



The **Reoccurring** **Conversation**

BY BAILEY FINK PHOTOS BY PROVIDED

Award season is coming to a close, but everyone is still talking about the continued lack of diversity and nomination “snubs” that award shows saw throughout the season. From the Academy Awards, better known as the Oscars, to the British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA) to the Grammy Awards, this award season faced severe backlash because of the lack of women and artists of color in the nomination mix.

However, this is not a new problem in Hollywood; awards season is typically dominated by white artists, usually men, winning most of the categories. Media outlets wait for the nominations to be announced, only to pounce on the academies for the lack of diversity. So, if this is happening every year, why have we not seen a change in nominations? And are there consequences for these historically white awards?

"I know there have been attempts to have more diversity and equity, but it's hard to when the people who are making decisions that composition hasn't changed," said Dr. Akil Houston, associate professor of cultural and media studies at Ohio University.

Voting academies are made up of thousands of what their websites describe as industry professionals who vote on the category of their expertise. For example, directors vote for directors and musicians vote for musicians. However, some categories allow for the entire body to vote, like Best Picture at the Oscars, which means people without expertise are allowed to vote on their favorite, even if they know nothing about the category.

In January, Deborah Dugan, CEO of the Recording Academy responsible for putting on the Grammys, was placed on administrative leave after the

Academy said an assistant accused Dugan of bullying, according to Vox. Dugan denied all claims and said she was placed on leave for exposing the misconduct and corruption within the Academy.

Dugan was the first female CEO of the Recording Academy, which looked to be a step in the right direction; however, she only held the position for five months before being placed on leave. Dugan issued a complaint to the Los Angeles Equal Employment Opportunity Commission saying, "The Academy's general counsel sexually harassed her; that her predecessor as Academy CEO, Neil Portnow, had been accused of rape by an artist (a charge Portnow has denied); and that the Grammy nomination process had been unfairly manipulated," according to a report by Vox. With the Grammys finished for the year, Dugan's battle with the Recording Academy continues with an open investigation, and harsh words are emerging from both sides.



Unfortunately, sexual misconduct claims are nothing new in Hollywood, especially after the #MeToo movement and Time's Up shocked the world in 2017. In the wake of #MeToo, the 2018 awards season was dominated by artists, female and male, showing support for women.

At the 2018 Golden Globes, nearly all of the women and many of the men wore black in solidarity for Time's Up, and Oprah Winfrey became the first woman of color to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award. Additionally, at the 2018 Oscars, #MeToo and Time's Up were addressed directly through a montage introduced by Ashley Judd, Salma Hayek, and Annabella Sciorra – all of whom reported sexual misconduct by Harvey Weinstein. The montage called for more inclusion and onscreen representation for women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community. In Frances McDormand's Best Actress speech, she invited all female nominees to stand. However, after the female-driven 2018 season came to end, the entertainment industry seemed to forget about it.

"I think when you normalize diverse ways of seeing and thinking, that's how you can

change your practice. But to just say OK, we got in trouble because there weren't any women, alright, so now we're going to have this overemphasis on women. Got that out of the way, now let's go back to the way things were. So I think that's what we've seen," said Houston.

The 2020 Oscars nominations announcement was followed by a slew of backlash from many groups as the nominations for the top four acting categories were painstakingly white, with Cynthia Erivo as the only person of color nominated in an acting category for her role in "Harriet." Additionally, social media buzzed with talks of notable snubs in the nominations. The snubs included Jennifer Lopez for her role in "Hustlers" and Awkwafina for her role in "The Farewell," especially after she was the first performer of Asian descent to win a Golden Globe Award in the lead actress film category.

Another significant snub that had people talking came in the Best Director category, which featured only men. This caused an uproar as people were furious that Greta Gerwig did not make the list for her direction of "Little Women." However, the best director category has been historically male-dominated as Kathryn Bigelow is the only



woman to have won an Oscar for best director.

In 2015, the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite took center stage after the Oscar nominations were announced to reveal that all 20 contenders for lead and supporting actor and actress are all white for the first time since 1998, according to *USA Today*. After this backlash, the Academy vowed to double the number of women and people of color in the Academy's membership, governing bodies, and voting members by 2020. After the 2020 nominations were announced, the #OscarsSoWhite hashtag resurfaced on social media.

"I think that what social media is allowing is kind of a reckoning. There's a disturbance, there's a reckoning of something's wrong. I think that social media increases the chaos, which feels bad right now, but actually is good in the sense of there's obviously a problem [and] people are upset," said Dr. Lisa Beeler, director of diversity and inclusion for the Ralph and Luci Schey Sales Centre. "And you look back at a lot of different things that were big ... things in the past that awakening needed to happen for people to start ... look at the civil rights movement. Well, now we have an awakening right here on our phone."



During the 2020 Oscars, Steve Martin and Chris Rock opened the show by addressing the lack of women in the directing category and the lack of black people nominated in the acting categories. Additionally, Natalie Portman wore a cape embroidered with the names of snubbed female directors to the event. While the Oscars ratings hit an all-time low, the movie "Parasite" made history by becoming the first foreign-language film to win the Oscar for Best Picture.

While the Oscar nominations slate was mostly white, the Screen Actors Guild's nominations recognized a more diverse list of actors and actresses including Lupita Nyong'o, Jamie Foxx, and Jennifer Lopez. However, even with this diverse list, the top four acting categories were awarded to white individuals, including Laura Dern, Brad Pitt, Joaquin Phoenix, and Renée Zellweger. The best cast win was the exception with the SAG Award going to the Korean cast of "Parasite."

At the 2020 BAFTA Awards, Joaquin Phoenix criticized the British Academy for the lack of diversity in the awards. All 20 of the acting nominees at the BAFTA awards were white, and when Phoenix won Best Actor

for "Joker," he used his speech to call for others to work to "dismantle" the "systematic racism." He also went on to say he was "ashamed" because he has not done all that he can to ensure his sets are diverse.

"So if Phoenix, what he had to say is true, then that's where the shift has to come from. [It] has to come from that group who are the least affected. I always say that when the least affected are the most outraged, that's when you'll see some real change," Houston said.

The world is diverse, and the representation that we see in Hollywood needs to change with that. Audiences are tired of the same narrative every year, and the viewership numbers for awards shows are reflecting that. Audience numbers are down and continue to drop every year, which cannot totally be blamed on the lack of diversity, but it surely seems to be playing a role.

As viewers, the outrage needs to continue because with social media and national media backing viewer opinions, their voices are heard. Members of the Hollywood community, as Phoenix said, need to take responsibility to create a real change. Hopefully, they will be the ones to lead the charge.