CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Where is Australia's GLAAD? A case for establishing an Australian LGBTIQA+ Media Institute to improve diversity in screen media representation
Authors	Krikowa, Natalie
Publication date	2023-12-20
Original Citation	Krikowa, N. (2022) 'Where is Australia's GLAAD? A case for establishing an Australian LGBTIQA+ Media Institute to improve diversity in screen media representation', Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media, 24, pp. 49-63. https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.24.03
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.33178/alpha.24.03
Rights	© 2022, the Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/
Download date	2026-11-06 21:12:46
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/13989



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media
no. 24, 2022, pp. 49–63
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.24.03

Where Is Australia's GLAAD? A Case for Establishing an Australian LGBTIQA+ Media Institute to Improve Diversity in Screen Media Representation

Natalie Krikowa

Abstract: *As screen studies scholars have noted over the past two decades, media representation is critical in being able to see oneself as important to society. In 2016, Screen Australia released the "Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in TV Drama" report on the diversity in Australian TV drama. "Seeing Ourselves" paints a critical picture of the lack of inclusive storytelling on Australian scripted TV, suggesting that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other sexuality- and gender-diverse (LGBTIQA+) people were in fact not seeing themselves—that the representation was lacking diversity, inclusivity, authenticity and complexity. This article presents a case study of the GLAAD Media Institute and similar international organisations and imagines how a similar advisory and advocacy organisation could be established to support Australian screen practitioners and students in being more inclusive of LGBTIQA+ people in their screen stories. It highlights the necessity for, and benefit of, creating an independent organisation that could replicate GLAAD's three pillars of training, consultation and research to improve the current lack of diversity—the ultimate goal of this organisation being to advocate for real and sustained impact, not just in Australian screen media, but in our local communities and society at large.*



Figure 1: ***All Our Lesbians Are Dead!*** **Natalie Krikowa, 2017.**

© Natalie Krikowa
This article is published as Open Access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial Licence (creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0) which permits non-commercial use, distribution and reproduction provided the original work is cited

Introduction

In 2016, Screen Australia released the "Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in TV" *Drama* report on the diversity in Australian TV drama. "Seeing Ourselves" paints a critical picture of the lack of inclusive storytelling on Australian scripted TV, suggesting that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other sexuality- and gender-diverse (LGBTIQA+) people were in fact not seeing themselves—that the representation was lacking diversity, inclusivity, authenticity and complexity. Similar organisations and associations have conducted additional research into the issue of screen diversity including the Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA), which furthered the research in 2020 by looking at the diversity in representation of higher education students and their projects, coming to similar concerning conclusions.

As many screen studies scholars have noted over the past two decades, media representation is critical in being able to see oneself as important to society (Beirne; Cover et al.; Monaghan, "Lesbian"). This is particularly significant given that we are still in the aftermath of the Australian Marriage Equality Postal Survey, which many argue caused additional harm to the LGBTIQA+ community and individuals in Australia (Ecker and Bennett). Popular culture and entertainment have not only been a primary mode of expression for queer identity, but one of the most effective means of narrowing social divides and enabling social change (Cover et al.).

As a creative practice academic from the LGBTIQA+ community with years of experience as a screenwriter, producer and scholar, I argue that when LGBTIQA+ people are simply part of a screen storyworld, the audience is reminded that those characters are a part of that world and, by extension, our own. However, when minority characters, such as those in the LGBTIQA+ community, are marginalised or made invisible within these worlds, it not only reminds those being underrepresented that their social position is less than others in their communities, but also makes it more difficult for the majority to see, let alone accept, them as part of that world's reality. Even if there is a desire to tell LGBTIQA+ stories, screen media practitioners may lack the tools, vocabulary and confidence to write, develop and produce these stories.

The Screen Australia "Seeing Ourselves" report identifies the core challenges to LGBTIQA+ representation as "authenticity in storytelling" and "casting issues" (18). The report also remarks that some writers agreed that authentic stories come from a close association with the lived experience of characters, and that including diversity late in the process can feel tokenistic (26). Therefore, while there may be a willingness on the part of non-LGBTIQA+ screen practitioners to tell these stories, there may also be a fear that one might offend the LGBTIQA+ community and potentially receive critical backlash for their efforts. In response to the "Seeing Ourselves" report, it seems that a possible solution to this problem of diversity lies in providing media professionals with the structures, information and support to improve the storytelling on Australian TV. The question then becomes *how* we build willingness, confidence and capability.

This article presents a case study of the GLAAD Media Institute and similar international organisations and imagines how a similar advisory and advocacy organisation could be established to support Australian screen practitioners and students in being more inclusive of LGBTIQA+ people in their screen stories. The goal of this organisation would be to advocate for real and sustained impact, not just in Australian screen media, but in our local

communities and society at large, working with and for the Australian LGBTIQA+ community. This article highlights the current state of LGBTIQA+ representation in the Australian population and provides a brief historical overview of LGBTIQA+ representation on the Australian screen, in order to place this issue within a historical context, illustrating the infrequency of LGBTIQA+ representation. Finally, it hypothesises how an advisory and advocacy organisation or media institute could work in partnership with state and federal screen organisations, other community partners, stakeholders and media and entertainment industry professionals to increase diversity on screen through the development of core skills and techniques that effect positive cultural change for the LGBTIQA+ and wider community. This article does not focus on the organisational/business structure of the proposed media institute, but rather reflects on the model presented in similar organisations, such as GLAAD, to highlight opportunities and challenges in establishing such an organisation in the Australian screen media context.

LGBTIQA+ Representation in Society and on Screen

The Screen Australia report recognises a problem with diversity of representation in screen media, noting that only 5% of characters were identifiably LGBTIQA+ and only 27% of programmes included at least one LGBTIQA+ character among the main characters (4). The report notes that "1 in 10 Australians now identify with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity" and that "the image of Australia that is reflected to us on television has been the subject of much recent debate… [and] commentators are questioning why our TV dramas are not reflecting the diversity that is now such a ubiquitous feature of our workplaces, schools, commutes, neighbourhoods, and, for many of us, our own family backgrounds" (1). Despite what we know, there is also a lot that we do not know, as representation of LGBTIQA+ people is overlooked at the highest levels. There is a lack of inclusion of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status in population research and currently there is no way to accurately ascertain how many people in Australian identify as LGBTIQA+ because the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not collect or publish information on sexual identity (Wilson et al. 1). In the latest 2021 census, the Australian Government again failed to collect this important information about people. This serious omission makes the representation issue doubly problematic because LGBTIQA+ Australians are unable to be recognised.

The only federal statistics were produced a decade ago in 2012 by the Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing in their "National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy" report, which indicates that Australians of diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender diversity are estimated to be up to 11% of the population. While this has other vital impacts on provisions of service for this community, it also makes it difficult for researchers, who make use of this data to better understand the composition of the LGBTIQA+ population and to support arguments around media representation. Recent research suggests that there are more people identifying as gender- or sexuality-diverse than ever before (Carmen et al.). In the US, "20% of Americans aged 18 to 34—a significant audience demographic to networks and advertisers—identify as LGBTQI+" ("Where 2020–2021" 4). It is clear from these various studies that LGBTIQA+ people are a significant audience for screen media and yet there remains a barrier to inclusive representation.

Over the past few decades, queer media scholars have shown that contemporary portrayals of LGBTIQA+ people have emerged from a long history of negative mainstream

representations both in the US and in Australia (Davis and Needham; Monaghan, "Lesbian"). Until recently, queerness was either omitted from mainstream film and television, or, if represented, was stereotypical or tokenistic. Queer characters were most often portrayed as villains or victims in violent and tragic situations (Monaghan, "Lesbian" 51). Often these portrayals of LGBTIQA+ people were trivial or tokenistic and appeared to be created as a way for executives, writers and producers to appear to be inclusive, if not accepting, of queer people. While their findings are yet to be published, the ARC-funded Australian Queer Screen study (2018–20) *Representation of Gender and Sexual Diversity in Australian Film and Television, 1990–2010* aims to provide "the first comprehensive account of Australian media production's contribution to gender/sexual minority representation, in the context of its importance for fostering (i) healthy identities, and (ii) acceptance of minorities to mainstream audiences in a digital media era" (Cover, Dau, and Pym). While Australia has seen minimal improvement in representation of minorities in traditional screen media, minority screen practitioners have taken to online platforms to tell their stories because there are fewer gatekeepers and more freedom to tell the stories they want to tell. First with web series, *The Newtown Girls* and *Starting From Now!...* (Monaghan, *Starting*), then the *Love Bites* and *Out Here* documentary series commissioned by ABC and Network 10 respectively for their online platforms (Munro).

LGBTIQA+ stories have also long been celebrated in Australian film festivals such as Mardi Gras Film Festival (QueerScreen) in Sydney and the Melbourne Queer Film Festival (MQFF). These spaces offer LGBTQIA+ storytellers an inclusive space to tell their stories, but arguably the audience is still primarily composed of LGBTIQA+ people. The issue of representation in mainstream screen media, however, remains, and organisations such as GLAAD in the US have helped to shed light on issues of representation and to hold the studios and those in positions of power and influence accountable.

International LGBTIQA+ Advocacy Organisations

GLAAD (formerly an acronym for Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), is a US-based organisation, created in 1985, that is dedicated to countering discrimination against LGBTIQA+ individuals in the media, and promoting understanding, acceptance and equality.[1] GLAAD has been fundamental to the increased portrayal of LGBTIQA+ people in US entertainment screen media, advocating for more fair, respectful representation that highlights the diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community ("About"). In recent years, GLAAD created the GLAAD Media Institute (GMI) to help build capacity in media professionals through the development of core skills and competencies to effectuate positive social and cultural change. GMI's three pillars of training, consultation and research have worked together to give media professionals including writers, producers, showrunners, executives and presenters a positive avenue for support and education. The result of this work is improved representation of LGBTIQA+ characters and storylines in US film and television.

Trans Media Watch is a UK-based charity dedicated to the improvement of trans and intersex issues in media coverage. Their aim is to help media professionals better understand trans and intersex issues, and produce more "fair, respectful and accurate" portrayals.[2] They also work with trans and intersex people who interact with the media. Similar to the GMI, they offer consultation and training, as well as a suite of resources to help educate media professionals in better representing trans and intersex people.

Australia, unfortunately, does not have an equivalent to the GMI or Trans Media Watch, and if media professionals here in Australia seek support, guidance or education, they often must look to these international organisations.[3] The downside to relying on international organisations for advice is that the guidance may not be appropriate for the Australian cultural context. LGBTIQA+ media organisations like GLAAD and Trans Media Watch exist in their own unique screen production industries and the nuances of Australian screen media production and distribution practices are understandably missing or overlooked. Therefore, a simple "copy–paste" of business models and support structures would not necessarily be effective in an Australian context. In Australia, screen practitioners rely heavily on highly competitive state and federal funding, whereas in the US, the studios and broadcasters are mostly privately funded (Gallagher et al. 465). In Australia, screen production is tightly regulated, again by state and federal bodies, whereas in the US the corporations in charge of the content production and distribution regulate themselves for the most part. Organisations like GLAAD were established to, along with the audiences themselves, hold the studios and broadcasters accountable, and Trans Media Watch to hold news organisations to account.

GLAAD and the Representation of LGBTIQA+ Characters on US Television

Since 2006, GLAAD has released "Where We Are on TV", an annual report that forecasts the representation of LGBT characters on television. The reports track and calculate the presence of LGBT characters in scripted primetime programs across broadcast and cable networks in the US as well as streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon and Hulu. A review of the reports from 2015 to 2021 shows that LGBT representation has increased slightly over the years, however, streaming has seen a decrease in LGBTQ characters (a total of 141 characters in 2021, 12 fewer than in 2020) and LGBTQ characters still represent less than 10% of the characters on scripted US Primetime TV.[4] While the GLAAD research studies do not account for the quality or authenticity of the performances, similar to the "Seeing Ourselves" report, they do provide an indication of the prevalence of queer identity in US film and television.

Australia: A Reflection of a Global Problem

Australian television was once a pioneering place for LGBTIQA+ representation. The 1970s saw the first openly gay characters appearing on Australian television[5], however there was a significant decline during the 1980s and 1990s (Beirne; Monaghan, "Lesbian"). It would be almost twenty years until Australian television would include LGBTIQA+ characters again, but these representations proved disappointing due to the lack of complexity and care given to the characters and their storylines by the shows' creators (Monaghan, "Lesbian"). Bisexuality and sexual fluidity were portrayed on several adult drama programs in the 2000s[6], however the situation was a little different for popular soap operas. In 2009, there was public outcry by some conservative viewers over a kiss between Charlie and Joey on *Home and Away* (Alan Bateman 1998–), leading to close-ups of the kiss being cut from the telecasted episode (Rowe).

Since 2010, we have seen a few shows portraying LGBTIQA+ characters from *Wentworth* (Lara Radulovich, David Hannam and Reg Watson 2013–) on Foxtel, *Please Like Me* (Josh Thomas 2013–16) and *Janet King* (Greg Haddrick 2014–17) on ABC, primetime dramas including *Offspring* (Debra Oswald, Imogen Banks and John Edwards (2010–17), and *A Place to Call Home* (Bevan Lee 2013–18), as well as new characters on long-standing soaps such as *Neighbours* (Greg Watson 1985–2022). However, as the "Seeing Ourselves" report indicates, these characters are few and far between and often portray a very narrow intersection

of the LGBTIQA+ community, lacking diversity in race, age, dis/ability and socioeconomic status. Of 199 television dramas broadcast between 2011 and 2015, 27% contained at least one LGBTIQA+ character: 88 characters across 53 programs (*Seeing* 17). Often the LGBTIQA+ characters appeared as "the only gay in the village" and many of the characters in TV dramas did not have a declared sexuality. Visibility is an important aspect of inclusion, and while it may be the easiest marker of progress towards equality, there is a need for scholarship to focus on the politics of representation.

While previous research has centred on the quantity of characters represented, focus also needs to be on the *quality* of representation (Monaghan, "Lesbian"). It is not just about creating more diverse characters, but also the need to create complex, multilayered, compelling and authentic characters. Dee Amy-Chinn notes that media representation can help LGBTIQA+ individuals "explore the range of identity positions available, and […] [f]or heterosexual viewers, television is frequently the site of their first encounter with LGB[TIQA+] sexualities" (65). Particularly for young people, diverse representation of minority characters, such as LGBTIQA+, in screen media not only validates their own existences but also exposes them to the experiences of others (Bond; Bronski; Evans; Marwick et al.). As I posit in my article "Intervention as Activism", the larger questions around what authenticity looks like onscreen centre around diversity and inclusivity, not just from a position of sexuality, but from intersectional identity positions of gender, race, class and disability. To be fully inclusive, we need to also represent LGBTIQA+ people of colour, from all socioeconomic backgrounds, and with varying abilities and disabilities. Through this, we can be seen to be representing the full diversity and beauty of the LGBTIQA+ experience. As Whitney Monaghan states in her discussion of "post-gay television":

> Only by moving beyond the popular assumption that television mirrors society and that visibility reflects changing social values around the LGBTQI+ community can we begin to understand how televisual narrative, form, character development and world building can shape social values, contributing broader processes of LGBTQI+ inclusion and social acceptance. (*Post-Gay Television* 439)

Screen Australia's "Seeing Ourselves" report has provided an important catalyst for improving diversity in screen media, yet does not offer a plan on how to intervene and improve diversity. The report offers up challenges ranging from having more diverse and inclusive writers' rooms and more inclusive casting practices but does not detail what this looks like or offer a road map on how we can get there. Academics like Rebecca Beirne and Monaghan have provided important empirical studies that deliver a historical context, regarding LGBTIQA+ representation in Australian screen media, but fall short in terms of offering solutions. It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel when there have been successful interventions made by organisations in other international contexts. By looking to other countries for exemplars in how to improve screen diversity, Australia can adopt successful strategies like those seen in the US with GMI, and Trans Media Watch in the UK.

The GLAAD Media Institute Model

GLAAD's educational and research arm, the GLAAD Media Institute (GMI) enables media professionals in the US to build and develop core skills and techniques that effectuate positive social and cultural change. This is done through the three pillars of training, consultation and research. GMI provides training for media professionals across various

production and creative roles, educating current and future media professionals on how to be more effective storytellers. The consultation pillar serves to provide industries, corporations and organisations with media advocacy education aimed at increasing equity and justice within these organisations by advising, coaching and working behind the scenes. Finally, GMI conducts research by fielding studies, evaluating data and developing metrics to strengthen their mission and drive action. Similar to the "Seeing Ourselves" report, the research conducted by the GMI documents LGBTIQA+ representation in screen media to provide the foundation for further advocacy and interventions within the entertainment industry. They produce annual reports including the "Studio Responsibility Index" report that measures film representation, the "Where We Are on TV" report that analyses diversity across broadcast and cable networks and streaming services, and the "Accelerating Acceptance" report that measures Americans' attitudes and comfortability towards LGBT Americans. Australia could use this as a model of best practice for tracking representation annually, rather than in one-off reports. This would enable researchers to identify trends in the data and keep media professionals and state and federal screen bodies accountable in a more immediate manner.

By undertaking this important work, the GMI continues to make significant impact in improving diversity of screen media. By educating more film and television creators and producers, more accurate and inclusive stories are being told that "include compelling, entertaining LGBTIQA+ characters that do not reinforce common stereotypes" ("GLAAD"). The reporting of LGBTIQA+ representation on US films and TV has led to a better understanding of the stereotypes and tropes that exist and these data are being used to hold studios to account for these representations. The research has also led to the development of important resources including best-practice guides. Arguably most importantly, it has created a national network of allied individuals and organisations which are committed to the improvement of diversity on screen.

The establishment of an Australian LGBTIQA+ media institute would require significant funding, resources and personnel. While GLAAD developed organically from a grassroots activist movement to a national media institute over three decades, unfortunately Australia does not have the time to allow a similar organisation to grow organically. Australia can, however, learn from GLAAD's history and build on the best-practice guides developed by GLAAD, so as not to necessarily start from scratch.

What an Australian LGBTIQA+ Media Institute Could Look Like

As a primary point of reference for the inclusion of LGBTIQA+ people in Australian screen media, the media institute could provide similar pillars of engagement with the industry: training, consultation and research. While there have been attempts to establish LGBTIQA+ media institutes in the past, such as the Australian LGBTI Media Centre that focuses on news media (albeit appearing to have been only mildly active between 2015 and 2018), there has yet to be a concerted effort to establish and maintain an organisation of adequate scope and influence dedicated to LGBTIQA+ representation in Australian screen media.[7]

Potential Partnerships

The media institute would need to establish key partnerships to produce the desired outcomes across all screen media (television, film and online/digital media). Federal, state and local screen bodies including Screen Australia, and state screen organisations (e.g. Screen

NSW, Film Victoria, Screen Tasmania, Screen Canberra, South Australian Film Corporation, Screen Territory (NT), ScreenWest and Screen Queensland) would be critical stakeholders as the agencies charged with supporting Australian screen development, production and promotion. LGBTQIA+ organisations would also play an important role in the establishment and preservation of the institute because they are keenly involved in the prosperity and celebration of LGBTQIA+ people. QueerScreen, as the national LGBTIQA+ film festival, aims to "transform and engage individuals and communities through queer storytelling on screen" ("Vision"). Other LGBTIQA+-centred organisations could be partnered with such as ACON, the peak health organisation for the LGBTIQA+ community; Gay and Lesbian Organisation of Business and Enterprise (GLOBE) and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Business Association (SGLBA) as professional support and development providers; and Pride in Diversity, an organisation dedicated to supporting LGBTIQA+ workplace inclusion. These partners would also play a vital role in helping to produce accurate accounts of the community and its diverse population.

Opportunities

An Australian LGBTIQA+ media institute could work to support media practitioners, scholars and students through a similar three-pillar structure. Working with key stakeholders including federal, state and local screen organisations, production studios, distributors and higher education providers, it would aim to improve LGBTIQA+ representation on Australian screens. Guidelines, similar to GLAAD's *Media Reference Guide* (which focuses on providing journalists and entertainment creators with the tools and vocabulary to tell LGBTIQA+ people's stories) and Australia's Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network's *Charter of Inclusion* (which focuses on diversity and inclusion in hiring practices) could be developed in collaboration with key stakeholders and circulated throughout the screen and higher education industries.[8] As ASPERA noted in their 2020 report *Diversity On and Off Screen in Australian Film Schools*, "[w]hile there is an even split of male and female lead characters in capstone student projects, the diversity of characters is low or minimal in the other categories surveyed (cultural background, principal language spoken, disability status, sexual orientation)" (3). These guidelines could act as important supportive and instructive documents for working with and telling stories about LGBTIQA+ people and communities.

In addition to producing functional and meaningful guidelines, the media institute could be a dedicated space to collaborate, produce research and provide training. Working with leading scholars in the field of LGBTIQA+ screen studies, further research into Australia's historical and contemporary screen media landscape could be generated and create a foundation from which to advocate for changes in media practices. Scholars would be supported to conduct vital research in the field with the outcomes presented as both academic papers and industry reports. These reports could then be used by industry bodies such as Screen Australia and the state-based industry organisations to help guide policy and funding decisions. Moreover, these reports could further advocate for the importance of arts funding in Australia.

Most crucially, the institute could provide training and consultation for industry professionals including writers, producers, executives and presenters, as well as essential training for higher education media production students that university staff could include in their curriculum. The "fear of getting it wrong" could be alleviated through early and ongoing consultation with institute members that have the expertise in LGBTIQA+ storytelling, including the critical story development and scriptwriting phases of pre-production. The Screen Australia "Seeing Ourselves" report stressed the important of research and consultation in

producing more diverse screen stories, suggesting that "productions should bring in script consultants or advisors to project development and writer's rooms when developing characters and storylines from specific backgrounds" (26). Finding appropriate script consultants with the necessary experience and background can be a challenge for established media professionals, let alone for novices looking to make a start in the entertainment industry. The institute would be a central point of contact for anyone, with any level of experience, to access appropriate consultants. The institute would offer advice and guidance for writers and producers to build their confidence and competencies and avoid tokenism and stereotyping in their work. This collaboration would be provided by experts in their roles who are also part of the LGBTIQA+ community, with knowledge of and expertise in screen media representation. The consultation could continue into the production stages by working with film and TV professionals to ensure casting reflects the rich and diverse nature of the LGBTIQA+ community, and that the characters are portrayed authentically. The "Seeing Ourselves" report noted that 90% of LGBTIQA+ characters written for TV dramas since 2011 were cast with a straight actor (30). Industry practitioners at any stage of their career, and at any stage of the story development or production, could reach out to the institute for guidance and support.

Training the current and future generations of screen storytellers is integral to solving the problems of diversity in contemporary screen media. Understanding how to include diversity in screen media in a practical sense should be a required element of the learned craft. Just as a screenwriter learns about scriptwriting forms, character development and story structures, they should learn about diversity and inclusivity and how to build projects around minority and marginalised individuals and groups. Training for current industry practitioners could range from knowledge and skill-based workshops to more tailored sessions for individual organisations. Training for future generations could take place in higher education settings at film schools and university media production/writing departments, meeting the requirements outlined by ASPERA. Staff could be provided with materials and lesson plans for inclusion in their curriculum, or similar knowledge and skill-based workshops. By upskilling the workforce bringing our screen stories to life and instilling their competence and confidence, an improvement in the diversity of the stories seen on Australian screens would be inevitable.

Current Obstacles to Establishing an Australian LGBTIQA+ Media Institute

There are obvious roadblocks that would need to be realistically addressed for the institute to be successful in its mission, notably funding and qualified personnel.

Funding

An LGBTIQA+ media institute would require funding from government and private sectors, both of which have been impacted greatly in the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Government funding in the arts sector, however, decreased significantly since 2015 under Coalition governments. In 2015, Screen Australia received its third round of funding cuts over a period of eighteen months, part of a wider $52.5 million worth of cuts to the Communications and Arts portfolio. This results in an annual allocation that will fall from $100.8 million in 2013 to $82.2 million in 2016 (Cooke, Maddox, and Morris). In March 2018, over two hundred film and TV workers signed an open letter to the government calling on them to protect the screen industry. Their demands included quotas for Australian content on platforms like Netflix, and an end to funding cuts for the ABC, SBS and Screen Australia (Harmon). Arts

funding schemes such as those seen through the Australia Council have also been slashed, with fewer opportunities and more competition for funding.

Drawing upon philanthropic funding may be the key to establishing the institute. It will be important to involve key partners from within and outside of the LGBTIQA+ community to support the institute in the short and possible long term. The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Business Association would be a key partner in sourcing partners and establishing a network of allies. Locating the necessary funds to establish and maintain the institute remains a key roadblock to overcome.

Personnel

The institute would need to be established with expert individuals who are able to bring credibility and legitimacy to the organisation. These individuals will need to have had industry experience and have a positive reputation among their peers. They will also need to identify as being part of the LGBTIQA+ community for the LGBTIQA+ audience to feel seen and heard. Key roles within the organisation would need to focus on research and analysis, education and training, developing organisational strategies and liaising with key stakeholders. These individuals and their respective teams would need to have the required background and connections. Recruiting such individuals to take on the challenge of establishing a new organisation in the current COVID-19 pandemic would be extremely difficult. These individuals would need to be able to work together to achieve their common goal—one that is not easily attainable, and certainly will not happen overnight amid a climate of dwindling funding and uncertainty. The past two years have been a time of rapid change for the entertainment industry and the world at large, yet we have also seen the important role that screen media has played during this tumultuous time. The role of screen media to change hearts and minds is a core reason why people work in the entertainment industry. It is this call to action that would bring the right people together at the right time.

Conclusion

The Screen Australia "Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in Australian TV Drama" report was the first step in recognising the problems in Australia with regards to diversity on screen. Identifying the gaps in screen media representation, however, is not enough and does little to solve the problems identified in the report. As the GLAAD media reports show, representation of diverse people is not simply about visibility, and quotas on representation is not necessarily an effective approach to increasing and improving representation. Further research is needed to investigate issues in media representation and the continued marginalisation of minority identities, including LGBTIQA+, on Australia screens.

There must be a plan for providing solutions to the issues that have caused and uphold these gaps. The establishment of an Australian LGBTIQA+ media institute is one possible solution to the problem. By providing support and education to Australian media professionals regarding LGBTIQA+ representation, the industry would have a centralised organisation that they can collaborate with to improve diversity and inclusion. While the fruits of this labour may not be evident immediately, if the GLAAD Media Institute's example is anything to go by, there is evidence that these kinds of interventions work to improve media representation.

In a growing screen media industry that has now moved beyond film and broadcast TV to include online and digital mediums, any institute would need to also consider media representations beyond the traditional mediums. As creative practitioners and scholars, we must continue to advocate for more authentic and respectful LGBTIQA+ representation across all mediums, where the complexities of the authentic lived experience are exhibited and celebrated. It is important that we do not wait for the next diversity report to see if anything has changed—we need to be the change we want to see in the world, now.

Notes

[1] GLAAD was formed in response to how AIDS was being discussed in New York media coverage, but now seeks to ensure that there is fair and accurate coverage and portrayal of LGBTIQA+ individuals in all facets of the media, including newspapers, magazines, film, television and radio. As part of that effort, the group responds to inappropriate and discriminatory depictions of LGBTIQA+ persons and educates media outlets with guides to appropriate language and terminology.

[2] Trans Media Watch's work focuses more on news media and the representation of trans and intersex people in news stories. Their website provides extensive resources for media professionals and those dealing with media professionals. See https://transmediawatch.org/ for more information.

[3] As noted by screenwriter/director Julie Kalceff in creating *First Day* (Krikowa, "Writing" 333).

[4] "Diversity of Regular Characters on US Primetime TV" from GLAAD "Where We Are on TV" reports 2015–21.

[5] *Number 96* (David Sale, 1972–1977) saw the character of Don Finlayson came out as gay and was portrayed in several romantic relationships. In 1972, the first gay kiss was shown on the series. At the same time, *The Box* (Tom Hegarty, 1974–7) showed both a gay character and a lesbian character. It also included the first lesbian kiss in 1974. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, female gay and bisexual characters appeared and attained starring roles in popular TV series such as *Number 96* and *Prisoner* (Reg Watson and Godfrey Phillip, 1979–1986).

[6] TV series such as *The Secret Life of Us* (John Edwards and Amanda Higgs, 2001–2006), *All Saints* (Bevan Lee, 1998–2009), *Water Rats* (John Hugginson and Tony Morphett, 1996–2001) and *Stingers* (Guy Wilding et al., 1998–2004) included LGBTQ characters. *Rush* (Christopher Lee and John Edwards, 2008–11) maintained an openly bisexual character who had relationships with men and women.

[7] The Australian LGBTI Media Centre is a volunteer group that have not yet provided the guidelines and workshops for news media professionals they aimed to include as part of their mission statement. The website is still active but has not been updated since 2018.

[8] The Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network charter includes nine guiding principles to find and empower storytellers who will reflect the diversity of Australia and its culture. The charter can be found via the Network's website.

References

"About GLAAD." GLAAD, 2012, www.glaad.org/about. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

"Accelerating Acceptance 2020 Executive Summary." GLAAD, 2020, www.glaad.org/publications/accelerating-acceptance-2020. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

Amy-Chinn, Dee. "GLAAD to Be *Torchwood*? Bisexuality and the BBC." *Journal of Bisexuality*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2012, pp. 63–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2012.645719.

Australian LGBTI Media Centre. 2016–2018, algbtimc.org. Accessed 12 Nov. 2022.

Bateman, Alan, creator. *Home and Away*. 7 Network, Australia, 1998–.

Beirne, Rebecca. "Screening the Dykes of Oz: Lesbian Representation on Australian Television." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2009, pp. 25–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/07380560802314128.

Bond, Bradley J. *Exposure to Sexuality in the Media and Emotional Well-Being among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adolescents*. 2011. Department of Communication, University of Illinois, USA, PhD Dissertation. www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/26199. Accessed 12 Mar. 2021.

Bronski, Michael. *A Queer History of the United States: ReVisioning American History*. Beacon Press, 2011.

Carmen, Marina, et al. "Research Matters: How Many People are LGBTIQ?" Rainbow Health Victoria, 2020, rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/media/pages/research-resources/research-matters-how-many-people-are-lgbtiq/4170611962-1638424209/researchmatters-numbers-lgbtiq.pdf. Accessed 30 Jan. 2022.

Cooke, Dewi, et al. "Book Council of Australia to Be Scrapped as $52.5 Million Cut to Arts Revealed in MYEFO." *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Dec. 2015, www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/book-council-of-australia-to-be-scrapped-as-525-million-cut-to-arts-revealed-in-myefo-20151215-glnwza.html. Accessed 10 July 2021.

Cover, Rob, et al. "Representation of Gender and Sexual Diversity in Australian Film and Television, 1990–2020." Australian Queer Screen, 2020, ausqueerscreen.net. Accessed 14 Jan. 2022.

Davis, Glyn, and Gary Needham. *Queer TV: Theories, History, Politics*. Routledge, 2009.

Ecker, Saan, and Ebony Bennett. "Preliminary Results of the Coping with Marriage Equality Debate Survey: Investigating the Stress Impacts associated with the Australian Marriage Equality Debate during the Lead Up to the Postal Survey Results Announcement." The Australian Institute, 4 Dec. 2017, apo.org.au/node/121851. Accessed 30 Jan. 2022.

Edwards, John, and Amanda Higgs, creators. *The Secret Life of Us*. Channel 4 Television Corporation, Network Ten and Optus Television, 2001–2006.

Evans, Elizabeth. *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life*. Routledge, 2011.

Gallagher, B. Kathleen, et al. "Beyond the "Studio System: Public Support for Films in the United States." *Handbook of State Aid for Film: Finance, Industries and Regulation*, edited by in Paul Clemens Murschetz, et al., Springer, 2018, pp. 463–80.

"GLAAD Media Institute." GLAAD, 2012, www.glaad.org/institute. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

Haddrick, Greg, creator. *Janet King.* Screentime, 2014–2017.

Harmon, Steph. "Cate Blanchett Joins Stars signing Open Letter that Calls on Australia to Protect Screen Industry." *The Guardian*, 27 Mar. 2018, www.theguardian.com/film/2018/mar/27/cate-blanchett-joins-stars-signing-open-letter-that-calls-on-australia-to-protect-screen-industry. Accessed 10 July 2021.

Hegarty, Tom, creator. *The Box.* Crawford Productions and Network Ten, 1974–1977.

Hugginson, John, and Tony Morphett, creators. *Water Rats.* Nine Network Australia and Southern Star Entertainment, 1996–2001.

Kalceff, Julie, creator. *Starting From…Now! YouTube*, www.youtube.com/@StartingFromNow, 2014–2016.

Krikowa, Natalie, creator. *All Our Lesbians Are Dead!* 2017.

---. "Intervention as Activism: Advocating Queer Female Representation through Independent Film Production." *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media*, vol. 33, no. 7, 2019, refractoryjournal.net/intervention-as-activism-advocating-queer-female-representation-through-independent-film-production. Accessed 18 Mar. 2021.

---, creator. *The Newtown Girls. YouTube*, www.youtube.com/@TheNewtownGirls, 2012.

---. "Writing Inclusive and Diverse Children's Television: Transgender Representation in ABC Australia's *First Day.*" *Journal of Screenwriting*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 325–43. https://doi.org/10.1386/josc_00070_1. Accessed 13 Jan. 2022.

Lee, Bevan, creator. *A Place to Call Home.* 7 Network, 2013–18.

---, creator. *All Saints.* 7 Network, 1998–2009.

Lee, Christopher, and John Edwards, creators. *Rush*. Southern Star, 2008–11.

Marwick, Alice, et al. "'Dolphins Are Just Gay Sharks': *Glee* and the Queer Case of Transmedia as Text and Object." *Television & New Media*, vol. 20, no. 10, 2013, pp. 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476413478493. Accessed 12 Mar. 2021.

Monaghan, Whitney. “Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Representation on Australian Entertainment Television: 1970–2000.” *Media International Australia*, vol. 174, no. 1, 2020, pp. 49–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X19876330.

---. “Post-Gay Television: LGBTQI+ Representation and the Negotiation of ‘Normal’ in MTV’s Faking It.” *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2021, pp. 428–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720957553.

---. “Starting from ... Now and the Web Weries to Television Crossover: An Online Revolution?” *Media International Australia*, vol. 164, no. 1, 2017, pp. 82–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X17708842.

Munro, Kim. “Making Visible: Out Here, Love Bites and LGBTQIA+ Documentary on the Small Screen.” *Metro (Melbourne)*, no. 206, 2020, pp. 42–5.

“National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy.” Report, Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government, 2012, www.acon.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/National-LGBTI-Ageing-and-Aged-Care-Strategy-2013.pdf.

Oswald, Debra, et al, creators. *Offspring*. Southern Star, 2010–17.

Radulovich, Lara, et al., creators. *Wentworth.* Fremantle Media Australia, 2013–.

Rowe, Darren. “Outrage at ‘Home and Away' Lesbian Storyline.” *Digital Spy*, 12 Mar. 2009, www.digitalspy.com/soaps/a149332/outrage-at-home-and-away-lesbian-storyline. Accessed 12 Nov. 2022.

Sale, David, creator. *Number 96*. Cash Harmon Television, Australia, 1972–77.

“Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network Charter.” The Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network (SDIN), 2022, www.sdin.com.au/charter. Accessed 12 Nov. 2022.

“Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in Australian TV Drama.” Report, Screen Australia, 2016, www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/157b05b4-255a-47b4-bd8b-9f715555fb44/TV-Drama-Diversity.pdf.

“Studio Responsibility Index.” GLAAD, 2021, www.glaad.org/sri/2021. Accessed 15 Feb. 2022.

Thomas, Josh, creator. *Please Like Me*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), John & Josh, International and Pigeon Fancier Productions, 2013–16.

“Vision, Mission and Values.” *QueerScreen*, queerscreen.org.au/about-us/vision-mission-and-values. Accessed 12 Mar. 2021.

Watson, Greg, creator. *Neighbours*. Grundy Television, 1985–2022.

Watson, Reg, and Godfrey Philipp, creators. *Prisoner: Cell Block H*. Grundy Television Productions and Network Ten, 1979–86.

"Where We Are on TV 2015–2016." GLAAD, 2015, www.glaad.org/files/GLAAD-2015-WWAT.pdf. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

"Where We Are on TV 2016–2017. GLAAD's Annual Report on LGBTQ Inclusion." GLAAD, 2016, glaad.org/files/WWAT/WWAT_GLAAD_2016-2017.pdf. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

"Where We Are on TV 2017–2018. GLAAD's Annual Report on LGBTQ Inclusion." GLAAD, 2017, glaad.org/files/WWAT/WWAT_GLAAD_2017-2018.pdf. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

"Where We Are on TV 2018–2019." GLAAD, 2018, glaad.org/files/WWAT/WWAT_GLAAD_2018-2019.pdf. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

"Where We Are on TV 2019–2020." GLAAD, 2019, www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD WHERE WE ARE ON TV 2019 2020.pdf. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

"Where We Are on TV 2020–2021." GLAAD, 2020, www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD - 202021 WHERE WE ARE ON TV.pdf. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

Wilding, Guy, et al., creators. *Stingers.* Beyond Simpson le Mesurier and Crawfords Australia, 1998–2004.

Wilson, Tom, et al. "What is the Size of Australia's Sexual Minority Population?" *BMC Research Notes*, vol. 13, no. 535, 2020, pp. 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-020-05383-w.

Suggested Citation

Krikowa, Natalie. "Where Is Australia's GLAAD? A Case for Establishing an Australian LGBTIQA+ Media Institute to Improve Diversity in Screen Media Representation." *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 24, 2022, pp. 49–63. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.24.03.

Natalie Krikowa is a media scholar and practice-led researcher. Her work problematises and discusses issues surrounding media representation and identity politics in screen studies, popular culture, and transmedia, with a feminist, Queer, and gender studies focus. She currently researches and teaches in the School of Communication at the University of Technology Sydney. In addition to this, she works as the Creative Director of Zenowa Productions, writing and producing queer female focused works including *The Newtown Girls* (2012) and *All Our Lesbians Are Dead!* (2017).