



Join the discussion with a panel of media representatives

Bring along a media article that you love or hate!

Weeks 6.30-9.30pm, 13th May
Serenity Cafe, 8 Jackson's Entry, The Tunn
111 Hollywood Road, E1 6RP

Booking essential via: <http://bit.ly/1Jmvo0z>
Contact Jules for more info: jules@lgbthealth.org.uk



The Media: Friend or Foe?

Community Discussion Event Report
Thursday 13th May, 2015



It could be argued that in Britain, there is more media coverage of LGBT issues than ever before. In our discussion event this quarter, we asked the question, does an increase in media coverage mean that LGBT people are being represented more positively? With the help of a media savvy panel, we explored the role the media play in progressing LGBT equality and challenging the hearts and minds of those who consume it. Our community discussion events continue to provide a safe and supportive space for LGBT people to have their say on the issues that affect them, hear from others and share experiences.

To help with the discussion, participants were invited to bring along examples of media coverage that they felt, had a positive or negative impact on LGBT people. Several of the participants brought ideas and examples which really helped to shape the discussion and focus our attention on the issues that mattered most to those who came along.

The Panel

Steve O'Brien - RBS Rainbow Network

The RBS Rainbow Network is one of the largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender networks in the banking sector and was established by employees for employees in order to provide a worldwide support forum and social network within the RBS group. Steve's role within the network is to manage communications, with a particular focus on using Twitter, Facebook and other social media to reach the network's members.



Katherine O'Donnell – Night Editor of the Times Scotland

Senior Times journalist since 2003, Kathy has been “instrumental in promoting positive coverage of transgender issues in various organisations under the auspices of News International– the knock-on effects of which are incalculable.” – Ian Herbert, IoS Pink List 2011



John Hein – Editor of ScotsGay

ScotsGay was set up in December 1994 as a bi-monthly magazine for the lesbian, gay and bisexual community in Scotland. John has been Editor since the first issue.



Setting the scene: Video Presentation

Events Team volunteer Gaia Croston, collated an impressive montage of media clips, to screen at the event to introduce themes and stimulate discussion. The footage included award ceremony speeches, adverts, interviews, Twitter headlines and much more.

The Discussion highlights

The video presentation introduced a number of topics that sparked discussion from both the panel and attendees. Here is a summary of the topics discussed in the first half of the event:

- Katherine O'Donnell spoke about the positivity and diversity of the coverage in the clips and reflected on her own belief that though there is further to go, **modern media is more positive than ever**, in its representation of LGBT content.
- The panel helped to established early on in discussion, that the **media is not a united entity**, but rather it is many separate institutions and bodies operating by their own ethos and structures.
- As a group we discussed **media coverage of AIDS** during the 1980s and 90s. It was argued that historical coverage of AIDS and HIV were intrinsically embedded with a **homophobic agenda**.
- Steve O'Brien led a discussion on social media; liberation, the permanence of comments, **bullying, hate crime** and the **positive impact of social media** and how Facebook records every item posted (making it possible to take legal action against hate crime perpetrators).
- John Hein raised the issue of the **cost of print media still creating a barrier** for consumers, whilst it was pointed out that for some, there are barriers accessing online media e.g. the cost of internet connection, access to the internet in rural locations etc...
- Katherine O'Donnell raised the issue of **gender inequality** within institutional print media. She shared her experience of Times editorial meetings in London, where 20-25 staff met to talk through the schedule and stories and shape the paper. She then explained that she was often the only woman present at those meetings.
- A discussion around the **lack of positive bisexual representation** in current media, was a theme reflected in volunteer Gaia's experience of seeking material for the video presentation. *"It was much harder to find clips online, of bisexual role models"*, she explained.
- A focus on **sport** encouraged a discussion around **'the right time for athletes to come out'**. There were varying perspectives in response to this, raising issues around success, career opportunities and the barriers sports people face in being open about their identity.

"We are all publishers"

- Katherine O'Donnell

"Newspaper institutions are as backwards and as forwards as the rest of society"

- Katherine O'Donnell

- **Trans representation** was discussed in relation to many themes throughout the discussion, with the panel echoing attendees' feelings that there is more positive coverage than ever. As conversation developed there was also recognition that there is still a damaging presence of sensationalism, that draws focus away from human lives and inappropriately objectifies and sexualises trans people.



Small group discussion: 'friend or foe?'

In the second half of the event we broke into two groups, to conduct smaller group discussions. It provided people the opportunity with a more intimate setting to discuss the articles and media examples that they had brought to the event. Some of the examples people shared, denoted the positive impact that media coverage had had on them. Some of these include:

- the presence of equality campaigns on social media
- more trans characters in film and television
- book and television series such as 'Tales of the City' (Armistead Maupin)
- LGBT documentaries reaching the mainstream
- public figures using the media to come out and be open about their sexuality
- LGBT people in a position of political power getting positive coverage in the press

Other examples shone a light on the more damaging impact that various media can have on LGBT people. It was considered in one group, that some of the examples reflect wider issues of sexism, ableism and a fixation with the binary. Examples include:



- magazines and newspapers only showing pictures of trans people whose bodies represent a 'perfect' image of a man or a woman; zero size waists and large breasts or muscular toned torsos.
- right-wing media from the USA publishing homophobic articles (which are available to view all over the world)
- the erasure of bisexual identities through the media perpetuating mythologies e.g. Bisexual people are straight people who are experiencing a phase or they're gay people who haven't come out yet.

"Excellent thought-provoking discussion"

- attendee of Media: Friend or Foe?