

# WORKING WITH QUEER PERFORMERS



QUEER PERFORMERS COMMITTEE  
UBCP/ACTRA

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## Introduction from the Queer Performers Committee

UBCP/ACTRA's Queer Performers Committee was first established in 2017 and is dedicated to raising awareness about Queer Performers, our stories and our place in the Canadian Cinema, Television, and Digital Media industry. Through ongoing education, we inform our industry about realistic Queer representation on screen as we seek a more accurate and balanced reflection of our rich and multifaceted community.

We work to end harassment and stereotyping of any kind. We also work to achieve true-to-life Queer onscreen visibility of our culture, stories and bring positive change to our industry.

To that end, we work in solidarity with other ACTRA Branches and committees, including [outACTRAto](#) (Toronto's Queer Performers Committee).

In 2020, our friends at outACTRAto published *Guidelines for Working with Queer Performers*. Building on their framework, we have expanded it for BC's Film Industry with the eventual goal of creating a national standardized guide for all of Canada.

This document is intended to encourage change in the way screenwriters, agents, casting agents, directors, producers and productions treat queer performers. It's about how we are portrayed, managed, auditioned, cast and directed. We seek to break down existing barriers in the industry that we love.

The hurdles we've experienced just to get through the door and into the room have been monumental, compounded by systemic oppression and intersectionality. We wish to be part of the change that creates a more diverse and inclusive industry. We are committed to the work and hope you will join us by becoming a part of the solution.

## WORKING WITH QUEER PERFORMERS

Queer performers are a very diverse group of people and Queer is an umbrella term used to describe a number of different experiences. As you familiarize yourself with this document, please keep in mind that the term Queer refers to both sexual orientation (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual) as well as gender identity (e.g., transgender, non-binary).

## HOW CAN I BE AN ALLY?

### WHAT IS AN ALLY?

In our industry, an ally is a cisgender and heterosexual person who supports, works and advocates for the recognition and advancement of queer performers. Here are some ways you can be an ally:

#### **If you are an AGENT**

Submit your queer clients for roles other than queer characters in the breakdown. We are so much more than just the sidekick or the "sassy, gay best friend" or "femme/sexy lesbian." Suggest us for recurring roles, series regulars, and as leads. Help your clients break new ground by encouraging casting directors and even screenwriters, directors and producers who are known to you, to audition us and hire us.

**If you are a CASTING DIRECTOR**

Bring us into casting rooms. Encourage agents to submit queer performers for both queer and non-queer roles. Look beyond the stereotypes and bring us in for characters that do not specify sexuality or gender identity. Trans actors can play cisgender characters as well. Consider pushing the envelope around gender. Bring in a transgender or non-binary individual for romantic lead roles. A great performer is a great performer.

**If you are a SCREENWRITER**

Start thinking of queer characters in an intersectional<sup>1</sup> frame. We are complex, multi-dimensional people like everyone else. The characters in your film, TV series, web-series, and commercials can be queer as well. Write queer parts where the character's sexuality or gender are not relevant to the story. Talk to us, we have fascinating stories to be told.

**If you are a DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, STUDIO and/or NETWORK EXECUTIVE**

When hiring performers, actively think outside the box. Consider not seeing heterosexual or cisgender performers for queer roles. Learn about things like common cliches or tokenizing<sup>2</sup> and actively set out to avoid them. Queer representation will not alienate your heterosexual audience. A heterosexual audience can relate to queer storylines. Plus, queer folks are your audience too. Successful productions like *Schitt's Creek*, *Baroness Von Sketch Show*, *Pose*, *Black Panther* and *Crazy Rich Asians* have demonstrated that both queer and straight viewers want to see queerness reflected on screen.

**AN ALLY'S RESPONSIBILITY:**

Being an ally starts with the belief that all people, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation, should be treated with dignity and respect. Here are some examples of practices to implement:

**LEARN**

- Seek out and listen to the experiences and perspectives of queer people; respect these experiences and perspectives; acknowledge their validity.
- Seek out information and opportunities to expand your understanding. (See Resources section)
- Remember that everyone is responsible for their own learning.

**REFLECT**

- Be open to feedback about how your behaviour is impacting other people.
- Be aware of your gaze<sup>3</sup> (your frame of experience) and reflect on and question the stereotypes and negative assumptions you and others may hold.
- Avoid assuming how people identify. Listen for or politely ask how someone wants to be identified.

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<sup>1</sup> **Intersectional** (or intersectionality) The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.

<sup>2</sup> **Tokenizing** is the act of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to be inclusive, especially by recruiting people from underrepresented groups to give the appearance of equality within a workforce.

<sup>3</sup> **Gaze**, also called "frame of experience", refers to an individual's (or a group's) awareness, and their perception of other individuals, other groups, and oneself.

- Remember, everyone's experience of gender and sexuality is different. It is both impossible and unfair to ask one person to speak on behalf of a whole group.

#### PRACTICE

- Use inclusive language to ensure everyone feels welcome and respected.
- Challenge policies, practices, and procedures that create barriers for queer people.
- Intervene when you witness offensive behaviour or language.
- Apologize regardless of intent. Everyone makes mistakes, it's the way a person responds to feedback that matters most.
- Discuss putting gender pronouns in all email signatures. This can help normalize the practice, remind people that they shouldn't make assumptions about anyone's gender identity, and demonstrate your willingness to use someone's chosen pronouns.
- Create gender neutral or all-gender washrooms in your workplace.

## SUPPORTING QUEER PERFORMERS

### BEST PRACTICES FOR AGENTS

#### **Create a safe and welcoming environment:**

Consciously move away from assumptions that are clients heterosexual or cisgender. Some performers are still afraid to come out<sup>4</sup> to their agent because they fear discrimination by being stereotyped, rejected, forgotten or dropped and left without access to employment.

Create a safe space and opportunity for your clients or potential new clients to self-identify their gender and sexuality. Consider stating on your website that you are an ally. Include queer and gender identity check boxes and self-identifying options on application and intake forms. Have safe space stickers in your office.

Be obvious and transparent in your support. Just like there are some loud and proud queer folks, you can be a loud and proud ally, too.

#### **Communicate with us:**

- Check in with us. Some performers are queer but feel they don't want or need to do so publicly and that's okay. Perhaps some want to be out-and-proud but don't yet have the courage, haven't had the opportunity or felt safe to do so.
- Gender and sexual identities are fluid, they can shift and change. One year, a client could identify as heterosexual then later discover they are bisexual. Another client may transition from one gender to another. Another who used to use gender binary pronouns (she/her/he/him) could shift to gender neutral pronouns (they/them).
- When submitting us for auditions, don't assume what roles we will or will not play. Check in with us first. Some queer performers prefer to only play queer roles.

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<sup>4</sup> **Coming out of the closet**, often shortened to **coming out**, is a metaphor used to describe LGBT people's self-disclosure of their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity.

- Don't hold us back from auditioning for queer characters out of fear we will be stereotyped or "pigeonholed". Talk to us about how we want to be represented and for what parts we wish to audition. Everyone is unique and feelings on the topic may change over time.

#### **Advocate and fight for us:**

- Once you know we want to do so, submit and push for us for all roles. We deserve equal access at the same rate of opportunity as heterosexual, cisgender performers. We deserve the same equity, dignity, and respect.
- If you work for us and fight for us, it increases our work opportunities and we both win, as a team.
- Be a leader, engage in discourse, help shift the narrative and shape the industry. Help us make the path easier for future generations of queer performers and create more authentic representations on screen. Don't just be agents, be agents of change.

### **BEST PRACTICES FOR CASTING DIRECTORS**

#### **Casting Calls and Submissions:**

- Do not ask performers to "out"<sup>5</sup> themselves at an audition. Leave it up to the performer to self-identify.
- Familiarize yourself with the kaleidoscope of gender identities and sexualities. (See glossary)
- Never assume anyone's gender or sexual identity, including their pronouns.
- Ask agents for the preferred pronouns of the performers who are being submitted.
- Actively encourage submissions from actors who identify as transgender, two-spirit<sup>6</sup> and/or non-binary to play characters of those identities.
- Audition queer identified performers for queer roles before auditioning the general talent pool. Why? Because representation matters. We haven't had the same access and opportunities as heterosexual/cisgender performers. Queer roles have generally gone to heterosexual/cisgender actors. ([10 Straight Actors Who Won Awards for Playing Queer Roles](#)).
- Strongly suggest to production to cast queer actors for queer parts.
- Expand the information about the character in a breakdown beyond just their gender or sexual identity.
- Refrain from stereotyping and relying on queer sexuality or gender tropes and cliches. Think multidimensional, intersectional, and original.

#### **Language in casting breakdowns:**

- Ask agents to submit clients who self-identify as queer.
- In an open casting call, allow performers the option to self-identify as queer.
- Make it clear that you would like to make space for non-binary performers to audition for and play non-binary parts.
- When incorporating inclusive language double check that you are using the correct terminology. For example, Asexual<sup>7</sup> does not mean the same thing as Open Gender (when a role is open to

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<sup>5</sup> **Out:** To be openly LGBTQ+. When a person no longer conceals their sexual orientation or gender identity.

<sup>6</sup> **Two-Spirit (2S):** A term is used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity. 2S can be used in place of, or in addition to, identifying as queer.

<sup>7</sup> **Asexual:** The lack of a sexual attraction or desire for other people.

both male presenting and female presenting performers). We have included a [glossary](#) at the end of this document to help you on your way.

- If in doubt about the proper use of language or designations, we are here to support you! Feel free to contact UBCP/ACTRA's Queer Performer Committee with any question you may have.

#### **During auditions:**

- If you are unsure of a performer's pronoun, please ask! Even if you have met the performer before it is never too late to inquire.
- Volunteer your own pronouns when introducing yourself. The more we all normalize expressing our pronouns, the more we create safe spaces for trans, non-binary and two-spirit performers within the industry.
- If you make a mistake, it's okay! Just apologize and correct yourself. Sometimes you don't know what you don't know.
- Please don't ask us to "be more gay" or to flail our arms around, or generally stereotype or tokenize us. We are vastly unique and different from one another in our gender expression, sexuality and identities. There is no one way to be queer, just as there is no one way to be heterosexual. We are all unique. It can be insulting to us to be told to behave in certain ways just as insulting as it might be if someone Black or Indigenous were asked to act 'more Black' or act 'more Indigenous'.
- Create a safe casting venue for queer performers by using safe space stickers, solidarity posters, or by offering queer materials in your offices and waiting rooms.
- Queer and transgender people are often the victims of hate crimes. Consider making casting venues safer spaces (outdoor lighting, security camera etc.)
- Provide gender neutral or all-gender washrooms.

#### **BEST PRACTICES FOR COSTUMES & MAKE-UP:**

Queer performers want our gender expressions and identities to be accurately reflected through our costumes and make-up. Once hired, it's unfair to try to change the gender expression of a performer to one that doesn't reflect their gender identity. Misogyny, homophobia, and transphobic stereotypes often present themselves in the costume rooms. Work with performers on finding the appropriate wardrobe, hair and make-up for their characters.

#### **BEST PRACTICES ON SET:**

- State on call sheets that the set is queer friendly, and that homophobia and transphobia will not be tolerated.
- At the beginning of production inform the entire cast and crew that homophobia and transphobia will not be tolerated on set.
- As rates of violence and mortality are significantly higher for trans, gender non-confirming and two-spirit communities, it is of utmost importance to consider the performer's safety. Before filming, implement measures to ensure safety. These can take the shape of:
  - Safe transportation at the end of the day
  - Gender-neutral washrooms on set

## OUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

We want queer youth from all races, socioeconomic backgrounds, genders, and abilities to know that our industry has a place for them with viable careers, and where being out will one day provide as many possibilities and opportunities as heterosexual youth envision and dream of. Please help us change the narrative and help us to inspire hope and tell/create inclusive and intersectional stories.

The Queer Performers Committee appreciate that these guidelines are only a beginning; that they are dynamic and will change with time. Please refer to them, educate yourself further and when in doubt, ask. By following these best practices you will make the bold choices to change our industry.

Queer your stories!

### NOTES: \*Queer.

Historically a pejorative term, the word "queer" has been reclaimed by some gender and sexually diverse communities as a term of pride and affirmation of their diversity. It can be used to encompass a broad spectrum of identities related to sex, gender, and attraction or by an individual to reflect the interrelatedness of these aspects of their identity. For the purpose of these guidelines and in an effort not to exclude any group, we have chosen to use the word "queer" in lieu of an acronym.

Acronyms, identifications and definitions are dynamic and constantly changing. There is no standard acronym used by organizations to reflect gender and sexual identities. For example, as of this publication, UBCP/ACTRA uses Queer to encompass the acronym LGBTQQ2SIA+\*; Pride Toronto uses LGBTQ+; CAEA uses LGBTQ; SAG/AFTRA uses LGBT; The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity uses 2SLGBTQIA+ and the word queer; Egale, a Canadian queer human rights organization, uses LGBTQI2S; and The Government of Canada uses LGBTQ2. Adding "+" at the end of an acronym has typically been used to signify: "including all others."

### GLOSSARY:

Accepted terminology around Queer identity and sexuality has evolved over the years. Below is a glossary of terms that are in use today that may be helpful to those wishing to familiarize themselves with how to talk about the Queer experience effectively.

The definitions given below should not be thought of as rigid labels but changeable placeholders, pointing to identities and relationships that are themselves constantly evolving. As always, the words and definitions that people use to identify and describe themselves supersede the definitions in this (or any other) glossary.

**2S (or Two-Spirit):** An English umbrella term to reflect and restore Indigenous traditions forcefully suppressed by colonization, honouring the fluid and diverse nature of gender and attraction and its connection to community and spirituality. This term is used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity. 2S can be used in place of, or in addition to, identifying as queer.

**Alphabet Acronym:** Any combination of letters attempting to represent all the identities in the queer community. Sometimes listed as a shortened combination of letters (LGBTQ) or a larger list (LGBPTTQQIIAA+). The letters are meant to represent Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Intergender, Asexual, and Ally, with the plus sign signifying a desire to be inclusive.

**Asexual:** The lack of a sexual attraction or desire for other people.

**Bisexual:** A term used to describe those who experience sexual or sexual and romantic attraction to two genders, not necessarily to the same extent.

**Cisgender:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Demisexual:** People only feel sexually attracted to someone when they have an emotional bond with the person. They can be gay, straight, bisexual, or pansexual, and may have any gender identity.

**Gay:** Of, relating to, or characterized by sexual or romantic attraction to people of one's same sex. There are additional subcategories within gay culture to further describe members and how they identify. Bear, Otter and Twink are a few examples. For more information visit: [Pride Magazine's article](#).

**Gaze:** Also called "frame of experience", refers to an individual's (or a group's) awareness, and their perception of other individuals, other groups, and oneself.

**Gender Fluid:** an identity or gender expression that is not fixed and is capable of changing over time.

**Gender identity:** Gender identity is your deeply held inner feelings of whether you are female or male, both, or neither. Your gender identity is not seen by others.

**Gender Non-Confirming:** A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

**Intersectionality:** The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.

**Intersex:** An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. In some cases, these traits are visible at birth, and in others, they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal variations of this type may not be physically apparent at all.

**Lesbian:** A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional, and sexual attraction is to other women. There are additional subcategories within lesbian culture to further describe members and how they identify. Butch, Lipstick and Femme are examples. For more information visit: [Curve Magazine's website](#).

**Non-Binary:** An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do.

**Non-Monogamy:** An umbrella term for every practice of intimate relationships that falls outside of monogamy and includes informed consent of all partners involved. Polyamory, open relationships and group marriage are all forms of non-monogamy.

**Out:** To be openly LGBTQ+. When a person no longer conceals their sexual orientation or gender identity.



**Pansexual:** Not limited in sexual choice with regards to biological sex, gender, or gender identity.

**Passing:** This term can have two definitions:

1. A queer individual who is believed to be or perceived as straight.
2. A Trans or non-binary individual who passes for the gender they are presenting and expressing, regardless of sex assigned at birth.

**Polyamory:** the practice of, or desire for, intimate relationships with more than one partner, with the informed consent of all partners involved.

**Pronouns (or Gender Pronouns):** Pronouns are used in place of a proper noun. In English, pronouns are most often used when referring to someone without using their name. A person's pronouns refer to their gender identity and this may be outside or apart from the way they present. Examples of common gender pronouns include:

- she/her/hers (used by female-identifying persons)
- he/him/his (used by male-identifying persons)
- they/them (used by non-binary persons)

**Queer:** A word that describes sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender (See [full definition](#) above).

**Queerbaiting:** A marketing technique where creators hint at, but then do not actually depict, same-sex romance or other LGBTQ representation. They do so to attract ("bait") a queer or straight ally audience with the suggestion of relationships or characters that appeal to them, while at the same time attempting to avoid alienating other consumers.

**Queer Coding:** The subtextual coding of a character in media as queer. A character's sexual identity may not be explicitly confirmed within their respective work, but the character might be coded as queer using traits and stereotypes recognizable to the audience.

**Questioning:** Someone who is unsure of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Sexual Orientation:** A person's identity in relation to the gender or genders they are sexually attracted to. Sexual orientation is not the same as Gender Identity.

**Token:** A person who is considered a representative of a social group hired primarily to prevent an employer from being accused of discrimination.

**Transgender (or Trans):** Refers to people whose gender identity, one's inner sense of being male, female, or something else, differs from their assigned or presumed sex at birth.

**Transitioning:** Referring to the process of a transgender person changing aspects of themselves (e.g., their appearance, name, pronouns, or making physical changes to their body) to be more congruent with the gender they know themselves to be.

## RESOURCES:

For more information please visit:

[BIPOC and LGBTQ+ Mental Health Supports](#)

[UBCP/ACTRA Performer Resources](#)

[QMUNITY](#): BC's Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit Resource Centre

[EGALE](#): LGBTQI2S Glossary of Terms

[The Canadian Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity](#)

[CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS](#)

[GLAAD](#)

[SAG](#)

[CAEA](#)

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