

Date: June 16, 2015

SAG/AFTRA

National Headquarters

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To our Union Leaders:

I write to you with the collaboration and support of my colleagues as proud and longstanding members of SAG and AFTRA to solicit your support in unifying our members and sparking a discussion addressing inequities in the entertainment industry.

It is time for women's interests to be addressed and their voices to be heard. Inequalities, discrimination and harassment are still part of our experience in the industry. We call for the support of our Union to form an actionable, open gender committee to address the issues facing female performers.

We feel the Union is in the best position to: unify its members with a unique ability to reach, convene, support and mobilize its participating members; institute policies within the entertainment industry that protect women's rights; provide resources for family planning and maternity leave; and take a clear stance on the stark income disparity between genders.[1]

While women represent an estimated 70% of actors (though only 41% of unionized SAG-AFTRA actors), "Females comprised [only] 12% of protagonists featured in the top 100 grossing films of 2014." [2] Though women comprise roughly half the world population, a 2015 report shows that women are underrepresented at 2 to 1 for film leads and nearly 2 to 1 for scripted broadcast leads. [3] Female characters remain younger than their male counterparts. The majority of female characters were in their 20s (23%) and 30s (30%). The majority of male characters were in their 30s (27%) and 40s (28%). Whereas the percentage of female characters declined dramatically from their 30s to their 40s (from 30% to 17%), the percentage of male characters increased slightly, from 27% in their 30s to 28% in their 40s. [4] Only 11% of females depicted in top grossing films of 2014 were black and moviegoers were only slightly more likely to see a Latina or Asian female character--only 4% and 3%, respectively--than a female character from another planet. This has much to do with the underrepresentation of women across the industry. In 2014, women comprised 17% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers - 4 to 1 among writers and 8 to 1 among directors. [5] We hope this will be addressed across the industry and its unions.

Competition among female actors can have an especially divisive effect. The intense competition actors face often encourages them to agree to conditions they would otherwise reject, with the understanding that the next actor will likely comply. A key principle of the Union is that our unity prevents such devaluations. We ask that it uphold this unifying principle with regard to issues facing its female members and be a force against discrimination, harassment and the inequities that taint the industry.

The role of women in media has long been a controversial subject. [6] It is time that the women of our Union be empowered regarding the use of their image, and to have roles that more richly and responsibly portray the lives and roles of women in our society. [7] We believe that the unification of the Union's female (and interested male and other gender) members around these issues will be a strong response. We would be served by the opportunity to convene around these issues with the support and protection of our Union to hold an open and transparent dialogue on the issues facing female performers:

- There currently exists a "women's committee" bullet pointed on the SAG-AFTRA website, but there is a lack of clarity to its activities, no contacts and no support available for interest in its activities and no initiatives or programs seem to exist around these issues. [8]



- It is especially challenging for a woman to have a career in scripted film and television today if she resists the call to exploit her body and her sexuality to the benefit of the media-makers.[11] The condition warrants research, discussion and unified action.

In the top 500 films ('07-'12) [9], roughly a third of female speaking characters were shown in sexually revealing attire or were (at least) partially naked while more than half the women portraying characters aged 13-20 were shown with some nudity.

[10] Women in speaking roles are often more than 400% more likely to be naked on screen than men (without data on the many women seen naked and not heard at all on camera). Though some of our members may accept the opportunity to reveal themselves, the stories are too many of women who have been pressured to expose themselves or put themselves in sexual situations on set and have felt exploited by this increasingly requisite initiation to the industry.[12] It is not a just standard that a woman's career should be inhibited for her refusal to expose or sexualize herself.

- If an actor should make an unpressured decision to expose herself in a sexual context for the camera, a clear understanding about use and ownership, context and inclusion of these images should be established for all members—with measures that ensure our rights will be unequivocally observed. Young actors brought into a situation where there is nudity should be presented with adequate resources to prepare and educate themselves to their rights.

We hope that actors will be able to walk in to any employment situation with confidence that their rights have been firmly established, supported and normalized by our Union without fear they may be individually targeted, slandered or precluded from future work in any way if they stand for what would otherwise be clear and basic human, moral and legal rights

- Issues of harassment and discrimination currently lack clear and enforceable guidelines and consequences.

The industry is marked by countless (documented and undocumented) stories of outright sexual assault, especially in a context of sexual content on screen.[13] We must find a way to promote an atmosphere and enforce a policy of 'zero tolerance'. These issues must be dealt with *before* they occur. Directing members who have been victims of harassment and discrimination to seek outside counsel after the incident is an unproductive response and fails as a deterrent. Current conditions more typically discourage the pursuit of justice in cases of harassment and discrimination as:

1. Outside Counsel is not generally affordable to most members.
  2. Post-action (legal action) is rarely effective, especially against a production with greater resources.
  3. In a competitive, freelance industry such as ours, standing for our rights more frequently prohibits our employment than it affects our working conditions.
  4. The effects of harassment and discrimination are profound and lasting. We must intercede to protect our members.
- Motherhood and parenting should be a point of discussion and advocacy for our Union.

Our Union provides for pensions, healthcare and even emergency relief, but offers no resources to women entering motherhood. Where most industries would accommodate a mother's role in the workplace late into pregnancy, the physical nature of our work prevents the same--effectively engendering employment discrimination against expecting mothers. Though it is a complex and difficult issue, most industries have made provisions for family planning and offer services and paid maternity leave to new mothers. Our industry has no equivalents during pregnancy and childbirth. Motherhood then continues to complicate our capacity for work in an industry with standard 12 hour workdays and little job security. Many women have found that they are less likely to be hired if production knows she has a child at home. We should aspire to an understanding of every member's ability to pursue this basic human right and not fear discrimination or an inability to achieve a work-life balance. A dialogue within the Union could offer support and resources for planning a family that recognize the particular circumstances facing women in our trade.

- Recent attention has been given to issues of income disparity by gender.[14] While this is a national issue, it does not warrant less attention by our industry. Our Union is a strong and unified voice that could lead a discussion to address and avoid this disparity.[15]

These represent some of the issues that merit attention from our Union and the Industry.



Despite the Union's documented policies, the industry's silent acceptance of these injustices has had critical, lasting effects on our members both personally and professionally. Considering the influence of media on culture we should acknowledge the magnitude of these offenses; we have a responsibility to lead on these issues. Instead, we lag behind other industries in protecting women and ensuring professional equality--in fact we are among the most hostile and exclusionary toward women. Our position and our failures warrant our evolution.

As creative professionals we can bring to life any culture we can envision. We can surely find a way to produce media that affects positive culture shifts, rather than reflecting and perpetuating oppressive binary gender roles and exploitive gender norms.

Our members have shown extraordinary resilience and perseverance in the face of extreme inequities, but it is time these conditions be addressed. SAG-AFTRA is a strong voice for performers. If our Union supports a voice for gender equality, we should convene a committee to discuss gender issues and spark an initiative for equality.

Thank you for your support of your female members.

Sincerely,

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Sag-Aftra member # 10194476  
Filmmaker  
Artist in Residence, MIT Media Lab

encl: I offer my support and continued efforts to the Union in addressing these issues and would enjoy the opportunity to sit down and discuss how to best proceed to achieve our unification around this issue. There are no easy answers to these quandaries, but I would appreciate the opportunity to suggest and discuss some initial steps. My unequivocal, enduring support is enclosed herein.

Please be in touch with your thoughts in response and a best time to schedule a discussion.

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- [1] [Gender inequality infographic](http://www.indiewire.com/article/gender-inequality-film-in-infographic-form): <http://www.indiewire.com/article/gender-inequality-film-in-infographic-form>
  - [2] [It's a Man's \(Celluloid\) World](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014_Its_a_Mans_World_Report.pdf); Dr. Martha M. Lauzen: [http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014\\_Its\\_a\\_Mans\\_World\\_Report.pdf](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014_Its_a_Mans_World_Report.pdf)
  - [3] [2015 Hollywood Diversity Report](http://www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2-25-15.pdf) : <http://www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2-25-15.pdf>
  - [4] [It's a Man's \(Celluloid\) World](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014_Its_a_Mans_World_Report.pdf); Dr. Martha M. Lauzen: [http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014\\_Its\\_a\\_Mans\\_World\\_Report.pdf](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014_Its_a_Mans_World_Report.pdf)
  - [5] [The Celluloid Ceiling Report](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014_Celluloid_Ceiling_Report.pdf): [http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014\\_Celluloid\\_Ceiling\\_Report.pdf](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2014_Celluloid_Ceiling_Report.pdf)
  - [6] [NYWIFT status of Women in the industry](http://nywift.org/article.aspx?id=STAT) . <http://nywift.org/article.aspx?id=STAT>
  - [7] ['Who Cares About Actresses'](http://whocaresaboutactresses.tumblr.com/) a blog by an industry colleague offering her support. <http://whocaresaboutactresses.tumblr.com/>
  - [8] [SAG-AFTRA site page for committees](http://www.sagaftra.org/content/committees): <http://www.sagaftra.org/content/committees>
  - [9] [Gender inequality in 500 popular films](http://annenbergh.usc.edu/pages/~media/MDSCI/Gender_Inequality_in_500_Popular_Films_-_Smith_2013.ashx): [http://annenbergh.usc.edu/pages/~media/MDSCI/Gender\\_Inequality\\_in\\_500\\_Popular\\_Films\\_-\\_Smith\\_2013.ashx](http://annenbergh.usc.edu/pages/~media/MDSCI/Gender_Inequality_in_500_Popular_Films_-_Smith_2013.ashx)
  - [10] [Gender inequality infographic](http://www.indiewire.com/article/gender-inequality-film-in-infographic-form): <http://www.indiewire.com/article/gender-inequality-film-in-infographic-form>
  - [11] [Movie Mezzanine SEX\(IST\): ON CINEMATIC NUDITY](http://moviemezzanine.com/cinematic-nudity-ladies-only-please/): <http://moviemezzanine.com/cinematic-nudity-ladies-only-please/>



[12] [Seydoux Says She Felt 'Like a Prostitute' During 'Blue is the Warmest Color' Sex](#)

[Scene](#): [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/07/lea-seydoux-blue-is-the-warmest-color\\_n\\_4056819.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/07/lea-seydoux-blue-is-the-warmest-color_n_4056819.html)

[13] On Maria Schneider: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-469646/I-felt-raped-Brando.html>

"I should have called my agent or had my lawyer come to the set because you can't force someone to do something that isn't in the script, but at the time, I didn't know that. ... "during the scene, even though what Marlon was doing wasn't real, I was crying real tears.

[14] [Hollywood's Highest-Paid Actresses: Where Gender Bias Reigns Supreme](#):

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/moiraforbes/2013/08/06/hollywoods-highest-paid-actresses-where-gender-bias-reigns-supreme/>

[15] [The Washington Post - Stop Denying the Gender Pay Gap](#)

[Exists](#): <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/17/stop-denying-the-gender-pay-gap-exists-even-jennifer-lawrence-was-shortchanged/>