Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: Despite some gains, men still dominate in every part of news, entertainment and digital media, according to the Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2019 by Women's Media Center. Women, particularly women of color, continue to be underrepresented in media. This unequal representation is worrisome, as it can reinforce and perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes. I'm Emily Yeap.

Dr. Holly Holladay is assistant professor of media, journalism and film at Missouri State University. In light of Women's History Month, she joins me today to discuss why the disparity exists and what can be done to address it.

Holly Holladay: I think that first comes down to, number one, who has access to the highest levels of production and power and who is creating media, which I can talk about more in just a second. But overall, I think habits are hard to break, and we get into these cycles of seeing the same things in media over and over again. It's stereotypical representations of women and all sorts of other minority groups. And if those have been successful in the past, it is less risky for companies to double down on that again. And so I think that's part of it.

In terms of who is making media, the networks, just like any other industry, any other job, social networks matter a lot, and who you have access to. We have made some progress. TV is a little bit better. Twenty-seven percent of cable programs, 24% of broadcast programs have female protagonists. Streaming platforms are much, much better in terms of who we're seeing onscreen and behind the screen. But we're talking about white women there, too. Those numbers are just dismal still for women of color, for LGBTQ women, women who are not able-bodied. We have made some progress, but at the same time, we still have a long way to go because, as we know, women's experiences aren't universal, and we should be seeing as many different stories from women onscreen as we possibly can.

Emily Yeap: How can the media do better in representing the voices and perspectives of diverse women?

Holly Holladay: That's such a huge question because every aspect of the media is a little bit different, whether we're talking about journalistic, information-based media or entertainment media, which I study. But I think that representation really matters. It's important for us to think about how we're talking about women in power in media, what sort of things that we're focusing on when we're covering them. But in terms of entertainment media, that we take it seriously, and knowing that when we see people onscreen who are like us, it makes a significant difference in the possibilities we're able to imagine for ourselves. And I think from a perspective of higher-ups, of decision makers, being willing to take risks, and I use risks in scare quotes there because anything that isn't a proven moneymaker is a little bit risky, but willing to be taking risks on stories of women, of people of color, of the LGBT community because seeing those people on screen really, really matters.

Emily Yeap: According to Holladay, one way successful women in media, whether in journalism or entertainment, can help bring about positive change is through mentorship.

Holly Holladay: I have a high school classmate who works for NPR in D.C., and she is a woman of color, and she actively mentors other young women of color, and she offers them expertise. Not just the formal structure of how to create media, whether that's news-based media or entertainment-based media, but the informal ways to navigate the workplace, to navigate the industry. I think that sort of advice from women already in the industry who are seeking to mentor younger women who want to be in those careers eventually is just indispensable.

Emily Yeap: Another issue in the media industry, as in many other industries, is the gender pay gap. While it's a complicated issue with no one easy solution, Holladay believes transparency is crucial.

Holly Holladay: We as a culture have really been dissuaded from talking about money, and that's very gauche, and we don't talk about it because it's one thing that you're supposed to keep private. And I think transparency in the workplace is so important. That's not something that would probably be popular to say to a lot of employers. But how do we know who's getting paid what unless we actively talk about it? And we've been sort of conditioned to keep that secret.

Emily Yeap: That was Dr. Holly Holladay, assistant professor of media, journalism and film at Missouri State. The university will celebrate Women's History Month with several events online and in-person.

Visit MissouriState.edu/MulticulturalPrograms for more information. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.