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Technology, Media & Telecommunications

Shattering the glass screen

Research suggests women remain locked out of top roles in media and entertainment. A more diverse cast is required.

by Lucas Beard, Jonathan Dunn, Jess Huang, and Alexis Krivkovich

There are many reasons to care about gender issues in the media and entertainment industry—not the least of which is the importance of moving beyond traditional stereotypes and having diverse storytellers share their unique perspectives in film, television, and other forms of print and broadcast media. Women are among the largest consumers of film and television, so they represent a key demographic for this industry and the advertisers that support it.[1]

According to our recent research, women are well represented in media and entertainment companies.[2] But even with corporate America's increased focus on ensuring gender parity, women in this industry experience a more hostile workplace than men and face a glass ceiling that prevents them from reaching top leadership roles.

Using data from the 2019 Women in the Workplace study, one of the largest and most comprehensive data sets of women in corporate America, McKinsey created a one-year snapshot of how women are progressing in media and entertainment and how their workplace experiences differ from those of men. We supplemented that information with collected data from 15 companies, as well as workplace-experience-survey responses of 1,700 employees[3]—both male and female—from the media and entertainment industry in 2019.[4]

We observed some positive trends. At early tenures, for instance, women in media and entertainment are at equal representation as men, which provides a stable foundation for the future. What's more, at early tenures, promotion rates for women exceed those for men, and the share of women hired from outside the company is equal to or surpasses the share of men. The women in our research also reported high satisfaction with their career

choices, as well as a strong desire to be promoted and otherwise advance in their organizations. HR respondents in this industry tended to say their companies were committed to achieving greater parity: 93 percent of them stated that gender diversity was a priority for their organizations.

But, as with women in all other industries, there are major challenges facing women in media and entertainment. When examining the three main drivers of women's advancement in corporate America—promotion, attrition, and external hiring—we found that women in entry-level positions in this industry are leaving their companies at higher rates than their male counterparts. Yes, promotions at early tenures drive strong representation at the managerial level, but that progress slows to a crawl the closer you get to the top. We observed that external hiring skews male for C-suite positions, which contributes to a corporate environment in which women are well represented at early-tenure positions but remain a minority at more senior levels. Only 27 percent of C-suite positions in media and entertainment are held by women. We found similar patterns when we took a closer look at one segment of media and entertainment in particular: the news media (see sidebar, "Women in news organizations").

Furthermore, we observed that women's day-to-day workplace experiences in media and entertainment are worse than men's. Almost half of all respondents said they believe women in their fields are judged by different standards than men, which they say makes it difficult to achieve parity in senior management in their workplaces.

In this article, we review the findings from our research and consider steps executives in media and entertainment can take to encourage greater equity.

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[1] See Ingrid Lunden, "Nielsen: Women watch more TV than men, but connected games consoles are changing that," TechCrunch, October 5, 2012, techcrunch.com; and *Theatrical market statistics* 2016, Motion Picture Association of America, motionpictures.org.
[2] For the purposes of this report, we've defined the media and entertainment industry as companies that engage in news, film, marketing, ticket sales, event management, and sports. This report is based on employee data from companies that opted in to the Women in the Workplace survey.
[3] Note that the Women in the Workplace study focused on the experiences and representation of salaried employees in corporate America and does not differentiate between editorial, creative, and business staff. It also does not include the hourly and "gig" employees that comprise many of the creative functions in the media and entertainment industry.
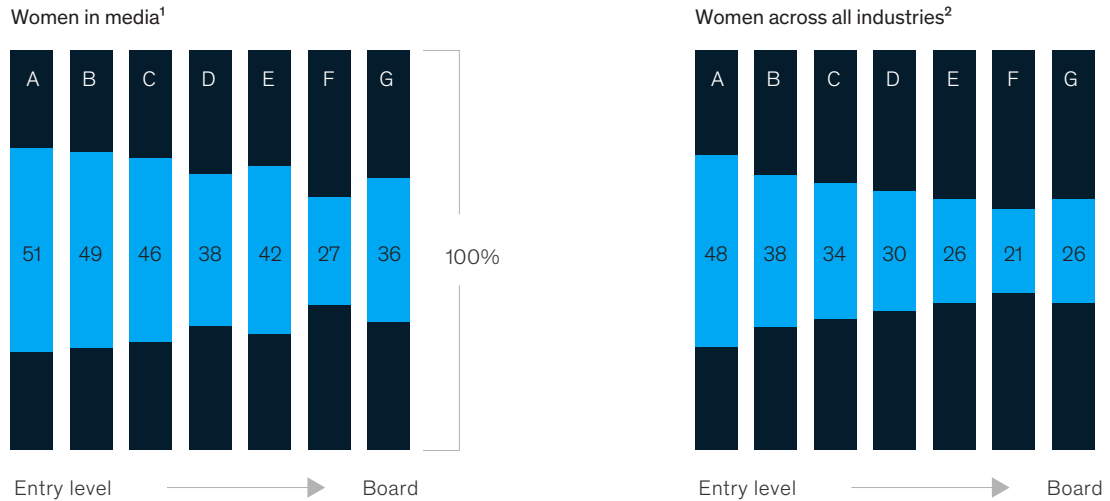[4] For the past five years, McKinsey, in collaboration with LeanIn.Org, has published Women in the Workplace, one of the largest comprehensive studies of the state of women in corporate America. Since 2015, the project has surveyed more than a quarter of a million employees at almost 600 companies. Companies voluntarily chose to participate in the study.

Exhibit 1

Women are better represented in media and entertainment than in industries overall.

Representation by gender, by career level, % of employees

A = Entry level **B** = Manager **C** = Senior manager/director **D** = Vice president **E** = Senior vice president
F = C-suite **G** = Board

Women in media[1]

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
51	49	46	38	42	27	36

100%

Entry level ⟶ Board

Women across all industries[2]

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
48	38	34	30	26	21	26

Entry level ⟶ Board

[1]Aggregate results from participating companies in media and entertainment (15 companies submitted pipeline data).
[2]Aggregate results from 320 companies that reported their pipeline data, weighted by industry to the Fortune 500.

There are more women overall …

There are a significant number of women in the media and entertainment industry compared with our overall benchmark for women's representation in corporate America. Women make up 49 percent of the total workforce in media and entertainment, although most of these women are concentrated in entry-level positions (Exhibit 1).[5]

Our research shows that women at entry-level positions are moving up the corporate ladder in media and entertainment faster than men. They are being promoted to the manager level twice as often as men—6 percent for women compared with 3 percent for men (Exhibit 2). This promotion rate contributes to a much higher percentage of women managers in the industry than in corporate America as a whole (49 percent in media and entertainment, versus 38

percent for all industries). It also represents a better promotion rate than in the wider workforce where that first promotion to manager is the most significant barrier to women's advancement, commonly referred to as the "broken rung."
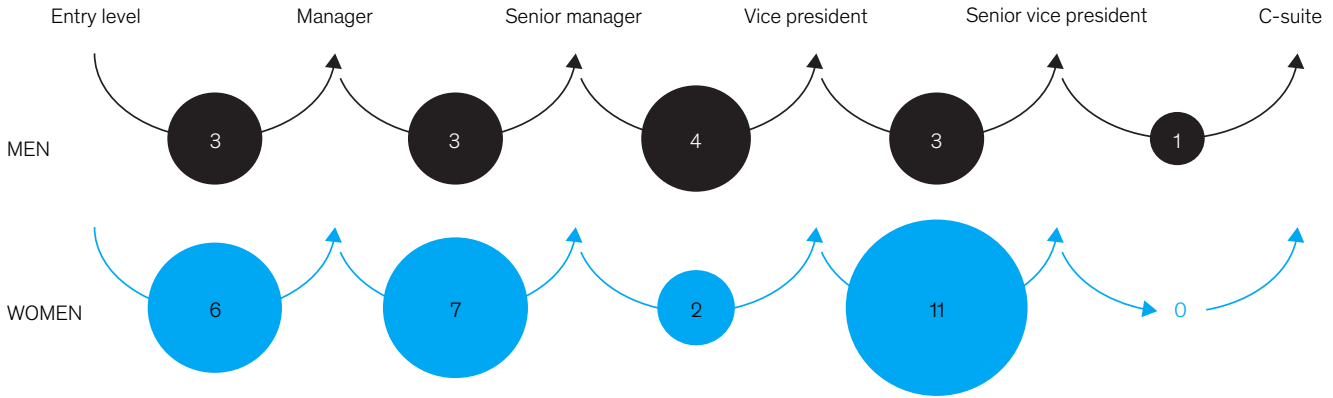
Our research suggests that women in this industry are more satisfied with their career choices than are women in corporate America overall. Women in media and entertainment report career-satisfaction rates that are slightly higher than men's—77 percent of women versus 75 percent of men (Exhibit 3). Additionally, 82 percent of women in our research reported a desire to be promoted to the next level, as compared with 71 percent of women across all industries. Indeed, 35 percent of women in media and entertainment said they had asked for a promotion during the past year, compared with 27 percent of

[5] Media and entertainment companies categorized their employees into six levels based on standard definitions, taking reporting structure and salaries into account. This was calibrated across news and entertainment mediums.
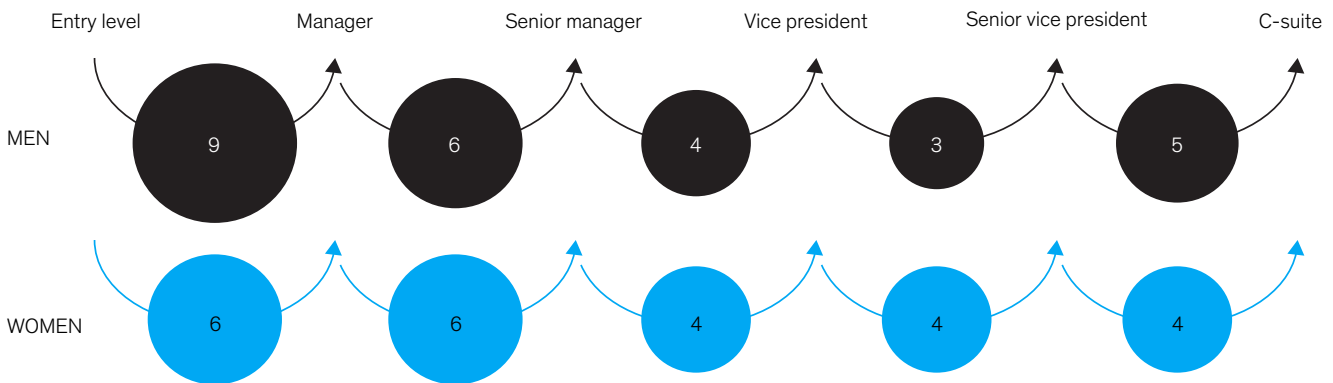
Exhibit 2

At the lowest organizational levels, women in entertainment and media are promoted at twice the rate of men.

Promotion rates by position for media and entertainment, %

	Entry level	Manager	Senior manager	Vice president	Senior vice president	C-suite
MEN	3	3	4	3	1	
WOMEN	6	7	2	11	0	

Promotion rates by position for all other industries, %

	Entry level	Manager	Senior manager	Vice president	Senior vice president	C-suite
MEN	9	6	4	3	5	
WOMEN	6	6	4	4	4	

men in the industry. These statistics suggest that the low representation of women in senior roles cannot be attributed to a lack of desire for advancement.
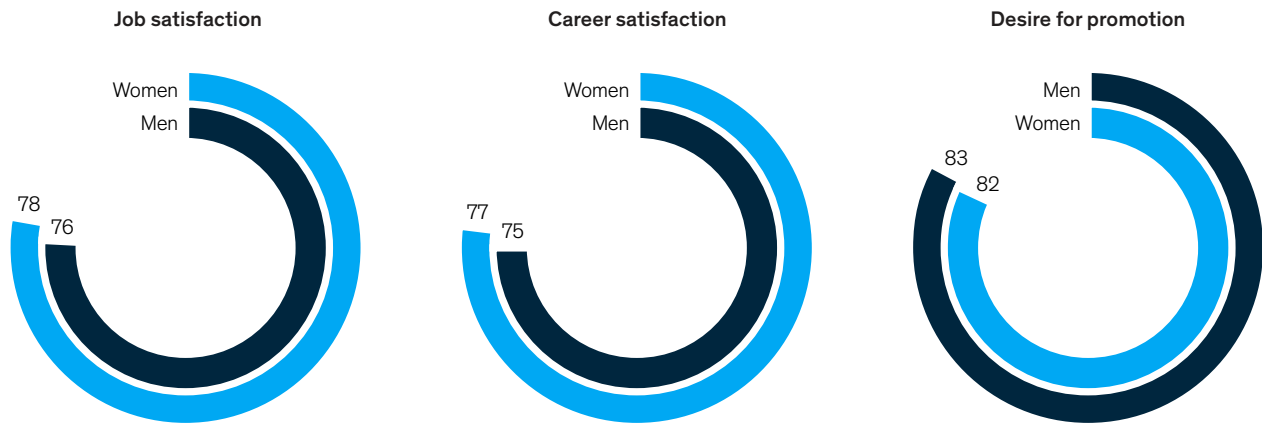
… but there is a dearth of women in senior leadership

Women are "getting a foot in the door" in media and entertainment, and they are enthusiastic about seeking advancement—but that's where positive trends begin to fade. For an entry-level woman looking up, every rung on the career ladder will have fewer women in it. A woman graduating with a degree in mass communications or journalism, for instance, will walk across a stage where six out of every ten students are women.[6] If she's hired into the industry, her entry-level class will consist of five women in every ten hires. Further up the corporate

[6] See Ana Borruto, "Studies examine gender enrollment in communications," *Ithacan*, April 1, 2015, theithacan.org; and Lee B. Becker, Oana Stefanita, and Tudor Vlad, *Predictors of faculty diversification in journalism and mass communication education*, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication conference, San Francisco, CA, August 2015, grady.uga.edu.

Exhibit 3

Women and men in media have similar levels of job and career satisfaction.

Job satisfaction	Career satisfaction	Desire for promotion

Women
Men
78
76

Women
Men
77
75

Men
Women
83
82

ladder, at the transition from senior manager to vice president, one woman from this group, on average, will drop out of the pipeline. By the time these mass-communication or journalism professionals are poised to reach the C-suite, they will account for fewer than three of every ten executives—a point commonly referred to as the glass ceiling.[7] For both men and women, there have been limited promotions from the senior-vice-president level into the C-suite; the promotion rate is less than 1 percent.

This lack of internal advancement for women is compounded by another observable trend: more men than women are hired from outside the company into the C-suite. Our numbers showed that of external hires in the C-suite, 79 percent were men and 21 percent women. To accelerate women's representation in the C-suite, media and entertainment companies will need to increase women's access to internal and external pathways to the top, potentially challenging existing corporate structures. It can be done: in the past five years, many other companies and industries have added women to the senior-most levels of management, and now close to 45 percent of companies have

three or more women in the C-suite compared with fewer than 30 percent of companies in 2015.

Women are clearly aware that the deck is stacked against them. Twenty-seven percent of women surveyed in the media and entertainment industry say that gender has played a role in their missing out on a raise, promotion, or a chance to get ahead, as opposed to only 7 percent of men. What's more, 35 percent of women reported that they expect their gender to make it harder to get a raise or promotion in the future as opposed to 15 percent of men (Exhibit 4).

This inequity grows deeper when we look at the intersection of race and gender. According to our data, women of color are poorly represented across all levels of leadership in media and entertainment. For example, white women represent 33 percent of entry-level roles in media and entertainment, while women of color represent 17 percent. And while women hold 22 percent of C-suite roles in media and entertainment, women of color hold only 4 percent of those positions (Exhibit 5).

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[7] Sandrine Devillard, Vivian Hunt, and Lareina Yee, "Still looking for room at the top: Ten years of research on women in the workplace," *McKinsey Quarterly*, March 2018, McKinsey.com.

Exhibit 4

Women say their gender hinders their advancement opportunities.

Employees who think gender will affect their ability to seize future opportunities, % of respondents

Women	35
Men	15

2.3×
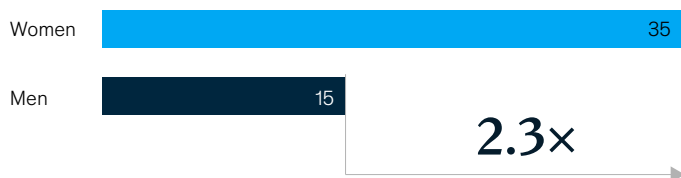
Employees who think gender is affecting their ability to seize current opportunities, % of respondents

Women	27
Men	7

3.9×
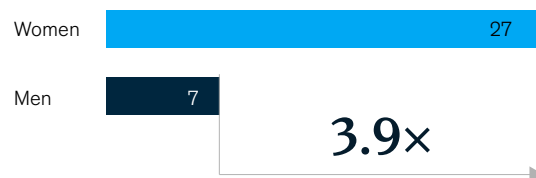
Note that men of color also have a difficult path to positions of leadership in media and entertainment. They represent only one out of every six employees at the entry level, and only one out of every 12 employees in the C-suite.

Women are held to a different standard

Almost half of the women in our research said they believe that women in the industry are judged by different standards than men. More important, they consider these gender-biased appraisals to be one of the biggest challenges to getting equal numbers of women and men in management at their organizations.

The numbers suggest that women are more aware of the biases facing other women than men are, with 34 percent of women reporting that they had heard or seen biased behavior toward women in the past year—a number that is 2.7 times higher than their male counterparts (Exhibit 6). This awareness gap can make it difficult for companies to mobilize and address issues with women's workplace experiences. If men, who still make up four of every five C-suite executives, don't perceive that bias toward women is happening, they won't feel compelled to allocate resources toward fixing the problem.

Our research also suggests that women in this industry experience more microaggressions than

women in other industries. Microaggressions are brief, often unintended, actions that can slight or marginalize a coworker—for instance, being interrupted while talking or having others explain things to you that you already know. Microaggressions can undermine women's confidence, inhibit their sense of belonging, and limit their opportunities for advancement. As compared with women in an all-industry benchmark, women in media and entertainment were more likely to report experiencing microaggressions in nine out of the ten categories we asked about (Exhibit 7). What's more, women of color reported experiencing microaggressions at higher rates than their white peers.

In the wake of such obstacles, 49 percent of women in the media and entertainment industry reported that their companies provided clear and safe ways to voice grievances and concerns, compared with 57 percent in all industries. The good news is that women are demanding even more: almost a third of the women surveyed in media and entertainment reported becoming more outspoken in the past two years about how women are treated at work.
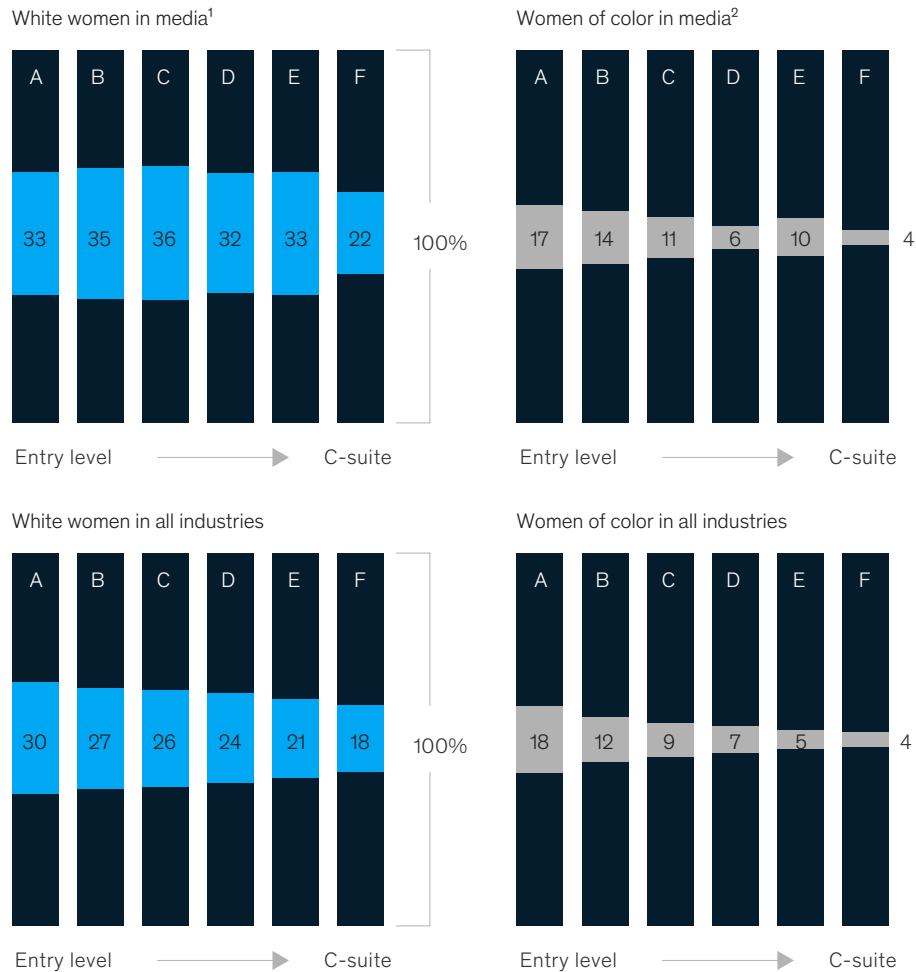
Taking action

As the numbers suggest, there are many obstacles for women in media and entertainment. But the two biggest challenges are the lack of women's

Exhibit 5

Women of color are poorly represented across all levels in media and entertainment.

Female representation pipeline, by ethnicity, by career level, % of employees

A = Entry level   **B** = Manager   **C** = Senior manager/director   **D** = Vice president   **E** = Senior vice president   **F** = C-suite

White women in media[1]

A	B	C	D	E	F
33	35	36	32	33	22

100%

Entry level ——→ C-suite

Women of color in media[2]

A	B	C	D	E	F
17	14	11	6	10	4

Entry level ——→ C-suite

White women in all industries

A	B	C	D	E	F
30	27	26	24	21	18

100%

Entry level ——→ C-suite

Women of color in all industries

A	B	C	D	E	F
18	12	9	7	5	4

Entry level ——→ C-suite

Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.
[1]Aggregate results from participating companies in media and entertainment (15 companies submitted pipeline data).
[2]Women and men of color include individuals identified as Asian, American Indian, Black, Latino/Latina, Pacific Islander, and mixed race. Individuals identified as "other" race/ethnicity are not included.

representation in senior positions and the culture of biased behavior that negatively affects women's day-to-day experiences in the workplace. There are tangible ways that companies can tackle both and help to level the playing field in the media and entertainment industry.

To help women advance to senior positions

Appoint more women to board positions. Adding more women to the board can help ensure greater gender parity as companies evaluate candidates for senior-leadership positions. Board diversity can help to draw in and motivate more talented

Exhibit 6

Women in media and entertainment experience biased behavior and notice when it happens to others.

Women being judged by different standards than men is the biggest challenge to achieving gender parity in management, % of respondents who agree

Women	47
Men	20

2.3×
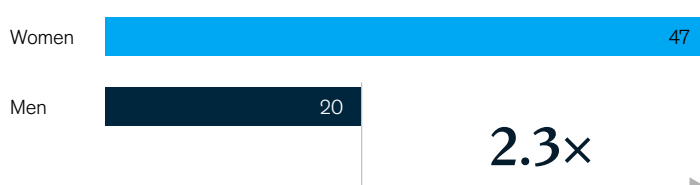
Men and women who heard or saw biased behavior toward women in the past year, % of respondents who agree

Women	34
Men	13

2.7×
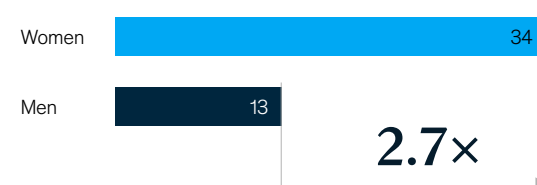
employees from a broader set of backgrounds. A good way to get started is for boards to make a visible commitment to diversity and set new principles for decision making—by including women on every candidate slate, for instance. They can also expand their criteria for who gets on the board—by considering candidates with the right expertise, for example, and not just those with prior experience.[8]

Establish senior-sponsorship programs. Sponsorship is crucial to career advancement for both men and women, but research shows they often have networks of different sizes and compositions. For instance, women's networks tend to be mostly female, while men's networks are mostly male.[9] This can become a disadvantage over time because of the lack of senior women available to provide sponsorship to the next generation of women. To bridge this gap, companies can create formal sponsorship programs that connect executives to high-potential women with the goal of building relationships, providing advice, and most important, creating opportunities.

Create and commit to a culture of accountability. Ensuring that people at the top of the organization

are accountable for diversity and inclusion can help shed light on the lack of women in leadership positions. As it stands now, 53 percent of human-resources (HR) respondents from media and entertainment companies said that the head of HR was held accountable for progress (or lack thereof) on diversity metrics or targets, versus only 27 percent reporting that the CEO was held accountable. Compare that with the all-industry benchmark, where 62 percent of HR representatives said the head of HR was accountable and 53 percent said the CEO was held accountable. If companies are truly committed to diversity and gender parity, our research shows that the issue needs to be a top priority for senior leadership.[10] The BBC's 50:50 Project provides a good example: Tony Hall, director general of the BBC, set a target of having at least 50 percent women contributing to the creation of BBC content by 2019. In April 2018, only 27 percent of production teams associated with the 50:50 Project reported having at least 50 percent female contributors; by April 2019, that number had increased to 74 percent of production teams.[11]

Ensure fair evaluations. Establishing formal hiring and evaluation criteria for senior leaders, as well

[8] Celia Huber and Sara O'Rourke, "How to accelerate gender diversity on boards," *McKinsey Quarterly*, January 2017, McKinsey.com.
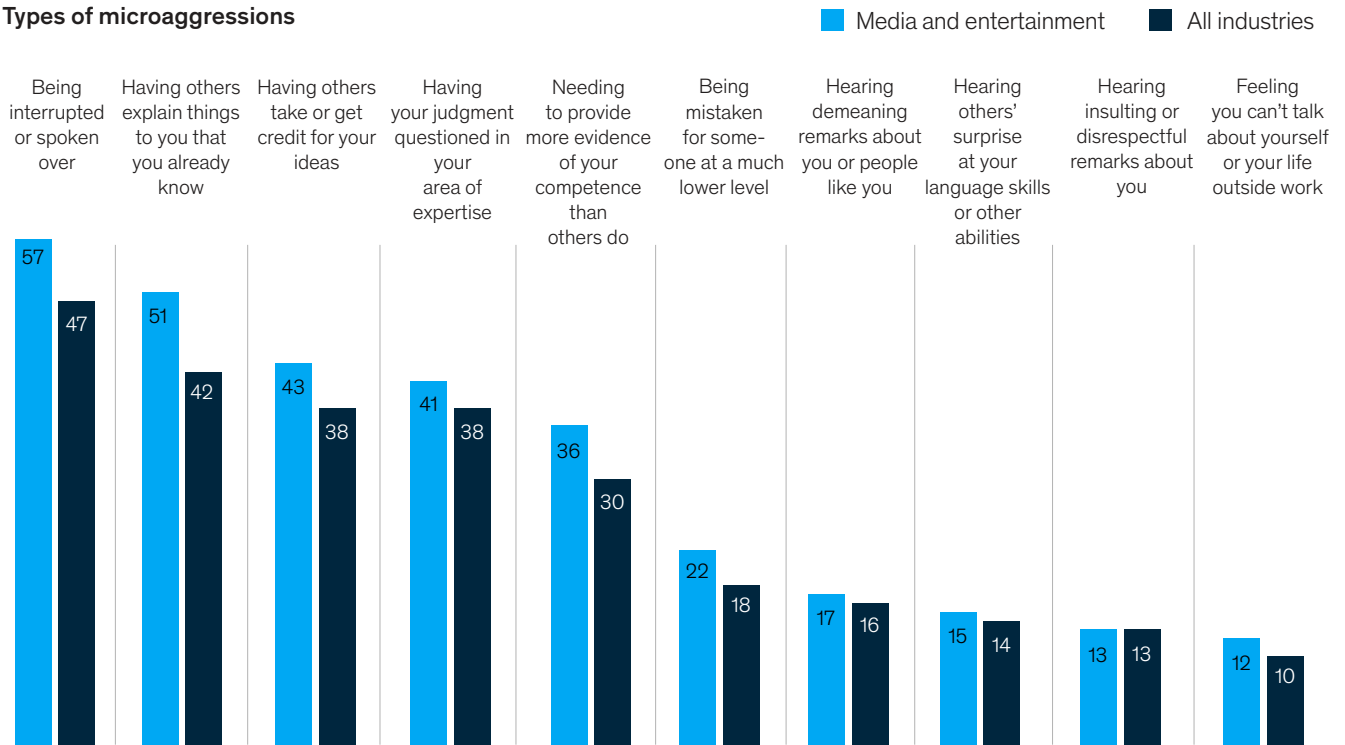[9] "Women in the Workplace 2016," McKinsey.com.
[10] Jess Huang, Alexis Krivkovich, Irina Starikova, Lareina Yee, and Delia Zanoschi, "Women in the Workplace 2019," McKinsey.com.
[11] "The BBC announces results of 50:50 Project which reveals big increase in female representation," May 15, 2019, bbc.co.uk.

Exhibit 7

Women in the media and entertainment industry experience microaggressions slightly more than women in other industries.

Types of microaggressions

■ Media and entertainment   ■ All industries

Being interrupted or spoken over	Having others explain things to you that you already know	Having others take or get credit for your ideas	Having your judgment questioned in your area of expertise	Needing to provide more evidence of your competence than others do	Being mistaken for some-one at a much lower level	Hearing demeaning remarks about you or people like you	Hearing others' surprise at your language skills or other abilities	Hearing insulting or disrespectful remarks about you	Feeling you can't talk about yourself or your life outside work
57 / 47	51 / 42	43 / 38	41 / 38	36 / 30	22 / 18	17 / 16	15 / 14	13 / 13	12 / 10

as rank-and-file managers, can help break down entrenched systems that have led to unequal representation at senior levels. One way to formalize these processes is to mandate that companies build diverse candidate slates when hiring; that is, the list of candidates should include at least two qualified women or minority candidates for the hiring managers' consideration. Another way to ensure that evaluations are fair is to track the outcomes of hiring and promotions to determine whether certain candidates or certain genders, races, or ethnic groups are being favored. The data will reveal whether hiring managers are following company policies, or if new policies need to be created to ensure fair outcomes.

To help address culture issues

Establish a systematic training program to combat biases. Cognitive biases can creep into performance evaluation and hiring processes, at all levels. To help mitigate these biases, companies should offer unconscious-bias training at important decision-making junctures—for instance, in the case of hiring or promotion decisions. Such training should be available to all, but especially for evaluators. Companies might even consider adding a bias observer to the process to flag any unconscious actions or views that may present themselves during performance evaluations or promotion discussions. When employees feel they have an equal opportunity for advancement and think the system is fair, they are likely to be happier with their

Women in news organizations

News organizations are a distinct and important part of the media and entertainment industry. They not only deliver daily information and reporting to the general public but they also help shape public opinion. We analyzed the talent-pipeline results from eight news organizations and found that despite some important progress for women in news, there remain significant challenges—particularly for women of color and for women at higher levels in the organization, who are leaving their companies at much higher rates than men. Here is a small snapshot of our findings:

Representation. At the manager level, women in news organizations represent 44 percent of employees, compared with 38 percent in corporate America overall; and at the senior-manager level, women comprise 43 percent of employees, compared with 34 percent in corporate America overall (Exhibit 1). Women of color represent 14 percent of entry-level employees at news organizations, compared with 17 percent in media and entertainment, and 18 percent in corporate America overall. This disparity is exacerbated throughout the pipeline. At the vice-president level,

for instance, women of color represent only 4 percent of employees at news organizations, compared with 6 percent of employees in media and entertainment and 7 percent of employees in corporate America overall.

Attrition. At almost every level, women in news organizations leave their companies at higher rates than men. At the vice-president level, for example, women's attrition rates are almost triple those of men (Exhibit 2).
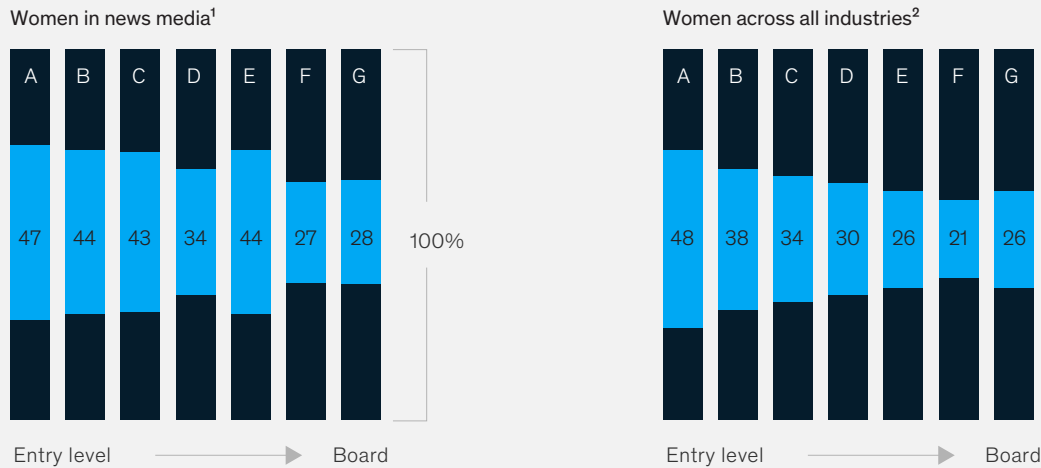
Organizational attention to diversity and inclusion. Only 14 percent of the news

Exhibit 1

Women are better represented in news organizations than they are in corporate America overall.

Representation pipeline by gender, by career level, % of employees

A = Entry level **B** = Manager **C** = Senior manager/director **D** = Vice president **E** = Senior vice president **F** = C-suite **G** = Board

Women in news media[1]

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
47	44	43	34	44	27	28

100%

Entry level → Board

Women across all industries[2]

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
48	38	34	30	26	21	26

Entry level → Board

Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.

[1]Aggregate results from participating companies in media and entertainment (15 companies submitted pipeline data).

[2]Aggregate results from 320 companies that reported their pipeline data, weighted by industry to the Fortune 500.

organizations surveyed set gender-based numeric targets for representation of all employees, as compared with 35 percent of companies in corporate America overall. What's more, news organizations reported

offering less training and fewer classes aimed at reducing bias and increasing diversity and inclusion than did companies in corporate America overall. Some provided unconscious-bias training (29 percent

versus 52 percent for companies in all industries), or sessions on managing or working with diverse teams (29 percent versus 37 percent for all industries).

Exhibit 2

At almost every level, women in news organizations leave their companies at higher rates than men.

Attrition rates by gender in news organizations, %
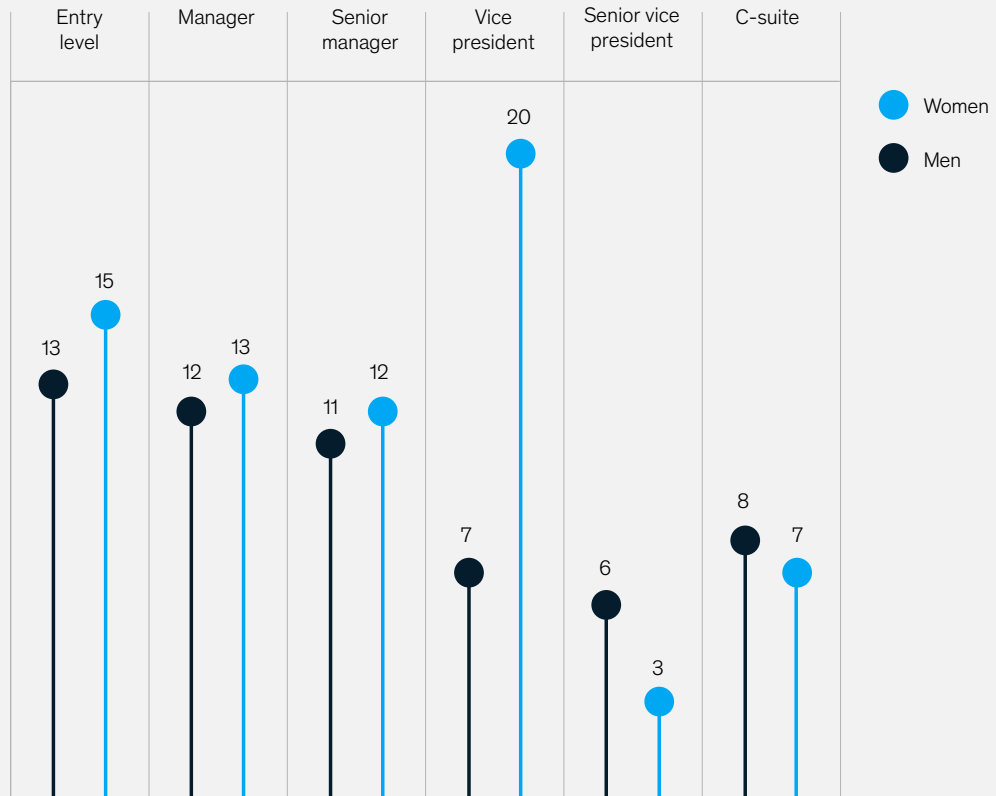
Source: 2019 Women in the Workplace pipeline data for Canada and the United States

career, plan to stay at their company longer, and are more likely to recommend it as a great place to work.

Biased behaviors can be deeply held, so one-off trainings or all-hands meetings may not be enough to change behaviors. True change will require a well-orchestrated campaign of diversity training, frequent communication, leadership modeling and support, and repetition. Such a programmatic approach to culture change should include systematic reminders and nudges about the characteristics of inclusive environments, as well as training and workshops that are aimed at changing behaviors. In an industry in which whom you know can be just as important as *what* you know, HR should deploy a programmatic approach to ensure that inclusivity is top of mind in the workplace day to day.

Listen to a woman's perspective. A good way to understand how to create more inclusivity in organizations is to learn from the women who have risen to leadership roles despite the obstacles in their way. For instance, when we asked 150 attendees at a women-only leadership program about their day-to-day work experiences, the systematic shortfalls became clear. Companies must expand the definition of leadership to encompass a range of styles and traits. They need to telegraph to employees at all levels that leaders need solid nurturing, collaboration, and listening skills, for example, as much as they need a strong and directive tone. Companies must also encourage dissent, so employees won't be afraid to speak up

about inequities and raise awareness about the challenges they face. And they must create space for reflection about gender and leadership issues—for instance, seeking feedback on this topic not just once a year, but on a rolling basis.[12] By making progress in each of these areas, companies can create more inclusive workplaces, improve retention rates among female leaders, and help women fulfill their career goals.

Enlist men as allies. Our research revealed a significant awareness gap between men and women in media and entertainment with regard to noticing biased behaviors in the workplace. A good first step toward closing this gap would be to provide training for employees at all levels on how to work within diverse teams—how to vary communication styles, for example, or how to recognize and limit microaggressions. Several global organizations, including UN Women, provide corporate-action kits to help with just this goal and to promote workplace equality.[13]

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Given the nature of the media and the entertainment industry's ability to influence culture at large through its production of film, video, and news publications, it is important for this industry to pay close attention to inclusion principles. As this report suggests, progress has been made, but there is more work to be done.

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[12] Natacha Catalino and Kirstan Marnane, "When women lead, workplaces should listen," McKinsey.com, December 2019.
[13] "Take action," HeForShe, heforshe.org.