



LookOut

Fair coverage of lesbian, gay
and bisexual people in Wales



LookOut

Stonewall Cymru's LookOut Media Project champions fair coverage of lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in the media in Wales. From Wales Today to the Western Mail, Post Prynhawn to Pobol y Cwm we work with journalists and researchers across Wales to try and ensure that portrayal of gay life represents twenty-first century Wales.

Funded for three years by Comic Relief, we have made significant progress in the way lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) issues are now reported, contributing to a number of high profile television and radio programmes, magazine and newspaper articles in Welsh and English.

Liz Morgan
Director



This report highlights key findings and successes from the LookOut project and suggests recommendations that will ensure lesbian and gay people continue to be realistically portrayed in Wales' television, radio and print output.

To download this report and access further information about the project and online resources for journalists, researchers and lesbian, gay and bisexual audiences visit:

www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/lookout

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Language 'You're so gay'

The media is a powerful tool. Television, radio, newspapers and magazines have the capacity to educate, inform and challenge individuals. But they can also be damaging to lesbian, gay and bisexual people by perpetuating homophobic attitudes. The casual use of homophobic language in the media is a growing concern. 'Gay' is frequently used by media personalities to mean something, or someone, is 'rubbish' or 'lame'. The BBC's Chris Moyles, Jeremy Clarkson and Patrick Kielty have all been 'named and shamed' by Stonewall Cymru supporters for their use of homophobic jibes on air. Even Doctor Who companion 'Rose Tyler' described the Doctor as being "so gay" after he complained about being slapped across the face.

When high-profile celebrities or fictional characters use 'gay' as a term of abuse it sends a clear message to their audience, many of them impressionable young people, that being gay is something to be ashamed of or a 'bit of a joke'.

There is a strong link between the casual use of homophobic language on certain radio and TV programmes and the widespread

use of the same terms to bully children in schools across Britain. The media can play a major part in transforming the lives of young lesbian and gay pupils who are too scared to go to school for fear of verbal or physical attacks.

Stonewall's The School Report, a survey of more than 1100 young people published June 2007, shows that homophobic language is endemic in schools. 98% of gay pupils hear derogatory phrases such as "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" at school. Seven out of ten say the bullying affects their school work. Even if gay pupils are not directly experiencing bullying; they are learning in an environment where homophobic language is commonplace.

"To ignore this problem is to collude with it. The blind eye to casual name-calling, looking the other way because it is the easy option, is simply intolerable."

Kevin Brennan MP, Children's Minister, speaking at Stonewall's Education for All Conference, 2007

To find out how Stonewall Cymru is tackling homophobic bullying visit our Education for All website: www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/educationforallcymru



Stereotyping and negative statements

One article that drew more complaints than any other during the three years of the project was Lowri 'Celebrity Fit Club' Turner's musings on gay men in politics. In her weekly Western Mail column Ms Turner claimed gay men are not fit to govern the country because their lifestyles are "too divorced from the norm." Because the biggest headache of her gay friends was deciding between the black and the cream sofa so, said Lowri Turner, "gay men are ill-suited to representing the interests of the population in general."

Needless to say LookOut was inundated with letters of complaints from lesbian and gay people across Wales who were offended at such a blatantly stereotypical view of gay men and bisexuals. As one supporter pointed out:

"Ms Turner seems to live in a parallel Wales, where all heterosexual men and women are decisive and strong, yet empathetic and caring. In her world, all homosexuals are clearly blithering ditherers who can't be trusted. How comforting it must be to live in so simple a mind!"

Articles about public sex locations, or 'cruising' also drew heavy criticism from our supporters. Often, these articles imply that gay men are sexually promiscuous and predatory, ignoring the fact that men who cruise for sex may identify as heterosexual. Such articles make unfair generalisations about the morality of gay and bisexual men and, because local cruising grounds were often listed, they could possibly facilitate incitement to hate crime against the men.

The media plays a huge part in influencing public opinion towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It's all too easy to dismiss clichéd stereotypes as inoffensive, harmless fun, but stereotypes, when they are the only images portrayed, are harmful and can encourage victimisation of lesbian and gay people.

Research commissioned by Stonewall Cymru (Counted Out, 2003) found that a large proportion of lesbian and gay people feel they have been victims of discrimination and mistreatment because of the way they have been portrayed in the media. The most common forms of discrimination, experienced between 65-69% of respondents,

included "being offended by public statements about the morality of homosexuals" and "being offended by articles or editorials in the print media". LookOut was set up as a direct result of these findings.

Despite LookOut's best efforts to build relationships with the media in Wales and a significant increase in balanced reporting of LGB lives, very negative opinions of print and broadcast media persist amongst LGB people in Wales. Results from Stonewall Cymru's third survey of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Wales (Counted In, 2007) revealed that:

- ★ 60% of lesbian, gay and bisexual people were offended by portrayals of gay people on TV
- ★ 63% offended by articles in print media, and
- ★ 59% by public statements about LGB people
- ★ 65% were offended by the lack of positive portrayals of LGB people across all media.

The effect is to make 49% of those questioned anxious about homophobic victimisation due to media portrayals.

LookOut responds to many incidences of offensive stereotypes or public statements on the morality of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. We ask to meet with editors or programme-makers and send our latest research reports for reference. And we always encourage lesbian and gay people to challenge journalists and programme-makers if they are offended by how they have been portrayed.

After all, they are the ones tuning in to the radio or television, or spending their hard-earned money on print publications.

Visibility of gay characters on television

Lesbian, gay and bisexual characters are visible on many of BBC Wales and S4C's leading programmes. Most notable is the charismatic Captain Jack character, played by out actor John Barrowman, in Doctor Who and Torchwood. Captain Jack flirts with both the Doctor and his female companion in a teatime programme aimed at family audiences, yet he remains a hugely popular character whose sexuality is almost incidental to the programme.

Welsh language soap opera Pobol y Cwm has featured lesbian and bisexual characters, most recently 'Brit' and 'Gwyneth' in major storylines, and these characters continue to have ongoing storylines that have little to do with their sexuality. S4C drama Caerdydd features prominent gay storylines and BBC One Wales' drama series Belonging also features prominent gay characters including, in its 2007 series, a developing storyline between a middle aged out lesbian and a divorced woman.

Yet findings from Stonewall's 2006 Tuned Out report, which researched the portrayals of lesbian and gay people during 168 minutes of prime time programming on BBC One and BBC Two, indicated that gay licence fee payers received poor value for money. Gay lives were realistically portrayed for just six minutes and out of 168 minutes of programming there was only 38 minutes of gay references, positive or negative. Lesbians, it was noted, "hardly exist on the BBC." (Tuned Out, 2006).

LookOut's experience of BBC Wales programming is slightly different from BBC One and BBC Two. Lesbian, gay and bisexual characters are represented in some English and Welsh language programmes. We have worked closely with current affairs and drama departments to ensure they have access to accurate information and real life experiences of LGB people to ensure gay life in Wales is realistically portrayed.

However, in spite of some of the positive work that is happening in Wales the BBC's reputation can still be undermined by homophobic jibes made by network stars such as Chris Moyles and Jeremy Clarkson.





Engaging with audiences

A crucial part of LookOut's work has been starting to empower lesbian, gay and bisexual people to feel able to participate in media debates. This has been particularly important as we are frequently asked by journalists to provide case studies for news reports or documentaries.

We worked with Quadrant Media & Communications Ltd to devise a media training programme that covered successful media interview techniques and hands-on experience doing live and pre-recorded TV and radio interview as well as preparation for print and telephone interviews.

Over 30 LGB people, representing LGB and non-LGB groups or speaking from personal experience, received this comprehensive training.

We are committed to representing the diversity within the LGB community and have trained lesbians, bisexuals, gay men younger and older people, people of faith and disabled people, many of whom have given interviews to local and national media.

For LookOut to fully engage with audiences across Wales, we needed to be proactive with our use of new media to reach people who do not access traditional media. The internet is a popular way of accessing information, especially among young people, and consultations with LGB and non-LGB groups have suggested a need for a website with Wales-specific LGB information. We also recognised that journalists require immediate access to accurate information on a broad range on LGB issues specifically for Wales.

With that in mind, we developed a clear, easy-to-use bilingual website which provides the latest news, information and research on a broad range of LGB issues specifically for Wales. The Stonewall Cymru website was launched in September 2005 and continues to receive over 2000 hits every month.

Working in partnership with Canllaw Online, who develop and support information services for young people, we ran a series of webchats for young people to chat with each other and with professionals and share experiences about homophobic bullying and personal safety.

Young people were able to talk to representatives from organisations such as ChildLine, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, LGBT Helpline Cymru and the South Wales Minority Support Unit and ask for further advice and support.

Webchats are an excellent way of engaging with young people in a way that is relevant to them. Feedback has been very positive and has encouraged us to continue using webchats to reach new audiences.

We are currently exploring options to use podcasts and vodcasts, which will allow people to download audio and video content onto their mobile phones, MP3 players and laptops. Podcasting is popular among younger people so we will initially focus on making programmes on homophobic bullying in schools/colleges and the workplace and then develop pod and vodcasts to address other campaigns, e.g. hate crime, healthcare and LGB representation in the media. Producing our own audio/video content will allow us the opportunity to deliver vital information in new and exciting ways.

Recommendations

Representation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people has improved since LookOut began monitoring the media in Wales. However, we recognise that more work needs to be done to ensure LGBT issues are accurately portrayed in both Welsh and English media.

We have developed a number of recommendations to encourage fair representation of gay people in Wales' media.

LookOut recommends that journalists and programme makers:

- ★ take urgent steps to address casual homophobic jibes in their output
- ★ make use of LookOut's online glossary of equality language which lists offensive language and suggests alternative terminology
www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/language
- ★ ensure coverage of lesbian, gay and bisexual issues are free from sensationalism and understand the effects of perpetuating stereotypes

- ★ consult with Stonewall Cymru and local LGBT community groups to ensure the portrayal of LGBT people is realistically representative of a twenty first century Wales

- ★ ensure that lesbian, gay and bisexual characters are portrayed realistically and accurately.

LookOut can also help journalists find 'real people' to talk about their personal experiences on a range of LGBT issues. If you would like to work with us please contact:
cymru@stonewallcymru.org.uk
or telephone 029 2023 7744.

www.stonewallcymru.org.uk

Further information

LookOut Media Project
www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/lookout
www.stonewallcymru.org.uk/gwylwchallan

Tuned Out: The BBC's portrayal of lesbian and gay people
www.stonewall.org.uk/tunedout

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