

Why Aren't There More Female Directors?

An Investigation into the Gender Biases in the Film Industry

[REDACTED]

ADPA6000: Independent Project

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When you watch a movie, do you think about what happens behind the scenes or how it came to exist? I did, and I noticed something: the people in charge are men more than 80% of the time (Smith et al., 2022). As of 2021, only 12.7% of directors were women, and out of all the top films from 2007 to 2021, only 5.4% were women (Wikipedia, 2021). Why is that? I aim to find out. I will look at how many female directors there are compared to males, what a director does, how one becomes a director, and any biases I encounter along the way. I will also showcase my knowledge and experiences as a woman with directing and directors to provide a first-hand example of what it takes and whether I experience any real impediments to women becoming directors.

2021 saw the release of around 754 movies (Wikipedia, 2021). To make things a little easier, I will assume that there is only one director per movie. So, how many of these directors were women? According to the Inclusion Initiative's (2021) evaluation of the top eight production companies for 2021, there were 95 directors: only 13 were women. That is a ratio of 6.3 men to every one woman, or 13.7% women (2021). Based on these estimates, only 103 of the 754 estimated directors were women, and 651 were men. The population of the United States in 2020 was 50.52% women to 49.48% men (Gender Ratio in the United States, 2020); if we compare that with the estimated percentage of directors above, there is a stark disparity. Looking at the data, we might expect an almost equal number of men and women in any field, but this is not the case.

A director is the creative lead for a film, and it is their job to take a script and envision it "while guiding the actors and technical crew to capture" that vision (StudioBinder, 2021, para. 3). A director often joins a project during a stage of development called pre-production or prep. This stage is where the director hires most of the heads of staff in collaboration with the producer (MasterClass, 2021). These heads of staff have more specific roles like casting, photography, or production design, to name a few. Directors perform several other tasks during this stage, but I will get into those later. The next stage of development is called the production or shoot stage and is where the directors "work to get the best performance out of the actors" while maintaining focus on the technical aspects of each scene (2021). After production, directors lead the film editing and produce a director's cut that their producers review before releasing a final cut during a stage called post-production or post.

Film directors often hold an undergraduate degree in film or a related field and have years' worth of work experience in various associated fields (Academic Earth, n.d.). From film editors to actors to assistant directors to props, most directors do not start their careers by directing a feature film. Instead, these varying roles help introduce individuals to the full range of jobs performed by the director (2021). Those who desire to advance in the future need to market themselves to their directors or other directors they have associated with (Rooney and Belli, 2011). The higher-ups may see the talent of these individuals and help them get their start in the industry (Rooney and Belli, 2011). Another way some directors get their start is by creating short films, submitting them to film festivals, and using those films to produce a director's reel that they can send to potential jobs, producers, or directors (2021).

To showcase my skills with regard to directing, I am going to walk through a modified pre-production phase of a remake of Disney's classic animation, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), set in the modern-day. I do not own the rights to this film, and the use of any characters, scenes, or lines is for research and educational purposes only. Any edit or reformat is mine, but the original writing credit goes to Irene Mecchi and Jonathon Roberts (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1996), and transcription credit goes to Ben Scripps (2016). I chose this script not only because of the relevancy of its commentary in today's society but because of the issues with gender representation: the film only names two women.

I will highlight several aspects of directing where they do (or do not) inhibit women's involvement based on my own experiences and industry statistics. I will also look at various stereotypes about women in the industry and in general to see if there are other legitimate reasons that fewer women work in this field. Such as women are better at multitasking, which, if true, might indicate that women are better suited to direct due to the number of jobs a director performs simultaneously (Buser and Peter, 2012). There are so many ways to become a director, yet women make up less than 15% of directors (Women and Hollywood, 2021; Smith et al., 2022); why is that, why does it matter, and what could we do to change it?

How many female directors are there?

The number of women in film production has increased since concerns initially rose about gender bias in the industry. However, recent data shows that that change has been wildly inconsistent (Smith et al., 2022). Based on statistics I found on the Women and Hollywood site's research reports, in 2008, women comprised 16% of directors (2009), while in 2015, women comprised only 5% of directors (2016), in 2019, women comprised 21% (2020), and in 2021, women comprised 12.7% of directors (2022). Additionally, according to a study by Slated (2016), between 2005 and 2010, only 8.8% of all directors were women, while an investigation by the Inclusion Initiative revealed that between 2007 and 2021, only 5.4% were women (Smith et al., 2022).

I was surprised to find that the percentage of female directors was not increasing or even remaining consistent, which led me to wonder about the popularity of female directors versus males. I searched for listings of the top 10-25 directors of all time and found six articles with a total of 98 names. Unfortunately, many of these sources focused on Hollywood directors instead of worldwide, but the results are revealing. None of the articles listed a single woman despite the articles' dates ranging between 2013 and 2021, and also only listed 39 unique men (Smith et al., 2022). That is, in my opinion, a small pool of talent to highlight.

After speaking with a few colleagues about this issue, I decided to widen my scope and searched for listings with the top 40-100 directors. The trend did not change. The listed women did not indicate any positive correlation between larger sample sizes and increased female representation. Since the population of women to men in the United States is roughly equal (Gender Ration in the United States. 2020), one might expect to find similar comparisons in the work pool. Especially given that the inequality between men and women has been addressed

several times over the last century, including in the film industry (Stolworth, 2016). However, in two different articles from the IMDB website--an informal encyclopaedic site that provides details and data about various forms of media--listing the top 50 and 100 directors of the world, each listed only two women (██████████). In other words, only 4% or 2% of their listings were women, respectively. As there were no stated measurements, ratings, or reasonings, these articles are not objectively reliable sources; however, they were not the only ones to have this disparity. The Guardian's "World's 40 Best Directors" article (Bradshaw et al., 2003) lists only two women, bringing our top percentage to 5% women to men. This article had a grading rubric of five elements adding up to 100 points and used a "panel of critics" (Bradshaw et al., 2003, para. 1), who tallied the votes, so I expected to see more women represented.

On Ranker--a site which allows its users to cast votes on the directors that had the highest impact on film--only one woman made it into the top 100 voted directors (2021) as of the 15th of December 2021. Only six women made it into Quartz's article, "The 100 Best Directors of the Last 25 Years, Ranked According to Thousands of Critic's Reviews" (██████████). Quartz calculated their data using ratings from Metacritic--a movie critic site with various voting criteria--based on each director's top six highest-rated films (██████████). Naturally, they only included directors who had produced at least six films bringing our highest percentage to 6% of women to men. This percentage was the highest I found, but it does not represent the number of female directors in 2017 (Women in Hollywood, 2018).

I could only consistently find female directors if I specifically searched for them. To keep my data as consistent as possible, I only included the arrangement of articles that totalled 98 entries. I found 58 distinctive women on seven sites (EmboldenedLoser, 2016; White, 2016; Molumby, 2019; Kennedy, 2020; Manish, 2021; Thomas, 2021; Whitten, 2021). Compare this with my earlier note of 39 unique men with the same possible number of names, and you will notice a lack of diversity as there are only about 40% unique men to 59% unique women.

I am going to put this in another way. If you asked 98 different people to name an influential director in the industry, they are 94-98% more likely to say a man's name than a woman's, unless specifically asked to name a woman. If they name a male, there is a 60% chance they will name the same man as another respondent, but if they name a female, there is only a 41% chance they will repeat a name.

Another reason gender bias is still an important issue is that women are more likely to hire female actors or generally increase diversity representation (Lauzen, 2020a). In 2019, films directed by women featured "girls and women comprising 45.1% of all speaking roles and 83.3% of leading/co-leading characters" (Women and Hollywood, 2020, para. 11, point 4). Meanwhile, films directed only by men featured girls and women in less than half of all speaking roles and lead/co-leading characters (Lauzen, 2020a). In films with marginalised female casting directors, 45.8% featured underrepresented characters compared to only 30.7% without marginalised female casting directors (██████████). This disparity is more concerning, considering that only 15.6% of films had underrepresented female casting directors (Women and Hollywood, 2020).

According to the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film (Lauzen, 2020b), women are more likely to hire other women in production roles. Lauzen's (2020b) research showed that in films with at least one female director, women comprised at least two times more of the other production roles than those with only male directors. "On films with at least one female director, women comprised 59% of writers" (Lauzen, 2020b, p. 8), 43% of editors, 21% of cinematographers, and 16% of composers. Meanwhile, in films without female directors, women comprised only 13% of writers, 19% of editors, 2% of cinematographers, and 6% of composers (Lauzen, 2020b).

Fewer female characters and actors might not seem like a problem, but it could be costing the industry revenue (Newman, 2021). According to Greater Good Magazine's research, producers should care about diversity--not just in terms of female representation, but ethnic and LGBTQ--because films with diverse casting earned more money than on average between 2016 and 2019 (Newman, 2021). And Bloomberg's article on the Fortune news site reveals that United States' female filmgoers aged 15-24 "account for 2 million admissions a week, compared with 1.7 million" males (Bloomberg, 2021). So, as far as Hollywood is concerned, there is a monetary incentive to cater to female audiences over males by hiring diversely.

Ciara Wardlow's article (2018) on The Film School Rejects news site also highlights this advantage of diverse casting and some of her own. She argues that "diversity adds meaning" to films (Wardlow, 2018, para. 7). She cites the film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) as one of the most influential films with this trend, indicating that casting a black man as Ben instead of a white actor, a character who is later killed by the people who should have saved him, gave the film racial subtext (Wardlow, 2018). This subtext ultimately amplified the character's death and gave the film relevancy that holds up today (Wardlow, 2018).

Another argument for diversity in the film industry is that psychologically speaking, humans seek out role models (Morgenroth et al., 2015), people we can relate to who inspire us to go further. According to research, role models appear to have a great potential to impact the people trying to enter the roles held by those models (Morgenroth et al., 2015). But no role model can encourage everybody, so it is vital to have a diverse range of individuals to provide as much possible inspiration to as many people as possible (Morgenroth et al., 2015).

Finally, there is an altruistic argument to consider. It is very closely related to the psychology of role models, but without the facts and figures. When I watch a movie, I tend to enjoy it more when I can relate to a character on the screen, whether physically or emotionally. My colleagues, friends, and family agreed with this, and since we are all living on the same planet, it is safe to say that we all deserve to see ourselves on-screen, to hear our different voices and stories through the writing, and to remember that we are not alone. If hiring more female directors creates more opportunities for diversity in casting, editing, writing, etc., which, in turn, increases revenue and viewership, maybe the typical procedure could be to have equal representation.

What is a director?

I am not going to list everything a director does because that would not aid my point, which is to determine whether there is a specific reason it would be more difficult for a woman to perform these jobs. Some stereotypes that may impact this ability are that women are less creative than men (Adams, 2015) or that women are better at multitasking (Buser and Peter, 2012). We will get into the truths behind these conceptions as they become relevant.

Earlier in this paper, I established that a director is the creative lead for a given production. The producer hires and brings them in during the pre-production phase. From here, the director leads the project in a way that "creatively expresses the ideas of the script in the fullest way possible" (Rooney and Belli, 2011). They should be able to handle the stress and pressure in healthy ways, be in good physical health, and picture how a written scene could play on film (ScreenSkills, n.d.; Rooney and Belli, 2011; StudioBinder, 2021).

There are three main stages to directing a film: prep, shoot, and post (Rooney and Belli, 2011). These are also called pre-production, production, and post-production (StudioBinder, 2021; MasterClass, 2021).

Prep.

Script Breakdown. The director breaks down the screenplay for story, character, style, and colour. But, before they can break down a script, they have to read it. They should be prepared to read it multiple times during this stage (Rooney and Belli, 2011; Simens, 2016; Danesh, 2021). The first time is to experience the story. Then break down the story into its base parts, and identify various plots, character archetypes, and the central conflict (Rooney and Belli, 2011; Simens, 2016; Danesh, 2021). Directors will also look at errors and inconsistencies within a script, identify elements to include in a breakdown sheet, and create scene breakdowns (Simens, 2016; McCullagh, 2019; Clark, 2020; MasterClass, 2020; Danesh, 2021).

The breakdown sheet will help set up a shooting schedule, establish items of importance, and provide the production departments with lists of everything they need to purchase or build for the film to be true to the script. This sheet includes a list of every character and the scenes they appear in, all costuming mentioned, any animals or vehicles listed, as well as indicating visual or special effects to be added (Simens, 2016; McCullagh, 2019; Clarke, 2020; MasterClass, 2020; Danesh, 2021).

Finally, a director needs to look at the characters in the script, partly to help with the casting process and partly to help with the character journey the actors explore during filming (MasterClass, 2021). This step aids directors in identifying what to look for in an actor (Rooney and Belli, 2011). There are a few ways to break down characters, and one recommendation in the book, *Directors Tell the Story*, by Bethany Rooney and Mary Lou Belli (2011) is to make a COW chart: what the **character** says about themselves; what **others** say about the character; what the **writer** says about the character. This chart highlights what the author(s) intended for character appearances and traits and can reveal how characters think or view one another and how they view themselves. These views will influence their personality, and the character's voice should reflect them. For example, in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), the character Frollo claims that he is guiltless after incidentally murdering the main character's mother. This view indicates

that he believes himself to be better than, or above, the dead woman, and his comments about other characters in the play later in the text reflect this.

Another way to look at characters is by something called actions. Actors often break down a script by asking questions about what the character wants to do or what they want other people in this scene to do (Rooney and Belli, 2011; New York Film Academy, 2016). These questions reveal the character's objective(s), and how they go about accomplishing this objective is their action for the scene (Rooney and Belli, 2011; New York Film Academy, 2016).

A third way to dive into characters in a script is to create character biographies [REDACTED]. A character biography is a list of the facts from the screenplay for a given character in a unique document. This document includes family members, jobs, past relationships, ages, events, etc. Anything mentioned in the screenplay about the character goes into their biography. Mitchell [REDACTED] goes into greater detail about what else goes into a character biography, including dates, a basic timeline of life events, and questions that might pop up during the listing process, but her point is to keep the answers and descriptions in the biography as simple and as close to the script as possible.

Whatever way a director chooses to investigate the characters, they will repeat the process for every single one. After all, you cannot cast if you do not know what you need (Rooney and Belli, 2011).

Casting. Casting is one of the most important jobs of a director since a director needs to "be able to recognize talent and suitability" (Rooney and Belli, 2011, p. 23) to get the people on-screen who can play the character truthfully. Finding a pool of actors for the available parts and negotiating with them is usually the job of a casting director, someone the director hired that generates a list of actors for consideration. This list includes the "actor's talent agent, availability, and whether that actor is willing to audition or will consider an offer only" (Rooney and Belli, 2011, p. 27).

Production Design. The production design is every not human element in a given shot (Rooney and Belli, 2011); it covers things like costuming, props, visual effects, makeup/hair, etc. The various production designers are the heads of staff the director hired in collaboration with the producer at the beginning of the pre-production stage (MasterClass, 2021). Once the director and producer have hired the staff, they hold a concept meeting to discuss the director's vision for the film and other preliminary information (Rooney and Belli, 2011).

There is a lot to do in the pre-production phase, and the director has to finish a lot of it around the same time, so it might be a good thing to have a director that can multitask reasonably well, right? And women are better at multitasking, so would it be better to have more women in the director's chair? Yes and no. Multitasking is bad for everyone. According to Buser and Peter (2012), it inhibits productivity. Yet people across the world think they multitask above average on a scale from 0 to 6 and that women are better at it (Szametat et al., 2015). There is no significant difference between men and women regarding multitasking (Stoet et al., 2013). However, evidence supports that women are better at task-switching, which differs from multitasking as it does not require tasks to be completed simultaneously (Stoet et al., 2013).

Shoot.

During the production stage, the director works closely with the actors and crew to tell the story and translate their vision onto the screen (Rooney and Belli, 2011; MasterClass, 2021). This phase occurs on the film set. The director needs to watch the actors rehearse to help them make informed decisions about the overall appearance of the film, including blocking and camera locations (Nashville Film Institute, n.d.). Then comes the actual filming. Filming involves frequent check-ins with the department heads to ensure the design elements and filming fit together (Nashville film Institute, n.d.; Rooney and Belli, 2011; MasterClass, 2021). It is also recommended to talk to the actors before and after every take during this stage to keep them engaged (Nashville film Institute, n.d.; Rooney and Belli, 2011; MasterClass, 2021). A "take" is an individual version of a particular shot and is typically numbered successively until the filming of the shot is finished (Wikipedia contributors, 2021c).

The production phase is arguably the most creative part of the process (StudioBinder, 2021), which would be the most difficult part for women in film as men are more creative, right? No. Studies suggest that this perception is due to the traits that people relate to creativity, such as autonomy and outside-the-box thinking, which are considered more masculine (Adams, 2015). Yet, there is no indication that this perception is related to the actual competence of the genders, but it does negatively impact women's advancement in various fields (Proudfoot et al., 2015).

Post.

The director is responsible for producing a director's cut of the film and is heavily involved with the editors who cut the scenes together, as well as the special effects and sound teams who sync sounds and effects to the existing footage (Nashville Film Institute, n.d.; StudioBinder, 2021). The director should include the takes that add the most meaning to the film (MasterClass, 2021). After they finish the director's cut, they consult with the producer to create the final cut, which they release to the public (Nashville film Institute, n.d.; StudioBinder, 2021).

How do you become a director?

The director has a lot of responsibilities once they land the job, but how did they get there? At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned that many directors start in related fields and often have years' worth of experience before directing a larger-scale project (Maio, 2020). They also often hold a degree in directing, filmmaking, or another related field (Academic Earth, n.d.). For example, Kathryn Bigelow, the first woman to win an Oscar for best director in 2010 for her film *The Hurt Locker* (2008), studied painting at the San Francisco Art Institute before turning her attention to filmmaking (Tikkanen, 2021). Then she attended graduate film school at Columbia University in the 1970s (Tikkanen, 2021). Conversely, Steven Spielberg was interested in filmmaking as a child and created and submitted short films to festivals before catching the attention of an executive at Universal Studios (Barson, 2022). James Cameron, director and writer for *The Terminator* (1984), started his career studying physics at the California State University before "a viewing of *Star Wars* (1977) inspired him to try his hand at filmmaking" (Britannica, 2021, para. 2). He began his work on films as a production designer in 1980 before making his film debut a year later (Britannica, 2021). As I stated before, Rooney and Belli

(2011) recommend that you self-promote to directors you work with and, if you can, create and submit short films to festivals the way Steven Spielberg did (Barson, 2022), so there is no single way to become a director. I always thought that older directors opened the doors for newer ones, and I was not far off, but I did not think of directing as a personal business that you have to market and promote. Instead, I thought of it the same way I do corporate jobs, where you turn in a resume with your experience, and that is the majority of the process done. However, there is a lot more work involved with becoming a director.

So why are there so few female directors? It appears that women face a lot of presumptions regarding their abilities, ambitions, and creativity in the filmmaking field (Robb, 2015). 42% of participants in a study by Sundance and Women in Film reported that they believed there was a lack of women to choose from, while 25% said there was a perceived lack of ambition from women to direct big-budget films (Smith et al., 2015). These perceptions may have led to fewer female hires in larger production companies (Smith et al., 2015).

My Experiences.

I am an actor, so what can I know about being a director? Well, I have worked closely with theatre directors for about a decade. I have done this as an actor, a co-producer, and a playwright, so I know a few things about what a theatre director is and what they do. I also knew there are a lot of similarities between them and film directors. Wikipedia describes a theatre director as a professional who "oversees and orchestrates the mounting of a theatre production" and ensures the "quality and completeness of" the production while leading the creative team in the realisation of "their artistic vision" (Wikipedia contributors, 2021d, para. 1). Meanwhile, Wikipedia describes a film director as someone who "has a key role in choosing the cast members" and controls the "dramatic aspects and visualises the screenplay" while leading the "film crew and actors in the fulfilment of that vision" (Wikipedia contributors, 2021a, para. 1). So, there are a lot of similarities in the basics of the jobs. Both film and theatre directors bring a screenplay or script to life for an audience, and both kinds of directors work closely with a production team to fully realise their vision. These base definitions are where I started when I looked more in-depth into directors and what they do.

Initially, I thought of taking a scene from a movie and showcasing my directing ability through a deep look into the finer points of what the director did in that scene; then, after a conversation with a couple of colleagues, I considered recreating the scene myself and making a comparison of the two. However, after talking to another colleague, Amy Hayward, about our research, we noticed that our subjects were closely related as she is researching producers for film and theatre. We shared some of our findings and decided to look at recreating an existing movie we might want to produce/direct and showcase our skills through the pre-production stage. I eventually landed on *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) because of the social relevancy I noted earlier regarding ableism, racism, and diversity as the original text (Mecchi and Roberts, 1996) brings up these points in an easy to digest way. However, it also pushes a romantic subplot that has little effect on the story, uses slurs to refer to the Romani people, and leaves a lot to be desired about female representation. So, when I pitched the movie to Amy, I

suggested that we push it into the modern-day, update the language, be open to the possibility of gender-swapping characters, and include LGBTQ+ representation. Amy agreed.

Script Breakdown. First, I had to find a script for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996). The only viable option I found was a transcript created by Ben Scripps (2016). In my research, I discovered the transcript would need to be reformatted as it did not have individual scenes, the dialogue sometimes blended into the next character's lines, and camera transitions were incorrectly formatted. After some more research, I found a screenwriting software called Fade In based on a few reviews and a recommendation (Script Reader Pro, 2022) that had the tools necessary to create an industry-standard screenplay. The transformation process took several hours, but it would have taken longer if I had had to figure out the formatting without the software and based solely on dimensions and templates online.

Directors would not usually be involved in the formatting process, so I do not expect I will need to do this whole process again in the future unless I write the script myself. However, fixing formatting errors is a common practice (StudioBinder, 2021), so I will know how to catch those errors in the future. Since this information was not difficult to find and the software was easy to use, regardless of whether or not you read the instructions, this step is not a barrier to anyone, female or otherwise.

I did not have a clean script, so my first experience with the text was through watching the movie. I chose not to wait until I had a readable version to experience the writing, partly because my plan involves theoretically remaking the film instead of starting from scratch as an accurate retelling of the script. This step helped me see the parallels and mirrored moments that I would ideally keep in my remake versus those I felt cluttered the piece and would dump. Regardless of how I experienced the screenplay, I was able to pinpoint the plot points and arcs through the script. After I finished the reformatting process, I began the character process I mentioned above: the COW chart. The COW chart was a straightforward process, though I ran into some trouble with the W part of the chart as Ben Scripps (2016) added the descriptions based on the movie, so I did not have the original writer's words (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1996). I inferred the "what the writer says about the character" section from how I interpreted the character's interactions with each other based on their lines and the context of the film.

The longest part of this process was creating the Scene Breakdown Sheets. Initially, I attempted to use software (StudioBinder, n.d.) whose free version did not enable me to create and fill a complete Breakdown Sheet, so I had to start the process over by hand. This rote copy and transfer was a tedious process that my neurodivergent brain could not remain focused on consistently, so in the future, I would invest in the software that would do it for me. But, now I know what I am looking for, what Breakdown Sheets are supposed to look like, and that while tedious, it is more than doable for women.

Casting. I did not have access to a casting director for this process, so it was up to [REDACTED] the stand-in producer--and me to find available actors. We reached out to our classmates/colleagues and students in other year groups to gauge interest. We did not ultimately

create any casting breakdowns as we cannot move beyond the basics of the prep stage for this film, and setting them up anyway, I felt, may have confused the actors and did not feel true to the production. Instead, Amy and I discussed the basic character tropes and traits we felt fit the characters and what we would look for in the actors on the day. Several actors showed interest in the audition, but we needed to be flexible because some of the actors had schedule conflicts that prevented them from making the original, scheduled session. Out of the six actors who agreed to participate, only four were ultimately available. We held two sessions over Zoom due to actor availability, each with two actors.

Before the audition, I pulled three two-person sides and edited them with some of my ideas for the final product, like including LGBTQ representation. Sides are short excerpts from the script that showcase some of the defining character traits of the characters in the scene (____). Directors often provide the sides to actors before film auditions or during theatre auditions (Cain, 2021; StudioBinder, 2021). We ran the audition process similarly to the theatre auditions I participated in, so we provided the sides at the start of the session rather than beforehand.

During the first audition, I felt shaky and uncertain; it was the first time I was in charge of the audition process instead of as an observer or participant. I stumbled over my words and ultimately forgot to ask the actors if they had questions at the end of the process. When I asked Amy for her thoughts, she suggested that I should begin the next session with a little more confidence and reminded me to ask the actors if they had questions at the end. But, she said it was good overall, highlighting that my insecurities about the process were unfounded and helping me settle into the second session.

Regardless of my anxiety, all of the actors were easy to work with and responded well to our suggestions. It did not take me long to start picturing the film with the actors in the various roles, which helped me formulate other changes I could make to the screenplay.

Earlier I mentioned that *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) had issues with gender representation which was quite apparent with the sides I pulled. I did not set out to find male-dominated sides; I merely scanned the script for any excerpt that featured two of the four main characters speaking together for about two minutes and lines that revealed important information about the chosen characters. Three out of the four main characters are male, and the fourth character never speaks to another female in the entire film. When 75% of the auditioners were women, the discrepancy was hard to dismiss. This kind of issue is why I have always found gender-blind casting essential in cases where the gender of a character doesn't impact the plot.

If I had based our casting on the existing genders from the script, I would have missed Lowri Wilson's interpretation of Frollo and Rowanne Hutchinson's interpretation of Quasimodo. Both brought new thoughts to the characters I had not previously considered. In the case of Rowanne, she lent a thread of truth to the performance because her experience with a physical disability is appropriate for the role of Quasimodo. According to both Judith Weston (1996) and Katie Mitchell (2008), knowing whether an actor has shared similar experiences to a character or can relate to them through their craft is vital in identifying actors that can bring a role to life

on-screen. When Amy and I discussed our ideal casting based on the pool of actors we had access to, it was an easy choice. However, we agreed that we would prefer to cast a wider net for a higher-budget production to get a more diverse cast list.

If I, a woman with ADHD and severe anxiety, can get this far into the pre-production process without a budget, crew, and a limited timeline, I can only imagine what I would accomplish with a production company. Because of my recent experience, I cannot understand why women would still be limited in this field because of old stereotypes and misconceptions [REDACTED].

What do we do?

We know that assumptions and stereotypes affect women being hired as directors or promoted in their jobs (Smith et al., 2015; Proudfoot et al., 2015). And we know that diverse storylines and casting increase ticket revenue (Newman, 2021). Simply supporting media and production companies which emphasise diversity and equal hiring processes can pressure more companies to produce that content (Hunt et al., 2019). It can also show production companies tangible proof that viewers are tired of the white-washed male films and urge them to create more diverse media to keep consumers interested in growing the industry ([REDACTED]).

[REDACTED]. Boycotting production companies and their films that lack diversity behind the scenes and on-screen puts this same financial pressure on them to make a change.

As I have shown, directing is an in-depth, detailed process that requires a lot of hard work and research--more than I could include here--but it is not impossible for anyone. It is only inaccessible because of harmful stereotypes and assumptions about the lack of ambition in female directors and a perceived lack of women filmmakers (Smith et al., 2015). So, another way to introduce more female directors to the world is to encourage more women to make films.

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