



WORKING
WITH
QUEER
PERFORMERS

INTRODUCTION FROM outACTRAto



outACTRAto is ACTRA Toronto's queer* committee, advocating for gender and sexually diverse performers. Since we were established in 2018, outACTRAto has created a number of important initiatives including our PSA [Queer Your Stories](#), our short film competition and partnership with the *Inside Out Film Festival Toronto*, and community outreach in the form of industry mixers. We are committed to educating and inspiring others in Toronto's film, TV, & digital media industry.

This document contains guidelines for our industry intended to encourage a change in the way screenwriters, agents, casting directors, 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. Contact outACTRAto at: lgbtq@actratoronto.com.

HOW CAN I BE AN ALLY?

WHAT IS AN ALLY?

In our industry, an ally is someone who is cisgender and/or heterosexual who supports, works and advocates for the recognition and advancement of queer performers. Other queer professionals in our industry can be allies as well. 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're so much more than just the sidekick or the "sassy gay best friend" or "femme/sexy lesbian." Suggest us for recurring roles or series regulars, or as the lead. 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 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 frame - because we are complex, multi-dimensional people. The characters in your film, TV series, web-series, and even your commercial 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, think outside the cliché boxes and expand beyond "tokenizing." We will not alienate your heterosexual audience. A heterosexual audience can relate to queer storylines. Plus queer folks are your audience too! *Schitt's Creek*, *Baroness Von Sketch Show*, *Pose* and *Crazy Rich Asians* have proven that queer communities will pay (along with large straight audiences) to see themselves reflected on screens.

To be an ally you must, as actors are always told: "make bold choices." By casting queer performers and creating opportunities for us you'll be leading the way.

AN ALLY'S RESPONSIBILITY:

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, your learning is your responsibility.

REFLECT

- Be open to feedback about how your behaviour is impacting other people.
- Be aware of your gaze (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.
- Remember, everyone's experience of gender and sexuality is different and it's 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 in an ally role. What matters is how you respond when it gets brought to your attention.
- 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, welcoming environment:

- Don't assume your client is heterosexual or cisgender. Some performers are still afraid to come out 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 or sexuality. Maybe this looks like stating on your website that you are an ally, including queer and gender identity checkboxes and self-identifying options on application and intake forms. Have safe space stickers.
- 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 be out and proud 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 and can shift or change. One year a client could identify as heterosexual then later discover they are bisexual. Another person can transition from one gender to another, and someone else, who used to use gender binary pronouns (she/her/he/him), evolves to using gender-neutral pronouns (they/them).
- When submitting us for auditions, don't assume what roles we will or won't play. Check with us first. Some queer performers prefer to only play queer roles.
- Do not hold us back from auditions for queer characters because you don't want to stereotype or 'pigeonhole' your clients. This could be your own internalized homophobia at play. That choice is up to us. Talk to us about how we want to be represented and for what parts we wish to audition. This is also fluid and may change.

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.
- Work for us. Fight for us. Help us find employment and we will happily pay you your 15%!
- Be a leader, engage in discourse, help shift the narrative and shape the industry. Help us make the way easier for the next generation of queer performers and create more authentic representation on our screens. Don't just be agents, be agents of change.

BEST PRACTICES FOR CASTING DIRECTORS**Casting Calls and Submissions:**

- Do not ask performers to out 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 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 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](#)) This is not equal and not fair. Prioritize us.
- Consider not seeing heterosexual and cisgender performers for 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.

- Be specific about pronouns, the differences between gender (non-binary, transgender, cisgender, etc.), sexuality (pansexual, bisexual, lesbian, etc.) and how gender and sexuality can intersect (two-spirit, butch lesbian, femme lesbian, etc).
- When in doubt about proper use of language or designations contact ACTRA Toronto.

During auditions:

- Please use the performer's correct pronouns, such as She/Her, He/Him, They/Them, or the performer's name. If you are unsure what the performer's pronoun is, ask. The more we normalize the use of gender non-specific 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 & MAKEUP:

Queer performers want our gender expressions and identities to be accurately reflected through our costumes and makeup. 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 makeup 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.
- As rates of violence and mortality are significantly higher for trans, gender non-conforming 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
 - At the beginning of production, inform the entire cast and crew that homophobia and transphobia will not be tolerated on set.

WHAT NOT TO ASK OR SAY TO QUEER PERFORMERS**Transition**

- "So when did you transition?" or "Where are you at in your transition?"
- "Are you on hormones?"
- "Have you had 'the surgery'?" or "Have you had any operations?"
- "Are you going to fully transition?"

Sexuality

- “So are you gay or straight?” Trans people are as diverse as cisgender people when it comes to sexual identity.

Outing

- Avoid outing a performer. Let the performer control their own disclosures.
- Avoid backhanded compliments or advice regarding appearance, clothing, voice quality, or identity. For example, don't tell a trans performer that they “don't look or sound trans” or that they could “pass for cisgender” or that they are “brave.” And don't tell a performer who is a lesbian with short hair that they would be more beautiful or get more roles if they grew their hair out. These are inherently homophobic and transphobic statements.

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.

Finally, at outACTRAto we 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-diverse 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, Pride Toronto uses the acronym LGBTQ2+, 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:

It is important to acknowledge that both language and the ideas expressed in language are constantly evolving. Consequently, the definitions given below should not be thought of as rigid labels but changeable placeholders, pointing to identities and relationships that are themselves always 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 - Two-Spirit: Two Spirit is 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. It is used by some Indigenous People rather than, or in addition to, identifying as queer.

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

B - Bisexual: A term used to describe those who experience romantic or sexual attraction to both people of the same gender as their own and different genders, not necessarily to an equal extent.

Butch Lesbian: Someone who identifies as a woman, and is romantically and sexually interested in other women AND who dresses, acts, or speaks in ways that are more masculine presenting.

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

Femme Lesbian: Femme is a term used to describe a lesbian who exhibits a feminine identity.

G - Gay: of, relating to, or characterized by sexual or romantic attraction to people of one's same sex.

Gender non-conforming: 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, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.

I - 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.

L - Lesbian: A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional, and sexual attraction is to other women.

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.

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

Passing: 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.

Q - Queer: (See definition above)

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

T - Transgender (sometimes referred to as 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:

outACTRAto: <https://www.actratoronto.com/performers/my-union/committees/outactrato/>

EGALE: <https://egale.ca/awareness/glossary-of-terms/>

The Canadian Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity: <https://ccgsd-ccdgs.org>

CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS: <https://canadianlabour.ca>

GLAAD: <https://www.glaad.org>

SAG: <https://www.sagaftra.org/get-involved/diversity-committees>

CAEA: <https://www.caea.com>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Written by Kiley May, Merlin Simard & Joanne Vannicola. Edited by David Gale.