

Leveraging Mainstream Media for Advocacy

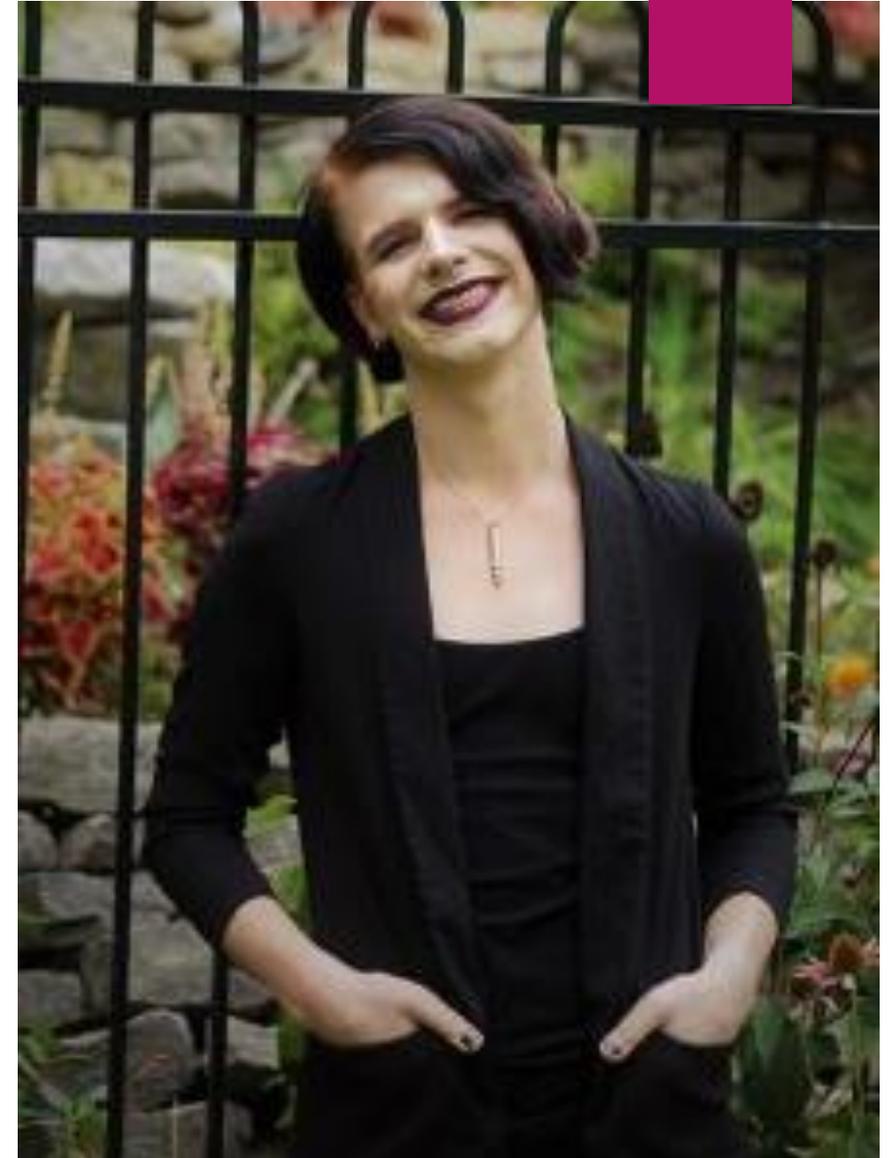
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Land Acknowledgement

Introducing Myself!

- ▶ **Fae Johnstone (They/she)**
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 - ▶ Trans and LGBTQ2+ Educator, Writer and Organizer
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House-Keeping

Discussion-Based
and Interactive

Safer and Braver
Space

Acknowledgements

I am by no means a media expert.

While I have a fair amount of experience writing for mainstream media (for a trans person...) I have never worked on the inside of a newsroom.

I have, however, successfully written for a number of outlets, 2SLGBTQ+-specific and not. I have also worked alongside a number of brilliant media folks who have taught me most of what I know.

I have also done quite a lot of work trying to get media interested in events I have put on, and trying to push more progressive narratives into a traditionally conservative space.

Overview

- ▶ Why should we use *Mainstream Media*?
- ▶ Advantages and Drawbacks of *Mainstream Media*
- ▶ How to Get *Mainstream Media* Interested
- ▶ The Practical Pieces:
 - ▶ Prepping for a media interview
 - ▶ Writing an Op-Ed
 - ▶ Drafting a Media Advisory



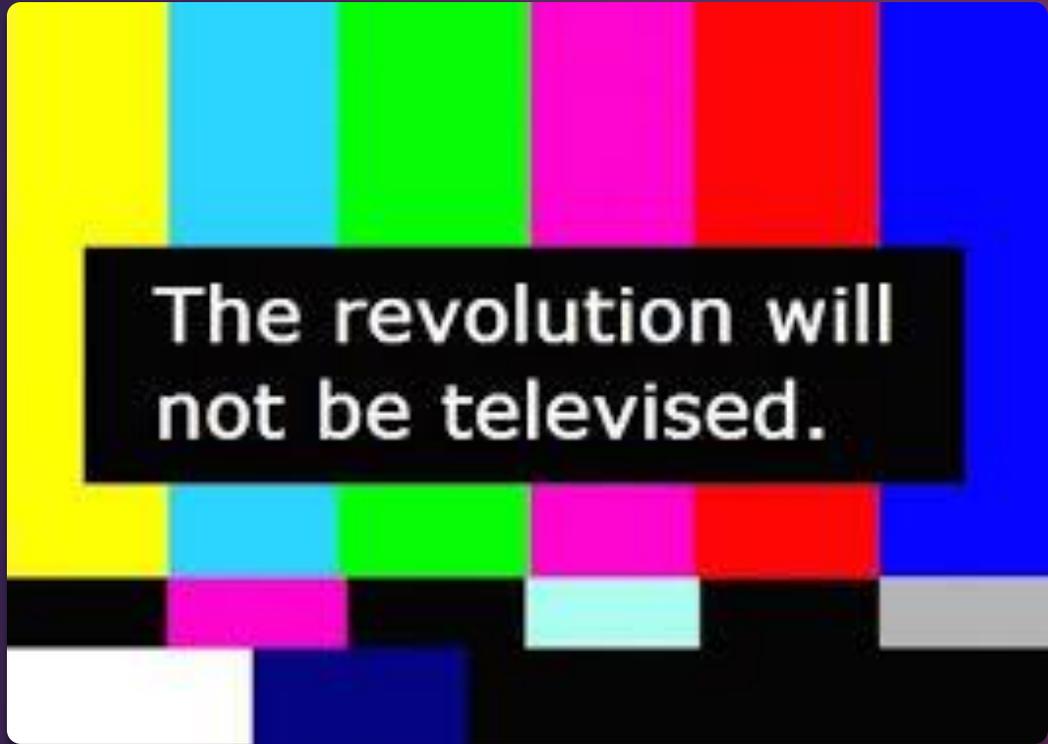
Why should
we use
mainstream
media?

Why I think connecting with mainstream media matters

1. Most people get their news from traditional media, either intentionally or not. From listening to the radio, to reading their local newspaper, to tuning into CBC or CTV, most people are getting their information from mainstream media.
2. Mainstream media is conservative, or centrist at best. Mainstream media is also dominated by columnists who (I would argue) lean quite conservative. Therefore, most news people get access to is tilted towards the right side of the political spectrum.
3. Progressive, inclusive, anti-oppressive narratives are largely lacking in mainstream media. When they're present, they're often not engaged with meaningfully, or are distorted to fit a particular narrative.
4. Mainstream media is an opportunity as much as it is a challenge. To reach significant audiences, get traction on our issues, and combat the social narratives that perpetuate harm against our communities.

Our Movements and Mainstream Media

- ▶ I don't think we've been great at mainstream media.
- ▶ We go into conversations assuming people think like we do, use the language we use, and that if we communicate to the public like we communicate amongst ourselves, we'll be successful.
- ▶ Using language like 'cissexism' might work for us, but it won't necessarily convince anyone else. Lots of our language isn't known to lots of people – and isn't accessible to tons of people either.
- ▶ We need to get better at communicating to the 'public', because public support is instrumental to liberation.
- ▶ My least favorite example of this is Jordan Peterson.



Drawbacks of
using
Mainstream
Media?

Risks of using Mainstream Media

- ▶ Our message can get distorted to fit a broader narrative, which can indeed cause harm to our own organizing, our reputations, and our movements.
- ▶ Mainstream media is often complicit in constructing our needs, our politics and our very communities as radical and dangerous.
- ▶ We can't always necessarily use the kind of messaging that we would like.

Benefits of using Mainstream Media?

Advantages to mainstream media



Massive potential reach.



Opportunity to counter traditional narratives in the very outlets that often promote those narratives.

How to get mainstream media interested

- ▶ Make it relevant to them. Demonstrate why your issue is timely and interesting to them and their audience.
- ▶ Make it unique. If it's an annual event, find a hook that makes it of particular interest this year, that gives it a different angle.
- ▶ Give them time. Media can respond quickly but planning for media involvement should include giving them a heads up in advance. I usually aim for at least 3 business days.
- ▶ Build relationships. Knowing a journalist, editor, etc... makes a difference. Keep their contact information and don't be afraid to use it (within reason...)

Relationships

- ▶ One of the main ways I've had success getting media interested in events I have been a part of is through relationships.
- ▶ Getting yourself a bit more into their world is helpful, both in terms of getting future coverage, but also in terms of understanding where they're coming from more fully.
- ▶ I got into writing because of folks I met who worked in print media. I've had news stories published because I happened to run into someone during my lunch break and followed up with a media advisory.
- ▶ Easy tips:
 - ▶ Follow folks on social media.
 - ▶ Keep an eye out for local journalists / writers / producers who share identities with you and might share opinions with you too.
 - ▶ Keep a list of your media contacts and don't hesitate to reach out to them – they're always looking for a story.

Understanding your audience

- ▶ Every audience is different and different media outlets cater to different communities.
- ▶ Ex: The Toronto Star is considered a liberal left media outlet, while the National Post is considered to lean to the right.
- ▶ We shouldn't compromise our values or our beliefs for media credibility. We can however understand our audience, and thinking critically about what arguments might work with them.
- ▶ It's not a pleasant reality but: most cisgender and heterosexual people don't care all that much about the suffering or needs of our communities. They likely don't know what the word trans means. We need to keep that in mind when we're writing.



Johnstone: The Ford government is about to make things even harder for trans kids

FAE JOHNSTONE Updated: April 1, 2019



Understanding the Personal Risk – Part 1

- ▶ There can be serious risks to engaging with media. Doing so as an individual can be unpleasant, and it's important to be aware of that.
- ▶ Being an openly 2SLGBTQ+ person in the media is very hard to take back. You'll be out in a big way and that can be a weigh on people. If you do it routinely, people might recognize you in public, particularly in tight-knit communities.
- ▶ Having any kind of a profile in 2SLGBTQ+ organizing also comes with risks of targeting, and it's important to be aware of those risks.
- ▶ In my limited time as an out trans person who's done media work, I have had death threats online, been called some really disgusting things and been in a Breitbart article.
- ▶ It is important to be aware of the impact that such a role can have on your mental health, and to be intentional about 1) ensuring you are ready to take this one and 2) ensuring you have folks who can support you.



The higher the pedestal, the deeper the fall.

© Ginkota & Clark

Understanding the Personal Risks – Part 2

- ▶ There's also a personal risk associated with being placed on a pedestal as a "2SLGBTQ+ activist". Your words matter more when you're more visible.
- ▶ It's not fair and it's not pleasant, but there are very few visible 2SLGBTQ+ people in the media. There's also a lot of people who will have problems with what you say – from outside of and within your own communities.
- ▶ There is a definitive privilege in stepping into this role, through perception of expertise, through community social capital, etc. But there are also risks. Being aware of these risks in advance is important.

Setting your boundaries



You don't owe a reporter or news outlet your story. It's yours and nobody else's.



Media will often be interested in your own identities and lived experience.



You don't have to share your personal experiences. Yes, they can help with a strong story, but once your personal experiences are out there, it's very hard to take them back.



And it's exhausting and can be painful to consistently recount how you've experienced violence and oppression.....



Boundaries

Understanding, Creating,
Maintaining the lines between us that let us know who we are.

By
Al Turtle

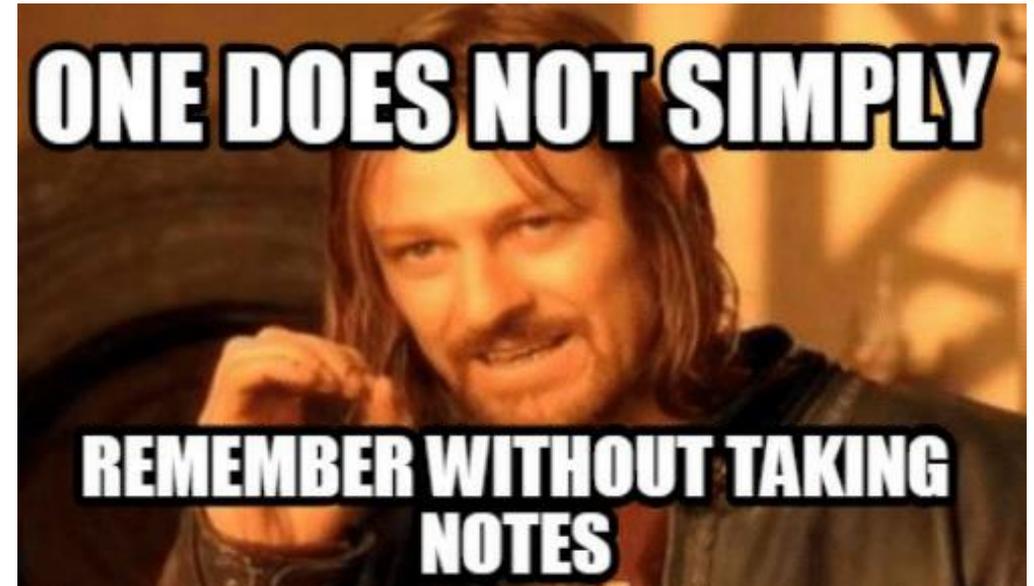


**MEDIA
TRAINING
TIPS**

The Practical
Side of
Mainstream
Media: What
you should
know

Doing an Interview with a journalist

- ▶ Interviews are one of the main ways that folks involved in organizing and advocacy interact with mainstream media.
- ▶ Some recommendations:
 1. Ask the journalist for questions in advance if possible
 2. Ask the journalist what their angle is on the story
 3. With or without questions in advance, write up short notes that highlight what you want to say, what your main points are.
 4. Remember that you don't actually have to answer their questions.
 5. Generate some key sentences beforehand to emphasize.
 6. Keep it succinct and concise



Prepping for an on-air interview

- ▶ Doing an interview on live television or radio is very different from an interview for a print piece. A print journalist can pick and choose quotes, while a live interview has less flexibility, but you also have more opportunities to make your key points and ensure they get on-air.
- ▶ Given that it's live, it's very important to prepare, to know your topic and have your key messages ready.
- ▶ Do your research. You won't likely know what all the questions are going to be. Pulling on statistics and otherwise demonstrating a well-rounded understanding of the issue is important.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to pause and reflect. It might feel awkward to you but it looks normal on TV. It is better to pause and reflect than rush into a response.

Writing an Op-Ed – Part 1

- ▶ Op-eds are among the best opportunities to share your perspective on a current issue. They allow you a lot of space (500-800 words, depending on the outlet) to make an argument.
- ▶ I love op-eds because they're a wonderful opportunity to reach a mainstream audience with a different kind of message than they're used to.
- ▶ Media typically takes full ownership of your article – and will often print it with a different headline, and with some possible (small) edits to the piece, usually for flow and to keep it concise.
- ▶ They're also often uncompensated, which...sucks.

Writing an Op-Ed – Part 2

- ▶ Your first pitch to an editor:
 - ▶ Introduce yourself
 - ▶ Describe the issue
 - ▶ Describe how it's relevant right now and to their audience
 - ▶ Describe your perspective
 - ▶ Thank them for their time and consideration
 - ▶ Attach the article
 - ▶ Don't be hurt if they don't reply.
 - ▶ Op-ed editors get dozens of op-ed submissions a day
 - ▶ I've been 'ghosted' even from outlets I've published with a few times.
 - ▶ But: always wait a minimum of 48 hours before pitching the piece elsewhere.



Writing an Op-Ed – Part 3

- ▶ Think of an op-ed almost like those 5 paragraph essays we had to write in high school:
 - ▶ Strong, clear thesis statement in the opening paragraph
 - ▶ Three paragraphs proving your points
 - ▶ One paragraph wrapping it all together with a clear conclusion.
- ▶ Op-eds are not meant to be lengthy, or particularly reflective. They're intended to make a concise argument on a particular, relevant issue.

Writing an Op-Ed – Part 4

- ▶ General tips for writing an op-ed:
 - ▶ Use language that is relevant and common – focus on simple ideas using language that most people will know.
 - ▶ Think about your audience. Writing for a 2SLGBTQ+ paper like Xtra Magazine is very different from writing with the Toronto Star, Huffington Post or Ottawa Citizen.
 - ▶ Make it personal – use examples to illustrate your points, draw some degree of a relatable narrative in your writing.
 - ▶ Use evidence to support your argument. Personal narratives are important, but evidence is just as crucial. Weave the two together and you're set.
 - ▶ Ask a friend (with writing experience) to review and refine. Encourage them to be a brutal editor – it makes a big difference.

Drafting a Media Advisory

- ▶ A media advisory (commonly known as a press release) is a key step in getting media interested in an event, from a protest to a gala. Here's what it needs to include:
 1. Date of the media advisory
 2. Time and location of the event
 3. A brief description of the event
 4. A pitch on why the event is important and relevant – and why the issue the event is focused around matters.
 - ▶ Include statistics and a relatable narrative if possible.
 5. A quote or two from one of your organizers.
 - ▶ Often, you won't get a response to a media advisory, but they might put out a story nonetheless based on your release. So think carefully about what quote you would want in the story.
 6. Your contact information – email and phone

Building your media toolbox

- ▶ Mainstream media is a great opportunity but it's not the only opportunity. Coverage is coverage is coverage. Try building a relationships with your local student/campus paper – they're almost always interested as long as there's some tie-in to students/youth.
 - ▶ Plus, student journalists often become mainstream media journalists
- ▶ Try submitting a few op-eds to your local paper. If they're rejected, see if you can get some feedback. Some editors won't have time (or, frankly, interest) but feedback can help you refine your angle and improve your piece.
- ▶ Local radio shows are often easy to pitch and get interest from. Contacting producers (listed on their websites) is a great way to get some interest. Consider refining your radio skills before moving on to live television.

We need more 2SLGBTQ+ voices in the media.

- ▶ There are very few 2SLGBTQ+ voices in mainstream media. Most of them are white, cis and middle-class from urban centres.
- ▶ Our narratives are most often shaped either by people who are not part of our communities, or by those with the most privilege within our communities.
- ▶ There are definitely risks to engaging with mainstream media. But there are opportunities too.
- ▶ We need more 2SLGBTQ+ voices.

Some closing thoughts

Think about your audience.

Stick to your key message.

Use relatable language.

Don't be afraid to assert yourself – be bold.

You get to define your own narrative, your experiences and your boundaries.

Try, try and try again – persistence and patience is crucial.

Resources! Resources! Resources!

- ▶ Informed Opinions Canada
- ▶ Media Style

Thank you!
