

**Your Turn**E. Scott Osborne
Guest columnist

Film festival offers voice to women, others who are underrepresented

I worry about media representation. And I worry about whose stories are told.

Think for a moment about all the media in your life. If you're like the average American, you consume more than 13 hours of media per day.

That media shapes us profoundly. The information and images and voices it offers up, subtly and not so subtly, help create who we are: the careers we aspire to, the people we may choose to marry, the clothes we wear, the way we talk and shop and socialize and travel and invest. And media forms our opinions about others!

If the *only* portrayal of a single mother you ever see is that of a young Spanish-speaking woman or the *only* expert economist you ever hear on the news is a middle-aged white man or the *only* images you see of Africa show half-naked rural people with cattle, don't you think that will affect you? Of course it will.

Since the media affects our lives and our world-views so much, we need to care about who makes this media, whose stories are told and how all our stories are portrayed. To empathize with others, we do need to hear from them – in their own words.

To understand the world, I need to see not only those cattle-rearing Masai in Kenya but also the gleaming skyscrapers of Lagos and Nairobi. I need to see not only the images of men at war but also the images of women caring for children. I need to see not only the lives of Israelis but also the lives of Palestinians.

So you should know that the overwhelming majority of mass media is made by men, especially white men. Virtually all (OK, 98%) of Academy Award Best Director nominations are for men, men speak seven times more than women in advertising and 82% of writers for film are male. Women get only a third of screen time and make up only 14% of cinematographers.

I could go on. That's not very equal media representation for half the population.

And I want my story and the stories of other women to be heard. I have been a lawyer, a teacher, a pregnant teen, a Peace Corps volunteer. My friends and I have compromised our careers so our husbands could fulfill their own aspirations; we have cared for our children and our parents. We have watched our daughters play sports and wondered what our lives might have been like in another era, one already blessed with the fruits of Title IX.

These voices matter too.

So every March I run a film festival in Sarasota specializing in underrepresented voices. Our film festival shows films made by filmmakers from countries all over the world, including Iraq, Israel, Afghanistan, England, Brazil, India, Germany and Sweden (to name just some of the 17 nations represented this year).

We show films by emerging filmmakers – new talents 30 and younger. We show films by and about the LGBTQ community. And, especially, we show films by and about women. Because even today, notwithstanding the popularity of a few hit films like "Barbie," women's experiences are grossly underrepresented. Women may be half the population, but their perspectives certainly do not get half the airtime – in any media.

If we want to live fully in the world, understanding it, appreciating it and having empathy for the variety of people around us, we need to have a few insights into other people – people not like us. We all walk only in our own shoes, after all, but from time to time I do want to borrow someone else's slippers and try them on.

Perhaps you do as well.

E. Scott Osborne is the chair of the nonprofit Through Women's Eyes International Film Festival., which is taking place through March 13 in Sarasota.