

Indie Women: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women in Independent Film, 2019-2020

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Conducted since 2008, *Indie Women* is the most comprehensive study of women’s behind-the-scenes employment on independent films available. In 2019-2020, all of the festivals included in this study posted their film selections online, regardless of whether they held their festivals in person or virtually, canceled or postponed their events.

Key Findings

•**In 2019-2020, the percentages of women working as directors and writers on independently and domestically produced films continued to climb, reaching recent historic highs.** Women comprised 38% of directors, up from 33% in 2018-19, and 29% in 2017-18 (see Figure 1). Women accounted for 35% of writers, up from 32% in 2018-19 and 26% in 2017-18 (see Figure 2).

•**Overall, the percentage of women working in key behind-the-scenes roles (directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, cinematographers) increased last year, growing from 32% in 2018-19 to 34% in 2019-2020.** Despite these gains, it is important to note that independent films employed almost twice as many men in these roles. 66% of those working as directors, writers, executive producers,

producers, editors, and cinematographers were male.

•**In other roles, findings were mixed. While the percentages of women working as directors, writers, producers, and executive producers increased, the percentage of women working as editors declined slightly, and the percentage of women working as cinematographers remained the same.**

Figure 1.

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Independent Films with Women Directors

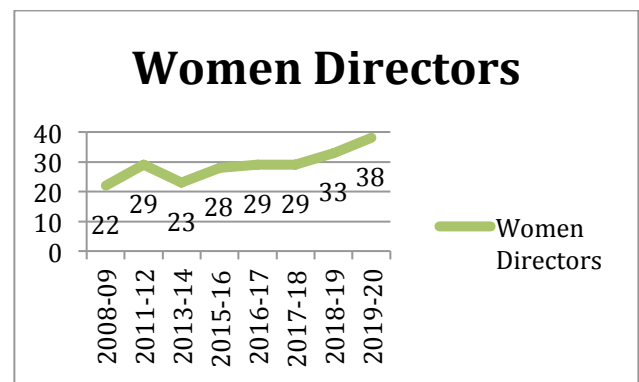
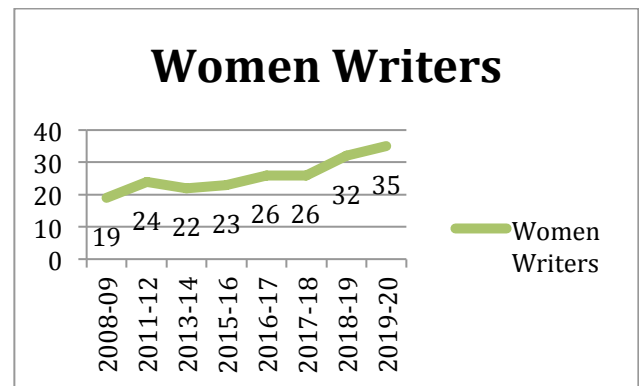


Figure 2.

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Independent Films with Women Writers



•**In 2019-2020, high-profile festivals in the U.S. selected and/or screened twice as many narrative features directed by men as by women.** The festivals considered selected and/or screened an average of 12 *narrative* films directed by men, compared to an average of 6 films directed by at least one woman (see Figure 3).

•**In 2019-2020, fests selected and/or screened almost equal numbers of documentaries directed by women as by men.** Festivals selected and/or screened an average of 11 *documentaries* directed by men versus an average of 10 documentaries directed by at least one woman (see Figure 4).

•**Women continue to enjoy higher employment on documentaries than on narrative features.** Women accounted for 40% of those working in key behind-the-scenes roles on documentaries versus 29% of those working on narrative features.

•**Films with at least one woman director had substantially higher percentages of women writers, editors, and cinematographers.** On films with at least one female director, women comprised 73% of *writers* versus 12% on films directed exclusively by men. On films with at least one female director, women accounted for 43% of *editors* versus 18% on films directed exclusively by men. On films with at least one female director, women comprised 27% of *cinematographers* versus 8% on films directed exclusively by men.

Figure 3.
Average No. of Narrative Features Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Selected/Screening at High-Profile U.S. Festivals

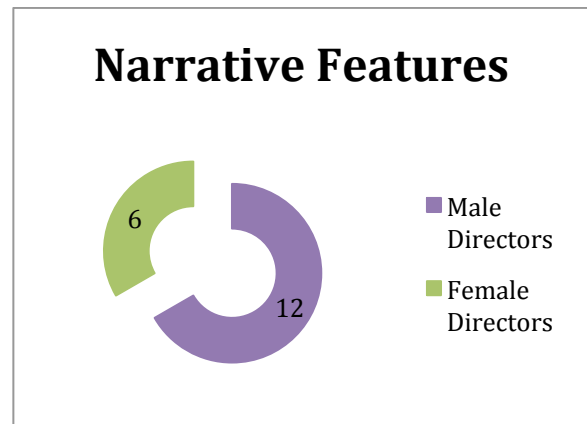
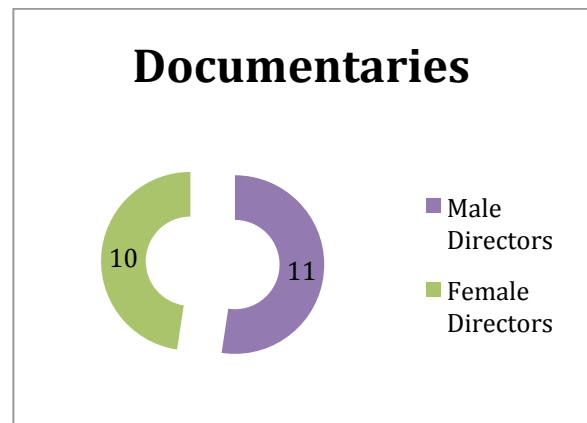


Figure 4.
Average No. of Documentaries Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Selected/Screening at High-Profile U.S. Festivals



Method

This study provides employment figures for domestically and independently produced feature-length documentaries and narrative films selected and/or screening from July 2019 through June 2020 at the following 22 festivals: AFI Fest; Ashland Independent Film Festival; Atlanta Film Festival; Austin Film Festival; Chicago International Film Festival; Cinequest Film Festival; Cleveland International Film Festival; Florida Film Festival; Hamptons International Film Festival; Nantucket Film Festival; New Directors/New Films; New York Film Festival; Palm Springs International Film Festival; Rhode Island International Film Festival; St. Louis International Film Festival; San Francisco International Film Festival; Santa Barbara International Film Festival; Slamdance Film Festival; Sundance Film Festival; SXSW Film Festival; Telluride Film Festival; Tribeca Film Festival. In total, *Indie Women* considers over 8,000 credits on more than 800 films in 2019-2020, and over 88,000 credits on almost 9,000 films over the period of 2008 to 2020.

The findings of this study are divided into four major sections. The first section reports the overall figures for women working on independently and domestically produced films. The second section provides the numbers for women working on documentaries only, and the third section reports the figures for women working on narrative features only. The fourth section discusses important relationships between women directors and the sex of those working in other key behind-the-scenes roles.

Overall Findings for Documentaries and Narrative Features Selected and/or Screening at Festivals

- Overall, high-profile festivals in the U.S. selected and/or screened an average of 16 films (narrative features and documentaries) directed by at least one woman versus an average of 22 films directed exclusively by men.

- High-profile festivals in the U.S. selected and/or screened twice as many *narrative* features directed by men as by women. The festivals selected and/or screened an average of 6 narrative features directed by at least one woman versus an average of 12 narrative features directed exclusively by men (see Figure 3).

- High-profile festivals selected and/or screened almost equal numbers of *documentaries* directed by men as by women. The festivals selected and/or screened an average of 10 feature-length documentaries directed by at least one woman versus an average of 11 directed exclusively by men (see Figure 4).

- 34% of the independent films considered employed 0 or 1 woman, 43% employed 2 to 5 women, 17% employed 6 to 9 women, and 5% employed 10 or more women. In contrast, 12% of the films employed 0 or 1 man, 33% employed 2 to 5 men, 29% employed 6 to 9 men, and 26% employed 10 or more men.

- Women comprised 34% of directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on independent films in 2019-2020. This represents an increase of 2

percentage points from 32% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high (see Figure 5).

- Women fared best as producers (40%), followed by directors (38%), writers (35%), executive producers (33%), editors (28%), and cinematographers (16%) (see Figure 6).

- In 2019-2020, women comprised 38% of directors. This figure represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 33% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 35% of writers in 2019-2020. This figure represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 32% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 33% of executive producers in 2019-2020. This figure represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 32% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 40% of producers in 2019-2020. This figure represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 37% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 28% of editors in 2019-2020, down 1 percentage point from 29% in 2018-19.

- Women accounted for 16% of cinematographers in 2019-2020, even with the percentage achieved in 2018-19.

*Figure 5.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of
Behind-the-Scenes Women Working on
Independent Films*



Figure 6.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Independent Films (Documentaries and Narrative Features) by Role

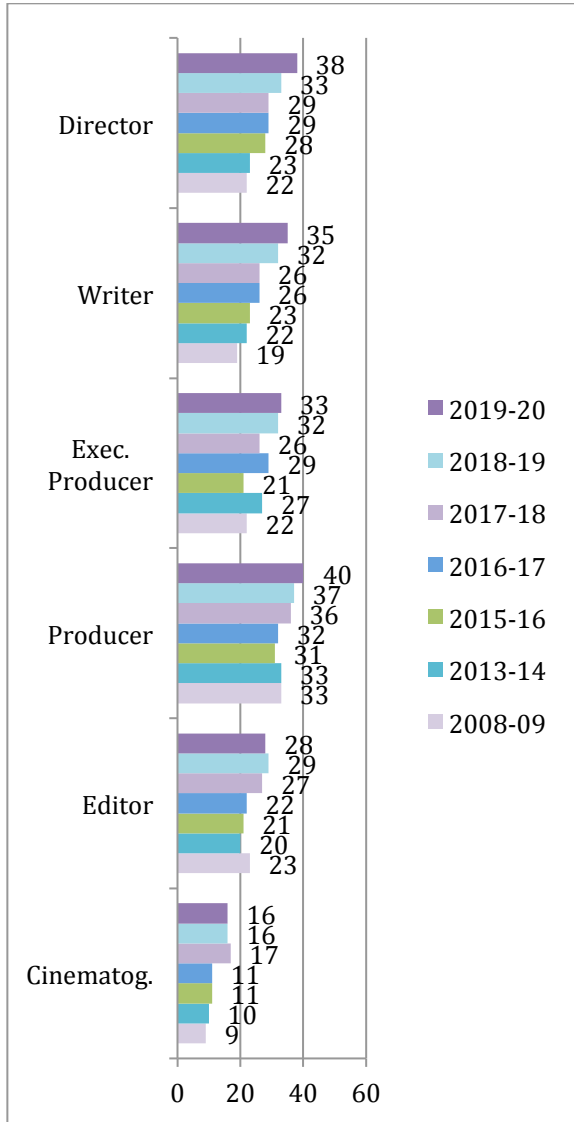
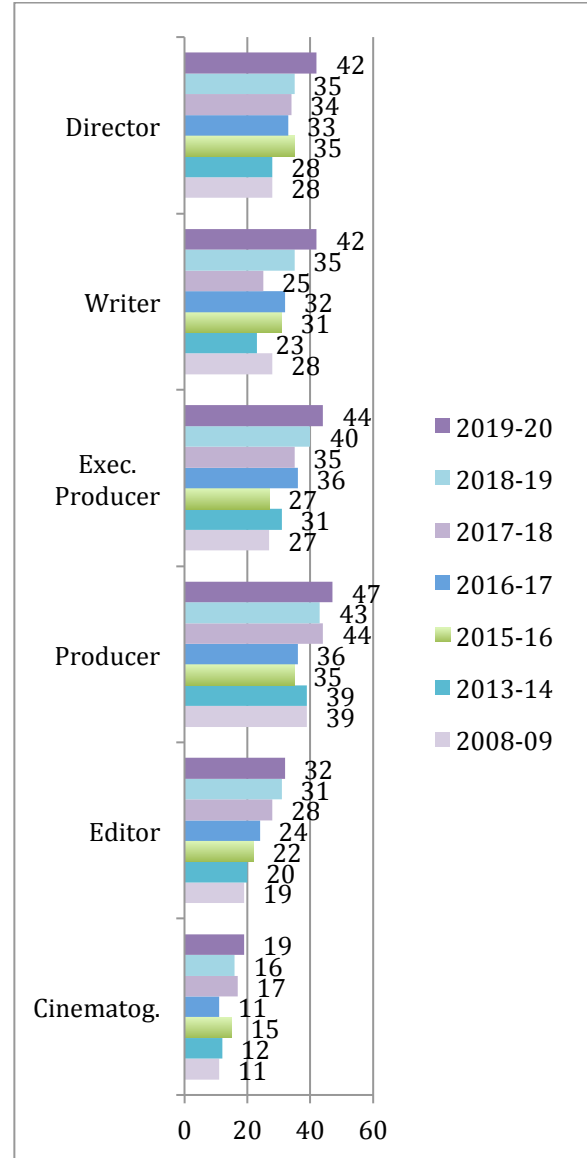


Figure 7.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Documentaries by Role



Findings for Documentaries Only

•Women comprised 40% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on documentaries in 2019-2020. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 35% in 2018-19.

•The percentages of women working in every behind-the-scenes role on documentaries increased in 2019-2020. Women fared best as producers (47%), followed by executive producers (44%), directors (42%), writers (42%), editors (32%), and cinematographers (19%) (see Figure 7).

- Women comprised 42% of directors working on documentaries in 2019-2020, up 7 percentage points from 35% in 2018-19. This also represents a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 42% of writers working on documentaries in 2019-2020, up 7 percentage points from 35% in 2018-19. This represents a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 44% of executive producers working on documentaries in 2019-2020, up 4 percentage points from 40% in 2018-19. This represents a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 47% of producers working on documentaries in 2019-2020, up 4 percentage points from 43% in 2018-19. This represents a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 32% of editors working on documentaries in 2019-2020, up 1 percentage point from 31% in 2018-19. This represents a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 19% of cinematographers working on documentaries in 2019-2020, up 3 percentage points from 16% in 2018-19. This represents a recent historic high.

Findings for Narrative Features Only

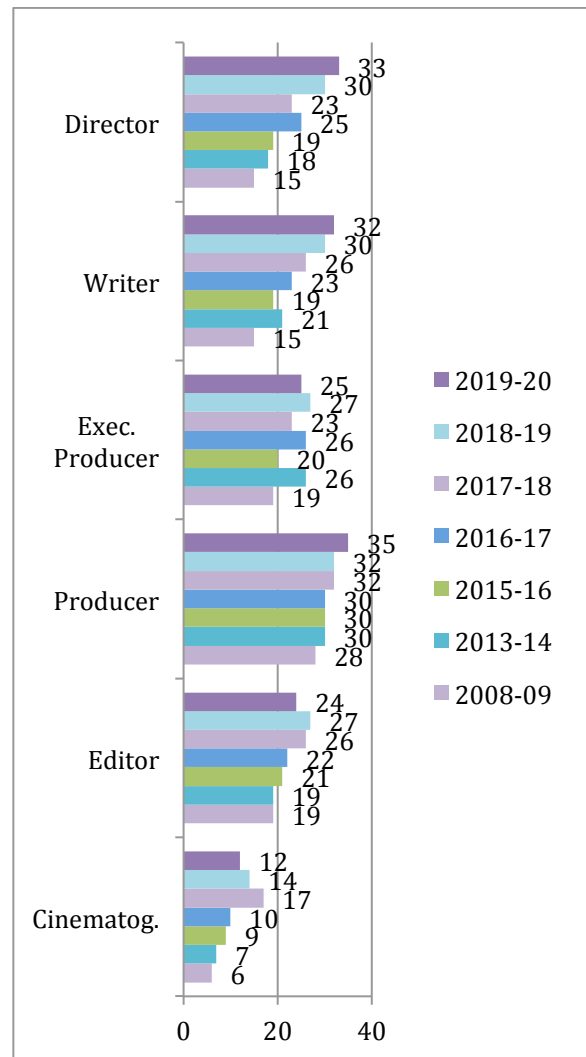
- Overall, women comprised 29% of individuals working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered on narrative features in 2019-2020. This represents no change from 2018-19.

- Women fared best as producers (35%),

followed by directors (33%), writers (32%), executive producers (25%), editors (24%), and cinematographers (12%) (see Figure 8).

- Women accounted for 33% of directors working on narrative features in 2019-2020. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 30% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

Figure 8. Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Narrative Features by Role



- Women comprised 32% of writers working on narrative features in 2019-2020. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 30% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 25% of executive producers working on narrative features in 2019-2020. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 27% in 2018-19.

- Women comprised 35% of producers working on narrative features in 2019-2020, up 3 percentage points from 32% in 2018-19. This represents a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 24% of editors working on narrative features in 2019-2020, down 3 percentage points from 27% in 2018-19.

- Women comprised 12% of cinematographers working on narrative features in 2019-2020, down 2 percentage points from 14% in 2018-19.

Important Relationships

- Films with at least one woman director had substantially higher percentages of women working as writers, editors, and cinematographers than films with exclusively male directors (see Figure 9).

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 73% of writers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 12% of writers.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 43% of

editors. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 18% of editors.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 27% of cinematographers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 8% of cinematographers.

*Figure 9.
Comparison of Employment of Behind-the-Scenes Women on Films with At Least One Woman Director vs. Films with Exclusively Male Directors*

