

The Women in Film Leadership Framework: Advancing Gender Inclusion in Media Production

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores gender inequality in leadership roles within the film industry and introduces the Women in Film Leadership Framework as a strategic solution to advance gender inclusion in media production. Through a comprehensive review of the barriers women face, including structural, cultural, and institutional challenges, the paper highlights how these obstacles hinder women's representation in key leadership positions. The research provides an in-depth discussion of gender theories, leadership models, and the development of a conceptual framework that includes key components such as mentorship programs, gender-sensitive leadership development, and equal representation in decision-making bodies. The paper further explores the practical application of the framework in film production environments, offering actionable strategies for film studios, production companies, and industry organizations to foster more inclusive, gender-diverse leadership. The findings emphasize the importance of a holistic approach to dismantling systemic barriers, promoting equitable practices in hiring and promotion, and enhancing work-life balance support for female leaders. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for stakeholders including policymakers, film studios, and universities, aiming to institutionalize gender-inclusive leadership initiatives and transform the future of film production. By implementing these strategies, the industry can move towards a more inclusive, representative, and equitable future, improving the leadership structure and reshaping the media narratives and creative content produced.

KEYWORDS: Gender inclusion, film leadership, mentorship programs, gender-sensitive leadership, women in media, film industry reform.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of Gender Inclusion in Film

The film industry has long been characterized by gender imbalances, particularly in leadership roles, which has perpetuated a lack of diverse narratives and perspectives in media production. Historically, women in film have faced significant barriers to entry into key positions such as directors, producers, and executives. Despite some progress in recent years, gender disparity remains a deeply rooted issue (Akinbola, Otokiti, Akinbola, & Sanni, 2020). According to various industry reports, women represent a small fraction of film directors, writers, and producers, with the majority of leadership roles still predominantly occupied by men. The underrepresentation of women in leadership not only impacts the opportunities available to female professionals but also influences the stories told on screen, reinforcing limited and stereotypical portrayals of gender (Ajayi & Akerele, 2022; J. O. Basiru, C. L. Ejiofor, E. C. Onukwulu, & R. U. Attah, 2023c).

The lack of women in leadership roles within the film industry is an issue of individual career advancement and has profound implications for the diversity of media narratives. Leadership positions in film production, such as executive producers and studio heads, are key to determining what

projects receive funding, which narratives are prioritized, and how films are marketed. When leadership is dominated by a homogenous group, the resulting films often reflect that group's biases, perspectives, and worldviews. This perpetuates a cycle where certain voices, particularly those of women, are sidelined, leading to films that lack the richness of varied experiences. Thus, advancing gender inclusion in film leadership is crucial for achieving equality within the industry and ensuring that films better reflect the diversity of the audiences they aim to reach (Ekeh, Apeh, Odionu, & Austin-Gabriel, 2025c; Omokhoa, Odionu, Azubuike, & Sule, 2024d).

Given these challenges, gender inclusion in film leadership has become a topic of increased discussion and focus. There has been a growing recognition that diversity in leadership positions can lead to more equitable outcomes for women in the industry and promote a more inclusive, representative form of storytelling (Ayinde, Owolabi, Uti, Ogbeta, & Choudhary, 2021). Recent initiatives, such as introducing mentorship programs, diversity quotas, and gender sensitivity training within production companies, have created a shift toward a more inclusive environment. However, systemic barriers remain entrenched in many sectors of the industry. The significance of gender diversity in leadership goes

beyond simple equality—it can potentially transform the kinds of stories told and the roles that women can play on and off the screen. By fostering an environment in which women have equal access to leadership roles, the film industry can create a more inclusive, dynamic, and representative media landscape (Chintoh, Segun-Falade, Odionu, & Ekeh, 2024b; Eyo-Udo, Apeh, Bristol-Alagbariya, Udeh, & Ewim, 2025).

1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Paper

This paper seeks to explore the Women in Film Leadership Framework, an innovative and practical model designed to advance gender inclusion in film production leadership. The purpose of the paper is twofold: first, to analyze the existing barriers that hinder women's entry into leadership roles in film production; and second, to introduce a framework that provides actionable strategies for overcoming these barriers. By integrating theoretical perspectives on gender inclusion and leadership with empirical research on the film industry, the paper aims to contribute to the growing discourse on gender diversity in film leadership and offer tangible solutions that can be applied within the industry.

The scope of the paper will focus primarily on leadership positions within film production, such as directors, producers, and executives. These positions have the greatest influence on the direction of films and their production process, making them critical to achieving meaningful change in the industry. The framework presented in this paper will address key areas such as mentorship, access to networks, institutional policies, and organizational practices that can promote or hinder gender inclusion. This paper will also review existing initiatives within the film industry that have attempted to address gender inequality and assess their effectiveness, critically evaluating how these efforts can be enhanced or integrated into the proposed framework.

By focusing on leadership, this paper does not aim to minimize the importance of gender inclusion in other areas of the film industry, such as in technical or creative roles. However, it recognizes that leadership is often the key to driving change across all film production sectors. Thus, the introduction of a Women in Film Leadership Framework offers a systemic approach that tackles the root causes of gender disparity in leadership and presents a model that film companies, educational institutions, and industry bodies can adopt.

1.3 Justification of the Study

This research is important for several reasons, both from an academic and practical perspective. Academically, the study will contribute to the limited body of literature on gender inclusion in film leadership by offering a comprehensive, structured framework for addressing gender disparities in leadership roles. While gender inequality in the film industry has been the subject of significant scholarly inquiry, few studies offer a practical, systematic model that can be applied directly to the challenges faced by women in leadership positions. This paper seeks to fill that gap by offering a framework that draws upon both theoretical insights and empirical evidence.

From a practical standpoint, the study is highly relevant to current industry needs. The film industry is undergoing a gradual but noticeable shift toward greater diversity and inclusion, but substantial barriers still exist that prevent women from reaching positions of power. By identifying these barriers and providing actionable strategies for overcoming them, this research offers solutions that industry stakeholders can adopt to create more equitable and inclusive working environments. Film production companies, studios, and policymakers can use the insights from this paper to implement more effective policies and practices that support women in leadership, ultimately leading to a more diverse and inclusive media landscape.

Furthermore, the outcomes of this study have broader implications for the way gender representation is constructed in film and media. Integrating more women into leadership positions can alter the kinds of stories told, the characters portrayed, and the themes explored on screen. As the film industry continues to evolve, the findings of this research can help shape the next generation of leaders, ensuring that they are not only more diverse in terms of gender but also more capable of producing narratives that reflect the complexities of a diverse world.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Gender Theory in Media and Leadership

Gender theory in media and leadership provides a critical lens through which we can examine the pervasive norms, representations, and power dynamics that shape the film industry. At its core, gender theory interrogates how societal constructs of masculinity and femininity influence both the content produced and the leadership structures that govern media production. Central to this discourse is the concept of gender representation, which scrutinizes the way media, especially film, constructs images of men and women (Okon, Odionu, & Bristol-Alagbariya, 2024). Early feminist critiques, notably by scholars such as Laura Mulvey, introduced the idea of the “male gaze”—a perspective that objectifies women and reinforces a hierarchy in which men are positioned as active viewers and decision makers. This concept reveals how visual narratives often marginalize female subjectivity, relegating women to roles that serve the interests and fantasies of a predominantly male audience (Adekola, Alli, Mbata, & Ogbeta, 2023).

Expanding upon this foundation, modern gender theory integrates the notion of intersectionality, a framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw that emphasizes the multiple, interlocking dimensions of identity such as race, class, and sexuality. Intersectionality is critical in understanding that women in the film industry do not uniformly experience oppression. Instead, their experiences in leadership or creative roles are influenced by overlapping social categories, leading to nuanced challenges and opportunities (C. Ogbeta, Mbata, & Katas, 2021). For instance, a woman of color in film leadership might face not only gender bias but also racial stereotyping and discrimination, thereby complicating her pathway to

authority. This layered approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis of power dynamics within media organizations, highlighting the importance of diverse leadership that can address multiple dimensions of inequality (Abiola-Adams, Azubuike, Sule, & Okon, 2025c; Okedele, Aziza, Oduro, & Ishola, 2024d).

Feminist media criticism further enriches this dialogue by deconstructing traditional narratives and questioning the normative assumptions that underpin media production. Feminist critics argue that film has historically been a medium for reinforcing patriarchal ideologies, where women are often portrayed in stereotypical roles that limit their agency. These critiques extend beyond the screen to the very structures of media institutions (Digitemie, Onyeke, Adewoyin, & Dienagha, 2025). The leadership within these organizations tends to mirror the same biases that are depicted in their films, creating a feedback loop where male-dominated perspectives shape both the production process and the cultural products themselves. In this sense, feminist media criticism serves as a call to reevaluate what stories are told and who is telling them. It challenges the entrenched power relations by advocating for a broader inclusion of voices and experiences, particularly those of women who have been historically sidelined (Abiola-Adams, Azubuike, Sule, & Okon, 2023; Odio et al., 2021).

The intersection of these gender theories with leadership and organizational behavior in the film industry is both complex and revealing. Organizational studies have long noted that cultural norms and societal expectations influence leadership practices. When applied to film production, these theories illuminate how gender biases become institutionalized. For example, decision-making processes in film companies may unconsciously favor masculine styles of leadership—characterized by assertiveness and individualism—while undervaluing the collaborative and empathetic approaches that are often associated with women. Such biases can manifest in recruitment, promotion, and creative decision-making, thereby perpetuating an environment where women struggle to break through the proverbial glass ceiling (Hanson, Okonkwo, & Orakwe, 2024b; Sule, Eyo-Udo, Onukwulu, Agho, & Azubuike, 2024).

Moreover, these theories provide a framework for understanding organizational resistance and change. They encourage a critical examination of the status quo, prompting industry leaders to reflect on how traditional practices may exclude innovative approaches to leadership. By drawing on gender theory, film institutions can dismantle outdated paradigms and adopt strategies promoting equity. This theoretical grounding supports the argument that genuine transformation in leadership structures requires policy reforms and a fundamental shift in cultural attitudes toward gender. This critical interrogation of media narratives and organizational practices lays the groundwork for more inclusive leadership models (Abiola-Adams, Azubuike, Sule, & Okon, 2025b).

2.2 Leadership Models

Leadership models that emphasize gender inclusivity are vital for understanding and reshaping the dynamics within film production. Transformational leadership and inclusive leadership are two predominant paradigms offering practical insights into effectively integrating women into leadership roles. Transformational leadership, characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate, is founded on vision, empowerment, and individualized consideration principles. Leaders who adopt this model are often seen as change agents who challenge traditional hierarchies by fostering an environment where creativity and innovation thrive (Adewoyin, Onyeke, Digitemie, & Dienagha, 2025). In the context of film, transformational leadership encourages a collaborative spirit, where diverse voices are not only heard but actively involved in decision-making processes. This approach is particularly significant given the historically entrenched patriarchal structures that have long defined film production. By focusing on personal development and a shared vision, transformational leadership provides a pathway for women to break through systemic barriers and contribute meaningfully to film production's creative and operational facets (Abiola-Adams, Azubuike, Sule, & Okon, 2025a; J. O. Basiru, C. L. Ejiofor, E. C. Onukwulu, & R. U. Attah, 2023b).

On the other hand, inclusive leadership strongly emphasizes diversity, openness, and collaboration. This model is built on the understanding that a diverse leadership team is more likely to generate a wide array of ideas and perspectives, ultimately leading to better decision-making and innovation. Inclusive leaders are committed to creating a workplace culture where differences are celebrated and every team member feels valued (Ogunyemi & Ishola, 2024). In the film industry, this means actively seeking out and nurturing talent from underrepresented groups, particularly women, who have historically been marginalized. Inclusive leadership models advocate for equitable opportunities, ensuring that policies and practices are designed to dismantle barriers to entry and advancement. This enhances creativity and aligns with broader societal shifts toward inclusivity and equality. Inclusive leaders pave the way for a more dynamic and resilient film production ecosystem by fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect (Ajayi & Akerele, 2021; Okedele, Aziza, Oduro, Ishola, et al., 2024).

Both transformational and inclusive leadership models share common ground in challenging conventional norms. They recognize that leadership is not merely about hierarchical authority but about cultivating a vision that harnesses collective potential. In film production, where creative collaboration is paramount, these models serve as critical tools for addressing gender disparities (Daramola, Apeh, Basiru, Onukwulu, & Paul, 2024). Research in organizational behavior has consistently shown that organizations led by transformational and inclusive leaders tend to exhibit higher levels of employee engagement, innovation, and overall performance. These findings are particularly relevant to film production, an industry where the rapid pace of change and the need for fresh, diverse narratives demand a rethinking of

traditional leadership practices (Hanson, Okonkwo, & Orakwe, 2024a; Ishola, Odunaiya, & Soyombo, 2024). Moreover, the application of these leadership models in film production provides tangible strategies for integrating women into leadership roles. For instance, transformational leadership encourages mentorship and coaching, enabling aspiring female leaders to develop their skills and confidence through guidance from experienced executives (Apeh, Odionu, Bristol-Alagbariya, Okon, & Austin-Gabriel, 2024b). Similarly, inclusive leadership supports the establishment of policies that promote diversity, such as targeted recruitment initiatives, unbiased performance evaluations, and supportive workplace practices that accommodate the unique challenges faced by women in the industry. These models offer practical frameworks for both individuals and organizations, suggesting that the path to greater gender inclusion lies in structural changes and a fundamental reorientation of leadership philosophies (J. O. Basiru, C. L. Ejiofor, E. C. Onukwulu, & R. U. Attah, 2023a; Hanson & Sanusi, 2023).

In addition to individual practices, the broader organizational culture plays a pivotal role in successfully adopting these leadership models. Film production companies that embrace transformational and inclusive leadership tend to foster environments where creativity and diversity are interwoven into the organization's fabric. Such cultures encourage open dialogue, continuous learning, and dismantling long-standing stereotypes that have historically hindered women's progress in leadership roles. The success of these models in other sectors underscores their potential applicability to the film industry, where a shift in leadership dynamics could catalyze broader industry-wide reforms (J. O. Basiru, C. L. Ejiofor, E. C. Onukwulu, & R. Attah, 2023; Oyenuga, Sam-Bulya, & Attah, 2025).

2.3 Development of the Women in Film Leadership Framework

The development of the Women in Film Leadership Framework represents a concerted effort to synthesize insights from gender theory and inclusive leadership models into a practical, actionable blueprint for the film industry. This framework is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional approach to redressing historical imbalances in leadership roles within film production. It draws on an extensive body of research highlighting the systemic barriers women face, ranging from deeply embedded cultural norms to structural impediments within organizations. The framework identifies these barriers and proposes concrete strategies for overcoming them, facilitating a more inclusive and equitable leadership landscape (Omokhoa, Odionu, Azubuike, & Sule, 2024c).

At its foundation, the framework acknowledges that the underrepresentation of women in film leadership is not the result of isolated incidents but is embedded in a complex interplay of social, cultural, and institutional factors. The initial step in developing this framework was to thoroughly review existing literature on gender inclusion, feminist media criticism, and leadership theories. This review revealed

recurring themes such as the persistence of the “male gaze” in media production, the significance of intersectionality in understanding diverse experiences, and the proven efficacy of transformational and inclusive leadership in fostering equitable work environments. By integrating these insights, the framework is positioned as a holistic model that addresses both the symptoms and root causes of gender disparities (Agho, Eyo-Udo, Onukwulu, Sule, & Azubuike, 2024).

One of the central components of the framework is the emphasis on structural reform. This framework aspect outlines strategies for dismantling the organizational practices that have historically marginalized women in film production. For example, the framework advocates for mentorship programs pairing emerging female talent with seasoned industry professionals. Such initiatives facilitate skill development and create vital networks that can help women navigate the often opaque pathways to leadership. In addition, the framework stresses the importance of transparent recruitment and promotion processes. It recommends the adoption of objective criteria for leadership selection and regular audits of hiring practices to ensure that gender biases are identified and corrected.

Cultural change is another critical pillar of the Women in Film Leadership Framework. Recognizing that organizational culture often reflects broader societal norms, the framework calls for a proactive reexamination of internal narratives and practices. It suggests that film production companies engage in continuous training and awareness programs that challenge stereotypical portrayals of gender and promote a more inclusive understanding of leadership. These programs are designed not only to sensitize staff to issues of gender bias but also to empower women by highlighting their unique contributions to creative and strategic decision-making. By fostering a culture that values diversity, the framework aims to shift the perception of leadership from one defined by traditional masculine traits to one that embraces a broader range of qualities and skills (Adewoyin, 2021).

The final element of the framework involves the creation of measurable benchmarks and accountability mechanisms. A robust system for monitoring progress must accompany any framework designed to promote gender inclusion. To this end, the framework outlines specific performance indicators that can be used to assess the effectiveness of implemented strategies. These indicators include metrics related to women's representation, retention, and career advancement in leadership roles. By regularly evaluating these metrics, film production companies can adjust their policies and practices to ensure they remain aligned with the goal of achieving gender parity (Ojukwu, Omokhoa, Odionu, Azubuike, & Sule, 2024; Omokhoa, Odionu, Azubuike, & Sule, 2024b).

3. BARRIERS TO GENDER INCLUSION IN FILM LEADERSHIP

3.1 Structural Barriers

Structural barriers to gender inclusion in film leadership are deeply ingrained in the film industry, perpetuating gender disparities in access to key positions of power. One of the

primary structural challenges is the unequal access to funding, a crucial element for any film production. In an industry where capital is tightly controlled by a relatively small number of predominantly male executives and financiers, women often find it difficult to secure the necessary resources to produce and direct films. Financial support for female-directed projects remains scarce, especially for women without established reputations or networks in the industry. This funding disparity restricts not only the opportunities available for women filmmakers but also the types of stories that are told, as films directed by women are often subject to more scrutiny and skepticism from investors (Nwaozomudoh et al.; C. P. Ogbeta, Mbata, & Katas, 2024).

Another critical structural barrier is the lack of professional networks, which play a pivotal role in the film industry. In many creative industries, opportunities often arise from personal connections and mentorship. However, women in film face significant challenges in accessing these networks, which male professionals have historically dominated. Networking is integral to career advancement in the film industry, as key job opportunities, such as producing roles or directing positions, are often secured through informal channels. Without the access to these male-dominated networks, women find it difficult to break into senior leadership positions or gain recognition for their work (CHINTOH, SEGUN-FALADE, ODIONU, & EKEH, 2024a).

Moreover, mentorship remains a significant challenge. Mentorship is an essential tool for professional growth and advancement, yet women in the film industry have fewer access points for mentorship compared to their male counterparts. Often, male leaders are more inclined to mentor other men, whether consciously or unconsciously, perpetuating the gender gap in leadership roles. Women in the industry may find themselves isolated or lacking the guidance necessary to navigate complex organizational structures, secure promotions, or even be considered for major projects (Ekeh, Apeh, Odionu, & Austin-Gabriel, 2025b; Leghemo, Azubuike, Segun-Falade, & Odionu, 2025).

The lack of opportunities in a highly competitive, male-dominated industry, coupled with unequal access to the resources and networks necessary for success, reinforces a structural system that systematically disadvantages women. These barriers create a difficult cycle, preventing women from rising into leadership positions and establishing long-term careers as directors, producers, and executives in film (Kokogho, Odio, Ogunsola, & Nwaozomudoh, 2025).

3.2 Cultural and Societal Norms

Cultural and societal norms profoundly impact the representation and acceptance of women in leadership roles within the film industry. One of the most pervasive societal norms is the deeply embedded stereotype of male leadership. Society often associates traits like assertiveness, confidence, and decisiveness with masculinity, while empathy and collaboration are perceived as more feminine (Alex-Omiogbemi, Sule, Omowole, & Owoade, 2024d). In the

context of the film industry, these gendered expectations can lead to a bias in leadership selection. Women who exhibit assertive leadership qualities are sometimes viewed negatively, being labeled as "aggressive" or "difficult." In contrast, their male counterparts are more likely to be celebrated for the same traits. This societal double standard reinforces the notion that leadership in film is a masculine domain, and women who enter these spaces are often scrutinized for not conforming to traditional norms of female behavior (J. O. Basiru, L. Ejiofor, C. Onukwulu, & R. U. Attah, 2023; Chintoh, Segun-Falade, Odionu, & Ekeh, 2025). Gender stereotypes also affect the types of roles and positions women are expected to take on in the industry. While women are often encouraged to pursue creative roles such as casting or costume design, they are far less likely to be considered for high-ranking roles like directing, cinematography, or producing. This is due in part to the societal expectation that women should occupy more supportive or behind-the-scenes roles, while men are seen as natural leaders. This gendered division of labor limits the scope of women's contributions to film production and reinforces the notion that leadership is outside of their purview. When women are placed in leadership roles, they often face skepticism regarding their competence and legitimacy, further perpetuating the gendered divisions within the industry (Alex-Omiogbemi, Sule, Omowole, & Owoade, 2024b, 2024c).

In addition to stereotypes about leadership, broader cultural attitudes regarding gender roles affect how women are portrayed in films. The traditional roles that women have occupied on screen—such as the supportive girlfriend, the distressed damsel, or the nurturing mother—mirror societal expectations of women's roles in the real world. These portrayals shape the public's understanding of women's place in the film industry and often lead to the belief that women are more suited to behind-the-scenes or supporting roles. As a result, both audiences and industry professionals may find it difficult to accept women in authoritative leadership roles (Kokogho, Odio, Ogunsola, & Nwaozomudoh, 2024b; Uchendu, Omomo, & Esiri, 2024).

Cultural biases also extend to the types of narratives that are considered "marketable" or "bankable." Films led by female directors or centered around female protagonists are often subject to heightened scrutiny. Female-driven narratives are frequently perceived as niche or less commercially viable, reflecting the broader societal tendency to undervalue women's stories. These biases contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, as films directed by women are less likely to receive the same level of support or recognition as those directed by men (Onyebuchi, Onyedikachi, & Emuobosa, 2024).

3.3 Institutional and Industry Practices

Institutional and industry practices also contribute significantly to women's barriers to attaining leadership roles in film production. A key example of this is the prevalence of the "old boys' club," a term that refers to informal networks and alliances that are often male-dominated and exclusive. These networks perpetuate a cycle of gender inequality by

favoring men when it comes to hiring, promotions, and decision-making within film companies. The "old boys' club" often operates through social events, private meetings, and long-standing personal relationships that are inaccessible to women, particularly those without the same connections or status in the industry. As a result, women are frequently overlooked or excluded from leadership opportunities, relegating them to lower-level positions or positions that lack real decision-making power (Awoyemi, Attah, Basiru, Leghemo, & Onwuzulike, 2025).

In addition, industry practices surrounding leadership behavior tend to be gendered, with male leadership styles typically being prioritized over female styles. In many organizational cultures, qualities such as competitiveness, individualism, and decisiveness are highly valued in leadership, often associated with masculinity. On the other hand, women may face criticism if they demonstrate leadership qualities that align with traditionally considered "feminine," such as empathy, consensus-building, or collaboration. These double standards create an environment where women must constantly navigate an unspoken set of expectations regarding how they should behave in order to be taken seriously as leaders (Leghemo, Segun-Falade, Odionu, & Azubuike, 2025; Okedele, Aziza, Oduro, & Ishola, 2024c). The lack of support systems for women aspiring to leadership positions further compounds these challenges. Unlike their male counterparts, women often do not have access to mentorship, sponsorship, or development programs that can facilitate career advancement. Without these crucial support structures, women are left to navigate a male-dominated landscape largely on their own, making it harder for them to rise through the ranks. Additionally, the lack of gender-sensitive policies, such as maternity leave or flexible work schedules, also disproportionately impacts women, especially in an industry where long, unpredictable hours are the norm. These policies often fail to recognize the specific needs of women, especially those with families or caregiving responsibilities, making it even more challenging for them to achieve leadership roles (Okedele, Aziza, Oduro, & Ishola, 2024b; Omokhoa, Odionu, Azubuike, & Sule, 2024a).

Furthermore, the gender bias embedded in industry practices also extends to the way that films are reviewed and promoted. Films directed by women are less likely to receive the same level of press coverage, awards, and distribution as those directed by men, reinforcing the idea that women's contributions to the film industry are less significant. This disparity in recognition, combined with the systemic biases present in industry practices, creates a reinforcing loop that continues to impede women's progress into leadership roles in film production (Odionu, Bristol-Alagbariya, & Okon, 2024; Oyenuga, Sam-Bulya, & Attah, 2024).

4. THE WOMEN IN FILM LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK: COMPONENTS AND APPLICATION

4.1 Framework Overview

The Women in Film Leadership Framework is designed to provide a comprehensive, structured approach for addressing

gender disparities in leadership roles within the film industry. The framework aims to create a more inclusive, equitable environment where women are represented in various production roles and empowered to occupy key leadership positions such as directors, producers, screenwriters, and executives. The framework's core principle is to dismantle the barriers that hinder women's entry into these roles by implementing systemic changes that promote gender equality (Ekeh, Apeh, Odionu, & Austin-Gabriel, 2025a).

At its foundation, the framework proposes initiatives that are designed to operate on both micro and macro levels. On a micro level, it advocates for transforming individual production environments, emphasizing creating spaces where women can thrive professionally and advance into leadership roles. On a macro level, the framework suggests industry-wide changes that can foster an environment where women are both included in decision-making processes and given the opportunities they need to excel (Kokogho, Odio, Ogunsola, & Nwaozumudoh, 2024a).

A crucial aspect of the framework is the idea of collaboration between stakeholders across the industry—studios, production companies, film festivals, and gender equality organizations—working together to create sustainable, long-term change. To do this effectively, the framework emphasizes the importance of mentorship programs, networking initiatives, and policy reforms that ensure equal access and representation of women in leadership. Furthermore, the framework advocates for incorporating gender-sensitive leadership development programs that can nurture and empower the next generation of female leaders in film (Fanijo, Hanson, Akindahunsi, Abijo, & Dawotola, 2023; Okedele, Aziza, Oduro, & Ishola, 2024a).

In addition, the framework supports the development of organizational cultures where inclusion is not only a goal but a lived reality. By fostering environments that value diversity, it aims to break down ingrained biases and discriminatory practices that hinder women's professional advancement. The result is an industry that becomes more reflective of the diverse perspectives and voices that make up the global audience it serves (Adewoyin, 2022; Apeh, Odionu, Bristol-Alagbariya, Okon, & Austin-Gabriel, 2024a).

4.2 Key Components of the Framework

The Women in Film Leadership Framework contains several key components that are designed to work in tandem to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in film. These components focus on dismantling systemic barriers and addressing cultural and structural inequalities women face in the film industry. One of the primary components of the framework is the development of gender-sensitive leadership programs that specifically cater to the unique challenges women face in leadership roles. These programs aim to provide women with the skills, confidence, and support they need to navigate the often male-dominated spaces of film production and executive leadership. Gender-sensitive leadership development involves providing women with leadership training and addressing gender biases in traditional leadership models. These programs can be

delivered through mentorship, workshops, and coaching. They should be designed to foster both hard and soft skills necessary for leadership roles, including strategic thinking, conflict resolution, and team-building. The focus is on nurturing women’s leadership potential and giving them access to the same resources and opportunities as their male counterparts (Ekeh, Apeh, Odionu, & Austin-Gabriel; Ibidunni, William, & Otokiti, 2024).

Another key component of the framework is ensuring equal representation of women in decision-making roles. Historically, women have been underrepresented in key decision-making bodies such as production companies, studios, film festivals, and distribution companies. The framework stresses the importance of creating policies that mandate gender parity in these spaces. Including women in decision-making makes it easier to ensure that their perspectives are taken into account when key choices are made about film projects, talent selection, and distribution strategies. Equal representation ensures that women can influence industry trends, hiring decisions, and even the types of stories produced. This component aims to break down the power imbalance that often leaves women out of critical industry discussions and negotiations.

Another important part of the framework focuses on addressing and eliminating the biases in hiring and promotion practices that often place women at a disadvantage. Gender bias is pervasive in film production environments, where hiring decisions may be influenced by unconscious stereotypes or gendered expectations about leadership roles. The framework advocates for clear, transparent hiring processes that are based on merit rather than gendered assumptions. This involves training for hiring managers to recognize and mitigate their biases, implementing gender-neutral job descriptions, and ensuring that women are equally considered for leadership positions. Additionally, the framework recommends developing mentorship and sponsorship programs that specifically focus on elevating women in their careers and ensuring that they are not overlooked for promotional opportunities (Alex-Omiogbemi, Sule, Michael, & Omowole, 2024; Onukwulu, Agho, Eyo-Udo, Sule, & Azubuike, 2024).

The framework also includes initiatives to improve work-life balance for female leaders in the film industry. The long hours and unpredictable nature of film production schedules can make it particularly difficult for women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities, to thrive in leadership roles. The framework calls for policy reforms that provide more flexible working hours, parental leave, and child care support, ensuring that female leaders have the resources to balance their professional and personal responsibilities. Providing adequate support for work-life balance allows women to remain in the industry and continue to contribute their leadership skills without sacrificing their personal well-being or family responsibilities. This component emphasizes the need for organizational cultures that are not only inclusive in terms of gender but also in terms of personal circumstances.

4.3 Practical Application in Film Production

The practical application of the Women in Film Leadership Framework can be seen in how it can be implemented across different levels of the film industry, from studios and production companies to individual film projects. One of the first steps in applying this framework is for studios and production companies to commit to the principles of gender equality and diversity. This can be done by adopting gender-neutral hiring practices, ensuring equal pay for equal work, and implementing gender-sensitive leadership development programs. For example, production companies can set measurable goals for gender representation in their teams, ensuring that women occupy leadership roles in key production departments, such as direction, producing, and cinematography (Onukwulu et al., 2024).

Furthermore, film festivals and industry events can play a significant role in the framework’s implementation by showcasing films directed or produced by women and providing platforms for female filmmakers to network, gain visibility, and collaborate on future projects. This also includes offering awards or recognition that specifically celebrate the work of female filmmakers, promoting the idea that women’s stories are just as valuable as those created by their male counterparts (C. Ogbeta, Mbata, & Katas, 2022).

Another practical application of the framework is the creation of collaborative networks that connect women across various film sectors. By fostering networks of female filmmakers, producers, and executives, the industry can build a support system that encourages mentorship, sharing of resources, and collective advocacy for gender equality. These networks can also serve as spaces for women to discuss challenges they face in their careers and provide mutual support in overcoming these challenges.

Finally, industry stakeholders, including government agencies, advocacy groups, and unions, can work together to implement policies that support gender equality in the film industry. These can include anti-discrimination laws, quotas for gender representation, and initiatives aimed at tackling workplace harassment. The framework suggests that successful implementation requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders to challenge existing power structures and create a more equitable environment for women in film leadership (Alex-Omiogbemi, Sule, Omowole, & Owoade, 2024a; Eyo-Udo et al., 2024).

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This paper has examined women’s significant barriers in achieving leadership roles within the film industry and introduced the Women in Film Leadership Framework as a potential solution to these disparities. The research has highlighted that structural, cultural, and institutional barrier such as unequal access to funding, lack of mentorship, and deeply ingrained gender biases significantly hinder women from ascending to leadership roles in film production. The paper has illustrated how a more inclusive framework could foster an environment where women have the necessary support and opportunities to lead within the film industry through a detailed exploration of gender-sensitive leadership programs, mentorship initiatives, and policy reforms.

The framework's key components, such as equal representation in decision-making bodies and strategies to challenge bias in hiring and promotion processes, are essential for addressing these systemic challenges. Moreover, the paper emphasized the practical application of these initiatives, underscoring the potential for studios, production companies, and industry organizations to actively implement these strategies. By doing so, they can create a more inclusive and equitable environment where women can thrive, influence industry trends, and contribute to a more diverse array of stories. Ultimately, this research reinforces the importance of the Women in Film Leadership Framework in advancing gender inclusion in film leadership.

Adopting the Women in Film Leadership Framework could profoundly alter the trajectory of the film industry by creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for female leaders. By ensuring women have equal access to leadership opportunities, this framework would result in a more diverse, representative industry in terms of the professionals behind the camera and the stories told on screen. A gender-inclusive approach to leadership would likely challenge traditional power dynamics, fostering greater innovation and creativity within film production. Studies show that diverse teams tend to produce more impactful and commercially successful content, which suggests that a more gender-diverse leadership could translate into increased profitability and greater cultural relevance for film studios.

Furthermore, gender-inclusive leadership could drastically alter the representation of women in media. With more women in leadership roles, the types of prioritized narratives and the way female characters are portrayed would likely shift. Rather than perpetuating harmful stereotypes or marginalizing women's voices, film would have the opportunity to reflect a broader range of lived experiences, perspectives, and voices, contributing to a more inclusive media landscape. This could help challenge the industry's historical pattern of exclusion and provide a more accurate representation of women in both real life and media portrayals. Consequently, the positive ripple effects of this shift would extend far beyond the film industry, potentially influencing other sectors to adopt similar gender-inclusive frameworks in leadership.

This paper proposes several policy recommendations for various industry stakeholders, including policymakers, film studios, and educational institutions, to facilitate the implementation of gender-inclusive leadership initiatives. First, policymakers should introduce and enforce legislation that mandates gender parity in film production and decision-making roles. Policies could include quotas for female directors, producers, and writers and regulations that incentivize studios to hire more women for leadership positions. Additionally, governmental support for mentorship programs and leadership training initiatives specifically targeting women in the film industry could help create a pipeline of qualified female leaders.

Film studios should take a proactive approach by incorporating gender equality goals into their corporate

culture and hiring practices. This could involve reviewing and revising their recruitment strategies to eliminate bias, adopting gender-neutral job descriptions, and ensuring equal pay for women in comparable roles. Studios should also invest in leadership development programs catering to women, as these initiatives are essential for fostering a new generation of women equipped to take on senior leadership roles. Furthermore, providing flexible work options, such as remote work or more flexible production schedules, would support women who balance professional and personal responsibilities, ultimately helping retain female talent in the industry.

Lastly, universities and film schools must integrate gender equity and leadership training into their curricula. By offering specialized programs that encourage young women to pursue leadership roles in film production, these institutions can help ensure that women are adequately prepared for the challenges of leading in the industry. Offering mentorship opportunities through alumni networks and industry partnerships could provide students with essential connections and exposure to key leadership figures in the field. By implementing these recommendations, industry stakeholders can create a more supportive, inclusive environment where women have the opportunities and resources to lead, ultimately transforming the future of film production and media representation.

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