

A GUIDE FOR LGBTQ INCLUSION IN ENTERTAINMENT

How to Reach Bigger,
Diverse Audiences in
the U.S., Latin America
& Spain

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INTRO

If you're reading this, you're probably interested in learning more about what studios can proactively do to improve LGBTQ representation in film and TV storytelling. Whether you're an industry vet or at the start of your journey, this is meant to be a quick and helpful read.

Worldwide, entertainment consuming audiences are becoming more diverse every day. They also have more options for entertainment than ever before, and they are looking for stories that reflect them and the world around them. They both notice and support shows and films that include them in meaningful ways.

LGBTQ-inclusive shows have, for many years, been among the most watched, downloaded and streamed in the United States and Latin America.

- In the U.S., LGBTQ audiences are growing: at least [21% of Gen Z Americans \(born 1997 - 2003\) who've reached adulthood](#) are LGBTQ. This number has continually grown each year as more of this generation reaches 18 and are included in surveying.
- LGBTQ audiences show up: Nielsen found that [LGBTQ audiences were more likely to use streaming services](#) than the total population across the board. LGBTQ audiences are [22% more likely to see a new theatrical release more than once compared](#) to straight audiences.
- LGBTQ audiences drive buzz: LGBTQ+ people are [reported to be nearly two times more likely](#) to be heavy social media users. Further, [49% of LGBTQ moviegoers said they texted, tweeted, or otherwise posted about a film the same day they saw it](#) as compared to 34% of straight audiences.

Spanish-speaking audiences are also growing increasingly diverse. In 2018, Latino, Latina and Latinx Millennials (aged 18-34) were the [most likely](#) demographic in their age group to be part of the LGBTQ community (more than 1 in 5). And that rate [remains higher](#) among Latino adults when compared to other communities.

LGBTQ stories also matter because there are humans behind the numbers. Sometimes the only place where a person can see themselves reflected is through an LGBTQ character in a show, movie, video game or other entertainment project.

What people see on their screens has a profound impact in the real world. In 2020, a GLAAD/Netflix

survey of viewers in Latin America found "three quarters (73%) of respondents from the LGBTQ community said entertainment has helped their family better understand them." According to a [2021 Gallup poll](#), only 31% of Americans say they know someone who has told them personally that they are transgender. Given this reality, most Americans will first learn about transgender people through entertainment and news media. As anti-LGBTQ prejudice continues to fuel violence, and equality remains the subject of debate in many corners, seeing accurate and inclusive stories is more important than ever.

Let there be no doubt: meaningful representation in media matters.

Films and television help tell the story of a culture. When you create stories that are inclusive, you help change the world. You also, quite possibly, help a person a thousand miles away from where you live feel included and seen. So whether it comes to development, casting, writing or hiring a crew, you can take proactive steps to ensure projects involving LGBTQ characters and stories not only entertain and move audiences, but also avoid harmful tropes and tired stereotypes.

So let's get started! And if you have any questions after reading, we're always here to help. You can find our contact information on the last page of this guide.

Daniela Vega in A FANTASTIC WOMAN which won the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film, along with a Goya, an Independent Spirit Award, and a Teddy, among other major awards.

Wilson Cruz in STAR TREK: DISCOVERY

GENERAL BEST PRACTICES WHAT YOU CAN DO

IN MOST SITUATIONS, YOU DON'T NEED TO USE ANTI-LGBTQ SLURS AND LANGUAGE

You should always think about this language in context, but in the overwhelming majority of cases it's not necessary, can perpetuate harm and should be cut. If a character is going to use an anti-LGBTQ slur, it should be treated as you would treat a racial or ethnic slur. It should not be spoken by the hero or used as a joke, and another character may speak out against its use.

AVOID HUMOR THAT RELIES ON GAY PANIC FOR LAUGHS

Avoid "gay panic" jokes that expect the audience to laugh out of disgust or discomfort with gay people, affection, or relationships. These are very different than jokes from those within the LGBTQ community poking fun at themselves. "Gay panic" jokes often result in homophobia that can do harm to real LGBTQ people in their daily lives. LGBTQ people are disproportionately targeted for hate crimes, [and the "LGBTQ+ panic defense" is still recognized in many courts.](#)

REMOVE TRANSPHOBIC JOKES AND TRANSGENDER CHARACTERS WHO ONLY EXIST TO BE A PUNCHLINE

When trans characters are reduced to a punchline based on disgust or cruelty, it's not just about being the butt of a joke. This directly influences a dangerous cultural misconception that leads to [the epidemic of violence](#) affecting transgender people. If you are not

transgender, imagine how some of your own family, friends, and co-workers who are trans might feel being degraded in the middle of enjoying a film or show.

DOES YOUR PROJECT PASS GLAAD'S VITO RUSSO TEST?

This is a minimum bar we expect to see more projects pass when it comes to LGBTQ inclusion. To pass, the project should meet three basic criteria:

1. The film has a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender.
2. That character isn't solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity.
3. The LGBTQ character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect.

MAKE THEM MEMORABLE

While we've seen increases in LGBTQ characters in film and TV, many of those characters remain in supporting or wider ensemble roles versus lead roles. Consider including LGBTQ characters in your films and shows who have agency in their stories and significant screen time and plot impact, and who appear in lead roles. As the LGBTQ community continues to grow, it is important that storytelling moves beyond including one LGBTQ character among a sea of straight and cisgender roles. Consider stories exploring LGBTQ friendship, relationships, and stories which include a majority LGBTQ cast of characters (things like *Queer As Folk*, *The L Word Generation Q*, *Good Trouble*, *Pose*, *It's a Sin*, and more).

Benjamin Lukovski and Fernando Barbosa in *TU ME MANQUES*

Litzy in *MANUAL PARA GALANES*

INCORPORATE CASUAL INCLUSION

If they are not lead roles, LGBTQ characters should still be included as part of any world you are creating, not just in those stories that are specifically about being part of the LGBTQ community. That means featuring LGBTQ characters whose sexual orientation or gender identity is confirmed on screen, but which may not be the focus of their storyline. An example may include a main character in a workplace comedy who has a picture with his husband on his desk and may talk about his family when the co-workers talk about their home lives.

REFLECT THE HUMANITY & DIVERSITY OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

Create LGBTQ characters with the same care, depth and variety we've seen in portrayals of cisgender and straight people for decades. Create characters who matter to the plot, with agency and nuance, rather than existing as props to a more central character's story or growth. Explore the stories of LGBTQ women, LGBTQ people of color, LGBTQ people living with disabilities, of people with different body types, as well as characters of various ages and from a wider array of economic, religious, and geographic backgrounds.

HIRE DIVERSE TEAMS (their creativity and perspective will bring so much to the room!)

Make it known - internally and externally at all levels - that hiring LGBTQ writers, showrunners, directors, actors, and producers, as well as LGBTQ talent below the line in all positions is an organizational priority for the company. The more inclusive a production is from top to bottom, the better an environment you're creating for LGBTQ stories and talent to thrive authentically, as well as creating a more welcoming environment for all.

BUILD A PIPELINE

Invest in developing programs that teach, prepare, and develop talent from marginalized communities to ensure a growing stable of LGBTQ talent entering and climbing through the industry. Help create connections so that those talented writers, directors, animators, and other roles get staffed on projects coming out of your company. These credits will fuel the career growth and development of LGBTQ+ talent, allowing them to work their way to senior roles.

LET THE WORLD KNOW

Support your amazing, inclusive storytelling with advertising, marketing, and promotion in both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ spaces and outlets. Standing behind these projects and teams will let creators and executives know that telling inclusive stories is a priority for your company. It also lets audiences know that your programming slate is meant for them beyond one single series they may have tuned in for.

Gabriel Sánchez in *MARICÓN PERDIDO*

Michaela Jaé Rodriguez in *POSE*

REPRESENTING THE FULL DIVERSITY OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY

INCLUDE NONBINARY PEOPLE

Nonbinary is a word used by people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the binary gender categories of “man” and “woman.” Many nonbinary people also call themselves transgender and consider themselves part of the transgender community. Others don’t. Nonbinary is an umbrella term that encompasses many different ways to understand one’s gender. There is no one way for a character to “look” or “be” nonbinary. Nonbinary people often use the singular pronoun “they” (in Spanish “elle” or “ellx” are the equivalent pronouns), although many other pronouns exist in both languages.

INCLUDE LGBTQ PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

[Research](#) from the Movement Advancement Project estimates that 3 to 5 million LGBTQ people live with one or more disabilities. Just as LGBTQ status cuts across every demographic — gender, age, race, religion, etc. — so too does disability. Too often, people with disabilities are represented by straight, white men in a wheelchair. Ensure that LGBTQ people of color are included in stories about disability. Additionally, think about the diversity of disability — including LGBTQ characters who are deaf or blind, have a cognitive disability like Down syndrome, or a non-visible disability such as a learning disability like dyslexia, or are living with a mental health condition like anxiety or depression.

INCLUDE LGBTQ COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Media depictions of the LGBTQ community often depict the community as a homogenous group — often represented by white, wealthy, cisgender men. But that perspective ignores the very real diversity of race, ethnicity, and national origin (as well as income/class, education level, geographic location, etc.) among LGBTQ people. [According to a 2021 Cornell University study](#), LGBTQ people are more likely than non-LGBTQ people to be people of color. Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian American and Pacific Islander LGBTQ characters in particular are underrepresented in film and television compared to their existence in the real world.

INCLUDE PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

Including people living with HIV as directors, writers and producers on stories about HIV is critically important. Allow people living with HIV to tell their own stories, specifically around conversations about authentic experiences, full healthy sexual lives, and how antiretroviral therapies (treatment) make it possible to thrive while living with HIV. [GLAAD and Gilead Science’s 2021 State of HIV Stigma report](#) shows that there is an opportunity for stigma to be lessened by accurate and authentic media portrayals of those who are living and thriving. People living with HIV should be represented across race, age, sexual orientation, faith, and gender identity. Stories should span a variety of experiences and explore the life experiences of those living with HIV, beyond stories focusing solely on diagnosis or a character’s death.

DON’T FORGET TO CALL YOUR FRIENDS AT GLAAD—THE EARLIER THE BETTER

As an organization created with the intention of improving the quality of LGBTQ narratives in news and entertainment, GLAAD is here as a resource for journalists, writers, producers and other media professionals based on our almost four decades of experience in this changing landscape.

Our teams see, read and/or consult on so many scripts, casting breakdowns, marketing materials, and more. We often find it most productive to address potentially harmful tropes, stereotypes, or clichés in the early stages of a project where conversations may be able to make more of an impact. You want a fresh take on an interesting, dynamic subject — so do we! And we can help you achieve it.

Paca la Piraña and Lola Rodríguez in *VENENO*

Vico Ortiz in *OUR FLAG MEANS DEATH*

TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Let's start with some general terms you should know when creating LGBTQ stories and working with LGBTQ people in any industry. Language continues to evolve, so please reach out to GLAAD for the most accurate terms:

SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH

Infants are assigned a sex at birth ("male" or "female") based on the appearance of their external anatomy, and an M or an F is written on the birth certificate. However, the development of the human body is a complex process, and sex is not solely determined by anatomy, nor is it strictly binary.

GENDER IDENTITY

A person's internal, deeply held knowledge of their own gender. Everyone has a gender identity. For many people their gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth (ie: cisgender people), for others it doesn't (ie: transgender people).

GENDER EXPRESSION

External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, voice, and/or behavior. Societies classify these external cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Do not confuse and conflate sexual orientation and gender identity. They are not the same. Sexual

orientation describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity is a person's innate understanding of their own gender. Like everyone else, transgender people have sexual orientations; they may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, etc.

TRANSGENDER

An adjective to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. People who are transgender may also use other terms, in addition to transgender, to describe their gender more specifically (transgender man, transgender woman, etc.). Remember that being transgender is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures. A person can call themselves transgender the moment they realize that their gender identity is different than the sex they were assigned at birth.

BISEXUAL

An adjective used to describe a person who has the potential to be physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one gender. Some people might use other terms like pansexual (someone attracted to people of all genders), fluid, queer or other words which describe people who have the potential to be attracted to more than one gender. Some people may use multiple words to describe their identity, such as using both bisexual and queer. Bisexual+ can be used as an umbrella term to encompass the people whose identities reflect attraction to more than one gender.

CREATING TRANSGENDER STORIES & CHARACTERS

Transgender and nonbinary people exist, of course, in every culture worldwide, and can and should be part of great storytelling. Inclusive stories also improve how trans and nonbinary people are treated in the real world. Please keep telling these stories in thoughtful and authentic ways.

BEST PRACTICES:

DO THE HOMEWORK

Have the conversations necessary to understand the nuances within the world you want to recreate – especially if you are not transgender yourself. If a trans writer isn't available to work with you, 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. If you cannot find a transgender writer with the experience you need, it is essential to hire and adequately compensate a transgender consultant who is fluent in storytelling and media to work with you.

INCLUDE TRANS WRITERS AND STORYTELLERS ON YOUR TEAMS FROM THE BEGINNING OF A PROJECT

It's important that you seek out and work with experienced trans creators and storytellers. There are many talented 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.

DO NOT CAST CISGENDER ACTORS IN TRANS ROLES

This reinforces the harmful and incorrect idea that transgender people are simply "disguised" as their actual gender identity (e.g.: "a man in a wig" or "a woman in a suit"). This is a particularly problematic trend when it comes to cisgender men playing trans women in film and television. There is no good excuse for not using trans actresses or actors for trans characters. They exist. Throughout history, out trans actors have been systematically rejected and denied equal opportunities to audition for the roles their cis counterparts might be offered.

ASK YOURSELF: HAS THIS STORY BEEN TOLD MANY TIMES?

Focusing solely on certain narratives, like coming out

or transitioning, is reductive because it conveys the impression that coming out or transitioning are the only interesting things about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or nonbinary people. Also, it's been done many times. If your story is about coming out or transitioning, ask yourself: Who is this character beyond having to explain themselves to others? What is my story's unique lens and angle on this story that makes it special? What other part of their identity may make this unique?

AVOID SAYING TRANS PEOPLE WERE "BORN IN THE WRONG BODY"

It's an overly simplistic and clichéd way to talk about being transgender. If someone's sex assigned at birth is mentioned and relevant to the story, simply say: "Maria's gender identity is different from the sex she was assigned at birth" using the correct respective pronouns in each instance (including he, she, they or other appropriate pronouns).

BE CONSISTENT AND ACCURATE ABOUT LANGUAGE

Make sure character breakdowns are written clearly and use the language used by the trans community. Talk or write about the trans character using their current name, even when talking about the past. If someone misgenders a trans person, correct them. Hire trans writers, directors and producers (yes, more than one!) to appropriately consult on these processes. Ensure that your casting teams are posting breakdowns to all appropriate platforms which will give you a wider pool of trans talent to see.

Mariana Genesio Peña in *PEQUEÑA VICTORIA*

Ricky del Real in *VENGANZA DE LAS JUANAS*

**CREATING GAY, LESBIAN,
AND BISEXUAL STORIES
& CHARACTERS****BEST PRACTICES:****GIVE GAY, LESBIAN, AND BISEXUAL ACTORS THE
CHANCE TO AUDITION FOR LGBTQ ROLES**

Out gay, lesbian, and bisexual actors have been historically marginalized in the entertainment industry – even when it comes to playing prominent gay, lesbian, and bisexual characters. It's part of the reason cisgender, straight actors were exclusively offered those (often award-winning) roles for so long. When casting, ensure that out LGBTQ actors are given an equitable opportunity to find and audition for LGBTQ roles. Include language in casting breakdowns and press announcements that makes it clear that you would like to see LGBTQ talent auditioning for the role.

**AVOID STEREOTYPES THAT MAKE GAY, LESBIAN,
AND BISEXUAL CHARACTERS SEEM DISPOSABLE**

'Dead Lesbian Syndrome' is the name of a trope (also known as the 'Bury Your Gays' trope) where queer women in particular are disproportionately killed off compared to other characters on television. Referring

to the Vito Russo test on page 2 is a helpful first step in avoiding these pitfalls. When writing LGBTQ characters, make sure they are not easily disposable. If an LGBTQ character absolutely must die in a piece, interrogate that decision. Whose story is this decision in service of? What is the method and context of death? How have other series' deaths been treated? When one show or film after the next kills off its LGBTQ characters, it's hard not to feel like all LGBTQ people are expected to meet tragic ends. It's both overdone and dangerous.

AVOID BISEXUAL ERASURE

While we have seen many lesbian and gay coming out stories, the same is not true for bisexual characters. Very often, film and television still engages in bi erasure through refusing to ever use the word, instead saying that the character 'doesn't believe' in 'labels' or 'boxes'. While there are people who prefer not to use labels or may be questioning their sexuality, the prevalence of this characteristic among bisexual characters becomes a trope. Many people enjoy using a label and the community found therein can be a powerful and positive factor in their lives.

Joaquín Bondoni and Emilio Osorio in *EL CORAZÓN NUNCA SE EQUIVOCA*

Macarena Achaga and Bárbara López in *AMAR A MUERTE*

Mishel Prada & Roberta Colindrez in *VIDA*

Claudia Salas and Omar Ayuso in *ÉLITE*

AVOIDING BISEXUAL STEREOTYPES

BEST PRACTICES:

Studies show that bisexual people make up over 50% of the LGBTQ community, and yet they are vastly underrepresented in media. Furthermore, when bisexual characters are portrayed they still tend to be written in ways that reinforce stereotypes and misinformation.

AVOID SUGGESTING BISEXUALITY IS A PHASE OR A DECEPTION

Do not imply that being bisexual is a phase and that bisexuals are “on their way” to being gay or lesbian. People who are bisexual are not confused, indecisive, or lying. Bisexuality is a distinct sexual orientation and not an experimental or transitional stage.

DO NOT TREAT A CHARACTER’S BISEXUAL IDENTITY AS TRANSACTIONAL

There are still several bisexual characters whose queer identity is only seen in a transactional sense – for example, a woman who only romances another woman to gain access to information kept in that woman’s home – rather than as an actual lived identity and part of the character’s life and perspective.

Alycia Pascual-Peña in *SAVED BY THE BELL*

AVOID STEREOTYPES THAT ASSOCIATE BISEXUALITY WITH PROMISCUITY

A common and inaccurate stereotype is that all bisexual people do not want to be, or cannot be, monogamous. It’s inaccurate and harmful to imply that bisexual people are more “promiscuous” than others. People of all sexual orientations can be monogamous for some or all of their lives, or they can choose other types of relationships. This decision has nothing to do with sexual orientation, and your scripts should avoid implying it does.

AVOID USING A BISEXUAL CHARACTER’S PARTNER(S) AS “PROOF” OF THEIR SEXUALITY

Simply being in a relationship with someone of the same gender, or a different gender, does not negate a person’s bisexual orientation. Similarly, don’t treat their relationships as a one-off plot point that is never referenced again, or as a sensational reveal. Bisexual people need not have had specific sexual or romantic experiences to be bisexual; in fact, they need not have had any sexual or romantic experience at all to be bisexual.

Thanks for taking the time to explore how you can create diverse LGBTQ characters and be part of an industry of change. If you have any questions beyond this document, you can reach out to GLAAD. The earlier in a project, the better!

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