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In spring of 2014, I was glancing through the Tony nominations to be met by a sea of predominantly white men's faces. I wasn't shocked. I was angry.

As a female director and theater-maker, even a white one, it felt like a slap in the face. Enraged, I took the headshots of the fifteen men (14 of them white), and one white woman that comprised the nominees for best book, best play, best director of a play, and best director musical (categories most relevant to my disciplines) that year, cobbled them together into an art project and posted them to my Facebook with the caption "Let's talk about this."

While I can't say that this particular project sparked a whole lot of conversations beyond "f\*\*\*\*\*c k," I do think that the industry is talking about it. I'm witnessing an uptick, especially Off-Broadway, in shows written, directed and designed by women, people of color, and to a much smaller degree, trans and non-binary folks.

In 2018, we witnessed milestones such as the first all-female director and design team on *Lifespans of a Fact* and Young Jean Lee becoming the first female Asian-American playwright to be produced on Broadway. In 2017, the year that Lynn Nottage's *Sweat* and Paula Vogel's *Indecent* too briefly graced the Broadway stage, the Tony's put forth an anomaly: actual parity in the playwriting category. Broadway World ran an article in response entitled [The Scarce History of Tony Nominated Female Writers by the Numbers](#).

It noted that in the history of "Best Play" nominations only 8 percent had ever been written by women.

Still, last year only 16 percent of plays that opened on Broadway were written by women, and 19 percent were directed by women. According to The League of Professional Theater Women, women directors, playwrights and designers still receive fewer than 20 percent of the opportunities nationwide. I'm going to accept, for a moment, the gender binary in which these figures and responses to them operate, but it's an issue I'll return to.

Looking at these statistics there's little question why initiatives like [50/50 in 2020](#) which calls for gender parity in theater, or [The Lilly Awards](#), whose mission is to "develop and celebrate women artists by promoting gender parity at all levels of theatrical production," should exist. The Kilroy's list of noteworthy plays written by women, trans, and non-binary playwrights was created in 2013 in response to a common justification for not producing work by these individuals: because producers and artistic directors (roughly 80 percent men in regional theaters nationwide) "couldn't find any."

Gender-specific awards like this exist because the statistics suggest that there's a question over

whether women's creative power deserves to be invested in or awarded equally to men's. So, if the men at the top insist on only doling out awards to other men, there must be an alternative way of shining a light on all the stellar artists they just can't seem to find.

However, the visibility created by "women's" awards isn't sufficient for achieving parity across a broader artistic landscape. Often I see women artists being told their work is perfect for opportunities designed specifically for women, but not being urged towards, or picked for non-gender specific opportunities. I'm proud to be a woman, but I and most non-cis male directors and artists I know, just want to be seen as artists. We want to compete across gender. The Lilly Awards aren't a replacement for a lack of women Tony nominees, they are a step towards getting more women nominated for Tony Awards, and given more jobs on Broadway overall.

Likewise, the Kilroy's mission fails if artistic directors do not put at least a few those playwrights into their season. Not just one, multiple. Parity, not tokenization, is the goal.

But there's a couple things that my own 2014 post, and the call for parity through gender-based awards fail to address. First, we should not be talking exclusively about a gender gap without addressing the disproportionate lack of representation and opportunity faced by female and trans artists of color. As a white woman, I do not see those who look like me represented in the highest accolades of theater in the same number as men, but they are represented consistently, if in small numbers. I also do not face the same prejudice as a barrier to my career. Treating women as a homogenous category often assumes that women will rise together at the same pace, but this is not how feminism has historically played out. Racial privilege tends to give white women a leg up to the front of the race. 50/50 by 2020 will not be good enough if for example, 80 percent of the women we see represented in that figure are white.

Second, by creating awards and initiatives for "women" without opening up our language explicitly to trans and non-binary folks, I worry that we are just speaking in binaries that continue to enforce them. It creates spaces where trans-men and non-binary individuals, who also suffer from a lack of opportunity, are either forced to be recognized under a category that they do not identify with, or they are excluded. The Kilroys is probably the best solution to both these issues that I have seen. They dedicated their 2018 list to recognizing female, trans and non-binary playwrights of color specifically. I wish more would take their example.

We need to keep pushing for a world in which gender is accepted to be as fluid as it is irrelevant

to talent. But until this is attained, we must respond to a world in which people are denied opportunities based upon their identity. It makes full sense to do so by creating specific means of recognizing the talent and capabilities of those artists. Ultimately, our ability to see artists as artists without the preface of identity relies upon everyone being hired and awarded equitably in every artistic landscape from the fringes to Broadway.

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