

FIRST PRINTED IN MAY 1985
REPRINTED IN NOVEMBER 1985

Printed by Shadowdean Ltd. (TU)

10519
N

NUJ GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING ON HOMOSEXUALITY

NUJ Equality Council/NUJ Lesbian and Gay Group

Introduction

Most people don't understand homosexuality, although it is estimated that one in ten of the population is gay. The Minorities Research Group was set up in 1963 – the first organisation of as well as for gay people.

Homosexual relationships between consenting men over 21 were illegal until 1967 when a new law was passed in England and Wales. This was extended to Scotland in 1982 and Northern Ireland in 1983. Ironically, the law does not mention lesbian relationships.

In spite of the changes in the law, people are still sacked for being homosexual, some suffer physical attacks, others are ridiculed by colleagues or neighbours. Gay bookshops are raided and in 1984, particularly in London, police launched orchestrated attacks on the gay community.

The media is responsible for much of the intolerance towards gay people. Newspaper stories and broadcasts help form and reinforce the biased social attitudes that provoke harassment, discrimination and hostility that seems worse now than at any time since the gay witch hunts in the 1950s.

Journalists should remember Clause 10 of the NUJ's Code of Conduct:

"Journalists shall only mention a person's race, colour, creed, illegitimacy, marital status (or lack of it), gender or sexual orientation if this information is strictly relevant. A journalist shall neither originate nor process material which encourages discrimination on any of the above-mentioned grounds."

The NUJ's Lesbian and Gay Group has drawn up these guidelines to help journalists portray a more sympathetic and accurate picture of gay people in Britain.

Images of Lesbians and Gay Men

Many journalists seem to have a vague and inaccurate picture of the way gay men and lesbians lead their lives. They are rarely presented in a positive or even objective light. Much reporting is confined to blatant "queer bashing" or innuendo.

Many pejorative words, phrases and expressions are used, although gay people do not refer to each other in this way eg poofta, lessie, queer, pansy, bent. Some descriptions are preceded by others in quotation marks eg "self-confessed", "self-admitted", "peace" women which mislead the reader.

The media continues to reinforce outdated and stereotyped images of women – often representing them solely as wives, mothers, homemakers, passive, sexually submissive and physically weak, servicing the needs of men. Lesbians are constantly misrepresented and maligned as sexual deviants, "gay girls", witches, manhaters, extreme feminists, dressed in butch boots and boiler suits.

Items like these fail to acknowledge that gay people read newspapers, listen to the radio and watch television too. As equal members of society, lesbians and gay men want to be described in terms that do not belittle, trivialise or demean them; do not encourage discrimination or distortion; do not sensationalise their activities or put them in a criminal light.

Broadcasting and television produce three particular images: either homosexual women and men are omitted entirely from air and viewing times; or they are discussed as "problems"; or they are ridiculed in one form or another.

Assumptions to avoid

"All gay people – particularly men – are child molesters and perverts"

This is one of the myths the media keeps alive. Lesbians and gay men are attracted to adult lesbians and gay men, not to children. People attracted to children are known as paedophiles and most are attracted to children of the opposite sex.

Examples

"Gay people are dangerous if they work with children or young people"

Some people believe that lesbians and gay men with responsibility over children and young people will attempt to convert them. There is no evidence to suggest that this is the case.

"Gay people make unfit parents"

In the area of child custody and the law, lesbian mothers in particular have been vulnerable to vicious press coverage. This means they risk losing their children. In the great majority of cases of separation or divorce, the legal authorities give custody of children to the father, usually because of their outdated and prejudiced attitudes towards lesbians. Yet gay people are just as good parents as any others.

"Gay people, especially men, are sick"

In the Middle Ages gay people were burned at the stake because they were thought to be in league with the devil. And the myth of sickness still remains: that gay people need medical or psychological help to make them "normal".

"Gay people are figures of fun"

To be a gay man does not mean feminine; to be a lesbian does not mean butch. The dungaree-wearing lesbian, the limp-wristed shop assistant, the male hairdresser, women in ties and so on are stereotypes created by the popular press and television to raise a laugh. They are also degrading, inaccurate figures of fun.

"Gay people working in the armed forces are a security risk"

So long as homosexuality has to be hidden, gay people working in these areas can be blackmailed and the media exacerbates this situation by its reporting.

"Public funds for gay centres and projects are a scandalous waste of taxes and ratepayers' money"

Gay people pay rates too! They tend not to have children but contribute towards the education budget. They pay for police forces that frequently harass and abuse them.

Please think twice

When reporting court cases, if it is *really* necessary to include the case of the man charged with what is known as "gross indecency" with another man – an "offence" which goes quite unremarked if it takes place between two people of the opposite sex. In the gay community these are known as "victimless crimes"; there is invariably no public complaint; no offence is caused; the police officer, however, sees this as an opportunity to make an easy arrest.

Publication of names and addresses in these cases almost invariably leads to loss of employment, and extreme distress to the people involved and their families.

PLEASE ASK YOURSELF: is the dubious news-value of such an item really worth the risk of your causing such tragedy?

Examples

The news cuttings on pages 5-12 are randomly selected examples of reporting on homosexuality. Some of these examples perpetuate the myths and rely on pejorative terms of language and therefore illustrate our argument for getting rid of biased and discriminatory reporting.

We hope these Guidelines will encourage journalists to defend the Code of Conduct, particularly Clause 10.

Examples

Daily Mirror Comment

Witch hunt

IN almost every society in the world, women have been discriminated against ever since human life began.

Napoleon said they were only machines for bearing children. Even today, the women who reach the top of their professions are exceptions.

That's why the last 20 years has seen a women's revolt against men who would consign them to an inferior rank.

That revolt has been natural and right. But like all revolutions, it has its excesses which cannot be defended.

Fools

Those who spell "wimmin" to eliminate "men" from their description are fools. Those who run women-only restaurants and hold women-only demonstrations are as silly as the men who maintain men-only clubs.

Nor does equality for women mean inequality for men. That would just substitute one privileged class for another.

Two London lesbians have just been sacked from their jobs as child care workers for discriminating against boy pupils.

Victims

One is said to have told a girl of four she was stupid to be a bridesmaid and would be stupid ever to get married.

She was also accused of telling children there was no Father Christmas – and then introduced a Mother Christmas to give presents.

Their defence was that they were victims of a witch-hunt. It never seemed to occur to them that they were behaving like witches.

Should the council employ gays?

Public Opinion

A TORY-CONTROLLED council has decided to crack down on homosexuals and ban them from council jobs. So what do people in Hackney think of the "no gays" ruling? And do they think Labour-controlled Hackney council should follow suit? We went to find out – and discovered that anti-gay prejudice is still alive and kicking. But the gay-bashing brigade were not so keen to stand up and be counted: several became curiously coy when it came to taking names and photographs.

SCHOOLGIRL Patricia Brown, 14, thought the whole idea was "really bad." She said: "It doesn't make any difference to how you do your job whether you're gay or not. Working for the council doesn't involve sex does it?"

FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD Avril Straker, of Laburnum Road, said: "It's people's qualifications that count – and that's all that should matter. Anyway, it's none of the employer's business what people do in their private life."

PERRY BEHIC, 29, of Queensbridge Road, thought the "no gays" ruling might be a good idea. "I think it's right," she said, "certainly for teachers, because it could affect the way they do their job. But I'm not sure whether they should have the same rule here."

SAID 21-year-old Eltina Taylor of Haggerton Road: "I don't think it's right at all. As long as people do their job that's what counts. And being gay's got nothing to do with it – there's plenty of people who aren't gay who are no good at their jobs."

TEENAGER Michael Ball, 17, of Dunston Road, said: "I can't see anything wrong with being homosexual. I've got a cousin who's gay and it doesn't bother him, so I can't see why it should bother anyone else – they're all the same inside."

NEWSAGENT Dahya Patel, 31, of Haggerston Road, was all for a ban on gays. "people shouldn't employ them because what they do is not natural," he declared. "I believe it's an infectious thing and they'll start spreading it around to other people too."

Hackney Gazette

The Sun

MY LOVE FOR BOY GEORGE

By HUGH WHITTOW

GENDER bender Paul Dawson yesterday revealed his bizarre secret "love" for Boy George.

He said: "I fell for George in a big, big way as soon as I saw him and I've adored him ever since."

The outrageous transvestite likes to be called Gemma – although he is now going straight in cowboy gear.

He and George have been "dating" since they met in a London club several months ago.

And they caused a sensation when Gemma turned up with George at a Frank Sinatra concert wearing a sexy black zip-up leotard.

THE SUN SAYS

Top town

HOORAY for Rugby!

The Tory council has scrapped a guarantee that it will not discriminate against homosexuals seeking jobs.

Farmer Gordon Collett declares robustly: "We're not having men turn up for work in dresses and earrings."

Dead Right!

The Sun has nothing against homosexuals. What they do in private is their own affair. But they have no right to make their closet problems our problems.

Preference

For years we have had to endure a campaign to cast homosexuals first as martyrs and then as heroes. Some employers have actually been bullied into giving them preference for jobs.

Local authorities – notably the GLC – have rushed to hand out public money to any group on the sole qualification that it is part of a sexual minority.

The homosexuals have been led to believe that they are superior, healthy and normal while the rest of the community are out of step.

A society which swallows that kind of sick nonsense is in danger of destroying itself.

Let's ALL follow Rugby in fighting back!

IT'S a while now since Rugby Council announced of a ban on the employment of homosexuals – even where they were well-qualified for the job.

I have had time to think about what you said and to ask myself whether one should remain silent: and the more I think about it, the more I am sure that you were wrong in printing that comment, and that someone ought to say so.

For six years in Parliament I have fought, with other Tory MPs, to get the message out that we care for ALL low-abiding citizens: that there is a place in our party for many different kinds of people, for minority groups, and – yes – for homosexuals.

By MATTHEW PARRIS MP

Conservative MP for Derbyshire, West and one of the Parliamentary Vice-Presidents of the Conservative Group for Homosexual Equality.

Respect

When Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone and Peter Tatchell have tried to hi-jack minority group in the name of Socialism, I have patiently tried to explain that freedom, in my party, does not just mean freedom to make money, but freedom to live your own life in your own way, without interference from the State *so long as you respect others*.

No more than you, do I like people who push or bully or embarrass others, who have not invited it, with a display of their sexual feelings.

Men who do this to women are not clever or funny: they can give great offence in the workplace.

Anyone who behaved in such a way at work towards their own sex would be making an even bigger mistake because it risks giving even deeper offence. Gay men and women need to be extra careful at work.

But they are already! If The Sun thinks Britain is a country in which a man can make a pass at *another man* at work (in the way he might do to a woman) – and escape a sock in the jaw – then you are living in a different world from your readers.

So, if Rugby Council had meant that they will not employ homosexuals who use their workplace to push their feelings on to others, then many would agree.

But that is not what Rugby Council said and it is not what they meant.

The Sun

THE SUN SAYS Top town

HOORAY for Rugby!

The Tory council has scrapped a guarantee that it will not discriminate against homosexuals seeking jobs.

Farmer Gordon Collett declares robustly: "We're not having men turn up for work in dresses and earrings."

Dead Right!

The Sun has nothing against homosexuals. What they do in private is their own affair. But they have no right to

Evil

My constituency of West Derbyshire is a part of Britain where people have rather old-fashioned ideas of right and wrong: and all the better for being so.

People don't talk about homosexuality – but I would guess that the majority of my constituents range from thinking it a personal misfortune, to thinking it a downright evil.

That is not my own opinion but I think an MP should have some respect for the views of those who send him to Parliament so I will say no more than what I think is common ground between most of my constituents and me.

It is this: very few of us, I believe, want to see anyone put in prison for his private sexual behaviour so long as this does not hurt others, unwilling, people.

Very few of us, I believe, think that people who may be homosexuals should not be allowed to seek employment.

Very few of us think that our own bedrooms are the business of the Home Secretary, the police or the Rugby Council.

The Sun is often outspoken. It never shrinks from telling readers the truth as you see it – and long may you remain so.

But, as this article shows, you are also prepared to let the other side be heard. For this I respect you – but not for your views on Rugby Council!

GAYS CAN MOVE INTO SMITHFIELD

Standard Reporter

ISLINGTON Council has given the go-ahead for a £500,000 gay community centre near Smithfield Market.

Today the council's Labour leaders were accused of putting the future of the market in jeopardy.

The one-man opposition, Social Democrat David Hyams, warned that the decision would "open the flood-gates" to office developers wishing to move into the area.

The planning applications sub-committee voted unanimously last night to give the Greater London Council planning permission for the centre in Cowcross Street, a few yards from Farringdon station.

The uses to which the gay centre will be put have been described in a report by Mr Andy Harris, GLC Member for Putney.

"The centre will be warm, friendly and welcoming, relaxed and non-intimidating, where you can spend time, bring friends, read, talk, obtain information, have coffee or something to eat, hold meetings, organise activities and events," the report states.

"It will be located in the former premises of a firm of butchers. The council's planning officials described the four-storey warehouse as "the best industrial building in the area".

Conflict

They urged the sub-committee to reject the GLC application on the grounds that it was in conflict with Islington council's Smithfield Area Plan.

They said that approval would mean the "loss of good quality warehouse accommodation which the council is determined to retain to service local industry and retain the present balance of land uses, employment and the character of the area".

Mr Hyams said: "The planning officials spelled out in terms an idiot could understand the consequences of allowing a change of use. Office developers who are now queueing up to move into the Smithfield area will be able to use the council's decision in support of their own applications."

Labour councillors argued last night that the GLC application was so different that it could not be used as a precedent. And they claimed that because part of the building would be used to print Gay News or some other gay publications a degree of industrial use would be retained.

The planning sub-committee was told that 70 residents had objected to the centre. But in spite of this Labour councillors agreed to give the scheme their unanimous backing.

Councillor Ken Banham said: "I hope this is the first of many." Alterations to the Cowcross Street building, which is at present empty, are to cost about £170,000 in addition to the £370,000 purchase price. The scheme is expected to provide up to 50 new jobs.

The Standard

GAY LOVERS LEAP HOUSING QUEUE

TWO gay women are jumping a housing queue because they are being treated as a married couple.

They will get priority over many engaged couples who are among 210 people on a council's housing list.

The decision has been made by Hereford housing committee. If it is approved by the full council, the couple are likely to be offered a flat within weeks.

The committee, which is Liberal-controlled, came under fierce attack last night from rival councillors. Labour's Bert Evans said: "I cannot see why sexual deviates should get priority."

Independent Jim McMahon said: "I do not condone or condemn them, but they have no right to priority."

Housing chairman Steve Strucken defended the decision. He said: "We look at every case on its merits and we felt we were justified in treating these women as a couple."

Daily Mirror

'No sympathy' for lesbians

A GLC grant of £35,000 to a Gay and Lesbian Employment Advice Project "is a complete waste of ratepayers money," Edgware Conservatives have been told.

Hendon North member Bryan Cassidy said: "It is the sort of extravagance which brings the GLC into disrepute, particularly at this critical moment in its fortunes when it is facing abolition."

Provocative gestures such as this are not calculated to win any friends among long-suffering London rate-payers."

Mr Cassidy, who was speaking at the Edgware Central branch Annual Meeting, said he had nothing against gays. "Many of them are highly talented and successful people who are prominent in the artistic professions. Many of them vote Conservative. They do not need hand-outs from the GLC."

But as for lesbians "I have no sympathy for them at all. They all seem to be socialists. They have also succeeded in giving feminism a bad name. They do not deserve any support from London ratepayers" he concluded.

**Hendon-Edgware
Independent**

Journalists frequently fail to contact gay men or lesbians, or any of the groups that represent them, when they are covering an issue concerning gay people. The following list of organisations will help fairer representation of gay people's point of view.

Organisations for lesbians

(contact Gay Switchboard, London 01-837 7324 (24hr) for addresses and phone numbers of all these organisations)

Action for Lesbian Parents
Black Lesbian Feminist Network
Catholic Lesbian Sisterhood
ExForces Support Group
Gay Youth Movement
Gemma
Gay Legal Advice
Joint Council for Gay Teenagers
Labour Campaign for Gay Rights
Labour Movement Lesbians
Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights (LAGER)
Lesbian Custody Group
Lesbian Line
Lesbian Mothers Group
LESPOP
London Gay Teenage Group
London Lesbian and Gay Centre
London Lesbian Offensive Group
London Women's Aid
Maternity Alliance
OWAAD (Organisation of Women of Asian & African Descent)
Older Lesbians Group
Rape Crisis Centre
ROW (Rights of Women)
Sisters Against Disablement (SAD)
Wages Due Lesbians
Women's Aid Federation
Women's Media Action Group
Working Class Lesbian Group
Young Lesbians Group

Gay Switchboards – larger centres
 Belfast 0232-222023 or 226117
 (Mon-Wed 7.30-10pm)
 Birmingham 021-6226589
 (Daily 7-10pm)
 Brighton 0273-690825
 (Sun-Fri 8-10pm, Sat 6-10pm)
 Cardiff 0222-40101/2
 (Tues, Thur, Sat 8-10pm)
 Edinburgh 031-556 4049
 (Mon-Sat 7.30-10.00pm)
 Glasgow 041-221 8372
 (Mon-Sat 7-10pm)

Leeds 0532-453588
 (daily except Tues 7.30-9.30pm)
 Leicester 0533-826299
 (Mon-Fri 7.30-10.30pm)
 Liverpool 051-708 9552
 (daily 7-10pm)
 Manchester 061-236 5986
 (daily 4-10pm)
 Newcastle Upon Tyne 0632-618555
 (weekdays 7-10pm)
 Sheffield 0742 584489
 (Mon and Wed 8-10pm)

Gay Organisations

Campaigning Groups

CHE 274 Upper Street
 London N1 2VA
 Conservative Group
 for Homosexuality
 Gay Social Democrats
 Labour Campaign for Gay Rights
 Liberal Gay Action Group
 London Gay Campaign Group
 NCCL Gay Rights Committee
 Northern Ireland Gay Rights
 Association
 Scottish Homosexual Rights Group

Counselling Groups

FRIEND
 Gemma
 Lesbian Line
 National Association of
 Gay Switchboards

Gay Centres

London Lesbian and Gay Centre

Gay Groups

The Gay Men's Group

Health

Terrence Higgins Trust
 BOX BM AIDS London
 WC1N 3XX

National Information Services

Hall-Carpenter Archives,
 BM Archives, London WC1
 London Gay Switchboard
 01-837 7324
 London Lesbian Line 01-251 6911

Other Groups

Action for Lesbian Parents
 August Trust
 GALOP (Gay London Police
 Monitoring Group)
 Gay and Housing Group
 Gay Medical Association
 Gay Rural Aid and Information
 Network
 Rural Alliance

Youth Groups

Gay Youth Movement
 NUS Gay Rights Group

Religious Groups

Catholic Lesbian Sisterhood
 Friends Homosexual Fellowship
 Gay Christian Movement
 Gay Humanist Group
 Jewish Gay Rights Group
 Jewish Lesbian Group
 Unitarian Gay Rights Group
 Quest

Trade Union Groups

AUT Gay Group
 CPSA Gay Group
 Gay Post Office /Telecom Workers
 Group
 Gay Rights at Work Committee
 Gay Teachers Group
 GMWU Gay Network
 London Transport Workers Gay
 Group
 NALGAY
 NATFHE Gay Group
 NUJ Lesbian and Gay Group

The Lesbian and Gay Press

1. Produced by, and mostly for, women: general coverage including lesbian issues:

Outwrite (national), Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London E2 6HG
 Special interest in international affairs, collective
Spare Rib (national), 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1 (01-253 9792),
 Collective.

2. Produced by, and mostly for, gay men:

Gay Times/Him (national, 283 Camden High Street, London NW1 (01-482 2576), news contact John Marshall.
Gay News (national), 1 Campden Hill Road, off Kensington High St, London W8
 (01-995 3335), contact Ian Dunmore.
Capital Gay (London), 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP
 (01-278 3766), contact Michael Mason or Graham McKerrrow.
Gay Scotland (Scotland), 58A Broughton Street, Edinburgh EH1
 (031-557 2625), contact Ian Dunn.
Mancunian Gay (Manchester), 61A Bloom Street, Manchester M1
Ten to One (Oxford), 34 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1HZ.

3. Special sections in general magazines:

City Limits, 'Out in the City', 313 Upper Street, London N1 2XQ
 (01-226 0080), contact Brian Kennedy.
Time Out, 'Gay London', Tower House, Southampton Street,
 London WC2E 7HD (01-836 4411), contact Michael Griffiths.

Sources of information and comment

1. Lesbians only:
London Lesbian Line, Monday & Friday 2-10pm, evenings 7-10pm
(01-251 6911).
2. Lesbian and gay:
London Gay Switchboard (24hr) (01-837 7324)
CHE (Campaign for Homosexuality Equality), 10am-6pm weekdays and
ansafone and media contact at other times, (01-359 3973).

Useful Reading – Equality Council Publications

The NUJ's Equality Council has published a comprehensive selection of booklets and guidelines that explain the Union's policy on equality and suggest how to implement it. All are free to NUJ members and can be obtained from:
NUJ, Acorn House, 314 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP.

Booklets

Negotiating for Equality
Images of Women – guidelines for promoting equality
Non-Sexist Code of Practice for Book Publishing

Guidelines

AIDS
Equality Officers
Sexual Harassment
Rape Reporting
Job-Sharing
Parental Leave

If you want to get in touch with the *Equality Council* write to the address above.

If you want to get in touch with the *NUJ Lesbian and Gay Group* you can either contact them through the Equality Council or write to BM NUJ LGG
London WC1N 3XX.