

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

Conditions are right for women to smash glass walls

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SUE UNERMAN, CHIEF TRANSFORMATION OFFICER 23 AUG 2017

Gender representation at Cannes this year revealed the lack of diversity in our industry.

Since the Cannes Lions festival in June I have been mulling over the state of our industry. As a self-proclaimed [champion](#) of diversity in senior management, how was gender diversity represented there this year?

Cannes organisers picked more women for the juries. Kate Stanners, chairwoman and global chief creative officer of Saatchi & Saatchi, [remarked](#) that being on a judging panel with a balanced gender split made its decisions more robust, and celebrated this change for the better: “Historically male juries have selected and awarded work through a male bias. The work we’ve traditionally put out there, put as best in class, has unwittingly had a gender bias. It has had a gender lens filter on it.”

So has the gender issue disappeared from Cannes as its organisers are doing more to ensure an even mix? Not exactly.

At a MediaCom fireside [chat](#) Madonna Badger said that team after team who picked up Lions at the awards [ceremonies](#) were mainly or exclusively men. As one member of the audience (who doesn't want to be named) subsequently privately observed, since these are the outstanding successes of creativity why would anyone think that change was necessary?

(I cannot comment on the proportions of the media agency teams picking up Lions as this is relatively statistically insignificant. The Media Lions predominantly were awarded to creative or PR agencies. Only 10 out of 95 were won by media agencies as the lead.)

There has been loads of research into the profit [benefit](#) to business from mixed gender boards but I've seen nothing to substantiate that creative teams would win more awards with more women on them. However with more than 80% of marketing efforts aimed at women you'd think that it couldn't hurt to try, and might give an agency a competitive edge.

Award-winning film director Gillian Armstrong featured on a SAWA "Women and Cinema" session at the Palais. She [stated](#) that while the proportion of movies directed by women is still only 14% it looks good compared to the proportion directing commercials – which is just 9%. "There is such a thing as a woman's point of view," she said, adding that it was mostly the "man in a baseball cap" who receives more creative opportunities.

If you buy the idea that you have to see it to be it, then you must worry for young women in agencies who frequently don't even see a single woman as a part of the team running up to accept the Lion.

You [must](#) also consider if this is the optimum way to build your team to market successfully to women.

Cannes this year leads me to conclude that our industry still has plenty to do in terms of

gender equality and smashing [glass walls](#). It is time. The conditions are right. Time to walk the walk not just talk the talk.

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