

Year of the Pussy

Politics



WHAT TO DO WITH THE P-WORD AFTER TRUMP'S ELECTION

Now that it has been plastered in headlines and debated on CNN, should women reclaim the vulgar term? Female humor writers prognosticate – and curse ‘the brief and terrible reign of “vajayjay”’ **By Merrill Markoe**

On Oct. 7, 2016, I sat slack-jawed, staring at the front page of *The New York Times*. That’s how powerful the paper’s international coverage of the crisis in ... no, no. Just kidding. That was the day the headlines were dominated by those infamous audio tapes featuring then-GOP candidate Donald Trump as he detailed his unusually aggressive approach to flirtation. It also was the first time, to my knowledge, that the front page of the nation’s most venerable news source printed two of George Carlin’s Seven

Dirty Words without asterisks: f— and tits! And those were just bread crumbs leading to everyone’s favorite piece of witch’s



Markoe

gingerbread house: paragraph five, containing the now immortal quote: “Grab ‘em by the pussy.”

As our nation sets out in search of a way to integrate the frequently coarse verbal tendencies of Mr. Trump into the traditionally polished category of “presidential” speech, it seems like a good time to confront another thorny question: Whither “pussy”?

Though it’s no longer trending, by now every journalist and commenter over the age of 6 has used the word publicly. So has it joined the pantheon of formerly taboo terms — like dick and ballsack — that have been neutered by pop culture references and comedy punchlines? Or has it been lifted, by virtue of being our president-elect’s preferred term

for vagina, to a kind of nouveau elegance? Might women now want to reclaim the word from its previously smutty context for their own exclusionary use, the way some black Americans have reclaimed the N-word and LGBTQs have reclaimed queer? I decided to check in with a group of my fellow feminist humor writers to see where we, as a touchy and generally pissed-off group, are politically with pussy these days.

The very definition makes it a difficult word to embrace. Merriam-Webster gives its first meaning as “cat” and its second as “(vulgar) vulva”; the remaining two meanings are “full of pus” and “a wimp, a weak man.”

Regarding the definition in focus here, “I’d always assumed

the etymology was that a man mistook a cat for a vagina and raped it,” says raconteur Sarah Thyre, co-host of the *Crybabies* podcast. Writer Caissie St. Onge believes pussy’s anatomical meaning more likely “came about as a comparison between one warm, furry (independent, untrustworthy) thing and another.”

Julianne Smolinski, a writer and philanthropist who is on record as hating “the brief and terrible reign of ‘vajayjay’ as much as the next person,” says she doesn’t like using the word. “And I don’t really know any women who do, even from a ‘reclaim it’ sense. Even when women use it in porn, they sound tentative and remorseful. It’s just straight-up bad-sounding,

Illustration by **Alessandra De Cristofaro**

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both reminiscent of ‘pus’ and uncomfortably juvenile. It sort of lets men communicate that they like heterosexual sex but don’t necessarily like women.”

Stand-up comedian Eliza Skinner cautiously embraces the word, at least in her act. “I guess it feels like a scary, disruptive term, and if dudes are going to use it, I am definitely going to use it when I have a mic,” she says. “I don’t want to make my female audience uncomfortable, but I totally want to make my male audience uncomfortable. It seems like a novel experience for them.” She keeps it to the stage, however: “I only use it theoretically, not personally, and not casually. I’m never going to tell my pals I’m going to the doctor to get my pussy checked.”

Kera Bolonik, executive editor of *Dame* magazine, agrees that “it really does depend on context. [The word] almost always takes on a very different tone when a man is using it in public and can feel like a betrayal and worse.” Comedian/producer Sue Kolinsky (*Top Chef*, *Last Comic Standing*) sums it up tidily. “Not a fan,” she says. “I’m more of a hoo-ha kind of a girl.”

Of course, the results of my extremely unofficial poll are not necessarily representative of the population at large. Though it remains to be seen whether the president-elect’s favorite terminology now will make its way into the mainstream, it’s probably safe to predict that its usage as an insult will endure — particularly in light of Mr. Trump’s continuing complaints about his portrayal on *Saturday Night Live*, which offer Merriam-Webster the opportunity to print a picture of the 45th president of the United States next to the fourth dictionary definition of the word “pussy” as a legendary example.

St. Onge has another word for Trump. “I think he’s a taint,” she says. “Tender. Peculiarly haired. Not good for much.” **VIVA**



Supporters of Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris (from left): Kroll, Lysa Heslov, Nicole Avant, Handler, Andrea Nevins and Ellen Goldsmith-Vein on Nov. 28 at Line 204 in L.A. Says Kroll of the current political landscape: “Let’s face it — there aren’t that many inspiring leaders. There are a lot of fantastically smart people, but not all are involved in politics. Kamala has always struck me as somebody formidable with a very clear view and a command of leadership.”

ONSET PRODUING BY ASHLEY HOUNSON FOR NUDE & NOIR COSMETICS AT CELESTINE AGENCY SARA DENMAN FOR KAT VON D EUNING PROOF AT CELESTINE AGENCY

DEM LADIES DON'T GIVE UP

Yeah, Hillary lost. Time to move on, as Warner Bros. marketing chief Sue Kroll, Chelsea Handler and the town’s other political influencers talk about glass ceilings, drumming up support and the party’s next star: ‘I knew Obama was going to be our next president, and I feel that way about Kamala Harris’ By Ramona Saviss

Continue for their political profiles

Photographed by Koury Angelo

What are the most important political issues for the immediate future? Hear Handler’s and others’ answers at [THR.COM/VIDEO](https://www.thr.com/video)



Left: In 2009, Avant (center) was sworn in to her ambassadorship by then-Secretary of State Clinton (right). Above: At a 2015 event in L.A., Clinton (left) with Goldsmith-Vein, who says: "We're so fortunate that we can effect change by accessing people with a larger audience, like J.J. Abrams or Katy Perry."

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I'll Hunt Trump Into the White House

Attorney Gloria Allred represents four out of about a dozen women who have charged the president-elect with sexual misconduct and vows to continue: 'It's going to be a far-reaching deposition'
As told to Ashley Cullins

In the recent campaign for president, Donald Trump was heard on the *Access Hollywood* tapes bragging about grabbing women and asserting he could do this because he was a star. In a debate, he denied that he had ever acted on those words. A number of women came forward, however, saying that he had engaged in inappropriate conduct with them.

I represent four of them: Summer Zervos, a former contestant on *The Apprentice*; Karena Virginia; Jessica Drake; and Temple Taggart, a former Miss Utah in the Miss Universe pageant, which was owned by Trump. (A number of other women also have contacted me but decided to maintain their privacy.)

Mr. Trump's response to the accusers' claims was to call all of these women "liars." He threatened to sue them after the election. That created a heavy backlash from his supporters against the accusers. Often when women make allegations



At an L.A. news conference on Nov. 11, Allred (left) appeared with client Zervos, a former *Apprentice* contestant who has accused Trump of being sexually aggressive during a job interview following the show.

Meet the industry women who make up today's power Democrat backers — all of them Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris supporters and many first inspired into action by Barack Obama speaking at the Democratic National Convention in 2004. "He made me see that all politics weren't corrupt and that there are politicians who care about public service," says Netflix's Chelsea Handler. With the recent selection of Steven Mnuchin as President-elect Donald Trump's Treasury secretary, the line connecting Hollywood to Washington, D.C., is stronger than ever. "This particular year, campaigning for Kamala and Hillary, felt like a different kind of year, so I was more involved than in the past," says Warner Bros.' Sue Kroll, who spearheaded and attended several campaign events for Harris in 2016. These industry insiders came together for Sen.-elect Harris, whom many met when she was San Francisco district attorney from 2004 to 2011. "Kamala is going to be a senator who engages with everyone, [including] Republicans," says U.S. ambassador Nicole Avant.

Like Clinton, who suffered a bitter presidential defeat, Gotham Group's Ellen Goldsmith-Vein knows "the meaning of a glass ceiling. I feel that every day." The gender barrier, adds Kroll, is "relevant — look at our election and politics. There are not a lot of women." The remedy? "We have to persevere, [put] women in key jobs and make contributions to whatever will make a difference."

NICOLE AVANT U.S. ambassador "When I was ambassador, I had a lot of men who were very uncomfortable with me," says Avant, 48, who was posted to the Bahamas by Obama. She asked one, "Is it because I'm female? Black? Young?" He said, 'All of the above, ma'am.' Avant, who is married to Netflix's Ted Sarandos, didn't become professionally political until Obama became president, but this past year, she co-hosted a number of events for Clinton and Harris.

ELLEN GOLDSMITH-VEIN Gotham Group CEO A key figure among Hollywood Dems who has been active since John Kerry's 2004 presidential run, Goldsmith-Vein, 52, and her husband, MarketShare CEO Jon Vein, "supported Barack long before that was popular," she says. The Veins hosted a 2007 Obama fundraiser at their

Hancock Park home: "We couldn't get people to show. You start off at \$2,700, then you're asking people for \$1,000, then \$500, \$200. Then you're calling in favors." Jamie Foxx ultimately emceed and neighbor Shonda Rhimes introduced Obama. Goldsmith-Vein served on Clinton's National Finance Committee with Jon, who was a delegate.

CHELSEA HANDLER host of *Chelsea*

"I got charged up when I heard Obama speak in 2004 and thought, like many other people that day, 'This man is going to be president,'" says Handler, 41. The comedian, who co-hosted an Oct. 25 fundraiser for Harris and whose Netflix show tackles racism, among other topics, adds that celebrity involvement in politics can be dubious — "we'd probably be better off if we didn't" — but notes, "I've decided to use my show for good, and I have always been a loudmouth anyway."

LYSA HESLOV Children Mending Hearts founder "I was raised a Republican," says producer Heslov, 51, "but I vote for people whose policies I relate to." Heslov, who is married to George Clooney's business partner Grant Heslov, voted for Clinton, who she felt "should have hosted a lower-cost event for millennials that wasn't \$100 million a person." She led a handful of Harris fundraisers this year and says about hearing Obama speak in 2004: "I [knew] that was going to be our next president, and I feel that way about Kamala Harris."

SUE KROLL President of worldwide marketing and distribution for Warner Bros. "I have kept my career and politics very separate, but this year I lent my time to Kamala," says Kroll, 55, who hosted lunches, one with director McG. "I have resources now and access to people that I've never had before. I can make a difference; I know that I can."

ANDREA NEVINS Documentary filmmaker During the 2016 election cycle, Nevins, who is 54 and married to Showtime president David Nevins, headed up a fundraiser with Chelsea Clinton at the Nevins' home as well as Harris' first campaign event. Also an Eric Garcetti supporter, she first began supporting Clinton with her 1994 A&E doc *Hillary Rodham Clinton*. Nevins' mantra: "If you have a voice of any kind, I think you need to use it."

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against rich, famous and powerful men, some people refuse to believe them. In this case, many supporters of Mr. Trump had a vested interest in discrediting the accusers. Some of the accusers were attacked by fake news stories containing outright lies and fake Twitter accounts. The lie always gets much more attention than the response to the lie. Truth was really the biggest casualty in this presidential campaign.

Trump is no longer just a star. He's president-elect. It is important he begin his term with a clean slate in reference to the accusers. I challenged him to retract his statement that these women are "liars," and I challenged him to state that he would not sue the accusers that he threatened to sue. That would undo some of the damage that he has inflicted on them. Mr. Trump now has the opportunity to act presidential. Will he seize that opportunity? To date, he has not; he has not yet accepted my challenge.

If he does act on his threat and sue, his accusers have the right to sue him for defamation: He has called them "liars"; truth is a defense. In a lawsuit, Mr. Trump would have to sit for a deposition while I ask him many questions he may not wish to answer but will be required to answer. It's going to be a far-reaching deposition. If that is how he wants to spend his time as the president of the United States, that is up to him. The Republican Congress could decide that it will pass a statute that would not allow civil cases to proceed against Mr. Trump while he's in office, but that would cause its own controversy.

What will we do if he does not retract? In the third debate, Chris Wallace asked Mr. Trump if he would concede if he lost the election. His response: "I will tell you at the time. I'll keep you in suspense, OK?" Even if Mr. Trump does not retract, even if he does not sue any of the accusers, it is possible someone will sue him first. We will just have to wait and see. "I will tell you at the time, Mr. Trump. I'll keep you in suspense, OK?" **THR**



Black, Female, and Donald Trump Is My Friend

Former *Apprentice* star Omarosa Manigault shares a personal side of the president-elect 'the world has not seen' as she spearheads his directive to 'make his administration the most diverse in history'

As told to Seth Abramovitch

I am black, female, and Donald Trump is my friend. I've known him since 2003, when we taped the first season of NBC's *The Apprentice*. I've had four seasons of TV with him: the original show, *Celebrity Apprentice*, and I'm the only apprentice to have had a spinoff, *The Ultimate Merger*. I've worked with him for a lot of that time, and I never observed any of the behaviors attributed to him. In my experiences with him, he has only been professional. I am aware of the perceptions. But he is open-minded: He does not judge people on their gender or race. He judges them on their ability to do the job.

We can look at his current company, The Trump Organization: He has more women executives than his competition — and they are also the highest-paid executives in his company. Look at his daughter Ivanka, who is about to take over the company. As early as the '80s, he has had women in roles as construction managers. That was unprecedented. Look to his past to see what he will do for women in this country. I believe he will empower women and have them shatter the glass ceiling.

As far as race, I can only talk of my own experiences as an African-American working with Donald, Ivanka, Eric, Donald Jr. and Melania on *The Apprentice* franchise. I've always felt incredibly appreciated and celebrated by the organization. You have to look at my track record with the Trumps. People show you who they are by what they do, and in my case, he's only invested in and empowered me. He's been very public about how he feels, that I contributed to *The Apprentice* franchise and how I was his favorite contestant — contrary to what people say and believe about him when it comes to African-American women. Truly, I am living the American dream because of Donald Trump. Look at my career, the wealth

and exposure that I've had: It's very difficult to make the argument that Donald Trump doesn't like black people and black women.

One other note that is often lost: He allowed me to take my show, *The Ultimate Merger*, to a black entrepreneur, Cathy Hughes, on a black network, TV One. It was a dating show — with an African-American cast. That point often is lost when people are trying to paint him with an ugly brush. One of the concepts we came up with was that there had never been a black Bachelorette or Bachelor on that ABC franchise. So we created our own version.

I'm on the presidential transition team in what is called national engagement. He has given me a personal directive that with the 4,000 jobs we need to fill, he wants his administration to be the most diverse in history. And LGBT is absolutely part of diversity. He wants it to look like America. There's only one responsibility: diversity for the transition. It's an extension of the job I had before when I was his campaign's director for African-American outreach. He spoke very openly at the convention about his desire that there be equality for LGBT people, for all people. These are things that have come out of his own mouth.

As for our friendship, I can give you an example of the time when my brother was murdered about five years ago. I was destroyed. Donald was very concerned and one of the first people to contact me. Then my fiancé, Michael Clarke Duncan from *The Green Mile*, died of a heart attack. Donald gave me great support at that time. He told me how he knew what a great guy Michael was and how happy I had been with him at that time and how huge a loss it was for me. I can tell you I experienced a kindness and compassion the world has not seen — the world does not know that side of Donald Trump.

WHAT HOLLYWOOD CAN LEARN FROM *HAMILTON*'S ADDRESS TO MIKE PENCE

The Eclipsed playwright and Walking Dead star calls the cast's moment 'a war cry,' adding, 'We must make use of every platform we possess'

By Danai Gurira

The theater never has been solely a place to be entertained. It also can be dangerous. As a playwright, I only know I am on the right track when I become frightened by what is unfolding on the page.



Gurira

John Kani, an actor and writer who worked in apartheid-era South Africa, said he expected that by the time he was done with a performance, the police would be outside. And they were. He was arrested. Arthur Miller and Clifford Odets used theater as a form of resistance during McCarthyism. Theater is often a place where societal discomforts are confronted, where disenfranchised voices are heard.

The cast, creators and producers of the Broadway musical *Hamilton* accomplished exactly that when they confronted Vice President-elect Mike Pence following a performance he attended Nov. 18. Brandon Victor Dixon, who plays Vice President Aaron Burr in the play, thanked Pence for attending, then read a statement co-crafted by *Hamilton* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda: "We, sir, we are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents, or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir. But we truly hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us. All of us."

Hamilton's greatness is that it tells the story of the birth of our nation through the voices of 21st century America. To watch the play is to witness that all of

us have a rightful claim to the history of this great land. It is to recognize an inclusive and diverse nation. So for the cast to address the vice president-elect about inclusion and respect, and to share their fears and concerns in a theater, could not have been more appropriate. They did not harass him; rather, they appealed to him as a fellow American, to his humanity, to his intellect and to his heart. We are now who you represent, they said. Please address our concerns. That is as American, democratic and representative as it gets. And to his credit, Vice President-elect Pence did not object to the address. Why should anyone else?

The cast of *Hamilton* addressed Pence directly for all those who may never have the opportunity. I am deeply appreciative because what they did should rouse all of us in the creative community to action. We must not choose complacency. As storytellers, we must focus on inclusion, diversity and equality like never before, and we must ask ourselves, "How will we fight for our values?"

I will tell stories from the core — stories that scare me, that



1 From left: actresses Zainab Jah, Saycon Sengbloh, Pascale Armand and Lupita Nyong'o in *Eclipsed*.
2 Nyong'o with Bono, who started the tradition of having the audience repeat back the names of two abducted Nigerian schoolgirls that the cast calls out after each show.

might come with consequences. I recognize this moment for what it is: one for which our children will hold us accountable. Did we find new ways to fight for inclusion and justice, or did we bury our heads in the sand and wait for the storm to pass?

The company of *Hamilton* seized a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and in that moment, they expressed the voices and concerns of many. It was a war-cry.

We must make use of every platform we possess to truly become the change we still believe in. The theater is a living, breathing exchange between artist and audience. When you walk in, you are in the hands of those who have labored to craft the performance.

My play *Eclipsed* focused on four young women caught up in the Liberian civil war. At the end of each performance, we stated the names of two Chibok schoolgirls abducted in Northern Nigeria who were still being held captive. We then asked the audience to repeat those names — a tradition started by our first special guest, Bono. We continued it every performance thereafter. I found it to be one of the most powerful things I ever had experienced. It made our theater all about those girls, and laid the responsibility for their survival with those who had just uttered their names: the audience. **THR**



Dixon, who plays Burr, read a statement to Pence. The VP-elect was in the audience Nov. 18.

Like a Boss

Work



WHAT *GHOSTBUSTERS*' (MALE) DIRECTOR LEARNED ABOUT BEING A WOMAN THIS YEAR

When Paul Feig announced his reboot of the iconic '80s movie with an all-female cast, he unlocked something scarier than a supernatural horde — angry men on the internet: 'The film was never meant to be political, but it became just that'

As told to Tatiana Siegel

What did I learn about being a woman in 2016? While I would never dare pretend to know exactly what women go through on a daily basis, as an advocate for women onscreen and in the industry, I definitely learned a lot more than I expected. Mainly, "Wow, the will of women is much stronger than even I thought." Over the past few years, I've loved making movies with female leads. The fact that people came to see these films, often multiple times, showed

me just how much we still need good, three-dimensional roles for women — not to mention female leads in franchises. And so I thought a *Ghostbusters* with female leads would be embraced and celebrated, especially given we already had two male *Ghostbusters* films. I love funny women and thought it would be an interesting take on the long-dormant franchise. And I was thrilled that the initial response to the announcement was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. The



McCarthy snapped this photo of Feig on the set of *Ghostbusters* outside Boston.

day I put out the first tweet two years ago saying I was rebooting *Ghostbusters* with hilarious women, people were ecstatic. They couldn't wait. Everybody was trying to figure out whom I would cast in the roles.

But then the second wave of reactions came in the next day — after the news hit the more guy-centric fan sites — and it was one of pure outrage and ugliness. Simply put, it was like a punch in the gut. I never expected so much blatant hostility.

Look, many people said they were upset we were touching a classic, and I totally understood and respected that. Rebooting a beloved film is always risky. But the truth is, there were a lot of men critical of the mere fact it would have *women* in the leads.

The original starred four funny men — Dan Aykroyd, Ernie Hudson, Bill Murray and Harold Ramis — and it was great. But at the end of the day, what gave the film its power was it was a movie about four funny, smart people who fought the paranormal using technology. That's just a great idea. It's not a *male* idea. My goal in doing this new *Ghostbusters* was to assemble the funniest people working today, just as original director Ivan Reitman had done. And I did, recruiting the hilarious and talented team of Leslie Jones, Melissa McCarthy, Kate McKinnon and Kristen Wiig.

But what excited me so much was that the overwhelmingly male disapproval that the press then began reporting endlessly on became something that many women rallied against. Every day, as the negativity poured into my feed, so did a much larger outpouring of support and excitement from women around the globe. And honestly, it was not just women. The outreach from both women and men was overwhelming and constant and far outnumbered the trolls and haters. As I would share photos

Illustration by **Bill Brown**

and news from the set, enthusiastic responses flowed in not only from people in the U.S. but also women and men everywhere from Asia to the U.K.

Sadly, the media kept reporting only on the negativity and insisted on referring to us solely as the “all-female *Ghostbusters*.” I mean, it’s 2016. Are we really that shocked that four women can star in a movie? Did it have to drive all our coverage? It points out that gender can still divide folks not just in politics but in entertainment — and boy, do we need to fix that. This film never was meant to be political. But, ridiculously, it became just that.

However, in the aftermath, the positivity has only grown. I am daily inundated by tweets and correspondence from women and girls (as well as men and boys) who have been inspired by our

Ghostbusters, who made the costumes for Halloween and for all the Comic-Cons worldwide and who have told me, “If I’d had this movie when I was younger, I would have been an engineer or a scientist now.”

That’s when you know, OK, we’re moving forward, and there are people who needed this. And we reached them and we succeeded.

Those of us in entertainment can’t let ourselves be stopped by disapproval, false outrage and resistance from a vocal micro-minority. My team and I created an inspiring group of heroes for women, and that’s a big deal. Our *Ghostbusters* are now owned by the millions of people around the world who have claimed them as their own.

And that is a victory that no troll can take away. [VIVA](#)

Internet Trolls? This Is How I’ve Learned to Deal With Them Now

By Paul Feig



Feig (left) with Bill Murray, who had a small role in the new *Ghostbusters*.

Just don’t engage. Period. Think of what Michelle Obama said: “When they go low, we go high.” Folks who spend their time spreading toxic negativity do not deserve an audience. They are not important, nor do they represent the majority of the people they claim to represent. You must put them in perspective. As the hardcore *Ghostbusters* fans — the Ghostheads, as they wonderfully call themselves — told me over and over during the past two years, “They don’t represent us — they just scream the loudest.” So just tune them out. Do not feed the trolls!

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WANT A FEMALE PRESIDENT? WRITE ONE

One of TV's few female Commanders in Chief argues that showcasing and including more big roles for women will breed a new reality **By Geena Davis**

I always say, "If they can see it, they can be it." Here's my favorite illustration of that concept: A few years ago, I had the pleasure of meeting Vigdis Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland. She told me that while in office, she would get letters from young boys asking, "Madam President, do you think a boy will ever become president?" Interesting, huh?

Turns out girls in the U.S. will have to keep wondering for a while.

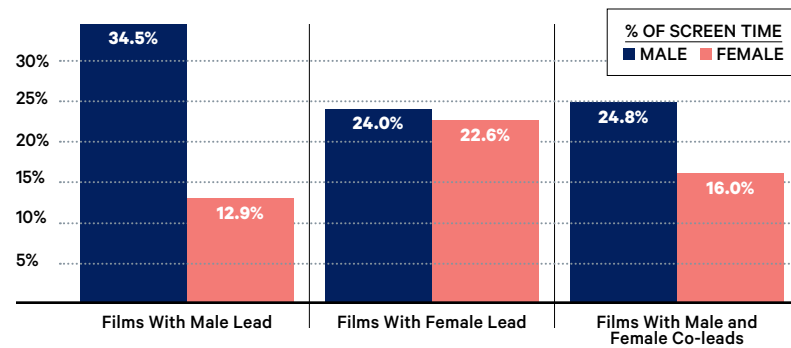
The outcome of the recent presidential election has left many of us shocked and scared. How can we explain the depth of misogyny and bigotry in our culture to our kids? Most

importantly, what can we do to counteract it? For 10 years, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media has commissioned in-depth analyses of family-rated films and children's TV. For all that time, I've been meeting with studios, networks, guilds and production companies to share the results and encourage a dramatic improvement in the number and quality of female characters.

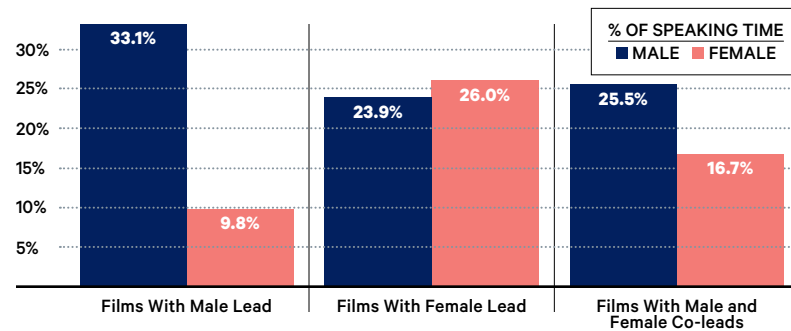
The research shows that female characters in kids' media are often underdeveloped, sidelined or hypersexualized; often plot devices, objects or eye candy. Or they are simply not there at all. Encouragingly, we have yet to leave a meeting without at least one person saying,

YUP, MEN SPEAK AND ARE SEEN WAY MORE THAN WOMEN

Men appear onscreen more often — even when women play the lead roles



Only when women are the leads do they speak more than men



*Based on a Geena Davis Institute study of the 100 top-grossing non-animated films in 2015.



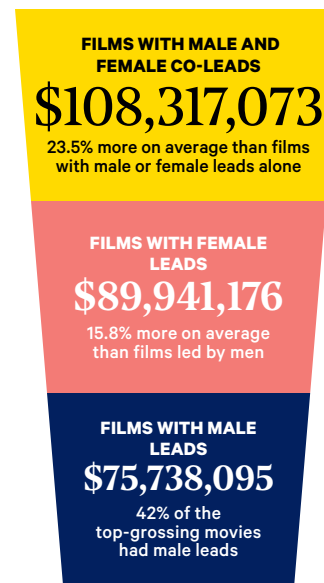
"You just changed my project."

So yes, we have seen some improvements, but we are not anywhere near a tipping point. It's urgent that we no longer create stories that teach children to view women and girls as second-class citizens — not when we've seen the level of sexism in our culture so egregiously put on display.

Movies and TV are artistic expressions, meant to entertain; I am not talking about adding a message. I'm asking you to take out the message in so much of children's media, even for the youngest kids: that women and girls are less important than men and boys because they do less

WOMEN BRING HOME THE BOX OFFICE BACON

Female protagonists drove ticket sales in 2015, but screen time has yet to catch up



DAVIS: KENT EAMES/PHOTOFEST

← Davis won a Golden Globe for her performance as the first female president in the 2005-06 ABC drama *Commander in Chief*.

and there are far less of them. It's creating unconscious gender bias from the beginning that's nearly impossible to reverse because we don't even know we have it.

My message always has been that gender inequality in entertainment can be fixed overnight. It doesn't have to be done in stages or phases. The next movie or TV show you make can be gender-balanced with diverse females as leads, supporting characters and extras. We can easily create worlds where women are half of the characters and do half of the interesting things.

We Hollywood types are often generalized as being very progressive, but we are profoundly not so when it comes to female characters. Consider this: In the real world, we're not seeing nearly enough women role models in top professions — not in C-suites, not as law partners, not in Silicon Valley, on boards, or as, um, presidents. But however abysmally few women are leaders in the world, there are far fewer onscreen — *where we get to make it up*.

Thanks to a generous grant from Google, my institute has a new tool to use in our research, developed by the USC Viterbi School of Engineering, called GD-IQ. We learned that when female characters are present, they are onscreen for less time and speak less than their male counterparts — even as films with female leads made nearly 16 percent more at the box office in 2015 than those led by men.

Let's not create one more movie or TV show that trains kids to see girls as "less than." Is your current project balanced? Do the female characters have agency? If it's not too late, do a gender pass — add female characters or simply cast women in roles written for men. It's easy, and it works. No more missed opportunities to show that boys and girls share the sandbox equally.

We can create the future now. If they see it, they can be it. We don't just need the first female president, we need it to be just as likely that our president will be a woman as a man. **WILL**

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Work



A WEEK WITHOUT 'SORRY'

After Hillary Clinton caught flak for saying 'I'm sorry' in her concession, Jimmy Kimmel Live!'s co-head writer kept a diary tracking every apology of her own **By Molly McNearney**

On the theory — proven in a *Psychological Science* study — that women apologize more than necessary (and way more than men do), *THR* asked Molly McNearney to attempt to go a week without saying sorry. Her diary shows the results.

MONDAY

I APOLOGIZE TO MY DAUGHTER

I have a 2-year-old daughter, Jane, and a full-time job as co-head writer and producer at *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* I try to spend parts of my morning playing with her while juggling work emails and assignments. Today, we were making ice cream cones out of Play-Doh. I was ignoring the temptation to check email on the iPhone in my back pocket. Ten minutes and two sloppy, purple



McNearney

Play-Doh cones later, I said, "OK, Jane. I love you. Have a great day. I'm going to go to work now" — I always try to say this

part cheerfully like I'm going somewhere magical. Halfway through the sentence, she started to whine. She doesn't seem to be celebrating my career as I'd hoped: "No. Mama. Stay one more minute." I put a pink Play-Doh cherry on top of those cones and then walked to the door: "I'll be home soon." She whimpered, followed me, hugged my legs and cried, "No, no, no, I don't want you to go to work." I sat down. "I'm sorry. Don't be sad. I'll be home to give you a bath." I pried her little hands off my legs and left. First sorry thrown before coffee.

THE CREW GUY Coming out of rehearsal, a crew guy was walking while texting and walked into me. I said, "Oops! Sorry!" I don't know why I said I was sorry. I wasn't sorry. Beyonce started to play in my head: "I ain't sorry." But it was a nice thing to say. It was a hell of a lot better than being rude or making him feel bad. Next time, if I remember, I'll go with, "Boo!"

Illustration by **Denis Carrier**

JIMMY I saw a breaking-news story and sent it to Jimmy to see if he wanted it included in the monologue that night. He replied, "It's already on today's outline." I responded: "Sorry. Please teach me how to read." I always believe in apologizing when you screw up at work. Own your mistakes. Also, some "breaking news" already has been broken.

TUESDAY

MY CO-HEAD WRITER I woke up, made a smoothie and then violently vomited that smoothie into my bathroom sink. This has become routine over the past few months. Morning sickness. I'm in my second trimester. I spent a good 20 minutes lying on the bathroom floor, waiting for the hangover without the alcohol to pass. I texted my very patient and understanding co-head writer Danny Kellison: "Running 10 minutes late. Vomiting. Sorry." And I *was* sorry. He didn't need to hear an apology. He's a supportive and understanding man and father. But I needed him to know that I was sorry my pregnancy was making me late to work. I hate being late. I hate it more when people don't apologize for being late. Especially if they have a fresh iced latte in their hand.

MY DAUGHTER AGAIN This was the toughest, most sincere sorry of the week. Election night, 10 p.m. Trump just won Florida, Michigan and Wisconsin. I couldn't watch anymore. I went upstairs to Jane's room. She was sleeping peacefully, still holding her Hillary Clinton action figure. I needed to be near her sweet oblivion. I actually crawled into her crib, sniffed and kissed her head, and whispered, "I'm sorry."

WEDNESDAY

MY OB-GYN Next morning. My OB-GYN texted me. "You coming to your 8 a.m. appointment?" It was 9:17 a.m. In my post-election mourning, I had forgotten. I texted back: "OH MY GOD I'M SOOOO SORRY. I COMPLETELY FORGOT. ROUGH MORNING. I'M SO VERY SORRY." This one got two sorrys. Flaking on someone is one of the worst offenses. This apology was deserved.

HILLARY MAKES HER APOLOGY

I dreaded Hillary's concession speech like a eulogy at a funeral of someone who died unexpectedly. I watched it while my daughter played at my feet, unaware that history was not being made. In the first minute, Hillary said: "I'm sorry we did not win this election for ... the vision we hold for our country." I hated hearing her apologize. I know I would've if I were her. But I felt like we all owed her one instead.

JIMMY AGAIN Drove into work in a fog. Walked into Jimmy's office for the producers meeting the morning after the election. Burst into tears. Like one of those shoulders-shaking, wet-face, snot-nosed ugly cries. The ones only Julia Roberts can pull off. I think I had underestimated the psychological toll this election and writing about it every day for the past year had taken. Today was supposed to be a celebration. A day to box up all the Trump jokes and put them away forever — I wouldn't have to watch every insane, infuriating sound bite of his any longer. Now the thought of writing jokes about him for the next four years made me collapse into tears. Jimmy looked up from his desk to meet the eyes of his show's slobbering co-head writer, and I only said two words, "I'm sorry," and got back to work.

THURSDAY

BUT I'M NOT SORRY ABOUT BEING SORRY

Driving into work, I let a guy into my lane. No wave. No acknowledgment. Minutes later, a woman cuts me off, I slam on my brakes to avoid hitting her. We make eye contact. I give her a, "What the hell was that?" look. She looks back at me like *I'm* the crazy one. No apology. No wave. And I realize how easy it is to say you're sorry, to take ownership of your mistakes. I know women in particular are criticized for saying it too much, and we probably do. But in a year of unapologetic insults from a man who will now be our president, I think we could all be saying it a little more. I'd rather overapologize than underapologize. I said it seven times in three days. And I'm not sorry I did. **VIII**



MY WONDER WOMAN 2017: 'VULNERABLE,' NOT 'LESSER'

The first feature about the invisible-jet-flying heroine, out next summer, also is the first studio superhero film helmed by a woman.

Patty Jenkins talks pressure – and why heroes should be nice

As told to Rebecca Ford

I met with Warner Bros. right after I made *Monster* [her only previous feature, the indie hit] more than 10 years ago, and I said, “I want to make *Wonder Woman*.” I’ve always been moved by the idea of movies that are personal but still have a huge reach. *Superman* had that effect on me when I was a kid — it rocked my world. That kind of movie was always the brass ring of what I wanted to do with my career. Because of my love of Wonder Woman and the genre, I felt

this project was absolutely the right thing for me to do, though I definitely knew what I was taking on — that there’s a huge amount of responsibility that comes with it. I knew just making a movie about Wonder Woman for the first time was going to matter to people and what I was stepping into with that.

When I’m asked if I feel additional pressure because I’m a filmmaker who is female, I say that I think it’s important but there’s really nothing you can do about it. Every step of my career has been that way — every project is something no one has done before, male or female, the pressure is always high, and I’m always doing it as a woman, so I think you just have to learn to mute it out and just be a great director and give everything you can.

Our film really draws from the original [1940s] *Wonder Woman* comic book by William Moulton Marston. The goal was to tap into what always spoke to me about her — to honor who she was, her legacy, and to make her as universal as she was to all of us little girls who ran around pretending to be Lynda Carter when we were kids. Wonder Woman is the grand universal female hero who didn’t have to be lesser in any way. She wasn’t less powerful, she wasn’t less of a woman. She’s as beautiful as any woman and as strong as any man. That, to me, is so enduring. There have been so few female characters like that — who weren’t small, niche characters or sidekicks. She’s a full-blown superhero who lives up to all of your dreams in every way.

It also was important to me to make sure she was as vulnerable, loving and warm as she should be. It’s important for her to be multidimensional.

It’s been incredible to make something about a superhero that stands for a message of fighting for a loving, thoughtful government, especially in this current climate. It’s been a special process to make something with the beautiful message that it’s difficult to be a hero and stay kind and thoughtful in everything that you do. There’s going to be a lot of conversation about her being a woman in these times, but I think the greatest part about the character is that she’s so much bigger than all of that. [VH1](#)



Gadot (left) and Jenkins on the *Wonder Woman* set in February in Leavesden, England.

What’s the Trick to Being Heard in Any Meeting?

THR asked Hollywood’s top women for their advice

“No tricks, just a firm believer in doing the work.”

Donna Langley, chairman, Universal Pictures

“Speak the f— up.”

Cindy Holland, vp original content, Netflix

“I’m in the middle of making a movie, so every meeting is about people wanting to hear my voice. That’s why we need more women and people of color to be directing: You don’t have to make your voice heard in the meeting — the meeting is about hearing your voice.”

Ava DuVernay, director, *A Wrinkle in Time*

“I have a loud and somewhat surprising whistle.”

Dana Walden, chairman and CEO, Fox Television Group

“Listen.”

Kathleen Kennedy, president, Lucasfilm

“Come prepared to have a point of view, and then follow through. The real work happens before the meeting begins.”

Gail Berman, chairman and CEO, The Jackal Group

“I like to do a British accent.”

Frances Berwick, president, Lifestyle Networks, NBCUniversal Cable

“Fred Rogers had a wonderful trick. He would speak lower than most, causing people to lean in and listen more carefully.”

Paula Kerger, president and CEO, PBS

“A little humor relaxes people and helps them pay attention.”

Zhang Wei, president, Alibaba Pictures

“Understand the point of view of others whether they are revealing it or not — and shape how I present my thoughts with this in mind.”

Mary Parent, vice chairman of worldwide production, Legendary Entertainment

“Honesty — saying what I know everybody’s thinking.”

Toni Howard, partner, ICMPartners

“Learning how to read a room, read the personalities and body language and then only speaking up when it’s important. The loudest voice in the room doesn’t always work. I think reading a room is kind of a lost art.”

Bonnie Hammer, chairman, NBCUniversal Cable Entertainment Group

“Have an opinion.”

Sophie Watts, president, STX Entertainment



'THIS MATTERS TO ME SO MUCH, I'M AFRAID TO FAIL'

Oh no, another awards show? Jane the Virgin’s Gina Rodriguez on how she got Hollywood on board to honor non-Insta-famous women

As told to Laurie Sandell

The idea for the Young Women’s Honors came about after I hosted the 2015 Teen Choice Awards. The producers, Mike Berg and Andrea Regalado, approached me about partnering on a show. Soon after that, I attended the Kennedy Center Honors to pay tribute to Rita Moreno, who was my idol. Having Moreno to look up to — a Latina actress who fought for women’s rights and was unafraid to draw attention to Latinas’ oversexualized roles in film and TV — made the road much less terrifying for me. When people go before you, they chop down that fear that looks like a brick wall. They create doorways and windows.

When I thought about how moved I was by the Kennedy Center Honors, I wondered, why don’t we have this for our youth? We need this kind of uplifting show for a demographic that is constantly fed one narrow idea of what fame, success and power look like. Not everybody successful is an actor or Insta-famous. So while the Kennedy Center Honors pays tribute to a lifetime of achievement in the arts, we wanted to pay tribute to young women who have broken ceilings and smashed down doors in all kinds of arenas.

To find our honorees, my company, I Can and I Will Productions (partnered with my manager’s company, Primary Wave Entertainment) assembled a blue-ribbon panel that included our sponsors, *Marie Claire* editor-in-chief Anne Fulenwider, Clinique global brand president Jane Lauder and Lord & Taylor president Liz Rodbell. We chose people like Jessica Matthews, who created energy-generating technology for third world countries, and 24-year-old Amanda Nguyen, who pushed legislation through Congress to ensure legal safeguards for survivors of sexual assault. Fereshteh Forough is a

↑ Rodriguez hosted the *Marie Claire* Young Women’s Honors on Nov. 19 at Marina del Rey Marriott.

young woman from Afghanistan who founded Code to Inspire, which offers women and girls technical fluency. When the ceremony airs on The CW on Dec. 19, I don’t want girls to look at one of our honorees and ask, “How many Instagram followers does she have?” I want them to say, “Tell me how I can do that, too!”

Hopefully by year five we will be doing a whole week of summits and classes with entrepreneurs coming to teach women how to open their businesses. But since this was just our first year, getting talent to jump on board for the event was a little more difficult. Some celebrities expressed concern because they didn’t know what to expect. I got a lot of, “Thank you, I hope I can participate next year.” But it was unbelievable to see the women who *did* take a risk, like Katie Holmes, Jenna Dewan Tatum and Laverne Cox — who appeared on the red carpet and went straight over to Tatyana McFadden, our Paralympic winner, crouched down next to her and said, “Girl, your arms are *gorgeous*. I read all about you, and I’m like, ‘Damn, what am I doing with my life?’” Tatiana Maslany literally shut down production on her show, *Orphan Black*, to travel down from Vancouver and was so moved by our honorees she was crying in the audience during the acceptance speeches.

Recently, I said to my boyfriend, “This matters to me so much, I’m afraid to fail.” And he said: “But the coolest thing is that you have the opportunity to fail. That means you’re doing something big.” I thought, wow, yes. I want to pass that idea on to others. Do something great enough that you can fail at it. That is so much cooler than not trying at all. [VH1](#)

JENKINS: CLAY EVANS/WARNER BROS.; RODRIGUEZ: RICH POLK/GETTY IMAGES FOR YOUNG WOMEN'S HONORS

Action Not Words

The Fight for Inclusion



RYAN MURPHY'S AMERICAN EQUALITY STORY

The showrunner's Half foundation aims to place women, people of color and LGBTQ members into 50 percent of his series' directing gigs. Ten months in, he's exceeded his goals **By Michael O'Connell**

Ryan Murphy knows what it's like to feel like an outsider. In 1999, when the first season of his TV debut *Popular* aired on the WB, the lack of diversity behind the scenes stunned him. "I walked onto the set, and it was all straight white dudes in their 50s," recalls Murphy, now 51 himself

— but back then a gay white dude in his 30s. "I remember feeling like a stranger in a strange land, and it was my own show." There may have been an evolution since the days when all showrunners looked like Steven Bochco and David Milch, but the changes have not been reflected

← From left: Korycinski, Bassett, Murphy, Curtis and Kiley on Oct. 16 on the Fox lot in L.A. Says Murphy: "After #OscarsSoWhite, I feel like the way to get something done is to do this and come up with a hard-and-fast number."

in the director's chair. Says Murphy, who is *THR*'s inaugural Equity in Entertainment Award honoree: "When you see who men choose to mentor, for the most part it's people who look like them — but 2 inches shorter and 20 years younger." After hearing former publicist Nancy Ryder speak at *THR*'s 2015 Women in Entertainment breakfast, Murphy realized that he was in a position to make a dramatic impact on that front, and in February, he launched Half. The foundation mentors TV newcomers who are women, people of color and/or members of the LGBTQ community toward occupying at least 50 percent of the directing slots on his sprawling roster of series: *American Crime Story*, *American Horror Story*, *Scream Queens* and the upcoming *Feud*.

Ten months later, having gotten the green light from his boss, Fox Television Group chief Dana Walden, Murphy has more than delivered on his promise, with 60 percent of his directing gigs going to women, dwarfing the industry standard: a paltry 17 percent. "He's already surpassed his own targets," says Walden. "This past season, the majority of episodes on all three of his shows — and, in the case of *Feud*, all of the episodes — were helmed by female or diverse directors."

Outside the foundation, Murphy has boosted inclusivity across the board. "I sat down with every department head on every show that I make and said, 'You need to hire 50 percent women when you can,'" he says. "If you don't have them, like the grip department, train them."

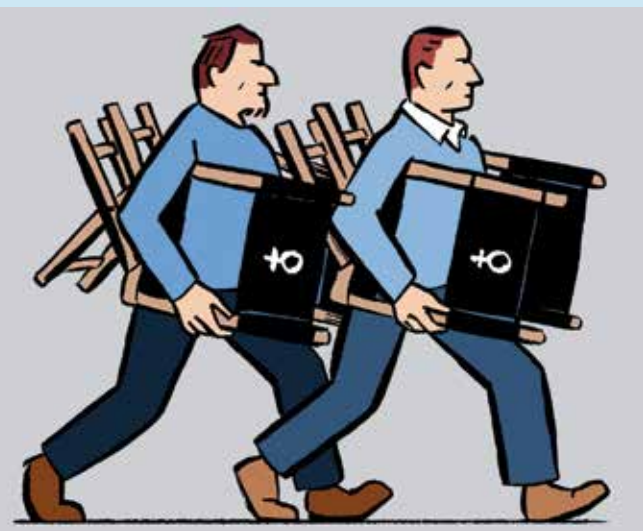
There are luminaries in the mix as well. Jamie Lee Curtis, star of Fox's *Scream Queens*, had directed only once prior to her turn behind the camera on the show. "The discovery, for me, is that I'm a director and have been my whole life," says Curtis, a zealous photographer. "I have a movie in development at Paramount, at Amazon, and I will now say, 'Why don't I direct it?' instead of 'Who are we going to have direct it?'"

Angela Bassett, the Oscar-nominated actress who's been part of Murphy's repertory company since 2013's *American Horror Story: Coven*, previously directed 2015 Lifetime telepic *Whitney* — but says offers did not roll in until she tackled a recent episode of *AHS: Roanoke*. "You wonder when the next opportunity will come," says Bassett, who hesitated when Murphy asked her to take a stab at *AHS*. "I'm not like Ryan, I'm more of a two-item juggler," she says with a self-deprecating laugh. But the experience changed her outlook. "I'm still an actor for hire, but now it's about taking meetings to let people know I'm just as excited about directing."

But it's the up-and-comers who've seen the most dramatic change. "I thought I would have been able to move into TV much sooner," says director Maggie Kiley, a Half participant whose first TV job was a *Scream Queens* episode after she helmed (and sold) three indie features with such stars as Allison Janney, Jesse Eisenberg and William H. Macy. "I'd shadowed other directors on series — but nothing. This program is so unique because there's Ryan, willing to hand you an episode because he believes in you." Adds Alexis Korycinski, who tackled a gruesome episode of *Roanoke*: "What's tricky is, it's taking a really targeted approach to force us in. I think it will take a few years of mandating this before all shows are pulling from a big pool of women and men."

Others are taking similar measures. Each episode of Ava DuVernay's OWN drama *Queen Sugar* has been directed by a woman, and *Jessica Jones* showrunner Melissa Rosenberg recently announced the second season of her Netflix drama will do the same. The challenge now is communicating these opportunities to people who feel the door is closed to them. "I'm mounting a college tour to speak to women and people of color in 2017," says Murphy, who also is launching a thus-far self-financed scholarship to get aspiring directors into film school. "What I'm trying to do is reach out to people and say, 'We need your stories.'" **THR**

Photographed by **Joe Pugliese**



That EEOC Investigation? Now What's Next Under Trump

By **Tatiana Siegel**

In September 2015, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission launched an investigation to uncover systemic discrimination against female directors. Hollywood's female helmers cheered the news, bemoaning their dismal representation with just 4.1 percent of top-grossing movies in 2002 to 2014, says a USC study. But at the time no one envisioned Donald Trump in the White House. Now many are wondering how Trump — whose candidacy was marred by allegations of groping — will affect the investigation. "It's all a big chess game," says director Maria Giese, the first woman to offer testimony to the EEOC. "The investigation could go several ways."

Among Trump's first moves post-election was appointing Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions to head the Department of Justice, of which the EEOC is a division. "On the surface, Sessions looks bad for civil rights," says Giese. "He is on record as being against gay marriage, and equality is probably not a priority." EEOC chair Jenny Yang's term is up in July, a post for Trump to fill, which could hurt the cause: Yang has championed equal pay and supported the investigation. Vice President-elect Mike Pence has opposed equal pay efforts and wields considerable influence as head of Trump's transition team.

Still, the EEOC is an independent agency and has discretion in what it pursues. And if Trump calls for budget cuts, it could be a silver lining. "Historically, when faced with cuts, the EEOC tends to pursue high-impact, high-visibility, systemic cases," says Giese. "That could be good for women directors." But the real wild card is Trump's need to appear critical of the industry: Given how much Hollywood met his candidacy with disdain, *The Apprentice*'s former star might save face by siccing the feds on studios and networks.

This comes as the EEOC is said to have moved from collecting directors' testimony to conversations with industry stakeholders. "We are encouraged by the seriousness of the investigation and ... are confident that the government will find the same systemic discrimination problems we found," says Melissa Goodman, a director of the LGBTQ, Gender & Reproductive Justice Project at the ACLU of Southern California. (An ACLU investigation led to the EEOC's actions.) Goodman sees the EEOC urging those with hiring power to rectify inequality as a sign that the government recognizes a widespread problem. Yet she acknowledges: "A new administration can set new enforcement priorities, and it remains to be seen whether ending discrimination will be a priority."

Illustration by **Nishant Choksi**

Action Not Words

The Fight for Inclusion



HOW IT FEELS TO EXPLAIN NATE PARKER TO WHITE HOLLYWOOD

Filmmaker Xavier Burgin details how he's given frank lessons about race and gender to Lena Dunham, Ellen Barkin and Amy Schumer **As told to Rebecca Sun**

Lena Dunham's September interview with Amy Schumer for her Lenny newsletter ignited controversy when Dunham complained that she was ignored by New York Giants wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. at the Met Ball, saying, "[His] vibe was very much like, 'Do I want to f--- it?'" When Twitter exploded

with cries of racism, filmmaker Xavier Burgin, 26 — a Sundance Lab fellow and a mentee of Ryan Murphy's *Half Foundation* — calmly reached out to Dunham.

I've been using Twitter (@XLNB) to tell funny longform stories and also to comment on race,

gender and sexuality issues for a long time. Some of my stories have gone viral, and actors and filmmakers I really respect have started following me. As a young black boy coming out of Mississippi, I never thought that would be possible. Through social media, I've had the opportunity to speak with Lena, Will Packer, Dana Delany. Ellen Barkin asked about [*Birth of a Nation* director] Nate Parker's sexual assault controversy, and I replied that black women more often than not are there for black men, even when we haven't been good to them. Here, they were asked to ignore the tribulations of gender to serve the purpose of race. We can't demonize them for either choice.

The day Lena posted her Lenny Letter, everybody in the Twittersphere was talking about it. Then Amy tweeted that men of color tend to catcall more. Catcalling is a pervasive problem, but that's a very racist idea. So I tweeted: "Hey, this is bad, why would you say this?" Amy said someone else was using her account and that the three of us should talk on the phone.

It was a good, honest conversation. I explained the problems of pinning sexual undertones on black men because that has gotten us killed, going back to the slavery era. You cannot push the idea of

hypersexualization on a black man because of its ramifications for us. And you cannot make assumptions about someone who hasn't spoken to you, which is what happened with Odell.

I also want to acknowledge that it's a problem that people reach out to me [about these issues] but not to black women. As a man, there are points that I am not completely equipped to explain because I have not lived the experience. Much of what I've learned comes from discourse with black women, but for some reason, many individuals would rather hear it from a black man, a white man or a white woman. Feminism is a beautiful necessity; the problem is when it excludes women of color. It would be great for celebrities who have these platforms to listen to more diverse voices.

When I choose to talk with white people about oppression, some balk — they don't want to deal because many of these institutions benefit them. In that situation, there's nothing I can do. But many others are beginning to deconstruct ideas they've been taught for a long time. If you're willing to have a civil conversation, we might be able to figure out how we connect as people. For me, that was the most important thing with this. **THR**

Would African-American Women Still Support O.J. Today?

The writer and activist behind #OscarsSoWhite ponders what has changed — and what has not **By April Reign**

As a recent law grad in 1994, I was so riveted by the O.J. Simpson trial, I brought a 5-inch black-and-white television to the office so I wouldn't miss it. When the jury declared O.J. not guilty, I cheered, surprising myself, unable to fully articulate why.

Twenty years later, two series provide some context for my emotions. FX's *The People vs. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story* and ESPN's epic documentary *O.J.: Made in America* offer the kind of nuanced look at race, class and gender that was impossible while the trial was happening. I was very interested to see how women on black Twitter — especially younger women — would react to these series.

Most watchers fell into two camps. On the one hand, some were content to see O.J. walk free because the prosecution had failed to prove its



Reign

case. Their frame of reference was informed by the Black Lives Matter movement. After seeing so many black men killed in the past few years at the hands of state-sanctioned violence, it was an acknowledgment that while the justice system is broken, its failings benefited a black man.

On the other hand, as we watched and tweeted the series, I did not see overwhelming support for O.J. within the black community, perhaps because he had used to his advantage something that he shunned — his race. He was famously known for saying, "I'm not black; I'm O.J." He used his wealth to distance himself from his blackness in every way: a home in an all-white neighborhood, white friends, a white wife. Yet when it came time to stand trial, lawyer Johnnie Cochran painted O.J. as yet another black man unjustly accused. Because O.J. had rejected us then, however, we now feel little inclination to support him.

If the tragedy occurred today, I also doubt O.J. would enjoy the support he received from the black community 20 years ago. Thanks to the advent of social media, the public has a much more well-rounded picture of an individual, and we would have delved deeper into his past, like the fact that he began dating Nicole Brown while he was still married to Marguerite, his first wife and a black woman. Issues informing the trial once considered too taboo to discuss openly now are debated freely. What has remained and still needs to be addressed is the inequitable way that the criminal justice system treats people of color.



Simpson awaited the verdict on Oct. 3, 1995.