



PTP
**PINK
PAPER**

2SLGBTQIA+ REPRESENTATION in Canada's Screen Industries

June 2024

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Land Acknowledgment

Pink Triangle Press acknowledges that we work from the unceded territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. Today, these lands remain home to a diverse array of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that the city of Toronto, in which we are based, exists through Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and subsequent treaties.

Further, we respect and affirm the inherent and Treaty Rights of all Indigenous Peoples across this land. We have and will continue to honour the commitments to self-determination and sovereignty we have made to Indigenous Nations and Peoples.

Lastly, Pink Triangle Press acknowledges the historical and ongoing oppression of lands, cultures, and the original Peoples of Turtle Island, also known as Canada. We encourage others to learn the histories of this land and its original Peoples, and to consider how our connections to these territories can best contribute to projects supporting Indigenous self-determination.

About Pink Triangle Press

Pink Triangle Press (PTP) is one of the longest-publishing 2SLGBTQIA+ media groups in the world. Our primary aim is to inspire our communities to pursue a future where everyone is free to celebrate who they are. PTP was founded on the understanding that storytelling and sharing experiences is a powerful tool for liberation. It is our belief that media created by, for, and about 2SLGBTQIA+ communities is crucial to their ability to thrive. We seek to amplify the work of activists, creators, thinkers and change makers. PTP is proud of its impact working with diverse communities to foster change. Building on our long history of promoting freedom and equality, we continue to bring communities together to create a better world for 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

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1.0 Introduction



Hollywood is yesterday, forever catching up tomorrow with what's happening today.

—**Legendary queer screen critic Vito Russo**, *The Celluloid Closet*

Life imitates art. Screen, in particular, is a powerful medium for shaping our realities.

Over generations, viewers have learned what a queer person is by seeing us represented on screen. Historically, those images have been largely distortions and omissions, with many Canadians not seeing themselves reflected at all.

The classic 2SLGBTQIA+ tropes are legendary: Villain. Coward. Predator. Victim. The list goes on. Even in the modern era, we are still too often the sad sack proxy for thinly veiled social issues or the gay best friend existing only to prop up the straight lead. We are not alone in these portrayals—other marginalized communities share our pain in dubious and often damaging representation.

We recognize how far depictions have come over the last few decades even as we acknowledge that there remains pressing work to be done. As one of the world's longest publishing queer media enterprises, Pink Triangle Press has always been invested in 2SLGBTQIA+ visibility on screens because we know that representation is vital to how we are perceived, how we perceive ourselves, and ultimately how we are treated.

As a champion of free expression, we have avoided playing the role of censor or scold. Way back in 1980, when the gay community boycotted the William Friedkin film *Cruising*, starring Al Pacino, we argued against a boycott and instead advocated a critique of the film which would help mainstream audiences understand how to engage it critically. Media literacy, especially in an era of disinformation, is a key skill for healthy democracies.

We don't want to see sanitized characters replace stereotypes; we want complexity, outrageousness, deliciousness, and depth. We want to see the range of experiences reflecting our lives. We hope this foundational research is used in service of this goal. The film, television, and video production industry, the videogames industry, and more importantly our society, will be better for it.

Thanks to the generous support of the Canada Media Fund and Telefilm Canada, Pink Triangle Press has launched this foundational research to report on the current state of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation across film, television, online streaming services, and videogames here in Canada. We gathered valuable insights from stakeholder interviews, a survey of Canadian media professionals, and a content analysis of the top Canadian television programs in French and English to understand the nature of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in Canadian media. The PTP Pink Paper identifies gaps and barriers but also opportunities. This work in no way represents a chastisement, but rather an invitation to collaborate, innovate, and celebrate.

Of course, none of this work would be possible without our incredible partners. The Canada Media Fund, and in particular Mathieu Chantelois and Jessica Fleming, who have been its biggest champions along with Francesca Accinelli and Elisa Suppa at Telefilm Canada. Our research partners Maru/Matchbox and Signal Hill, led by Jacqueline Campbell and Jeff Vidler, respectively, both who have been invested in every step of this work. Thanks to Jenn Kuzmyk and the team at the Banff World Media Festival, and the amazing panel (Emily Hampshire, Cassandra James, Michelle Mama, Alexander Nunez and Michael Serapio) for creating an industry platform and beginning an important conversation on the 2024 PTP Pink Paper themes.

Thanks to Alex Custodio, a respected academic and author we were lucky to bring on as the report writer, who has been a passionate advocate working tirelessly to deliver complex analysis and insight on impossible deadlines. Thanks to our publicists Olivier Lapierre in Quebec, and Ally LaMere-Shedden and Alya Stationwala with Route 504 in Toronto, who are helping us spread the impact of this work. Thanks to our creative team here at PTP and designer Leah Gryfe who are helping us tell the story of the numbers and the experiences they represent in an understandable and beautiful way.

I also want to acknowledge the PTP team, under the guidance of managing director Jennifer McGuire, who have gone above and beyond to raise the bar on this entire project. It is a big lift for a small team and they have been tireless. A huge thanks to Jennifer and our Advocacy Manager Gina Hara and the rest of the PTP team involved: Zoltan Nemeth, Perna Babbar, Chris Cherrie, Roberto Bonifacio, Mitchell Cheeseman, Andrew Chang, and Heaton Dyer.

Finally, a note of gratitude to the many members of Canada's screen community and the Canadian 2SLGBTQIA+ community for their generosity in sharing their experiences and opinions with us, and to all those who helped us make connections or get the word out about our survey.

We believe that the Canadian screen industries are uniquely positioned to be global leaders in a more authentic and dynamic approach to diversity, both on screen and behind the scenes.

We look forward to this research being part of this important conversation and our hope is that we all use its tools, and our own personal agency, to “catch up to tomorrow” and engage in meaningful shifts in 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in Canadian media.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Walberg', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

David Walberg
CEO
Pink Triangle Press

1.1 Executive Summary

93% of industry professionals agree that **2SLGBTQIA+ representation on Canadian screens is extremely important** to them.

90% of media professionals agree that **on-screen representation increases understanding and drives acceptance** of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in society at large.

85% of professionals observe that the **on-screen portrayal of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters has improved in the past 5 years**. However, while there has been progress across industries, **there remains a significant gap in representation**.

82% of respondents believe **2SLGBTQIA+ representation is uneven**. Two-Spirit, trans, and gender diverse characters' identities are seen to be more underrepresented than other 2SLGBTQIA+ identities, especially compared to gay men.

66% of Canadian media industry professionals **do not believe Canadian-funded content sufficiently supports the inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ themes, stories, and professionals**. There remains an immense opportunity to better represent Canadian voices.

2SLGBTQIA+ identities remain critically underrepresented across the Canadian media landscape. Nuanced, meaningful, and authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ stories are particularly lacking.

Although representation is seen to have improved in recent years, the vast majority of industry professionals agree that portrayal of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters is **frequently superficial** (85%), **stereotypical** (84%), or **focused solely on trauma** (88%).

French respondents tend to feel more positively about 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayals than their English counterparts, but a content analysis of the top-watched Canadian television shows reveals that 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are more likely to be portrayed as one-dimensional in French television (73%) compared to English television (25%). These findings reveal **a need for conversations around what constitutes accurate, authentic representation in order to align perceptions**.

There is a significant push for more meaningful and celebratory 2SLGBTQIA+ representation on Canadian screens. **90% of professionals agree that Canadian audiences want to see authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation, two thirds of whom feel strongly about this sentiment.**

Across all industries, the lack of 2SLGBTQIA+ decision-makers is seen as the leading barrier to authentic representation on Canadian screens.

This barrier has immense downstream effects. The shortage of 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals in leadership roles impacts what stories are told and by whom.

Dedicated programs and funding criteria that depend on 2SLGBTQIA+ could create specific, quantifiable opportunities for greenlighting 2SLGBTQIA+ stories. Industry leaders should consider **development and mentorship programs for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals** to support their career advancement. Granting 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals greater opportunities to tell their stories will allow them to demonstrate the value they bring to the media industries and will help these stories remain accurate and authentic.

Key Barriers

1. Lack of 2SLGBTQIA+ decision makers
2. Cautious industry executives
3. Storytelling tropes and stereotypes
4. Tokenizing professionals
5. Lack of financial support
6. Few mentorship and career opportunities

Overall, the people who offered their voices to this project want to see:

- **MORE AUTHENTIC, COMPLEX, AND INCLUSIVE 2SLGBTQIA+ REPRESENTATION** that discards tropes, clichés, and stereotypes in favour of accurate and authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. This not only means the inclusion of **different 2SLGBTQIA+ identities** but also more **nuanced intersections with race, disability, neurodivergence, class, age, and body type**.
- **A WIDER VARIETY OF NARRATIVES, GENRES, AND THEMES THAT INCLUDE 2SLGBTQIA+ CHARACTERS**, including documentaries, reality television, and news programming, as well as mainline videogame titles. Participants want to see stories that **celebrate 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and**

experiences and they want narratives they're proud to share with friends, family, and each other. There is also a desire for 2SLGBTQIA+ characters to be **seamlessly integrated** into narratives.

- **BEHIND THE SCENES REPRESENTATION AT ALL LEVELS AND ACROSS ALL INDUSTRIES.** This includes actors, writers, directors, editors, crew members, game designers, programmers, producers, and executives. It is especially urgent to have more 2SLGBTQIA+ people in **decision-making roles**, which can be supported by more **robust hiring and career development practices to sustainably address the gap in representation**.
- **AND INCREASED FINANCIAL, PROMOTIONAL, AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR 2SLGBTQIA+ CONTENT AND PROFESSIONALS.** Meaningful change demands a **financial investment into the development and distribution of media that represents 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences** such as through dedicated programs and funding criteria that depend on off-screen representation. Supporting sustainable off-screen representation goes hand-in-hand with **establishing inclusive education and training programs to combat transphobia and queerphobia** in all sectors of the media industries including on set, in the writer's room, and on executive boards. All screen industries should adopt and enforce a **zero-tolerance policy for harassment, discrimination, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ violence**.

1.2 A Note on Language

Language is constantly in flux, and words take on new meanings and tenors over time, so it's important to qualify what we mean when we choose to adopt a given vocabulary in a report like this one. Nuance matters, especially when addressing questions of identity, representation, and portrayal in the Canadian media industries.

Consider the complicated history of the word "queer." For many decades, the word was used pejoratively to refer to people whose gender identity and sexual orientation fell outside the perceived social norm. It wasn't until after the Stonewall Riots in 1969 that its reclamation began, and "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it!" became at once a declaration of defiance and an act of pride. In the decades that followed, activists also adopted queer as a radical alternative to the centering of white, cis, able-bodied gay men in movements for social and legal liberation (e.g. the gay rights movement). Today, queer is a versatile, resilient, and expansive term that

describes a range of gender identities and sexual orientations. However, for many people who grew up before the turn of the millennium—including many people who lent their voices to this research project—the word queer remains fraught.

With this in mind, the PTP Pink Paper adopts the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ to refer to people whose gender identities and sexual orientations are not exclusively cisgender or heterosexual. Commonly used in Canada, this acronym stands for Two-Spirit (2S), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual. The + sign is inclusive of a diverse range of gender expressions, sexual orientations, and romantic orientations, including agender, non-binary, aromantic, and pansexual among many others. Placing Two-Spirit at the beginning of the acronym reflects that Indigenous peoples were the first communities to acknowledge and respect gender and sexual diversity on this land we call Canada.

We are mindful that no term can perfectly communicate the full spectrum of identity. When we talk about 2SLGBTQIA+ people, we are not talking about a singular community, but many overlapping ones. Regardless of the terms we use in this report, it is important to respect how people choose to refer to themselves. To that end, when quoting interviews and qualitative verbatims, we preserve each participant's choice of vocabulary.

A glossary of terms can be found in [Appendix C](#).

1.3 Methodology

We cannot change what we cannot measure. The quantitative and qualitative data we have gathered provides a foundational starting point from which to evaluate the landscape of queer representation in the Canadian media industries and provide evidence-based recommendations.

Pink Triangle Press hired Maru/Matchbox and Signal Hill to conduct research for this report. Data was collected between December 2023 and May 2024 via three primary methods:

1. In-depth video interviews conducted with 9 industry professionals, including actors, screenwriters, producers, and videogame developers; 7 interviews were conducted in English and 2 in French.
2. A 10-minute survey completed by 479 professionals working in the Canadian media industries.
3. A content analysis of 22 hours of top-watched Canadian television shows (determined by Parrot Analytics)—14 in English and 8 in French.

To better understand how 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is received by audiences, Pink Triangle Press fielded an additional 10-minute online survey through *Xtra Magazine* and its affiliated social media accounts, which received 278 responses. Unless specified as data from the *Xtra* reader survey, all statistics are drawn from the aforementioned survey of industry professionals.

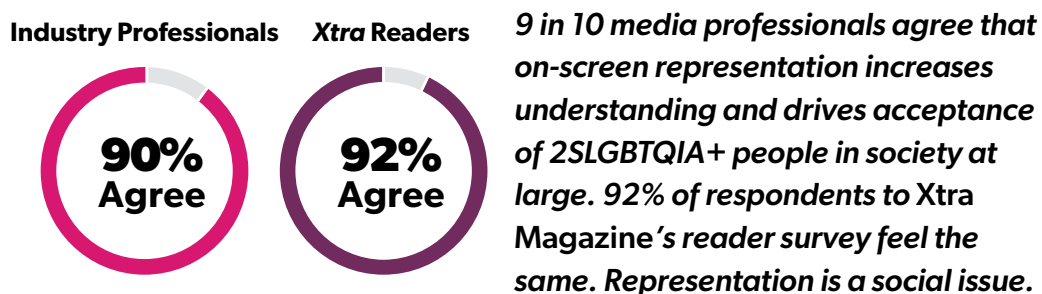
This research has been supplemented with additional information from industry documents, white papers, news articles, and relevant scholarship, which have been cited throughout the report. A complete bibliography can be found in [Appendix A](#). For more information on methodology as well as demographic data on our research participants, please see [Appendix B](#).

2.0 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation in Canadian Media

When we talk about media representation, we often use the metaphors of mirrors and windows (Style 1988; Bishop 1990). Mirrors are stories that affirm, reflect, and validate aspects of an individual's own identities and experiences. Windows offer insight into the identities and experiences of others. For some people, mainstream media is at once a mirror and a window; for others, media has been limited in its capacity to serve as either. Often, conversations around representation are as much about what we *don't* see as they are about what we *do* see.

This section presents data on the state of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in Canadian film, television, streaming, and videogames. These quantitative findings are drawn from an industry-wide survey of media professionals as well as a content analysis of top-watched Canadian television programs. Our goal is twofold: to provide foundational, evidence-based insights into 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in Canadian media; and to set a baseline for tracking 2SLGBTQIA+ representation over time.

2.1 Why Representation Matters



Canadian media are not merely objects of entertainment. They are also products of culture and expressions of identity ([Canada Media Fund 2023b](#)). By communicating messages about how to act, what to value, and who to listen to, Canadian media has tremendous power to affect public perceptions and attitudes.

It is difficult to overstate how recent 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion is under federal law. Over 63% of our survey respondents were born before the Canadian Human Rights Act was amended to include sexual orientation as one of the prohibited grounds for discrimination in 1996. Gender identity and expression were only added as recently as 2016 via Bill C-16, finally providing legal protection for transgender and gender diverse people.

Despite these legislative milestones, the last few years have witnessed a nationwide rise in harassment, threats, and violence committed against 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, the brunt of which has been directed toward trans and gender diverse people ([Dietzel et al. 2023](#)). In 2023, the government of Saskatchewan invoked the notwithstanding clause to override sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and pass Bill 137, making parental consent mandatory before a child under the age of 16 can use a “different gender-related name or pronoun” at school ([Hunter 2023](#)). New Brunswick introduced a similar mandate with Policy 713, which was subsequently challenged in court ([Ibrahim 2023](#)). Earlier this year, the Alberta government has announced plans to implement a bevy of policies that limit the rights of trans and gender diverse youth, including banning access to gender-affirming care. Among these proposals is also a policy that requires parents to “opt their children in” whenever educators plan to teach about gender identity, sexual orientation, or sexual health ([French 2024](#))—subjects that concern everyone regardless of identity.

Decades of research have demonstrated that media shape and are shaped by social norms, perceptions, and behaviours (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003; [Levina et al. 2000](#); Massood et al. 2021). How stories are told—and who gets to tell them—matters. If the only narratives seen on Canadian screens focus on 2SLGBTQIA+ trauma and fear, then these are the stories at the forefront of family members’ minds, of voters’ minds, of policymakers’ minds.

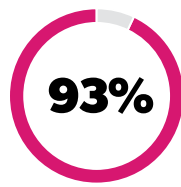
One interviewee offers a liberatory alternative:

// The moment that [my grandfather and aunt] saw that everyone else saw me as a guy, every little bit of nervousness they had went away. Not once did they misgender me or say my old name or feel uncomfortable in public. **It is social perception that makes families reject people.** That’s why changing the narratives are so important. We need our families to know that we will be fine, that we will be happier, that we will be stronger, that our relationships will be better. We need to break this myth that our lives will be miserable. It is gorgeous when we can just exist and that fear disappears. It’s the most beautiful thing.

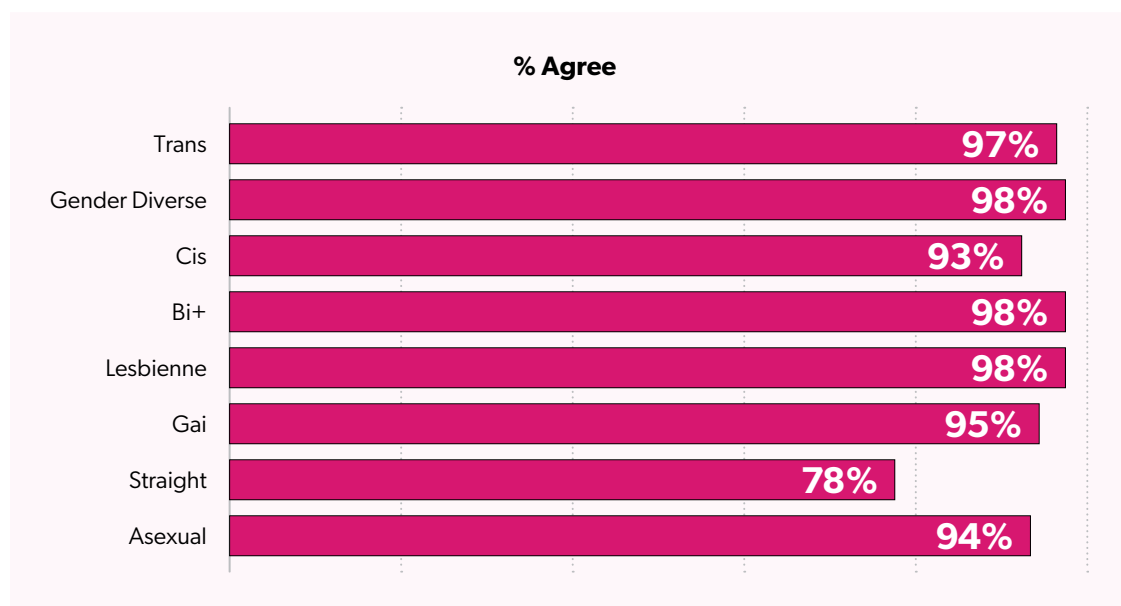
—**Stakeholder Interview**, Film Producer, Writer, and Director

Through quantitative and qualitative research findings, the PTP Pink Paper reveals that the stories told by the Canadian media industries provide meaningful windows into the vastness of lived experience. The above story is not the only story, but it is a potent counterpoint to the narratives often seen on Canadian screens. It challenges the false and harmful rhetoric that endangers Canadians across the country. Ordinary, joyful, and authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ stories play a critical role in acceptance, and these stories are just as crucial now as they have ever been.

2.2 Representation and Portrayal



Almost unanimously, industry professionals agree that it is extremely important for them to see 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in Canadian film, television, streaming, and videogames.



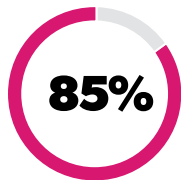
2SLGBTQIA+ Representation Is Extremely Important

97% of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents agree that this representation is extremely important to them. While straight respondents are less likely to agree, **78%** declare that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is **extremely important to them**.

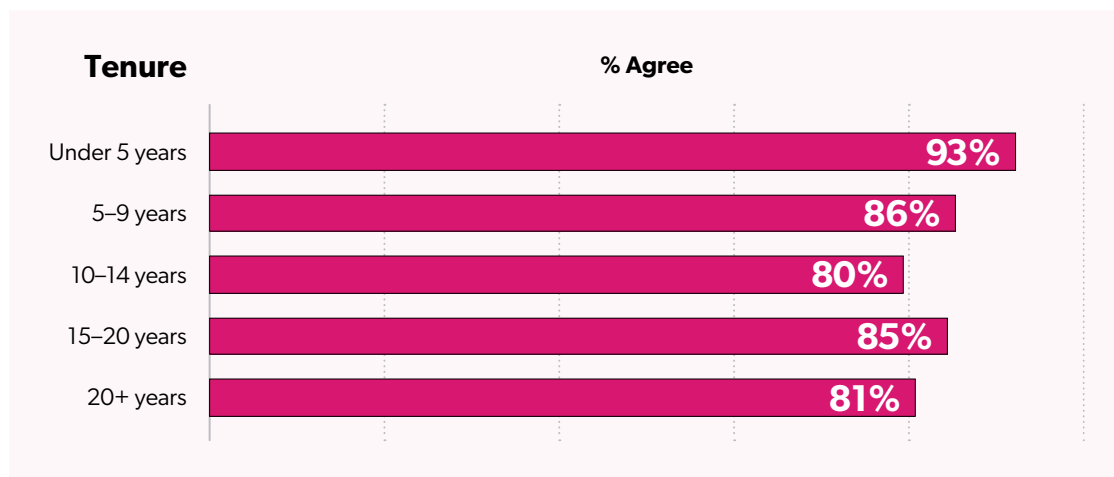
These findings are important because they challenge the assumption that cis or straight people are resistant to 2SLGBTQIA+ stories. Our research reveals that one of the perceived barriers to representation is the cautious nature of media decision-

makers who treat 2SLGBTQIA+ representation as a risk for audience retention. **This data reveals the imagined audience is largely a myth, and a strong majority of respondents believe on-screen representation is critical.**

Despite Efforts to Improve Diversity, 2SLGBTQIA+ Characters Remain Underrepresented on Canadian Screens



Regardless of identity, 85% of industry professionals agree that on-screen 2SLGBTQIA+ representation and portrayal has improved over the last 5 years.



On-Screen Representation Has Improved

Tenure influences professionals' attitudes toward improvement. Professionals with less than 5 years of experience are most likely to agree 2SLGBTQIA+ representation has improved (93%), whereas those who have spent more time in the industry are less likely to observe improvement. This data may gesture to some of the opportunities and frustrations experienced at various points in a career.



Right now, it's better than it's been before. We're being represented more in scripts whereas there never used to be any, except maybe a caricature of what we think of as a gay woman or gay man. That was all that was there was for a long time, and even that was scarce. There was always the joke that the gay dies. That was the role of the queer community in film: comic relief or disposable. **There still needs to be more, but it is happening.**

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Actor

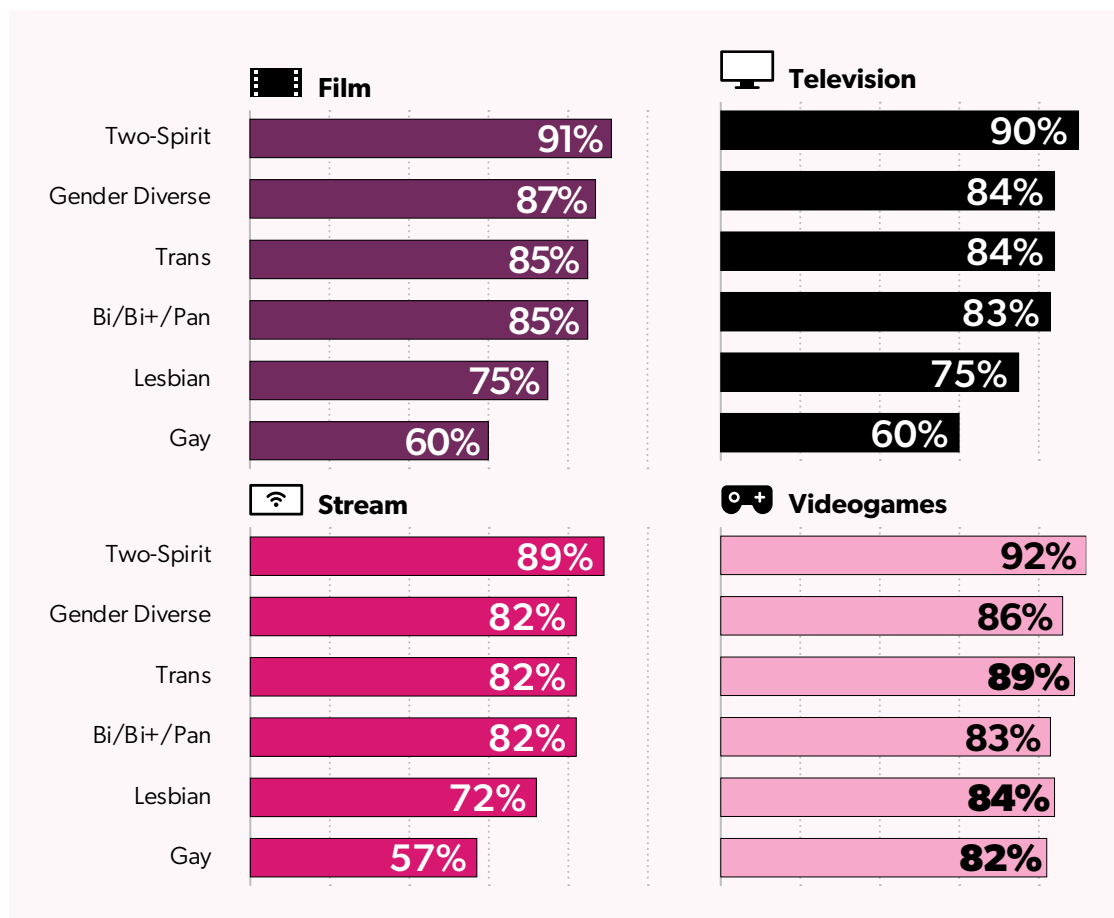


The climate is more receptive. Going back to the 2000s, when I was first making work, it was a lot tougher. I'm no longer being given notes that suggest "wouldn't it be better if this person was straight?" or "wouldn't it be better if we didn't have a gay kiss?" or "wouldn't it be better if the lesbians were kind of in the background?" In the length of my career, it's as good as it's been.

—**Stakeholder Interview: Ian Iqbal Rashid**, Writer and Director

Film, television, streaming, and videogames have made strong strides toward greater inclusion. Both the quantitative data and the sentiments shared by stakeholders speak to efforts to represent 2SLGBTQIA+ identities on screen and there is room for pride in this progress. However, these findings are also reminders of how inaccurate, absent, or harmful 2SLGBTQIA+ representation was even half a decade ago.

Despite improvement, 2SLGBTQIA+ identities are still critically underrepresented in Canadian media. 3 in 4 professionals also believe the Canadian media industry only focuses on one underrepresented group at a time.

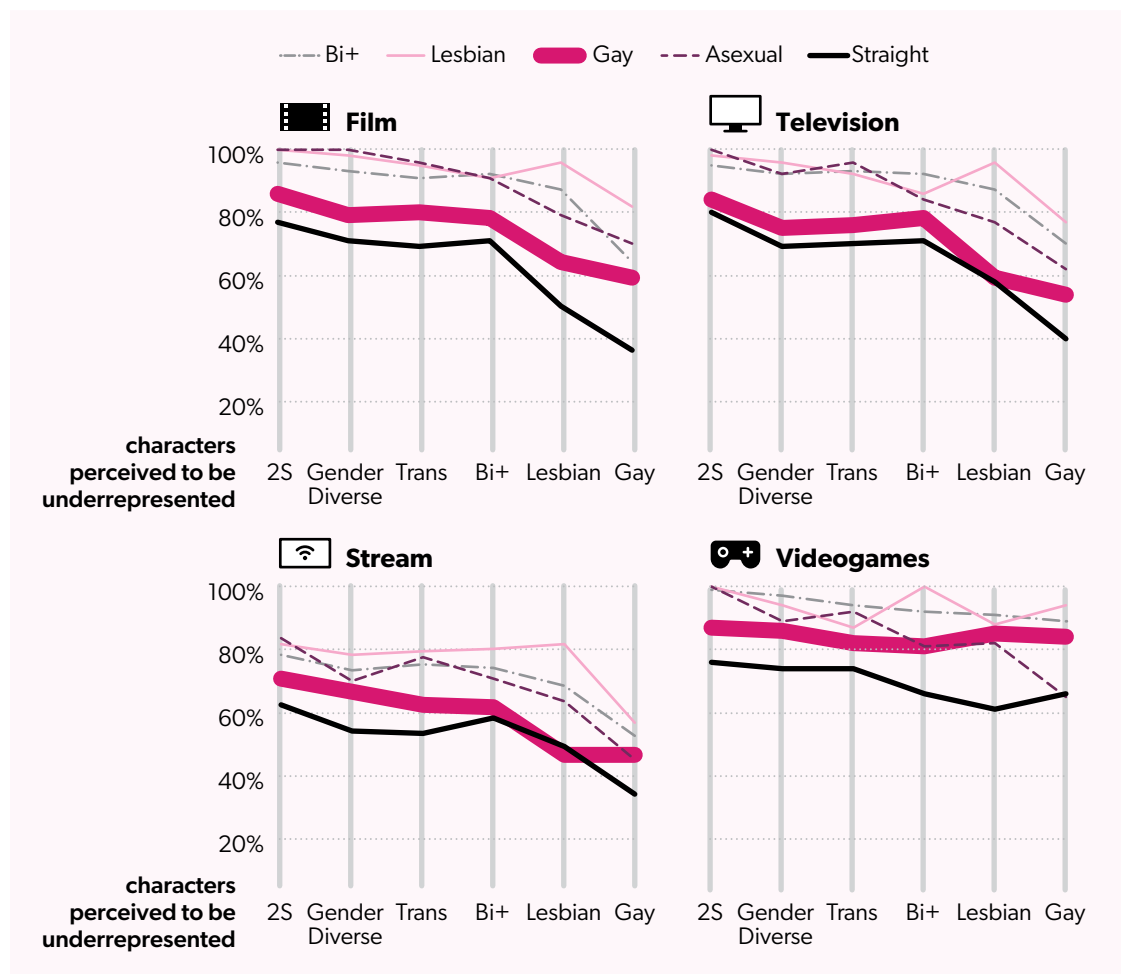


Underrepresentation of 2SLGBTQIA+ Identities

Across all industries, Two-Spirit, trans, and gender diverse people are seen to be the most underrepresented 2SLGBTQIA+ identities. Gay men are understood to be the least underrepresented. One point of divergence is the videogame industry, where gay men are seen to be almost as underrepresented as lesbians.

Due to the absence of intersex and asexual characters in mainstream Canadian media, professionals were not asked about their perceptions of intersex and asexual representation. A recent GLAAD report reveals that asexual characters are only just beginning to be seen on American television, but intersex characters remain entirely absent ([GLAAD 2023](#)). Even outside mainstream broadcast networks and publishers, it is difficult to find work that features intersex and asexual characters. Deliberately making space for 2SLGBTQIA+ narratives that focus on underserved identities can help drive greater awareness. This marks a clear area for future work and research.

A notable finding from this study is that gay men are less likely to perceive underrepresentation of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities on screen.

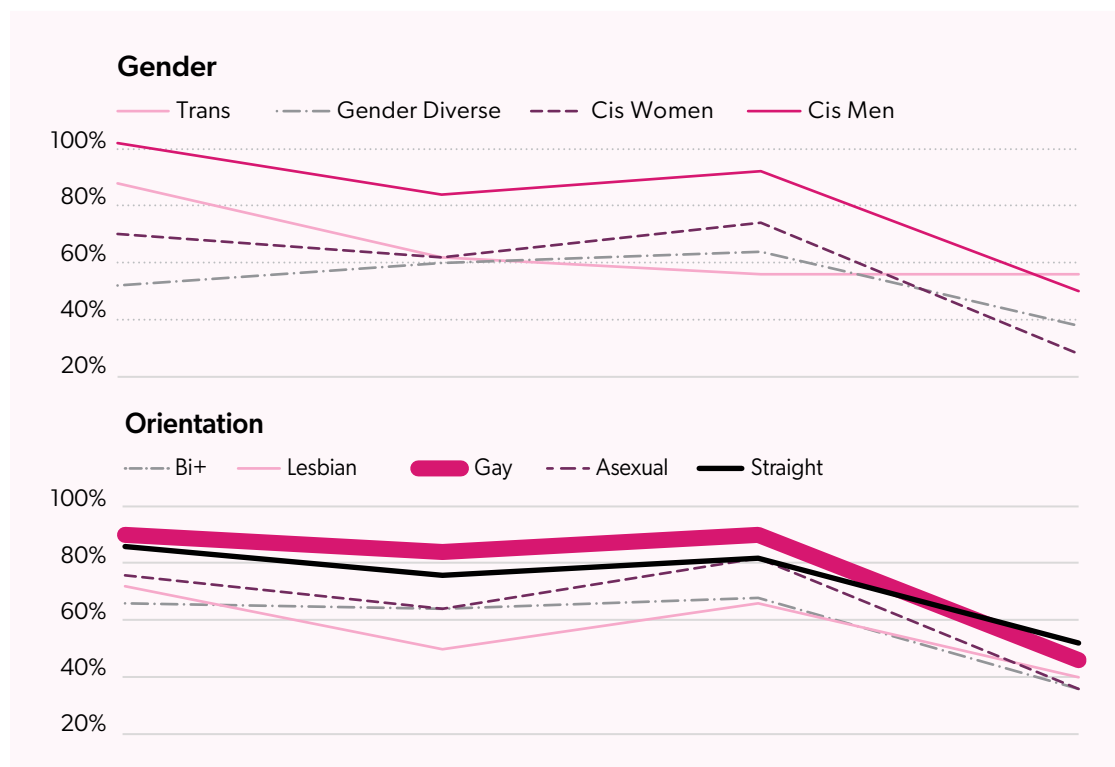


Perception of Underrepresentation by Identity

While straight respondents are less likely to observe underrepresentation than non-straight respondents, the opinions of gay professionals align more closely with straight respondents than with lesbian, asexual, or Bi+ respondents. Notably, gay men are universally seen as the least underrepresented 2SLGBTQIA+ identity, suggesting a correlation between privilege and perception of marginalization. **This perception gap is a key takeaway from this report, and it points to a need for conversations that support solidarity and greater alignment between gay men and other 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.**

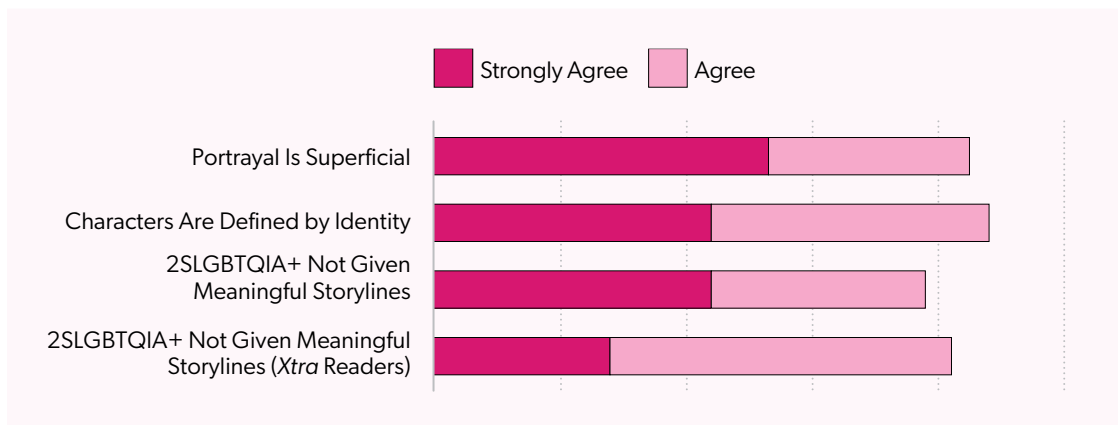
Portrayals Are Seen to Be Inaccurate and Inauthentic

Fewer than 2 in 5 industry professionals feel that current portrayals are accurate, many declaring them to be tokenizing, stereotypical, or superficial at best.



Perceptions of the Accuracy of 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation

Participants who are gender diverse or cis women recognize inaccuracy in Canadian media more often than cis men. Meanwhile, gay men are more likely to say that representation is accurate than any other group—including straight people. **Once again, the findings point to a significant perception gap between gay men and other 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals.**



Inaccuracy of Portrayal

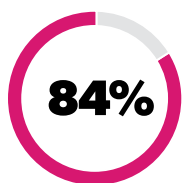
85% of industry professionals believe 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal in Canadian media tends to be superficial. A strong majority find 2SLGBTQIA+ characters to be frequently defined by their gender identity or sexual orientation (88%). In both cases, we find close alignment between 2SLGBTQIA+ and straight cisgender respondents.

When 2SLGBTQIA+ characters get time on screen, they are not seen to be given meaningful stories. This sentiment is strongly felt by 2SLGBTQIA+ (83%) and straight cisgender (71%) respondents. 82% of participants in our *Xtra* reader survey similarly agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are not often given meaningful storylines.

// Show us as human beings with complex lives, hopes and emotions. We're either sexless houseplants or stereotypes. **It feels like LGBTQ2S representation in media is often for straight people.**

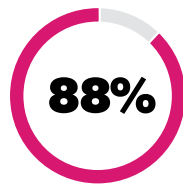
—*Xtra Reader*, gay man

These findings are correlated. Superficial characters who are defined by their 2SLGBTQIA+ identities are less likely to be given meaningful narrative arcs and development. Consequently, depictions seem one-dimensional and do not accurately reflect the lived experience of 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

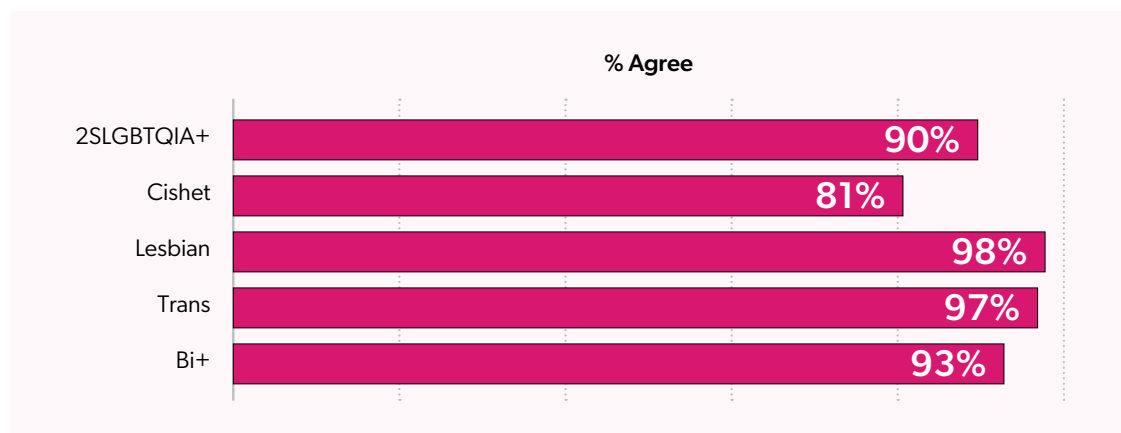


84% of media professionals agree that Canadian films, television, and streaming programs rely on 2SLGBTQIA+ tropes and stereotypes

These include, among many others, the “gay best friend,” the “promiscuous bisexual,” and the “bury your gays” trope that frequently sees 2SLGBTQIA+ characters die to further the plot of a straight character. Superficial, cliché, and harmful portrayals caused by a reliance on these tropes and stereotypes likely contributes to the lack of accurate depictions of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.



There is widespread acknowledgement that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in Canadian films focuses on trauma. 88% of media professionals agree with this statement, and 41% strongly agree.



2SLGBTQIA+ Films Focus on Trauma

Trauma narratives are those that focus on the struggles, torment, and anguish of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters. These include but are not limited to stories that centre abuse, assault, and harassment, as well as more systemic and institutional forms of violence such as micro-aggressions, discriminatory legal policies, and other threats to identity and expression.

Lesbian (98%) and trans (97%) respondents are in near-unanimous agreement that these are the dominant narratives depicted in film. While 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents (90%) are more likely to agree, straight cisgender respondents are also in overwhelming agreement (81%). **This finding is significant because it reveals that Canadian films are naturalizing the idea that trauma is an expected part of being 2SLGBTQIA+.**

As this study has shown, on-screen portrayal affects audience understanding and acceptance. Trauma narratives communicate to 2SLGBTQIA+ and straight cisgender audiences alike that 2SLGBTQIA+ lives end in tragedy, providing

institutional justification for the acceptance of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ violence. Research participants often bring up the need to move beyond trauma narratives not only to shift how a straight cisgender audience sees 2SLGBTQIA+ people but also how 2SLGBTQIA+ people see themselves. As one interviewee notes, the naturalization of 2SLGBTQIA+ trauma narratives falsely suggests that 2SLGBTQIA+ people cannot live rich, interesting, joyful lives. This, in turn, limits the opportunities 2SLGBTQIA+ people envision for themselves.

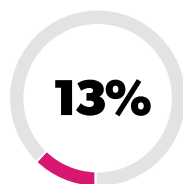
// There's a lot of non-queer people telling or trying to tell our stories, but there are also queer filmmakers repeating these narratives because that's how we've learned to see ourselves and that's what we think we can offer. I think a lot of our trauma and a lot of our difficulty has to do with the way that movies have portrayed us. It's not just informing people outside the community. It's also telling us who we are and how we have to be and that we are not enough and that we just deserve death and crime and all of these things. We don't get to see real and positive representations. There is a need to not just stop people from outside of our community telling the stories about us, but also to bring awareness of the ways in which we have learned to see ourselves and speak of ourselves and tell our stories.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Film Producer, Writer, and Director

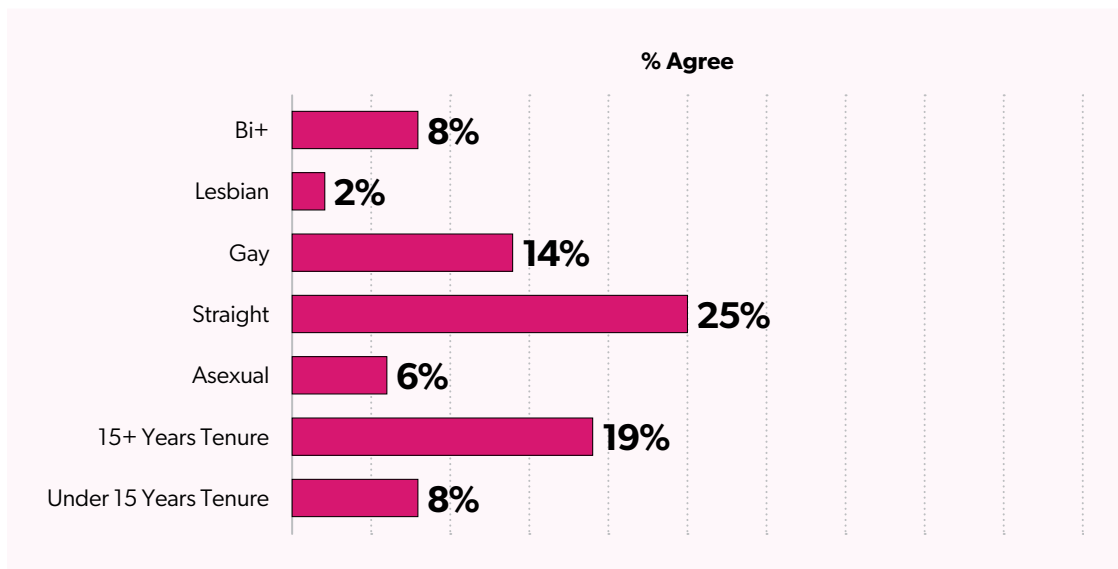
Canadian Films

Canadian film production often foregrounds feature-length films made by independent production companies. Telefilm Canada plays a key role in financing Canadian films; last year, the Crown corporation administered \$158.7 million in funding. International co-productions—particularly with the United States—remain an important part of the Canadian film industry by providing Canadian producers the funding necessary for larger projects. A CBC News article states that, while much has changed since the 1990s, few Canadian cinemas screen 2SLGBTQIA+ content. Consequently, 2SLGBTQIA+ festivals remain one of the few ways for audiences to gather and watch 2SLGBTQIA+ films ([Knegt 2016](#)).

Audiences Want Meaningful, Authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation



Only 13% of media professionals believe that there is too much focus on 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in Canadian media. 60% strongly disagree with this statement and 87% disagree overall.



Canadian Media Focuses Too Much on 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation

Trans respondents are in unanimous disagreement that the Canadian media focuses too much on 2SLGBTQIA+ representation (0%) and only 2% of lesbians agree. While 25% of straight respondents hold this opinion, the vast majority disagrees.



When surveyed, only 5% of *Xtra's* readers agree that there is too much focus on 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. The near-total majority disagrees (95%), and 64% of participants qualify their sentiments as a strong disagreement. These findings suggest that 2SLGBTQIA+

Canadian Media Focuses Too Much on 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation (*Xtra* Readers)

participants categorically do not believe the Canadian media industries have focused on 2SLGBTQIA+ representation enough.



9 in 10 media professionals agree that Canadian audiences want to see authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ characters. 6 in 10 strongly agree.

There is near-universal acknowledgement that Canadian audiences want meaningful 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal on their screens. This sentiment is strongly shared across industry roles, including among executives, directors, writers, and developers. **A key takeaway from this study is that**

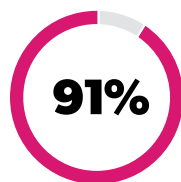
authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation holds substantial audience appeal. Greenlighting and supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ content can therefore drive ratings, advertising revenue, and sales.

2.3 Industry Spotlight: Videogames

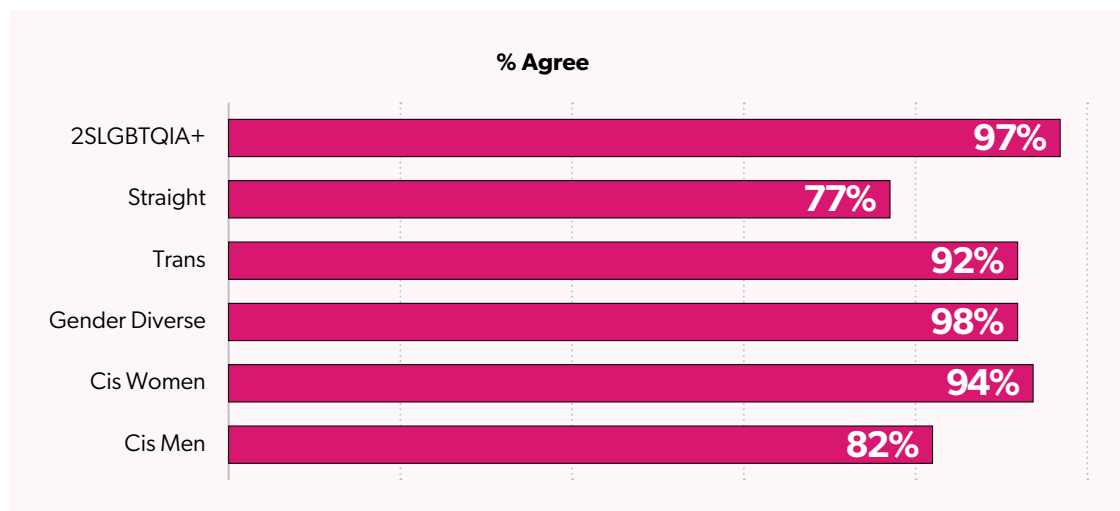
Canada is the third largest global producer of videogames, surpassed only by the United States and Japan. According to a 2021 report by the Entertainment Software Association of Canada (ESAC), the country is home to over 900 videogame companies (75% Canadian-owned) that contribute over \$5.5 billion to the GDP ([ESAC 2021](#)). Thanks to its global reach, the industry affords Canadians an outstanding opportunity to shape the landscape of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in games.

Videogames themselves are uniquely powerful. For 2SLGBTQIA+ players especially, games hold space for self-expression and self-discovery, allowing the exploration of different genders, sexualities, and identities. At the same time, videogames and the player cultures that surround them are often hostile to anyone who isn't part of an imagined audience of white, straight, cisgender men (Ruberg 2019). Discrimination and harassment are rampant in videogame culture, most clearly exhibited in the reactionary hate campaign known as GamerGate, which targeted women in the industry in 2014. Closer to home, Montreal-based consulting company Sweet Baby Inc. has recently become the subject of gamers' ire for their work on diversity, inclusivity, and authentic storytelling. In the face of violent threats and misinformation, the videogame developers who worked with Sweet Baby have stood by the company ([Ore 2024](#)).

Perceptions of the videogame industry are rapidly changing as games continue to enter mainstream culture. **Today, 3 in 5 Canadians—over 23 million people—play videogames** ([ESAC 2020](#)). Despite this enormous number, little research has been done on who these Canadian players are and what they want to see, especially when it comes to 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. This section of the report offers landmark insights that can help videogame developers at all scales meaningfully prioritize the content their audiences want to play.



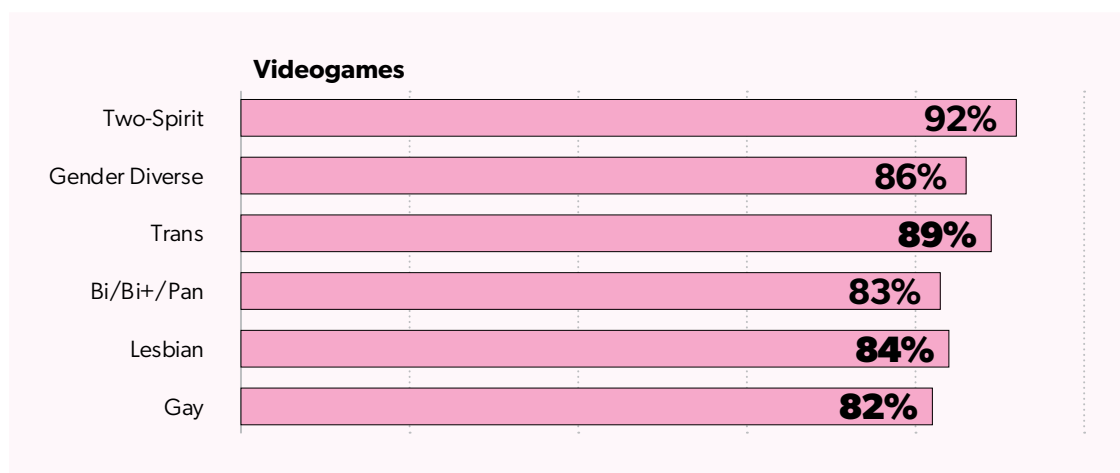
91% of videogame professionals agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is necessary in videogames. Most respondents feel strongly about the importance of this representation (77%).



Representation Is Necessary in Videogames

While agreement is highest among gender diverse respondents, cis women, and trans respondents, over 80% of cis men believe 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is necessary. Respondents whose sexual orientations fall under the 2SLGBTQIA+ umbrella (97%) are more likely to agree than straight people (77%) but again we see tremendous agreement across identities.

87% of videogame professionals agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation has improved over the last 5 years, higher than the percentage in any other industry. Despite this transformative shift, over 80% videogame professionals agree that all 2SLGBTQIA+ identities remain critically underrepresented.



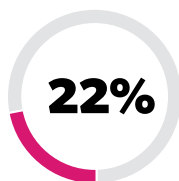
Unevenness of Representation in Videogames

Professionals note similarly universal levels of 2SLGBTQIA+ underrepresentation in videogames as in other industries regarding the depiction of Two-spirit, trans, gender diverse, and bi+ characters. One major point of divergence is that gay men (82%) are almost equally likely to be seen as underrepresented as bi+ characters (83%) and lesbian characters (84%). The unevenness of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is less dramatically felt here than in other industries because all identities are seen as vastly underrepresented.

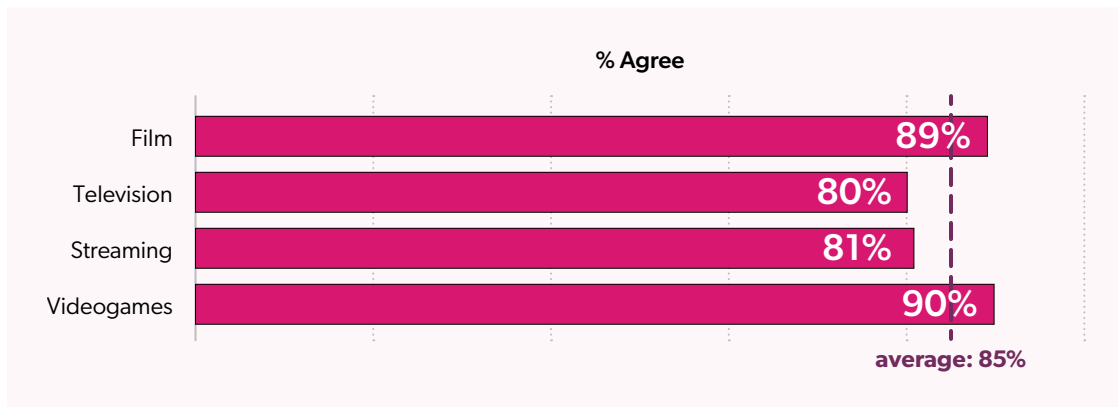
Importantly, the inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters in videogames has not always been done in the name of authentic portrayal. Research participants note that lesbian characters in particular have historically been oversexualized and depicted through the male gaze with the goal of titillating a presumed audience of straight men. Sexuality, in these cases, becomes a form of objectification. While the industry is beginning to portray 2SLGBTQIA+ characters in less harmful, more authentic ways, there is considerable work to do to dismantle decades of stereotypes and reductive representation.

// A phenomenon we've seen in the last 20 years is that there are characters who are lesbian women, but not because the game was made *for* lesbian women. In the videogame space, it took longer to see gay men than lesbian women. I think that the fact that—in videogame companies and especially in decision-making roles—it was mostly heterosexual men, **the representation didn't necessarily come from good intentions**. It was more of a fantasy.

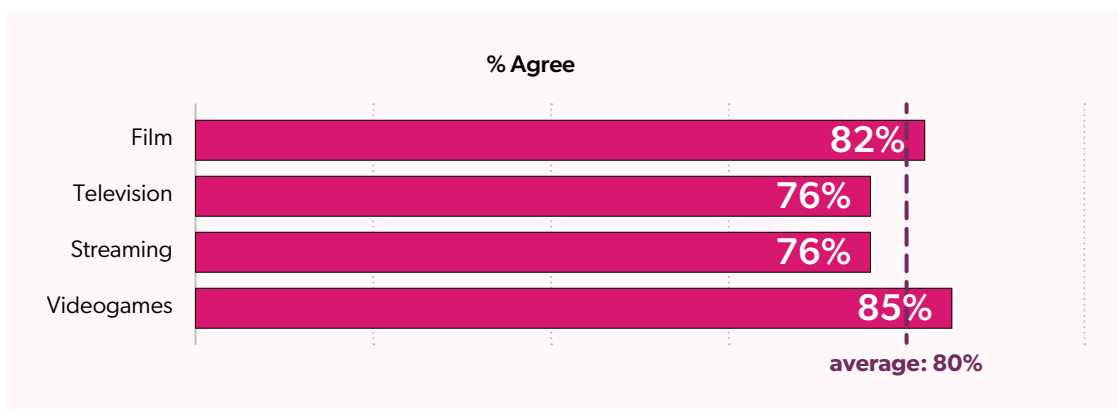
—**Stakeholder Interview: Chloé Lussier**,
Videogame Company CEO



Only 22% of professionals agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal is accurate in Canadian videogames—less than any other industry.

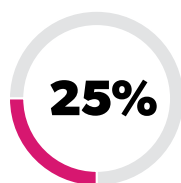


Portrayal is Superficial

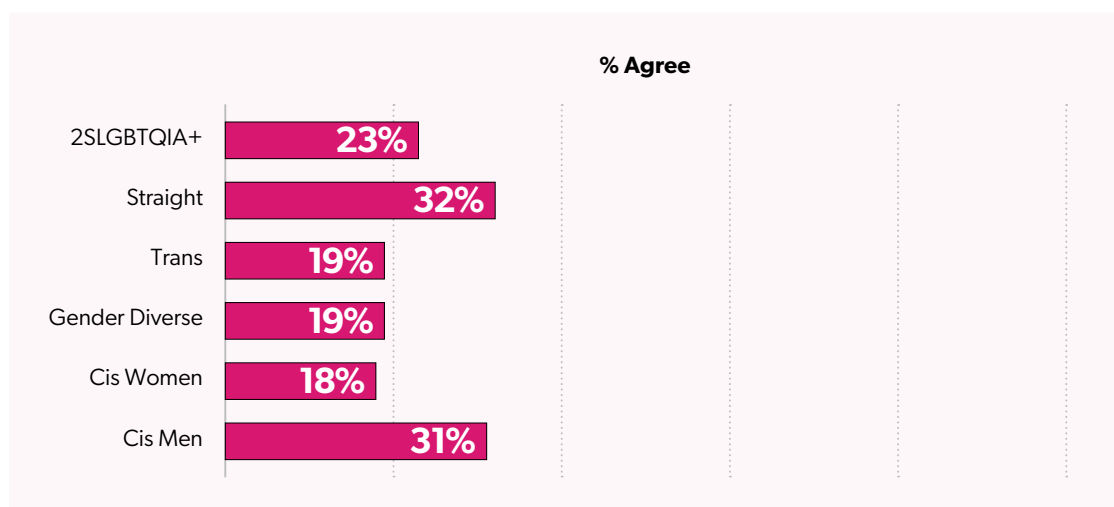


2SLGBTQIA+ Not Given Meaningful Storylines

Professionals who work in videogames are also more likely to say that 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal in Canadian media is superficial (90%) and that 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are not given meaningful storylines (85%) compared to professionals in other industries. These findings suggest that current 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is often superficial in videogames.



Most professionals believe players won't be dissuaded by 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in videogames. Only 25% agree that gamers don't want to play 2SLGBTQIA+ characters.



Gamers Don't Want to Play Queer Characters

According to a recent GLAAD report, developers have avoided making videogames that centre 2SLGBTQIA+ characters because they have assumed audiences would be disinterested or opposed to this representation ([GLAAD 2024](#)). Our data reveals this audience aversion isn't the case. While straight respondents are more likely to agree that gamers don't want to play 2SLGBTQIA+ characters (32%) than their 2SLGBTQIA+ counterparts (23%), these findings suggest the majority of players won't be deterred by representation. Cis women (18%) are the least likely to agree that gamers don't want to play 2SLGBTQIA+ characters, a perception that may stem from an overall lack of diversity in videogames—for much of the medium's history, women have played characters whose gender differs from their own.

One of the ways videogames sometimes include 2SLGBTQIA+ characters is through optional representation. Offering a range of avatar customizations and romanceable character choices gives players an opportunity to explore 2SLGBTQIA+ identity in videogames and see themselves on screens. Research participants acknowledge that, while this is a good first step toward representation, it often lacks depth and nuance, since developers can't fully realize an infinite number of narratives. Moreover, this optional approach has been criticized for putting the onus of inclusion on underrepresented players themselves in otherwise heteronormative gameworlds ([Shaw 2015](#)). Incorporating more explicit 2SLGBTQIA+ representation among playable and non-playable characters alike is necessary for meaningful portrayals.

As one of largest producers of videogames internationally, the Canadian games industry has the potential to be at the forefront of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. The professionals we heard from feel strongly that authentic representation is necessary in videogames.

Over the last half-decade, the industry is seen to have made substantial strides toward greater 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in videogames, but the data reveals that there is ample opportunity for improvement in both the quantity and quality of portrayal. **Professionals are emphatic that games with more accurate, meaningful, and well-rounded 2SLGBTQIA+ representation are needed.** These games can play a pivotal role in driving acceptance in the videogame industry and culture at large.

// Fortunately, when it comes to videogames, many **independent games and small productions are paving the way for 2SLGBTQIA+ content.** It helped me, a cishet, to understand and learn.

—**Canadian Game Developer**, straight cis woman

For the purposes of this initial report, we have combined all sectors of the videogame industry together, from AAA studios to indie developers. We recognize that doing so neglects some key nuances of the industry. Much more can be said about the specific conditions and opportunities for authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in different sectors of the Canadian videogame industry. Future research here could prove fruitful. Our findings, though not exhaustive, are intended to set a baseline against which future efforts toward authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation can be measured.

2.4 Key Findings

- **Representation is a social issue.** 9 in 10 media professionals agree that on-screen representation increases understanding and drives acceptance of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in society at large.
- **All 2SLGBTQIA+ identities are underrepresented in Canadian media, but some are more underrepresented than others.** Intersex and asexual people are universally underrepresented on Canadian screens. Two-Spirit, trans, gender diverse, and bi+ identities are also critically underrepresented.

- **The opinions of gay men tend to align more closely with straight respondents than with other 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents.** There is a need for meaningful, industry-wide conversations to address this perception gap.
- **Across the board, a strong majority of industry professionals find current 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayals tokenizing, superficial, or inaccurate.** Over 4 in 5 professionals agree that Canadian media relies on harmful tropes and stereotypes. These findings suggest that creators must take significant steps to create more meaningful and authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ characters.
- **Canadian films are naturalizing the idea that 2SLGBTQIA+ people inevitably experience trauma.** 88% of respondents agree that Canadian films centre trauma narratives, which affects the perceptions of 2SLGBTQIA+ and non-2SLGBTQIA+ people alike.
- **3 in 4 videogame professionals believe 2SLGBTQIA+ representation won't dissuade gamers.** Professionals express confidence that representation will not detract from audience engagement but may actually bring in new audiences.
- **Canadian audiences want authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation.** 9 in 10 media professionals agree that there is a demand for this content. Fulfilling this demand can drive ratings, advertising revenue, and sales.

2.5 Television by the Numbers: A Content Analysis of Top-Watched French and English Television

To assess the current representation of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters in Canadian television, we commissioned a content analysis of top-watched French and English programs. The sample yielded 134 speaking roles in French television and 224 speaking roles in English. Additional methodological notes can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Our analysis of the data addresses the representation of sexual orientation and gender identity as well as their intersections with race and disability. We also analyze characters based on their assigned prominence in each episode. For scripted television, narrative role and dimensionality are analyzed as well.

For ease of presentation, this analysis uses the term character to refer to all speaking roles, including hosts, contestants, panelists, and interviewees on unscripted television.

Variables

Sexual Orientation

Characters are identified as gay, lesbian, bi+ (bisexual or pansexual), straight, or queer, which coders use to refer to characters who are not heterosexual but are not confirmed to be gay, lesbian, or bi/pan. Drag queens have been coded as queer. No characters are identified as asexual.

Gender Identity

Characters are identified as cis or trans, where cis refers to individuals whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth and trans refers to individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. Trans is used here as an umbrella term.

Race

Characters are identified as white, Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, or People of Colour, which has been used to account for identities not mentioned above. Characters can be coded as more than one race. Race is only coded for primary and supporting characters.

Physical Disability

This research is only inclusive of physical disability. Disability is only coded for primary and supporting characters. A large-scale content analysis that attends to nuanced representation of disability among 2SLGBTQIA+ characters would be a generative avenue for future intersectional research.

Prominence

Each character has been assigned one of three levels of prominence:

- **Primary**—characters who are tied to the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect on the television show;
- **Supporting**—characters who enhance the narrative by adding depth, conflict, humour, or insight but who are not the central focus of the plot;
- **Incidental**—characters who have speaking roles that typically only serve functional purposes (e.g. the barista serving a coffee).

Role

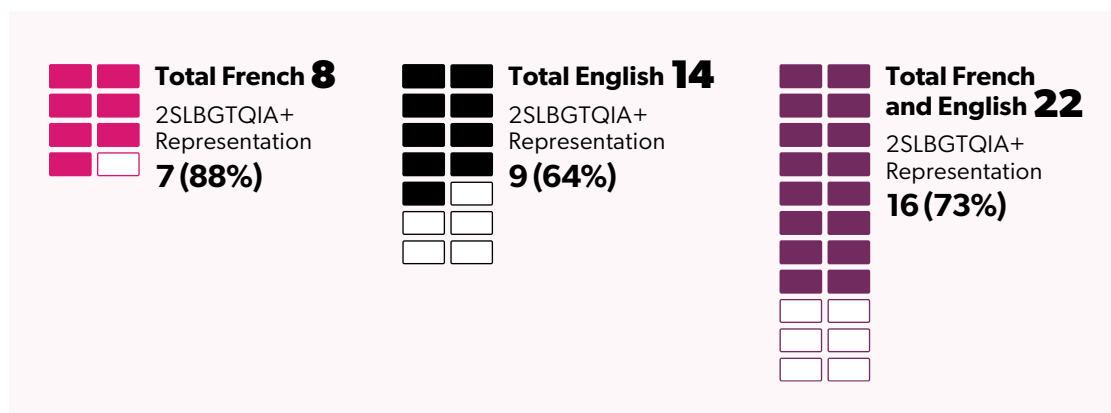
Most primary and secondary characters are considered protagonists unless they are clearly positioned as antagonists, meaning a source of conflict in the show. Coders use the label “victim” to refer to characters who suffer harm or adversity, often due to the actions of the antagonist; these characters are most common in procedural dramas.

Dimensionality

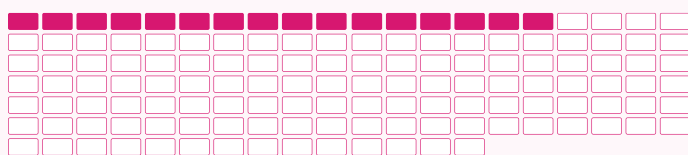
Characters are coded as either multidimensional or one-dimensional. Multidimensional characters are depicted with complex personalities and rich narratives. For 2SLGBTQIA+ characters, this means they are shown as fully realized people with varied interests, aspirations, flaws, and experiences that extend beyond their gender identities or sexual orientations. Multidimensional portrayals mirror the full range of human experiences.

Conversely, one-dimensional characters lack nuance and complexity. For 2SLGBTQIA+ characters, this often means they have been defined solely by their gender identity or sexual orientation. Characters who adhere to reductive stereotypes and harmful clichés are considered one-dimensional as they not only limit narrative potential but also reinforce misconceptions and biases.

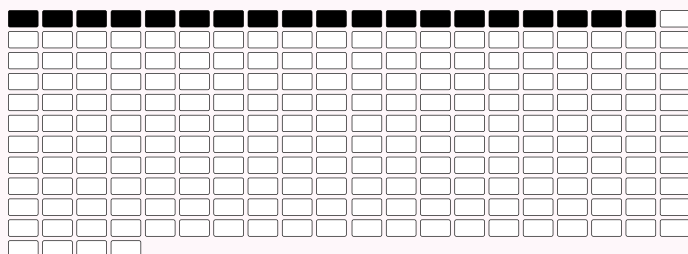
Results



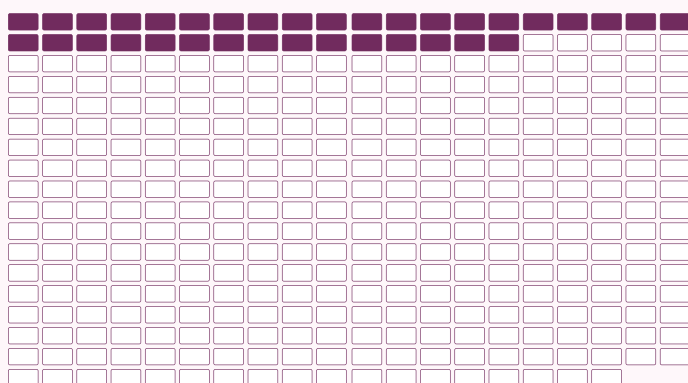
Shows with 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation



Total French 134
2SLGBTQIA+ Representation **16 (12%)**



Total English 224
2SLGBTQIA+ Representation **19 (8%)**



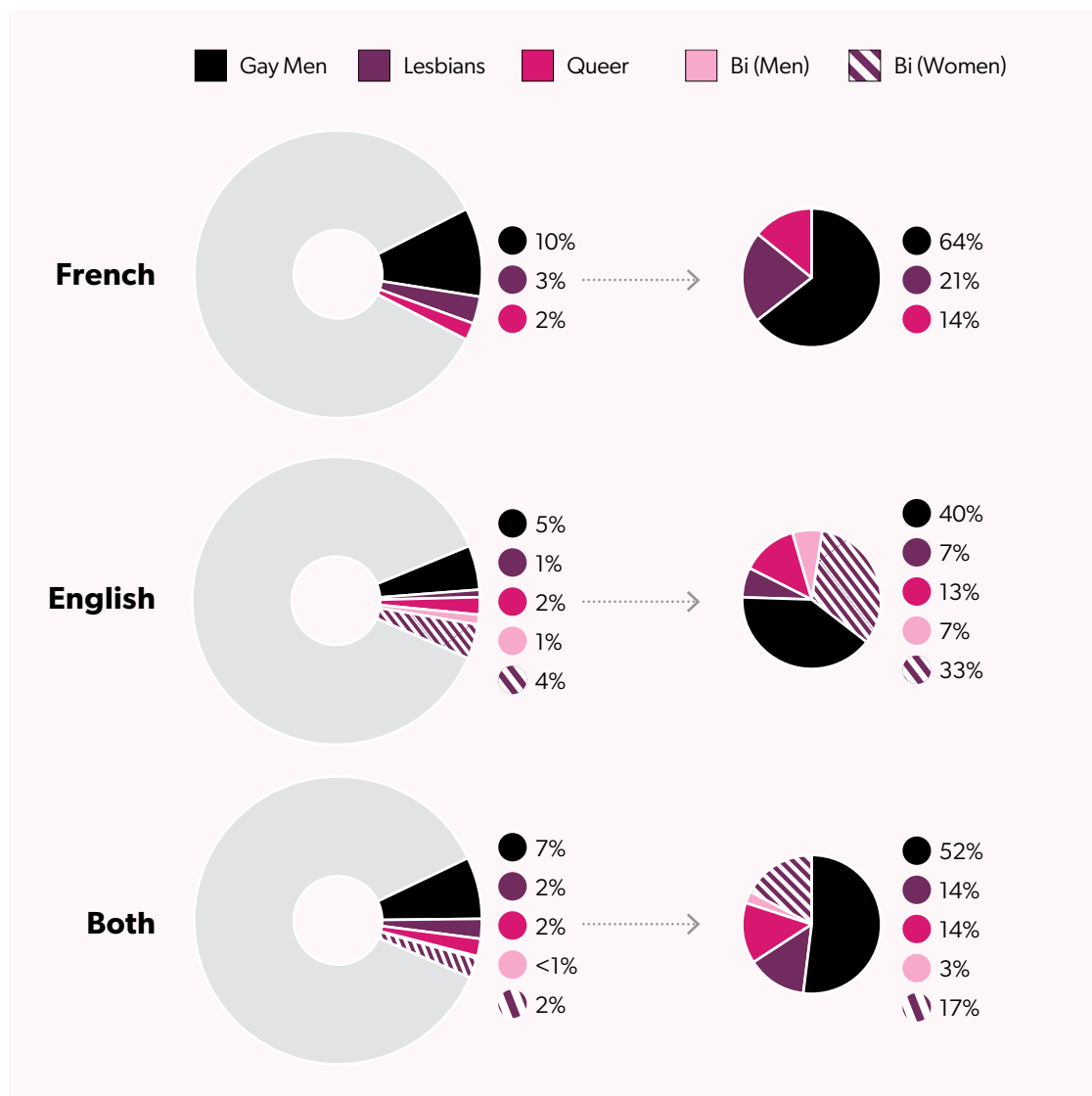
Total Both 358
2SLGBTQIA+ Representation **35 (10%)**

2SLGBTQIA+ Representation in Television

73% of top-watched Canadian television programs include 2SLGBTQIA+ characters, revealing that representation does not detract from top viewership. Nevertheless, 2SLGBTQIA+ characters still hold fewer than 10% of speaking roles overall.

French television is more likely to include 2SLGBTQIA+ characters than English television. 7 in 8 (88%) top-watched French television shows include some form of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. Of the 134 total speaking roles, 16 are 2SLGBTQIA+, representing 12% of French-speaking roles.

Conversely, only 9 in 14 (64%) top-watched English television shows include 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. Of the 224 English-speaking roles, only 19 are 2SLGBTQIA+, representing a mere 8% of all roles.



2SLGBTQIA+ Representation by Sexual Orientation

2SLGBTQIA+ representation is extremely uneven across the top-watched television shows in Canada. Over half the prominent 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are cis gay men (52%). Regardless of language, no top-watched Canadian television program represents people who are asexual.

On French television, we see that 64% of non-heterosexual characters are gay men, 21% are lesbian, and 14% are queer. 43% of all 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in French television centres white cis gay men. **No characters on the top-watched French television shows are shown to be bi/pan.**

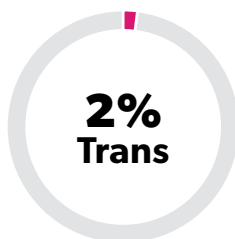
Of the non-heterosexual characters in English television, gay men are most represented (40%), followed by bi+ women (33%), and queer people (13%). There are small but equal proportions of lesbians and bi+ men (7% each). Despite less monolithic representation than what we see in French, 33% of all 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in English television centres white cis gay men.

While the above data is useful for addressing the unevenness within 2SLGBTQIA+ representation, it is important to remember how scant this representation is overall. Looking at the big picture, we see gay men represent only **7%** of primary and secondary roles, followed by an equal proportion of bi+ women, lesbian women, and queer folks (2% each). Less than 1% of roles depict bi+ men. Heterosexual characters represent an overwhelming 86% of prominent roles.

An important takeaway from this report is understanding that the goal is not to reduce the portrayal of gay men but to bring more voices to the table and have more representation overall. There is notable fear among some respondents who identify as gay men that more fulsome representation of intersectional 2SLGBTQIA+ identities will come at the cost of their own limited representation. **It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the overwhelming majority of characters on Canadian screens are cisgender and heterosexual.**

On Bi+ Representation

The significant proportion of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters who are bi+ in English television (40%) challenges the widespread tendency to ignore, remove, or re-explain evidence of bisexuality or pansexuality—a phenomenon known as bi erasure. Looking at our survey demographics, we find that 54% of non-heterosexual English professionals identify as bi, pan, or otherwise queer (compared to, for instance, 18% as lesbian and 24% as gay). Among French professionals who do not identify as straight, 32% identify as bi, pan, or otherwise queer. The total absence of bi and pan characters in French television signals a significant shortfall in accurately representing a breadth of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.

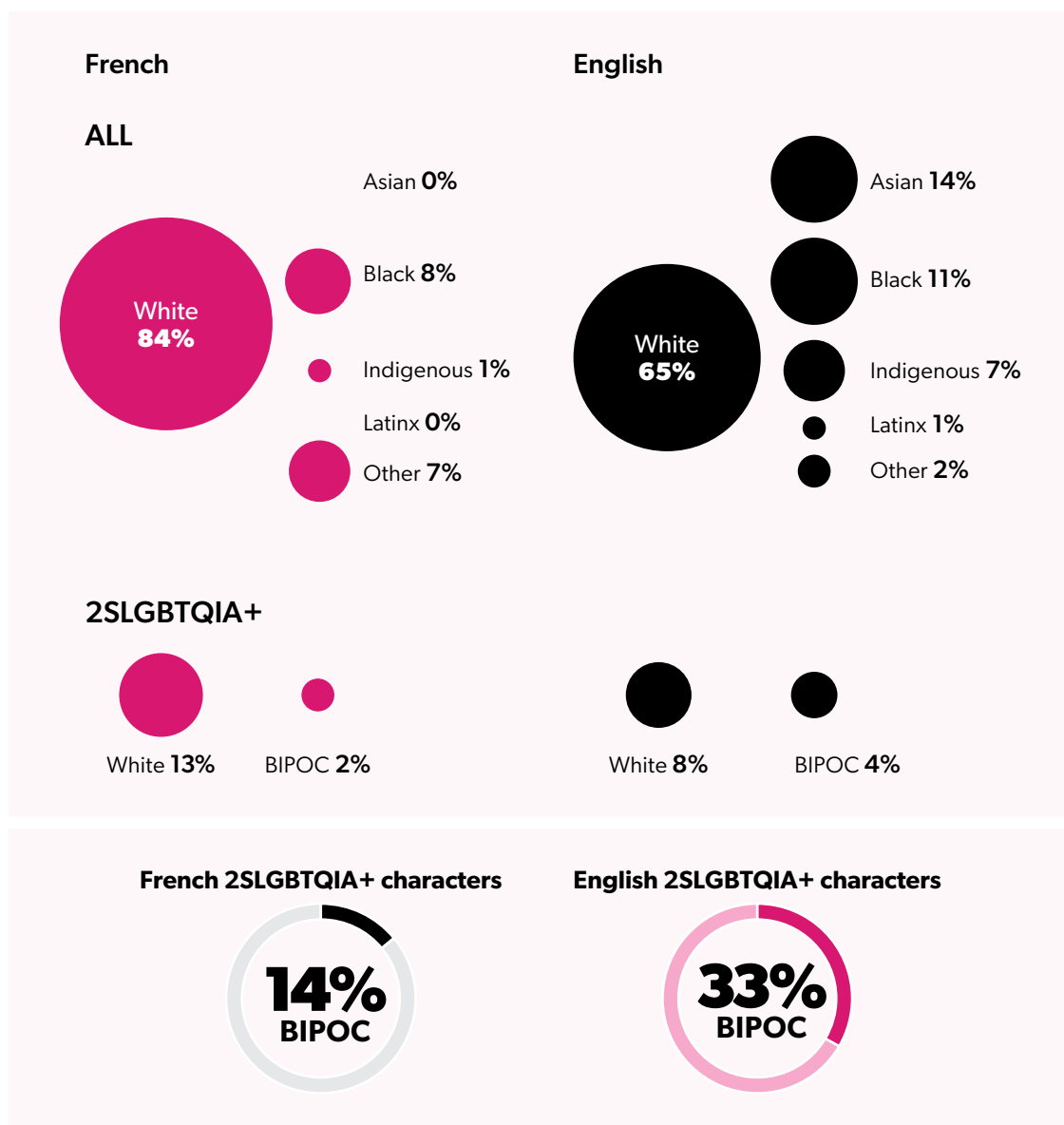


Across both languages, fewer than 2% of characters in primary or supporting roles are trans.

Of the 2SLGBTQIA+ characters in primary and supporting roles, 55% are men, 38% are women, and 7% are trans or gender diverse.

Only 2 trans people appear in primary or supporting roles in the top-watched French television shows. One is a contestant on a reality television program who identifies as queer; the other is a trans woman on a French drama who is played by a cis man.

Proportionally, English television has even less trans representation than French television. There are only 2 trans people on the top-watched English television shows despite more roles overall. Moreover, **no top-watched English drama or comedy include trans characters.** Among the shows that were analyzed, trans people only appear on one unscripted program. **These results fall in line with survey participants' observations that trans people are critically underrepresented in Canadian television and streaming.**



Distribution of Primary and Secondary Characters by Race

BIPOC 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are universally underrepresented in Canadian television, represent only 2% of prominent roles in French television and 4% in English television.

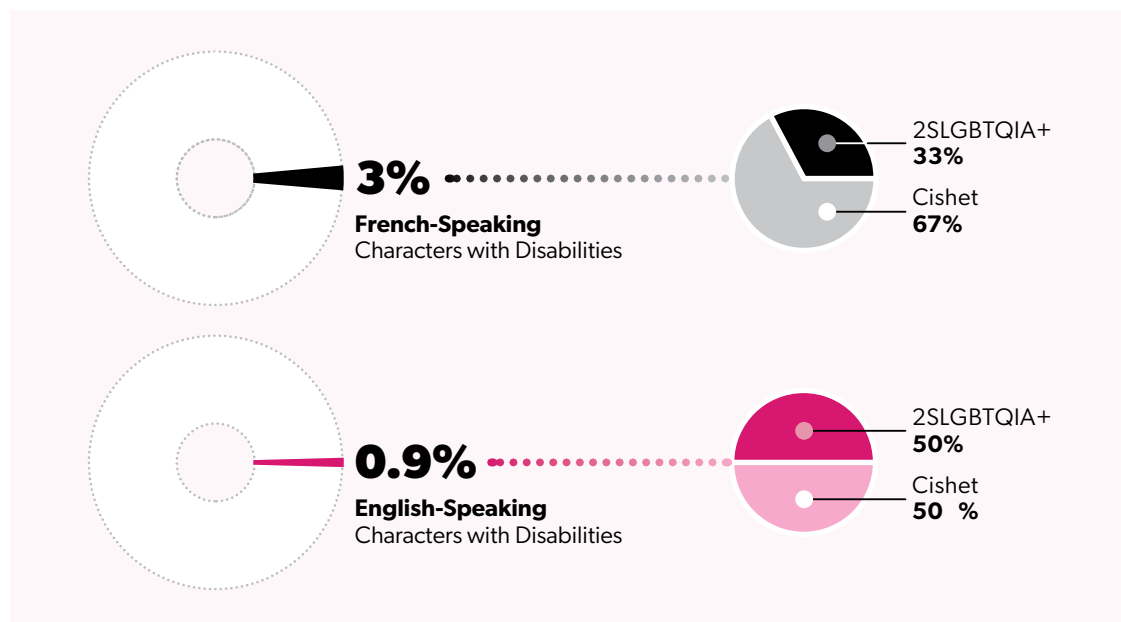
Only 14% of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters in primary and supporting roles in French television are BIPOC. While English television tends to portray more intersectional identities, only 33% of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are BIPOC.

Overall, we find substantial differences in how French and English television engage with racial diversity. Primary and supporting roles in French television are overwhelmingly white (84%). Black characters only make up 8% of important roles, followed by other People of Colour (7%), and Indigenous characters (1%). There are no Asian or Latinx characters in the top-watched French television shows.

The majority of characters in English television are also white (67%). Asian characters make up 16% of important roles, followed by Black characters (11%), Indigenous characters (2%), other People of Color (2%), and Latinx characters (1%).

There is a definitive need for industry-wide improvement in representing intersectional 2SLGBTQIA+ identities on Canadian screens.

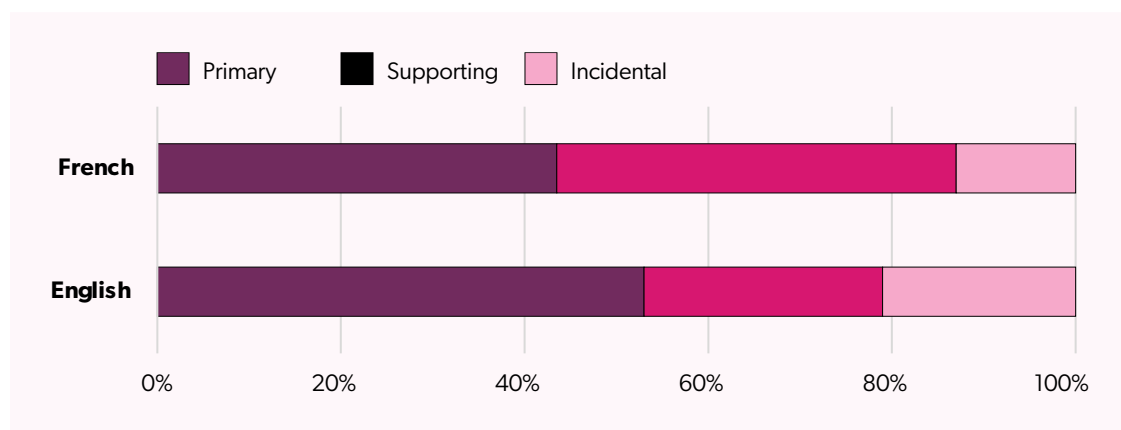
There is vanishingly little representation of people with physical disabilities in the top-watched English television programs.



2SLGBTQIA+ Intersections with Physical Disability

Only 3 primary or supporting characters on the top-watched French television shows have physical disabilities (2%), 1 of whom is 2SLGBTQIA+ (33%). Only 2 characters on the 14 English television shows we looked at have a physical disability (0.9%). Of those 2 characters, 1 is also 2SLGBTQIA+ (50%).

Due to the extremely low sample of physically disabled characters and the lack of sufficient data on other types of disability, including neurodivergence, it is difficult to derive meaningful conclusions about the portrayal of the intersection of disability and 2SLGBTQIA+ identity on Canadian television and streaming platforms. Given the high rates of disability among 2SLGBTQIA+ Canadians, there is a marked need for future intersectional research on this topic ([Rauh 2023](#)).



Prominence of 2SLGBTQIA+ Roles

2SLGBTQIA+ characters often hold primary or secondary roles in both French and English television—with some caveats.

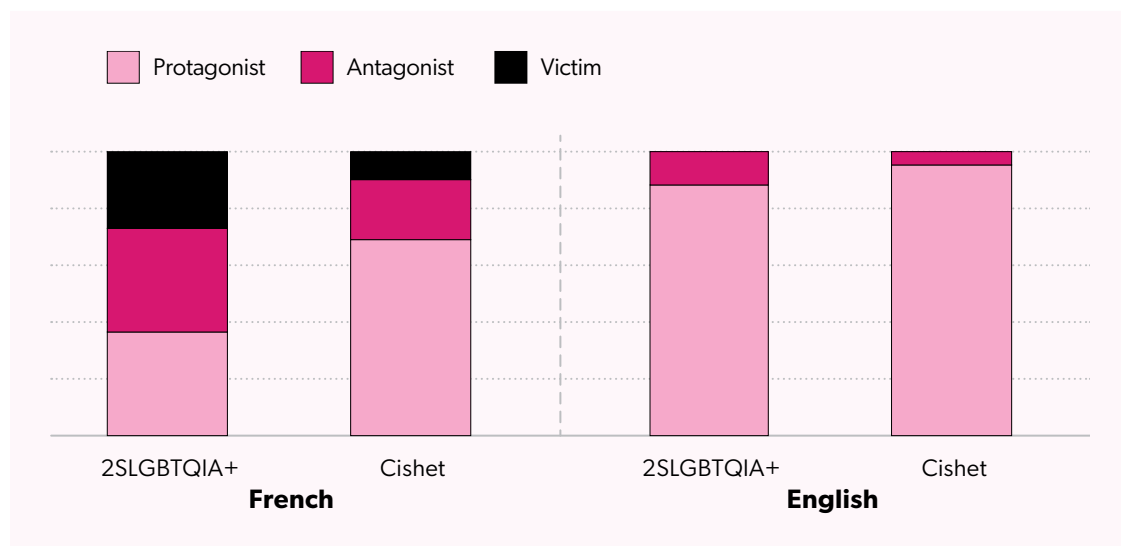
In French television, 2SLGBTQIA+ people account for 18% of primary roles, 14% of supporting roles, and 4% of incidental characters roles. In English television, these percentages are slightly lower, with 2SLGBTQIA+ making up 16% of primary roles, 9% of supporting roles, and 4% of incidental roles.

However, approaching this data from a different angle, we see notable differences in distribution between French and English television. In French television, 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are equally likely to hold primary and secondary roles (43.5% each) compared to incidental roles (13%). In English television, 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are most likely to hold primary roles (53%) but almost as likely to hold supporting roles (26%) as incidental roles (21%). Incidental characters make up over a third of speaking roles in French television (34%) and nearly half of speaking roles in English television (47%).

We can credit several factors to the correlation between 2SLGBTQIA+ identity and prominence. Foremost among them is that it's easier to communicate a character's gender identity and sexual orientation the more they're developed on screen.

One of the defining features of cisheteronormativity and allonormativity is the assumption that all people are cisgender, straight, and allosexual until explicitly proven otherwise. Canadian television has great potential to challenge these assumptions over time through richer and more nuanced representation of diverse 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.

The top-watched French television episodes under study are significantly more likely to villainize or victimize 2SLGBTQIA+ characters than straight cisgender characters whereas English television is more likely to write them as protagonists.



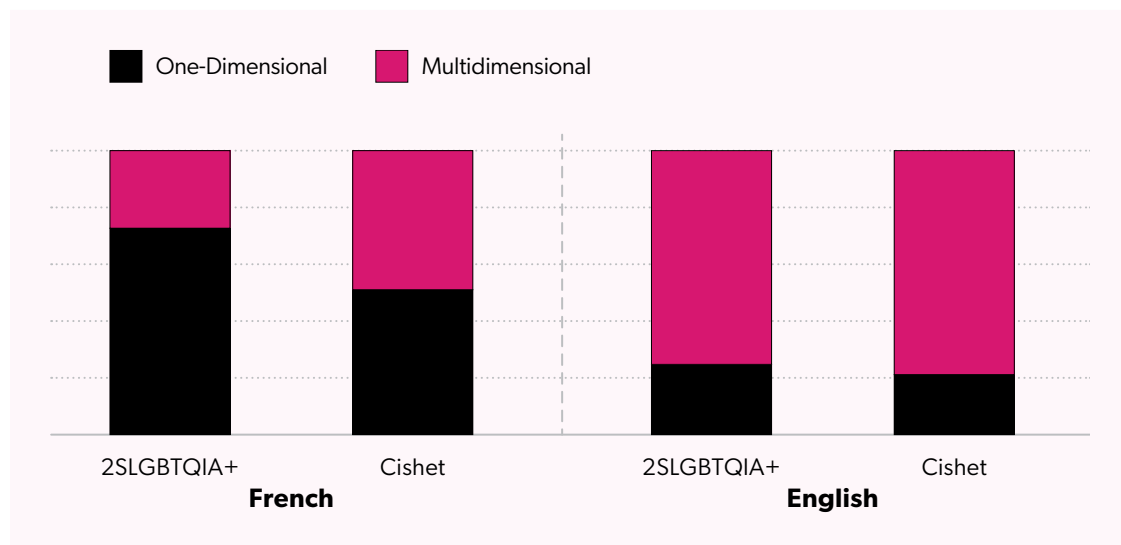
2SLGBTQIA+ Representation by Narrative Role

To address narrative role and dimensionality, we remove unscripted television (1 French show and 4 English shows) from the data sampling. Our goal is to consider how 2SLGBTQIA+ identities are written for Canadian audiences.

In French television 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are almost evenly split between protagonists (36%), antagonists (36%), and victims (27%), while straight cisgender characters are mostly protagonists (69%), occasionally antagonists (21%), and rarely victims (10%). **The portrayal of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters as villains, predators, and targets of violence perpetuates harmful and reductive tropes and stereotypes.**

Conversely, English television is much more likely to portray 2SLGBTQIA+ characters as protagonists (88%) than antagonists (12%), though not quite at the same proportions as straight cisgender characters (95% protagonists, 5% antagonists). None of the television shows in our data sample depicted victims in primary or supporting roles.

We see a similar discrepancy between French and English when it comes to dimensionality where French television tends to rely on superficial portrayals and reductive, stereotypical, or harmful clichés.



2SLGBTQIA+ Representation by Dimensionality

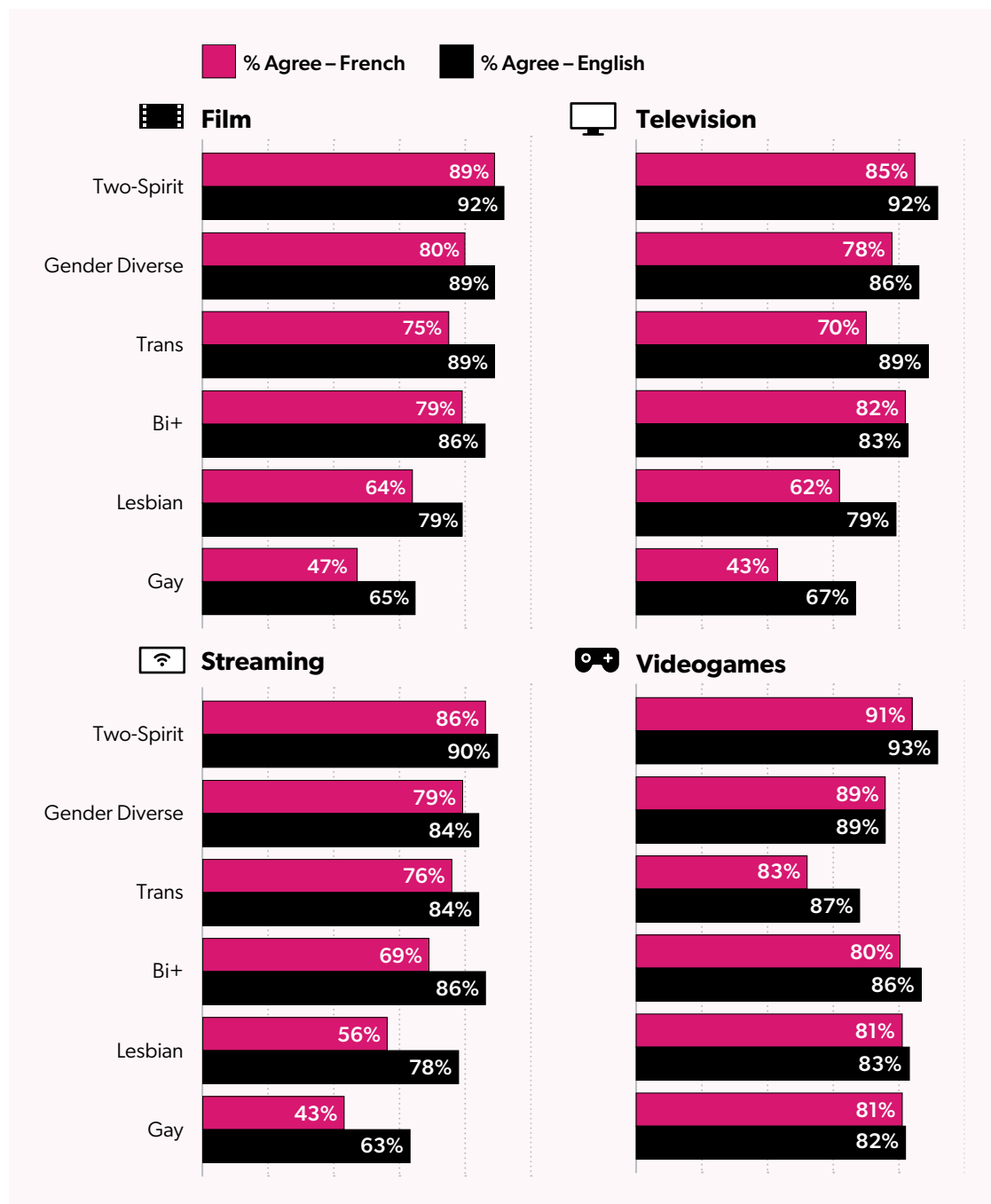
French television is significantly less likely to depict 2SLGBTQIA+ characters multidimensionally (27%) compared to one-dimensionally (73%). While we see this trend among straight cisgender characters as well (49% multidimensional compared to 51% one-dimensional), there is nevertheless a significant discrepancy between how 2SLGBTQIA+ and straight cisgender characters are portrayed.

English television is much more likely to portray 2SLGBTQIA+ characters multidimensionally (75%) than one-dimensionally (25%). These proportions are almost equivalent for straight cisgender characters (79% multidimensional compared to 21% unidimensional), which points to increasing efforts to represent 2SLGBTQIA+ identities more thoughtfully.

Language Matters

Together, the content analysis and survey results point to a significant perception gap between French and English professionals.

When surveyed for this study, French media professionals are less likely to find 2SLGBTQIA+ identities underrepresented on Canadian screens.



Underrepresentation by Language

While respondents are more aligned in their assessments of underrepresentation in the videogame industry, we see notable divergence in film, television, and streaming. In those industries, French respondents are significantly less likely to say 2SLGBTQIA+ identities are underrepresented.

The content analysis does reveal that French television is more likely to portray 2SLGBTQIA+ characters than English characters. However, this is only true for specific identities, primarily gay men. Despite more favourable outlooks on the part of French industry stakeholders and quantitative data, only 15% of French media professionals agree that French media industries consistently tell 2SLGBTQIA+ stories. **These findings point to a critical disconnect between the content that is produced and the perception of what constitutes a lack of representation.**

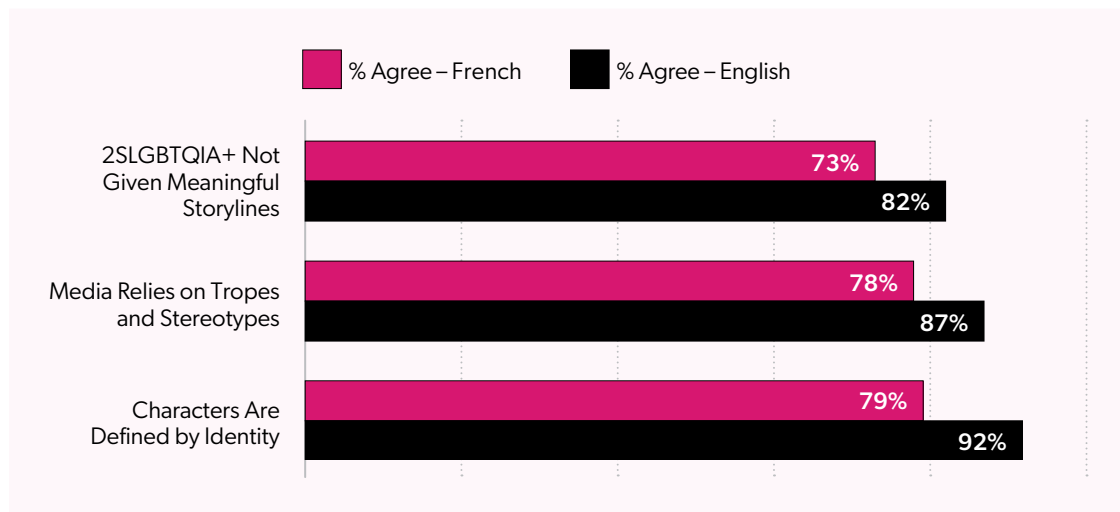
// [2SLGBTQIA+ people are] probably the diversity group that's best represented because it's the first to be established and take its place. The French media field is a welcoming place to work for any under-represented group.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, French Media Executive

This lack of alignment may unveil the different priorities held by French and English Canadians. In Quebec, the French language is often thought of as integral to cultural identity, and Francophones outside Quebec feel themselves marginalized as a French-speaking minority. One of our French stakeholders reveals that conversations around representation foreground language above all other exclusions.

// [French Canadians] have a double challenge. Like the rest of Canada, they have these members of the community, but they also have to be the ones who speak French. Even when they come from that community, they always tell me: our first minority [to represent] is the French-speaking minority. Then, you can talk about the fact that someone comes from the queer community. **For them, it's first and foremost the fact that they're minority Francophones.**

—**Stakeholder Interview**, French Media Executive



Different Attitudes Between French and English Professionals

This divergence in attitudes extends to perceptions of the quality of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. French respondents largely overestimate the accuracy and authenticity of their 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal.

Our survey data reveals that French respondents tend to view the on-screen portrayal of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters more positively than English respondents. They are less likely to agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are:

- represented one-dimensionally (79%, compared to 92% English);
- not often given meaningful storylines (73%, compared to 82% English);
- portrayed through tropes and stereotypes (78%, compared to 87% English).

While these attitudes could suggest that French media portrays 2SLGBTQIA+ characters more authentically and multidimensionally than English media, the content analysis disproves this conclusion. Our findings reveal that top-watched French television is:

- 3 times more likely to portray 2SLGBTQIA+ characters one-dimensionally than English television
- Significantly more likely to introduce 2SLGBTQIA+ characters as antagonists and victims rather than as protagonists

These findings reveal a need for more conversations around how to accurately and authentically portray 2SLGBTQIA+ characters without perpetuating tropes and stereotypes. Harmful portrayals further gaps in perception and

understanding rather than resolving them, leading to a more hostile environment for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals in society. As this research reveals in the next section, the result of this negative portrayal is a cycle wherein 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are less likely to disclose their identities and less likely to push for meaningful change.

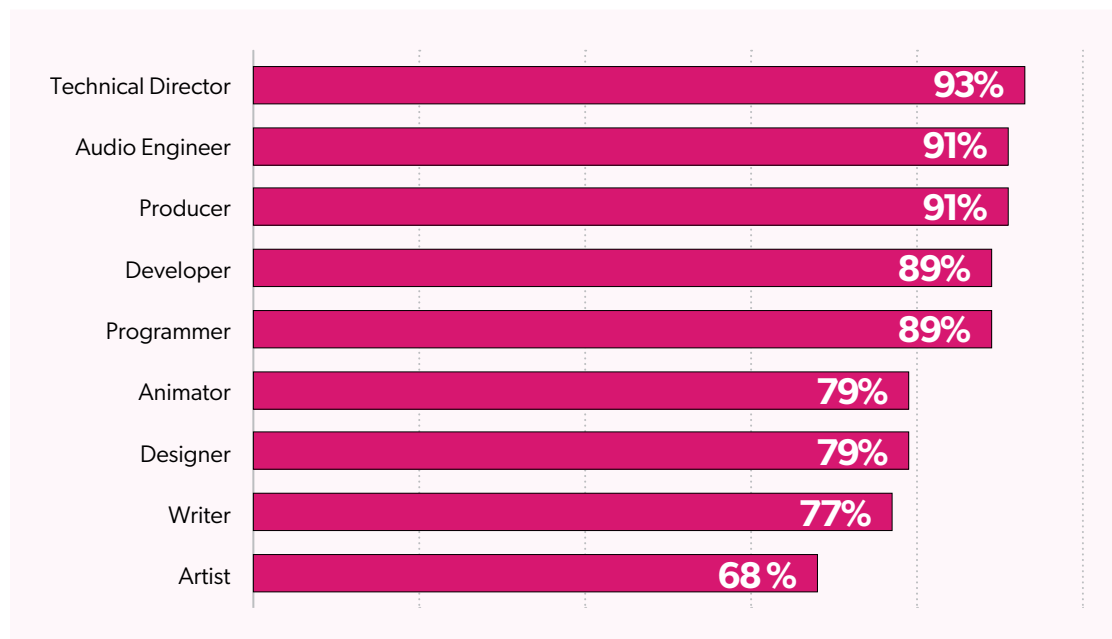
Key Findings

- **2SLGBTQIA+ representation does not detract from top viewership.** Nearly 3 in 4 top-watched Canadian television shows include some form of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation.
- **Several 2SLGBTQIA+ identities remain severely underrepresented in Canadian television.** Two-Spirit, intersex, and asexual characters are completely absent from the top-watched French and English programs, and trans, gender diverse, and bi+ identities are significantly underrepresented. Portraying underserved identities marks a critical opportunity for greater representation on Canadian television.
- **Over half the 2SLGBTQIA+ representation on Canadian television centres gay men, the majority of whom are also white.** While gay men make up only 7% of primary and secondary characters overall, these results point to a need to move away from monolithic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation.
- **French television proportionally includes more 2SLGBTQIA+ representation than English television. However, the quality of this representation is seen to be significantly less accurate and authentic.** French television tends to portray 2SLGBTQIA+ characters superficially or through harmful tropes and stereotypes.
- **The French media industry overwhelmingly overestimates the quality of their 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal while the English media industry somewhat underestimates the quality of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation.** There is a clear need for cross-language conversations around what constitutes accurate, authentic representation.

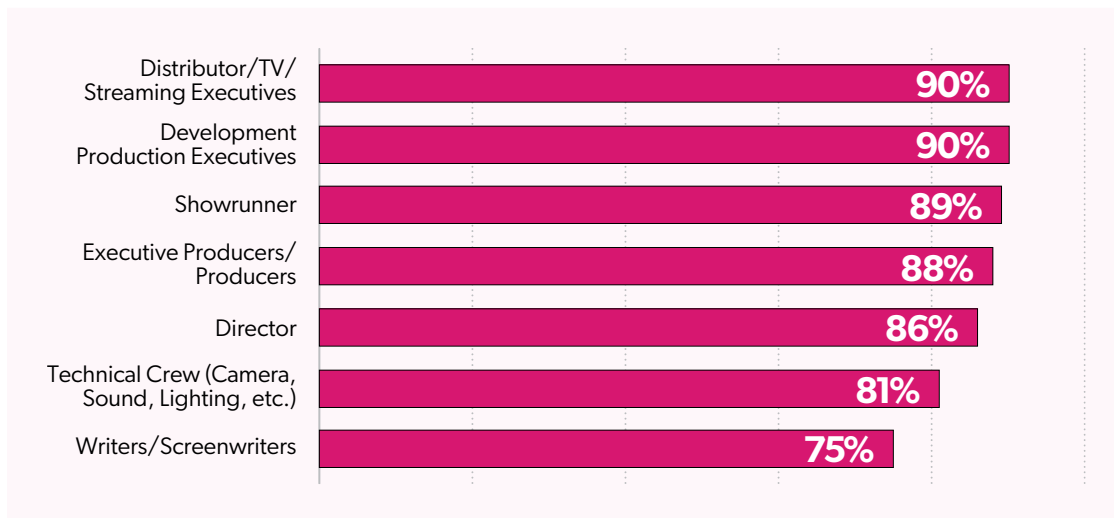
3.0 2SLGBTQIA+ Professionals Working in the Screen Industries

The findings of this study reveal that **equitable off-screen representation is one of the driving forces behind authentic and meaningful 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal in Canadian media.**

Equity is an important concept. Whereas equality assumes that treating everyone the same way will lead to identical outcomes, equity acknowledges that some people have been systemically oppressed and excluded. Equity is why many media professionals ask that only 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are considered for 2SLGBTQIA+ roles at the same time as they ask for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals to also be hired for straight and cisgender roles. As this study reveals, 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals have historically not been afforded the same opportunities.



Off-Screen Representation by Role (Film, Television, Streaming)



Off-Screen Representation by Role (Videogames)

While many professionals agree that off-screen representation has improved within the last five years, 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals remain underrepresented and under-supported across all roles. Several participants also articulate a growing fear that, in conjunction with a rise in hate-crimes and anti-trans legislature across Canada, media industries are becoming more hostile toward 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals, particularly those who are trans and gender diverse.



So that it's authentic, that it's sincere, that it comes from the right place requires more people from marginalized and underrepresented communities to join the industry. It's vicious cycle in videogames. It's hard to talk about the industry without talking about the products we make; as long as the products don't give a positive impression of these communities, these communities won't go into the industry. **If the game doesn't represent you, you won't be attracted to go to work for that company.**

—**Stakeholder Interview: Chloé Lussier**,
Videogame Company CEO

Behind-the-Scenes Representation Is Critical

Canadian professionals are firm in their acknowledgement behind-the-scenes representation is necessary for authentic portrayals on screen.



Behind the Scenes 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation is Essential

“Why are we not thinking about who is behind the camera? Wouldn’t that make better content if people felt more comfortable with the people who are capturing the content? I try to crew up with as many queer people as possible when going to interview a queer subject or going to a queer environment. It matters. It changes the energy.

—**Stakeholder Interview: Michelle Mama**, Filmmaker, Director, and Producer

87% of film, television, and streaming professionals agree that behind-the-camera representation is crucial, and almost two thirds strongly agree. This agreement is unanimously shared by trans and lesbian respondents (100%). While straight respondents are demonstrably less likely to agree, the vast majority still believe representation behind the camera is important (68%).

Canadian gaming professionals are in near-universal agreement (94%) that authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal in games requires behind-the-scenes representation among developers, producers, and designers. 74% of respondents strongly agree.

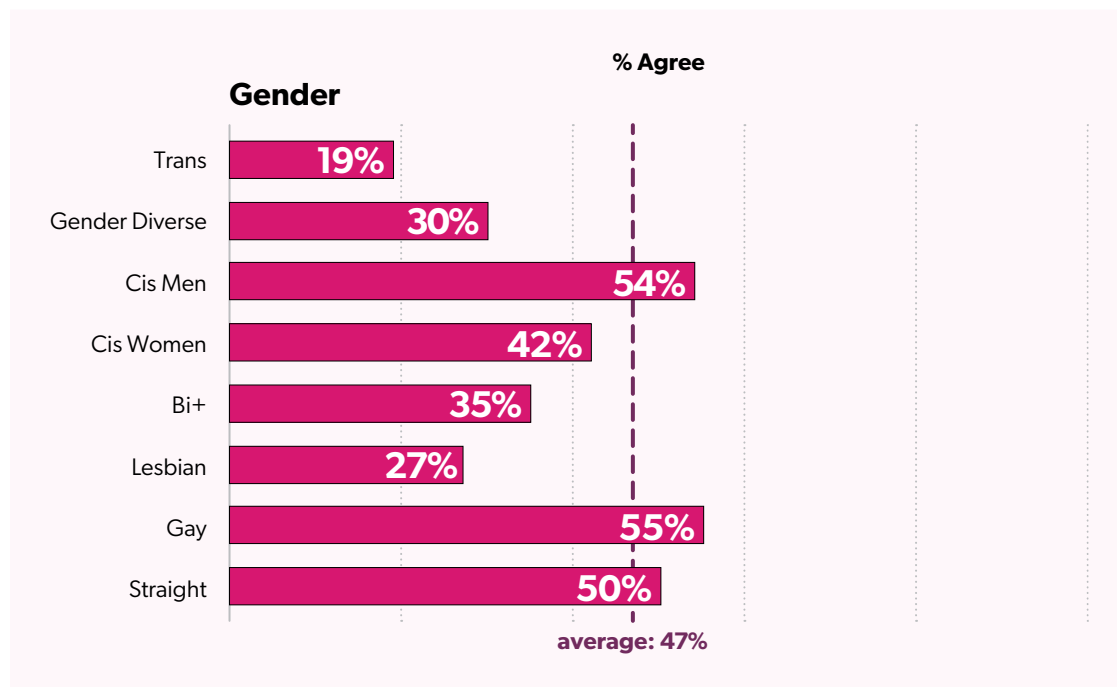
Transphobia, Queerphobia, and Gender-Based Discrimination Remain Prevalent Across Industries

Despite the importance of off-screen representation, there is extensive agreement among respondents that 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals experience systemic discrimination in the Canadian media industries. Respondents report experiences of harassment, microaggressions, misgendering, tokenizing, abuse, and violence in workplace settings.



[We need] protections for any 2SLGBTQIA+ public figures who are visible through their job roles; this often comes with harassment and death threats.

—**Canadian Game Writer**, gender diverse asexual bisexual



Media Industries Are (Un)Safe for 2SLGBTQIA+ Professionals

Only 41% of professionals agree that the Canadian media industries are safe work environments for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals. Trans respondents feel the lack of safety most keenly (19%), followed by lesbian (27%) and gender diverse professionals (30%). Gay respondents (55%), the only group comprised almost entirely of men, are most likely to agree these spaces are safe for 2SLGBTQIA+

professionals—more than straight respondents as well (50%). **This discrepancy is critical as it reveals how those with the most privilege drastically underestimate the oppression felt by other 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals.**

A lack of safety causes both immediate and prolonged harm. Respondents who have been confronted with harassment, hostility, repeated misgendering, and other forms of discrimination explain that they often feel the need to “tough it out” in order to guarantee future opportunities, which respondents framed not just to their own benefit, but for future generations of 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals.

Across the board, **these findings reveal the need for industry-wide efforts to combat transphobia, queerphobia, and gender-based discrimination, including mandated anti-oppression training.** Participants reflect on the need for significant structural change to guarantee the long-term success and advancement of 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals. That in turn will lead to more accurate and authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ stories.



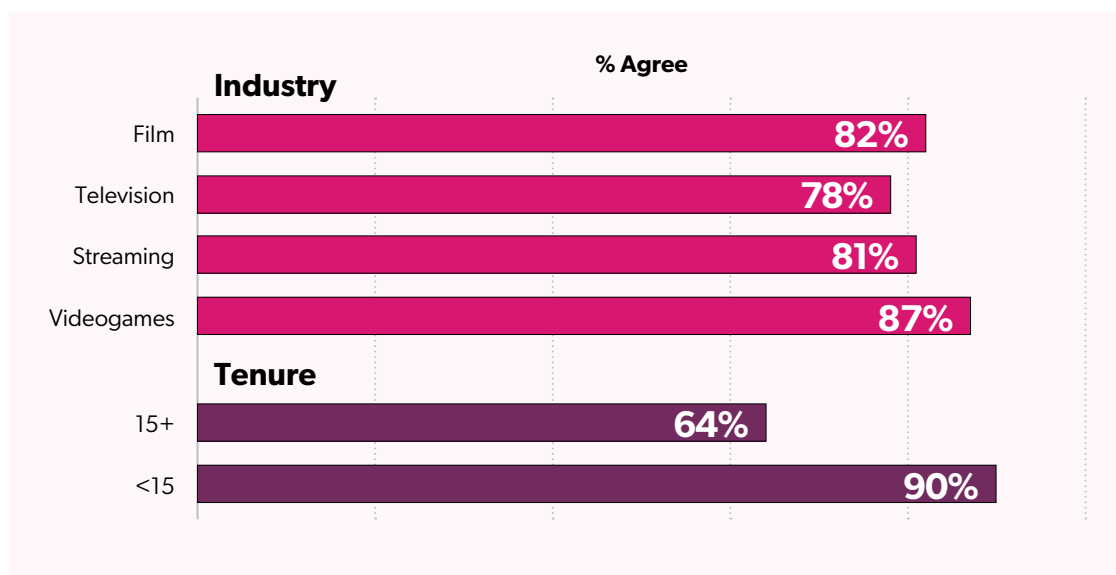
Working conditions need to be conducive to the safety and well-being of our talent pool. That means work environments that are inclusive and respectful.

—**Canadian Television Editor**, lesbian cis woman

2SLGBTQIA+ Professionals Are Given Fewer Opportunities in Canadian Media Industries

2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are universally seen to experience more challenges than their straight cisgender colleagues with respect to career advancement, job security, and their ability to contribute creatively. These barriers are felt most strongly in the videogame industries, but they remain pervasive across the board.

82% of professionals agree it is more difficult for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals to advance into senior decision-making roles. Agreement is highest among professionals in the videogame industry (87%).



2SLGBTQIA+ Professionals Experience More Barriers to Career Advancement

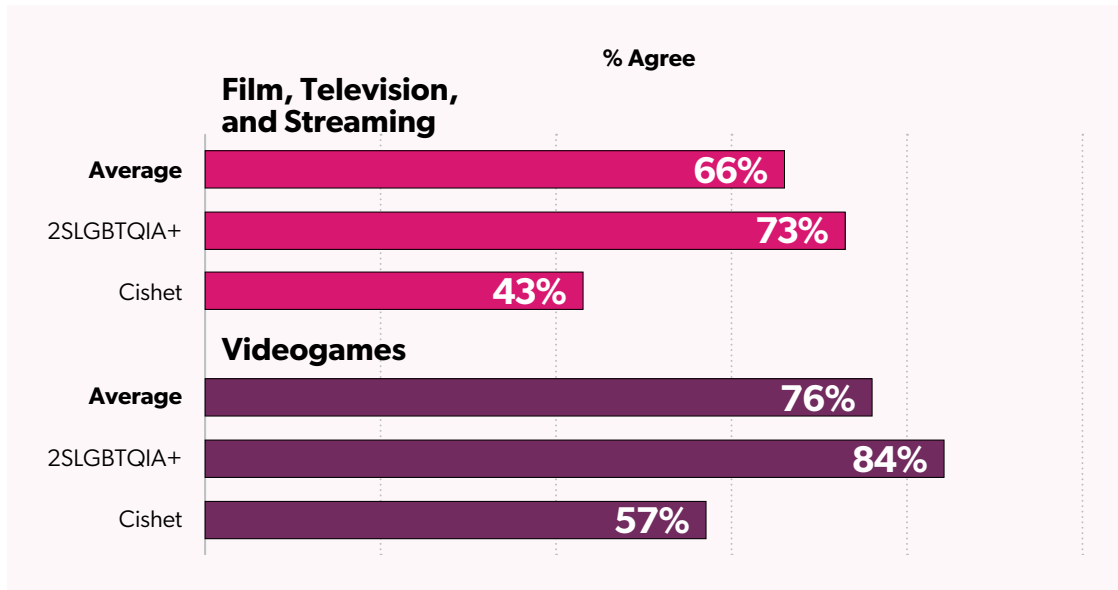
Professionals with over 15 years in the industry are significantly less likely to agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals experience more challenges advancing into senior decision-making roles (64% compared to 90% of professionals with less than 15 years of experience). Established professionals tend to underestimate the difficulties faced by emerging and mid-career 2SLGBTQIA+ talent.

The lack of career advancement opportunities has significant downstream effects on the quantity and quality of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. Funders, network executives, producers, and developers determine what content gets made and how. Stakeholders share that, without 2SLGBTQIA+ voices present in these roles, 2SLGBTQIA+ creators are forced to alter their projects to make them accessible to straight cisgender decision-makers. The result is the flattening or erasure of 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences, leading to “diverse” content that is frequently sanitized or stereotypical.

“Even if there’s a kernel of an idea that’s wily and queer, by the time it goes through all the filters of the network, the advertisers, the internal programming conversations, it can get watered down. Something that starts out as queer maximalism can end up as a little side story.

—**Stakeholder Interview: Michelle Mama,**
Filmmaker, Director, and Producer

2SLGBTQIA+ professionals experience more job precarity than straight cisgender professionals. Respondents note that the lack of job security raises the stakes for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals and limits their ability to take creative risks.



2SLGBTQIA+ Professionals Have Less Job Security

Over half of film, television, and streaming professionals (66%) agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals have less job security. This number rises to 73% among 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents.

We see even higher agreement among videogame professionals (76%), especially those who are 2SLGBTQIA+ (84%). Trans videogame professionals are in unanimous agreement.

// 2SLGBTQIA+ folks get maybe 1 or 2 opportunities to step on leadership's toes before they're let go for unjustifiable reasons and given a gag order. Contrast this with cis men in the gaming industry who get a near unlimited amount of strikes before they're let go or relegated to some ceremonious role where they can't do any harm. The amount of gaslighting 2SLGBTQIA+ and women endure in gaming is unbelievable. And, because employment is so insecure in this industry, people take hush money on their way out for extra severance and can't share their stories for risk of legal ramifications or blackballing.

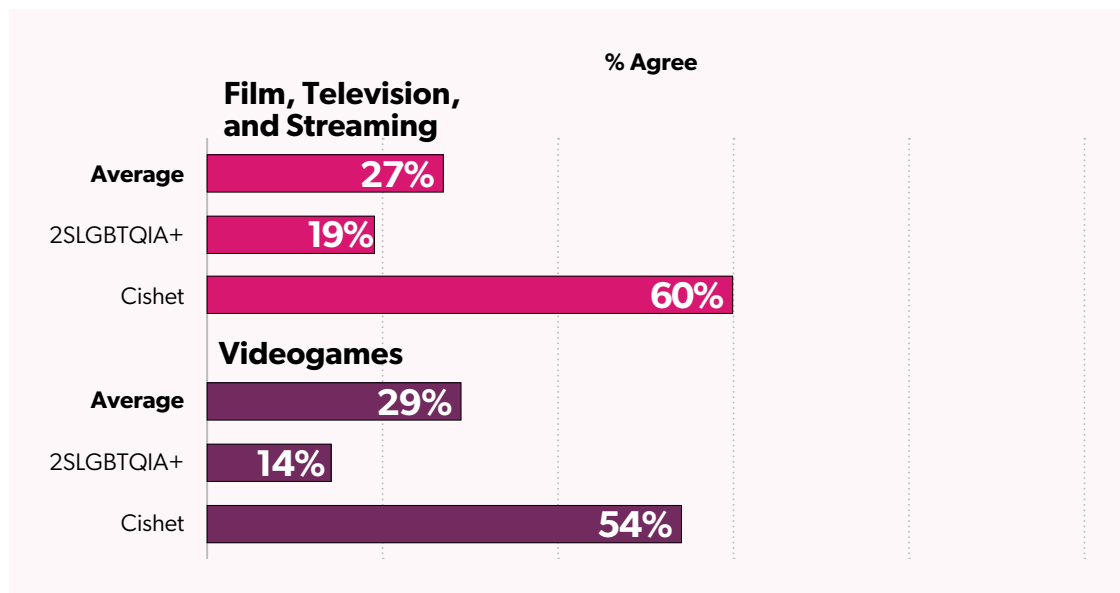
—Canadian Game Designer, Programmer, and Producer,
lesbian trans woman

Stakeholders and survey respondents emphasize the added pressure 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals experience in an already-high-stakes industry. They explain that, because 2SLGBTQIA+ narratives are thought to be “risky,” 2SLGBTQIA+ creators are only given single chances to succeed, which constrains creativity and limits the ability to learn through mistakes.

// Being a minority in any regard doesn’t mean you’re perfect, but that seems to be the standard both on and off screen. The model minority is a tiring trope.

—**Canadian Film Producer, Director, and Showrunner,**
genderqueer pansexual

The opinions of 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are given less weight than straight cisgender professionals. Additionally, 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are not given the same opportunities to contribute narratively and creatively and are often tasked with only speaking to 2SLGBTQIA+ issues.



2SLGBTQIA+ Professionals Are Given Equal Off-Screen Opportunities

A majority of stakeholders and survey respondents share experiences of being tokenized for their identities, especially those who are 2SLGBTQIA+ and Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour. They report being hired onto projects to fulfill

diversity criteria without equitable inclusion on creative teams. As a result, we see that, while 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are let into the room, the value of their contributions is undermined or outright dismissed.

Only 27% of respondents who work in film, television, and streaming agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are given the same off-screen opportunities in as their straight cisgender colleagues. Straight cisgender respondents are over 3 times as likely to agree (60%) as their 2SLGBTQIA+ counterparts (19%).

This disparity is amplified in the videogame industry (29%) where straight cisgender respondents are almost 4 times more likely to agree (54%) than 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents (14%). The lack of creative opportunity is disproportionately felt by trans respondents as well as lesbian respondents—notably the only category that does not include men. In both cases, only 8% agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are given equal opportunities. **This enormous perception gap reveals the inequity uniquely experienced by non-men in the videogame industry.**

The difference between how 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals and their straight cisgender counterparts answer these questions reveals the systemic biases that pervade the industry. **Straight cisgender respondents consistently underestimate the difficulties imposed upon 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals regarding career advancement, job security, and opportunities in the workplace.**

Key Findings

- **There is a definitive link between representation on screen and behind the scenes.** The success of 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals in the media industries is essential for authentic representation that reflects the perspectives, lives, and experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ Canadians.
- **2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are significantly underrepresented in gatekeeping roles, despite a strong desire to tell their own stories.** Securing career development and advancement opportunities for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals is pivotal in light of this research.
- **Systemic biases pervade all levels of the Canadian media industries.** 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals report minimal career advancement opportunities, less job security, and fewer occasions to offer meaningful creative contributions. Additional research into the long-term effects of minority stress on media professionals can prove illuminating.

- **The privilege conferred by patriarchy, heteronormativity, and industry experience leads to a tremendous gap in perceptions around working conditions.** Cis men, straight professionals, and professionals with over 15 years of experience vastly underestimate or deny the challenges felt by 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals, perpetuating systemic inequality. Intersectional and intergenerational conversations are necessary to align perceptions.
- **Transphobia, queerphobia, and gender-based discrimination are pervasive.** Superficial commitments to diversity that do not address systemic oppression bring 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals into unsafe workplaces. The Canadian media industries must implement actionable and accountable efforts to address harassment and enforce a zero-tolerance policy around anti-2SLGBTQIA+ discrimination.

4.0 Barriers to Authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation

This section draws on the insights of stakeholders and industry professionals to summarize 6 key obstacles to authentic representation, many of which reinforce one another.

It is important to note that these **barriers are amplified by systemic inequalities**. The challenges listed below disproportionately impact 2SLGBTQIA+ people who are also Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, immigrants, refugees, disabled, neurodivergent, and low-income. The words of Black trans activist Marsha P. Johnson continue to resonate: **“no pride for some of us without liberation for all of us.”**

Safety is the other common throughline. As the data has shown, **2SLGBTQIA+ professionals experience an enormous amount of discrimination and harassment in the workplace**. Identifying barriers is a first step toward equitable representation, but this study proves that meaningful change requires actionable, accountable, and sustainable efforts to dismantle systemic oppression.

// The only way for meaningful access and inclusion for the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities is by addressing structural barriers at every level and within every role within the industry. That means 2SLGBTQIA+ decision makers, but also individuals from the community in every department, at the funders, at the streamers and networks, at production companies, on set, in the writers room, and in the editing bay. It means being thoughtful about co-productions and the terms set on working with organizations who discriminate against 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. It means servicing the many different identities within the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities and not assuming that representation of one group of people is “enough.” It’s about acknowledging intersectionality and being open to hard conversations. It’s understanding that exclusion is erasure. It’s about trusting queer creatives to tell their own stories. Change can’t be one person’s responsibility. It has to be all of us.

—**Canadian TV Executive Producer and Screenwriter**,
queer non-binary

4.1 The Lack of 2SLGBTQIA+ Decision-Makers

The lack of 2SLGBTQIA+ decision-makers across industries perpetuates systemic exclusions and limits authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ storytelling. Training 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals to promote into leadership positions can have a sustainable impact on the future of representation in the industries.



Almost universally, professionals agree that meaningful industry change requires decision-makers to be proactive (92%). However, with 82% of participants agreeing that it is more challenging for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals

to advance into senior decision maker roles, we find 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals routinely excluded from the rooms where most change happens.



There are two key groups that can make a difference: **development executives and producers**, including showrunners. The industry is completely lopsided where **2SLGBTQIA+ make up a substantial amount of the entry level, but the C-suite and decision makers are entirely made up of white cis men and women**. There is far more opportunity in the US for authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ stories than in Canada. It doesn't help that most 2SLGBTQIA+ material in Canada is written by straight, cis white people that don't have lived experience. There are amazing 2SLGBTQIA+ stories out there that get overlooked because the decision makers are old and white. Until they step aside and retire and younger talent get those decision maker roles and act as mentors, nothing but superficial feel good measures are going to happen.

—**Canadian Film Producer**, straight cis man

Acknowledging that it will take time, participants posit that preparing 2SLGBTQIA+ talent to promote into decision-making roles will infuse the industry with new perspectives and lead to more nuanced representation. Canadian media industries can begin implementing several processes to pave the way:

- **establishing education and bias training programs** to promote safer and more inclusive workplaces;

- **creating development programs to support 2SLGBTQIA+ career advancement** into decision-making roles (e.g. training writers to become showrunners);
- **facilitating mentorship opportunities** between senior and emerging professionals to assist with skill training and network building.

These initiatives can have sustainable, long-term impact by offering 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals more equitable access to decision-making opportunities. That, in turn, will lead to greater support for 2SLGBTQIA+ storytelling across industries.

// The board and the structure of who sits on various boards of these larger companies is incredibly important. That influences the overall strategy of an organization or corporation. I look at the board makeup of most of those companies, it's pretty dire. I'm not sure any of the larger media companies in Canada have any representation at all and it's not just at the board level. It's also within the senior management teams. It's mostly straight white cis men.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Media Executive

// For all the attempts at inclusion that have been made at multiple tiers of the industry, those in the position to make important decisions and fund stories tend to be predominantly white and cisgender and not of the lived experience of the many marginalized communities that are currently making headway in the industry. **There's still a lack of representation at the highest level.**

—**Stakeholder Interview: JP Larocque**, Screenwriter and Producer

Addressing Perception Gaps and Taking Action

Some participants point out the need to investigate the conditions that exclude 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals from executive positions and implement actionable change through more equitable training and hiring practices. Others question the sincerity of those who style themselves as allies, especially in times of scarcity.

While 2SLGBTQIA+ people count on the support of allies, a key takeaway of this report is that straight and cisgender people routinely underestimate the lack of safety and dearth of opportunity felt by 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals.

These findings point to a need for straight cisgender people to educate themselves on the realities of sexuality- and gender-based oppression, and to move beyond performative allyship. This includes advocating for equitable access to career advancement opportunities (even when pursuing the same opportunities), calling out microaggressions, and taking action to confront personal and systemic bias.

// Executives and those in leadership positions in all facets of the industry should investigate the lack of queer colleagues working at their level and address this gap through community consultation, better DEI practices, and bespoke solutions suited to the work and the barriers that currently exist.

—**Canadian Television Writer**, gay trans man

// Allies—stop showing up for the party but remaining silent when we’re the first laid off or pushed aside when there’s nothing left to squeeze out for clout. The majority of those in positions of power are extractive, fair-weather, and cowardly.

—**Canadian Film Producer**, lesbian, pansexual, queer cis woman

4.2 The Cautious Nature of Canadian Media Industries

2 out of 3 Canadian industry professionals don’t feel that Canadian-funded content sufficiently supports 2SLGBTQIA+ themes and professionals. A scarcity mindset has led to the de-prioritization of 2SLGBTQIA+ narratives.



Canadian-Funded Content Supports 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation

that Canadian-funded content supports authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal, while 22% strongly disagree. These findings are consistent between the French and English screen industries, but those who hold executive positions are significantly more likely to feel that Canadian-funded content sufficiently supports 2SLGBTQIA+ representation (48%) than professionals in other roles.

The cautious nature of industry decision-makers—including funders, network and streaming executives, heads of content, and videogame publishers and studio heads—limits representations of Canadian voices. Only 8% of respondents strongly agree

The financial troubles buffeting the media industries have led to a general rise in conservative decision-making. Research participants emphasize that production and distribution executives err on the side of safeguarding their positions rather than championing diversity—even though caution has proven not to have helped the industry.



I can't tell you how many times I've had sidebar conversations with networks who say, "I'd love to do this, but I can't do it. I'm scared to lose my job."

—**Stakeholder Interview: Michelle Mama**, Filmmaker, Director, and Producer

Across the board, Canadian media industries are experiencing a tumultuous period of layoffs and budget cuts. Within the last year:

- CBC/Radio-Canada laid off 141 employees and cut 205 vacant positions ([CBC News 2024a](#))
- Bell Media has declared the end of multiple television newscasts and the sale of 44% of its regional radio stations ([Canadian Press 2024](#));
- Vice Media announced several hundred layoffs ([Associated Press 2024](#));
- and Quebec media giant TVA revealed a reorganization plan that would jettison 547 positions—a cutback of nearly a third of its workforce ([Morris 2023](#)).

The videogame industry hasn't fared much better. In Quebec alone, an estimated 400–500 videogame workers have been laid off from major studios like Ubisoft, Behaviour Interactive, Eidos Montreal, and Beenox only months into 2024 ([CBC News 2024b](#)).



[The industry] is more equitable than it has been. However, as the industry contracts and as Canadian production slows down, **there is less opportunity to give chances to things that seem marginal, less appetite for risk.**

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Actor

A New Legislative Environment

On April 27, 2023, the Senate approved Bill C-11, also known as the Online Streaming Act. Encouraged by Canadian broadcasters and telecom giants, the bill amends Canada's Broadcasting Act to include online streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, granting the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) more control over these digital media companies.

A majority of stakeholders underline the fact that the Canadian industry is small, and the dire nature of the media landscape has had pronounced downstream effects on 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. Almost universally, they point out that **decision-makers see 2SLGBTQIA+ representation as a risk**—an assumption that is not borne out by our content analysis where 73% of top-watched Canadian television shows include some form of 2SLGBTQIA+ representation.

// I've worked in Canada and the US. Sometimes it feels like the Canadian broadcasters—the people who are making these decisions—are not incentivized the same way Americans are. They get their paycheck and they go home, no matter whether it's a hit or a miss. There's a conservatism: *don't rock the boat; keep my job*. **There's no incentive to be bold in Canada.**

—**Stakeholder Interview: Michelle Mama**, Filmmaker, Director, and Producer

// **People are terrified of losing their jobs in this business.** There isn't a huge amount of jobs in media. Often, people only want to bank on those who have a consistent track record of success. **That makes it harder to open the aperture for different kinds of people to come in.**

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Media Executive

Who Funds Our Stories?

In 2021, news broke that Canadian tax dollars from media funds were going to productions that prohibited 2SLGBTQIA+ content, a discriminatory policy in direct violation of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Canadian production teams, it was revealed, had partnered with BYUtv, the television arm of Utah's Brigham Young University. Owned in part by the conservative Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as LDS or Mormonism, BYUtv's policy of not featuring characters identified as 2SLGBTQIA+ prompted outrage among many Canadian media professionals ([Schneller 2021](#)).

// Canadian creators and producers and networks need to be in control of their content to ensure that we don't have to make concessions around representation. We can't just be in the interest of making money [...] We shouldn't be put in a situation where producers feel that they have to get in bed with conservative organizations in order to make Canadian content.

—**Stakeholder Interview: JP Larocque**, Screenwriter and Producer

Following this media outcry, BYUtv's Canadian producing partner Marblemedia has said they will include 2SLGBTQIA+ characters in future seasons of their co-productions ([Simonpillai 2021](#)). Nevertheless, Canadian tax dollars are still being invested in an organization that operates in contravention of Canada's anti-discrimination and hate speech laws. Showrunners defended the co-productions as a consequence of the dire nature of the industry.

As American streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon increasingly draw audiences away from Canadian content, participants argue that the industries could benefit from a shift in perspective. The success of *Canada's Drag Race* and *Sort Of* reveal that bold choices to foreground 2SLGBTQIA+ representation have a proven track record. Respondents propose that less hesitation may help Canadian media stand out.

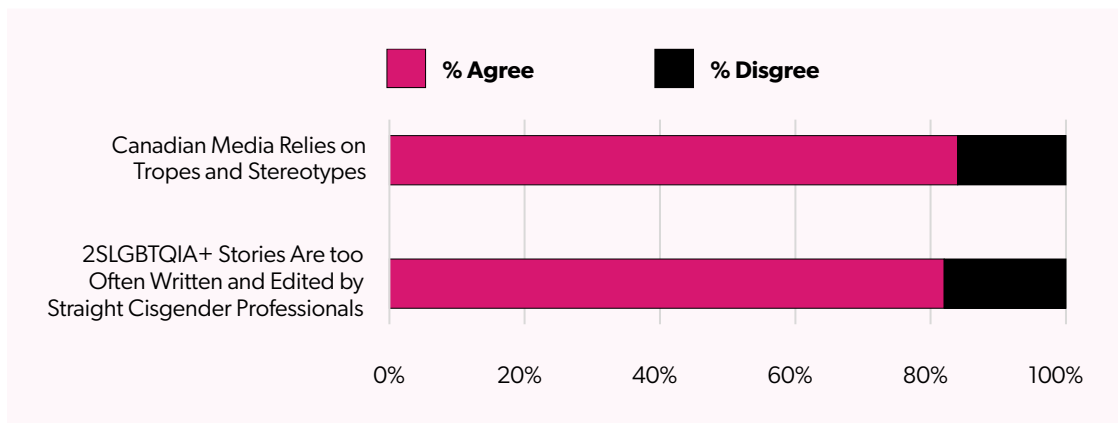
// The Canadian Media Industry needs to know and believe that queer stories are just as important, interesting, and profitable as non-queer stories.

—**Canadian TV Producer and Technical Crew,**
gay/queer cis man

4.3 A Reliance on Tropes and Stereotypes in Storytelling

Media professionals across industries express frustration with a continued reliance on stereotypical and tokenistic depictions of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters. Not only do these superficial portrayals limit authentic representation, they also contribute to damaging perceptions of 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

The surfeit of reductive storytelling is seen as the third most prominent barrier limiting authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. **Straight respondents are notably more likely to identify this storytelling as an obstacle compared to the more systemic barriers addressed in this study.**



84% of respondents agree that Canadian media often relies on 2SLGBTQIA+ tropes and stereotypes and nearly as many (82%) industry professionals agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ stories are too often written and edited by non-2SLGBTQIA+ professionals. Taken together, **these findings suggest that the prevalence of harmful clichés and reductive depictions is a direct result of not having 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals in the writer’s room.**

// The first problem was getting representation of these communities. We’ve gone through that barrier. We have “representation.” Now, it’s about fine-tuning it to be *accurate* representation. To have that part, we need the *actual* voices in the room when those stories are being created. With Canadian TV, it feels like there are a lot of boxes being checked, but that doesn’t translate into fulsome, authentic storytelling.

—**Stakeholder Interview: Michelle Mama**, Filmmaker, Director, and Producer

2SLGBTQIA+ professionals do not feel as though the Canadian media industries are accurately portraying the realities of their lives. This is especially true for trans and gender diverse people and 2SLGBTQIA+ people who experience other intersecting forms of oppression. A lack of research and understanding on the part of straight cisgender writers is often credited for this insufficient portrayal.

// Part of it has to do with staffing and the representation of 2SLGBTQIA+ folks in the industry itself. For a long time, there was an eye to representing the queer community through the lens of cisgender whiteness. I think that, slowly, there are more queer voices entering the industry that are of differing and intersectional experiences. But I do think Canada is a bit slower in terms of bringing those voices in and listening to them so that we can see ourselves reflected on screen.

—**Stakeholder Interview: JP Larocque**, Screenwriter and Producer

// To tell authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ stories, **members of these communities need to be hired and involved at all stages of production, including post-production.** Too often, those roles don't understand the nuances of the story and can't adequately represent our lives and experiences. The stories that queer communities need and want can only be made by us and with us.

—**Canadian Television Editor**, lesbian cis woman

// There is often one token queer person on screen when, in many of the social circles I run in, there are many queer people all the time. It feels weird that that experience is so rare.

—**Canadian Game Producer**, bisexual cis woman

Behind the Scenes Representation at All Levels

Outside of independent film and videogames, most media productions rely on the efforts of a tremendous amount of people. While writers imagine a story and set it to paper, it is brought to life by actors, directors, producers, art directors, casting directors, costume designers, cinematographers and many, many others, including the editors who put a film or television show together. In the videogame industry, a single title can involve input from hundreds of creative and technical professionals.

// One of the things the media community has spoken a lot about in the last couple of years is being able to have authentic storytelling. One of the ways content and media does that is actually hiring key crew that happen to be part of that community. If they are telling their own stories, you potentially avoid those pitfalls because you've got someone who has that lived experience who can then infuse it into the production process.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Media Executive

Several stakeholders reveal that, even when there is representation in the writer's room, many of the notes come from straight cisgender decision-makers, who request changes that reduce the nuance of 2SLGBTQIA+ portrayal. Other respondents state that a multiplicity of 2SLGBTQIA+ perspectives ensures that all aspects of a project reflect lived experiences and many affirm that the presence of more 2SLGBTQIA+ people on set leads to greater comfort and more authentic performances.



In my time working in the industry, I do think things have improved. There are more queer folks with intersectional identities working in different tiers of the industry which has led to more voices being able to weigh in and catch certain things as a story goes from initial genesis straight through to post-production. They're able to say, "hey, this wouldn't be accurate to a specific lived experience, right?" It could be little things like set dressing that seem small, but when you depict them on screen, you recognize immediately that it's not accurate to the lived experience of somebody from that community. Things are getting better because of multiple voices in the mix.

—**Stakeholder Interview: JP Larocque**, Screenwriter and Producer



It makes a difference who's behind the camera. The space in which you work makes a difference. If you have a trans sound person, it becomes normalized within the set or your makeup artists is a queer woman. It makes a huge difference to the tenor of the set [when] you feel welcome there and can give your best performance.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Actor

4.4 Inadequate Funding, Distribution, and Marketing

Canadian funders, network executives, and publishers have an enormous amount of power over which stories get told and by whom. However, Canada's funding models makes it difficult for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals to gain access to the resources they need to tell their authentic stories.

Creative struggles are entwined with financial ones. Participants agree that bolstering funding for **2SLGBTQIA+ professionals to tell their own stories** will lead to better, more authentic Canadian screen media. At the same time, professionals aren't naïve. They recognize that film, television, streaming, and videogame development are challenging industries. **This barrier therefore has less to do with the dearth of funding in Canadian media—something that impacts everyone—but rather the pervasive inequalities that disproportionately affect 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals, particularly those who are trans and gender diverse.**

// There is no shortage of 2SLGBTQ+ performers, writers, producers etc. We are just not given the opportunities to tell our stories. Often, straight folks tell queer stories, and, often, we don't get the funding we need to tell our own. It is the responsibility of funding bodies, as well as higher ups, to ensure queer folks are being given a chance to thrive in the industry.

—**Canadian Film Producer and Actor**,
genderqueer bisexual/queer

Supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ Talent

Public broadcasters are looking for audiences to drive advertising revenue and commercial industries are looking for return on their investments. Industry stakeholders and media professionals alike issue the potent reminder that **2SLGBTQIA+ professionals cannot prove they can bring in audiences and revenue if never given the chance.** *Canada's Drag Race* became the highest-rated original production in Crave's history upon launch, challenging the assumption that 2SLGBTQIA+ content is less profitable. Granting 2SLGBTQIA+ creators the opportunity to prove themselves can allow the industry to meet audiences' demand for authentic representation.

// The Canadian Media Industry needs to know and believe that queer stories are just as important, interesting, and profitable as non-queer stories. There is definitely a fear of investing in queer stories as they are seen as less profitable. That's the bottom line. We need more queer, diverse, and original business models. *Canada's Drag Race* is a start, but we need more diversity in the content of profitable, queer programming.

—**Canadian TV Producer and Technical Crew**, gay/queer cis man

The Funding Landscape of Canadian Content

Canadian broadcasters must commit a minimum of 5% of their gross revenue to Programs of National Interest (PNI), defined as Canadian dramas, comedies, long-form documentaries, children's programs, and specific Canadian awards shows ([Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission 2010.](#))

With the passing of Bill C-11, the CRTC will now require online streaming services to contribute 5% of their Canadian revenues to support Canadian content ([Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission 2024](#)). This requirement will begin in the 2024-2025 broadcast year and is estimated to bring in \$200 million in funding.

The Canada Media Fund (CMF) is the largest funder of Canadian content in the country across all audiovisual platforms. Last year, the CMF supported over 1,300 media projects. ([Canada Media Fund 2023a](#)).

Prioritizing 2SLGBTQIA+ Voices to tell 2SLGBTQIA+ Stories

There is widespread acknowledgement that government funding is finite. However, respondents are firm that public funding for 2SLGBTQIA+ narratives should go to 2SLGBTQIA+ creators. Stakeholders and professionals propose that funders and regulatory bodies make this change through dedicated funding envelopes and mandates for behind-the-scenes representation that foreground equity, not box-checking. Commitments to prioritizing 2SLGBTQIA+ voices when it comes to telling their own stories will lead to more meaningful portrayals by promoting more accurate and authentic representation.



Funders continue to give money to people who are not from our communities. And funders do not have selection committees that represent us, so films that are transphobic or homophobic continue to get money.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Film Producer, Writer, and Director



I believe you need legislation or you need rules from Telefilm and the CMF. You need them to mandate the change [...] The general thesis of “you’ve got to attach change to capital” is probably the way to have an impact because the business revolves around earnings.

—**Stakeholder Interview**,
Media Executive

Inside Out’s International Financing Forum Making Meaningful Change

The Inside Out Festival’s IFF is the first and only 2SLGBTQIA+ fund of its kind. It provides 2SLGBTQIA+ producers, directors, and writers an opportunity to create meaningful 2SLGBTQIA+ content through mentorship, professional development, and a platform through which they can pitch their projects to decision-makers.

Expectations of Unpaid and Low-Pay Labour

Participants are critical of the need for emerging professionals to perform unpaid or low-pay work, noting that it exacerbates systemic exclusion. They explain that Canada’s funding model relies on applications that have bias embedded within their eligibility criteria by favouring those who have the means to work for free, further marginalizing 2SLGBTQIA+ creators.

// The need to take low-paying jobs and unpaid internships in order to get union credits and opportunities for advancement and skills sharing is a barrier. We are often financially fragile before we come into the industry and asking unpaid labour from us prevents us from truly committing to professional paths.

—**Canadian Film Director and Writer**, non-binary queer

// They way the system is currently setup favours those with money; money begets money. Who will give marginalized creators bank loans when they have no equity? Micro budgets don't cut it and are not sustainable financing models.

—**Canadian Film Director**, Producer, and Writer, trans woman

2SLGBTQIA+ professionals in the videogame industry who, as our survey found, experience significantly greater barriers behind the scenes emphasize the urgency of financing emerging game creators. For many, of these respondents, forming independent studios is the only way to safely and sustainably share their stories.

// More startup funding for 2SLGBTQIA+ creators wanting to form their own gaming studios/collectives. We can't fix broken cis male leadership in gaming. We have to start our own endeavours and we need money to do this, because most of us don't come from means.

—**Canadian Game Designer, Producer, Programmer**,
lesbian trans woman

Meaningful Marketing Strategies

While this study largely focuses on how to *create* authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ content, many participants feel that it is equally important to *promote* 2SLGBTQIA+ content. Professionals note that inaccurate framing or a lack of directed marketing strategies prevents 2SLGBTQIA+ media from reaching its intended audience. One stakeholder points out that traditional publicity channels don't reach many people under 30 and some 2SLGBTQIA+ content is consequently missed by its intended audience.

// [Television networks] need to grow audiences. They need to be more daring. They need to look at what younger audiences are watching on YouTube and TikTok and try and discover the formula for that.

—**Stakeholder Interview: Ian Iqbal Rashid**, Writer and Director

// Give media that portrays good and accurate representation an equal and fair chance on the market. Use statistical data and projections to incentivize publishers and investors of successful 2SLGBTQIA+ games that exceeded marketing expectations as examples. Currently, 2SLGBTQIA+ media is poorly advertised and promoted either from lack of funding for advertisement slots or social media sponsorship or inaccurate framing.

—**Canadian Game Artist**, genderfluid/nonbinary bi/pan/queer

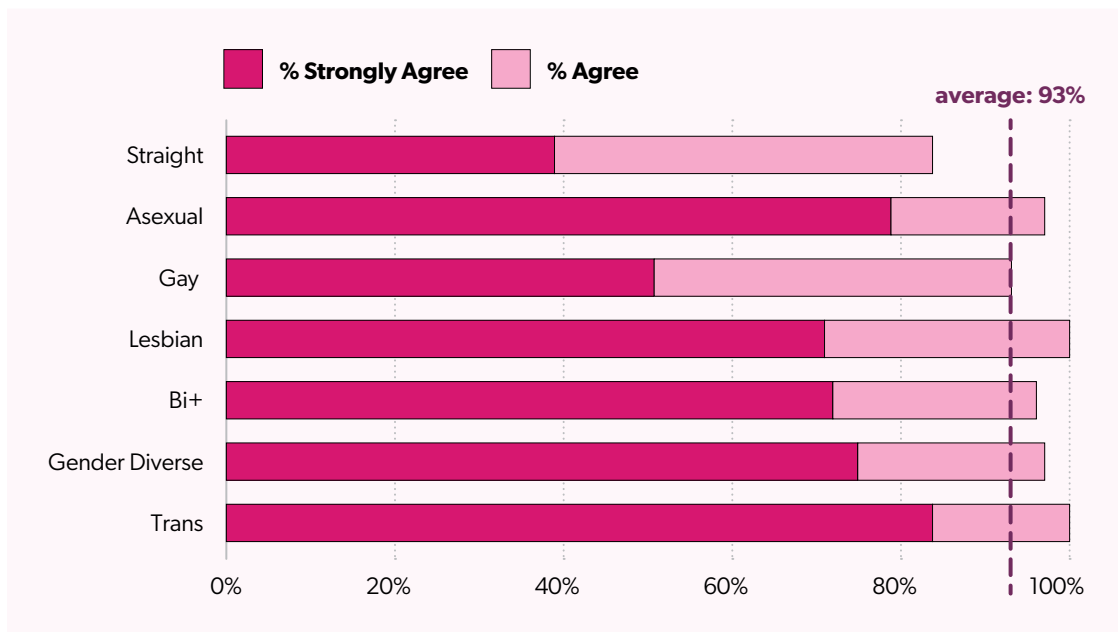
The danger of investing in production without thinking about marketing is that it sets up 2SLGBTQIA+ representation to fail. The industry's ecosystem is such that media must demonstrate their success, which is measured by ratings, reception, and sales. If audiences don't know the content exists, they won't engage—no matter how authentic. Marketing strategies that reach and resonate with intended audiences are critical for ensuring that Canadians see themselves represented.

// It's not as easy as saying, "if you make it, they will come." If you have great content with great representation but nobody puts a penny behind marketing it, it's probably not going to be successful. That's the function of gatekeeping—choosing that this show is going to get financed versus that one; making the decision to market this show over another one. People in those positions, no matter what service they're working for, have a lot of power to influence the cultural discussion.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Media Executive

4.5 Tokenization of 2SLGBTQIA+ Professionals

2SLGBTQIA+ professionals report feeling tokenized by shallow attempts at diversity that reduce them to their gender identity or sexual orientation. They often feel like expendable hires who have been brought on to a project to check a box, which diminishes or ignores the value of their creative contributions.



2SLGBTQIA+ Professionals Are Tasked with Representing All 2SLGBTQIA+ Identities

There is near-unanimous agreement that 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are tasked with representing the needs of all 2SLGBTQIA+ identities (93%), a sentiment shared by every trans and lesbian respondent (100%). When the burden of representation unduly falls upon a single person, anxieties around failure are amplified. Several participants express concern over the way their work is framed as representative of the “entire 2SLGBTQIA+ community,” despite there being as many intersecting 2SLGBTQIA+ communities as there are identities.

“There is a lot of tokenism, and that’s where we are right now. “I’ll have the one trans guy. I’ll have the one queer guy.” Everyone has the one, and being the one is difficult because [you] can’t have a person represent a whole community. It’s a spectrum. It’s different for every person. But we always find ourselves having to defend our whole community and having to fight alone. If we start bringing more people on board, the load of that responsibility will feel more manageable.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Film Producer, Writer, and Director

2SLGBTQIA+ professionals report feeling tokenized on productions where they are the sole 2SLGBTQIA+ hire. Not only does this hinder their ability to creatively contribute to a project, it also requires they hide, downplay, or ignore parts of themselves in the workplace. One stakeholder recounts a liberating experience on a production where they weren’t the only South Asian person, nor the only trans

person, nor the only non-binary person. Instead, they were allowed to be a nerd, free of the burden of representing all 2SLGBTQIA+ people and able to bring their unique sensitivity to the project. Hiring 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals with a range of lived experiences can open the door to constructive critique and allow creative teams to tell more nuanced stories.

Shallow Diversity Efforts

Stakeholders also pointed to instances where diversity and inclusion were capitalized upon by productions dominated by non-2SLGBTQIA+ people. Several participants shared experiences of arriving on a production to discover that their role was to keep quiet and allow the show to collect a tax credit on the basis of their identity.



There have been situations in the past where I'd get to writing rooms and know exactly what my role is: if the show gets policed, they can point to me and say "look, we had this guy in the room."

—**Stakeholder Interview: Ian Iqbal Rashid**, Writer and Director



The heads of Canadian Media companies and the managers that oversee the projects that created. Many of them claim to be inclusive, but just use queer content as a way to check a diversity box so they can pat themselves on the back while silencing members of the queer community.

—**Canadian Television Art Director**, queer cis man

Diversity hiring initiatives must be paired with inclusion and equity to be meaningful. Ignoring a professional's ability to creatively contribute to a project renders these efforts meaningless and serves to further exclude them from the industry. As noted by a respondent, one of the dangers to shallow diversity initiatives is that 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals become expendable because their value is not interwoven into the entire project.



All these young people who are getting opportunities on these shows, are they actually allowed to contribute creatively? Or are they literally on the credit list so someone can access tax credits on them?

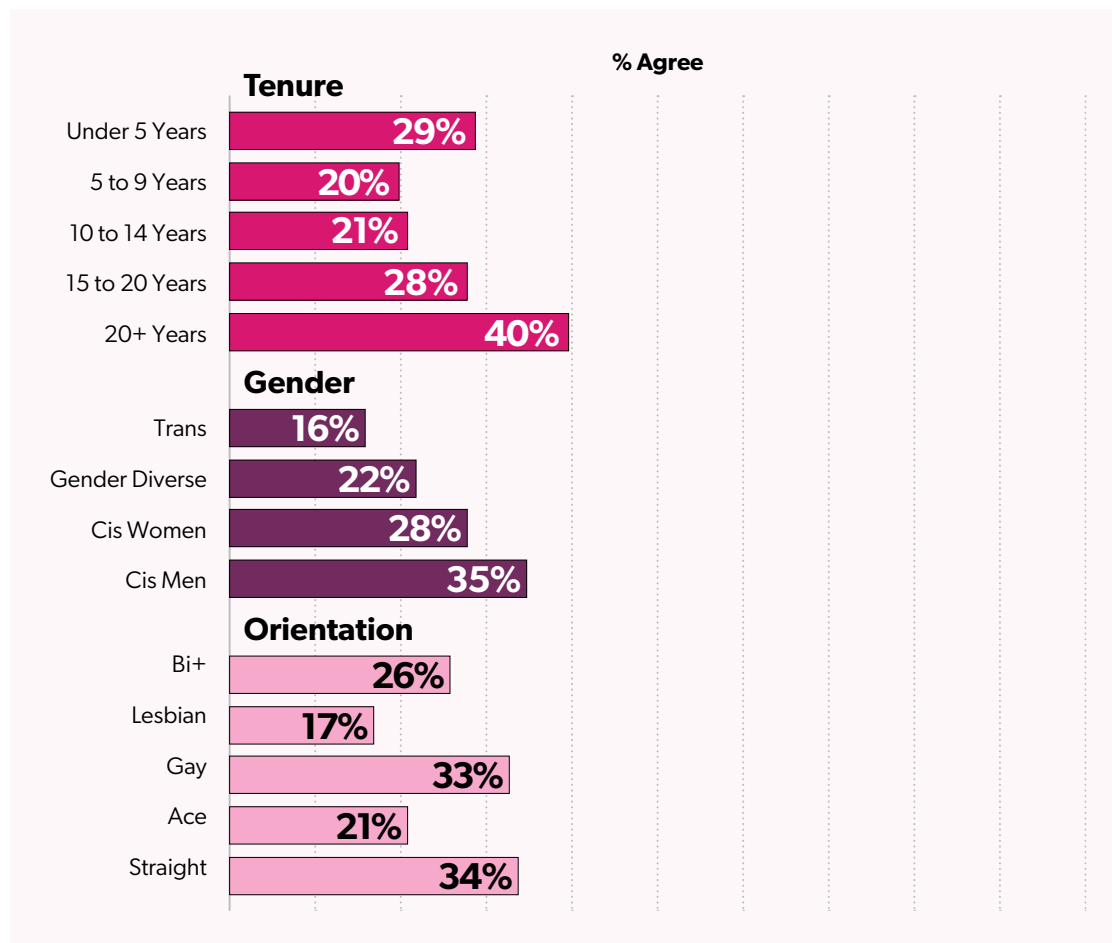
—**Stakeholder Interview: Michelle Mama**,
Filmmaker, Director, and Producer

// We are expendable, especially when we call for those in power to try harder or face accountability. We have seen unprecedented numbers of people losing jobs in the games industry over the last 1–2 years, and those earning huge wages at the top are almost never the ones to step forward, take a pay cut, and keep a studio moving forward in times of need.

—**Canadian Game Designer and Producer**, lesbian cis woman

4.6 Fewer Mentorship and Career Advancement Opportunities

2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are underserved when it comes to career development and upward mobility. Only 28% of industry professionals agree that the Canadian media industries adequately develop diverse offscreen talent. Meaningful mentorship impacts everyone, but 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals keenly feel this lack due to systemic inequity.



Canadian Media Industries Develop Diverse Talent

The length of tenure dramatically impacts respondents' views on the difficulty of career advancement. Emerging professionals are more likely to recognize the guidance of others while mid-career professionals feel the least amount of support. While those who have spent over 2 decades in the industry are markedly more likely to agree that the Canadian media industries adequately develop diverse offscreen talent.

What these findings reveal is that those with the greatest opportunity to offer mentorship are overestimating the training that exists. Conversely, mid-career professionals who are best positioned to move into leadership positions are given the least amount of support. It is also worth noting that the **lack of training is unevenly felt by 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals; trans, lesbian, and asexual respondents feel the inadequacy of training opportunities most keenly while gay men are aligned with straight respondents**. This is another example of a significant perception gap that has surfaced in this study.



The number one priority is mentorship. Putting the elevator back down and bringing people up. It comes with confidence. I'm not worried someone is coming for my job. I'm not competitive. I want to help and grow and mentor and foster and teach. What does it cost you to help someone else? You make one small change and it changes a whole life, but there's so much resistance at the network level. All we're doing is giving a young, queer person an opportunity that they're ready for.

—**Stakeholder Interview: Michelle Mama**

Filmmaker, Director, and Producer

Mentorship is crucial to ensuring that 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals are ready to move into decision-making positions. As several participants explain, what often ends up happening is that a production will promote someone without having given them adequate training—either prompted by shallow diversity measures (that is to say, diversity without equity or inclusion); or with the intention of watching them fail. Then, due to the established tendency to tokenize 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals, the production can use them as an example of why “diversity hires” and behind-the-scenes representation are ineffective. Mentorship and promotion go hand in hand.



Throwing open the doors at a funding level without having addressed training and education will result in a small measurable increase in access for 2SLGBTQIA+ creators. A tree does not grow from branches down—addressing barriers is much like removing rocks on the ground and nourishing existing seeds (which are already there and have always been there). The approach to handling the barriers is just as important as identifying them.

—**Canadian Film Director and Writer**, Two-Spirit

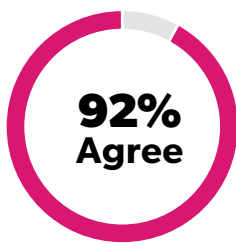
Participants also address the need for mentorship across the span of a career in order to support sustainable, long-term advancement. As noted, mentors can assist emerging and mid-career talent through skills training, job access, and network building, the last of which is particularly important when it comes to facilitating upward mobility. Several stakeholders share experiences of running into infrastructural barriers around mentorship, including lack of funding, lack of mentors, and bureaucracy around credit lines.



Create a mentoring program for behind-the-scenes roles, from PMs to producers, and from technical directors to CTOs, to enable upward mobility, professional development, and long-term career growth for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals. A viable permanent career path in the linear media/IDM space in Canada would strongly support the positioning of queer players at all strata in the media development ecosystem.

—**Canadian Game Producer**, gay cis man

Moving Beyond the Writer's Room



92% of writers and screenwriters acknowledge that it is difficult to gain the experience needed to move into leadership roles without being on set. One stakeholder makes the point that the next generation of showrunners isn't being trained because productions aren't paying writers to leave the writers' room and access vital career development.



One of the problems I'm observing in Canada is that it's challenging for writers to get out of the writing room and onto set. I learned to direct from having been a writer on set, and I learned to be a showrunner because I know what it's like to be on set and to work in post-production. What's happening here is that young writers aren't invited onto sets for their episodes or to observe how things get made, so they get stuck in the writing room as junior writers. Then we don't get the women, the people of colour, the queer writers moving into show runner positions. It compounds the problem of representation on screen as well.

—**Stakeholder Interview: Ian Iqbal Rashid**, Writer and Director

This barrier brings us full circle. As noted, change cannot happen in a vacuum. Committing to meaningful 2SLGBTQIA+ representation means committing to dismantling each of these barriers with safeguards to guarantee accountability. Education and anti-oppression training—especially as it pertains to establishing safer environments for trans people—are foundational to this work.

5.0 Opportunities for More Authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ Representation

Across industries and identities, participants acknowledge the genuine efforts made over the last 5 years to improve 2SLGBTQIA+ representation on screen and behind the scenes. At the same time, they also underscore the **inadequacy of the current state of representation, noting that portrayals are uneven, superficial, and still dependent on harmful tropes and stereotypes.**

Industry stakeholders and media professionals offer several suggestions for direct and meaningful action, which we have synthesized here. There is growing demand for the Canadian media industries to adopt an equity-driven approach to inclusion and portrayal. As our research reveals, **audiences want to see accurate, nuanced, authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation on Canadian screens that reflects lived experiences.** The opportunities outlined in this section can help catalyze a conversation to meet that demand.

5.1 Representing All 2SLGBTQIA+ Identities

Assessing 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in the aggregate is important for measuring progress, but it can also obscure how **certain identities tend to be portrayed more than others.** This study finds that:

- Two-Spirit, trans, and gender diverse characters are profoundly underrepresented across all industries.
- Bi+ characters are disproportionately underrepresented compared to gay and lesbian characters, despite nearly half of 2SLGBTQIA+ media professionals identifying as bi, pan, or queer.
- Two letters of the acronym used throughout the Pink Paper are entirely absent from top-watched television on Canadian screens: intersex people and people on the ace spectrum.

//

Trans representation is the worst, but there are problems in every single aspect of our community. For example, we do not talk about or understand intersex identities. That's still hard to find. Bisexual people have a lot of stigma against them. None of us are properly represented.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Film Producer, Writer, and Director

//

I never see asexual representation anywhere, so I made a short film that follows the story of an asexual girl. To my surprise, not even LGBTQ+ film festivals were interested showing it. As a filmmaker, you have to be used to rejection, but, since this film was so personal (trying to create authentic asexual representation inspired by my own lived experiences), it was a huge blow to me personally. Old insecurities about being valid or being queer resurfaced.

—**Canadian Film Director and Writer**, asexual cis woman

We are at a turning point in history where media matters more than ever. Meaningfully representing Two-Spirit, trans, intersex, asexual, and bisexual characters, as well as those whose identities reside more comfortably within the + can provide a mirror for those who have long been underserved, promote greater understanding in Canadian society, and be a driving force for acceptance.

//

More representation of trans, Two-Spirit, and non-binary roles onscreen (as well as off). It has been proven that bias comes from ignorance and, right now, with the way trans+ people are being treated across the board, representation and education through authentic storytelling is more important than ever.

—**Canadian Film Distribution Executive**, non-binary lesbian

//

We need more representation of lesser known identities (pansexual, demisexual, asexual, etc.).

—**Xtra Reader**, queer, asexual cis woman

//

We need the industry to realize the “+” is there for a reason.

—**Xtra Reader**, asexual, agender femme

5.2 Greater Intersectional Representation

For 2SLGBTQIA+ representation to be authentic, it must also be reflective of intersecting identities. Many 2SLGBTQIA+ people are:

- Indigenous, Black, or People of Colour
- Disabled, neurodivergent, or both
- Low-income or poor

Stakeholders and survey respondents recognize that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation has often been *white* 2SLGBTQIA+ representation, and disability is often absent from media altogether.

// I find that what will end up happening is, for a period of time the industry will embrace coming out stories, or trans and non-binary characters, but often in isolation and rarely alongside each other. There's not a sense [that] there's a plethora of other stories that are representative of Queer experience, but also [that] you can do multiple stories about Queer identity—if you have multiple characters. Oftentimes **Canada will be very good at doing one form of queer representation, but it comes at the sacrifice of many other queer stories that I think they could also be doing as well.**

—**Stakeholder Interview: JP Larocque**,
Screenwriter and Producer

A lack of intersectional representation on Canadian screens risks reinforcing systemic exclusions. Many Indigenous people, Black people, and People of Colour feel underrepresented in 2SLGBTQIA+ communities ([Dayal 2022](#)), as do many who are disabled and neurodivergent ([Tran et al. 2023](#)). This is known as “lateral violence,” a phenomenon where members of a marginalized group perpetuate bias against others within that group. Participants emphasize the need for positive intersectional representation in film, television, streaming, and videogames, as well a recognition of the impact of colonization and a clear effort to dismantle systemic inequalities.



As time has gone on, there has been more pressure, more awareness, more understanding that, even within the queer community, there are people who have been left out of representation. There are a lot of gay or lesbian characters, but they're often white. **There's not enough representation of the full breadth and width of the queer community.**

—**Stakeholder Interview: Tom Hastings**, Media Executive



Queerness is very attached to People of Colour and to people with disabilities, but we don't get to see that much representation and **we don't get to see positive representation.**

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Film Producer, Writer, and Director



I want to see more accurate, unapologetic, authentic life stories of Indigenous people. Everything from shifting focus off our painful histories to our unstoppable and infectious joy. I want Native representation that is more than trauma and “magic Natives,” and I want direct and clear statements made on the impact of colonization.

—**Canadian Game Designer**, genderfluid queer bisexual



We need diversity in terms of representing the 2SLGBTQIA+ community—more BIPOC representation, differently abled and sized bodies, and elders.

—**Xtra Reader** gay cis man

5.3 Celebrations of 2SLGBTQIA+ Joy

2SLGBTQIA+ participants are in overwhelming agreement that they want the industry to move away from trauma and coming out narratives. As anti-2SLGBTQIA+ rhetoric and policy decisions continue to put 2SLGBTQIA+ adults and youth at greater risk, the media industries have a unique opportunity to combat hate through authentic storytelling. For the Canadian media industries to create meaningful mirrors and windows, there is a need for authentic portrayals of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters who live regular, fulfilling, joyful lives.



[We need] to not pigeonhole the 2SLGBTQIA+ community but allow for a wide variety of stories to be created by 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals that don't focus on trauma but on joy.

—**Canadian Film Director and Writer**,
genderfluid, genderqueer pansexual



We just want to feel good. We want to celebrate queerness. We want to see where we can go. We want to bring our family to see the movies with us and we don't want to see them watch someone queer be killed.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Film Producer, Writer, and Director



Start creating more stories beyond coming out stories or traumatic trans narratives. Where it's just about the complicated and sometimes joyful lived experience of a queer character.

—**Stakeholder Interview: JP Larocque**, Screenwriter and Producer

Sort Of Exceptional

Over half our stakeholders brought up Bilal Baig and Fab Filippo's *Sort Of* (CBC Gem) as a paragon of authentic portrayal and an example of what 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals can offer when given the support. The show received a Peabody Award for Entertainment in 2021 and was the most nominated television series at the 2022 Canadian Screen Awards.

Following Sabi Mehboob, the non-binary child of Pakistani immigrants, *Sort Of* centres its story around trans identity without steeping it in tropes or trauma. ***Sort Of* is an exceptional television show, but many stakeholders worry it will become an exception; instead, they hope to see its success drive the Canadian media industries to continue investing in accurate representation.**



When a show like *Sort Of* exists, you hope that there will be an attempt to bring more trans and nonbinary and intersectional stories into the mix. What's strange about [the Canadian industry] is that there's more of an attitude like "well, we've done that. Let's move on." As a result, representation doesn't necessarily lead to more representation. It ends up being isolated bubbles of interesting queer shows or fighting for nuanced queer representation—on every show.

—**Stakeholder Interview: JP Larocque**, Screenwriter and Producer

5.4 Representation Across Genres

Respondents also want to see a wider variety of stories that feature 2SLGBTQIA+ characters and themes. Identity is not itself a genre, and all genres and formats can be seen as rich for authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation, including romances, comedies, science-fiction, high fantasy, reality television, and documentaries among others. Several respondents also pointed out the need for representation in news media to report on relevant issues from a more informed and authentic point of view.

// 2SLGBTQIA+ shouldn't be limited to creating the same genre-specific, trope-specific version of TV and film that is currently accepted by funders. They should be free to explore new genres and be authentic to their own personal vision.

—**Canadian Television Writer**, genderqueer bi, pansexual, queer

// We need better reporting on queer issues speaking directly to queer people, not around them. [The media needs] to stop painting us as the problem

—**Xtra Reader**, queer gay man

Videogame professionals are in strong agreement that meaningful 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is possible in a wide range of games (70%). While visual novels and independent narrative videogames have offered rich portrayals of 2SLGBTQIA+ characters, respondents argue that there are opportunities for representation across other genres. 2SLGBTQIA+ characters could be introduced as playable or non-playable characters in action adventure, fighting, strategy, role playing, roguelike, and platform games, among other genres.

5.5 Seamlessly Integrating 2SLGBTQIA+ Identities

Many respondents express a desire for 2SLGBTQIA+ characters to be more seamlessly integrated into stories without their gender identity or sexual orientation being their defining feature. When 2SLGBTQIA+ characters are introduced as fully-realized characters, they can reflect a spectrum of experiences the way straight cisgender characters often do.

// Focus on stories that feature 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals whose character arcs don't solely or overwhelmingly revolve around their gender and/or sexuality. The goal is to portray such individuals as well-rounded and multifaceted souls who aren't merely a collection of identity markers.

—**Canadian Game Writer**, asexual cis man

// Simple normalization. Including representation always comes with a conversation or is the result of a conversation. It would be nice if we could just have representation and inclusion be something that no one even thinks about and just does.

—**Canadian Game Programmer**, asexual cis man

5.6 Regular Measurement and Reporting

Participants acknowledge that change is difficult to assess without regular and accurate reporting. Several stakeholders point to GLAAD's Studio Responsibility Index and evidence-based advocacy work as examples of initiatives that changed the landscape of 2SLGBTQIA+ storytelling in American media by revealing how little 2SLGBTQIA+ there has been on Canadian screens. There is a belief among participants that an irrefutable measuring tool that tracks on-screen portrayal—specifically **authentic** portrayal—can support more equitable representation.

While some funders and organizations have begun collecting data regarding media professionals' self-identification to identify gaps in support for underrepresented communities and aid in decision-making intended to fill those gaps, the on-screen effects of these initiatives are not currently being measured ([Telefilm Canada 2023](#), [Canada Media Fund 2024](#)).

// I can confidently say that there's a lot of good intentions to put queer characters in television shows. Could more be done? I think so. In the States, they have organizations that are annually looking at representation on screen and involvement of talent behind the screen. I don't think we do that in Canada. **A measurement tool is irrefutable.**

—**Stakeholder Interview**: Tom Hastings, Media Executive

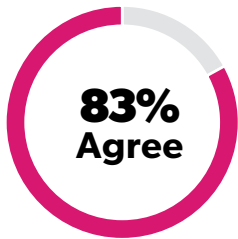


You need someone who reports and keeps people accountable.
That's how GLAAD changed things in America.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Film Producer, Writer, and Director

5.7 Greater Support from Unions

In addition to bargaining for fair wages, unions advocate for their members, allowing professionals to speak up about inequity, discrimination, and harassment with less fear of retribution.



83% of industry professionals working in Canadian film, television, streaming, and videogames agree that unions play an important role in ensuring 2SLGBTQIA+ representation.

2SLGBTQIA+ respondents (89%) are significantly more likely to agree on the importance of unions than straight cisgender respondents (67%), and we find the strongest agreement among gender diverse (96%), trans (94%), and lesbian (94%) respondents. This data is reflective of the way labour movements are often led and supported by people who are systemically marginalized. A significant number of media professionals imparted the opinion that it is incumbent upon unions to push for greater 2SLGBTQIA+ representation.



[OutACTRA] allows people to have a community where they can talk about their issues, meet other creators so they can start to see how it's done, what to talk about, who in the industry is sympathetic, what casting agents are seeing enough queer representation for all the roles. We can put pressure on casting people. We can talk to agents. We can advocate for queer representation in any role so not just the one queer role that they've suggested

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Actor

While Canada is home to several trade unions that represent the industries of media professionals in Canadian film, television, and streaming, workers are only just beginning to unionize in the videogame industry. In 2022, workers at British Columbia's Anemone Hug Interactive formed the first union in the Canadian videogame industry, with Keywords Studios following shortly thereafter. Earlier

this year, two labour unions in Quebec—Game Workers Unite Montreal and the Confédération des syndicats nationaux—partnered to launch a provincial unionization campaign ([Iantorno 2023](#)).

// To move our industry forward and tell stories that reflect the realities of the Canadian public we must be aware of inclusion, diversity, and equity and have those concerns addressed by all of the unions in our industry. And that’s not something that can be done once or over one or two years. That is a continuous process to rectify what’s been decades of exclusion.

—**Stakeholder Interview: JP Larocque**, Screenwriter and Producer

Nevertheless, the existence of a trade union has not always guaranteed protection for 2SLGBTQIA+ people. As some stakeholders acknowledge, eligibility criteria that rely on referrals or specific education channels often exclude 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals. Several respondents express dismay at the ubiquity of transphobia and queerphobia even within these organizations. As anti-2SLGBTQIA+ vitriol rises across the country, discrimination is increasingly common within the very organizations formed to protect the most vulnerable, a point that media professionals brought to our attention several times.

// We’re living in a time where hate is viewed as a casual difference of opinion. I work in a union, and homophobia and transphobia are growing [among] crew on set and higher ups in office. I feel more concerned than ever.

—**Canadian Television Professional**, cis gay man

// We need union language specifically around protecting trans/nonbinary workers (gender-affirming care benefits, mental health benefits, pronoun language, etc).

—**Canadian Film Professional**, non-binary bisexual

By law, unions have a duty to defend workers whose rights are threatened, to protect workers who are subject to harassment, and to provide education around issues of equality ([Canadian Labour Congress](#)). Research participants emphasize that it is essential for unions to uphold this moral and legal mandate by taking a meaningful stance against violence and ensuring the language of their collective agreements are inclusive of gender diversity.

5.8 Establishing A Queer Screen Office

Many of our stakeholders posit that a Queer Screen Office can assist efforts toward meaningful 2SLGBTQIA+ representation. Over the last seven years, we have witnessed the creation of the [Indigenous Screen Office](#), the [Black Screen Office](#), and the [Disability Screen Office](#), which support the on screen and behind the scenes representation of Indigenous, Black, and disabled media professionals respectively. Several participants in this study affirm that a Queer Screen Office can open networks, promote inclusive hiring practices, and advocate for safer workplaces through awareness-raising and accountability.

// Part of the work of the various offices—the Black Screen Office, for example, or the Indigenous Screen Office—is opening up networks for people who wouldn’t otherwise have access to certain people. The reason that I’ve had as much success as I’ve had is because people took chances on me. Finding more ways for that to happen within different organizations and more access to different kinds of education is necessary.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Media Executive

Some stakeholders express support for a Queer Screen Office with the caveat that its establishment alone is not enough to catalyze industry-wide change; for a screen office to do its work, it needs financial and infrastructural support.

// A Queer Screen Office can truly change things. It can provide data, it can offer training, it can bring queer Canadian content and films to markets. I think it’s essential. We need a dedicated operation. If the industry truly wants to show that they are willing to change things and support our community, then the first step to give us money to do our own thing.

—**Stakeholder Interview**, Film Producer, Writer, and Director

6.0 Recommendations for Actionable Change

While not designed to present directives, this Pink Paper concludes with insights into potential strategies for advancing 2SLGBTQIA+ representation on screen and behind the scenes. Informed by quantitative and qualitative findings, these recommendations are intended to start conversations among funders, executives, decision-makers, and media professionals who will ultimately guide the path forward.

- **Funders and executives should consider creating specific, quantifiable opportunities for greenlighting 2SLGBTQIA+ stories through dedicated programs and funding criteria dependent on 2SLGBTQIA+ representation.** Granting 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals greater opportunities to tell their stories will allow them to demonstrate the value they bring to the media industries. The inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ voices at all levels will also help these stories remain accurate and authentic.
- **Decision-makers and industry leaders should consider establishing 2SLGBTQIA+ mentoring programs to address perception gaps and professional blocks.** With an eye to career advancement, these programs should target key roles in the development chain (e.g. showrunner, director, technical director). Training programs, skill sharing, and network building can prepare emerging and mid-career 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals for greater job opportunities.
- **Industry leaders should consider enacting more robust hiring and career development practices to address a systemic lack of 2SLGBTQIA+ decision-makers with the goal of sustainably confronting this gap in the long-term.** Measurement will be key to progress.
- **Funders, executives, and media professionals must take concrete steps to address perception gaps around 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in Canadian media and in the workplace.** There is a need for conversations that drive alignment within the media industries as well as among 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals.

- **All screen industries should adopt and enforce a zero-tolerance policy for harassment, discrimination, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ violence.** There is a need to mandate education on the diverse ways people experience gender identity and sexual orientation. The media industries should make it a necessary condition for accessing publicly-funded envelopes, awards, and industry accolades.
- **Storytellers should consider deliberately making space for more 2SLGBTQIA+ characters and narratives with a particular focus on underrepresented identities.** Asexual, intersex, Two-Spirit, trans, gender diverse, and bi+ people are underserved by the Canadian media industries, as are 2SLGBTQIA+ people who are Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, and/or disabled. Authentic portrayal can drive greater awareness and understanding throughout Canadian society.
- **Creators should take steps to move beyond tropes, clichés, and stereotypes to portray 2SLGBTQIA+ characters more meaningfully and authentically in Canadian media.** 2SLGBTQIA+ voices are key to this more nuanced and accurate representation.

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Appendix B: Methodology

Research for the PTP Pink Paper was conducted between December 2023 and May 2024 in three stages:

- Stakeholder interviews to set context and establish a framework
- A 10-minute survey completed by Canadian media professionals
- A content analysis of top-watched French and English Canadian television

Pink Triangle Press fielded an additional 10-minute online survey through *Xtra Magazine* and its affiliated social media accounts, which complements the above research by assessing how 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is received by Canadian audiences.

The qualitative data collected through stakeholder interviews and open-ended survey questions adds depth, nuance, and context to our quantitative findings. Quotes have been edited for clarity and length but are otherwise provided in our participants' own words.

Stakeholder Interviews

Research began with in-depth video interviews to provide perspective and insight into the Canadian media industries. Interviews ranged between 45–75 minutes long and were conducted by Maru/Matchbox between December 2023 and January 2024. Of the stakeholders, 9 were interviewed across the film, television, streaming, and videogame industries, 2 in French and 7 in English. All stakeholders consented to being recorded.

Participants were selected in consultation between Pink Triangle Press and the project's funders. These stakeholders include:

- 3 broadcasting executives, 1 of whom is an executive at a French broadcasting network
- 2 directors who work in both film and television, one of whom is also a writer and one of whom is also a producer and showrunner
- 1 writer, director, and producer who works exclusively in film

- 1 writer and producer who works exclusively in television
- 1 actor
- 1 videogame company CEO

8 out of the 9 interviewees identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ while one refers to themselves as an ally. 4 interviewees are People of Colour. To preserve the anonymity of several stakeholders, additional demographic data has not been shared.

The findings from these interviews were used to drive the research and analysis phase of this project. Qualitative data provides the essential detail and context that makes legible the results of quantitative survey findings. To that end, this study aptly foregrounds stakeholders' own words through quotations. All interviewees have reviewed and approved the final transcripts. Stakeholders who wished to remain anonymous have been credited by role.

Survey of Industry Professionals

Social science research methods were employed to gather data from media professionals across industry roles. Between April 15th and May 1st, Pink Triangle Press distributed the survey through partner networks, industry organizations, film festivals, videogame studios, unions, and newsletters. The survey was also shared on social media platforms including LinkedIn, Instagram, Discord, Facebook, BlueSky, and X (formerly Twitter). Respondents were invited to complete the survey in either English or French.

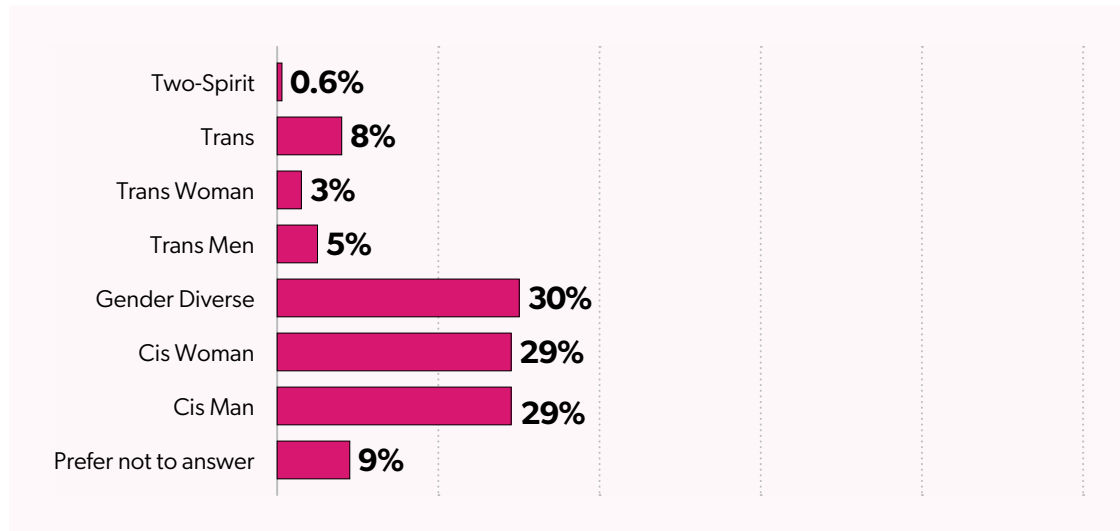
The survey received 479 responses from professionals working in Canadian media. Maru/Matchbox determined all samples statistically met the baseline bar. All survey responses were kept anonymous.

Research Participants

While this research focuses specifically on 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in the Canadian media industries, our survey included several demographic questions to arrive at a better understanding of whose voices this research represents.

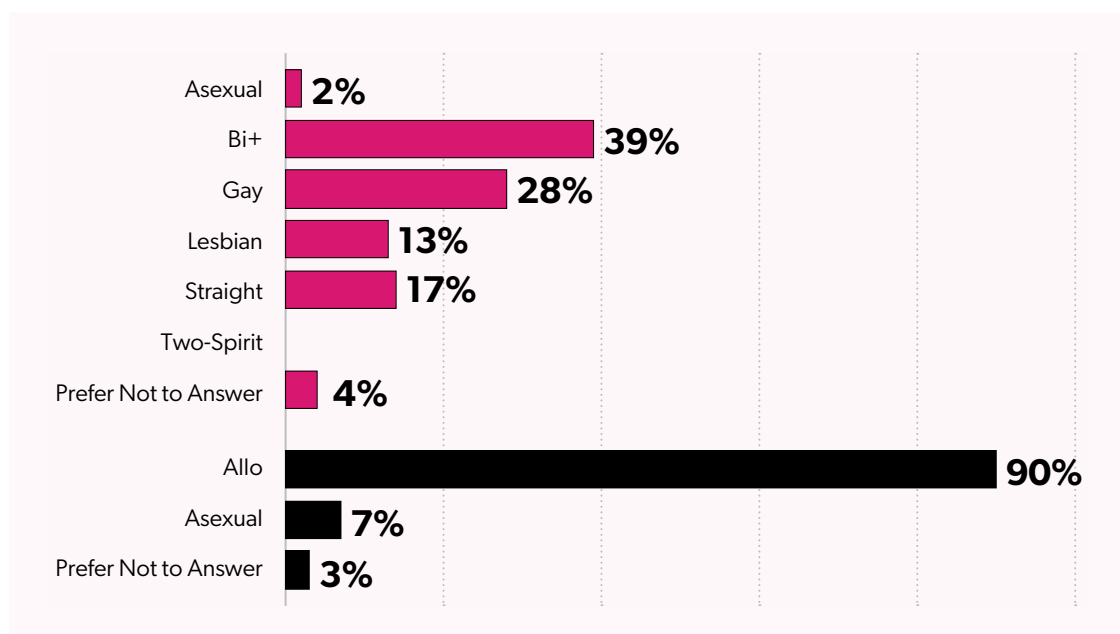
Our intention was to include a diverse and representative range of demographics within the media industries. Nevertheless, as noted below, some groups are more represented than others.

Gender and Sexual Orientation



People who identify exclusively as cisgender comprise the majority of our participants (58%) with respondents evenly split between cis women (29%) and cis men (29%). Almost one third of our participants (30%) identify as gender diverse, an umbrella category that, for ease of analysis, we use to include people who identify as agender, bigender, genderfluid, genderqueer, and non-binary among other gender identities. 5% of our respondents identify as trans men and 3% as trans women. Only 1% of respondents identify as Two-Spirit. 9% of survey participants preferred not to answer this question.

The sum total of these percentages exceeds 100% as some participants identify with multiple categories (e.g. trans and non-binary).

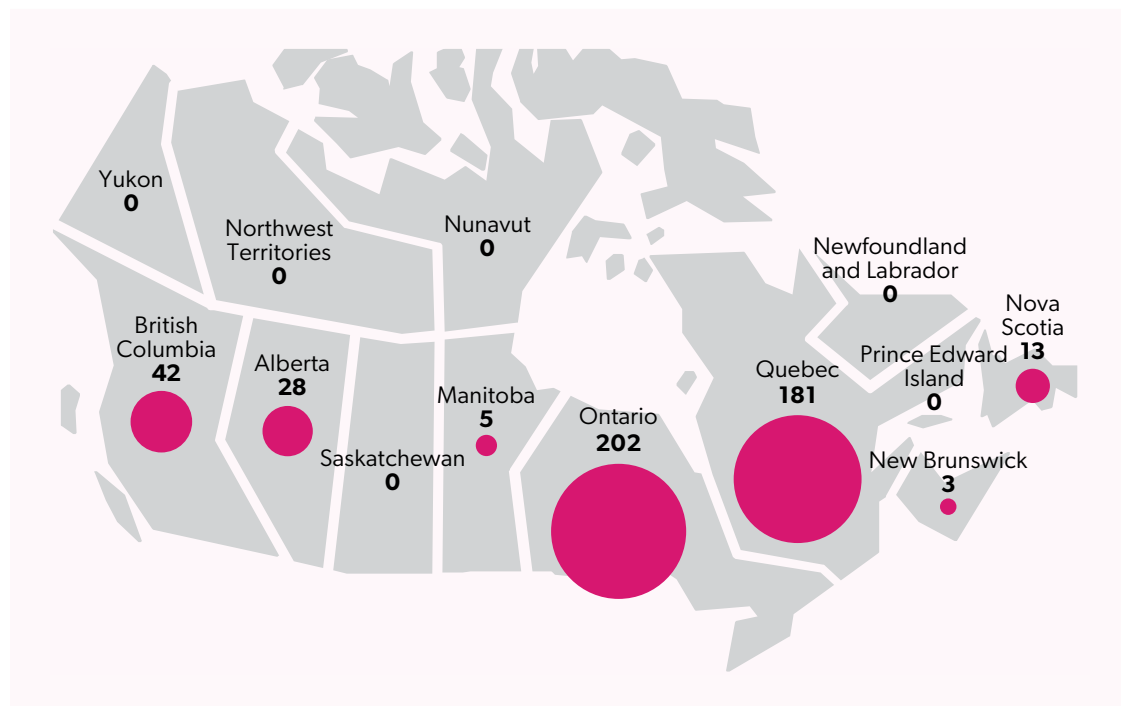


We use the umbrella term Bi+ to include people who identify as bisexual, pansexual, and queer only, as well as multiple combinations of orientations. It is our largest category, representing 39% of respondents, followed by people who identify exclusively as gay (28%), people who identify exclusively as straight (14%), and people who identify exclusively as lesbian (13%). 2% of respondents identify as asexual only and one participant (0.2%) identifies as Two-Spirit. 4% of survey participants preferred not to answer this question.

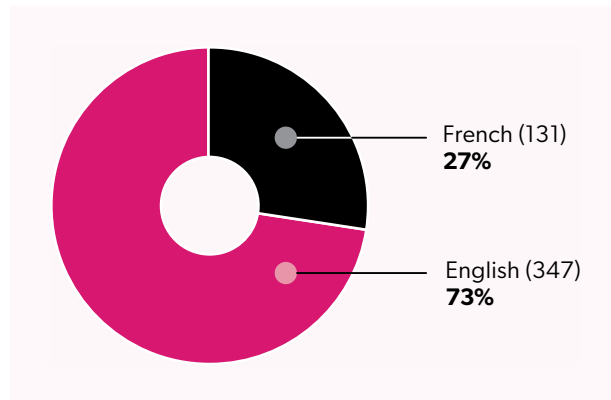
When discussing sexual orientation, it's important to note that asexuality is a spectrum that includes demisexual, ace flux, and grey ace among other identities. Asexual identities can and do overlap with other sexual orientations (e.g. a demisexual lesbian). People on the ace spectrum, including those who identify solely as asexual and those who identify as asexual in addition to other orientations, comprise 7% of the survey's total respondents.

A note on coding: For the purpose of this report where respondents must be quantified for data analysis, respondents who have identified as queer and who do not use any other label have been included in the bi+ category. Cis respondents who use queer interchangeably with gay or lesbian have been coded under the most specific label applicable. Cis women who interchangeably use gay with lesbian have been recorded as lesbian. Respondents' stated gender identities and sexual orientations were listed when quoting quantitative verbatims.

Region and Language



Our data overwhelmingly reflects the experiences of professionals working in either Ontario (42%) or Quebec (38%). Less than 1% of respondents primarily work in Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon. We had no respondents from Nunavut or the Northwest Territories.

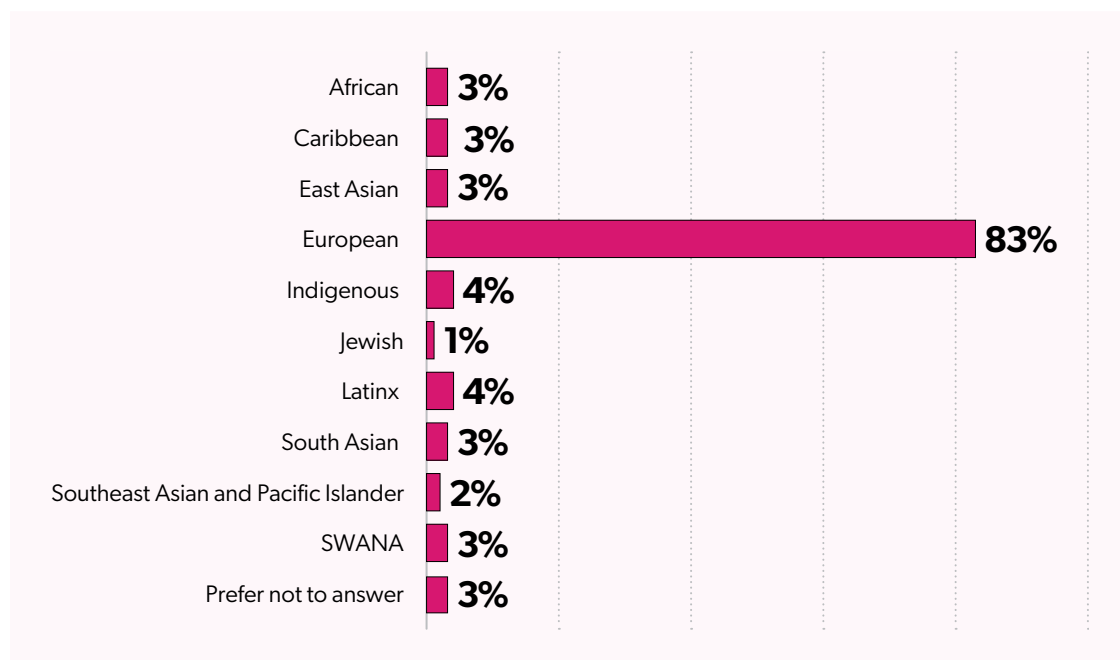


Of the respondents, 73% completed the survey in English while 27% completed the survey in French.

Unsurprisingly, of the participants who completed the survey in French, 92% also report working in Quebec. Although French-language media is available across Canada, its funding and

infrastructure tend to be located in Quebec. This is largely due to the concentration of French speakers in the province, with 84.1% of its population speaking French according to the 2021 census ([Canadian Heritage 2024](#)).

Ethnicity

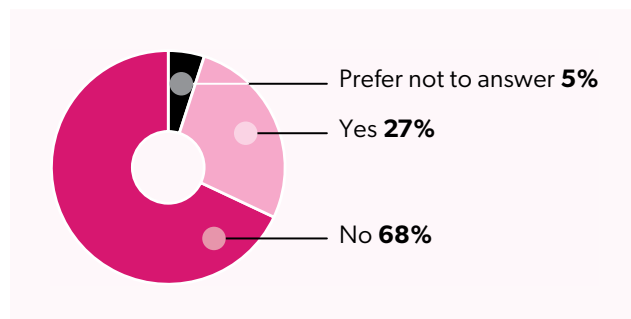


83% of respondents identify their ethnicity as European or Canadian. 4% of industry professionals identify as Indigenous and as Latinx. African, Caribbean, East Asian, South Asian, and Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA)

respondents each make up 3% of respondents. 2% of respondents are Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders and 1% of participants are Jewish. 3% of respondents preferred not to answer.

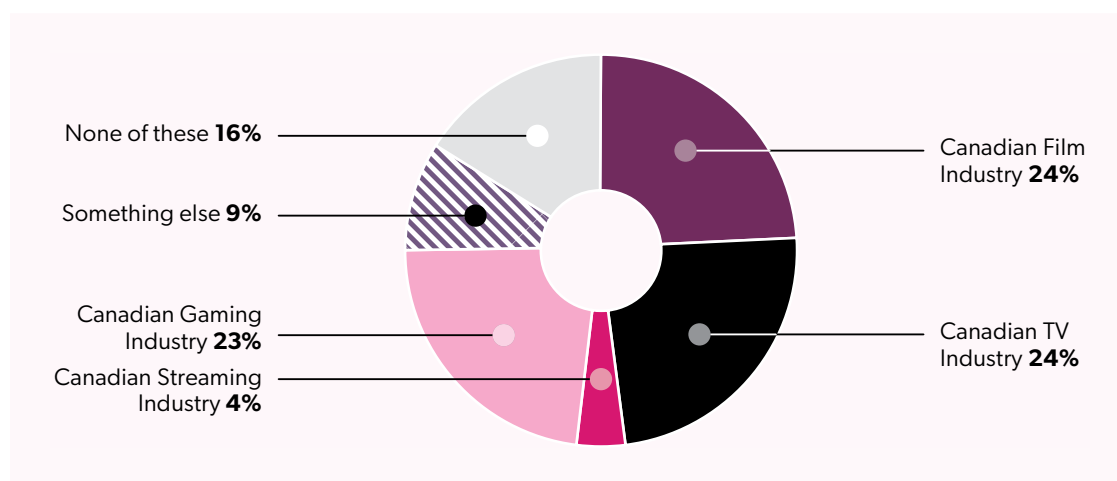
The sum total of these percentages exceeds 100% as some participants identify with multiple categories. This survey substantially underrepresents the diversity of Canada's population according to results of the 2021 census ([Statistics Canada 2022b](#)).

Disability



27% of respondents identify as having 1 or more disabilities and 68% of respondents identify as having no disabilities. 5% of respondents preferred not to answer.

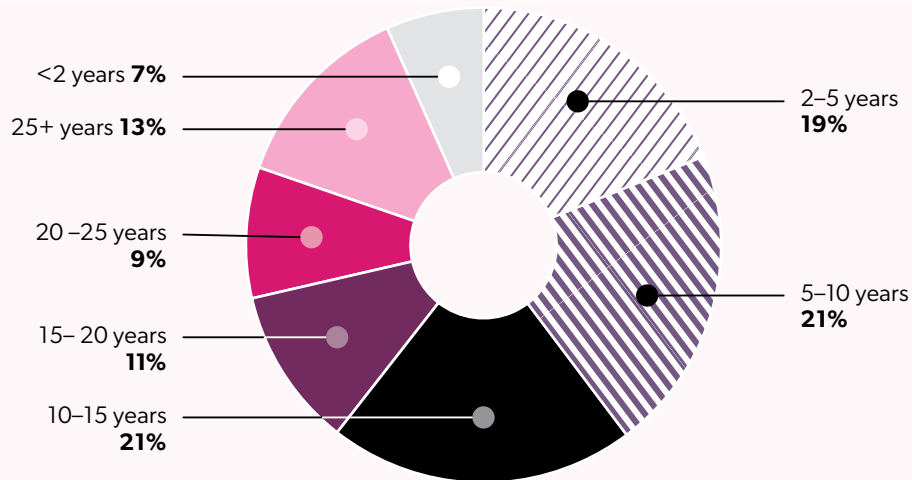
Industry and Experience



Media Industries

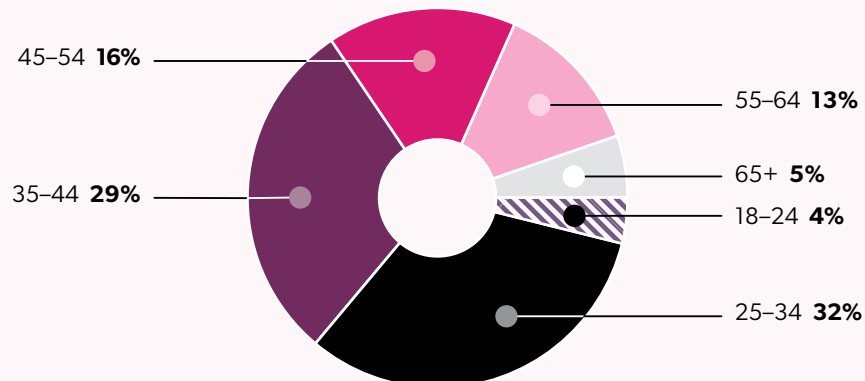
We received almost equal numbers of participants across the film (24%), television (24%), and videogame (23%) industries in Canada. Streaming (4%) is comparatively underrepresented, which may be due to the fact that our survey limited responses to one industry.

The remainder of our respondents (25%) report working in a Canadian media industry other than film, television, streaming, or videogames. These include but are not limited to advertising, digital immersion, journalism, media arts, music, podcasting, radio, and theatre.



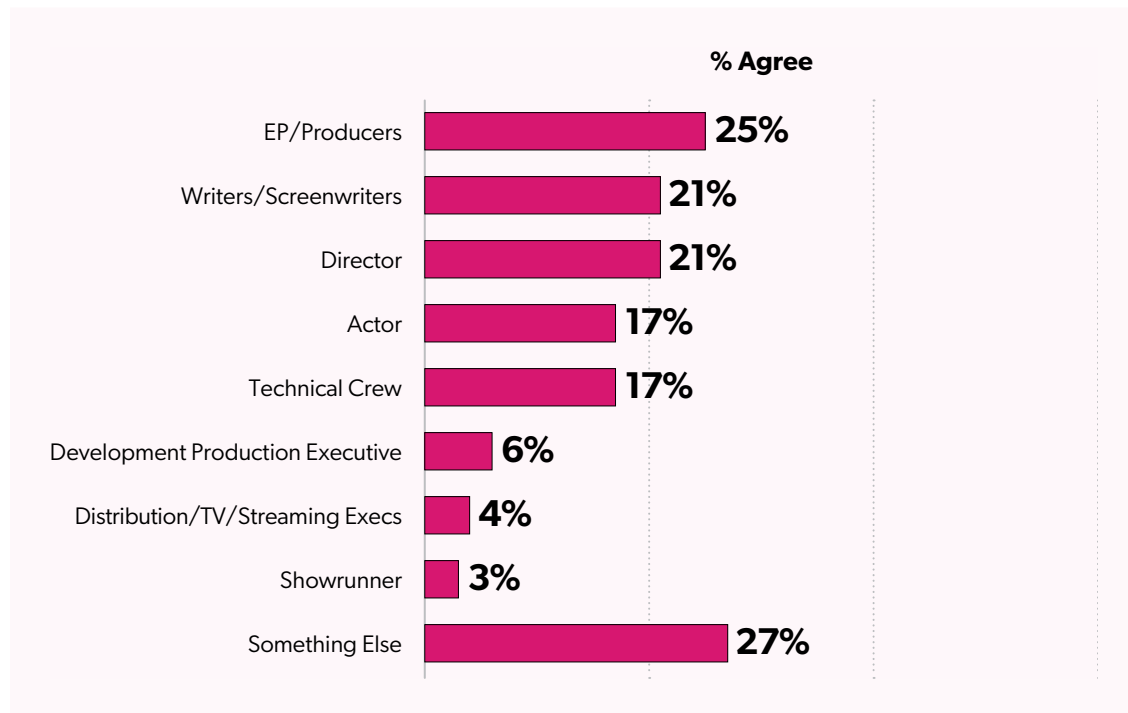
Tenure

Of the professionals who report working in Canadian film, television, streaming, and videogames, we see the greatest number of responses among those with less than 5 years of experience (26%). We have equal representation from professionals who have spent 5 to 9 years, 10 to 14 years, and over 20 years in the industry (21% each). Only 11% of respondents have between 15 and 20 years of experience.



Age

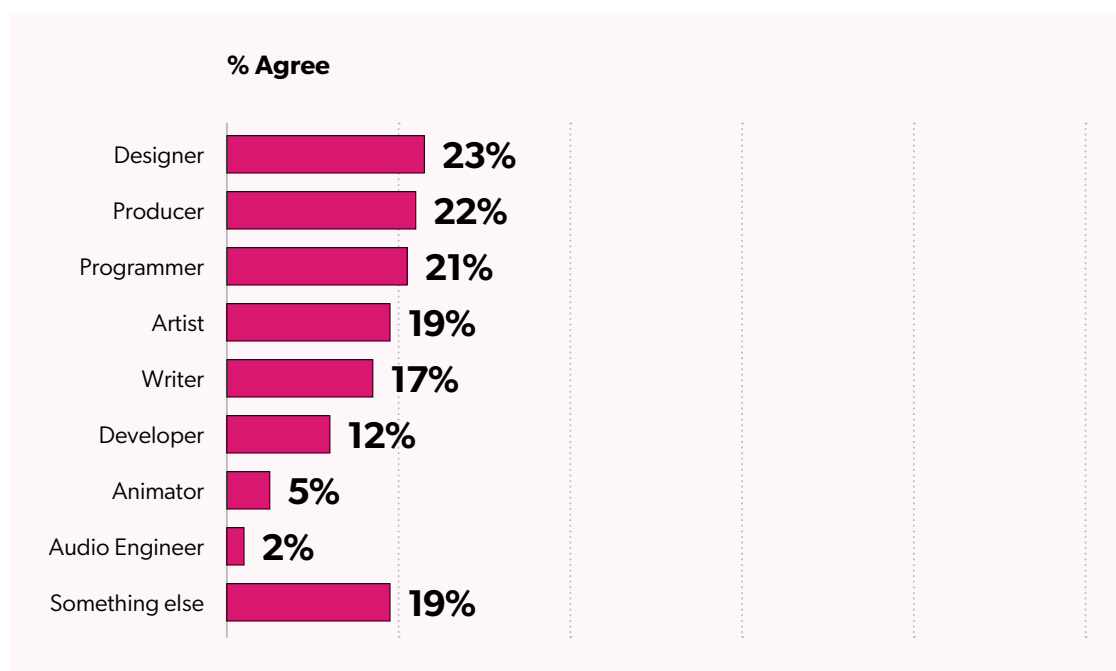
Although our survey participants vary in ages, the majority of respondents are either 25–34 (32%) or 35–44 (29%) years old. Participants whose ages range from 45–55 (16%) and 55–64 (13%) are almost equally represented. Only a few participants are younger than 24 (4%) or older than 65 (5%).



Role in Film, Television, and Streaming

Of the 252 participants working primarily in Canadian film, television, and streaming, over one third work in executive positions. In this category, we include producers and executive producers (25%), development production executives (6%), and distribution executives (4%). Writers (21%), directors (21%), actors (17%), and technical crew (17%) are strongly represented. Showrunners (3%) are least represented.

Additionally, 27% of professionals in Canadian film, television, and streaming state their role is not included among the above options. These include administration, advertisement, consulting, editing, and post-production.



Role in Videogames

Of the 108 participants working primarily in the Canadian videogame industry, we find a fairly even split between designer (23%), producer (22%), programmer (21%), artist (19%), and writer (17%). Developers (12%) are somewhat represented while animators (5%) and audio engineers (2%) are less represented.

Nearly 1 in 5 gaming professionals note that their role is not available from this list. These positions include community manager, content moderation, director, localization, marketing, production assistant, and quality assurance. Several respondents refer to themselves as solo developers or videogame generalists, referring to how indie games are often made by one person or small teams where roles are shared.

In order to account for the way media professionals often move between specialized roles, participants were invited to select all that apply. Consequently, the sum of these percentages exceeds 100%.

Content Analysis

Maru/Matchbox performed a content analysis of 22 hours of top-watched Canadian programming. They used Parrot Analytics to determine the top-watched television shows using Canadian demand, which is calculated through social media metrics, web research, video engagement, and peer to peer downloads

rather than Average Minute Audience (AMA) ratings. The list was filtered to exclude children's television and include only shows with new episodes made available after January 1, 2021. Television programs consisted of both scripted and unscripted content, including dramas, comedies, and reality competition shows among others. Maru/Matchbox determined the above methodology lines up with Canadian viewership since it includes shows from Crave, CBC Gem, and QUB among other streaming platforms. This makes the selection not only representative but quantified and defensible.

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability were coded on a four-point scale (definitely, probably, probably not, and definitely not) to account for how identities are not all made explicit in every episode. These scales are determined as follows:

- **Definitely:** a demonstrable or tangible assertion of identity whether through dialogue or visual contexts (e.g. romantic attachments to indicate orientation, a wheelchair to indicate physical disability)
- **Probably:** a relatively strong assumption can be made but there is no direct confirmation
- **Probably not:** a character is probably cisgender, heterosexual, or able-bodied but this information is also not directly established in the program
- **Definitely not:** a tangible assertion that a character is cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied

When summarizing the results, **definitely** and **probably** were combined into one category and **probably not** and **definitely not** in another. Characters or contestants in drag are coded as queer.

Race is determined through context markers within the show and characters' physical appearance. Characters were coded as being either white, Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, or other People of Colour. Given that race is not necessarily announced, coders exercised judgement in determining a character's race.

Maru/Matchbox employed one English and one French coder to code the television shows in their respective languages. Pink Paper researchers cross-coded the results for greater consistency, supplementing the initial coding with canonically verifiable information online.

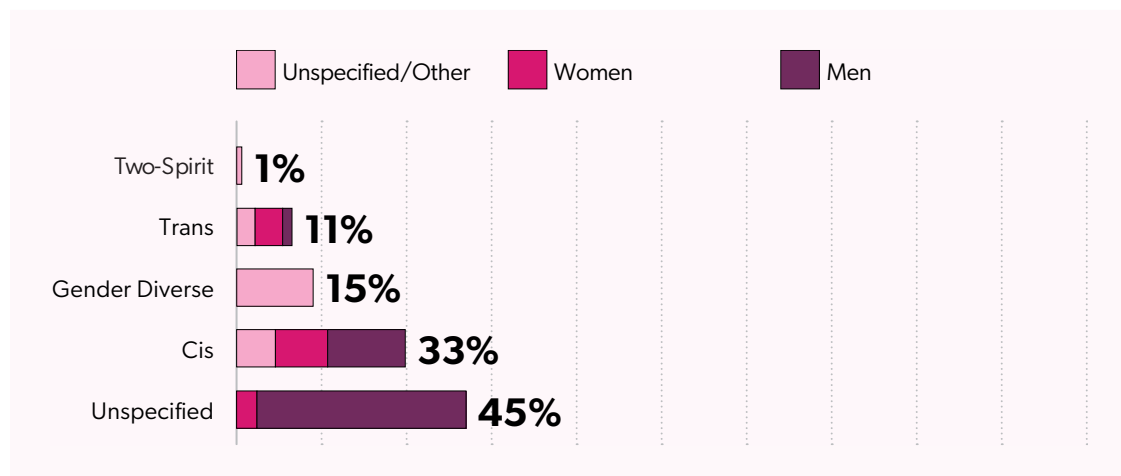
Survey of *Xtra Magazine* Readers

Pink Triangle Press fielded an additional survey to readers of *Xtra Magazine*. The goal of this second survey was to gather information on whether 2SLGBTQIA+ people see themselves represented in the Canadian film, television, streaming, and videogame industries. Participants were also asked what changes, if any, they would like to see over the next 5 years.

This survey reached a majority of respondents (75%) through *Xtra Magazine*'s weekly email. Additional entries came from participants who encountered the survey through the magazine's advertisements or announcement bar (12%), from their social media platforms (9%), and from their drag newsletter (4%).

Research Participants

Gender and Sexual Orientation



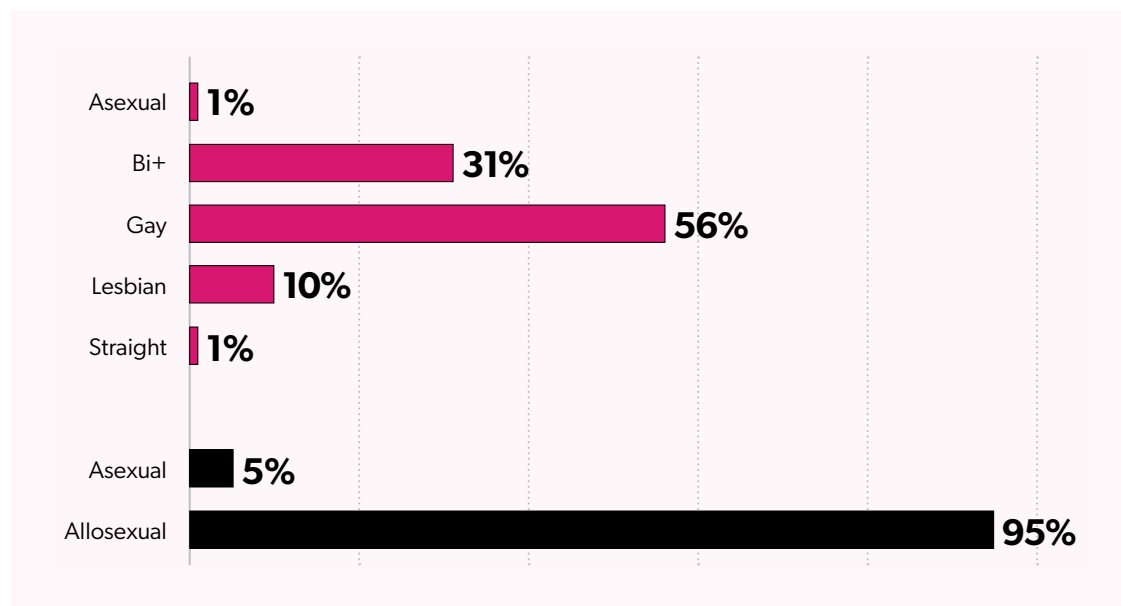
Cisgender people account for 33% of survey respondents. Of this number, 46% identify as cis men and 31% as cis women; the remainder of cis respondents (23%) did not specify beyond the umbrella term cis.

Trans people account for 11% of survey respondents. Of this group, 50% identify as trans women and 17% as trans men; the remainder of trans respondents (33%) did not specify beyond the umbrella term trans. 63% of people who identify as trans also identify as gender diverse.

15% of respondents identify as gender diverse, which we are here using as an umbrella term that includes agender, bigender, genderfluid, genderqueer, and non-binary identities among others.

Two-Spirit people account for only 1% of participants.

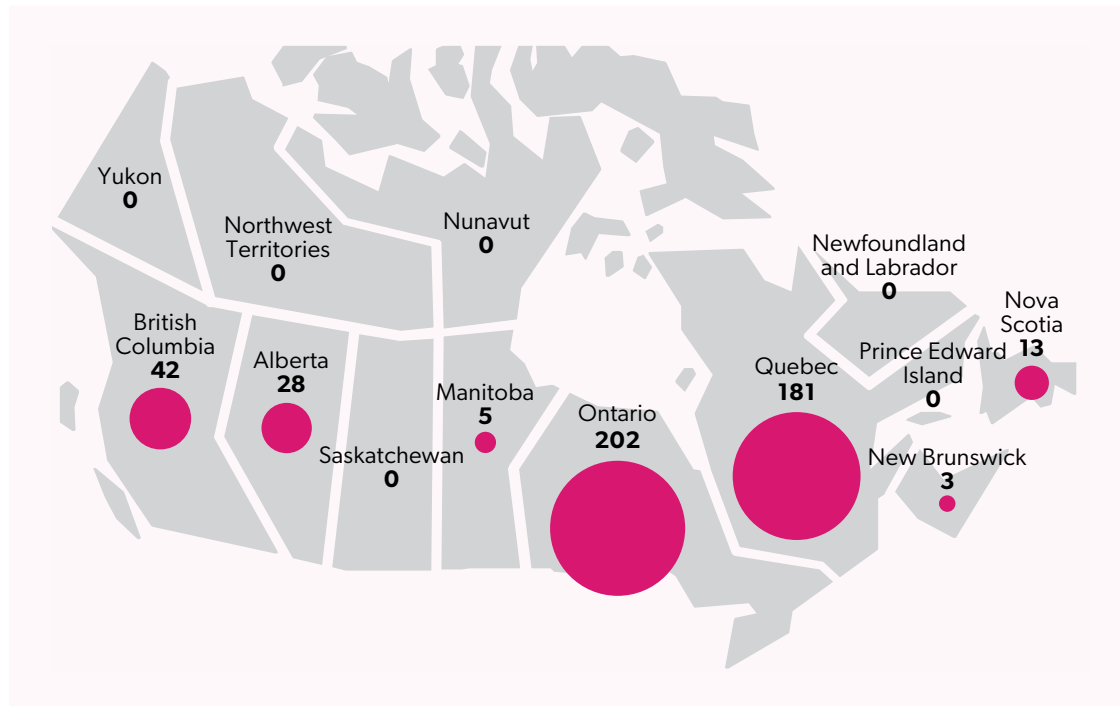
One of the limitations of this survey is that the selection options make it difficult to code demographic data in a way that is attentive to the nuance of identity and experience. Sorting respondents into demographic categories, though important for statistical analysis, goes against the spirit of the question. A significant number of respondents reported their identity only as “Male/Man/Masc” (41%), and several reported their identity only as “Female/Woman/Femme” (4%). Given that these types of responses do not specify whether the participant is cis or trans, we cannot sort them into the above umbrella categories with any certainty. It is foundational that this report understands that trans and cis men are men and trans and cis women are women.



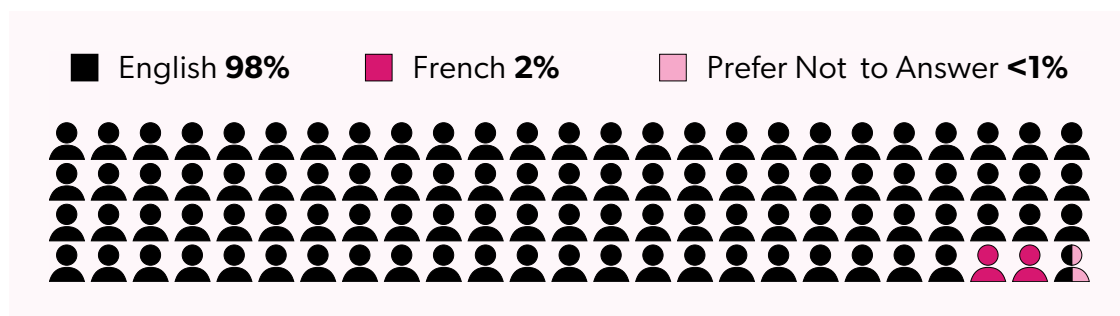
The majority of our participants identify exclusively as gay (56%), followed by Bi+ (31%), which we use as an umbrella category for people who identify as bisexual, pansexual, and queer only, as well as people who identify with multiple combinations of orientations. 1 in 10 respondents are lesbian (10%). Heterosexual people represent a vanishingly small portion of participants (1%), as do people who identify exclusively as asexual (1%).

As noted previously, asexuality is a spectrum that includes several identities that may overlap with other sexual orientations. People on the ace spectrum make up 5% of the survey’s total respondents.

Region and Language

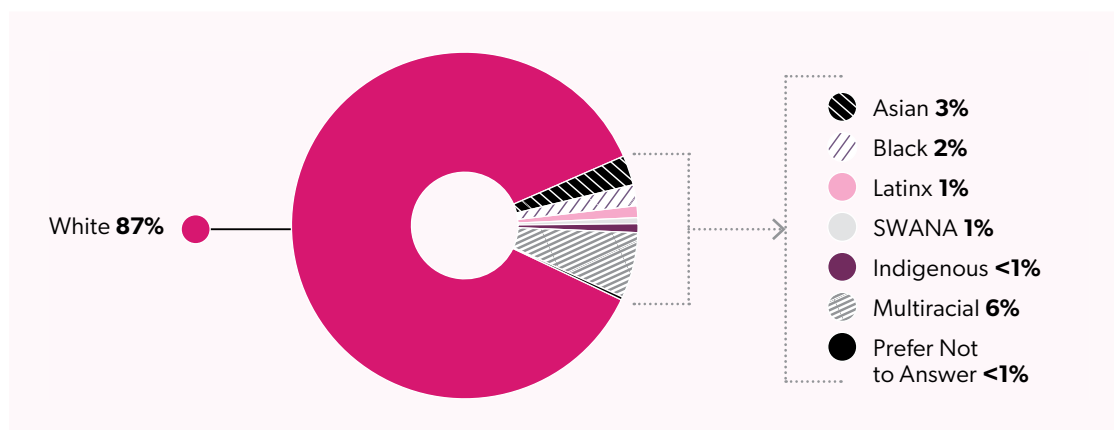


The majority of respondents currently reside in Ontario (63%), followed by British Columbia (20%). Representation drops off sharply for Alberta (6%), Quebec (4%), and Saskatchewan (3%). There is at least one respondent from Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward island. There are no respondents from Nunavut, the Yukon, or the Northwest Territories.



Almost every participant primarily consumes media in English. 2 respondents primarily consume media in French and 1 person primarily consumes media in a language that is neither English nor French.

Race



The overwhelming majority of survey respondents identify as white only (87%). The next largest grouping of survey respondents identifies as Asian (3%), followed by Black (2%), and SWANA (1%). Less than 1% of respondents identify as Hispanic, Indigenous, or Jewish or otherwise preferred not to answer the question.

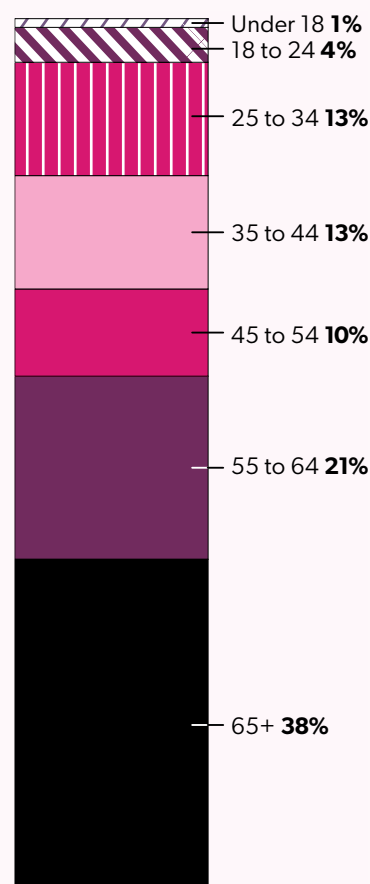
This demographic breakdown points to a critical shortcoming in our data collection of Canadian media consumers in that it disproportionately reflects a white experience.

Age

People older than 65 were, by far, the most common type of participant (38%), followed by people between the ages of 55 and 64 (21%). The 35 to 44 year old and 25 to 34 year old brackets were equally represented (13%) with 44 to 54 year olds lagging slightly behind (10%). A mere 4% of respondents are under 25.

This breakdown differs drastically from that of our survey of industry professionals. These demographics skew sharply toward older respondents, likely reflecting *Xtra's* audience.

It is important to note that Gen Z has negligible representation in this research project; the percentage of respondents who are under 25 years old sits at a scant 4% in both surveys. This is significant because we see much higher



rates of 2SLGBTQIA+ identification among younger generations. When the 2018 Survey on Safety in Public and Private Spaces polled Canadians aged 15 and up, over 30% of the 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents were 15–24 years old ([Statistics Canada 2022](#)). Many 2SLGBTQIA+ voices have yet to be represented in the Canadian media industries.

Research Limitations

One of the major hurdles to conducting research on authentic 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is a dearth of demographic information. The most recent Census of Population in 2021 was the first to collect data on gender in addition to assigned sex at birth sex, finally including trans and non-binary Canadians in their measurement. To date, the Census of Canada still does not ask about sexual orientation, meaning there is no authoritative data on how many Canadians identify as gay, lesbian, bi, pan, ace, or otherwise queer. The few statistics that do exist come from the voluntary CCHS survey and from census figures for same-sex couples—here meaning married or common-law. Strikingly, the latter omits:

- many asexual and aromantic people;
- bi, pan, or queer people married to someone of a different gender;
- 2SLGBTQIA+ people who are single or in relationships not recognized by the census.

Census data also regularly excludes people who are unhoused, and an overwhelming number of unhoused people are 2SLGBTQIA+ ([Abi-Nakhoul 2023](#)).

This is a research problem as well as a social and economic one. Census data assists the federal government in determining how to allocate over \$600 billion in funding each year, \$780 million of which is being invested in the Canadian media industry through the CMF, Telefilm, the Indigenous Screen Office, and the National Film Board of Canada ([Government of Canada 2024](#)). Without valuable demographic data, it is difficult to measure the degree to which 2SLGBTQIA+ people are underrepresented in the federally-funded media industries.

Once again, representation matters. The challenges of data collection are compounded by the fact that many 2SLGBTQIA+ people still do not feel comfortable self-identifying. Moreover, 2SLGBTQIA+ people regularly find themselves thwarted by the insufficiency of representative sex, gender, and orientation categories. Even well-meaning advocacy groups continue to omit intersex options and limit respondents from selecting multiple gender identities

or sexual orientations that reflect their lived experiences (e.g. demisexual + pansexual). The result is that many 2SLGBTQIA+ people don't feel reflected or included in Canadian society.

Authentic media representation can lead to profound social change by promoting greater understanding and acceptance. Attentive demographic reporting can help support future projects on 2SLGBTQIA+ representation by allowing findings to be put into context.

Appendix C: Glossary

2SLGBTQIA+: An acronym standing for Two-Spirit (**2S**), **l**esbian, **g**ay, **b**isexual, **t**ransgender, **q**ueer, **i**ntersex, and **a**sexual.¹ The **+** sign is inclusive of a diverse range of gender expressions and sexual and romantic orientations, including agender, non-binary, aromantic, and pansexual among many others. Placing Two-Spirit at the beginning of the acronym reflects that Indigenous peoples were the first communities to acknowledge and respect gender and sexual diversity on this land.

Both language and identity are fluid. When referring to others' identities, it is important to respect the words they use to describe themselves and avoid making assumptions. Sexual orientation is determined by self-identification and attraction (or lack thereof); it is not determined by whether one has a partner nor is it determined by the gender or sexual orientation of one's partner.

AAA Games: Also known as Triple-A, an informal classification used to describe videogames produced or distributed by a major developer. These games are usually developed by an immense team comprising hundreds of professionals who have highly structured and specialized roles, including design, animation, sound, programming, and marketing. Ubisoft is an example of a AAA publisher.

Mid-market videogames developed by smaller (50–100) teams are sometimes called AA (Double-A) games. These development studios tend to have more freedom to innovate compared to AAA studios, but are often still beholden to their investors' demands, particularly around risk-limitation.

Allonormativity: The dominant cultural attitude that presupposes all people experience sexual and romantic attraction. Allonormativity is the driving force behind compulsory sexuality, the social belief that sexuality is obligatory. It is closely related to amatonormativity, the social, economic, and legal systems that privilege and incentivise romantic relationships. Allonormativity also leads to the erasure and pathologization of people who are asexual and aromantic, also known as aphobia.

Asexual: Sometimes abbreviated to ace, an individual who does not experience sexual attraction. Asexual people may or may not experience forms of romantic, aesthetic, or sensual attraction, and may also use terms like lesbian, gay, bi, pan, queer, straight, etc. As an umbrella term, ace includes people who experience sexual attraction only under certain circumstances. People who are demisexual, for instance, experience sexual attraction only after they have formed a strong emotional

¹ 2SLGBTQIA+ terminology is continuously evolving. Previous acronyms have included *questioning* in place of or addition to *queer*; this was especially common in youth support settings.

or romantic connection to someone. Consequently, asexuality is often understood as a spectrum that encompasses several identities, including ace-flux, demisexual, and gray-ace among others.

Asexuality is not the same as abstinence or celibacy, which are terms that reference behavior rather than attraction. People who are asexual can have partners and can engage in a range of sexual behaviors without undermining their identity.

People who experience sexual attraction and do not consider themselves asexual are referred to as *allosexual*, a term that merely defines the ability to experience sexual attraction toward others.

Assigned Sex at Birth: The classification of a person as male, female, or intersex based on characteristics at birth, including internal and external genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes. AFAB is often used as a shorthand for someone who is assigned female at birth and AMAB for someone assigned male at birth.

Bisexual: Often shortened to bi, people who experience sexual or romantic (biromantic) attraction to people of more than one gender. The “bi” typically refers to genders similar to and different from one’s own. Bi+ is often used to be inclusive of other identities, including pansexual, fluid, and queer.

Cisgender: Often shortened to cis, a term used to refer to a person whose gender aligns with their sex assigned at birth. The prefix cis comes from the Latin preposition for “on the same side of.” It is independent from sexual orientation.

Cishet: People who are both cisgender and heterosexual. This term is not pejorative.

Cisheteronormativity: The dominant cultural attitude that assumes and imposes a continuity between sex, gender, and sexual orientation. The term combines the words *cisnormativity* (the assumption that everyone is or should be cisgender) and *heteronormativity* (the assumption that everyone is or should be heterosexual) to reflect the socially-imposed causality between the two. Cisheteronormativity includes the implicit notion that being cisgender and heterosexual is the “default” identity and that all other genders and orientations are consequently outside the norm. As a system of privilege, cisheteronormativity intersects with sexism, racism, ableism, classism, and other forms of systemic oppression.

Gay: People who are sexually or romantically attracted to people of the same gender. While it often refers to men who experience attraction to men, people with other gender identities may also use this term to describe themselves.

Gender Expression: The external presentation and communication of gender through any combination of clothing, hairstyle, behaviors, body language, mannerisms, vocal patterns, and so on. Pronouns and chosen names can also be a form of gender expression. Given that gender is socially constructed, understandings of gender expressions relating to femininity, masculinity, both, and/or neither may differ across social contexts. A person’s gender expression does not automatically correspond to their gender identity.

Gender Identity: A person's individual experience of their own gender. Gender itself is a set of socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes that a given society ascribes to a person's assigned sex. Gender identity can be the same as or different from a person's sex assigned at birth and is not necessarily the same as their gender expression. People who do not identify with or experience any gender often use the term agender to describe themselves.

Gender Non-Conforming: A term that refers to people who reject social stereotypes around gender and/or people who expand ideas of gender identity or expression. Gender non-conforming is not synonymous with trans, non-binary, or other identities, although they can overlap. Cisgender people can be gender non-conforming.

Indie Games: Short for independent videogame, a term that refers to games created by individuals or small development teams without the financial backing of a publisher. They tend to be sold through digital distribution channels like Steam rather than popular retailers.

Intersectionality: Coined by legal scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, the term refers to the way multiple social identities overlap with and affect each other, producing distinct experiences of oppression. Importantly, intersectionality is not a theory of addition. A Black lesbian woman does not experience racism, sexism, and homophobia as discrete forms of oppression but as forms of inequality that exacerbate one another. Her experience of racism will differ from that of a Black man, and her experience of homophobia will differ from that of a white lesbian. Meaningful efforts to dismantle cisheteronormativity must also be attentive to the way cisnormativity and heteronormativity intersect with racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of systemic oppression.

Intersex: A term that refers to people who are born with sex characteristics medically associated with male and female bodies. These characteristics include variations in hormones, chromosomes, and internal and external genitalia as well as any combination of any primary or secondary sex characteristics. Intersex refers to biological sex and is distinct from gender identity.

Lesbian: Typically, women who experience romantic and/or sexual attraction to other women. However, the above definition relies on a rigid gender binary that excludes people who do not identify as women (e.g. non-binary lesbian; gender fluid lesbian). A more inclusive definition is a non-man who is attracted exclusively to non-men. This second definition is more representative of our research participants.

Transgender: Often shortened to trans, a term that refers to a person whose gender identity does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. The prefix trans comes from the Latin preposition meaning "on a different side from." Other groups of people who transcend social expectations around gender identity and expression—including androgynous, gender diverse, and non-binary individuals among others—

may use trans as an umbrella term, but not all do. It is important to respect the terms people use to describe themselves. The term trans is independent of sexual orientation.

Two Spirit: Sometimes written as 2-Spirit or 2S, an umbrella term used by some Indigenous people of Turtle Island (North America) that encompasses sexual, gender, and/or spiritual identity. This term should not be used by people who are not Indigenous and should only be used to describe an Indigenous person if they use it to describe themselves.

Queer: An umbrella term that refers to a wide variety of people across a spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations. The term has been reclaimed from its pejorative use.

Unions: Unions are organizations formed by employees who join together to negotiate for fair wages, reasonable hours, better benefits, and safe working conditions. Union members typically elect staff who advocate on workers' behalf and ensure that management fulfills the terms of their union contract, a document known as a "collective agreement."

Appendix D: Additional Resources

Industry Unions & Screen offices

Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists

<https://www.actra.ca>

Black Screen Office

<https://bso-ben.ca>

Canadian Actors' Equity Association

<https://www.caea.com>

Canadian Labour Congress

<https://canadianlabour.ca>

Canadian Media Producers Association

<https://cmpa.ca>

Directors Guild of Canada

<https://www.dgc.ca>

Disability Screen Office

<https://www.dso-orphe.ca>

Game Workers Coalition

<https://gameworkerscoalition.org>

Indigenous Screen Office

<https://iso-bea.ca>

International Alliance of Theatrical, Stage Employees

<https://iatse.net>

Société des auteurs de radio, télévision et cinéma

<http://www.sartec.qc.ca>

Writer's Guild of Canada

<https://www.wgc.ca>

Other Resources

Asexual Visibility and Education Network

The world's largest online asexual community. It also serves as a robust archive of resources on asexuality.

asexuality.org

HAVEN Online

A national online reporting platform for incidents of inappropriate behavior in the workplace developed in partnership with the Director's Guild of Canada and the Canadian Actors' Equity Association. <https://www.actra.ca/haven>

Egale

A Canadian organization that champions 2SLGBTQIA+ equality through research, education, awareness, and legal advocacy. <https://egale.ca>

Intersex Campaign for Equality

An organization promoting human rights and equality for all intersex people through art, education, and action. <https://www.intersexequality.com>

Workers in Transition Guide

A practical guide for union representatives and trans union members from the Canadian Labour Congress. <https://canadianlabour.ca/workers-in-transition-guide>

Working for Change: Understanding the Employment Experiences of Two Spirit, Trans, and Nonbinary People in Canada

A report developed by Egale that presents findings related to the employment, underemployment, and unemployment experiences of Two-Spirit, trans, and non-binary people in Canada. <https://egale.ca/awareness/wfc>

Working with Queer Performers

Industry guidelines intended to encourage meaningful change in how screenwriters, agents, casting directors, directors, and producers treat 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals. Developed by outACTRAto. <https://www.actratoronto.com/committees/outactrato/working-with-queer-performers>

Xtra Magazine

Xtra is a non-profit online magazine and community platform covering 2SLGBTQIA+ culture, politics, relationships, and health. <https://xtramagazine.com>