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## Women are Speaking Up at Sundance

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# Women are Speaking Up at Sundance

## **Abstract**

Women speak up at Sundance 2018.

## **Keywords**

Women, Sexism, Feminism, Hollywood, Leadership

## **Author Notes**

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration



Photo by Rubina Ramji, March on Main, Park City, January 2017

This year, more than any other, felt like the *Year of the Woman* at the Sundance Film Festival. Interspersed throughout the ten days of films and red carpet events, women were given the opportunity to speak about their experiences making movies, as well as the daunting hurdles they endure by remaining in the industry. Women have been underrepresented in many societal roles, including religious leadership. This is more so for women of color. Therefore it was refreshing to see more films directed by women and films allowing women to have the starring role, rather than just supporting role, in this year's offerings.

Adding to the more greatly diversified film screenings this year, Sundance 2018 put on numerous panels that illuminated the voices of the underrepresented in the film industry. On Saturday January 20<sup>th</sup>, The Creative Coalition held the *Leading Women's Luncheon* (presented by Aspiriant) that brought together actors, producers and executives to celebrate women's leadership in the entertainment industry. On Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, Color of Change, Planned Parenthood, and The Blackhouse Foundation came together for a *Women of Color in Hollywood* panel moderated by IMPACT Strategies and CNN and NPR analyst Angela Rye.

Also on January 21<sup>st</sup>, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Golden Globe Awards, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA) hosted a *Women Breaking Barriers* panel filled with women who had won various awards in their roles as actors, producers, directors and cinematographers. HFPA also gave a \$50,000 grant to the Sundance Institute Women's programs. Panelists provided personal experiences and practical advice for achieving equality for women in the entertainment business and the fight they undertook to get women's issues addressed, not just on screen but in the industry itself. Panelists acknowledged that the #metoo movement opened up new dialogues, not just about abuse but also forcing people to confront deep-seated cultural issues that are often embedded in religious rhetoric (HFPA Press Release).

On the same day, the Blackhouse Foundation and the Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation focused on the voices of underrepresented storytellers on camera and behind the scenes, by organizing the panel *Broadening the Lens: Perspectives on Diverse Storytelling*. The Blackhouse Foundation also hosted the launch of a new global initiative, the Eos World Fund, which "supports bold, innovative women directors speaking their minds and pushing the boundaries of cinema and the visual arts." They hosted a panel entitled *Women in Charge: Through*

*a New Lens*, to explore how the narratives of women in cinema and media can be reformulated (The Purple Agency).

On Monday January 22nd, Refinery29, DOVE Chocolate and the Sundance Institute co-hosted the 2018 *Women at Sundance Brunch* to celebrate the accomplishments of female filmmakers at Sundance and to acknowledge the work that needs to be done for equity to actually take place. Only 7% of the top 2016 films were directed by women (Rubenstein Public Relations). In stark comparison, 37% of the movies screened at the Sundance Film Festival were directed by women.

All of the various women-focused events that took place at the Sundance Film Festival were launched by the Women's March taking place in Park City, in conjunction with a Nationwide March, on January 20<sup>th</sup>. The "Respect Rally" in Park City was filled with Utahans as well as Hollywood actors and producers. The rally was held to honor the one-year anniversary of the National Women's March and the local success of "March on Main in Park City" in 2017. Common the rapper shared his new song "The Day Women Took Over." As women's positions are moving towards a more equitable representation in North American society, women still remain underrepresented in leadership positions in the world's faith groups. Perhaps as the #metoo movement has affected the film industry for the better, it will have a similar impact on religious organizations and the societal factors that exist which are resistant to change.