



A guide to creating trans-inclusive culture

**5050
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AN OPEN LETTER TO HOLLYWOOD

From your transgender and nonbinary colleagues, and our allies

We know that the best storytelling is diverse storytelling, and it's clear that Hollywood is at a tipping point. Studios and production companies are bringing more people into the creative process, hearing their stories, and creating better films and TV shows because of it. It is time for transgender people to be included in this conversation.

First, some things you should know. As a community, trans people are fighting every day to be seen and accepted as human beings. Some in Washington D.C. are trying to erase trans people from our culture by banning us from serving in the military, allowing health insurance companies to deny us medical care, and refusing to protect trans youth in schools. In the past 18 months, at least 44 trans people have been murdered in the U.S., almost all of them trans women of color. The unemployment rate of trans people is 3 times the national average – and 4 times for trans people of color. Thirty percent of trans people live in poverty – twice the national average. When visiting the doctor, one in three trans people have been verbally harassed by the doctor or denied medical care. Transgender Americans face bullying in school, discrimination on the job, and violence on the street. Perhaps most alarmingly, because the culture is so transphobic, 40% of trans people report attempting suicide, compared to 4.6% of the general population.

That's a lot of negative information, but we hope it helps explain why transgender people are pushing so

hard to be heard. It's because we are struggling to survive.

The world is unsafe for trans people – and we can do better.

In the US, 80% of people say they don't know a trans person in their family, workplace, or school. That's where Hollywood comes in. Hollywood tells the stories that help people understand how to feel about themselves and how to feel about people around them who are different. As Roger Ebert said, film is an empathy machine. We know projects like *Ellen*, *Will & Grace*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Milk*, and *Moonlight* helped break down stereotypes about gay and lesbian people, and the timeline for marriage equality would have been remarkably different without them. Women, people of color, people with disabilities, and diverse faith groups have made it clear they want more authentic stories about their lives in films and on TV. Trans people feel the same way.

We are grateful that Hollywood is starting to embrace these myriad points of view. It may seem as if some trans people are overly sensitive about how these trans stories are developed and told. But, as trans people, we have grown up watching films and TV shows in which we have been portrayed almost exclusively as tragic victims, psychotic killers, and one-dimensional stereotypes. We have been confused with drag queens, seen our history erased in historical films, and been ridiculed for gender expressions that don't conform to social norms.

We believe that we are at an unprecedented cultural moment -- a moment when we can ask Hollywood to use its power to improve the lives of trans people by changing America's understanding about who trans people are. We want to help you tell our rich and diverse stories - and we need your help to do it.

This is about more than diversity and inclusion. It's about empowering trans people and sharing with us the tools and access that have been offered to you throughout your career. It's about offering people who are different from you the confidence and the sense of belonging that inspires the very best art.

We know Hollywood is a business, as well as a creative community. We are not

asking you to stop making money. We are asking to be brought to the table, so that our knowledge, talent, and stories can help improve your work and increase its value.

This guide, created by GLAAD and 5050by2020.com, is an invitation to begin co-creating this future by changing the way trans people are portrayed in media and culture.

We believe that when trans people are empowered to help culture makers tell our authentic stories, it will improve how trans people are treated in the real world. Those negative statistics above will become a part of our history, not our present. Let's work together to create a beautiful, diverse, and inclusive world in which trans people are fully accepted as equal human beings.

Signed by trans people working within these organizations, and our cisgender allies who support us:



A GUIDE TO TRANSform HOLLYWOOD

I'd like to make content with transgender and/or nonbinary characters.

Fantastic! Have the conversations necessary to understand the nuances within this world. We're having those conversations with women, people of color, people with disabilities, and people from diverse faith groups to tell their own stories. This is just another way to include more voices at the table. Seek out and get to know trans storytellers and creators. Take it slow, meet and greet, build relationships. Just like any other artists that you bring in who may not share your same background, be aware of your gaze, the lens through which you see things. If you don't know where to find trans creators, reach out to 5050by2020 and GLAAD and we'll suggest some places to start.

I already have a movie or TV script about trans topics but it's been generated without any trans collaboration.

No problem! Things have been evolving very quickly and the cultural landscape is really starting to come into focus now. It's never too late to pause and bring in those experienced trans people to partner with you on your vision moving forward.

I found a great book or story, and it's about trans or nonbinary characters. I'd like to adapt it myself or find someone to adapt it.

If the work is not created by a trans person, start by talking to an experienced trans content creator about the merits of the book. Non-trans writers often bring their cisgender perspective to the books they write too.

I found a great book, and it's written by a trans or nonbinary person. I'd like to adapt it myself or find someone to adapt it.

Can you collaborate on the adaptation with the person who wrote the book? If the trans writer isn't available to adapt the book, the closer you can match the POV and gaze of the screenwriter to the person who created the work, the better. If a trans woman of color generated the IP you are working with, look for a trans woman of color to adapt it.

If you hire a cisgender screenwriter to adapt the book, they may not capture the nuances of the trans experience that make the book so powerful.

I heard about a really interesting trans person in history, and I want to tell their story.

We recommend you proceed with caution when approaching stories about trans people in history. Trans people have always existed in every community, culture, and country around the world. Unfortunately, reports about transgender men in history have often been distorted by describing them as women living as men to get a job, and transgender women are dismissed as men who passed as women. The history is further complicated because today's trans terminology wasn't used in the past, and because the ability to medically transition with hormones and surgeries didn't begin until the early Twentieth Century. As an artist, it's important not to project onto people in the past ideas and concepts that didn't exist in their time. However, some people in history were trans. To do their stories justice, you need to know a lot about the history of the trans community. There are people who study and understand how trans people existed in the past, and it's important that you talk to them.

I've read the above, but I'm gay or lesbian, can't I figure this out myself?

If you are not trans, you're still likely to project your own ideas and experiences with gender expression onto trans characters.

I've met some trans people I want to bring in.

Fantastic. But be sure you haven't just hired the first trans person you met at a party - not everyone is an expert on storytelling and content creation. It's important that you seek out and work with **experienced** trans creators and storytellers. There are trans people today who have experience directing TV and feature films, working in writers rooms, and producing. Additionally, check out trans people creating content in playwriting, novels, poetry, art, memoir, academia, and comedy.

I've identified and surrounded myself with one or more trans people. What now?

Empower and enable the trans people you hire. That means encouraging them to push back on you creatively, especially when it comes to the specificities of the trans experience. There is often pressure, explicit or otherwise, for a trans person to toe the party line when working on projects originated by powerful cisgender people.

Ideally you've hired experienced people who understand storytelling and content creation, not just someone who happens to be trans. But even some of those experienced trans creators may need extra support in the form of mentoring and feedback. The trans people you bring in, especially in entry level jobs, won't necessarily enter the room with that sense of belonging that straight white cis people have. Be aware of both your - and their - levels of privilege and act with kindness and empathy.

Help make the trans people in your project feel safe by educating your crew. There are horror stories from trans actors and creators on set who've experienced blatant, explicit transphobia from co-workers both above and below the line. Don't let that happen on your project. Share with people on your set what you've learned about being an ally to trans people. Even better, bring in an expert to conduct a session on trans identities and representation at the start of production. GLAAD offers these trainings as part of its mission to be a resource to media creators. Many people inadvertently invade trans people's privacy with invasive, inappropriate, and personal questions about genitals or ask questions like, "When did you choose to change your sex?" This creates an unsafe work environment for the trans person and can be considered sexual harassment. A trans training session will create a space for cisgender people to ask questions that would be inappropriate in a workplace or social setting.

I'd love to follow this guide, but I don't think I can find money if the lead character, who is trans, isn't played by a person with an international financing reputation.

Can I cast a cisgender person in that situation?

The world is evolving, and today it is a mistake, especially if you are cross-sex casting (a cis man to play a trans woman, or a cis woman to play a trans man.) It simply isn't cost effective to take this risk; recent projects which cast cis actors to play trans roles have felt the tide of public opinion turn against them and have taken a hit at the box office.

What if my project portrays someone before and after their transition? Won't having a trans person in the role inhibit my ability to do that?

Talented, trained trans actors can be found who have medically transitioned and who have not medically transitioned; who transitioned in grade school or in retirement; who are perceived as trans by others quite quickly or who are assumed to be cis based on their appearance. You just have to search. Trans actors may be willing to play the character pre-transition, depending on the content. And transition narratives are not the only stories to tell about trans people. Films and TV have told that story many times already, and transition narratives make casting much more difficult. Talk to trans creators about the other stories which have been largely untold by Hollywood - you might find those narratives fresh, new, and inspiring.

But I don't understand - why is it so important that trans roles be cast with trans actors? Isn't acting what actors do?

This is a complicated issue that isn't easily reduced to a soundbite. We urge you to talk to trans content creators about your specific project so the casting conversation can happen in context.

The crux of the issue is this: we live in a culture that refuses to believe trans people are who they say they are. When one of your co-workers tells you that they are gay, you take that at face value. You don't argue with them about it. But when trans people disclose their gender identity, the reaction is often quite negative; they may be told they are liars, deceptive, or mentally ill. Trans women are met with "You're really a man," and trans men are usually just met with confusion due to the invisibility of trans men in our culture. But the message is clear: Your lived identity is a joke, a fake, a costume, a delusion - your chromosomes are more important than your own knowledge of yourself. Many people still believe that trans people should go to therapy and be "fixed," even though the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association agree that gender identity is an innate trait that cannot be changed.

Given that reality, when cis actors play trans characters it perpetuates this belief that trans people aren't real. When a gay man plays a straight character, it doesn't cause audiences to assume that all straight men are secretly gay men. But when a cis man playing a trans woman takes off the wig and the dress, it sends the message that underneath it all trans women are wearing costumes and still "really men." This toxic belief, that trans women are just men playing dress-up, contributes to a U.S. culture in which a trans woman is murdered every two weeks, and bills like HB2 pass in North Carolina. And when cis women play trans men, who are largely invisible in the media, it reinforces the mistaken idea that trans men don't exist at all.

In a perfect world -- and we're not there yet -- trans actors would be cast regularly for both trans roles and cis roles. We would also live in a world where trans people's gender identities are understood and believed to be real and valid. When that day comes, and we know Hollywood can play a key role in getting us there, it may be less important if a cis actor plays a trans role.

The conversation about casting trans roles makes headlines, but remember, a script written by someone who does not understand the trans experience isn't fixed by casting a trans person to play the part. Problematic casting decisions are often a consequence of a script that isn't fully informed by the trans experience. If you start collaborating with trans content creators early in your process, you probably won't even need to worry about casting.

Okay then, if it's so complicated, I just won't make trans content.

Wait! The best thing you can do is still tell a good story and surround the trans lead in your cast with big names to build the budget. Audiences are ready for these stories and these characters, and you'll be riding the wave of the future. Over the past year, Breakdown Services/Actors Access made it possible to search for trans actors, the Casting Society of America launched a global casting call for trans actors, *A Fantastic Woman* received the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film (trans actress

Daniela Vega was the film's lead), and FX's *Pose* premiered to critical acclaim and widespread buzz with five trans women of color as series regulars. It's only a matter of time before history is made by the first trans actor to win an Academy Award or an Emmy for acting - maybe in your project!

I'm not making specifically trans content, but what can I do to be more trans-inclusive in my business practice?

So glad you asked. This is most of the industry, to be honest, and you are just as important as those making trans content. Here are some things to think about.

Include trans people in every area of your project, from directing, to costumes, to lighting, to craft services, to accounting. As with all of your hiring, take specific care to go beyond the communities familiar to you and look for trans people. It's important to remember that trans people can have other intersectional identities: they are also people of color, people with disabilities, queer people, and immigrants (to name a few).

Build infrastructure to support trans people through internships, mentorships, guidance, and access to job networks. Create opportunities to break new talent who have lived experiences. Try setting a goal of interviewing at least two out trans people per department, and include trans people of color. Help train and teach them.

Hire trained and talented trans actors to play the cis roles in your project. This is not only an employment equity issue, but also shows that you understand that trans women are women, trans men are men, and nonbinary people are people. Being trans is not the only interesting or valuable thing trans actors bring to the table. Notice that many roles are not clearly specified as cis or trans (cop at the crime scene, barista #2). Hire trans people to play those roles so they can build their resumes and move onto bigger parts.

When writing character breakdowns, occasionally call for Male Presenting, Female Presenting, and Nonbinary actors. You might find actors in that casting call whose gender expression is exciting and unique. When you're looking at their auditions, set aside increasingly outdated standards of beauty. Perceptions of what's "appropriately" feminine and masculine have been set mostly by cis, straight men, and have constrained everyone - not just trans people. There is beauty in diverse gender presentations.

I've learned so much. I'm done, right?

Probably not. We're all still learning. A revised version of this Guide will be different five years from now. Learning is lifelong, and unlearning things we've been taught about the gender binary takes time.

What am I forgetting?

If you're killing it and you've pulled off creating some fantastic trans content, continue your trans-awareness all the way through distribution and marketing. Think about impact; your project is going out into a world in which trans people are profoundly marginalized. Reach out! You may wish to incorporate a community benefits strategy to help trans people and educate viewers about trans issues. Build relationships with non-profit organizations with trans competency who can assist you with community engagement when your project is released. The trans community can be strong and loud advocates for your project - if it's good. Make sure it is, and then reach out to the community to help you build buzz!

What else can I do?

Look at all your infrastructure for signs that you're reinforcing the idea that there are only two genders and that everyone is cis:

- Consider moving beyond those little "M" and "F" checkboxes on forms
- Discuss putting gender pronouns in all email signatures
- Create all-gender restrooms in your workplace
- Keep a sense of humor and realize we are all learning. Mistakes will be made, and it's an opportunity to learn more.

Also, realize you might already have trans people working on your project, but they may choose to keep their gender history private - which is perfectly fine. Not every trans person wants to be an advocate - some just want to do their job and have their gender not be an issue. *Pro Tip:* Trans people who choose to be private about their gender history are not "in the closet." Trans people show you their true identity every day when they arrive at work as their authentic selves, and many trans people avoid talking about being trans because it draws attention to a past they are happy to leave behind. Don't pressure or expect them to educate you or share their personal stories for your benefit.

More questions? Looking for consultation, resources and referrals?

Reach out to us. 5050by2020 and GLAAD work every day with creators in Hollywood to give them the resources and information they need to tell better stories about trans and nonbinary people. As a non-profit organization, GLAAD can consult with you at any stage of your project's development, and can also refer you to trained trans people who can join your team as collaborators and co-creators.

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HELPFUL TERMS TO KNOW

gender identity is an internal sense of self; no one can “see” your gender identity. Most people think of themselves as a man or a woman, but some people feel that neither of those terms describes their gender identity.

gender expression is made up of all the external cues used to communicate your gender, like hair, clothes, makeup, pronouns, and names. Everyone can see your gender expression; people read and interpret your gender expression the moment they see you or hear your name and pronoun. Gender expression ranges from masculine to feminine and there are a million points on the spectrum in between.

sexual orientation is about who you are attracted to, fall in love with, go to sleep with at night. Trans people have sexual orientations too. A trans man who's attracted to men is a gay man; a trans woman who's attracted to men is a straight woman; a nonbinary person who's attracted to all genders would be bisexual, etc.

cisgender (or cis) means someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth – in other words, someone who is not transgender. If you're cis, you have a gender identity too, you just probably never noticed because it matches how you see yourself and what people see when they look at you. Cisgender people's gender expressions can also range from masculine to feminine and everywhere in between.

transgender (or trans) means a person who has a gender identity that differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. Trans men were assigned female at birth, but their gender identity is male. Trans women were assigned male at birth, but their gender identity is female.

nonbinary people is its own umbrella term. Nonbinary people are not new – we've always existed – but the way we talk about ourselves is evolving, which means it can be challenging to keep current when you're creating culture. A few years ago, we might have used the words genderqueer or genderfluid, today we're mostly using nonbinary. Nonbinary people have a gender identity that doesn't fit into the either/or of the male/female gender binary. But after that, each nonbinary person will describe their gender identity in a way that is unique to them. Some will say they are both male and female; others will say they are neither male nor female; and still others will use terms that don't reference male or female at all. Some people who are nonbinary also call themselves trans, others do not. Many nonbinary people use they/them pronouns (instead of he/him or she/her) as a way to make their identity more apparent. As people find space in our culture to really be themselves, new ways of talking about their gender will appear. Check in with us for the latest!