

## The Hollywood boys' club

### Lead-in

Can you name one each of the following? Tell the class about them.

- 1 A film directed by a woman.
- 2 A film written by a woman.
- 3 A film made for a female audience.

Do you think that there should be more female-oriented films made? Why? Why not?

### Vocabulary

Look at these jobs connected with the film industry. Match them to what they do.

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Director        | 1 writes the words   |
| Actor           | 2 says the lines   |
| Screenwriter    | 3 tells the actors what to do                                |
| Studio chief    | 4 the boss at MGM or Paramount                               |
| Producer        | 5 decides what the set should look like                      |
| Designer        | 6 gets the money and people together to make the film        |
| Film-maker      | 7 controls the camera, and decides on how the film will look |
| Cinematographer | 8 another word for director                                  |

Match the verbs to the nouns.

- |         |              |
|---------|--------------|
| direct  |              |
| play    |              |
| write   |              |
| star in |              |
| win     | an Oscar     |
| make    | a film       |
|         | a role       |
|         | a screenplay |

### Reading 1

Very few Hollywood movies are written or directed by women. Which of the following reasons do you think are likely?

- 1 The economic situation in Hollywood is bad at the moment, so studios won't risk money on new directors and writers, particularly female ones.
- 2 Studio chiefs are all men, so they tend to employ male directors and writers.
- 3 Women are not as good as men at writing and directing movies.
- 4 Very few women go to film school, so there are not enough women trained as directors.
- 5 Movies made by women are often criticized by male critics.
- 6 The studios don't want to encourage more female directors and writers. They are happy with the people they already have.

Read the passage and decide whether the reasons above are true or false.

## The Hollywood boys' club

### Duncan Campbell in Los Angeles

Hollywood remains a boys' club, with women directors and screenwriters hitting a "celluloid ceiling" and their numbers actually falling, according to a survey. The lack of women working as directors, writers and cinematographers was blamed this month on a "fear factor" currently afflicting the entertainment industry. The percentage of women directors dropped from 11% in 2000 to 6% in 2001 in a survey of the top 250 domestic grossing films. Men directed more than nine out of 10 films released and served as cinematographers on virtually every film. The representation of women writers fell by 2% to 10% in 2001. Martha Lauzen, who is professor of communication at San Diego State University, says she believes that little has changed in the past 15 years, despite the emergence of women into some senior positions in the industry as studio chiefs. In 1987 3% of directors of the top 100 films were women, so the percentage has barely shifted in that time.

"I used to believe that this was an awareness problem," says Professor Lauzen. "I am coming to believe that the studios are simply not interested in changing the status quo." She blames the situation for women on economic fear in the industry: "When people are frightened they fall back on established patterns." The figures are doubly surprising given that three women are now studio chiefs and that women now

hold the senior posts in three of the main film unions. Rachel Abramowitz, the author of *Is That A Gun In Your Pocket? Women's Experience Of Power In Hollywood*, says that the continuing lack of women as directors and writers is "totally **perplexing**". "It is incredibly **discouraging** that you have three female studio heads but the studios are still unwilling to entrust a \$50m movie into the hands of a woman," says Ms Abramowitz. She adds that although there is near parity between men and women in film schools, this does not seem to translate itself into directors' jobs for women. There are a small number of women directors working in mainstream Hollywood, but even the successful ones have found it hard to get regular work on major films. Callie Khouri won an Oscar in 1991 for writing *Thelma And Louise*, but still had difficulty in creating the kind of films she wanted to make. She directed the recent *Divine Secrets Of The Ya Ya Sisterhood*, which has been dismissed by some male critics as a "chick flick". In acting, the figures are very different, with women playing 38% of the roles, according to the Screen Actors Guild. But here, too, it has taken time for them to catch men in earnings. In 1999 Julia Roberts became the first female star to cross the \$20m barrier previously reserved for male actors.

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## Reading 2

Check the meaning of the words in bold italics, then discuss the questions with a partner. Read the passage again if you need to.

- 1 Why is the lack of women in Hollywood perplexing?
- 2 Why is it discouraging?

## Vocabulary in context

Can you explain the following?

- 1 a celluloid ceiling
- 2 a fear factor
- 3 a grossing film
- 4 the status quo
- 5 mainstream Hollywood
- 6 a chick flick
- 7 the \$20 million barrier

## Follow-up

Prepare to debate the following motion: 'Hollywood needs more female writers and directors'

Divide into two groups. Group A must prepare four or five reasons why they think more female writers and directors would be a good idea. Group B must prepare four or five reasons why it would not be a good idea.

When you have prepared your arguments, use some of the language below to put together a speech for the debate.

We firmly believe that...  
We are of the opinion that...

First of all,  
Secondly,  
Thirdly,  
Finally,  
To sum up,

Select a spokesperson for each group. The spokesperson for group A should present their argument, then the spokesperson for group B should present their argument. At the end you may have a vote to see who has made the strongest argument.