

FROM THE EDITOR



WIF was invited last month to give testimony in Sacramento before the Women's Caucus of the California State Legislature regarding "Violence Against Women: Domestic, in the Workplace and in the Media." The Caucus, composed of 28 women in the state legislature, is particularly concerned about gender-motivated crimes. They want to confront it in a holistic manner, dealing with all possible contributors—including on-screen violence—and treat it as a violation of the victim's civil rights.

The Caucus was sincerely interested in WIF's attempts to end the depiction of women as demeaned and dehumanized victims, and solicited suggestions for solutions. Here are brief excerpts from the testimony I wrote and delivered on behalf of WIF:

If "Sesame Street" can teach the alphabet, children can learn the ABCs of mayhem by watching gratuitously violent entertainment. But it's unrealistic to expect the industry to set and implement guidelines for media violence. Concerned government officials also need to take a leadership role in educating filmmakers and consumers about the negative affects on all society of on-screen violence against women.

Sexual discrimination in the industry is a serious problem. Results of recent studies by the guilds reported in last month's trades that few women are in top positions, creative or executive level. Only 17% (average) of the 1991 feature films were written by women; only 11 features were directed by women; only 3% of the telefilms were directed by women; SAG actresses earned only 28% of all 1991 theatrical film earnings; only one woman heads a studio (Paramount) and only two women head networks (USA cable and Fox Broadcasting).

If hiring and pay were equitable in the industry, we'd see a greater balance of male/female stories, a reduction in the demeaning and stereotyping of female characters and a different sensitivity and sensibility. This from top members polled in "Reel News" (11/92) when asked, "If Women Held Half the Top Jobs in Hollywood, Would the Industry be Any Different?"

The Women's Caucus expressed enthusiasm about continuing a dialogue and doing PSAs with WIF to educate their constituents about critical viewing. Others testifying at the media portion were Marcy Kelly (Mediascope), Dr. Ed Donnerstein (UC Santa Barbara) and Jack Valenti (MPAA, written testimony only). Copies of our written testimonies and a transcript from part of the hearing are available in the office.

Karen

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