

## **Future Film Festival preview: Women in Film & TV**

Husna Rizvi wonders how we can increase the number of opportunities for women to make an impact in film and television.

Upon mindlessly surfing the Internet recently, I came across a vaguely familiar phrase that caught my eye amid a sea of BuzzFeed and Jezebel articles: “The Bechdel Test”. I remember a friend telling me that it was a way of testing for “fair representation of women in the media”. Upon further research about the Bechdel Test, I can now say “fair” is a bit of a stretch.

There are three very basic requirements that films or media pieces have to meet in order to pass the test: 1) They must feature at least two named female characters. 2) These characters must talk to each other. 3) These characters must talk to each other about something other than men, even if it’s shopping, cake decorating, or other “feminine” tropes. Out of the almost 6000 movies available on the [Bechdel database](#), only about half meet these very basic standards. A simple test such as this one is enough to reveal the tragic extent to which the media skews representation of women.

The solution to this problem, however, seems laughably simple: get more women to be the storytellers, filmmakers and graphic artists to give more accurate and three-dimensional portrayals of women in art. After all, who better to tell women’s stories than ourselves?

Inevitably, however, implementing these “simple” solutions can prove a bit more complicated in reality. As I see it, there are three core obstacles facing female creatives today: getting into the industry; staying in; and being appropriately recognised and validated by their male peers once they’re in. Ava DuVernay’s recent Oscar snub [for Best Director, *Selma*] is arguably the most high-profile indicator of this troubling pattern.

Despite these barriers to entry, there is cause to be hopeful. Organisations such as Women In Film And TV — which was set up in 1989 by a group of female business executives, creatives and performers — exists to combat these exact issues and promote female creative talent worldwide. They hold networking evenings, run mentoring programs, collaborate with industry bodies on research projects, and lobby for women’s interests in creative industries.

Many of their members are established talents with a diverse set of skills. Take Jeanie Finlay, a British artist and filmmaker who creates intimate, funny and personal documentaries. She recently directed the hugely enjoyable *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* for BBC Storyville; it was an Inspiration Award Winner at the 2013 Sheffield Documentary Festival. Finlay will give a keynote speech to kick off the BFI Film Future Festival. She is among the plethora of exemplary talent emerging from WFTV

that are needed to encourage aspiring female creatives in today's every increasingly entrepreneurial landscape.

Caroline Sugg, Head of Policy and Advisory at BBC Media Action, sheds some light on the value of organisations such as WFTV: "With some notable exceptions, current interventions tend to concentrate on the production of media content without addressing the systemic barriers that can limit media's ability to improve girls' lives. Challenges around girls' access to media as well as gender balance within media organisations need to be addressed head on in order to ensure that media can play a positive role in enhancing girls' potential."

It is for this reason that the presence of associations like WFTV are not only necessary, but essential. They provide a desirable support network and a sense of camaraderie for the next generation of female storytellers.

**The Future Film Festival launches on Friday 21 February with a Keynote speech from Jeanie Finlay, presented in partnership with Women in Film and TV**

**Husna Risvi was a successful applicant for the IdeasTap and BFI Film Journalism Workshop and Mentoring brief.**