

"The truth is, we're rooting for actors. It serves all of us if they do well," says Juliet Taylor, center, with (from left) Laura Rosenthal, Jennifer Euston, Patricia DiCerto and Ellen Lewis, who were photographed at the Wythe Hotel in Brooklyn on Nov. 15.

Why Do These Women Get No Respect?

Martin Scorsese calls Ellen Lewis one of his 'main collaborators.' Woody Allen raves about Juliet Taylor because 'she never settles.' Yet casting directors, disproportionately female, still struggle for recognition as these five (who put the stars in a slew of this year's hot awards-season projects) spill all about actors, auditions and why Oscar won't acknowledge them By Stacey Wilson Photographed by Steve Schofield



WRITING, DIRECTING, cinematography, editing and other male-dominated areas of filmmaking — which, let's face it, are almost all of them — have never struggled for recognition by Oscar. Yet casting, a craft populated largely by women (the Casting Society of America estimates that more than 73 percent of its 600 members are female) has yet to see its top artists eligible for Hollywood's biggest award. (An Emmy for television casting, however, has been given out since 1989.) It was the inequity in film casting that inspired filmmaker Tom Donahue to make his 2013 documentary *Casting By*, about the life and career of pioneering casting director Marion Dougherty. The film, which screened in New York and Los Angeles before premiering on HBO in August (it was ultimately not among the docs shortlisted by the Academy), explores casting's roots and how the star-obsessed era of Hollywood's early studio system placed good looks above any other hiring criteria. It also shows how Dougherty changed the scope of her low-paying craft (casting directors often earn less than most other craftspeople) by giving New York-based talent such as Robert Duvall, Christopher Walken, Glenn Close and Robert De Niro their big breaks. The film also exposes the lingering lack of respect for casting directors among some helmers — former DGA president Taylor Hackford says in *Casting By* that they don't merit Oscar recognition because “they don't direct anything” — and puts into sharp focus why Dougherty, who fought for years for her work to receive a formal onscreen credit, is held up as casting's biggest hero.

Despite being Academy members for 30 years, casting directors only got their own official branch in the summer — the Academy had rejected motions for one three times since 1996 — allowing, finally, for at least three casting directors to sit on its board of governors. But for the five women who gathered on a fall afternoon in Brooklyn to reflect on Dougherty's legacy — two of them, Ellen Lewis and Juliet Taylor, were apprentices under the late Dougherty and appear in *Casting By* — the long-gestating recognition still isn't quite enough.

In a frank and often funny discussion, Taylor, Lewis, Patricia DiCerto, Laura Rosenthal and Jennifer Euston reveal their reactions to Hackford's comment, why casting is something you can only learn on the job, what actors should never do in auditions (bringing a gun is at the top of the list) and why casting is dominated by women. (Hint: “Our gender is just smarter.”)

***Casting By* has become a piece of activism for your craft. What's the reaction been for you personally?**

JULIET TAYLOR I thought the film was mainly going to be an homage to [Marion], but Tom made it into something about politics in Hollywood and the problems with the regard in which casting directors are held. The reaction's been fantastic, even from people not in the business.

LAURA ROSENTHAL It's definitely made what we do more three-dimensional. Even people who work with us every day have sent emails and phone calls saying, “Congratulations, I'm so proud to do business with you.”

PATRICIA DICERTO Honestly, it should be required viewing for anyone entering the business — especially actors. We are their champions.

TAYLOR But they don't think that's true!

JENNIFER EUSTON Somebody once told me I was a dream killer. I almost fell over. It was the most awful thing I'd

ever heard in my life! I'm like, “I'm a dream maker!” (*Laughter.*) But the movie is good for laypeople. It took years for my parents to get what I did for a living.

What did they think you did?

EUSTON They thought I was working for no money, no health insurance, 12 hours a day ...

TAYLOR Which you were. (*Laughter.*)

ELLEN LEWIS For years people have seen this credit in a movie or TV show — “Casting by” — as this mysterious thing, like the actors just appeared on the screen. Or the director just discovered them.

How did it feel to hear former DGA president Taylor Hackford say in *Casting By*: “Casting directors don't direct anything,” and therefore don't deserve to be recognized with their own Oscar.

LEWIS It's funny, in a way, because what he's saying is this: Nobody knows what goes on behind a closed door. And that's true. Casting is very private. It's between the casting director and the actor. Of course what [Hackford] doesn't address is why he's meeting the actors that he's meeting. And that's because his casting director has done her job! He's also leaving out that the reason it's behind the closed doors is to protect the actor who's doing something vulnerable. Nine times out of 10 it ends in rejection.

ROSENTHAL I was going to say [he] is the perfect villain. We needed him, you know?

TAYLOR Another part of the argument against casting directors being acknowledged by the Academy is: Who knows where a casting director's job ends and the director's begins? You could say the same thing about editors.

EUSTON That disparages cinematographers, too.

ROSENTHAL Yes. It's evil and reductive. We are really, really important to the process.

What is the biggest fight you've had casting someone?

DICERTO I never want an actor to think that they had to be fought for — ever. Does that make sense? I am more protective of them than anyone else.

TAYLOR When I was casting *Julia* in the late 1970s, Jane Fonda was already attached to the film, and she was at her most political. I thought Vanessa Redgrave would be great for the second lead role, and she happened to be in New York doing a play. The director, Fred Zinnemann, had never met her. He said, “Look, I've got Jane Fonda on my hands. And now Vanessa Redgrave says she's going to run for Parliament?” (*Laughter.*) I can't handle both of them.” He was really adamant. But I thought it was such a waste. Vanessa was right there in New York! So I went to the producer, Richard Roth, to see how he could make this meeting work. Fred found out I did that and was furious with me. But Vanessa came in, charmed Fred beyond belief and got the part. Those things happen. But you really can't ever say to the director ...

EUSTON “You're crazy.” (*Laughs.*)

Casting today, especially in film, increasingly is about who is bankable overseas. For *Dallas Buyers Club*, even with Matthew McConaughey attached, the producers needed an actor who could generate box office abroad, and they got that in Jennifer Garner. How early do these concerns creep into your process?

DICERTO It's definitely a challenge in independent filmmaking. You're casting for a budget as opposed to casting for the film. That's the craziest thing: These buyers actually break down the value of an actor ...

LEWIS By territory.

DICERTO Yes. You get your list back with the dollar amounts: “This person is worth \$300,000, this person is



Juliet Taylor



Patricia DiCerto

\$500,000, or this person's a million dollars." Then you have to think about, "OK, who in column B will fit in ..."

EUSTON It's shocking to me that a movie with Matthew McConaughey can't be greenlit without extra help. Casting directors don't value actors that way.

LEWIS Yet. We have to think about it.

DICERTO We want the movie to get made, so unless you get an actor with some value, it's not going to be released.

TAYLOR (*Motioning to Rosenthal*) Laura has so many folders on her desk of movies that she's waiting to see if they get off the ground. (*Laughter.*)

ROSENTHAL Oh, yeah.

DICERTO I remember starting out (*to Rosenthal*) in your office and seeing all those different folders. Then years later I'd see a movie and think, "I remember that folder!" It took eight years to get that movie jump-started because you needed an actor to bring value to it.

ROSENTHAL But whether you're doing a huge film that a studio can throw money at, or something that's intimate, it's the same game. Who's your audience? What's the value of the actors? Even the director understands the process isn't so precious anymore. Or it never was.

Laura, one film you had particular difficulty casting was *The Kids Are All Right*. Was it because the two lead roles were gay women?

ROSENTHAL Yes. But women's roles are hard no matter what; actors are always easier to attach money to. Also, it was women "over a certain age."

LEWIS But were there several different people attached while you were trying to get it going?

ROSENTHAL Yeah, we couldn't get it together. Then the director, Lisa Cholodenko, had a baby, and we never had enough money. But that's the case working on a huge film, too. I'm for getting actors for nothing, but it's a drag.

TAYLOR Another thing people don't know about our profession is that we, A) Yes, have to cast within a budget, but B) We also have to negotiate all the agreements.

LEWIS Negotiations and then the scheduling. Producers work so closely with us and, because we all worked for Juliet, we're always anticipating a problem. And then



Blue Jasmine 2013

Cast by **JULIET TAYLOR**
and **PATRICIA DICERTO**

Other credits for **TAYLOR**

- *Midnight in Paris* (2011)
- *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993)
- *Terms of Endearment* (1983)
- *Annie Hall* (1977)
- *Taxi Driver* (1976)

Other credits for **DICERTO**

- *The Departed* (2006)
- *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006)
- *Angels in America* (2003)
- *Angela's Ashes* (1999)
- *You've Got Mail* (1998)

THE COMPLETE DISCUSSION

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trying to circumvent that problem. Producers — agents, too — appreciate us because we're constantly communicating what *might* happen. They trust us.

Why are most casting directors women?

TAYLOR Marion said it was because we got paid so poorly.

Meaning that men weren't as willing to take these jobs early on?

TAYLOR Yes. But really — maybe this is a sexist thing to say — I do think women are just more intuitive.

DICERTO We are also nurturing. And the difficult personalities among directors and producers? We are better able to negotiate those.

EUSTON I think Juliet has said this before, but casting is like hosting: You're constantly introducing people to each other, making them feel comfortable.

ROSENTHAL If an actor isn't at ease, they don't do well.

TAYLOR I think the job also requires a high tolerance and appreciation for people who might not be very likable. You have to be able to think, "That person's really talented" and not let the fact that they aren't nice get in the way — whether it's the director or an actor. Women are better at that. (*Laughter.*)

ROSENTHAL And we ask a lot of questions. That's how we get our information. It's the right and the left sides of the brain working perfectly. And our gender is just smarter.

How has technology changed your jobs?

LEWIS Right now I'm casting a new project and we're taping the actors — that's how directors and producers want to view people for the first time now. But I'm still sitting there in the same old-fashioned way: Somebody walks in the room, they read, I thank them, and my assistant walks them out and thanks them again for coming in.

EUSTON We still have schedules on session sheets and we write on those.

ROSENTHAL That's the same. But when you make your lists, do you guys write them?

EUSTON Handwrite it, yes.

DICERTO Yeah, of course.

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LEWIS Again, all those things were passed down to us — like the way our session sheets are typed up — from Marion to Juliet. When I worked for Juliet I knew, “This is how Marion did it.” For example, when we have our actor sessions, we also list their agents. But when we have our director sessions, we never list the actors’ agents. (Laughter.)

DICERTO There are a lot of casting directors who use the Internet. Many have Facebook pages that actors can visit, “Like” and submit pictures and videos. It’s very instant.

LEWIS But what gets complicated is when you get casting ideas from agents — and we go through them carefully — we call them and tell them who we want to see, then all of a sudden you will just start getting self-tapes [unsolicited video auditions submitted by the actor].

ROSENTHAL It’s like showing up for an audition without an appointment.

Has the self-tape replaced the unsolicited picture-and-résumé being dropped off at your front door?

ROSENTHAL No. Self-tapes are definitely worse!

EUSTON I’ve been doing mostly TV for the past few years. The turnover is very quick, so Web access has been unbelievable. I started out as a casting assistant on *Law & Order* and had to type all my memos on a typewriter and fax sides [the pages of a script an actor reads in an audition]. If you wanted a script, you had to pick it up.

EUSTON You called every single agent about the appointments. Now assistants can do it all through email — send a script, sides, anything.

ROSENTHAL It’s great.

EUSTON But they don’t learn!

DICERTO You’ll tell an assistant, “Can you call the agent and go over ideas for this character?” and they go to the computer. I’m like, “No, pick up the phone!” (Laughter.)

ROSENTHAL Some things aren’t right to do over email.

DICERTO Especially for Woody’s films. We don’t put out a breakdown [a description of the roles released to agents and managers], so the first chat with the agent is vital.

TAYLOR You have to get the nuance across.

LEWIS This is something that a lot of TV executives and studios specifically don’t understand. Casting directors are under so much pressure to do things so quickly that it’s become more about volume than the creative process. I think those executives should try to cast something at some point. We should switch places!

What do you prefer that actors never do in auditions?

EUSTON Touch you. Handshaking is fine, I always do it. It’s like, “Hey, how are you?” But I was an assistant in L.A. once and reading [lines] with this guy, and the director asked, “Could you sit and read next to him?” And it was a scene with a gun and he held it up to my head. Getting that close was the freakiest thing.

TAYLOR There were many years actors got physical.

DICERTO I had an actor pull me onto his lap once.

ROSENTHAL They get naked. (Laughter.)

LEWIS I was once offered \$3,000 from an actor [during an audition] so he could meet the director. I said that wasn’t the way to do it. I later heard that he actually had a gun with him that day, which also wasn’t a great idea.

OK, we need to know who this person was.

LEWIS All I’ll say is it was while casting *Goodfellas* ... and yes, he’s in the movie. (Laughter.)

TAYLOR One thing that’s upsetting is when you meet an actor you’re really taken with, then they come in the day of



Laura Rosenthal



Kill Your Darlings
2013
Cast by LAURA ROSENTHAL

Other credits
→ *Mildred Pierce* (2011)
→ *Wendy and Lucy* (2008)
→ *Chicago* (2002)
→ *Far From Heaven* (2002)
→ *Analyze This* (1999)



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Rosenthal, reacting to Taylor Hackford’s comments in the documentary *Casting By*, in which the former DGA president says casting directors “don’t direct anything” and therefore aren’t deserving of Oscar consideration

the audition and have done a dramatic change to themselves, like wearing a huge amount of makeup because they thought the part required it. It freaks you out.

LEWIS I tell people, “Don’t do anything different.”

EUSTON Especially for the director session.

LEWIS Another thing we learned from Juliet is to give actors as much info as we can about the role and the director. We set up people for Woody by saying, “Know the meeting will be 10 seconds long. There’s nothing to be nervous about. It will be over before you know it.”

EUSTON If I’m in a session and the director isn’t giving anyone direction — they let the person do it once, say thank you and leave — I tell everybody in the waiting room, “Don’t think you did something wrong.” Actors always wait [for feedback], so I want them to know the director is doing it to everybody.

ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy* proved a milestone for so-called “colorblind casting” a decade ago. How much freedom do you have to cast different races? Is TV more open than film?

EUSTON I have great freedom, especially on *Orange Is the New Black*. I bring in all ethnicities.

ROSENTHAL It depends. I’m working on a period movie right now and it just doesn’t make sense for certain ethnicities to be in the film.

TAYLOR Woody has been shooting in Europe lately, but for so long he wrote about the Upper East Side — which didn’t lend to a lot of diversity. But he’s particularly conscious of it when he can be. In *Deconstructing Harry*, for example, he cast actress Hazelle Goodman in a part that wasn’t written for an African-American.

EUSTON That’s why *Orange* is so amazing. I can just cast the best actors. I mean, I cast a transgender woman! They wanted an authentic, black transgender woman. I looked everywhere. I’d auditioned Laverne Cox before — she was gorgeous, had such a great attitude and could really act. As soon I read *Orange*, I said, “Laverne has to do this.” But the whole *Orange* cast is amazing. They are all “character women.” They are minorities; many are older women who never got opportunities to have an arc on a TV show. They would play like “Nurse No. 1” in *Law & Order*, and now they have 13 episodes to develop the story.

When you’re scouting for talent off-Broadway or in Los Angeles at community theater productions and you’re really taken with someone, do you share your discoveries or keep them private?

DICERTO We share it among ourselves, right?

ALL Yeah.

LEWIS Juliet’s the best at going to see a play and then writing an entire synopsis for us about her feelings. (Laughter.)

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Ellen Lewis



Jennifer Euston

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TAYLOR One thrill of this job is being able to use someone who's never been seen before in an original way.

EUSTON But you have to be careful with the word "discover," especially if that person has a manager and they have credits [you don't know about]. Unless I pluck somebody off the street, I never say I "discovered" him or her.

ROSENTHAL I remember once casting someone from an open casting call versus an actress who was much more well-known. The person I cast hasn't gone on to become a huge star, but the art of what we did [on that project] couldn't have been better.

DICERTO Annaleigh Ashford, who's currently in [the Broadway musical] *Kinky Boots*, I would love to cast in an indie film. She was on a few episodes of Showtime's *Masters of Sex*, but she still isn't a name who is going to get recognition for a budget or box office.

LEWIS Asa Butterfield, who was the lead in [Martin Scorsese's] *Hugo*, had only been in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and *Nanny McPhee Returns*. I always say, you never know what's going to shine the light on somebody. And Bryan Cranston — I had nothing to do with *Breaking Bad*, but he'd been working for years before that show!

TAYLOR You believe in people and keep bringing them in.

EUSTON We open a door. But actors do all the work.

What's been your proudest casting achievement?

DICERTO *Midnight in Paris* was a highlight — especially the work we'd done learning about all the historical characters, like Hemingway and Picasso; finding the essence of who they were, and not just casting look-alike actors.

EUSTON When Adam Driver got nominated this year for a best supporting actor Emmy for *Girls*. I had loved him for so long before the show, it almost brought me to tears.

LEWIS I'm always more comfortable casting the day players. (Laughter.) "Really? Do I have to do the lead roles?"

ROSENTHAL A career highlight for me isn't one film; it's repeating the relationships that I have with directors. To know they want to work with me ...

DICERTO And they're loyal.



The Wolf of Wall Street 2013

Cast by **ELLEN LEWIS**

Other credits
→ *Boardwalk Empire* (2010)
→ *Casino* (1995)
→ *Forrest Gump* (1994)
→ *A League of Their Own* (1992)
→ *Goodfellas* (1990)



Orange Is the New Black 2013

Cast by **JENNIFER EUSTON**

Other credits
→ *Veep* (2012)
→ *The Pacific* (2010)
→ *The Aviator* (2004)
→ *Sweet Home Alabama* (2002)
→ *Zoolander* (2001)

What advice would you give your younger self?

LEWIS Work for Juliet Taylor. (Laughter.)

EUSTON That's mine too. It's really an apprenticeship.

TAYLOR Casting is a craft. You can't go to school for it.

ROSENTHAL Be patient and communicate with your boss.

TAYLOR We're not surgeons, but it's a very stressful job. Every director thinks their movie or show is the most important thing. And they want you to believe that, too.

How do you manage the stress?

ROSENTHAL I've never tried doing that. (Laughter.)

No, I think I disassociate. But I really try to take weekends to myself and not think too much ahead.

LEWIS When agents call and ask, "Can we do lunch?" It's like, "No, we don't leave the office. Leave us alone!"

DICERTO (To Taylor) You were a great role model because you were always there for your kids. I try to shut off at a certain point, too — but I still find myself emailing agents at 11 p.m. after the kids go to bed.

TAYLOR I get emails from you at 2 a.m. (Laughter.) I remember once getting up the nerve to tell an important director he couldn't call me after 9 p.m.

EUSTON But it's so hard with the Internet and cellphones. I remember when you left the office ...

LEWIS You stopped working.

EUSTON Now they call me at 7 a.m. and midnight.

LEWIS But that's where you set boundaries.

TAYLOR Otherwise you're on call 24 hours a day!

EUSTON I feel like a doctor. "OK, we got this emergency. What do we do?" It's crazy.

What would Marion think about you all being here today?

TAYLOR I do wish she were here.

ROSENTHAL Me too.

TAYLOR She really wanted casting directors to be appreciated, and fought so hard for it. She would have loved every minute of this. **THR**