

Dear Hollywood,

We see you. Do you see us?

Our industry is in a period of long overdue reckoning. For decades, gatekeepers have been rewarded for locking the most marginalized voices out of the room — whether that be the boardroom or the writer's room. The system is broken.

As leadership of the WGAW's LGBTQ+ Writers Committee, we are here to tell you that the fight for inclusion and visibility has hardly begun.

We are halfway through Pride Month, when LGBTQ+ people (and our allies) come together to celebrate who we are, individually and collectively. While it is also a time to acknowledge how far we've come, it is undeniable that there are — to quote a great writer — “miles to go before we sleep.”

The industry's storied history is also one steeped in decades of codified bigotry against the LGBTQ+/queer community. Some of America's most treasured cultural and artistic achievements were released under the “moral guidelines” of the Motion Picture Production Code (aka the Hays Code). These guidelines meant that openly LGBTQ+ characters were entirely absent from major studio projects, except to be ridiculed, pitied, or pilloried. Far more often, they existed solely in subtext, trapped in a celluloid closet.

The portrayals of Hollywood's past — and present — are responsible for exacerbating harmful stereotypes and stigmas that have persisted through generations. Perception bleeds into and then becomes reality. We have been taught to see ourselves as The Other, just as the heteronormative majority has been taught to see us. Even in a post-Hays Code landscape, the prevailing narrative has not allowed LGBTQ+ characters the full scope of our humanity. Too often, we are reduced to our collective traumas — coming out, victimization, the AIDS crisis, being murdered for our identities. GLAAD's 2021 [“Where We Are in TV” Report](#) has shown progress, but in film, LGBTQ+ representation is lagging. Of the 118 [films released](#) by the major studios in 2019, a mere 22 — only 18.6% — included a single LGBTQ+ character. Of those, only nine featured an LGBTQ+ character for more than ten minutes of screen time. And, of course, the statistics are far more dire when looking at representation for queer BIPOC and queer disabled characters.

But on-screen visibility — or lack thereof — is not the entire story of how Hollywood continues to fail the LGBTQ+ community, and LGBTQ+ storytellers.

Last month, in a survey of 158 members of the WGAW's LGBTQ+ Committee, a staggering 46% of writers reported that they have hidden their identity — or felt compelled to do so — in an industry environment. Even when narrowing focus to the

past five years, that number remains at 25%. When asked why, the top three most cited reasons were: fear of discrimination; fear of not getting or losing a job; and not wanting to be stereotyped. One committee member explained: “When you grow up not fitting in, feeling endangered, and trying not [to] draw attention to yourself, it’s hard to let that go. I suppose I didn’t want to be reduced to one facet of my being.”

We must challenge any environment where queer writers feel the need to hide their identity. And we must ask how many artists aren’t out at all, or have quit the industry altogether — especially within the more underrepresented and intersectional parts of our community: transgender, non-binary, intersex, BIPOC, disabled, over 55, etc.

In the past five years, 22% of LGBTQ+ Committee members report having been the target of overt discrimination and/or harassment in an industry setting based on their identity. That number jumps to 57% when looking at microaggressions.

LGBTQ+ discrimination is not a problem of the past. Hollywood can no longer hide behind good intentions, progressive values, or marriage equality.

Queer people continue to live in fear of being who we are, in a country that continues to marginalize us, invalidate us, erase us, and deny us our basic access to housing, employment, and healthcare. Our industry’s current health plans provide transgender writers with incredibly limited access to gender-affirming care. By comparison, transgender part-time employees of Starbucks receive the highest standard of care, as recommended by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. But as of the publishing of this letter, we have trans folks at every level who must consider alternative employment in order to have more inclusive coverage. It is time for the industry to do better by our transgender community.

Although LGBTQ+ people share a culture, a psychology, and a history of political and religious oppression — we are, with rare exception, not considered an underrepresented or marginalized group among Hollywood circles. We are left out of diversity reports and fellowship opportunities. Our scripts are often not submitted in response to requests for “diverse voices” because our representatives are told that being LGBTQ+ “does not count.” All the while, there are still shows with queer characters on screen, but no queer writers in the room — let alone a writer who matches and can speak to the specific identity of the character. Frequently, studio executives blame the very laws meant to protect LGBTQ+ people from discrimination, claiming they cannot legally inquire about our sexualities or gender identities. The fact is, we are telling you how we self-identify. Now, we demand you value us and include us.

If you believe the industry already does, think again. Twenty-two percent of surveyed LGBTQ+ Committee members report being turned down within the past five years for a staff job, a meeting to get on a show, and/or having a script read for staffing

because the writer's room "already has an LGBTQ+ writer." The LGBTQ+ community is not a monolith. We are not interchangeable. Yet our identities continue to be tokenized and our voices minimized by this "there can only be one" mentality — 25% reported they were "always" or "often" the only LGBTQ+ writer in the room. This burdens the singular queer writer with the weight of representation for the entire acronym, which is particularly challenging to navigate at the lower levels.

Unfortunately, this is the same type of box-checking other underrepresented groups face, and it must stop across the board. We refuse to feel fortunate to simply be allowed a seat at the table, only for our presence to be used as a "rainbow shield" while our perspectives are ignored.

In the same way the success of Shonda Rhimes does not mean Hollywood has fixed its racist history of suppressing Black voices, the existence of Greg Berlanti or Ryan Murphy does not mean LGBTQ+ writers as a whole have "made it." In fact, an overwhelming 72% of TV writers on the Rainbow Pages — an independent database of queer WGA members — are low-level, have written freelance episodes, or have not yet staffed at all. The continuing, systemic forces of heteronormativity and bigotry are preventing us from rising in the ranks, and from being hired in the first place.

Writers are not alone in this. We stand in solidarity with our queer siblings in other industry unions who are suffering the same marginalization, and we must also acknowledge the unique challenges they endure as directors, actors, and crew members.

Hollywood can do better, and so Hollywood must do better. Although this list is not exhaustive or all-encompassing, here are some good places to start:

- Read us. Get to know us. Hire us. Hire more than one of us in your TV writer's room. Buy projects from us. Pay us. Pay us what we are worth. *Find us in the [WGA Directory](#) by specifying Writer's Background, or by [contacting our committee](#).*
- Thirty percent of our members report being asked to consult on a project because of their LGBTQ+ identity. If you are looking to tell a story about a specific queer POV — rather than hire a cishet writer, only to later bring us in to achieve a degree of authenticity — hire a queer writer at the outset.
- Listen when we tell you an LGBTQ+ storyline, scene, character, or line of dialogue is problematic or inauthentic. When we speak up, it is not a personal attack. It is an opportunity to dig deeper and do better.
- If your program, fellowship, or competition exists to uplift underrepresented and marginalized voices, LGBTQ+ people must be included.

- Do the work to educate yourself on the identities and terms that comprise our community. Respect our names, pronouns, and boundaries. Do not stop trying when you stumble, or because you are afraid to “get it wrong.”
- In 2021 alone, over 100 bills targeting the transgender community have been proposed, and dozens enacted into law. Many of our productions are in these states. Hollywood must stand up and vociferously speak out against the wave of anti-trans legislation, not simply with words, but with actions. The industry has spoken out against anti-abortion and anti-voting laws in the past. We must do the same now.

There is a tremendous cost to Hollywood’s pervasive, systemic bigotry. This cost cannot only be tallied in dollars — though we would note a [UCLA study](#) published in October 2020 that estimated studios lose up to \$130 million per film due to a lack of authentic diversity. Every June, multinational corporations engage in Rainbow Capitalism, chasing Pink Money. We must ask: just how much revenue does Hollywood lose each year because it rejects LGBTQ+ stories and storytellers?

The stories we tell, the stories you greenlight, determine the future that LGBTQ+ youth envision for themselves. What we see on-screen and how we are represented informs what we believe is possible.

It is present-day Hollywood’s responsibility to make right all the harm caused by Hollywood’s past. The notion that even a single queer character will be deemed too much of a risk in our increasingly global market is unacceptable. Reject this idea, or knowingly choose to reject us.

Either way, we see you.