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Women in Hollywood:
The Ongoing
Fight for Equality

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to investigate why progress for women in Hollywood has been so slow despite gender justice advocates pushing for reform both inside and outside the industry for more than half a century. We begin this report by addressing the question of why gender equity matters. This is followed by an assessment of women’s status in key decision-making roles in film and television. In the third section, we address two major obstacles to women’s advancement in the industry: gender discrimination and sexual harassment. We conclude with a discussion of what we can do to effectively reform the industry. After a half-century of research and activism, Hollywood is ripe for reform. Today, activists are addressing gender discrimination, gender and race disparities in representation, training a new generation of female leaders and leaders of color in the industry, and harnessing consumer pressure to demand change in the industry.

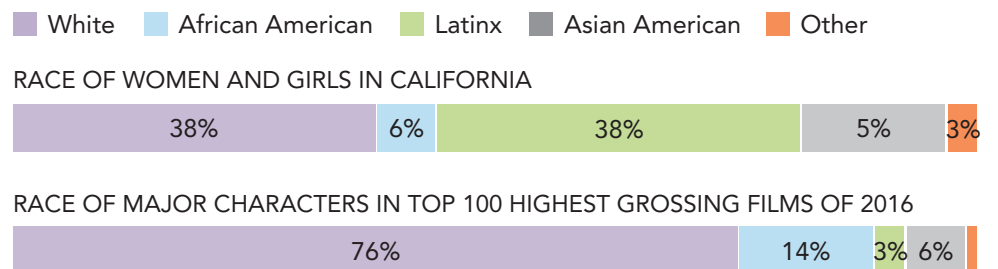
Why It Matters

As 2017 came to a close, Salma Hayek published a penetrating op-ed in the *New York Times* asking, “Why do so many of us, as female artists, have to go to war to tell our stories when we have so much to offer? Why do we have to fight tooth and nail to maintain our dignity?”¹ For decades, researchers have been studying the impact of workforce parity on the content of our media, and now, this watershed moment full of first-hand revelations has delivered an additional level of depth by adding the impact of gender discrimination and sexual harassment to our analysis of on-screen representation. Hayek’s piece, “Harvey Weinstein is My Monster Too,” unravels the thread of this “socially accepted vice” as it moves through her own personal violation onto the big screen. When Weinstein demands that Hayek lose the unsexy unibrow and limp and callously manipulates her into performing a nude, full-frontal lesbian sex scene, the voyeuristic camera also hypersexualizes our collective memory of the powerful feminist icon Frida Khalo.² These abuses degrade not only the women struggling to pursue their passion and livelihood, they enter the world of cinematic imagination where objectification thrives and sexist behavior is normalized.

Normalizing Unconscious Bias

What we see on screen impacts the world around us, and yet, Hollywood continues to present a distorted version of reality. Women constitute 51% of the population in the U.S., but male characters dominate both screen time and speaking time of our top-grossing films. Over the last decade, the ratio of male to female screen time has remained 2.3-to-1, while women make up an average of 30.4% of the speaking characters (this figure peaked at 32.8% in 2009).³ Of the limited roles available, white women fare drastically better than women of color, further adding to the skewed vision of the world on the big screen (Figure 1).⁴

FIGURE 1: 2016 RACE OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CALIFORNIA AND 2016 RACE OF FEMALE CHARACTERS



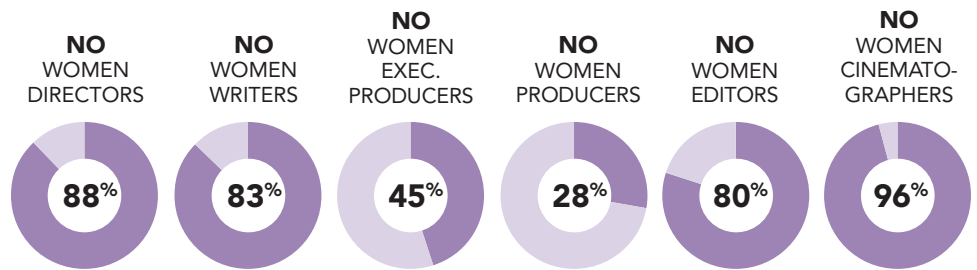
Source: Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University 2018.

When they are present, female characters are sexualized more often than male characters. This hypersexualization onscreen correlates with Hollywood’s sexual harassment epidemic behind the scenes. One-in-four (25.6%) women versus 9.2% of men were shown with some nudity in the top 100 films of 2016.⁵ One in three (34.3%) female characters are shown in sexy attire compared to less than

one in ten (7.6%) male characters.⁶ These blatant imbalances in representation are present across factors including leadership, occupation, life goals, age, marital status and more.

Studies have repeatedly shown that including more women behind the scenes increases the visibility and quality of female characters onscreen.⁷ For example, films with exclusively male directors and/or writers portrayed protagonist characters as females 18% of the time, whereas projects with at least one woman director and/or writer featured 57% female protagonists.⁸ And yet, as Figure 2 highlights, women remain strikingly absent from key roles in Hollywood.⁹ bell hooks reminds us that: “From slavery on, white supremacists have recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination.”¹⁰ Likewise, Hollywood’s white-male-dominated control over images has been instrumental to the maintenance of intersectional gender discrimination.

FIGURE 2: NO WOMEN IN KEY FILMMAKING ROLES IN TOP 250 FILMS OF 2017



30% of films had no or one woman in the above roles

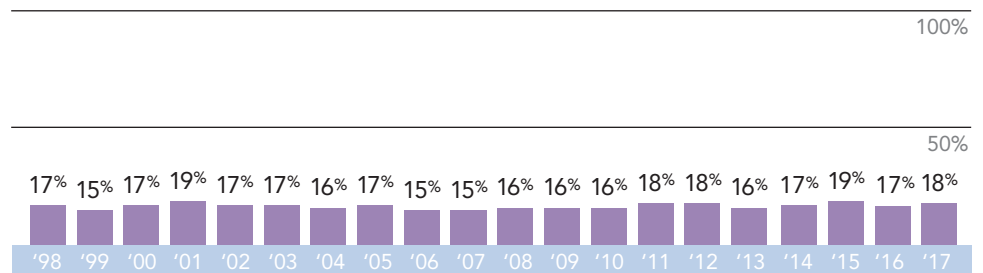
The Status of Women in Film and Television

Two decades of research is now available on gender discrepancies in film and television. In this section, we examine the size and persistence of discrepancies in cast and crew, and in awards.

Women in Film

Women have mostly been missing behind the scenes since the inception of Hollywood. Today, among the 100 top-grossing U.S. films, women hold only 17% of influential positions — directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors and cinematographers. As Figure 3 shows, women have made almost no progress on this front in two decades.¹¹

FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN KEY POSITIONS IN THE TOP 100 GROSSING FILMS BY YEAR



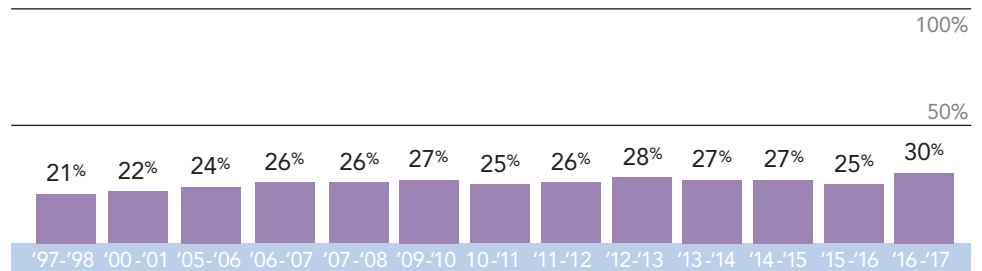
The situation for women is especially bleak when it comes to director positions. In the past decade, only 4.4% of the top-grossing films were directed by women, which means studios hired approximately 24 male directors for every female director.¹² Also, the career paths for male and female directors look different in ways that reflect gender bias. A typical male director will work in that role starting in his 20s and through his 80s, but the typical female director works from her 30s through her 60s.¹³ In other words, female directors get a later start in the industry and have shorter careers than male directors.

The situation for women of color in the director's chair is even bleaker. A study of the past decade finds that only three directors were African American women, three were Asian American women, and one was a Latinx woman.¹⁴ This means that women of color are virtually absent as directors of top-grossing films in entertainment media.

Women in Television

Women are also underrepresented in television, although the figures are not as dire as film. In 2016 women held one in four (26%) key storytelling roles in television (i.e., creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors and directors of photography).¹⁵ As Figure 4 shows, women's progress behind the scenes in television has stalled in the past decade.¹⁶

FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN KEY POSITIONS IN PRIMETIME TV BY YEAR



Women's underrepresentation is especially stark when it comes to showrunners, a position that holds incredible power to shape the creative direction of television shows. Overall, women constituted just 11% of showrunners in the 2016-17 season.¹⁷ The situation for women of color in television is even worse. Only 2% of the showrunners in the 2016-17 season were women of color.¹⁸

The status of women in film and television is bad, and it has not improved much in the five decades that women have been demanding change in the industry. In the following section, we examine gender discrimination and sexual harassment as the leading causes of women's persistent erasure behind the scenes in entertainment media.

Awards

Given women's anemic numbers in film and television, it is not surprising that few women are nominated for or win major industry awards. For the Academy Awards, some categories break out women and men (e.g., best actor/actress and best supporting actor/actress), but women fare poorly in gender-neutral categories. According to a study from the Women's Media Center, 80% of nominees in non-acting categories, such as director and original screenplay, did not include a single female nominee from 2005 to 2016.¹⁹ In 2018, Natalie Portman made headlines for calling out the gender disparity in the best director category at the Golden Globes. In announcing the best director winner, she opened with "Here are the *all-male* nominees for Best Director."²⁰ Only seven women have been nominated for best director by the Golden Globes in 75 years, and only one woman has won (Barbra Streisand for *Yentl* in 1984).²¹

Gender Discrimination

The first barrier to women's progress in entertainment media is gender discrimination, defined as prejudice based on a person's sex or gender. In thinking about why there are so few women in entertainment media, it is useful to think about supply-side or "pipeline" factors that result in a smaller pool of qualified applicants, and demand-side factors such as bias and discrimination that set up a preference for male candidates. The supply-side explanation does not fully explain the lack of women in key positions in entertainment media. Women make up half of film school graduates today, up from one-third of graduates a decade

Obstacles to Women's Advancement in the Industry

ago, but they are not hired at the same rate as male graduates.²² This indicates that demand-side explanations are more potent, namely, gender discrimination.

Gender discrimination violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin.²³ In the first year after the law was implemented, one in three complaints involved gender discrimination.²⁴ Gender discrimination comes in many different forms such as bias in hiring, promotion, compensation, mentoring and other professional opportunities. In recent decades, the entertainment industry has implemented gender and race diversity programs to increase the hiring numbers of women and people of color, but with little effect for women.²⁵

Women in Hollywood have been working for gender-equitable workplace practices for more than half a century. They have filed at least four federal Civil Rights Act complaints over the years, but with little success. The first federal complaint for discrimination in Hollywood was filed in 1969. It prompted several days of hearings in Los Angeles by the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) that found the industry was engaging in race and gender discrimination, but the EEOC did not establish mechanisms to hold Hollywood accountable so the discrimination continued. A second complaint was filed in 1978, and a third in 1984, and the EEOC again found race and gender discrimination. In both cases, no action was taken to ensure Hollywood compliance with fair hiring practices. A fourth complaint was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California in May of 2015 pertaining to gender discrimination against female directors that led to an investigation. The EEOC is in negotiations with six major studios to address systemic sex discrimination, but it remains to be seen whether this latest effort to enforce the Civil Rights Act will be successful.²⁶

Women in Hollywood have also been fighting for equal pay for decades. A handful of high-profile female actors have won pay equity battles in recent years, for example, Ellen Pompeo on *Grey's Anatomy*, Emmy Rossum on *Shameless*, Gillian Anderson on the 2016 reboot of *The X-Files*, Charlize Theron for the *Snow White and the Huntsman* sequel, and Robin Wright on *House of Cards*.²⁷ The wage gap is intersectional in that women of color are paid even less than white women in Hollywood.²⁸ In 2017, actors Jessica Chastain and Octavia Spencer publicized their strategy for increasing pay for women of color. Chastain, a white woman, packaged her salary negotiations together with Spencer's, an African American woman, and this increased Spencer's salary five times over.²⁹

Despite years of equal pay efforts, a massive wage gap persists in Hollywood. In 2017, the highest paid male actor (Mark Wahlberg) made \$40 million more than the highest paid female actor (Emma Stone), and top ten male actors made three times what the top ten female actors made.³⁰ After working for a decade as a co-host of *E! News's Daily Pop* program, Catt Sadler resigned upon discovering she was making only half the salary of her male co-host.³¹ Jennifer Lawrence penned a piece titled "Why Do I Make Less than my Male Co-Stars?" in which she described the systemic bias against equal pay in Hollywood.³² Lawrence laid out sexism as a cause and also how women are less forceful negotiators because they want to be liked and avoid being labeled "spoiled." Gender bias is at play in terms of what women feel comfortable negotiating and what they are accorded by (mostly male) executives.

Societal roles and values assigned to the work of women and men are the engine that drives gender discrimination in the workplace. Decades of academic research finds that women across industries experience subtle gender discrimination in terms of being ignored in group settings and being evaluated less favorably for the same performance.³³ In experiments where resumes are identical except for female and male names at the top, male candidates are seen as far more competent and worthy of a higher starting salary.³⁴ Female applicants were also less likely to be rated as deserving of mentorship and less likely to be hired.³⁵

These biases are the result of deep-seated beliefs that men and their work are simply more valuable than women and their work. Similar biases are found for people of color compared to white people,³⁶ which means that women of color face compounded gender and race bias in the workplace.

Gender discrimination is more accepted in the entertainment industry than in many other industries because of its emphasis on creative freedom. The problem with this focus is that both men and women are biased in their perceptions of who is creative. According to research from Cornell University professor Devon Proudfoot, women and men see men as more creative than women.³⁷ Both women and men assign more value to objects when they are told they are created by men, but this bias is not based in reality. For example, when symphony orchestras switched from auditions in which the selectors saw the gender of the performer to a process in which the performer's identity was hidden, the hiring of female musicians increased 25%.³⁸ Women who work in Hollywood or want to work in Hollywood are seen as less creative, the skillset that the industry values most.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment, which was established as a form of sex discrimination in the 1980s,³⁹ is another major obstacle for women's progress in entertainment media. The EEOC defines sexual harassment as unwanted sexual advances and other verbal or physical harassment that is sexual in nature. Legal standards for what constitutes sexual harassment vary from state to state. The EEOC reports that approximately 42% of women and 15% of men experience sexual harassment in the workplace.

Sexual harassment is nothing new. Enslaved women and "free" domestic workers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were routinely subjected to sexual harassment and violence from their owners/bosses, and women faced the same behavior when they moved en masse into the U.S. workforce in the twentieth century.⁴⁰ Feminist reformers of the 1960s and 1970s successfully passed a series of laws to recognize sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination, and to hold employers accountable for enabling this form of gender bias in the workplace. The primary law governing sexual harassment in the workplace is the 1964 Civil Rights Act that applies to employers with fifteen or more employees.

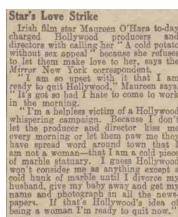
Starting in 1980, the EEOC began to actively enforce the Civil Rights Act clause that unwanted sexual advances are a type of sexual harassment, but sexual harassment was still a relatively unaddressed phenomenon in 1991 when Anita Hill testified before the U.S. Senate during the confirmation process of Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Thomas was confirmed 52-48, and it was later revealed that another woman was ready to testify during the Senate hearings with similar allegations, but she was not allowed to.⁴¹ Hundreds of lawsuits and federal investigations have further defined the nuances of sexual harassment law in the U.S. since the Hill-Thomas hearings.

Sexual harassment has been a fact of life for women in various occupations, but especially so in the entertainment industry. Early female actors endured frequent abuse, some of which has come to light only in recent years, including Shirley Temple, Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe.⁴² Some abuse from this time period was even noted publicly when it occurred. In 1945, Maureen O'Hara went public with allegations of sexual harassment from producers and directors (see Figure 5).⁴³ At least one press outlet at the time defined the sexual harassment O'Hara experienced as "love."

Back in the 1960s, leading lady Tippi Hedren alleged that famed director Alfred Hitchcock sexually assaulted her many times while they were working on the 1963 film *The Birds*.⁴⁴ She revisited these allegations in a 2017 tweet in which she stated that "Hitch said he would ruin my career" if Hedren refused his sexual advances (see Figure 6).

The longstanding casting couch culture in Hollywood was blown wide open in the fall of 2017 when more than 100 women went public with allegations against

Figure 5:
Press Coverage
of Maureen
O'Hara Defying
Sexual Harassers



Im watching all the coverage on Weinstein. This is nothing new, nor is it limited to the entertainment industry. I dealt with sexual harassment all the time, during my modeling and film career. Hitchcock wasn't the first. However, I wasn't going to take it anymore, so I simply walked away and didnt look back. Hitch said he would ruin my career and I told him to do what he had to do. It has taken 50 years, but it is about time that women started standing up for themselves as they appear to be doing in the Weinstein case. Good for them!



Figure 6:
Tippi Hedren
Tweet About
Alfred Hitchcock's
Sexual Violence

well-known producer Harvey Weinstein.⁴⁵ Since the Weinstein allegations broke, dozens of prominent men in Hollywood and media have lost work based on reports of sexual harassment or assault, including actor Kevin Spacey, director James Toback, comedian Louis C.K., producer David Guilloid, producer/director Brett Ratner, actor Tom Sizemore, actor Jeffrey Tambor, and many others.

The tidal wave of sexual violence allegations against men in entertainment, media, politics and other industries culminated in the #MeToo movement. Anti-sexual violence activist Tarana Burke named the #MeToo campaign in 1997, and actor Alyssa Milano popularized this hashtag on social media two decades later. To date, more than 1.7 million people in 85 countries have used the #MeToo hashtag on social media.⁴⁶ But the #MeToo movement did not appear out of thin air in 2017. The groundwork for the movement was laid in 2013 when sexual assault survivors on college campuses put the topic on the national agenda by strategically filing dozens of federal complaints against schools across the country. In 2015, the national discussion enveloped Hollywood when 35 women who allege sexual violence from famed comedian Bill Cosby appeared on the cover of *New York Magazine*.

In 2016, the movement against sexual violence spread to the world of cable news when host Gretchen Carlson successfully fought to have Fox News head Roger Ailes removed for sexual harassment. Within six months, popular Fox News hosts Bill O'Reilly and Eric Bolling would both be removed amidst multiple allegations of sexual misconduct. On Oct. 5, 2017, the national conversation turned a corner when the New York Times reported on the sexual violence of Harvey Weinstein. Within days, a slew of high-profile celebrities came forward to report their experiences, including Angelina Jolie, Lupita Nyong'o, Gwyneth Paltrow and Ashley Judd. The celebrity status of these survivors likely inspired more Americans to believe other women as they came forward.

If sexual harassment has been the norm in every industry since women have been working in them, and if sexual harassment has been rampant in Hollywood since the start, why is it now getting the attention it deserves? Social media, which emerged in the mid-2000s, is one primary reason why allegations of sexual harassment and violence are being taken more seriously today than in the past. The sheer volume of stories about sexual harassment and violence demonstrates the scope of the problem and encourages Americans to believe the victims/survivors.

Another factor in Weinstein being the breaking point (after 130 years of organized activism against sexual harassment/violence) may be the fact that the more high-profile survivors are beautiful, mostly white celebrities.⁴⁷ As actor and rape survivor Gabrielle Union told a reporter, "I think the floodgates have opened for white women. I don't think it's a coincidence whose pain has been taken seriously. Whose pain we have showed historically and continued to show. Whose pain is tolerable and whose pain is intolerable. And whose pain needs to be addressed now."⁴⁸ Indeed, celebrities of color like Lupita Nyong'o and Aurora Perrinea who came forward to report sexual misconduct did not receive the same reaction to their experiences.⁴⁹ The #MeToo movement in Hollywood is an unmitigated success in terms of raising awareness about the issues and demanding accountability from the industry, but at the same time, it reinforces the idea that the voices of certain survivors are simply not as important or worthy of concern.

In response to the #MeToo Hollywood moment, Kathleen Kennedy, head of Lucasfilm, teamed up with Maria Eitel, chair of the Nike Foundation, attorney Nina Shaw and venture capitalist Freeda Kapor Klein to form the Commission on Sexual Harassment and Advancing Equality in the Workplace.⁵⁰ The purpose of this commission is to create and implement a comprehensive strategy to get Hollywood to create fairer, safer spaces, and it is chaired by anti-sexual harassment pioneer Anita Hill. Various other efforts have also been launched by existing non-profit organizations. For example, Women in Film launched a help-

line to offer legal support and other guidance to people experiencing sexual harassment and violence in Hollywood⁵¹ and 20th Century Fox tech executive Claire Schmidt left the industry to develop an online tool for reporting sexual harassment and gender bias in the entertainment industry.⁵² Shonda Rhimes, Reese Witherspoon, and hundreds of other prominent women in the entertainment industry launched the #TimesUp campaign that includes a legal defense fund, legislative initiatives, and a push for gender parity in hiring practices.⁵³ Only time will tell if the watershed #MeToo movement will bring about the change in the industry that advocates have been advocating for for half a century.

Looking Forward

Throughout 2017, a study of 3,011 individuals working in key positions on the 250 top-domestic grossing films reveals that women filled 18% of these jobs, while men filled 82%.⁵⁴ Given over five decades of research and activism with the needle not moving, the question remains: When will the representation and status of women in Hollywood finally change — and how do we get there?

Parity in the Workforce

In the face of daily sexual harassment scandals, studios and industry agencies such as Creative Artists Agency, International Creative Management, etc., have recently taken the “50-50 by 2020” pledge; yet what will hold them accountable for reaching this goal? Industry improvement in gender equity and inclusion is untenable if the only thing offered in response is patterned lip service.

In contrast, female-led organizations such as the Women’s Media Action Coalition (WeMAC) and Take The Lead’s initiative, “50 Women Can Change the World in Media and Entertainment,” are executing multi-pronged approaches to achieving intersectional gender parity in the workforce. WeMAC has seven task forces committed to lobbying, litigating, continued research, funding projects and accessing tax credits. Take The Lead is aiming for gender parity in film and television by 2025. They are conducting a leadership and movement-building program to create a network of women with tools for navigating the industry that will serve as a model for closing the gender leadership gap. There are also executives who are dedicating themselves to actively closing the gender gap by only hiring female filmmakers on their projects. For example, Ava DuVernay hired only female directors for the first two seasons of *Queen Sugar*, a successful television series she created for the Oprah Winfrey Network.⁵⁵

Shifting Representation

In order to shift the status of women in Hollywood there must also be strategies for altering the representation and presence of women on screen. For example, the production studio Wise Entertainment combines extensive research on power dynamics and social hierarchies with rich storytelling, ensuring that the content they develop accurately represents the communities and social issues portrayed. The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary’s University uses its groundbreaking research to lobby major movie studios for greater gender inclusion in their content. The Institute’s namesake, Geena Davis, encourages media makers to be specific at the script level writing parity into background scenes and suggests changing male characters to females to help erase inherent gender bias. The Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative at USC Annenberg advocates for the #JustAddFive campaign, contending that if screenwriters simply added five female speaking characters to top films we could reach onscreen gender parity in four years.⁵⁶

Next Generation

Film schools can also have an active role in closing both the employment and representation disparities in Hollywood as they train the next generation of media makers. Yet unlike other professionalized studies, such as law school or medical school-related majors, there are no competitive standards for moving students into Hollywood, and thus the industry remains dominated by white men. There is also no curriculum standard that mandates the inclusion of the profound research surrounding onscreen representation. USC Annenberg’s

Inclusion Initiative and Mount Saint Mary's Film and Social Justice program are examples of higher education programs and initiatives giving students the tools to practically apply this data to the creation of media content. Without these changes, film schools remain complicit in the proliferation of workplace discrimination and stereotypical representation, and fail to prepare women and men for responsibly creating equitable media content.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti announced the City's partnership with industry leaders through the Evolve Entertainment Fund (EEF) that seeks to close the employment gaps maintained by these film school inadequacies and industry bias. The fund will offer paid internships and more to people normally overlooked in hiring: women, people of color, and low-income Angelenos.⁵⁷

Audience

Audience members also have power. Viewers can use their consumer dollars to support particular films on opening weekends and can vote with their remote by purposefully watching television shows or streaming content that advance equality in Hollywood and then leaving positive reviews. Sites such as grademymovie.com and Common Sense Media provide ratings for media content so consumers can use their buying power to reward films and television programs that are more inclusive. For example, grademymovie.com awards grades for race and gender to the top films on opening weekend so moviegoers can choose films with gender and race equitable casts and crews.

Conclusion

After a half-century of research and activism, Hollywood is prime for reform. The fight for equality requires that we actively close the gender employment gap and eliminate the culture of sexual harassment. Gender discrimination impacts not only the women attempting to work in the industry but also every audience member who consumes the resultant biased representation of women on screen. Current progress shows that the combination of academics, artists and activists working in alignment offers a promising solution for achieving equality on and off screen.

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The Center for the Advancement of Women at Mount Saint Mary's University is a hub for gender equity research, advocacy and leadership development. Its vision is to find solutions to persistent gender inequities and work with partners to eradicate those inequities in our lifetime. That goal includes eliminating obstacles that women face in the workplace, in their communities, in the media and beyond to make a positive difference in the lives of women and girls in California and our nation. The Center also creates public programming, research guides and training opportunities to engage more partners in its work. **MSMU.EDU/CAW**



Mount Saint Mary's is the only women's university in Los Angeles and one of the most diverse in the nation. The University is known nationally for its research on gender equality, its innovative health and science programs, and its commitment to community service. As a leading liberal arts institution, the University provides year round, flexible and online programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. Weekend, evening and graduate programs are offered to both women and men. Mount alums are engaged, active global citizens who use their knowledge and skills to better themselves, their communities and the world. **MSMU.EDU**

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