

THE GENDER GAP IN THEATRE

MARCH 2021

What does the gender gap look like in the theatre industry?

In 2019, seven Broadway shows had ZERO female Directors, Choreographers, Writers, Set Designers, Costume Designers, Lighting Designers, Sound Designers, Hair Designers, or Makeup Designers. That same year, only one woman, Rachel Chavkin, was nominated for Best Director (which she won, by the way). Statistically, every design field except for costume design and wardrobe on Broadway employs more men than women. Theater, one of the more progressive industries, has a significant gap in men and women employed. Commercial theater is a man's world. The majority of lead Broadway producers are men, creating a barrier of entry for female producers. As a high-stakes financial game, the industry has a strong barrier to entry on the producing side for women. On the designer side, we see that men are almost overall more prevalent. A website called Production Pro accounts for all Broadway shows in a given year and shares that data with the public. Here are a few of the 2019 stats:

Set Design: 30% women, 70% men

Costume Design: 52% women, 48% men

Lighting Design: 22% women, 78% men

Sound Design: 13% women, 87% men

Sound Crew: 8% women, 82% men

Stage managers: 47% women 53% men

Company managers: 57% women, 43% men

Music Directors: 32% women, 68% men

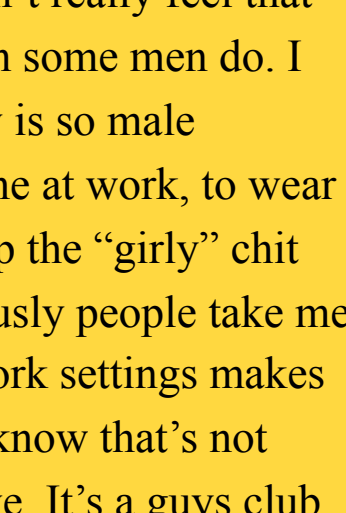
On the actors' side, if you walk into a high school audition room, you'd notice that most auditionees are girls. Yet, Broadway sees significantly more male-titled characters. In 2019, out of the 365 titled characters, 61% were male, 32% were female, 0.27% were non-binary, and 7.1% were unspecified. Consistently shows have more male leads than female and, more often than not, written by men. Why is this? There are typically more female students at the university education level than males, and many productions struggle to find male leads. Yet, go into the professional world, and there is significantly more opportunity for male actors.

SIGNIFICANCE & EVOLUTION

Historically, theater has been a male-dominated field. Going back to Shakespeare and even further to the Greeks, female characters were solely played by men. The first female actors didn't appear on stage until the 1660s. The rise of the first female playwrights didn't come until the late 17th century. Women, for most of history, were barred from participating in theatrical enterprises. It wasn't until the early 20th century and the suffragette movement that women became a part of the theater community. Today, women are actively a part of the theater industry, but like we've said, at a disproportionate rate to men.

To close the gap between men and women employed in the theater industry, we have to bring awareness to the problem. By actively calling out the commercial industry, we can start to make a change. There are fantastic nonprofits working to call attention and raise female voices. For example, THE KILROYS a group of playwrights, directors, and producers in LA and NYC. They produce, similar to the Black List in film, a list of projects every year "written by the women, trans, and non-binary writers of the American theatre" to support their work in the theater industry. Or Works by Women founded in 2009, an organization inspired by grassroots movements discussing gender parity in American society and the fact that women make up an insignificant portion of theater professionals, yet over 60% of theatergoers are female.

Nonprofits like these and individuals in the theater community using our platforms to address the gender gap we can call make theater a more equitable career. Women do participate in the theater industry, but not at an equal level. The goal is not to push out other gender identities but to create equitable opportunities by raising female-identifying artists and advocating on their behalf. This also doesn't just have to happen on the commercial level. We, as artists, can work individually to make sure there are women on our creative and production teams and that we are pushing against the stereotypes in the theater industry.

Power to the Women!
Anonymous Thoughts from
Female SDA Students

"Stage management, unlike design, is increasingly dominated by women. While I think it's really great that women are able to obtain those significant leadership roles, I think it has also led to a different conception of what the responsibilities of a stage manager are. Yes, we are managers of the production, but we are not meant to act like the caretakers of our casts and teams. I think the growing presence of women in this role has led to the idea that the SM is supposed to act like a mother and go out her way to tend to the needs of those around her, which just isn't in our job description. I've also seen a lot of female stage and production managers get talked over by male designers and directors and be disrespected by male actors. These are people who should understand the role of the SM and respect her position and opinions, but too often, female stage managers are unfairly forced to either allow this kind of behavior (which is personally embarrassing and upsetting) or stand up for ourselves (which risks losing the cohesion of the team because outspoken women tend to be perceived as mean or defensive). I don't believe the issue with stage management is an underrepresentation of women. I think it is how the industry has reacted to the significant representation of women in this role."

"I think it's really interesting to look back at the history of women in theater. Like, it was thought to be a profession that was beneath prostitution in how immoral it was. Actresses were thought to be morally loose and sexually deviant. It translates into today that a lot of romance on stage. I think male actors expect to continue off stage. They think that because you have chemistry on stage, you must have it off stage. Personally, I had an experience where I was playing a female character who had finance who was male, and in real life, this guy had a girlfriend. I wasn't interested in him. It was purely an onstage romance. One day before we went on stage, he just kissed me and kind of groped me and blamed it on method acting. I think there's almost an expectation that you can do it so well on stage, then that must mean that something is happening offstage. Since shows in theater have primarily male casts, it creates a toxically male environment for female actresses. There's not really a space that is fully occupied by women, a safe place for women. There's always a male sphere, of sorts, that overshadows women. I think that kind of leads to a lot of things happening that wouldn't happen in a primarily feminine space."

"I think I've often noticed sexism in theater spaces, like more than other professional work and educational environments, particularly in situations with gender roles and stereotypical casting in that sense. But also, in regards to the actual people who are in power and leading organizations in theater are completely male-dominated. It's very intimidating to be a woman in theater trying to produce and trying to lead teams. It's just not as conventional. It's the same in acting and more in filmmaking. Oftentimes you can get talked down just because of sexism and the nature of not trusting the female voice. Being a female actress, there is so much sexualization. Many acting teachers say, "Play like you want to sleep with him," or other things like that are not necessary to the character, and they want you to play into certain stereotypes."

"Most playwrights are male, and males don't generally write great female characters because they can't understand the feminine experience. A lot of female characters are half-baked. A lot of them are there as the object for the hero of the play. A lot of them are a reward for when the male accomplishes his goal. They're there to further the male's journey. They're there to support, to love, to care for the male. I think more often than not, the female characters tend to be lackluster. As an actress, it's really disheartening because you look at theater, which is supposed to be a reflection of human beings, and the female characters are humans. They are objects. They don't have fully fleshed-out personalities, objectives, or through lines- which sucks. I'm not trying to discount female playwrights because there are wonderful female playwrights, but they are still in a minority group. It sucks because you want to have a good character, real person. Not half of a person or 75% of a person. You expect something more, and you don't really get that."

"I recently spoke to a woman working in sound for one of my classes, and her advice to me was that in order to succeed in this industry as a woman, you have to work harder and be better than any other man, you essentially have to be the best to be taken seriously. As a woman I don't really feel that I'm able to "skate by" when I make mistakes like I've seen some men do. I also feel as a female sound designer that since the industry is so male dominated, there's this pressure I feel to act more masculine at work, to wear more masculine presenting clothing, to toughen up, to keep the "girly" chit chat to a minimum, because I feel that it affects how seriously people take me. I feel this sense that presenting more feminine in sound work settings makes the men in the room question if I should really be there. I know that's not always what men are thinking, but it's a genuine fear I have. It's a guys club, and I'm a feminine presenting woman, but I like that about myself, and I don't feel like I should have to change that in order to be taken seriously at work. I do believe it is changing. In my time at USC, I've had the privilege of working with other female sound designers. Our sound cohort at SC has actually been really great with women working right beside me, and those women give me encouragement for entering into an industry that I believe is truly changing for the better."

DIVERSIFY YOUR FEED

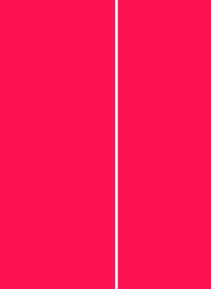
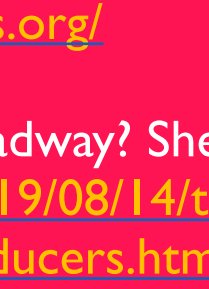
Women in Sound Zine

[@WomeninSound](#)



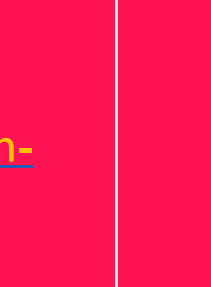
The Women's Network: USC

[@thewomensnetwork_usc](#)



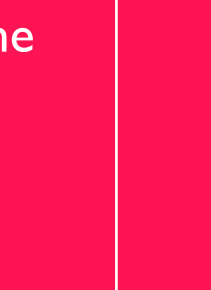
USC Women of Cinematic Arts

[@uscwca](#)



Women in Voiceover

[@womeninvo](#)



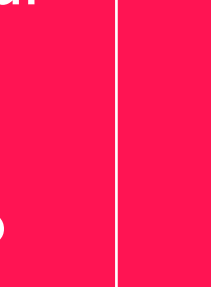
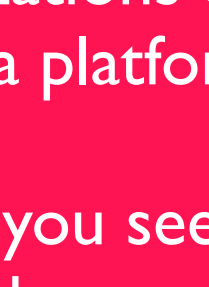
Women of Cinematic Arts

[@womenofcinematicarts](#)



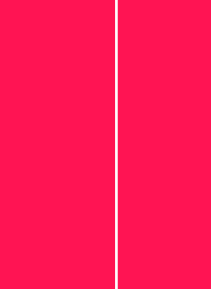
Black Women on Broadway

[@blackwomenonbroadway](#)



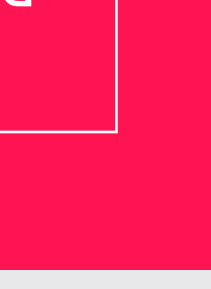
Women in Music Industry

[@wimindustry](#)



Sound Girls

[@SoundGirls](#)



ACTION ITEMS

Check out these websites & articles:

Sound Girls
<https://soundgirls.org/>

Who Calls the Shots on Broadway? She Does.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/14/theater/broadway-women-producers.html>

How to Write About Women in Sound
<https://soundgirls.org/how-to-write-about-women-in-sound/>

How Broadway Has Changed For Women, and The Work That Still Needs To Be Done
<https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/broadway-changed-women-work-still-needs-done-1039/>

Follow women's organizations on your favorite social media platforms

Call out sexism when you see it, no matter who is in the room

Make a financial contribution to a women's organization

Support Women and Minority owned businesses in your area

Best Wishes,
MTR's Diversity Equity and Inclusion team

March Issue Editors:

Sarah Campbell

Joy Cheever

Ella Lao

Who Does Your Theatre Serve?