

You've come a long way on film, baby!

April 16 2010

A female director wins best director at the Oscars. A female-driven movie wins two Academy Awards, including best adapted screenplay. It may not be a huge sign, but it signals a huge shift in what the general public is watching and how Hollywood is viewing the much-maligned genre, the "chick flick."

Ashley Elaine York, a PhD student in sociology and first Corus Entertainment Fellow in Television Studies, says the new female-driven narratives are getting their due, largely as a result of a shift in identity from the date [movies](#) or tearjerkers of yore. These new films are being given treatment that was previously reserved for blockbuster movies, York noted. From the recent successes of some of these movies at the Oscars, such as *Precious* or *the Hurt Locker*, the trend is definitely catching on.

"The new model of the 'chick flick' is not the romantic comedy of years past. It's conceived and marketed in such a way that it's multi-pronged," said York. "There's a book, there's retail merchandise associated with it. It's a movie with spectacular visuals; it gets a lot of pre-release hype. It's tied into a soundtrack and into a star persona."

The traditional examples of this genre had limited, niche public appeal, says York. Movies such as *16 Candles* and *Clueless* were largely directed at teen audiences. While other movies like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* developed a cult following, the movie likely didn't attract certain key demographics, such as men 26-35 or older women.

However, the formula and the appeal of the female-driven narrative are changing, notes York. The stories are topical and relevant for the modern woman. York says movies such as *Mamma Mia* and *Sex and the City* are multi-generational, multi-racial features starring both genders and having a broad appeal. But they also treat women in a different way than traditional women-centred films.

"The chick flick is both a date movie and an empowerment movie," said York.

York says that this shift is likely to bring on more major changes to the new women's-film franchise revolution, some of which she notes are already happening. New stars are appearing all the time, she notes. Though some are coming from the television side of Hollywood, such as Blake Lively of *Gossip Girl* (appearing in the upcoming movie, *Green Lantern*) or Minka Kelly of *Friday Night Lights* (*The Kingdom*, *500 Days of Summer*), others, such as *Precious*' Gabourey Sidibe, have been plucked from relative obscurity and become breakout stars in their own right, she notes.

"I think now you're seeing people [like Sidibe] become stars just for being in a movie when we really know little to nothing about them, except for the fact that they were in this movie," said York. "That's sort of a new wave."

Aside from more female-driven movies being produced, York says female stars can leverage more control over, and more latitude with, their films through their own productions companies. These types of movies allow female stars to explore topics that would not have been talked about before in any movie.

"This new formula works for what Drew Barrymore and Flower Films, her production company,, did with *Whip It*," said York. "It also works

for women directors, too, such as Catherine Hardwicke, who directed *Twilight*, or Kathryn Bigelow with *The Hurt Locker*."

But the power for women to tell and craft stories that have such a wide ranging approach is not the only sign of changes of a female powerplay in Hollywood, says York. The powerful female stars, be they actors, producers or directors, are also reaping the financial rewards of these new kinds of blockbusters. With the ladies of Tinseltown being able to wield that sort of power leads York to believe that the women are truly bringing out the "Holly" in Hollywood. And it's a trend that is not likely to end anytime soon.

"It's very exciting because you're talking about structural changes in the mechanism of Hollywood," she said. "Whenever you're dealing with structural changes, you're often dealing with something that's more long term, something that has a lasting effect, a lasting impact.

"I really do believe that we're in the decade of the woman. It just hasn't been recognized yet."

Provided by University of Alberta

Citation: You've come a long way on film, baby! (2010, April 16) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-04-youve-baby.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.