



glaad 
SOUTHERN
STORIES

A Guide for Reporting on LGBT People in Alabama

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When GLAAD's 2015 Accelerating Acceptance report revealed that levels of discomfort towards the LGBT community are as high as 43% in America—and spike to 61% in the U.S. South—we knew we had to act. Now in its second year, this ongoing study by GLAAD and our partners at The Harris Poll of Americans' attitudes towards the LGBT community shows that while comfort levels may be rising, more than half of Southerners believe their peers remain uncomfortable around LGBT people in various day-to-day situations, such as seeing a same-sex couple holding hands or learning a family member is LGBT. To accelerate LGBT acceptance in the U.S. South and to counter the growing levels of apathy towards LGBT acceptance nationwide, GLAAD is telling the stories of LGBT people from across the region through our Southern Stories initiative.

We are amplifying experiences of LGBT people who are resilient in the face of inequality and adversity and are building a culture in which they are able not only to survive, but also to thrive. These are impactful stories with the power to change hearts and minds, but they are too often missed or ignored altogether.

When GLAAD visited Alabama during its 2015 Southern Stories Summer Tour, we found a diverse and vibrant LGBT community working in a variety of areas. We were fortunate to participate in the Birmingham AIDS Outreach Poker Run on Smith Lake. During the Poker Run, we talked to many people about their efforts to eradicate HIV, even while caring for those who were living with the disease. During an intimate lunch in Birmingham, we met with LGBT leaders working on projects including racial justice, elder care, mental health, and political support for the LGBT community.

Alabama is the birthplace of a number of LGBT leaders, from Apple CEO Tim Cook to actress and advocate Laverne Cox. Most recently, the country has been watching *The Prancing Elites* on Oxygen, which shares the stories of gay and gender non-conforming performers from Mobile.

We are excited to shine a spotlight on Alabama's diverse and impactful LGBT community. This guide will serve as a useful tool for the media as it works to effectively share the stories of LGBT people so that all Alabamians can live the lives they love.

Sarah Kate Ellis
GLAAD President & CEO

Getting Started

While Alabama has yet to achieve passage of necessary legislation to ensure full LGBT equality statewide, there still exists a vibrant and diverse LGBT community. It has built itself into an incredible force for change over the last few decades and is making significant progress to bring policy protections and cultural acceptance to LGBT people in the state.

Support for marriage equality has increased enormously over the past decade. In 2004, when an amendment to the state constitution banning all forms of family status for same-sex couples passed through popular vote, just 16% of Alabama residents supported marriage equality. By 2012, that number doubled to 32%, as reported by the Williams Institute.¹ Slowly but surely, support for LGBT acceptance seems to be growing.

In January 2015, Alabama became 37th state to allow same-sex couples to wed when the Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the 11th Circuit, Callie v. Granade, declared the ban on marriage equality in Alabama unconstitutional. A few months later, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that marriage equality was the law of the land in all 50 states. Despite this ruling, Alabama’s Chief Justice Roy Moore has attempted to defy the Supreme Court by issuing a court order for probate judges to deny marriage licenses to same-sex couples. The struggle to embrace marriage equality even after it became legal nationwide makes clear the ongoing need to accelerate acceptance in order to protect the progress we have made.

Beyond marriage equality, Alabama still has a long way to go. In 2015, the Alabama House of Representatives cancelled a vote on a

bill that would have banned discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, voting, and financial transactions based on sexual orientation and gender identity.² This move echoes many across the South, where no state laws against LGBT discrimination exist.³

Montgomery, the state’s capital, however, offers protection against discrimination in public employment, but only on the basis of sexual orientation. The state as a whole does not protect LGBT people from discrimination in housing, employment, hate or bias crimes, public accommodations, or schools.⁴ Statewide anti-bullying laws and policies that protect transgender people’s equal access to healthcare are also absent.

When it comes to LGBT representation in government, Alabama has just one person on record. In 2006, Patricia Todd became the first openly gay elected official in the state of Alabama. She remains in office as a member of the Alabama House of Representatives today, winning re-election twice, as the only LGBT public official.

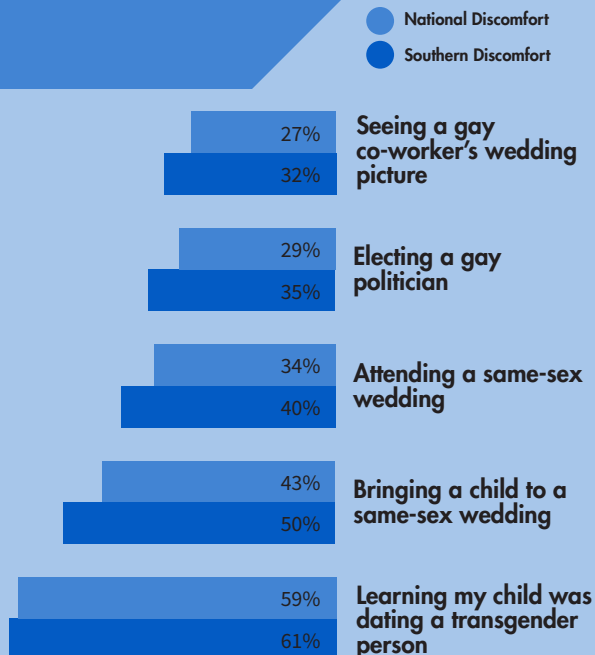
Alabama has numerous grassroots organizations working toward equality and acceptance, many of which are intentionally inclusive of LGBT Alabamians with diverse backgrounds and identities.

The pages of this guide only begin to tell the story of LGBT life in Alabama. Our hope is that it empowers and motivates media professionals to find and discover new stories, new angles to existing stories, and a whole new framework for reporting on LGBT individuals in the state.

Why the South? Why now?

In late 2014, GLAAD commissioned The Harris Poll to measure attitudes towards LGBT Americans. What we found is that while the public is increasingly embracing equal protections under the law, many are still uncomfortable with having LGBT people in their families and the communities where they live. Within these numbers, we find that Southerners feel significantly more discomfort about their LGBT families, friends, and neighbors than is found in other regions of the country. The following year, GLAAD and The Harris Poll found that while this gap is starting to slowly close, Southerners are more unconcerned or unaware of important issues facing the LGBT community than the general U.S. population. By amplifying the voices of LGBT Southerners, GLAAD is working to bring these pressing disparities to light in order to accelerate LGBT acceptance.

For more information, visit glaad.org/acceptance





Terms and Definitions

Sexual orientation – The scientifically accurate term for an individual’s enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual (straight) orientations. Avoid the offensive term “sexual preference,” which is used to suggest that being gay, lesbian, or bisexual is voluntary and therefore “curable.” People need not have had specific sexual experiences to know their own sexual orientation; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all.

LGBT / GLBT – Acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.” LGBT and/or GLBT are often used because they are more inclusive of the diversity of the community. Care should be taken to ensure that audiences are not confused by their use. Ensure that the acronym is spelled out on first usage.

Queer – Traditionally a pejorative term, *queer* has been appropriated by some LGBT people to describe themselves. However, it is not universally accepted even within the LGBT community and should be avoided unless describing someone who self-identifies that way or in a direct quote. When Q is seen at the end of “LGBT,” it typically means queer and/or questioning.

Homophobia – Fear of lesbians and gay men. *Intolerance* or *prejudice* is usually a more accurate description of antipathy toward LGBT people.

Marriage – Many states, including Alabama, had voted against recognizing the marriages of same-sex couples. Because a key section of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), passed by the federal government in 1996, was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2013, however, legally married couples became recognized by the federal government. Furthermore, in June 2015, the Supreme Court’s historic ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* determined that the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right for everyone to marry the person they love.

Bisexual (adj.) – Describes a person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to those of the same gender or to those of another gender. People may experience this attraction in differing ways and degrees over their lifetimes. Bisexual people need not have had specific sexual experiences to be bisexual; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual.

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 individual.

Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to change their bodies. Some undergo surgery as well, but not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon medical procedures.

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 an individual prefers.

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 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 *women*, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.

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 includes 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.”**

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.

Alabama's LGBT History

The timeline on these pages accounts for some of the important milestones in Alabama's LGBT history. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to provide a context in which LGBT people in the state find themselves living at this critical juncture in the movement for equality and acceptance.

1977

Alabama Forum is published

Alabama Forum begins to circulate as a tabloid for the gay and lesbian community with writers and contributors using pseudonyms. For 15 years, the Forum's editor is June Holloway. After an impressive 25-year run, the Forum ends circulation and publication when June falls ill.⁵ Its archives can be found at the Birmingham Library and the archive at the University of Alabama – Birmingham.⁶

1981

Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) opens in Birmingham

MCC is opened as the first LGBT-affirming congregation in Alabama. The MCC will be renamed as the Covenant Community Church of Alabama in 1986 and affiliate with the United Church of Christ in 2013.⁹ It remains a major hub for LGBT organizing.¹⁰

1985

Birmingham AIDS Outreach (BAO) launches

BAO begins saving and transforming lives as Alabama's first AIDS Service Organization. The organization provides support and education to people living with HIV and AIDS as a grassroots response to the widespread health issue. BAO continues to provide various resources, such as free HIV testing, support groups, prevention outreach, and programs for the LGBT community.¹²

1978

Central Alabama Pride's first parade

Central Alabama Pride annually hosts PrideFest, including the Pride Parade.⁷ It is the largest LGBT event of its kind in the state, now drawing more than 40,000 attendees each year.⁸



1983

SPECTRUM forms at the University of Alabama

SPECTRUM forms as a student organization for LGBT people at the University of Alabama. The student-run club works to provide advocacy, outreach, and social and educational events for students and the broader Tuscaloosa LGBT community.¹¹

1986

AIDS Alabama, Inc. forms

The nonprofit organization serves people with HIV and AIDS, and begins providing housing and supportive service to Alabamians living with HIV. AIDS Alabama will grow to be the state's largest HIV and AIDS service provider, helping to fund nine other AIDS Service Organizations in order to cover all 67 counties statewide. The group provides prevention education, as well as free and confidential testing and connection to care, education, services, and housing. AIDS Alabama also has resources for improving policies impacting people with, or at risk for, HIV and AIDS. AIDS Alabama will also run the state's only facility for people living with both HIV and severe mental illness.

1988

AIDS Action Coalition launches

The AIDS Action Coalition, now known as Thrive Alabama, begins its mission to support those living with HIV and AIDS. This organization operates to help prevent the spread of HIV and provides both healthcare and community support. In 1992, AIDS Action Coalition opens the Joe Davis Clinic, devoted to providing medical care for people who are HIV-positive throughout the 12 counties of Northern Alabama.¹³



1996

Governor bans recognition of marriage for same-sex couples

Governor Fob James signs an executive order banning the recognition of marriage for same-sex couples, even if the marriage was performed in another state or foreign country.¹⁵

2002

Lesbian mother is denied custody of her kids based on her sexual orientation

In the case *Ex Parte H.H.*, an anonymous lesbian mother tries to regain custody of her children from her former husband, whom she says is physically abusive. While she is deemed fit to take care of the children, the Alabama Supreme Court does not grant her custody simply because she is in a relationship with a woman. The Court rules that same-sex couples' relationships violate criminal and civil laws, and have been declared "immoral."¹⁷

Equality Alabama is founded

Equality Alabama forms when Gay and Lesbian Alliance of Alabama (GALAA) and Equality Begins at Home of Central Alabama merge. The nonprofit organization works towards equality for LGBT Alabamians through education and advocacy.¹⁸

1994

PFLAG Birmingham forms

This nonprofit chapter of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) works to reduce the stigma surrounding LGBT-identified people through education and monthly support groups for community members.¹⁴

1997

Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Pryor

The Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance at the University of South Alabama wins a federal court case, which rules that the school's denial of funding to LGBT student organizations is a violation of students' First Amendment rights.¹⁶

2003

Lawrence v. Texas

In a 6-3 ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court strikes down laws that criminalize consensual sexual activity between two people of the same sex. Similar laws in Alabama and 12 other states are overturned.





2005

ALGBTICAL forms

The Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling of Alabama forms to raise awareness of LGBT issues among members of the counseling profession by providing educational programs and resources to counselors serving the state's LGBT community.¹⁹

2007

Alabama Safe Schools Coalition is formed

The Alabama Safe Schools Coalition is founded to create a safe educational environment for LGBT students. In Alabama, there is no existing anti-discrimination law protecting individuals, including students, on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The Safe Schools Coalition aims to provide resources and education in order to combat bullying and harassment in schools.²³

2012

MASS becomes AIDS Alabama South

AIDS Alabama, Inc. acquires Mobile AIDS Support Services (MASS), now AIDS Alabama South, in order to continue services to more than 2,000 people living with HIV in Southwest Alabama. AIDS Alabama South is the only AIDS Service Organization (ASO) in a 12-county region providing essential social services, housing assistance, and quality HIV prevention education to people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS.



2006

Ban on marriage equality

Amendment 774, The Alabama Sanctity of Marriage Amendment, makes marriage for same-sex couples unconstitutional. The act is approved by 81% of statewide voters. It deems that any same-sex couple's union will have no legal effect in the state.²⁰

Patricia Todd elected

Patricia Todd makes history when she is elected to Alabama's House of Representatives. Todd is the first – and remains the only – openly gay elected official in Alabama's history.²¹

SHOUT premieres

SHOUT is Alabama's LGBT Film Festival, which showcases media works pertaining to LGBT issues. The festival showcases features, documentaries, and short films by new and established artists and offers attendees the opportunity to view topics of interest to the LGBT community, as well as to interact with filmmakers and documentary subjects in attendance.²²

2009

LGBT Resource Center in Huntsville is founded

Established as the GLBT Advocacy & Youth Services, now Free2Be is a public charity offering outreach and education through its Free2Be Safe Anti-violence Project. This program addresses intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and bullying with a specific lens to meet the unique needs of LGBT people.²⁴



2013

Living in Limbo is established

Living in Limbo, a Birmingham-based organization, supports projects in the arts and humanities that illustrate the need for LGBT equality.²⁵

Magic City Acceptance Center (MCAC) is founded

Birmingham AIDS Outreach expands its mission statement to include the LGBT population. With this change, MCAC, an affirming space for LGBT young adults ages 13-24, opens. In its first years, MCAC provides over 1,200 direct services, including free counseling, sexually transmitted infections (STI) testing and education, drop-in hours, art programs, and more.

2015

Searcy v. Strange and Strawser v. Strange lead to overturning of Alabama's marriage equality ban

On January 23, District Judge Callie V. Granade rules Alabama's ban on marriage for same-sex couples is unconstitutional. *Strawser v. Strange* ensures the ruling is applied to all counties. Marriage equality is in effect until March 3, when the Alabama Supreme Court halts probate judges from issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples.²⁷ Though the U.S. Supreme Court declares marriage equality the law of the land nationwide in June, there are still up to 15 counties in AL refusing to issue marriage licenses to any couples at the time of this writing.²⁸

Minister arrested for offering to marry a same-sex couple

Anne Susan Diprizio, a Christian minister from Autauga County, attempts to officiate the marriage of a same-sex couple. The probate judge had stopped allowing marriage ceremonies in the office, but Diprizio refuses to leave and is arrested.²⁹



2014

Alabama sodomy law struck down

A man is found not guilty of sexual assault against another man, but he is convicted of sodomy. Sodomy laws had already been abolished by the Supreme Court through *Lawrence v. Texas*, but the Alabama legal system had failed to update its codebooks. Following this trial, sodomy laws are officially removed from Alabama law.²⁶

2016

Magic City Wellness Center (MCWC) is founded

Birmingham AIDS Outreach launches the MCWC, providing primary medical care and services for LGBT people and their allies. Counseling services, massage therapy, and nutritional services are also available. This is the first LGBT Wellness Center in Alabama and one of the few in the Southeast.

Terms to Avoid

Offensive: “homosexual” (n. or adj.)

Preferred: “gay” (adj.); “gay man” or “lesbian” (n.); “gay person/people”

Please use *gay* or *lesbian* to describe people attracted to members of the same sex. Because of the clinical history of the word “homosexual,” it is aggressively used by anti-gay extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered – notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Please avoid using “homosexual” except in direct quotes. Please also avoid using “homosexual” as a style variation simply to avoid repeated use of the word “gay.” The Associated Press, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* restrict use of the term “homosexual.”

Offensive: “homosexual relations/relationship,” “homosexual couple,” “homosexual sex,” etc.

Preferred: “relationship,” “couple” (or, if necessary, “gay couple”), “sex,” etc.

Identifying a same-sex couple as “a homosexual couple,” characterizing their relationship as “a homosexual relationship,” or identifying their intimacy as “homosexual sex” is extremely offensive and should be avoided. These constructions are frequently used by anti-gay extremists to denigrate gay people, couples, and relationships.

As a rule, try to avoid labeling an activity, emotion or relationship gay, lesbian, or bisexual unless you would call the same activity, emotion or relationship “straight” if engaged in by someone of another orientation. In most cases, your readers, viewers or listeners will be able to discern people’s sexes and/or orientations through the names of the parties involved, your depictions of their relationships, and your use of pronouns.

Offensive: “sexual preference”

Preferred: “sexual orientation” or “orientation”

The term “sexual preference” is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured.” Sexual orientation is the accurate description of an individual’s enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, as well as straight men and women.

Offensive: “gay lifestyle” or “homosexual lifestyle”

Preferred: “gay lives,” “gay and lesbian lives”

There is no single lesbian, gay or bisexual lifestyle. Lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are diverse in the ways they lead their lives. The phrase “gay lifestyle” is used to denigrate lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals suggesting that their orientation is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured.”

Offensive: “admitted homosexual” or “avowed homosexual”

Preferred: “openly lesbian,” “openly gay,” “openly bisexual,” or simply “out”

Dated term used to describe those who self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in their personal, public, and/or professional lives. The words “admitted” or “avowed” suggest that being gay is somehow shameful or inherently secretive. You may also simply describe the person as being out, for example: “Ricky Martin is an out pop star from Puerto Rico.” Avoid the use of the word “homosexual” in any case.

Offensive: “gay agenda” or “homosexual agenda”

Preferred: accurate descriptions of the issues (e.g., “inclusion in existing nondiscrimination and hate crimes laws,” “ending the ban on transgender service members”)

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are motivated by the same hopes, concerns, and desires as other everyday Americans. They seek to be able to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love. Their commitment to equality is one they share with many allies and advocates who are not LGBT. Notions of a so-called “homosexual agenda” are rhetorical inventions of anti-gay extremists seeking to create a climate of fear by portraying the pursuit of equal opportunity for LGBT people as sinister.

Offensive: “special rights”

Preferred: “equal rights” or “equal protection”

Anti-gay extremists frequently characterize equal protection of the law for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people as “special rights” to incite opposition to such things as relationship recognition and inclusive nondiscrimination laws.

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.”

Defamatory Language

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

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 one’s biology does not “trump” one’s gender identity. Finally, people are born babies - they are not “born a man” or “born a woman.”

Defamatory: “fag,” “faggot,” “dyke,” “homo,” “sodomite,” and similar epithets

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 lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person.”

Defamatory: “deviant,” “disordered,” “dysfunctional,” “diseased,” “perverted,” “destructive” and similar descriptions

The notion that being gay, lesbian, or bisexual is a psychological disorder was discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Today, words such as “deviant,” “diseased,” and “disordered” often are used to portray LGBT people as less than human, mentally ill, or as a danger to society. Words such as these should be avoided in stories about the LGBT community. If they must be used, they should be quoted directly in a way that clearly reveals the bias of the person being quoted.

Defamatory: associating gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people with pedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality, bigamy, polygamy, adultery, and/or incest

Being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender is neither synonymous with, nor indicative of, any tendency toward pedophilia, child abuse, sexual abuse, bestiality, bigamy, polygamy, adultery, and/or incest. Such claims, innuendoes, and associations often are used to insinuate that LGBT people pose a threat to society, to families, and to children in particular. Such assertions and insinuations are defamatory and should be avoided, except in direct quotes that clearly reveal the bias of the person quoted.

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”

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

Best Practices in Media Coverage

First and foremost, is this person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity relevant to the story?

If it's not immediately relevant to the story or profile, there is no need to include it. If it is relevant, then be sure to use accurate and respectful terminology to discuss the LGBT-identified person.

Use a personal lens in your reporting

If a person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity is indeed relevant to the piece, ask for personal stories; both the joys and challenges of being LGBT in Alabama. Ask about relationships and networks of support.

Include voices of people who identify as LGBT

Often, news coverage silences the community by covering anti-LGBT legislation and social groups without including the voices of those who are most affected. Hearing from LGBT-identified people - not just allies or advocates - is critically important. Positive change is made when marginalized people and groups are humanized in the press.

Personal details about someone's life may be more important than labels

If sexual orientation and/or gender identity is indeed relevant to the piece, be sure to use accurate and respectful terminology to discuss the subject. You do not have to necessarily apply an LGBT label to them, but rather provide details that give a fuller picture of the subject's life. For example, "When Tonya Johnson isn't running the new tech startup, she's at home helping her wife raise their two children."

Include LGBT angles in stories that may not immediately appear to have an LGBT focus

Stories like immigration, health care, housing, and even the economy can have LGBT angles. One of the questions to ask is, "What impact does this have on someone who is LGBT?" Finding subjects who can speak to this angle is important.

Explore the intersection of LGBT issues with other identities

LGBT people do not live in a vacuum, but rather approach the world with other identities, including race, gender, and class. To isolate out an LGBT identity from the rest of the person is to make them one-dimensional. Ask questions that can talk about the challenges and privileges that come with various aspects of one's identity.



Reach out to state and local organizations

The more localized your sources, the better able you are to tell an authentic story. State and local organizations can more readily tell you what is at hand in their communities. A list of resources are listed at the end of this guide.

Challenge anti-LGBT activists with accurate information about the LGBT community

Often, pundits will make claims about the LGBT community that are not based on fact as a way to score political points. Do not let fallacies stand. Rather, note the inaccuracies when they are stated and present clear and factual information in their stead. If you want more information on anti-LGBT activists, visit glaad.org/cap. The **GLAAD Commentator Accountability Project (CAP)** aims to put critical information about frequent anti-LGBT interviewees into the hands of newsrooms, editors, hosts and reporters.



Pitfalls to Avoid

Avoid omitting coverage of Alabama’s anti-LGBT laws

Coverage of Alabama and its political progress should make note of its anti-LGBT laws whenever possible. Omitting information about this community may give the impression that your news outlet is overlooking the safety of LGBT Alabamians or condones the state’s anti-LGBT laws.

Avoid minimizing the advancements of the LGBT community in Alabama

While Alabama is not the archetype for LGBT acceptance in the United States, do not ignore the progress and progressive ideas that emerge from Alabama. Highlighting advancements sends hope to LGBT individuals in the state and at large.

Avoid speaking only to anti-LGBT activists about LGBT people

It is hard to hate somebody when you know their story. When the media acts as an unbiased conduit of people’s authentic stories, cultural acceptance is accelerated.

Avoid speaking only to anti-LGBT activists about LGBT people

It is hard to hate somebody when you know their story. When the media acts as a non-partisan conduit of people’s stories, cultural acceptance becomes much more attainable.

Avoid pitting people of faith against LGBT people

Being a person of faith and an LGBT person are not mutually exclusive. Do not presume or imply people who identify as LGBT are not also people of faith.

Avoid the use of outdated or pejorative terminology See “Terms to Avoid.”

Story Ideas



Marriage equality is ahead of employment protections

While marriage equality may be the law of the land throughout the United States, it is still legal to fire LGBT workers in Alabama, just for being who they are. In Alabama, there are no statewide protections against employee discrimination based on either sexual orientation or gender identity. The city of Montgomery has protections against public employee discrimination based only on sexual orientation.



Explore in the state of nondiscrimination protections in Alabama

In 2015, Alabama legislature cancelled a vote on a bill that would have banned discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in areas such as employment, housing, voting, public accommodations, and financial transactions. As a result, LGBT Alabamians remain without basic protections.



Explore the experiences of LGBT individuals in Alabama who are living with HIV

Southern States account for 49% of HIV diagnoses nationwide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2010, Alabama ranked as the state with the 10th highest HIV incidence in the nation with nine counties exceeding the national average of HIV and AIDS prevalence. Tell the stories of HIV-positive LGBT people in a way that is humanizing and raises awareness about the discrimination and stigma that they face. Explore the resources available throughout the state.



Explore how faith communities and the LGBT community intersect

Though the media regularly portrays them in opposition, faith communities and the LGBT community often overlap in positive and interesting ways. Speak with LGBT people about their faith journeys, allies of faith about their journeys to LGBT acceptance, and faith leaders who minister to the LGBT community.



Explore the experiences of LGBT individuals living on military bases in Alabama

The military sometimes remains a difficult place for LGBT people to live their authentic lives. Ask about both the triumphs and the challenges of serving in the military as an openly LGBT individual.



Focus on the advocacy of communities of color in Alabama

Much of the coverage and storytelling around the LGBT community in Alabama has centered on the experiences of gay white men. As a result, the experiences and advocacy of communities of color are often underreported. Be sure to recognize the achievements and experiences of LGBT people of color. For example, the LGBT African-American community has played a very strong role in the history of Alabama's major cities and the state at large.



Focus on the activism of the transgender community in Alabama

The transgender community in the U.S. South is prolific in its advocacy, and it is important to highlight both the accomplishments they have brought about and the struggles they still face.



Highlight the stories of groups addressing multifaceted historical challenges in Alabama

Alabama's history is marked by disparities in acceptance of LGBT people in various marginalized communities. It is important to highlight the work of people and organizations working to mend these historical inequalities within Alabama's LGBT community.



Explore the experiences of youth affected by anti-LGBT sentiment

Anti-LGBT sentiments in families and communities at large can result in youth living out-of-home. Work with LGBT youth organizations to profile youth affected by these challenges and the lives they construct in response. Include the influence of anti-LGBT religious practices and how they can lead to LGBT homelessness.



Explore the stories of LGBT people seeking political office in Alabama

In 2006, Patricia Todd became Alabama's first LGBT public official when she was elected to the state's House of Representatives. Today, Todd remains the only elected LGBT official, so media coverage may help accelerate acceptance elsewhere in Alabama politics.



Focus on LGBT happenings outside of metropolitan hubs

LGBT people and their allies live complex lives with joys and challenges throughout the entire state of Alabama, and their experiences may be unique from those living in major cities.



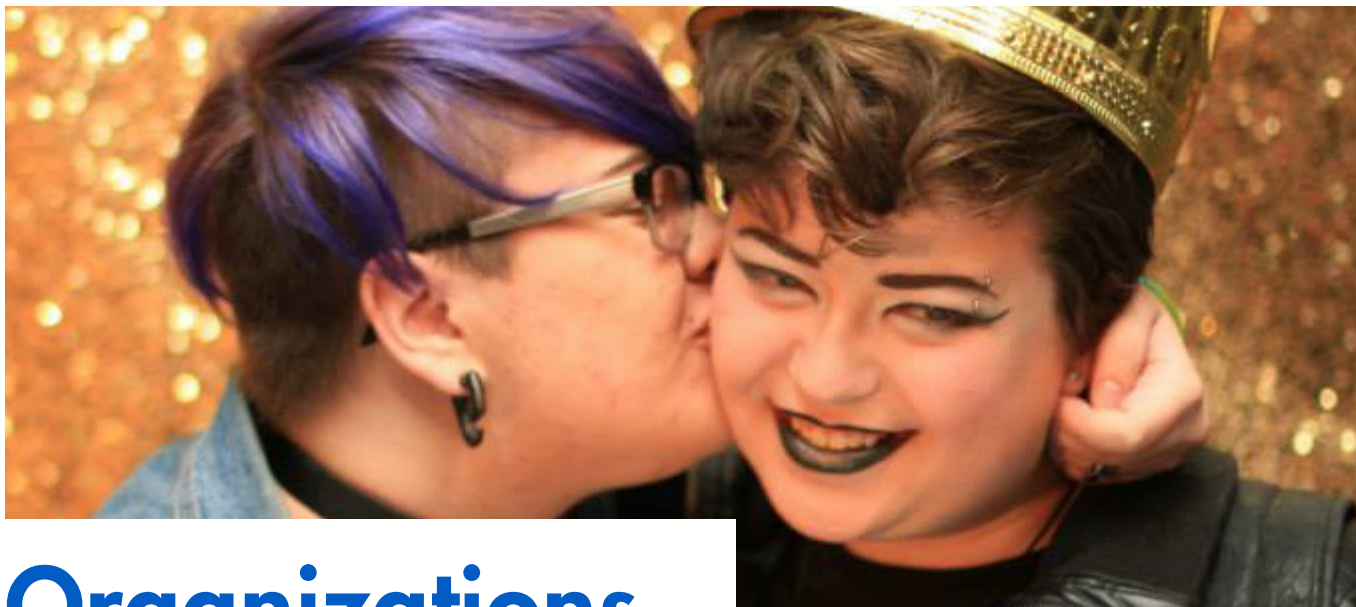
Explore Alabama LGBT sports leagues and programs

Several LGBT sports leagues and programs, including Freedom Bowling in Birmingham, New South Softball League, and A Different Stroke dragon boat racing team provide positive and fun environments which welcome LGBT members.



Highlight prominent LGBT figures with Alabama roots

Tim Cook, Laverne Cox, and other LGBT leaders hail from the state of Alabama. Feature their experiences being LGBT in the state.



Organizations

AIDS Alabama South

P.O. Box 40296
Mobile, AL 36640
(251) 471-5277
Confidential helpline: 1 (800) 592-2437
aidsalabamasouth.org

Alabama Safe Schools Coalition

alabamasafeschools.org

ALGIBICAL: The Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling of Alabama

algbtical@gmail.com
algbtical.org

Birmingham AIDS Outreach

205 32nd Street South
Birmingham, AL 35233
birminghamaidsoutreach.org

Central Alabama Pride

205 32nd Street South
Birmingham, AL 35233
centralalabamapride.org

Community Foundation of Birmingham's LGBTQ Fund

2100 First Avenue North, Suite 700
Birmingham, AL 35203
(205) 327-3800
cfbham.org/lgbtqfund

Equality Alabama

202 Government Street Suite 229
Mobile, AL 36602
facebook.com/equalityalabama/

Magic City Acceptance Project

205 32nd Street South
Birmingham, AL 35233

Magic City Wellness Center

2500 4th Avenue South
Birmingham, Alabama
magiccityacceptancecenter.org

PFLAG Huntsville

P.O. Box 485
Meridianville, AL 35759-0485
pflag.huntsville@gmail.com
(256) 415-5670

PFLAG Mobile

957 Church Street
Mobile, AL 36604-3048
scleveland@cabanissmobile.com
(251) 438-9381

PFLAG Montgomery

8790 Vaughn Rd
Montgomery, AL 36117-8848
pflagmontgomery@gmail.com
(334) 546-0390
(334) 324-2084

GLAAD's Assistance

For more information, help, and guidance, please contact GLAAD. We can put you in contact with organizations and spokespeople, and provide resources, facts, and ideas to tell the stories of LGBT people living in the U.S. South.



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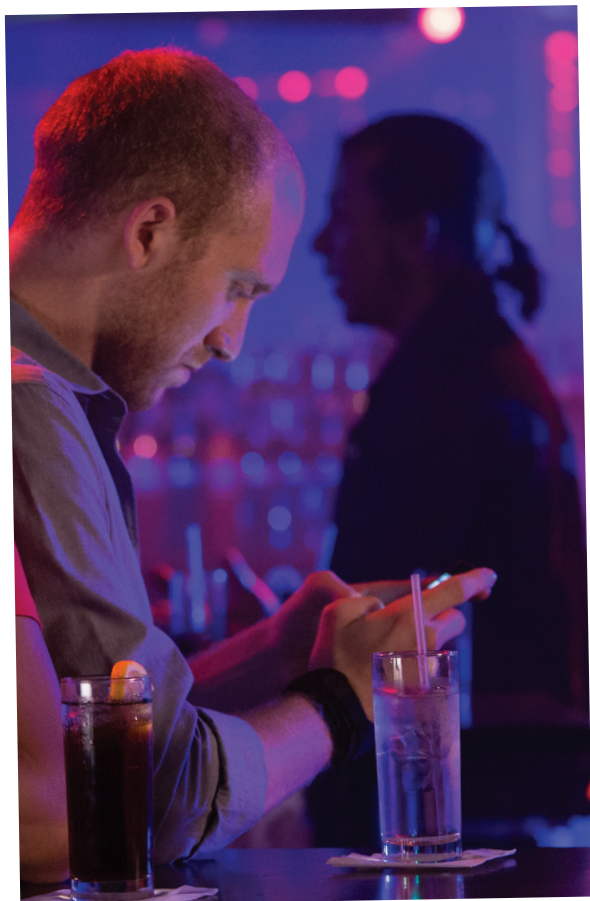
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Photo Credits

Birmingham AIDS Outreach
Central Alabama Pride
Magic City Acceptance Center

Talk

can be the perfect foreplay.



Protect yourself and your partner. Talk about **testing**, your **status**, **condoms**, and new options like **medicines** that prevent and treat HIV. Get the facts and tips on how to start the conversation at [cdc.gov/ActAgainstAIDS/StartTalking](https://www.cdc.gov/ActAgainstAIDS/StartTalking).

Start Talking. Stop HIV.



Follow us online at:  [facebook.com/StartTalkingHIV](https://www.facebook.com/StartTalkingHIV)

 [@TalkHIV](https://twitter.com/TalkHIV)



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.

glaad.org
facebook.com/glaad
[@glaad](https://twitter.com/glaad)



Americans' attitudes and behavior on LGBT equality are not just influenced by what they see and hear, but who they know. GLAAD's Southern Stories initiative tells the stories of LGBT people and their allies in the South to create a cultural shift towards LGBT acceptance and understanding in the region.

glaad.org/southernstories
[#SouthernStories](https://twitter.com/SouthernStories)