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The Underrepresentation of African Americans in Hollywood and the Role of Casting Directors

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### Abstract

Films are cultural products, which reflect the existing and often underlying ideologies in a culture. In the American culture the two dominant ideologies are white normativity and patriarchy, which reinforce historical ideas, beliefs, and stereotypes about minorities. These ideologies are reflected in media. With the Oscars right around the corner, the world is anticipating this year's nominees and winners. After two controversial years in a row, hopes are high that this year the Academy Award for best actor will go to someone who is diverse. If films are reconstructions of culture, however, and culture and its ideologies have not changed much, then can we really expect to see change at the Oscars? Through deep and thorough qualitative research and interviews with industry professionals, a detailed and rich picture of the role of casting directors in the casting process for lead roles in Hollywood films has been painted. Along with many industry factors such as typecasting, economics and distribution, researchers such as Vera & Gordon, Guerrero and Stuart Hall, have laid the groundwork for cultural factors that influence casting decisions in Hollywood. The theory which served as the theoretical framework, was Stuart Hall's theory on *Representation and Discourse*, in which Hall claims that those in charge of media reconstruct culture according to their ideologies. Based on that and extensive research, the primary findings were first and foremost, that casting directors do not make final casting decisions and therefore have little to no ability in bringing more diversity to lead roles. Second, studios have a great amount of power and as financiers of content, approve, if not make all decisions, especially in regards to casting. Third, distribution influences casting greatly since distributors look for marketability of lead actors, meaning that cast matters a great deal when trying to sell a film.

## Introduction

It is almost that time of year again. Award season is right around the corner and in January voting for the 89<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards begins. Will this year's Oscars dominate social media with memes and the #OscarsSoWhite again, or will change be visible at the Academy Awards? Nominations for the most prestigious film award are already highly speculated on the internet, but it will not be until January 24, 2017, before the actual nominees are announced. While some might claim that these are just films and yet another award, the Oscars show just how underrepresented minorities are in the film industry, year after year, without little change. The very recent and ever reoccurring controversy surrounding the Academy Awards is not just show. On the contrary, what the ceremony really does, is it mirrors the film industry as a whole, and most importantly it reflects the American culture. Films are much more than just films. Films are media and media, as extensive research shows, is used to construct culture, reflecting the existing ideologies held by those in charge of media (Hall, 1997). The films we see, the content we see, the stories that are told in films represent the American culture and its deeply engrained and underlying ideologies. Hollywood is a white man's world and that is exactly what we see reflected in films and most above all at the Academy Awards. Without change in the industry, there will most likely be little change at the Academy Awards. If audiences want to see themselves represented on screen, if they want to see more diversity in film and at the Oscars, if they are tired of hearing the sentence "And the Academy Award for best actor goes to," followed by a white man's name, then instead of pointing fingers, it is time to work on understanding the American culture and its ideologies. In America, in particular, African Americans have faced discrimination and underrepresentation for a very long time. This in part is due to its long history of slavery, but while society and laws changed, similar ideologies of white normativity still exist

in the American culture. This deeply engrained idea of whites as the norm and superior to others is a key factor in the perception whites have of themselves, of others, and of their relation to others. In Hollywood, an industry which is predominantly white and male, the white normativity ideology as well as the white savior phenomenon contribute to the reinforcement of stereotypical roles and the underrepresentation of African Americans in film. In addition to that, industry factors such as the studio structure in Hollywood, power dynamics and economics contribute greatly to the underrepresentation of minorities, including African Americans. While conducting research on the role of casting directors in the casting process for lead roles in Hollywood films, three major findings were made. First, that casting directors do not make final casting decisions and therefore have little to no ability in bringing more diversity to lead roles. Second, studios have a great amount of power and as financiers of content, approve, if not make all decisions, especially in regards to casting. Third, distribution influences casting greatly since distributors look for marketability of lead actors, meaning that cast matters a great deal when trying to sell a film.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Diversity, and especially the representation of African Americans in film has long been a crucial issue that has been researched to a great extent in the past as well as the present. With the #OscarsSoWhite dominating social media over the past 3 years, more research on the representation of African Americans in film is being conducted today, but little attention has been paid to the key players in the casting process. While researchers often focus on cultural and industry factors that affect African Americans in US film, little attention has been paid to the

casting process and those who make final casting decisions. These key players, however, possibly have the ability to change the continued lack of diversity and the misrepresentation of minorities in film. The research previously conducted, however, is very valuable to the issue and provides several reasons outside of casting for why we see a lack of African American lead actors on screen. This section will first look at works on cultural factors that affect the underrepresentation of African Americans in film. The cultural factors are divided into three parts, with the history of African Americans first, followed by works on representation and society and lastly colorblindness and colorblind casting. The second part of this section focuses on industry factors which affect African Americans in film. The industry factors are divided into two parts with the first one focusing on casting. This part includes works on typecasting, talent agents and their role as well as casting and Title VII. The second part examines works on economic factors such as reputation and Hollywood as a business.

## **Cultural Factors**

### **African Americans in film: History and progress**

Cultural factors that affect African Americans in US film have been researched extensively and one of the most important works that has been written is *Framing Blackness* by Ed Guerrero. The book examines the representation of African Americans in film throughout several decades; and though Guerrero claims that progress has been achieved, he argues that what we see on screen is a reflection of American society: America's ideology of white dominance and its racialized structure. According to Guerrero, progress is visible in many areas of film regarding the representation and roles of African Americans. He claims that roles are less racist and stereotypical; however, the Blaxploitation genre is current and affecting African Americans who are, to this day, exploited in historically racist roles (Guerrero, 1993).

Thomas Cripps revealed similar findings. In his book *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie From World War II to the Civil Rights Era*, he examines Hollywood from the post-World War II era up to the Civil Rights era. Cripps argues that the post-World War II era provided new opportunities to African Americans in film due to its liberal nature and society's changed view on African Americans (Cripps, 1993). Despite the progress he sees, Cripps much like Guerrero emphasizes that African Americans continuously struggle for equality and opportunity in film. (Cripps, 1993). Rhines' *Black Film/ White Money* takes a closer look at African Americans in Hollywood since 1915 and is similarly optimistic about the progress that has been achieved through the post-war era. However, Rhines agrees with Cripps in that African Americans struggle greatly to this day in achieving equality. He argues that it is much more difficult for African Americans to get their projects financed and distributed (Rhines, 1996).

### **Representation and society**

These historical analyses of African Americans in film show how different eras have provided African Americans with opportunities, resulting in some progress. However, the struggle for recognition, equal opportunities and authentic representation continues into the present day. Other researches in the field have taken a more sociological look at film and the issues surrounding the representation of African Americans in US film. They have come to the conclusion that American society and its ideologies affect the images we see on screen. Vera and Gordon's *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fiction of Whiteness* examines the self-representation of whites in Hollywood over a decade. They argue that industry professionals, such as directors and writers, portray whites as saviors. This, they claim, is because of society's ideology and culture of white normativity; a belief that whites are good, ideal Americans who save others (Vera &

Gordon, 2003). Vera and Gordon also claim that this depiction of the white savior is closely related to US politics on race and the race agenda in the US. According to their research, movies reflect society's and American culture's beliefs and ideologies as well as their view of themselves in relation to others (Vera & Gordon, 2003).

Hughey's *Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in "Magical Negro" Films* takes a similar approach by looking at "Magical Negro" films. A "Magical Negro" is the portrayal of a lower class, uneducated African American who helps broken white characters transition into competent people (Hughey, 2009). Hughey claims that though this representation is often viewed as positive and progressive it actually reinforces society's idea of white normativity and the racial status quo present in American society (Hughey, 2009). Movies are "cultural artifacts, economic products and political statements" which affirm society's ideologies about race and reflect the American culture and its ideas of white supremacy and patriarchy (Chennault, 2006). Chennault argues that films reflect a society in which African Americans are portrayed as criminals or servants whereas whites are portrayed as the ideal American savior of all (Chennault, 2006; Hughey, 2009).

### **A colorblind culture**

Part of the American culture is a so-called post racial framework which includes the concept of colorblindness. Jason Smith argues that color and race are not being recognized in the American society, politics and Hollywood. He argues that colorblindness creates inequality and contemporary racism which reflects the "racialized structure in America society" (Smith, 2013). According to Smith colorconsciousness can challenge colorblindness (Smith, 2013). Colorblindness is not only an issue in society but also when it comes to casting.



**Industry/ Economic Factors****Casting: Typecasting**

Casting is a part of the film industry, which greatly affects African Americans in US film. A collection of research in the past and present has focused on the role of casting agents, typecasting as well as Title VII in relation to the casting processes in Hollywood. Typecasting is one of the most controversial and possibly discriminatory casting practices that affect actors in Hollywood. According to Pamela Wojcik, typecasting reinforces stereotypes and takes away creative opportunities from actors (Wojcik, 2003). This is relevant to my research question because it also applies to African American actors who are often typecast in historically racist and non-authentic roles that reinforce stereotypes.

**Casting: Talent agents**

Zelenski and Reinking both take a look at the role of talent agents and though their works are not necessarily about the affects talent agents have on African Americans in US film, it still is important and relevant work because through their work it becomes evident that actors often need talent agents in order to book jobs (Reinking, 2012; Zelenski, 2002). Talent agents according to both authors provide actors with auditions and most casting agencies only accept materials from reputable talent agencies (Zelenski, 2002). Talent agents are under a lot of pressure since the actors they represent determine their success or failure in the industry (Zelenski, 2002). It therefore seems to be crucial that actors are represented by talent agents in order to get anywhere near casting agents and auditions.

**The Casting Process: Title VII**

The casting process itself, according to Onwuachi-Willig and Kim, is often discriminatory towards African Americans and other minorities. Both researchers examine aspects of Hollywood and casting with respect to Title VII and agree that, due to the unique nature of Hollywood, Title VII does not apply in Hollywood. In addition, it is very difficult to file a successful Title VII violation based on casting discrimination, which leaves actors with little protection against discrimination (Onwuachi-Willig, 2007; Kim, 1997). They argue that casting is biased and often reinforces and reflects racial hierarchies present in American society (Onwuachi-Willig, 2007).

### **Economic Factors: Reputation and success**

As touched on previously, researchers such as Rhines argue that African Americans face certain battles when it comes to financing films. Economic factors affect African Americans in US film greatly. Faulkner and Anderson examine the role of economics and reputation in Hollywood in *Short Term Projects and Emergent Careers*. According to their work, reputation is everything in the film industry and without prior success and a good reputation it is very difficult to get jobs in Hollywood (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987). They repeatedly state that Hollywood is a very unique industry that comes with a lot of risks and uncertainty. This is why, in order for industry professionals to reduce uncertainty and risk and to increase profits, professionals prefer actors, directors and writers with experience, prior success and a good reputation (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987). They need to be marketable. The following statement seems to be true: “You’re only as good as your last record” (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987). Reputation and prior success, however, are not easy to come by in the industry and according to Monica White Ndounou, African Americans are at a great disadvantage. She claims that because African Americans have historically been “underrepresented, undersold and underfunded” in the

industry, they are at a great disadvantage. This, she claims, is because their value is lower than that of whites to begin with, as they lack prior success. In the industry and for executives, African Americans seem to pose a higher risk, because their lack of prior success and of a marketable name lower the chances for profit (Ndounou, 2014). However, according to Lee, not only African Americans struggle when it comes to economics and financing. White, successful directors in Hollywood have a hard time getting their films with diverse casts financed due to the perceived risk, so that even if there were more white directors to make more films with an African American cast or lead, they have a very difficult time getting those financed, distributed and marketed; and on the flip side are being accused of whitewashing films (Lee, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

It is therefore important to not only look at African Americans in film but at all key players and especially those who make casting and financing decisions and have the ability to change the content we see on screen. All research leading up to the present is crucial in understanding the lack of diversity and lack of African Americans on screen but in order to change next year's hashtag at the Oscars it is important to do research on the casting process; to analyze who is in charge and who has the ability to change the underrepresentation of African Americans in US film. Therefore, I believe that it is important to look at the role casting directors play in the casting process and in the continuation of an unequal distribution of lead roles to African American actors in Hollywood films.

### **Methodology**

This section looks at the research method used, the theoretical framework on which the thesis is built, as well as relevant definitions to understanding the findings.

**Method**

For my research, on the role of casting directors in the casting process for lead actors in Hollywood films, I chose the qualitative method. Qualitative research allows for a much more detailed and rich picture as well as ambiguity. In order to examine the role of casting directors in regards to casting decisions made in Hollywood, I needed research that would allow for detail and ambiguity. In addition to that, I felt that it was important to incorporate as much quantitative research as possible to show that there is in fact an unequal distribution of lead roles to African American actors. Incorporating quantitative research allowed me to present to the reader in clear-cut data that the problem is real and that it is important to be researched. To find this quantitative research, I used the Grand Valley databases as well as Google Scholar to ensure that the research has been peer reviewed. All quantitative research used, is scholarly and published by University presses.

Both secondary research with quantitative aspects, as well as qualitative research, helped tremendously in painting a clear picture of the film industry in Hollywood, the fact that an unequal distribution of lead roles to African American actors exists and most importantly the role of casting directors in the casting process.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research was important to answer my research question in that it allowed me to see the bigger picture, get more detail and richness, and most importantly it allowed for ambiguity. With the qualitative research I was able to answer the research question in more detail and depth, which quantitative research could not have done. The qualitative research focused on two main aspects: Interviews and secondary research on the casting process.

I conducted interviews for my research because interviews are very valuable and rich in detail. They provide answers that can be ambiguous and allow for a much bigger and much more detailed picture. To ensure that the interviews were ethical and valid, I had my questions approved by my professor and I took part in an interviewer workshop. I practiced my interviewing skills before conducting any interviews and I made sure not to ask any leading or biased questions, and made sure not to influence the answers of my subjects (see appendix A-F). I conducted all interviews without bias or prior assumptions about the outcome. A list of questions can be found in the appendix (see appendix A-C). The questions asked were similar for all subjects in order to get the different opinions and viewpoints from three industry professionals who work in the same industry, yet have very different jobs. While questions were similar, I tailored them a little according to the subjects' specific jobs in order to get a lot of detail about the different sides of the industry. This way I was able to get a much bigger picture of the industry and of how everything connects (see appendix A-C). All interviews were recorded with a professional recorder and transcribed according to APA format. The full transcripts of all interviews can be found in the appendix (see appendix D-F). In addition to making sure that questions were not biased, I got informed consent from all subjects (see appendix G-L). The consent was given via email in response to an email which had all three consent forms attached. This was done via email because it was the most convenient and fastest way to give consent for the interviewees. Attached in the appendix are the blank consent forms for reference as well as the emails in which the interviewees give consent. The consent is mutual and though the forms were not actually signed, the electronic signatures of my interviewees as well as my own suffice for all forms. The interviews were conducted over the phone and were recorded and then transcribed for the purpose of this paper. Since all subjects live outside of

Michigan, where I am located, a phone interview was the best option as I wanted to be able to ask follow up questions. Interview subjects included a casting director, a film and TV producer and the COO and president of Voltage Pictures which is a production, financing and distribution company. The purpose of the interviews was to get an insight into the industry, find out about the role of casting directors with regards to casting and get some information on the casting process as well as other key players involved in the casting process. For a list of questions that were asked, the interview transcripts, and consent forms see the appendix (see appendix A-L).

The second aspect of qualitative research focused on finding already published works on the casting process. I wanted to make sure that I fully understood the casting process, the roles of those involved and factors that influence casting before coming to any conclusions. For this, I again used the Grand Valley databases and Google Scholar to ensure that all research is scholarly has been peer reviewed. This research helped in understanding the roles of all key players in the casting process, supported what interviewees have said and allowed for a bigger picture of the industry and the casting process. This qualitative research led me to look at industry factors that affect the casting process as well as cultural factors which affect the casting process, connecting the casting process to our culture and leading me to the framework discussed below.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Cultural Studies: Representation and Discourse – Stuart Hall**

Stuart Hall is one of the leading researchers in the field of Cultural Studies. His work in the field, especially his work on *Representation and Discourse*, is of utmost importance to answering my research question. In his work, Stuart Hall states that “representation is an act of reconstruction (Hall, 1997).” What he means by that, is that representation is not a reflection of something like

our culture, but instead a reconstruction of it, created by those in charge. With regards to media, according to Hall, those who control media create every single image with a larger purpose in mind. Within the media, which they control, they reconstruct their own ideologies of what culture looks like or should look like. Discourse, as part of his theory, is defined as a “group of statements which provide a language and way of representation of knowledge about a topic (Stuart 2001).” What this means, is that within a culture, those who are in charge of media create the language. With that language they shape the way we talk about a topic. The example given by Hall in *The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power* is the differentiation between the Western world and the Eastern world (Hall, 1996). By creating the terms “West” and “East” to categorize and refer to countries in this world and using the terms to distinguish between a modern, civilized West and a rather primal, poor East, an imbalance of power is created through language. The West has become superior to the East. According to Stuart and his theory, those in charge of media are in charge of our culture. They decide what our culture looks like, they reconstruct it according to their beliefs and ideologies by creating a new language that serves their purpose.

Stuart’s theory is not only of utmost importance to understanding culture and our society, but to understanding Hollywood and in answering my research question. Hollywood is the leading industry when it comes to media. It pretty much controls all media, and though a lot of studies claim that society is reflected in media, cultural studies and the theory of *Representation and Discourse* by Stuart Hall actually claim that media does not reflect culture and society, but instead reconstructs it. Those in power, executives and decision makers in Hollywood, hold certain ideologies. These ideologies are reflected in the media they produce, finance and distribute. By controlling how we see and experience culture those in charge reconstruct society

and culture to serve their own views and ideologies. Their goal is to stay in power and remain in control (Hall, 1997). Therefore, one might say, that the unequal distribution of lead roles to African American actors is based upon Hollywood's and also society's ideology of white normativity and dominance. Since those in control and power of the media are predominantly white males who would like to stay in power, they need to construct and create media which show that. The best way to do that is by keeping minorities small, underrepresented and in fewer lead roles.

### **Relevant definitions and concepts:**

The purpose of this section is to define and explain key terms and concepts relevant to understanding the issue at hand as well as this study.

#### **Actors of color:**

“Actors of color” is much like the term “people of color”, except that it refers to people of color with the profession of an actor or actress. A person of color is any person who is not white. Their race or ethnicity is usually considered a minority in the US (Maleski, 2014).

#### **African American**

According to the United States Census Bureau an African American is “a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa” (US Census Bureau).

#### **A-list/ level talent**

An a-lister or a-list talent is usually a very successful, marketable and often famous actor, director or other talent (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5).

#### **American Film Market (AFM)**



According to Jonathan Deckter who has been to AFM several times, “AFM is, in essence, a world trading market where companies from all over the world set up shop and attempt to license their content to other companies who distribute films worldwide” (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22).

### **Casting Director:**

A casting director is the person assigning roles in a movie, play or other production. Casting directors are the “middleman” between a) studios and the production team (i.e. producers and director), and b) between studios and the production team on the one side and actors and their representatives on the other side. Casting directors help negotiate contracts, hold auditions for lead and supporting roles and make lists of actors that fit certain roles. Based on the project, casting directors search for actors that fit the parts and make lists of preferred actors for the roles. These lists are shown to directors and producers, who then pick actors they like. Casting directors hold auditions and make sure actors’ schedules work with the production times while keeping the budget in mind. Casting directors suggest ideal actors for roles (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11; Reinking, 2012).

### **Director:**

A film director directs the making of a film. They need a lot of knowledge in all areas of film making to direct the crew and actors on set. A director has a lot of responsibility and generally controls a film’s artistic aspects. They are the ones who visualize the script. The director along with the producer casts actors, organizes and decides on filming locations, lighting, etc. The director approves all decisions regarding lighting, costumes, hair and make-up, music and even editing. They are there from start to finish. Directors interpret or even write the script and direct everyone including actors, crew, cinematographers in making the movie the best it can be by visualizing the script. They often have a specific vision for their films and the cast. Since it is a lot of work they often delegate some of it to assistant directors and/ or producers (Osgood, 2009; K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11).

### **Distributor:**

Distribution is the side of the film industry where films are monetized, meaning released theatrically and licensed to networks, HBO, iTunes, etc. A distributor acquires films via deals either with studios, production companies or through film sales agents who represent filmmakers. Distributors, after acquiring films and the rights to those films, are usually in charge of the release plan, media promotion and what edits and changes are allowed. Sometimes the distribution company is also the production company and more often than not a studio (Osgood, 2009; J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22).

### **Hollywood produced films:**

This solely refers to movies produced, financed and/ or distributed by at least one of the major studios in Hollywood, or one of their subsidiaries. This also includes all major film studios in Hollywood. The major studios include: Warner Brothers, Sony, Universal, Walt Disney Studios, and more (Hunt, 2015). For a complete list refer to Hunt's *Hollywood Diversity Report* (Hunt, 2015). Besides the major studios there are a lot of production companies. A production company produces, possibly finances films but does not distribute their own films. Production companies have executives much like studios do and operate similarly. For the purpose of this paper the focus is on the major studios since production companies produce any films from independent to big budget films. However, the major production companies, which operate similarly to a study are considered but not separately referred to. For the majority of the thesis though, when speaking of Hollywood films in this study, it refers to films produced, financed, and/ or distributed by one of the studios or their subsidiaries.

### **Ideology:**

A system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy (Ideology, n.d.).

### **Lack of diversity:**

This term does not refer to the complete absence of diversity in movies with regard to people of color in lead roles but rather the unequal distribution of lead roles among people with regard to race and ethnicity (Hunt, 2015).

### **Lead Role**

A lead role is defined as the first-credited actor in the cast list of a film. It is usually the main character with the most speaking lines. In most Hollywood productions lead roles are played by a-list celebrities (Hunt, 2015).

**Producer:**

A producer for film can take on a variety of roles. Depending on the project a producer might do any or all of these: selecting a script, shape the idea into a film, raise money for production and manage finances, hire the directors and decide on the cast, oversee all aspects of film making from pre-production to postproduction, marketing and negotiating worldwide rights. A producer can be hired by a studio, production company or independent. Their job is primarily to plan and coordinate different aspects of film making from start to finish. A producer makes a film happen and is in charge of coordinating the shoot and acquiring all materials needed such as cameras, equipment, locations, etc. though they may not decide for example what kind of camera is used (Osgood, 2009; R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5).

**Studio / Production Company:**

A film studio is a major entertainment company that owns its own studio facility to make films. Studios produce, finance and distribute films. They often make big budget movies with a-list celebrities. While they sometimes self-create content, usually the filmmaking is handled by a production company (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). A production company that has a lot of funding and, or has been involved in the production of big budget films is considered a major production company. Major production companies often work with expensive, well-known talent. For a list of major production companies refer to Hunt, 2015. Both studios and production companies operate similarly in that they have executives at the head level (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). The small production companies, though they might operate similarly are not necessarily considered in this research as the research focuses on Hollywood films and not independent films.

**Talent Agent**

A talent agent represents talent such as actors, writers, performers and musicians. Agents work for their clients and act on behalf of them, promoting and representing their clients'

interests. Talent agents usually handle all business between clients and their employer. They act as liaison between their client (i.e. actor) and the director, producer, casting director, etc. Talent agents use their networking skills to promote their clients and to get them auditions. They also negotiate contracts, arrange auditions and submit all necessary items and paperwork such as headshots, promo reels, etc. They also act as mentors for their clients, giving them advice on which jobs to take in order to benefit their career (Zelenski, 2002).

**Timeframe:**

For this study I focus my research on the years 2012 to present. Since the film industry is very dynamic and thousands of films are produced annually I decided to focus on the past 5 years. This is also because of the #OscarsSoWhite issue which emerged within the timeframe and shed new light on the issue. This timeframe refers to films and findings, not research in terms of publication dates.

**Top Films:**

Top films are based off of a film's success at the Box Office. For this study the focus is on the US box office. Box office refers to the amount of money the movie made from the day it premiered and does not factor in the budget of a movie. A top-grossing film is the most successful film of the year. A blockbuster is a film that made more than 200,000,000 US Dollar. A top film therefore falls along those lines. As defined by UCLA for their study, a top film is a film that has been rated among the top 100 per year based on box office success. Lists can be found on sites like IMDBPro (Hunt, 2015).

**Unequal distribution:**

This refers to the percentage of movies with African American leads vs. white leads as well as the percentage of African American leads compared to their share in the US population. Unequal, therefore, does not only mean less than white people, but whether the amount of African American lead actors in top films is proportional or equivalent to their share in the US population (Hunt, 2015).

**Writer:**

A writer writes the script. They develop a story, create characters and the plot and write it out in form of a script. Often times scripts are rewritten in Hollywood to make it the best it can be. After the script is finished and producers are happy with it, it is usually the end of creative involvement for the writer in the project. Unless the writer is the director or producer at the same time, a writer is only responsible for writing a creative script that can be produced and financed (Osgood, 2009).

## Findings

### Introduction

In his theory on *Representation and Discourse*, Stuart Hall claims that media is controlled through reconstruction of ideologies held by those in charge of media (Hall, 1997). With regard to my research question, on the role of casting directors in the casting process for lead roles in Hollywood films, Stuart Hall's theory suggests that it is not the casting directors who make the final decisions but rather those that finance films. The question about who is in charge in Hollywood, specifically with regards to casting is a question much talked about and speculated, but with little to no research existing to this day. It is such an important question and topic because it greatly shapes the films we see and has an enormous impact on diversity in casting. In addition to that, films have a huge impact on culture and the way we perceive ourselves, others and ourselves in relation to others. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the industry which produces the content that greatly adds in shaping our lives, perceptions and ideologies. With that being said, based on the interviews with Kate Mueller (casting directors), Jonathan Deckter (COO and President of Voltage Pictures), and Rob Ford (Film and TV Producer), as well as deep research, the primary results of this research are the following: First, Casting directors do not have the power to make final casting decisions; second, studios have a great amount of power

and as financiers of content, approve, if not make all decisions, especially in regards to casting; and third, distribution influences casting decisions based on selling factors and economics. The findings section is divided into four parts based on the primary findings of this research. First, the role of casting directors in the casting process is examined. Then, the focus shifts to studios and production companies, their role in the casting process as well as the business side of the industry which affects casting. Third, distribution and its role in the casting process is looked at, as well as how it connects to casting and how all branches of the film industry come together and shape the content we see on screen. Lastly, limitations of the research are evaluated and explained.

When it comes to the industry, pinpointing those in charge of decision making in Hollywood is not always that easy. A lot of different voices are involved in the casting process as well as the decision-making process and there are a lot of complicated dynamics that audiences do not fully understand or know about (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). When it comes to casting, which is a very long and often times complicated process, fingers are often pointed at the casting director, especially now, with the OscarsSoWhite outrage over the past couple years. To really understand the mechanics behind casting and diversity issues surrounding casting, which often lead to an underrepresentation of African American lead actors on screen, it is important to examine the role of a casting director, the casting process as well as other driving factors. While conducting research and interviews, I came up with three major findings.

## **Findings**

### **Casting directors**

The first finding is that casting directors have no authoritative say in casting. They do not make final casting decisions and, therefore, do not have the ability to change diversity in film. While talking to Kate Mueller, who has worked in casting for over 10 years, I asked her to describe the casting process to me as well as the role of a casting director. The job of a casting director, according to Kate Mueller, is to read scripts and compile lists of actors that are possibly interested in and available for a role (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). These lists also have to align with the production team's, especially the director's vision regarding a role. With casting for lead roles in particular, the casting director is only minimally involved. Since most lead roles are played by celebrities who no longer have to audition for parts, the casting director's responsibility is to talk to agents about an actor's interest in and availability for a project (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). Since every film is different and can be produced in a variety of ways, casting directors are not even involved in necessarily all films (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). Besides hiring a casting director or agency, the director or studio can also directly talk to an actor's agent or the talent themselves, and hire actors that way. This, however, pertains to almost solely celebrities for the lead roles (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). If a casting director is involved, however, they work closely with directors and producers, providing them lists of talent which the director usually chooses from (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). The director is responsible for bringing their vision of the film to life and is in charge of making various creative decisions (Osgood, 2009). On independent films, the director has the power to pick actors he or she likes; however, with Hollywood feature films their authority and power is limited (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). Any decisions made, particularly those regarding casting, on a Hollywood feature film, which are typically studio productions, have to be approved by the

studio (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). When it comes to casting and diversity, as Kate Mueller explains, “there is always room for conversation;” however, she also states that while casting directors can push for diverse actors and while it is a casting director’s job to bring up the conversation about diversity and to push for it, she argues that “you can state the case but ultimately the studio gets to decide” (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). While Kate Mueller emphasizes that the role of a casting director is very important, she makes it clear that casting directors do not have final say in who gets the job and who does not (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). They mainly suggest actors for roles and act as liaison between directors and producers on the creative side and studios on the business or distribution side of the industry, trying to find a common ground (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). Instead of the casting director and depending on the film and those involved, the final decisions regarding casting are either made by the director or the studio. This, Kate Mueller, Jonathan Deckter and Rob Ford claim, depends hugely on the kind of film and whether or not a studio is involved (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11; J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22; R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). For Hollywood films, the final decisions are predominantly made by studios and their executives.

While I recognize and acknowledge that much of my findings are based on one casting director’s experience and that there could possibly be other casting directors with different experiences or more of a say when it comes to casting decisions, Cathy Reinking, a veteran casting director and author painted a similar picture in her book *How to book acting jobs in TV and film: The truth about the acting industry: Conversations with a veteran Hollywood casting director*. She as well emphasizes the importance of a casting director’s role in the casting



process, however, she again states that the final decisions are not made by casting directors (Reinking, 2012).

### **Studios**

The second finding is that studios have ultimate power in Hollywood, with specific regard to casting. While casting directors, producers and the director play a huge role in the casting process and influence decisions, studios have the final say because “the studio was forking out all of the money and therefore they have, [...], the god power” (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). Studios are production and distribution companies, which means that they produce, finance, and distribute films. Most films produced and financed by studios are big feature films known as Hollywood productions (Hunt, 2015). These films, more often than not, ranked among the top 100 films per year, have huge budgets and an a-list celebrity lead actor or ensemble cast (Hunt, 2015). Studios primarily finance the production of films through third party companies, or they acquire completed films, which they then distribute to their vendors worldwide (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). They almost never self-produce or self-create content (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). First and foremost, however, studios distribute films, meaning that they monetize the content and put it in theatres or license the content for television, iTunes, etc. (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). If involved in the production of a film, studios are hugely involved in the decision-making process because they are financiers and in addition to that they are financiers who know the industry well and understand film (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). Therefore, studios have a specific vision for a film and its cast in order to make money (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). This vision often times does not align with the director’s vision and with regards to casting Kate Mueller explains the studio’s role as follows:

“Their responsibility is to make money. That’s their job. [...] They get the final say on most things; much to the anger of the casting director and the director some of the time. And they ultimately have the say about who gets to get cast. And after all of the work the director, producers and the casting director do together, to decide who they want the ensemble to be, we then have to call the studio and get permission for all of those people. So, we have to actually get a written confirmation that all of the people that we want are going to be okay with the studio since they’re paying the 35, 40 million dollars to make the movie and if they aren’t, then we have to go back and start again, which happens *all* the time.”

Studio executives, therefore, are the ones who make final casting decisions, about both lead roles and supporting cast in Hollywood films (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). They make final casting decisions based on economics, meaning selling factors such as celebrities and a good story which appeal to audiences, as well as economic indicators of success, meaning whether there is proof that a film will be successful based on whether similar films have worked in the past (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). With regards to casting this means that studios look for actors that are able to sell a film, i.e. celebrities. They also look for stories that appeal to audiences (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). What this essentially means, is that they look for films that align with an audience’s as well as their own ideologies. What’s interesting about this, is how it ties back in with Stuart Hall’s theory on *Representation and Discourse*. According to his theory, those in charge of media control culture by reconstructing it based on their beliefs and ideologies (Hall, 1997). If those in charge of film are those who finance them, meaning the studio executives, then it is them who

control what we see. They reconstruct culture according to their views. Extensive research has been done on these ideologies, one of which is the white savior phenomenon. This ideology has been researched by many, including Vera and Gordon in their book titled *Screen Savors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness*. Vera and Gordon argue that there is an existing ideology of white normativity in the US which is reflected on screen. They claim that whites portray themselves as saviors and ideal Americans who save the broken characters of minorities (Vera & Gordon, 2003). One example of this is the film *The Blind Side*. It is a film about a poor, homeless African American boy who is saved by Sandra Bullock and made into a football star (Vera & Gordon, 2003). What is even more interesting about this, is how it relates to diversity. Both the University of Southern California (USC) as well as the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) conduct annual reports on diversity in entertainment. Their reports look at several hundred films and TV shows. According to their reports, 94 percent of studio executives are white and 100 percent of studio executives are male (Hunt, 2015). While it is difficult to prove a correlation between the race and sex of studio executives and what we see on screen, when relating this back to Stuart Hall, Hollywood is a white man's world, whose primary goal is to make money (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). Not only are executive positions filled with predominantly white males, but the majority of celebrities are also white males, therefore 71.7 percent of all speaking roles are played by white males (Hunt, 2015). Only 12.2 percent of all speaking roles, not all of which are lead roles, have gone to African Americans (Smith, 2016). Their share of the US population is 13.2 percent (US Census Bureau), which shows that African Americans are underrepresented on screen, especially in lead roles (Hunt, 2015). An often-stated reason for this underrepresentation of minorities and specifically African Americans in lead roles is a so-called "lack of economic indicators" (J. Deckter, phone

interview, 2016, November 22). These indicators are used to predict whether or not a film will be successful at the box office and with regards to African Americans in lead roles these indicators or the supposed lack thereof predict that films with diverse lead actors will not be successful at the box office (Ndounou, 2014). What this means, is that there is no existing proof for such films to work economically to where they are profitable. The lack of proof is considered a high risk in the industry which according to Kate Mueller, Hollywood “is quite literally one of *the most* high-stake industries in the nation and possibly globally because you’re talking about millions and millions of dollars on the line” (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). To keep the risks low and profits high studios prefer hiring established professionals, i.e. celebrities, who are able to sell films (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11; J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). Since there are not many African American celebrities because they have “historically been underrepresented”, they stay underrepresented (Ndounou, 2014). This contributes to the vicious cycle of fewer African American celebrities who can sell a movie and can be hired without that risk factor to it. Studios, for economic reasons, prefer celebrities in lead roles because as Kate Mueller perfectly describes it, “the bigger name you can get, the likelihood that you’re going to make more money is fairly high,” and she goes on saying, “I think that affects diversity a lot because so many of the celebrities are white and male” (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). The majority of celebrities are white males who are consistently booked for jobs because of their star power and gravitas, which leaves little opportunity for more diverse talent. This in part is due to economic reasons, ideological reasons as well as the “very limited perspective or views, and [...] an unfortunate, ethnic makeup that has been in place for the past seven, eight, nine decades,” in studio executive positions (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). While this is the reality in Hollywood, Kate Mueller said that she sees this

changing quite a bit with streaming networks such as Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu who are increasingly casting more diverse actors and giving them opportunities and a platform from which they rise to celebrity status (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). She gave the example of Laverne Cox, an African American transgender woman from the Netflix Original show *Orange is the New Black* (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). The numbers on inclusion presented by USC's report confirm that networks such as Netflix and Amazon score higher. Compared to studios such as Warner Brothers, Universal and Sony, who scored about 20 percent when it comes to inclusion of minorities on screen, Amazon and Hulu scored 65 percent (Smith, 2016). While we do see change slowly happening, studios are still in charge and have a huge amount of power. This not only holds true for casting, but also and especially, when it comes to distribution. Not only do studios consider and have to consider the opinions of marketing and distribution people, studios are primarily distributors and run that side of the industry as much, if not more, than the production side.

Although I realize that the public perception of making Hollywood more diverse and counteracting the OscarsSoWhite is that one person such as a casting director can change the diversity issue in Hollywood, research conducted by Vera and Gordon as well as Stuart Hall shows that this is not the case. According to them, the diversity issue is a rather structural and systemic problem. Stuart Hall proves this in his theory on *Representation and Discourse* (Hall, 1997). Hollywood is a large industry with a lot of individuals working on a film, and while studios consider all these voices when making decisions, ultimately it is the executives of studios who make decisions based on structural and deeply engrained ideologies in the American culture. The other voice that is quite important and influential, and according to Jonathan Deckter, often makes final decisions or gets what they want, that voice is the voice of the

director (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). While I acknowledge that directors play a huge role and have a lot of power, especially in independent films, this seems to only hold true for a small percentage of a-level directors in studio productions. Based on my research and existing research studios have the final say in the vast majority of Hollywood productions and while they consider and listen to the opinions of creatives and are influenced by a lot of the other key players, the final decisions are theirs to make.

### **Distribution**

Distribution is a little-known area of the film industry, which most people do not fully understand. It is very complicated, but I have had the great opportunity to learn from professionals at the American Film Market. “AFM is, in essence, a world trading market where companies from all over the world set up shop and attempt to license their content to other companies who distribute films worldwide” (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). A production company, as the name suggests, produces or finances films while a distribution company acquires films from production companies to distribute them (Osgood, 2009). This can take many forms, but the most common form is theatrical release. Distribution, therefore, and as described by Jonathan Deckter, is the side of the film industry where films are monetized, and put in theatres, or otherwise licensed so that the public can watch them (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). Essentially, a production company creates a film and then with AFM for example, shows that film to distributors who either buy it or not. Distributors then make deals and contracts with movie theatres, iTunes, HBO, etc. to get the films released (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). The third major finding in this research is that distribution plays a huge part in casting. This takes place in a variety of ways. The first and probably the most influential way in which distribution influences casting is the fact that a lot of

the big distribution companies are in fact studios (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). Therefore, studios not only control the production of Hollywood films and decisions regarding casting in feature films through financing them, but also control and influence the films which they do not produce and finance through distribution. An independent film does not have a studio attached to it; therefore, the director is in charge of making most decisions and has a lot more power and freedom when it comes to casting (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). However, independent filmmakers cannot distribute their own films and need to find a distribution company to do so. While there are 30 plus distribution companies in the US, the big studios own this part of the industry as well (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). Studios not only have a lot of money for advertising, they also have a lot of connections and relationships, especially with movie theatres and chains such as Loews and AMC (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). Studios often have deals and contracts with movie theatres and movie houses, which is why so many films in the theatres, especially on the big box office weekends like Thanksgiving and Christmas, are predominantly films with some type of studio involvement (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). For example, I went to the movies the other day and saw two films, both of which were huge studio productions and while the previews for this year's Christmas films were playing I noticed that every single film in the previews that is coming out this Christmas was either produced or distributed by one of the major studios. While this is anecdotal evidence I still think that it is valuable to this research because it shows just how connected everything is and how these deals affect the content we see. Regardless of whether the distribution for a film is handled by a studio or one of the other companies, the primary goal for distributors is to make money. Money is a major driving factor in the industry, as "films are driven by economics" (J. Deckter, phone interview,

2016, November 22). While distributors usually are not involved in production and the actual casting process, they can be involved in at least three ways (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). The first one is as a studio which either produces, finances, and/ or distributes a film. By putting all this money into the making of the film they become eligible and powerful to where they make or approve all decisions (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). As Jonathan Deckter explains, as a financier you have a lot of power because if your requests are not accommodated you do not have to stick with the film and could pull your money from it (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). The second way of involvement is when a distribution company is also a production company, similar to the studios. However, in this case the distributors do not make final casting decisions. What they do, is they give their opinion on actors that are considered for a film from a marketing and distribution standpoint (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). These suggestions are primarily based on an actor's marketability as well as economic factors and market research (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5; J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). Essentially, what distributors do, according to Jonathan Deckter is, "judging which names will alleviate a film or not" (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). While this is a rather passive way of influencing casting, the awareness of the distribution side and the factors which increase the likelihood of a film's success, play a huge role in casting and especially casting the lead actor for a film. This influences the decisions made by filmmakers (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). The third way in which distribution can be involved in the casting process is rare, but sometimes filmmakers need money up front to make the film. They then go to distributors and make a deal with them, which makes the distributor the financier of the film and as mentioned before those who finance the movie control its content (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). While



distributors are not directly involved in picking actors, distribution and the factors which distributors look for in a film greatly influence the decisions that are made, whether in a studio production or an independent production. Some of these factors that distributors look for in a film in order to buy it and essentially complete the filmmaking process by releasing it to the public, are factors which to an extent guarantee a return on their investment (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). Some of these factors are, first and foremost the marketability of the talent in the film, meaning how famous they are and how many seats they can fill (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 2016). They also look for a great story that will get audiences into the theatres (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). Both of these factors are important to distributors because they essentially make a film appealing to an audience and increase the chance of profit (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). Because of the role of distribution and the fact that it is vital to making money off films to then produce more, filmmakers are highly aware of the factors which distributors look for in films, this includes the director. As Jonathan Deckter explains, “Filmmakers have realized that they have to accommodate the other areas of the business in order to get their movies made“ (J. Deckter, phone interview, 2016, November 22). The economic indicators that are so important to studios and distributors because they lower the risks of failing at the box office and losing millions of dollars greatly affect the films we see and affect diversity in film. Not only are minorities such as African Americans underrepresented because of the ideologies held by those in charge of making casting decisions, the films we see are essentially the same ones time after time again because they have been proven to work. This is not only noticeable in terms of diversity but at a press conference Jennifer Lawrence said the following about her new film *Passengers* and studios:

“The thing that excited me about this movie is that it’s original. It’s a completely original story, and nowadays it’s really hard to, um, get a studio to spend a lot of money on something that doesn’t have proof of viewers, like franchises or something that’s based off a book. It’s very, very rare to find something that could be epic in size and original. So, for me right away, that’s—I—I really loved the story that it was, that it was very original. Uh, it—it’s hard to find interesting and original characters, that haven’t already been done by someone else” (Entertainment, 2016).

Essentially, what this shows, is that not only is there a lack of diversity in film, but even the actors who get work in the industry, and who are successful are frustrated because roles are not only not diverse, they are also very often not original. Hollywood really is a very unique and complicated industry. While creatives are suffering because they cannot tell the stories they want to tell, with the people that deserve to have their stories told, and characters that stray away from the norm because of a so-called “lack of economic indicators,” those on the business side of the industry are doing what they have been doing for decades. When asking Rob Ford about the economic indicators and the claimed lack thereof in regards to diversity and diverse actors he said the following:

“That is often said and used as, you know, in my opinion an excuse. [...]

The sort of blanket statements of like, “Well, if you have black people in your film it’s not gonna [sic] sell overseas,” or “if you have a female lead it won’t sell,” [...] that to me is just really, you know, ludicrous and it’s just to me, like people are not trying hard enough, they’re not being open-minded enough about stories, because if you have a great story, color doesn’t and

shouldn't matter, ethnicity doesn't and shouldn't matter. You know, we're all human beings and what compels us, you know, for the most part to watch cinema is the human experience and so if you're telling a true story about the human experience, it's almost insulting to other human beings to say, "Oh, you're only gonna [sic] watch it if this type of person is in it [...]". And so, people are very self-centered, egotistical, you know-- one-sided mentality which is also part of the problem, but it's basically saying that, only one type of person or type of, you know, ethnicity, will-- or gender sometimes-- that is of value and importance. And with saying that, we're proving that these are the only stories that are being told in high quality, you know. Uh, and that's essentially what you're communicating when those types of projects keep coming out time and time again" (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5).

While there might be some indicators that support the claims being made about diverse films, and while they might be true for certain types of films that are very regional, the reports conducted by UCLA and USC actually support Rob Ford and contradict the statement that there is a lack of economic indicators (Hunt, 2015; Smith, 2016)). Their reports show that films with diverse casts do very well at the box office and this is where the ideologies come into play again. As Rob Ford rightfully stated, there is this mentality, this belief that diverse films won't work and while there might not be any existing proof in forms of sales reports and market research, to show that this is largely because these films have not been made. Without these films, there cannot be any market research on their success, so the excuse that is often used is, to some extent, based on ideologies that are so deeply engrained in this culture and in people's minds that

they are unable to look outside of that. As Rob Ford states, “you get to a point where you feel like it’s the norm,” which is exactly what Vera and Gordon talk about (R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). This ideology of white normativity essentially labels everything that is different as risky and highly uncertain, because there is no proof that it will work (Vera & Gordon, 2003). High uncertainty is something that people try to avoid and especially in a business where so much is at stake it is much easier to stick to the films that have been proven to work (Neuliep, 2014). Based on the findings it becomes clear that distribution has a huge impact on casting. Not only is much of the distribution side heavily dominated by studios, but the factors distributors look for in films predominantly pertain to casting. As for Hollywood productions, in particular, the findings show that it is ultimately the studios who control the content of Hollywood films and with that have a huge impact on diversity in film. The films they produce, finance, and distribute largely follow the same structure, content and are based heavily on ideologies of white normativity in order to reduce potential risks. Based on these ideologies, held by predominantly white males, studios make final decisions and ultimately run Hollywood.

When it comes to casting and the fact that celebrities sell, it is important to recognize that while the majority of celebrities are white, there are marketable African American celebrities such as Will Smith and Idris Elba. These famous African American actors do have the ability to sell a film much like any white celebrity, however, the number of African American celebrities is much smaller and I therefore still claim that this is an issue. Celebrity status is the number one factor that will a) get an actor a job, b) get the attention, interest and financing of the studio and c) will increase the likelihood of success both in regards to distribution as well as the box office. To a studio executive whose primary goal is to make money off a film and who controls both production as well as distribution, the more celebrities he can get to sign on a film, the more

money he can sell it for. So the number of African American celebrities plays a huge role when it comes to diversity and while there are famous a-list African American celebrities who can sell a movie and have the same star power and gravitas as a white celebrity, there just are not as many of them, which is an issue.

### **Limitations**

Given more time, resources, and money I would have liked to extend the research in many ways. With more time I would have interviewed a lot more industry professionals from various areas of the film industry, such as directors and actors. With better resources, money and time I would have liked to also interview studio executives and celebrities to draw an even richer picture of Hollywood, the casting process and the key players' roles. I think that it would have been very beneficial to observe the casting process for a Hollywood film first hand or to even observe the entire process of making a film from start to finish, from acquiring a script and financing it, to hiring practices, casting, production to distribution until the film premieres. I think that seeing every stage of the filmmaking process, observing the dynamics and interactions, and interviewing the professionals who are involved in every step, could have been very beneficial to this research. However, with the time and resources that I had available I did the best I could.

### **Discussion**

This research uncovered three major findings which answer the question about the role of casting directors in the casting process for lead roles in Hollywood films. These findings are first and foremost, that casting directors have no authoritative say in any decisions made regarding casting because they mainly suggest actors for roles. Second, studios have a great amount of

power and as financiers of content, approve, if not make all decisions, especially in regards to casting. Third, distribution, which is largely controlled by studios, plays a key role in casting because distributors mainly look for marketable actors. Therefore, distributors are looking to buy films with celebrity filled lead roles because the likelihood of success is much higher. These three primary findings are key to understanding Hollywood and the issue surrounding diversity in the industry. This section of the research will look at possible objections to the findings, ways in which this research and the findings agree, disagree, or extend published works in the field, and then describe two suggestions for future research and how they could help in bringing more diversity to Hollywood.

When doing research and interviewing industry professionals, I found that while the majority of industry professionals agree on the power imbalance in Hollywood and the fact that studios have ultimate power, there are a few professionals who disagree. Jonathan Deckter, while interviewing him, said that studios have a lot of power and make decisions about greenlighting films, however, he also said that high profile directors usually “get what they want” (J. Deckter, phone interview, November 22, 2016). While this might be true for a limited number of directors, my findings support Kate Mueller who said that studios, in the majority of instances, have ultimate power and approve all decisions, even those made by high profile directors (K. Mueller, phone interview, November 22, 2016). While these directors do have more freedom and more say, the studio, if attached, most likely has the upper hand if they really disagreed with a director. In addition to that, a few casting directors might argue that they have more power than my findings claim, however, while this might be the case for a few, not anywhere near the majority of casting directors have that kind of power over studio executives or directors (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). Kate Mueller, Jonathan Deckter, and Rob Ford

all said that power relations really depend on the film and the people involved, but when it comes down to it, a casting director suggests actors for roles (K. Mueller, phone interview, November 11, 2016; Jonathan Deckter, phone interview, November 2016; R. Ford, phone interview, 2016, December 5). Despite these two exceptions, my findings are well supported and shine light on the complexity of and dynamics in Hollywood.

With regards to published research in the field, my findings mostly agree with already existing research. African Americans are clearly underrepresented in lead roles in Hollywood films. This is in part due to cultural factors such as the existing ideologies present within the American culture, which still to this day contribute to the underrepresentation of African Americans in lead roles and affect the roles available for African Americans as discussed by Vera and Gordon (Vera & Gordon, 2003). With regards to the role of casting directors, my findings mostly agree with existing research, in that industry professionals are very aware of the role of a casting director and their lack of power when it comes to actually making final casting decisions (K. Mueller, phone interview, 2016, November 11). While this is well known among scholars and industry professionals, it might be contradicting to society's beliefs on the role of casting directors. Few people really know the industry or understand all the different roles and people that it takes to make a film and while the word "casting" in casting director might suggest a lot of power, what their job really is, is liaising between the actors and those in charge of making casting decisions (K. Mueller, phone interview, November 11, 2016). The amount of power that studios have, again is rather well known in the industry, but there is little research on the process of casting or in fact Hollywood and the way it operates. Therefore, my findings agree with facts well known among professionals, yet extend knowledge in that my findings shine light on the power relations and the interconnectedness of the business side of the film industry and

the creative side of it. When it comes to distribution, my findings definitely extend existing research and add new findings to the issue of diversity in Hollywood. There is little to no research on distribution so far and the research that exists does not connect distribution to casting at all. Therefore, my findings present new ideas and facts about the industry and a huge factor that influences casting and diversity in Hollywood films. Research that has already been published, often fails to include distribution when talking about issues such as diversity. Distribution is rather complicated and if I hadn't had the incredible opportunity to see it first hand at the American Film Market and to talk to distributors and get a feel for the dynamics and its role within the film industry, I, too, would probably have failed to even mention it. I think that the correlation between casting, the studios and distribution adds to the great works that have already been published and aids in understanding Hollywood, the biggest media and entertainment industry there is. Increasing diversity, therefore, is not as simple as it is often deemed to be by critics and the public. It has a lot to do with the structure of Hollywood as Hall explains. The issue which is often considered to be personal is rather systemic and structural (Hall, 1997). As Hall suggests in his theory on *Representation and Discourse*, those in charge of media reconstruct culture according to their ideologies (Hall, 1997). Ideologies, while sometimes intentional and conscious, are usually unintentional and unconscious ideas and beliefs, in this particular case about African Americans in the US culture. Based on Hall's theory, the issue of diversity and the gross underrepresentation of African Americans in lead roles is therefore much more complex, structural and ideology-based than it is perceived in society. In addition to that, the issue of underrepresentation has a lot to do with the ideologies that are so deeply engrained in the American culture, which in fact might be the same as those held by the predominantly white males in executive positions. These ideologies, which are so deeply engrained in this culture, are



often not recognized because they are unconscious and have become so internalized that we deem them “normal,” as explained and pointed out by Vera and Gordon (Vera & Gordon, 2003).

In order to help bring more diversity to Hollywood and more African Americans on screen, or simply to stir the conversation about diversity outside the realm of the Oscars, I think that it is important to conduct further research. The issue surrounding diversity in film and media, the extreme amount of power studios have over the content we see, and the way we perceive our own culture and other cultures is something that needs to be talked about. I came up with two ideas for future research which I think can help in better understanding Hollywood as an industry, the power of studios as well as the “lack” of diversity in film. I think that future research should look at ways and strategies to put more pressure on studio executives to diversify their products. Observing and researching the ways in which studios operate, their goals and means of achieving them, and how one can break the cycle of producing the same films because they have worked in the past, is something that might be beneficial in bringing more diversity to the screen. Another focus of future research should be to take a look at streaming networks, such as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon, which scored much higher when it comes to inclusion and diversity (Smith, 2016). By researching how they operate, what they do differently from studios and why their system is so successful and then figuring out ways to implement the model or aspects of it into Hollywood, can possibly lead to more diversity in Hollywood. If not that, then it will at least provide us with ideas on how to possibly increase diversity in Hollywood productions through other means and concepts. Most importantly, however, I think that it is crucial to educate the people of the American culture and to work on changing the ideologies that are held by so many, and which consciously or unconsciously reinforce the use of stereotypes, biases, and prejudices towards African Americans. Finally, to change the content on screen, it

might be beneficial to change the demographics of those behind the camera and in executive positions.

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Appendix A

Thesis Interview Questions 1

Interviewer: Chantal Suhling

Interviewee: Kate Mueller, Casting Director

Interview Setting: The interview was conducted over the phone interview on Friday November 11, 2016

Introductory questions:

Can you tell me what your job is and what you do?

Can you describe the role of a casting agents/ director in the film industry?

Where do see your role as ... fit in the film industry?

How long have you been working as ...?

Questions:

1. Can you describe to me what the general casting process for a film looks like?
2. Can you describe the casting process for a lead actor/ actress?
  - a. In what ways/ if at all, would you say that it is different?
  - b. Can you elaborate on the key players in the casting process of a lead actor/ actress?
3. Can you describe the decision-making process for a lead role?
  - a. Can you elaborate on the role ... plays in making the decision?
  - b. Can you elaborate on the role a casting director plays in making this decision?
  - c. Can you elaborate on the role of the director in making this decision?
4. When casting for a lead role in a movie, could you tell me about the decision-making process with regards to the script?
  - a. Can you tell me more about the flexibility of the characters in a given script?

- b. Can you tell me about the role of a writer in the casting process?
5. How would you describe the role of the director in the decision making/ casting process?
6. How would you describe the role of the studio executives in the decision-making process?
7. How would you describe the role of the distributor in the casting process?
8. Can you give me examples of factors that play a role in selecting a lead actor for a film?
9. Can you tell me about diversity in film?
10. Knowing the industry pretty well, what if anything would you change about the industry?
11. Can you explain to me the role of the cast in the success of a movie?



## Appendix B

## Thesis Interview Questions 2

Interviewer: Chantal Suhling

Interviewee: Jonathan Deckter, COO and President of Voltage Pictures

Interview Setting: The interview was conducted over the phone interview on Tuesday November 22, 2016

Introductory questions:

Can you tell me what your job is and what you do?

Can you describe the role of a sales ... in the film industry?

Where do see your role as ... fit in the film industry?

How long have you been working as .../ in the film industry?

Can you describe to me, how you got started in the film industry?

Can you describe the things you like about your job/ work?

Questions:

1. Can you explain distribution to me?
  - a. When selling a film, what are some characteristics that distributors look for?
2. How would you describe the role of the director in the decision making/ casting process?
3. How would you describe the role of the studio executives in the decision-making process?
4. How would you describe the role of the distributor in the casting process?
5. Can you describe to me what AFM is?
6. How would describe the role of distribution in regards to casting for a film?
  - a. Would you say that as filmmakers being aware of distribution and the selling factors of a film influences casting decisions?
7. Can you give me examples of factors that play a role in selecting a lead actor for a film?
8. Can you tell me about diversity in film?
9. Knowing the industry pretty well, what if anything would you change about the industry?

Appendix C

Thesis Interview Questions 3

Interviewer: Chantal Suhling

Interviewee: Rob Ford, Film and TV Producer; Founder of the Creative Mind Group

Interview Setting: The interview was conducted over the phone interview on Monday, December 5, 2016

Introduction:

Can you tell me what your job is and what you do?

Can you describe the role of a ... in the film industry and how it fits in the film industry?

How long have you been working in the film industry?

Questions:

10. Can you describe to me what the general casting process for a film looks like?
  - a. Can you elaborate on the key players in casting process?
11. Can you describe the casting process for a lead actor/ actress?
  - a. In what ways/ if at all, would you say that it is different?
  - b. Can you elaborate on the key players in the casting process of a lead actor/ actress?
12. When casting for a lead role in a movie, could you tell me about the decision-making process with regards to the script?
  - a. Can you tell me more about the flexibility of the characters in a given script?
  - b. Can you tell me about the role of a writer in the casting process?
13. How would you describe the role of the director in the decision making/ casting process?
14. How would you describe the role of the producer in this process?
15. How would you describe the role of the studio executives in the decision-making process?
16. How would you describe the role of the distributor in the casting process?

17. Can you give me examples of factors that play a role in selecting a lead actor for a film?
18. Can you name some factors and characteristics that distributors are looking for in a film?
19. In a studio production, can you explain the chain of command in the decision-making process?
20. Could you describe the influence of studios in distribution to me?
  - a. When going to the movie theatre, most films are produced or distributed by one of the big studios, could you explain or name some reasons for why that is?
21. Could you name some advantages and disadvantages of selling an independently produced film to a studio for distribution?
22. Can you describe some factors/ characteristics which audiences are looking for in a film?
23. Can you tell me about diversity in film?
24. You often hear, that “there is a lack of economic indicators for the potential success of diverse movies,” could you possibly describe your stance on that and your experience with that? (Do you see this lack of economic indicators as well?)
  - a. Could you name some of these indicators which let distributors believe that diversity won’t sell?
25. Knowing the industry pretty well, what if anything would you change about the industry?

## Appendix D

## Thesis Interview 1

Interviewer: Chantal Suhling

Interviewee: Kate Mueller, Casting director and film and television historical researcher

Interview Setting: The interview was conducted over the phone on Friday November 11, 2016

Affiliation with Interviewee: The interviewee is a friend of my thesis professor

I= Interviewer

P= Participant

(Start of Interview)

I: I have a couple questions just to start off, to kinds [sic] get to know you a little better and what you do...

P: Of course.

I: So, we can get started, and if you could just tell me what your job is, first of all.

P: Yes, well I work several (inaudible), as most of us do in the arts. Primarily I work in film and television historical research. So, like drama (inaudible) work in theatre but doing it for film and TV, for particularly period pieces. Um, I have a TV show that's being produced in the UK right now and it takes place in Elizabethan England, and as you can imagine there is a lot of work that goes into creating a world that took place 400 years ago. So, part of my job is to research everything from the-- the real people that were involved in the period, to reading the scripts, to see if the language sounds appropriate. And so, that's part of what I do. The other part is-- I do film and TV casting, which I first started doing about 10 years ago and I've worked for several different, really amazing casting directors and I've also done some freelance work on my own as well.

I: Alright great.

P: So, those are the two things I do.

I: That's very interesting. How do you balance the two of those [sic]?

P: Uh, you know, you have to be really selective of the work that you take and look at the scope of projects to make sure, you know, if you're working on a TV show, you know you're gonna [sic] be in for a long haul because they shoot over a long period of time and depending on where the television show is located, you can be working 16 hours a day cause [sic] you're liaising with people in Bali, if that's where they're shooting, so that part is-- can be very difficult. Films are a little bit more condensed in time. You could be working, you know, two to three months before shooting for a TV show-- for a film. So, you kinda [sic] have to be careful about what work you

chose, and knowing that you're taking on something that's gonna [sic] be going for quite a while. The historical research stuff is usually-- actually over a much longer period of time but it's not as time intensive. So, you-- I'll get a phone call and I'll get something to work on and it's a script that is being written, so it's not even being produced yet. So, it's-- it actually takes up a lot less time each day but it could last, you know, one and a half to two years. So, you know, they're kinda [sic] different in that way. So, I guess, in a way it sort of actually makes it easier to balance the two cause [sic] I can take on one really intense project and then also have something longer that I can do when I have time.

I: Yea [sic], definitely.

P: If that makes sense?

I: Oh yea [sic] definitely. That's actually very interesting. Alright, so, could you describe to me the role of a casting director in the film industry?

P: I would *love* to, because it's kind of a hot button topic. Um, it's a largely overlooked job and there is-- in the casting industry, there is a lot of disappointment about how little recognition there is for it. There is not an Oscar for it, there is not a SAG Award for it and there is just very little recognition and it's sad. I think people misunderstand that the casting director is-- I think and I realize I'm biased, but is one of the most important roles in the entire film or TV show and basically, **the casting director is responsible for assigning all of the roles**. Um, but it-- I mean that kind of is what it is **by definition** but we do a lot more than that and when people sit in our office and see what we do, they are sort of (inaudible). Um, I mean in a nutshell, what we do is, **we get phone calls from studios, from independent directors, from producers, who have a project that they have funding for or that a studio is producing and they need someone to help them find celebrities or actors for all of the roles. And our job is to create lists of actors for every role and present those lists to the director and the producers and, or the studio, if there is a studio involved, and start narrowing down these lists to people that they like, that they're interested in.** But within those lists we have to present them with lists that are realistic, a) meaning if you're working with a studio that wants a-list celebrity talent, you have to be able to give them a list of celebrities that would actually do the project and that kinda [sic] comes down to, do they have the money and is it going to be a big enough film for them, for it to be worth it to them? And that takes a lot of experience to sort of know, um, to know what's realistic and what isn't, as well as kind of a gut instinct on things. But the other part of these lists is, knowing whether or not actors are even available for a project and that requires talking with agents and managers. So, to put the list together takes a huge amount of time and effort and **what we present initially are actors that could be interested and would be available for the project.** And then we start narrowing everything down and it takes weeks and weeks and then we narrow it down more and then we get to the part where we kind of have to start making some offers to actors. We make offers to actors who are kinda [sic] of a certain echelon, I wanna say and again that kinda [sic] takes experience to know cause[sic] there is this funny thing that happens, in particularly the celebrity world, where you don't really necessarily wanna [sic] ask for an audition cause [sic] that can be viewed as highly offensive. Chemistry reads are different because you're looking to pair two people together, to see if they have chemistry. Or, a producer session which is where you-- it

would be down to you and one or two other people and you're auditioning at the studio or for the director and producer, so that-- that's [sic] kind of is a must for everybody. But it takes a lot of honing down of these lists of people who would be right for different roles and working with the producers and the director to come up with people that want to do the project, are available on the dates that you're gonna [sic] be shooting and can you actually get them to sign the contract, can you actually get them to do it, and can you get an entire cast of people to do all of those things for the same amount of time to shoot a movie? And it's kind of a miracle that it happens, to be honest.

I: Ya [sic]

P: It's really-- it's really hard and I think-- I think it's a really overlooked job. A lot of **directors feel that it's a job that they do because they're looking at the lists and picking their actors** and they don't see that the casting director has done a huge amount of work to get them to that point. So, I think there is a lot of misunderstanding about what we do but, you know, when you see awards, award shows in particular-- and I remember a woman I was working for, whose very close friend cast Orange is the New Black, they were just commenting that, in Orange, which is a fantastic show with an incredible ensemble of actors that they put together, that works so well together, and how hard it was to do that, despite all the awards that that show just won, nobody recognized the casting director for that. And it-- it's hard, but we don't do it because we don't get any recognition. We do it because we love it. That's the secret to working in casting and that's why I love working in casting. It's because you're working with people that want to do it and they get no recognition for it. So-- it's also a women's world, which I really love. Most casting directors are female and it's the kind of tight, close-net group of ladies and-- we all stick together and we all have each other's back and it's just neat. It's a really neat part of the industry, that is so female heavy and, you know, if talking about diversity, that is one of the few areas women kind of dominate. So, it's pretty fun. That was kind of a long winded way of saying what we do, but it's complicated, but that's it, more or less it.

I: That's perfect. Thank you for that. So, where do you see the role of a casting director fit in the film industry? You said that it's-- that they're kind of overlooked and that they're-- what I got from it, is that they're kind of the middle man, or woman in this case, between the studio, producers, directors and then the agents and actors on the other side.

P: Yea [sic], we play the middle man is [sic] an ideal phrase. Um, **we play the middle man in a lot of ways actually.** If the-- if the film is a TV show, a studio show, you know like Warner Brothers for instance, then we are actually the **middle man between the studio and the production team.** So, the directors and the producers-- so, there's often a fight that happens and I would say 98 percent of the time there's a **fight between what the studio wants and what, um, what the producers and the director wants** [sic]. **And the studio has kinda [sic] the ultimate power because they have all the money and they have a very specific view of what they want their movie to look like.** And the director and the producers often have a different opinion of actors that they want in their show, and so the **casting director will come and be the middle man and from the voice of reason look for compromise** between the two to make everybody happy, or to convince one side or the other, that the other side is right. So, we play the middle man in that way. We also **play the**

middle man with the studio, producers, director and the agents. So, we help to negotiate the contracts with, you know, basically how much money they're making and how long their shoot is, how many days they're working. We don't-- we don't actually go through the process of the contracts, that goes through lawyers and, you know, legal attorneys and stuff but we do help to negotiate with the agents cause [sic] the agents will often say, "Well, this actor is only available these days but you know they should be getting paid this much." And we will go back to the studio and say, "Well, they're asking for more money and less days of work." And so, we kinda [sic] go back and forth to help negotiate the contracts, which is another huge piece of the puzzle that most people don't realize that we do but we do and we-- contract has to-- so we liaise and we're middle men in both of those-- both of those ways.

I: Alright, thank you. And then the next one is, can you describe to me what the general casting process for a film looks like?

P: Yes. Casting usually comes in after the-- after all of the funding has been received. So, you know, depending on the casting director-- I mean, I've-- I've thankfully, mostly worked for very high level casting directors. So, women who are really at the top of their game, who don't do small indie films, who don't, you know, do things pro bono, but there are plenty of wonderful casting directors that help the little-- the smaller directors start out in their career, but I don't have as much experience with that. But usually, when we come in all the funding is already in place so, you know, we negotiate our contracts with the studio or with the independent director. Like I was working on, um, *The Free State of Jones*, the Matthew McConaughey movie that came out, um, last March I think and-- which I still haven't seen because I have a baby and I never get to movie theatre, but-- but that was actually an independent film. So, that was not done with the studio. That was done with the director, um, Gary Ross, who wanted to do a movie and so we sign on to (inaudible) and we were about four to five months before shooting began-- is when we started nailing down the lead actors. Uh, so, I would say about between-- usually between five to six months before the shooting of a film is ideally when we start casting a movie. Sometimes we start working eight months prior, if it's a large cast or particularly if it's a TV show, which takes a huge amount of work and coordination with another casting director that's called the location casting director. Which hopefully doesn't get too complicated, but if you're shooting a TV show in Atlanta for instance and we're based in Los Angeles, you're gonna [sic] have a location casting director as well, cause [sic] you're hiring a lot of local people, a lot of local actors and you have to be working together with the Atlanta casting director to make sure that you are creating an ideal ensemble. And so, sometimes on TV shows you work seven to eight months in advance but usually five-- five, six months is ideal. You get the script, you read through it, you immediately start making lists of actors, and you're making phone calls with agents to see who is available and would they be interested in this type of material. And that takes a couple of weeks and you're working with the director and the producers, talking about what everybody is interested in, who everybody likes, who we should pursue, who we should take of the list. And over those weeks of time you also have to call the agent to make sure they're still available, cause [sic] sometimes, what happens is, unfortunately, the director really eyes someone that they like and then you call the agent and they signed a contract for another film. And then you have to start all over again, which is horrible, but, you know, that's why you make

these lists and you give them lots of options-- but you do have to remain in contact with people to make sure that things haven't changed since the last time you spoke. So, it can be very anxiety producing and stressful but, um, you narrow it down and you narrow it down and you get down to two or three people, particularly if you have a script with a love interest, you will do chemistry reads. And you'll see how people look on screen together and that is usually in a small room, in a studio lot with the producers and the director and the studio executives and the casting director is kind of sitting in the-- on the side, coaching them, asking them to do things differently and change things and they're filming it and then they go back. Everybody goes back and watches the film and kinda [sic] tries to make a decision about who they like and sometimes there's a fight about it and you have to liaise between everybody and figure out, you know, who would really be the right person and ultimately, it's not up to the casting director. It's the people paying for it, which is the studio. Um, and then you start negotiation process [sic] and if people are, um, from out of the country, which we had to deal with on many occasions, you have to make sure that they're work visa is appropriate for the work that they're doing and making sure that their-- their work days are negotiated, their contract, you know. Everything has to be finally detailed out in the contract, the days they're working, are they allowed to fly certain places, are they allowed to go home on certain days? Everything is sort of drawn out and you have to hope that in between the time that you finish casting-- which really is never finished until the film is totally complete and you are on the red carpet at the premiere. Really, I mean, we-- you lose actors fairly often actually. So, we usually kinda [sic] (inaudible) complete a casting process, ideally at least a month or two before the start of shooting because you want time for the director and the actors to get together, to talk about the script, to do research on the characters, to-- sometimes they even go into rehearsal period and-- and they need to have plenty of time. I worked on the Nicholas Sparks film "The Best of Me" with James Marsden, that came out a couple years ago and James was not supposed to play that role. It was supposed to be Paul Walker who died shortly before they were supposed to start shooting and that was one of those instances, where we all of a sudden-- everything got thrown into the goblet because our lead actor *died* and it was *horrible*, and we had to make a last minute decision about what to do; and thankfully James Marsden was available and was wonderful, but he didn't have a lot of prep time and he kinda [sic] had to come in under the gun and get the job done. And as a casting director, therefore, your job really is never over until it's really *really over*. And we even have people that get fired on set, or pose a problem to the production, or become ill, or whose family becomes ill-- I was working on "Pete's Dragon" for Disney, that-- the remake that came out. And we had one of the lead actors who [sic] had to drop out because his-- a family member of his got greatly ill and he had to leave. Thankfully it happened before they started shooting, but, you know, it's kind of a complicated process and there's never a sort of median of what does an average film look like because you just never know what's gonna [sic] happen. But generally speaking, you're looking at a five to six month period and you have to have a lot of back up plans because anything can happen and you really don't wanna [sic] get caught in a position where you don't have options. Um, cause [sic] you know, life happens to all of us and—but-- while everybody understands that life happens, it is quite literally one of the *most* high stake industries in the nation and possibly globally because you're talking about millions and millions of dollars on the line and it's very stressful. And so, as a casting director you're make or break, you know, if you have a great script



but you have a terrible cast you're gonna [sic] have a horrible show. Even if you have not [sic] a great script but you have a great cast you're gonna [sic] have a good show. So, it's high stake, it's very high stakes. And-- and having lots of options and knowing that you will be working very hard for about three months and then there is always the possibility that the phone could ring any time, which at that point, in the end of shooting-- so it's about-- all together, I would say it's probably about eight months of work.

I: Oh wow.

P: And you have to hope you get paid for that entire time cause [sic] sometimes the studios don't wanna [sic] pay you after your contract is technically ended, even though they find themselves in an emergency situation. So, yea [sic], it's a blast. I mean, it's so much fun but it is-- it's stressful. It's very stressful talking to studio executives, as you can probably imagine.

I: Yea [sic], definitely. So, can you kind of elaborate on the key players in the casting process? So, obviously the casting director is very important, but you said that, you know, the studios play a big part and then the director, the producers. So, what is each person's role in the casting process?

P: Sure. So-- so your main players are the casting director, you have casting associates, casting assistants. So, they are all the people working in the casting office that contribute. Um, the director is obviously very important, the person directing the show or the film and they do not really have ultimate responsibility-- ultimate say over a studio. The studio was forking out all of the money and therefore they have, you know, the god power. But the director's responsible for bringing the whole thing together. So, you know, they have a very specific vision of what they want their film to look like and they're working with the casting director to make sure that vision is realized with actors in particular. They obviously have a lot of other production people that they're working with, lighting, and sound, and music, and, you know, all those production (inaudible), you know, the costumes, to make sure that their vision is seen. But specifically, in regard to casting, they're working with-- talking with us every single day about auditions that they're seeing-- some people-- vimeo, you tube clips, movie clips that we've downloaded for them of celebrities to try and look at people together, to see whether or not, you know, James Marsden is gonna [sic] look good with Scarlett Johansson and, you know, trying to get ideas of how to bring their vision to life. And it's very stressful for them to— (inaudible) their network. And then you have the producers. And the producers are absolutely, amazingly important and they're not just the money, which is what a lot of people think they are. They do-- producers often come-- most of the time they come on board of projects because they do make a lot of money off of highly successful films and TV shows because they contribute money to it and then they get a bounce back from that, but actually, their job is to liaise between the director, the actors and the studio. So, the director we talk to constantly but in a lot of instances we talk to the producers more because the director is involved in so many things all at one time that it's actually very difficult for him or her to devote four hours looking at videos of actors when they're on location trying to pick a church that they like. So, the producers are actually the ones that make all of the negotiations with the casting people, and the actors, and the agents and they're calling the studios, talking to the studios about what the director likes, what they want,

where to go from here, what actors we have that we really wanna [sic] choose. So, actually they are the voice of the director in a lot of ways and when the director is having difficulty deciding on something, or they need advice on something, the producers will step in and say, “Okay, we’re gonna [sic] take over from here. These are the actors we want and we’re gonna [sic] negotiate for them.” And so, they really *really* do a huge amount of work and are super important to-- particularly to the director, who just needs a lot of help. And they’re-- basically they’re to be a second, third, fourth voice for the director and the director’s vision, making sure that he or she is getting what they want. Um, then you have the **studio**, if there is a studio involved, because again, not all TV shows and films have a studio attached, **but their responsibility is to make money. That’s their job** [laughs]. So, they-- they have a huge amount of projects going on at any one time. I mean, they can have, you know, 20-25 movies happening all at the same time and it’s actually very difficult to get them on the phone. Any studio executive is *very* difficult to get on the phone because they’re so busy. But, **they get the final say on most things**; much to the anger of the casting director and the director some of the time. **And they ultimately have the say about who gets to get cast**. And after all of the work the director, producers and the casting director do together, to decide who they want the ensemble to be, **we then have to call the studio and get permission for all of those people**. So, we have to actually get a written confirmation that all of the people that we want are going to be okay with the studio since they’re paying the 35, 40 million dollars to make the movie and if they aren’t, then we have to go back and start again, uh, which happens *all* the time.

I: Oh wow.

P: And-- *all* the time. And it’s so irritating because half the time we kinda [sic] feel like they aren’t even really looking at the material that we send them. They’re just kind of, I mean, kind of profiling in a way because they have a certain look that they want and the director has a certain look that they want and sometimes you win and sometimes you lose and-- but you have to appeal everybody [sic]. So—so, ya [sic], casting director, director, producers, studio. I would say those are the biggest hitters for the initial process of casting a film or TV show. Those-- those are the big guns.

I: Ya [sic]. Alright, that’s very *very* interesting since I just worked for a bunch of-- Voltage Pictures actually, at the film market.

P: Oh.

I: Ya [sic]. So, that was very interesting to see how they were trying to sell the films and how they always have to advertise the cast who’s in it. Um...

P: Yes. Yes. Oh gosh. Marketing and distribution is *so* complicated. Ya [sic], that is a whole other tiger right there.

I: Yea [sic]. Alright, so, just a quick question about casting for lead actors versus the supporting cast. Is there a difference in the casting process?

P: Yes. The-- I would say the supporting cast-- I don’t know if it takes longer-- that process is longer but I do think it’s because most of the supporting cast is auditioned. And, so, we will set

up audition periods in, you know, in an office, in our casting office, or a studio and you will have, you know, tens of actors coming through your office, you know, a couple days in a row auditioning for one role. And when you have a film that's got several supporting cast roles, it takes much to get through people. Especially, since you have more than one audition for an actor. So, you start out again with those lists of people and sometimes-- a lot of directors-- a lot of big, successful directors work with the same casting director every movie, because they like working together, they know each other very well. That is a lot of what Hollywood is about, is, you know, working with people you are comfortable with and enjoy working with, which is good and bad I suppose, but you put together lists of people, you give it to the director, the director then chooses, you know, a bunch of people that they like and then you audition them. So, you have them come in and you put them on tape, you record the audition. If they can't be there in person you can ask them to use their iPhone and have their, you know, sister record them and email it to you. And then we compile all of those videos and we send them all on a private, you know, database to the director and the producers. They look through all of those videos and decide who they like, who they'd like to see again, maybe reading a different scene, who they don't like and then we narrow down the search again and we have them come back and audition again with more material, with different material, um, ask them to change some things—so, we'll coach them a little bit. If the director says, "Hey, I really like that girl but I think she needs to be a little bit more angry," then we'll let her know, "Hey, when you come in we need you to be a little bit more angry," or whatever the note is from the director. And so, we-- we do a lot of coaching for them so that, you know-- cause we are-- casting is one hundred percent on the actor's side. So, despite the fact that we're working for the director and the studio, we want every actor that walks through the door to get the job. I mean, we are so pro actor and it's very stressful for them and so we do as much as we possibly can to help them do their best, to get the job. And then through that sort of auditioning process-- it's really up to the director how many times they wanna [sic] see somebody audition. Most of the supporting roles in big feature films will then go to a producer session. So, you narrow it down to two or three choices and those two or three actors come to, you know, the allocated location where the producers, the directors are and they meet them in person, which for directors is really helpful. It's really helpful to see an actor, to talk with them, to get to know them, to see if you guys match together, you know, you're-- you're spending 40 million dollars to make a movie and you wanna [sic] get along with the people you're working with. And then you audition them, you can coach them, they, you know, they will change things, they will change the scene a little bit, and see how well the actor works for them. And out of those two to three people you're just really gonna [sic] hope that they will love somebody and then you call the studio and you say, "Hey, this is the person we wanna [sic] hire, here is the tape of the producer session," and they watch it, hopefully, and they say yes or no. And we have to do that entire process for every supporting role that there is. So, it's a huge amount of work and often times, you know, we'll have five, six, seven supporting roles for a movie and an astronomical number of those for a television show. Um, the-- the lead roles is [sic] quite a bit less work, hands on work for us because in big features they are sort of a straight hire. So, they're celebrities that don't really need to audition because they've done so much work that you kinda [sic] know them in a way and sometimes the director or the studio will request a chemistry read, which is not unheard of. I mean, Jennifer Lawrence did a chemistry read for the

Hunger Games the first time around and that was how they decided on a lot of the supporting roles that-- how she interacted with everybody else and that's really important in an ensemble film. You know, you look at-- I mean-- gosh you look at like "12 Years a Slave"-- what an incredible film and, you know, the chemistry reads are so important to that process and knowing that people are really going to work together. And I'll tell you, it's so true that when you watch a video of people together, they either have it or they don't. There is either chemistry there or there is not and you just can't make that up. So, sometimes that will-- that will happen. I would say more often than not because when you're paying two to ten million dollars for a celebrity to be in your movie you wanna [sic] know that they're gonna [sic] have chemistry with another person and it's not that much to ask, to come in for, you know, an hour to do a chemistry read. But, pretty much after that you just have to negotiate money and get the contract written up and know that the studio is okay with all of your choices and make sure that they okay everything, but-- the only snag and tricky thing about working with, you know, the lead celebrity roles is that they will often sit on their contract and not sign it until they have to because they wanna [sic] know if anything better comes along, whereas supporting actors are the people that are trying to make it to the lead roles and so they are hungry to work and really want the work, which is sort of heartbreaking in a way cause [sic] you get-- you get to know all of the actors so well from all of their auditions and, you know, only one person is gonna [sic] get it. But I would-- I would say the biggest difference between supporting and lead casting is-- is the amount of time that goes into it. It's just a huge amount of work for supporting roles. It's just so much bigger because they have to prove themselves as opposed to the lead celebrity roles who kind of already have proven themselves because now they're a celebrity and now they don't need to prove themselves anymore because they have made it. So, I think that's the biggest difference between the two.

I: Alright, that is so interesting. So, would you say that-- what I understood, is that studios are making the final decisions on any casting. Would you say that it is very important to them to cast celebrities, um, because of them having to make money and does that affect diversity at all?

P: And-- and wait, say the last part again.

I: Does that affect diversity, would you say?

P: Oh yes. Absolutely! Yes, yes. **Celebrities are important because they sell a movie.** You know, **the bigger name you can get, the likelihood that you're gonna [sic] make more money is fairly high.** Um, I think **that affects diversity a lot because so many of the celebrities are white and male.** And the statistics of how many speaking male roles there are versus female roles, regardless of race, is something like 76 to like 30 something percent. It's-- like 76 percent of speaking feature film roles are men. The rest are women. So, that imbalance is huge and that's mostly celebrities. Now, I'd like to say that that's getting better. And I think it's getting better because you have networks like, or companies like Netflix, Amazon, Hulu that are completely changing the game. And they are ordering massive numbers of TV shows and movies being made [sic] under their production company and because of this huge influx of-- of projects being made, there are now so many more opportunities for everybody to get a piece of the pie and so, diversity, I feel, and I hope, is on an up turn now. There's just so many more characters that I see coming through the door that call for diverse actors. It's not-- it's better than it used to be. It's

still not great. The statistics are not great as , I feel like, as we see more of the Netflixes [sic], and the Amazons [sic], and the Hulus [sic]-- as that movement progresses and more actors are coming in for more roles and this flood of projects is happening, there will be a movement of celebrities coming out of these Netflix shows like, “Narcos” for instance-- that are calling for bilingual actors or, you know, actors of color and, transgender actors, you know, **Laverne Cox, for instance from Orange is the new Black**-- that all of these-- you know, “Orange is the New Black” from Netflix-- I mean Netflix helped to revolutionize the industry for diversity and as we see more of that happening, you know, that **Laverne Cox has become a celebrity** in her own right and we’re gonna [sic] see more of that, I hope. And so, my-- my inkling is that the celebrity world is gonna [sic] become more and more diverse and hopefully-- hopefully network executives will continue to support that. I think we have every indication that they will, but **so much of Hollywood is still made up of middle aged white men**. So, I think there is an up-turn, I think it’s gonna [sic] happen-- it’s happening slowly and the Oscars took, you know, a lot of (inaudible) in 2014 for, you know, the all-white Oscars but I do think that there is change happening. That it’s really, I think, due to the binge-watching companies-- the Netflix and Amazon sort of revolution. And I think it’s amazing. I think it’s time and this is the way it’s gonna [sic] happen. So, it’s there. It’s happening, like-- no I really— I-- it needs to, it has to-- it has to cause it’s been-- it’s been a white man’s world for a really, *really* long time.

I: Yea [sic]. Alright, one question about scripts. Is there-- how flexible are the scripts with regards to casting?

P: Hmm. That’s a *really* good question. Um, it depends on who you’re working with. Often times you’re working with a-- well the casting director isn’t but the director and producers are working with a script writer. Sometimes the director is the writer, they’ve written their script and they’re directing it, which happens a lot, so, you can definitely-- **there is always room for conversation. Always. There is never a time where it’s inappropriate to talk about whether or not a character could be diverse**, could be an actor of color, or a female, you know, or whatever it is that-- **that’s always a question that should be asked**. Um, it’s often stated very clearly when you get a script, in the character description, if it needs to be very specific for a specific reason, you know, you’re not gonna [sic] cast “12 Years a Slave” and not understand that you’ll need a lot of black actors because it would be inappropriate to not do that. So, there are things that are specifically written for certain purposes and, you know, sometimes for obvious reasons that needs [sic] to be adhered to but it’s always important to question whether a role can be, you know, this or that, you know, which direction are we going, does it need-- does it matter, can we see a wide range of actors? And, you know, we-- we’re constantly questioning that and we’re constantly bringing in diverse actors and actresses, you know, various genders and to help move the movement forward, **I think, casting directors have a huge responsibility to keep pushing the boundaries, and keep talking about it, and keeping the discussion open**. Sometimes, depending on who you’re working with, it’s not up for discussion, unfortunately. Sometimes it’s very open to discussion, particularly when you’re working with directors who are themselves a minority and those are great people to work with-- not that directors who have a very specific vision aren’t great to work with. It does make our job easy if they know exactly what they want, um, but I do think there’s-- there’s always room for the conversation. Sometimes you get shot down and



sometimes they say, “Oh, that-- that’s interesting. Let’s-- well let’s-- let’s look at some Latina actresses and see what happens.” And that-- that’s the best scenario but there is no scenario where it shouldn’t be talked about. I think it needs to be brought up all the time because otherwise that change is never gonna [sic] happen. So, you know, again, it just really depends on who you’re talking to and who you’re working with. And sometimes you get a really great response and sometimes you really don’t. And it just-- it just depends, unfortunately. But I do think-- I do think with the script that there is always room for conversation. Always. You have to.

I: Would you say that this decision, you know, about diversity or changing the script, would that have to be approved by the studio as well or is that a creative choice the director can make?

P: My understanding, although I’ve never been in a direct conversation about a script change, is that everything has to be approved by the studio. Um, they get very angry when some things are not approved by them. They-- that’s, you know, just all part of the contract so, you know, and again, at the end of the day, even if it becomes a creative choice, or the character in a description has no specific race description, and you’re presenting the studio with four options, you know, that have-- that all have diverse backgrounds, that are not just a bunch of white girls but maybe, you know, an African American girl, a Latina girl, and two white girls, they still have the ultimate say. So, you can push for the Latina actress because you think it would be really great for the movie to have that diverse voice, the studio could still shut it down and say, “No, we wanna [sic] go with, you know, the white girl with brown hair and blue eyes.” I mean, so, you can work with the director to make those decisions about which direction you wanna [sic] go with a character but ultimately, if you’re working with a studio, you have to get their approval anyway. So, yea [sic], it’s a game. It’s hard and the casting director’s job a lot of the time is trying to convince the studio why it’s important to do-- to go a certain direction and if diversity happens to be the topic, I think it’s really important for the casting director to say, you know, “This is an important-- this is an important voice that needs to be heard,” and you can state the case but ultimately the studio gets to decide. So, it’s tough. It can be a let down being a casting director, cause [sic], you know, you can fight, fight, fight and feel really strongly about the diversity movement but sometimes you hit those road blocks, but I think we’ve come a long way. I think we’ve come a *really* long way from where things used to be 15, 20 years ago. And stories are starting to be heard more, I mean, I so cannot wait to see “Birth of a Nation”. You know, what an amazing cast and an amazing story and you have a black protagonist and, you know, all of these things that are coming around, they are-- they’re there. We just kind of have to fight for it. But we will.

I: Yea [sic], definitely. So, with films that are not so involved with the studios, that are mostly run by, you know, independent directors, would you say that the director there has more of a say with regards to the cast?

P: Yes. 100 percent. 100.000 percent, yes! You know, when we did “The Free State of Jones” with Gary Ross and Matthew McConaughey, he-- Gary Ross got to choose anybody he wanted. It took so little time. It was amazing. I mean, it was the best possible way to be a casting director because you come in every day and he calls and says, “I like her, I want him, I want her, make

the calls,” and that’s it. And you’re done. You don’t have to get approval from anybody, you just got your approval from your director. Sometimes-- I worked on a horror film, which was actually a horror to work on because the director did not know what he wanted at all. And it was-- it was a nightmare actually because you didn’t have someone saying, “Well, this is the executive decision, this is the final decision, or if you’re not making this decision then I’m going to make it for you.” He was on his own. So, we kept having to try to steer him in a certain direction and, you know, we had one actress that kept coming in time after time *after time* and she-- and he ended up not hiring her and it was heartbreaking for her and it was heartbreaking for us and, so, you know, it can go-- it comes down to what I said before, it depends on who you work with. **But as far as actually getting to make the final decision, it is entirely up to the director if you’re working on an independent** with, I mean, I would say, in collaboration with the producer who is putting their money into the project. You want their approval as well. You want to all be on the same page, but there is no, you know, upper-- **upper group of people that are lording over you and vetoing decisions that took eight weeks to make.** You know, you can actually make a decision and be done. So, it’s pretty great. It’s pretty great when you don’t have a studio involved except for the fact that, you know, you don’t have 40 million dollars.

I: Yea [sic], oh definitely.

P: Sometimes—yea [sic]-- sometimes you do—sometimes, you know, **really great directors can come up with a lot of funding with really great producers and that’s the best possible scenario. It’s the best scenario for any director because they get so much more freedom. So much more and I think diversity can really come out of that as well because they can make those decisions without anyone vetoing them.** Ya [sic] (inaudible) studios.

I: Alright, great. Thank you so much for that. I have one last question and that is, knowing the industry so well, what, if anything would you change?

P: Oh, well, diversity is a big one, a huge one. Um, I’d like to-- I’d like to see a lot more diversity and inclusion. I’d like to see a lot more women step up to the plate. Um, I’d like to see a lot more racial issues being discussed, you know, I think “Straight Outta Compton” was a really important film to be made. Um, but I’d like to see more of it. I would-- I would like to see a lot more diversity in big, massive feature films. Marvel has gotten a lot of smack for sort of “whitewashing” their superheroes, although “Black Panther” is coming out, which is great, but you know, giving particularly kids and young adults more of an eye for diversity in film, in TV, I think that’s really super important. Um, and female-- and the female voice, obviously, you know, I’m particular about that because I’m a female working in a man’s world. Um, I-- I’d also like to say that if there was [sic] less celebrities, I would be okay with that. Less focus on the idea of being a celebrity and paparazzi and more focus on the art form of it because art, you know-- theatre is on a decline. Theatre in, you know, public education almost doesn’t exist at all anymore. That and theatre is where a lot of film and TV comes from, you know, people who started in theatre-- and like me, I mean, I started in theatre for twenty years first and I moved into film and TV, like most of us did. And it’s being shuffled off and it’s being largely forgotten and people sort of forget why they are doing it in the first place because there is all of this negative press and this following around of people and, you know, hounding actors on the red carpet and

asking them about their personal lives and nobody seems to be asking about the movie or about the TV show. I mean there is, you know-- in interviews there is sort of these-- like very cursory questions or these obligatory questions that are asked about like, "Well, did you guys goof around on set?" And now there is a-- or you know, "I heard you got married," but rather than really be talking about the work that's being done and why it's important and what are you bringing-- what is your film bringing to our culture that's important-- you know, why is nobody talking about that? Why-- why isn't that important? And I think it's-- it's sad, this whole crazy celebrity (inaudible).

I: Yea [sic].

P: You know, I just-- I'd like to see less of that and more focus on the art form and I'd like to see more diversity. I think we're on the right track for diversity. I do not think we're on the right track for celebrity. I think it's only gonna [sic] get worse. Once Brad and Angelina divorced, I mean, it was all over. That is all I hear about now. Heaven forbid I should hear about anything other than Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. But, I would say those would be the two things that I'd like to see changed. You know, there is a lot of-- a lot of little nuance things that are bothersome and annoying but really, I mean, diversity is huge. It's number one. It's everything that everyone talks about. So ya [sic]. Those would be the two I would say.

I: Yea [sic], great. Well, thank you.

P: Ya [sic]. You're very welcome.

I: This was very helpful and insightful. I learned a lot today.

P: Oh, I'm so glad. Oh good. Ya [sic], it's kind of a complicated-- a complicated world that you really have to be intimately involved with to sort of really understand the mechanics of it and it's complicated but it's an amazing field to work with-- and casting, and being around really strong and smart women is really a privilege, a huge privilege. So-- and my friend Dylan, I just heard back from him today. So, I was gonna [sic] call him and I think he's been on a project. Usually, when you don't hear back from someone that works in casting, it's because they're involved in some really ridiculous project. So, I will-- I will pass on his information to you because I think he would be really great to interview. He's done a lot of really interesting work. He would be very insightful for you.

I: Yea [sic], that would be great.

P: Yea [sic], yea [sic]. Well, I'm so glad-- if there is anything else that you think of, you know, don't hesitate to call or email me-- or things that I say that you're like, "What is he talking about," don't hesitate to ask.

I: Alright, great. Thank you so much.

(End of Interview)



## Appendix E

## Thesis Interview 2

Interviewer: Chantal Suhling

Interviewee: Rob Ford, Film & TV Producer and founder of the Creative Mind programs

Interview Setting: The interview was conducted over the phone on Monday December 5, 2016

Affiliation with Interviewee: The interviewee is the founder of the Creative Mind Group through which I attended the American Film Market as an intern in November of 2016

I= Interviewer

P= Participant

(Start of Interview)

I: Before I take up too much of your time, I want to get started right away. So, if you could tell me what your job is and what you do at your job, that's the first question, to get us started.

P: Ok, uh, one sort of counter question to you before I answer that, and I think you kind of know from our conversations or maybe from I guess like our website possibly, but anyways, uh, so you know I do like the Creative Minds thing with like, you know, you and the AFM Hollywood program and all of the (inaudible) in that world, but then I also produce television, and films as well outside of that and so my question, I guess would be, when you're asking, are you asking about TV and film producing or like running the Creative Minds programs?

I: Great question. More of like TV producing, film producing and that sort of stuff.

P: Ok. Uh, ok, cool, so, uh, [mumbles]), I'm just sending one last email and then I will give you my one hundred percent, complete, undivided attention and answer your question [talks to self]. Cool, alright, so, my title, I guess starting there, uh, for my TV and film stuff is in most cases producer, sometimes showrunner and my film, that I have in post-production right now, I am the executive producer on that. And so, I kinda [sic] talk through the difference between each and, you know, my role in all that (inaudible), in each one. And so, what I do mostly is TV produce [sic] and non-scripted television, which is like docu [sic] series stuff, I've done a lot of reality TV, I've done some competition TV, so those are the very versions of the non-scripted world. And so, I guess I'll just go with what I'm literally-- was just sending in an email, so it's perfect time [sic] to answer your question. What my role and responsibility is on this particular show I'm on now, it's a docu [sic] series, where each episode is one hour and it features one subject, that is in most cases a woman, who is either an actress, or a musician, or a big time TV personality and so the network confirms the talent. The talent is defined as the guest that we feature on our show. And then, once the talent is confirmed, their information is given to me, as well as **their manager, or their publicist, or whoever is their equivalent what we call handler**. And

so, at that point in time, I reach out to them and we do a preliminary phone call where we talk through what they have going on, what's important to them, what they want to talk about in the episode, some of their greatest accomplishments, some of their darkest, most depressing moments and just how to execute our show. So, they answer a bunch of questions, kind of similar to what you and I are doing now and then we take notes and then we break away. And, so, after that it takes probably about a week or two and I review everything from that call. We got a team of researchers that put together packets of supporting documents that they sent to me. I go through all the research and I basically pull all of the most interesting elements that I can find, that I deem TV worthy about this person. And, I then study all of those ideas, those, you know bullet points, those notes, and I start to form a concept of like little story ideas and little beats of like, how we could build a moment with, you know-- around this idea in the episode. And then from there, once I start to see all of the different beats, then my next move is to start to actually take all of those beats and ideas and to put them in some type of storytelling order as it relates to our show format. And our show format is six segments, because it's a one hour show and what that basically means, is that, you know, five times we go to commercial breaks within the show. So, each segment is what plays from one commercial break to the next and that's how we package the content of each, you know, (inaudible) and each one has a set amount of time that it can play, you know, usually seven to like twelve minutes, you know, per segment, it just depends. And so, I have to keep all that in mind when I put together the material, of like okay, this is segment one, I can have x amount of minutes, I want to have all of these ideas exchanged here, then we go on commercial break, I gotta [sic] figure out well, what are we gonna go to commercial break on, because we need a cliff hanger that makes people wanna [sic] come back. And then, once we come back from commercial break, what are we teasing as a coming up idea, to make sure, you know, people keep watching. So-- so, I lay the whole episode out, creatively on paper, what's the story we're gonna [sic] tell from beginning til [sic] the end and then I send that back to the network and say, "Hey, you know, for Chantal we have a (inaudible), we went through the research and here is the story, this is the story that I want to tell about her, that's how I want to tell it," and I literally pitch them the idea. And we'll have a back and forth exchange of like, add this, change that, you know, don't talk about this, we need more of that, this sounds boring, this is really great, can we get more of this, jadijadijada [sic] and then I'll accommodate that with, you know, (inaudible) some changes. And then, I go back to the talent themselves, in this case, I'll go back to Chantal, and say, "Hey, alright, I talked to the network," you know then I might say, "On my end, here is the story we want to tell of you and how we're going to tell it." It's the same idea. I'm pitching them the idea of essentially their own life story at this point and how we're gonna [sic] tell it on TV. And then they do the same thing, "Oh, I don't wanna [sic] talk about that, oh, I can't talk about that because that's the lawsuit and I'll get in trouble if I talk about that. well, I don't want to give this person any extra attention because we had a bad falling out and I don't wanna [sic] put them, you know, on my episode." So, it's all back and forth about I love this, I don't like that, change this, change that until we get on the same page and then I do another revision. At this point it might be like the third, fourth or fifth draft of the idea, you know, the breakdown and then, once they're happy, I'm happy, the network's happy that's the final sort of "locked creative", is what we call it, that we go out into the field with and we actually start shooting. And we get a week with each person to spend in their personal life, their

professional life, uh, shooting them in various capacities, depending on what the creative call for. And then, uh, we start to schedule all of shoots [sic] and that's where a lot of travel becomes involved, a lot of logistics, a lot of planning. So, I have a team that actually shoots that stuff but I oversee it and then we go out and we shoot for a week and most of our episodes-- the center of the episodes is something called a master interview and the master interview is essentially, a maybe four to six hour interview that I conduct myself with the talent asking them a bunch of questions. And that's how we lay out our whole story, what we used to (inaudible) the story against, the foundation, (inaudible) And, uh, it's done very cinematically, in a beautiful location, you know, high-end cameras and all that stuff. And then once that shot's done, we come back to LA, where we're based and we edit the show. We have maybe two to three weeks to cut the edit of the show and then we send it back to the network and they give us, you know, notes to make sure they're happy, everything is good. We do a few rounds of the back and forth with notes and then, you know, once that's settled and everybody likes what the final version is, they put it on air for television. And that's the end of the process. And I just do that same thing over and over again, you know rinse, wash, rinse and repeat or whatever they say. So, you know, I'm doing this simultaneously, not like doing one complete version and then go back and do it again, but we have to deliver all of the episodes in a, you know-- as a whole package, so they can air them week by week, So, yea [sic], so that's what I do now. You know I can send my resume to you. I didn't think about that. If you want like a more formal, condensed version of that answer description but, you know, for the purposes of this—cause [sic] I wanted to kind of take you through it step by step, so that you can understand it.

I: Yes, that works perfectly. Thank you for that. Uh, is that the same for film producing, or similar?

P: No. So, for the movie-- for the movie that I'm on as executive producer, uh-- one thing that I did is—well, there is a bunch, but one thing I did that's huge for that is I was financially-- I put money into the movie. So, half of the budget for the film, I put in and so that's what got me the executive producer credit. So, the big thing, I was a financier, so called financier of the film. Additionally, I helped find some of the key cast and crew members. I did not write the script, I did not direct the movie, I wasn't involved in any of that part of the writing or creative process. I got involved when the script was already done, it was present [sic] to me and I got involved. When the film was shot, I wasn't on set for one day, I didn't deal with any of the actual production elements, I was actually shooting my television show while the film was being shot. Most of my involvement has been, yea [sic]-- I made suggestions regarding cast but didn't make final casting decisions. That was more of our director, so yea [sic], most of my involvement since the film has been shot-- we're now taking it into post and I found the editor that cut the film and then I've been involved in all of the edit sessions for rough draft, second draft and now I don't even know what draft number we're on now but I've been involved in all of the shaping of the movie as far as notes and editorial cuts and trims and such of that nature. And then, uh, now that the film is close to being done, I brokered us a lot of big deals. So, like I said, I found the editor of the film, I found the posthouse for the film and the posthouse is where we're getting our color correction done, our sound mix, our ADR, our special effects and graphic design and all that (inaudible). That's what happens at the posthouse. So, I brokered that deal and then the next

big thing is getting it into festivals which I'm using my relationships through Creative Minds and those folks to help with that. And then, the ultimate, sort of final piece of the puzzle on my end will be trying to help secure a sales agent for the film so we can sell the movie, you know, like make our money back and in the best case scenario make a profit. So, those are my roles and responsibility [sic] as an executive producer and it's very, you know-- this is more generally from experience now, it varies from project to project what, you know, each producer or executive producer does. It really depends on the group of people and each person's skillset and what you're good at, what you can do. So, you know, it's like there is [sic] three people and ten things need to get done, so, I can do three things really well, you can do four of them really well and the other person can do, you know, three of them really well too, so that's what happens. You'll take those three, I'll take those four and everyone just works their strong suits and you just kind of like get into a *groove* of like whose gonna [sic] be doing, you know, what to keep the project moving along. And that's been my experience, you know, at least on this so far. Cause [sic] it wasn't like I came in and said like, "Hey, I can do—" I kind of did say that to a certain degree, about what I can bring to the table, now that I think about it, uh but yea [sic], so that's what I'm doing. I put up some money, I helped find, you know, I helped find some of the cast and crew (inaudible) and then a large part of my involvement has been on the post side with the edit and then on the festival side with like post and sales-- the sales aspect of things and trying to get it into a festival, uh yea [sic].

I: Okay. And then a really quick question, how long have you been working in the film industry?

P: Uh, well officially, I got into film and television immediately right out of college. So, I graduated college in 2004 and started working pretty much straight away. I mean, even prior though, I had internships and I had my own first business when I was in college producing TV, so, on my college campus, but that wasn't like professional, I wasn't getting paid but it was definitely, you know, content creation and (inaudible) so, professionally, getting paid since 2004. But I would say, in general, just like as a creative being since 2000. That's when I first started my business, yes 2000.

I: Okay, cool. So, now the other questions are targeted a lot towards casting, especially in the film industry. We'll just see how much you know and just feel free to say, you know, if you don't want to answer something. Uh, but they're very general questions. So, the first one is, can you describe the general casting process for a film.

P: Got you. Uh, so, I can tell you how we did it and then how it normally happens. Uh, but for us and [sic] an independent, low budget, low is not even (inaudible), micro budget film, uh, what we did was we reached out to friends that were working, you know, in the casting world who had contacts with agents and actors. And we had them send out, you know, requests on behalf of our project for certain talent. And then, once folks started responding, we would send them the script and once they expressed interest in the script you send them, you know, budget [sic] and an offer of pay. And then you-- you know, once the numbers were right and the script was right, the next thing is to have them have a meeting with the director, because the director and the talent are gonna be very intimate in this process and they need to match and have a cohesive, you know, sort of bonding for it to work. And so, hopefully that meeting goes well and then it usually

becomes an area where each party is kind of checking out the other party. The actor wants to know, can I trust this director, is he or she gonna make me look good and give me good direction and take care of me, you know, on screen. And the director wants to know, can this person perform, can they deliver, can they follow direction and are they gonna deliver on what I need on the screen to make this project work? So, if all that goes well, then you basically get the talents, which is the director and the cast and say, “Hey, you wanna [sic] do it? And then the cast, the talents representation, which is usually an agent, will then begin to work out the formal details of contracts and negotiations of logistics with the legal (inaudible) in place for the film. That’s how we did it and so, the alternative way is, **if you’re a studio or production company, etc. you can go directly to a talent agency or talent agent based on the person that you want.** So, if you want Leo DiCaprio in your film, who is represented by CAA, then you can reach out to the agent directly and tell them about your project and that you want Leo and they’ll see if it is (inaudible) and if it makes sense and is worthwhile. And if, they’ll present it to their client. And then from there, the client reads the material and lets the agent know if they’re interested. So, that follows the kind of standard protocol of how you get it done, but yea [sic], usually, you go through a casting agency, company or firm, which wasn’t our angle because we didn’t have relationships already with agents and agencies, not to that degree to get the people we needed. So, that’s how we did it but if you’re already a player and you know who is what and the talents you want, you go directly to the agents, save yourself some money because **you don’t have to pay casting people.** The other option and alternative is, if you know talent because you’re a director, producer, or writer and these people are in your circle, you can go to them directly and just say, “Hey, I got this project, I think it’s really awesome for you. You know, it’ll give you a chance to play this character that’s gonna [sic] push you to attention for an Oscar or show how multisided you are,” or whatever, “and you should check it out.” So, they check it out, they like it and then boom [sic], they tell their agent, “I wanna [sic] do this, make it happen,” you know, whatever they may say. So, these are three ways that you can go about it. **You can go to the talent directly, you can go to a talent’s agent or you can go through a casting agency, you know, firm or a casting director if you don’t know these people.**

I: Alright great. And then the next question would be, it’s kind of a very broad question, but can you describe the role of the key players in the casting process for a film? So, the director, the producer, the studio executives, if they’re attached, and then the distributor?

P: Yea [sic]. The distributors are not often involved, it just depends on the project, like, **sometimes distributors are involved because the producer needs the money up front** to make the film, like-- they don’t have the budget. So, they’ll go to the distributor and say, “Hey, I got a movie, uh, I’ll give you the rights to the territory once it’s done, but you gotta [sic] advance me x amount of dollars, you know, to get that guarantee and if you do that, you know, I’ll give you a film that’s gonna have Denzel in it,” or Leo or Tom Cruise. And so, in that case distributors are involved. **With a lot of films, distributors don’t come into play until the films are already done.** The more normal, standard way would be all the other people [sic] you said. For sure, the most consequential and almost ever present individuals are gonna [sic] be the director, the talent as in the actor, the actress, obviously those are the two nonnegotiable. Then, beyond those two, there is usually **the talent agents, if you get a casting director,** firm, or some type of casting company.

Those are probably the four most universally present, you know, always involved people. And then, outside of that, yes, then come the producers. **A lot of producers will or will not invest in a film, contingent upon who the cast is.** They'll say, "I'll give you a million bucks for your movie but you gotta [sic] get Emma Stone or you gotta [sic] get Will Smith," you know. Or, they'll give them a short list and say, "You gotta [sic] get one of these five people for me to give you the money," or "You gotta [sic] get an a-lister [sic]. A lot times the money they will ask for, or potentially won't ask for, they may as well just say, "Uh, I have the right. We're giving you finances for the film to have final say so [sic] on cast," meaning, like, you can't hire and confirm anyone until I approve as a contingency of me paying for the film. So, that's how the producers tend to get involved. For-- and then there's the creative producers. **The creative producer is putting all the (inaudible) together for the director, the script, the talent and they're weighing in because their insight and perspective and expertise is actually valued and as a result they give their consent-- opinion on who works and who doesn't.** Because they know what they're talking about, so yea [sic], those are the players on that one.

I: Ok. And then can you give me an example of factors that play a role in selecting lead actors for a film?

P: Sure. So, I think that it's debatable. I think, in artistic circles, uh, the first item on the list of importance is gonna [sic] be talent, as in ability, performance, and skill. And then, I think the second would be **marketability, like, how known is the person, how much, you know, commercial-- sort of a viability do they have to be able to sell tickets and get people in seats?** Uh, some people may say that's the first most [sic] important thing-- is you know your ability to have market cache. Uh, it's kind of a tosser [sic], but those two, you know, whichever one you deem-- On everybody's list they're either one or two and then after, you know, those two, I would say it's probably the look. Like, whatever character you wrote or the writer wrote in the script, they envisioned someone and this person had a look and, you know, characteristics, etc. So, it's about how close talent is to that particular character's, you know, essence. So, look is hugely important. And then I would like to think and hope, you know, ethnicity comes into play as well as it relates to, you know, diversity and having someone that is-- well that's actually-- I'm gonna [sic] go back on that because then again it comes down to character and how it was written and who you have in mind. So, if you wrote something for, you know, a black male for example, then you can't-- then in turn, you know, hire-- I mean you could completely change the story but on so many levels and, you know, if you do that, it'll be hard to then hire, you know a white male-- an Asian now, because there would be very distinctive elements to that character and it would change the story. So, ya [sic], **I think it's about talent, it's about marketability and then I think it's about the look, you know, how the person embodies the character. Those are the three most important things.** Uh, I would say lastly it's also probably **cost**, as in like, you know, is the person charging, how much do they rate and if you can actually afford them from a budgeting perspective, uh, you know, for your project. Those I think would be the four most important things, most prevalent, that always appear on [sic] determining cast.

I: And then would you say that these factors or characteristics are similar to what distributors are looking for in a film?

P: Uh, yes, but not in that order. I can tell you for sure, that distributors flat out, are for sure interested, first and foremost, in marketability. And by and far, like, marketability over talent. So, does this person have a name, do people know them, are they gonna [sic] be able to sell? You know, that's their number one, primary concern. I think after that is, like, the overall composition of the film. It's not a casting thing or a production thing but how does it look, how well is it shot, you know, how well is it edited, music, all those elements then come into play for the distributors. But basically, as far as talent goes, I would say they're most interested in the person's marketability. They're second most interested in what the person got paid because all of that goes into what they will or would not make, you know, how much has to be sold on the film before things recoup. It also goes into, like, if this person may get backend, residuals and points because of, you know, their deal agreements. So, essentially it's the cast, talent, character, however you want to describe it-- I forget how you worded the question, but when it comes to casting, the distributors are most interested in the marketability of the of the talent, the talent's deal that was struck with the project, and then I would say last of the four, well I think I said four and I'm only on number three now, but the next would be the actual performance, the skill, and the talent that will be-- I forgot what the fourth one was already [pause].

I: That's okay. I'll find it later in the recording.

P: Okay, cool.

I: And then, just going back to the key players one more time, if a studio is involved, uh, can you explain if anything in the power dynamics with regards to casting changes? So, usually it's the director that is in charge of making final decisions, if I got that right, what if a studio is involved?

P: Uh, whoever is-- in most cases, whoever is financially involved, and in this case the studio, you know, if involved, that's usually their position. They're definitely gonna [sic] have a say in the cast. So, they may have cast already in mind, they may suggest cast or they're gonna [sic] wanna [sic] approve the cast, if it's not something that they're putting together themselves. Uh, so, uh, yea [sic], I--

I: That makes sense.

P: Give me the, yea [sic]. I can give you the full just of it, just give me the question one more time. So, I think you were asking, what's the studio's involvement with relation to the cast and yea [sic], they're heavily involved because there is no studio who doesn't know and understand film. The only time you have financial people, you know, of that matter, to a level who are involved and not make decisions on cast, is when it's someone who is giving money and they're walking away, like, it's just truly and solely an investment to them. So, maybe someone who is in oil or they're in real estate and they don't need to know, you know, Tom Cruise or Leonardo DiCaprio, so they're not gonna get involved in that conversation. They're just gonna give the money, solely based on what was presented to them for a return on their investments. But, when you do it with a studio, you're doing it with individuals who are very aware of the market place and value and, you know, what they should be paid and what they can earn and how much they can make and so, as a result, they will have a say. So, whether it's on the front end as far as



suggesting, or on the back end as far as approving, or not approving. They'll be involved in that way. Yea [sic].

I: Alright thank you. And then, the next question, uh, kind of along the studios again, can you describe the influence of studios in the distribution side of the industry?

P: Well, mainly that's what studios are, that's what they do. You know, they make movies, they fund movies, but even then, they're doing it through like third parties, you know. It's like Universal or Sony will hire JJ Abram's Bad Robot to make Star Wars, or they'll hire Lucasfilm to make Star-- you know, so, they're not normally self-producing or self-creating content. What they are doing, what they are in the business of is selling it and the rights to it and the distribution to--. So, they have relationships with theatre chains and theatre houses, and what used to be video stores and what is now on demand, you know, so like streaming and all of that crap [sic]. Uh, that's their world. So, they're in the business of acquiring content and reselling it to their vendors worldwide and that's how they make their money. Uh, now, there are scenarios, a few times a year, you know, as far as volume goes, where they will pay to do it themselves because why not? You know, they have the distribution side, they understand marketing value and they have their relationships, so, they will pay for stuff. Uh, but they don't do it often and they don't do it a lot because, uh, there is a lot of risk in that and their business could go down, you know, and very quickly if a few movies didn't work out. We've seen that with, you know, some of these companies that are out here, they're like mini studios, well yea [sic], but making a few bad films and then they're just done because you lose massive amounts of money if the films don't do well. So, yea, they're more in the business of someone else taking the risk of putting everything in a product and then just acquiring it, finding it, and putting it out based on their relationships and their ability to determine quality product of what the marketplace, you know, is interested in or wants.

I: Alright, cool And then can you name some advantages and disadvantages of selling an independently produced film to a studio for distribution?

P: Advantages are, if they like it you're basically doing a whole sale deal product, meaning, "Hey, I've paid for this whole thing, got it to this point with my own money, so you just have to pay for sort of handover (inaudible)." Whereas, if you come to a studio and you don't have the project done, then they have a lot more leverage to be aggressive about the deal and what you're gonna get because they're taking more risk, because who knows how the film is eventually going to turn out. So, the biggest advantage is leverage, when you have the project complete and then the finished film and they're interested, you still won't be able to take advantage of them but you would be in a much better position of power than you would if you were asking for money to get the film made. As far as disadvantages go, I don't know what they would be, if any. I mean, I guess one could be that if they thought you had a really great idea but it was poorly executed, they may steal it. Uh, and steal it in the sense of put a slight twist on it but it's essentially still [sic] your idea but because they have a bigger machine and more money and more access, they'll probably make it look better than you, they'll probably be able to put it out before you, they'll probably be able to get it in front of more people as far as eyes and ears and theaters and locations. So, uh, it'll seem to the world, to the masses probably as if it was their thing all along



and you were never a part of it. And that, you know, can be a very challenging battle because you're this independent individual and now you gotta [sic] go into court and you gotta [sic] fight, and you fight against this mega machine, so, yea [sic], I think the only negative thing could be like just the idea to be compromised. Uh, that's pretty much it. I mean if you got an independent film, that's well done and you're at the point where you're meeting with the studio about it, then for the most part you're in a very favorable position. Even if they don't like the film but they like the direction, they like the writing, and they just like what you got done visually for the amount of money, you know, they might say, "Hey, we got this other thing that we'd love to put you on, or hire you for, or have you put together a project for us with this budget amount and see what you can do." So, it could turn into some other great thing, if you get to that stage and that point. Uh, again, the worst case would be, they take your idea, uh, and yea [sic], or, you know, another bad, I guess, disadvantage would be-- I think it's just like super strange (inaudible) relation (inaudible) that really involves, like, some type of personal vendetta of angst, but it could be a situation where they call other studios and say, "Hey, so and so is shopping a film around, if I were you I wouldn't buy it, I wouldn't do business with them because," you know, whatever reason. I don't know what that reason would be, but, you know, it could have been because they don't think it's good, or because they think you're doing bad business, or I don't know, I mean who knows on that one. But, uh, I think there's not a lot of disadvantages of working with them, is what I think.

I: Okay. And then we're gonna [sic] move into the last kind of topic of questions. Can you tell me, and you already hinted at this, can you tell me about diversity in film and your take on it?

P: Well, it's still an industry in all aspects, in front of the camera, behind the camera-- much more worse [sic] behind the camera, but you know-- that's still dominated by white males. And, you know, diversity is further now, than it's probably ever been, but nowhere near close to being in a balance where it needs to be, you know. So, yea [sic], I mean, that's like the (inaudible) on it, you know, there are folks, you know, particularly in television who are getting lots of great opportunities that are, you know, diverse individuals or minorities if you will. Uh, and again, I would say that's rampant now for sure more than ever, but if you put it on a scale and you weigh it against, you know, other, you know, sort of demographics of ethnicities, you will see that the comparison or disparity is just-- it's just-- it's insane. And it's worse for women, unfortunately, you know, particularly in creative positions, you know, behind the camera. Uh, **it's almost like an epidemic of absence**. That's not due to lack of interest, lack of competency, lack of ability, uh, it's just more, **if anything lack of opportunity**. And not opportunity as in they're not being (inaudible) in TV shows, etc. or being made, they are every now—so, the opportunity is there, but the opportunity to have those positions, you know—**jobs, for whatever reason, are not being offered and presented to women** and that's a big problem. So, I think women, you know-- you talk about diversity and issues in the industry from that regard-- I think before you can enter race, the sex issue is the number one as far as the disparity between men and women. And after that I think then it becomes a color thing, where it's just not a lot of folks, you know, of different ethnic backgrounds in high volume, even collectively, you know, in positions, not even the power ends, just in every day sort of work, (inaudible) positions in front of and behind the camera. So, yea [sic], long [sic] way to go and lots to be done. And that's very sad.

I: Yea [sic]. And then, I've often heard and read that this lack of diversity is due to a "lack of economic indicators that films with a diverse cast would work." What is your take on that quote?

P: Yea [sic], that is often said and used as, you know, in my opinion an excuse. So, I said, you know, you have scenarios where for all people of all different types of, you know, cultural, ethnic, societal background [sic]-- where things don't translate, you know. So, if you've [sic] something that's a local comedy about (inaudible) in Boston, you know, that may not work overseas because it's so regional. But the sort of blanket statements of like, "Well, if you have black people in your film it's not gonna [sic] sell overseas," or "if you have a female lead it won't sell," or when you have, you know, things like that-- that to me is just really, you know, ludicrous and it's just to me, like people are not trying hard enough, they're not being open-minded enough about stories, because if you have a great story, color doesn't and shouldn't matter, ethnicity doesn't and shouldn't matter. You know, we're all human beings and what compels us, you know, for the most part to watch cinema is the human experience and so if you're telling a true story about the human experience, it's almost insulting to other human beings to say, "Oh, you're only gonna [sic] watch it if this type of person is in it," or "that people are only interested in this human experience." And so, people are very self-centered, egotistical, you know-- one-sided mentality which is also part of the problem, but it's basically saying that, only one type of person or type of, you know, ethnicity, will-- or gender sometimes-- that is of value and importance. And with saying that, we're proving that these are the only stories that are being told in high quality, you know. Uh, and that's essentially what you're communicating when those types of projects keep coming out time and time again. Whereas, if an opportunity were given to, you know, other ethnicities, cultures, sex groups with similar types of human stories, we could be-- the veil could be lifted, showing that people are interested in these types of stories as well. And I think over the past few years there have been films that came out that had, you know, mass reception, you know, global success and they have had diversity or they've had storylines that are not featuring the status quo people but they still do well. And, you know, there is the proof. The problem, it sounds, is that there's so few far and between, you know, and as a result you don't get a chance to-- you get to a point where you feel like it's the norm and you feel like there's been a cultural shift of acceptance to "this is just the reality"—that, "Hey, other people have human experiences that are of [sic] telling and of interest, too, and we should share in [sic] their storytelling as well vs., you know-- so so limited. Uh, but we haven't got [sic] there yet, so I think that it's not that it doesn't exist. I think it does now, but it just doesn't exist with high volume and frequency of consistency.

I: Yes, great, thank you. And then my last question is more of a fun one. Knowing the industry pretty well, what if anything would you change about the industry?

P: Uh, good question. Uh, I think here in America in particular, I would have more governmental support of artists. If you go to other countries in the world, they all have government grants and government programs where the government takes money to support the arts. We're one of the few countries that doesn't have it, or we do have it and it's very, very limited and I get why that is. It's because our industry of Hollywood is so booming [sic] and so financially successful, I think, that it's just kinda [sic] assumed that it's not needed and is not necessary. But there's a lot

of artists who never get a chance to have their voice heard because they want to tell stories that don't fit everything we've been talking about for the majority of this conversation as far as stereotypes and, you know, absence of diversity, women, life stories, etc. And then, because of that the movies don't get made, don't get financing, but that doesn't mean they're not of quality, of interest or not worthy. So, you know, if they had somewhere to go apply, or compete, or somehow access funds to tell their stories, that would be one thing I would change, but that's more an American thing, not like film worldwide, but for sure. And then, you know, I think the biggest thing would be, you know-- this is-- I don't know if this is a proper answer for the question, because we're talking about human beings here, cultural shifts and businesses and that dynamic, but definitely having more diversity, almost by demand, like it's a mandate that they have more diversity at the studio executive, studio head level, you know. Whether it's by committee or by individuals. There should be a greater reflection of what the country looks like on, you know, the day to day (inaudible, a very small group of people. So, like the-- the Academy did that, you know, recently with all that happened last year and we'll see how effective it is and how true they stay to it, but they went and restructured the whole, you know, diagram of who's involved, and who votes, and how, why, etc. to mix it up and that's what needs to sort of continue to happen within the studio structure. But then again, within America, that's where the decisions are made heavily because we live in a space, where pretty much our cinema at the local AMC, or Loews, or Regal, which is [sic] all big chains-- connected to movie studios and they're sending them their films. And if the individuals deciding which films are being made, purchased or acquired have a very limited perspective or views and keep doing the same old, same old-- or it's just of a-- an unfortunate-- an ethnic makeup that has been in place for the past seven, eight, nine decades, you know, nothing's gonna change. And that to me, I think is, you know-- if we saw that in place, I think the ripple effect of it would be so grand and so distinctive that you would start actually [sic] seeing more changes trickle down across the board, the type of films that are made, the type of stories that are being told, the type of individuals that are being hired to tell and execute the telling of those stories, uh, you know, that-- that's where it all-- and I never thought we would get to the point in America where we had a black president before we had people of ethnic makeups and backgrounds running movie studios, which is kind of crazy because, you know, the presidency seems a little bit more unattainable than like a studio head. But, in terms of like Hollywood trying to catch up, to even politics, is pretty bizarre. Uh, but yea [sic], I think more money from the government for arts and more diversity in decision making positions at the studios would be the changes, you know, I would like of the top of my head, and for the industry, yea [sic].

I: Those sound fantastic.

P: [laughs] Thank you.

I: Alright, well thank you. That's all the questions I have. If you'd like I can send you a copy once it's done.

(End of Interview)

## Appendix F

## Thesis Interview 3

Interviewer: Chantal Suhling

Interviewee: Jonathan Deckter, COO and President of Voltage Pictures

Interview Setting: The interview was conducted over the phone on Tuesday November 22, 2016

Affiliation with Interviewee: The interviewee was my boss during an internship with the company in November of 2016

I= Interviewer

P= Participant

(Start of Interview)

I: Can you describe your job to me and what you do?

P: Uh, wow, uh, actually you know, before I answer, can you give me a little bit of background on what the paper is about, so I can frame it properly for you?

I: Oh definitely. So, my thesis focuses on mostly the casting process and the role of casting directors with regards to casting. But while doing research I found out quite a bit about, you know, how all kinds of-- how all areas of the film industry actually connect and how studios as well as distribution kind of influence casting as well. So, with these questions I want to get your take on what you think about how it connects to casting, or maybe even doesn't connect to casting.

P: Got it. Ok. That makes perfect sense. So, my job is-- I am-- you're recording this right?

I: Yes.

P: Cool. So, alright, I am the president and COO of Voltage Pictures and within my job description is, in essence, running the day to day non-production related activities of the company. And what that means, is overseeing the sales, marketing, distribution, delivery of movies and being a big part of-- of whether movies get greenlit or not, on whether we chose to finance them or not. In addition, I oversee the acquisitions department, which is in essence, picking the movies that we are going to take to the market as sales agents and making those deals.

I: Alright, great. And then can you describe how the role of your jobs as a president and COO fits into the film industry?

P: Uh, now, there is two sides of-- there is [sic] two main sides to the film industry, or at least within our company. There is the production business, which is where we manufacture movies and then there is the **distribution business, which is where we monetize the movies. I focus 99**

percent of my life on the latter part, which is monetizing the content. Uh, to the extent I get involved in production, it is only with respect to judging which names will alleviate a film or not. And for a smaller point, I've made some overall deals with vendors, you know, to get volume discounts and some things like that because we have a number of different producers who focus on their individual projects and, you know, what I do is sort of look after the company's interest on a global basis.

I: Great. Ok, so, how long have you been working in the film industry?

P: Almost 20 years.

I: Wow. And has your whole time in the film industry been in distribution and sales primarily?

P: Yes. I mean, I started-- my first job was in the mail room of a company that sold films and so I've been involved in one way or another my entire career.

I: Okay great. And then, can you describe to me, just a little bit, how you got started in the film industry? How you got started, you said you started in the mail room...

P: I got started-- I graduated from college in May, packed my Uhaul in Arizona and moved to Los Angeles and faxed resumes out every morning and so, uh, I got a job in the mail room in August at a company called (inaudible). I didn't know anybody, I had no connections, I just got lucky.

I: That's awesome. It's a nice story. Okay, so let's get started. Can you explain a little bit to me, what distribution is, since a lot of people don't really understand that part of the industry.

P: Sure. Uh, people in the States go to see a movie in the movie theatre. They also, you know, one time people used to go to video stores and rent videos, now you got to red box and rent a disk or you click on iTunes or whatever, or you watch a movie on paid television. Within the United States there are thirty or so companies, you know, maybe more, that actually distribute films. There are the major studios, Fox, Sony, Warner Brothers, Disney, Universal, Sony, I'm not sure if I said them or not and what they do is, they create-- they produce films and they distribute them. And what I mean by distribute, is they put them in the theatres, they put them on iTunes, they license the red box, they license to HBO, uh, and onward and onward. So, that's really what distribution is. What we specialize over here in [sic], is oversees distribution, which means, uh, being the middle man between the content provider and the person, or persons, or company, or companies in each territory which vocalize the content and then do the same job: release films theatrically, you know, put them on DVD, license them to Netflix, or Hulu, or put them on iTunes, or license to television, etc., etc.

I: Great. So, when selling a film, what are some things that distributors are looking for in a film?

P: They, you know-- there are a lot of different types of films that make money in different territories. First they're looking for a return on their investment because this is the film business, you know, nobody is doing this for fun. And, you know, they look for things that will appeal to their audience. Every territory has different markers or different things that their audience likes. Our job as filmmakers and content providers is to attempt to make movies that work in as many

places as possible and then put them in the right hands of capable distributors to get the movies distributed properly. But for, you know-- to make it simpler, distributors are looking for films with big movie stars, strong directors with a great story, that's uplifting and gives audiences worldwide a reason to get off of their sofa and go to a movie theatre and spend 12 dollars on a movie.

I: What are some main characteristics that distributors look for in films particularly for the US?

P: Think like any-- the world, the environment that we live in now is such that people got big screen televisions at home that are 60 inches plus with great surround sound systems and it's easy to stay home and watch movies 60, 90, 120 days after they come out in theatres and in a really nice environment. So, really the (inaudible) and the trick is for us distributors and distributors worldwide to eventize [sic] the movies and again give people a reason to get off their sofa, to go watch these in theatres, as movies were meant to be watched.

I: Okay. Can you just really quickly describe to me what AFM is?

P: AFM is, in essence, a world trading market where companies from all over the world set up shop and attempt to license their content to other companies who distribute films worldwide.

I: Great. Perfect. I knew that but just for the readers [laughs].

P: I get it.

I: Alright. The next question would be, how would you describe the role of studio executives in the casting and/or distribution process?

P: Well, looking at the major studios, casting has gotten harder and harder for everybody. Which, in a studio environment, in addition to the directors vision and the creative producer's vision, they've also got to consider the marketing people's opinions and the distribution people's opinions. And what that means is, if there is an actor like Johnny Depp, who is regarded as one of the best actors in the world, but he gets himself in trouble in the press, then while the creative producer may love him for a role, the distribution and the marketing people may say, "You know, that's really not the person we want to be the lead on [sic] our movie which is geared towards women." So, in that respect, there are a lot of voices in the room. For an independent production company like ours, we don't quite have the same limitations or we have different limitations but the creative producers and the creative directors have a vision of who they want to be in the movie and then it's sort of the sales side of the company's job to say, "Well, this guy is great in Germany, this guy is great in France, let's do it or, you know, if we put this guy in we're not going to sell a lot of movies in whatever country because they don't like this guy, or woman."

I: Ok. So, would you say that studio executives have a say in who gets to get cast or would you say that it depends a lot on all these different voices?

P: Well, it's a lot of voices and it all comes down to who the director is on each movie and what the actual movie is. If you're talking about a-- a big action movie that has a high concept and there is a franchise around it, then, uh-- sorry I was trying to find my thought-- then the



marketing people and the distribution people will have less of a say. If you're talking about an art movie or a performance driven piece, you know, people always tend to listen more to the director. If the director is what's known as an A-level director, then they're basically going to get their way because directors are more sought after than anything.

I: Ok. And then, do you personally prefer selling a film to a studio for distribution or one of the other companies and why?

P: No, we generally like to sell our films to independent distributors for a number of reasons. First and foremost, when you sell your movie to the studio for the world, the studio combines, or does what's called "cross collateralizing" all of the rights, meaning, if you make a whole lot of money in one country and you lose a whole lot in the other country, the country where they lost swallows all the profits from where you've gained. When we license content to independent distributors, we license them to an essence of 40 to 45 companies, so if you win in Germany, you get paid extra, regardless of whether you lost in France or not. And so on and so forth.

i: Interesting. That's very interesting. And then, would you say that being aware of the distribution side of the film industry and the selling factors of a film such as cast and a good story, would you say that that influences casting decisions that are made?

P: I'm sorry can you repeat that?

I: Yes. So, would you say that being aware, for the production side, you know, the directors, the producers, if they're aware of the distribution side of the industry and the selling factors such as, you know, celebrities as a cast makes a lot of money as well as a good story, would you say that that influences casting decisions that are being made?

P: Yes, it certainly does. It certainly does.

I: In what way would say?

P: Filmmakers have realized that they have to accommodate the other areas of the business in order to get their movies made and getting movies made is really, really tough right now.

I: So, it really all comes down to money doesn't it?

P: It's a very, very big part of it.

I: Ya [sic], and it makes sense. I mean, it is an industry and it has a lot of business aspects of [sic] it. Alright, so moving on to kind of more casting and the general idea of my paper, can you tell me about diversity in film, with all the Oscar issues and everything that people are complaining about. Can you just tell me about your feelings about diversity in film?

P: Well, I think that the industry can certainly stand to get-- to become more diverse than it is, but at the same time, films are driven by economics and until there are economic indicators that other types of films will work, they're not going to get made. And, the good news is, that you know, there has always been a business for African American movies and that business continues to grow. Uh, female driven movies have been more profitable in the past three or four years than [sic] they ever have so, they are starting to grow. As far as the Oscars go, I think that,

that is in part **reflective of the movies** but it's also-- the Oscar choices from last year also have to do with the fact that the **average age of the Academy voters are up 72 years old and they tend to be white males. So, when you've got a group like that, making these choices, you're going to have limited choices.** The Academy made great strides last year and opened their door to a whole new bunch of members, you know, of all ethnicities, which I think is a good start. From a corporate position, you know, whether, you know, man, woman, black, white, green, purple, we try to hire the best person to the movie. And, you know, we try really hard to make films that are geared towards both men and women, um, so [stops].

I: Yea [sic], that sounds pretty reasonable. So, in the beginning you said that, while describing your job, that you greenlight, or kind of decide which films are being greenlit. Can you explain that process to me, of how you decide which scripts are going to be made into movies?

P: Sure, We-- we read the scripts, you know, everyone in the company reads the scripts. We analyze what they are and a large part of it is, you know, **personal choice** on whether we think it's good. Uh, there is a big component of **market research**, which goes into it, where we try to figure out, uh, you know, if we think the movie will be appealing and we go from there. But a big part-- a big part of all our greenlighting movies is a gut check.

I: So, when you read these scripts and you decide to produce one of them and make them into a film, is there any way that you guys have a say in changes that are being made to the script or the characters?

P: Of course. Yea [sic], I mean, we have a say to extent [sic] that as a **financier we can chose not to do it if the changes that we ask for aren't accommodated.**

I: Ok. And then the last question, just knowing the industry pretty well, what if anything would you change about the industry?

P: Piracy. Uh, there is such a [inaudible] that piracy problem that [inaudible] from this industry and throughout the world. We spend millions and millions of dollars to make movies every year and consumers and, or other people put them up online and trade them like they are free, and treat them like they are free, and it's stealing, you know, you don't walk into Bloomingdales and because you like the look of a shirt decide to put it in your backpack, go home, wear it and maybe return it or not. And I mean, there is a big part of education that has to happen the world over [sic], you know, with people, there are real people who lose their jobs over this stuff. Film crews, employees, thousands of thousands of people every year and when we see the amount of **profits that we lose** or even break-even money that we lose over piracy, you know, really cripples the industry and affects everyday people.

I: Alright. Well, I think that is it, unless you know a lot about the casting process, uh...

P: Not a ton, uh, I'm happy to, you know-- if you wanna [sic] ask me stuff, I'm happy to help or if you wanna [sic] shoot me an email I can (inaudible) around our casting folks and see if they can be helpful.

(End of Interview)



## Appendix G

## Consent Form 1

## COM 498 Interview Consent Form

Name of unit - \_\_\_\_\_ School of Communications \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title of Thesis \_\_\_\_\_

1. I agree to be interviewed for the purposes of the thesis project named above.
2. The purpose and nature of the interview has been explained to me, and I have read the assignment and/or information sheet as provided by the student.
3. I agree that the interview may be electronically recorded.
4. Any questions that I asked about the purpose and nature of the interview and thesis project have been answered to my satisfaction.
5. Choose a), b) or c):
  - a. I agree that my name may be used for the purposes of the assignment only and not for publication.
  - b. OR I understand that the student may wish to pursue publication at a later date and my name may be used.
  - c. OR I do not wish my name to be used or cited, or my identity otherwise disclosed, in the thesis.

Name of interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

6. I have explained the project and the implications of being interviewed to the interviewee and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

Name of interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of interviewer \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix H

## Consent Form 2

## ORAL DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL

## Instructions:

**(1) Informing your Participant:**

When an individual is approached to be interviewed, either with or without electronic recording, it is important that you explain to them very clearly who you are, what the project is about, why you are doing it, what risks it poses to them, who will benefit, and what will become of the materials. This makes for "informed consent," meaning they truly understand what they are getting involved in. You can read the materials to them, and you may also give them the option of reading the description themselves.

**(2) The Agreement to Interview Form**

The Agreement to Interview form is a very good and appropriate way to insure that your participants know what they are getting into. After you have read the project description to them, and explained clearly what the project is about, why you are doing it, and what will become of the interviews and other materials.

You may then, if you feel it's appropriate, ask them to sign the Agreement to Interview form, and give them a copy. Keep the other copy in a safe place.

Alternatively, you can obtain their consent "on tape," in the actual interview.

**(3) Final Consent Form**

**(a) Draft Review:** Before obtaining final consent, it is absolutely essential that the participants be given the opportunity to look over any final product(s) that you produce from the interviews, and they should have the opportunity to request changes (which you should then make). Remember, this is their words you are using, and those words are their intellectual property. It is important that you respect their requests to have their words read as they want them to.

The final consent form is designed so that you can get their signature in advance, providing that you will make the changes that they request. They may also want a family member or other third party to edit their materials, and the form also allows for this.

**(b) Final Consent:** this form allows you to go ahead and publish their words in whatever form is appropriate to your project. Note that there are also places where they can choose to be identified. If they do not sign these, but request to remain anonymous, you must respect that and protect their identities from being released.

**Final Consent Form**

[Name of your project]

*Dear Participant:*

*This form gives us final authorization to use material from your interview in [name of your project]. A draft of these materials should have been presented to you for your review, correction, or modification. You may grant use rights for this draft "as is," or with the modifications you specify, if any. See "Conditions" at the bottom of the form*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby grant the right to use information from recordings and or notes taken in interviews of me, to [your name or your institution], and as presented to me as a draft copy. I understand that the interview records will be kept by the interviewer and the project, and that the information contained in the interviews may be used in materials to be made available to the general public.

\_\_\_\_\_ *By initialing here, I also agree to be identified by name in the project and related materials.*

\_\_\_\_\_ *By initialing here, I also agree to be identified by photograph in the project and related materials.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Interviewee Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Interviewer Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**The following conditions limit the release of information, as agreed between the interviewer and the interviewee:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ None needed
- \_\_\_\_\_ Material may be released once corrections I specified have been made
- \_\_\_\_\_ Material may be released once it has been edited by a third part (please specify)

Appendix I

Consent Form 3

**Informed Consent:**

[Name of the Project]  
[Your Contact Information]

**Project Description:** [insert]

**Procedure and Risks:**

We would like to record the interview, if you are willing, and use the tapes to write our materials. We will record the interview only with your written consent, and will ask that no personal identifiers be used during the interview, to ensure your anonymity. Please feel free to say as much or as little as you want. You can decide not to answer any question, or to stop the interview any time you want. The tapes and transcripts will become the property of project.

If you so choose, the recordings and recording-transcripts (or copy of notes taken) will be kept anonymous, without any reference to your identity, and your identity will be concealed in any reports written from the interviews.

There are no known risks associated with participation in the study.

**Benefits:**

It is hoped that the results of this study will benefit the community through providing greater insight into the culture and history of our area.

**Cost Compensation:**

Participation in this study will involve no costs or payments to you.

**Confidentiality:**

All information collected during the study period will be kept strictly confidential until such time as you sign a release waiver. No publications or reports from this project will include identifying information on any participant without your signed permission, and after your review of the materials. If you agree to join this study, please sign your name on the following page.

**INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS**

[Name of Project]

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to be interviewed for the project entitled \_\_\_\_\_ which is being produced by [your name] of [your institution].

I certify that I have been told of the confidentiality of information collected for this project and the anonymity of my participation; that I have been given satisfactory answers to my inquiries concerning project procedures and other matters; and that I have been advised that I am free to withdraw my consent and to discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without prejudice.

I agree to participate in one or more electronically recorded interviews for this project. I understand that such interviews and related materials will be kept completely anonymous, and that the results of this study may be published in an academic journal or book.

I agree that any information obtained from this research may be used in any way thought best for this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Interviewee Date \_\_\_\_\_

*If you cannot obtain satisfactory answers to your questions or have comments or complaints about your treatment in this study, contact:*  
[your or your institution's contact information here]

cc: signed copy to interview.

Appendix J

Consent Email Interviewee 1

Interviewee: Kate Mueller, Casting Director




Interview Setting: The interview was conducted over the phone on Friday November 11, 2016

Consent: Consent for all consent forms attached in appendix G-I was given by Kate Mueller via email, in response to the consent forms. The consent is mutual.

---

1 of 1

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 **kate.mueller20@gmail.com** Dec 4 (7 days ago) ☆    
to me ▾

Hi Chantal,

My sincerest apologies, my family is coming out of a horrible flu bug and I'm finally back to reality.


I give you my consent to all three forms you sent me.

So glad I could be of help!




Good luck on your final thesis weeks!

Best  
Kate


Sent from my iPhone



---

 **Chantal Suhling** <suhlingc@mail.gvsu.edu> Dec 4 (7 days ago) ☆    
to Kate ▾

Thank you!



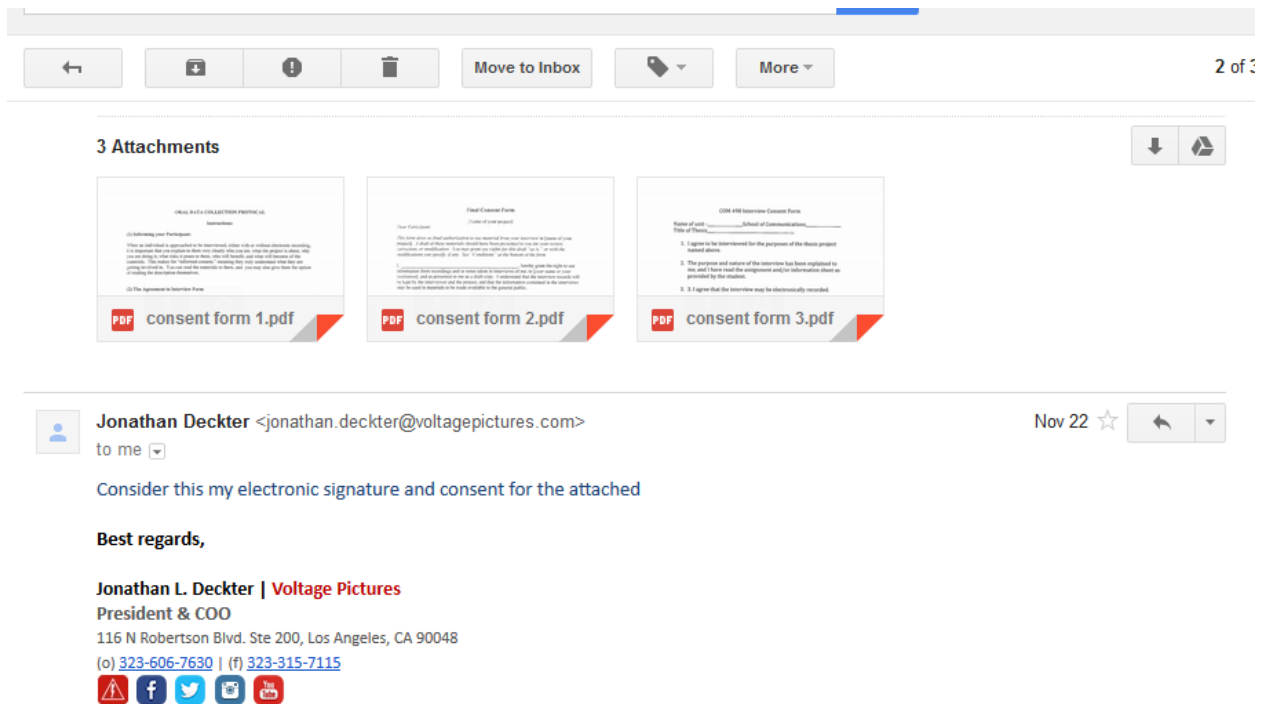
Appendix K

Consent Email Interviewee 2

Interviewee: Jonathan Deckter, COO and President of Voltage Pictures

Interview Setting: The interview was conducted over the phone on Tuesday November 22, 2016

Consent: Consent for all consent forms attached in appendix G-I was given by Jonathan Deckter via email, in response to the consent forms. The consent is mutual.





Appendix L

Consent Email Interviewee 3

Interviewee: Rob Ford, Film and TV Producer, Founder of the Creative Mind Group

Interview Setting: The interview was conducted over the phone on Monday December 5, 2016

Consent: Consent for all consent forms attached in appendix G-I was given by Rob Ford via email, in response to the consent forms. The consent is mutual.


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More ▾

1 of 8


I have attached the consent forms that I need signed for the interview. If it is more convenient for you, other interviewees have just replied with an email in which they state their consent for the forms sent above. You are more than welcome to do that as well. Again, thank you for helping out. I will be calling you in about 2 hours if that still works for you. If not please let me know.

⋮


**3 Attachments** ↓ ↻




**consent form 1.pdf**



**consent form 2.pdf**



**consent form 3.pdf**



**Rob Ford**

to me ▾


You have my consent for the interview.

Please confirm that will suffice.

⋮

Dec 1 (10 days ago) ☆

↩️ ▾



**Chantal Suhling** <suhlingc@mail.gvsu.edu>

to Rob ▾

This is great. Thank you

⋮

Dec 1 (10 days ago) ☆

↩️ ▾