

WHITE PAPER

"GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CINEMA, STREAMING AND TELEVISION"

The media shape our perception of reality and therefore have a special responsibility. This applies all the more to such a socially urgent topic as gender-based violence.

The study "*Gender-based Violence on German Television*", initiated by the MaLisa Foundation and UFA, shows that explicit gender-based violence, often serious violence against women, is portrayed in a third of all TV formats. With this white paper, Women in Film and Television Germany (WIFT), the MaLisa Foundation and the Bundesverband Schauspiel (BFFS) would like to contribute to a conscious approach to the portrayal of violence against women in audiovisual media.

The following set of recommended questions emerged from the discussions of the think tank, "Gender-based Violence in Cinema, Streaming and Television. Our Responsibility in Storytelling and Production", which brought together more than forty decision-makers from the German audiovisual industry in September 2023. The questions are intended to stimulate reflection at different stages of the creative process.

The discussion participants agreed that artistic freedom and the telling of exciting and entertaining stories are central. However, a responsible and conscious approach to the staging of violence against women should also be a prerequisite. The white paper is intended as an invitation to reflect on one's own work and creative decisions.

Recommended questions for script development (screenplay, editorial work, production)

- Is a violent scene necessary for the story?
- Is the depiction of sexualized violence necessary?
- Is the scene of violence told from the perspective of the perpetrator or the victim/survivor?
- Has the topic of violence against women and its depiction been researched? Have relevant data and facts and, if necessary, specialist advice from experts been included? This applies to narratives of violence in the main and subplots.
- Was the victim's/survivor's perspective actively taken into account during the research?
- Have the results of research and expert advice been integrated, even if they lead to the story developing in a different direction?
- Is there a vision agreement between the author and the production in which, among other things, the handling of depictions of gender-based violence and other sensitive topics is stipulatedⁱ? If no vision agreement is drawn up: Do the author and production have a common stance?
- Has a sensitivity reading been carried out by a professionally qualified person?
- Are myths and stereotypes about (sexualized) violence against women avoided or repeated, e.g.:
 - Is the victim assumed to be complicit?
 - Is the victim portrayed as helpless and unable to defend herself?
 - Is the crime committed by anonymous perpetrators in public spaces?
- Are impulses for new narratives found, e.g.:
 - Does a victim/survivor of violence seek (and find) competent support so that she is not left alone and therefore "broken"?
 - Do victims/survivors talk about their experience of violence? What attitudes do the interviewees adopt and what perspective is chosen for the scene?
 - Is the structural dimension of violence against women addressed? Do the characters verbalize structural elements of violence?

Recommended questions for broadcasters and film funders

- Are costs for research and the involvement of experts included in the budget?
- With regard to a responsible approach to the topic of violence against women, has a conscious decision been made as to whether or not to include a content notice / content warningⁱⁱ?
- Are references to support services for those affected shown during or after the broadcast, as well as on the online platform or in social media postsⁱⁱⁱ?
- Is the conscious handling of the topic of (sexualized) violence against women considered as quality criteria in the evaluation of submitted projects?
- How are the quality criteria checked^{iv}?

Recommended questions for staging and shot list (directing, acting, camera)

- Is it a conscious decision to show the act of violence? Is an alternative possible in terms of storytelling and dramaturgy?
- Do all those involved have a common understanding of the implementation of violent scenes, and if not, is it possible to make changes to the scene with the authors or even cut the scenes?
- Were the violent scenes actively discussed with all head of departments during preparation, e.g. as part of a look and feel discussion?
- Were the actors' contractual agreements taken into account?
- Is an intimacy coordinator and/or stunt coordinator consulted?
- Has the shot list been discussed with the director before shooting?
- Has it been discussed how the agreements can be implemented on set despite time pressure?
- How can the staging of scenes of violence be prevented from having an aestheticizing, glorifying or sexually arousing effect?
- Has the shot list been chosen in such a way that stereotypes about (sexualized) violence against women are not reproduced?
 - For example, is the fragmented depiction of female bodies and body pan avoided?
 - Which POV is chosen? That of the perpetrator or the victim?
 - Is the character portrayed as a helpless victim who is unable to defend herself through the positioning of the camera (lower/upper perspective)??
- Is the use of costume and makeup/special effects (e.g. film blood) appropriate in the scene?

Recommended questions for post-production (editing, sound design)

Editing

- Does the editing have the possibility to break through stereotypes, e.g. about sexualized violence or assumed complicity of the victim/survivor, which may have been unconsciously reproduced during filming?
 - Does violence have to be shown in order to tell the story? Does the editing work even if images that glorify or trivialize violence and/or reproduce stereotypes are omitted?
 - Is it possible to drop scenes that have been filmed, in consultation with the director, or is it possible to carry out a reshoot?
 - If different perspectives were filmed: Which one is chosen in the editing: the perpetrator's, victim's/survivor's or a neutral perspective?
- Can a viewing be carried out by people who are not part of the industry but are experts in the topic depicted?

Sound design

- Can the perspective of the victim/survivor be strengthened by the choice of sound design?
- Can, for example, the sound on an off-screen narration strengthen the perspective of the victim/ survivor?
- Are there scenes of violence that are trivialized by the choice of sound?

We are convinced that good films can only be made under good conditions. With this in mind, the following questions are aimed at commissioning networks and employers of filmmakers (i.e. production companies) on set.

Recommended questions for commissioning networks and production companies

- Is there a clear and unambiguous position against sexual harassment on the part of the commissioning network and the production company, encouragement of self-reflection in the team, provision of information material and other preventive measures?
- Are all employees informed about who victims/survivors of sexual harassment and violence can turn to? If available, an internal contact point is advisable, and/or the independent and confidential advice center Themis, which offers psychological and legal advice for those affected^{vi}.
- When depicting intimacy and/or sexualized violence: Was an intimacy coordinator^{vii} involved from the beginning of the process?
- If there are scenes with nudity and sexual content, are the *ICDA best-practice casting guidelines for nudity and sexual content*^{viii} applied?

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Women in Film and Television Germany (WIFT)

MaLisa Stiftung

Bundesverband Schauspiel (BFFS)

ⁱ A vision agreement is a written agreement on a content vision for a series or film. Components include basic plot and stylistic elements, handling of depictions of gender-based violence and sensitive topics. It can be part of a screenplay contract. The vision agreement can also be used to align the other departments with the common vision of the project and to sensitize them to certain topics contained therein.

ⁱⁱ see e.g. BBC Editorial Guidelines Section 5 Harm and Offence Content Information (<https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidelines/harm-and-offence/guidelines/>); FSF Fachmagazin Mediendiskurs 103, 1/2023 „Warnhinweise - Schutz vor belastenden Inhalten“ (<https://mediendiskurs.online/heft/warnhinweise-ausgabe-103/>)

ⁱⁱⁱ e.g. Violence against women helpline in Germany: 116 016 | www.hilfetelefon.de; Sexual abuse helpline in Germany: 0800 22 55 530 | www.hilfe-portal-missbrauch.de/hilfe-telefon ; A table of the national women's helplines available in 46 European Countries: <https://wave-network.org/list-of-helplines-in-46-countries/> ; international list of country help lines, provided by UN Women: <https://www.endvawnow.org/en/need-help/>; cf. also BBC Action Line: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/actionline/>

^{iv} cf. the approach of the Austrian Film Institute in the context of the feature film inclusion checks – see <https://filminstitut.at/foerderung/projektmission>

^v cf. “The Menkes List: 5 Camera Techniques That Objectify Women In Film”: <https://intheirownleague.com/2019/11/05/the-menkes-list-6-camera-techniques-that-objectify-women-in-film/>

^{vi} <https://themis-vertrauensstelle.de/>

^{vii} cf. BECTU guidance for shooting intimacy: <https://bectu.org.uk/news/bectu-launches-guidance-for-shooting-intimate-scenes>; professional networks: <https://www.idcprofessionals.com>; Germany: <https://b-ik.art/infomaterial#Verband>

^{viii} <https://the-icda.com/protocols/2020/icdn-best-practice-casting-guidelines-for-nudity-and-sexual-content/>