

ARE MEN BETTER FILMMAKERS THAN WOMEN? EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DIRECTOR AND SCREENWRITER GENDER ON FILM CREATIVITY

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ABSTRACT

The study examines how the gender of leading production personnel affects the creativity of blockbuster films. To do so, we draw on genre innovation theory and define the number of genre categories in a film as a measure of its creativity. We then use regression analysis to examine whether filmmaker gender is related to the film's creativity. For the analysis, we use a purposive sample of 1000 motion pictures with the highest box office receipts in film history. Our results show that director gender is not related to film creativity. On the other hand, however, we find a statistically significant and negative relationship between creativity and female screenwriters. Our results thus partially confirm the empirical observation from many other fields that women are less creative at the highest levels of performance. The implications of this finding for research and management practice are discussed in detail.

Keywords: *Film creativity, genre innovation, gender, film industry, film production personnel*

1. INTRODUCTION

The majority of blockbuster films in Hollywood are produced under the creative direction of men (Donoghue, 2020). However, the film industry is not unique in this regard. In almost all creative industries, the top creative professionals are male (Wolfe, 2019; Chattoo, 2018; Penner, 2015; Kaufman, 2006). Researchers have long puzzled over this observation, as an overwhelming number of empirical studies show that men and women do not differ in their creative dispositions (Stoltzfus et al., 2011; Kaufman et al., 2010; Matud et al., 2007; Hassler et al., 1990; Ambile, 1983). In the search for an explanation, two common lines of reasoning have emerged. The first points to a structural disadvantage of women in the creative industries and attributes this to male-dominated power structures (Karniouchina et al., 2023; Donoghue, 2020; Simon, 2019; Lutter, 2015; O'Brien, 2014). The second line of reasoning assumes that men have the same creative dispositions on average, but are more creative than women at the top levels (Abraha, 2016; Pinker and Spelke, 2005). However, the last line of argument lacks empirical evidence in the context of the film industry.

Against this background, we draw on genre innovation theory (Matthews and Glitre, 2021; Bothmann, 2018; Miller, 2017; Spohrer, 2009; Landrum, 2007) and, consistent with this line of research, interpret the number of genre categories in a film as a measure of its creativity. Using this metric, we examine whether, for the top 1000 blockbusters in film history as measured by worldwide box office receipts, the gender of leading project executives is related to film creativity. The results of our analysis show that the gender of the director is not related to film creativity. In contrast, the gender of the screenwriter is linked to film creativity. Specifically, films produced by female screenwriters have significantly fewer combinations of genre categories than films produced by male screenwriters.

Our results contribute to research in several ways. To begin with, we provide the first empirical evidence of a relationship between the gender of leading production personnel and film creativity. Although this relationship has been studied in other contexts, research for the film industry has been lacking. Therefore, our results help complete the picture by closing the blind spot in the film industry. Moreover, our empirical approach shows how genre innovation theory can be operationalized to address problems in research on creativity and gender. To date, genre innovation theory has eked out a niche existence because its applicability in empirical research has not been adequately demonstrated. Our work can therefore give new impetus to research by implementing a conceptual framework that has been little explored so far.