



FACE EQUALITY
INTERNATIONAL

MEDIA RELEASE

Hollywood and the Entertainment Industry are being Challenged by International Alliance of Disfigurement Charities

In the wake of the 2023 awards season which was almost entirely devoid of positive, accurate, authentic representation of people with disfigurements and visible differences, an Alliance of activists and 36 NGOs are calling upon the entertainment industry to no longer exclude and cause harm to this marginalized community.

[Face Equality International](#), together with a team of experts, has put together a [Position Paper](#) and [Open Letter](#) to challenge the absence or misrepresentation of the visible and facial difference community in film, TV and the arts.

- Disfigurement has historically been used as a character device, often through use of prosthetics to indicate immorality or vulnerability.
- There are four damaging tropes that dominate the entertainment industry. People who look different are largely portrayed as victims, villains, vigilantes or outcasts, causing real-life harm to this neglected community. From discrimination in the workplace to bullying in schools, these stereotypes lead to real-life abuse of people with disfigurements.
- Using the American Film Institute's list of 100 Greatest Heroes and Villains, [researchers at the University of Texas found that 60% of the all-time top 10 American film villains have skin conditions](#) including alopecia, facial scars, verruca vulgaris, and bulbous noses. In contrast, 0% of the top 10 heroes have similar conditions.
- [In 2021, Changing Faces research conducted by Savanta ComRes](#) found that three quarters of respondents (74%) thought popular culture was changing to be more inclusive, but that people with visible differences were being left behind. The same survey also reported the long-term impact of the lack of representation on people with visible differences, with a third having low levels of confidence and 2 in 10 having low self-esteem.

Phyllida Swift, CEO of Face Equality International said:

“Media representation can truly shape societal attitudes for the better; when harnessed correctly. The facial difference community deserve to have their true, multi-faceted, real-life stories told. This is a critical issue for Face Equality International, and so we will do all we can to turn the tide on the disproportionately negative representation of facial difference; something we currently see all too often.”

Extract from [Redefining Disability](#), [Jaz Gray](#), Professor and FD Activist:

“The media representation of disability centers a concern for the presence of disabled characters in mainstream entertainment narratives. Media participation demands particular attention to the lack of opportunities for disabled people to ultimately acquire equal access to resources needed to produce media independent of, and particularly within, the mainstream media industry. Such access can directly influence our capacity to overcome stigmatization and acquire the cultural, social, and material capital needed to become fully liberated.”

Amy Acton, CEO of Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors said:

“Today, the world’s great storytellers aren’t always telling the story of the survivors I have had the pleasure to know. ... Survivors, as we know them, have great strength, compassion, and a sense of community that the world needs to have more insight into. They need a bigger platform to show the great things they are doing and see them for the people they are – not the villains sometimes portrayed in film, literature, or television.”

The global visible and facial difference community are tired of having their stories exploited, or being excluded from creative industries. This is a talented community that wants to be seen and heard on their own terms. For this reason, the Position Paper outlines five proactive, collaborative ways that media creators can consult with and involve this community. These calls to action include speaking up about harmful stereotypes, recognising bias, including diverse professionals in the entire creative process, casting real people with visible differences rather than prosthetics, and removing barriers to employment and opportunity.

Face Equality International is calling upon creative professionals to [sign the face equality pledge here](#).

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Media enquiries should be sent to info@faceequalityinternational.org or +44 (0) 7841 908852.

A full list of contributing Members of Face Equality International is here: <https://faceequalityinternational.org/thealliance/>

Case studies and interviews with contributors to the paper are available upon request.

Background

Face Equality International is a growing Alliance of activists and organisations with a vision for the global facial difference community to live freely, without indignity or discrimination. In order to achieve this vision, FEI's mission is to position face equality as a social justice movement.

FEI builds solidarity for the face equality movement by advocating for disfigurement to be recognised as an equality and human rights issue, growing an empowered network of organisations and activists, campaigning for an equitable society and eliminating stigma.

Formed in 2018 by the late Dr James Patridge OBE, FEI is a UK registered charity, no: **1198641**