

# A SWIFT MISSION:

Tackling the Gender Disparities in South Africa's  
film and television industry



# SWIFT

Sisters Working In Film & TV

Co-authored by Lebohang Ntoele and Monique Atougua  
commissioned by SWIFT

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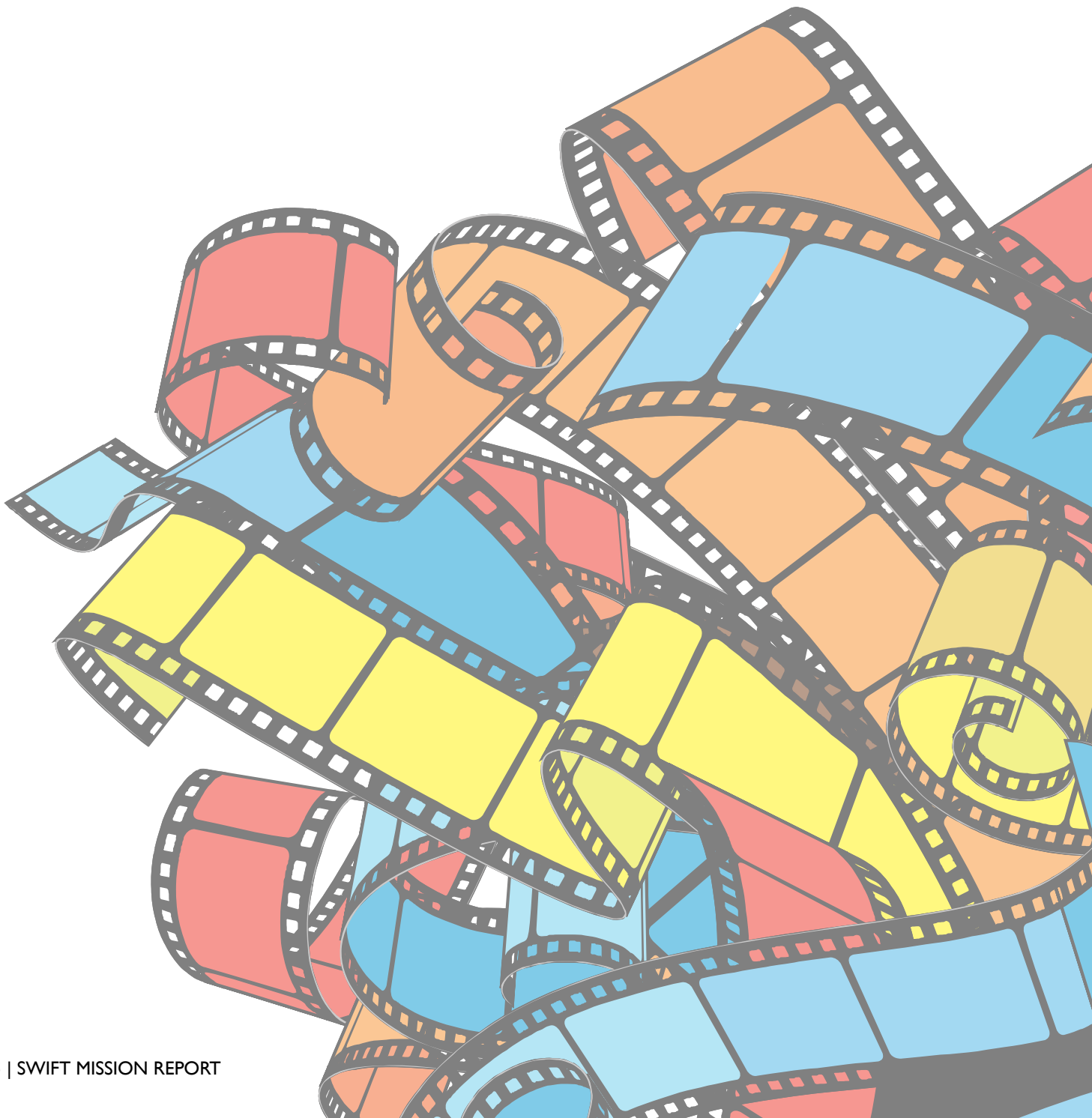
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## 01 Acknowledgments

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Lastly to the many inspirational women near and far, who through their achievements, great work and pioneering, help us to combat our own imposter syndrome and inspire us to be better feminists.



## 02 Glossary of Terms

### **Ableism**

A term used to describe discrimination or prejudice against the differently abled, based on their perceived inabilities. Wherein these disabilities are seen as defects to be repaired rather than differences (Zelinger, 2015).

### **Consent**

The freedom to agree voluntarily or to give permission. This is not simply verbal.

### **Discrimination**

Refers to the unjust or unequal treatment of different categories of people because of and on the grounds of their characteristics such as sex, gender, race, age etc. Discrimination is also the most striking evidence and reproduction of social power, in that it is the power or act of distinguishing.

### **Gender**

Exists on a spectrum and is based on the differentiation between masculine and feminine. Gender has a complex but bound interaction with the body, identity and expression (GenderSpectrum, 2017).

### **Imposter Syndrome**

A psychological phenomenon disproportionately affecting women, in which one feels inadequate and like a fraud, despite one's ample capabilities, skills and evident success (The Financial Diet, 2016).

### **Microaggressions**

Briefly, microaggressions can be described as the casual degradation of a marginalised group. This includes the commonplace verbal and nonverbal, slights and insults, whether intentional or not, which reinforce hostile or demeaning messages based solely on the victim's membership to the marginalised group (Sue, 2010).

### **NFVF**

National Film and Video Foundation

### **Patriarchy**

Refers to a socio-political system in which men occupy the primary roles of power and dominate in other influential aspects of society such as moral authority, leadership, social privilege and control of capital. These unequal power relations are historic, whereby women have systematically been disadvantaged and oppressed (Mhkize, 2017).

### **Rape Culture**

Refers to a pervasive environment wherein rape is prevalent and sexual violence is normalised and even excused in popular media and culture. Rape Culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, microaggressions, the objectification of the feminine body, the glamorisation of sexual violence as well as ignorance surrounding consent, thereby giving rise to a society that fails to prioritise women's rights and safety (Marshall University, 2017).

### **SAFT**

South African film and television

### **SWIFT**

Sisters Working In Film and Television

### **Sexual Harassment**

Refers to unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours (rationalised or excused as a means to advance in one's career) verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which creates a hostile or insecure environment for the victim, predominantly women.

### **Violence**

Johan Galtung defined violence as present when harm is by definition avoidable. He emphasized somatic, psychological and systematic harm (further defining structural and cultural violence- since then more categories have since been added to this literature, such as symbolic violence). Through this thorough definition of violence it becomes clear that violence does not always have a clear subject-action-object structure but can be built-in in social, political or economic structures (Galtung, 1969: 169- 175).

## 03 Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged both at a national and industry level, that there are numerous transformational gaps in the South African film and television (SAFT) industry even twenty-three years into being a working democratic state. Having emerged from a highly segregated and discriminatory political economy, the South African film and television landscape has inherited the institutional cultures and practises implemented by colonialism, apartheid, and cultural imperialism from the Global North. As such it has been recognised that the industry's ownership and participation practises have been informed by the dominance of a white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy (NFVF, 2015: 4; Treffry-Goatley,

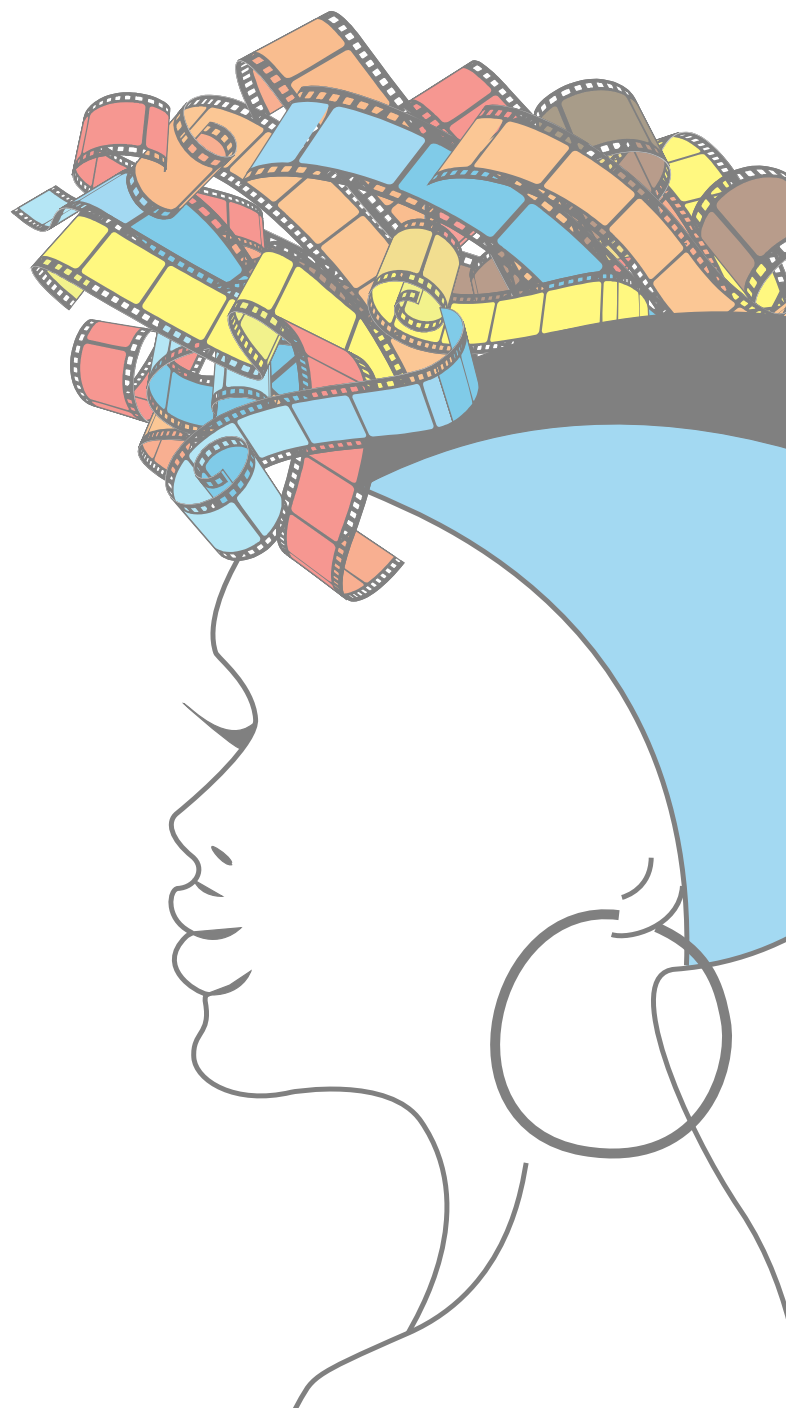
2010). Moreover, the profit driven demands of the industry structure have hindered considerations towards transformation priorities based on gender, race, class and sexual orientation (NFVF, 2015: 5).

A clear indication of this lack of prioritisation for the reform of the industry is evident in the limited data available on the volume and structure of the industry itself. More specifically, the infrequency of knowledge production leads to gaps in the data with regards to the aforementioned factors, specifically regarding that of gender and race. In light of this, this report aims to begin contributing to the body of work required to fill up these lacunas.

## 04 SWIFT

On behalf of Sisters Working In Film and Television (SWIFT), a research report based on a survey conducted by SWIFT between the months of January and April 2017, has been collated and organised by the authors of this paper. SWIFT is a non-profit organisation (NPO) based in South Africa, formed in response to a shared consensus for a forum that addresses the concerns of women in the SAFT industry.

After a meeting that took place amongst over 40 women on the final day of the Durban Film Festival in 2016, a decision was made for further meetings to take place. These meetings took place in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban and have since resulted in the organisation establishing subcommittees looking at the organisational structure, skills and mentorship, and an advocacy platform for the industry. The concerns of the advocacy committee are to address the prevalence of gender disparities and sexual harassment in the industry. The survey that forms the basis of this report emerges from this committee as a means to establish a foundation on which to action their advocacy goals. This survey was disseminated digitally and proposed questions specifically appealing to potential members and supporters of SWIFT.



## 05 Methodology

***This research report applied a mixed method research methodology, which allowed the analysis of quantitative data obtained through closed-ended survey questions as well as an interpretative analysis of qualitative data obtained through the respondents' elaborations within the survey. Within our findings themes and patterns have been found and highlighted which will allow for transformative measures to be taken and applied by the organisation.***

The survey was distributed via online media platforms through SWIFT's social media pages, namely Facebook and Twitter, as well as a member specific mailing list, and marketing efforts made through online publications and radio. The target audience of respondents was aimed at individuals who identify as women. The surveys were made available for response for the duration of four months, from January to April 2017. Due to the channels of distribution it is evident that the respondents were

expected to be individuals who were already aligned with or in support of the organisation's objectives. Alongside previous engagements in meetings, the distributions would result in somewhat pre-determined feedback expectations that will be further engaged with in the findings of this paper.

The survey provided by SWIFT was set with the intention to find out about the experiences of being a woman in the SAFT industry. The survey was initially divided into two sections labelled as 'Section 7.1A' and 'Section 7.2B' addressing matters relating to experiences of sexual harassment, assault and discrimination in the workplace. In the process of collating the data the sectors have been further divided and referred to as follows: 'Section 7.1A' relates to personal variables and experiences of sexual harassment; 'Section 7.1B' relates to witnessing sexual harassment and assault in the workplace and 'Section 7.2B' relates to discrimination. The data provided in the surveys were then analysed by the authors of this report.

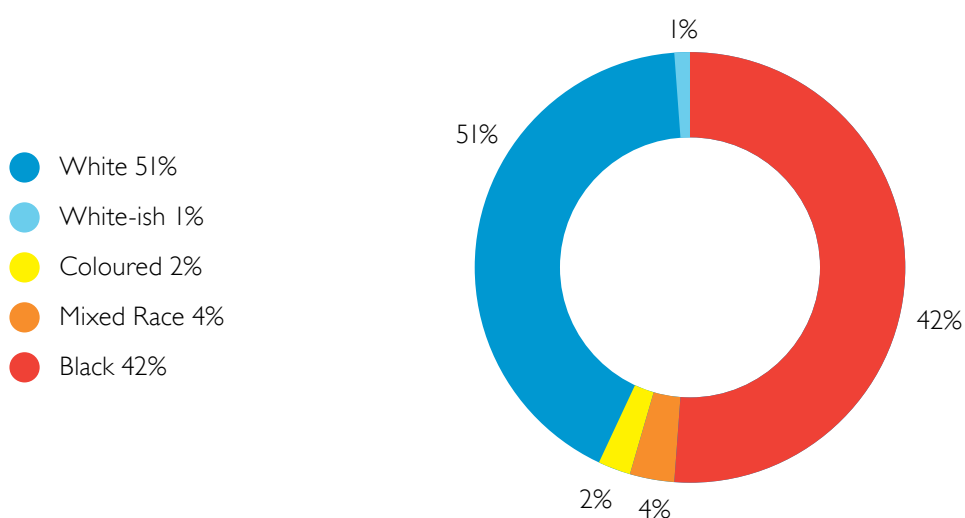
## 06 The sample: demographics of the respondents

A rich and varied spectrum of respondents emerged from a sample of 81 completed responses. Wide variations appeared in age, professional position, race, sexual orientation, location and years of experience within the industry, among several other factors. It is acknowledged that although this sample size may appear

to be small at first, it offers a highly fecund insight into an under-researched sector of the industry. Moreover, this research will provide a base from which to form a culture that aims to increase the production of knowledge for the SAFT industry.

**Figure 1**

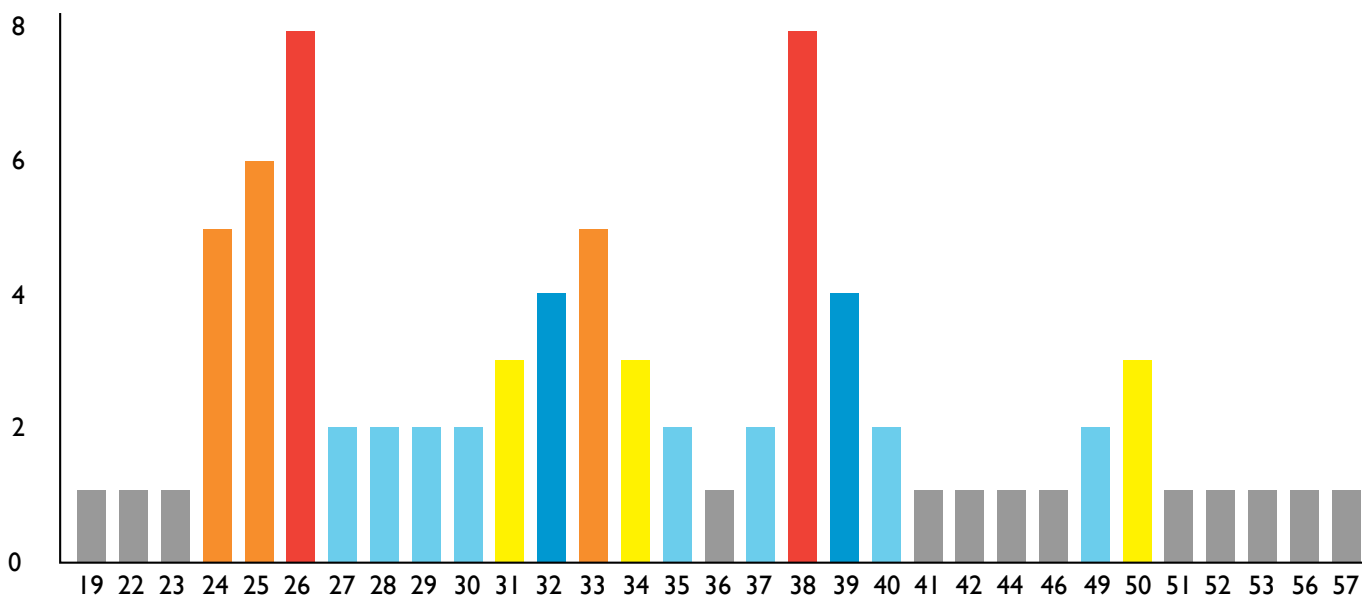
**RACE OF RESPONDENTS**



As is clear from Figure 1 above, the racial majority of survey respondents were white but not by a large margin (52% as opposed to 48% respondents of colour). It has been noted that this sample is racially skewed and not reflective of the racial demography of South Africa. This likely reflects the lingering legacies of white privilege for entering, staying

and contributing to the industry, but without available data to map the racial demographics of the SAFT industry it is difficult to judge the racial representation of the survey's sample. It does, however, still provide an accurate insight into the SAFT industry and particularly useful insights for this report.

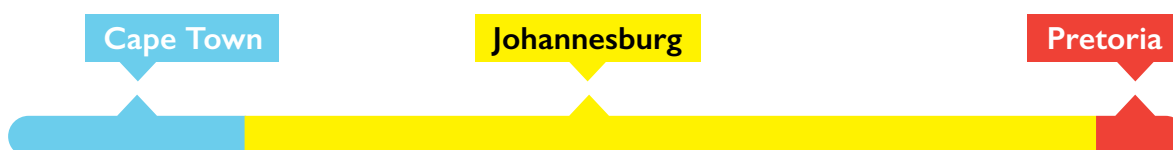
**Figure 2** AGE OF RESPONDENTS



As can be seen above, the sample provides a wide and varied range of women working in the industry, with the

most concentrated ages being those in their mid-twenties and mid-to-late thirties.

**Figure 3** LOCATION OF RESPONDENTS

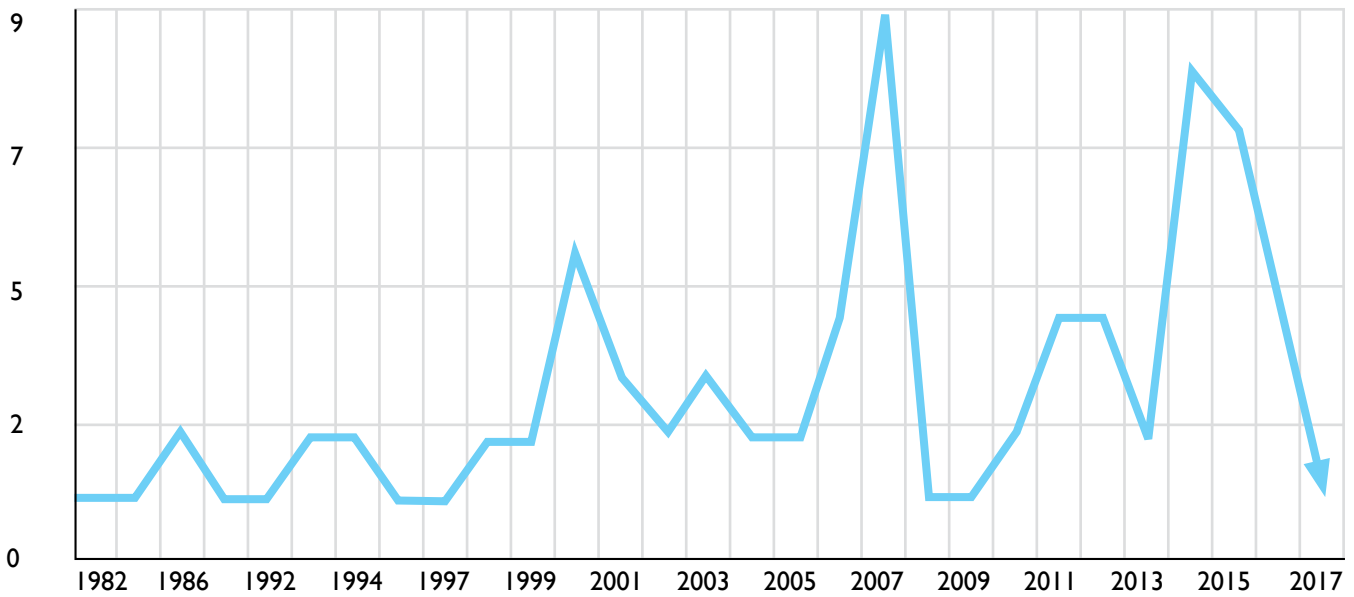


Of the sample's 81 respondents, a significant majority (79%) were based in Johannesburg. This either reflects SWIFT's locational bias or simply reflects Johannesburg's economic position relative to other South African cities. Being South Africa's biggest economic hub, it seems likely that this metropolis can and does offer more opportunities to women, particularly black women and women of colour. A stark realisation in the survey came from the lack of responses from other economic hubs, most significantly, women filmmakers in Kwa-Zulu Natal. It is therefore acknowledged that this report is skewed towards the experiences of women filmmakers based in Johannesburg and more research needs to be focused on other provinces.

The respondents' year of entry into the industry confirms a recent NFVF report which indicates that the industry opened up more from the 2000s, specifically beginning to accommodate women more from this period onwards (NFVF, 2015: 3-4). This follows a general increase in women in the South African labour force during this period (NFVF, 2015: 3-4). This sample therefore confirms broader political-economic shifts of women more visibly entering different industries of the South African economy. That being said, better representation does not always result in substantive transformation, as this report will further illustrate in its findings.

**Figure 4**

**YEAR OF ENTRY INTO THE INDUSTRY**



## 07 Findings

### Section 7.1A: Sexual Harassment: The normalisation of rape culture

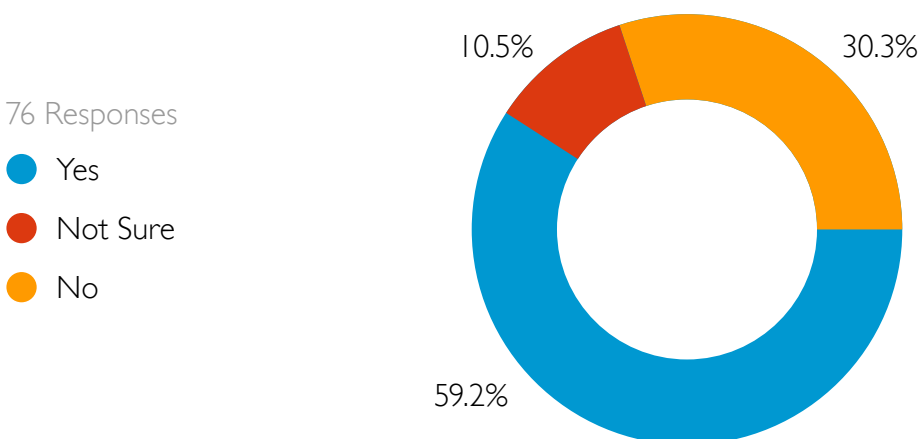
An initial observation in the structure of the SWIFT survey is the cumulative way it frames and queries discrimination in the SAFT industry. This allowed the authors of this report to gain a full and comprehensive understanding of the ways in which gendered discrimination and harassment manifests and becomes normalised. Following the personal variables asked in Questions 1-7 in which the nature of the

sample is made evident, the first set of questions in Section A concerns the experiences of sexual harassment and discomfort due to unwanted advances in the workplace.

These questions are subdivided according to stares or looks which caused discomfort (Q7.1A:a), unwillingly or coerced touching (Q7.1A:d) and rape (Q7.1A:e); while the

#### Section 7.1A: Question A

a.) Did a stare or look in your direction that made you feel uncomfortable (any and all feelings of discomfort, upset and unease)?



final question (Q7.1B:f) provides space for the elaboration of other experiences therein not included. Within each question a further subset of questions asks for i) elaboration, ii) the frequency of the form of harassment, iii) the gender of the perpetrator and iv) their position relative to that of the respondent (higher, equal or lower). This subset of questions provided a crucial space for testimonials, which were drawn on extensively in the writing of this report.

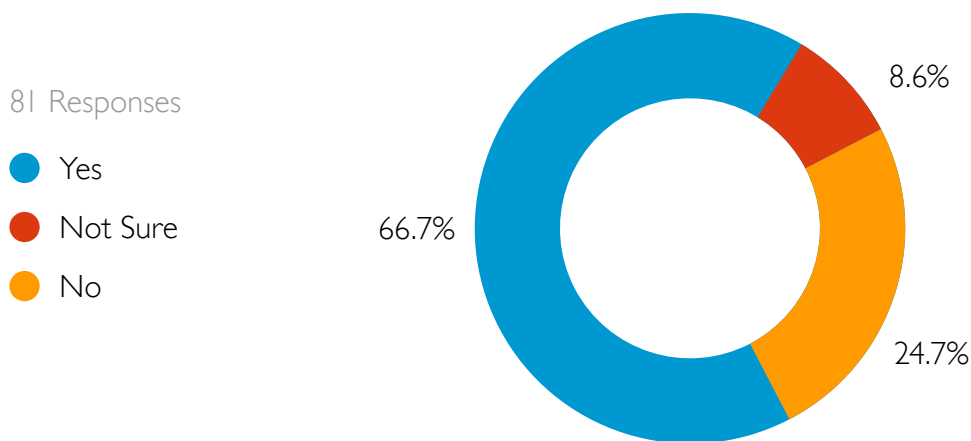
From this subset of questions, it is evident that the perpetrators were overwhelmingly identified as men, as indicated by question Q7.1A:a) 76%, Q7.1A:c) 89% and Q7.1A:d) 86%. This alludes to the patriarchal nature of the SAFT industry and suggests that although women in the workplace may have greater access and visibility in recent years, this does not necessarily translate into equal occupation, security and accommodation therein. It can be seen in the responses and the analysis thereof that the SAFT industry is an insecure environment for women, not conducive to their equal and full potential contributions. While important insight can be gained from each question and its subset of questions, the nature of the quotidian harassment and rape culture in the SAFT industry becomes a lot more striking in respondents' testimonials. Most

respondents admitted to often experiencing lingering and leering stares from male co-workers and generally being regarded as less knowledgeable and capable as well as routinely being seen as sexual objects before colleagues or professionals.

According to testimonials given by the respondents, this can manifest in a number of ways, one of the most common of which was the policing of how women dress in the SAFT workplace. Despite the absence of a dress code in most SAFT contracts, respondents explain the constant policing by male colleagues regarding how they should present at work. Most commonly cited were comments directed at women to wear tighter, more revealing clothes, high-heels, make-up and otherwise feminine gendered clothing. Many respondents wrote that they were discouraged from being assertive, one respondent quoting a male colleague who told her that assertiveness was only "attractive in the bedroom" while other respondents had physically been removed or had their mouths shut by male colleagues when speaking. A great number of respondents wrote that they were routinely referred to by unprofessional and patronising names such as 'princess', 'honey', 'sweetie', 'baby' etc.

## Section 7.1A: Question B

b.) Have you in any way felt uncomfortable in the workplace due to unwanted advances by co workers?



Moreover, many respondents noted that sexual advances by male colleagues were normal in the workplace, despite their expressed disinterest. Numerous respondents explained how the workplace is often manipulated by male counterparts to further these advances, for example cell phone numbers being extracted from the crew list and used to inappropriately contact and harass female colleagues; 'wrap' parties being regarded as a predetermined site of sexual contact; and women being strategically included in certain meetings or events to "disarm" investors. 64,5% of respondents said that they were non-consensually

touched, and explanations throughout the elaborations sections of Section A1 mentioned a culture of normalised, inappropriate, uncomfortable and unsolicited hugging, butt-slapping, brushes or other 'accidental' contact (including that of genitals).

Something which requires further research and which only came up in two testimonials is the perception of pregnant women or women who would like to or do have children. According to the aforementioned testimonials, pregnancy is openly looked down upon and discouraged in the SAFT

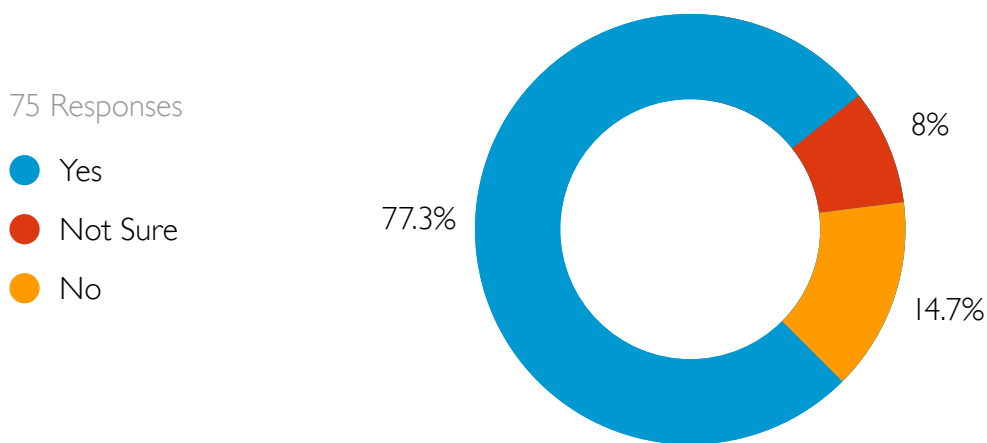
workplace and little accommodation is made for women who are also mothers. Both testimonials reflected that women in the industry who choose to or do have children are somewhat vilified. Again, considering the limited feedback on this issue, more research is required.

Something to note, is that throughout this section the myth that women are sexually discriminated against and

harassed predominantly by those in higher positions to them is subverted. It is herein clear from the responses that discrimination is experienced on all levels within the industry and that perpetrators are as likely to be in higher, equal or lower positions to their victims. This illustrates that it is not so much professional hierarchies which reinforce discrimination but rather the cultures within the SAFT industry and South African society at large.

### Section 7.1A: Question C

c.) Comments directed at which made you feel uncomfortable.



## Section 7.1A: A Breeding Ground for Microaggressions

The majority of respondents indicated that they had experienced the most common forms of gendered discrimination, as outlined in Questions 7.1A: c to d, creating frequent discomfort and unease for them in the workplace. While seemingly 'harmless' and rarely addressed or taken seriously as harassment, these common patriarchal, microaggressions enforce informal gendered power dynamics and control. In elaborations following these questions, it seems clear that the respondents feel and are made to feel, even by other women in the industry, that this treatment is part of the nature of the industry and it is them who must adapt or leave.

When microaggressions are undermined and are given the space to occur more frequently, a culture of degradation is normalised in which more violent abuses can occur. Illustrations of this appear in testimonials, a few examples of which are business meetings conducted in strip clubs, being denied a separate room and bed on off-site or festival business travel, and phones not being banned on set and hence being used to film semi-nudity and full nudity scenes by crew and sundry, unpermitted

by the actress. Moreover, a number of respondents who had experienced a high degree of sexual harassment and insecurity in the workplace due to a male colleague, also admitted that they had knowledge of other women either resigning or being fired due to incidents by the same perpetrator, whose position was retained and secure.

Thus it is clear that this culture not only creates an insecure and uncomfortable working environment for women but can have dire career outcomes. For example, a respondent explained how she was denied work as a continuity supervisor because she was "too pretty" and "would intimidate" the actresses on set. The same respondent was only later employed as nobody else was able to take up the position. Similarly, a woman who had been experiencing sexual harassment by a senior male colleague was later fired by her producer under suspicions that she was having an affair with him. This was despite having confided in her female, executive producer who told her the sexual harassment was her fault.

## Section 7.1A: When a culture of microaggressions leads to physical violence

While many respondents could freely describe and indicate experiences of frequent gendered discrimination and harassment, proportionately less respondents voiced experiences of non-consensual or coerced touching and penetration, the most extreme and violent forms of sexual harassment. That being said, 23,7% of 76 respondents indicated that they had been unwillingly touched and 11,8% indicated that they were unsure, suggesting that these are not unexceptional experiences but rather that the normalisation of lesser aggressions compounds the silencing of more violent harassment and abuse. This percentage is significantly lower than that of a similarly phrased question regarding being touched non-consensually earlier in the survey. This is either a sign of participant fatigue or the culture of silence around harassment making the same respondents doubt the severity of their experiences. Further, because of the implied consequences of speaking out about the discomfort and harassment in the industry, a sizable number of respondents within this section expressed uncertainty about their victimisation.

Ultimately, in Question 7.1A:d, which asks about rape, of the 70 of the original 81 respondents, only one respondent indicated that they had been raped in their workplace and another indicated that they were unsure. There are eleven respondents who are unaccounted for

in this question, and while their absence should not be overstated, there is a possibility that even in an anonymous survey it can be difficult for survivors to break the silence. The occurrence of this single violent incident affirms that within the industry there has been a culmination of gendered harassment in its most violent form. This is one occurrence too many and alerts to the possibility that it is not the only one.

Moreover, as has been touched on above, through numerous testimonials in the 'elaboration' sub-sections, many respondents either knew of somebody that had been raped or had had experiences where they feared they would be raped, in the SAFT industry. A particularly shocking testimonial which illustrates how rape culture culminates into an outright violent working culture, was that of a young woman who 'blacked out' on set with other crew members present and upon waking and suspecting she had been raped, she was victim-blamed by her producer and later fired for getting a rape kit done, on the grounds of bringing her company and colleague's name into disrepute. She then left the industry completely. The common practice of women simply 'disappearing' after incidents of sexual harassment, whatever the degree, highlights how underrepresented and underestimated the gravity of rape culture within the SAFT industry is, and how little recourse there is for such harassment.

### Section 7.1A: Question D

d.) Non Consensual/unwillingly coerced touch on any part of your body.

76 Responses



### Section 7.1A: Question E

e.) Non Consensual/unwillingly coerced penetration (rape).

70 Responses



## Section 7.1A: Little or No Support

In light of these questions, Section 7.1B:b queries the respondents' knowledge or access to support structures and protocol available to them. Section 7.1B:b asks the respondents if they felt or knew of any support, platform or person they could confide in or approach to address the incident of which 71% indicated that they did not, and 17,7% indicated that they were unsure. This confirms the persistent lack of structures, regulations and organisations in place to address and prevent gendered discrimination and harassment.

For those who did confide in somebody within the industry, many respondents revealed that they were met with attitudes of resignation or further ostracized, even from other women or HR departments within the industry. Again, many expressed how they were made to feel that this was simply the nature of the industry and told to "harden the f\_\_k up" or simply told they were being "too sensitive". In one testimonial, a respondent mentions the discouraging case of a women who unsuccessfully took a male colleague to the CCMA for sexual harassment. This illustrates how normalised, self-perpetuating and internalised the culture of patriarchal domination is. Many

more expressed an evidently justified fear that reporting or confiding in a person or structure would damage their career prospects and jeopardise their current employment status, which anecdotes throughout the survey reveal as a commonplace reality. In addition, there seemed to be an underlying consensus that those they could confide in would be ill-equipped to assist or prevent further incidents. In one case where an incident was reported to a senior colleague, the situation was handled so unprofessionally that the victim was subjected to a second occurrence of harassment by the same perpetrator.

Besides issues relating to sexism, sexual harassment and gender discrimination, even in this survey it became clear that the industry itself is highly unregulated: with no labour board, standardised pay, legally recognised unions or support structures. Furthermore it has been noted more than once that there is no formal procedure or available recourse after being harassed or unfairly dismissed in the SAFT industry. While these issues are beyond the scope of this report, they do reinforce insecurity and inequity for the most vulnerable in the industry, especially people with disabilities, people of colour and women.

### Section 7.1A: Question F

f.) Respondents who felt they had a platform or individual(s) for support.



## Section 7.1B: Witness Intervention

This leads into Section 7.1B which deals with witnessing sexual harassment and assault in the workplace and the response of respondents thereafter. How incidents of discrimination and harassment are or are not dealt with is as important as the nature of the discrimination and

harassment itself, as it creates a precedent and informal protocol in work environments. Of 80 responses, 39% indicated that they had witnessed a colleague experience sexual harassment and a significant 15% indicated that they were unsure. Moreover, in a follow-up question, 91%

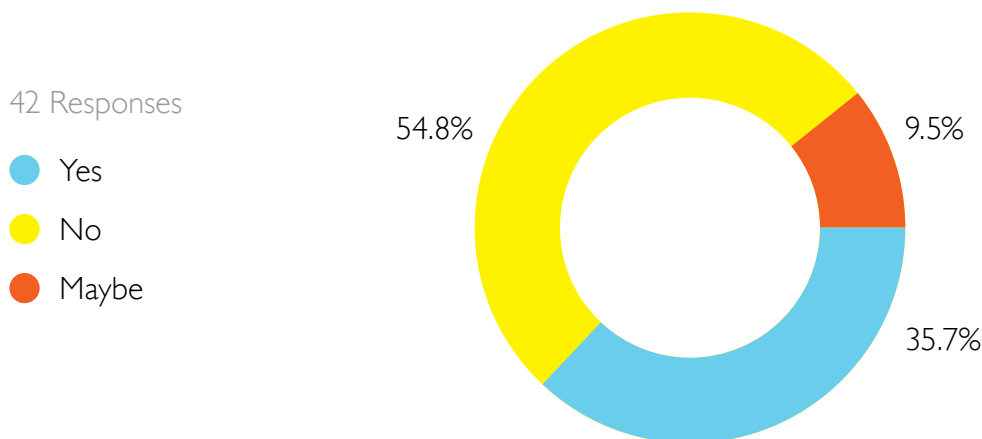
identified the perpetrator as a man. Most affirmed that they knew that there would no repercussions even if they did intervene or report what they witnessed.

In contrast to Section 7.1A in which professional hierarchy appeared not to influence the amount discrimination faced, 65% of respondents signified that they witnessed sexual harassment by a perpetrator in a higher position, 30% in an equal position and only 5% in a lower position. This clear hierarchy in the witnessing of discrimination in contrast to the experience thereof suggests that sexual discrimination and harassment becomes less visible or harder to detect, even for (potential) victims themselves, when the power dynamics between perpetrator and victim are not as stratified. This reconfirms the nature and operative ease of the culture of gendered harassment in the workplace.

While 54,8% of respondents indicated that they intervened 27% of these confirmed that they risked their job to do so. The elaboration section which followed showed the unease and uncertainty that these women felt in situations that they had either experienced or knew they could just as likely experience. Lastly it was subsequently unanimously acknowledged that if not them, it was unlikely that anybody else would or did intervene. This clearly shows the need for better established regulation, protocol and platforms for mediation. As such, it seems it would benefit the industry and the women therein to have a trained, independent watchdog entity and established protocol, perhaps including standardised non-disclosure forms for both freelance and permanent work. These suggestions and similar ideas were uniformly expressed in the testimonials of the survey and are being undertaken by SWIFT.

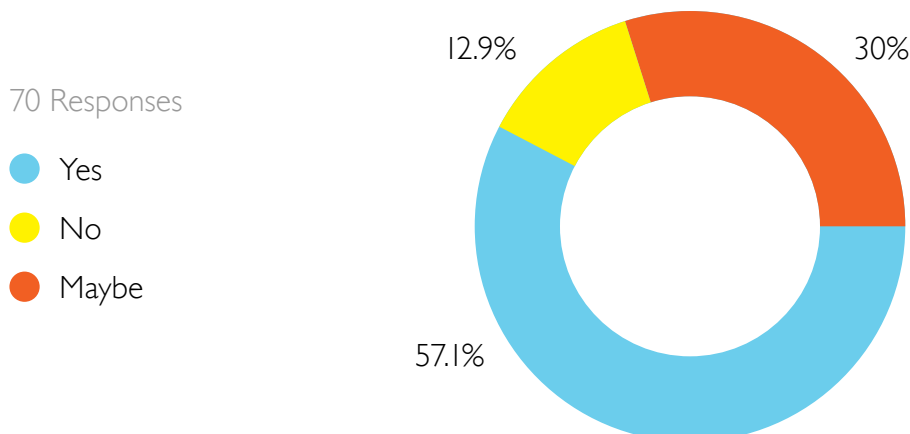
### Section 7.1B: Question A

a.) Did you intervene?



### Section 7.1B: Question B

b.) Would you benefit from having a watchdog body on set whose role involves dealing with issues of harassment. (Whether it be forming part of a line producer's role or a separate mandatory entity on set).

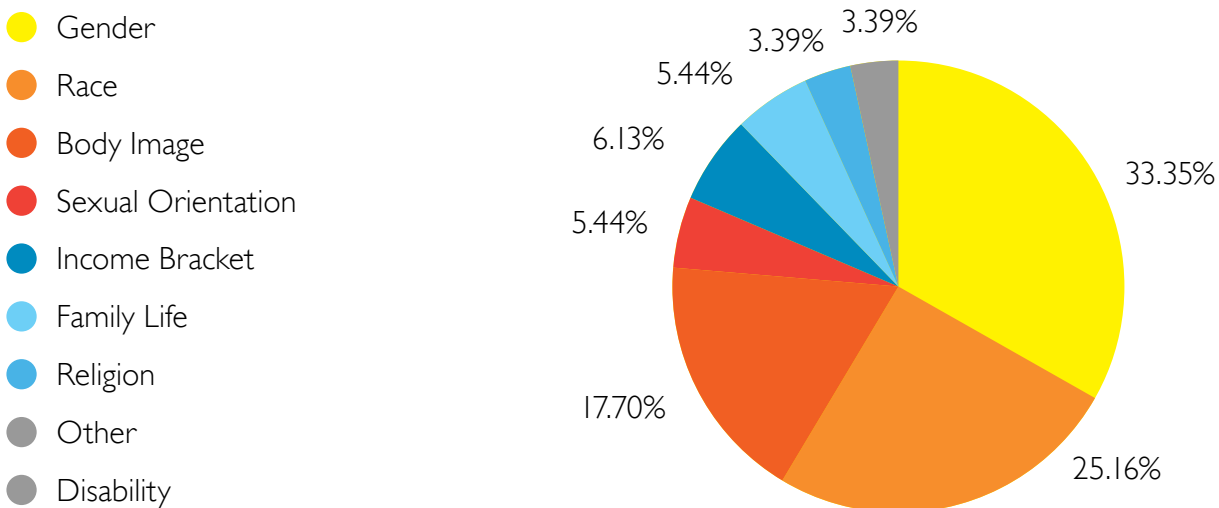


## Section 7.2: Discrimination

Within the responses given by participants of the survey a number of salient takeaways on the experience of discrimination in the workplace were found. To begin, the participants were asked if they had experienced discrimination based on any number of identity factors such as their gender, race, sexual orientation, body image, religion, family life, income bracket or any other components not listed. The participants were able to select more than one factor that may apply to their own identity and circumstances. Due to this feature it is established that all participants were able to indicate the simultaneous systems of oppression they had been subjected to at any point in time in their careers. Within this first question the following results were ascertained from 63 respondents:

- 77,8% of respondents felt they had been discriminated against based on their gender.
- 58% of respondents felt they had been discriminated against based on their race.
- 41,3% of respondents felt they had experienced discrimination based on their body image related to their body size or 'look'.
- A remaining 55,5% indicated that they had felt discriminated against based on sexual orientation, religion, family life, income bracket, or selected 'other'.
- 0% indicated any experiences of discrimination based on any possible disability.

**Figure 5** FACTORS OF DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCE



Moreover, the striking lack of representation in the results of those who experienced discrimination based on a disability may need to be considered as part of an oversight in reaching out to disabled women in the industry. Additionally, it was noted by a respondent that there is an apparent lack of disabled workers in the industry which may also account for why there are no expressions of discrimination thereof, suggesting that the industry itself is unaccommodating or inaccessible to those with disabilities.

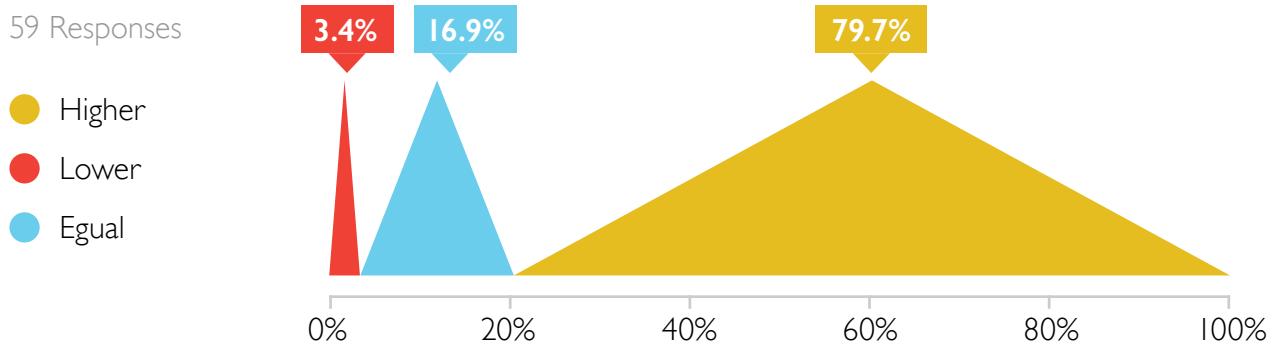
Participants were subsequently asked to identify the gender of the perpetrators of the discrimination they had experienced. Among the responses, 62% indicated that their perpetrators were men; 23% chose not to select one of the binaries offered and indicated 'other', and 14,8% indicated that their perpetrators were women. It was also noted that these results were based on 61 responses from the original 81 responses provided at the beginning of the survey. As the survey progressed towards

its end there was a significant drop in the number of responses based on the original 81 participants. This may be indicative that the participants found the survey to be too long or too difficult to continue with.

Alongside identifying the perpetrator's gender the participants were asked to indicate the working position of their perpetrator in relation to theirs. The options they were offered were either higher, lower or equal to their working position. The majority of the participants (79,7% of 59 responses) indicated that their experience of discrimination occurred from an individual in a higher position to theirs. 16,9% of 59 participants experienced discrimination enacted upon them from an individual in an equal position to them. It is therefore evident from these results that there is a strong correlation between the amount of discrimination one will face from being in a position that is lower or equal to an alleged perpetrator.

## Section 7.2: Question A

a.) Was this person in a higher position, lower or equal position to you at the time of the incident?



In instances provided, participants highlighted that they often found themselves being bypassed for opportunities in favour of white male counterparts. There is a significant number of experiences that indicated sexist and racist motivations in their undermining. Men, particularly white men, in managerial positions have been said to provide mentoring and growth opportunities to male trainees who have been "less enthusiastic and knowledgeable" while overlooking and failing to provide the same upward mobility to women trainees. Women working in technical positions, such as with the camera, have been considered to only be useful as hires when other women happen to be involved in shoots where they will be visibly exposed. A hiring practice such as this completely undermines any working female cinematographer's or photographer's skill set under the premise that they can only serve one purpose or subject. Several participants also indicated instances in which their sexual orientation made them the target of discrimination and hate speech based on being in same-sex relationships. Respondents mentioned being subjected to derogatory comments by colleagues based their sexuality.

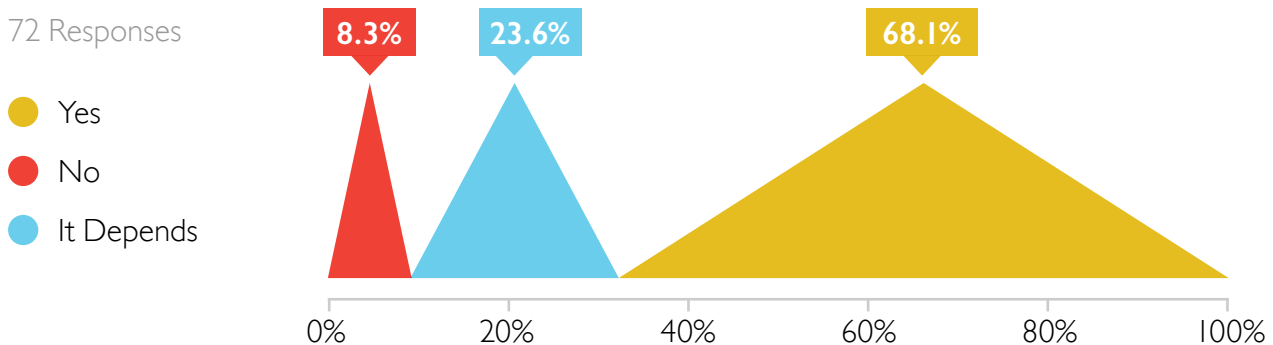
Participants were then asked if they felt they had to work harder than male counterparts in their workplaces. Out of 72 responses 68,1% believed they do, in fact, have to work harder

than their male colleagues; 23,6% considered that it depends on the circumstance they find themselves to be in and 8,3% of the respondents considered they did not have to work harder than their male counterparts. Experiences provided by respondents that felt they had no choice but to work harder than their male counterparts, ranged from observing male comraderies and "boys clubs" forming in predominantly male workspaces and knowing that men working on the same project are paid higher than women therein.

Moreover, women who have worked in or aimed to work in directorial positions have indicated that regardless of their years of experience, they have often not been allowed the opportunity to direct work. They expressed that they have been overlooked in favour of male counterparts with equal or less experience, based on the underlying belief that men have more technical capabilities. There were a number of women who related instances where they were expected to train male counterparts in positions they themselves had been expected to learn experientially only to then be surpassed once their colleague had been efficiently trained by them. Hence it can be seen that women are overlooked by both men and women in higher working positions for work and skills opportunities which would allow them to move beyond designated administrative and logistical work in the industry.

## Section 7.2: Question B

b.) Do you feel you have work harder than male counterparts to prove your worth?



In recognising the intersections of oppressive systems often at play for many women, the survey asked whether or not participants felt they had to work harder because of their race. Out of 71 responses, 42,3 % affirmed that they did feel under the pressure to work harder to prove themselves due to their race, while 19,7% believed that it was situation-dependent. Again, considering the racial demographics of the survey, this is a significant percentage, given that just under half of the participants who completed the survey were people of colour. This highlights the considerable racial legacies and lingering white supremacist culture within the industry.

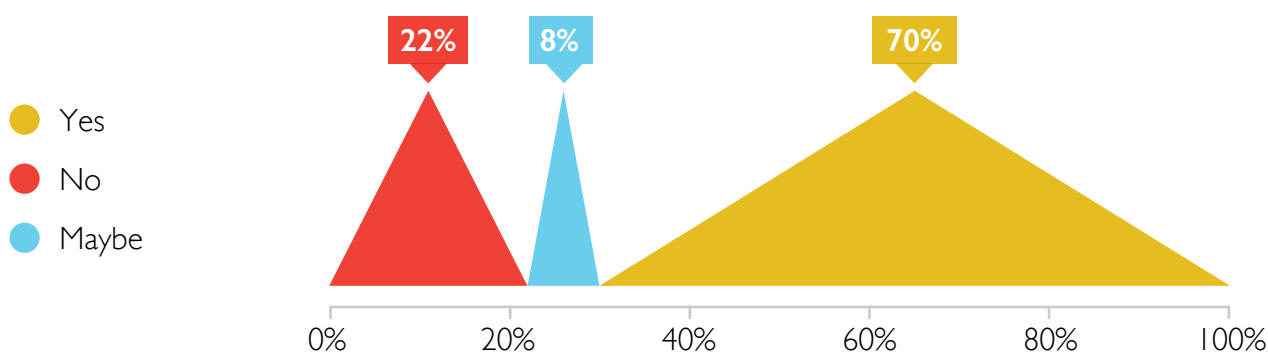
Several respondents shared that alongside their own experiences they often witnessed multiple forms of discrimination happening to their colleagues. Whether they chose to intervene or not, it is clear that there is a dominant culture built on the fear of jeopardising one's

position or future opportunities by speaking out against ill-treatment, especially against superiors. Respondents shared that in cases where they or a colleague chose to voice their opinion about mistreatment or managerial lapses, this would set them up for further victimisation. Other respondents who chose not to intervene or speak to superiors about moments of discrimination, shared a concern about the loss of work or other possible punishment for not enduring perceived poor treatment. Many among these participants believe that this culture does not provide any space for them to raise their concerns regarding poor treatment of themselves or others and that there is often not much that can be done.

As such, there is a notably high demand from respondents for a monthly emotional support group arranged with SWIFT to deal with matters raised within the survey as well as within meetings arranged by the organisation.

**Figure 6**

**DEMAND FOR SWIFT SUPPORT GROUP**



## 08 Imposter Syndrome: Working Twice as Hard, to get Half as Far

Given how prolific and normalised experiences of discrimination and harassment are for women in the SAFT industry and the lack of protocol and recourse therefor, an environment is fostered in which imposter syndrome is produced and reproduced. In an industry in which women are already hyper-sexualised, women in the SAFT industry must mediate the way their bodies are viewed before they can be taken seriously in their professional roles. This is especially the case with actresses, as was mentioned in a number of testimonials throughout the survey. Furthermore, the authors of this report found that the correlation for discrimination based on gender is more acutely experienced by younger women, specifically because of their more youthful (and thus more sexualised) appearance.

The normalisation of casual gender discrimination and sexual harassment creates a sense that women, and especially women of colour, in SAFT industry are 'lucky' just to be where they are. As such, speaking out about their mistreatment jeopardises already questioned credibility and capability in the workplace and endangers their position(s) therein. This manifests in women feeling that their competence is constantly in question and further inhibits their progress and advancement in the industry. Hence, these women may be less willing or dissuaded to put themselves forward for applying for jobs, promotions, and other employment opportunities, as confirmed by a number of respondents' testimonials.

A work environment in which women are not able to contribute fully or to their full potential is undoubtedly a loss for the industry. As a growing and increasingly influential industry with 7,4% of South Africa's GDP in the financial year 2016/ 2017 and thus an important site for public-private partnerships and employment, the SAFT industry has a high potential for transformational impact

and development. It is therefore important to drive home that this is not simply the concern of some women or women in the SAFT industry alone but all those invested in the South African socio-economic landscape. To foster or ignore a culture which penalises half or more of a potential workforce is not only a great social harm but a grave economic one too.

## 09 Limitations

There were a number of limitations regarding the SWIFT survey itself which limited this report's potential findings. To begin, the survey having been launched on SWIFT's social media platforms, had a limited reach, principally to SWIFT members and supporters. This method also excluded those who did not have access to the means to complete the survey: namely the technology, internet access and the social network through which the survey was administered. More than this, the survey would have been largely inaccessible to those with disabilities, particularly the visually impaired.

Another limitation occurred with the interpretation of key components in the survey, particularly the interpretation of discrimination in the South African historical context. Within the pool of 81 participants 52% of the respondents identified as white women and when questioned on the experiences of discrimination, 58% of respondents indicated that they had felt discriminated against based on race. A concern of the authors of this report is the indication in the testimonials by some respondents which highlight that they felt discriminated against by restorative measures such as affirmative action. For example, testimonials which read that respondents felt discriminated against when black industry counterparts, especially men, were awarded opportunities instead of them. In a country like South Africa, with a marked history of disenfranchisement based on race, class and gender, implemented politically and socio-economically, it is has nevertheless become

commonplace to act from a position of blissful ignorance. The legacies of colonialism and apartheid still run deep within the infrastructure and cultures of the industries in the South African economy. Therefore, the statistics regarding discrimination based on race are seen to be unreliable as more than half of the respondents appear to have misinterpreted the magnitude of discrimination in the South African context and thus what discrimination based on race means in such a context.

Once again, as has been noted earlier, there is very little data available on the demography and size of the SAFT industry and what information there is, for example, how many women there are in the industry itself, is often unreliable, sparse and cannot be cross-checked by any other sources. Thus, while it is recognised that this report cannot account or speak for everybody and every woman in the industry, it is the first that holistically attempts to do so.

Lastly, the SWIFT survey from which this report departs presented a narrow view of the understanding of gender by subscribing to the gender binary and in doing so reduced the nuanced experiences of harassment and discrimination. By not allowing room for those who are often marginalised on the gender spectrum and questioning the experiences of cis-heteronormative forms of sexual harassment and discrimination only, those who have no room to voice their experiences continue to be largely unheard.

<sup>1</sup> Studies reveals the South African film industry has a positive Economic Impact on the national economy (NFVF, 2015: 4)

<sup>2</sup> This is based on the perusal of freely available NFVF reports and independent research by the authors of this report.

## 10 Conclusion: A Call to Action

In observing the data provided by SWIFT in a survey conducted between January and April 2017, a minor study has allowed for the observations of salient disparities within different working environments in South Africa's developing film and television industry. A number of experiences of gendered, racialized and classed discriminations were shared by participants who took part in the survey. In as much as the industry continues to develop to provide economic and social transformation there remains underlying occurrences of discrimination informed by historical systems of domination based on gender, race and class. Moreover, these oppressive practices are reinforced by the lack of regulatory bodies and protocols informing all industry operations and work cultures.

With a focus on the experiences of women working in and entering the industry, the intentions for the research task are made clear in that they are set to determine remedial systems and institutions that will contribute to transformative development. This report therefore will form the bedrock of SWIFT advocacy and industry-based interventions into the normalised infringements occurring to women in the industry on a daily basis. It is important to note that this culture does not exist in a vacuum but is informed by a nationwide rape culture and hegemonic displays of patriarchy. However, the infrastructural and operational nature of the SAFT industry and its history, make disenfranchised groups more vulnerable to systematic violence.

Since the launch of the organisation and in the period in which this report was produced, SWIFT has developed a Code of Conduct which will become a mandatory component in all SAFT contracts. This Code of Conduct is committed to upholding and enacting the principles enshrined in the second Chapter of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and hopes to begin laying the foundations for accountability for women in the SAFT workplace. Alongside this Code of Conduct, SWIFT initiated a Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign by the name of #thatsnotokay, which was a series of short films, based on real incidents of harassment and discrimination as experienced by women in the SAFT industry. It featured local filmmakers, producers and actors, spreading the campaign message and appealing to the industry and South African society at large, to sign the organisation's pledge. The campaign includes a training and mentorship component, which endeavours to give female crew and cast exposure in the SAFT industry within the production process. Furthermore, SWIFT is in the process of establishing a Safety Person Programme responsible for implementing the Code of Conduct prescriptions and protecting vulnerable groups on set. However, as an NPO whose members are mostly independent workers in the SAFT industry, it, like many before it (most of whom have since dissolved) requires financial support and assistance to realise and sustain these objectives. Improving the work experiences for women and vulnerable groups in the SAFT industry benefits the entire industry and economy at large, and is the responsibility of all those party to it.

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Tackling the Gender Disparities in South Africa's  
film and television industry



**SWIFT**  
Sisters Working In Film & TV

Co-authored by Lebohang Ntoele and Monique Atougua  
commissioned by SWIFT