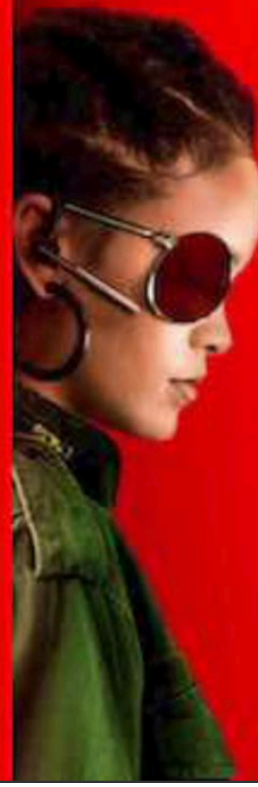


LEADING LADIES

BY BAILEY FINK PHOTOS BY PROVIDED





Over the past few years, women have begun to see themselves portrayed as powerful roles in movies and television shows. Strong female leads such as Brie Larson, Gal Gadot, and Viola Davis are making history and headlines as they show that women can be the protagonist to stories that aren't just romantic comedies.

According to *USA Today*, 2018 brought about the highest percentage of female-driven movies in years with 40 out of the

top 100 films featuring a female in the leading or co-leading role. The past two years have brought many popular female-led movies including "Ocean's 8," "Crazy Rich Asians," "Captain Marvel," and even "Frozen 2." Additionally, women are dominating television on cable and popular streaming services in shows like "The Handmaid's Tale," "Almost Family," and "Orange Is the New Black."

However, while the number of females on the screen is steadily increasing, the number of female

directors is increasing at a much slower rate. In 2018, female directors only accounted for 6.6% of all directors, according to the University of Southern California's Annenberg Inclusion Initiative.

"For women in entertainment it's the best of times and it's the worst of times because... we're seeing more women on the screen [and] we're seeing more directors, in particular," said Marilyn Greenwald, Ph.D., a professor of journalism at Ohio University. "A lot of people get their reality from what they see

on the screen, so if they see more women and if they see more women in [these] kind of powerful roles, they will think that's natural and that's the way life will be."

Greenwald says while the numbers aren't ideal right now, it is still a step in the right direction, and she is optimistic that they will continue to rise. Today, there is more opportunity for women to take the lead in front of and behind the camera, especially with the increasing popularity of streaming platforms.

"Streaming is so ubiquitous,

and women are taking an active role in that, so it's a matter of the culture changing, technology is changing, and women seem to be changing along with that," said Greenwald. "We see more women in non-stereotypical roles, we see more women directors, [and] we see more women in powerful roles. So, we're inching along, with changes in the culture, changes in society."

These platforms are constantly putting out content and because

of this, they can hire more women to work on screen and behind the scenes. However, some platforms are not taking advantage of this; according to the Women's Media Center, Netflix hired the least women to direct their episodes in 2019.

Additionally, some platforms are hiring a "token" woman to direct one episode of a show, without giving them creative control, which makes the number of females in the industry appear higher.

"I think these platforms can actually take a lot more responsibility and kind of walk the walk, stop doing the talking and start actually funding writers,

putting the money where their mouth is," said Lindsey Martin, an assistant professor of film.

Also, after the "#MeToo" movement rocked Hollywood, it has given women more of a voice in the industry. Women are being listened to and that has led to producers and writers telling stories that female audiences want to see and are marketed toward women.

"We're seeing films that... I want to go see that, I want to

go see these Marvel movies now because they're actually people and lives and characters I'm interested in," said Martin. "When you see things that you can relate to it only empowers you and it makes you enjoy it or see yourself reflected in front of you. [Also] it's

just getting boring; we need new stories."

A conversation about women in the entertainment and media industry can't be had without discussing the wage gap between men and women. On average, white women make 82 cents for every dollar a man makes, according to the American Association of University Women.

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story that Michelle Williams made less than \$1,000 compared to Mark Wahlberg's \$1.5 million for the reshoot of "All the Money in the World." Williams spoke out against the disparity, which sparked a conversation about inequality.

"I think people roll their eyes when they see these women who are making tons of money come and say, 'I need more money,' but ... that's actually trickling down to people who don't make that much money on set," said Martin.

Even as the buzz surrounding female-led movies and televisions is growing, there is still a

long way to go. However, the entertainment industry has finally taken the first step in the right direction to portray more women and other minorities on the silver screen.

"We have so many people watching right now that what you put out needs to be more than for entertainment and money," said Martin. "A lot of people are realizing how far their voice can go in these platforms and are ... hopefully taking a little bit more responsibility in the kind of content they're creating just cause it can go so wide."