

# How to Increase Media Diversity: 3 Lessons from the London Feminist Film Festival

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A few months ago, the London Feminist Film Festival approached me for help in [reaching out to African feminist filmmakers](#) for their open call. The media activist I am, I admit that I did make them jump through hurdles before I agreed to help them spread the word of the festival on my blog. But it was only fair.

In my relatively short experience as an activist (who is also a person of color), I've received so many requests from [white-run organizations and campaigns asking me to "help them create more diversity"](#), often without any proof that they've attempted to do *any* of this outreach on their own. It's almost as though they view brown people as the people primarily responsible for alleviating the "burden" of creating the diversity they claim to want in their spaces. Oh, who am I kidding? 9/10 times that's actually the case. But I digress.

After a series of sharp-shooting, poignant questions to the committee ("What have you done to reach out to feminist filmmakers of color?" "Who is missing from your lineup, and why?" "What have you done to make this relevant to African feminists, specifically?"), and receiving thoughtful (and honest) responses, I found myself in a strange place: satisfied, and affirmed enough to see myself as partly responsible (as an afrofeminist) for ensuring their success. I didn't just write about the festival; I [volunteered to be one of their media partners](#) and a [judge for one of their jury awards](#) as well.

**Why am I telling you this? Well, there are lessons about diversity to be learned (and shared) here.**

It's only been a few months since the LFFF's initial email to me, but judging from the film festival's program, the organizers efforts have really paid off. The lineup of films included in the program look fantastic; the panelists and jurors represent a wide range of perspectives, *aaaannd* (so far), they've avoided appearing to be The London *White* Feminist Film Festival, which is quite commendable. I can't tell you how many times I've witnessed "universality" (i.e. [lack of intersectionality](#)), [result in the white-washing of so many spaces](#) which would — with some effort — have the potential to truly empower and unify communities within communities.

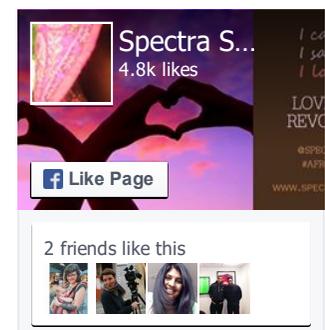
It's not every day I get to see I'm impressed with an organization's outreach efforts (and results). So, I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight **A Few Awesome Things the London Feminist Film Festival Did to Support Media Diversity:**

**1) They Avoided the "We Are One" Trap:** In my post calling for support of the London

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Feminist Film Festival (LFFF), I talked about the importance of diversity in media, especially in the context of solidarity groups; it's actually quite easy to let diversity slide under kumbaya umbrella politics i.e. "we're all feminists, women, etc," ignoring inequalities as we embrace sameness. But the festival organizers, tempting as it may have been to default to what was familiar, made a commitment very early on in their organizing process to keep the inclusion of minority groups in mind, including queer/LGBTI women, African/Black women, etc.

## 2) The Organizers Did Their Own Outreach Before Contacting Minority

**Stakeholders:** As I mentioned at the beginning of this post, there's a difference between being asked to solve an organization's (lack of) diversity issues *for them* (i.e. being tokenized) and being asked to lend your efforts and guidance to *work with them* towards a more inclusive space. As my communications with LFFF revealed a progressive approach to diversity, I was happy to become more deeply involved in ensuring the festival's success. When I asked the organizers what they'd done to reach out to other minority groups, I was pleased to hear about their efforts, as well as their honest observations about audiences they were having trouble reaching, making it easy for me to see my role as offering support vs. being saddled with the entire responsibility of creating a diverse program for their festival. Still, I'm obviously not the only partner LFFF has been working with obviously; the LFFF committee has done a phenomenal job building a team of partners, community stakeholders, vendors, and feminist advocates with unique perspectives and talents to both both shape and amplify the 3-day event this weekend. So, this is a PSA to festivals, organizations, campaigns everywhere: outreach isn't a buzz word, it's work that needs to be done. So please do it vs. asking marginalized people to do it for you.

## 3) The Film Festival Resisted the Urge to "Caucus"

Instead of creating a 'special' track for Black films, LGBT films etc, the festival opted instead to create special tracks for their "outreach", in order to improve representation in the larger pool. The result is an impressive festival program that reflects a range of perspectives and experiences, rather than the separation of "main" from "other." Now, can everyone just adopt this policy? I'm tired of having to choose between discussions, sessions, films etc that represent fragments of who I am, and I'm pretty I'm not the only person with multiple identities that feels this way. Check out some of the films that I'm most excited about (and the range of countries represented), which will be screening next weekend:

- [Lesbiana – A Parallel Revolution](#) is a documentary about the lesbian writers, philosophers, and activists who were key players in creating a revolutionary sisterhood in the 1980s (USA)
- [As a Warrior \(Como una Guerrera\)](#) is a drama about a victim of domestic violence who finds the strength to be her own knight in shining armor (Argentina)
- [Sari Stories](#) is a short about women in rural India documenting their everyday lives and talking about the problems of growing up as women in a patriarchy as they're trained to become video journalists (India)
- In [Beautiful Sentence](#), women prisoners experience the therapeutic effect of creative writing (UK)
- [The Witches of Gambaga](#) is an award-winning documentary about a community of women condemned to live in a camp for 'witches' (Ghana)
- [Audre Lorde – The Berlin Years 1984 to 1992](#) highlights the contributions of award-winning, African-American, lesbian, feminist poet, Audre Lorde, to the Afro-German movement (Germany/USA)
- And last, but not least, [Kung Fu Grandma](#) is about elderly women in Kenya undertaking a self-defense course to help protect themselves from rape by young men in their community (Kenya)

Note: Some of these films are available for free viewing online, so I encourage you to check them out. The LFFF has also granted me access to a few of the features as well, so I'll be publishing my reviews (and reflections) of several of these films leading up to the festival. I've already published a few. But stay tuned for more!

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