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Fostering Diversity On and Off Screen

Editorial

Marsha Berry, Kath Dooley and Margaret McHugh



Figure 1: A film crew at work. Image created by Marsha Berry using Midjourney, 2022.

This issue of *Alphaville* brings together research that responds to the broader social zeitgeist concerning gender and diversity inequities in the field of screen production. In recent years, individuals and groups from inside and outside of academia have called for greater diversity on screen, resulting in campaigns such as #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #OscarsSoWhite. In particular, the gender imbalance that exists on screen and behind the camera has been a particular point of focus.

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As Australian academics, screen practitioners and educators with strong industry links, we have followed these movements with deep interest to better understand how such considerations around gender and diversity may shape industry and teaching practices. We put out a call for papers concerning research investigating questions of gender and diversity in screen production. We were interested in evaluatory studies of funding body initiatives aimed to increase diversity as well as case studies from the screen industries including film productions and/or screenplays, which have demonstrated a commitment to increased diversity on screen. We were also interested in empirical studies from educational settings which explored ways in which students could be encouraged to interrogate issues of diversity on screen and behind the scenes.

Our aim for this issue was to present research that suggests a way forward for practitioners, educators and members of the broader screen industries from all over the globe in regard to improving gender and diversity imbalances. This goal may appear to be overly ambitious; however, recent debates in the humanities and social sciences surrounding critical race theory, feminism, queer theory and postcolonialism have seen the development of deeper awareness of the importance of diversity in regard to gender, disability, class, race, and ethnicity, also considering intersectionality. These debates have spilled into the wider community as well, with impassioned discussions about culture wars, such as the recent outrage around the US Supreme Court overturning *Roe vs Wade*, which represents a threat to abortion rights for women everywhere.

In the context of this issue, the term "diversity" relates to the inclusion of individuals with a variety of identities within a particular context (such as within a group or organisation). The issue builds upon a series of important prior studies and projects exploring screen diversity in industry and educational contexts, some of which we will note in this editorial. In terms of the former, we observe the wealth of literature exploring gender inequalities on and/or off screen, for example in the US (Lauzen), Canadia (Coles; Liinamaa and Rogers), the UK (Cobb et al.; Green) and in global screen industry contexts (Liddy). Alongside this, in an Australian context, we look to work undertaken on gender inequalities and sexism in postproduction sectors (Dooley and Erhart), on Australian film and television sectors more broadly (French, "Women" and "Gender"), on the power of men's networks (Verhoeven and Palmer), and on the effects of caring responsibilities that most commonly fall upon women (Verhoeven et al.). All of this work highlights an ongoing problem of gender bias that affects screen industry products, workplaces and networks. Further to surveying gender, the above-mentioned study by Shelley Cobb, Linda Ruth Williams and Natalie Wreyford considers intersectional factors and highlights a low participation rate for women behind the camera who are Black, Asian or hold Minority Ethnic identities. Similarly, a special section of *Media Industries* journal edited by Skadi Loist and Deb Verhoeven explores intersectional perspectives on international screen media sectors with a focus on the post-Weinstein era.

Moreover, ethnic diversity in the screen industries has been taken up by a number of authors and institutions, ethnicity being "one of the characteristics that are mostly included in reports about creative workers' demographics" (Ozimek 28). For example, ethnicity and cultural production in UK television contexts has been explored by Anamik Saha while Kristen Warner examines "post-racial" Hollywood labour practices. Clive James Nwonka ("New Babel") and Jack Newsinger and Doris Ruth Eikhof observe that Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals in the UK remain marginalised on and off screen, despite nearly twenty years of screen industry

initiatives to address inequalities (Nwonka, *Race*). The 2018 CAMEo Research Institute report on "Workforce Diversity in the UK Screen Sector" makes a link between the inequalities and discrimination experienced by individuals from ethnic minorities backgrounds and their limited access to networks and opportunities that will advance career progression (38). All of this research supports an assertion made in the recent symposium on "Diversity On and Off Screen" organised by the Center on the Dynamics of Ethnicity, that contemporary diversity initiatives have a long way to go in order to create a positive impact for their ethnically diverse survey respondents (CODE).

Some of the research listed above has explored how government screen agencies around the world have increased efforts to address gender equality and diversity in the screen industry. These initiatives have primarily focused on quotas and funding schemes such as Screen Australia's Gender Matters (2015) and, notably, the Swedish Film Institute's FiftyFifty by 2020 (2012). Key differences between these two funding schemes can be seen in the distribution of funding with the Swedish Film Institute allocating an even split in total funding to male- and female-led productions, whereas Screen Australia's Gender Matters funding initiative allocated AUD $5 million over three years from 2015 to 2018 towards supporting the development of female-driven stories (Brilliant Stories) and female-driven businesses (Brilliant Careers). Other industry actions that directly aim to address diversity behind and in front of the camera include British Film Institute's Three Ticks (2015) diversity fund and the Academy's Representation and Inclusion Standards for the 96th Oscars in 2024, where a film must meet two out of four standards to be deemed eligible for inclusion in the Best Picture category.

The long-term benefits of one-off funding initiatives is contested. As Deb Verhoeven points out:

> It is safe to assume that sporadic equal-opportunity measures or affirmative-action policies that identify the statistical representation of women as the cause rather than the symptom of a problem do not create the conditions for improved diversity throughout the film industry. [...] It is not the numbers we need to be focused on. It's the values.

Thus, the capacity of initiatives based on quotas to truly address the underlying cause of gender issues behind and in front of the camera in the film industry remains to be seen. This also leads to the importance of developing alternative models to address the systematic issue of gender and diversity issues in the industry.

Less academic or industry research has considered other aspects of screen industry diversity, such as age, social class, disability, sexuality, geographical location or religion (Ozimek). One notable report, "Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in Australian TV Drama" by Australian national funding body Screen Australia, probes statistics around cultural background, disability status and gender identity, finding that a number of the country's minorities and marginalised communities are under-represented in Australian Television drama (3). In particular, representations of disability are particularly low (4). Relatedly, the CAMEo "Doubling Disability" research report suggests that "there are significant gaps in the understanding of disability and of being disability inclusive" across the UK broadcasting industry (2).

Looking at research on educational contexts, we acknowledge the valuable work of Anne Orwin and Adrianne Carageorge and of Miranda Banks, who highlight the problem of gender inequality in the screen production classroom. These researchers demonstrate the ways in which biases and power dynamics manifest, and suggest strategies to address this phenomena. Similarly, strategies and interventions to subvert gender inequalities and other diversity issues in the classroom are discussed in the 2020 Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA) report titled "Diversity On and Off Screen in Australian Film Schools" (Dooley et al.), which receives analysis in an article by Kath Dooley and others in this issue. This comes following Pieter Aquilia's exploration of the role of film schools in relation to improving the gender skew away from female directors in the Australian film industry.

Notable work to address diversity in the screen production and screen studies classroom more broadly has been undertaken by a consortium of US-based instructors associated with the University Film and Video Association, led by Jennifer Proctor as part of the EDIT Media initiative. The EDIT Media website hosts a number of high-quality teaching materials designed to foster inclusive instruction and diversity on screen. The teaching resources that appear in the "Addressing Diversity On and Off Screen in the Classroom" Dossier of this issue of *Alphaville* aim to supplement these valuable resources.

Fostering Diversity: What Are the Ongoing Issues and Barriers?

The articles featured in this issue demonstrate that, while progress is being made in some areas, a number of ongoing challenges and barriers against diversity in the screen industries remain. These are reflected in new entrant and experienced practitioners' perceptions of changes to screen diversity, the unreasonable expectations that continue to be placed on individuals with caring responsibilities by some employers, and the cultures and approaches of screen-based organisations.

Perceptions of Diversity and Slow Change

In her article on the Irish screen industry in 2021, Susan Liddy presents an analysis of the perspectives of female practitioners working in a number of roles either above or below the line in film or television sectors. By conducting a series of interviews and questionnaires on the impact of targeted initiatives introduced from 2016, Liddy finds common themes relating to continuity and change, resistance and lip service, and the road ahead. This research suggests that female practitioners in Ireland consider there to be a greater industry discourse around gender equality, diversity and inclusion but actual change on the ground is still fledging.

On a related note, Sarah Arnold and Anne O'Brien explore the perceptions of aspiring new entrants to the Irish media industries. Their interviews with Generation-Z graduates reveal generally cautious or sceptical attitudes towards the idea of "equality and fairness" in Irish media work, this being a reflection of diverse representations within Irish media to date. This scepticism extends to interviewee expectations of discrimination and exclusion from the industry, which may deter some graduates from pursuing a career in the field.

Interrogating Organisational Strategies and Initiatives

Natalie Krikowa's article analyses and reflects on how the GLAAD Media Institute (America's primary advocacy and advisory organisation for LGBTIQA+ representation in media and entertainment) may be applied to an Australian context in order to improve diversity on the screen. Krikowa argues that positive cultural change may be achieved through the development of knowledge about the LGBTIQA+ community. Krikowa proposes that a practical approach will help writers and directors develop the confidence and language to create stories that include LGBTIQA+ characters in a meaningful way.

The Impact of Caring Responsibilities and Unreasonable Hours

In their interview with UK-based freelance Series Producer Natalie Grant, Helen Kennedy and Jack Newsinger probe the continued challenges experienced by practitioners with caring responsibilities. Grant is codirector of Share My Telly Job (SMTJ), an organisation that promotes job sharing and encourages the normalisation of flexible working approaches in the UK television and film industry, more broadly. This includes options such as part-time work or the condensing of work hours so as to encourage better equality, diversity and inclusion. Grant laments the nature of "feast-or-famine" work in the screen industries that presents obstacles for many carers, and in particular for single mothers, parents of children with special needs, those without family support networks, or those living outside of production hubs.

Similarly, in her article exploring the significance of geographical location on experiences of work within Scottish screen industry, Susan Berridge presents a fascinating snapshot through a series of interviews with parents including both women and men who have worked in film and television to examine how gender inequalities are influenced by geography in terms of location as well as caring duties. Berridge puts forward a convincing argument that the concentration of the screen industry in London presents significant obstacles for parents and carers who wish to work in the screen industry within the UK. Although progress has been made by establishment of a hub in Glasgow through a dedicated BBC Scotland channel and the opening of Channel 4's Creative Hub, the interviews reveal the substantial challenges experienced by professionals working in the Scottish screen industry.

Television Cultures

Two articles address diversity on and off screen within television contexts. The systemic processes that contribute to the disparity of First Nations content on Australian commercial and noncommercial television networks is explored in Karen Nobes and Susan Kerrigan's article "*White Noise*: Researching the Absence of First Nations Presence in Commercial Australian Television Drama". The study engaged with First Nations and non-Indigenous Australian industry practitioners and leaders to learn more about the contributing factors that lead to the barriers that impact the inclusion or exclusion of First Nations content in commercial television drama.

Lucy Brown, Rosamund Davies and Funke Oyebayo approach diversity within television cultures through the notions of power and agency. They uncover how unconscious bias manifests to reinforce exclusions and inequality. Their article provides a nuanced discussion of the social

and financial costs and benefits for shifts towards greater diversity and inclusion in television programme-making in order to appeal to contemporary audiences and represent and reflect their concerns. They argue that unconscious bias needs to be addressed within concept and idea development and this, in turn, is an important step towards addressing structural inequality in terms of power and agency. To achieve greater diversity and inclusion, they advocate collective action to drive institutional change within the television industry itself.

Addressing Diversity On and Off Screen in the Classroom

Several articles in this issue, and the papers that make up the Dossier on teaching practices in particular, provide some guidance as to ways that educators can address diversity in the classroom. In the aforementioned article that analyses ASPERA survey data, Kath Dooley, Margaret McHugh, Marsha Berry, Craig Batty, and James Verdon explore the ways that screen production educators might approach normalised classroom practices so as to create lasting change. They suggest a range of teaching and learning interventions that might disrupt conscious and unconscious gender biases that are evident in global screen industries. These include the foregrounding of diversity in class texts and staffing choices, as well as exercises to interrogate students' biases.

On a similar note, in the first paper of the Dossier Aparna Sharma shares approaches used to critically engage students with diversity in documentary media education. These include the inclusion and curation of diverse materials in the curriculum, which present cinema as "a space of competing discourse formations and aesthetics". Sharma argues for documentary media classes that draw upon postcolonial and feminist theory, as well as ethnography, so as to foster historically contextualised understanding of texts. This then aids students to grasp their contemporary subject positions and reactions to documentary works.

How students can be encouraged to interrogate diversity and representation in their filmmaking practice through teaching strategies is explored in Sarah Sinwell's "Teaching Diversity, Questioning Representation". Sinwell argues for students to engage with the following six modes of analysis when creating screen work: 1) search for presence, 2) seek out positive representation, 3) create complex and layered characters, 4) consider casting, crew, consulting, and mentoring (including below the line), 5) focus on intersectionality, empathy and empowerment, 6) interrogate your choices.

To explore another approach to student practice, Vincent Giarrusso's "Reimagining Multiculturalism and Diversity Through Screenwriting and Filmmaking" looks at the pedagogic methods used in the research project "Zooming In: Multiculturalism Through the Lens of the Next Generation". In this paper, Giarrusso explores the interconnections between multiculturalism and diversity through filmmaking and sociology through student approaches to writing for the screen.

Feminist pedagogy and process is examined in "'Left to my own devices, I probably could': Reflections on Inclusive Pedagogy and Gender Equity During Melbourne's Pandemic Lockdown" by Victoria Duckett and Liz Baulch, who argue for the home to be seen as a site of creative play. As educators during the Covid-19 pandemic, they reflect on how smartphone filmmaking during lockdowns could in fact turn homes into sites for feminist pedagogy and progress.

Taken as a whole, the collection of articles featured in this special issue provides greater insight into a range of issues that continue to challenge equality and diversity for screen industries and screen education. While we acknowledge the importance of exploring disability, we have not been able to address this specifically in this issue due to the topics and themes covered by the submissions we received in response to our call for papers. With this in mind, we would like to draw attention to some useful resources and organisations that address disability in the context of the Australian screen sector. The aforementioned Screen Australia report "Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in Australian TV Drama" highlighted the challenges practitioners with a disability face when working in the industry and the need for better representation of characters with a disability on screen. To address these issues, innovative organisations such as Bus Stop Films have run education and training programmes dedicated to teaching people with disabilities film studies, their stated aim being to use "filmmaking and the film industry to change community attitudes globally around the rights and contribution to society of and by people with disability" ("About"). Additionally, when it is published, we look forward to seeing the results of Radha O'Meara's forthcoming research survey "The Disability and Screen in Australia 2022".

The ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic provide a significant additional challenge to diversity and inclusion as explored by Duckett and Baulch and noted in the interview by Kennedy and Newsinger. We also acknowledge the need for further research into its impact on practitioner opportunities and working conditions going forward. Please enjoy reading the issue.

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Marsha Berry is an Associate Professor in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University where she teaches creative practice research methods. She is an ethnographer, writer and artist whose practice includes filmmaking, participatory art projects and poetry. She is author of *Creating with Mobile Media* (2017) and is coeditor of three volumes of essays on mobile media and screen production. With over fifty articles and book chapters, she has published her research extensively in highly prestigious international journals such as *New Media and Society* and *New Writing* as well as in edited books.

Kath Dooley is Associate Professor based at the University of South Australia. She is a filmmaker and academic. Her work as writer/director has screened at events such the Edinburgh International Film Festival and FIVARS, Toronto. Kath is author of *Cinematic Virtual Reality: A Critical Study of 21st Century Approaches and Practices* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) and coeditor of *The Palgrave Handbook of Screen Production* (2019). Her research interests include screen production methodology for traditional and immersive media, screenwriting, women's screen practice, and diversity in the screen industries.

Margaret McHugh is a creative practice researcher and an award-winning documentary filmmaker. She comes from an industry background working in film production, and film festival programming and marketing. As a practitioner, Margaret has directed, written and produced over sixteen video works. Her films have screened at more than fifty national and international film festivals, galleries and online exhibition platforms, and have received numerous competitive awards, special jury awards and director's choice programming selections. Margaret's current research interests include documentary film, feminist theory and screen production research. She is a lecturer in Media Arts and Production at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).