



## Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

### WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Transgender (or “trans”) people have a gender identity that differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This includes all trans people, regardless of the pronouns or name(s) they use (or those on their legal documents), their gender expression, or medical history. Note: Some trans people have binary gender identities—either man or woman—while others are non-binary (but not all non-binary people are trans).

### HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

In 2021, only 31% of Americans reported personally knowing someone who is trans, meaning onscreen representation is the primary reference point for trans people for a majority of the U.S. Harmful stereotypes that depict trans people as deceitful, violent, and disordered, along with the dissemination of misinformation, fuels rampant fear-mongering and discrimination (e.g., anti-trans healthcare and sports bills). This leads to a wide variety of negative outcomes (e.g., poverty, police brutality, poor mental health, targeted violence), especially for Black and Latina women who comprise the overwhelming majority of victims of anti-trans violence and murder. Therefore, authentic, humanizing portrayals are vital to the cultural understanding and safety of trans people.

**NOTE ON LANGUAGE:** As TV writers, we can model good language practices by affirming a trans character's identity (e.g., saying “she is a woman” rather than “she identifies as a woman”). Always use “trans/transgender,” never “transgendered” or offensive language (i.e., transphobic slurs).

# TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

## OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Gender Reveal:** Revealing a character is trans for shock or comedy and centering a cisgender (or “cis”)\* character's reaction and/or arc (e.g., grief, disgust), rather than the trans character's. This falsely implies trans people are “hiding” or deceiving people if they're private about their gender history.
- **Forced Disclosure\*:** Trans characters outed or made to disclose their gender history (e.g., medical transition\*), especially to romantic/sexual partners. The false expectation that trans people are obligated to disclose to anyone leads to staggering rates of violence against them, particularly BIPOC women.
- **Sensationalized Bodies:** Focusing on or questioning a trans character's anatomy, medical history, or how they have sex. This objectifies their bodies and suggests interrogation is acceptable.
- **Trans Pain:** Tragic stories (e.g., romantic failures, as victims of violence) and stories that *wrongly* depict transitioning as dangerous (e.g., complications from surgeries or hormone replacement therapy\*, health issues related to sex assigned at birth). While trans people face hardship due to a transphobic society, these portrayals erase the fulfilling lives they lead.
- **“Psycho” Killer:** Violent, obsessive, and unstable portrayals. This fuels the false narrative that trans people are deviant, sexually predatory, and dangerous.
- **Always Sex Workers:** Trans sex work stories that ignore the interrelationship between survival, criminalization, and empowerment (e.g., reduced to *only* victims of violent crime). These portrayals erase the many other contributions of trans people to society *and* ignore the reasons trans people, especially women, can be forced into sex work (e.g., employment discrimination, familial rejection).
- **Bad Behavior:** Characters mistreating trans people without rebuke or correction (e.g., misgendering; deadnaming; panicking, joking, and/or complaining about pronouns). This teaches audiences that it's acceptable to abuse and mock trans people.

## THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Beyond Transition:** Stories that go beyond transitioning and disclosure. Show trans characters through their own POVs, with careers, romances, families, and hobbies.
- **Varied Experiences:** Nuanced portrayals of trans people of all kinds (e.g., non-binary, BIPOC, HIV+, disabled, poor, older, intersex), showing how their identities shape their beliefs, behaviors, and experiences (e.g., living safely with HIV; disability impacting clothing options/gender expression). Don't *only* depict challenges; trans joy is equally true and important.
- **Trans Men:** More trans men, especially as protagonists. Go beyond depictions of pregnant trans men (while not necessarily problematic, these often sensationalized pregnancies shouldn't be the *only* story about them).
- **Happy Youth:** Young trans people, with supportive friends and family, thriving in their communities (e.g., in school, at jobs, volunteering). Show them living happy lives and bonding with trans people of all ages.
- **Affirming Care:** Trans youth and adults receiving healthcare from knowledgeable, supportive providers (e.g., doctors, therapists, educators). Portray what all legitimate research proves: gender-affirming care (e.g., puberty blockers, HRT) leads to optimal outcomes for *all* trans people.
- **Sex & Love:** Trans characters (of all sexual orientations) dating, having consensual sex, and in healthy, loving relationships with both trans and cis partners.
- **Athletes:** Trans characters of all ages playing sports. Dispel the myth that trans people's bodies or hormones give them an athletic advantage.
- **Trans History:** Trans characters in stories across every time period and culture. Trans people have always existed and their contributions to global history and culture deserve to be depicted.
- **Comedy:** Trans people humanized through humor, allowing viewers to laugh with trans characters, not at them.

\*Denotes a term in the glossary

## QUICK FACTS

- ➔ There were no trans characters in comedies on broadcast TV in the 2021-22 season.
- ➔ In 2021, 110 legislative bills were introduced in 37 states that attempted to prevent trans youth from playing sports, using gender-affirming restrooms, and/or accessing gender-affirming healthcare, putting 45,100+ trans youth at risk of losing critical support.
- ➔ In 2021, there were 36 trans people elected to national, state, and local political offices.
- ➔ An estimated 29% of U.S. trans adults live in poverty, the result of widespread anti-trans employment discrimination, especially for BIPOC trans people. The poverty rate increases to 35% for Native and Indigenous trans adults, 39% for Black trans adults, and 48% for Latinx trans adults.

### ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- Autostraddle: [“This Is an Essay About Penises”](#)
- Center for American Progress: [“Fact Sheet: The Importance of Sports Participation for Transgender Youth”](#)  
[“Protecting and Advancing Health Care for Transgender Adult Communities”](#)
- The Conversation: [“I’m a pediatrician who cares for transgender kids—here’s what you need to know about social support, puberty blockers and other medical options that improve lives of transgender youth”](#)
- Gallup: [“Mixed Views Among Americans on Transgender Issues”](#)
- Gender Spectrum: [“Some Common Myths About Gender”](#)
- GLAAD: [“A Guide To TRANSform Hollywood”](#)  
[“Transgender FAQ”](#)  
[“Where We Are on TV, 2021-2022”](#)
- GLSEN: [“I’m a Trans, Disabled Young Person, Not One or the Other”](#)
- The Guardian: [“Mapping the anti-trans laws sweeping America: ‘A War on 100 fronts’”](#)
- Human Rights Campaign: [“Seven Things About Transgender People That You Didn’t Know”](#)  
[“Transgender and Non-Binary People FAQ”](#)  
[“Understanding the Trans Community”](#)
- Netflix: [“Disclosure”](#)
- Them: [“Nearly 1,000 LGBTQ+ People Have Been Elected to Office in the U.S.”](#)
- Transgender Law Center: [“Trans Agenda For Liberation”](#)
- The Washington Post: [“The murder of Black transgender women is becoming a crisis”](#)

## GLOSSARY

### Cisgender (Cis):

Someone whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

### Disclosure:

The act or process of sharing one’s gender history with another person. Trans people should never be forced or coerced to disclose to anyone, and if, how, and when they do *should* be entirely up to them.

### Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT):

The use of hormones (e.g., estrogen, testosterone) in medical treatment. For trans people, HRT is an empowering way to medically transition by bringing their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Documented benefits of HRT include improved mental health, physical wellness, and reduced gender dysphoria.

### Transition:

When a trans person transitions, they are not “becoming” a different gender, rather they are aligning their gender expression and/or body with the gender identity they’ve always been. This is a complex process that can occur over a long period of time and varies from person to person. It *can* include: **social transition** (e.g., telling family and friends; dressing differently; using a new name/pronouns); **legal transition** (e.g., changing name and/or sex marker on legal documents); **medical transition** (e.g., HRT, surgeries). Some trans people choose not to, don’t want to, or are unable to transition in one or all of these ways for many reasons (e.g., financial barriers, don’t feel like they’re in the “wrong body”). Being transgender is not dependent on physical appearance or medical procedures.

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **assigned female/male at birth, binder, cisnormativity, deadnaming, gender dysphoria, gender euphoria, gender expression, gender identity, gender non-conforming, minority stress, passing, pronouns, puberty blockers, TERFs, transfeminine, transmasculine, transmisogyny, and transphobia.**

In-kind support and materials for this factsheet were provided by the following partner organizations. Please contact them for additional information, story guidance, and in-room consultations.



[GLAAD.org](http://GLAAD.org)

Storyline|Partners|

[StorylinePartners.com](http://StorylinePartners.com)



[SeeJane.org](http://SeeJane.org)



[HRC.org](http://HRC.org)

SRC Partners<sup>o</sup>

[SRC-Partners.com](http://SRC-Partners.com)



[TransFilmCenter.org](http://TransFilmCenter.org)

INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANT: [Laura A. Jacobs, LCSW-R](#)

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A list of the most up-to-date contact information for all of our partner organizations can be found on our website:  
[WriteInclusion.org/factsheets](http://WriteInclusion.org/factsheets)

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY:

