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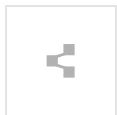


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Director James Cameron has been making some headlines recently, and they don't all have to do with his ongoing plans for a series of *Avatar* movies. Instead, Cameron has been making some **very public comments** regarding this summer's *Wonder Woman* and the role he feels the film plays (or doesn't) in promoting female heroes. In Cameron's own words, he feels like Gal Gadot's version of the character represents a step backward for women in film. His



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Sarah Connor

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reason? She's too good-looking.

"[Gal Gadot] was Miss Israel, and she was wearing a kind of bustier costume that was very form-fitting," **he said to THR** when they asked if he wanted to walk back his initial statement. "She's absolutely drop-dead gorgeous. To me, that's not breaking ground."

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Cameron supported his statements by comparing Diana Prince to another action movie heroine, his own: Sarah Connor. "Sarah Connor was not a beauty icon," he said, referencing the character in *Terminator 2*. "She was strong, she was troubled, she was a terrible mother, and she earned the respect of the audience through pure grit."

Cameron isn't wrong on either count. Gal Gadot's Diana Prince is attractive. Sarah Connor is a strong, troubled mother. The

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issue here is in pitting the two women against each other. In making these comments, Cameron is effectively saying that there is only one way to write a strong female character, that troubled or broken or in some way unlikable are the markers of female strength. The fact that Cameron doesn't seem to see any merit in offering female fans more than one archetype for their heroes is one problem. But the bigger issue, the one that we need to overcome in order to make that progress Cameron seems so keen on, is that he sees himself as an authority on what women should find empowering.

Here's a little insight into why this is an issue: Cameron is not a woman. What Cameron is — or at least, what he is supposed to be — is an ally; to feminists and to women on the whole whether in the audience or behind the camera. His recent string of comments, however, prove that Cameron, while he may consider himself a feminist and an ally to women, is not very good at it.

He's not the only one. Being an ally is hard. It's supposed to be. It's about not only recognizing the issues facing a

disenfranchised group but also recognizing your place of privilege as someone outside of that group. Then, it's about figuring out how to use that privilege to bring about change without silencing the voices of those you're trying to help. It's a delicate dance that requires you to put your own ego aside in the struggle to elevate voices less privileged than your own. Mostly, it's about being quiet, opening doors (or breaking glass ceilings) and then stepping aside to allow someone else to walk through in front of you.

Cameron is failing on many of these counts. It is not enough to simply call yourself a feminist. It's not even enough to create a strong female character, no matter how many women may look up to her decades later, though it is certainly a good start. You have to bring women to the table. You have to let them speak. You cannot speak for them. But speaking for women is exactly what Cameron is doing through his comments. In saying publicly that women should not be empowered by a beautiful woman kicking ass, taking names, not taking any crap from the men who tell her no, and saving the world through faith and hope and love, Cameron is using his position of power as a respected producer and director to

silence women. Despite the fact that he has — to my knowledge — no experience living on this planet as a woman in the 21st century, he is claiming to know better, and because he speaks from a position of privilege, people are more likely to listen to him.

Female representation in film has **long been sorely lacking** and improvements come only incrementally each year, if at all. Part of that change comes from women getting hired in positions of power, positions that allow them to make decisions, whether as writers or producers or directors or studio executives. **Studies have shown** that having a woman in the writer's room for a film increases the number of significant female characters by 50%. Meanwhile, allowing female directors to helm big studio projects (especially projects about female characters) allows women to take back control of how those stories are being told, to attempt to remove the male gaze from films and depict women **the way we see ourselves**, rather than the way we are seen by men.

Despite those factors, men still outnumber

women in the director's chair by a factor of 12-to-1, and in the writers' room 7-to-1. Improvements are being made, but they are slow, owing in no small part to the fact that studios and producers don't believe women can handle big budget features. It's a catch-22, of course. Women can't be hired to helm a \$100 million movie until they've proved they can helm a \$100 million movie. Strangely, though, directors like Colin Trevorrow and Rian Johnson manage to be put in charge of big blockbusters after helming successful indies.

But what does this have to do with allyship or James Cameron? It all comes back to the main job of an ally: shut up, stand back, and let the women speak. The key to creating more female directors able to helm a tentpole film like *Wonder Woman* is to hire more female directors, and with men outnumbering women in such large numbers, they're the ones that have to do the actual hiring. Cameron is in a perfect position to do so and yet so far he doesn't seem committed to that goal, even in light of his recent comments.

Shortly after his initial comments regarding the "step backward" that was *Wonder*

Woman, Cameron **announced that he would be returning** to the *Terminator* franchise for the first time since 1991's *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, and he's bringing the original Sarah Connor with him. While, to Cameron, this might seem like him taking a step in what he sees as the "right" direction, a look at his writer's room for this and future installments in the franchise proves otherwise. That writer's room features zero women, and with Cameron expected to step back into a directorial role as well, likely won't include women at any level of the creative process.

If Cameron's concern is truly about the improving the way women are represented on screen, his first step should probably be to listen to some women.

