

Diversity behind the camera

Beyond the nitty gritty of what we call ourselves, it is perhaps time to take a good look at who we are as camera people. Zerb guest editor **Hazel Palmer** asks who makes up this profession and looks into how the camera department compares with the rest of the television industry and society at large.

Whether you like it or not, it has been publicly noticed that the television and film industry is made up of a select type of person when compared with the general population. As an industry that often tasks itself with holding a mirror up to society, it needs to be able to effectively and responsibly reflect that society, both on and off screen.

Recent studies have looked into this and found massive under-representation of marginalised groups in film and television production jobs, especially in the camera department. For example: an extensive study by the University of Southampton looked at female representation across the six key film production roles. It found that women make up just a fifth of the industry workforce overall and only 13% of films are directed by a woman. By far the biggest imbalance, however, was found in cinematography, with only 7% of these jobs filled by women.

More troubling still is the finding that across all six key roles, women of Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) identity made up less than 2% in each category. In fact, of the 13 women who were cinematographers on British films in production during 2015, not one was of BAME identity.

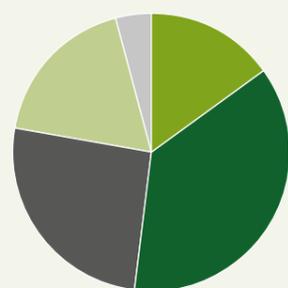
It appears that this lack of diversity is not just confined to the film industry: a study by Directors UK found that only 1.5% of the most popular and significant UK television programmes made up until 2013 were made by directors of BAME descent, when this demographic in fact represents around 14% of the UK population. It was also found that the proportion of BAME directors in 2013 had dropped by over 20% in comparison with pre-2011 programmes, so there is no sign of things getting better for this demographic. Quite the opposite.

Camerawomen and identity

Peer research conducted by Zerb, 2017.

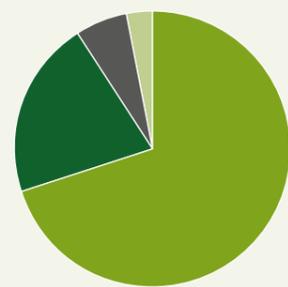
An anonymous survey distributed via email, word-of-mouth and social media to camerawomen in the UK to gauge their opinion on job titles whilst also gathering information on demographics and diversity. There were 68 respondents.

Age range | Fig.1



- 18 to 24 | 15%
- 25 to 34 | 37%
- 35 to 44 | 26%
- 45 to 54 | 18%
- 55 to 64 | 4%

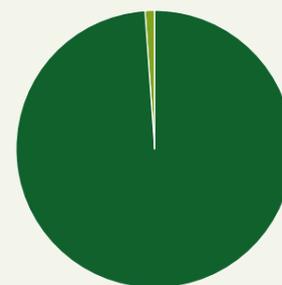
Race / ethnicity | Fig.2



- White British | 70%
- White Other | 21%
- Asian / Asian British | 6%
- Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups | 3%

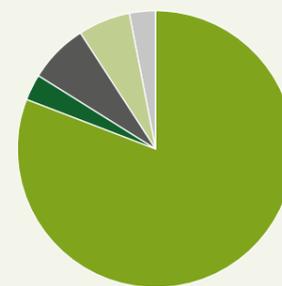
Disability | Fig.3

The Equality Act of 2010 defines disability as: "a physical or mental impairment with long term, substantial adverse effects on ability to perform day to day activities."



- Yes | 1% (dyslexic)
- No | 99%

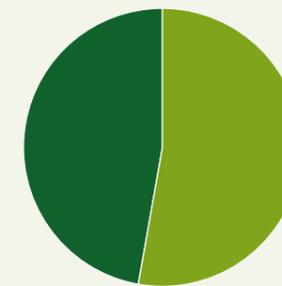
Sexual orientation | Fig.4



- Heterosexual / Straight | 81%
- Gay / Lesbian | 3%
- Bisexual | 7%
- Prefer not to say | 6%
- Other / Self-describe | 3%

Discrimination | Fig.5

Have you ever felt discriminated against on the basis of your gender, ethnic background, age, sexuality or disability?



- Yes | 54%
- No | 46%

This tallies with my own experience in my working environment: as far as BAME representation goes, I can count the number of Black cameramen I've met on one hand, and as well as it still being quite a novelty to meet another camerawoman, NONE of those I've met so far have been women of colour (I do hope there are some out there!).

Added to these shortfalls is the proportion of disabled people in television, which is also much lower than in the workforce as a whole and has not improved in 10 years. Just 5% of those who work in TV consider themselves to be disabled, compared with 11% of the wider working population. It has also been revealed that those with a disability earned £2,440 less than the industry average.

Looking at the demographics of Zerb's recent survey of women working in the camera department, of the 68 respondents, 91% were white, 81% were heterosexual and 99% claimed no disability (see Figs 2-4).

When comparing the makeup of our profession to society at large, as well as to other sectors, there is a strong hint that our industry is more welcoming or accessible to a particularly narrow selection of people.

Creative Skillset's workforce survey found that older people are also being overlooked, with 48% of creative media employees under 35 compared with 35% across the UK. Their study also found that 48% of us have done unpaid work at some point in our career, and those who attended fee-paying or independent schools is double the national average at 14%, all pointing to a significant socioeconomic divide. The proportion of Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) people in creative media was actually found to be slightly above the national average (6%) at 7%, however this varies greatly between sectors, with 14% in cable & satellite TV and only 3% in facilities.

Why does this matter?

Looking at these figures, as well as with our own eyes, it's probably fair to say that our profession isn't very diverse. We can pretty safely assume from these statistics that the 'standard' UK cameraperson is a young to middle-aged white male from a comfortable financial background. But is this a problem? After all, we're just one part of making television, hidden behind the scenes, not out representing the wider population. In a competitive industry such as ours, you obviously have to be very committed, hard-working and determined in order to break through and to keep your work. Perhaps some people just aren't passionate enough about working in this area. Nobody is judged on anything other than their skills and commitment, so why force the issue?

1. It's quite simply not very fair

Ofcom, in partnership with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, have produced guidelines for the broadcasting industry, which state: "Everyone wanting to pursue a career in broadcasting should have a fair and equal opportunity to do so, whatever their background. Yet the figures show some groups may be experiencing barriers – both in entering the industry and allowing them to progress once they are in."

Major film producers Barbara Broccoli and Kathleen Kennedy have backed a recent report that states: "Nepotism, word-of-mouth employment practices and the widespread use of unpaid work experience have created a 'pandemic lack of inclusion' in the British film industry."

One of the reasons the same type of people are populating all the UK's creative media jobs is because there is a large

headstart for some over others. These people will likely be living within or with easy access to London, they will have relatives or friends already in the industry or will mix in similar circles, and they will have the capacity to build and nurture these relationships and networks through unpaid placements. When they advance through the ranks they will likely enforce this pattern.

According to research by Directors UK, employers hire the same types of people – either those they already know or those similar to them. They trust and respect certain types based on preconceived notions of strength, intelligence, reliability, personality and work ethic. This leads to a lack of role models for those who don't fit this 'standard' – they likely have lower confidence in their ability, which leads to low regard from others, which in turn may discourage other candidates. It's a vicious circle (see Fig 5).

2. It affects the work we produce

Without representation behind the camera, why should we expect the experiences and visions of minority groups to be accurately portrayed on our screens?

In an impassioned speech to MPs, actor Idris Elba (*Luther, The Wire*) summed up the problem, stating that while the UK is "the most successful, diverse, multi-cultural country on earth [...] you wouldn't know it if you turned on the TV." He elaborated, "People in the TV world often aren't the same as people in the real world [...] I should know, I live in the TV world. And although there's a lot of reality TV, TV hasn't caught up with reality."

Whether life imitates art or vice versa, having only a certain group accurately and consistently represented in the media we consume is of huge disadvantage to other groups.

3. A lot of creativity and talent is being wasted

Channel 4's Off Screen Diversity Executive, Nina Bhagwat, explains: "If you have diverse talent right in the heart of the creative process (and when I say diverse talent I mean different voices; diversity of thought), then you're in a much better place to create something that is absolutely going to engage [more audiences]."

Production teams could be stronger if they had a wider range of people contributing to them as well. Tema Staig, who runs 'Women in Media', says that many men she has spoken with express to her that they want more women on their crews: "They feel a crew with more women is more pleasant, more comfortable, less of an aggressive environment, and women work hard (they have something to 'prove', after all!)."

A considerable factor that can impede the progress of a woman's career more than for others is the prevailing mindset

that if you are the prime child-carer then you're just not suited to a job in film or television. For me, being a single mother from a young age set me back in my career over and over again – and yet, caring for someone else involves learning a host of valuable skills applicable to camerawork: multi-tasking, organisation, patience, compassion, weight-lifting! The same could be attributed to all types of caring – and with the ever-increasing crisis in elderly care many more of us are going to need to take some time out to help our loved ones at some point.

When it comes to disability issues, it might seem almost impossible to make camerawork accessible for the disabled given the physical demands of the job, the often inaccessible locations and the need for clear communication. But that's not to say it is impossible. With regulatory changes and imaginative will, why not? Someone used to wrangling a wheelchair would probably be an excellent studio camera operator. The infrastructure modifications would be a small price to pay for the talent you would get in return, not to mention the improvement in quality of life for that person.

Is anything being done to redress the balance?

Channel 4 is leading the way for the broadcasters. As Nina Bhagwat enthuses: "At Channel 4 we've got diversity in our DNA [...] We were set up to embrace different points of view. For us diversity is a creative win." They have set out a '360° Diversity Charter', which covers a variety of activities both on and off screen at every level, and covers a wide definition of diversity including BAME, disability, LGBT, gender and social mobility.

One of the most ambitious of these activities is their leadership of Project Diamond, an industry-wide in-depth diversity monitoring system created by broadcasters BBC, Channel 4, ITV and Sky, in collaboration with Pact, Creative Skillset and the Creative Diversity Network. This promises to provide "detailed, consistent and comprehensive monitoring and reporting of diversity" both on and off screen.

However, on closer inspection, Project Diamond is only publishing its equality monitoring data according to different television genres, refusing to break it down into individual programmes or series. BECTU and The Writers Guild claim the broadcasters are not being transparent enough about sharing data to make it work and have resolved to boycott the project. They fear it will not result in any progress on diversity because: "Those [currently] failing to hire BAME workers will continue to avoid accountability for their failure."

Ofcom has also been criticised for deferring accountability for diversity monitoring to Project Diamond, which, being run by the profit-driven TV industry big players, has been

suggested is a failure to act in the public interest (Simon Albury, openDemocracy). This will be the first year Ofcom will be put in charge of regulating the BBC, but it has said that it will only set targets for the corporation's on-screen diversity and not for anything off-screen. For many, this is just not enough.

Outside of policy and monitoring, on the ground, there are some attempts to even up the employment opportunities for under-represented groups. For example, 'Reel Angels', set up by Lulu Elliot, is an agency focused exclusively on placing female technicians in properly paid roles across the film and television industry. I have heard accusations of 'reverse sexism' levied at this, but according to Lulu, "Reel Angels exists to give the client recruitment choice. We work under the Equality Act 2010 in terms of promoting 'positive action'... we simply promote an under-represented group, in this case, women."

To get a rough idea of female representation in television camerawork, I surveyed the names on the lists of six of the main UK television camera crewing sites. I was shocked to find that women comprised just 5.5% of camera operators on their books. In fact, three of the companies had no camerawomen AT ALL, and without one of the agencies bringing up the overall percentage with a (faintly) impressive 20% female crew, the figures would have averaged out at a measly 2.6% operators and 6.5% assistants – not great representation for over 50% of the population. As such, I think it's fair to say that men aren't going to be at a disadvantage from one female-only crewing company trying to open the choices up!

Will it help?

While it's apparent that positive steps are being taken by industry leaders to monitor diversity and create a more inclusive industry, there are still some barriers at play that these actions don't address.

1. 'Bottom-up' or 'top-down' approach?

The action of both the Government and the TV companies has always previously been focused on mentoring, placements and bringing in more new entrants. However, Sir Lenny Henry has criticised this response to the decline in BAME people working in the industry: "They seemed to think more training initiatives were the easy fix – rather than training courses for those in positions of power on how they could be



Diversity is a creative win

Nina Bhagwat, Channel 4

more diverse and inclusive in their employment practices and commissioning." This is backed up by BECTU's response to Project Diamond: "By far the biggest problem is the attitudes and hiring practices of the gatekeepers. Too many hirers are unable to believe that minority ethnic professionals are capable of doing the job, no matter how much experience or how successful."

To be fair, Channel 4 has recognised where diversity initiatives have gone wrong in the past, so for 2017 they are focusing on a 'top-down' approach. Nina Bhagwat explained their reasoning: "Ultimately if we get the diversity at a senior level, there are more pickers and choosers and decision-makers who reflect the breadth of diversity, [meaning..] we will have people who are making hiring decisions in a slightly different way, because their networks are likely to be more diverse."

However, Tema Staig (Women in Media) doesn't believe that change just happens 'top-down': "The feminist film movement, for the last 30–40 years, had a top-down approach – that if we only get more producers, directors, actors and writers, in time, it will trickle down, that they will hire more women. That's not happening [...] if you push from the bottom up, as well from the top down, we will achieve quality and have better stories."

2. Where are the real incentives?

The way the industry operates could also throw up barriers to change. With the endemic climate of uncertainty and insecurity in the industry, and the pace at which teams and projects are put together, hiring, by necessity, relies on traditional methods of preconceived notions and 'who you know'. Projects are generally short-term and there just isn't the time or budget to put long-term HR plans in place.

Most of us are freelance, so many employment and discrimination rules either don't apply or are ineffective. With no permanent contracts, you can be employed or dropped from a job with no explanation. Even a momentary hint of

I've been hired as a female for sensitive subject matters.

At times it has helped me as there are few of us in natural history and productions have wanted a female touch.

I think the colleagues I work with on a daily basis enjoy working in a mixed rather than a purely male environment.

I'm keen and a fast learner. These skills are valued beyond gender – and the majority of men I work with take pride in an equal gender workplace.

Some of the positives of hiring women – responses from the 'Camerawomen and Identity' survey

Boxx



Cobalt SD
2007



Meridian HD
2009



Zenith HD
2011



Atom HD
2015



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