

and now a word

...from my perspective, a Seattle native, an former L.A. script supervisor

A Tumblr blog has been making the rounds titled, "Sh*t People Say to Women Directors." (<http://shitpeoplesaytowomendirectors.tumblr.com/>) It's a compilation of comments and opinions that women directors and women in other positions in the industry have been subjected to. It includes everything from overt sexist behavior and rude commentary to what could be politely termed well-intentioned ignorance, "You can't get into this van honey. I'm waiting for the director." (You guessed it, she was the director.) Sure it's benign, but no less erroneously assumptive and insulting and one of the less derogatory remarks.

Comments like these recounted in the blog undermine women in an industry where many positions have been defined as male or female. It's difficult not only to break through to the other side but also to redefine roles as gender blind. It's not enough that women are directors and editors and producers. We need positions to have *no gender* in the industry.

While some women are working hard to climb the ladder, a Google search of the words "great directors" yields a disappointingly homogenous list of white men (<http://shitpeoplesaytowomendirectors.tumblr.com/image/117625402945>). Hooray for Kathryn Bigelow, the lone outlier. However, so many great films made by women are being overlooked, and the list is also notably missing ethnic diversity.

There's also been a lot of discussion over the last few years, including from Sheryl Sandberg (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheryl_Sandberg) *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, examining leadership roles and about how women themselves fail to recognize the things they're doing to undermine their own authority. Valerie Alexander, Huffington Post contributor and author of *How Women Can Succeed in the Workplace (Despite Having "Female Brains")* lectures regularly on how women can make small changes to be more highly rewarded and recognized in male-dominated workplaces, while still taking advantage of the things that make us inherently female, instead of forcing ourselves to simply "behave like men." (<http://www.amazon.com/Valerie-Alexander/e/B00CMDBAIE>). Also making the social media rounds, writer Tara Mohr recently published on Goop, Gwyneth Paltrow's site, an article on *How Women Undermine Themselves with Words*, (<http://goop.com/how-women-undermine-themselves-with-words/>). It emphasizes how our word choices, qualifying our requests, apologizing when apologies aren't needed, and other female speech habits soften our communications – a downside in an industry like ours based on communication. These blog posts made me think too about the terminology in the entertainment industry. At a basic level we're doing ourselves a disservice by allowing certain antiquated terminologies to continue to be used. Just as the word "extra" has been phased out of our lexicon and replaced with "background actors," what other terms do we use to refer to ourselves and our positions in the industry that are compromising our authority and our worth? Even outdated terms like Script Girl, Sound Guy and The Vanities still haven't been completely eliminated from use..

We also need to look to at how we define positions. There are plenty of male hairstylists, makeup artists, costume designers and script supervisors, males in positions traditionally labeled as female; But how many female grips do we see? Electricians? Camera operators? In five years in network television and indie film in Los Angeles, I have worked with many female camera assistants, but never once a female DP or camera operator. Where are these women? In Seattle?

Thinking about defining value can start at a grassroots, indie level. Online you'll see ads/requests from people hiring crew for their low budget film and most of the time the positions that are paid and the positions that are expected to be volunteer are drawn down those same feminine/masculine lines. A makeup artist might get a small kit fee, but no pay, but the filmmakers will pay a DP. The technical skills of a makeup artist, whose work is visible on every single frame of the movie, on whose responsibility it falls to be nurturer, mentor and therapist for the actors on the set, where a rookie mistake can screw up the entire production, are not as valued as the technical skills of a DP. The script supervisor, also a position where a screw up can create unusable hours of footage, on whose shoulders every line of dialogue, every second of action continuity falls, is expected to provide skills for free on a low budget set.

The moment we decide that any key position on a crew is not worth paying for, we denigrate the position and the people working that job.

Women's creativity and authority should not be undermined by anyone, least of all by women themselves.

My experience in film/TV has been mainly from a New York and L.A. perspective, only recently getting more involved here in Seattle. And in some ways here we're insulated from some of the worst sides of the business, having so many incredible women involved in our local industry. There are plenty in L.A. as well.. I worked with with many strong women, from TV director Bethany Rooney (*NCIS*, *About a Boy*, *Criminal Minds*) to showrunner and writer Jennifer Cecil (*Hell on Wheels*, *Private Practice*, *90210*) and also worked with many wonderful, supportive men. But I too can add a note to that circulating blog. A (generally pleasant) DP berated me for the way I was doing my job as script supervisor because his buddy, a returning director, was unhappy that I was going in to talk to the actors. The DP wasn't my boss. He also had no idea that the word for word correction I made was a mandate given to me directly by the showrunner. However, he felt it was his place to tell me how to do my job or, more specifically, how *he thought* I should do my job. Neither he nor the director had authority to countermand directions from the showrunner nor dictate how I should behave on set, but he felt he had, and did it in a patronizing, condescending way.

Would he have done that if I were a man? We all know the answer.

In situations such as this, Tara Mohr might suggest, "Be an arrogant idiot. Of course I know you won't, because you never could. But please, just be a little more of an arrogant idiot. You know those guys around the office who share their opinions without thinking, who rally everyone around their big, (often unformed) ideas? Be more like them. Even if just a bit. You can afford to move a few inches in that direction." (<http://www.taramohr.com/10rules/>).

In an LA Weekly article [<http://www.laweekly.com/news/how-hollywood-keeps-out-women-5525034>], screenwriter Diablo Cody, winner of the Academy Award for 2007's *Juno*, noted, "You have to be protective and arrogant [to direct]. Those are great qualities, but people hate it in women. We talk about this on set all the time. You'll hear about a male director throwing stuff; we just laugh, because a woman would never work again, no matter who it was."

There's no easy solution to an age-old dilemma. However, just like encouraging girls to consider STEM careers, we need to encourage women in film to take on "nontraditional" roles and make it the norm. More than that, we also need to help create a value for the roles we do. From our use of words, to how

we as women look at those traditionally female roles, even small changes go a long way to help us strengthen the role of women in film. We all need to continue supporting and encouraging our directors, our editors, our showrunners, our producers, and all women in our field - and mentor more strong women to continue our lead.