

Indie Women: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women in U.S. Independent Film, 2022-23

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First initiated in 2008, the *Indie Women* project monitors the employment of behind-the-scenes women working on films screening and/or streaming at 20 high-profile film festivals in the U.S. This report focuses on the representation of women working as directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers on domestically and independently produced feature-length documentaries and narrative films selected by the festivals from July 2022 through June 2023.¹ This year's study also tracks women's representation as composers.

While the fests continue to stream/screen more narrative features directed exclusively by men than those with at least one woman director, the margin is narrowing. In 2022-23, the festivals streamed/screened an average of 10 films by male directors and 7 by female directors. In 2021-22, the ratio was 10 to 6.

For the first time since women's representation at festivals has been tracked, the gender gap disappeared entirely for documentary features, with festivals streaming/screening equal numbers of films directed by men and women in 2022-23.

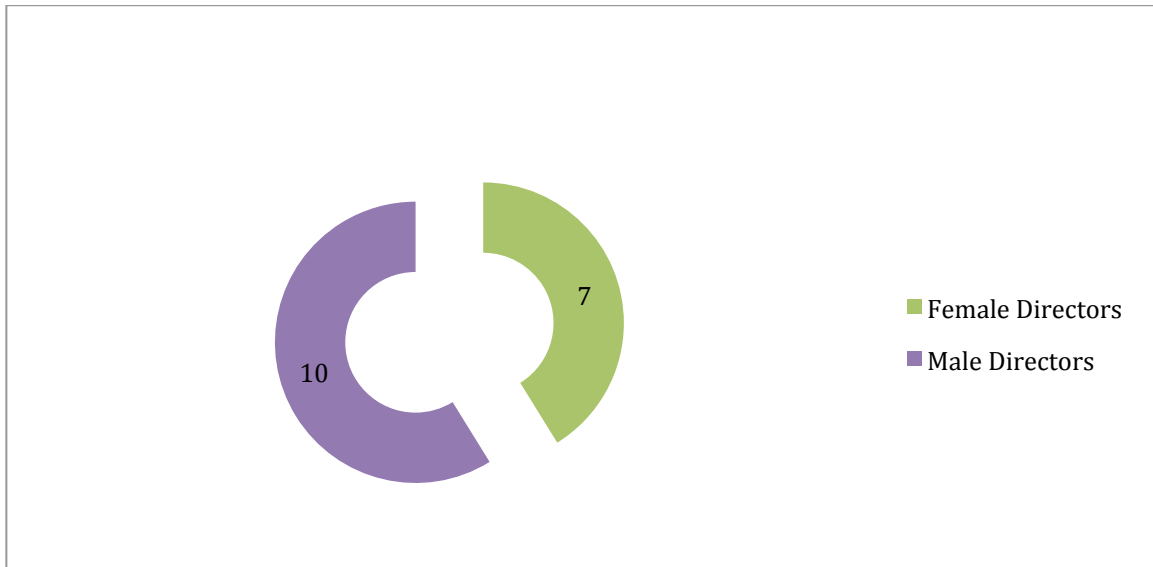
In terms of employment, men continue to comprise the majority of those working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered (men 61%, women 39%) on independently produced narrative films and documentaries. While the percentages of women working as producers, editors, and cinematographers remained stable in 2022-23, the percentage of women working as directors increased from 40% in 2021-22 to 42% in 2022-23. The percentage of women writers rose from 35% in 2021-22 to 40% in 2022-23. These are recent historic highs.

Key Findings

•**In 2022-23, the U.S. festivals considered in this study streamed and/or screened more *narrative* films directed exclusively by men than with at least 1 woman director.** The festivals streamed/screened an average of 10 *narrative* films directed by men, compared to an average of 7 films directed by at least one woman (see Figure 1). This marks a slight improvement from 2021-22 when the festivals streamed/screened an average of 10 narrative films directed by men and 6 films directed by women.

Figure 1.

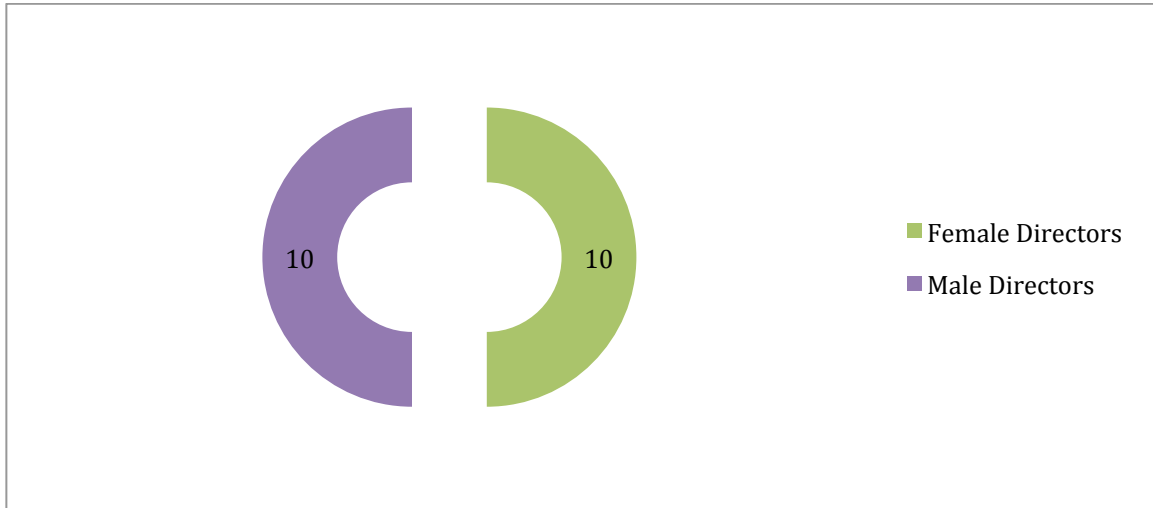
Average No. of Narrative Features Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Streamed/Screened at U.S. Festivals



•**For the first time since women’s representation at festivals has been tracked, festivals streamed and/or screened equal numbers of documentaries directed by women and men in 2022-23.** Festivals streamed/screened an average of 10 *documentaries* directed exclusively by men versus an average of 10 documentaries directed by at least one woman (see Figure 2). This marks a slight improvement from 2021-22 when festivals streamed/screened an average of 11 documentaries directed by men and 10 directed by women.

Figure 2.

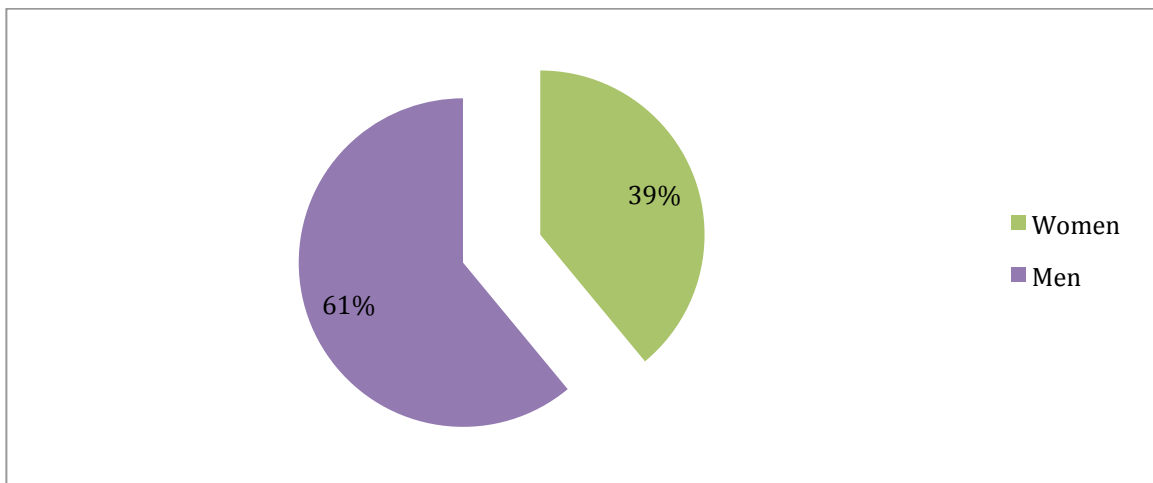
Average No. of Documentaries Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Streamed/Screened at U.S. Festivals



•In 2022-23, women comprised 39% of individuals working in key behind-the-scenes roles on U.S. independent features (narrative films and documentaries). This represents no change from 2021-22. Men continued to account for the majority (61%) of individuals in these roles (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women and Men Working on U.S. Independent Features Streamed/Screened at High-Profile Festivals in 2022-23



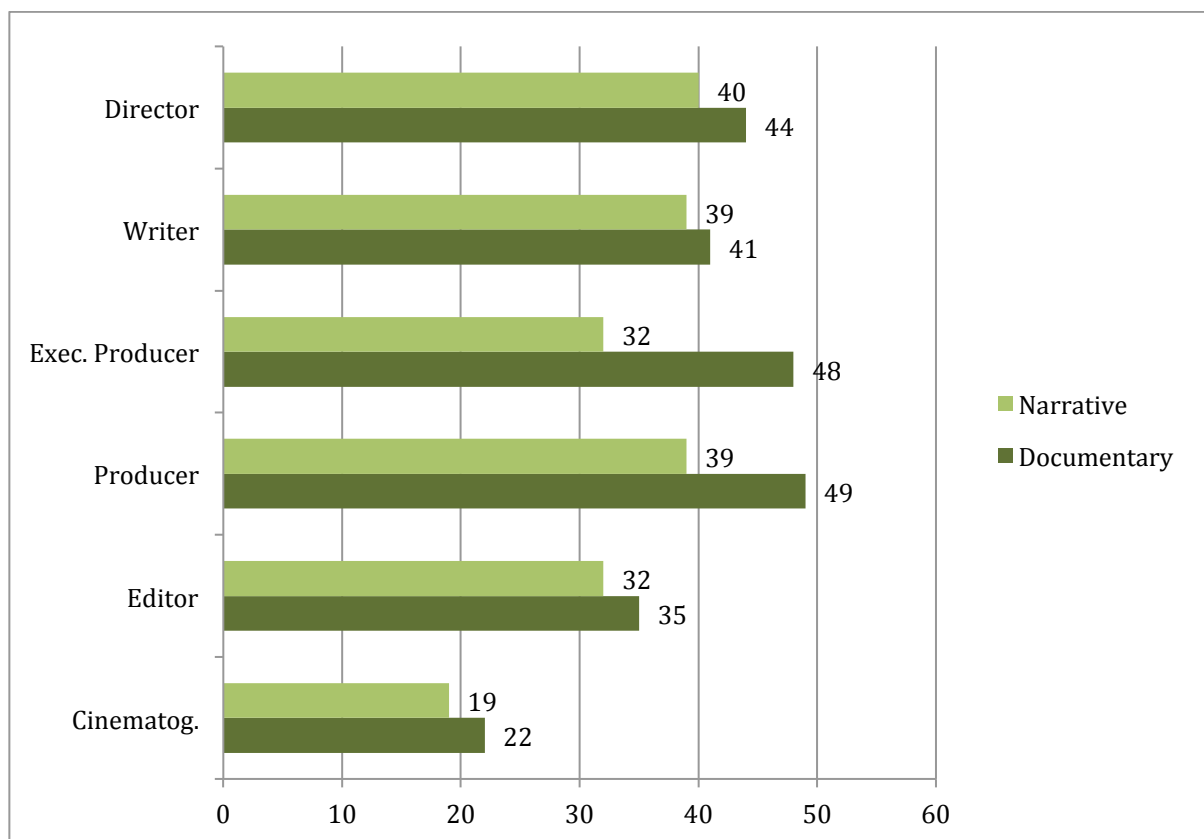
•On all films considered (narrative features and documentaries), women fared best as producers (44%), followed by directors (42%), executive producers (40%), writers (40%), editors (34%), and cinematographers (21%).

•Women continued to enjoy higher employment on documentaries than on narrative features. Women accounted for 44% of those working in key behind-the-scenes roles on documentaries and 35% of those working on narrative features.

•The percentage of women working in every role considered was higher on documentaries than on narrative features (see Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Comparison of Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women Working on Narrative Features vs. Documentaries



•Films with at least one woman director had substantially higher percentages of women working as writers, editors, cinematographers, and composers. For example, on films with at least one woman director, women comprised 30% of cinematographers.

On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 12% of cinematographers.

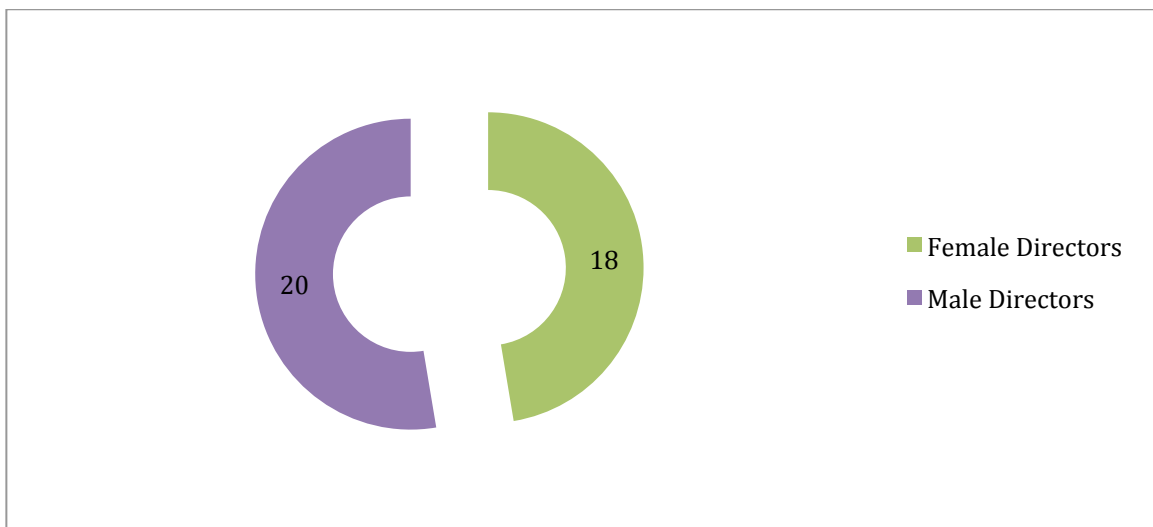
•**Overall, women comprised 20% and men 80% of composers working on independent films in 2022-23.** Women composers fared better on documentaries (26%) than narrative features (16%).

Findings for Documentaries and Narrative Features Streamed and/or Screened at Festivals

Overall, high-profile festivals in the U.S. streamed and/or screened an average of 18 films (narrative features and documentaries) directed by at least one woman versus an average of 20 films directed exclusively by men (see Figure 5). This is an improvement from 2021-22 when the festivals screened an average of 16 films directed by women and 20 directed by men.

Figure 5.

Average No. of Narrative and Documentary Films Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Streamed/Screened at U.S. Festivals



Women comprised 39% of directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on independently and domestically produced feature-length films in 2022-23 (see Figure 3 in Key Findings section). This represents

no change from 2021-22.

Women fared best as producers (44%), followed by directors (42%), executive producers (40%), writers (40%), editors (34%), and cinematographers (21%) (see Figure 6).

By role, women accounted for 42% of directors, up 2 percentage points from 40% in 2021-22. Women comprised 40% of writers, up 5 percentage points from 35% in 2021-22. Women made up 40% of executive producers, down 2 percentage points from 40% in 2021-22. Women accounted for 44% of producers, even with the percentage in 2021-22. Women comprised 34% of editors, up 1 percentage point from 33% in 2021-22. Women accounted for 21% of cinematographers, even with the percentage in 2021-22. Figure 7 provides a historical comparison of 2022-23 figures with those from prior years.²

Figure 6.

Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women and Men Working on Narrative Features and Documentaries by Role

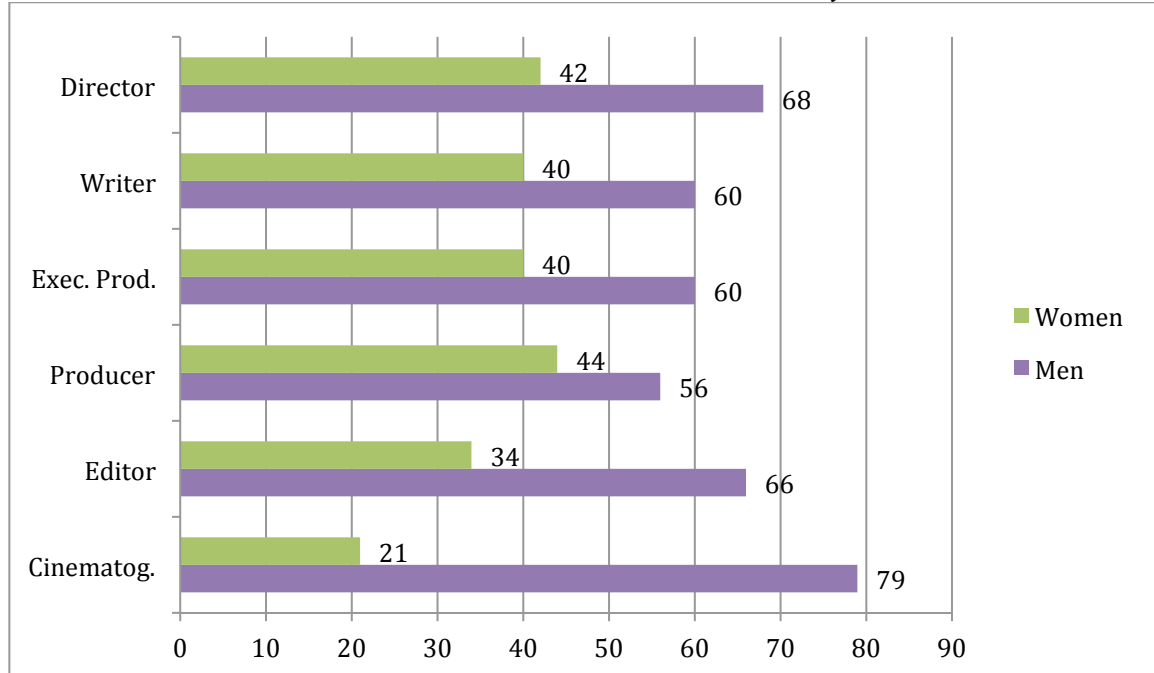
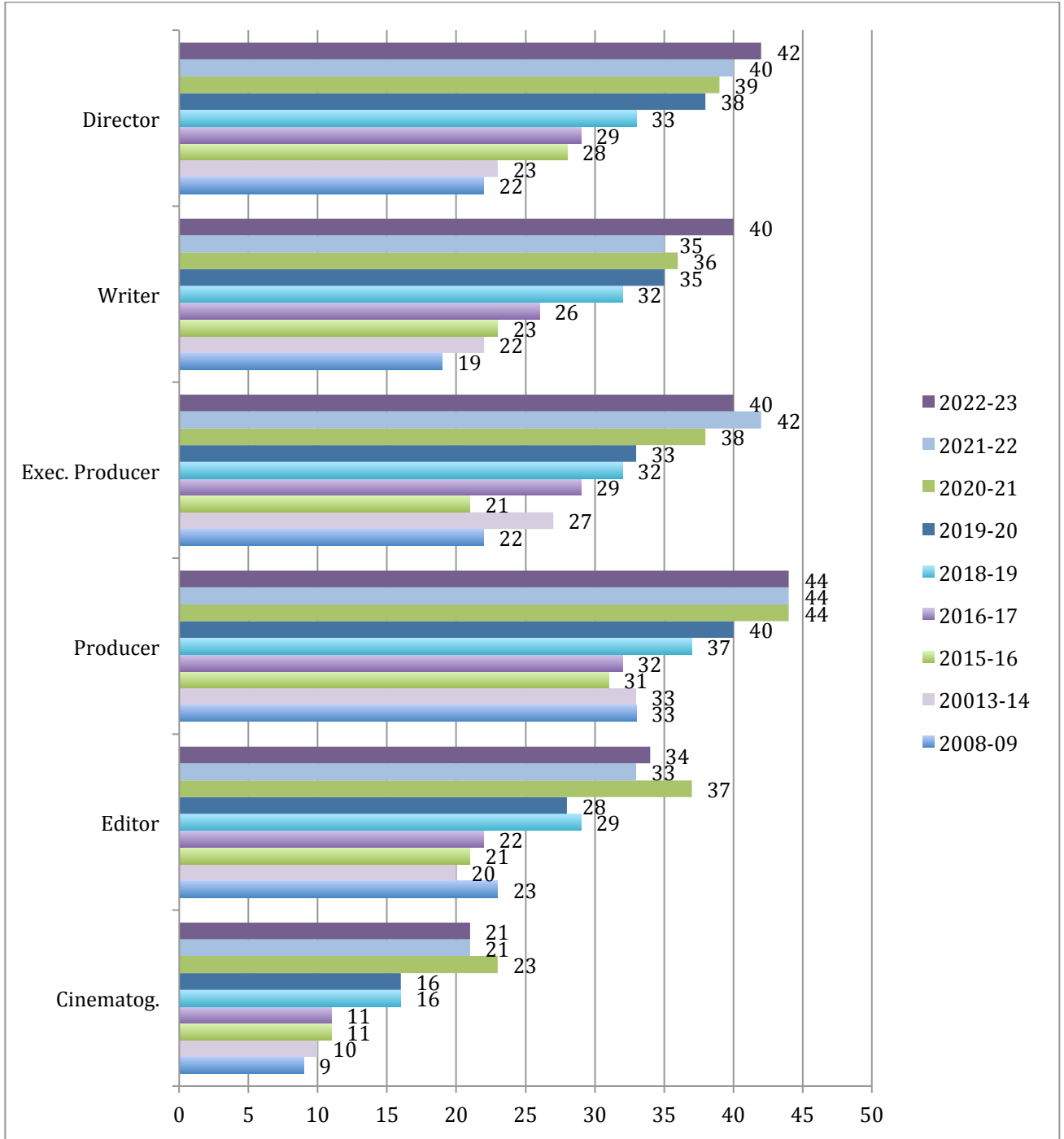


Figure 7.

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



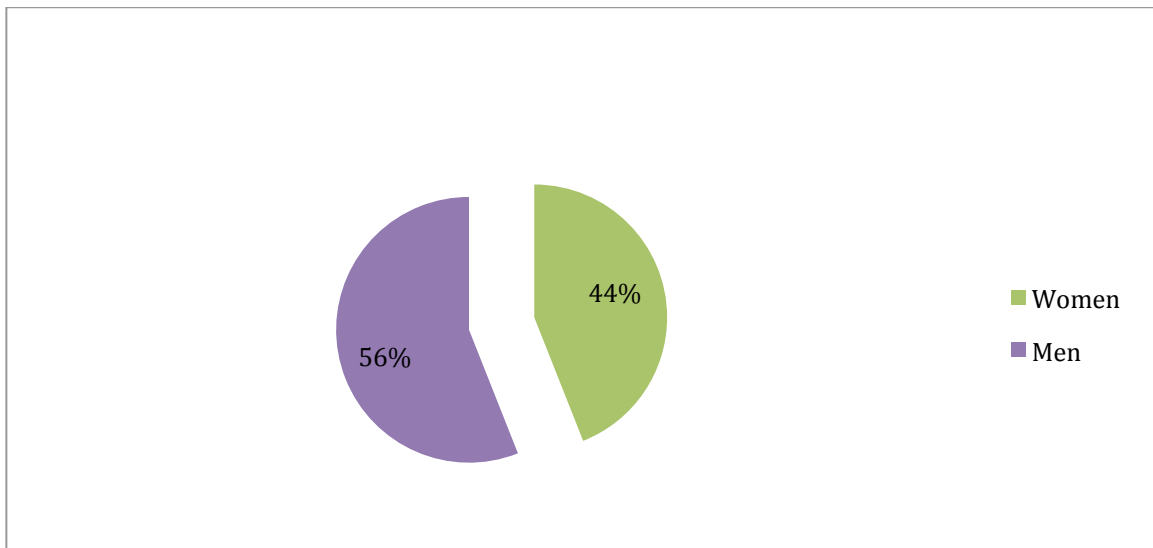
Women directors and writers achieved historic highs in 2022-23.

Findings for Documentaries Only

Women comprised 44% and men 56% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on documentaries in 2022-23 (see Figure 8). For women, this represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 43% in 2021-22.

Figure 8.

Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women and Men Working on Documentaries Streaming/Screening at High-Profile Festivals



Women fared best as producers (49%), followed by executive producers (48%), directors (44%), writers (41%), editors (35%), and cinematographers (22%) (see Figure 9).

Figure 9.

Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women and Men Working on Documentaries by Role

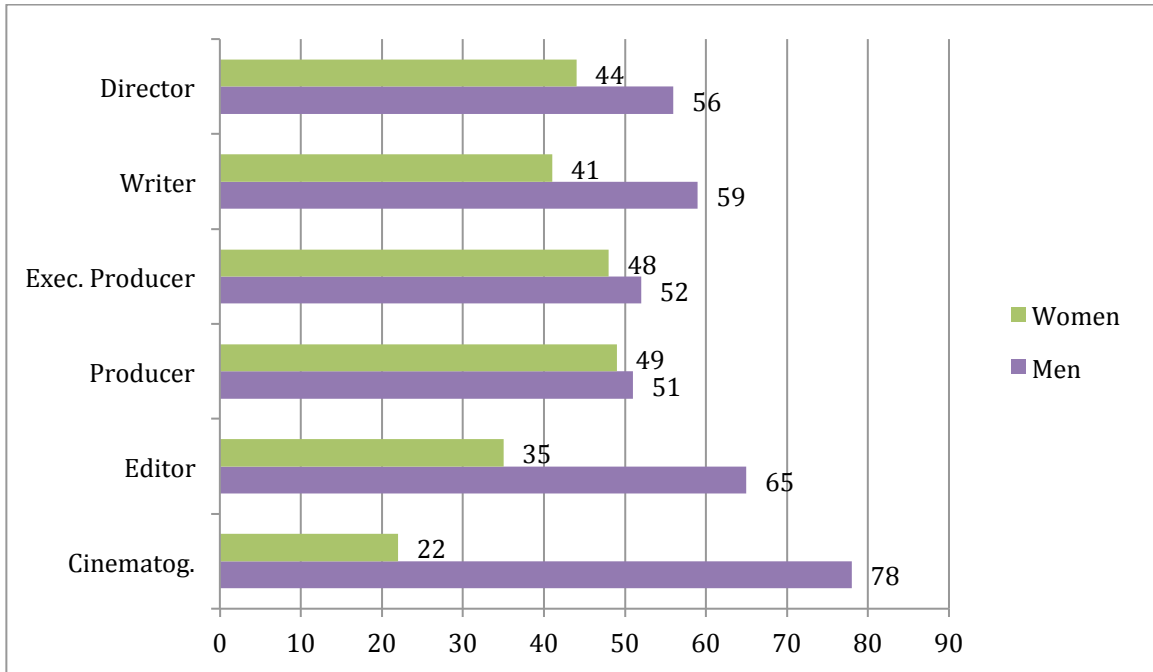
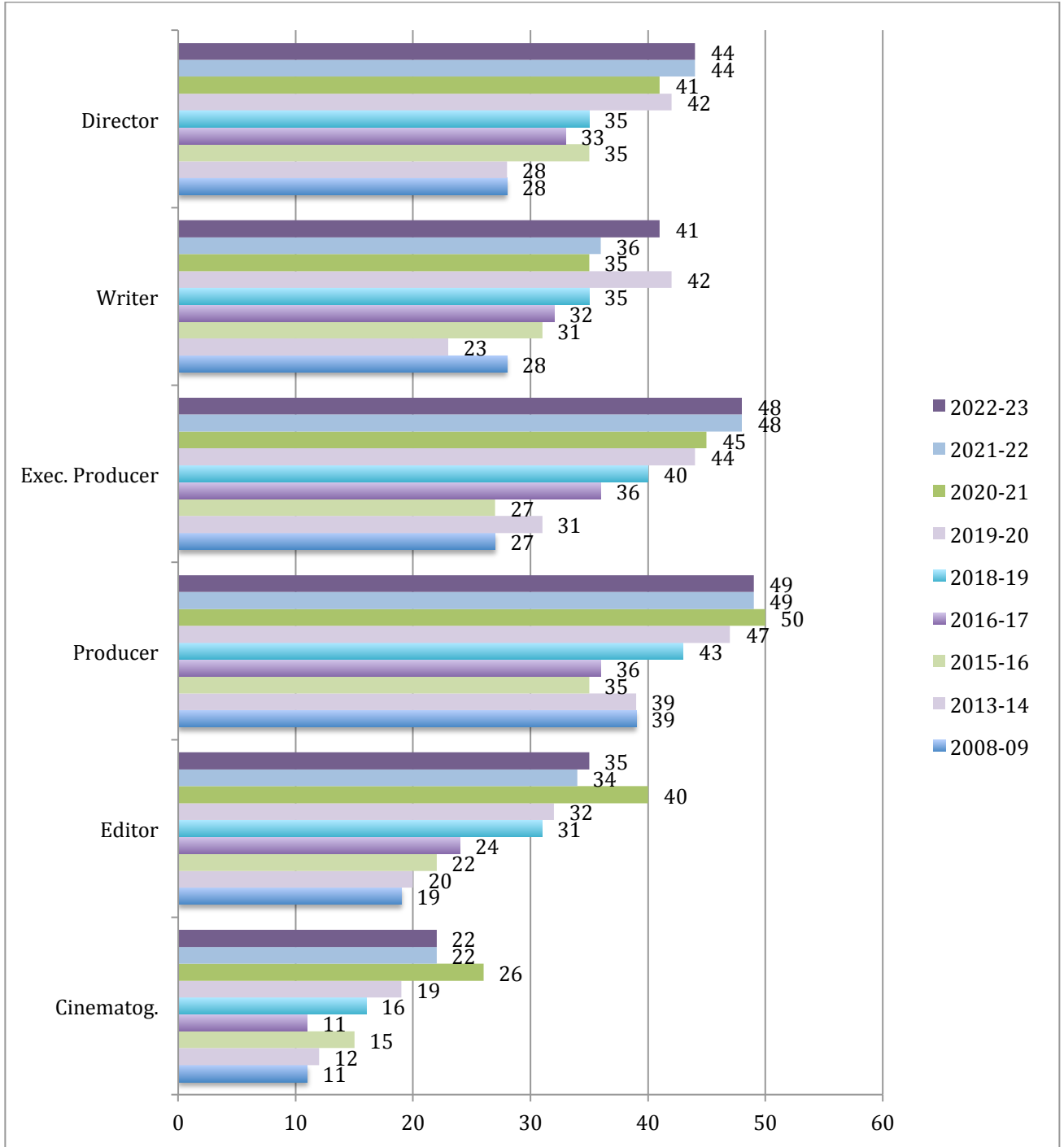


Figure 10 provides a historical comparison of 2022-23 figures with those from prior years. By role, women comprised 44% of directors, even with the percentage in 2021-22. Women accounted for 41% of writers, up 5 percentage points from 36% in 2021-22. Women made up 48% of executive producers, even with the percentage in 2021-22. Women comprised 49% of producers, even with the percentage in 2021-22. Women accounted for 35% of editors, up 1 percentage point from 34% in 2021-22. Women made up 22% of cinematographers, even with the percentage in 2021-22.

Figure 10.

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Documentaries by Role

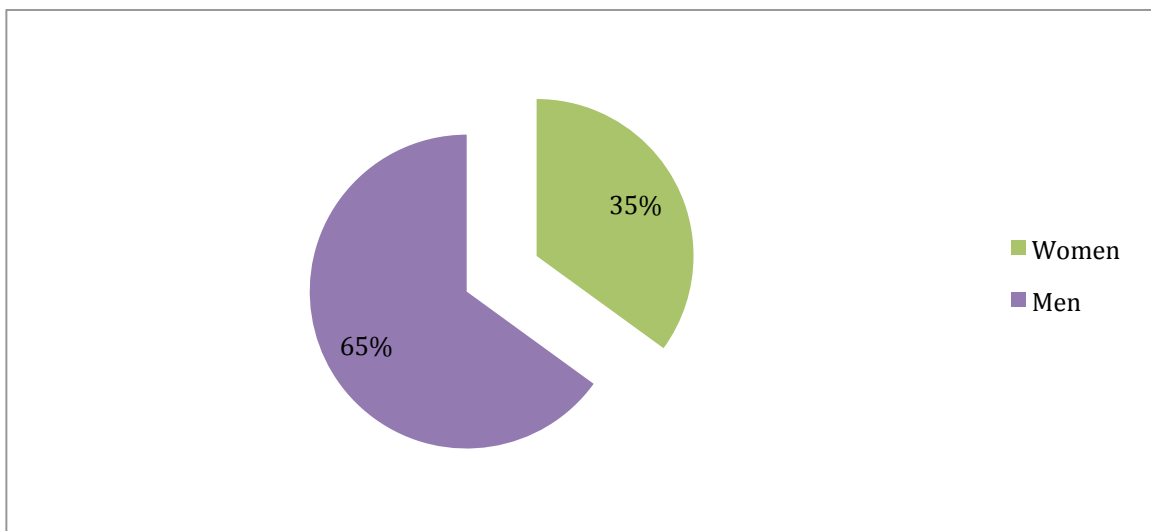


Findings for Narrative Features Only

Overall, women comprised 35% and men 65% of individuals working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered on domestically and independently produced narrative features in 2022-23 (see Figure 11). For women, this represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 34% in 2021-22.

Figure 11.

Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women and Men Working on Narrative Features Streaming/Screening at High-Profile Festivals



Women fared best as directors (40%), followed by producers (39%), writers (39%), executive producers (32%), editors (32%), and cinematographers (19%) (see Figure 12).

Figure 12.
Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women and Men Working
on Narrative Features by Role

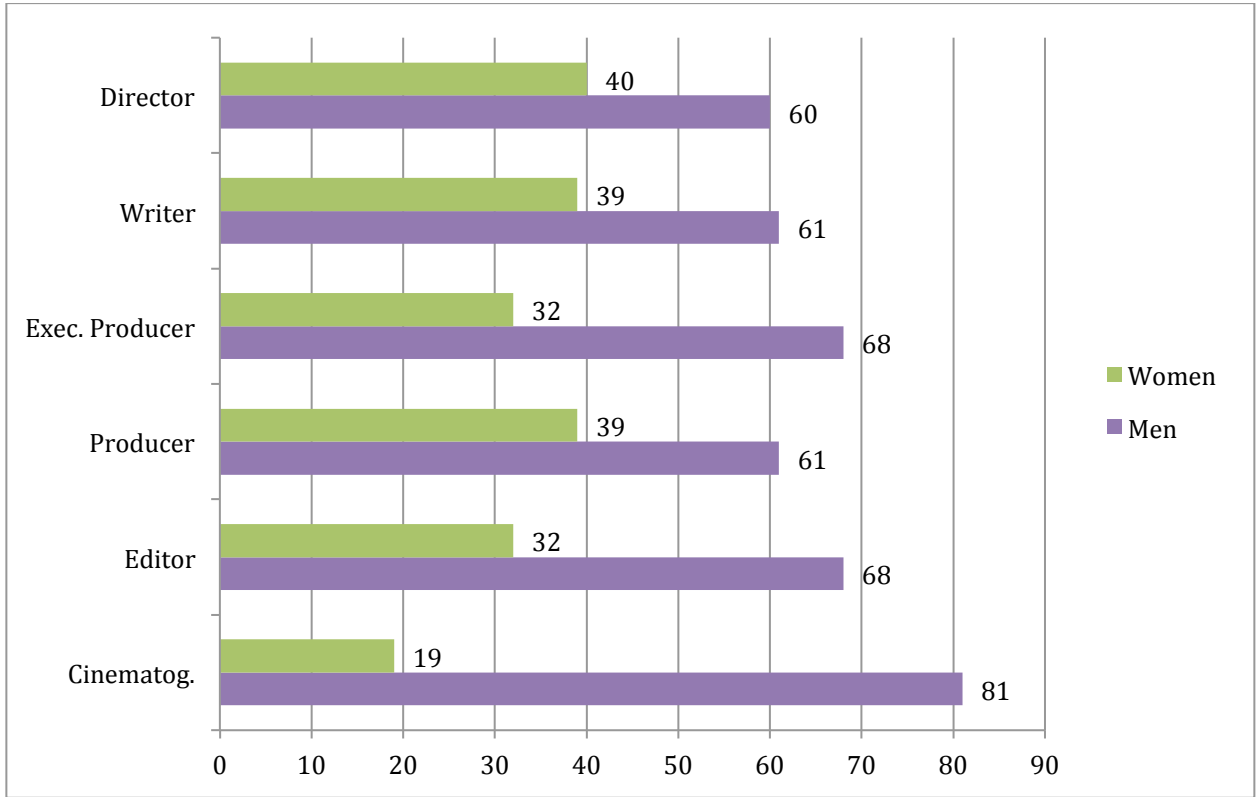
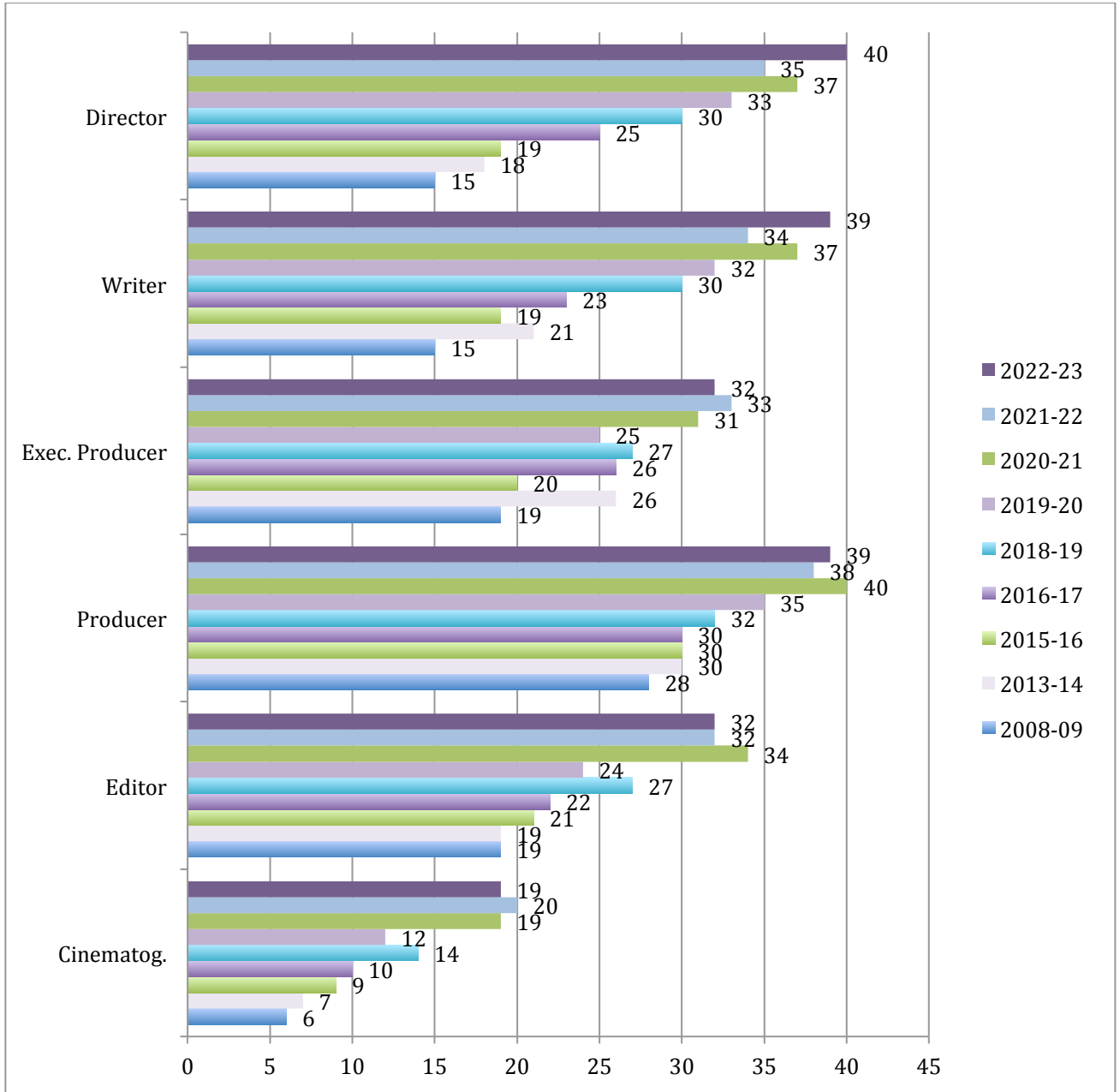


Figure 13 provides a historical comparison of 2022-23 figures with those from prior years. By role, women comprised 40% of directors, up 5 percentage points from 35% in 2021-22. Women accounted for 39% of writers, up 5 percentage points from 34% in 2021-22. Women made up 32% of executive producers, down 1 percentage point from 33% in 2021-22. Women comprised 39% of producers, up 1 percentage point from 38% in 2021-22. Women accounted for 32% of editors, even with the percentage in 2021-22. Women made up 19% of cinematographers, down 1 percentage point from 20% in 2021-22.

Figure 13.

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Narrative Features by Role



Women who direct and write reached historic highs on narrative features in 2022-23.

Findings for Composers

Overall, women comprised 20% and men 80% of composers working on independently and domestically produced narrative and documentary films in 2022-23.

Composers, who happen to be women, fared better on documentaries than narrative features. Women accounted for 26% of composers working on documentaries and 16% of composers working on narrative features.

When a film had at least one woman director, women accounted for 29% of composers. When a film had exclusively men directors, women comprised 13% of composers.

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 14).

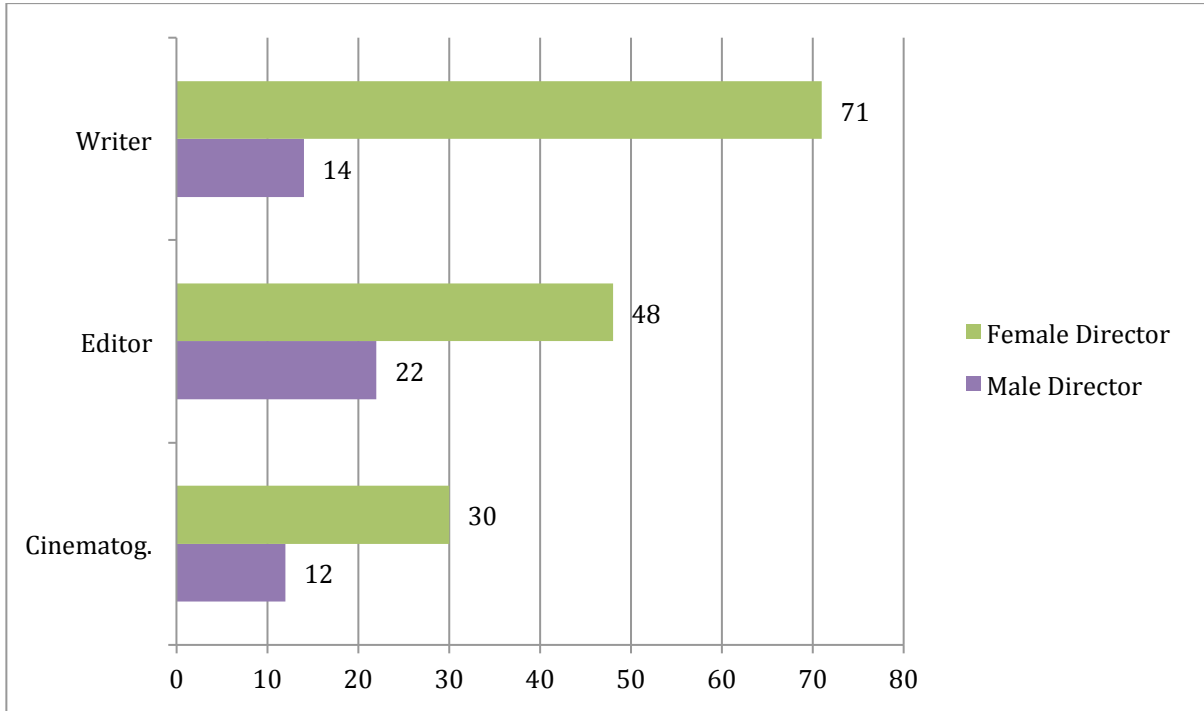
On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 71% of writers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 14% of writers.

On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 48% of editors. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 22% of editors.

On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 30% of cinematographers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 12% of cinematographers.

Figure 14.

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



Endnotes

¹The festivals include AFI Fest; Atlanta Film Festival; Austin Film Festival; Chicago International Film Festival; Cinequest Film Festival; Cleveland International Film Festival; Florida Film Festival; Hamptons International Film Festival; Nashville Film Festival; New Hampshire Film Festival; New York Film Festival; Rhode Island International Film Festival; St. Louis International Film Festival; San Francisco International Film Festival; Santa Barbara International Film Festival; Seattle International Film Festival; Slamdance Film Festival; Sundance Film Festival; SXSW Film Festival; Tribeca Film Festival. In total, this study considers 11,094 credits on 754 films in 2022-23, and over 116,400 credits on more than 10,900 films over the period of 2008 to 2023.

All of the films included in the study were posted on the festival's website and/or in program guides. The study included U.S. feature films (narrative and documentaries) screening/streaming at the festivals, including those in and out of competition.

There are no definitive or objective lists from reputable sources designating the "top" festivals. However, festivals appearing on the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Oscar qualifying lists (short films/documentaries) tend to be well regarded. The festivals included in this study appear on those, as well as other, industry lists.

For the purposes of this study, independent film is broadly defined as films made outside of the studio system. However, the study does include films produced by independent companies owned by the major studios.

²The selection of film festivals in 2022-23 is almost identical to the selection in 2021-22. The only change was that the New Hampshire Film Festival replaced the Ann Arbor Film Festival.