

Fifties Vibe, 21st Century Audience: Australian Children's Media and Cultural Diversity

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Context

Australia has one of the most concentrated patterns of media ownership among developed countries (Jakubowicz 2010)

Government broadcasting divided among

- ABC (very similar to the BBC, TRT, and other public service broadcasting models) and**
- SBS (unique to Australia, with its specific mandate to cover multicultural issues)**

Context continued

But..

Commercial sector encompasses the press (state and local) and broadcasting outlets of News Corporation and its effective monopoly cable service Foxtel, and the Fairfax media group including press (state and local) and radio.

The difference between how multicultural Australia is 'in real life' and 'on screen' can be seen through data from the Census, and from research into television.

The Census gives us a picture of the Australian population every five years.

It's conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (a government agency).

The newest Census was in 2016.

49 per cent of Australians had either been born overseas (first generation Australian) or one or both parents had been born overseas (second generation Australian).

- 32 per cent of Australians are of non-Anglo Celtic backgrounds**

2.8 per cent of Australians identify as Indigenous (Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander).

18 per cent of Australians are believed to have a disability

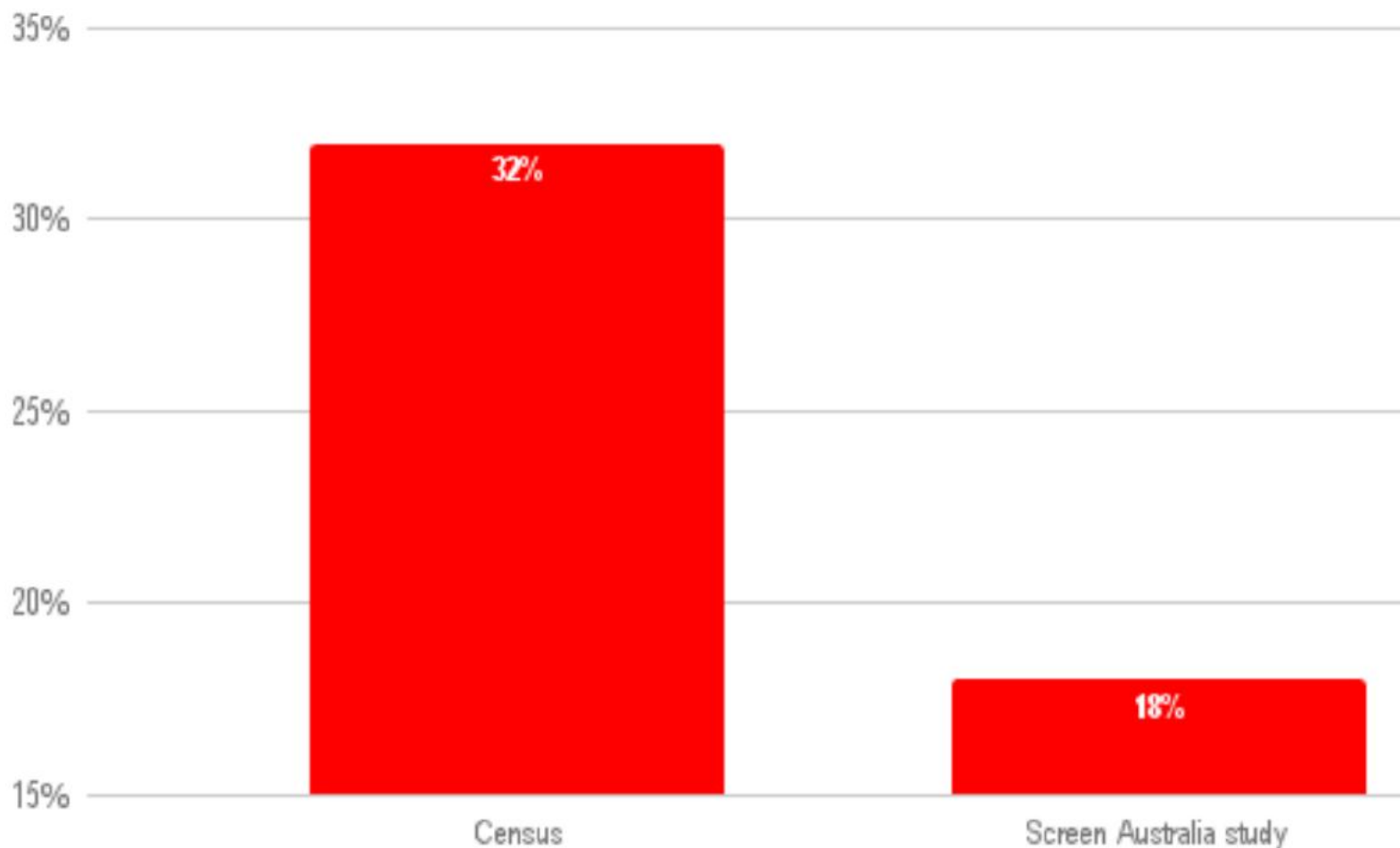
SCREEN AUSTRALIA STUDY

Screen Australia = government agency that oversees film and TV funding and research

Conducted in 2016, the study looked at 199 TV Dramas (fiction excluding animation) that aired between 2011 and 2015

Characters of non-Anglo Celtic backgrounds

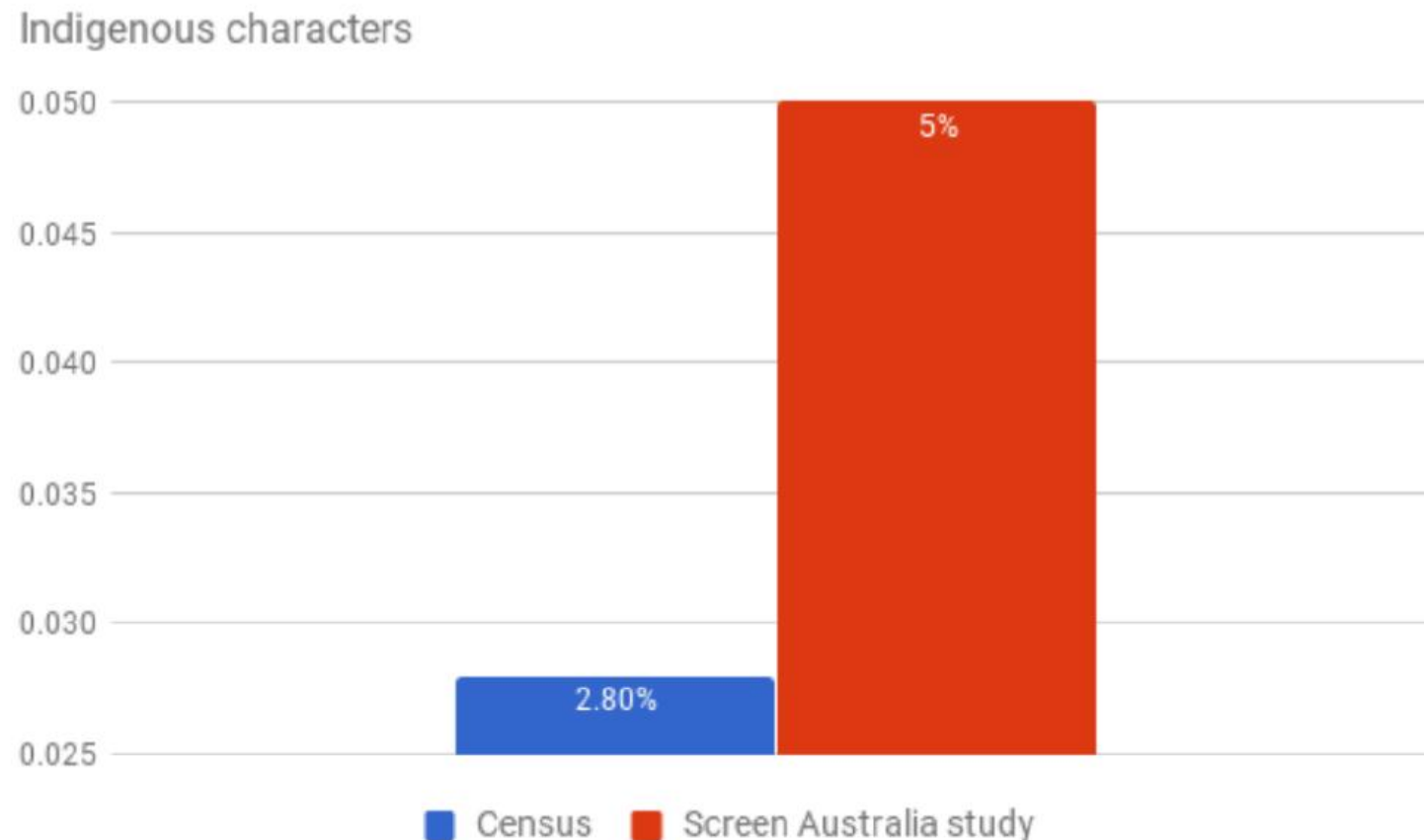
Characters of non-Anglo Celtic backgrounds

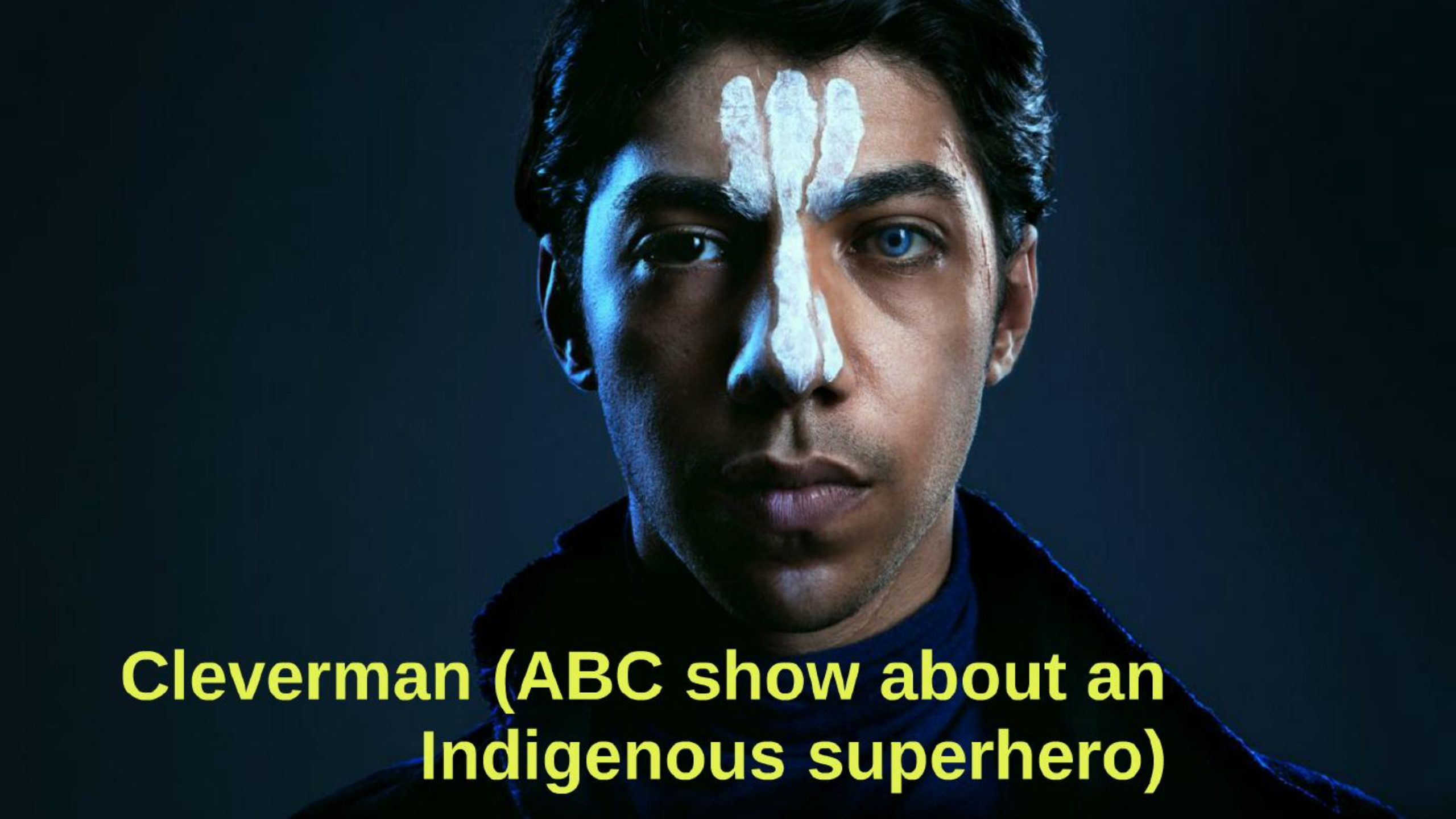




Shows like SBS's *The Family Law* are normally seen on public broadcasters, not commercial ones

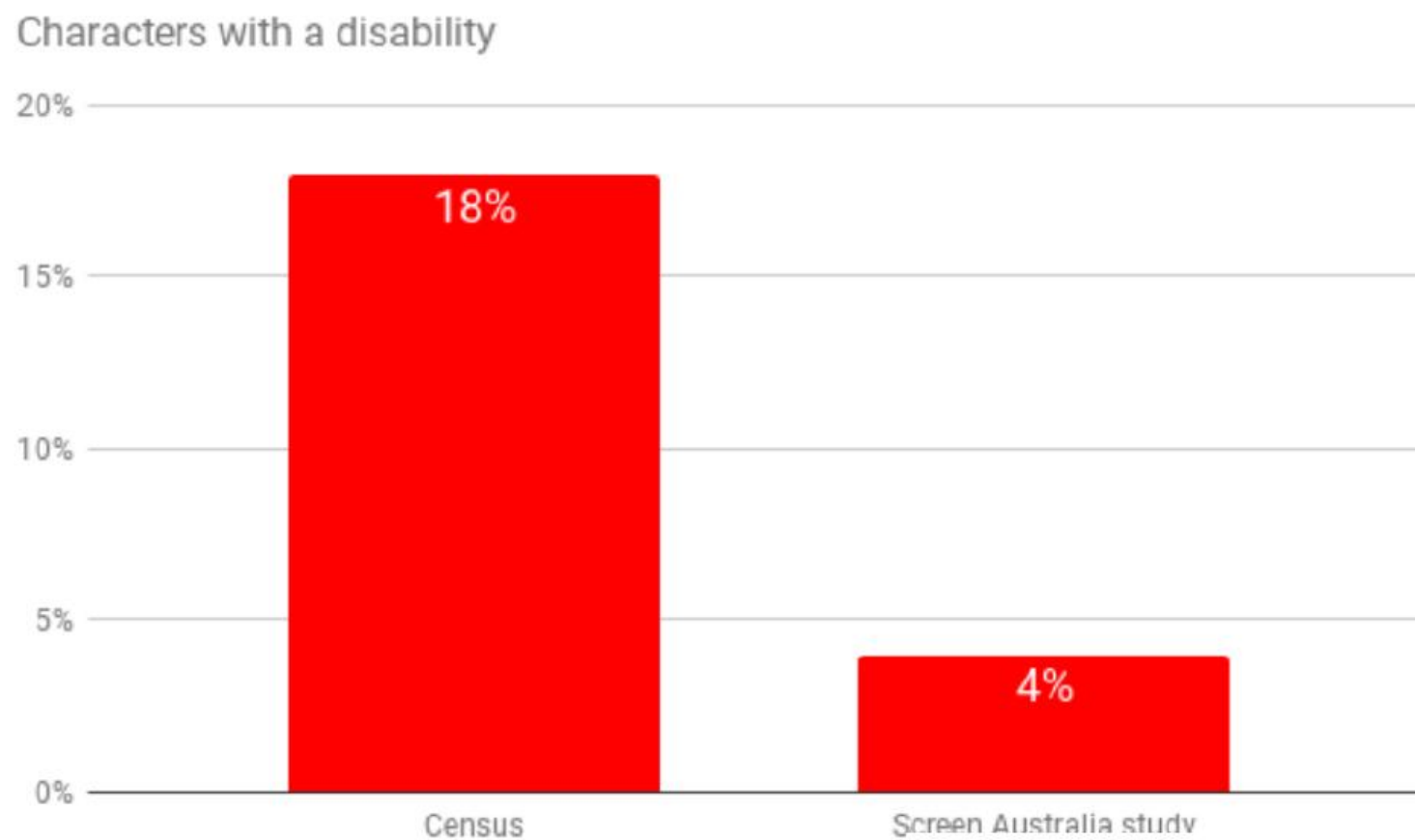
Indigenous (Aboriginal) characters are over-represented on screen (a positive move)





**Cleverman (ABC show about an
Indigenous superhero)**

Characters with a disability





A still from Please Like Me, an ABC show that Screen Australia singled out for praise for including main characters with a disability

SOME POSITIVE SIGNS

64% of all programs included at least one character who was not Anglo-Celtic

and

Children's shows and comedies tended to be more diverse than other dramas (Screen Australia 2016)

positive signs continued

Some political moves, like the Australian Greens' Save Kids TV campaign.

“Every culture needs to tell their own stories, for learning and reflection, quality children’s TV is one way of helping our kids to make sense of what it means to be Australian and how we connect with each other and those beyond our borders. Australian kids shouldn't have to miss out on having that greater reflection and understanding of their own cultures because big commercial broadcasters can't find profit in it.”

Greens' arts and youth spokesperson, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young (in Morelli 2017)

positive signs continued

Australian producers feel producers in other nations, such as Canada, were at a competitive advantage because their local broadcasters helped them put together the project financing deals (Aisbett 2007). The ABC and SBS are limited in their abilities to do this.

The monopoly of traditional commercial broadcasters is being eroded with iTunes, Netflix and Stan (a local Netflix-like company). This permits parents to have a wider choice of children's programs, including overseas productions with more cultural diversity.

POSSIBLE WAYS OF OVERCOMING THE LACK OF DIVERSITY ON AUSTRALIAN SCREENS

1. refuse to support or watch programs coming out of commercial Australian TV, as they are monocultural and do not reflect the reality of life in a diverse society
 - Instead, support children's programming on Netflix etc
2. encourage people from diverse backgrounds to join the industry as a producer, presenter, or actor
3. encourage the industry to script and write programs that reflect the diversity of Australian life

Last two options are difficult because of the size (small) of the Australian industry

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Larger markets like the US and UK (and Turkey, now) are more open to, or provide more opportunities for, 'colourblind' casting (where roles are not culturally defined and can be played by actors of any 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" (Screen Australia 2016).

Because of a markedly smaller market, commercial broadcasters and producers in Australia are not likely to improve on showing diversity in children's shows (they worry that this type of product won't sell).

The effect of new internet based providers like Netflix on diversity in children's shows is an exciting, potential new area for research