“Breaking In” to Hollywood:
An Ethnography of Women Filmmakers



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Abstract

Although Hollywood filmmaking is brutally competitive, aspiring filmmakers try to "break in" and develop careers anyway, hoping to beat the nearly impossible odds. Research has shown that men are much more likely to succeed than women, who directed 5.4% of the top-grossing narrative films between 2007 and 2021 (Smith et al. 2022). Beyond largely statistical data, there is little research into women filmmakers' experiences on the ground, and this thesis provides a distinctive, in-depth anthropological study of this significant and persistent gender gap in Hollywood. Exploring research materials collected during a critical period–the year preceding the emergence of the #Metoo movement–and drawing on interviews with 38 film and television workers from 2018, I examine production patterns, practices, and hierarchies to explain how "breaking in" to Hollywood is a highly gendered process. Focusing on women filmmakers at different times in their life course, the ethnographic chapters identify and analyze gender-based challenges at three key career stages–emerging, mid-career, and established–demonstrating that, and illuminating contextual reasons why, most women never truly "break in" to Hollywood as filmmakers. As their careers evolve, so too do reasons for not hiring them. Ultimately I argue that exclusion, precarity and risk are significant interwoven factors which have compounding effects on the lives of women filmmakers, impacting on, yet not deflecting them from, their continued efforts to break in.

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Chapter 1 | Introduction

> “For guys competition is fierce, but for women you are more likely to win the lottery.”
>
> –Martha Coolidge, film director and former president of the Director’s Guild of America, speaking about opportunities for filmmakers (Women and Hollywood 2012).



Figure 1. *Filmmaker Oliver Stone at the Oxford Union in 2016. Image by the author.*

Oliver Stone may not be a lottery winner, but he has won the Oscar for Best Director twice (IMDb 2016b). When he visited the Oxford Union for a speaking engagement in 2016, only one woman, Kathryn Bigelow, had ever won the award and three others had been nominated since 1927 (Brown 2022; Wiese 2020). Stone’s talk occurred weeks after the #OscarsSoWhite campaign drew attention to the lack of diversity in Hollywood for the second year in a row. Blogger April Reign created the hashtag to critique the preponderance of white nominees in acting categories at the 2015 Oscars (Kirst 2016), and it was revived in 2016 when the nominees were all white again. Stone, a white man, was asked about gender and race during the Oxford Union Q&A.

He responded that all filmmakers are impeded by setbacks, but that success is merit-based (OxfordUnion 2016).

"My belief is that Hollywood is gender-blind and colour-blind. They don't see you; they see *money*," Stone said. "They [studio executives] want good ideas," he continued, later in the presentation. "If you can provide what they want, they'll go with it. It's very difficult still for anybody, a male or female, to get a movie made…. Look at my struggles" (OxfordUnion 2016). Stone *has* faced adversity as he developed projects (Fleming Jr. 2020; Lattanzio 2019), however, he also achieved success that no woman has come close to replicating. He won his first Oscar eight years after graduating from film school (Stage n.d.) and his films have been nominated for 32 Oscars, winning nine (IMDb 2016b). Since 2016, two more women have won the Best Director Oscar and a total of seven have now been nominated in 95 years (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences 2022).[1] Awards are certainly not the only measure of success in Hollywood–box office profit is prioritized too–but as I discuss in Chapter 4, mainstream awards build careers through peer validation and legitimacy (Cattani et al. 2014), helping male directors achieve dominance.

This Introduction begins with an overview of the topic, my objectives, and the research questions I am exploring. I present my argument, describe how I came to study gender equality in Hollywood filmmaking, and define terminology. Next I review relevant literature from anthropology and related fields, while linking these issues to the status of women in the United States. I summarize relevant film history and describe legal steps that have been taken to address disparities in filmmaking.

[1] In 2021, Chloé Zhao became the first woman of colour to be nominated for Best Director, and win, for *Nomadland* (2020), and Jane Campion won in 2022 for *The Power of the Dog* (2021). Campion was previously nominated for *The Piano* (1993) (Brown 2022).

1.1 Topic overview

1.1.1 The problem

Filmmaking is highly challenging for everyone, as Stone says, with each stage fraught with difficulty, involving fundraising, shooting in adverse conditions, and problem-solving, among numerous other obstacles. Women filmmakers face all the above-mentioned challenges in addition to systemic exclusion based on gender, which hinders their progress at all career stages. Though Stone sees merit and profit as Hollywood's driving forces, the dominance of white men and the absence of women across key creative roles suggests that other factors must be considered too. "If it was all based on merit, this environment would not be as monochromatic," one of my research participants, filmmaker Tina Mabry, said during our 2016 interview. The Hollywood environment is indeed dominated by white men, as I explain. Women were involved in early cinema (Bean et al. 2002; Mahar 1995; Morgan et al. 2013) but were pushed out as studios became dependent on Wall Street money in the 1920s (Mahar 1995); women have since struggled to make inroads into big-budget projects (Kiang 2015a) and even fewer have become household names (Chaudhuri 2006, 6). Lists of the "best directors of all time" often feature no women or very few (Dirks 2016; E.W. Staff 1996; Bradshaw et al. 2011). Though the gender ratio of film school enrolment has been represented as fairly balanced (MTV News 2015, Renée 2013), women face a "steep fiscal cliff" as they attempt to become commercial filmmakers (Communication and Marketing Staff 2015). A recent study indicated that only 5.4% of the highest-grossing Hollywood films from 2007 to 2021 were directed by women (Smith et al. 2022). Of the 1,447 available directing positions on the top-grossing Hollywood films from 2007 to 2019, eight were held by Black women, three by Asian women and three by Latinx women (Smith et al. 2020, 4). A long-running study has shown that women rarely "break in" to Hollywood as filmmakers and have been underrepresented in behind-the-camera positions for

decades (Lauzen 2020; Lauzen 2022b).[2] In this thesis, I explore these topics from an anthropological perspective as I examine how this significant and persistent gap affects women pursuing careers in filmmaking.

1.1.2 Why this matters

Despite the efforts of individuals, organizations and federal agencies working to improve opportunities for women filmmakers through various initiatives (discussed later), women's involvement in key creative roles essentially flatlined in 1998 (Lauzen 2020) (depicted in Figures 3-6 on pages 19-20). Before industry statistics became available in recent years, several of my research participants were aware of how severely the odds were stacked against them. There is a baseline expectation that "making it" in Hollywood is extremely difficult and that filmmakers will face rejection and failure, so when some women filmmakers I spoke to encountered adversity, they attributed it to not being "good enough." After accepting this explanation for years, they began to realize that other factors, such as gender, may have played a role in missed opportunities. This thesis examines some of those factors to identify patterns that explain why women have been overlooked in filmmaking for so long.

Furthermore, a worldwide gender equality movement–emerging in part from Hollywood itself–has only resulted in incremental change for women filmmakers. My research data was collected during a critical period: the year preceding the rise of the #Metoo movement (2016-2017), with additional interviews in 2018. Initially sparked by allegations of misconduct against Hollywood studio founder Harvey Weinstein in two exposés (R. Farrow 2017a; Kantor et al. 2017), #Metoo gained momentum with a tweet from actor Alyssa Milano in October 2017: "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet" (@alyssa_milano 2017). Milano unknowingly

[2] Many would argue that similar boundaries exclude others on the basis of ability/disability (Martinelli 2018; Novic 2018; Emery 2018), gender identity and sexual orientation (R. Lopez 2018; GLAAD 2018; Beresford 2019), but these topics are beyond the scope of my research.

borrowed the phrase from activist Tarana Burke, seen in Figure 2 below, who employed it to empower fellow survivors of sexual violence in 2006 (Ohlheiser 2017). Within 24 hours of Milano's tweet, there were more than 12 million related posts (CBS 2017) with women speaking out against sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other abuses of power across industries (Brannon Donoghue 2020; Luo et al. 2022). Over time, alleged perpetrators were named, publicly shamed, and many were fired (Baum 2022); their behaviour was no longer publicly tolerated in workplaces in Hollywood and globally (Jaffe 2018; Lee 2018; Gibson et al. 2019). *Women and Hollywood* advocate Melissa Silverstein (2017) predicted that 2017 would be the year that "could change everything or nothing." In this Introduction's literature review, statistics reveal there was no tidal wave of change for women in filmmaking; however, some progress has been noted.



Figure 2. *Tarana Burke used "Me Too" before it became a global phenomenon with Alyssa Milano's 2017 tweet. "Tarana Burke at a speech" by Marco Verch licensed under CC BY 2.0. Modification: cropping.*

1.1.3 Objectives and research questions

I am interested in understanding how this significant and persistent gender gap between filmmakers manifests itself. I study the Hollywood setting, a key entertainment

capital, the relationships involved in producing narrative films and television series, and the roles of filmmakers and decision-makers. Drawing on interviews with participants and their narratives, as well as media coverage of higher-profile filmmakers where applicable, I explore the obstacles facing women filmmakers as well as their strategies for making sense of them. I examine this group's practices, how they adapt to working conditions, and how they are perceived. I explore how filmmakers develop professional relationships, attempt to obtain employment, and cope with exclusion and precarity, including harassment, unwanted attention, and derogatory remarks. Though many of my research participants are critical of industry practices, most are still vying for a spot "inside" Hollywood. Their pathways are not always linear and some choose to leave filmmaking eventually, while others attempt to develop a parallel system to create work on their terms. Gender is my primary focus but I aim to be intersectional, a term introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to acknowledge that women of colour encounter multiple axes of discrimination. To understand their experiences, Crenshaw argued, one must consider the compounding effects of sexism and racism.

My research is guided by the following central questions: With so few women filmmakers "breaking in" to Hollywood, even though many have the training and qualifications, how can this phenomenon be explained? How are women filmmakers perceived in Hollywood and how do these perceptions evolve? Do the challenges women face evolve too? How do the experiences of men and women in Hollywood compare and contrast?

1.1.4 Argument

I aim to examine how gender inequality affects the lives of women filmmakers, and whether men and women follow similar trajectories. I argue that the ways in which women are perceived and treated in their work contexts are rooted in several forms of exclusion, designed to preserve resources and opportunities among existing industry members and their allies. Throughout this thesis, I argue, from an anthropological

perspective, that women face systems of exclusion based on gender as they attempt to "break in" to Hollywood as filmmakers. While "breaking in" tends to connote young people trying to get hired for the first time, I demonstrate that women never truly "break in" and continue to struggle for acceptance. As their careers evolve, so too do the excuses for not hiring them: emerging women filmmakers are perceived as "too risky" to manage large projects; mid-career women filmmakers are "too old" to be championed as fresh new talent or "too niche" to take on projects in another genre; women with emotions or opinions are "too difficult" to re-hire. A small number of women direct features for studios but risk being blamed for box office "flops," and/or may face prolonged periods of unemployment, while their white male peers recover from perceived failures and resume working with fewer interruptions. I argue that men and women typically follow different trajectories as filmmakers. My ethnographic chapters detail how women filmmakers try to fit into an exclusionary industry and cope with precarious conditions and double standards concerning their behaviour. The Conclusion discusses new forms of solidarity that are developing as women produce their own work outside the industry using unconventional approaches.

1.1.5 Personal interest

I became interested in women filmmakers as a film student in Montreal, Canada, in 2002. We studied works by those referred to as "masters of cinema" who were primarily white men. One instructor asked the female students to appear on-camera for a lighting exercise because they were more pleasing to look at (and thus they did not learn how to use the equipment). On set, I often found myself outnumbered as a woman in a technical role. Inspired by the Guerilla Girls, an anonymous collective that uses satire to highlight the plight of women in the art world, I created a faux PR campaign about the dearth of female directors for a class assignment in 2004 (see Figure 53 for a sample, and Figure 89 for their work). Upon graduating, I directed short documentaries and a feature and noticed that many women around me were no longer directing films. As

statistics about gender balance began circulating in the media (e.g. Rickie 2013; Cochrane 2010), I realized that my experience on male-dominated sets was not unusual. I wanted to study this phenomenon and gain a better understanding of how women navigated the film industry, choosing paths within it, working alongside it independently, or abandoning it. My initial goal was to map out industry structures to determine whether women directors are *pushed out* through limited opportunities, or whether they are *choosing to pursue alternate paths*, perhaps due to a hostile work environment or financial difficulties. My perspective has since evolved and this thesis focuses on what happens to those who try to remain in the industry.

1.1.6 Terminology

My research concentrates on narrative features, which are films of at least 90 minutes; however, I also reference television because very few women find employment in feature directing and attempt to work in television instead.[3] I include the perspectives of writers, producers, and actors because many creative professionals wear "many hats" as they develop careers, sometimes out of necessity due to limited funding, and sometimes by choice, to exercise greater control over their work. Therefore, I use the umbrella term "filmmakers" to refer to those in my study.

Since my topic relates to bias and discrimination, I aim to use inclusive language. I am reluctant to use the term "women filmmakers" because men are rarely described in that way, however, I employ it to simplify sentence structure. I am also conscious of the fact that relying on the categories of "men" and "women" reinforces gender binaries and is imperfect. I refer to those of Latin American origin or descent using "Latinx," the most widely used non-gendered form, despite some controversy (Salinas 2020; Trujillo-Pagán

[3] When I refer to "filmmaking" I am referencing both film and television production as the lines between the two become increasingly blurred.

2018). Finally, some of my participants preferred not to be called “African American” (a term they viewed as “overly politically correct”) so I have chosen to use “Black” instead.

1.2 Literature Review

Here I situate my study within relevant anthropological literatures. Though anthropologists were not studying media industries in the early 20th century, they utilized moving images, still photography and sound in their research to capture the “disappearing” cultures of “others” (Ginsburg 2002, 213) and for “objective” scientific documentation (Askew et al. 2002, 7). While visual anthropology can encompass aspects of social life that are seen, such as painting, art, and performance, media anthropology is based on ethnographic research, has an awareness of history and context, and looks specifically at how people interact with and understand media (Askew et al. 2002). Studies by Lynd et al. (1929) and Warner (1963) inspired a genre of sociological “community studies” in which towns and cities were studied, often with an emphasis on the role of media within the town’s social system (Peterson 2003, 33). In the early 2000s, the anthropology of media emerged as a subfield along with multiple overviews of the topic (Peterson 2003; Askew et al. 2002; Rothenbuhler et al. 2005; Ginsburg 2002). The study of mass media made anthropologists re-examine their methods, as they could no longer necessarily study one group of people in one geographic location–media messages may be produced in one location, and then disseminated to a different audience or many disconnected audiences (Peterson 2003, 19). Many have debated the bias towards studies of visual media both within anthropology and other disciplines, which Jay (1988) has called “ocularcentrism” (see Crary 1990; Fabian 1983; Krauss 1988). Media scholars Holt et al. (2011) argue that there should be a field of study dedicated to media industries to bring together various multidisciplinary approaches, while Caldwell (2008, 5) advocates for a media industries approach through a merger of cultural studies and political economy.

Within anthropology, Hortense Powdermaker (1950) published the only ethnography focused exclusively on Hollywood, called *Hollywood, The Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-makers*. She posited that films shape culture and are shaped by culture (her work is discussed further shortly). Film has been portrayed as a powerful medium (see Knopf 2008; Waugh et al. 2010; Goodman 2015) which can unite people to support a cause or viewpoint more effectively than other media (Shohat et al. 2002, 119).[4] The rituals involved in going to a theatre and watching collectively play a central role in this unity or "nation building," recalling aspects of Anderson's (1983) imagined communities. Film is such a provocative art form that it has been used along with other media to assert supremacy over groups (Schiller 1976). The mid-century influence of the Frankfurt School led to the belief that the audience was powerless and simply received information while the industry[5] is a powerful monolith. Adorno et al. (1947) present a cynical view of the film industry with audiences so entranced that they do not think on their own anymore. Hall (1980) challenged this and proposed a reception theory involving audiences either accepting the meaning intended by the filmmaker, creating their own, or negotiating between the two. For Shohat et al. (2002, 119), there is nothing inherently negative about film's ability to shape thinking; however, it has been frequently used asymmetrically, advancing specific agendas and causing harm to groups.[6] Stephenson (1964) attempted to move beyond the tendency to view mass media as a tool for social control, and to focus instead on the way individuals are united through the process of selecting the media they choose to consume, thereby creating

[4] A few brief examples: Frank Capra's war propaganda series *Why We Fight* (1942-45) convinced Americans to support World War II efforts (Silver 2011). In 1988, Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* helped overturn a murder conviction and set an imprisoned man free. The documentary *Blackfish* (2013, dir. Gabriela Cowperthwaite) is credited with convincing Sea World to end its orca breeding program (Palmieri 2016).

[5] Hollywood's film and television industry is commonly referred to as "the industry" as if it is the only one that matters.

[6] Mulvey (1975), for instance, would say that Hollywood films were representing society's dominant patriarchal ideology, which was oppressive to women. She coined the term "Male Gaze" to describe the dominance of men's perspectives in filmmaking.

ties with others, a practice he called convergent selectivity. In the US context, films influence and interpret American life, and are an integral part of national history (Sobchack 1980, 293).

Advocates regularly mention film's influence on culture when they argue that having few women behind the camera denies women the right to contribute to cultural narratives (M. Evans 2017), promotes unconscious bias against women (Kahn 2018), and presents a skewed view of the world. The documentary *Half The Picture* (2018, dir. Amy Adrion) about the dearth of women directors, is named as such because the perspectives of women filmmakers–half the population–are largely missing from mainstream film. "There's so much in the culture that's like quietly telling women that their stories don't matter," filmmaker and actor Lena Dunham says in the documentary. For filmmaker Dawn Porter (2014), *who* is telling the story is critical, because media images influence how groups see themselves and others. "When marginalized groups in society are absent from the stories a nation tells about itself, or when the media images are rooted primarily in stereotype, inequality is normalized and is more likely to be reinforced over time through our prejudices and practices," she writes for *Indiewire* (Porter 2014). Research has begun to examine the link between the gender/race of a filmmaker and the content depicted onscreen, a topic I discuss below.

1.2.1 Powdermaker's Dream Factory

Powdermaker hypothesized that films are a product of the environment in which they are created–Hollywood's social system influenced the content and meaning of films (Powdermaker 1950, 3). This was not a new proposal, but it had never been examined in relation to films. Ultimately, she found that Hollywood is a "caricature of selected contemporary tendencies," (Powdermaker 1950, 305)–some characteristics of American life are downplayed in the industry while others are exaggerated (a pronounced class divide, concentrated power, and greed). These characteristics are then reflected in films. In some ways, there are parallels here with what I am trying to accomplish, which is to

examine how Hollywood's social system affects the production of films by women filmmakers. Powdermaker's Hollywood was an isolated village, marked by extreme isolation and excessive boundaries (Powdermaker 1950, 19–20). Stars and executives often remained within the confines of their neighbourhood, such as Beverly Hills or Bel-Air for daily activities and socialized with other wealthy people at "dull" parties; contact with the outside world is limited (Powdermaker 1950, 20–21). In Chapter 3, I examine how industry members congregate in fortified communities and develop relationships (and business deals) with each other while the rest of the city is highly segregated. What emerges from Powdermaker's monograph is an unflattering portrait of an industry rife with infighting, resentment, and anxiety. She calls Hollywood totalitarian, with limited freedom for creative individuals who have what it takes to make their own choices but lack power, and overbearing executives who have the freedom to choose, but lack skills or knowledge. Power struggles are a common thread throughout her study, which is no surprise given Powdermaker's background as a union official (Ortner 2015). She describes individuals' behaviour as compulsive and driven by anxiety (Powdermaker 1950, 327–328). This state of continual crisis rendered Hollywood businesses inefficient, and strained human relations, resulting in unremarkable films (Powdermaker 1950, 332). If directors took creative risks and contributed to the advancement of cinema as an art form, they were successful "in spite of the system," (Powdermaker 1950, 204). A director could not easily go against producers or executives, lest "he"[7] risk getting fired or being called "difficult" (Powdermaker 1950, 190)–a label I discuss in regard to women filmmakers in Chapter 8. Powdermaker (1950, 332) concludes by urging Hollywood to adopt new practices and prioritize cooperation over domination. Her work is valuable as a historical document and comparative guide; nearly seventy years later, as I argue

[7] A sign of the times: Powdermaker uses the pronoun "he" in her discussions of executives, producers, writers and directors.

throughout this thesis, Hollywood is still exclusive, unstable, and brutally competitive, producing a fair number of expensive, unremarkable films.

1.2.2 Contemporary ethnographies

Beyond Powdermaker (1950), anthropological literature about film and television production has been limited. Recent ethnographies have examined the transformation of Ghanaian society through religion and video-making (Meyer 2015); the production of celebrity, through examination of the work of Latinx paparazzi and white women reporters in Hollywood (Diaz 2020); the rise of the Bollywood industry in India (Ganti 2012); the creative integration of obscene materials in Bangladeshi action movies (Hoek 2013); and the logistics and unpredictability of making feature films in the Egyptian film industry (El Khachab 2021). I focus here on the three most relevant monographs that explore risk in filmmaking in various forms but do not address gender, race, or systemic inequality in detail: Anand Pandian's *Reel World* (2015), set in South India, Sylvia J. Martin's *Haunted: An Ethnography of the Hollywood and Hong Kong Media Industries* (2017), set in Hong Kong and Hollywood, and Sherry B. Ortner's *Not Hollywood* (2013), about American independent ("indie") filmmaking. Martin and Ortner's ethnographies are the only works, to my knowledge, that examine filmmaking in and around Hollywood, while Pandian's ethnography raises relevant questions about methodology, access, and risk. My work complements and builds on each of these studies in different ways.

Both Ortner and Martin discuss gender, whereas *Reel World* is informed by the perspectives of men working in film and does not include in-depth analysis of gender or race, although they are mentioned.[8] Pandian uses male-oriented language in describing "the men at the local film distribution office" (2015, 251), and the "cameraman" (2015, 161) on a film set, which illustrates how male-dominated his field sites were. Martin

[8] Pandian (2015, 253) writes apologetically: "There may come a time when women's lives and stories find a better place in Tamil cinema. For now, forgive me for lingering once more on the fate of men's deeds."

(2017, 94) briefly addresses gender and race-based inequality, saying disparities were visible but not discussed during her fieldwork between 2003 and 2007, well before gender inequality and racism became subjects of debate with #MeToo in 2017 and with #BlackLivesMatter in 2020. She observed more women working on set in Hollywood versus Hong Kong, but noted that the women were mostly white (Martin 2017, 26). Production crews were fairly homogenous in both locations–white in Hollywood and Chinese in Hong Kong. Comparing production experiences, she found one Hollywood set was the most "respectful" and the most diverse (Martin 2017, 26), which is ironic considering the unpleasant experiences of several of my participants (discussed in Chapter 7). Unlike Pandian and Martin, Ortner includes a chapter about women in which her participants speak of "boys" running the studios and investors acting inappropriately in meetings (Ortner 2013, 180–182). Known for her pioneering work on gender–in which she argued that women are universally subordinate to men (Ortner 1972)–Ortner considered these topics in interviews conducted a decade before the #MeToo movement brought gender inequality to the fore. My work expands on this in a significant way, exploring inappropriate behaviour and gender- and race-based adversity as I chart women's careers.

Precarity is a theme across all three works, with individuals shouldering risk rather than the industry. Pandian (2015, 6) argues that cinematic experiences and creation itself are made in a "milieu of tremendous uncertainty" and that those involved overcome challenges by working in a fluid and improvised manner. Filmmakers endure cycles of excitement and disappointment as they dedicate themselves to bringing their creations to life. My research participants also speak of such cycles, involving the "highs" of making films, and the "lows" of not knowing when they might work again or obtain sufficient funding to move forward with their productions. These challenging periods between projects are mentioned by Pandian, but I describe them at length in the chapters

that follow, explaining how filmmakers take personal and financial risks to advance their careers.

Ortner and Martin both reference neoliberalism and globalization, explaining how the rise of corporate powers has contributed to fewer protections for workers who are seen as disposable. Chapter 7 of this thesis includes a more detailed discussion of their positions. My research acknowledges these macro influences but focuses on personal experiences to explore aspects of risk that have not previously been discussed in anthropological literature about film and television production. The topics I shed light on include: the gendered nature of risk (in which women filmmakers are perceived as "risky" hires and are therefore overlooked for directing jobs); culturally specific risk (when young women filmmakers choose to pursue film though their families and/or cultural communities are not supportive of careers in the arts), as well as the personal financial risk of being a filmmaker (which depends on how women support themselves at different career stages). While these themes are briefly mentioned in passing in other ethnographies, they are fundamental considerations in my research. As part of my contribution to anthropological work on filmmaking, this thesis aims to deepen understanding of gender inequalities in the industry, with particular reference to exclusion, risk and precarity. I relate experiences of these issues to gender, to explore how they impact women's careers in the film industry, showing that they are important factors in understanding career paths in Hollywood's cultural context.

My methodological challenges (described in Chapter 2) also contribute to debates surrounding access and participant observation in highly secretive and exclusive environments. Had I worked *inside* the industry like Martin and Pandian, I may not have been able to present a critical ethnography about the challenges of "breaking in" to an exclusionary system–challenges that I faced, and that my research participants face. Ortner originally intended to study Hollywood filmmaking but was unable to make inroads and thus shifted her focus to the "indie" film world (Ortner 2010). Pandian,

meanwhile, gained access to 17 film shoots and found himself “on the inside” in ways I could only imagine: going for a jog with a director, visiting a screenwriter’s apartment, and observing filmmakers as they made decisions on set. In one instance, a producer *called him* to invite him to a film set (Pandian 2015, 253)–whereas, by contrast, I spent much of my research time calling and emailing to no avail. Accordingly, I imagine that Pandian had to tread carefully in his research, perhaps avoiding controversial topics which may have complicated his access (as he says in his book, “I’m just a visitor here, trying not to get in the way” (2015, 5)). He does not explore how most of his high-profile research participants ascended the ranks of filmmaking or mention that several have famous parents who are also active in film as I discovered by Googling their names.

Like Ortner’s, my work is situated on the threshold between independent film and Hollywood due to issues of research access. Though I initially perceived this as a shortcoming, I realized that standing alongside filmmakers on the “outside” allowed me to develop a nuanced first-hand understanding of what “breaking in” to Hollywood can entail and mean. Ortner describes an independent film movement which evolved in a reactive manner, as “anti-Hollywood” (2013, 3), whereas I position my research participants as operating alongside Hollywood, straddling both worlds. My participants describe the pitfalls of pursuing a creative career and the systemic inequality they encounter; however, many still believe in a form of the American dream, in which their undisputed talent *will* be noticed, they *will* be the exception to the rule, and they *will* achieve upward social mobility. Aware of the barriers and the fact that few filmmakers succeed, they are trying anyway.

To summarise, having been unable to gain substantial “access” to Hollywood filmmaking practices, and having little to lose, I have been able to pursue lines of inquiry without risking relationships with people on the “inside.” Through my research, I experienced what it is like to be an “outsider” attempting to “break in” and gained insight into the mental, physical and emotional toll involved (as I explore in detail in Chapter 2).

1.2.3 Women in filmmaking: quantitative data

Over the past two decades, data have shown that the number of women employed in key filmmaking positions in the US has remained almost static, despite wide-ranging reform efforts, described below. Key studies have been authored by Martha M. Lauzen from San Diego State University (SDSU) and Stacy L. Smith from the University of Southern California (USC). Here I include statistics relating to the period during which I conducted my fieldwork (2016-2018), with more recent data where relevant. Since 1998, Lauzen has compiled reports relating to women's representation in front of and behind the camera (e.g. Lauzen 2013; Lauzen 2015a; Lauzen 2015b; Lauzen 2020; Lauzen 2022a; Lauzen 2022b), and Smith has drawn media attention with reports about how "pale and male" the industry is (e.g. Smith et al. 2006; Smith 2007; Smith et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2012; S. L. Smith et al. 2016; Smith et al. 2020; Smith et al. 2022). Smith's studies, often released in partnership with organizations such as the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, have analyzed the on-screen representation of groups including women, men, or people of colour, behind-the-scenes employment, independent filmmaking, and gender balance of film critics, among other topics. Lauzen focuses exclusively on gender, which is one of the limitations of her work. Her research tracks the employment of women in key behind-the-scenes positions (director, writer, producer, executive producer, editor, and cinematographer) on the highest-grossing films. The relative number of men and women has remained almost constant since 1998, with men occupying between 79 and 85% of key positions depending on the year (Lauzen 2020, 3). For a visual presentation of Lauzen's data, please see Figures 3-6 below. Smith et al. (2016, 3–4) found that feature filmmaking had the lowest number of women directors (3.4%), with women faring better in television (17.1% of directors of broadcast television and 15.1% of cable) and online (11.8% of directors), with similar results for writers. Statistics from Europe reveal similar patterns: male directors outnumbered female directors five to one in Spain in 2015 (Martinez 2016) with comparable statistics from Austria, Croatia, the United Kingdom and Germany

(European Women's Audiovisual Network 2016a; European Women's Audiovisual Network 2016b; EWA 2016; European Women's Audiovisual Network 2016d). Lauzen (2015b, 1) proposed that women are more likely to succeed in independent filmmaking (where they represented 18% of directors in 2014-15), documentary (29%) or broadcast television (14%). In 2018, women directed 4% of the 100 top-grossing Hollywood films, 8% of the top 250 films, and 15% of the top 500 films (Lauzen 2019), which suggests that women are more likely to be limited to films with lower profiles, smaller budgets, and fewer box office expectations, a topic explored in Chapter 6. As I explain, men dominate high-risk, high-budget filmmaking and with so much capital invested, studios spent millions to recoup their money by ensuring the films are well-marketed and widely distributed. Higher-budget films usually make more money (De Vany 2004, 132), which helps these same men get re-hired. With women relegated to low-budget projects, they are not given the same distribution or marketing, which feeds the "persistent Hollywood belief" (Hickey 2014) that "women's films" do not make money. The 2021 Hollywood Diversity Report from the University of California, Los Angeles, confirmed that both women and people of colour are more likely to direct the lowest-budget Hollywood films (under $20 million) and that white directors were twice as likely as directors of colour to make a $100 million film (Hunt et al. 2021). Women of colour experience limitations due to their gender and their race, a subject I return to later in this thesis. Figures 3-6 on the following pages contain data from 1998 to 2021 and demonstrate that women have been underrepresented in key creative roles in the top 250 domestic features, with a slight increase since 2017.

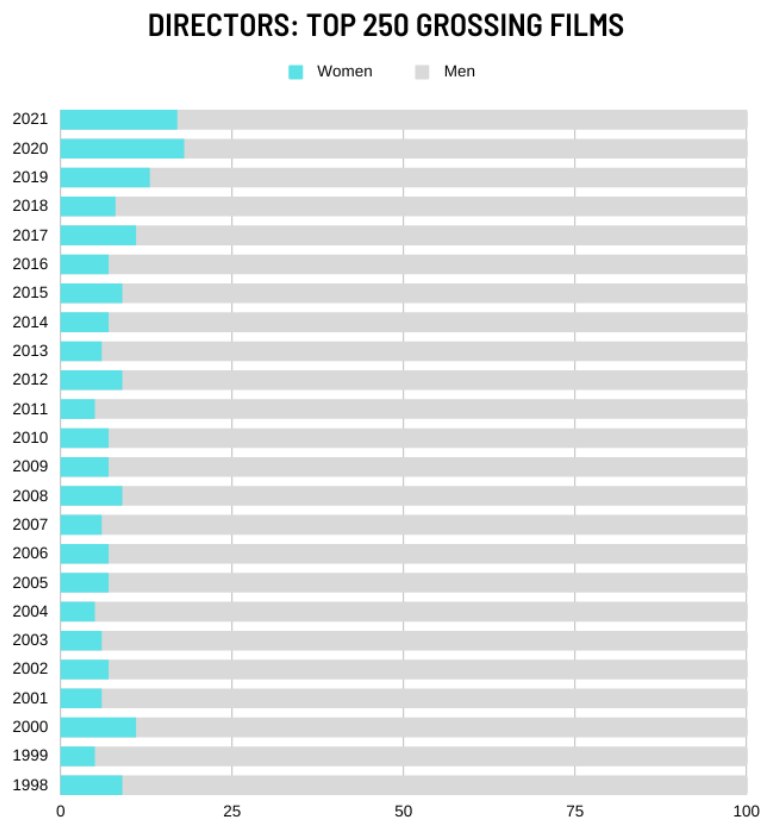


Figure 3. *The number of women directors rose to a high of 18% in 2020 before dipping to 17% in 2021. Graph by the author using data from Lauzen (2020; 2022b).*

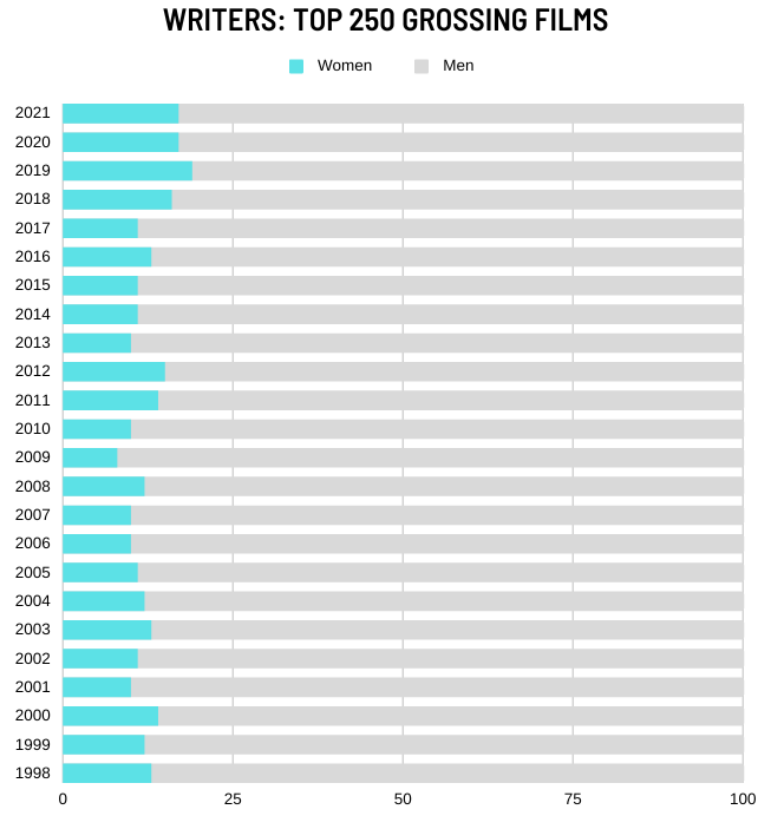


Figure 4. *Women have had more opportunities as writers, but the role is still heavily dominated by men. Graph by the author using data from Lauzen (2020; 2022b).*

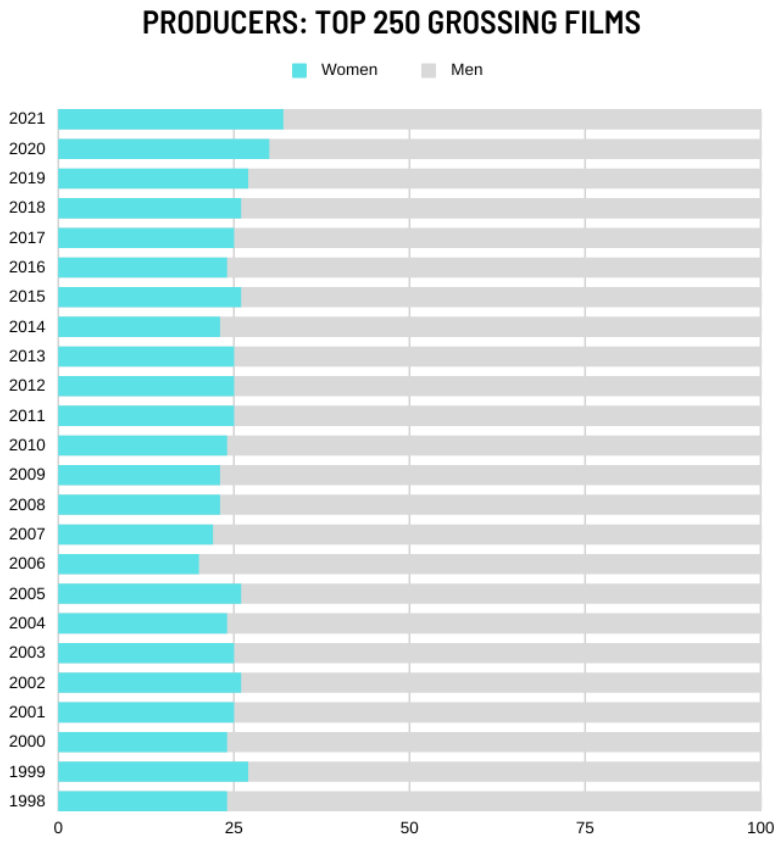


Figure 5. *Women's employment as producers has hovered around the 25% mark since 1998, with a gradual increase since 2016. Graph by the author using data from Lauzen (2020; 2022b).*

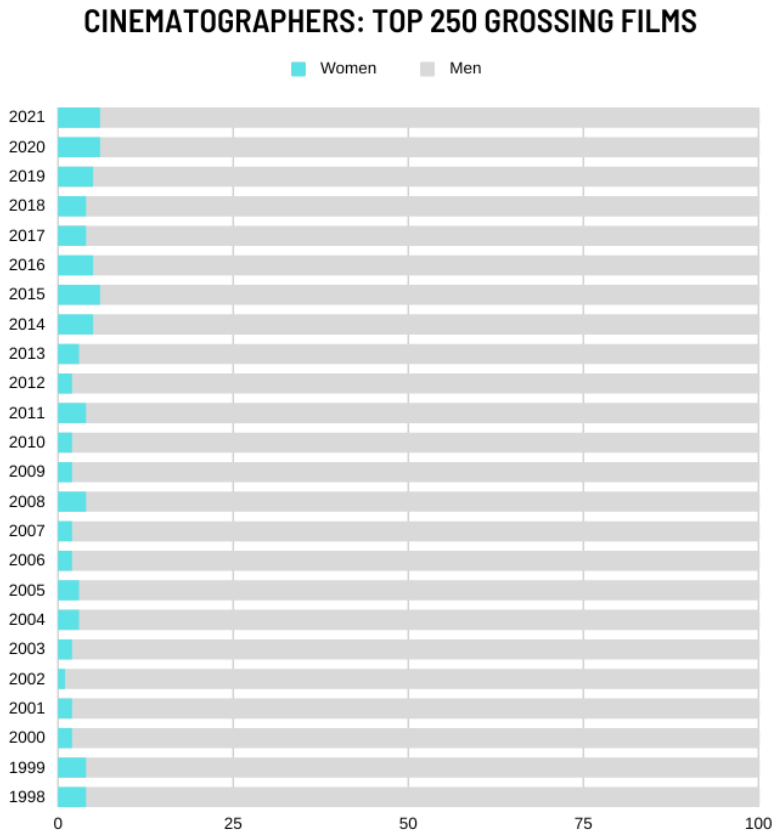


Figure 6. *There is considerable progress to be made for women in cinematography: they represented 4% of cinematographers in 1998, and 6% in 2021. Graph by the author using data from Lauzen (2020; 2022b).*

On a related topic, Lauzen and Smith have considered how the presence of women filmmakers affects hiring and onscreen content (other researchers have also examined this, e.g., Seger 1996; Steenland 1995). When women direct, productions hire up to six times more women as writers, editors and cinematographers (Lauzen 2015). In noting that as the number of female writers/directors increases, so too does the number of female characters, Smith suggests that "one solution to on-screen diversity is to hire more women behind the camera" (S. L. Smith et al. 2016, 5). However, she goes on to say that studios may have a tendency to hire women for "female-oriented" projects and this limits women's opportunities to so-called "chick flicks" (S. L. Smith et al. 2016, 5). Some of these projects may also be lower budget, meaning that in-demand male producers or writers, as examples, may not be interested in working on them, freeing up opportunities for women. In the 100 highest-grossing domestic films of 2015 Lauzen (2016, 1), found that women made up 22% of protagonists; however, in films with at least one woman as writer or director, the number of female protagonists rose to 50% (Lauzen 2016, 4). Again, is this because the projects were already "female-oriented"? Women depicted onscreen were overwhelmingly young and white, and as they aged, became less visible onscreen compared with men (Lauzen 2016, 3), and were also more likely to be scantily clad, have fewer lines, and no defined occupations (appearing as "the girlfriend" or "the mother") (Smith et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2019). Studies show that the presence or absence of women as directors can influence how characters are represented or whether they are seen at all.[9] The findings suggest that when women are hired for key roles, they become a "gateway" to employment for other women, according to Lauzen (Dockterman 2015). Further research on the link between filmmaking positions and on-screen representation is needed to draw conclusive links.

[9] The Bechdel Test is designed to identify films in which female characters have meaningful interactions. To pass the test, the film must feature two or more named characters who are women; the two characters must speak to each other; and they must talk about anything other than men. Though the test has been criticized for its narrow scope, it draws attention to the fact that many popular films do not even have two named female characters.

Other studies indicate that almost all branches of film and television production are dominated by men and/or white people. A *Los Angeles Times* report compiled data relating to the decision-makers who determine which films to make and how to promote them: in 2016, executives were 98% white and those in public relations were 95% white (Keegan et al. 2016). Hollywood used to have several women leading studios, but by 2015 all major studios were headed by men (Ogilvie 2015). In a survey of nearly 20,000 reviews of the top 100 movies of 2017, most were written by men (77%) and by white critics (82%) (Choueiti et al. 2018), which is significant because they have the power to influence box office results (Basuroy et al. 2003; Eagan 2020). Not surprisingly, members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, who vote for the Oscars and confer elite status (Cattani et al. 2014) on actors, filmmakers and technical specialists, are also overwhelmingly white (94%) and male (77%) as of 2016, though the Academy has recently made efforts to diversify their ranks (Keegan et al. 2016; Thompson 2020).

1.2.4 Stagnation, and incremental change

The absence of women from key film jobs is well-documented and industry organizations (such as the Alliance of Women Directors, Women Filmmakers Across America, CineFemme, Women and Hollywood, Women Make Movies, and Sundance Institute's Women Filmmakers Initiative) have been trying to effect change for decades. Even studios–the ones accused of discriminating against women (Robb 2017)–spend money on long-running mentorship and shadowing programs targeting women and "underrepresented" groups (discussed in Chapter 5). Others have created special funds, grants, training schemes and talent incubators to support their work (e.g. Murphy 2020; Kilkenny 2018b; Women and Hollywood 2021; Galuppo 2020; Dadgar 2019). Summits and panel discussions regularly address gender inequality (e.g. NewEnglandFilm.com 2018; Kilday 2016; City of West Hollywood 2016; Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2017). Women filmmakers in Hollywood started becoming a "hot topic" as media coverage, fueled in part by Smith and Lauzen's research, intensified in the early 2010s

(McClintock 2011; Murty 2013; Krischer 2014). “Hollywood’s ‘female director problem’ has been the source of much dialogue over the past several years,” Smith said in 2018. “The evidence reveals that despite the increased attention, there has been no change for women behind the camera” (USC Annenberg Staff 2018). Despite their efforts, advocates for women filmmakers started feeling frustrated when they saw the numbers stagnate. When Cathy Schulman, then-president of the board of directors for the non-profit organization Women In Film, Los Angeles (WIF), was preparing remarks for their annual gala in 2012, she realized that she did not want to stand up yet again to quote the same discouraging data. “[N]ot only was I going to be grossly disappointed in myself and the organization, but I also was going to be depressed and embarrassed,” she told *Variety* (Noonan 2014).

Even if all studios and networks decided to integrate women filmmakers today, a demographic shift could take years because of the time required to execute a project– there are potentially hundreds of projects with men attached that have yet to be released. As explained in Chapter 5, it is common to spend years developing a project only to discover it will not move ahead and repeat the process with another. Women may be already associated with unannounced projects that are still in development (planning, conceptualization, and financing), and that risk being abandoned along the way. While there was no tidal wave of change after #MeToo in the film world, there *has* been a noticeable shift in television: in 2013-2014, women represented 17% of television directors, with women of colour directing 2% of episodes that year (Directors Guild of America 2014); by 2021, women represented 39% of directors, and women of colour directed 13% of episodes (Directors Guild of America 2022c). On television series, directors operate on a “for hire” basis and typically join the staff of a series for an episode or two, executing the show’s established vision and style (Ravage 1978). Most power remains with the “showrunner” (or series “creator”) and their writer-producers (Blakey 2017; Everett 2015). Though the schedules are rigid and funding is tightly controlled,

hiring a television director is arguably less of a gamble than hiring a feature director; with features there are far more variables and unknowns, not to mention less oversight of the director as film has long been considered a “director’s medium” (Jacobson 1990; Dukore 1985). In feature filmmaking, women directed 10.7% of the 100 top-grossing films in 2019 (Smith et al. 2020, 2), a considerable improvement over previous years when the numbers dropped as low as 1.9% in 2013 and 2014 (Smith et al. 2022). However, three out of seven major studios hired no women directors in 2019 (Smith et al. 2020). Lauzen’s (2022b, 3) most recent study shows that women directed 16% of the top 100 features in 2020, and 12% in 2021, along with 18% of the top 250 features in 2020, and 17% in 2021. As of May 2022, every major studio has at least two features directed by women set to be released by 2023, which, as indicated above, is atypical (Erbland 2022). Although women directors are starting to gain ground, in part due to the considerable attention paid to them, women in other categories have not fared as well: among the top 250 films, women represented 4% of cinematographers in 1998, and 6% in 2021; 13% of writers in 1998 and 17% in 2021; and 20% of editors in 1998 and 22% in 2021 (Lauzen 2022b). Ortner (2013, 176) writes that the number of women in the Producers Guild of America, the union representing producers, rose from 0.3% in the 1970s to 45% in the 2000s, however Lauzen’s data shows that their contributions to top-grossing films has only grown marginally since 1998 (see Figure 5 on page 20). It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason the demographics began shifting; however, a range of factors have likely contributed: a federal investigation into studio discrimination in 2015 (Keegan 2015), a reinvigorated women’s movement following the election of US President Donald Trump in 2016 (Berry et al. 2018), and the #MeToo movement starting in 2017 (Luo et al. 2022; Brannon Donoghue 2020). I address these topics later in the Introduction. As demonstrated in this section, there is considerable data available about women’s employment in key roles; however, further context and nuance are needed to more fully understand women’s marginalization; which is why I chose to analyze this topic from an anthropological perspective.

Quantitative researchers, activists and industry organizations have all raised awareness of the limited success of women directors in Hollywood, but have not explored production patterns, practices, or hierarchies, beyond brief mention of these. Anthropologists acquire "situated" knowledge by gaining a deep understanding of events and environments over time (Peterson 2003, 8) that are not easily captured in a magazine feature or a quantitative survey. Long-term fieldwork reveals new understandings of the social and cultural factors that influence and contribute to cycles of inequality in Hollywood. In this thesis, I consider gender-based inequality across filmmaking stages: choosing and hiring a director, developing a project (seeking funding, meeting potential collaborators, and refining the script), shooting the film, negotiating with producers or executives, and, finally, distribution and marketing. Deeply-rooted gender imbalances extend beyond Hollywood. To describe and analyse them in the Hollywood context, I use an anthropological approach–taking a wide range of factors, behaviours and patterns into account and comparing them. Unlike media scholars, who aim to understand the content of media messages and how they are transmitted and received, my goal is to understand the social and cultural context in which those messages are produced. I explore these issues in detail in Chapter 2.

1.2.5 Feminism and the status of US women

Though Powdermaker (1950) argued that Hollywood was socially isolated, the industry's gender imbalance is connected to wider inequality in the US, ranked 28th in the world for gender equality in 2015 (World Economic Forum 2015). As the following condensed overview shows, inequality permeates multiple spheres of women's lives in the US. For instance, shortly after American women gained the right to vote in 1920, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was introduced to provide men and women with the same constitutional protection. It did not pass in 1923, was voted down for the next 50 years, and has not yet been ratified (Equal Rights Amendment 2016; National Archives 2022). Regarding pay parity, white women earned 79% of men's salaries in 2019,

compared to 63% for Black women and 55% for Latinx women (AAUW 2020). Women are more likely than men to live in poverty (Hess et al. 2015) and retire into it (Hicken 2014), especially women of colour.[10] Abortion access has been difficult for years (Bearak et al. 2017), and in 2022, the Supreme Court overturned previous rulings to allow individual states to ban abortion (Lazzarini 2022). With no mandated paid maternity leave (Andres et al. 2016), some women use vacation and sick days to recover from childbirth (Green 2018).[11] Uneven access to health care is another concern (Howard 2017), with American women dying of complications related to childbirth at much higher rates than women in other high-income countries (World Health Organization 2019), and Black women being three times more likely to die than white women (Petersen et al. 2019). Finally, some argue that "rape culture" which normalizes sexually aggressive behaviour, is dominant in the US (Buchwald et al. 1993; Herman 1984); approximately one in five women report being raped in their lifetime, and just under half of American women have experienced sexual violence (Breiding et al. 2014).

Though feminists rally against the injustices described above, women have not always been allies to other women, whether they are struggling against patriarchy, or working in film, or in academia. "White feminists" have been accused of creating a two-tier system of their own by ignoring the perspectives of women from different classes and backgrounds (Breines 2006; Bolles 2013; Jonsson 2014; Collins 2020). The First Wave of feminism began in the late 19th century with a decades-long fight for the right to vote (Donovan 2000), though Hewitt (2010, 16) has challenged the focus on suffrage, saying that the histories and struggles of Black, Native American, Mexican-American,

[10] In the US, the average income for white men over 65 is $44,200, whereas it is $23,100 for white women, $21,900 for Black women, and $14,800 for Latinx women (AAUW 2022).

[11] The availability of maternity leave and affordable, subsidized childcare can have a direct influence on women's continued employment–Mandel et al. (2006) conducted a study of 22 industrialized nations which found that the number of weeks of paid maternity leave and the percentage of children in publicly-funded childcare are linked to women's participation in the labour force.

immigrant and white working-class women should have been included. Betty Friedan (1963) published *The Feminine Mystique*, helping to launch the Second Wave in the US by highlighting women's frustrations and repression. According to Black feminist thinker bell hooks (2000, 2), Friedan foregrounds the concerns of "leisure-class white housewives" at the expense of women of colour.[12] My thesis focuses on women filmmakers in Hollywood–a social group whose opportunities have been diminished by a more dominant group–and yet even some white women filmmakers have participated in the silencing of women of colour. Recently, Jane Campion, a prominent contemporary director, was accused of displaying "peak white feminism" (Agarwal 2022) at the Critic's Choice Awards in 2022. After receiving an award, she acknowledged tennis champions Venus and Serena Williams in the audience, saying, ''you are such marvels. However, you do not play against the guys, like I have to" (TBS 2022). Campion, a white woman, seemed to be attempting humour, but her remarks were swiftly criticized for being tone-deaf (Nordyke 2022; Mercado 2022), ignoring the fact that the Williams sisters, two Black women from south central Los Angeles, have overcome considerable race- and gender-based adversity to dominate a "white" sport (Spencer 2004; Tredway 2020).[13] The "whitewashing" of film roles, another form of erasure in which white actors are chosen for parts written for actors of other races and ethnicities, is repeatedly criticized and yet recurs (Lee 2016; Smith 2015; Leadbeater 2017). Even in anthropology, a discipline concerned with mapping power relations and dismantling hierarchies, the perspectives of women (and people) of colour have often been ignored or suppressed within the Academy (Baker 1998; Harrison 1995; McLaurin 2001), leading some to speak out about the lack of respect and recognition for Black women, for instance (Bolles 2013; Brown-Vincent 2019). I mention white feminism, well-intentioned but misguided white filmmakers, and the double standards within anthropology because struggles for equality

[12] Later work by Third Wave feminists in the 1990s critiqued the Second Wave and attempted to examine the intersections of gender, race and class (Mann et al. 2005; K. Mahoney 2016).

[13] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of race-based adversity.

have involved numerous missteps by various parties. As I explain in the Conclusion, “progress” has been messy–even those leading the charge for women filmmakers have admitted they sometimes hired white men for their projects instead.

1.2.6 Reigniting the women’s movement

Available research reveals that behind-the-camera demographics have started shifting with more women being hired as directors in film and television. However, because of how de-centralized Hollywood hiring is–with no formal procedures and individual producers hiring for individual productions across numerous studios and networks–it would be difficult to attribute this change to any one particular source or factor. A combination of socio-political occurrences is likely to have contributed, which I outline here as context for the chapters that follow. Firstly, in 2015, a federal agency, the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC), launched an investigation into studio discrimination against women directors, which is described in greater detail in Chapter 5. One of my research participants, filmmaker Maria Giese, instigated a complaint with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) which eventually led to the EEOC investigation (Giese 2015c). Maria told me that she firmly believes that using the legal system is the only effective way to implement change in Hollywood because industry leaders are fearful of lawsuits and losing money. In Maria’s view, the noise surrounding the ACLU complaint and EEOC investigation helped trigger the #MeToo movement.

There are also other factors which likely contributed to the socio-political climate which made #MeToo possible. The November 2016 election of Donald Trump, a man serially accused of sexual misconduct, over Hillary Clinton, the first woman to run for a major party (Berry et al. 2018), is credited with reinvigorating the women’s movement (Chozick 2018; Rickards et al. 2018). Trump was elected despite bragging about grabbing women “by the pussy” and forcefully kissing them without consent (BBC News 2016). “And when you're a star they let you do it. You can do anything," he was recorded

as saying, a statement which is echoed in later chapters of this thesis about what powerful Hollywood men can "get away with." Multiple women had already accused Trump of sexual misconduct and many more "corroborated Trump's own boasting" (Tolentino 2016; Kurtzleben 2016). Trump's election sparked widespread protests from women (Berry et al. 2018, 85), with an estimated 500,000 to 750,000 people gathering in Los Angeles to march the day after his 2017 inauguration (Broomfield 2017; Pressman et al. 2017). #MeToo soon followed in October of the same year, starting with the Weinstein exposés and soon spreading to other industries and countries (Lee et al. 2021; Levy et al. 2022). In Hollywood, survivors gained the courage to speak out about abuse, assault or harassment allegedly perpetrated by numerous power-wielding men in entertainment, including Matt Lauer, Les Moonves, Louis C.K., Kevin Spacey, James Toback and many others (Siegel 2020; Setoodeh 2020; Maddaus et al. 2019; Stelter 2018; Gonzalez 2018), typically resulting in their "cancellation" (Baum 2022).



Figure 7. *Up to 750,000 gathered for the Women's March against Trump on January 21, 2017. According to some experts, it may have been the largest day of protest in US history (Broomfield 2017). Image by the author.*

Growing discontent over domestic politics encouraged a record number of women to run for office (World Economic Forum 2018), particularly among Democratic supporters who were already engaged in political debate (Castle et al. 2020). In 2018, Brett Kavanaugh was appointed to the US Supreme Court despite facing "credible" accusations of sexual assault from Christine Blasey Ford (Folley 2018; Donegan 2018). The situation mirrored the allegations against Clarence Thomas in 1991, another supreme court candidate who was accused of sexual harassment by Anita Hill and appointed anyway. Gibson et al. (2019) call the Hill/Thomas saga the "starting point for a slow cruise to a season of reckoning." Twenty-seven years later as Kavanaugh was being confirmed, political journalist Aída Chávez published a cryptic tweet inciting women to "riot at midnight" (see Figure 8 below).



Figure 8. *Journalist Aída Chávez captured the frustration some American women were feeling as they watched the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings. Screengrab from Twitter.*

These events served as a backdrop for my fieldwork, which took place at a time when women began to speak out against abuses of power en masse. On the night of Trump's election, I was sitting in on a film class about women's careers in Hollywood at the University of Southern California (USC). The instructor, Bonnie Bruckheimer, kept apologizing to the guest speaker, filmmaker Meera Menon (director of *Equity*, 2016, and numerous television series), for interrupting their discussion to monitor the vote tally

using the classroom's projector. The students uttered "Holy shit!" and "Oh no, no, no," as Trump made gains on CNN. Over the course of the next year, the "season of reckoning" erupted.

1.2.7 Women in creative industries

Having discussed the socio-political climate, I now turn to the disparities within the creative and cultural industries (CCI). There is an assumption that creative people congregate in environments which are open, diverse, and lacking rigid hierarchies (Florida 2002), and tech companies in particular are viewed as "cool, creative, egalitarian" (Gill 2002). In 2016, Google topped *Fortune*'s (2015) "100 Best Companies to Work For" for the sixth year despite ranking 83rd for gender balance, with a workforce that was 28% women.[14] Though Google spent $150 million on "diversity initiatives" in 2015, only 4% of new hires that year were Black (Eadicicco 2016; Guynn 2015). As I argue throughout this thesis, inequality is often the result of deep-rooted systems of exclusion which cannot be changed overnight: "[C]ompanies can't buy diversity," (Stephanie Mehta 2019). Like Silicon Valley, Hollywood is perceived as liberal (Gross 2018; Kendall 2009), with celebrities demonstrating support for LGBTQ+ causes, sustainability, and humanitarian crises (Jang 2015; Greenfield 2015; The Associated Press 2006), even though the industry as a whole has a poor record for inclusion of women, people of colour, and other marginalized groups (Lauzen 2020; Smith, Choueiti, Case, et al. 2019; R. Lopez 2018; Beresford 2019; Martinelli 2018). Industry members' support for "progressive" causes is discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7 also explores the precarity associated with creative work. Women in the CCI tend to be relatively young (Conor et al. 2015, 6) and though the UK television industry, for example, is excellent at recruiting women, it cannot retain them over time

[14] *Fortune* claims to consider "diversity" in its rankings, but one would assume it is not heavily weighted if Google was ranked first.

according to Kate O'Connor (BAFTA 2010); Leung et. al (2015, 52) write that the UK television industry is "haemorrhaging" women in their late thirties and forties. Burke et al. (2009) looked at the impacts of long hours and found that women who worked 56 hours per week or more, which is frequently required in CCI jobs, were younger, more likely to be unmarried, and have few or no children. A similar study found that men in numerous industries could work significantly longer hours and were more likely to have a partner who stayed home (Hewlett et al. 2006). Furthermore, there is an expectation that CCI workers will accept little to no compensation when they are starting out or when it is required for the project's successful completion, with unpaid internships standard in some fields (Siebert et al. 2013; Shade et al. 2015). Financially, the burden is greater for women, who earn 15% less than men in the CCI (Skillset 2010a: 6), which can limit their ability to start or advance their career. With a significant amount of CCI freelance work based on informal hiring practices and word of mouth, networking is crucial and some women are unable to participate in the "compulsory sociality" (Gregg 2006, as cited in Leung et. al 2015, 57) of creative work due to caring responsibilities, discussed further in Chapter 4.

1.2.8 Histories of film

I have detailed the inequalities women face in the US and in the CCI. Next, I trace key developments in film history to reveal that the exclusion of women filmmakers has deep historical roots in the form of institutional practices. These practices are hard to dislodge and have been resilient in the face of critique and protest, as I explain. In my ethnographic chapters, I describe how the desire within Hollywood to make as much money as possible has resulted in a system which favours internal hiring, often from an established pool of white men. This drive for profit is linked to audience appeal: executives do not necessarily know what audiences want, so will repeat successful formulas, which often involves working with similar filmmakers. Studios and networks have been pressured to include more women behind the camera recently but have been

very slow to react because the status quo has been profitable and appeals to audiences. A further historical aspect I consider is the evolution of the director's role over time, which is relevant because as women filmmakers attempt to fit "into" Hollywood's system, they encounter obstacles due to their low status; their power is taken away, and they are blamed for problems even when they have limited control. While men also struggle for creative authority, they are proportionally less likely to encounter difficulties because they rise more quickly than women through the ranks and gain legitimacy.

Filmmaking began as a male domain in the late 19th century (Mahar 1995, 19), involving experimentations with new contraptions as cameras and film stocks were invented by men–as carefully documented in film history (Grainge et al. 2007; Cook 1990; Thompson et al. 2010). Early filmmakers discovered the commercial potential of films and began to make formulaic content as quickly as possible, delivering adventure, violence, and romance in spectacular packages (Grainge et al. 2007; Dixon et al. 2008)–early versions of today's high-cost, high-profit blockbusters. In the years that followed, films became increasingly popular for mass entertainment and competition grew intensely as profits increased, as Grainge et. al (2007, 6) note, with investors pouring money into exhibition and technology (Cook 1990). The camera's operator often directed the action, but as longer projects developed with storylines and casts, a "director" was needed (Jarvie 1970, 69). There was little hierarchy on-set, with actors and crew members sharing responsibilities and interchanging roles frequently (Mahar 2006). Some directors worked in an improvised manner, building on a story idea provided by a "scenarist" (screenwriter) (Casella 2006). Women were heavily involved in filmmaking at the time, writes Mahar (1995, 2), who called the industry a "place of particular opportunity for women" even if some scholars like Jarvie (1970, 66) "have yet to learn of a woman producer," from that period. Lois Weber, Mrs. Wallace Reid, Mabel Normand, and Frances Marion are a handful of the women who were making films (Slide 1996). Though they have been omitted from many accounts of film history, there were so many women

working as producers in 1917 that magazine *Photoplay* magazine called it "'her-own-company' epidemic" (*Photoplay*, May 1917, 121 quoted in Mahar 1995, 306). These women gave the industry "cultural legitimacy" but were pushed out when "financial legitimacy" saw investors take control at the end of the 1920s (Montañez Smukler 2018, 10). I return to women's contributions below.

The ability to shoot outside year-round in warm weather drew filmmakers to Los Angeles, and the first studio opened in Hollywood in 1911 (Slide 2013, 35). By the end of World War I, most major Hollywood studios were formed, including Universal Pictures, Fox Film Corporation, Warner Bros., and Metro Goldwyn Meyer (Dixon et al. 2008, 33). The United Artists (UA) studio, founded in 1919, was unique in that it was owned by artists such as Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford (Cook 1990, 315–317). UA emphasized artistry and individuality over standardization and efficiency (Balio 2009, xvii). American companies initially covered their expenses with domestic sales and expanded distribution worldwide to increase revenue–a model still in use albeit with different technology (Grainge et al. 2007, 49). As studios gained control of production, distribution, and eventually exhibition, white women and people of colour were pushed out (Mahar 1995; Andreeva 2020) and never found a meaningful re-entry point. Bigger, more costly projects in the mid-1910s led to studios clamping down on directors' creative authority to streamline costs, Mahar writes. Studios prioritized efficiency and power was handed to a single male producer–leading many directors to form their own companies instead. Over the coming years, Wall Street investment helped studios consolidate power (Mahar 1995). Paramount Studios co-founder Adolph Zukor, for example, convinced cash-strapped theatre owners to sell him their businesses during the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic (Andreeva 2020; Dick 2001). These changes led to the creation of a studio system (Gomery 2005) and vertical integration, in which studios distribute their films to their own theatres, guaranteeing audience reach (Schatz 1981). "Zukor squeezed out all of these independent filmmakers, many of whom were women," says

historian William Mann. “[W]hen Zukor buys up everything, so many people lose access then and lose a voice in the industry” (Andreeva 2020). Production costs rose significantly over the next decade and independent producers could not compete. Studios relied on money from financiers, whose influence became more pronounced as theatre attendance decreased during the Great Depression (Grainge et al. 2007, 273). Box office figures were monitored so that information on successful films could be relayed to the studios and films in production would be amended to incorporate elements from the successful film. “Every step was taken to eliminate those unpredictable elements which are of the nature of art” (Klingender et al. as cited in Cook 1990, 239), thus diminishing the artistic freedom of the director. Today, studios are often reliant on “remakes” of existing films and franchise sequels to capitalize on built-in audiences, discussed further in Chapter 4.

After approximately 40 years of operation, the American film industry became “an international benchmark for glamour, star power, spectacle, action, and narrative compression” (Dixon et al. 2008, 136). But there was a newfound appreciation for aesthetics and directors, who began to fight against the studios to execute their visions in the 1950s (Thompson et al. 2010). In the 1970s, blockbusters returned and production budgets climbed 178% (Cook 1990, 887–888); studios began taking enormous risks because if successful, the profit could be significant. The invention of video ushered in an era of cheaper and more accessible production, with writer-directors (called “filmmakers”) making films that were “too original” for the studios and “too eccentric” for mass audiences of the 70s and 80s (Cook 1990, 990). Soon after, studios began acquiring successful independent production companies to create their own in-house “indie” divisions. Digital technologies in the late 1990s further democratized access to the means of production, leading to an independent film boom (Rogers 2013; Biskind 2004). Today’s studios have been absorbed into conglomerates and operate more like “gatekeepers” rather than the “film factories” of the past, though still controlling access

to production and distribution (Compaine et al. 2000). Parent corporations (such as Walt Disney Co. and Comcast) own studios (such as Walt Disney Studios and Universal Pictures, respectively), who run specialized production units (such as Touchstone Pictures and DreamWorks Animation) (Currah 2006, 441), with frequent mergers and name changes (e.g. Moneywatch 2022; Reuters 2022; Chmielewski 2017).

While studios are keen to please moviegoers to remain profitable, they routinely refuse to acknowledge market realities or external forces, often waiting until the last minute to alter their practices to avoid financial ruin. For instance, the introduction of sound technology in the late 1920s delighted audiences but some studios were staunchly opposed because of the cost of upgrading their equipment and held out for as long as possible (Cook 1990, 258). When internet access allowed American consumers to view and pirate films in the late 1990s, Hollywood maintained centralized distribution through DVDs until they experienced a 40% decline in DVD revenue (Dirks 2016), (Vigeland 2012). Once streaming services started producing Oscar-winning features, film purists protested, saying films should be experienced collectively in darkened theatres, not on a laptop[15] (Nissen 2019; Shoard 2019; Roxborough 2019). Filmmaker Steven Spielberg unsuccessfully pushed to change the Oscars eligibility to make it harder for digitally released films to be considered (A. Thompson 2019; Barfield 2019; Agar 2019). He eventually capitulated, signing his own deal with Netflix, saying, ”[W]e had an amazing opportunity to tell new stories together and reach audiences in new ways” (Pallotta 2021). A reluctance to “read the room” also applies to hiring women: even with considerable pressure to diversify, industry leaders have been slow to respond to the call for change.

[15] Simran Hans (2019a) points out that many Academy members screen nominated works at home on their televisions before casting their votes.

Men in positions similar to Spielberg have historically controlled the means of production in American filmmaking, and scholars have devoted volumes to their accomplishments, deciding through inclusions (and omissions) who the venerated filmmakers would be (e.g. Dixon et al. 2008; Cook 1990; Grainge et al. 2007; Thompson et al. 2010). Mentioned only in "footnotes, parentheses, half-sentences, or no mention at all, many talented, hard-working women of the past have become virtually invisible in recorded film history," wrote Cecile Starr (1980). Evaluations of their careers are further complicated by the fact that most of their films have been lost, and are therefore *literally* absent from the film canon (Slide 1996, xi). "Can we really judge the directorial careers…on the basis of one film each?" asks Anthony Slide (1996, xi). Sobchack (1980, 298) has proposed that feminist film scholars contributed to this erasure by focusing on women's representation on-screen (e.g. Haskell 2016; Mulvey 1975; Chaudhuri 2006). Some argue that Alice Guy Blaché, "The Forgotten Mother of Cinema" (Fernandez 2018), directed the first fiction film in 1896 (Acker 1993, 7; Katz 1979, 519), even though leading historians barely mention her (e.g. Thompson et al. 2010; Cook 1990). She contributed to approximately 700 films (McMahan 2013), and it is believed that when she died in 1968, no obituary was published[16] (Starr 1980). Dorothy Arzner, on the other hand, the "most prolific woman studio director in the history of American cinema" (Field 2013) generally only attracted interest from feminists and queer theorists (Johnston 1975; Mayne 1994; Doty 2004). Even the way women were pushed out of the industry as studios gained power is a topic that has been overlooked until recently (Mahar 1995; Cooper 2010). Film historians have begun reclaiming history by exploring women's contributions (e.g. Slide 1977; Bowser 1994; Geller 2003; Bean et al. 2002). Through archival research, they are piecing stories together but "often the thread goes cold," (Hanson 2018) because there is little documentation (Hunter 2018; Williams 2018). Alfred Hitchcock's cinematic mastery has been recognized with lifetime achievement

[16] *The New York Times* eventually published an obituary in 2019 (Dargis 2019).

awards (IMDb 2019a), but his long-time (and often uncredited) creative partner and wife, Alma Reville, is hardly known outside scholarly circles. “The Hitchcock touch had four hands, and two were Alma's,” Charles Champlin (1982) wrote in the *Los Angeles Times,* notably after her death. Director Ida Lupino, active in the 1950s and 1960s, is one of the few women who rose to prominence within Hollywood’s studio system. However, less is known about her television work, according to Stefan Borsos (2018), who had to locate film prints to confirm her credits because the available information was unreliable. Lupino reportedly diminished her own role to avoid upsetting those around her with “big egos” (Borsos 2018).



Figure 9. *In this presentation at the 2018 Doing Women’s Film and Television History Conference in Southampton, UK, Stefan Borsos used a question mark in place of an image of Livia Granito, who directed 55 episodes of television between 1956 and 1965 (IMDb 2019c). No photos of her were available. Image by the author.*

1.2.9 The centrality of the director

The previous section described how filmmakers (usually men) rose to prominence throughout film history, while others (usually women) were disregarded. The

role of director is pivotal in film production; therefore, I have chosen it as a starting point for examining social relations and industry practices in contemporary film and television productions. Many aspiring filmmakers dream of "making it" in Hollywood and have romantic notions about what that entails (see Chapter 7 for a realistic depiction). These notions are fueled in part by the perception that directors are in charge of a film's production, a perception that is reinforced by film studies courses and books emphasizing the centrality of a director's role and vision (e.g. University of Washington 2015; University of Pittsburgh 2022; Gelmis 1970; Henderson 1971). Henderson (1971, 5) described the director as an "[A]rtist whose canvas is celluloid, whose brush is the camera." In the media, directors are praised for their artistry in a way that is rarely seen for screenwriters or producers–also crucial figures. Brad Kane (2013) applauds director Alfonso Cuarón for his role in making *Gravity* (2013): "This movie wasn't simply *written*– it was *authored*, from start to finish, by a visionary,"[17] (emphasis in original). Or, the trilogy of films based on J.R.R. Tolkien's novels have been referred to as "Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*" (Fong 2021; IGN Staff 2014), with Jackson's so-called "ownership" surpassing Tolkien's. In reality, filmmaking is a highly collaborative process (Owczarski 2010; Hodge 2009; Banks 2019) and directors rarely have full control (Brook 2014). They play a critical role in shaping the film's form and content by interpreting the script, and instructing the actors and the crew (StudioBinder 2021a). They also shape the film artistically by determining the *mise en scène*,[18] editing, image style (treatment of the image through various formats, aspect ratios, colour, special effects), composition (close-ups, wide shots, composition in depth, framing, narrow focus, deep focus), and editing (jump cuts, invisible cuts, spatial and temporal continuity, rhythm) (see Bordwell et al. 2010; Giannetti 2005), though all of these processes are executed with up to

[17] Cuarón admitted that he frequently argued with the studio. They pressured him to add a love story, flashbacks, and more action (Woerner 2013). It is unclear how much control he had over the final film.

[18] *Mise en scène* comes from the French theatrical term for "placement on stage."

several hundred collaborators. The number of contributors–and resources required–distinguishes narrative filmmaking from several other art forms, in which an individual may conceive and execute an idea on their own.

The idea that an artist is the author of a work rose to prominence during the Romantic era (1780 to 1848) when painters, writers and composers found inspiration within themselves (Boland 2011). Authorship in cinema has been contested since the 1950s when discussions of *auteur* theory were articulated by writers from the *Cahiers du cinéma* magazine in France. Filmmaker François Truffaut (1954), then a critic, published a manifesto in which he criticized the emphasis placed on screenwriters, who were viewed as the authors of films in France. Truffaut and colleagues distinguished between a director who executes a script (a *metteur-en-scène*) and one who channels their vision into a creation (an *auteur* or author), in an attempt to elevate directors from practitioners to artists (Buscombe 2008). While *Cahiers* discussions ignited the debate, directors' unique approaches and styles had already been evident in cinematic history according to Michel Ciment, editor of film magazine *Positif*, as cited by Andrews (2012, 37–38). Successful filmmakers used their brand recognition as a marketing tool; in the silent era, D.W. Griffith and Charlie Chaplin prominently displayed their names to draw viewers (Wharton et al. 2005, 10), with Chaplin also using his star power as an actor. In the 1930s and 1940s, critics spoke of the "Lubitsch touch" or a "Hitchcock thriller,"–suggesting that there were specific characteristics in films directed by Ernst Lubitsch and Alfred Hitchcock (Schatz 1981, 15). Studio films were regarded as "commercial" and were not respected by film theorists because studio directors usually played minor roles in decision-making (Wharton et al. 2005, 18). Auteur theory helped convince academics that under the guidance of a great director, Hollywood films could be taken seriously as works of art (Wharton et al. 2005, 8).

Auteur theory has been widely discredited for misrepresenting the complexity of collaboration in film production (Kael 1971) and for borrowing from individualistic forms

of expression, such as painting, in which the artist's role is clearcut (Bazin 1957). Still, scholars continue to publish books about specific directors with "undiminished enthusiasm" (Grant 2008) (e.g. Scott et al. 2019; Hedling 2021; Kääpä 2011 among many others). Furthermore, even the most revered film "auteurs" must answer to their funders–unless, like "maverick" filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola (Fleming Jr. 2021), they can fund themselves. The tension between art and commerce is ever-present in Hollywood filmmaking and was highlighted during season 4 of the reality show *Project Greenlight* (2001-2003, 2015, creator Alex Keledjian), in which aspiring filmmaker Jason Mann was chosen to direct a feature for HBO. Mann argues with producers about maintaining control of "his film"; meanwhile they criticize his refusal to compromise and his lack of understanding of how the industry operates. Producer Effie Brown reminds Mann that HBO is in charge and he must "kiss that ring" to finish his film. The producers chose Mann for his authorial voice but had to constrain him to meet HBO's financial and dramatic objectives. Mann expresses disappointment: "I would love it if I could make movies in the future where I don't have to debate the logic of how it should be," he says, adding, "Ultimately, it should be a personal art form."[19] Films are works of art but also commodities produced by profit-seeking corporations; even in early cinema, independent filmmakers like Nell Shipman learned that "financial entanglements meant giving up some control" (Mahar 2008, 163). The disconnect between one's "personal" vision and the massive industrial apparatus required to bring that vision to light while addressing the demands of numerous stakeholders is a source of considerable conflict in Hollywood, as I explain in Chapter 6. Director John Huston, who was active from the 1930s onwards, once said, "No one ever really has final cut [full creative control], even when you're the producer. Somebody else always owns the picture, and there's always someone ready to take it away from you and screw it up" (Petrie 1973, 27). Many of my research

[19] The finished film was so poorly rated that it generated a 0% approval rating on review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes (2017).

participants tolerate obstacles and make sacrifices because hardship is seen as a necessary step to be able to reach audiences and/or express themselves through film. Returning to my earlier point: all filmmakers face challenges, but as I show later in this thesis, women are regularly blamed for any missteps, even when executives interfere with their decisions, and they rarely have advocates in senior positions to help them navigate this terrain.

While auteur theory has unravelled within film studies, there is still a persistent and popular view that films directed by the same individual will demonstrate unique vision and artistry (Grant 2008). The glorification of directors is perhaps what convinced me–and some of my participants–to study film initially (explored further in Chapter 7). Kane (2013) summarizes the mysticism behind the auteur: "If you look at the Best Picture Oscar nominees for 2011 and 2012, a full half of them were written and directed by one person. What does this tell us? That when a single visionary owns a project from conception to production to release, the result is a special kind of creative magic."

1.2.10 Federal investigations and lawsuits

Before moving on to an overview of my thesis it is relevant to discuss past investigations into Hollywood inequality, as this provides further insight with regard to the film industry as a working environment. According to Title VII of the US Civil Rights Act of 1964, employers cannot discriminate against employees "on the basis of race, religion, sex, or national origin" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2016). Though women's enduring absence from key filmmaking positions has gained attention recently, politicians and industry leaders have long been aware of the problem. In 1969, the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) conducted hearings relating to the employment of women and minorities in several industries, including film and television. They uncovered grounds for legal action but lacked the "authority to sue" so recommended that a lawsuit be filed by the Department of Justice (DOJ) (Equal Opportunity Employment Commission 2000). Due to bipartisan conflict and lack of

support for the EEOC, an agreement was reached instead (Montañez Smukler 2018). The Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers, representing more than 80 production companies, the IATSE-International union,[20] and nine local chapters agreed to reform their practices voluntarily–with no penalties for non-compliance–to help "minority" members find employment (California Advisory Committee 1978, 13). Women were not included because, according to a DOJ lawyer, there were not enough women in the workforce to constitute a labour pool (California Advisory Committee 1978, 13–14). By this rationale, studios and television stations could not discriminate against women working as filmmakers or crew members because there weren't any to discriminate against. Once the agreements expired, the studios and unions returned to their traditional hiring practices (involving personal referrals and nepotism) and stopped reporting to the EEOC.

In 1977, the US Commission on Civil Rights issued a 181-page report entitled, Window Dressing On the Set: Women and Minorities in Television, about the representation of women and minorities on television and their employment. To comply with license regulations, stations had to submit data to the Federal Communications Commission about their workforce, and the report's authors found that 68.4% of officials and managers at eight stations were white men, and 22.4% were white women (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1977, 93). Many of the women who were supposedly in leadership roles actually held clerical positions (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1977, 107). There were no men of colour and no women in top management roles (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1977, 93).[21]

[20] IATSE is the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts.

[21] Interestingly, Kathleen Kennedy, now president of Lucasfilm, the production company responsible for *Star Wars*, was given a job operating the camera at a television station in 1973 because the station had to hire women to keep their license (Fortune Magazine 2015).

The following year, an advisory committee evaluated the implementation of "good faith" affirmative action measures in filmmaking (Montañez Smukler 2018, 75), but they found that few studios were willing to even meet with them (California Advisory Committee 1978, 2). "One basic finding of this report is that enforcement efforts by the Federal Government have been weak, allowing the motion picture industry to shirk its equal employment responsibility," (California Advisory Committee 1978, iii). Though the report's wording was strong, the entire exercise was characterized by Smuckler (2018, 75) as an "empty presentation of unimpressive numbers," leading to no concrete change. Several years later, a class action was filed against two studios on behalf of women directors who were unable to find work (Syme 2016), and though it was unsuccessful, it led to more recent legal action. In Chapter 5, I explain how the class action inspired the aforementioned filmmaker, Maria Giese, to take legal action of her own, leading to the 2015 EEOC investigation into studio discrimination against women directors. It is unclear when the investigation was completed because the EEOC is not required to disclose any information about it, but there were rumours of financial penalties levied against all major studios in 2017 (Robb 2017). While "good faith" agreements have been largely unsuccessful, this history is relevant for two reasons: one, the government has long been aware of systemic discrimination against women and minorities and has done little to counter it, and, two, industry leaders have historically felt so powerful and "above the law" that they have not bothered to implement reforms, even when the request originates in Washington.

1.3 Chapters summary

Having introduced my topic and outlined relevant literature, I now turn to an overview of this thesis which addresses how risk, precarity and exclusion feature at different career stages for women filmmakers. In **Chapter 2**, I describe the research methods used in this study, and explain the methodological challenges I faced concerning research access: like my research participants I had no industry connections

and had to spend a long time trying to develop the relationships I needed to "get in." Rather than focusing on inaccessible elites, I interviewed emerging and mid-career filmmakers and shifted my focus to the difficulties of "breaking in" to Hollywood. **Chapter 3** is an examination of the Hollywood landscape, with urban characteristics influencing industrial characteristics, and vice versa. I argue that Hollywood's exclusionary practices are linked to the emergence of a powerful (mostly white) class of industry members, who build personal and professional relationships with their wealthy neighbours and channel resources to their offspring, making it even more difficult for those from other backgrounds to integrate, such as women–and particularly women of colour. **Chapter 4** explores how a "core" versus "periphery" divide (Cattani et al. 2014) makes it very hard for emerging women filmmakers to gain employment in mainstream film and television. The Hollywood system favours the advancement of insiders and those closely linked to insiders (often other white men, their family members and friends) because with significant sums of money invested, "safe" decisions are preferred. While women are perceived as "risky" and spend years trying to find a way in, men are often offered a "fast track" to jobs. Career challenges persist for women at the mid-career stage, explored in **Chapter 5**. Once they gain experience, they fall into a slump, unable to benefit from opportunities for emerging filmmakers and still not trusted to direct features. Numerous men with limited experience have surpassed much more experienced women, and gone on to direct expensive blockbusters. Lacking options, women filmmakers are often forced to participate in shadowing opportunities which rarely lead to employment. I explain how this situation pushed Maria Giese to the edge: she abandoned any hope of reviving her career by filing a complaint with the American Civil Liberties Union (Giese 2015c; M. Evans 2017).

Chapter 6 utilizes journalistic sources to detail what happens to the few women who manage to direct studio features; most still do not "break in" and continue to occupy low status in the industry, often returning to low-budget filmmaking. With so few women

employed by studios, they are perceived as representing 'all women' and any mistakes can have far-reaching consequences. Men are often given chances to try again, whereas women who direct unsuccessful films typically enter "movie jail" and rarely get out. Precarity is the central theme of **Chapter 7**, as I move beyond career stages to examine survival in a highly unpredictable industry with limited access to health benefits, extremely long hours, and frequent periods of unemployment. I argue that women filmmakers experience more extreme forms of precarity because of their persistent underemployment. Once hired, women are often reluctant to speak up about poor treatment to avoid threatening their livelihoods; precarity is therefore framed in my analysis as a disciplinary power that keeps workers in line (Pedaci 2010).

My research participants are often subject to subtle micro-aggressions as well as overt racism and misogyny, and yet continue working because they are passionate about filmmaking. In **Chapter 8**, I discuss prominent male filmmakers who have been accused of criminal acts (some involving sexual assault of minors) to shed light on the double standards that exist concerning behaviour, and due to the subject matter I include a content warning for that chapter. Because they are valued, respected, and most importantly, financially successful filmmakers, many alleged aggressors have deflected scandals and continued working (up until very recently), hence the term "Teflon men" (Minelle 2017; L. Hill 2018) because the controversies slide right off them. I also discuss the challenging working conditions on the sets of some films whose directors are extremely demanding but excused because they are perceived as *enfants terribles* or "geniuses." In contrast, women filmmakers who display emotion or defend themselves are called "difficult," a gendered term that damages their reputations and makes future employment even harder to secure. As noted in many of the following chapters, women cannot simply focus on the numerous challenges of bringing their visions to the screen; they must also contend with layer upon layer of adversity that slows their progress, wears them down, and threatens to push them out. And yet there is hope for change. In the

Conclusion, I describe how some women have used the leverage they have acquired to reach back and provide opportunities to other women to build a new system within the industry. In that final chapter, I connect the main lines of argument of my thesis, identify limitations and suggest areas for future inquiry.

Chapter 2 | Methodology

> "Setting up the interview and actually making it happen are two different things."
>
> –Carol A.B. Warren (Warren 2001, 90).



Figure 10. *Geena Davis, left, is best known for her role opposite Susan Sarandon in* Thelma and Louise *(1991, dir. Ridley Scott). "Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon" courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Time magazine (Timothy 1991).*

When I heard that actor Geena Davis was co-founding a film festival "championing women & diversity in film" in Arkansas, I knew it would be an ideal opportunity to speak to industry leaders in an isolated setting away from Hollywood–with

fewer distractions and direct access. This was in spring 2015, several months before I started my DPhil in Oxford.

As founder of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDIGM), a Los Angeles-based organization at the forefront of gender-based research into film and television (Spring 2017; Turchiano 2019), Davis has become an outspoken advocate for women onscreen and behind the camera. GDIGM co-sponsors highly-publicized quantitative research (e.g. Smith 2007; Smith et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2012), which has brought significant media attention to these issues. As I headed to the Bentonville Film Festival (BFF), I told myself that if Geena Davis was not interested in what I was doing, no one would be.

Though the festival celebrated "women and diversity," it was hosted in Bentonville, a small, relatively homogenous,[22] difficult-to-reach-town in northeast Arkansas. Bentonville is also the headquarters of the world's largest retailer, Walmart, known for union-busting and keeping wages (and prices) rock-bottom (Murmello 2013; Phillips et al. 2019). Walmart was a major festival sponsor, hence the decision to host it there. Attending BFF was not necessarily accessible to those with limited means; my expenses involved plane tickets ($480), accommodation ($508), and car rental ($214). Still, I swallowed these costs because it was the festival's inaugural year, and I thought it would be brimming with potential research participants.

Given Davis' commitment to research relating to gender and media, I presumed it would not be a challenge to pique her interest and hoped a partnership might develop, allowing me to access her network of contacts. I scanned the event program and purchased tickets for a panel discussion which featured Davis. Sitting in the front row, mere feet away from her chair, I thought, "This will be easy." After the presentation, I

[22] According to the 2010 census, Bentonville is 74.3% white (U.S. Census Bureau 2022).

waited for the small crowd to disperse, shook Davis' hand and told her I was embarking on PhD research about women filmmakers. "Oh, great!" she said, smiling, and continued towards the exit without breaking her stride. I'm not sure what I expected her to say or do but I was quietly stunned. In retrospect, I should have taken this as a sign of what was to come, with regard to access issues, described throughout this chapter.



Figure 11. *My first encounter with Geena Davis (holding microphone) at the 2015 Bentonville Film Festival. Image by the author.*

2.1.1 Chapter overview

While preparing for fieldwork, I anticipated that obtaining access to the highly-guarded and secretive film and television industry would be a significant challenge. In order to study how women filmmakers break in, sustain careers, and cope with working in a male-dominated industry, I aimed to immerse myself in the culture of Hollywood by shadowing filmmakers. I hoped to examine how they find collaborators, gain entry, obtain employment, navigate meetings, and balance responsibilities. My background as an independent filmmaker gave me insight into how the industry functioned and knowledge to build upon.

During my nine months of fieldwork in southern California (2016-17) and a subsequent period conducting interviews remotely (2018), I learned about the difficulties of reaching industry members, especially those in power and that gaining access was not straightforward. Though the experience was challenging, I faced many of the same obstacles as my participants, allowing me to deepen my understanding and collect valuable data about exclusion. I am now grateful that I had to adapt my methods and modify my approach because I learned about the resilience and determination needed to cope with Hollywood's many structural impediments. I navigated the industry as other newcomers might, making mistakes, altering my approach, and using every resource at my disposal. I leveraged my film experience; relied on existing contacts; expanded my social network; used social media to contact potential participants; attended professional development sessions; went to screenings, panel discussions, workshops and film festivals; volunteered at events; became affiliated with the University of Southern California (home to one of the world's "top" film schools); interned at an industry organization; and watched as many series and films as I could manage to become better acquainted with the vast array of Hollywood productions.[23]

This chapter discusses my methods, positions me within the research, and offers reflections and context. I explain how my attempts to "break in" parallel the experiences of filmmakers who are trying to "make a name" for themselves because in many ways, we faced similar challenges: no direct links to powerful people, few resources, and difficulty attracting the attention of decision-makers.

[23] In 2016, the year I started fieldwork, 736 films were released in American theatres, which is twice the number of films released in 2000 (Follows 2017). Television was in a phase known as "peak TV" in which a record number of scripted television shows were being produced (Goldberg 2016).

2.2 Fieldwork summary

In Los Angeles

Dates October 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017 | Nine months

Description Participant observation and interviews with filmmakers

I started my fieldwork with the aim of shadowing multiple filmmakers. I volunteered for industry organizations, and attended professional development events for filmmakers, industry conferences and screenings.

Interviews via Skype/telephone

Dates August 3 to September 5, 2018 | Approximately one month

Description Conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews with filmmakers

In the summer of 2018, I conducted interviews via Skype and telephone with 38 filmmakers. I followed up with some filmmakers I had already interviewed in Los Angeles, and also interviewed new contacts. I spoke to the majority of participants again briefly in 2022.

Research participants

- Emerging and mid-career filmmakers: directors, screenwriters, producers, actors, cinematographers (also known as directors of photography), camera assistants, production designers
- 19 white women, 13 women of colour
- 5 white men, 2 men of colour
- Age range: recent university graduates to mid-sixties
- Mostly Americans (with a few Canadians, and several other nationalities represented)

2.2.1 Researcher's background and position

I have been an independent filmmaker since 2006 and hoped to use that experience to find an entry point as a researcher to Hollywood. I attended film school in my hometown of Montreal, Canada, learning about film theory, history and production.

Upon graduating, I worked as a documentary director, producer and cinematographer and became well acquainted with funding challenges and logistical obstacles. I have balanced creative work with numerous day jobs, learned how to pitch projects and raise money through crowdfunding, and how to market myself and my projects to funding agencies, the media, and online supporters. I was confident that my film knowledge would make it easier to relate to fellow filmmakers and build relationships based on shared understanding. I read Ortner's (2010) paper about the challenges of gaining access to Hollywood with great interest; to my knowledge, she was the first anthropologist to attempt to study mainstream Hollywood filmmaking since Powdermaker (1950). As a leading figure in anthropology, Ortner still faced insurmountable obstacles forcing her to shift her focus to independent filmmaking instead, as I discuss further below. I was hopeful that as a relatively young filmmaker and an emerging anthropologist, I could be perceived as non-threatening and might be able to convince "insiders" to let me in. I was optimistic I would be able to study "sideways" among my peers (Ortner 2010, 223) rather than studying "up."

2.2.2 Fieldwork preparations

I began fieldwork preparations several months before starting my DPhil in 2015:

- I built up my profile on Twitter, tweeting about my research, engaging in relevant debates and following thought leaders;
- I shared posts about gender parity and my research with my personal network on Facebook, and collected suggestions for potential contacts;
- I contacted friends in Los Angeles and asked for help;
- I asked my partner, who is also a filmmaker, to reach out to his contacts;
- I joined mailing lists to keep abreast of news and opportunities relating to women in Hollywood;
- I attended film festivals for my own recently-released feature documentary, *With This Ring* (2016) about women's boxing in India. It is unrelated to my doctoral project but it was screened in India, Europe, and North America, affording me networking opportunities;

- I followed industry news via trade publications (*Variety, The Hollywood Reporter*, *Deadline*, *IndieWire*);
- I watched as many Hollywood films and series as I could, especially those made by women, to ensure familiarity with a range of productions in case they were mentioned by potential participants.

2.2.3 Bentonville Film Festival

As previously discussed, I hoped that the Bentonville Film Festival would be my starting point, and the experience gave me a taste of what was to come. The industry panellists and guest speakers responded positively to my project and several expressed interest in participating. I collected numerous business cards and arranged to follow up after the event. I discovered that despite having the best of intentions, many industry members lived such hectic lives that making contact with them was difficult if not impossible. I had their information and their consent theoretically but was not able to track them down once we parted ways. Some never responded while others were busy and asked me to contact them again later, at which point they did not respond. As I explain in later sections, I experienced similar outcomes during my fieldwork and changed strategies to attempt to find other means of entry.

2.2.4 Original research plan

I aimed to spend the first three months of fieldwork as a volunteer/intern at an industry organization related to women filmmakers and/or gender parity. I wanted to establish a foothold, develop a network, contribute to the gender parity movement, and begin informal interviews. I hoped to move on to participant observation with feature directors to see how the industry functioned from the "inside." My original focus was film, but I ended up incorporating interviews with television directors too because very few women filmmakers were finding work in film. I wanted to spend three to four months alongside at least two directors to analyze their networks, challenges, and opportunities. I planned to combine this with a series of interviews with participants over a long period of time to present a broad portrait of women's careers.

2.2.5 Institutional partnerships

In 2015-16, my priority was setting up the internship ahead of time. I tried contacting organizations related to women and film or television via email from Oxford. Several did not respond, and others asked me to come for a meeting once I arrived in Los Angeles. I asked one group if I could offer my skills/labour in exchange for help reaching out to industry contacts. The organization's executive was initially supportive, but it was difficult to obtain specifics about how we might collaborate. The conversations continued for months but it became clear they had other strategic priorities. My emails were rarely answered and our phone meetings were frequently rescheduled or cancelled, so I decided to pursue other possible avenues.

2.3 Fieldwork activities

2.3.1 Organizations for emerging/women filmmakers

Once in Los Angeles, I responded to an advertisement from a group seeking volunteers for a project related to emerging filmmakers. In November 2016, I began a loosely structured "internship" at this organization and worked there two to three days per week until April 2017. Since I already had several years of work experience in the areas I was contributing to, I was more of a "volunteer" than an intern who was acquiring skills or experience. Like many of my research participants, I was looking for *any* foothold into Hollywood and was willing to complete menial tasks for free[24] (discussed Chapter 4). I helped edit/write reports in addition to providing graphic design and project coordination. I am not naming the organization because my superior there was hesitant about my writing about them. Some staff members vented their frustrations about colleagues and there was tension between them. I suspected they were worried that I would write about these aspects even though they were not relevant to my research or objectives. I later learned that another intern was asked to sign a non-disclosure

[24] The internship was unpaid but they reimbursed parking expenses.

agreement (NDA) but I was not asked to do so. Attempting to salvage data from my time with the group, I proposed research partnerships, involving obtaining access to their contacts in exchange for a report with my findings, but one of the organization's leaders expressed scepticism about the value of qualitative research and said they preferred "hard facts." I continued to intern there because I was given the impression that I would be able to speak to industry contacts *at some point*. My superior was evasive but encouraging; she inferred that I would be getting access "later" when tasks quieted down, but this time never came. The organization had few resources and relied on volunteers to complete daily tasks. As it became clear that I would not be able to speak to their contacts, I moved on to other avenues.

Initially, I thought that aligning myself with groups trying to assist women filmmakers would be straightforward. My project was relevant to their long-term objectives of helping women enter the film and television industry and I am not aware of any other qualitative research into women filmmakers in Hollywood, so I thought my work represented a unique contribution. I had been warned that academic studies were low priority for industry members (Ortner 2010, 222) but I had hope that those who actively leveraged research to effect change might be more receptive. As I spent more time familiarizing myself with how these groups operated, I began to see how many are already functioning at maximum capacity. Several groups work so closely with industry members that they tend to operate as if they are *part* of the industry, but they do so with the budget of a non-profit. They compete with corporations for the time and attention of actors and filmmakers, proposing humanitarian projects that will not necessarily generate revenue. In some cases, these groups were not *unwilling* to work with me, but had more pressing priorities, a reality that many other ethnographers face as well. Some groups have no offices, and staff work from home; others have small teams of

administrators and a heavy reliance on unpaid interns and volunteers.[25] I came to understand that even groups working to combat gender inequality in Hollywood did not have the capacity to assist me.

Overall, I spent a considerable amount of time nurturing relationships that I hoped would open up access to the industry. After six or seven months in Los Angeles, I found myself with few additional contacts and as detailed above, unable to write in detail about my volunteer experiences, which was discouraging. In the interest of conserving my own limited resources, I once again moved on.

2.3.2 Interviewing elites

I attempted to speak with established members of the industry to aid my understanding of how the studios operated. While it is easier to reach those who are considered "marginal," as noted by Ortner (2010, 222), I was determined to speak to elite members to learn how they achieved their positions. Elites are defined as "groups of individuals, who hold, or have held, a privileged position in society," and are likely to have had more influence on their particular industries or disciplines than members of the public (Richards 2007, 199). They generally have "more knowledge, money, and status," and are often very difficult to reach; many are also less inclined to be interview subjects (Odendahl et al. 2001, 299). The challenge of conducting interviews with elites is well-documented (see Odendahl et al. 2001; Richards 2007; Stephens 2007; Empson 2018). Researchers often ask elites to set aside what is important to them in order to speak about topics which may be sensitive or intrusive (Empson 2018, 60), which is not an attractive proposition. "With senior professionals working 80+ hours a week, an hour with an academic represents the loss of an expensive billable hour or, perhaps more valuably, an hour lost with family or catching up on sleep," writes Laura Empson (2018, 60). In

[25] There has been growing criticism of feminist organizations that rely on women's unpaid labour. Mehta (2019) writes that unpaid internships enable "class privilege" and replicate the very structures the organizations are fighting against.

Hollywood, every moment and opportunity is seen as valuable and potentially career-altering.

I decided to try anyway because I was in Los Angeles, the epicentre of global film and television production, for close to a year, so I wanted to seize this unique opportunity. When meeting with industry members, I planned to ask for just one interview because this would not require a significant investment of time on their part, although I secretly hoped for subsequent interviews and, eventually, participant observation. I wanted to develop a working relationship, if possible, and observe their work practices if appropriate.

2.3.3 Putting the plan into practice

On any given day of the week, there are events which seemingly give the public a chance to interact with "big name" industry members. Attending these events and trying to speak to the invited guests became a key component of my strategy during my first few weeks of fieldwork. Studios, networks and streaming companies organize free screenings of films and series as part of their marketing campaigns prior to the official release; the presence of celebrities draws crowds and generates publicity. Invitations to these screenings are regularly circulated via email through film-related organizations, meaning potentially tens of thousands of people might receive them. Responding promptly (within minutes) is critical especially for highly-sought after titles or events with well-known attendees. There were too many screenings to choose from in locations across the city so I based my decisions on who was attending and if they might be sympathetic to my cause.

I also sought to obtain access to industry members by attending workshops, panel discussions, and networking sessions with other filmmakers. These events often featured "non-famous" professionals who contribute behind the scenes, including directors, producers, writers, cinematographers, and studio executives. Access was

typically granted to members of the organizing body, and non-members could often purchase tickets. Women in Film Los Angeles organized a monthly Speaker Series with prominent women from the industry, while Film Independent had an annual Directors' Close Up which featured a series of panels with contemporary directors such as Barry Jenkins, Pablo Larraín, Issa Rae, and Denis Villeneuve–all "big names" in the film community.



Figure 12. *From left, Jay Roach (director of* Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery, *1997, and* Bombshell*, 2019), moderating a discussion at the USC Comedy Festival featuring Diana English (creator of* Murphy Brown*, 1988-1998), Norman Lear (creator of multiple family comedies including* All in the Family, *1968-1979, and* The Jeffersons, 1975-1985*) and Frank Rich (executive producer of* Veep*, 2012-2019). Image by the author.*

Screenings and discussions usually featured a Q&A period, during which audience members would seek insight into the speakers' creative processes, inspirations, or technical decisions. People asked about pitching ideas, getting their first "break", finding an agent, or revising a script. Once the event ended, some speakers exited quickly while others remained to interact. While volunteering backstage at an event for women filmmakers, the organization's director advised the panellists to "save

yourselves" and exit through a back door to avoid being swarmed. Ironically, speakers at many of these events shared stories about how they "broke in" by cornering executives in an elevator or calling their assistants every day–going to great lengths and refusing to take "no" for an answer. These same speakers, now successful and in demand, hoped to avoid the same pressure and quietly slipped out.



Figure 13. *Director Maren Ade's image is projected on a screen as she speaks at the Golden Globe Foreign-Language Film Symposium in early 2017. The event featured all the directors nominated for Best Motion Picture-Foreign at the Golden Globes that year. Image by the author.*

Depending on the venue, scale of the event, and notoriety of the guests, the invitees would generally be available after the Q&A. These moments were sometimes calm, and sometimes rather tense, as dozens of people fought their way to the front, clutching business cards, script printouts, or even iPads with video samples. Initially, I joined the queue, hoping to convince industry members that they should agree to an interview. In most cases, I was successful in reaching them and surprisingly, almost everyone I approached said "yes" to an interview. A small number refused (as discussed later in this chapter), and these rejections helped me reflect on how I presented myself and my project. I had only a few seconds to try to build rapport, while also conveying

vital information about my project and their potential involvement. Knowing that they were already being pulled in multiple directions, I tried to be personable but also direct when speaking to them. This is referred to in many industries as the “elevator pitch”– what one might say about one’s project while sharing an elevator ride with an “important” person, who may step off at any moment. Countless sessions I attended in Los Angeles stressed the importance of honing one’s elevator pitch and here I was, pitching every day.



Figure 14. *Audience members interact with speakers following a panel discussion at the West Hollywood Library. Image by the author.*

Numerous well-known directors, producers and writers said, “yes,” and provided me with contact information but did not respond when I tried to reach them. I was genuinely surprised that after I approached filmmaker Jay Roach (see Figure 12) at the USC Comedy Festival, he wrote down his personal email in my notebook. He did not respond to my messages, perhaps because I could not quite make out his handwriting, or because he was busy. Warren (2001, 90) writes, “Setting up the interview and actually making it happen are two different things.” This situation occurred repeatedly over the course of several months and I usually followed up several times before giving up. I

planned to stop asking established members of the industry for interviews, but then I would be convinced to try one last time because a new potential contact seemed genuinely interested. Every positive response in person re-ignited a glimmer of hope that perhaps the result would be different. After many false starts, I decided that attempting to speak to successful but overloaded filmmakers was not an effective use of my time.

Upon reflection, I realized that "yes" was the easiest answer because it allowed industry members to end the conversation and move on (to the next person in line, or following them into the elevator, or out to their car). Ignoring (or "blocking") my follow-up emails or directing me to an assistant required little energy. Saying, "no," in my presence would only prolong the interaction should I refuse to give up (which most industry members advise aspiring filmmakers to do!). There were only three cases in which people clearly said, "no," and they all involved what I considered "easy targets"–industry members who were involved in so-called "feminist" projects. The first was Joss Whedon, creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). I mistakenly told him that my project was about women directors and that I wanted to learn more about his career path, he became tense and said, "I don't know anything about that topic," backing away. Previously, he had been touted as a "feminist" filmmaker (Warner 2014; Chang et al. 2022) who developed iconic female characters, so I was surprised by his reaction.[26] When I told Diane English, creator one of the most popular American television shows in the last 30 years, *Murphy Brown* (1988-2018), that I was interested in talking to her about her career, she said no interview was necessary because her former assistant had already written a book and, "Everything you need is in there." I met Andrea Navedo, who played Jane's mother in the comedy series *Jane the Virgin* (creator Jennie Snyder Urman, 2014-2019), and she enthusiastically agreed to an interview, but it turned into a

[26] Whedon has since become a controversial figure, accused by his ex-wife Kai Cole (2017) of adultery and deceit in a widely-shared post, and of inappropriate and abusive behaviour on-set by his former actors (Shapiro 2022).

"no" once I followed up with her publicist. Not understanding the chain of command, I replied to her team, saying Andrea had agreed and she was really interested, at which point a more senior publicist wrote back telling me she was not available "for this." With limited time and busy schedules, her team was probably focused on opportunities which would benefit Navedo's career and "this"–an interview with a PhD student–provided no tangible benefits.

2.3.4 Industry events

While I was pursuing "high-level" contacts, I simultaneously attended a range of industry events as a participant or volunteer, hoping to meet filmmakers working at all levels. Filmmakers are generally categorized as either emerging, mid-career, or established. The exact definitions vary, but I have been working with the understanding that an emerging filmmaker has made one or several short films and may be developing their first feature film. A mid-career filmmaker has usually made one or more feature films, which represents a career of approximately 10 years. Established filmmakers have made multiple feature films, either as producers, directors, or writers (sometimes combining multiple roles).

As a volunteer at day-long conferences, social events, and panel discussions relating to women's experiences in the industry, I was often responsible for greeting guests upon arrival. At times I worked behind the scenes, assisting organizers in the "green room" where speakers gathered before or after the function, including actor/director Kyra Sedgwick (who was very kind), her husband actor Kevin Bacon (I did not speak to him much), and director Joey Soloway (the creator of Amazon series *Transparent*, 2014-2019). I offered them food or drinks, provided free parking passes and help as needed. Generally, it was not possible to speak to them about my research, as they were a guest of the organization and I was a volunteer to help the event run smoothly, not solicit participation in my own project. In an ideal world, these experiences would have helped me develop longer-term relationships, but unfortunately, I did not

encounter most of these people again. Still, these volunteer opportunities were not in vain. I often spoke to the organizers ahead of time and said I would like to help if it meant I could also attend the event, a proposal which generally worked. After concluding my duties, I slipped into the theatre to hear the speakers talk about their experiences, which was useful and allowed me to collect data.



Figure 15. *I volunteered at a film financing workshop for women, organized by the Sundance Institute and Women in Film Los Angeles, at the Pacific Design Center in May 2017. Image by the author.*

I also attended networking and professional development events for emerging filmmakers. I met multiple contacts at a dinner organized by a group called Women in Media (WiM). I had the opportunity to stand up and introduce myself at the dinner and thus met numerous filmmakers who put me in touch with other contacts. One attendee invited me to a gathering organized by the Alliance of Women Directors, which helped me meet additional participants. I also became part of a group attending semi-regular digital gatherings through the website Meetup.com. I attended the Sunday morning sessions of a group known as Females in Entertainment & Media (F.E.M.), organized by filmmaker, Dawn Fields, by logging into a video platform. Though I did not use data from the F.E.M. meetups (as I had no permission to do so), the discussions helped me gain a more complete image of the challenges of industry life. After fieldwork, I travelled from

my home in Quebec to Cape Cod, Massachusetts for the 2018 Women's Media Summit; I had the opportunity to meet activist/filmmaker Maria Giese, in addition to Inclusion Rider[27] co-authors Fanshen Cox and Stacy L. Smith, as well as other key players in the gender parity movement. These events helped me compile a long list of potential participants that I would later approach for interviews.

2.3.5 Post-fieldwork: interviewing "non-elites"

After being unable to interview elites or conduct participant observation on film sets, I left Los Angeles feeling as if I had not collected any data. I was deeply concerned about how I would salvage my project. Back home in Canada, #Metoo took off as I left for maternity leave. I returned to my studies in the spring of 2018 with renewed energy and a plan to contact the emerging and mid-career filmmakers that I had met. Less established creative professionals have been far more receptive to my requests for interviews. I accepted that infiltrating Hollywood to gain insight from elites would not be the emphasis of my work. I also reached out to my own network and asked friends to refer filmmakers or actors that they knew. In addition to independent filmmakers, I contacted Canadians working in Los Angeles and for American productions being filmed in Canada.

In the summer of 2018, I was home with my family in Quebec and unable to return to Los Angeles, so I conducted interviews remotely. Like economist Neil Stephens (2007, 205), who interviewed elite economists during his PhD fieldwork, I did not originally intend to conduct interviews this way. Stephens feared that it would be challenging to build rapport without speaking face-to-face, and I shared that worry. However, it is interesting to note that even when I was in Los Angeles, most of my contacts asked to

[27] The Inclusion Rider gained prominence when actor Frances McDormand mentioned it while accepting an Oscar in 2018 (Belam et al. 2018). It is a clause that actors can ask studios to add to their contracts, which requires that a film's cast and crew achieve specific diversity targets. It is further discussed in the Conclusion.

conduct the interviews over the phone or online anyway because it was more convenient. According to Deakin and Wakefield (2014, 609), participants sometimes say they do not have time to meet in person, but if Skype is proposed, they are more likely to agree. Phone (or Skype) interviewing is an inexpensive, time-efficient manner to collect data in situations where participants are scattered across geographical distances (Thomas et al. 1994). In some cases, I conducted interviews while filmmakers sat in traffic or between meetings. I aimed to be as flexible as possible.

The long gap between my fieldwork and the second series of interviews was beneficial because I could ask filmmakers to reflect on key developments since I left the field. For example, the emergence of the #MeToo movement in October 2017 led to a profound shift of consciousness about gender relations across industries but especially in Hollywood. During my first round of interviews in 2016-17, one contact asked to remain anonymous because she feared repercussions for speaking about Bob Weinstein chasing a woman around the office when she interned at the Weinstein Company. By 2018, the climate had changed dramatically, and many participants were more forthcoming about difficult subjects and wanted to be on the record with their names used. The time lapse also gave me a chance to review my field notes and devise new questions about “breaking into” the industry and the challenges of getting past gatekeepers, which became more important as a result of my own access obstacles. I conducted several interviews (in-person and over the phone) while I was in Los Angeles, but the bulk of the 38 interviews were conducted via Skype and phone in August 2018.

It took me several hours to prepare for each interview because most of my participants had existing media profiles and bodies of work, so I familiarized myself with their productions and read their interviews where possible. I wanted to demonstrate knowledge of their work as a sign of respect and to avoid asking questions they had already answered in other articles. My goal was to maximize interview time to collect data that would be “otherwise unattainable” (Odendahl et al. 2001, 309). When possible,

I watched their films or television shows so I could have a better understanding of who they were and their career stage. The interview focused on the context in which their work was produced, so in cases where I could not watch their productions due to limited distribution or other barriers, it did not hamper our discussion. My interviews were mostly semi-structured, and I prepared a checklist for myself to ensure I covered a range of topics, which, according to Berg (2007, 39), "allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study." I also added specific questions relevant to their experiences.

2.3.6 Collecting data via interviews

While phone- or Skype-based interviews are an efficient use of time (Block et al. 2012, 431) for the researcher and the participant, it can be challenging to collect ethnographic data during short sessions. Most of the interviews lasted one hour, and given that many of my participants were busy, I ended the interviews on time and did not push to prolong them. In a few cases, participants offered to continue, so we spoke for up to two and a half hours. I had so many questions to ask and felt I had barely scratched the surface. It was clear that some people did not want to (or were not available to) arrange a second interview, but a small number of people offered to speak again, so we did have an opportunity to discuss further. In the majority of cases, I met my participants briefly in person in 2016-2017 and then conducted the interview in 2018, and that was the extent of our contact. Participant observation, on the other hand, could have allowed me to explore topics in greater depth: spending a significant amount of time with my participants, being able to ask them follow-up questions on a more casual basis (rather than having to set up another interview), and building a relationship, so they felt comfortable opening up. Whether or not it is possible to build rapport during a one-hour conversation is debatable, but conducting the majority of my interviews via Skype helped because by seeing the person, I could get a better sense of who they were as they were speaking.

Many cancelled their interviews at the last minute or were unreachable. This disadvantaged me somewhat, but I needed their collaboration, so I often tried to reschedule. Some view this as empowering the participants and granting them greater control (Holt 2010, 116). Having spoken to other researchers, I know that cancellations occur commonly. I was sympathetic because I knew about the industry's working conditions, but at the same time, I was concerned about my resources. When participants did not show up more than once, I moved on in the interest of time.

Instead of conducting traditional participant observation, I engaged in what Gusterson (1997, 116) refers to as "polymorphous engagement." He describes it as, "interacting with informants across a number of dispersed sites, not just in local communities, and sometimes in virtual form," and "[C]ollecting data eclectically from a disparate array of sources in many different ways" (Gusterson 1997, 116). In her ethnography of Wall Street, Karen Ho (2009, 19) gained access through various techniques across multiple sites. She argues that studies of the "power elite" are not necessarily suited to traditional participant observation, and in the context of Wall Street, setting up a tent in the lobby of J.P. Morgan is unrealistic (Ho 2009, 19). My reflections below further detail why participant observation was not feasible.

Before moving on, I would like to mention that several of my chapters mention more established filmmakers who are not easily reachable, so I relied on secondary sources from the media to discuss their careers. I also used journalistic sources in cases where my participants revealed sensitive information that could identify them. To avoid putting them at risk, my supervisors recommended that I focus on material from existing publications.

2.4 Reflecting on and re-framing research

It was difficult to gain perspective on my fieldwork while I was still in Los Angeles. Months after returning home, I realized my efforts were not in vain. With some

perspective, I came to see that having industry gatekeepers obstruct my path was valuable; the stumbling blocks I considered failures were, in fact, productive research materials that would inform my work. I accepted that I would not be presenting an account from “inside” Hollywood but rather a depiction of women filmmakers' challenges while trying to get *in*. These challenges would eventually become integral aspects of my ethnographic chapters. I learned that there is no set path “into” the industry (either as a filmmaker or researcher) and that one cannot replicate another individual’s approach because “getting in” depends on numerous subjective factors–knowing the right person or being in the right place, or having the right kind of project at the right time. I discuss the circuitous path into Hollywood in Chapter 4.

There are several reasons why participant observation is complicated to carry out in Hollywood. First, industry members have more pressing priorities. The fact that I was an academic attempting to study the industry was often met with apathy, as predicted by Ortner (2010, 222). This disinterest did not stem from ill will or contempt–filmmakers and executives were simply trying to stay afloat. Second, confidentiality is paramount. Hollywood is built on maintaining a competitive advantage and extensive use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs). Ortner (2010, 218) discussed how secretive the industry is, making participant observation at higher levels difficult, if not impossible. Relationships–and by extension, business deals–are often developed through “schmoozing” and building trust over time. My ethnographic chapters explain that Hollywood filmmaking is a perilous endeavour in which significant sums of money are invested. Accordingly, members cling to their positions and prefer to work with people they already know to mitigate risk as much as possible. In my experience, they are also acutely aware of how they might be portrayed (either in the media or academic research) and can be highly guarded. An extra person in the room, such as an anthropologist taking notes, would impede business activities. Therefore, “deep hanging out” (Geertz 1998) in Hollywood is not realistic. Third, “shadowing” positions are often reserved for aspiring

filmmakers. Studios and networks organize “diversity” fellowships for unemployed filmmakers to allow them to observe the work of established filmmakers. In Chapter 5, I explain that women filmmakers have difficulty transitioning away from these “fellowships” and spend years shadowing for free. Because so many women filmmakers are attempting to shadow on set, industry members receive numerous requests for such access and cannot accommodate everyone. Lastly, inequality in Hollywood has attracted significant interest recently. Even before #MeToo, media outlets were regularly publishing articles about women directors (Hiscock 2013; Scott 2013; Winter 2013; Edwards 2015; Kamen 2015); the bias they face (Dowd 2015; Kiang 2015b; Le Vine 2015; Shit People Say to Women Directors 2016); and women’s representation onscreen (Emery 2014; Silverstein 2015; Pomerantz 2015; Lang 2015; Carpentier 2016). Although research on “diversity and inclusion” was generally perceived as worthwhile, conducting research in this area was no longer novel, and industry members were tired of being asked for interviews. Franklin Leonard, a former executive and founder of The Black List, an online network for scriptwriters, buyers and representatives, tweeted, “While I am endlessly flattered by the non-stop invitations to speak for free on panels about diversity in Hollywood, I have expertise in other areas too (and a job that requires that I occasionally do things other than legitimize your brand without compensation.)” (@franklinleonard 2018). Had I been conducting this research several years earlier, I may have been able to reach industry members more easily.

2.4.1 Empathy

Once I understood how volatile Hollywood could be, particularly for women filmmakers (for more, see Chapter 7), I began to feel reluctant about taking up their time. Statistics show that 80% of women directors will not make a second film within 10 years (Smith et al. 2017, 1), meaning they face difficult odds even after “breaking in” to studio features. One filmmaker, Sian Heder, agreed to talk to me, but I chose not to pursue her because I could sense she was already overloaded. During a 2016 panel discussion,

she revealed that she finished her first feature while walking her two-week-old baby up and down the hall outside the editing suite. In the next room, a male colleague was finishing his own film while his wife was home with their three-week-old baby. “You have to be careful about where you use your energy,” she told the crowd. “Make sure you are caretaking other aspects of your life. Choose projects that are worth it.” Instead of caretaking her own life, she offered me 20 minutes for a phone interview. Knowing that it would be insufficient for my purposes, I thanked her but did not follow up. Six years later, the film she was working on at the time, *CODA* (2021), won the Oscar for Best Picture (!).

2.4.2 Stress and insecurity

I spent most of my fieldwork worrying that my efforts were not bearing fruit. Over time, the refusals and mixed messages I received became a source of stress that I carried with me (“Why were they saying, ‘yes,’ and then not responding?”). While sociologist Joseph A. Conti was conducting elite interviews for his PhD research, the experience was mentally taxing and affected his self-esteem. His participants evaded his questions, answered phone calls during the interview and occupied themselves with other “multi-tasking” (Conti et al. 2007, 72–73): “Preparing for interviews and even sending letters soliciting potential informants became an incredible burden as I continually had to overcome feelings of inadequacy and misdirection” (Conti et al. 2007, 73). Even if I had successfully obtained permission to interview some elite industry members, unforeseen challenges might have arisen in the process, as in Conti’s case.

Facing rejection is a typical experience for those in the film industry. When I worked as a filmmaker, I was refused by funders, broadcasters and festivals, but the rejections were spread over 10 years. I also had other activities to occupy my time and mind, so the impact was less severe. During fieldwork, I had limited time to execute my plan and was fixated on it. Living in Los Angeles is also relatively expensive. While paying the equivalent of $2500 CAD a month for my small apartment and making no

tangible progress, I began to question whether it was worth staying. This helped me appreciate the stress of having limited finances while trying to “make it” in Los Angeles– a reality for many of my participants (revisited in Chapters 4, 5, and 7). Furthermore, I was unsure how to move forward or alter my situation. Several of my participants spoke about having periods of self-doubt when things were not going well, and I, too, had these sentiments.

Compared with other creative professionals in Los Angeles, I experienced a relatively short period of uncertainty. Clinical psychologist Mihaela Ivan Holtz offers specialized counselling to those in film, television and other fields and writes that creative careers represent “[A] fine balance between keeping yourself grounded and slipping into the territory of insecurity” (Holtz 2018). The industry sews self-doubt in emerging filmmakers by continually celebrating the stories of those who have managed to break through while an unknown number of others are still desperate to find a way to stand out. Actors regularly speak about attending therapy (Flanagan 2019; Weinberg 2019; Wood 2019), and some producers have their informal support networks which involve “listening to another producer’s brain dump of all that’s overwhelming,” according to producer Scott Macaulay (Goldberg 2018). It is a job “built to grind you to a pulp and take everything inside of you and use it and then throw it into a trash can,” says Alicia Van Couvering in *Filmmaker Magazine* (Hess 2018). Some industry members struggle for years with anxiety, addiction, insecurity, creative blocks and other emotional conflicts, partly due to financial stress, intense competition, and pressure to succeed. Now, I understand the need to discuss industry experiences and gain an outsider’s view. I had difficulty seeing a path forward and found it challenging to have perspective on my work while I was still inside the bubble of Los Angeles.



Figure 16. *The USC School of Cinematic Arts. The buildings, featuring impressive archways and courtyards, were named for industry donors such as Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. Image by the author.*

2.4.3 Affiliation with USC

While in Los Angeles, I was a visiting student at the University of Southern California (USC). Although it did not necessarily lead to access to industry members, I felt connected to people who understood me. I visited the campus once a week and used the library regularly. I met aspiring filmmaker students and attended USC film events, where I spoke to directors, producers, cinematographers and screenwriters. I was invited to observe a film course taught by producer Bonnie Bruckheimer about women's careers in Hollywood. Bonnie had collaborated for years with actor Bette Midler and was formerly married to Jerry Bruckheimer, creator of hit shows like *CSI* franchise and blockbusters like *Top Gun* (1986, dir. Tony Scott). The class gave me a break from the realities of fieldwork and helped me remain in touch with aspiring filmmakers who were planning their entry into Hollywood. They were tasked with conducting interviews with established filmmakers, and Bonnie advised them on how to go about obtaining access while being respectful of the filmmakers' time. Many students were unsuccessful, like me, so they

discussed obstacles and tried to find alternatives. Bonnie is warm and supportive, and I am grateful she let me experience the USC film school universe. I was unprepared for the psychological toll of conducting long-term fieldwork and underestimated the complexity of "breaking in."

2.5 Conclusion

Like others who moved to Los Angeles with no Hollywood experience, I arrived brimming with ideas about how I would find my path "into" the film and television industry. Like filmmakers, my trajectory was primarily determined by factors beyond my control, which was difficult to accept. The media frequently glosses over hardships, sharing stories about celebrities who "came from nothing" to become famous (Muniz 2014), filmmakers who were "discovered" right out of film school (Fairbanks 2017) and actors with extraordinarily good luck (Baron 2017). By highlighting how individuals defied great odds to join the industry, these narratives contributed to my unrealistic expectations about what fieldwork might be like. My participants are aware of systemic bias against women and people of colour and of the hyper-competitiveness of the industry. Few will succeed, yet they devote themselves to trying anyway. Perhaps egotism is to blame– thinking that one is somehow special and will manage to succeed when all signs indicate it is impossibly hard to do so. Perhaps it is also due to getting swept up in the "rat race" of Hollywood, where everyone is vying for the "top." I thought elite members would provide the data I needed, but I was not prepared for the mental load of pursuing them. Being fixated on "breaking in" and executing my original fieldwork plan may have clouded my vision and limited my ability to consider alternatives. After spending so much time trying to access elites, I learned to appreciate the complexity and nuance around me that is within reach. Finally, several participants told me that in this industry, "It's not even who you know; it's who knows *you*." However, nobody knew me. I had no personal relationships with powerful insiders (discussed in Chapter 4). At the same time, if I had those connections, I might have a different view of Hollywood and would not be able to

present the critical ethnography that follows about the challenges of gaining access to the Hollywood industry.

Though I never saw Geena Davis again, we reconnected, in a sense. When she was presented with a special award for her contributions to gender equality at the 2022 Primetime Emmy Awards, the broadcast included a montage of photos celebrating the work of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDIGM). A friend messaged me to say congratulations on my appearance at the Emmy's and I could not figure out what she was talking about. She sent a photo of her television screen–depicting me volunteering at a 2016 GDIGM event (Figure 17). I could not help but laugh at how this experience had come full circle.



Figure 17. *I was bewildered (and amused) to learn that a photo of me (above left) volunteering at a 2016 Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media event was shown at the Emmys in 2022. Image courtesy of Jackie Dzuba.*

Chapter 3 | Portrait of Hollywood



***Figure 18**. A stereotypically Californian scene: beautiful weather, palm trees, a convertible, and the Pacific Coast Highway. "Cali Sunday" by Eric Demarcq licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

I arrived in Los Angeles for fieldwork on the hottest day of 2016; our dog refused to exit the car in the 38-degree (Celsius) heat. It was late September, and after being in cool, drizzly Oxford for the last year, I felt like I had walked into an oven. My partner and I had packed up our lives and driven 4,500 km from our home in Quebec to the west coast of the US over six days. On our final day of the trip, we crossed the Mojave Desert and ascended Cajon Pass, hoping to escape the oppressive heat. Traffic was heavy, and the freeway widened as we entered a densely populated area, with five lanes in each direction. We thought we had "arrived" in Los Angeles, but the development stretched for another 90 minutes as we traversed Ontario, Pomona, Covina, El Monte, and Monterey Park. Once in Los Angeles proper, we drove to our short-term rental west of downtown.

Known for its extensive network of freeways, Los Angeles cannot be understood without moving through the textures of its urban environment, writes architectural historian Reyner Banham (1973, 5), who learned to drive in order to "read" the city like a native Angeleno. Without being present to witness the cream-coloured gated communities, chain restaurants and malls, it is difficult to fathom how expansive this metropolis is. Framed by mountains, the ocean, and arid canyons, the city has stunning scenery, palm-lined streets and coastal views. Los Angeles has been named one of the most stressful American cities (Greenfield 2011) and the most pleasant (Barragan 2014a). Known by names including the "City of Angels" and "La La Land," it is an entertainment capital and lures aspiring actors, models and musicians from around the world.

While my research focuses on filmmaking, this chapter explores the context in which the industry has developed. Beneath Hollywood's shiny veneer is a challenging milieu; I examine urban characteristics which influence the social lives of creative professionals and contribute to cycles of exclusion faced by my research participants. I argue that exclusion is built into the industry's fabric and American society as a whole. Filmmakers of colour start their careers several steps behind their white counterparts, and women of colour face additional hurdles, recalling Crenshaw's (1989) axes of discrimination. While some Black women in Hollywood, such as *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-) creator Shonda Rhymes and *Selma* (2014) filmmaker Ava DuVernay, have begun making individual gains with historic deals with online streamers (e.g. Porter 2021; Schneider 2018), women of colour are still severely underrepresented as directors (Smith et al. 2022), writers (Beresford 2020), and executives (NAACP Hollywood Bureau et al. 2022).

The first section introduces Los Angeles; I begin with a short historical overview and explain how the region has attracted migrants seeking new opportunities since the 1850s. They were drawn by the warm, dry weather which later convinced filmmakers to

use Los Angeles as a base for filmmaking operations. The city is afflicted by sprawl and has notoriously bad traffic, leading some of my research participants to feel isolated and disconnected. I explain why I chose to situate myself in Culver City, known as "The Heart of Screenland" and outline the challenges of being close to the industry geographically, while not being *part* of it.

In the second half, I create parallels between the city and the industry as I suggest that both are controlled by a group of mostly white, wealthy individuals who live and work in environments that cannot be accessed by the general public. There is a pronounced gap between rich and poor, with mansions worth tens of millions of dollars and a downtown homeless encampment covering 62 blocks. The high cost of living creates financial strain for emerging filmmakers who have aspirations of joining the industry. Racial segregation has created sharp divides along neighbourhood lines, and though the situation has improved since 1970, recent data suggests that wealth is still concentrated in primarily white neighbourhoods. Nationally, white families have accumulated more resources than Black families, a situation which consequently means their children usually go to "better" schools, lead more stable lives, and are better equipped to climb the "social ladder." Those with access to money can spend more time exploring uncertain careers like filmmaking rather than pursuing jobs with stable salaries and benefits (explored in upcoming chapters). With mostly white residents living in the wealthiest areas, many industry members live in gated communities among their peers–somewhat similar to how the industry itself functions, with studios surrounded by towering walls and gatekeepers limiting access. I propose that affluent enclaves provide fertile ground for the development of close personal and professional relationships between those already "inside" the industry (including their children) to the detriment of those on the "outside"–often women and particularly women of colour. The next chapter about Emerging Filmmakers delves into exclusion in even greater detail. Throughout this discussion, I

argue that the city's characteristics have impacted the industry and the industry's practices have, in turn, shaped the city.



Figure 19. *Map of the United States, with stars added to indicate my home in Canada and fieldsite of Los Angeles. Image © OpenStreetMap contributors. Data is available under an Open Database License, CC BY-SA. openstreetmap.org/copyright*

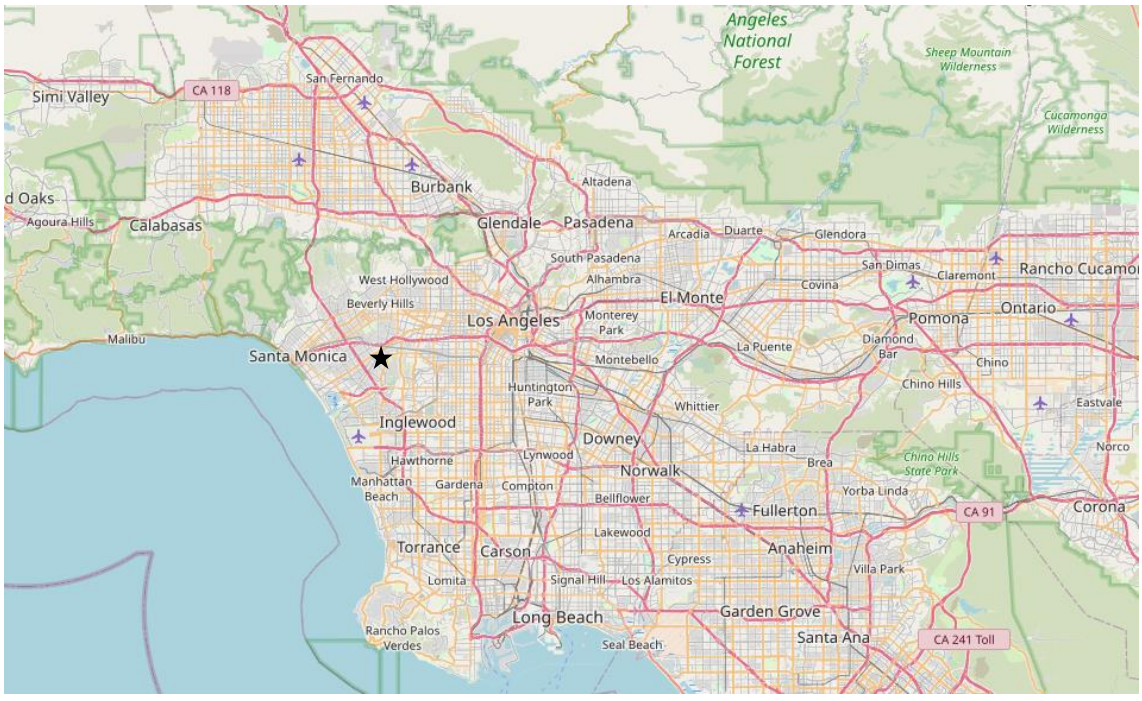


Figure 20. *Map of the greater Los Angeles area, with a star added to indicate the approximate location of my home in Culver City. Image © OpenStreetMap contributors. Data is available under an Open Database License, CC BY-SA. openstreetmap.org/copyright*

3.1 Los Angeles, California

3.1.1 A brief history

Prior to contact with European settlers, the area now known as Los Angeles was inhabited by Indigenous groups known today as the Tongva (Shiffman 2005); archaeological findings in California date back to 18,000 BCE (Lake 2006, 9). In the late 18th century, Spanish priests and soldiers ventured north from their colonies in Mexico (Bancroft 1884), establishing missions in picturesque settings along the Californian coast (Hanson 2006, xiv). The missionaries imposed Spanish law and Catholicism on the Indigenous populations, exploiting their labour (Smith 1924; Phillips 1980, 433) and taking their land, leading to demographic collapse (Jackson et al. 1995, 6; Robinson 1952).

In 1781, a group of 44 settlers founded a *pueblo* (town) in Los Angeles (Phillips 1980, 430), which rapidly evolved in the next 100 years as Mexico gained independence from Spain (Lake 2006), and the Americans and Mexicans went to war. By 1850, California became an American state (California State Library 2020) and was in the midst of a gold rush, which led to an influx of tens of thousands of hopefuls who packed up their lives and risked everything by moving west to discover riches (Holliday 2015), a journey not unlike that of today's aspiring creatives. The gold-seekers saw California as a land of opportunity, teeming with resources for those willing to endure years of struggle–again, not unlike filmmaking today. Though many returned home empty-handed, others were convinced to stay in California due to the temperate weather, fertile soils, better wages, and rapidly-evolving towns (Holliday 2015). A national campaign advertised the wonderful weather and sunny conditions (Kennedy Rodgers et al. 2020). Trains began connecting the growing metropolis to other American cities, improving access for visitors and migrants: by 1880, the population surpassed 10,000 and ten years later, it exceeded 50,000 (Braudy 2011, 16). The growing city's main source of fresh water, the Los Angeles River, was prone to drying out and flooding (Deverell et al. 2016),

so this “small pueblo in a semiarid basin” needed access to a new source to “allow it to grow into a major city” (Mulholland 2000, 15). Highly complex and costly projects followed, involving the diversion of rivers, and the construction of dams, aqueducts, and reservoirs (Deverell et al. 2016; Kahrl 1982). Hollywood itself was incorporated as a town in 1897 (Braudy 2011, 20). Los Angeles continued to grow rapidly through the end of World War II, almost doubling in size every decade according to historian Lonnie Bunch (Kennedy Rodgers et al. 2020). Today, nearly 10 million people are spread across Los Angeles County (U.S. Census Bureau 2018), which is made up of 88 cities (County of Los Angeles 2018).

Southern California’s year-round sunshine attracted filmmakers (Slide 2013, 35; Osborne 2013, 7), and throughout history, many others were drawn to the Golden State. In the mid-19th century, “California was America’s dearest object of desire,” writes Janet Fireman (2020), and it remained desirable throughout the 20th century (Gregory 1991; U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Today, the state continues to lure educated college graduates from across the country as part of a “brain gain” (Johnson 2019). When the first studios were established in the early 1900s, Los Angeles was nothing more than an agricultural town of 800,000 people, and by 1950 there were four million people, many of whom came to join the industry (Banham 1973, 17). Banham (1973, 17) writes: “Hollywood brought to Los Angeles an unprecedented and unrepeatable population of genius, neurosis, skills, charlatanry, beauty, vice, talent, and plain old eccentricity, and it brought that population in little over two decades, not the long centuries that most metropolitan cities have required to accumulate a cultured and leisured class.” Subsequent sections of this chapter explore the genius, neurosis, and other qualities associated with industry members in further detail. The concurrent development of an entertainment industry and urban environment in a relatively short period of time has resulted in a complex, interdependent relationship between the two. The film industry was built *because of* Los Angeles, but it also *created* Los Angeles as it is known today.



Figure 21. *Crowds packing Huntington Beach, south of Los Angeles. "006_LA_981" by Alpe89 licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

3.1.2 An idyllic setting

I now turn to geographic and climatic features that lured so many to embark on arduous, trans-continental journeys to reach Southern California, often shortened to "SoCal." Los Angeles County has approximately 30 miles of (mostly) sandy beaches, with cool water and popular surf spots. The coastal climate is considered very "pleasant" with warm, sunny days and low humidity year-round (VanHemert 2014; Brettschneider 2018). According to Powdermaker (1950, 17), the semi-tropical conditions lead to "a certain soft ease to living." While visiting Los Angeles in December 2013 prior to fieldwork, I was surprised to see people wearing down jackets on the beach in 18-degree weather (as I wore a t-shirt), but after living there for some time, I adjusted quickly and found myself reaching for my own jacket. With no distinct seasons to mark the passage of time, the weeks and months of fieldwork melded together. Though the conditions are seemingly "ideal," Southern California is prone to severe droughts, earthquakes, landslides, flash flooding and wildfires decimating homes and uprooting families (Garoogian 2013, 27; Tchekmedyian 2017; Siddique et al. 2017; ABC7 News 2018, 7; CBS Los Angeles 2018; Flemming 2019). Smog is a persistent problem, clouding the

cityscape since World War II (South Coast Air Quality Management District 2018). Studies show that air pollutants in the county contribute to chronic health problems (Abbey et al. 1991) and premature death, especially among children (Künzli et al. 2003; Hall 1989).



Figure 22. *Smog hangs over central Los Angeles. "006_LA_372" by Alpe89 licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

With hills and valleys, ocean and desert within a short drive, the county's terrain has provided filmmakers with varied filming backdrops. The landscape is dramatic, featuring 1,741 square miles of flat land and another 2,121 square miles of hills and mountains (County of Los Angeles 2018). The Santa Monica Mountains run east-west, separating the city from the San Fernando Valley, colloquially referred to as, "the Valley," where one can find moderately-priced housing, as well as film and TV production studios. In the colder months, 10,000-foot snow-capped peaks tower over downtown's small cluster of skyscrapers.



Figure 23. *Mount Lukens in northeast Los Angeles. "2013_06_25-26_syd-akl-lax-iad-ewr_057" by Doc Searls licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

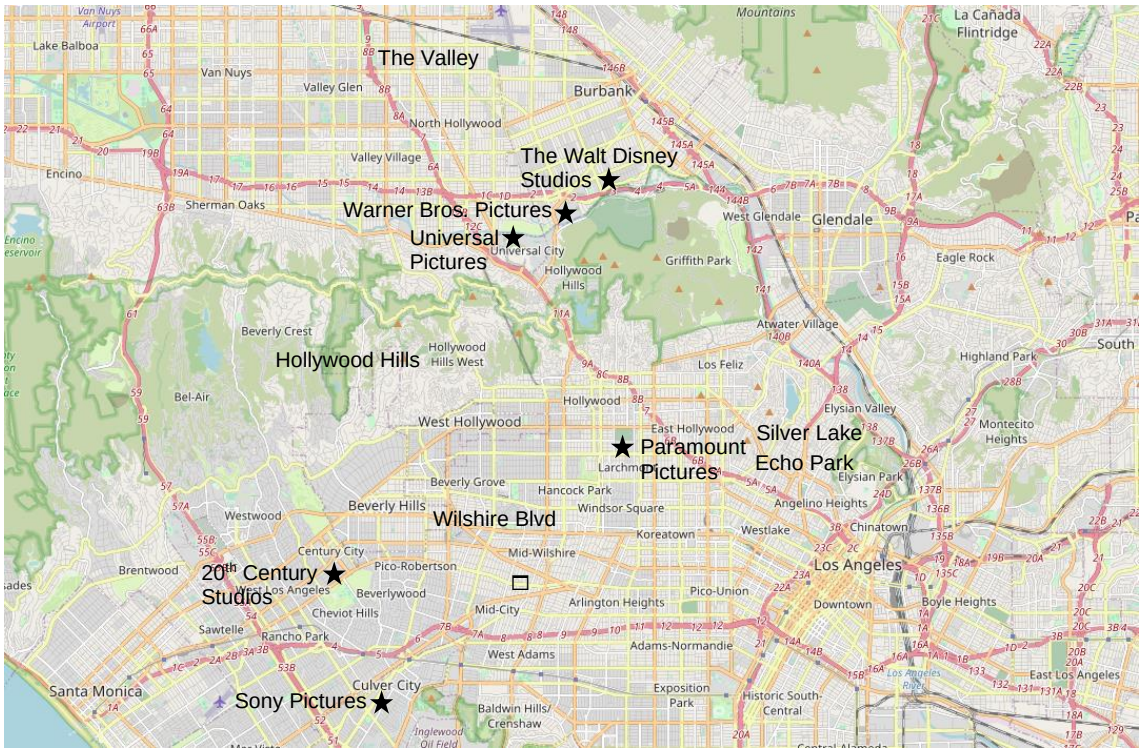


Figure 24. *Industry members living in the green section in the middle of the image can easily travel north or south as required for work. Image © OpenStreetMap contributors. Data is available under an Open Database License, CC BY-SA. openstreetmap.org/copyright*

Industry buildings are spread across the city. Many stars and filmmakers live in the Hollywood Hills (shown in green in Figure 24), close to studios (in numerous locations) and industry offices, often along Wilshire Boulevard. Some industry workers live in the slightly more affordable valley to the north, and traverse one of several congested roads through the mountains if they have meetings in Hollywood. My research participants are scattered across the city, often living as close to the action as they can afford to, as I did. Some artists, musicians and filmmakers converge in trendy (and pricey) areas such as Silver Lake and Echo Park, while others are further away and endure lengthy commutes.

Though Los Angeles has the "most extensive freeway system the world has ever seen" (Newman et al. 1999, 54), the traffic is infamous. In a survey of 1,360 cities worldwide, the 2017 INRIX Global Traffic Scorecard found that Los Angeles had the worst traffic for the sixth year in a row (INRIX 2018). Although professionals in other US cities reported slightly longer average commute times, Los Angeles respondents had the highest levels of stress upon arrival at their destinations (Robert Half 2017). With so much time spent behind the wheel, Los Angeles drivers can be hostile and easily angered. One day, I stalled[28] as I was about to turn right onto Venice Boulevard and it took me a few moments to recover. The driver behind me was furious; he blared the horn and raised both middle fingers, yelling an expletive to the sky. On the freeway, many drivers disregard the 65 mph speed limit, leaving little room for error, and cars float between lanes without signalling. Many vehicles have been marred by deep scratches, broken mirrors, or dented bumpers–what I started referring to as being "LA-ized," perhaps owing to the amount of time drivers spend in cars, or road rage.

[28] In Los Angeles we drove our Canadian car, which had a manual transmission, despite being warned that this was a bad idea because of heavy congestion and constant shifting.

Los Angeles once had a well-developed network of streetcars until a holding company controlled by automotive leaders purchased the rail system–and that of 44 other cities–and began shutting it down (Newman et al. 1999, 30). The streetcars provided greater access to jobs for people of all racial and ethnic groups; allowing working-class people living inland to access beaches for leisure, and promoting the "intermixing of race, class, and gender" (Reft 2014). Easy access to employment disappeared once the streetcars were replaced with slow and inefficient buses. In speaking with industry members, I discovered many never took public transit and were confused as to why I would, especially with the proliferation of ridesharing services like Uber and Lyft ("Just take an Uber," they would say). When I took the metro and train from the American Film Institute to my home on the West side–a distance of 10 miles as the crow flies–the trip took 90-minutes[29] and I began to understand the reluctance to use the under-developed public transportation system (Wachs 1993; Blumenberg et al. 2001; Davidson et al. 2011). In an industry in which "time is money," spending hours on public transit rather than "hustling" for opportunities is seen as an inefficient use of time. I was told by multiple people that having a car is a requirement for filmmakers, as they are expected to be mobile to travel to events and work. Flexibility is also key–they need to be able to drop everything to attend a last-minute meeting across the city should an opportunity arise. Safety is another concern when filming overnight or in locations inaccessible by public transportation. Some also schedule meetings during their commutes and call in by phone. Travelling by car was not always necessarily faster: when I checked the travel time to a particular destination via my phone, I was often given a range of between 45 minutes and two hours. That meant I had to leave hours in advance to reach an event, and risk arriving more than an hour early, or an hour late. When people arrived an hour or more late, it was rarely remarked upon; there seems to

[29] According to Google Maps, the journey is expected to take 30-55 minutes by car, and one hour by bike.

be a shared understanding that everyone is busy and that everyone is perpetually stuck in traffic. One of my research participants, Justin,*[30] who is an actor and filmmaker, says he dislikes the way the city feels like it was built for cars with pedestrians as an afterthought:

> You have to be in your car to feel like you're operating normally in the city, which means you're in traffic, which means you're subject to the flow of the ocean of congestion and chaos that is LA's car traffic. It's world-famous for a reason, it makes billionaires want to build whole tunnel networks to avoid it, it makes under-billionaires take helicopters everywhere, it kills thousands of people violently and non-violently every year, and on and on. The way the city is built also makes it harder to make connections with people, since the density is so much less than other cities, and hence the also-notorious isolation people talk about in LA.

With great distances between neighbourhoods (for more on sprawl, see Kunstler 1994; Ewing 1997), research participants originally from other cities spoke of isolation. Several said it took them years to start liking Los Angeles but things improved considerably once they "found their people" and built a supportive community. When I met new friends at social events, the conversation often trailed off when we discovered we lived on opposite ends of the city–and would likely never see each other again. As a friend told me, it was not worth investing in a relationship with someone who lives 90 minutes away, without traffic.

With heavy reliance on cars for transportation, limited parking and a high proportion of wealthy people, valet parking has become ubiquitous in Los Angeles, with attendants available at shopping malls and movie theatres, and there is even "community valet parking" offered by the municipality in downtown Culver City. At the first industry event I attended at the Google offices in Venice, CA, people lined up around the block in their cars when I arrived. Young valet attendants, who appeared to be primarily Latinx, were parking cars in side lots and sprinting back to collect the next car. They were

[30] Names marked with an asterisk throughout this thesis have been changed to preserve anonymity.

elegantly dressed in black suits and drenched in sweat. I came to understand that valet parking was not just for the most expensive hotels and restaurants, as I thought, but viewed as the default for industry events. If it was not available, organizers notified guests that “self-parking” (that is, parking one’s own car) was required. I also noticed a preoccupation with “validation,” which involves having one’s parking pass stamped or scanned to waive parking fees. I often heard early-career filmmakers asking at reception, “Do you validate?” followed by either relief or disappointment. When filmmakers travel across the city to an event, parking in a paid lot was generally the quickest and only option available. With fees of around $8-20 depending on the lot, expenses multiplied quickly for those attending several events per week. This discussion of finances raises another question: the gap between rich and poor, examined shortly.

3.1.3 Homebase in Culver City

Since I did not have a specific field site upon arrival, I wanted to be strategic with my housing to be able to travel to different parts of the city with relative ease. The options in our price range were limited but we ended up settling on a slightly run-down one-bedroom cottage for $1,900 per month in Culver City. It was a “rear house” located behind another building, set back from the road. The kitchen overlooked palm trees and bright pink bougainvillea flowers which were in bloom when we arrived. We had a secluded backyard, with green vines covering the garage and succulents growing in containers. By our Canadian standards, the cottage was outrageously expensive for the condition it was in but we signed the lease because the owners accepted pets, the area was clean and quiet, and it was advantageous geographically. Situated five miles from the coast, Culver City is located between the airport, the Westside, Hollywood and downtown. Many classic films have been filmed at studios in Culver City, including *Citizen Kane* (1941, dir. Orson Welles), *Rebecca* (1940, dir. Alfred Hitchcock), and *Raging Bull* (1980, dir. Martin Scorsese). “The Heart of Screenland,” is emblazoned on signs and banners throughout the city.



Figures 25, 26, 27*. Built in 1938, our cottage (behind the bushes on the left) was at the end of a long driveway behind two other apartments. According to the real estate website Zillow, the three units were estimated to be worth $1.6 million (Zillow 2017a).*

Once settled, we explored our neighbourhood, which consisted mostly of modest, middle-class homes and modernist architectural wonders. With a year-round growing season, residents invested in their outdoor spaces and had elaborate gardens. Several homes had free lending libraries on the front lawn: small structures resembling miniature sheds containing books for anyone to borrow.



Figure 28. *A tree-lined street in Culver City, one block from our home. "Trees in Culver City, California" by ChrisGoldNY licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.*

The cottage was located a short walk from the gates of Sony Pictures Studios and I had the naïve notion that if I lived nearby, I would somehow have easier access to it. I had aspirations of conducting fieldwork at the studio, where classics such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939, dir. Victor Fleming) and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952, dir. Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly) were filmed. What began as Ince/Triangle Studios in 1915 changed hands several times before being purchased by Sony Corporation in 1990 (Sony Pictures Museum 2019). Today, Sony's "lot," as it is referred to in industry parlance, is used primarily for television, including long-running game shows like *Jeopardy* (1984- , created by Merv Griffin) and *Wheel of Fortune* (1983- , created by Merv Griffin).



Figure 29. *Goldwyn Studios (now Sony Pictures Studio) in Culver City in 1919. The large building resembling a warehouse is a sound stage (a large, soundproof structure used for filming), and in the foreground, there are fake "western" buildings. I have added a white star to identify the approximate present-day location of our cottage. "Aerial View of Goldwyn Studios in Culver City, 1919" digitally reproduced by the USC Digital Library. Source: University of California Libraries and California Historical Society. Licensed under CC BY 3.0.*

I thought it would be relatively straightforward to befriend studio employees over lunch at the nearby Jackson Market café and perhaps even get an internship at Sony (I applied but was never contacted). While I may have been geographically close to the faux village squares of historic films, I was firmly planted outside the studio's towering walls, craning my neck to get a look in as cars entered and exited. The only celebrity I spotted in nine months of patrolling the gates while pretending to "walk my dog" was actor Bill Hader, of *Saturday Night Live* fame, who was crossing the street nearby.



Figure 30. *Tourists pass an oversized Oscar statuette during a tour of the Warner Bros. Studio lot. Image by the author.*

The entertainment industry is omnipresent in Los Angeles and yet cannot be clutched in a meaningful way by those who are not part of it, including myself. Like the Hollywood sign, discussed later, industry infrastructure is visible across the city but hovers out of reach of regular people (Braudy 2011). It *feels* close by, with studios, agencies, and other infrastructure visible across numerous neighbourhoods and industry events (parties, premieres, screenings, award ceremonies) spilling over onto city streets every day. With my access difficulties always in the back of my mind, I was keenly aware of the number of cordons and guards that controlled access to physical spaces, events, and people. For a fee, tourists can climb into open-air vans for "exclusive" visits to neighbourhoods where celebrities are rumoured to live. Ortner (2010, 215) describes going on a "star tour" and visiting locations where "nothing is visible at all." Most houses are concealed by thick green hedges, fences, and walls (discussed further in the next section) because of the very existence of invasive practices *like* star tours. The public's fascination with "unfiltered" portrayals of celebrities' lives has led to the proliferation of gossip magazine columns like, "Stars – They're Just Like Us," featuring often unflattering

images of famous people buying groceries or walking their dogs in grubby clothes with no makeup (Us Weekly Staff 2022). The work of paparazzi photographers is regularly condemned for privacy reasons (CNN 1997; Vulpo 2019), yet still more people consume the images and rely on them for their livelihoods (Diaz 2020). Despite the ubiquity of Q&A sessions with actors (described in the Methodology chapter) or "VIP experiences" at studios, these opportunities provide a form of superficial access which has been sanitized for public consumption. They provide an illusion of access which seems to satisfy voyeuristic tourists, but in my case, was more frustrating than having none at all because they represent another way of producing exclusivity. My annoyance arose from the fact that I was there, mere feet away from the person I wanted to speak to or place I thought I needed to be, but I could not reach them.



Figure 31, 32. *Gates and hedges concealing homes in Beverly Hills. "Wooden Door and Staircase on Doheny Road – Beverly Hills, CA" and "IMG_0457" by ChrisGoldNY licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0. Modification: cropping.*

Thus far I have introduced Los Angeles and its complexity, detailing the scenic beauty of its surroundings and the stress-inducing reliance on cars for transportation. The next section explores the gap between rich and poor and the history of racial

inequities, as well as links between exclusion in the built environment and exclusion in the industry.

3.2 Linking the city and the industry

In this section, I propose that urban characteristics are linked to industry characteristics. The dominance of white men in today's industry is connected to larger patterns of exclusion which have existed in Los Angeles for more than a century. I begin with a description of the pronounced gap between rich and poor; while wealth is highly visible, many struggle to afford basic necessities in this expensive city. (The financial woes of filmmakers are examined in Chapter 7.) Next, racial segregation has transformed the city's neighbourhoods over decades, making it difficult for non-white residents to obtain mortgages and preventing them from living in "desirable" neighbourhoods altogether. Even after those restrictions were lifted, the most affluent areas have remained predominantly white. This ties in with the next sub-section about gated homes and the development of social relations between wealthy residents, who are often industry members. Living in fortified compounds, the residents band together, restricting access to public beaches and adding gates for "security" reasons. At the same time, they build relationships and create new enterprises together. My aim is to illustrate that the lifestyles of powerful industry members influence the functioning of the industry itself. Their homes and workplaces are designed to be unreachable and they employ "gatekeepers" to further control access to their time and resources. They live in prosperous, mostly white neighbourhoods, and work in fortified compounds surrounded by mostly white colleagues, employing support staff who are often people of colour.[31] In the next chapter, I explore how aspiring filmmakers who lack existing connections to

[31] The contributions of people of colour working as domestic workers or gardeners are often rendered invisible, partly because they work behind the walls and because what counts as working "in the industry" does not include these forms of labour. "Live-in" positions supporting affluent Los Angeles families, often occupied by immigrant Latinx women, are not considered "real jobs" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007).

members of the industry often flounder as they seek a way “in” to Hollywood–a particularly challenging issue for filmmakers of colour.

3.2.1 Extreme wealth and poverty

Given the opulence of many residences and the abundance of luxury cars such as Bentleys and Maseratis, it is not surprising to discover that Los Angeles is home to 91 of the nation’s richest 1,000 neighbourhoods (Higley 2014). It is the fifth richest city in the world (Knight Frank Research 2017, 22), with 173,300 millionaires, 7,740 multi-millionaires ($10 million+), and 3,150 ultra-high net worth individuals (with more than $30 million in assets aside from their primary residence) (Knight Frank Research 2017, 65). In June 2019, the median sales price for a Los Angeles home was $810,000 (Trulia 2019) and in April 2019, the median rent price was $3,500 (Zillow 2019). In addition to pockets of extreme wealth, there is also a sizeable chasm between rich and poor, with the poorest 20% of Los Angeles residents earning $17,567 annually, and the richest earning $217,770, or 12.3 times more (Berube 2014). At the time, Beverly Hills had the largest pay gap in the state, with the richest 20% earning 45 times more than the poorest 20% (Barragan 2014b). Furthermore, one in nine households in Beverly Hills was extremely low income, defined as a single person making $17,950 or two people making less than $20,050 (Alpert Reyes et al. 2014).



Figure 33. *Tents occupied by homeless people cover the sidewalk in downtown Los Angeles. "Sunny Street" by Russ Allison Loar licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Modification: cropping.*

When aspiring filmmakers converge on Los Angeles, they are faced with a high cost of living relative to their income potential, as unpaid or poorly paid opportunities are typical entry points (see Chapter 4). "Rags-to-riches" stories circulate about celebrities who slept in their cars or experienced homelessness before becoming famous (Vivinetto 2015; J. Smith et al. 2016)–more than 16,000 Los Angeles residents lived in their vehicles in 2019 (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority 2019a).[32] The city is experiencing a housing "affordability crisis" (2019c, 6) and an historic housing shortage, attributed to a healthy economy, growth of the city's tech industry, and increasing foreign investment (Thomson 2017). The homeless population is large and visible; approximately 102,278 people were considered homeless in 2017.[33] Though their makeshift structures are regularly bulldozed by officials for various violations (Holland

[32] The city has developed "safe parking" programs to allow people to park in secured lots (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority 2019b; Safe Parking L.A. 2021).

[33] According to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, the homeless population increased by 23% to 57,794 in 2017. After analyzing those figures, data scientists from a non-profit organization, the Economic Roundtable, reported that 102,278 was a more accurate figure as it included those who were homeless *at some point* in 2017 (Economic Roundtable 2018).

2019), many have extensive setups with tarps and furniture–bookshelves, dressers, and chairs. Downtown, homeless encampments stretch through a 62-block area of Skid Row (for an aerial tour, see Christi et al. 2019), with mini-tent cities cropping up under bridges, overpasses and along embankments elsewhere. Meanwhile, the surrounding hills and ocean-front neighbourhoods feature median real estate listings of $4,131,000 as of April 2019 (Trulia 2019). In recent years, extravagant homes have been listed for up to $350 million (Kiefer 2017; Dangremond 2017). Housing prices have risen sharply, and in 2018, the median sales price for a home was 9.5 times the median household income (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University 2018, 12). Most Los Angeles residents live in rentals (64%), and half are spending 35%[34] or more of their monthly income on rent (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). To afford the Fair Market Rent of $1,804 for a two-bedroom home, one must work 116 hours per week (or 2.9 full-time jobs) at the 2019 state minimum wage of $12 per hour (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2019, 36). In California, 7.9 million people (or 20.4%) lived below the poverty line in 2014, 2015, and 2016, the highest rate in the nation (Fox 2017). While many are struggling, figures from 2015 to 2017 reveal that poverty disproportionately affects Latinx communities: 23.6% of Latinx people live in poverty, followed by 17.6% of Black people, and 16.4% of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, compared with 12.5% of white people (Bohn et al. 2019).

[34] Spending at least 30% of one's income on housing meets the government's definition of "cost-burdened" (Dawkins et al. 2018).



Figures 34, 35, 36, 37. *Opulent homes in Beverly Hills circa 2021. "House in Beverly Hills, California," "Palm Trees and Architecture in Beverly Hills, California," "Sports Car and House in Beverly Hills, California," and "Attack Dog Warning Sign - Beverly Hills, California" by ChrisGoldNY licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0. Modification: cropping.*

3.2.2 Opportunity gaps

With poverty affecting higher percentages of people of colour in the US, opportunity gaps develop. The Black community, in particular, has been subject to race-based inequality produced in part by slavery (abolished in 1865) (Plous et al. 1995;

Feagin 2004; Coates 2014), the Jim Crow era (the system of discrimination and segregation in the southern US) (Broussard 2013; Martin et al. 2007), systematic voter suppression (Combs 2016; Manheim et al. 2019), and the mass incarceration of Black men (Roberts 2003; CNN 2019). Writer Max Fisher (2014) argues that, "[N]ot only does discrimination continue today, but the consequences of two centuries of slavery and one century of explicit white supremacy still directly impact and hold back Black families." Despite this, a 2014 poll found that 63% of Americans believe that, "Blacks who can't get ahead are mostly responsible for their own condition" (Pew Research Center 2014).

Throughout this thesis, I underscore the challenges that all women face as filmmakers but often note that women of colour face even more significant obstacles. When Oliver Stone says that filmmaking is hard (in the Introduction), he is talking about inconveniences that slowed him down, like funding delays or actors falling ill. He did not content with white supremacy nor was he confused for a bank robber because he is a Black man (like filmmaker Ryan Coogler, see Figure 38 below) (Welk 2022). In early 2022, Coogler was placed in handcuffs after he tried to withdraw $12,000 from his Bank of America account while in Atlanta filming *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022). Coogler also directed the first *Black Panther* film in 2018, which grossed $1.3 billion worldwide (Box Office Mojo 2022b). Ava DuVernay is a Black filmmaker from Compton in South Central Los Angeles, considered a "rough" neighbourhood in which some white people I met would not dare walk or drive their cars. To say that she "struggled" before making her first short film at the age of 32 glosses over the depth of the adversity that she and others have likely overcome. When emerging filmmaker Chidera,* who is of Nigerian descent, says that store employees in her hometown followed her as she shopped, her experience takes on new meaning in the context of centuries-old oppression based on skin colour. My aim in presenting this information is to illustrate that a wide range of deep-rooted causes has contributed to the absence of filmmakers of colour and that filmmaking is not just "hard" for them. Many additional aspects of racial

discrimination are worthy of consideration, including the experiences of members of the Latinx and Asian-American communities and those from other racial and ethnic backgrounds.[35] These topics are mentioned in my ethnographic chapters, where applicable.



Figure 38. *Police bodycam footage shows filmmaker Ryan Coogler in handcuffs after employees thought he was trying to rob the bank in 2022. Image from CBS Mornings used in accordance with fair use.*

From a socio-economic standpoint, Black filmmakers start well behind their white counterparts, who are more likely to come from homes with two earners, have easier access to cars (a requirement for entry-level industry jobs), are able to borrow emergency funds from family or friends, and inherit money from their families (Dettling et al. 2017). Black children are more likely to be surrounded by hardship: in the US, 66% of Black children born between 1985 and 2000 lived in neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty, compared with 6% of white children (Sharkey 2009). Proximity to financial

[35] Relations between majority and minority groups in California have been turbulent throughout history, involving anti-Asian violence and legislation starting in the late 19th century (Saxton 1971; MeGovney 1947); the deportation of thousands of Mexicans (Morales 1972); and uprisings from the Black community following police brutality in 1965 and 1992 (Oberschall 1968; Martin 2005), among many others. Gibbs et al. (2001, xii) note that, "It is not without considerable irony that 150 years after statehood, these same groups are emerging as the majority of California's residents, poised to reclaim their heritage and to reassert their right to determine the future course of their native state."

resources allows young white filmmakers to at least consider a career in the arts–something that several Black filmmakers I spoke to only contemplated as they got older. Several first-generation American filmmakers said their parents came to the US to create a better life and wanted their kids to pursue “safe” and “stable” career paths in medicine or law, as I explain in the next chapter.

Social mobility research shows that wealth gaps lead to opportunity gaps; employment prospects can be influenced by one’s socio-economic background and environment (Musterd et al. 2006), with those in “disadvantaged” communities more likely to lack connections and opportunities (Wilson 1987). Almost half of the millennials born since 1980, who represent a large portion of my research participants, are experiencing downward social mobility, meaning their employment status does not match that of their parents at the same career stage (Hout 2019). Research has found an “almost linear relationship” between the income of parents and their children’s opportunities (Chetty et al. 2014, 1555). As parental income increases, the revenue of their offspring climbs, as does the likelihood they will attend university (Chetty et al. 2014, 1555). In California, a large portion of school funding was derived from property taxes until the 1970s (Rancaño 2018), meaning affluent urban areas often had the best-funded schools. Higher educational attainment does not correlate with easier entry into Hollywood; however, it is reasonable to assume that higher-income students have more flexibility upon graduation to take on unpaid internships or work for low/no wages as newcomers to the film industry are expected to. They may also more easily develop bonds with their higher-achieving peers, which could translate to access to entry-level positions through existing connections. Topics related to “breaking in” are discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

In what follows, I describe residential segregation before discussing the advantages afforded to wealthy white people. Though Los Angeles is racially and ethnically diverse (U.S. Census Bureau 2010; Cooper et al. 2015, 5), it is segregated

along racial and economic lines, with wealth concentrated in predominantly white neighbourhoods and higher poverty in primarily “minority” communities (Bobo 2000; Ethington et al. 2001). The 2000 census shows that Los Angeles had the state's largest population of Black residents by a considerable margin (410,986) and the second highest rate of Black/white segregation in California (CensusScope n.d.). For a visual representation, see Figures 39 and 40 below. As a Canadian, I was struck by how visible this segregation was, as one neighbourhood abruptly ended and the next one began, a feature of many American cities (Massey et al. 1988; Frey et al. 2005).

I focus here on two factors that contributed to racial segregation, which is associated with “the concentration of disadvantage,” according to Ta-Nehisi Coates (2014). As intolerance increased in the early 1900s in Los Angeles, racially restrictive covenants began prohibiting non-white people from living in particular areas unless they were servants (Redford 2017). Though now illegal, the wording remains part of hundreds of thousands of deeds in the US (Garrison 2008; Watt et al. 2020; Rich 2005). The penalty for breaking the covenant was harsh: the owner could lose the property. In the 1930s, additional measures were implemented as the government-sponsored Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) began classifying neighbourhoods to determine who should receive mortgages based on perceived risk (Nelson et al. 2022d). “Green” areas were deemed “safe,” whereas “redlined” areas were “hazardous” in part due to “infiltration” of “nationalities” (immigrants and people who were not white) and lenders were cautioned to avoid them. Deed restrictions meant that Black residents found themselves confined to redlined areas, unable to obtain mortgages (Reft 2017). HOLC reports warned that some neighbourhoods (such as Northwest Compton) were at risk of turning into “slum districts” (Nelson et al. 2022c), a designation which became a self-fulfilling prophecy because redlined neighbourhoods lacked investment and crumbled over time (Oliver et al. 2006; Reft 2017).

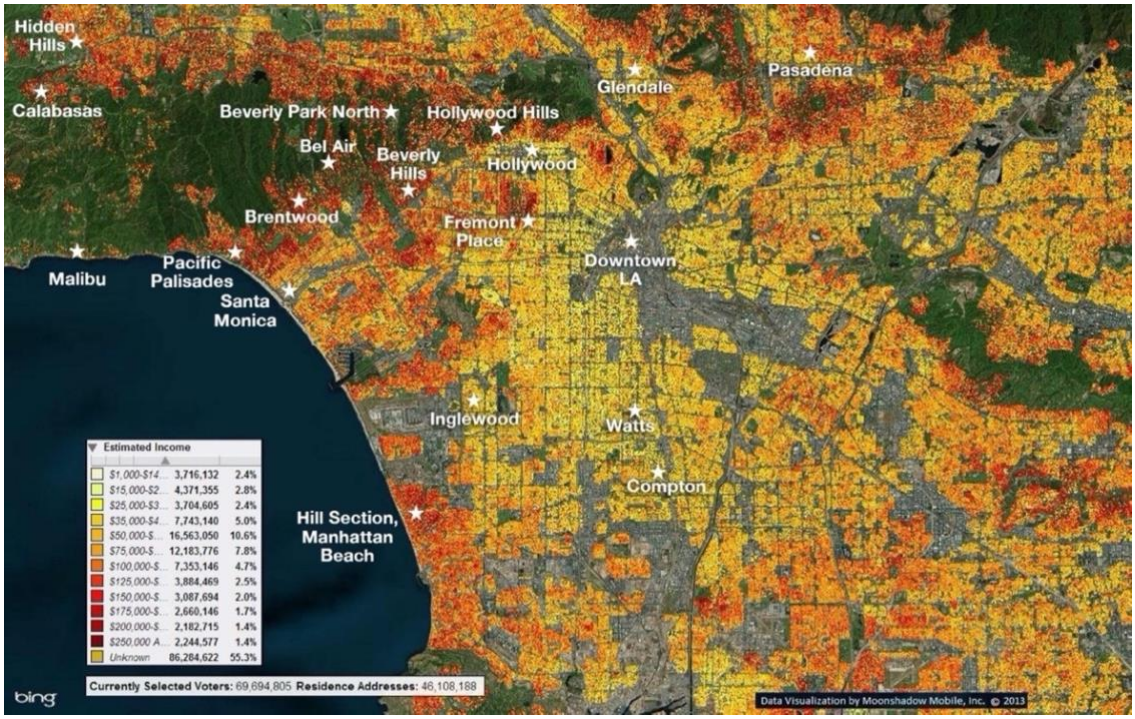


Figure 39. *This 2013 graphic depicts the estimated income of voters across LA County. The wealthiest voters (earning $250,000 per year and up, in dark red) are primarily grouped in the green hills and on the coast, with lower-income households (bright yellow, up to $34,999 per year) in the middle. Data Visualization by Moonshadow Mobile, Inc. Image courtesy of Census Viewer (Boesjes 2013). Modifications: place names have been added.*

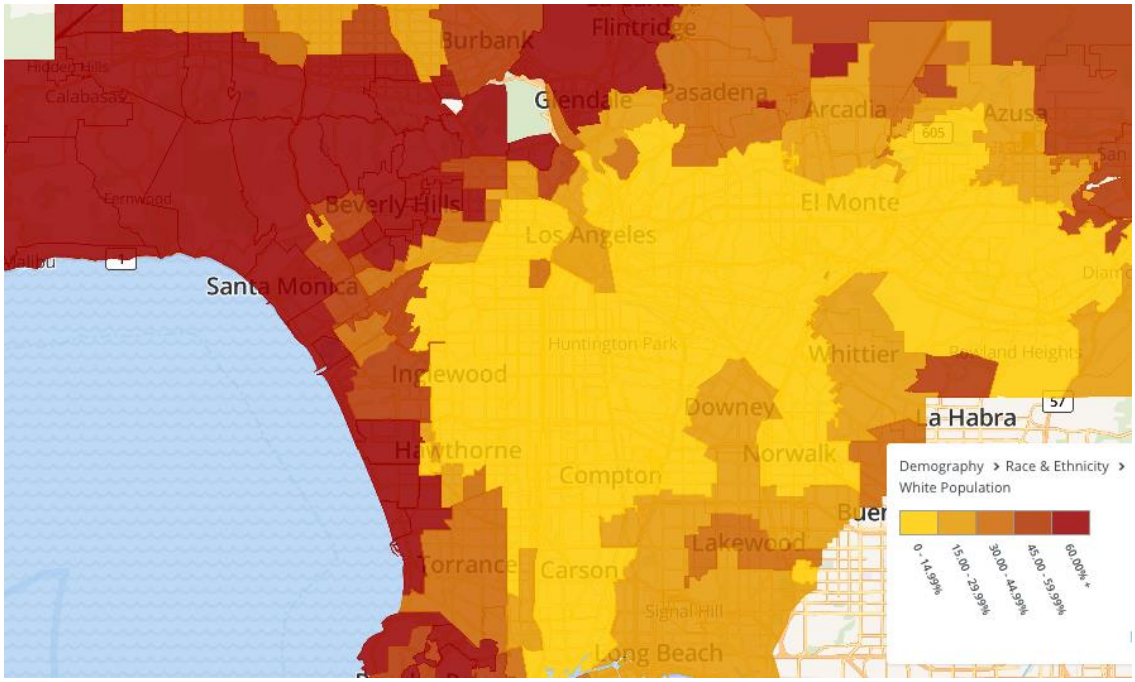


Figure 40. *In 2013, the wealthiest areas of Los Angeles, seen in Figure 39, were also the whitest areas. The dark red portions of this map are home to populations that are at least 60% white, and the yellow portions in the middle have the smallest white population. While this chart only indicates "60%+" some areas were closer to 85-90% white according to 2000 census data (Los Angeles Times 2022a). Image courtesy of USC's Neighborhood Data for Social Change platform at la.myneighborhooddata.org (2021).*

In contrast, the area comprising Bel-Air, Holmby Hills and Beverly Estates received the "highest green" ranking and "ample" funds for the mortgages of the motion picture executives, stars, and directors who settled there, earning salaries of $10,000[36] and up (Nelson et al. 2022b) (for a photograph, see Figure 43). There were reportedly no Black people (referred to as "Negroes") or foreign families living there and the "highest type deed restrictions" protected residents "in perpetuity against racial hazards" (Nelson et al. 2022b). The language above regarding built-in protection against "outsiders" and the homogeneity of the residents is striking because of how closely it resembles Hollywood today. This desirable neighbourhood nestled in the hills was accessible to wealthy, white men working in film. Black and brown people could not live there, nor could they dream of being integrated into filmmaking in a meaningful way. The report authors predicted in 1939 that the area would only become more desirable, and their glowing report likely contributed to that. Though the deed restrictions were lifted decades ago, the racial composition has not noticeably changed: Bel-Air was still 83% white as of the 2000 census (Los Angeles Times 2022b) and Holmby Hills and Beverly Estates were 87% white (Los Angeles Times 2022c). As I move on to further discussions of Hollywood wealth and physical landscapes, I demonstrate how industry members retain resources over time and develop personal relationships which turn into business relationships with friends and neighbours, giving them professional advantages over non-members.

3.2.3 Affluent enclaves

I have briefly described chasms between different groups in Los Angeles: rich, poor, Black, and white. Next, I explore how advantages are concentrated among the most privileged, many of whom belong to Hollywood's elite. By exploring the built environment and neighbourhoods in which members live, I examine the context in which relationships develop in an industry where "who you know" is critical. The next chapter

[36] Equivalent to $211,650 in 2022 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022).

discusses how core members of the industry facilitate the advancement of those who are like them (typically white men), leaving peripheral filmmakers (often white women and women of colour) on the side-lines.



Figure 41. *The Hollywood sign was originally erected to advertise a new real estate development called Hollywoodland. The "land" was eventually dropped, but the rest remained. "behind the Hollywood sign" by Oliver Dodd licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

While many in Los Angeles struggle to make ends meet as aspiring creatives, one only has to look up to be reminded that "making it" is possible. The white letters of the Hollywood sign are seen as the symbol of the city (McCawley 1996, 3), conveying a "landscape of fantasy" (Brook 2013, 8). The sign represents Los Angeles but is not easily reachable, Brook argues, (like careers in the industry, I would add): "Its own physicality is delimited by its comparative inaccessibility to the viewer, whose experience of it is commonly by sight, and from a distance," writes Brook (2013, 7–8). It is surrounded by other physical manifestations of *what could be*. Once considered "useless for anything but grazing" (The Hollywood Sign 2017), the hills around it are populated with sprawling homes perched on ridges, with tufts of greenery and bright blue swimming pools. Looking at aerial images of Brentwood, Bel Air, Beverly Hills and Hollywood (see Figure 43), the

ridges extend like fingers transformed by sprawling estates. Often grouped on crescents or dead-end roads, there is no through traffic. While cliffside homes command stunning views, the area is prone to wildfires (Serjeant 2007; ABC7 2017; ABC7 News 2018), mudslides (Mamoun 2011; CBS Los Angeles 2018), and earthquakes (Zheng 2013)– ever-present reminders that safety in Hollywood is never guaranteed.

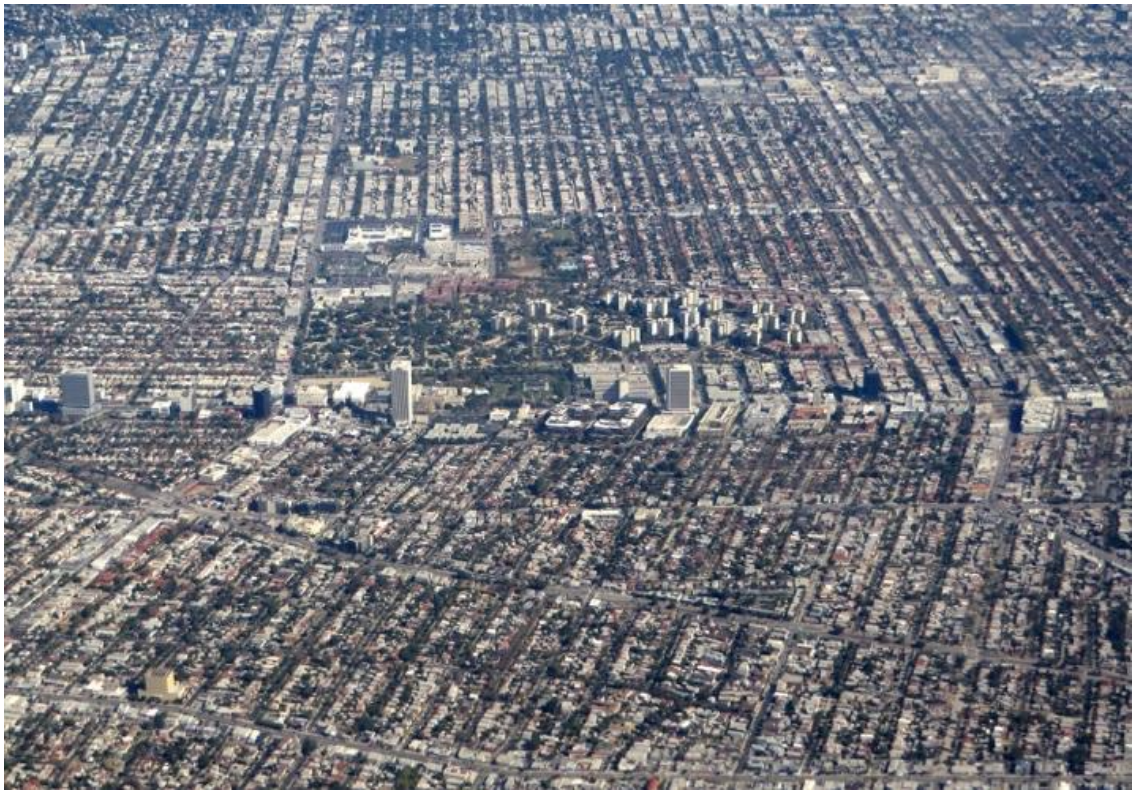


Figure 42. *Large portions of Los Angeles are organized according to a grid, with aligned blocks of low buildings. "The Grove" by Ken Lund licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Modification: cropping.*

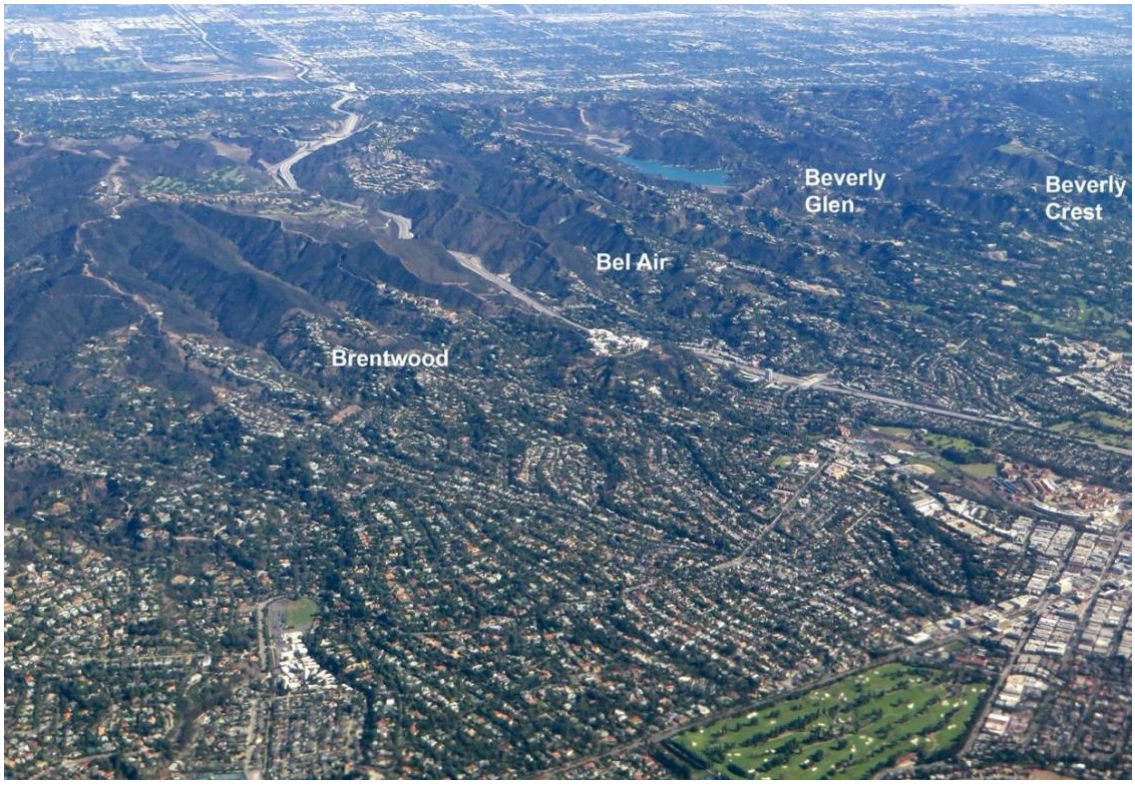


Figure 43. *In the hills above Hollywood, the streets twist and turn under a canopy of trees and large homes are perched atop canyon ridges in Brentwood, Bel-Air, Beverly Glen, and Beverly Crest. "The Getty Center, Los Angeles, California" by Ken Lund licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Modifications: brightness/contrast, cropping, and place names have been added.*

During Powdermaker's (1950, 19–22) fieldwork in the 1940s, she found that film professionals lived dull, insular lives with few interactions with the outside world: "Even physical contact with the private people is exceptional," she wrote, "for the residential suburbs such as Beverly Hills and Bel-Air are far removed from the working-class and industrial districts" (Powdermaker 1950, 19). Gated communities, residential areas "where gating mechanisms control who may enter the neighbourhood and feature walls and fences along community borders" (Branic et al. 2018, 402), are now ubiquitous in Southern California, representing one-third of all new residential developments[37] (Low 2008, 92). First announced in 1911, Fremont Place was the city's first gated community (Los Angeles Conservancy 2019), and exclusivity was an integral aspect of the founders' vision. They promised that no other property which would offer a "man of means such

[37] Gated communities often feature swimming pools, fitness facilities, and shared greenspace for use by the residents. They range in size from a few homes to several hundred, with networks of private streets and guarded checkpoints or automatic gates at the entrances.

opportunity for exclusiveness," and it was touted as "the most exclusive and highest class residence community" (Maginnis 2016). The streets were slightly curved, emulating Beverly Hills, and the gates offered a sense of safety and superiority to prospective residents who were uneasy about "perpendicularity and wide-open spaces," Maginnis (2016) writes sardonically. The community's famous former residents include silent era star Mary Pickford (Los Angeles Conservancy 2019) and boxer Muhammad Ali.

With the rise of celebrity stalkers (Wilson et al. 2018; Schlesinger et al. 2008) and intrusive paparazzi (Murray 2013), today's stars and executives live in increasingly fortified compounds (Blakely et al. 1997; Low 2006). "The hills around LA are famously studded with stars, but the real money lives in North Beverly Park," writes Morgan Brennan in wealth magazine *Forbes* (Brennan 2013b). Residents of the "paparazzi-proof" (Brennan 2013b) neighbourhood have included actors, athletes, entertainment moguls, business leaders and foreign dignitaries. Though the community has guarded entrances, each house is also walled-in, and some have additional security teams too (Jackson 2015). With elaborate amenities ("commercial-grade gyms, bowling alleys, in-home spas with beauty salons and movie theatres") (Jackson 2015), residents' contact with the outside world can be limited if desired. They develop bonds with those who share their social standing like Powdermaker's participants (1950, 19), the idea being that with similar strata of wealth or fame comes shared experience and understanding. Living in elite gated environments is about more than secured entrances and private roads; it involves joining a community with shared values (Mohamed Salah et al. 2018; Le Goix et al. 2014; Branic et al. 2018). These locales represent a space to escape work pressures, life in the spotlight, press and fans: "One of the things that's attractive—especially for celebrities greater than me—is the privacy and 'getting away from it all,'" said reality TV director and Hidden Hills resident Ken Fuchs in an interview with *Vanity Fair* (Lee 2017). "The people here say, 'Are you in?' Meaning inside the gated area," he continued. Getting "in" points to a transition which may occur when one's status changes,

moving from outside the walls with no status to becoming a valued member–"one of us." As I argue in the next chapter, core members are intent on protecting their status, a process which can be facilitated when living and working alongside powerful friends.

Another consequence of having a "high concentration of über-celebs" (Harris 2005) in a particular area is the normalization of ethically questionable and sometimes illegal behaviour, both within the industry and in daily life. (I explore the workplace misbehaviour of senior members in a subsequent chapter). Sensational stories involve neighbours at war over construction zones, blocked views, damage to property, and excessive noise (e.g. Raymond 2015; Cabe 2017). Filmmaker Quentin Tarantino filed a lawsuit against his neighbour screenwriter Alan Ball whose exotic birds disturbed him with their "blood-curdling screams at random intervals for seven to eight hours each day" (TMZ 2011). Teen idol Justin Bieber paid $80,900 in restitution after he vandalized his neighbour's home by throwing eggs, somehow causing an estimated $20,000 in damage (Winton 2014; O'Connor 2015). Actor Minnie Driver was involved in a multi-year legal challenge with a neighbour over the use of a shared driveway (Chestang 2016). Ahead of Driver's three-week trial in 2018, which involved six lawyers and at least eight witnesses, LA Superior Court Judge Rita Miller commented that this case was about "who's richer than who" (Parry et al. 2018). As Harris Field (2005) has suggested, these seemingly insignificant tales highlight what happens when wealth becomes concentrated, and power is unchecked.

The sense of entitlement that comes with occupying a high-status position sometimes impacts those who live alongside Hollywood's elite. In a *Los Angeles Times* opinion piece about conflicts between developers and conservationists along the Malibu coast west of Los Angeles, David K. Randall (2016) writes that "everyone who arrives in Malibu tries to close the door behind them." In a well-known example, billionaire studio

co-founder David Geffen[38] installed a gate by his ocean-front home to close off public access to Carbon Beach, nicknamed “Billionaire’s Beach.” Neighbours Steven Spielberg, Bob Dylan, Dustin Hoffman, Barbra Streisand, and Tom Hanks reportedly supported Geffen, citing the risk of stalkers and intruders (Harris 2005). Referred to as “Hollywood’s richest man” (Forbes 2019), Geffen was subsequently entangled in a legal battle over what became known as “Geffen Gate” for 22 years and refused to remove the gate until 2015 (O’Neill 2015). This is not an isolated incident; other Malibu residents have been caught posting fake “Private Property” signs at public beach access points and using security guards to threaten beachgoers with legal action (Low 2008; Day 2015b; Weikel 2016; Nagourney 2018). These measures represent a “soft abuse of power” (Wolbe 2013) which has limited public access to Malibu’s coastline for decades.[39] Low (2008, 88) argues that affluent residents are harming natural resources, restricting access to public space, and effectively privatizing public space through illegal practices.

[38] As the co-founder of DreamWorks SKG studio along with Steven Spielberg and Jeffrey Katzenberg and the founder of Geffen Records and several other companies, Geffen has amassed a fortune worth $8.5 billion as of April 2019 (Forbes 2019).

[39] Twenty (out of 27) miles of Malibu coastline are blocked by private residences (Groves 2014). In response, activists have created a #freethebeach movement and a mobile app called, Our Malibu Beaches, which instructs users on how to find hidden access points, identify illegal signs, and reach the sand (Escape Apps et al. 2013).



Figure 44. *The coastal access path by David Geffen's former home was paved and gated while he controlled it (Harris 2005). He also allegedly installed four "fake garage doors" and had the curb lowered to simulate an entrance to prevent people from parking there (Abcarian 2014; Leitereg et al. 2017; Wolbe 2013). He sold the home in 2017 for $85 million (Johnson Mandell 2017). Image from 2022 by Amanda Krate Charnoff.*

A few miles west, another strip of Malibu beachfront has become a storied playground for film stars and executives who sought an exclusive area to enjoy the sun and sand in the 1920s (Willens 2014). What was once a row of beach huts became the mansions of Malibu Motion Picture Colony, known as Malibu Colony today. In 2018, it was ranked as the most expensive neighbourhood in the Los Angeles area, with homes sold for the median price of $10.65 million (Theiss 2018) and monthly rentals in the range of $200,000 per month (Pacific Union International 2019), despite how tiny the plots of land are (see Figures 45-46).



Figure 45. *The Pacific Coast Highway winds along the coast in Malibu, leaving only a narrow strip of land for oceanfront homes (formerly occupied by beach huts). "Malibu Beach Houses" used with permission of Eric Demarcq.*



Figure 46. *Homes in Malibu Colony, at the bottom of the image, form two packed rows along the water. The area is particularly desirable because it is set back from the Pacific Coast Highway and protected by a guarded entrance. "bos-lax-sba_54.JPG" by Doc Searls licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Modification: cropping.*

While the collective mentality and protected lifestyle of gated environments are seemingly desirable for those on the "inside," scholars have explored how these developments contribute to social segregation by creating homogenous communities, decreasing property values in neighbouring areas and redistributing crime into surrounding communities (Helsley et al. 1999; Le Goix 2005). Writer and historian Mike Davis (1992) argues that the guards, gates, and walls surrounding gated communities are part of a strategy to reconstruct Los Angeles as a fortress, protecting the rich from the poor. He refers to objects in the built environment that restrict access as the "militarization" of Los Angeles. Meanwhile, Blakely and Snyder (1997, 28) are critical of gated communities but express an opinion which is in line with my own: gated communities are not the source of social inequality but rather a manifestation of larger societal patterns. Walled neighbourhoods are not causing unease for my research participants, who have other more pressing preoccupations. Still, they contribute to a broadly exclusionary system found in both Los Angeles and the industry. Because of their wealth and resources, many Hollywood decision-makers play a role in supporting this exclusionary system, which my participants are trying to "break into."

3.2.4 Social networks and advantages

This section explores the parallels between how elite members of the industry live–among other elite members in houses or communities with controlled access–and how they operate professionally–in an industry with layers of gatekeepers in place to protect insiders' interests. Carbon Beach neighbours David Geffen and Steven Spielberg collaborated to protect the privacy of their ocean-front homes *and also* founded DreamWorks SKG studio (now called DreamWorks Animation) with Jeffrey Katzenberg in 1994 (LaPorte 2010). Katzenberg, the former chairman of Walt Disney Studios, was another Carbon Beach resident (Brennan 2013a). Now three of the most influential individuals in Hollywood, they have amassed a collective fortune worth around $12 billion as of 2019 (Forbes 2019; Blankfeld 2015b; Blankfeld 2015c). They live alongside Oracle

founder Larry Ellison, who reportedly owns 10 homes on the same beach (Beale 2012; Kirsch 2021). His daughter, Megan Ellison, founded Annapurna Pictures at the age of 25 and has worked with some of the "biggest names" in Hollywood (Donnelly 2021), while his son, David Ellison, is also a producer (Padia 2021). The advantages of being rich and living among powerful neighbours are passed on to the next generation as the children of these moguls enter the arena with deep pockets and well ahead of other candidates. In July 2021, industry news site *Deadline* reported on a new short film involving actor Hopper Penn (son of actors Sean Penn[40] and Robin Wright), director Destry Spielberg (daughter of Steven Spielberg), and writer Owen King (son of author Stephen King) (@DiscussingFilm 2021). Such short films are not typically covered in trade news unless they involve the offspring of famous people, as Franklin Leonard pointed out on Twitter (@franklinleonard 2021b). Leonard shared a link to the story with the comment, "Hollywood's a meritocracy, right?" (@franklinleonard 2021a), which led to a debate involving actor Ben Stiller,[41] who disputed Leonard's claim, writing, "Too easy @Franklinleonard. People, working, creating. Everyone has their path. Wish them all the best" (@BenStiller 2021). My point (and Leonard's) is that for some, the path is short, well-paved, and smooth, whereas for others, such as women filmmakers without connections, it is bumpy and leads nowhere. When elite members of the industry form close bonds (through residential proximity or family ties), they contribute to a cycle that ensures that Hollywood power remains concentrated in the hands of (mostly) white males.

In addition to a group of billionaires blocking a beach and founding a studio together, there are socio-economic similarities between the city and the industry which relate to exclusion. On the one hand, Los Angeles is a metropolis of nearly 20 million people, with extreme wealth gaps and highly visible economic and racial segregation.

[40] Incidentally, Sean Penn is the son of actor Eileen Ryan and actor/filmmaker Leo Penn.

[41] Stiller is himself the son of actors Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara.

Affluent areas are predominately white (Los Angeles Almanac 2010), and many of these neighbourhoods are gated, fenced, or difficult to access via winding roads. On the other hand, the film and television industry is also characterized by pockets of extreme wealth and highly visible economic and racial segregation. Reflecting the power structures found in society, Hollywood's executives and filmmakers are primarily white and male (Smith, Choueiti, Choi, et al. 2019), and entry into the industry is notoriously complicated for all aspiring creative professionals, but especially for white women and women of colour, as explored further in the next chapter. In many ways, Los Angeles' and Hollywood's elites lead parallel lives, existing in isolation with other wealthy and influential people from relatively homogenous racial and ethnic backgrounds. Looking at the "lifestyles of the rich and famous" may seem unrelated to gatekeeping and discriminatory hiring practices. However, to my knowledge, the characteristics of the urban environment have not been studied in relation to Hollywood exclusion. Evidence suggests a link between how industry leaders live, whom they associate with, and how the business is structured. Several participants mentioned that living in a relatively central area of Los Angeles was more important than living in a specific neighbourhood. At the same time, one participant said that personal well-being–critical in an industry that can be ruthless–was most directly impacted by living within walking distance of friends. In their quest to "break in," my participants aim to be reachable (for last-minute work, if needed) and mobile (with a reliable car), whereas an executive like David Geffen strives to be inaccessible, building walls around himself. With his power comes privilege: he can set meetings and people to come to him–or he could bypass traffic with a helicopter. Better yet, he could conduct business meetings at home, among neighbours, with no commute required.



Figure 47. *View of Los Angeles from Mulholland Drive. "Good Morning America" by Eric Demarcq licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

3.3 Conclusion

This research suggests parallels between exclusions produced by the built environment and exclusions produced by particular working practices. Exclusivity is built into the idea of Hollywood, not just at the level of making it as a film director but in the architecture and spaces of Los Angeles. The walls and gates physically keep aspiring filmmakers *out* and represent their lack of professional progress. To live in an ultra-elite gated community is a sign of having succeeded, of literally being "in." The emergence of a powerful class of celebrities in Los Angeles since the creation of Hollywood, combined with a highly-segregated city with clear demarcations between groups, influences the upward mobility of filmmakers. Hollywood's glass ceiling is much like that found within American society, with most positions of power in politics (Center for American Women and Politics 2019), business (U.S. Department of Labor 2019) and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields (Russell et al. 2019) occupied by white males. I have shown in this chapter that Los Angeles is a city of extremes, with excessive

wealth and abject poverty both on display. I have demonstrated that divisions in the landscape created psychological divisions for me; though I lived by a major studio, the compound's physical structures reminded me daily that I was not welcome, a perception which only heightened my desire to gain entry. To protect themselves from prying eyes, industry members relocate to fortified suburbs, along canyon ridges and ocean-front roads, surrounded by others like them. In the hills and along the ocean, white residents maintain their wealth and demographic dominance across generations, as their children benefit from well-funded schools, social connections, and other residential advantages. Deed restrictions and the categorization of neighbourhoods through redlining have constrained the residential choices of Black residents, who have been consigned to "undesirable" areas that have become even more "undesirable" through purposeful neglect. Today, the wealth gap between Blacks and whites in the US is significant, with a median net worth for whites ($171,000) that is ten times the amount for Blacks ($17,600) (Dettling et al. 2017). Meanwhile, industry members debate whether Hollywood is a meritocracy when news of a project involving the offspring of famous industry members is raised. To her credit, filmmaker Destry Spielberg acknowledges that she was born into privilege. She tweeted: "I make it my mission to bring new talent into the industry & give opportunities to artists of all backgrounds. No one should be left out because of the connections they dont (sic) have" (@destryallyn 2021). Though the headlines focused on the *already connected* people she built ties with for her short film, she may also be opening doors to underrepresented talent, a topic I explore in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 | Emerging Filmmakers



Figure 48. *The crowd reflected in mirrored panels at Nightingale Plaza at the Women in Film pre-Oscar party in February 2017. Image by the author.*

Standing amid a sea of people in a nightclub on La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles, I strained to listen as a voice echoed on the loudspeaker. People continued to talk over the woman, rendering certain words unintelligible. Competing with the voices around me, she sounded small and unsure. Actor Brie Larson was speaking from across the room two days before the 2017 Academy Awards. The party was organized by Women in Film Los Angeles (WIF) to celebrate the 46 female Oscar nominees, and I was a volunteer at the check-in table. During a lull in the action, I left my post momentarily to enter the party. The inside of Nightingale Plaza combined the aesthetics of a plush 70s disco and a neon spaceship, with LED light strips and chandeliers throughout the main area. The walls featured mirrors hung high, along with mirrored panels on the ceiling facing down. There was expansive seating made up of red velvet sofas grouped

in semi-circles or U-shapes, with standing room in the middle and on either side by the two bars. I could only see the backs of heads but I imagined Larson, the party's co-host, standing near the cordoned-off section for the highest level of VIPs: actors Meryl Streep, Emma Stone, Viola Davis, and Viggo Mortensen among them. I scanned the mirrored panels on the ceiling, trying to make Larson out.

One year earlier, Larson was nominated for her first Oscar for *Room* (2015, dir. Lenny Abrahamson), an independent drama in which she played a young mother held captive for years in a room with her child. Her peers voted and chose her as the "Best Actress" among thousands–an award considered the pinnacle of success for actors and filmmakers. Soon after *Room*, her ascension to stardom was swift, and she was named Hollywood's latest "It Girl"[42] (CBS News 2015). Several years later, she would take on the role of Captain Marvel in the first Marvel superhero film to centre on a female protagonist and the first Marvel film with a female co-director, Anna Boden (Erbland 2019a).[43] Still, Larson started her speech at the WIF party by saying that she did not feel like it was her place to give any advice: "Because I don't know anything. I really don't, I'm sorry." The chatter continued to drown her out. Two nights later, I watched from home as she walked onstage at the Dolby Theatre to hand the 2017 Oscar for Best Actor to Casey Affleck.

[42] "It Girls" are highly popular, attractive female stars. The status is temporary and fades as the next "It Girl" is selected.

[43] Not all Marvel fans approved of the decision to cast a woman and flooded online review site Rotten Tomatoes with negative ratings for *Captain Marvel* prior to the release (Nash 2019). Despite the protests, the film went on to gross more than $1 billion (Box Office Mojo 2019c), breaking records (Shaw-Williams 2019).



Figure 49. *Brie Larson, centre, attends a film premiere in 2017. "Kong: Skull Island Japan Premiere Red Carpet: Tom Hiddleson, Brie Larson & Samuel L. Jackson" by Dick Thomas Johnson licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

Larson may not be a filmmaker, but the unease she displayed is shared by many of my participants, who have yet to gain their footing. Though it was disappointing to hear that she felt she had little insight to offer in the year since her Oscar win, her admission revealed that even those who appear to be firmly "inside" Hollywood–hosting an event for VIPs, with the highest form of validation from their peers (e.g., an Oscar) and a rising career–lack confidence regarding their positions. I share this vignette because it introduced me to the visible and invisible barriers aspiring industry members may face and showed how individuals perceive their status within Hollywood's hierarchical system. For women who are aspiring filmmakers, insecurity is commonplace, and the barriers to entry are pronounced, as I explain.

4.1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter focuses on "breaking in"–the process by which individuals attempt to gain access to establish themselves as Hollywood filmmakers early in their careers.

Due to their outsider status, I argue that many women remain on the margins for a prolonged period, with limited contact with industry insiders. I discuss why women filmmakers have been unable to cement their positions in an industry where gender-based exclusion has hindered their advancement.

I begin by describing the industry's exclusion and selective inclusion, by which executives make conservative business decisions regarding content and hiring to protect their status. "Safe" decisions involve hiring from existing networks, composed primarily of white males, and through referrals, often to other white males. Next, I examine the difficulty of finding entry points to employment. There are no replicable paths "into" Hollywood or sequential steps to follow, meaning most filmmakers rely on connections or new relationships developed through luck, nepotism or common bonds. Women are often disadvantaged because they cannot fully participate in networking activities. These factors have led to a pattern of hiring in which white men rise through the ranks more quickly than women.

Additionally, emerging filmmakers need considerable financial resources to finance their films and support themselves, often working for low or no wages for years. Among my participants, first-generation American filmmakers are more likely to face pressure to choose financially stable careers in other domains. Women of colour have told me they did not initially consider filmmaking as a career because they had no role models from their communities. Once they discover an interest in filmmaking, they often find themselves a decade behind their white male counterparts in regard to career advancement.

In this chapter, I discuss interviews with participants, examples from the media, and my observations gathered through fieldwork. Several threads run consistently through the interview narratives, and when presented as a whole, industry practices

become evident as part of a larger pattern of activities which serve to exclude filmmakers along gender lines.

4.1.2 Core versus periphery

My ethnographic findings resonate with the perspectives of Cattani et al. (2014), who suggest that the industry features a "core" versus "periphery" divide. In their study of cultural consecration in Hollywood, the authors find that core members usually bestow major awards on (and therefore lend credibility to) filmmakers whose work resembles their own. They do so to protect their cultural legitimacy because they have built their careers by creating films that follow established conventions (Kremp 2010, 1055). Those on the periphery are more likely to produce work that departs from norms and conventions, which Bourdieu (1993, 83) refers to as breaking "the silence of the doxa" and casting doubt on the "taken-for-granted world of the dominant groups." While critics frequently praise peripheral filmmakers' (at times) unconventional work, these filmmakers are less likely to receive mainstream awards voted on by the industry's core (Cattani et al. 2014, 259); therefore they remain relatively peripheral. Cattani et al. focus on core members granting legitimacy through awards, and I adapt their approach to develop a discussion about industry-wide processes related to patronage and recruitment. I describe how Hollywood provides access and privileges to aspiring filmmakers who are similar to core members, contributing to a cycle of exclusion and marginality that has existed for generations: senior members recruit in their own image, fostering relationships with younger white males (Dowd 2015). (I briefly discuss solidarity between women in the Conclusion, explaining how some women who accumulate power share it with other women.) Women tend to have fewer relationships with core members who can facilitate their access to core resources (jobs, connections, financial and social capital), and my participants remain on the fringes, spending years trying to gain entry.

4.2 Exclusion and selective inclusion

Hollywood is both *exclusive* and *selectively inclusive*, two processes which have an impact on the advancement of the filmmakers in my study. To begin, independent producer Christine Vachon (2006, 7) has described Hollywood as a "culture that thrives on exclusion." Industry boundaries are delineated with both mental and physical barriers separating insiders from outsiders (Ortner 2010, 223): gatekeepers control access to people and resources; lists of "approved" filmmakers circulated by agencies and studios help the same filmmakers obtain jobs; and at industry functions, VIPs use a special entrance to "walk the red carpet" for the media, whereas non-famous guests enter separately. Features of the built environment (walled studios, gated homes, VIP seating in clubs) signal to insiders that they belong, and remind outsiders that they do not. Over time, being "excluded" can have negative emotional, psychological, and behavioural effects (Macdonald et al. 2005; Williams et al. 2005). For several of my research participants, it contributes to resentment and isolation, as they attempt to find a way to make films on their own, whereas for others, being scorned motivates them to work harder to get "in."

Industry success also hinges on selective inclusion: granting entry to those who are similar to core members. My research shows that the selection process is influenced by factors relating to gender and race, as well as others which are beyond the scope of this study (including class, age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation). Unlike exclusion, which involves limiting access, selective inclusion consists of inviting only those who meet specific criteria "in." Many of my participants do not believe that industry members are necessarily "against" women or those from minority racial/ethnic groups, but that they are "more comfortable" working with white men, which is why women often cannot compete for filmmaking positions, thus remaining marginal. Executed in tandem, exclusion and selective inclusion protect the interests of core members, granting access

to their friends and allies, and creating physical and mental distance between valuable core resources and peripheral filmmakers.



Figure 50. *At events, the tiers between industry members are apparent. Members with high status are greeted by name as they "walk the red carpet," while others enter separately. Pictured above, the WIF pre-Oscar party. Image by the author.*

4.2.1 Belonging

Navigating industry hierarchies and membership is not a straightforward process as Ortner (2010) discovered while attempting to infiltrate Hollywood for her research. After two years, she was finally able to gain access to a set. Convinced that she was "in," she discovered she was far removed from decision-makers, who gathered together to watch scenes on monitors in an area called "video village." Being on set was not the same as being "in," because there is "always an inside further inside the inside" (Ortner 2010, 215). Like other cultural communities, Hollywood's centre is never clearly delineated but people are pulled towards it nonetheless. Producer Christine Vachon feels like she is in high school at the Cannes Film Festival because "at any moment, there is a lunch, a party, a press conference, a meeting that you have been excluded from"

(Vachon et al. 2006, 118 quoted in Ortner 2010, 215). Vachon is accomplished and connected (Cipriani 2016a; Mitchell 2020), suggesting that no matter how "in" one may feel, there are additional layers of "inness" that are unattainable, and perhaps even the most "in" person may not feel fully inside the core.

Status is currency in Hollywood and designations and lists elevate the rank of one member over another, even if only temporarily. Brie Larson is critical of the industry's transitory fixation on particular people and demonstrates an awareness that popularity can be lost as quickly as it is gained. In an interview, she questioned the "It Girl" label she was given in 2015: "But what is 'it'? There is no 'it'! And who was 'it' before 'it'? And when does 'it' go away?" she asked (CBS News 2015). Hollywood status is also delineated through "power lists" in the media featuring the most dominant or wealthy members (e.g. Blankfeld 2015a; THR Staff 2018; Caldwell et al. 2019) and star rankings according to A-, B-, C- and D-lists (The Ulmer Scale 2014).[44] The pronounced emphasis on improving one's status and reminders that one's "15 minutes of fame" will soon end, can make even the most embedded industry members feel apprehensive.

With membership set to expire without warning and players constantly in flux, core members make decisions based on fear: of being fired for mistakes, of failing at the box office, and of being left behind, socially and professionally (Prindle 1993; De Vany 2004). This tension is not new: in her 1950 ethnography, Hortense Powdermaker (1950, 36) wrote that industry members were overwhelmed by the pressure to continue making successful films because, "A man is only as good as his last picture," quoting a popular saying at the time. Individuals fell out of favour quickly within the studio system, and there was no job security (1950, 36–37), which is still the case today. Fear controlled individuals, inclined to make so-called "safe" choices to extend their time at the top (1950,

[44] The alphabetized rankings, devised by former journalist James Ulmer to predict the "bankability" (profit potential) of both actors and directors in various markets, are now commonly used by entertainment news outlets in discussing the value of specific stars, with "A-list" being the highest.

36). Filmmaker Jen McGowan told me that today's industry is equally cutthroat, and the prevalent attitude is that, "If you can't survive, you're not worth surviving," meaning that if one does not have the qualities or attributes to succeed, one deserves to fail.

Despite the unfavourable odds, aspiring filmmakers hope to become exceptions to the rule. Hollywood jobs remain highly desirable partly because they are "exclusive"– in limited supply and out of reach to many. Some envisage that once "inside," it will be easier to access the social and financial capital needed to make films and series. Individuals often long for social attachments and avoid eroding existing bonds. Baumeister et al. (1995, 500) propose that the "need to belong is something other than a need for mere affiliation," as it involves mutual care and affection. Though individuals may care about the wellbeing of colleagues, industry structures provide no safety net or social protections (more on this in Chapter 7). Hollywood working conditions remain poor partly because if an individual is unhappy, other candidates are ready to replace them.

By *excluding* most and *selectively including* only a small group, core members successfully elevate the prestige of positions within mainstream filmmaking; they limit access to those on the periphery out of fear for their jobs, and they ultimately ensure that power, wealth, and opportunities remain concentrated in the hands of a select few, as I discuss. Thus far, Hollywood has not been held accountable for its exclusionary practices vis-à-vis filmmakers, though many have tried to exert pressure to diversify the industry with limited success (e.g. S. L. Smith 2014; Howard 2016; Sun 2017a; Montpelier 2019; Belam et al. 2018).[45]

[45] There have been no successful legal cases brought against the studios for discrimination in hiring, and any findings from the 2015 EEOC investigation are confidential. The #MeToo movement helped to draw attention to the institutional culture which permitted sexual harassment and sexual assault to continue unabated by influential Hollywood leaders. #MeToo also gave rise to the TIME'S UP movement, which attempts to tackle harassment, assault, and discrimination in the workplace more broadly (TIME'S UP 2020).

4.3 Safe ideas, safe investments

This section explores how the fear of taking risks relates to the content of films and series because content often influences hiring. Filmmaker Jen McGowan explains that few people outside Hollywood understand how conservative the industry is. Conservatism dictates how people operate day-to-day, form alliances, and make decisions: they work with vetted filmmakers referred by trusted collaborators; approve "safe" projects that will be profitable; and avoid unnecessary risks where possible. The industry's conservatism also leads to the marginalization of women, particularly women of colour, who are not already part of the system and are therefore seen as "risky" business choices. I expand on the gendered dimensions of risk in the next chapter.

Jen is a 40-something director and founder of Glass Elevator (formerly Film Powered), a networking and skills-sharing group of 3,000 industry women (Faughnder 2019) in operation from 2015 to 2021. Glass Elevator aimed to "increase the skills and strengthen the contacts of and relationships between our members in an effort to reach gender parity in our business" (McGowan 2019). Jen's first feature, *Kelly & Cal* (2014), starring Juliette Lewis, premiered at the top-tier South by Southwest (SXSW) Film Festival in Austin, Texas, and had a small theatrical run, receiving mostly praise according to review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes (2019a). More recently, she directed the independent thriller *Rust Creek* (2018), which was also well-received (Rotten Tomatoes 2019b) and distributed theatrically and digitally (Amazon.com 2019). A mutual acquaintance introduced us, and I interviewed her via Skype in the summer of 2018. Jen explains conservative decision-making:

> There's a reason that studios make the same films over and over. If you're an executive and you greenlight [approve] a new show and it bombs, you are out …. Nobody gets fired for saying, "no." The same thinking applies to hiring. They hire through agencies, and they hire through who they know because nobody has the bandwidth to take a risk.

In the interest of self-preservation, executives know that turning down a project is the safest decision. Conversely, approving a project that fails financially or hiring a filmmaker who becomes problematic can irreparably damage one's career. Widely regarded as one of the "biggest flops" of all time (Coates 2015), the epic *Waterworld* (1995, dir. Kevin Reynolds) is still mocked 25 years later (Costner 2019), among other examples. Industry members, and the public, tend to remember misfires (e.g. Ryan 2021; Bianco 2016).

Because executives cannot predict which films will be successful or profitable, they often pitch familiar storylines which are more likely to be approved: "Once a brand has been established in the marketplace, it makes sound business sense to repeat the formula," wrote the late critic Roger Ebert (2011). Reboots, remakes, sequels and prequels of popular films are considered wise investments because the audience has relationships with the characters, and this familiarity usually translates into enormous profit. While critics often pan them, many "tremendously bad" sequels make significantly more than the first film, bringing average box office earnings of $163 million per film versus $18 million for the original (Crockett 2016).[46]

Idea-recycling for profit is at odds with the industry's supposed desire for daring, original material. Francis Ford Coppola, considered to be one of the "greatest" American filmmakers (Thrift 2019), now finances his films outside of the studio system and is critical of the commercial emphasis found in Hollywood (Anderson 2011). Coppola argues that cinema evolved through experimentation–"by people not knowing what to do"–and that risk is a central element of art (Anderson 2011). One of my research participants, screenwriter and director Markus Redmond, has been pitching what he considers to be novel ideas and has been frustrated by the tepid response. As an actor, his first "break"

[46] There are numerous examples of sequels outperforming the original films. The sequel to the 2012 comedy *Pitch Perfect* (dir. Jason Moore) grossed 183% more domestically (Box Office Mojo 2019b). *Lethal Weapon 2* (1989, dir. Richard Donner) saw a 126% improvement over the first film (Box Office Mojo 2019a).

was the 90s sitcom *Doogie Howser, M.D.* (1990-1993, creators Steven Bochco & David E. Kelley) alongside Neil Patrick Harris, and he had recurring roles in the long-running cop series *NYPD Blue* (1993-2005, creators Steven Bochco & David Milch) and legal drama *Murder One* (1995-1997, creators Steven Bochco, Charles H. Eglee & Channing Gibson). When I interviewed Markus, he was trying to establish himself as a screenwriter while directing too.[47] In our interview, he posits the idea that executives say they want to see something different: "You present that and then they say, 'Oh, I've never seen that before. I don't know how it's going to work.'" He discusses how stars or "named talent" carry weight and meaning for industry decision-makers, who are concerned with profit above all:

> You come in with this cool new story. [But] it's not something they can look at and see profitability because profit does not come from the eyes of these execs …. It comes from who's involved. "What star do you have attached?" You go back to them and say, "I have a great story with Keanu Reeves attached." There's no accounting for story, really. It's the elements around the story. Movies in Hollywood get bigger and bigger and have to be based on something that already made millions of dollars. If you're coming in new, it's so hard to get someone to pay attention to you.

Tested and true formulas featuring named talent directed by core members are "easy sells" due to the name recognition and market potential of a built-in audience. Therefore, there is little impetus for overstretched executives or producers to take unnecessary risks by working with unknown actors or directors, for example, with women. Though low-budget films from outside the major studios regularly sweep mainstream awards,[48] executives are hesitant to gamble with multi-million dollar investments and prefer to rely on known quantities–familiar insiders with a proven track record (Prindle 1993; Faulkner et al. 1987; Gitlin 2000).

[47] In speaking to Markus briefly in 2022, I learned that he has since moved on to writing novels.

[48] It is no surprise that the most daring and innovative films in recent years have emerged from the independent sector or overseas, with Best Picture winners *Moonlight* (2016, dir. Barry Jenkins) *Parasite* (2019, dir. Bong Joon-ho), and *Nomadland* (2020, dir. Chloé Zhao) to name a few examples.



Figures 51, 52. *Left, filmmaker Jen McGowan says industry members do not have the bandwidth to take risks. Image courtesy of Jen McGowan. Right, actor, screenwriter, and director Markus Redmond has been trying to pitch new ideas and has been frustrated by the response. Image courtesy of Markus Redmond.*

4.4 Paths “into” Hollywood

“Breaking in” is widely used to describe how emerging actors or filmmakers find their way “into” the industry for employment, and the choice of language is no accident. To get past industry “gatekeepers,” one must exert significant force, use powerful connections, or be exceptionally lucky (or a combination thereof). Few successfully “break in,” though many try. Panel discussions, workshops, books, courses and podcasts featuring advice about “how to break in to Hollywood” abound (e.g. Sajdak 2018; White 2011). From the events I attended, popular advice for women includes: make excellent work; be friendly with assistants because they can provide connections to powerful people (and might be the boss one day); “get in the door” with any job or opportunity; ask for help; become indispensable to the organization or company; and outperform all men (V. Mahoney 2016b; Bamford n.d.; Schroeder 2016).

4.4.1 No clear path

For aspiring creators, moving from the periphery to the core is an ambiguous process. Unlike highly competitive fields such as law or medicine which involve sequential steps (e.g., completing training or a degree, passing exams) and formal job

applications, Hollywood has few formalities. During Equal Opportunity Employment Commission hearings into hiring discrimination in 1969, executives said they had little control over hiring because it was so decentralized (Montañez Smukler 2018, 50–51). One executive said that they could not rely on formal hiring measures because sometimes a worker needed to be replaced the same day to allow filming to continue; they had to hire through word-of-mouth and existing networks because their work was unpredictable. Essentially they were saying, “Our work is too important, too complicated, and too expensive to waste time on diverse hiring.” Though contemporary executives may not admit this today, they operate as if it were true, as evidenced by the lack of progress for women and people of colour behind the camera.

Instead, hiring is based on subjective considerations (e.g., personality, experience, vision, and being in the “right place at the right time”), making it impossible for others to replicate the path of a successful filmmaker. Trying to figure out the “way in” consumes considerable energy for filmmakers, as it did for me during my fieldwork. Jen McGowan (2019) tweeted that being hired and directing are two different things. “I've always found getting the job to be harder than actually doing the job,” she wrote. Lisa,*[49] a television producer, compares the process to architecture, because getting hired involves a significant amount of pitching and preparation, with no guarantee of employment. My participants tell me that attending film school offers no concrete advantage and bears little meaning in the industry, though it does help with meeting collaborators. The competition to stand out among film graduates is intense, with nearly 8,000 degrees in cinematography or film production awarded in the US in 2016 (Data USA 2019), flooding an already-saturated market with thousands more aspiring filmmakers.

[49] As a reminder, names marked with an asterisk throughout this thesis have been changed to preserve anonymity.

4.4.2 Gatekeepers

To deal with the flood of would-be filmmakers, mechanisms are in place to control access. Upon completing her film degree in 2018, emerging filmmaker Chidera* hoped to find work by contacting industry members directly using the information on IMDb Pro, the subscription-based version of the Internet Movie Database.[50] She called talent agents: "They'd be like, 'Who are you? Oh, you don't know anybody, ok, bye.' Rejection, rejection." Cold-calling employers can be a fruitless exercise in an industry which relies extensively on "gatekeepers" to conserve core members' time and resources. Publicists filter interview requests, agents and managers pre-screen scripts or invitations for collaborations, and assistants redirect (or ignore) phone calls and emails. There is a perception that core members are too busy to engage with those on the periphery whom they see as having nothing to offer. "Anyone in Los Angeles who has time to talk to a nobody probably can't get your movie made," writes indie film blogger Moe Poplar (2013). Poplar suggests that anyone who engages with a "nobody" likely does not have core status–access to power or social capital–and that filmmakers should be wary of them. Speaking directly to an executive is viewed as such a valuable opportunity that when Women in Film, Los Angeles auctioned off a three-hour lunch and tour with a Sony executive in 2017, bids rose to $3,750 and counting (Charitybuzz 2017). The fact that some are willing (and able) to pay that much for lunch with an executive hints at the existence of additional barriers relating to access, which I explore later in this chapter.

4.4.3 Connections

Emerging filmmakers are encouraged to use all means at their disposal to circumvent gatekeepers and engage with decision-makers, as discussed in the Methodology chapter. "It isn't about how tall you are or how good-looking you are," said

[50] IMDb is a public online database of films and series with cast, crew and production details. The Pro version, which cost $40/year at the time, includes contact information for agents, managers, and production companies.

studio co-founder and billionaire David Geffen of “Geffen Gate” fame; it is about building relationships (Forbes 2019). Research on creative work supports Geffen’s statement, demonstrating that relationships determine outcomes in “reputation economies” (O’Connor 2010), such as Hollywood, where one is hired based on the imprint one leaves on other people, developed through perceptions and experiences. Obtaining access to the “right people” worries several of my participants, including Chidera. Based in the northeast US, she considered moving to Los Angeles, where she had a few contacts, but first, she needed to save money and start paying off her $60,000 student loans. She moved in with her aunt and uncle while looking for industry opportunities in nearby New York City. She is discovering that her lack of connections will make her path–as a young woman of Nigerian descent–more arduous. She explains:

> I think most people of colour, their parents aren’t in the entertainment industry. When people came to our school [as guest speakers], I would ask, “How did you get there? What steps did you take? How did you do it?” Either their mom was the producer, or their dad was there, or their uncle. People of colour don’t have those connections. It’s definitely about connections.

What many do not realize, Chidera continues, is that today’s industry is significantly more competitive: “It used to be that once you graduated from film school, you got a job as a PA [production assistant]. People in their forties and fifties say, ‘Oh, just get a PA job.’ I’ve been trying to get one for a year now. It’s not that easy.” Meanwhile, other recent graduates are producing work and attending industry events, which she does not have time or money for.

Alex* has been working in Los Angeles since 2012. He is a writer and editor and works for a commercial director, drafting treatments (written pitches) to present to clients. As a white male originally from Canada, he acknowledges his privilege. He was introduced to his current boss by family friends: “It’s nepotism for sure,” Alex says. “I feel like that’s a big part of the industry. I’ve been lucky in that I’ve never had to work that hard to get a job. I don’t think that’s because of my skillset per se.” He grew up in the

shadow of the Canadian media industry, where his father worked, and “fell into” an internship, admitting that it was “not fun, but all fairly easy.” Due to his connections and social status, Alex obtained employment with minimal effort. While writing treatments may not be his long-term goal, he supports himself while developing other projects.

Chidera has no direct access to employment; to “break in” she must demonstrate excellence, be perseverant, and, if necessary for financial reasons, accept job offers that may not be related to her aspirations. Even with the most charismatic personality and a strong portfolio, she is disadvantaged compared to others with ties to core members. As noted, in a “reputation economy” insiders can “vouch” for a candidate and help them obtain preferential treatment. Due to her outsider status, Chidera faces drawbacks as she navigates the industry: she lives with relatives nearly two hours from the city on public transportation, she does not have the time or resources to make films to enhance her portfolio, and she misses industry events due to work.

4.4.4 Advancement through networking

It is challenging for anyone–male or female–to move from the periphery to the core of Hollywood. However, gender and race are significant factors–across numerous employment sectors–which can propel candidates forward or thwart their progression. A study by Hanson et al. (1991) revealed that job seekers often depend on contacts of the same gender and race to facilitate access to employment, allowing the candidate to “fall into” a position like Alex did. Hollywood’s informal hiring is frequently based on referrals and word of mouth. Almost all filmmaking departments are dominated by men, who tend to facilitate the career progression of “young guys in baseball caps who remind older guys in baseball caps of themselves” (Dowd 2015). Leung et al. (2015) note the tendency toward homophily, by which insiders recruit candidates who resemble them or with whom they have a good rapport.

"A big part of 'getting a shot' is about studio execs seeing themselves in you. As a woman and a Black filmmaker, I'm often not that person," said Dee Rees, director of the acclaimed independent films *Pariah* (2011) and *Mudbound* (2017), in an interview with the *New York Times* (Dowd 2015). Participants tell me that executives and producers hire based on "gut feelings" and personal compatibility ("Do I like this person? Do I want to work with them?"). With success hinging on relationships, it is easier to form bonds in meetings when there are shared connections or experiences to invoke. While white men struggle too, some bypass these challenges with minimal effort–they can sit on a plane next to someone, and "all of a sudden you have $250,000 for an independent film," says one of my participants, who lists her attributes ("Black. Woman. Gay.") as if they are strikes against her. While most filmmakers start on the periphery to some extent, for some, there is the possibility of a "parachute" into the core because they are "like" core members. Filmmakers who do not fit the typical mould for directors, who have historically been white middle-aged bearded men (see Figure 53 below), have trouble making inroads with core executives and remain peripheral for longer due to elements they cannot control or change.

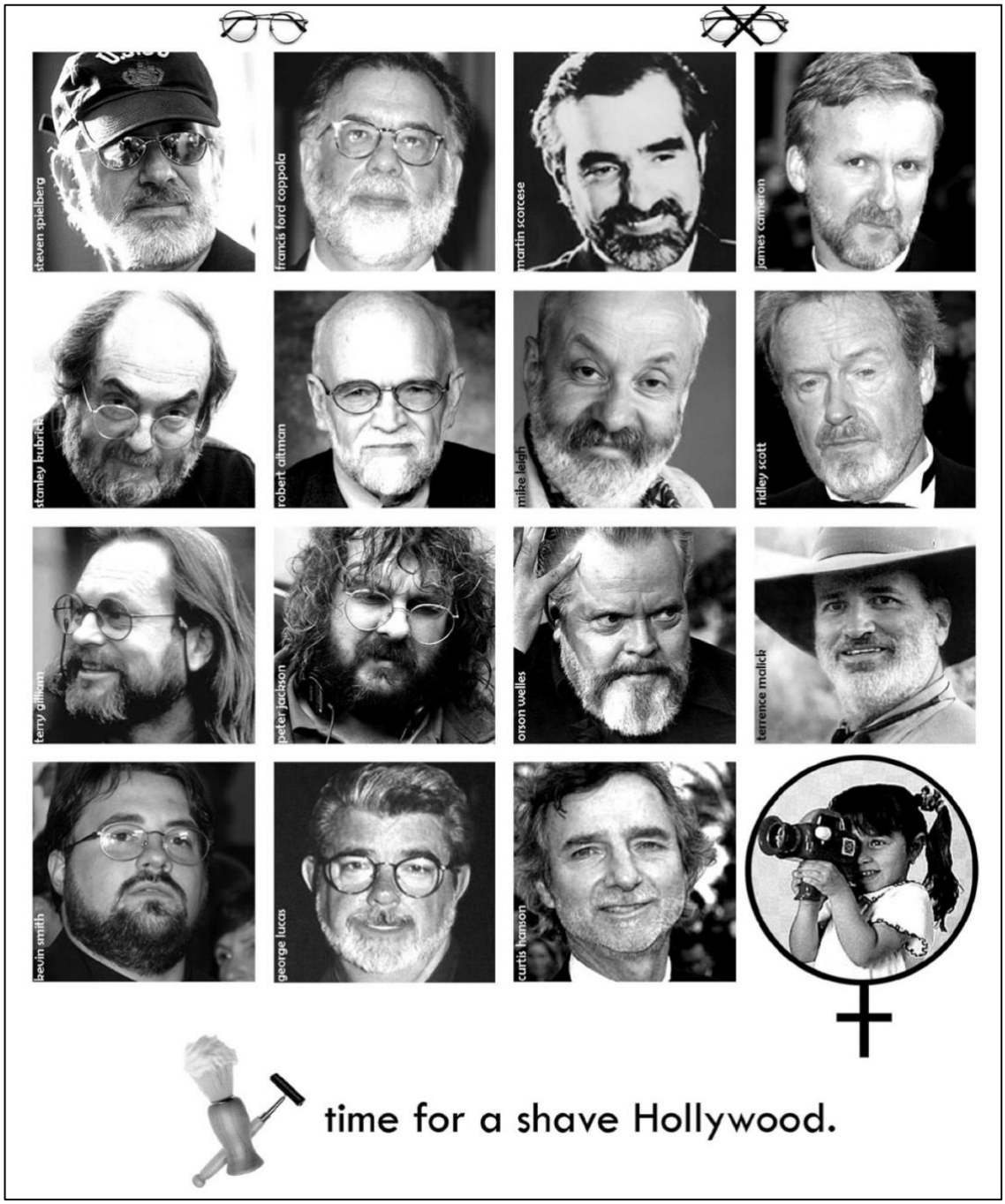


Figure 53. *After noticing the physical similarities between the "top" directors (Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, James Cameron, Stanley Kubrick, and others), I created a series of satirical public service announcements as a film student in 2004.*

After-hours sociality is also vital for meeting people, which my participants say can lead to the development of friendships which turn into professional relationships, a broadening of network connections, and referrals for employment, either immediately or in the future. Men benefit from several advantages in these settings. Alex, for instance, has expanded his network by befriending other Canadians working in Los Angeles. He

is outgoing and funny, making it easy for him to "shoot the shit with a bunch of guys, talk about sports, and it's 'all buddy-buddy,'" he says. Encounters begin casually over beers but can develop into collaborations or favours, such as being able to "get you in a room" for a meeting. This phrase is used commonly in Hollywood, with creatives aiming to "get into a room" with executives to pitch ideas to someone with access, power, and resources. Having the ability to get *others* "into a room" is viewed as valuable currency to bypass gatekeeping. One weekend, Alex met people at a party and exchanged contact details. By Monday, he received messages asking for his editing reel. He is not actively looking for work but notes that having an existing connection can be helpful later. He predicts it would be more complicated for women to participate the same way because men may assume that if a woman speaks to them, she must have romantic interests.

Several of my research participants concur. Alice,* a white woman in her 30s who has worked as a camera assistant for a decade, worries about how it would be perceived if she asked a male cinematographer (who is theoretically her boss) for a drink to discuss work. As a freelancer, she is constantly "hustling" and seeking out prospects to avoid unemployment, but she cannot engage in networking as freely as her male peers, which may result in failure to find work. A cinematographer I met in 2018 said she was criticized for socializing with straight male crew members because their female partners felt threatened by her presence, even though she identifies as a lesbian. Screenwriter Mia,* who is Muslim, would like to work in television but sees no entry point, partly because she does not have sufficient contacts and partly because it is hard to make new ones:

> You have to be part of the club to get hired. I don't know why it's taken me longer to get hired. I don't drink, and I wouldn't go to a bar. I don't know that many people from these boys' clubs so I'm not invited to go to them. You have to get 10 people on your bandwagon to go and push for you.

Finding 10 people to support one's candidacy is challenging for those who cannot participate in the dominant forms of relationship-building, typically involving alcohol and "shooting the shit" with other men. With limited opportunities to bond with current and

potential colleagues, Alice and Mia must find ways to demonstrate that they are more exceptional than other candidates to compensate for their inability to bond after hours. A study by Kanter (1977) showed that women and racial minorities are disadvantaged in corporate environments because they are often not included in casual conversations and social interactions, so they have less access to professional opportunities and advancement. Network research shows that men form stronger alliances and develop relationships with sponsors who wield more power, with women often excluded (Burt 1998). Others cannot participate due to other barriers; in a study of UK television workers, women told Leung et al. (2015, 57) that networking often occurs in spaces that are more friendly to men (such as bars) or after hours when some women have childcare responsibilities. In sum, men can participate in a range of networking activities from which women are largely excluded. Men generally do not risk having their enthusiasm or friendliness conflated with sexual attraction and can engage in conversations with new contacts, leading to further career development.

4.4.5 Hiring internally: the path of least resistance

I have argued that decision-makers often create bonds with those who are similar to them; relationships may develop organically through friendships and lead to collaboration. In this section, I explain how recruiting through existing contacts is often the easiest and safest way for producers, who are responsible for hiring the cast and crew, to proceed. While not *intended* to exclude specific groups, this process often benefits white men because of the existing relationships they tend to have (or can develop) with current core members.

A white male independent producer told me that the risks involved in hiring from outside existing networks are significant. When making a feature, he says, if one knows that *Man A* can deliver, why stray? It is unreasonable to ask the producer to hire *Woman A* if she is unknown. “At the producing level, you’re financially responsible, personally. You have to deliver that contract. If you don’t deliver the film, you owe that money. It’s

like taking out a mortgage on someone you don't know. Someone who goes over budget and over time," he says. In addition, some television productions want the same crew members to be re-hired for cohesion and continuity. Cinematographer and University of Southern California (USC) film professor Linda Brown explains that once a relationship is formed, the attitude is that there is no reason to hire someone different the next season. "You'll often get pressure from above not to change things …. It would be hard to convince the production that it's all going to look the same," she says. Audrey,* a white emerging filmmaker from an acting background, admits that she struggled to "crew up female" on early projects because the candidates with experience were men. "I don't fault anyone for wanting to find the person with the most experience. Every project matters to somebody, and you want the best person for it," she says. Describing her film as her "baby," she understands how and why these patterns repeat themselves and how they may limit her own progress as a filmmaker.

Kieran Crilly is a white male filmmaker from Montreal who served as co-producer and cinematographer of the Oscar-winning short film, *The Lady in Number 6: Music Saved My Life* (2013, dir. Malcolm Clarke). When hiring, he tries to prevent problems by filtering candidates. Some may be outstanding creatively, but if they lack interpersonal skills or cannot handle stress, they can derail the production, he says. Producers typically hire heads of departments (e.g., director of photography, art director), who assemble their own crews. Kieran starts by reaching out to his network:

> I get a few bites, talk to them, and ask how they handle situations. Usually, I interview department heads. I tend to ask a lot of questions and have them ask me a lot of questions. I wait for them to ask the right questions. Things that are signals of experience. That informs me. Sometimes I ask them questions I know the answers to see if they answer the way I want them to.

The goal is to assemble a cohesive unit that will operate efficiently to ensure the production is on schedule and on budget. Producers often rely on people they know

because trust is crucial when tension mounts, as it often does, and unexpected problems arise.

In some cases, the dearth of women behind the camera is due to the fact that producers lack the time and resources to hire beyond their immediate circles. Because of engrained attitudes and recruitment practices, solving the problem is not necessarily straightforward. As mentioned, tech companies, long-accused of having homogenous workforces (Williams 2014; Ashcraft et al. 2016), have poured millions of dollars over years into "diverse" hiring but have made minimal progress (The Associated Press 2017; Harrison 2019). Speaking at an academic conference in the UK in 2018, a white television producer remarked that it was really difficult to find women cinematographers because there were only "three or four of them," (Cobb 2018). She was stopped by her fellow panellist, a Black television director, who shook her head, saying, "No, there's loads of them," (Cobb 2018). The producer continued, "I mean ones that are at a certain level … that can handle a £50 million project. It's also hard to find a female editor," at which point another woman of colour on the panel, an editor, said, "I'm right here," (Cobb 2018). The producer and the director both had valid perspectives: there are few women cinematographers in the pool of talent who are generally *considered* for big-budget industry projects,[51] and some industry members do not know where to find more "diverse" candidates, nor do they have the time, knowledge or resources to reach beyond their existing networks.

Not having enough "qualified women" in the talent pool raises questions about candidates' credentials and potential to succeed, which I delve into in the next chapter.

[51] A Directors UK study found that between 2005 and 2014, 6.2% of cinematographers on 2,591 UK features were women (Follows et al. 2016, 27), which is slightly better than the United States, where the figures range from 2% to 4% in 1998, 2000, 2006, 2017 and 2018 (Lauzen 2019, 2). The Directors UK dataset included features of all budget levels filmed in the UK. With a total of 160 feature films shot by women cinematographers over 10 years and very few films with budgets of more than £30 million, it is theoretically possible that only a handful of women worked on those bigger-budget films.

The issue with seeking out a filmmaker or crew member who is not already working *within the system* is that it adds an element of the unknown, as noted above. The white producer described the realities of an industry in which time and money are limited, so safe choices are prioritized. Most of my participants operate similarly, establishing long-term partnerships organically based on overlapping social circles or creative visions. They work with friends or become friends with those they hire, often working together for years. “If I can, I work with the same people,” says another producer. Based on the east coast, but frequently in Los Angeles on business, she is developing multiple projects with the same director. “It’s really hard to find people with whom you have a kindred spirit and a friendship and trust. I’ve had a lot of bad experiences and worked with some pretty awful people. It’s not worth the time or energy,” she explains.

Arguably, there is nothing inherently nefarious about working among friends unless it contributes to exclusion. In the 2015 public letter to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), lawyer Melissa Goodman (2015) states that women are “systematically excluded from or underemployed in directing jobs” due in part to the “studios’, networks’, and producers’ intentional and discriminatory failure to recruit, consider, and hire qualified women directors” and the “use of discriminatory recruiting and screening practices that have the effect of shutting women out, such as word-of-mouth recruiting and use of short lists on which women are under-represented.” The above-described modes of relationship-building, networking and hiring prop up white men who are part of the system. The use of referrals provides a “fast track” to the core for those on the periphery with connections, which helps to explain how the demographics behind the camera have remained stagnant for so long. In response to industry members’ excuses about “not knowing any women” or being unaware of where to find them (TIFF 2017; Essence 2019), numerous databases have been created to highlight crew members from underrepresented groups. In the United States alone, there is the Amplify Database, the AMPS Members’ Directory, Cinematographers XX, The

Director List, Free the Bid, Glass Elevator, The Topple List, Women In Media Crew List, and numerous others, easily found among the top results of a Google search for “list of women directors.”

4.5 Resources and opportunity

I have explored industry-related processes which may contribute to the systemic exclusion of emerging women filmmakers. There are also cases in which filmmakers’ circumstances and upbringing can thwart their progress, which I turn to next.

4.5.1 Family pressure

An early-career director with credits in Hollywood and Hong Kong revealed that he believes the online “outrage” about diversity and inclusion in the industry is misdirected. In his view, there are so few Asian-American filmmakers because “nobody’s parents will let them do it.” Calling it a “very Asian-specific problem,” Chris,* whose parents are from China, says that Asian families want their kids to have stable careers. “It’s very rare to see a solidly middle-class Asian filmmaker in the US. So many Asian filmmakers I see [in film school] are international students from China,” he says. He points out that immigrant parents build new lives and want their offspring to avoid gambles. “My sister is an investment banker and has never changed firms,” Chris says, laughing, suggesting she has followed a more stable, “parent-approved” route.

More substantial research in this area is needed to avoid overgeneralization, but based on my data, participants who are first-generation American or from ethnic/racial minorities are less likely to consider or even be aware of filmmaking as a career at an early age, either due to pressure to conform to familial expectations or due to an absence of role models from their communities: “In Nigerian culture, you’re either a doctor, engineer, or lawyer. Something that will bring money fast,” Chidera says, “I wanted to be a doctor up until my freshman year of college.” When she chose to major in film, she was the only Black person in her cohort, and her family was initially unhappy with the decision.

Another filmmaker of South Asian descent says her parents were “biting their tongues” when she decided to study film. “They weren’t like a lot of other South Asian parents,” she says, inferring that others would have disapproved more. A producer with Indian parents echoed that sentiment, saying she was free to determine what she wanted to do, which was “not the norm” in her community. Although I interviewed only a few white male filmmakers, most said their parents were not involved in their career decisions. Filmmaker Kieran Crilly never felt pressure from his parents, both artists, to pursue a particular direction. His father, Chris Crilly, also worked in film. They joked about “Didn’t I learn anything from watching two artists?” and “Shouldn’t I go into medicine?” Kieran felt that many doors were open to him.

Some filmmakers noted the absence of role models in film and television from their communities, and said they were not aware of film as a viable option until later in their careers/education. Research has shown that women are less likely to pursue careers in non-traditional domains (for example, in STEM–science, technology, engineering, and math) if those domains lack female role models (Basow et al. 1979; Nauta et al. 1998). Chris admits that when he was growing up, he was conscious that there were few non-white directors in Hollywood. Until the recent rise of creator Shonda Rhimes (*Grey’s Anatomy*, 2005-) and filmmaker Ava DuVernay (*Selma*, 2014) (White 2018; Schneider 2018), there were also few (if any) prominent Black women decision-makers in film or television. In filmmaker Tina Mabry’s home state of Mississippi, “No one was making films,” she says during our interview. Her family was poor, and she was the first to attend college; she planned to go to law school afterward because it was a “safe” choice. Her trajectory changed after discovering that two films that impacted her life were written and directed by women, *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999, dir. Kimberly Peirce) and *Love and Basketball* (2000, dir. Gina Prince-Bythewood). “What really got me was seeing the end credits come up,” and realizing women were at the helm, Tina recounts. “I sat there for a long time.”



Figures 54, 55. *When Tina Mabry, left, saw the work of Gina Prince-Bythewood, right, she was inspired to become a filmmaker. Image of Tina Mabry courtesy of Tina Mabry. "Gina Prince-Bythewood" by Gage Skidmore licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.*

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2020) uses the slogan, "If She Can See It, She Can Be It," to underscore their research on the importance of having young women see themselves represented in a wide range of careers in the media they consume, thereby encouraging girls to explore a wide range of professional goals (Smith et al. 2012; Smith et al. 2013; Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2016; Lyda Hill Foundation et al. 2018; 21st Century Fox et al. 2018). Seeing Jodie Foster direct films expanded Audrey's horizons as she grew up in a middle-class home in Los Angeles. Once she began studying at the USC School of Cinematic Arts in the early 2000s, Audrey noticed how advanced her male peers were:

> I think opportunity, and early opportunity is what helps you get that first job. If you're not told as a child that female directors exist… When you don't think it's an option, you don't apply to film school. You don't have bad short films…. Even going into film school, it's majority male. I remember going to orientation, and two men were talking to each other: "Well, how many [films] have you made?" I hadn't made any films. I was worried. I felt behind as I was just beginning.

Young white men with a passion for film do not question whether they belong in Hollywood; they see themselves represented among the industry's most iconic filmmakers. Men can begin making films at a young age, giving them the chance to

develop a portfolio before many women of colour are aware of film as a career. The trailer for Steven Spielberg's latest film, *The Fabelmans* (2022), loosely based on his life, depicts the protagonist receiving his first film camera as a young boy. Maturing as an artist takes years, involving the development of taste, personal vision, and in the case of filmmakers, many "bad student films" (Renée 2018; Rosen 2008, 126). Even legendary male directors had missteps early on: according to the late producer, writer and production designer Polly Platt, John Ford made 45 "lousy" films before producing quality Westerns, and Alfred Hitchcock's early work was "quite dreadful" (Ogle 1981). In filmmaking, men frequently benefit from having a head start over women and are granted the opportunity to fumble and find themselves before their careers begin to flourish in their late 20s and 30s.

Based on my interviews, by the time many women of colour decide to become filmmakers, they have already completed undergraduate or master's degrees in other fields, leaving them nearly a decade behind filmmakers who studied film after high school. Women and people of colour are often not encouraged to pursue film and lack role models who demonstrate that success in film is possible. As a result, many do not have the same opportunities to experiment with the medium at a young age, spending the first few years of their careers trying to catch up to white men. My research shows that, coupled with their low status, this has long-term ramifications for their careers and that they never truly "break in," a situation that is described in further detail in the following chapters.

4.5.2 Financial resources

Financial security is another crucial consideration in this discussion of peripheral and core status. For those with the drive to pursue filmmaking, money is critical for two reasons: 1) making a film requires significant resources (time, money, labour), and 2) emerging filmmakers are expected to work for low or no wages as they are starting out. Coming from a wealthy family or having access to those with assets can alleviate the

burden of trying to find investors early in one's career, and help filmmakers support themselves while interning or volunteering. In my interviews, there were differences between the resources of several white women and women of colour, as I explain.

Fiction filmmaking is a collaborative endeavour which requires a long-term investment: emerging filmmakers must dedicate months, if not years, to research, grant-writing, pre-production, production, post-production and distribution of their film, often with little to no remuneration. They must also secure funding or pay for production expenses themselves, and hire actors/crew members or convince friends/acquaintances to donate their time. As a cogent example, my partner spent two years directing a 10-minute narrative film in 2012, involving four actors, a crew of 20, and expenses of approximately $200,000, which was classified as "low budget" by Canadian unions. Though he was "paid" a salary on paper, the money was funnelled back into the film. While the scale of projects can vary significantly, even student films can cost tens of thousands of dollars.[52] When Tina Mabry was a graduate student at the University of Southern California film school, the university provided funding for four narrative films in the 546 production course, and she desperately wanted to be selected to make a film but was not chosen.[53] The funding would have been critical for her, as she could barely afford her tuition, which was approximately $32,000 in 2005 when she graduated (University of Southern California 2006):

> That's why [the funded 546 projects] were so pivotal and why everyone goes after those positions. Especially for me, I had no money. Every semester was a gamble for me. I had no idea if I was ever going to finish [my degree]. Who knows if I can afford next year? You're not eligible for scholarships your first year. I was just rolling the dice. My parents don't have the credit to get private loans, I can't get a private loan. I've got to make it work and I'm holding down three jobs and going to school full-time.

[52] During my fieldwork, I met USC students who self-funded their short films with budgets of up to $40,000.

[53] 546 projects often rival professional films in terms of their production values. Budgets are also significant. For instance, in 2016, USC student Jonathan Juntado raised $7,638 via crowdfunding just to cover the cost of submitting his 546 film to festivals (Juntado 2016).

After scraping together funds to make her first feature, *Mississippi Damned* (2007), Tina had trouble getting a second feature off the ground. She found herself working as a teacher for five years (Kassam 2018), on the verge of giving up filmmaking altogether when she was offered a job in television, as outlined later in the Conclusion.

Emerging filmmakers from middle and upper-middle-class backgrounds must still work hard to secure financing, but have a wider range of options at their disposal: crowdfunding among their networks, borrowing money from family or friends, or paying for the production themselves. When I spoke to Audrey, she was in the process of financing her first feature. “I’ve taken so many people out to coffee who told me that funding started with their family and friends,” she says. Ashley,* a white female director, made her first feature in 2016 and has since directed numerous television series in Los Angeles. She was able to sustain herself thanks to the benevolence of a friend’s father, who offered her a lump sum to allow her to make her feature. “I’m coming from enormous privilege,” she says. “My dream is to get to a place where I can pay it back. I want to pay the rent for emerging female artists.” While most of the white women I spoke to are not necessarily wealthy or fully supported by their parents–they live frugally and have financial struggles–many can access money if needed and benefit from a safety net.

4.5.3 Free labour

In the first few years of their careers, many filmmakers lack funds to advance their projects and rely on the unpaid labour of friends and newcomers to the industry, who are often aspiring filmmakers themselves. With the filmmakers and their collaborators earning little to no money from the project, they rely on other income to survive, and often end making their own films using unpaid labour too, continuing the cycle. As mentioned in the Introduction, my participants have said that the lower the budget of a project, the higher proportion of women who are involved in the crew–partly because they cannot compete with more experienced men for jobs on higher budget projects and/or because men with more experience are unwilling to work for low or no

wages. Inexperienced filmmakers are expected to “pay their dues” by offering their time, sometimes for years, to build their portfolios, networks, and list of credits, with a view to getting paid employment in the future. Actor, producer and director Foster Wilson has directed eight short films since 2016 and is accustomed to working with a shoestring budget. “I do come from that scrappy independent filmmaking world,” she says, “Larger budget projects are always incredible, but I am able to be creative and do a lot with very little.” Foster explains how she made two short films for $1000:

> Our location, the house, was donated by a friend. My DP [director of photography] owned an Alexa [camera] and all the lenses. We used all-natural light. We deferred payment to the actors. We had a micro crew, and paid our makeup artist and sound person. We fed everyone. Those are one-time only favours. As we move up in our productions, we always want to pay everyone their worth.

Foster and many others rely on free labour due to budget constraints, but hope to transition to higher budget projects with paid crew members.[54] Yet the practice is so common that unpaid and poorly paid labour is also found in mainstream filmmaking, which strains emerging filmmakers from poorer backgrounds. To gain vital experience and/or spend years developing projects, hopeful candidates need another source of income, either from their parents, a day job, or personal savings, for example. When I spoke to Chidera, she was hoping to find an industry job that would allow her to afford an apartment closer to the city, saving her three to four hours of commuting per day. She had offers to work for 40 hours per week in exchange for $10 per day in transit vouchers–though her daily fare costs $26 return. “It doesn’t add up,” she says. The industry’s most peripheral filmmakers, who lack their parents’ financial support, experience and connections, start from behind and continue to trail other candidates.

Some filmmakers are so eager to get their “foot in the door” and gain a perceived advantage that they are willing to do almost anything for free. In a profanity-laced rant

[54] I too worked for free and asked others to work for low or no wages while co-directing a feature documentary with a very limited budget–an experience that I would not repeat today.

from the documentary *Dreams With Sharp Teeth* (2008, dir. Erik Nelson) about his life, the late writer Harlan Ellison lambasted Warner Bros. for asking him if they could use one of his interviews on a DVD without compensation ("Would you go to a gas station and expect me to give you gas for free?") and criticized amateur writers for participating without remuneration, hoping to gain publicity ("*These people* [at the studio] are so used to getting it for nothing,") (Horton 2007). Internships are another tool frequently used by studios, networks and production companies, and are perceived as an "essential" stepping stone to entry-level positions (Kilkenny 2020b).[55] Even unpaid internships are highly competitive, with students receiving college credit and little else. Every year, 200 aspiring filmmakers are recruited to participate in internships at the American Pavilion (AmPav) at the Cannes Film Festival. AmPav interns gain experience with industry partners but also spend four hours per day providing "services" such as serving food and drinks at the pavilion (Follows 2022). "Getting in" to Cannes–no matter the work involved–is viewed as so desirable that these interns pay to serve food: the "program" fees cost $4,895 in 2023 plus most food and all travel expenses from their home countries to France (AmPav 2022).

According to the Fair Labor Standards Act, an unpaid internship at a for-profit company must benefit the intern, not the employer (U.S. Department of Labor 2018), but in reality many involve menial tasks. In one highly publicized example, Eric Glatt hoped to gain skills to become an editor as an unpaid intern on the production of *Black Swan* (2010, dir. Darren Aronofsky), a $13-million feature which eventually grossed $330 million. Glatt was disappointed to be running errands for Aronofsky: sourcing a hypoallergenic pillow, the "perfect" scented candle and the director's favourite tea (Miller et al. 2014). Feeling exploited, he sued in 2011 with other interns and received $7,500

[55] During my fieldwork, I applied for several internships at studios. I was desperately looking for a way "into" Hollywood so I would have accepted any offer of work (paid, unpaid, janitorial, secretarial–anything). I was not successful.

in compensation after a five-year legal dispute (Patten 2016). Consequently, many studios began paying their interns, resulting in far fewer positions being available and even greater competition (Patten 2016; Barnes 2016). In some cases, it can be seen as a "privilege" to work for specific companies or with certain collaborators regardless of the conditions (Conor et al. 2015, 9). Luisa,* who works in advertising, interned at several studios during college. At 19, she was a summer intern at Miramax, the company founded by brothers Harvey and Bob Weinstein. On her first day, the elevator doors opened and she saw Bob chasing an assistant around in a flirtatious manner as others watched. Luisa stepped back and wondered, "What have I gotten myself into?"[56]

While my participants have vastly different life experiences, they agree that the industry's reliance on free labour is detrimental and favours those who come from means. "You can't expect someone who can't pay their rent to go anywhere," says Ashley, the director who was supported by her friend's father. With so few paid entry-level positions, most cannot sustain themselves without help. For filmmakers like Tina Mabry, who could barely afford film school, finding a full-time job outside the industry is often the most realistic option. However, that leaves little time for gaining experience on set, meeting new contacts or sourcing work, thus presenting numerous disadvantages. Alice, the 30-something camera assistant, notices that the women in the generation ahead of her seem to be unwilling to press for change, saying, "We survived, so should you." A measure of insecurity or discomfort is seen as a rite of passage in film and television production, with each generation expected to experience hardship to demonstrate their commitment. However the current system upholds both exclusion and selective inclusion because those who can afford to endure the rite of passage–and emerge from it to advance through the industry–are often from middle or upper-middle

[56] Though Luisa did not witness any other questionable behaviour during her time at Miramax, Bob's brother Harvey Weinstein would later become one of the most reviled figures in Hollywood, accused and then convicted of rape and criminal sexual acts (Cooper et al. 2020). Bob was accused of sexual harassment in 2017 (Littleton 2017b).

class families, and based on my data, usually white. “We’re never going to get the diversity we need [in the industry] if we force people to work for free,” says Hannah,* a white production designer who has been in Los Angeles for several years. A graduate of an Ivy League university, she admits to having worked for free initially. “I hope my generation will be the one to change this. Just because we suffered doesn’t mean everyone else has to,” she says.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter shows that women filmmakers occupy peripheral spaces in the industry, and that core members’ practices contribute to their low status. The industry’s exclusion reinforces distinctions between “insiders” and “outsiders,” while selective inclusion helps those who overlap with core members gain entry more easily. Together, these practices bolster the sense of security of members, who cling to their positions and make safe decisions in film content and hiring, further contributing to cycles of exclusion. The atmosphere is rife with anxiety, to the point where even Hollywood’s “It Girl,” at the pinnacle of popularity and “peer acceptance,” questions her status.

The majority of my research participants are on the periphery and have little in common with current core members, the “older guys in baseball gaps” who tend to recruit younger versions of themselves (Dowd 2015). A white male executive may have nothing against a Black queer director from the South, but he may find it easier to engage in conversation with the white male director who likes the same sports team, or whose father is a mutual connection. With no existing core links, white women and women of colour struggle to obtain entry-level positions and they are thwarted by gatekeepers who protect core members from peripheral “nobodies.” Women are also at a disadvantage in networking, worrying that their interest will be mistaken for attraction or unable to enter into such spaces at all. They must learn to navigate Hollywood on their own, with some women of colour facing pressure from their families to engage in more stable pursuits in

other fields, remaining unaware of filmmaking as a career option due to a lack of role models. When women of colour do turn to filmmaking, they often have fewer financial resources and cannot afford to work for free like their white counterparts. While some filmmakers were hesitant to speak about their financial situations, several white participants recognized how privileged they were to have financial support early in their careers, allowing them to execute their ideas and parlay them into paid opportunities.

My ethnographic findings variously support Cattani et al.'s (2014) concepts of core and periphery. However, I propose that this model needs to be more nuanced to account for those on the periphery who, for reasons outlined in this chapter, end up with the possibility of a "fast track" into the core because of their personal/physical attributes, socio-economic positions, or relationship-building qualities. Whether they are white men who happen to sit next to potential investors on airplanes, or the relatives, friends or acquaintances of existing core members, some peripheral filmmakers transition to the core with relative ease. The periphery is a differentiated field in which not all are disadvantaged to the same degree.

In its current form, the Hollywood system is a highly stratified reflection of American society, with resources concentrated in the hands of the few and success seemingly based on merit. In reality, complex forces propel some candidates forward at the expense of others, and socially and culturally constituted boundaries create isolation and division. While there is growing awareness of issues relating to gender-based inequality, Hollywood has yet to grapple with the root causes of these imbalances or acknowledge the nationwide social structures which reproduce them. Still, some remain hopeful that change is possible. During Larson's enthusiastic yet innocuous speech at the pre-Oscar party, she tried to break down barriers: "Let's get excited about where we are right now because … there's only room to grow," she said, "Let's create that connection; let's learn from each other. I'm looking out at like such a diverse group of people! Look at you; you're all different heights. Look at that! It's amazing. Let's talk."

Chapter 5 | Mid-Career Filmmakers

> "We had one Oscar, a Fulbright, two AFI Filmmaker grants, two Emmys, and what we figured out we really needed was a penis."
>
> –Filmmaker Lynne Littman in the documentary, *This Changes Everything* (2018).



***Figure 56**. Rachel Feldman poses with actors she has worked with over the years. Image courtesy of Rachel Feldman.*

With three decades of experience and a wide range of credits on popular shows, writer and director Rachel Feldman should be considered a "veteran." In other industries, she likely would be, but in Hollywood filmmaking, she lacks the right credits to establish herself. I begin with Rachel because she is one of the most accomplished filmmakers I interviewed, yet she was treated like a newcomer when she attempted to develop a feature. In the last chapter, I showed that women filmmakers cannot get hired if they are inexperienced. In this chapter, I demonstrate that new challenges arise as they reach the "mid-career" mark, a category which lacks cachet. Like emerging filmmakers, they struggle to escape their peripheral status, face limited employment prospects due to the perceived risk of hiring them, and contend with challenging working conditions. This chapter links the mid-career period to precarity, illustrating how women's low status leads

to a protracted period of uncertainty relative to male filmmakers with similar (or fewer) credits.

Sitting in on a meeting with a group of producers and executives as a volunteer note-taker, I heard a fifty-something white producer of multiple highly successful films say, “There’s nothing less sexy than a mid-career woman [director].” Her words struck me because she was ostensibly an “ally”–actively engaged in the fight for gender equality. At the same time, she acknowledged the conflicts and contradictions of an industry in which mid-career women filmmakers are perceived as unsexy and not marketable, rendering their stalled careers difficult to resuscitate. Careers on hold bring numerous challenges, personally and professionally, as I explain.

5.1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter is divided into two parts: first, I explain how difficult it is for mid-career women to gain employment because of gendered perceptions of risk. They face obstacles when they compete with men, and as such, they are still trying to “break in” 10, 20, or 30 years after starting their careers. In feature directing, experienced men with limited experience frequently overtake women with considerable experience, making the leap from short films to major blockbusters. Such leaps are unheard of for women filmmakers. Despite having directed one or more feature films, many women are forced to become trainees at the mid-career stage, shadowing working directors in the hopes of gaining employment. Women also often lack senior mentors or sponsors who can connect them with a wider network and guide them toward jobs. In the second part, I discuss the radical actions of two groups of accomplished mid-career women who experienced the challenges discussed in part one: they could not find work and felt they had no options remaining so they resorted to legal action. In the 1980s, unemployed women filmmakers came together to launch a class action against two studios. Though unsuccessful, the case is credited with opening up opportunities for women directors over the following decade until it reached an all-time high in 1995, at which point the

numbers fell again and stagnated until very recently. The recent uptick is partly attributed to the activism of women filmmakers such as Maria Giese, who sacrificed her career to launch a public legal battle against the Hollywood establishment. Though her efforts have shifted the needle for women once again, speaking out has hurt her chances of working in mainstream film and television. Maria has successfully "blazed a trail" for other women but has not benefited personally.

5.2 Risky women

In the previous chapter, I described Hollywood's reliance on "safe" choices, with conservative decision-making dictating which films are "greenlit" (funded and approved) and who is hired. Fear drives Hollywood decision-making, and the fear of losing one's status has led to the development of bias against mid-career women filmmakers too, who are perceived as "risky hires," as I explain in this chapter. This effectively creates a two-tier system in which emerging men more easily overtake mid-career women. Figure 57 (on page 162) illustrates that women are fairly well represented in low-budget filmmaking, a "low-risk" category, and almost absent from the big-budget and "high-risk" categories. This creates an almost inescapable loop in which women are not trusted with risky/expensive films because they have not shown they can handle risky/expensive films, whereas men have more freedom. Explaining why perceptions of risk are gendered at the mid-career stage is somewhat of a puzzle; however, I propose that Burt's (1998) analysis of gender and social capital is useful. Burt writes that investors (or producers, or executives) feel they can predict the behaviour of someone like them, so they are more likely to invest in an existing group member instead of an outsider. Secondly, investors know that group members have a stake in protecting their reputation by making sure things go well, and are thus more trustworthy. In Hollywood, mid-career filmmakers on their own are not given opportunities and have limited power, but with an influential mentor, they can unlock opportunities. The only way for non-members lacking family connections to "break in" is "to borrow social capital rather than build it," (Burt 1998, 6).

Social capital refers to the ability to access benefits through other people (Portes 1998, 6), with social networks and mentors serving as two prime examples. In theory, shadowing programs could serve this purpose by pairing unemployed filmmakers with members of the industry, but despite their prevalence, they rarely lead to employment in Hollywood as I explain later in this chapter.

5.2.1 Too old, yet too inexperienced

In typical fields, workers typically progress from entry-level tasks to more complex roles that make use of their skills and experience. Career trajectories for Hollywood filmmakers begin with low-budget short films and move progressively towards longer and more expensive films if that is desired. Directors, for example, may make one or more short films, to build "buzz" (which means having people talk about the work in an excited manner) through awards, festivals and distribution. A compelling short film can become a "calling card" for a filmmaker with aspirations to direct features and help convince investors or producers that they have skills and vision. The next milestone is the development of a feature of approximately 90 minutes, which is usually low-budget. At this stage, the process is similar: filmmakers hope their first feature will be well-received, launch their careers, and lead to higher-budget projects.

Most participants mentioned in this chapter have not yet reached a recognizable "mid-career" stage, nor have they accumulated the authority one might expect given their years of work. They find themselves in a double bind: they are no longer "new" enough for the industry to champion as "fresh talent," yet they lack the clout of veterans. They are still seen as "risky" hires, as Rachel Feldman's story will demonstrate. The mid-career stage is lengthy in academia too, and women at this phase are often neglected, with more attention paid to young scholars and senior academics (Coate et al. 2015). Though most filmmakers expect to move forward progressively, I show throughout this thesis that women's careers do not necessarily follow linear trajectories.

Returning to Rachel, she has been involved in the industry since childhood, when she spent years as a child actor. She completed her MFA in film and television at New York University, one of the highest-rated film schools (Appelo 2017; Beresford et al. 2019), and her thesis film, *Giustina* (1980), won numerous awards. When television creator Steven Bochco saw *Giustina*, he hired her to direct an episode of *Doogie Howser, M.D*. (1989-1993, creators Steven Bochco and David E. Kelley), which also starred Markus Redmond (previously mentioned) in a supporting role. From there, Rachel gained credits on popular shows, such as *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1993-1998, creator Beth Sullivan), *Picket Fences* (1992-1996, creator David E. Kelley), and *Sisters* (1991-1996, creators Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman). Like other women, Rachel experienced a lull after taking time off to have children but later returned to direct several network crime series: *The Rookie* (2018- , creator Alexi Hawley), *Blue Bloods* (2010- , creators Mitchell Burgess & Robin Green), *Criminal Minds* (2005-2020, creator Jeff Davis), as well as the pilot and five episodes of family drama *The Baxters* (2019-2021, executive producer Roma Downey). At the time of our interview, she had directed 40 episodes of 16 television series and two TV movies (IMDb 2020d), in addition to optioning[57] and selling numerous scripts (Feldman 2020).

While working on up to 15 projects at various stages of development–"You have to juggle many balls in the air," Rachel says–she also began pitching a feature based on a screenplay she wrote about Lilly Ledbetter, an equal pay advocate who sued Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. for paying her less than her male colleagues. When I spoke to Rachel first in 2018, she was told by nearly 30 producers that she would not be able to direct the project due to her inexperience. Ironically the film, called *Lilly*, is about gender inequality in the workplace:

[57] An option is an agreement between a producer/studio and a screenwriter/author, which grants the producer/studio rights to a script or story for a period of time as they attempt to develop a project.

> They would call me a first-time director and more often a "TV director." As if that were a disparagement, yet working in television is one of the few avenues women have to gain experience, confidence, not to mention a good income. This would happen time and time and time again. Because I had not yet made a feature film, they wouldn't give me the chance to make one.

Even with substantial credits accumulated over decades, Rachel could not shake the "first-time filmmaker" moniker and was called a "TV director" disparagingly, even though she has directed movies for television. Due to differences in scale, budget, creative authority and production processes, a director's contribution to a "made-for-TV" movie is not given the same weight as a film distributed in theatres.[58] In academia, men often overtake women at the mid-career stage because they more easily amass the "right metrics" (e.g. publications, order of authors' names on publications, international keynotes and editorial roles) (Kandiko Howson et al. 2018, 534). Kandiko Howson et al. refer to the concept of "prestige economy" (English 2005) to propose that distinction is gendered because female academics have more difficulty gaining access to the "currency" which will advance their careers. These metrics are associated with research rather than teaching, which is seen as an activity of lesser value, comparable to the film vs television paradigm. Rachel's perceived "inexperience" with features meant that she was considered too risky for producers to become involved in her project, which, as I show later in this chapter, does not typically occur with male directors. Luckily, the situation has evolved recently, and *Lilly* is entering the production phase with a $15-million budget and the backing of a major star–developments I return to later.

5.2.2 "Shut out after their first feature"

With two features, Jen McGowan is now a mid-career director. "Women… get shut out after their first feature…. You go from 'potential' to, '*not the winner of Sundance*,'" she says. Young filmmakers have a wider range of opportunities, Jen says,

[58] As noted in the introduction, some film purists believe that productions destined for the small screen cannot compare to films exhibited theatrically, with the inference being that they are not "cinema" (Nolan 2014; White 2014; Ryan 2015). This attitude has faded recently with the emergence of the latest "golden age of television" (Leslie 2017; Jeffery 2018; Richford 2019).

and enjoy a period of “benevolent sexism” during which they are offered advantages that are rooted in gender stereotypes. After releasing their first feature, their careers often languish; “People like to mentor young filmmakers. There’s all these programs for young filmmakers. But all we’re doing is creating more lemmings that we’re throwing off a cliff if the industry doesn’t sustain them,” Jen says.

Robin Swicord, a screenwriter with 30 years of experience adapting books into movies, including *Little Women* (1994, dir. Gillian Armstrong) and *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005, dir. Rob Marshall), was unable to “break in” to directing until 2007, according to the *Los Angeles Times* (Kaufman 2017). Her low-budget directorial debut, *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007), earned positive reviews and grossed $7 million (Box Office Mojo 2020d). She assumed she would continue directing: “I was naive enough to think that if you exhibit competence in something, the movie makes some money and people are happy, that you move onto something of equal size–or larger,” she said in an interview (Kaufman 2017). “No jobs came to me. Zero. Lost, in every case, to a man.” It wasn’t until a decade later that she found another job on a film with a lower budget than her first (Kaufman 2017), a familiar theme for established women filmmakers (discussed in the next chapter). These examples show that making a “good” first film is not enough for mid-career women, who fall into a slump that is difficult to escape.

5.2.3 Experience vs potential

While women are judged for their inexperience, men are evaluated based on their potential. Producers often cite “lack of experience” as the reason women are not hired for key filmmaking positions. This forces women directors into a “dark loop,” (Dowd 2015) according to filmmaker Lena Dunham, who rose to prominence with the HBO series she created and starred in, *Girls* (2012-2017). With no experience, women cannot get hired, and if they do not get hired, they are unable to gain experience, Dunham told *The New York Times* (Dowd 2015). Rachel Feldman raised a similar point: since she had not directed a feature, she would not be allowed to direct one. To explore this further, I

recount examples from the media, coupled with information from my research participants. I also rely on quantitative evidence that women are seldom hired for high-risk, big-budget projects to illustrate how gender- and race-based systems of exclusion come into play.

The previous chapter described producers' reluctance to hire "outsiders" for key filmmaking roles. Since white men have occupied leading positions for decades, hiring women is generally perceived as "risky" (Goldstein 2003; Child 2015b). Proving that women filmmakers are less trusted by investors and studio leaders is not a straightforward process; however, statistics show that women are relatively well-represented as directors on short films, and are seldom (if ever) hired to direct expensive blockbusters (Figure 69 on page 204 illustrates that women's involvement is often limited to specific genres too). As depicted in the line graph below, women directed 28% of narrative short films (which are relatively inexpensive) but only 4% of the top-grossing films between 2007 and 2016 (Smith et al. 2017). Except for a few notable exceptions, top-grossing films are generally those with the largest budgets.[59]

[59] As mentioned earlier, studios pour money into the distribution and marketing of big-budget films to recoup their investment. That means that even expensive "bad" films are likely to make hundreds of millions of dollars. Low-budget films cannot compete with the scale and reach of blockbuster films, distributed in thousands of theatres worldwide.

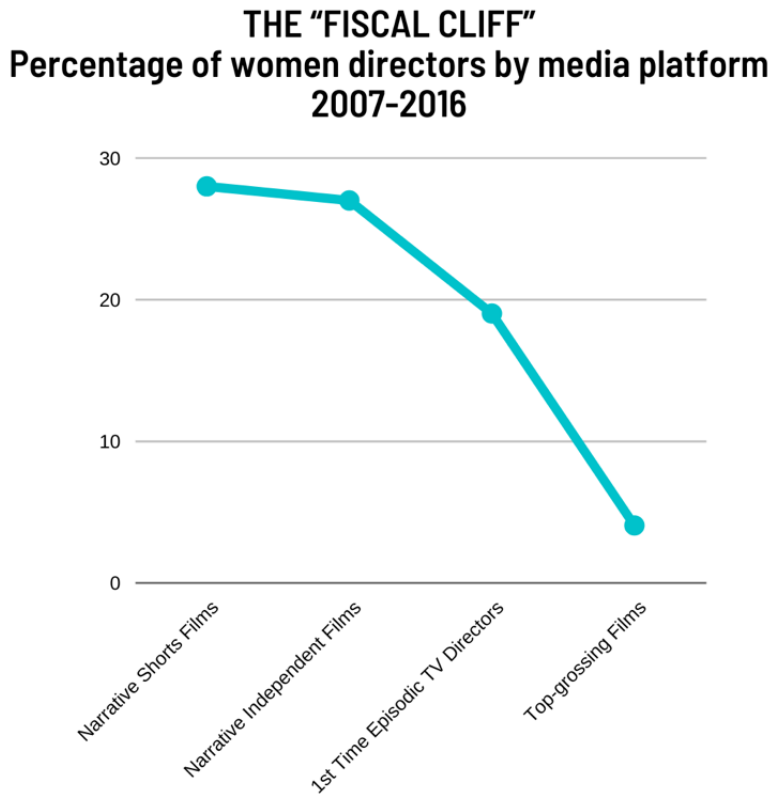


Figure 57. *As budgets increase, the opportunities for women diminish, with women directing a small percentage of the big-budget projects between 2007 and 2016. Graph by the author, using statistics from the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative (Smith et al. 2017).*

In a report about the Canadian film industry prepared for the Canadian Unions for Equality on Screen (CUES), researcher Amanda Coles (2016) writes that film and TV production is both risk-intense and risk-averse: "The investment in key creative positions–and the director in particular–is seen as critical to minimizing risk," she says, adding that the risk assessments conducted by industry members are "not gender-neutral" (Coles 2016, 3). The data suggest that as the risk involved in making a film increases, opportunities for women decrease. Researcher Stacy Smith refers to this as a "fiscal cliff" which stunts the careers of otherwise competent directors who are unable to find employment (Communication and Marketing Staff 2015).

In practical terms, women are often overlooked for positions which are eventually offered to men with similar or considerably less experience. In October 2015, Lucasfilm president and *Star Wars* producer Kathleen Kennedy cited lack of experience as one of

the reasons women have never been hired to direct *Star Wars* films. “There’s nothing we’d like more than to find a female director for *Star Wars*,” she said (Martinson 2015). However, she also said she could not hire a filmmaker “who’s done one movie and expect them to come in and do something the size of *Star Wars* without having an opportunity to find other movies they can do along the way” (Martinson 2015).[60] In another interview, she was unsure how to explain the gender gap in Hollywood but suggested that those in power aren’t “trying hard enough,” (Fortune Magazine 2015).

It is unusual for a filmmaker to make a short film and then be offered a big-budget project because: 1) they have not necessarily proven that they can handle larger scale projects (with more money being risked, larger crews, longer timeframes and significantly more demands and pressure); 2) there are many qualified candidates who have directed one or more feature films who would likely be considered first. However, there are numerous examples of white men with limited experience who have made such jumps because they benefited from what reporter Scott Mendelson (2017) refers to as, “the presumption of competence.” For example, Michael Bay, best known for films in the *Transformers* franchise (2007, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2017), had only directed music videos when he was chosen to direct the action-comedy *Bad Boys* (1995) (McIntyre 2014). Before directing *Alien*[3] (1992), David Fincher was creating music videos for Paula Abdul and Madonna (Pearce 2017). Carl Rinsch was hired to direct *47 Ronin*, a $170-million film, after having directed a short film and a commercial (Fernandez 2011). Finally, Joseph Kosinski had limited experience and said that in making his first feature, *Tron: Legacy* (2010) for $200 million, he relied more on “instinct than experience” (Castillo 2010).

[60] Kennedy remains a controversial figure. She co-founded a gender equality organization called The Hollywood Commission in 2017, which aims to “lead the entertainment industry to a strong and equitable future by defining and implementing best practices that eliminate sexual harassment and bias for all workers” (The Hollywood Commission 2020). In 2018, television producer Glen Mazzara (2018) criticized Kennedy for leading the commission despite having never hired a woman to write, direct, or develop a *Star Wars* film, which remains true as of 2022 as well: “Why has no one noticed this, called it out, or demanded better?” he wrote.

Director Colin Trevorrow has been called the "poster boy" for this phenomenon (Mendelson 2017), as the oft-cited example of white male privilege due to his inexperience (one low-budget independent feature film), the size of the budget he was given for his second film ($150 million), and the way he was mentored on set by a senior figure (Steven Spielberg) (Theodore-Vachon 2015; Women and Hollywood 2015). In March 2013, Trevorrow was hired to direct the blockbuster *Jurassic World* (2015) after having directed *Safety Not Guaranteed* (2012), an independent film. At the time, no woman had ever directed a live-action film with a budget of more than $100 million (Siegel 2017).[61] Coincidentally, he was hired by producer Frank Marshall, husband of Kathleen Kennedy of Lucasfilm (Buchanan 2015b). The jump to *Jurassic World* was so monumental that Trevorrow did not envisage it for himself, saying, as Kennedy had suggested, that he should have made several films before directing a large franchise (Bishop 2015); "I had to almost play the role of myself 20 years from now, with far more experience and far more knowledge, and I went method the whole damn time," Trevorrow said (Bishop 2015). Seen below with baseball caps, glasses, and greying beards, Trevorrow (Figure 59) bears a resemblance to Spielberg (Figure 58), director of the first two *Jurassic Park* films from the 1990s (IMDb 2019d), providing an example of the "young guys in baseball caps" sponsorship cycle discussed in the last chapter. During filming, Trevorrow benefited from a unique form of mentorship: Spielberg coached him on a daily basis (Bishop 2015).

[61] Since *True Lies* (1994, dir. James Cameron) became the first film with a $100-million budget, there were 335 additional films in the $100 million plus category as of 2016 (Cruz 2016) but almost all have been directed by men. In 2002, Kathryn Bigelow became the first woman to direct a $100-million film, *K:19 The Widowmaker* (2002) and Jennifer Yuh Nelson was next nearly a decade later, with the animated feature *Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011) (Welk 2019). In 2016, it was announced that Ava DuVernay would be the first woman of colour to direct a $100-million film, *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018), and she tweeted in response: "Not the first capable of doing so. Not by a long shot" (@ava 2016).



Figures 58, 59. *Left, Steven Spielberg directing the original* Jurassic Park *(1993). Image from jurassicworld.com. Right, Colin Trevorrow on the set of Jurassic World (2015). Image from Universal Pictures. Used in accordance with fair use.*

"Women rarely receive those kinds of big breaks," wrote *New York Times* film critic Manohla Dargis (2014) about Trevorrow's opportunity–nor do they receive one-on-one mentorship from established filmmakers on projects they are arguably not qualified for. Trevorrow's trajectory is sometimes compared with that of his peer, Ava DuVernay, whose feature also premiered at the Sundance Film Festival the same year as Trevorrow's. DuVernay, a Black woman now in her late forties, had worked for 14 years as a marketer and publicist for films directed by Spielberg, Clint Eastwood and Michael Mann (DuVernay 2016). She had previously directed short films, TV movies, a feature and several documentaries (IMDb 2020a). Her film, *Middle of Nowhere* (2012), was at Sundance the same year as Trevorrow's debut feature, and she won the festival's award for Best Director (DuVernay 2016). Despite the recognition, she was not offered future work (Dargis 2014). A year later, Trevorrow was hired for *Jurassic World* while DuVernay still had her day job (Dargis 2014), despite being the "best director" at the nation's most influential independent festival. Eventually, DuVernay was hired to direct the Martin Luther King, Jr. drama, *Selma* (2014), with a $20-million budget (The Numbers 2020), which industry members consider a respectable step for an independent director. Dargis remained skeptical: "In what has become a familiar story of male success, he [Trevorrow]

went on to direct the relaunch of a franchise behemoth" (Dargis 2014). DuVernay's work was once again recognized with awards: *Selma* was nominated for Best Picture at the 2015 Oscars, won the Golden Globe for Best Drama and Best Director, and received 60 awards and 89 nominations overall (IMDb 2016c). Meanwhile, *Jurassic World* won a "Golden Schmoe" prize for Most Overrated Movie of the Year (IMDb 2016a) and was criticized for its stereotypical depiction of women (Abad-Santos 2015; Kelley 2015). The female lead, Bryce Dallas Howard, was nominated for a mean-spirited award from the Alliance of Women Film Journalists: Actress Most in Need of a New Agent (IMDb 2016a).

Jurassic World went on to gross $1.67 billion worldwide, at the time trailing only *Avatar* (2009, dir. James Cameron) and *Titanic* (1997, dir. James Cameron) for the top worldwide sales figures (Box Office Mojo 2015). Whether awards are a meaningful gauge of talent is debatable; however, this example suggests that after making one feature, an unremarkable white male director could ascend to blockbuster filmmaking more easily than an award-winning Black female director, who then continued to produce acclaimed work while he did not. Furthermore, Trevorrow was hired because he was deemed more qualified than other directors, even women with considerably more experience. In summary, inexperienced men are often given significant job offers, while talented women filmmakers with similar experience (or more) often flounder. I return to DuVernay in the Conclusion because as she developed her career, she chose to use the leverage she gained to reach back and support other women of colour, a decision for which she has been criticized.

5.2.4 Lack of senior female mentors

I have discussed the advantages of physically resembling or having associations with core members of the industry, a factor which helps some white men build their careers with less effort. As we have seen, this extends to mentorship as well, with white men gaining opportunities even when they have less experience. While some hiring is done via "lists" of approved directors that are circulated by agencies or studios, building

a relationship behind the scenes with a power broker who is willing to offer mentorship can help "mentees" secure jobs. While under Spielberg's wing, Trevorrow received structured support to ensure that *Jurassic World* was successful despite his own limited experience.

Cinematographer and USC film professor Linda Brown believes that a lack of mentorship is part of the reason that women are underrepresented in the field of cinematography. As a former member of Local 600, the International Cinematographers Guild, Linda says that she is used to being outnumbered. At Saturday morning union meetings, she recalls seeing around 100 men and four women in attendance. During breaks, she was amused that for the first time, women did not have to stand in a long line to use the bathroom, while 30 men lined up for the men's; "It just hits you visually to see that," she says. At an awards ceremony for the American Society of Cinematographers, the crowd of men in black suits looked like a "sea of penguins." Being outnumbered means there are few senior female cinematographers available to mentor women at early career stages. To help combat the imbalance, Linda organizes "Brown Bag Lunches" at USC to encourage female students to learn more about cinematography; "We can't sit around and wait for the guys to change this. We have to do it ourselves," she says.

Even in directing, there are few established women with the power and gravitas[62] of male directors such as Spielberg, George Lucas, Francis Ford Coppola, James Cameron, Martin Scorsese, and others. This became apparent to writer and director Kelly* at one of her first Women's Steering Committee (WSC) meetings at the Directors Guild of America (DGA). The DGA is the union representing directors, assistant directors, unit production managers, associate directors, stage managers and production

[62] Criticized for lacking "gravitas," American news anchor Katie Couric (2015) joked the word must be "Latin for 'testicles.'"

associates (Directors Guild of America 2019). WSC organizers were trying to get the late Penny Marshall as guest speaker, Kelly recounts, but she did not attend the meetings and did not like to speak in public. Marshall had iconic status: she starred in *Laverne & Shirley* (created by Lowell Ganz, Gary Marshall & Mark Rothman, 1976-1983) and later directed "female-driven" comedies such as *A League of Their Own* (1992). Instead, her brother Gary Marshall, director of *Pretty Woman* (1990) and *The Princess Diaries* (2001), was invited. "So, that was my first experience, Gary Marshall, speaking to the women. I thought, 'this is going to be interesting,'" Kelly says.

In professional environments in which men have typically outnumbered women, it can be beneficial for women to see someone from their own group achieve success (Ragins 1997). Female role models serve multiple functions according to psychologist Penelope Lockwood (2006, 44): they inspire women by showing that it is possible to overcome gender barriers; they can demonstrate competence and prove that gender stereotypes are inaccurate; and they can carve out paths that can inspire other women to follow in their footsteps. However, research has shown that when role models take on additional roles, such a mentorship, men in certain industries may have access to more power and be able to provide more opportunities for their mentees (Koberg et al. 1998). Women across sectors benefit from having mentors in positions of power; Australian mid-career women in academia gain guidance and support through mentorship (Mate et al. 2018), while Black women in graduate programs at predominantly white institutions use it to build solidarity with each other (Minnett et al. 2019).

In Hollywood, filmmakers can only advance so far by relying on the human capital they develop as individuals–their training, skills, experience, and knowledge (Becker 1993)–and need to develop social capital, which is accessed through other people. In a study of managers at a large American computer and electronic equipment manufacturer, Burt (1998, 6) found that "legitimate" members of the group could build social capital, but that "illegitimate" members (young men and women) could not, so they

borrowed it from those with access. Still viewed as an “illegitimate” member and a first-time director, Rachel Feldman has only been able to move forward with her feature, *Lilly,* by borrowing the social capital of a central Hollywood figure. Reported as an “exclusive” story in *The Hollywood Reporter* (Vlessing 2020), actor Meryl Streep helped introduce Rachel to industry connections to assist with casting the film, a process which had been a challenge for several years. “Meryl Streep is a key person who went out of her way [to help],” Rachel said when we spoke briefly again at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. As of October 2022, the film was in production with Oscar nominee Patricia Clarkson in the title role (Grobar 2021).



Figure 60. *Filmmaker Rachel Feldman, who was treated like a “first-time filmmaker.” Image from 2019, courtesy of Rachel Feldman.*

Like Rachel, many women with experience have lacked mentors to “open doors” for them. Organizations are attempting to redress this imbalance by creating mentorship and sponsorship programs for women filmmakers (e.g. Horizon Award 2022; Women in Film Los Angeles 2022; Alliance of Women Directors 2022; Sundance Institute 2022). Studios and networks also run numerous “fellowships” to help filmmakers from underrepresented backgrounds obtain the skills needed to get hired. The merits of these initiatives are explored next.

5.2.5 Forever a trainee

When I interviewed Kelly, she was in the process of applying for "diversity programs" to shadow directors on set. Run by studios and networks, these initiatives aim to help women and "minority" filmmakers enter the workforce through on-set experience. Kelly is competing against feature directors who cannot get hired otherwise: "Instead of giving [mid-career] women an episode [of television], they are telling them, 'You're going to have to take this two-year diversity program.' You have to jump through all these hoops to get into these programs, even if you have directed a bunch of stuff already," she says. Marketing materials from some programs highlight the fact that they been in existence for decades and yet the directing statistics have barely shifted, which suggests they do not necessarily achieve results.

A report from Creative Ireland found that women in film and television are more likely than men to participate in training programs and other forms of career development throughout their careers (Barton et al. 2020, 8). Once accepted into highly-selective fellowships, directors typically shadow the director from pre-production through filming and editing. The programs are generally unpaid, but some offer a stipend. Some participants pay out of pocket to fly to the shooting location to observe on set: "It's the most degrading and ridiculous thing," says Kelly, who knows a director who shadowed for 10 years before being hired to direct their own episode. According to Tessa Blake, then-head of the Directing Workshop for Women (DWW) at the American Film Institute, the year-long program's acceptance rates are more competitive than those for entrance to Stanford, Yale and Harvard Universities, "which is stupid," she said at the 2016 Women in Entertainment Summit: "We should not be that competitive; these people should already be working," (Blake 2016). Filmmaker Vickie Sampson participated in the DWW in 1987, at a time when it was designed for women with industry experience who had never directed. Vickie has decades of experience in post-production sound, both sound editing, dialogue editing and automated dialogue replacement (ADR): "I thought I

would finally get out of sound and be able to direct. 'I'm going to make this great movie and people are going to be falling over at my doorstep to let me direct.' And of course it wasn't that way at all," she says. Years later, while serving on the DWW admissions panel, Vickie was amazed by the calibre of the applicants applying now: "I'm looking at their reels, thinking, my God why do they need this program at all? They have already directed more amazing things than I probably ever will."

Filmmaker Maria Giese spent hundreds of hours observing directors on numerous primetime TV shows. "It's kind of embarrassing to be shadowing," Maria told me during a phone interview. The "trainee" director is seen as a "pain in the ass," she says, because they are an outsider competing for a role the show's cast and crew members also covet: "Everyone on a set wants to direct. They all want an episode. All the producers, the actors … even the sound guy wanted an episode." Maria shadowed directors on several shows created by Dick Wolf including *Law & Order* (1990-2010) in the early 1990s for approximately 500 hours, but was never offered a job. When a directing opportunity arose in 1994, it was given to Jace Alexander, the stepson of executive producer Ed Sherin, once again demonstrating the strength of insider networks and connections to core members. At the time, Alexander had few credits but went on to build a career, directing 32 episodes (IMDb 2019b) of *Law & Order* and numerous other shows. He was eventually elected second vice president of the Directors Guild of America (Handel 2015). He continued working until he was arrested on child pornography charges in 2015 (Patten et al. 2016) and was sentenced to 10 years probation.[63] Giese, meanwhile, began a crusade on behalf of other women directors who were also out of work, which I explore later in this chapter.

[63] In the interest of full disclosure, I knew Jace Alexander's late father and stepmother in 2006. I never met Jace but it was deeply unsettling to read about his crimes in the media.

Alba,* a Latinx filmmaker, said that the highly-selective training programs are creating more barriers to entry: “People are just passing us around. And what’s the point?” she asks. Ultimately filmmakers need a senior member of the industry to make a phone call and vouch for them so they can be hired, she explains. She knows a filmmaker from a minority background who participated in “all the programs” but was still living in his car after six years, unemployed. His mentor, a leader of “diversity” initiatives at the DGA, finally made a call and he was hired, which shows that a direct referral from a trusted industry member (social capital) can be more valuable than additional training (human capital). If the fellowships are ineffective, why do they exist? It is all about appearances, Maria Giese says. Hollywood companies put money towards “diversity” to make it seem like they are addressing the problem. Alicia,* a white female television director, suggests that companies invest in initiatives to appear concerned about equality but continue to use traditional recruitment practices: “A lot of it is a PR opportunity for people to pat themselves on the back and be like, ‘Oh yay, we did that thing everyone is talking about. Now, go call that guy who made that Sundance indie.’”

5.2.6 “A Career You Didn’t Have”

When Maria Giese completed her MFA at University of California-Los Angeles in 1994, her first feature, *When Saturday Comes* (1996) was “greenlit” (funded and approved) very quickly. It only took two years of development to reach that stage, which is relatively expedient. “Development” is the term used for the planning phase, involving refining the story, seeking investors, producers, and cast members. The film is based on a script Maria wrote about her then-husband’s life, and it screened at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival but was not distributed in the US; as a result, it was as if *she had not made* a feature, she says. Subsequently, Maria dedicated years to re-writing and developing projects that went nowhere: “I would take these scripts and make them viable,” she says in a phone interview from her home in Connecticut, where she now lives with her family. After years of meetings and rewrites, the projects did not move forward, or the producers

hired a man instead, she says: “It can only happen so many times before you’re… old!” Maria explains, “If it takes two to five years or longer and someone else gets to direct it, it’s like you *didn’t do* five years’ worth of work. You piece six to eight of those [periods] together, that’s your career. That’s a career you didn’t have.”

In addition, career progress is often judged based on credits listed on IMDb, an online database of films and series, which is somewhat reminiscent of the “prestige economy” and metrics valued in academia. Participants say their IMDb profiles are often incomplete, creating the perception that they are not working. Maria, for example, was working on four projects when I spoke to her in 2022 but only one was listed on IMDb at the time. Television credits often obfuscate contributions even further, with one person often listed as an episode’s writer (even if there is a team in the “writers’ room”) and the term, “showrunner,” not appearing in credits at all–those who manage the series are usually listed as either writers, executive producers, and/or creators. Women often have gaps of several years between projects–seven years is typical for feature directors–and if they have no recent credits, it may give the impression they are not active even though they have been working full-time in development. Men have gaps between films too to recharge their “creative juices” or transition between projects, but they typically return to make another film. Women directors are more likely to be “one-and-done”; over a ten-year period examining the top 100 films per year, Smith (2017, 1) found that 80% of women only directed one film, compared with 54.3% of non-black and non-Asian males.[64] Having no recent activity on IMDb can be misleading because filmmakers may be developing productions on a start-stop basis like Maria–opportunities that can be taken away or go nowhere. The second part of this chapter explains how these gaps can hurt filmmakers as they lose access to union health benefits, pensions and voting rights.

[64] The group they classified as “non-Black and non-Asian males” fared the best, whereas 60% of Asian men directed one film, along with 62.5% of black men, 79.3% of white women and 83.3% of women of colour (Smith et al. 2017).



Figure 61. *Maria Giese directing* When Saturday Comes *(1996) in Sheffield, England, in 1995. Image courtesy of Maria Giese.*



Figure 62. *Still image from* When Saturday Comes*, starring Sean Bean. Image courtesy of Maria Giese.*

Lena Dunham's "dark loop," is at the root of this cyclical problem: since women lack opportunities, they are not offered opportunities. Hiring women who have talent but lack specific experience requires a leap of faith, and not all are willing to take it. For Catherine Reitman, American-born creator and star of the Canadian comedy series *Workin' Moms* (2017-), the risk was worthwhile. In television, the creator (or showrunner) is responsible for hiring: "With great power–comes hiring more women," she said in an interview with BUILD Series (2019). She is proud that 69% of her department heads are women:

> And it's challenging, not because women aren't talented, but because their resumes are lacking because they haven't been given [the] opportunity that men have…. I can't tell you how many times in an interview, I said, 'look, I don't see it [the experience] here [gesturing towards an imaginary sheet of paper], but I want to see it here [pointing towards an interview subject], so tell me, tell me what I'm going to get.' And because of that conversation and how transparent it was upfront, out [of] the gates, they deliver every day on that set. (BUILD Series 2019)

Reitman described her set as productive, supportive, constructive, and not "emotional," a stereotype often associated with women's environments. "I have no regrets about hiring that many women. I would do it again," she said (BUILD Series 2019). Now an international hit in its sixth season with distribution on Netflix, *Workin' Moms* was nominated for nine Canadian Screen Awards in 2019 and has received two International Emmy nominations (Thiessen 2019). Fiona* is one of the crew members Reitman hired. "It's kind of funny that it took this American woman [Reitman] to say, 'Yeah I like her, give her a shot,' with this kind of maverick mentality that Canadians do not have," Fiona says. "As a result of her being 'first-in' on me, it made other doors open." Fiona has since worked on numerous productions, acknowledging that she has been exceptionally lucky: "Ask women in their 50s, how the fuck did they get in when there was no conversation about this [gender] at all? I actually feel like I hit the jackpot in terms of timing."

With men being hired for their potential, and women being hired based on their experience, successful young white men advance through the industry more quickly than other demographics. “It’s not about risk: It’s about gender,” writes Casey Cipriani (2016b) in a blog post for the website, Women and Hollywood, one of the primary sources of news about gender in the industry. “This is about male privilege and the belief that untested men can handle films better than women with experience.” Men are more likely to be mentored by powerful industry leaders, trusted with large sums of money, and be offered subsequent projects. In a study of the top 1,200 films from 2007 to 2018, male directors were also more likely to be hired at a younger age (nine men were hired in their 20s, compared with zero women) and later in life as well (81 men were hired in their 60s, 27 in their 70s and nine in their 80s, compared with seven women in their 60s, and no women in their 70s or 80s) (Smith, Choueiti, Choi, et al. 2019, 9). Meanwhile, women with credits are still treated as “first-time directors” or required to shadow for years, with no promise of employment. Those who refuse to stay silent about these working conditions, like Maria Giese, discussed next, may find themselves unable to work again.

5.3 Women with nothing left to lose

5.3.1 The Original Six and the DGA

I now turn to the activism of several mid-career filmmakers who found themselves out of work with no prospects. They pushed back against powerful figures and suffered professional consequences. They spoke up because, as one filmmaker says below, they exhausted all other avenues, not unlike Maria Giese.

Maria’s career stalled after *When Saturday Comes* and she was not able to revive it through shadowing. At that point, there was no social media for rallying together, and women filmmakers were somewhat isolated, she explains. In the book *Women Who Make a Fuss*, Stengers and Despret (2014, 14) write that women in academia sometimes reflect on their careers and justify why their progress may have stagnated, “even

speaking of a ‘choice’ in the matter,” as if they had control over the outcome and partially shared the blame. Women *choose* certain opportunities over others or choose *not* to pursue certain opportunities, which helps to explain their current standing (Stengers et al. 2014). In my own experience, when my films were rejected from film festivals or denied funding, I assumed it was because I was not good enough (or my films were not good enough)–I did not contemplate systemic barriers or women being disadvantaged as a whole. Academic women hold themselves responsible for their relatively slower career progression as well, even as men surpass them (Kandiko Howson et al. 2018). After seeing her male peers “rise up in power and become the auteur directors of our time,” Maria realized that other women directors were not finding jobs either (Houston Cinema Arts Society 2018). She went to her union, the Director’s Guild of America (DGA), and began asking questions. She learned about a group of six women filmmakers who first met in the late 1970s and realized they were all unemployed: Joelle Dobrow, Nell Cox, Susan Nimoy, Dolores Ferraro, Lynne Littman, and Vicki Hochberg (Syme 2016). “It was really a tough conversation,” says filmmaker Joelle Dobrow in the documentary, *This Changes Everything* (2018, dir. Tom Donahue) about gender inequality in filmmaking, “because in the entertainment industry, the last thing you wanna say is, ‘I’m not working.’” The women had experience and qualifications but no jobs: “We had one Oscar, a Fulbright, two AFI Filmmaker grants, two Emmys, and what we figured out we really needed was a penis,” says filmmaker Lynne Littman in the documentary.[65] In 2014, Maria called them the “Original Six” in an article (Giese 2015a), and the name stuck.

[65] See earlier note about Katie Couric and gravitas.



Figure 63. *The Original Six. Back row from left: Joelle Dobrow, Susan Bay Nimoy, and Victoria Hochberg. Front from left: Nell Cox, Dolores Ferraro, and Lynne Littman in 1980. Image courtesy of Lynne Littman.*

Members of the Original Six gathered statistics and discovered that between 1949 and 1979, 0.5% of film directing jobs were held by women. They founded the DGA's Women's Steering Committee (WSC) in 1979 and spent the next three years trying to convince studios to commit to hiring a minimum number of women directors each year, in an initiative known as "goals and timetables." This was recast in a negative light as a system of "quotas." The DGA favoured "voluntary compliance" in which studios could choose to hire more women but were under no legal obligation to do so, similar to the approach adopted by the government in relation to Hollywood hiring in the 1970s, mentioned in the Introduction. Presenting their case to powerful leaders was intimidating at times, but "[W]e had so little left to lose," Littman said in an interview with *Pacific Standard* (Syme 2016). By 1983, nothing was changing and DGA Executive Director Michael Franklin invited studios, networks and production companies to an important meeting to review the situation. The meeting was known as the "Danish Debacle" because the DGA ordered "pounds of pastries" and nobody turned up (Syme 2016).

“This was the first time those men [at the DGA] were ever treated with a slap in the face, they were treated like a woman, and it was their first taste of it,” Dobrow said in the documentary. Franklin was angry, Victoria Hochberg says in the film, and decided to sue. The DGA launched a lawsuit against two major studios, Warner Bros. and Columbia Pictures, for discrimination against women and minority directors (Stambler 2011). As noted earlier, Title VII of the US Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employment discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex and national origin (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2016), and their collected data showed women had few opportunities as directors. The DGA’s involvement was surprising to some, because the union rarely took political stances and was known as a “gentlemen’s club” up until 1978 (Montañez Smukler 2013). Researcher Maya Montañez Smukler (2013) says their actions were “uncharacteristic” and may have been rooted in self-preservation, to prevent members from turning on the union itself. In 1985, the lawsuit was dismissed before it began because Judge Pamela Rymer ruled that the DGA had a conflict of interest and could not represent the women and minority directors (Michaelson 1985). The DGA was partially responsible, she said, because directors (hired by the studios) selected their own assistant directors using the “old boys’ club” and “word of mouth” hiring practices (Montañez Smukler 2013) and women and minorities were no better represented in the assistant roles (Syme 2016). In her ruling, *Directors Guild of America Inc., & Others v. Warner Brothers, Inc. Directors Guild of America Inc., & Others v. Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.* (1985) CV 83-4764-PAR; CV 83-8311-PAR, Rymer wrote that the DGA helped perpetuate cycles of discrimination:

> Eighty percent of the DGA's members are white males; only 4% are minorities and only 15% are females. Of the ten DGA officers, two are women and none is a member of a minority group. With the exception of one female, all eleven members of the DGA's national board are white males. (Id.) There is no showing that the DGA has consistently sought equal rights through its collective bargaining efforts. To the contrary, the defendants' counterclaims raise serious issues concerning the DGA's role in creating and perpetuating the allegedly discriminatory system of hiring.

She continued, “DGA's assertion that it has no conflict with the interests of women and minorities, but instead has an interest congruent with such a class to establish that the defendants [Warner Bros. and Columbia] are responsible for their underemployment, is not convincing.“

Had the lawsuit succeeded, members of the Original Six hoped to ask for retroactive “points” from their union instead of backpay. At the time, directors gained points when they worked, which entitled them to access DGA health and pension plans (Syme 2016). Out-of-work directors pay for their own health coverage and if they have not collected enough points, will not receive a pension. To retain access to the health plan as of 2022, DGA directors must earn a minimum of $37,000 or $120,000 (depending on their chosen plan) over a 12-month period (Directors Guild of America–Producer Pension and Health Plans 2022). Being unemployed also impacts one’s ability to hold positions on committees within the DGA because of rules surrounding inactivity, discussed further shortly.

Though the Original Six lawsuit did not proceed, the threat was enough to spur action; over the next decade, the number of women directors on studio features rose to an all-time high of 16% in 1995 (Syme 2016). Since then, however, the figures have dropped steadily, as noted in the Introduction. A decade ago, a group of women including Maria began advocating for change once again through the DGA’s Women’s Steering Committee (WSC). The “agitators” proposed a summit to bring together all women at the DGA and discuss avenues for change and they reportedly faced heavy resistance as they attempted to organize the event. Maria later called the WSC a “stagnant committee willing to accept the status quo or ‘chip away’ at the problem incrementally” (Giese 2015c). Maria says they faced opposition:

> The head of the Directors' Guild, Jay Roth, told me, 'If you do this, you are starting a war. You are taking the food off the plates of men.' But, like the Original Six, I have to be fearless. I’m so fed up. I have given my whole life to this profession, and at some point it became clear to

> me that it wasn't my failure. This was a systemic failure, This is a matter of silencing and censoring women's voices. This is bigger than me, and the Original Six are the shoulders I stand upon. I don't think I would have been remotely as credible with the ACLU if I hadn't relied on Victoria [Hochberg] as a mentor.... Those women are heroes, there is not a single women director working now who doesn't have them to thank for their jobs. (Syme 2016)

The DGA presents itself as an ally to women and people of colour, devoting "significant time and resources" to diversity issues for more than 30 years (Directors Guild of America 2022a). In a 2011 *DGA Quarterly* article called "The Good Fight," the union pledged to "keep up the battle" (Stambler 2011). However, accounts from several of my participants suggest there was also an internal "battle" against women directors pressing for change: "They're totally scared of an uprising of women directors," one observer told me. I discuss these developments in broad strokes using public sources, where possible, to protect the careers and identities of my participants.

Despite the tension, Maria and colleagues spent a year putting together the 2013 DGA Women of Action Summit which drew 250 people and featured numerous prominent speakers and roundtable discussions. The keynote address was delivered by Geena Davis, and panellists included *Mad Men* executive producer Matthew Weiner, *Twilight* director Catherine Hardwicke (featured in the next chapter), and filmmaker Robin Swicord (mentioned earlier), among many others.



Figure 64. *Bottom left, wearing white: keynote speaker Geena Davis at the 2013 DGA Women of Action Summit. Behind her sits USC researcher Stacy L. Smith who has compiled significant data about women in film. Image by Tanya Wise.*

According to a summary from the DGA website, “The ultimate goal of the summit was to help build a thriving coalition united in the goal of increasing employment for women DGA members” (Directors Guild of America 2013). This goal was in conflict with the underlying mission of the DGA, according to Maria, who said, “A union run by a bunch of directors who are all competing for jobs does not possess the impartiality to fairly represent women who want to compete for those same jobs” (New Zealand Film Commission 2019). A producer I interviewed on a topic unrelated to the DGA talked about “intentional procrastination” based on fear: “White men, just like these tiki torch dudes [protestors at a 2017 white nationalist rally in North Carolina], they think they see this future where they are not going to exist anymore. They are intentionally stalling progress,” the producer said. Within the DGA, I was told the same “intentional procrastination” and unwillingness to share contact information of potential women participants was creating challenges for those trying to push the summit forward.



Figure 65. *Attendees gathering for lunch at the summit, held at the Guild's Los Angeles theatre complex. Original Six organizer Lynne Littman is seated in the centre facing left, wearing black. Image by Tanya Wise.*

The summit "started a few things," one filmmaker told me. The DGA changed the structure of their Diversity Task force, chaired by former president Paris Barclay and current DGA president Lesli Linka Glatter, and introduced several new committee bylaws. Elections would be held online rather than in-person. This meant all members could vote, even those who did not attend WSC meetings. Two filmmakers told me that this rule change reportedly helped the Guild leadership exert more control over who would be elected. There was also a new rule which stipulated members must have worked for 30 days within the last seven years to participate in elections to prevent "inactive" or "out of touch" filmmakers from gaining control. In a blog post, Maria wrote that the bylaw favoured "highly employed DGA women who were already well-represented by numerous other Guild councils and boards" (Giese 2015b). As a result of this bylaw, some Original Six members lost their rights, as did other underemployed mid-career filmmakers, because they were considered "not working in the trade." "This is the great irony of the WSC," Original Six member Joelle Dobrow is quoted as saying, "We were founded to represent women who were not working. We were meant to be the voice of a huge group of women who had no jobs, who couldn't get jobs" (Syme 2016).

To Dobrow's point, many women were seen as "inactive" because of systemic discrimination, and the WSC was founded to counteract this. These same women could not present themselves as co-chairs or vote for others to represent their interests anymore. Lynne Littman summarized the situation: "[W]omen are twice punished. We are punished once for being women, and then again for not being able to work because we were women," (Syme 2016).

5.3.2 New legal avenues for change

Following her attempts to reform the DGA internally, Maria sought new ways of effecting change through legal action. "Unfortunately, the law moves slowly, and I wanted to move fast," she said during a 2018 speech (TEDx Talks 2018). A filmmaker I interviewed recalled seeing Maria at an early WSC meeting: "She spoke like an attorney. She was on fire. She wanted to take the whole building down," she says. Instead of waiting for the WSC to react, Maria went "to war" (Giese 2015c). On February 14, 2013, Maria met with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Getting little traction there, several weeks later, she turned to Melissa Goodman, the director of advocacy and legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, to outline a case against major studios for employment discrimination against women. Over the next two years, Maria and other filmmakers contributed to the ACLU's investigation, which painted an "incontrovertible picture of bias happening in the industry," according to Goodman (UCLA TFT 2017). On May 12, 2015, the ACLU applied pressure by sending letters to the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, the EEOC, and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP). Their 15-page letter to the EEOC was published in *The New York Times.* The issue could no longer be ignored: "The failure to hire women directors and give them a fair opportunity to succeed in the field is a civil rights issue that our state and federal civil rights agencies should use their time and resources to remedy" (American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California 2015). In the fall of 2015, the EEOC launched a formal

investigation to determine if film studios used discriminatory hiring practices and began interviewing women directors. Maria was the first person called for the interviews, which lasted between four and eight hours, and others soon followed. One participant explained that the investigators started from scratch and had a steep learning curve. They did not know how hiring in Hollywood worked and wanted to be taken through every moment from the minute she was accepted into film school. It is unclear if or when the EEOC investigation ended because they are not obligated to share any information with the public, as mentioned earlier. A "knowledgeable source" told *Deadline* that: "Every one of the major studios has received a charge contending that they failed to hire women directors," (Robb 2017). Recent statistics, however, are more revelatory, particularly in television directing. In 2013-2014, before the EEOC investigation began, women accounted for 17% of TV directors (Directors Guild of America 2014), and by 2020-2021, that figure rose to 39% (Directors Guild of America 2022c). Women of colour directed 2% of episodes in 2013-2014 versus 13% in 2020-2021. There were also positive developments in the first-time TV directors category, with people of colour representing 39% of directors in 2020-21. The numbers suggests that this underrepresented group is now being given an entry point.

5.3.3 Looking back and forward

Rachel Feldman was one of the women involved in creating the 2013 Summit. She is passionate about activism but admits, "It's not moving my career [forward], but I have to fight injustice where I see it." She is no longer involved in the DGA or the WSC at the same level, though colleagues have told her the situation is improving. "The only way I have been able to survive is because of my Pollyanna DNA and my happy life," Rachel says, referring to the excessively optimistic character from literature and films. "Without those two things, the struggle would have injured my spirit." Another filmmaker I interviewed is careful about putting her name in the press because of the potential impact on her career. "You can't change the system if you're not in the system. You need

to play the game and be involved," she says. Despite everything that happened, she is still pressing for change.

Today, "Diversity" is featured prominently on the DGA webpage, and the union states that its goal is to be "a global industry leader in the fight against discrimination" (Directors Guild of America 2022b). Women make up 18% of the directors in the DGA as of June 2021; African Americans represent 4.8%; Latinx represent 3.7%; Asian Americans represent 2.8%; and Native Americans represent 0.2% (Directors Guild of America 2022a). In their diversity FAQ, the union insinuates their hands are tied with regard to current demographics, saying, "Like any labour organization, we are a reflection of the employers' hiring practices…. Eligibility for membership is generally based on who employers hire" (Directors Guild of America 2022a). The DGA bargains with major studios, networks and the industry, and, "many of our proposals are not met with agreement" (Directors Guild of America 2022a). They claim to employ a four-pronged approach: 1) Holding meetings with industry decision-makers "specifically to address diversity in hiring" and share relevant statistics. They created a searchable member database so employers can find "women and ethnic minority members" online. 2) Negotiating with employers through collective bargaining agreements. The Guild has "pushed for diversity-related provisions during collective bargaining with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP)" since 1981, among other measures such as holding "annual diversity meetings with signatory companies" starting in 2002. A Television Director Development program followed in 2014. 3) Providing opportunities for networking, career enhancement and training through their various diversity committees, targeting women, Latinos, Asian Americans, African Americans, and other "ethnically diversity Guild members." 4) Reporting statistics to the industry relating to the ethnicity and gender of television directors and first-time directors on scripted series, among other topics (Directors Guild of America 2022a). These measures aside, there appears to be a disconnect between the "shopfront" of the DGA webpage, which

celebrates diversity and inclusion, and the realities of women directors I interviewed. Brutally honest as ever, Maria is not convinced that the DGA is the right avenue for advocacy:

> Yes, the DGA has radically shifted–as if an earthquake hit them, but their response has been to fortify their walls, pull in, cover their tracks, and put on a false show of making change. Their corruption is even deeper now as they have imposed discriminatory new by-laws that silence activism in the Guild. Their system of cronyism is even more entrenched as they identified and deputized female allies among the membership willing to sell out in exchange for jobs and positions in DGA governance. They have actively recruited women to help them silence feminist activism by members like me. (M. Evans 2017)

5.3.4 Career ending

Despite the statistical shift and recent attention paid to gender parity, Maria's activism over the last decade has not been well-received by many peers. "…Hollywood does not like whistle-blowers (they only like making movies about them)," filmmaker Lexi Alexander tweeted in 2018 (@lexialex 2018b). Alexander points out the twisted irony: stories about whistle-blowers make for captivating cinema, but they are seen as troublemakers if involved in the industry itself. When Maria first asked other women to come with her to the EEOC, none were willing, fearing repercussions. When the ACLU investigation began, her recruitment of other women was slow at first. Their hesitation was not unfounded–research shows women are more fearful of the repercussions of whistleblowing, and the women who follow through are more likely to face retaliation than men (Rehg et al. 2008). This has been partly explained by social role theory (Carli et al. 1999), which asserts that American women are expected to remain in line and keep their opinions to themselves. When they violate the social order by blowing the whistle, they face harsher punishments than men would (Rehg et al. 2008, 223–224). Perry (1998, 235) defines whistle-blowers as "insiders who go public." It's worth noting that Maria was never really an "insider" but was objecting to the impediments to becoming one, which is my essential argument: no matter what they do, women filmmakers never reach the inner circle. Whistle-blowers act on principle, making the difficult decision to disobey authority

because of their higher regard for “truth” or “justice” (Lennane 2012, 249). Furthermore, they dissent from “the accepted culture, internal principles and practice of the organization”, such as the old boys’ networks in this case. Alford (2002) claims that it is less risky for women to speak out because they are not usually part of men’s networks and thus have less to lose if they damage relationships. Lawyer Anita Hill (2002) expanded on this, writing in a *New York Times* piece that women’s “outsider” status is perhaps the reason they are starting to speak out more; women are reaching higher positions while not being integrated. A decade earlier, she “spoke truth to power” while testifying that US Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas sexually harassed her when she was his assistant at the Department of Education and the EEOC, of all places (A. Hill 2018). While government whistle-blowers who “serve the public interest” are protected by legislation (Levin 1989), no such protection exists for filmmakers operating in a reputation-based industry, with insider networks and word-of-mouth hiring favouring white men–the very things Maria was rallying against.

Before interviewing Maria, I asked if she wanted to remain anonymous, but her response was categorical: “I don’t like being anonymous; I think that’s the whole problem.” Maria wants the law meant to protect individuals from employment discrimination, Title VII, to be reformed so that those who take a stand will be protected. If women cannot get hired because of their gender and cannot speak about it without being punished, “[W]ell that means that law doesn’t work,” she says in her Tedx Talk (TEDx Talks 2018). Instead of lamenting the career she “didn’t have,” Maria brought attention to the plight of women directors through blog posts, social media, media outreach and speaking engagements. She became the face of the ACLU complaint and EEOC investigation, with the media reporting on her “crusade” (Dargis 2015; Eng 2015; Lanz 2015). However, being a “hero” (@hopedickle 2019) for women filmmakers has cost her professionally and personally. Today, she has been ostracized, she says. In addition to ending her career and hurting her finances, “This has been really consuming

for my whole family and it still kind of is," she tells me in 2022. After developing dead-end scripts, losing jobs to men, enduring unemployment, dealing with a toxic environment, and ultimately damaging her reputation, I asked why she still wants to work in film:

> It's who you become. I can't stop trying to direct films; it's second nature to me. I think about movies all the time. Every article or book I read, I think about how that could be a film? When I think my career is over, which I think about a lot, a few minutes later I'm back to pursuing another project. There isn't anything else I want to do. Somebody said it best, that being an artist of any kind is like a gambling addiction. You're gambling on yourself and can't put it away.

In an email, Maria told me that her "end-game" since 2012 has been to try to get a class action suit before the courts and hopefully take the fight to the US Supreme Court (Giese 2022). As of 2022, she is developing four independent films and recently co-produced *Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power* (2022, dir. Nina Menkes), a documentary which premiered at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival about how the entrenched language of cinema objectifies women on-screen and results in employment discrimination and a global culture of sexual harassment and abuse off-screen. Maria has been a subject of several documentaries and books and was a guest speaker at Stanford University the day before we spoke. Of all the people I have approached for my research since 2015, she has been the most forthcoming, making herself available by phone, text and email. She has sent me web links and legal documents and invited me to stay with her in Connecticut so we could speak further, though I could not go due to family commitments. "I'm so glad you're writing about it at all!" she wrote in an email.



Figure 66. *Marie Giese holding up a copy of the* Los Angeles Times *from May 13, 2015, with her picture on the cover. The headline reads: "Female directors are on the outside looking in." Image courtesy of Maria Giese.*

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of women's challenges as they reach the "mid-career" mark, a decidedly "unsexy" stage when they are too old to benefit from initiatives for young talent and perceived as not experienced enough to handle complex productions. Because women have not directed many big-budget features, they are rarely allowed to do so and are eclipsed by less experienced men. Industry members judge women based on their credits while judging men for what they might be able to do (sometimes offering personalized coaching too). Having few women in senior filmmaking roles wielding money and power also means there are few mentors available to guide women and "open doors" to more opportunities. Mid-career women flounder and are

faced with few options; they apply for “diversity programs” hoping to build the connections needed to find employment in television. The programs are a good idea “on paper” but fail to achieve results. With so many filmmakers desperate to find a way to “break in” the competition for shadowing positions is fierce, and the filmmakers chosen to participate are usually over-qualified–they should be working already. These ineffective programs rarely lead to jobs without a senior industry member's intervention and put considerable financial strain on filmmakers who earn little to no money and need more effective forms of support. To reverse this cycle, decision-makers like Catherine Reitman take a chance on women who may have less experience on paper and manage to create award-winning content.

Mid-career filmmakers mobilize in different ways to achieve inclusion. They participate in mentorship and shadowing before attempting to change the system through advocacy. Some institutions that are supposed to advocate for directors seemingly disadvantage women through their working practices, even if they publicly appear to provide support. After women failed to achieve progress at the DGA, they changed tactics and tried more aggressive approaches. In her keynote at the 2013 DGA Women of Action summit, Geena Davis said, “Every woman who is a director is a true hero, in my opinion, because you’re blazing a trail” (Directors Guild of America 2013). And blaze a trail they did. To call attention to the impasse they were facing, women resorted to legal action against their would-be employers in 1983 and again in 2013-2015. They sacrificed their careers but opened up opportunities for other women. It is too early to tell if the statistical changes will be long-lasting. During our 2022 phone call, Maria tells me that many women have ascended to more powerful positions in film and television because of the EEOC investigation. Still, no one has offered her a job. Though she cannot pursue feature filmmaking in Hollywood, she knows that she has made an impact: “I think what I’ve accomplished is very different from what I thought I would. I think I’ve made a very significant impact on our industry and culture.”

Chapter 6 | Established Filmmakers



Figure 67. *Catherine Hardwicke at an event in June 2009 following the release of* Twilight*. "Catherine Hardwicke" by James Jeffrey licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

In 2008, a movie adaptation of a novel about teenage vampires was released and the studio expected it to appeal to "about 400 girls in Salt Lake City," (Desta 2018a). Executives at Summit Entertainment told the film's director, Catherine Hardwicke, to reduce the budget by $4 million at the last minute (Desta 2018a). Hardwicke, who won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival with her acclaimed film *Thirteen* (2003) (Bradshaw 2003; Hans 2019b), believes their low expectations allowed her to secure the job in the first place: "Why do you think they hired a female director? If they thought it was going to be a big blockbuster, they wouldn't have ever even hired me, because no woman had ever been hired to do something in the blockbuster category [at that point]," Hardwicke said (Zimmerman 2018). To their surprise, *Twilight* (2008) became a "Cinderella story" for Summit (Barnes 2008), making $407 million (Box Office Mojo 2020e)–the highest box office gross for a film directed by a woman at the time–and launching a young-adult franchise boom (Desta 2018a). It also launched the careers of

actors Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson, who became an heartthrob (Cartter 2022; Van Paris 2017; Ide 2022). With *Twilight*'s success, the formerly "tiny" studio (Barnes 2008) was ranked eighth for overall market share in 2009 (Statista 2009).

After "breaking in" to the highly exclusive studio structure and achieving unprecedented box office success, Hardwicke thought that life post-*Twilight* would be "easy" (Setoodeh et al. 2013). Speaking at a 2015 event at the Bentonville Film Festival, Hardwicke says she heard that studios often reward directors with a car, a two-film deal, or carte blanche to develop new projects (Hardwicke 2015). Following the film's unprecedented debut, she went into the studio offices on Monday morning to do some "online chat" work and found the staff celebrating in her absence, with "massive bouquets and balloons and bottles of wine" (Zimmerman 2018). They gave Hardwicke a mini cupcake. She thought, "Oh, ok, cool–coming in here, I'm sort of working for free, doing this online stuff, and that was what I was offered: a mini cupcake" (Zimmerman 2018).

Based on the success of the first film, the studio saw the potential to develop numerous profitable sequels. Hardwicke was reportedly fired from the next film because, according to an unnamed source, the executives thought she was "difficult" and "irrational" (Finke 2008; Zimmerman 2018)–both gendered terms (Baker 2018; King 2020)–though Hardwicke maintains it was due to scheduling conflicts (Hewitt 2008). She said she wanted more preparation time and Summit was anxious to begin production "yesterday" (Hewitt 2008). No other women directors were hired for *Twilight Saga* films; all four sequels were directed by white men, which is curious considering Hollywood's preference for repeating profitable formulas. I suspect there may be a link between *Twilight*'s profit potential and the decision to employ men for the sequels. Men are perceived as "safer" choices in part because of the proven track record of the many men who have made successful films in film history. At the time, Catherine Hardwicke was the first woman to make a film that was *this* profitable, so there was no data on women repeating success. Summit executives may have been influenced by the underlying

assumption that women directors are less likely to consistently deliver success because women directors had never had the chance to consistently deliver anything. Ironically, Hardwicke may have become unemployed for doing her job *too well*; the franchise grew so popular that she was replaced by a "safer" choice. At that point, her career stalled and when she finally signed on to another film several years later, she was asked to take a 57% pay cut (Setoodeh 2015).

6.1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter explores the complexities of studio filmmaking, typically reserved for "established" directors who have made multiple features. By obtaining a highly sought-after studio position, a very small minority of (mostly white) women filmmakers have seemingly escaped the volatility of emerging and mid-career stages, however in reality, they are entering a new phase of uncertainty, with additional challenges and risks.

Though I refer to the women in this chapter as "established" they do not enjoy the job security or clout that would typically be associated with gaining a foothold in a particular field. A "foothold" is a base to use for forward advancement, and is associated with stability and safety. At this stage, women filmmakers occupy an "in-between" category which involves working on projects of a similar scale as established male directors, with none of the protection. I argue that a studio deal does not significantly alter the status of women filmmakers and that they remain peripheral. The data in this chapter, largely compiled from secondary sources, shows that women's career progression is not linear, and after moving from a low-budget film to a studio feature, many are unable to find work or must return to low-budget filmmaking, a move which is perceived as a demotion. While this happens to men too, many more men escape this fate and work on progressively larger projects. With so few women in the top tiers of studio filmmaking, this issue becomes amplified because it seems to affect almost all women in this category.

Women's low status in studio filmmaking leads to gender-based adversity and they must continually prove their worth. Ryan et al. (2007, 550) argue that women overcome great odds to break through the "glass ceiling" and then face a "second wave" of discrimination that hinders their progress, as I explain throughout this chapter. In some cases, studios hire women to direct films for which they have low expectations (e.g., *Twilight*) or films which are seen as stereotypically "female" (e.g., dramas or romantic comedies). It can be challenging for women to break away from these genres, whereas men are considered capable of directing different types of films. Women directors may be also replaced if their film demonstrates the potential to make significant profit (e.g., *Twilight*). The women filmmakers discussed in this chapter are personally blamed if the film is deemed a "failure" even if they had limited control over the finished product. They wrestle with studio executives in decision making, resulting in a muddled vision. Male directors, in contrast, recover more easily from "flops" and are given the opportunity to try again, whereas the women I have highlighted endure lengthy periods of unemployment. Since there are so few women directors employed by studios, they also carry an additional burden–they are seen as representing all women and their perceived missteps have far-reaching repercussions. Finally, it can be difficult to prove that women are not hired again because of their gender, as opposed to for other reasons. In addition to research that shows many women directors do not make subsequent films (Smith et al. 2017), anecdotal evidence reveals that women filmmakers are often unable to find additional work even after directing critically acclaimed or financially successful films (Patterson 2008; Gilbey 2011; Desta 2018a), which I discuss in further detail.

N.B. Most of the data in this chapter has been collected from the media. Few women "break in" to studio directing, and once they do, they become impossible to reach. I include my participants' perspectives where relevant.

6.1.2 Glass ceiling, glass escalator and glass cliff

Though women are somewhat better represented in corporate leadership than they were in the past (Women Business Collaborative et al. 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021), women are still unable to reach top positions due to invisible barriers– the "glass ceiling" (Maume 1999). Across industries, there has been a persistent "manager equals male" stereotype (Berthoin Antal et al. 1993) that limits access to leadership roles. A 1989 study showed that male middle managers prefer managers who exemplify "masculine" traits while female middle managers appreciate managers with a wider range of qualities (Brenner et al. 1989). Kanter (1977) found that women were often forced into "female" jobs (clerical or administrative) alongside other women and did not benefit from training and assignments that would assist them should they be promoted. In cases where female secretaries gained higher positions, they lacked managerial skills and their shortcomings were attributed to their gender.

Women struggle to move up in male-dominated positions while white men in female-dominated positions "must work to stay in place" (Williams 1992), that is, they cannot avoid being promoted, even without effort. Williams likens this to being on a moving escalator that carries men upward (towards promotions) even if they do nothing by standing still (Williams 1992, 256). When women do pierce through the glass ceiling, they are sometimes offered positions in failing companies. Psychologists Alexander Haslam and Michelle Ryan (2008) coined the term "glass cliff" to describe how these women are destined to fail. When the companies continue to decline, the newly appointed CEOs, often women, are held responsible, which contributes to the stereotype that women are not equipped to lead.

The filmmakers discussed in this chapter are still held back by the glass ceiling, and others find themselves at the edge of a glass cliff, worried that their "failure" will reflect on all women. Their behaviour is judged more harshly than men's behaviour, even for identical actions (such as crying on set). They do not compete for opportunities on

equal footing with white male directors, and are worried about making mistakes that could cost them their jobs. Before exploring these double standards in further detail, an overview will introduce the reader to studio filmmaking.

6.2 Directing studio features

Studio filmmaking is a complex industrial process involving billions of dollars and thousands of jobs. “Major” studios own production facilities and partner with affiliated production companies who develop projects and oversee production. Studios typically finance a large portion of the projects and handle the distribution of films made by these independent companies. There are also varying types of studios, with these major studios occupying the largest market share: Universal Pictures, Paramount Pictures, Warner Bros. Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures, Columbia Pictures. The major studios are owned by entertainment conglomerates who also operate their own production companies, television networks, and streaming providers, among many other divisions and brands. Next, there are the “mini-major” studios, such as Lionsgate Films and STX Films, followed by independent studios that are sometimes absorbed by larger studios if successful (e.g., Marvel Studios, Lucasfilm, Pixar Animation Studios, DreamWorks Pictures and Summit Entertainment).

This chapter describes conflicts which have arisen between directors and the studios that employed them–a relationship that is often adversarial in nature because studios hold the purse strings and directors spend their money, as explored in the Introduction. Directors strive to execute their creative visions, while producers, who oversee the logistical execution of the film from start to finish, often try to constrain that vision: pushing for “safer” creative decisions; questioning whether expensive or time-consuming elements are really necessary; maintaining relationships with executives and investors; and doing everything possible to complete the film within budget and on time. It is important to note that directors are regularly fired from productions over “creative

differences"–a diplomatic "catch all" phrase that conceals the true reasons–and the relationship can be strained for both men and women. My purpose is to highlight cases in which these "creative differences" are gendered in nature, and to identify gendered patterns which have emerged from media accounts about high-profile projects involving both women and men as studio directors. Gender is the focus of this chapter because there is limited data about the experiences of women of colour directing studio films, most likely because very few women of colour are active in studio filmmaking, which is another topic worthy of inquiry.

Studio filmmaking is complicated because of added bureaucracy at every step. Filmmakers have significantly more resources at their disposal but they are accountable to the studio, investors, producers, "the talent" (actors), agents, managers, and the audience, who each have ideas and demands. Gabriela Tagliavini, an Argentinian director now based in Hollywood, has made films in and out of the studios and says the story determines the right fit. In her view, a commercial comedy with broad appeal is well-suited to the studios because it will have a wide distribution, whereas a quirkier project lacking mass appeal might be a better fit for independent filmmaking. Gabriela explains some pros and cons of studio filmmaking:

> In the studio system, there's more people involved. More executives, development executives, marketing executives. You as a director, part of your job is to create and part is to listen to everybody's ideas. A lot of times the executives have great ideas, you listen, and it's part of the process. Sometimes when there are too many opinions, directors lose their core and their style. So it's important to listen to everybody but keep your vision. Yes, some directors prefer the independent route, because they think, "I don't want to lose all control." The problem is that, yes, you have control but you don't have marketing. You don't have posters and advertising. So then very few people see your movie. There's not a right or wrong choice, just choices that are yours to make.

Some of my participants, accustomed to handling all aspects of indie production without having their choices overseen by committees, are wary of working under these conditions. However even if they wanted to, it is statistically unlikely that they would be able to direct a studio feature. To expand on statistics from the Introduction, male

directors outnumbered women directors by 22 to 1 among 1,200 of the “top-grossing” films from 2007 to 2018, with women directing 4% of features in that period (Smith, Choueiti, Choi, et al. 2019). From 2007 to 2018, there were almost no women of colour directing studio films; only 46 individual women were involved in directing “top” films, of which 39 were white, 4 were Black, 2 were Asian and 1 was Latinx (Smith, Choueiti, Choi, et al. 2019). Figure 57 in the last chapter shows that women directors are much better represented in low-budget (and low-risk) filmmaking.

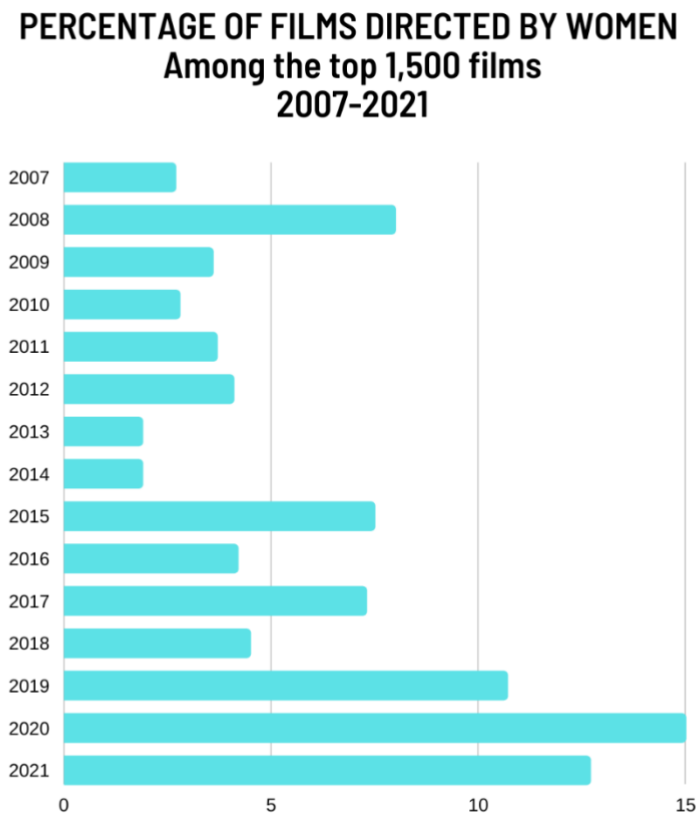


Figure 68. *Starting in 2015, the number of women involved in the 100 top-grossing films per year began increasing. By 2019, the change was more pronounced. Graph by the author using data from Smith et al. (2022).*

One may assume that since the #MeToo movement and 2015 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) investigation shed light on gender inequality in Hollywood, the situation may have improved dramatically. In fact, there has been a small shift: women accounted for 10.7% of directors of the 100 top-grossing films of 2019, compared with 4.5% in 2018 and 2.7% in 2007 (Smith et al. 2020). By 2020, the figure

rose to 15%, followed by 12.7% in 2021 (Smith et al. 2022). While the shift is encouraging, three out of seven of the major studios hired no women directors for their features in 2019 (Warner Bros., Lionsgate and Paramount), whereas at the remaining studios, women directors accounted for between 8 and 25% of feature directors (Smith et al. 2020). In total, one hundred male directors and 12 female directors were hired for 2019's top-grossing films (Smith et al. 2020, 2). With projects remaining "in development" for significant periods of time before being "greenlit," it is possible that demographic change will become more apparent in the coming years. It is important to note that the statistics released annually by Lauzen and Smith detail the number of women involved in the top-grossing projects and do not reveal how many women are involved in less profitable studio features, a category in which they may be better represented. However, the figures show that women are rarely involved in "top-tier" projects with the highest investment and highest risk (see Figure 68 for a visualization).

6.2.1 A self-reinforcing spiral

The scale and reach of studios are of critical importance–if the studio invests significant sums in a project, they will "get behind" it with their expansive resources to ensure its financial success. The average feature from a major studio costs approximately $100 million, and marketing represents around half of the budget (Bedard 2022). Studios attract audiences through marketing and by distributing the film to thousands of theatres globally. Not all highly-profitable films are well-reviewed, nor is that relevant when the studio apparatus is in operation. For instance, *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (2008, dir. Rob Cohen), the third film in *The Mummy* franchise starring Brendan Fraser, cost $145 million and made $403 million in 3,778 theatres worldwide (Box Office Mojo 2022e) despite its 13% approval rating and poor reviews (Rotten Tomatoes 2022b). Meanwhile another blockbuster, *The Last Airbender* (2010, dir. M. Night Shyamalan), cost $150 million and made $319 million worldwide with a 5% approval rating from critics (Box Office Mojo 2022d; Rotten Tomatoes 2022a). John

Walsh (2010) from *The Independent* called the film a "breathtakingly clueless, misconceived, stupid, humourless, unexciting, dim, dumb farrago, the worst film I've seen in years." The highest-grossing films in a given year are typically studio films that benefit from this approach. If studios can guarantee a large audience for a film, they can spend more money on it, leading to higher production values,[66] which attract a larger audience. In his book about Nigeria's Nollywood film industry, Haynes (2017, 4) refers to this as a "self-reinforcing spiral towards dominance." The aforementioned data shows that women directors are usually excluded from this cycle of investment and promotion because they are rarely involved in higher-budget projects. When industry members say, "Films made by women don't make money," as I commonly heard during fieldwork, it is often because films directed by women are not given the equal opportunity to make money with the studio's backing. Writing for *The New York Times* more than 40 years ago, Sally Ogle (1981) proposed, "If given the big studio treatment–major distribution, widespread advertising and marketing–a woman's film can be just as successful as any other good, well-promoted film." Therefore, if a film directed by a woman makes less money, it is not because she is a woman, but because her film did not benefit from the promotion and audience guarantees of big studio films. For instance, of the 48 films that have made at least $1 billion at the worldwide box office, only three involved women directors and all three were co-directed with men (Bean 2020; Box Office Mojo 2020a; Box Office Mojo 2021; Box Office Mojo 2022a).[67] Thus far, no woman director has been trusted on her own with the resources needed to make a film that *could* gross $1 billion. As filmmaker Rachel Feldman said in the last chapter, the fact that she has not had the opportunity to make a feature film meant she would not be given the chance to make

[66] Production values are defined as the "overall quality of a movie as determined by its technical merits. This value is based on criteria like set design, special effects, and costumes rather than the more creative and subjective criteria such as directing, acting, and writing" (StudioBinder 2021b).

[67] *Frozen* (2013, dir. Chris Budd & Jennifer Lee) grossed $1.28 billion, *Frozen 2* (2019, dir. Chris Budd & Jennifer Lee) grossed $1.45 billion, and *Captain Marvel* (2019, dir. Anna Boden & Ryan Fleck)–starring Brie Larsen–grossed $1.12 billion (Bean 2020).

such a film. The same applies here: because women directors have not been given large budgets, they do not make as much money as men, so they continue making films with small- to medium-sized budgets. As a result, “women’s films” are perceived as being less profitable and women directors are relegated to the lowest tier of studio filmmaking–if allowed “in” at all. In addition to the challenges of making a studio film (handling a multi-million dollar budget, hundreds of crew members, and complex shooting periods), women directors face structural obstacles when working for studios, as this chapter shows.

While my participants are critical of the studio system and the amount of control they would have to relinquish to work within it, many are still vying to direct studio films. But not all. Actor and emerging filmmaker Audrey is not drawn to working with studios because, as she says, she “likes being a director.” To her, directing means having control over the vision. She also wonders if she does not think of herself as a studio director because the role has not been modelled for her; the filmmakers she admires are working outside the studios. Others may prefer to work on projects in more intimate settings–filmmaker Mira Nair turned down one of the Harry Potter films because she said it was too technically oriented and she preferred to work with “humans” (Prabhudesai 2004).

6.2.2 Typecasting

Women filmmakers’ professional opportunities are sometimes thwarted because of stereotypes linked to gender essentialism–the belief that men or women’s qualities are determined by biology, not one’s environment (Smiler et al. 2008) (e.g., “Boys will be boys,”). Gender essentialism has contributed to women’s uncertain status by limiting the types of projects women are considered qualified to be involved in. Many of my participants said they believe that women possess gender-based qualities that aid them as filmmakers. Several said that women are good at organization, they are sensitive, they have the capacity to listen and work collaboratively, and their maternal qualities help with managing a set. A few participants said they did not subscribe to these beliefs, but

noted if women are seen as good organizers it is perhaps because they are often relegated to crew positions that require tracking information and planning ahead.

While men regularly write and direct films across a wide spectrum of storylines and styles, women are seen as not qualified to direct specific types of films, e.g., genre films (including science fiction, adventure, or action). If a woman does not have experience with action or science fiction, it would be challenging for her to convince a producer or studio executive that she is able to deliver a film or series in that category. Men do not face such challenges, according to director Lexi Alexander. “Women have to be ‘one of the boys’ to get in on the superhero business, whereas male directors don’t have to have any proof on their resume that they can deliver hardcore action,” she is quoted as saying in a 2015 article entitled, “Why Women Aren't Being Hired To Direct Superhero Movies, According To Only Female Director Of A Superhero Movie” (Libbey 2015). As the headline implies, Alexander was the only woman who had directed a big-budget superhero feature at the time, 2008’s *Punisher: War Zone*. Alexander believes that women only get hired for action films if their previous work is “masculine” (Libbey 2015). As the chart below indicates, men were more likely to direct action by a ratio of 68 to 1 (Smith, Choueiti, Choi, et al. 2019, 2).

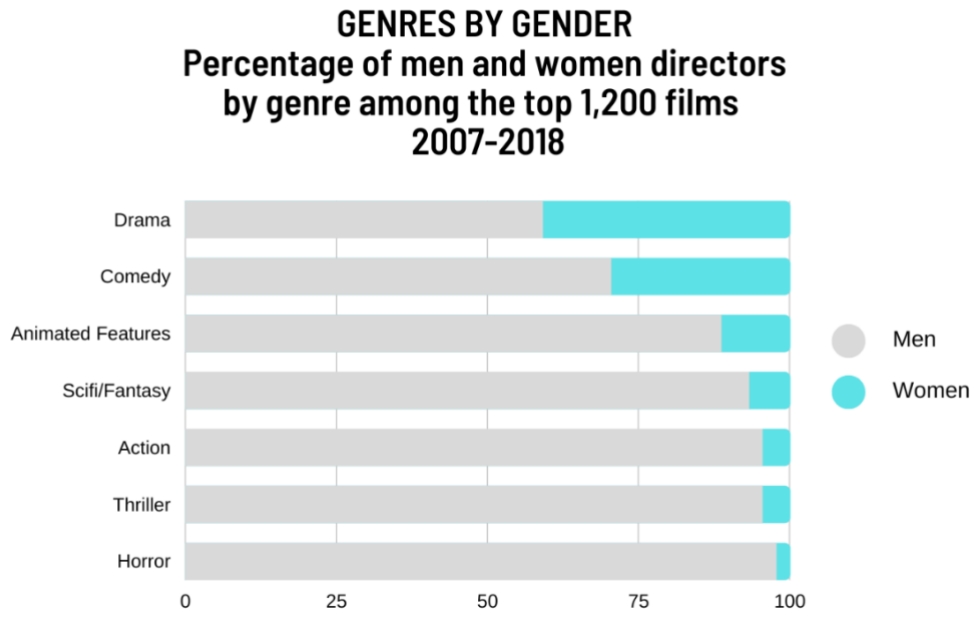


Figure 69. *Women directors are more likely to direct dramas or comedies, while more expensive action films and thrillers are primarily directed by men. Between 2007 and 2018, only one "top" horror film was directed by a woman. Graph by the author using data from Smith et al. (2019, 1).*

Assigning specific attributes to men and women is reductive and limits opportunities, primarily for women in studio filmmaking who have been sequestered in dramas and comedies (seen in Figure 69). If a woman director strays from the aforementioned genres and finds success in other categories, it is typically seen as a "positive" development; however Kathryn Bigelow was not immune to criticism for doing so. Known for *Point Break* (1991) and *The Hurt Locker* (2008), Bigelow became the first woman in 82 years of Oscar history to win the award for Best Director in 2010. Because her films feature male protagonists and often explore unconventional forms of masculinity, she was accused of making "male films" (Adams 2010) and for masquerading as a "hyper-macho bad boy to win the respect of a male-dominated industry" (Nochimson 2010). Indeed, core members of the industry have a tendency to celebrate work that more closely resembles their own (Cattani et al. 2014), which, according to Bourdieu (1993, 20), guarantees "the continued reproduction of the legitimacy of those who produce or defend the canon." Voting members of the Academy

of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences may be guilty of perpetuating such stereotypes and reinforcing the validity of their own work by celebrating Bigelow, but casting her films as "male" or "not female enough" is an oversimplification and generalizes about topics that are of interest to women (McClay 2010; Barscay 2008). By suggesting that a woman should not make so-called "muscular" films (Nochimson 2010) with male protagonists, one is further pigeonholing women. Film critic Manohla Dargis (2010) argues that Bigelow is helping to "dismantle stereotypes about what types of films women can and should direct."

Demonstrating an ability to make "masculine" films is not necessarily enough to convince a studio to hire a woman if she is competing against men, though. During a podcast, Lexi Alexander discussed the fact that she and Catherine Hardwicke (of *Twilight* fame*)* wanted to be considered as potential directors for the 2010 boxing film, *The Fighter,* which featured Mark Wahlberg, Christian Bale, and Amy Adams (Schmoedown Entertainment Network 2014). Hardwicke was upset that she was not allowed to pitch for the project and went public with the reason she was given: it was an action film about boxing, so, "I was told it had to be directed by a man," she said (Weinstein 2011). Director David O. Russell (e.g., *Flirting With Disaster*, 1996, and *I Heart Huckabees*, 2004) was chosen, to the ire of Alexander, who is known for being a former karate and kickboxing champion (Dargis 2005). Her 2005 feature, *Green Street Hooligans*, was about violent football hooligans, and her 2008 film, *Punisher: War Zone*, featured elaborate action and graphic violence. Alexander said:

> I have to watch as David O. Russell gets the job. Can you imagine? … I mean, I fucking killed a guy in the ring. I'm joking now. But that's an issue …. I know everything about boxing that there is to know. I was nominated for an Oscar for a 40-minute film about a boxer. It just sucks. We [women directors] get told this *all* the time. (Schmoedown Entertainment Network 2014)

Alexander's boxing film, released in 2002, was the first film she directed and it was nominated in the highly competitive Best Live Action Short Film category at the

Oscars (IMDb 2020b). After they hired Russell, one of *The Fighter*'s producers reportedly said about Alexander: "You know what, she gave us such great notes on the script. We're using all her notes" (Schmoedown Entertainment Network 2014). While the producers valued Alexander's insight as a filmmaker, they did not hire her because, according to Hardwicke, they felt a man was better suited to direct a film with "male" subject matter. *The Fighter* was nominated for seven Oscars including Best Picture and Best Director, winning two awards in acting categories (IMDb 2020f).

While some believe women lack the skills or experience to direct specific categories of films, others believe that women filmmakers are not interested in such content. Jason Blum, the producer behind numerous successful horror films, was criticized in 2018 for saying that there were not many women directors, and even fewer who wanted to direct horror (Patches 2018; Sims 2018).[68] Colin Trevorrow, already a controversial figure for his relationship with Steven Spielberg, tweeted that he did not believe women wanted to direct genre films featuring "superheroes, spaceships, or dinosaurs," because they had too much artistic integrity (@colintrevorrow 2015). The tweet was in a response to a question about whether Trevorrow believed he would have been hired to direct *Jurassic World* if he were a woman (@AutisticWeirdo 2015). Not only was Trevorrow suggesting he was taking a job that no woman would want–essentially doing them a favour–he generalized about the type of filmmaking women are interested in. On the one hand, women filmmakers are seen as unqualified to direct action/adventure films involving dinosaurs, and on the other hand, they are too sophisticated for "low-brow" material. As mentioned, at the time of Trevorrow's hiring for *Jurassic World*, no woman had ever directed a film with a budget that large ($150 million).

[68] The following day, Blum apologized for his "dumb comments" and said, "I will do better," (Bui 2018). In March 2020, it was announced that Blumhouse hired Karyn Kusama to direct an upcoming Dracula film (McNary 2020b), which was cancelled three weeks before production began over "creative differences" with Kusama (Fleming Jr. et al. 2022).

While women's options are limited, numerous male directors have built their careers around "female-fronted" films, with prominent female characters for female audiences, including Todd Haynes (*Far From Heaven*, 2002), Pedro Almodóvar (*All About My Mother*, 1999), and Paul Feig (*Bridesmaids*, 2011), among others. With so few women employed as directors in the studios, many iconic "feminist" films have also been directed by men, including *Thelma and Louise* (1991, dir. Ridley Scott), *9 to 5* (1980, dir. Colin Higgins) and *The Color Purple* (1985, dir. Steven Spielberg). Based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Alice Walker about Black women in the Southern US, *The Color Purple* was not considered a stretch for Spielberg, who was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in Ohio, and was known for action films. Kathleen Kennedy, of *Star Wars* fame, was one of the producers of *The Color Purple*. Even many #MeToo era films and series are made by male directors and showrunners, including the drama *Bombshell* (2019), about the toxic environment for women journalists at Fox News (directed by Jay Roach), mini-series *The Loudest Voice* (2019) about the downfall of Roger Ailes, also at Fox News (created by Tom McCarthy and Alex Metcalf), and the documentary *The Reckoning: Hollywood's Worst Kept Secret* (2018, dir. Barry Avrich) about sexual misconduct in Hollywood. Two well-regarded documentaries about women filmmakers were also directed by white men: *Women Make Film: A New Road Movie Through Cinema* (2018, dir. Mark Cousins), a 14-hour film that "spans 13 decades and five continents to give a guided tour of the art and craft of movies as told by female filmmakers," and *This Changes Everything* (2018, dir. Tom Donahue), about gender disparity in Hollywood, executive produced by Geena Davis. Some argue that male directors associated with these films should be applauded as "allies" (Debruge 2018), and others say these opportunities should have gone to women (Felperin 2018).

6.3 Blaming women

Once "inside" the studios, women filmmakers often have trouble adapting to their new environments. Due to their low status, inexperience with the system, and limited

mentorship, they often lack the power and clout needed to fight back when studios request drastic or unreasonable changes to the films they are working on. This section also explores the double standards at play in Hollywood filmmaking, in which women are more likely to be punished if their films are perceived as failures and how their mistakes cast a pall over all women, even if they had little say over the project. I discuss how male directors are given second and third chances to succeed; they can display eccentric and exasperating behaviour because they are "visionaries"; and they can get away with almost any misbehaviour. As filmmaker Lexi Alexander says in the next chapter, women are called "difficult" if they sneeze in the wrong direction. Research has shown that when women take on leadership positions traditionally occupied by men, their behaviour is judged more harshly, particularly if the judges are male (Eagly et al. 1992). Eagly et al. (1992) found that women who used typically "male" leadership styles (e.g. autocratic and nonparticipative) are more likely to be devalued even if they behave the same way men do. When male leaders are brash or assertive, they are seen as doing their jobs effectively, whereas women doing the same are perceived as inappropriate or pushy (Ryan et al. 2007, 551). In the field of accounting, Ann Hopkins was denied partnership at Price Waterhouse even though she was a "top performer." She had the most billable hours of any candidate for partnership that year (Fiske et al. 1991, 1050), but was assertive and forceful, which was negatively perceived by colleagues. She was called "macho" and advised to walk, talk, and dress "more femininely," (Hopkins v. Price Waterhouse 1985, 1117). Her partnership candidacy was put on hold and not considered the following year so she took legal action. Fiske et al. (1991) contend that a man would not have been judged the same way. The district judge ruled the Price Waterhouse's evaluation process for partners was tainted by stereotyping and discrimination based on gender (Hopkins v. Price Waterhouse 1985, 1118), though the company appealed. Eagly et al. (1992) suggest that women "pay a price" for taking on "male" positions or using "male" leadership styles, and that some may try to compensate by aiming to be twice as competent as their male counterparts (Eagly et al. 1992, 18). The "selective devaluation"

phenomenon Eagly et al. (1992, 19) describe could "preserve the traditional division of labour and discourage women from seeking positions that offer higher income and status." According to Ryan et al. (2007, 551), women leaders are in a "lose-lose situation" because: "If their behaviour confirms the gender stereotype, they are not thought to be acting as a proper leader, but if their behaviour is consistent with the leader stereotype, they are not thought to be acting as a proper woman." As this thesis shows, women filmmakers cannot win no matter what they do. I demonstrate this using several examples that have been covered in the media.

Until recently, director Karyn Kusama was in "movie jail"–the term for filmmakers being punished for making "bad films" (Ellwood 2016; Yamato 2016). Born in a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, to a Japanese father and white midwestern mother, she left her racially homogenous hometown to study film at New York University (Horowitz 2006, 164–165). Her debut feature, *Girlfight* (2000), was about a troubled Latinx boxer played by Michelle Rodriguez and received considerable "buzz" when it premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. After winning the festival's top awards (Best Director and the Grand Jury Prize) and gaining international distribution (Cochrane 2000), *Variety* called her "a major new talent" (Levy 2000).[69] Still, it took years to secure her follow-up project, *Æon Flux* (2005), a big-budget science fiction film starring Charlize Theron (Vary 2016). Grateful to be working on a studio film but unsure of how to navigate her role, she encountered numerous problems. Originally budgeted for $112 million, the film had its funding cut in half and the studio head changed three times over the course of production (Satter 2016). With each new leader came a new vision for the film. When the executives did not like the "$50 million art film" she had directed, new editors were brought in and Kusama lost control; her creative decisions were dismantled and the film became unrecognizable (Vary 2016). In an in-depth interview with BuzzFeed from which I

[69] I saw *Girlfight* when it came out in 2000, and it was one of the films that developed my interest in independent filmmaking and the perspectives of women as directors.

gathered much material, she said it was like having “open-heart surgery without the painkillers" (Vary 2016). Kusama continues:

> This is where gender plays a part. This is where big personalities and power and influence really make a difference. Because I just didn't have anyone who could advocate for why it was important that they treat me better. There are so few playbooks to go by in my situation. It was kind of like I was in this primeval forest.

As a woman of colour making her first studio film, Kusama had no status or leverage. While male filmmakers like Colin Trevorrow often rely on senior mentors, Kusama had no ally to support her ideas. She was overpowered and outnumbered, wandering in a “primeval forest” in a liminal state of being. Based on a $62 million budget, *Æon Flux* only grossed $53.2 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo 2020b) and received poor reviews (e.g., Smith 2006; Bradshaw 2006). At a Women in Film panel I attended in October 2016, Kusama said that in some respects, the executives were willing to engineer a failure and that she was still processing what happened a decade later:

> I got a phone call from my agent at the time … I was panicking. “What are we going to do? What are we going to do?” And he just said, “We’re going to move on.” And it was so cold, the way it was delivered …. But it became the kernel of learning something larger movie to movie, which is you make something, you give all of yourself to it, and then you let it go and you move on. There’s something very healing about coming to terms with that.

Kusama attempted to “move on” but found herself once again overpowered by studio authorities on her next project, horror/comedy *Jennifer’s Body* (2009). 20th Century Fox went against Kusama’s wishes and marketed the film to straight young males even though the story centred on female friendship and was written for young women (Peitzman 2018). The characters’ sarcastic lines about PMS (premenstrual syndrome) being invented by the “boy-run media” were lost on the male audience, and the marketing materials featured hypersexualized images of star Megan Fox, alienating potential female viewers. Kusama, Fox, and screenwriter Diablo Cody, who had recently won an Oscar for *Juno* (2007, dir. Jason Reitman), believe that the poorly-conceived marketing contributed to the failure (Peitzman 2018). Though *Jennifer’s Body* has now found an

audience and is regarded as a feminist cult classic (Blichert 2018; Navarro 2018; Cohen 2018), it was a misunderstood "flop" at the time (Grady 2018b). With two troubled features, Kusama was firmly planted in "movie jail."



Figure 70. *From left, Karyn Kusama, Jason Reitman, Diablo Cody, Johnny Simmons, Adam Brody, Amanda Seyfried and Megan Fox at a 2009 screening of* Jennifer's Body. *"TIFF 09 Jennifer's Body" by Sam Javanrouh licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0. Modification: cropping.*

6.3.1 "One-and-done" filmmakers

Kusama believes that for women filmmakers, each film represents possible career-ending "finality"; women are not allowed to have "hits and misses," which are characteristic of being an artist (Vary 2016). For example, Lexi Alexander, the first women to direct a superhero film, never directed another studio film. Her film, *Punisher: War Zone* was released on Friday, December 5, 2008, and the box office performance that weekend was so poor that she was fired by her agents on Monday morning (Raftery 2017).[70] She directed a low-budget straight-to-DVD film in 2010 and has not made another feature. Alexander is one of many women directors who disappear after making

[70] *The Guardian* gave the film a one-star review (Pulver 2009) and others decried it for being "ultra-violent" (Berardinelli 2008). Roger Ebert (2008) said it was "one of the best-made bad movies I've seen," but also "disgusting." Like *Jennifer's Body*, *Punisher* has since gained a cult following (Gamble 2012; Griffin 2016).

a studio film, have multi-year gaps on their résumés (published online via IMDb), or must return to lower-budget, independent filmmaking. Typically, successful directors progress from short films, to low-budget feature films, to higher-budget studio films. To transition from a studio film–seen as the apex of filmmaking–to short films or low-budget features is perceived as a significant step backwards.

Recovering from failure is never guaranteed for women, and those who enter “movie jail” often remain there, hence the finality of the situation. Kusama says enduring such hardship is seen as a rite of passage for filmmakers who eventually recover and begin working, “but so few women get any opportunity to have more than just the rite of passage" (Vary 2016). While men stumble too, they often have the chance to try again. “I'm very conscious of how frequently great artists in film who are male and are also generally called 'big personalities' get to fail," Kusama says (Vary 2016). Numerous well-established male directors have recovered from “bombs”: David Fincher (*Alien*^{3}, 1992), Joss Whedon (*Serenity*, 2005), Peter Jackson (*The Frighteners*, 1996), Zack Snyder (*Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga’Hoole*, 2010, and *Sucker Punch*, 2011), Steven Soderberg (*Haywire*, 2011, and *Logan Lucky*, 2017), Richard Linklater (*Fast Food Nation*, 2006), and the Coen brothers (*Hail, Caesar!*, 2016) (Rose 2019; Vary 2016).

Though Kusama found work in television, her feature career continued to stall and by 2015, she found herself back where she started 15 years earlier, directing a $1-million film, *The Invitation* (Yamato 2016). This time, she retained creative control and hopes to continue working in that way, even if budgets are limited (D’Alessandro 2018). Kusama recently directed the pilot episode (and serves as executive producer) of *Yellowjackets* (2021- , creators Ashley Lyle & Bart Nickerson), a Showtime series about a girls’ soccer team stranded in the wilderness (IMDb 2021), which is well-reviewed and has been renewed for a second season (King 2022; Benchetrit 2022).

6.3.2 New frontiers with Wonder Woman



Figure 71. *Patty Jenkins with* Wonder Woman *star Gal Gadot at San Diego Comic Con 2016. "Patty Jenkins & Gal Gadot" by Gage Skidmore licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Modifications: exposure and brightness.*

In 2015, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) investigation into studio discrimination was underway and pressure was mounting on studios to increase their representation of women directors. Warner Bros. announced that a woman, Patty Jenkins, would be directing *Wonder Woman* (2017), which was met with jubilation and criticism.[71] When the film was released in 2017, the decision was presented as daring by trade publication *The Hollywood Reporter*, with the following tweet: "Warner Bros. is gambling $150M with a filmmaker whose only prior big-screen credit was an $8M indie" (@THR 2017).[72] Many criticised *The Hollywood Reporter* on social media for perpetuating stereotypes: "RETHINK your headline @THR, these

[71] Originally, Michelle Maclaren was hired as the director, but she was later replaced by Jenkins in 2015 when "creative differences" arose (Child 2015a).

[72] The article itself featured a thoughtful interview with Jenkins, but the tweet was poorly crafted and not representative of the full piece.

opportunities happen ALL THE TIME for men. Don't contribute to the misconception that women directors = risk," wrote documentary filmmaker Amy Adrion (@amyadrion 2017), who directed *Half the Picture* (2018), the afore-mentioned documentary about the dearth of women directors. UK-based director Hope Dickson Leach also responded: "Why is 'risk' only associated with female filmmakers? This is toxic & does nothing to further an inclusive industry" (@hopedickle 2017). As many users pointed out, the $8-million indie that Jenkins had previously directed was 2003's *Monster*, featuring Charlize Theron as serial killer Aileen Wuornos. Theron won the Oscar for Best Actress and gave "one of the greatest performances in the history of the cinema" (Ebert 2004). In addition to being critically acclaimed (Bradshaw 2004; Smith 2004) and garnering awards, *Monster* was profitable, with revenue of nearly $60 million (Box Office Mojo 2020c), more than seven times the original budget. Since *Monster*, Jenkins has worked in television, directing the pilot for the US version of *The Killing* (2011-2014, creator Veena Sud) as well as episodes of comedies *Arrested* Development (2003- , creator Mitchell Hurwitz) and *Entourage* (2004-2011, creator Doug Ellin). Jenkins' prior work was Oscar-winning, received positive reviews and made money at the box office. However, when she was hired for *Wonder Woman*, her gender could not be overlooked because the studio was departing from norms. According to film industry reporter Scott Mendelson (2017), the decision to hire a woman for the first female-fronted superhero film was objectively a gamble–since it had never been done, it was impossible to predict the result. "The issue is that it took this darn long for a studio, any studio at all, to give a female director this kind of budget for this kind of movie," he wrote in *Forbes* (Mendelson 2017).

In the lead up to *Wonder Woman*'s release, pressure was mounting on Jenkins to "deliver" on behalf of all women. It was the most expensive film ever directed by a woman, surpassing Bigelow's *K:19 The Widowmaker*, made for $100 million in 2002. Industry news outlet *Deadline* predicted a low opening weekend of $65 million, with an estimated total domestic box office of $225 million (Boxoffice Staff 2017). Anxious

observers suspected that the studio was not investing enough money in promoting the film (Burwick 2017), with some internet commentators wondering why there were few video trailers or product tie-ins announced, possibly because of the low projections. “[W]here's my *Wonder Woman* cereal?” asked Shana O’Neil (2017). Sensing that the box office results could have a ripple effect on other female-driven and female-directed content in the future, fans created unofficial *Wonder Woman* viewing parties across the US, often dressing up in Wonder Woman costumes to attend screenings. Writer Donna Dickens urged her readers to get involved: “Tell your friends the movie comes on June 2, 2017. Buy tickets. Show up. Because right now Warner Bros. is trying–intentionally or not–to bury the Amazon Princess and it’s up to us to make sure they fail,” (Dickens 2017).

6.3.3 Representing all women

When films directed by women encounter critical or financial problems, the directors themselves are often blamed, their careers stall, and as a consequence, all women filmmakers face repercussions. This is a direct consequence of the industry’s exclusive practices: if only one woman director is employed by a studio in a given year and her film does not succeed, her “failure” casts a negative light on all women. Mathematically-speaking, 100% of the studio’s female-directed films were unsuccessful. “When a man produces an expensive flop, he is judged as an individual and generally given another chance,” Sally Ogle (1981) wrote in a *New York Times* opinion piece nearly 40 years ago. In other words, a man’s failure is personal, while a woman’s is collective. There is safety in numbers for male directors (see Table 72), who easily blend among their peers; their gender is “invisible” in this context and male identity is not understood as definitive of particular achievements or failures. Women directing studio features are still anomalies. Only 18 women from “underrepresented” racial and ethnic groups directed top-grossing films from 2007 to 2021 (Smith et al. 2022)–equivalent to approximately one woman per year across all studios. If her film underperforms, “They will say, ‘We tried to hire a woman and it didn’t work,’” according to filmmaker Victoria

Mahoney (V. Mahoney 2016b). Mahoney says the most dangerous thing women filmmakers can do is “show up and do a half-assed job,” because there are “100 women behind you that will be rejected for your performance on that set.”

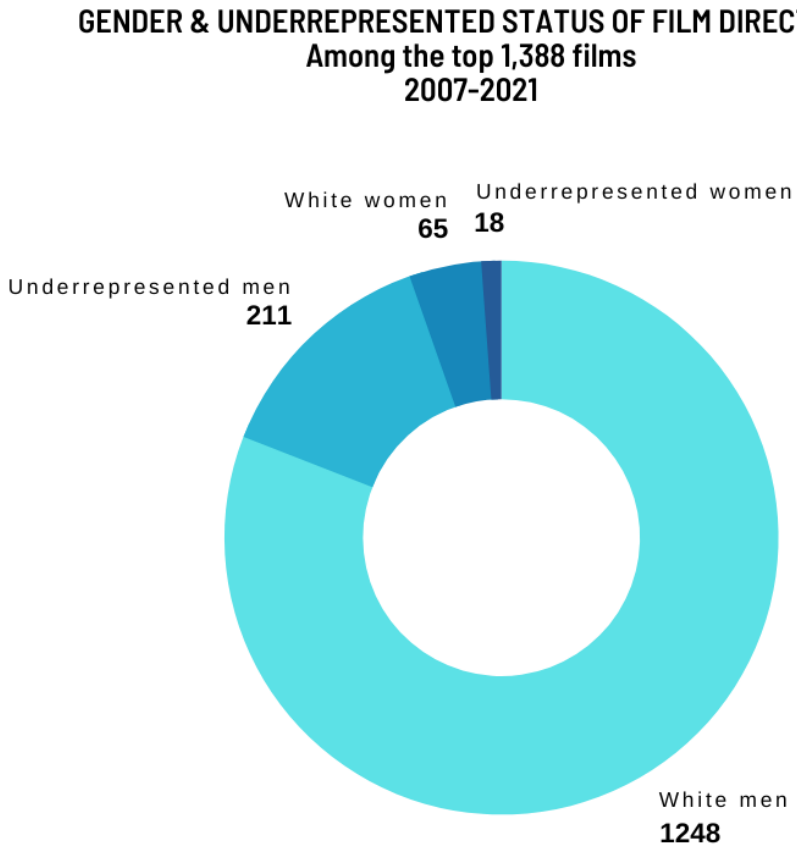


Figure 72. *The vast majority of the top-grossing films since 2007 have been directed by white men, with a much lower proportion directed by men from “underrepresented” racial and ethnic groups. Graph by the author using data from Smith et al. (2022).*

Research has shown that when female-led initiatives are unsuccessful in business, all women face consequences (Ryan et al. 2007). In the aforementioned *Hollywood Reporter* article, Jenkins responded, saying, "I can't take on the history of 50 percent of the population just because I'm a woman" (Siegel 2017). Instead, she set out to make the best film she could, and said she put the most pressure on herself to simply make an excellent film. In the end, the reviews were positive and *Wonder Woman’*s opening weekend totalled $103 million, with worldwide sales of more than $820 million

over a period of 31 weeks in theatres (Box Office Mojo 2020f), breaking Catherine Hardwicke's record for a woman-directed film.

Filmmakers are under considerable pressure to deliver a film that is profitable and/or acclaimed and must satisfy the needs of demanding stakeholders: producers, studio executives, investors, agents, managers, and the general public. Women directors carry an additional burden, and must avoid negatively impacting the careers of their peers and future generations of women directors. In years past, actor, writer and director Elaine May was accused of setting back "the cause of women directors in Hollywood by ten years," according to her former assistant Todd McCarthy (Abramowitz 2002). May is the only woman to have directed a studio film between 1966 and 1979, and McCarthy believes her behaviour had repercussions:

> [E]very negative notion that any male executive might have was confirmed by her: "She was irresponsible. She didn't know what she was doing. She couldn't be controlled." … All those things that people with conventional minds wanted to believe–she confirmed them in spades. (Abramowitz 2002)

"When you belong to a community that is marginalised, if you have a flaw, it's attributed to the community as a whole," said Kieran Medina at a panel discussion at the Women in Entertainment Summit during my fieldwork (Medina 2016). Medina is a queer trans Latinx man who was representing Outfest, a Los Angeles festival for LGBTQIA+ filmmakers and content. As "token" women working in studio directing, these women carry significant responsibility because there are so few other women around to balance the scales and present varying perspectives.

6.3.4 Doomed projects

Aware of the weight on their shoulders, some women directors are wary of taking on potentially problematic productions. Returning to the "glass cliff" phenomenon in which women are offered leadership roles in failing enterprises, researchers conducted experimental studies and found that when considering equally qualified male and female

candidates, participants were more likely to select women to lead organizations that were on the decline (Haslam et al. 2008). This is explained, in part, by the fact that women leaders are often associated with qualities that may be useful in managing crises: they are seen as understanding, helpful, sensitive to feelings, intuitive, creative, and cheerful (Schein 1973; Schein 1975). According to Brenner et al. (1989), male leaders are associated with behaviour that is aggressive, dominant, and achievement-oriented.

In the early 2010s, Patty Jenkins abandoned a big-budget tentpole[73] after two months because of undisclosed problems. She was reluctant to name the film and preferred not to discuss it in media interviews (Siegel 2017). (It was revealed to be Marvel's *Thor: The Dark World* (2013, dir. Alan Taylor)). Though "creative differences" were cited, she also left because of a sense of responsibility to other women**.** Knowing the project was unlikely to succeed, she said she had to walk away to avoid hurting the careers of women around her. "If I take this knowing it's going to be trouble and then it looks like it was me, that's going to be a problem. If they do it with a man, it will just be yet another mistake that the studio made. But with me, it's going to look like I dropped the ball, and it's going to send a very bad message" (Siegel 2017). The editors of news and advocacy site *Women and Hollywood* questioned if a man would turn down a "high-profile, lucrative job because he's concerned that poor critical reception and/or disappointing returns would adversely affect his male peers" (Women and Hollywood 2017). This shows that men are relatively more carefree, and can make decisions that suit their own interests. Furthermore, those who might notice missteps (and dole out the punishments) are often men in leadership roles. When executives and producers–usually men–appoint and evaluate other men, they do not "notice" gender as a salient

[73] Tent pole films are big-budget projects designed to produce maximum profit for a studio. They cost a lot of money, and are supposed to make a lot of money, "propping up" the studio like a tent pole and helping to fund other projects.

characteristic, whereas when they evaluate women, they are confronted by “difference” that is all too easily reduced to gender.

As the beginning of this chapter showed, when Catherine Hardwicke directed a hit and launched a record-breaking franchise, the studio found new reasons to replace her. This section has shown that women filmmakers do not establish themselves as core members of the industry whether their films succeed or not. They are not considered “members”–they are peripheral filmmakers who are given temporary access to a studio lot. They often exit the studios as quickly as they entered. If they direct a “flop,” there is little motivation to give them a second or third chance and many return to low-budget filmmaking. Women who are offered incredible opportunities are also saddled with the burden of representing all other women. No matter what they do, women cannot beat the system.

6.4 Conclusion

It can be difficult to denote patterns surrounding women’s careers in studio filmmaking because of the small number of women who have directed “top” films. They are likely more active in the “lower tier” of studio filmmaking; however those projects are less likely to be discussed in the media–another way in which women’s contributions are rendered invisible–and the data is limited. What is clearly established is that male filmmakers have latitude when it comes to success and failure. They can try, and fail, and try again, because they blend in among the many other men working for studios. As discussed in the next chapter, even highly-publicized scandals do not necessarily impede their career progression. The few women who have entered the studio arena have to tread much more carefully; at present, women filmmakers working in the studio system are an anomaly and easily call attention to themselves as “others.” Patty Jenkins faced intense pressure to succeed with *Wonder Woman* lest she damage the careers of other women filmmakers. For Catherine Hardwicke, making hundreds of millions of

dollars for the studio was not enough to set her on a path to success and she returned to low-budget projects. Karyn Kusama wrestled for control and tried to execute her vision which was not possible within the confines of studio filmmaking and she was sent to "movie jail." Former martial artist Lexi Alexander could not compete for directing roles with men because she is a woman, and therefore viewed as less qualified to direct a boxing film. This chapter shows that behind the reduction to gendered difference, lies a set of relations among men, including the promotors of studio films who essentially guarantee a box office audience to male-directed films (and very rare female-directed ones). Meanwhile, most women directors make films that do not have that infrastructure behind them, so are at higher risk of not generating large audiences/success, which is then attributed back to them being personally "risky" rather than to the fact that the conditions under which the film is made were risky. Owing to the uncertainty that surrounds women, and the structural exclusion that permeates the production of film and television, women seldom become "established" and are permanently forced to justify their positions as directors.

As I conclude this chapter, I would like to briefly note that the women mentioned gained entry to studio filmmaking after making acclaimed independent films for which they won awards. Kusama's *Girlfight*, Hardwicke's *Thirteen*, and Jenkins' *Monster* were recognized for their authenticity. I remember seeing their films at repertory cinemas when I was a budding filmmaker and being inspired by their approaches. Once "inside" the studios, they struggled. Being admitted into the "core" (however tenuously) comes with "liabilities in the form of tighter restrictions on productions that challenge recognized standards and categories" (Cattani et al. 2014, 261). Ultimately, many women who dip their toes "in" later make their way back to low-budget features, where they have fewer resources for aerial shots but greater control over the finished product. Now coming to terms with her past "failures," Kusama hopes to keep working. "I am not going away,

people,” she says. "You will have to keep dealing with me, whether you like it or not,” (Vary 2016).

Chapter 7 | Precarious Women



Figure 73. *Still image from the Oscar-winning short documentary* Learning to Skateboard in a Warzone (If You're a Girl) *directed by Carol Dysinger. Image courtesy of A+E Networks.*

As Carol Dysinger accepted the Oscar for Best Documentary short film in February 2020, she reflected on her journey. "Frank Capra handed me a Student Academy Award in 1977," she said, referring to the late legendary filmmaker, "And I thought I'd skipped the hard part." Her recent documentary, *Learning to Skateboard in a Warzone (If You're a Girl)* (2019), is about a group of girls learning to read, write, and skateboard in Kabul, Afghanistan. "And if I hadn't had that encouragement at my back, back then, I wouldn't have been able to withstand the last f-four decades in this business," Dysinger said, stumbling slightly. Her voice wavered as she continued: "To get from Capra to here took a whole lot of not quitting. And teachers.… They teach girls courage. To raise your hand. To say, I am here. I have something to say. And I'm going to take that ramp. Don't try to stop me" (@TheAcademy 2020).

While Dysinger's analogy refers to skateboarding and she is a documentary filmmaker, her words pertain to narrative filmmaking too. "Taking that ramp" means

having the strength to try and possibly fail; venturing in a new direction; and performing a move which could cause injury or embarrassment. All filmmakers contend with these obstacles as they attempt to develop careers in an ultra-competitive domain with few available jobs (Prindle 1993), but as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, women face additional setbacks that impede their progress. Dysinger had a promising debut and then dropped into obscurity–a familiar tale for women filmmakers; if anything is remarkable about her story, it is the fact that she found herself collecting an Oscar years later. Chapter 5 described the frenzied excitement which surrounds "fresh talent" in Hollywood and the challenges of entering the "mid-career" stage. Dysinger spoke of how hard it was keep working; many do not have the tenacity or ability (financially, emotionally, and/or physically) to remain in the industry as long as she did.

The theme of this chapter is precarity; filmmakers deal with fluctuating income levels, extremely long working hours, limited or no health care, and difficult or abusive colleagues. I argue that women experience these challenges for a protracted period of time because of their chronic underemployment. Due to Hollywood's gender-based systems of exclusion, women have difficulty finding work at all career stages. This chapter documents the long-term impact of those systems of exclusion on women filmmakers' personal and professional lives. As already discussed, when women fail to move into the "core" of the industry, they are less likely to be recognized with awards from their peers. With less name recognition comes smaller production budgets and limited distribution, meaning their projects have less potential to earn revenue. Women can easily become trapped in this cycle: making small films that are overlooked and not widely available. Precarious working conditions persist throughout their careers.

I also focus on an interconnected issue: because women occupy precarious positions, they are often unwilling or unable to defend themselves against harassment, abuse, and micro-aggressions in the workplace because they worry that speaking up may threaten their tenuous employment. Like the crew members working on unsafe sets,

mentioned below, my research participants do not wield power in most filmmaking contexts and often try to avoid conflicts to maintain working relationships. They encounter harassment, physical/verbal abuse, sexist or racist comments, and assumptions about their abilities. They feel ignored or undervalued in business meetings; they face prejudice; and they deal with harassment and unwanted physical contact. They are criticized for wearing makeup or not wearing makeup; for covering up or showing too much skin. They resist quitting, like Dysinger, because they are strongly motivated and willing to endure difficult phases of work, expecting that their sacrifices will lead to bigger and better opportunities on a range of projects. However, as I have also demonstrated in other chapters, many women remain peripheral long after they have begun making films and those anticipated results are often unattainable.

7.1.1 Precarity as disciplinary power

Marcello Pedaci (2010) views precarity as a form of disciplinary power; workers facing poor working conditions cannot speak up, and must behave in certain ways to remain employed. Individuals shoulder the risks associated with this type of employment and need to perform according to expectations to be re-hired (Pedaci 2010). Pedaci (2010, 253) proposes that unstable, temporary jobs place control in the hands of employers who can exert dominance over workers. The American economic system has been characterized by growth fuelled by deregulation, few social protections, and limited government intervention, which has had an impact on media industries (Pedaci 2010, 251; Curtin et al. 2016, 6). Ortner (2013, 12–14) has asserted that the rise of American indie film must be considered in relation to significant socio-economic shifts in the US since the 1970s, including neoliberalism (less government involvement in “free market” activities); post-Fordism (weakened labour conditions and workers being perceived as disposable); a collapsing middle class (the rich get richer and the poor get poorer); a conservative political agenda (including policies which favour the wealthy) and the erosion of the American dream (the realization that hard work does not necessarily lead

to financial success). She draws links between contemporary film production and these forces, explaining how studios owned by large corporations–made possible by neoliberalism–are seen as disposable and therefore face pressure to be profitable (Ortner 2013, 199). This in turn influences the types of films that are made. Prioritizing blockbusters because of the potentially high returns, has contributed to the development of an alternative form of filmmaking in the independent world (Ortner 2013, 199–200). These profound societal changes have contributed to the working conditions that my research participants face today, with their daily lives governed by precarity and instability. Sylvia J. Martin (2017) also has a keen awareness of the challenges that film production workers face. As she argues, workers are "haunted" by their risky jobs, which consume all aspects of their lives, while also being shaken by the grim material they are tasked with shooting, especially death scenes (Martin 2017, 3). Like Ortner, she refers to globalization and political processes as she explains how job insecurity is fuelled by outsourcing and post-Fordist practices. Much like the high-risk, high-reward environment of Wall Street (Ho 2009), Hollywood workers can easily be replaced by other aspiring filmmakers willing to accept poor conditions and/or work for free if necessary.

In the HBO documentary *Showbiz Kids* (dir. Alex Winter, 2020), about child stars, actor Evan Rachel Wood says the industry's concentration of power and high entry stakes create an environment in which abuse is likely. "[A]fter a while it starts to become, 'Well, who can take the most abuse?' Because somebody's waiting in line to take your place, so you just start to allow yourself to be abused in some form or another," she says (Juzwiak 2020). Wood is referring to children thrust into the spotlight, but women are also vulnerable in their quest to become filmmakers. If they gain employment, they become marginalized members of the industry, often with few allies. When faced with uncomfortable or borderline abusive situations, they are not generally in a position to exert pressure to change their circumstances.

7.2 Uncertain work if you can get it

While people are drawn to filmmaking, a highly competitive pursuit, they often have limited understanding of the challenges ahead. Gifted filmmakers lacking money management skills may not be able to support themselves long-term. Working in film *seems* like a fun job but it also comes with a gruelling schedule, financial insecurity, and possible exploitation, as I explain.

7.2.1 The allure of filmmaking

"[I]t is commonly assumed that creative jobs, by their nature, are not deficient in gratification," writes Andrew Ross (2009, 18). The jobs are "packaged" in such a way that they are associated with pleasure and satisfaction, he continues. However jobs in creative industries involve self-sacrifice, substantial risk, and exploitation of one's self (Gill 2002; Gill 2007; Prindle 1993; Curtin et al. 2016). To the delight of employers, creative workers are often willing to develop coping strategies, tolerate high-stress situations, and put up with a "feast-or-famine economy" in the hopes of "making it" (Ross 2009, 19), as I expand on later in this section.

Analyzing precarity in American anthropology, Platzer et al. (2018) write that many PhD students have unrealistic post-graduation expectations. The authors wonder why universities train students to be academics when an estimated 80% of graduates will not obtain a tenured position. Aspiring fashion designers are plagued by similar unrealistic beliefs: according to Bates (1993) media reporting in the 1980s and 1990s convinced students they could become designers with their own studios. Despite being advised to temper their expectations, many held on to their dreams, even after long periods of unemployment (Bates 1993, 82). As with academic posts and design jobs, making films *seems* to be accessible, especially when studying in elite institutions in which one has the capacity to interact with "real" filmmakers. Prominent Hollywood figures also repeat notions about inexpensive technology making it possible for *anyone*

to make a film and *become* a filmmaker. While filmmaker Quentin Tarantino has spoken out against forms of digital technology, calling the digital projection of films “the death of cinema,” in 2014, he has also repeated the popular refrain: “A young person can make a film on a cell phone, if they have the tenacity to do so” (N. M. Smith 2014). With the availability of digital cameras and editing software, young filmmakers today have “no excuses,” according to Ridley Scott (Mitchell 2018), known for directing *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Thelma and Louise* (1991). Those who want to become a filmmakers should “go out and make a movie this weekend or stop moaning,” he said (Mitchell 2018). At the USC School of Cinematic Arts, Linda Brown, head of the cinematography track, advises aspiring filmmakers to consider their options before committing to a career in film. She asks them, “Is there anything else you can do in life and be happy?” If the answer is, “yes,” she tells them, “Then you need to go do that. Because this is going to be really, really hard.” Linda acknowledges the perceptions that careers in film and television seem glamourous, but the reality involves exacting, unpleasant tasks and a “day-to-day grind.” For one project, she found herself standing in a swamp with insects biting her legs. “That’s the work,” she says plainly. In addition, longevity requires financial know-how and the development of resilience. These aspects are rarely discussed in film education, leaving many unprepared to face the realities of freelance work. No one asks aspiring filmmakers if they know how to save money and live frugally, Linda explains, or if they can sustain themselves emotionally without a job.



Figure 74. *Linda Brown is head of the cinematography track at USC and has worked as a cinematographer and director. Image courtesy of Linda Brown.*

7.2.2 Financial Precarity

Linda refers to a series of subtle and unspoken challenges that filmmakers face as they seek work and develop projects. Some of my research participants benefit from parental assistance, while others support themselves but have access to emergency funds from friends or family if needed, whereas others have no safety net and must become comfortable with discomfort. Work in creative industries is typically project-based, with short-term contracts offered to individual workers (Eikhof 2013). Most Hollywood production jobs are freelance and involve periods of unemployment. This is not a new phenomenon; a report from the Federal Communications Commission indicated that in the early 1970s, union members faced high rates of unemployment: 30.6% of film editors, 30% of directors, 85% of Screen Actors' Guild members were unemployed in 1974 (U.S. Federal Communications Commission 1976, 868). Not all film workers have enough credits (or the right kind of credits) to join unions, which means that these figures do not include the potentially even higher rates of unemployment of those working on non-union low-budget or independent projects. A recent worldwide

study of actors, drawing data from 1888 to 2016, found that only 2% earn a living from acting and that unemployment among actors has increased to around 90% (Williams et al. 2019). Though these statistics pertain to acting, there is some overlap between the working patterns of actors and filmmakers, and many actors are also making their own films, and vice versa.

Claudia is an actor who hopes to direct her own short film soon. She worked as an assistant to a writer and as a waitress before supporting herself through acting. She still feels shaky:

> You make no money until you work. You don't get paid to audition. When you finally make money… you make this huge chunk of money. Then you're paying off the credit card. "I'm going to go buy this pair of jeans." It trickles away and you have no money again. You have to pay taxes on top of all that shit.… I got screwed when I was younger. I made some money, and I spent it all. My bank account got seized…. I thought I would get another job. Every time my taxes come, I have a bit of PTSD [Post-traumatic stress disorder].

The freelance cycle takes a toll: frenetic periods of activity with a sudden influx of money, followed by a dry spell with no income and no guarantee of future work. For filmmakers, these dry spells may be lengthy, as they are not paid to pitch film ideas, attend film festivals to meet collaborators, or drum up interest in potential projects. Maria Giese, the activist filmmaker (see Chapter 5), spent years trying to develop projects that were either given to male directors, or abandoned, meaning she earned no money. I explain that filmmakers in the Directors Guild of America must earn a minimum salary to maintain access to union health insurance. When income fluctuates, some gig-workers can no longer afford their health insurance when they stop working (Karlamangla 2014). According to a 2014 *Los Angeles Times* article, actors and musicians are key beneficiaries of the Affordable Care Act (often referred to as "Obamacare"), a health plan introduced by former president Barack Obama with more affordable premiums and guaranteed coverage for those with pre-existing health conditions (Karlamangla 2014). For uninsured workers with limited financial resources, there are no safeguards in place

and medical expenses must be paid from their own pockets. An estimated 85% of members of SAG-AFTRA, the union for performers and various crew members, are ineligible for union health insurance, while approximately 75% of musicians affiliated with MusiCares, an organization that provides health coverage to musicians, say they have no insurance. Employers in other industries often offer retirement plans, sick leave, health insurance and professional development training, whereas in the creative industries, individual workers assume the cost of these benefits, if they have them at all (Gill 2002).

Justin* is a white male actor and filmmaker in his mid-thirties, who spends time in Los Angeles while filming television. Originally from Vancouver, the stress of being in the US without adequate health insurance affects his mental health:

> I was just there [in LA] for four months this year. It was… It was *ok*…. But I don't love it. I had a medical incident and it was so anxiety inducing because I wasn't in Canada [where there is universal healthcare]. I was left with this low-level anxiety for the rest of the trip. Not feeling safe, not feeling cared for. I will, like, speak to my American peers who are basically living the exact same life as me, but they're fine with that. They've grown up with it. They have calluses for that kind of shit.

Justin's American peers seem to be immune to this anxiety, he says, because they presumably grew up with a level of uncertainty with regard to healthcare. Many creative workers from countries with universal healthcare and other social protections descend on Los Angeles to try to "break in" every year, and like Justin, must adapt to these new realities.

To cope with income irregularities, many of my research participants have day-jobs, from teaching to designing custom medical scrubs. "I can't live off of what I make," mid-career filmmaker Jen McGowan says in 2018. "I think if people were more open you'd find this a lot. This is a hobby for rich people. Most people who are doing this job, and myself included, had another means of income before. I made my living as a

production supervisor. I'm 42 now. Just this year, my husband is making enough money that I don't have to do that [anymore]."

Success in risk-laden artistic work is largely dependent on access to capital, writes Bourdieu (1993, 67–68) because financially independent artists do not need to appeal to the masses by making "commercial" works for money. This "indifference to profit" gives them considerable creative freedom and in the words of McRobbie (1998, 32) cushions artists "from the harsh economics of cultural production." In this context, being a commercial "failure" is framed as an indication of "artistic integrity" because the artist has stayed true to themselves instead of selling out by producing work just to make money (McRobbie 1998, 11). MacCarthy (1979, 17) includes the following quote from Gabriel Tinto: "The moment the artisan student is taught to become an artist instead of a draughtsman, his mind becomes unsettled and aspirations arise in his bosom calculated to lead him out of the sure and solid path of commerce into the thorny and devious tract which leads to Fine Art." The Fine Art tract is thorny indeed. Aspiring filmmakers could abandon their lofty ideals and enjoy a stable future by filming weddings or making corporate videos, but for my research participants, becoming a "draughtsman" is not an alluring prospect and writing, directing and/or producing remain their goal.

For those with limited resources, the strain of studying film or working for low or no wages during the early career stage is a significant obstacle. Government data shows that American women are 28% more likely than men to graduate with student debt, and that the group most likely to have student loans are non-Hispanic Black women (U.S. Census Bureau 2021b). As noted already, Black women directors are poorly represented among the "top" filmmakers in Hollywood, having directed two (out of 55) of the highest-grossing films of 2021 (Smith et al. 2022, 12). Further research into the economic situations of women filmmakers is required to determine any potential link between debt loads, career decisions and advancement. On the internet forum Reddit, one poster wondered whether he should remain in film school and accumulate $120,000 of debt or

drop out to work for a production company. One of the responses read: "Truth [is] unless you become extremely successful in the industry (extremely rare) you are going to have a bitch of a time paying off that loan" (JakeTallon 2017). Graduates from Columbia University's master's program in film had a median debt of $181,000, and half of them earned less than $30,000 two years later (Korn et al. 2021). "There is a small number of people who can afford to take that pay, and it's rich white kids," TV writer Deirdre Mangan told *The Hollywood Reporter* (Galuppo et al. 2019). In 2019, the starting salary for assistants, seen as a gateway job to numerous forms of employment in Hollywood, was just above the California minimum wage of $12, so to make ends meet, workers take on part-time jobs as "side hustles," live with multiple people in one-bedroom apartments, or save food from industry-catered events to feed themselves (Galuppo et al. 2019). A 2019 report from the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, commonly known as Freddie Mac, found that Los Angeles residents would have to work 90 hours per week at minimum wage (then $11) to afford a one-bedroom apartment at the fair market rent of $1,284 (Freddie Mac 2019). The working conditions of assistants will be explored in further detail later in this section. Ryan Coogler, now known as the director of *Creed* (2015) and *Black Panther* (2018), lived out of his car when he started studying film at USC (Adams 2013), where the cost of undergraduate tuition and housing was an estimated $81,659 for the 2021-2022 academic year (USC Cinematic Arts 2022).[74] While one-third of "unsheltered persons" in Los Angeles County are on the street, a growing number are living in vehicles: cars (9.94%), vans (9.19%), campers/RVs (21.91%), in addition to tents 17.03%) and makeshift shelters (10.49%) (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority 2019d), as noted earlier. Among those in vehicles are entertainment workers who either cannot afford the cost of living on their low salaries or prefer the lifestyle (Kilkenny 2018c).

[74] Coogler was mentioned in the Introduction because he was mistaken for a bank robber and detained in early 2022.

I have argued that many aspiring filmmakers have unrealistic expectations about their career prospects, and that pursuing a career in filmmaking involves considerable financial strain due to irregular employment, limited provisions for health care, and significant student debt. Such precarity operates as a disciplinary force that keeps workers in line and discourages them from complaining, but when the workers are unemployed or irregularly employed, there is no one to complain *to*. As one contract ends, crews disband and may not work together again. Workers faces challenges during this in-between period, and once they are employed again, the memory of their past hardship fades. No one entity is responsible for their struggles or can easily alter their working conditions–it is a systemic problem. In the next section, I consider the long working hours of those who do manage to find jobs.

7.2.3 "Uncivilized" hours

Since the late 1990s, two-time Oscar winning cinematographer Haskell Wexler has campaigned for better working conditions on set, culminating in a battle against his union, the International Cinematographers Guild (Robb et al. 2016). "There is no such thing as civilized hours in the motion picture business," says producer Richard Zanuck in a documentary Wexler directed, *Who Needs Sleep?* (2006)–available for free online (IMAGO - Cinematographers 2013). While established directors can influence the daily hours and pace of their feature shoots in consultation with producers, television schedules are particularly gruelling because they adhere to rigid timelines and often require 14-hour days as standard. There are cases in which industry members have as little as one to four hours off before returning to work (Busch 2018) and some must travel several hours each way to remote locations. Wexler was so concerned about workers' rights that he co-founded the "12on12off" campaign, to cap days at 12 hours and offer crew members at least 12 hours of turnaround time (12on12off n.d.). He also interviewed colleagues about their 16-, 18-, or even 22-hour work days and the sometimes fatal consequences of sleep deprivation (Wexler 2006). In an CNN clip from Wexler's film,

Richard Masur, then-president of the Screen Actors Guild, calls industry working hours "anti-human" and "anti-family." For example, director of photography Ken Zunder reveals he has never been home to have dinner with his family while working, which remains one of his biggest regrets. "Never once…. It's a big thing to miss," he says. Whitney McCleery, who has two children, rarely sees her husband Bruce, an on-set electrician. "His dirty laundry appears at night, and then there's coffee cups and things left in the morning. Sometimes we don't see him, but we see evidence of him, sort of droppings through the house," she says laughing (Wexler 2006). Long days are popular because they are seen as the most cost-effective way of managing a production's budget, but some have argued for reducing hours to avoid paying exorbitant overtime rates, saving money long-term. The idea of an eight-hour day, introduced by line producer Robert Schneider in 1997 as a cost-effective measure (CPN Admin 2012), has yet to catch on.

Wexler's documentary returns frequently to the story of Brent Hershman, a 35-year-old father of two who died after falling asleep at the wheel following a 19-hour day on the set of the film *Pleasantville* (1998, dir. Gary Ross). Joe Tuck was also killed in an accident after working from 9 a.m. to 3 a.m. (18 hours) on a Netflix show (Alexander 2014; Busch 2015), and actor KJ Apa narrowly escaped death after driving into a pole after a 16-hour day in Vancouver (G. Evans 2017; Johnson 2017). Research shows that sleep deprivation can impair drivers as much as intoxication (Williamson et al. 2000) or even more so (Lowrie et al. 2020), leading to poor judgement, slow reaction times and increased risk of accidents. Solving this issue is not straightforward because it is linked to another form of precarity: some workers need or *want* overtime hours for financial reasons. They risk getting trapped in a vicious cycle: they welcome overtime because if they have insufficient hours, they will lose their union health insurance, so they work longer hours even though it can put their lives at risk. "I'm against long hours, but when you need those hours, you're going to get 'em any way that you can," says electrician Michael Everett in *Who Needs Sleep?* Filmmakers themselves are not typically tasked

with overtime; they are paid per project and occupy powerful roles on the set. They are more likely to be asking the producer to mandate overtime or extend the shooting schedule. However, this discussion is relevant because it provides another example of how far “lower status” creative workers are willing to go for their jobs, either because they hope to advance to “higher status” jobs or are fearful about speaking out.

With rising production costs in Los Angeles and international trade deregulation allowing workers to move more freely across borders (Ross 2009, 15), “runaway” Hollywood productions are increasingly filmed elsewhere (Christopherson 2006). Tax incentives help producers save millions by shooting in Louisiana, New York or New Mexico (McNary 2014; Wick 2017; Lang et al. 2020). Jack Valenti of the Motion Picture Association of America and Motion Picture Association, voiced his support for the migration of productions in 2002, saying, “This kind of competition stirs creative juices. It lifts the level of quality in the creative community” (Christopherson 2006, 739). American states change their tax offerings every few years (Variety Staff 2019; Maddaus 2022) and do indeed “compete” to attract productions as Valenti suggests. However, when they move abroad, it does not “lift the level of quality” for workers who end up with fewer protections. In Vancouver, London, Dubai and Beijing, local unions have offered significant concessions to attract Hollywood productions, cutting wages and revising work guidelines to satisfy cost-conscious producers (Curtin et al. 2016, 3, 7). For example, at the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, as most countries went into lockdown, many visual effects (VFX) workers had to go to work anyway or risk their jobs (Perman 2020). Hired by major studios and streaming companies, VFX companies are located around the world. To comply with security restrictions for the projects they were working on, some had to be on-site, often sitting “elbow-to-elbow” with colleagues in cramped quarters due to security concerns relating to the content. One digital compositor told the *Los Angeles Times*: “People were coughing. It was very nerve-racking for me. Luckily, we were all fine,” (Perman 2020).

7.2.4 A matter of life and death

Caught up in a "race to the bottom" (Curtin et al. 2016, 2) production teams have been cutting corners and sacrificing safety. Brent Hershman and Joe Tuck are not the only crew members whose lives have been cut short abruptly due to difficult working conditions. In 2014, 27-year-old camera assistant Sarah Jones was killed by a freight train on the first day of shooting *Midnight Rider* (dir. Randall Miller, never completed) in the state of Georgia (Busch 2014). According to reports, production leaders were denied permission to film on a narrow railroad bridge above the Altamaha River (Johnson 2014; National Transportation Safety Board 2015), but proceeded without telling the crew they were trespassing (Bynum 2017). "They wanted to get the shot, so whatever it took to get the shot is what they did," said hairstylist Joyce Gilliard, who was among six people injured (ABC News 2014). As a train came barrelling towards them, crew members "had to basically run for [their] lives," to escape the platform, Gilliard said (ABC News 2014). Jones, described by colleagues as indefatigable, was reportedly concerned about trying to save the camera equipment (Johnson 2014) and was struck by a prop which pushed her onto the tracks (Yamato 2014a). For his role in this accident, director Randall Miller was sentenced to two years in jail and eight years of probation, during which he could direct films or supervise a crew[75] (Siegemund-Broka 2015), while the executive producer, producer and first assistant director were given 10 years' probation and fines of $5,000 to $10,000 (Lewis 2015).

Jay Self, former head of the Savannah Film Office, received more complaints about one of Miller's previous production than he had in an entire year (ABC News 2014; Yamato 2014a). "[Miller] would say, 'but we're trying to make a movie here,' as if that somehow outweighed the safety or the welfare or the business of other people. It was

[75] Miller served one year of his sentence and was released. He reportedly asked the Directors Guild of America for permission to direct a film overseas and proceeded to do so, violating the terms of his probation (Patten et al. 2020; Patten 2021).

like some kind of magic card," said Self (ABC News 2014). Miller's arrogance was seemingly shared by another of *Midnight Rider*'s key decision makers: during a speaking engagement several days prior to the accident, producer Jody Savin, who is married to Miller, reportedly complained about Self and said, "We make movies by our own rules," (Yamato 2014b). When filmmakers adopt the attitude that making their film or obtaining they shot they envisage is more important than anything else, the well-being of those involved is often sacrificed. In my own film experience, I witnessed this repeatedly on different types of projects, from student films run by inexperienced volunteers to big-budget films with union crews. Those in control seemed to think that treating others poorly or flouting regulations was justified in the name of making "great art," and those supporting them almost universally said nothing, allowing the behaviour to continue.

More recently, cinematographer Halyna Hutchins was killed in 2021 on the set of low-budget film *Rust* (not completed) by a bullet from a gun held by actor Alec Baldwin, who was also one of the film's producers. An investigation determined that the production team did not follow "industry standards for firearm safety" and "wilfully violated" rules (Vercammen et al. 2022). The production's armorer, for example, was supposed to inspect the guns before each shot but was asked to help with props instead, the investigators found (Hay 2022). Baldwin alleged that he is now being targeted by lawsuits because he appears to have "deep pockets," whereas those who were actually negligent have no money and thus have avoided further legal battles (Harlan et al. 2022).

In Wexler's documentary, journalist Leonard Klady says he thought that the aforementioned fatalities would serve as a wake-up call to the industry, but nothing has changed. "This is an industry that works best on crisis and it has not yet been identified as a crisis situation, but I think it is," he said. Bruce Doering, National Executive Director of the International Photographers Guild, says in the film that while Hollywood is seen as very glamourous, it is also run in "sweatshop style" conditions and that there is little

sympathy for those who complain. “If you can stand it, you can work. If you can’t stand it, get out,” he says.

7.2.5 Exploiting assistants

Many enter the industry working in the mailroom of a talent agency or as a personal assistant–taking what are known as “pipeline jobs,” highly coveted by aspiring writers, directors, producers and agents who hope to use them as a “gateway” to other forms of employment (LaPorte 2021). There are numerous types of assistant positions: showrunner’s assistant, writer’s assistant, production assistant, executive assistant, and so on (Any Possibility 2019). Obtaining these ultra-competitive jobs is one thing, but being able to afford them is another; some say that these entry-level jobs are inaccessible to those who do not have other financial support (Clark 2020; CNT Productions 2019). As already mentioned, the salaries are often close to the minimum wage but the positions still attract countless applicants. A 2021 survey found that 80% of industry support staff are considered “cost-burdened” (which means they earn a salary of less than $53,600 in Los Angeles, spend more than 30% of their salary on housing, and may have trouble affording basic necessities) (Kilkenny 2021). Data from 2019 showed that nearly 50% of assistants received financial support from friends or family, 67% had additional jobs to earn money, and 91% felt anxious about their working conditions (Kilkenny 2019b). In online magazine *Vulture*, talent agent turned writer and director Priyanka Mattoo (2019) wrote about starting her career as an assistant. “I took home $1,800 a month, mice ate my sad groceries, I had no friends, and even if I made friends, I didn’t have enough money to leave the house. Plus, my car got totalled on the 101 [freeway], and I was depressed. It was awful.”

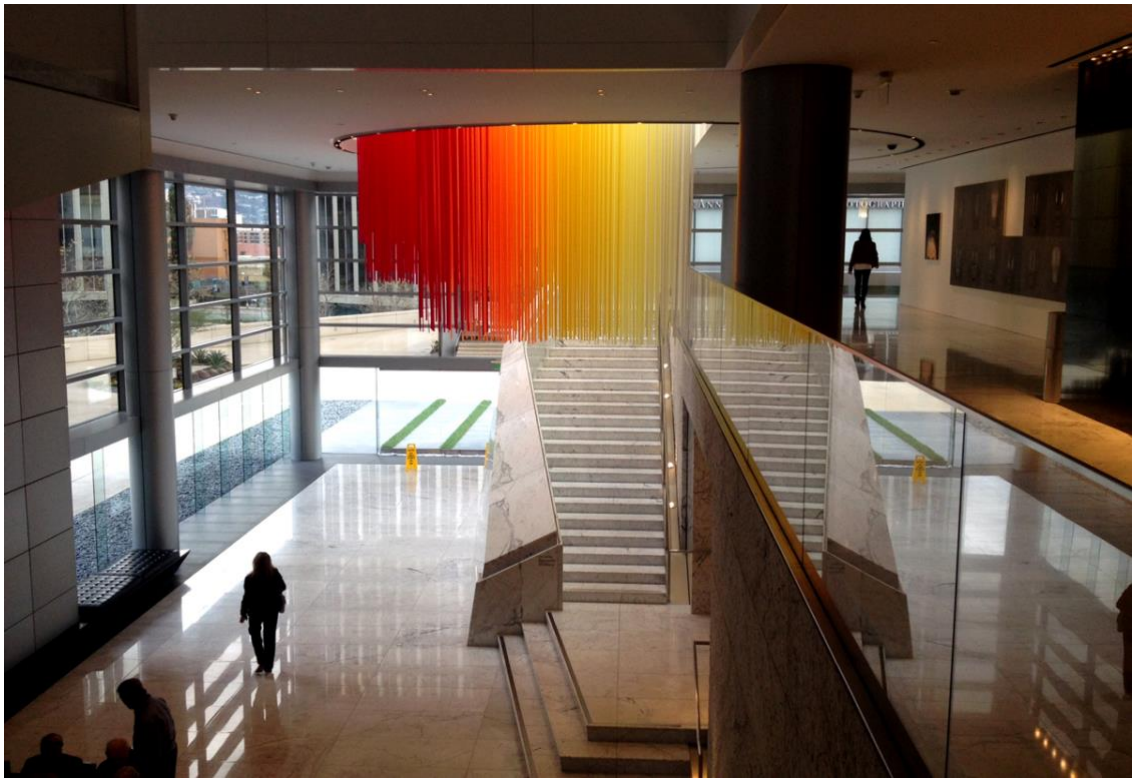


Figure 75. *A view of the inside of one of the biggest talent agencies, Creative Artists Alliance (CAA), taken in 2017. Image by the author.*

In 2019, assistants' salaries began trending with the creation of the hashtag #PayUpHollywood, which prompted an outpouring of stories on social media (Perman 2019; Thorne 2019; Kilkenny 2019a). Overworked and underpaid assistants launched an "open revolt" (Perman 2019). Noting that many are reluctant to speak out, writer Jamie Trundel tweeted: "[F]or every story posted, there's 100 just like 'em that remain silent" (@jamietunkel 2019). Another TV writer (and former assistant) Deirdre Mangan helped spur the movement, and says that the amount of work assistants are expected to do is "astronomical" (Thorne 2019). Industry members treat them poorly and make "insane demands" because they know if one person will not do something, they can find someone else who will (Thorne 2019).

Screenwriter John August, who wrote the live-action adaption of *Aladdin* (2019, dir. Guy Ritchie), started as an assistant two decades ago. He and Craig Mazin (creator of HBO series *Chernobyl*, 2019) spoke about assistants' salaries on their Scriptnotes podcast and asked listeners to share their stories on social media, a dialogue which

evolved into the #PayUpHollywood movement. As momentum grew, August announced he would host a town hall discussion on this topic and tickets sold out within 45 minutes (Kilkenny 2019b), showing that there was a strong desire to explore these issues. At the town hall, August noted that assistants are faced with atypical expenses that are not reimbursed: wardrobe (there are high expectations with regards to how they dress); events (they must see the latest films and be aware of things that are going on); and transportation (a car is required) (CNT Productions 2019). The creator of the #PayUpHollywood hashtag, Liz Alper, was a panellist at the town hall and said that assistants are the industry's apprentices, the "next generation" of executives, writers and directors. "We keep talking about diversity and inclusion in Hollywood… but unfortunately we've made it so that those candidates [from different backgrounds] can't afford to be here," she says (CNT Productions 2019). According to a 2021 survey of 1,014 Hollywood support staff, 76% were white, 10% were Latinx, 9% Black, 9% Asian or Pacific Islander (#PayUpHollywood 2020). For reference, Los Angeles is 28% white, 48% Hispanic or Latino, 8% Black, 11% Asian and 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander as of 2021, which illustrates that white people are overrepresented as assistants compared to other groups (U.S. Census Bureau 2021a). In Chapter 4, I discussed entry barriers that are more likely to hinder women of colour, and the assistant positions are no exception. Chidera, the emerging filmmaker profiled in that chapter, struggled to find entry-level work that would pay her enough to survive, whereas her white peers were creating work and had time to network too.

After #PayUpHollywood started trending, numerous agencies made swift changes (Any Possibility 2019). One of the biggest agencies, Creative Artists Agency (CAA), raised salaries to $18 per hour (Kilkenny 2020a), while the United Talent announced new minimum salaries of $22 to $26 per hour (Donnelly 2020) in 2020. As of July 2022, the minimum wage in Los Angeles County is $15.96 per hour (County of Los Angeles 2022). However with the strain of COVID-19 Pandemic, many have been laid

off, asked to work from home and absorb all associated costs, or do the same amount of work in fewer hours (Alper 2021). The aforementioned support staff survey found that in 2020, nearly 80% of respondents made less than $50,000 (below the “cost-burdened” threshold of $53,600), 35% made less than $30,000 and many had to move in with family or friends or relocate to more affordable cities (#PayUpHollywood 2020).

In addition to financial issues, assistants often deal with toxic work cultures as they strive to “get ahead.” Their exploitation has been discussed in the media on numerous occasions, often because of the sensational nature of their assigned tasks. A 2014 article discussed an unnamed assistant who accepted a job because she was told she would obtain production experience to advance her career. Instead, she was waking up at 4 a.m. to deliver Starbucks to her boss’s bedside and being called away from her family to drive her boss to an emergency “therapy” session with a psychic. She was also reportedly sent to break up with her boss’s boyfriend in person (Vineyard 2014). In another example, a job posting was circulated for a position with an industry member, rumoured to be actor Rob Lowe, who allegedly sought an assistant who could lift 25 lbs, would “never assume anything,” and had to check with estate staff to see if he wanted the jacuzzi turned on before he got home (TMZ 2017). Lowe awkwardly laughed as the tasks were mocked on a late-night talk show, saying he liked the specifics of the job posting but would have to “look into” whether it came from his team (Jimmy Kimmel Live 2017). In 2017, assistant Rosette Laursen asked for a day off to participate in the national women’s strike. Her boss accidentally included her on his response, sent to the rest of the team: “Are you fucking kidding me. At the end of pilot season. Someone should sew her vagina shut. I’m never hiring a girl again.” He also called her an “uppity selfish cunt,” and complained about women being considered “diverse” and pushing men out. Laursen published the exchange in a since-removed Facebook post (Hope 2017) and a week later, her boss, Michael Einfeld, reportedly lost most of his 50 clients and shut his company down (Donnelly 2017). Though there were consequences for Einfeld because

of the attention-grabbing nature of his transgressions (responding to a request to attend a feminist event with a decidedly unfeminist language), this is just one example among many and most assistants are too scared to speak up because they worry about reprisals (discussed below). "We were moulded into thinking that being put down and yelled at was the best way to become better," says former assistant Jennifer Jendrzejczyk, who is quoted in an article about the allegedly "pervasive bullying culture" at one of the biggest talent agencies, ICM Partners (Lee 2021). Male bosses at ICM were accused of harassing, bullying, and behaving inappropriately toward women and people of colour (Lee 2021).[76] The story notes that most interviewees wanted to be anonymous because they signed non-disparagement agreements or feared the company would retaliate against them. "[I]t's a choice between your career or complaining," said another former worker. Prior to #PayUpHollywood, few would speak candidly about their work experiences. One anonymous assistant shared his story with *Vulture* and spoke about the effectiveness of (and protection offered by) strength in numbers:

> They [the bosses] make you feel a debt to them. Like they're doing you a favour. Like you'll never work in this town again if you say something. That's why I never spoke up. I was a terrified little brown boy making terrible money. If there was going to be mass action, it would have to be fuelled by people of colour. And I wasn't brave enough. (Clark 2020)

While salaries have increased, other work conditions have largely remained the same because those who are treated poorly are given the same message: if they do not like it, they can leave (Perman 2019), because there are many willing candidates to replace them. There are so few routes "into" Hollywood so the small number of people who obtain an assistant job are supposed to be grateful for the opportunity, no matter how low their salary is, what they are asked to do or how they are treated. Senior members have done little to alter the working conditions because they rely on assistants' cheap labour and take for granted that they can bully them or abuse them because of

[76] Two years earlier, ICM had made an audacious pledge to reach 50/50 gender parity among their leadership and board by 2020 (ICM Partners 2019).

how many people are seeking such positions. “The number of people who exploit *the dream*–it’s pretty gross,” says Justin, the actor and filmmaker from Vancouver that I spoke to. While clinging to this distant dream, assistants and other workers find themselves being taken advantage of.

To summarise so far, this chapter describes challenges associated with unstable creative work in Hollywood. Many are drawn to filmmaking because they view it as a glamourous job but few are aware of how tedious the work can be, or how erratic and unreliable the employment is. Adding to the stress of trying to “break in,” filmmakers must figure out how to survive financially between jobs and pay for medical expenses. Both men and women experience this precarity as they develop careers, but men have been shown to rise up more quickly through the ranks. Men who make profitable films are given the chance to repeat their success with additional work, even if they behave very poorly, whereas even women who break box office records, like Catherine Hardwicke, are demoted. Women do not escape precarity, and it follows them at every stage. The next half of this chapter explores a further aspect of precarity: its silencing effect. Women filmmakers who are treated poorly must decide whether to speak up–and risk their jobs–or smile and pretend that all is well.

7.3 Bad behaviour and mistreatment

> "So much stuff under, around, outside, and between us and the actual work we want to do."
>
> -Actor and filmmaker Lee Shorten (2019) via Twitter.

Assistants absorb considerable abuse, but all creative workers encounter "difficult" personalities and conflict while working in the high-stakes environment of film or TV production. Crews spend long hours together, often in cramped quarters or difficult conditions, and issues that could typically be resolved easily boil over into larger problems. Emotional outbursts are not uncommon, nor is yelling. "You will be yelled at, everyone will. It is a fact of life," writes crew member Jason Ponic (2022) in an online guide. Industry members must develop a "thick skin" to survive according to numerous sources (ABC News 2018; Tilchen 2021). Screenwriter T.R. Locke (2009) suggests that, "[T]hick skin might be too soft a term–try armor plating." The above quote from Lee Shorten refers to the challenges of independent films but I employ it to refer to the "stuff" women filmmakers have to deal with, on top of the many challenges that *all filmmakers* face (developing a compelling story, finding investors, assembling a crew, casting actors, and working in challenging locations, in addition to the volatile conditions mentioned in this chapter). Women contend with additional layers of complexity in the form of harassment, sexism, racism, comments about their bodies, and mistreatment, as I explain.

7.3.1 Token women cannot complain

In a scene from independent film *The Assistant* (2019, dir. Kitty Green), a recent graduate (played by Julia Garner) working for a predatory film executive finally speaks out about her boss's inappropriate behaviour with young women. She meets with a representative from human resources, who tells her that 400 Ivy League graduates are

vying for her position and that complaining would ruin her career. He tells her not to worry because she is not her boss's "type," meaning he would not be interested in her sexually. By the time she returns to her desk, her boss has been informed about her visit to HR and she has to apologize to him via email. The film is based on the experiences of women across the industry who were interviewed by writer and director Kitty Green. "The same stories were happening over and over again," she said in an interview (The IMDb Studio 2020).

Here, I explore how the few women who do get hired face unpleasant working conditions and feel they have no recourse because they are outnumbered by men and are trying to remain employed. Off-hand comments, assumptions, jokes and other seemingly minor incidents can damage self-esteem, increase stress levels (Wong-Padoongpatt et al. 2017; Nadal 2018), and build up gradually over time until they become intolerable (Young et al. 2020). Sue et al. (2007, 271) defined "racial micro-aggressions" as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of colour." The term was later applied to gender-based discrimination as well (Basford et al. 2014). For Sue et al. (2007, 274), micro-aggressions exist on a spectrum. In their most subtle form, *micro-insults* are rude or insensitive actions and words that belittle a person's racial identity (or gender identity, and so on). *Micro-invalidation* denies the lived experiences of a person of colour, who may be told they are being "too sensitive" if they feel they are being treated differently. Finally, a *micro-assault* is intentional and obvious; the use of racial slurs or a swastika leave no room for misinterpretation.

My ethnographic findings resonate with the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) who writes that when women take on jobs in fields in which they represent less than 15% of the work population, they become "tokens" and suffer consequences. Tokens often respond by overcompensating and celebrating their own achievements, or

by trying to blend in with the men, becoming invisible and avoiding conflicts. As a consequence of this minority status, individuals endure significant stress and must dedicate time to "resolving problematic interactions" (Kanter 1977, 987–988). Some experience social isolation and cannot necessarily "join the group for communal 'tension release'" (Kanter 1977, 988), which I discuss in relation to networking in Chapter 4. Kanter (1977, 988) writes that even if these women do well, it comes at a cost, as they dedicate considerable energy to trying to bridge social gaps, and managing stress that few others face. Because of the dynamics of "tokenism," Kanter continues, the system ensures that those with marginal status remain that way. Having a few members of a minority group does not necessarily help others from the same minority become integrated–"in many cases, it has the opposite effect" (Kanter 1977, 988). While many studies support Kanter's theory (e.g., Krimmel et al. 2003; Archbold et al. 2008), several aspects have been contested. For instance, Zimmer (1988) contends that Kanter's approach–and focus on a numerical value of 15%–is too simplistic and does not account for other gender-related factors that could better explain their work experiences and treatment. Williams' (1992) "glass escalator" study of men in minority roles, mentioned in Chapter 6 of this thesis, showed that when men are in female-dominated professions, they are given preferential treatment. Yoder (1991) proposes that *gender status* must be considered; the relative status of a group in relation to the dominant group can help explain their treatment. These criticisms aside, many of the personal and professional consequences of tokenism remain relevant to this discussion.

With regard to "paving the way" for others, Chapter 6 discusses how women filmmakers are scrutinized much more closely that men, and are punished for missteps. They are seen as representing "all women," and errors could potentially have gender-wide ramifications. I argue that because filmmaking jobs are so highly coveted and so few white women and especially women of colour are offered opportunities, they are reluctant to complain if they are mistreated because of their minority status. I combine

Kanter's perspective with Pedaci's view of precarity as a disciplinary power, to demonstrate how women filmmakers cannot complain about their working conditions or mistreatment because of their isolation.

7.3.2 Harassment

When my participants were the only women occupying a role on a male-dominated team, some felt undervalued, received unwanted attention and experienced harassment. Returning to women who remain "tokens," research shows that women are less likely than men to enter professions in which they anticipate that sexual harassment will occur, and are more likely to leave those professions if it does occur (Dresden et al. 2018). McDonald (2012, 2) describes sexual harassment as but one of many "abusive" or "counterproductive" behaviours which occur in the workplace and which are linked to hierarchies and power. Others behaviours that serve to marginalize or exclude include bullying, mobbing (psychological harassment), racial harassment, and sex-based harassment (Thornton 2002; Zippel 2006). "Harassment is the symptom of an unhealthy workplace culture, which includes its values, beliefs, interactions and what guides the company, internally and externally," according to Sarah Bédard, who offers sexual harassment sensitivity training across various industries in Quebec, Canada (Dunlevy 2020). Research has shown that institutional culture is one of the largest predictors of sexual harassment (National Academies of Sciences 2018), and that the way leaders discuss sexual assault and harassment is a key indicator of how their employees will perceive those problems (Hart et al. 2018). "When the climate toward sexual harassment is lenient, members feel that there are few consequences–that those who engage in sexual harassment will be protected, while those who report it will be disregarded or even penalized" (C. Hart et al. 2018 as quoted in Hollywood Commission 2020a).

7.3.3 Discomfort with women

Some of my research participants believe that profound discomfort with women, and especially women wielding power, is the main reason they are treated poorly. This

discomfort manifests itself in the form of disrespectful, inappropriate and unpleasant language/behaviour on set and behind closed doors. When producer Navya,* who has an MBA, attends meetings with her husband, who is also a producer, executives often direct questions to her husband. They assume she knows nothing about business, she says, and it “happens all the time.” Emerging filmmaker Audrey says an investor assumed her producing partner (and husband) would be directing the project they were pitching. “Well, when *he* directs it,” the investor said multiple times, even after being corrected. Men have been seen as the default for directors for so long that it is difficult to disrupt the pattern. In these cases, the potential collaborators assumed the male partner was the director and seemed to have trouble envisaging a woman in the role. I asked other research participants about dynamics in meetings and many said that being ignored or not taken seriously was common. When he was producer of *The Shield* (2002-2008, creator Shawn Ryan), Glen Mazzara privately encouraged two young women on his writing team to share their ideas more in meetings (Sandberg et al. 2015). They told him that every time they tried, they were interrupted before they finished speaking. When their ideas were good, male writers would co-opt them without letting them finish their sentences. Mazzara introduced a “no interruptions” policy and saw an immediate change in the dynamics (Sandberg et al. 2015). In 2016, *The Hollywood Reporter* published an article featuring advice from female executives about how to be heard in meetings. "Speak the fuck up," suggested Cindy Holland, Vice President Original Content at Netflix, whereas Bonnie Arnold from DreamWorks Animation said, "I raise my hand and clear my throat; it does work," (THR Staff 2016). These challenges arise in numerous contexts beyond Hollywood: women on boards of Fortune 1000 companies are unable to get their colleagues to listen to them (Konrad et al. 2008); when women are in the minority, they speak less in political discussions (Karpowitz et al. 2014); and as US Supreme Court Justices, they are three times more likely to be interrupted by fellow male justices (Jacobi et al. 2017). New terms have been coined in recent years, such as “mansplaining” (a man condescendingly explains a topic he has limited knowledge of) (Solnit 2008;

Rothman 2012), “manterrupting” (a man interrupts a woman) (Bennett 2015) and “bro-priation” (a men gaining credit for a woman’s idea) (Bennett 2015). Comedian Sarah Cooper (2018, 101) tackles many of these issues in her book, *How to be Successful Without Hurting Men’s Feelings*, with sarcastic advice like, “when all else fails, wear a mustache….” If ideas are stolen, instead of saying, “That’s what I just said,” Cooper (2018, 93) her suggestion is more restrained: “Thank you for articulating that so clearly.”

During our 2018 interview, screenwriter Katie Ford spoke about turning her own “very sexist” business meeting into comedic fodder. While discussing the script she was co-writing, *Miss Congeniality* (2000, dir. Donald Petrie), with executives at Castle Rock Entertainment, Katie’s ideas were repeatedly ignored–until her white male colleague repeated them. Outside, she turned to her colleague and said, “I was just saying that,” and he responded, “I know. I totally know.” They decided to add the experience to the script, unbeknownst to Castle Rock. In the finished film, FBI agent Gracie Hart (played by Sandra Bullock) hovers in the background as her colleagues try to prevent a group from bombing a beauty pageant. While they scramble, she suggests concrete, actionable steps which are ignored until her male superior repeats them. “Good idea, boss!” one agent says.[77] Katie says her male peers were favoured, taken seriously and “breezed through their careers in a way that no woman could.” *Miss Congeniality* became an unexpected success, grossing $212 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo n.d.) and a sequel was developed. Katie’s relationship with her co-writers unravelled, a situation she preferred not to discuss in detail, and though she was not involved in the sequel, she was credited for creating the characters.

“Oh, we didn’t hear you,” male colleagues would say to another research participant, Sandra*, who was often the only woman on a team. “I think when they hear

[77] As of October 2022, the scene is available on YouTube at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpkMK94jnHA

women's voices, their ears just shut down. They just don't want to hear us," she says. Sandra has more than 30 years of experience in post-production on independent and studio projects. "I know for a fact I made at least $1000-2000 a week less than my male counterparts. If you speak up about it, you're complaining," she says. Eager to mend relationships and continue working, Sandra and others often had to tolerate unpleasant behaviour and mean-spirited comments. Some look to women in executive roles for support, assuming they would be sympathetic, but several participants said their experiences with women were not necessarily any better. As solitary women in those roles, they are vulnerable and may "toe the line" in order to remain employed. Women in executives roles were sometimes "the worst," according to one writer, demonstrating that giving women leadership roles without fundamentally altering the rest of the system may not result in meaningful change.

Several research participants believe that heterosexual men do not want to hire straight women because of the possibility of sexual tension or attraction. These men reportedly avoid working with straight women to steer clear of any potential conflict so they only hire men. Others say that not being "attractive enough" can be an issue in Hollywood, where appearances matter. Director Martha Coolidge told *The Guardian* that her agent sent a woman for an interview for a directing job, and was called afterwards by the man in charge of hiring, who said, "Never send anyone again who I wouldn't want to fuck" (Cochrane 2010). A writer/director hypothesised that women who identified as queer or lesbians had an easier time because they were not viewed as "prey" by straight men. Another filmmaker proposed that "more masculine" women, regardless of their own sexual orientation or identity, had an easier time fitting into the director's mould alongside the "young guys in baseball caps" mentioned in Chapter 4. "It's a lot easier to work with their own and that's how they build a team. I think it's just easier for studios to finance that," Navya explains. With so many potential problems obstructing a film's progress, making life "easier" for all involved is highly desirable, as previously mentioned.

Ageism was also raised as a potential issue for women. A filmmaker told me about her 40-year-old friend who was working at one of the major studios in an administrative role and has to conceal her age from her colleagues. “They think she’s barely touching 30. If you’re 40, you haven’t advanced enough in your career. You should be further along,” she said. Another participant was reluctant to tell me her age because she feared she would be judged for not being “more advanced.” She said there was an expectation that she should have accomplished specific things or already “broken in.” This research shows that typical career timelines are not realistic for most women filmmakers, yet the public pressure to adhere to them persists. Another research participant posited that women of any age are not hired because they are viewed as “potential vehicles for children,” inferring they are unreliable workers and not worthy of investment since they may want to take maternity leave or exit the industry altogether. A married female producer with children said in an interview that a younger woman she works with said she “doesn’t normally like people who have kids,” and several mothers described being unable to mention their children in any professional capacity, for fear of being labelled a “mother” and therefore committed to something other than the industry, thus “un-hireable.”

7.3.4 “Not necessarily” racist or sexist

Several of my research participants from minority backgrounds told me that they believe most Hollywood decision makers are “not necessarily” racist or sexist. Though the #MeToo movement has drawn attention to abuses of power and a wide range of criminal acts perpetrated by industry figures against women (e.g. R. Farrow 2017a; Whipp 2017; Stelter 2018), sexism and racism remain significant issues. While hosting the 2016 Oscars, Chris Rock shared his view of Hollywood racism at the height of the #Oscarssowhite controversy. For the second year in a row, the acting categories had all-white nominees (Buckley 2016), sparking online criticism using the aforementioned hashtag and rumours of a boycott (Goodman 2016). In his opening monologue, Rock

said that Hollywood was not “burning-cross racist” or “‘Fetch-me-some-lemonade’ racist” but instead “sorority racist.” “It's like, ‘We like you, Rhonda, but you’re not a Kappa,’” he joked (Oscars 2016). Industry members, he continued, are the “nicest white people on earth!” and yet still unwilling to hire Black people (Oscars 2016). His jokes highlight Hollywood members’ surface-level support for “progressive” causes which is at odds with deep-rooted reluctance to employ people who are not white men.

For some, derogatory comments or abusive actions were direct, but for most, they were subtle and difficult to pinpoint, leading one director to say: “You wouldn’t be able to go back and say, ‘That guy was being racist to me.’” Others were unsure if they were treated poorly because they were women or for other reasons, leading to second-guessing (“Did that really happen?”) and sometimes self-blame (“What did I do?”). Women filmmakers often alter their emotional responses in order to appease colleagues and (potential) employers, behaviour that is referred to as “emotional labour” (Hochschild 1983). Hochschild describes how flight attendants are taught to manage and suppress emotions to help passengers feel at ease, even when passengers are unpleasant or abusive. Some of my research participants avoid confrontations with current or would-be collaborators to protect their professional prospects, smiling politely or ignoring questionable behaviour, while others speak up. In a scene from season two of the comedy *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017- , creator Amy Sherman-Palladino), Midge, a comedian, eats lunch with her manager, Susie, and spots their arch-rival across the diner. He works for another comedian and sent mobsters after Susie over a business conflict. Nonetheless, he greets them with a big smile and invites Susie to meet him for lunch; she readily agrees, “Name the day.” As he walks away, Midge demands answers: “What the fuck?… what was *that*?” “*That* was showbiz,” Susie responds (Sherman-Palladino 2018). For Susie, being in “showbiz” means avoiding a public disagreement, even with a prospective murderer, and preserving what remains of their relationship by carrying on. Women filmmakers bear the additional strain of having to manage

problematic encounters, and must decide whether to defend themselves or move on like Susie. A young Black director I met spoke about the burden of monitoring others, educating them if they behave inappropriately, and trying to mend relationships. “It’s too much,” she said.

If women complain or assert themselves forcefully, they risk damaging the connections they have carefully nurtured, which are seen as the gateway to employment. They may also be cast as “difficult,” a gendered term which typically ends women’s careers in Hollywood, as detailed in Chapter 8. Straight white men are rarely targeted in the same way and can focus on their work. In the documentary #MeAfterToo (2019, dir. Daphne Simon), Toronto filmmaker and actor Melissa D’Agostino alleged that an executive for federal funding agency Telefilm Canada, spoke to her inappropriately at an industry event in front of her husband. Wearing what she described as a “sexy” dress to a “fancy” party in 2018, she chatted with the executive, later revealed to be Dan Lyon (Ravindran et al. 2020), about her script and set up a meeting. He reportedly looked her up and down and asked, “Are you going to wear that dress when you come?” She paused, not believing it really happened, and tried not to react: “I’m going to make this ok, I’m gonna make this ok,” she told herself. She tried to diffuse the situation by making a joke. D’Agostino was conflicted about attending a meeting with a man who harassed her but decided to go because she needed the money (@melissadags 2020b). “I am nervous about this meeting in an unreal way, beyond the nerves of *having to pitch your film*, which is already a massively nerve-racking thing,” she says in an excerpt from a documentary published on Vimeo (D’Agostino 2020). She did not receive funding from Telefilm.[78]

[78] Telefilm Canada announced an investigation into claims made by D’Agostino and others in July 2020 (Ahearn 2020). On January 4, 2021, the agency announced that no inappropriate behaviour had occurred, though Lyon left his position at the end of 2020 (Ahearn 2021; Ramachandran 2021).

In addition to managing others' feelings, women of colour must confront their own discomfort. Several participants feel uneasy in industry settings when they are the only non-white person present. Filmmaker and USC graduate Grace* says she is often the only Black woman on set and in meetings and feels like a "unicorn." She borrows the term from filmmaker Victoria Mahoney (2016a) who has spoken about the challenge of being the odd person out. "People want to pet the unicorn," Mahoney said to laughter at a 2016 summit I attended about women in entertainment. Mahoney's mother is Black and her father is of Irish descent (Jenkins 2012), though like many biracial people she is referred to as Black (Andreeva 2019; Boone 2019). Grace also felt different growing up and now embraces the "unicorn thing." Still, she continues to feel underestimated in Hollywood: "If someone sees a Black girl… they don't look at me and think, 'Oh she has two master's degrees.' They look at me, and the way they talk to me, it's like, 'How are you even here?'"

Mia,* who is a screenwriter, has faced subtle forms of discrimination of her own. As a Muslim woman who wears a hijab, she says executives seem surprised she can speak English fluently. Hollywood racism is nuanced, she explains. "It's not like people are saying anti-Muslim things to your face." People are too smart to do so, "even if it means sucking in a comment that you can see on their face." Her team is strategic and do not meet with potential collaborators who are perceived as "unfriendly." She is aware that there is "a whole other group I don't get sent to." Her pitches are always with white males: "It's not like I'm being sent to minority people. They don't exist. It's always a middle-aged–or sometimes a bit younger–white dude. I can't think of the last time I saw an Asian executive," she says.[79]

[79] When I spoke to Mia in the summer of 2022, she said that she has now met a few Asian-American executives: "Not many, but a few."

Gabriela Tagliavini is originally from Argentina and has directed multiple successful features. Two of her Spanish-language films have opened the Mexican box office at number one: *Ladies' Night* (2004) and *How To Break Up With Your Douchebag* (*Cómo cortar a tu patán*) (2017), which surpassed *Blade Runner 2049* (2017, dir. Denis Villeneuve) on opening weekend. On her first day directing *Border Run*, a 2012 feature about illegal border crossings starring Sharon Stone and Billy Zane, Gabriela was in the bathroom on break. "I was so happy, I was directing this big star, and I was feeling really accomplished," she says during a phone interview in between meetings in 2018. A woman from accounting came into the bathroom and asked for toilet paper. "I was so in shock," she recounts. "She saw me as a Latina and as a woman and she thought I was a maid. This happened a few years ago, not in the 1800s." Gabriela told the woman, "I'm the fucking director," and left. The unconscious bias demonstrated in this example is rooted in structural racism and the expectation that if "brown women" are working on film sets, they must be members of the custodial staff. It reveals deep prejudice against Latinx women–not only within the film industry but across the US (for examples of women of colour being mistaken for janitors/support staff, see @AcademicMami 2019; Schulte 2015). The accountant's assumption is fueled by the industry's historical exclusion of non-white women filmmakers and demonstrates how uncharacteristic it is to have a Latinx woman in a leadership role, with 95.5% of directing roles on major motion pictures from 2007 to 2018 being given to (mostly white) men (Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, et al. 2019). Since #MeToo, Gabriela has seen a change and says that while people may still hold racist or sexist attitudes, they are at least aware that they cannot say certain things in public.

7.3.5 Regulating women's bodies

Some of my research participants have faced intense scrutiny regarding their looks, which affects their professional advancement and views of themselves. Several spoke about unwanted attention directed towards them for either being "too attractive"

or not adhering to conventional ideals. Paris-based filmmaker Elena Rossini's first documentary feature, *The Illusionists* (2016), is critical of the beauty industry and sheds light on the way women's insecurities are fueled by companies selling beauty products. In her professional life, Elena says she is regularly patronized and not taken seriously because of her own appearance. I asked if she thought she was considered "too pretty" to be a filmmaker, and she laughed, admitting it was awkward to discuss. Not "too pretty," she responded, but maybe "too feminine?" After being belittled at social events, ("Oh what kind of little short films do you make?"), she has been tempted to cut her hair or dress more androgynously, hoping it would help her appear more "credible." She attempted to change the way she was perceived, opting for all-black loose-fitting clothes that hide her shape. "At the age of 38, I've found the outfit that does not put my credibility in question. So, now I dress like an architect. I've found that's the sweet spot," she says over Skype in 2018. Amused and angered by the way men would respond to her–she wanted to "cry or scream at times,"–she went a step further and created a line of clothing emblazoned with the text: "This is what a film director looks like." She hoped to normalize the presence of women filmmakers and show that they come in all shapes, sizes, races and ethnicities. Wearing one of the shirts at an event attended by people from the US and France, she was asked by a journalist from a prominent publication what she did for a living. She pointed to her shirt and he seemed puzzled. "It was literally written across my shirt," she says. It still did not register with him.



Figure 76. *Filmmaker Elena Rossini wearing one of the shirts she designed. Image courtesy of Elena Rossini.*

The idea that in order for a woman to be perceived as competent she must change her appearance is at odds with Elena's values; she advocates for a world in which women are taken seriously, irrespective of their looks, age or clothing. Citing tech entrepreneur Mark Zuckerberg as an example of someone who dresses casually (in hooded sweatshirts and jeans) and has no trouble attracting investors, she says that men and women play in the "same arena under different rules." In filmmaking, Elena continues, "Networks and production companies fund those they believe can do the job. Unfortunately for us, there's an extra layer of effort that needs to be made–we need to *look* capable to do the job."

7.3.6 On-set experiences

One participant in a typically male-dominated role regularly faces criticism regarding her body and often has no female colleague to turn to in uncomfortable situations. As a production designer, Hannah* is responsible for designing and creating visual elements: sets, props, wardrobe, and lighting. At lower-budget levels, there are more women in production design and Hannah corrects those who call her the "art girl." ("I'm not under 18. I am not a girl," she says). Surrounded by male colleagues, she is

constantly on the defensive against what she calls “sexist bullshit.” For example, Hannah is criticised when she wears makeup and when she does not. Most days she dresses like “Indiana Jones or [someone from] Jurassic Park,” but describes herself as “put together.” She wore shorts one day and crew members made jokes, saying, “Oh Hannah, you keep wearing shorts like that, you can do anything you want,” and, “Hannah, just show ‘em your tits.” One day, she was scouting a location with a female colleague. It was hot but Hannah felt she could not wear shorts because it might become “a whole other thing.” That day, crew members asked Hannah if the colleague was her “lesbian lover.” A crew member recently grabbed her fingernails and said, “This is so unprofessional. Your nails, get them done,” pointing to her chipped polish. Later that day, Hannah went to help him load the truck. He said, “Are you sure? You’re going to get dirty. Good thing you don’t have an expensive manicure.” In addition to misogynistic comments, Hannah has to deal with unwanted touching: “Almost every production has a creepy AD [assistant director] who touches me too much…. I had a boss who was always trying to hug me…. I got weird vibes. I did not want to be hugged by him.” Another director treated the crew poorly but wanted to hug everyone before going home. “I don’t want to have to hug a bunch of old dudes at the end of every day,” she recounts.

Hannah risks being insulted or harassed whether she wears feminine clothing or baggy shorts; paints her nails or chooses not to. There’s no way to “win,” she says. She has noticed some improvement in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, but some colleagues have responded unusually. One said, “Let me know if anyone ‘Harvey Weinsteins’ you.” To which Hannah sarcastically replied, “Ok, ya, for sure. I’ll let you know if anyone *Weinsteins* me.” She heard another call for “two Harvey Weinsteins.” He was asking for 50-pound bags of dirt, she explains, because “Weinstein is the biggest dirt bag in Hollywood. I appreciated that.” Her mother dislikes hearing her work stories and tells Hannah to stop “stirring the pot,” inferring that she should avoid escalating conflicts and try to get along.

As #MeToo provided a platform for women to speak about their past experiences, powerful celebrities began to share stories of early-career abuse and mistreatment, which is almost a “rite of passage” for women across industries (Shaw et al. 2018; Jain-Link et al. 2019). Reese Witherspoon said she was sexually assaulted by a director at 16, and that agents and producers made her feel that “silence was a condition of my employment” (Nahas et al. 2017). Jennifer Lawrence was pressured to lose weight and when she raised this with a producer, he said he saw no issue because she was perfectly “fuckable.” She was also forced to stand in a nude lineup with much thinner women and was told to use the photos of her body as inspiration for weight loss (Elle.com 2017). "I didn't want to be a whistleblower,” she said in 2017. “I didn't want these embarrassing stories talked about in a magazine. I just wanted a career" (Elle.com 2017). Patricia Arquette published a thread on Twitter about an encounter she had with director Oliver Stone, who set up a meeting to discuss a film that was “very sexual” (@PattyArquette 2017a). Later, he sent roses and invited her to a screening. Arquette felt uncomfortable so brought her boyfriend along and Stone asked her, “Why did you bring him?” She never heard about the film again. Since nothing in particular *happened*, she didn’t talk about it, but still felt something was off about their exchanges. She shared the story to call attention to the “craggy and uncertain terrain women negotiate in Entertainment and all businesses” (@PattyArquette 2017b) where problematic behaviour is difficult to decode and women question their own interpretations of events. Finally, in 2020, actor Kate Winslet shared a memory of filming a topless scene for *Heavenly Creatures* (1994, dir. Peter Jackson), during which a crew member said, “Well, I guess it’s hard-dicks day, boys.” Winslet was 19 at the time and thought: “‘Well, that wasn’t very nice, but we’d better not say anything.’ And so I just carried on…. [W]hen you’re younger, you do this nonsense thing of just thinking, ‘That’s what men say.’ And they do it sometimes like they’re breathing” (Miller 2020).

Not being able to say anything about inappropriate behaviour–until you become a major Hollywood star–silences "low status" women. Up until recently, those who complained about sexual misconduct or harassment and received financial settlements were often required to sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) to prevent them from speaking about the alleged misconduct or compensation they received (Altman 2022). However, NDAs have been used more widely to protect intellectual property and the content of productions from being leaked to the media. A 2017 *Los Angeles Times* journalist discovered that the NDAs used by Leonardo DiCaprio's production company Greenhour Corp. in recent years included provisions to warn workers that "conversations, jokes, banter and behavior may contain explicit references to sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, violence and other protected categories" as part of the "creative process" (Koren 2017). Furthermore, the wording suggested that workers could not sue DiCaprio or Greenhour for any wrongdoing; the terms were "pretty standard" for Hollywood according to a litigator interviewed by the *Times* (Koren 2017). Once it became more acceptable to speak out after #MeToo, one of Weinstein's former assistants "broke" her NDA to discuss a secret settlement she received with the press, admitting she was not allowed to keep a copy of the agreement she signed (CBS This Morning 2017). New legislation implemented in California in 2018 has banned the use of NDAs in sexual assault, sexual harassment, or gender-based discrimination settlements (Perman 2018). Even with new laws, the industry has developed processes for covering up, ignoring and sidestepping problematic behaviour to keep the cameras rolling–at any cost (described in Chapter 8). In male-dominated industries with few women occupying positions of power, women are vulnerable and cannot speak up or complain. Hollywood hiring is based on reputations and relationships, in which "getting along" with others is primordial. When Hannah defended herself against inappropriate comments, her mother saw it as provoking further controversy ("stirring the pot"). In academia, "new people" (women, those with less privilege, and immigrants) are allowed into the establishment so long as they do not create problems by speaking out, according

to the authors of *Women Who Make a Fuss* (Stengers et al. 2014). They are expected to adhere to the academy's terms and conditions. "Come in, just don't make a fuss" (Stengers et al. 2014, 17). Senior industry members shared the same message with Witherspoon, while others like Winslet had already internalized it and knew not to say anything. It is important to note that all of these celebrities shared their past experiences recently, after they had amassed fame, fortune, and presumably teams of publicists and lawyers who could protect them if needed.

Despite what others say or do, "[I]f you want the job, you've gotta be nice and get along with everybody," said Robin Swicord, the aforementioned experienced screenwriter who had trouble transitioning to directing (Kaufman 2017), "You've gotta smile all the time." Her husband, screenwriter Nicholas Kazan (son of legendary filmmaker Elia Kazan), can express himself freely. He has yelled at producers on the phone: "You can't talk to me like that! [Screw] you!" (Kaufman 2017). Swicord, who arguably has had more success than her husband when credits are compared (IMDb 2020c; IMDb 2020e), believes she would be fired if she spoke like that. I focus on what men can "get away with" in Chapter 8.

"The misogyny is beyond anything that people believe when I tell these stories," wrote series creator Theresa Rebeck (2017) in an essay excerpted from the book *Double Bind: Women on Ambition*. Like Hannah, she has had a wide range of unpleasant encounters which enrage her husband (who threatened to leave her if she took another job in TV) and bewilder her friends from outside the industry:

> On my first job in television, when I was in my twenties, I would sit, dazed, while a roomful of men sat around and told fist-up-the-ass jokes, roaring with laughter. In another room, the guys would sit around and pitch stories, and then write everything down in great detail on little white cards. Whenever a scene with female characters showed up they would write a card that said, "girl scene here." Then they would look at me and say, "You're a woman, you write this." … Instead of apologizing, one of my male peers said to me, "If you think that's rough, you haven't been in enough writers' rooms." "Don't tell me where I've been, a-hole," I replied. Okay, I didn't really say that, I just thought it. But the rest of those stories are true. (Rebeck 2017)

Rebeck didn't answer back to those men because she likely feared reprisal, and as a young woman outnumbered by men, she had no seniority and no allies. Women have been expected to "tough it out" and endure the crude jokes of their mostly male colleagues; it was part of developing that "thick skin" required to survive in Hollywood. After #MeToo, this started to change, my research participants tell me, and words are chosen with greater care. Director Gabriela Tagliavini says, "They may treat me one way and think another way, but at least people watch out now not to hurt you."

7.4 Conclusion

Women and women of colour who seek to develop filmmaking careers face particularly difficult working conditions due to precarity. Examining risks involved in becoming a Hollywood filmmaker, Prindle (1993, 55) writes, "These artists are willing to pay any personal price or bear any burden to become a success." Women must tolerate all the usual forms of instability associated with creative careers in film and television, while fielding inappropriate behaviour, petty comments about their abilities, overt and subtle racism and misogyny, and sexual harassment. If they are the target of inappropriate comments, for example, they must temper their reactions and do their utmost to protect the other person and their working relationship, lest they be cast as "difficult." There are hierarchies in place that determine who can break the silence, and who cannot; if 19-year-old Kate Winslet complained about the crew member's inappropriate comment, she would have likely been told to not "make a fuss" for the sake of her career. Melissa D'Agostino, the filmmaker who spoke out about an executive's comments about her dress, "made a fuss" and has worked to find alternative film financing to avoid working with the agency that found him not guilty of wrongdoing (effectively the only studio in Canada). "[Y]ou shouldn't have to build your own funding/streaming system to avoid harassment & discrimination," she tweeted in 2020 (@melissadags 2020a).

I have also focused on the plight of assistants because the way they are treated is illustrative of an attitude found among some industry members, who believe they have earned the right to abuse those "beneath" them. Once core members "climb the ranks," gain status (through financial or critical success) and build relationships with others in power, they are seen as almost "untouchable." As noted in Chapter 8, their filmic contributions are deemed to be so valuable that they can mistreat their assistants and others with impunity. Furthermore, earning no money is viewed as part of the process, as #PayUpHollywood organizer Liz Alper explains:

> [E]verybody is supposed to be proud of the war stories they have when they were a starving assistant sharing a one bedroom with three other people, but they scrapped and starved so that they could have the career they have today and to me that's such privileged bullshit. It's not addressing any sort of problem, it's inflicting the same sort of pain on a new generation who are facing a multitude of issues [economic challenges] that didn't exist 10 or 20 years ago. (Thorne 2019)

Assistants are supposed to transition to higher-status roles, leaving their poor treatment behind as they become the showrunners, directors, and agents of tomorrow. Women filmmakers are treated poorly early on, in the middle of their careers, and as they enter studio filmmaking. They are expected to "grin and bear it," according to camera assistant Alice, who says that women from older generations are not necessarily allies: "[They] are like, 'I got through it, I put in 25 years. I was able to do it, and you can too.' Then there are the women who joined maybe 15 years ago and they were told 'no' so many times that they shut down." Alice's generation is keen to push for change, she says, but their will to fight diminishes over time too. Since we spoke in 2018, Alice, who was active since 2008, has left the industry. As Lee Shorten (2019) said on Twitter, there is "so much stuff under, around, outside, and between us and the actual work we want to do," and some women can only tolerate it for so long.

Chapter 8 | Teflon Men and Difficult Women

> "What he said to me is that it doesn't matter what's true. What matters is what's believed."
>
> –Mia Farrow recounting her ex-partner Woody Allen's words in the miniseries *Allen V. Farrow* (2021, dir. Kirby Dick & Amy Ziering)

By the time Bryan Singer was considered to direct the Freddie Mercury biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018), he already had a reputation for trouble. Executives at the studio, Fox, were said to be hesitant to hire him, but he reportedly demonstrated tremendous "passion" for the material (Masters 2018). According to sources, they made a deal with Singer: to remain employed he had to show up to work and not break the law (Masters 2018)–conditions under which no woman director would ever be hired, as I argue. The bar was so low that showing up for work had to be specified. Given Singer's history, one writer on celebrity gossip site Dlisted wrote, "It boggles the mind as to why Fox even hired him in the first place…" (Mieka 2018).

This chapter focuses on the double standards which exist with regard to conduct on- and off-set in Hollywood. The alleged abuse of successful men is overlooked if their films are profitable or acclaimed; they are cast as geniuses or *enfants terribles*. I have already explored how misdeeds are tolerated in Hollywood, particularly when the abuser is a well-connected male figure. I have discussed how bosses exploit and bully their assistants, how racist or sexist comments are ignored in meetings, how women who complain are seen as risking their employment, and how new arrivals must develop a "thick skin" to survive in a highly-charged environment. This thesis demonstrates that exclusion along gender lines holds women filmmakers back professionally, but as I show in this chapter, it also elevates high-status white male filmmakers who misbehave, abuse their colleagues and even commit crimes while furthering their careers. Some male filmmakers continue to do so for decades as their staff cover their tracks and collaborators turn a blind eye. In one of the most notorious examples, more than 80

women, including celebrities, accused studio founder Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault or harassment dating back to the 1980s (Williams 2017; Levin 2017). These were not isolated incidents but a pattern of behaviour that became an "open secret" because Weinstein's work was cherished. I argue that professional standards are perceived differently for men, who can bury controversies, as the women around them suffer consequences for expressing opinions or showing emotions. Men are typically forgiven for their arguably much more serious transgressions because they are already "inside" the system–they have well-established reputations for delivering films that audiences want to see and networks of people that rely on them for employment. A significant amount of time and money has been invested in them and as actor Amber Heard says later in this chapter, they will take everyone down with them if they sink. Lacking clout and status, a woman filmmaker is expendable: she might arrive at a studio, cry once on set, and then have trouble working again. Powerful men recover from scandals, hence the moniker, "Teflon men" (Minelle 2017; L. Hill 2018), used by the media to describe some men in the industry because nothing sticks to them. Women, in contrast, can be represented as "difficult," an image that leads to relative disadvantage and reputational damage.

"[S]ome directors are real pricks to work for, but they put out amazing movies," said radio personality Anthony Cumia (Opie and Anthony 2012), who was later fired for a racist rant of his own (Coleman 2014). I demonstrate that "pricks" who continue to work are typically men, while women are relegated for almost any reason. The second half of Cumia's sentence is key: "*but they put out amazing movies*." Their filmic contributions (whether artistic or financial) are so highly valued that their behaviour is ignored. Being a "good person" or getting along with cast members is irrelevant when the return on investment of a production is close to a billion dollars. Roman Polanski, discussed later, still makes films despite pleading guilty to unlawful sex with a child and fleeing the US. "Polanski has made some cracking films, but *Knife in the Water* and *Chinatown*, fine

works as they are, surely don't license their director to rape," wrote Jenny Diski (2009) in the *London Review of Books*. In numerous cases, white male directors have been forgiven for egregious acts because their films were *that good*. "It's a weird business, the film business," said producer Lauren Shuler Donner, who worked with Bryan Singer, in a media interview (Siegel 2020). "We honour creativity and talent and we forgive the brilliant ones," she said, so long as they are high-status white men, I argue.

This chapter discusses a particular cultural conception of creativity that has developed, which is rooted in the idea that individual geniuses can behave however they want if they (or their work) are perceived to achieve a certain status or value. Such a conception of creativity is highly gendered and has implications for power dynamics, as I explain. The archetype of the male "genius" is culturally constructed and influences how male filmmakers' conduct and work is perceived and enabled. This chapter begins with an examination of several prominent male filmmakers, who are known for being exacting and challenging to work with; despite their unorthodox working methods, they are revered and highly-sought after. Next, I include detailed profiles of four industry members who have either allegedly committed sex-related crimes (Woody Allen, Roman Polankski, and Bryan Singer) or been abusive towards their employees (Scott Rudin). These four men (and others) continued working despite the numerous allegations they faced and were protected by their status, relationships, and track record for success (though as I explain, #MeToo has now hampered them somewhat). Finally, I describe how women filmmakers are subject to different standards and must tread carefully to avoid overstepping bounds on set, lest they be branded as "difficult"–a gendered term which tarnishes their reputation, sometimes irrevocably.

8.1 Demanding geniuses

When male directors are highly demanding or work in very particular ways, they are perceived to take on a mythic, almost "God-like" quality. For example, in Anand

Pandian's (2015) *Reel World*, a film composer from the Tamil film industry is so revered that directors line up in his studio hallway for hours waiting for him to emerge. Though they do not know if he's working or even inside, they wait patiently. "They take his work as a matter of divination," Pandian (2015, 192) writes. Later, the composer describes how songs come to him using vocabulary tinged with religious elements: "I'm sort of a messenger. It just flows through me. Nobody can create something like this. It just comes, it's flowing through me. I'm just a mediator, in between" (Pandian 2015, 193). Such "visionaries" are often given more latitude with regards to their behaviour, in filmmaking and also in other industries. Apple founder Steve Jobs, for instance, was venerated for creating innovative products and being "truly special"; however, he was also famously unpleasant (Barondes 2011). Tech writer David Coursey (2011) argues that Jobs would not have been able to accomplish what he did by being a "nice guy" because then he would not have been *Steve Jobs*–his mean streak was part of the package of culturally constructed behaviour that was considered "acceptable" because he was a "genius." Coursey writes that only Jobs could act the way he did, " [I]f you can't match his genius and ability to imagine and deliver, you haven't earned the right to match his behaviour." By that rationale, once an individual reaches a certain level of perceived intelligence or ability, the social codes governing human relations no longer apply because they have–within this cultural context–apparently "earned the right" to be an "arrogant jerk," like Jobs (Groth 2012). There are numerous Hollywood directors who are perceived as having earned the right to behave this way. Filmmaker David Fincher, for example, gets away with being the "ultimate control freak" because he is also regarded as one of the "most talented directors of his generation" (Ducker 2020). He is known for shooting "dozens upon dozens" of takes for his films, to the point where his editor had to devise a new classification system to manage the extremely high volume of material (Ducker 2020). In some cases, it took weeks of editing to assemble a scene, which is highly unusual. When actor Amanda Seyfried had to film an estimated 200 takes of a scene for *Mank* (2020), she gushed about the experience: "Honestly, it is the hardest

I've ever worked. But I am so thrilled with it… to get to work with Fincher, he's one of a kind" (Sharf 2020b). Despite his reputation, Fincher is "never at a loss for people who want to work with him" (Ducker 2020). Though he is demanding and the working conditions are challenging–actor Robert Downey Jr. joked about a "gulag" (Halbfinger 2007)–instead of calling him "difficult" Fincher is reframed as a "perfectionist" whose obsessiveness is not only tolerated but glorified (Sharf 2020c; Riesman 2018). It's all part of the "Fincher experience" (UPROXX 2014).



Figures 77, 78. *Left, David Fincher at a New York screening of* The Social Network *(2010), a film about another "genius", Mark Zuckerberg. "Jesse Eisenberg and David Fincher" by Raffi Asdourian licensed under CC BY 2.0. Modification: cropping. Right, David O. Russell at the French premiere of* American Hustle *(2014). "David O. Russell avp 2014.jpg" by Georges Biard licensed under CC BY 3.0.*

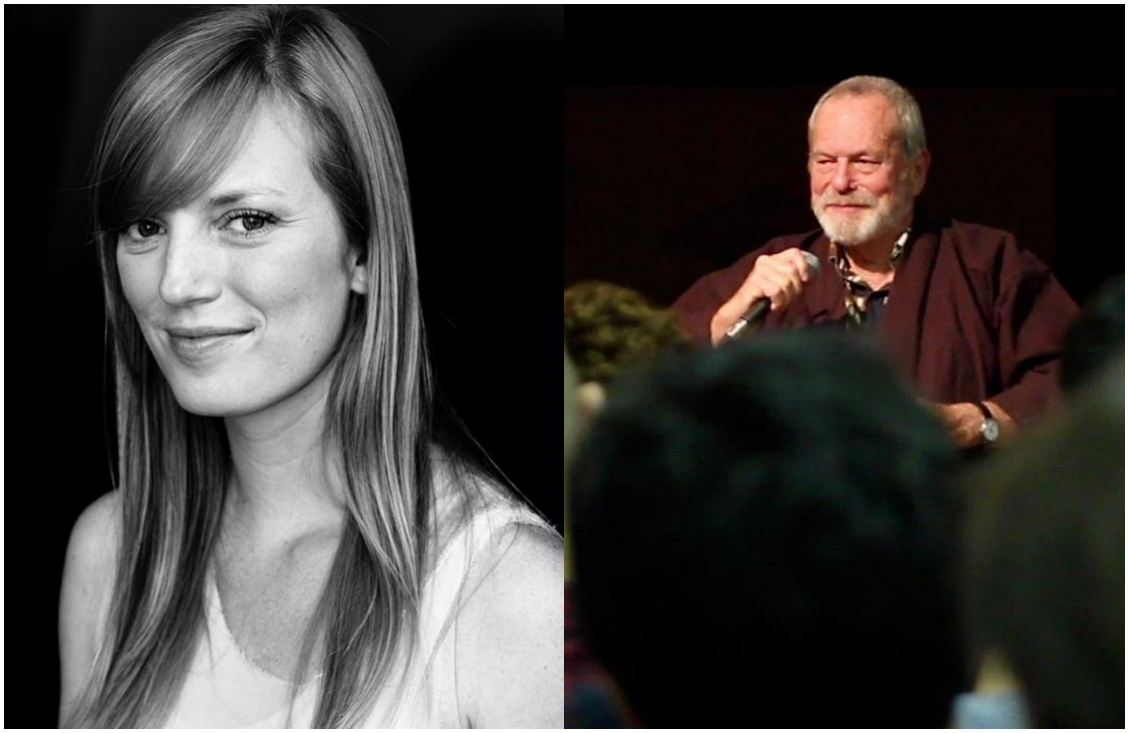
Stories have also swirled around David O. Russell (Sacks 2015; Waxman 2004; McGurk 2016), the filmmaker chosen over Catherine Hardwicke and Lexi Alexander to direct 2010 boxing film *The Fighter* (discussed in Chapter 6). Russell's alleged "abuse and lunatic behaviour are extreme even by Hollywood standards," according to journalist Jonathan Alter (Sacks 2015). He wrote those words in a private email to his brother-in-law Michael Lynton, the CEO of Sony Entertainment, whose email account was hacked during a company-wide breach in 2014 (James 2015; Faughnder et al. 2014). Alter's

words suggest that *some* “abuse and lunatic behaviour” is permissible when making films, but that there are limits. Lynton replied saying, "Trust me I know all about the other," in an apparent reference to Russell (Sacks 2015). This was not the first indication of alleged issues with Russell. He and actor George Clooney reportedly got into a “brawl” (Schwerdtfeger 2016) while filming *Three Kings* (1999) and Clooney vowed never to work with Russell again. In a video leaked online in 2007, Russell exploded at actor Lily Tomlin on the set of *I Heart Huckabees* (2004), screaming that she was a “fucking cunt” and a “bitch” as he threw props around the room in a fit of rage (Vundacast Productions 2016). On the set of *American Hustle* (2014), he allegedly bullied actor Amy Adams to the point that she cried almost every day (McGurk 2016). Leaked emails show that her co-star Christian Bale apparently had to get in Russell’s face and tell him to stop “acting like an asshole” (Sacks 2015). Bale was undeterred, though; after winning an Oscar for *The Fighter*, and being nominated for *American Hustle*, he signed on to another film with Russell (McNary 2020a). When the results are *that good*, some collaborators appear willing to tolerate the above-mentioned “abuse and lunatic behaviours,” (Sacks 2015).

Terry Gilliam is another iconic filmmaker whose “brilliance” has allowed him to direct 13 features and numerous episodes of television despite operating in a reportedly chaotic, poorly planned, and sometimes dangerous manner (see for example Edelstein 2003; Seibold 2022; Russell 2019). His credits include *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998). The documentary *Lost in La Mancha* (2002, dir. Keith Fulton & Louis Pepe) documents the unravelling of one of Gilliam’s films, *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, which was initially abandoned as the production ran out of time and money and faced numerous other challenges. In an excerpt from Canadian actor and filmmaker Sarah Polley’s (2022) memoir, *Run Towards the Danger*, she describes disorder and trauma on the set of Gilliam’s *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1988) when she was eight years old. Polley feared for her life as she was repeatedly told to run through burning obstacles for a scene in which explosions

detonated around her. Between takes, she sobbed in her father's arms, begging him to intercede on her behalf. Other episodes involved nearly being trampled by a horse, having an explosive set off so close that she had to be sent to the hospital in an ambulance (she was physically unharmed), and being dangled in the air high above the studio parking lot. As an adult, Polley emailed Gilliam to tell him about the terror and exhaustion she experienced, hoping he would be sensitive to the needs of future child actors he hired. Her message was rambling and apologetic ("sorry for babbling") (Polley 2022) and she frequently blamed her parents for not advocating for her. Gilliam replied, saying he had no idea she felt scared but that in several of the situations she described, she was never in real danger. His reframing made her question her own experience. Later when they met in person, Gilliam made light of the situation by "playfully" lifting her shirt, asking to see her metaphorical scars (Polley 2022). Years after the shoot, Polley met with Richard Conway, who was responsible for orchestrating *Baron Munchausen*'s many special effects, for which he was nominated for an Oscar. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry about what happened to you on that movie," he said as his eyes welled up. Polley and Conway rewatched the film, holding hands, as a kind of "exorcism" and Conway cried, feeling remorseful about his role (Polley 2022). Polley's co-star, Eric Idle, also confirmed her version of events on Twitter in 2018. "She was right. She was in danger. Many times. It was amazing we never lost anyone," Idle wrote (@ericidle 2018). It was hard for Polley to realize that Gilliam was the one responsible for her experience because she admired him so much:

> I let Terry off the hook in part because, even as a child, I had bought into the glamour of the idea of the *enfant terrible* director, the out-of-control mad white male genius–a myth that has dominated the film industry's understanding of what brilliance must necessarily look like. As an adult, I find myself wholly intolerant of the fetishization of this archetype of genius, having seen, first-hand, great works made by decent, conscientious people, and having witnessed sharp impatience with female or BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and people of colour] filmmakers who show any similar signs of irresponsibility. Terry lived for so long in the film world's imagination as a "mad genius" whose madness and recklessness somehow elevated his work. (Polley 2022)



Figures 79, 80. *Left, Sarah Polley at the Venice International Film Festival in 2009. "Sarah Polley 66ème Festival de Venise (Mostra)" by Nicolas Genin licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Modification: cropping. Right, Terry Gilliam presents a film in Italy in 2018. "Terry Gilliam Don Quixote Bologna" by Pietro Luca Cassarino licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. Modification: cropping.*

Polley says that women and BIPOC filmmakers would never be allowed to act in the same way and that Gilliam's status as a white man allowed his "madness" to continue, unchecked. Now, she sees what he and many other white men "have been allowed to get away with in the name of art" (Polley 2022). Previously, Gilliam and the others mentioned in this chapter operated with few restraints; their behaviour was ignored because their "art" was highly prized. However, once predatory men started getting "cancelled" in 2017, critics have been divided with regard to what should be done with "good art" created by "bad people" (e.g. Grady 2018a; Dederer 2017; J. Thompson 2019). Can it be consumed privately? Should it be destroyed? Or publicly presented with space for a critical discussion? There is no straightforward solution.

Polley also refers to Hollywood's tolerance for the *enfant terrible* director, "the out-of-control mad white male genius" who has set the standard for behaviour. While auteur theory (the idea that the director is the main author of a narrative feature) has already been critically discussed in the Introduction, Gilliam is still called a "true auteur"

whose many production challenges–which might otherwise be viewed as symptoms of mismanagement–only add to his legendary status (Vlessing 2018). The tendency to celebrate particular individuals as the sole authors of films remains a problematic tendency. As noted in the Introduction, critic and film pioneer François Truffaut helped filmmakers gain credibility as artists by calling them *auteurs*. Similarly, Christine Battersby (1991, 16) argues that architecture became a respected field in the 19th century by borrowing the same convention from art history in highlighting the contribution of a single creative genius. Derived from Latin, *genius* was originally associated with men. Initially, it referred to the divine forces protecting male procreation and later the spirits guarding a man's, life, virility, land and inheritance, meaning women could not possess *genius* (Battersby 1991, 12). Later, genius became associated with creativity and the God-like ability to make something from nothing; geniuses were culturally constructed as imaginative, passionate, irrational, emotional creators (Battersby 1991, 14). While the idea that architecture (or filmmaking) is a meritocracy remains a popular concept, Thornton (2014, 129) notes that those who evaluate merit are "products of their culture and the gendered systems that reinforce male privilege." Therefore, the designation "genius" is given to those who meet certain standards, as viewed through a male lens. In a study of 70 Australian architects, Matthewson (2017, 169) found that even experienced women expressed doubts about their own abilities, whereas no man did the same. She proposes that women have internalised their status as "other" within architecture and unconsciously accept that men are the geniuses who have earned their rightful place in the field.

In Hollywood, "geniuses" have been given hundreds of millions of dollars and free rein on set. Numerous directors have displayed questionable behaviour while building a cult-like following including: Stanley Kubrick was documented bullying lead actor Shelley Duvall on the set of *The Shining* (1980) (Abramovitch 2021; Greene 2016); Alfred Hitchcock reportedly harassed actor Tippi Hedren while filming *The Birds* (1963) (Evans

2016; White 2021); Michael Bay's verbal abuse allegedly pushed star Megan Fox to quit *Transformers 3* (2010) (Sneider 2010); and Lars von Trier reportedly targeted singer/actor Björk, while filming *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) (Kreps 2017; Björk 2017). Despite apparently having overbearing personalities, anger management issues or other destructive tendencies, the above-mentioned filmmakers were not impeded by controversy as they became icons.

8.2 Admitted (and alleged) abusers

Content warning: this section contains allegations of abuse and sexual assault involving women and children.

According to the above reports, there are many "great" white male filmmakers who are unpleasant to work with. However, to my knowledge, they are not convicted criminals or fugitives. They have not been accused of drugging and raping young boys; of pushing their employees out of moving vehicles, or of molesting their adopted daughter. While these examples may sound extreme, they are all based on allegations against directors in the text that follows.

Up until October 2017 when the #MeToo movement inspired people to hold alleged abusers to account, it was very difficult for successful Hollywood filmmakers (and executives) to fall out of favour no matter how they behaved. So long as they continued to "deliver" professionally, they could do almost anything in front of colleagues or in their personal lives while maintaining their status and privileges. The men profiled below have benefitted from a system in which their work was so well respected that people were able to separate the art from the artist and continue to enjoy their films, no matter who may have been hurt in the process of making them. The systems of exclusion that keep women *out* also help these men stay *in*–they are industry figureheads.

8.2.1 Woody Allen

In August 1992, a media circus descended on filmmaker Woody Allen, who was accused of molesting his seven-year-old adopted daughter, Dylan Farrow, in Connecticut. Months earlier, his then-partner Mia Farrow found nude photos of her other adopted daughter, Soon-Yi Previn, in Allen's apartment, a discovery which led to the unravelling of their relationship. After he was accused of abusing Dylan, Allen, age 57, held a press conference to declare his love for 21-year-old Soon-Yi, whom he eventually married (Silman 2015), and used the media to spin a narrative that Mia Farrow was an irrational, vengeful ex who coached Dylan to lie. His affair with Soon-Yi was given more attention than the allegations of sexual abuse, according to *The Guardian* (Freeman 2020).

The miniseries *Allen v. Farrow* (2021, dir. Kirby Dick & Amy Ziering) explores the aftermath from the perspective of the Farrows. In the film, Frank S. Maco, the State's Attorney for Litchfield County, Connecticut, said he asked the Yale New Haven Child Sexual Abuse Clinic to evaluate Dylan to see if she could testify in court about what happened. Clinic workers deviated from accepted practices by interviewing Dylan nine times over a seven-month period and then destroying their notes, which are supposed to be given to law enforcement. Forensic psychiatrist Stephen P. Herman was a witness for Mia Farrow and said in the documentary that interviewing a child about sexual abuse allegations that many times was highly irregular. The clinic's social workers drafted a report saying there were inconsistencies in Dylan's story and that she may have been coached by her mother. They contacted Allen and Farrow, instead of sending the report to Maco. "Next thing I know, the Yale New Haven team presented the findings to Allen, the suspect of the investigation, and allowed him to announce the results, publicly, on the steps of the hospital," Maco said. Allen smiled at the press conference as he stated that the report was accurate and "There was no sexual abuse that ever took place." *The*

New York Times reported the story under the headline, “Woody Allen Says Report Clears Him” (Perez-Pena 1993a).

In New York City, where the family resided, Child Welfare Administration case worker Paul Williams began investigating and found Dylan credible. He was reportedly told by his superiors that since the case was high-profile, it would be pursued by someone with more seniority. He was reassigned but would not give up on the case, so he was apparently fired. “I did my job and I believe the kid,” he said as he was being hounded by reporters. Others have suggested Williams was fired for being rude and demonstrating bias in interviews for the case (Bennet 1993). The agency stopped investigating later that year citing “no credible evidence” (Perez-Pena 1993b). The documentary makers suggest a cover-up may have occurred, possibly involving top city officials, because Allen generated millions of dollars by filming in New York; however no evidence is presented. In September 1993, state’s attorney Frank Maco announced there was probable cause (reasonable grounds to believe a crime was committed) to arrest Allen for sexual assault of a minor, but he did not pursue charges to avoid traumatizing Dylan further, a decision her mother supported (Henneberger 1993).

Dylan Farrow maintains she was abused and her story was published in the mainstream media several times over the last decade (Orth 2013; Kristof 2014; D. Farrow 2017). “What he said to me is that it doesn’t matter what’s true,” Mia says of Woody in the documentary, “What matters is what’s believed.” Though he hasn’t been formally charged with a sex crime, Allen has long been viewed as a “deviant” in the court of public opinion according to journalist Travis M. Andrews (2017). He has operated with “a low buzz of controversy” humming beneath his career for 25 years (Wilkinson 2018), but it was never enough to hurt his popularity (until recently). Actors from his films “praise his skills as a director but remain detached when it comes to the allegations” (Andrews 2017). *Allen V. Farrow* filmmakers allege that Allen mounted a successful PR campaign to build public support and discredit his opponents. When asked about the allegations,

Cate Blanchett, who stared in Allen's *Blue Jasmine* (2013), said, "I think that's a family issue and I hope they can resolve it. I really do." Scarlett Johansson has appeared in three Allen films and has been an active in the Time's Up movement to assist victims of sexual harassment in the workplace. She and fellow actor Javier Bardem have both said they believe Allen is innocent and would work with him again (Keegan 2019; Pulver 2018).

Two months after #MeToo began, Dylan Farrow (2017) spoke out again[80] and in the new political climate, her story gained traction. Actor Timothée Chalamet felt remorseful about appearing in Allen's 2018 film, *A Rainy Day in New York*, and announced in January 2018 that he would donate his salary to charity (Harmon 2018), several months after his co-star Griffin Newman did the same (Nolan 2017). "I am learning that a good role isn't the only criteria for accepting a job," Chalamet wrote in a statement on Instagram (@tchalamet 2018). Mira Sorvino won an Oscar for Allen's 1995 film *Mighty Aphrodite* but says that the experience is now tainted. She knew about the allegations but worked with Allen anyway because she was a "naïve young actress." Sorvino apologized to Dylan in an open letter, saying she could not imagine what it was like to see Allen "lauded again and again, including by me and countless others in Hollywood who praised him and ignored you" (Sorvino 2018). Like Sorvino, many people knew the story but did not care *enough* to turn down a "good role" in Allen's films, which typically feature ensemble casts of the latest "It" stars and established actors. As the backlash has grown since late 2017, Amazon Studios reneged on a four-film deal they signed with Allen because of what they called the "renewed focus" on past allegations (Vigdor 2019). The abuse claims were not identified as the issue, it was the growing negative attention, and Allen became expendable to preserve Amazon's public image.

[80] It is worth noting that Allen's biological son with Mia Farrow, Ronan Farrow, is one of the investigative reporters whose work exposed Weinstein, helped spur the #MeToo movement, and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize (The New Yorker 2018). He believes his sister's allegations and is estranged from his father (Respers France 2020).

According to Allen, Timothée Chalamet only condemned him because he was nominated for an Oscar that year, and he thought that it might help him win (Freeman 2020). Media reports indicate that few actors are willing to work with Allen today (Goldstein 2022), and the filmmaker says that denouncing him has become “the fashionable thing to do, like everybody suddenly eating kale” (Freeman 2020). It took years to reach this stage though: since he was first accused in 1992, he has directed 31 films and is working on a new project set in Paris (Keslassy 2022b).



Figure 81. *Woody Allen, third from right, at the world premiere of his 2016 film,* Cafe Society *at the Cannes Film Festival with actors Blake Lively, Kristen Stewart and Jesse Eisenberg. “Cannes 100 (27830873530.jpg” by GabboT licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

8.2.2 Roman Polanski

Allen may have had a “low buzz” of controversy but filmmaker Roman Polanski has a guilty plea and fugitive status dating back to the 1970s. Still, in 2003, actor Harrison Ford gave a wry smile as he announced Polanski won the Oscar for Best Director, to thunderous applause (Oscars 2011). Martin Scorsese, Meryl Streep, and even Harvey Weinstein rose to their feet and clapped forcefully as the crowd gave Polanski a standing

ovation.[81] Many appeared to be searching the room for Polanski, who could not be present because he was wanted for crimes related to drugging and raping a child. In 1978, he fled the US after pleading guilty and is considered a fugitive today (Freeman 2018; Graser et al. 2009). Since 2010, five more women have come forward to allege he assaulted them, attempted to rape, or raped them as minors (Freeman 2018). Polanski's legal troubles have not stopped him from winning an Oscar, being an honoured guest at the Cannes Film Festival, or having a film released by Summit Entertainment (of *Twilight* fame) (Finke 2009). Some members of the Hollywood establishment have stood by him, continuing to appear in his films, signing petitions on his behalf (Goldstein et al. 2009; Graser et al. 2009), or defending him by saying it was not "rape-rape," in the words of actor/TV host Whoopi Goldberg (Hayes Thomas 2012). In September 2017, just prior to #MeToo, actor Kate Winslet said that she had "extraordinary" working experiences with both Polanski and Allen. "Having thought it all through, you put it to one side and just work with the person," she said. As the tide shifted, she recanted her statement, saying that it was "fucking disgraceful" that they were embraced for so long (Countryman 2020).

[81] The moment is viewable online via the official Oscars YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXnNOBj26lk



Figure 82. *Director Roman Polanski, third from left, at the Livre Paris trade show in 2017. "Frédéric Taddeï, Delphine de Vigan, Roman Polanski et Olivier Assayas – Livre Paris 2017" by ActuaLité licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Modifications: colour adjustment and cropping.*

Allen and Polanski have continued to maintain access to the professional and social activities that accompany filmmaking, including film festivals, awards shows, and press coverage. Major publications, for instance, contribute to the normalization of their presence by publishing regular updates about them. The articles typically discuss their films and collaborators, and include a paragraph at the bottom about the elephant in the room–the controversies that surround them. Mainstream news stories typically present information using an inverted pyramid structure, with the most critical details at the top so that they will not be missed and other information in descending order of importance (Sills et al. 2021; Scanlan 2003). By focusing on Allen and Polanski's professional contributions first and mentioning their troubled pasts as a footnote, journalists are amplifying the narrative that those details are less relevant than the films they are making. This adds a more difficult and problematic dimension to the cultural conceptions of male "genius," or the Teflon man–the scandals just slide off. The *Los Angeles Times*, for example, published Dylan Farrow's (2017) op-ed entitled, "Why has the #MeToo

revolution spared Woody Allen?" but also reviewed Allen's most recent film (Goldstein 2022). In another example, *Variety* published a 2022 story about a new Polanski film, and noted in the headline that it was an "EXCLUSIVE" (Keslassy 2022a), meaning, a sought-after story that *Variety* is privileged to publish. The eight-paragraph story mentions that Polanski is a fugitive who raped a child in the seventh paragraph–before listing awards his last film won (Keslassy 2022a). The media plays an important role in helping these directors maintain their status and connections. By keeping their peers informed about their latest works, they lend Allen and Polanski credibility and treat them like any other member of the industry, albeit with a disclaimer.

8.2.3 Bryan Singer

Allen and Polanski made "great films" and had established personae by the time they faced controversy due to incidents from their personal lives. Bryan Singer, on the other hand, has been dogged by allegations which crossed from his personal life to the work environment since his career began in the 1990s with *The Usual Suspects* (1995). An investigative report in *The Atlantic*, entitled 'Nobody is Going to Believe You,' details many incidents (French et al. 2019), in which Singer reportedly preyed on vulnerable boys, telling them he would show them his Ferrari or cast them in a film. Several allegations involve sex with boys who were as young as 15 when Singer was in his early 30s (the age of consent in California is 18). In addition, he allegedly raped a 17-year-old, Cesar Sanchez-Guzman, on a yacht in 2003 (Garcia-Roberts 2017), coerced an unnamed teenage boy to engage in sex acts in London in 2006 (Lattanzio et al. 2014), and sexually assaulted Victor Valdovinos, then 13, numerous times on the set of *Apt Pupil* (1998) (French et al. 2019). Several boys who were extras in *Apt Pupil* filed lawsuits that they were pressured to remove their clothes for a nude shower scene while their parents waited in an adjacent building, as reported by *Entertainment Weekly* in 1997 (Ascher-Walsh et al. 1997). Singer was also affiliated with the short-lived Digital Entertainment Network (DEN), an online video platform which has been embroiled in sex

scandals involving underage boys, drugs, and alcohol (Rice 1999, see also the 2014 documentary *An Open Secret* (dir. Amy Berg)). He invested in DEN and was apparently a regular presence at their parties at a mansion owned by Marc Collins-Rector, who is now a registered sex offender (Associated Press 2004). Collins-Rector and the other DEN founders were accused by child actors employed by DEN of rape, assault, and uttering death threats in several lawsuits (Menn 2000), while a 2014 lawsuit filed by Michael Egan III alleged that DEN was a "sordid sex ring" for adult males to exploit young boys (Ross 2014). Egan accused Singer of drugging him and forcing him to engage in oral and anal sex when he was 17 (the suit was later abandoned because of inconsistencies with Egan's story) (French et al. 2019). The lawsuits were dropped or settled, and Singer was never formally convicted of wrongdoing. He denies all allegations (Siegel 2020) and called the *Atlantic* exposé, which involved more than 50 sources and 12 months of research, a "homophobic smear piece" (Wiseman 2019). His lawyer, Martin Singer (no relation) said that Egan's lawsuit was "absurd" and conveniently timed with the release of Bryan singer's new movie, suggesting it was a publicity stunt (Ross 2014).



Figure 83. *Bryan Singer was head of the international competition jury at the Tokyo International Film Festival in 2015. "Bryan Singer 'International Competition Jury' at Opening Ceremony of the 28th Tokyo International Film Festival" by Dick Thomas Johnson licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

In addition to what has been described as his ”boy obsessions” (Roy 2014), Singer’s on-set behaviour was also problematic, reportedly involving tantrums, drugs and frequent absences. Young men supposedly accompanied him to meetings they had no business attending (“Young guys. A different person every time” (Siegel 2020)). Producer Tom DeSanto reportedly tried to halt the shooting of *X2: X-Men United* (2003) because Singer and crew members were incapacitated after taking drugs. Shooting continued and one of the actors, Hugh Jackman, was injured while filming. Cast members Alan Cumming, Patrick Stewart, Halle Berry, Jackman, and others staged an intervention in full costume to voice their concerns, according to Cumming (Gostin 2021). Singer told them they were “full of fucking shit!”, had never made a good film and were “lucky to be working with him,” to which Berry allegedly responded, "You can kiss my Black ass” (Gostin 2021). One executive involved in *X-Men* said, "His behaviour was poor on the movie. We accommodated him on the first movie, and therefore we can accommodate him on the second movie. And on and on. And it created a monster" (Siegel 2020). The studio ended up “accommodating” Singer on four lucrative *X-Men* films (2000, 2003, 2014, 2016), and he directed several other features. He was reportedly “up to his old tricks” (Desta 2018b) while directing Freddie Mercury biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018), and allegedly fought with star Rami Malek. With weeks remaining in the shoot, he left the UK for the US despite being told not to and was fired. “For executives who had worked with–and suffered through–Bryan Singer, the question was: Why? Why give him a shot at making *Bohemian Rhapsody* when the director had such an established reputation for causing chaos on set?” journalist Kim Masters (2018) asks. The answer, according to a statement from Singer himself, is because “…the work speaks for itself” (Masters 2018). His films make “mountains of money” for the studio (Siegel 2020)–$3,716,553,162 as of July 2022, which is more than George Lucas’ total with *Star Wars* films (The Numbers 2022a). Despite the problems, *Bohemian Rhapsody* won four Oscars and grossed nearly a billion dollars (Box Office Mojo 2022c), and Rami Malek is listed as one of Singer’s “most productive collaborators,” due to the significant

profit and awards (The Numbers 2022a) even though the two men apparently did not get along. After *Rhapsody*, Singer was supposed to direct *Red Sonja* for Millennium Films, whose CEO Avi Lerner called the *Atlantic* investigation, “agenda-driven fake news.” When Lerner was unable to find a US distributor for the film, presumably because of the public backlash to the exposé, Singer was dismissed (Masters et al. 2019) and has not directed a film since. While Hollywood members never took a stand against Singer, students at the University of Southern California collected 4,499 signatures to have his name removed from the film school’s Bryan Singer Division of Critical Studies (Halaka et al. 2017). USC, his alma mater, was “thrilled and extremely grateful” to accept his $5 million gift in 2013 (Turpin 2013), but later reversed course under pressure. Another petition from 2020 with more than 57,000 signatures urged the FBI to investigate Singer for his “alleged crimes” (Investigate Singer 2020).

Though there were numerous “red flags” throughout Singer’s career, he kept working because those in power seemingly prioritized profit above all else. The decision to keep hiring him was “mind-boggling” to observers (Mieka 2018; Masters 2018), but his blockbuster returns convinced studio executives to look the other way even when numerous stories about sexual misconduct or on-set conflicts circulated.

8.2.4 Scott Rudin

The last “Teflon man” that I examine is the “super producer” Scott Rudin, who managed to avoid scrutiny until the spring of 2021, long after the floodgates of #MeToo opened. #MeToo was supposed to be a “turning point” (Clark 2018; Wallace 2018) when survivors would be empowered to break their silence and abusers would be held accountable. Within a year, women began to report sex crimes at a higher rate (Levy et al. 2022). While sexual misconduct was being taken more seriously, Rudin allegedly continued to abuse his employees until his actions were exposed in *The Hollywood Reporter*. Rudin was a prolific visionary who reportedly inflicted physical and

psychological damage and used intimidation,[82] non-disclosure agreements and existing relationships to protect himself (Siegel 2021a; Siegel 2021b). Like Weinstein, stories about Rudin were "passed around Hollywood parties like mushroom canapes, occasionally surfacing in a profile that focused on his genius and with enfant terrible framing" (Siegel 2021b). His "genius" consisted of 151 Oscar nominations and 23 wins for his films. Notable projects include *Clueless* (1995, dir. Amy Heckerling), *The Truman Show* (1998, dir. Peter Weir), *No Country for Old Men* (2007, dir. Ethan & Joel Coen), and *The Social Network* (2010, dir. David Fincher), among many other popular films.

As with Singer, studio executives reportedly knew about Rudin's behaviour–and literally covered it up. While working on the lot of Paramount Studios between 1994 and 1997, former Rudin employee Jason Carter Eaton said that his boss punched so many holes in the walls that the studio stopped paying for repairs. Staff members allegedly put large plants in front of the holes. Eaton shared an off-colour description: "[T]here were so many plants and at a certain point it literally felt like you were dropped into a Vietnam war movie," due to the foliage, distant screaming, and fearful assistants (Siegel 2021b). Rudin allegedly pushed an assistant out of a moving car when he could not synch his calendar with his phone (Maddaus 2021), and smashed a computer monitor on a staff member's hand (Siegel 2021a), among other forms of bullying and violence. Former employee Josh Arnon said that these were not isolated incidents: "He would yell at people all day. He yells at people over the phone. People who were there just for an interview would hear Scott yelling. I find it impossible to imagine that people who worked with him more than one day would miss any of that. People just ignored it" (Siegel 2021b). *S*creenwriter Aaron Sorkin, who worked with Rudin on three movies, a TV show

[82] A copy of the Rudin exposé was leaked prior to publication and one former employee named in the story, Andrew Coles, who is Black, suspects that someone was trying to send him a message: a day before the article was published, an anonymous caller reported a fake murder-suicide at his home. As a police helicopter hovered overhead, an armed SWAT team descended on Coles' home and his housemate was taken out at gunpoint. Rudin denied his involvement (Siegel 2021b).

and a play, initially refused to comment on the allegations (Siegel 2021b) and later denied that Rudin's behaviour was an open secret. "That's ludicrous. Everybody did not know. I certainly didn't know, and I don't know anybody who knew," he said (Ford 2021). Though Rudin was removed as producer of Sorkin's Broadway adaptation of *To Kill A Mockingbird* when the allegations emerged, he remained an investor in the project (Ford 2021). This suggests the production team wanted "public" distance from Rudin for PR purposes but maintained closeness through the use of his resources, and one can assume Rudin would profit if the play succeeded. Other long-time collaborators, like filmmaker Wes Anderson, would not comment, while Joel Coen denied witnessing bullying (Haylock 2021; Beresford 2021). Writer Michael Chabon (2021), who worked with Rudin over a 20-year period, wrote in a *Medium* article that he "knew enough" and felt deeply ashamed that he did not act. "There are a lot of angry people making movies and television," Chabon continued, "and the culture of Hollywood, until now, has offered little in the way of discouragement to those who feel their status is a license to shout, curse, rant, and hurl invective or objects" (Chabon 2021). Producer Megan Ellison, who founded Annapurna Pictures (and is the daughter of Larry Ellison, the Carbon Beach magnate mentioned earlier), tweeted that the exposé was merely an introduction and that many more are still too afraid to speak out against Rudin because he is vindictive and lies freely. "This piece barely scratches the surface of Scott Rudin's abusive, racist, and sexist behaviour," she wrote (Sharf 2021).

Though Rudin was largely unknown outside of Hollywood, he was also implicated in the Sony hack in December 2014 when his emails were leaked to the media. Writing to colleagues, he called actor and director Angelina Jolie a "minimally talented spoiled brat," and made racist jokes about former US President Barack Obama only liking movies about slavery and stereotypically "Black" themes (Biddle 2014). (He also called Megan Ellison, mentioned above, "a bipolar 28-year-old lunatic," (Sharf 2021), which may explain why she was one of the few to denounce him). Writing for Hollywood news site

Deadline, Mike Fleming Jr. (2014) tried to justify Rudin's comments: "It is an intense business, and back and forth can be bracing and the language rough, even though it is a shorthand between creatives and executives who've been in the trenches together and still have a drink when the movie makes it to the premiere."[83] Fleming suggests that filmmaking is like a war zone in which rough conditions must be tolerated but once the film comes out, conflicts dissolve. Rudin and his boss Amy Pascal also exchanged heated messages over their troubled Steve Jobs biopic. At one point, Rudin threatened her: "You've destroyed your relationships with half the town over how you've behaved on this movie. If you don't think it's true, wait and see" (Biddle 2014). Pascal was fired soon after the leak for undisclosed reasons (Galuppo 2019; McNary 2015). Rudin was not, and continued collaborating with some of the industry's biggest names, producing *Fences* (2016, dir. Denzel Washington), *Lady Bird* (2017, dir. Greta Gerwig), and *Isle of Dogs* (2018, dir. Wes Anderson), among many others until he was "cancelled" in 2021. After the detailed exposé, he was reportedly able to keep his agents at William Morris Endeavour and had the support of media executives and billionaires David Geffen and Barry Diller, amid rumours of a comeback (Haylock 2021). Though Rudin's case is extreme: many people were implicated and his behaviour took place over decades, I discuss it here to exemplify how much harm is tolerated when the perpetrator is an influential man, even after the watershed moment that was #MeToo.

8.2.5 Protecting "cash cows"

When filmmakers misbehave in front of actors and crew members or in other professional contexts, how and why do they remain employed, and are the studios/networks aware of their employees' actions? I spoke to one research participant, Eric,* who worked in a studio department that dealt with labour issues and complaints.

[83] This is reminiscent of the "locker room talk" excuse used by former President Donald Trump when the Access Hollywood video surfaced of him bragging about assaulting women (Diaz 2016).

They handled up to 20 crises per day, involving actors needing to be replaced due to illness, major substance abuse on set, allegations of inappropriate behaviour, or other reasons. Eric told me they did what was necessary to keep a project moving forward, while ensuring that the hundreds of people employed by the production remained employed. Protecting crew members' jobs adds another dimension to this discussion because Eric's department was not simply shielding misbehaving key talent, but also their colleagues' livelihoods–regular people who are away from their families for long hours, often for weeks or months. Being away from home leads to more misbehaviour, according to Alice, who has worked in the camera department on numerous American series and movies filmed in Canada. She says that some people treated "on-location" shoots like a "paid vacation" and that with everyone staying together in a hotel with a bar in the lobby, there was often "trouble." Furthermore, some high-ranking members of the US production acted like the Canadian crew should be grateful for their business and therefore could behave as they liked, Alice says:

> It's a power thing. The higher up they are, the more money they have, the more likely they will get away with anything. There's very much the attitude of, "Let's cover it up because the ship must keep going." You have a limited number of days. Limited everything. Everything has to get done by a certain date. If people show up drunk to work, sober them up. Don't fire them because then our schedule is screwed.

Eric's department knew about problematic individuals long before their transgressions became widely known. One industry member was fired after numerous people went public with accusations of inappropriate behaviour. "That dude, we've known about for… probably a good decade," Eric says. The industry member's accusers requested anonymity, fearing reprisals. When asked why they did not report him earlier, one accuser said that it never occurred to them, because rules rarely apply to those in power.[84] Eric believe that if it had been a woman who was accused, she would have been "dealt with": the studio would have found a way to terminate her contract or shuffle

[84] To protect Eric's identity, I am not naming the accused industry member or citing related media articles about this case.

her to another studio. “My bosses would say they tried to be fair about the situation. I don’t think that’s true,” he says, adding that the studio protects high-status actors or filmmakers if they are seen as “cash cows.” Eric continues:

> There are actors, directors, showrunners, producers … that would have multiple lawsuits on file for sexual harassment. I can’t remember if they included rape but definitely physical altercations that should have ended their career. You get a lawsuit from the person [the accuser], the studios would pay out; they would do a settlement agreement, and part of that always included the non-disclosure [agreement] in perpetuity. They [the actor or filmmaker] would get a warning, “If this happens again, you’re done.” Wait, like, three years, it would happen again. There were several of those cases that my hands came across. It depended on who it was. If they were high up, they got the pass. If they were lower down, they got the rehab or the warning status, or they were terminated. But just because they were terminated didn’t mean they couldn’t go to another studio and do the same thing.

Eric says that the studios don’t necessarily know what happens to directors who are dismissed or whether they repeat offences elsewhere. However, union representatives are typically present for disciplinary meetings relating to allegations and keep detailed employment records. To keep the “ship” sailing, these situations are generally overlooked when high-ranking men are involved. “No one wants to claim responsibility,” Eric tells me.

The continued support for Allen, Polanski, Singer and Rudin demonstrates that high-status men can get away with almost any behaviour. Returning to my earlier discussion of exclusion, once white male filmmakers are “in”, they usually remain *in*. If their bad deeds are eventually publicized, they have a chance to recover, depending on the severity of the acts, and to continue “business as usual.” Women filmmakers are held to a much higher standard, a topic I will turn to shortly.



Figure 84. *Amber Heard, left, with her then-husband Johnny Depp at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2015. "Black Mass 11" by GabboT licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Modification: cropping.*

8.2.6 Amber Heard vs. Johnny Depp

In my discussions of "Teflon men" I have alluded to the "machine" in place to protect important industry assets, whether it be by silencing accusers with a payout and a non-disclosure agreement, initiating PR campaigns to improve their public image and gain support from celebrities, or hiring them with specific conditions (e.g., showing up for work). Before examining women filmmakers, I briefly discuss a recent case which exemplifies the personal cost of confronting well-connected men even in a post-#MeToo world. Following a highly-publicized civil trial, a US judge ruled in 2022 that actor Amber Heard defamed her former husband, actor Johnny Depp, by making "false" statements in a 2018 *Washington Post* article (for the article, see Heard 2018). Depp is classified as a leading actor whose 51 films have made $10,323,912,118 at box offices worldwide as of 2022 (The Numbers 2022b), and is therefore highly "bankable." Heard did not name Depp in the piece but wrote about representing survivors of domestic abuse, and the

inference was made that “everyone knew” it was about him. When the trial concluded, Heard was ordered to pay Depp $10 million for defamation (Moghe 2022). Despite the fact that a UK judge ruled in 2020 that Depp had committed 12 acts of domestic violence against Heard (BBC News 2020), the public heavily favoured Depp during the defamation trial and Heard was attacked online incessantly, events which became the subject of extensive media coverage (Donegan 2022; Saha 2022; Sung 2022; Spiteri-Staines et al. 2022). The article in which Heard “defamed” Depp was about this very topic–how women are treated if they speak out about abuse. In it, she explains why men are protected in light of such allegations, using the ever-popular “ship” metaphor: “Imagine a powerful man as a ship, like the Titanic. That ship is a huge enterprise. When it strikes an iceberg, there are a lot of people on board desperate to patch up holes–not because they believe in or even care about the ship, but because their own fates depend on the enterprise,” Heard (2018) writes. Agents, managers, lawyers and publicists are among the team of professionals who make money from highly profitable stars and filmmakers. Should the star or filmmaker transgress, their support team rallies to make the problem *go away*, so that the star/filmmaker can continue working–and paying their salaries (or pleasing investors). Heard wrote the article “to ensure that women who come forward to talk about violence receive more support.” The article led to the lawsuit, which resulted in considerably more abuse directed at Heard, involving daily threats on her life and that of her baby (Honderich 2022). Sociologist Nicole Bedera (2022) wrote that although Depp’s supporters claim #MeToo has gone too far, the verdict shows that the movement has not gone far enough. Survivors “are punished for sharing their stories, betrayed by the very systems that are supposed to protect them” (Bedera 2022).

In summary, the “demanding geniuses” at the beginning of this chapter are high-status members of the film community whose “difficult” behaviour is tolerated because of the perceived “quality” (and/or profitability) of their works. Whether they are highly controlling or so disorganized that their projects descend into chaos, they have proven

track records and a respected body of work. In the case of Terry Gilliam, his reported recklessness was excused by Sarah Polley, one of his alleged "victims," because of his "brilliance." Gilliam even caused her to doubt her own memories of the experience, until two colleagues confirmed her version.

With regards to some of the most notorious "Teflon men" in Hollywood, deeply troubling accusations have trailed Allen, Polanski, Singer and Rudin, for decades. Their alleged transgressions are more serious and on a large scale, and yet they have been afforded equal protection until recently. Though there were rumours about inappropriate behaviour with boys, Singer was so secure in his role that he showed up to work surrounded by young men–if he bothered to show up at all. His actions on-set alarmed actors, some of whom vowed never to work with him again. It all came to a head in 2019, when the Atlantic exposé was published one month before the Oscars. Ostensibly to preserve their chances of winning awards, the *Bohemian Rhapsody* team seemed to pretend that "Bryan Singer does not exist," and never mentioned his name (CBS Los Angeles 2019). The film remained an "awards season favourite" and won major prizes. Singer moved forward with his next film, *Red Sonja*, until distributors showed no interest, 22 years after the first allegations. Still, no one stood up to say that Singer was a liability and should no longer be employed as a director. These examples illustrate that "red flags" that crop up throughout a man's career, whether they involve rape or getting along with cast members, are not necessarily relevant when their films generate "buzz."

8.3 "Difficult" women

Though "Teflon" men typically maintain their social connections and employment, women face consequences for lesser offences such as expressing how they feel. One common tactic involves branding women using gendered terms such as "difficult," or "emotional," which, in an industry that is reputation-based, can have career-ending consequences. "We can sneeze in the wrong direction, and we're difficult. It's always like

that," says filmmaker Lexi Alexander during a podcast interview. Alexander, who is Palestinian and German, resides in Los Angeles and has gained a following on Twitter for being outspoken online about a range of political and social issues. "So, at some point I was like, doors are going to shut…I might as well be loud. If I'm well behaved getting a reputation as difficult, fuck it," she says (Schmoedown Entertainment Network 2014). Though she may say she has nothing to lose, the "bad girl" of Hollywood has her limits and still protects her career. In a since-deleted tweet, she wrote that she has an application set up to automatically remove her tweets after a period of time. When a user thanked her for her speaking about systemic exclusion in Hollywood in 2018, she responded by saying, "Enjoy it before my agents call me and tell me to delete all of it" (@lexialex 2018a).

Being difficult is not a flaw, writes Kelly Baker (2018, 16), a self-identified "difficult woman," but "a protest against a system that tries to make us less than who we are." By "less" she means: "Young girls are taught to be less–to take up less space, energy and time–so boys, and the men they become, can be more. Girls like me who are 'too much' become a problem. Women who are 'too much' are even more worrisome." Journalist Helen Lewis' (2020) wrote about pioneering women who made history by standing up for women's rights by any means necessary. She writes that people are conditioned to believe that women who assert themselves are unreasonable, selfish, or unfeminine–another form of "too much." She quotes writer Rebecca West, who wrote in 1913: "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is. I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat."

The filmmakers I discuss in this section are not "too much," nor are they "bad" or "rebellious" like the women in Elizabeth Wurtzel's (1998) *Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women*. They are simply doing their jobs; "directing" literally means telling others what to do. It involves coordinating the efforts of several hundred people; giving instructions

to crew members and actors; and ensuring that one's vision translates to the screen. Sometimes emotions run high as stress mounts and tense words are exchanged, but as Mike Fleming Jr. (2014) says (as quoted in the previous section), some "rough talk" in the trenches is expected in such an intense industry. Along the way, some women operating in a male-dominated environment were labelled "difficult" by those who knew how damaging such a word can be to a woman's reputation. Unlike the men profiled earlier in this chapter, whose behaviour was allegedly explosive (or criminal), there is little information about what has gone on during film shoots run by these "difficult" women aside from anecdotes from the directors themselves. I suspect there was no damning evidence leaked to the tabloids because the filmmakers' behaviour was unremarkable; there was no abuse, no violence, no threats and no tantrums.

Known for art house films such as *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (2011), white British filmmaker Lynne Ramsay told *The Observer* in 2018 that she has a reputation for "being difficult," even though she was just doing her job:

> [T]o me that always feels like bullshit. You're doing a tough job, where you're the captain of the ship, and there's always tough decisions to make, and sometimes you've just got to go, 'That's not right for this.' You've got to stick up for what you believe in. If you don't do that, you're doing a disservice to the audience, because you're making something really diluted. (Sawyer 2018)

Ramsay is saying that her core task is to stay true to her vision, and that conflicts that arise while she attempts to execute it are part of the job. That is why she was hired in the first place–for her unique approach and experience. Directors do everything in their power to execute that vision, which is highly complex in filmmaking because of the tough conversations with producers or executives, errant department heads who have their own ideas, or actors who may not respect a director's wishes. Ramsay also alludes to the fact that her behaviour is judged differently because she is a woman, who is not expected to be forthright ("That's not right for this,") or stick up for herself, and is therefore "difficult." In Chapter 6, I described how the actions of men and women are interpreted

differently, even when they behave in the same way. In that chapter, I noted that Catherine Hardwicke was reportedly "fired" from the *Twilight* sequel for being "difficult" and "irrational" during the first film (Finke 2008), though her account of their parting differs. Hardwicke says that one day, a storm prevented them from shooting. Frustrated, she went behind a tree in the forest and cried "for like 30 seconds" and then returned to work (Setoodeh 2015). She continues:

> I had a $150,000-a-day pressure. Most directors scream. We've seen videos of it. They yell. They fire people. They don't come out of their trailer. Some people drink. Some people bring hookers. Everyone reacts to the extra pressure in different ways. Well, I just thought, "I'll go over there and cry for a second and come back." Someone saw, and reported it. I'm suddenly labelled "emotional." And yet, now I've learned of two instances of male directors who cried on set and they got a standing ovation, because they were so sensitive. Of course it's a double standard. Of course it's gender bias. I've never gone over budget, and my movies have made a ton of money. Still, I get labelled whatever code word they want to label me. I've had 20 movies since *Thirteen* that I've tried to get made. On *Red Riding Hood* [the film after *Twilight*], I had to take a 57% pay cut right after I created a $400 million movie and a huge franchise. (Setoodeh 2015)

Hardwicke was handling a big-budget feature and the associated pressures of a studio film for the first time. When things unravelled for a moment, she stepped away from the set to collect herself but her temporary loss of control was reported. She mentions a double standard: her male colleagues were celebrated for something she was penalized for. Researchers have examined the way perceptions of crying are influenced by gender: in the past, when men cried they were viewed as weak and their behaviour was considered inappropriate (Cretser et al. 1982), but attitudes have changed and men may experience more benefits than women when they cry publicly (Labott et al. 1991). According to Labott et al., because men cry so infrequently, "[S]ubjects may believe that something truly important must have occurred for a man to engage in this behaviour" (1991, 412). Women, on the other hand, report more frequent episodes of crying over both everyday issues and important ones. Because adults have the capacity to control when they cry, women's crying can be viewed as suspect or potentially manipulative (Warner et al. 2007; Lutz 1999). Feminist pop-culture website

Jezebel, published a video of 57 male actors crying on camera because it was novel to see men expressing raw emotions. Crying is for girls, the Jezebel text reads, but if a man cries, "it could earn him an Academy Award," (Morrissey 2010). Because men are so rarely depicted crying, it "produces powerful results," the author writes. Crying is not the only act that is perceived differently for men and women in the workplace. For instance, women's angry outbursts are negatively viewed, whereas equivalent behaviour from men can boost their status (Brescoll et al. 2008). Male evaluators do not respond favourably to women who try to negotiate for higher salaries during hiring, and they are "significantly more inclined to work with nicer and less demanding women" (Bowles et al. 2007, 99). Even physical attributes are perceived differently: researchers found that "masculine" faces were more likely to be associated with competence (Oh et al. 2019).

Actors are not immune to being called "difficult" either. Black British filmmaker Steve McQueen (who bears the same name as a white American actor with a "bad boy" persona (Spiegel 1987)) was told not to hire actor Michelle Rodriquez (whose "breakout role" was the lead in Karyn Kusama's *Girlfight)* because she was "difficult" (M. Ryan 2018). McQueen ignored the advice and built a successful collaboration with Rodriguez anyway. He says that race adds another dimension to this issue: "If you're a white director, they call you a perfectionist. Me, they call difficult," (M. Ryan 2018). Essentially, anyone who deviates from the industry standard (white, male) is liable to be branded.

Understanding the weight of such labels, Weinstein reportedly circulated rumours in the 1990s that actors Mira Sorvino, Ashley Judd, and Annabella Sciorra were "difficult," and allegedly hurt their careers (K. Lopez 2018). Filmmaker Peter Jackson, known for *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, admitted that he did not hire Judd or Sorvino because Miramax, the studio run by Weinstein, told him they were a "nightmare to work with" (Redden 2017). Both Judd and Sorvino said they rejected Weinstein's sexual advances and believe they were punished for it (R. Farrow 2017a; Kantor et al. 2017). Sciorra said that Weinstein raped her in the early 1990s and sexually harassed her in the years that

followed (R. Farrow 2017b). Weinstein worked steadily even though his abuse was an "open secret," while those labelled as "difficult" women–Judd, Sorvino and Sciorra–could not find roles.

Alba, the filmmaker mentioned in Chapter 5, says during our interview that her female colleagues and mentors are called, difficult "all the time." When men employ certain tactics, they are applauded for their leadership and for holding on to strong choices. If women do the same, people think, "Wow she's a bitch. She's really difficult to deal with on the set, or she's not really being collaborative," Alba says. Women have to be assertive while also being shining rays of sunshine, she adds–"They have to be *all the things*." This is another example of how women need to do so much more than men to compete: they need experience but must also be young and "fresh" for marketing, they need a strong vision but also need to compromise, they have to be tough to ignore sexual comments but also have to be fun and friendly. They cannot focus simply on their films and ideas–they have to manage others' emotions and tread carefully, lest they be viewed as uncooperative. The "difficult" label is yet another manifestation of the extra baggage women drag around in their quest to make films. This system of labelling is part of a social and cultural process: the term, "genius," sustains men as their behaviour is excused. Meanwhile Hardwicke admits she used to take the labels personally (Zimmerman 2018), unaware of how these "code words" are levelled at women in professional contexts.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter began with an overview of men's misbehaviour and closed with a discussion of how women are labelled "difficult"–a social and cultural process that is damaging to their reputations and which has effects on their access to work within the industry. These examples have shown that labelling a woman as difficult can lead to greater repercussions than when men are allegedly involved in criminal acts. Serial

predator Harvey Weinstein knew this when he punished female actors by spreading malicious rumours about them; he kept working while they did not.

There are so many “terrible” stories involving Hollywood men that could have been discussed in this chapter; however, I have chosen to profile only a handful, whose behaviour has been widely discussed in the media and yet still overlooked for decades. With the rise of #MeToo, several alleged perpetrators have faced “cancellation” while others continue to work outside the US, where the political climate appears to be less heated. I have shown that there are different highly-gendered standards for evaluating behaviour in Hollywood. While Lexi Alexander is fearful that a tweet may hurt her and Catherine Hardwicke was allegedly replaced for breaking down, “Teflon men” have had little to worry about until recently. Women directors have to be on their best behaviour at all times; Alexander and Hardwicke have no legacy to fall back on. Allen and Polanski have long histories of making films that have become part of the film canon (Girgus 2002; Lee 2015; Caputo 2012; Orr et al. 2006), while Rudin and Singer churned out box office hits. There are no women, to my knowledge, who have similar clout as filmmakers which would allow them to abuse people around them or commit sex crimes while continuing to win awards, attract investors, and exhibit their films theatrically. In fact, there are few established women filmmakers, period.

In closing, Sarah Polley contemplates whether the wonder depicted onscreen is more valuable than the personal experiences of those creating it. “Though he [Terry Gilliam] was magical and brilliant and made images and stories that will live for a long, long time, it’s hard to calculate whether they were worth the price of the hell that so many went through over the years to help him make them” (Polley 2022).

Chapter 9 | Conclusion

> “As the old saying goes, ‘Good movies aren't made, they escape.’”
>
> –(@jonrog1 2022)

9.1 A new world

This thesis has examined how hard it is for women to develop careers in Hollywood as filmmakers. I have explored the issues they face in the form of bias, prejudice, double standards, unreasonable expectations and unwanted attention, and the obstacles that slow them down or block their path–including having the “wrong” type of experience or not enough experience, few mentors, limited access to networking, prolonged financial instability, and more. Before presenting the main conclusions of this thesis, I discuss alternative ways of working in and around mainstream filmmaking, demonstrating that there are viable alternative routes that women are campaigning and striving for. I include these examples to illustrate that making film and television without excluding women is feasible. Women do not necessarily need to contort themselves to fit into a system that was not designed with them in mind; as this thesis has shown, the industry, in its current form, can be a relatively toxic environment for women.

When the Golden Globes nominations were announced in December 2019 and women filmmakers were again left out of several major categories (Wiseman et al. 2019), *Honey Boy* (2019) director Alma Har’el denounced the awards and the system behind it. “These are not our people and they do not represent us. Do not look for justice in the awards system. We are building a new world,” she tweeted (@almaharel 2019). Some women are helping to build this new world by refusing to follow industry conventions, while others are “reaching back” to share their power with filmmakers on the periphery. Still more contribute by making small, independent projects without waiting for permission (or funding).

I begin this section with Ava DuVernay, mentioned in several chapters. She was a contemporary of Colin Trevorrow, the "poster boy" for white male privilege (Mendelson 2017), who was offered a big-budget movie and coaching from Steven Spielberg to make up for his inexperience, while DuVernay returned to her day job. Today, she is one of the most celebrated women filmmakers in Hollywood (Danielle 2020; Sanchez 2022), whose photo appears first in Google search results for "women directors" in 2022. DuVernay has used her newfound status as a power broker to disrupt the system, as I explain. At the 2018 Gloria Awards, she explained why she hired women to direct every episode of the show she created, *Queen Sugar* (2016-2022), on OWN, the Oprah Winfrey Network (Ms. Foundation for Women 2018). She assembled a roster of filmmakers she admired who had made promising features or short films but floundered because they lacked connections or credits (Chapman 2022). Across seven seasons of *Queen Sugar*, DuVernay hired 39 "inexperienced" women who had never directed scripted television, and all 39 have gone on to direct other projects (Rose 2022). DuVernay describes her team:

> A woman heading post-production. A woman heading casting. A woman showrunner. A woman producing-director. A majority women's writers room. A woman colourist.[85] A woman composer.… Women executives at both our studio and our network, and you have to request that to get it–and we did–and we have it on a network owned by a woman. I mean, it is beautiful. It all works. It's possible. Why do we do this? Because we can.… We can create spaces that nourish our image in the same way our male counterparts have created in their own image for over a century. Why? Because we should. We should correct the errors of the past by over-indexing with an aim to create balance, and parity, and equitable workplaces. Why? Because time is freaking up. (Ms. Foundation for Women 2018)

DuVernay sharply criticizes the structures and processes that have enabled the industry's leaders to foster the careers of emerging male filmmakers of their choosing. This cycle has been repeated across generations throughout film history.[86] She breaks

[85] A colourist manipulates aspects of the image's visual qualities (e.g., brightness, tone) during the post-production process.

[86] Furthermore, entire series have been directed by white men for decades with no fanfare.

tradition and forces change by purposefully hiring women she believes should have been given opportunities.



Figure 85. *Filmmaker Ava DuVernay at the 2017 Academy Awards. "146030_4274" by Walt Disney Television licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.*

9.1.1 Resistance is… fertile

One of my research participants, Tina Mabry, caught DuVernay's eye with her debut feature, *Mississippi Damned* (2009), an autobiographical tale of abuse and poverty in the deep south starring a then-unknown actor, Tessa Thompson.[87] Tina completed an MFA in film production in 2005 at the University of Southern California, arguably the top film school in the US (Appelo 2017; Wilkins 2019). After *Mississippi Damned,* Tina's career stalled and she worked as a teacher for five years (Kassam 2018). She was on the verge of giving up film altogether when she received a phone call from DuVernay.

DuVernay herself had a promising start at the Sundance Film Festival in 2012 with her second feature, *Middle of Nowhere*. Even without Spielberg's patronage, her

[87] Thompson has gone on to star in *Westworld* (2016-, creators Lisa Joy & Jonathan Nolan), *Creed* (2015, dir. Ryan Coogler) and various Marvel Studios films.

profile slowly grew over the coming years and she became the first Black woman to earn a Best Picture nomination at the Oscars for her Martin Luther King, Jr. biopic, *Selma* (2014), and a Best Feature Documentary nomination for *13th* (2016), about the mass incarceration of Black people. With *A Wrinkle in Time* (2016), she became the third woman in history, and the first woman of colour, to direct a live-action film with a budget over $100 million, following Kathryn Bigelow (*K:19 The Widowmaker*, 2002) and Patty Jenkins (*Wonder Woman*, 2017) (Silverstein 2016b; Brill 2016). In 2018, DuVernay signed a deal reported to be worth around $100 million to develop multi-genre content for Warner Bros Television Group (Patten 2018).

On the phone with Tina Mabry, DuVernay made a proposal: "I got this show; I want you to come as a producer…" (Satter 2016). "'I want you to direct at least one episode.' My mouth dropped," Tina recounted. The following week, the phone rang again. It was filmmaker Gina Prince-Bythewood. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Prince-Bythewood's film, *Love & Basketball,* inspired Tina to become a filmmaker. Now Prince-Bythewood wanted Tina to join *her* series as a writer. "And I'm like, whoa. When it rains, it pours," Tina says (Satter 2016). Unable to accept both, Tina had to turn Prince-Bythewood down, but they developed a mentor/mentee relationship. In August 2022, it was reported that the two were filming a feature adaptation of the *New York Times* bestselling novel *The Supremes at Earl's All-You-Can-Eat*, with Prince-Bythewood adapting the story and Tina directing–her first feature film since *Mississippi Damned* (Wilmington Regional Film Commission 2022; WECT Staff 2022). Interviewed with Tina in 2018, Prince-Bythewood spoke about mentoring women of colour. "It's so important for us that once we get in, we gotta reach back. There's so few of us" (Slamdance 2018). As Black women in an industry dominated by white men, DuVernay and Prince-Bythewood felt a duty to share their power with women who had none.

In TV, obtaining that first credit is the key to future jobs, and since *Queen Sugar*, Tina has worked steadily. "It has been a game changer in my career," she said in 2022

(OWN 2022). In a matter of years, Tina "broke in" to television, accumulated numerous credits, and is now working on a feature, thanks to DuVernay's invitation. When we spoke in 2016, she had finished *Queen Sugar* and joined the writing staff of action/drama series *Queen of the South* (2016-, creators M.A. Fortin & Joshua John Miller). Since then, she has produced and written for *Proven Innocent* (2019, creator David Elliot) and directed episodes of *Pose* (2018- , creators Steven Canals, Brad Falchuk & Ryan Murphy), *Black Jesus* (2014- , creators Mike Clattenburg & Aaron McGruder), *Insecure* (2016- , creators Issa Rae & Larry Wilmore), *Dear White People* (2017- , creator Justin Simien), and others. Though Tina had the proper credentials: film training and a well-reviewed first feature (Byrge 2009; Scheib 2009), as a Black woman, she did not fit the industry's mould and needed help. Some members of the Hollywood establishment did not respond positively to DuVernay's initiative; she was accused of discrimination (Ms. Foundation for Women 2018). She responded, "I would invite you to tell whoever is feeling discriminated against to sue me so that I can inversely sue every studio that has left women out of a crew since the beginning of the motion picture industry 100 years ago" (Ms. Foundation for Women 2018).

According to filmmaker Miranda July, the industry already has "enough movies by guys who knew a lot about film and were really into it" (Roth 2020). July, a white woman, has written and directed several features since her 2005 "breakout" film *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005) won the Caméra d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival for best first feature and a Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival for originality of vision (IMDb 2022b). She continues: "It's an art form. You could be the kind of person who doesn't give a fuck about the history of film because it doesn't relate to you or the stories you want to tell. But you're still a storyteller, and it can still be a good medium for you" (Roth 2020). July references the archetype of a male "film buff" who has acquired detailed film knowledge–they dominate the industry. Equally dominant are the stories of white men in film history; she suggests some talented storytellers cannot relate to those

narratives–or lack access to them. July dropped out of college to become a performance artist (Day 2015a) and still managed to win a mainstream award at Cannes, a festival that is not exactly "friendly" to women filmmakers (Dry 2017; Eller 2022; Complex 2022; Keegan 2022; Furdyk 2016) and has been known for a "decades-long pattern of misogyny" (Keegan 2022). Her success demonstrates that having particular attributes (film knowledge or formal education, for example), is not necessarily required to produce art worthy of the highest accolades. Many established industry members might agree with that idea, but it becomes a question of the "outsiders" getting access to them to share ideas or samples of work. Decision-makers are well-protected by industry structures that funnel new filmmakers in through conventional channels–it is only through chance encounters "outside" industry walls that they can "discover" others, like Michaela Coel, discussed next.

While DuVernay's resistance has been publicized and executed on a large scale, some filmmakers resist in subtler ways by questioning industry conventions. British multi-hyphenate Michaela Coel had no film training before winning numerous BAFTAs[88] for the series she created, wrote, and starred in, *Chewing Gum* (2015-2017). She based her next award-winning series, *I May Destroy You* (2020), on the trauma she experienced following sexual assault. Coel admits that she still has to Google "how to write a TV show" for each new project to relearn scriptwriting. "It's basic stuff that I think other people learned when they were writing in writer's rooms [as staff writers for a TV show] or when they went to school to learn about writing. I've never done either of those things, so I have to keep learning this elementary, like, *Wiki How*, to write" (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert 2021). *I May Destroy You* won an Emmy for Outstanding Writing, in addition to BAFTAs, Independent Spirit Awards, and more (IMDb 2022a), demonstrating

[88] BAFTAs are awards from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

that Coel overcame limited knowledge to execute her idea. To borrow July's words, "it's a good medium" for both of them.



Figure 86, 87. *Left, Miranda July at a 2017 event in San Francisco. "Miranda July at Modern Times" by Steve Rhodes licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Modifications: cropping and colour/brightness. Right, a screengrab of Michaela Coel accepting a Peabody Award in 2021. "Michaela Coel Peabody Awards, June 2021.png" courtesy of Peabody Awards. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.*

Born in London to Ghanaian parents, Coel is a self-described "misfit" (Coel 2021) who has not been part of "inner circles" and does not necessarily follow industry protocol. She is not one to "kiss that ring" in deference to executives, as I reported producer Effie Brown suggesting in the Introduction. For instance, while filming *Chewing Gum*, she confronted the producers for putting Black and Brown actors in one trailer and giving a white actor her own. "You know what that looks like, don't you? Like a fuckin' slave ship!" she said (Edinburgh Television Festival 2018). When producers wanted to hire co-writers to assist her, she protested because she was writing from her perspective–one that was rarely seen on television. "Is it important that voices, used to interruption, get the experience of writing something without interference at least once?" (Edinburgh Television Festival 2018). Women of colour from working-class backgrounds like Coel have traditionally had almost no voice in film and television production; Coel is now asserting herself in the process. When Netflix offered her $1 million for *I May Destroy You,* she walked away, unhappy with their terms (Jung 2020; Rao 2020). She asked for

5% of the rights and was met with silence (Jung 2020). She was told that that was not how they did things and was assured it was "not a big deal." To Coel, it *was* a big deal. She proposed 2%, 1%, even 0.5% of the copyright. The Netflix executive paused and said, "Michaela? I just want you to know I'm really proud of you. You're doing the right thing," and hung up the phone (Jung 2020). Coel took her idea to the BBC in 2017 and was offered full creative control and the copyright (Jung 2020). She left her high-powered agency, Creative Artists Agency, because they pushed her to take the Netflix deal so that they could reportedly receive money on the back end (through profits) (Jung 2020; Rao 2020).[89] The experience taught her to ask questions and admit when she did not know something while also questioning conventional wisdom (e.g., "That's not how we do things"). Coel's very position as a Black woman on the periphery informs her perspective as an artist–she presents a side of London that has not been captured before (British GQ 2020)–and influences the way she operates in the industry–by fighting for herself even if that means ruining a deal in the process.

In the examples thus far, I have shown how filmmakers have pushed back against expectations and/or norms after "breaking in." But before "getting discovered," both July and Coel created independent works for smaller audiences (Silvers 2015; Costa 2014), which is, in a sense, another way to flout conventions. While July now has access to the resources needed to make large-scale productions, she also values intimacy:

> There's something about the spontaneity that's possible with a really, really tiny project. I'm interested in how small a crew you could have these days. Conceivably, it could be nobody. It could just be me and a camera. That's interesting to me because I think it just brings forth different energies and emotions and kinds of performances. It's a different kind of art. There's no amount of money that will buy that kind of intimacy and spontaneity…. Some stories are just better served by a more intimate process…. (Roth 2020)

[89] In a move that could be linked to a falling out, *Chewing Gum* was removed from Netflix in 2020 and became available on HBO Max in 2021. This development was described as "unprecedented" and "odd" by one reporter because *Chewing Gum* was a "Netflix Original Show" (Fikse 2021).

July says small production provides opportunities that cannot exist in bigger-budget projects. Many of my participants operate with limited crews and wear multiple hats as writers, directors and producers, not always by choice but by necessity. Unable to convince executives or investors to fund their work, they make films with limited resources, relying on favours from friends and unpaid labour. Several started as child actors and transitioned towards directing because they were dissatisfied with the roles they were offered or wanted more control. Others were writers who could not sell scripts and decided to execute them independently. When I met filmmaker Elizabeth Blake-Thomas in 2017, she had already directed four low-budget features that year. After accompanying her daughter, a child actor, to set, attending festivals, and trying her hand at producing, Elizabeth realized she knew how to make films. Her boyfriend at the time told her to start introducing herself as a director. "Just say you are," he said. She quickly made contacts and was offered $5,000 to write a film set on a ranch. By the end, the budget rose to $250,000. Soon after, she shot another feature for $50,000. The parents of the actors in that film approached her to make two more features with their children. Barriers exist, but fixating on them is problematic, says Lia,* a writer, producer and director who identifies as a "stealth Latina" because people assume she is white. She explains:

> There's no door. There's no *opportunity*. This is about me being my own door. That dawned on me slowly. This fixation on getting your foot in the door. Who's going to give you permission?... You're waiting for someone else to give you this thing that they can take away. You are *so vulnerable* to them…. So I'm a firm believer in the undeniability of your work…. Blast through your meetings because your work is so fucking good.

Lia talks about being proactive about career advancement by creating undeniably strong work. She says that by waiting for a higher authority to grant access, creators have no control because they rely on that authority for power instead of creating it themselves. My research participants actively engage in the "hustle" of making work, building connections, and trying to get noticed while supporting themselves with day

jobs. They hone their craft because they have heard about the Miranda Julys and the Michaela Coels, who had no status when they became overnight sensations because their work was "so fucking good." They make low or no-budget projects with friends and acquaintances, building solidarity networks to cope with their outsider status. For Alacovska (2018), creative workers experiencing precarity develop trusting relationships with transactional elements: they support each other personally, exchange services, and assist with professional advancement. In an article about gender in architecture and conferring the "genius" label on men, mentioned previously, Matthewson (2017, 171) discusses the "experimental togetherness" which results from working against existing models in which men are dominant. Alternative movements, she writes:

> [P]rovide spaces where the individual can become collective, spaces that can challenge and change collective conversations, spaces where modifications to the propositions that attach architects can be made and, importantly, shared. In this process of proposing and sharing, we can transform the ethos of our habitat. However, the goal is not to reach any final formulation. The aim is to avoid habits of thinking that can trap us, to continue to think and work towards what architecture and architects might become, and to foster the force of our practice by thinking through those aspects of our habitat that might constrain and limit us.

In many ways, DuVernay, July and Coel are doing just that–showing other ways of being and operating in and around the industry and contributing to the development of a new space in which women can write, create, and produce free from industry habits and practices which developed while men were in control. My research participants do the same on a smaller scale, not waiting for permission, as Lia suggests. Yet, at the same time, the allure of working *inside* the present industry remains powerful; most of my participants keep an eye out for official forms of "opportunity." Returning to Ortner (2013, 3), who described independent film as "the anti-Hollywood," I continue to present my participants as operating in both spheres, with their feet planted in independent filmmaking but ready to step into the mainstream. They create on their terms with few resources until it is no longer sustainable to continue. For Tina, that moment came after several years of working as a teacher, and everything changed with a phone call. Still,

this discussion has shown that once women are invited "in," some use their accumulated capital to make space for other women, slowly redirecting the ship by a few degrees as they envisage what the industry's habitat "might become," like Matthewson's architects.

I noted in the Introduction to this thesis that many organizations have worked to redirect the ship for decades; today, new initiatives have emerged to support the movement. ReFrame, for instance, is a project started in 2017 by Women in Film, Los Angeles and the Sundance Institute, now led by 84 industry leaders who work to effect change internally, including Catherine Hardwick, Stacy L. Smith, Gina Prince-Bythewood and Franklin Leonard (Sun 2017a; ReFrame 2022). ReFrame Rise is a sponsorship program pairing women mid-career directors and cinematographers with a team of industry members for two years (Montpelier 2022); Tina Mabry was a member of the inaugural cohort in 2019 (Lee 2019). As noted earlier, searchable databases of women creators have also cropped up to help eliminate the excuse that producers "didn't know any women" and "couldn't find them." Free the Work, started by Alma Har'el–the director hoping to build a new world in the opening of this chapter–is a database of vetted creatives working in 181 countries (Free the Work 2022a) and a roster of corporate partners (including At&T, P&G, Ford, IBM, Meta, and General Motors) who pledge to "support, hire, and advocate for inclusivity in film" (Free the Work 2022b). On an individual level, initiatives like Girls on Tops (see Figure 88 below) allow people to display their support for women in film by wearing shirts with the names of contemporary directors like DuVernay and July in bold type (Girls on Tops 2022).



Figure 88. *Girls on Tops, a t-shirt company that celebrates women's contributions to film. Image courtesy of Girls on Tops.*

A growing number of white male allies have also made strides to shift the numbers. When J.J. Abrams, director of *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019), needed a second unit director for the film (who would shoot scenes with a separate crew simultaneously), he asked his friend Ava DuVernay for recommendations. She gave him one: Victoria Mahoney (Boone 2019), who described feeling like a "unicorn" in meetings with executives in Chapter 7. Through Abrams, Mahoney became the first woman to take on such a job for any *Star Wars* film (Jackson 2019). Ryan Murphy, known for *Glee* (2009-2015, creators Ian Brenna, Brad Falchuk, Ryan Murphy) and *American Horror Story* (2011- , creators Brad Falchuk, Ryan Murphy), launched the Half Initiative in 2016 to ensure that half of directing positions on his shows went to women and achieved that goal within a year (Littleton 2017a). Once again, Tina is one of the directors who benefitted when she directed Murphy's show *Pose* (noted above). Murphy regularly works with FX Network, whose head, John Landgraf, also started focusing on diversity in 2016 (Porter et al. 2020). In 2021, white male directors at FX were slated to be in the

minority, directing only 37% of shows, compared with 85% in 2016 (White 2020). Landgraf said his team started considering directors who had theatre experience or who worked on “procedural” shows (crime shows, mysteries) instead of “premium” dramas and comedies and ended up finding talented directors who were “hiding in plain sight,” (White 2020).

9.2 Main research findings

The notion of “hiding in plain sight” is another way of framing what this thesis is about as I turn towards summarizing my main conclusions. Women filmmakers, with the training and experience to make films, are physically in the same city as executives, who have the power to “greenlight” ideas but cannot be reached. They operate on different planes with limited overlap, separated by barriers that are often insurmountable. The only way for those on the periphery to move to the core is by “breaking in,”–piercing through a reinforced layer with force. To break in quickly, explosive, revolutionary actions must usually be initiated by someone already inside, like Steven Spielberg for Colin Trevorrow or Ava DuVernay for 39 women filmmakers. Men often benefit from special access to jobs, whereas it is highly uncommon for women to enjoy the same, and if they do, accusations of discrimination may follow. Most of my participants continue to make films in “plain sight” along with countless other women filmmakers, funnelling their vision and storytelling abilities into work made with few resources.

In **Chapter 2**, I discussed my research methods and processes, and in particular my fieldwork challenges and frustrations, which paralleled my research participants’ attempts to ‘break in.’ Throughout my fieldwork I often received what I viewed as mixed messages from industry members who seemed interested but never responded to my inquiries. I suspect they were simply too busy to cope with yet another “ask” from someone on the periphery. I discovered that having film experience did not help me “stand out” but rather to “blend in” among the masses of filmmakers who are seeking to

gain entry to a highly exclusive field. Building on these insights, **Chapter 3** links exclusion in working practices with exclusion in the built environment. Hollywood feels omnipresent in Los Angeles and "outsiders" are given small tastes of what being in the industry might feel like (e.g., through community valet parking), but they are denied entry through physical structures and layers of gatekeepers. Segregation not only kept Black residents "out" of desirable, wealthy areas, but it helped keep white residents "in" those same areas, preserving resources across decades and giving the next generation of industry members a considerable head start over others.

In **Chapter 4**, I describe how exclusive practices hinder emerging women filmmakers, who lack industry connections and peer acceptance. From their positions on the periphery, women cannot easily "break in" to the core, a process which is often facilitated for white men. The preference for "young guys in baseball caps" is presented as a question of professional (and social) survival for core members, who are anxious about their positions and uncomfortable giving leadership roles to people they do not know (or cannot easily build rapport with). Risk continues to a factor for women entering what should be a "mid-career stage." **Chapter 5** shows how, even at mid-career, women filmmakers are no further ahead than emerging filmmakers and have to participate in (often unpaid) training to try to find work even if they have experience. Eclipsed by men with less experience once again, they are perceived as "risky" hires and spend years trying to shed that label. Facing no employment prospects, some mid-career women invoke the "nuclear option" as a last resort and choose to go to court, damaging their reputations to advocate for other women. **Chapter 6** illustrates how male filmmakers often have latitude when it comes to successes and failures while directing studio features because they blend in among men, whereas women do not. Women who are invited "up" into studio directing, building on the successes of the award-winning independent films they wrote and directed (dare I say, "authored"), sometimes struggle to recreate the same "magic" onscreen because they have limited control. Yet again,

their employment is perceived as “risky” because so few women directors reach that level. Though some believe that “women’s films don’t make money,” their films are also not necessarily given the chance to make money because they lack the full support of the studio’s distribution and marketing wings, with the result that women filmmakers are often relegated to lower-tier studio projects. Studios spend less on films directed by women, and so the films make less money, and the cycle continues.

Chapter 7 finds that women rarely “make a fuss” about how they are treated because they are concerned about risking their jobs or future opportunities. Institutional hierarchies determine who can speak out; low-ranking women filmmakers are rarely secure enough in their positions to publicly report inappropriate behaviour. Those occupying entry-level positions in Hollywood are often paid poorly and treated badly; however, they endure these privations because they expect to move forward into jobs with higher salaries and better conditions. Nonetheless, the precarity women filmmakers experience is ongoing. **Chapter 8** shows that “great films” and the filmmakers responsible for them are so highly respected that almost nothing can unseat them. #MeToo has made it more difficult for some filmmakers accused of pedophilia and rape to continue working, but their films are still financed and distributed, if not in the US then overseas. The process by which these men are excused is bound up in social and cultural practices by which they are given “genius” titles because their work is perceived as “valuable,”–another cultural construct. Many other male filmmakers are highly demanding (and even unpleasant) during production but this, too, is excused because of their artistic merit. Due to opposing yet highly-gendered standards for evaluating behaviour in Hollywood, men have been historically offered protection no matter what they do whereas comparatively lower-status women filmmakers are walking on eggshells, trying not to “sneeze in the wrong direction,” lest they be labelled “difficult.”

Examining these aspects of gender inequality in Hollywood’s film industry from anthropological perspective reveals the extent to which women filmmakers experience

exclusion, risk and precarity–which intersect and feed each other. Bringing these significant and interrelated issues into focus, this ethnography shows that all three have to be acknowledged to fully understand why and how it is so hard for women to "break in" to Hollywood as filmmakers. Any one of these factors would make progress difficult, but the compounding effect of each one stalls women to an even greater extent. By attending to different stages in women's life course, and documenting their careers at three key stages, I show that at different moments, the exclusion, risk, and precarity they experience play out in different ways. For instance, precarity in the early stages of making films with few resources is different from the precarity experienced by women later on as they spend years developing projects that are later offered to men.

My research shows how and why many women filmmakers cannot find a place within Hollywood's inner circles. As a consequence of being unable to 'break in' they remain 'unknown' and are considered "risky" hires. Due to such systems of exclusion–which as I show are present in working practices and operating along gender lines–it is difficult for women to change their status and to become integrated. Men, for example, can more easily participate in after-hours networking and develop bonds through shared alliances with executives or producers. Women often have fewer credits and rarely direct big-budget films, reinforcing the perception that their films are not profitable. As a result of these perceptions, women filmmakers are likely to experience prolonged precarity and unemployment. If they get a job, they often cannot advocate for themselves or other women without risking their employment. The longer they are viewed as "risky," the more pronounced their precarity, and the less likely they are to speak up lest they hurt their chances of working again. Even so-called "established" women in the studios lack security and often return to low-budget filmmaking. In the case of *Twilight* director Catherine Hardwicke, breaking box office records was not enough to guarantee stable work, and a moment of vulnerability reportedly hurt her reputation and career. Due to the exclusion, risk and precarity that women encounter, they have to be on their best

behaviour at all times. As anomalies among studio directors, women filmmakers are easily branded, and their mistakes follow them. Conversely, men are easier to forgive; with so many men in the industry, any potential failings are attributed to the individual, not men as a whole. Even then, they can recover and continue working if they are accused of crimes (and sometimes admitting to them) because they have accrued such status and social capital that entire teams of people rely on them for employment. Their work is also highly profitable, award-winning, or both. Collaborators look the other way, and fans separate the art from the artist, continuing to consume their favourite films, even if alleged rapists or abusers made them.

Though I have referred to difficulties women filmmakers face as "challenges" throughout this thesis, I now view them as more than setbacks to be overcome. Analysed from an anthropological perspective, it becomes apparent that such challenges don't simply make life more difficult, but they make career progression almost impossible for some, like filmmaker-turned-activist Maria Giese, who had to abandon her filmmaking aspirations. Taken as a whole, these "challenges" can have career-ending consequences because of their compounding effect: daily comments about appearances, racist assumptions ("Wow, your English is so good,"), the stress of perpetual financial instability, and the inability to find work in a genre outside of romantic comedies, not to mention seeing other less qualified candidates gain employment because of their physical resemblances or family connections to those in charge. In 1975, author Toni Morrison (1975) spoke about how systems of oppression in the US have preserved jobs, land, and money for those in power by wearing others down; racism was used as a distraction to denigrate and subjugate Black slaves and their descendants. "It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining over and over again your reason for being" (Morrison et al. 1975). In addition to worrying about the demands of her job, production designer Hannah is constantly deflecting comments about her nails, her shorts, and her (supposed) romantic entanglements with other

women. Elena Rossini is asked about the ”little films” she is making, and even while wearing a shirt that says “This is what a film director looks like,” is questioned about what she does for a living. Maria Giese was pushed to such an extreme that she took a public stance that she knew would damage her career. The mental strain of interceding in conflict situations or defending oneself from the onslaught of comments adds considerably to the mental load of working in film and television. The Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous collective of women advocating for gender equality in the art world, captured aspects of this strain in one of their posters, seen in Figure 89.



Figure 89. *Guerrilla Girls,* The Advantages of Being A Woman Artist*, 1988. Copyright © Guerrilla Girls, courtesy guerrillagirls.com.*

After spending years gathering and interpreting this research material, and writing about the setbacks my research participants have faced, I half expected to discover that many had abandoned the industry. As of September 2022, almost all of my participants are still involved in film and television production. I had forgotten that many

uprooted their lives to “make it” in Los Angeles. They were not pursuing filmmaking as a hobby in their home cities; they redirected all their resources toward making their Hollywood dreams a reality. Many are difficult to reach via email because they are overworked or have little work and are trying to remedy the situation. I continue to monitor their careers using social media, IMDb profiles, and industry news sites. Tina Mabry is one filmmaker whose profile has grown considerably since we spoke, and her mentor Gina Prince-Bythewood has become her collaborator, as noted above.[90] Rachel Feldman is currently filming *Lilly*, the $15 million film she was initially considered “too inexperienced” to direct. Feature director Jen McGowan, who shared her knowledge of industry members’ fear-based decision-making in Chapter 4, is working non-stop. She directed several *Star Trek* episodes (Pascale 2022), is attached to two features (one for a studio) and was accepted into a mentorship program run by the Women’s Steering Committee at the Director’s Guild of America (Complex 2022). Chidera, the recent graduate commuting to New York City for low-paying work, is now working in project management at a major network. Once mistaken for a cleaner, Argentinian director Gabriela Tagliavini is finishing a Christmas movie and is working on several television series. Ashley, the filmmaker whose early career was funded by a generous family friend, is working steadily in television. Hannah, who was the target of unwanted attention from male crew members while working as a production designer, has now expanded into commercials and music videos. Audrey, the actor turned director who felt like she was already behind her male peers as she started film school, has been acting consistently, directed her first feature, and welcomed a baby. Paris-based filmmaker Elena Rossini, who confused a journalist with her t-shirt, is also a new mother and is writing a series of children’s books about inspiring women whose stories are largely untold. *Miss*

[90] Prince-Bythewood’s most recent project, *The Woman King* (2022), exceeded expectations by premiering at #1 in the US in September 2022 (Rubin 2022). With positive reviews and box office potential, the film is supposed to be a “door opener” for Black stories (McClintock 2022). “No major Hollywood studio has produced an action-historical drama centering on an ensemble cast of dark-skinned Black women,” McClintock (2022) writes.

Congeniality screenwriter Katie Ford co-created an upcoming comedy for AppleTV called *High Desert* (2022-), starring Patricia Arquette and directed by Jay Roach, known for *Austin Powers* films (and for having handwriting I could not decipher, as noted in Chapter 2). Lastly, the documentary that Maria Giese co-produced, *Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power* (2022, dir. Nina Menkes), is set to premiere in theatres in October 2022. In reading about my participants' accomplishments, I feel somewhat buoyed up by the knowledge that they are still active and making headway. To keep going, according to one actor turned filmmaker that I interviewed, self-belief is critical:

> You have to have a mindset of belief. Period. Simple. It's no different from a belief in God. You need this unwavering belief that you have something to bring to the world. With that faith comes reassurance when there are obstacles. People who are gunning for the fame of it– they normally don't have that faith because it's an instant gratification game that they're after. The fame is not enough to keep you going. You have to know that there will be setbacks, and they don't define you.

Producer and director Lia, who was about to start work on a new Netflix series when I spoke to her, had recently come out of a dark period. She lost her way, but: "it was useful, it's over, and it's good." She says the industry is never fair; it is brutal, and being a good filmmaker is not enough to survive: "Talent does not make a career. Resilience makes a career."

9.2.1 Further research

Before looking ahead to future possibilities for women filmmakers, I briefly look at some areas which are worthy of additional consideration. I have focused primarily on women's career paths; however, I acknowledge the intersections between gender and race, or indeed between gender and other characteristics (disability, class, sexual orientation). As a mother of young children, I am also conscious of how women's professional lives are transformed by motherhood; several of my participants spoke of hiding their pregnancies (and their families) from colleagues because of professional consequences. I anticipated that I would write a chapter on this topic, but I was also wary of contributing to the narrative that caring for children is a "woman's domain" and of

reinforcing assumptions that motherhood is the source of women's exclusion. In the end, I built a case (and easily reached my word limit) by addressing other challenges that limit women filmmakers, with no mention of motherhood. I have mixed feelings about this because it is a topic that I am passionate about, but I hope to examine these issues in another format (for more on this topic, see Mayer et al. 2022; Dent 2016; O'Brien et al. 2021).

9.3 Messy, difficult progress

Before concluding, I briefly examine recent developments on the turbulent "path to parity" because attitudes and perceptions have not changed overnight, even if women are being considered for more jobs in filmmaking. Statistics shared in the Introduction indicate that a few more women are directing top-grossing features and that considerably more women are directing television. The majority of my interviews were conducted in the summer of 2018, almost a year after #Metoo; at that time, most participants said that there was growing awareness that inappropriate behaviour was no longer acceptable, at least in front of colleagues. Perceptions of so-called "progress" vary by gender and race; according to a survey of nearly 10,000 Hollywood workers, 78% of white men have the impression that considerable progress has been made concerning diversity and inclusion, versus 47% of Black or African American women (Hollywood Commission 2020b, 16). In speaking to my participants via email as I prepared to submit this thesis, almost five years to the day since #MeToo began, several filmmakers said they still experienced unpleasant behaviour, witnessed bullying (from men and women), and needed peer support to cope.

With regards to being "post-MeToo" or "post-Weinstein," UK academic Rebecca Harrison (2018) has written, "We are not 'post' anything. This is our present, and it is messy and difficult." #MeToo organizing, for instance, has been fraught with conflict. Time's Up, an organization created to provide a legal defence fund to those who

experience misconduct or assault at work, has been plagued by scandals (Erbland 2021; James 2021). In 2021, the leaders resigned after it was revealed that the board co-chair advised former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo as he sought to discredit a woman accusing him of sexual harassment (BBC News 2021; LeBlanc 2021). Other prominent #MeToo activists have also allegedly engaged in problematic behaviour. One of the movement's figureheads, actor Asia Argento, accused Harvey Weinstein of rape in a “searing speech” at Cannes (with Ava DuVernay standing by her side) (Kilkenny 2018a), but she has since been accused of sexually assaulting an actor when he was 17, reportedly paying him for his silence (L. Ryan 2018; Winton 2018). In another example, celebrities heeded the call to take a ”united stand” by wearing black to the Golden Globe Awards in January 2018, including actors who would later be accused of misconduct (Rubin 2018; Wang 2022). When asked about the Time’s Up pin he was wearing at the awards, actor James Franco appeared visibly tense, clearing his throat several times and stumbling over his words (Variety 2018). Several women later accused him of sexually inappropriate and exploitative behaviour, with one woman saying that seeing him with the pin felt like “a slap in the face” (Miller et al. 2018). Addressing the controversy soon after, actor Scarlett Johansson said, “I want my pin back!” (Stanton 2018).



Figure 90. *James Franco, left, wears a Time’s Up pin on his lapel as he is interviewed by Ryan Seacrest, right, (also wearing a pin) at the 2018 Golden Globes. Both men have been accused of misconduct (Miller et al. 2018; Holloway 2018). Image from YouTube (E! Insider 2018), used in accordance with fair use.*

In hiring, even those most committed to gender equality have faced difficulties. Cathy Shulman worked to increase opportunities for women filmmakers as board president of Women in Film, Los Angeles from 2010 to 2018 and co-founder of ReFrame, mentioned above. She admitted that she was not able to hire an equal split of men and women for her productions in 2018. “When somebody like me who literally leads this movement talking about this can’t get it done, you wonder how hard it must be for other people who are less invested,” she said (Gardner 2018). Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy has not been able to find a woman director with enough experience to handle *Star Wars* films but co-founded The Hollywood Commission to tackle the “culture of abuse and power disparity” (Hollywood Commission 2022), as mentioned in Chapter 5. She said in 2020 that a woman would “absolutely” be hired to direct a *Star Wars* film (Sharf 2020a), though none have been announced. Initially united in their fight against perpetrators of abuse, members of the movement have also turned against each other. When actor Natalie Portman presented the award for Best Director at the 2018 Golden Globes, she said, “And here are the all-male nominees” (Petski et al. 2018). She later wore a cape to the 2020 Oscars embroidered with the names of women directors who were not nominated for Best Director. Fellow actor and #MeToo advocate Rose McGowan (2020) condemned Portman for “acting the part of someone who cares,” while working with few women directors. Portman said she has tried to work with women directors, but often, the films did not proceed, or the women were pushed out due to poor conditions, and she referred to the unmade projects as a “ghost history” (Pulver 2020). Industry members may have the best intentions, but changing business models and hiring practices to integrate women is not straightforward, particularly when systemic barriers slow women’s progress or keep them out.

Continuing in that vein, implementing “solutions” has been equally messy and difficult. Highly touted remedies, such as the Inclusion Rider (S. L. Smith 2014), have disappeared from discussions. Originally introduced to the world by actor Frances

McDormand at the 2018 Oscars (Belam et al. 2018; Keegan 2018; Dwyer 2018), the Inclusion Rider is an addendum to contracts in which individuals indicate preferences or demands, in this case, for diverse hiring on a production. Ideally, actors or filmmakers would stipulate that the Rider is a condition for their involvement. Some filmmakers told me that doing so was not realistic, as even established actors had difficulty getting other parties to agree to it.[91] There was also considerable attention paid to public pledges, such as "5050x2020" in which film organizations vowed to reach gender parity (50:50) by 2020 (Sun 2017b; Mumford 2018; Anderson 2018; Byrnes 2015). The Cannes Film Festival was the first international festival to sign the pledge (Erbland 2019b); however, by 2021, only four films out of 21 in the official competition were directed by women–and three out of 18 in 2022 (Eller 2022)–the same ratio as 2016 (Silverstein 2016a). As of 2022, the website for 5050x2020 is no longer online (Anon n.d.). Once the deadlines passed (amid a global pandemic) and the targets were unmet, the initiatives faded away.

The fatigue is not unexpected, given how entrenched industry practices are. During fieldwork in 2016-2017, some industry members already seemed tired of hearing about these issues; I heard grumblings about how much time was wasted with mandatory unconscious bias training, for example. Due to the current political climate, they had to appear to support "diversity" efforts even though they were somewhat resentful of having to put their work aside to participate in the training. In some respects, "diversity" has become a groan-inducing punchline, like "political correctness." A scene from HBO black comedy *Barry* (2018- , creators Alex Berg & Bill Hader) pokes fun at this phenomenon. When drama student (and serial killer) Barry sees the size of the venue his girlfriend Sally has secured for the presentation of their sketches, she reassures him that her agent

[91] The Rider was co-authored by industry executive Fanshen Cox, lawyer Kalpana Kotagal, and researcher Stacy L. Smith, though many media reports credited Smith, the only white woman involved. Kotagal has since become President Joe Biden's nominee for commissioner of the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC), though she has not been confirmed for the role (Wiessner 2022).

sold out the theatre by telling industry members it was a “diversity showcase.” They were “afraid not to RSVP,” she says.

Looking towards the future, it is difficult to say whether women will be better integrated into tomorrow’s industry or whether hiring through referrals and friends will regain prominence as the latest EEOC investigation disappears from view. To “create space” for more women to succeed, Ava DuVernay and others have worked diligently. In the 2018 speech mentioned above, she repeats an adage: “When you let go of what doesn’t serve you, you create space for what’s meant to be.” She says:

> Spaces, so many spaces created in this country, are rife with exclusion and inertia. These are spaces not created by us but for us to control and to maintain a status quo. But historically, warriors for good, known as women, have defied these restrictions and made deliberate decisions to resist and create spaces that are safe and that nourish, and we must do this in whatever way we can in our own lives. For me, I tell stories. (Ms. Foundation for Women 2018)

By going against industry norms and reforming hiring practices, changemakers are letting go of industry practices that have not served women for more than a century. Instead of trying to fit into an exclusionary system, they are building a new one; this time, the guest list is under their purview. ❖

References

The source materials for this thesis have been divided into sections to help the reader navigate between primary sources, reports and legal documents, and secondary sources.

Primary Sources	322
Reports and Legal Documents	394
Secondary Literature	402

Primary Sources

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