

2015 in culture: Women narrow the gender gap

Adele, J-Law, the Turner Prize: 2015 was a bumper year for women in culture. Is it time we acknowledged that there's no difference between male and female artists?



It's a woman's world: Just a few of the female artists who made headlines in 2015

'Hello, it's me.'

With those three words, Adele launched her comeback. Her single 'Hello' rocketed to number one in 28 countries, paving the way for her new album *25*, which broke all kinds of sales records on its release in November.

Adele was the most talked-about pop musician of 2015. But she wasn't the highest-paid: that title goes to Katy Perry, who earned **\$135m**. Meanwhile, Taylor Swift made headlines with her epic 1989 World Tour, while artists such as Iggy Azalea and Beyoncé dominated the Grammy Awards. Some called this a bumper year for female musicians.

That comment was echoed elsewhere in the world of culture. Three of the four nominees for the prestigious Turner Prize for art were women. Art Basel Miami Beach, the US's most important art fair, hosted *No Man's Land*, an exhibition devoted to women artists. 'It's the year of the woman,' declared the fair's director Marc Spiegler.

In the film industry, the **notorious** gender

imbalance took a hit. This was partly thanks to successful movies that gave complex lead roles to women, such as *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Carol* and feminist historical drama *Suffragette*.

At the same time, sexism in the industry was directly attacked by various celebrities. Guests at Cannes Film Festival complained about its policy of forcing women to wear high heels, and Jennifer Lawrence wrote a furious article in which she denounced the **pay gap** between male and female actors.

Even in the male world of theatre, women were more prominent than ever. In the **West End**, plays like *Jane Eyre* and the Nicole Kidman-starring *Photograph 51* featured high-profile female leads. Female designers created the best sets of the year, and girl power was celebrated onstage in *Bend It Like Beckham: the Musical*.

As the media reflect on these achievements, people are asking whether we still need to use the term 'women artists'. Now

that sexism is on the decline, perhaps we should refer to all artists, male or female, as just that: 'artists'? Surely women should be allowed to say 'Hello, it's me,' without having to explain who 'me' is?

Stick it to the man

Absolutely, say some. Saying 'women artists' suggests that the **default** artist is male. Plus, the term **pigeonholes** women: it suggests that all women artists are supposed to make art about being a woman. They shouldn't be restricted in this way.

But the truth, say others, is that most artists are men – even in 2015. If we really want to get rid of the gender imbalance in culture, we need to keep drawing attention to the women, by using that term. And it can **empower** them: grouped together, women artists become a movement with a voice.

Q & A

Q: Should I care about sexism? Surely it isn't really an issue anymore?

A: Wrong. As Jennifer Lawrence writes, women in film still struggle to make themselves heard, or be paid as much as men. The same goes for theatre and fine art – check out our links in

Become An Expert. These problems are not unique to the culture industries: they are symptoms of discrimination against women throughout society, from politics to homes where some women endure domestic violence.

Q: What's being done about this?

A: A lot. Many countries have laws banning gender discrimination, and some political

parties have policies aimed at boosting female representation. More generally, people have launched campaigns against misogyny, and there are websites where users can post their personal experiences of sexism, and much more.

YOU DECIDE

1. Who is your favourite female artist, and why? You can choose a singer, actress, painter, film director – anyone.
2. Should we stop using the term ‘women artists’?

ACTIVITIES

1. Design a poster for the last film you saw.
2. Write a 400-word letter to your local newspaper, giving your thoughts on the male-female pay gap.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

‘An artist’s gender is irrelevant to their art.’

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WORD WATCH

\$135m – According to a Reuters article published in November.

Notorious – Infamous. Well-known, but for a bad reason.

Pay gap – The difference between (in this

case) male and female earnings in a profession. Often where one earns less than the other for the same work.

West End – A district in London with a high concentration of theatres. The term can also be used to refer specifically to the theatre scene in that area.

Default – Standard, normal (especially where

no alternative is proposed).

Pigeonholes – To pigeonhole someone is to assign a particular role or category to them, in a way that restricts them.

Empower – Give power to someone, making them more confident especially in claiming their rights.


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Notes

