



Inequality in the Spotlight

A closer look into the prejudice behind
Hollywood's biggest award ceremonies

A warm, beaming stage light creates a spotlight as millions of people anticipate the winner of the award show category. The content of an award show varies, from “Album of the Year” award at the Grammys to “Best Picture” at the Oscars, but award recipients have historically come from one racial background and sex, leaving people of color and women massively under-represented.

“It has come up a lot in national media where award shows are a huge apparent thing and then we see the list of nominees,”

Alanna Williamson, the Composition and Literature of Visual Media teacher said. “There’s not a lot of representation and oftentimes the winners are white.”

According to the magazine *Insider*, the past decade of Oscar award shows nominees were 89% white and 71.1% male.

“I think the issue really starts with the roles,” Williamson said. “Part of the reason that we’re seeing a lack of representation

in the people who are nominated is because there’s a lack of opportunities for roles. So if the roles aren’t there, of course they’re not going to get nominated.”

The lack of roles creates a domino effect of underrepresentation, but there

but those roles aren’t the ones getting nominated, so there must be some kind of intrinsic bias happening,” Williamson said. “There’s a lot of subjectivity to [the nominations]. So if you have intrinsic bias within that subjectivity already, that can definitely create a problem.”

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are other roadblocks in the way, especially considering the increased efforts to create more diverse films in recent years. This progress is demonstrated in UCLA’s “Hollywood Diversity Report 2022” which showed that in 2021, 31% of the top 252 films of the year had a cast that was built of people of minorities making up 50% or more of the cast.

“In past years there have been more roles and opportunities [for minorities],

The vice president of Paly’s Film Club, senior Dora Pang, points out that this is not only an issue that impacts those in front of the camera but affects those watching from home.

“It’s a problem because when young people watch who’s been represented on screen and who’s winning these awards, it can hurt one’s confidence and identity if they do not see someone that looks like them represented,” Pang said.

Of the 2023 nominations for Best Actor at the Academy Awards, every single nominee is white. As the problem of misrepresentation continues, an increasing number of people are speaking up against it.

“I know that multiple artists in the

past decided to boycott the Grammys including Frank Ocean and Zayn Malik,” Paly junior Rori Escudero said.

Singer and songwriter Frank Ocean won two Grammys in the 2013 awards, but in 2017 decided not to submit any of his new music for consideration to win the award.

“I think the infrastructure of the awarding system and the nomination system and screening system is dated,” Ocean said while speaking with The New York Times.

Boycotting award shows by not attending or watching the awards live is a method that stars and students alike can participate in.

“Boycotting [shows] is a great way to have an impact because [companies] aren’t going to change unless money is attached,” Williamson said.

Regarding the Oscars, the 2023 nominations have shown progress in diversity, evident by the nomination of “Everything Everywhere All at Once” for 11 Academy awards, including Best Picture. The A24 film stars Asian-American actors and underlying themes demonstrating immigrant experiences, with East Asian representation in both its cast and those working behind-the-scenes.

“There’s a lot of really good representation this year,” Williamson said. “So maybe this year isn’t the year to boycott. We want to show support for those people, not necessarily the institution. And I think just being mindful of separating the two is a good conversation to have.”

Williamson also points out that we must check our own intrinsic bias in order to find the root of the societal problem.

“If I asked you to name 10 actors or actresses people can probably get there over time,” Williamson said. “[But what if I asked you to] name 10 Asian actors or actresses. Name 10 Black actors. Name 10 Muslim actors...I think something that we can all personally do is to check that bias and make sure that we’re learning people’s names.”

Industry-wide change must be met with this self-discovery.

“Whiteness is presented as the norm,” Williamson said. “We should get to a point where there’s so much representation that it isn’t novel anymore.”

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★ - Dora Pang, 12



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Insider.com found that

89% of Oscar Nominees are White

Non-Minorities



Minorities