

Whats in a name?



In light of the recent decision to change the name of the GTC from The Guild of Television Cameramen to Guild of Television Camera Professionals, and the resulting debates, this seems a good time to take a look at where we are regarding diversity in the camera department. GTC Council Member **Hazel Palmer** delves deeper into the importance of what we call ourselves – both as an organisation and as individuals.

There have been frequent discussions over the years as to whether to change the name Guild of Television Cameramen to something non-gender specific, culminating in the recent Council decision and member vote to choose a new title. The primary reason for pushing forward this change, as explained in Graham Maunder's summary (pages 6–7), is that when promoting and advertising our guild there has been increasingly frequent objection, sometimes even ridicule, over the non-inclusivity of our name. This has come from people thinking of joining, existing members, sponsors and, importantly, universities and colleges. Having 'Cameramen' in the name has been seen to be at odds with the equality policies under which such institutions operate. With this in mind, Council decided it was absolutely necessary to make a change if we are to maintain our status and progress as an organisation. However, this proposal sparked heated debates, with passionate defenders emerging on both sides.

For me, these debates have thrown up broader questions than just whether we should alter our name. How diverse are we? How do we compare to other professions and the rest of the industry? Are these debates just a storm in a teacup or a symptom of bigger issues?

So, I'm a woman who works as a cameraman – what should I call myself?

Let's take a look at the rights and/or wrongs of using the term 'cameraman'. The overriding argument against changing the term comes down to the inadequacies of other titles to describe the range of skills of a cameraman.

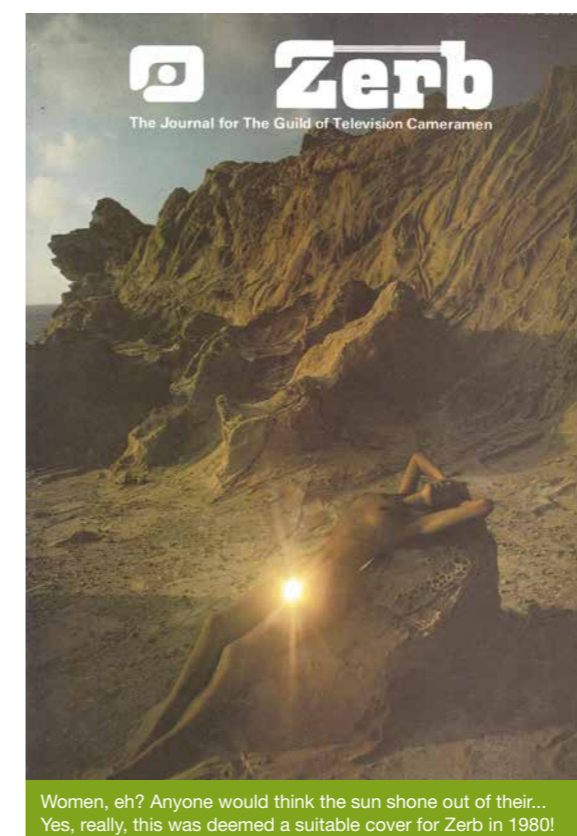
One of the complainants against the change explained their reasoning: "My job title should be 'television cameraman' [...] I get frustrated when the title 'camera operator' is used as [to me] this is a job title from film and single camera practice that has lower skills requirements [...] A television cameraman is expected to operate the zoom, focus, develop moving shots themselves on mobile pedestal mountings and, above all, have the ability to work to talkback, camera scripts and cue lights. They are also expected to offer complementary shots via the use of external vision feeds. As this role is only found in multicamera studios and OBs, it falls under the 'Lorimer case' precedent that means it's impossible to provide equipment but can nonetheless be properly assessed as self-employment (hence the Lorimer Letter/LP10 letter/Schedule D status). For the record, 'cameraman' is no more a gender-specific term than midwife, Bachelor of Science or Master of Arts.

It traditionally came from qualifying and being promoted to a job grade by the acquisition of specialist skills within the broadcast industry. This is a really important distinction with respect to self-employment status at the moment and it's a shame so many people don't understand the full implications of the job titles and what these represent."

However, to argue that 'cameraman' is the universally agreed term (and the only tenable one at that) isn't necessarily sound. The fact is that in an industry where most of us are freelance and which features increasing numbers of broadcasters in various guises, a whole heap of terms are in circulation. The automatically accepted self-employed grades used by HMRC make no mention of 'cameraman' and their film production unit replied to my request for confirmation with this: "For HMRC purposes camera operator includes cameraman and the same rules apply to both grades. As it is unusual for a cameraman to supply their own equipment (given the expense of purchase), both camera operators and cameramen should be treated as employees unless they are able to provide a Special Letter of Authority (an LP10 or Lorimer Letter). Whilst there may be significant differences between 'cameraman' and 'camera operator' from an industry perspective, for HMRC purposes, there are no differences and, as stated above, the same rules apply to both."

BECTU similarly regards job grades on a case-by-case 'self-described' basis with no mention of 'television cameraman' as a job title.

To some, as in the above television cameraman's response, 'cameraman' is a gender-neutral term to be used by all and is quite simply the only title which suitably describes their specialist skillset. Others believe that you should be either a cameraman or camerawoman – but then this displeases those who don't want to be labelled in their work according to their gender. The fact is there is no universally agreed protocol on what job titles to use across the industry and this leaves us women sometimes not quite knowing where we fit in.



As long-standing GTC member Christina Fox pointed out at the recent EGM, changing the name of the guild does not force anyone to change their own personal job description, but it does stop some people feeling excluded – and surely that's a good thing.



The survey

Amongst all the arguments for or against the name change there was very little coming from the only people really qualified to say whether it had an effect on them or not – camerawomen. So, in an anonymous survey, I asked 68 camerawomen what they consider their job title to be. Of those whose job didn't fit into an already non-gender specific role, such as DoP or camera assistant, their answers included: camerawoman, camera operator, cameraman, lighting camerawoman, and one shooting PD (and let's not even get started on that one!).

I then turned to the 'official' bodies to see whether they have an agreed job title when it comes to employing/crediting those people who do all the things a television cameraman does. BBC Commissioning Guidelines state: "Credits which imply that certain jobs are the preserve of one gender only must not be used" – and when I contacted them, they confirmed that 'cameraman' would indeed fall into that category (oddly enough, the exception is 'best boy'). No other broadcaster replied to my request for verification, but looking at credits from Channel 4, ITV and Sky, as well as the websites of Skillset, ProductionBase and BECTU, 'camera operator' seems to be the most used title, along with the occasional 'cameraperson'.

Picture a cameraman...

Ask most people to picture a cameraman and they will likely conjure up a white male. This is probably because this demographic has dominated the industry (as in so many other industries) since filming started, back when women were the caregivers, men the providers, and reality was good old-fashioned monochrome. The disagreements arising around the cameraman job title suggest that this may no longer be the case though – or at least shouldn't be.

Cameraman has long perfectly described the job that men in the industry do. But does the term also contribute to the image most people have in their minds of a cameraman? Personally, I would happily adopt this title if it really were universally accepted as gender-neutral. However, when I turn up on a job as a 'cameraman', or introduce myself as such, I am often met with surprise. Almost invariably someone will quip 'But you're not a man'. Sometimes, others will introduce me as the cameraman but then apologise and flounder over what term to use – and I'm not entirely sure how to help them.

Why what we call ourselves is important

While some argue that 'cameraman' describes a specific role which other terms don't adequately cover (and we as professionals know and understand), it doesn't alter the perceptions among the general public and the people booking us, who don't always grasp the intricacies of the different roles.

I have lost count of the times I've been mistaken for a production assistant, client or caterer – even when standing right by my camera. I've been in auditoriums preparing to film a show and been asked by members of the audience to direct them to their seats; a show producer has approached me at my camera to ask me where the cameraman was; a client has directed their questions about camera and lighting decisions to my young male trainee; and at trade shows, wanting to find out about a new camera, I've often struggled to get the attention of salespeople while they jumped to help the nearest man, despite my job title being clearly displayed on my name tag. Does this happen to men? When operating handheld are they constantly required to politely respond to comments about how heavy the camera is?

Obviously, these occurrences are generally well-meaning or unintentional (and I must stress that little of it comes from colleagues these days) – and we all tend to make unconscious judgements about people based on their looks. However, the results can nonetheless gnaw away at your confidence on a daily basis and the fact that no harm is meant by these uninformed or thoughtless comments doesn't mean we shouldn't try to change things to avoid them occurring in the first place.

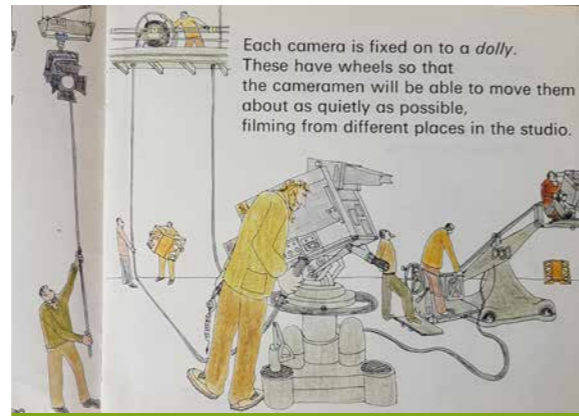
Just because you've never heard a camerawoman complain or seen any treated unfairly at work, it doesn't mean it's not happening. From the women I surveyed here are some examples of the many comments returned:

- "I've been told I can't do certain jobs due to being female."
- "There is an assumption I'm less technically minded due to my gender."
- "I've had folk admit they'd presumed I can carry less, endure less, might attract animals when menstruating (yes really!) and found out I've been paid less."
- "On a fashion shoot, crew were making rohipnol rape jokes about the models. I asked them to stop but they just complained about having a woman on comms. I wasn't booked by that company again."
- "Working in a kitroom, male colleagues are considered ahead of me for location work, with stated reasons of 'wanting a more laddy atmosphere'

Waiting for a man to come and carry the equipment so we don't break a nail
#everydaycamerawomanproblems



JOPHIL/ISTOCK



'Making Television Programmes' (1981) teaching children that bearded white men do all the technical work

and 'there being a lot of carrying involved' used by productions."

... and these are only the more obvious examples, not the 'under-the-radar' sexism where the subject is either unaware of it, or left unsure as to whether they've actually been discriminated against or are just being 'over-sensitive' (another female 'trait').

Of course, not all of this everyday sexism will be fixed purely by our using a different job title, but this doesn't mean the term cameraman isn't part of the problem. It's just one of many examples where 'male' is the default characteristic, and a non-gender specific term might just alter some of this bias.

One of the suggestions put to me regarding the GTC name change was that since the GTC has been called the Guild of Television Cameramen for the past 45 years, we should take it in turns and call it the Guild of Television Camerawomen for the next 45 years! While chuckling at such a ludicrous idea, it did make me wonder why I found it so ridiculous and also to consider what we all accept as the norm.

Although we probably don't want to go down the road of overly PC, 'call-everything-something-neutral-so-we-don't-offend-any-person-animal-or-vegetable' rules of language, it doesn't hurt sometimes to take a look at the bigger picture and to try and understand why some people are asking for change. While some might think that changing a word is silly and unnecessary, not many of those critics are the people who might ever have experienced a problem with it, which is why I decided specifically to ask female camerapeople what they thought. From my survey results, 13% were happy with Cameraman, 24% chose Cameraman/Camerawoman, and the majority (46%) preferred Camera Operator.

No matter what the arguments for and against all these names are, at the end of the day it won't change what your job is. A good point was made by long-standing GTC member Christina Fox at the EGM. She said that she has always been proud to call herself a cameraman and will continue to do so. Changing the name of the guild does not force anyone to change their own job description, but it does stop some people feeling excluded – and surely that's a good thing.

So, here we are midway through 2017 as the Guild of Television Camera Professionals. Maybe it's not a perfect alternative to 'Cameramen', but perhaps the main issue here is not what we call ourselves, but who we are. This is a bigger issue, and diversity at large in this industry needs addressing. I go on to discuss these wider implications in the article 'Diversity behind the camera' on pages 78-82.

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