

Sexism and the Gender Wage Gap in the Film Industry

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Abstract

The film industry is an occupation for a large number of people, though some employees do not reap the same benefits as others. Women in the film industry suffer a difference in pay, far less responsibility, bad representation on, and behind the screen. There is a major gap in the pay between actors and actresses on screen and behind the camera with females not being able to attain high power positions. Even when they have high power positions behind the camera, they are not given the opportunity to make big films or receive awards for their work. Having females in high power positions would rectify problems on and off screen. Females in executive roles could give bigger budgets and opportunities to females in the industry, and lower the wage gap between actors and actresses in movies.

Keywords: Sexism, Gender Wage Gap, Film Industry, Female Filmmakers, Actresses, Gender Equality,

Introduction

Females in film have been an inspiration for young girls and women since they first came on screen, but these women have faced inequality and underrepresentation from the beginning. The Confrontation on the Bridge, shows the hard battle the African Americans fought to earn their right to vote, and how they kept fighting even when they did not know the outcome. Women in the film industry connect because they need to fight for their rights to be equal to men in the same positions. Franklin D. Roosevelt states in his inaugural address, for the crisis to be solved everyone must be equal, and "larger purposes will bind upon us all as a sacred obligation with a unity of duty hitherto evoked only in time of armed strife" (24). Women in this industry have to come together and be united if they want to solve their problem. There is a \$2.4 million difference between actors and actresses (Park 3). In 73 years, eight women have won for Best Original Screenplay, this makes sense once learning 77% of Oscar voters are male (McKinney 12).

Women only make up 16% of producers, directors, and writers in Hollywood, this has remained the same since 1998 (McKinney 14). McKinney also found, "for every woman behind the camera, there are roughly five men" (15). These astonishing statistics lead to the question of, what are the primary factors causing the gender wage gap in the film industry, and how can increasing females in high power positions help to address them? Increasing females in high power positions positively impacts the representation of women on screen and behind the camera, makes major systemic changes, and gives females more opportunities in the future.

How Patriarchy Affects the Film Industry

The patriarchy has negatively impacted women for a long time, and continues to impact women in the film industry. Bobbie Lucas, UCLA producer, believes inequality comes from the patriarchal structures in our world, "forcing women to adapt to a male dominated status quo", and "allowing men to reject female domination as

'other'" (142). Allowing women's career successes to "situate them first as 'women' instead of as 'filmmakers', maintaining the gendered status quo and preserving the male hierarchies"(Lucas 145). Behind the camera women are forced to live within the patriarchy, as writer and director positions are seen as a "man's job". Professor of media at the University of Leeds, David Hesmondhalgh believes in all existing societies some occupations are "strongly associated with women and some with men" (Hesmondhalgh 23). He believes jobs in the film industry are seen as male jobs from the long standing patriarchy in the industry (Hesmondhalgh 32). Along with working in film, women on screen have been subjected to patriarchal values in how they are portrayed. Kim Akass, Professor of radio, television and film at Rowan University, believes female representations show a "deep-rooted misogyny", and "tie women to their reproductive potential", impacting their "positioning in society, their employment prospects and a lifetime's wage prospects"(73). The way women are seen on screen shows how men in the film industry see women, and mostly male writers for movies can be seen in the unrealistic, 'on screen' women's lives (Akass 75). These experts agree, patriarchal values being passed down from generations plague women in this industry, with their representation on screen and how they are treated in behind the camera positions.

Sexism within the Genres of Movies

Specific genres of movies are catered towards men and women, these stereotypes cause some disparities between genders in the film industry. Professor of film, Nick Redfern, found "family films, romance, and romantic comedies"are associated with females (47). While movies catered towards male audiences "tend to be action-based and technology driven" (Redfern 47). Along with this, Redfern found genres associated with male audiences "have broader appeal than genres we associate with female audiences" (50). More people watch movies made for men than made for women, because movies made for men are made by men (Redfern 52). Peter Wuhr, professor of psychology at Dortmund University, agrees with Redfern and adds to the claim. Wuhr states, assuming observers enjoy "films that allow them to identify with the major protagonist" and "prefer to identify with

same-sex protagonists"(248). Wuhr continued, claiming, the "preponderance of male protagonists in films may explain why men prefer more genres than women in our study"(248). Women like "typical 'female' genres to a lesser degree than presumed" and men like "typical 'male' genres to a lesser degree than presumed" (Wuhr 249). He believes discomfort could be avoided if "people were aware that gender differences in movie preferences, if present at all, are smaller than presumed"(Wuhr 250). Experts agree, if studios began to ignore genre gender stereotypes they would not only appeal to a larger audience, but they would have better portrayals and more opportunities for women in the film industry.

Lack of Females in Executive and Filmmaker Positions.

All of the previous issues lead back to the main cause of sexism and the wage gap in the film industry, the lack of females in executive and filmmaker positions. Dr. Martha Laurenz, professor of film at San Diego State University, believes in films with at least one woman director or writer, females comprised 42% of major characters, films with exclusively male directors or writers, females accounted for 35% of major characters (1). Films with female directors or writers were more likely than films with no women in these roles to "feature higher percentages of females as protagonists and as speaking characters" (Lauzen 2). Less females in these positions gives actresses less roles. Bobbie Lucas adds to Lauzen's claim, stating, women in the industry have "neither supply or demand power to choose what films are made"(145). With men being in control from the start of big things in the film industry, women have never been able to be in control of the movies they make, or if they get to make movies at all. Lucas continues by stating, the lack of movies directed by women does not "stem from a shortage of female directors". Instead she believes the problem lies in the "'catch-22' cycle of film financing" for women (148). Women in the film industry are not granted opportunities because they lack the experience men in this industry have, but they can never gain experience because they are not granted the same opportunities as men (Lucas 148). She states, part of the problem rests on the fact, "most of the studio executives that have the power to green light films are men".

Therefore, they “agree to produce films they believe will turn profits”, and these films are about and made by men (Lucas 147). These experts agree, the lack of females in high power and behind the camera positions majorly hinder the women in this industry from gaining opportunities and advancement in the film industry.

Increasing Females in Behind the Camera and Executive Positions.

The amount of women in the film industry is a terrifyingly small number, and to solve sexism and the wage gap that number needs to increase significantly. Increasing women in executive and behind the camera positions would be the feminine boost this industry so desperately needs. This increase will happen with making systemic changes and evidence based policies. Making systemic changes involves changing the hiring process, the STEM field implemented this effectively. They made their hiring processes by making applications anonymous, the hiring committee could only see the person's credentials and experience not their race or gender. This seemed to have many positive implications where there was a more equal amount of men and women hired. Evidence based policies can change the environment these newly hired women work in. Executives can enforce more equality in day to day scenarios and make active policies, attempting to give women the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Implementing policies introducing younger women interested in the film industry to women already in the field having experience is very beneficial in STEM fields. Creating bonds and having connections to other women in the same field give them more support and opportunities as they work with women who have been in the industry for a long time. Increasing females in high power and behind the camera positions is the best way to solve sexism and the gender wage gap in the film industry, as it gives females better on screen representation, makes major systemic changes in the industry, and gives more opportunities for females in the film industry in the future.

Better On Screen Representation.

Having more female writers, directors, and producers gives women more roles and positive portrayals. Rocco found, in female

directed films, “women were 67% of top-billed characters’ ’ compared to “20% in male-directed films” (42). Additionally, “high-grossing movies directed by women” had more women “behind the scenes” and included “more female characters than high-grossing movies directed by men” (Rocco 45). Rocco finishes, stating, “men, in popular film, almost exclusively tell male stories, while women choose to tell female stories”(Rocco 47). Films with more women behind the scenes actively show more roles for women, decreasing the wage gap, and more accurate representations, working against the evident sexism. Heldman agrees and adds, “studies have repeatedly shown that including more women behind the scenes increases the visibility and quality of female characters on screen” (124). Heldman's research further proves the point of how increasing females behind the camera gives better representation. More roles and opportunities open up for actresses with women directing and writing, and audiences get a real female story instead of one conjured up by a man.

Major Systemic Changes in the Film Industry

More women behind the camera will lead to many positive things on screen, but they will change things in the industry's work environment. In order to gain more women in this industry more women need to be hired, and to do that the hiring process needs to be changed. Dasgupta found , in STEM industries, search committees should “have to mask each applicant's identity (gender, race)” (76). Their research shows, “de-identifying applicants has been hugely successful and increased gender diversity” (Dasgupta 77). They continue, saying this can be used in other areas like “submitted manuscripts and grant proposals” (Dasgupta 80). Having applicants and submissions anonymous will bring many positive implications into the film industry. More equal numbers of women and men will be hired, and things like budgets will be less of an unfair difference between female and male directors. Along with this, Dasgupta found, policies fostering an “inclusive environment” can encourage “research or teaching collaborations between junior and senior faculty”, increase “professional and personal interactions”, and reduce “professional isolation experienced by new faculty”(82). Policies set in place to make the

work environment equal for men and women will shape the new system in the film industry. Theodore Roosevelt talks about making systemic changes in his inaugural address, he claims major systemic changes are needed to solve the problem (23). This ties in with systemic changes in the film industry, as it solves these problems.

More Opportunities for Females in the Future.

Increasing females behind the camera can give females in the future more opportunities. Dasgupta found, STEM departments should support “programs that help foster a sense of belonging among women in STEM” which invests in “students’ success”(84). Allowing students interested in acting or directing to make bonds and find ties with women already in the industry can give them more opportunities when they enter the field. Wang found, “female role models are important for increasing positive female attitudes toward STEM careers” (172). Additionally, this can be accomplished through “career fairs and inviting successful female STEM scientists and professionals to visit schools on career days” (Wang 173). Wang finishes, stating that STEM departments in universities should “provide and encourage networking opportunities for women to establish a peer support system”(174). This should be implicated in the film industry as role models for younger women coming into the film industry can be positive and gain them more opportunities.

Conclusion

Though this solution does many positive things for women in the film industry,

there are some major fall backs to the implementation. With blind hiring and deciding budgets women may still be overlooked, not for their gender in this case, but their lack of previous experience. Women are not granted big enough budgets or given movies with stars like men are, they do not have the tools or resources to make a blockbuster. This leaves women in a ‘catch 22’ where they do not get big budgets for movies because they have not made large profits , but they cannot make large profits without the budget to do so. Along with this, there may be some resistance from men in the film industry changing the patriarchal ways they have always seen. This resistance, similar to the resistance of the white people during the Confrontation on the Bridge, as they did not want things to change from how they had always been. The white people did not want the African Americans to gain their right to vote and for things to change. These limitations may seem major, but when thinking about the things women in the film industry can do, they are easy to look past. Having more women in writer and director positions not only changes the representation of women, but gives actresses more roles and opportunities to lessen the wage gap. Heldman found, films with exclusively “male directors and/or writers” portrayed “protagonist characters as females 18% of the time”, whereas movies with “at least one woman director and/or writer” featured “57% female protagonists”(127). This is triple the amount of women that can be cast in a movie. The film industry needs to change its system to have more inclusivity and representation for women now, and from women in the future.

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