

REEL EQUALITY

Reel Equality is a new film club based in Nottingham. After attending a Cinema For All event in 2014 the club was set up and has had a very successful first year.

Reel Equality is a film club run by Nottinghamshire-based charity Equation <http://www.equation.org.uk/>. To counter the dominance of male-focused stories and tired female gender stereotypes in the mainstream film industry, they show feature films every month that tell diverse and interesting women-centred stories. They also put on film-themed events to accompany screenings, such as food, quizzes and talks about gender and representation. The club is open to all genders.

ABOUT

The club arose as part of Equation's campaigning interest in promoting gender equality. Equation is a domestic abuse prevention charity. The causes of domestic abuse are complex, but it is known that perpetrators of domestic abuse hold sexist attitudes that women are worth less than men, and sexist beliefs about how women should behave, which are based on gender stereotypes. These attitudes develop from many sources, but sexist messages from culture and media – like TV, music, film, magazines – play an important part. Reel Equality is a positive way that Equation can challenge these messages locally.

Male leads outnumber female leads in mainstream Hollywood films by 3:1, and female characters are four times more likely to be sexualised than their male counterparts. But a lot of people still aren't aware of a gender inequality issue in film at all, so Equation wants to use Reel Equality to raise awareness of this problem and the damaging impact it has on real-life experiences. They don't just want to preach to the converted. Ultimately, through attracting a wide audience to screenings, they'd like to contribute to the evidence that there's a big demand for films that show diverse, interesting representations of women, and so encourage better film-making and film programming.

INCEPTION

The group were invited to attend a Community Cinema Info Day held by Cinema For All in collaboration with BFI Film Hub Central East, our local Film Audience Network Hub. This came when they had just picked the sort of films they wanted to show and needed practical help about sorting out venues and licence bookings. At the day they found out that we could receive great support from being a member of Cinema For All such as the Booking Scheme and getting general advice about starting their journey.

The two biggest challenges have been time and cash. At the beginning, none of the group had put on a film screening before nor were they film buffs, and they also wanted to try out lots of different venues – so this required a big investment in learning and organisation time. Based at Equation they have limited time to devote to running the Club, and are supported by some very generous and capable but time-restricted volunteers. It takes a lot of effort between them not only to arrange a screening each month, but to advertise, sell tickets, and ensure the night is a success. They've found it costs a ton of money to show films too, so they've had to be very careful with budgets – even after receiving an injection of funding support from the BFI's Film Audience Network. It's still been a rewarding experience though and they feel that their campaign message is getting out there.

SCREENINGS

They've now had 4 anti-sexism screenings focused on women's lives. Showing stories about coming of age as a misfit American teenager (*Ghost World*), about how a bright young woman with a criminal conviction tries to make amends for a terrible mistake (*Another Earth*), about a young girl in the American South coping with life within permanent natural disaster (*Beasts of the Southern Wild*), and about a Palestinian woman fighting for her livelihood (*Lemon Tree*). They put together a programme that would tell stories of women of a diverse range of cultures, ages, backgrounds and experiences. At every screening the audience is introduced to the rationale behind the club and about different aspects of the way women are represented in mainstream cinema.

The audience is diverse in age range and isn't just made up of people who are typically interested in 'women's issues' in the local area. About 25% of the audience are men. Audience numbers have grown quickly. The most recent screening sold out a 60-seater venue and it is anticipated that future screenings will do the same. As Season 1 has been such a success, they're already busy planning their second season (due to start in Spring 2015) and looking for collaborations with local groups and new ways they can make the club accessible and attractive to as wide an audience as possible. They are going to be trying a mum-friendly screening next time, and looking to screen in venues that are outside the middle-class arts circuit. Anyone who wants to come along or find out more about the club can check out www.equation.org.uk/reequality or follow the Facebook page www.facebook.com/reelqualitynotts and if anyone wants to collaborate or needs more information they can email reel.equality@gmail.com - they'd love to hear from you.

It's nice to have helpful and reassuring advice available on the end of the phone. Negotiating film licences and understanding how that bizarre system works was a real steep learning curve, and I received helpful direction from the Cinema For All team on that one. The Community Cinema Info Day was also invaluable in giving us reassurance that we were heading in the right direction and offered practical how-to guides for the different elements of running a film club.

Chloe Cheeseman, Equation