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Title: Casting Call: The Female Actor's Struggle to Stardom

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Susan M. Shaw

In the era of #MeToo, we have learned more about the plight of women in Hollywood as they seek employment as actors. While the recent public conversation about gender and sexualization in Hollywood is robust, few peer-reviewed academic articles examine the actor's personal experiences of gaining meaningful employment in television and/or film: conflicts and resistance to portraying stereotypes, the auditioning process, and potential benefits and sacrifices incurred as a working female actor. This thesis studies the experiences of women actors in finding and being cast in film roles. It utilizes Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and Objectification Theory as its theoretical underpinnings and analyzes data to identify barriers women actors encounter when seeking employment in the film industry. This thesis includes interviews with women actors who have been cast in film roles in a major motion picture, independent motion picture, or television.

Casting Call:

The Female Actor's Struggle to Stardom

by

Dawn Suzanne Schiller

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Dawn Suzanne Schiller, Author

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DEDICATION

For my brilliant daughter, Rochelle Jade Schiller Bristol. You are my inspiration. I hope this thesis gives you a glimpse into your mother's passion and why she cares so much about people. May you build on these words and find hope in a better future. You are worth it all. I love you.

Chapter One

Introduction

The motion picture industry historically under-represents women in Hollywood, and the process for women actors to secure meaningful roles is fraught with many challenges that can negatively affect their lives (Robinson, 2007; WGAW, 2017-18.) Rumors of the proverbial "casting couch" have permeated Hollywood for generations sending out an unspoken warning, particularly to women actors, as they seek to find employment being cast in acting roles. With the dawning of the #MeToo movement more and more evidence of gender-based harassment, assault, and violence has been revealed within the film industry's machinations, particularly among women actors who are measured by their appearance, youth, size, and sex appeal more than their acting intelligence and talent. During the casting process, women are often objectified when auditioning for a role (Mulvey, 1975, 2019; Kaplan, 1997, 2013; Hollinger, 2012; McCabe, 2013.) There is very little research done in this area, and there is a lack of literature that tells us which barriers women face. Therefore, this research was conducted in order to fill the gap in the literature regarding the dilemmas women actors face in gaining meaningful employment. Fifteen semi-structured interviews with female actors explored their experiences in the casting process. The conclusions drawn from the data help to shed light on the issues these women face in the film and television industry and potentially promote change in the casting process.

Researcher's Background and Interest

I first became interested in the process of film production in 2002, when director James Cox and film producer Holly Wiersma hired a private investigator to locate me and invite me to act as a consultant/producer on the film *Wonderland*. The film centered around the July 1, 1981 murders of four people on Wonderland Avenue in Laurel Canyon, Los Angeles ("Wonderland murders," 1981) and partially based on my lived experience as a survivor who was victimized by the primary subject of the film. After accepting the consultancy, I advised production during the final casting process for the leads in the film, primarily the roles of my batterer and me.

Although I had little to no experience in filmmaking, I did understand that the producers of the film wanted to cast actors who would reflect similar characteristics as their real-life counterparts. I leaned heavily on my assumption that through the casting process, the actors would be judged on their acting abilities, favoring those that bore the closest physical characteristics to the source, of course, but ultimately not favoring appearance over the talent of the actor. My understanding of film production was that highly skilled and talented hair, make-up, costume, and prosthetics professionals could easily amend any physical differences. My role in the casting process began after the director had narrowed down potential candidates to four or five finalists—actors who had already auditioned. During this latter process of "casting," I began my research of the finalists, narrowing down my choices by scrutinizing their acting prowess or acting "chops" of each of the actors. I critiqued the actor's many film projects and measured them to the scripted characters of "John" and "Dawn."

While engaged in this process of "casting," I began to recognize disparities between choosing an actor for their talent versus their physical appearance. This was particularly obvious for the female. Her beauty, age, and overall "general audience" appeal took precedence over talent for the film's decision-makers. Ultimately, a tall, slim, blonde, and beautiful nineteen-year-old actor with two strikingly distinct different colored eyes landed the role to play me, who, in reality, was a short-statured average looking teenager with brown hair and a large nose. As a young actor, her experience consisted of several one-line and small primary roles in previous films and a recent breakout surfer film in which she carried the lead. In contrast, the male lead of "John" was an actor with a history of several successful film leads. He was physically shorter, broader, and more stoutly built than the real-life male lead he was to represent.

It was clear that the male actor who won the role was measured, or cast, differently than the female actor. The female actor was valued based on her appearance or her ability to appease a film audience's idea of what represents beauty. Interesting to me was that the filmmakers and crew, in general, were excited about the final casting decision for the role of "Dawn." They had found Kate Bosworth, an ingenue who was young, slim, and beautiful, and the overall feeling that the film would be successful centered on this foundation.

Ultimately, I accepted the decision of the studio and director. By the current societal beauty standards, Kate Bosworth was more beautiful than myself at that time in my life, so I thought, "Why not have someone so gorgeous play me." However, aside from the initial burst of excitement, the idea that someone who looked like me was not

relatable or likable to general audiences reminded me that to receive sympathy and favor was for the "beautiful," not for someone like me. As a survivor of severe gender-based violence, I understood this, and a portion of the expectation to tell my story honestly as a real victim on film was dashed. During the casting process, I observed the women who auditioned for the part of "Dawn" endure the scrutiny of their bodies, evaluation of their sex appeal, and subjugation to the male gaze to gain the approval of the producers and director for consideration of the part. I hope this thesis will provide a more in-depth investigation and analysis of what women actors experience to attain meaningful work in the film industry and will serve to uncover and address the systemic oppression that creates and maintains gender biases for women actors in the film industry.

The Casting Process

Making a film, from the initial concept, or "pitch," to the final release, whether for movie or television, is a complex coordination process that is the collaboration of writers, actors, agents, managers, producers, directors, marketers, financial backers and other production talents (Borcherding & Filson, 2001.) Casting is the process of finding and hiring an actor to perform in a role for film, television, or theatre, and is a critical element in its successful production (Blume, 2019.) The casting process in film and television narrows down the collaboration to the casting decision-makers: (1) studio executives; (2) producers; (3) director; and (4) casting director (Robinson, 2007.) Some major film productions may seek to offer a leading role to a "bankable" leading actor before filling any other major roles in the film's production to guarantee an audience and, therefore, financial success. In this case, the studio will not hold auditions or generate a

breakdown for that role. However, depending on the size of the production, casting directors usually hire the actor, where a principal casting director is responsible for filling all speaking roles, and a background casting director is responsible for all non-speaking and "movie extra" roles.

It is common practice for the film's producer and casting director to generate a comprehensive list of all talent required for the film, or a "breakdown," and distribute it to an approved roster of talent agents and managers who utilize it to select a good "fit" out of all of the actors they represent. Casting breakdowns are extractions from a script that assist the casting director in channeling actors to a specific role which includes a description of the characters in a production and consists of specifications that may include sex, race, age range, physicality, unique personality traits, and other special talents or characteristics necessary to match the film role (Chideya, 2006; Robinson, 2007; McGrail, 2018.)

Robinson (2007) states that breakdowns based on race and/or sex-based considerations often constitute evidence of discrimination and that this discrimination is concealed. Concealment occurs because the agents and managers have restricted access to the breakdown, and they are contractually bound not to distribute to the potential actor. Although the writer of a film or television project has no contractual power over casting an actor, film producers typically, however, engage the writer to dictate the casting decisions around sex, age, race, and ability based on their scripted characters. According to the Writer's Guild of America West's (WGAW) Inclusion Report Card (2017-2018), women and persons of color are underrepresented as television writers, with women at

36% and people of color at 27%. Additionally, women make up only 24% of showrunners, (leading producers,) and people of color make up only 12% of showrunners. Even more disturbing, is that although 56.7 million of the national population identify as disabled, disabled writers make-up less than 1% of television writers who are actively employed. The WGAW report (2017-2018) found that since information as to LGBTQ+ writers requires self-identification, the data in their report was incomplete. However, the report states that writers over 50-years-old faced severe systemic age discrimination finding a near-total absence of that age group within staff writers. Additionally, the report says, "64% of writers from historically underrepresented groups reported bias, discrimination, and/or harassment and discrimination in the workplace." In addition to the evidence of overall disparity among writers, Robinson (2007) claims that "primarily white male [film] decision-makers buy scripts from primarily white men, who tend to write lead characters who are white men." This also means that writers who draw on their personal experiences may not be conscious of their discriminatory character choices.

With the film breakdown in hand, talent agents will then consult their current roster of performers and choose one or more of their best actors to audition for the part (Robinson, 2007; Blume, 2019.) Lauren McGrail, a screenwriting professor, tells actors, "the casting breakdown serves as a first taste of what the project could offer in terms of artistic exploration and career-boosting performance potential…[and it] has the potential to get someone [an actor] excited about playing the role" (2018.) In her instructions in "How to Use a Casting Breakdown to Get Good Actors," McGrail views the casting breakdown, with specifications of sex, ethnicity, age, body type, and ability as a means

for an actor to tap into their master levels of acting for the audition. She points out, however, "the importance of carefully approaching issues such as race and physical features in a casting breakdown" as not to be perceived as racist, misogynist, or pornographic, and remember that actors are professionals at their craft who deserve respect (2018.) UCLA Professor Russell Robinson found that race and sex heavily factor into the casting process, yet in the breakdowns, both race and sex are treated differently (2007.) Robinson claims that the character sequencing in the breakdowns implies that sex forms the underpinning of a character more than other traits such as race and age. Regarding race, Robinson found that 45.2% of breakdowns specified a particular race and that 5.4% used race code like "Waspy," "pale-skinned" or made reference to white actors that would serve to exclude many actors of color (2007.)

As the talent agent or talent manager selects a performer or performers that match closest to the character breakdowns, it is customary to send the casting director the actor's portfolio containing a resume, photographs, and videos of prior performances. From this point, the principal casting director reviews all of the submissions and selects the talent they wish to audition. The agent will then receive a callback with the specifics for the audition that may or may not include "sides," or a small number of lines from the script that the actor will read (Robinson, 2007; Blume, 2019.)

An audition is a snippet or glimpse of an actor's performance that demonstrates the level of their acting skill and considered to be an optimal opportunity for an actor to showcase their range. There are several combinations to the audition, or screening processes for an actor that may include the following steps: the pre-read, which is usually

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done via a self-tape audition when the casting director needs more information about the performer; the audition; the callback for a second audition; the callback for producers; and the final stage – the screen test, where casting directors and producers analyze the "chemistry" between the auditioning actor and the rest of the productions cast. Screen tests are a big deal among the acting community as it indicates that the actor has passed multiple layers of casting critiques and is viewed as a finalist for the film project (Brownstone, 2015; Blume, 2019.)

For a performer to secure an audition is an exciting prospect. Essentially, it means that an actor has been chosen from a vast pool of their peers for a highly coveted job interview and is in the running as one of the project's "favorites." It is the opportunity to showcase intricacies of their talent and professionalism with the hope of gaining employment by being cast in a role. Unlike typical mainstream job interviews, a working actor must secure continuous film roles to be meaningfully employed. While an acting job is only as long as the production, actors must strive for as many auditions as possible.

Therefore, although having an audition is an exciting prospect, an actor must continuously and rigorously pursue opportunities to gain access to the audition process to be working. An actor must always prepare for the next audition by honing their craft, knowing their lines, being confident, patient, and being able to move past the many inevitable rejections that are sure to come in this highly competitive career. To be a successful actor, one must be passionate and resourceful and have a "never-give-up" attitude. For female actors and especially female actors who have marginalized identities, having a positive attitude is barely enough to succeed. They face challenges to navigate

multiple macro and micro attacks of sexism, racism, looksism, colorism, ableism, sizeism, homophobia, and classism.

History of the "Casting Couch" Metonym

The expression "casting couch" has been associated with the beginning of the film studio industry since the 1920s and '30s. However, the phrase can be traced back to Broadway's theatrical scene well before the launch of Hollywood's entertainment industry. Attributed to Lee Shubert, one of the founders of New York's Broadway district, the phrase "casting couch" refers to how an aspiring actress has to trade sexual favors to secure a role (Zimmer, 2017.) Foster Hirsch historicizes theatre's Shubert pioneers and details how the eldest brother, Lee, kept "an elegantly furnished boudoir, reserved for leading ladies and promising ingenues, and a shabby, spartanly furnished room with a single couch where he met chorus girls and soubrettes." Agnes de Mille, a dancer who worked with Shubert, verified that if an actress did not sleep with them, she would not get the part (1998.)

By the 1920s, the burgeoning film and cinema industry moved west to Hollywood, and the casting couch concept had moved with the industry as a normalized metonym for sexism within the casting process. In 1920, Karl Kitchen reinforced the casting couch concept in Photoplay Magazine, "young women are not advanced in their chosen profession unless they submit to the advances of studio managers, directors, or influential male stars." The phrase casting couch continued to be woven into the language of Hollywood's casting process, from casual references in the press, spoken and unspoken innuendos, lyrical connections in music, such as Rudy Vallee's hit song "You

Oughta Be in Pictures," to F. Scott Fitzgerald, who worked "casting couch" into "The Last Tycoon" published in 1941. The casting couch scene is inferred when Cecelia tells Wylie that she imagines suddenly being interrupted while meeting a powerful movie producer in his office. Wylie then comments, "And you jump up quickly off the casting couch smoothing your skirts," making the implication obvious (Zimmer, 2017.)

In the 1960s, the existence of a literal casting couch was considered a thing of the past. The idea of an actress having to give in to sexual pressure in exchange for an acting role was dismissed by the film casting community, something that was no longer prevalent. Marvin Paige, a well-known casting director, is noted as saying, "The days of the casting couch—if they ever existed—are over." In reality, even if the existence of a symbolic casting couch was no longer present, the abusive environment it created was hardly eradicated, and, in fact, further embedded and protected misogyny within film culture (Taylor, 2017; Zimmer, 2017.)

Years later, the depth of the Harvey Weinstein scandal, along with multiple sexual harassment accusations of major film industry leaders, would come to the surface, making it evident that the legacy of the casting couch still infects Hollywood's casting process. The difference now is that more and more folks are no longer turning away from the toxicity of the abusive culture and, along with the #MeToo movement, are organizing to collectively dismantle the sexist systems that perpetuate it (Barnes, 2017; Rothman, 2017; Taylor, 2017; Zimmer, 2017.)

Initially, the term "casting couch" was perceived as innocuous movie-business slang—a Hollywood in-joke, that spun beliefs and perceptions about female actors who

would willfully do just about anything to get famous. Female actors were viewed with contempt under the assumption that they would give themselves sexually to the powers behind a film for a chance to act in a film. However, the consequences for refusing advances and expectations to provide sexual favors meant that they risked losing an audition, securing a role, and ultimately, being blacklisted from the movie industry entirely in retaliation. The casting couch represented a genuine threat for female actors who had to navigate rampant sexism in an industry they hoped they could excel in, leaving them fighting for their safety, dignity, pride, and careers. Today, the phrase "casting couch" is symbolic of the way the film industry normalizes sexual assault where powerful men dominate – a metonym for the perverse sexual politics of the entertainment business.

Aim

Visual media surround us, and in almost every aspect of our daily lives, images from television, magazines, film, and the internet play significant roles in the public's consumption of information. Like most folks, the characters I watch on the cinematic screen tell stories of fantasy, drama, comedy, and horror that intertwine relationships and portray images of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability that reflect a sense of identity to me personally and to my situation in society. Historically, women actors are underrepresented in notable films, and women from marginalized groups even more so (women of color, LGBTQ+, disabled.) The overarching aim of this thesis is to identify barriers erected by intersecting systems of sexism, racism, ableism, heterosexism, classism, and ageism and the ways women encounter these barriers in auditioning for roles in film and TV.

Research Scope and Significance

Hollywood has represented the film and television industry since the first decade of the 20th century (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985; Bordwell, Thompson and Ashton,1997; Stacey, 2013.) From concept to final production, it remains the characters that drive the film to the awaiting senses of audiences. But what are the guiding forces that decide who will be chosen to represent a character for the screen?

For female actors, a complex and competitive casting process (Borcherding and Filson, 2001) shaped by historically entrenched systems of oppression negotiate the character-type actors that casting directors will seek to hire for film work. In turn, this same casting structure dictates the personalities female actors must portray to compete for the roles designed around these characters. Prompted by a film's imagery, an aggressive audition process regularly demands sexist, racist, and other discriminatory casting calls (or breakdowns) that present long- and short-term personal, emotional, social, familial, and career challenges for female actors as they pursue employment in television and film.

Protected by the First Amendment as artistic freedom, discriminatory casting practices remain unopposed by employment discrimination law (Title VII) (Robinson, 2007; Scott, 2004.) Within this working environment, the female actor lives and works in a celluloid world of deep internal conflicts created by an employer that requires stepping into racist/stereotypical roles, sacrificing family, resisting barriers to professional growth imposed by the celluloid ceiling (Lauzen, 2014, 2015,) and living up to an image-driven market of impossible beauty standards, yet rarely are their experiences considered under an analytical lens.

To examine the experiences of female actors within the Hollywood casting system, this thesis will first define Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), which examines Freud's ideas about scopophilia and her perspective on the male gaze as the theoretical framework. Next, this research will ground itself in Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Robert's article, "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks," (1997) examining the alliance of the film industry's sexist casting practices that objectify the female body and the negative impact these practices have on the female actor.

Finally, this research will focus on fifteen (15) semi-structured personal interviews conducted with female actors that range in age, race, ethnicity, and ability who are currently working and/or have worked in the film/television industry as an actor. I will look at how the film industry, as an institution, is constructed by and embodies systems of oppression and maintains the status quo by examining how the male gaze dictates casting guidelines for hiring female actors, and how these controlling guidelines influence the lives of the female actor's experience in securing meaningful film roles. Additionally, I will analyze the female actor's experiences through the lens of Objectification theory while highlighting and comparing their experiences to the current #MeToo movement. Although there is a good pool of academic authorship on controlling images (stereotypes), little peer-reviewed scholarly articles exist that examine the actor's personal experiences of gaining meaningful employment in television and/or film, i.e., conflicts and resistance to portraying stereotypes, the auditioning process, and potential benefits and sacrifices incurred as a working female actor. This thesis will shine a light on the experiences of the female actor, a population that has been historically

marginalized, as an act of resistance and help build on the movement to create a safer and more equitable casting process.

Research Questions

Women actors have historically been underrepresented in significant films, and women from marginalized groups even more so (women of color, LGBTQ+, disabled, etc.) The overarching goal of this thesis is to identify barriers that emerge from systems of oppression (sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia, classism, etc.) and the factors that create these barriers that women face in attaining more significant meaningful roles.

This research will examine the personal experiences of women actors in finding and being cast in film roles in a major motion picture, independent motion picture, or television. It will inquire as to the actor's career aspirations, accomplishments, and perceived failures to answer the following two questions:

1. What are the barriers women actors encounter when seeking roles in the film and TV industry? and
2. What are the circumstances and consequences of these barriers?

Thesis Outline

This thesis includes five chapters that examine the experiences and barriers for female actors to be cast in film and television roles and attain meaningful employment in the film industry as an actor. Chapter One introduces the research, its aims, and guiding questions. Chapter Two presents a review of feminist theories on scopophilia and the male gaze in cinema and objectification as theoretical underpinnings and looks at the

current #MeeToo movement. Chapter Three details the methods and theoretical

frameworks used for the research. Chapter Four describes and analyzes the findings of

this study. Finally, Chapter Five offers conclusions, calling for greater inclusion and

accessibility for female actors in the film casting process, and presents recommendations

for the film industry to dismantle existing biases while building future equitable film and

television productions.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

In the film and television industry, women actors are often depicted in minor roles and/or in roles designed to support the male actor that is objectifying and subordinate. Additionally, the female actor is reduced to portraying these minimal roles during the casting process, hoping to secure an acting job and build on their acting careers. This literature review will examine three arguments; first, Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," with focus on the male gaze and its application to the female actor in the casting process; second, objectification theory; and finally, the current #MeToo movement and its connection with Hollywood and the film industry's involvement in oppressing and violating women actors. The main purpose of this literature review is to synthesize the information and look at women actor's experiences in the casting process through the lens' of the "male gaze," objectification theory, and the #MeToo movement.

Scopophilia and the Male Gaze in Film Theory

In Laura Mulvey's 1975 pivotal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," she took some of the first steps in analyzing classical Hollywood film and its interpretation of female representation. Mulvey argues that cinema mirrors a patriarchal image of women as "other," setting her apart from the male protagonist as an object and

not as the film's subject. From this essay, the dominant film theory of the "male gaze"

was coined and will serve as the theoretical underpinnings for this thesis.

Drawing on Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytical interpretation of scopophilia, or

the desire to see, Mulvey (p. 6-8) integrates structures of voyeurism and narcissism into

the story and image of film. Mulvey noted that the fascination with cinema could be

explained psychoanalytically through Sigmund Freud's works on "scopophilia," which is

the fundamental drive to look (p. 8). Motivated by sex, scopophilia embodies structures

of voyeurism and narcissism that, according to Mulvey, directly stimulates the desire to

look by the spectator through cinematic story and image. Here, voyeuristic visual

pleasure is gained through cinema when the viewer is gratified from participating in

unhindered looking at a celluloid illusion of a private world (p.7.) In her essay, Mulvey

views cinema as a place where ego ideals are produced through a star system, ("the

glamorous impersonates the ordinary,") connecting it with scopophilia where pleasure

arises, first; by separation of the identity of the subject on the screen while thus sexually

objectifying the subject (usually women) through sight, and second; by identifying with

an image (again, usually a woman) as a spectator subjecting them to a controlling and

curious gaze (p. 9).

It is here that Mulvey delineates the presence of a profoundly rooted heterosexual,

patriarchal imbalance in film as a perpetual regurgitator of a controlling force; i.e.,

cinema/film manifests and perpetuates a straight male as the dominant figure and

representative of power (p. 13). She posits the dichotomy, "…pleasure in looking has

been split between active/male and passive/female," and that "the woman displayed has

function on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator" (p. 11.) This means that primarily, the camera's gaze is equivalent to the male gaze, which relies on the image of the "penis-less" or "castrated" woman on the screen, and is near impossible to separate (Mulvey, 1975, p. 14; Sassatelli, 2011, p. 124.; Silverman, 1988.) There are two ways the male unconscious can escape the anxiety evoked by this woman, first ascertaining guilt, asserting control, and subjecting the guilty (woman) to punishment or forgiveness (sadistic nature,) and second, to build up the physical beauty of the woman, fetishizing her (Mulvey, p. 15.) Additionally, Mulvey argues that the narcissistic misperception of self with an idealized character on film, typically a male hero, is another visual pleasure (p.18-19.)

Mulvey points out that not only men, but women engage as spectators, or observers of cinema and a crucial point in her essay argues that "the male gaze is also the female gaze – namely that women look at themselves through the male gaze" (Mulvey, 1975; Silverman, 1988; Sassatelli, 2011.) In an interview with Mulvey, Roberta Sassatelli summarizes, "so there is no escaping the male gaze as it is 'the gaze' and no other position exists from which to look at film" (2011 p. 128.) Mulvey also established that women are active in reproducing their subjugated positions in cinema, and more importantly, their participation in watching other women and themselves.

According to Mulvey, the male gaze in cinema relies on the camera to manipulate the audience through the perspective of a heterosexual man (p. 14.) Camera techniques of movement, such as lingering over the curves of a woman's body, combined with invisible editing, tend to distort screen space where "the male protagonist is free to command the

stage" (p. 15.) Thus, as Mulvey (1975) contends, the cinematic gaze is always masculine by identifying with the male hero and reinforced through the objectifying cinematic techniques of the camera (Silverman, 1988; Mulvey and Backman, 2015.)

In summary, Mulvey's theory of the male gaze argues that man emerges as the dominant power within the fantasy of mainstream media and that women are passive to the active gaze of the male. Within this dynamic, a patriarchal order manifests, grows, and influences audiences as the continuing dominant power over the female. At the same time, the female also views characters on the screen through the lens of the male gaze. By using Mulvey's psychoanalysis of the male gaze to deconstruct Hollywood films, we are able to use a critical eye to uncover the overt and subtle patriarchal myths through which women have been positioned as "other" (Mulvey, 1975; Kaplan, 1997, 2013.) Mulvey's hypothesis of the male gaze is a useful lens in looking at the casting process and analyzing data around women actors because it enables us to understand how women are cast through the male-dominant gaze.

Cinema's Casting Process and the Male Gaze

To understand the female actor's experience, we must look deep into feminist film theory. The male gaze suggests two manners in which Hollywood cinema produces pleasure, first; the objectification of the image (woman) on the screen, and second; the identification with that image (Mulvey, 1975, 2019; Kaplan, 1997, 2013; Hollinger, 2012; McCabe, 2013.) There is an extreme burden that the male gaze imposes on gender identities that is a consequence of the objectification and subjugation of a male-dominant power-driven through the camera's lens. It affects all that participate in the production

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and consumption of cinema, film, and media, including the female actor who seeks to portray those scripted characters in a story.

Film is constructed through and for the male gaze, which dictates the physical, mental, emotional, and intellectual properties that define the parameters of a female film role, which, in turn, establishes the character specifics sought out by casting directors. Hence, female actors attend casting calls ready and willing to embody the persona that has been created through the lens of the "male gaze." This is how the tentacles of the male gaze reach out and control the dynamics of the casting process. By inextricably connecting a controlling patriarchal force to cinema, film, and media, Mulvey and her ilk have provided a diagram for how we look at film.

Objectification Theory

Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Robert's (1997) Objectification Theory posits a framework for understanding the sexual objectification of women in sociocultural experiences and the mental health consequences they may endure. Objectification theory postulates that women's bodies are sexually objectified and are valued and treated as objects to be used by others and that her body and body parts are separated from her person and regarded as a physical object for male sexual desire. The idea that women are valued for their bodies (or the collection of their body parts) for the consumption of others is the common instigating theme that supports sexual objectification and the underlying psychological consequences that women face. As a form of gender oppression, sexual objectification promotes a number of further oppressions such as; discrimination in employment, minimizing women's efforts and input, and goes as far as

sexual violence. Additionally, combinations of ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, and other differences should be considered as posing intersecting oppressions of objectifying behavior that affects women (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr, 2011.)

Hendrickson and Roberts (1997) claim that sexual objectification is a "socially sanctioned" right of all males and includes a span of oppressions that range from sexual violence to the more subtle and refutable sexualized evaluation that manifests through the gaze or visual inspection of the body. There are three (3) spaces where the objectifying gaze occurs; first, within interpersonal and social encounters, second, in visual media that depicts sexually interpersonal and social encounters, and, third, in visual media encounters that highlight bodies and body parts while aligning viewers to engage in implicit sexualizing gaze (Mulvey, 1975). Understanding that sexual objectification is the objectifying [male] gaze that often occurs in media representations of women and is the basis for the dehumanizing challenges that female actors can face in the film and television casting process (Moradi and Muang, 2008). The media in U.S. culture, such as commercials, television, movies, and videos, are environments where "women more often than men are depicted in sexualizing and objectified manners" and often depicts a narrow and unattainable standard of physical beauty (Szymanski, et al. 2011.) Therefore, media representations of women, and intrinsically women who portray the characters written for them in the media, are likely subject to sexual and other forms of objectification during the casting process.

Cinema, the Casting Process, and Objectification Theory

On one side of the camera, Mulvey's essays recognize how the male gaze commands our perception of female actors in a film role, where the objectification of the female body dictates our perception of female actors from the other side of the camera. Objectification Theory (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997) states that "bodies exist within social and cultural contexts and hence are also constructed through sociocultural practices and discourses," and that by being female, women are subject to sexual objectification that is likely responsible for a multitude of psychological distresses; i.e., eating disorders, depression, substance abuse, etc. When understanding objectification theory as the sexual objectification of women's experiences, it's also recognized that women actors are frequently sexually objectified both in the portrayal of their character and in the attainment of the role via the casting process.

Within the manufacture of cinema's visual product (film, television, commercials, etc.), the casting process plays an essential function in hiring female actors and therefore sets itself up as the perfect sexually objectifying environment. Additionally, the objectifying situation for female actors is compounded as the media prominently promotes the sexual objectification of women. According to Dines (2020), the media aggressively promotes the sexual objectification of women in the media, stating, "the phrase 'sex sells' obfuscates what really sells. What 'sells' is the sexual objectification of women for the male gaze. It 'sells' because it reaffirms, reproduces, normalizes, and cements masculinity as constructed in patriarchy. What is being sold is male power over women."

The Casting Couch

From a major motion picture to television, all film projects contain specific constitutive elements that make them uniquely "a film." In film development, there are five fundamental formal aspects necessary to its production; literary design, visual design, cinematography, editing, and sound design. Dictated by script and story ideas, the literary design includes the story, setting, action, characters, character's name, dialogue, film's title, and deeper subtexts and thematic meanings of a film (Benshoff and Griffin, 2011.) It is from this original foundational piece of storytelling that the other aspects of film form are built. From this primary point, the characters in a film are established and ultimately sought out in casting. In essence, the script and the interpretation of its storyline prescribe the character's film form and therefore create the casting guidelines.

Overall, the male gaze is happening with the production of film itself and also in the casting process. It becomes clear when applying Mulvey's feminist film theory on the male gaze that characters are developed in stories that reproduce the image of a subordinated and objectified female. Not only is there a male gaze in production, but there is also a male gaze among women's casting experience. According to Martha Lauzen of the Center for the Study of Women in Television (2011) part of what's happening is that directors are looking for a particular shape, in particular, white, straight bodies, and if queer, they are still presented for the white male (Wojcik, 2003.) It is clear that the Hollywood casting couch exists for queer LGBTQ+ actors and is evidenced by actor Tom Ratcliff's experience in the Birmingham Post which prompts further study in this area (2019.) This is one area that I have not addressed, however, and a full review of the literature for the LGBTQ+ community is outside the scope of this review.

The proverbial "casting couch" has been well rumored and is a place known to women actors (and some men) as a place where sexual "favors" are exchanged either by demand from a professional with the power to cast a role or offered by a female actor in hopes that the exchange will secure a role on film. Borcherding and Filson, (2001) contend that most new (female) actors would accept no wage at all and even pay for the opportunity to appear on film and posits that they willingly "sell their sexual services in an attempt to influence producer." Borcherding and Filson claim that although illegal, this type of exchange is more quid pro quo as opposed to being coercive and might very well be a victim-less crime. This assessment of normalizing the casting couch runs counter to understanding sexual harassment and presents another extension of the patriarchal male gaze. It is well known that universities such as UCLA and USC provide educational workshops on sexual harassment which include conversations around the casting couch; however, it is considered an unspoken truth that is hard to measure as it is presumed that so many new (female) actors are engaged in the same practice (2001, p. 26-27.)

Hollywood and the #MeToo Movement

The #MeToo movement originated with sexual harassment survivor and activist Tarana Burke in 2006 via the social media outlet Myspace. #MeToo was originally a call to other women and girls – particularly women and girls of color – who had survived sexual harassment and assault to raise their collective voices and engage in putting an end to societal complacency, victim-blaming and sexual abuse (Ohlheiser, 2017.) In early October 2017, and in the midst of writing this thesis, actor Ashley Judd made public

sexual abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein, a prominent Hollywood film producer. Accusations by many other female actors soon followed (Bahr, 2017; Zimmer, 2017.) On October 15, 2017, Alyssa Milano reposted the #MeToo hashtag on social media outlet Twitter with the comment, "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem." Soon afterward, an avalanche of a-list female actors such as Uma Thurman, Ashley Judd, and Jennifer Lawrence posted #Metoo as their response to Ms. Milano's tweet, indicating that they have also experienced some form of sexual harassment or assault. It did not take long for several female actors to make references that Hollywood was full of "Harvey's" (Swan, 2017.) The dam broke, so to speak, and the simple act of reposting the personal truth of #Metoo, many women, but in particular women actors, became empowered to speak up and organize to expose Hollywood's infamous "casting couch." The #MeToo movement exposed some of the most egregious acts of sexual assault in the film industry, and one of the most damaging barriers uncovered in this study and therefore, has provided further contextualization for the results.

Women of Color Actors

With the historically overwhelming majority of stereotypical images of African American women as the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire, Black women actors seeking employment in today's film industry have a difficult battle to fight to attain more meaningful and multi-dimensional roles. Sharon Jones states, "Black women are often presented as decentralized, marginalized, and unempowered individuals, and that these

depictions [stereotypes] serve to reinforce the racial, class and gender hierarchies in the United States…despite the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s…" (1998, p. 35.) Jones states that motion pictures transmit memorable images with the power to alter or reinforce popular conceptions of Black women. Jones exemplifies this argument by pointing out that *The Color Purple* and *Waiting to Exhale* perpetrates distorted images (stereotypes) of African American women's experiences. Contrastingly *Jackie Brown* illustrates a more dynamic African American woman (1998, p. 35.)

Media images of African Americans are stereotypical and often negative, which causes the actors that portray these images to be typecast into a fixed perception and ideal (Bell, 2004; Frost, 2008; Eschholz, Bufkin, and Long, 2002.) Still, contemporary films continue to portray African American women in the controlling light of the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotypes even if the racial characteristics are more diluted in some films than others. In the more recent films of *Precious* (2009), the actor Mo'Nique plays the part of the mother, Mary Lee Johnston. Mia Mask describes that "the character, Mary, reanimated stereotypes of the castrating, matriarchal black bitch" and is another iteration of a dominant narrative [Sapphire] familiar to African American women (2012, p. 101.) Additionally, when Halle Berry won her Oscar for Best Actress playing Leticia Musgrove in *Monster's Ball* (2001), the role emanated from a manifestation of the Jezebel stereotype, whereas more blatantly the role played by Octavia Spencer as Minny Jackson, the maid to a white family in *The Help* (2011) outright represented the Mammy stereotype measuring the value of African American women to servitude and housework.

While the film industry continues to propagate the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire stereotype, the dynamics behind these racial stereotypes not only serve to depict African American women as inferior to the viewers but also impose an internalization of oppression onto African American women as both women and as actors. Briana McKoy writes, "African-American women, in particular, must deal with stereotypical images of black women in mainstream media that influence their everyday roles in society" (2012, p. 134.) This means that as Black women's view of "self" is guided by racial stereotypes and as a Black female actor, being cast as a racial stereotype in films places them in the role of the racist influencer. Ella Louise Bell states, "Media images of African Americans are stereotypical and often negative in nature which caused the actors portraying these images to be typecast into a fixed perception and ideal" (2004, p. 363.) Black actors face a dilemma in the face of such stereotypical portrayals. Either they can work in roles that demean Black people, or they may not work at all.

The barriers for African American women actors to attain meaningful and frequent roles in film and television come from many directions; historically ingrained controlling images of white supremacist domination that inform the stories of African American women that create acting roles, the socialized negative self-esteem that is internalized as a viewer of media caricatures, and the challenge to recreate those subordinated stereotypes as an actor who represents their race to the public. As entertainment media has developed and films have grown in popularity, opportunities for African American women actors are limited to stereotypical roles, allowing racist images to frame their acting opportunities in the film industry. Van Peebles writes, "But rarely, even today, are the tribulations of Black actresses ever mentioned" (2005, p. 94.)

Historically, the majority of stereotypical images of Asian American and Asian women are portrayed in the media as a Dragon Lady, China Doll, and Lotus Blossom, which create a difficult battle for Asian women actors to attain more meaningful and multi-dimensional roles (Paner, 2018.) Shoba Rajgopal (2010) points out that, "when Asians *are* given roles in Hollywood, they are often stereotyped." For instance, when actor Zhang Ziyi played Hu Li in the film "Rush Hour 2" (2001,) she depicts a henchwoman stereotype of a "dragon lady" as ruthless and seductive while the other supporting cast of Asian women are submissive and weak (Park, Gabbadon, and Chernin, 2006.) Rajgopal also tells us that Hollywood's portrayal of Asian women as submissive and docile feeds the belief that Asian women indeed are exotic and submissive and thus subjects them to a greater risk of sexual assault, by giving the impression that they are "asking for it" (2010.)

Additionally, Asians are stereotyped as "nerds," karate masters, and Ninja killers with exaggerated accents along with the mythical "model minority" characteristics of being intelligent, hardworking, and ambitious. For Asian women actors, these stereotypes serve to pigeonhole them into "othered" roles that perpetuate Asian portrayals, not only as demure women serving white men, but as simple, passive "eternal foreigners unworthy of well-rounded representation, and never possessing the rights of citizenship" (Paner, 2018.) These stereotypes have negative social and cultural consequences that bring about feelings of shame and disgrace. Hollywood perpetuates the misconception that "Asia is a monolith with interchangeable cultures" by indiscriminately casting Asian actors in any Asian role effectively erasing the unique cultures and traditions of multiple countries

(Paner, 2018.) In the casting process, Asian actors are often only hired for their race, whereby a casting call will not specify characteristics for the role; instead, they deem "any Asian will do" as acceptable (Teng, 2016.) These casting practices create additional barriers for Asian women actors as it blurs the ethnicity of the specific roles being cast and limits available acting jobs.

Conclusion

It is theoretically solid to analyze and assess the casting process as another branch of the male gaze manufacturing machine known as cinema or "Hollywood." Mulvey's psychoanalytical theory of a patriarchal male gaze reinforces notions around gender, race, class, age, and beauty barriers. Additionally, within the casting process, female actors must don a mask of characters that further support a subordinate and objectified mirror image of the feminine persona.

Let's face it. There would be no Hollywood film industry without the diverse female actor, and to overlook their integral position in creating a cinematic story and their years of personal risk and commitment, is to consider them more like props and not people. Is the film industry's need to market female actors via the male gaze as commodities an egregious act of oppression without an end, or can the patriarchal control of cinema be challenged, weakened and maybe even neutralized to allow female actors a fair opportunity to attain meaningful employment and perhaps become a star.

This literature review has provided a framework for understanding the barriers of objectification, sexism, racism, body shaming, sexual harassment, and sexual assault that women actors face in finding and maintaining acting roles in film and television utilizing

both Laura Mulvey's theory on the male gaze and objectification theory. While the literature applies these theories to women in general and women portrayed in the media, there is a gap in understanding the dilemmas women actors face in the casting process and gaining meaningful employment.

This chapter has offered a context for exploring the problems and barriers that women actors face and the effects that these barriers have on them. The #MeToo movement has also provided a new context for understanding the sexual objectification of women actors and the casting couch. The focus of the next chapter turns to the methodology this piece of research used to investigate this issue.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

Acting opportunities within the film industry range from small, non-speaking roles in commercials to principal leads in major motion films. According to the New York Film Academy 2018 report, gender bias is evident in representation. For example, of the top 900 films from 2007 to 2016, only 12 percent of movies feature a balanced cast where half of the characters are female. The average ratio of male actors to female actors was 2.3 to 1 (Perrone, 2018.) Another issue of representation centers on the ways women are positioned in film as the object of the male gaze. The view that men are the spectators and women the spectacle in cinema, along with understanding the consequences of being perceived as a sexual object, lends a deep and meaningful perspective to the analysis of women actors' experiences (Mulvey, 1975; Fredrickson, 1997.) Male power in Hollywood becomes particularly evident at the intersection of representation and casting. The concentration of power in the hands of men combined with male sexualization and objectification of women makes the proverbial "casting couch" a central issue for women actors, one that came into clear focus with #MeToo.

This chapter will examine my positionality as a researcher and explain the research methodology of the thesis. Specifically, this chapter addresses the research strategy and questions, research design, sample selection and participants, research process, data analysis, ethical considerations, and research limitations of this study.

Researcher Positionality

Because I was a survivor of severe gender-based trauma as a teenager (from 1976 to 1982) by a high-profile criminal batterer/pimp, I was not surprised that the media wanted to report on the illegal activity of the case. In this vein, I have had experience as an interviewee on several televised true crime shows, including "E! True Hollywood Story," "Hidden City Crime Files: L.A.," "Mysteries and Scandals," "Poisoned Passions," and "The Wonderland Story." On these shows, I had the experience of being filmed as a subject matter expert only and was not a part of any film production or casting process. My singular experience with the casting process was as a consultant and associate producer on the 2003 film, *Wonderland*. My personal history with the actors and the casting process for the film *Wonderland* was limited and does not reflect any expertise, experience, or education in the filmmaking industry. Nevertheless, I understand that I must constantly check my own biases when researching and interviewing subjects on topics that aim to shed light on the harmful imbalance of power. Additionally, I found that my experiences in the film industry allowed me to create a non-threatening environment for the interviewees in this study, permitting them to be more comfortable and open in their responses.

As a feminist, I am in search of the subjugated knowledge of the multiple intersections of women's lives that is often hidden and unspoken (Hesse-Biber, 2014.) With in-depth interviews that are limited in structure and that focus on a specific topic of interest (i.e., women actors in the casting process), the ability for lived experiences to be relayed in a safe and comfortable environment allows a richer flow of knowledge and

identity to be analyzed. In addition, personal interviews conducted with a focus on gender and the distribution of power and resources offer detailed and nuanced qualitative data that would not necessarily be available via quantitative research methods. The feminist researcher is, "reminded to be mindful and respectful of differences between women, to be aware of the multitude of ways that race, class, and gender intersect in an individual woman's lived experience, and to be cognizant and watchful of power dynamics and differentials throughout the research process" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006.)

Research Strategy and Questions

Researchers historically and currently study and report in-depth on gender bias in film, but they have not analyzed the gendered experiences of women actors in the film casting process. Instead, researchers tend to focus on representation and sexualization, but women's experiences in actually attaining work on camera are neglected. As this is a subject area that needs further investigation, my goal is to build on existing research on gender bias in film by talking with women actors to look specifically at the challenges they face in securing meaningful work.

My specific research questions are:

1. What are the barriers women actors encounter when seeking roles in the film and TV industry? and

2. What are the circumstances and consequences of these barriers?

Research Design

As a feminist interviewer, I understand there is no one way of seeing an individual's experience; this includes the complexities of ever-evolving forms of feminist methodology. Hesse-Biber and Leavy, (2007) tell us, "Feminism is a window onto the social reality and encompasses a wide range of perspectives and practices. As such, feminism is multivocal." Understanding that female actors will have unique experiences during the casting process, this thesis utilizes qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured, in-depth interviews of 15 diverse female actors who share the experience of seeking employment in the film industry via the casting process.

After carefully considering the aim and questions of this thesis, I decided on twenty-six non-sequential, open-ended interview questions to allow the participants space for more in-depth personal reflection and to share stores related to their experiences in the film casting process. I paid particular care not to inject my bias as a white graduate student with prior experience being interviewed by the media and working on the film *Wonderland* and remaining aware of this in the review and coding of the interviews. I am aware, however, that I can incorporate my passion in this area by applying a sensitive lens to the gathering and analysis of the data. The Explanation of Research and Protocols for data collection was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Oregon State University. I began interviewing participants in September 2014 and finished with all 15 participants in January 2015.

Sample Selection and Participants

This research project utilized a snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects. I reached out to my acquaintances of actors, writers, directors, and producers in Hollywood via email or phone. I asked if they would provide my contact information to any female actors they thought might have an interest in this study. Within 30 days of making these initial contacts, 15 qualified female actors presented themselves as interested and available for one to two-hour in-person interviews. Each participant chose a pseudonym; eleven identified as white, two as African American, one as Chinese American, and one as Korean American. The female actor participants are:

Participant Pseudonym	Age Range	Race/Ethnicity	Years in Film	Common Roles	Education
1 Belle Paris	40s	White	10-15	Addicts, girlfriends, villains	Professional Acting Classes
2 Betty Holiday	20s	African American	10-15	Evil, hooker, best friend, gritty roles	Professional Acting Classes, Private Coaches
3 Billie	50s	White	20-25	Agent, crusty women, damaged, drama, comedies	College, Theatre Schools, Professional Acting Classes
4 Bo Peep	30s	White	15-20	Sexual, sexpot	Professional Acting Classes, Private Coaches

5 Bunny	50s	White	20-25	Losers, floosy broads, sluts, 2 smart people	College, Professional Acting Schools, Private Coaches
6 Carrie	40s	White	10-15	Feisty girl next door, soap operas, nice girls	Professional Acting Schools, Private Coaches
7 China Doll	30s	Chinese American	15-20	Nurse, mom, wife, detective, administrator, guest star, co-star, often fills the diversity quota	College, Theatrical Universities, Acting Schools, Private Coaches
8 Eileen	20s	Korean American	5-10	Party girl, pop star, semi-sexual to asexual, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, professional	Professional Acting School, Private Coaching
9 Gigi	40s	White	15-20	Strong, Sexy, Funny, Doctors, Lesbians	Graduate School, Master Acting Programs
10 Jester	40s	White	20-25	Girl-next-door, vixen, comedy, victim, manipulator, lesbian, bi-sexual	Backstage Experience, Private Coaches
11 Lulu Lustig	40s	African American	20-25	Educated Black best friend, quirky, love interest	College, Professional Acting School

12 Marceline	40s	White	15-20	Sexy mom, MILF, cougar, quirky older girlfriend, older roles,	College, Professional Acting Schools and Private Coaches
13 Patricia	60s	White	45 +	Mothers, waitresses, housekeeper, nurses, drunks, business-person, lady next door, general-type character	Professional Acting College, Private Coaches
14 Sara	30s	White	10-15	Sexy roles, moms	College, Professional Acting Schools
15 Ms. Tomato	60s	White	35 +	Ingenue, girl next door, sweet, grieving mother, comedy	College, Professional Acting School, Family Educated

Research Process

Having garnered my sampling via a snowball method, I made contact with the

selected 15 female actor participants via formal and semi-formal email/phone. I described

the study's context and scope, which included the name of the study, contact information,

and the Explanation of Research. I then flew to Los Angeles on two weekends in

September 2014, where each participant chose a neutral place (a private home, street

corner, or home/office rental) where they felt comfortable conducting the in-depth

interviews. The final interview was held in January 2015 via Skype. The interviews

lasted approximately 33 and 82 minutes and were recorded and transcribed for the coding

and analysis of this thesis. Personal observational notes on facial expressions and body language were also noted and interpreted in the analysis process.

Data Analysis

According to Christians and Carey (1989), "Interviews are one of the best methods for qualitative research." I began coding the data after I transcribed the interviews, only deleting my uh-huh, probes, involuntary vocalizations, and outside interruptions (Hesse-Biber, 2007.) I listened to and read each interview several times. I then created a master Excel spreadsheet that listed all twenty-six questions across the top and listed each participant's pseudonym on the left side of the spreadsheet. One-by-one, I re-read the responses to each question and extracted comments and stories that gave me general code ideas, copying them into the spreadsheet. I reviewed all the general responses I had extracted in this initial coding and drew broad code names that I wrote above each of the questions at the top of the spreadsheet. I next carefully studied, line-by-line, the general responses that I gathered and assembled more codes above each question at the top of the spreadsheet resulting in a compilation of codes. I then began to sort similar codes at the bottom of the spreadsheet into categories searching for consistent and overarching themes for my data. Here, I developed four (4) overarching themes with several minor supporting themes each enabling me to organize multiple narratives to "tell the same story from different perspectives, or several different stories that connect with each other" (Spear, 2018.)

Ethical Considerations

Although my target participants of female actors are not considered a highly vulnerable population, the potential for any backlash, retaliation, and/or being blackballed within the film industry did exist. Therefore, it was understood that they are not to be personally identified with any of their interview comments during this study. In compliance with ethical research practices, all participants remained anonymous, choosing their own pseudonyms. Participants were fully informed of the objectives of the study. I provided participants with the IRB approved Explanation of Research, identifying the framework, academic purpose, potential risks, and remedies of the study. The Explanation of Research stood in lieu of any consent form and intended to maintain confidentiality and avoid exposing the actor's identity. Great care was taken to be sensitive and supportive when discussing distressing incidents. Participation in this study is voluntary, with a clear understanding that withdrawal was without penalty. I spent considerable time and effort, allowing the participants to choose the time and place for their interviews, which would allow them not to be recognized by the public and to feel safe. As some of my participants were acquaintances from my work on the film *Wonderland*, it was clear that I had no influence or held no position of power that may adversely affect them within the film industry.

Research Limitations

Although this study was able to garner in-depth and important information about female actors' experiences within the film/television casting system, some limitations did present themselves. Those limitations were:

- The size of the sample is small – There were fifteen female actor participants in total. A larger, more diverse sample would enrich the data pool and findings.

- The sample lacks a balanced amount of diversity – Out of the fifteen participants, only two identified as African American, one identified as Chinese American, and one identified as Korean American. Additionally, no participants identified as LGBTQ+ or as having a disability.

This chapter has provided an examination of my positionality as a researcher and explained the research methodology of the thesis, including research strategy and questions, research design, sample selection and participants, research process, data analysis, ethical considerations, and research limitations of the study. The next chapter's focus turns to the analysis of the participants' interviews to contextualize the data in this study.

Chapter Four

Analysis of Findings

In this chapter, I identify four major themes with six subthemes from my interviews with female actors. To highlight the interviewee's lived experiences, I will include their in-depth quotes that align with the themes. I've identified those themes and subthemes as follows:

Themes			
Casting Couch	Biases	Career	Acts of Resistance
Male Gaze & Objectification	Racism/Stereotypes	Satisfaction, Achievements & Benefits	
Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault	Gender - Age & Body Image	Sacrifices & Regrets (Barriers)	

In this study, all of the women interviewed discussed encountering barriers concerning the equitable treatment of women and the women of color participants noted the ways racism and sexism intersected in their experiences of these barriers, for example, being typecast into racial stereotypes for women of color. Patricia told me her views on negative gender-based situations she experienced over the years: "I just think it's a terrible industry to women in particular . . . They are mean to you because you are expendable. They use women. They use them up, and they throw them away. It's not like they treat men." Belle Paris echoed those sentiments saying, "It's very male-dominated,

and a lot are the type of males that do not like women." Both Patricia and Belle Paris identify destructive, oppressive male power over women in the film industry.

Gigi described the unfair hiring preferences given to male actors during the casting process. She told me, "I do think there are more men without [known] names that break into acting than women. I can't believe how many guys show up on set and… don't know the lines and how they can go farther just by being in the "good old boys' club." Jester relayed her experience with inequality and the lack of gender roles by telling me, "I know for a fact that we have fewer roles, and the roles that we do have are usually secondary. I don't feel that the respect is equal when I'm in a room with males. I don't feel like we're being treated equally." Lulu Lustig shared her thoughts on racist patriarchal power over women and their exercise of the male gaze, stating, "When I first started, I thought I could go for any role. I didn't realize I couldn't because I was black," and, "Unfortunately, men run everything. I feel like it is a very male-dominated business. I've said, 'Well, why did you cast this girl over that girl?' And they'll say things like, 'Well, her hair bounced better.' So basically, it all boils down to who did we want to fuck?"

The Casting Couch

Well known in the Hollywood film casting business is the notorious "casting couch" – a name given to a metaphoric couch that represents a place where the practice of powerful men exploits women (and sometimes men) actors who are trying to break into the television and movie business (Borcherding and Filson, 2001; Zimmer, 2017). The casting couch euphemism has been a part of Hollywood culture for over a century and reputedly includes the victimization of such renowned actors like Marilyn Monroe and Kim Novak. Today, as evidenced by the criminal conviction of Hollywood film

mogul Harvey Weinstein, the practice of soliciting sexual favors from woman actors is alive and well (Barnes, 2017, Kampmark, 2017, Rothman, 2017.) One of the dominant themes to come out of my interviews in this study is the "casting couch." Film critic, Carrie Rickey, states, "The casting couch is only one of the many land mines an actress must defuse in an industry where men are the principal deciders of who gets represented and how, as well as the principal hirers" (2017.) The interviewees in this study expressed many variations of inappropriate experiences during the casting process, ranging from uncomfortable gazing and sexual objectification to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape. In this study, not everyone experienced the "casting couch," but all were aware that it existed and knew of another female actor who had had the experience.

Lulu Lustig encountered multiple casting couch situations as a young actor and reflected later in life that she likely lost employment opportunities because she resisted sexually objectifying herself to powerful men who could have advanced her career. She explains how her decision not to be sexually available, or "fuckable," created their own set of barriers to her success in film. She told me:

> I think women actors in Hollywood, you're either a sexual object or you're
>
> not. …I've never been somebody who led with my sexuality… which I
>
> regret a little bit. I'll have to say I would have used it in some way;
>
> nowhere prostituted myself, but I understand the power now that I'm older
>
> of a woman's sexuality. I wish I had... because I feel like ooh if I knew
>
> that, I could have really done something bigger. I feel like you either are
>
> fuckable or you're not. And once you're unfuckable, you're unfuckable.

For Lulu, choosing not to use sex as a way to get parts meant she got the reputation of being "unfuckable," which then limited her access to better roles, causing her some regret in hindsight.

Betty Holiday was well aware of the pressure to use sex to help garner parts. She said: "Then there's the casting couch… I mean, girls who are willing to do anything and sleep with anyone, and they're going to get an opportunity that another girl may not. …I know a specific actress who works a lot…who has put herself in that position and is doing very well." As Betty notes, the expectation of sex in exchange for roles also leads to resentment between women, particularly for women who feel they have lost out because they refused the casting couch.

Similarly, Sara acknowledged the pervasiveness of the casting couch. She explained: "I went with the producer who made it clear that he had dated women that he put in his films and that did not interest me. So, women actresses prepare themselves for this possibility of happening at the sexual level? They call it the casting couch…" As Sara noted, the expectation of the casting couch is so universal that women prepare themselves for it.

Lulu Lustig, Betty Holiday, and Sara's comments regarding the casting couch describe a common knowledge of two distinct "types" of women actors that are perceived in the film industry – those who use their sexuality to attain acting roles and those who rely on their talent alone. According to Borcherding and Filson (2001), the nature of film production and the promise of landing a role in a high-profile and big-budget film creates an environment that can lead to the exchange of sexual favors by new actors. They posit

that film financiers are searching for someone that they can make a profitable "star" and that most newcomers trying to make it in Hollywood are indistinguishable from each other, and only on extremely rare occasions does an actor have the exceptional talent to stand out. According to Borcherding and Filson, it is this struggle to reach stardom among a sea of contenders that maintains the "secret" that allows the exchange of sexual services with a film influencer for a film role (2001.) Interviewee Lulu Lustig looked back on her career and acknowledged that had she emphasized or shown her sexuality as a young actor in the casting process, she would have landed better film roles and likely had a more successful film and television career.

Male Gaze and Objectification

Feminist filmmaker and critic, Laura Mulvey, first coined the term "male gaze" in her essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975.) In her essay, Mulvey draws on thoughts of male scopophilia, or the psychology of looking, as the way in which women are depicted in visual arts; i.e., presented and represented as sexual objects and objectified for the pleasure of the male heterosexual viewer. Film industry decisionmakers seek to produce money-making film and television projects and rely heavily on audience satisfaction that objectifies women for the pleasure of the male viewer. Women actors are, therefore, asked to audition for roles that represent the characters they will play that is also written for them through a sexually objectifying male gaze. It is in this casting process environment that women actors are subject to being analyzed and sexually objectified while auditioning for a role. Not surprisingly, every one of the fifteen women I interviewed had experienced some form of being analyzed and

objectified negatively during the casting process. Of course, this objectification is also shaped by the ways the male gaze is racialized as a white male gaze. For women of color, this meant being specifically objectified and assessed as a Black woman or an Asian woman. Billie had an incident where she walked into an audition and felt the objectifying gaze of a room full of men. Billie told me:

> I walked into the room, and there must have been eight men. Only men around this long conference table. I literally could feel the eyes all going straight to my tits. It sounds so cliché, but it instantly made me go, 'hmm', and then, when I started opening my mouth to read the script, they went, 'What are you doing?' Just in that split ten seconds of my being in that room and feeling that energy, I came out completely deflated. I instantly thought, 'I'm not pretty enough. It doesn't matter how I will act in this.' I started looking at the other girls in that room thinking, 'Is this what it's going to be like in LA?'

Billie's experience during this audition was not about her talent as an actor; it was what her body looked like to the men in the casting room and whether or not they approved. This left her feeling humiliated and unnecessarily critical of herself which, affected her self-esteem. Billie recounted another auditioning incident where she was sexually objectified:

> I went to another audition. The guys were literally making a joke about my ass… and I wasn't comfortable with it. I did not know what to do, and I started joking back with them… It was the director and the producer. They

were making it sound like playing. I was not naïve, I was 32, 33, but not used to that.

The objectification of women's bodies under the oppressive male lens is often normalized and is evident in Billie's experiences during the casting process. Jester experienced sexual objectification while in character during an audition. Jester told me:

> I can tell you that I had one incident with one director, the one where I chose to get naked, and the role did have to do with her sexuality. She was not deviant… She was someone who's very sexually active and intrigued in that way, and… when I sat with the director in a hotel room, and he was asking me about my sexuality and sex toys and all kinds of preferences, and I felt like these were perfectly normal questions because he wanted to know whether I related to the character. I think about it now; I was in my 20s, it was really disrespectful. He didn't need to know my personal life in order to see whether I could play the character.

For Jester, the director probed her personal and private sexual preferences displaying another form of sexual objectification during the auditioning process where professional boundaries are blurred under the guise of legitimacy. In Sara's case, she experienced the male gaze, even before she arrived at the audition in the way her agent instructed her. She told me: "My agent never came on to me directly, but if he called me for an audition, he will be like, 'Bring out the guns. This is a booby role.' That kind of thing, and that made me feel uncomfortable." Here, Sara describes how the sexual objectification of female actors is reinforced within the patriarchal film industry and is

evidenced by her acting representative (agent) who prepares her for auditions where she will be judged for by the looks of her breasts.

Billie's experiences show how, when she entered the audition, she was not considered for the role based on her acting abilities. Instead, she was assessed only for her body parts and dismissed. Jester was auditioning for a role where the director inappropriately and explicitly discussed her sexual preferences. Sara's agent often readied her for auditions in which she would be judged for her breasts. These women felt demeaned, embarrassed, angry, and dehumanized by those experiences.

The male gaze is a lens in which one looks at others, particularly women and women's bodies, as sexual objects. Sara's experience of being told that this is a "booby role" exemplifies explicitly through its language Mulvey's idea of the male gaze. Sara was reduced to a body part—her breasts—to satisfy the male gaze. Additionally, Billie's experience of being in a room full of men and feeling their eyes on her breasts is another example of the male gaze in which she was objectified and reduced to a single body part for male pleasure. Mulvey views cinema as a place where ego ideals are produced and where pleasure arises, first by separation of the identity of the subject on the screen while thus sexually objectifying the subject (usually women) through sight, and second by identifying with an image (again, usually a woman) as a spectator subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze (1975.) Billie shared her experience of being objectified by the men in the casting room "making jokes about her ass," and Jester spoke about the inappropriate conversation about her sexual preferences during an audition where she agreed to be nude. Objectification theory postulates that women's bodies are sexually

objectified and are valued and treated as objects to be used by others and that her body and body parts are separated from her person and regarded as a physical object for male sexual desire. The idea that women are valued for their bodies (or the collection of their body parts) for the consumption of others is the common instigating theme that supports sexual objectification and the underlying psychological consequences that women face (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997.) In one way or another, all participants experienced this objectification and the consequences of dehumanization, shame, and anger, shaped as they were by race as well as gender.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Sexual harassment is defined by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 1980) as illegal acts of "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual assault, by definition, means "any nonconsensual sexual act proscribed by Federal, tribal, or State law, including when the victim lacks the capacity to consent" (OVW, 2020). Sexual assault is a criminal offense and includes acts from unwanted sexual touching to rape.

Women actors are essentially looking for employment during the casting process and auditioning to play a broad spectrum of characters can open the door for them to be vulnerable to sexual harassment and violent sexual assault. Ideally, they should be measured for their acting prowess, and actors, especially young actors, hold dear, such tremendous hopes at securing a role and proving themselves worthy of being held in esteem among their peers, that they often trust filmmakers that take advantage of them (Lucca, 2018.) Sexual harassment to sexual assault assumes many forms among the

interviewees' casting experiences, ranging from asking them to perform unnecessary intimate and inappropriate touching to the ultimate sexual assault of rape.

Bo Peep describes her worst casting experience with a well-known director who wants to engage in a kissing and fondling scene while alone in a hotel room designated as a casting site. Bo Peep told me:

I think the worst situation, a known guy… decided to do a casting at a hotel. I was young and wanted to believe the good and not bad, thinking, 'This isn't going to happen. There's no such thing as the casting couch. That's bullshit because I hadn't come across it.' I totally thought it was a myth. I went to the hotel room, and he gave me the script, and it was a make-out scene. It was just me and the guy in the room. I was like, 'Okay. Well, how am I going to ... I mean, a lot of it is making out. Do we just skip that and then read the lines? What do you want me to do?' He was like, 'Well, no, I'll read it with you.' I'm like, 'You're going to ... Are we going to do this scene together? You're the director. That's odd.' I just felt so uncomfortable, and I tried to do it, but then I was like, 'This is weird.' I wanted to have the role so bad. I tried as best as I could, and then I made up a story about why and how I had to go, and I left. …I felt very weird after. I thought to myself, 'Is that supposed to happen? Is that the casting couch? Did I just experience that?'

What happened to Bo Peep was frightening. Her youth and naiveté were preyed upon by this director, who used his position as a film decision-maker to bring her to a

50

hotel room alone to audition an intimate sexually charged scene. Whether the role was legitimate or not, this director used the lure of possible employment to take advantage of her sexually.

In Bunny's case, she had already secured the role in a film but was still subjected to sexual harassment and sexual assault by a well-known lead actor she was to work with on the film. She told me:

> I went to do this role and when I got there…the producer said, 'We're going to go to the lead actor's house,' and my scene was with the lead actor. We went to his… home, and it was nine o'clock at night, and…there was just a light on in the bedroom. I have to say, in the producer's defense, they were supposed to leave me there, and I was supposed to rehearse the scene with the lead actor. I felt like the producer smelled a rat, and so he said, 'We'll be back in two hours to pick you up.' Instead . . . he stayed in the kitchen with the actor's assistant. It was incredibly uncomfortable because it was the lead guy in the film… He treated me like a prostitute, and he was trying to get me to rehearse the kissing in the scene…and I was trying to acquiesce. I was trying to be cool and have him still like me, but still, turn him down. I finally got out of there, and cut the thing short, because it was so clear what was going on. When I tattled on him ... When the producer was driving me back to my hotel, I said that was really out of line. I said he was trying to cop a feel before we film tomorrow. I said to my agent this is what went down, and when the actor found out that I

tattled on him, he didn't want to do the scene with me, because I had

tattled. Then I had to do the scene with his stand-in. The whole thing was

just so creepy. They did a shunning; I think looking back at it. Then you

come off as the troublemaker on a film. This guy that pulled this shit was

really popular, a very popular actor that was incredibly well known.

Here, Bunny was sexually harassed and assaulted by a lead actor that she was

hired to work alongside in a film after a producer drove her to his private residence and

led her into his bedroom under the guise of rehearsing an intimate scene. Bunny managed

to escape his sexual advances and told the producer of the incident. She later experienced

retaliation by shunning from the actor and his crew, labeling her as a troublemaker, which

served to limit her ability to attain future film roles. Additionally, Bunny's experience

shows a level of complacency and co-conspiracy within the film industry that serves to

support the actor's assault on her by normalizing the incident and reinforcing patriarchal

power over her, leaving her dangerously vulnerable with barely any means of protection.

In Belle Paris' situation, she was sexually harassed by both her agent and a

producer in a situation where her agent arranged the audition. She told me:

I got an agent, and all of a sudden, I realize he's a total scum bag, he was

trying to have sex with me, and he had sent me on [an] audition… for this

sleazy guy. He put together independent movies, and they were pretty

popular. He was so slimy and hitting on me… He goes, 'Girl you're not in

porn.' Then I go, 'What does that mean?' He goes, 'If you're in porn, you

don't have to sleep with the producer, but if you plan on being in motion

pictures like the kind I produce, that actually sell and are blockbusters…,
you're going to have to put out.'

The sexual harassment co-conspirators in Belle Paris' situation were her
agent and a producer in which the agent had a working relationship in the film
industry. She was explicitly told that she would have to "put out," meaning have
sex with him if she wanted to act in his films. She was essentially handed over by
one sexual predator to another, placing her in a situation where she would have no
choice but to comply if she wanted to have a successful career as an actor.

Patricia recounted her sexual harassment experience during an audition that left
her uncomfortable and concerned about whether she got the part. She told me:

I've had only one casting couch experience…from an agent that I was
seeking to take me on… and that I got hit on. He was very cool about it.
He started out behind the desk and was telling me all this bullshit about
how I would have to behave out in the world. I tried to explain to him that
I was married, and I had babies. Anyway, he ended up putting his arms
around me from the side and asking me if I was uncomfortable. I said,
'Yeah, I am uncomfortable.' He said, 'Well, you will just have to get over
that.' I said, 'No. No, I won't really have to get over it.' I never said I'm
leaving or anything, but he closed the meeting pretty quickly after that.

In a meeting to sign with a popular agent and boost her career, Patricia was faced
with unwanted sexual advances that diminished her relevancy as a serious actor.

Additionally, the sexual harassment created stress for herself and her children's wellbeing should she be forced to comply. Patricia continued to think about her negative experiences in the film industry during the interview and recalled the occasion where she was raped while working on a film:

> They use women. They use them up, and they throw them away. It's not like they treat men; it really isn't. Women are a dime a dozen, and they know that we all line-up, that we want to do this… Well, I did get raped once. I was on a location. This time I was with a bunch of people. We were all on this film for two weeks. The cast and the crew, everybody, we were in the bar one night. Then we all went to my room, a whole bunch of us went to my room to continue the party. We do that. We have a few more drinks, and then everybody leaves my room. This guy who was the…head crew guy comes back to my room, and I open the door. He would not leave. He wanted one more drink. I thought, 'Well, I'll give him one more drink and then he'll leave.' He wouldn't leave, and then he raped me. I never turned him in. That's part of the industry. I did not want to bring attention to myself. He's probably done it to other people too, and that's what bothers me most. I felt very scared that he was going to try it again. The next day he was walking on this little back street, and I was walking towards him. I walked over to him and, I said, 'If you ever come near me again, I will turn your ass in.' He didn't bother me anymore.

Patricia's experience of rape represents the epitome of sexual assault violations and the patriarchal power and control over women and their bodies. Although it was a criminal offense at the time of the incident, Patricia did not have support within the film industry to report the crime. Due to the resurgence of the #MeToo movement in Hollywood, the ability to report, find support, and to penalize the perpetrator/s of sexual harassment and assault are strongly emerging in the film community (Hess, 2017; Buckley, 2018.)

This study looks to Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory to comprehend the experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault the female actor encounters during the film and casting process. The male gaze suggests two manners in which Hollywood cinema produces pleasure, first, the objectification of the woman on the screen, and second, the identification with that image (Mulvey, 1975, 2019; Kaplan, 1997, 2013; Hollinger, 2012; McCabe, 2013.) Mulvey tells us that women represent the fear-producing castrated or penis-less female to the male. There are two ways the male unconscious can escape the anxiety evoked by this woman, first ascertaining guilt, asserting control, and subjecting the guilty (woman) to punishment or forgiveness (sadistic nature,) and second, to build up the physical beauty of the woman, fetishizing her (Mulvey, 1975.) The sexual harassment and assault of being pressured for sex, being lured into an audition that oversteps the boundaries of a valid sex scene, and the abject rape experienced by the participants, represent specific examples of the male unconscious that seeks to punish women while asserting control and objectifying her body.

Gail Dines (2020) claims that the media aggressively promotes the sexual objectification of women stating, "The phrase 'sex sells' obfuscates what really sells. What 'sells' is the sexual objectification of women for the male gaze. It 'sells' because it reaffirms, reproduces, normalizes, and cements masculinity as constructed in patriarchy. What is being sold is male power over women." Therefore, it is not surprising to find that women actors seeking employment are valued for their bodies (or the collection of their body parts) for public consumption in the media and that they are vulnerable to the common instigating theme that supports sexual objectification and subsequent sexual harassment and sexual assault. This is evident in all of the women who reported being coerced into performing sexual acts and is a real example of men's complete power over women. All interviewees above expressed aggressive forms of sexual harassment up to the worst of sexual assault, rape. Bo Peep told us that she was manipulated into a kissing scene while alone in a hotel room with the director. Bunny was taken to a lead actor's private residence, where he forcefully tried to kiss her and did inappropriately touch her. Belle Paris was equated to a porn actor, and her producer inappropriately touched her and insisted she would have to have sex with him to be cast in his popular film. Patricia shared that an agent inappropriately touched her with the intent of having sex with her, and, sadly, she shared that she was followed to her hotel room and raped while at a film location. As a survivor of sexual assault myself, I can deeply empathize with the short and long term emotional and psychological trauma that these actors endure. Here, the men in the film industry took advantage of the women actor's vulnerabilities and violated them, knowing that they hoped to be able to land and/or keep an acting role.

Biases

In this study, biases represent a person's prejudice and bigotry toward or against another person. Biases often incorporate stereotypes as a negative predetermination of a person's identity rather than actual knowledge of the individual and/or their situation (Jones, 1998; Paner, 2018.) These biases utilize stereotypes as controlling imagery around physical characteristics, including women's sexuality. These biases and stereotypes bleed into the film industry and into the casting process to create further barriers of prejudgments and discriminatory practices, particularly for women of color actors.

Racism and Stereotypes

This subtheme investigated women of color actor's experiences in the film industry, specifically during the casting process, and the racism that exists in the industry. Many interviewees spoke about their personal experiences of racism and racist behaviors within the film industry. Previous research has shown that people of color are historically underrepresented and are subject to negative stereotyping (Bell, 2004; Paner, 2018; Eschholz, Bufkin, and Long, J., 2002.) Although this study included only four women of color actors, two African Americans, one Chinese American, and one Korean American, their experiences were powerful and valuable, prompting the need for further research in this area.

China Doll's experience's in the casting process disclosed racist practices within the casting decision-making process. She told me:

In casting they… would call it the black up because, like okay this is our

first choice, the white people, but if we have to go ethnic, here's the black

people that we would choose. Not always black, but there's the Asians. If

the white people don't work out, we'll go with the Asian couple. If we

need diversity, here's the Hispanic couple. It's called the black up.

China Doll's experience with the casting practice of tossing aside women of color

actors into monogenous groups based on generalized ethnicity subjects her to both

external and internal marginalization and dehumanization. This practice that chips away

at an actor's self-worth and confidence create further barriers to a successful career.

In another example, Billy Holiday shared a common racist casting practice

that persists in maintaining negative and controlling stereotypes. She told me:

Sometimes you go in for a role, and they'll say, 'Can you be more urban?

Could you be more black? Could you be more ghetto?' I have had

experiences where they'll say, 'She doesn't act black enough,' and that's

been from my own community as well as from the white community. Just

casting, they don't understand - if you walk in like me, normal, this-

'normal.' Not a stereotype. If I don't come in as a stereotype, then

immediately they say, 'Oh, she can't play this.'

Billy Holiday's battle to be considered for various acting roles is thwarted by the

racist stereotyping in casting that demands her to portray either the Mammy, Jezebel, or

Sapphire if she expects to be hired as an actor. This sends the message that who she is,

her body, her color, her everything, is not valuable unless the white male gaze can control

her. She added to this point describing the fear of losing a job for being too much of a

stereotype: "If you're too strong or too smart, you seem to be a bitch, or too aggressive.

You don't want to come off as ...a sapphire." The double standard of playing and

embodying a stereotype to win a role is, at the same time, a great risk for being dismissed

from consideration due to the negative implications attached to the stereotype.

China Doll's experiences as an Asian American actor presents its own unique set

of oppressive stereotypes under the white male gaze:

I think it's very unique being an Asian actor. …always professional roles.

Always the nurse or the doctor or the lawyer, and if not that I remember, I

got hired for a one-hour drama as a sweatshop worker turned prostitute.

That's something only Asian actresses can play. Stereotypes. I truly feel

that we're just meeting a quota for the networks, not principal roles…we

have the one-liners and the two-liners. …principal roles even as recent as

five years ago, like they're just, they're all white.

As China Doll describes, the stereotypes of Asian women pigeonhole her as an

actor and hinder her ability to play deep and meaningful characters while forcing her to

take a back seat to white actors who are always considered for the coveted principal roles.

The research tells us that women of color are often presented as unempowered,

marginalized, and removed from the center of privilege and status and that stereotypes

are used to reinforce racist hierarchies (Jones, 1998.) Images of women of color actors in

the media are often negative stereotypes, such as the Jezebel, Sapphire, and Mammy put upon African American women, and the dragon lady, Suzy Wong, or china doll put upon Asian women placing them a situation of being typecast (Bell, 2004; Paner, 2018.) The women of color actors in this study identify experiencing racism in the casting process and being cast into racist stereotypes that hinder and decrease their abilities to gain meaningful acting roles. China Doll shared that a common practice in the casting process is to apply something called "black up," which refers to casting actors of color as second, third, and other choices if there were no white actors available for the role. Billie Holiday spoke candidly about her casting experiences asking her to be "more black" and telling her she does not act "black enough." She also told me she was careful not to be too strong of a personality for fear of being stereotyped as a sapphire. China Doll also referred to typically auditioning for roles that are Asian stereotypes, in particular getting hired to play "a sweatshop worker turned prostitute." Stereotypes not only affect women actors negatively as individuals but also negatively affect representation, adding to racism and racist practices. For women of color actors, the intersection of race and sexual objectification is exacerbated through the lens of the white male gaze. They are subjected not only to being sexualized in racialized ways; i.e., hypersexualized jezebel, sweatshop worker turned prostitute, but are sexually objectified for their gender through the male gaze.

Gender, Age, and Body Image

Another bias subtheme that presented in the data were barriers around gender, age, and body discrimination, particularly sizeism. Gender disparity is evident in statistics

that recorded only twelve percent (12%) of movies feature half its characters as female characters from 2007 to 2016 (Perrone, 2018). Women's marginalization in film had been like the elephant in the room – everyone knew it existed. Then, in 1985, Alison Bechdel compiled a measure of representation for women in scripted film called the "Bechdel test" which asked: do films have at least two female characters, do they talk to each other, and do they talk about something other than a man (Selisker, 2015.) The data also shows that female characters starting in their 30s to their 40s experience a steep decline in numbers in film representation compared to male characters and age discrimination in the worsens as a women age further (Lauzen, 2018.) Additionally, women's ability to be hired for an acting role hinges on whether they possess a body-type deemed desirable by the male gaze. Several of the women interviewed shared their experiences and expert perspectives on the lack of significant acting roles and the difficulties and barriers they encountered regarding their age and body image. Additionally, one woman of color actor expressed racialized body shaming.

Age and Ageism

Ageism is a barrier that consistently impedes women actors from regularly being cast in film and television roles. The opportunities to audition for female roles diminishes as their age increases due to the lack of older female character development by Hollywood writers, thus creating more competition. Again, all of the women interviewed expressed negative experiences with ageism in the casting process, shaped as it was by gender and race. I have included many of the interviewee's responses to emphasize the negative impact that ageism has had in their struggle to build careers as an actor. Patricia told me: "Casting doesn't come around as often when you're over 50. It appears to me that

there is no level of appreciation for the hard work and experience for somebody of a certain age." Marceline discussed how being typecast restricted her talent: "I get a lot of the MILF roles and cougar roles and the sexy mom roles and the crazy, quirky, older girlfriend roles. I'm stuck in that right now... I am capable of so much more, but I'm not being looked at as being capable." Carrie told me: "There are so few roles for strong older women. It's unbelievable to me. But I guess the public in general just doesn't want to see older women or something." Bunny told me: "I think women actors really lose their power as they get older. Age is the number one deterrent for me getting a job." Patricia, Marceline, Carrie, and Bunny all spoke of the lack of roles and appreciation for any age experience they may bring to an acting role, and how ageism disempowers them in the film industry.

Gigi told me: "When I moved out here at 27, I was told I was too old. There is a prejudice against women who are over 27. They're telling you just as you're getting started that it's over." Bo Peep told me: "People would lie about their age at the time, and I never did. Now, I'm seeing it's a problem. A lot of casting calls have come up, and they're like, 'Oh, you'd be so great for this, but you're six years too old, seven years too old." Lulu Lustig told me: "I was just hitting 41…I was playing 30, but when my age was on IMDB [Internet Movie Database] it was almost impossible to book readings for roles that were in their 30s. There's a lot of roles for 15 to 29, and those are the majority of women roles… That's true, and I think that's because it's a patriarchal studio system still." Jester shared her dilemma of landing acting jobs once her age was revealed. She told me:

When you hit 40, there are much fewer roles because the industry is

geared towards people in their 20s, and unfortunately, it's still geared

towards male audiences… I can look 40, but I can also look 34, but

unfortunately, the way the business is now if my agents put me forward

for a job, they'll immediately look at IMDB and see my age and say, 'Oh

no, this character is 35. She can't play that.' The things that are offered to

me now are cop on a cop drama or a doctor in a hospital show if I'm lucky,

or mom of an 18-year-old, always secondary to the male. It's challenging.

Gigi, Bo Peep, Lulu Lustig, and Jester all reinforced the age discriminatory

practices within the film casting system and revealed that once their ages were discovered

from IMDB, they were limited to playing an age range that a skilled actor would typically

be able to perform. As women actors age, they are not considered desirable or valuable in

the film industry. Through the lens of the male gaze, women are no longer beautiful or

sexy and are easily marginalized until they are discarded altogether.

Body Image

For female actors, having the "ideal" body for film and television is to have a

body that is approved for consumption by the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975.) In order to land

an acting role, female actors are pressured to strive for and maintain that "ideal" body

type. It is a considerable barrier to gaining employment and sets women up for lifelong

emotional and psychological issues of self-esteem and body image. The objectification of

women's bodies as sexual objects and body parts for the consumption of the male viewer

positions women actors to be under extreme scrutiny during the casting process

(Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997.) The actors I interviewed shared their struggles with

body image in the film industry.

Bo Peep told me: "We sit down at lunch and people watch what you eat. So, I'm just going to eat a little bit of salad and a little bit of watermelon. Everyone is staring at you at whatever you eat. Body issues are a big problem." Jester told me: "Body image, absolutely tough…being in front of millions of people who are giving opinions about what your body should look like… that maybe you should get your boobs done." Gigi told me: "LA is more driven on, 'Are you the perfect body?'…it's an assault really on the female population, especially with our bodies and what is considered perfection… There's pressure also for plastic surgery to look a certain way. Men don't have that same pressure. Men aren't expected to get Botox. Men are considered sexier as they get older." Ms. Tomato told me: "…unless you're playing the funny sidekick or the PTA mom where size doesn't matter, it's always going to exist – to maintain a thinner physique. Now it seems like it's even more so. All the movie stars, who are almost anorexic." Bo Peep, Jester, Gigi, and Ms. Tomato spoke about the pressures to stay thin and police their eating habits to lose or maintain weight, as well as having to navigate constant messaging to consider plastic surgery and Botox for themselves. Additionally, male actors were not held to the same body image standard. Betty Holiday experienced discrimination based on both her body shape and size. She told me:

> You'd be horrified by how they pick apart someone's looks. Like, 'She's not hot enough, or her nose is too big, or her smile is too wide."' On set, they'll always have smaller clothes available. Because more small women are portrayed on film now, they're not eating, so a curvy girl shows up, and it's like a big deal to have to adjust. 'My God, a size six, showed up!'

For Betty Holiday, who identifies as African American, her experience of the casting process' critiques is something horrifying. Additionally, the othering on a set of being a curvy actor plays into the stereotype that Black women's bodies are deemed fat, ugly, and less feminine and sends a negative self-image message of not being good enough. Black women's bodies have historically been uniquely oppressed through the intersection of race and gender, and their bodies have been viewed as less desirable compared to the male ideal of the thin, white women.

Sara shared her experience of being told she was not good enough during an audition because of her weight:

> The casting director called my agent directly, said, 'We love her. She was hilarious, she is our number one choice, but she has to lose 10 pounds. We do not think she will be able to do that by the time we start shooting because we are shooting so soon.' But there was nothing in the script about size. She is just supposed to be an attractive young woman. It was when I was mid-20s. You are meant to look a certain weight to be deemed attractive and fit into that role? What they consider attractive or what they think also middle America considers attractive.

For Sara, her ability to land an acting job was directly related to losing 10 pounds to be considered attractive for the objectifying view of the male audience and be approved by the male gaze.

Jester summarizes her observations of biases among her colleagues in the film industry throughout her years as an actor: "I've witnessed discrimination with female directors. I've witnessed it with girlfriends of mine who are powerful, strong, and talented women [actors] who can't get an agent or can't get a job because of their race or their age or their body type."

In casting today, diversity for the female actor is "defined increasingly by physical appearance, race, body type, age, gender, and sex" (Wojcik, 2003, p. 244.) Women actors are subject to extreme examinations that dehumanize and continuously reinforce the message that they are objects and ultimately not good enough. The media support this by generating and embodying environments where women are depicted in sexualized objectifying manners that portray narrow and unattainable standards of beauty (Szymanski et al., 2011.) These data demonstrate a consistent and severe lack of opportunities for women as film and television actors as they age and show how Hollywood negatively polices their physical appearance to conform with the objectifying male gaze that is perpetuated in the film and television casting process (Moradi and Muang, 2008).

Career

Many young girls may feel the spark of thespian creativity in their youth and begin to dream of becoming an actor as a career – to be a "star." The dream is filled with a future of lights, cameras, and adoration in exchange for the hard work of learning to intricately and sensitively hone a craft where you can slip into a plethora of characters and demonstrate your acting range. No matter when a woman pursues her career, there

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are benefits for being a recognized actor in film and television, and it can be attractive to be a star performer who can draw large crowds and a large paycheck. Yet, the road to "stardom" for a female actor is not only challenging in the dedication of time and effort of the craft, but it's also fraught with barriers of oppression of gender, race, age, sex, physical appearance, and body image (Wojcik, 2003.) Each of the women interviewed identified both the long- and short-term benefits and regrets to me in this study, all of which are shaped by both gender and race, as well as age.

Satisfaction, Achievements, and Benefits

Each of the actors interviewed, disclosed that she had some involvement with performing in her youth and continued to follow an organic path into acting as a career. Additionally, two actors were influenced and supported by family members who were already well-established actors. Many of the interviewees gained tangible and emotionally meaningful rewards as career actors. They found purpose and inspiration to continue in the field even when faced with many forms of oppression and bias. The ability to anchor themselves and remain optimistic when many times in their early career, satisfaction, achievements, and benefits are few and far between is commendable. They shared some of their acting career highlights with me:

Billie told me: "I'm now making a living as an actress, so that's a benefit. I have health insurance." Marceline told me: "The benefits I've received from the film industry I think there's a wonderful community feeling within the Screen's Actor Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), union." Ms. Tomato told me: "There's some incredible pension. There's medical. The quality of people in the industry

has been so great." Sara told me: "I am lucky to have health insurance through SAG." Billie, Marceline, Ms. Tomato, and Sara all speak highly of the health care coverage, pension, and union employment protection benefits they have earned in their careers as an actor. There is also a level of excitement with the camaraderie that can be present in the acting community.

Another perceived benefit shared among the interviewees was the attainment of a level of recognition for their performances. Betty Holiday told me: "People are nice to you. If you're working on a project, people are really nice to you and can say stuff like, 'Oh, I saw her on something.' Or she's treated nicely walking into a store. Automatically people are a little bit nicer." China Doll told me: "It's also fun when I have like a show running or a commercial running… like constantly, people are always saying, 'Oh, I saw you in this, I saw you in that.' That's fun too. But I think I've lived an extraordinary life. I've been able to spend time with someone of the most creative, talented people." Bunny told me: "Restaurants, getting on flights. I mean, I'm just saying there are all these perks you can't see in the future as to what they would be, but when they happen, you're so thrilled that you were in that movie." Patricia told me: "I have a pension. It gave me that. It's given me who I am. I love this business in a way. I love myself in the business. I don't always love the business part of it. I guess I needed that recognition from people, from my peers. I've won awards in things." Lulu Lustig told me: "I was probably treated a lot better than a lot of black women out there because I was in the film industry. When people recognize you. That ultimately really helped when I walk in, and they're treating me a certain way. I feel like with race, especially, I probably did not suffer certain things because I've noticed that even racist people would want to know you if they think you're

famous." The public recognition and approval received by Betty Holiday, China Doll, Bunny, and Patricia bring a real boost to their self-esteem. It is a measure of feedback and acknowledgment of their acting craft that comes with preferential treatment and privilege. Lulu Lustig added her perspective as an African American actor and points out how the privilege of recognition extends as the temporary erasure of public racist behavior.

Lulu Lustig continued by discussing the professional thrill of accomplishment in landing a part: "But nothing beats the high of booking a show… it's euphoric. I suppose there's a lot of chasing that dragon, believing at any moment something spectacular could happen." China Doll also describes her experience of accomplishment during the audition process:

I have had more fun than I think any human being is allowed to have. I remember standing in the wings going, 'I am living my dream right now. I am having so much fun.' There are moments when…stuff was coming out of me in auditions that I never thought… Where you're just like, 'I was quite brilliant there.' Then everyone's like, 'Oh my god, where did that come from?' You're like, 'I don't know!' Those are the moments I think actors live for.

Jester told me:

It's been incredible. I've had again a very blessed life. I earned a good amount of money. I mean listen, I was in my 20s, and I had dinners with presidents and hung out with the royal family in England, just like all these experiences and meeting my idols and artists that I've always looked up to and pretty much getting to meet whoever I wanted to meet, and

getting to respectfully have a conversation, not just a meeting. That's pretty amazing. I've been able to help out loved ones, been able to help out family, been able to help out friends when they've needed it. I've got a very, very lucky life. I've been able to do what I love for a very, very long time, and not many people can say that.

Jester shares a compelling history of hard-earned benefits and privileges that she has garnered throughout her acting career. Her experience represents many of the ultimate "perks" and rewards that so many aspiring actors envision a Hollywood star can attain – personal satisfaction, public recognition, artistic expression, and financial security, to name a few.

Sacrifices and Regrets

The road to "stardom," whether the benefits ultimately manifest or not, is an extremely challenging path to travel for a female actor. More than the emotional consequences sustained via oppression of gender, race, age, sex, physical appearance, and body image, consequences surrounding painful, irreplaceable losses of family time and relationships are the hard trades they make to pursue their acting dreams. Almost all of the women interviewed looked back on their careers and discussed their sacrifices and regrets.

China Doll told me: "I really think women feel sacrifices more – sacrifice of families, sacrifice of men, marriage, and family. We make so many sacrifices as actors. I'm going to cry a little bit. I could have gotten married and have been a mother and had a

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secure life very easily. I've turned that down." Lulu Lustig told me: "I feel like I would have had a family. I might have gotten married. …I feel like I literally put a career before anything." Bo Peep told me: "Sacrifices that I've had to make, obviously, relationships. It hurts because I want to have a family, and I want to settle down. It's like here; you can't really have a serious relationship. That's definitely ...a huge sacrifice." China Doll, Lulu Lustig, and Bo Peep regret the loss of building relationships and creating families.

Sara told me: "I have had to sacrifice my family back East. My time with them. It is a huge sacrifice because they mean so much to me." Marceline told me: "…my children sacrificed a great deal of time with me as I was chasing the dream." Billie told me: "I've thought about this a lot over the years. The hardest thing for me is having to be so far away from my parents." Bunny told me: "I remember all the Thanksgivings and things that I blew off for one line in some stupid piece of shit, thinking, 'Oh, my God, I'm going to get my SAG card, so I'll blow off Thanksgiving,' and you look back. You're like, 'I can't believe I blew off my family for this piece of shit job.' That's the big sacrifice." Sara, Marceline, Billie, and Bunny all expressed deep regret at having to give up time with their families to continue auditioning and working on inconsequential roles.

Jester described an overwhelming loss of personal relationships and temporary loss of identity when she told me: "I didn't have a life. I lost my relationship with a great number of friends and family for a period…and I lost myself. I didn't know who I was." Belle Paris' frightening experience with potentially dangerous fans caused her to create a pseudonym for protection. She told me: "Oh gosh, I've had to change my name. I can't be on social media with my real name, not because I have fans. It's because I have a few creepy fans."

Having to take unimportant acting roles is not the only difficultly working in film. Patricia discusses the issues around lack of childcare and sick leave as a non-principal actor on a film set and the consequences she bore as a result. She told me:

> I was single-minded about being an actor. I moved heaven and earth to do it to the detriment of my husband. Having my children, I thought that was going to be the detriment of my career. I was going to have an abortion when I found out I was pregnant. I didn't really want to get an abortion. I became this incredible mother, one that I am very proud of and put my career for the first and only time behind them. Support for mothers? None whatsoever, none. They do not care. If you're an A-lister and you're opening a movie, they provide all kinds of childcare…but the day player whose there for a few days or a week, forget about it. They don't want to know if you've got kids who are sick at home. They want you to shut-up, do your work, get out of there. They treat you nice, but you get the sense that you really are just a piece of meat that they are using to further their film. In order to further your career, you're given the impression that you don't make waves, that you don't ask to have your basic needs covered as a mother or if you get sick. It just means you're going to lose that position or that role. I got sick on a shoot one time for a documentary after lunch, and I just went ahead and did it. I was throwing up. We will do anything to keep a job because you don't want it to get back to anybody like your agents.

The pressures to meet the male gaze, and the daily sexual objectification the female actor faces to continue and build on her presence in film and television negatively affect the female psyche. Carrie told me:

> I remember going up to a producer's house. The whole situation was very uncomfortable. It was him and another guy, and they wanted me to take off my shirt, and I wouldn't, because the role required nudity, but that has nothing to do with it. That was one of the more pivotal moments in my decision to leave acting. … my discomfort seemed like the problem was me, not a problem with them. I basically decided that I wasn't willing to be a part of that whole game. It was a bad scene for me. I became really promiscuous for a while and got really into coke in the late 80s, early 90s. It just was a really bad scene for me; I didn't have the coping skills to navigate my way around all of the pressure being thrown at me. I became anorexic. I became such an object in my own head that I lost myself completely... I was so desperate to become what I thought was the ideal or whatever… I crashed a Maserati. It was really bad. I wouldn't go back. I became nothing basically. I lost myself. I was this shell. It makes me emotional.

Borcherding and Filson tell us that most incoming actors are indistinguishable from each other and that newcomers are willing to accept low wages and minimal benefits because "success in the movie business, although rare, is rewarded very highly" (2001, p. 26.) Thus, this potential to earn great privileges and recognition creates a powerful "superstar" effect that fuels an actor to invest their lives in "chasing the dream."

Yet, the road to stardom is elusive and comes with no guarantee. The levels of satisfaction, achievements, and benefits for female actors are weighed out individually against the sacrifices and bearable regrets they endure. Mulvey (1975) describes cinema as a place where ego ideals are produced through a star system by sexually objectifying women actors and subjecting them to a controlling gaze. As women actors navigate their working spaces around biases within the film industry, it serves as a bit of hope to look to the dreams of being a "star." My participants consciously weighed the benefits and risks to this career path and recognized the sacrifices they had made along the way in their pursuit of stardom.

Acts of Resistance

With all the external glitz and glamor of Hollywood, the reality behind the film industry is that it under-represents women while the casting process for women actors to secure meaningful roles is besieged with sexually objectifying challenges (Robinson, 2007, WGAW, 2017-18.) With powerful and controlling men running the shots, it can appear that any acts of resistance by women actors may be inconsequential. However, as evidenced by the reemergence of the #MeToo movement in 2017, women in film have taken up arms and pushed back against sexual harassment and assault (aka the casting couch) and continue to organize and dismantle the many other forms of oppression within the industry. Gigi talks about the growth in women-run productions and her concern that it may not be enough within a male-dominated system.

Gigi told me:

…Women are taking control and making their own stuff. I think that there

is a generation now that is pushing to show older women in roles…that

more and more women are directing, and more and more women are

producing, and more and more women are writing. I don't know that those

are the people that are breaking into the studio systems and getting heard

as much, let me just say because it's very "good old boys."

Billie notes an improvement in incorporating difference in films and how she

fights systems of oppression by choosing roles that carry a social justice message for

change:

I think it's changed in the last twenty years. There is a movement and

acceptance… It's getting better in terms of writing and embracing

different, more quality stars, and ethnicity in casting. You see heavier

women on TV now. It seems a lot of the stereotypes are finally being

broken. They are embracing LGBTQ+ folks in film… That's what artistic

expression is and being involved with projects that I have the capability to

change lives and change people's way of thinking and seeing the world. It

can change people's lives, even one person. I want to be a part of making

the world a better place.

Jester identifies the necessity for women actors, and women in film to band

together and the steps she took to support her acting community:

It's about people standing together… at least communicating about it and

acknowledging the issue and trying to come up with solutions. It's about

us needing to gather and… to figure it out. I joined Women in Film. Its

women supporting women, so directors, actors, writers, we'll do

conferences for younger or people in the business who are trying to learn,

and it's about supporting them.

Jester also shared powerful insight into the film industry from a close female

filmmaker:

She's making six films at the moment, and she said, 'I got to tell you,

there's one film… I know for a fact that if I get it made, it will be the most

successful film, but it's female-directed, female-written, female stars.' She

said, 'The amount of work that I have to do...is at least 20 times more

compared to other films, which aren't good.' She said, 'I will get it made.

I'll do everything I can.' It's nice to hear that there are a few women up

there who are fighting for it…

All of the women acknowledged the need for a more substantial, more equitable

presence in the film industry and the women of color actors expressed the deep need to

break typecasting stereotypes and create more roles that center and empower their stories.

They expressed further ways to engaged in acts of resistance – joining Women in Film,

supporting younger/newer female actors, taking on roles in films that center marginalized

groups, and recognizing the need for more female-driven characters and female-lead

positions within the industry. It is noted that this study's interviews were conducted

before October 2017 when actor Alyssa Milano retweeted sexual assault activist, Tarana Burke's #MeToo hashtag that ignited many female actors voices to speak up about their personal victimization with the casting couch in Hollywood (Ohlheiser, 2017, Swan, 2017).

Conclusion

My interviews suggest that multiple barriers exist within the film industry's casting process for female actors. To gain employment, women actors are subjected to negative and controlling pressures of the male gaze's objectification as well as sexual harassment and sexual assault via the "casting couch." Additionally, biases of racism, stereotypes, gender, age, and body image create further circumstances that oppress and hinder women from attaining meaningful roles. It is also observed that the sacrifices they made in pursuing an acting career carried long-term regrets for these women actors. Based on this evidence, the next chapter suggests ways that women actors and the film industry can take action to dismantle the systemic oppression of women and women of color actors in the industry and help create a safe and equitable working environment.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter contains the research summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further research. It identifies the gender disparity in the Hollywood film industry, the continued exposure of sexual harassment and sexual assault initiated by the #MeToo movement, and the need to further build alliances. It will addresses implications for further research on ageism in film, women of color actors, and queer actors.

Summary of Findings

The overarching aim of this study is to examine the personal experiences of women actors in auditioning for roles in major motions pictures, independent motion pictures, and/or television, and identify the barriers erected by intersecting systems of sexism, racism, ableism, heterosexism, classism, and ageism and the ways women encounter these barriers. Women actors are underrepresented in the film and television industry, and women of color even more so. This study inquires about the actor's career aspirations, accomplishments, and perceived failures to answer the following two questions: 1) What are the barriers women actors encounter when seeking roles in the film and TV industry? 2) What are the circumstances and consequences of these barriers?

In order to find answers to these questions, this thesis utilized qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured, in-depth interviews of 15 diverse female actors who share the experience of seeking employment in the film industry via the casting process. After carefully considering the aim and questions of this thesis, I decided on

twenty-six non-sequential, open-ended interview questions to allow the participants space

for more in-depth personal reflection and to share stories related to their experiences in

the film casting process. The Explanation of Research and Protocols for data collection

was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Oregon State University. I

traveled to Los Angeles on two separate occasions in September 2014 and conducted the

final interview via Skype in January 2015. Each participant chose their own pseudonym

to protect their identity. The interviews lasted between 33 and 82 minutes and were

recorded and transcribed for the coding and analysis of this thesis. Personal observational

notes on facial expressions and body language were also noted and interpreted in the

analysis process.

Each of the women interviewed works or has worked in either film, television, or

both and has experience in the audition/casting process to gain employment. All of the

women experienced some form of being analyzed and objectified negatively during the

casting process, and the four women of color actors interviewed each expressed

experiencing the intersecting oppression of the racist male gaze. Fourteen out of the

fifteen interviewees identified as having experienced sexual harassment during the

casting process and all of them knew of multiple other women who had been sexually

harassed which is in line with previous research (Mulvey, 1975, 2019; Kaplan, 1997,

2013; Hollinger, 2012; McCabe, 2013.) Of the fifteen interviewees, eight of the women

disclosed experiences of sexual assault. Four of the interviewees identified as women of

color and experienced multiple forms of racism in the casting process, and all the women

have experienced gender parity in the film industry and discrimination based on gender,

age, and body image. For research question one, it was found that the barriers facing

women when they seek roles in film and television are sexual harassment, sexual assault, racism, ageism, looksism, and gender discrimination. In regard to research question two, the study found that all the women recognized the potential benefits of financial security, artistic creativity, and different levels of privilege and recognition, but also acknowledged deep regrets and great sacrifices building/maintaining relationships. Additionally, due to the intersecting oppression of racism, the women of color actors' successes were harder earned, and their sacrifices and regrets more painful due to the difficulties of managing racist casting practices in the film industry. All of the women recognized the need for a more substantial and equitable presence in the film industry, including abolishing racist, ageist, and body discrimination hiring practices. Several of the women actors in this study engaged in various acts of resistance, such as: joining women in film organizations, supporting younger/newer female actors and women in film, and supporting roles that represent marginalized groups. Each of the themes I found provided significant examples of the experiences that women face every day with the casting couch, and these are concluded below.

Conclusion

Women actors in the film and television industry are often depicted in roles that are designed to support the male actor that are objectifying and subordinating. These roles are filled by a competitive casting process entrenched in systems of oppression that determine the character casting directors will seek to fill (Borcherding and Filson, 2001.) This same casting structure dictates the personalities female actors must portray to compete for the roles. An aggressive audition process regularly demands sexist, racist,

and other discriminatory casting calls that can subject women to sexual harassment and sexual assault (the casting couch), resulting in long- and short term personal, emotional, social, familial, and career challenges.

As women actors pursue employment in the male-dominated television and film industry, they must step into racist/stereotypical, sexist, and ageist roles, meet impossible image-driven beauty standards, and sacrifice family, yet rarely are their experiences considered under an analytical lens. This research has identified barriers that women actors encounter in auditioning and being cast for film and television roles. It has shown that the effects of this process subjugate and impedes their career progress while creating painful and life-altering consequences.

Recommendations

Seeking an agent and/or manager to represent them and attending casting calls is an expectation of a career in acting. Negotiating these spaces without the threat of sexual harassment/sexual assault can be challenging. As the #MeToo movement exploded in 2017, women actors gathered in force (Zacharek, 2018.) They exposed their experiences with sexual harassment and sexual assault by powerful men in Hollywood, such as convicted predator, Harvey Weinstein. Now is the right time and the right place during this anti-violence zeitgeist to end sexual abuse in the film industry. Women in film should continue to ride the wave of the #MeToo movement and demand implementation of protocols to ensure that women actors can audition safely, without fear of violation.

The issue that women are underrepresented in the film industry and represented as marginalized and objectified characters creates massive barriers (Eschholz, Bufkin, and Long, 2002.) Gender disparity is evident in statistics that record only twelve percent (12%) of movies feature half its characters as female from 2007 to 2016 (New York Film Academy, 2018). These data demonstrate a consistent and severe lack of opportunities for women as film and television actors. Greater efforts are needed to enable equitable hiring practices in the industry, which includes employing additional women producers and writers that create more meaningful roles for women in the media. Currently, organizations like "Women in Film" and "The Geena Davis Institute," research and gather data and statistics on women's representation, and additionally, create support and mentoring groups. There is a need to not only support these institutions but also for further research and education to continue to dismantle the inequities within the current male-dominated film industry.

Implications for Further Research

While this study was small, it points to a number of significant implications for both the film and TV industry and for academic researchers who study gender and media.

1. More extensive research is needed on women of color actors, specifically, African American, Asian and Latinx, being cast in the film industry in order to identify the unique systemic racist barriers, nuanced stereotypes, and the consequences these women endure as a result.

2. Ageism is a barrier that consistently impedes women actors from regularly being cast in film and television roles. The data in this study demonstrates a consistent

and severe lack of opportunities for women as they age. All of the women interviewed expressed negative disempowering experiences with ageism in the casting process. There is limited research on age discriminatory practices in the casting process for women actors. There is a need for research that further explores the practices and consequences of ageist hiring practices for women actors.

3. The sample in this study did not represent the experiences of women actors who identify as queer. Queer women actors experience unique complications based on their sexuality in the film casting process. The currently limited research indicates that barriers exist, and further research will provide a richer understanding of the challenges they face.

In summary, the ultimate purpose of this study is to peek behind the curtains of Hollywood's casting process and examine the experiences of women actors – what does it take to be successful in film – what does it take to be a star? There is a lack of literature on female actors and little research done in this area. This study interviewed fifteen women actors, exploring their unique journeys in landing a role in the film industry. The conclusions drawn from the data help to shed light on the issues these women face in seeking employment and potentially to promote equitable change in the casting process.

It is significant to recognize that the interviews in this study took place between the summer of 2014 and winter of 2015, amidst a climate of sexual harassment and assault complacency and co-conspiracy in the film industry, and well over two years before the #MeToo movement that launched the exposure of Hollywood's powerful

sexual predators. The women actors who participated here showed great courage stepping up to share their personal experiences of the casting couch without the safety net of the #MeToo movement. Since the #MeToo movement's resurgence, the ability to report, find support and penalize the perpetrator/s of sexual harassment and assault are strongly emerging in the film community. During the 2018 Oscars, Salma Hayek, one of Harvey Weinstein's accusers, spoke about the changes the #MeToo movement hoped to bring. She told the audience, "We salute those unstoppable spirits who kicked ass and broke through the bias perception against their gender, race, and ethnicity to tell their stories." Today, the discourse and resistance to abusive practices of the casting couch are more public and sexual harassment support has strengthened within the film industry, however, it is not yet wholly transformed. There is still much to be done to protect women actors as they seek to build their careers.

Film and television play a pivotal role in society not only as entertainment but also as information for the public on power and privilege. I hope this thesis will lead to a more in-depth investigation and analysis of what women actors experience to build a career in the film industry and will serve to uncover and address the systemic oppression that creates and maintains gender biases – to see beyond the glittering lights of Hollywood, to pierce the façade of that "magical" world and reach stardom.

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