Faceless Women: The Blurred Image of Women in Film on and Off-Screen

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Abstract : Till this day, women have been underrepresented and stereotyped both in TV and Cinema Screens all around the World. While women have been gaining a different status and finding their own voice in the work place and in society, what we see on-screen is still something different, something gender biased, something that does not show the multifaceted identities a woman might have. But why is this so? Why are we stuck on this shallow vision of women on-screen? According to several cinema industry studies, most film screenwriters in Hollywood are men. Women actually represent a very low percentage of screenwriters. So why is this relevant? Could the underrepresentation of women screenwriters in Hollywood be affecting the way women are written, and as a result, are depicted in film? Films are about stories, about people, and if these stories are continuously told through a man's gaze, is that helping in the creation of a gender imbalance towards women? On the other hand, one of the reasons given for the low percentage of women screenwriters is: women are said to be better at writing specific genres, like dramas and comedies, and not as good writing thrillers and action films, so, as women seem to be limited in the genres they can write, they are undervalued and underrepresented as screenwriters. It seems the gender bias and stereotype isn't saved exclusively for women on-screen, but also off-screen and behind the screen. So film appears to be a men's world, on and off-screen, and since men seem to write the majority of scripts, it might be no wonder that women have been written in a specific way and depicted in a specific way on-screen. Also, since films are a mass communication medium, maybe this over-sexualization and stereotyping on-screen is indoctrinating our society into believing this bias is alive and well, and thus targeting women off-screen as well (ergo, screenwriters). What about at the very begging of film? In the Silent Movies and Early Talkies era, women dominated the screenwriting industry. They wrote every genre, and the majority of scripts were written by women, not men. So what about then? How were women depicted in films then? Did women screenwriters, in an era that was still very harsh on women, use their stories and their power to break stereotypes and show women in a different light, or did they carry on with the stereotype, did they continue it and standardize it? This papers aims to understand how important it is to have more working women screenwriters in order to break stereotypes regarding the image of women on and off-screen. How much can a screenwriter (male or female) influence our gaze on women (on and off-screen)?

Keywords : cinema, gender bias, stereotype, women on-screen, women screenwriters