

# Gillian Anderson

## Gender inequality in Hollywood? 'It is still alive and well.'

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The truth may be out there but Gillian Anderson isn't interested. Best known for her role as skeptical (and smoldering) FBI Special Agent Dana Scully in *The X-Files*, a worldwide hit through most of the 1990s and now confirmed for a six-part comeback, people still want to share their supernatural experiences with her today.

"It's the story of my life!" she says. "Just the other day someone who had read a science fiction book I have co-written wanted to talk to me about how what happened in the book had actually happened to him. So yes, people want to bend my ear every once in a while."

Ever had any close encounters of your own? "I have been asked that thousands of times," she sighs.

"But any time I ever answer that question it ends up being the headline and then it gets carried in a tabloid and there's really no point in engaging in a conversation about it. That's not going to be your headline I'm afraid."

Anderson, 46, was born in Chicago but moved with her family to England when she was 2. They stayed until she was 11 before returning to Grand Rapids, Mich., but she has always considered the U.K. home and currently lives in London. "It feels more familiar than the States," she says. "I'm still moved by the city. It's the smell of hedgerows, the history and architecture, and the sound of a British accent."

Anderson herself speaks in cut-glass English but is bidialectal, able to switch between two accents, particularly useful for someone whose career bridges both sides of the Atlantic. Why did she want to become an actress? "It's the only thing I can do, that's why I do it," she replies, matter-of-factly.

The *X-Files* changed TV, setting a trend for well-written, well-acted shows that led to the landscape we have today. Television also offers a fertile ground for strong female characters, of which Scully was a pioneer. "I have been extremely lucky," Anderson says.



PHOTO BY STEPHEN BUSKEN

"In television, the trend has been around for a good decade. There is a lack of three-dimensional female characters in film and that continues to be difficult to crack. But in TV there seems to be a plethora of opportunities."

Perhaps, but most seem to be snapped up by Anderson herself. She plays the canny cannibal's psychotherapist Bedelia Du Maurier in "Hannibal" and chases another serial killer around Belfast as DSI Stella Gibson in *The Fall*, opposite Jamie 'please don't typecast me as Christian Grey' Dornan.

She also performs in the West End, most recently as Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and she hopes to take the production to Broadway soon. But when will there be the time? Rumors about a reboot of *The X-Files* were confirmed just after our interview, when Fox announced that filming with Anderson, David Duchovny, who played perennially spooked spook Agent Mulder, and the show's creator Chris Carter will begin in the summer.

But as we speak, Anderson is remaining tight-lipped... "Umm we're still talking about

it," she claims. "Everyone is hoping it will become a reality. At this juncture it's still a work in progress. I don't think anything has been signed. Everybody who's interested is 100 percent interested. It's a very different situation once you jump into a negotiation with a network, especially one like Fox. Negotiations take months so at that point it is out of our hands."

At the Oscars, Patricia Arquette used her acceptance speech to demand wage equality in the industry. During *The X-Files*' original nine-year run, Anderson was paid significantly less than Duchovny and only received equal pay for the second spin-off film "I Want to Believe." Although she does not refer to the new *X-Files* explicitly, you don't need to be a conspiracy theorist to imagine she is referring to current contract negotiations when talking about Arquette's speech.

"Yes, it is still a problem. In a very, very big way, including something recent and unconscionable, which I really can't talk about but yes, it is still alive and well. There was a period of time in the 1990s when it was appropriate to talk about it, and there

## The new X-Files in the making?

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was a period of time in the 2000s when people still wanted to talk about it. Most of my reaction was, 'Yes, that happened but that was then, this is now.'" But the fact is it's not just then – it is also happening now."

Anderson's latest film sees her step back toward sci-fi in *Robot Overlords*, a British feature about a group of kids who turn out to be our only salvation from global robot domination. "As with most good science fiction tales, there's generally a sense of impending doom," says Anderson, who plays the mother of the lead character.

"I don't get the chance very often to play a soft character," she continues. "I'm often cast as quite hard, intelligent bosses, whether it's MI5 or MI7 or the Met. Or the FBI."

Anderson has just finished work on Andrew Davies' abridged adaptation of Tolstoy's epic "War and Peace," but her most recent TV appearance was as a "Star in a Reasonably Priced Car on Top Gear," a week before Jeremy Clarkson got suspended for punching a producer. Anderson did not escape the experience unharmed.

"I have not recovered from spending three hours in that car," she grimaces, adding that she had to treat her shoulder with heat pads, ice and constant painkillers after she kept having to turn awkwardly to change gears. "It's frozen, which means my arm will not bend a certain way so I am constantly reminded about my three hours on the tarmac at Top Gear. But it was totally worth it. It was so much fun."

As a fan of the show, would you be sad if Clarkson was no longer involved in the program? "He can't not be part of the show. He makes the show. It's an unfortunate situation but the show is as popular because he is as inappropriate on camera as he is off camera."

Anderson's impressive lap time was the fastest any celebrity has recorded in "mildly moist" conditions. So besides acting, something else she is good at is driving.

"Yeah," she laughs. "I could be an Uber driver."

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