

# ***Living Archive: The Celluloid Ceiling***

## ***Documenting Two Decades of Women's Employment in Film***

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by Dr. Martha M. Lauzen

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Since 1998, the annual *Celluloid Ceiling* study has tracked women's employment in the core crafts of filmmaking, including directing, writing, producing, editing, and cinematography. It is the longest-running and most comprehensive study of women's behind-the-scenes employment available.<sup>1</sup>

For the first time, the *Living Archive* makes the findings from every year of the study available.

The takeaway from this report is that the celluloid ceiling has proven to be far more resilient than we ever could have imagined. Despite the countless panels, repeated calls for voluntary programs, and promises of change, the percentages of women have remained relatively stable in the majority of the roles considered. The percentage of women cinematographers remained virtually unchanged over the 22 years of the study (4% in 1998, 5% in 2019). The percentage of women working as producers climbed just 3 percentage points, from 24% in 1998 to 27% in 2019, with similar increases for executive producers (18% in 1998 to 21% in 2019), and editors (20% in 1998 to 23% in 2019). The percentage of women directors rose a scant 4 percentage points, from 9% in 1998 to 13% in 2019. Women writers experienced the largest gains, with their percentage rising 6 points from 13% in 1998 to 19% in 2019.

A number of big-budget films originally slated for release in the 2020 pre-pandemic world – including Cathy Yan's *Birds of Prey*, Niki Caro's *Mulan*, Patty Jenkins's *Wonder Woman 1984*, Chloe Zhao's *the Eternals*, and Cate Shortland's *Black Widow* – promised to generate momentum for the issue of gender inclusion in the mainstream film industry this year. Some industry observers even predicted that 2020 would mark a turning point in women's employment. But it is unclear whether this handful of films signals real movement in Hollywood's comfort level with women directors or is a short-lived response to external pressures. The long view provided by *The Celluloid Ceiling* suggests that evolutionary change is more likely than a revolutionary shift.

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the study has tracked additional roles, including composers, music supervisors, supervising sound editors, sound designers, production designers, art directors, special effects supervisors, and visual effects supervisors. Initially, the study monitored the top 250 (domestic) grossing films every year. However, the study was expanded to include the top 100 and top 500 domestic grossing films in 2015. That information is not included in this report but is available by contacting Dr. Lauzen at [lauzen@sdsu.edu](mailto:lauzen@sdsu.edu).

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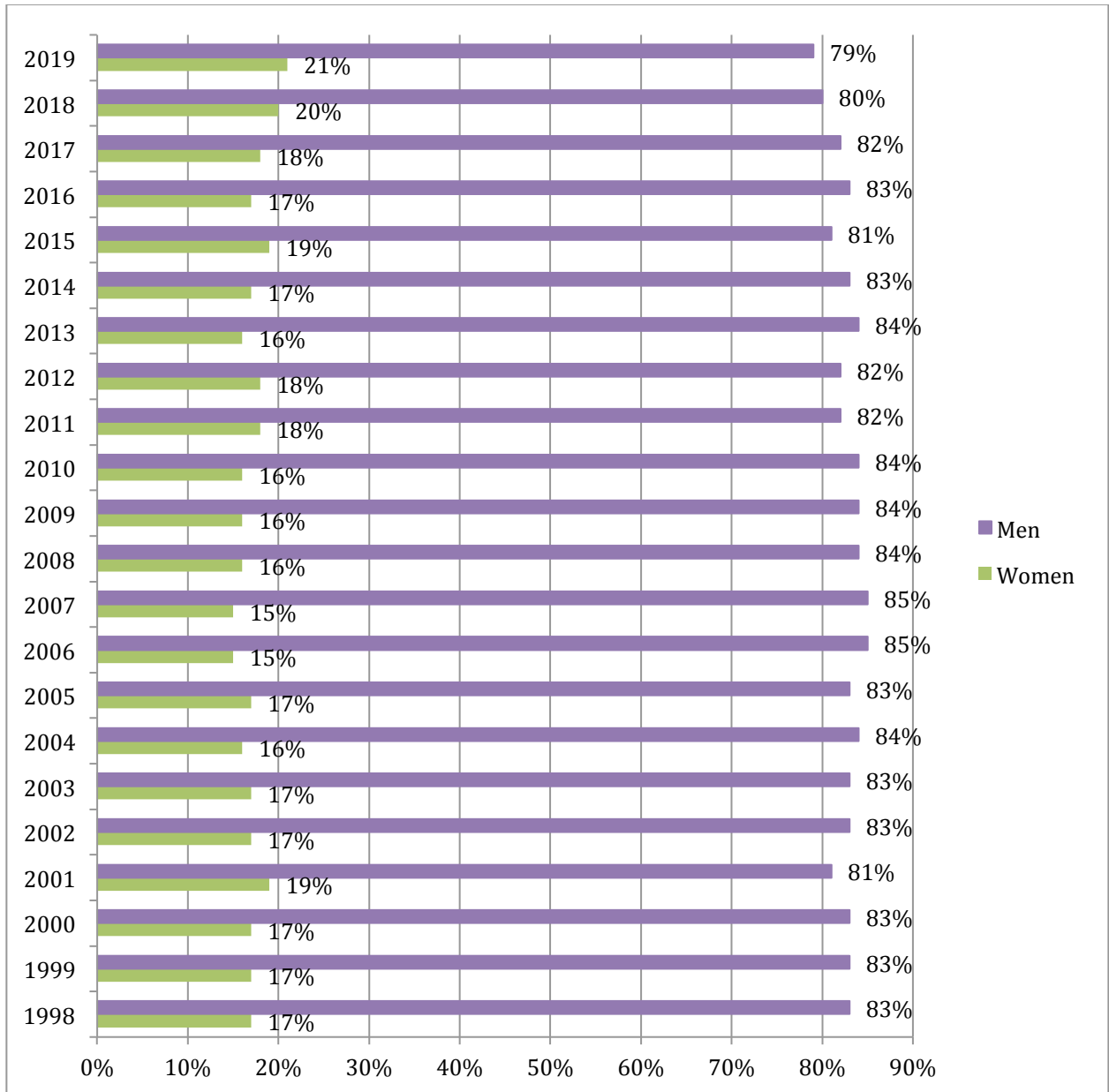
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Figure 1.

*Women's Behind-the-Scenes Employment on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019 (includes Directors, Writers, Producers, Executive Producers, Editors, Cinematographers)*



**Summary statement:** The percentage of women working in key behind-the-scenes roles has barely budged in over two decades, increasing only 4 percentage points from 17% in 1998 to 21% in 2019.

Figure 1a.

*Women's Behind-the-Scenes Employment on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019 (includes Directors, Writers, Producers, Executive Producers, Editors, Cinematographers)*

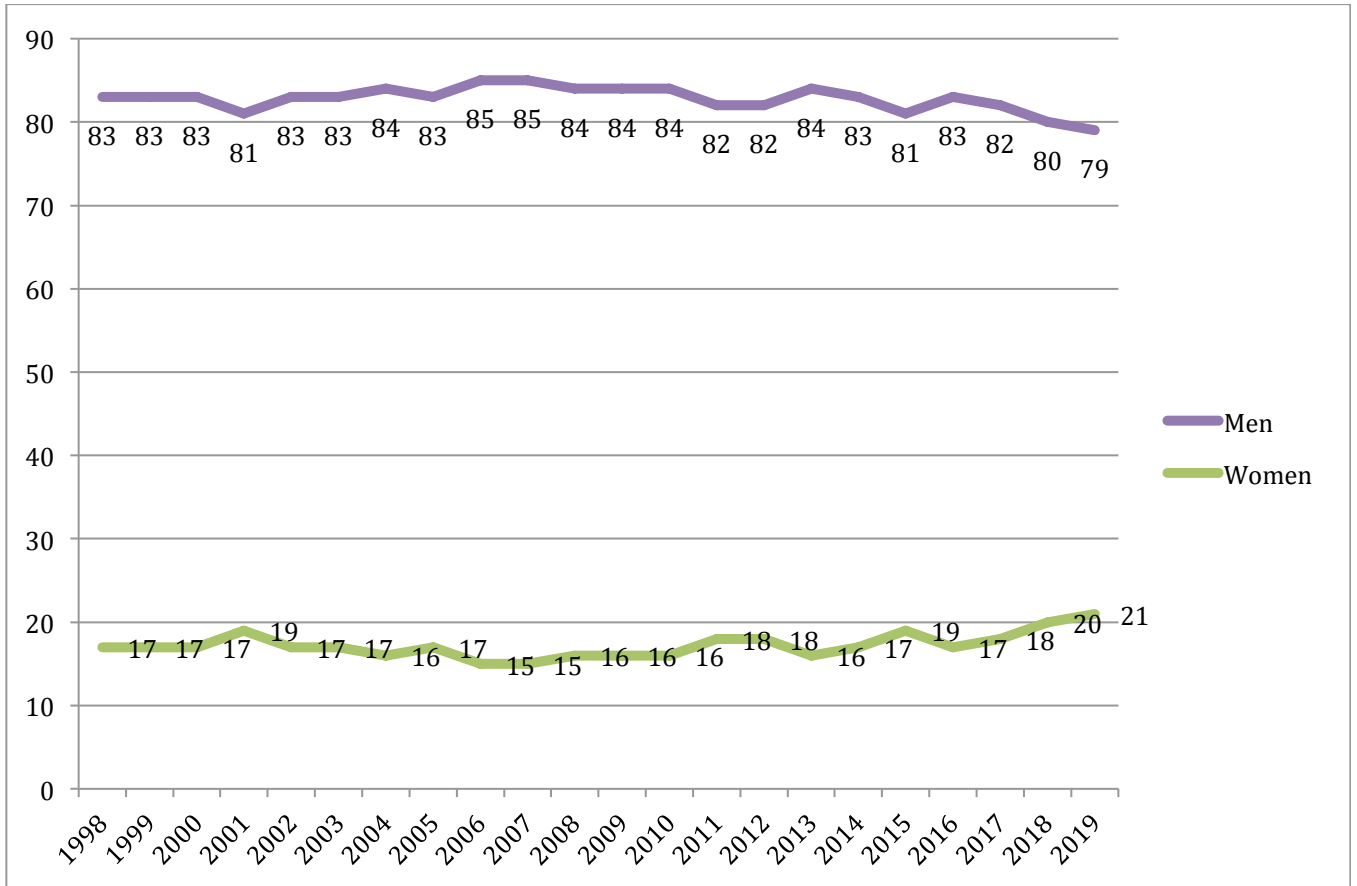
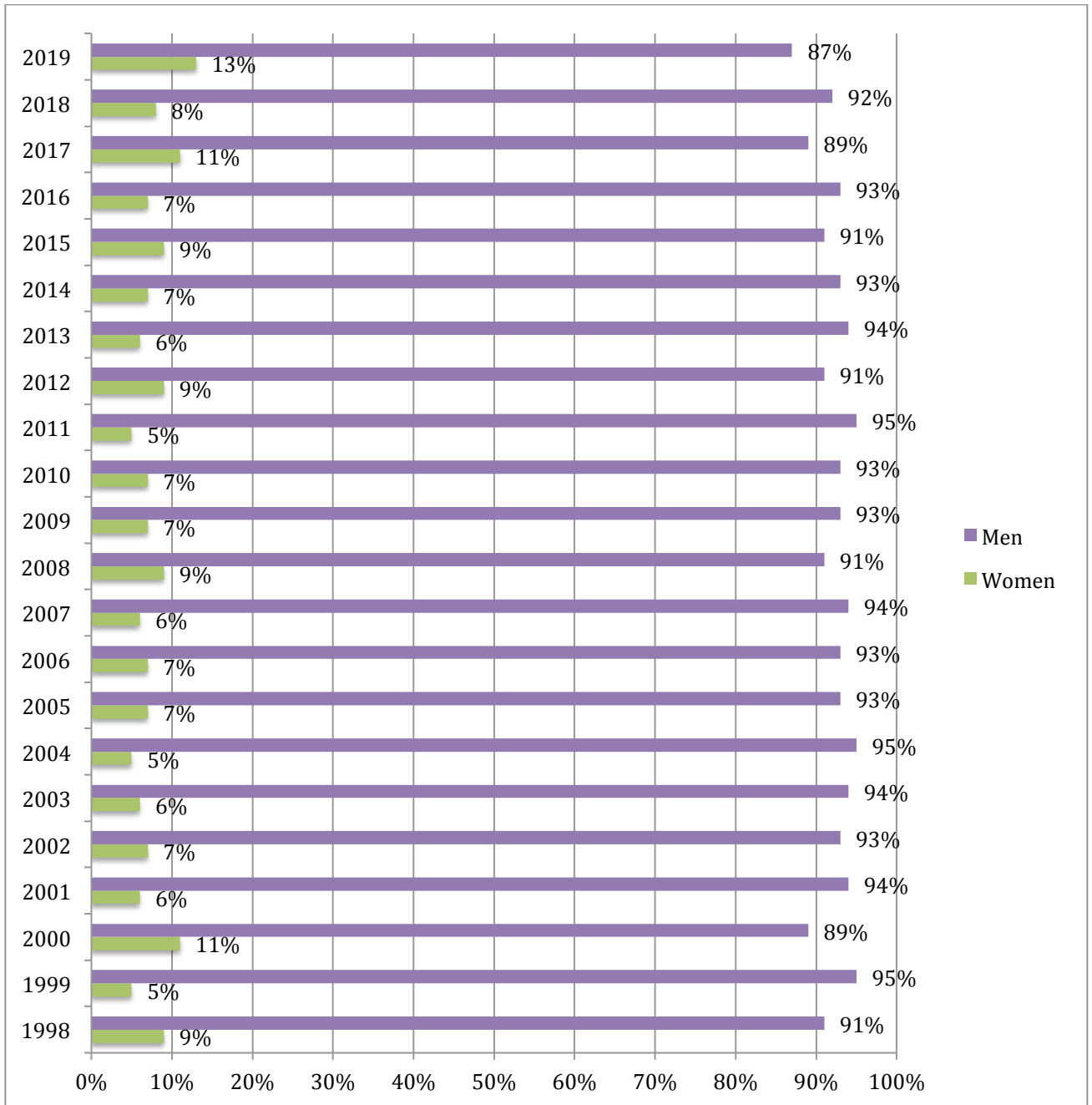


Figure 2.

*Women's Employment as Directors on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019*



**Summary statement:** We have yet to experience two consecutive years of increases in percentages for directors. In 1998, women comprised 9% of directors. Over two decades later, that percentage increased by only 4 percentage points to 13% in 2019.

Figure 2a.

*Women's Employment as **Directors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019*

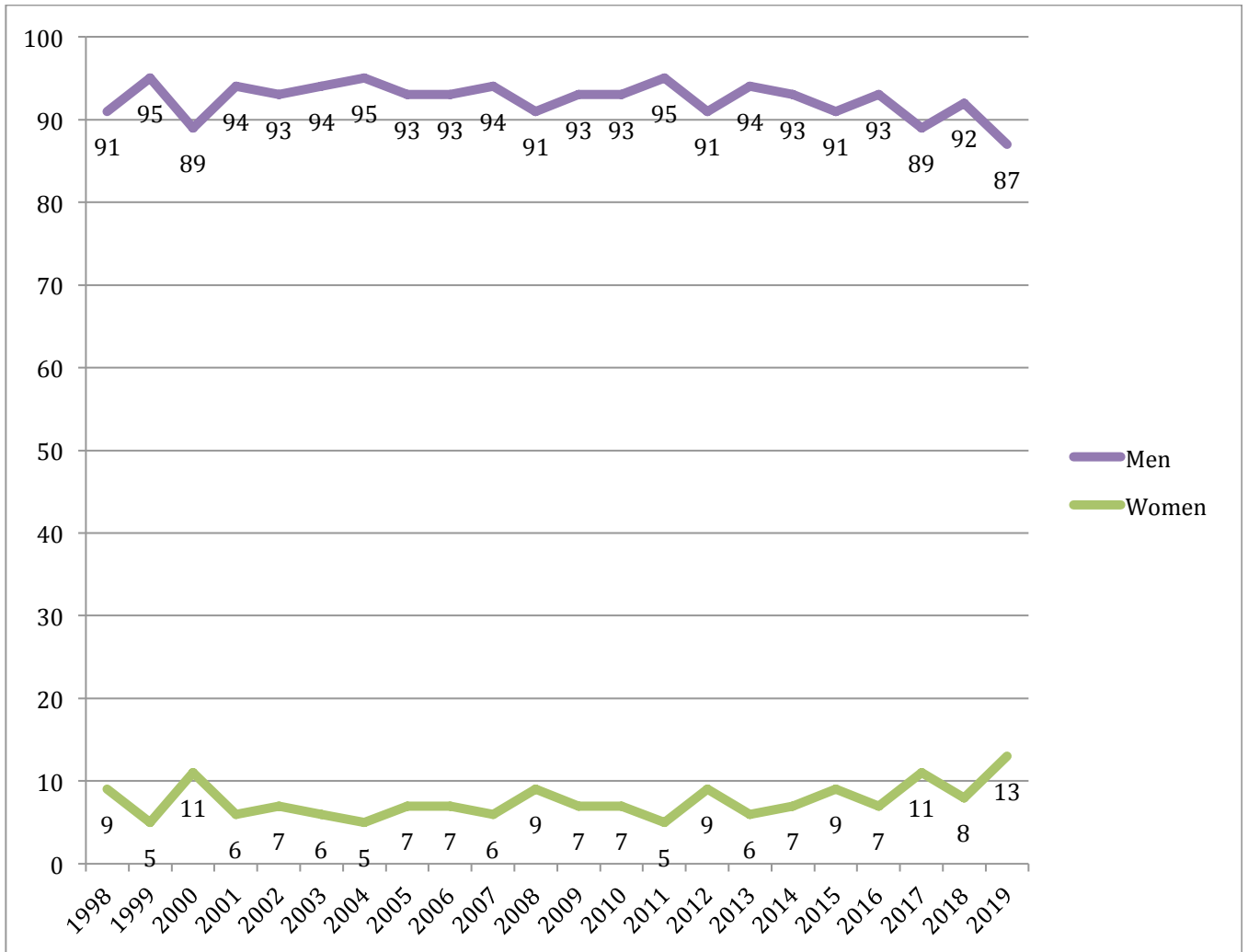
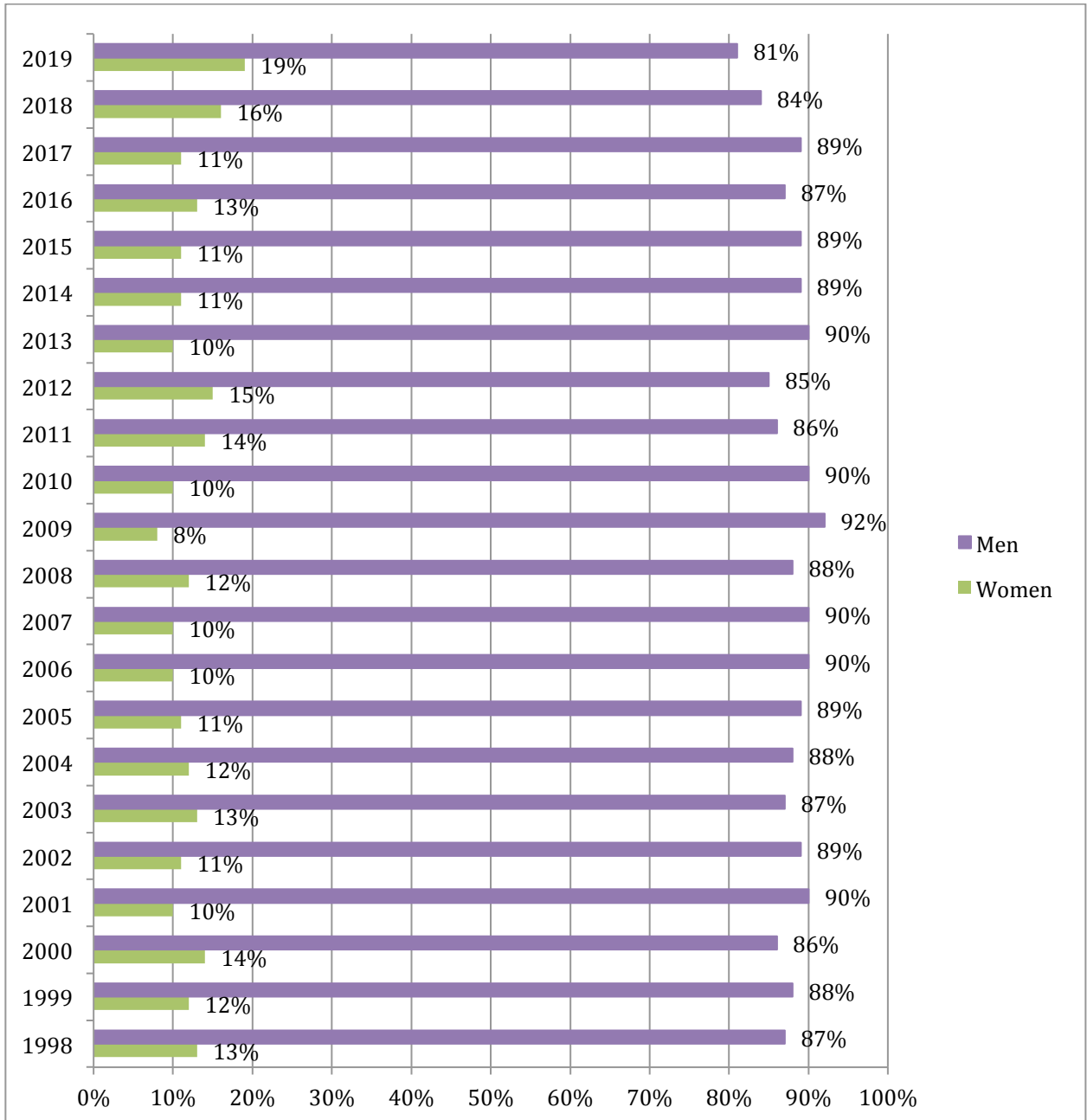


Figure 3.

Women's Employment as **Writers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019



**Summary statement:** Women accounted for 13% of writers in 1998. Over two decades later, that percentage increased 6 percentage points to 19% in 2019.

Figure 3a.

Women's Employment as **Writers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019

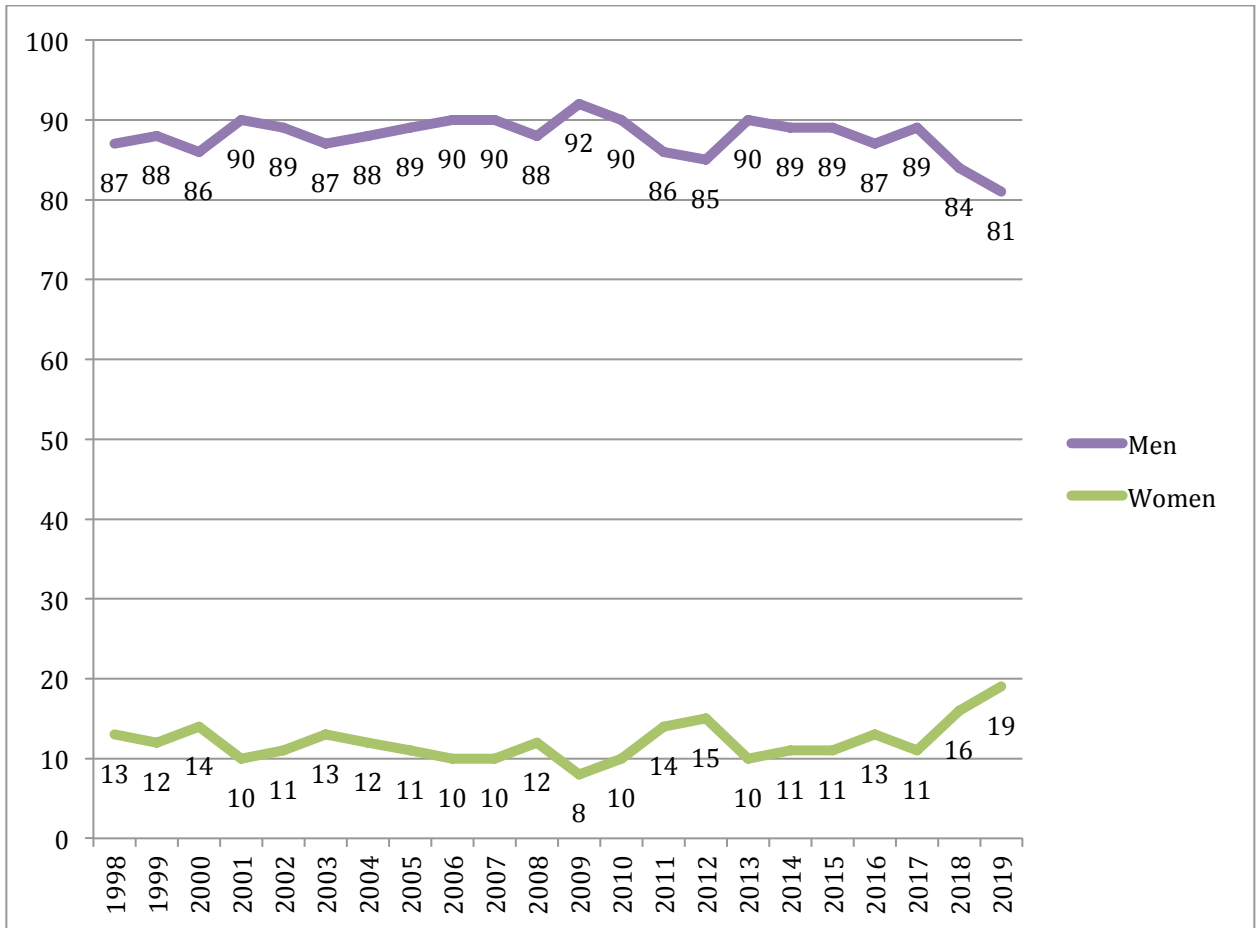
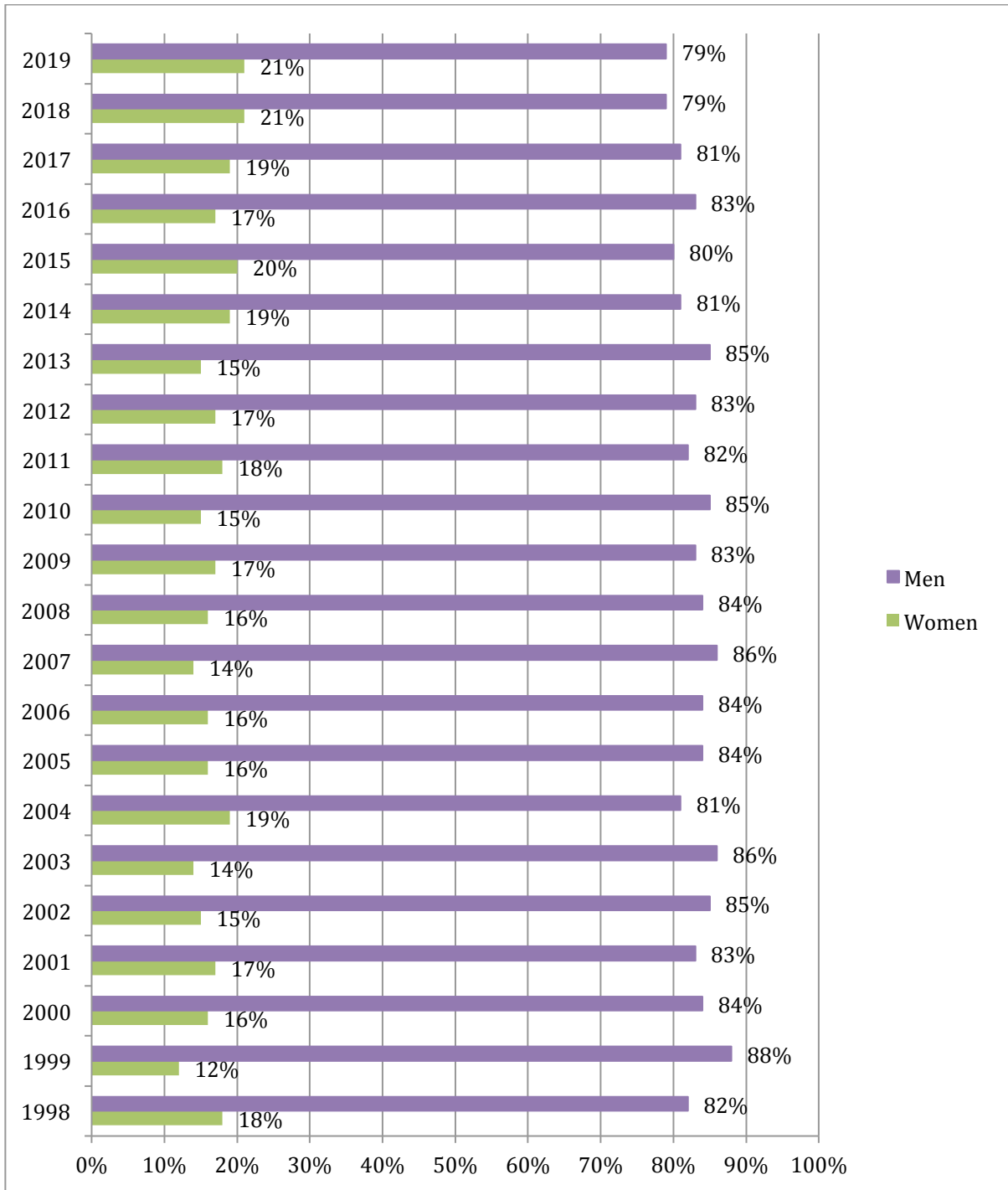




Figure 4.

*Women's Employment as **Executive Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019*



**Summary statement:** Women accounted for 18% of executive producers in 1998. Over 20 years later, that figure increased only 3 percentage points to 21% in 2019.

Figure 4a.

Women's Employment as **Executive Producers** on the 250 (Domestic) Top Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019

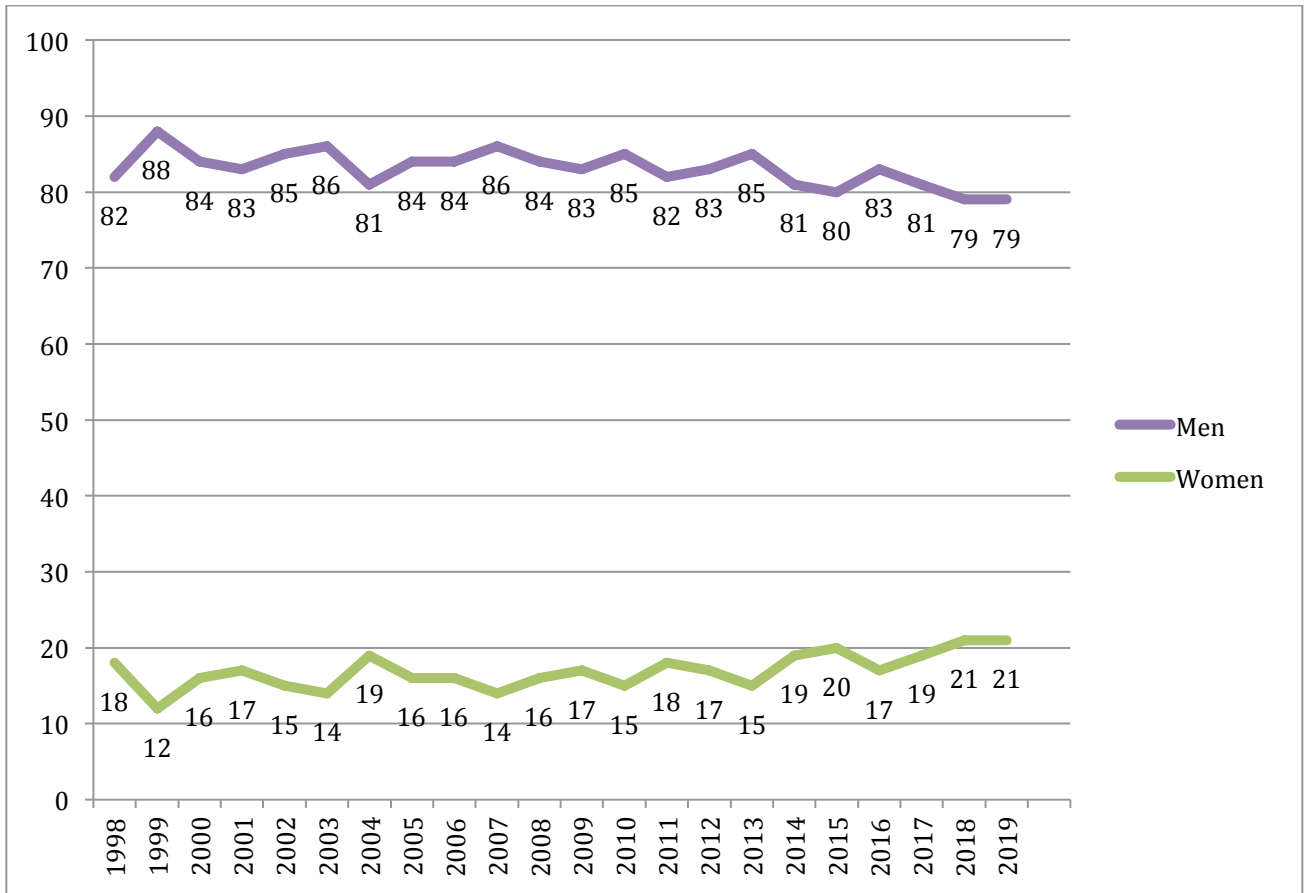
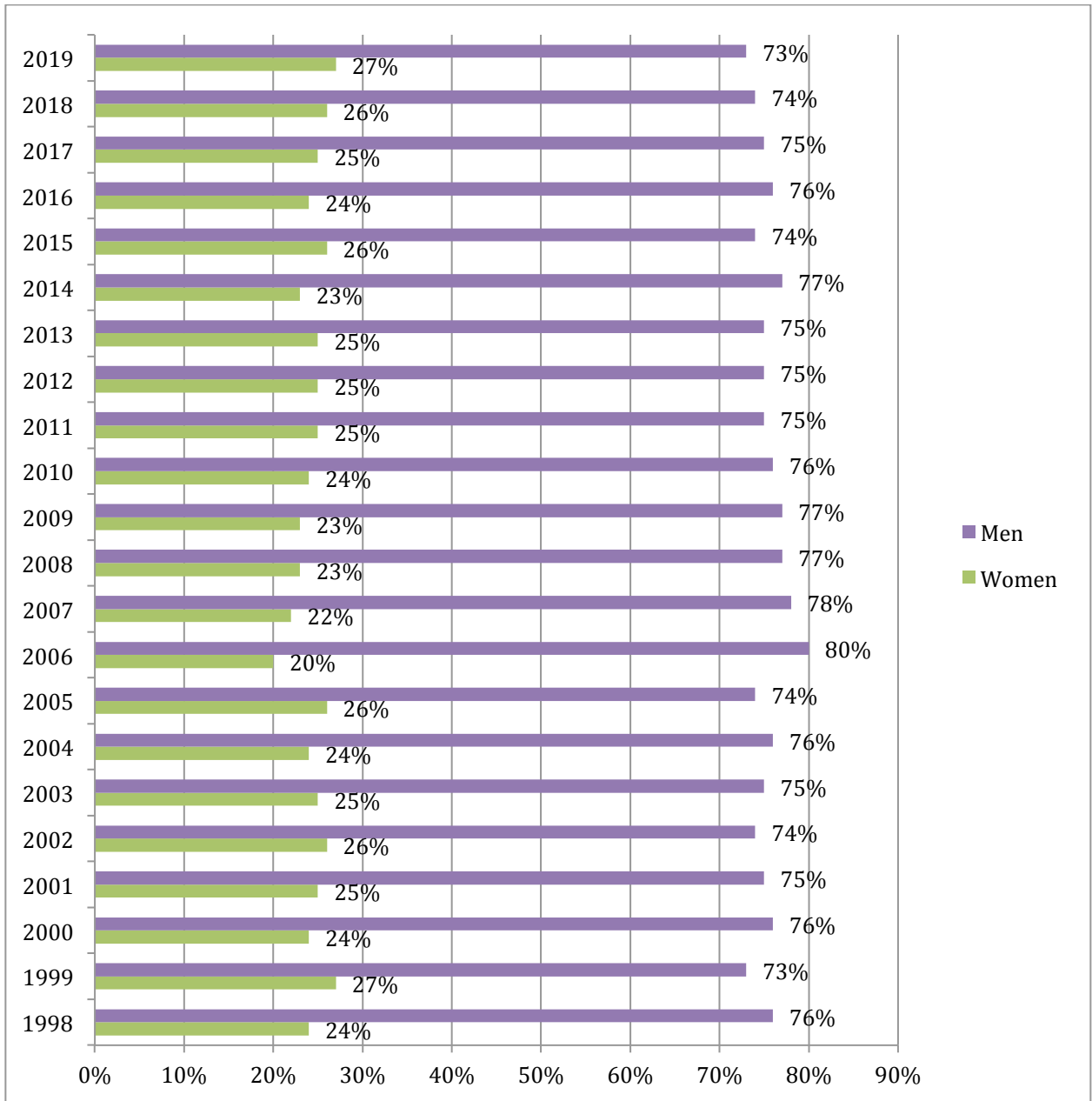


Figure 5.

*Women's Employment as **Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019*



**Summary statement:** In 1998, women comprised 24% of producers. Over 20 years later, that percentage increased only 3 percentage points to 27% in 2019.

Figure 5a.

Women's Employment as **Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019

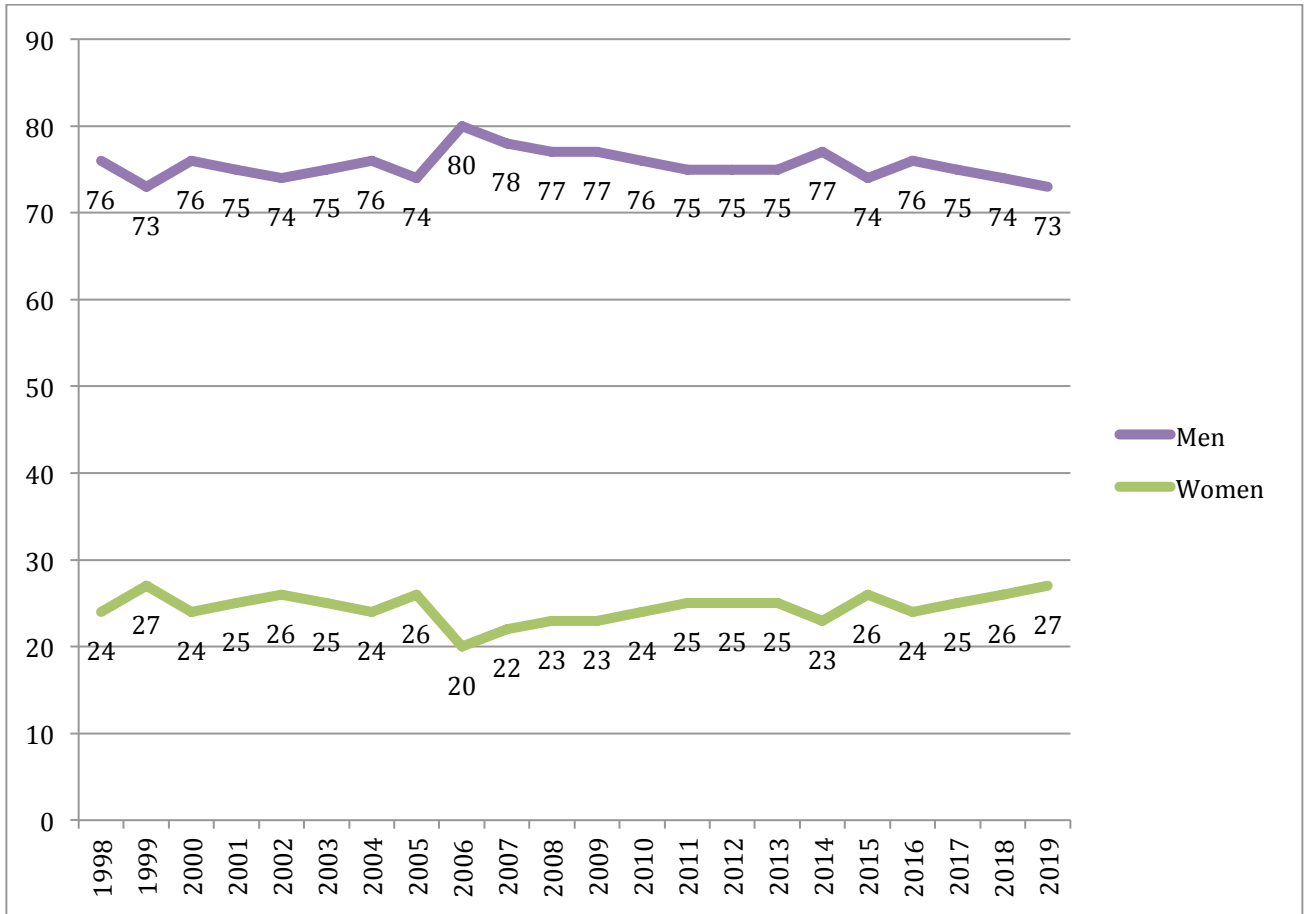
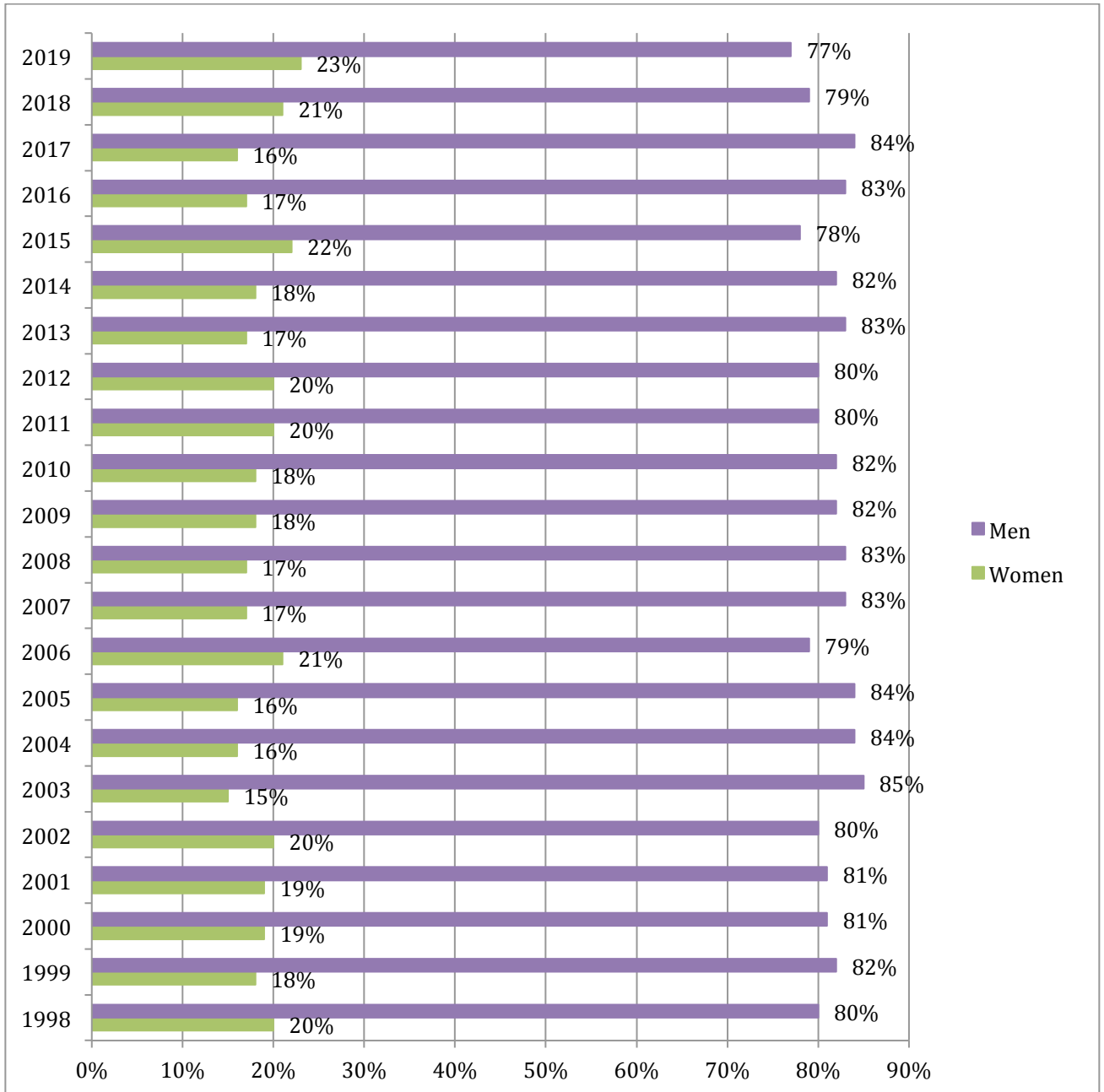


Figure 6.

Women's Employment as **Editors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019



**Summary statement:** In 1998, women accounted for 20% of editors. Over 20 years later, that percentage increased just 3 percentage points to 23% in 2019.

Figure 6a.

Women's Employment as **Editors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019

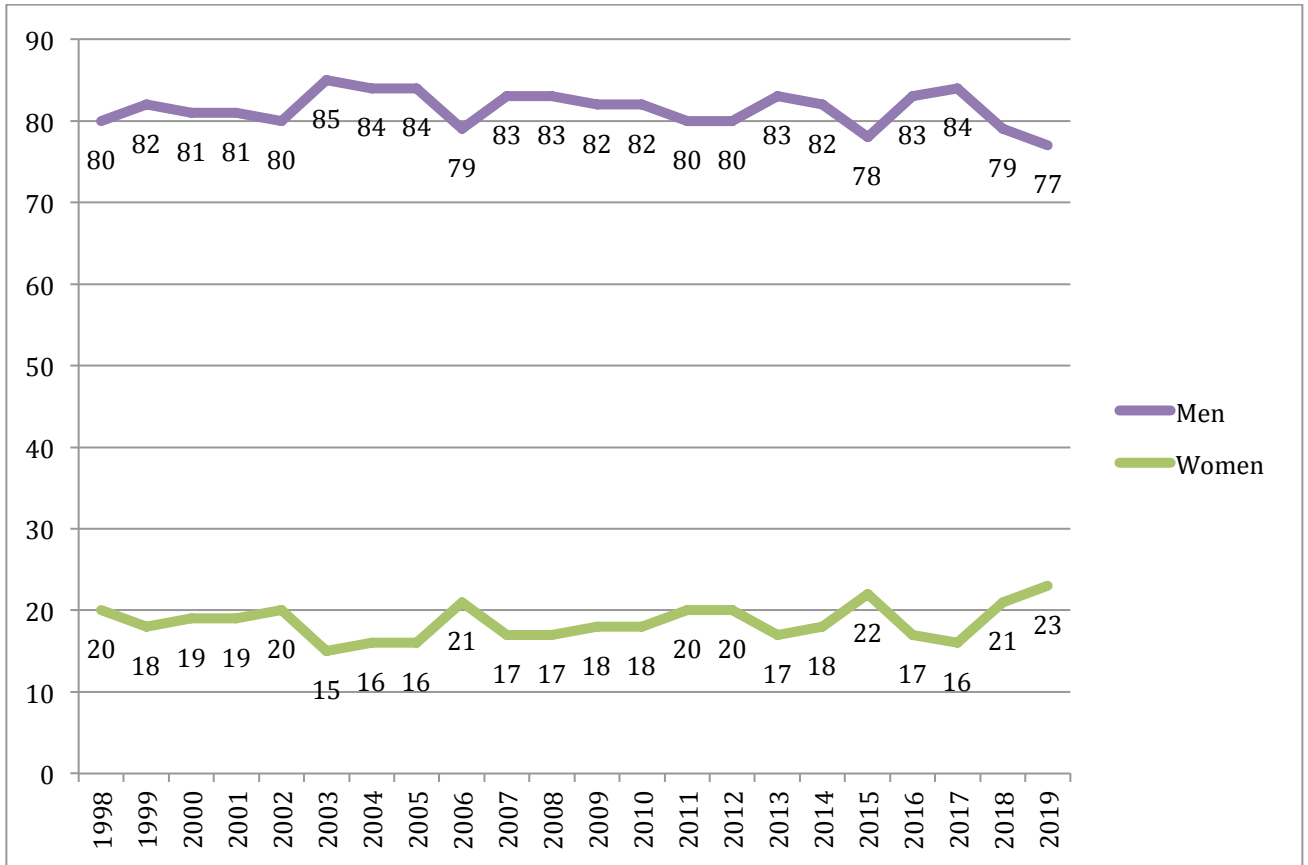
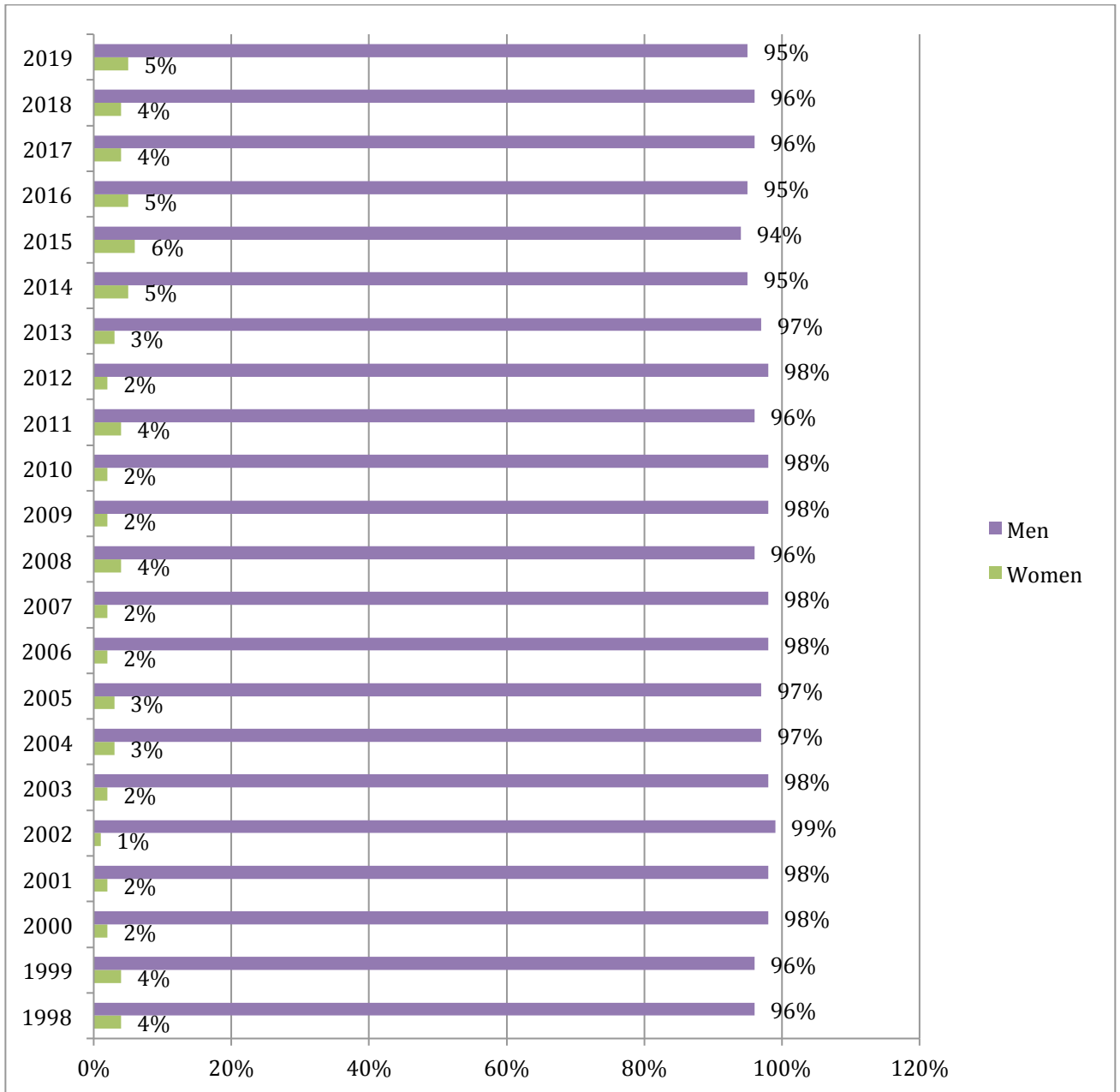


Figure 7.

Women's Employment as **Cinematographers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019



**Summary statement:** In 1998, women comprised 4% of cinematographers. Over 20 years later, that percentage increased only a single percentage point to 5% in 2019.

Figure 7a.

Women's Employment as **Cinematographers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2019

