



## **EQUAL REPRESENTATION FOR ACTRESSES – INFORMATION SHEET**

**13 May 2017**

We are ERA - Equal Representation for Actresses - a grass roots movement co-founded in late 2015 by actresses Elizabeth Berrington and Polly Kemp.

Our mission is a simple one. We want to see women represented in UK theatre, film and television in equal numbers to men. Our campaign is to challenge the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and all other major broadcasters to implement an equal gender balance across their drama and comedy slates by 2020.

As part of this, we also hope to begin a conversation about range of roles, sexual stereotyping, and a persistent ageism that sees actresses who have built a strong CV in their 20's and 30's all but disappear after the age of 45.

We were shocked when in the Autumn of 2015, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media published its report, *Gender Bias without Borders* – the first ever global study of gender depictions in movies, analysing 120 popular films across 11 countries.

Findings included:

- From speaking or named characters, 31% were female, 69% male.
- Only 23% of films featured a female leading or co-leading character.
- Another of their studies on children's TV and film found that:
  - In 'family' films, the ratio of male to female characters is 3:1.
  - Women make up 40% of the workforce. Fewer than 25% of employed characters are female.
  - And even more baffling, women make up only 17% of crowd scenes.

As actresses, we have recognised and tolerated this imbalance for too long and as women, for the sake of future generations, we cannot go on seeing ourselves - 51% of the population - so chronically under and misrepresented.

Firstly, this poses significance for actresses themselves who are roughly five times less likely to get into drama school than actors, less likely to be picked up by an agent upon graduating and likely to have fewer roles and less money throughout their careers.



We also maintain that this disparity of representation holds significance for the wider British population who absorb this inequality through their screens on a daily basis.

We believe that every girl deserves to grow up with as many positive and empowering cultural representations of her gender, as her male peers do.

Our predominant aims are for greater transparency in casting and commissioning choices made by publicly funded organisations like the BBC and C4 (and the production companies they work with) and to address the criteria that qualify a production for high-end tax relief.

We have carried out some very basic research on 165 British TV shows that qualify for this relief dating back three years and have found that the average ratio of actors to actresses in these productions is 2:1. This is without even accounting for content of story or quality of role, which we predict, would further widen the gender disparity.

We believe that programmes benefiting from this tax relief should be required to have equal numbers of men and women in significant speaking roles and this is what we are currently trying to tackle.

We have so far been attempting to highlight this issue both within the performance industry and the political sphere and over the past year we have had extraordinary conversations with people and organisations that are game changers on the issue of gender equality. We have gained public support from a number of industry individuals and groups including Olivia Colman, Denise Gough, *Directors UK*, *WFTV* and *Women in Journalism*.

We would aim to see the establishment of an independent body to monitor gender across all broadcast content and report annually. We would ask that casting and creative decisions made by commissioners and programme makers are held to a basic requirement of a 50:50 gender balance across all roles from leading to minor including supporting and background artists. Ultimately, our aim is to force government action to ensure that women working in this profitable section of the economy have the same rights, protections and access to work as their male colleagues.

We believe the underrepresentation of women young and old across British media has a detrimental effect on all of society.

Actresses, whether in drama or comedy, across film, theatre, TV and radio, are the fictional stand-ins representing all women.

**AND IF YOU CAN'T SEE IT, HOW CAN YOU HOPE TO BE IT!**

EQUAL REPRESENTATION FOR ACTRESSES

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