

Natalie Kalfus

Legal Director for Australia and New Zealand at Netflix

Eli Fisher, co-editor, sits down with **Natalie Kalfus**, Legal Director for Australia and New Zealand at Netflix to discuss her thoughts on International Women's Day in 2022 and to celebrate the incredible contribution Natalie is making to the media law community. Natalie began her career as a lawyer, working at Mallesons in the IP and M&A teams in Sydney. After 5 years there, and a further year at Linklaters in London, Natalie moved in-house to work at Warner Bros. Entertainment where she spent more than ten years including as Vice President, Legal & Business Affairs for Warner Bros. Home Entertainment, Asia. In 2017, Natalie joined Netflix in Singapore where she led and built the legal team responsible for working with the Netflix Marketing, Publicity and Communications teams across APAC. In the last year, she has returned home to Sydney to take on a role with Netflix's legal team for Australia and New Zealand.

ELI FISHER: Natalie, thanks so much for talking to us about your career and your thoughts on International Women's Day in 2022. You've had a mix of private practice and in-house experience. You've worked at a major media company that's about to celebrate its hundredth birthday, and you currently work at a media company (the largest in the world) which is younger than us. You've worked across the EMEA market, the UK, Asia and Australia/New Zealand. How did your career path lead you to where you are today? Did you seek out a diversity of experience deliberately?

NATALIE KALFUS: Thanks, Eli. How wonderful to have the opportunity to speak with you and be part of CAMLA's 2022 IWD edition - thank you!

That's a great question! I'd love to say that my career path was premeditated but some of it has been a result of serendipity. Curiosity, a thirst for learning new things and a passion for entertainment might have also played a part...

I studied Art History and Law at UNSW and even back then had a strong interest in intellectual property and the application of the law within creative industries. I clerked and then worked as a graduate at King and Wood Mallesons (back then it was Mallesons Stephen Jacques). I started out in their M&A team but sought out media-related deals. When my first graduate rotation was coming to an end, I expressed my interest in moving to the firm's IP team. This was a hotly contested seat but I felt strongly that this was the direction that I wanted to take my career. I was successful in securing the seat and working with the Mallesons' IP team. This experience in IP would prove to be invaluable in laying the foundations for where my career would take me next.

I decided to take a leave of absence and move to London to seek new experiences, both personally and professionally. After a stint at Linklaters, I moved in-house with Warner Bros. working with their EMEA Home Entertainment team primarily covering the UK, Spain and Italy. This was my dream job and it was where I really cut

my teeth in entertainment law. It was also right in the middle of Warner Bros.'s release of the Harry Potter film franchise so it was a very exciting time to be at the Studio.

A few years later I relocated to Singapore for personal reasons. I remember being really bummed about the possibility of having to leave my dream job and my husband pushed me to see if there were any opportunities at Warner Bros. in Asia. And it turned out there was - or they at least made one for me. Working for Warner Bros. in Asia allowed me to deepen my experience as a regional counsel - working across continents and cultures.

Netflix launched across Asia (and various other parts of the world) in 2016. It was the new kid in town and everyone was talking about it. They were changing the industry and I wanted to be a part of that new frontier. I spent almost a year interviewing with Netflix on and off. Eventually we scoped out a role that piqued my interest - building and leading the regional legal team that partnered with Netflix Marketing, Communications and Publicity teams across APAC. This move turned out to be one of the best decisions that I've made. Being part of the Netflix journey as it established itself across Asia was exhilarating. Having the opportunity to hire, train and build out a new team was extremely rewarding. But all good things must come to an end and it was time for me to move back home.

I remember the first time I met Reed Hastings, Co-Founder and Co-CEO of Netflix. It was early 2019 and he was visiting the Singapore office. Reed often arranges 1:1 meetings and dinners with the Directors at Netflix. He asked me if we should open a Sydney office. Never did I imagine that three years later I would be working in that office.

ELI: What does your role as Director of Netflix's ANZ legal team involve on a day-to-day basis?

NATALIE: I handle all things legal for Netflix ANZ with the exception of local production which is handled by our stellar talented



Business & Legal Affairs team. This means that I work with our Marketing, Public Relations, Partnerships and Public Policy teams and provide local support to our other corporate functions. The wonderful thing about my job is that each day is different. One day I might be preparing a submission on proposed legislative reforms, negotiating with a major telco and reviewing a creative concept for a TikTok challenge.

ELI: What energises you about your work?

NATALIE: Coffee, kidding. I really enjoy the challenge of finding a path to yes for the business. I think most lawyers are naturally risk-averse as we are taught to think about risk elimination rather than minimisation. However, what excites me is trying to unpick risk to help find pragmatic and creative solutions. The Netflix Legal team's approach to risk is very pro-business so it's a great environment for commercial lawyering.

ELI: Are there legal or regulatory reforms that are sorely needed, or legal challenges that keep you up at night?

NATALIE: The biggest one that I think about is how we are going to effectively tackle regulation of the Internet. This is by no means a new issue but one that may be very relevant with certain futurists predicting an exponential increase in technological advancements in the next decade (not to mention the Metaverse!). The issue that keeps me up at night and has also been the topic of numerous lively dinner party debates is the fundamental inconsistency between the (borderless) internet and our contemporary national legal systems.

ELI: What do you celebrate about International Women's Day? What is the triumph that pleases you most?

NATALIE: On International Women's Day I like to celebrate the incredible female mentors that I've been lucky enough to have in my life. All the firsts that these women have had to accomplish - breaking glass and bamboo ceilings - to pave the way for future generations of women that follow in their footsteps. Special shout out to Nicola Wakefield Evans and Katrina Rathie

who were the best role models that I could have asked for as a young lawyer. They are both trailblazers who taught me how to command the room when needed, be an empathetic leader and the importance of bringing your whole self to work.

ELI: What do you lament most on International Women's Day? What are your most urgent concerns?

NATALIE: That it's 2022 and I still have to tell my daughters that they can do anything and everything. My most urgent concern is the importance for young women to feel confident and safe in their own sexuality closely followed by the interplay between power and gender dynamics.

ELI: What's the best professional advice you've ever received?

NATALIE: There are a few things that stand out: (1) from when I was in private practice, always know about the people in the room before you get there, and (2) from when I moved in-house, no matter how hard you try you will never get everything done so know when to call it a day.

ELI: Can you tell us about your involvement in Netflix's Women@ network in Singapore?

NATALIE: With pleasure. I helped set up the Women@ Netflix Employee Resource Group (ERG) in Singapore. I did this after noticing that many of the smart young women who I worked with often did not speak up, especially in larger forums. As someone who suffers from imposter syndrome and has had to find my own voice at work, I believe in the power and solidarity of the sisterhood and the duty to lift others as you rise. It gave me much joy to be told by other women that I worked with that this group allowed them to be seen and to feel heard and supported.

We did one project for IWD a couple of years ago which stands out. It was called "I AM ...". We asked female employees to think about themselves in the workplace and complete the sentence "I AM ...". We then asked one of their colleagues to complete a similar sentence starting "SHE IS ..." (reflecting on their colleague) and revealed the answers to both individuals at the same time. It was incredibly insightful and moving to see how we (women) see ourselves versus how others perceive us. To the right are pictures from that project.

ELI: Do you attribute some of the professional successes you've had to date to certain things about how you were brought up?

NATALIE: My mother was a single working mum so she wasn't able to be the kind of hands-on mum that some of my friends had. That meant I had to sometimes figure things out for myself. Like when I told her I wanted to be a vegetarian at seven she told me then I'd better learn to cook for myself. As a result, I'm a pretty decent cook but I'm also very good at problem solving.

ELI: Do you have advice for hypothetical interviewers raising three daughters (asking for a friend)?

NATALIE: I tell our girls (I have two daughters) regularly that they can do

anything. I think it's really important to message this to girls from a young age. We started doing this when a boy at pre-school told our daughter that she couldn't be an astronaut because of her gender. It's also important for girls to understand that as women they can have it all, but not always at the same time (and that's okay). I think it's also really important for parents of boys and young men to be aware of the role they need to play in disrupting gender bias. We should all be engaging early with our kids (regardless of their gender) on the topic of difference and exploring topics like gender, race, class, ability and religion with them. It's also important to talk about consent and body autonomy early and often.

ELI: The 2022 International Women's Day theme is #BreakTheBias. What does this mean to you and how would you suggest this is implemented in our readers' work and personal lives?

NATALIE: We all have bias, much of which is unconscious. Gender bias and rigid gender norms are things that we are all exposed to often from a very young age, whether that is through what we read, what we watch and what we hear. For me #BreakTheBias is a great reminder that we all have the power and responsibility to recognise and overcome our biases (whether conscious or unconscious). As members of the media industry, many of us are also in the privileged position of being able to influence culture and #breakthebias through the stories we tell and the characters that are represented on the screen.

ELI: I loved Reed Hastings' book No Rules Rules, and I think about it often still. Do you think that the best solutions to solving problems of unequal opportunity are driven by law? What role can company culture play? What role can technology play? What are some ways that you've seen organisations effectively #BreakTheBias in the course of running their business?

NATALIE: There are many different tools that can be used to help break gender bias. I am open to trying them all and seeing what sticks but, as you have implied, a "rules based" approach is not always the most effective way to bring about change as the motivation behind the need for change is a key factor.

Closing the gender pay gap is a good case study. In some countries, policies/laws have been implemented that place the burden on employers to show that they pay men and women equally for equal work. Iceland was the first country to implement this back in 2018 under their Equal Wage Management Standard. Salary transparency is a corporate culture driven solution that can be used to try and solve the same issue. This is something that we have implemented at Netflix for employees above Director-level but I believe the adoption rate of similar policies at other companies is low. Data and technology can also be used to help identify pay inequity (e.g. through pay equity analysis). In summary, I don't think there is one silver bullet for how to best solve these types of issues and sometimes a multi-pronged approach may be needed.

ELI: Who is one woman in the industry whom you really admire, and why?

NATALIE: The late Ruth Bader Ginsburg. This woman was at the top of her field. She overcame sexism and was a staunch advocate for women's rights at a time when all the odds were stacked against her. She had the courage to stand up and fight for what she believed was right and made seismic change for women in the legal profession. What a legend, what a legacy. It makes me think of the words of Kamala Harris during her inauguration speech: "While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last".

I also admire and applaud the other selfless women who stand and speak up to bring about change for those that come after them. Closer to home, I'd like to call out the courageous and amazing work that women like Grace Tame and Chanel Contos are doing in speaking out for the survivors of sexual assault and about the importance of consent education. They may not be in our industry but their advocacy does have an impact on policy and law makers (e.g. affirmative sexual consent laws).

ELI: On behalf of all our readers, thank you so much for sitting down with us. Happy International Women's Day, Natalie!



**NATALIE
& SHREY**