# NO SEZISM PLEZSE -WE'RE SWEDISH

A study of gender equality in the film industry



Women In Film And Television Sweden

# WOMEN IN FILM AND TELEVISION

Some of the first filmmakers and studio powers were women. But times changed dramatically, so that by the 1970s, women were struggling for a voice of recognition and power in the television and film industries. Rather than just bemoan cruel fate, a group of women in Los Angeles decided to do something about it. Women in Film and Television (WIFT) started in Los Angeles in the 1970's and is today a global network comprised of some 40 Women In Film Chapters worldwide and over 13,000 members dedicated to advancing professional development and achievement for women working in all areas of film, video, and other screen-based media.







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#### IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SOLVE A PROBLEM WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW THE PROBLEM EXISTS

"Has gender equality gone too far in Sweden?" This is one of the most common questions I've faced over the last couple of years. In short: No. First of all, "too equal" is a mathematically impossible concept. But put that aside and look at the facts on the ground in female-friendly Scandinavia, where equal pay is still a basic struggle. In Sweden, a woman will earn \$450,000 less than a man in her lifetime. Further, recognition of rights and equal political representation is still not in place, anywhere. And in the movie business the celluloid stories are still mostly driven by leading men, while being created and perpetuated by male screenwriters, directors and producers.

Gender inequality is obviously a problem and the film industry indeed holds a responsibility. Film influences people, and therefore a conservative film industry will hamper progress.

So I, together with WIFT and four cinemas, made a campaign in 2013 to spread awareness about female representation in film. We simply made a logo for the Bechdel Wallace test to identify the films that have at least two named women who speak to each other about something other than a man. The logo stands for Approved and the films are A-listed.

The campaign is in no way the only solution to these challenges but it is a method and eye-opener that illustrates gender norms and structures. And it has made a great impact already, in Sweden and worldwide.

But in 2015, for the first time ever in Swedish film history, there were signs of something that might have been the beginning of equality: the Swedish Film Institute achieved its goal of dividing its film funding equally between women and men.

## So, what progress? Is the Swedish film industry now equal? Is our work with gender equality done? The answer to both questions is still an emphatic no.

WIFT Sweden has previously published academic studies of film quality, decision processes, distribution, and production – all of which strongly suggest that the film industry remains structurally unequal. Inequality has far deeper roots than the Swedish Film Institute's funding redistribution can reach. And that's because it isn't only a question of funding; it's also about what's shown on-screen, and especially the norms of women's and men's behavior.

In film there is no absolute measure of quality, so it boils down to the personal tastes of financiers and politicians. And many of the big guns in the Swedish film industry admit to following their gut feeling when deciding about a film, and often never factor in the social norms and structures involved.

It's impossible to solve a problem if you don't know the problem exists. This is the reason why WIFT Sweden is working to expose structural inequality, using hard facts and practical advice to steer the industry in the right direction–equality, in front and behind the camera.

The film industry is not equal, but many of us are working for positive change.

Join us!

# ELLEN

Board member WIFT Sweden Initiator to the A-list campaign @EllenTejle



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## SUMMARY

#### 1. Sweden is leading the way!

Sweden is the country closest to achieving gender equality on-screen and behind the camera.

2. The hard work of raising awareness can pay off Thanks to the Swedish Film Institute and grassroots campaigns such as the A-listed scheme, Sweden is very aware of gender issues – the reason why it has made such progress, perhaps.

3. Scripts by women are always A-listed Films by women screenwriters always pass the Bechdel-Wallace test.

4. Films by women do not sexualise women There is never any uncritical sexualisation of women in films by women directors.

#### 5. The biggest challenge is diversity

Sweden and other Western countries have a very long way to go to increase racial diversity in the film industry, both behind the camera and on-screen. Practical measures, campaigns, and studies should be the priority.



"I am proud that Sweden is leading the world when it comes to gender equality in the film industry.

It is gratifying to see that our work on gender equality in film has had such positive results, not least in the sheer breadth of ideas that make it onto the silver screen.

The question of who has the chance to make films, and what those films are about, is something that concerns us all, and remains a continuing challenge."

ALICE BAH KUHNKE Swedish Minister for Culture and Democracy



"The more film and tv a girl watches, the fewer options she thinks she has in life"

Geena Davis

"It's hard enough for children to grow up in this world. When indian children watch television... And when they see their race depicted as they are in films, their minds become injured in ways we can never know." Marlon Brando

#### PURPOSE

The point of this leaflet is to take a closer look at women's representation in recent Swedish films; to compare Sweden with other countries to see whether the campaign to improve gender equality in film is paying off; and to ask some more questions about how women are represented, and whether there is any sign of greater equality. We have chosen to talk about representation on the basis of full diversity. Our hope is that this can help raise gender awareness in the film industry, and help end the underrepresentation of women and minorities.

#### METHOD

This WIFT study was carried out by Anna Wahl, a professor of gender at KTH Stockholm, and Ottilia Wahl, a researcher in the film industry. Their source material was made up of all recent Swedish feature films that had a theatrical release in 2013. They have also used data from 2014 and 2015, along with the findings of other academic studies, including Miklo's work on the image of Sweden in Swedish film (2015), and Gender bias without borders (Smith, Choueiti & Pieper, 2014). The full study at wift.se.

#### THE ISSUES

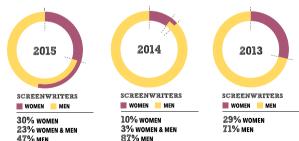
WIFT Sweden has chosen to investigate the extent to which women are represented in recent Swedish film by looking at (i) Bechdel-Wallace test results, (ii) gender distribution in front and behind the camera, and (iii) the on-screen sexualization of women, and we have also used (iv) the Chavez Perez test to identify films that have at least two non-white characters who speak to each other about something other than a crime.



## The state of Swedish film

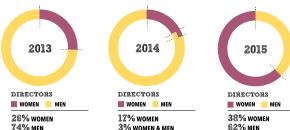
The figures show that Sweden is moving in the right direction: women are increasingly taking the lead behind the camera. The gender distribution among film directors is also becoming more equal. The proportion of films with at least one woman director was 29 % in 2013, up to 38 % in 2015. When it comes to producers, the difference is even more striking: the proportion of films with at least one woman producer was 73 % in 2015, where in 2014 it had been 40 %.

#### Screenwriters



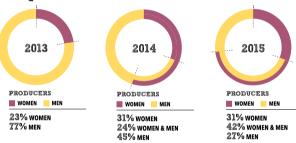
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#### Film directors

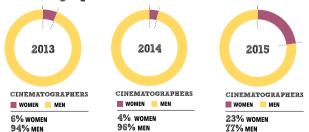


80% MEN

#### Film producers

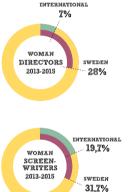


#### Cinematographers



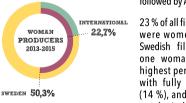
## SWEDEN COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES





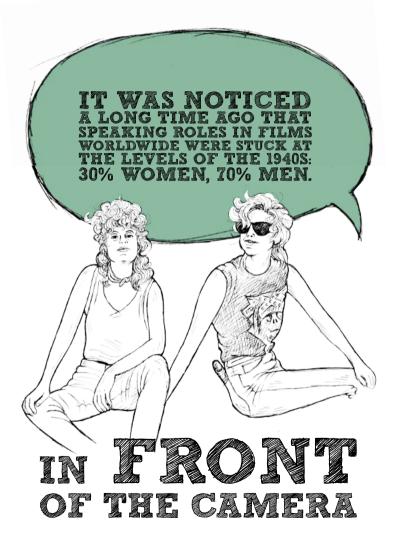
The figures confirm that there were more women behind the camera in Sweden than in most other countries for which equivalent data exist; in fact, there were often more than twice as many women in these roles in Sweden as elsewhere. That said, while Sweden is best for now, things are only stable when it comes to producers – the proportion of both directors and screenwriters tends to fluctuate. However, although it covers only a few years, the study's findings indicate that the campaign to make equality an issue, taken with the efforts of the Swedish Film Institute, is starting to yield results.

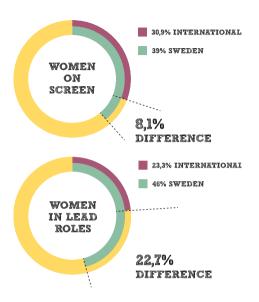




23% of all film producers in the 11 countries were women; by comparison, 40% of Swedish films in 2013 had at least one woman producer. Brazil had the highest percentage of women producers with fully 47%; Japan (8%), France (14%), and India (15%) had the largest gender imbalances.

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It seems clear from the Swedish figures, however, that wherever there are more women behind the camera, there are more women in front of it too: in Sweden, 39 % of speaking roles are women, and 46 % of lead roles.

A very recent study (Polygraph 2016) of speaking parts in over 2,000 films, however, shows that it is not only the casting that matters: in **78 % of the films, men have more speaking time than women**. This is true even in films where women have the lead roles (Pretty Woman, Mulan, Changeling, Little Miss Sunshine).

This leaflet is limited to discussing gender in terms of women and men, because unfortunately there is not yet the material to support a discussion of other genders.

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## THE SEXUALIZATION OF WOMEN IN FILM

In this study, the on-screen sexualisation of women was taken to be objectifying remarks made by a male character about a female character's sexuality, body, gender, or appearance. We examined Swedish films given a theatrical release in 2013, looking for the overt sexualisation of women by men, and found objectifying remarks in 60 % of the films. There were three distinct categories of remarks: sexist, routine, and questioned.

#### 1) Sexist remarks

The sorts of comments that represent uncritical, unthinking misogyny-a sexist joke or disparaging language directed at a female character, expressed in a way that makes the viewer party to the sexism. The man is shown as being entertaining or cool. By being sexist, he gets the viewer to sympathise with him.

#### 2) Routine remarks

Such comments reproduce prejudice against women in a credible and more neutral way, without explicitly problematizing it. In many cases it takes the form of sexist language, belittling women in general, but without being for or against the female character in the film

#### 3) Ouestioned remarks

Here it is the woman who is subjected to sexual harassment who is the subject. The viewer is invited to sympathise with her, and not with the person who is being sexist.

## PERPETUATES GENDER DISCRIMINATION

**UN-backed** study

With misogyny on show in 60 % of the films, it should be considered common. In just over a third of cases the remarks were what we would typify as routine - all of them in films directed by men. About a quarter of the films, directed by both men and women, take a critical line, calling the misogyny into question. Conspicuously, there was no sexist remarks in any of the films directed by women.

#### SEXUALIZATION IN FILMS DIRECTED BY MEN







REMARKS

Women are less visible in films, but when they are present they are exponentially more likely to be figured in sexualised terms. Roughly three times more than men saying data collected by researchers at USC Annenberg checking the 700 top-grossing films in US box office 2007-14. The research also claim that when a female producer is on board, female characters are much less likely to be depicted in sexually revealing clothing (26.4%, rather than 35.9%) or with nudity (25.1%, instead of 33.3%).

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## The **BECHDEL WALLACE test**

In 1985, the cartoonist Alison Bechdel drew a comic-strip for her series Dykes to Watch Out For in which the 'two women speaking to each other about something other than men' criterion appeared in print for the first time. In the 2000s it became known as the Bechdel test, but Bechdel herself has insisted that the correct name is the Bechdel-Wallace test, because it was her friend Liz Wallace who invented it.



### - A CAMPAIGN TO RAISE **AWARENESS ABOUT WOMEN'S** REPRESENTATION IN FILM

In order to raise the issue of women's representation in film, four cinemas in Sweden began to stamp every film they showed that managed to pass the Bechdel-Wallace test. WIFT Sweden also joined in the launch. The 'A-list' campaign guickly spread to cinemas across Sweden and caught the attention of the world's media. The A-list proved as an eye-opener for the industry and filmgoers alike – a constant reminder that women are under-representented on screen.

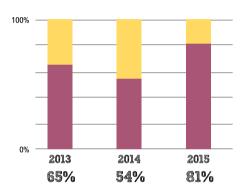
And the A-list is not only used in Sweden. As we got medias attention around the world filmmakers and cinemas started to get in touch with us. China, Brazil, Colombia, Italy, France, Spain, United Kingdom, Canada, USA, Australia, Rumania, Albania, Turkey, Iceland do all use A-list as a tool to create awareness about the importance of representation in film.



#### TO BE A-LISTED THROUGH THE BECHDEL WALLACE TEST, THE FILM HAS TO FEATURE:

- 1. At least two named women
- 2. ... talking to each other
- 3. ... about something besides men.

# SWEDISH RELEASES THAT PASSED THE BECHDEL WALLACE TEST



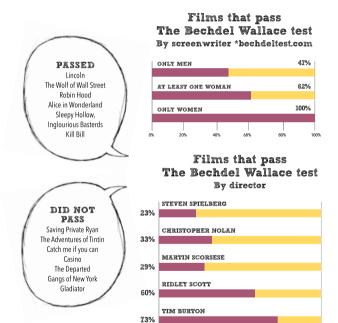
Since we launched A-list in Sweden the awareness of represention in film have increased. The results speaks for itself, more films pass the test. The slightly lower figure in 2014 reflects the drop in the number of female screenwriters that year (to 13 %) compared to other years.

Attention! Most of the films pass the Bechdel Wallace test only thanks to **ONE scene**. When a time limit have been applied at the test such as one minute of conversaton, only around 30 % will still pass it.

At www.bechdeltest.com, over 6,500 films have been assessed so far. At present 57.7 % pass on all three criteria. **Here too Swedish films do better than the international average**.

# DOES IT MATTER WHO'S BEHIND THE CAMERA?

Polygraph (a 'data-driven storytelling site') has looked at the correlation between the genders of the screenwriters and the Bechdel-Wallace test results for the 200 highest-grossing films in the US in 1995–2015.



OUENTIN TARANTINO

Yes, only male directors were highlighted in the study

87%

18 THE BECHDEL WALLACE TEST THE BECHDEL WALLACE TEST 19

"It's not about boycotting or anything. We want opportunity. We want black actors to get the same opportunities." Chris Rock

> "I feel diversity is a medicinal word that has no emotional resonance, and this is a really emotional issue. It's emotional for artists who are women and people of color to have less value placed on our worldview." Ava DuVernay

## DIVERSITY

In recent years, the question of whiteness in film has finally been raised in Sweden and internationally. The boycott of this year's Academy Awards, spread under the hashtag **#OscarsSoWhite**, was one campaign of many to highlight the problem of lack of diversity in film. Study after study shows that the whiteout behind and in front of the camera in Western countries is the rule rather than the exception.

A study by the University of Southern California looked at racial equality in America's 700 most popular films between 2007 and 2014, with the following results: **Only 0,004** % were directed by a black person • 73 % of the speaking characters were white • 12,5 % were African American • 5 % were Asian • 4,9 % had Hispanic ancestry.

In Sweden there have also been attempts to put numbers on diversity. For example, in 2014's films only **7** % **of roles went to minorities** or recent immigrants, far lower than their actual 27 % of the population, and where they did appear, it was usually in very stereotypical roles.



A test invented by the Swedish author Inti Chavez Perez has proved very useful in measuring diversity, much like a Bechdel-Wallace test but for minorities. The criterion is whether a film has two non-white people speaking to each other about something other than a crime.





TO BE A-LISTED THROUGH THE CHAVEZ PEREZ TEST THE FILM HAS TO FEATURE:

- 1. At least two non-white people
- 2. ... talking to each other
- **3.** ... about something besides crime.

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## "WE'RE ONLY A SHORT WAY DOWN THE ROAD TO FULL EQUALITY."

#### What has to be done to make the film industry more equal?

Change takes time. We at the Swedish Film Institute might seem to have achieved gender equality in only three years, but in reality that achievement is based on decades of work. There have been immense efforts throughout Swedish society to raise the issue of inequality—there have been projects (such the Doris manifesto's film Doris), academic studies (WIFT Sweden among them), and a range of campaigns to raise the profile of women in film (for example, scholarships).

Having a government that demands full equality has made the Swedish Film Institute's work relatively easy. But things are only really equal where the Swedish Film Institute is involved with the funding. Privately financed films had only 14 % women directors in the same period as Institute-funded films had 44 % women directors.

We're only a short way down the road to full equality. The most important thing we can do is to keep going—and expect to keep going for years to come. We have to lead by example, and back that up with knowledge and incentives.

The Swedish site *nordicwomeninfilm.com* is an example of the lasting effect we can have. It's not only a static resource about women filmmakers in history, it is constantly adding new filmmakers. It is open to all to contribute, and I hope it will continue to play a role in raising awareness of women role models in film.

## Why do you think Sweden is in the leading position working with gender issues in film?

I think it's because of what I said about strong political leadership and strong social action.

Our country has a long history of peace, with rapid growth and the same political direction for 40 crucial years during industrialization. We have had a series of governments that have worked hard to end inequality, and laid the foundations for full equality. We have seen Sweden become a country where since the nineties there have been as many women as men in government, and where a full-blown Feminist Party stood in the last general election. The party's success means that other political parties now claim to be just as feminist. In fact, we now have a feminist government, and they're adamant that they expect all of us to work for full equality. Even the opposition in Sweden shares much the same feminist values

#### What is the Swedish film industry's biggest challenge?

Improving quality, and for that we need both renewal and continuity.

The film industry needs to make sure new voices can be heard, while amplifying the voices it already has. That applies to both women and men. The financial prospects for the film industry, with its dwindling aftermarket, are not ideal. Everyone relies on Swedish Film Institute money, and public funds and other support are not enough to go round.

ANNA SERNER

CEO Swedish Film Institute sfi.se @AnnaSerner



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"I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING AGAINST 50+ WHITE MEN. IT'S SIMPLY THAT IN 2016 NOTHING CAN RATIONALLY JUSTIFY THAT THEY'RE STILL THE ONLY ONES IN CHARGE".

Pamela Pianezza is a Paris-based reporter, photographer and film curator who graduated in journalism and visual arts. She is the editor of the feminine cultural online daily Tess Magazine a freelance journalist working in UK, Canada and France. She has been selecting films for the Cannes' Critics' Week and is a member of the REC Tarragona and Fribourg IFF artistic teams.

#### What has to be done to make the film industry more equal?

Education, money, power, diversity. Give more power to more women and bigger budgets to make all kind of films and things will change gently. There're already a lot of great production companies run by women. But as long as the bigger festivals and the most important medias will be run only by white males over fifty, the way women – and especially young women – are seen in this industry will never change. Understand me well: I have absolutely nothing against 50+ white men. It's simply that in 2016 nothing can rationally justify that they're still the only ones in charge. I observed with a great curiosity how festival directors like Marit Kapla (when she was at Göteborg), Tine Fisher (CPH:Dox), Hrönn Marinósdóttir (Reykjavik) were running their festivals and their teams, and I could see that they integrated gender equality so well that they don't even need to think about it. We need more profiles like them in Southern Europe.

## Why do you think Sweden is in the leading position working with gender issues in film?

I'm not naive, I know that Sweden isn't the paradise of gender equality yet. But it is definitely much closer to it than the Mediterranean countries I come from. And, maybe more important, Sweden is perceived by a large part of the world as a model to follow, which brings extra responsibilities. Because Sweden is already experimenting to understand what could lead to a real gender equality in daily life, this is also the best place to just go further and investigate what could bring a better gender balance in film. I see Sweden as a bold laboratory whose discoveries are awaited by the rest of the world.

#### Do you see any positive trends in France?

For sure things are changing but to slowly to my taste. Of course, they're wonderful associations and independent medias doing a hard and courageous work fighting the unbearable clichés regarding the role women can hold on a film set, the kind of films they should do or how they should be represented on screen. But the mainstream medias, despite their opportunities to reach the widest audiences, are stuck with their old habits, probably still thinking like in the 60s that cinema is the art of making pretty girls do pretty things: they love to use the word "feminism" as a trendy accessory, but to get the cover of a film magazine you still need to be a gorgeous actress or, if you're a director, you have to be a man or Jane Campion.

## PAMELA PIANEZZA

Reporter, photographer and film curator **tessmag.com** 

@PamelaPianezza



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### "THE DIALOGUE HAS INCREASED IN THE UK AND CALLING FOR 50/50 FUNDING ACROSS GENDER"

Jemma Desai is Film Programme Manager at the British Council and a programme advisor for BFI London Film Festival. She is also the founder of I am Dora, a curatorial initiative that explores how women relate to one another through the medium of film.

#### What has to be done to make the film industry more equal?

I think there are many answers to this. One approach is the option which tackles the disparities between male v female, ethnic minority v white, straight v queer etc. This approach addresses real concerns over pay, the inequity of parenting and contribute to a more equal society but often reflect the needs of the kind of women who have the voice in the room. In the UK these voices are often from the middle classes and they are often white. This approach can miss the richness and contradiction within the female population in the UK.

Another is a more fragmented approach, the benefits of which are harder to measure. This more abstract option has a sprawling canvas: from transparency around funding decisions - and being willing to have a dialogue on possible unconscious bias in the methodology of these decisions - all the way to creating dialogue between practitioners from a variety of backgrounds and widening our understanding of 'audiences' and 'quality' of work.

#### Do you see any positive trends in the UK?

There is an increased dialogue about how screen content in all forms (including our news media) has a profound influence on our society. Independent film clubs and a new generation of young filmmakers are working outside of

institutions and funding bodies to create new work and are more comfortable with an activist led approach to reaching gender parity and diversity.

Directors UK just published a report highlighting a 'unconscious, systemic preference for male directors' and calling for 50/50 funding across gender and Raising Films is highlighting the impact that motherhood has women's career choices. The British Film Institute (BFI) is rolling out a 'three ticks' scheme to support parity of gender and ethnic background and initiatives such as the Independent Cinema Office's Women's Leadership and Film FEDs schemes are tackling the paucity of female and people of colour decision makers.

Here at the *British Council*, we are in the midst of celebrating a great British white male - William Shakespeare - with a tour of British Film inspired by his stories. When we initially saw the list of films that we had available to tour, we were struck by the lack of gender parity. We decided to team up with funding body Film London and dreamt up the 'Shakespeare's Sister' initiative. We gave two female filmmakers funding and support to showcase their talent, with films inspired or informed by Shakespeare's plays, poems, characters or life. Interventions and collaborations such as these between decision makers, practitioners and audiences to creatively address imbalance are exciting and I would hope a sign of some better statistics in coming years.

## JEMMA DESAI

Film Programme Manager at the British Council Programme advisor for BFI London Film Festival film.britishcouncil.org/ @dorabyiemma



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## "WOMEN ARE NOT GIVEN THE SAME TYPE OF ACCESS TO MONEY AS MEN. GIVE WOMEN ACCESS TO CAPITAL"

Melissa Silverstein is a writer and speaker with an extensive expertise in the area of women and Hollywood. She is the founder and editor of Women and Hollywood, one of the most respected sites for issues related to women and film. She is the Artistic Director and co-founder of the Athena Film Festival - A Celebration of Women and Leadership in NYC.

#### What has to be done to make the film industry more equal?

There are many things that have to be done to make the film industry more equal. The entertainment business has multiple layers of sexism and when you peel away one layer, there is another layer to get through. Here are some things that need to be done:

- 1- Give women access to capital. Women are not given the same type of access to money as men. They are not seen as competent and reliable. That has to change.
- 2- Interview and hire women for open directing jobs. If women can't get in the room then they can't get the jobs. Women need to get into the rooms.
- 3- Have confidence in women's stories- there is a belief that stories about women are not commercial even though all the data supports that they are. Those are just a couple of ideas. There are many more.

## Why do you think Sweden is in the leading position working with gender issues in film?

Sweden is leading on this issue because a decision was made at the top of the Swedish Film Institute that this was an organization wide priority. Sweden has shown leadership through its funding. In the US the funding is not centralized so this is difficult to achieve. But the fact that people in charge have made gender equality a priority is key.

#### Do you see any positive trends in the US?

The positive trend I see in the US is the conversation and the activism. It's happening everywhere. The numbers need to follow and unfortunately they have not yet shown improvement.

## MELISSA SILVERSTEIN

founder and editor of
Women and Hollywood
Artistic Director and co-founder of
the Athena Film Festival
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"The media is a monumentally important influence in our lives, whether we want it to be or not. We all absorb it, whether or not we're trying to. Who are we to deprive young men and women with an image that doesn't look like them?" Simone Ritchie

## DO YOU KNOW ANY A-LISTED FILMS?



#### THE BECHDEL WALLACE TEST

- 1. At least two named women
- 2. ... talking to each other
- 3. ... about something besides men.



#### THE CHAVEZ PEREZ TEST

- 1. At least two non-white people
- 2. ... talking to each other
- 3. ... about something besides crime.

www.a-listfilm.com Twitter/A-list campaign Facebook/A-list Mail: info@wift.se