



women in film <sup>SM</sup>

A PROFESSIONAL NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYMENT, DEPICTION AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN FILM AND TELEVISION

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ON SCREEN

Testimony

to

WOMEN'S CAUCUS  
CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE

from

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If "Sesame Street" can teach the alphabet, children can learn the ABCs of mayhem from gratuitously violent entertainment. There is a correlation between reel violence and real violence.

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Women in Film (WIF) is a professional nonprofit organization founded in Hollywood in 1973 to improve the employment, position and depiction of women in film and television. Today there are nearly 2,000 members in the Los Angeles area, 13 autonomous chapters throughout the nation and 13 international chapters (and growing).

Although women have made employment gains in the entertainment industry, and a handful have attained senior-level positions, depiction of women in film is an area where few advances have been made since the inception of the organization 20 years ago.

**The proliferation of violence on the screen is a serious public health issue, especially since female characters are often the victims. The pervasive use of it in films and television has, after a time, an anesthetizing affect on the entire culture. When violence is trivialized, so are its victims.**

To address this concern, WIF formed an Issues & Advocacy Committee and has conducted several seminars and panel discussions on the issue. During one program, WIF member Edward James Olmos stated outright, "Film is the single most powerful medium that has ever attacked the subconscious mind in the history of planet," and he made a plea for colleagues to take responsibility for showing gratuitous violence.

Of course not all women need be depicted as angels of mercy. But most films still demean women as one-dimensional characters, representing their contributions as absurd novelties. Women are stereotyped as either victims, prostitutes, molls on the arm of gangsters, the deranged wife/girlfriend or the ditzy airhead. Gratuitous, exploitive and sensationalized sexuality or violence against women on screen is still the rule rather than the exception.

Erotic thrillers, for example, are a popular genre with studios because they sell big, especially overseas. In these films, women are typically depicted as victims and exploited as sex objects to appease the voyeuristic thrills of male victors and viewers.

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