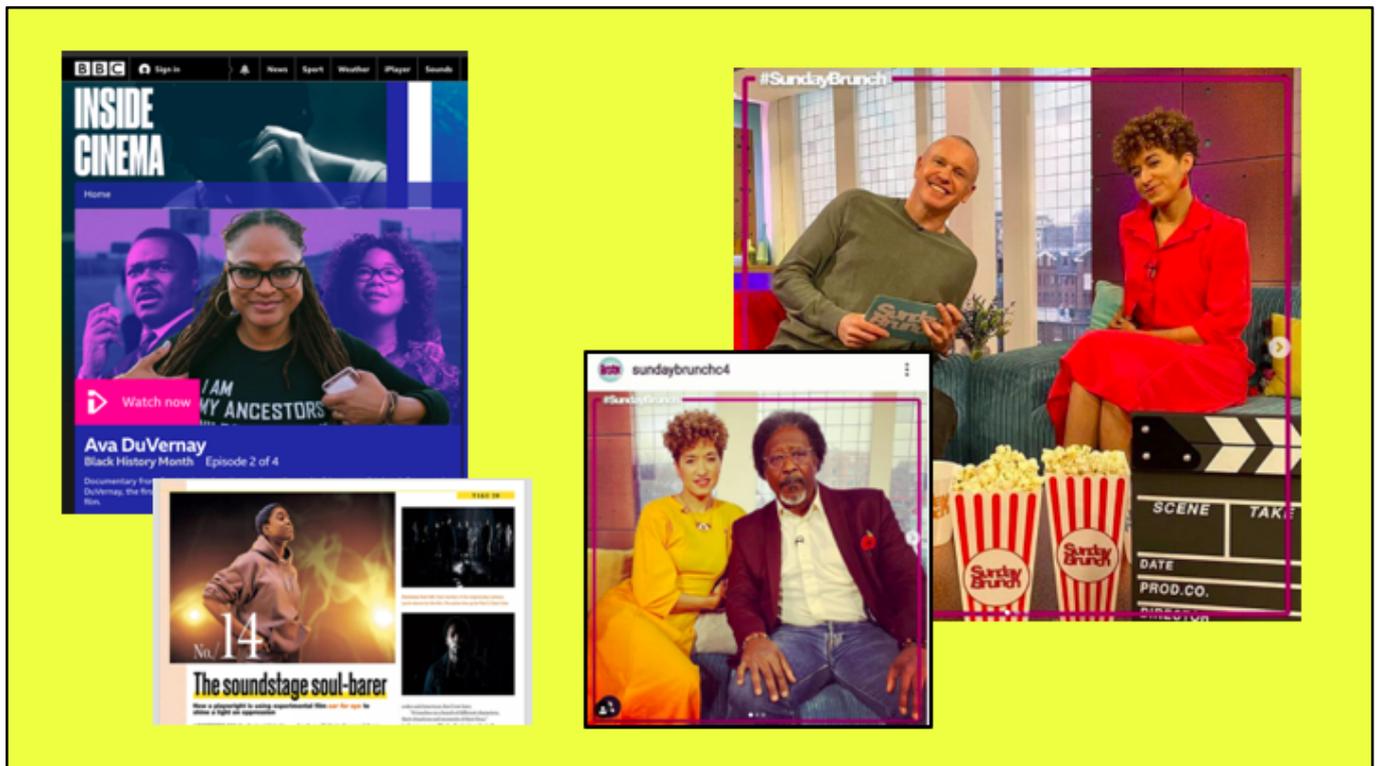


My name is Corrina and I'm the founder of Bechdel Test Fest - an ongoing celebration of women in film.

I'm also a freelance critic for Empire Magazine and most recently have produced a documentary on Ava Duvernay for the BBC and have had the pleasure of working with debbie tucker green on the release of her forthcoming new film.

In addition I am the resident film critic for Sunday Brunch once a month on Channel 4.

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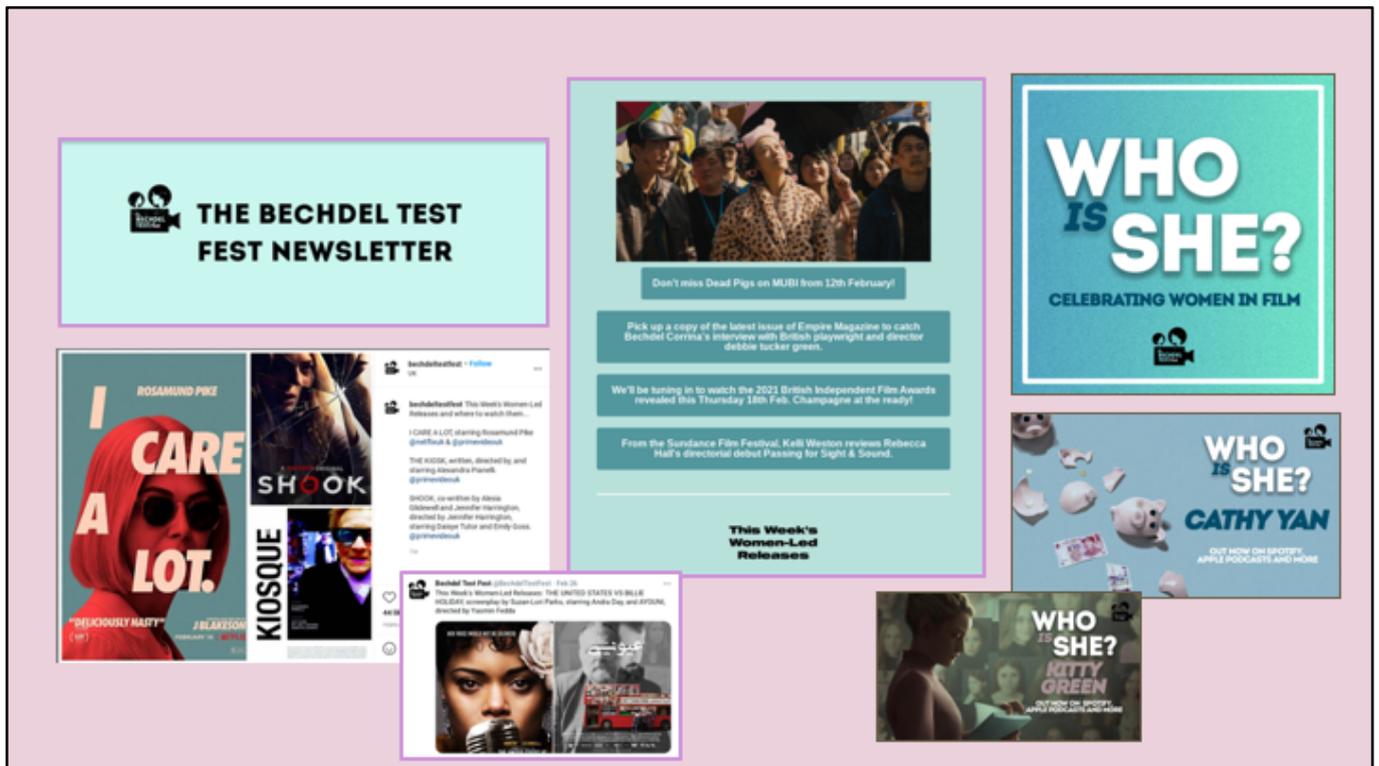
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...For the day job, I am the arts and culture comms officer for Hackney Council which has me working on events such as Windrush Festival, Hackney's Anti Racism Plan, Carnival, Black History Season, Hackney Black History Curriculum and the forthcoming Census. I'm Hackney born and bred so...



Right now, due to the pandemic, Bechdel Test Fest has been unable to screen films of course but we are still committed to celebrating the work of female-identifying women in film via our Friday newsletter and social which promotes all the week's new releases and our podcast Who Is She which spotlights and usually interviews a brilliant female filmmaker.

I want to begin by managing the expectation here. No one person can change the world. Seven years ago I set up Bechdel Test Fest, and I'm proud to say that in that time we've done some incredible things, but I cannot take credit for doing it single handedly.

It took finding my people.

Finding people who share your vision, ambition or drive can be hard. It can be disheartening when you think they don't exist. But let me tell you they do.

Take this moment right here and now. We are all here in this digital room gathering to hear how to make ideas happen. So already, you are in a room with like minded

people. Don't take that for granted, this is rare. Especially in this isolated age.

Perhaps we could take a moment to acknowledge that and take advantage of it? Why not use the chat after this session to share something you want to do and post your email address in case there's someone who wants to help? Your people might just be here...

Another expectation I want to address here is the tackling of inequality....Now, there is a lot of inequality in the world and unless you want to burn out... be good to yourself and know *that you can't fix it all.*

What fight are you fighting? What tools are you going to use? Also, as time goes on those inequalities will grow new heads - some will be explicit - some more insidious - so you have to be ready to keep up with its variants.

Finding your people and focusing on what your fight is, are two key lessons I've learned from setting up Bechdel Test Fest.

I have more... but I feel those two key points are important to address the topic of this conversation before we go any further.

Stop presenting OR

So let's talk about Bechdel Test Fest...

The inequality I wanted to fight... was the lack of positive representation in film. This was inspired by having an up close and personal relationship with the film industry in both how empowering and lazy it can be.

I landed a job at **Virgin Media as Movies Manager** for their on demand titles. This meant liaising with all the film distributors and studios on a daily basis as they tried to get me to promote their films.

The most fascinating was the quarterly slate meetings. Each studio, or distributor, would have us sit in a room while they talked up their forthcoming releases with the hope we would add them to Virgin's VOD platform.

We would watch trailers for hours...and be wooed by goody bags and coffee...sometimes drinks. Anyway... I loved these meetings. Many of the films I

would already know about as they had been in the cinema already and now it was time for their DVD/streaming release.

But many...I had **not** heard of...as they either had a really small release...or were titles that were always going to be a straight to DVD.

This was at a time when I hadn't quite discovered how great films and cinema could be... cinema was expensive and I rarely connected with the kind of films at the multiplex. But now I was being invited to press screenings for films that hadn't come out yet and as the invites came in, I soon got the cinefile bug and I adored going to watch films with a free glass of wine.

Back to the slate meetings - I began to notice a theme. Those smaller releases would always come at the very end of the meeting... if we had time. They were almost apologetic about even bothering to show them to us.



The themes were...Female stories. Stories with Black leads. Unknown female directors. Documentaries...It was like gliding down a isle of neglect and yet these were the films that connected with me most. So I soon became protective over how we placed them on the Virgin Media service.

Virgin Media's audience is huge so I knew I had the power to present these films to an audience who may otherwise have never known about them. I would work overtime to think of marketing tactics and write reviews for the website in a bid to draw attention to them. As a result, the distributors loved me for it because they could see I had a passion for giving their small releases some love.

At the screenings of their films I began to see another theme...I was almost always the only brown girl in the room. Usually the youngest too. I would look around and wonder if these older guys could possibly be connecting with the likes of Clio Barnard's THE SELFISH GIANT, Amma Asante's BELLE, Sophia Copolas THE BLING RING. How were they going to care for these stories? (balance ect)

And then...I was made redundant. Having time, money and anger are great things to have when you want to make change and with the knowledge of how the film industry treats the stories I care about, I knew I wanted to set up a platform that gave them the

love they deserved.

I didn't know how yet. I knew I needed an idea, a theme...

To make ends meet I did a bit of freelance journalism and while researching for a piece on feminism in film I came across the Bechdel Test...and it blew my mind...

**Two named
women...**



**...have a
conversation...**



**...not about
men.**



For those who don't know or need a reminder, the test is a simple, low bar measure and in order to pass a film needs to have two named women, who talk to each other about something other than a man.

What is The Bechdel Test?



It was inspired by Alison Bechdel, a queer American cartoonist who is now an award-winning playwright and graphic novelist. This is the very comic strip that inspired the test which she came up with alongside her friend Liz Wallace which is why it's sometimes called the Bechdel Wallace Test..

(Are you My Mother and Fun Home)

Now passing this test should be simple...right?

There are 8,076 movies in the Bechdel Test database only (57.6%) pass.

In 2016, a third of the top 50 films at the box office did not feature female characters talking to each other in any meaningful way.

33.1 per cent of speaking roles in 2018's 100 top-grossing films went to women.

In 2018 fewer than half of the 89 films named best picture at the Oscars passed

What I liked about it was how aggravatingly simple it was and unlike trying to explain what feminism was back then - this simple measure made explaining gender bias in film crystal clear.

I also liked its tongue in cheek approach...and knew the power in humour. I'm not an academic writer at all and after doing celebrity journalism I understood the power in short, snappy, and often silly modes of communication to deliver impactful messages.

It also reminded me of a conversation I had with someone at Virgin - an old boy director who I'll never forget telling me that *'as soon as you call something feminist, it becomes political and...people are put off by politics.*

As riled as I was...it's been an important consideration on how to venture out of an echo chamber.

A-Rate



Thrilled with the knowledge of the Bechdel Test, I did my research some more and came across **A Rate**. A classification tool used in Sweden to signal if a film passed the Bechdel Test. I was smitten and with Sweden not being too far away I contacted the founder Ellen Tejil and set up an interview and went to visit her at her indie cinema called Rio Bio.

A Rate was making an impact...

It was at this visit that Ellen told me about the 30th anniversary of the Bechdel Test. With my marketing and comms knowledge that people like hooks and thematic celebrations I thought a year long celebration of the test would be a nice idea.

Quite frankly. I had no idea what I was doing but I kept talking about the idea, in the right rooms, until it started to take shape.

Never underestimate the power of a good networking event - Film London, ICO, We Are Parable, Bounce Cinema...they all regularly advertise them.

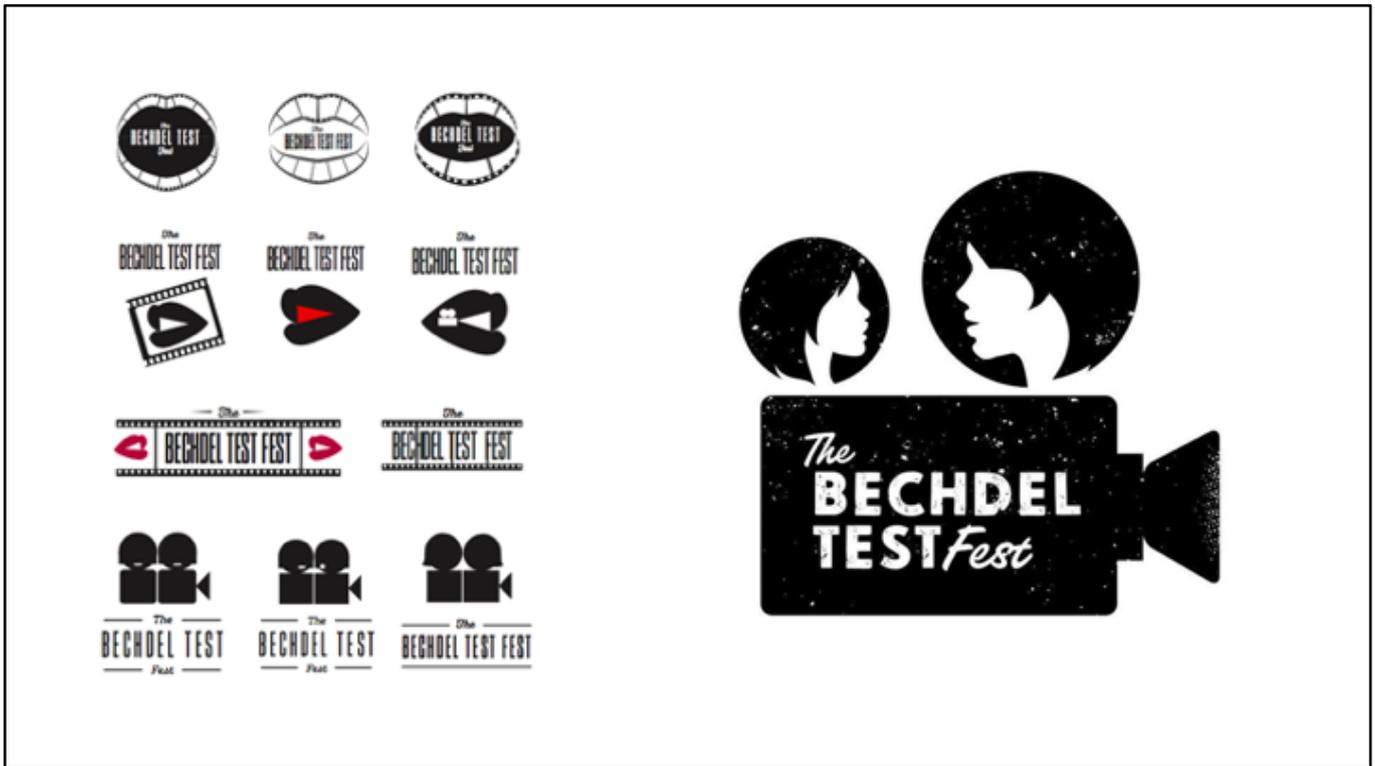
Now, from what I remember it was an ICA event where I met Phoenix and mentioned the idea I had about putting on a festival...screening only films that passed the test...I said Bechdel Test...he said 'fest' and the lightbulb chain was

pulled.

Passion is infectious and I could tell the more I believed in the idea the more people wanted to be involved. I would leave events with a bunch of new names and numbers of people who wanted to make it happen. Then, pride took over...I couldn't NOT do it.

It was pretty gutsy of me to want to launch a film festival without ever really having gone to one. So...I sucked up all the experience I could get by volunteering at various festivals or covering for the press.

It was a lot of fun...and I learnt so much about programming, marketing, Q&As and what audiences were looking for....and all the while I was burrowing this info away to inform how my own festival could work.



Having a background in marketing I knew I needed a look. So I called on some favours from my friend who knew a thing or two about logos, and after much two and fro we came up with the same logo we have today.

The brief was something that signaled film or cinema and tried to tie in with the idea of two people talking to each other.



Mission

MISSION STATEMENT

Once I had a logo, I could start building the brand. But a brand needs values.

Mission statements and About pages, in all my work, are very important. They help anchor a project to its intent, and if you ever feel like you're swaying from the original objective - you can come back to it to keep you on track. It is also very useful to direct people to when you find yourself explaining yourself again and again. Or, if you get asked to do something nice...but not quite in line with your mission, you have an easier time saying thanks but no thanks. *Also helped me answer questions such as can me come along?*

So I had a logo and a mission.... now I needed to be found - and so, I bit the bullet and launched a website and some social media platforms.

Back then, and understandably now, setting up social media platforms was the most nerve racking thing. I allowed myself to believe the idea that feminists were constantly dragged and trolled... and laughed off the internet.

And yet... I was met with nothing but positivity and people excited to see something to help fill the gap in the market. Nor did I feel any competition - there were a few indie film programming groups around and I was welcomed to the club.

I sometimes wonder what I wouldn't have achieved had I let that anxiety get the better of me...

Going back to finding your people. I knew forming a collective would be great.

I made a conscious decision to never directly ask anyone to work with me on a management level as I didn't want to create a power imbalance. If someone wanted to be a part of Bechdel Test Fest I would let them ask so they knew this was their decision. And that worked..

Side note - this...is also why it's important to make a conscious decision to surround yourself with good people who inspire you, so if and when they ask you to collaborate - you of course say yes.

As someone who had seen the success of working as a volunteer, I naturally thought recruiting volunteers for general assistance would be wise.

Now that my social media accounts were up and with a nice following...I Tweeted out that I was going to hold a volunteer afternoon at Genesis cinema and that if anyone wanted to help make some feminist cinema happen, they should meet me there.

That was nerve wracking...that morning I bought a bunch of snacks and got there early praying people would actually turn up.

And they did. Come the end of the day I had around 20 young women ready to help with the first events.



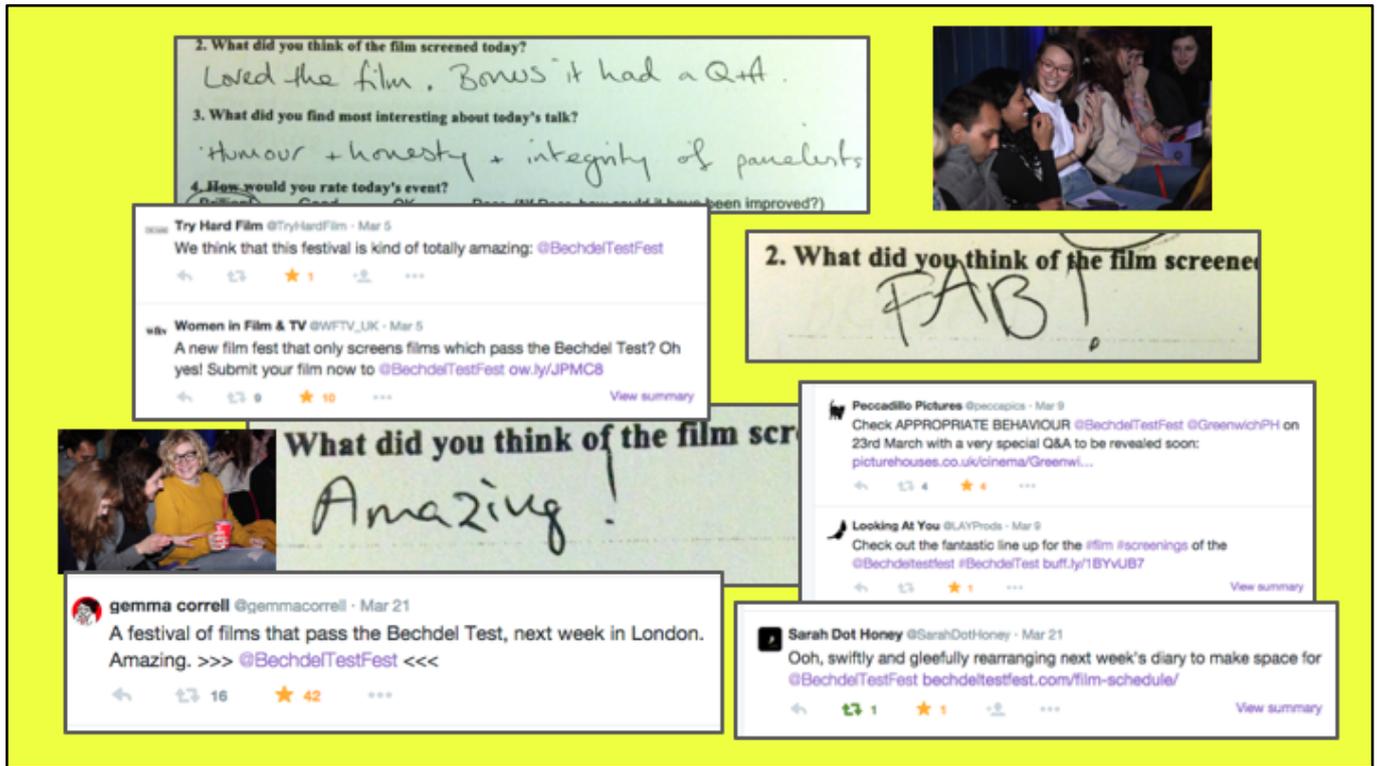
One thing I'd observed with other film festivals was that they were pretty flash in the pan and couldn't possibly cover the breadth of films and topics of conversations we wanted to. Also, frankly, I didn't have money or big sponsors to fund a week-strong series of events.

This is why the year-long model, and then an generally ongoing series of events, made sense. It also allowed us to be more responsive to cultural events or discussions.

We launched on Valentine's day with **Reclaim The Rom Com** which was our way of giving romance films with positive female leads their due....we did a double bill of *Obvious Child* and *Philadelphia Story*. Other events that year included *Little Women* *Big Stories* (coming of age stories) and *Horror Heroines*.

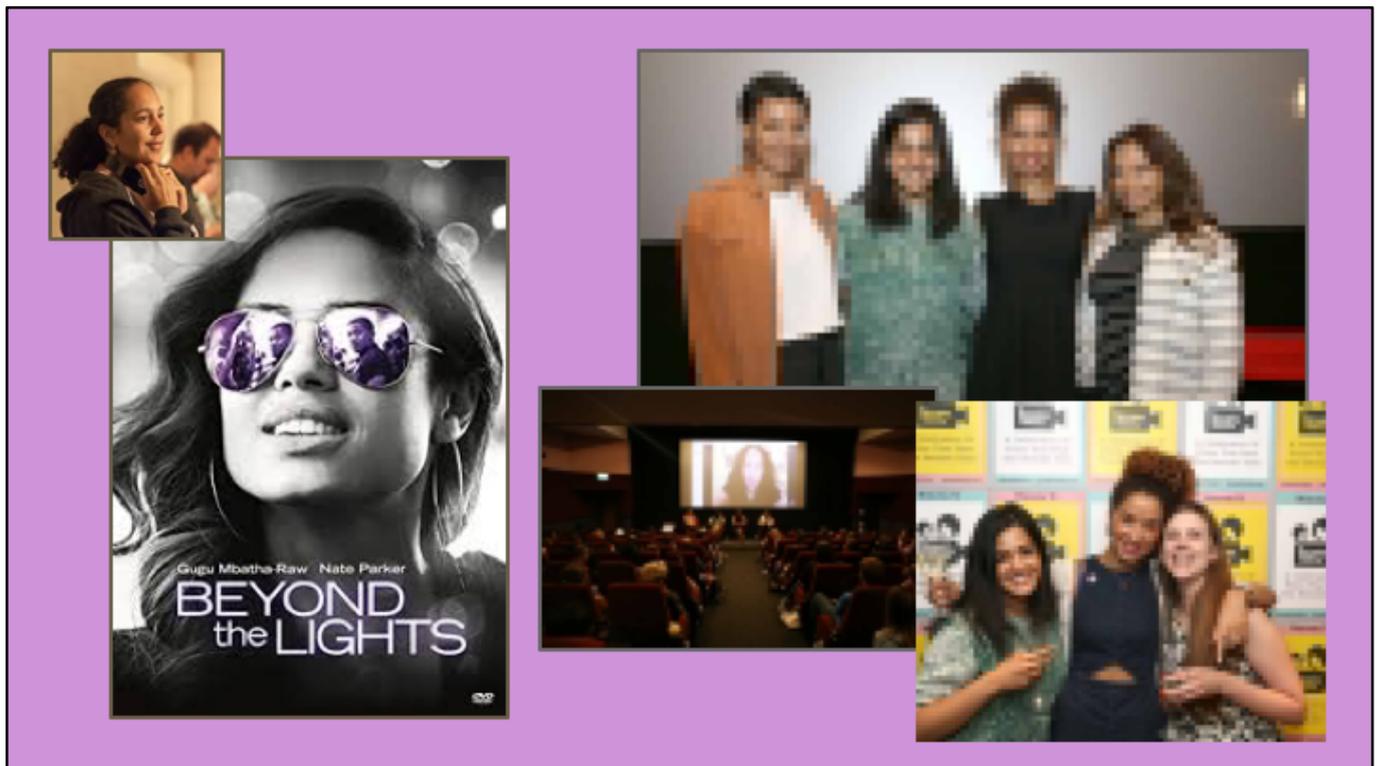


We got some great press thanks to the PR expertise of a best friend of mine...



...and generated great word of mouth. All of this makes great storytelling tools to what it is you're trying to communicate.

I'm going to go back to some events in our first year which really stood out for us...



One of our 2015 highlights was hosting the London premiere of Gina Prince-Bythewood's *Beyond the Lights*. Starring Gugu Mbatha-Raw (*Belle*), the film was initially set for a home entertainment-only release in the UK.

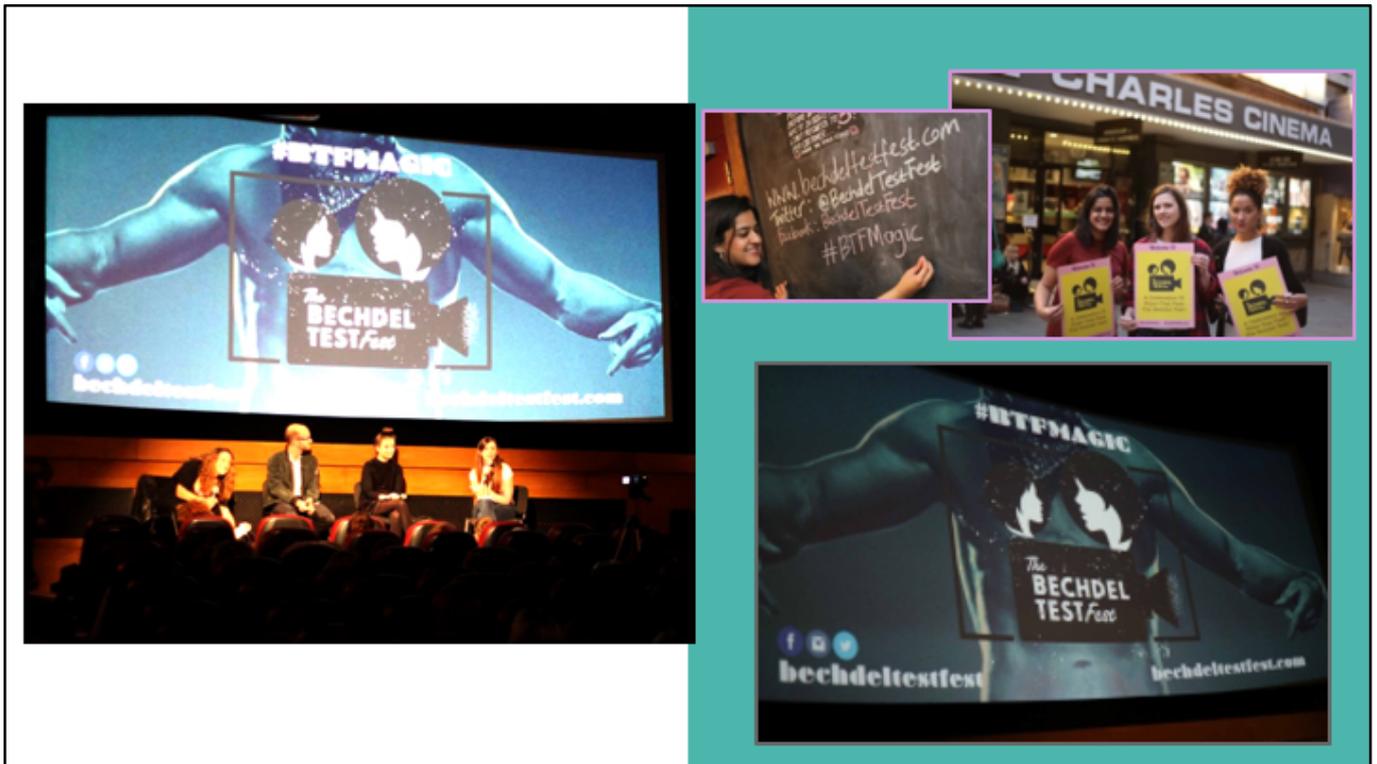
We felt certain that the US film, which is partially set in Brixton, would attract a cinema audience and we knew from Gina's tweets that this method of release was not as she had intended. She actually tweeted us to tell us that her film passes the test and that we should screen it. So obviously we wanted to help.

We fought to have the film screened at the Ritzy and were eventually given permission to give the film its London premiere.

We followed the film with an informative panel including MTV's Jasmine Dotiwala, filmmaker Cecile Emeke, journalist Simran Hans and Gina allowed us to to a skype Q&A.

The event sold out in 24 hours, prompting lots of positive press and an additional screening at Picturehouse Central and saw Gina's work be celebrated at the BFI's Love season later than year.

We were thrilled to prove there is in fact big business in female-led film and we succeeded in highlighting the importance of the cinema experience.



In one of our most exciting events we presented a double bill of what was perhaps two of the most misunderstood movies of the decade - Magic Mike (2012) and its sequel Magic Mike XXL (2015).

Do these pass the test? Not exactly with flying colours, but this is what we wanted to encourage - debate around all groups of people who are misrepresented on screen.

On top of this, let's be real - we also wanted to make space for female pleasure. XXL concentrates on appreciating the most neglected women in society and was perhaps one of the most ridiculously feminist films of the year - so...we wanted to praise it lovingly for its efforts.

But also...underneath... lies commentaries on the hearts and minds of men... and on the ever-evolving definition of masculinity.

In between the night's features, our panel discussion explored **'How Hollywood Shapes Masculinity'** joined by journalists and authors from The Observer and The New Statesman.

It was also an opportunity to welcome new audience members into a space

that discusses feminism without being intimidated by it. I always remember a friend saying - I wanted to come to your screening but I didn't think I was smart enough. That broke my heart. So putting something on like MM, and in a fun accessible way - she felt she could come along and she had a great time!



Since then we've screened Wonderland with a live piano score, Drop Dead Gorgeous with LOCO film festival, the shorts of Mati Diop at the London short film festival, we even launched a zine dedicated to women writers and food on film.

But another proud moment of mine was Can I Touch It which screened short films, all by black female film directors which had something to say about the relationship with their hair.

This was personal to me and was a way of helping people understand the complexities of having an afro.

This is all things we have done with the creative use of the bechdel test message. But we're not the only ones. There have been plenty more tests born since then, they include...

F-Rated



The F-Rating is awarded to films

1. directed by a woman and/or
2. written by a woman

If the film also features significant women on screen in their own right it is TRIPLE F-Rated

The rating is designed to support and promote women and redress the imbalance in the film industry

There are over [80 film festivals and cinemas](#) who use the F-Rating to highlight films directed and/or written by women

The Mako Mori Test

1: A least one female-identifying character.

2: Their **own narrative arc...**

3: That arc must not be about supporting a male's narrative.



Inspired by the narrative arc of Mako Mori in Pacific Rim...

The Ava Test

Black people have fully realized lives rather than serve as **scenery** in white stories.



Posited by New York Times film critic Manohla Dargis at the Sundance Film Festival

Dargis said her “DuVernay test” would merely require “African Americans and other minorities [to] have fully realised lives rather than serve as scenery in white stories”.

The Riz Test



One Muslim character who **ISN'T...**

- 1: Talking about, the victim of, or the perpetrator of terrorism.
- 2: Presented as irrationally angry.
- 3: Presented as superstitious, culturally backwards or anti-modern.
- 4: Presented as a threat to a Western way of life.
- 5: If the character is male, is he presented as misogynistic, or if female, is she presented as oppressed by a man.



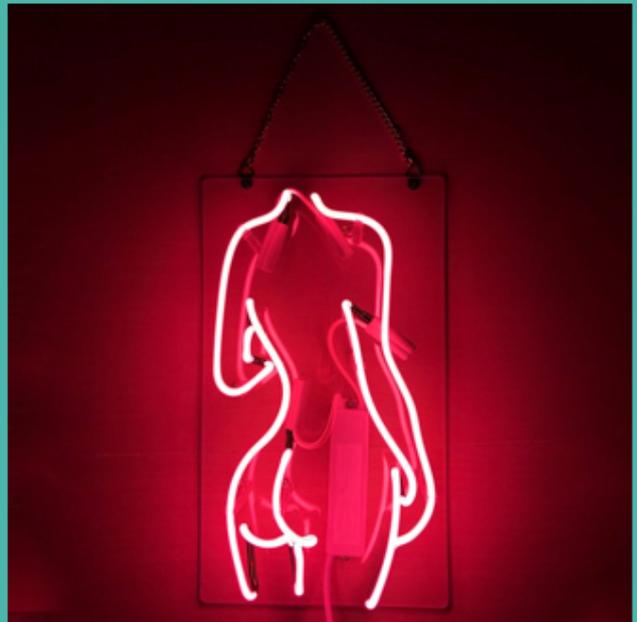
Was launched by a team of two film buffs from academic and tech backgrounds. Just like most Muslims we're tired of seeing the same old stereotypes and Islamophobic tropes being played out in Films and TV Shows.

Taking cues from the [Bechdel Test](#) and inspiration from [Riz Ahmed's 2017 speech on diversity](#), we decided to create a set of criteria to measure how Muslims are portrayed on Film and TV.

The Sexy Lamp Test

“If you can take out a female character and replace her with a sexy lamp...YOU'RE A FU*KING HACK.”

Kelly Sue DeConnick



The test was established by [Kelly Sue DeConnick](#) who mentioned it during an [Emerald City Comic Con](#) panel titled "From Victim to Hero".^[2]

In its original wording:

So, there's [the Bechdel test](#). I've got another test that works just as well.

The Sexy Lamp test. If you can take out a female character and replace her with a sexy lamp, YOU'RE A FUCKING HACK.^{[2][3]}

The Clit Test



If a film acknowledges that the **clit** exists...it passes the test.

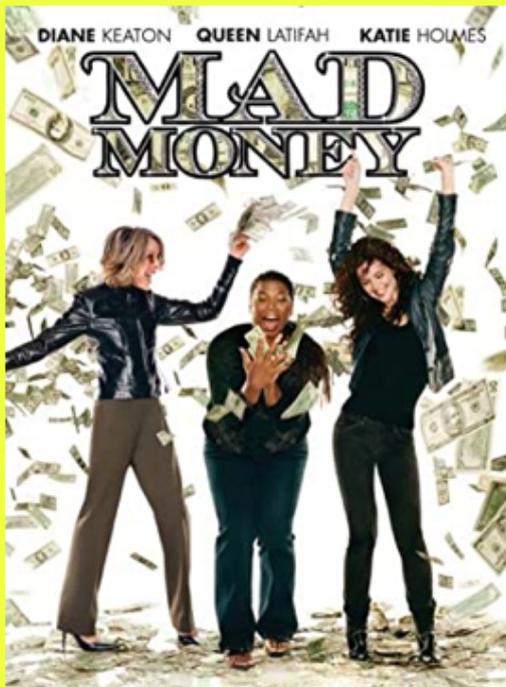
This could be showing, mentioning or even heavily implying clit touching, cunnilingus or masturbating.



The clit test celebrates sex scenes that reflect that the clitoris is a central part of sexual pleasure for most women -

Too many girls - and the women they grow into - are left disempowered, confused and even ashamed of their own sexuality. Lack of sexual enjoyment is linked to a range of problems including low self-esteem, and a sexual landscape that centres around only men's pleasure can only feed into to a culture of sexual violence.

All fun...but thought provoking.



Female-led films make mor£ mon£y...

Between 2014-2017, all films
with a lifetime box office
of more than \$1 billion
passed the Bechdel test
(apart from one...)

The top-grossing U.S. films released
between January 2014 to
December 2017 found that female-led
films outperformed male-led films at
all budget levels.

My most satisfying moments in my bechdel career have been when coming across a film director who doesn't know what the Bechdel Test is and watching the penny drop once I explain.

I've had directors email to say they didn't know about it and now were going to make sure all their films pass from now.

The other satisfying thing over the years has been debunking the idea that women's films don't make money and in a capitalist world, means they're simply not important.

Over the years we've proven this wrong...with many sold out shows. This was something we were always keen to advertise - that we knew how to bring an audience. It's all good comms.

What's also good comms is publicising hard facts and debunking myths. The truth is female-led films make more money...

Black-oriented films can be highly profitable when marketed to all audiences, study finds

by University of Pennsylvania



Credit: University of Pennsylvania

DECEMBER 7, 2018

Researcher uses hacked studio data to prove racially diverse casts are more profitable

by Molly Callahan And Lisa Petrakis, Northeastern University



...as do films with a 'diverse' cast

Diverse casting leads to box office success, study shows

A study released by the Creative Artists Agency showed that, from 2014 to 2016, films with more diverse casts outperformed others at the box office



And so are diverse films...



These are small wins, and like I tried to manage your expectations earlier - are hardly going to change the world, but...if we get people thinking about who they are putting on screen... what effect those images are having on our culture...and how the film industry can take responsibility for how we treat one another,...I'm sure we will - as I've seen in the last 10 years or so - see those ships start to slowly turn.