



# Seeing ourselves

Reflections on diversity in  
Australian TV drama

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## Introduction



Underbelly: Infiltration

WHOSE STORIES ARE OUR TV dramas exploring? What experiences are their creators drawing from? What kinds of characters are we asked to identify with? Who is being cast in roles that seek to capture our imaginations?

The image of Australia that is reflected to us on television has been the subject of much recent debate, headlined by some impassioned speeches at the television industry awards night, the Logies.

In her 2015 Logies acceptance speech Aboriginal actor Miranda Tapsell called for Australia's screen industry to "put more beautiful people of colour on TV and connect viewers in ways which transcend race and unite us". The 2016 Logies saw further voices added to this, including Waleed Aly's powerful acceptance of his Gold Logie award on behalf of all the people in the industry with "unpronounceable names" and Hall of Fame new entrant Noni Hazelhurst

criticising the glacial pace of change in the TV sector.

Australia has one of the most culturally diverse populations in the world, with at least 32 per cent from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. Further, more than one in 10 Australians now identify with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity; and just under one in five people report having a disability.

Commentators are questioning why our TV dramas are not reflecting the diversity that is now such a ubiquitous feature of our workplaces, schools, commutes and neighbourhoods, and, for many of us, our own family backgrounds.

Is the TV production industry merely responding to consumer demand and audience expectations? Screen Australia's 2013 *Hearts & Minds* study revealed a perception amongst audiences that mainstream Australian content failed to reflect the multicultural reality of urban life. At the Logies, after winning the popular award, Aly said he felt that his nomination carried the expectations of many CALD (culturally and linguistically

diverse) Australians because there were so few 'avatars' for them on television. He declared: "if tonight means anything it's that as far as the Australian public, our audience, is concerned, there's absolutely no reason why that couldn't change."

TV drama, of course, is not 'real life'. It is developed, commissioned, financed, scripted, cast, directed, edited, programmed and marketed as a carefully constructed product. Any number of decisions along this pathway shape the final content that reaches our screens. What is influencing these decisions around which stories matter, what audiences want and, indeed, what characters our audiences will and can identify with?

This report aims to provide useful benchmarks for the industry on questions of diversity. It also explores some of the potential barriers that have limited change. We know this is an issue that will require an industry-wide approach. The support for this study across the industry has suggested a great willingness to engage with the issues – we seek to carry this enthusiasm and momentum forward.

# Executive summary

## TELEVISION MATTERS

because it is so much a part of contemporary daily life, and television drama matters in particular because of its capacity to create emotional connections, insight and identity. It reflects our sense of who we are as a society, and who we might be.

Screen Australia is seeking to establish benchmarks for current levels of diversity in Australian TV drama through analysis of the main characters in five years' worth of programs. The study also draws on a series of surveys and face-to-face consultations to explore the challenges and opportunities involved in making TV drama more broadly representative of Australian society.

Diversity, by definition, is about multiplicity and means different things in different contexts and to different people. The ultimate aim is that all of the many and varied voices in the Australian community have the opportunity to be represented through screen content, regardless of things such as gender, age group or where they live.

The research focuses on three aspects of diversity: cultural background, disability status and sexual orientation/gender identity. See 'Scope', page 6, for further discussion.

## Benchmarking on-screen diversity

The benchmarking in this study is based on analysis of 1,961 'main' characters from 199 Australian TV dramas broadcast on public, commercial free-to-air and subscription television between 2011 and 2015. Children's dramas and comedies were included, but animations were excluded due to the number of non-human characters.

'Main' characters were defined as those who appeared in each episode, give or take a small margin. For telemovies and ensemble shows such as *It's a Date* they were the characters with a significant number of speaking lines and/or those who



were on screen for a significant proportion of the running time. The average number of characters analysed was eight, excluding the serials *Home and Away* (Seven) and *Neighbours* (Ten) where the average was 36, due to their long-running nature (around 117 hours of each screened per year) and large ensemble casts.

Screen Australia identified the main characters using program websites and other publicity materials, and verified each list of main cast with the relevant broadcaster. See appendix 3 for a full list of programs analysed.

Each character was examined to identify cultural background, disability status and sexual orientation or gender identity.

Four broad classifications were used to define cultural background: Australian Indigenous, Anglo-Celtic, European and non-European. These categories follow those established by the Australian Human Rights Commission<sup>1</sup> as appropriate in light of Australia's demographic history, and reflecting the main waves of immigration that have primarily shaped the composition of Australian society today.

Identification of disability followed the definition set out under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, incorporating physical, psychological, intellectual and sensory limitations, restrictions and impairments, whether temporary or permanent.

Identification of sexual orientation and gender identity followed the definitions

set out in the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, which was revised to incorporate sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status in 2013.

## HOW DID WE DO IT?

Each character's cultural background was established using a set of indicators – the character's name, family background, story elements, language spoken, accent and visible attributes. Disability, sexual orientation and gender identity were established primarily through story elements, as well as visual cues where relevant. All character analysis was verified by the relevant broadcasters.

The cultural backgrounds of the 988 actors who played the 1,961 main roles were also analysed. Each actor's own country of birth and that of their parents were identified, initially through direct surveying of the actors, through their agents and through the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance. Where direct responses were not available, public sources were used including official biographies and media quotes.

Following the lead of the Australian Human Rights Commission, we have erred on the side of counting more cultural diversity than less. Where someone has mixed heritage we have favoured counting them as European rather than Anglo-Celtic, or as non-European rather than European. Again, the cultural backgrounds of actors were checked and verified by the relevant broadcasters.

For more information about methodological classifications see 'Definitions', page 6.

Examples of how this process worked in practice help to show how some of the distinctions between a character's and an actor's cultural background are important in discussions of how cultural diversity is experienced and perceived through TV drama, and the incidence of 'colour-blind' casting.



• Firass Dirani has Lebanese heritage<sup>2</sup>, so as an actor he is categorised as being of non-European background. His role as Justin Baynie in *House Husbands* (Nine) was categorised as non-European, based on the character's surname (which can be considered as having Lebanese origin), combined with the casting of Dirani in the role. His role as Gary Montebello in *The Straits* (ABC) is categorised as European based on the story elements of the program (Gary is the orphaned son of a cousin of the English/Maltese protagonist, Harry).



• Don Hany has Hungarian and Iraqi heritage<sup>3</sup>, so as an actor, he is categorised as being of non-European background. His role as Zane Malik in *East West 101* (SBS), is defined within the story as a character of Middle Eastern Muslim background and was therefore categorised as non-European. His roles as Chris Havel in *Offspring* (Ten), Joe Cashin in *The Broken Shore* (ABC), Adam Bourke in *Devil's Dust* (ABC) and Bishop Vincent Quaid in *Devil's Playground* (Foxtel) were all categorised as Anglo-Celtic, as there were no defining features of these roles that identified them otherwise.



• Jonathan LaPaglia has Italian and Dutch heritage<sup>4</sup>, so as an actor, he is categorised as being of European background.

His role as Greek-Australian Hector in *The Slap* (ABC) was categorised as European. And his role as Doctor Patrick McNaughton in *Love Child* (Nine) was categorised as Anglo-Celtic.

For further discussion of the combination of these two measures of cultural background – analysis of *actors and characters* – see 'Benchmarking diversity' page 8.

## THE NUMBERS

Overall, the results show that a number of Australia's minorities and marginalised communities are under-represented in TV drama compared to the population, in particular people of non-European backgrounds such as Asian, African or Middle Eastern, and people with disabilities. On the other hand Indigenous Australians are well represented on-screen compared to their proportion of the population. Children's programs and comedies tended to show a higher level of diversity than dramas as a whole.

### Cultural diversity

#### How does the cultural mix of **characters** compare to Australian population?

- The cultural diversity of the Australian population is not currently reflected in the main characters in TV dramas. People of non-Anglo-Celtic background were represented in drama programs at just over half the rate that they are present in the population:
  - 32 per cent of Australians have a first- or second-generation background other than Anglo-Celtic, compared to only 18 per cent of main characters in TV dramas from the last five years.
- People from European backgrounds such as Greek or Italian, and from non-European backgrounds such as Asian, African or Middle Eastern, were significantly under-represented:
  - 6 per cent of characters were identified as from European backgrounds, compared to 12 per cent of the population
  - 7 per cent of characters were from non-European backgrounds, compared to 17 per cent of the population.

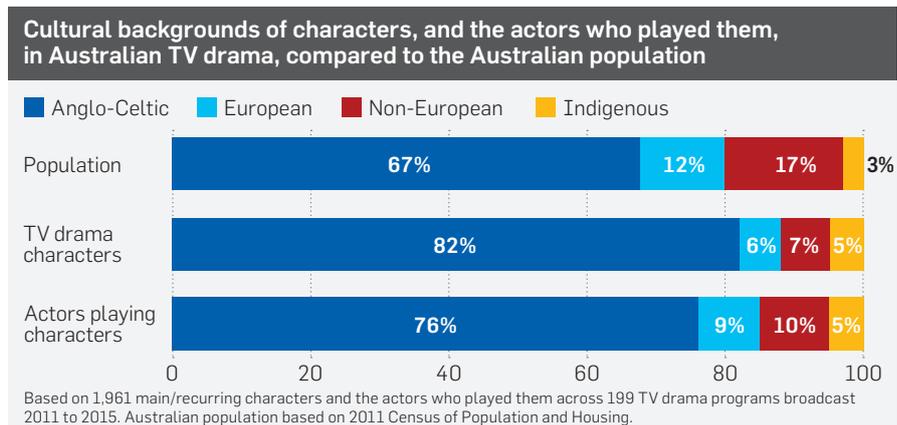
- Characters identified as Indigenous Australians were comparatively well represented, at 5 per cent, compared to their proportion of the population (3 per cent).
- Children's programs and comedy tended to show a higher level of diversity amongst main characters than dramas as a whole, and were in particular more representative of characters from non-European backgrounds.

#### How does the cultural mix of the **actors playing these roles** compare to the Australian population?

- Broadly, the backgrounds of the actors taking main roles reflected the categories of the characters they are playing.
- However, there was a slightly greater cultural mix amongst the actors, with more identified as European (9 per cent) and non-European (10 per cent) than amongst the characters (6 per cent and 7 per cent respectively). This points to a degree of 'colour-blind casting', where actors of European or non-European background have played characters of Anglo-Celtic background.
- Five per cent of actors identified as Indigenous (matching the number of roles).

#### How many programs incorporated cultural diversity?

- Overall, 36 per cent of programs had main casts entirely comprising characters of Anglo-Celtic background.
- That also means 64 per cent of programs included at least one main character from a non-Anglo-Celtic background.
- Indigenous characters were concentrated in fewer programs than characters from European or non-European backgrounds.



### What types of roles?

- There's evidence that we've moved beyond much of the stereotyping of minority cultural groups of the past, as examples of all occupational categories were present across characters of all cultural backgrounds.

### Disability status

#### How does the number of characters with disability compare to the Australian population?

- Disability is very much under-represented in TV drama compared to the Australian population.
- 18 per cent of Australians are estimated to have a disability. By comparison only 4 per cent of main characters in Australian TV dramas were identifiable characters with a disability.
- It should be noted that, like cultural backgrounds, disabilities in the population – and therefore amongst characters – may not necessarily be apparent. However, our study focussed on main characters where these characteristics generally appeared on-screen in some way. Given that the rate of disability in the population increases with age, the low representation of disability on-screen may also reflect a focus on characters in younger age groups.

#### How many programs included disability?

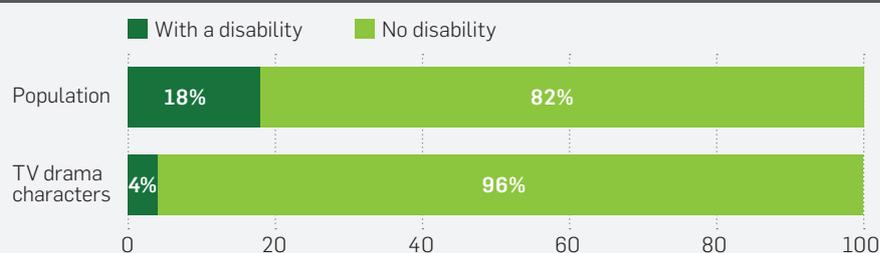
- 10 per cent of the programs included at least one character with disability among the main characters.
- For the titles that had main characters with disability, those characters accounted for between 4 per cent and 38 per cent of the program's main characters.

### Sexual orientation and gender identity

#### How does the number of characters of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity compare to the Australian population?

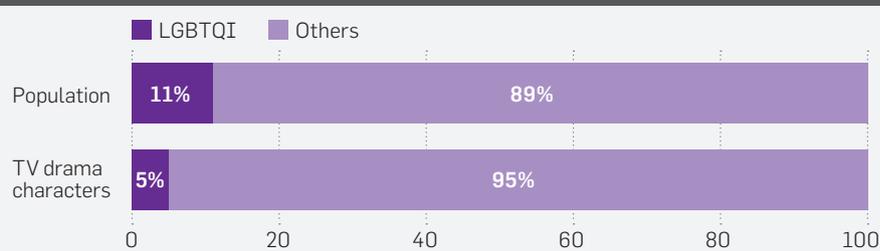
- LGBTQI – lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (or questioning) and intersex – characters are under-represented in TV drama compared to the Australian population.
- Up to 11 per cent of Australians are estimated to be of diverse sexual

### Characters with disability in TV drama compared to the Australian population



Based on 1,961 main/recurring characters across 199 TV drama programs broadcast 2011 to 2015. Australian population based on Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2012*

### LGBTQI characters in TV drama compared to the Australian population



Based on 1,961 main/recurring characters across 199 TV drama programs broadcast 2011 to 2015. Australian population based on Department of Health, Australian Government, *National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy (2012)*.

orientation, sex or gender identity. By comparison, only 5 per cent of characters were identifiable LGBTQI.

- It should be noted that, just as a character could have a cultural background or disability that isn't immediately obvious, a character's sexual orientation, sex or gender identity is not always evident. However, our study focussed on main characters where these characteristics generally appeared on-screen in some way.

#### How many programs included LGBTQI characters?

- 27 per cent of programs included at least one LGBTQI character among the main characters.
- Most programs that had LGBTQI main characters had only one.

## Challenges and opportunities

A series of surveys and face-to-face consultations drew on views and experiences from both sides of the camera to explore the challenges and opportunities involved in making TV drama that reflects the diversity of Australia today.

## COMMISSIONING AND PRODUCTION

### Ideally there would be:

- Opportunities for broadcasters to commission programs from a wide range of creatives of different backgrounds.
- A diversity of backgrounds among decision-makers as well as producers, directors and writers.
- Capacity within the market to develop and showcase a wide range of talent, both on-screen and behind the scenes.
- A better understanding of how audiences of different backgrounds see themselves and find relevance in TV drama characters and stories, and how to harness the appetite for diversity in TV content.
- Recognition of the potential for diverse content to engage large (and sometimes untapped) audiences.

### Challenges

- TV drama is expensive to make, so it's difficult to take risks with new and different programs.
- Audience appetites have driven TV drama towards a reduced volume of high-cost, short-run shows, so there are fewer opportunities to experiment with new and different programs.

- There's a commercial imperative to focus on audience size, and a perception that Australian 'niche' audiences are not large enough in themselves to warrant programs produced 'for' them.
- There are some perceptions that audiences and the market have a low tolerance for diversity, especially when they perceive it to be 'worthy'.
- On the other hand, audiences who don't find content that's relevant to them may move away from broadcast television to online or multichannel options.
- Real or perceived broadcaster resistance to diversity may be preventing diverse content coming through the door in the first place.

## WRITING FOR DIVERSITY

**To facilitate writing for diversity, ideally there would be:**

- A range of stories that provide insights into diverse communities and life experiences, as well as those that 'normalise' diversity by including it more incidentally.
- Authenticity as the basis for all characters and stories.
- Opportunities for writers with personal experience of the cultures and issues portrayed.
- Effective collaboration through partnerships and consultation with communities.
- A greater level of comfort and confidence around incorporating diversity into scripts.

### Challenges

- Getting the balance right around who can and should write which stories.
- Building realistic diversity into storylines where relevant, and keeping an open mind about character backgrounds to encourage diverse casting.
- Having confidence that scripted diversity will not fall away as projects move to casting and production.
- Ensuring proper collaboration and consultation to avoid tokenism and stereotyping.
- Recognising network concerns about risk without self-censoring; meeting them head on to pitch and create audience-engaging drama that naturally reflects Australian diversity.

## CASTING AND PERFORMANCE

**To facilitate casting for diversity, ideally there would be:**

- Enough diverse talent to stimulate the creation of characters, including lead cast – with minority actors as 'bankable' as any other actor, once established.
- A talent pool deep and mature enough (and a production environment open enough) to enable characters with a scripted background to be played mostly by actors of the same background.
- Actors from diverse backgrounds able to freely audition for and be cast in any role where ethnicity or minority status is not specified.
- A production environment that accommodates research, consultation and support for diversity.

### Challenges

- Attracting performers of diverse background to grow the talent pool, when there are few role models – you 'can't be what you can't see'.
- Ensuring those in the industry have opportunities to demonstrate talent and maintain and improve their craft skills.
- Respecting and supporting authenticity in casting characters of diverse background.
- Overcoming assumptions of default casting as Anglo-Celtic and without disability.
- Limited scope for research and consultation to ensure authentic performances.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Decision-makers and drama commissioners are open to incorporating greater diversity in their TV drama slates – not just because it's the 'right' thing to do, but because they recognise that diversity opens up opportunities to engage audiences with a vast range of interesting characters and storylines.
- There are examples of successful programs across all networks that both 'normalise' and provide authentic insights into many of our minority or marginalised communities.
- There's growing evidence of a 'diversity dividend', with domestic examples and international studies establishing the success of programs that have found new ways to engage with diversity.
- The commercial value of diversity is already being recognised in the advertising sector.
- Online content, with its low costs, low barriers to entry and capacity to aggregate niche audiences internationally, shows the potential power of niche or special interest content to reach large audiences.
- Authentic stories and characters can inspire mainstream audiences to identify with 'heroes' of diverse background, as viewers of diverse background identify with conventional protagonists. In this way on-screen diversity not only has the potential to engage audiences, it can also generate connection and empathy, and shift perceptions of 'otherness'.

## MORE WORK TO DO...

This study commenced toward the end of 2015, when conversations about on-screen diversity, both in Australia and overseas, were building and attracting increasing levels of attention.

The benchmarks published here cover programs broadcast up until the end of 2015. Since then, we have seen some high-profile examples of diversity in local TV drama – in January, *The Family Law*, a comedy about a dysfunctional Chinese-Australian family, screened on SBS; in February *Here Come the Habibs*, a comedy about a Lebanese migrant family moving to an affluent neighbourhood, premiered on the Nine Network; and in June the

Indigenous futuristic drama *Cleverman* screened on the ABC. And *The Secret Daughter*, a drama led by Indigenous actor/singer Jessica Mauboy, is scheduled for broadcast on Network Seven later this year.

So the industry is already moving toward a greater embracing of diversity in TV drama and an understanding that, when done well, diversity can deliver resonant stories and commercial value. However, the data reminds us that while there are strong examples across all Australian broadcasters of programs that draw on, reflect and 'normalise' many of our marginalised communities, they are still the exception rather than the rule.

# Part 1. Setting the scene

TV remains one of our most ubiquitous forms of media. According to recent media consumption studies, Australians watch an average of three hours every day, mostly within seven days of broadcast.<sup>6</sup> And TV drama, with its capacity for generating emotional connections, reactions and insights, offers tremendous opportunities for building cohesion and understanding across Australia's diverse communities.

## 1.1 About this report

Until now, there has been little comprehensive evidence to inform discussions of diversity on TV. Harvey May's *Broadcast in Colour: Cultural Diversity and Television Programming in Four Countries* for the Australian Film Commission found in 1999 that 23 per cent of actors in sustaining roles were from culturally diverse backgrounds – up from an estimated 2 per cent in 1992. A 2001 update then found that 26 per cent of actors had culturally diverse backgrounds. These increases were found to be significantly enabled by second-generation immigrants taking up acting as a career, although there were no sustaining roles for actors of Asian backgrounds. The 1999 study included two Indigenous actors (Aaron Pederson and Heath Bergerson) compared to none in 1992.

In embarking upon this new research, Screen Australia has sought to:

- benchmark the current level of diversity in Australian TV drama, through analysis of the main or recurring characters and the actors playing them in 199 Australian TV dramas (those that had their first broadcast on commercial free-to-air, public or subscription television between 2011 and 2015);
- explore the challenges and opportunities involved in making TV drama more representative of the diversity of Australian society through:



- a series of surveys seeking the views and experiences of:
  - actors and actor's agents
  - casting directors
  - screen practitioners with disability
  - the credited writers, producers and directors of the 199 programs in the benchmarking analysis
- face-to-face consultations with the drama departments at all of the broadcasters, industry associations, training institutions, community arts organisations and advocacy groups.

See appendices for more details on methodologies.

### SCOPE

One of the biggest challenges was settling on the appropriate parameters within which to measure and analyse diversity in a coherent way, when the ultimate aim is that all of the many and varied voices in the Australian community have the opportunity to be represented through screen content. Diversity, by definition, is about multiplicity and means different things in different contexts and to different people.

In deciding on the attributes to be analysed, we have aimed to:

- address the main areas of concern regarding under-representation in Australian screen content;
- use the most encompassing and recent definitions that are supported and promoted by the relevant advocacy groups and by the Australian Human Rights Commission;

- where possible, provide comparability to international and previous Australian analysis.

### DEFINITIONS

'Main' characters were defined as those who appeared in each episode, give or take a small margin. For telemovies and ensemble shows like *It's a Date* they were the characters with a significant number of speaking lines and/or those who were on screen for a significant proportion of the running time. The average number of characters analysed was eight, excluding the serials *Home and Away* (Seven) and *Neighbours* (Ten) where the average was 36, due to their long-running nature (around 117 hours of each screened per year) and large ensemble casts.

In TV drama, diverse backgrounds and experiences may be incorporated through the stories, the characters or the actors, or any combination of these, and we have attempted to incorporate all of these elements into the research.

Categorisation of actors and characters drew on definitions supported and promoted by advocacy groups and the Australian Human Rights Commission. See page 8 for more information about categorisation methodology. Due to subjectivity around the application of these definitions, there may be cases where the background of a character or actor is unknown or has been mis-categorised. All reasonable efforts have been taken to minimise such cases.

### Cultural background

Four categories have been used throughout this report to capture cultural diversity. These categories are those used by the Australian Human Rights Commission in its *Leading for Change* report (July 2016). As the Commission noted in that report, "It is not suggested that these categories are the only ones that can be used. We use them because they reflect, if only roughly, the cultural mix introduced to Australian society in historical terms (British colonisation, post-Second-World War mass immigration from Europe, and non-European immigration following the end of the White Australia policy)."

- **Anglo-Celtic:** Those of Anglo-Celtic heritage, based on country of birth of the person and both of their parents, where this is known; otherwise based on specified criteria. For example, people of English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh heritage from Australia, the UK, Ireland, North America, New Zealand or South Africa.
- **European:** Those with a background from non-English-speaking European countries, based on country of birth of the person or at least one of their parents, where this is known; otherwise based on specified criteria. For example, people of French, Greek, Italian, Swedish heritage.
- **Non-European:** Those with a background from countries outside Europe, excluding those of Anglo-Celtic background from the US, UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia; based on country of birth of the person or at least one of their parents, where this is known; otherwise based on specified criteria. For example, people of Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern heritage.
- **Indigenous:** Any Australians who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

### Disability

The definition of disability in this report follows that set out under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.<sup>7</sup> It incorporates physical, psychological, intellectual and sensory limitations, restrictions and impairments, and covers temporary, permanent, past and future disabilities as well as those imputed on an individual.

### Sexual orientation and gender identity

The term LGBTQI is used in this report to encompass people of diverse gender and/or sexual orientation. LGBTQI refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (or questioning) and/or intersex.

Definitions follow those set out in the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, which was revised to incorporate sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status in 2013.

## 1.2 The Australian population

This section summarises the available data on diversity across the population. These measures are used as the basis for evaluating the results reported throughout this report.

### Cultural background

According to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing, 48 per cent of Australians were either born overseas or

had at least one parent born overseas.<sup>8</sup> For this study, data on overseas countries of birth from the 2006 and 2011 Census has been mapped according to the categories used for the TV drama analysis, i.e. Anglo-Celtic, non-English-speaking European and non-European (see at left).

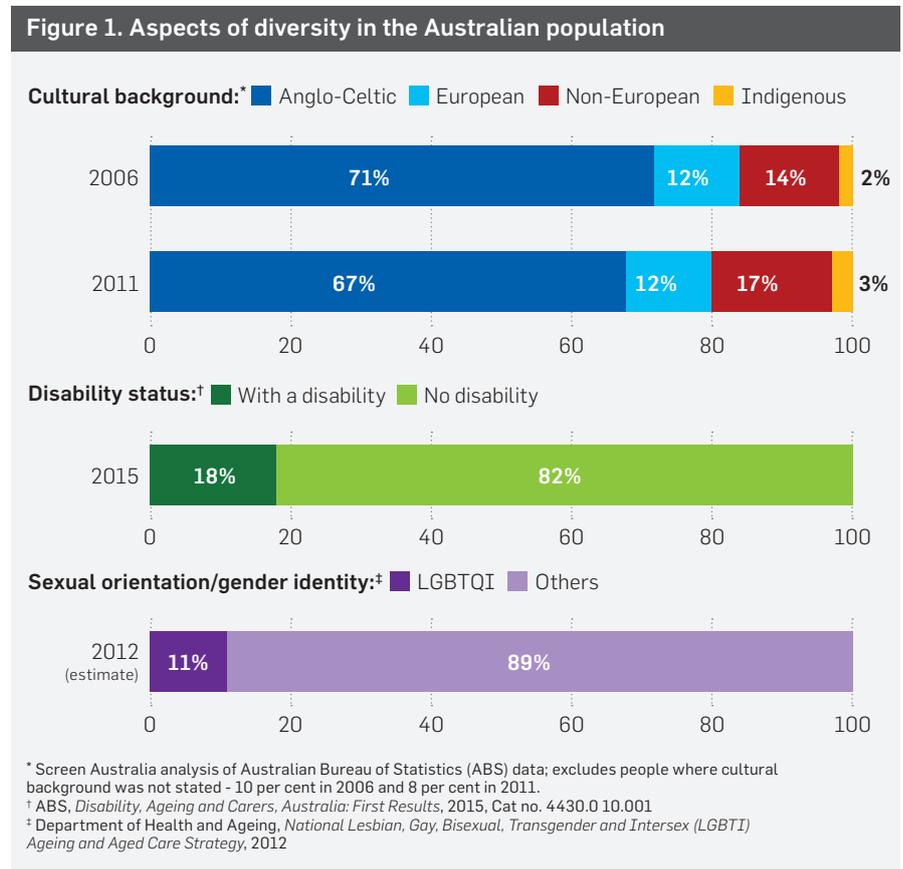
The proportion of Australians of non-Anglo-Celtic background has been growing, reaching around a third of the population in 2011. The growth has been driven by an increase in people of non-European background.

### Disability status

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics,<sup>9</sup> in 2015 there were 4.3 million Australians with disability, or 18.3 per cent of the total population.

### Sexual orientation and gender identity

In 2012, the Department of Health and Ageing estimated that Australians of diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity may account for up to 11 per cent of the Australian population.<sup>10</sup>



## Part 2. Benchmarking diversity

This research started with a simple question: how diverse is Australian TV drama? While that sounds like a straightforward exercise of quantifying and analysing, it's wrapped around a whole range of highly subjective issues including perception, personal identification and individual experience of the world.

The last research published on cultural diversity on television, Harvey May's *Broadcast in Colour*, focused on the cultural heritage of actors cast in seven commercial Australian TV dramas of the time.

Today, Australia is even more diverse and complex in its social structures, conversations around diversity and inclusivity have progressed, broadened and amplified, and TV drama has changed significantly in terms of structure, subject matter, distribution, audience engagement and industrial environment. So the measures required to inform the conversation around on-screen diversity today need to be broader than just a focus on the actors.

In order to address as many current concerns as possible, we chose a combination of measures in analysing on-screen diversity.

### Character attributes

Analysing the background or attributes of the characters from TV drama programs provides information squarely from the audience perspective, gauging the range of stories and character perspectives experienced through these programs.

Characters were categorised based on a set of indicators – story elements, visible attributes, and, in the case of cultural background, name, family, language spoken and accent – with the results confirmed by the relevant broadcasters.

Such an approach means that where there were no indicative story elements, a character's cultural background was identified subjectively through the



*Winners & Losers* (Seven) features Sophie Wong, a character of Chinese heritage, played by Melanie Vallejo.

attributes of the actor playing the role, which can be more revealing in some cases than others. For example, an actor of Danish or French background may not be identifiable as being of that heritage if he or she performs with an Australian accent, whereas an actor of African or Asian heritage may be visibly recognisable as such. 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, which is the point of this aspect of the analysis.

To explore something about the types of characters depicted on our screens,



and whether there was evidence of stereotyping, we also looked at the occupational status of main and recurring characters, classified into 11 groups.

### Background of the actors

Analysing the background or attributes of the actors playing these characters addresses the issue from an industrial perspective, exploring access to casting opportunities for all performers, as well as the audience's access to a full range of faces, bodies and voices on-screen.

Each actor's own country of birth and that of their parents were identified, primarily through direct surveying of the actors, through their agents and through the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance. Where direct responses were not available, public sources were used including official biographies and media quotes. Actors were not asked to identify in terms of disability or sexual orientation. We sought personal views and experiences in relation to these issues through surveys.

### Actors playing characters

In the case of cultural diversity, the combination of these two measures – based on analysis of actors and characters – takes on board some of the nuance

around cultural identification, while still resulting in a set of definable benchmarks. It also helps identify cases of 'colour-blind' or 'generic' casting – where characters of undefined background are cast with actors of diverse backgrounds.

Examples of how this process worked in practice help to show how some of the distinctions between a character's and an actor's cultural background are important in discussions of how cultural diversity is experienced and perceived through TV drama, and the incidence of 'colour-blind' casting.



- Firass Dirani has Lebanese heritage<sup>11</sup>, so as an actor he is categorised as being of non-European background. His role as Justin Baynie in *House Husbands* (Nine) was categorised as non-European, based on the character's surname (which can be considered as having Lebanese origin), combined with the casting of Dirani in the role. His role as Gary Montebello in *The Straits* (ABC) is categorised as European based on the story elements of the program (Gary is the orphaned son of a cousin of the English/Maltese protagonist, Harry).



- Don Hany has Hungarian and Iraqi heritage<sup>12</sup>, so as an actor, he is categorised as being of non-European background. His role as Zane Malik in *East West 101* (SBS), is defined within the story as a character of Middle Eastern Muslim background and was therefore categorised as non-European. His roles as Chris Havel in *Offspring* (Ten), Joe Cashin in *The Broken Shore* (ABC), Adam Bourke in *Devil's Dust* (ABC) and Bishop Vincent Quaid in *Devil's Playground* (Foxtel) were all categorised as Anglo-Celtic, as there were no defining features of these roles that identified them otherwise.



- Jonathan LaPaglia has Italian and Dutch heritage<sup>13</sup>, so as an actor, he is categorised as being of European background. His role as Greek-Australian Hector in *The Slap* (ABC) was categorised as European. And his role as Doctor Patrick McNaughton in *Love Child* (Nine) was categorised as Anglo-Celtic.



*House Husbands* (Nine) features the gay character, Kane (played by Gyton Grantley), raising a child with his partner.

### Concentration of diverse characters per program

We also looked at the drama programs themselves, to see how many incorporated no main characters from diverse backgrounds, and whether the diverse characters we identified were concentrated in a few programs or distributed broadly across many programs.

This analysis should not be seen as a measure of the focus or impact of diversity in storylines. In a program such as *Mabo*, for example, only two of the nine main characters were written as (and cast with) Indigenous Australians. But the story revolved around Torres Strait Islander man Eddie Koiki Mabo and his successful legal battle to bring about native title legislation, so its significance as a story of Indigenous Australia is indisputable. And importantly, the program was produced by an Indigenous team.

**None of the measures employed in this study is definitive or beyond dispute in relation to individual examples. However, the combination provides as comprehensive and considered an approach as possible to understanding the degree to which our TV drama content reflects the diversity of Australia today.**

## 2.1 Cultural Background

An estimated 32 per cent of Australians have a cultural background other than Anglo-Celtic, as defined for this study (see page 7). However, across the 199 Australian TV drama programs broadcast over the last five years, only 18 per cent of main characters had non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds.

As Figure 2 shows, people from European backgrounds and from non-European backgrounds (such as Asian, African or Middle Eastern), were significantly under-represented, at 6 per cent and 7 per cent of characters respectively, compared to 12 per cent and 17 per cent of the population. Interestingly, children's programs and comedy (see page 13) were more representative in terms of characters from non-European backgrounds than the programs as a whole.

At 5 per cent, Indigenous Australians were comparatively well represented as characters compared to their proportion of the population (3 per cent). See 'Long time coming', page 12, for a discussion of support for Indigenous talent.

Broadly, the backgrounds of the **actors taking main roles** reflect the categories the characters they are playing. However, as Figure 3 shows, there is a slightly greater cultural mix amongst the actors, with more identified as European (9 per cent) and non-European (10 per cent) than amongst the characters (6 per cent and 7 per cent respectively). This points to a degree of 'colour-blind casting', where actors of European or non-European background have played characters of Anglo-Celtic background. See page 31 for insights into 'colour-blind' casting from our surveys and consultation.

Five per cent of actors identified as Indigenous, matching the number of roles, which indicates that Indigenous characters have generally been played by Indigenous actors.

Looking at the incidence of **cultural diversity in individual programs** reveals a significant proportion (36 per cent) that had main casts entirely made up of Anglo-Celtic characters, and many programs with only one character from another background.

Figure 2. Cultural backgrounds of **main characters** in Australian TV drama broadcast 2011 to 2015, compared to the Australian population

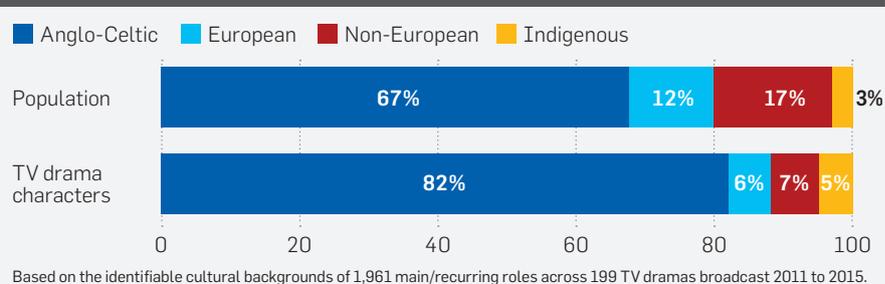
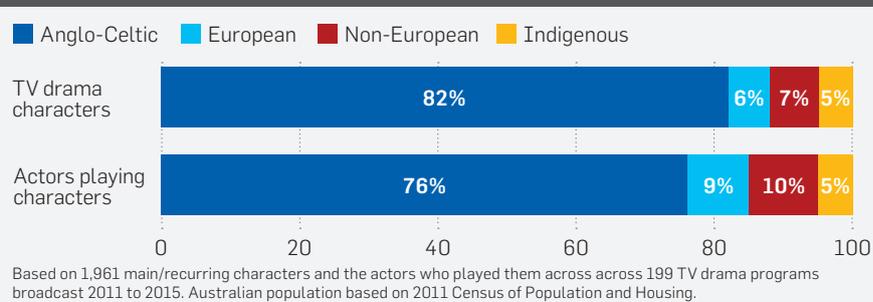


Figure 3. Cultural backgrounds of the **actors playing main characters** in Australian TV drama broadcast 2011 to 2015, compared to the characters they played



Indigenous characters were more concentrated in fewer programs than characters from European or non-European backgrounds, as Figure 4 shows.

Eight programs had 50 per cent or more **Indigenous** main characters: *8MMM*, *Aboriginal Radio*, *Black Comedy*, *Gods of Wheat Street*, *Ready For This*, *The Straits* and two series plus the telemovie of *Redfern Now*. All of these were made for the ABC.

The rest of the 33 programs with Indigenous main characters featured only one or a few such characters. These included *Love Child* (Nine, Martha Tennant), *Offspring* (Ten, Cherie Butterfield), *The Broken Shore* (ABC, Paul Dove and Bobby Walshe), *The Code* (ABC, Tim Simons and Clarence Boyd) and *Neighbours* (Ten, Nate Kinski).

Five programs had main casts predominantly from **non-European** backgrounds: *Better Man* (SBS), based on the true story of Van Nguyen, *The Principal* (SBS), set in a multicultural boys' high school in south-west Sydney, kung fu comedy *Maximum Choppage* (ABC), Chris Lilley's mockumentary *Jonah from Tonga* (ABC), and the children's program *Hoopla Doopla!* (ABC), which featured six

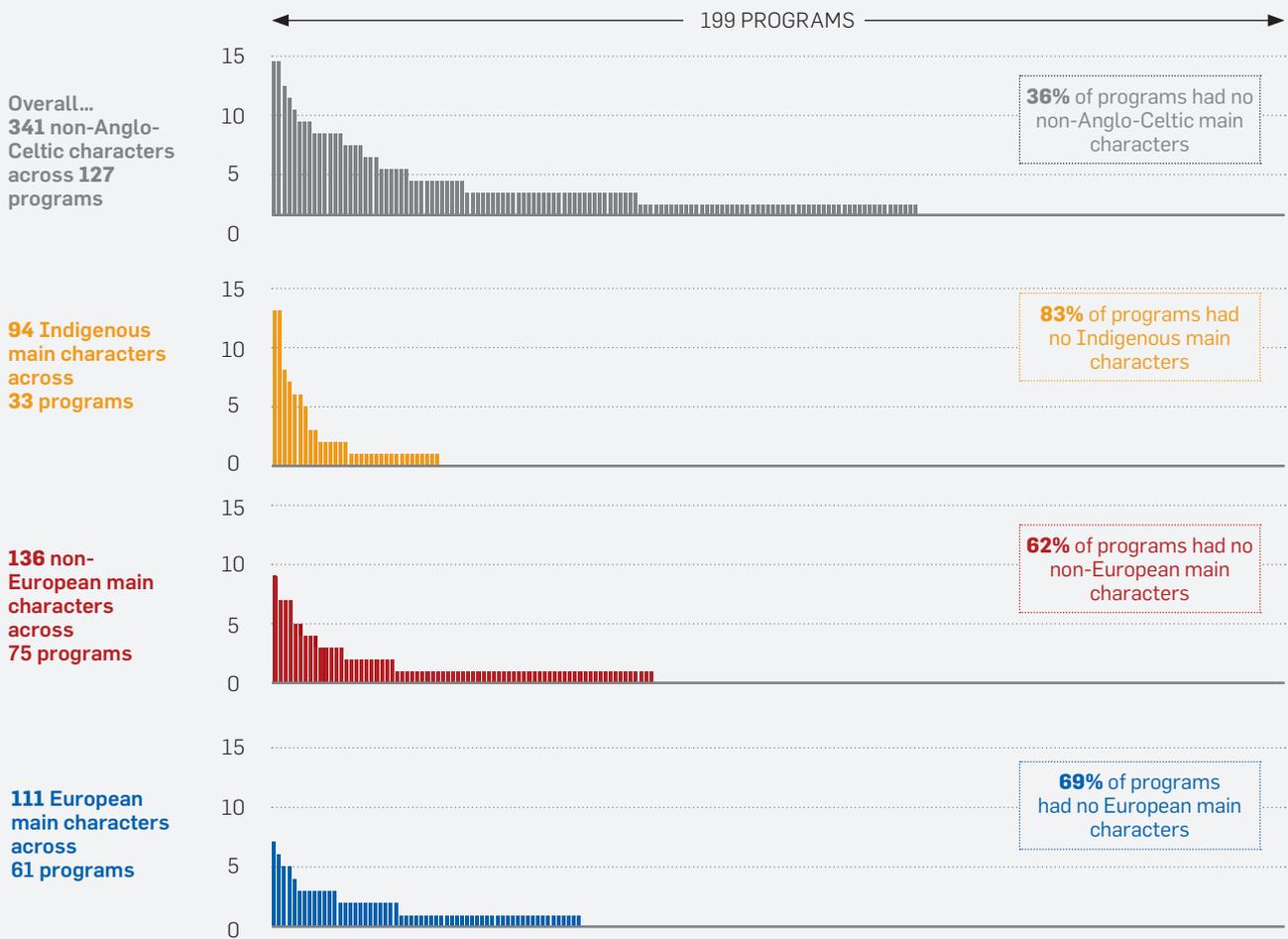
characters performing physical comedy, three of whom were from China.

Fourteen titles had between a quarter and half of their main cast made up of characters with non-European background, such as children's drama *Dance Academy* (ABC), set in an elite dance school, and *East West 101* (SBS), the fictionalised portrayal of a multicultural crime squad in western Sydney.

Most (56) of the total 75 programs with main characters of non-European background featured only one or a few such characters. These ranged from children's mockumentary *Little Lunch* (ABC, Melanie), *Devil's Playground* (Foxtel, Father Matteo), *Time of Our Lives* (ABC, Chai Li Tivolli), *Winners & Losers* (Seven, Sophie Wong) as well as *Home and Away* (Seven, Elijah Johnson) and *Neighbours* (Ten, members of the Kapoor family).

Twelve programs had between a quarter and half of their main cast made up of characters with **European** background. This includes programs such as *The Slap* (ABC) based on the book by Christos Tsiolkas, which had strong 'incidental' cultural diversity amongst its characters, *Danger 5* (SBS) a comedy set in the 1960s about a group of spies from different

Figure 4. Distribution of main characters from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds across the 199 programs analysed



Based on the identifiable cultural backgrounds of 1,961 main/recurring roles across 199 TV dramas broadcast 2011 to 2015.

countries on a mission to kill Hitler, and *Underbelly: Infiltration* (Nine), a true-crime drama based around Melbourne's Calabrian mafia.

Three programs had main casts that were half made up of European characters and these shows were largely set overseas: *An Accidental Soldier* (ABC), the story of an Australian soldier in WW1 France, *Mary: The Making of a Princess* (Ten), the biography of Australian Mary Donaldson marrying into the Danish royal family, and children's drama *In Your Dreams* (Seven), about Australian teenage twins spending time with relatives in a German castle.

Most of the titles that had main characters of European background – 46 of the total of 61 – had just one or a few characters of European background (ie up to 25 per cent of main characters). These included

*Neighbours* (Ten, eg Toadfish Rebecchi), *Home and Away* (Seven, eg Bianca Scott), *Packed to the Rafters* (Seven, eg Nick Karandonis), *Offspring* (Ten, eg Zara Perkich) and *Rake* (ABC, eg Nicole Vargas).

### Character status

The good news is that while there are areas of over and under-representation, there don't seem to be dominant stereotypes in terms of occupational status. Examples of all occupational categories were present across all cultural groups. See figure 5.

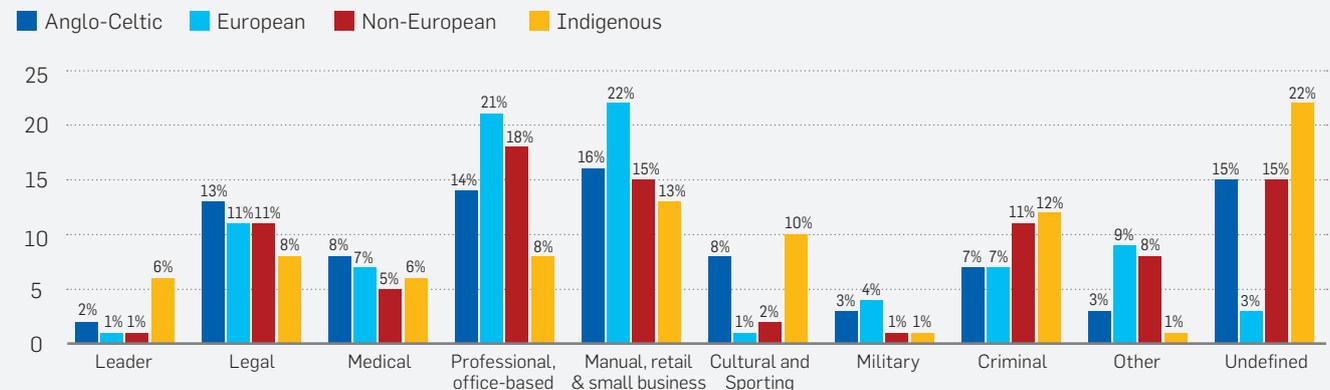
Anglo-Celtic characters were slightly more evident than other groups in 'Legal' and 'Medical' roles, while European and non-European characters were more strongly represented in 'Professional, office-based' occupations. Characters with European background were particularly strongly represented among 'Professional,

office-based' and 'Manual, retail and small business' roles.

Indigenous characters had proportionally more 'Leaders' than the other cultural groups, reflecting characters in *Redfern Now*, *Mabo*, *The Broken Shore* and *The Secret River* (all ABC). Indigenous characters also had the highest proportion of cultural/sporting roles, and of undefined roles (these are roles that are primarily defined by their relationships to other characters rather than their occupations).

The higher results in the 'Criminal' category for non-Anglo-Celtic characters were most heavily influenced by crime thriller *The Straits* (ABC, for Indigenous characters), the *Underbelly* franchise (Nine, for characters of European background) and *Maximum Choppage* (ABC, for non-European characters).

Figure 5. Occupational status of characters from each cultural group



Programs do not include children's programs or sketch comedy. Analysis does not include 194 characters where occupational status is not applicable (eg students, children, supernatural characters). 'Undefined' refers to roles such as family, friends, neighbours.

## LONG TIME COMING – BEHIND THE INCREASING VISIBILITY OF INDIGENOUS SCREEN TALENT

At the 2011 Census, it was estimated that Indigenous Australians represented 2.5 per cent of the Australian population. But Indigenous actors playing Indigenous characters in Australian TV dramas over the last five years are represented at double that rate, accounting for 5 per cent of all main or recurring characters. Compare this with the results of Harvey May's 2002 analysis, which reported no Indigenous actors on screen in 1992 and only two in 1999 (Aaron Pederson and Heath Bergerson).

This development hasn't occurred organically.

Although there were 33 dramas broadcast between 2011 and 2015 that featured at least one Indigenous character, most of the characters were concentrated in eight programs – *8MMM Aboriginal Radio*, *Black Comedy*, *Gods of Wheat Street*, *Ready For This*, *The Straits* and two series plus the telemovie of *Redfern Now*. All of these were made by Indigenous screen practitioners for the ABC, supported by its Indigenous Department, which was established in 2010 to develop and commission an expanded slate of prime-time Indigenous drama and documentary.

Many of the Indigenous people involved in making these programs – both behind and in front of the camera – were assisted in their careers by decades of work from many individuals and organisations dedicated to supporting the development

of Indigenous talent and stories. From Indigenous media associations such as CAAMA and Goolarri Media, to federal funding agencies the Australian Film Commission (AFC), Film Australia, Film Finance Corporation (FFC) and now Screen Australia, state and territory screen agencies, the ABC and SBS, and institutions such as AIATSIS and AFTRS. The AFC's Indigenous Branch, in particular, played a crucial role. Formed in 1993, it built on the skills base established by the Indigenous media organisations in the 1980s to provide stepping stone programs that involved practical professional development coupled with production funding.

A wealth of Indigenous talent has come through those and other organisations and

created numerous critically acclaimed short films, documentaries and features. Several Indigenous actors (such as Deborah Mailman, Aaron Pederson and Ernie Dingo) have been working in TV drama for many years. The blossoming of new Indigenous-led TV dramas in recent years has created opportunities for many more Indigenous stories and faces to grace our screens.

An important by-product of the success of Indigenous-led film and television content (see page 23) is that it showcases the star-power of Indigenous actors, who then go on to be cast in main roles in mainstream commercial dramas – such as Miranda Tapsell's multi-Logie Award winning role in *Love Child* on the Nine Network.



### Children's drama – towards the 'new normal'

Of the 199 Australian drama programs broadcast between 2011 and 2015, 25 were children's programs, accounting for 150 of the total 1,961 main or recurring characters analysed. Animated programs have been omitted from this analysis because of the number of non-human characters.

While children's programs accounted for a small proportion of total programs and characters, they showed a higher level of diversity than programs for adults. Non-European characters in particular had a higher level of representation in children's programs, at 13 per cent compared to 6 per cent for programs for adults.

Thirteen of the 25 children's programs featured main or recurring characters of non-European background: two seasons of *Dance Academy* (ABC), *The Elephant Princess* series 2 (Ten), *a gURLs wURLd* (Nine), *Hoopla Doopla* (ABC), *Lightning Point* (Ten), *Little Lunch* (ABC), two seasons of *Mako Mermaids* (Ten) and two seasons of *You're Skitting Me* (ABC). Most were visibly recognisable as being of non-European background, rather than being identified through subject matter or storylines. And nearly all were young characters.

Encouragingly, this comparatively high level of incidentally diverse casting of young actors of mainly Asian and African background presents Australian children with content that is a little more reflective of the reality of the Australian population, in a context where non-European heritage is normal and unremarkable. It also bodes well for increasing the talent pool of actors of non-European background in Australia, as long as roles continue to be available to the young actors as they move out of children's programs into 'grown up' roles.

Seven per cent of main or recurring characters in children's dramas were Indigenous Australians, higher than the five per cent for adult dramas. They appeared in two of the 25 programs – *My Place* series 2 and *Ready For This* (both ABC).

Figure 6. Cultural backgrounds of main/recurring characters in children's vs adult dramas broadcast 2011 to 2015

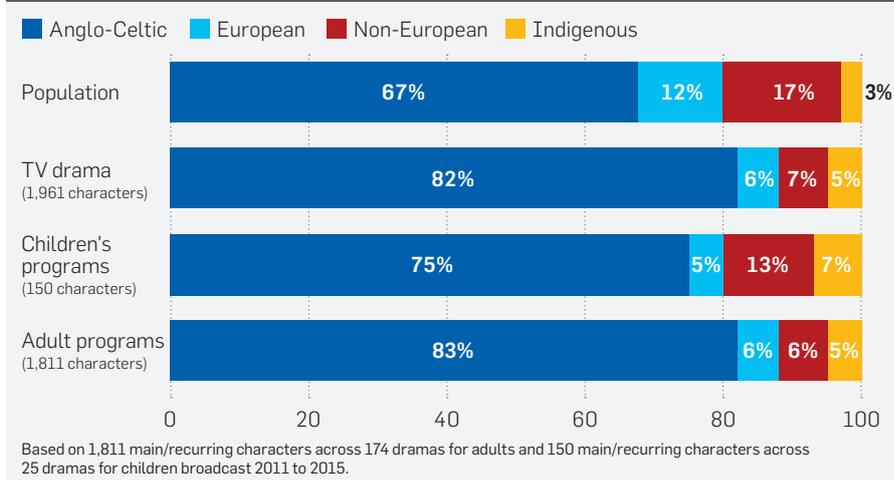
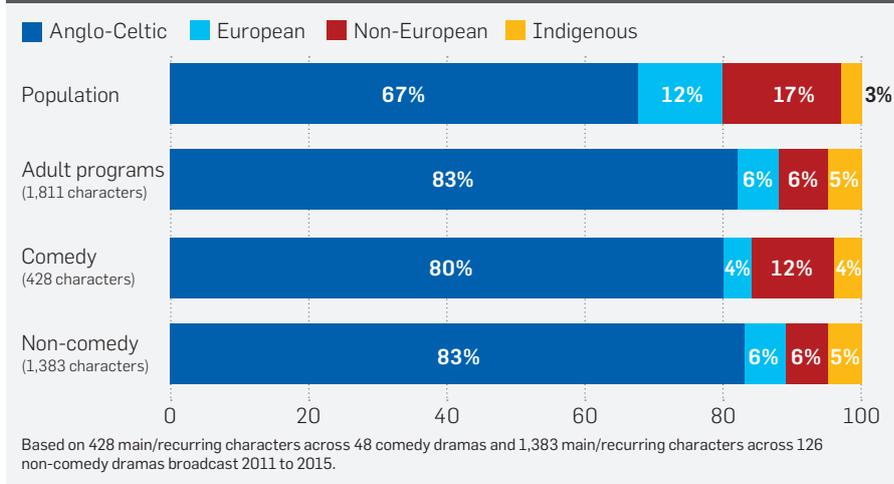


Figure 7. Cultural backgrounds of main/recurring characters in comedy vs non-comedy dramas broadcast 2011 to 2015



Five per cent of characters were identifiable as being of European background, the same proportion as programs for adults. For the children's dramas, almost all were characters with German backgrounds from the two seasons of *In Your Dreams* (Seven), *a gURLs wURLd* (Nine) and series 2 of *My Place* (ABC).

The higher degree of cultural diversity – at least in relation to characters of non-European and Indigenous background – means the programs have more potential to both reflect children's own communities and expand their experiences of the world.

### Comedy – laughing 'with' difference

Like children's drama, comedy programs broadcast between 2011 and 2015 had more non-Anglo-Celtic characters amongst the main or recurring characters than other types of drama programs for adults. And also like children's drama, the main difference related to characters of non-European background, who accounted for 12 per cent of characters in comedy programs compared to 5 per cent in other types of drama. However, comedies contained fewer characters of European and Indigenous backgrounds than other programs.

With their specific cultural settings, *Maximum Choppage* and *Jonah from Tonga* (both ABC) accounted for around a third of all non-European characters across the 51 comedy titles. There were also many comedies that included one or two characters of non-European background, such as *At Home with Julia*, *This Is Littleton*, *Utopia* and *Please Like Me* on the ABC, and *Danger 5* series 2, *Housos* and *Swift and Shift Couriers* series 2 on SBS. Comedian Ronny Chieng, who has an Asian background, featured in six comedies across the five years: *Problems* (ABC), two seasons of *It's a Date* (ABC), *This is Littleton* (ABC), *Kinne* (Seven) and *Stories I Want to Tell You in Person* (ABC).

Indigenous Australian characters accounted for 4 per cent of main or recurring characters in comedies, compared to 5 per cent for other types of dramas. Two programs accounted for the majority: *8MMM Aboriginal Radio* and *Black Comedy* (both ABC). Three other comedies included Indigenous characters: *Angry Boys*, *It's a Date* series 2 and *Outland* (all ABC).

Characters of European background accounted for 4 per cent of comedy characters, a smaller proportion than non-comedy. In both comedies and other types of dramas, characters of European background tended to be included in programs with a mix of other characters, rather than in stories specifically focused on European heritage. A few exceptions include the comedy *Danger 5* (SBS) and non-comedies *The Slap* (ABC) and *Underbelly: Infiltration* (Nine).

### CULTURE IN THE FOREGROUND – INSIGHTS INTO DIVERSE CULTURES AND EXPERIENCES



Although the majority of dramas that feature non-Anglo-Celtic characters included them as 'normal' or unremarkable in the communities of their stories, there are some strong examples of programs that have broken new ground in exploring stories actively focused on Australia's rich cultural diversity.

*East West 101* (SBS) was a fictionalised portrayal of an actual multicultural crime squad of detectives based in Sydney's western suburbs. The critically acclaimed and award-winning drama ran for three seasons, and was developed with extensive research (two members of the crime squad acted as script consultants). Its central character, Zane Malik (played by Don Hany), was a Muslim detective struggling to balance his role as a police officer with his connections to his culture and his community. The program explored the post-9/11 world and issues of crime and law enforcement in multicultural Western Sydney through the eyes of Malik.

*Redfern Now* (ABC) was the first drama series written, directed and produced by Indigenous Australians. Comprising two six-part series and a final telemovie, each episode told a separate story centred on the inner city lives of predominantly Indigenous Australian families. *Redfern Now* showcased

Indigenous talent on both sides of the camera. It garnered high audiences, was critically acclaimed and won many awards. The program is considered ground-breaking in bringing diverse representations of Indigenous culture to a wide audience, including some previously unseen and strongly positive sides of Indigenous communities.

*The Principal* (SBS) was set in a violent and difficult boys' high school in Sydney's south-west, with students of Lebanese, Syrian, Polynesian, African, Asian and Anglo-Australian backgrounds, including recently arrived refugees from war zones in the Middle East and Africa. The central character was the new school principal, Matt Bashir (played by Alex Dimitriades), a second-generation Lebanese Christian and a former student of the school. While the students jostled and bristled with each other, their families, teachers, the local community and the police, Bashir worked to reform the way the school dealt with the recurring conflicts, based on his firm belief that every kid deserves a chance.

#### Challenges:

- Who should tell these stories? see 'Towards authenticity', page 25
- Do viewers want to see such stories? see 'Channelling the audience' page 22, and 'The diversity dividend' page 23.

## 2.2 Disability status

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 18.3 per cent of Australians (around one in five) had a disability in 2012.<sup>14</sup>

By comparison only 4 per cent of the 1,961 main characters in Australian TV dramas broadcast between 2011 and 2015 were identifiably characters with a disability, or 71 characters in total. It should be noted that this analysis did not request personal information about disability from actors; rather, it focused on the portrayal of disability on screen.

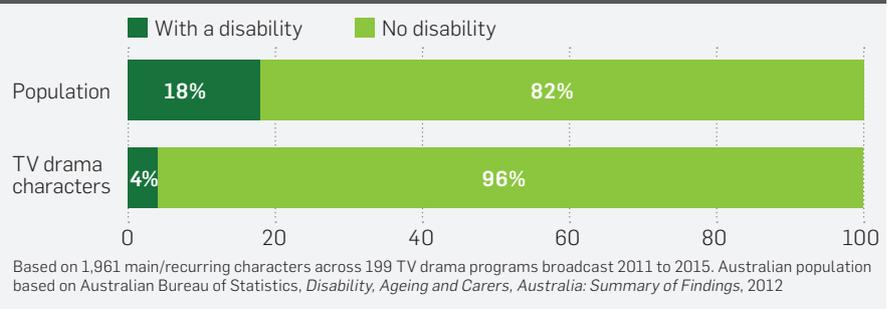
Given that the rate of disability in the population increases with age, the low representation of disability on-screen may also reflect a focus on characters in younger age groups.

Of the 71 characters with disabilities, 25 were considered to have physical or sensory disabilities such as blindness, paralysis or amputated limbs, while 47 had psychiatric, neurological, cognitive and/or intellectual disabilities (note that some characters such as Fish Lamb from *Cloudstreet* on Foxtel had multiple disabilities). 77 per cent of characters with disabilities were found in *Neighbours* (Ten) or *Home and Away* (Seven).

The portrayals of disability in the long-running serials largely appear to be built into storylines for dramatic effect and to help drive ongoing storylines, rather than characters with disability being a 'normal' part of the program's world. For example, central characters have had temporary disabilities such as memory loss, blindness, paralysis, and psychosis. Others have had longer-term disability written into their character, such as Susan Kennedy (played by Jackie Woodburne) on *Neighbours*, who has developed Multiple Sclerosis and Doug Willis (played by Terrence Donovan) also on *Neighbours*, who has Alzheimer's.

Although these characters and stories are primarily included for dramatic effect, they provide the potential to explore real-world experience of disability, both temporary and long-term, with popular characters for a mainstream television audience, and the capacity to remove some of the stigma and limiting social attitudes towards disability.

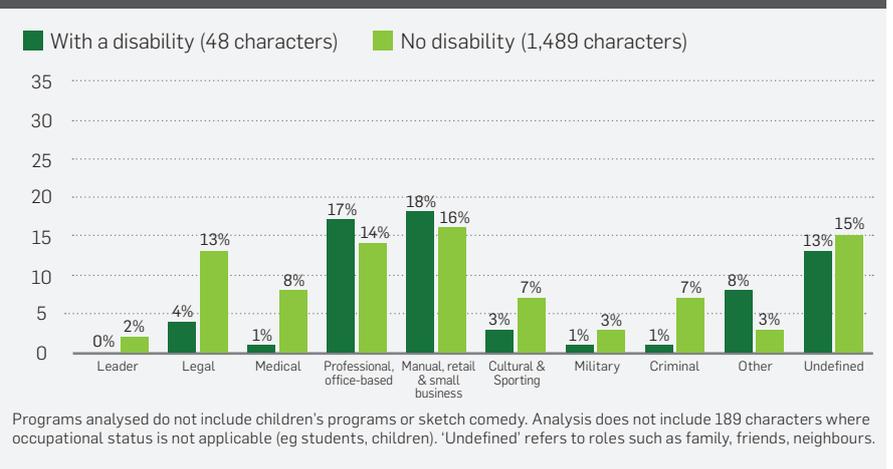
**Figure 8. Representation of people with disability among main/recurring characters in TV drama programs broadcast 2011 to 2015, compared to the Australian population (2012)**



**Figure 9. Distribution of main characters with disability across the 199 programs analysed**



**Figure 10. Occupational status of characters with identified disability compared to characters with no disability**



Other programs provide insights through a focus on the experience of disability through central characters and themes (see box page 16).

Looking at the distribution of characters by program, 10 per cent of the 199 drama titles analysed included at least one character with disability among the main characters, or 20 programs in total.

For the titles that had main characters with disability, those characters accounted for between four per cent and 38 per cent of the program's main characters.

### Character status

Compared to characters without disability, characters with disability had higher levels of representation in the 'Professional or office-based' and 'Manual, retail and

small business' categories. In the 'Other' category, five of the six characters with disability were unemployed or retired.

They appeared much less often than other characters in 'Legal' and 'Medical' roles, and there were no characters with disabilities in roles as 'Leaders'. Ernie Johnson, an army veteran with PTSD in *Redfern Now* (ABC) was the sole 'Military' character.

Almost a third of all characters with disabilities were students, and so were not included in the analysis. Twenty-one of these 23 characters appeared in *Home and Away* (Seven) and *Neighbours* (Ten), and experienced a range of physical and mental disabilities – some temporary, some recurring, and some permanent.

"I feel passionately about this, not only because I'm a struggling actor with a disability, but also because the more disabled actors we have on our screens, the greater impact we can have on people with disabilities in our society. ... If there had been more positive depictions of people with disability in the media when I acquired my disability as an 11 year old, I believe I wouldn't have struggled with my self-worth as a disabled person as much."

*Daniel Monks, actor, writer, producer*

## INSIGHTS INTO DISABILITY THROUGH CENTRAL CHARACTERS AND THEMES



A small number of TV drama programs broadcast between 2011 and 2015 incorporated disability through central characters or in-depth themes.

In the mini-series, *Cloudstreet* (Foxtel), based on Tim Winton's acclaimed novel, a near-drowning as a child left Fish Lamb (played by Hugo Johnstone-Burt) with severe mental impairment and the capacity to experience visions.

Although Fish is unable to communicate verbally, he communicates directly with the audience as narrator of the mini-series. *Dogs of War*, the final episode of *Redfern Now* series 2 (ABC) explored the experience of post-traumatic stress disorder through the character of Ernie (played by Ernie Dingo), a retired Army drill sergeant, whose screams during the night from recurring dreams of his time in the Vietnam War cause tension in his community.

In the political thriller *The Code* series 1 (ABC), Ashley Zuckerman plays a computer hacker, Jesse Banks, who has autism spectrum disorder. While socially challenged, Jesse has channelled his talents into mastering the online world. Zuckerman has spoken publicly about researching the role of Jesse, with the help of ASteen, a support group for teenagers with high-functioning autism. "There was often talk about the commitment to processes, the inability to deal with change, the pursuit of their own desires. All the research made me understand why Jesse can be so manipulative at times, why he can be so dogged, why he can be so unnerved and scared."

The character of 'Mum' in *Please Like Me* on ABC (played by Debra Lawrance) has bipolar disorder and attempted suicide twice over the first two seasons of the show. The program has earned praise from mental health professionals for tackling these serious issues in a realistic yet engaging way. The creator and main actor in the show, Josh Thomas, has spoken publicly about wanting to expose audiences to issues of mental health which are prevalent but rarely discussed: "This is a good thing for people to get a practice experiencing. You will probably meet somebody who has attempted suicide, and it's hard to understand." While the character is loosely based on his own mother, who also has mental illness, Thomas has underlined the extensive levels of research the writers undertook, and the fact that *Please Like Me* presents only one of many possible portrayals of a complex issue.

### Challenges:

- Who should tell these stories? see 'Towards authenticity', page 25
- Do viewers want to see such stories? see 'Channelling the audience' page 22, and 'The diversity dividend' page 23.

## 2.3 Sexual orientation and gender identity

The Department of Health estimates that 11 per cent of Australians are of diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity.<sup>17</sup> By comparison, only 5 per cent of characters were identifiably LGBTQI, or 88 characters in total.

Looking at the spread of characters per program, 27 per cent of the 199 dramas broadcast between 2011 and 2015 included at least one LGBTQI character among the main characters, or 53 programs in total. LGBTQI characters comprise 62 male characters and 26 female characters (including two transsexual/transgender). No characters were identified as intersex.

In one program (*Outland*, ABC), the entire main cast was made up of LGBTQI characters, but most (34 programs) had only one LGBTQI main character.

It should be noted that just as a character could have a cultural background or disability that isn't immediately obvious, a character's sexual orientation, sex or gender identity is not always evident. However, our study focussed on main characters where these characteristics generally appeared on-screen in some way.

### Character status

LGBTQI characters were strongly represented in the medical occupations, largely due to two recurring roles: nurses Aidan Foster in *Neighbours* and Kim Akerholt in *Offspring* (both Ten).

Around a quarter of the analysed LGBTQI roles fell into the 'Manual, retail and small business' category, including small businessman Kane and firefighter Tom from *House Husbands* (Nine) as well as Scotty Boland, Nate Kinski and Steph Scully from *Neighbours* (Ten).

Eleven per cent of LGBTQI characters were classified into 'Cultural and sporting' occupations, four per cent more than non-LGBTQI characters. Characters from *Carlotta* (ABC) made up five of the nine roles in this category, with Peter Allen and Gregory Connell from *Peter Allen: Not the Boy Next Door* (Seven) also featuring.

Figure 11. Representation of LGBTQI characters in TV drama programs broadcast 2011 to 2015, compared to the Australian population

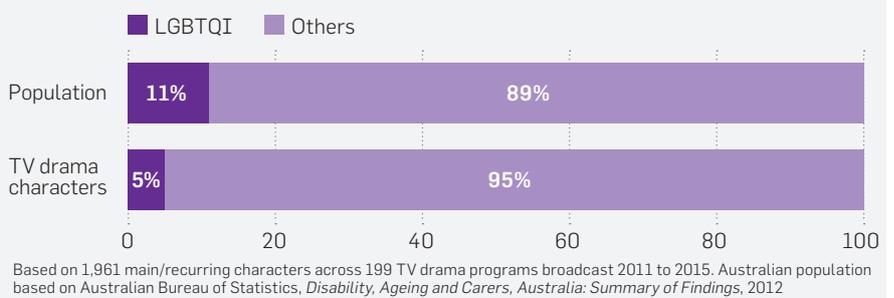


Figure 12. Distribution of LGBTQI main characters across the 199 programs analysed

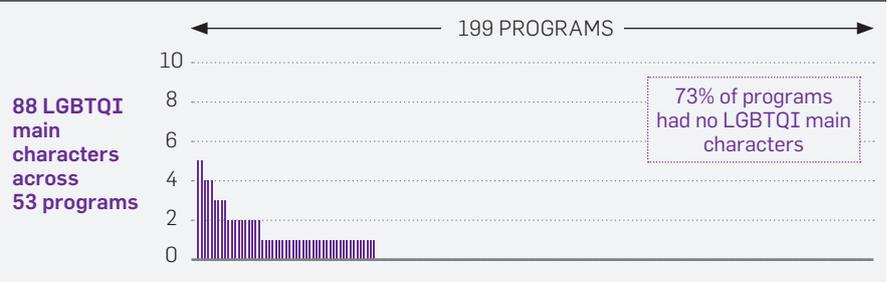
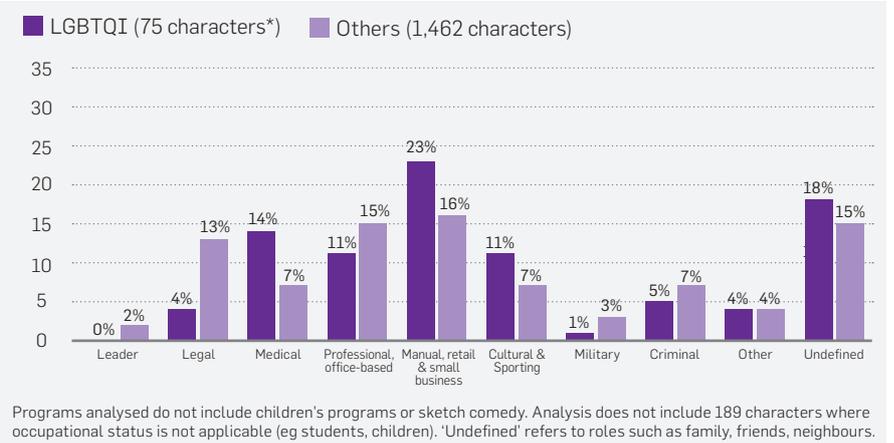


Figure 13. Occupational status of characters identified as LGBTQI



LGBTQI characters in 'Legal' occupations only represented 4 per cent of roles, compared to 13 per cent for non-LGBTQI characters. They included Janet King in *Crownies* and *Janet King* (both ABC) and Stella Dagostino in *Rush* (Ten).

## TOWARDS 'NORMALISATION' AND UNDERSTANDING



Janet King

Amongst the programs analysed, all networks featured examples of characters whose LGBTQI status is incidental rather than pivotal to the storyline, and characterised as everyday and unremarkable. These include Kane (played by Gytton Grantley) in *House Husbands* (Nine), Kim (played by Alicia Gardner) in *Offspring* (Ten), Jonathan (played by Damian Bodie) in *Winners & Losers* (Seven), Franky (played by Nicole da Silva) in *Wentworth* (Foxtel), and characters from *Ready For This* and *Dance Academy* (ABC).

Both public broadcasters featured programs headlined by a character who was incidentally, rather than pivotally, LGBTQI – Janet King on the ABC and *The Principal* on SBS. *Wonderland* (Ten) explored the idea that sexuality is not a gay/straight dichotomy through the character of Carlos (played by Glenn McMillan), who did not see his previous experience with men as a barrier to his growing relationship with Grace (played by Brooke Satchwell).

Strong, authentic storytelling through TV drama has also provided insights into the lives of LGBTQI Australians. *A Place to Call Home* (Seven/Foxtel), for example, highlighted the attitudes and

responses to homosexuality in 1950s Australia. According to writer Bevan Lee, it was supported by research into the lives of gay men and women in the 50s and interviews with senior members of the gay community.

*Carlotta* (ABC) depicted the life story of well-known performer and celebrity Carol Spencer (known professionally as Carlotta), who was born male and underwent gender re-assignment in the 1970s. The biographical drama shone a light on the world of cabaret and drag queens in Sydney from the early 1960s, and Carlotta's role in helping to shift attitudes and promote understanding of transgender.

*Please Like Me* (ABC) navigated the process of a young man coming out, and facing other difficult life challenges associated with the first decade of adulthood, with honesty, humour and empathy. The program's resonance with its audience was evidenced through strong social media engagement and returning seasons.

### Challenges:

- Authenticity in storytelling, see page 25
- Casting issues, see page 28

## 2.4 Diversity behind the scenes

This section summarises the available data on diversity levels amongst the people working behind the camera – broadly across the screen production and television industries and more specifically those who have key creative roles in bringing TV drama to our screens.

### Employment in the screen industries

According to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing, the screen production and television industries<sup>18</sup> employ a lower proportion of people of non-European background compared to the total Australian workforce.

People working across the screen industries are also less likely than the general population to speak a language other than English at home, according to the 2011 Census.

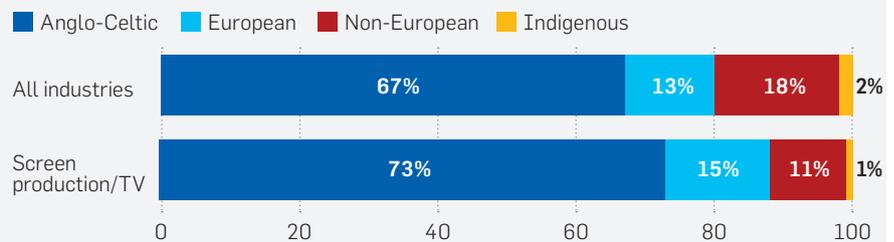
### Key creative roles

Screen Australia regularly analyses the number of active writers, producers and directors making Australian drama and documentary content. Personal information about country of birth and country of parents' birth is not comprehensively collected from Australian screen practitioners, so it's not possible to profile the cultural mix amongst the people who have been bringing TV drama to our screens.

However, we are able to report figures for Indigenous representation.

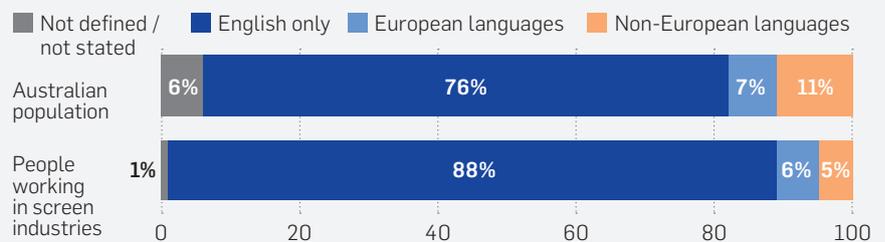
Indigenous directors and writers participate in TV drama production at a similar or higher rate than they appear in the Australian population (3 per cent in 2011). But Indigenous producers are under-represented.

Figure 14. Cultural background of people working in screen production and television, 2011



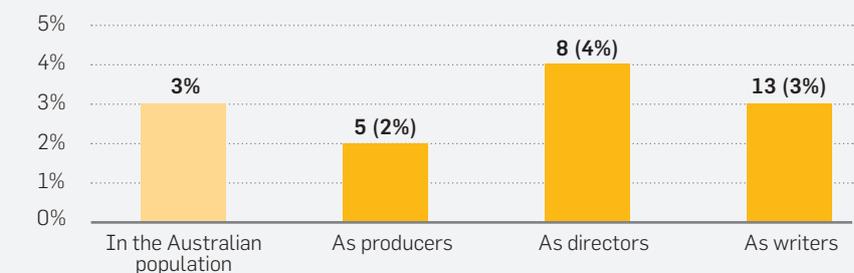
Source: Screen Australia analysis of ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011

Figure 15. Languages spoken at home among people working in screen production and television, 2011, compared to the Australian population



Source: Screen Australia analysis of ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011. Less than one per cent of the population speak Australian Indigenous languages at home.

Figure 16. Indigenous key creatives credited on Australian TV drama 2010/11-2014/15



Source: Screen Australia analysis of credits for Australia TV drama titles shot between July 2010 and June 2015.



## Part 3. Challenges and opportunities



This section draws on interviews and surveys to present views and experiences from both sides of the camera – actors, agents, casting directors, writers, directors and producers – as well as broadcasters, industry associations, training institutions, community arts organisations and advocacy groups.

Although the survey data reflects the views of the industry practitioners who chose to respond and should not be seen as representative of the whole sector, it contributes valuable insights into the challenges and barriers to diversity faced every day by those involved in bringing these stories and characters to the screen.

### OPPORTUNITIES

As well as the challenges outlined in this section, the research identified a range of opportunities that could underpin moves to better reflect Australia's diverse communities on screen.

- Decision-makers and drama commissioners are open to incorporating greater diversity in their TV drama slates – not just because it's the 'right' thing to do, but because they recognise that diversity opens up opportunities to engage audiences with a vast range of interesting characters and storylines.
- There are examples of successful programs across all networks that both 'normalise' and provide authentic insights into many of our marginalised communities.
- There's growing evidence of a 'diversity dividend', with domestic examples and international studies establishing the success of programs that have found new ways to engage with diversity.
- The commercial value of diversity is already being recognised in the advertising sector.
- Online content, with its low costs, low barriers to entry and capacity to aggregate niche audiences internationally, shows the potential power of niche or special-interest content to reach large audiences. It also offers opportunities for less experienced creatives and performers to build their profiles and demonstrate their talent.
- Authentic stories and characters can inspire mainstream audiences to identify with 'heroes' of diverse background, in the same way that viewers of diverse background are accustomed to identifying with conventional Australian protagonists. In this way, diversity not only has the potential to deliver large audiences and commercial returns, it can also generate connection and empathy, and shift perceptions of 'otherness' within the Australian the community.

### 3.1 Commissioning and production

One of the writers surveyed for this study summed up her experience this way: “Producers will use every excuse under the sun. From ‘there’s no one good enough’ to ‘the network won’t have it’ to ‘the experienced star actors can’t work with such inexperience’. It makes things too hard. And the biggest one is ‘the investors won’t invest unless we have a big star’ and of course there aren’t many big stars from diverse backgrounds. Guess why? Because investors won’t invest, networks won’t take a risk, producers won’t risk pissing off a network.”

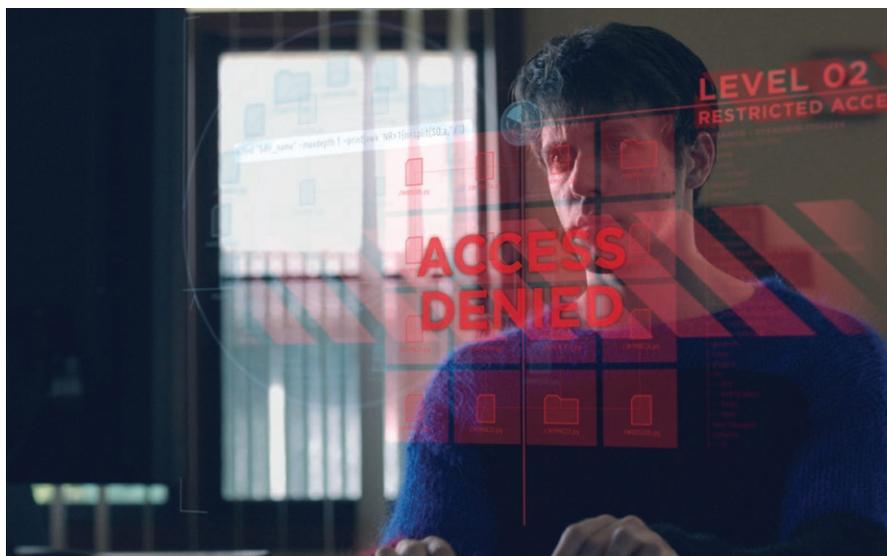
**To facilitate diversity in commissioning and producing content, ideally there would be:**

- opportunities for broadcasters to commission programs from experienced creatives with a range of different backgrounds
- a diversity of backgrounds among decision-makers as well as producers, directors and writers
- capacity within the market to develop and showcase diverse talent, both on-screen and behind the scenes
- a better understanding of how audiences of different backgrounds see themselves and find relevance in TV drama characters and stories, and how to harness the appetite for diversity in TV content
- recognition of the potential for diverse content to engage large (and sometimes untapped) audiences.

#### RISKY BUSINESS

TV drama is an increasingly high-cost and high-risk enterprise. With the high production values pioneered by US networks such as HBO and Netflix setting new audience expectations and trends towards binge viewing, Australian broadcasters are investing higher budgets in shorter-run series.

The broadcasters still use Australian dramas as major brand-building content to market their network and define its local presence, but series runs are getting shorter so total hours of production have declined in recent years – series and serials production declined from



A central character in *The Code* (ABC) is Jesse Banks, a character with autism spectrum disorder, played by Ashley Zukerman.

an average of 480 hours per year in the 10 years up to 2010 to just 284 hours in 2014/2015 with a five-year average of 317 hours from 2010 to 2015.

This tends to mean that there’s less capacity for the networks to take risks on new writers and lesser-known actors, as the pressure is greater on each program to succeed. An unexpected impact of the so-called ‘golden age’ of higher-quality TV production may be that work is more likely than ever to go to experienced creatives, and there are fewer opportunities for new talent to be tested out. Regeneration of talent is a broad issue for the networks, but it also limits opportunities to work with people from diverse backgrounds who have not yet proven their bankability.

There is also a strong pressure to supplement budgets with international sales of marketable content, and stars, that will appeal to global buyers of content.

*Chris Irvine, SBS:* “We are in the business of producing distinctive Australian drama – but more so than ever, these shows

have to play to an international audience. ‘Rest of world’ distribution advances are making up more than 10 of overall drama budgets and it would be incredibly difficult to commission shows without this financial support.

“Naturally, international distributors are looking for the marketing hook – including a stellar cast that can sell a show into multiple territories; but we have to balance this with our need to develop culturally and linguistically diverse talent on screen. The reality is that there is a limited ‘CALD’ base of ‘lead’ Australian talent that can sell a show internationally – so experimentation is a real challenge.”

Surveyed writers, producers and directors also acknowledged the networks’ concerns about potential viewer backlash and poor program performance in preventing greater diversity on screen.

*Writer/producer:* “Free-to-air networks generally (not always) are nervous about Asian, Indigenous and Muslim storylines. Same goes for casting. Putting a cast member in a wheelchair or having a stutter or a mental disability is a battle, more so if the actor suffers a physical or mental disability.”

Some writers and producers saw this as a particular barrier when working with commercial broadcasters “because ultimately, the business side of show business means you have to ‘sell’ an actor based on both their talent and how the

audience will respond to them". It was felt this was a kind of unconscious racism or discrimination, which made it "difficult to tackle the issue head on".

However, other practitioners were quick to praise the support they had received from broadcasters they had worked with in relation to diverse characters and stories: "No challenges from networks," said one producer. "We've done projects that have focused hard to represent mental illness, LGBTIQI storylines and have been celebrated for it and encouraged in it."

### CHANNELLING THE AUDIENCE

The drama that ends up on Australian TV screens is strongly influenced by what the creatives and decision-makers believe will appeal to an audience, and how that audience is defined. The question of whether content is considered to be 'for' diverse groups can have an impact throughout the development process.

While OzTAM ratings provide gender, age and geographic location breakdowns, information about other forms of diversity such as cultural background amongst television audiences is not available. Assumptions about cultural background, disability status, sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to television audiences may be influencing conversations about what audiences will relate to, or 'tolerate', on-screen.

As outlined in section 1.2, the Australian population has a high level of diversity. And Australians from all walks of life experience diversity in their families, workplaces and communities. Recent social research points to a broad familiarity and level of comfort with multiculturalism among Australians, and a view that they wanted to "do more to learn about the customs and heritage of ethnic and cultural groups in Australia".<sup>19</sup>

Almost all (93 per cent) of the writers, producers and directors who responded to the survey consider their audience to be diverse. The majority (78 per cent) also felt that audience considerations influence the types of characters and/or casting decisions in their Australian TV drama work. Almost a third (29 per cent) regard them to be a primary influence.

There was also agreement (80 per cent) that audience attitudes and expectations



### *Better Man* (SBS) is based on the true story of Van Nguyen.

towards diversity on Australian screens have changed since 2011, with more than a third, including 45 per cent of producers, feeling they have changed significantly.

The majority (70 per cent) also felt that marketing considerations impact on the level of character diversity and/or casting decisions in their Australian TV drama work. Almost half (45 per cent) regard them to be a primary consideration.

Given the low levels of diversity reflected on screen, these findings suggest there may be perceptions that the audience and the market have a low tolerance for diversity, which may be skewing content away from greater diversity. By contrast, the people in advertising we spoke to for this study referenced lost market opportunities in an industry that was not culturally relevant to audiences.

*Thang Ngo, Managing Director at IDENTITY Communications, a multicultural marketing business that is part of IPG Mediabrands:* "Commercial opportunities are being lost. Diverse audiences are increasingly being taken seriously as consumers. It's carving out another mainstream."

Of course audiences' viewing decisions are not necessarily driven solely by

their culture or community. Audiences of culturally diverse backgrounds, for example, may be as likely to expect majority white casts in their television fare as any other group. Viewers from non-majority backgrounds, be they Vietnamese, queer, living with disability or any other form of difference, are likely to be well accustomed to identifying with a mainstream protagonist or 'hero' in television drama. The question is whether we can imagine mainstream audiences to have the same levels of agility and adaptiveness to also identify with characters that are different from themselves.

Many of the commercial network decision-makers we spoke to described the commercial imperative to appeal to a 'broad audience'. It was difficult to articulate exactly what gives a program broad audience appeal, but such a concern reinforces the perceived need to cast well-known actors to headline shows, and to avoid taking risks with unconventional stories or characters.

The charters of the public broadcasters, ABC and SBS, contain obligations to reflect diversity and both were established to provide content for 'all Australians'. However, even for them, there is a sense that the difficulty in engaging audiences with challenging content can weigh heavily.

*Rick Kalowski, ABC:* "People talk about a 30 per cent discount in ratings for shows featuring diversity."

*Sally Riley, ABC:* "A perception of different or more challenging content can be: 'our audience isn't going to watch that/ it's a bit heavy.' The ABC has a huge untapped audience – very important for the national broadcaster. Shows like *Black Comedy* have done really well in Western Sydney."

The ABC is developing a greater awareness of diversity as a strategic priority and SBS is aiming to appeal both to communities represented – for example, by subtitling local content such as *Once Upon a Time in Cabramatta* into key languages and simulcasting *First Contact* on NITV along with SBSOne – and to a broader audience.

## THE 'DIVERSITY DIVIDEND'

As noted above, there's a perception amongst some network executives that audiences are less willing to engage with content that they perceive to be 'worthy' – content you watch because it's good for you rather than for entertainment – colloquially known as 'broccoli TV'.

Some of the content built around stories of diversity might be seen this way. However, it's also acknowledged that the opposite is also true, and there's a growing case for recognising the 'diversity dividend'.

- *Redfern Now* (ABC) reached much higher audience levels than anticipated for a program made by, for and about Indigenous Australians. Series 1 averaged over 1.1 million viewers nationally<sup>20</sup>, showing an embracing of authentic Indigenous stories by mainstream audiences.
- *Black Comedy* (ABC) performed exceptionally well on social media and YouTube. The Indigenous sketch comedy reached over 6 million people on Facebook, capturing some often unreachable audiences for the ABC – such as teenage boys and people in Sydney's western suburbs.
- *Please Like Me* (ABC) centred on the story of a young gay man coming out and also featured strong themes around mental illness. Before the first season went to air in Australia, it was picked up by US digital cable channel Pivot, which launched a social media website for viewers to share their personal experiences of issues raised in the program, and went on to co-commission the second series with the ABC. Locally, the program generated a high level of online engagement and compatibility with evolving viewing patterns.
- Political thriller *The Code* (ABC), which had a central character with autism spectrum disorder, as well as main characters of diverse cultural backgrounds, averaged over 1.1 million viewers nationally.<sup>21</sup> It also engaged with non-traditional viewing behaviours, generating high levels of catch-up viewing.



Series 1 of *Redfern Now* (ABC) averaged over 1.1 million viewers nationally.

- *The Code* is also amongst the highest-selling Australian dramas internationally in recent years, with sales to the Sundance international channels, ARTE, the BBC, Danmarks Radio and RUV Iceland.
- Other internationally high-selling dramas also have diversity at their centre. *The Principal* (SBS), set in a multicultural boys' school and featuring strong cultural diversity as well as a gay main character, made strong sales to Sundance international channels and Netflix, which will distribute to the rest of the world in 14 languages. And *The Slap* (ABC), based on the book by Christos Tsiolkas, which had significant 'incidental' cultural diversity amongst its characters, sold to the BBC, and following that ARTE in France and Germany and virtually every territory worldwide, including to DirecTV in the US.
- And the Australian web series *Starting from ... Now*, made in response to the lack of authentic drama featuring lesbian characters on TV, has had over 20 million views worldwide. It has been praised by fans for its portrayal of characters who just happen to be lesbian, dealing with issues of everyday life.

Australian TV ratings also show that far from turning off, audiences are embracing programs that incorporate diversity.

Many of the top-rating Australian dramas on free-to-air television in 2015 included diversity in characters, actors and/or storylines. *Peter Allen: Not the Boy Next Door* (Seven), which profiled one of Australia's biggest musical stars, who also happened to be gay, was the no. 2 program, with 2.273 million viewers; *Love Child* (Nine), at no. 6 with 1.545 million viewers, featured an Indigenous main character; *Home and Away* (Seven), no. 9 with 1.351 million viewers, incorporated storylines around mental health and physical disability; and *House Husbands* (Nine), no. 10, with 1.294 million viewers, featured main actors of Lebanese background and gay characters.<sup>22</sup>

While diversity may not have been at the centre of all these programs, it was certainly visibly present, and clearly did not compromise their performance.

As mentioned on page 22, the advertising industry is seeing the commercial opportunities, with diverse audiences increasingly recognised as a significant proportion of consumers. With a proliferation of new platforms and ways to watch, and strong engagement with more diverse content on these platforms, the traditional Australian TV drama players are becoming increasingly aware of the value of diversity to their bottom line.

### WHO'S PITCHING DIVERSITY?

While some writers and producers spoke of broadcaster resistance to stories containing diversity, some of the network drama heads claimed that projects that reflect diversity aren't coming through their doors in the first place, and suggested this was a result of few people of diverse backgrounds coming into the industry.

However, there may also be an issue of self-censorship, with writers not including diversity in a script because they anticipate it being rejected. Those working closely with under-represented communities also described a common perception that commercial TV sector was "not for them" and they saw no place for themselves in it. Such sentiments may be sustaining a self-limiting division between worlds.

One of the key problems maintaining this division may be the relative homogeneity of the media industries (see 'Diversity behind the scenes' page 18).

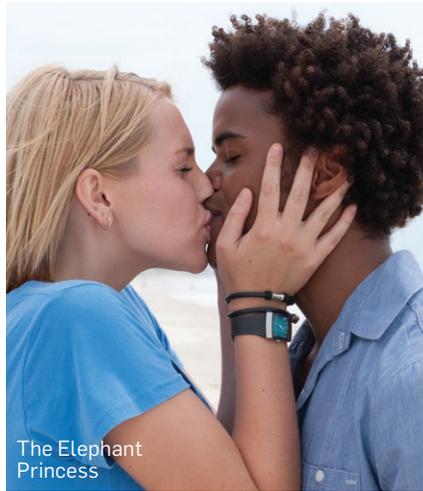
*Neil Peplow, AFTRS:* "CALD practitioners are already trying to prove themselves against a bias – they have to push harder."

*Sally Riley, ABC:* "We need diverse people on decision-making panels – working as producers, and at funding bodies and broadcasters. The sense of a 'great story' is often 'I can relate' and if decision-makers can't see themselves they aren't going to choose it."

### EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES ONLINE

The low barrier to entry of online production, and its immediate relationship to audiences, contrast with many of the constraints affecting TV drama. Many online productions are able to reach very high audience numbers through aggregated international niche or special-interest groups. Some of Australia's most successful YouTubers in the comedy space include names like Natalie Tran, Ronny Chieng, the Philippou brothers, and Jewish South-African Troye Sivan.

Many people we spoke to suggested that online was much more diverse in terms of practitioners, content and the kinds of audiences they can build around content that may not be perceived as 'broad' enough for network television, at least initially. The online series *Starting*



*from... Now*, for example, has had over 25 million views worldwide – many in the US – and was able to cross over from YouTube to a commission for SBS2. Some of our consultees, particularly those working with CALD creatives, have noted that younger practitioners of diverse background don't see network television as being 'for them' and they prefer the level of creative control they have online.

The opportunity to generate engagement with more diverse content was seen as particularly pronounced among young people, who are turning away from TV content towards online.

*Travis Cardona, SBS/ NITV:* "There is a huge appetite for content from young people from minority groups."

*Sally Riley, ABC:* "They are finding stuff online – especially the younger audience,

the 25-39 year olds. We are missing them."

Online drama can also be more experimental and take more risks, including appealing to more niche audience groups.

*Rick Kalowski, ABC:* "Niche is 'catnip for diversity'. Niche audiences can be devoted audiences. *Please Like Me*, for example, received international acclaim, and performed well on iView, especially with younger audiences. It had great social media engagement."

There are downsides to this fragmentation, however. If people feel Australian television is not catering for them, and switch over to online viewing or multilingual satellite channels to find the content they want to watch, this is not just a loss of audience – and ad revenue – for the broadcasters. It also means we lose the important integrating effect of free-to-air broadcasting, with its opportunities for shared conversations and insights into unfamiliar communities and experiences.

*Pino Migliorino, Cultural Perspectives, multicultural marketing and communications consultant:* "We are now in an era of choice media. Previously we had limited choice. NESB homes are watching satellite TV. They have moved from cultural consumers to cultural maintainers and it is shifting from an issue of preference to an issue of identity. Unless we start reflecting our diversity, we will not create an inclusive society."

### CHALLENGES FOR CONTENT COMMISSIONERS

- TV drama is expensive to make and audience appetites have led to a reduced volume of higher-cost, shorter-run programs, so there are limited opportunities to take risks with writers and actors who have not yet proven their bankability.
- International investors and the need for broad audience appeal tend to prioritise established, well-known actors.
- There is a commercial imperative to focus on audience size, and a perception that Australian 'niche' audiences are not large enough in themselves to warrant programs produced 'for' them.
- There's a perception that audiences and the market have a low tolerance for diversity, especially when they perceive it to be 'worthy'.
- On the other hand, audiences that don't find content that's relevant to them may move away from broadcast television to online or multichannel options.
- Real or perceived broadcaster resistance to diversity may be preventing diverse content coming through the door in the first place.

## 3.2 Writing for diversity

Across the industry, there is consensus that a more representative version of Australia will come through both stories that draw on diverse cultures and experiences to create compelling drama, and those that 'normalise' diversity with the incidental use of diverse characters in everyday roles.

While there are differing views about how these stories should be created, all parties agree – from major networks to community arts organisations – that a 'tick a box' approach to writing-in diversity for the sake of it is not the way to create meaningful or engaging content. Everyone agrees with the bottom line that it has to be 'great drama'.

Views on how great drama should be created tend to differ depending on where you sit in the industry. Drama can be created about particular communities – and there seems to be a new appetite for this as a source of new stories – but the extent to which people believe they should also be created by or for those communities appears to differ across the sector.

Stories focusing on diverse communities can provide insights and enhance understanding. *Redfern Now* (ABC) is one example, set in Indigenous communities, made by Indigenous filmmakers, with Indigenous actors playing Indigenous characters; or *Please Like Me* (ABC), in which writer and star Josh Thomas presents the somewhat autobiographical experiences of a young man coming out as gay while negotiating his mother's mental illness.

A sense of diversity may also come through more subtly when actors who are identifiably from a non-Anglo-Celtic background are cast in roles that have no relationship to their own cultural heritage, such as the character of Franky Doyle in *Wentworth* (Foxtel) played by actor Nicole da Silva, who has Portuguese heritage.<sup>23</sup> In cases such as this, the audience may or may not be conscious of the actor's cultural background when they engage with that character.

A similar picture of diversity as a 'normal'



*Wentworth* (Foxtel) features several actors of diverse cultural backgrounds.

part of society can also be communicated where a character from a minority cultural background is written into a story that does not revolve around cultural diversity. The character of Sophie Wong in *Winners & Losers* (Seven), for example, has a Chinese background, which, although it helps to inform the characterisation, is entirely incidental to her narrative journey and the story arc of the program. Interestingly, the character is played by Melanie Vallejo who has Filipino, Spanish and Ukrainian heritage.<sup>24</sup>

This study focuses on main characters – those that appear in most episodes – as they are the dominant characters that drive audience engagement. But it should be noted that there is also a role for normalising diversity through the choice of guest and background characters.

**To facilitate writing for diversity, ideally there would be:**

- a range of stories that provide insights into diverse communities and life experiences, as well as those that 'normalise' diversity by including it more incidentally
- authenticity as the basis for all characters and stories
- opportunities for writers with personal experience of the cultures and issues portrayed

- effective collaboration through partnerships and consultation with communities
- a greater level of comfort and confidence around incorporating diversity into scripts.

### TOWARDS AUTHENTICITY

The perspectives of people who work regularly with diverse communities, at organisations such as Accessible Arts, ICE, Curiousworks and NITV, tend to emphasise the importance of authenticity. They see the genuine involvement of creatives who have personal experience of the cultures and issues portrayed – who get the specifics of the 'whole story' – as vital to the credibility and relevance of the work.

*Shakthi Shakthidharan, Curiousworks:* "By a community is the best business model for world-class content – it's how the market responds. Stories must be authentic to communities. Scripts need specificism: a sense that 'the people who are writing this, get all of this'."

*Sofya Gollan, Accessible Arts NSW, now development and production executive at Screen NSW:* "Most stories are told by people with little or no experience of disability. Those stories are then hugely influenced by the prism of that person's perception. How do we enable people with disabilities to make stories?"

Among respondents to our survey of practitioners with disability, some had no problem with 'anyone' telling stories about characters with disability, provided the characterisation was treated with respect and authenticity. This at least would allow mainstream audiences to gain some insight into the lived experience of disability.

However, the majority were not in favour. There was an attitude of 'nothing about us, without us', with many tired of others writing about them and a desire and drive to get their own voices out there.

*Kath Duncan:* "We need opportunities. Our stories and inputs are fantastic. We want to be productive in the industry and we don't get any chance to show what we can do."

One outcome of a greater level of experience and personal comfort with diversity may be a more naturalised sense of where it can sit in stories – as a reflection of everyday diversity – rather than reverting to stereotypes. The background of a character may be incidental to the main narrative and characters' journeys, or it may provide a rich source of additional stories.

*Travis Cardona, NITV:* "Real diversity is people from different backgrounds doing everyday things and playing leads."

*Shakthi Shakthidharan, Curiousworks:* "The problem with current approaches to diversity on screen is that they feature the 'same kinds of stories' with people with different coloured skin in them. We need to aspire to the most interesting stories told as authentically as possible with the best talent from those communities. I have no doubt we will find 'world class' talent."

This kind of outcome is arguably what is emerging after many years of focus on resourcing the development of Indigenous storytelling voices (see 'Long time coming' page 12).

### GETTING DIVERSITY INTO THE SCRIPT

Some writers who responded to the survey agreed that in order to be authentic, stories should come from a close association with the lived experiences of characters. Others asserted that

professional writers should be entrusted to create characters for any background.

Some reported a lack of support in the writer's room when diverse characters and stories were pitched. There is a fear of writing what you do not understand and looking novice. When opportunities to tie diversity to the storyline are limited, writers may try to encourage diversity through particular character names; however, this was reportedly sometimes erased through the casting process.

One writer felt that "script producers tend to automatically storyline for white Anglo-Saxon characters" and noted that on productions where they are essentially guns for hire, they are required to write what they are told to.

*Alix Lee, writer:* "'Leave it to casting' is a request I've heard a lot in the development room (from producers and battle-weary writers)... Basically we create a white, Anglo world and then cast an occasional non-white face to operate within that world. I'm talking network TV here but also selling to international markets. The advice is clear from producers: the mains have to be white."

TV drama producers and directors generally agreed that diverse casting is easiest when it is tied to the story. However, producers commented that there often isn't enough diverse talent with experience from which to cast, an attitude

from the production of 'leave it to casting' or general apprehension about rocking the boat with the network were also cited as reasons writers feel they are not always encouraged to include characters from diverse backgrounds in their scripts. This concern was also raised by others; see 'The talent pool' page 29.

Writers were also conscious that including diversity late in the process can feel tokenistic. Some commented that the story itself often dictates how much diversity can be organically included, with obvious constraints on productions such as those based on real people or events, with period settings, or when new characters need to be biologically related to existing characters.

Several writers had received pushback on including LGBTQI characters in their scripts: "I have also heard on a couple of occasions that LGBTI characters will be off-putting to a mainstream audience, although, gratifyingly, I've been hearing this less and less." Others noted the characters they pose in relationship-based dramas "are limited to what characters they can hook up with". Another felt that "when it comes to LGBTI representation, there tends to be much more willingness to represent the 'G' and (to a lesser extent) the 'L' than any other letter, but there is still a lot of fear around representing characters with non-binary gender identities or more fluid sexualities."



*Danger 5* (SBS) is a comedy set in the 60s about a group of spies from different countries on a mission to kill Hitler.

However, writers also acknowledged that commercial networks were becoming more open to stories focusing on diverse characters, even though restrictions may still be placed on exactly how diverse the characters could be.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION

Ideally, productions would bring in script consultants or advisors to project development and writers' rooms when developing characters and storylines from specific backgrounds.

Writers, producers and directors who had worked on Australian TV drama projects since 2011 featuring diverse characters in the scripts were asked whether they'd had the opportunity to undertake any research or consult with members of that community as part of this process.

Among the TV drama writers who responded, 62 per cent had undertaken research and around half (52 per cent) had consulted with members of the community. A third of all TV drama producers or directors had also undertaken research and consultation.

*Kristen Dunphy, writer:* "I always undertake research for these characters unless I have direct personal experience already. I've only once been paid to do it. But mostly it's at my expense. I find many writers don't bother because the expectation isn't there and I believe it should be. My approach doesn't differ when the character is in a less major role."

*Niki Aken, writer:* "I'll contact friends with relevant lived experience and reach out to online communities. While this effort always pays dividends it's not included in the budget. Yet on many shows I've worked with paid consultants with other expertise – lawyers, cops, scientists, etc. The problem with assuming writers will do this research into diverse communities off their own bat is that our writing schedules so rarely allow for it. So when the choice is between a) a tokenistic representation due to time constraints, and b) excluding a cultural group so as to not offend 'by getting it wrong' – the evidence of the more favoured path is writ large on our screens."



Outland

Some in the industry describe these relationships as highly constructive and vital to bridging current divides between professional experience and deep cultural knowledge.

*Bevan Lee, writer:* "In creating the gay characters in *A Place to Call Home*, I researched the lives of gay men and women in the 50s and also spoke to some senior members of the Gay community."

*Alastair McKinnon, ABC:* "ABC has a consultation process but it's not formal, more relaxed. But for anything culturally or religiously specific they must consult. It's incumbent on the writers to do it as part of the research process."

However, there was also hesitation from some about the level of credence given to the advice of consultants and whether there is enough authority for the consultants in this model to have true influence on outcomes.

Community arts organisations ICE and Curiousworks both suggested that they were seeing new levels of interest from the industry in accessing new story ideas from diverse groups, but both were keen to see a role for the community beyond being the source of story ideas – in the form of a genuine collaboration.

*Shakthi Shakthidharan, Curiousworks:* "We get a lot of interest from production companies and networks – interest is

not the problem. They tend to be trying to find stories that they then put other people on to write and develop. I can't see the benefit to the community in that model. We're looking for ways to develop models of legitimately recognised creative input. This was 'too big an idea' 4-5 years ago but we are now being approached by producers who seem to have the right approach to collaboration. The conversation has progressed."

### CHALLENGES FOR CREATIVES – WRITERS, PRODUCERS, DIRECTORS

- Getting the balance right around who can write the stories
- Building realistic diversity into storylines where relevant, and keeping an open mind about character backgrounds to encourage diverse casting
- Having confidence that scripted diversity will not fall away as projects move to casting and production
- Ensuring proper collaboration and consultation to avoid tokenism and stereotyping
- Recognising network concerns about risk without self-censoring; meeting them head on to pitch and create audience-engaging drama that naturally reflects Australian diversity.

### 3.3 Casting and performance

The diversity of on-screen talent that brings stories to life on television depends on a range of factors, including:

- the talent pool of actors, their skills and 'star power' – and the opportunities that any individual actor has to develop these attributes
- decisions about who can play what, including assumptions about what audiences will relate to; and implications for the production as a whole.

*Julie McGauran, Seven:* "Some roles may not call for a specific ethnic or cultural background, but casting an actor from a diverse background can allow for the development of richer storylines exploring that aspect of the character."

**To facilitate casting for diversity, ideally there would be:**

- enough diverse talent to stimulate the creation of characters, including lead cast – with minority actors as 'bankable' as any other actor, once established
- a talent pool deep and mature enough (and a production environment open enough) to enable characters with a scripted background to be played mostly by actors of the same background
- actors from diverse backgrounds able to – and encouraged to – freely audition for and be cast in any role where ethnicity or minority status is not specified
- a production environment that accommodates research, consultation and support for diversity.

#### BARRIERS TO DIVERSE CASTING

While many producers and directors felt that ensuring on-screen diversity was an essential part of their job, others felt there was still some resistance to putting 'brown' faces on TV.

One director noted: "The part of a Chinese character on a production for a commercial network was reduced from a minor ongoing character to a non-speaking extra. This had nothing to do with the actor's prowess or lack of, it was done simply because the character and actor was Chinese and considered to lack appeal because of that."

The shortage of opportunities for actors with a disability was also noted. Decision

makers were not willing to take a risk or cast creatively.

One writer noted an intention to include a deaf character in the following season had they been picked up, and as long as a deaf actor could be found for the role. But he/she felt that the casting was likely to be overturned by the network or producer.

There can be a chicken and egg cycle, as broadcasters and producers mitigate risk by preferring to cast actors with experience and a proven track record, the majority of whom do not have disability and come from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. Meanwhile the small number of actors from diverse backgrounds entering the industry cannot improve their craft and gain the experience needed to take on leading roles unless they are given opportunities to work, the lack of which may result in them either leaving the industry or moving overseas, which in turn contributes to the small pool of diverse talent within Australia.

*Sarah Walker, writer:* "Producers are now very motivated toward diverse casting but they also want actors who have an existing profile and name – Miranda Tapsell, Leah Purcell, Deborah Mailman etc, or Don Hany,

or Peta Sargeant. They don't want to risk an unknown diverse actor in a main role... Casting unknowns in a lead or those with less experience is a huge risk to a show."

For actors with a disability, there are also issues around accessibility and support. Many respondents to our survey acknowledged the limitations their disability can place on their physical capabilities when working. Filming locations may not be wheelchair accessible, for example, or an Auslan interpreter may be required.

In addition, societal pressure to transcend the disability and "approach work as if it were no impediment at all" has for some meant concealing workplace difficulties and caused confusion about how best to contribute. Many felt that a supportive working environment could generally counter most obstacles.

*Jess Kapuscinski-Evans, performance artist and singer:* "If a production team has a line in the budget for access, then measures can be taken even within funding constraints, and can be applied from the smaller independent arts makers, right through to the Melbourne Theatre Company and Hollywood."



*Peter Allen: Not the Boy Next Door (Seven) profiles one of Australia's biggest stars, who also happened to be gay.*

**THE TALENT POOL**

Many network drama heads expressed the desire to cast more diverse actors in roles but claimed that the talent pool of experienced actors in Australia was relatively shallow.

*Jo Rooney, Nine:* "If an actor has the screen presence and the craft skills, their background doesn't matter. It's about skills, and the pool is limited. There needs to be a balanced 'palette' and chemistry within the palette for each show."

Writers and producers also commented on a perceived small pool of experienced talent from diverse backgrounds in Australia from which to cast.

*Male producer/writer 40-49:* "Casting actors from certain multicultural backgrounds that have the skills as an actor to carry off roles [is a challenge]. This is after having battled through the writing to keep that detail in the script."

*Female producer 50-59:* "The pool of available Asian actors is quite small in Australia, although this is increasing every year."

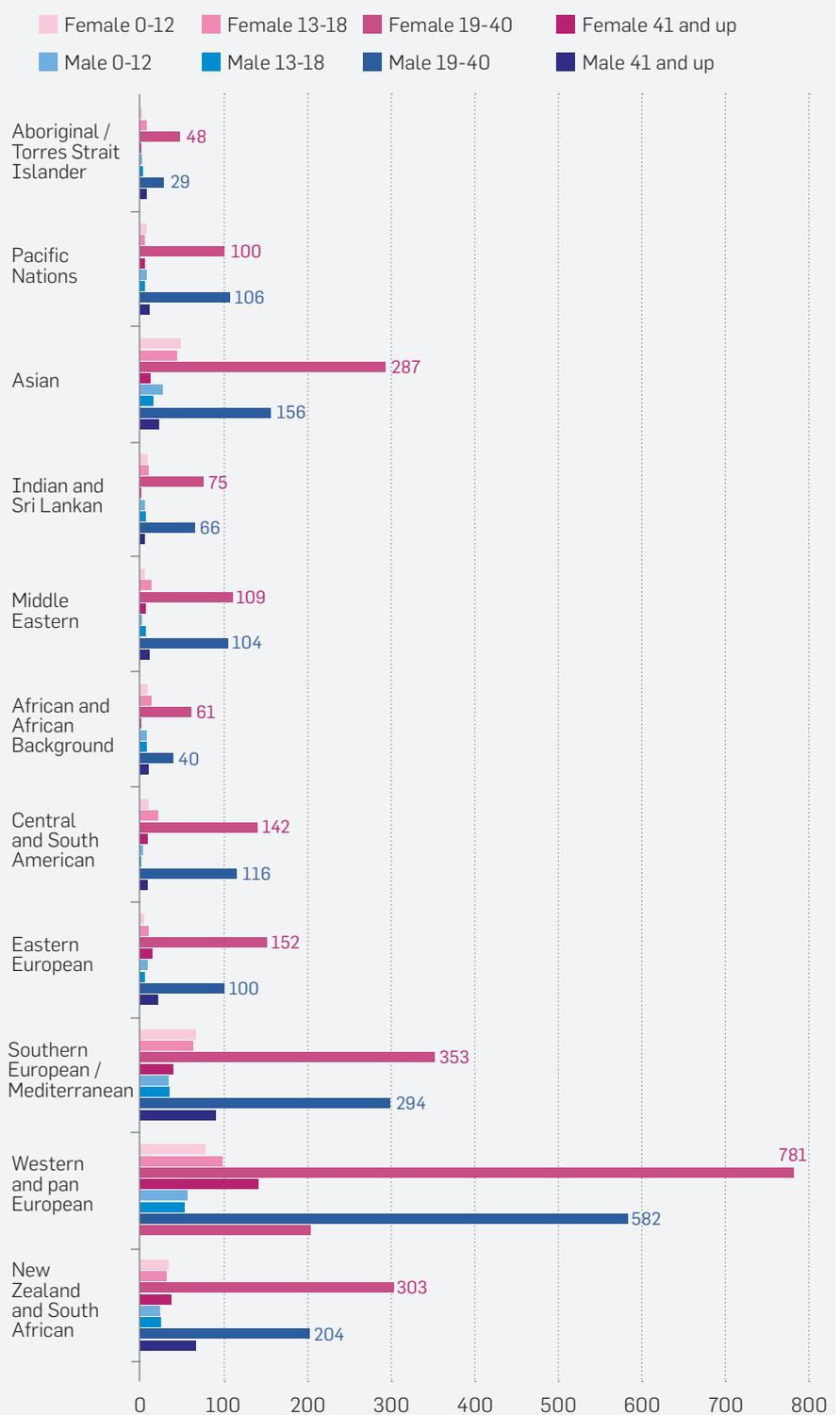
This includes Indigenous Australian actors, who one producer felt were "always working and hard to book!" – a possible consequence of the focus on developing Indigenous production in Australia over many years (see 'Long time coming', page 12).

**Reality check: How many actors are available to play culturally diverse characters?**

While many actors' agents acknowledged that the majority of their client base is Anglo-Celtic, they all represent actors from European and non-European backgrounds and all but one had Indigenous clients. The majority (82 per cent) could also identify LGBTQI clients on their books, and two represented actors with a disability.

*Nick Buckland, AAA Talent, SA:* "We believe that actors are employed to represent people of the real world as well as fantasy. For that reason, as many diversities as exist in the world need to be present on our books, even though the call for them may be sporadic. The ability to act precludes no-one by virtue of their

**Figure 17. Number of actors indicating their availability for casting as characters from various cultural backgrounds (not including Caucasian) by age and sex**



Source: Screen Australia analysis of data provided by Showcast.  
 Notes: Performers who nominated multiple ethnicities are counted in each nominated cultural group. Performers whose age range spanned multiple groups were placed into the age group containing the majority of their age range. 25 performers did not indicate a gender, and 15 of these did not select an age range or ethnicity. They are excluded from this analysis.

ethnicity or physical ability. The ability to act is only determined by an appropriate blend of talent and skill. The selection of talent for a role is determined by that ability, availability and suitability for the role."

If a producer wants an actor with Middle-Eastern background, for example, what are their options? We analysed the 13,000 performers listed on *Showcast*, an industry database that allows those listed to nominate 'ethnicities' they can play. After classifying these 'ethnicities' into 11 cultural categories, we found the following results.

Some performers made a conscious decision not to indicate ethnicity – just under 20 per cent of those currently listed in *Showcast* did not select any ethnicities in their entry. Around a quarter of the actors who did select ethnicities nominated more than one. And 58 per cent of the actors who nominated ethnicities selected only 'Caucasian' – a term that has different meanings in different contexts, and in the casting world is a generalised term for people of Anglo-Celtic or European origin. Three quarters of all actors who nominated ethnicities included 'Caucasian' as one of them (we have omitted 'Caucasian' from the figure so that the patterns among less commonly listed ethnicities are more obvious).

The vast majority of actors who nominated ethnicities were in the 19-40 age range and generally, women outnumbered men. The analysis shows, for example, that 104 men and 109 women have indicated they can play Middle Eastern characters aged 19-40; 29 men and 48 women can play Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander characters in this age group, 156 men and 287 women can play Asian characters, and 294 men and 353 women can play Southern European / Mediterranean characters. Several cultural groups contain fewer than a dozen casting options in younger and older age groups.

It must be noted that this analysis does not assume suitability for a particular role on the basis of a performer's nomination to play that cultural background, as there are many factors involved in selecting the right actor for any role.



*Ready For This* (ABC) follows the lives of six Indigenous teens as they follow their dreams.

**Change is afoot**

All the decision-makers and drama commissioners we spoke to expressed interest in casting greater diversity. In the words of ICE Screen Cultures producer Barry Gamba, "There are lots of indications of goodwill. We now need to translate goodwill into opportunities."

In terms of developing the next generation of actors, representatives of major acting school NIDA claimed there had been a 'discernible difference' in the level of

diversity in the acting cohort since 2011. NIDA is now encouraged to look for diversity in its intake, and is consciously using 'positive discrimination' in selection – for example by providing more time and support to someone of an under-represented background who displays less confidence in auditions.

*Di Drew* (NIDA, Screen): "We ought to be reflecting the people turning on the TV out there. We need to normalise difference... We are supporting young actors from diverse backgrounds with skills and a sense of their own political identity – and encourage them to look for roles beyond the stereotypes – to play doctors, judges etc."

There are also opportunities for actors to demonstrate talent and build profile in other media, particularly online.

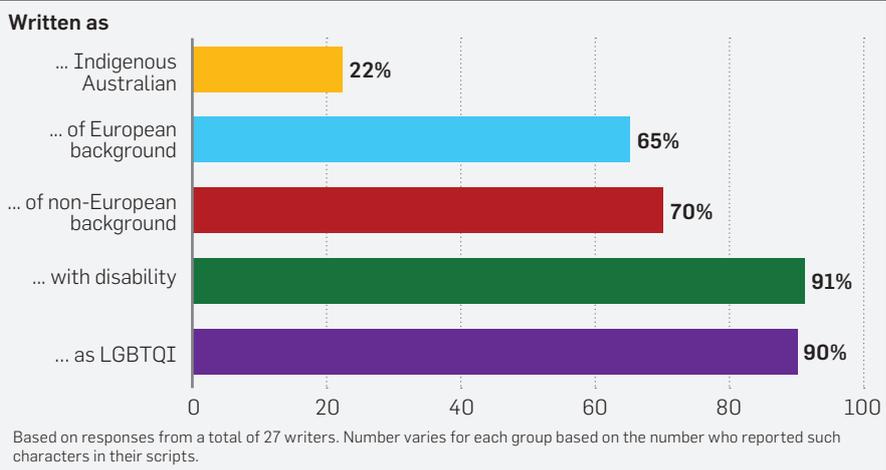
**WHO PLAYS WHAT?**

**Towards authenticity – casting actors based on their background**

Where a script specifies a character with a particular cultural background or disability, seeking an actor with the same attributes is the logical approach to casting the role.

However, the small pool of talent from specific backgrounds means roles are sometimes cast from outside the particular group. This both frustrates actors from those backgrounds looking for work and opens up questions around authenticity.

**Figure 18. Proportion of writers who reported writing a character that was ultimately cast with an actor of a different background from the one they'd written, in one or more TV dramas since 2011.**



One actor commented that this felt like a double standard when compared with Indigenous casting. We are rarely tolerant of non-Indigenous actors being cast in Indigenous roles but we are not as concerned about substituting one Asian ethnicity for another, which may be offensive to many Asian Australians. Another actor reported learning multiple Asian languages to increase employment options.

Similarly, according to respondents to our survey of practitioners with disability, working with people who have a disability is perceived as risky, which not only prevents them from being put forward for characters with disability but also from being considered for general roles.

One hearing-impaired practitioner noted that filmmakers may occasionally seek advice on the use of Auslan in their projects, but generally prefer to use hearing actors for Deaf characters instead of Deaf actors.

*Mija Gwyn:* "Casting agencies and producers often cite a lack of suitable Deaf talent as the reason for their refusal to work with Deaf actors. However, they rarely attempt to network or consult with the Deaf community in order to find suitable talent. The intent of their inclusion of a Deaf character is usually due to the novelty value of Auslan and/or the Deaf community rather than genuine inclusion or an attempt to portray diversity; they instead portray one dimensional stereotypes that do further damage to Deaf people's ability to find work in the field."

An agent representing a client with a disability commented that on the rare occasion an appropriate disabled role comes up the client is overlooked, even when pitched. Auditioning actors were left unsure whether the subsequent rejection was based on their disability or performance.

To gauge the scale of this issue, TV drama creatives were asked whether characters of a background specified in the script had gone on to be cast with an actor from a different background in one or more of the TV drama projects they had worked on. Unsurprisingly, the results were low for Indigenous characters (though not non-existent), highlighting the importance



Kung fu comedy *Maximum Choppage* (ABC) is set in the multicultural Sydney suburb of Cabramatta.

both the industry and audience place on authentic Indigenous casting.

Similarly, the results were predictably high for both LGBTQI characters and characters with a disability, underscoring the low proportion of characters cast from within those communities.

Examples of actors playing characters with backgrounds different from their own are not uncommon. Actress Andrea Demetriades, who has Greek/Cypriot heritage, was first cast as a Palestinian Muslim lawyer in *Crownies/Janet King* (ABC) then as a Lebanese teacher in *The Principal* (SBS); Peta Sergeant, of Malaysian and Irish descent, was cast as the Filipino-born Rose Porteous in *House of Hancock* (Nine); and Vietnamese characters were played by Filipino actors in *Maximum Choppage* (ABC). The character of Carlos in the series *Wonderland* (Ten) was changed from Argentinean to Brazilian when Brazilian-born actor Glen McMillan was cast in the role. Most creatives in our survey acknowledged at least one instance of ethnicity substitution between character and actor for both European and non-European characters in their work.

**'Blind' casting – opportunities for diverse actors to play any role**

There is also a feeling that actors from minority backgrounds should be able to play any character where the background is not specified in the story.

Actors' agents cited a general shortage of roles open to any ethnicity as the main barrier to getting clients from diverse backgrounds cast in Australian TV drama, particularly leading roles: "The lead roles are still almost always white – diverse actors tend to be given the bit parts and supporting roles – the friend of the lead." One agent noted the practice of representing ethnicity by casting Anglo-Celtic actors with darker hair still occurred but was becoming less common.

Several agents, however, had experienced no discrimination at all, and children's casting was already considered to be quite diverse. Others felt the situation was improving and it was becoming more common for ethnic diversity to be encouraged in briefs.

Many producers and directors were keenly aware that creating opportunities for 'colour-blind' casting was an essential part of their job and something they were actively working hard at.

*Male director 60+:* "I have, on many occasions been encouraged/directed/commanded by producers or executive producers to cast a role from a non-Caucasian pool even though that role had not been written for a non-Caucasian. The same is true for gender. But less so for LGBTQI and disabled (i.e. I have never been directed to blind cast from these areas)."

There was some acknowledgement that diverse casting was much easier to achieve "if it is written into the script and the story world. I think we are still not thinking about diverse casting unless it is specified in the script". One producer/director commented that "in my experience we naturally assume all characters are straight and white unless otherwise stated in the script. It's important that we change this initial assumption about characters and provide greater diversity for the audiences that we purport to represent".

However, as noted in section 3.2, some writers commented they did not always have the opportunity to influence the casting process and that a 'leave it to casting' attitude from the production team was impacting on their ability to bring diversity through in the story.

Practitioners with disability felt it was far more likely that a filmmaker would cast actors with disability if they had a disability themselves. "Having knowledge of the capabilities of people of disability gives rise to more authentic and adventurous storytelling and ensures creatives are not limited to just telling stories focused on disability." It was felt that unless the production was disability-led, there was little chance of actors with a disability being cast as characters with a disability.

All casting directors who participated in the survey indicated that they had, at different stages, sought out Indigenous, European and non-European actors for roles where diversity was not specified as a requirement in the script. However, only 63 per cent indicated that they had specifically approached LGBTQI actors for general roles, and only one had been asked to seek out an actor with a disability.

One noted that "for general roles I'm often encouraged by directors and producers to actively seek cultural diversity and there would be an expectation that I would screen-test actors from a wide range of backgrounds". Another felt that while producers and directors "might look...they often won't pick", when up against a 'non-minority' actor.

Actors' agents generally agreed that European and non-European actors had occasionally been sought for general

roles. About two thirds (64 per cent) could say the same about Indigenous actors. Only 27 per cent of agents reported that actors identifying as LGBTQI had been sought out for general roles; however, this may be because sexual orientation is not as visibly tied to the casting process as ethnicity or simply be a result of actors not disclosing their status. Unsurprisingly, the proportion of agents who had been asked to put forward clients with a disability for general roles was also low (27 per cent).

*Female agent:* "They may request diverse actors once in a blue moon but as a rule – they don't."

*Female agent:* "Children's drama is very diverse but network TV will only rarely colour-blind cast. The character usually has to be written as diverse before they will see anyone not white."

Most agents had also actively proposed actors from diverse backgrounds for general roles when the brief allowed. However, almost half the agents reported negative responses from producers or directors at the suggestion: "Ignored or 'no thanks'", "thanks but not right for the role", or they did not get any response at all – "just get ignored and the role gets cast elsewhere".

There was also some feeling that actors identifying as LGBTQI were being

overlooked for roles or considered not a right fit: "I find there is a stigma still attached to out gay actors; comments are often 'too gay'. And when a gay role comes along I find most of the time the actors who are auditioned and who win the role are in fact straight."

Among the actors, one commented: "the opportunity to audition for a non-ethnically specific character is so rare that this question almost doesn't even apply". Another felt that in cases where there is no mention of ethnicity in the script "it is generally presumed that the role is considered white... Only when a role is specified as ethnic, is an ethnic actor cast for the role." And another felt that characters of a non-white background are rarely cast in roles that have enough depth to be tied to the main story line.

However, one Indigenous respondent felt a sense of freedom in not being cast as an Indigenous character: "While working on a web series I was offered the opportunity to claim a heritage set in a future population...(this) was one of the first times my casting was not associated with my Indigenous background. It offered me a great deal of freedom in the preparation for my performance and was not politically restricted by the cultural protocol of any current ethnicity."



The Indigenous sketch comedy *Black Comedy* (ABC) reached over 6 million people on Facebook.

**The risk of tokenism and stereotyping**

Around half (55 per cent) of actors' agents reported that a client had raised concerns about a role in terms of stereotypes and/or token inclusion of diversity. This included concerns from Middle Eastern and Indigenous actors about stereotypes; from Indigenous actors about misappropriation of culture and a lack of cultural understanding; and from Asian actors about marginalisation.

*Trent Huen, actor:* "Once I was told by an AD, just say ice cream, apple, hotdog, whatever words you know – it doesn't matter. Sound was rolling, so I made sure I quickly learnt a more appropriate passage from an extra who happened to be Japanese."

On the other hand, agents feel that actors are also concerned they are missing out on consideration for 'negative' roles such as criminals due to concerns from the production about reinforcing stereotypes.

*Casting director:* "I find now that if you suggest casting an actor from a diverse background to play 'baddies', the producers will get scared and not choose these actors. It's almost reverse racism as they don't want to portray an actor from a Lebanese background playing the 'killer' or wife beater or someone who is 'bad'. They want them to play a role that's 'nice' so the show doesn't look bad."

**RESEARCHING ROLES**

More than a third (36 per cent) of actors indicated that they had undertaken research when playing a minority character, particularly one different from their own background, with close to a quarter (24 per cent) reporting consultation with members of the community.

While occasional support for research and consultation was provided by the production, more often than not actors would seek out additional research, with many saying it was their responsibility to do so.

An Anglo-Celtic actor explained their approach as involving "Skype chats and even meeting the actual person who lived through the experience. My approach in researching characters, especially those



of a background different to my own, would be as detailed as possible."

One actor of Asian descent commented that "some directors think I can, on the spot, speak a different Asian language just because my character does", while another stated that "coaching was very much focussed on sounding 'right'. No resources were put towards cultural understanding or respectful portrayal. Accent coaching was only offered when a role was considered significant enough and even then, only on request."

*Trent Huen, actor:* "I've been given a script in English and not told until the day of shoot that I need to speak my lines in a totally foreign language."

One heterosexual actor reported that when playing a gay character on stage, he would consult with friends in the LGBTQI community on how to portray the character.

Another actor who played a lesbian in a production commented that she was able to talk with couples and do her own research around sexuality before commencing the role.

A third of actors who had played a character with a disability also indicated that they had undertaken research when playing a diverse character; 17 per cent reported consulting with members of the community.

One survey respondent without a disability stressed the importance of extensive research when playing a character with a different experience: "I have played someone with a disability and did extensive research in the interests of 'getting it right'. To do otherwise would have shown little respect for the character or those with a similar condition in reality."

**CHALLENGES: CASTING AND PERFORMANCE**

- Attracting performers of diverse background to grow the talent pool, when there are few role models – you 'can't be what you can't see'
- Ensuring those in the industry have opportunities to demonstrate talent and maintain and improve their craft skills
- Respecting and supporting authenticity in casting characters of diverse background
- Overcoming assumptions of default casting as Anglo-Celtic and without disability
- Limited scope for research and consultation to ensure authentic performances.



## Part 4. International comparisons

### 4.1 Overseas experiences

#### Actors

Half (50 per cent) of all the actors who responded to the survey had worked internationally. Of these, the majority (77 per cent) felt their experience differed between Australian and overseas productions, particularly those actors from a non-European background.

When asked to comment further on their experiences, there was a consensus, even amongst actors from an Anglo-Celtic background, that larger markets like the US and UK are more open to and provide more opportunities for 'colour-blind' casting. Roles are not necessarily culturally defined and can be played by actors of any cultural background; therefore actors are more likely to be cast based on their ability than their appearance. An actor of Asian descent felt that "Australia is about 20 years behind the US in terms of being more open with 'colour-blind' casting".

Others felt that overseas markets provided greater opportunities to be cast in roles where their background was part of the story. One actor even felt overseas markets have a different understanding of culture and meaning through art than Australia does.

*Male of Anglo-Celtic descent:* "I've only auditioned internationally, but have had far fewer mentions of 'blonde', or Caucasian, in those auditions. I have noticed, though, that for US pilots they can tend to put 'white/black/Latino' next to role breakdowns."

*Takaya Honda, actor:* "I have an American agent and audition regularly for the US market and 90 per cent of the time the role being cast is asking to 'send any ethnicity' – something I have never seen on a brief for a drama production in Australia."

*Male of South American descent:* "In the US I have been cast in roles which are not at all culturally defined and could be played by an actor of any cultural background. No reference is made to the fact that I am 'ethnic' or 'Latino-looking'."



The 'Jack Irish' telemovies (ABC) feature the rugged and enigmatic 'fixer', Cam Delray, played by Indigenous actor Aaron Pedersen.

Actors, particularly those from European and non-European backgrounds, noted a level of discrimination in the Australian industry that often isn't as prevalent in overseas markets – both in terms of the number of roles written for culturally diverse actors and opportunities for colour-blind casting. In the US there is "less fear of difference, more focus on what actor has to offer" and less "discrimination in terms of dark or light coloured hair, skin or features".

An actor of non-European descent felt that other countries that have a predominantly Anglo-Celtic population such as New Zealand, Canada and Britain were more open to casting people of colour, "whereas Australia still finds it hard to accept, recognise and celebrate the diversity of cultures, ethnicities and sub-cultures". Another actor felt there remained an unconscious bias against on-screen diversity as a result of historical immigration policies. This sentiment was echoed by an actor of African descent who felt that "Australian TV doesn't seem to want to use those who look Afro-British or Afro-American". It was felt that "in Australia you are judged by the outside and less on skills".

Many actors were generally attracted to work in overseas markets as they offer opportunities for work they're not getting in Australia.

*Actor from an Indian background:* "It took me more than 10 years just to find representation in Australia. When I went to Los Angeles, I found a reputable agent, manager and my first paid job for a major network in Hollywood in the first three months. This was followed by two more roles in feature films shot in Los Angeles. I did more auditions in one year in Los Angeles than I have done in my entire life in Australia. I was born and raised in Australia."

*Female actor of non-European descent:* "I have been considered for far more lead roles in the US than in Australia."

One actor from an Asian background also felt there was a difference between working on Australian productions and foreign productions filmed in Australia: "I've worked on two American programs filmed in Australia, and both these roles were more significant and important characters than the roles I've played on Australian TV. When I'm cast in Australian TV it can seem like it's in smaller roles that don't 'matter' so much and can

therefore be cast diversely; whereas American programs have been more committed to casting ethnically diverse actors in leading roles.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, only a small proportion of Indigenous actors had worked overseas (30 per cent), though one actor commented that the emphasis on his Indigenous background in domestic productions had remained true so far for his overseas work.

Amongst actors identifying as LGBTQI, half (52 per cent) had worked internationally, with the majority (81 per cent) again noting different opportunities between Australian and overseas productions.

One actor with a disability who had worked internationally said that “when I was in London I was able to play more roles with my background and that my disability was not an issue. If anything it was a positive”.

### Actor’s agents

Almost two thirds (64 per cent) of agents had worked overseas or represented clients working internationally. When asked how they and their clients felt the Australian TV drama industry’s approach to diversity on screen compared to overseas markets, the majority thought that Australia was behind overseas markets when it comes to diverse casting but had recently made some progress.

They confirmed the opinion of the other groups surveyed that large overseas markets such as the US and UK are not only more open to diversity at the auditioning stage but are also more likely to put diverse faces on screen, as many markets have guidelines in place to ensure minorities are fairly represented. However, it was also acknowledged that the production levels coming from these markets allow for more niche characters and programming.

One agent noted concern from her ethnically diverse clients that they “will never be given the opportunity even though they have played leads in theatre and for no other reason that there are so few ethnically diverse leads in Australian TV drama. Even in the UK I feel there are better opportunities for work in TV drama if you are ethnic or diverse.”

Another agent commented on the perception of Australian actors within the US: “They notice we are all blonde and blue-eyed and 18 and beautiful. We do not look real. It’s like Australia is another planet with just pretty blue-eyed and blond-haired people.”

There was also acknowledgement that the grass is not always greener elsewhere as networks in most countries are still primarily “run by white males and scripts are written by white males and directed by white males”. Another agent had noticed more recent changes in attitudes to diverse casting both in Australia and the US: “The 2016 US pilot season reflected a major shift toward diverse casting with, for example, women of colour playing a much bigger role in auditioning and casting. Locally it seems to be progressing.”

### Casting directors

Amongst casting directors, only three had worked internationally. One was conscious of how white Australian commercial TV had seemed in the past and that the US market was “very clear about seeking diversity in their TV projects”, much like the ABC.

Another casting for a UK project from within Australia noted reactions of her UK colleague to the range of diverse Australian talent on offer: “We brought in a fantastic range of diverse actors – the UK casting director was amazed;

some, he said, would be ‘stars’ if they were living in the UK. He couldn’t believe the wonderfully diverse actors we had, saying ‘you wouldn’t know it from your TV screens’.”

However, one casting director felt that while the US market might be more open to auditioning diverse actors, diversity was not always front of mind when casting decisions are made – much like Australian commercial broadcasters.

### Writers, producers, directors

The majority of TV drama writers, producers and directors felt the Australian industry’s approach to diversity on screen did not compare favourably to overseas markets, particularly on the commercial broadcasters, though many felt the situation was improving.

*Female writer/producer 60+:* “Our record is embarrassing by comparison. Especially casting say an Asian actor in a role not associated with an Asian storyline. But there is slow improvement.”

*Female director 40-49:* “It is dreadful – a diversity desert. When the exceptions come it’s a delight.”

*Female writer 30-39:* “In terms of ethnic diversity we are extremely far behind the UK and the US, and we’re behind Scandi drama. We are not as appallingly



In *My Place* (ABC) we hear the stories of many children who all live in the same place, but at different times.

backwards in terms of LGBTQI – with primetime shows like *House Husbands* and *Janet King* featuring gay leads. We are very behind in terms of differently abled representation."

*Male writer 40-49:* "If you look at the mainstream TV shows, compared to other countries we rarely have Indigenous actors in lead roles, just an extra's role in the background."

*Female director 50-59:* "I think we could up our representation of transgender individuals – in fact, with the possible exclusion of gay men, all LGBTQI sections could be better represented, and disabled people need to be seen more on our screens."

There were references to the commercial success the US is having with diverse productions (*Empire*; *Scandal* and *How to Get Away with Murder* from Shonda Rhimes), though there was acknowledgment that larger, more established markets are able to offer a more diverse slate with programming that appeals to a wider variety of audiences. The small size of the Australian industry makes it conservative by nature, with fewer opportunities for niche or special-interest programming.

On the other hand many creatives felt that the Australian TV drama industry is fairing comparatively well in relation to the population, and considering the number of international productions with fairly Anglicised casts still flooding Australian screens.

Practitioners with disability could note many examples of best practice in overseas markets. They felt that a deliberate push in the US, UK and Europe has started to normalise audience expectations of disability on screen. For the UK this includes the casting of wheelchair-bound actress Liz Carr in the long-running series *Silent Witness*; a wheelchair-bound actor as a student in the comedy *Bad Education*; *Life's Too Short*, the semi-fictional series written and starring Warwick Davis, an actor of short stature; and *Cast Offs* a BAFTA-nominated mockumentary that follows a group of six disabled people sent to a remote British Island for a fictional reality show. Respondents praised the UK for offering a dedicated funding stream specifically for filmmakers with disability resulting in a



*The Principal* (SBS), set in a multicultural boys' school, features strong cultural diversity and a gay main character.

decade of development for disability-led programs commissioned by the BBC and Channel 4.

US productions singled out were *Breaking Bad* for casting RJ Mitte an actor with cerebral palsy and *Game of Thrones* for the character of Tyrion Lannister played with acclaim by Peter Dinklage, an actor of short stature. The teen drama series *Switched at Birth* was noted for its focus on a hearing-impaired teen in a leading role as well as the performance of Oscar®-winning Deaf actress Marlee Matlin in a supporting role. *Law and Order* was also praised for the many deaf and disabled actors that have appeared in storylines over the years. Even *Twin Peaks*, a production broadcast 25 years ago, was praised by one practitioner for featuring characters with disability but not focusing on this as part of the storyline.

In addition to those listed by the respondents, other recent US productions supportive of disability include *American Horror Story* and *Glee* for casting actors with Down syndrome, *NCIS: New Orleans* for featuring a wheelchair bound actor amongst its ensemble and 2013's *The*

*Michael J Fox Show*, a sitcom about a news anchor and family man with Parkinson's Disease going back to work. The focus on disability in the US has also spread to other formats such as theatre with the 2015 revival of the Broadway musical *Spring Awakening*, an adaptation focused heavily on making theatre accessible to people with disabilities. In addition to having deaf cast members using Sign Language (often mirrored to great effect by hearing actors) it marks the first Broadway production to ever cast a wheelchair-bound performer and the first to provide interpretation for deaf-blind theatregoers.

While some respondents felt that recent features focused on disability such as *The Intouchables*, *The Belier Family*, *The Sessions*, *The Theory of Everything* and *Me Before You* play their part by bringing characters with disability to mainstream audiences and proving that disability on screen can be commercially successful, others were frustrated by inauthentic casting and storylines that at times treated the characters as victims or inspirational or brave.

It was felt by some that there is "a coming of age of disability arts, that the disability perspective on the world and society is a fresh and unique one, with the potential to offer new flavours to narratives that are both entertaining and commercial. But only if they are disability-led and owned". Only this way will characters be fully developed with their disability depicted as incidental rather than a focus.

## 4.2 International benchmarking

The diversity of those in front of and behind the camera is a growing focus across the world, with screen professionals, academics and audiences increasingly asking if their country's screen stories reflect their own stories. The findings of several prominent studies and programs from the United States, United Kingdom and Canada are summarised below.

### Cultural diversity

- Shows with culturally diverse casts got better ratings than non-diverse shows in the **United States** in 2015, according to UCLA's [2016 Hollywood Diversity Report: Business as Usual?](#) But, participation rates for people of colour in key creative and gatekeeper roles were stagnant or dropped.
- No show in 2014-15 accurately reflected the ethnic diversity of the USA in its cast, half of all shows featured no speaking or named Asian characters, and 13 per cent of pilot episode directors were from non-white backgrounds (the US norm is 37.9 per cent), according to USC's [Inclusion or Invisibility?](#) report.
- There was a 10 per cent jump in recurring characters who are people of colour to 33 per cent over the two years to 2015-16, according to the US [2015-16 Where We Are On TV](#) report by advocacy group GLAAD.
- Black and minority ethnic (BAME) characters made up 9.4 per cent of **British** narrative roles and 7.8 per cent of lead roles, while 12.9 per cent of Britons are from BAME backgrounds, according to the [Creative Diversity Network \(CDN\)'s 2014 study](#).
- BAME directors only directed 2.4 per cent of British dramatic programs in 2015, according to a 2015 Directors UK report, [UK Television: Adjusting the Color Balance](#).
- The CDN, BBC, Channel 4, ITV and Sky will soon launch a database called 'Diamond' to track perceived and actual diversity across gender, gender identity, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability in roles in front of and behind the camera. [A House of](#)

[Commons April 2016 briefing paper](#) summarises available research on all forms of diversity and various policies from broadcasters to address diversity concerns.

- On **Canadian** television, lead characters were rarely non-white and multiculturalism was celebrated but shown as an 'other' according to [Media Action Media's 2012 report](#). A [2012 survey](#) found 4.1 per cent of screenwriters were from a visible minority, compared to 16 per cent of Canadians.

### Disability

Note: definitions of disability may vary between studies.

- The percentage of regular characters shown as living with a disability dropped from 1.4 to 0.9 in the **United States** 2015-16 television season, according to [GLAAD's 2015-16 report](#).
- Characters with disabilities made up 5 per cent of the **British** narrative roles examined in the [CDN's 2014 report](#).
- Characters with disabilities and their social realities were absent from **Canadian** TV according to [MAM's 2012 report](#).

### LGBTQI

- In the 2014-15 **United States** television season, lesbian, gay or bisexual characters made up 2 per cent of all speaking roles (compared to 3.5 per cent of the US population) according to [USC's Inclusion or Invisibility report](#).
- 4 per cent of regular characters on US scripted television were LGBT, according to [GLAAD's 2015-16 report](#), which tracked an increase in regular and recurring LGB characters but found transgender and racially diverse LGBT characters were underrepresented.
- LGB characters filled 3 per cent of lead fictional roles, 1 per cent of supporting roles and 0.2 per cent of background roles in **UK television**, according to the [CDN's 2014 study](#).
- Non-stereotypical LGBT roles were emerging in **Canadian** television but non-white, non-straight characters were almost non-existent in [MAM's 2012 diversity study](#).

## Appendix 1

### PREVIOUS STUDIES OF DIVERSITY IN AUSTRALIAN TV CONTENT

Debates about the cultural diversity of Australian television are not new: diversity of cast and crew has been an issue for several years. A number of studies have examined cultural diversity on Australian screens, including those below.

- A 1998 national report funded by the Australia Council found artists from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) were substantially under-represented in the television sector, with Asians particularly disadvantaged. Entitled *The Taxidriver, the Cook and the Greengrocer*, the report focussed on theatre but found television played a role in promoting a monocultural image of Australian society, with NESB characters largely restricted to stereotypical roles.

Bertone, S., Keating C., Mullaly, J. 1998, *The Taxidriver, the Cook and the Greengrocer*, Australia Council for the Arts

- A 1999 study and survey of several commercial television dramas found that performers from culturally diverse backgrounds represented 23 per cent of total sustaining cast members – up from an estimated 2 per cent in 1992. This increase was found to be significantly enabled by second-generation immigrants taking up acting as a career. However, the study identified no sustaining roles for actors of South East Asian backgrounds.
- The 1999 study, a casting snapshot of seven drama programs made for the commercial free-to-air networks, was a significant element in Harvey May's report *Broadcast in Colour*, which also examined cultural diversity policies and their impact on diversity on-screen in the United States, United Kingdom and New Zealand. May found that carefully considered involvement in, and attention to, cultural diversity in policy and program production at all levels can yield valuable results for all stakeholders.

May, Harvey 1999, *Broadcast in Colour: Cultural Diversity and Television Programming in Four Countries*, Australian Film Commission

- In 2002 May's survey was updated by Marion Jacka, looking at 13 drama productions made for broadcast on the commercial networks, ABC and SBS. Jacka found culturally diverse actors filled 26 per cent of roles, a three per cent increase. *Cultural Diversity in Australian Television Drama* identified two recurring roles for South East Asian actors, found little difference between public and commercial broadcaster programming, and also confirmed that culturally diverse actors were more likely to find work in guest roles rather than sustaining or recurring roles.

Jacka, Marion 2002, *Cultural Diversity in Australian Television Drama*, Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre, Queensland University of Technology

## Appendix 2

### DEFINITIONS

#### Census data on cultural background:

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Census of Population and Housing for 2006 and 2011 has been mapped to the four cultural background categories defined for this study: Indigenous Australia, Anglo-Celtic, European and Non-European. Responses on birthplace of the individual, birthplace of their parents and ancestry were used to analyse the data, and categorise respondents accordingly. Individuals were categorised as being of European or Non-European background if they themselves were born, or had at least one parent born in the relevant countries. Individuals were categorised as Indigenous if they identified themselves as such in the Census.

Census data has been analysed this way for the whole Australian population and for people working in film and video production and post-production services and television broadcasting.

**The definition of disability** in this report follows that set out under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* ([www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A04426](http://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A04426)). It incorporates physical, psychological, intellectual and sensory limitations, restrictions and impairments, and covers temporary, permanent, past and future disabilities as well as those imputed on an individual.

As follows:

**'disability'**, in relation to a person, means:

- (a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or
- (b) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- (c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or
- (d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or
- (e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or
- (f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or
- (g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour;

and includes a disability that:

- (h) presently exists; or
- (i) previously existed but no longer exists; or
- (j) may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or
- (k) is imputed to a person.

To avoid doubt, a disability that is otherwise covered by this definition includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability.

**Definitions of gender identity and sexual orientation** follow those set out in the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* ([www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A02868](http://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A02868)), which was revised to incorporate sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status in 2013:

**sexual orientation** means a person's sexual orientation towards:

- (a) persons of the same sex; or
- (b) persons of a different sex; or
- (c) persons of the same sex and persons of a different sex.

**gender identity** means the gender related identity, appearance or mannerisms or other gender related characteristics of a person (whether by way of medical intervention or not), with or without regard to the person's designated sex at birth

**intersex status** means the status of having physical, hormonal or genetic features that are:

- (a) neither wholly female nor wholly male; or
- (b) a combination of female and male; or
- (c) neither female nor male.

**Characters** with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity were identified primarily through story elements, and the results were confirmed with the relevant broadcasters.

**Actors** were not asked to identify in terms of sexual orientation or gender identity. We sought personal views and experiences on these aspects through the surveys.

## Appendix 3

### ON-SCREEN TV DRAMA TITLES (2011-2015)

The analysis of main characters in Australian TV drama and the actors playing them is based on the following 199 TV drama titles, which had their first broadcast on commercial free-to-air, public or subscription television between 2011 and 2015.

2011	
Angry Boys	ABC
At Home With Julia	ABC
Bed of Roses series 3	ABC
Blood Brothers	Nine
Castaway (Trapped series 2)	Seven
Cloudstreet	Subscription
Crownies	ABC
East West 101 series 3	SBS
Elephant Princess, The series 2	Ten
Good News World	Ten
gURLs wURLd, a	Nine
H2O: Just Add Water series 3	Ten
Home and Away series 24	Seven
Housos series 1	SBS
Jesters, The series 2	Subscription
Killing Time	Subscription
Laid series 1	ABC
Mal.com	ABC
Me and My Monsters	Ten
My Place series 2	ABC
Neighbours series 28	Ten
Offspring series 2	Ten
Packed to the Rafters series 4	Seven
Panic At Rock Island	Nine
Paper Giants: The Birth of Cleo	ABC
Rescue Special Ops series 3	Nine
Rush series 4	Ten

Sea Patrol series 5 - Damage Control	Nine
Slap, The	ABC
Slide	Subscription
Small Time Gangster	Subscription
Spirited series 2	Subscription
Swift and Shift Couriers series 2	SBS
Twentysomething series 1	ABC
Underbelly: Infiltration	Nine
Underbelly: Lucifer	Nine
Underbelly: Razor series 4	Nine
Underbelly: The Man Who Got Away	Nine
Wild Boys	Seven
Winners & Losers series 1	Seven

2012	
Beaconsfield	Nine
Bikie Wars: Brothers in Arms	Ten
Dance Academy series 2	ABC
Danger 5 series 1	SBS
Dangerous Remedy	ABC
Devil's Dust	ABC
Dripping in Chocolate	Subscription
Great Mint Swindle	Nine
Home and Away series 25	Seven
House Husbands series 1	Nine
Howzat - Kerry Packer's War	Nine
Jack Irish: Bad Debts	ABC
Jack Irish: Black Tides	ABC
Laid series 2	ABC
Lightning Point	Ten
Lowdown series 2	ABC
Mabo	ABC
Micro Nation	Ten
Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries series 1	ABC
Moody Christmas, A	ABC
Mystery of a Hansom Cab	ABC
Neighbours series 29	Ten
Offspring series 3	Ten
Outland	ABC
Packed to the Rafters series 5	Seven
Problems	ABC
Puberty Blues series 1	Ten
Rake series 2	ABC
Redfern Now series 1	ABC
Straits, The	ABC
Strange Calls, The	ABC
Tricky Business	Nine
Underbelly: Badness series 5	Nine
Underground - The Julian Assange Story	Ten
Winners and Losers series 2	Seven
Woodley	ABC
You're Skitting Me series 1	ABC

2013	
Accidental Soldier, An	ABC
Better Man	SBS
Cliffy	ABC
Dance Academy series 3	ABC

Doctor Blake Mysteries, The series 1	ABC
Elegant Gentlemen's Guide to Knife Fighting, The	ABC
Home and Away series 26	Seven
House Husbands series 2	Nine
Housos series 2	SBS
In Your Dreams series 1	Seven
It's A Date series 1	ABC
Ja'mie Private School Girl	ABC
Mako Mermaids series 1	Ten
Mind Over Maddie	Subscription
Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries series 2	ABC
Mr and Mrs Murder	Ten
Mrs Biggs	Seven
Neighbours series 30	Ten
Nowhere Boys series 1	ABC
Offspring series 4	Ten
Packed to the Rafters series 6	Seven
Paper Giants: Magazine Wars	ABC
Place to Call Home, A series 1	Seven
Please Like Me series 1	ABC
Power Games: The Packer-Murdoch Story	Nine
Redfern Now series 2	ABC
Reef Doctors	Ten
Serangoon Road	ABC
Time of Our Lives series 1	ABC
Top of the Lake series 1	Subscription
Twentysomething series 2	ABC
Underbelly: Squizzy	Nine
Upper Middle Bogan series 1	ABC
Wentworth series 1	Subscription
Winners & Losers series 3	Seven
Wonderland series 1	Ten
You're Skitting Me series 2	ABC

2014	
ANZAC Girls	ABC
Black Comedy series 1	ABC
Broken Shore, The	ABC
Carlotta	ABC
Code, The series 1	ABC
Devil's Playground	Subscription
Doctor Blake Mysteries, The series 2	ABC
Fat Tony & Co	Nine
Gods of Wheat Street	ABC
Hard Rock Medical	SBS
Home and Away series 27	Seven
Hoopla Doopla	ABC
House Husbands series 3	Nine
INXS: Never Tear Us Apart	Seven
It's a Date series 2	ABC
Jack Irish: Dead Point	ABC
Janet King series 1	ABC
Jonah from Tonga	ABC
Killing Field, The	Seven
Kinne series 1	Seven
Lah Lah's Adventures	Seven
Lost Tools of Henry Hoke, The	ABC

Love Child series 1	Nine
Moodys, The	ABC
Neighbours series 31	Ten
Nowhere Boys series 2	ABC
Offspring series 5	Ten
Old School	ABC
Parer's War	ABC
Party Tricks	Ten
Place to Call Home, A series 2	Seven
Please Like Me series 2	ABC
Plonk series 1 (web series)	Ten
Puberty Blues series 2	Ten
Rake series 3	ABC
Sam Fox: Extreme Adventures	Ten
Schappelle	Nine
Secrets & Lies	Ten
Soul Mates series 1	ABC
This is Littleton	ABC
Time of Our Lives series 2	ABC
Upper Middle Bogan series 2	ABC
Utopia series 1	ABC
Wentworth series 2	Subscription
Winners & Losers series 4	Seven
Wonderland series 2	Ten
Worst Year of My Life, Again, The	ABC

## 2015

8MMM Aboriginal Radio	ABC
Banished	Subscription
Beautiful Lie, The	ABC
Catching Milat	Seven
Danger 5 series 2	SBS
Deadline Gallipoli	Subscription
Divorce, The	ABC
Doctor Blake Mysteries, The series 3	ABC
Ex-PM, The	ABC
Fresh Blood	ABC
Gallipoli	Nine
Glitch series 1	ABC
Hiding	ABC
Home and Away series 28	Seven
House Husbands series 4	Nine
House of Hancock	Nine
In Your Dreams series 2	Seven
Kinne	Seven
Little Lunch	ABC
Love Child series 2	Nine
Mako Mermaids series 2	Ten
Mary: The Making of a Princess	Ten
Maximum Choppage	ABC
Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries series 3	ABC
Neighbours series 32	Ten
Open Slather	Subscription
Peter Allen: Not the Boy Next Door	Seven
Place to Call Home, A series 3	Subscription
Please Like Me series 3	ABC
Principal, The	SBS
Ready For This	ABC

Redfern Now - Promise Me	ABC
Sammy J & Randy in Ricketts Lane	ABC
Secret River, The	ABC
Stories I Want to Tell You in Person	ABC
Utopia series 2	ABC
Wentworth series 3	Subscription
Winter	Seven

## Appendix 4

### CONSULTEES

**Alastair McKinnon** (ABC)  
**Amal Awad** (writer/journalist)  
**Australian Network on Disability** (survey advice)  
**Bali Padda** (Equity Diversity Committee MEAA)  
**Barry Gamba** (ICE)  
**Carly Heaton** (Foxtel)  
**Chris Irvine** (SBS)  
**Claire Tonkin** (Ten)  
**Di Drew** (NIDA)  
**Diversity Council Australia** (survey advice)  
**Imogen Banks** (producer)  
**Izzy Kerr** (SBS)  
**Jackie Leewai** (SBS)  
**Jo Rooney** (Nine)  
**John Godfrey** (SBS)  
**Julie McGauran** (Seven)  
**Kylie Burke** (AFTRS)  
**Michael Scott Mitchell** (NIDA)  
**Natasha Eves** (SBS)  
**Neil Peplow** (AFTRS)  
**Niki Aken** (writer/producer)  
**Olya Booyar** (AWG)  
**Pearl Tan** (Equity Diversity Committee MEAA)  
**Penny Win** (Foxtel)  
**Pino Migliorino** (Cultural Perspectives)  
**Rick Kalowski** (ABC)  
**Rick Maier** (Ten)  
**Ross Crowley** (Foxtel)  
**Sally Riley** (ABC)  
**Sarah Harmelink** (ABC)  
**Shakthi Shakthidharan** (CuriousWorks)  
**Sofya Gollan** (Accessible Arts NSW)  
**Stuart Paul** (ACMA)  
**Thang Ngo** (IDENTITY Communications, part of UM)  
**Tim Soutphommasane** (Human Rights Commission)  
**Ting Lim** (Human Rights Commission)  
**Todd Loydell** (SBS)  
**Tony Ayres** (Matchbox Productions)  
**Travis Cordona** (SBS)  
**Tureia Sample** (SBS)

## Appendix 5

### SURVEY METHODOLOGY

To more comprehensively understand the on-screen representations of character and diversity, Screen Australia undertook five online surveys for this study.

A broad survey of actors was undertaken, with the assistance of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA). It was circulated to 4,660 current financial members of the MEAA, with 129 responses received. This survey aimed to gauge the experiences of actors at various career stages, and included those who had worked in TV drama and those who had not had that opportunity. The responses were unsurprisingly skewed toward actors of diverse backgrounds, as the most motivated to contribute to a conversation about on-screen diversity.

A second survey was circulated to the 430 credited writers, producers and directors of the 199 TV dramas that made up the on-screen analysis, with 55 responses received. This survey aimed to understand the views and experiences of those who have been actively involved in bringing TV drama to our screens over recent years, to help contextualise the results of the on-screen analysis.

The third and fourth surveys were circulated to 135 actors' agents and 30 casting directors, who have roles both as 'gatekeepers' of which faces end up on screen, as well as advocates and suppliers feeding the constant need for fresh faces and new talent. Responses were received from 11 agents and 8 casting directors.

Due to the very small number of writers, producer and directors with disability earning TV drama credits over the last five years, a fifth survey, targeting practitioners with disability was circulated, with assistance from Accessible Arts, in order to fully understand the issues facing these practitioners within the industry. 11 responses were received.

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- <sup>18</sup> Screen Australia analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2011*.
- <sup>19</sup> The Scanlon Foundation, *Mapping Social Cohesion National Report 2015*, <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/research/surveys/>
- <sup>20</sup> OzTAM and RegionalTAM, 5 city metro, combined markets, total people, 7-day consolidated. Metro viewers totalled 707,000.
- <sup>21</sup> OzTAM and RegionalTAM, 5 city metro, combined markets, total people, 7-day consolidated. Metro viewers totalled 764,000.
- <sup>22</sup> Ratings quoted are OzTAM and RegionalTAM, Total People, Combined 5-city Metro plus Regional. 7-day consolidated, average audience. 5-city Metro only ratings for the programs quoted were 1.507m *Peter Allen*, 1.074m *Love Child*, 0.83m *Home and Away*, 0.933m *House Husbands*.
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