#HerFrameMatters

PROTOCOL GUIDELINE 2024

REELWORLD

SCREEN INSTITUTE | FILM FESTIVAL | DATABASE
BLACK | INDIGENOUS | PEOPLE OF COLOUR

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I don't think we've really begun to dig as deeply as we should into the very specific and intersecting experiences of racially diverse women and people in this country.

— Canadian Broadcast Executive

"

Is there good representation and depiction of racially diverse women in canadian content?

I think there's not been an emphasis on depicting these stories because racially diverse women have not been the curators of content in this country. I feel like our society or our country, or however general you'd like to get, has a lot of work to do in terms of decentering the White gaze and the belief that racialized and marginalized stories will be too hard to connect to.

...I do think they are slowly starting to change. But I think until some of that happens, and there's better decision-makers, or more diverse decision-makers, and marginalized and racialized people at the table, making decisions about what content is going forward, I don't think we're going to see the spectrum of human experience that we should.

So I'm hopeful...But no, I don't think we've done a very good job. I think we have a really, really, really long way to go to really, truly, and authentically depict that wide, wide range of experience on screen.

— Canadian Broadcast Executive
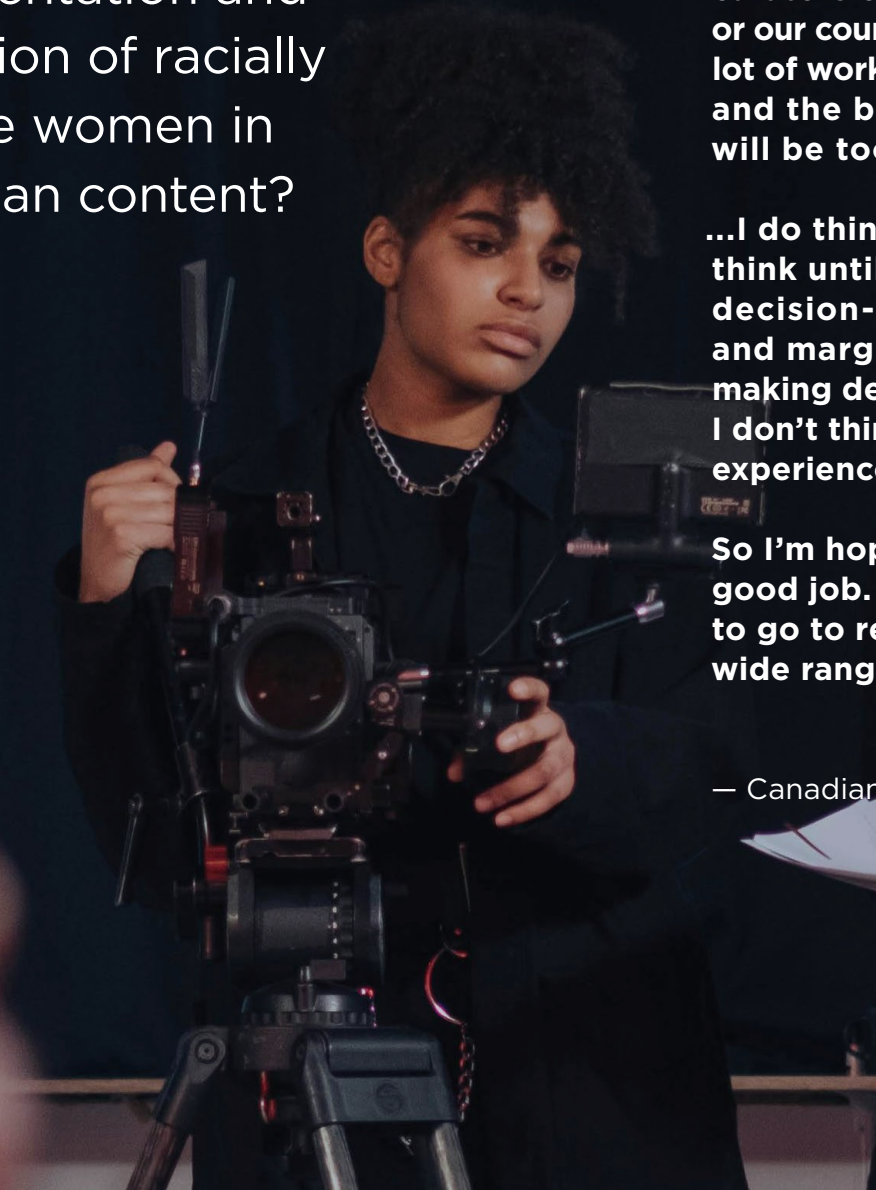
Introduction

The Canadian screen industries have undergone significant changes in recent years due to several driving factors:

1. The changing demographics of Canada are increasing the diversity of who tells our stories and who consumes these stories.

2. A greater global reach of, and interest in, Canadian productions thanks to the success of programs such as *Little Mosque on the Prairie, The Porter,* and *Mohawk Girls*.[1]

3. Changing demands of younger and more diverse generations who are more media savvy, committed to social equity, and not hesitant to protest or boycott products or messaging they view as inauthentic.

The Canadian film and television industry has more recently tried to ensure greater representation and more equitable access to the resources needed to tell Canada's stories, including the stories of Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latine, MENA (Middle Eastern and North African), and Women of Colour (henceforward 'Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour').

Of course, there's much more that can be done. Recent research including the 2023 Women In View report demonstrates the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Indigenous and racialized women in the Canadian screen industries. Our research further demonstrates that many Canadian women creatives and performers from underrepresented groups have experienced industry efforts that are tokenistic, performative in nature, and inherently harmful.

Reelworld Foundation, with the support of Reelworld Screen Institute, has created this Protocol Guideline to benefit everyone in Canada's screen industries—for the creators, and ultimately the consumers, of Canadian content. This work has been done to gather and convey the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour. It's based upon our collective lived experiences working at a variety of jobs and levels within the Canadian screen industries and our understanding of the ways that industry practices have contributed to one-dimensional and chronically stereotypical portrayals of women from underrepresented groups.

These protocols are culturally appropriate and ethical guidelines that will help you comply with Narrative Positioning policies as required by the major funding bodies. Considering the work to modernize Canada's broadcasting framework by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), it's also an

opportune time to rethink how we tell stories and represent Canadians both to themselves and to the world.

Our goal isn't to change individuals. It's to help change the systems, practices, and mindsets within the Canadian screen industries.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the participants who contributed to our research study #HerFrameMatters, and who ultimately helped us better understand the contemporary struggles for equity, diversity, and inclusion in the Canadian screen industries. We are indebted to the hundreds of participants who directly contributed to our findings and agreed upon protocols: everyone from executives, producers, directors, and writers to performers, crew members, and audience.

We worked with several collaborators throughout the process including, but not limited to: ACTRA, Ipsos, and McMaster University (listed in alphabetical order).

We would also like to thank the following individuals for their contributions:

Dr. Patience Adamu (PhD), Lead, Research Activities Writer

Ronak Karami, Research Manager

Tazeen Ahmed, Research Coordinator for Interviews and Focus Groups

Samah Ali, Research Coordinator for Series and Film Content Analysis

Shivani Saini, Strategic Consultant

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We also want to express our deep gratitude to the Reelworld board and staff who worked tirelessly on this initiative.

Sincerely,

Tonya Williams
Founder & Executive Director, Reelworld Screen Institute and Reelworld Foundation

Patricia Bebia Mawa
Board Chair, Reelworld Foundation

How to Use This Guideline

The #HerFrameMatters Research Study conducted by the Reelworld Foundation provided the starting point for rethinking the historical practices of the Canadian screen industries. The aim is to improve the working conditions of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour in the industries, and to create more authentic and nuanced women characters on screen. We have highlighted some general insights from the #HerFrameMatters Research Study to provide context, but we urge you to read it as a whole.

This Protocol Guideline is motivated by three key ideas:

1. It is possible to tell more genuine and nuanced stories involving Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour characters.

2. The changes to industry practices and mindsets will improve these stories and improve the working lives of these women in the industry itself.

3. A significant component of this involves a greater and more active presence of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour at higher-level decision-making positions in the Canadian screen industries.

Each section of this Protocol Guideline highlights key issues that we've identified through the research and provides direction on how to address the unequal and unfair realities faced by Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour. It closes with examples of what things look like when they go right, as well as key guiding questions that can help you and your staff make the best decisions for your production, cast, and crew.

SECTION 1

INDUSTRY PRACTICES AND THE HARM THEY CAUSE

This section offers an understanding of the harm that is being enacted on audiences through the media. By understanding the impact up front, creators of media content can be more thoughtful in their development and creative decisions.

DEFAULT IDEAS AND PRACTICES ARE INDIRECTLY DISCRIMINATORY

Everyone has biases. We come from many different worlds and take on the likes and dislikes, loves and hates of those worldviews and cultures. We evaluate things in terms of our own frame of reference. What turns these preferences and worldviews into problematic practices is when they become naturalized as default practices, as "the way things have always been done" and "the stories that audiences have always wanted".

The Canadian screen industries continue to privilege or centre people and stories that are White and male, and more generally to be exclusive or dismissive of other experiences. Often described as the "White Gaze" or the "White Gates", criteria for excellence and "screen-worthiness" are often grounded in past perspectives developed when the industry was almost exclusively dominated by White men who made films and TV programs primarily for White audiences. Their lens is the default, although it no longer reflects the society they work in.

Even people who intend to do things differently, despite their best intentions, still often repeat the old ways of doing things, which reproduces the inequalities and forms of discrimination we are addressing.[2]

There is ample evidence that Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour have not been adequately or appropriately portrayed on screen. Even today, these stereotypical portrayals of women abound: the "angry Black woman", Eurocentric depictions of Asian women (such as the presumption that they must have black hair), Latine women as maids or caregivers, and the portrayal of Indigenous women as victims or sex workers. There is also research that shows that the presence of Women of Colour on screen is often driven by their characters' proximity and importance to male characters, as shown by the Bechdel-Wallace Test of whether a script portrays a relationship between women that doesn't involve men.[3]

Research shows that the chronic representation of stereotypical roles on screen amplifies existing biases and contributes to the perpetuation of violence against Women of Colour. Closely tied to these flawed ideologies, chronic stereotypes become deeply held beliefs that drive behaviour. For example, research has found relationships between exposure to media aggression and a tendency to see the committing of crimes such as rape and domestic violence as acceptable.[4]

Today's media landscape produces information that portrays little bits of a much bigger picture, which many people in the audience take as the whole picture. Making the "bits" incorrectly or inauthentically means misrepresenting the reality of things.

WHAT AUDIENCES ARE SAYING ABOUT ON-SCREEN PORTRAYALS

Reelworld engaged Ipsos to conduct qualitative research to understand how a sample of Canadian women viewers feel about the depiction of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour on the country's most-watched television shows. The research participants spoke of the need for improved, authentic, and nuanced depictions:

"…symbolic violence is a very real thing. Racism might not look like you physically harming someone, but the [shows] you put out, that's a form of symbolic violence. Racialized communities being harmed, [this harm] being perpetuated, other people will perceive that, and think it's okay to harm racialized communities."

— Audience Member

"[I] think we internalize a lot of it. I remember my mom used to use whitening products on me as a child because [of the] prevalence of Eurocentric standards of beauty. It was not attractive to be [a] darker skin tone. I thought I was ugly because I didn't see representation and it's hard not to internalize the standards that were everywhere."

— Audience Member

"

There are few stereotypes about Indigenous people because of very little representation of them. If there are, they're once again the token Indigenous person in the show… It's deeply racist and comes from a place of White supremacy when we see these images. Even if an Indigenous woman is to wear anything scandalous, she is going to be ostracized for it. It's like a woman isn't even free to express herself sexually without the concern that she's going to be called a sex worker…

— Audience Member

While in the past audiences were more homogenous, contemporary audiences are more heterogeneous and more highly educated and are seeking thoughtful, responsible storytelling. Thus, the kinds of tales the Canadian screen industries default to may very well not be what audiences actually want to see in today's context. Changing the stories and depictions of Women of Colour as well as the discriminatory practices that often occur on set is not only the right thing to do but there is a strong business case to do so.

WHAT BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND WOMEN OF COLOUR SAY ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES

It's common for women creatives from underrepresented groups to "code switch" or "cover" to become more relatable to industry leaders and to secure opportunities. Code-switching is defined as "the ways in which a member of an underrepresented group (consciously or unconsciously) adjusts their language, syntax, grammatical structure, behaviour, and appearance to fit into the dominant culture".

Code-switching and covering can ultimately impact the ability of women creatives to produce authentic and nuanced depictions because they are translating them into a "White lens" that can't understand or believe those experiences— meaning that these creatives are not able to bring their full selves to their work.

Performers we interviewed also spoke of "shadeism" or "colourism" which is another issue that affects the portrayal of Women of Colour. This form of discrimination favours lighter skin tones over darker ones. It perpetuates a bias that correlates lighter skin tones with Western notions of beauty and status. This bias undermines the diversity of hair types and skin tones and can lead to typecasting or exclusion based on physical features, rather than talent or role suitability of the performer.

Default settings can suppress Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour performers from fulfilling their potential as they have been locked into particular types of roles based not on their acting skills, but rather on the body they were born into. Assumptions about Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour performers—what clothing they'll wear, the make-up products they'll need—continue to reproduce inequalities and lead to inaccurate depictions of women characters.
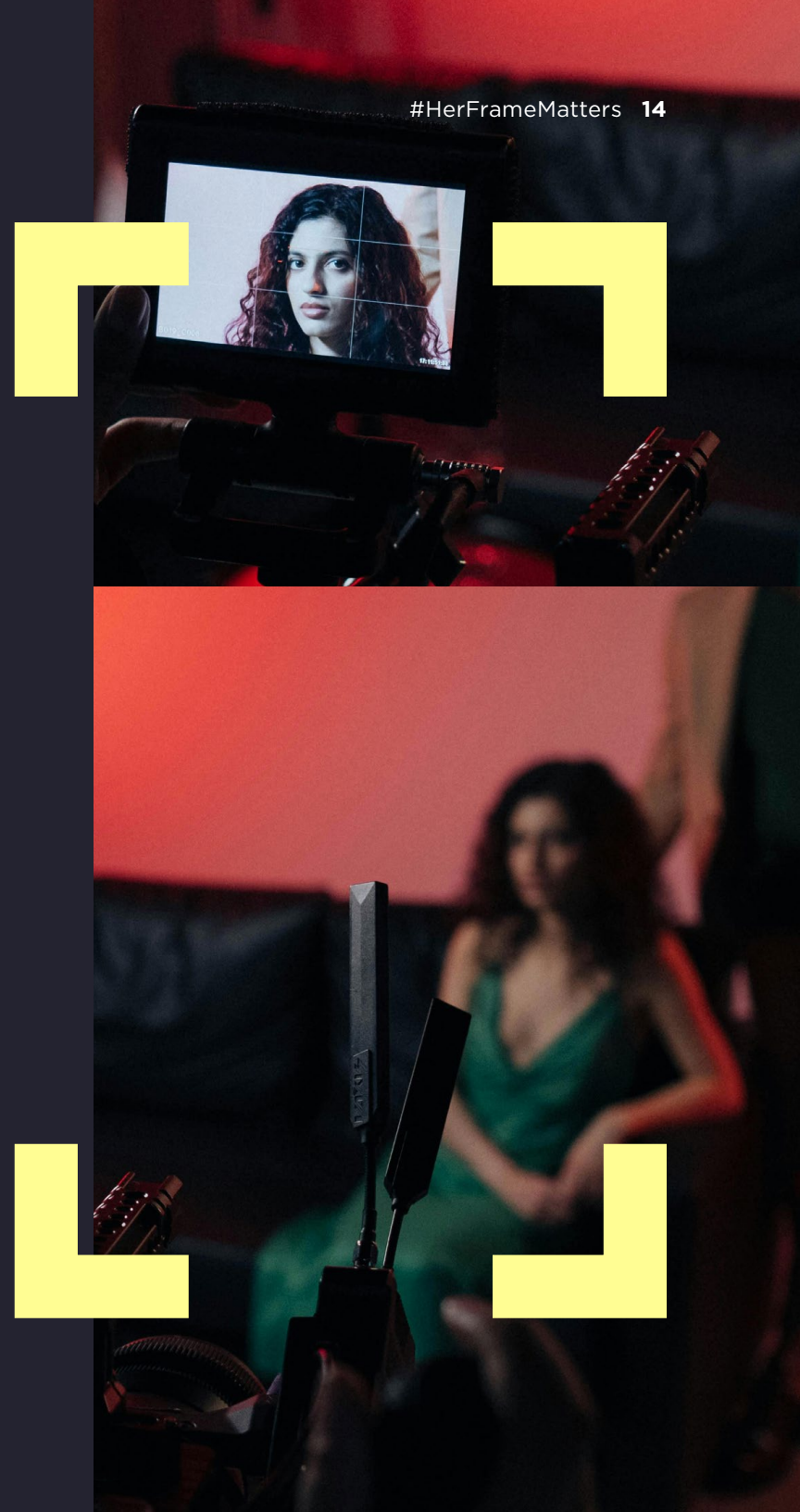
ADDRESSING DIRECT AND INDIRECT DISCRIMINATION IN THE CURRENT SCREEN ECOSYSTEM

How can we make sure that characters and stories are authentic? Authentic and nuanced depictions of women require changes to both project development and the day-to-day work on sets. It's important to review all stages of the development and production process in collaboration with people who can help ensure the genuineness of the characters, relationships, and plot.

To address direct and indirect discrimination we recommend that leaders on set:

1. Conduct research into the characters, their backgrounds and backstories, and the other aspects that ground a character in a scene and a narrative, including ensuring that speaking patterns and dialects are appropriate and that the narrative and character are made to be "well-positioned"[5].

2. Ensure the needed infrastructure is present, including appropriate make-up and hair supplies, lighting, set design, etc.

3. Edit, frame, and market the project to maintain the authenticity of the characters and the story.

Our research shows that the number of women, especially Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour, in the Canadian screen industries is not proportional to the number of women in the Canadian population. But representation alone is not enough—it's insufficient to think of this as only a numbers game. The transformative work needs to be done in collaboration with people who know and understand the experiences, backgrounds, and backstories of the characters and the plot—and if the characters and stories pertain to Indigenous and racialized women, they need to be involved across all stages of project development.

In this context, it's important to remember how the social capital you may have "earned" through your privilege, is not as easily gained by Black, Indigenous and Women of Colour. Your social capital can be used to extend the table[6]—to enable others to have the same chance at success—and this should be a consideration in developing a project from the early research stage. This, as much as anything else, will transform the industry and the stories we tell. In other words, find the budget to enhance diversity and inclusion, hire and train more Black, Indigenous and Women of Colour, and provide paid mentoring.

Positionality and Social Distance

The idea of positionality helps us understand our position in society and conceptualize and tell our stories. Positionality is the "personal values, views, and location in time and space that influence how one engages with and understands the world".[7] Reflecting on our positionality makes it possible for us to see how society grants or withholds privilege from us. When we talk about particular forms of privilege or disadvantage, we're talking about two parallel phenomena:

1. The ways in which society puts certain kinds of blocks and blinders up for some groups of people.

2. Not only the *absence* of those blocks and blinders for people from dominant groups but often a complete lack of awareness that they exist for other people.

This can be measured by "social distance": the nearness or distance, i.e. familiarity or strangeness, in the relationship between two people or two groups of people (such as between a creative and a character or a creative and a story).

Where there are stories that live at a larger social distance from our own social position (for example: for male creatives, those featuring women or for White creatives, those featuring People of Colour)—we need to learn more about those experiences, those social identities, how people from these groups act and react to certain things, why these things matter to them, and so on. The only way to gain these insights where there is a greater social distance between creatives and the story being portrayed is to ask, invite to collaborate, and humbly listen to the input of those we consult.

A Note to Producers and Line Producers

The authenticity of stories with Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour as characters is not just the responsibility of the writers who research a story and produce a script. Canadian producers and line producers play a critical role in improving both the faithful portrayal of characters and stories and the working conditions of Indigenous and racialized women on set.

Producers need to make sure that the scripts they option and develop are respectful and responsibly present the characters and narratives. This means asking the hard questions, from how characters and their backstories are written to ensuring that all of the creative choices involved are done with an eye toward both creating the best content and the most nuanced and genuine visual story possible. They also need to make sure that they hire the department leads who are not only the most technically qualified but who can also build the staff and practices that go against the default settings and are most appropriate for and inclusive of all cast and crew.

Protocols for Producers and Line Producers

✔ Acknowledge your positionality, preconceptions, and biases

✔ Acknowledge the social distance between you and the story

✔ Decentre the default assumptions about how things are done, and challenge your department heads and crews to rethink how to be inclusive

✔ Make sure that your department heads have the necessary budget and resources to make this happen

✔ Make sure your cast and crew are all credited and compensated appropriately for all of their contributions to the production when outside their normal role

✔ If you don't know, ask consultants, ask them again, and hear what they say

Project Development and Greenlighting Content

BE CLEAR ABOUT THE ROLE OF RACE, ETHNICITY, AND CULTURE IN THE CHARACTER'S BACKSTORY AND NARRATIVE ARC

In our discussions with Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour in the industry, several themes emerged that should be avoided.

Trauma, violence, and servitude narratives: Many Canadian narratives featuring Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour characters are rooted in trauma, violence, and conditions of servitude. They are often insensitive and perpetuate harmful stereotypes. It's important to tell a range of stories including portrayals of real-life women across all walks of life in which race or ethnicity are not necessarily the main focus. Stories can encompass numerous facets of life, such as love, friendship, family, and more. There should be space to integrate these women into stories that have nothing to do with their race or ethnicity.

The White Saviour narrative: This is a common storytelling trope where White characters are heroes who rescue or save Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour, who are portrayed as helpless or in need. While it may promote a "feel good story", it often centres Whiteness, perpetuates stereotypes and racial hierarchies, and undermines the agency of the

Indigenous and racialized women characters. Media should try to centre the story on the perspectives of these characters and their resilience.

Orientalism narratives: Orientalism is rooted in historical and literary narratives where the East or the "Orient" is represented in an exoticized way. It often portrays oversimplified representations of Eastern cultures as backward and uncivilized against a more progressive and "superior" West. These narratives are rooted in colonialist attitudes. It assigns specific "othering" stereotypical traits and qualities to Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour that are rooted in the White Gaze and colonial ideologies, for example, depicting Middle Eastern, North African, Arab, and South Asian women as oppressed, East Asian women as quiet and helpless or sexualized, etc. Characters are often shown to find "enlightenment" by rejecting their "barbaric" cultures and adopting those of the West. Media should avoid centring Whiteness as the pinnacle of progress and power.

When developing a narrative where a woman's race is critical to the narrative arc, it's imperative to create a backstory. Creating the backstory of women characters from under-represented groups is critical to creating nuance and authenticity, even with smaller roles (i.e. exploring how she *became* a drug addict, rather than her simply being a drug addict).

Biographical content is widely available to help inform the development of characters. Do not exploit Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour in your cast and crew for knowledge and education unless you are paying them for this service. Further, one individual from a specific race, ethnicity, or culture cannot be expected to act as the overall expert and representative of that underrepresented group. Nor does a person's race or ethnicity represent everything about them or what they are capable of doing; these markers of identity are distinct. It's imperative for writing and development teams to always conduct the appropriate research to understand these underrepresented characters and communities, and through the right means.

THE BURDEN OF PROOF OF AN INTERESTED AUDIENCE SHOULD LIE ON THE FUNDERS

Our research shows that production companies and distributors want to receive pitches from underrepresented creatives. However, Canadian broadcasters and distributors are also incredibly risk-averse and are working in the shadow of U.S. screen industries, which implicitly drives the kinds of projects that are approved.

Having data on audience measurement, the success of similar projects in the past, and other elements important to the decision-making process is critical. However given that there is no industry-standard research that focuses on insights from women and people from underrepresented backgrounds, this information has been gathered on an ad hoc basis (usually by the creatives themselves using whatever information they can gather) and is frequently questioned, more deeply critiqued, or outright rejected by decision-makers, particularly if it does not align with funders' default assumptions about the audience.

What's needed is a unified source for data on the make-up of the industry and audiences and the past successes of projects. It cannot solely be the responsibility of women and marginalized creatives to produce this evidence. Rather, because it impacts the entire screen industry in Canada, it should be an industry-wide initiative.

Protocols for Project Development and Greenlighting Content

✔ Do the research needed to intricately understand the characters, the story, and all of the nuances (including culture, language, dialect, accent, and default assumptions about Westernized notions of beauty or a performer's appropriateness for a character)

✔ Be transparent about the importance of the woman character's race, ethnicity, and culture to the overall story and the character's identity and story arc

✔ Don't default to stories of violence, trauma, or servitude for Women of Colour characters

✔ Negotiate whose responsibility it is to provide audience and market research and ensure that all projects being considered are treated similarly

✔ If you don't know, ask consultants, ask them again, and hear what they say

Casting

"OPEN ETHNICITY" CASTING CALLS

Agents and casting directors have as important a role to play as writers and directors of photography. While in recent years there has been a greater trend toward "open to diversity" or "all ethnicities" calls, oftentimes this is perceived by Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour as:

- Wanting to avoid the perception of discrimination

- A lack of knowledge about what directors and producers want in their cast or the place of race, ethnicity, and gender in the character's story

- The lack of the correct language or vocabulary to describe characters from underrepresented groups in casting notices

- An emphasis on trying to match the physical appearance of auditioning performers with a stereotyped view of who should get the role

Casting directors are often perceived as only putting diverse actors into background or secondary roles (a common example includes the Black Best Friend). Some performers report that they have only ever booked one "open ethnicity" role and usually get hired for roles that require an accent. One performer told a story about a Canadian casting director who didn't believe the performer's background when it did not match what they thought people from Group X "looked like". Another performer reported having auditioned for an "open ethnicity" role and finding out that only a very small proportion of the roles were given to "ethnic" people. Other accounts state that performers often feel demeaned or tokenized by "open ethnicity" calls.

One of two things should be considered for "open ethnicity" calls. They should either truly be for roles that are being cast without regard to race or ethnicity—in which case, it needs to be made clear to talent and agents that everyone is welcome to audition and the best performer for the character will be chosen. Or, casting directors need to be specific about the particular racial or ethnic characteristics they are looking for.

Typecasting

CAST THE BEST PERFORMER FOR THE ROLE, WHETHER IT MATCHES THE MENTAL IMAGE OR NOT

Casting based on ethnic or racial stereotypes is disrespectful because it views Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour performers only in terms of their identity characteristics and ignores their acting skills. Stereotype casting also prevents casting directors from finding the best woman for the role regardless of their ethnicity so the production can represent the world as it is.

In auditions, Indigenous and racialized women performers sometimes receive very little information. They may not know if they're being chosen because of their ethnicity or race, or if the casting director is expecting a particular kind of accent, or the link between the role and the race/ethnicity/culture/other identity characteristics of the performer.

Because casting directors have such an influence on translating the character on the page to a performer on screen, they need to be very clear with themselves, the director and producers, and the performers they audition, about whether or not and why race or ethnicity matters to the character or the story and about who is "qualified" for the part.

Protocols for Casting Directors

✔ Create and/or cross-check casting calls with people from the relevant underrepresented groups regarding descriptions of Women of Colour characters

✔ Be transparent about the importance of the woman character's race, ethnicity, and culture to the overall story and the character's identity and story arc

✔ Make sure "open to diversity" and "all ethnicities" casting calls are really open to diversity and looking for the best-qualified performer OR get rid of open diversity calls

✔ Assess each performer's audition according to merit-based criteria about their performance, and not based on their racial, ethnic, or cultural appropriateness for the role

✔ Make hiring and training practices for casting departments more inclusive and representative by creating and funding training and shadowing pathways for women from historically underrepresented groups

Agents

As representatives for a group of people who are underrepresented in the screen industries, it is imperative for agents to have a solid understanding of their clients' specific needs as Black, Indigenous, or Women of Colour, and to actively advocate and negotiate for their needs. Agents should consider what their client's needs are in terms of wardrobe sizing, make-up products, hair styling, and lighting. Any culturally specific needs (such as access to a private room for daily prayers or restricted set access for scenes involving intimate circumstances), as well as any other needs based upon them being women or their particular life circumstances (such as childcare or a private area for breast-feeding), also need to be actively negotiated for.

ADVOCATE FOR THEM TO EARN ROLES THEY'RE QUALIFIED TO PLAY

As advocates for their clients, agents should push for their clients to be considered for roles they are qualified to play based on their skills and authenticity to the role, and not simply because they look or sound the part. Likewise, agents have a responsibility to their clients to gather as much information as possible about the role and production, particularly when it comes to wardrobe, cultural attire or practices, nudity, sex scenes, and pay.

Scenes around nudity or other common cultural taboos should be communicated and consideration should be made about performers from underrepresented backgrounds so they are not expected to act in ways that violate their cultural norms and values (such as removing headscarves or religious attire or wearing cultural or religious garb that is stereotypically assumed of a group) without this having been discussed and negotiated in advance.

INSIST ON A PRE-PRODUCTION CALL AND FOLLOW-THROUGH

It's critical for agents to schedule a pre-production meeting with the performer and/or relevant department heads to communicate the performer's wishes and needs. For example, many Black women performers want a pre-production call to better understand whether the professionals on the project are comfortable with textured hair and with global skin tones and facial structures, and to make sure that the appropriate products are available. Skipping a pre-production call can result in a more stressful experience.

The Talent Agent Managers Association of Canada (TAMAC) and talent agents need to be better empowered to protect and advocate for the women performers they represent when issues arise on set. Likewise, these consultations cannot just be lip service; the production has an obligation to meet the performer's needs as they have been arranged and follow-through must be ensured.

Protocols for Talent Agents

✔ Be clear on the importance of the woman character's race, ethnicity, and culture to the overall story and the character's identity and story arc, and communicate this to your client

✔ Think about the best performer on your client list for the role as listed, and not just about matching race or ethnic characteristics

✔ Know your client's needs (racial, ethnic, cultural) and actively negotiate to make sure the production will provide appropriate supplies and supports or will reimburse women performers for expenses they incur to make their role possible

✔ Talent Agencies should make sure they have a diverse representation of agents at their company

On Set

The uneven realities of the world show up on set and impact Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour creatives and performers in particular, limiting their ability or capacity to communicate their needs and suggestions. When they do communicate, their requests can be misinterpreted as demands or as them being "difficult". It's important to remember issues that arise on set occur due to a lack of prior communication and negotiation. Ideally at the point of arriving on set, these issues and concerns should have already been discussed. Maintaining communication and addressing issues quickly and respectfully is the best way to attain the dual objectives of nuanced and authentic stories and the improved working lives of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour.

Below are some of the issues raised by our participants during the research phase, along with recommendations for how to address them appropriately.

ACCENT AND DIALECT COACHES, TRANSLATIONS

Accents, dialects, speech patterns, and translations are often sites of indirect discrimination against performers who are Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour. Our research found that performers are often told they will never land a lead role because they have "an accent" or are asked to do accents that aren't authentic to them or the character.

In some cases, performers have spent hundreds of dollars and unpaid hours to reduce their accents so that they can be considered more broadly for roles. It also happens that women performers from underrepresented groups frequently must do their own research on specific accents or dialects, sometimes because the available dialect coaches are unaware of the proper accent. Other performers have reported that they've been required to do on-the-spot translations of their lines because the writers did not have the lines properly translated — even if the performer isn't fluent in that particular language.

It is the responsibility of the writers and line producers to make sure that the proper resources are given to Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour performers to ensure that accents and dialects are authentic and their lines are accurate. If performers have to provide their own resources, they need to be reimbursed for the expense or credited and compensated for their contribution to the production beyond the performance they were hired for.

Protocols for Acting Coaches, Dialect Coaches, and Translators

✔ Remember that accents can be regional and audiences today are more sophisticated and can hear when an accent is inauthentic

✔ Be aware of the specifics regarding speech and language usage (such as region or locality) and make sure that performers have the resources to sound authentic to sophisticated audiences

✔ Provide qualified dialect coaches from the proper underrepresented group for the specific accent and translations you want, or compensate performers for out-of-pocket expenses they incur

HAIR, MAKE-UP, WARDROBE, AND LIGHTING

Hair, make-up, wardrobe, and lighting departments are important parts of the mise-en-scène that can make on-screen depictions more authentic and nuanced. People from every ethnic group (and within these groups) have different complexions, skin tones or shades, hair colours and textures, and different ideas about the importance of hair and make-up to their sense of self. All of these contribute to the sense of authenticity. They are also all aspects of a performance and production that rely on not just people's actions but also the appropriate products to enhance the performance.

Wardrobe is also a particularly problematic area for Women of Colour. For example, clothes aren't always bought or made for a range of different body types, and Indigenous and racialized characters are often costumed according to stereotypes.

I was hired to do a special skill background as a tea ceremony serving person. But when I showed up on set, I was a Geisha. I was appalled. And the wardrobe that they brought out was a fake kimono. It looked like a high school theatre. Just ridiculous. And we felt so bad. The fake wig didn't even look like a real hairdo for a Geisha. [And it was] whitewashed make-up with red lipstick. Just awful. I felt like a clown. So I was expressing my concern to the costume and make-up people. And they all knew this wasn't right. But because of the production, they couldn't speak up to [the] producer. We couldn't. Each of the department people told me, 'I feel so bad. I'm so sorry that you have to wear this.' And I said, 'Yeah what can I do?' So that was very upsetting.

— Asian Woman Performer

Even something as seemingly neutral as lighting matters. It's only in recent years, for example, that cinematographers have begun to pay better attention to how Black skin of various shades is lit. The film industry has recently placed more attention on this issue[8], but television has yet to catch up. Likewise, without being made aware of the skills required to appropriately light the global variety of skin tones, lighting directors and techs are rarely taught about how to compensate for the hidden biases built into their equipment, such as white balances and light meters that are by default geared toward the skin tones of people who are White.[9] And having a stand-in who is a Person of Colour is not necessarily an appropriate measure for setting the lighting if the stand-in's skin tone is entirely different from that of the performer.

Productions need to make sure that the hair, make-up, wardrobe, and lighting needs of every member of the cast are fully considered and taken care of by appropriately trained artists. The default assumptions that historically ground every production need to be upended—make-up and hair departments can't just get "the usual" products; lighting directors have to rethink how they light a scene so that *all* performers are equally well-lit. Also, no hair and make-up artist should be limited to only working on one specific type of hair or skin tone based on their background (i.e., Black hair and make-up artists should not be limited to Black performers), and they should all be able to handle differently textured hair, global skin tones, and all kinds of facial structures.
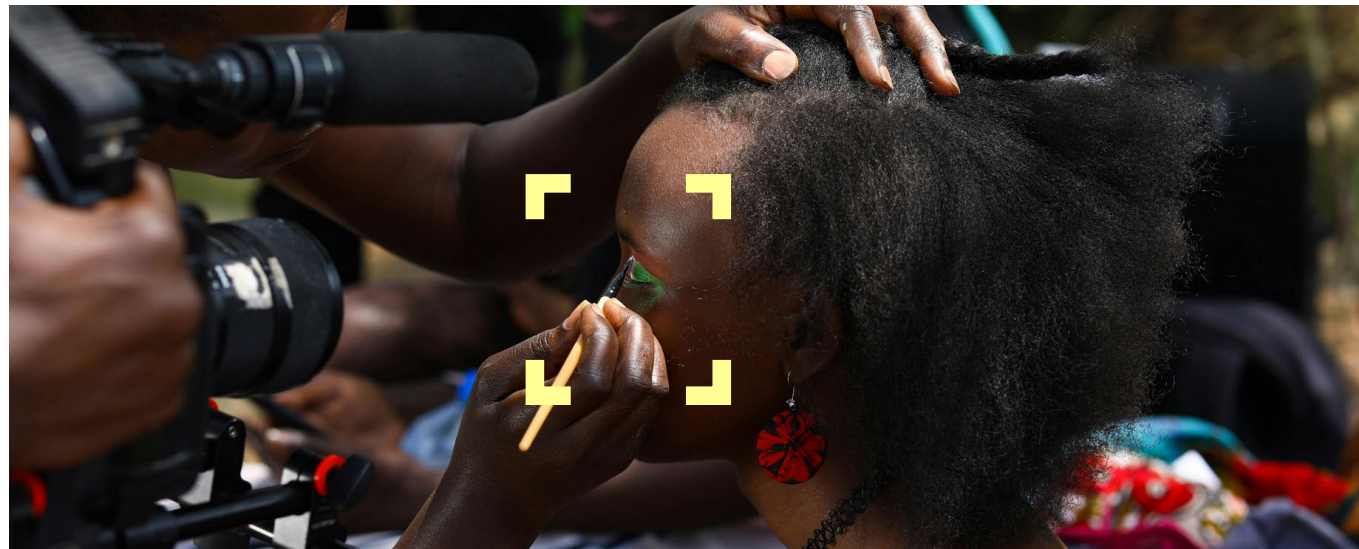
Protocols for Hair, Make-up, Wardrobe, and Lighting Departments

✔ Check your assumptions about how Women of Colour characters and groups present, especially when there is a large social distance between department keys and the characters/cast

✔ Ensure the department leads have mandatory and ongoing conversations with Women of Colour performers to assess their hair, make-up, and wardrobe needs

✔ Be cognizant of the impact of shadeism, colourism, texturism, and other Western notions of beauty on choices that are made for Women of Colour performers, and be sure the right choices are made

✔ Train crew in hair/make-up/wardrobe departments to deal with unique shade, complexion, hair style and texture, and clothing needs of Women of Colour performers

✔ Hire crew members in lighting departments who know how to deal with the lighting needs of Women of Colour performers, including how standard practices and tools default to Whiteness (e.g., light meters, make-up kits, hair styling products, using random stand-ins for lighting checks)

✔ Where possible, recruit, train, and pay Women of Colour crew members in these departments to ensure both representativeness and authenticity

INTIMACY COORDINATORS, CULTURAL SENSITIVITY EXPERTS, AND TRAUMA-INFORMED SETS

Many of the historical and contemporary stories we tell may tap into deeply emotional wells that could be triggering for performers and crew members, bringing up intergenerational trauma.[10]

Even though intimacy coordinators, trauma counsellors, and cultural sensitivity mediators are now regularly on set, the supports they provide are often focused on lead performers—and women performers from underrepresented groups are not often cast in lead roles. These women performers may have lived experience with the trauma being depicted on screen—and this matters even if the performers or crew members concerned are not actively involved in the scene.

The intersections of race, ethnicity, gender identity/expression, and sexual orientation/preference could create a likelihood for Indigenous and racialized women to have had a negative experience. This experience, if not adequately addressed by the production, can potentially retraumatize performers.

The Government of Canada defines trauma-informed practices as "policies and practices that recognize the connections between violence, trauma, negative health outcomes, and behaviours".[11] It's important that productions implement trauma-informed practices when it comes to scenes or stories that could retraumatize Indigenous and racialized women performers or crew members. Ensuring they have the support they need to deal with these issues and a safe on-set and backstage environment is the best way to ensure the ethical care of your staff.

Protocols for maintaining a safe and inclusive set

- ✔ Acknowledge that Women of Colour performers may have experienced traumas due to racism, sexism, discrimination, bias, or violence, and may be retraumatized by their involvement with a project

- ✔ Ensure the set is a safe environment for everyone

- ✔ Hire paid consultants for the equity and inclusive practice expertise

- ✔ Provide diverse intimacy coordinators, cultural sensitivity moderators, and persons trained in trauma-informed practices for anyone in the cast/crew to consult with

Conclusion: The Stories We Tell

As you've seen throughout this Protocol Guideline, the changes that are needed to ensure the fair and inclusive treatment and depiction of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour often seem small, but they lie in the systems and structures within the Canadian screen industries. The practices of the industry; how responsibilities, credit, and compensation are sorted out; the motivation behind how entire projects are organized and how tasks are implemented—all play a significant part in the lives of the people in our industry, the stories we work so hard to tell, and the people who are looking to see themselves and understand their place in the world through what we do. Likewise, ensuring that we're aware of our social position and the social distance between us, women performers and crew members, and the stories we want to present on-screen improves our ability to tell nuanced stories with authentic performances because we've done the work to understand the lives and perspectives of other people.

We know that productions don't exist in a vacuum. People from all different departments move between sets and projects. Ideas travel. People talk with others. People help others get in or get funding. What's done on one set can ultimately change how every set works, which ends up changing the industry. These experiences cycle back to the larger players in our business (funders, producers, networks, streamers, etc.), and with time, they eventually become part of our default settings.

We also know that this is hard work. It's challenging to question the ways that we've learned to do our craft, to humble ourselves, and to think about how we do things that may exclude groups of people we don't intend to. It's difficult to come up with new ways of organizing how we make art so that the art, and the people who make it, show our world as it really is.

This is why "extending the table" is so important: By actively finding ways to bring in Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latine, MENA (Middle Eastern and North African), South Asian, and Women of Colour and actively ensuring that they benefit from our experience while we also learn from theirs, we can make sure that these changes are sustainable and transformative for the industry and our audiences. Through this work, we hope that this too will just become the way things are done.

Scenarios: Protocol Guideline in Practice

In this section, we provide examples to illustrate how our protocols and best practices can play out in various scenarios.

Black Woman Performer on Set

A Black Woman Performer has just been cast as the lead in a film on the experiences of Black students on Canadian university campuses.

The producer hires an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) consultant to review the film script and identify any precautions the team should consider during production. This consultant explains to the team that the experiences of many Black people on Canadian university campuses are traumatic, and recommends that the producer commits to creating a trauma-informed set.

When the performer arrives for the table read:

- Trigger warnings are embedded into the script before racist and sexually exploitative scenes or messages.

- An anonymous complaint system is established and explained in detail to the cast.

- Following the table read, the director and producer arrange a pre-production call with hair, wardrobe, make-up, and lighting keys so that she and other cast members can inform them of their particular needs for products and clothing styles, and so that lighting can get baselines for all the cast members.

- Although the script feels authentic to her, she is encouraged to offer suggestions about how to make it more genuine. If the suggestions are extensive, she is credited and paid accordingly.

A Producer Meets Funders

A producer is pitching a limited series on dating as a Toronto-based millennial to a major Canadian broadcaster.

In advance of their final meeting to determine whether the series will be greenlit and picked up for production, the broadcaster asks for specific data on who the audience will be and says all producers who are pitching will be asked to provide the same materials.

At the pitch meeting, the producer is asked:

- To explain how this work meets the Canada Media Fund's Narrative Positioning Policy, more specifically: Why have they chosen to develop this particular film or program with this particular cultural material in it? What are their positions and preconceptions about this story?

- How they are working to ensure stereotypes (such as the implication that Black women are inherently sexually promiscuous or that Muslim women are repressed) in the script will be managed and not harmful to audiences.

- Whether they know the kinds of questions they will need to ask during this production, to whom to ask them, and when. And finally, whether the consultations they are anticipating have been built into their budget and production plan.

10 Guiding Questions

The following are questions that we recommend producers, writers, and directors consider before their next project or production to ensure that Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour are treated equitably and feel welcome to join your team and bring their whole and true, genuine selves to the table.

It's important to not only consider these questions but to actively communicate some of the answers to these questions to the creatives, cast, and crew that are supporting your next project.

1. Why have you chosen to develop this particular film or program with this particular cultural material in it? What are your positions and preconceptions about this story?

2. Do you know the kinds of questions you will need to ask during this production, to whom you need to ask them, and when? Are these consultations built into your budget and production plan?

3. Does your work reinforce negative stereotypes or treat people from underrepresented groups as tokens of their gender, sexual orientation, gender presentation, race, ethnicity, or skin colour?

4. Do you have writers or script consultants with appropriate lived experience working on the project?

5. What role will each woman character's race, ethnicity, culture, or gender identity play in the overall story? Are these the focal points of the character's identity and story arc or secondary to the story? Have you researched your characters in consultation with people who have intimate knowledge of the life experience presented in the story?

6. Has the use of producers, writers, directors, actors, casting directors and agents, and dialect coaches from the relevant and appropriate underrepresented groups been considered? Are they being paid appropriately, equitably, and according to the value of contributions made to the project?

7. Have the experts and consultants hired for the project been given the agency to ensure the authenticity of the project?

8. Are personnel aware of how women performers are working through trauma with stories you want to tell, and are these concerns taken seriously? Are trauma-oriented resource people available on set and funded in the production budget to help those impacted?

9. Have all people who have contributed to the development and authenticity of this project been appropriately credited and compensated?

10. Has the production worked to develop future generations of diverse creative talent through hiring, employment, and mentoring processes?

Appendix: Key Terms and Definitions

WHAT ARE RACE, ETHNICITY, AND CULTURE?

Race

The National Human Genome Research Institute indicates that "race is a social construct used to group people. Race was constructed as a hierarchical human grouping system, generating racial classifications to identify, distinguish, and marginalize some groups across nations, regions, and the world. Race divides human populations into groups often based on physical appearance, social factors, and cultural backgrounds".

Race becomes a marker of identity. Many women self-identify by the race they belong to, while also having others identify them by their race.
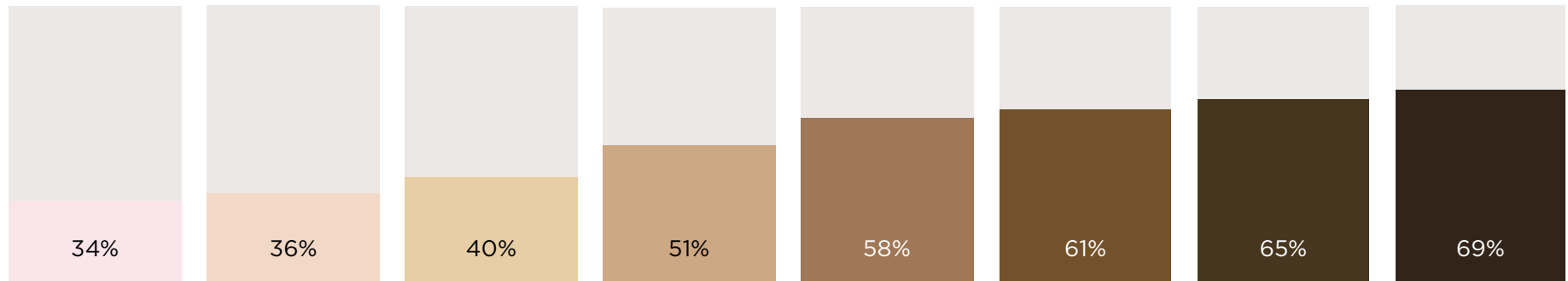
In the context of this Protocol Guideline, we're using the term race to identify women who are Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latine, MENA (Middle Eastern and North African), and Women of Colour. Within Latine and MENA groups, some women are White, and that differs from women within these groups who are People of Colour; this Protocol Guideline refers to and includes the latter.

Within these respective races, the colour or shade of a woman's skin also plays a significant factor in our industry. Merriam-Webster defines Colourism (also known as Shadeism) as "prejudice or discrimination, especially within a racial or ethnic group favouring people with lighter skin over those with darker skin". The specific colour or shade of a woman's skin has a direct impact on her hiring desirability; the lighter her skin, and the closer she appears to be White, the more favourably she is likely to be viewed, increasing her professional opportunities and chances of being hired. There are deeply rooted and highly prevalent biases that contribute to this and in the larger context of systemic racism and discrimination.

Biases can be conscious and unconscious or implicit. Oxford Languages defines biases as "prejudice in favour of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair". UCSF's Office of Diversity and Outreach describes unconscious biases as "social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs

Skin Tone Affects Experiences of Racism

**WOMEN WITH DARKER SKIN TONES ARE MORE
LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE RACISM AT WORK**

34%	36%	40%	51%	58%	61%	65%	69%

about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing".

Conversations about race, and who is considered to be racialized in the context of seeking and creating equity are ongoing. For this Protocol Guideline, we're focusing on Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latine, MENA (Middle Eastern and North African), and Women of Colour, as they are historically underrepresented groups in Canadian film and television, on and off-screen.

Notes as you read:

1. Women of Colour in our research included women who did not self-identify as being part of another group, and/or women who did not have the availability to participate in their respective group.

2. In this Protocol Guideline, we collectively refer to Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latine, MENA (Middle Eastern and North African), and Women of Colour as:

- "women performers and creatives"

- "women performers and creatives from underrepresented groups"

- "women characters"

- "women characters from underrepresented groups"

3. "Creatives" refers to key creatives in film and television and includes content creators, such as producers, writers, and directors.

It's important to point out that race also differs from both ethnicity and culture specifically in the context of this Protocol Guideline.

Ethnicity

Oxford Languages defines ethnicity as "the quality or fact of belonging to a population group or subgroup made up of people who share a common cultural background or descent".

Individuals who are White can also belong to specific ethnic groups that are European, Middle Eastern, or North African in descent (for example, Scottish, German, Italian, Israeli, and Arab). But they are not racialized in the same way that Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latine, MENA, and Women of Colour are. Merriam-Webster indicates that racialization is "the act of giving a racial character to someone or something: the process of categorizing, marginalizing, or regarding according to race". In essence, racialized people are negatively impacted by racism and/or discrimination. Our research demonstrates that the women represented in this Protocol Guideline have been racialized by Canada's predominantly White film and television industry.

Culture

Cambridge Dictionary defines culture as the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.

One can identify with or belong to a certain culture, without necessarily belonging to a specific race or ethnicity and vice versa. In reality, this can apply to everyone.

For example, a South Asian woman born and raised in Canada, who partakes in aspects of Canadian culture (i.e. attends hockey games while wearing her favourite team's jersey), is obviously not White. And although her race is South Asian, she may not necessarily relate to her respective South Asian culture in ways that others from her race would.

Understanding that race does not automatically mean culture is an important consideration to make when creating women characters from underrepresented groups, and to ensure these depictions are both authentic and nuanced.

A Note on Terminology

Asian. This umbrella term refers to East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian groups. West Asian groups are categorized within the MENA grouping.

Black. Refers to those who both identify and ascribe to the label set aside for those with Sub-Saharan African ancestry.

East Asian. Refers to people with Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, and Taiwanese heritage.

Indigenous. In Canada, this term refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. We acknowledge the difficult history that accompanies the term 'First Nations' and seek to use it in the broadest sense possible, including the descendants of First Nations Peoples who lost their status due to patriarchal or otherwise oppressive systems. In the U.S. people within this group are also commonly referred to as Native Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, or First Americans.

Latine. Refers to those from Central and South America. We use the term understanding that one can be both Black and Latine thus the category can be contested when used as a racial category (not an ethnicity).

MENA. This term is an acronym for Middle Eastern North African. We elected not to use the term 'Arab' to define people from this region in appreciation of the fact that people from the region claim various ethnicities including Amazigh, Persian, and Kurdish among others.

South Asian. Refers to people from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan is often also included, although this is contested as it is also considered MENA.

Southeast Asian. Refers to people from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.

In this Guide, we refer consistently to **Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour**. The reason for highlighting Black and Indigenous women is tied to Canada's long history of specific treatment of these groups. For instance, Black and Indigenous men are overrepresented in the Canadian justice system (Canadian Press, 2022); Black and Indigenous children are overrepresented in the Canadian child welfare system (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018); so it follows that the situation for Black and Indigenous women in Canada differs significantly from those of other groups of non-White people. Throughout this report, the term Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour is inclusive of all of the groups mentioned above.

White. Refers to those who have partial or full European ancestry. Race is a social construction, meaning that Whiteness can be ascribed to someone who has Indigenous heritage, but be read as White based on others' perception of them.

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