Communities and Communication: Diverse Voice

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Talent Representation and Diversity: M88 and MACRO

Abstract

In media scholarship, the roles that talent intermediaries including talent agents and managers play in production has gone frequently overlooked (Lotz, 2014: 27-28; Roussel, 2017: 194-195). In 2018, however, UCLA’s annual *Hollywood Diversity Report* found that talent agencies and talent managers perform gatekeeping roles that contribute to the underrepresentation of women and people of colour in Hollywood film and television production (Hunt et al. 2018: 28-32). Since the publication of this report, a greater spotlight on diversity in Hollywood following especially the #MeToo, #OscarsSoWhite and #BlackLivesMatter movements have led to incremental gains being made for women and people of colour in screen production, especially in television (citation). In turn, some shifts have occurred in the talent representation business.

One manifestation of these circumstances came in 2020 when Charles D. King, the first ever African American partner at WME and the founder of production firm MACRO, partnered with Phillip Sun, one of WME’s first ever Asian American partners, to establish M88, a talent management firm focused on representing diverse voices (Tran, 2020). Recruiting marquee clients including Ryan Coogler, Michael B. Jordan and Idris Elba and maintaining links with WME, M88 positioned itself as a potentially powerful new player in the Hollywood talent representation business. Thus, Sun stated, ‘Where M88 can be a leader in the industry is to shine the light that a successful representation firm can look like us … How do we keep pushing the bar for the next generation?’ (Lee, 2020). With all of this in mind, this paper takes M88 and its parent company MACRO as a case-study for shedding light on the role that talent agencies and management companies play in improving or restricting diversity in screen media production. In doing so, the paper explores to what extent real change is occurring and asks whether companies such as M88 can really help to bring about the change that is needed.

Keywords

M88, MACRO, Talent Agencies, Talent management, Black Lives Matter

Author Biography

Dr. Andrew Stubbs is senior lecturer of Film, Media and Communication at Staffordshire University. He has written articles exploring the relationship between talent managers and auteurs in an era of media convergence including: ‘Packaging House of Cards and The Knick: How Talent Intermediaries Manage the Indie-Auteur Brand to Sell Premium Television’ (2020) and ‘Spike Jonze and Music Video Work: Talent Management and the Construction of an Indie-Auteur’ (2019). He is now in the process of writing a monograph on the topic for Edinburgh University Press. He is also co-managing editor of the *International Journal of Creative Media Research* and is on the editorial board of the journal for *Short Film Studies*.