

Seeing Ourselves 2

Diversity, equity and
inclusion in Australian
TV drama

April 2023



Australian Government



Screen Australia is grateful to all those who contributed to *Seeing Ourselves 2*.

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Inside cover: Behind the scenes of *Mystery Road* series 2: Jada Alberts, Warwick Thornton and Aaron Pedersen

Back cover image: *Hardball*





Acknowledgement of Country

Screen Australia acknowledges we work on lands of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation in our Ultimo office and on the lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation in our South Melbourne office.

We pay respect to Traditional Custodians and Elders past and present, and recognise their continuous connection to culture, community and Country. We extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout all lands, waters and territories.

We acknowledge the continuous strength and power in First Nations storytelling and are proud of the work of Screen Australia's First Nations Department, who for nearly three decades have provided leadership and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander storytellers around the country.



Five Bedrooms

Foreword from the CEO

Australian TV drama has a tremendous capacity to connect us and represent us by bringing distinctive local stories into our homes. Australian audiences are diverse, the Australian community is diverse, and it is important that our screen stories reflect this diversity.

Screen stories that authentically reflect us and our place in the world are important for helping to grow our cultural identity and because all Australians have the right to be included in the stories we tell about ourselves. They also make commercial sense, because stories and characters that resonate and connect with audiences are more likely to succeed, both here in Australia and on a world stage.

Unprecedented access to global content options is leading to fragmented audiences and competition for viewers. Audiences and distribution models have changed dramatically, and those who do not adapt with the changing landscape will be left behind. But with change comes the opportunity to connect with new audiences and ideas.

Part of Screen Australia's remit is to provide the sector, policy makers and the broader community with data and information about how the Australian screen industry is performing. As with the *Drama Report*, *Screen Currency* and the first *Seeing Ourselves*, this report, *Seeing Ourselves 2*, is intended to provide an objective overview, some specific insights and data evidencing what we are seeing on our screens.

There is a strong desire in the industry to craft increasingly nuanced and sophisticated Australian stories dealing with the diversity of our communities and the sometimes challenging conversations that arise from genuine introspection. It is important that industry,

communities and storytellers are provided with data and evidence to support their work and the positive changes that will flow from a diverse slate of content.

I am proud to share *Seeing Ourselves 2*, the second report in our landmark research series about diversity in Australian TV drama, building on our 2016 study.

Part 1 of this report presents quantitative data about the diversity of main characters in drama titles broadcast between 2016 and 2021, across several diversity dimensions. This includes, for the first time, examination of age, location and intersectionality, and a deeper dive into cultural background. It is pleasing to see substantial improvements in many areas since our 2016 study, including levels of First Nations representation going from strength to strength.

However, the overall results indicate that the pace of change remains slow – there is still a long way to go to reach full representation of Australia's diverse communities. In particular, disability representation remains critically low. This highlights the need for targeted, focused effort in this area from industry, as we have seen successfully employed for First Nations screen representation over the past three decades.

Part 2 of this report dives beneath the numbers and behind the scenes. It draws on consultations and interviews to examine the factors that are limiting change as well as opportunities to improve representation both in front of and behind the camera. These qualitative findings are based on the voices and experiences of a broad range of industry stakeholders, decision makers and creatives, with a particular focus on the perspectives of historically under-represented screen practitioners.



Stateless

Collectively, the views of our interviewees provide useful insights to support our industry in navigating what are increasingly nuanced, varied and complex conversations around improving diversity, equity and inclusion. These vexed issues can be seen at all stages of storytelling – from content development and commissioning, through to casting, production and promotion. I encourage the sector to consider the challenges and opportunities set out in this report, and to collaborate on ways of building a stronger and more diverse screen industry that produces more fresh and engaging stories.

In Part 3 of this report, we place our findings in an international context through a scan of related research and activity from our peers in the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand screen industries. While our on-screen results compare favourably with some of our peers on several metrics – such as our strong First Nations and women's on-screen representation – other jurisdictions are ahead of the game in terms of taking action and implementing whole-of-sector strategies. We can learn from these countries as we look at ways to pick up the pace of change in our local industry.

Tools and resources are also important to support change, and Part 4 of this report presents a range of these. We found that many tools and resources already exist that can be used by the industry to continue to become more inclusive in our day-to-day work. I urge everyone in the Australian screen industry to make use of this wealth of information, as well as the insights in this report.

Since the first *Seeing Ourselves* report in 2016, Screen Australia has launched a number of initiatives aimed at diversifying our industry and screen stories and supporting practitioners from under-represented groups.

These include the:

- Writers' Journey lab in partnership with Netflix and Australians in Film (AiF), where early-career writers attend an intensive Netflix writing workshop to improve episodic writing skills across various genres.
- Untapped initiative in partnership with AiF, where undiscovered and historically excluded writers and directors gain professional development with masterclasses from award-winning international filmmakers and mentorships from leading practitioners.
- Digital Originals initiative with SBS and NITV where up to ten teams of screen creatives from currently under-represented groups develop and pitch a project that aligns to the SBS charter and SBS On Demand platform.
- Developing the Developer workshops where practitioners from diverse backgrounds enhance their story development skills, and build a development toolkit across platforms and genres in an intensive workshop environment.
- Talent Camps with AFTRS where just under 100 emerging screen creatives are supported to intensively work on story development, provided mentorship and receive the chance for their production to be funded for development.

I welcome too, the Australian Government's release of the National Cultural Policy, *Revive*.¹ The policy affirms the need for storytelling that authentically reflects Australia's people, and the vital role of Australian stories in building national identity, social unity and economic success. It also seeks to increase diversity and improve access and workplace safety in our creative industries.

There has been significant and positive engagement from the screen industry in the development of this report. I sincerely thank all those who have contributed, including those who participated in consultations and interviews, who shared their insights and experiences so generously.

There is much goodwill in this industry, and a genuine willingness to address issues like representation, workplace cultural safety, and authentic storytelling and content partnerships. *Seeing Ourselves 2* is a resource that can guide our decision making, inform and empower us, and help monitor the effects of our collective efforts. It indicates where there has been progress in TV drama, and it illuminates where further attention is needed to build on this momentum, and to continue to improve sector diversity and inclusion.

While much work has been done, more lies ahead to ensure we have an industry in which everyone can participate and thrive, and all Australians can see themselves represented. Collaboration will be essential to bringing about transformative change, equity and full representation in the Australian screen industry.

Graeme Mason
CEO Screen Australia

¹ Australian Government 2023, *Revive: A place for every story, a story for every place*.

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Executive summary

Introduction

Screen Australia's *Seeing Ourselves* research series investigates diversity in Australian TV drama and the challenges and opportunities behind the scenes for telling authentic, diverse screen stories.

For Australian screen content to have the most cultural impact it should reflect Australia's diversity. This will also improve creative and commercial outcomes by connecting with new perspectives and audiences.

A follow up to our landmark 2016 study, *Seeing Ourselves 2* examines the diversity of the main characters in scripted Australian TV drama broadcast between 2016 and 2021, how this compares to the Australian population, and what has changed since the previous *Seeing Ourselves* report. In response to changing distribution

platforms, we have expanded the scope of the study to include commissioned content broadcast on streaming and online services. We also conducted stakeholder consultations and interviews to capture the opportunities and challenges faced by those involved in bringing Australian stories to the screen, with a particular focus on the perspectives of historically under-represented screen practitioners.

In an environment of heightened global discussion and scrutiny, and an industry working to raise the bar on diverse representation, *Seeing Ourselves 2* aims to be a reliable source of information that supports further positive change – towards diversity, equity and inclusion in the Australian screen industry.



Mustangs FC series 2

Part 1: On-screen diversity

Method

For our current study, we examined 3,072 main characters in 361 scripted Australian TV dramas, including children's dramas and comedies. Titles examined were first released between 2016 and 2021 on free-to-air or subscription TV, streaming or online services available in Australia.

Seeing Ourselves 2 looks at several aspects of diversity including First Nations identity, cultural background, disability, gender, sexual orientation, occupational status and two new variables: age and location. In measuring these aspects of diversity, the aim is that all the many and varied voices in Australia have the opportunity to be represented in local screen content.

Characters were categorised based on a set of indicators: self-identification (used where possible), story elements (such as romantic attraction), visible attributes, and in the case of cultural background, name, family, language spoken, accent, or the background of the actor.² We drew on definitions supported and promoted by the Australian Human Rights Commission and advocacy groups, including use of the social model of disability for disabled characters. Actors' demographic attributes were identified through public sources such as talent profiles and interviews.

Further details can be found in [*How we measured on-screen diversity*](#) and [*Appendix A: Key terms and definitions*](#).

Highlights

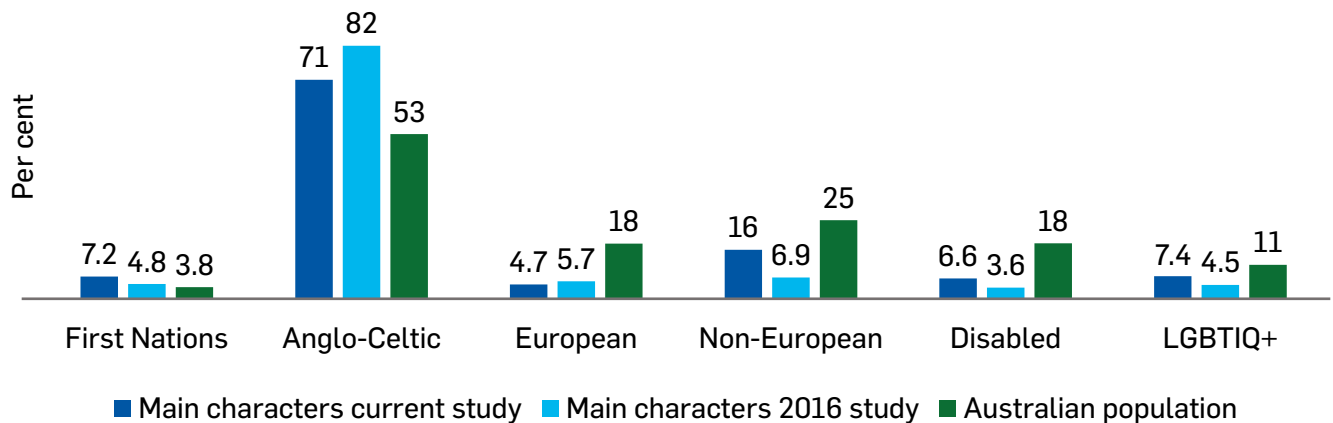
- There have been increases in the levels of diversity among main characters in TV drama since our 2016 study, including increased representation of First Nations, disabled and LGBTIQ+ characters, and a doubling of non-European representation.
- There is a strong and growing level of First Nations representation on screen. However, First Nations main characters are more concentrated in fewer titles than characters from other groups. Among First Nations main characters, there are lower rates of LGBTIQ+ and disability representation than among main characters overall.
- A number of Australia's communities remain under-represented compared to population benchmarks. These include people from European backgrounds such as people with German, Dutch and Italian ancestry; and people from non-European backgrounds such as people with Indian, Chinese, Filipino and Vietnamese ancestry. One in four TV dramas feature all Anglo-Celtic main characters, which is an improvement from around one in three in the previous study.
- The rate of disability representation among main characters has improved, but from a low base. Disability remains very much under-represented in TV drama compared to the Australian population and seven in ten titles feature no main characters who are disabled. There are higher rates of disability representation among main characters who are Anglo-Celtic or European than among characters who are non-European or First Nations.

² The best practice for diversity data collection is self-identification. We used further supplementary indicators as the best available information for fictional characters in screen content. The phenotypical approach reflected in these supplementary measures should not be the standard for data collection on diversity more broadly. For discussion of self-identification in data collection on cultural diversity, see Australian Human Rights Commission 2022, [*National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report*](#), p.87.

- Apart from non-binary characters, main characters are split evenly between women and men. There were 18 trans and/or gender diverse main characters in TV drama between 2016 and 2021 (0.6% of characters), including five trans men, eight trans women and five non-binary characters.
- The overall rate of LGBTIQ+ representation has also improved but is still significantly below the population benchmark. Almost seven in ten titles have no LGBTIQ+ main characters, and almost half of the titles that feature LGBTIQ+ main characters feature just one. More than one in two LGBTIQ+ main characters are women. There is a higher rate of LGBTIQ+ representation among main characters who are non-European than among other cultural backgrounds and there is a higher rate of disability representation among LGBTIQ+ characters than among other groups.
- There is a bias towards socioeconomic advantage on our screens, particularly among Anglo-Celtic and European main characters. While nearly all groups are represented at all occupation skill levels, First Nations, non-European and disabled characters are less likely to be represented in higher skill level occupations.
- Children's titles and comedies tend to show higher rates of First Nations and non-European representation than general drama titles, but have lower levels of disability and LGBTIQ+ representation.
- There is under-representation of people aged under 12 or 60 and over, and people in regional areas. There is a bias in Australian TV drama towards centring stories on characters aged 18–44, and living in capital cities.
- While still below population benchmarks, there are higher levels of European and non-European representation among the pool of actors cast as main characters, than among the main characters they play. This suggests additional opportunities for 'colour-conscious casting' which involves intentional consideration of an actor's ethnicity and how it enriches a character's identity and the story.³
- Just 3.9% of actors receiving main roles publicly identify as disabled. While this is likely to be an undercount due to reliance on public information, it suggests a need to increase disability representation in the talent pool to create more opportunities for 'identity-conscious casting'.
- 4.8% of actors cast in main roles publicly identify as LGBTIQ+ including four trans men, three trans women and ten non-binary actors. Nearly all trans or gender diverse main characters are played by actors who publicly identify as trans or gender diverse.

3 The concepts of 'colour-conscious' and 'identity-conscious casting' are part of a live, complex and evolving discussion (see *From colour-blind to identity-conscious casting*). Further research is needed due to the reliance on publicly sourced information about actors and as the numbers alone cannot effectively tell the whole story.

Figure 1: Diversity of main characters compared to the Australian population, 2016 results and current study



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021 in the current study and 1,961 characters across 199 TV dramas broadcast 2011 to 2015 in the 2016 study.



The Other Guy

Part 2: Challenges and opportunities

Method

To understand the challenges and opportunities for the screen industry in improving representation and inclusion on screen and off, we conducted consultations with 35 representatives across 23 organisations including: diversity, equity, inclusion and human rights organisations; screen guilds and industry associations; screen education and training organisations; and Australian broadcasters and streaming services.

These were followed by in-depth interviews with 28 screen industry practitioners at the frontline of Australian content creation to

delve deeper into the themes identified in the consultations. Practitioners included decision makers in broadcasters or streaming services, representatives from state/territory or community screen bodies, key creatives (producers, directors and writers) and actors. While our interviewees encompassed a broad range of lived experience, the majority identified with historically excluded or under-represented communities.

Details of participants can be found in [*Appendix C: List of consultation and interview participants*](#).



All My Friends are Racist

Highlights

Centring lived experience⁴ and genuine collaboration in telling authentic stories

Challenges highlighted by participants include:

- uncertainty over who can tell what stories
- persistence of stereotypes, tokenism, and gaps in representation in storytelling
- scripted diversity may fall away as projects move to casting and production
- negotiating the boundaries and grey areas of cross-cultural collaboration on First Nations stories
- hierarchical and transactional ways of working, which mean producers and directors have all the power over the end product of cultural elements in a story
- practitioners from under-represented communities carrying the burden of reputational risk and community accountability when storytelling is inauthentic or exclusionary.

Opportunities highlighted by participants include:

- First Nations stories are increasingly told from a First Nations voice and perspective
- greater recognition of both the cultural and commercial value of diverse content, and increased demand and opportunities for authentic, diverse storytelling

- inclusive and authentic storytelling can be achieved through:
 - telling stories led by or in genuine collaboration with people with lived experience, and valuing cultural knowledge as integral to projects
 - presenting stories about characters' personal experiences, rather than trying to portray a whole community in 'broad brushstrokes' which can risk reducing characters to stereotypes
 - shifting from 'colour-blind' to 'colour-conscious casting',⁵ and extending this intentional practice beyond ethnicity to 'identity-conscious casting' by actively acknowledging other aspects of an actor's identity such as gender and disability
 - getting more diverse voices into writers' rooms and on set and giving actors an active role in storytelling
 - increasing cultural safety,⁶ and sharing decision making, creative control and credit when it comes to the cultural elements in a story
 - doing cultural or community research, consultation and engagement well, including genuine collaboration that benefits both parties (see [4. From consultation to collaboration](#)).

⁴ Lived experience is defined as: 'Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.' Chandler D and Munday R 2016, *Oxford: A dictionary of media and communication* (2nd ed.), Oxford University Press.

⁵ Interviewees described 'colour-conscious casting' as intentional consideration of an actor's ethnicity and how it enriches a character's identity and the story. See *From colour-blind to identity-conscious casting*.

⁶ Cultural safety is defined as: 'An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.' See *Cultural safety in practice*.

Increasing diverse representation across the screen industry at all career stages

Challenges highlighted by participants include:

- the persistence of systemic barriers in the screen industry for people from historically excluded and under-represented groups, particularly disabled people and those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage
- a need to increase diversity among producers, commissioners, experienced mid-career key creatives and the leadership of screen organisations – particularly disability representation
- growing and retaining a diverse acting talent pool, and challenges in developing new and existing talent and career pathways across different roles (for example, from writer to producer).

Opportunities highlighted by participants include:

- having more diversity among crews, which can normalise diversity on set and support actors
- online platforms that provide new opportunities for emerging talent by having lower barriers to entry and a broad audience reach
- an abundance of entry level and emerging talent that community-based organisations can source
- developing and supporting the careers of under-represented talent by building a network of champions and mentors and developing structured attachment programs.

Increasing cultural safety and accessibility across the screen industry

Challenges highlighted by participants include:

- a lack of understanding of cultural safety and accessibility⁷ in the Australian screen industry and a need for education tools and training to assist production companies and improve workplace culture
- fears among under-represented practitioners about being punished or ostracised for speaking up about cultural safety concerns or access needs
- practitioners from under-represented communities carrying the burden of educating production teams and advocating for themselves, their access needs and cultural safety
- expectations on individual practitioners to provide lived experience to shape storytelling without an additional fee or credit.

Opportunities highlighted by participants include:

- culturally competent commissioners, producers and key creatives are driving generational change by building diverse teams, creating culturally safe and accessible workplaces and valuing lived experience in storytelling
- individuals, especially the project leaders (producers, directors, writers) can 'self-educate' on cultural safety and accessibility: do their own research to alleviate the burden on under-represented practitioners to educate production teams
- professional education and training to improve cultural safety and accessibility across the industry.

Further challenges, opportunities and suggestions to increase diversity and inclusion are detailed throughout Part 2 of this report.

⁷ For definitions, see [Appendix A: Key terms and definitions](#). For further discussion, see [Cultural safety in practice](#), [The social model of disability](#) and [Spotlight on disability](#).

Part 3: International context

Method

To understand how the results of *Seeing Ourselves 2* compare to findings from our international peers, we looked at similar studies of on-screen representation in the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand, as well as actions to address inequities in these screen industries.

Highlights

- Our international review suggests that Australia compares favourably to some of our peers on some on-screen diversity dimensions, such as First Nations and women's representation.⁸ However, it also highlights an opportunity to learn from our peers who are forging ahead with collaborative whole-of-sector responses to improve diverse representation.
- The strong rate of First Nations representation among main characters in TV dramas found by *Seeing Ourselves 2* was not found in studies in the US, Canada or New Zealand.⁹
- Similar international studies show varied results on cultural diversity but tend to indicate the need for more representation of people of colour, particularly Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Representation of Black people among main TV characters has achieved parity with population benchmarks in both the US and UK.
- Low disability representation both on screen and behind the camera is an international concern, highlighted in studies from the US, UK and Canada.
- The gender parity for women found in *Seeing Ourselves 2* was not found in international studies of on-screen representation on TV, except for the UK's Diamond project. Like *Seeing Ourselves 2*, UK results also highlight under-representation of older people on screen.
- Internationally, there are a range of initiatives by industry and governments to improve diverse representation and inclusion in the screen industry. These include campaigns and summits; diversity strategies, standards and targets; use of existing or proposed legislation; tax incentives; investment in training, skills and talent development; and reforms to screen industry awards. (See [*International responses*](#)).

⁸ Our review is based on similar research reports that were publicly available at the time of preparing *Seeing Ourselves 2*. Results are not directly comparable to our on-screen results due to different methods, categories and timeframes.

⁹ No on-screen representation study was identified for New Zealand. However, Māori people have been identified as an under-represented group in the New Zealand Film Commission's strategies.

Part 4: Tools and resources

There are a range of resources available to support diverse representation, inclusion and equity. *Seeing Ourselves 2* presents a compilation of these, including links to protocols, toolkits, training, guidelines and strategies, related research, and the stories of Australian creatives working in inclusive storytelling. (See [*Part 4: Tools and resources*](#)).



Hungry Ghosts

Introduction: Setting the scene

TV dramas are watched by millions of Australians each week and have an extraordinary capacity to create emotional connection, insight and empathy. The people and stories we see on our small screens reflect and shape our sense of who we are as a society, and who we might become. That is why seeing ourselves reflected in TV drama, in all our diversity, matters.

Australia's population is rich in diversity. However, a recent study found less than one in two Australians are satisfied with their level of representation on screen, almost one in four feel poorly represented and more than eight in ten want to see more diversity on screen. In addition, more than eight in ten Australians agree that representation on screen impacts our real-world perceptions of who we see represented.¹⁰

As well as social impacts, improving representation of our diverse communities can deliver more appealing and likely, more successful screen content. When done well, diverse content is likely to have a better chance of reaching, and authentically engaging, rapidly fragmenting audiences.

In 2016, Screen Australia published a landmark investigation of diversity on Australian TV screens. *Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on diversity in Australian TV drama* sought to understand whose stories our TV dramas were exploring and showcasing. Overall, the results showed that a number of Australia's communities were clearly under-represented.

Seeing Ourselves established benchmark data. *Seeing Ourselves 2* helps us consider what has changed and where we are now. Part 1 of this report looks at whether there have been improvements in the diversity of on-screen representation or if the gaps have grown.

Many enabling factors happen off screen. Part 2 of this report examines the driving factors behind the scenes that foster diversity, and how inclusion is recognised along the pathway of content development, commissioning, casting and production. Through interviews with industry participants and decision makers involved in bringing Australian stories to our screens, Part 2 also considers the barriers limiting change, and the opportunities to improve representation. Along with the international picture captured in Part 3 of this report and the range of tools and resources included in Part 4, insights from these interviews may provide guidance to support the Australian screen industry in its efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in our workplaces and on our TV screens.

¹⁰ Paramount ANZ 2022, *Reflecting Me: Global representation on screen*. Based on survey responses of over 1,000 people in Australia aged 13–49.

What has changed since the last report?

As well as the vast disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, much has changed across the screen industry and society since the 2016 *Seeing Ourselves* report.

Heightened discussion and scrutiny

Global movements have prompted deep reflection, discussion and action in the community and among the screen industry around representation, power and equity. This includes movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and #DisabilitySoWhite, as well as longstanding scrutiny of the treatment of Australia's First Nations people.

In Australia, this has resulted in a dynamic conversation about the diversity of our screen content. While local TV drama continues to be popular with Australian audiences, there has been a growth in online and media commentary discussing the whiteness of our TV screens¹¹ and award ceremonies.¹² There has also been discussion of ableism¹³ and the complex issue of actors portraying characters without sharing their lived experience, such as non-disabled actors

playing disabled characters.¹⁴ Australian actors, performers and writers have been more willing to publicly call out discrimination or racism on sets,¹⁵ and have been more vocal about the need for change on and off screen.¹⁶

Social media has changed how these sensitive conversations play out. In an environment of increasing polarisation and attention on inequality, racism and injustice; diversity and inclusion are becoming both more discussed and more contentious, and language and terminology are evolving and contested. These changes set the scene for our latest study which aims to provide the industry with evidence, insights and information to better understand and navigate difficult conversations and continue to make progress towards diversity, equity and inclusion.

The changing nature of distribution platforms

The nature of the TV sector itself has changed significantly over recent years. When the first *Seeing Ourselves* report was released, streaming services in Australia such as Stan and Netflix were in their infancy. Since the first report, there has also been a proliferation of commissioned, scripted drama distributed via social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. Australians now have

access to an ever-increasing range of content and platforms that can be accessed anywhere and anytime. As well as increased content creation, this has resulted in audience fragmentation and increased competition for viewers. These changes are considered in both the scope of the titles included in this report and the insights it presents.

11 See for example, Zhou N 2021, 'Whitewashed: why does Australian TV have such a problem with race?' *The Guardian*, 18 April 2021.

12 See for example, Faruqi O 2022, 'TV's night of whites: Why are the Logie Awards taking so long to catch up on diversity?' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 2022; and Roberts M 2022, 'The Logies remind us how whitewashed Australian television still is,' *Junkee*, 20 June 2022.

13 See for example, Eriksen D 2022, 'Disability project charts ableism in Australia's screen industry,' *Screenhub*, 1 March 2022.

14 See for example, Lee G 2021, 'The problem with "cripping up" and why casting disabled actors matters,' *ABC News*, 28 December 2021.

15 See for example, Om J 2021, 'More allegations of racism from former Neighbours actors,' *ABC News*, 19 April 2021.

16 See for example, Murphy-Oates L 2020, 'While on-screen diversity is important, what happens offscreen is paramount,' *The Guardian*, 27 August 2020.

Industry change and action

The first of its kind in Australia, the 2016 *Seeing Ourselves* report was received positively. There is now a growing area of related local research on diversity; and a range of commitments to improving representation via funding and commissioning guidelines and policies¹⁷ (see *Part 4: Tools and resources*).

There have also been new initiatives, such as CGA-Showcast's dedicated database for Deaf and disabled performers;¹⁸ the formation of the Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network;¹⁹ and The Everyone Project,²⁰ which is capturing diversity data from a broad range of production teams for the first time in Australia. Behind the scenes data is important, as change behind the scenes will drive change on screen.

The industry is collectively addressing this data gap through The Everyone Project and the preliminary report from this was released in October 2022.²¹

In crafting the best stories for Australian audiences, it is important that the industry is equipped with information and resources to reflect and collectively respond. There has been clear progress that builds on ground-breaking efforts and there is much desire in the industry for further change.



Eden

17 For example, Screen Australia's inclusive storytelling commitment, the South Australian Film Corporation and Screenwest's diversity and inclusion strategies, ABC and SBS guidelines for diversity and inclusion in commissioning, and the No Diversity, No Commission policy at Network Ten. See *Guidelines, commitments and strategies*.

18 CGA-Showcast 2022, *CGA-Showcast Portal for Deaf and Disabled Performers*.

19 See *The Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network*.

20 See *The Everyone Project*.

21 See Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network 2022, *Everyone Counts: Preliminary data on diversity in the Australian screen industry from The Everyone Project*.

Measuring and understanding diversity in Australian TV drama



Any investigation into diversity and inclusion requires careful consideration of stakeholder and community expectations. Research on diversity navigates complex, personal and sensitive terrain. Multiple aspects of identity intersect and overlap, and terms are continually tested and contested. The community's appetite for research, insights and action around diversity continues to grow, with constantly evolving and shifting community standards around respectful language and definitions. See [*Appendix A: Key terms and definitions*](#) for more information on the terms used in this report.

None of the measures used in this study to count on-screen diversity are definitive or beyond dispute. However, the combination of measures, along with exploration of opportunities and challenges off screen, provide as comprehensive and considered an approach as possible to understanding how much our TV drama content reflects the diversity of Australia today and the factors that enable or restrict diverse stories being told.

Method and scope

Seeing Ourselves 2 assesses the level of diversity represented in Australian scripted TV drama broadcast between 2016 and 2021. We looked at the level of diversity represented by both the characters and the actors who play them; how this compares to the Australian population; and whether things have changed since the previous *Seeing Ourselves* report.

In *Seeing Ourselves 2*, we have expanded the scope beyond broadcast TV to include commissioned content on streaming and online services, to reflect changes in audience viewing behaviour over the past six years. We have also expanded the scope of diversity aspects examined, which now include First Nations identity, cultural background, disability, gender, sexual orientation, occupational status, age and location. We have excluded self-commissioned content to keep data collection and analysis manageable.

As well as counting on-screen diversity, we conducted stakeholder consultations and interviews to capture insights and experiences of the opportunities, challenges and barriers experienced by those involved in bringing diverse stories and characters to the screen.

We targeted a broad range of views, including content commissioners, industry guilds, and representative organisations working with diversity, equity and inclusion. Our in-depth interviews, which delved deeper into the themes identified in the consultations, included a focus on screen practitioners from groups that have been historically excluded, as well as key decision makers. See [*Appendix C: List of consultation and interview participants*](#). Collectively, these perspectives may offer valuable and actionable insights for the benefit of the industry as a whole.

In addition, we have placed our findings in an international context through a scan of related research findings and initiatives by international peers in the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand screen industries.

Lastly, we have provided a summary of resources that may be useful for the Australian screen industry in increasing diverse representation, inclusion and equity.

Seeing Ourselves 2: method and scope overview

Part 1: On-screen diversity

- **We examined 3,072 main characters in 361 scripted Australian TV dramas**
 - includes children's dramas and comedies but not animations
- **Australian, commissioned titles that were broadcast or released in 2016–21 by:**
 - TV broadcasters (free-to-air, subscription and on demand)
 - streaming services (such as Stan and Netflix, new in this report)
 - online services (such as YouTube and Facebook, new in this report)

- **We examined:**

- each main character's:
 - self-identification (used where possible)
 - story elements
 - name (origins)
 - family
 - language spoken
 - accent
 - visible attributes²²
- publicly available information about actors

- **Diversity aspects examined:**

- First Nations identity
- cultural background (greater specificity than 2016 report)
- disability (now using the social model of disability)
- gender identity and sexual orientation (now reported separately)
- occupational and social status (new categories)
- age (new in this report)
- location (new in this report)

- **Analysis of:**

- diversity among main characters including intersectionality
- concentration of diverse characters across titles
- main characters' diversity by genre: children's drama and comedy
- diversity among actors playing main characters

- **Comparisons (where possible) with:**

- the Australian population
- 2016 *Seeing Ourselves* results

22 The best practice for diversity data collection is self-identification. We used further supplementary indicators as the best available information for fictional characters in screen content. The phenotypical approach reflected in these supplementary measures should not be the standard for data collection on diversity more broadly. For discussion of self-identification in data collection on cultural diversity, see Australian Human Rights Commission 2022, *National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report*, p.87.

Part 2: Challenges and opportunities

- **Findings from:**

- consultations with 35 participants across 23 industry organisations
- in-depth interviews with 28 key stakeholders including decision makers and diverse screen practitioners

Part 3: International context

- Scan of related research findings and activity in the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand

Part 4: Tools and resources

- A compilation of publicly available resources

For more on the method and scope see:

- [*How we measured on-screen diversity*](#)
- [*Appendix A: Key terms and definitions*](#)
- [*Appendix B: List of titles*](#)
- [*Appendix C: List of consultation and interview participants*](#)



Safe Harbour

Part 1: On-screen diversity



This section of *Seeing Ourselves 2* presents data about diversity among main characters in scripted Australian TV drama. Analysing the diversity of main characters provides information squarely from the audience perspective, gauging the range of stories and character perspectives experienced through these titles.

We also looked at the drama titles themselves, to see whether diversity is concentrated in a few titles or distributed broadly, including how many incorporated no main characters, or just one, from our groups of interest.

Finally, we looked at the level of diversity represented by the pool of actors cast as main characters. Analysing the diversity of the actors provides an industrial perspective, exploring access to main role casting opportunities for all performers. It also addresses the audience's access to a full range of faces, bodies and voices on screen.

Highlights

- There have been substantial improvements in the levels of diversity among main characters in TV drama since the 2016 study, including increased representation of First Nations, disabled and LGBTIQ+ characters, and a doubling of non-European representation.
- There is a strong and growing level of First Nations representation on screen. However, First Nations main characters are more concentrated in fewer titles than characters from other groups.
- A number of Australia's communities remain under-represented compared to population benchmarks. These include disabled people; LGBTIQ+ people; people from European backgrounds such as people with German, Dutch and Italian ancestry; people from non-European backgrounds such as people with Indian, Chinese, Filipino and Vietnamese ancestry; people aged under 12 or 60 and over; and people in regional areas.
- One in four TV dramas feature all Anglo-Celtic main characters, down from one in three in the previous study.
- There is a bias towards socioeconomic advantage on our screens, particularly among Anglo-Celtic and European characters. While nearly all groups are represented at all occupation skill levels, First Nations, non-European and disabled characters are less likely to be represented in higher skill level occupations.
- Children's titles and comedies tend to show higher levels of cultural diversity than dramas as a whole, but less disability and LGBTIQ+ representation.
- While still below population benchmarks, there are higher levels of European and non-European representation among the pool of actors cast as main characters than among the main characters they play. This suggests additional opportunities for 'colour-conscious casting' which involves intentional consideration of an actor's ethnicity and how it enriches a character's identity and the story.²³
- Just 3.9% of actors receiving main roles publicly identify as disabled. While this is likely to be an undercount due to reliance on public information, it suggests a need to increase disability representation in the talent pool to create more opportunities for 'identity-conscious casting'.

²³ The concepts of 'colour-conscious' and 'identity-conscious casting' are part of a live, complex and evolving discussion (see [From colour-blind to identity-conscious casting](#)). Further research is needed due to the reliance of publicly sourced information about actors and as the numbers alone cannot effectively tell the whole story.

How we measured on-screen diversity

Content platforms

The titles examined for this report were first released between 2016 and 2021 by one of the following:

- **TV broadcasters:** Australian free-to-air and subscription broadcasters, including their video on demand platforms such as ABC's iview.
- **Streaming services (new in 2023 report):** Netflix, Stan, Paramount+, Amazon Prime, AMC and Revry (other services did not have any first releases during the study period).
- **Online services (new in 2023 report):** YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Vimeo and Hyvio. For these platforms, we only included content commissioned by Screen Australia, state and territory screen funding agencies, and Australian broadcasters and video streaming services.

With the increase in content platforms since the 2016 report, the volume of local content has also grown: 199 Australian titles were captured in the 2016 report and 361²⁴ were reviewed in the current study. However, it should be noted that the screen content consumed by Australians is much broader than the 361 Australian titles examined in this report (see [Appendix B: List of titles](#)), particularly due to the rapid uptake of subscription video on demand and user-generated content from around the world.

Main characters

'Main' or recurring characters were defined as those who appeared in each episode, give or take a small margin. For telemovies and shows with an ensemble cast like *Black Comedy* they were the characters with a significant number of speaking lines and/or those who were on screen for a significant proportion of running time. For titles with multiple series, main characters were counted once in each series they appeared (for example, over five series of *Wentworth*, Vera Bennett was counted five times). Main characters were identified using title websites and other publicity materials, and we shared main cast lists with the relevant broadcaster.

The average number of characters analysed per title was seven, excluding the serials *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* where the average was 42 characters, due to their long-running nature and large ensemble casts.

24 One additional title was identified after the period of analysis concluded and has been excluded from the data. Results are not materially impacted by the title's exclusion.

How characters were categorised

Measuring diversity in TV drama involves a range of highly subjective issues including perception, personal identification and individual experience of the world. The methodology reflects our attempt to do this systematically, sensitively and avoiding bias.

Categorisation of main characters drew on definitions supported and promoted by the Australian Human Rights Commission and advocacy groups. This includes use of the social model of disability for disabled characters (see *The social model of disability*).

Self-identification, whether featured in the content or in press and media materials, was the primary indicator for categorisation. However, this was unavailable for many characters, so supplementary indicators that could be perceived through the content were used. These included story elements, visible attributes of characters and their surroundings, and in the case of cultural background, name, family, language spoken and accent.²⁵ Results were shared with the relevant broadcasters.

Where there were no indicative story elements, a character's cultural background was identified through the background of the actor playing the role (rather than assuming the character is Anglo-Celtic as a default). Actors were categorised based on publicly available information, such as self-identification in interviews and casting profiles. Where a character's story elements and the actor's public information did not reveal any cultural background beyond 'Australian' (i.e. no European, non-European or First Nations cultural background was identified), the character was categorised as Anglo-Celtic. There were also a limited number of cases categorised as 'not enough information' where there was no evidence to validate any specific categorisation.²⁶

For example, a character played by an actor of African or Asian heritage may be visibly recognisable as such. However, an actor of Danish or French background may not be identifiable as being of that ancestry if their public profile describes them as Australian. Although fewer characters may end up being categorised this way as 'European', the results would still broadly align with audience perceptions of on-screen diversity.

25 The best practice for diversity data collection is self-identification. We used further supplementary indicators as the best available information for fictional characters in screen content. The phenotypical approach reflected in these supplementary measures should not be the standard for data collection on diversity more broadly. For discussion of self-identification in data collection on cultural diversity, see Australian Human Rights Commission 2022, *National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report*, p.87.

26 There were nine characters and seven actors whose cultural background was categorised as 'not enough information' where there was ambiguity and no evidence found to validate categorisation.

Examples of how cultural backgrounds were categorised



Actor Alex Dimitriades has Greek heritage, so was categorised as European. He plays Peter Alexiades in *The Cry* who was categorised as European; and Charles Dancer in *Secret City* series 1 who was categorised as Anglo-Celtic. In both instances, this was based on the character's surname (and a lack of other story elements to indicate another background for Charles Dancer).



Alexander Bertrand is an Australian actor and has been categorised as Anglo-Celtic. He plays Pasquale 'Pat' Barbaro in *Australian Gangster*, who is a real person of Italian heritage, so his character was categorised as such. In playing Les Norton in *Les Norton*, his character was categorised as Anglo-Celtic.



Andrea Demetriades has Greek heritage, so was categorised as European. She plays Romi in *Squinters* series 1 and 2, where no story elements indicated her cultural heritage, so Demetriades' own cultural heritage was used to categorise Romi as European. In *Janet King* series 2, Demetriades plays character Lina Badir who has a storyline that indicates her Palestinian heritage, so the character was categorised as non-European.

First Nations



Black Comedy series 3

Highlights

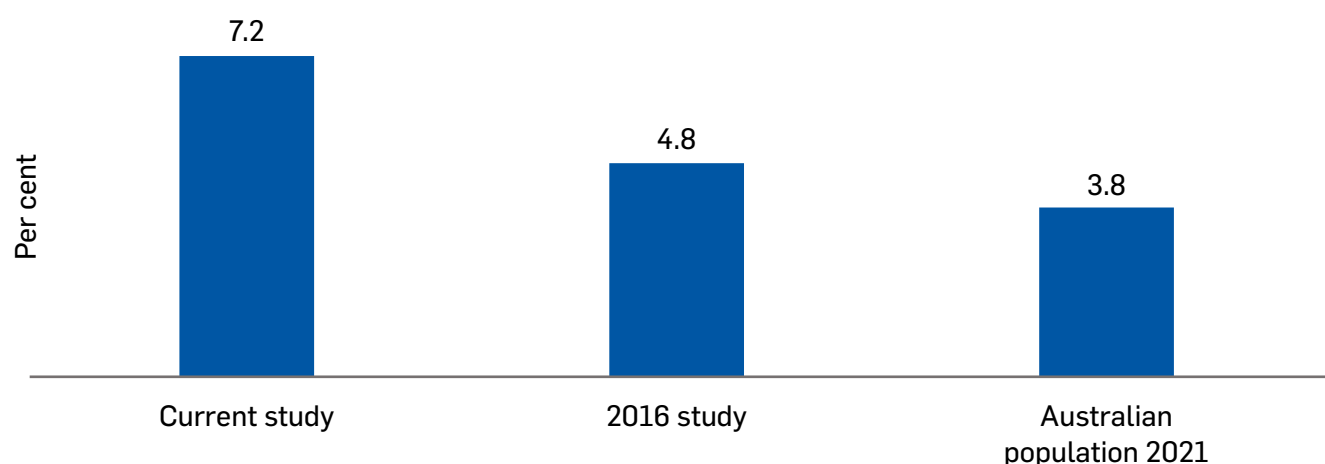
- The level of First Nations representation on screen is strong and growing, increasing from 4.8% of main characters in the previous study to 7.2%, compared to the population benchmark of 3.8%. This represents the culmination of over 30 years of work in the industry to support First Nations practitioners and stories.
- Three quarters of Australian dramas have no First Nations main characters (74%). However, this is an improvement from 83% in the 2016 study.

First Nations main characters

Among main characters in TV dramas between 2016 and 2021, 7.2% were First Nations, which is up from 4.8% in the 2016 study, and higher than First Nations people's proportion of the Australian population (3.8%) (Figure 2).

This positive result represents the ongoing support and advocacy for and by First Nations people in the screen industry, including the strong track record of First Nations media organisations, Screen Australia's First Nations department and other screen agencies.²⁷

Figure 2: First Nations representation among main characters compared to the Australian population, 2016 results and current study



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021 in the current study and 1,961 characters across 199 TV dramas broadcast 2011 to 2015 in the 2016 study. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021,²⁸ adjusted for undercount in Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2021.²⁹

A Chance Affair, 2017



Chance – played by Steven Oliver

When Chance declares his love for his best mate Geoff, he discovers that true love can only be found by being truthful to himself.³⁰

Steven Oliver is a descendant of the Kuku-Yalanji, Waanyi, Gangalidda, Woppaburra, Bundjalung and Biripi peoples. His web series *A Chance Affair* was nominated for best web series at both the 2018 Australian LGBTI Awards and Screen Producers Australia Awards.³¹

²⁷ There have been decades of work by many individuals and organisations dedicated to supporting the development of First Nations talent and stories. This includes Indigenous media associations such as CAAMA and Goolarri Media; federal, state and territory screen agencies; the ABC, NITV and SBS; and institutions such as AIATSIS and AFTRS.

²⁸ ABS 2021, *Snapshot of Australia*.

²⁹ ABS 2021, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*.

³⁰ *The Screen Guide*, Screen Australia.

³¹ *Steven Oliver (he/him)*, Sydney World Pride.



Cleverman

The proportion of titles that feature First Nations main characters has also increased, to 26% from 17% in the 2016 results. More than half of these titles had just one First Nations main character (16% of all titles). There is still a concentration of First Nations representation, including in shows such as *Cleverman*, *Black Comedy* and *Mystery Road*. Of all titles examined, 10% had

more than one First Nations main character, and almost three in four titles had no First Nations main characters (74%, compared to 83% in the previous study). First Nations main characters were more concentrated in fewer titles (26%) than characters from non-European backgrounds (55%) or non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds overall (75%).



Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to ways systemic discrimination can be compounded due to intersecting aspects of identity.³² Analysis of intersecting aspects of identity can reveal nuances in levels of on-screen representation. For example:

- Just over half of First Nations main characters are women (52%), 48% are men and none are non-binary.
- Among First Nations main characters, there is a lower rate of LGBTIQ+ representation (5.9%) than among main characters overall (7.4%).
- There is also less disability representation among First Nations main characters (3.6%) compared to among all main characters (6.6%) despite a high rate of disability among Australia's First Nations population (24%).³³
- Relative to main characters overall, First Nations characters are less likely to have high occupational status and are more likely to appear as sketch comedy characters, supernatural characters, children, students or criminals. A few key titles with multiple series have influenced this result, including *Cleverman*, *Black Comedy* and *Wentworth*, as well as strong representation in children's programming.

32 Crenshaw K 2017, *On Intersectionality: Essential writings*, The New Press, New York, NY.

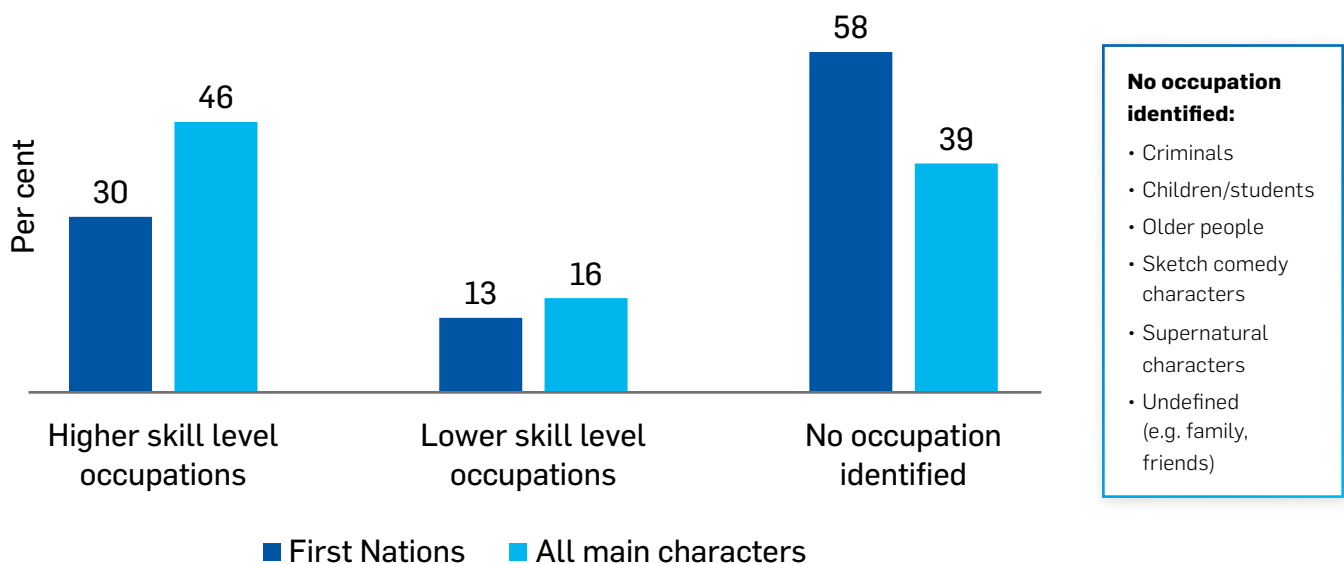
33 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021, *Disability Support for Indigenous Australians*.

Occupational status of First Nations main characters

In the current study, First Nations main characters were represented at all occupation levels, including almost one in three at the higher skill levels (30%), which includes occupations such as doctors and police.³⁴ However, First Nations characters were less likely to work in higher skill level occupations compared to main characters overall (30% of First Nations characters compared to 46% of all characters) (Figure 3). This reinforced 2016 findings that First Nations characters were less likely to hold professional or office-based occupations than other characters.

Where it was unclear if a character held an occupation, for example, characters who were family, neighbours, students or sketch comedy characters, they fell into the 'no occupation identified' group. First Nations characters were much more likely to be in this group (58% compared to 39% of all characters).

Figure 3: Occupational status of First Nations main characters



Based on 221 First Nations characters and 3,072 (all) main characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Higher skill level occupations include skill levels 1–2 and lower skill levels include levels 3–5 based on ABS ANZSCO 2021.

³⁴ See *Occupational and social status* in *Appendix A: Key terms and definitions* for an explanation of skill levels.

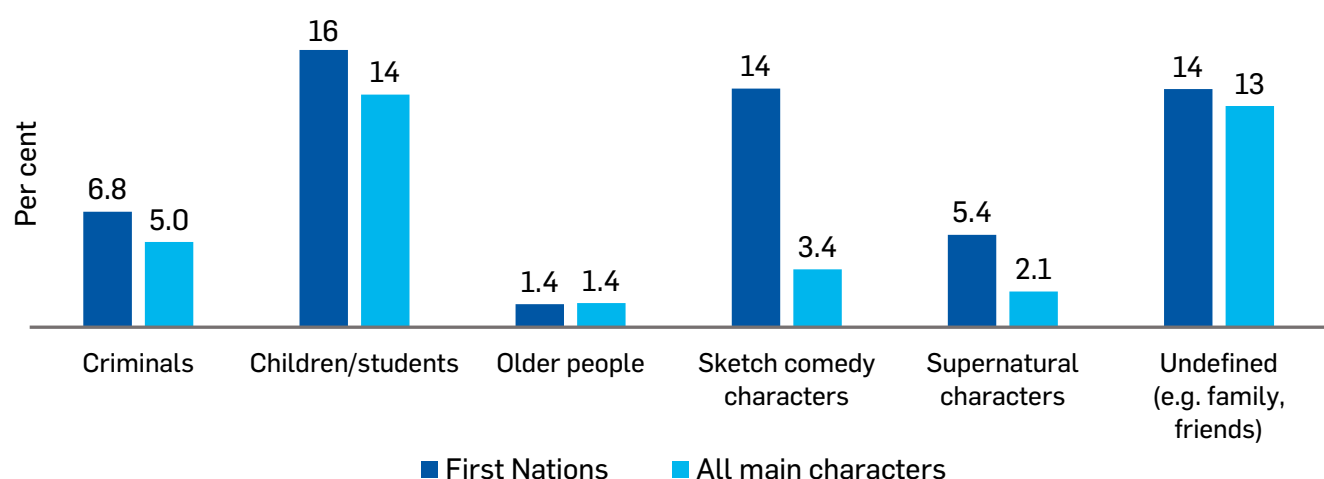
This high level of First Nations representation among characters with no occupation identified was largely due to strong representation in sketch comedy: while sketch comedies comprised a small segment of all main characters in the current study (just 3.4%), one in seven First Nations main characters were in sketch comedies (14%) (Figure 4), with the majority of these in the series *Black Comedy*.

First Nations characters were also relatively more likely to be supernatural (5.4%, compared to 2.1% of all main characters), with half of these from futuristic sci-fi drama *Cleverman*; and criminal (6.8%, compared to 5.0% of all main characters),

due to the amount of First Nations characters featured in *Wentworth*. Centred on the lives of women in Wentworth prison, *Wentworth* accounted for 3.6% of all First Nations characters in the current study (with characters recurring over series 4–8).

In line with the strong representation in children's titles (see *Are Australian children seeing themselves on screen?*), there was slightly higher representation of First Nations main characters among children and students (16% of First Nations characters), compared to all main characters (14%).

Figure 4: First Nations main characters with no occupation identified



Based on 221 main First Nations characters and 3,072 (all) main characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021.

***Dinghy Girls*, 2018**



Shanice Tabua –
played by herself

A 12 foot tinny, gifted to Shanice by her grandfather, offers a new sense of freedom as Shanice and her two friends Cienni and Jenna set off on Island adventures.³⁵

Shanice Tabua is a Torres Strait Islander woman handpicked to study at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2015.³⁶ She wrote and performed in *Dinghy Girls* which was part of the Straight out of the Straits initiative.³⁷

³⁵ [The Screen Guide](#), Screen Australia.

³⁶ Power S 2015, 'Four Cape York youngsters are following their dreams in Perth,' *Cairns Post*, 11 February 2015.

³⁷ [The Screen Guide](#), Screen Australia.

Cultural background (non-First Nations)

Highlights

- There have been improvements since the previous study, including a doubling of non-European representation in TV drama.
- However, people from European and non-European backgrounds remain under-represented among main characters compared to population benchmarks – particularly those from the Southern and Eastern European, Southern and Central Asian, and South-East Asian groups. There is still more work to do to ensure our screen stories reflect Australia's cultural diversity.
- Some groups are seeing representation on par or slightly above population benchmarks, for example, the North African and Middle Eastern group (which includes Lebanese and Turkish communities) and the Oceanian group (which includes Māori and Samoan communities).
- One in four TV dramas feature all Anglo-Celtic main characters (25%) down from around one in three in the previous study (36%). A further 23% of titles have just one main character who is not Anglo-Celtic.

Cultural background of main characters

In this section, which looks at the cultural background of main characters who are not First Nations, we begin with results for the groups used in the previous study. Mirroring key waves of migration to Australia, these are Anglo-Celtic, European and non-European. We then provide more detailed analysis within the European and non-European groups.

Note on population benchmarks: In the 2016 study, when looking at the Australian population benchmark, we considered a person's place of birth, parents' place of birth, and nominated ancestry. In the current study, we have shifted to counting only a person's ancestry reported on the Census, reflecting the methodology used in more recent reports published by the Australian Human Rights Commission.³⁸

Anglo-Celtic

While 53% of the Australian population have Anglo-Celtic ancestry (for example, English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh), 71% of main characters in our current study of TV drama were represented as Anglo-Celtic (Figure 5). While still high, this level of representation is down from the 82% share of main characters in the 2016 study, suggesting the industry has made efforts to ensure more cultural diversity in the main characters on our screens.

In the current study, one in four Australian dramas had no characters with a background other than Anglo-Celtic. In other words, 25% of Australian dramas had 'all-white' main characters, down from 36% in 2016. A further 23% of titles had just one main character with a background other than Anglo-Celtic.

38 Australian Human Rights Commission 2018, *Leading for Change: A blueprint for cultural diversity and inclusive leadership revisited*.

European

European characters (for example, characters with German, Dutch, Italian or Greek ancestry) continue to represent a low proportion of main characters at 4.7% compared with the Australian population benchmark of 18%. Our on-screen stories feature relatively few main characters who have specific story elements (such as name, language and family members) that represent the diverse communities within this group. This has reduced by around 1% since 2016, when 5.7% of characters

were identified as European (Figure 5). While these results suggest under-representation, they may also reflect that many Australians with European ancestry now have anglicised names, making them harder to identify – ancestry is not always apparent either on screen or in daily life.

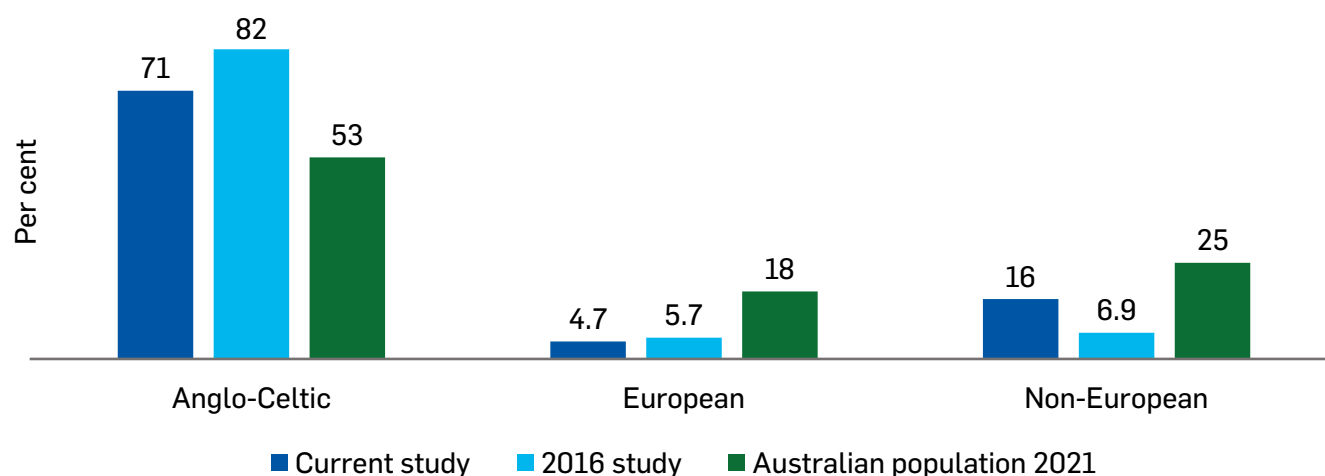
Almost three quarters of titles in our current study featured no main characters identified as European (73%), up from 69% in the 2016 study.

Non-European

Since the 2016 study, the share of non-European main characters (for example, those with Indian, Chinese or Middle Eastern ancestry) has more than doubled from 6.9% to 16%. However, while this doubling of representation is a positive trajectory, the non-European group remains under-represented compared to the Australian population benchmark of 25% (Figure 5).

Non-European characters featured in just over half of Australian TV dramas between 2016 and 2021 (55%) which is up from 38% in the 2016 study. Just under half (45%) featured no non-European characters, 22% featured one and 33% featured more than one.

Figure 5: Cultural background of main characters compared to Australian population, 2016 results and current study



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021 in the current study and 1,961 characters across 199 TV dramas broadcast 2011 to 2015 in the 2016 study. Results for First Nations people are reported in Figure 2. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021.



Deeper dive: European and non-European main characters

This section provides a more detailed breakdown for the cultural backgrounds of characters in the European and non-European groups.³⁹ In looking at cultural background in more detail, we have also counted multiple ancestries.⁴⁰ While the ABS Census allows people to nominate up to two ancestries, we have attempted to capture as many cultural backgrounds that were evident in the story elements (or an actor's background where it informed us about the character).

Figure 6 presents the cultural background of main characters allowing for multiple ancestries. It shows under-representation among main characters for some groups, for example:

- The **Southern and Eastern European** group (most commonly represented in Australia by Italian and Greek communities) make up 12% of the population but only 5.3% of main characters identified in the current study.
- The **Southern and Central Asian** group (most commonly represented in Australia by Indian and Sri Lankan communities) made up only 2.8% of main characters despite being a growing community in Australia representing 7.0% of the population.
- The **South-East Asian** group (most commonly represented in Australia by Filipino and Vietnamese communities) make up 4.6% of the population but only 1.7% of main characters were identified as such.

Some groups are seeing representation on par or slightly above population benchmarks: the **North African and Middle Eastern** group (which includes Lebanese and Turkish communities); the **Oceanian** group (which includes Māori and Samoan communities); the **Sub-Saharan African** group (which includes South African and Zimbabwean communities); and the **Peoples of the Americas** (which includes Chilean and Brazilian communities).

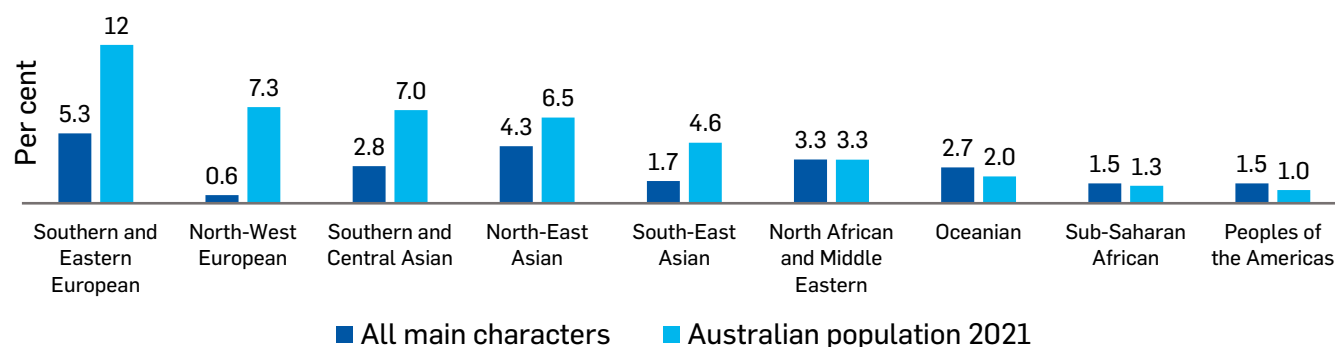
³⁹ Based on the 'broad groups' categories from the ABS [Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups \(ASCCEG\)](#) (2019).

⁴⁰ Results reported for the four broad groups above classify each person/character into one ancestry, with a hierarchy determining which group people with more than one ancestry are counted in.

While these are positive findings, it is important to note that the data does not tell the whole story, as these numbers do not provide insights about the nature or quality of representation. Our interviews with diverse screen practitioners for *Seeing Ourselves 2* highlighted concerns around inauthentic or stereotypical portrayals of cultural

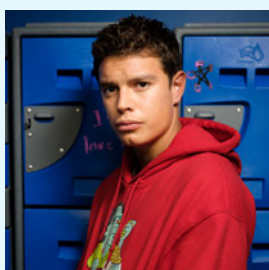
elements (see [Part 2: Challenges and opportunities for our interview findings](#)). We have used analysis of occupational and social status as one way to measure how stereotyping might manifest (see [Cultural background and occupational and social status](#)).

Figure 6: Deeper dive into European and non-European representation among main characters compared to the Australian population, allowing for multiple ancestries



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021. Allows for multiple ancestries.

Bump series 1, 2020 and series 2, 2021



Santi – played by Carlos Sanson Jr

Santi and Oly must adjust to their new lives as parents while balancing their high school studies, family obligations and social life.⁴¹ Latino culture is rare to see on Australian TV and *Bump* offers an authentic representation through Santi's family.⁴²

Carlos Sanson Jr, who plays Santi, is an Australian-born Chilean of Cuban and Nicaraguan descent. Having limited acting opportunities in Australia previously, this is his breakout role.⁴³

To look at cultural groups with further specificity, Figure 7 presents the representation of main characters compared to the ten most common European and non-European ancestries in the Australian population. For certain communities, representation among main characters is still relatively rare, for example there were only nine Filipino characters across five years of content.

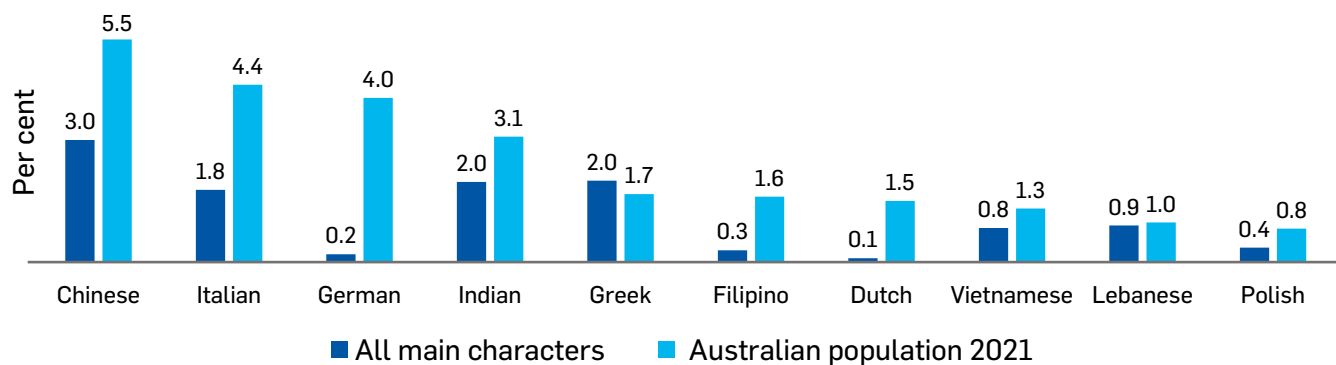
Our interviewees mentioned that when representation is rare, these characters take on the burden of representing a community that rarely sees itself on screen and can come under extra scrutiny regarding inauthentic portrayal or perpetuating stereotypes (see [When lived experience is undervalued: Carrying the burden and reputational risk](#)).

⁴¹ *Bump*, IMDb.

⁴² Watson M 2021, 'Bump review – sharp, sweet and surreal story of unexpected teen parenthood,' *The Guardian*, 1 January 2021.

⁴³ Chandra J 2020, 'Why Carlos Sanson Jr says the role of Santi in Stan Original series Bump is "meant for me",' *Nine Entertainment*.

Figure 7: Cultural background of main characters compared to the Australian population, ten most common European and non-European ancestries in Australia



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021. Allows for multiple ancestries.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to ways systemic discrimination can be compounded due to intersecting aspects of identity.⁴⁴ Analysis of intersecting aspects of identity can reveal nuances in levels of on-screen representation. For example:

- Main characters from European backgrounds are more likely to be women (63%) than main characters from other backgrounds or overall.
- There is a higher rate of LGBTIQ+ representation on screen among main characters from non-European backgrounds (11%) and a lower rate among main characters from European backgrounds (4.2%) compared to among main characters overall (7.4%).
- There is a higher rate of disability representation on screen among main characters who are Anglo-Celtic (7.3%) or European (7.6%) compared to among characters who are non-European (4.8%) or main characters overall (6.6%).
- Anglo-Celtic and European characters are more likely to hold higher skilled occupations than non-European and First Nations characters, suggesting that whiteness is associated with higher social status in terms of formal education and specialised or managerial occupations.
- In contrast, non-European characters are more likely than Anglo-Celtic and European characters to have no identifiable occupation, including appearing as children or students.

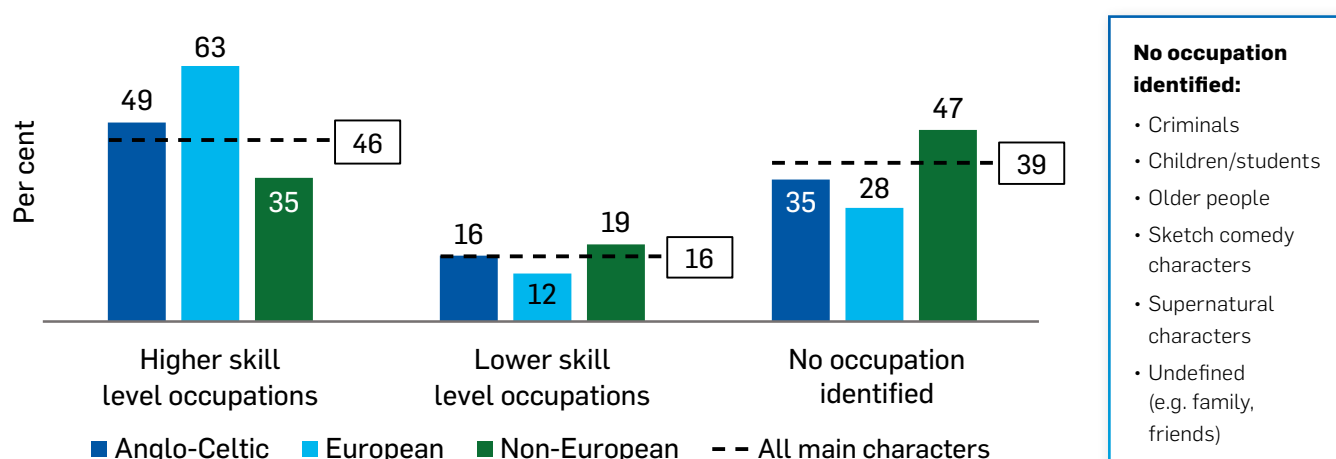
⁴⁴ Crenshaw K 2017, *On Intersectionality: Essential writings*, The New Press, New York, NY.

Cultural background and occupational status

In TV drama between 2016 and 2021, all cultural groups were represented at all occupation skill levels with the exception of European characters, who were not represented in the lowest skill level occupations (such as courier or cleaner).⁴⁵ European characters were the group most likely to be represented at the higher skill levels (63%) and were much less likely to be represented at lower skill levels (12%) or to have no identifiable occupation (28%) compared to other cultural groups and main characters overall (Figure 8).

Figure 8 reveals a bias, that non-European characters are less likely to hold higher skill level occupations (such as doctors or police) than European and Anglo-Celtic characters: in the current study, 35% of non-European characters held higher skilled level occupations compared to 63% of European characters and 49% of Anglo-Celtic characters. This bias is a new finding compared to the 2016 study which found only small differences across these cultural backgrounds in representation among higher skill occupations.⁴⁶ In the current study, almost half of non-European characters had no identifiable occupation (47%).

Figure 8: Occupational status of main characters across cultural backgrounds



Based on 2,193 Anglo-Celtic characters, 144 European characters, 505 non-European characters and 3,072 (all) characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Results for First Nations people are reported in Figure 3. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021. Higher skill level occupations include skill levels 1–2 and lower skill levels include levels 3–5 based on ABS ANZSCO 2021. There were a small number of characters who held identified occupations as well as roles described in the 'no occupation identified' category (for example, builder and drug trafficker), so percentages may add to more than 100%.

Looking more closely at characters who did not have identified occupations, European characters were the most likely to be represented as criminals (8.3% of European characters, compared to 5.0% of

characters overall) (Figure 9). European characters who were criminals were evenly distributed across titles (12 characters over 12 titles), including five from Italian backgrounds and four from Russian.

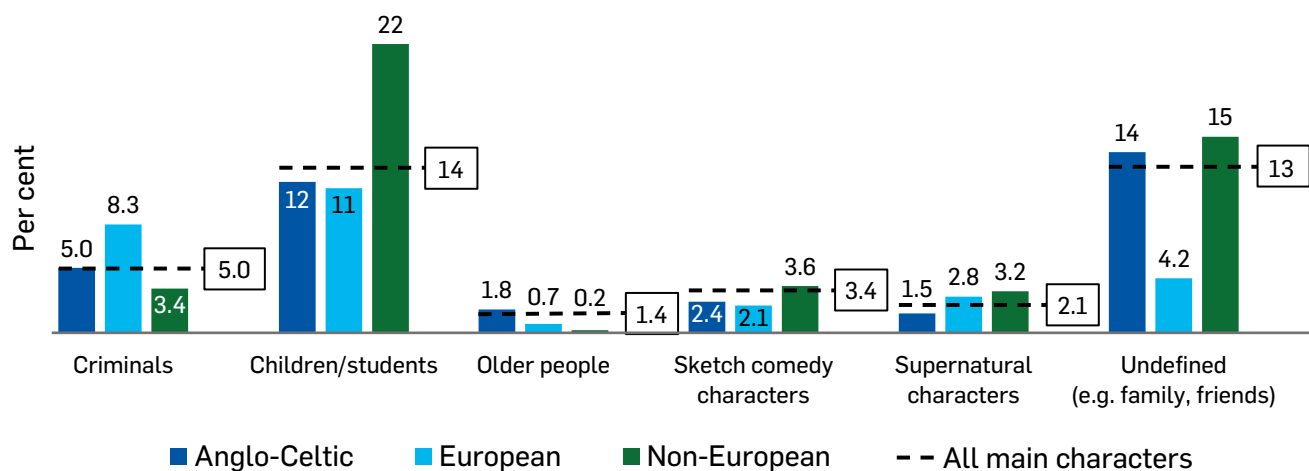
⁴⁵ Level 5 based on ABS ANZSCO 2021. See *Occupational and social status* in *Appendix A: Key terms and definitions* for an explanation of skill levels.

⁴⁶ The previous study used different categories, including 'legal', 'medical' and 'professional office-based'.

Non-European characters were the most likely group to be seen as children or students (22% of non-European characters compared to 14% of characters overall). While some of this is explained by the higher levels of non-European representation in children's titles

(see *Are Australian children seeing themselves on screen?*), over-representation remained when we removed children's titles from the analysis: 17% of non-European characters in general drama titles were children or students compared to 10% of characters overall.

Figure 9: Cultural background of main characters with no occupation identified



Based on 2,193 Anglo-Celtic characters, 144 European characters, 505 non-European characters and 3,072 (all) characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Results for First Nations people are reported in Figure 4.

Back to the Rafters, 2021



Nick 'Carbo' Karandonis – played by George Houvardas

Nick 'Carbo' Karandonis is the Greek-Australian best friend and neighbour to the Anglo-Celtic Australian Rafter family. This spin-off series looks into the new challenges facing each character as they enter new phases of their lives.⁴⁷

George Houvardas is a Sydney-born actor with Greek heritage best known for his role in *Packed to the Rafters*. Recently he also worked on TV series, *Frayed* (2019), playing politician Chris.

⁴⁷ *Back to the Rafters*, IMDb.

Disability

Highlights

- The rate of disability representation among main characters has improved, but from a low base. Disability remains very much under-represented in TV drama (6.6%, up from 3.6% in the previous study) compared to the Australian population (18%).
- Seven in ten programs do not feature any main characters who are disabled (71%). More work is needed so that disabled people are included as main characters in our screen stories.
- The most common types of disability⁴⁸ portrayed in TV drama are psychosocial (for example, memory conditions or mental illness), which affects 59% of disabled main characters; and physical disability, which affects 42%. There is opportunity to broaden the breadth of disability portrayal to open audience perspectives to the diverse range of experiences of disabled people.

The social model of disability

To identify disabled characters, in *Seeing Ourselves 2*, we have used the social model of disability. According to the social model, people are disabled by barriers in society (such as buildings not having a ramp or accessible toilets), as well as people's attitudes (such as assuming disabled people cannot do certain things). This is different to the medical model which says people are disabled by their impairments or differences – what is 'wrong' with the person rather than what the person needs.⁴⁹

The social model of disability highlights barriers in society. Accessibility is about considering and addressing these barriers (or 'access needs') through access strategies, which involve creating or adjusting products, services, facilities and workplaces so that everyone can fully participate.⁵⁰

Access strategies include budgeting for and using Auslan interpreters; implementing captions on videos and imagery; booking accessible venues; using technology that includes accessibility functions such as screen magnifiers or speech recognition tools; and allowing time for rest.⁵¹

In *Seeing Ourselves 2*, characters were identified as disabled based on self-identification, or if they had a health-related impairment that limited their participation in the fictional world of the TV drama because of social or environmental barriers.⁵² For example, in *Retrograde*, which is set during the COVID-19 lockdown, the chronic illness of immunocompromised character Sophie is acknowledged explicitly by the character herself in the first episode. Broader story elements across the season then show the social and environmental access barriers that Sophie experiences.

48 Types of impairments that are connected to disability status due to environmental or social barriers.

49 Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, *Social Model of Disability*, viewed March 2023. See also People with Disability Australia, *Social Model of Disability*, viewed March 2023.

50 See People with Disability Australia, *Social Model of Disability*, viewed March 2023; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Disability and Health Inclusion Strategies*, viewed March 2023.

51 For more, see Australian Human Rights Commission 2016, *Access for all: Improving accessibility for consumers with disability*.

52 Health related impairments were categorised using the disability groups from the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: 'Sensory', 'Intellectual', 'Physical', 'Psychosocial', 'Head injury, stroke or acquired brain injury' and 'Other'. ABS 2019, 'Appendix – disability groups' in *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of findings Methodology*.

The shift in definition means characters who experienced temporary impairments (for example, temporary paralysis or memory loss) were not counted as disabled characters in this study as they were in the 2016 report. We used United Nations⁵³ and ABS definitions⁵⁴ as guidance for identifying disabled characters where it was not clear from story elements, synopsis or press coverage.

It should be noted that, like cultural backgrounds, disability in the population – and therefore among characters – may not necessarily be apparent. Our study focused on main characters where disability was evident on screen in some way.

Disabled main characters

Almost one in five Australians is disabled (18%).⁵⁵ However, only 6.6% of main characters were identified as disabled in the current study (Figure 10). While this is higher than the 3.6% identified in the previous study and indicates progress,⁵⁶ the level of representation on screen remains significantly below the population benchmark. Disability representation was lower still in comedy (3.6%) and children's titles (3.8%) (see *Diversity in children's drama and comedy*).

Seven in ten titles did not feature any disabled main characters (71%). While this is an improvement from the 90% reported in 2016, it indicates that more work needs to be done so that disabled people are included as main characters in our screen stories. One in six titles featured one disabled main character (17%) and 12% featured more than one (such as *The End* and *Legend of Burnout Barry* from the DisRupted initiative).

***The Heights* series 1, 2019 and series 2, 2020**



Sabine – played by
Bridie McKim

Sabine is navigating life at her new school, dealing with her single mum and has cerebral palsy. She is one of the first disabled characters to be written as a lead role on Australian screens.⁵⁷

Bridie McKim, who plays Sabine, is a proud disabled woman with cerebral palsy. She is a graduate of NIDA and has continued to establish her career with recent roles in *Christmas Ransom* (2022) and *Irreverent* (2022).⁵⁸

53 United Nations 2006, *Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

54 See 'Disability' within 'Glossary', ABS 2019, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of findings Methodology*.

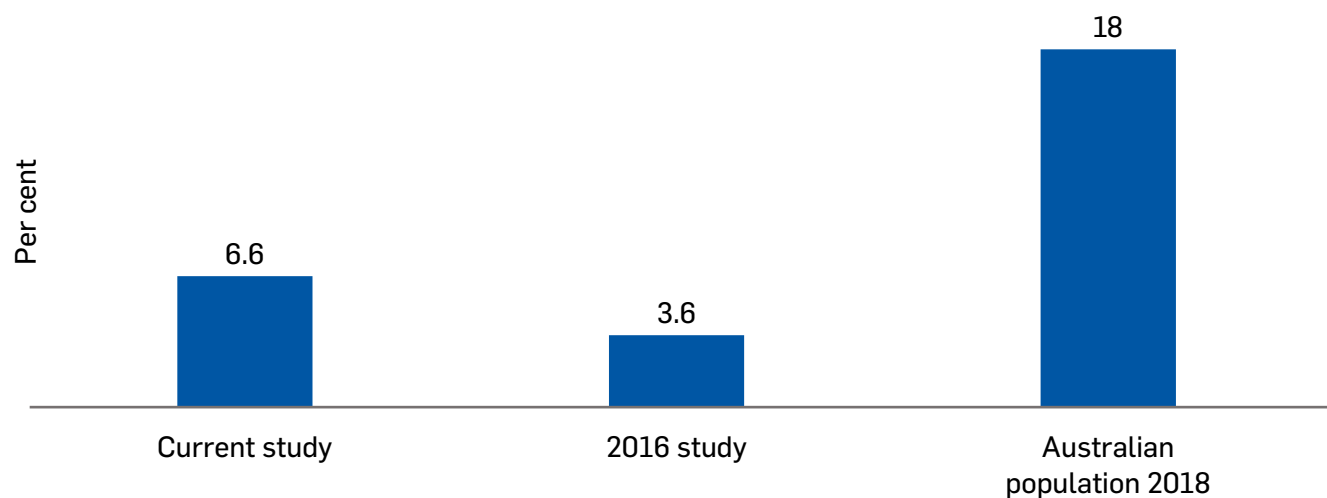
55 ABS 2019, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of findings, 2018*.

56 Particularly given the current study used a narrower definition based on the social model of disability.

57 Bizzaca C 2022 '*Raising the bar for The Heights*', *Screen Australia Screen News*, 8 September 2022.

58 *Bridie McKim*, IMDb.

Figure 10: Disabled main characters compared to the Australian population, 2016 results and current study



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021 in the current study and 1,961 characters across 199 TV dramas broadcast 2011 to 2015 in the 2016 study. Australian population based on the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.



Types of disability represented on screen

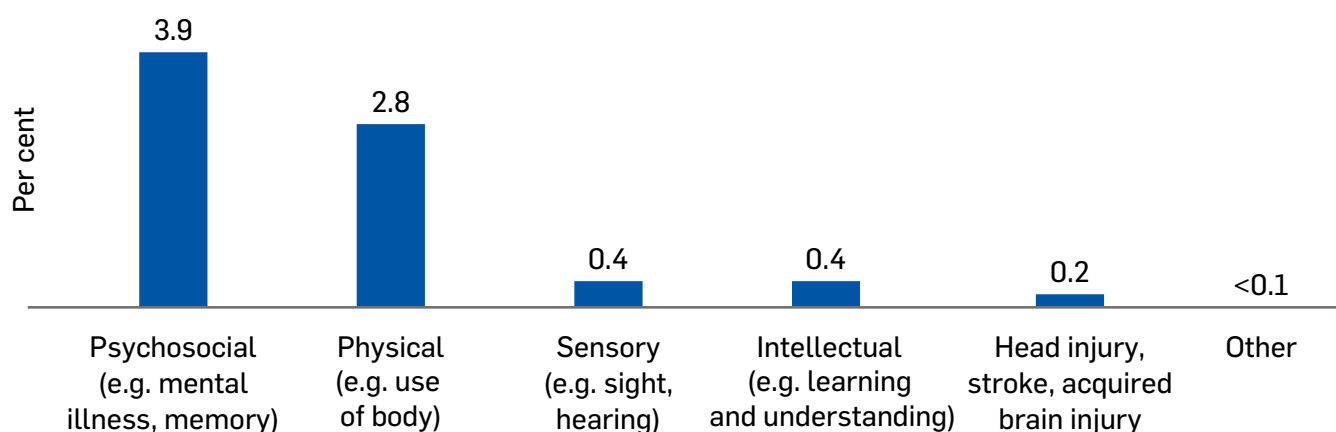
The experiences of disabled people are diverse and multi-dimensional. To provide further details about the nature of disability represented among main characters, we used the disability groups from the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. The intention is to explore whether there is diversity in the disability represented on screen, and whether specific communities are represented, such as people who are Deaf, deaf or hard of hearing. In identifying disability groups, a main character could experience disability in more than one domain.

Overall, in the current study, there were 204 disabled main characters across 105 titles. The most common types of disability portrayed were psychosocial disability (for example, barriers related to memory conditions or mental illness), which affected 3.9% of all main characters (59% of disabled main characters); and physical disability (for example, barriers related to chronic pain or wheel chair use), which affected 2.8% of all main characters (42% of disabled characters) (Figure 11).⁵⁹

There are no comparable population benchmarks on types of disability.⁶⁰ However, these findings may reflect a narrow representation of disability based on what the industry assumes to be most familiar or recognisable to audiences; rather than opening up our perspectives to a more diverse range of experiences, such as sensory or intellectual disability. Our consultations and interviews for *Seeing Ourselves 2* highlighted that there are still concerns about how disability is represented on screen and the need for these stories to be led by disabled people (see [Spotlight on disability](#)).

Sensory disability (barriers related to loss of sight, hearing or speech) was portrayed by 0.4% of all main characters (5.9% of disabled characters); intellectual disability was portrayed by 0.4% of all main characters (5.4% of disabled characters); and 0.2% of all main characters experienced disability associated with head injury, stroke or acquired brain injury (2.5% of disabled characters) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Types of disability represented among main characters



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021 and disability groups from the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers.

⁵⁹ Results do not add up to 100% as there were a number of characters who had disability in more than one category.

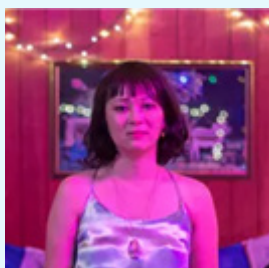
⁶⁰ Types of impairments that are connected to disability status due to environmental or social barriers.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to ways systemic discrimination can be compounded due to intersecting aspects of identity.⁶¹ Analysis of intersecting aspects of identity can reveal nuances in levels of representation. For example:

- Half of all disabled main characters are women, half are men and none are non-binary.
- Rates of disability representation are higher among main characters who are Anglo-Celtic (7.3%) or European (7.6%) than among characters who are non-European (4.8%) or main characters overall (6.6%).
- The rate of disability representation is particularly low among First Nations characters (3.6%) despite a high rate of disability among Australia's First Nations population (24%).⁶²
- Disabled characters are represented at all occupation skill levels, including more than one in three at the higher skill levels, such as doctors or police (36%). However, they are less likely to be represented at these levels compared to main characters overall (46%).
- Compared to main characters overall, disabled characters are more likely to be represented as older people, and as children or students despite lower representation in children's TV compared to general drama.

Homecoming Queens, 2018



Michelle Low – played
by Michelle Law

Michelle's diagnosis of alopecia sends her back to Brisbane to her best friend who has just been diagnosed with breast cancer. Together they navigate their chronic illness and the impact these have on their daily lives.⁶³

The story is based on the lived experience of chronic illness from series creators and writers Michelle Law and Oliver Reeson.⁶⁴ The series won the 2018 AWGIE award for Web Series and Other Non-Broadcast/VOD Works.⁶⁵

61 Crenshaw K 2017, *On Intersectionality: Essential writings*, The New Press, New York, NY.

62 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021, *Disability Support for Indigenous Australians*.

63 *Homecoming Queens*, SBS.

64 Convery S 2018, 'Homecoming Queens: Friends turn chronic illness into comedy script,' *The Guardian*, 15 April 2018.

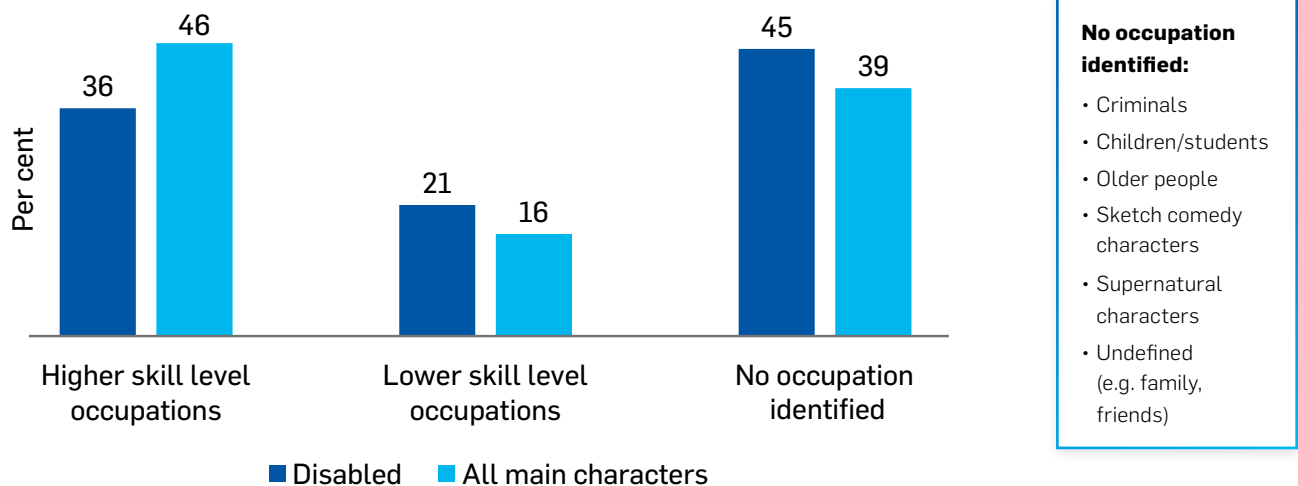
65 *Homecoming Queens*, AUSTLIT.

Occupational status of disabled main characters

In Australian TV drama between 2016 and 2021, disabled main characters were represented at all occupation skill levels, including one in three at the higher skill levels, such as doctors or police (36%).

However, they were less likely to be represented at this level compared to main characters overall (46%) and were more likely to have no identified occupation (45% of disabled characters compared to 39% of all main characters) (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Occupational status of disabled main characters



Based on 204 disabled characters and 3,072 (all) main characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Higher skill level occupations include skill levels 1–2 and lower skill levels include levels 3–5 based on ABS ANZSCO 2021.

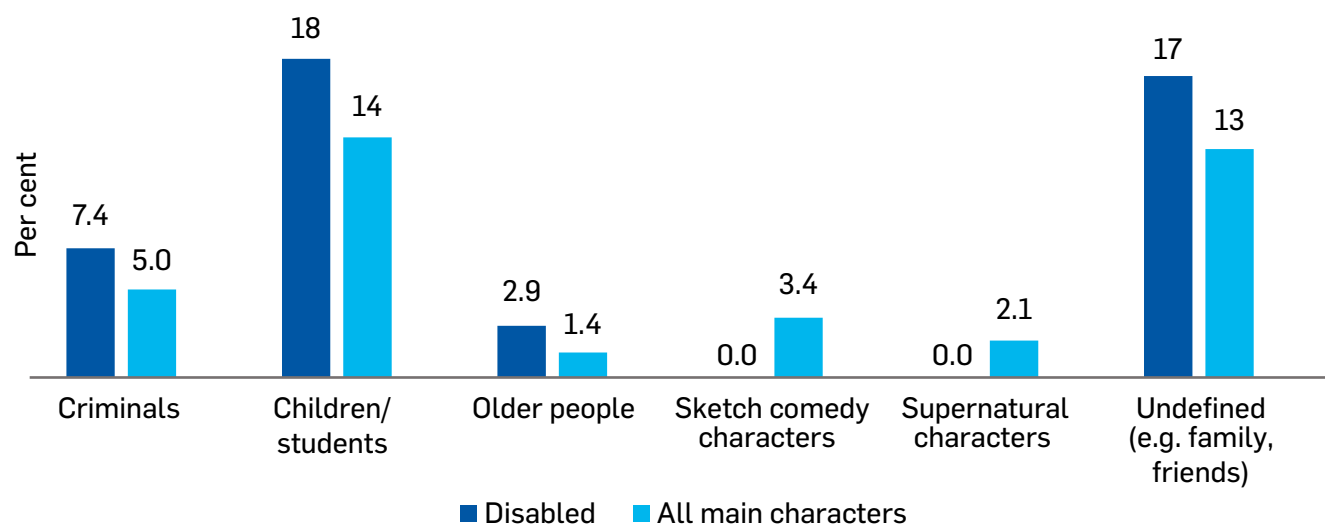


Almost one in five disabled characters who had no occupation identified were represented as children or students (18%), which was over-representation compared to main characters overall (14%) (Figure 13). This was despite lower representation of disability in children's programming compared to adult titles (see *Are Australian children seeing themselves on screen?*).

Among disabled characters there was a higher level of representation of older people (2.9%) compared to among all main characters (1.4%).

This reflects the trend in the population that the prevalence of disability increases with age.⁶⁶ Disabled characters were more likely to be represented as criminals (7.4%) than main characters overall (5.0%) due to disabled characters in *Wentworth*. There is a high prevalence of disability in Australia's prison population.⁶⁷

Figure 13: Disabled main characters with no occupation identified



Based on 204 disabled characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021.

⁶⁶ ABS 2019, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of findings, 2018*.

⁶⁷ Disabled people comprise 29% of Australia's criminal justice system, compared to 18% of Australia's overall population. Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability 2020, *People with Disability Over Represented At All Stages of the Criminal Justice System*.

Gender identity and sexual orientation

Highlights

- Apart from non-binary characters, main characters are split evenly between women and men.
- There were 18 trans and/or gender diverse main characters in TV drama between 2016 and 2021 (0.6% of characters), including five trans men, eight trans women and five non-binary characters.
- The overall rate of LGBTIQ+ representation among main characters has increased (from 4.5% to 7.4%), though it remains below the 11% population benchmark.
- 69% of titles have no LGBTIQ+ main characters, down from 73% in the 2016 study. Almost half of the titles that feature LGBTIQ+ representation have just one LGBTIQ+ character.

Gender identity among main characters

In TV drama broadcast between 2016 and 2021, the gender of main characters was evenly split between women and men (50% of characters), similar to the split of women and men in the Australian population.⁶⁸ Our study found five characters whose gender identity was non-binary (0.2%) (Figure 14).

There were 18 characters who were trans and/or gender diverse (0.6% of main characters): five who were trans men, eight who were trans women and five who were non-binary. At the time of preparing this report, there were no population statistics for people who are trans and/or gender diverse.

Figure 14: Gender of main characters compared to Australian population

	Cisgender	Trans and/or gender diverse	Total characters	% of all characters	% of Australian population
Men	1,515	5	1,520	50	49
Women	1,539	8	1,547	50	51
Non-binary	n/a	5	5	0.2	Unknown

Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021.

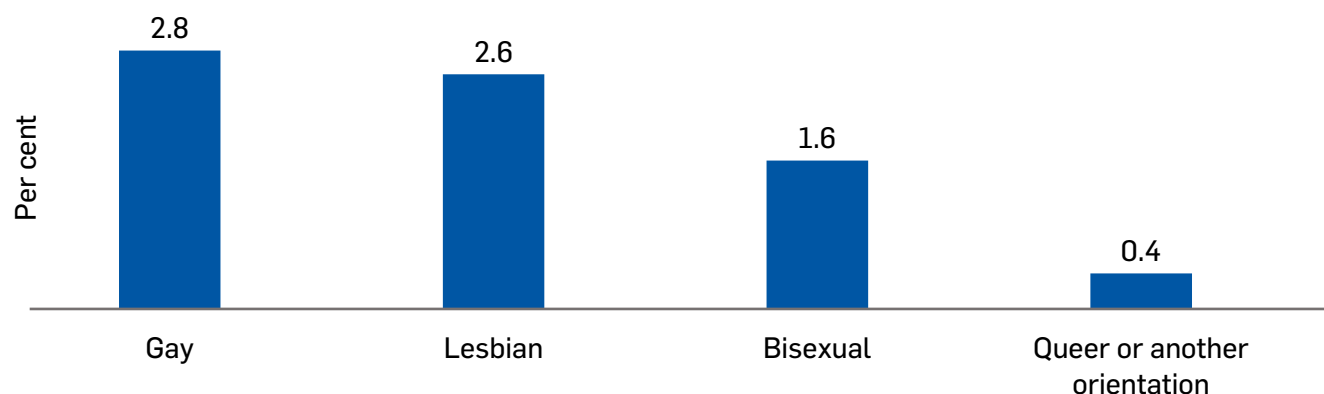
⁶⁸ At the time of preparing this report, no reliable population statistic was identified for Australians with non-binary gender identity.

Sexual orientation of main characters

Of all main characters in the current study, sexual orientation was unknown for 28% and 65% were heterosexual. Around one in 13 main characters had a sexual orientation other than heterosexual

(lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or another sexual orientation) (7.4%, or 228 characters) (Figure 15). There were no characters where story elements indicated that the main character was asexual.

Figure 15: Main characters with known sexual orientation other than heterosexual



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. A further 65% were heterosexual and sexual orientation was unknown for a further 28%.



Scattered

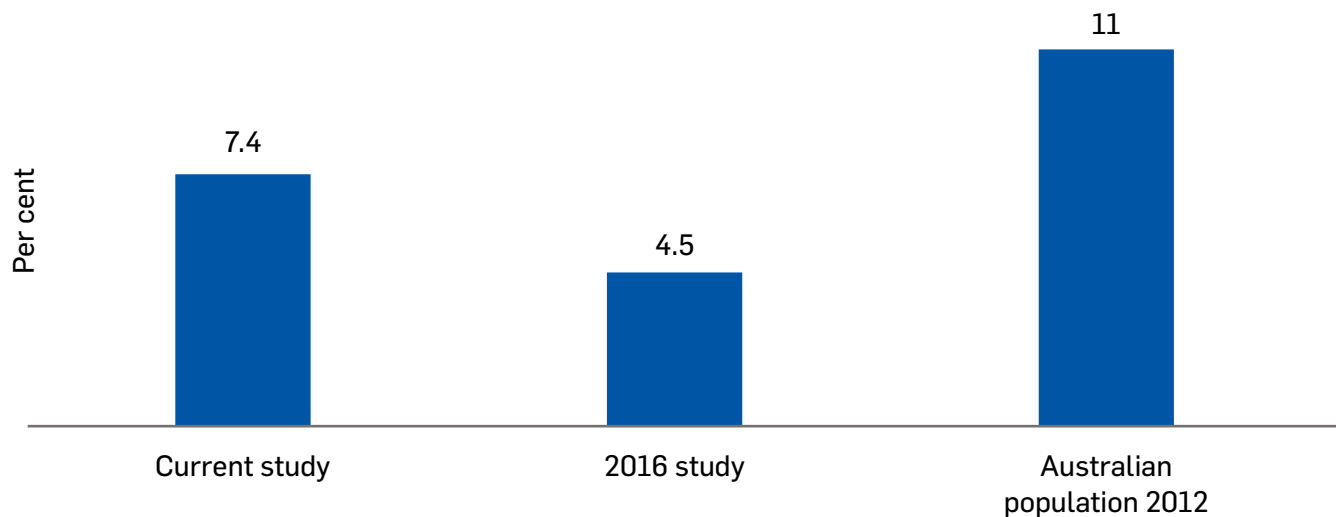
LGBTIQ+ main characters

The LGBTIQ+ community includes people with diverse gender identities as well as sexual orientations. Looking at this community as a whole, in total, there were 228 LGBTIQ+ characters in TV drama between 2016 and 2021. This represents 7.4% of all characters, which is an increase from 4.5% reported in the previous study (Figure 16). This shows a positive improvement in seeing more

LGBTIQ+ main characters on our screens but remains under the population benchmark.

Representation occurred in 31% of titles (111 titles), compared to 27% in 2016, with almost half of these titles featuring just one LGBTIQ+ character. Around seven in ten titles had no LGBTIQ+ characters (69%).

Figure 16: LGBTIQ+ representation among main characters compared to the Australian population



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on Department of Health and Ageing 2012. There were 228 unique characters included in the LGBTIQ+ group. For example, a person who is trans and gay was counted as one character.

Comparing these findings to a population benchmark is difficult as, at the time of preparing this report, there had been no updated population estimates for the LGBTIQ+ community since 2012.

In 2012, it was estimated that around 11% of Australians were LGBTIQ+.⁶⁹ Compared to this estimate, representation among main characters at 7.4% remains below this benchmark.

⁶⁹ Department of Health and Ageing 2012, *National Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Care Strategy*. See Australia Council 2021, *Towards Equity: A research overview of diversity in Australia's arts and cultural sector*, p.88 for a summary of research that estimates the size of Australia's LGBTIQ+ population.

Intersectionality

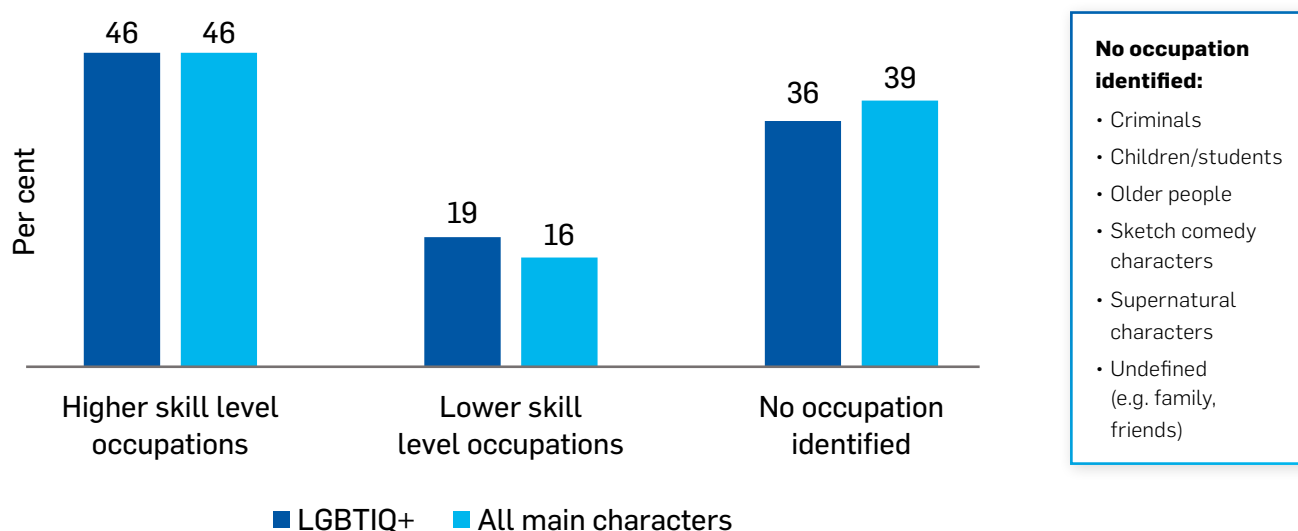
Intersectionality refers to ways systemic discrimination can be compounded due to intersecting aspects of identity.⁷⁰ Analysis of intersecting aspects of identity can reveal nuances in levels of representation. For example:

- More than half of LGBTIQ+ main characters are women (54%), 44% are men and 1.8% are non-binary.
- Rates of LGBTIQ+ representation are higher among main characters who are non-European (11%) or Anglo-Celtic (7.0%) than among characters who are First Nations (5.9%) or European (4.2%).
- 8.8% of LGBTIQ+ main characters are represented as disabled, compared to 6.6% of all main characters, with types of disabilities portrayed wide-ranging including psychosocial and physical disabilities.
- LGBTIQ+ characters are represented as criminals at around double the rate of main characters overall, with the diversity of the *Wentworth* cast contributing to this high representation.

Occupational status of LGBTIQ+ main characters

In TV drama broadcast between 2016 and 2021, LGBTIQ+ characters were represented at all occupational skill levels, at a similar rate to main characters overall (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Occupational status of LGBTIQ+ main characters



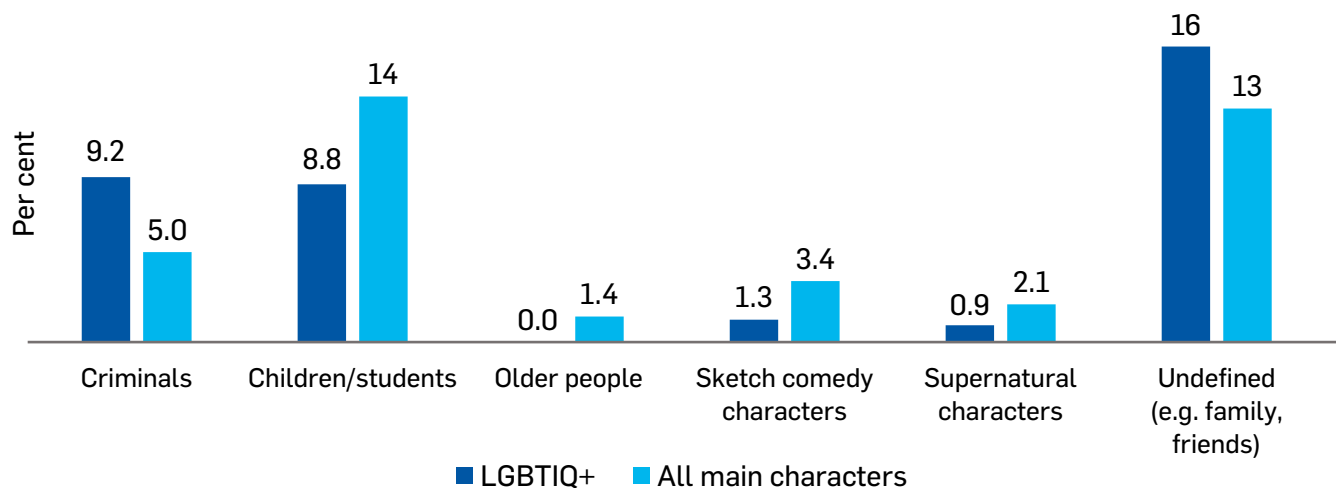
Based on 228 LGBTIQ+ characters and 3,072 (all) main characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Higher skill level occupations include skill levels 1–2 and lower skill levels include levels 3–5 based on ABS ANZSCO 2021.

⁷⁰ Crenshaw K 2017, *On Intersectionality: Essential writings*, The New Press, New York, NY.

Looking at characters with no identified occupation (Figure 18), LGBTIQ+ characters were represented as criminals at around double the rate of main characters overall (9.2% compared to 5.0%), with the diversity of the *Wentworth* cast contributing to this high representation.

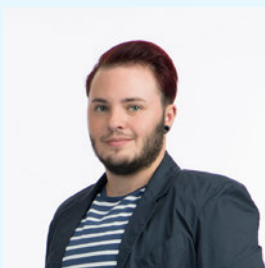
In line with lower representation in children's TV (see *Are Australian children seeing themselves on screen?*), LGBTIQ+ characters were less likely to be younger characters such as children or students (8.8% compared to 14% of all main characters).

Figure 18: Occupational status of LGBTIQ+ main characters with no occupation identified



Based on 228 LGBTIQ+ characters and 3,072 (all) main characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021.

Back in Very Small Business, 2018



Leslie Leonard –
played by Roman
Hadley-Lund

Ray Leonard employs his transgender son, Leslie, who has been transitioning for the past few years. While Leslie is trying to establish his role at the very small business, he romantically pursues a colleague.

Leslie is played by Roman Hadley-Lund, a trans man, who was also transitioning at the time of filming.⁷¹ *Back in Very Small Business* was Roman's breakout role.⁷²

71 *Surrounded by love, Roman won't give up the fight for equality*, *Medibank*, 31 March 2017; *'Back in Very Small Business'*, *MediSpy*, October 2017.

72 *'Roman Hadley-Lund'*, *Word for Word*, 8 September 2018.

Occupational and social status

Highlights

- Main characters in TV drama are more likely to have higher occupational status (holding roles such as doctor or police officer) than the Australian labour force overall. This suggests a bias towards socioeconomic advantage on our screens.

Occupational status of main characters

In the sections above, we have looked at the relationship between the occupational and social status of main characters and other aspects of diversity to see if there is evidence of stereotyping. In this section, we look at the occupational and social status of main characters overall as a measure of the socioeconomic diversity portrayed on our screens, and whether it aligns with Australia's socioeconomic diversity.

Among main characters in TV drama from 2016 to 2021:

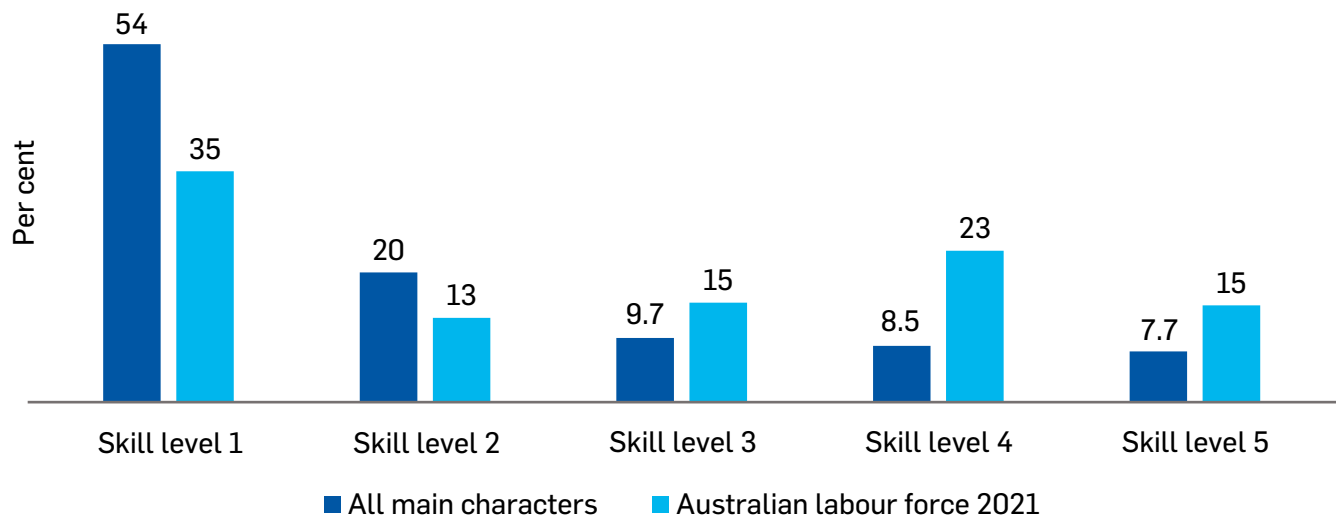
- 62% had identifiable occupations
- 39% had no occupation identified:⁷³
 - 5.0% were criminals
 - 14% were children or students
 - 1.4% were older people
 - 3.4% were sketch comedy characters
 - 2.1% were supernatural characters
 - 13% were classified as 'undefined' in that they held roles that were primarily defined by their relationships to other characters, such as lovers, friends or neighbours.

Looking more closely at the 62% of characters with identified occupations compared to the Australian labour force (Figure 19), there is a strong trend for main characters to hold higher skill level roles, such as doctors and police. Representation of lower skill level occupations among main characters was much lower than the population benchmarks. (See *Occupational and social status* in *Appendix A: Key terms and definitions* for more information about the skill levels). Occupation is one of the many factors that contributes to socioeconomic status,⁷⁴ and this finding suggests that there is a bias towards stories about main characters who have relative socioeconomic advantage.

⁷³ A small number of characters were counted as holding an occupation as well as falling into one of the categories for 'no occupation identified', for example, a builder who was also a drug trafficker, so percentages may add to more than 100%.

⁷⁴ ABS 2018, *Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia, 2016*.

Figure 19: Main characters with identified occupations compared to the Australian labour force



Based on 1,871 characters with identified occupations across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian labour force based on ABS Labour Force, August 2021.⁷⁵



⁷⁵ ABS 2022, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*, Quarterly, Table EQ08 – Employed persons by occupation unit group of main job (ANZSCO), sex, state and territory, August 1986 onwards. Data reported for period August 2021.

Age

Highlights

- There is a bias in Australian TV drama towards centring stories on characters aged 18–44.
- There is under-representation of main characters aged under 12 or 60 and over.
- Under-representation of children and older people means audiences have limited opportunities to gain insights into their perspectives and life experiences through TV drama.

Age of main characters

The inclusion of age is a new metric in *Seeing Ourselves 2* and reflects increased awareness of ageism in society. A 2021 Australian Human Rights Commission report found 83% of Australians believe ageism is a problem, and focus groups highlighted the media's role in perpetuating inaccurate stereotypes about age.⁷⁶ In our study of TV drama, we found main characters tended to be younger people, with 62% of characters aged 18–44 years old.

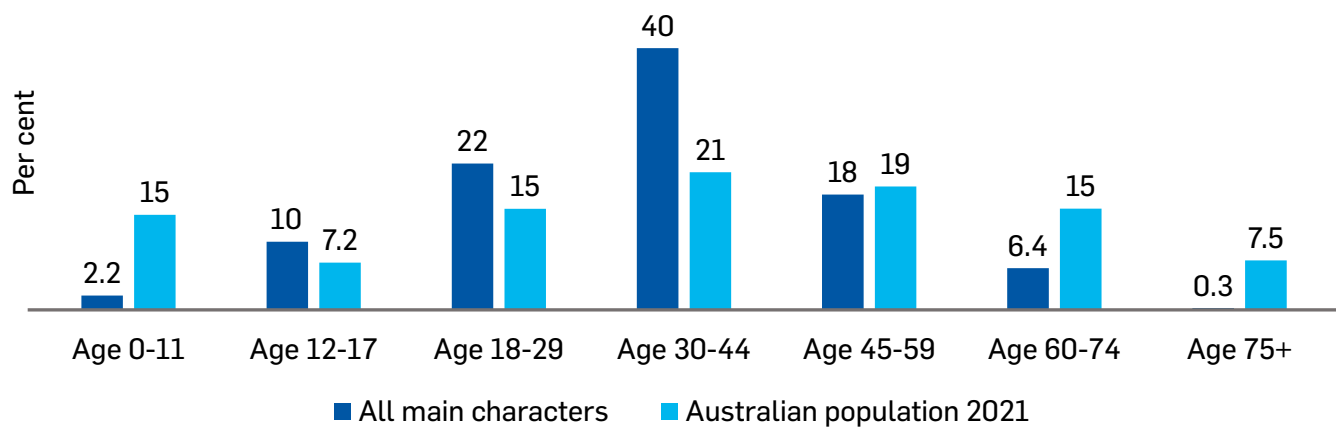
When compared to the Australian population,⁷⁷ main characters over-represent adolescents, younger adults and adults aged 44 and under (Figure 20). Conversely, main characters under-represent older adults: 6.7% were 60 years and over, much lower than this group's share of the population (23%), which likely contributes to the sense of invisibility of older Australians on our screens.

Main or recurring characters also under-represent children: 2.2% were under 12 years old, compared to the population benchmark of 15%. Contributors to under-representation include that babies and infants are usually unable to hold main or speaking roles on screen (for example, while *The Letdown* centres around babies they are not main characters), as well as the demands of the industry on children. However, this under-representation means that TV drama is a limited medium for opportunities to gain insights into children's experiences and perspectives, and potentially, the perspectives of families.

In children's titles, 14% of the main characters were aged under 12, which aligns better with the 15% among the general population, however children's titles were a small share of the titles included in this study (38 of the total 361 titles) (see [Are Australian children seeing themselves on screen?](#) for more on children's titles).

76 Australian Human Rights Commission 2021, *What's Age Got To Do With It? a snapshot of ageism across the Australian lifespan*.

77 ABS 2022, *National, State and Territory Population*, Table 59, Estimated Resident Population By Single Year Of Age, Australia. June 2021.

Figure 20: Age of main characters compared to the Australian population

Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on ABS National, State and Territory population.



Diversity in children's drama and comedy

Are Australian children seeing themselves on screen?

Highlights

- Levels of cultural diversity are higher in children's programming than general drama and have increased since the previous study in terms of First Nations representation and characters from non-European backgrounds.
- However, levels of disability and LGBTIQ+ representation are much lower among children's titles compared to general TV drama titles.
- Children's titles are of course much more likely to feature main or recurring characters that are aged under 12 or under 18 than general drama titles.

The current study of Australian TV drama included 287 main or recurring characters from 38 children's titles broadcast between 2016 and 2021. While children's titles accounted for a small proportion of the total titles and characters in our study,⁷⁸ they showed a higher level of cultural diversity than general drama titles (the 323 titles in the study that were not children's titles).

The level of First Nations representation was higher among main characters in children's titles (9.1%) compared to First Nations representation in general drama titles (7.0%) (Figure 21) and has increased from 7% in children's titles in the 2016 study.

Conversely, while almost two in three main characters in children's drama were Anglo-Celtic (62%), this is down from three in four in the



⁷⁸ Children's titles accounted for 11% of the total titles in our study and 9.3% of the total characters counted were in children's titles.

2016 study (75%) and is lower than Anglo-Celtic representation among main characters in general drama titles (72%).

In the current study, 5.2% of characters in children's titles were identifiable as being of European background, similar to in general drama titles (4.6%) and on par with the 2016 results (5%). However, there was a higher rate of representation of characters from non-European backgrounds in children's titles (22%, up from 13% in the 2016 study), compared to in general drama titles (16%).

Higher levels of First Nations and non-European representation in children's titles compared to general drama may reflect that public funding is the main source of investment in children's titles (for example public broadcasters, Screen Australia, and the Australian Children's Television Foundation). Generally, public agencies and corporations have clearer expectations or requirements to fund and distribute content that reflects diverse Australian audiences. This speaks to how commissioners and public funding play an important role in setting expectations for on-screen representation more broadly. In addition, producers and commissioners of children's titles may be more aware of the need to reflect the high level of diversity – and awareness of it – among younger Australians.

However, while we saw greater cultural diversity in children's titles, more work can be done to centre disabled main characters: just 3.8% of main characters in children's titles were represented as disabled compared to 6.9% in general drama titles (Figure 21). Disability representation among main characters in children's TV has potential to normalise disability for younger audiences,⁷⁹ and screen practitioners interviewed for *Seeing Ourselves 2* highlighted the importance of screen representation for young disabled people (see *Spotlight on disability*).

LGBTIQ+ representation was also lower among characters in children's titles (3.1%) compared to general drama (7.9%). Part of LGBTIQ+ representation is romantic and sexual attraction, which is more likely to be prominent in storylines for adolescents and beyond. However, it has been suggested that LGBTIQ+ screen representation is important for young people who have LGBTIQ+ family members or who are navigating their gender and/or sexual identity. For example the successful and multi-award-winning series, *First Day*, tells the story of Hannah, a school aged girl who has transitioned and is navigating life in her new school and conversations about her gender identity with her friends and family.

***First Day*, 2020**



Hannah Bradford
– played by
Evie Macdonald

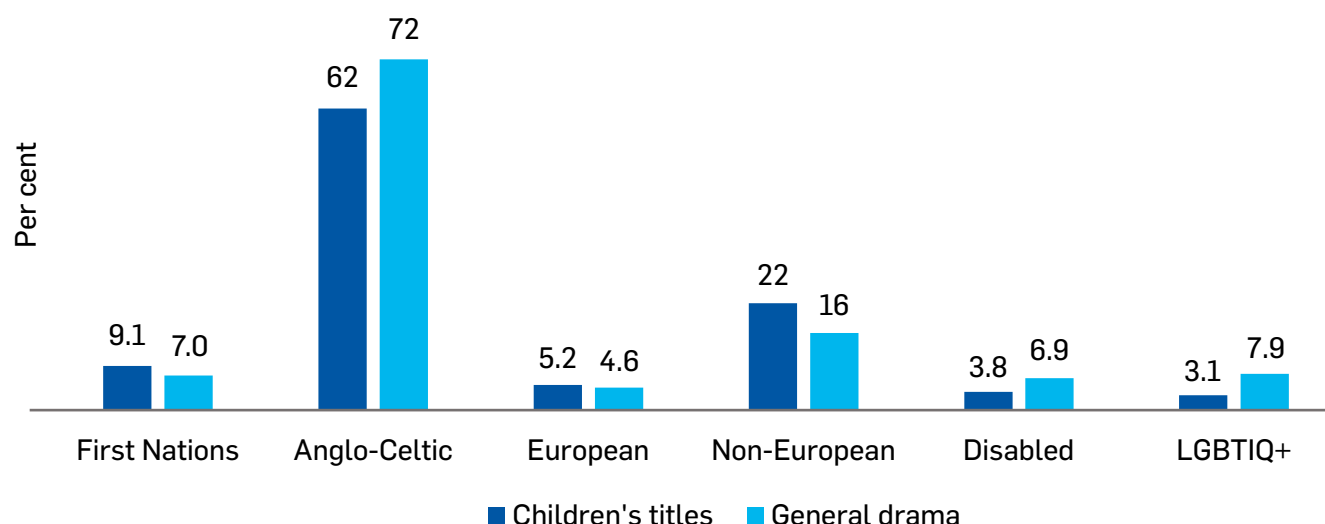
Hannah Bradford is a transgender school student navigating her way through the transition of primary school to high school as her most authentic self.⁸⁰

Played by Evie Macdonald, an Australian trans actress, model and advocate, *First Day* is the winner of an International Kids Emmy, a Kidscreen Award and a GLAAD Media Award.⁸¹

79 Hopster 2019, *Is TV Making Your Child Prejudiced? A report into pre-school programming*, p.10.

80 *First Day*, IMDb.

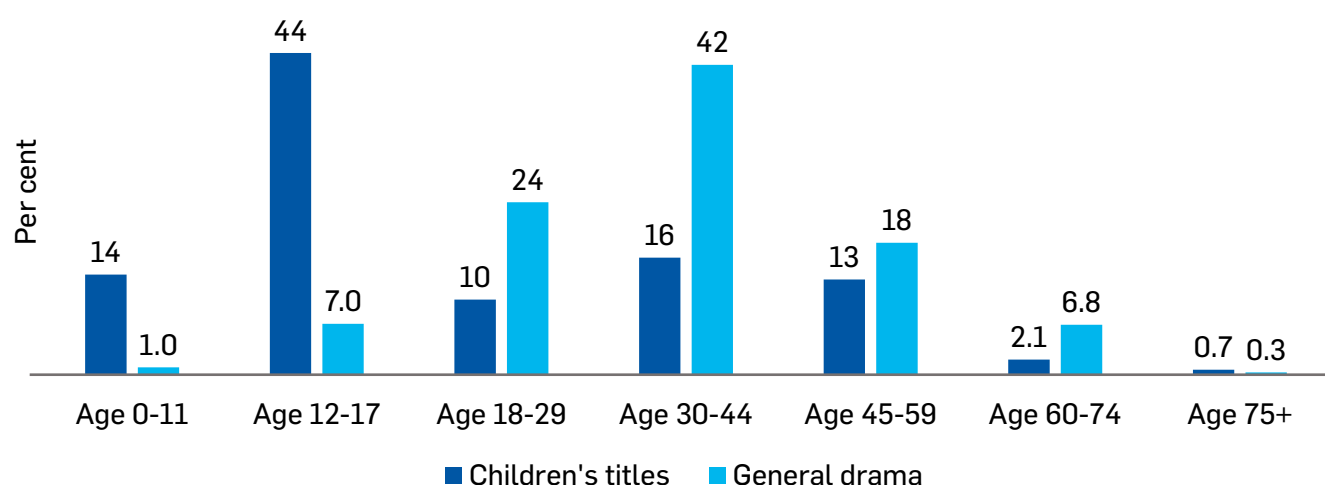
81 Pobjie B 2022, 'Trans actor Evie Macdonald is only 16 and she's already made history,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 March 2022.

Figure 21: Diversity of main characters, children's titles versus general drama titles

Based on 287 characters across 38 children's titles and 2,785 characters across 323 general drama titles broadcast 2016 to 2021.

In children's titles, 14% of the main characters were children aged under 12. This aligns better with this group's representation in the Australian population (15%) than results for main characters overall (2.2%), as would be expected (see [Age of main characters](#)). Among general drama titles, it is rare to see children aged under 12 as main characters (1.0%) (Figure 22).

However, children's titles are less likely to feature older people: in children's titles between 2016 and 2021, only 2.1% of main characters were aged 60–74 and there were only two aged 75 or above (0.7%).

Figure 22: Age of main characters, children's titles versus general drama titles

Based on 287 characters across 38 children's titles and 2,785 characters across 323 general drama titles broadcast 2016 to 2021.

Comedy – laughing ‘with’ difference

Highlights

- Comedy titles feature higher rates of First Nations and non-European representation among main characters than non-comedy titles, which could reflect a greater appetite for risk in commissioning comedy.
- This cultural diversity in comedy has increased since the 2016 study, including a doubling of First Nations representation among main characters (from 4% to 8.3%).
- The level of non-European representation among main characters in comedy (20%) is substantially higher than in non-comedy titles (14%).
- Disability representation is lower among characters in the comedy genre (3.6%) compared to in non-comedy titles (8.8%).
- LGBTIQ+ representation is also lower in comedy (6.7%) than in non-comedy titles (7.9%).

The current study of Australian TV drama included 1,261 main or recurring characters across 197 comedy titles broadcast between 2016 and 2021. Comedy titles included sketch comedies such as *Orange is the New Brown* and *The Moth Effect*, and narrative comedies such as *All My Friends Are Racist* and *The Family Law* series 1–3.

First Nations main characters were slightly more likely to be in comedy titles (8.3%) than non-comedy titles (6.4%) (Figure 23), with a doubling of First Nations representation in comedy titles in the current study compared to the 2016 results (4%). A third of First Nations characters in comedy were featured in *Black Comedy*.

Conversely, there was lower Anglo-Celtic representation among main characters in comedy titles (69%) compared to non-comedy titles (73%), with the share of main characters in comedies that were Anglo-Celtic down from 80% in the 2016 results.

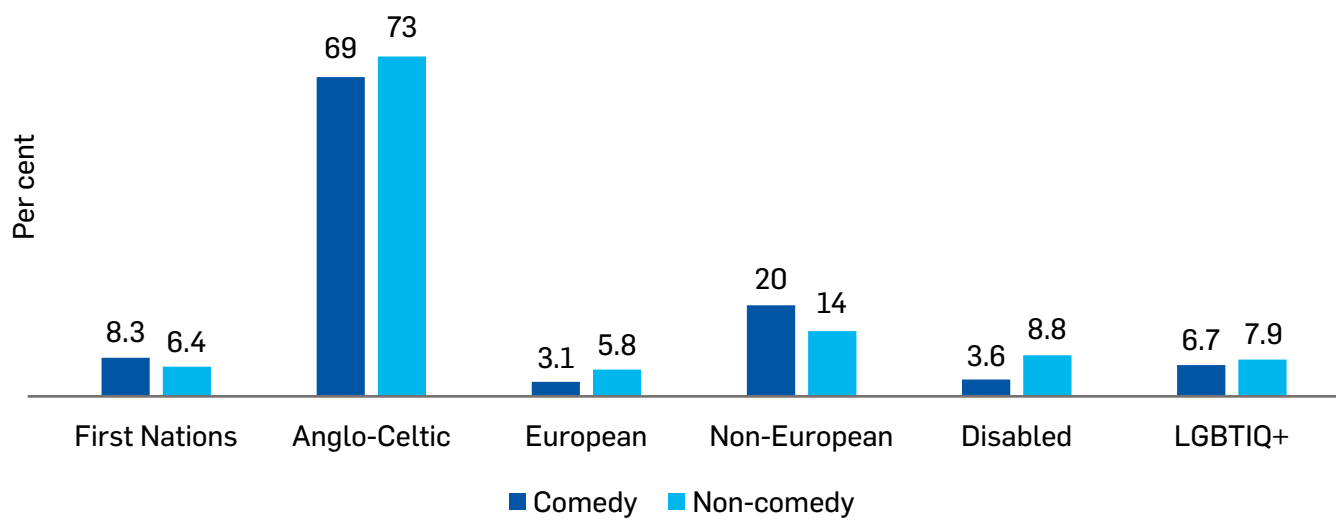
When we isolated the comedy genre from the full range of Australian titles, there were lower levels of representation of both Anglo-Celtic and European characters, and higher levels of representation of non-European characters (Figure 23). Among comedy titles in the current study, 3.1% of main characters were identified as European, down from 4% in the 2016 results and lower than the 5.8% share of non-comedy titles for this group; and 20% were non-European, up from 12% in the 2016 results and substantially higher than the 14% share of non-comedy titles for the non-European group.

This relatively strong representation of First Nations and non-European characters in comedy titles could reflect that comedy is usually shorter and cheaper to make than non-comedy and a greater appetite for risk in commissioning comedy. One industry practitioner we interviewed for *Seeing Ourselves 2* mentioned that ‘niche’ comedy content is more tolerated by commissioners given the broad range of tastes and preference when it comes to humour among audiences.

However, this does not appear to encompass disability representation. Among main characters in comedy, 3.6% were disabled compared to 8.8% in non-comedy titles. It may be that disabled characters are overlooked in the comedy genre due to a fear of causing offense by laughing at disability.

LGBTIQ+ representation was also lower in comedy than non-comedy (but with less difference between these genres). Among main characters in comedy titles, 6.7% were represented as LGBTIQ+ compared to 7.9% in non-comedy titles.

Figure 23: Diversity of main characters, comedy versus non-comedy titles



Based on 1,261 characters across 197 comedy titles and 1,811 characters across 164 non-comedy titles broadcast 2016 to 2021.



Regional and remote Australia

Highlights

- Australian TV drama over-represents main characters whose stories are based in capital cities – 72% of main characters' stories are located in capital cities compared to 67% of Australians.
- Regional areas, and the stories and perspectives of regional and remote communities, are relatively under-represented in our screen stories.

Location of main characters

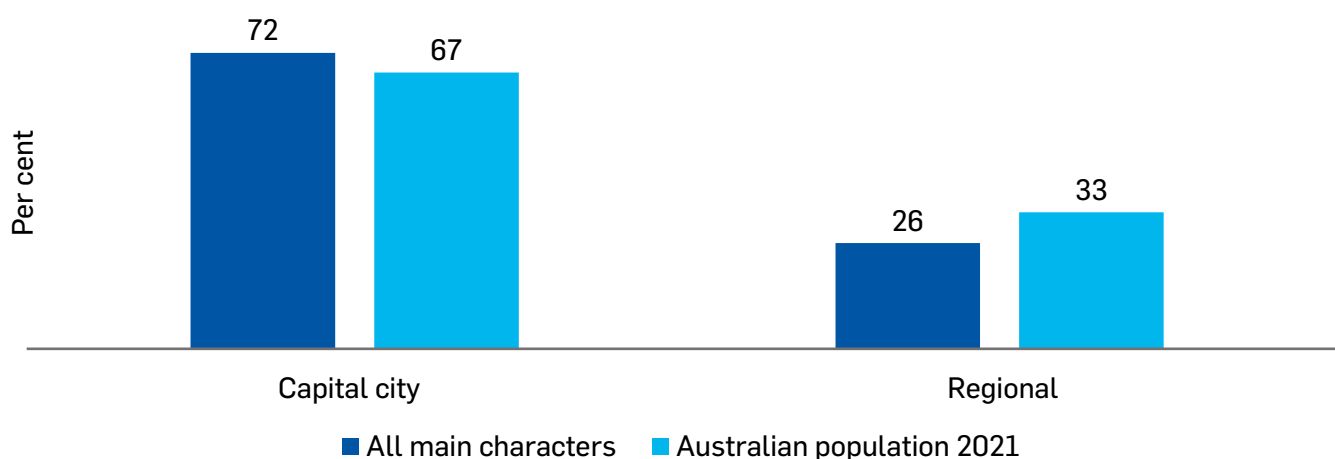
Location is a new metric in *Seeing Ourselves 2* and reflects increasing scrutiny on inequity and access to opportunities for people who live in relatively more regional or remote areas of Australia.

Between 2016 and 2021, we saw more main characters whose stories were situated in capital cities (72%) than regional areas (including the balance of state/territory, from regional towns through to remote areas)⁸² (26%) (Figure 24). While this broadly reflects the pattern of how the Australian population is distributed, there

is an over-representation of stories based in capital cities (particularly places such as Melbourne or Sydney), home to 72% of characters compared to 67% of Australians.

Regional areas were relatively under-represented, home to 26% of characters compared to 33% of Australians. It has been argued that it is important for regional and remote stories and perspectives to be reflected to Australians on screen⁸³ and the data indicates further room for this in TV drama.

Figure 24: Main characters' stories by location compared to the Australian population⁸⁴



Based on 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021 and the ABS Greater Capital City Statistical Areas.

⁸² See ABS 2021, *Greater Capital City Statistical Areas: Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3*.

⁸³ For example, Brigel C, Chichester J, Hepworth K and Okine R 2022, 'The Power of Local: Reflecting regional and remote Australia back to Australians,' Panel discussion at Screenworks *Regional to Global Screen Forum 2022*, Lennox Head, 26 May 2022.

⁸⁴ These percentages do not add to 100% as there were multiple characters who either lived in both capital cities and regional areas, were not located in Australia, or whose location was unidentifiable.

Diversity of actors

As well as looking at diversity among main characters in Australian TV drama, we looked at diversity in the pool of actors who played them. Information about actors was collected from publicly available information such as talent profiles and published interviews.

This section does not reflect the total pool of actors available to work in Australia: the data only shows actors who played main characters in the 361 Australian TV dramas in our study. Other actors may not have been exposed to these main roles or may have auditioned but not been cast. Actors who played supporting roles or who work in advertising or theatre are also not included.

In the 2016 study, we looked at cases of 'colour-blind' or 'generic' casting – where characters of undefined background are cast with actors of diverse backgrounds. This has not been a focus of the analysis given the conversation has shifted from 'colour-blind' to 'colour-conscious' and 'identity-conscious' casting⁸⁵ (see [*From colour-blind to identity-conscious casting*](#)).

Discussion in this section touches on the concepts of 'colour-conscious' and 'identity-conscious casting' as there is interest in these topics as part of a live, complex and evolving discussion. However, further research is needed due to the reliance on publicly sourced information in this study and as the numbers alone cannot effectively tell the whole story.



Sunshine

⁸⁵ We have not compared with the 2016 results as this shift of focus means we have used different calculations this year, where each actor is counted once as part of a pool of actors receiving casting opportunities, rather than counting them each time they appear in a role or series.

Highlights

- Among the pool of actors cast in main roles, First Nations representation is higher than the population benchmark.
- First Nations and Anglo-Celtic actors are cast in multiple roles or series at a higher rate than European and non-European actors.
- The diversity of actors cast in main roles remains below population benchmarks for the European and non-European groups, including under-representation of seven of the ten most common European and non-European ancestries in Australia.
- However, there is more European and non-European representation among actors than the main characters they play. This suggests additional opportunities for 'colour-conscious casting' which involves intentional consideration of an actor's ethnicity and how it enriches a character's identity and the story.⁸⁶
- Just 3.9% of actors receiving main roles publicly identify as disabled. While this is likely to be an undercount due to reliance on public information, it suggests a need to increase disability representation in the talent pool to create more opportunities for 'identity-conscious casting'.
- 4.8% of actors cast in main roles publicly identify as LGBTIQ+ including four trans men, three trans women and ten non-binary actors. Nearly all trans or gender diverse main characters are played by actors who publicly identify as trans or gender diverse.



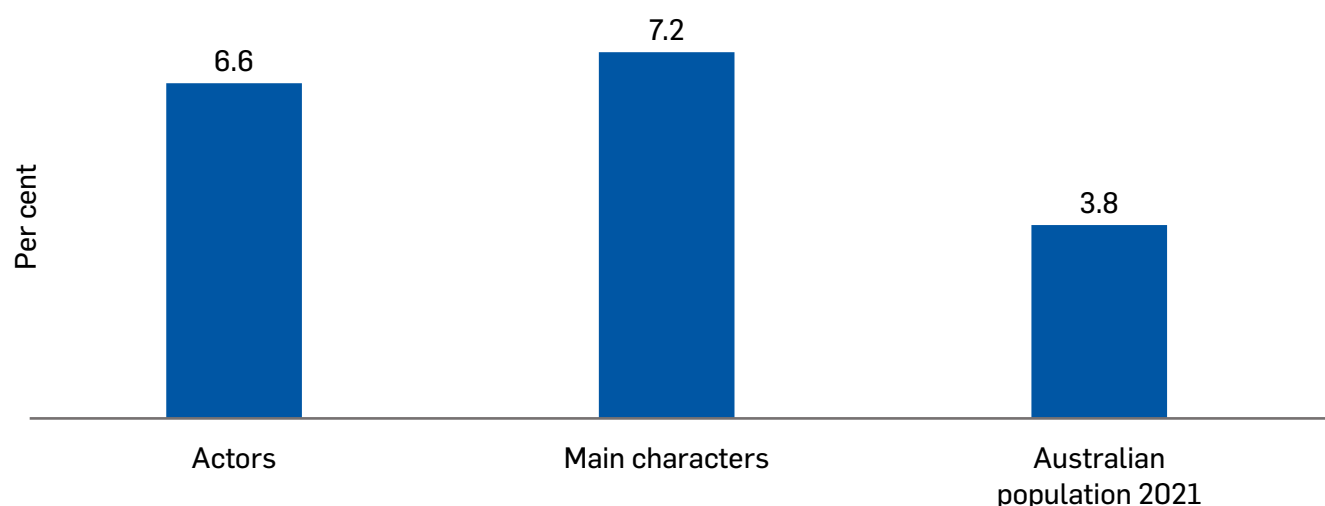
⁸⁶ As noted above, further research is needed due to the reliance on publicly sourced information about actors and as the numbers alone cannot effectively tell the whole story.

First Nations

Relative to First Nations representation in the population (3.8%), First Nations actors were well represented among the pool of actors cast as main characters included in the current study (6.6%) (Figure 25). Many of the First Nations actors who played a main role played more than one role or repeated a role over a series: the pool of First Nations actors who received these

opportunities was less than half the size of the pool of main characters⁸⁷ (104 First Nations actors played 221 main characters). The difference between First Nations representation among main characters (7.2%) and among the pool of actors who played them (6.6%) is due to the same actors playing multiple roles.

Figure 25: First Nations representation among actors playing main characters compared to the Australian population



Based on 1,573 actors who played 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021, adjusted for undercount in Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2021.

⁸⁷ This was also true for Anglo-Celtic actors and actors overall.

Cultural background (non-First Nations)

When it comes to the broad cultural background groups of Anglo-Celtic, European and non-European, there was more diversity among the actors than the main characters they played. This suggests additional opportunities for colour-conscious casting (see [From colour-blind to identity-conscious casting](#) for more on this). However, the diversity of actors getting main role opportunities remains below population benchmarks for the European and non-European groups and above for the Anglo-Celtic group.

Among actors cast in main roles between 2016 and 2021:

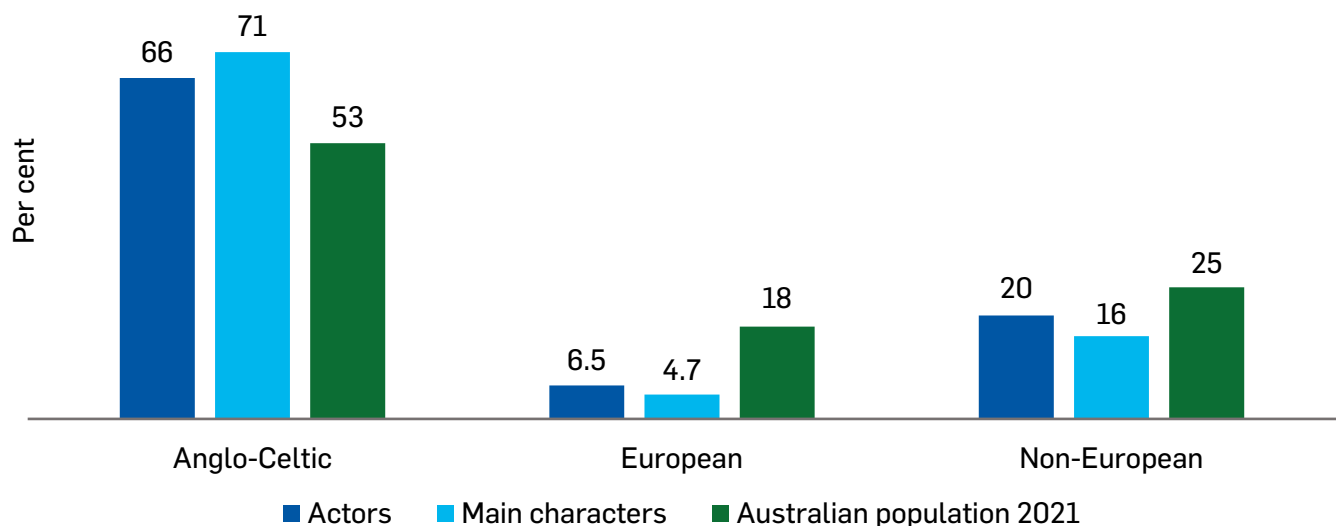
- two in three had **Anglo-Celtic ancestry** (for example, English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh ancestry) (66%), lower than Anglo-Celtic

representation among main characters (71%) but higher than Anglo-Celtic representation in the population (53%)

- 6.5% had identifiable **European ancestry** (for example, German, Dutch, Italian or Greek ancestry), compared to 4.7% of main characters and 18% of the Australian population
- 20% had identifiable **non-European ancestry** (for example, Indian, Chinese or Middle Eastern ancestry) compared to 16% of main characters and 25% of the Australian population (Figure 26).

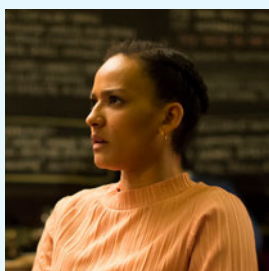
European and non-European actors were less likely to play multiple main roles or appear in multiple series compared to Anglo-Celtic actors, First Nations actors or actors overall.

Figure 26: Cultural background among actors playing main characters compared to the Australian population



Based on 1,573 actors who played 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Results for First Nations people are reported in Figure 25. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021.

Sisters, 2017



Amanda – played by
Zindzi Okenyo

Amanda is a lawyer pursuing a class-action case and finds herself in a passionate affair with her senior colleague Edie. Amanda's desire to develop their relationship outside of the workplace is challenged by Edie's recklessness and troubled marriage.

Zindzi Okenyo who plays Amanda, is an Australian-Kenyan actress, musician and openly queer woman.⁸⁸ She's hosted ABC's *Playschool* and successfully released EPs and singles in her music career.⁸⁹

Deeper dive: European and non-European actors

Looking at a more detailed breakdown of the cultural backgrounds of actors in the European and non-European groups⁹⁰ and allowing for multiple ancestries,⁹¹ there was under-representation among actors for some groups (Figure 27):

- The **Southern and Eastern European** group (most commonly represented in Australia by Italian and Greek communities) make up 12% of the population but only 7.0% of actors.
- The **North-West European** group (most commonly represented in Australia by German and Dutch communities) make up 7.3% of the population but just 1.8% of actors were identified as such.
- The **Southern and Central Asian** group (a growing community most commonly represented in Australia by Indian and Sri Lankan communities) were represented among actors (3.4%) at less than half the rate of representation in the population (7.0%).
- The **North-East Asian** group (most commonly represented in Australia by the Chinese community) comprised 3.9% of actors compared to 6.5% of the population.

- The **South-East Asian** group (most commonly represented in Australia by Filipino and Vietnamese communities) comprised 3.2% of actors compared to 4.6% of the population (Figure 27) despite on par representation for Vietnamese actors (Figure 28).

For each of these groups, representation was higher among actors than the main characters they played with the exception of the North-East Asian group due to a higher incidence of actors playing multiple roles: 62 actors played 133 roles.

Some groups are seeing relatively strong representation among actors compared to both main characters and population benchmarks, such as the **North African and Middle Eastern** group (which includes Lebanese and Turkish communities); the **Oceanian** group (which includes Māori and Samoan communities); and the **Sub-Saharan African** group (which includes South African and Zimbabwean communities), in which roles were more evenly distributed across actors compared to many other groups: 37 Sub-Saharan African actors played 46 roles.

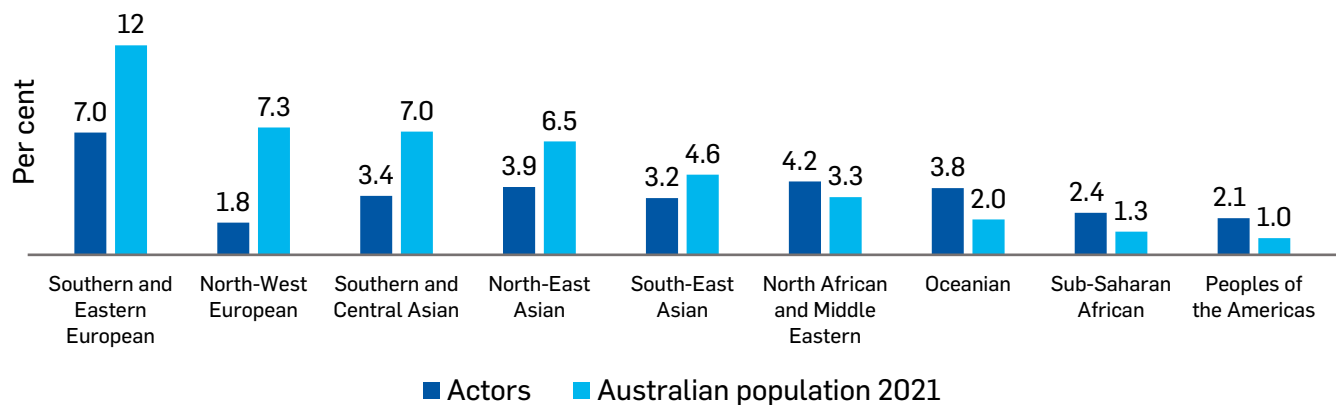
88 Powell SM 2017, 'The radical vulnerability of okenyo,' *i-D*, 17 February 2017.

89 Kembrey M 2018, 'Actor, musician and presenter Zindzi Okenyo on taking risks and self care,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 February 2018.

90 Based on the 'Broad Groups' categories from the ABS [Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups \(ASCCG\)](#) (2019).

91 Results reported for the four broad groups above classify each person/character into one ancestry, with a hierarchy determining which group people with more than one ancestry are counted in.

Figure 27: Deeper dive into European and non-European representation among actors compared to the Australian population, allowing for multiple ancestries

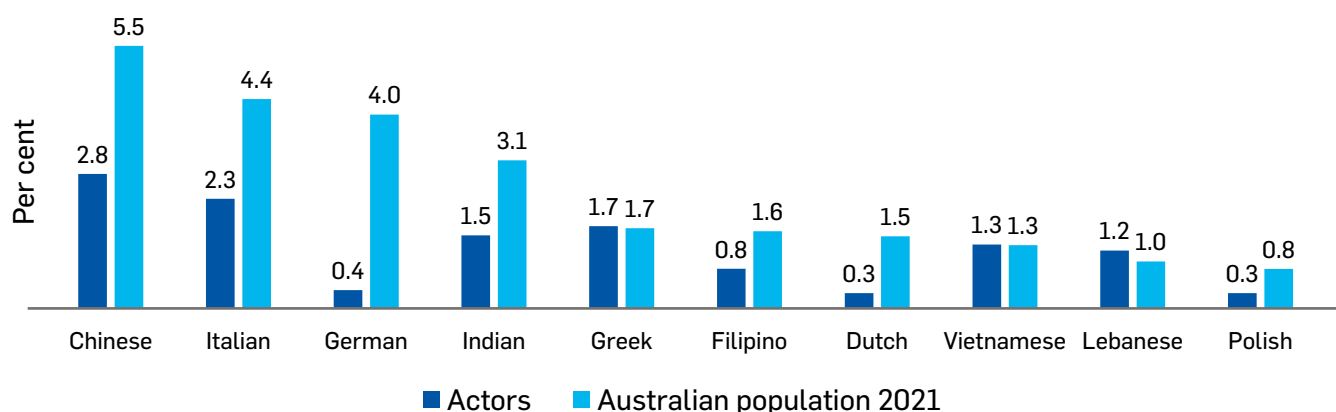


Based on 1,573 actors who played 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021.

Looking with further specificity, there was under-representation among actors of the ten most common European and non-European ancestries in Australia⁹² with the exceptions of Greek, Vietnamese and Lebanese actors who saw proportionate representation compared to population benchmarks (Figure 28).

Vietnamese people's representation among actors was on par, despite under-representation of the Vietnamese community among main characters, due to a lower rate of Vietnamese actors playing multiple roles or roles across multiple series compared to actors overall.

Figure 28: Cultural background of actors compared to the Australian population, ten most common European and non-European ancestries in Australia



Based on 1,573 actors who played 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on ABS Census 2021.

⁹² Chinese, Italian, German, Indian, Greek, Filipino, Dutch, Vietnamese, Lebanese and Polish. Based on ABS Census 2021.

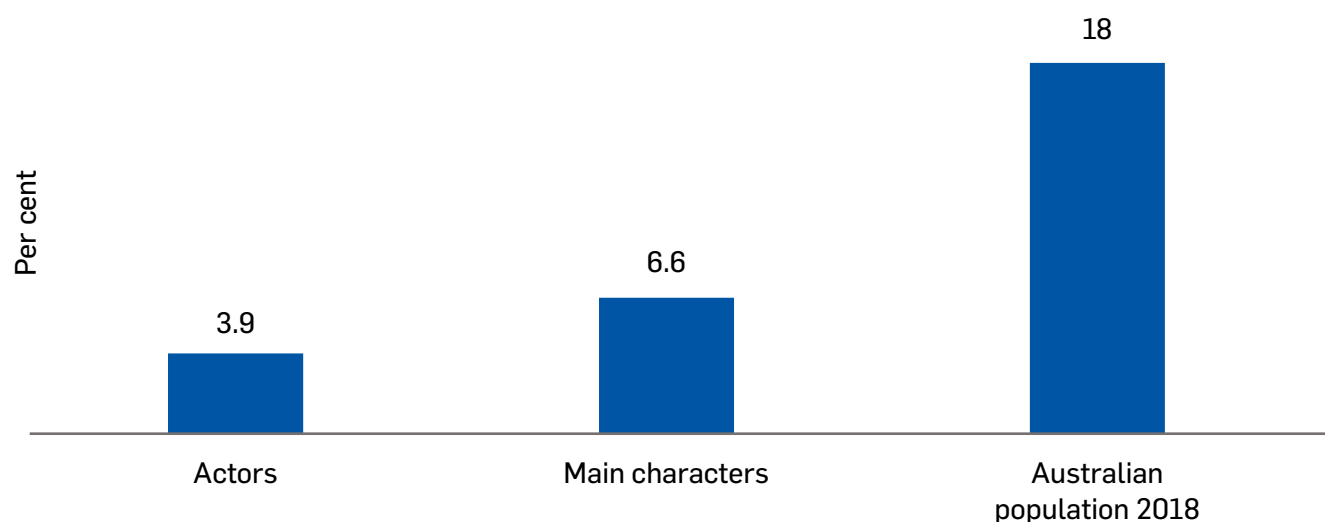
Disability

Among the pool of actors cast in main roles included in the current study, 3.9%, or 61 actors publicly identify as disabled. As with main characters, this is most commonly due to psychosocial disability, for example, barriers related to memory conditions or mental illness; followed by barriers related to physical disability.

The proportion of actors who publicly identify as disabled is much lower than the proportion of main characters with disability (6.6%) and the population benchmark (18%) (Figure 29). However, this is likely to be an undercount due to the reliance on public information – many disabled people may choose not to identify publicly. Some of the difference is also due to disabled actors playing multiple main roles.

While caution should be used in interpreting these numbers, they suggest a need to increase disability representation in the talent pool, including among 'household name actors', to create more opportunities for identity-conscious casting. These were major issues raised by screen practitioners interviewed for *Seeing Ourselves 2*, who said that disabled children growing up need to see that being an actor is a viable option and that disability representation works well when lived experience is valued as part of both the casting and the storytelling.⁹³ While our interviews highlighted increasing willingness to identify as disabled in the screen industry, they also highlighted barriers throughout the industry, including the sense that a stigma around access needs still remains (see *Spotlight on disability*).

Figure 29: Publicly identified disability among actors playing main characters compared to the Australian population



Based on 1,573 actors who played 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. There were 61 actors and 204 main characters categorised as disabled. Note that this is likely to be an undercount of disability among actors due to the reliance on public information and that one actor could play more than one character.

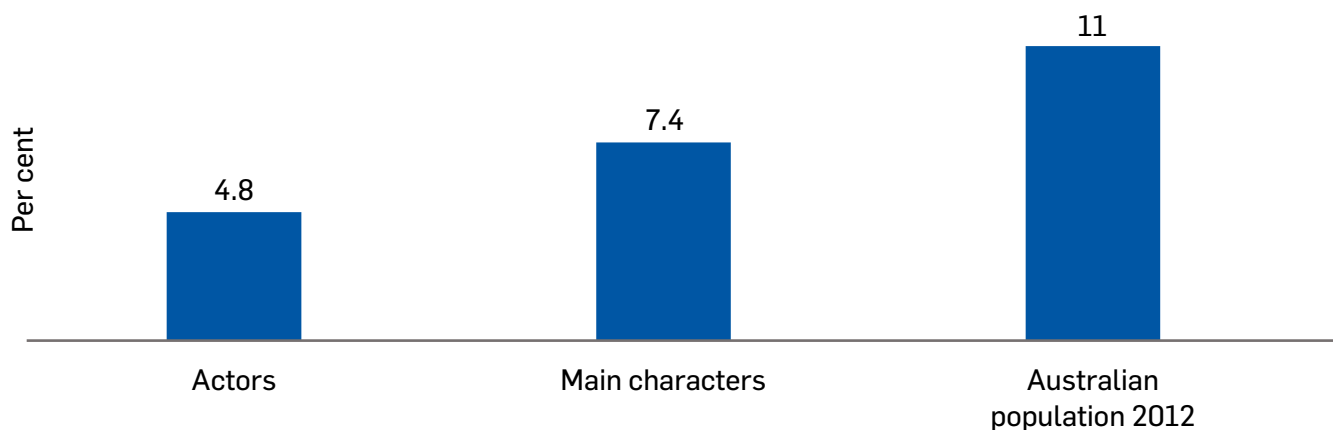
⁹³ For discussion of the complex issue of non-disabled actors playing disabled characters see Lee G 2021, 'The problem with "cripping up" and why casting disabled actors matters,' *ABC News*, 28 December 2021.

Gender identity and sexual orientation

Among the pool of actors receiving the main character casting opportunities included in the current study, 50% are women including three who publicly identify as trans women; 50% are men including four who publicly identify as trans men; and 0.6% or 10 actors identify as non-binary. Nearly all trans or non-binary main characters are played by actors who publicly identify as trans or non-binary. In total, 1.1% of the pool of actors are trans and/or gender diverse.

As with disability, publicly available information on sexual orientation is limited – sexual orientation is unknown for half of the actors who received main character opportunities in TV drama between 2016 and 2021. There were 76 actors who publicly identify as LGBTIQ+, or 4.8% of the pool of actors. Screen practitioners we interviewed highlighted that it can still be a career risk to identify as LGBTIQ+ as it may reduce your opportunities. This becomes vexed if we expect actors to identify to play queer roles (see [Emerging casting considerations](#)).

Figure 30: Publicly identified LGBTIQ+ representation among actors playing main characters compared to the Australian population



Based on 1,573 actors who played 3,072 characters across 361 TV dramas broadcast 2016 to 2021. Australian population based on Department of Health and Ageing 2012. There were 76 actors and 228 characters included in the LGBTIQ+ group. A person who is both trans and gay was counted as one actor/character. Note that this is likely to be an undercount of LGBTIQ+ representation among actors due to the reliance on public information and that one actor could play more than one character.

Hungry Ghosts, 2020



Roxy Ling – played by Suzy Wrong

Roxy Ling is a gifted clairvoyant, trans woman and May's best friend, who uses her supernatural abilities to defend against the demons that are causing havoc on the Vietnamese-Australian community.⁹⁴

Suzy Wrong is a transgender woman, Sydney theatre critic, blogger and performer who immigrated to Australia from Singapore in 1996.

⁹⁴ Wrong S 2020, 'I finally landed the role I've dreamed of: A trans woman at peace with – and loved by – the world,' *The Guardian*, 26 August 2020.

Part 2: Challenges and opportunities

This section of *Seeing Ourselves 2* presents views from the industry on current challenges and opportunities, both on screen and off, in delivering authentic and diverse representations of Australia through scripted TV drama.

These findings are based on:

- **consultations with 35 individual participants across 23 organisations**

(see [*Appendix C: List of consultation and interview participants*](#)), including:

- diversity, equity, inclusion and human rights organisations
- screen guilds and industry associations
- screen education and training organisations
- Australian broadcasters and streaming services.

- **in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 28 screen industry practitioners**⁹⁵

to delve deeper into the themes identified in the consultations through a broad range of lived experience. Practitioners included:

- decision makers in broadcasters or streaming services
- representatives from state/territory or community screen bodies
- key creatives (producers, directors and writers)
- actors.

Many practitioners we interviewed have experience in more than one of these roles. Producers, other key creatives and actors included emerging, mid-career and established practitioners.

All screen industry practitioners we interviewed identified as members of First Nations, non-Anglo-Celtic, LGBTIQ+, disability or regional communities; and/or they have worked on content counted in *Seeing Ourselves 2* that features at least one of these communities. They include prominent voices and experienced advocates as well as relative newcomers. (See [*Appendix C: List of consultation and interview participants*](#) for further information).

Our consultation participants and interviewees were chosen to ensure the study captured the voices, experiences and insights of those at the frontline of Australian content creation; in particular, people in decision-making positions as well as screen practitioners from groups that have been historically excluded.

Although these views should not be seen as representative of the whole sector, they contribute valuable insights into the challenges and barriers faced every day by those involved in bringing Australian stories and characters to the screen. Collectively, these views and experiences provide valuable insights about increasing diversity, equity and inclusion in the Australian screen industry.

⁹⁵ Practitioners are anonymous in this report unless the reference to their name or work was authorised.

Overarching themes

Overarching themes of the consultations and interviews include:

- centring lived experience and genuine collaboration in telling authentic stories
- increasing diverse representation throughout the screen industry, from new and emerging talent through to leadership roles
- the importance of self-education and professional training to improve workplace culture
- increasing cultural safety and accessibility⁹⁶ across the screen industry.



Fires

96 For definitions, see [Appendix A: Key terms and definitions](#).

The context: an industry raising the bar

Screen practitioners we interviewed described a definite shift in the Australian TV industry since the 2016 *Seeing Ourselves* report; an industry feeling the pressure of global movements and acknowledging the need to rectify a long history of systemic bias and exclusion. Practitioners spoke of an industry now lifting the bar on diverse representation, with more commissioners and producers acknowledging both the cultural and commercial value of creating diverse content. Many interviewees expressed their passion and active commitment to improving industry inclusion and there was – and continues to be – genuine excitement about the increased opportunities for diverse storytelling.

While interviewees perceived that diversity levels remain lower than they would like, both on screen and off, there was acknowledgement that they are improving. They suggested that it is becoming less unusual to be surrounded by diversity on set and in writers' rooms, with less tolerance for excuses such as 'we can't find anyone' or 'it's too hard'.

One producer said:

'Diversity in content has been a long time coming and has really improved in the last few years, which is fantastic! You can't turn around now without being asked about, or without us asking ourselves, "where is the diversity in this project?"'

However, while interviewees said some production companies are doing inclusive storytelling and collaboration well, they felt others do not seem serious about creating positive change. There was general agreement that significant barriers remain and that more work is needed to improve both on-screen representation and diversity off screen in production teams, writers' rooms and key decision-making and commissioning roles. This is particularly relevant for disabled people (see *Spotlight on disability*) and people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.



Robbie Hood

Lived experience and authentic storytelling

Interviewees said the market and audiences are demanding diversity, and storytelling informed by lived experience. They said that among younger generations, diversity and inclusion is commonplace; it does not need a special narrative to exist:

'Online platforms focusing on Gen Z and early millennial audiences are leaps and bounds ahead in diverse representation; it's not a decision, it just is.'

(Producer)

Practitioners told us there is drive in the industry to tell diverse stories in a way that is nuanced, specific and authentic. There was a general acknowledgement that authentic content is successful content and attracts audiences:

'I see a great opportunity in diverse storytelling because there is an appetite from audiences and more scrutiny and savviness about whether a story rings true.'

(Producer/director)

However, this can be difficult terrain, with uncertainty over who can tell what stories and the need to avoid tokenism. Content producers and creatives fear being publicly criticised or 'cancelled' despite their best intentions. Practitioners still fear being punished or ostracised for speaking up about cultural safety concerns or asking for accessibility needs to be met. Increased and considered cultural competence⁹⁷ and safety are needed (see *Cultural safety in practice*).

Interviewees noted that there is no industry definition of 'authenticity', which is a dynamic and contested term. As one writer articulated, 'It's the idea that the story and representation feels true, but who does it feel true to?' Concerns interviewees associated with 'authenticity' included a lack of recognition among decision makers and project leaders of the diversity *within* historically excluded communities (which can result in perceptions that familiar, stereotypical portrayals are authentic); and pressure on historically excluded practitioners to commodify community-specific trauma.

Recurring suggestions from our interviewees included to:

- tell stories led by or in genuine collaboration with people with lived experience (rather than people with lived experience being invited to only 'give a tick' to the story)
- present fresh and unique perspectives by centring non-dominant voices
- present stories about characters' personal experiences, rather than trying to portray a whole community in 'broad brushstrokes' which can risk reducing characters to stereotypes
- ask who the story feels authentic to or whether unconscious bias is at play, as stereotypical portrayals may seem 'authentic' to producers and audiences from over-represented groups
- do cultural or community research, consultation and engagement well (see [4. From consultation to collaboration](#))
- 'self-educate': individuals, especially project leaders (producers, directors, writers) should do their own research or get training to improve their cultural competence and understanding of access issues.

⁹⁷ Cultural competence is 'the ability to participate ethically and effectively in intercultural settings', including understanding 'your own cultural values and world view'. National Centre for Cultural Competence, *What is cultural competence?* University of Sydney, viewed March 2023.

When lived experience is undervalued: carrying the burden and reputational risk

Interviewees highlighted that currently, the responsibility for the authenticity of a project is often carried by individual practitioners on sets who have lived experience of historical exclusion, or who are perceived to know about the culture or community (either by association or having an 'adjacent' cultural background). This responsibility requires research, education and advocacy, and this work is not usually recognised, paid or expected from their counterparts. It can also impact the practitioner emotionally and personally, including facing the pressures of community accountability or personal trauma.

'There is a level of accountability that key creatives from under-represented communities have that those from dominant communities don't tend to have to worry about ... [Unlike consulting with a doctor about their occupation] culture is tied to deep-seated identity and the identity of a whole community, not just the individual.'
(Producer/director)

This inequity in responsibility, burden and community pressure was emphasised strongly by actors and writers we interviewed. Their reputation is on the line, and they are held to a high standard by their community, particularly if that community has few opportunities to see themselves represented on screen. For writers, there is reputational risk if a script they are credited on changes outside the writers' room (see [The role of writers](#) for more on this). For actors, the stakes are particularly high as they become the face of a story about an under-represented or excluded community.

Despite these high stakes, actors we interviewed spoke of being expected to provide lived experience or cultural knowledge on set without an additional fee or acknowledgement. They also gave examples of being put in compromising positions because of culturally inappropriate props, set design or use of language, or a lack of voice coaches when portraying accents. And they highlighted that it can be difficult for actors to speak up about inappropriate cultural elements or access needs under the conventional, hierarchical way of working on sets (see [Spotlight on disability](#) for more on access needs).

Genuine collaboration and sharing the creative control over story elements relating to culture or identity includes collaboration with actors and writers. But there is a difference between providing cultural safety to enable practitioners to share their specific lived experience through the work, and asking them to be unpaid educators or advisors on behalf of their communities or communities they are associated with. Clarifying any expectations at the outset is essential.

First Nations perspectives: rebalancing the scale

While diversity is intersectional, First Nations people must have a primary place in Australia's story and identity, and in efforts for inclusion and equity. First Nations practitioners have led the way for inclusion in Australian screen, and today's screen practitioners benefit from over 30 years of First Nations practitioners teaching and implementing inclusive practice.

Interviews highlighted the importance of authenticity and legitimacy in First Nations storytelling. Authenticity is foundational for First Nations filmmakers – as one First Nations producer put it:

'We are born into the stories we are telling.'

The industry and audiences are now asking who has the right to tell First Nations stories. In a 'rebalancing of the scale', these stories are increasingly told from a First Nations voice and perspective.⁹⁸

However, First Nations practitioners are still negotiating the boundaries and grey areas of cross-cultural collaboration. They do not want to exclude collaboration with non-First Nations partners who are doing the groundwork to tell authentic stories with cultural safety.

First Nations interviewees articulated a key mission to get First Nations stories out there, told by people who have the nuance, cultural knowledge and cultural competence to tell these stories. They observed that funders are increasingly demanding First Nations representation, both on screen and behind the scenes.

Ongoing challenges include:

- defaulting to conventional ways of working, which are hierarchical, transactional and reflect a 'white perspective' (on and off screen), because this is easier than improving industry practices
- non-First Nations people trying to present First Nations content with no real respect for or knowledge of it
- culture that is 'pasted on' as an afterthought
- First Nations people and filmmakers fraudulently listed as consultants on funding applications or productions they do not know about.

98 Examples include *Total Control*, *Mystery Road: Origin* and *True Colours* – written, directed and/or produced by First Nations practitioners.

The need for diverse leadership

Interviewees highlighted that those in leadership roles have the power to create change. They spoke of the need to increase diversity among the leadership of screen organisations, including on the boards of guilds; in government funding agencies and production companies; and among commissioners and producers. Disability was highlighted as a particular area needing increased leadership representation.

Interviewees said that workspaces have a greater risk of being culturally unsafe when there is no leadership or active engagement around diversity and inclusion.

Diverse leadership can:

- champion diversity on screen and among off-screen industry workers, including actively scouting diverse talent
- bring fresh ideas, new perspectives and different ways of working
- proactively foster a safe and inclusive workplace where silencing and exclusion are less likely to occur
- provide tailored support to create a culturally safe and accessible workplace.

‘Leadership and pathways are still a challenge. We need to find ways to elevate more diverse executive talent who can be active partners in how we design new ways of working.’

(Commissioning team member/producer)



Heartbreak High

Commissioning and financial risk

TV drama is a high-cost and high-risk enterprise. Producers must navigate a complex and competitive funding landscape (from a variety of public and/or private sources) to fund a project, and it can take years to get commissioned. Interviews highlighted that limited budgets and resources can be a barrier to commissioning diverse content and taking risks; and that there is a tension between screen production as a business and as an artistic or cultural endeavour.

Interviewees noted that commercial free-to-air broadcasters rely on advertising and face pressure to hit audience targets to generate commercial revenue. As a consequence, decision making is likely to be risk averse. Preference is given to production companies they have worked with before, more experienced creatives, and bigger-name actors.

In contrast, public broadcasters do not have commercial pressure and were perceived to have greater scope for risk taking. They also have charter obligations to represent Australia's diverse communities.

Interviewees said that disabled screen practitioners can be seen as 'too risky' to invest in; and that there is an assumption among broadcasters and subscription services that audiences need a white protagonist to relate to, as well as household name actors in the main cast.

Practitioners highlighted that becoming successful as a household name is not a meritocracy: people from diverse backgrounds are rarely cast in lead roles or featured in posters and promotional materials, or they are relegated to the margins. But as one producer pointed out:

'... as we insist on different kinds of actors, they will get more power.'

Another interviewee called for more commissioners who have the skills and experience to understand and produce stories in a way that is culturally competent, saying 'Education is key'.

However, among some broadcasters and subscription services, there is growing awareness of the changing demographics and demands of the Australian audience. Some commissioners reported that their 'niche' content is the most successful because it tells a unique story that connects with audiences. It offers a fresh perspective on universal human experiences by centring on specific places, communities and identities.

As identified in the previous *Seeing Ourselves* report, authentic and diverse stories generate a 'diversity dividend', and have demonstrated strong success in viewership, ratings and box office. We continue to see examples of success such as *Bump* and *Heartbreak High*.

Despite this success, interviewees acknowledged that specific and targeted content is associated with greater financial risk. This discourages commercial investment in fresh perspectives and new stories. Interviewees emphasised that funding support – through initiatives, programs and partnerships – is crucial to grow and sustain the creative pipeline by reducing financial risk.

Several interviewees believed there is a need for better audience insights that can drive decision making without implicit and historical biases. They also highlighted opportunities in overseas markets, saying the US and UK are moving much faster than Australia on diversity and inclusion, and are more willing to take risks on new shows and talent.

Spotlight on disability

Authentic representation of disabled people on screen can be a powerful way to challenge societal stereotypes, attitudes and unconscious biases. Screen practitioners we interviewed for *Seeing Ourselves 2* – including commissioners, producers, directors, writers and actors who are disabled, or who have worked closely to support and advocate for disabled practitioners in the screen industry – highlighted the importance of disability representation on both sides of the camera.

Interviewees mentioned recent progress, including more screen practitioners feeling safe enough to identify as disabled. According to one disabled practitioner, '... it's an exciting time, just in terms of working in the industry and what we are seeing on screen.'

However, practitioners also highlighted significant barriers in the industry and 'a long way still to go in terms of capturing disabled voices.' They spoke of difficulty generating projects that feature disabled people and a sense of no disability representation on sets. Disabled practitioners believe disability representation in Australia lags behind progress overseas, as well as representation of other aspects of Australia's diversity: 'When people talk about diversity, disability is often left at the bottom of that list.'

On screen, disability is often still used as a temporary hurdle for a character to overcome. As one disabled practitioner noted, 'We see this portrayal of disability over and over again ... It would be great if disability was not a plotline. That can be really reductive.' Disabled screen practitioners said they want young disabled people to have screen representation they can see and aspire to be, and show audiences the message that living with disability is not a tragedy.

Interviewees highlighted that disability representation works well when authenticity and lived experience are valued as part of both the casting and the storytelling ('identity-conscious casting'), rather than 'to tick a box'. This can mean giving disabled actors an active role:

'When we give actors the chance to be that lived example, we can see them actively participate. It gives you another insight into someone else's experience.'

(Disabled practitioner)

Alternatively, research and consultation done well can result in characters so well-developed that the actor can contribute their lived experience if they want to, but the burden is not on them to do so.

Disabled practitioners experience particular challenges in the screen industry, including feeling isolated and having to advocate for themselves, their access needs and their workplace requirements, which they may minimise to get the job:

'You have to advocate that you can do the job and not be too expensive ... There are questions that make you feel like you are a liability – "Will insurance cover this?"'

(Disabled practitioner)

Discussing access needs can be uncomfortable and disabled practitioners can fear being seen as too demanding, hard to work with, ungrateful for the opportunity or 'difficult'. They noted that there is still a fear and stigma towards disability and that a lack of direct experience working with disabled people contributes to this:

'You can feel people's discomfort and panic when you mention disability. You get the feeling that they don't want to appear ignorant. So often it's easier for them to say or think, "it's too hard to accommodate this person".' (Disabled practitioner)

To improve the low disability representation across the industry, interviewees highlighted the need to normalise and centre accessibility, including through education on access strategies.

They also made the point that disabled people are not a homogenous group. For example, while major adjustments may be needed for some, they are not needed for all disabled people – sometimes attitudinal barriers and unconscious biases are the main barrier for disabled practitioners to getting work, funding and other opportunities to grow their skills and careers. For example, the belief that disabled people are unable to do the job to the same standard or to progress on their own. One established disabled practitioner felt that this was a key reason why there has not been more progress, particularly around disability representation in production teams:

'These are the same conversations from five years ago. We're still talking about giving people attachments rather than moving on to talking about giving people jobs.'

There can also be failure to consider intersectionality – ways barriers, biases and disadvantage can be compounded in relation to overlapping aspects of identity.⁹⁹ This includes fewer opportunities for disabled people from regional areas (as concerns about access and travel costs are compounded) and greater enthusiasm about working with younger disabled people but not older screen practitioners who have experience to lead, mentor and make a greater impact on the industry.

Mentors, networks and allies are vital to the careers of disabled people in the screen industry, although it can be harder for disabled people to access events and broker networks. For example, disabled practitioners mentioned being unintentionally excluded from attending networking events through organisers selecting inaccessible venues.

Disability-led cultural change is needed, driven by the social model of disability. This includes valuing access, addressing barriers and moving 'from trepidation and fear to enthusiasm' towards working with, hiring and featuring disabled people. Interviewees emphasised the need for disability training, guidelines and targets, and increased disability representation in leadership roles (including among producers, commissioners and funding agencies) to embed cultural change in the industry:

'We need decision makers who are diverse ... someone who is a part of the community will know how to find the charismatic talent [disabled or with lived experience] that attracts investors or commissioners.' (Disabled practitioner)

See Johanna Garvin's article, *When support and opportunity collide*, for a first-hand account of the impact of leadership on sets.

99 Crenshaw K 2017, *On Intersectionality: Essential writings*, The New Press, New York.

Suggestions from our interviews about improving disability representation in the screen industry included to:

- learn about the social model of disability and the contemporary and historic systemic discrimination of disabled people
- have open conversations about access needs before starting work. Be prepared by seeking out existing tools and resources¹⁰⁰ and being collaborative, innovative and solution-focused
- be curious, brave and open-minded – do not be afraid to make a mistake and move past it
- recognise and challenge unconscious biases about working with disabled people
- recognise that disabled people are diverse and have diverse access needs and life experiences
- plan and budget for accessibility in advance; be led by disabled practitioners about access requirements and self-educate on their procurement and costs
- use an accessibility audit and liaise with individuals to develop customised access strategies (such as ramps, how information is provided and time for rest)
- undertake disability inclusion training (all roles across the industry)
- share credits when telling stories about people with disability (beyond consultant credits)
- respect disability cultural safety by ensuring disabled people are not isolated on sets
- build opportunities and career pathways for disabled people beyond attachments
- prioritise the process (including relationships and career development) as well as the product
- ensure disabled people can attend opening nights and networking events (for example, using accessible venues, Auslan interpreting and hybrid delivery with online access)
- include disability as an aspect of the character and not a plot point
- have more disabled people in leadership roles and with creative control
- create opportunities for disabled people to develop in 'mainstream' spaces, including opportunities for disabled actors to be cast in non-disabled roles
- check if companies you work with or are funding are hiring disabled people
- establish policies and guidelines that set benchmarks and standards.

For resources relating to disability, see [*Toolkits and resources: Disability*](#).

100 For example, the South Australian Film Corporation is using an [*Access Requirements: Travel, Accommodation & Wellness Form*](#) with production teams to help managers understand what their employees need to feel comfortable and safe in the workplace. Bus Stop Films runs an [*Inclusion in Action*](#) workshop, after which they suggest going through a 'you can't ask this' process to create a safe space for teams.

The role of commissioners and producers

Collectively, commissioners, funding agencies and producers have influence or control over representation in our screen stories. Screen stories require investment to be developed and produced, which is typically sourced from content commissioners (broadcasters and streaming services) and government funding agencies. Commissioners hold financial control and can influence the project via its producer.

The following sections further explore the realm of influence among content commissioners and producers, and the challenges and opportunities for them in improving diverse representation in Australian TV drama.

1. Commissioners and producers as agents of change

While TV is a highly collaborative medium, funding is tied to the producer, who exerts creative control over the project. The producer decides the story they wish to tell, and in consultation with commissioners, decides who works on the project (including cast, director, department heads, writers' room and crew).

Producers and commissioners can decide to include a diverse cast instead of default casting of mostly white, cisgendered and non-disabled actors. They also control who gets credits, and who is recommended for future projects. The producers we interviewed said the industry needs more producers and key creatives who are committed to delivering inclusive stories. Culturally competent commissioners, producers and other key creatives can drive generational change.

Practitioners highlighted that even with a diverse cast and other key creatives on the project, the producer needs to be a champion for inclusion and equity to prevent tokenism and an unsafe environment.

They noted low levels of diversity among producers and commissioners, which means a lack of culturally specific lived experience among those who hold financial and creative control in the TV industry:

‘We need to have producers who have diverse backgrounds, and who are also interested in delivering inclusive stories, not just producing “sellable” stories.’
(Director)

Interviewees also emphasised socioeconomic factors as barriers to entry for aspiring producers, including limited access to personal networks and financial security. There is a need to remove these barriers and upskill experienced creatives from historically excluded communities to become producers.

2. The need for self-education, training and cultural competence

According to interviewees, practitioners from historically excluded and under-represented groups are still carrying the burden of educating production teams and advocating for themselves, their access needs and cultural safety. Interviewees repeatedly raised the need for self-education and professional training to improve cultural competence¹⁰¹ and to shift this burden away from historically excluded and under-represented talent:

‘The industry needs basic level education in cultural competency and a consistent understanding of [what it means to feel] safe in the workplace.’
(Commissioner)

Under-represented practitioners described cultural education demands placed on them as ‘unfair’ and ‘exhausting’; and interviewees highlighted that it is inappropriate to expect that people from historically excluded communities act as ‘guardians of culture’ unless they are hired (and paid) in a specific cultural consultant role. People from excluded backgrounds may not have had the cultural immersion to provide advice and can be criticised by their own community.

First Nations interviewees described being asked to provide cultural authority for a community they do not belong to, and other non-Anglo-Celtic practitioners described instances of actors being asked to provide cultural resources and translation.

Increased cultural competence is needed among producers so that they can better understand and navigate these challenges, including what stories are for them to tell, and what is cultural appropriation. Interviewees also highlighted that there is usually no dedicated team or staff member responsible for cultural safety on a film set, so it is up to producers to provide appropriate processes and cultural safety.

While support and guidance are needed, there is an onus on producers to self-educate, do the research and support historically excluded practitioners when they are working on stories about their culture, community identity or disability. Interviewees pointed out that historically excluded or under-represented practitioners should not be relied on to provide information that is easily and publicly available via online resources. Resources available include those published by funding agencies, or diversity, equity and inclusion organisations, as well as media coverage of advocates’ voices and experiences. See [Toolkits and resources](#) for a collection of resources suggested by interviewees.

However, this does not mean that self-education can replace lived experience in telling screen stories. Interviewees commented that if online research is needed to find out specifics, such as what a character from a certain background would have for breakfast or how a character with a wheelchair would shower, it may indicate that the wrong person is telling the story.

¹⁰¹ Cultural competence is the ability to participate ethically and effectively in intercultural settings. See National Centre for Cultural Competence, [What is cultural competence?](#) University of Sydney, viewed March 2023.

Cultural safety in practice

The term cultural safety originally comes from work led by Dr Irihapeti Ramsden¹⁰² among Māori nurses in New Zealand. It is defined as:

‘An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.’¹⁰³

Cultural safety creates an environment of shared respect that enables all those involved in a production to participate and thrive. As a First Nations producer we interviewed said, ‘You feel culturally safe when the right protocols are put in place for everyone.’

Interviewees highlighted that cultural safety needs to be more widely understood in the Australian screen industry and that education tools should be developed to assist production companies to better engage with and manage culturally safe practices.

Common suggestions from our interviewees for what inclusion and cultural safety look like in practice included the following:

- Ensure team members are not isolated. There needs to be more than one person from a historically excluded or under-represented background in the room or on set.
- When telling stories that explore a particular identity or culture, bring people with lived experience of that identity or culture into the room and share creative control. Allocate budget to have the right mix of people on the production.
- If you engage with someone else's culture or lived experience as part of story development, it should be a two-way exchange that goes beyond paying for time by consultation. Support their professional growth and build their industry networks in exchange for learning insights.
- People who advise on cultural content or lived experience should be involved in the project from start to finish and should receive appropriate credit and remuneration.
- Have open conversations to understand an individual's needs before starting work, such as adjustments to meet access needs; pronouns; or cultural or religious dietary requirements.
- Make expectations explicit at the start of projects, and check-in during the project as things can change. Once the project is finished, discuss issues that were not resolved and lessons learnt for future projects.

102 See Ellison-Loschmann L 2003, ‘Irihapeti Ramsden,’ *BMJ*, 327(7412) p.453.

103 Williams R 1999, ‘Cultural safety – what does it mean for our work practice?’ *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 23(2). This definition is used by the Australian Human Rights Commission and is cited in the *SBS Commissioning Equity & Inclusion Guidelines*. SBS 2022, *SBS Commissioning Equity & Inclusion Guidelines 2021–2024*.

- Acknowledge power dynamics in the room. Commit to listening and learning from each other, especially from points of difference. More experienced practitioners should make space for others.
- Consider intersectionality.¹⁰⁴ For example, consider the gender as well as the cultural background of those brought into the room and how this could have an impact on power dynamics.
- Self-educate and undertake training. Remove the education burden from people from under-represented or excluded groups on sets and in writers' rooms. Do not ask questions that can be answered from public resources.
- Have structures and support in place to protect people's mental health, especially when telling stories about trauma.
- Avoid 'pigeon-holing' practitioners – see them for who they are as a person, and their capacity and achievements beyond being a person who represents a particular community or identity.
- Use protocols, clear communication guidelines, a cultural risk assessment, inclusion riders and/or budget for an independent cultural safety consultant on set.



¹⁰⁴ Intersectionality refers to the ways systemic discrimination and marginalisation can be compounded due to the intersections of social categories such as cultural background, disability, age, gender, sexuality and class; and how this creates distinct experiences and identities. Australian Human Rights Commission 2022, *National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report 2022*, p. 16. See also Crenshaw K 2017, *On Intersectionality: Essential writings*, The New Press, New York.

3. Building a diverse team and inclusive space

TV is a collaborative medium. Interviews highlighted that effective diverse storytelling requires culturally competent people at all levels of a project team, and all stages of development and production:

‘Cultural safety practices should be done by the people with the most power: producers, all the way through to runners and note-takers.’
(Writer)

Diversity and inclusion must be foundational, even when telling stories about Anglo-Australian characters and experiences. As a First Nations writer said:

‘I want to be in rooms where it’s not about Indigenous content, because how else is diversity going to be normalised?’

Participants highlighted that the hierarchy, structures and systemic biases in the screen industry need to evolve as access and equity remain problems. One producer/director pointed out that expecting creatives from under-represented groups to become more resilient to adapt to the industry is one-sided:

‘The onus shouldn’t always be on the individual.’

Actors we interviewed said that even on shows with a diverse cast, if key creatives are white, it can feel tokenistic and culturally unsafe on set. However, a diverse crew can normalise diversity and support the actors. It is important to have people with diverse backgrounds, including disabled people, both in front of and behind the camera. A writer we interviewed said:

‘... the best chance we have for diverse storytelling is having a diverse room. That means including different classes, heritages, and ages. That will inform a TV story to be richer, and more authentic because you have all these voices.’

Interviewees also highlighted the need to consider intersectionality on sets and in stories (for example, when there is an impact due to a person’s gender, sexuality, age or disability as well as their ethnicity). It can be hard to anticipate when intersectionality will come into play, so this underlines the value of having multiple diverse voices in the room. There is power in numbers, and:

‘If you’re outnumbered, your power is limited.’
(Writer)

Working in the screen industry can still be exclusionary

Practitioners we interviewed shared many examples of ways the screen industry can still be exclusionary to people from historically excluded groups or experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. Barriers can be compounded for people with intersectional identities.

Examples included:

- fears of being punished or ostracised for speaking out about cultural inaccuracies or access needs
- avoiding asking for support so people don't feel 'it's too hard to work with this person' or embarrassed for appearing ignorant, particularly around access needs
- feeling afraid to speak up or ask for a credit due to being grateful just to be in the room, and under pressure to pave the way for people who will follow
- feeling like a token diversity hire or character due to being the only person of colour on a production or creative team
- difficulty generating projects that feature disabled people and a sense of no disability representation on sets
- a sense that disability is at the bottom of the 'diversity list' because representation is extremely low in all areas of the industry
- finding it difficult to participate in productions due to financial disadvantage and needing to spend money out of pocket, for example getting to locations without a car
- feeling pigeon-holed as a 'diverse' practitioner who only works on a certain type of story, or channelled into smaller funding streams specialised for 'diversity' or 'regional' content
- having hair and make-up done poorly by teams who do not know how to work with all hair and skin types
- being offered less favourable arrangements due to perceptions people from regional areas 'aren't as business savvy' and as there are fewer opportunities.

In addition to their suggestions for ***Cultural safety in practice***, interviewee suggestions for building a diverse and inclusive team included to:

- bring the cast and crew together before starting on set to start the conversation about identity, stories and issues relevant to the project that touch on under-representation (see [*Navigating the conversation*](#))
- recruit and budget for mentors for new practitioners (for example, recruit a supervising script editor to mentor practitioners who are sharing their lived experience)
- recruit additional consultants, and/or recognise and pay existing staff for any consultation services they provide on top of their roles
- recruit hair and make-up specialists who know how to work with cast with individual requirements, such as the treatment of hair and skin for people of colour

- use tools, resources and/or structured processes with production teams to help managers understand what their employees need to feel comfortable and safe in the workplace (for example, the best way to communicate with the employee and how they handle stressful or intense situations)¹⁰⁵
- budget for the time and costs needed to: identify knowledge gaps and access issues, recruit a diverse creative team and crew, forge collaborative relationships, and build a culturally safe team and accessible space.

While resourcing and budget constraints are a challenge, the producers we spoke to said that a lack of intentional planning, research and budgeting for time are the biggest barriers; and that leadership and cultural competence can go a long way.

4. From consultation to collaboration

Producers generally own the process of cultural or community research, consultation and engagement. Screen practitioners told us that when this is done well, everyone is proud of the story.

Our interviews highlighted the need to be more collaborative when working with stories that portray historically excluded and under-represented communities – to move beyond discrete, transactional, cultural consultant roles, to genuine collaboration that is ongoing throughout the project and benefits both parties. As one director/writer put it:

‘A consultation is often less meaningful than a collaboration, and there are missed opportunities to help fellow professionals within the industry from under-represented groups progress their career or receive the appropriate credit.’

Interviewees also observed more rigorous discussions in the industry about respectful consultation and collaboration. Genuine collaboration involves valuing lived experience and cultural knowledge as integral to projects.

This means moving away from a hierarchical model in which the producer and director have all the power over the end product, to sharing decision making, creative control and credit when it comes to decisions about the cultural elements in a story.

As one director said, ‘We need a structure where co-creation is central, and ego is at the bottom.’ Genuine collaboration benefits the production company; the practitioner and/or community with lived experience; and the audience, who experience authentic, unique storytelling. On the other hand:

‘Stories told without giving authentic voices power... can do more damage than good.’
(Writer)

Interviewees said there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to authenticity and cultural safety in collaborations – it must be tailored to the project. They suggested producers and creatives should constantly interrogate and discuss elements of portrayal, authenticity, representation and specificity; by asking questions like, ‘Is this element crucial to the story?’ ‘How does it impact the community or culture we are portraying?’ And ‘How does it impact the actor?’

¹⁰⁵ Tools include the South Australian Film Corporation’s [Access Requirements: Travel, Accommodation & Wellness Form](#) and ‘Cast and crew communication’ in Bus Stop Films’ [The Inclusive Filmmaking Toolkit](#) (p.30). See [Part 4: Tools and resources](#) for more tools.

And while there is a preference for collaboration over consultation, there is still a strong place for research, consultation and engagement to strengthen authentic storytelling.

Interviewees highlighted that when producers perceive it is 'too hard' to produce or cast culturally specific story elements or characters, they tend to be erased. While producers are showing respect in avoiding an inaccurate portrayal, poor planning can lead to exclusion. It also means that the extensive work that has gone into research and advice to inform creative decisions are dismissed.

Recognition for contribution to the story is a key issue for producers to address. A director/writer we interviewed asked, 'Who is on the red carpet? Who is getting the elevation? It's never the consultant.'

Interviewees said that contributors, including key creatives, actors and other non-writing participants who use their cultural knowledge or lived experience to inform the story need clear expectations and certainty through contractual agreements about the nature of the exchange and if or how they will be credited, and they should be paid an additional consultant fee. Practitioners emphasised a need to break down industry perceptions that cultural knowledge and lived experience, such as language translation, should be available for free.

Our interviews highlighted opportunities to improve community engagement in screen projects. Allowing enough time, which is often in short supply, is key.

Suggestions included:

- do not underestimate the size and scope of the consultation
- invest more time to ensure the story is authentic and accurate, which will pay dividends with audiences
- allow time to engage and negotiate the views and opinions of different community groups
- allow time for people who hold the cultural knowledge or lived experience to travel to you – not everyone can conform to a tight production timeline
- be transparent about expectations of all parties up front, for example, fees, time commitments and credits
- employ cultural consultants and an access consultant rather than depending on under-represented screen practitioners to do this work for free
- ensure ongoing consultation throughout the project, not as a one-off transaction
- integrate community engagement into the production process, for example by building relationships with First Nations Elders and inviting an Elder-in-residence to be part of the project.

***Grace Beside Me*: The value of community collaboration, engagement and diverse voices**

TV series *Grace Beside Me*, based on the young adult book by First Nations writer Sue McPherson, follows the adventures of a teenager who learns on her 13th birthday that she can communicate with spirits. With themes including connection to Country and characters with First Nations, South Sea Islander and Māori backgrounds, the series needed to deftly manage sometimes sensitive subject matter alongside multiple unique perspectives.



With Screen Queensland coming on board as a financing partner, a decision was made with the author's blessing, to relocate the story from Wiradjuri Country where McPherson is from, to Mununjali Country in Queensland.

To go any further, producers Dena Curtis and Lois Randall would require the permission and consultation of the Traditional Owners of Mununjali Country. Randall said, 'We had a meeting with the Mununjali Elders Council, which was a really pivotal moment for us and

they kind of grilled us and sent us outside to wait.' Once the Elders Council had discussed it, the team were called back in to answer more questions. According to Randall:

'They gave us their endorsement, but they wanted to know what the benefits for the local community were going to be and how we were going to engage the local community, which obviously was something we really wanted to do anyway. They also allocated three Elders to work with us to be our story consultants and our point of connection.'

A formal paid agreement was established with the Mununjali Elders Council and the three Elders, who the team would meet for sessions in the park. More importantly, over time, they established relationships and trust. Curtis said:

'Working with the community was amazing ... We got to put Mununjali language into the series, which was a language where, at the time, there weren't too many speakers, so that was really exciting. We worked very closely with them. We used to send them newsletters every month just to update what we were doing.'

The emphasis was on respectful collaboration and communication to create an authentic series that stayed true to the messages of McPherson's novel – something that also extended to the writers' rooms. A South Sea Islander consultant and Māori writer were brought on to assist in the development of the scripts. Curtis explained, 'I think authenticity only comes from a lived experience ... You don't have inherent knowledge; you haven't had an experience from that perspective or of that culture or as that person.'

Beyond the value of authentic voice, Curtis thinks this collaborative nature of *Grace Beside Me* also pushed the series; bringing in new elements and challenging old ones, so together the team could take the story somewhere new. Looking back, Randall said this unique, story-driven process for *Grace Beside Me*, 'was such a joy ... It's been one of the highlights of my professional life as an experience and a learning experience. Also [for] that relationship that we developed with the local community.'

A more detailed version of this case study can be found in Screen Australia's [Authentic Storytelling](#) series.

The role of writers

There is an opportunity to improve authentic storytelling by getting more diverse voices into writers' rooms; and by increasing cultural safety, access, collaboration, and sharing of creative control over cultural elements in the story. Writers noted that the current hierarchical structure in the screen industry leaves under-represented writers often feeling outnumbered and disempowered:

'There are power structures in production teams and so if you are representing a whole community, only having one writer in the room is not enough. It feels like the responsibility of "authentic" diverse representation lands on that one person.'
(Writer)

Challenges identified by writers include being consulted for their lived experience without the opportunity to develop their own skills or credits as a script writer; being pigeon-holed as a 'cultural writer'; and often not having direct participation in any community consultation undertaken.

In addition, writers often do not have continued access on sets. Even when writing is done well, scripts and casting can change outside the writers' rooms for a variety of reasons. This can sometimes corrupt intentional specifics and bring reputational risk to those who are named in credits. As one writer said, 'Something that starts out as authentic and true to the creator then starts to have different lenses put over it to make it more "palatable".' Writers can lack the skills, opportunities or resources to negotiate control over their creative intellectual property.

However, producers have the power to advocate for authentic writing on set:

'The success of keeping creative control is through finding a producer who is not going to compromise ... The final product and output can easily change if the producer isn't fighting for it.'
(Writer)

Interviewees noted increasing opportunities for writers from under-represented groups to be credited, and increased scrutiny of storytelling about historically excluded groups: there is a growing expectation that lived experience is incorporated as part of the core writing team or via a consultant throughout the entire project (see [4. From consultation to collaboration](#) for more on this). They also suggested ensuring scripts include cultural specificity to help producers and casting agents understand a character's background in casting.

Stereotypes and gaps in representation are still too common in scripts. For example, regional stories written by writers from metropolitan areas 'lean into cliché' and historically excluded people are often used as 'vehicles of trauma': an LGBTIQ+ character often has a traumatic coming out experience, disability is presented as a temporary hurdle to be overcome, or stories focus on intergenerational trauma (and without adequate mental health supports in place for the talent working on these projects). Historically excluded people want to be seen in a full spectrum of roles and story arcs. This highlights the need for increased investment in story and script development so that Australian audiences see nuanced and authentic stories, and gain insights about human experiences beyond stereotypes.

From colour-blind to identity-conscious casting

Interviewees emphasised a need to move from 'colour-blind' to 'colour-conscious casting', and to extend this intentional practice beyond ethnicity to 'identity-conscious casting': actively acknowledging additional aspects of an actor's identity such as gender and disability.

- **Colour-blind casting** – the ethnicity of actors and characters are not a consideration in story development, production or casting.
- **Colour-conscious casting** – there is intentional consideration of an actor's ethnicity and how it enriches a character's identity and the story. This might look like:
 - a character's ethnicity is specific and written into the script so that a culturally appropriate actor can be cast
 - character storyline and portrayal affirm the actor's cultural identity in a way that enriches the role.
- **Identity-conscious casting** – there is intentional consideration of other aspects of an actor's identity, such as gender and disability, and how it enriches a character's identity and the story.¹⁰⁶

Colour-blind casting has been a practice to increase diversity by broadening the potential casting options for a character. For example, a 'best friend' character could be portrayed by someone from any cultural background.

However, colour-blind casting asks the audience to ignore aspects of the actor's identity when portraying a 'generic' character, for example, to ignore their skin colour. As the character can be 'anyone', specific story elements such as the casting of family members, are often not consciously designed or adapted to reflect

a coherent identity for actors and characters. Interviewees acknowledged that despite good intentions to broaden casting options, colour-blind casting can perpetuate the erasure of identity.

By contrast, colour-conscious and identity-conscious casting recognise a person's identity and interviewees emphasised that this approach enriches the role. For example, practitioners highlighted that disability representation works well when lived experience is valued as part of both the casting and the storytelling.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ See Jadhvani L. and Vazquez V 2021, '[Identity-conscious casting: Moving beyond color-blind and color-conscious casting](#),' *Howlround Theatre Commons*, 2 February 2021.

¹⁰⁷ For discussion of why casting disabled actors matters see Lee G 2021, '[The problem with "cripping up" and why casting disabled actors matters](#),' *ABC News*, 28 December 2021.



The Family Law series 2

The actor's personal identity could be reflected in story elements, even in small ways such as the character's name reflecting their ethnicity. But this does not mean that it needs to drive a 'special narrative' to exist – diverse representation can be a natural element of the story. For example, if the story is about a family who are Chinese-Australian, this does not mean the show must be about ethnicity rather than family (*The Family Law* centres on a Chinese-Australian family and the relationship between mother and son). One producer noted that the shift to identity-conscious casting is happening much quicker in the UK and US, but the Australian screen industry is 'slowly catching up.'

Interviewees highlighted that specificity is still lacking, both in character descriptions and in casting. For example, roles and accents are described as 'African', which is as broad as saying 'European.' Some casting calls inaccurately call for a broad range of diverse actors, such as including white actors in a casting call despite specificity in the script. One actor said:

'... if that role has been written specifically about a character from an under-represented background, then there's a duty to approach that casting with dignity and respect.'

Emerging casting considerations

With the changing landscape, there are new considerations for actors. These are also considerations for their agents and casting directors, who could be advocates for under-represented actors and protect them from culturally unsafe work environments or situations.

Emerging considerations highlighted by interviewees included the following:

- Actors are now questioning taking roles portraying historically excluded or under-represented identities when they do not personally have the relevant lived experience.
- Whether 'adjacent' or 'close enough' casting is sufficient and culturally respectful can be a difficult decision for creatives. Some practitioners have used lateral representation (for example, Chinese versus Vietnamese) as a last resort. While not ideal, it has been used as a way to increase representation for communities who have faced similar historical exclusion or under-representation. Interviewees indicated that the industry is still navigating this practice, and ultimately it is a context-dependent creative decision.¹⁰⁸
- Some practitioners suggested casting calls should indicate which aspects are optional, for example 'Japanese appearance, optional Japanese language speaking.' Making expectations explicit supports cultural safety.
- It can still be a career risk to identify as LGBTIQ+ as it may reduce your opportunities. This becomes vexed if we expect actors to identify to play queer roles.
- There is growing scrutiny of casting agents and expectations that they should have a diverse slate of actors on their books.

Growing and retaining the acting talent pool

Interviewees highlighted that the size and diversity of the acting talent pool in Australia remains a barrier to more diverse casting. This can be linked to seeing ourselves on screen: children growing up need to see that they are included as part of the industry and that being an actor is a viable option. This is particularly so for disabled people who lack visibility at every level of the industry:

'You can't be what you can't see.'

However, interviewees from community-based organisations that work with historically excluded and under-represented communities commented on the abundance of entry level and emerging talent they can source. Community-based organisations, such as Cinespace, Arts + Cultural

Exchange, Screenworks, The Other Film Festival, and Bus Stop Films frequently assist with sourcing talent for broadcasters and industry.¹⁰⁹

Interviewees said the well-known talent pool is not large enough. For example, the industry calls on the same few people when they need an actor, writer or panellist who is a person of colour or from another under-represented group. Many of our diverse talent migrate overseas where there are more opportunities for lead roles rather than just supporting characters. It is still unusual to see people of colour cast as leads in Australia, so it takes longer to source the talent and costs more if they need to be hired from overseas. There is a need to grow and retain a diverse acting talent pool to avoid this depletion of Australian talent.

¹⁰⁸ For example, see British East & South East Asians in Theatre & on Screen (BEATS) *Statement on colour-conscious casting in opera*, viewed 30 November 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Cinespace and Arts + Cultural Exchange work with multicultural communities, and Screenworks supports the regional screen industry.

Raising the bar for *The Heights*

Co-creators of ABC's *The Heights*, Warren Clarke and Que Minh Luu, wanted to make TV that was reflective of the diversity of Australia. The two 30-episode series of *The Heights* follow the residents of the inner-city social housing tower Arcadia as well as those that live and work in the quickly gentrifying area around it.



Authenticity was not shoe-horned into a show like *The Heights*. It was there from initial conversations and was driven from the top. The creators, the network, the production company, the heads of department: everyone came onto the project knowing the intention was to reflect the audience that should be watching the series. According to Clarke:

‘That was part of the mandate of the show as it was pitched. That was an immovable piece of what the work was and then everything got to fall behind and follow that North Star.’

For the series to be representative, they knew the characters would need to be a diverse group, cast authentically. The difficulty lay in the follow-through for those decisions – Clarke said pathways and opportunities are not necessarily available to every demographic, which means there can be potentially smaller pools of talent for certain roles:

‘You’ll hit that point of, “it would just be so much easier to cast this person” or it’s late in the day, but you have a group that goes, “let’s keep looking, let’s push”.’

On *The Heights*, this involved working with Annie Murtagh-Monks to cast a group of characters of First Nations, Anglo-Celtic, Middle Eastern and Asian cultural backgrounds, while some are straight, others are LGBTIQ+ or disabled. Murtagh-Monks won the 2019 Casting Guild of Australia Award for Best Casting in a TV Drama for her work casting 100 or so speaking roles on *The Heights*. In her acceptance speech, Murtagh-Monks said it was her most ambitious job but also the most rewarding.¹¹⁰

The Heights ran on a 30-episode model, and Clarke highlighted that the beauty of longer-run shows, which used to be such a staple of the industry, is how they give emerging talent exposure to the 'machine' that is making TV. On series 1, there were 41 interns who worked on *The Heights*, but while internships, placements and attachments are important, for Clarke it was also about getting people their first screen credits, and hopefully more down the line:

'How do you set people up to win? It's not enough to provide an opportunity. You have to provide the opportunity in the correct way.'

That was done by making sure there was an infrastructure created, by putting resources into training and engagement, including mentors and an additional script editor to work with emerging writers on each series:

'It came in the form of mentorships, particularly in the early writing stages. We brought on an additional script editor who was able to work specifically with the more emerging talent in the craft principles and bringing their scripts along.'

The end result is a series that has provided in-roads for creatives, and was critically lauded, with reviewers saying it 'proves that diversity done right is not just tokenism, but makes for genuinely better TV',¹¹¹ and calling it 'the Aussie soap opera you should absolutely be watching'.¹¹² It was nominated for the AACTA Award for Best Drama Series, as well as nominations from the SPA Awards, ADG Awards and ASSG Awards, and it won the AWGIE Award in 2020 for writing in a TV serial.

As Clarke said, reflective storytelling is not only better for society, it also makes for better TV, '... to reach a point where anyone could turn on the television and find themselves somewhere there.'

¹¹⁰ How Annie-Murtagh-Monks accomplished one of the most ambitious casting jobs in the country, *FilmInk*.

¹¹¹ Lu D 2019, 'The Heights review – Finally, a warm, complex and credible Australian soap opera,' *The Guardian*, 22 February 2019.

¹¹² Guillaume J 2019, 'The Heights' is the Aussie soap opera you should absolutely be watching,' *Junkee*, 11 July 2019.

Talent development and escalation pipeline

Interviewees noted that there are challenges in developing diverse new talent across roles in the screen industry, as investment in the historical development pathway (such as short films, cadetships and state resource centre training) has reduced or disappeared. A gap in supporting regional professionals in the industry was also highlighted. However, there are new opportunities for emerging talent: interviewees said they should be encouraged to seek out mentors and engage with online platforms, which often have lower barriers to entry and a broad audience reach.

Practitioners highlighted how the insecure nature of screen industry placements and work, and long hours, can be a barrier for many who are living week-to-week, don't have a car, or have family responsibilities. There is a gap in recognising how socioeconomic disadvantage can play a role in career entry and opportunities:

'A lot of people don't really talk about how hard it is to come from a low-socioeconomic background and try and work in this industry.'
(Writer)

Interviewees highlighted that people from under-represented groups are concentrated in the 'entry-level free-labour' career stage, most frequently seen as attachments rather than paid roles on productions (see [Attachment programs](#) for more on this).

Practitioners stated that there are still only a limited number of experienced mid-career creatives from historically excluded groups working as writers, directors and producers. At the same time, they believe that early-career/emerging creatives are not given enough development opportunities to transition out of being seen as 'emerging' – they lack the opportunities, pathways or mentored support to perform at the level required for bigger projects. A producer/director stated, 'There is no pipeline to build entry level professionals up and through to mid-career'; and a writer highlighted that creatives of colour have a different starting line and, 'A longer road – diverse practitioners are kept in the "emerging space" much longer than their non-diverse counterparts.'

Practitioners at various career levels need accessible training and ongoing support via funding and from their professional networks. They need opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities and achievements, build up a portfolio, gain on-the-job skills, and advance into new and ongoing roles as part of their career progression.

Interviewees called for a coordinated, strategic, whole-of-sector approach to target and develop historically excluded and under-represented talent across the industry and through career pathways; and highlighted the loss of not-for-profit, community training organisations such as Metro Screen (NSW) and Open Channel (VIC).

Suggestions for a talent development and escalation pipeline included:

- funding to produce their own small-scale projects, for example online content and short films, and coordinated efforts to link individuals with the right resources and people
- improvements to attachment programs (see [Attachment programs](#))
- pathway programs introducing emerging industry professionals to decision makers
- tailored bespoke programs involving training and mentorship with industry partners¹¹³
- workshops targeting identified gaps in skill sets
- ongoing, established training programs at community level
- traineeships and cadetships with broadcasters and streaming services
- opportunities on bigger projects with networks and broadcasters, particularly on long-running series that have stable operating environments (for example, *Black Comedy* and *Home and Away*)
- support and funding to attend industry events for talent with access requirements
- building networks and mentoring opportunities (see below), including established practitioners and organisations doing outreach to actively engage people from under-represented communities in the places they live.

Building formal and informal networks

Interviewees highlighted that relationships and networks are key to making it in the screen industry. Practitioners told us that their careers were supported by champions, mentors and recommendations. Jobs are not always advertised so having a professional and personal network means your reputation is known and increases your access to work.

Our interviews indicated a need for a network of champions and supportive mentors. Interviewees suggested development of legacy programs, for example where alumni of funding agency programs engage in mentorships between each career level, from entry to senior levels.

Access is particularly important for disabled people from all historically excluded groups, including support for team members from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and regional areas to attend industry events (and the set).

Interviewees highlighted instances of actors from under-represented groups having to work harder to build a profile due to not being invited to high-profile industry awards or events, or not being able to afford to get there. Disabled practitioners talked of being unintentionally excluded from attending networking events through organisers selecting inaccessible venues.

¹¹³ For example, Screenworks' [Regional Crew Development Program](#) with Netflix.

Attachment programs

Attachment programs provide on-the-job experience for emerging and early career practitioners. They aim to develop production skills and support participants to build their professional networks. Most attachment programs are run by screen funding agencies and having an attachment on a production can sometimes be a condition of government funding.

Interviewees highlighted that attachments remain a valuable way of learning from and building relationships with established practitioners. Attachments expose emerging talent to the realities of working in the screen industry and give people an opportunity to see and try new roles. They also provide an alternative career pathway for those who did not go to film school or cannot afford to.

However, practitioners said that attachments need to be more structured (including a defined role and responsibilities), better managed, and involve placements being actively prepared and supported. A 'sink or swim' mentality was identified as the approach taken on some placements, leading to 'culture shock' and disappointment for participants – or a lack of cultural safety that could result in people leaving the industry. Expectations for both parties need to be prepared and communicated up front. Interviewees suggested that guidelines, training¹¹⁴ and advice on how to run a successful attachment program should be developed and provided to productions engaging with attachment programs.

Practitioners pointed out that attachment opportunities are only as good as the skills you can demonstrate at the end, and how you can show you contributed to a project. Attachments for two weeks can be too short; working for the duration of a production or on a slate of projects would have more impact.

Interviewees suggested that there is a role for funding agencies to broker attachments and projects: to do the call outs, identify the skill gaps and foster the relationships. The industry needs to genuinely target people who have been historically excluded, rather than anyone who vaguely ticks a 'diversity box'. The industry needs producers who want to invest time mentoring attachees, help them gain new skills, champion their careers, and put effort into creating a safe space, opportunities and relationship. One writer said:

‘There is sometimes pushback from producers who argue that a set is “not a community welfare service” and they only want to work with “the best” rather than emerging talent from a diverse background.’

If producers do not see and explain the value in diverse attachments for building skills and the industry, it can set up a production team culture that mimics this view and potential for attachments to be pigeon-holed as 'sub-par creatives'. Disabled people experience additional attitudinal barriers and some will need to have a strong advocate to get attachment experience (see *Spotlight on disability* for more on attitudinal barriers).

¹¹⁴ For example, at the time of writing this report, the South Australian Film Corporation had trialled and was developing a master-apprentice micro-credential training initiative with department heads, undertaken prior to attachments. Department heads are trained on what it means to be a mentor, and 'apprentices' are taken through the fundamentals of the screen industry before applying for an attachment.

Navigating the conversation

Communication is key. Constructive and sometimes 'difficult' conversations about roles, responsibilities, inclusion and diversity need to happen in development and production.

Where previously, under-represented practitioners feared the repercussions of speaking up about cultural concerns or inappropriate behaviour; today, some of these conversations are avoided due to a fear of backlash or causing offense to individuals or communities. Younger screen practitioners are more willing to speak up about processes and behaviour that are not respectful. This highlights social and cultural shifts around expectations and what is acceptable.

Interviewees said there is a genuine desire to make space for historically excluded and under-represented people in the screen industry, but that sometimes the skills to do this are missing. While there is tension and discomfort in addressing sensitive topics, it is essential for productions to have these conversations to create safer, more inclusive and productive work environments.

Practitioners called for:

- cultural sensitivity, awareness and vigilance about each other's cultural safety when difficult conversations take place, including recognising power imbalances
- creation of safe spaces where people can ask for support, access needs or opportunities, including awareness that not everyone will have a relationship with the producer
- proactive offers of support, access and opportunities from producers and team members to historically excluded practitioners, so that the burden is not on them to ask
- dialogue and feedback rather than public shaming
- allowing people to learn from their mistakes
- a commitment to being open to listening, learning and collaborating rather than defensiveness or punishment.

The tools: guidelines and policies

Interviews for *Seeing Ourselves 2* highlighted that diversity and inclusion targets, tools, insights and incentives would help the industry become more equitable. Guidelines and policies are important for excluded people to have a way into the room and to set clear expectations and accountability for a minimum standard of behaviour. Interviewees mentioned COVID-19 safety plans as a recent example that was implemented and enforced. Clear targets, goals and funding incentives can help fight inertia and show what success looks like.

For example, they can help ensure that training institutions, production companies and funding agencies are enabling and recruiting disabled people. Participants said that guidelines and respect training around disability and access are lacking, and that the key to making changes work

is addressing unconscious biases about physical needs and communication.

Typically, there is no dedicated team or staff member to advocate for cultural safety and accessibility on production sets, and mandatory guidelines will not help if cultural awareness and sensitivity is insufficient across the team. Interviewees suggested inclusion and cultural safety training or micro-credentials for everyone in the production, and building in budget and time for an inclusive operating model.

While gaps in resources remain, there are a range of existing resources available that can help guide the screen industry in increasing diverse representation, inclusion and equity. Interviewees contributed to the list provided in [*Part 4: Tools and resources*](#).

Part 3: International context

This section discusses how the results published in *Seeing Ourselves 2* compare with research findings from our overseas peers; as well as actions to address inequities in the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand screen industries.

The diversity of those in front of and behind the camera continues to be a growing focus across the world, with screen professionals, academics and audiences increasingly asking if their country's screen stories reflect their communities. Since the 2016 *Seeing Ourselves* report, great strides have been made in more accurately capturing and assessing the diversity of on-screen content and off-screen practitioners.

This includes annual reports from the UK's Creative Diversity Network on the Diamond project which looks at diversity in both on and off-screen TV roles in the UK;¹¹⁵ the Vancouver Asian Film Festival's 2022 *Diversity on Screen* audit of Canadian broadcasters;¹¹⁶ US advocacy group Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's (GLAAD) annual *Where We Are on TV* reports on the diversity of primetime scripted series

regulars;¹¹⁷ Nielsen's *Being Seen on Screen* reports on screen share of recurring characters across the most viewed programs in the US;¹¹⁸ and UCLA's *Hollywood Diversity Report* on scripted TV leads.¹¹⁹

While not directly comparable to the *Seeing Ourselves* results due to different methods, categories and timeframes, these reports indicate some similarities as well as some differences with our international peers.

In addition, there are several studies and tracking by funding agencies on the diversity of key creatives working off screen in TV in New Zealand,¹²⁰ the UK,¹²¹ the US¹²² and Canada.¹²³

In response to these reports and their findings, as well as global movements and discussion, there has been an increase in the development of policies, initiatives and incentives to improve industry inclusion and increase opportunities for under-represented groups. The Australian screen industry can learn from the successful actions taken in other regions to create new opportunities locally.

115 See [Diamond](#). Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5* reports on content produced by the BBC, Channel 4, ITV, Paramount and Sky broadcast between 1 August 2020 and 31 July 2021 using over 41,000 diversity forms relating to more than 850,000 on and off-screen TV production roles.

116 Vancouver Asian Film Festival 2022, *Diversity on Screen: Audit report of Canadian broadcasters 2022* looks at Asian and BPOC representation in the main cast of scripted and unscripted programs broadcast April 11 to April 17 2021 by the top four national broadcasters in Canada and one provincial.

117 GLAAD 2021, *Where We Are on TV 2021–2022* looks at 775 primetime scripted series regulars scheduled to appear on scripted broadcast primetime programming for the 2021–22 season and LGBTQ characters on cable networks and streaming services.

118 Nielsen 2022, *Being Seen on Screen 2021: The importance of quantity and quality representation on TV* looks at the share of screen for recurring cast members across the top 1,500 most viewed programs in the US in 2020–21 across broadcast, cable and streaming, including all genres.

119 Hunt D and Ramón a 2022, *Hollywood Diversity Report 2022*, UCLA, looks at scripted leads across 407 programs from the 2020–21 TV season.

120 For example, NZ On Air's annual *Diversity Report* monitors gender, ethnic and regional representation across funded screen production. The New Zealand Film Commission publishes [head count](#) data on the ethnic diversity of key creatives and [head count](#) and [project count](#) data of the gender of key creatives granted development and/or production funding.

121 For example, the British Film Institute reports on the diversity of key creatives in funded [production](#) and [development](#) projects. The UK's [Diamond](#) project also reports on key creatives.

122 For example, the Directors' Guild of America's annual *Episodic Television Inclusion Report*; and Hunt D and Ramón a 2022, *Hollywood Diversity Report 2022*, UCLA also reports on key creatives.

123 For example, Golic J and Younglai 2021, *Women in View On Screen Report*.

Highlights

- Our international review suggests that Australia compares favourably to some of our peers on some on-screen diversity dimensions, such as First Nations and women's representation.¹²⁴ However, it also highlights an opportunity to learn from our peers who are forging ahead with collaborative whole-of-sector responses to improve diverse representation.
- The strong rate of First Nations representation among main characters in TV dramas found by *Seeing Ourselves 2* was not found in studies in the US, Canada or New Zealand.¹²⁵
- Similar international studies show varied results on cultural diversity but tend to indicate the need for more representation of people of colour, particularly Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Representation of Black people among main TV characters has achieved parity with population benchmarks in both the US and UK.
- Low disability representation both on screen and off is an international concern, highlighted in studies from the US, UK and Canada.
- The gender parity for women found in *Seeing Ourselves 2* was not found in international studies of on-screen representation on TV, except for the UK's Diamond project. Like *Seeing Ourselves 2*, UK results also highlight under-representation of older people on screen.
- Internationally, there are a range of initiatives by industry and governments to improve diverse representation and inclusion in the screen industry. These include campaigns and summits; diversity strategies, standards and targets; use of existing or proposed legislation; tax incentives; investment in training, skills and talent development; and reforms to screen industry awards.

Please note that the following section of Seeing Ourselves 2 uses terminology from the reports reviewed. Some of the terminology used is contested and evolving. For definitions of the categories quoted in this section, refer to the reports cited.

¹²⁴ Our review is based on similar research reports that were publicly available at the time of preparing *Seeing Ourselves 2*. Results are not directly comparable to our on-screen results due to different methods, categories and timeframes.

¹²⁵ No on-screen representation study was identified for New Zealand. However, Māori people have been identified as an under-represented group in the New Zealand Film Commission's strategies.

First Nations

While *Seeing Ourselves 2* found First Nations people are well represented among main characters compared to the population benchmark, this strong level of representation has not been found in the US where 'Native persons' made up 0.9% of the scripted leads in broadcast shows, 0.5% in digital shows, and were absent in cable shows in the 2020–21 season.¹²⁶ Another study found that, depending on the platform, 'Native Americans' received just 0.1–0.4% share of screen as a recurring cast member across the 1,500 most viewed programs in the 2020–21 TV season (compared to a population benchmark of 1.4%).¹²⁷

A 2016 report on diversity within Canadian TV programming also found the First Nations community under-represented, with 'Aboriginal peoples' comprising just 1% of speaking roles in English language programming compared to a population benchmark of 4.9%, and 0% in French language programming.¹²⁸

In 2017–18 in Canada, a dedicated Indigenous Screen Office was created,¹²⁹ '... committed to ensuring Indigenous stories on screens are in the control of First Nations, Inuit and Métis storytellers, who have historically been excluded from the sector.'¹³⁰

In New Zealand, Māori people have been identified as an under-represented group in the New Zealand Film Commission's diversity and inclusion strategy¹³¹ and in the 10-year strategy for the New Zealand screen sector to 2030.¹³² Indicators in the 10-year strategy include growth in the number of and revenue generated from Māori productions and stories; and the sector is 'encouraged to embrace Tikanga Māori' – 'the Māori way of doing things'.¹³³

126 Hunt D and Ramón a 2022, *Hollywood Diversity Report 2022*, UCLA, p.24–25.

127 Broadcast programs: <0.1%; cable: <0.1%; SVOD: 0.4%. Share of screen tells us the percentage of an identity group that appears on-screen as a recurring cast member. Nielsen 2021, *Being Seen on Screen 2021: The importance of quantity and quality representation on TV*, p.11 and p.15.

128 Nordicity 2016, *Review of Cultural Diversity within Canadian TV Programming*, prepared for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), p.16–17. 3,109 speaking roles from 196 programs were analysed. At the time of preparing *Seeing Ourselves 2*, an update of this study was underway.

129 See *Indigenous Screen Office*.

130 See *ISO: Funding*, viewed 30 November 2022.

131 New Zealand Film Commission 2022, *He Ara Whakaurunga Kanorau | Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022–2025*.

132 *Aotearoa New Zealand Screen Sector Strategy 2030*, p.5.

133 *Aotearoa New Zealand Screen Sector Strategy 2030*, p.39, 34–35.

Cultural diversity

Seeing Ourselves 2 found 71% of main characters in Australian TV drama are represented as Anglo-Celtic and a further 4.7% are identified as European. US studies looked at 'White' representation, with results including 60–72% of scripted leads in the 2020–21 TV season (compared to 43% of the population)¹³⁴ and 60–80% of recurring cast member screen time in the most viewed programs in 2020–21.¹³⁵

Seeing Ourselves 2 found that people with non-European ancestries are under-represented (16%) compared to population benchmarks, particularly the Southern and Central Asian group (2.8%) and the South-East Asian group (1.7%). Some groups are seeing representation on par or slightly above population benchmarks, for example, the North African and Middle Eastern group (3.3%) and the Oceanian group (2.7%).

UCLA's *Hollywood Diversity Report* found 'people of colour' to be under-represented in scripted leads in the 2020–21 TV season, comprising 27–40% depending on the broadcast platform, compared to 43% of the population.¹³⁶ 'Black' and 'multiracial' leads exceeded proportionate representation on cable scripted shows (23% and 11% respectively) and digital platforms (16% and 12% respectively), but not on broadcast (11% and 5.7% respectively). 'Middle Eastern or North African' leads were absent from broadcast and under-represented on cable (0.9%) but were over-represented on digital platforms in 2020–21 (2.2%). 'Latinx' and 'Asian' leads were under-represented across platforms

(2.8–5.7% and 1.9–3.8% respectively).¹³⁷ The report also presents findings on ratings that suggest America's increasingly diverse audiences prefer diverse TV content.¹³⁸

GLAAD's report on primetime scripted series regulars in the 2021–22 US broadcast season found higher representation for 'people of colour': of the 775 series regulars, 50% of characters were 'people of colour' and 25% were 'Black', setting record highs.¹³⁹ However, the 'Latinx' community was again found to be under-represented, at 8%; and 7% of characters were 'Asian-Pacific Islander'.¹⁴⁰

Nielsen's report on the most viewed 1,500 programs in the US in 2021 found that 'Black' talent was represented above parity (13–20% share of screen for recurring cast) with this representation driven by Black men. However, the report highlights that for Black audiences, parity is not enough, with Black viewers twice as likely to seek out content where they are represented.¹⁴¹ 'Asian and Pacific Islander' communities were under-represented at 2.9–5.5%; and while 'East Asian' people had the highest share of screen among this group (1.4–2.8%), 'South Asian' and 'South-East Asian' on-screen representation was low (0.5–1.5% and 0.2–0.7% respectively), far below population benchmarks. The Nielsen report highlights that the full diversity of Asian Americans is not represented and that stereotypes remain a concern.¹⁴²

134 Broadcast programs: 73%; cable: 60%; digital: 62%. Hunt D and Ramón a 2022, *Hollywood Diversity Report 2022*, UCLA, p.23–27.

135 Broadcast programs: 60%; cable: 80%; SVOD: 75%. Nielsen 2021, *Being Seen on Screen 2021: The importance of quantity and quality representation on TV*, p.5.

136 Hunt D and Ramón a 2022, *Hollywood Diversity Report 2022*, UCLA, p.23–25.

137 Hunt D and Ramón a 2022, *Hollywood Diversity Report 2022*, UCLA, p.20–25.

138 Hunt D and Ramón a 2022, *Hollywood Diversity Report 2022*, UCLA, p.4–5.

139 GLAAD 2021, *Where We Are on TV 2021–2022*, p.22–24.

140 GLAAD 2021, *Where We Are on TV 2021–2022*, p.26–28.

141 Nielsen 2021, *Being Seen on Screen 2021: The importance of quantity and quality representation on TV*, p.8.

142 Nielsen 2021, *Being Seen on Screen 2021: The importance of quantity and quality representation on TV*, p.7.

Nordicity's 2016 report on Canadian broadcasting found 'visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples' comprised 14% of speaking roles in English language drama/comedies (compared to a population benchmark of 21%) with representation levels higher in children's programs but lower in French language programs.¹⁴³ The Vancouver Asian Film Festival's 2022 *Diversity on Screen* report found that for scripted programs made in Canada, 'Asian' representation was low: 'Asian' characters comprised 0–16% of main casts depending on the broadcaster, and characters that were 'BPOC' (Black or people of colour excluding Asian) comprised 16–19%.¹⁴⁴ The report makes a range of recommendations including dedicated funding and mandated equity targets.¹⁴⁵ In 2020, Telefilm Canada supported creation of the Black Screen Office,¹⁴⁶ which has commissioned several studies to help 'accelerate system change towards equity, inclusion and authentic content',¹⁴⁷ including consultations with under-represented groups that provide directives for the industry on authentic and inclusive content creation.¹⁴⁸

Looking to the UK, and at lead actors in scripted roles in TV programs broadcast in 2020–21, the Diamond project found representation at or above UK population benchmarks for those who identify as 'Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME)'¹⁴⁹ (24%), including people who identify with 'mixed or multiple ethnic groups' (11%), as 'Black' (6.9%) or 'South Asian' (5.9%).¹⁵⁰ However, representation was below the 'BAME' share of the population in London (40%) where most TV is produced, and overall representation of 'BAME' people on screen has seen decreases each year from 2017–18,¹⁵¹ prompting critical media coverage in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement.¹⁵² In 2020–21, overall representation on screen of people who identify as 'BAME' was slightly higher in children's programs (28%) and comedy (31%) than drama (22%).¹⁵³

In New Zealand, 'Pacific peoples, Asian communities and MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American and African)' people have been identified as under-represented groups in the New Zealand Film Commission's diversity and inclusion strategy¹⁵⁴ and 'Pacific' and 'pan-Asian' groups in the 10-year strategy for the New Zealand screen sector to 2030.¹⁵⁵

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- 143 Nordicity 2016, *Review of Cultural Diversity within Canadian TV Programming*, prepared for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), p.23. At the time of preparing *Seeing Ourselves 2*, an update of this study was underway.
- 144 Vancouver Asian Film Festival 2022, *Diversity on Screen: Audit report of Canadian broadcasters 2022*, p.7–11. Based on representation in the main cast of scripted and unscripted programs broadcast April 11 to April 17 2021 by the top four national broadcasters in Canada and one provincial.
- 145 Vancouver Asian Film Festival 2022, *Diversity on Screen: Audit report of Canadian broadcasters 2022*, p.12–15.
- 146 See *Black Screen Office*.
- 147 See *Black Screen Office: Research*, viewed 30 November 2022.
- 148 Black Screen Office 2022, *Being Seen: Directives for authentic and inclusive content creation*.
- 149 In response to feedback from people from ethnic minority backgrounds, the UK government is no longer using the term 'BAME' and many organisations have followed this lead. See Race Disparity Unit 2022, '[Why we no longer use the term "BAME" in government](#),' Gov. UK Equality Hub, 7 April 2022.
- 150 Data was not available on East Asian leads, but population benchmarks were met for on-screen representation in scripted roles overall (2.3%). Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5*, Full data release, Table 7 on-screen roles.
- 151 Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5*, p.24.
- 152 See Kanter J 2021, 'Damning new report reveals that BAME representation went backwards in British TV last year,' *Deadline*; Mirza W 2021, 'Why British TV needs to rethink its approach to diversity,' *Television Business International*, 18 March 2021; and Davey J 2021, 'Diversity decreased in British TV programming in 2020,' *Complex UK*, 30 January 2021.
- 153 Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5*, Full data release, Table 5 genre.
- 154 New Zealand Film Commission 2022, *He Ara Whakaurunga Kanorau | Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022–2025*.
- 155 *Aotearoa New Zealand Screen Sector Strategy 2030*, p.5.

Disability

In our current study of Australian TV drama, only 6.6% of main characters were identified as disabled – well below the population benchmark (18%). Disabled character representation was lower still in comedy (3.6%) and children's programs (3.8%). Significant under-representation of disabled people on screen and in the industry is also a common finding across international reports.

US advocacy group GLAAD's examination of primetime programming for the 2021–22 season found just 2.8% of 775 primetime scripted series regulars were 'characters with disabilities', down from 3.5% the previous year and well below the 13% of 'non-institutionalized Americans [who] live with disability'.¹⁵⁶ Nielsen's report highlights that while the volume of content 'inclusive of people with disability' has increased over the past decade, most of that visibility comes via feature film content, with TV programming comprising only 16% of screen content 'inclusive of disability'. In addition, advocacy group RespectAbility has estimated that 78% of disabled characters are portrayed by non-disabled actors.¹⁵⁷

Nordicity's 2016 study of Canadian broadcasting found 'persons with disabilities' were identified (as part of the plot) in just 0.7% of speaking roles in English language programs and 0.6% of French language programs.¹⁵⁸ In 2022, a Disability Screen Office was launched in Canada to support and amplify disabled creatives.¹⁵⁹

The UK's Diamond project found 'disabled people' comprised 8.1% of lead actors in scripted TV programmed in 2020–21; and 7% of all on-screen roles in drama; 5.9% in comedy; and 12% in children's.¹⁶⁰ While these results are higher than the *Seeing Ourselves 2* results for disabled actors playing main roles (3.9%), the findings are not comparable as the Diamond project is based on a confidential survey of screen industry participants rather than the public identification captured in our study.¹⁶¹

Diamond has been the catalyst for the UK Creative Diversity Network's Doubling Disability initiative which aimed to double the percentage of disabled workers in off-screen roles in broadcasting by 2021.¹⁶² The 5th Diamond report notes that representation and inclusion of disabled people is an area the industry needs to urgently address, with current rates of improvement too slow.¹⁶³

In 2021, the British Film Institute and its Disability Screen Advisory Group launched the second iteration of a digital Press Reset campaign calling on industry decision makers to recognise and reject ableism;¹⁶⁴ and in 2022, leading UK broadcasters and streamers teamed up to create the TV Access Project, which includes guidelines and principles to help improve access for disabled talent in TV.¹⁶⁵

156 GLAAD 2021, *Where We Are on TV 2021–2022*, p.30. The population statistic cited by GLAAD is based on the 2017 Community Survey conducted by the US Census. Nielsen reports that 'In the U.S. alone, about 26% of the adult population is living with a physical or neurological disability' based on data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Nielsen 2021, *Being Seen on Screen 2021: The importance of quantity and quality representation on TV*, p.12.

157 Nielsen 2021, *Being Seen on Screen 2021: The importance of quantity and quality representation on TV*, p.12.

158 Nordicity 2016, *Review of Cultural Diversity within Canadian TV Programming*, prepared for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), p.21–22. At the time of preparing *Seeing Ourselves 2*, an update of this study was underway.

159 Telefilm Canada 2022, *Disability Screen Office will support and amplify the creative voices of Canadians with disabilities nationally and internationally*, 28 April 2022.

160 Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5*, Full data release, Table 5 and Table 7.

161 The *Everyone Project* uses a confidential survey like the UK's Diamond project, and it found similar results in the first year of reporting. However, these results are preliminary only and should be used with caution until participation in The Everyone Project increases. See Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network 2022, *Everyone Counts: Preliminary data on diversity in the Australian screen industry from The Everyone Project*, p.22.

162 See Creative Diversity Network 2019, *Doubling Disability*.

163 Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5*, p.4. See also Tidball M and Bunting C 2021, *Interim Report on Doubling Disability*; and Creative Diversity Network 2022, *Diamond at 5: A deep dive into the representation of disabled people in UK television*.

164 British Film Institute 2021, *Press Reset*.

165 See Channel 4 2022, *The TV Access Project*.

Gender

The *Seeing Ourselves 2* study found the gender of main characters in Australian drama is evenly split between men and women (50%). There were 18 trans or gender diverse main characters between 2016 and 2021 (0.6% of characters), including five non-binary characters.

Women's representation is mixed in international studies. Nordicity's 2016 study of Canadian broadcasting found women held just 37% of all speaking roles, including 40% in English language dramas but strong representation in English language children's dramas (63%).¹⁶⁶

UCLA's *Hollywood Diversity Report* found women to be under-represented in scripted leads in the 2020–21 TV season, comprising 44% on broadcast and 49% on cable; but surpassing parity on digital (59%).¹⁶⁷

Nielsen's report found women's share of screen was 44% on broadcast and cable and 43% on subscription video on demand (SVOD), with 'Black' women and women from 'Middle Eastern and African' backgrounds highlighted as under-represented compared to men in these groups.¹⁶⁸

US advocacy group GLAAD reported that 47% of 775 series regulars on primetime scripted broadcast programming for the 2021–22 season were women. There were ten trans or gender diverse series regulars: four trans men, four trans women and two non-binary characters.¹⁶⁹

The UK's Diamond project found higher representation of women: 58% of lead actors in scripted programs in 2020–21 were women¹⁷⁰ and 1.1% of all on-screen scripted roles were played by transgender people.¹⁷¹

166 Nordicity 2016, *Review of Cultural Diversity within Canadian TV Programming*, prepared for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), p.18–19. At the time of preparing *Seeing Ourselves 2*, an update of this study was underway.

167 Hunt D and Ramón a 2022, *Hollywood Diversity Report 2022*, UCLA, p.21–25.

168 Nielsen 2021, *Being Seen on Screen 2021: The importance of quantity and quality representation on TV*, p.5, 8 and 9.

169 GLAAD 2021, *Where We Are on TV 2021–2022*, p.10–11.

170 Potentially representing a selection bias, as previous research has suggested a tendency for more women to respond to surveys than men. Smith WG 2008, *Does Gender Influence Online Survey Participation? a Record-linkage analysis of university faculty online survey response behavior*, San José State University.

171 Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5*, p.22.

LGBTIQ+

Our study of Australian TV drama found LGBTIQ+ representation among main characters has increased from 4.5% to 7.4%, though it remains below the population benchmark.

When it comes to sexual orientation, we would expect the UK's Diamond project to report higher representation than our study as it captures private self-identification through a survey rather than visible representation in storylines on screen, and this is the case, particularly for children's programs. In the UK, people who identify as 'lesbian, gay or bisexual' comprised 13% of lead actors on scripted programs and 17% of all scripted roles in 2020–21, including 15% in comedies, 22% in children's programs and 10% in drama.¹⁷²

GLAAD reports that 12% of 775 series regular characters on primetime scripted broadcast programming for the 2021–22 US season were 'LGBTQ', up 2.8 percentage points from the previous year.¹⁷³ For the first time in the report's history, gay men did not make up the majority of 'LGBTQ' characters on broadcast (35% were gay, 40% were lesbian, 19% were bisexual and 6% were transgender).¹⁷⁴

GLAAD has challenged all platforms to ensure that at least half of 'LGBTQ' characters tracked are 'people of color', and broadcast has met this for the fourth year in a row, with 58% of 'LGBTQ' characters being 'characters of color'. Cable broke the 50% barrier in 2020–21 and streaming has yet to do so, although the platform's share of 'LGBTQ characters of color' has increased.¹⁷⁵

Nordicity's 2016 study of Canadian broadcasting found 'LGBT+' people were identified (as part of the plot) in just 0.4% of speaking roles in English language programs and 0% of French language ones.¹⁷⁶

In New Zealand, 'LGBTQ+' people have been identified as an under-represented group in the New Zealand Film Commission's diversity and inclusion strategy¹⁷⁷ and in the 10-year strategy for the New Zealand screen sector to 2030.¹⁷⁸

172 Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5*, Full data release, Table 5 and Table 7.

173 GLAAD 2021, *Where We Are on TV 2021–2022*, p.8.

174 GLAAD 2021, *Where We Are on TV 2021–2022*, p.10–11.

175 GLAAD 2021, *Where We Are on TV 2021–2022*, p.12 and p.21.

176 Nordicity 2016, *Review of Cultural Diversity within Canadian TV Programming*, prepared for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), p.20–21. At the time of preparing *Seeing Ourselves 2*, an update of this study was underway.

177 New Zealand Film Commission 2022, *He Ara Whakaurunga Kanorau | Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022–2025*.

178 *Aotearoa New Zealand Screen Sector Strategy 2030*, p.5.

Age

Our study of Australian TV drama found a bias towards centring stories on characters aged 18–44 (62%), with under-representation of main characters aged under 12 (2.2%) and 60 and over (6.7%).

The UK's Diamond project has found similar trends, reporting that people aged over 50 comprise 25% of all on-screen roles, compared to 36% of

the population. This under-representation has been relatively unchanged over the past five years. Two thirds of all on-screen contributions are made by people aged 20–49 (65%), with 10% made by people aged 19 or under.¹⁷⁹ Looking by genre, there is under-representation of people aged over 50 in drama (22%), children's programs (14%) and comedy (26%).¹⁸⁰

International responses

In response to these reports and their findings, as well as global movements and discussion, there are a range of initiatives by industry and governments to improve diverse representation and inclusion in the screen industry. In addition to those mentioned in relation to specific groups above, these include:

- **campaigns** – for example, MADE | NOUS's Seek More campaign to encourage Canadian audiences to seek out creators and content from diverse and under-represented groups;¹⁸¹ and the UK union BECTU's #UnseenOnScreen bullying and harassment awareness campaign¹⁸²
- **summits** – for example, the 2019 The Power of Inclusion Summit run by the New Zealand Film Commission;¹⁸³ and diversity, equity and inclusion summits planned by the US Television Academy¹⁸⁴
- **diversity strategies, standards and targets** – for example, the British Film Institute's Diversity Standards and Inclusion Targets;¹⁸⁵ the New Zealand Film Commission's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022–25;¹⁸⁶ the Canada Media Fund's Equity and Inclusion Strategy 2021–23;¹⁸⁷ and Telefilm Canada's Equity Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan¹⁸⁸
- **use of existing or proposed legislation** – for example, consideration of the *Online Streaming Act (Bill C-11)* in Canada to include online broadcasting within scope of the regulatory system and update broadcasting and regulatory policies to better reflect Canada's diversity; and use of the UK *Equality Act 2010* which drives work by the British Film Institute and Creative Diversity Network

179 Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5*, p.12.

180 Creative Diversity Network 2021, *The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5*, p.34–35.

181 See MADE | NOUS 2021, *Seek More*.

182 See BECTU 2021, *#UnseenOnScreen*.

183 See New Zealand Film Commission 2019, *The Power of Inclusion Summit*.

184 See Schneider M 2022, 'Television Academy to hold an industry-wide summit on diversity, equity and inclusion this December,' *Variety*, 19 August 2022.

185 See BFI *Diversity Standards and Inclusion Targets*.

186 New Zealand Film Commission 2022, *He Ara Whakaurunga Kanorau | Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022–2025*.

187 Canada Media Fund 2021, *Equity and Inclusion Strategy 2021–23*.

188 Telefilm Canada 2022–2024, *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan*.

- **tax incentives** – around the world, organisations have experimented with and advocated for diversity targets and quotas to qualify for film and TV tax credits,¹⁸⁹ for example a proposal and advocacy from the UK's Film Diversity Action Group in the UK,¹⁹⁰ and diversity tax incentives operating in places such as Illinois,¹⁹¹ New Jersey,¹⁹² and New York¹⁹³
- **targeted investment in training, skills and talent development** – for example, NZ On Air's investment in early-career Pan Asian screen creatives and voices;¹⁹⁴ the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' investment in the career development of Black British musicians;¹⁹⁵ the UK Screen Skills' Film Forward program to support Black, Asian and minority ethnic screen professionals to advance into more senior industry roles;¹⁹⁶ Telefilm Canada's initiatives to enhance career development of Black women;¹⁹⁷ and the British Film Institute's *BFI Skills Review 2022* and *Screen Careers 2022* reports, which both point to diversity, equity and inclusion being high on the agenda for workforce development¹⁹⁸
- **reforms to screen industry awards** – for example, the Golden Globes has announced reforms in transparency and diversity;¹⁹⁹ the BFI Diversity Standards are used as part of eligibility requirements by the BAFTA Film Awards and the British Independent Film Awards,²⁰⁰ and have been adapted for the Oscars®;²⁰¹ and there is a shift to gender neutral acting categories, including at the British Independent Film Awards²⁰² and the Spirit Awards²⁰³
- **investment in tools, resources and research** – see *Part 4: Tools and resources* for examples of related international research and resources.

189 Nordicity 2021, *Racialized Funding Data in the Canadian Film and Television Industry*, Racial Equity Media Collective and the Inspirit Foundation.

190 Film Diversity Action Group 2018, *It shouldn't get the money if it doesn't have the mix*; Ilott T 2021, 'Guest comment: Use tax credit to promote greater diversity in the UK film industry,' *ScreenDaily*, 8 April 2021.

191 To be eligible for the Illinois Film Tax Credit incentive program, production companies must submit a diversity plan with specific goals and steps for employment that represents the diversity of the state. See The Illinois Film Office, *Film Tax Credit: Diversity Documents*, viewed 19 January 2023.

192 The New Jersey Film & Digital Media Tax Credit Program offers an additional 2% incentive to productions that meet diversity criteria. See NJEDA, *Film and Digital Media Tax Credit Program: Diversity*, viewed 19 January 2023.

193 The *Television Diversity Tax Credit Bill* incentivises the hiring of women and minority television writers and directors. See Baysinger T 2019, 'New York Gov Andrew Cuomo signs landmark TV diversity bill,' *The Wrap*, 19 December 2019.

194 See NZ On Air 2021, *NZ On Air invests in Pan Asian voices*.

195 See Oscars® 2022, *Academy partners with Mercury Studios to launch Jonas Gwanga Music Composition Initiative, a career development program for Black British musicians*, 7 July 2022.

196 See Screen Skills 2021, *Film Forward: New career progression program to address under-representation in film*.

197 See Telefilm Canada 2022, *Telefilm Canada supports career development of Black women in film*.

198 See British Film Institute 2022, *BFI Skills Review 2022* and *Screen Careers 2022*.

199 See DW 2021, *Golden Globes announce diversity reforms*, 5 July 2021.

200 BFI Annual Report 2019–20, p.36.

201 Oscars® 2020, *Academy establishes representation and inclusion standards for Oscars® eligibility*, 8 September 2020.

202 See Tartaglione N 2022, 'British independent film awards shifts to gender neutral acting categories; adds prizes,' *Deadline*.

203 Kay J 2022, 'Spirit Awards switches to gender-neutral acting categories, raises budget caps,' *ScreenDaily*, 24 August 2022.

Part 4: Tools and resources



There are a range of tools and resources available that can support the screen industry in increasing diverse representation, inclusion and equity. The following is a compilation of resources that we discovered or were suggested to us during consultations and interviews. While not an exhaustive list, these are publicly available and relevant to all levels of the industry.

Toolkits and resources

First Nations

- Screen Australia's [Pathways & Protocols: A filmmaker's guide to working with Indigenous people, culture and concepts](#)²⁰⁴
- The Australia Council for the Arts' [Protocols for using First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts](#)²⁰⁵
- The South Australian Film Corporation's [First Nations Cultural Protocols](#) to guide screen production in South Australia and [First Nations Screen Strategy 2020–2025](#)
- Definitions of [cultural safety and cultural security](#) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Social Justice Report*²⁰⁶
- Development of the [Screenwest Indigenous Screen Strategy 2022–2025](#)
- Screen Queensland's [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy 2019–2022](#)
- SBS's [Elevate Reconciliation Action Plan 2022–2026](#)²⁰⁷

Cultural diversity

- [The Creative Equity Toolkit](#) produced by Diversity Arts Australia (DARTS) and The British Council (2020)
- DARTS' [The Colour Cycle Podcast](#)
- DARTS' [Creative Lives](#) articles spotlighting diverse Australian cultural work
- Western Sydney University's [Bystander Anti-Racism Training, Workplace Assessments, and Education Packages](#)
- A panel of film critics, directors and casting directors discuss colour-conscious casting in Hollywood in [Academy Dialogues: Colour-conscious casting](#) (virtual panel) (US)
- [#ChangeHollywood](#), a Color Of Change initiative, is a resource to help film and TV projects replace harmful narratives with more honest, expansive depictions of Black people (US)
- Open letters published in 2020 by over 125 independent producers of colour [in Hollywood](#)²⁰⁸ and over 3,500 workers in the [British film and television sector](#)²⁰⁹ call for an end to 'systemic racism' in the industry and highlight focus areas for change (US/UK)
- [Access Reelworld](#) is a searchable recruiting platform for Canadian screen creatives who are Black, Indigenous, Asian and People of Colour (Canada)
- The USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative's study [Missing & Maligned](#) (2021) looking at Muslim characters in popular films (US)
- McKinsey & Company's [Black representation in film and TV: The challenges and impact of increasing diversity](#) (2021) (US)

204 Prepared by Dr Terri Janke in 2009.

205 Published in 2019 based on True Tracks ICIP Principles, Dr Terri Janke and Company.

206 'Defining cultural safety and cultural security,' Chapter 4.2 in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2011, *Social Justice Report 2011*, Australian Human Rights Commission.

207 An Elevate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is the highest level within Reconciliation Australia's RAP framework, for organisations with a proven track record of initiatives to empower First Nations peoples and create societal change.

208 See Fleming M 2020, 'Black and Brown indie producers press Hollywood for commitments to end systemic racism: Open letter,' *Deadline*, 17 June 2020.

209 See Kanter J 2020, 'British film & TV stars sign open letter demanding an end to "systemic racism" in the industry,' *Deadline*, 21 June 2020.

Disability

- [The Inclusive Filmmaking Toolkit](#), produced by Bus Stop Films and Taste Creative to help guide the creative sector to become more inclusive and disability-confident
- Bus Stop Films' [Inclusion in Action](#) workshop
- Accessible Arts' [Disability Confidence Training Workshop](#)
- A2K Media's [Disability Justice Lens](#) training for the screen industry
- The South Australian Film Corporation's [Disability Screen Strategy](#) and 2021 webinar on [Understanding Disability Equality](#)
- CGA-Showcast's [Portal for Deaf and Disabled Performers](#)
- Screen Well's [Workplace Resources and Guides](#) for improving wellbeing in the industry
- The Australian Network on Disability's [Resources](#)
- The [Attitude Foundation](#), including the [ReFramed podcast](#) about representation of disabled people in TV and film
- The [Global Alliance for Disability in Media and Entertainment](#)
- The Other Film Festival's [Screen Industry Resources for Change](#)
- RespectAbility's [Hollywood Disability Inclusion Toolkit](#) (US)
- FWD-Doc's [Engagement Pack](#) and [Toolkit for Inclusion & Accessibility](#) in documentary film (US/UK)
- The UK Creative Diversity Network's [Deep dive into representation of disabled people in UK Television](#) (2022) (UK)
- The [FilmDis White Paper on Disability Representation on Television](#) (2022)

Gender and sexuality

- Pride in Diversity's [Pride Inclusion Programs](#), including an employer support program and employer training and consulting services
- Women in Film and Television (WIFT) Australia's [range of resources](#)
- Screen Australia's [Gender Matters 2021–22](#) research (2022)
- The Screen Actors Guild and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA)'s [Intimacy Coordinator Resources](#) (US)
- Women in View, Telefilm Canada, Canada Media Fund and Ontario Media Creates' [MediaPLUS+ Diversity Toolkit](#) helps industry practitioners make more inclusive choices on and off screen (Canada)
- GLAAD's [Guide for LGBTQ Inclusion in Entertainment](#) on how to reach bigger, diverse audiences in the US, Latin America and Spain
- The Geena Davis Institute's [reports about diversity in family entertainment](#) on a broad range of topics, including what children and families are watching, and representation of Muslim women and women over 50
- The Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film's annual reports about [women in the US screen industry](#)
- The Women in Film and Television Canada Coalition's [Deciding on Diversity: COVID-19, risk and intersectional inequality in the Canadian film and television industry](#) (2021)

- Women In View's [6th On Screen report](#) on women's employment in Canada's publicly funded film and TV (2021)
- The Canadian Media Producers Association's report [Women & Leadership: A study of gender parity and diversity in Canada's screen industries](#) (2017)

Regional

- Screenworks' [FAQs page](#)
- Screenworks' [Regional Crew Development Program](#) with Netflix

Diversity, equity and inclusion – local

- SBS's [Cultural Safety Plan Template](#)
- Pearl Tan and Priya A Roy's article on [How Intersectionality Can Help Storytellers](#) and a more diverse screen industry
- [Arts Law Centre of Australia's](#) free and low-cost resources, legal advice and education for creatives, including on navigating contracts
- The South Australian Film Corporation's [Access Requirements: Travel, Accommodation & Wellness Form](#) which helps managers understand what their employees need to feel comfortable and safe in the workplace

Diversity, equity and inclusion – international

- UK Film & TV Charity's [The Whole Picture Toolkit](#) provides guidance, advice and resources to ensure a 'mentally healthy' production
- The UK Creative Diversity Network's [Crewing Up](#) provides resources on how to build diverse production teams
- The British Film Institute (BFI) and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA)'s work to [tackle and prevent bullying, harassment and racism in the workplace](#) which includes an action list for employers
- The trade body for UK screen producers Pact's [Diversity Tool Kit](#), a free resource available to industry practitioners
- The Canadian report [Building Inclusive Networks in the Film and Television Industry](#) includes a check-list for building inclusive networks from pre-development through to post-production and distribution²¹⁰
- Lavina Jadhvani and Victor Vazquez's essay on [Identity-Conscious Casting: Moving Beyond Color-Blind and Color-Conscious Casting](#) (2021)
- Screen and media professionals talk about their experiences of discrimination and struggle in the screen industries in [Industry Voices](#), a video series produced by the UK's Screen Industries Growth Network (SIGN)
- [#UnseenOnScreen](#) is a bullying and harassment awareness campaign amplifying the voices of those who have been bullied in the workplace

²¹⁰ Knight N 2022, [Building Inclusive Networks in the Film and Television Industry](#), 1844 Studios and WIFTA – Alberta, p.52–55.

- The UK Digital Orchard Foundation's [Equality In Focus](#) provides a training framework, action plan and resources for film and TV crew
- The [ARRAY CREW](#) app is an award-winning database promoting under-represented below-the-line talent in the US and Canada
- The University of Southern California (USC) Annenberg Inclusion Initiative's [Inclusion Rider Template](#)
- [The ReFrame ReSource](#), an open source, research-based toolkit for advancing equity in the screen industries

Training

- Bus Stop Films' [Inclusion in Action](#) workshop
- Accessible Arts' [training workshops](#)
- A2K Media's [Disability Justice Lens](#) training for the screen industry
- SBS's [Inclusion Program](#) (only available for Media Federation of Australia (MFA) members)
- Western Sydney University's [Bystander Anti-Racism Training, Workplace Assessments, and Education Packages](#)
- Griffith University's Motivating Action Through Empowerment (MATE) [violence, discrimination and racism prevention training programs](#)
- DARTS' [Diversity and Inclusion Training Programs](#)

Guidelines, commitments and strategies

Local

- Screen Australia's [inclusive storytelling commitment](#)
- SBS's [Commissioning Equity & Inclusion Guidelines 2021–2024](#)
- ABC's 2021 [Commissioning for Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines](#) and [Diversity & Inclusion Plan 2019–22](#)
- South Australian Film Corporation's [Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022–2032](#), [First Nations Screen Strategy 2020–2025](#) and 2022 [Disability Screen Strategy](#)
- The [Western Australian Screen Industry Diversity and Inclusion Roadmap 2017–2023](#)
- VicScreen's [Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusiveness Statement](#)
- Screen Queensland's [Equity and Diversity Taskforce](#)
- The Media Federation of Australia's 2022 [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy](#)
- Australian Film Television and Radio School's (AFTRS) [Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#)
- Australian Human Rights Commission's [best practice guidelines for recruitment and selection](#)
- The Seven and Nine Networks have diversity policies covering employees, contractors and other stakeholders,²¹¹ while Ten and Paramount+ work under the 'No Diversity, No Commission' policy implemented by Paramount²¹²

211 Seven West Media 2015, [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy](#); and Nine Entertainment Co. 2022, [Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#).

212 See Knox D 2020, '[ViacomCBS rolls out No Diversity, No Commission worldwide](#),' *TV Tonight*, October 14 2020.

International

- The BFI's [Diversity Standards and Inclusion Targets](#) (UK)
- The New Zealand Film Commission's [He Ara Whakaurunga Kanorau | Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#) for 2022–2025
- The Canada Media Fund's [Equity and Inclusion Strategy 2021–2023](#)
- Telefilm Canada's [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan 2022–2024](#)

Related research

Local

- A2K Media and The Melbourne Disability Institute's [Disability and Screen Work in Australia](#) (2023)
- The Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network's [Everyone Counts: Preliminary data on diversity in the Australian screen industry from The Everyone Project](#) (2022)
- The Australian Cinematographers Society's [A Wider Lens: Australian camera workforce development and diversity](#) (2022)
- Media Diversity Australia's [Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories 2.0?](#) (2022)
- Paramount ANZ's [Reflecting Me: Global representation on screen](#) (2022)
- The Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association's [Diversity On and Off Screen in Australian Film Schools](#) (2020)
- The Australia Council for the Arts' [Towards Equity: A research overview of diversity in Australia's arts and cultural sector](#) (2020)
- DARTS, BYP Group and Western Sydney University's [Shifting the Balance: Cultural diversity in leadership within the Australian arts, screen and creative sectors](#) (2019)
- Raising Films Australia's [Honey, I Hid the Kids! Experiences of parents and carers in the Australian screen industry](#) (2018)
- AFTRS and The Gist's [Inclusive Pathways Framework: For Screen Storytelling Talent](#) (2016)

International

- Creative Diversity Network's annual [Diamond Reports](#) (UK)
- Vancouver Asian Film Festival's [Diversity on Screen: Audit report of Canadian broadcasters 2022](#)
- GLAAD's annual [Where We Are on TV reports](#) (US)
- Nielsen's [Being seen on screen](#) reports (US)
- UCLA's [Hollywood Diversity Reports](#)
- Canada's Black Screen Office's [Being Seen: Directives for Creating Authentic and Inclusive Content](#) (2022) provides guidance to the Canadian screen sector and aims to reduce the burden of difficult conversations
- The UK communications regulator Ofcom reports [on equity, diversity and inclusion](#) among TV and radio broadcasters' workforces
- The BFI's [Skills Review 2022](#) and [Screen Careers 2022](#) reports (UK)

- The US Television Academy and ReadySet's [Industry Data Report](#) (2022)
- The USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative's studies, including [Inequality in 1,600 Popular Films](#) (annual) and [Inclusion in the Director's Chair](#) (annual) (US)
- The Directors Guild of America's annual [Episodic Television Director Inclusion Report](#) (2022)
- Telefilm Canada's [Understanding Inclusive Business Practices Amongst Canadian Producers](#) (2021)
- Nordicity's [Racialized Funding Data in the Canadian Film and Television Industry](#) (2021)
- The Association of Film Commissioners International (AFCI) and the TIME'S UP Foundation's global [Diversity Report 2020: A Study of AFCI Member and Partner Diversity Initiatives](#) (2020)
- The World Economic Forum's [Audience Representation Index 2022](#) (US, UK, France)

Screen Australia's Authentic Storytelling series

To keep screen practitioners informed of the evolving conversation and ways of working, [Screen Australia's Authentic Storytelling Series](#) spotlights Australian creatives who have shared their experiences in inclusive storytelling. Issues covered in Screen Australia's interviews, articles and podcasts include: colour-conscious casting, the value of community collaboration, developing authentic characters and the impact of leadership.



The Warriors

Appendix A: Key terms and definitions

The following is a list of key terms and definitions used in this report, and further background on how information has been captured. Screen Australia recognises that terminology is evolving, contested and deeply personal for some people; the importance of self-determination; and that identities can intersect and overlap. We recognise the need to carefully consider how data and terminology are used to help us better understand and address structural inequalities rather than reinforce them.

Diversity

Diversity, by definition, is about multiplicity. It can mean different things in different contexts and to different people. This research focuses on several aspects of diversity including First Nations identity, cultural background, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, location and occupational status, as well as intersections between these aspects. In measuring these aspects of diversity, the ultimate aim is that all the many and varied voices in Australia have the opportunity to be represented in local screen content.

First Nations people

In this report, we use the term 'First Nations' to refer to people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. First Nations characters were identified primarily through self-identification or story elements and we drew on publicly available information about the actors who play them.

Cultural background

There is ongoing debate about how to measure and discuss cultural diversity. In our 2016 study, we drew on the Australian Human Rights Commission's classification of cultural diversity based on Australia's demographic history and the key waves of immigration that make up Australian society today:

- **First Nations** (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander)
- **Anglo-Celtic** (for example, English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh ancestry)
- **European** (for example, German, Dutch, Italian or Greek ancestry)
- **non-European** (for example, Indian, Chinese or Middle Eastern ancestry).²¹³

For *Seeing Ourselves 2*, in addition to using these categories, we have collected information about cultural background at a more specific level – in particular, to recognise the many and diverse ancestries within the broad categories of European and non-European.²¹⁴

Self-identification, whether featured in the content or in press and media materials, was the primary indicator for categorisation. However, this was unavailable for many characters, so supplementary indicators that could be perceived through the content were used. These included story elements, visible attributes of characters and their surroundings, and in the case of cultural background, name, family, language spoken and accent.²¹⁵ Results were shared with the relevant content platforms.

²¹³ Australian Human Rights Commission 2018, *Leading for Change: A blueprint for cultural diversity and inclusive leadership revisited*.

²¹⁴ Based on ABS 2019, *Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCEG)*, (2019).

²¹⁵ The best practice for diversity data collection is self-identification. We used further supplementary indicators as the best available information for fictional characters in screen content. The phenotypical approach reflected in these supplementary measures should not be the standard for data collection on diversity more broadly. For discussion of self-identification in data collection on cultural diversity, see Australian Human Rights Commission 2022, *National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report*, p.87.

Where there were no indicative story elements, a character's cultural background was identified through the background of the actor playing the role (rather than assuming the character is Anglo-Celtic as a default). Actors were categorised based on publicly available information, such as self-identification in interviews and casting profiles. Where a character's story elements and the actor's public information did not reveal any cultural background beyond 'Australian' (i.e. no European, non-European or First Nations cultural background was identified), the character was categorised as Anglo-Celtic. There were also a limited number of cases categorised as 'not enough information' where there was no evidence to validate any specific categorisation.²¹⁶

For example, a character played by an actor of African or Asian heritage may be visibly recognisable as such. However, an actor of Danish or French background may not be identifiable as being of that ancestry if their public profile describes them as Australian. Although fewer characters may end up being categorised this way as 'European', the results would still broadly align with audience perceptions of on-screen diversity.²¹⁷ We have attempted to capture as many cultural backgrounds as we could that were evident in the story elements (or an actor's background where it informed us about the character).

Additional terms used in this report include the following:

- **Person/people of colour** – is used to reflect statements made by screen practitioners we interviewed about people who do not identify as 'white'²¹⁸ and in reference to international reports. Please see the international reports cited for definitions of terms used.
- **Non-Anglo-Celtic** – is used to refer collectively to First Nations, European and non-European characters and people. While it is better to be specific rather than homogenous where possible when referring to people's backgrounds and identities, at times we use umbrella terms to describe shared experiences. Given ongoing discussion about terminology used for reporting nationally²¹⁹ we have at times used 'non-Anglo-Celtic' for consistency with the approach to cultural background described above.

Disabled people

This report uses the term 'disabled people' in keeping with the social model of disability and increasing use of identity-first language in Australia's creative sector, including among screen practitioners, advocates, peak bodies and government agencies. We recognise that some people prefer person-first language (for example, 'people with disability') and that some choose to identify with a specific community such as Deaf/deaf, or prefer not to refer to themselves as disabled.

²¹⁶ There were nine characters and seven actors whose cultural background was categorised as 'not enough information' where there was ambiguity and no evidence found to validate categorisation.

²¹⁷ As noted above, use of a phenotypical approach in these instances should not be a standard for diversity data collection.

²¹⁸ For discussion of the use of this term in Australia, see Pearson L 2017, 'Who identifies as a person of colour in Australia,' *ABC News*, 1 December 2017.

²¹⁹ For example, discussion of the limitations of the term 'culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)' and increasing use of terms such as 'culturally and racially marginalised (CARM)'.

The social model of disability

There is no single way of capturing the diverse, complex and multi-dimensional experiences of disabled people. In *Seeing Ourselves 2*, we have used the social model of disability.

According to the social model, people are disabled by barriers in society (such as buildings not having a ramp or accessible toilets), or people's attitudes (such as assuming disabled people cannot do certain things). This is different to the medical model which says people are disabled by their impairments or differences – what is 'wrong' with the person rather than what the person needs.²²⁰

Characters were identified as disabled based on self-identification, or if they had a health-related impairment that limited their participation in the fictional world of the TV drama because of social or environmental barriers. For example, in *Retrograde* which is set during the COVID-19 lockdown, the chronic illness of immunocompromised character Sophie is acknowledged explicitly by the character herself in the first episode. Broader story elements across the season then show the social and environmental access barriers that Sophie experiences.

We used United Nations²²¹ and ABS definitions²²² as guidance for identifying disabled characters where it was not clear from story elements, synopsis or press coverage. The shift in definition in *Seeing Ourselves 2* means characters who experienced temporary restrictions or impairments (for example, temporary paralysis or memory loss) were not counted as disabled characters in this study as they were in the 2016 report.

Disabled actors were identified based on self-identification in publicly available information.

Accessibility

The social model of disability highlights barriers in society. Accessibility is about considering and addressing these barriers (or 'access needs') through access strategies: creating or adjusting products, services, facilities and workplaces so that everyone can fully participate.²²³ Access strategies include budgeting for and using Auslan interpreters; implementing captions on videos and imagery; booking accessible venues; using technology that includes accessibility functions such as screen magnifiers or speech recognition tools; and allowing time for rest.²²⁴

Gender identity and sexual orientation

For this current report, information was collected in the same way as the 2016 report,²²⁵ although reported slightly differently by providing separate reporting for gender identity and sexual orientation.²²⁶

Terms used to discuss gender and sexual orientation in this report include the following:

- **'Gender'** refers to the way a person identifies or expresses themselves, whereas sex refers to a person's biological characteristics.²²⁷
- **'Non-binary'** and 'gender diverse' are umbrella terms describing people who identify with gender identities that are not exclusively 'woman' (or girl) or 'man' (or boy).
- **'Cisgender'** refers to people whose gender identity matches what was legally assigned to them at birth.

220 Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, *Social Model of Disability*, viewed March 2023. See also People with Disability Australia, *Social Model of Disability*, viewed March 2023.

221 United Nations 2006, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

222 See 'Disability' within 'Glossary', ABS 2019, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of findings Methodology*.

223 See People with Disability Australia, *Social Model of Disability*, viewed March 2023; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Disability and Health Inclusion Strategies*, viewed March 2023.

224 For more, see Australian Human Rights Commission 2016, *Access for all: Improving accessibility for consumers with disability*.

225 Following the definition set out in the 2013 revision of the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) for gender identity and sexual orientation.

226 This approach reflects ABS 2021, *Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables, 2020*.

227 Australian Human Rights Commission 2018, *Terminology*, viewed March 2023; ABS 2021, *Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables, 2020*.

- **‘Transgender’** and ‘trans and/or gender diverse’ are umbrella terms describing people whose gender identity is different to what was recorded for them at birth.²²⁸
- **‘Sexual orientation’** is an umbrella concept that includes sexual identity, attraction and sexual behaviour.²²⁹
- **‘LGBTIQ+’** is an acronym used in this report, recognising evolving terminology. It refers to people with diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identities, including those who are or identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, trans, gender diverse, queer, asexual or who have an intersex variation.²³⁰

The gender and sexual orientations of characters were identified primarily based on self-identification, visible attributes and story elements, and actors based on self-identification in publicly available information.

Occupational and social status

To explore representation of socioeconomic diversity on our screens, we looked at the occupational and social status of main characters. To investigate whether there was evidence of stereotyping, we also looked at how this interacted with other aspects of diversity, for example, the relationship between the cultural backgrounds of main characters and the types of occupations in which they are more likely to be portrayed.

New occupation categories used in this report based on the ABS Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) 2021²³¹ enabled us to compare characters as having more or less skilled occupations, and how this matches up with the distribution in

Australia's labour force. Occupations are assigned a skill level that considers the amount of formal education and training, previous experience, and on-the-job training required in that occupation.

Examples of how occupations are categorised in ANZSCO 2021:

- **Skill level 1 (highest):** Doctor, school principal
- **Skill level 2:** Building inspector, police officer
- **Skill level 3:** Driving instructor, bricklayer
- **Skill level 4:** Bar attendant, receptionist
- **Skill level 5 (lowest):** Courier, cleaner.

Additional categories were used to explore the occupational and social status of main characters:

- **No occupation identified**, including:
 - **Criminals**
 - **Children/students**
 - **Older people** (for example, retirees)
 - **Supernatural characters**
 - **Sketch comedy characters**
- **Undefined:** primarily defined by their relationships to other characters, such as lovers, friends, family.

228 Australian Human Rights Commission 2018, *Terminology*, viewed March 2023.

229 ABS 2021, *Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables, 2020*.

230 In the current study, there were no characters where story elements indicated that the main character was asexual or intersex.

231 Based on ABS 2021, *ANZSCO – Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, 2021*. Due to the new categories, we have not made comparisons with the 2016 results.

Age (new in 2023 report)

Age is a new metric in *Seeing Ourselves 2* and reflects increased awareness of ageism and increasing scrutiny on inequity and access to opportunities for younger and older people.

We have used age brackets found in social research and government policy and services, which usually reflect common life stages. Age is an area included in anti-discrimination law and is included as a dimension of interest by the Diversity Council of Australia.²³²

The age groups characters fell into were identified primarily based on story elements, visual attributes, and publicly available information about actors.

Location (new in 2023 report)

Location is a new metric in *Seeing Ourselves 2*, reflecting increasing scrutiny on inequity and access to opportunities for people who live in regional or remote areas of Australia. We collected new data on the location where the character's main storyline took place: capital cities or regional areas (including the balance of state or territory, from regional towns through to remote areas). Where a character's story was evenly split between locations (for example, frequently moving between a capital city and a regional area), both were captured.

As we are interested in how location relates to access to opportunities and participation, we used the ABS Greater Capital City Statistical Areas which are part of the Australian Statistical Geography Standard.²³³

Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to ways systemic discrimination and marginalisation can be compounded due to the intersections of social categories such as cultural background, disability, age, gender, sexuality and class, and how this creates distinct experiences and identities.²³⁴ Forms of discrimination can include racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, intersex discrimination, ageism and social stigma.²³⁵

Screen practitioners interviewed for *Seeing Ourselves 2* highlighted potential for overlapping forms of marginalisation or disadvantage to compound systemic barriers to participation in the screen industry and to impact power dynamics and cultural safety on sets; and that it is important to recognise how intersectional identities are represented on screen.²³⁶

Historically excluded and under-represented

When referring to people's backgrounds and identities, it is better to be specific rather than homogenous where possible. However, at times we use umbrella terms to describe shared experiences.

In this report, we have used 'historically excluded' and/or 'under-represented' when describing a shared experience among communities, groups or screen practitioners who have faced historical exclusion, misrepresentation and under-representation in the screen industry and broader society. These terms collectively include First Nations people, people who are from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, disabled

²³² See Diversity Council of Australia 2022, *Latest DCA Research & Guides*, viewed March 2023.

²³³ ABS 2021, *Greater Capital City Statistical Areas: Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3*. Please note that this may differ to how individual funding agencies and organisations identify regional and remote locations.

²³⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission 2022, *National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report 2022*, p. 16. See also Crenshaw K 2017, *On Intersectionality: Essential writings*, The New Press, New York, NY.

²³⁵ Victorian Government 2021, *Understanding Intersectionality*, viewed March 2023.

²³⁶ See also Tan P and Roy P 2022, *How intersectionality can help storytellers*, *ArtsHub*, viewed March 2023.

people, the LGBTIQ+ community and people from regional areas. This is evolving language aimed to encompass shared experiences without marginalisation.

Main characters

'Main' or recurring characters were defined as those who appeared in each episode, give or take a small margin. For telemovies and shows with an ensemble cast like *Black Comedy* they were the characters with a significant number of speaking lines and/or those who were on screen for a significant proportion of running time.

The average number of characters analysed per title was seven, excluding the serials *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* where the average was 42 characters, due to their long-running nature and large ensemble casts.

Content platforms

Titles examined for this report were first released by one of the following:

- **TV broadcasters:** Australian free-to-air and subscription broadcasters, including their video on demand platforms such as ABC's iview.
- **Streaming services (new in 2023 report):** Amazon Prime, AMC, Netflix, Paramount+, Revry and Stan (other services did not have any first releases during this report period).
- **Online services (new in 2023 report):** Facebook, Hyvio, Instagram, TikTok, Vimeo and YouTube. For these platforms, we only included content commissioned by Screen Australia, state and territory screen funding agencies, and Australian broadcasters and video streaming services.

With the increase in content platforms since the 2016 report, the volume of local content has also grown: 199 Australian titles were captured in the 2016 report and 361 are reviewed in this report. However, it should be noted that the screen content consumed by Australians is much broader than the 361 Australian titles examined in this report (see [Appendix B: List of titles](#)), particularly due to the rapid uptake of subscription video on demand and user-generated content from around the world.

Population benchmarks

The purpose of this research is to better understand the extent to which Australians are seeing ourselves reflected in TV drama. Given this objective, we have compared levels of diversity in Australian TV drama with levels of diversity in the Australian population. We have used 2021 Census data for population benchmarks unless otherwise specified.

Cultural competence

In this report, we have used the definition for cultural competence from the National Centre of Cultural Competence:

*'Cultural competence is the ability to participate ethically and effectively in personal and professional intercultural settings. It requires knowing and reflecting on one's own cultural values and world view and their implications for making respectful, reflective, and reasoned choices, including the capacity to imagine and collaborate in cross cultural contexts.'*²³⁷

237 National Centre for Cultural Competence, [What is cultural competence?](#) University of Sydney, viewed March 2023.

Cultural safety

The term cultural safety originally comes from the work led by Dr Irihapeti Ramsden²³⁸ among Māori nurses in New Zealand and is defined as:

*'An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.'*²³⁹

Lived experience

Lived experience is defined as:

*'Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.'*²⁴⁰

Colour-blind casting

Colour-blind casting refers to the practice of ignoring the ethnicity of actors and characters in story development, production or casting. Colour-blind casting has been a practice to increase diversity by broadening the potential casting options for a character. For example, a 'best friend' character could be portrayed by someone from any cultural background.

Colour-conscious casting

Colour-conscious casting refers to intentional consideration of an actor's ethnicity in story development, production or casting, and how it enriches a character's identity and the story. This might look like:

- a character's ethnicity is specific and written into the script so that a culturally appropriate actor can be cast
- character storyline and portrayal affirm the actor's cultural identity in a way that enriches the role.

Identity-conscious casting

Identity-conscious casting refers to intentional consideration of additional aspects of an actor's identity (beyond ethnicity, for example gender and disability) in story development, production or casting, and how they enrich a character's identity and the story.²⁴¹

238 See Ellison-Loschmann L 2003, 'Irihapeti Ramsden,' *BMJ*, 327(7412) p.453.

239 Williams R 1999, 'Cultural safety – what does it mean for our work practice?' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 23(2). This definition is used by the Australian Human Rights Commission and is cited in the *SBS Commissioning Equity & Inclusion Guidelines*. SBS 2022, *SBS Commissioning Equity & Inclusion Guidelines 2021–2024*.

240 Chandler D and Munday R 2016, *Oxford: A dictionary of media and communication* (2nd ed.), Oxford University Press.

241 See Jadhvani L and Vazquez V 2021, 'Identity-conscious casting: Moving beyond color-blind and color-conscious casting,' *Howlround Theatre Commons*, 2 February 2021.

Appendix B: List of titles

On-screen TV drama titles (2016–2021)

The analysis of main characters in Australian TV drama and the actors playing them is based on the following 361 commissioned Australian TV drama titles.²⁴² Titles had their first release on commercial free-to-air networks, public broadcasters, subscription TV, streaming platforms or online services between 2016 and 2021.

2016

Drama title	Platform	Drama title	Platform
ABC Comedy Showroom	ABC	Deep Water	SBS
Airlock	SYFY	Doctor Blake Mysteries, The series 4	ABC
Aunty Donna: 1999	YouTube	Doctor Doctor series 1	Nine
Australiana Hostel, The	YouTube	Family Law, The series 1	SBS
Barracuda	ABC	Fancy Boy	ABC
Black Comedy series 2	ABC	Goober	ABC
Brock	TEN	Here Come the Habibs! series 1	Nine
Bruce	YouTube	Home and Away series 29	Seven
Caravan, The	TEN	Home and Away: Revenge	Foxtel and Presto
Cleverman series 1	ABC	Hyde and Seek	Nine
Code, The series 2	ABC	Jack Irish series 1	ABC

²⁴² One additional title was identified after the period of analysis concluded and has been excluded from the data. Results are not materially impacted by the title's exclusion.

Drama title	Platform
Janet King series 2	ABC
Katering Show, The series 2	ABC
Kettering Incident, The	Foxtel
Little Acorns	YouTube
Little Lunch series 2	ABC
Love Child series 3	Nine
Mako Mermaids (Mako – Island of Secrets) series 3	TEN
Member, The	YouTube
Molly	Seven
Neighbours series 33	TEN
No Activity series 2	Stan
Nowhere Boys: Two Moons Rising	ABC
Offspring series 6	TEN
Place to Call Home, A series 4	Foxtel
Please Like Me series 4	ABC
Rake series 4	ABC
Rosehaven series 1	ABC

Drama title	Platform
Secret City series 1	Foxtel
Secret Daughter, The series 1	Seven
Soul Mates series 2	ABC
Starting From... Now! series 4	SBS
Starting From... Now! series 5	SBS
Tomorrow When the War Began	ABC
Traffic Jam – The Musical	YouTube
Under the Sun	ABC
Upper Middle Bogan series 3	ABC
Wanted series 1	Seven
Wentworth series 4	Foxtel
Wham Bam Thank You Ma'am	ABC
Winners & Losers series 5	Seven
Wizards of Aus, The	SBS
Wolf Creek series 1	Stan
Wrong Girl, The series 1	TEN
You're Skitting Me series 3	ABC

2017

Drama title	Platform	Drama title	Platform
600 Bottles of Wine	TEN	Here Come the Habibs! series 2	Nine
Bent 101	Seven	High Life	Nine
Blue Murder: Killer Cop	Seven	Hoges: The Paul Hogan Story	Seven
Chinaboy Show, The	ABC	Home and Away: All or Nothing	Foxtel and Presto
Cleverman series 2	ABC	Home and Away series 30 (2017)	Seven
Doctor Blake Mysteries, The series 5	ABC	Horizon, The series 7	YouTube
Doctor Blake Mysteries, The: Family Portrait	ABC	House Husbands series 5	Nine
Doctor Doctor series 2	Nine	House of Bond	Nine
Drop Dead Weird series 1	YouTube and Seven	Janet King: Playing Advantage series 3	ABC
Edge of the Bush, The	ABC	Justine Clarke Show, The	ABC
Ex-PM, The series 2	ABC	Kiki and Kitty	ABC
Family Law, The series 2	SBS	Letdown, The series 1	ABC
Friday on my Mind	ABC	Let's Talk About series 1	Foxtel
Get Grubby TV series 2	ABC	Let's Talk About series 2	Foxtel
Get Krack!n series 1	ABC	Lost in Pronunciation	ABC
Glitch series 2	ABC	Love Child series 4	Nine

Drama title	Platform
Method	Nine
Mustangs FC series 1	ABC
Neighbours series 34	TEN
Neighbours vs Time Travel	YouTube
Neighbours: Mrs Robinson (Neighbours spin-off webseries)	TEN
Newton's Law	ABC
Offspring series 7	TEN
Oh Yuck!	Seven
Other Guy, The series 1	Stan
Other People's Problems	ABC
Place to Call Home, A series 5	Foxtel
Pulse	ABC
RackaRacka YouTube Channel	YouTube
Ronny Chieng: International Student	ABC
Rosehaven series 2	ABC
Secret Daughter, The series 2	Seven

Drama title	Platform
Seven Types of Ambiguity	ABC
Sexy Herpes	YouTube
Sisters	TEN
Slot, The	Foxtel
Small Town Hackers	YouTube
Sunshine	SBS
Superwog Show, The	YouTube
Top of the Lake: China Girl series 2	Foxtel
Trip for Biscuits	ABC
True Story with Hamish and Andy series 1	Nine
Utopia series 3	ABC
Wake in Fright	TEN
Warriors, The	ABC
Wentworth series 5	Foxtel
Wrong Girl, The series 2	TEN

2018

Drama title	Platform	Drama title	Platform
Afro Sistahs	YouTube	Dinghy Girls	ABC
Almost Midnight	ABC	Doctor Doctor series 3	Nine
Aussie Rangers	ABC	F####ing Adelaide	ABC
Back in Very Small Business	ABC	Fighting Season	Foxtel
Bite Club	Nine	Fresh Blood Initiative	ABC and YouTube
Black Comedy series 3	ABC	Fresh!	YouTube
Blake Mysteries, The: Ghost Stories	Seven	Grace Beside Me series 1	SBS and NITV
Bureau of Magical Things, The series 1	TEN	Harrow series 1	ABC
Chance Affair, A	YouTube	Home and Away series 31	Seven
Chosen	Netflix	Homecoming Queens	SBS
Counter Play series 1	Amazon and Nine	Housemate, The	ABC
Counter Play series 2	Amazon and Nine	How to Stay Married series 1	TEN
DAFUQ?	ABC	Jack Irish series 2	ABC
Dead Lucky	SBS	Larry the Wonderpup series 1	Seven
Deadlock	ABC	Life of Jess	YouTube
Dee-Brief	TEN	Little Sista	Revry

Drama title	Platform
Mr Inbetween series 1	Foxtel
Mystery Road series 1	ABC
Neighbours series 35	TEN
New Legends of Monkey, The series 1	ABC
No Activity: The Night Before Christmas	Stan
Nowhere Boys series 4	ABC
Olivia Newton-John: Hopelessly Devoted to You	Seven
On the Ropes	SBS
Orange is the New Brown	Seven
Picnic at Hanging Rock	Foxtel
Pine Gap	ABC
Place to Call Home, A series 6	Foxtel
Playing for Keeps series 1	TEN
Rake series 5	ABC
Romper Stomper: The Next Gen	Stan
Rostered On series 1	Netflix

Drama title	Platform
Russell Coight's All Aussie Adventures	TEN
Safe Harbour	SBS
Sando	ABC
Sheilas	YouTube
Squinters series 1	ABC
Stage Mums series 1	TEN and YouTube
Street Smart	TEN
Superwog series 1	YouTube and ABC
These New South Whales series 2	Foxtel
Tidelands	Netflix
True Story with Hamish and Andy series 2	Nine
Underbelly Files: Chopper	Nine
Wanted series 3	Seven
Wentworth series 6	Foxtel
Wolf Creek series 2	Stan
Wrong Kind of Black	ABC

2019

Drama title	Platform	Drama title	Platform
Australia's Best Street Racer	YouTube	Get Krack!n series 2	ABC
Bad Mothers	Nine	Glennridge Secondary College	YouTube
Bloom series 1	Stan	Glitch series 3	ABC
Bondi Slayer	YouTube	Hardball series 1	ABC
Carpark Clubbing	YouTube and ABC	Harrow series 2	ABC
Commons, The	Stan	Heights, The series 1	ABC
Content	Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and ABC	Home and Away series 32	Seven
Cry, The	ABC	How To Know If You're Dating A Narcissist	YouTube
Dark Place	ABC	Hunting, The	SBS
Diary of an Uber Driver	ABC	Inbestigators, The	ABC
DisRupted Initiative	ABC	Internment	YouTube
Drop Dead Weird series 2	Seven	KGB	ABC
Drop Off, The series 2	Facebook	Kinne Tonight series 1	TEN
Family Law, The series 3	SBS	Lah Lah's Stripy Sock Club	ABC
Fat Pizza: Back in Business series 1	Seven	Lambs of God	Foxtel
Five Bedrooms series 1	TEN	Les Norton	ABC
Frayed series 1	ABC	Letdown, The series 2	ABC
		Lift	TEN

Drama title	Platform
Listies Work for Peanuts, The	ABC
Lucy and DiC	YouTube
Lunatics	Netflix
Metro Sexual	Nine
Mr Inbetween series 2	Foxtel
Mr. Black	TEN
Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries series 1	Seven
Mustangs FC series 2	ABC
My Life is Murder series 1	TEN
Neighbours series 36	TEN
Neighbours: Erinsborough High	TEN
Nevernight	YouTube
Nice Shorts	YouTube and Facebook
Nightwalkers	ABC
Other Guy, The series 2	Stan
Over and Out	YouTube
Phi and Me	YouTube
Playing for Keeps series 2	TEN

Drama title	Platform
Resting Pitch Face	YouTube
Robbie Hood	SBS
Rosehaven series 3	ABC
Rostered On series 2	Seven
Sarah's Channel	ABC and YouTube
Seachange	Nine
Secret Bridesmaids' Business	Seven
Secret City series 2: Under the Eagle	Foxtel
Single Ladies	Hyvio
Skit Box	YouTube
Squinters series 2	ABC
Total Control series 1	ABC
Unboxing, The	Facebook
Unlisted, The	ABC
Upright	Foxtel
Utopia series 4	ABC
Wentworth series 7	Foxtel

2020

Drama title	Platform	Drama title	Platform
At Home Alone Together	ABC	Gloaming, The series 1	Stan
Aunty Donna's Big Ol' House of Fun	Netflix	Halifax: Retribution	Nine
Between Two Worlds	Seven	Heights, The series 2	ABC
Black Comedy series 4	ABC	Home and Away series 33	Seven
Bloom series 2	Stan	Housos vs Virus: The Lockdown	Seven
Cancelled	Facebook	How to Stay Married series 2	TEN
Colour Blind	YouTube	Hungry Ghosts	SBS
Definitely Not News	ABC	Informer 3838	Nine
Ding Dong I'm Gay	YouTube	Itch	ABC
Doctor Doctor series 4	Nine	Kinne Tonight series 2	TEN
Dom and Adrian: 2020	Stan	Larry the Wonderpup series 2	Seven
Drunk History Australia	TEN	Love Bug series 1	IGTV and TikTok
First Day	ABC	Love Bug series 2	IGTV and TikTok
Fracketty Frack: It's the Frackpocalypse	YouTube	Love, Guns and Level Ups	YouTube
Gamers 2037, The	Nine	Loving Captivity	Facebook
Girl, Interpreted	YouTube	Mint Condition	Vimeo

Drama title	Platform
Mustangs FC series 3	ABC
Mystery Road series 2	ABC
Neighbours series 37	TEN
New Legends of Monkey, The series 2	Netflix
Operation Buffalo	ABC
Retrograde	ABC
Rosehaven series 4	ABC
Secrets She Keeps, The series 1	TEN

Drama title	Platform
Secrets She Keeps, The: Uncovering Secrets	TEN
Sex & Death	YouTube
Stateless	ABC
Thalu	NITV
War on 2020	Facebook and Twitter
Wentworth series 8	Foxtel
YouTube Famous	YouTube

2021

Drama title	Platform
1 For All series 3	YouTube
2 Street 2 Racer	YouTube
Aftertaste series 1	ABC
All My Friends Are Racist	ABC
Amazing Grace	Nine
Australian Gangster	Seven
Australia's Sexiest Tradie	Seven

Drama title	Platform
Back to the Rafters	Amazon Prime
Big Nothing, The	YouTube
Born to Spy	ABC
Bump series 1	Stan
Bump series 2	Stan
Bureau of Magical Things, The series 2	TEN
Celebration Nation	YouTube

Drama title	Platform
Clickbait	Netflix
Deadhouse Dark	Shudder
Dive Club	TEN
Doctor Doctor series 5	Nine
Eden	Stan
End, The series 1	Foxtel
Fat Pizza: Back in Business series 2	Seven
Firebite	AMC+
Fires	ABC
Fisk series 1	ABC
Five Bedrooms series 2	Paramount+
Formal, The series 2	TikTok
Formal, The series 3	TikTok
Frayed series 2	ABC
Graceful: amazing Grace series 2	Facebook and YouTube
Hardball series 2	ABC
Harrow series 3	ABC

Drama title	Platform
Home and Away series 34	Seven
How to Stay Married series 3	TEN
Hug the Sun	YouTube
Iggy & Ace	SBS
Itch series 2	ABC
Jack Irish series 3: Hell Bent	ABC
Lie With Me	TEN
Love Me series 1	Binge
Metro Sexual series 2	Nine
Moth Effect, The	Amazon Prime
Mr Inbetween series 3	Foxtel
Neighbours series 38	TEN
New Gold Mountain series 1	SBS
Newsreader, The series 1	ABC
Nine Perfect Strangers	Amazon Prime
Power of the Dream, The	IGTV and Facebook
Preppers	ABC

Drama title	Platform
ReCancelled	Facebook
Reckoning	Seven
RFDS	Seven
Rosehaven series 5	ABC
Scattered	TikTok
Sonia & Cherry series 2	YouTube
Spreadsheet	Paramount+

Drama title	Platform
Superwog series 2	ABC
Tailings, The	SBS
Total Control series 2	ABC
Unusual Suspects, The	SBS
Wakefield	ABC
Why Are You Like This series 1	ABC



Appendix C: List of consultation and interview participants

The following list is a combination of participants in our consultations as well as our interviews with screen practitioners. Not everyone who participated in our consultations and interviews is listed – only those who gave permission for their name to be published.

Screen Australia sincerely thanks everyone who participated.

Consultation participants and interviewees

Aaliyah Bradbury (Producer)

Amanda Duthie (Stan)

Ana Tiwary (Diversity in Australian Media)

Barry Gamba (Screen Cultures Program, ACE)

Beck Cole (Director)

Ben Nguyen (Stan)

Benjamin Law (Screenwriter and Creator)

Beth Neate (SAFC)

Brad Taylor (SPA)

Bridie McKim (Actor)

Cassandra Nguyen (Writer, Director and Producer)

Catherine Poulton (Catherine Poulton Management)

Catherine Văn-Davies (Actor and Co-Artistic Director)

Dan Lake (Producer)

David Newman (McSweeney Newman Casting, President Casting Guild of Australia 2020–22)

Debbie Lee (Matchbox Pictures)

Donna Chang (SBS)

Dr Nell Greenwood (CEO of AFTRS)

Fadia Abboud (Director)

Fiona Tuomy (Writer, Director and Producer)

Gemma Bird Matheson (Actor, Writer and Producer)

Genevieve Clay-Smith (Filmmaker and Co-founder of Bus Stop Films)

Jennifer McLean (Australian Human Rights Commission)

Jess Mayers (Pride in Diversity)

Johanna Garvin (Filmmaker)

Kelrick Martin (ABC)

Ken Crouch (Screenworks)

Kodie Bedford (Writer)

Leah Vandenberg (Actor and Writer)

Lena Nahlous (CEO, Diversity Arts Australia)

Lyn Norfor (Director Production and Technology, AFTRS)

Mariam Veiszadeh (CEO, Media Diversity Australia)

Mark Franklin (Australian Human Rights Commission)

Matt Okine (Actor, Writer)

Matthew Hall (Arts Access Australia)

Michelle Cheng (SBS)

Mithila Gupta (Writer and Producer)

Monica Keightley (Mollison Keightley Management)

Nazli Sevinç (Cinespace Inc and Screenwriter)

Nick O'Donnell (Netflix Australia)

Remy Hii (Actor)

Sacha Gregson (ABC)

Sally Riley (ABC)

Saroni Roy (Actor and Co-chair, MEAA)

Sharron Meissner (Association of Drama Agents NSW)

Sofya Gollan (Bolshiebird Content)



Love Child series 3



Australian Government

