WOMEN OWNING THE NARRATIVE

Storytelling and Creative Control As A Driving Force for Social Change

A Research Project Based On The Purpose and Success of Black Women in Film! Canada.

COURSE: MCM 740 Capstone

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Transformative Narratives: Black Women Pioneering Inclusivity in Film and Media

ABSTRACT

This research project, encompassing a short documentary and an accompanying research paper, critically examines the impact of narrative ownership and creative control by Women of Colour (WOC) in film and media. It specifically addresses the challenges Black Women in Film and Media face in environments characterized by limited representation and systemic biases. The documentary features powerful interviews with a collective of Women, highlighting their struggles and the transformative roles of their work in advocating for diversity and inclusion. The research paper further explores these themes, focusing on the intersection of race and gender, and provides an overview of the global landscape of women storytellers. Through a detailed analysis of interview responses, the project reveals how film and television can significantly influence societal perceptions of gender and power dynamics. The findings advocate for a paradigm shift towards greater narrative control by women, emphasizing storytelling's potential in challenging stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive future. Key recommendations are proposed for the next generation of female storytellers to harness this power for social change.

Keywords: Women of Colour, Narrative Ownership, Creative Control, Social Change, Representation, Gender Equality, Film and Media, Storytelling, Inclusion

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research shows that in Canada, in the space of Film and Media, Women of Colour face stark inequalities (Women in View, 2023). Black women creatives have the lowest representation across all key creative roles, lead the fewest projects, and receive the least funding across major networks in Broadcast Media such as CBC, Rogers and Corus (Women in View, 2023). Lack of representation can also lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes, especially negative ones, towards racial or cultural groups (Rostagno, E., n.d.). In the long term, underrepresentation of women creates a gender-imbalanced picture of society that can reinforce and perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes (Rattan, A., et al., 2019).

Diversity among film actors, directors, producers, writers, and other contributors has been lacking since the start of the film industry (Amaral et al., 2020, as cited in Topaz, C.M., et al., 2022). As an example, the New York Film Academy acknowledges the enduring gender bias in Hollywood, noting that despite some progress and increased female representation, women still face significant challenges in gaining exposure and power in big-budget films, as evidenced by their struggle to secure wide releases even when they make up about half of the directors at events like the Sundance Film Festival (New York Film Academy, 2013). Despite making some progress towards gender parity in the Canadian film and television production industry, research shows that women still face barriers to career advancement (CRTC, 2023).

The film industry traditionally relies on established networks and mentor-mentee relationships for career advancement. Closely tied to financing, gendered networks and homophily can prevent women from making relationships with gatekeepers and accessing the

same opportunities as men (Jones & Pringle, 2015; Wing-Fai et al., 2015, as cited in Carraway, S., 2020).

The underrepresentation of Black women directors in film and in key decision-making roles in television leads to a cycle of limited perspectives and representation (O'Neill, 2020); career advancement barriers (Beard et al., 2020); economic disparities (Xie & Vazrapu, 2023); a narrower creative scope (O'Neill, 2020); and persistent workplace biases (Beard et al., 2020). Further, underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Black women as film directors and in media have several significant effects such as racial discrimination leading to a cycle of exclusion and narrow storytelling (Topaz et al., 2022); biased portrayals in media (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, n.d.); limited diversity of narratives and perspectives in mainstream media (Bordow, 2022); internalized stereotypes and biases among the youth (Studies of Black History, 2022); tokenism and quota systems that restrict career progression and visibility of their work (Bordow, 2022).

The study's conclusions emphasize the urgent need to address the future of Black women as film directors and leading figures in media, who are depicted in this project as critical storytellers and catalysts for social change. This study therefore seeks to answer three research questions:

- ***RQ1: How do personal experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds of Black women in film and media influence their approaches to mentorship, advocacy, and movement-building within the industry?***
- ***RQ2: In what ways do intersectionality and multi-dimensional representation in the works of Black women contribute to challenging and reshaping industry narratives and stereotypes?***

- ***RQ3: What are the effective strategies and practices implemented by Black women in film and media to create inclusive spaces and platforms for underrepresented voices, and how do these initiatives contribute to systemic change in the industry?***

The title of this research project is Women Owning the Narrative Storytelling - Creative Control as A Driving Force for Social Change. The study seeks to demonstrate the importance of representation and inclusion in Film and Media and investigate how Canada can better support and promote the creative voices of Black women in the broadcast media, filmmaking, music and theatre spaces to enhance diversity. The researcher focused on a collective of Black Female Film Producers and Directors, Television Reporters, Media Executives and Leaders of Cultural Organisations whose works have created and developed opportunities for discourse and action.

The project underlines the urgent need for a rebirth of Canada's sociocultural and socioeconomic environment, using the lack of representation and inclusion of Women in Film and Media (Collie, M. 2019) as the basis for this call to action.

Chapter 1 incorporates an introduction of the study, the purpose, and the significance of the research. Chapter 2 contains a literature review on systemic barriers; gender equality related theories; notes on Film and Television Media; and a glimpse at the situation in other jurisdictions. Chapter 3 encompasses the research questions, discussions on the research methods of this study, including the research design study, interview protocols, and statements of personal bias. Chapter 4 includes the study results. Chapter 5 contains the discussion. Chapter 6 focuses limitations and delimitations. Chapter 7 provides the conclusion and recommendations, including some ideas for future research. The final element is the personal and professional reflections of the researcher, which also highlights some action points created by the researcher.

Project Based in Toronto

The researcher chose to establish this project in Toronto, a major hub for film and television production due to several factors. Toronto has one of the top five screen-based sectors in North America, offering a comprehensive range of industry networking opportunities, services, talent, crew, facilities, and locations for successful production (City of Toronto, 2024). The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) was established in 1976, and has grown into a major cultural event downtown Toronto. Every September, the city showcases a blend of international and Canadian cinema, as well as hosting special events and an industry conference (National Today., n.d). The Festival's international prominence has helped establish Toronto as a key destination for film culture.

The media and broadcasting landscape in Toronto is replete with media companies and broadcasting networks. This includes the public broadcaster CBC/Radio-Canada, which owns 27 television stations (CBC/Radio-Canada, 2023). Bell Media Inc., a Canadian media conglomerate, owns CTV, Canada's most-watched privately owned TV network (CRTC, 2023; Kramb, 2024). Additionally, there is Global which is owned by Corus Entertainment (CRTC, 2023), and Citytv which is owned by Rogers Communications (CRTC, 2023).

Through this study, the researcher sheds light on the instrumental role of Black Women in film and media, their commitment to societal progress, and the influence they wield in challenging existing power structures. By unearthing the narratives of these women and examining the impact of their work, the researcher established a better understanding of the urgent need for equality, diversity, and inclusion, ultimately contributing to a more just and inclusive society for all.

The researcher also discovered that it is not up to Black Women to consistently prove the need for representation and inclusion (Cooper, 2023). Black women must also show up to

a job they love and do it for the purpose of passion, interest, and contribution to society (Cooper, 2023). Additionally, the researcher also learned that specifically Black women are at liberty to also decide the basis and direction of their narratives and must not be weighed down only by the need to tell a story within the broader perspective of social change or discourse (Erskine, A. 2023).

The research project established the challenges of representation and inclusion caused by systemic barriers and biases in Film and Mass Media in Canada, by showcasing the contributions of Black women cultural narrative professionals including directors, producers, screenwriters, journalists, cinematographers, and actors, who have used their work in Film and Media to garner attention and possible solutions to the urgent need for equity, diversity and inclusion in the Film and Media spaces.

By conducting interviews with these individuals, the researcher concludes that for meaningful change in Canada's film and media industry, there must be a concerted effort to address systemic barriers that hinder the progress of Black women. The researcher determined that through the intentional individual and collective movements of women including those featured in this study, Canada is becoming increasingly aware of the need to increase access to funding, providing more opportunities for representation in key creative roles, and fostering environments that nurture women’s unique voices and stories.

Overview of Conceptual and Methodological Framework

The conceptual and theoretical framework that underpins this study on the relationship between mass media and social change are, the cultivation theory, formulated by George Gerbner in 1973 (Gerbner, G., & Gross, L., 1976); and Social Learning Theory created by Albert Bandura (Rumjaun, A., & Narod, F., 2020). The cultivation theory explains that mass media exert subtle influences on audiences and leads them to unconsciously

internalize prevailing symbols, images, and media messages; a phenomenon referred to as the cultivation of dominant image patterns; this theory suggests that prolonged exposure to television can shape shared perceptions and beliefs about the world (Gerbner, G. & Gross, L., 1976); Dobrow 1989 as cited in Tuladhar, S. K., 1994); Bryant, J., et al 2006). Social Learning Theory suggests that the media serves as influential yet understated educators, imparting knowledge about the world to readers, viewers, and listeners (Kurt, S., 2019). A key aspect of this theory is its elucidation of how individuals can acquire knowledge through observation alone. According to Bandura, imitation involves the actual reproduction of observed motor activities. It is argued that media influence is rooted in the fact that it can provide information in a way that enhances coordination on a norm or action through the creation of common knowledge (Bandura 1977 as cited in Michael C., 2001)

Rationale

The rationale for this research paper, complemented by an accompanying documentary, centres on the unique and underexplored subject of Black women in Canada's film and media industry. This dual approach of a scholarly paper paired with visual storytelling significantly enriches the study, making it both original and impactful.
While the topic of women's representation in various industries has been widely discussed and analyzed across different platforms and studies such as the World Economic Forum (Global Gender Gap Report 2023); UN Women (Women's representation in society, 2020) and McKinsey (Women in the Workplace report, 2023), the researcher noticed that the specific focus on Black women in Film and Media in the Canadian context is largely uncharted in academic research.

This study delves into the nuanced experiences of the seven participating Black women, spotlighting their unique challenges and achievements. It transcends the generalities

often found in broader diversity studies, offering a focused exploration that brings their specific narratives to the forefront.

The inclusion of a documentary alongside the written research paper enhances the depth and reach of this study. It provides a dynamic platform for women in the study to share their stories, adding a layer of emotional and personal engagement that written text alone cannot capture. This visual component complements and amplifies the written findings, making the research accessible and relatable to a broader audience. It caters to various learning styles and preferences, and illustrates a compelling message on how the need for equity, diversity, and inclusion resonates with a diverse group of stakeholders, including academia, industry professionals, and the general public. The documentary captures the essence of these women's experiences in a way that text cannot, showcasing their emotions, expressions, and personal testimonies. This approach adds authenticity and richness to the research, providing a more holistic understanding of the subject.

The combination of written and visual media in this research is not just about presenting information; it's about inspiring change. By vividly illustrating the realities of Black women in Canada's film and media industry, the study aims to influence public opinion and encourage policy-making that addresses their specific needs and challenges.

In essence, this research, through its focused topic and innovative dual-format approach, seeks to make a significant contribution to the discourse on representation in the film and media industry. It highlights the importance of understanding and supporting the unique experiences of Black women in this field, aiming to catalyze a more inclusive and equitable industry landscape.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Unveiling the Influence of Mass Media

To understand the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, especially the social learning theory, described earlier, it is important to define the mass media space in the context of unconscious bias, the impact of a lack of representation, and the effects of intentionally formulated narratives helps grasp the extent of control that mass media has over public consciousness, opinions, and perceptions. The goal is to empower Black women with narratives and broader access to audiences, which can drive social change and reshape the course of their struggle for equity.

In the late 20th century, mass media was defined by any communication, used to simultaneously reach a large number of people including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, films, recordings, books, the internet and smart media (Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2012). In modern society, 'the public' is inevitably a mediated sphere as only media can bridge its spatial, temporal and topical diversity (Schrape, J.F., 2016). From the perspective of such a multi-level model, different dissemination media types facilitate the communication and social reality construction in distinct ways (Bardoel 1996 as cited in Schrape, J.F., 2016).

Movies and television are often an escape from, and a reflection of life unfolding and can play an outsize role in shaping and reinforcing cultural beliefs and attitudes about race (Dunn, J., et al., 2021). They foster a more comprehensive, efficient, and interdisciplinary understanding of how these subsets of mass media shape perceptions, and influence cultural narratives, and why they provide a powerful force for fostering social change (Kurgat, K., & Jerop, C., 2023). Conceptually, narratives within mass media are frameworks that allow

humans to connect apparently unconnected phenomena around some casual transformation (O'Loughlin, B., et al, 2013).

In the 1950s, most television entertainment programs ignored current events and political issues, studiously avoiding prevalent social issues such as racial discrimination and civil rights (University of Minnesota 2016), with Black people mostly given roles as subservient maids, butlers, slaves and sharecroppers in movies with regressive, racist messages (Manasan, A., & O'Connell, M., 2021).

Modern Day Social Movements Inspired by Historical Forebears

It is essential to examine historical figures and their influence on current social movements to understand and establish the origins of contemporary efforts by Black women to highlight and address systemic barriers and underrepresentation that hinder women's socio-economic advancement, this historical perspective is vital in appreciating the groundwork laid by these pioneers, which has shaped today’s initiatives to enhance women’s roles in society.

On March 24, 1853, activist, publisher, lawyer, teacher, and journalist, Mary Ann Shadd Cary published the first edition of The Provincial Freeman, Canada's first anti-slavery newspaper (Hassan, H., 2022). She established a legacy not only as the first Black woman in North America to edit and publish a newspaper, but also helped lay the groundwork for racial integration and women's equality in Canada (CBC Radio, 2023).

The 1940’s were marked with significant steps that were taken towards recognizing and protecting civil rights (Ciufo, C., 2021). While Mary Ann Shadd Cary's pioneering efforts in the world of publishing and advocacy set a powerful precedent years before this era (Shadd, A., 2023), others followed in her footsteps. In 1946, Dr. Carrie Best co-founded The Clarion, one of the first newspapers in Nova Scotia owned and published by Black Canadians

(McLeod, S., 2021). This endeavor followed her 1942 arrest alongside her son Cal for disturbing the peace, an incident that occurred when they sat in the 'whites only' seats of The Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow (Nellie's, 2015; McLeod, S., 2021). Dr Best used the newspaper to publicize the case of Viola Desmond, another black woman arrested and fined for sitting in the whites-only seats at Roseland (Zemel, J., 2020).

The works of Cary and Best were not just about challenging the status quo but also about using media as a tool for social change. In the 1970s and 1980s, Jennifer Hodge de Silva's career as a filmmaker can be seen as a direct extension of this legacy. Hodge de Silva was a pioneering African Canadian filmmaker of the 1970s and 1980s (Kroll, L., 2021). As a pioneering Black Female filmmaker to work consistently with both the National Film Board (NFB) and the CBC (Parris, A., 2017) with an acclaimed and influential body of work known as realist social-issue documentary (Bailey, C.,1999), she broke barriers in the Canadian filmmaking industry by presenting people from many different cultural backgrounds, native, Chinese, Black as real portraits not stereotypes (Papergirls, n.d). Where Shadd Cary and Best used journalism and direct activism to confront and highlight issues of racial injustice, de Silva and indeed many who have come after her, have leveraged the power of film and visual storytelling to challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive representation of diverse communities.

During the early '80s and the '90s, Black women film makers such as Claire Prieto (Parris, A. 2017), Martine Chartrand (NFB, n.d), Sylvia Hamilton (Mullen, P. (2021), Alison Duke, Frances-Anne Solomon, and Christene Browne (Wikipedia contributors., n.d.) emerged as influential voices of change. Since the early 2000's, special groups and coalitions have increasingly tackled not only gender inequality but inequality associated with class, race, sexualities and ability (Strong-Boag, V., 2016). Since 2001, the ReelWorld Film Festival -

founded by Tonya Williams - has been showcasing and connecting BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Colour) filmmakers as an antidote to the lack of diversity and representation in the film industry (Armstrong, B., 2019). Through Reelworld, Williams (2023) sought to challenge the industry's status quo by promoting diverse storytelling and providing a space where the unique perspectives. Black Women Film! Canada emerged in 2016, with its founder – Ella Cooper - focusing on nurturing Black women in film and television, providing essential professional development and networking opportunities (Cooper, 2023).

Though the women in this study and many others have further developed the legacy of their predecessors by utilizing their platforms to advance conversations about race, gender, and representation, they have also consistently faced significant systemic barriers that persist in their industry.

Systemic Barriers Then and Now

Systemic barriers are policies, practices or procedures that result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded (The Accessibility to Manitobans Act, n.d). The slowing down of processes, results in systemic barriers which limit growth, and cause deeply rooted problems in particular ecosystems (Ricee, S., 2022).

In a 2021 interview with CBC's Amanda Parris, Dr. Rita Shelton Deverell shared a personal account that detailed a response she received from an executive producer: "No, you can't. Because you are Black, and the Canadian people are not ready for a Black host of a network television show" (Parris, 2021). This response came when she expressed her interest in taking over as the host of the television show "Talk 30" after its original host had moved on to another program.

The same barriers in television expressed by Dr. Rita Shelton Deverell are found today in the film industry, where obstacles preventing Black women from accessing higher-paid

acting opportunities and directing big-budget films have been tougher to dismantle (Wilson, S. 2021). In a 2020 CanCulture Magazine interview, Samora Smallwood, an accomplished actress and Co-chair of the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television, and Radio Artists Toronto's (ACTRA) Diversity Committee, highlighted the ongoing challenges within the industry. She shared her personal experience of being the first choice for a role in a crime show but ultimately being rejected because the producers did not want to go "exotic," a euphemism for her being considered "too Black" for the part, despite her light-skinned, half-Newfoundlander, and half Cape-Verdean descent. This incident underscores the persisting racial typecasting and power dynamics in the industry (Lopez, S., 2020). Although, these poignant experiences were fifty years apart, they - unveil the profound racial bias confronted by Black Women and present a stark reminder of the enduring systemic barriers prevalent in media and film. Statistics available to this researcher establish that, in 2021, 1.5 million people in Canada self-identified as Black (2021 Census – Statistics Canada). Needless to say, while specific literature on the percentage of Black women within this demographic is lacking, the researcher refers to 2016 statistics, which indicate that 51.6% of Black Canadians are women (2016 Census – Statistics Canada).

As highlighted in a 2021 report by the Canadian Women's Foundation, the pervasive nature of these barriers not only restricts Black Women's advancement but also significantly impacts their overall well-being and access to opportunities. A close assessment of Dr. Deverell's and Miss Smallwood's individual experiences to the broader struggles faced by Black women in North America, makes evident the fact that they face unfair expectations, unique challenges, and biased assumptions about where they fit in the workplace that differ from the perceptions held about women from other racial and ethnic groups as well as men (Frye, J., 2019).

Representation in Canada

For more than forty years, Canada has attempted to use legislation to advance diversity and inclusion in organizations (Diversity Leads, 2020). Canada's Employment Equity Act (1986) required federally-regulated corporations to report on the number of employees and leaders belonging to four designated groups (women, visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples, and persons with disabilities). To accurately define representation in Mass Media, the researcher uses a BBC definition, which describes "representation as how societal aspects such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, and social issues are presented' (Race to a Cure., 2021). The advantage of accurate, authentic representation can break down barriers, open us to new ideas, create powerful role models, and even be a source of inspiration (Abbott, J., 2019). Though women continue to make slow progress, in some cases representation of racialized people is moving backwards.

This pervasive issue of the lack of growth of women and racialized minorities within media organizations and popular media is widely acknowledged in present-day Canada (Women in View 2023). The report also concluded that Black Women are underrepresented relative to their share of the national population, and when present, they tend to be depicted in accordance with normative negative stereotypes.

Black women in Canada's film industry face systemic racism and sexism, which significantly hinders their progress. The industry's decision-makers often lack an understanding of systemic racism, limiting the greenlighting of projects that represent Black experiences. Filmmaker Jennifer Holness highlights that gatekeeping, once predominantly by cis men, now also involves predominantly white women, underscoring a narrow focus on gender diversity that often overlooks racialized groups (Wilson, 2021)

Representation in Leadership - A Noticeable but Slow Progression

The progression of representation of women in leadership roles has been noticeable yet slow, as evidenced by various studies and reports. A study by Western University found that, as of 2020, the representation of women in leadership positions has improved significantly, reaching levels comparable to their population percentages. (Sutter, A., & Esses, V., 2021).

McKinsey's 2023 report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives highlights the slow overall progress in closing gaps such as the global economic gender gap. Despite increased spending on DEI efforts, which is expected to more than double from $7.5 billion in 2020 to $15.4 billion by 2026, the pace of progress remains gradual (Ellingrud, K., et al, 2023).

The representation of Black women in leadership roles in Canada's film and media industry is slowly improving, with notable figures like Maxine Bailey at the CFC, and as identified by this research project, leaders such as Kadon Douglas of BIPOC TV & Film, Tonya Williams at Reelworld Screen Institute, and Joan Jenksonson Executive Director at the Black Screen Office, are making strides (Now Toronto., n.d.). However, systemic barriers, such as a male-dominated industry and a scarcity mentality among Black female filmmakers as this paper has already mentioned, still exist and the challenges of racism, sexism, and traditional power structures continue to hinder the amplification of Black women's voices and their advancement to leadership positions (Elle Canada., n.d.)

A Global Perspective on Gender Equity - Do Women Have the Same Challenges Everywhere?

Transformative Narratives: Black Women Pioneering Inclusivity in Film and Media

While the primary emphasis of this research project centres around Black Women in Film and Media in Toronto, the researcher has discovered that the challenges faced by Black women in film and media in Canada mirror some aspects of the broader global issues of gender inequality in the industry. Specifically focusing on the concept of gender equality that serves to lend some key challenges to aspects of the struggle Black Women in film and media face in Canada.

McKinsey's report on gender inequality in media and entertainment highlights that, while women are well represented at entry levels in media and entertainment companies, they face a 'glass ceiling' in climbing to top leadership roles (McKinsey & Company 2019). Only 27% of C-suite positions in this sector are held by women. This discrepancy is attributed to higher attrition rates for women in entry-level positions, biased external hiring that favors men for top roles, and different standards applied to judge women's competence.

UNESCO reports that despite the momentum gained from movements like #MeToo and Time's Up, gender imbalance and stereotyping persist in cinema (UNESCO, 2019). The discrepancy in gender representation in the media and entertainment industry, particularly concerning the higher attrition rates for women in entry-level positions, biased external hiring favouring men for top roles, and different standards for judging women's competence, is also underscored by UCLA's 2020 Hollywood Diversity Report (Hunt, D., & Ramón, A.-C., 2020). The report mentions that as of 2019, women's representation saw gains in key areas: film leads (44.1%), film directors (15.1%), film writers (17.4%), total actors (40.2%), and studio heads (18%). Despite these improvements, women's representation still falls short of being proportionate to their more than half share of the overall population, with a particularly notable gap in directorial and studio head roles where they are outnumbered by more than 3 to 1.

Some Historical Global Efforts Towards Achieving Equity

Women brought a gendered analysis of the mass media to the global stage in the 1970s when a multipart critique was first presented at the 1976 Mexico City conference, which opened the U.N. Decade for Women (Byerly, C. M., n.d). With one of the overarching objectives being to achieve full gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination (United Nations, 1975), though the women came together united by bonds of disadvantage in a world of male privilege, they were divided by major distinctions of class, race, culture and geography (Chesler, E., 2018).

In 1995, for the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, 50,000 activists, diplomats, and world leaders met in Beijing, China to plan for a world in which all women everywhere in all diversity could live full and equal lives. The resulting declaration and platform for action was the most progressive blueprint ever conceptualized for advancing women's rights (UN Report,1995). 29 years later, women journalists are targeted online significantly more than their male colleagues (Posetti, J., et al, 2021); women are structurally underrepresented in professional roles that include high levels of creative and economic decision-making power, such as directors, writers, and producers (Ehrich, M.E., et al 2022); violence against women as a topic is not given enough coverage in the media since longer forms or forms that provide for a deeper insight into the topic (such as interviews or comments) are rare (UN Women, 2017).

Continental Perspectives on Gender Equity in Film and Media – Africa

According to *DW Akademie's* 2020 report on the state of Women filmmakers in Africa, African film, though a rapidly growing economic driver, excludes women in areas such as directing, script writing and technical aspects like editing, and camera work, resulting in an imbalance in how stories reflect the experiences of Women (Rietdorf, J., 2021).

Research shows that although against tremendous odds African women succeed in producing films, the emergence of female directors in Africa remains a crucially declining trend and requires more focused research (Bisschoff, L., 2009).

As an example, Sisters Working in Film & Television (SWIFT) is a non-profit organization committed to championing empowerment and access to equal opportunities for women in film and television, a previously male-dominated industry, by advocating for change from the historical imbalances and a legacy that discriminated against women in South Africa. SWIFT posits that the intersectionality of women content creators and storytellers across the value-chain enables empowerment of Women through storytelling and the transformation of communities through contextual narratives.

Continental Perspectives on Gender Equity in Film and Media – Asia

In a study conducted by Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, & Dr. Katherine Pieper at the Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, it was established that Women represent less than 15% of film and television executives and employees (Smith, S. L., et al 2016). As a result of this study, in India specifically, where there is a high percentage of sexualized female characters in film and media (Slatewala, Z. Z., 2019). The trend negatively impacts the effectiveness of gender-based storytelling meant to provide focus and education on gender-based violence (Slatewala, Z. Z., 2019) for cultural change to enhance desirable behaviours in communities. Breakthrough India, a women's rights organization, seeking to create a cultural shift to reject discrimination and violence against girls and women, describes gender-based violence as a taboo topic in India, thus the need to use authentic experiences and stories to break the stigma and mainstream the subject through media such as music, new media, and pop culture (Breakthrough Media, 2016).

On average, across Asia and the Pacific, women make up 28.6 percent of the media workforce (UNESCO, 2015). The proportions are lower in decision-making roles in media organizations where women make up 17.9 percent of executive roles, 19.5 percent of senior editorial and 22.6 percent of mid-level editorial positions (UNESCO, 2015). The reasons for these low percentages are often attributed to cultural barriers and stereotypes resulting in many women not feeling encouraged. The same reports indicate that Women journalists in Cambodia are met by an extremely male-dominated industry where issues of sexual harassment, pay inequalities, little or no union support and representation, and family responsibilities and poor working conditions, prevent women from pursuing their careers effectively and actively (UNESCO Asia and The Pacific Gender Report, 2015).

Continental Perspectives on Gender Equity in Film and Media – Europe

According to the European Audiovisual Observatory 2022 report on Female Professionals active in the European Film industry, authored by Patrizia Simone and published in October 2023, women accounted for only 25% of all film directors of European feature films between 2017 and 2021 (Simone, P., 2023). This statistic highlights a significant gender disparity in leadership roles within the film industry, indicating that women are underrepresented in influential and creative positions. Similarly, research conducted by the Catalan CAC in 2006 found that women accounted for only 27% of speaking time in the main news programmes, a decrease from the previous year's figure of 29%. This not only signifies a marginalization of women's voices in news media but also suggests a trend of decreasing visibility over time.

The situation across Europe and the United Kingdom further underlines these disparities. As noted by Jessica Jones in her 2018 research, one of the primary issues contributing to these low percentages is the lack of prioritization in addressing the systemic barriers preventing women from advancing in these fields. The failure to provide opportunities for women to pivot into different roles or ascend to higher positions perpetuates a cycle of exclusion. Additionally, Jones (2018) points out the scarcity of women in key decision-making roles in media, which directly impacts the representation and narratives portrayed in media content.

This lack of representation in decision-making capacities not only influences the types of stories that get told but also affects the opportunities available to women in the industry. These findings collectively demonstrate the entrenched barriers that women face in the film and media industries. From limited access to leadership roles to reduced visibility and voice, these barriers not only hinder the progress of women but also restrict the diversity and

richness of media and film content. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to acknowledge and actively work towards dismantling the systemic biases and obstacles that impede women's full participation and advancement in these fields.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights from participants. This approach allowed for flexibility in exploring the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of Black women in film and media.

Validity and Reliability

External validity addresses the ability to generalize data across a larger population under scrutiny at varying times and geographical locations (Cohen al., 2016). The study involves the purposeful sampling of Black film and media women leaders whose works are based in Toronto, Canada. Therefore, the generalizability of the study is limited to Black women in Film and Media (Taherdoost, 2016). Participants were encouraged to provide honest responses during their interview. Participation was also wholly voluntary and independent of their work.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected and contacted with the help of Black Women Film! Canada - an organization for which the researcher had provided mentorship to young women within the organization's producer masterclasses and residencies. Through Black Women Film! Canada, the researcher was able to identify Black women with established careers in film and media. This included filmmakers, producers, writers, actors, and activists. Their names and titles are Dr. Rita Shelton Deverell, CM, EdD, Broadcaster, Actress and Activist; Joan

Jenkinson, Executive Director, Black Screen Office; Jully Black, Singer/Songwriter, JUNO Award winner and Canada's Queen of R&B; Ella Cooper, Founder, Black Women Film! Canada; Cherene Francis, Actor, Producer and Creator; Tonya Williams, Founder, ReelWorld Screen Institute and Reelworld Foundation; Trey Anthony, Producer, Author and Award-winning Playwright. The criteria for selection were based on their contributions to the industry, their advocacy for diversity and inclusion, and their role in mentorship and community building. The full bios of each participant can be found in Appendix D.

Interview Protocol

Introduction and Consent:

Participants were introduced to the purpose of the study and provided informed consent via email correspondence and phone conversation.

Background Questions:

The researcher developed 15 questions which were designed to provide an overview of the participant's background, career journey, and motivations. An example of this set of questions can be found in APPENDIX B.

Research Questions:

- **RQ1: How do personal experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds of Black women in film and media influence their approaches to mentorship, advocacy, and movement building within the industry?**
    - This question aims to explore the link between the individual life experiences and cultural backgrounds of Black women in the industry and their methods for enacting change. It seeks to understand how these experiences shape strategies in mentorship, advocacy, and the establishment of initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion.

- **RQ2: In what ways do intersectionality and multi-dimensional representation in the works of Black women contribute to challenging and reshaping industry narratives and stereotypes?**
    - Focusing on the theme of intersectionality, this question investigates how Black women's portrayal of diverse and complex characters and stories challenges and transforms traditional narratives and stereotypes in film and media.
- **RQ3: What are the effective strategies and practices implemented by Black women in film and media to create inclusive spaces and platforms for underrepresented voices, and how do these initiatives contribute to systemic change in the industry?**
    - This question delves into the practical measures and strategies employed by Black women to foster inclusivity and representation in the industry. It seeks to identify and analyze successful initiatives that have led to the creation of more inclusive spaces and how these efforts are contributing to systemic change in the film and media landscape.

The interviews delved into themes around challenges faced in the industry, strategies for overcoming these challenges, experiences with mentorship, advocacy efforts, and contributions to diversity and inclusion.

Closing Statements – Calls to Action:

The researcher developed a request for calls to action from each participant, serving to inspire the next generation of women, and with the possibility of interventions for impact in the future.

Data Collection

Data were collected through video and audio-recorded interviews, which were then transcribed for analysis. Interviews typically lasted between 15- 40 minutes. Although each participant had the questions well in advance of the interview, the semi-structured nature in the form of a narrative discussion, allowed participants to share their stories and perspectives in an open-ended manner, providing rich qualitative data. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts are available in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved coding the transcripts to identify common themes and patterns. This thematic analysis aimed to distil significant insights related to the barriers faced by the participants and their contributions to overcoming these barriers. Through the meticulous process of open coding, the researcher used codes such as career inception and direction, field and trajectory of career, experience of challenging stereotypes, systemic industry challenges and importance of representation. These themes were further categorized to underscore the multifaceted experiences of the participants, ranging from personal narratives of resilience and tenacity to broader discussions on the need for more inclusive and diverse storytelling.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board.

Statement of Personal Bias

The researcher's personal background and experiences may influence their interpretation of the data. As someone engaged in the study of media and diversity, the researcher acknowledges potential inherent biases. To mitigate this, the researcher employed reflexivity

throughout the research process, constantly reflecting on how their perspectives might shape the research interpretations.

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

The researcher has chosen to present the results in a categorized manner because it effectively highlights the unique perspectives and experiences of each participant. The format not only underlines the specific contributions of each participant but also emphasizes the interconnectedness of these categories in the context of systemic industry change. This method is vital for accurately representing the diverse, rich narratives of each participant, by acknowledging how their varied experiences still manages to reach a collective goal and ambition.

RQ1: How do personal experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds of Black women in film and media influence their approaches to mentorship, advocacy, and movement building within the industry?

The insights garnered from the interviews with the participants reveal a profound connection between their personal experiences, socio-cultural backgrounds, and their approaches to mentorship, advocacy, and movement building within the industry. Each woman's journey, marked by unique challenges and triumphs, significantly informs their strategies for enacting change.

1. Personal Experiences and Mentorship:

Rita Deverell's narrative illustrates how overcoming barriers in her early career, such as racial discrimination and the struggle for meaningful representation, fuelled her commitment to mentorship. She emphasized the importance of "making one's own work" as a strategy to circumvent systemic obstacles, a lesson she imparts to her mentees.

Joan Jenkinson spoke about her journey from a young, aspiring professional to a seasoned executive. Her experiences of being frequently the only Black woman in professional settings led her to prioritize creating spaces where Black women are not just

present but are leading and making decisions. This directly influences her approach to mentorship, where she encourages aspiring professionals to aim for leadership roles.

2. Socio-Cultural Backgrounds and Advocacy:

Tonya Williams' reflections highlight how her upbringing, shaped by exposure to diverse cultures and the arts, informed her advocacy efforts. She advocates for a broad, inclusive approach to storytelling that transcends racial and cultural barriers, drawing on her own experiences of cultural fluidity.

Ella Cooper discussed how her childhood, surrounded by creativity and support, inspired her to establish Black Women Film Canada. Her socio-cultural background informs her advocacy for more inclusive representation in the media, focusing on nurturing Black women filmmakers.

3. Movement Building within the Industry:

Trey Anthony's experiences as a Black woman in the industry, dealing with stereotypes and limited roles, catalyzed her commitment to creating platforms for Black voices. Her initiatives are deeply influenced by her desire to see more authentic and diverse representations of Black women in media, a direct response to the gaps she observed in her career.

Cherene Francis' journey underscores the significance of seeing oneself represented in media. Her initiatives aim to broaden the scope of representation, ensuring that Black women's stories are told in their entirety, reflecting a range of experiences and backgrounds.

Jully Black’s personal journey of overcoming stereotypes and finding her unique voice in the industry inspired her to use her platform to advocate for change. Her approach to movement building is deeply personal, advocating for authentic self-expression and challenging traditional narratives in media.

RQ2: In what ways do intersectionality and multi-dimensional representation in the works of Black women contribute to challenging and reshaping industry narratives and stereotypes?

In response to RQ2, each interviewee demonstrated how through their work, they contribute to a broader and more nuanced portrayal of Black women, breaking away from monolithic representations and embracing complexity.

4. ***Challenging Stereotypes through Diverse Characters:***

Rita Deverell's work in broadcasting and production emphasizes the importance of creating content that reflects a wide range of Black experiences. Her approach challenges the industry's tendency to pigeonhole Black characters into stereotypical roles, showcasing the richness and diversity within Black communities.

Tonya Williams, through her advocacy and film festival initiatives, has been instrumental in providing a platform for stories that transcend traditional stereotypes. By promoting films that depict a wide array of Black experiences, her work counters the industry's narrow portrayal of Black lives.

5. ***Intersectionality in Storytelling:***

Joan Jenkinson's career trajectory, marked by advocating for diversity and inclusion, highlights the necessity of intersectional representation in media. Her work underscores the importance of acknowledging and representing the various identities that Black women hold, including race, gender, and sexuality, to create more authentic narratives.

Ella Cooper's focus on transformative programs for Black women filmmakers addresses the need for intersectional perspectives in storytelling. By supporting Black women from various backgrounds, her work facilitates the creation of stories that are not only racially diverse but also rich in different cultural, social, and personal experiences.

6. Reshaping Industry Narratives:

Trey Anthony's creative endeavours illustrate how personal narratives and experiences can significantly impact mainstream media. Her work, often drawing from her own life, presents Black women in roles and situations that defy conventional stereotypes, offering new perspectives and narratives.

Jully Black's career, evolving from a performer to a voice of change, demonstrates the power of personal stories in reshaping industry narratives. Her emphasis on authentic self-expression and challenging traditional narratives offers a fresh and impactful perspective in media.

Cherene Francis' journey as a creator and consultant in digital marketing reflects the growing trend of utilizing digital platforms to present diverse Black narratives. Her work in creating and promoting content that showcases the multifaceted nature of Black womanhood contributes to breaking stereotypes and reshaping industry narratives.

RQ3: What are the effective strategies and practices implemented by Black women in film and media to create inclusive spaces and platforms for underrepresented voices, and how do these initiatives contribute to systemic change in the industry?

The response to RQ3, derived from the interviews reveals a range of effective strategies and practices implemented to foster inclusivity and amplify underrepresented voices. These initiatives not only create more inclusive spaces but also contribute to systemic change in the industry.

7. ***Establishment of Platforms and Festivals:***

Tonya Williams, through ReelWorld Screen Institute, has created a significant platform for showcasing diverse narratives. This festival not only highlights underrepresented stories but also opens doors for filmmakers of color, allowing them access to wider audiences and industry recognition.

Joan Jenkinson's involvement in the Black Screen Office exemplifies a strategic approach to creating inclusive spaces. This organization focuses on research and knowledge mobilization, ensuring that decisions and initiatives in the film industry are informed and inclusive.

8. ***Mentorship and Professional Development Programs:***

Rita Deverell's role as a mentor and advocate emphasizes the importance of mentorship in nurturing the next generation of Black talent. Her efforts in providing guidance and opportunities for young Black women in broadcasting and production are instrumental in creating a more inclusive industry.

Ella Cooper's leadership in Black Women Film! Canada highlights how targeted professional development and leadership programs can elevate underrepresented voices. These programs provide essential skills, networking opportunities, and platforms for Black women filmmakers.

9. ***Advocacy and Representation Initiatives:***

Jully Black's transition from a performer to an advocate for change underscores the power of using one's platform to promote inclusivity. Her work in advocating for more representation and diversity in the industry helps challenge existing norms and encourages systemic change.

Cherene Francis' consultancy in digital marketing and media showcases how digital platforms can be leveraged to promote diverse voices. By utilizing digital media, Francis creates new spaces for underrepresented narratives, contributing to a more inclusive media landscape.

10. Creating Content that Challenges Stereotypes:

Trey Anthony's focus on storytelling that reflects the real experiences of Black women demonstrates how content creation itself can be a powerful tool for change. By producing work that challenges stereotypes and presents multifaceted characters, she contributes to reshaping industry narratives.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

Thematic Analysis

Individually, the participants provided profound insights into the challenges they faced and their efforts to create meaningful change in the industry. The researcher identified key themes revealed through the interviews with the seven trailblazing Black women in film and media.

Theme 1: Socio-Cultural Advocacy and Movement Building

A recurring theme is the participants' commitment to socio-cultural advocacy and movement building. Rita Deverell's career, influenced by early exposure to Black-centric productions, exemplifies a life dedicated to promoting inclusivity in media. Trey Anthony, known for her ground-breaking work in theatre, also echoes this sentiment, using her platform to address and dismantle racial and gender disparities in media representation.

Theme 2: Mentorship and Fostering Next Generations

Mentorship is a critical theme across the interviews. Jully Black emphasizes the importance of "leading with love" and guiding young Black women in the industry. Similarly,

Trey Anthony's work in motivational speaking and writing often focuses on empowering the next generation, stressing the value of mentorship in cultivating successful Black professionals in media.

Theme 3: Intersectionality and Multi-Dimensional Representation

The interviews underline the importance of intersectionality. Joan Jenkinson discusses the need for multi-dimensional representation, advocating for narratives that authentically reflect the diverse experiences of Black women. Trey Anthony's plays and talks often explore the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality, challenging monolithic narratives and enriching media with complex stories.

Theme 4: Personal Experiences as a Catalyst for Change

Personal experiences are seen as catalysts for broader change. Ella Cooper uses her personal narratives to transform advocacy into art, thereby educating and inspiring others. Trey Anthony's work, particularly her critically acclaimed plays – Da Kink In My Hair and How Black Mothers Say I Love You - draw from personal experiences to highlight systemic issues in the industry, inspiring systemic reforms.

Theme 5: Creating Spaces and Platforms for Underrepresented Voices

Creating platforms for underrepresented voices is a significant theme. Tonya Williams' founding of ReelWorld Screen Institute is a prime example of building a platform that showcases Black talent and addresses industry barriers. Trey Anthony's theatrical productions and workshops have also provided vital spaces for Black and minority storytellers, offering visibility and recognition and embodying a vision for a more inclusive media landscape.

CHAPTER 6 – LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The study primarily concentrates on collecting insights from industry leaders who are Black Women, inherently limiting the generalizability of the findings to the distinct yet intersecting identities and experiences of the participants. This limitation is further compounded by the diverse entry points and motivations of the participants within the film and media industry. The choice of an interviewing methodology was employed to deeply explore the nuanced experiences and challenges faced by these women, allowing for rich, qualitative data but also acknowledging the potential for subjective interpretation.

The study's focus on Black Women is a deliberate delimitation, recognizing their unique position and contributions within the industry, which have historically been underrepresented and undervalued. This specific focus, while providing critical insights into the experiences of Black Women, means that the experiences of individuals from other demographics such or intersecting identities are not encompassed within the scope of this research.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Urgency of Agency

Agency refers to the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act (Ahearn, 2001, 42). In the context of gender equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion, it refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices (CPTC Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion., n.d.). To Black women in Film and Media, equity, diversity, and inclusion means investing in training programs, mentorship opportunities, and career advancement initiatives (BW Empowered, 2023), having the autonomy to craft narratives

(Anthony, 2023), make key decisions, and access opportunities on an equal footing on a path void of obstacles that hinder their professional journey thereby allowing them to fulfil their potential without being constrained by gender and racial biases (Jenkinson, 2023). The urgency to foster this agency is paramount, as it not only elevates Black women in their respective fields but also sets a transformative example for future generations, paving the way towards a more inclusive and equitable industry.

Reflecting on the Challenges and Improvements

In conducting this research, several challenges arose that impacted the study's scope and depth. Reflecting on these issues offers valuable insights into how future research in this area could be improved. A significant and recurring challenge encountered was managing scheduling conflicts with participants. These conflicts often led to the need for repeatedly cancelling, rescheduling, or even replacing participants, significantly extending the duration of the research process far beyond the initially planned few months to an entire year. The majority of the contributors, being actively involved in their own productions, had demanding schedules, making it exceptionally difficult to find mutually beneficial times for interviews. This challenge underscores the importance of building in considerable flexibility and buffer time when planning research timelines, especially when working with professionals in dynamic and demanding industries such as film and media. Future research in similar contexts should anticipate and plan for such scheduling challenges to minimize disruptions and ensure a smoother research process. Improvements for future research could include allocating more time for participant recruitment and interviews, potentially over a span of several years, to accommodate the busy schedules of industry professionals.

When the interviews were conducted, the heightened interest by the participants in the subject matter made for very rich in detail, presenting a challenge in condensing all the

material. While this depth provided invaluable insights, it also meant that certain aspects of the interviews had to be excluded from both the paper and the documentary to maintain page and video length. This exclusion risked diluting other valuable facets of the participants' experiences and perspectives that could have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The initial plan included a longitudinal component, which, had it been implemented, would have significantly enriched the research. A longitudinal approach would have provided a dynamic perspective on the evolving experiences of these women over time, offering invaluable insights into the industry's transformation and the role of Black women within it. Such an approach would have allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the long-term impacts of trailblazing women whose careers began in the 1970s on subsequent generations. This could have shed light on how their pioneering efforts have inspired, educated, and prepared those whose careers are just beginning. Understanding this intergenerational influence is crucial in comprehending the full scope of their contributions and the evolution of their roles in the industry.

Moreover, a longitudinal study would have set the stage for a broader, richer perspective, capturing the ongoing changes and trends in the industry. This would have included how shifts in technology, audience preferences, and industry practices have affected the opportunities and challenges faced by Black women over the years. Though mentioned briefly in the interviews, it would have been impactful to have an extended view from the newer generation of professionals.

In future research, adopting a longitudinal approach from the outset would be highly beneficial. This would involve planning for extended periods of data collection and analysis, allowing for the observation and recording of changes and developments over time. Such a

study would not only build on the findings of the current research but also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the trajectory of Black women's roles and influence in the film and media industry. This approach emphasizes the importance of considering the historical context and long-term trends in understanding the present and shaping the future of diversity and representation in the industry.

In the same vein, the research, while aiming to provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Black women in Canada's film and media industry, reveals a significant gap in its historical scope. Specifically, it lacks an exploration of historical Black women in media and film from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, whose pioneering work laid the groundwork for future generations. These women, who navigated and shaped the industry during these pivotal decades, played a crucial role in breaking barriers and setting precedents for those who followed.

The absence of this historical perspective in the research presents a deficiency in understanding the full spectrum of the topic, especially considering the unique and complex history of Black women's struggles and achievements in Canada. Their stories and contributions during these earlier eras are integral to a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of Black women's roles and representation in the industry.

This oversight highlights the need for future research to include a more extensive examination of historical figures. Such an inclusion would not only enrich the narrative with a broader temporal context but also pay homage to the resilience and trailblazing efforts of these women. By capturing their legacy, from these earlier decades, future research could provide a more nuanced and complete picture of the ongoing journey towards diversity and representation in the Canadian film and media landscape.

A significant issue encountered in this research was the need to extend the initially approved 8-minute documentary to a 50-minute feature. This change was necessitated by the unexpectedly high volume of rich contributions from the interviewees, which could not be adequately covered in the originally planned duration. The extension of the documentary meant allocating more resources towards editing, production, and post-production processes. It also required a more comprehensive approach to storytelling, as the extended format allowed for deeper exploration of themes and narratives. This experience has highlighted the importance of being adaptable in documentary filmmaking, especially when dealing with rich and complex subject matter. Future projects may benefit from planning for multiple versions or cuts of the documentary to accommodate varying depths of content while maintaining ethical and narrative integrity.

THE RESEARCHER'S PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Embarking on this research journey has illuminated the profound role of storytelling as a vehicle for empowerment and change, particularly for Black women in film and media. This experience has reinforced the power our narratives wield in challenging perceptions, dismantling stereotypes, and fostering a deeper comprehension of our multifaceted experiences. It has solidified my dedication to crafting stories imbued with authenticity and advocating for platforms where Black women's voices are acknowledged and esteemed.

The core of this research delves into the portrayal and impact of Black women in the film and media sectors, areas where their presence has been notably scarce and frequently marginalized. Drawing on detailed interviews, an extensive literature review, and my own personal and professional insights, it's evident that critical interventions are necessary to genuinely empower Black women and establish a foundation for the generations to come.

Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach, with recommended action points tailored for various stakeholders within the film and media industry.

Emphasizing these recommendations in a specific, targeted manner is essential for implementing effective measures that confront the unique obstacles and prospects, thereby nurturing a film and media industry that is more inclusive and equitable for Black women:

Young Women of Colour Pursuing Film and Media:

- Participate in networking events, join online communities, and attend film festivals to foster relationships with both peers and industry veterans. Engage in conversations and ask insightful questions during these interactions.
- Delve into the histories of significant figures to understand their influence on the socio-cultural landscape.
- Pursue mentorship and coaching from pioneering professionals in your field. Don't hesitate to ask questions and seek advice during these mentorship sessions.
- Proactively search for internship opportunities both within and beyond your community to gain a diverse and comprehensive global perspective on relevant issues. Engage actively and ask questions to deepen your understanding and experience.

Established Industry Professionals:

- Provide mentorship opportunities to young Black women entering the industry, sharing knowledge, experience, and guidance.
- Use respective platforms to advocate for diversity and inclusion within the industry, highlighting the importance of representation.

- Initiate or support programs that offer internships, workshops, and roles specifically designed for underrepresented groups.
- Facilitate introductions and connections for young Black women to key industry players and opportunities.
- Advocate for other Black Women professionals to be included in key conversations.

Leaders in Film and Media:

- Actively engage with Black Women and Women of Colour to understand their professional needs and aspirations, and seek their input on effective support strategies.
- Implement and enforce robust diversity and inclusion policies that encompass all facets of production, hiring, and storytelling.
- Vigilantly ensure equitable representation both in front of and behind the camera, setting clear goals and benchmarks.
- Dedicate specific budgets and resources to projects that celebrate diverse narratives and are spearheaded by members of underrepresented groups.
- Conduct regular assessments of workplace inclusivity and the diversity of content produced, making necessary adjustments to foster a more inclusive environment.

Cultural Movement Leaders/Curators:

- Organize film screenings, art exhibits, and talks that celebrate and highlight the work of Black women in film and media.
- Create spaces for dialogue and community engagement that address issues of race, gender, and representation in the arts.
- Collaborate with educational institutions, film organizations, and media companies to promote inclusivity and diversity.

- Use platforms to share and celebrate the achievements of Black women and women of colour in the industry, providing inspiration and role models for others.

Media and Broadcasting Companies:

- Ensure a diverse range of stories and perspectives are represented in programming, specifically including narratives by and about Black women.
- Adopt and enforce inclusive hiring practices that prioritize diversity at all levels, from entry-level positions to executive leadership.
- Actively seek out and provide platforms for Black women creators, including directors, writers, and producers.
- Allocate funds equitably to projects led by or featuring Black women, ensuring they have the resources needed to succeed.
- Publish diversity reports and hold the company accountable for making tangible progress in inclusion and representation.

Educational Institutes:

- Revise curricula to include studies on race, gender, and media, emphasizing the contributions and challenges of Black women in the industry.
- Provide scholarships and financial aid specifically for Black women pursuing careers in film and media to alleviate financial barriers.
- Extend invitations to Black women professionals in film and media to conduct guest lectures and workshops, offering students a broad spectrum of role models. This initiative should be consistent throughout the year, not limited to Black History Month.
- Develop partnerships with media companies to create internship and job placement opportunities specifically for Black women students.

- Foster a supportive and inclusive campus environment that addresses and combats racism and sexism, providing a safe space for all students to learn and grow.

Through the insightful testimonies gathered in this research, several pivotal learnings have emerged that hold significant implications for Black Women in the film and media industries. One key takeaway is the critical need for autonomy in crafting and controlling one's narrative, highlighting the importance of self-representation and ownership in storytelling. Another crucial insight is the collective call for inclusion, underscoring the necessity of creating spaces where Black Women can make key decisions, access opportunities, and navigate their professional journeys without the constraints of gender and racial biases. Additionally, the emphasis on community and mentorship reaffirms the value of support networks that empower Black Women to break barriers, share knowledge, and pave the way for future generations.

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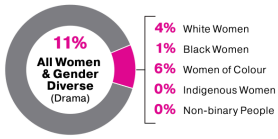
APPENDIX A - Women in View 2023 Data

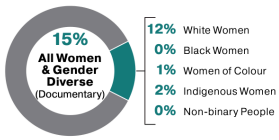
WOMEN AND GENDER DIVERSE CREATIVES IN DECISION-MAKING ROLES MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Gender representation in decision-making roles, even in mixed gender environments, significantly increases the share of credits awarded to women and gender diverse creatives across all key creative roles.

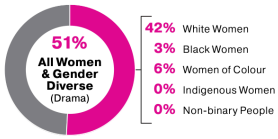
Television

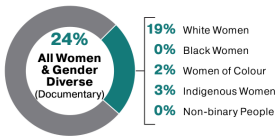
Women and Gender Diverse Share of Work: Men-Led Series



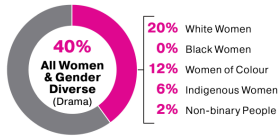


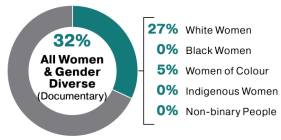
Women and Gender Diverse Share of Work: Women-Led Series





Women and Gender Diverse Share of Work: Mixed-Led Series





BLACK WOMEN: TELEVISION

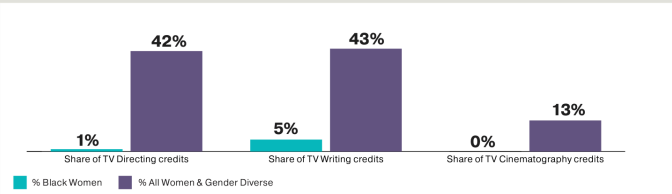
WIVOS23 is the first time the data for Black women in TV and Film has been separated from Women of Colour data.

The results of analyzing the representation of Black women and Women of Colour separately showed marked differences in share of work and investment, adding further, quantitative support for the criticism that many Black-led and People of Colour-led organizations have been making for years: the term BIPOC fails to recognize the significant diversity across Indigenous, Black, and Women of Colour communities, and the range of experiences within these communities. Recently, the Black Screen Office (BSO) and the Racial Equity Media Collective (REMC) successfully advocated to have "Black" separated from "racialized" as part of Bill-C11; a change that should carry through to all sector activities (e.g., creation / allocation of funds, analysis of employment, etc.).

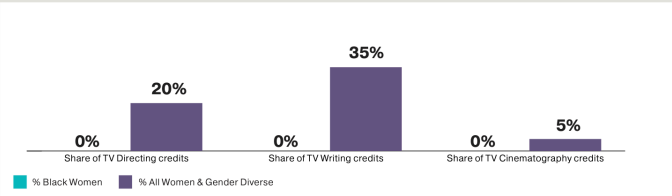
Black women's total share of key creative work in English-language television was just 2%.

Black women did not showrun any TV series in 2020 or 2021.

Drama: Share and distribution of key creative credits to Black women in English-language television credits (2020 & 2021 combined)



Documentary: Share and distribution of key creative credits to Black women in English-language television credits (2020 & 2021 combined)



BLACK WOMEN: FILM

In 2020 and 2021, Black women received far fewer opportunities and worked with significantly smaller budgets than all other women and gender diverse creatives.

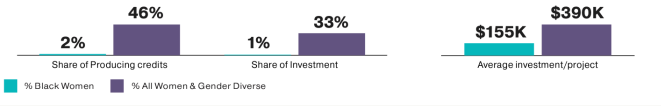
All films produced by Black women were funded at the bottom two funding levels (Talent to Watch and Under $500K). On average, projects led by Black women received 59% less investment than those led by creatives of other identities.

These observations gain further significance considering recent findings shared in the BSO's "Being Heard"[7] research study, which detailed the self-perpetuating cycle of Black-led projects being severely under-funded, evaluated using quality standards that do not account for the creative constraints imposed by such a lack of funding, and then receiving feedback that these projects "do not perform as well" as other projects – which contributes to a (false) narrative that Black stories and storytelling do not appeal to Canadian audiences.

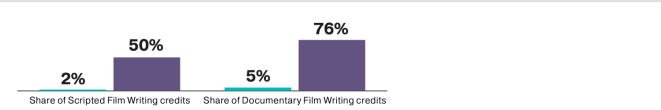
Black women were also the least collaborated with across creatives of all identities in 2020 and 2021: Black women key creatives were only hired on films produced by Black women.

These stark findings resonate with existing research that details the challenges Black women creatives face in gaining network and resource access throughout the sector[8] and emphasize just how much is missed by absorbing the experiences of Black women into broader categories like Women of Colour and Racialized.

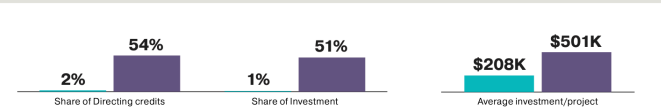
Producing



Writing

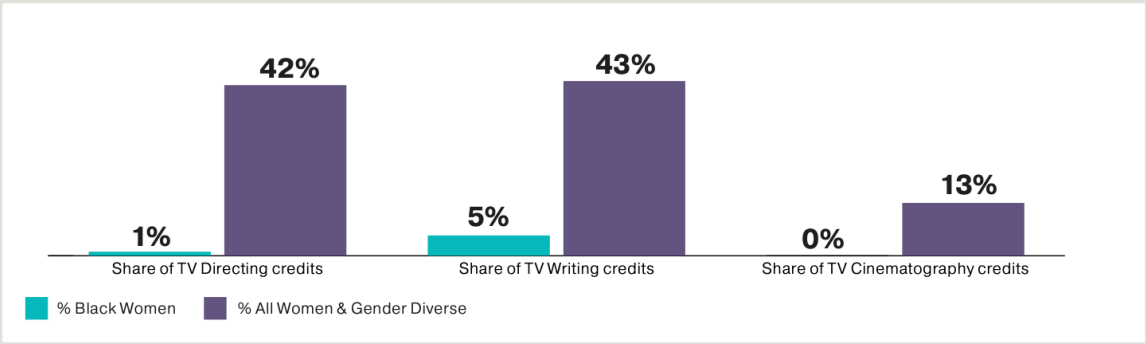


Directing

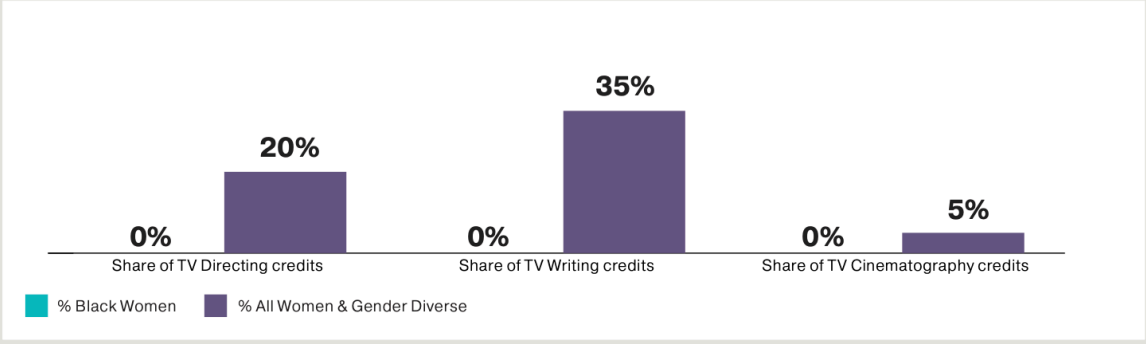


ON SCREEN REPORT 2023

Drama: Share and distribution of key creative credits to Black women in English-language television credits (2020 & 2021 combined)



Documentary: Share and distribution of key creative credits to Black women in English-language television credits (2020 & 2021 combined)



BLACK WOMEN CREATIVES ARE THE LEAST SUPPORTED BY A SIGNIFICANT MARGIN

Black women creatives have the lowest representation across all key creative roles, lead the fewest projects, and receive the least funding.

Black women are also the most isolated, as the least likely creatives to occupy key creative roles on projects that were *not* led by Black women.

The stark differences in the experiences of Black women creatives have, in previous years, been hidden in the data representing Women of Colour, underscoring the necessity of distinguishing the experiences of Black women through data.

These results reinforce the findings reported extensively in recent studies by the Black Screen Office and WIFT Alberta, detailing the ways Black women encounter both gender bias and anti-Black racism that create systematic barriers to access at every level throughout the sector.

Television

Percentage of key creative credits to Black women on English-language drama series

Drama	Black Women	All Women & Gender Diverse
Directing	1%	42%
Writing	5%	43%
Cinematography	0%	13%

Percentage of key creative credits to Black women on English-language documentary series

Documentary	Black Women	All Women & Gender Diverse
Directing	0%	20%
Writing	0%	35%
Cinematography	0%	5%

Employment of Black women in key creative roles by showrunner in English-language television

Employment by Showrunner	Black Women	All Women & Gender Diverse
Men-led	1%	11%
Women-led	3%	51%
Mixed-team	0%	40%

Film

Share of producing credits to Black women on English-language films

Producing	Black Women	All Women & Gender Diverse
Share of Producing credits	2%	46%
Share of investment	1%	33%
Average investment/project	$155K	$390K

Share of directing credits to Black women on English-language films

Directing	Black Women	All Women & Gender Diverse
Share of Directing credits	2%	54%
Share of investment	1%	51%
Average investment/project	$208K	$501K

None of the projects produced or directed by Black women were funded for more than $500K in 2020 & 2021.

Share of writing credits to Black women on English-language films

Writing	Black Women	All Women & Gender Diverse
Share of Drama Film Writing credits	2%	50%
Share of Documentary Film Writing credits	5%	76%

Share of key creative credits to Black women by producer on English-language films

	% Black Women hired		All Women & Gender Diverse	
	writing	directing	writing	directing
Men producers	0%	0%	78%	78%
Black women producers	100%	100%	100%	100%
Indigenous women & gender diverse producers	0%	0%	85%	100%
Women & gender diverse People of Colour producers	0%	0%	100%	100%
White women producers	3%	3%	55%	48%

APPENDIX B - Participant Transcribed Interviews

Interview With Cherene Francis

Anita Erskine: Cherene, when did you started on your path, what was the environment like for Women of Color?

Cherene Francis: Uh, I mean, in terms of the environment, we were present. We were allowed to show up and to create. But in terms of the belief around backing creative projects. Um, there wasn't, I would say, an interest in terms of those who maybe had the funding or the resources to back projects with Black women representation. So, starting out, for me, I didn't want to have to wait. For permission. I just went ahead and did a lot of things independently

Anita Erskine: What did it mean to work independently on an emotional, mental, financial level? What did it mean?

Cherene Francis: It meant that I had to personally get out of my own comfort zone and solicit, um, businesses, independently, small, medium sized businesses and people that did believe in the projects that I was starting, um, I would You know, ask I would hustle.

I would have to be really good at selling the vision in order to really make things work, um, digging into my own pockets and self funding all of my projects. All of that. Um, you know, I had to go above and beyond. To make things work, because there was no structure or connections that I had readily available.

And, all I had was vision, passion, and heart, and so I just got really good at selling my ideas to people that did have the financing.

Anita Erskine: From your experience, and in your opinion, um, what unique struggles have Women of Color faced, uh, in the pursuit of their ambitions, their dreams?

Cherene Francis: I think that because we're not used to seeing women of color, well now we see it more, but back when I started, there wasn't, I didn't see a lot of people like me out there. And, I also started at a really interesting place where the internet and digital was just taking off when we talk about like social media like Facebook and all of those things were just in their infant stages.

And so, um, I think the biggest struggle was the sense that people like me who look like me don't do this type of work. Um, and if we do, it's going to be a long journey. So I think a part of it could be confidence. And is it is it really going to be accepted? Am I going to be, um, welcomed in this type of work and community, especially when I don't see other people that look like me in this.

Will my, how I look, get in the way of, uh, not necessarily racist, it's not racism, but it's just competence. I think that, um, sometimes there are unconscious biases that are projected, and It takes, it's more work to persuade people that you're competent in doing it. So it's a two way street where it's having to prove yourself a lot more and then also having the confidence to trust that you can break like trailblaze in a particular industry.

Anita Erskine: As a creative, Cherene, what's your definition of representation?

Cherene Francis: My definition would be being able to see yourself in cultural, uh, media. To be able to see yourself in art, uh, in Whether it be moving video, television, movies, you know, or dance or stage, it's just being able to see yourself in other people, and it doesn't necessarily that they're exactly like me, um, but even if it's another person of color that has You know, a role of being a president, right? You don't normally see something like that. So it's just being able to see yourself in other contexts of media.

Anita Erskine: And have you been able to use your work to address these challenges? If yes, how did your audience feel about it?

Cherene Francis: So all of my work that I do, I feel like I'm a native, right? So to address it, I just have to go and do it. And how people respond is great, right? It's it. They enjoy it. They love it. Um, there's, there is a sense of, wow, great job. I thoroughly enjoy it. It's a different perspective, a different way of looking at things.

And so that's really refreshing. Um, and so the problem isn't that it won't be welcome. The problem is that, you know, we just need more. Of us doing it and more of us with the confidence to do it. So I feel really excited about what I do because it does inspire people. A lot of people say that what I do is inspiring to them and has taken them out of their own comfort zone as well.

Anita Erskine: What has influenced your thinking, um, around Black women, representation, inclusion, and perhaps what motivates you to get involved, um, in the opportunity to advocate for social change?

Cherene Francis: Really, it's just an inner calling for me. I can't see myself not expressing myself through media and the fact that you don't see it a lot. Means that this is why I have this feeling, this is why I have this, um, this desire to put myself out there in creative communication. And so that really is what inspired Viola Davis as well and I would say Oprah Winfrey would probably be the, my top two that I have watched as a child. Being black women and not just black. There's an aspect of shadism that happens in our industry. So being a dark skin. Black women, uh, black woman having kinky hair. I know my hair is not kinky right now, but though Viola Davis and Oprah Winfrey, to me were the symbols of being, you know, dark skinned woman with nappy hair, but they're doing really huge things in media and television.

And so to me, they showed me that, wow, you can have high levels of excellence. In doing what you do, but there still needs to be more of us. And so I feel called to continue that.

Anita Erskine: Why is it so important to take social change into account, uh, when we are being creative or when we're telling stories?

Well, it's important to It's important to be relevant to what's happening in your cultural landscape, right? So there are concerns that people have, social issues that are challenges for people on a day to day.

And if you're not able to connect with them and meet them where they are, then you're not going to get viewership. And so it's important for. Uh, for us as people in media to be aware of what's happening culturally and socially, economically, just all of that in terms of, uh, what is our current state of living and being able to speak to that and have commentary on that.

Anita Erskine: As you reflect on your journey, um, what advice would you offer to emerging women, uh, of color, who are storytellers, who are pursuing careers in the creative space? Um, you know, especially knowing very well that they may face systemic challenges. What would your advice to them be?

My advice is to realize that although there's a saying that says art imitates life.

But there's another aspect of creativity that requires you to paint a future possibility. And so what I find is even though [00:13:00] there is a push for more diversity and seeing more diversity, sometimes the push in the pictures that we're seeing are not the ideal of what our social change is. Wanting to work towards.

And so my advice would be to one work on yourself confidence because sometimes what you see out there in terms of representation is not our ideal. You need to paint your own ideal for yourself. and visualize that and see that for yourself. And two, just because you don't see it in life, your art can be an ideal that you have imagined and vision casted for yourself.

And don't be afraid to put out the extraordinary or things that people have never seen before, because [00:14:00] Uh, this is what we need as black women is to see differences and what can be and not what always was.

Anita Erskine: If you have to share a special Shireen Francis call to action to every woman of color who is in the storytelling space, young, middle aged, old, whatever you call it, what would be, what would that call to action be?

is to know yourself, uh, to be really self aware, um, of who you are, what is your essence, what makes you unique, what are your strengths. Because when you get out there, there's going to be a lot of opinions. There's going to be a lot of people telling you what you should

do, what [00:15:00] you can't do. And if you don't have a strong sense of self, it's very easy to get lost in the current of culture.

And as someone that is, uh, in the media, your job is to contribute to culture. To have commentary on culture and your voice, your perspective matters. So know yourself and know what you're bringing to the table.

Anita Erskine: if I can ask, it was about your personal experience. Um, if you've ever experienced, uh, resistance navigated that, um, that experience.

I haven't received any racial resistance. Um, I would say the majority of it again comes back to unconscious bias and the perspective of a black woman and whether she is competent. Um, and so it's always awkward because It's as if you are having to fight, uh, an imaginary person, uh, you know, what media has said we are or what culture has understood what black women, what they think black women are, what, what their abilities are.

But they, when personally, when they meet somebody like me, um, and I say this humbly, I feel like I have to break down limiting beliefs. I have to be so persuaded in and confident within myself to break down the beliefs of others that might not think I'm competent or my ideas aren't going to work. So, in terms of resistance, I would say it's the mindset.

It's the current state of how we think Black women are and how we think, uh, they do things. It's really breaking down those constructs. And, um, so how I do that is with compassion, right? Um, it's easy to get angry, it's easy to say, Oh, you shouldn't be racist, or Oh, you should get rid of your unconscious biases.

But this is why I'm in media, is because if you read, if people don't see these other pictures and images of what can be, then they're always going to think that. So I just have compassion because people only know what they've seen and if they haven't seen representation, if they haven't seen people like me and the possibilities, then what am I supposed to expect?

And this is exactly why more Black women need to step up and put our perspectives, put our stories and put the possibilities. Of us out there so we can reshape the mindset of culture and how they see black women in, in media.

Interview With Jully Black

Anita Erskine: Julie Black, what a powerful name and Julie, Julie Black isn't even your original name. What is the journey to becoming Julie Black?

Jully Black: Oh my goodness. First of all, thank you for having me. My birth name is Julianne Indira Gordon. My dad named me Indira based on Indira Gandhi, the first female, prime minister of India.

And there's other history. She, he just said that she, he, he saw her to be such a powerful woman before I was born and wanted to make sure her name was involved in my, my name, interestingly enough, though I'm Jamaican, I'm Jamaican descent. It's interesting how different cultures influence. You know, the mindset.

So that's, that's that part, becoming Julie black. I became Julie black at the age of 14 and, it was a manager at the time that said, my voice was kind of, he said, quote, your voice is real. It's raw, it's rich and has a darkness, but it's, and he just kept going on. And he said, it's black, it's Julie black.

And I hated it. Hated it. For like years, cause I was a teenager and I'm like, Julie Black, I'm Julianne Gordon. I'm baby G. You know, I'm JG and all that, but, and it stuck. And I, I'm so happy that I have that name to lean on and lean into, because it really signifies taking a chance. And my mom giving me the opportunity to activate my dreams at such a young age.

Anita Erskine: So Julie, we still stick on the concept of your name and now when your name is mentioned in auditoriums filled with thousands of people, what goes through your mind? I mean, Julie, when they mentioned ladies and gentlemen, Julie Black, what's that thing that hits you that, wow, my name, Julie Black is being mentioned.

Jully Black: What hits me every single time is community. Is being raised in a marginalized at risk community, though my mom, you know, she, she worked hard. She worked at General Motors. He had a great income, raised all her kids as a single parent. It lets me realize that there was so much judgment and stigma around, you know, community housing. Like my mom had to get on her feet. So, especially after the divorce. And so every time my name is called, I feel like my entire community of Jane and Finch here in Toronto is saying, you know what? Great things come out of Jane and Finch and I look at, I look at Dr. Dre saying Compton, or, you know, there's people there's ludicrous in Chicago or Mary J.

Blige, just like Yonkers, like people in America tend to really shout out their community and their street, their borough. But being in, in Canada, you know, I want to be that I want to continue to pay homage and celebrate that great things are happening in these communities and come out of these communities.

Anita Erskine: So let's talk about the struggle because you mentioned it and regardless of the kind of upbringing anyone has, everyone has their version of a struggle. Julie, what was your struggle? And how did you navigate these struggles, particularly when you received critical acclaim for your music, for your voice, for your acting, for your personality? What was the struggle that you were seeing?

Jully Black: I think the struggle first started internally, just believing that I was good enough. You know, I've always had a, firm self confidence, but being in Canada without black radio, without seeing black women on TV that look like myself, without seeing actors or, you know, theater performers look like myself, without seeing lawyers and doctors look like myself.

I really lived in this space where it's like. All things outside of my four walls outside of my church was white. And so it was like, really, how do I lay the pavement? How do I put down these breadcrumbs so that somebody else could also follow along in the future? So that was the first struggle, just making sure that I had a solid belief system when I left my household and my, you know, it was about faith for sure.

My mom made sure that I didn't have idle time, where a lot of my friends were kind of getting in trouble and being teens, my mom put me into programs, whether it was afterschool program or a music program. I even went to modeling school. Hence why I'm, you know, I have a certain posture. I know, you know, I went to etiquette school, like things that.

In the West Indian community, they would think would be like a waste of money. My mom was like, no, she saw something in me and she knew I wanted to do it. So the struggle turned into how do we turn this into something inspirational and to show proof to our family, proof to our culture, proof to the Jamaican community, especially that as a woman, um, there's more.

To this industry, then, you know, then, then it being about our body parts, et cetera, you know, and as far as being a woman, um, and as far as being in Canada and just the struggle of radio, not playing black music, and just going through life saying, okay, you know what? There's something there for me. I'm, I'm great at what I do.

I started singing before I could speak and how do I keep this going? And, um, and not give up. And so education was played a big role. I went to school for law enforcement and, uh, learning my rights and responsibilities, learning entertainment law, learning how to read contracts. Like it was always a constant.

Uh, I think, I think one of the struggles Anita is. Taking a moment to, to kind of not have to be a professional student because when you're, you're self made, you're an entrepreneur, you're your own artist, you're all the things you tend to, I realized I was always learning, learning what's next, what's next, and not celebrating the actual accolades and the success.

Anita Erskine: So in that learning, um, clearly all the learning, all the, all the struggle, all the travel brought you to the point where you then became this bonafide artist. You justified your inclusion. Uh, you showed people that You know, you did justify your inclusion and you're talking about Jamaicans, et cetera. And I love that, but you are reaching to the Africans.

I was one of them. I was working at flow 93. 5 when they said, Julie black, you felt like that is one of us, you know, and, and there was a genuine feeling of if Julie is doing this, when Julie says this, where Julie goes, it means that the rest of us can follow. But I can only imagine at the time that perhaps you also felt.

A sense of responsibility. What was that responsibility specifically, Julie?

Jully Black: Yeah, 100%. Uh, that sense of responsibility was really first for me, it was to ensure that the distractions were at bay, you know, um, I was growing, I was learning, I was maturing, you know, hormones are changing, like different distractions that happens in life, especially for, um, for teens and for young adults.

And so for myself, there were some sacrifices. That had to be made. There was some, okay, well, when everybody else was kind of going on dates or going to prom or going to like, I was in the studio, I was writing songs. I was in art school, you know? So I knew that it was a solid sacrifice that I wanted to make, because I, I also recognize that.

I am at the time and still now my ancestors wildest dreams. And so I love that you mentioned Africans because, you know, I had a friend named Kofi Mensah and, you know, growing up in school, he always would encourage me. And I hope one day he sees this and hears this. Um, To just keep singing, he was like always there.

It was like this beautiful features. And he was like my first kind of like platonic guy friend. That was very handsome Ghanaian man. That's like, we were literally brother and sister. And to show the world and our inner world and outer world that you can have this friendship and you can have this West Indian African diaspora thing happening early.

We didn't know. We didn't know that's what was happening because we were leading with love. Right. And, and Nana and all this, you know, I look back at the time, I'm like, That was really, I really had that protective shield around me because people were cheering for Julie, like you can do this. Even when I wasn't focusing on the business, it was school assemblies, it's community involvement, it's church.

I think that's why, you know, when you encountered me during the flow 93 days, it was like, there was a sense of family and camaraderie and a sisterhood. And everyone just says, I feel like I've known you my entire life. And I think that it's because how immersed. I was, and still am, into feeling that, that community love and that community chastisement.

That's the thing about the responsibility. Cause like, there are things that now becoming Julie Black gives me the privilege to be an amplified voice. But on the flip side, I still have to govern my talk, govern my walk, govern who I hang with. Like, because one, one wrong turn could really put a, a, a smear on our entire community's reputation.

Thanks for bringing us to this conversation that responsibility isn't only trailblazing, but it's also making sure that you are the example that mothers and fathers want their children to follow. Um, I mean, it doesn't have to be that way, but it also shows Your, your sense of community.

Anita Erskine: So Julie, if you are this person that you're describing to me, so responsible, so conscious of your environment, so conscious of generations to come, what does it feel like to be the voice of change?

I mean, we saw in 2023, you do something that the rest of us were watching TV. And we're like, Oh, she did it. What does it just take me to the moment before. You change the words of the national anthem, the moment after and life after. Oh my gosh, moments before I'm going to bring you to 75 [00:10:00] hours before the decision was dropped in my spirit three days before.

Jully Black: So up until then, I was singing it the original way, but something as I was practicing. I kept hitting what I call us. I'm like what's the speed bump. When I sang that hour native, I like, ah, it doesn't feel right. And so in wisdom and discernment, I reached out to some friends who are indigenous. And I said, this is what I'm feeling because I'm very, very now I need to, let me tell you something.

I do not deny the feeling of God. Like it's a whole other day now where before I kind of take a census, ask my friends, ask my family, ask my, But I had to go to those who I knew. This is the part of their history. This is something that they must know more than I do. And so when I sang it to my friends who are indigenous, um, they start to cry.

There was a visceral reaction. There was like, this is how the elders taught us. This is how my mom and dad taught us. We've never sang it any other way. I was like, Oh my goodness, how am I at this age just knowing this? And so I was sold. I didn't tell anybody who was part of my crew until I sang it in soundcheck in Utah, like literally in the arena.

Nobody knew I was going to do it. And so a friend of mine, Tashaun, he was there and he said, you know, you might want to, he's the one person I told when I landed, I said, I'm going to do this. He said, you might want to sing it out loud so that it's in your body before the night. And so the funny thing is Anita, I, there was such peace.

And when people ask me like, Oh, it was such a big decision or how do you, how do you decide when you're going to do something so grand? And for me, it wasn't even that grand is because it was so meaningful. It felt. Sacred and tiny, like I could just hold it in my hand like

this, you know, and that's how I knew that it was the right thing to do because I had had total peace.

And so being a Canadian at an American event, I knew I'm like people, well, what I felt actually, I was like, ah, no one's really going to notice this. I'm just gonna. I always say, I'm going to hide the kale in the smoothie, put a little kale in there, a little mango, a little strawberry, you know, home on native land, just blend it up, shake it up.

And right after I didn't know that it hit after I was just happy. I didn't stumble on my heels. I heard the announcer trip up my name. I just kind of chuckled, did it, went back to my seat, watch the game, eat some popcorn. And when I got back to the hotel. I went on my phone and just like my phone was on fire.

I'm like, what's going on? And it it hit and for five weeks straight I did press every day For five weeks every day that to bring me food, my friends, Jen and Asra would bring me or to be Uber eats or my nephew would cook for me. And I got on, I knew, I said, you know what, whether it was, you know, Rosa Parks or Marcus, Marcus Garvey, if it's Gandhi, if it's Dr.

King, whoever it is, like those giants of the world, you go back to Moses and, you know, everybody like those giants to me, um, they didn't do what they did for a reaction. Or for publicity. And I didn't either. So that's why I was like, okay, no matter how long, if this is my forever, I'm excited to be a part of change and to know that my mom is in the heaven, smiling, saying, you know what you go, girl, you did something that wasn't, you know, narcissistic and self serving.

I just so happens that. All these months later, and it's going to continue for the rest of my life, um, that I'm a part of starting a conversation that was long overdue and a part of bringing truth and reconciliation to the table, because without truth, uh, there could be no reconciliation.

Without truth, there can be no reconciliation.

Anita Erskine: So Julie, would you say that the average eye, the average ear thinks that Julie Black is about music, but in fact, Julie Black is about transformation in a way that none of us probably even knew she could help us to transform?

Jully Black: I appreciate that so much. Yes. I mean, a lot of times how, how people meet you, they tend to want to, I mean, kind of hold you in that regard or keep you there, which isn't a problem.

I'm always, I was, like I said, I started singing before I started speaking according to my family. Um. But this has been me since day one, this has been me in kindergarten. My mom would say that I was always charismatic. I always wanted to be the teacher's helper. I always had an opinion and sometimes it got me in trouble sometimes on my report card It would say

Jully Anne talks too much or Jully Anne is too loud or Jully Anne had an attitude or Jully Anne all these things You know, I was over opinionated and really it was I was always an activist in training, I believe.

And so I'm happy that people are getting to know, the world is getting to know who Julie Black is. What I do is the [00:15:00] soundtrack. What I do is an opportunity for people to experience joy, experience boldness and courage, um, experience I'm also very vulnerable in that I am very, I'm fragile and I am to be handled with care, no matter how much I'm a five, 10, you know, glamazon, it's like, no, I am this inner child.

Julianne Gordon will always live inside of me. And sometimes she needs to, to, to be often times loved on and protected and cared for and validated.

Anita Erskine: Thanks for your transparency. But Julie, when you started your music career, you didn't have that many mentors. I mean, I'm going to guess there weren't that many women like you, black, like you, tall, beautiful, like you, talented, like you, opinionated, like you. So, so beyond your mother's, you know, natural ability to love and guide and protect you, who did you have?

Jully Black: Anita, I have to say this with full, full, honestly, honesty. I had nobody, I had nobody. And at the same time, I had everybody because what every mistake that I made was just a decision. My mom would say, you don't make mistakes.

You, you make decisions and you could learn from each decision. So she'd have me not beat myself up. If I'm like, I made a mistake or, you know, why did I do that or say this? And so in a, in one sense, I grieved. I'm like, where? And there were other women in the business, but back then it wasn't, there wasn't so much solidarity.

I love that the generation of today. And I think it's also through sheer necessity because it's such an entrepreneurial time in life. I think that more women are coming together saying, and humans are saying, let's support each other. What could you bring? What could I bring back then? It was so competitive.

And it was a set in a sense in Canada, especially where there was the one Julia, the one divine Brown or one Deborah Cox or what? And we, we were put out years apart from each other. So it's not like we're in the same class meeting, meaning like class of 99, class of 98, like a graduating class. The industry was like, we have room for one.

And then it'd be years, years, years. Now we'll enter another one. So I'm looking over your shoulder. Oh, there's another one. Rather than being like, Let's meet at the table of like, what are they paying you? Like, are there wage disparities, et cetera? Like that's, that's what I, my dream was, but now we all come.

And we share our experiences. I have a saying, I got it from, uh, Faith Jenkins, um, Justice Faith Jenkins. She says, I start over as often as is necessary because I'm not starting from scratch. I'm starting from experience. And that in itself is what has been my fuel and has made my smile be even wider and brighter.

Cause I'm like, this is the school of life. There's no university out there. That could teach me the lessons that I've learned. I feel like I have a PhD in wisdom, knowledge, and understanding and still learning and still willing and willing to share. [00:18:00]

Anita Erskine: Julie, when did you fall in love with Julie black?

Jully Black: Ooh, you coming with the who Anita, I guess I could say that I officially fell in love with Julie black 16 months ago.

Fit like full, full, like sold out everything. Julie black is. I love, I love the gap of my teeth. I love the shape of my hips. I love, you know, the, the flare of my nose. Like there, there are times where I would look in the mirror and be like, what do everybody else see? Like, I just wasn't seeing it, but I've always been in love with my voice.

And that's one thing I can say forever and ever my voice. I would, the beauty of my voice has always, I've always recognized it because it's such a tool and it's, it's healing. It's, it's something that I've also been able to benefit from the healing, the tone, the timber, the texture, the intentionality that comes out of my mouth.

It's so spiritual and supernatural. I thank God for choosing me. At the moment where, um, or when you, you lost your mother, did it? Of course, you know, losing a parent is devastating, but I want you to connect it with who perhaps you have become today.

Anita Erskine: What did losing her mean for the Julie Black we're watching today?

Jully Black: What a beautiful and deep, profound question. Um, being on the journey as my mom was, um, declining. In fact, that was. The biggest, um, wake up call in the sense of like, what really matters, who matters, um, understanding we have a measure of breath and how after, and after she passed away, it's like, well, I was there for her last night.

If we knew I say this on stage often, like if we knew we had X amount of breaths, you know, what conversations would we have, what conversations wouldn't we have, and this helps to guide my life. It's a guidepost. It's, it's, it's what I use to make decisions. You know, um, I've become a lot softer. I've been able to be more just stand in my femininity and not have to be hard, not have to be, you know, and really just access, um, a certain type of strength where it doesn't have to be masculine.

You know, my mom was, she had short hair, uh, for her whole, for as long as she'd been my mom. Um, so she cut her hair way back and she always wore short hair and. It was just, her

face was just full beauty. She didn't really wear makeup. I love makeup though, Hala. But anyway, um, I just love that my mom found her joy and she has, she had a very hard life, but we were able to experience a woman who [00:21:00] lived to 81 and.

Still was dancing, was able to praise her. God was able to forgive my father and the, my, my sibling's father, you know, for what they did and also forgive herself for staying like, it's just, so all of this is who a part of who I am on today, because I realized that pointing the finger doesn't serve a purpose, sitting in bitterness.

Unforgiveness, um, you know, it's, it's not taking me anywhere and to know that. You know what? My mom, I feel like it's like a, I go like this, like it's a relay team, right? And she gave me the baton to keep, keep running that race, but find a, find a pace, find a pace. You don't have to sprint, right? And, um, and to know that it's okay, that no is a complete sentence.

My mom learned her no probably at like 70 and I watched her say, you know, nope, not interested or not. I don't feel like going or just no. And not have guilt. [00:22:00] So a lot of that is, and there's so much more. Beautiful.

Anita Erskine: Julie, we're going to the last part of this conversation and I kind of want you to help me make sense of the power of a woman's voice, specifically a Black woman's voice.

Jully Black: The power and the reason why Black women should own their narrative, why Black women should walk into a space. And appreciate that they may be one or two, um, but it's okay. And that they have an opportunity to teach people and show people how extraordinary they are. What are your thoughts on Black women owning their narrative?

Whether it's in the creative, uh, space, music or television, whatever it is you're most comfortable with. What are your thoughts? I think black women are often the most misunderstood of the species. I think that because we wear our emotions, a lot of us wear our emotions. I don't want to generalize, um, on our faces.

Sometimes we may not even realize that a thought is showing up on our face, that [00:23:00] there's, there's preconceived notions, judgment, et cetera. There's often times where we have so brilliant and so smart and so bold and courageous that we're labeled aggressive when we're just exercising assertiveness. Right.

So I think in order for us to really. Um, break that stigma and eradicate the being misunderstood as we have to speak. And we have to understand that when we enter rooms where we are othered, um, that we're actually the majority in our experience and we're the majority in our way to tune a room. It's, masterclass in crowd control.

I don't care if you're in the subway, in the boardroom, at the hairdresser, at the grocery store, we draw attention. Period. We are bold in our hair. We're bold with our features. We are bold, and I'm talking. You could have as plain nothing. Our nothingness is everybody else's

everything. And we have to realize this, realize this, that most of us, no matter what, we will take care of ourselves, meaning as our aesthetic.

Now it's time for us to take care of the inside just as much as our hair done, nails done, everything did. We got to go in and that's the hard work and that's where we're going to have to feel and face things that it's easy for us to step out in the street and, and where our blackness and our boldness, because that's what we do.

Right? Laws are changed when, when, when black women speak up, when black women speak up, they change voting rights for white women too. You know what I mean? This is something that's been going on from the beginning of time. And so now with the power of especially social media, it's like, okay. I check in with myself, I ask myself why I'm going to post something, especially if it's something that's personal.

Uh, and I say, you know what? In order to not create cancer in my body, create all types of other sicknesses, hormonal imbalances, et cetera, I need to speak, speak up, speak out, step up, step in. So that's my view. That's a t shirt right there. Speak up. Speak up. I am going to. Hashtag Julie Black said.

Anita Erskine: So Julie, um, Finishing up on words of advice for young women who are clearly growing up in a, I guess the world is a little bit different, but still there are values of lessons that we learned when we were teenagers and twenties and all of that kind of stuff.

But from your Julie Black experience, Experience of all the good, all the bad, all the highs and lows of what it means to stand up and show up. What advice would you give to the next generation of black women who just want to be but in being, they also want to be seen as great as everybody else in that room, or even greater than everybody else in that room.

Jully Black: I think it's very important that, they realize that they're one of one. And you are one of one. And I say that to say, we're following the crowd and going after likes, use and follows and having the algorithms pull you into areas. Cause this that's their language. That's the vernacular. That's the day that we're in.

Right. So I realized that I have to also learn their language and let them know, you know, what the birds still fly without technology, the squirrels and the raccoons, they're running around without technology. Like, so be present. And it's important because a lot of young people don't know how to interact, don't know how to have a sense of belonging off of their devices.

So I want to encourage and inspire young people, young black people, young black women and men, especially to save your money, make your money, save your money to travel. Experience other communities, experience other parts of the world. If we really take a look at, oh, my light just went out. I'm sorry. If we really take a look at what, if we really take a

look at, um, where we're investing our time, energy, you know, uh, and money, we could re reallocate that.

To personal growth and development and realizing, Ooh, I'm, I'm not going to be 17 forever. You know, I know sometimes it seems like you'll never grow up, but my mom would say this, everybody ages. Not everybody grows up. Hold that one. Everybody ages, not everybody grows up. Julie Black, everyone. Thank you. for having me.

Interview With Dr. Rita Deverell

ANITA ERSKINE: So, Dr. Deverell, I'm going to start off, if you can, with you taking us back to when your career in storytelling began. Can you

RITA DEVERELL: I call myself a broadcaster, a presenter, interviewer, a producer, sometimes a scholar, a writer, but never a storyteller. All right.

ANITA ERSKINE: Then I stand to be corrected. Can you tell us when you became a broadcaster and all the wonderful other things that you are, Ms.

RITA DEVERELL: I started on several different occasions. So I'm going to try to quickly tell you about them. I would make the first one when I was about eight years old. Uh, I grew up in Houston, Texas, pre the Civil Rights era, so Black people very much existed in an all Black world.

And I went to a production of Antigone, the Greek play Antigone, at my local Black community center. So the whole cast was black, including Antigone. The director was black. The audience was black. And I was so impressed by this that I thought at eight years old, this is what I want to do. And I meant by that insofar as I was thinking this through to be and in many ways, I worked on that for quite a long time. When I finished my master's degree, which was in 1967, and I am now in St. Thomas, Ontario, all 23, 000 people of it. I don't know how I'm going to start to work at all. And what happened at that point is that I finally wound up writing to anyone in the yellow pages in St. Thomas and London who might be able to use a woman who had a master's degree in the history of religions and was a drama specialist.

And at that point, I actually invented some work. That lesson stayed with me from then until now that it was possible to make my own work. And then the next time was when I fell into broadcasting. I fell into broadcasting in about 19 72, 3. When I realized that being an actor was an impossible definition of work for a whole bunch of reasons, some of which have to do with race, but many of which have to do with the condition of actors.

And at that point, I applied. For a bunch of other work and the job that I got was a four month contract to research children's television with religious television associates, which was an ecumenical broadcasting group. That's how I fell into broadcasting, which I continued to do, uh, one way or another from then until now.

ANITA ERSKINE: What was it like when you started your career in broadcasting for Black women or women of color?

RITA DEVERELL: Well, you know, I don't even know that I thought of it that way in particular. Well, yes, of course I did. Um, when I very seriously was pursuing being an actor

in the 1970s, I would actually get letters saying, from artistic directors, saying, um, we don't need any black actors this season.

Now. Sometimes, if I was feeling quite perky, I would write back and say, I am an actor who is black. You do need some actors, don't you? Um, however, I would say that this was not the defining thing for me, which is why I stopped being an actor only, is how powerless [00:05:00] uh, actors were and are. So when I fell into television, I discovered I could make things happen.

And that was entirely a different concept. So were things bad? Yes, things were bad. Have things improved? Yes, they have. Um, have they improved in major uh, outstanding ways? Probably not. A report came out today from Women in View, which has measured the participation of women in cultural industries in Canada for the last, oh, forty years.

And what they said, the top line is that black women are the least advantaged in terms of the key creative roles in media. So, have things improved? Yes. Uh, dramatically? No.

ANITA ERSKINE: As a broadcaster, and, and I, I like to bring in, um, your multifaceted Faceted approach to telling the story through broadcasting to being the story as an actor and being celebrated, um, as, as an award winner. Looking around you, Ms. Devereaux, are you able to describe perhaps with what you've experienced in what you've seen in your various capacities, the meaning of representation?

RITA DEVERELL: One, one of the reasons that I helped to start Vision TV is that I knew if I wanted a place where people who looked like me could work, I would have to help build it. Uh, so that was one of the reasons, aside from the fact that I found very sympathetic colleagues in the people who helped to start Vision TV, uh, which is multi faith and multicultural, both things.

And we were doing this at the end of the 80s, so a long time ago. Um, So I knew I had to help build that place because in order to have the representation in front of the screen or behind the screen, there weren't a lot of places, there weren't any, really. to do that. Um, the trouble with representation is what's really important is who owns it, who's on the board, who are the major decision makers.

And if that is in place, then the rest will follow. The people we see will follow. But who controls it? And it took me a long time to learn this. I didn't learn this when I was 12, but I think I was pretty solidly on it by the time I was 50.

ANITA ERSKINE: So, Miss Deverell, now that you learned this at the age of 50 and you pursued it, can you describe the role of perhaps television, film, theater, music in influencing social discourse or perhaps maybe, uh, uh, social change?

RITA DEVERELL: I'm not sure that I can. That's a very broad question. At this moment, we have a much greater awareness. of the lived experience of Black people. We have a much greater awareness of the lived experience of Indigenous peoples, which I, in fact, will put first, even though I put Black people first. Um, uh, and, and this is, A marvelous and major development.

I have been, since the murder of George Floyd, and the discovery of the unmarked graves, uh, of indigenous peoples, I have been run off my feet with EDI, and now I'm going to add another D, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization Training. Uh, arts and cultural industries feel they need this, and they do.

Um, so all of these are, um, influences on the way the world is operating. But there also is denial. Of these items. Um, I'll, I'll, I'll stop a second on residential schools. In fact, media have been reporting on residential schools for years. It's only recently that, uh, the media voice and some of the church voices and some of the government voices have been heard on this subject.

But the trouble is, this is offset by, uh, many social media, fake news, uh, separate groups that go into denial. And so then you have, um, more people having information, but also more people having disinformation.

ANITA ERSKINE: How do you envision mentorship and fostering the next generation of women in broadcasting, in media, film, etc. How do you envision their role as an integral part of ensuring that we talk about the important topics?

RITA DEVERELL: Mentoring is crucial. And, um, I have been doing an increasing amount of it. Now that's not surprising.

Um, I am, uh, one birthday away from being 80. So at this point, if I can't partner with younger women, especially, then what can I do? I, in fact, consider that it's very important that I serve on boards of directors. including in voluntary, strictly voluntary capacities, uh, that I mentor, so I've been doing a lot of it.

Um, the two mentees that I've had who have crashed and burned have been two younger women who thought They could live in a world where there was no racism, there was no sexism, surely we were beyond these things, which meant that whenever they encountered racism and sexism, they were completely knocked off their feet, and I would wind up saying, I can't, uh, solve this problem. All of the problems of racism, sexism in the world in the next five minutes. All I can do is provide you with some serious coping strategies. And the two who crashed and burned didn't like that, and so we didn't continue to get on. Uh, in short, yes, I think it's a responsibility of mine, and it's not a responsibility that means I'm always bringing good news.

ANITA ERSKINE: And on the topic of good news, with all your years of experience in broadcasting, which I believe is probably the most powerful, uh, medium in the world to empower people through, uh, uh, reports that are authentic, through interviews that are authentic and all of that. In the spirit of good news, what would you say is Something that you're hopeful for when it comes to women of color in the fields you've pursued all your life.

RITA DEVERELL: I am hopeful that women of color and indigenous women and all women will be able to aspire to the professions for which they have gifts. and contributions to make. Um, that the barriers to their achieving their greatest success are chipped away and chipped away and chipped away. And that they find wonderful colleagues and allies.

And I've been very fortunate. Uh, with that in my life, and in fact, always stress that, uh, when you have good colleagues and allies, that is goal. There is no better place for you to be. You don't have to look for the next promotion if you're in a great team. Uh, make that great team last and be appreciated.

Uh, so that's what I hope. Uh, not only in broadcasting, but in All [00:17:00] other, uh, areas of activity as well.

ANITA ERSKINE: Your call to action to all that are listening, both men, women, and every other, uh, uh, gender respectfully, um, every race respectfully, from all of your experience, what would be your call to action to everyone who needs to pay attention to the importance of EDI and D, as you have very well put it?

RITA DEVERELL: I should say that D, the last D, came from an indigenous colleague of mine who, uh, I have been working with. for 40 years. So what I wish for everyone is that you have the kind of allies who can cause you to be at your creative best and that you, uh, build those relationships. Um, sometimes these are women.

Sometimes they are women of color, sometimes they are men, and sometimes they are other diversities in gender, or in race, or in whatever, um, but build those creative identities. Bye. Bye. Teams, and that takes, uh, work, and it takes, um, a, a focus on the importance of the work you're doing, as opposed to a focus on individuals.

ANITA ERSKINE: And that ends our interview, Miss Deverell. Thank you so much.

Interview With Joan Jenkinson

ANITA: Joan, thanks so much for doing this. And we start. Joan, please tell us when your career began?

JOAN: Um, my career in the film industry and film and TV industry began, um, when I graduated from university. I, every job I had, um, even though they were junior jobs. involved, um, in some way making a video or something, uh, visual form of storytelling. Um, and it progressed until I was, uh, got my first job in the film industry, official job, which was to be the executive director of Women in Film and Television. And I was there for five years, and it's where I really honed my skills on professional development and training and helping women to build their careers in the screen industries.

ANITA: Why did you become a storyteller? Why did you pursue this extraordinary career?

JOAN: I grew up with stories. My mother was an amazing storyteller. I think it's a skill that a lot of Jamaican mothers have. Uh, she could tell stories about, you know, boiling a potato and it would leave you on the edge of your seat.

So I don't think I really appreciated it that much when I was younger, but I certainly do now that my whole life is centered around the media. So, you know, I can see how important those stories are. Were now and I myself am not necessarily a storyteller, but I love the idea of helping storytellers bring their ideas to life at the time

ANITA: When your career began what was it like for women of color?

JOAN: When my career began, um, women of color, particularly black women, uh, were not dissimilar in position to what they are now. We are underrepresented in front of and behind the camera. Um, we don't occupy key roles. Um, as writers, producers, directors, and lead actors, uh, there was a recent study, uh, reviewed by Women in View, um, about the, about women, the performance of women in the film and television industries, and black women were at the bottom of the run, like, with, with very few, uh, creative roles, certainly.

Next to no, um, decision making roles and receiving the least funding of, um, any other women and on top of that, um, you know, we've dealt with harmful stereotypes with, um, characterizations and portrayals that are negative and that really impact our lives and particularly the lives of young women, uh, who are, you know, shaped in, in, in their body image and the way they think about themselves, you know, from the, from the beginning of their lives, potentially.

So, you know, we were, we didn't have decision making roles. We, um, didn't have an opportunity to shape what stories were being told about us or any other characters for that matter. But what, What was happening back then was the beginning of grassroots movements and advocacy that, um, that where our voice was, um, starting to be heard, and that included

an organization called, uh, Black Film and Video Network, uh, that I was involved in, uh, but also trailblazers like Claire Prato, Karen King, Tanya Williams, um, back then were already starting to make a significant contribution in the industry, I think.

And I think that was, you know, the, the, the, the grassroots and the, for the inspiration that would continue to, um, bring about change that we're seeing many, many years later.

ANITA: So you can say that change has come, things are changing for the better.

JOAN: Um, I would say some things are changing. Um, other things are not changing.

Um, so I think we're seeing the growing recognition of the importance of diversity inclusion. We're seeing various industry initiatives through funders, broadcasters, production companies. We're seeing mentorship opportunities, grants. And advocacy efforts by organizations like the Black Screen Office and BIPOC TV and Film, ReelWorld, a number of organizations that, um, you know, post, um, the murder of George Floyd have sprung up.

Um, some of them have been around for a long time, as I mentioned, like Real World. Uh, but now we're seeing a real concerted, um, advocacy efforts that are being noticed. And I think we're also seeing audiences whose appetites are changing. Streamers like Netflix and Amazon are showing content from different countries and different languages.

And we're seeing that those are very, very successful. But as I mentioned, despite these Positive changes. We're seeing we're still, you know, lacking in the creative roles. We get paid less. There's still a harmful stereotypes and systemic barriers. And I think more than anything is what I'm hearing, um, being called advocacy fatigue.

Or diversity fatigue, and we certainly don't want the changes that have happened more recently to be just trends. We want to make sure that these values are embedded in our institutions and within the film and television industry, so that we don't have to, you know, start all over again in the next cycle where diversity becomes the trend.

ANITA: So I would love to focus just a little bit on Black Screen Office and what its mandate is and, and the kinds of milestones that you've, you're really proud to share.

JOAN: Um, so the Black Screen Office started in November, 2020.

So we haven't been around for very long. Um, we did join together as a group of senior, uh, producers and creatives in the film television industry to make sure that, uh, at that time when organizations were, um, speaking about their commitments and their allyship, um, for black people and, you know, speaking up against anti black racism, we wanted to be sure that the industry realized.

That anti black racism was alive and well in our industries. And it was from that in conversations with Canadian Heritage and Telefilm CMF that we started the black screen office and our goal is basically threefold. One is to do, um, research and knowledge mobilization. And that was really important to us because before the Black Screen Office, there had never been any research done on, uh, Black producers and creatives and tech.

And crew in the industries. Uh, and we wanted to make sure that whatever we do had a strong evidence based foundation, and it wasn't anecdotal, which is what we've relied on, um, for all these years. So we did a study on, um, creating authentic and inclusive content, one on Black, Indigenous, and people of color audiences, and another one on the Black Canadians working within the screen industries.

So, we also wanted to ensure that those reports didn't sit on people's shelves, but they're actually being used. So we developed a whole program of knowledge mobilizations where the directives, the recommendations, um, the guidelines and protocols were actually put into effect by the organizations within the industry that are meant to use them.

Uh, so we've had a lot of Success with that. I think that's what what's given the organization a lot of credibility. And out of that, we've developed a framework for creating accelerator programs. So there's a there's a formula to any Professional development that we do. In fact, we like to stay away from the words professional development because we're looking at, uh, working with people within the screen industries, um, in in their in role and or in new positions where they're getting training coupled with real.

Um, positions, real money, real credits and credibility within the screen industry. So everything we do has to have those elements. Um, for example, our, um, career accelerator program has, um, a job, like, um, Black professionals in the job or coming into the job there. They have a group of mentors that surround them.

The employers are implicated in [00:10:00] the success of that individual as well as mentors and a BSL coach where we're fully there to make sure that the experience that they have does. in fact, accelerate their careers and that they're getting paid and that they're getting credit and that they're getting agency and credibility within their organizations.

And then with all that we're trying to bring the Black community together across the country. We're a national organization, and we want to make sure that everyone feels welcome and supported and that we're not just seen as, um, Ontario centric organization as the industry often is, but that there is a place for everyone across the country, regardless of the regions that they live in.

ANITA: And so now looking ahead, um, what emerging storytelling trends do you believe will have a significant impact on advancing the discourse on representation and I guess action generally for social change?

JOAN: Um, that's a big question. Um, can you say that again? Sorry, I lost track of no worries. I'll break it down.

ANITA: What emerging storytelling trends do you believe will have impact on where we want to go, you know, as a collective as black people or black women or, you know, professional black, uh, uh, uh, professionals in, in, in the film or media industry?

JOAN: So I think there's some exciting, um, new technology that's making, um, things very interesting, um, there, we now have, you know, interactive and immersive storytelling, which is, um, becoming more and more, um, popular, and I think we'll have Um, a real impact on the authenticity of the work that we do.

Uh, we have user generated content, which, uh, what makes me excited about that is it's, it's, uh, you know, democratizes content. It's also anti colonial, because it's not You know, coming out of our entrenched institutions. Um, I'm excited to see what AI storytelling is going to be like. That AI that enhances storytelling.

Um, I know a lot of people are afraid of that, but it's here. So it's like, what can we do with it? How do we, um, uh, help it to advance? The way we tell stories. And I think also, um, again, with the streamers, um, being open to the world, I think, uh, our storytelling can become more global that we can, um, rather than just focus on where we live, but also think about the diaspora and the stories that we can tell across cultures and with co productions and countries that, you know, now we don't have co productions with.

Uh, so I think just. Moving forward there, there are just lots of possibilities, um, to tell our stories in a different way and to go around, you know, the brick wall of the systemic barriers that control how stories are made now, where the money's concentrated, the power's concentrated, and we want to look for ways in the future to get around that and, you know, to be able to tell the stories that we want to tell.

ANITA: What must we do, what must we hold close, uh, when we're pursuing this, you know, great ambition of putting our stories out there and owning our narratives?

JOAN: I think what I think that's really important is is to tell authentic stories and have authentic representation. When we think of authenticity, we're often thinking of other people telling our stories and being authentic. But I think as we tell our own stories, we have to be mindful that there are various communities and various, uh, um, uh, you know, Black communities across the country. So I, as a, um, a Black person born in Jamaica would not feel comfortable or shouldn't really be comfortable telling a story about, uh, Black. People in Nova Scotia because it's a different experience. So I think if we're always focused on authentic representation, that it becomes the norm as we tell stories, that stories that are, you know, complex, that, you know, are rich tapestry of human experience, that that is what what is going to make our story strong.

I think another important thing is that we don't forget about intersectional identities. Uh, we are so much more than our, our color. We, um, you know, there's different, um, identities, race, gender, sexuality, and more that informs. Who we are as individuals. And if we're going to tell, uh, complex, engaging, unique stories, we have to be sure that they're intersectional.

And I think one of the, uh, one of the most important things is that we measure our success. We we're starting at a place now, but where do we want to go? How will we evolve and adapt and respond as, uh. As social change is happening, as the needs of society is changing, I, [00:16:00] I think beyond, um, you know, thinking of our personal stories, I think we need to think of the legacy of storytelling and where and where, what our place is and moving that forward.

ANITA: Joan, what would your call to action be? There is a beautiful, extraordinary generation of black, uh, individuals. Black women, um, pursuing, you know, their own ambition. Now, now that you know what you, you know, and you are who you are, what would you say to them?

JOAN: I think as women, we have to dare to dream big. Um, our stories can inspire and change the world, and we should really take that on. I found when I began my career, uh, one of the most difficult things to do was to get women to actually admit what they wanted to do. They would tell you about what the next steps might be, they want to be a production coordinator.

assistant, but never really say, I want to be the producer. I want to be the director. I want to be the writer. And it would take a lot of time to, um, get them to really own that dream. And I think moving forward that we should just step into that, uh, that, that ownership step into that, um, audacity to, you know, dream and, and dream big.

ANITA: What do you wish someone had done for you or shared with you when you first started on your personal journey that perhaps would have made things, let's just say, easier?

JOAN: When I started in the industry, I was really oblivious, I think, to a lot of the issues of racism and microaggressions and all the things that are coming to light right now that people are sharing.

I think I felt a lot of things, but I didn't know how to express them. And I just You know, I just move forward. I end up in many places being the only black person in the room, and I think I was just oblivious to what was around me. Um, in some ways that helped me because it just meant that I focused on the things that I wanted to do and I didn't let anything get in my way of doing that.

But I think it would have been a much more enriching experience if there had been other black women beside me. Uh, you know, going through this journey. I think together we

would have been able to, uh, much more early on to have a much bigger impact in the industry.

ANITA: Thank you so much. I'm just going to stop the record button now, so I don't forget.

Interview With Tonya Williams

Anita Erskine: So, Tonya, the 1st part of this conversation is on your personal experience. Um, and then we kind of go into the real world, which is an extension of who you are and what you want other people to experience, maybe, maybe experiences you didn't get to have. Um, so that's how we'll flow with this. So starting off with the first question, um, how, how did you get into the space of storytelling?

Tonya Williams: Well, it's so hard to go. When did I get in the space of storytelling? Because I'm an only child and my parents read a lot to me. So storytelling. For me, started from when I was about, you know, one and a half is what I remember, and always obsessed with books and storytelling of any kind.

And then, discovering television and consuming everything I could on TV, but definitely not with the idea of a one day I'm going to tell stories or I'm going to be an actor or I'm going to be a writer or a director. That wasn't the thought process, just how much I loved stories and watching stories. And maybe as an only child, it's how I made sense of the world, how I saw other people, how I saw experiences around me.

Um, so that was really the beginning of it, but I started ballet when I was three. I started piano when I was five and I did both of those till I was 17. And while I was in high school, I joined, you know, our band. And I ended up playing the orchestra. Actually, I ended up playing tenor saxophone and oboe and French horn.

And so music is the thing and classical music has always been my passion and my love. But when I was 16, 17, I. Agent had seen me and wanted to know, ask my mother if I joined the agency and my mother was fine, you know, to do commercials and to do some catalog work. Excuse me to do some of those things that, uh, that was fine as long as it didn't interfere with my schooling.

And that was my beginning. I didn't even think of that as a job to tell you the truth because it was just it was fun. It was light. It was entertaining. Um, but while I was on those jobs. I was meeting people who were professional actors and cinematographers and people in crew and directors. And that was my first entree being 16, 17 meeting these people.

I, I started to understand the business that went behind all of this and got more passionate about it. And, uh, And ended up going to Ryerson, which is a university called something different now, Metropolitan something University, but they had one of the best drama programs in, in Canada, and I studied there.

So I think that answers the how did I get in section perfectly, but it's. It's a bit of an arc to it perfectly.

Anita Erskine: So given that you got into the space, you know, out of, out of pure nature, if I may put it that way, at which point in time would you say you looking back is when you started by virtue of realizing that, Oh my God, this is a career.This is my life. This is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life.

Tonya Williams: When was that you said you're asking? Yes. So when was that? I would say when I went when I decided I wanted to go to Ryerson. I mean, I wouldn't have gone to a university. I wouldn't have gone to study drama if I wouldn't have done that for just fun. It was up until that point, I had planned to go to York University and study classical music professionally.

And my dream would be to play in an orchestra or a symphony. Up until then, that was what I thought I wanted to do with my life. So acting though, I think what I loved about it was. You lose yourself in a character. It's not you exposing you. It's you. It's you there, but people are talking to you and people are responding to you, but they're not talking to you.

They're talking to a character. So because I am a real introvert and people confuse shyness with introvert. I'm not shy in any way, but I'm an introvert. I love the feeling of putting on another skin. If you want to putting on someone else. And moving forward so I knew that was a career and that's something I'd want to do my whole life.

Um, I just enjoy that. I love revealing other characters are more than revealing who I am because I feel people understand my characters. More than they understand me personally, I have trouble explaining who I am, so I have no problem explaining who a character [00:06:00] is, though. So, I think I've taken it seriously since about the age of 18, 19.

I know my agents at the time said I approach the work unlike any of their other clients. But, you know, when I got an audition, I would research who Was in the room who was the casting director who was the agent was the manager what things that they've done before to get a sense of what they're looking for what they like what they don't like by looking at the work they had previously done.

Um, I studied. Um, the Director Guild Awards in Canada or the Actra Awards or the Writers Guild Awards. I wanted to see who was winning these awards and who were the, you know, I wanted to work for really reputable people. And sometimes you've just got to put that research in. And remember, this was research happening before computers, before internet.

So you really had to understand how to research from that point of view. But I, I take everything I do. Um, I'm a little bit intense and very serious. I'm a workaholic and I love working, but I, I thought just in the last few years, as I was reflecting on it, that discipline and that training of piano and ballet is how I approach the discipline of everything preparedness rehearsal.So, I, I've always approached everything that way.

Anita Erskine: As you're going along from school, you know, for, from preteen to teen to school and then getting all these extraordinary roles, were you looking at yourself as a woman of color? Did the people around you ever make you feel like you are different? You are colored?

Tonya Williams: Absolutely. I don't, I think it would be impossible to be born. Like as a black person and not know immediately that you're a black person, because I think I was three years old. The first time I heard something negative about being a black person. So I was in, like, kindergarten, pre kindergarten, when another girl, who was three, came up to me and said, what bad thing did you do?

I was in Jamaica at that time. I was born in England, but my parents went to Jamaica when I was almost two years old and I lived there until I was six. So I was like, what bad thing did I do? I didn't understand. And she said that her mom had said that in the Bible, you know, black people, their skin was black because of bad things that they had done.

So I remember going home, going to my mom, what bad thing did I do? And she was like, what do you mean? And I go, because someone told me this. And she goes, honey, that's not, you know, and then she explained it to me. But I love that she explained it in a way that made me. She, uh, my parents, both my parents were not the kind of people to explain it in a hostel, like that they were angry at whoever said that.

They always approach things that you are going to meet people who are Not as well [00:09:00] educated who don't really understand things and these, these people have, you know, their parents are like that and they pass these things on. There was some sensitivity in the way my mother explained it, which made me always feel sorry for people when they said those kinds of things to me after that time when people teased me.

Or said something, yeah, it hurt, but there was a part of me that went, they actually don't know any better and a part of me would always. Um, back in a way that I would explain really not hostile. I remember being, um, seven and eight and I was in a school in England and pretty much the only black person and I, a kid had asked me if I was made of chocolate, you know, but he said it in a way that I actually think he believed it.

So I said, well, lick me, lick my arm. And so this is how, and then he licked it and then he was like, no, it tastes just like my skin, but. I think it taught me that not everyone is asking these, what we assume, horrible, you know, ignorant questions. They're not always asking them out of hate or to put you down, they're really asking it out of a complete ignorance.

Of the education or the understanding around what it is to be a person with just different skin color that you're not really any different than they are just a different skin color. But growing up, I, my parents, I went to private school in England. And I remember my mother would at this 1 private school every day.

She would say, oh, what did you learn today? You know, and I was like, nothing. I was reading my comics and she'd be like, this went on for a few weeks. And she's like. She went to the school, you know, you're paying good money and your kid keeps saying they're reading comics. So they're reading, you know, just reading whatever in the book in the class.

So she went to my teacher and I'll remember, I'll never forget that teacher's name because it was Mrs. Beasley. And Mrs. Beasley, an old white woman teaching, and this is back in the 60s, remember her, said to my mother. Well, I don't want Tanya to feel uncomfortable in the class because, you know, we understand that black people are not able to learn in the same way that white people can.

So, she was purposely not giving me any of the schoolwork. Because she didn't want me to feel like, um, you know, like, like, like I was dumb against the other students. So, my mother was like horrified, you know, pulled me out of that school, put me in another school because, you know, she, both my parents were well educated too.

So, I think the fact that my father ended up being a barrister and then a judge and then my mother a registered nurse, I had the benefit of them going through. A lot of this stuff being in predominantly white areas themselves and dealing with this kind of racism that they really prepared me as a kid for that.

So I can't there's racism. It's there. It's it's ugly faces there all the time. And I've lived long enough. I'm 65 now I've lived long enough to know that there are times it gets better and times it gets worse and times it gets better. And right now we're in a time that it feels worse. I mean, there is so much violence against Asian people, against black people, against LGBTQ, there's just so much hate and violence right now against people that there have been times in my life where things were better and things, you know, are worse.

And so I think right now, you know, your question is timely that we're just going through. A really hard time and I hope there's a generation that comes out of this that makes it a bit better. Again. It's a it's a scary time.

Anita Erskine: It's a scary time. Thanks very much for, you know, for, for, for bringing this because then I come into the conversation around real world and perhaps real world existing to, to, to use storytelling to change, you know, hopefully to change the kind of times you're describing when you, um, launched ReelWorld in 2000, um, till now, and of course counting. What are some of the milestones that you look at and you say you are so proud of?

Tonya Williams: Well, I'll start with just starting ReelWorld. I was really proud of. So I was already in my 40s when I started ReelWorld. I had a good career. I was living in, I still am living in Los Angeles and, um, on the show, The End of the Restless.

I'm making good money and my career is going well. And, but I would go back to Toronto or other parts of Canada. People would invite me to speak at different things. And all these

young people would come up to me and I'm in my forties now. So I feel, you know, I'm, I'm, you know, I'm, I'm not a, I'm not a 20 something person.

I'm a mature person, but they would be, you know, how did they get to the States? They weren't asking me, how do I, you know, you know, how do I make a career, how do I, they weren't even thinking of Canada at all. And it made me sad to think that the opportunities that were not there for me when I was 16, 17, 18 in Canada that made me make the move to the U.S. was still there, even at, you know, even in 2000. And that was the beginning of the impetus of me wanting to create something, some sort of platform because even though people ask me questions, I don't have the answers to everything. You know, I don't have the solution to everything. Now, I'm a big festival person.

I started going to the Toronto International Film Festival when I was 17. I told you that whole business and strategy. I would go to the festival and I would see the films and hear the different directors talking about the films and the programmers and how the whole. And meet different people there from above the line, below the line of of the industry.

But so I thought I wanted to start with a festival. So I started real world film festival. We did the 1st, 1 in March of 20. 2001. And my hope was by lots of really professional, experienced people coming together. [00:15:00] These young people, emerging people, mid level people could come and hear not just from Tanya, but hear from all kinds of people in all kinds of levels of the industry, whether they're agents or managers, um, whether they're cinematographers, whether they're art directors, you know, really to get a sense of this industry that I love so much.

I mean, I love the industry, the industry. I feel so blessed to be working in it, really. And so that was it. Milestones were, when the first one happened, people cried, people shed tears because. Never before in Toronto had they been to an experience like this. It was not, I think this was shock people too, because I'm Black, there's always an assumption that if you're Black, you're creating something just for Black people.

But my mind never worked that way. So, ReelWorld has always been for Black people, Indigenous people, Asian, South Asian, and other people of colour. And when they arrived at that inaugural festival, and saw that we kicked off the festival with an amazing Indigenous film called Bear Walker by Canadian director Shirley Chichu, and the audience was filled with all these different racially diverse people together.

That's what I love about storytelling. It shouldn't define a race, you know, it shouldn't be a story that only one race, like when you think of the great movie Pink Panther, Pink Panther, Black Panther, it wasn't a movie just for Black people, anybody can enjoy that movie, it's a great, you know, story. That's what I wanted to be able to be a part of, that I wanted, Our creators and filmmakers, I wanted them to think of stories that are universal to everybody, not just their one community should watch that movie.

And so over the years, we've had like Ruchi Mehta, who came to Real World in 2001, and as a South Asian person, never even thought the industry was inclusive for him. Being at Real World, by year two, he had made a short film that he put at Real World, and it won an [00:17:00] award that year. And through that recognition, he was able to garner funding because remember a lot of times, that's a part of me that's always thinking I have my creative side, but I also have my business side too.

And starting a film festival meant. That a lot of people of color were not getting into other festivals in Canada, the Canadian ones. They were not getting in the festivals. And if you can't get in a festival, a lot of times you can't activate funding that comes from these government sources. Because sometimes the question is, have you ever screened at a festival?

So they would have to write no. Now they got to write yes. And then if you win an award at a festival, so if you can't even get into a festival, you can't win an award at a festival. So if you get to win an award at a festival, that just elevates you so much more when you're applying for funding. And by winning at one festival, this is what's beautiful.

Other festivals across Canada, other festivals internationally. think about inviting you to their festival because they get to say that this movie won at this other festival. So it's a prize for another festival. So these were the things that were going in my head. And when I was building real world, these are the stepping stones I was building.

So, um, Richie Mehta, his movie ended up getting funding for a feature, which ended up going to TIFF. And getting an award at the Toronto International Film Festival, but over the 23 years of ReelWorld, we've so many stories. Um, um, Don Wilkinson is a really amazing, uh, female black director out of Canada, got her start at ReelWorld. She had a short film and I think in 2001, 2002. That her 1st feature was in 2005, we got her into meeting a lot of the executives because a key part of real world is it's only for Canadians, by the way, real world is an oasis for Canadian talent. So, we bring a lot of the broadcasters and a lot of people from production companies, Canadian production.

production companies to meet our talent. They met Dawn, they saw her work, they saw her winning at ReelWorld, and now she is directing series in Los Angeles. She's directing them in Toronto. She's one of the more highly sought after directors, and she accredits ReelWorld for her start. Um, Alison Duke, the same, she's an amazing director.

Um, Alison rockumentary, which is about hip hop. A documentary, no festival in Canada was picking it up. It's screened at real world, won an award at real world and then got picked up that by the American Black Film Festival to be at that festival, won an award there. And now, you know, Allison has created her own organization called Oya Media Group, where she's training young people and she's making her own documentaries and feature films.

It's, it's wonderful. Oh, you know what? I thought of a great story. Dorothy Kaduba. Who is from Kenya, I believe. I hope I have that right. She was in Toronto for a few years. She went through some of our ReelWorld programs and was so inspired going through the program.

She went back to Kenya. And started similar programs, and now is 1 of the executives over at Netflix for night for the Nigerian content.

So it is wonderful to see that you can plant a seed and to just see where it grows. But we have had. Numerous over the 20 some odd years of people who just hope they could get in the industry and they started at real world and either they were at the festival, but we, we also have a lot of year round programs.

Don't forget, we have our E 20 screenwriting program. We have two really major producer programs. We have our Black Entrepreneur for Casting Directors, Agents, Managers program. And we do, you know, the advocacy work we do. So we're always hitting from every angle. So, yeah, we have a, we have a plethora of success stories of people who have gone through real world and, you know, what's beautiful people who have gone through real world found real success and we bring them back to be the [00:21:00] mentors now of the next generation. That's the moral.

Anita Erskine: Um, so Tonya, you mentioned the next generation, and they're seeing, you know, you also mentioned how What kind of time we're in. So the next generation is seeing it.

They're feeling it, uh, probably a little confused about it or inspired by it. You know, you never know. Um, what's we're finishing up the interview now from where you sit, what you've gone through, the good, the bad, the up, the, the, the down, the, all of that, what kind of words of advice or call to action would you give this new, uh, generation of, uh, colored storytellers?

Tonya Williams: That's such such a great question. The, the idea, first of all, I, I'm a huge believer in a higher power, so I think all of that is impossible if you do not have a strong sense. Of a higher power, religious belief, something that makes you understand that you are here for a purpose. You are here for a reason.

You're not randomly just placed on the planet at this specific time, just because it's an accident. So I like to look at any situation I'm in as. There's a reason I'm here, and there's something positive while I'm here. So, no matter what the challenges are on the planet right now, there is a reason someone is born into the world right now, why we are here right now, and a gift that we're supposed to give, something that we're supposed to do that improves the situation.

So, if you're a young person right now, and you're thinking about, how do I get in this industry? The first thing to do is not, not create yourself to be a victim of the industry. Don't feel, why are other people not [00:23:00] hiring me? Why are other people not giving me these opportunities? It's not the correct way, even if you, even if you were in the career when I started.

As I told you, you have to be smart. There's a working hard, which is important, and then there's a working smart. Which is more important. You have to educate yourself. Don't look for other people to educate you. The trade papers are out there. In Canada, there's playback. Read Variety. Read Hollywood Reporter.

Read whatever trades are out there. That's your responsibility. Nobody else's. Try to read about other filmmakers. Watch other people's films. Um, and don't watch just other people's films of now, look at the films from the 20s, from the 30s, from the 40s, from the 50s, from the 60s. You should, this is not a sprint, our industry.

This is, you're making a commitment, which is why you see actors in their 70s or 80s or 90s or directors who are 80s or 90s. It's a [00:24:00] long, long game. So pace yourself. You better love it and enjoy it. If your one goal is to be famous and make lots of money, then I think your journey is going to feel strained and difficult because you've put, you can't force being famous.

You can't force to make a lot of money. It's just, it's just, it's not a goal. But if your goal is to commit yourself, and I really feel that. Being in the entertainment industry is like a calling, you know, being in the arts is a calling. It's, it's not really a job. You shouldn't see it that way. Sorry that I have this cough seems today.

It's, it's really not like, um, um, I don't think you should approach it as a job. So don't look at it as this is going to be my 9 to 5 job Monday through Friday. You don't know when an opportunity is going to present itself where. You go to a screening on a Saturday and you see someone there and you start a conversation and it ends up being.

Something that 5 years later turns into a job. I'll tell you something that happened to me. I was at an event that I was invited to, and this was like, 15 years ago, more than that. I should say. No, wait, like, 25 years ago, I was at this event and, you know, sometimes when you go to an event and you're asked to speak, they give you somebody that kind of takes care of you, you know, like, Shall I get you a water?

You know, are you okay? What do you need? And there was a, this, there was this guy, David Rosen, that was the guy that was that person, you know, when you're on stage, you want me to hold your bag, you know, kind of a thing. Got to five years later, my agent in Toronto called me up and said, they're asking if you're available to be on a part of a series called Sci Fi.

I think it was called Sci Fi or something like that. And I was like, they just called me up to see if I wanted to be in this. Um, S, [00:26:00] no, S factor, side factor, something like that it was called. And they're like, yeah, and I read the part and I thought, this is great, but I, I was like, I don't even know these people, why it turned out that the producer of this was that guy who just helped me that day.

And when I saw him, he said, I remember just how lovely and kind and you made me feel so special and I, you know, I asked questions and you answered them, you know, without any hesitation, just answer my questions and. He goes, in my mind, I was like, I want to work with that girl, you know, someday. And now he was in a position where he had that power and he made that happen.

And you have no idea. And I say this to young people all the time. You can't create a timeline, you know, in your, in this industry, you can't go, I'm giving myself 12 months to make it or six months or X amount of years. You just have to know, this is what I want to dedicate my life to. And this is just what I want to do.

I love it. And whether I make money at it and whether I don't, and whether people recognize me or they don't, it doesn't matter because the joy really just comes from doing, from working, from the experience of it, that really should ignite you and make you feel good just getting any kind of a job. And you know, there's a lot of work for actors that people don't talk about.

You could be working at a children's theater, you could be on a traveling kids show, you could be. Doing there's so many things. Everything is not Hollywood and blockbuster movies. There is a world of work out there for people at all different levels. There are people that make a living doing background work, doing voiceover work, um, doing trade shows.

You know, a lot of directors shoot TV commercials. A lot of producers produce trade shows and live shows. You can't limit your mind to I want to be in a blockbuster movie. That's going to be worldwide. I mean, everybody wants that. So everybody can't be that, but if you get to, if you love this industry, and you get to work in this industry, does it really matter in what capacity that you're working in it and because you just get to wake up every morning knowing. That I'm, I'm working on my dream. This**,** you know, this last part is enough for an entire class at Metropolitan University. Well, actually, these are some of the things I speak to when I am invited to talk.

Anita Erskine: Extraordinary. Thank you, Tonya. Thank you so much. You've answered all my questions.

Tonya Williams: Oh good, did we hit all your questions?

Anita Erskine: Yes!

Interview With Trey Anthony

Anita Erskine: Let's jump into why you became a storyteller Trey. What is it that that made you say, Yeah, you know what, I'm gonna tell my story!

Trey Anthony: I think it comes down to me around being a storyteller is to be in control of the narrative. And I think especially for a black woman, for a black Caribbean queer woman, it was very important for me as well to have control of the stories that were being told and to actually authentically tell them. And to be able to, as a storyteller, be able to give layers of authenticity and vulnerability as well to Black women's stories, because a lot of times what ends up happening, and I'm sure we know this, is just the stereotypical roles of Black women, and I wanted to really combat that and say, you know, give us some level of humanity and give us some kind of depth.

And that's what I felt was missing. So for me, it was really out of necessity of seeing another type of Black woman being portrayed. And that's why, um, I decided that I needed to tell stories.

Anita Erskine: When you started on your path, your career, your journey, what was the environment like for Black women, especially Black women who were in the field of telling stories in media or in film or music? What did you see as being what was happening to them?

Trey Anthony: A lot of us were doing a lot of work in isolation. And there was a lot of us who were doing work out of necessity because Because we knew that our stories were not being placed to something of value, you know, there's a lot of coded language which is in the industry where they will talk about, you know, will it resonate with mainstream rates.

And, um, does this have crossover appeal or why is this important to the main society? And basically what they're saying is, you know, will white people like the stuff that you're doing? Right? It's as simple as that. And how can we make this more palpable for them to digest? And in that digestion, it means usually shrinking your story.

And making it feel less like in the stories that I tell, most of them are very Caribbean based as well. So it's losing that Caribbean ness of [00:03:00] it, right? It's losing the blackness of it. And um, I would love to say that things have changed, right? But you know, it's funny, I was just having a conversation before this interview with my brother and I said to him, there's nobody.

In Canadian media, who is at a position of power to green light a show to put on a Canadian network. And that's just the truth, right? And so I said, so that's why it's harder for us to get through the door. Because we have to convince them of our worthiness, we have to convince them of our ability to be able to make quote unquote mainstream white society see our stories as worthy.

Right? And so it's, it's that extra layer of [00:04:00] work and unpaid labor of just R. a little do this right right. Trying to convince people of your humanity, like it's just as simple as that. So it can get very frustrating. It can get very tiresome and it can get very isolating in the work that we do. And not much has changed.

I'd love to say a lot has changed. But when you have nobody in a position of power to green light stories that you are finding essential to yourself and your community. Um, yeah, it's very frustrating.

Anita Erskine: What, why is it important then, um, to take social change concerns into account when we're writing these stories, when we're producing these, uh, uh, uh, plays, when we are, uh, uh, choreographing, you know, these, these, these beautiful pieces of art. Why must we pay attention to how they will influence social change?

Trey Anthony: I think what it is important, um, of how it influences. Social change is just us having the urgency to tell our stories mirrors back to the audience that is so craving to see their stories told. It actually mirrors back and bears witness.

To their lives, right? Like a lot of times people have asked me. Um, how am I still able to work as an artist in Canada or have the success that I've had? And it's because I've never waited for people to validate my work. There's been many a times I've gone to mainstream theaters or I've gone to pitch TV shows and they've been turned down.

And I always then look at like, okay, if the story is important to me. then what can I do to tell it in a way and produce it myself? And I've been lucky that I've had my audience show up time and time again because they are hungry to see themselves, right? And that's where the social change happens is that if there is a relationship between you, um, As the artist and your audience, and they believe that you are actually rooted in providing authentic stories about them, they will show up and continue to show up.

Right? And that is what has happened to me. You know, I've been in this industry for 15 years, right? And I've established that relationship with my audience, you know, even for example, After the success of the kink play, the kink in my hair play, and then the TV show, you would have thought that I could have shown up at any theater.

And say, Hey, I want to produce a show, you know, and my other show, how black [mothers say, I love you. I went to every single mainstream theater knocking at doors, asking for them to produce it. And they were like, Oh, it's too niche. She wants to hear a story about the immigrant story of a black woman coming from Jamaica and leaving her children behind.

It's too niche. This won't resonate with our mainstream audiences. And so then I produced it myself. Right? And not only did I produce it myself, it then became the sold out hit. And then they came back and said, we will produce it. Then I wrote the, the screen version of it. And then, you know, I produced that.

So it's all of those things of like, you as an artist, especially as a Black artist. You know, there, there's a level of tenacity that you have to keep showing up with in order to get your work done. But it's also, for me, what feeds me, going back to your original question, is this need to actually change the way Um, and the only way black people are viewed in society, and the only way that is going to happen is through us continuing to tell our stories in a way that feels authentic to us.

Anita Erskine: Artistic expression. And I think you've just probably touched on that but I'll ask anyway but artistic expression can sometimes challenge social norms. It can provoke change as well. all in the middle of pushing back. Um, can you tell us that moment when, you know, where you intentionally pushed the boundaries?

You knew you were about to push boundaries, um, either through, you know, a play or, um, well, any work that you've done. Um, and what kind of. Reaction. Did you get what, what did your audience do with that pushback or that desire to push back?

Trey Anthony: Yeah, for sure. Um, for me, it was definitely, um, around. Oh, sorry. No, no, sorry.

Sorry. Um, for me the pushback, um, I did the kink. What 20 years ago, nearly 20 years ago, right at that time when I did the kink there was. Um, there was a monologue in there that dealt with, dealt with a woman who was coming out to her family as gay and queer. There was another monologue in there that dealt with incest, right?

There was another monologue in there that dealt with colorism within the Black community. Um, when we first started doing, That monologue, especially about a woman coming out to her family. There was pushback from the audience where some audience members [00:10:00] actually booed the actor. Some people would kiss their teeth.

There was definitely a feeling of animosity. from the audience. Nobody wanted to talk about queerness in the Black community at all. When we did the monologue on incest, I got, um, letters back and responses from Black men who said, why are you portraying us as molesters? Why are you doing this? Why are you doing that?

And there was a conversations that were happening. That people did not want to have, but that play actually pushed us to have those conversations. Right. And, you know, the play recently celebrated its 20th year anniversary, and you could see now how certain things that we were trying to talk about. 20 years ago, how much now we have become much more open to be talking about those things, right?[

And people are now owning their stories around being incest survivors, around being gay and out. So all of those things, that's what We were able to do with theater and even, you know, like how black mothers say, I love you, the, the main character in that is a black queer woman

who come, who's been the strain from her family, her Christian mom, who has basically turned her back on her daughter because she's gay.

And I remember when I first produced that play, everyone said, Oh, no, your audience isn't going to come. Nobody wants to deal with that. And I said, they're going to come. And the reason why they're going to come is because the main character, Daphne, who is this Jamaican Caribbean Christian mom. She's spewing all of the homophobia and all of the sentiments.

That every single Caribbean mother usually says when their child comes out. So they will come because they see themselves in her. And I was exactly right. They came because they loved what Daphne had to say. And so those are the things that you realize that you can tell the story that you want to tell in a way that can also educate, but also reflect back people's realistic experiences of themselves and of their families.

And that's why how Black Mothers Say I Love You became such a hit alongside The Kink in My Hair. is because there are Caribbean old mothers sitting there going, Oh, that's me. And that's my belief. And that's what I think as well. And yet I'm going to pay for this ticket because I, even though I don't support homosexuality, I actually, I'm going to pay for this ticket because I want to hear somebody talk about what homophobia looks like in a Caribbean family.

Anita Erskine: So you have had to be creative?

Trey Anthony: You have had to be bold.

Anita Erskine: Mm-Hmm. You have had to be authentic all the while being a black woman who has at the time was doing something, very few people had the courage to do. Mm-Hmm.With all of this, knowing what you've been able to do the last 15, uh, I would say maybe 20 years.Because I saw the kink in 2002. Was it 2000? I saw it then. Um, fresh from Ghana. See, yeah. And I, I, I'm watching this thing and I'm like, Hey, this woman, she's bold. Wow. You know, even at the time, you know, even at the time, but, but with all that said. Your call to action for women who look like you and what I mean is, you know, your souls look like you.They have a lot to share. Their skin is like you. They're Black women. They have ambition. They really do want to become storytellers. What would your call to action be to them?

Trey Anthony: I always get young women who come up to me who are in theater or who are actors or producers and they're like, Oh, we want to write the next kink in my hair.

And I say, no. You don't want to write the next kink in my hair. You want to write the story that's important to you. Right? And I think for me, the kink came from a place. of real hunger, right? It came from a place of real, I needed to tell this story. If not, I would die if I did not tell this story, right?

Like I knew what I wanted to say and create. When I wrote How Black Mothers Say I Love You, I knew it was a love letter to my mother and to my grandmother. Of women who had left their children behind my grandmother had left my mother behind in Jamaica. My mother had left us behind in England, you know, and I wanted to make sense of that for myself of what does it mean as a mother to leave your children, especially as I was planning on being a mother.

And so those stories were important to me and I think with every story that you tell as a storyteller, it should come down to the fact for you. That if you do not tell the story, your soul cannot live. And that's how I feel with all of my work. That's how I choose what story is important to me. You know, I've been asked to tell many of the story.

Or people will be like, oh, can you co write with this on me? Or can you come on as a producer with that? And most of the time I turn down a lot of opportunities. Because it doesn't resonate with my soul. It doesn't feel urgent. It doesn't feel important. It doesn't feel that this is where I need to put my love, energy, sweat, and tears.

And I say to every single storyteller who's trying to break into the business or wants to do this, it has to be that sense of urgency for you of like, I live, breathe, and eat this. And this is why this story needs to be told. And if it's something that you just feel, hmm, a little bit okay about, or yeah, I could go either way, then that's not your story you need to be telling.

Right? And I think that is why audiences connect with my work is because they know that in that work are pieces of my heart, pieces of my soul, pieces of my family. That's my voice. That needs to yell out to say, look at me and see me here. I am.

Anita Erskine: Thank you so much. Trey Anthony. I'm going to stop this recording.

Trey Anthony: Thank you

Interview With Ella Cooper

Anita Erskine: Please tell us your full name, your title, and if you can remember when your career began.

Ella Cooper: Ooh. Hi everyone, my name is Ella Cooper. I am the founder director of Black Women Film Canada, and I'm also, hmm, so many things. I am also a director, a producer, a writer, an artist.

Um, a facilitator, a speaker, an entrepreneur and, uh, a mother and my career began, you know, I think to be totally honest, when you're an artist, it begins and when you honor that voice as a child. So I really feel that. I was lucky, um, my parents always said yes to my creativity, and I always said yes to my creativity.

And I have continued to channel that creativity in everything that I do. Um, but if you want to put like a real professional career number on it, I would say that it It started when I came to Toronto. Um, and I, and that's when it, like when I, my first foray into contemporary art and also the media industry.

Anita Erskine: Why did you start Black Women Film Canada?

Ella Cooper: Um, oh, so it's hard to, it's hard to like just say, you know, I started Black Women Film Canada in 2016. And. I wanted to create a professional, um, level experience for Black women working in the industry that did not exist in Canada anywhere. I had delivered a lot of programs for, um, our Black communities and underserved communities, and I found that While there was a lot of funds for youth, um, there was a lot of assumptions that it was Black youth who need, you know, needs the big up.

There wasn't a lot of, yeah, programs at all for Black women in the industry when, when, um, Black women came on the scene. Black women in film came on the scene, to be exact. And in addition to that, prior to that, I had done a lot of research in my master's about representation of Black female bodies and of Black women, identified people, and especially in relation to representation, Western vigil culture, Canadian identities.

And all the stereotypes out there and the history is, as people know, not a great history. And so I wanted to change that in different ways through my art, uh, through the films I've created, but also I wanted to create a transformational program, uh, that would support the development of Black women in film and media.

And it started, uh, in 2016 with TIFF, CBC, and NFB, um, And a bunch of other industry partners who I went to and I said, I've got this idea. I've got this funding from the Ontario Arts Council. I want to do this leadership program. And what was once a really amazing leadership program that also took a group of A Black woman through TIFF, and it is now, you

know, a thriving, not for profit organization and we, we run at least, um, you know, seven programs every year.

We have a staff of five and, um, we continue to grow and, and adapt to the needs of our, um, our community across Canada. When you started

Anita Erskine: with your, uh, with your mantle, if I may put it that way, what was the audience reaction like?

Ella Cooper: Um, what do you, what do you mean by

Anita Erskine: mantle? When you started on this journey with, uh, Black people in Canada, um, what, what was the audience's, uh, reaction to it?Black people, non Black people, everybody.

Ella Cooper: Right. I think when we started on this journey, what was funny is we did a A launch event in May 2000. I think I'm at gosh, I feel like I have to go back. Like it was either 2015 or 2016, but, um, seven years ago, whatever the math is there. Um, and When we did this event, we brought together about 40 black women from the industry, some who are emerging, some who are very seasoned, some who are known names, and some who are, who are like up and coming.

And we took a photo, and we put that with our press release, and People were blown away. Um, we were featured on Metro Morning and the CBC. Folks were writing articles about us. People were reaching out saying, Oh my God, will you read my script? And this is a godsend. And like, how can I help? And the other people would say, I didn't even know there was 40 black women working in the industry.

And you have to imagine that that was just in Toronto and that did not reach half of the people who do work in the industry who are filmmakers in their own right. Um, not to mention all the black women across Canada. And so it created some waves and there was definitely interest, uh, lots of interest from the community to partner.

And, um, yeah, we, we continue to be the only of our kind. There's a lot of. Incredible programs for our BIPOC community now, uh, and our Black community, but we're the only ones who focus on Black women solely.

Anita Erskine: Why is it important for women of color to use their platforms, whether it's film or media, to use their channels to advocate for social change?

Ella Cooper: Hmm. Um, so I would say that black men, y'all can take a rest from advocating for social change. Take a break. And the reason I want to say that it is actually not our job. Our job as artists and filmmakers is to let our voices be heard. When you create work that's

just advocating for social change, but you leave yourself out of it or you're doing it for the better good.

I think a lot of people forget that actually telling your authentic story or telling the stories that excite you as a black woman are what affects social change. Um, I, I've seen, I've seen the work that is about raising awareness and that's really great, but We raise even more awareness when we show ourselves, when we show our creativity, when we write the stories we want to, um, hear and not, it doesn't always have to be about, hey, I'm black.

And this is my life. It can also be, Hey, I'm black and I see the world this way, you know, it's so inspiring when people go beyond just being focused on social change, not because it is necessary, it's so necessary and it's so important. It becomes something that we carry on our shoulders a little too heavily.

And I see too much burnout when the work is just about that, you know, the, like, Anita, getting to hear about you taking a break with your family, those type of things that we're seeing now depicted, like there's a whole series of on Black leisure at, um, about Black rest at NYU. These little, this vulnerability, the showing of ourselves is actually letting people know the diversity of Blackness.

You know, I have one experience, but my experience is not representative of a lot of other people I know. And I, by me choosing to, to create the world that I want to see out there in creating the work that makes my heart sing and that's authentic to me, then I affect more social change. And if I, I'm out there just pushing and banging down doors, but not actually, you know, joining in this beautiful art of storytelling.

This question

Anita Erskine: is not in the list of questions, but, um, Ella, what have you been most inspired by looking back from when you were a child to maybe even now, and how what you do and why you do it, what has inspired and continues to inspire it.

Ella Cooper: I'm really inspired by people. Um, I, it doesn't matter what my mood is.

If you put me in a room of people, I, uh, and I get to engage with them in some way. Um, that just brings me to life. I'm inspired by creative communities, like coming together with folks and creating. Um, I'm inspired by people who are living authentic lives. Um, ones that are balanced, ones that center nature and family and spirituality and peace and childcare.

Um, I'm really inspired by spaces that can be like really frank and anti oppressive, but also Um, caring and creative and loving. Um, I'm really inspired by BIPOC creators who want to collaborate with each other. Um, I'm so inspired by, like, my Indigenous brothers and sisters, my Chinese Canadian brothers and sisters, my, like, just, um, the [00:10:00] people in my life that are Yeah, trying to raise their kids in, in beautiful, inclusive ways.

Um, yeah, things like that. And I, I always find it's hard when someone says, is there a person that inspires you, but I, I hate to pinpoint one person, but rather it's like what they represent and what different types of people represent, but yeah, that, that's pretty open, but as, as a, as a hermit extrovert.

When I come out into the world and I get to engage with whatever community you throw me into, who's, who's game, you know, is game to make change or make art or come together. I'm just so inspired by who I meet and what I see and the potential of who we are. And the last thing I'd say is. We're doing a lot more programs across Canada, so I'm getting to meet new people who are part of our community, and the heartfelt sharing is really inspiring.

You know, I think the way that when Black women are in a space with all Black women, they show themselves in a way that is very inspiring, and I think it makes all of us feel like we're not alone. Last

Anita Erskine: question, if you could share, To a group of women, which clearly you do all the time, but if you could share, um, a call to action, you know, that one advice that you feel every black woman who is in storytelling has to hear right now, uh, in this time, what, what, what would that advice be?

What, what would that call to action be?

Ella Cooper: Um, the call to action is, is to me and it's to everyone and I'm somebody who I will put my family, my community. The needs of others at the center of my sense of purpose every day. And that will give you accolades and attention and it will make people feel special.

But I actually think that we need to All center ourselves a little more and I don't mean in a selfish narcissistic way I don't mean in the way when you're like alone in your room and you start anxiously thinking about all the things I mean in the way that And I said this actually at the Margaret Atwood talk, there's something in you right now that you want to create.

There's something in you right now that wants to be written down or painted or filmed or said or sung. And I'm, you can write a million lists till the cows come home, you can plan it forever, but really the only way to start is to start now. And in order to do that, It's about centering yourself. So it's like, look at your calendar, look at your schedule, see all the things you've put there and take a whole bunch of things off or carve out a day.

That's yours, whatever it may be, but really take the time. Without questioning why to just create the thing that's calling you because it is so surprising what it'll illuminate once you do, and it's a gift to everyone around you, even if you never show them, um, to, to really center that part of yourself, whatever it may be.

APPENDIX C - Sample Interview Questions

1. Please state your full name, title and tell us when you career began.
2. Why did you become a Storyteller?
3. At the time when you started on your chosen path, what was the environment like for Women of Colour in Film?
4. From your experience and in your opinion, what unique struggles have Women of color faced in the pursuit of their ambitions?
5. How did you navigate these challenges?
6. Are these struggles/challenges changing? Are things improving?
7. What has influenced your thinking around Black Women and Inclusion and motivated you to get involved in being an advocate for social change?
8. Why is it important to take social change concerns into account in storytelling?
9. What do Film/Theatre/Music/Fashion/Television play in influencing social discourse?
10. How can Women in Storytelling use their voice and work to engage society at all levels for the purpose of encouraging and perhaps controlling discourse in favor of Representation and Inclusion.
11. Could you recount a specific instance from your career where storytelling had a tangible impact on promoting equity, inclusion, or diversity? What was the outcome, and how did it shape your belief in the power of creative narratives for social change?
12. Storytelling often involves making choices about whose stories are told and how they are portrayed. How do you approach the responsibility of representing diverse voices and experiences authentically in your work?
13. Looking ahead, what emerging storytelling trends do you believe will have a significant impact on advancing the discourse on representation and social change?

14. Lastly, how do you envision the legacy of your storytelling work in the context of fostering lasting transformations in the narratives of equity, inclusion, and diversity?

15. If you had to share a call to action with all Women Storytellers, what would it be?

APPENDIX D - Participant Bios

Dr. Rita Shelton Deverell

Dr. Deverell was appointed to the Board of Directors of CBC/Radio-Canada on November 28, 2020, for a five-year term.

An independent scholar, author, as well as a theatre and media artist, Dr. Rita Shelton Deverell has been named Lakehead University's 10th chancellor, where she currently acts as a member of the President's Council on Truth and Reconciliation in addition to an Adjunct Professor of Education. Moreover, she is also a member of Act 3, a collective of older professional female actors and is part of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). She is also an Adjunct Professor of Women's Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University.

Over the course of her career, Rita made a name for herself in the media sphere. In addition to hosting several programs for CBC (Regina Noon, 24 Hours in Saskatchewan, CBC Access and Take 30) in the 1970's, she was the Director of the University of Regina's Journalism School in the 1980's, and she co-founded Vision TV where she was Vice President of Production, before becoming News Director at APTN until 2005 mentoring her Indigenous successor.

In the summer of 2005, Rita retired from full-time broadcasting and returned to theatre and drama. She was the first CanWest Global Fellow at Western University (2006) and Storyteller in Residence at Centennial College's Centre for Creative Communication (2008-2009).

Her many distinguished honours include two Geminis, the Black Women's Civic Engagement Network Leadership Award, membership in the Canadian Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame and recipient of the Order of Canada (2005). She was named 2018 ACTRA Woman of the Year for her contributions to arts and activism, and she received the ACTRA Fraternal Benefits Society's Award for Volunteerism. Rita Shelton Deverell has served on several boards and advisory councils, including the then Ontario Media Development Corporation and the Ontario College of Art and Design.

2019 saw the publication of her book American Refugees: Turning to Canada for Freedom, and her play Who You Callin Black Eh? won the Teen Jury prize at the Toronto Fringe Festival.

Rita holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Adelphi University, a Master of Arts in the History of Religions from Columbia University/Union Theological Seminary, and her dissertation was on Arts Policy, Ed.D, OISE/University of Toronto.

Cherene Francis

Cherene Francis is a multi-talented professional who has made her mark in various fields, enriching each with her unique perspective and skillset. She is an actress, writer, producer, entrepreneur, and content creator deeply passionate about telling captivating stories through film, TV, and digital media. Having graced the screen in comedic commercials, thrilling television productions, and soulful feature films, Cherene has gained a reputation as a versatile actor. She also collaborates with brands, businesses, writers, and directors who share her vision of making a powerful impact through storytelling.
Cherene's artistic vision explores various cultural, psychological, and spiritual perspectives in her productions, unearthing insights into the mindset, mental health, ancient and modern wisdom, faith, and paranormal activity, among other fascinating topics. Her prowess in storytelling has earned her critical acclaim and a devoted following among viewers and collaborators alike.

One of her notable achievements as a producer is the independent production of two seasons (24 episodes) of "LEAP!" - a compelling talk show that explores the mindset of multi-millionaires and entrepreneurs. The show, broadcast across Ontario through CHEX TV Corus Entertainment, featured notable leaders such as Les Brown, Todd Stottlemyer, and Dragon's Den Winner Claudia Harvey. It was a groundbreaking production that showcased Cherene's exceptional ability to bring out the best in her subjects and craft compelling, thought-provoking stories.

Cherene has also impacted the business world through her branding and digital marketing expertise. She is highly sought-after for her consultative services that help businesses develop powerful brands with compelling stories and reach new heights of success. Her creative approach to brand building utilizes the latest techniques in digital media, helping companies leverage their online presence to attract customers and increase sales. With a deep understanding of how modern consumers think and interact, she helps businesses craft strategies that catch the attention of potential buyers while staying true to their core values. Cherene's years of experience have also enabled her to create unique customer engagement approaches, further driving growth and loyalty.

Cherene's educational background is equally impressive, with degrees and practical experience in Communications, Film & TV Media, Branding, Marketing, Image Consulting, Acting for Camera & Theatre, World Religions, and Philosophy. She is also an International Board Designated Trainer of Hypnosis & Master NLP Coach, demonstrating her commitment to continued personal and professional growth.

When she is not pushing the boundaries of storytelling, Cherene enjoys spending quality time with her husband and two daughters, watching movies that bring their family closer together. Her ability to balance her professional and personal lives with effortless grace is an

embodiment of the values and ideals she instills in her productions - dedication, hard work, and an unwavering passion for creating stories that make a difference. Cherene Francis is undoubtedly an extraordinary individual whose talents and achievements inspire others to reach new heights in their own endeavors.

Jully Black

Jully Black is a true Canadian Icon. Named as one of 'The 25 Greatest Canadian Singers Ever', (CBC Music) she has been dubbed 'Canada's Queen of R&B Soul' by fans and industry leaders alike. As a platinum selling recording artist, her music career has yielded multiple singles reaching the Top 10 pop, R&B and dance music charts. She has taken home Juno and Gemini Awards, earned innumerable industry accolades, was hand selected to sing for the Queen of England and inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame in 2021 (PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE - Arts & Entertainment). With her powerhouse vocals, hilarious personality and love of people, Jully Black truly is everyone, and unlike anyone. Her passion for philanthropy has taken her from the shantytowns of Bangladesh to the villages of South Africa and all across Canada. As a woman of faith, she champions important causes and uses her career as a platform to celebrate and inspire the greatness that lies within each of us. As a songwriter, Jully has touched the hearts of her fans with her extensive music catalogue, her compositions for industry heavyweights such as Destiny's Child and Nas, and on collaborations with songwriter, musician and performance titans such as Ian Thornley (Big Wreck). She has shared the stage with superstars such as The Black Eyed Peas, Kanye West, Bon Jovi, Celine Dion, Elton John, Alicia Keys, Etta James, Juno Breakthrough Artist, Jessie Reyez, hot emerging Canadian trap artist Paris Richards at Rolling Loud Festival T.O. Jully also co-headlined Drake's 'Road to OVO Fest Tour' – All Canadian North Stars with Choclair, Kardinal Offishall, Keshia Chante', K-OS, Maestro Fresh Wes, Saukates, and Shawn Desmond to name a few.

Jully is a major presence in the Canadian media and entertainment industry. As former host and correspondent for CTV's etalk, Jully was chosen to interview global megastars such as Jay-Z, Oprah Winfrey, and former President Bill Clinton. Her music has been featured in film and television and she has personally appeared on, co-hosted and been featured on numerous national television programs and speaking platforms including the sizzling and immediately viral CBC 'Canada Reads' 2018 appearance, a much lauded TED Talk, the Global TV feature 'The First Time I Was Called A …', CTV's 'Canadian Idol'. In 2022 Jully was a contestant on The Amazing Race Canada and she is the popular segment host of 'Monday Motivation' on Global TV's #1 rated, nationwide morning program 'The Morning Show'. Jully's successful 2018 foray into creating and hosting 'The Blackout with Jully Black' (the critically acclaimed, provocative, ebullient and empowering weekly radio show on iHeartRadio - Newstalk1010) along with guest starring roles in the Canadian television crime drama series' 'The Coroner' (2019) and 'Diggstown' (2021) and featured segments in documentary film features with acclaimed directors and producers, serves to firmly establish her as the preeminent personality in the entertainment arena unlike anyone has in Canadian history.

Steadfastly maintaining personal fitness and wellness goals remains a priority in Jully's life. In 2018 she leveraged social media influence and innate leadHERship skill along with unwavering desire to be the bridge that everyone can cross and launched 100 Strong and Sexy ('100SAS'); Canada's largest female founded, curated and led fitness challenge to date. 100SAS was birthed to honour Jully's late mother; it is the largest Black founded and lead holistic wellness and lifestyle membership based program with 600+ members of all races who have reclaimed their position of optimal mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health. In 2020, Jully launched The Power Of Step ('TPOS') at the height of of the global pandemic and it is now a wildly successful, full-fledged virtual Step Aerobics and Personal Transformation Coaching practice with worldwide membership. With purpose driven ideals and boundless spiritual fortitude, she continues to refine and reinvent her artistry. A phenom in Canadian entertainment, lifestyle and public speaking arenas, she is also co-founder and key note speaker for the renowned "Empowered In My Skin' women's empowerment summits, a vocal advocate for the LGBTQ+ communities, recipient of the prestigious BBPA Harry Jerome [Entertainment] Award (2018) and a powerful Personal Development Coach, Speaker Coach and Spiritual Mentor. With lead roles in theatre such as The Musical Stage Company's signature concert feature "Uncovered" (with Music director, Reza Jacobs in collaboration with stars of Stratford, Shaw, Broadway and London's West End, 2018), and starring role in the critically acclaimed Mirvish Production of "Da Kink In My Hair" at the renowned Princess of Wales theatre in Toronto, Jully continues to magnify her expansive musical, theatre and television repertoire.

Jully took the musical theatre world by storm in February, 2020 in her critically acclaimed, starring role as 'Caroline' in the Obsidian Theatre and The Musical Stage Company co-production of 'Caroline, Or Change' (books and lyrics by Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning, Academy Award/Golden Globe/ AACTA/BAFTA Nominated, Tony Kushner). Extolled as "smart, dramatic, emotionally stirring" (NOW Toronto); a "rapturous, musical theatre debut" (The Star), "heavenly glorious" (OnStage Blog), "with the depth as an actor and genius as a singer" and with "applause that shook the leaves on the ceiling of the theatre" (Broadway World); Jully absolutely stunned audiences and critics alike and left her indelible mark on the gorgeous Elgin and Winter Garden Theatre and musical theatre community. In June, 2020 Jully won both the coveted Toronto Theatre Critics Award for Best Lead Performance in a Musical and The Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA) highly esteemed Dora Mavor Moore Award (the 'Dora') - which recognizes excellence in professional theatre, dance and opera in Toronto - in the Outstanding Performance in a Leading Role, Musical Theatre, category for her role in 'Caroline, Or Change'.

Jully released three new singles throughout 2022 from her long-awaited, critically-acclaimed, autobiographical full album 'Three Rocks and a Slingshot' (released Sept. 2022). With collaborations with megawatt songwriters and producers Gauntlette 'VersaceP' Alexander Jr. (Jully Black Musical Director, Drummer), Luther Brown Jr. (So You Think You Can Dance Canada and L.A.), Kareem James (Giant, GQ, Gap) and KickRaux (Jay-Z, Major Lazer, M.I.A. Ty Dolla Sign, Jack U [Skrillex & Diplo]), Jully entered and dominated the Canadian musical landscape that she has helped define throughout her career. Singles 'No Relation', 'Half Empty', and 'Time for Jesus' playlisted and charted across streaming platforms

immediately; with 'Half Empty' charting at #1 on the iTunes R&B chart and the album charting at #1 on iTunes R&B chart and #3 on the iTunes 'All Genre' chart.

With a few top-secret projects to be announced very soon, Jully, truly, is doing it all!

Trey Anthony

Trey Anthony is a visionary creator who uses the unique blend of comedy, theater, motivational talk, and her own life experiences to inspire and lift up others.
She is a professional speaker, lifestyle coach, producer, author, and award-winning playwright, but she's also "your girl" who tells it how it is. Through art, humour, and the power of a clear message, she's here to give Black women the no-nonsense tools to take control of their lives and thrive!
As a sought-after speaker, Trey has delivered keynote speeches around the world including Harvard University, New York University, and numerous other colleges and organizations.

Drawing from her own life with a talent for sharing valuable life lessons combining comedy and vulnerability, Trey guarantees an invigorating, life-affirming experience as featured in her popular viral TEDx Talk, Coming Out Of Your Box that continues to inspire people everywhere.

Trey's book, Black Girl In Love (With Herself), is released January 2021 by Hay House Publishing. It details Trey's inner struggles to meet the demands of her family and the societal pressures of living up to the image of a "strong" black woman. Black Girl In Love (With Herself) will have you laughing and crying! Black girls around the world will be reimaging and reinventing their lives in order to push past these demands and truly come into their own on their own terms.

Trey's sold-out hit play, 'da Kink in My Hair, grossed millions and broke box office records across Canada, the United States, and England after it premiered in 2001. It was named one of the top ten plays in Canadian theatrical history and received 4 NAACP Theatre awards, including Best Playwright. It continues to be produced on stages throughout North America.

In 2007, Trey adapted 'da Kink in My Hair for the small screen, making her the first African Canadian woman to create, write, and produce a primetime television show on a major Canadian network. Since then she has written for the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), Lionsgate, Will Packer Media, The Comedy Network, and CTV.

Trey's daring and thought-provoking play, How Black Mothers Say I Love You, premiered in 2017. It was the first play to be featured on The Globe and Mail's Bestsellers list. It has now been optioned as a feature film by Conquering Lion Productions with critically acclaimed director, Clement Virgo (Empire, The Book of Negroes, The Wire) attached to direct. The screenplay was also shortlisted for the Sundance Institute's Screenwriters Lab and is in development with CBC to be adapted into a television series.

Trey is a regular contributor to HuffPost and has been a featured writer at Toronto Star. She

has given numerous interviews nationally and internationally on television and radio, appearing on City TV, Global Television, CTV, Rogers Television, and more. She is also a former television producer for the Women's Television Network (now W Network).
Trey is a recipient of an Eve Ensler Vagina Warrior Award for her work with women. She has also received a Harry Jerome Award for her work in entertainment and a Queering Black History Award from Egale Canada. In 2016, Trey was inducted into the Brampton Arts Walk of Famefor her valuable contributions to the arts in Canada.

Trey is based in Atlanta where she lives with her newborn son, Kai. She makes an amazing curry chicken. And dreams of rapping on stage with Drake some day!
Tonya Williams is an award winning actress, producer and activist who has worked in the entertainment industry for the last forty-five years in Canada and the USA. She is best known for her nineteen years starring on the daytime drama The Young & The Restless as Dr. Olivia Winters. She is also the founder and executive director of Reelworld Screen Institute, Reelworld Film Festival and Reelworld Foundation since 2000. She founded Reelworld to address the lack of opportunities, access and inclusion in Canada for Black, Indigenous, Asian and People of Colour in the screen industries. In 2020 Reelworld launched Access Reelworld, one of Canada's largest searchable database for racially diverse crews and talent.

Tonya Williams

As a Black person born in the late 50's, I was subjected to the negative images presented on screen by Film and Television. Stories and, in particular, stories told with images are powerful tools. Stories can impact not only the communities they represent, but the government and society as a whole. Since the invention of Television and Film, producers have perpetuated harmful narratives to the Black, Indigenous, Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern and Latinx communities. Showing us as savages, illiterate, over sexed, untrustworthy, criminals, lazy, lacking in moral values. Only through empowering racialized storytellers and executives can we start to erase the damage and correct.

I was considered fortunate. While still in high school in 1976, I started my career as an actress. On sets, I was often the only person of colour in front of or behind the cameras. That absence was a constant reminder to me of how devalued my community was. The audience the industry was focused on was not a racially diverse audience. It was the 'White' audience who were hailed as the ultimate goal.

In 1987, I was informed that I was booking all the "available" jobs in Canada. I was told how fortunate I was even though I could barely make a living. So I relocated to Los Angeles and immediately found the success I sought. For the next twenty years I starred on a show called The Young and The Restless. Throughout my time on the show, I was always cognizant of the continued lack of access racially diverse talent had back in Canada.

In 2000 I launched an initiative in Toronto that was new and bold - Reelworld Film Festival. A year later, Reelworld Foundation (now called Reelworld Screen Institute) followed. These initiatives had one single focus - to literally change the face of the industry. Reelworld became a training ground for curators/programmers, arts administrators, grants writers,

theatre managers, publicists and more. Giving opportunity to filmmakers was just part of our mission. We wanted to make sure that everything we did would impact racially diverse professionals on every level of this industry.

As we are today, Reelworld was an advocate for change on the government level. Through discussions with Telefilm Canada, Canadian Media Fund, Ontario Creates, Canada Council for the Arts and others, we helped bring much needed attention and understanding to the needs of the diverse media artists we were supporting. This gave more insight to those who had the power to create much needed inclusion and access.

In 2018, Reelworld was asked to speak at the Senate committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, "Impact and Utilization of culture and arts in Foreign Policy and Diplomacy" about the importance of showing the world our diverse artists and their stories. We illustrated how more help was needed to open up the concepts of what is considered “Canadian content”.

Reelworld sat with broadcasters and shared the challenges and issues our talent had, and helped with changes to their policies in hiring practices behind the cameras.

We worked with community centres and created youth workshops to give youth more exposure to different facets of the screen industry and the lucrative opportunities it might provide them.

Reelworld sat with the unions, from ACTRA, WGC, DGC, Iatse, Nabet and affiliates such as ACCT, CMPA and others. We are always pushing for more inclusion for our diverse talent and always pushing to pull down the barriers that hinder access.

Reelworld continues to be that voice and a strong arm pushing for change. Our new initiative, Access Reelworld is a national database and job board for Canadian racially diverse creators and industry professionals. We hope this will once and for all stop the question 'where can we find that diverse talent".

We continue our fight. Our twenty years of work have allowed us to build strong relationships with every inch of this industry. With our power, we push for the change our members tell us they need.

Ella Cooper

Ella Cooper is an award winning producer, director, writer, multi-media artist, educator and cultural leader based in Toronto (Mississauga Territory), born in Montreal (Abenaki Territory), who has been working in the arts, film and cultural sector for over 25 years. Her creative work spans from broadcast media, photography, writing, textile and illustration.

In film and media, Ella loves to direct children’s content, episodic series, comedy, contemporary dance, music videos and art docs. She was long listed for a 2023 Canadian

Screen Award for Best Direction in a Youth Series and is going into her 3rd season as writer director for the TVO Kids series Sunny's Quest produced by Apartment 11. Ella recently Director shadowed Zoe Hopkins on Season 2 of CBC Run the Burbs and director Aleysa Young on Untitled Films Capital One commercial shoot. She received the award for Best Canadian Film (Caribbean Tales) for her doc Black Men Loving, with her limited series Dance for Life receiving Honorable Mention for Best Documentary (San Francisco Dance Film Festival). To date Ella has created and directed over 20 short films including one animation for CBC Books.

As an artist, Ella's work has shown in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada Council Ajemo Gallery, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Dunlop Gallery, Nuit Blanche, Exposure Festival and beyond. Her photo series 'Witness' received a 2020 Editors Pick in Canadian Art Magazine and her documentary, dance and video installations have been presented in galleries, public spaces and film festivals in Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Calgary, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Amsterdam and Berlin, with an upcoming show in Vienna June 2024. She receives continued support from the Ontario, Toronto & Canada Arts Councils.

As a cultural leader and producer, Ella is the founder of Black Women Film! Canada a not for profit supporting the development of Black women in film and media. She is a renowned speaker and facilitator who creates transformative leadership programs and impactful master classes internationally and enjoys running Brown Rabbit Studios, her new boutique production company that brings together award-winning Black and BIPOC women creators, and our allies, to create incredible video works for tv, arts, lifestyle and children's content programming with a new animation in development with CBC Kids, Sphere Media & Karen Chapman and multiple ongoing commissions.

Ella received the Tiffany's Hometown Hero Award and was nominated for the 2019 TAC Mayor's Arts Award for cultural leadership and featured as one of 33 Black Canadians Making Change Now in Chatelaine magazine.

Joan Jenkinson

Joan Jenkinson is the inaugural Executive Director of the Black Screen Office which supports, nurtures and promotes the creation of Black Canadian stories globally.

Joan was Vice-President of Independent Production for VisionTV where she commissioned, developed and executive produced hundreds of hours of award-winning creative content in all genres. Joan spearheaded VisionTV's ground-breaking DiverseTV/NSI initiative which helped to launch the careers of Black producers and creatives.

For five years, Joan served as Executive Director of Women in Film and Television - Toronto (WIFT-T), where she established professional development training and networking opportunities for women in screen-based media.