



LCP
LIGHTS CAMERA POWER

How LCP is Helping Female Directors Get Camera-Savvy

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Former 2nd AC Phoebe Arnstein discusses her Lights Camera Power initiative, which aims, through practical workshops, to equip directors with the technical skillset to achieve their vision and build collaborative relationships with DOPs.

What inspired you to set up Lights Camera Power?

For many years I worked as a 2nd AC (assistant camera) on features and TV drama such as *The Crown*, *Black Mirror* and *Sherlock*. Being in the camera department gives you incredible proximity to the technical side of filmmaking and I learnt so much by simply being on these sets working alongside some of the best actors, directors and cinematographers in the industry.

After I put down the clapper board to focus on my own directing journey, I started to realise how unique my background in camera was. For me, using the camera to tell a story is one of the most enjoyable aspects of filmmaking and having an understanding of this technical process is invaluable. I realised that what female directors needed was a non-judgmental place to ask the technical questions they felt like they couldn't in the past and to get hands-on with cameras and lenses in their own time off set. LCP has official support from Panavision and Panalux, which means top-end equipment is accessible at every workshop.

At each workshop we invite a guest cinematographer to share their unique creative and practical perspective, which in turn helps nurture a working relationship between the director and DOP. We've had some incredible talent at LCP already, including Ula Pontikos BSC [pictured below], Chris Ross BSC, Rina Yang, Adriano Goldman ASC, BSC and Stuart Bentley BSC.



Ula Pontikos BSC, one of the guest cinematographers at LCP's workshops

What sort of issues is the initiative hoping to address?

The underlying issue is of course addressing the tiny percentage of women directors active in the industry, but I wanted to focus my efforts on a smaller part of a big problem. I hope the initiative will broaden our technical vocabulary and help directors grow in confidence on and off set, which will ultimately lead to better communication between themselves, the production and the HOD's (heads of department). Directors don't need to be technical wizards (I'm certainly not) but having a deeper understanding of the practical process ultimately puts women in a seat where they have more control in realising the visual aesthetic of their project from start to finish.



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Thank you to our wonderful guest DOP @edjibevel for joining the discussion 📹



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You worked in the camera department for seven years before becoming a director, what were the main challenges you encountered along the way and do you think that's still the case?

For me, being next to the camera was one of the most exciting places to be on set (other than the director's chair!) and I look back at that period of time with great fondness. However, I was often the only woman in the camera team and that brought with it many emotional challenges. Sexism is inherent in the industry and dealing with that on a daily basis whilst working an intensely physical job in a male dominated environment was crippling at times. Don't get me wrong, there are some wonderful male camera crews out there and I've had the pleasure of working with many of them, but unfortunately you carry bad experiences with you for a long time and they're always the most difficult to shake.

"[The A-Camera focus puller] looked over at me and said: 'So, as you can see boys, we're one man down today...'"

One memorable occasion was back when I first started out as a camera trainee in 2011. It was a colossal, live-action Coca-Cola commercial, which required five or six camera teams to cover different elements of the event; I was the only woman. Before the teams dispersed to their designated spots around the location, the A-camera focus puller gathered everyone around for a pep talk. He looked over at me and said: "So, as you can see boys, we're one man down today..." I felt humiliated and vulnerable but my lack of experience and my desperation to be 'one of the guys' forced me to push this to the back of my mind and just get on with it.

On my last camera-assisting job in 2017, something atrocious was said to me in passing on set. After years of enduring this sort of obscene, colloquial language I decided to make a formal complaint to the producer. It was one of the most difficult things I've ever done but I felt like I heard my voice for the first time and it was so exhilarating. Finally I was taking control over a situation in which I had so often felt at sea. I've actually never spoken publicly about my negative experiences in the camera department but as I started writing this piece for shots, I felt that it was important for readers to know where I started in the industry and in turn understand part of the incentive behind my initiative.



Why do you think female camera crews are still in the minority?

This is a really difficult question and I'm a little wary of answering it to be honest. Historically, technical jobs in film have been out of reach for most women but it's also important to talk about the fact that it can be a very isolating job. This of course affects both men and women. It's particularly grueling on relationships and it's difficult for friends who aren't in the industry to understand why you're suddenly not around for long periods of time or you're too exhausted to meet after a long shooting day. I worked on Season 1 of *The Crown*, which was a nine-month shoot. We were well looked-after on that production but undeniably it had a significant impact on my personal life. You're either in or you're out and there's always someone at the receiving end of a phone call to replace you.



Arnstein (pictured right) on set

Being a camera assistant is a labour-intensive role. There are far more female camera trainees and 2nd ACs now but you start to see a drop-off at focus puller level. I think it's because by the time you've worked your butt off and climbed the hierarchical ladder to get to that position, you might be at a point in your life when you start to think about having children. On features and TV drama a shooting day can be up to twelve hours a day, plus three or four hours travel depending on the location, plus the possibility of a pre-call or overtime, which you can never plan for in advance. When you add those hours up, how on earth can you manage a working schedule like that alongside caring for your baby? There is no support for parents in film and quite often women are forced to put their careers on ice in order to have a baby.

How can people get involved with LCP?

Follow us on Instagram and **email us** to get on our mailing list to hear about future events.