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Five steps to greater equality

28 July, 2016 | By Minnie Crowe



Campaign highlights on-screen gender gap, says Minnie Crowe

The recent launch of the Equal Representation For Actresses campaign has thrust the issue of female representation on screen into the spotlight.

And last year, The Centre for the Study of Women in Television & Film released a report, *It's A Man's (Celluloid) World*, with depressing findings. After examining the top 100 grossing films of 2014, only 12% of protagonists were female, with women making up 29% of major characters and just 30% of all speaking characters. Geena Davis' campaign, *If She Can See It, She Can Be It*, showed that from 2006 to 2009, not one female was depicted in family films in the field of medical science, as a business leader, in law, or politics.

We need to do more to inspire young women to aspire to roles that they thought were 'not for girls'. Let alone the economic imperative. Speaking as a 30something woman, if I see a poster for a film or TV show with four men and one woman, my response is this isn't for me. If you include more women on screen, more people will watch your content.

So how do we change this? Here are five steps the industry can take:

1 Neropa: Neutral roles parity (Neropa) is the brainchild of German actress Belinde Ruth Stieve. Look at all the smaller speaking roles in a script and decide which are gender neutral. This should not be influenced by job roles – the head of security does not have to be a man. Simply go down the list and, starting with female, allocate genders alternating between male and female. The joy of this technique is that we can adapt it to help us reflect all sorts of diversity, including non-white actors, age and actors with disabilities.

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2 Gender swap: This happened recently in *The Night Manager*, with Olivia Colman's role originally written as male. If we are reading scripts where all the leads are male, perhaps we can talk to the writer to find out if that is important to the story, or if it would be possible to change more of those characters to women. This is a simple conversation with far-reaching impact.

3 Where did all the older women go? Geena Davis' research also showed that the percentage of male characters in their 50s (18%) is twice that of female characters in their 50s (9%). Let's bring back the older women. There are two ways to do this. Firstly, make female leads the same age as male leads. Revolutionary, right? Secondly, with smaller roles, make sure we have a range of ages in the female roles.

4 Show me the money... Introduce a budget for childcare. This will benefit everyone who is a parent. If it became an industry standard, it would do more than anything to help women be available to work.

5 More women writers: If we have more female voices writing for TV and film, we'd probably automatically see more women on screen. There are some really good ones around – Bola Agbaje, Rachel DeLahey, Polly Stenham, Michaela Coel, Sophie Petzal. Let's stop seeing female writers as a risk.

It is not about whether we should try to achieve better representation for women on screen, but about how we go about doing that. These five steps can help us reach that goal.

Minnie Crowe is chief operating officer of TriForce Creative Network