

# The Future Is Female: Understanding Film Finance Is the Key to Better Representation

Whether the problem is stereotyping, sexualisation of actresses, or simply downright exclusion, the representation of women in film has long been lacking, to say the least. From Katniss to Hermione to Rey, female characters have acted as inspirations to generations of filmgoers, so to see the lack of representation prevail is frustrating and disappointing.

For change to happen, though, we need to think about why this lack of representation prevails. Looking at the economics of the decisions that are made in Hollywood can give us a window into why, in a decade where gender equality is a subject that's discussed so much, we are seemingly slow to make progress.

Deciding a way to measure how lacking the representation of women is in the film is subjective, and requires many factors to be considered. For years, film critics have utilised what is known as the Bechdel Test, originally inspired by a 1985 comic by Alison Bechdel. To pass, films must meet the following criteria:

1. The film must have at least two women in it,
2. These women must talk to each other, about
3. Something besides a man.

The Bechdel test is by no means perfect - for example, the film *Gravity* [fails](#) because although the film is dominated by Sandra Bullock as the protagonist, she doesn't speak to any other women in the film.

While there are many ways to assess whether a film not only represents women in a positive way, the number of films that fail the Bechdel test is high. In 2016, 43.6% of films failed the Bechdel Test, in 2018, 34.4% of films failed, while so far in 2021, 27.2% of films failed. While things are certainly improving, when you compare the proportion of films that fail this test to the criteria of the test, it's concerning.

Unfortunately, risk aversion is an important part of the decision process when executives decide which films to make, and it's stating the obvious to say that films want to make money. The idea of what will make money, however, differs. A continuation of a large franchise, an adaptation of a bestselling book or a remake of a loved classic represent safe ventures. The demand is already there - these types of films have a pre-existing audience.

Essentially, when a studio can make a film that is a sure-fire success, they're likely to do that rather than take a chance on a film where the audience will not have been exposed to the characters and plot before. Films can be financed through loans, equity financing, and grants.

Equity financing is a common way of funding a movie. It involves [selling ownership of the film to investors](#), who will get a share of the profits of the film that is proportional to the ownership of the said film. The money can come from family or friends, or private sector investors looking to make a profit from their investment.

This money can come from a variety of sources, but directors and producers need to prove that the film will make enough money to give investors a return on their investment, and to pay back any loans, making a “risky” film proposition unattractive. [Tangerine Entertainment](#), a film-making company working solely with female-identifying directors, looks to change this trend. [The films they fund through their Tangerine Juice Fund](#), are female-led and empowering and want to keep us engaged with female characters that are smart, funny, and complex.

Take the many Disney remakes that have been gracing our screens, for example - stories like Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella, The Jungle Book, and others. The originals of these remakes often rely on the stereotypical gender roles that were prevalent at the time of release, not necessarily representing today’s views. Using older material to inspire new works contributes to both the lack of women on screen and sexist stereotypes when they are portrayed - after all, representation has to be meaningful. What we need is original content. Thankfully, successes such as Moana and Frozen have shown that we don’t need to rely on stereotypes, and are well-written films that have empowered so many young women across the world.

Some filmmakers are trying to increase representation but without the risk, by reversing the genders of the characters in the film. This has been seen recently in Ghostbusters and Ocean’s 8, amongst other films. Daniel Craig, star of the latest James Bond film No Time to Die, has weighed in on the debate around gender-switching characters [while responding to questions about whether a woman should be cast in the role of James Bond](#): “there should simply be better roles for women.” Female characters need to be original, authentic, and written with purpose - it’s not good enough to switch a character’s gender, and call it a day. The same goes for people of colour, those with disabilities, and members of the LGBT+ community. Minority groups need to be included in film from the outset, and not simply be an afterthought.

To see more women represented on our screens, we need more women behind the camera and in decision making, who are dedicated to female character development and creation. We also need advocates and those with power in the industry to put their money where their mouth is. Studios need to calculate so-called risks and do women justice. We must understand the features of the most successful female films, replicate them, and most of all, just like Elsa, go Into the Unknown.

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