

WOMEN'S MEDIA SUMMIT

INFORMING THE PANELS
(FOR MODERATORS, PANELISTS & PARTICIPANTS)



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“What might our world look like when women tell half the stories?”

--Christine Walker

Introduction

The stories and images that emerge from our media help define our national ethos, and contribute to the voice of our civilization. They are powerful influencers of the way people look at issues both here and abroad. Even so, despite the recent widespread outcry against staggering gender inequity in Hollywood, most of our stories remain outside of the control and influence of women.

The exclusion of women's voices and perspectives from our nation's cultural narrative is a deeply entrenched problem in which we cannot control our own messages. Instead, our creative expressions and concerns are filtered through a mostly male lens. This denies women their full rights under the law, and it is not in keeping with American ideals of freedom and equality.

Media today has become so universally present in our lives that it can truly be said that it is the nexus for power on every level in society. As such, never before in our history has it been more important for women to take their rightful place as equal contributors to this engine of our cultural narrative. Until we have gender parity in storytelling, we will not find equality in society.

We assemble as a group to brainstorm actionable strategies in order to move us closer to equity. The Summit's three panels and presentation are designed to provide an inspiring stepping-off point for the think tank sessions to come.

Our hope is to ignite dynamic, out of the box thinking to inspire fresh and imaginative solutions. We encourage exploration beyond our established assumptions, value systems, and methods of getting things done.

We are not looking for a single solution, but rather a wide array of remedies that could include grassroots and media campaigns, programs and incentives inside the industry, and state and federal legislative reform. All ideas are welcome that advance the work to achieve enduring gender equity.

In our work as a collective, we become more than the sum of our parts, as we bank ideas off one another and allow the magic of creative process to inform our thinking. Each Summit participant is valued as a unique contributor, so please feel free to express your ideas, concerns, and goals to the group.

Thank you all so very much for your commitment to this effort, and for your presence at the Inaugural Women's Media Summit. We look forward to your contributions.

“Show up. Dive in. Stay at it.”

--Barack Obama

Panel One - Showing Up

Women Storytellers Missing in American Cinema

Moderator: Dr. David Adler (Alturas Institute)

Panelists: Dr. Kathleen A. Tarr (Stanford), Maria Giese (“Women Directors in Hollywood”)

This panel will provide an overview of discrimination against female storytellers in American cinema. When we talk about American cinema today, it’s a symbolic term for the big screen feature films that have been so beloved over the past 120 years. The stories and images in these films shape the way we see our selves and the world, and influence societies and cultures globally.

It is striking to note that only 1.9 percent of the top grossing 600 films from 2007 to 2013 were directed by women (Lauzen). Women have also yet to break through the 20% mark behind-the-scenes in Hollywood, and we have made no progress on this front for at least two decades (Lauzen, 2002, 2012, 2016).

The primary law governing equal employment opportunity is the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, which among other things established an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). In 1969, the EEOC first held hearings on gender and race discrimination in Hollywood and discovered that women and racial minorities were not being hired behind the scenes; lacking enforcement power at the time, it referred its findings to the Department of Justice. The DOJ worked with the studios to address discrimination against racial minorities, but not women specifically.

In 1978, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights conducted further hearings that produced a lengthy report documenting the problem, but did not result in further agency action. The Directors Guild of America tried to move the gears of change in the early 1980s by filing a class action lawsuit against two major studios challenging their hiring of women and racial minorities. The case was dismissed in 1985, however, after the DGA was disqualified from leading the class based on conflict of interest. As a result of these failures, the industry has enjoyed the privilege of being the self-correcting—and, not surprisingly, has continued to perpetuate it’s systemic bias.

Recent events give us hope that significant progress is possible. In 2015, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) launched a campaign for women directors in Hollywood that led to an EEOC investigation into the matter. Based on that investigation, the EEOC is now, according to press reports, in settlement talks with all six major studios. But whether, and to what extent, those efforts will bear fruit is not yet known.

Since the 1960s, grassroots efforts among women filmmakers, coupled with immense news media support, and federal legal action have provided a convincing framework for the argument that women have a legal and ethical right to demand immediate remediation through our government and court system. This panel will address this issue and question what further action is needed today to ensure that real, enduring change for women begins immediately.

Panel Two - Diving In

Women Storytellers Missing in Small Screen Content

Facilitator: Jody Hassett-Sanchez

Panelists: Kirsten Schaffer (Women In Media), Maria Carter Agui (Emerson)

This panel will explore the current landscape of women in key storytelling positions in TV, commercials, and new media available on TV screens and mobile devices. We are living in the golden age of television, digital technology makes filmmaking more accessible than ever, and thanks to the internet delivers content instantly to people around the globe. This presents the greatest opportunity ever for female inclusion as directors and storytellers, yet our participation as directors of small screen content remains far below our 51% demographic.

While the percentage of female directors on the big screen has hovered at 7%-- down from 9% in 2015 (Lauzen)—one would expect female hires to be much higher in episodic television, yet in the two decades since 1995 that percentage has flat-lined. Even while women graduate from film schools at parity with men, in 2016 females only comprised 17% of the TV directing jobs (DGA).

Because of the complex nature of Hollywood hiring systems and the myriad obstacles that stand in the way of female advancement, solutions must be innovative and diverse. Recent interest in advancing women in Hollywood has resulted in the proliferation of wide-scale efforts to remedy the problem inside the industry. Women In Film has been integral to a multitude of cooperative efforts with many indie and studio programs intent in solving the problem from the inside, including industry inclusive campaigns like ReFrame. Others, like Martha Lauzen, suggest external (government) pressure is required (NYT).

For example, since 1995, the Directors Guild of America and combined studio diversity agreements and programs have maintained a single category for women and minorities. As a result executives and showrunners fulfilled their diversity obligations by hiring men of color almost exclusively—leaving women sidelined. Women of color have been virtually shut out while male minority hires have reached their demographic equivalence.

Exposing obvious problems like this presents exciting opportunities for dynamic thinking about how to break down concrete barriers that prevent gender equal hiring in Hollywood, as well as battle the unconscious systemic bias that keeps women from advancing.

This panel will explore the experiences of women filmmakers and industry activists who have been working toward gender equity. We will consider ways to improve current efforts, seek solutions beyond those that are already being tried, and recommend the end of failed programs that divert us from better solutions.

Panel Three - Staying At It Female Representations Onscreen

Facilitator: Dr. Caroline Heldman (GDIGM & Occidental College)

Panelists: Cristina Escobar (The Representation Project), Robin Wright (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Ohio State University)

In 1973, Laura Mulvey first identified a “male gaze” in cinema, the idea that most popular movies are filmed in ways that cater to heterosexual male desires. We know that the view from behind the camera is intrinsically tied to the portrayals in front of the lens.

We now have nearly 50 years of qualitative & quantitative research to document the impact of inequity, yet women are persistently underrepresented and misrepresented in all media. This panel explores how diversity has shifted over time, where there has been progress or decline, and where we find the greatest obstacles (and therefore the keys) to equality. A few watershed moments in research, advocacy and media literacy education:

Dr. Martha Lauzen founded the Center for the Study of Women in Film and Television at San Diego State University, “home to the longest running and most comprehensive studies of women in film and television.” Their *Celluloid Ceiling* research has raised considerable public awareness of the issue, and provided a basis for consumer activism campaigns and discrimination lawsuits.

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media was founded to research the impact of negative onscreen depictions of women and girls via *If She Can See It She Can Be It*, and to advocate within the major studio system for greater onscreen gender inclusion.

Dr. Stacy Smith established the Media, Diversity, and Social Change Initiative at the University of Southern California. Her MDSC research initiative has ignited far-reaching social media campaigns, including the popular #OscarsSoWhite and #OscarsSoMale campaigns by @ReignofApril, and now is digging deeper on speaking roles on screen & lack of inclusiveness of race & sexual identity onscreen.

Jennifer Siebel Newsom’s popular documentary *Miss Representation* once again put this issue on the public radar. Echoing ideas from the 1970s, this documentary reinforced how systematically “media is selling the idea that girls’ and women’s value lies in their youth, beauty, and sexuality and not in their capacity as leaders. Boys learn that their success is tied to dominance, power, and aggression. We must value people as whole human beings, not gendered stereotypes.”

Today, dozens of initiatives and organizations advocate for equal representation of women on screen and behind the camera, and pressure is applied from both within the industry and through consumer activism. As we acknowledge and mine the efforts at equity made over nearly half a century, this panel will also explore new strategies and tactics for real institutional, and therefore socio-cultural, opportunities for change.

Presentation - Providing a Frame for Action

“Women, the Industry & the Law”

Gillian Thomas (ACLU Women’s Rights Project) & Kalpana Kotagal (Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll)

Gillian Thomas and Kalpana Kotagal will provide an overview of prior efforts to address discrimination against women in Hollywood, and the current prospects for reform. The session will include a primer on federal and state law, as well as discussion of possible tools for effecting change—including litigation, government tax credits for diverse hiring, media outreach, and other organized action.

Thomas and Kotagal will explain the origins of the ACLU’s 2015 letter to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission calling for a federal investigation into discrimination against women directors, the current status of that effort, and potential outcomes. By setting the stage for possible legal remedies for discrimination, Thomas and Kotagal will provide a frame for brainstorming the most effective advocacy strategies during the breakout discussions.