

**CORE THEMES  
REPORT**

**being  
seen**

Directives for creating  
authentic and  
inclusive content

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**Joan Jenkinson,**  
BSO Executive Director

## BSO MESSAGE

We are all storytellers. For tens of thousands of years, humans have communicated through visual stories that weave together individuals and generations, showing us our common ground. Without them, individual identities and communal histories disappear. That is why whose stories get told—and how—matters.

Despite Canada's rich diversity, Black and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, People of Colour and People with Disabilities are severely underrepresented across Canada's \$9 billion\* film, television and digital media industries. This is no coincidence, but the inevitable outcome of systemic racism and discrimination in Canada's screen industries that have gone unacknowledged by those with the power to dismantle them.

Since 2020, much has been said about improving equity, diversity and inclusion, but this requires sustained commitment, systemic change, and accountability. The Black Screen Office has taken a leadership role to support that change and ensure practices and policies are equitable and free of anti-Black racism. With our first activation tool, ***Being Seen: Directives for Creating Authentic and Inclusive Content***, we have produced a practical tool for decision-makers to recognize their blind spots, remove systemic gaps and create truly authentic, inclusive content.

More than 400 industry professionals participants, children and their parents who are Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+, People with Disabilities, informed ***Being Seen***'s directives. I greatly appreciate and am humbled by their honesty and vulnerability, which crystallize the importance of seeing oneself on screen and behind the scenes. These directives offer a clear call to action to decolonize Canada's screen industries and reflect all Canadians, not just a privileged few.

I am also grateful to our funders and supporters who made ***Being Seen*** possible. Together, we have created the first of many tools to achieve equity. Our Black Screen Office team looks forward to continued collaborations with industry partners to fulfill ***Being Seen***'s promise as the industry-standard tool for creating authentic and inclusive content.

\*Sources: <https://mobilesyrup.com/2021/11/09/the-canadian-video-game-industry-esa-canada-2021-report/>  
<https://www.pwc.com/ca/en/industries/entertainment-media/subsectors/film-and-tv.html>



**Jen Holness,**  
BSO Founder and Chair of the  
Board of Directors

## BSO MESSAGE

Being seen are powerful words that hold meaning beyond the obvious. In its most authentic interpretation, it affirms our intrinsic value. It means we get to take up space with agency and that our wants and needs are not marginalized. It means we get to tell our stories, from our point of view with support and esteem. It is no accident that the Black Screen Office has chosen in its inaugural year to spearhead this ground-breaking report, **Being Seen: Directives for Creating Authentic and Inclusive Content.**

Black people want their stories told. They want authentic representation, and they want to have a strong hand in the telling. We are not unique in this great human need. It transcends race, culture, sexual orientation, religion, and location. But until recently there have been few opportunities for Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ and People with Disabilities to tell their authentic stories in the Canadian landscape.

**‘Being Seen: Directives for Authentic and Inclusive Content’** is a consultation on the representation of Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ and People with Disabilities in the screen-based sectors. But what makes it so important is that the input of over 400 participants from diverse communities is distilled down into a report that offers up targeted directives! Directives that recognize that we are in this industry together and it’s only by working in collaboration that we will make real and necessary change. **Being Seen** is how the Black Screen Office starts the conversation on authentic representation, and we are excited to work with you to remake our Canadian Screen Industry into one in which we can all thrive.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canadian audiences want to see themselves on Canadian screens. They want their stories told. They want to see positive role models. They want authentic representation. Canadian creators and producers from under-represented communities want more opportunities to tell those stories. How do we get there?

“ We need people who look like us at the decision-making level who can have the necessary conversations with their colleagues, so that we can go about the business of telling the stories, because if we have to create the thing AND have the difficult conversations, it’s too much. Hire some people who look like me and pay them to help you do this properly and respectfully. Include us on all levels. ”

‘**Being Seen**’ spoke to underrepresented Canadians about what authenticity means to them in order to provide guidance to the Canadian screen sector to help improve the quality and volume of authentic and representative content, and to reduce the burden of the difficult conversations referred to above. The Black Screen Office consulted with over 400 members of the Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ and People with Disabilities communities including both those who work within the Canadian film, television and digital media industry and members of the general public. Through focus groups and one-on-one interviews participants were asked a number of questions about what they thought about their representation and what could be done to improve it. Participants thoughtfully and often emotionally shared their stories, their thoughts, their insights and their recommendations. They were very passionate about the need for change and how it should be done.

This **Core Themes Report** summarizes their thoughts on themes that were consistently addressed, regardless of identity. It features quotes that are shared in their own words, and also summarizes their opinions with clear Directives for creators, producers, broadcasters, digital platforms, streaming services, funders and distributors to improve authentic representation within Canadian screen-based media, in English and French.

The **Core Themes Report** specifically deals with:

- Missing complexity of storylines and characters
- Lack of understanding of the complexity of communities
- Whether someone can tell a story from outside their own community and if so, what steps are necessary to ensure authenticity
- The importance of authentic casting and what can be done to achieve it
- The impact of poor or missing representation on Canadian audiences
- Recommendations for structural changes to increase authenticity
- Regional differences in responses to the Core Themes questions

Companion Reports specific to Children’s Media and to Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ and People with Disabilities communities will dig deeper into issues specific to those reports.

Together the reports will provide stakeholders with guidance that will allow them to create, commission and assess more authentic and representative content. The BSO will work with industry stakeholders through a Collaborative Network to initiate the structural changes necessary to both implement the Directives, but also to ensure that Canadians can see themselves in the stories and characters in Canadian screen-based media.

“ The most frustrating assumption that’s made is that stories featuring Black folks are for Black audiences only. I have no connection personally to stories like *Minari* but I can love that story. We’re humans, and we relate to human stories that are compelling. ”

## INTRODUCTION

“ To be seen and to be heard, I cannot explain with words to you how much it means, not just for me professionally, but personally and as a human being. ”

There is a growing demand for a restructuring of the Canadian screen-based media sector to provide equitable access for Canadians of all backgrounds and identities to create content, and to allow all Canadians to see themselves reflected on our screens. The demand has triggered a seismic shift with content creators, funders, broadcasters, digital platforms, streamers, exhibitors, and most importantly, audiences. Together we are trying to build a new system where all creators can feel supported to do their best work and where audiences can see themselves reflected, and where their stories are told. It will take many structural interventions, and the will to enact them, to dismantle the current structures and build this new world. This guide and its companion reports is one of those interventions.

## RESEARCH GOALS

The Black Screen Office’s (BSO’s) vision is to provide Directives to everyone in the film, television and interactive digital media industries to help them commission, create and assess authentic content. The Directives, which come from the community of under-represented members of the industry and general public who were consulted as part of the research, are a tool meant for the industry to use to educate themselves, develop strategies for change, and enact real, systemic and long-lasting transformation. We also want content creators and audiences from underrepresented communities to be heard. These Directives should be just the beginning of ongoing conversation about what it means to create authentic content and the impact that content can have in the Canadian screen-based sector and in Canadian society.

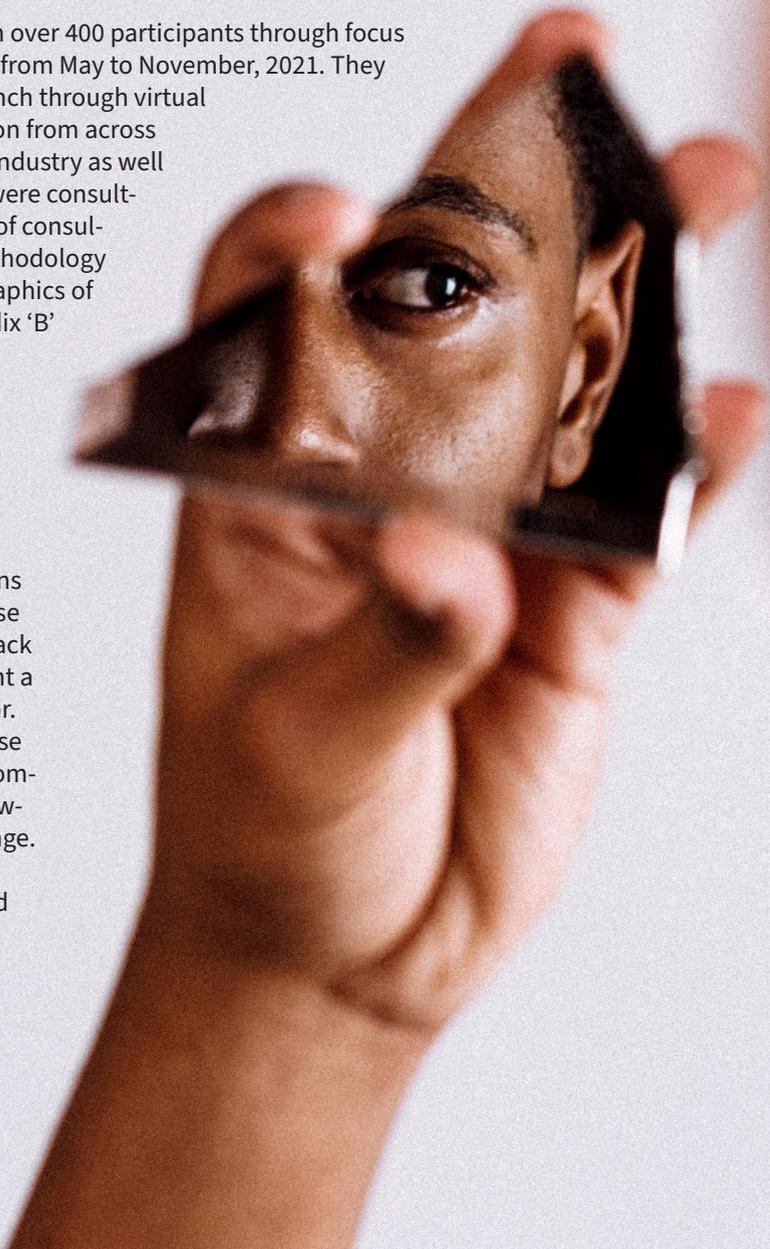
This research does not directly address other important barriers to equity, such as racism, harassment or discriminatory hiring practices, though it does seek to adopt an anti-racist intersectional framework for rebuilding the screen sector. More work needs to be done with targeted initiatives aimed at various specific barriers in the sector. However, adopting many of the Directives in this report will have a positive impact on working conditions and opportunities as well as on the content funded and created.

For too long, the bulk of Canadian content has been created by and for straight, white, able-bodied Canadians. The system was created to preserve the dominant culture and doesn't reflect or provide equitable opportunities to those who do not belong to that culture. While creators with other identities have historically been marginalized, they have produced quality content despite systemic barriers. However, the volume of such content has not been comparable with the demographics of Canada. Throughout the consultations, participants argued for an equitable response to eliminate barriers and support creators and producers until we can build a screen sector where everyone has equal access without the need for intervention.

Consultations were conducted with over 400 participants through focus groups and one-on-one interviews from May to November, 2021. They were conducted in English and French through virtual platforms and included participation from across the country. Those working in the industry as well as members of the general public were consulted. For more detail on the process of consultation please see Appendix 'A' - Methodology and for more detail on the demographics of those consulted please see Appendix 'B' - Demographic Charts.

The Directives are a product of the consultations and the awareness and the activism of those who chose to participate. Some participants are looking for small improvements and accommodations to the existing system, often because they are starting from a complete lack of representation, while others want a complete restructuring of the sector. The Directives therefore reflect those different voices with a range of recommendations and guidelines. All, however, agreed with the need for change.

Please note that all quotes included in this Report are identified and come from the consultations conducted by focus group or one-on-one interview.



# RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The Directives have been researched and drafted by the Black Screen Office (BSO). BSO's goals are to make Canada's screen industries practices and policies equitable and free of anti-Black racism; to work collaboratively with decision-makers to develop tools and strategies that enable system-level engagement and accountability; and to empower Black Canadians working within the screen industries to thrive and share their stories.

## What do we mean by authenticity and how does it differ from representation?

Representation is just being seen. There have been a few studies recently that have counted representation on screen<sup>1</sup> but that just demonstrates whether people are there and may only support minimal requirements to fulfil 'diversity' mandates. Very few studies<sup>2</sup> have delved into how people from underrepresented communities are being portrayed and if those portrayals are authentic. Authenticity means true and accurate<sup>3</sup> but in the context of representation it is more complex than that:

“ Authenticity means true representation that doesn't restrict the multiplicity of voices essential to really capture communities. ”

## Why is authenticity and representation so important for Canadian screen media?

According to the 2016 Canadian census, 22% of the Canadian population are visible minorities<sup>4</sup>, while 51% of Toronto and 49% of Vancouver are visible minorities. Calgary and Edmonton, which both recently elected People of Colour as mayors, are 34% and 28% respectively.

Four percent of the Canadian population belong to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community<sup>5</sup>.

Twenty-two percent of the Canadian population have a disability<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Three examples of statistical review of representation are: [Being Seen On Screen: Diverse Representation and Inclusion on TV, 2020](#), Nielsen's, Inclusion in [Netflix Original U.S. Scripted Series and Films, 2021](#), Netflix and USC Annenberg, and [Where We Are on TV](#), GLAAD, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Two reports that drilled down into the portrayal of specific communities are [I Am Not a Fetish or a Model Minority: Redefining What It Means to Be API in the Entertainment Industry, 2021](#), Geena Davis Institute, and [Missing and Maligned: The Reality of Muslims in Popular Global Movies](#), USC Annenberg and Pillars Fund

<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster definition of [authentic](#)

<sup>4</sup> Note that [Statistics Canada data](#) includes Black within Visible Minority but excludes Indigenous. It also excludes some multiracial identities. Montreal is lower than Toronto and Vancouver at 22% visible minorities

<sup>5</sup> [LGBTQ2+ communities in Canada: A demographic snapshot](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Making an accessible Canada for persons with disabilities](#)



# 22%

**VISIBLE MINORITIES**

# 51%

**TORONTO**

# 49%

**VANCOUVER**

While there are no research reports on visible representation in Canadian media, Nielsen's report on U.S. on screen representation, cited in footnote one, demonstrated a need for increased visibility of People of Colour (which Nielsen defines to include Black) and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. The Netflix/University of Southern California Annenberg study of Netflix films and television shows demonstrated that while white leads were overrepresented on that platform and Black leads were comparable to their percentage of the population, there was significant underrepresentation of Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern/North African, American Indian and Pacific Islander populations<sup>7</sup>.

The existing research tells us that Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ and People with Disabilities are not seeing themselves sufficiently on screen (other than as leads on Netflix Originals). This report aims to dig deeper and ask participants if they see themselves represented authentically, how do they feel about that, and if not, what should be done about it. What we discovered through the consultation is that while some felt that they did have some representation, it was not authentic, while others did not see themselves at all. Both aspects of representation were therefore addressed.

“ As the saying goes, ‘the story you tell yourself today becomes the reality you live tomorrow’. Stories are really, really powerful, and who gets to tell the stories is really, really important. If we do not expand the space of who gets to tell stories, then the world we’re seeking to have will never come to fruition. It’s more than just entertainment, it becomes who we are as people. ”

<sup>7</sup> See Footnote 1

“ Representation on shows like *Modern Family* and *Pose* does impact the lived experiences of marginalized groups in a very real way. You are bringing those marginalized groups into people’s homes and people are engaging with and empathizing with characters who are from those walks of life. ”

“ Often people with disabilities feel ‘I don’t see anybody that’s like me, or stories that are like mine being told, and therefore, I don’t dream those things’. I think other folks might experience that as well. ”

“ Screw the whole economic argument that diversity bloody sells, and I know it is absolutely true, and it is the best way to convince people to get behind this movement. But at the end of the day, diversity is essential to who we are and to how we function as a nation. ”

These Directives are focused on people who identify as Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ and People with Disabilities. We were inspired by the imagineNATIVE “[Protocols and Pathways](#)” guide. That guide addresses many issues that are unique to Indigenous communities but also created a model for community consultation and engagement in developing protocols for authentic content creation. While the “*Protocols and Pathways*” guide is based on universal principles such as respect and consent, its priority is Indigenous sovereignty. As well, other underrepresented communities in Canadian media have issues unique to them that need to be addressed. They also want to be seen and heard. We encourage the use of these Directives and the “*Protocols and Pathways*” guide together to create more authentic content.

The BSO engaged a representative team of researchers to research and draft the Directives. They conducted third party research, focus groups and interviews. The results of those consultations and research are summarized in these Directives. As much as possible the report allows the participants’ voices to be heard through quotes, provided that identifying information has been deleted, paraphrased or summarized. Also note that not every quote will be grammatically correct due to the relaxed nature of the conversation and the number of participants with English or French as a Second Language. Profanity has been left in quotes because it was authentic.

This report is referred to as the ‘**Core Themes Report**’ and addresses themes that were common to all identities. Companion reports go deeper into the issues of Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ and People with Disabilities communities, and a report that focuses on representation in Children’s Media. Please visit [www.beingseen.ca](http://www.beingseen.ca) for an online version of the reports, as well as more data and background research for those interested. There will also be downloadable tip sheets available at that link for specific and easily shareable recommendations.

## A NOTE ON IDENTITY

As mentioned above, detailed demographic charts are included in Appendix B, and a Glossary of terms in Appendix C provides definitions.

Before getting into the data and analysis please keep in mind the following points which came up during the consultations:

- Several communities, particularly the Transgender and Nonbinary communities and People with Disabilities communities, felt that this was the first time that they had ever been included in consultations about the screen-based media sector or about representation, and they were very grateful to be included. There appears to be a distinct lack of opportunities to be heard within the sector and to engage with each other.
- There was a significant response from people with Multiracial identities who often do not feel comfortable in the community groups of any of their identities. They sometimes adapt by ‘passing’ for the identity that is more visible but still feel isolated. Others find themselves asked to ‘choose’ one or the other of their racial identities, depending on the situation.

“ I have multiple ethnicities. I use the term mixed race. With ACTRA I had to pick and choose so I’m listed as South Asian. Some of the efforts to increase diverse representation are somewhat misguided. I should be able to put myself forward as a person with multiple identities which is what it says on my census form. We need to be able to write in what our ethnicity is, or what our identity is. The checklist system is not going to result in this room being represented. ”

- There was also a significant response from people with multiple identities who often do not feel comfortable in the community groups of one of their identities. They adapt sometimes by prioritizing an identity depending on the situation, such as Black when in a room of Black people or 2SLGBTQIA+ when at an 2SLGBTQIA+ event. The research took an intersectional approach to the consultations, encouraging participants to choose as many identity focus groups as they wished and to provide responses based on any of their identities without any sense of hierarchy. Participants were very appreciative of this intersectional approach which did not require them to prioritize or choose aspects of their identity.

“ As a Black person, that is at the forefront a lot of the time. Someone might not see me as Queer, but this is me as a Black person and they’re going to act on that. If I’m in a space that specifically is for LGBTQ, it might be really white and then I’m treated in a particular way because of my race. I think it should be the responsibility of whoever’s creating spaces to understand that not every person comes with one identity. ”

- People with both Multiracial and multiple identities may not ever see themselves fully represented in media, but they also are often flexible in what they see as representation that they can identify with.

“ I grew up in French but my parents have thick Hispanic accents so I could see myself in Kim’s Convenience even though not Asian. ”

“ I love My Big Fat Greek Wedding because of the large family dynamic. ”



## CORE THEMES

# 1. Authentic Storytelling

### 1.1 Complexity

There were two kinds of demands for complexity that came up repeatedly in the consultations:

1. Complexity of storylines and characters and for a movement away from tokenism and stereotypes.
2. Better representation of communities so that the diversity within a community could be seen and understood.

Both forms of complexity speak to a need for a greater understanding of Intersectionality, and an integrated analysis of how social and political identities create overlapping systems of oppression and disadvantage. Any attempt to simplify inevitably results in inauthentic and stereotypical characterizations.

Stereotypical content was sometimes negatively described by members of the industry as ‘lazy’ screenwriting, as it was evidence that the screenwriter had not done the necessary research (see page 19 below) and consultation to go beyond superficial and often tokenized stories and characters. However, the blame for the lack of complexity was not leveled at screenwriters alone, but also seen as the responsibility of producers, broadcaster/digital platforms/streaming services, distributors and funders to demand that stories and characters fully reflect communities and identities.

### 1.2 Storylines and Characters

There will be a more detailed discussion of representation and authenticity within each companion report of communities, but in general we heard a frustration with seeing the same stories and the same stereotypical characters. In particular, only seeing their identity in the context of trauma was potentially triggering. This was seen as content to be avoided rather than enjoyed as entertainment. Several participants pointed to *Schitt’s Creek* as a rare example of an openly gay (even rarer – pansexual) character where the story wasn’t about him coming out or the trauma of his identity.

A very frequent theme in the Black community was wanting to see more than just stories of slavery or brutality, but each community expressed that they are portrayed in one type of story over and over and wanted to see so much more.

“ We’re not just about the slavery story, we’re not just about the brutality story. Let’s get into all the other stories as well. ”

“ Right now, the trope around disability is that it either has to be tragic, inspirational or an evil character. I think the best way for disability to be included is first of all as an Intersectional identity, and as part of everyday life. ”

“ I feel often that the coming out story is like super traumatic, and the person coming out has no systems of support ever, or you know, is suicidal. I think a big one too is not just getting killed, but also being suicidal because of being LGBTQ is something that I kind of never want to see again. ”

“ Almost nowhere have I seen a story in which a transgender person is not penalised by their identity, ends up lonely or dead or accused of being a liar. I haven’t seen love stories or comedies in which my gender is not the joke. ”

“ All the characters that we see in Queer films, they always have to be misunderstood. You can’t just have someone who is Queer in the movie, doing awesome stuff, having a great time. ”

“ Dead Asian women: *Law and Order*, *SVU*, *Top of the Lake*, *Sherlock*. The trope of East Asian women being smuggled into the country via a Triad and then ending up dead at the beginning or the end of the show. I am so sick and tired of that being the only way that we can get on a show. I’m not saying that human trafficking is not a legitimate issue but it seems like every East Asian woman on a mystery or crime show is the dead body. ”

“ So things like *Max Payne* [video game] where you’re running through the favelas, you walk around shooting black teenagers in the face. If you’ve spent any time there, you realize that these are actually just people trying to survive, and they’re having a tough time. ”

Each community is frustrated with tokenism where their identity is too often portrayed in one or two ways. This tokenism also tends to erase Intersectionality so that if a character is Black, they cannot also be a Person with a Disability or 2SLGBTQIA+. Another form of tokenism is lumping multiple identities into one character to showcase

diversity while still leaving room for more white, straight, able-bodied characters. Multiracial identities are just not seen. Even if characters are portrayed by multiracial performers, the complexity of the performer's identity is not part of the character.

“ One thing that I find frustrating is the need for a Black character to either be too perfect or to be too rough around the edges. I'd love to see, like other characters, like just the full breadth of humanity being able to be shown. When flushed out, it kind of helps society to be able to see us as we're well-rounded people. ”

“ The side character, the best friend who they want to lump in every sort of intersection of identity that they can think of. We're going to be the Black Queer friend, we're going to be the Black, over sexual, Queer friend, we're also going to be the Black disabled - all just lumped into one character where you don't even get a chance to dissect what they're like. ”

“ The checkbox approach to diversity really negates the fact that so many of us have intersecting identities. We're all coming from very different backgrounds. What happens in writing rooms in the dominant media is that they decide on a more diverse approach and it's 'let's check the boxes'. ”

“ There's also room to consider how people's identity changes or how their identity doesn't necessarily inform every aspect of their lives. Tokenizing is the idea where every character's decision has to be informed specific to their identity. It's a fine balance where you want them to be authentic, real characters too. ”

“ I would like to see more narratives, Queer narratives or Trans narratives, or BIPOC narratives that are thinking about the every day, the mundane and how we as people who occupy different social locations are not always concerned about how those necessarily interlock in every single aspect of our lives. Think less about the misery and exceptionalism of these particular communities and more about the joy in every day. ”

“ I've seen some games that have tried to be diverse by adding in characters of colour. But there's no actual culture associated with it, it's just a skin swap. There's nothing that has anything to do with everyday lived experience. ”

“ The stereotypes that we're used to seeing, they affect the way we create. We analyze our own projects and we think 'am I going to get funding if I'm not telling the story they want to hear?' So you start creating differently because you want to fit the expectations. We have to deconstruct this and be confident about our own stories. ”



### 1.3 Communities

Communities are complex but the feeling is that they are not being portrayed that way, often due to poor research or understanding. The factors most discussed were how communities differed in immigration status, within geographic regions and within identity:

Immigration status:

“ There is a difference between POCs born here and more recent immigrants. Those born here are closer to Canadian culture so tend to drive the definition of what it means to be Indo-Canadian or Chinese-Canadian. We need to reflect that complexity. ”

“ I worked with a company looking for voiceover actors and they wanted to ensure they had diversity in casting so it had to be obvious, they wanted people with accents. But I’m brown and I don’t have an accent. ”

Within geographic regions:

“ There’s this weird expectation from casting and from directors that we’re all interchangeable East Asians. ”

“ Any character that’s East Indian or South Asian, whether it’s TV or film, there’s a homogenization of the identity of that Indian character. Either it’s someone who is an immigrant that has an accent, or somebody that works in IT, when the Diaspora is incredibly diverse. It’s all stereotypes. ”

“ [I would like to see] more shows that show the diversity of the Black Diaspora where it could have like someone from the Caribbean, someone whose family is from Canada and showing that they are different cultures that still have unique ties to each other. ”

“ [I would like to see] more shows that show the diversity of the Black Diaspora where it could have like someone from the Caribbean, someone whose family is from Canada and showing that they are different cultures that still have unique ties to each other. ”

“ The Black experience in the States tends to come out of slavery and that’s very different from the immigrant experience. The American Black Muslim experience is different both for immigrants and those who have been there for generations. And even with African Muslims, then there’s Mali, Nigeria, Morocco, Ethiopia, Somalia, like we all have different cultures. We need to be wary of grouping us all as if we’re the same<sup>8</sup>. ”

“ Canadian and North American media has failed to recognize the diversity that being Brazilian means in terms of racial diversity. There isn’t a face to Brazilian identity. ”

“ People are going for a diversity that you can see, even if it’s not authentic. I was talking with a bunch of Arab friends, and they all looked completely different - some have red hair, some blue eyes, some have black hair, some are brown, some are white - and that’s an authentic representation. ”

#### Within Identity:

“ Everyone with disabilities experiences them differently, even if it’s the same or similar disability. So representing everyone is a challenge but to start would be fantastic. ”

“ Black Muslims are not portrayed as accurately as they could be. Even the representation of a hijab is not the way the Muslim community would appreciate. Islam is represented as just one whole thing when there are levels to it and they face their own racism. ”

“ For far too long, Arab and Muslim communities have been represented as either villains or victims. If you’re a woman you are either oppressed or you’re going to throw on a suicide vest, or you wear a hijab. If you’re a man, you’re radicalized or you’re part of some kind of gang. I would like to see less of that on the screen. ”

“ I’m mixed race and I don’t really see anything representing any worldview that I might have at all. ”

<sup>8</sup> Note that while we did not target religion specifically, religious representation came up frequently in Black and POC focus groups and where relevant will be referred to. However, as religion was not a target identity, religious identity was not requested as part of the demographic information and did not form part of the demographic data. Future research should target representation of religious minorities, particularly those that have visible representation.



“ There will be a show with representation of Black Canadians but then it might not show a Black Canadian Queer person or Black Canadian who deals with mental health. ”

“ There should be more intersectional characters - disabled, nonbinary, Trans, intersex, BIPOC, Indigenous, immigrants, refugees. It’s often a one equity seeking character limit. ”

As illustrated in the preceding quotes, participants had many recommendations for improving the complexity of storylines, characters and identities. They have been summarized for the following Directives.

## 1.4 Directives for: Creators, Producers

- Review storylines, plots, locations and characters for shorthand descriptions that could be perceived as stereotypes or tokens and which fail to explore complexity and Intersectionality.
- Assess whether there is a need for another trauma-based story from your particular perspective. There could be, particularly if you belong to the same community as the story and if it is a story that few have told. However, if the interest in telling the story could be described as profiting from the pain of others then reconsider whether it is your story to tell. For example, there are few stories about slavery in Canada, however, a white creator or producer should not be telling or profiting from that story.
- Consider the complexity of characters and settings in every story told. Do not default to white, able-bodied, heterosexuals in your love story, comedy, horror, fantasy, sci-fi, soap opera, documentary, etc.
- Avoid trying to fit one of every identity (i.e. one Black, one Person of Colour, one Person with a Disability etc.) into a cast or cram multiple identities into one character to leave the others free to be white, able-bodied, straight people.
- Move beyond addressing underrepresentation with the best friend or sidekick or only secondary characters who have little character development or agency, and only exist to support the narrative and character development of the white, able-bodied, straight leads.
- Do your research so that you understand the community and characters that you are writing about.
- Find ways to solve underrepresentation that go further than substituting colour or skin tone for race (see Casting on page 28)

## 1.5 Directives for: Broadcasters/Digital Platforms/Streaming Services, Funders, Distributors

- Implement an anti-racist intersectional framework to content review. Assess every story to ensure that an Intersectional approach is taken and there are no stereotypes or tokenism.
- Ensure that there are no common tropes embodied in the characters (see the Companion Reports for more detail by community on common tropes). Address content that looks like a “checkbox diversity” approach and dig deeper to ensure that representation is authentic. Identify if the underrepresented characters are only in secondary roles. Positive intention is good but ensure that the creative team is committing to more than the minimum.
- Don’t just commission trauma stories but instead explore the many other stories that are possible.
- Feature but don’t centre stories on characters’ identities.
- Understand the communities being written about. If you have no familiarity with those communities, ask questions of the creative team. They should be able to explain any aspect of the characterization or plot based on understanding or research.
- Avoid solving poor or lacking representation by asking for representation based on skin tone that doesn’t reflect authenticity.

## 2. Telling a Story From Outside Your Community

First, a bit of an explanation of what is meant by this theme may be required. Anyone who tells the story of a community that they do not belong to, is telling a story from outside their community. This can range from the concept of the story of a film or television show or game to the inclusion of characters in that story. Most of those consulted focused on the story of the community as a whole rather than specific characters in a broader or more general story, and were most passionate about possible limitations to who could tell that story. Note that being ‘outside a community’ does not refer only to straight white able-bodied folks but to anyone trying to tell a story about a community, or include characters from that community, that is not one that they belong to. Community can be defined very narrowly, depending on the circumstances. For example, a Lesbian telling a story



about a Trans Man is telling a story from outside their community, or perhaps more accurately their lived experience, even though both are 2SLGBTQIA+.

The reactions to the question about whether it is okay for someone to tell a story about a community that they do not belong to generally fell into one of three categories, with no trends in responses by identities, communities or participation in the industry. In fact, many participants from the general public had strong feelings on the subject. What was clear was that this is an incredibly complex topic with multiple firmly held opinions. There was also a strong thread that basic beliefs such as the freedom of an artist to create could be compromised by the need for equitable responses to address systemic barriers. This report raises awareness of the complexity of the opinions and provides the reader with questions that could help them determine how they feel about the topic. It also offers guidance for navigating research and relationship building should they choose to engage with a community other than their own.

The three reactions, detailed below, are:

- There should be no censorship or limits;
- No one should tell a story from outside their community; and
- It depends on the circumstances and the strategies being employed.

## 2.1 There should be no censorship or limits

There was a strong thread of not wanting to see any censorship or putting limits on creators and what stories they can tell. There was also a concern that if white, straight, able-bodied creators and producers were told what stories they could or could not tell, then the underrepresented creators and producers would also be told what stories they could or could not tell.

“ It’s like trying to monopolize who has the right to say anything about whatever subject. Anyone can write whatever they want especially when it comes to the arts. If you’re good and it has truth to it, it will prevail no matter what is the origin of the person who wrote it. ”

“ There’s a fear with writers and creators thinking ‘well what am I going to write about if I’m not allowed to write outside of my community’. If you’re a white writer, that’s not a threat to you. Nobody’s telling you to write a white only, or a straight only cast. We’re telling you to do the opposite. There are amazing people who’ve done that beautifully within a positive collaborative system. ”

But even that belief, the ability to be creative, had some limits for some participants.

“ I definitely don’t think that as creatives we should be limited to the type of stories that we want to tell, because that’s what makes us creative. However, I do believe that in some capacity, we need to involve the culture that we’re trying to represent in our stories, to be part of developing that story. ”

“ There is also responsibility held by the market. The broadcaster, the distributor, the audience should hold the creator accountable and say, ‘this is not okay, greenlighting a show where the representation is not authentic, the person hasn’t done their due diligence. ”

“ I think that when white Quebec authors write for example a whole series or a whole season or something specific on a family of a specific culture, I think that they should have to deal with consultants to precisely have collaborations or scenarios so as not to fall into clichés. But I also think that we need to create spaces for Latino people, Black people, of all origins, to write stories and not just stories specific to their origins. I think there is beauty in the ordinary. We need to create spaces for screenwriters from all walks of life, so they can tell stories, not just stories of People of Color. ”

## 2.2 No one should tell a story from outside their community.

Those who felt that no one from outside a community should tell someone else’s story generally explained it as preventing inauthentic storytelling and characterization. No amount of research could replace lived experience, understanding and existing relationships.

“ If you’re not Queer you shouldn’t be making films with Queer leads. ”

“ You can’t make up the truth. You can’t fake the funk. We can smell it from a mile. ”

“ If you don’t belong to the community, there’s really no reason as to why you would want to tell their stories unless they asked for it. No matter how much research, you’re still not a part of that community, you can’t authentically tell the story. ”

“ I think the problem that we’re seeing today is that there is this assumption that comes with privilege that it’s acceptable to take stories that belong to other people, to be writing from perspectives that aren’t one’s own. There has to be a shift in the mindset in which the industry, which is predominantly white-run, understands that not every story is theirs to tell. ”

“ Never. If you’re not from that community, you shouldn’t be speaking for that community. There’s enough talent of all different backgrounds in Canada. We need to create resources for the people in power who make the decisions about what gets seen on screen to be able to let them know that this talent exists.” ”

“ I think we can distinguish between 1) white people telling POC stories, and 2) POC telling racially diverse stories. I don't want Asian stories to only talk about Asians, in isolation from others, so I think we need some way to approach others' stories well. ”

“ Stories is not just simply our appearance or some of our primary behaviour. It has to be deeper. What gets lost by other people telling our stories is really deeper social issues. There is racism within our own communities, there is sexism, there is violence against women, violence against LGBTQ communities. What is missing is not only that we are physically present but we are ideologically present. ”

“ It is absolutely crucial that the community has ownership of the story. There might be situations where someone outside the community has a really authentic relationship with that community but they can tell the story from their perspective, their experience. They shouldn't be speaking from the point of view of the community itself. ”

## 2.3 It depends on the circumstances and the strategies being employed

However, there was a lot of nuance in the responses to this issue where participants could see both sides or see where storytelling from outside a community could be ok under certain circumstances and with certain strategies employed. As long as the producer engaged a creative team with the appropriate lived experience or expertise and research skills, and the screenwriter(s) did their research and engaged respectfully with the community in a way that was not exploitative, then it could be fine. At times it was felt that it was more important that the story be told at all than who told it. For some, there were topics that should only be dealt with by someone with lived experience. Note that the list of 'off limits' topics tends to be specific to a community and will be dealt with in greater detail, by community, in companion reports.

As mentioned above, equality of opportunity was an ongoing theme. Anyone could tell any story theoretically, but as many underrepresented storytellers have been barred or lacked access to training, funding or gatekeepers to be able to tell their stories, it was felt that there is a greater need right now to address the systemic barriers and provide more opportunities for people to tell their own stories.

“ As artists we want to create work that's outside of our own experience. It's the transformative nature of what we do. I want to explore the unknown of what I don't know about myself. I think the challenge is working conscientiously to not miss or take someone else's story as your own. ”

“ You have to be a little bit mindful that there are people who've probably been trying to pitch the same story but have not been given the opportunity to tell their own story. ”

“ If we make cis het<sup>9</sup> producers afraid to put in LGBTQ or Trans characters we'll never become normalized in storylines so we have to be careful. But some lines have to be drawn. ”

Some participants asked about motivation. Why does this person want to tell a story from another community? Are they exploiting someone else's story, trauma or history, for their own profit? Or do they have a connection to the story or a valuable outside perspective on the story.

“ Many cis white men are trying to tell stories but they don't know how. One of the things that I always bring to them when they come to me with a script or a logline is I say 'What motivated you to do this particular story? Have you consulted with people that are part of that demographic? How close are you to those people? Have you shared your thoughts with those people? Have you bounced these pieces of text off those people to see where they see it work and doesn't work? Do they identify with what you're saying? If that kind of stuff comes together and you're supported by members of the community while you're telling that story, then I think it's valid. If you were just writing it for inspiration porn - shut up'. ”

“ I think a lot of times, especially with communities who haven't been able to speak for themselves, there's a large aspect of saviourship. When it's white saviour or neurotypical saviourship, they're saying 'I'm going to tell these people's story for them, because they can't'. That's a big problem. ”

“ They have the right to make whatever stories they want. But it doesn't make sense when we do have limited representation to give voices to our minority stories from people who are the majority, who then might go on to misrepresent and portray us in a poor light. ”

“ Most of us are capable of empathy, that we can get in the mind space of any character from any cultural background, but at this time when stories have been dominated by white writers and white producers, I think that's when space needs to be made for people from BIPOC groups to own their stories and be able to reap the financial benefits of producing their stories. ”

If someone chooses to tell a story from outside their community, or include a character, participants had a lot of advice about how to engage with communities and consultants to ensure that the right degree of research and consultation was done to ensure authenticity and fair representation.

<sup>9</sup> 'cis het' is short for cisgender heterosexual. Cisgender refers to people whose gender identity conforms with the identity assigned at birth. Heterosexual refers to people who are sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex.

A condition of telling someone else's story was often the 'necessary' engagement, but how much was necessary was a frequent topic of discussion. Was consultation enough? Yes, in certain circumstances, but generally it was felt that the current trend to consultation was insufficient because it could be:

1. Rubber stamping to say 'see we consulted' and then doing whatever the creator or producer wants.
2. A source of employment for consultants but fails to build the talent pool. Hiring people from that community as creators would build the talent pool by giving them work experience and credits that would allow them to advance in their careers. Hiring a consultant rather than a creator also fails to take advantage of and give opportunities to talent and unique voices that have the potential to improve the creative.
3. Potentially the perspective of only one person and not sharing a wider, more complex perspective on a community, depending on the professional background of the consultant.

“ I'm a producer and I want to make sure that I am telling culturally diverse stories. When I do that, I want to make sure that I am bringing those people in, in order to be able to tell their stories. ”

“ If they're going to be in the room, you got to give them some power, because this whole diversity without power is bullshit, because that's just window dressing. ”

“ My girlfriend did a cultural appropriation exhibit, she defined cultural appropriation as profiting from something that is unique to another culture. Profit without credit. If a white director-producer or a writer feels that he is the one who can write something about a Black subject matter, it's already cultural appropriation, if he didn't involve a Black person who can directly or indirectly benefit from this fact. ”

“ If you are from the dominant community and you want to tell inclusive stories then thank you. I commend you. And the way to do that properly is to surround yourself with not one but multiple people from every sector of wherever it is that you're also setting these stories. Once you hire them then listen and consider and empower them and do the right thing. ”

“ As Black people, when we tell Black stories, we also need to do our homework. If I was doing a film about Blacks in Nova Scotia and I've only been to Nova Scotia twice in my life, I would have to really consult the people because I've read the books, I've seen the movies but it's not my turf. I don't believe in censorship, but I think to get an authentic voice, you need to actually be on the ground, spend some time with the people. You want the voice to come out from a deeper place than just you trying to be a creative. ”

“ Yeah, anybody can tell the stories, but if you have to hire somebody who looks like us to help you tell the story, maybe you shouldn't tell that story, maybe you should just hire us. ”

“ If you grew up in a community and have lived experience, even if you don’t share that identity, you have experience and existing relationships. I am invested in the care for these people because I have attachments to them. If you just go do some research without a personal connection you’re not going to be as completely empathetic. ”

“ [A white producer] wanted me to write a Black story but he didn’t listen to me. He’s the one who gets into the room and will be listened to by [broadcaster]. He wants to write a Black story but [broadcaster] is saying no more, you need a Black person to do it. I wrote the script. He argued with me about what Black characters would say and do and he would not listen. Eventually I quit. It was a good opportunity but I had to quit. ”

“ It’s not ok in terms of the primary narrative. I’ve had people approach me when they’re writing secondary or tertiary characters. Usually I’m not into the whole diversity consultant culture, because it feels like a cop out, but I’m in when there’s an opportunity to help create the character and be a more holistic part of the character development, even if I don’t have more agency on the rest of the show. And when I was in the writers room, when I said this doesn’t resonate or this would seem very colonial, people in the room and the producer were very respectful and acknowledged that perspective and changed accordingly. ”

“ The consultants are being tokenized, they’re bringing you in so that they can say, look there was this person who was here to help us, but we’re often not listened to. A consultant doesn’t have the power that a director [in a documentary] has to shape the story. ”

“ I would say to showrunners, particularly beware of the people who are marketing themselves as the arbiters of a community, because most likely they’re not. The folks who probably have that knowledge, you’re going to find them in universities, in community groups. ”

“ It puts so much pressure on me when I’m called on to check if a story is authentic in some way to Muslim identity because I don’t want to be responsible for how all Muslims are represented. ”

“ It’s about building partnerships with community members. **Being Seen** [researchers] reached out to Concordia and we received an email. It’s about building these relationships and sustaining them, creating a bank of communities where you can have them review or get a second opinion, especially when they don’t have a seat at the table when it’s being written. ”

The CBC show *Kim's Convenience* came up throughout the consultations, regardless of the target community being talked to. The very public controversy about the conflict between the primarily white writing room and creative team and the Asian actors took place at the beginning of the consultations. Whether a member of the public or the industry, there was widespread awareness of the conflict and it was regularly held up as an example of what not to do. Even those who loved the show and welcomed the Asian representation pointed to it as an example of inauthentic representation.

“ The play *Kim's Convenience* was an authentic story from a Korean writer, the story he wanted to tell and it was very melancholy. But the play was turned into a shiny brainless sitcom. They handed it to the showrunner of *Corner Gas*. He's going to do everything he can to make it as palatable for white people, which is probably what they wanted. But it was the wrong person to tell the story. ”

“ There isn't going to be a *Kim's Convenience* situation again but there's going to be a different version of that. If you've been perpetuating systemic racism, and you're given a diverse cast, then it's not addressing the fact that you were part of the problem. You need to be honest with who you are, the work you've done and your privilege. ”

While there is no consensus amongst those consulted on whether someone from outside a community can tell their story there was clear guidance on the issues to be considered before deciding to tell that kind of a story and how to go about ensuring authenticity.

## 2.4 Directives for: Creators, Producers

- Ask who benefits from the story. If the ownership is outside the community, then build pathways to improve capacity through hiring in junior creative and production roles so that community members can gain experience and credits necessary to be able to tell their own stories in the future.
- Ask yourself why you want to write/produce a story from outside your community. Do you have a connection to the story or the community? If you do, then the research and consultation is more likely to come from a place of empathy. If you are responding to a trend in the marketplace, then the empathy and understanding may not be there and the community may not respond well to you. You also run the risk of telling the story from an outsider perspective which can contribute to 'othering' (i.e., identifying a group as not part of the 'norm').
- If you are telling a story from outside a community, you can expect that there may be resistance to your involvement, despite the best of intentions. Do not invalidate these points of view. Communicate your point of view clearly. There may be legitimate reasons for an outside perspective, but if you are trying to tell the story as if you are a community member then it will not be authentic.
- Get involved in the community. Build a direct relationship with the community and understand that no community is monolithic. Check with multiple sources. It's about engagement and involvement but not permission as there is no one person or group who could give it. Consider creating an advisory

board that can give feedback throughout development and production. Budget time and money for this engagement. While there are no standards for fees for community consultation, review Writers Guild of Canada IPA<sup>10</sup> rates for Story Consultants or the Canadian Artists Representation/Le Front des Artistes Canadiens<sup>11</sup> for rates for Professional Services fees that include consultation for guidance.

- There are consultants who can take a community-wide perspective because of their academic research or grassroots community work but be cautious of hiring a consultant just because they are a member of a community. They may only represent one perspective.
- Do your research to ensure that any organization that you contact is itself representative and well-regarded by the community. For example, Autism Speaks is an Autism awareness and advocacy organization that takes positions that are controversial within the Autism community.
- If hiring someone from the community, give them authority and the ability to say ‘no, that has to be changed’. Co-creation is one way to ensure that authority. One lone voice in a writer’s room can be intimidated into silence or acquiescence. Consultation does not require that the person consulted is listened to and can be used as a rubber stamp of approval and then ignored. However, if the concern is not telling a story but including characters from a community that you do not belong to, it may be possible to achieve authenticity through consultation or adding a screenwriter from that community to the writers’ room.
- Engaging a consultant or screenwriter is the beginning and not the end of the process. They have a job to do and expect to do it.
- Continue engagement and consultation from writing in development through production and post-production to ensure continued authentic portrayal that extends to casting, production design, wardrobe, locations, editing and the whole creative process.

## 2.5 Directives for: Broadcasters/Digital Platforms/Streaming Services, Funders, Distributors

- Ask if the creator is the best person to write and produce the story, do they have lived experience or might there be someone else with a more direct connection to the story.
- Engage with the community either through consultations or an ongoing working group or hiring staff or engaging with independent contractors as evaluators or script reviewers. Community engagement will provide access to perspectives that will inform your assessment of the creative.
- If the creator is from outside the community of the story, ask if they have engaged a co-writer, story editor or consultant from the community. Ask if they ensured that input will come from or represent multiple perspectives. Do they have a connection to the community? Have they done or are they planning research that will inform their work?
- If the creator has hired a writer/story editor/consultant, ask if that person has the right identity for the story (e.g., Black Nova Scotian for a Black Nova Scotian story)?
- Ask if there is a plan to include members of the community throughout development, production and post-production.
- Ask who is profiting from the story. Are members of the community excluded or only included in minor ways (i.e. consulting fee)? If someone from outside the community is telling the story, ask if they have taken steps to create pathways to build capacity so that more members of the community are in a position to tell their own stories in the future.

<sup>10</sup> [Writers Guild of Canada IPA](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Canadian Artists Representation/Le Front des Artistes Canadiens](#)



### 3. Authentic Casting

Participants understand that casting performers who represent the identity being portrayed can sometimes be a challenge. However, in general the feeling is that more needs to be done to both cast authentically and provide work opportunities to performers from underrepresented identities so that they can develop their skills. Not being able to find someone is not a good enough excuse if a) you didn't look hard enough, and b) you have done little to help to develop the talent pool.

“ If you cannot find someone from the community it's because you are not working hard enough, you are not seeking people out. There are tremendous barriers that People of Colour face in the arts industry in general. You need to be doing that work. When you put out a casting call and your inbox is all white people instead of 'well that's all I get' it should be a light bulb in your head that you need to reach out to the community. Go watch theatre, contact Reel Asian, there are places you can go. ”

“ For a short film, I messaged in the group chat for the Masjid<sup>12</sup> and her mom said 'oh my daughter wants to act' and that's how I got her to be a part of it. ”

<sup>12</sup> Arabic, meaning mosque

“ My question is, so why aren't there more actors? Let's go back to education and training. And as a kid I didn't see anyone with my kind of experience on TV, so I couldn't imagine myself there. The ways you've set up casting, the ways that you do auditions, the ways that you engage in filming and the ways that ableism is embedded in the structures of the very thing you're recruiting someone to do is going to stop people. ”

“ If you're fortunate enough to be doing your production, filming or voice recording in a metropolitan city like Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, then you have a wider pool to cast from. But if you're doing more of a regional production or working with a very limited budget, you don't have that ability. But you need to at least make an effort to cast as authentically as possible. ”

“ You have to put in that little bit, or sometimes it's a lot more effort. We have a smaller industry here. It's not always easy to find what you're looking for. We've scoured through the cultural community groups and people who aren't even professional and we spend a little more time with them in the studio, just to get that authenticity. And it is a bit more work but we have now a small group of people that we can go back to, sometimes again and again. ”

“ These big companies in the world, in the industry, have the money to be able to educate. Apple pays a Blind woman to teach Blind actors how to act, because they are doing the television show See. Apple's got a ton of money but they also have this show where they're trying to hire Blind actors so they're doing their bit in trying to create a talent pool to draw from. ”

“ We have a character on a [animated] show that is Deaf and we wanted a little girl watching the show to be 'this person is like me, let me go look up the actress'. We did a Canada wide audition and we found someone. You have to do that extra bit of work as a creator, if you want to tell these stories. And now the Deaf girl, who had only done modelling before, now knows she can do voice work. You've given them a seat at the table, or you've let them take a seat at the table. ”

On the other hand, there was a recognition from performers, creators and producers that performers do not want to be limited in the roles that they can play. They want to grow and stretch themselves. The question then becomes about equity. Is the actor taking the place of someone who is not getting work opportunities because of their identity? Why does the white/heterosexual/able-bodied performer get to grow and develop their talent when the underrepresented performer struggles to get an audition. The need to break down systemic barriers and work to redress former inequities is similar here, as above, under the theme of who can tell a story.

“ I really like that part of acting where I get given something and it challenges me to understand a new culture, challenges me to learn. ”

“ I don't have a problem with straight actors playing gay roles. I draw the line when it comes to trans folk, because for me there is a clear economical injustice. ”

“ Although Queer people do like to be cast as Queer characters, they also don't want to be just only seen as playing Queer characters. ”

“ It's acting. You are embodying something that is not yourself. But until what's on screen at least comes somewhat in line with reality then it is of utmost importance that productions look to find actors to represent that community. ”

“ I've been told so many times you've got to bring yourself to the role. Well my take is neurodiverse and I can't change that. If you're looking for neurodiverse or invisibly disabled bodies, as well as a diversity statement then ask for neurodiverse actors to submit a neurodiverse take. I think we need to open that door to conversation about what neurodiverse casting is. ”

A recurring theme was inauthentic casting from either a lack of awareness of what an ethnicity really looks like or an intentional desire to cast a performer with visible diversity to get credit for the diversity, even if it is not authentic.

“ There are actors and performers from all equity seeking communities who are ready and willing to fill roles but are often overlooked due to their looks often conflicting with the stereotyped or imagined character, often due to incorrect stereotypes, inherent biased media training and sub-conscious consumptions of bias, and inaccessibility of workplace conditions. ”

“ At the beginning of my career I thought maybe I shouldn't tan in the summer, maybe I should get a nose job, maybe I should get rid of some of the Arabness of myself to fit into these boxes because it's frustrating having to fit into someone else's box. And with the Arab Muslim auditions they always want to put an accent on you and a hijab. ”

“ There’s this weird expectation from casting and from directors that we’re all interchangeable East Asians, same for South Asians. You want a South Asian accent? Which one? ”

“ I feel like they hire South Asians to play Middle Eastern people mostly for the colouring. ”

However, some participants did feel that there were similarities between communities that would make ‘adjacent’ casting appropriate based on similar lived experience.

“ We do need to respect whether that person’s lived experiences are similar to the person they’re portraying. For example, Simu Liu on *Kim’s Convenience* is Chinese, he’s not Korean. And for the most part East Asians are fine with it. I think the big reason is because East Asians have similar lived experiences in terms of our appearance. We have the same skin colour. The way we’re treated in our daily lives is very similar to one another. And East Asian cultures are also very similar, we have a lot of connection, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese. So a mixed race Black person may have the same skin tone as a South Asian but you’re not going to interchange them because culturally it’s very different, their lived experiences are very different. It’s not just about skin tone.<sup>13</sup> ”

“ The disability experience is rooted in how people look at you, how people speak to you, how people condescend to you on a daily basis, having little access to education and the workplace and physical barriers. So I think we don’t have to jump to ‘I couldn’t find a person who is Deaf and Blind’, let’s look into the wider disability community because they have a similar lived experience. ”

The participants were clear that the goal of casting should be authenticity, even when they felt that exceptions could be made. It was a recurring theme that the casting process could be better and they provided a number of specific recommendations to improve the process.

### 3.1 Directives for: Creators, Producers, Casting Directors

- Review your character description to remove stereotypical descriptions that will limit who will audition to those who fit the stereotype. Ensure that the character description is not racist and does not aim for ‘visible diversity’ over authenticity.

<sup>13</sup> Note that this quote conflicts with the quote above on page 31 about Asians not being interchangeable and demonstrates that a community does not speak with one voice. It is important to consider both points of view and the casting strategy may depend on context and the story and performers involved.

- If a specific cultural or ethnic heritage is required for a role, research the range of what that means and particularly pay attention to the range of skin tones, eye colour and hair types and the kinds or lack of accent (i.e., are they a recent immigrant? Do they need to be?)
- Is your casting and audition process accessible, both physically and in other ways that accommodate Persons with Disabilities?
- Reach out beyond standard industry channels to community organizations (for example, the above quote re messaging in the Masjid group chat) and other performing groups (i.e., theatre, dance). If you have members of the community on your creative team, have them leverage their connections to share the casting notice.
- Is lived experience relevant to the character? Think beyond skin tone to cultural and lived experience.
- If you have tried but cannot find skilled actors with lived experience, are you taking steps to build the talent pool? See the quotes above on page 29 for suggestions for training that can build the talent pool.

### 3.2 Directives for: Broadcasters/Digital Platforms/Streaming Services, Funders, Distributors

- Review casting decisions for opportunities to promote talent with lived experience that can provide unique marketing opportunities beyond what is possible with ‘star power’ that may be lacking in authenticity.
- Ask questions about the casting process and whether it supports authentic casting and whether the creative team is even aware of the issues.
- Ensure that any corporate diversity mandate does not undermine authenticity by prioritizing symbolic representation over substantive change.
- Recognize that community members in the audience can tell the difference if the casting is not authentic. Always.
- Support initiatives to broaden the talent pool on a broader (i.e., not project specific) level.

## 4. Impact on Audiences

What impact does poor or missing representation have on an audience? They stop watching or engaging. We heard repeatedly that participants do not watch mainstream film or television because they do not see themselves. Or they watch shows from other markets such as the US or the UK which might air more content that is representative of their identity (e.g., a lot more Black representation in both the US and UK) or a country that shares their background (e.g., Bollywood content for South Asians). Or they go to YouTube or streamers like Netflix with larger global catalogues.

Increasing authentic representation is an opportunity to bring these viewers home. Participants were asked which they thought was more important, having more authentic content on mainstream media or their own services, such as OUTtv or AMI-TV, and there were a range of responses, with no clear trends by identity.

“ I stopped watching shows where there are no Black characters. Everyone is talking about *Schitt’s Creek* but there are no Black characters so I can’t get into it.<sup>14</sup> ”

“ When people say they just aren’t interested in seeing Asian films or Black and Indigenous films, it is because of white supremacy and people are told whose stories are most important. Communities are saying ‘we’re just going to tell our stories anyway’ and that’s a really powerful approach to tackling white supremacy. We need to create space, in the context of white supremacy, where People of Colour and Black and Indigenous people can thrive and grow and be self-determining and have joy on our own terms. ”

“ There are more venues and SVODs are definitely able to take more risks so I think there are more opportunities in general for diverse stories to be told. There’s a thirst for content for so many things now that I think this is the best time ever for diverse filmmakers to be able to tell their stories. The old guard, they’re quite limited in what they think they can invest in. I think they have to get off their assumptions that only these white stories work. ”

“ A lot of what I hear is that well, there’s so little work to begin with, we just have to protect what little we have. That’s a further excuse to keep us out. I’m tired of that excuse. They need to invest in the industry and the future of investing in the industry is investing in us. If you want to grow audiences, you want Canadians to care about what Canadian creators are doing, then invest some more money and then specify it for those of us who have been historically kept out. ”

“ This [representation] should also be happening even with market contraction, even with the few shows that we have in Canada. Even if you’re going to have a police procedural, it should still have inclusion and representation. If you’re going to do a network comedy, they’ll have inclusion and diversity because that’s the reality of the society we live in. ”

“ We should be allowing marginalized communities to tell their stories as part of the fabric of mainstream shows. That being said, I also think there’s a specificity to experience and to storytelling and lots of storytelling traditions that are non-mainstream, and that need to be respected and need to be engaged with, within the community itself. I think we should have mainstream representation, but I think we should also have storytelling that is specifically for our community as well. ”

<sup>14</sup> There was a Black character in *Schitt’s Creek* but as she did not feature in a lot of the publicity this member of the audience was not aware of her. That supports the point about marketing below.

One key point that was expressed repeatedly was that a wide range of audiences are interested in more authenticity and diversity in screen-based media, and not just the content from their own community. There was also a frustration that broadcasters and distributors were not marketing shows so that the audience could be aware the shows were available for them to watch..

“ I loved *We Are Lady Parts*. It is not representative of me but felt real. ”

“ They don’t create their culture with us in mind, because they don’t see us as part of their culture. So even when they do create a show, they don’t know how to communicate the fact that this show exists to the audience. If you really are committed to refashioning your content and your programming to be more inclusive and more representative of what Canada looks like, you then have to figure out how to market and promote and communicate that this stuff exists. ”

#### 4.1 Directives for: Broadcasters/Digital Platforms/Streaming Services, Funders, Distributors

- Review commissioning strategies to ensure that if the target audience is broad that it is reflective of Canadian audiences
- Review marketing strategies to ensure that content that is representative is marketed to demonstrate that diversity. ‘Build it and they will come’ is not likely to be an effective marketing strategy.
- If the target audience is one particular underrepresented community, keep in mind that it will likely find an audience within other underrepresented communities. Do not underestimate the potential audience or limit marketing.
- Authenticity is necessary for social cohesion but it is also good business.

## 5. Structural Changes Needed to Increase Authenticity

During the consultations we asked participants for ideas on what structural changes would help to increase the level of authentic representation in Canadian media. They focused on how to provide opportunities and training to underrepresented creators to support their career paths with a lot of practical ideas about how to do that.

<sup>15</sup> Channel 4 show about an all-female Muslim punk band in London, UK



Training was a must but current training is too limited and often cost-prohibitive. Mentorships and job shadowing were seen to be the most effective in helping to develop the talent pool but will only provide practical opportunities to underrepresented creators if they are paid. Mentorships and job shadowing should also be offered at all levels and not just entry level since there are many stuck trying to get up the ladder in their careers, or trying to shift from one format to another, such as from film to television.

“ We need real world experience by training in a real world situation where people are getting paid to learn how to do their job. ”

“ I did a program that put BIPOC directors with short film experience into TV. It wasn't shadowing but actually getting the job of a half hour on a tv show with someone you could call and talk about your shot list. This was the only mentorship in literally 20 years where I actually got a job after it. ”

“ Shonda Rimes had a deal with *Grey's Anatomy* that said something like after two or three years she would show run, but to start there was a senior showrunner assigned. Their job was to make her as strong as possible because after that they're gone. People coming up need that support. ”

“ There are lots of organizations creating internships, mentorships but they're entry level. What about folks with some AD experience, some producing experience on short films. Funding opportunities for folks to continue at different points in their career are important. ”

“ At the mid-level, senior level, showrunner level, everyone’s scared that by going diverse we’re going to cut them out of their jobs. That’s not the case no matter how much we try to explain. So what I’m noticing is that only the positions at the bottom are being filled with diverse people and then these people are in positions that don’t have enough power or enough voice to be able to vocalize at these lower positions. ”

“ CMPA Mentorship was great because it prioritized giving funding to companies that had a retention plan for those employees. Let’s take it further to create a structured plan so that the employee also has a plan for advancement within the company and actual career growth. ”

“ I have a baby, I’m married, I have a house and bills to pay, I can’t take a month off and work for free, so effectively I can’t learn how to direct TV now. ”

“ There are several grassroots organizations like BIPOC Film and TV<sup>16</sup>. They have a kids animation writing bootcamp and I’ve seen people coming out of that program getting hired as writers, developing their own material. We need more of that. It’s grassroots because that was the only way to create these programs. It was created by writers who said ‘hey we need more people like us and there’s a need for people to receive training and gain experience’ and they started those programs themselves. The more that we can have those types of programs that are properly funded and led by people of the communities, that’d be great. ”

“ I had read an article where they said just let us make mistakes because Quebec cinema was built on a lot of bad films. And I asked SODEC, why do Quebecers have white rights? Why are they allowed to make mistakes and we can’t? ”

“ I think that you need to have producers and companies that are willing to support BIPOC storytellers, writers, producers, actors, creators, whatever it is, even if they don’t have the same level of experiences as white counterparts do. That’s something that a lot of companies have skated by on, saying ‘we need this level of experience’ so they don’t say it’s about race. You can form a million task forces and support groups but if you don’t hire them, that’s meaningless. If you don’t think they have enough experience then hire them anyway but maybe pair them with someone, have them shadow someone, let them be Co-EP, let them shadow that person for a year, still working, and then take over. Employers have to get over themselves and thinking that the only thing that will work is the exact thing that they had before. ”

<sup>16</sup> Correct name is [BIPOC TV and Film](#)

“ I was working on a documentary which was excellent. We paired young directors of photography with well-established former directors of photography from Quebec who are open to sharing their knowledge. In fact, when you have pairings like that you can also have serious conversations about our biases and prejudices. ”

“ How about a tax credit for hiring new, unestablished writers for shows? ”

Structural change also needs to happen throughout the system and not just focused on creating a larger, more diverse talent pool of skilled creators.

“ We need to make sure that we have the voices and the people who are not only creating the shows but also green lighting and supporting the creators and producers who are making those shows to ensure that we are really telling diverse stories, and that they’re based on experience and not just one person’s experience. ”

“ We need access to trusted experts, possibly mentors or advisors. If you have an idea, wouldn’t it be great to be able to bring that idea to people that you can trust, who can carry that idea with you to completion, to market? A group of experts, ideally POC, who you can trust to get you there. That’s more important than the money. ”

“ We need more Black people in positions of power in those institutions but Black folks in those institutions who are interested in transforming the system. Change is uncomfortable, changing the dynamics of privilege is uncomfortable, but you need to create a space where that is welcome. It has to start from the top and the bottom, leadership and mentorship. ”

“ There needs to be inclusion at almost every level of the industry, so that needs to be at the broadcaster level, at the funder level, in the film festivals, in the writers’ rooms on set. The more that representation is occurring everywhere, the less tokenizing it becomes. The more that there are many different resources, the less that the onus of representation ever falls on one individual or one group. Representation has to be everywhere because that is the only way that representation is ever going to be authentic, that creatives are ever going to feel safe and not tokenized if they know that the people who are signing the cheques and greenlighting the ideas and answering their phones are people who understand their lived experience. ”

“ There’s a lot of funding opportunities that are happening out there but what do we do with our films after their funding. We still need to distribute them, still need to broadcast them, they still need to be in film festivals, for people to watch them. Systemic racism infiltrates every single level of the film industry, it’s not just the funding. ”

“ What we see happen is that with all of these initiatives happening for writers and directors and all of these other crew positions, is that the ownership is still primarily centred on white owned companies. For the landscape to really change we need more racialized ownership, more ownership within LGBTQ+ communities and communities of People with Disabilities. ”

“ I’ve done mocap<sup>17</sup> work where a character has my movements and my voice but then they made the character white. We need more kids, Black youth, youth of colour, to get involved in these programs so then they can become the developers, the modelers, the producer, and then they can put out their ideas about how they want these characters to look. ”

“ I can’t just grab a bunch of Black youth and say ‘I’m going to make you game developers’. There has to be a process of learning the basics, and then once they’re out there, internship opportunities to get them in the door and then there are so many stages of closed opportunities. I need some organizational help to do it all. ”

How are some of these structural changes such as job shadowing and on set accommodations funded? There should be line items in the budget that funders agree are acceptable production costs.

“ We need to mobilize to get the industry to put more budget towards hiring disabled writers, consultants, tech crew, etc. Accessibility redesigns can happen, including extra time for projects that accommodate disabled parenting or working-class team members who often need more time to execute steps. We need to prioritize budgets that support truly inclusive creative teams. ”

Infrastructure change can happen anywhere. The key, as evidenced by this quote, is that if you see a problem, then you work on a solution.

<sup>17</sup> Motion capture

“ I was looking for a Black showrunner for an animation show about a Black family. I went up to every single agent in Canada and none of them had a Black showrunner level client with animation experience to put forward. It was apparently a given that the animation industry is not welcoming to Black writers, which is horrifying. So I created an inhouse database and asked all the agents to send their BIPOC writers so there'd be no excuse of 'I don't know any'. ”

And as always, keep an eye out for stakeholders trying to bend the rules in their favour.

“ There are all these different funds that have come out lately specifically for BIPOC people to the point where I have white producers openly trying to recruit inexperienced BIPOC producers to add to their project just so they can access funding. It's fine if they are legitimately giving the BIPOC person the benefit of the experience and not using them as some sort of tool or a prop to get access to money that they're not supposed to have. ”

We heard a lot about sensitivity training and anti-oppression training so that workplaces could be safe spaces once underrepresented talent found jobs.

“ Sensitivity courses to make workspaces safe places. It's mind boggling that it's needed because these systemic structures have stopped people from seeing other people sympathetically. Often you please the person who's paying you because you don't want to be considered the bitch or the problematic one or someone who is not getting hired again. ”

“ There are tons of people who are currently in positions of power who again, don't understand the nuance of different intersectional identities (ethnocultural, sexual, gender). When I pitch a show, if the person I'm talking to hasn't done the work to understand what the story is about and the market potential of it, they're not going to invest in it. It requires another level of self-directed education, because with a lack of true understanding, we run into the risk of being tokenized. Network executives and producers should be taking mandatory cultural sensitivity training, DEI training<sup>18</sup>. ”

<sup>18</sup> DEI refers to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

“ What we’re seeing right now is performative, not because people aren’t well intentioned, but because they still haven’t, for lack of a better phrase, drunk the Kool Aid. There still needs to be more anti-oppression, more education, it’s got to be embedded at all levels. Then we have to become more open-minded and there has to be an openness and a willingness that is genuine. ”

One of the unexpected outcomes of the focus group consultations was the joy that participants got from being able to network with other people with the same or similar identities through the consultations. This happened in both the public and industry consultations and was consistent throughout the industry consultations. Participants frequently shared contact information in the chat and talked about wanting to continue the conversation, find ways to work together and support each other. More than once participants shared that this was the only time they had ever been in a ‘room’ with other people like them. They particularly liked connecting with people from across the country, especially if they lived in a community with little diversity.

“ We need opportunities like this group of people to make something together. Even if we all get a little boost, we’re still under these umbrellas, we’re far apart, we’re potentially in these tokenized positions. We need to become more familiar with each other’s work and work together as professionals. ”

## 5.1 Directives for: Creators, Producers, Broadcasters/Digital Platforms/ Streaming Services, Funders, Distributors, Associations

- Before your organization creates programs for underrepresented creators, talk to them, see what else is out there and fill the gaps, particularly for mid-career creators. Create pathways into broadcasters, funders, distributors, film festivals and exhibitors so that diversity is increased throughout the sector. Consult with target communities to ensure that the programs meet their needs and have clear, measurable goals.
- Support programs that increase ownership as well as storytelling by underrepresented creators and producers.
- Support networking and community building within and between communities. Communities are stronger together and want to learn from each other. Do not pit them against each other.
- Conduct anti-oppression, DEI and cultural sensitivity training for all staff. Hire DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) trainers. Do not expect existing staff from underrepresented communities to take on the labour of educating their white, heterosexual, able-bodied colleagues if that is not part of their job description.
- Do not put all the weight for structural change and representation on the underrepresented staff members. It is everyone’s responsibility to enact and support change.
- Change funding guidelines to state that funding for job shadowing and mentorship of underrepresented creators and crew are accepted budget line items to raise awareness of the appropriateness of those categories in the budget. Require a plan or outcomes to ensure that the job shadowing or mentorship is meaningful.
- Take risks. Allow for failure. Learn and evolve.

## 6. Regional Differences

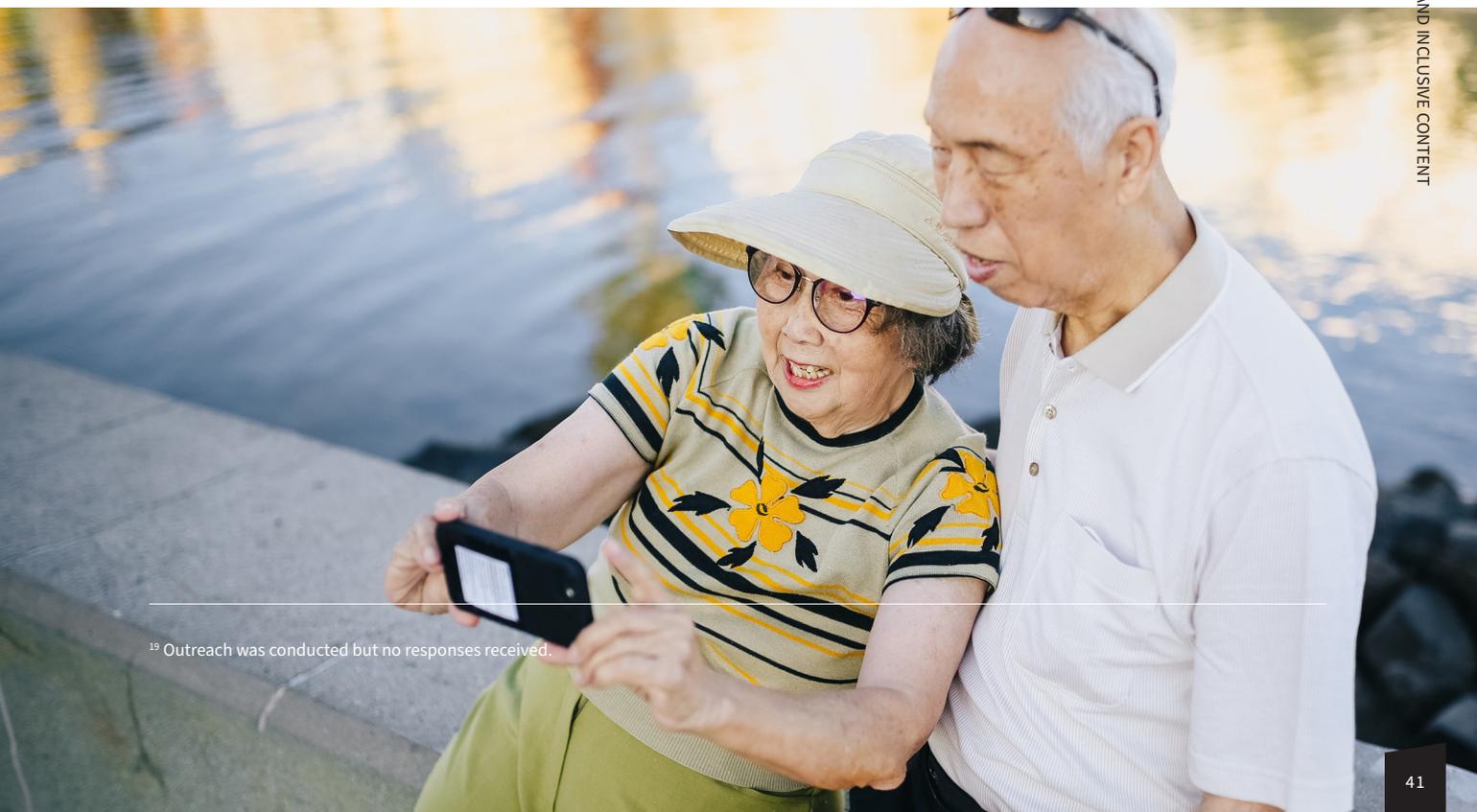
Consultations had representation from all regions of the country, other than the North<sup>19</sup>. For the most part, there were no differences in responses from participants based on their geographic location (provincial or urban/suburban/rural). However, there were a few differences based on province that should be noted. Responses specific to a community within a province (e.g., the Halifax Black community or the Haitian community in Montreal) will be addressed in more detail in the Companion reports.

### 6.1 British Columbia

Participants expressed frustration with the industry in Vancouver being so far from the demographics of Vancouver itself.

“ In Vancouver our Asian representation is like 60% of our population and I think we have maybe 5% of the film industry. So I’m not going to be nice any more. Give me the money, give me the pitch meeting, I will show you that I’m amazing and awesome. ”

<sup>19</sup> Outreach was conducted but no responses received.



Vancouver’s ethnic demographics are very different from other urban centres in Canada. For example, while there is substantial Asian representation in the population of Vancouver, there is very little Black representation.

“ There are so few Black people in Vancouver that when we see each other we greet each other. ”

## 6.2 Prairie Provinces

While the demographics of Black and People of Colour in the Prairie provinces have increased over the years, it is still challenging to fill crews and hire key creatives from underrepresented communities. It is that much harder for underrepresented talent to build a community within the sector in their region.

“ There are so few people of colour in the industry out here. It feels very isolating. It’s also hard to find POC crew to hire for productions. I’m really enjoying this opportunity to speak with other people and to network. ”

## 6.3 Quebec

There are unique challenges for Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ and People with Disabilities communities in Quebec. Universally the response from these communities was that they face greater challenges in achieving authentic representation in Quebec than in the rest of Canada. There was a pessimism about the ability to make change when in the rest of the country there was more of an optimism that the first steps toward progress are being made. It is beyond the scope of this project to delve into why they feel this way but the research instead focuses on how they feel. There are historical and cultural reasons for why Quebec society and Quebec media address authenticity and representation differently than the rest of the country. Regardless of the reasons though, there is still a greater perception from those consulted in Quebec than in the rest of Canada that there are representation problems that are not being addressed.

“ In Quebec one of the main concerns is to make sure that French Canadian culture stays alive and there is this tendency to think that people of other origins are not part of that, they’re not able to make that culture alive. I was born here. All my references are French Canadian. So there’s no reason why I couldn’t be a vector of that culture, even though I have other influences. It’s very hard to break through that. ”

“ They’re trying to protect the Quebec French culture. It’s like ‘we’re fighting this, we don’t have time for you’. ”

“ I’m completely bilingual. We have an openness to speaking to each other directly in an Anglo-phone culture where in French culture we’re going to beat around the bush 18 times before we can say ‘that’s the problem’ because we don’t want the conflict, we want to make sure that everyone understands what we want. I find it problematic because we are moving forward three times less quickly and we are including three times fewer people because we are not recognizing the problems they are experiencing. ”

“ If I recognized myself in a film, it was not a Quebec production and this is where it shocked me because it exists elsewhere that I can recognize myself in a position for real. While here I find there must always be a reason for it. ”

“ In Montreal I can travel to meet people I don’t normally have access to, Iranians, Koreans, etc. We have richness here but we do not have access to this medium which allows us to have this representation of the place where we meet which is rich, which is varied, which is colourful. And we could attach ourselves to this plural identity to do something with it and make this diversity a powerful tool that identifies us as a society. ”

“ I grew up in Quebec, I was born in Quebec, my parents arrived here when they were super young so I really grew up with Quebec culture but I didn’t really see myself on television growing up. I decided to study film because I like film and universal stories. Quickly enough in my studies I realized that a lot of characters with diversity were missing and that motivated me a lot. I realized how deficient I was because when I was growing up, I could never see myself on the screen. ”

“ If you go to the English-speaking side, the communities are more structured and organized and they knock on the door more regularly. In Quebec, I find that we have spent a long darkness, a waste of time, with doors closed which prevented the development of new talents behind and in front of the cameras. People changed jobs and left the province because there was no opportunity. You’re not going to sit around for ten years waiting for someone to listen to you. So I think we’ve lost a generation of people who could have been mentors now. ”

The research first saw a difference between Quebec and the rest of Canada in the response of participants to the outreach efforts. Approximately half of the Quebec-based participants chose to participate in English. Please see Appendix B for a more detailed demographic breakdown. The Research Team dug further and in response to enquiries the reasons provided by participants included the vocabulary for the topics discussed being easier in English, but also a concern about the accent or vocabulary of French speakers not born in Quebec. As a result, there were fewer Francophone focus groups than expected but Francophones participated in English throughout the other focus groups.

“ It’s mostly the fact that talking about gender and sexuality is much more comfortable in English than in French. There are words and specificities, I feel like maybe things can get across much easier with English. The French I speak is not necessarily the Quebec French. ”

## 6.4 Directives for: Broadcasters/Digital Platforms/Streaming Services, Funders, Distributors

- While a lot of work needs to be done in all regions of Canada, some regions seem to have even less authentic representation in the industry and the content that is created and it will require extra, targeted effort to redress the imbalance.
- Rather than assessing the accuracy of statements or the efforts that are currently underway in the regions, think about the feelings that participants are expressing and how stakeholders can engage with them. The common thread is that participants in the regions did not feel listened to, so an important first step is to open dialogue with the various underrepresented communities either through grassroots organizations or, if they do not exist, through individuals working in the industry.

# Conclusion and Next Steps

“ At the end of the day it’s about reflecting what we see in the real world. This is not a trauma competition. ”

For many participants in this consultation, this was the first time that anyone had asked them how they felt about what they were seeing on Canadian screens or any screens. It was the first time they had met people like themselves and had conversations with other people who shared their concerns and their lived experiences. It was impactful and even sometimes life changing. They frequently saw more in common with each other than differences. **Being Seen** pulled together these threads of commonality and solidarity for this **Core Report**. While the Companion Reports will delve deeper into communities to explore differences and highlight specific concerns, the **Core Report** emphasizes how underrepresented communities share so many dreams, hopes and goals, including one day being fully seen on our screens.

With **Being Seen**, the BSO will start a conversation about how to address systemic oppression in the screen-based sector, create more opportunities and ultimately provide a variety of authentic content that audiences are looking for. This is an important step that can be expanded to include more identities (e.g., religious identities) and evolve to incorporate new ideas and learnings as we tackle the challenges.

It is recommended that Broadcasters, Digital Platforms, Streaming Services, Funders and Distributors collaborate to develop strategies to meet the Directives and provide a common response to Creators and Producers. This will ensure consensus and early, thoughtful incorporation of the Directives, rather than trying to incorporate them prior to a project hitting the market. Consensus will reduce delays during development or production and ensure that the impact on budgets are consistent across stakeholders.

There currently are separate self-identification forms for many of the stakeholders. Collaboration on definitions and forms would also help in implementation of the Directives to promote transparency, streamline the review process, and promote collaboration between stakeholders.

It is expected that these next steps will go a long way to supporting the structural change that the Directives are intended to initiate. The BSO intends to work with stakeholders to form a Collaborative Network to implement these Directives.

# Appendix A – Methodology

## The Team

The Research Team was built by the Lead Researcher to be representative of the communities being consulted. They also covered a range of experience (some industry, some academic) and skill sets (research, community engagement, administration, technology). The Lead Researcher mentored as well as managed the team, to encourage the development of a more diversified research talent pool.

## Research Team



**Joan Jenkinson**  
*BSO Executive Director*



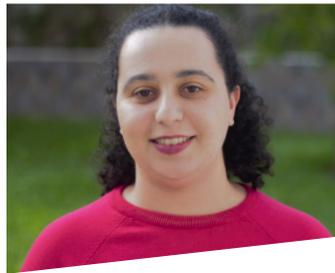
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**Shaquille Bulhi**  
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**Shubham Maini**  
*Assistant Researcher*



**Rime El Jadidi**  
*Assistant Researcher*



**Yimi Poba-Nzaou**  
*Junior Researcher*



**Masoumeh Hashemi**  
*Junior Researcher*



**Christine Wu**  
*Junior Researcher*

The Editorial Committee was built by the BSO Executive Director to provide guidance to the Research Team through the development of the outreach plan, focus group questions, helping with outreach, report design and drafting. It also was designed to be representative of the communities being consulted.

### **Editorial Committee**

Miryam Charles  
Ravida Din  
Anthony Jiwa  
Nilesh Patel  
Ken Tsui  
Kim Wilson

## **Research Methodology**

The research was conducted in three phases:

- Third party research
- Zoom-based focus groups with industry and with members of the Community
- One-on-one interviews to explore issues that arose in focus groups or fill gaps in representation in focus groups.

The research allowed the Research Team to discover what other research on representation in screen-based media existed in English speaking territories and to help to frame the questions and outreach plans. Results of the third-party research are available at [www.beingseen.ca](http://www.beingseen.ca). During the research phase the Research Team also assembled a list of community and industry organizations across the country and throughout the target identities for the focus groups.

Outreach for the Industry focus groups took place using BSO channels, funder channels and industry partners (e.g., DGC, ACTRA, BIPOC TV and Film) and the focus groups took place May to June 2021. The focus groups for Industry were broken out by identity with all industry groups and specific groups for screenwriters, producers, interactive digital media creators and children's media creators. Focus groups were adjusted based on response with additional groups scheduled in response to high registration rates or collapsed with other groups due to low registration rates. Focus groups were split into more than one breakout room if there were more than 15 registered in order to keep discussion in one room to 8 to 12 participants. Breakout rooms were split by either identity or job category or experience level, depending on the demographics of those registered. Individuals were paid for participation but while they were allowed to sign up for more than one focus group, they were only paid once. Several participants registered for multiple focus groups to cover multiple identities (e.g., Black and 2SLGBTQIA+).

Outreach for the Community focus groups was more of a challenge than with the Industry focus groups. Many community organizations just did not respond despite repeated outreach. In response the Research Team leveraged their own networks and reached out to Industry focus group participants and asked for their assistance through their networks and this was more successful. As well, members of the Industry who had missed the Industry focus groups, or who wished to participate on the basis of another aspect of their identity, also participated in the Community focus groups. As with the Industry focus groups, individuals were paid for participation but while they were allowed to sign up for more than one focus group, they were only paid once. Several participants registered for multiple focus groups to cover multiple identities. The Community focus groups took place July to August, 2021. Note that additional focus groups for children also took place from September to November 2021 but they will be addressed in the Children's Media companion report.

While conducting focus groups, effort was made by the Research Team to be inclusive in terms of communication style and technology experience. A Zoom Tech provided support and posted each question in the chat. Participants could talk (camera on or off) or write in the chat. ASL interpreters and captioning was engaged for the focus groups requiring them. Participants were also provided the opportunity to send in answers in writing after the focus group. The Team was responsive and if questions were not resonating or needed refining, they were revised for later focus groups. Questions were also adapted to the specific concerns of different identities or to dig deeper into issues that had come up in earlier focus groups. If the focus group spent more time on some of the questions, not all questions would be asked, in an effort to keep the focus group as close as possible to one hour. As a result of the foregoing, not every focus group was asked the same questions.

One-on-one interviews were conducted by the Research Team to explore issues, gain perspective from those with more experience in the industry and cover gaps in participation (e.g. Francophones and 2SLGBTQIA+ Parents were two particular gaps). Interviews were conducted with both Industry and Community participants, from May to September, 2021.

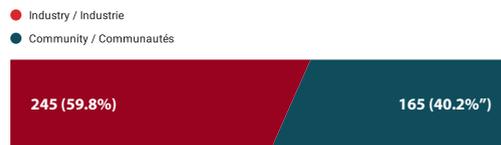
All participants agreed that recordings could be made of the focus groups and interviews, on condition that the recordings would only be used for the research and would be deleted once the research is complete. Any demographic information associated with their contact information will also be deleted at that time.

# Appendix B – Demographic Charts

Community Participants / Participant-e-s de la communauté :



Industry/Community | Industrie / Communautés :



Community Focus Groups / Groupe de discussions de la communauté :



Interviews / Entrevues :



Industry Participants / Participant-e-s de la industrie :



Language / Langue :



Industry Focus Groups / Groupe de discussions de la industrie :

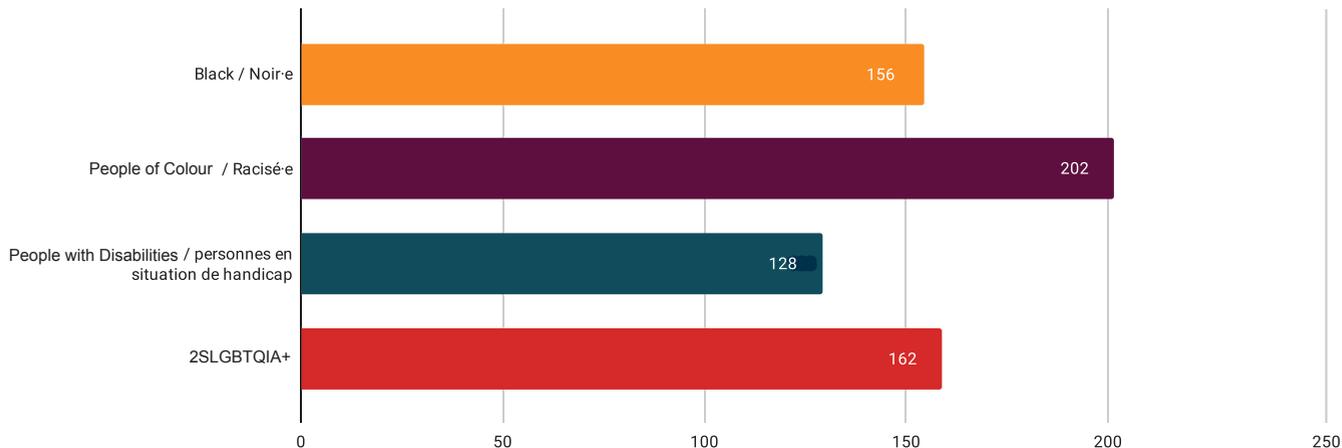


Multiracial Participants:



Target Demographics / Démographies cibles :

To account for intersectionality, the total is more than the number of self-identifying participants.



# Appendix C - Glossary

Note that with many terms there are differences of opinions on which terms are the appropriate ones to use. The “**Being Seen**” team reviewed the research and literature and made decisions on what terms seemed to be most appropriate but recognizes that terms both evolve and may not work for everyone.

## **Creators**

In the context of this Report, creators are inclusive of filmmakers, screenwriters, directors, game designers and all others who are key members of the creative team.

## **DEI - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

Sometimes referred to as DEID to include Decolonization or IDEA to include Accessibility. This is an umbrella term to refer to anti-racism, anti-oppression and equity programs, training and assessment for organizations.

## **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a term first coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw but based on previous scholarship to refer to an integrated analysis of oppression that included factors such as gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance and class.

## **Latinx**

Latinx is a gender neutral version of Latino or Latina. It replaces Hispanic, which is seen by some as a colonial term and is generally considered to only refer to Spanish-speaking people from Mexico, Central and South America. Latinx is generally defined to also include Portuguese-speakers from Brazil.

## **Person with a Disability**

Sometimes shortened to PwD in charts. After consultation with members of the community and third party research, the project chose to use the term Person with a Disability to encompass all those with visible (e.g., Blind, Deaf, Physically Disabled) or invisible disabilities (e.g., Neurodivergent or with mental health issues). A person can be born with a disability or it can occur after birth. Note that frequently Persons with Disabilities will have multiple disabilities.

## **Multiracial**

An identity that includes more than one race. Multiracial is used here instead of biracial or mixed race to be inclusive of those with more than two racial identities.

## **Neurodivergent**

A person who thinks differently than the majority of society (neurotypical). Neurodivergent can include learning disabilities, ADHD, autism spectrum, Tourette’s syndrome and obsessive-compulsive disorder, but is related to how the brain has developed rather than a mental health issue that can be treated.

## **Nonbinary**

Someone whose gender identity is neither male nor female. Their identity can be fluid or they identify with both male and female at the same time. Another term for nonbinary is GenderQueer.

## **West Asian**

The geographic term West Asian is used instead of Middle Eastern as Middle Eastern is a colonial term coined by the British Foreign Office and is a political rather than geographic description.

**CORE THEMES  
REPORT**

**thank  
you**

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