

## **Anonymous pitching for screenplays**

*I wrote this letter in June 2013, and emailed it to the owner of an online screenplay pitch site I had been using. The reply was sympathetic, but nothing changed. I have also shown it to people at Women in Film and Television Vancouver, with the same reaction. The Writer's Guild of Canada did not respond. I am currently taking a break from writing and pitching screenplays while I think about a lot of things, and may use a man's name when I go back.*

I have been subscribing to one form or other of the [name of site] newsletter since November 2011 and have had one or more scripts listed on your site since July 2012. I am absolutely thrilled that you offer this service — it makes it so much easier for those of us who are not in LA, and perhaps also for those who are, to reach decision makers and perhaps get our work read and maybe even filmed.

However, I have found the list of options/sales etc. at the beginning of each newsletter increasingly discouraging. Not because I'm jealous of the successful writers, but because so many of the names are male. I recently took all the newsletters I'd saved (64 total from November 4, 2011 to June 6, 2013, including all of the ones from June 1, 2012 onwards) and counted up the number of male and female writers and decision makers. If you look only at options/sales (and one executive producer credit), only 19% of the writers are female. Looking at hires, 20% are female. Combine the two, and 19% are female. It's even worse for those getting agents. Only 11% of those writers are female.

It makes no difference if the decision maker is male or female. 22% of the DMs hiring or optioning are female, and 43% of the agents are female, but there are no sex differences in who they sign up. (I can send you the spreadsheet with the data/calculations if you like.)

Now, it's possible that there are fewer women using [name of site], and it's possible that women are paying for fewer services. (I for one cannot afford to list anything in the magazine you send out to DMs.) And we may not be bumping our scripts up to the top as frequently or pursuing leads as frequently. But I very much doubt that there are fewer women writers out there. And it's hard for me to believe that it's somehow all my fault that I'm not getting more hits. I can't help but wonder how much it's because I have a woman's name.

[In one article [on your site, the author] suggested that if we get 150 hits on a synopsis but no scripts read, that we might want to fix the synopsis. In the year and four listings I've had, I've had a total of 179 logline views, 6 synopsis views, three resume views, and one script downloaded. How does that compare to the [name of site] average? It might be nice to know, just to know if we're not being assertive enough. I'd ask if there are sex differences in how many hits we get, but I know you don't have sex (or race/ethnicity) in your database and can't just run the numbers to see. And I know how much of a headache it is to go through lists of names trying to figure out who's a he and who's a she, assuming that they're not using pseudonyms. Maybe you could add those fields in and ask us to add the data so you could check?]

### **Industry statistics**

When you look at film credits in recent years, the percent of writers who are female typically range from 8% to 14% of the total number of credits (but up to 17% in Oscar nominated films). For television, it's a bit higher, ranging from 20% to 28%, and one study found much higher numbers for documentary films at Sundance (32.8% female). For working writers in the WGAW overall, percentages ranged from 18.7% to 23.2% female for the years 1982–1997. In other words, InkTip numbers are basically typical for the industry. (Sources of data listed at the bottom.)

I don't think that people consciously believe that women are less capable of screenwriting, or less profitable (though some might). Actually, the data I've seen suggests the opposite: that women have a slight edge in getting Oscars, and that when you control for budget, female writers do better at the box office. One study found that female writers on Broadway were more successful than their male peers, but their productions didn't run any longer, and they only made up 12.6% of the writers. I don't believe that anyone is trying to discriminate against women on purpose. But the way it works itself out, women generally tend to have to be better than men to hold their own. If we were hired at parity, we would probably be no more profitable or awardable than men are.

I do wonder if there isn't some sort of unconscious quota operating, given the stability of the numbers listed above. That when people hire above a certain percentage of women, they start to get uncomfortable and swing back to hiring more men to balance things at the 20% mark. Without even noticing it.

I do know that it is advantageous for women to use male names, or even just initials. Dorothy Fontana, for example, found it easier to get her foot in the door when she switched to calling herself D.C. Fontana. And there is the example of James Chartrand, a writer who gets her work online, who found quite by accident that when she switched to a male name she got paid and treated much better for the same work. We could perhaps call this the Remington Steele effect. It hasn't gone away yet. Once people are convinced of a person's competence, gender doesn't seem to matter so much any more, but getting to that point without a man's name can be difficult.

I know we are allowed to use initials instead of full first names (since I see writers doing that) but I'm not sure how much of a difference that would make to me personally, with my feminist new age surname. I was under the impression that we were required to use our real names, but don't know where I read that. Is that true? If not, may we use names chosen to be neutral? May we use obviously male names to get our feet in the door? But even if we could, though, that would not help things overall, since it would merely reinforce existing biases, and possibly bump other women (and people with ethnic names) lower in the queue. And I might get my foot in the door, but I'd still have a hard time finding movies I wanted to see, since there would still be the lack of diversity.

Personally, what I would really prefer is to be allowed to pitch completely anonymously. [name of site] is already capable of allowing that, since you sometimes do for DMs. What if all listings were listed only by number, and the DM had no way of knowing who we were until after they got as far as downloading a script? Anonymous auditions ("blind" auditions) have helped considerably in getting more women and visible minorities into symphony orchestras, where they are used. There was always lots of female talent, but for some reason people thought they weren't as good. So it would probably also work well for writers.

It's not [name of site]'s fault that the industry is biased against women and cultural minorities. However, [name of site] (and other similar services if they exist) are in a wonderful position to help mitigate against discrimination. I know that if I have a choice, I am going to choose a service that allows me the opportunity to pitch anonymously, so that I have a better chance of being evaluated on my work, not my name.

I personally will not be posting anything on [name of site] for the next while, because I need to save my money for something else right now (self-publishing a book) and I have a lot of thinking to do about what kind of writing I want to do next. (The pitch summit I attended last September in LA gave me a lot to think about.) But when I do come back, I'm hoping that I find a more level playing field when I get there.

Would you please consider switching to anonymous pitching? If not, would you please encourage women to use male names? Or have everyone only use initials?

Thank you,

Anemone Cerridwen

P.S. I am copying WGC and WIFTV in the hopes that they can help with this issue. They may even be doing something about this already.

### **Sources:**

#### *FILM AND TELEVISION WRITERS COMBINED*

Denise D. Bielby and William T. Bielby, 2001. Audience Segmentation and age stratification among television writers. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 45(3): 391-412.

- Film and television writers combined (WGAW members), 1982-1997 (table 1): % of working writers who were female ranged from 18.7% to 23.2%

#### *FILM*

Martha M. Lauzen, Ph.D, 2010. The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 250 Films of 2009. downloaded from [womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2010\\_Celluloid\\_Ceiling.pdf](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2010_Celluloid_Ceiling.pdf)

- top 250 films of 2009, women were 8% of writers; compare with 12% in 2008, 10% in 2007 and 13% in 1998

Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, Amy Granados, and Sarah Erickson, ND. Asymmetrical Academy Awards®? A look at gender imbalance in best picture nominations from 1977 to 2006. Downloaded from <http://annenbergl.usc.edu/Faculty/Communication%20and%20Journalism/SmithS.aspx>

- 150 films, 13% of writers were female

Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, and [Stephanie Gall]. Asymmetrical Academy Awards® 2: another look at gender in best picture nominated films from 1977 to 2010. Downloaded from <http://annenbergl.usc.edu/Faculty/Communication%20and%20Journalism/SmithS.aspx>

- 30 films, percentage of writers that were female: 1977–1986: 17%; 1987–1996: 8.8%; 1997–2006: 15.2%; 2007–2010: 12.3%

Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, Elizabeth Scofield and Katherine Pieper, 2013. Gender inequality in 500 popular films: examining on-screen portrayals and behind-the-scenes employment patterns in motion pictures released between 2007–2012. Downloaded from <http://annenbergl.usc.edu/Faculty/Communication%20and%20Journalism/SmithS.aspx>

- top 100 films each from 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012. Percentage of female writers were 11.2%, 13.6%, 13.5%, 11.1% and 12.2% respectively

Stacy L. Smith and Marc Choueiti. Gender disparity on screen and behind the camera in family films: the executive report. Downloaded from <http://annenbergl.usc.edu/Faculty/Communication%20and%20Journalism/SmithS.aspx>

- 122 top grossing family rated films (G, PG, PG-13) from 2006–2009; writers were 13% female

Stacy L. Smith, Ph.D., Katherine Pieper, Ph.D. & Marc Choueiti, 2013. Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers. Downloaded from <http://annenbergl.usc.edu/Faculty/Communication%20and%20Journalism/SmithS.aspx>

- Sundance Film Festival, 2002–2012: 20.6% of writers in narrative films were female, while 32.8% of writers in documentaries were female (overall total 23.3%)

Anemone Cerridwen and Dean Keith Simonton, 2009. Sex Doesn't Sell—Nor Impress! Content, Box Office, Critics, and Awards in Mainstream Cinema. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 3(4):200–210

- 11.77% of writers were female in 914 films that went to wide release 2001–2005.

[filmcontentdatabase.com](http://filmcontentdatabase.com) (Cerridwen and Simonton database, expanded)

- female writers have a slight but statistically significant advantage at the Oscars (calculations not posted but this is what I found)
- male writers are slightly positively correlated with box office, but also with budget, and when budget is accounted for, the correlation becomes slightly negative.

### TELEVISION

Martha M. Lauzen, David M. Dozier and Manda V. Hicks, 2001. Prime-time players and powerful prose: the role of women in the 1997–1998 television season. *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(1): 39–59.

- 20.3% of writers were female in top 100 shows of 1997–1998 prime time season

Martha M. Lauzen and David M. Dozier, 1999. Making a difference in prime time: women on screen and behind the scenes in the 1995–96 television season. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 43(1): 1–19.

- 22% of writers were female in top 100 prime time shows of 1995–1996 season

Martha M. Lauzen and David M. Dozier, 2004. Evening the Score in Prime Time: The Relationship Between Behind-the-Scenes Women and On-Screen Portrayals in the 2002–2003 Season. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 48(3):484–500.

- 27% of writers female in prime time television, 2002–2003 season

Cited in Martha M. Lauzen, David M. Dozier, and Nora Horan, 2008. Constructing Gender Stereotypes Through Social Roles in Prime-Time Television. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52(2): 200–214.

- Steenland (1990) [Steenland, S. (1990). What's wrong with this picture? The status of women on screen and behind the camera in entertainment tv. Report to the National Commission on Working Women of Wider Opportunities for Women, Washington, DC.] found that 25% of writers in 1990 prime time television were female

- Lauzen (2006a) [Lauzen, M. M. (2006a). Boxed in: Women on screen and behind the scenes in the 2005–06 prime-time season. Retrieved July 26, 2006, from [moviesbywomen.com](http://moviesbywomen.com)] found that 28% of writers were female in prime time

### *THEATRE*

Emily Glassberg Sands, 2009. Opening the Curtain on Playwright Gender: An Integrated Economic Analysis of Discrimination in American Theater. Downloaded from [graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/theater/Openingthecurtain.pdf](http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/theater/Openingthecurtain.pdf)

2008/2009 season in NYC, 12.6% written by women; in 1908/1909 season was 12.8%; in non-profit it was 17.8%

“Female-written plays are perceived by artistic directors and literary managers to be of lower overall quality, to have poorer economic prospects, and to face worker discrimination.” page 91: comparing identical plays but submitted with male vs female names

- She also looked at 10 years worth of Broadway plays, with 11% of writers female; works with female writers have noticeably higher average weekly revenues (18%) and sell more tickets (in other words, female writers need to be better than their male counterparts)

### *BLIND AUDITIONS*

Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, 1997. Orchestrating impartiality: the impact of “blind” auditions on female musicians. Downloaded from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w5903>

- introduction of blind auditions in symphony orchestras significantly increased probability that women would be hired.

### *JAMES CHARTRAND:*

<http://www.copyblogger.com/james-chartrand-underpants/> *Why James Chartrand wears women's underpants*

<http://blog.intuit.com/employees/james-chartrand-of-men-with-pens-on-being-a-woman-in-the-copywriting-world/> *James Chartrand of Men With Pens on Being a Woman in the Copywriting World*