

Thumbs Down: The Representation of Women Film Critics in The Top 100 U.S. Daily Newspapers

by Martha M. Lauzen, Ph.D.

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Men write the overwhelming majority of film reviews in the nation's top newspapers. In Fall 2007, men penned 70% and women 30% of all reviews.

Furthermore, of the newspapers featuring film reviews, 47% had no reviews written by women critics, writers or freelancers. In contrast, only 12% had no reviews written by men critics, writers or freelancers.

In addition, men wrote significantly more reviews than women. Men wrote an average of 14 film reviews whereas women wrote an average of 9 film reviews during the study period.

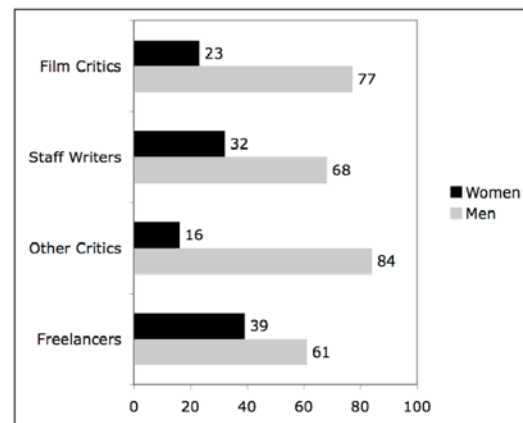
This study examined the numbers of women and men reviewing films at the top 100 U.S. daily newspapers during Fall 2007. From October 22 through December 25, 186 individuals wrote 2,365 reviews appearing in newspapers with a combined circulation of approximately 28 million readers. However, as the majority of the reviews written by these individuals also appear on the Internet, the reach and influence of these individuals is far greater.

Findings

Approximately one-quarter (26%) of the top 100 newspapers had no women or men writing film reviews during the study period.

Men outnumbered women in every job title category considered. Seventy seven percent (77%) of film critics were male and 23% were female. Sixty eight percent (68%) of staff writers were male and 32% were female. Eighty four percent (84%) of critics in other areas writing film reviews were male and 16% were female. Sixty one percent (61%) of freelancers were male and 39% were female. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1.
Job Title by Sex of Reviewer

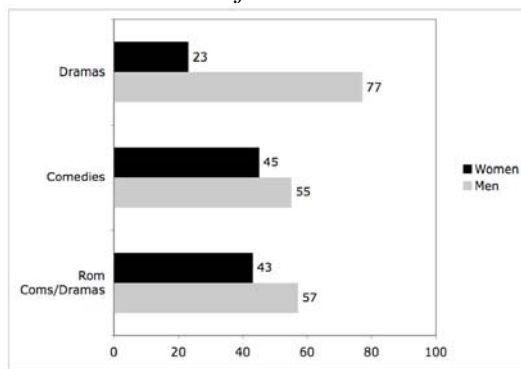


Women writing reviews were most likely to hold the job title of staff writer (35%), followed by film critic (29%), freelancer (29%), and some other type of critic, such as music critic or television critic (8%). Men writing reviews were most likely to

hold the job title of film critic (37%), followed by staff writer (29%), freelancer (18%), or some other type of critic (16%).

☞ Men wrote more reviews of films in all genres than women. Men wrote 77% and women 23% of reviews about dramas. Men penned 55% and women 45% of reviews about comedies. Men wrote 57% and women 43% of reviews about romantic comedies and dramas. (See Figure 2)

*Figure 2.
Genre of Films Reviewed by
Sex of Reviewer*



☞ By genre, romantic comedies and dramas constituted a larger proportion of the reviews written by women than by men. Sixteen percent (16%) of the reviews written by women but only 9% of the reviews written by men were about romantic comedies and romantic dramas. Twenty seven percent (27%) of the reviews written by women and 14% of the reviews written by men were for non-romantic comedies. Fifty six percent (56%) of the reviews written by women and 77% of the reviews written by men were for non-romantic dramas.

☞ By job title, men film critics wrote an average of 25 reviews whereas women wrote an average of 19 reviews. Men staff writers wrote an average of 10 reviews and women wrote an average of 6 reviews. Men critics in areas other than film wrote an average of 6 film reviews whereas women with this job title wrote an average of 3 film reviews. Men freelancers wrote an average of 7 reviews and women freelancers wrote an average of 4 reviews.

☞ Films with women filmmakers comprised a larger proportion of the films reviewed by women than by men. Of the reviews written by women, 22% were for films with at least one woman director or writer. Of the reviews written by men, 14% were for films with at least one woman director or writer.

☞ A significantly higher percentage of films reviewed by women were for films featuring female protagonists or ensemble casts. Of the reviews written by women, 33% were for films featuring a female protagonist or ensemble cast and 67% were for films featuring a male protagonist. Of the reviews written by men, 18% were for films featuring a female protagonist or ensemble cast and 82% were for films featuring a male protagonist.

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👎 On average, women and men wrote equally negative reviews. Both women and men wrote reviews with an average of 4 negative sentences.

👎 On average, women and men wrote equally positive reviews. Both women and men wrote reviews with an average of 5 positive sentences.