

# **Independent Women: Behind-the-Scenes Representation on Festival Films**

by Martha M. Lauzen, Ph.D.

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The percentage of women working as directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, and editors on domestically produced feature-length films appearing at top U.S. film festivals is substantially higher than the percentage of women working on the top 250 domestic grossing films (24% vs. 16%). In fact, in every behind-the-scenes role considered, a higher percentage of women worked on festival films than top grossing films. These differences are largely due to the high numbers of documentaries screening at film festivals.

The differences between festival and top grossing features are especially dramatic in the two most traditionally male roles, directing and cinematography. In these positions, the percentages of women working on festival versus top grossing films more than doubles.

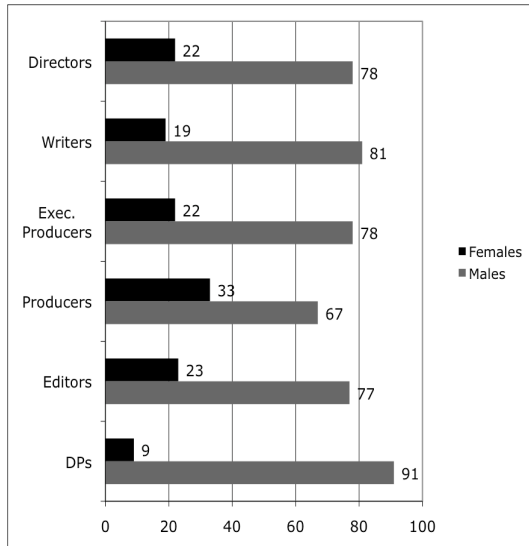
The following summary provides employment figures for feature-length festival films (June 2008-May 2009) and compares these figures to those culled from the top grossing films of 2008 as reported in the annual *Celluloid Ceiling* study released earlier this year.

The 25 film festivals considered in this study include: AFI Fest; Ann Arbor Film Festival; Atlanta Film Festival; Austin Film Festival; Chicago International Film Festival; Cinequest Film Festival; CineVegas Film Festival; Cleveland International Film Festival; Florida Film Festival; Hamptons International Film Festival; Los Angeles Film Festival; Nashville 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; Seattle International Film Festival; Slamdance Film Festival; Sundance Film Festival; SXSW Film Festival; Telluride Film Festival; Tribeca Film Festival.

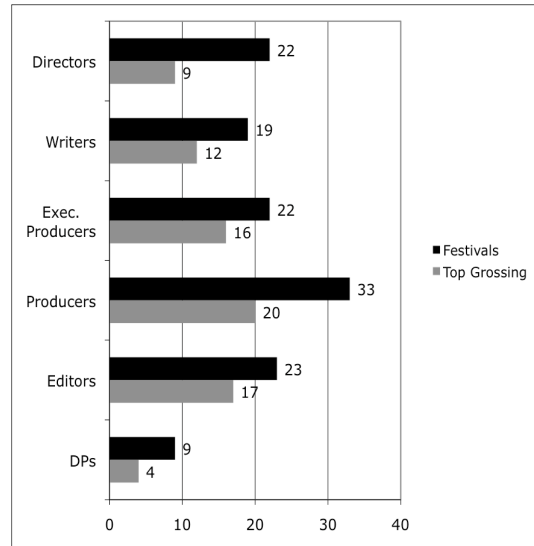
## *Overall Findings*

- This study analyzed behind-the-scenes employment of 8,051 individuals working on 906 feature-length films identifying the U.S. as the country of origin screening at the 25 festivals listed above.
- Overall, women fared best as producers (33%), followed by editors (23%), executive producers (22%), directors (22%), writers (19%), and directors of photography (9%) (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1.  
Percentages of Women Employed in Key  
Behind-the-Scenes Roles at Film  
Festivals*



*Figure 2.  
Comparison of Women Employed in Key  
Behind-the-Scenes Roles at Film  
Festivals vs. Top Grossing Films*



- Women comprised 22% of directors working on films appearing at the festivals considered, compared to 9% on top grossing films (see Figure 2).
- Seventy seven percent (77%) of festival films employed no women directors.
- Women accounted for 19% of writers working on films appearing at festivals but only 12% on top grossing films.
- Eighty four percent (84%) of festival films employed no women writers.
- Women comprised 22% of executive producers working on films appearing at festivals, compared to 16% working on top grossing films.
- Seventy seven percent (77%) of festival films employed no women writers.

- Women accounted for 33% of producers working on films appearing at festivals but only 20% of those working on top grossing films.
- Forty one percent (41%) of festival films employed no women producers.
- Women comprised 23% of editors working on festival films compared to 17% of those working on top grossing films.
- Seventy six percent (76%) of festival films employed no women editors.
- Women comprised 9% of directors of photography working on festival films but only 4% of those working on top grossing films.

- Ninety one percent (91%) of festival films employed no women directors of photography.

#### *Narrative vs. Documentary*

- Documentaries accounted for almost half (49%) of all feature-length films screening at the festivals considered. Because behind-the-scenes women have traditionally been better represented on documentaries than narrative features, separate analyses were conducted.
- Women comprised a larger percentage of directors working on documentaries than narrative films. Of all directors working on documentaries, 28% were female and 72% were male. Of all directors working on narrative films, 15% were female and 85% were male.
- Of all women directors working on festival films, 32% directed narrative films and 67% directed documentaries. In contrast, of all men directors working on festival films, 52% directed narrative films and 48% directed documentaries. In other words, females were more likely to direct documentaries than narrative features whereas males were almost as likely to direct documentaries as narrative films.
- A higher percentage of women worked as directors of photography on documentaries than narrative films. Of all directors of photography working on documentaries, 11% were female and 89% were male. Of all directors of photography working on narrative

features, 6% were female and 94% were male.

- Women directors of photography were more likely to work on documentaries than narrative films. Of all women directors of photography, 67% worked on documentaries and 33% worked on narrative features. In contrast, of all men dps working on feature films, 47% worked on narrative features and 53% worked on documentary features. In other words, women were much more likely to work as dps on documentaries than narrative features whereas men were almost as likely to work on narrative features as documentaries.
- Overall, women comprised a larger percentage of behind-the-scenes workers on documentaries than narrative features. Of all behind-the-scenes individuals working on documentaries, 29% were female and 71% were male. Of all behind-the-scenes individuals working on narrative features, 18% were female and 78% were male.

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