

# *Indie Women: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women in Independent Film, 2017-18*

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*Indie Women* is the most comprehensive study of women’s behind-the-scenes employment on independent films available. The report is sponsored by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University.

## Key Findings

•**In 2017-18, U.S. festivals screened almost three times as many narrative features directed by men as by women.**

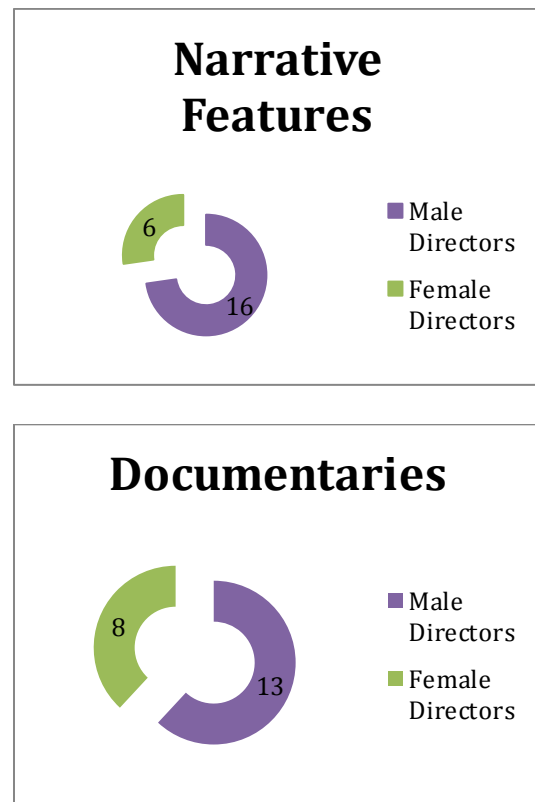
The festivals considered screened an average of 16 narrative films directed by men, compared to an average of 6 films directed by at least one woman. Festivals screened an average of 13 documentaries directed by men versus an average of 8 documentaries directed by at least one woman (see Figure 1).

•**Overall, independent films screening at high-profile film festivals in the U.S. employed more than twice as many men as women in key behind-the-scenes roles in 2017-18.** 71% of those working in these roles (directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, cinematographers) were males and 29% were females. This represents an increase of one percentage point from 28% in 2016-17.

•**85% of the independent films screening at the festivals had no women cinematographers, 77% had no women writers, 73% had no women editors, 67% had no women executive producers, 66% had no women directors, and 33% had no women producers.**

•**Women continue to enjoy higher employment on documentaries than on narrative features.** Women accounted for 34% of those working in key behind-the-scenes roles on documentaries versus 26% of those working on narrative features.

Figure 1.  
Average No. of Films Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Screening at High-Profile U.S. Festivals



**•The percentages of women working as editors and cinematographers reached historic highs in 2017-18.**

Women comprised 27% of editors, topping a previous high of 25% achieved in 2011-12. Women accounted for 17% of cinematographers, topping a previous high of 13% achieved in 2011-12.

**•Films with at least one woman director also had substantially higher percentages of women writers, editors, and cinematographers.**

On films with at least one female director, women comprised 71% of *writers* versus 8% on films directed exclusively by men. On films with at least one female director, women accounted for 47% of *editors* versus 17% on films directed exclusively by men. On films with at least one female director, women comprised 34% of *cinematographers* versus 7% on films directed exclusively by men.

**•Festivals with at least one woman who functions as the head of programming screen higher percentages of films with female directors (33%) and writers (30%) than festivals with exclusively male heads of programming.** At these festivals, women comprise 24% of directors and 22% of writers.

This study provides employment figures for domestically and independently produced feature-length documentaries and narrative films screening from June 2017 through May 2018 at the following 23 festivals: 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; 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. In total, *Indie Women* considers 10,758 credits on 991 films in 2017-18, and over 69,000 credits on almost 7,000 films over the period of 2008 to 2018.

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 Screening at Festivals***

•The festivals considered in this study screened an average of 14 films (narrative features and documentaries) directed by at least one woman versus an average of 29 films directed exclusively by men.

•The festivals screened an average of 6 *narrative* features directed by at least one woman versus an average of 16

narrative features directed exclusively by men (see Figure 1).

- The festivals screened an average of 8 feature-length *documentaries* directed by at least one woman versus an average of 13 directed exclusively by men (see Figure 1).

- Women comprised 29% of directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on independent films in 2017-18. This represents an increase of one percentage point from 2016-17 (see Figure 2).

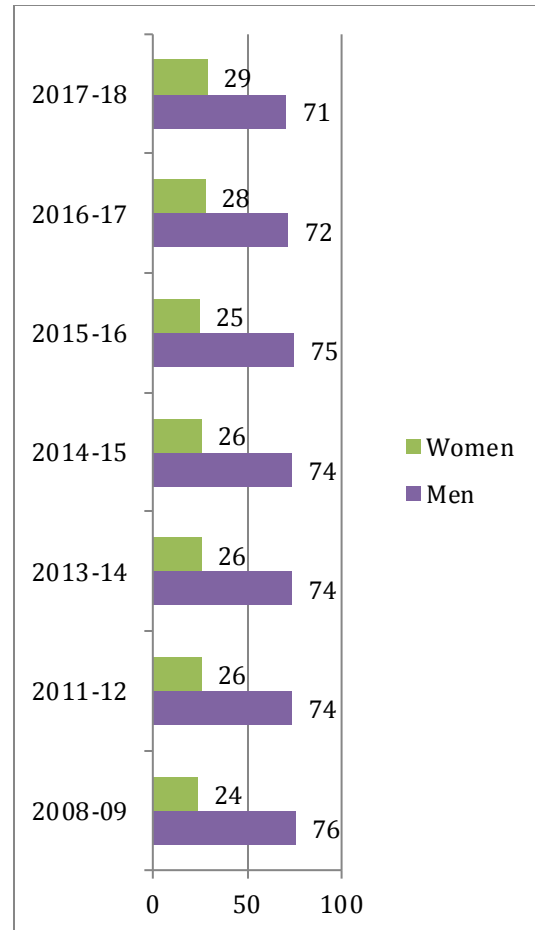
- 35% of the independent films considered employed 0 or 1 woman, 46% employed 2 to 5 women, 15% employed 6 to 9 women, and 4% employed 10 or more women. In contrast, 14% of the films employed 0 or 1 man, 23% employed 2 to 5 men, 33% employed 6 to 9 men, and 30% employed 10 or more men.

- Women fared best as producers (36%), followed by directors (29%), editors (27%), executive producers (26%), writers (26%), and cinematographers (17%) (see Figure 3).

- In 2017-18, women comprised 29% of directors. This figure is even with last year, and represents an increase of 7 percentage points from 22% in 2008-09.

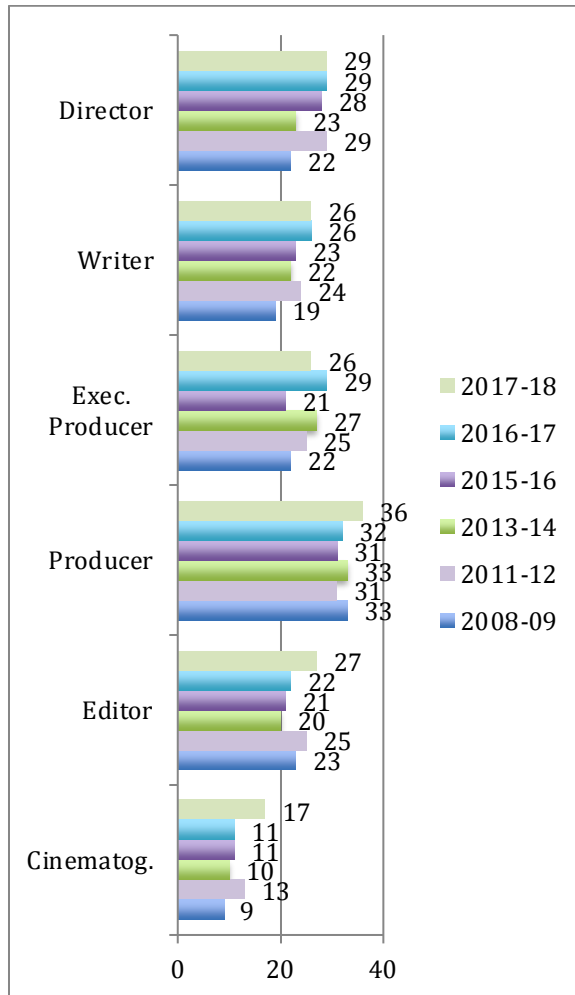
- Women accounted for 26% of writers in 2017-18. This figure is even with last year, and represents an increase of 7 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

*Figure 2.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women Working on Independent Features*



- Women comprised 26% of executive producers in 2017-18. This figure represents a decline of 3 percentage points from 29% in 2016-17, and an increase of 4 percentage points from 22% in 2008-09.

*Figure 3.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of  
Women Working on Films  
(Documentaries and Narrative Features)  
Screening at High-Profile U.S. Festivals*



- Women accounted for 36% of producers in 2017-18. This figure represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 32% in 2016-17, and an increase of 3 percentage points from 33% in 2008-09.

- Women comprised 27% of editors in 2017-18, up 5 percentage points from 22% in 2016-17. This figure also

represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 23% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 17% of cinematographers in 2017-18, up 6 percentage points from 11% in 2016-17. This also represents an increase of 8 percentage points from 9% in 2008-09.

- 85% of the independent films screening at the festivals had no women cinematographers, 77% had no women writers, 73% had no women editors, 67% had no women executive producers, 66% had no women directors, and 33% had no women producers.

### *Findings for Documentaries Only*

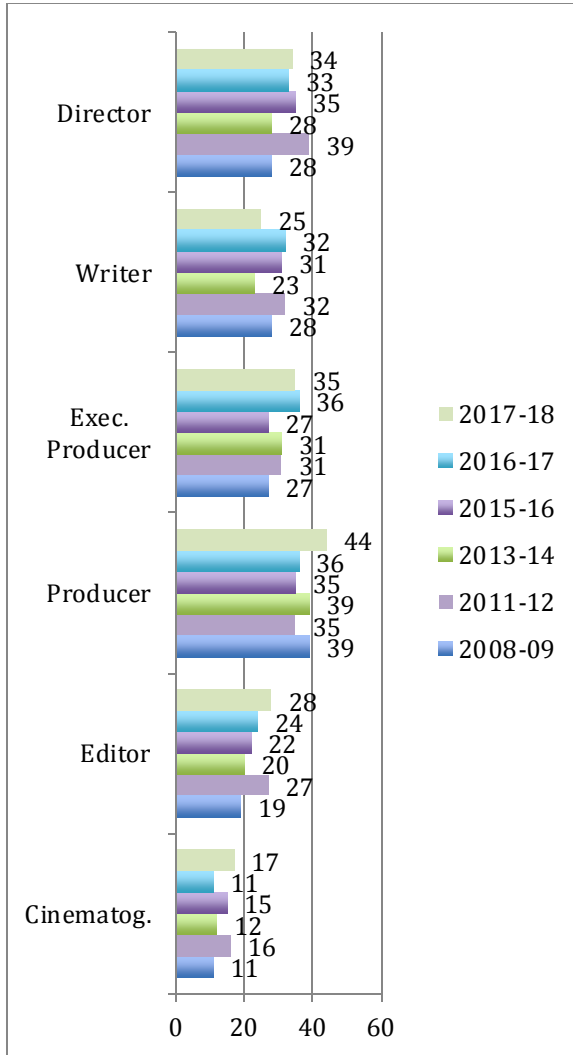
- Overall, women comprised 34% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on documentaries in 2017-18. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 31% in 2016-17.

- Women fared best as producers (44%), followed by executive producers (35%), directors (34%), editors (28%), writers (25%), and cinematographers (17%) (see Figure 4).

- Women comprised 34% of directors working on documentaries screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18, up one percentage point from 33% in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 28% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 25% of writers working on documentaries screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18, down 7 percentage points from 32% in 2016-17. This represents a decline of 3 percentage points from 28% in 2008-09.

*Figure 4.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of  
Women Working on Documentaries  
by Role*



- Women comprised 35% of executive producers working on documentaries screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18, down one percentage point from 36% in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 8 percentage points from 27% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 44% of producers working on documentaries screening at the festivals considered in

2017-18, up 8 percentage points from 36% in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 39% in 2008-09.

- Women comprised 28% of editors working on documentaries screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18, up 4 percentage points from 24% in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 9 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 17% of cinematographers working on documentaries screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18, up 6 percentage points from 11% in 2016-17 and 2008-09.

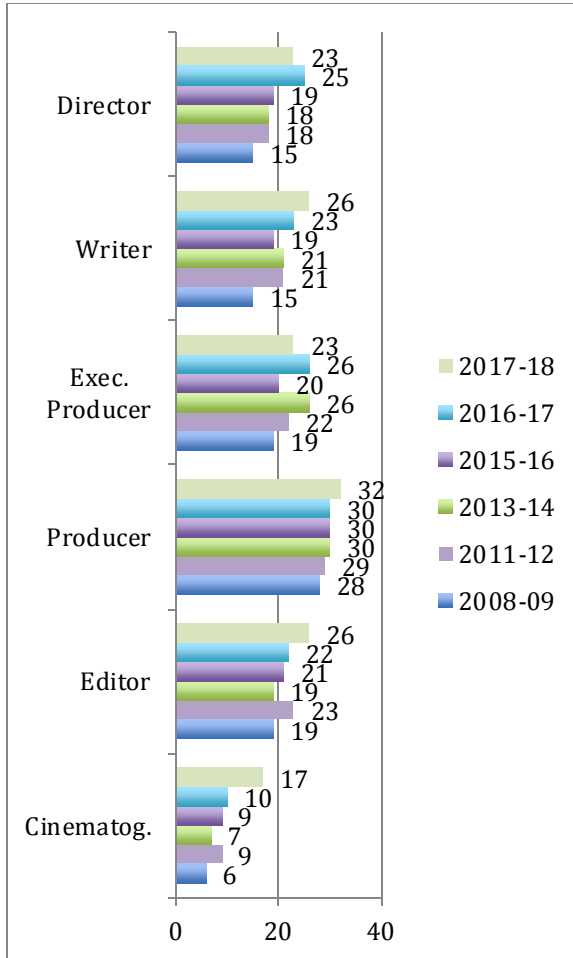
#### *Findings for Narrative Features Only*

- Overall, women comprised 26% of individuals working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered on narrative features in 2017-18. This represents no change from 2016-17.

- Overall, women fared best as producers (32%), followed by editors (26%), writers (26%), executive producers (23%), directors (23%), and cinematographers (17%) (see Figure 5).

- Women accounted for 23% of directors working on narrative features screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 25% in 2016-17, but an increase of 8 percentage points from 2008-09.

*Figure 5.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of  
Women Working on Narrative Features  
by Role*



- Women comprised 26% of writers working on narrative features screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 23% in 2016-17, and an increase of 11 percentage points from 15% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 23% of executive producers working on narrative features screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18, down 3 percentage points from 26% in 2016-17. This represents an

increase of 4 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

- Women comprised 32% of producers working on narrative features in 2017-18, up 2 percentage points from 30% in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 28% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 26% of editors working on narrative features screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18, up 4 percentage points from 22% in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 7 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

- Women comprised 17% of cinematographers working on narrative features screening at the festivals considered in 2017-18, up 7 percentage points from 10% in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 11 percentage points from 6% in 2008-09.

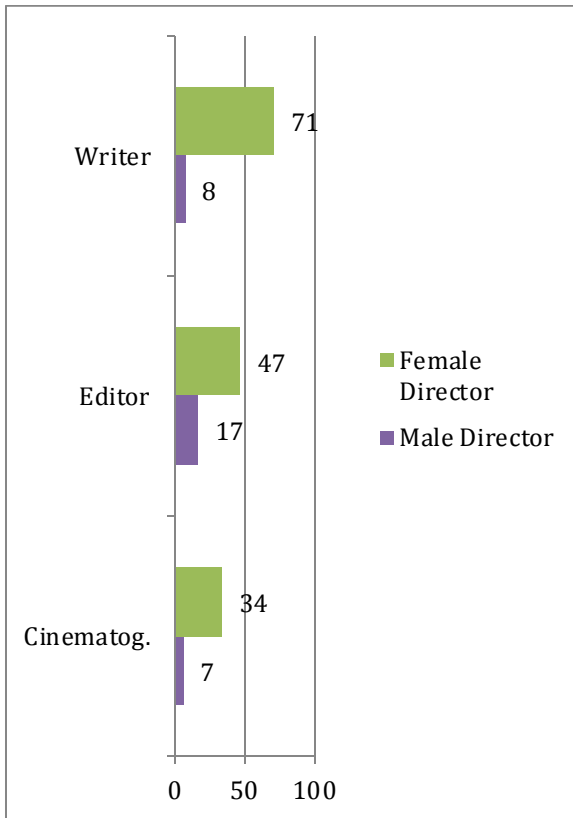
### *Important Relationships*

- Films with at least one woman director had higher percentages of women writers, editors, and cinematographers than films with exclusively male directors (see Figure 6).

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 71% of writers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 8% of writers.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 47% of editors. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 17% of editors.

*Figure 6.  
Comparison of Employment of Behind-the-Scenes Women on Films with At Least One Woman Director vs. Films with Exclusively Male Directors*



women comprise 24% of directors and 22% of writers.

#### *About the Center*

The *Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film* at San Diego State University is home to the longest running and most comprehensive studies of women's behind-the-scenes employment and on-screen portrayals in film and television. Dedicated to producing the most current research available on women in film and television, studies generated by the Center provide the foundation for a realistic discussion of women's employment and representation. For more information, visit the Center's website, <http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu>.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 34% of cinematographers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 7% of cinematographers.

- Festivals with at least one woman who functions as the head of programming screen higher percentages of films with female directors and writers than festivals with exclusively male heads of programming. At festivals with at least one women who serves as the head of programming, 33% of the films have a female director and 30% have female writers. In contrast, at festivals with exclusively male heads of programming,