

World Schools Debating League Asia Post-Round Reading

THBT major award shows (including but not limited to the Oscars, Emmys and Tonys) should abandon gendered acting categories (eg Best Actor, Best Actress etc.)

Context – There are plenty of competing **principles** in this debate, such as equality, fairness, representation and so on – but try to add some **practical impacts** to your case in order to have the best chance of winning this debate. This is also a motion where **examples** can be useful. If you don't know too much about the movies or awards, this is a good opportunity to read up on a couple of examples that may help you in similar debates in the future!

The **problem** that this motion is trying to solve is that gendered awards divide actors into a binary choice of category – male or female – in a world where we no longer consider gender to be a binary. So a non-binary actor may be forced to compete in a category that they don't feel they belong to; but more important is what it says to non-binary or trans people on a wider level. Getting rid of gendered categories would be better for the TV and movie industry, better for representation and better for society. (Some analysis about why movies and TV are a particularly important means of representation, would probably help here.)

On the other hand, there are good reasons why gendered categories exist – in an industry which is still highly male-dominated, abolishing these categories might erase the representation of women in awards. Consider the underrepresentation of female directors in the Best Director category at the Oscars, for example, to see what could happen if you get rid of these categories altogether. So maybe this is not the best way to tackle this problem?

Video debriefing – Our post-round analysis is from Klaudia Maciejewska, who will be on the CAP of both WUDC (the World Championships) and EUDC (European Championships) in 2023.

<https://youtu.be/MqXcUaxRvgM>



Is it time to scrap gender specific awards?

8 May 2017

By Emma Saunders



Asia Kate Dillon plays Taylor, a non-binary gender character in Billions

Emma Watson has won the MTV Movie and TV award for best big-screen actor – the first gender-neutral prize the ceremony has given out.

In her acceptance speech, the actress said [winning the prize](#) for her role in Beauty and the Beast was "very meaningful". "To me, it indicates that acting is about the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes, and that doesn't need to be separated into two different categories."

MTV [announced the change](#) to the categories earlier this year after Billions star Asia Kate Dillon raised the issue with the Emmys. When organisers asked the female-born star how they wanted to be considered, it proved a struggle because the performer identifies as gender non-binary.

What to go for – best actor or best actress? The dilemma opened up a dialogue with Emmy organisers after Dillon wrote a letter to the Academy.

The star asked: "I'd like to know if in your eyes 'actor' and 'actress' denote anatomy or identity and why it is necessary to denote either in the first place?"

The Emmys explained that "anyone can submit under either category for any reason. The Academy supports anyone's choice to do that, and the Academy is not going to do any sort of check", [Dillon told Variety](#).

"I found them to be 100% supportive," Dillon says of the Academy. "I really couldn't have been happier."

The performer chose to enter the best supporting actor category in the end, explaining "actor" is generally regarded as a non-gendered word.

But is it time to drop the gender tag altogether?

While most of the big hitters including the Oscars and Baftas still have best actor and best actress categories, there are some organisations that are pushing the envelope.

The National Television Awards (NTAs) first changed its best actor and actress categories to simply best drama performance and best serial drama performance back in 2008.

And bar two years when they reverted back to best male and best female in 2012 and 2013, it's been the same ever since.

Usually the serial and drama vote has been split between a male and female winner, but this year Sarah Lancashire won best drama performance for her role in Happy Valley and Lacey Turner won best serial drama performance for EastEnders.

"It felt right for the National Television Awards to make the change," says Kim Turberville, executive producer and founder of the NTAs.

"A great performance is great regardless of gender and we think that dropping the male/female division has made the drama performance category more exciting.

"It may surprise viewers one year if all four short-listed nominees voted for by the public happen to be female or male, but if that is the case it will be because of their brilliant performances and will be an interesting outcome in itself."

In the music world, while the Brit Awards offer the more traditional best male and best female prizes for both British and international artists, across the pond at the Grammys, no such thing exists.

Although the Grammys feature a huge 80-plus list of categories, including everything from best Latin rock album to best new age record, there is no sign of any male or female awards. The big awards are considered to be album of the year, song of the year and record of the year.

So it's not just an issue of gender identity – it's about having no distinction between female and male talent. Put simply, which performance is the best overall?

But there could be other implications for awards organisers if they changed their rules.

Having only one overall best actor category – if you agree with Dillon that the word actor is a non-gendered word – could give the winner more kudos in the acting community having beaten both male and female competition.

On the other hand, with just one category, fewer performers may get short-listed and worthy nominees may miss out.

For example, the Oscars currently have five nominees in each best actor and best actress categories. They may well increase the number of nominees if there was to be only one best performance award, but that's not a given.

It could also potentially mean fewer actresses are nominated overall. If, in any given year, there are more male performances nominated but only one category for them to be recognised in, they could effectively take the places of what would've been female nominees.

Perhaps one way to solve this would be to be more genre specific in each category – so rather than best actress or best actor, how about best drama performance or best comedy performance?

Of course the Golden Globes already do this, although they still split the awards down gender lines.

Olivia Colman and Hugh Laurie were both beneficiaries of this system earlier in the year, when they won best performances by an actor and an actress in a supporting role in a series, mini-series or TV movie in *The Night Manager*.

And you could argue that having more gender split categories might boost the profiles of women film-makers, who historically struggle to gain recognition in areas such as directing, which is gender neutral.

There have only ever been four female nominees for the best director Oscar and, as of 2017, only one winner – Kathryn Bigelow for *Hurt Locker* in 2010.



Foster's film Money Monster starred George Clooney and Julia Roberts

'Larger conversation'

Who might have made a best female director nominee at this year's Oscars? Perhaps Andrea Arnold (*American Honey*), Mira Nair (*Queen of Katwe*) or Jodie Foster (*Money Monster*)?

Dillon's hope is that the Emmys conversation opens the debate further, saying: "I can only speak to the world in which I wish to live.

"I think this is a really good place to start a larger conversation about the categories themselves, and what changes are possible and what may or may not be coming.

"I'm excited to see what other people think, and what they want to say once they become aware of this."

And who knows - could a change happen at the Baftas? We've asked them if they can see a rule change on the horizon, but they have yet to respond.

It's Time for the Emmys to Eliminate Gender-Specific Acting Categories

[Michael Schneider](#) Aug 8, 2019



As TV and storytelling continue to evolve, does it still make sense to silo male and female performers into separate Emmy categories? Splitting up “outstanding actor” and “outstanding actress” awards as if they’re different skill sets seems like an outdated practice — yet combining them, and eliminating half of the key acting [Emmys](#) in the process, would likely be a nonstarter in a business hungry for more, rather than fewer, accolades.

But there’s plenty of precedence for ending the gender divide. The Television Critics Assn., which revealed its 2019 award winners last weekend, already combines its acting categories into just two: individual achievement in drama and individual achievement in comedy.

And the conversation about whether gender-inclusive categories still make sense kicked into high gear in 2017, when [MTV](#) undertook several major revamps to its movie awards show. Most noticeably, the cable network added TV to the mix, turning it into the MTV Movie & TV Awards. But it also made waves by dropping gender-specific categories — something it has also started doing with its signature Video Music Awards show.

That year, [Emma Watson](#) became the first to win a gender-neutral MTV award for best movie performance, and she praised the decision to merge actor and actress categories into one. “With acting, you put yourself in someone else’s shoes,” she said while accepting her award. “The only distinction should be between each outstanding performance.”

And why not? Great acting is great acting, regardless of gender. It’s taken a long time, but TV is now offering juicy, big lead roles for women — perhaps making the need to distinguish male roles from female roles on awards shows a bit

obsolete. Indeed, three years in, MTV has been mostly lauded for dropping the distinction between “actor” and “actress.” “After we did it, it seemed like such an easy decision, and it was kind of like a no-brainer,” MTV live events vice president Vanessa Whitewolf told me earlier this year.

Merging the categories also seems appropriate in a world finally accepting the notion that gender itself can be a fluid construct. Two years ago, “[Billions](#)” star [Asia Kate Dillon](#), the first gender nonbinary performer to play a nonbinary character on a major TV show, asked the TV Academy to clarify its gender distinctions.

“I’d like to know if in your eyes ‘actor’ and ‘actress’ denote anatomy or identity and why it is necessary to denote either in the first place?” Dillon wrote in a letter to the org. “The reason I’m hoping to engage you in a conversation about this is because if the categories of ‘actor’ and ‘actress’ are in fact supposed to represent ‘best performance by a person who identifies as a woman’ and ‘best performance by a person who identifies as a man’ then there is no room for my identity within that award system binary. Furthermore, if the categories of ‘actor’ and ‘actress’ are meant to denote assigned sex I ask, respectfully, why is that necessary?”

Dillon ultimately entered in the supporting actor category, and although they haven’t been given an Emmy nomination yet, the performer has been nominated as best supporting actor in a drama series at the Critics’ Choice Awards.

Early concerns about combining the actor and actress categories focused on whether women might be shut out. But if this year’s MTV and TCA nominations are any indication, it’s women who are dominating the competition (perhaps giving male actors some pause). The TCA drama category includes just one male, Billy Porter, up against Amy Adams, Patricia Arquette, Christine Baranski, Michelle Williams and Jodie Comer; in comedy, Bill Hader is the lone male up against Pamela Adlon, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Natasha Lyonne, Catherine O’Hara and Phoebe Waller-Bridge.

As has been pointed out by others, awards such as the Pulitzer and the Nobel aren’t distinguished by gender. And in Hollywood, craft awards aren’t separated that way. In an industry still lagging in pay parity and equal representation behind the lens, stripping the gender classifications from performance categories would send a strong message to all of Hollywood.

Digital Spy

Why gender-neutral awards aren't necessarily a good thing for women – sorry Emma Watson

#Oscarsomale By [Rosie Fletcher](#), 9 May 2017



The MTV Movie and TV Awards made news this week when [they presented their first gender-neutral awards for acting](#). Rather than separating Best Actor and Best Actress categories, the awards included:

- Best Actor in a Movie
- Best Actor in a Show
- Best Comedic Performance
- Best Hero
- Best Villain

All of which were open to both male and female nominees. When Best Actor winner Emma Watson accepted her award, she said it was "very meaningful" and added: "The first acting award in history that doesn't

separate nominees based on their sex says something about how we perceive the human experience."

In fact plenty of industry awards are not categorised by gender: the Pulitzer isn't for the best article written by just men or just women. The Booker Prize doesn't care whether the author is male or female. And the Nobel prizes – awarded to people who have "done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses" – don't care if you're a Ms or a Mr.

So on paper, MTV is making a resonant and progressive stand, saying that acting is a skill and a craft like any other and that a person's gender gives them neither a hindrance nor an advantage – great work should therefore be rewarded regardless of who you are.

In a society which is becoming more and more gender fluid and less binary, it also seems like a smart move. After all, how do you categorise someone who doesn't identify with either gender? And why should they even have to be categorised?

But.

There's another side to gender-neutral awards in such a massively male-dominated industry.

As *The Wrap* reports, MTV hasn't created the the first entertainment awards to opt for gender neutrality.

The Television Critics Awards have gender-neutral Drama and Comedy categories, for example, but in the 20 years they've existed, 67 percent of the nominations and 69 percent of the wins have gone to men.

The BAFTA Rising Star award is gender neutral, and shortlisted by judges who are generally very mindful of including diverse nominees. But in the last 12 years, 9 winners have been male and only 3 female.

We recently reported that a study from the Center for the Study of Women in Television & Film found that leading female roles had reached an all-time high. Great news! Until you realise that's [still only 29%](#).

And before we even begin to start considering calling for a gender-neutral Oscars, for example, it's worth bearing in mind that the Academy, which votes for the awards, [is also predominantly male](#).

According to a 2014 survey conducted by *The Los Angeles Times*, Oscar voters were on average 63 years old. 76% of them were men, and 94% of them were white (although the Academy has been trying to address the balance somewhat).

Non-gendered awards in film, particularly at high-profile events like the Oscars and Golden Globes, which are not voted for by the public, could end up being a minefield. Either they will skew massively male – in reflection of the better, more prevalent, more diverse and more interesting roles men get to play in Hollywood – or they'll self-police in way that would feel like tokenism.

Artificially awarding comparable numbers of awards and nominations to women to avoid accusations of sexism – thereby not always giving the award to the most deserving candidate – would, as a side-effect, make every woman who wins an award secretly feel like she only won it because she's a woman.

With an industry as imbalanced as it is, non-gendered and gendered awards feel like they're offering the choice of two different kinds of discrimination:

1. In the name of equality, deny a bunch of women the profile and salary boost they'd get from winning awards, when the pay and the roles on offer aren't in any way equal; or
2. Divide the two genders out, thereby implying there is something different and separate about women's acting and men's acting.



If anyone was going to try a gender-neutral awards though, MTV was the right one to do it. Its awards are voted for by the public, and it's a far younger public than the stalwarts who vote for the Globes, the Oscars or the BAFTAs. The hope is that this younger generation don't see gender in quite the same way as those that came before them.

This is a generation who genuinely think that Emma Watson gave the greatest performance of ANY ACTOR in the last year, bless them – although to be fair they were only given a choice of:

- Emma Watson – *Beauty and the Beast*
- Taraji P. Henson – *Hidden Figures*
- Daniel Kaluuya – *Get Out*
- Hugh Jackman – *Logan*
- James McAvoy – *Split*
- Hailee Steinfeld – *The Edge of Seventeen*

So no *Manchester by the Sea* or *La La Land* to contend with.

Of the five gender-neutral awards, three went to women fair and square – including Taraji P Henson as Best Hero for *Hidden Figures* and Millie Bobby Brown as Best Actor in a Show for *Stranger Things*.

With careful managing of the nominees list and a clear understanding of their readership, as well as hopefully a move towards more equality in roles when it comes to the next generation, the MTV Movie and TV Awards could be an amazing step towards effecting real change in attitudes going forward.

Sadly Hollywood as a whole has a range of other problems to address on the inside before it can begin to celebrate fairly, openly and equally at an awards ceremony.