada down the path of equality.

Your office is a good place to start. Is there a boy's club atmosphere at the paper? You may want to think about making sure that women and men are encouraged to take part in all areas of writing, production, editing and business. Having a large number of men working the sports section or the business desks are only two examples of the all-too-common workspace.

Remember that your office is one huge recruitment ad. A male-dominated workspace sends the wrong message to potential recruits and volunteers. If it doesn't already have one, your paper should consider setting up a process for dealing with sexual harassment grievances — one that educates and mediates and has some teeth to it.

As for covering stories dealing with sexism, one consistent question is “should men be covering them?” This is something that every paper needs to deal with.

All students journalists should be involved in covering these stories. Tackling these kinds of issues are sometimes difficult, but they provide an opportunity to discover your own biases and learn how to best deal with them.

For example, when you are interviewing, do you view a male as more knowledgeable or credible than a woman? When covering gender issues, remember that the problems created by a male dominant society — such as restrictive social roles, abuse and control of women's lives — are relevant to both women and men. These are not “women's issues” insofar as men have a lot to do with why they exist. Both sexes need to be told about this patriarchal society and how we fit into it.

There are, of course, stories that more directly affect women (e.g. the safety of the IUD) but the reality is such that men are always involved in these issues (male doctors, boyfriends, male legislators influencing and controlling women's reproductive health, etc.).

This is not, however, an argument against the need for certain women-only events or spaces. There is a need for women to have a safe, comfortable space to meet, share, support and begin to create a unity and past that has been ignored consciously and unconsciously by our society.

If you're a man covering a story about abortion rights and you're not sure how to go about it, consider the following: listen to women; listen even more closely to women who believe in equality and can tell you why; phone the women's centre on campus (and if there isn't one, ask why not) and talk to someone there; give your story some societal context (i.e. the history of abortion in Canada, the impact of illegal/cross-border abortions).

Always remember the big picture. If you're doing a story on poor lighting on campus, for example, remember that

the story is not about women screaming about unsafe areas, it's about the unsafe environment and the reasons for it being unsafe. Who are the predators and who designed the lighting scheme? It's not uncommon to find that individuals who don't regularly feel threatened while walking alone in the dark don't take those dangers into account when designing areas for other people.

The sooner you recognize the consistent biases and embedded cultural prejudices prevalent in our society, the quicker you'll be able to see the sexism prevalent in the media you help produce.

Try a story about women's centres. What do they do, why are they there? Make sure you have some ideas about the questions you have. Remember, women's centres usually don't see educating men as a primary responsibility, so do some homework and make sure you're not wasting their time.

When you sit down to write a story related to sexism, consider how men are related to the story. If it's a story about abortion you may want to look at the relationship between the lawmakers — a male-dominated group — and the people most directly affected by their laws (women). Another angle may be the support, or control, women receive from male doctors or boyfriends when making decisions about reproduction.

If you're working on a story that seems unrelated to sexism, think again. Sexism can become an angle within just about any story. For example, if the story is about a new student centre, you'll want to consider: is there a space for a women's centre? Is the building as safe as possible for all people, especially



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at night? Did female students have an equal voice in the decision-making processes?

Other topics to consider are the male stereotypes on campus, the male-female ratio of administration and faculty, the presence of the glass ceiling on campus and wage/tenure differences across gender lines.

At CUP conferences, men and women have an opportunity to better educate themselves on gender issues and to talk to other members about the ways in which their papers have been involved in raising awareness and striving towards equality.

If men are the ones who are creating the problem, then it is important to recognize that men need to be educated and take responsibility for sexism. It's helpful to remember that the personal is the political. You're making decisions and telling others how to see things all the time. Being a good student journalist who recognizes the inherent sexism in society means being as critical of yourself as you are of the issues you cover.



Matthew Lawrence is a former copy editor of the Uniter (University of Winnipeg) and former CUP Prairie Bureau Chief (1990-91) He has helped facilitate Men's Caucus at Regional conferences and served on two sexual harassment grievance committees for CUP.