

It's not pie...



By [Sonja Fahn](#)

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According to *AdAge*, only 11% of creatives globally are female. And the 3% Conference started a few years back because someone worked out only 3% of creative directors were women.

Admittedly in South Africa we also have the huge issue of racial representation in our industry. Because of the ongoing national discourse and our BBBEE laws, we are thankfully becoming increasingly focused on the issue. Given the backdrop of racial and financial inequality in our country, it seems vaguely petty to comment on the dearth of women in creative departments.

Perhaps that's one of the reasons why the issue persists.

There are many studies that show why gender diversity is good for brands. It's also common sense: who does most of the shopping and makes most of the 'purchasing decisions' in the home, after all? And who understands them better than a team of men?

I recently had dinner with a group of creative women, one of whom is from New York and keen to start a chapter of 'She Said' in Cape Town ('She Says' is an award-winning organisation running free events for women in creative industries).

Mentorships, support and female role models are a fantastic start, but it occurred to me that we would be talking (let's be honest: mostly moaning) about the same issues to the same circle of faces. Swapping endless stories of discrimination, the wage gap, the sexist jokes that persist, the subtle and not so subtle harassment, or the fact that when we have babies we are judged by a new set of standards. So much so that sometimes we just give up and 'lean out'.



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It's a start, but these are not issues that will go away when women meet and are equipped with tools and have the backup of the sisterhood. They will however improve when it becomes 'our' issue rather than merely a 'women's issue'. When men become part of the conversation without being defensive. When women can discuss issues without being dismissed as sensitive. It strikes me as ironic that in our informed, intelligent and open-minded creative departments, where sneakers and swearing are okay, we still have to talk about gender equality.



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Which brings me to the crux of this:

“ *Equal rights for others doesn't mean less rights for you. It's not pie.* ”

How do we make this pie relevant to a group of people who are all a bit defensive? How do we bring it up constructively without eye rolls and groans? What would the brief to the collective creative department be, that could make this issue resonate with an apathetic audience? Because ultimately we all want the same thing. Better work.

“Diversity doesn't lower the bar. Diversity raises the f***ing bar. Diversity will make our industry more creative and more lucrative.” - Cindy Gallup, founder and former chair of the US branch of Bartle Bogle Hegarty, and founder of the IfWeRanTheWorld and MakeLoveNotPorn companies.

ABOUT SONJA FAHN

I have been in advertising for 20 years, 10 years of that as a creative director. My background is in design and art direction so I love creating beautiful visuals. Having worked on many amazing brands around the world, I have insight and a passion for brand strategies - developing ideas and ultimately work that works.
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