

# LEADING LADIES

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Hollywood has long symbolized the entertainment industry, which, despite strides in achieving true diversity, remains a male-dominated industry with 88% of the top 250 films of 2017 having no female directors and 83% with no female writers according to San Diego State University. It tells of the inequality behind the camera, but what about on-screen? According to USC Annenberg's Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative, "Only 30.2% of the 30,835 speaking characters evaluated were female across the 700 top-grossing films from 2007 to 2014." This proves a gross under-representation of women in film as, statistically, women did not comprise many speaking roles in the time from 2007 to 2014, much less the lead roles in these films.

Movies that had leading women with unique narratives like "Lady Bird" (2017) or "La La Land" (2016) were some of the highest-grossing films of their respective years, so why are female-led movies still under-estimated in terms of success? Shockingly, only 31% of protagonists in films of 2018 were women, achieving a record-high and increasing from 2017's 24% according to the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film. While the number of female leads in blockbuster movies spanning from dramas to sci-fi has become much higher since the times of Old Hollywood, for a modern audience, this simply is not enough.

Seeing someone like themselves on the silver screen matters to audiences and according to

*Despite the commonality of male leads in film, numerous female-led films became major blockbusters in recent years.*

the MPAA's Theme Report, women accounted for 51% of movie-goers in 2018. Not including complex women in these fictional worlds marginalizes women and makes them see themselves as less "socially important" than men.

The majority of non-leading female characters in movies are subject to what is termed as "the male gaze" where they are only shown on

the benefit of having female leads beyond this stereotype. It disservices the female audience to only see themselves on-screen as a character lacking the most basic level of depth that is always awarded to any male character.

Increasing the number of female leads and even non-leading, complex female characters in the films of the future would be a great stride in diversifying cinema and shattering the male-ego of Hollywood that makes so many narratives and movies male-dominated. With this year having a remarkable amount of blockbuster films (such as "Us" and "Mary, Queen of Scots") with strong female leads, the roles of women in Hollywood, more specifically the leading woman, will continue to grow and redefine the male-dominated entertainment industry.

*Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation.*

*George Gerbner and Larry Gross, researchers*

screen as men wanted them to be: oversexualized with much less of a speaking role than their male counterparts. According to Statista, 33.2% of female characters ages 21-39 from the top grossing movies in the United States in 2017 show "some nudity" while this raises to 35.9% of female characters ages 13-20. These more traditional type of roles (like "The Bond Girl," that only serves as a sex-object) exemplify

**12%** no female directors (2018)

**17%** female writers (2018)

**24%** of protagonists were female (2017)

**31%** of protagonists were female (2018)

**51%** movie-goers were female (2018)

**30.2%** speaking characters were female

**33.2%** 21-39 yr old female characters nude

**35.9%** 13-20 yr old female characters nude

(Graphics/Bella Ramirez)

