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Women's Media Summit: Actionable Strategies

Christine Walker · Wednesday, May 16th, 2018

Curated by Kathleen Antonia Tarr, “Woman’s Work: Setting the Agenda for Gender Equity” is a new series highlighting proactive efforts by women to benefit the social, political, and economic status of women and girls. Focusing on contributions through the arts, the purpose of this series is to serve as a forum and inspiration for all who seek gender equity across intersections.

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The 2nd Annual Women’s Media Summit convened April 5-7, 2018 in Provincetown, Massachusetts featuring some of the top scholars and change makers for gender equity in U.S. entertainment media. Of particular note was April Reign’s keynote which erupted into a standing ovation over her call to elevate the most vulnerable as a strategy to benefit all marginalized people within the industry. #TrickleUp will be perhaps accompany Reign’s #OscarsSoWhite hashtag as another key to this movement.

The 2018 Summit proactively engaged in meaningful and actionable strategies for success, building on 2017 participants’ identification of seven creative action plans for addressing gender gaps in entertainment media:

1. Litigation against gender discriminatory practices.
2. Lobbying policymakers at the federal level to address persistent gender discrimination in entertainment media.
3. Tax credits to encourage the hiring of more female filmmakers.
4. Development of a financing network for female filmmakers (Media Incubator and Marketplace).
5. Development of a promotion fund to advertise films made by women (FundHer).
6. Marketing to educate the public about the issue of gender discrimination in Hollywood.
7. A Consumer campaign to encourage viewers to vote with their dollars for gender equity in Hollywood.

The first two action plans, litigation and lobbying, use government leverage to reform the media industry by compelling better oversight and possibly, incentives, from the judicial, executive, and legislative branches. The next three action plans (tax credits, investment, promotion) use financial leverage to increase the number of female content producers. The last two action plans leverage the public to reform the industry through increased awareness of the problem and getting viewers to pressure the industry to hire and feature more women through consumer activism.

The Women's Media Action Coalition (WeMAC) was created to implement these action plans, and the movie-makers, academics, lawmakers, business professionals, and supporters who participated in this year's Summit refined strategies to end gender inequity in American film and television.

Following the Summit, Provincetown Film Society presented the inaugural Film Financing Forum, a comprehensive two-day program during which industry leaders addressed investment and financing strategies from the traditional (equity, bank, tax credits, sales) to the unconventional (crowdfunding, cryptocurrency). The Film Financing Forum created a conference and networking opportunity for writers, directors, producers, and investors along with the opportunity for participants to learn the nuts and bolts of financing a project from script to screen.

The public may not know it is already reaping the benefits of the 2017 Women's Media Summit. GradeMyMovie.com – brainchild of Summit co-founder Dr. Caroline Heldman – is a tool that helps audiences know how well the movies they want to see are doing regarding race and gender employment. Race and gender grades are based on inclusion in the top six crew/cast positions: Director; Writer; Producer; First Actor/Actress; Second Actor/Actress; and Third Actor/Actress. Currently tentpole films fail regarding disability and intersectionality, but should they one day distinguish themselves in this regard, GradeMyMovie is eager to evolve the data.

The 2019 Women's Media Summit will no doubt be another occasion for proactive strategizing on behalf of gender equity in film and television.

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