



## Neutral Roles Parity – a Way to more Gender Diversity

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.

With **NEROPA** women can be seen more often in "unusual" professions (plumbers, archaeologists or 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.

### NEROPA Method

The first step is the production's decision to adopt the method *NEROPA*.

After that a team of three people is appointed to implement the method. Ideally they could represent different departments like casting, directing, production, script writing or commissioning. Those three will individually check the script and mark the roles according to their gender. Then they identify all characters that could be any sex as "neutral". A general question to ask could be "*Does this character have to be male, and if yes, why?*" If not, they are neutral.

Next the members of the team get together, compare and discuss their results to agree on the neutral characters, which are then defined as female – male – female – male alternatively. The script is adapted where necessary (names, pronouns etc.)

That's it! Now the character list is complete and the casting process can begin.

### NEROPA Finetuning

Casting directors can follow-up with Finetuning to diversify the cast, when they propose actresses and actors for the new ensemble. If the film setting and role descriptions allow it the cast can 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.

### NEROPA: Right From The Start

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

When starting to write a story, the main character is usually clear from the start. Other major and minor characters and functional roles (neighbour, taxidriver, judge) appear as the script grows. Until their gender gets relevant they remain „neutral“. And if they still are neutral when the script is finished, they can be defined gender equal, woman – man – woman – man.

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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 method **NEROPA**.