



Neutral Roles Parity: A Casting Tool

Belinde Ruth Stieve, Berlin 2016.

<http://NEROPA.stieve.com/en.html>

The aim of **NEROPA** - an acronym for *NEutral ROles PArity* - is to raise the currently disproportionately low representation of women in film and television's fictional productions. This is done in a comprehensible, systematic and straightforward way - not by adding additional characters, but by converting a number of neutral (formerly male) roles into females.

Due to **NEROPA** women can be seen more often in "unusual" professions (female plumbers, archaeologists and computer engineers) and be defined more frequently by their actions rather than by their relationship to other characters, as wife, mother, lover, daughter etc.. More women on screen will result in greater variety and more role models, and eventually in more interesting films and TV programmes for women and men alike.

The NEROPA Check: Procedure

The first and most important step is the production's decision to adopt the tool *NEROPA - Neutral Role Parity*. This is what happens next:

- A team of three is assigned to perform **NEROPA**, possibly consisting of the project's director, casting director and producer or commissioning editor.
- Before the first team meeting each member will check the cast list of the film project and mark all roles according to their gender, as implied by the role name, pronouns in dialogue, contexts ("old friend from boys boarding school", "conversation in men's locker-room etc).
- Then all roles that could be any gender are identified as "neutral", no matter if these roles are big or small, and are with or without a name. A general question to ask could be "*Does this character have to be male, and if yes, why?*" If not, they are neutral. This is again something everybody does on their own.
- First team meeting: the three appointees compare their lists, negotiate and eventually agree on the neutral characters. Then these neutral roles are specified as *female - male - female - male* alternatively.
- That's it! Now the final cast list is available and the casting process can start.

If the **NEROPA** principle is applied at an earlier stage, e.g. during script development, it may not be necessary to perform the NEROPA check as a corrective at the start of a production.

NEROPA: More Gender Balance and Variety

NEROPA can quickly remedy the large quantitative disadvantage of actresses and lead to more opportunities for women to appear on screen.

Casting directors could follow-up the **NEROPA** Check with fine-tuning, the diversifying of the cast, when they consider and propose actresses and actors for the new ensemble. If the film setting and role descriptions allow it the cast can probably be as colourful and diverse as the world around us, - think of age, ethnicity, body size and shape, sexuality, pregnancy, dis-/ability, accents and more.

Belinde Ruth Stieve is a German actress. In 2013 she started examining the situation of women in front of and behind the camera and blogging about it bilingually (de/en): *Schspin - An Actress's Thoughts* <https://schspin.wordpress.com>. In 2016 she introduced the casting tool **NEROPA**.