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TV needs to do more to support female writers



Blog Charlotte Hudson

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Whilst working up in Edinburgh on a show in the Summer of 2009, my writing partner and I eschewed the usual after-hours drunken shenanigans and instead stayed in most evenings to write up a TV sitcom proposal.

A producer who'd seen our show expressed an interest in working with us and, naturally, we wanted to impress with a treatment. This producer was due to give birth in September and we wanted to get something to her before she went 'out of action'.

There was another reason for such dedicated bullet-biting: I was also pregnant and as well as being shattered, I knew I'd be 'out of action' myself before long. Then, my writing partner had the lemerity to put herself out of action by having a baby five months after me, and then yet another producer we were working with also took time out to give birth - twice! - and so our fecund farce continued... In the intervening five years, our writing sessions and meetings have been snatched in evenings, weekends and in between - and mostly during - full-time childcare.

It's an unfortunate truth that few people in today's industry will pay anything when a piece of work is in development, meaning ideas have to be substantially worked - or even written - up first. Added to that is that there are no real deadlines in TV, and time spins by without writers (male or female) getting paid for anything at all. It's been a testament to producers' faith in our work that my writing partner and I have had paid TV development options, been hired writers on shows, and commissioned to write our first feature film script. But none of these have paid enough to cover the childcare required to do them.

If it's to shake off the posh, white, male Oxbridge* cliché; UK TV writing needs more women. For her TV blog, Stop it, Show! US writer Madelyn Glymour charted every scripted show that aired six or more episodes on TV in the last three years on the following channels: BBCs One, Two, Three, Four, ITV1, and ITV2. She concluded that only 1 in 4 TV writers were female, and only 1 in 5 episodes were written by women. I'm sure the comments below will offer many arguments as to why women writers aren't getting their work on TV, but I'd like to put having kids and being not wealthy enough (or daft enough) to cover childcare during the increasingly lengthy, largely unpaid, no-guarantees commissioning process high up the list.

In juggling my child's upbringing and my career, I realised how difficult it is for mothers working within such an irregular industry, and how important it is for support to be provided to develop their careers. In October this year, I received a John Brabourne Award from The Cinema and Television Benevolent Fund (CTBF) - a scheme dedicated to providing financial support to people that are facing difficulties in progressing their career. This has meant that I can give precious time to developing my projects, and I am well aware of how fortunate this makes me. For other women writers, the career-stalling act of having children will mean their talented voices will remain confined to unpaid, naptime-only output.

**Disclosure: I did go to Cambridge, and am white. But not posh or male.*

For more information on The CTBF's John Brabourne Awards, and to apply, please visit <http://www.jbawards.org.uk/>

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