Dear Women Creatives: Keep Raising the Bar

This week, with Anora winning Best Picture and films like The Substance, Emilia Pérez, and Wicked telling layered stories about what it means to be a woman in this world, it’s hard to remember a time when women’s stories were not invested in and celebrated by commercial audiences and Hollywood awards juries.

But there was a time. Not long ago, stories about women were dismissed as “chick flicks.” And in our field of advertising, which tends to slightly lag behind entertainment, that time feels even more recent.

So as a female creative in this industry, who is finally seeing incredible storytelling around women and women’s products in our marketplace, I want to take a second to celebrate just how far we’ve come. And I’d like to appeal to our industry, to marketers and to advertisers—despite whatever happens in the news or in Washington—let’s keep raising the bar to push women’s creativity even further.

Creative work for women has been an afterthought

I’ve been doing this job for a while now. And for the majority of my practitioner career as a creative, I was routinely dismayed by how lame and uninspired the creative briefs directed toward women would be. Perhaps this is why I spent all of my time trying to be “one of the boys” and vying to work on their briefs—because the briefs for men had a chance to be interesting, funny, brave, innovative, or even just

smart.

I’m not alone. Top women creatives tell me the same thing, again and again, behind closed doors.

But there’s a group out there—about 51% of the population—that needs us to bring our very best thinking when we create messaging directed to and concerning them.

We are an industry that spends nearly $400 billion each year telling stories. The amount of creativity we put into our work directed to women has real world implications. In truth, it’s one of the reasons I wanted to start my agency—because I felt women audiences deserved better creative work. But I wasn’t prepared for just how much doing great work would actually impact women.

In our time at Joan, I’ve seen our teams create sparkling, breakthrough creative thinking that has worked to close the gender gap in CPR, inspire over 2,000 moms to start businesses, rally women to protect the planet, and erode the stigma surrounding women’s body parts.

We’re not alone here. I am inspired by the work at e.l.f. Beauty, for example, like “So Many Dicks”—the campaign to call out gender gaps in the boardroom. It was entertaining and spread messaging to make women’s lives better—all while helping the brand leap up the charts in market share.

The commercial power of creativity for women

But the work doesn’t need to be capital-P “Purpose-Driven” to make an impact. In fact, merely caring enough about women audiences to break out your very finest creativity is in itself extraordinarily affirming for the audience. Because it is affirming to simply feel seen. To be understood and cared for. To be shown the basic respect of an advertiser hoping to delight you, and giving it every ounce of insight and

imagination to do so.

Women are extremely savvy. They know when they're being talked down to, and they know when you are putting in the effort of reaching higher. There is incredible commercial power when you strike this chord right.

I've seen this effect again and again—and not just in the work for female-driven brands. We do large-scale global work for all audiences, and sometimes we cast a protagonist in a gender-neutral role with a woman actor. It's surprising, with great effect: Show a woman in a leading role, especially an unexpected one, and you've made a friend with a wallet.

Turn up the heat

So here we are, standing on the edge of the future for women's storytelling. As the era of dismantling DEI starts coinciding with algorithms offering up how-to videos for conservative Utah curls and tradwives making homemade bubble gum, I fear that the world of marketing will knee-jerk back to a world where "great" creative for women involves singing about how happy your fabric softener makes you.

No real woman sings about her fabric softener. Unless that fabric softener also gives you multiple orgasms. Which, last I checked, it doesn't.

So, this trumpet goes to all of the brilliant female creative leaders in the industry. I love you all very much, and we need you more than ever. Remember: The thing that got you in this position is your ambition and your wickedly unique creative POV. You have earned your seat at this table, and we're all watching … including every single woman out there in the audience. Let's give them something freaking incredible to

watch.

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