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Beyond the Screen: The Impact of the Representation of Women in Media

We devote 56% of our day to consuming media—whether browsing the internet, watching TV, listening to music, or scrolling through social media—which shapes our perceptions and experiences in ways we may not fully comprehend. The impact the media has on society extends beyond just entertainment. Media is a powerful lens through which culture is reflected and actively shaped, molding our collective consciousness and societal values. As our daily lives become increasingly intertwined with media consumption, we must critically examine its profound influence on shaping our perceptions, beliefs, and societal norms. Media holds the power to catalyze positive social change. Yet, the distorted portrayal of women in media has consequences that extend into social, economic, and political spheres, profoundly impacting real women's lives. The depiction of women across diverse media channels, encompassing film, television, advertising, music, and social media, serves as a critical lens through which we can dissect and comprehend the intricate gender dynamics shaping our society. Throughout time, the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of women in media, particularly those from marginalized communities, perpetuates a cycle of inequality that extends far beyond the screen. This misrepresentation fuels discrimination, limits career opportunities, and contributes to harassment and sexual violence, ultimately affecting women's overall well-being. The persistence of these issues highlights the critical importance of raising awareness on this topic.

On average, we dedicate 3 hours daily to watching our favorite movies or TV shows on streaming platforms. The movies and TV shows you choose to watch are more important than you think. Media psychology studies how media, including film and television, affect how we behave, act, and feel. TV and film are cultural mirrors, reflecting our society's values, beliefs, and struggles while shaping public perception. This is why analyzing the misrepresentation of women in cinema is essential to understanding women's societal issues.

According to a study investigating the inequality of 1,700 Popular films from 2007 - 2023 by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, only 30% of top films featured a female lead or co-lead, marking a substantial decrease from 44% in 2022. Not having female main characters in cinema not only leaves women underrepresented but also creates a disproportionate focus on male experiences and perspectives. Additionally, only 14 films in 2023 featured a woman of color as the protagonist, highlighting the stark disparities in the film industry and underlining the ongoing lack of diversity in leading roles. This disparity extends beyond on-screen roles to key behind-the-scenes positions, where women comprised only 16% of top film directors, writers, and producers in 2023, with only a 9% improvement since 1998; the stagnant growth in women's behind the scene roles in filmmaking not only limits creative diversity but also perpetuates a cycle of inequality, suppressing women's voices, perspectives, and career advancement opportunities in an industry that shapes cultural narratives and societal perceptions.

Another source that provides insight into the representation of women in film is the Bechdel-Wallace Test, created by Alison Bechdel in 1986. This test assesses gender representation in movies by requiring at least two named female characters to talk to each other about something other than a man. Only 49.58% of the highest-grossing films have passed this

test over the last four decades. This test reveals a current cinematic landscape where women's identities, relationships, and narratives are predominantly defined through their connections to men, reinforcing a harmful cultural narrative that diminishes women's autonomy and value beyond their relationships with male characters.

The authentic representation of women in cinema is crucial for fostering a nuanced understanding of our diverse society. However, with men predominantly behind the camera, the portrayal of complex female characters often needs to be revised. Reese Witherspoon, addressing women's challenges in the film industry, highlighted this issue in her 2015 Glamour Woman of the Year acceptance speech. She expressed her frustration with scripts lacking female input: "I dread reading scripts with no women involved in their creation because inevitably I get to that part where the girl turns to the guy, and she says, 'What do we do now?!'" Implying that a woman wouldn't know what to do in a given situation. This oversimplification of female characters not only misrepresents women but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces male dominance in narratives. Witherspoon's critique underscores the urgent need for more diverse voices in filmmaking to create authentic, multifaceted female characters that reflect the true complexity of women's experiences and capabilities. Demonstrating how just being represented isn't enough; the quality and depth of the portrayal of female characters are equally crucial in shaping authentic and impactful representations that challenge stereotypes and reflect the true diversity of women's experiences.

With an overwhelming majority of male directors and film crew, women are often filmed to cater to male perspectives and desires, portraying them on camera in a specific way. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" introduced the concept of the male gaze, critiquing how women are depicted in cinema from a masculine,

heterosexual perspective that presents women as sexual objects for male viewers' pleasure. "Rewrite Her Story" by Plan Internation and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media reports how film and media stereotypes affect girls' and young women's lives and leadership ambitions. They found that the women portrayed in leadership positions were more likely to be depicted as sexual objects or with nudity compared with their male counterparts, representing how movies are often told from the "male gaze." These women were also almost twice as likely "to be shown as partially nude" than men (15% versus 8%) and four times more likely to appear "completely naked" on screen (2% versus 0.5% of male characters). The study also found that women portrayed in movies were almost four times more likely to be sexually objectified — for example, "the camera focused on their body parts in slow motion" — and five times more likely to be sexually harassed than men. This sexualization and objectification of women of authority in film sends a devastating message to young girls and women: that their worth, even in positions of power, is primarily tied to their physical appearance and sexual appeal, undermining their intellectual capabilities and leadership potential.

While women in media are consistently sexualized to cater to the male gaze, a recognizable contradiction emerges when female characters embrace their sexuality: they are often villainized. This dichotomy reveals a profoundly ingrained double standard in Hollywood's portrayal of women.

Carol J. Clover first coined the term "Final Girl" in her 1992 book Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film. This term describes the lone female survivor who ultimately triumphs over the killer in horror movies. Historically, the Final Girl is usually the "good girl" in the film, avoiding vices and abstaining from sex. These films often depict sexually active characters as early victims, positioning the "good girl" as the hero of the film.

This trope is evident in popular films like Halloween (1978), Friday the 13th (1980), and A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984). The dichotomy between the virtuous survivor and the "punished" sexually active woman in these movies is harmful to women in several ways. For one, It reinforces the damaging notion that female sexuality is inherently dangerous or immoral, undermining women's autonomy and sexual expression; it also projects outdated and oppressive attitudes toward women's autonomy and sexual expression. Later slasher films challenge this trope, like in the 1996 movie Scream, where the character Sydney Prescott survives despite having sex, challenging the conventional "rules" of slasher films. Contemporary horror films showcase a significant evolution of the Final Girl trope, presenting protagonists increasingly nuanced, diverse, and unbound by outdated conventions. These modern heroines boldly defy the antiquated, often absurd, unspoken rules that once defined the archetypal Final Girl, offering a refreshing and more realistic portrayal of female survival in the face of terror.

While the Final Girl trope often punishes female sexuality by the sexually active characters being the first to go, an equally troubling narrative emerges in the portrayal of queer women in cinema, particularly in horror and thriller genres. This shift from demonizing heterosexual female desire to vilifying queer sexuality reveals a persistent pattern of using women's sexual expression as a source of both fascination and fear. This character can be seen in the 1955 film Les Diaboliques, the 1992 film Basic Instinct, and the 2009 film Jennifer's Body. This trope demonizes female sexual fluidity by consistently casting queer women as antagonists, ultimately condemning them to die at the end of the film. Often queer women in the film fall prey to fetishization, particularly in movies directed by men. This trend leads to the exploitation of queer women's bodies and stories, using their relationships as a marketing tool rather than an integral part of the narrative. In "Jennifer's Body," while Jennifer's antagonistic role isn't directly

tied to her queerness, the film's marketing strategy exploits the fetishization of sapphic relationships while sexualizing the female characters of the film, only to deliver a movie that ultimately critiques the very audience it targeted. This resulted in a low box office performance, demonstrating how the male gaze in the advertising of a film can undermine its success and obscure its intended message. These persistent tropes, spanning decades of cinema, reveal how the film industry continues to exploit women's sexuality rather than embracing authentic, nuanced portrayals of diverse sexual experiences and identities.

In analyzing the representation and portrayal of women in cinema, we see that a significant disparity in the representation of women involves age. According to the study analyzing 1,700 films by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, only three films feature females over 45 compared to 32 films with male leads over 45. This contrast reveals an age bias against older women in leading roles, reflecting ageist tendencies in the industry and a double standard between men and women. "Beyond the Stereotypes: The Reality of Aging Women in Film," a study by the Geena Davis Institute, concluded female characters aged 50+ are significantly underrepresented in film, making up only 25.3% of characters over 50. They are also more likely to be depicted as senile, feeble, and homebound than their male counterparts. They are also more frequently shown as unattractive and depicted in roles emphasizing their physical frailty. Only one in four films has at least one female character over 50 who is essential to the plot and portrayed without reducing them to ageist stereotypes. The 2024 film "The Substance" critiques the blatant ageism within Hollywood, particularly towards women. This film highlights the industry's obsession with youth and beauty. At the same time, the main character, played by Demi Moore, goes through a horrifying and risky process to become young

again, symbolizing the real-world "horror" women in the industry face as they age, as well as how sexism in the industry puts women against each other.

The intersectionality of gender and race adds another layer of complexity to women's representation in media. While films with leads from racial/ethnic minorities are increasing, women of color remain significantly underrepresented. "Representations of Black Women in Hollywood" by the Geena Davis Institute of Gender Media, Black female leads and co-leads from the top 100 grossing films from 2009 to 2019 were analyzed. This study revealed that the overall representation of Black women and girls in cinema (6.1%) and television (6.2%) roughly matches the population percentage of the population (6.5%), and a deeper analysis revealed persistent issues in the portrayal. Only 19% of Black female leads had darker skin tones, indicating a bias towards lighter-skinned Black women. Additionally, 57.1% of Black leading ladies were depicted with hairstyles conforming to European beauty standards. Black female characters and other female characters of color are twice as likely as white female characters to be shown with a degree of nudity. In 2013, Academy Award nominee Viola Davis highlighted the state of opportunities for Black actresses in Hollywood, declaring they were "in crisis mode" due to the scarcity of roles that could truly showcase their talents and range. This persistent underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women of color in media, particularly the bias towards Eurocentric beauty standards and the hypersexualization of Black women denies diverse audiences authentic reflections of themselves,

The entertainment industry, historically monopolized by white male narratives, the casting of women of color in traditionally white roles represents a significant shift towards inclusivity and diversity. For example, a Black actress, Halle Bailey, was cast to play Ariel in the live-action version of "The Little Mermaid." While many celebrated this groundbreaking

decision, it also sparked a backlash, with the hashtag #NotMyAriel trending on social media. Halle Bailey is not the only actress who received backlash, but so has Rachel Zegler when she was cast as Snow White and Cynthia Erivo as Elphaba in "Wicked." Many fans have noted through the backlash that for Elphaba's casting, a Black actress playing her adds depth and relatability to the character's struggles. The 2024 Hollywood Diversity Report revealed that films with racially diverse casts perform better at the box office. For instance, movies where 31% to 40% of the cast were people of color were the most successful. The 2024 Digital Media Trends study reported that nearly 70% of all consumers surveyed enjoyed TV shows or movies that helped them learn about cultures different from their own. Concluding the report's findings, it's clear that film diversity reflects audience demographics and drives box office success. Films with diverse casts consistently outperformed less diverse counterparts domestically and globally.

The representation and misrepresentation of women in the film reveal a complex landscape of progress and persistent challenges. Despite some advancements, women remain significantly underrepresented on-screen and behind the camera. When women are portrayed, they often fall victim to stereotypes and objectification, with female characters more likely to be sexualized or depicted through the "male gaze." This issue is compounded for women of color and older women, who face even more significant underrepresentation and stereotyping. Despite these persistent challenges, the film industry shows signs of positive change, proving that inclusive filmmaking is both culturally significant and economically viable. As the industry continues to evolve, these trends suggest a promising future where women's stories, in all their complexity and diversity, will increasingly take center stage, enriching cinema and society.

While women have been victims of stereotypes and over-sexualization through cinema, the advertising industry also has a history of misrepresenting women, leading to adverse

outcomes in society for women. According to the Geena Davis Institute, about twice as many male characters as female characters are shown on screen. For the female characters that do show up on screen, 85.0% of women say film and advertising need to catch up to the real world when depicting women. Just a decade ago, a "Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls" revealed that 51.8 percent of advertisements that featured women portrayed them as sex objects. To contrast, when women appeared in advertisements in men's magazines, they were objectified 76 percent of the time. With the perception of this type of content having gone down since then, it is evident that women are still depicted differently in ADs than men. However, a study conducted by experimental psychologist Helena Lawrence in "Sex Does Not Sell" found that "The increased cognitive load associated with sexual appeals diminishes available cognitive resources for encoding the brand." This means even though over-sexualized women in ads grab male attention, it doesn't mean sales revenue for that brand, proving that sex does not sell.

In the 20th century, women were almost always seen in advertisements reflecting traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes and being depicted as homemakers, mothers, or objects of desire. Despite women's increasing presence in diverse professional fields, advertising often fails to reflect this societal progress accurately. As described in "Yes, Marketing Is Still Sexist" by Mara Altman, in advertisements, women have been depicted in workplace settings a mere 4% of the time between 1980 and 2010, and even in 2019, male characters outnumbered female characters two-to-one in advertisements. This skewed representation is compounded by the fact that only 4% of ads feature women in leadership positions, reflecting a broader trend of marginalization. The predominance of male creative directors—who make up 71% of the industry—contributes to these imbalanced portrayals, often framing women through a male perspective that emphasizes appearance and narrow beauty standards. Praying on the insecurities

of women, advertisements frequently target women with content that undermines their aspirations for independence and self-comfort by promoting ideals centered on being thinner and conforming to specific femininity standards. Brands use these insecurities for profit by giving women solutions to problems that may not have existed before.

With the popularity of companies preying on their consumer's insecurities to sell their products, many have realized that speaking on women's issues and empowering them rather than targeting their insecurities has been proven effective for growing their audience. Since 2004, Dove has grown its platform by empowering women, rejecting beauty stereotypes, and promoting self-esteem and body confidence. Dove's Real Beauty campaign was inspired by a global study that revealed that only 2% of women worldwide considered themselves beautiful, which sparked a conversation on self-esteem and the unattainable beauty standard the media places on women. Other companies, such as Nike, have launched campaigns targeting a more female demographic by addressing women's issues. Nike's "Dream Crazier" campaign, launched in 2018, is a powerful tribute to women in sports that challenges societal stereotypes and celebrates female athletes' strength, determination, and resilience. Narrated by tennis icon Serena Williams, the campaign features many accomplished women athletes encouraging women to pursue their dreams fearlessly, regardless of societal expectations or limitations. "Dream Crazier" sparked global conversations about gender equality in sports and empowered women to break barriers across various fields. As companies start to represent and celebrate more diversity, it has come with some backlash. A recent campaign released during the holidays, The Boots 2024 Christmas advert, has sparked praise and controversy with its portrayal of Mrs. Claus. Adjoa Andoh, a Black woman, plays Mrs. Claus and takes charge of Christmas preparations while Santa sleeps. The ad, "The Christmas Makeover," showcases Mrs. Claus organizing gift

production with her "elfluencers" and using inclusive language, including gender-neutral pronouns. While many viewers applauded the advert for its representation of women's often unacknowledged labor during the holiday season, it also faced backlash from right-wing critics who labeled it as "woke" and called for boycotts. The controversy highlights the ongoing debate surrounding diversity and representation in media. However, the ad has also received praise for acknowledging that women are often behind the magic of Christmas celebrations in many households.

Despite progress in some areas, the advertising industry still faces significant challenges in accurately and respectfully portraying women. While some brands have made strides with empowering campaigns, the overall representation must be balanced. The industry must continue evolving, embracing diversity, and challenging outdated stereotypes to reflect a woman's true capabilities and contributions to society.

As the advertising industry becomes a more diverse space for women, women in the music industry fight to be represented across all genres. While pop music has a higher representation of women than other genres, even in pop, female artists are still in the minority. Pop music has the highest female representation at 38%, which means men still dominate the genre. The situation is even more pronounced in other musical genres. According to another study by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative analyzing Gender and Race/Ethnicity of Artists, Songwriters & Producers across 900 Popular Songs from 2012-2020, the most significant disparity for women is in Alternative music, where there is only one female artist with every eight alternative male artists. In 2023, the first major study of gender representation across audio production and engineering personnel revealed out of 1,260 total music producers, only 65 were women and nonbinary people (5%). The numbers were similarly dismal for engineers — only 46

out of 1,480 (3%). Looking at the positive, in 2023, women artists reached an all-time high of 35% on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, marking a substantial increase in female representation among individual artists. Within music fans, there is also a gender listening gap; in 2019, Spotify data exposed male-identifying users listening to 94.2% of male artists, 3.3 % of female artists, and 2.5 % of mixed groups, while women listened to 55% of male artists, 30.8 % of female artists, and 14.2% of mixed groups.

Additionally, women constituted 40.6% of all individual artists, reflecting a positive trend toward inclusivity. However, while women songwriters achieved a record 19.5% representation, the percentage of female producers remains critically low at just 6.5%, indicating that while women are gaining visibility as performers, their behind-the-scenes influence still needs to be improved. Recent award seasons have spotlighted women's achievements, with seven out of eight major categories at the 66th Grammy Awards won by women, including historic wins by Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish. Despite these milestones, the industry continues to grapple with pervasive issues related to misogyny and sexual violence. Reports indicate that sexual violence disproportionately affects women in the music space, with 85% of cisgender white women feeling unsafe in live music environments, according to a 2023 survey in Melbourne.

Not only do women face inequality in their outward representation, but within the industry, many women face sexual abuse and harassment as most of the jobs in the industry are dominated by men. According to The Women Musicians Insight Report published by the Musicians Union in 2024, 51% of women in music have been discriminated against due to their gender, a third of women in music have been sexually harassed, and female musicians are paid less and have shorter careers – despite on average being more trained and educated.

Within the industry, many women are advocating for a change in the representation of women. She is the Music, founded by Alicia Keys and Ann Mincieli, is an independent with a mission to increase the number of women working in music – songwriters, engineers, producers, artists, and industry professionals. To serve women in the industry today with their initiatives while fostering the development of future generations. To create a change for women and build an equal future for music. Chappell Roan has emerged as a powerful advocate for queer representation in the music industry, particularly for women. Her debut album, "The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess," released in 2023, has catapulted her into the spotlight as a new kind of queer superstar. Roan's music authentically celebrates the queer experience with songs that openly depict women-loving women and encourage listeners to embrace their true selves. Her onstage persona incorporates drag-inspired elements, bringing queer culture to mainstream audiences. Roan's impact extends beyond her music, as she uses her platform to increase visibility for the LGBTQ+ community, dedicating her Best New Artist win at the Video Music Awards to drag artists, queer and trans people, and queer youth in the Midwest. Another Artist pushing boundaries in the music industry is Janelle Monáe, who uses her art to challenge societal norms and advocate for marginalized communities. Her album "Dirty Computer" boldly declares her intersectional identity. Through songs like "Django Jane" and "Pynk," Monáe confronts issues of gender, race, and sexuality, offering a defiant response to oppression and promoting equality. Monáe has a non-profit organization, Fem the Future, which provides resources and support for young women and girls in under-resourced communities of color. They focus on increasing exposure and access to various careers, particularly arts, music, and leadership development.

The music industry has seen significant progress in recent years regarding the representation of women, but substantial challenges persist. In 2023, women artists reached an all-time high on the Billboard Hot 100 Year-End Chart, marking a notable improvement from previous years. This increase in visibility has been accompanied by notable achievements, such as women dominating major categories at award shows like the Grammy Awards. However, the overall landscape still heavily favors men. Behind the scenes, the disparity is even more pronounced. This underrepresentation extends to technical roles. Discrimination and harassment remain significant issues for women in the industry. These challenges and structural barriers, such as caring responsibilities and unsociable working hours, contribute to shorter career spans for women in music. Despite these obstacles, initiatives founded by female artists are working to increase the number of women in various music industry roles and foster future generations of female talent. As the industry evolves, addressing these systemic issues will be crucial in achieving true equality and representation for women in music.

Just as the music industry grapples with representation issues, social media has emerged as a powerful platform that both empowers women and poses new challenges related to misogyny. Social media has emerged as a mainstream platform that significantly influences the representation of women. On the one hand, social media enables women to share their stories, advocate for gender equality, and challenge harmful stereotypes often perpetuated in mainstream media, such as in the film, advertising, and music industry. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter/X, and TikTok have become spaces where women can voice their experiences, build communities, and promote diverse narratives celebrating female empowerment.

One example of using social media as a tool to advocate for women would be the MeToo movement, initially started by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, which gained widespread attention in 2017 following sexual abuse allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein. This movement has since become a global phenomenon, raising awareness about sexual harassment and abuse in Hollywood. The phrase "Me Too" was coined by Burke in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence, especially young women of color, find healing and solidarity. However, the movement gained massive traction in October 2017 when actress Alyssa Milano tweeted, encouraging people to reply "me too" if they had experienced sexual harassment or assault. Within 24 hours of Milano's tweet, Facebook reported over 12 million reactions related to #MeToo. The MeToo movement was a positive step towards change for women within the entertainment industry. Not only did this movement single out men in Hollywood who have sexually assaulted or abused women in the industry, but it also encouraged women all over the world to share their experiences. This movement led to a national survey in 2018 to examine the prevalence of sexual harassment in all places. "The National Study of Sexual Harassment and Assault in the United States" in 2018 showed that 81% of women and 43% of men have been sexually harassed or assaulted in their lifetime. The large number of women being victims of sexual harassment and assault in America means women were more likely to be victims than not in 2018, leading to the idea that America has a rape culture.

Cassie Jaye's documentary "The Red Pill" began as an exploration of rape culture in America. While researching, she found a website labeled "A Voice for Men," published in 2009 by Paul Elam, with many articles posted by Men's Rights Activists, also known as MRAs. These activists believe that men are being oppressed due to research on issues affecting men, such as suicide rates, homelessness rates, workplace fatality rates, incarceration rates, men's health

issues, and abuse. They believe we do not live in a patriarchy and instead, men are the ones being discriminated against, and women are the ones who have the advantage in society. Cassie Jaye interviewed Katherine Spiller, Executive Director of Feminist Majority Foundation and Executive Editor of Ms. Magazine, who believes the Men's Rights movement is just the backlash of feminism. She said, "Men have felt threatened by the opportunities that have been opened up to women…and I don't know if it's because…they now have to compete with a lot more people (women) for their jobs...Think about it, grandfather's generation probably had it pretty well, right? All of his needs, his shirts were ironed… just all of that was always taken care of. Well, you know, grow up. Realize the world has changed…No person looking at the data can say women have an advantage. We're just beginning to get an even level playing field." Cassie Jaye was left conflicted at the end of her documentary and concluded that MRAs feel like their issues are neglected now that women's issues are being talked about. Men have valid issues that need to be addressed, but are they a men's rights issue? The MRAs blame women for their problems but fail to realize that their issues stem from the patriarchy and gender roles they set up…both of which they don't believe to exist.

The "The National Study of Sexual Harassment and Assault in the United States" study from 2018 was done again in 2024, and the number of women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted decreased by 38%, and that of men reduced by 1%. Even with the number decreasing, just under half of women in America have been sexually harassed or assaulted, still underlining a problem in America.

Recently self-proclaimed "incels" and "red pill" men are amplifying anti-feminist ideologies through social media. The term "incel," an abbreviation for "involuntary celibate," applies to mainly heterosexual men who define themselves as unable to find romantic or sexual

partners despite desiring such relationships. The term has evolved to be associated with a misogynistic ideology that often blames women for their lack of romantic success. Although many "red pill" influencers on social media claim not to be associated with incels, many of the misogynistic beliefs found in incel online communities are found on "red pill" platforms that give dating advice to men. The term "Red pill" or having the "red pill mindset" derives from the 1999 science fiction film "The Matrix." In a pivotal scene, Morpheus presents the protagonist Neo with a choice: take a blue pill and remain in blissful ignorance, or take a red pill and discover the harsh truth of reality. They argue that the concept of female oppression is a fabrication designed to manipulate men into accepting exploitation and surrendering their power. By "taking the red pill," followers of this ideology believe they have become aware of this perceived unjust social order. They view themselves as part of a resistance movement against what they see as a "feminist-dominated" society. Influencers such as Andrew Tate, Myron Gaines, and Rollo Tomassi have gained a platform on social media for their idealogy. With over 1 million subscribers, Myron Gaines's podcast, Fresh & Fit, claims to be "The #1 men's self-improvement podcast in the WORLD! We provide the TRUTH to men on females, finances, and fitness." according to their YouTube channel which has an audience of predominantly young men. The conversations on this podcast and others like it not only negatively impact their viewers' perception of women, contribute to harmful gender stereotypes, and reinforce traditional gender norms but also do the opposite of what their platforms strive to do, which is to uplift men. Their idolization of gender norms and hypermasculinity leads to unrealistic standards for men, toxic masculinity, and overall inaccurate advice for men wanting to be in a relationship.

As I previously stated, men do have problems society needs to address; however, they are not caused by women. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, "Toxic

masculinity is the way men are culturally trained and socially pressured to behave. Its three core tenants, toughness, anti-femininity, and power, range in expression from person to person, but all combine to create the sense of 'manliness.'" It's characterized by toughness, emotional suppression, aggression, rejection of feminine qualities, and power. These qualities lead to issues like mental health problems, difficulty in forming relationships, and gender inequality. This behavior affects women in relationships with men by increasing their risk of violence, impacting their mental health, and normalizing toxic behavior in relationships.

Social media has emerged as a conflicting platform that significantly influences the representation of women. While movements like #MeToo have demonstrated the potential of social media to raise awareness and drive positive change, they have also faced backlash and criticism. MRAs and the popularity of "red pill" influencers highlight the persistent challenges women face in online spaces. These influencers negatively impact how women are treated in society as well as negatively impact the mental health of men. Influencers with a mission to critique and educate have emerged to challenge "red pill" influencers, exposing the flaws in their ideology and raising awareness about the detrimental effects these ideas have on society and their followers.

Several key strategies can be implemented to positively change the representation of women in all media. In the entertainment industry, cinema has long sexualized and stereotyped women. To combat this, we must increase diversity in key creative roles, including directors, writers, and producers. Having more women in behind-the-scenes roles in the film would create more complex, multi-dimensional female characters that avoid stereotypes and represent people and women of various ages, ethnicities, body types, sexualities, gender identities, and abilities in lead roles. Promoting female perspectives in storytelling will challenge the "male gaze" and the

over-sexualization of women in film. This approach aims to create content that authentically

portrays women, allowing audiences to see themselves reflected in the media they consume.

Companies using advertising to promote their brand or product should avoid reinforcing

traditional gender stereotypes in ad campaigns representing women with diverse jobs, body

types, and backgrounds. Advertising directors and creators should avoid the unnecessary

sexualization of women in advertisements, moving away from the notion that "sex sells." To

fully represent the female experience in ads, we need more women in creative director positions

to make the decisions. For the music industry, it is clear that we need to increase the visibility

and support of female artists across all genres of music. We must promote more women to

executive and decision-making positions in record labels. Providing mentorship and training

programs for women in technical roles like production and engineering and support initiatives

will increase the number of women in these roles in the music industry. By addressing sexual

harassment and discrimination in all media industries, we create a safer environment for women

to reach their full potential. Lastly, influencers should speak out against toxic influencers on the

platform, and social media should have stricter regulations on what type of content they want on

their platform. Companies can use social media advertisements to create campaigns and

movements to advocate for awareness of women's issues, create educational content that serves a

purpose to better society and underrepresented groups, and create safe spaces and support groups

for women on these platforms.

      As society continues to evolve, it is crucial to critically examine and challenge how

women are represented and portrayed in media, pushing for more diverse, authentic, and

empowering representations that reflect the full spectrum of women's experiences and

capabilities. It will take some time, but by addressing these issues, we can transform the media

across all platforms to celebrate women's diverse experiences, inspire future generations, and create a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

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