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## BATTLE OF PRAHRAN

The fight for the pink vote  
in the marginal electorate

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## What once was *done* is now **undone**

*Brief history of  
decriminalisation  
of homosexuality*

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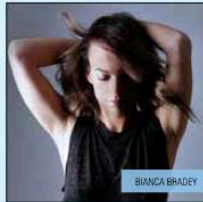
**MORE TO MR  
LEATHERMAN  
LA THAN YOU  
THINK P12**

**NEW  
SPOTLIGHT ON  
COMING OUT  
STORIES P10**

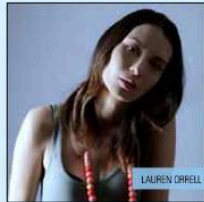


# LESBIANS ARE THE NEW BLACK

We meet the creator of Australian web series *Starting From... Now!*



BIANCA BRADEY



LAUREN ORRELL



SARAH DE POSSESSE



ROSIE LOURDE

## SUCCESS BEYOND THE STARTING LINE

LATELY, THERE HAS BEEN A SHARP RISE IN WEB SERIES WITH LGBT-CENTRIC STORIES, THOUGH MOST CATER TO A GAY MALE AUDIENCE. HOWEVER, LESBIAN WEB SERIES ARE INCREASING THEIR SHARE OF THE SPOTLIGHT, AND AUSTRALIA'S *STARTING FROM... NOW!* IS ONE OF THE NEWEST ADDITIONS. ELIAS JAHSHAN MET ITS DIRECTOR TO GET THE LOWDOWN.

JULIE Kaleff had a few reasons why she created her web series *Starting From... Now!*, but one stuck out as quite profound.

"Young girls growing up and questioning their sexuality sometimes don't see themselves on screen," she said.

"You look on screen and they've all got boyfriends, and they might think, 'what's wrong with me?'"

"So, the more representation we have, the less that we're the 'other' and that there's something wrong with us."

It's also the reason Kaleff became a screenwriter — to address the gap in lesbian content in both mainstream and LGBT-skewed film and TV.

"Lesbian content is always a minority," she told the *Star Observer*, highlighting some of the lead characters in current TV series *Orange Is the New Black*, *Wentworth* and *Grey's Anatomy* as exceptions.

Everytime anything comes out it's compared to *The L-Word*, which I think is a problem because that shows there's not enough there, not much diversity."

However, with *Starting From... Now!* already gaining over three million views since its debut in March, Kaleff believes this highlights the mainstream film industry's need to fund innovative content due to the competition from web series.

"Mainstream media is a business and they want to make money," she said.

"If we've had over three million views in over eight months, that obviously shows there's a demand for it and they need to recognise it."

As for Kaleff herself, her credits include various short films, such as *Ex*, which screened at 20 LGBT film festivals. It also won multiple awards, including the prestigious My Queer Career honour at the 2011 Mardi Gras Film Festival.

*Starting From... Now!* is not her first web series — she was also the writer/director of 2011's *The Newtown Girls*, which was viewed in over 190 countries.

Kaleff said her newest series' story began as a feature film script around five years ago.

"I kind of started it from the point of 'what sort of things

*The more representation we have, the less that we're the 'other' and that there's something wrong with us*

do I want to see' and what I think there's not enough of on screen," she recalled.

"But I put it away, and when I was thinking of doing a web series [about three years later] I was thinking of that content so I pulled it back out and reworked and re-shaped it."

As the cliché goes, the rest is history.

Filming for season one took place in late 2013, and the first of its six episodes went live online in March this year.

Season two was then dropped online over winter, and the first episode of season three was launched in mid-November.

Kaleff said the first two seasons were self-funded, while the third season was supported through an online crowdfunding campaign in August.

All of her cast and crew are volunteers, including lead actors Bianca Bradey, Sarah de Possesse, Rosie Lourde, and Lauren Orrell.

However, with the lack of significant funding to pay everyone involved, Kaleff expressed frustration at the process required to obtain it.

"To get funding, and the types of funding, such as for a short film to enter a film festival, there's always someone you kind of have to go through," she said.

Despite these challenges, her experience in creating *Starting From... Now!* has been a rewarding one.

"The beauty of web series is that you can just put it online, and if it's good and you do the work you can

hopefully find an audience," she said.

"I'm eternally grateful for people that come on board and give their time and their talent for the series.

"It's really important because it's really helped its growth and helped me grow as a director and with my writing, as well."

And what of the viewer feedback?

"[It's] been great," Kaleff said, citing the US, then France and Australia as the series' top three countries of viewers.

"One of the things that I like the best is that we're getting feedback from all over the world, and we're getting feedback from people saying 'there's no lesbian content in my country, or I'm not able to access lesbian content'."

"It's been really important to make it available to people all over the world."

When asked what made *Starting From... Now!* different to other lesbian-oriented TV shows or web series, Kaleff said it was the fact the characters were not defined by their sexualities.

"They don't talk about their sexuality," she said.

"We're very conscious of not wanting to do a series where lesbians are angry about their sexuality or a coming out story. I feel like that's been done. There's a place for it, but that's not the sort of story I am usually interested in talking about."

"I wanted a series with characters who weren't defined by their sexuality, who were strong, confident women, female protagonists — who happen to be lesbians — and the complications in their lives."

[www.startingfromnow.com](http://www.startingfromnow.com)



JULIE KALEFF

### About *Starting From... Now!*

The web series follows the tangled lives of four, strong and independent lesbian women in Sydney. Season one begins with the naive Steph Fraser, who moves to Sydney to pursue her dream job. However, as she shares their small inner-west home, her life gets complicated as she falls for her childhood friend Kristen's long-term girlfriend, Darcy. The story primarily deals with the strain and realistic repercussions that Steph's move to Sydney puts on her friend and her girlfriend, and one of her colleagues. Each season has six episodes, and director Julie Kaleff is in the process of writing season four, with season five also in the pipeline.

Photos: Ann-Marie Callihanna