

## **Diversity Council**

### **RESPONSIBILITY IN TRANS STORYTELLING**

By Savannah Lucas - Diversity Councilperson; Story Editor on *Snapped*

Recently, trans rights have been at the forefront of the media with Trans Awareness week occurring in mid-November, followed by Elliot Page coming out as trans. With his [announcement](#), Elliot brought immense visibility to the trans community by thanking its members and allies for their support while also drawing attention to the massive amount of injustice and violence that trans people face.

An IndieWire [article](#) about Page's announcement gave kudos to the media's response, saying: *"While the media coverage of Page's announcement hasn't been perfect, the reception has been largely positive and respectful. IMDb ... swiftly changed all of Page's credits and pronouns, as did Wikipedia and Netflix. ... Page is coming out in a vastly different media landscape than [Chaz] Bono or [Caitlyn] Jenner did, a marked improvement ushered in by years of tireless work by trans activists and educators."*

This swift action from such media giants brings me hope that visibility and respect for this community will only increase in the coming years. As storytellers and producers, we are a part of this movement. The way we choose to tell stories carries a great potential to influence society. Since 84% of Americans have never met a transgender person before, the general population's perception of trans people has been formed and reinforced by depictions in media and entertainment, most of which have been problematic and inaccurate; this reality is explored in a recent Netflix documentary called *Disclosure*, which I highly recommend viewing.

Working in media production, we have an immense responsibility to tell stories accurately and respectfully, and to acknowledge that our own identities and lived experiences often do not yield the expertise to do so; therefore, we must self-educate on our own blind spots to prevent perpetuation of harmful narratives. When we tell stories that involve a trans subject, it's important to do thorough research to avoid common mistakes and offenses, such as referring to trans people by their dead names, getting their pronouns wrong, using derogatory language toward the trans community, or tokenizing trans people and their experiences. When reporting on transgender victims of crime, there are additional sensitivities we must be aware of—more reading on this subject [here](#).

2020 has been one of the deadliest years on record for hate violence against trans and gender nonconforming people in the U.S., with 40 reported murders of trans people, most of whom are Black or Latinx trans women. These murders, combined with suicide and other minority stress induced causes of death, result in much lower life expectancies for trans folks, with the average life expectancy of a Black trans person being 30-35 years old. Though I'm sharing these as numbers, I want to emphasize the great importance of [knowing their names and their stories](#) as well. I have no doubt some of these cases will make their way into our scripts and edit bays in the coming months, and if we tell these stories accurately and from an informed perspective of sensitivity, our actions will contribute to the efforts of normalizing respect for the trans community in media—ultimately influencing society to move toward global acceptance of trans folks, preventing further violence and death.

As a starting point, please review GLAAD's [media reference guide](#) for tips on how to refer to transgender people in our projects.