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Exploring the Factors Contributing to Low Women Participation in the Kwazulu-Natal Film Industry

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Abstract: Globally, there is a stark gender imbalance in the film industry, and this is true for the KwaZulu-Natal film industry. There is an underrepresentation of women in production and executive positions, suggesting barriers to entry that discourage women from pursuing a lucrative career in the film industry. A quantitative research approach and an online structured questionnaire were used as a guide to investigate the causes of the low representation of women in the KZN film industry. The target population for this study was 34 women in the film sector. This study offers valuable insight regarding the status of women's participation in the KZN film industry and the challenges they face in this sector. The results suggest that investors prefer males in the industry and the barriers to entry are favorable to those with financial muscle and connections which has limited women's participation in the industry. Common themes included lack of support, lack of long-term opportunities, lack of funding and limited resources, lack of strong women narratives in the film roles, nepotism, lack of connections, and sexual harassment. This study recommends that there is a need for the industry to foster more female-targeted local and international internship programs and the provision of mentorship programs that pair experienced female professionals with aspiring women in the film industry. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for the establishment of labor unions and policy formulation in the film industry to deal with issues of transformation, inclusivity, diversity, safety of women, and equality.

Keywords: *Women, harassment, marginalization, underpayment, discrimination, gender disparity, film*

1. Introduction

The film industry contributes significantly to the economy of South Africa through the generation of revenue, the creation of jobs, and the attraction of foreign exchange. The total estimated impact of the film industry on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was estimated at R2.91 million in 2020/2021 (National Film & Video Foundation (NFVF, 2021). Provincially, the KwaZulu-Natal film industry contributed R327.46 million to the South African GDP, which is 9.26% of the national figure (KZN FilmCommission, 2022). Moreover, the film industry supports other industries, such as the hospitality and transport industry by stimulating hotels, catering, restaurants, and transportation businesses, thereby creating direct and indirect employment (NFVF, 2014). The estimated total employment impact was 31 444 full-time equivalent jobs in 2019/20, with an estimated 18 104 direct jobs and 3 302 indirect jobs (NFVF, 2021).

Despite the industry's economic contribution, the (KZN FilmCommission, 2022) reported the following challenges as the impediments preventing the transformation of the industry. These were a shortage of skilled production crew (including skilled producers and talented scriptwriters) and studio infrastructural facilities, a fragmented policy environment that does not support the industry cohesively, a lack of consumer support for locally produced films, and inadequate access to distribution and marketing instruments among other issues. In addition, the stagnant transformation of the industry to include women and Black individuals is a significant impediment. According to NFVF (2022b), women are less likely to break into senior roles that impact decision-making compared to their male counterparts. This is the case even though South African women filmmakers are vastly skilled, with the majority (52.15%) having gone through formal film school training and another 31% having acquired their skills through experience or being self-taught (NFVF, 2022b).

Anecdotal evidence from the KZN film suggests that female students do not join the industry in numbers post-tertiary education. In all local tertiary institutions, female students are the largest numbers (Urban-Econ Development Economists, 2020). However, very few of them take the profession of filmmaking after their tertiary qualification. This can be corroborated by the gendered trends in the study conducted by NFVF (2014)

that argued that lack of connections and knowing the right people in the industry were among the obstacles that film students in higher education identified as barriers preventing them from breaking into the industry.

The film industry does not advertise positions but instead relies on word of mouth to attract employees, so, if you do not know anyone or have any connections within the industry, chances of getting employed are limited (Erbland, 2023). A recent report by NFVF (2022b) revealed that this issue remains a concern, revealing that connections, referrals and networks are currently the most popular mode of finding work opportunities, outstripping project advertising. While this method is regarded as the most efficient and effective, there are concerns that it sets limits on transformation; for example, new entrants who are black, young women and people living with disabilities often find it difficult to enter the industry as they lack the support of viable networks (NFVF, 2022b). Lack of experience and financial challenges were also identified as significant obstacles, with 55.6% of graduates experiencing them (NFVF, 2014). In addition to these obstacles, the chairperson of the Independent Directors Association Africa (IDAA), Andile Sinqoto, dissected some of the current challenges facing the industry, arguing that many South African film industry professionals, including the youth, are leaving for better opportunities abroad. Some are leaving the film industry and transitioning to other businesses due to challenges faced within the sector (Elsesser, 2023). There has been growing awareness and discussion of the limited representation of females in the film industry and literature.

However, despite increasing awareness of this disparity, the industry has undergone a minimal transformation to address the inequalities in the film industry. Furthermore, no comprehensive studies are looking at the challenges faced by women in the film industry and the absorption trends of women in the film study within the KwaZulu-Natal context. This study provides vital insights into the status of women's participation in the KZN film industry and the issues they encounter in this sector, considering that the film industry in the province is still in its infancy. Hence, the main objective of this study was to (a) Investigate the underlying factors behind the underrepresentation of women in the film industry. (b) Identify challenges and barriers faced by women in the KZN film industry. (c) Propose and recommend measures to improve the participation of women in the KZN film industry.

2. Literature Review

The representation and participation of women continue to be a lingering question in many industries in South Africa and around the globe, the film industry is no exception. Gill (2013) asserted that across various genres (such as film, television, advertising, and news media), women, minority ethnic groups, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are significantly under-represented in contrast to males, white people, and those from the middle and upper classes. A study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Lora-Mungai & Pimenta, 2021) confirmed this by pointing out that gender disparities exist in the film and audio-visual industry throughout the African continent, with Central Africa exhibiting the most significant gap, where 98% of practitioners estimate that the ratio of women in the sector is less than 10%. In Eastern and Western Africa, 50% of practitioners believe that the proportion of women in the field is less than 10%. South Africa is no exception, from its inception, males have dominated the South African film industry.

Women's representation in the film industry has been a subject of considerable scholarly attention globally. Studies have consistently highlighted the glaring gender disparities that persist in the sector (Brannon Donoghue, 2023; Donoghue, 2022; Kangas et al., 2014). According to a study conducted by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film in 2022, women comprised 24% of directors, writers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 250 grossing films, down 1% from 2021. The study further revealed that women comprised just 7% of cinematographers working on the top 250 grossing films of 2022 that's up only 3% from 1998. The number of female editors hasn't improved much either, increasing from 20% in 1998 to 21% in 2022. Women didn't fare much better in other roles, comprising only 19% of writers, 25% of executive producers, and 31% of producers in 2022. For the top 100 grossing films, the numbers were similar, with women faring best as producers (28%), editors (18%), writers (17%), directors (11%), and cinematographers (8%). Only 9% of composers of the top 100 films were women (Elsesser, 2023).

In other countries, however, efforts to improve women's representation in the film industry have been evident in recent years, with some progress being made. The Cannes Film Festival, for instance, saw an increase in the

number of female-directed films showcased in 2023, reaching 26%, up from 18% in the previous year. Additionally, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) reported a rise in the percentage of female nominees across various categories, reaching 35% in 2022 (Erbland, 2023). These developments demonstrate a growing awareness of the importance of gender parity in the industry, but much work remains to be done to ensure equal opportunities and visibility for women in the global film landscape. The gender pay gap affects most industries, with women earning less than their male counterparts – and Hollywood is no different. It was revealed that women stars earn around US\$1.1M less than male actors with similar experience (Sanchez, 2024). The income gap shrinks a bit among higher earners but even among actors that have ten years or more of experience, the difference remains statistically significant. According to Sanchez (2024) female talent earned on average US\$2.2M less per film which was 56% less than men. The difference in pay can be explained by the myriad factors that determine an actor's pay. This includes the financial success of the previous films that actors had been in, the genre of the film and the actor's popularity (based on things like social media followers). Sanchez (2024), accounting for variations in time spent shooting, evaluating the profitability and the production budget of the current film, and taking into consideration other movie and actor characteristics.

Women's representation in the film industry in South Africa has been a subject of concern for many years, with significant disparities persisting across various roles in the sector. In 2004, research by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) reported that the industry employed more men than women and that the male: female ratio was slightly higher (61:39) among permanent employees than freelance/ temporary employees (56:44). On the contrary, the freelance/temporary worker category between the white/black ratio was 23:77 (HSRC, 2004). This trend continues to date, with a higher concentration of women in temporary work. NFVF (2014) reported that 15.78% of women were employed full-time and 37.66% freelancing due to hiring practices within the industry. In a recent study, the NFVF (2021) identified several systemic, institutional, and cultural barriers that prevent women from entering and breaking into higher-ranking positions in the film industry. These barriers were gender disparities in the sector, equal funding access, investor risk aversion, a lower share of broadcasting funds for female directors, and low representation of women on commissioning and funding panels (NFVF, 2021).

Another study conducted by the South African Screen Federation (SASFED) in 2021 revealed that women accounted for only 28% of directors, 32% of writers, and 23% of producers in locally produced films. This underrepresentation of women in key creative positions underscores the need for greater efforts to foster gender diversity and inclusivity within the industry (NFVF, 2022a). Despite these challenges, there have been notable strides towards improving women's representation in the South African film industry. Initiatives such as the Women's Film and Television Empowerment Programme (WFT EP) have played a crucial role in promoting gender equality by providing training and mentorship opportunities for aspiring female filmmakers. Moreover, the success of films directed or produced by women, such as "Rafiki" by Wanuri Kahiu and "Ayanda" by Sara Blecher, has shown the potential for powerful storytelling when diverse voices are given a platform. However, systemic barriers persist, hindering further progress.

The film industry has long been characterized by a significant gender imbalance, with women facing numerous challenges that hinder their participation and advancement (Shi, 2023). One of the primary obstacles is the pervasive gender bias that influences hiring practices, funding opportunities, and the distribution of roles (Teixeira et al., 2021; Weinbaum et al., 2019). Studies have shown that women are often underrepresented in key creative positions such as directors, producers, and writers, which subsequently affects the types of stories being told and the opportunities available for female actors (Khadilkar et al., 2022; Lee & Raesch, 2015). This underrepresentation is compounded by a culture of sexism and harassment that many women in the industry experience, discouraging their continued participation and advancement. Furthermore, the lack of mentorship and networking opportunities for women exacerbates these issues, making it difficult for them to gain the necessary support and visibility to succeed in a highly competitive environment (Brannon Donoghue, 2023).

The University of Southern California reported that, in Oscar's 95-year history, only 17% of nominees were women and less than 2% were black women. Moreover, only 9% of the directors of 2022 top 100 earning films list were women and less than 3% were women of color (Brown et al., 2023). In South Africa, women were less likely to break into senior roles in the film industry that impact decision-making compared to their male

counterparts (NFVF, 2022b). Albeit South African women filmmakers are vastly skilled, with 52.15% having gone through formal film school training and another 31% having acquired their skills through experience or being self-taught (NFVF, 2022b).

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. One effective strategy is the implementation of diversity and inclusion policies that mandate equitable hiring practices and ensure that women have access to the same opportunities as their male counterparts (Ehrich et al., 2022). Initiatives such as gender quotas for key creative roles and funding allocations specifically for female-led projects can help to level the playing field (Ehrich et al., 2022). Additionally, creating robust mentorship programs that connect emerging female talent with established industry professionals can provide the guidance and support needed to navigate the industry's complexities. Moreover, fostering a culture of accountability through clear anti-harassment policies and regular training can help to create a safer and more inclusive environment for women (Ehrich et al., 2022). By addressing both the structural and cultural barriers, these strategies can contribute to a more equitable and diverse film industry.

3. Methodology

This study used the exploratory design, which is conducted about a research problem when there are few or no earlier studies to refer to. There is no evidence that a study has been conducted on the low participation of women in the KZN film industry. This study used a mixed-method approach that involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data. Interviews and a survey were used as the research strategies and the interview guide and questionnaire respectively were used as data collection research instruments. The interview guide was used in face-to-face interviews. A panel of three (3) experts was used to validate the questionnaire through content validity and cognitive interviewing. The rating obtained for the questionnaire was 0.9.

Recruitment Strategy, Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, data was collected from women in the film industry aged 18 and up. The recruitment strategy involved obtaining permission from two production companies based in eThekweni Metropolitan (KZN) since there are no production houses outside the metropolitan. Gatekeepers' permissions were obtained before collecting data from individuals who agreed to participate. Data collection methods included survey questionnaires and in-person interviews, focusing on demographics, occupation of the women in film that participated in this study, mode of securing or landing current position, causes of gender disparity in the film industry, perception of men being afforded better opportunities than women in the film industry; gender bias in the workplace, challenges faced by women in the film industry and strategies to bridge the gender disparity gap within the film industry.

The collected data underwent a data cleaning and validation process, whereby all duplicate records and identified errors were removed and all typing errors corrected. To produce the expected outputs, descriptive statistical procedures in the form of frequencies were used to analyze the quantitative data. The frequency tables with corresponding summary charts were produced using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel as data analysis tools. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Sampling strategy and sample size

Purposive sampling was utilized for selecting the sample. Purposive sampling is one of the most common sampling strategies in which groups participate according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question (Palinkas et al., 2015). The population size for this study was estimated to be 40 women in the film (KZN Film Commission, 2022), and the sample size was 37 women in film calculated using the Raosoft sample size calculator with a 90% confidence level and a 5% error margin. The low participation of women in the KZN film industry is attributed to job seekers leaving KZN for job opportunities in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Additionally, there are only two production houses based in eThekweni Metropolitan which affected the sample size of this study. Furthermore, these production houses are dominated by males.

Ethical consideration

Researchers encounter several ethical problems, including respect for privacy, confidentiality, maintaining honest and open relationships, and avoiding misrepresentations (Weinbaum et al., 2019). Informed consent has been regarded as an essential component of ethical research in a variety of domains (Yoo et al., 2021). As a result, this study obtained full consent from the participants. Ethical issues that were considered include confidentiality, transparency, accountability, safety of the participants, etc. Moreover, ethical clearance was obtained from the research ethics committee before conducting the study.

4. Findings and Discussion

Socio-demographic characteristics

Table 1 reveals the socio-demographic characteristics of women in the KZN film industry. The analysis shows no significant difference in employment status based on citizenship, with non-South Africans having a slightly higher employment rate (75%) compared to South Africans (66.22%). This indicates a level of inclusivity and equal opportunity for both local and international talent in the South African film industry. The equitable employment outcomes suggest that the industry is open to diverse talents, regardless of nationality, reflecting positively on the industry's diversity and inclusion practices (Lora-Mungai & Pimenta, 2021).

Age emerges as a significant factor influencing employment status. Younger individuals, particularly those aged 18-24, face considerable employment challenges, with only 35% employed in the industry. In contrast, individuals who participated in the study aged 35-65 have a 100% employment rate, indicating that experience and accumulated professional networks significantly enhance employability. These findings suggest that younger professionals may benefit from targeted programs that provide practical experiences, such as apprenticeships and mentorship schemes, to bridge the gap between education and employment. The industry could also benefit from initiatives aimed at retaining younger talent and providing them with growth opportunities (Jones, 2019).

Gender differences in employment status are not statistically significant, although females have a slightly higher employment rate (67.61%) compared to non-binary individuals (50%). This suggests that while the industry provides relatively similar employment opportunities for women and non-binary individuals, there may still be underlying challenges for non-binary professionals. The film industry should continue to promote gender inclusivity and address any subtle barriers that may exist for non-binary individuals, ensuring equal opportunities for all (Sanchez, 2024).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of Women

Variables	Measurements	Employed in the Film Industry		
		No (n=26) 33.33%	Yes (n=52) 66.67%	X2
		Percent (%)		
Citizenship	Non-South African	25.00	75	0.717
	South African	33.78	66.22	
Age	18-24	65.00	35.00	0.000***
	25-34	37.14	62.86	
	35-44	0.00	100	
	45-54	0.00	100	
	55-65	0.00	100	
Gender	Female	32.39	67.61	0.216
	Non-binary	50	50	
Race	Black	32.76	67.24	0.747
	Colored	33.33	66.67	
	Indian	37.50	62.50	

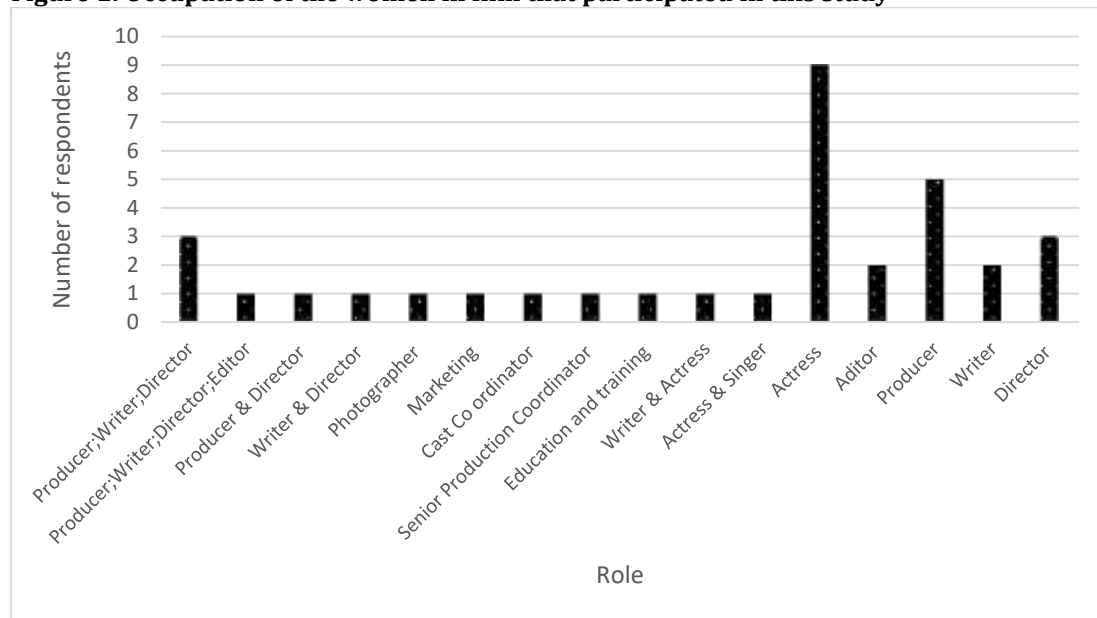
White	25	75
Other	50	50

NB: *** means significant at a 1% level

Occupation of the women in film that participated in this study

Most of the women in film that participated in the study were actors (9) followed by producers (5) directors (3), editors (2), writers (2), etc. (figure 1). Interestingly, some of the women indicated that they play different roles depending on the nature of the production, meaning they occupy more than one position, e.g., 8.8% of the women indicated that they are producers, writers, and directors, whereas one of the participants indicated that they are a producer, writer, director, editor, and enrolled as a film student. Such revelations are encouraging as they highlight the fortitude, passion, desire, and appetite that women have towards advancing in the film sector. In support of the above results, research shows that there is an underrepresentation of women as directors, producers, scriptwriters, and cinematographers (Jones, 2019; Sanchez, 2024; Yang et al., 2020). Loist & Prommer (2019) reported that, between 2009-2013, women solely directed 22% of the films, while no women were involved at all in 75% of the films. Moreover, Liddy (2020) showed that only 3% of women across the globe directed theatrical screening films, contending that there has been a percentage decline of women in all creative roles, some tripping below 30% in countries such as Australia, Germany, Portugal, New Zealand, USA, and Poland. Additionally, a study undertaken by (Smith, 2010) associating women 'on-screen' with women 'behind the camera', concluded that in films where women are 'decision-makers' such as directors, writers, and producers, the 'holy trinity' of filmmaking, more women are featured on screen as main protagonists.

Figure 1: Occupation of the women in film that participated in this study

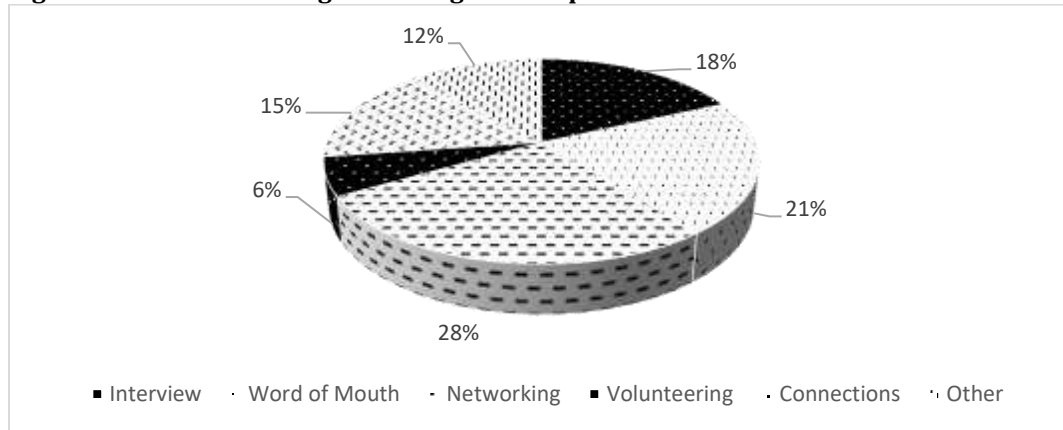


Mode of securing or landing current position

The findings of this study (figure 2) show that the most effective way to secure employment within the film industry is through networking (28%), word of mouth (21%) interviews (18%) and connections (15%). The least effective method according to the respondents is volunteering (6%). These results are consistent with the report by NFVF (2022) that revealed that the film industry does not advertise positions but instead relies on word of mouth to attract employees, so in essence, if you do not know anyone or have no connections within the industry, chances of getting employed are limited. The report further alluded that connections, referrals and networks are currently the most popular mode of finding work opportunities, outstripping that of project advertising. While this method is regarded as the most efficient and effective, there are concerns that it sets limits on transformation, for example, new entrants who are black, young, women and people living with

disabilities often find it difficult to enter the industry as they lack the support of viable networks (NFVF, 2022). Additionally, Rammal et al. (2023) affirmed that the film industry relies heavily on networks and connections which is similar to the findings of this study. These findings highlight some of the systematic barriers for women to enter the film industry.

Figure 2: Mode of securing or landing current position



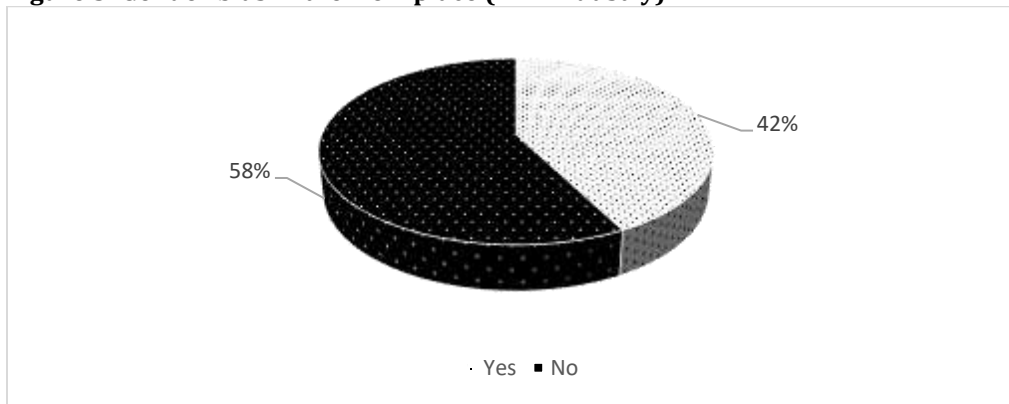
Personal experience with Gender bias in the workplace

Most of the women who participated in the study indicated that they have not been victims of gender discrimination in their workplace (58%). However, it is worth noting that 42% have been victims of gender bias (figure 3). This section unpacks in detail how the respondents have been victims of gender bias:

- Loss of opportunities due to being female.
- Being patronized by older white men, and being asked what a woman of my age is doing in the film industry.
- Being paid significantly less than male co-writers and cast members, regardless of their qualifications and experience.
- Lack of structural resources and male colleagues hogging equipment.
- Being viewed as inferior, incompetent and being paid significantly less than male counterparts, regardless of the experience, and qualification.
- Being harassed and intimidated by male co-workers.
- Being overlooked and views and suggestions not being considered. Women's viewpoints and ideas are usually overlooked, and when the same ideas are presented by a male, they are supported.
- Being undermined
- Being asked for sexual favors to secure employment in the film industry.
- Being significantly underpaid and only getting freelance work.

According to Khadilkar et al. (2022), while the general portrayal of women in popular movie dialogues from both Bollywood and Hollywood has improved over time, modern films continue to demonstrate significant gender bias and have failed to attain gender equality. These findings are consistent with the findings of this study. Istead et al. (2022) discovered a widespread male bias, with more than 75% of contemporary films expressing it. However, they found that this prejudice has decreased compared to fifteen years ago. Furthermore, their study also found that the gap in box office sales between films with male and female bias is narrowing.

Figure 3: Gender bias in the workplace (film industry)



Causes of Gender disparity in the film industry

Women further requested to pinpoint the causes of gender disparity within the film industry. It is no surprise that 95% of women are of the view that there's immeasurable gender disparity in the film industry. The section below highlights some of the participant's viewpoints regarding the causes of gender disparity.

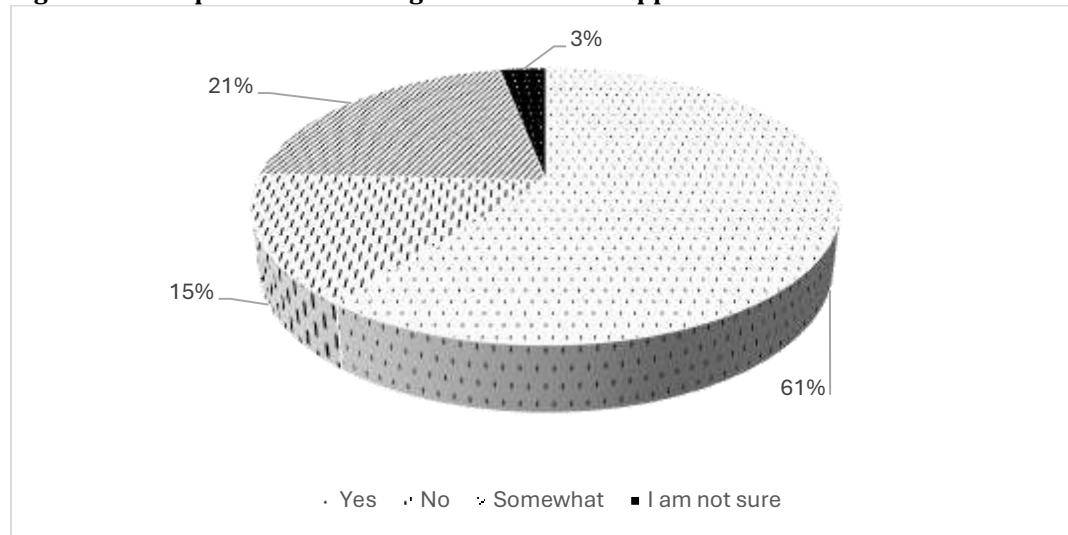
- Funders have a perception that men can do better than women, moreover, the film industry has been highly politicized.
- Industry Gatekeeping by those that have financial muscle and connections.
- Industry favors men over women, as such men occupy strategic and executive positions in the film industry.
- Patriarchal tendencies and negligence.
- If a male and a female (with similar experience and credentials) both apply for the same job in the film industry, it is most likely that the male would get the job. It could be because women are viewed as incompetent compared to men. Women are compelled to work twice as hard to be recognized as equals in the film industry.
- There is a lack of transformation within the film industry. Hence, this sector is dominated by males.
- The industry has traditionally been run by white males, women coming into the industry are victimized and discriminated against. Moreover, there is a preference for younger and aesthetically pleasing women in the industry over talent and experience.
- Women face barriers to entry into the film industry. Furthermore, due to financial constraints accessing opportunities and resources needed to succeed in the industry, including funding, mentorship, and networking is challenging.
- Instances of discrimination, sexual harassment, and a toxic work environment have deterred women from pursuing careers in film.
- Women are severely disadvantaged and marginalized in the film industry and are not offered the same opportunities as males.
- Due to the stereotypes, women are deemed to be individuals who cannot balance work and family life.
- South Africa is a country with the highest inequality; therefore, patriarchy is a significant factor.
- Women are treated as inferior and depicted as sexual objects.
- The reason could be that men are more flexible about working long hours, whereas women have more responsibilities e.g. taking care of households, and family while also trying to pursue a career.
- Women are not adequately supported nor encouraged to participate in the film industry.
- "Historically, the voice in the film industry has been typically white male. This could explain the nature of the content, narratives, characters, and style of many films that we have produced over the past hundred years. This has resulted in gender disparity. But there certainly have been changes and transformation is happening, at a slow rate. More female producers are aware of the disparity and would like to be part of the change by ensuring more females are set behind the scenes and in the pre and postproduction process.
- In the film industry it is not so much what you know, it is more about who you know in the industry (connections).

- Women must be encouraged to acquire technical skills that are necessary in sets, such as lighting, editing, cinematography, animations, etc. These positions are frequently occupied by males.

Men are afforded better opportunities than women in the film industry.

A staggering 61% of the participants affirmed that men are favored and offered better opportunities in the film industry as compared to females. Moreover, 21% pinpointed that this is somewhat a status quo in the industry. Only 15% of the respondents believed that equal opportunities are offered to both sexes (figure 4). Consistent with the findings of this study NFVF (2022), reported that in South Africa, women were less likely to break into senior roles that impact decision-making compared to their male counterparts.

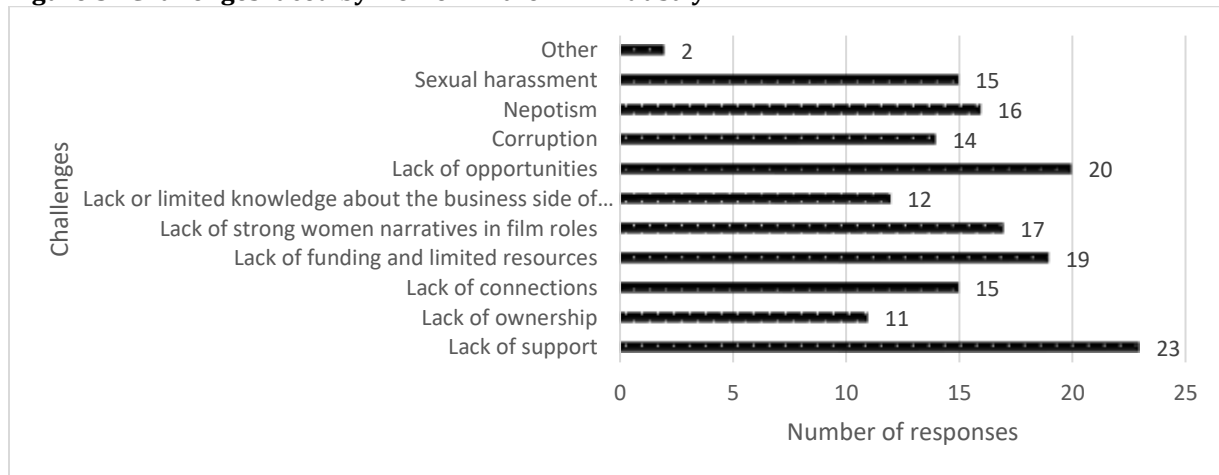
Figure 4: Perception of men being afforded better opportunities than women in the film industry



Challenges faced by women in the film industry

Women in the film industry face tremendous challenges ranging from lack of support (23), lack of opportunities (20), lack of funding and limited resources (19), lack of strong women narratives in the film roles (17), nepotism (16), lack of connections (15) and sexual harassment (15), etc. This is depicted in Figure 5 below. Other scholars have asserted that women in the film industry face innumerable challenges of gender inequality and discrimination, lack of mentorships, lack of training and education, bias in funding, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, and balancing family life and work, amongst other issues that hinder their participation and success in the industry (Ehrich et al., 2022; Sandoval, 2022; Starnski & Son Hing, 2015). Milkman (1987), further observed that jobs available to women in film lacked the pay and the challenges that had made wartime work so satisfying, encouraging women to define themselves in terms of home and family even when they were working. Mosomi (2019) reported that although women's participation in the labor force has increased significantly, they are often employed in low-wage positions in the film sector, while men tend to be employed in higher-paying positions. Additionally, Sanchez (2024) revealed that women stars earn around US\$1.1M less than male actors with similar experience.

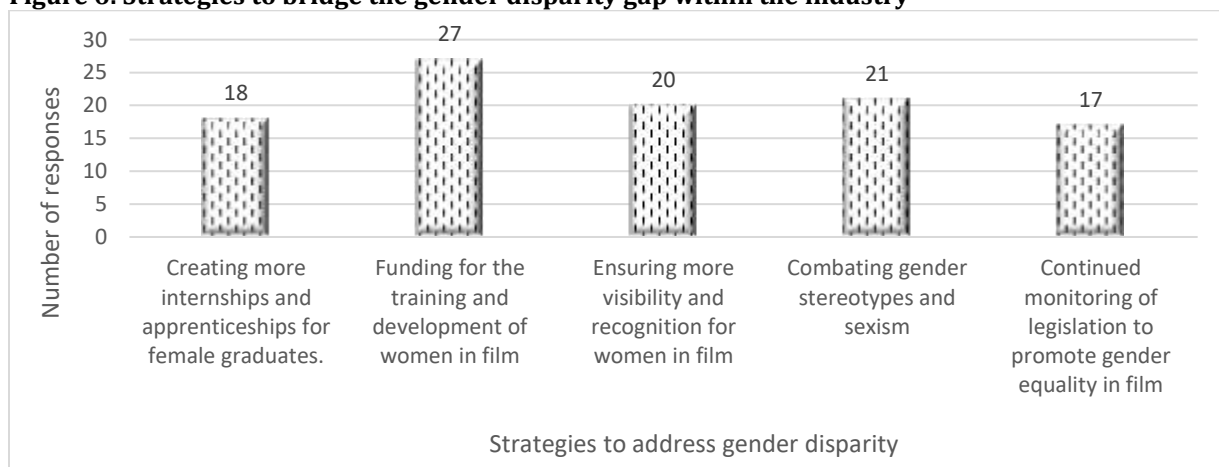
Figure 5: Challenges faced by women in the film industry



Strategies to bridge the gender disparity gap within the film industry

Several strategies have been proposed by women in film to address gender disparity and gender bias within the film industry (figure 6). These strategies include funding for the training and development of women in film (27), combating gender stereotypes and sexism (21), and ensuring more visibility and recognition for women in film (20). Similarly, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Lora-Mungai & Pimenta, 2021), access to high-quality filmmaking education and training is crucial for gaining the requisite skills. However, many aspiring filmmakers face impediments to formal schooling or specialized training programs due to budgetary constraints and lack of availability in specific areas. The absence of educational and training opportunities impedes the skill development and professional advancement of women in the film sector. The implementation of the proposed strategies will transform the film industry and will enable more women to participate and contribute meaningfully to the film industry. Jessop et al. (2022) affirmed the importance of actively funding women-owned enterprises in the film industry. The authors regard this intentional conduct as an essential step that should be carried out with open transparency and a reporting and tracking system that offers up-to-date statistics on the number of women that have been supported and the value derived from such initiatives. They further postulated that there is a need to expand and develop women entrepreneurs' networks or social capital in the film industry. They believe that structured mentoring should be used to keep mentors and mentees accountable for optimizing their relationships. Stereotypical and gender-biased images foster damaging and limited perceptions of women and their skills. When women are regularly portrayed as docile, objectified, or restricted to conventional roles, a culture emerges that hinders women's and girls' desires and successes (Olorunfemi, 2018).

Figure 6: Strategies to bridge the gender disparity gap within the industry



5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The film sector, with its interconnected stages of production, distribution, exhibition, and consumption, plays a significant role in both the entertainment industry and the country's economy. Through its diverse contributions, including revenue generation, job creation, cultural preservation, and artistic expression, the film industry enriches society and provides audiences worldwide with compelling audiovisual experiences. To ensure its continued success, collaboration between policymakers and industry stakeholders is essential in addressing challenges and promoting a thriving film industry that not only entertains but also drives economic growth and cultural diversity on a provincial and national scale. In South Africa, the film industry has flourished, reflecting the nation's cultural diversity, and addressing social issues through powerful storytelling. Efforts to nurture emerging talent and foster international collaborations have bolstered the industry's growth and economic impact. However, women's representation in the film sector remains a pressing challenge. Gender inequality, limited access to education and funding, lack of role models and mentorship, bias in distribution, and family-work balance issues hinder women from fully participating in the industry. To address these challenges, promoting diversity and inclusion, providing access to education and training, supporting female filmmakers, promoting gender equality, and encouraging mentorship and networking opportunities are crucial steps toward a more inclusive and equitable film industry. By embracing these strategies, the film sector can tap into the creative potential of a diverse range of talents, enriching storytelling and driving success on both artistic and economic fronts. Additionally, this research advocates for the following:

- Policy initiative aimed at transforming the KZN film industry and increasing female participation.
- Fostering more female-targeted international internship programs.
- Provision of mentorship programs that pair experienced female professionals with aspiring women in the film industry. These programs can help build confidence, develop skills, and help aspiring creatives navigate the industry's complexities.
- Establishment of labor unions and policy formulation in the film industry to deal with issues of inclusivity, diversity, the safety of women and equality.
- Development of a whistle-blower line that will encourage women to report sexual harassment, abuse and intimidation.
- Afford women equal opportunities in technical jobs e.g. directors of production, pullers, gaffers, key grips, camera, lighting, and grips. Not all women aspire to work in makeup, hair and wardrobe.
- Providing a safe, conducive, and supportive work environment for women.
- Combating gender stereotypes and sexism within the industry and ensuring more visibility and recognition for women in film.
- Push for talent and experience when it comes to job opportunities and rely less on informal connections and networking.
- Female production team as a strategy to increase the participation of women in the Film industry i.e., female directors and producers are a key to getting more women behind the scenes.
- Promote equal pay for equal work regardless of gender.
- Women should be encouraged to write, produce and direct their own stories that consider the critical societal issues that affect women in general.

Limitations

Data collectors faced the challenge of gender identification since Gen X and Z no longer identify as binary (male and female). Most respondents, natural females, were offended by the gender options- male, female and other. They argued that "other" was not inclusive of queer identities. The study could not determine the exact population size because there are no official records to ascertain the number of women in the KZN Film industry. Furthermore, the low participation of women in the KZN film industry was due to job seekers leaving KZN for job opportunities in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Additionally, there are only two production houses based in eThekwin Metropolitan which affected the sample size of this study.

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