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FAQ FOR REPORTERS WRITING ABOUT ANTI-TRANS VIOLENCE

THERE IS AN EPIDEMIC OF ANTI-TRANS VIOLENCE, AND NEWS REPORTS OFTEN MISIDENTIFY VICTIMS OR MISS CRUCIAL CONTEXT.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, a trans woman is four times as likely as a cisgender woman to be murdered. At least 37 transgender or gender nonconforming people have been fatally shot or killed by other violent means so far in 2020, making it the deadliest year on record. Violence against trans people often goes unreported or is misreported, so it is impossible to know the full extent of the crisis. The majority of victims are trans people of color, particularly Black trans women.

Media outlets often misgender or deadname slain trans people in reporting, which goes against journalistic best practices. Misidentifying victims disrespects their identity, causes pain to an already grieving trans community, and reinforces the dangerous stigmatization of trans people at the center of anti-trans violence. A Media Matters review of written reporting in 2020 found that media outlets misgendered or deadnamed about two out of three victims of anti-trans violence; at least 139 articles misidentified victims, and the vast majority of these stories were not updated.

Trans people face structural barriers to updating their identity documents to accurately reflect their name and gender. Rather than parroting police reports that misidentify trans people by referring to them by their legal name and gender, reporters covering anti-trans violence should be aware of law enforcement's record of mistreating the trans community — such as disproportionately profiling, arresting, and being physically violent with trans women of color — and seek more accurate sources.



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How can reporters find the correct identifying information for a trans victim?

Reporters should always confirm a trans person's identity through self-identification on social media or elsewhere, the person's loved ones, and/or the local trans community. In order to depict victims accurately, reporters should refer to a trans person solely by the name and pronouns they most recently used in life, regardless of their legal name, gender marker on identification documents, or details listed in police reports.

How should reporters identify victims if there are conflicting reports on the person's identity?

There may not always be one clear way for a reporter to discover how a victim self-identified, and there may be discrepancies between how one's identity is depicted in various settings. Reporters should strive to get as close to self-identification as possible and approach the word of official authorities such as police reports with the same degree of skepticism as they would other sources.

If police reports identify a victim as transgender but appear to present conflicting information on their identity, outlets should consider withholding a victim's name in the interest of privacy until their correct name can be ascertained.

According to the Trans Journalists Association, "police often deadname, misgender, and provide inaccurate information about trans victims. Not only is the information often inaccurate, but reporting this inaccurate information will erode trust between journalists and trans communities."

What if someone who knew the victim does not correctly acknowledge their gender identity and refers to them with an incorrect name or pronoun?

Trans people often face family rejection, domestic violence, and workplace discrimination when coming out and thus may not be out to their family or be able to live openly in other environments such as their workplace. This may result in sources such as family or coworkers misgendering or deadnaming victims.

As the Trans Journalists Association's style guide notes:

A friend, family member, or the police may misgender or deadname your source. Do not use that quote in your story without a correction. Use brackets to replace the incorrect information with the correct information for text stories. For video or audio stories, reporters should find another clip or write around the deadnaming or misgendering. If this is not possible, consider not using this person as a source. You may also let the listener/viewer know the person is being misgendered/deadnamed and bleep those words out, as you would with a curse word or protected personal information.

What if a person identified themselves with more than one name and gender?

Many trans people identify as genderfluid, which means that their gender fluctuates or is not fixed. They may use a range of pronouns, including identifying by both "he" and "she" or by using they/them pronouns. If reporters are able to confirm a person had a fluid gender identity, they should note this in reporting, use pronouns as consistent with their self-identification as possible, and work to capture the nuances of the person's gender.



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What should reporters include in their stories other than the victim's trans identity?

Reporters should put the victim at the center of a story and describe their achievements, passions, and aspirations. Knowing how a person authentically lived is vital in telling the full story of their life and death. Media outlets should also provide background on the epidemic of anti-trans violence and contextualize the discriminatory societal factors that cause trans people to be disproportionately vulnerable to violence, such as heightened barriers to accessing health care, stable housing, and jobs.

How should reporters write about anti-trans violence if there are ascribed motives for the killing such as robbery or domestic violence?

Though anti-trans violence is often examined through the lens of hate crimes, this can be a narrow view that ignores the fact that trans people are disproportionately exposed to violence because of high rates of poverty, homelessness, and social isolation fostered by stigma and prejudice. Reporters are encouraged to provide this context in incidents where the motive of perpetrators may be unclear or driven by factors other than or in addition to the victim's identity.

How should media outlets correct a story to include a person's correct name and gender or to remove inaccurate references to a person's identity?

Reporters should promptly update and correct stories that misidentify victims of anti-trans violence. Media outlets should remove and update all incorrect references to a person's identity and include an update or editor's note explaining what changes have been made.

How can reporters build relationships with their local trans community?

In order to produce reporting on anti-trans violence that is respectful and accurate, reporters — particularly crime reporters — should establish relationships with their local trans community before there is a crisis rather than afterwards. Reporters can connect with their local [LGBTQ community center](#), [health clinic](#), [campus pride center](#), [PFLAG chapter](#), or [regional advocacy organization](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Trans Journalists Association: [Style Guide](#)
- GLAAD: [Doubly Victimized: Reporting on Transgender Victims of Crime](#) and accompanying [More Than A Number](#) report
- Human Rights Campaign Foundation: [Dismantling a Culture of Violence](#) and [A Brief Guide to Getting Transgender Coverage Right](#)
- National Center for Transgender Equality: [Tips for Journalists](#)