

Portrayal of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People on the BBC

Research Update
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Foreword

Two years ago the BBC published the most comprehensive audience research and public consultation conducted by a broadcaster on how lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people are portrayed on the BBC.

We made a commitment then that we would review the work and I'm pleased to introduce it here.

Serving all audiences is a fundamental obligation for the BBC and putting audiences first is one of our core values. This review has developed and enhanced our understanding of the views of all audiences on this subject and provides us with critical insight into how we can portray LGB people more accurately and authentically.

We used our own independently-run audience reaction panel (called Pulse) to do much of the work this year. This was possible because we now know that approximately 4.5% of respondents are lesbian, gay or bisexual. This is so important because it means we can now use our panel to keep in touch with the views of LGB audiences more easily.

To complement that analysis we also spoke to representatives of LGB organisations as a way to understand the perspective of LGB communities more broadly. Those we approached were very receptive and glad to see that this work is part and parcel of our business.

This report gives a summary of the review and what we found and as a result our focus will be squarely on sharing the findings with commissioner and editors in particular, and continuing to monitor our progress.

Tim Davie

Acting Director-General

Chair of the BBC Working Group on Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences

Executive Summary

In 2012, the BBC has enhanced its understanding of the issues around the portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the following ways:

- Replicating key elements of the 2010 quantitative research on the BBC's independently-run audience reaction panel (called Pulse) has reinforced that the key messages from 2010 are robust and has also established a benchmark for tracking attitudes in the future
- Internal testimonials have told some of the stories of where the research has supported and informed creativity and editorial decision-making
- Analysis of LGB consumption and appreciation via the BBC's independently-run audience reaction panel (called Pulse) has shown that
 - Gay and bisexual men seem relatively happy with the TV they consume (across all channels, not just the BBC) – lesbian and bisexual women perhaps less so
 - The channels watched by LGB audiences are broadly the same as those watched by heterosexual audiences of the same age and gender – with some slight differences
 - Both LGB men and women are more likely than heterosexual audiences to watch Arts programming, and gay and bisexual men are also more likely to watch soap operas and continuing drama
 - Soap and drama titles, shows with strong entertainment values and programmes featuring LGB talent do seem to resonate more with LGB audiences
- Expert interviews have suggested that
 - there is still a perception among LGB communities that there is insufficient representation of LGB people across the media, although there has been a gradual degree of improvement over the past ten years or so
 - LGB experts feel that television has a key role to play in the portrayal of LGB people, particularly in news & current affairs, drama series and factual programming; they believe there should be a careful mix of incidental, overt and landmark types of LGB portrayal, and that LGB representation should reflect the diversity of LGB people, and avoid stereotypes
 - there is a call from the LGB experts who we interviewed for the BBC to be bolder and more creative in how it represents LGB people, and to lead the field in this area

In response to the findings in this report the BBC LGB Working Group has committed to repeating key questions from the 2010 quantitative survey in a year's time using the 2012 analysis as a baseline and to using the findings of some commissioned content analysis work to demonstrate any action required to help address the quantity of LGB portrayal.

There will also be targeted internal awareness-raising of the findings of both this report and the research and consultation from 2010 across the creative areas of the organisation.

1. Introduction

The BBC's diversity strategy, through which the corporation strives to reflect the diversity of the nation on and off-air, has driven the work of the BBC's Working Group on the Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Audiences which was set up in April 2009.

The Working Group's remit was to look at the BBC's editorial policy and practice in this area on behalf of the BBC Diversity Board and to identify opportunities to enhance creativity and audience engagement to improve its portrayal of lesbian women, gay men and bisexual people.

The Working Group is made up of commissioners, programme makers and senior executives and it has worked with LGB community and voluntary sector organisations and other partners to identify and share examples of good practice to help inform solutions for further improvement. Terms of Reference are available in Appendix 1.

Al Booth, Editor of Sunday Love Songs, Radio 2:

“As an editorial team at Sunday Love Songs we discussed the research, and were particularly interested to discover that the clear majority of the UK population are either comfortable with, or do not feel strongly either way about, the portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media.

“This and other findings gave us a richer understanding of how LGB portrayal sits with our audience, and so we have continued confidence to cover dedications from same-sex couples in this mainstream show in same way that we do heterosexual couples.”

BBC Working Group activity

The Working Group sought to develop a deeper understanding of what all audiences think about how the BBC portrays LGB people across its services.

The Working Group met with a range of LGB community and voluntary sector organisations during the course of their work to inform their examination of the BBC's practice in this area.

The chief outcome of the Working Group was a comprehensive and unprecedented programme of audience engagement in this area involving both audience research and public consultation. This was important to understanding the perceptions, experiences and recommendations of all audiences.

Both qualitative and quantitative audience research was conducted with all audiences focusing on portrayal of LGB people across all broadcast media generally, including BBC services.

The Working Group also conducted a public consultation on this topic offering anyone the opportunity to give their views on how well the BBC portrays LGB people. The public consultation was designed to complement the audience research and to provide added richness to the audience research findings.

The results of both the audience research and public consultation were published in September 2010 and included 5 recommendations in response to the findings, agreed by the BBC's Diversity Board,. These were:

1. BBC commits to addressing the issues raised through the audience research and consultation to achieve accurate and authentic portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual people across its services.
2. All BBC editorial heads will be responsible for identifying how to address the key issues raised and overseeing resulting activity
3. All BBC editorial heads will be responsible for debriefing outcomes of audience research and consultation with their teams
4. BBC will review this audience research and consultation again in two years to ascertain whether the BBC has moved forward in the eyes of our audiences
5. BBC Working Group on the Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences will monitor pan-BBC implementation on behalf of Diversity Board

The full research and consultation reports can be found online at the following site:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howwework/reports/diversity_research.html

Janice Hadlow, Controller, BBC Two:

“The 2010 research confirmed our commitment in BBC Vision to ensuring a range of LGB portrayal, from thinking about how we cover subjects with LGB issues at their heart, to the way we portray LGB characters in comedy and drama, and to ensuring that our casting of popular shows and formats reflects the diversity of our audiences.

“It prompted us to continue to strive for authenticity as a critical driver of credibility and engagement in all our LGB portrayal, from investigative documentaries such as BBC Three’s ‘Britain’s Gay Footballers’, to drama storylines such as in BBC One’s ‘Upstairs Downstairs’, through to the casting of LGB people in formats like BBC Two’s ‘The Great British Bake Off’.

“The research also challenged us in terms of seeking out more diversity within LGB portrayal, and in understanding the role of stereotypes. We continue to have on-going conversations about LGB portrayal, now more fully informed by this research, and we look forward to the 2012 update.”

Recommendation 4: reviewing the audience research and consultation to ascertain whether the BBC has moved forward in the eyes of our audiences

The BBC has published this report in response to Recommendation 4.

Given the comprehensive approach in 2010, the approach was taken to complement and build on this this work rather than to repeat it.

Following the 2010 study, the BBC added questions about sexual orientation to its independently-run audience reaction panel (called Pulse) which reports daily on content and broadcasting issues from a nationally representative sample.

Over 700 people identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual. This was a large enough sample to be able to take a look at what kinds of media LGB people consume and appreciate compared to the heterosexual population of the same age and gender to identify any differences, and ask specific questions about the views of LGB audiences on the media.

The 2012 work included the following areas:

- a. repeating some of the key questions from 2010 on views about LGB portrayal in the broadcast media on the Pulse panel
- b. carrying out analysis of consumption and appreciation of television channels, genres and programmes by LGB audiences.
- c. commissioning expert interviews with LGB organisations and representatives
- d. talking to internal colleagues about the benefit and impact of the original research & consultation.

This report is a summary of these strands of work. To contextualize the findings, we have also included the headlines from the 2010 research project and consultation exercise.

2. A reminder of the key findings from 2010 research and consultation

Ben Stephenson, Head of Commissioning, Drama:

“The 2010 LGB Portrayal research was published between Series 1 and Series 2 of BBC Three’s landmark lesbian drama, Lip Service. The findings gave us continued belief in the show, having confirmed the hunger of the LGB audience for content such as this which pushes boundaries in terms of LGB portrayal and could be felt to ‘belong’ to LGB communities.

“We were very proud to have such an iconic, critically acclaimed programme in our BBC Drama portfolio, which also continues to include both overt and incidental LGB portrayal, in line with the research’s recommendations.”

In 2010 a research report was published which comprised a qualitative study followed by a quantitative survey. The purpose was to gain a deeper understanding not only of what LGB people think of LGB portrayal in broadcast media in the UK, but also to gather the views of a representative sample of the UK population overall. There was a specific focus on the BBC’s portrayal of LGB people.

The qualitative phase of the research consisted of focus groups and in-depth interviews with LGB and heterosexual people, which were conducted by 2CV Research for the BBC. The quantitative survey was conducted by Kantar Media for the BBC and comprised two samples.

Firstly, a nationally representative sample of 1,625 UK adults aged 16+ were surveyed face-to-face. The incidence of LGB people from the nationally representative sample we conducted was 3%.

Secondly, a boost sample of 510 LGB respondents completed the same questionnaire online. The final proportion of lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents in the LGB boost sample was: 148 gay men, 100 lesbian women, and 262 bisexual people (98 men; 164 women).

At the same time as the research report, a consultation report was published which summarised the responses from public consultation exercise that attracted comment from almost ten thousand viewers and listeners. It was conducted online and was open for anyone to answer and the BBC actively encouraged as many as possible to participate.

There was striking consistency between what both the audience research and the consultation found, and in what audiences, both LGB and heterosexual, said they wanted from the BBC in relation to improving how LGB people are portrayed on the BBC.

The full research and consultation reports can be found online at http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howwework/reports/diversity_research.html

The key findings from audience research and consultation into the portrayal of lesbian women, gay men and bisexual people in broadcast media were as follows:

1. LGB people want to see more, and greater diversity within, LGB portrayal

Specifically:

- Diversity within portrayal of LGB people, showing LGB people of all different backgrounds and life experiences. In particular, they want to see more lesbian women and depictions of bisexual identity, as well as alternatives to stereotypes of gay men.
- Integrated portrayal of LGB people across all genres, so that their sexual orientation is not always a defining factor or the focal point for their inclusion.
- More portrayal of LGB people overall and in particular that this content is flagged up, and broadcasters are seen to have pride and confidence in it.

Heterosexual people who are comfortable with the portrayal of LGB people also want broadly the same, although LGB people's opinions tend to be stronger.

2. The portrayal of LGB people is not always noticed by audiences

It can be hard for audiences, particularly heterosexual people, to form an opinion on the portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media. When prompted, even LGB people can be surprised by the amount and range of portrayal, although they tend to think there is too little overall.

3. Context is critical to how all audiences perceive the portrayal of LGB people

Context is shaped primarily by the genre of a programme. For example, audiences want humour in the portrayal of LGB people to have wide parameters, but news to be reported with impartial yet consistent language and tone, while drama and factual programming should include authenticity. Following genre, audience expectations are also set by the media platform (e.g. TV, radio or online), when the programme is scheduled for broadcast, and the talent featured.

Joe Godwin, Controller, Children's:

"The research in 2010 was with adults, but confirmed that they expected LGB portrayal in Children's content to be treated in a way appropriate for children; essentially, no 'adult' themes, nor too much depth around the issue and no sexual content. This reaffirmed our existing approach to LGB portrayal at CBBC of reflecting the diversity of family make-ups rather than exploring children's sexual development.

"It has given us continued confidence to portray LGB adults in the context of families and households in our content, in programmes ranging from the upcoming Tracy Beaker spin-off The Dumping Ground to our factual output in Newsround."

4. The clear majority of the UK population are either comfortable with, or do not feel strongly either way about, the portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people

Comfort with the portrayal of LGB people is largely tied up with audiences' personal experiences, social contexts and overall media diet. There is a significant minority of the UK population (19%) who describe themselves as uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB

people, while a third (32%) are ambivalent and half (50%) are comfortable with it. The levels of comfort have been derived from answers to multiple questions about different aspects of portrayal. Owing to rounding, the percentages may not sum to 100.

5. Intimacy, both emotional and physical, is the primary concern for people who are uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB people

Uncomfortable people feel strongly about the portrayal of LGB people and would like to see less of it. They often cite content to which children could potentially be exposed and the possible need to explain behaviour or relationships as a reason for their discomfort. As a result, they tend to screen out the portrayal of LGB people. However there are some contexts within which this group can feel less uncomfortable with LGB portrayal; for instance, if it is in relevant, familiar content, and it contains a reflection of their own worldview.

6. The BBC fares relatively well with its portrayal of LGB people, but there is more to be done

Overall, the portrayal of LGB people by the BBC compares relatively well to other broadcasters (behind Channel 4, but ahead of the other main broadcasters). However, portrayal which causes offence can quickly challenge views of the BBC. For heterosexual people uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB people, the primary concern is that the BBC remains an impartial and trusted family media provider. Meanwhile, LGB people and those comfortable with LGB portrayal want the BBC to have a cohesive and confident approach to its LGB portrayal.

3. 2012 survey about the portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media

As part of this research review the BBC repeated some of the questions from the 2010 study on its independently-run audience reaction panel (called Pulse) in October 2012. This yielded a sample of 3464 in total, of which 564 identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Mohit Bakaya, Commissioning Editor, Radio 4 and Radio 4 Extra:

“The Audiences team came to the Radio 4 creative community with this research early in 2011. Radio 4 has a fairly good record on LGB representation and portrayal, but the finding that bisexuality was under-represented as an identity resonated with me. As a result, I commissioned *It’s my story: Getting Bi*, a documentary in which musician Tom Robinson explores what it is to be bisexual in Britain today. It is a piece of content we are all proud of, and has been very well received by the audience. It might well not have happened, were it not for the prompting of this research.”

It is not possible to make direct comparison of the present results with those of last time as the methodologies, samples and question context are different– although the shape of responses was broadly very similar and this similarity has reinforced that the key findings from the last survey are robust.

Repeating the questions on Pulse has also established a benchmark for tracking in future – the questions can be repeated in an identical context on a regular basis to see if anything has changed.

The following headlines from the 2012 survey are based on the whole UK sample (heterosexual as well as LGB) unless otherwise stated. The survey questions showed that:

- Around 40% think it’s important that TV features LGB content (40% have no view, and 20% think it’s unimportant). Responses to the same question just about the BBC gives a similar response – the audience don’t seem to distinguish a difference in obligation just because it is the BBC
- Portrayal of LGB people on TV is seen as less important than portrayal of other personal characteristics - portrayal of disabled people is seen as the biggest provision gap
- While amongst the overall around 20% think there is too little LGB coverage on TV, the majority of LGB people feel this way (many heterosexual people don’t have a view)
- A significant minority of heterosexual men (around 25%) say there is too much coverage of LGB people on TV – particularly of gay men
- The perceived level of importance of the LGB portrayal of LGB people on radio is less than that felt for TV – quite a lot more people don’t have a view on either the importance or the amount in the case of radio
- A slight majority of the population say they are ‘comfortable’ with the portrayal of LGB people in the broadcast media (just over 50%); approximately 15% say they aren’t comfortable, and the rest have no strong views

- Heterosexual women are slightly more likely than heterosexual men to be comfortable with the portrayal of LGB people - particularly of gay men
- Views on the amount of the portrayal of LGB people across different broadcasters are similar. Overall, for each broadcaster, just over 10% of people say there is too much and about 15% say there is too little with the remainder feeling either that the amount at the moment is about right or having no strong views. However, amongst LGB audience it is much higher = half of the LGB audience feel there is too little portrayal by each of the broadcasters.
- Most people rate each of the broadcasters as either good or neutral on how they feature LGB people and their lives. Less than 10% say they are poor, however this figure rises to a quarter amongst LGB people. BBC and Channel 4 are rated slightly higher than other broadcasters.

4. Analysis of LGB audiences' consumption and appreciation of television

A key part of this review was to look at the consumption and appreciation of television by LGB panel respondents. This was done by looking at responses from a whole year of data to provide as many examples as possible and smooth out any seasonal patterns. However, even with an overall sample of around 700 LGB people, the numbers for looking at specific channels, genres and programmes is limited. **This makes the following findings indicative rather than definitive.**

James Holden, Director, BBC Audiences:

“The LGB research gave us really rich insight into the views of all of our audiences (gay and straight) about the portrayal of LGB audiences in the media. It also helped us enrich the broader narrative around diverse audiences and the BBC. Many of the themes around authenticity, variety, and the roles of both incidental and overt portrayal, are ones which chime with other work we have done on geographical and age portrayal.

“It also kick-started a development in the way we capture, measure and have the capacity to report on LGB audiences in our other surveys. We can now look at actual consumption behaviour of LGB audiences and monitor their attitudes in a more systematic way than ever before.”

This sample size limitation applies in particular when we try to look at individual programmes - the analysis is limited to the bigger programmes where there is a large enough sample to compare LGB people's responses with heterosexual people's responses.

It has also proved difficult because of limited sample sizes to break out many of the specific results by gender and age (particularly for lesbian and bisexual women) so the conclusions are necessarily somewhat broad brush.

The key findings were:

- LGB audiences overall appear to watch slightly less TV than heterosexual audiences, though younger male gay or bisexual audiences (those aged from 16-54) watch a bit more than heterosexual people of the same age
- The average appreciation score (AI) given by LGB audiences to the programmes they watch is a little higher than that given by heterosexual audiences.. However, younger lesbian and bisexual women report lower levels of appreciation.
- The higher consumption and appreciation levels for gay and bisexual men suggest there are few concerns with television as a medium for this group in terms of everyday satisfaction (though this says nothing about views on portrayal). In contrast the lower consumption/appreciation by younger lesbian or bisexual women does suggest some concerns.
- On balance LGB audiences tend to watch the same channels as heterosexuals – BBC One and ITV1 dominate, then the other terrestrial channels

However, LGB audiences are more likely to watch some channels, than heterosexual audiences particularly those with a younger age profile. For gay or bisexual men, Channel 4 viewing was higher highly across the age groups – Dave and ITV4 viewing was lower. There was less consistency for lesbian and bisexual women

- LGB audiences are more likely to watch for the viewing of arts and films – and to a lesser extent drama, entertainment and music programmes. They are less likely to watch children’s programmes and sport
- For both LGB men and women the programmes which appear to have higher resonance are:
 - Soap operas, particularly ITV soaps
 - Continuing dramas
 - Programmes with prominent LGB talent
 - Big entertainment shows – particularly those on Saturday night
- For gay and bisexual men in particular (there is not enough sample to say definitively for lesbian and bisexual women) there was high resonance for:
 - Programmes with strong entertainment values
 - Chat shows
 - News/current affairs
 - Period drama
 - Reality (even for middle aged men)
- Programmes that didn’t seem to resonate with LGB audiences included:
 - Older skewing BBC One shows
 - ‘Older at heart’ dramas
 - Antiques programmes
 - Sport-related programmes
 - Daytime quizzes
 - Panel shows

Ruby Kuraishe, Executive Producer, BBC Entertainment:

“On many of the Entertainment panel shows I look after, since the research in 2010 contributors and producers have seemed more free and more comfortable with LGB content and portrayal. On QI, for example, Stephen Fry and Alan Davies often allude to Stephen’s sexuality and in this series, Sandi Toksvig and Susan Calman joke about being “a lesbian team”. The research and the context it provided have given us more confidence to explore this kind of comedy on this show and others.”

5. Interviews with LGB organisations and representatives

Justin Bairamian, Head of Creative Marketing:

“As a part of our ongoing conversation around diversity portrayal, the LGB Portrayal research had some very useful learnings not only for content-makers, but also for Marketing at the BBC. It emerged that the portrayal of LGB people is not always noticed by audiences, and that LGB people in particular wanted to see it more flagged and celebrated by broadcasters.

“In Marketing at the BBC, where the content and context allows, we have taken on the challenge of amplifying the BBC’s portrayal of LGB people. We believe it is important to demonstrate the BBC’s confidence in and commitment to LGB portrayal, as well as to attract the awareness and engagement of LGB people, not to mention the significant number of the UK population as a whole who we know are comfortable with and interested in LGB portrayal.

“A range of organisations and individuals were invited to take part in follow-up research and in total nine in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews explored a range of areas from the role of media in portraying LGB people to perceptions of portrayal across different genres as well as further recommendations to the BBC going forward.”

The full report can be found online at:

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/diversity/pdf/media_portrayal_lgb_nov12.pdf.

Key findings

1. The LGB experts feel that media plays a critical role in representing LGB people.

They believe that the portrayal of LGB people in media has two primary effects:

- a. Educating wider society. By increasing the visibility of LGB people on programmes, it is felt to raise awareness and increase familiarity which in turn can help to reduce fear or discomfort, possibly rooted in lack of awareness.
- b. Validating LGB people. Role models can play a powerful part in reassuring younger LGB people or demonstrating positive experiences or outcomes.

2. All broadcasters are believed to have a responsibility to represent the diversity of people.

However, there is thought to be an extra obligation on the BBC given the nature in which it is funded to be the standard-bearer and to push boundaries for the whole industry.

3. There is still thought to be insufficient representation of LGB people across media.

Although there has been a gradual degree of improvement in the level of representation of LGB people across all media, including the BBC, over the past ten years or so, there is a sense from the LGB experts that representation is still so unusual that it stands out when it is included and that LGB people are still relatively invisible, especially lesbian women and bisexual people

4. BBC radio is perceived the LGB experts to have a greater frequency of LGB representation compared to its television channels.

The participants believe that television is the main driver of perceptions yet it is felt to be lacking in adequate representation of LGB people. Online is felt to be an under-used platform for the portrayal of LGB people by the BBC and a missed opportunity.

5. There remains a call for a deliberate mix of incidental, overt and landmark types of LGB portrayal.

However it is felt there could be even more incidental portrayal on the BBC than is currently featured, and that this should pay attention to the broader context in which it is represented. The LGB experts also expressed that there should be more landmark LGB-specific programming, especially for young LGB people.

6. Where lesbian, gay and bisexual people are represented in the broadcast media, the LGB experts feel this representation still needs to reflect the diversity of LGB people, and to avoid stereotypes.

Within the limited amount of LGB portrayal that the LGB experts felt there to be, it was noted that the majority was the portrayal of gay men, particularly within drama. They felt there is little portrayal of lesbian women, and hardly any representation of bisexual people. In addition, where there is LGB portrayal, there is a feeling that it tends to be skewed toward younger, white and non-disabled LGB people.

Ben Cooper, Controller, Radio 1

“Radio 1 celebrates and reflects the diverse lives of young people across the UK. We do this not only through programmes such as Radio 1’s Surgery, which tackles issues relating to young gay, lesbian and bisexual listeners, but also through the music we play the range of our presenters, and the guests which we have on across the station. Research like this helps us and gives us the fresh insight we need to continue to challenge how we represent the different life experiences of our audiences.”

7. Language and tone were not particularly salient issues for the LGB expert participants.

This was because other aspects of the portrayal of LGB people - particularly the lack of it - took precedence for them.

8. Participants agree that all genres have a role to play in representing LGB people and, when done effectively, are thought to be able to influence both the education and validation effects.

However, the genres most talked about were News & Current Affairs, Drama and Factual

News and current affairs: This is the genre that receives the most criticism from the experts. As a public service broadcaster and a standard bearer on moral issues, the BBC is asked to reconsider the way in which it is perceived to set up news debates

with two extreme perspectives and to be more creative and nuanced in its presentation.

Drama: Using fiction to represent LGB people is considered to be a powerful tool in fulfilling an education role, especially given the potential for incidental portrayal in continuing dramas and soaps. There is consensus from these LGB experts that programme-makers should be bolder and ensure the focus of the output is the engaging storyline which is then brought to life through interesting and creative characters, some of whom may be LGB.

Factual: Factual programmes on both the BBC and Channel 4 in particular are perceived to have successfully incorporated incidental portrayal of LGB people. However, there is an acknowledgement that broadcasters could include a wider range of portrayal of LGB people in factual programming, for example in specialist factual topics such as History. The BBC is also noted by this group of LGB experts for the visibility of high-profile factual presenters who are also LGB.

There was also feedback, albeit less, about other genres.

Comedy: The biggest risk here, according to the LGB experts, is the portrayal of LGB people being the focus of a joke. However, if the author or source of the humour is LGB, this is felt to be more authentic or appropriate and so there is more acceptance.

Entertainment: LGB presenters who are there because of their talent as opposed to their sexual orientation are seen as role models by the participants. If referencing their LGB status can be achieved in subtle and appropriate ways, this is believed to be valuable in educating wider audiences. This was an area where lesbian portrayal was recognised as being visible.

Children's: The LGB experts feel that the BBC should seek to incorporate the portrayal of LGB people within programming targeted at children, to familiarize audiences through incidental portrayal from an early age as well as validating children who are going through their formative years and who may be LGB.

Sport: There was felt to be missed opportunities for the portrayal of LGB people here, particularly given the availability of expert and relevant LGB talent, for example in women's sport.

9. The LGB expert participants feel that the BBC should be more creative and bolder in how it represents LGB people across the range of genres and platforms.

Concerns were raised by the LGB experts that the findings and the intentions of the 2010 research have not been effectively communicated or shared with the creative community, particularly independent producers. There was also a sense that the BBC did not explicitly commit to changes as much as it could have following the research findings.

Amanda Rice, Head of Diversity:

“The LGB research and public consultation represented important audience engagement for the BBC. It marked the first time we asked audiences for their views on how we portray lesbian, gay and bisexual people - giving anyone the opportunity to tell us their thoughts through a public consultation.

“The findings have provided our production and commissioning teams with new insights into how their programming can more accurately reflect the lives of LGB people – and thereby contribute to a key BBC equality and diversity objective: ‘to make high quality programming which reflects modern Britain accurately and authentically.’”

6. Next Steps

In response to the findings, the BBC Working Group made three recommended actions to help achieve more authentic and more common-place portrayal of LGB people. These are intentionally focused on making these considerations part and parcel of the commissioning process:

- We will repeat the survey on Pulse in a year's time using the 2012 analysis as a baseline
- We will use the findings from all other available research, including snapshot content analysis, to demonstrate any action required to help address the quantity of portrayal of LGB people on the BBC
- We will target commissioners and editors in particular with the findings of both this report and the research & consultation in 2010.

Peter Lloyd, Senior Producer, Doctors

“When I created the character of Freya in Doctors, I found the 2010 LGB portrayal research useful in understanding how bisexual people feel they are portrayed, and the wider context in which LGB portrayal is received by audiences.

“The research gave us confidence in including a bisexual woman in the show and the issues she would face and helped us to develop a well-rounded, authentic character who became much-loved by the daytime drama audience, and in whose storylines her sexual orientation was sometimes relevant, and sometimes completely incidental. In addition, we did use humour to raise issues, which was a useful mechanism.”

Appendix 1

BBC Working Group on Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Audiences

Terms of Reference

Purpose

The BBC Working Group on Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences is a task oriented team made up of staff from across the organisation set up to identify opportunities to enhance creativity and audience engagement, by considering current editorial policy and practice, and improving portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual people (LGB).

The Working Group has been set up to advise the Diversity Board and provide it with recommendations on how the BBC can meet its aspirations under both its diversity strategy and the public purposes in relation to LGB audiences.

The Working Group will work with colleagues internally and with Stonewall and other LGB community partners as and when appropriate, to identify and share examples of good practice to inform solutions for further improvement.

Aim

To enhance the BBC's creative output and fulfil its key public purpose: representing the nations, regions and communities which states that the BBC should:

- portray and celebrate the range of cultures and communities across the UK
- provide a range of output, including original content, designed to meet the needs of the nations, regions and communities of the UK
- provide engaging output that gives an accurate picture of the many communities that make up the UK and that informs understanding and stimulates discussion about their concerns"

Objectives

- To advise Diversity Board via a report with a set of recommendations identifying solutions to inform commissioning, scheduling and programme makers in general

Portrayal

- To help improve the portrayal of LGB people in output, in line with the BBC's overall diversity strategy
- Identify ways to promote accurate, incidental inclusion within BBC content
- Identify existing good practice and identify ways to share this information more widely internally and externally
- Consider commissioning genre-specific content analysis to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement

- Identify ways to monitor portrayal of LGB people routinely
- Identify how the BBC can promote more LGB writers as part of developing more accurate and authentic content.

Audience engagement

- Consider commissioning audience research with all audiences, including LGB people, to understand their perceptions and experiences
- Identify ways to measure the views of LGB audiences routinely

Communications and complaints

- Review and monitor specialist media to identify relevant commentary and concerns
- Develop a coherent story about the BBC's approach and its commitments targeted at LGB audiences
- Review the organisation's approach to responding to editorial complaints – including how the organisation reaches a line to take – and identify any recommendations

Co-ordination

- Complement and co-ordinate with work ongoing to improve employment practice and through the BBC-wide diversity action planning process

Expected Outcomes

- A report to Diversity Board with a set of recommendations
- Possible policy document for programme makers
- Possible content analysis
- Possible audience research

Working with LGBT Communities

While principally an internal group, the Working Group will work with external partners including Stonewall and other organisations inviting their views at key points during the Group's work to inform its approach.

Accountability

- Tim Davie is the Executive Board Sponsor for the Working Group
- The Working Group will be facilitated and supported by the Diversity Centre
- The Working Group will report their findings and recommendations to the Diversity Board
- The Working Group's progress will be reported to the BBC Trust through the annual report on implementation of the diversity strategy in October.