

Actresses must be picky about with whom they work to survive in movie industry

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Actresses need to be pickier than men about with whom they work if they want to survive in the movie industry, suggests a new study.

"My research indicates that [women](#) in the [film industry](#) suffer a lack of access to future career opportunities when they tend to work with people who have collaborated frequently in the past," said Mark Lutter, lead author of the study and head of the "Transnational Diffusion of Innovation" Research Group at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG) in Germany.

Titled, "Do Women Suffer from Network Closure? The Moderating Effect of Social Capital on Gender Inequality in a Project-Based Labor Market, 1929 to 2010," the study will appear in the April print issue of the *American Sociological Review* and was published online today.

For the purposes of his study, Lutter analyzed the career data, including more than a million performances in almost 400,000 movies, of about 100,000 actors and actresses in the American film industry. The data originated from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), which contains details on all films produced since the advent of cinematography, as well as information on all of the actors and actresses involved and the networks within which they operated—in other words, with whom they worked.

Lutter found that when actresses work more often with less connected, more diverse groups featuring people from different social and cultural

backgrounds, their career prospects become indistinguishable from those of actors.

"The career opportunities for actresses are more likely to dwindle if they work in homogeneous teams," Lutter said.

If the groups they tend to work with also feature a large proportion of men in senior positions—directors and producers, for instance—or if the actresses work in male-dominated film genres, the risk of career decline is even greater. The effect is further amplified for actresses still in the early stages of their careers.

"I suspect that women suffer when they are frequently part of homogeneous teams because they might enjoy a much lower degree of active support from mentors than men, and their professional friendship networks might also give them access to fewer contacts in positions of power," Lutter said. "This would mean that they are likely excluded from important sources of information about future projects."

This is particularly problematic in project-based labor markets, such the film industry, in which jobs tend to be obtained through informal channels and personal networks.

"So rather than relying on close circles and personal friendships, women should focus on developing diverse networks of relationships outside their own circle," Lutter said. "By and large, they should take a more strategic, considered approach to their decisions concerning future projects if they want their careers to benefit."

While the study focuses on the film industry, the findings have implications for people in other industries as well.

"In this day and age, [work](#) very often takes place in project teams, the

film industry being a prime example," Lutter said. "Those involved in filmmaking move along from project to project—working together for a limited period of time and then going their separate ways—like many freelancers in the creative professions, but also not unlike many people working for larger corporations. My research highlights strategies women can use to increase their visibility in these job markets, as well as steps employers interested in advancing women's careers can take when creating project teams."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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