

Living Archive: The Celluloid Ceiling

Documenting 25 Years of Women's Employment in U.S. Films

by Dr. Martha M. Lauzen

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Since 1998, the annual *Celluloid Ceiling* study has tracked women's employment in some of 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.¹

The *Living Archive* makes the findings from every year of the project available in a single reference document.

The takeaway from this report is that gains in women's employment have been uneven and, in the case of some roles, negligible. The percentage of women working as editors on the 250 top grossing films increased by a single percentage point from 20% in 1998 to 21% in 2022. The percentage of women cinematographers rose just 3 percentage points over the last 25 years, from 4% in 1998 to 7% in 2022. The percentage of women writers increased 6 percentage points from 13% in 1998 to 19% in 2022. The percentage of women working as executive producers rose 7 percentage points from 18% in 1998 to 25% in 2022. The percentage of women working as producers climbed 7 percentage points, from 24% in 1998 to 31% in 2022. Women directors experienced the largest gains, rising from 9% in 1998 to 18% in 2022.

Given the centrality and importance of directors to filmmaking, the lion's share of media and industry attention has focused on this role. And while the percentage of women who direct has doubled over the last 25 years, they remain dramatically underrepresented, as do women working as writers, editors, cinematographers, composers, and in other vital roles. Moving forward, it is imperative that media articles and industry panels continue to discuss women's underemployment as directors but expand their focus to include women in other important roles.

The findings of this project provide a historical record of women's employment in the mainstream film industry in the U.S. As such, the study provides a sobering consideration of women's continuing underrepresentation.

¹ 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. That information is not included in this report but is available by contacting Dr. Lauzen at lauzen@sdsu.edu. Initially, the study monitored the top 250 (domestic) grossing films every year. However, the study expanded to include the top 100 and top 500 domestic grossing films in 2015. Due to changes in production caused by the pandemic, in 2021 and 2022, the study tracked only the top 100 and 250 films.

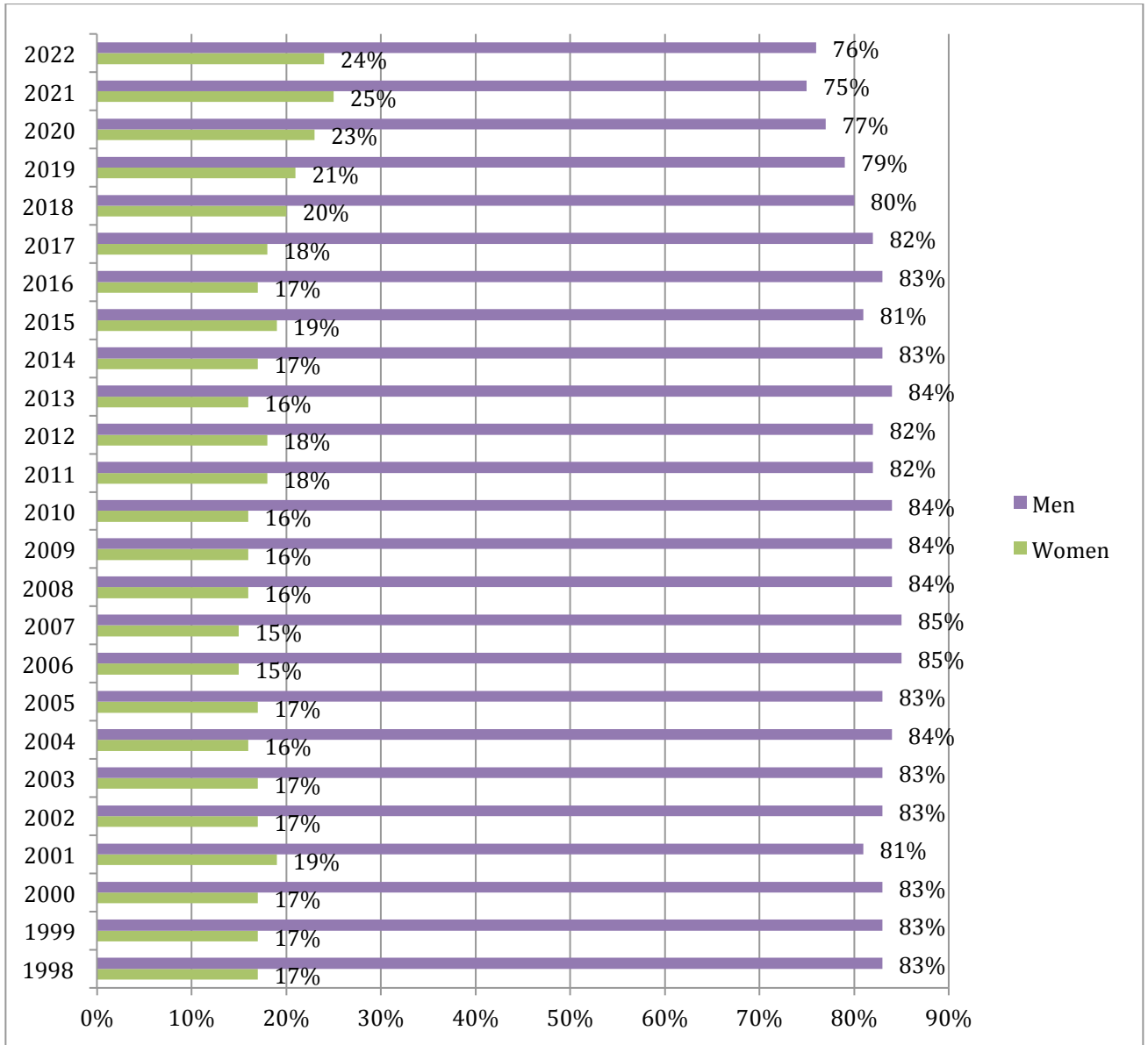
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Figure 1.

Women's Behind-the-Scenes Employment on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022 (includes Directors, Writers, Producers, Executive Producers, Editors, Cinematographers)



Summary statement: The percentage of women working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered has increased only 7 percentage points from 17% in 1998 to 24% in 2022.

Figure 1a.

Women's Behind-the-Scenes Employment on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022 (includes Directors, Writers, Producers, Executive Producers, Editors, Cinematographers)

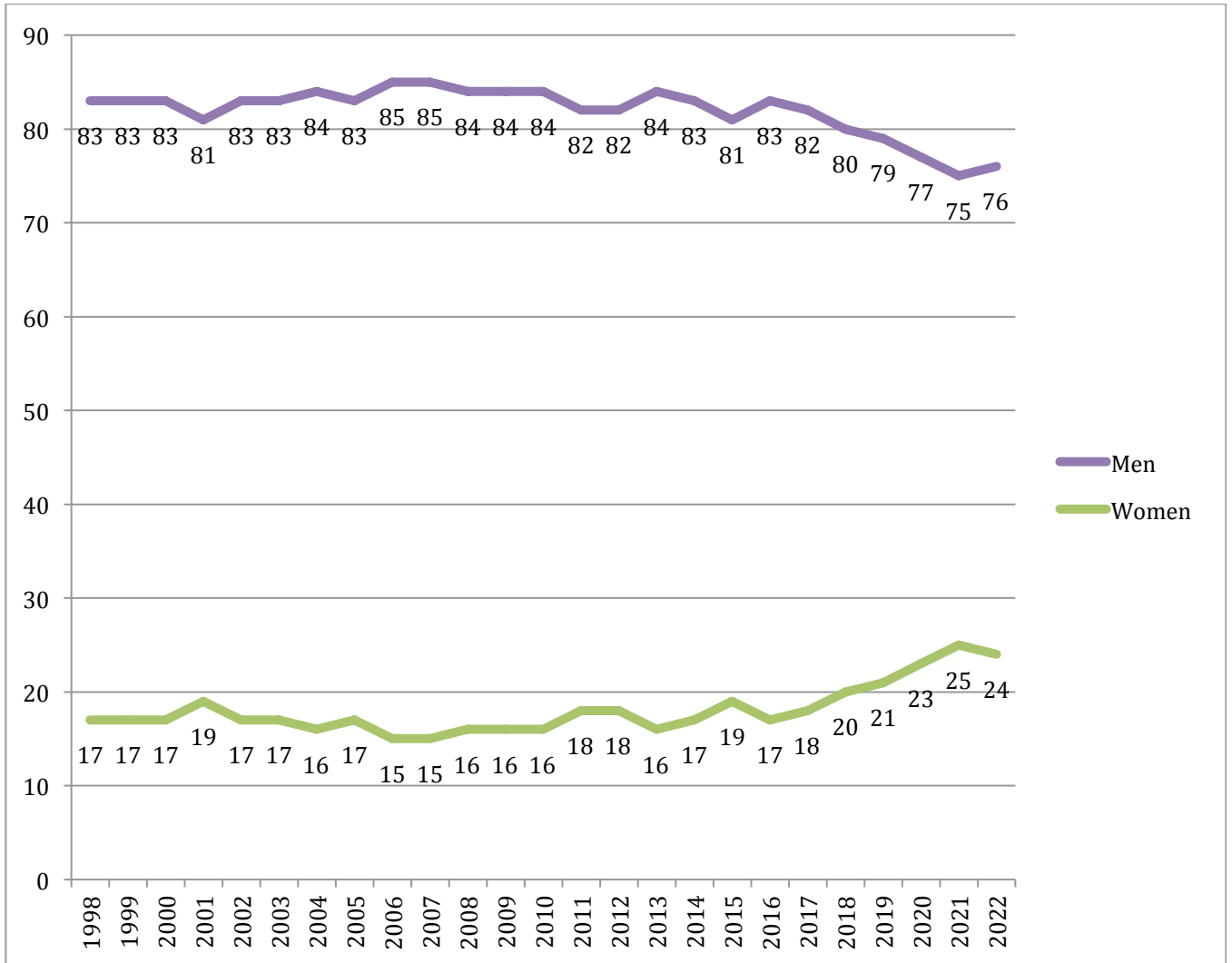
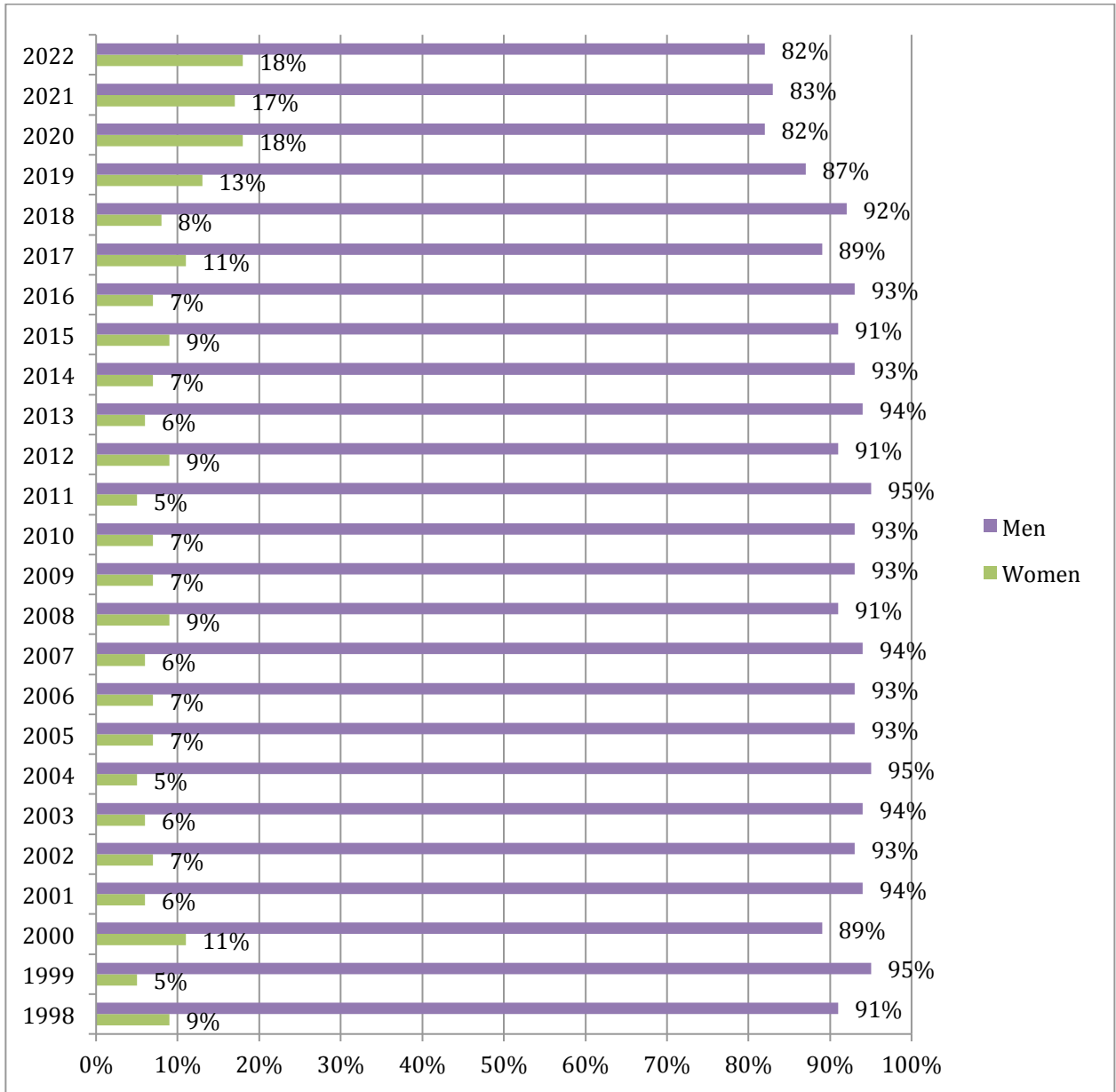


Figure 2.

Women's Employment as **Directors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022



Summary statement: The percentage of women directors doubled from 9% in 1998 to 18% in 2022.

Figure 2a.

*Women's Employment as **Directors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2020*

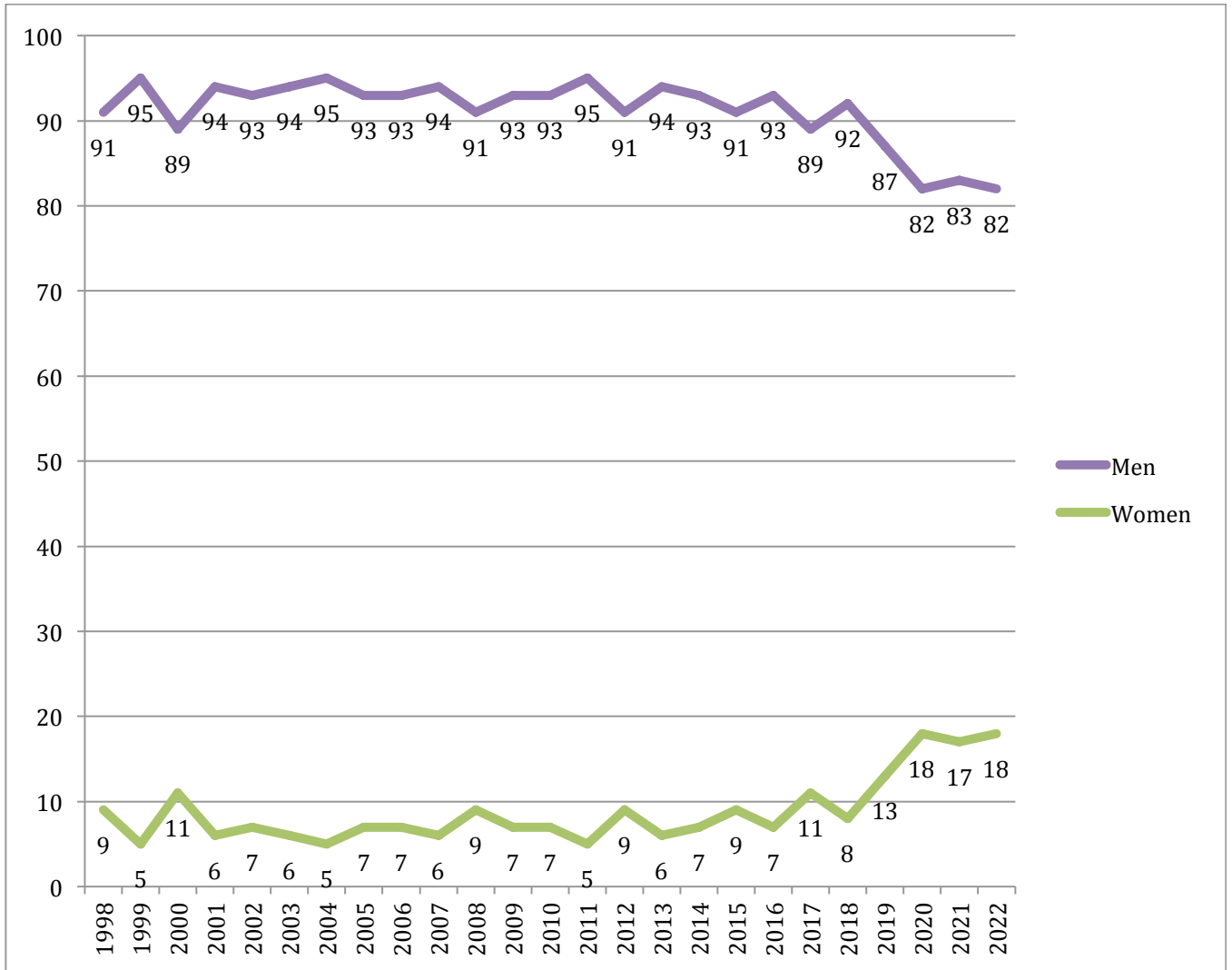
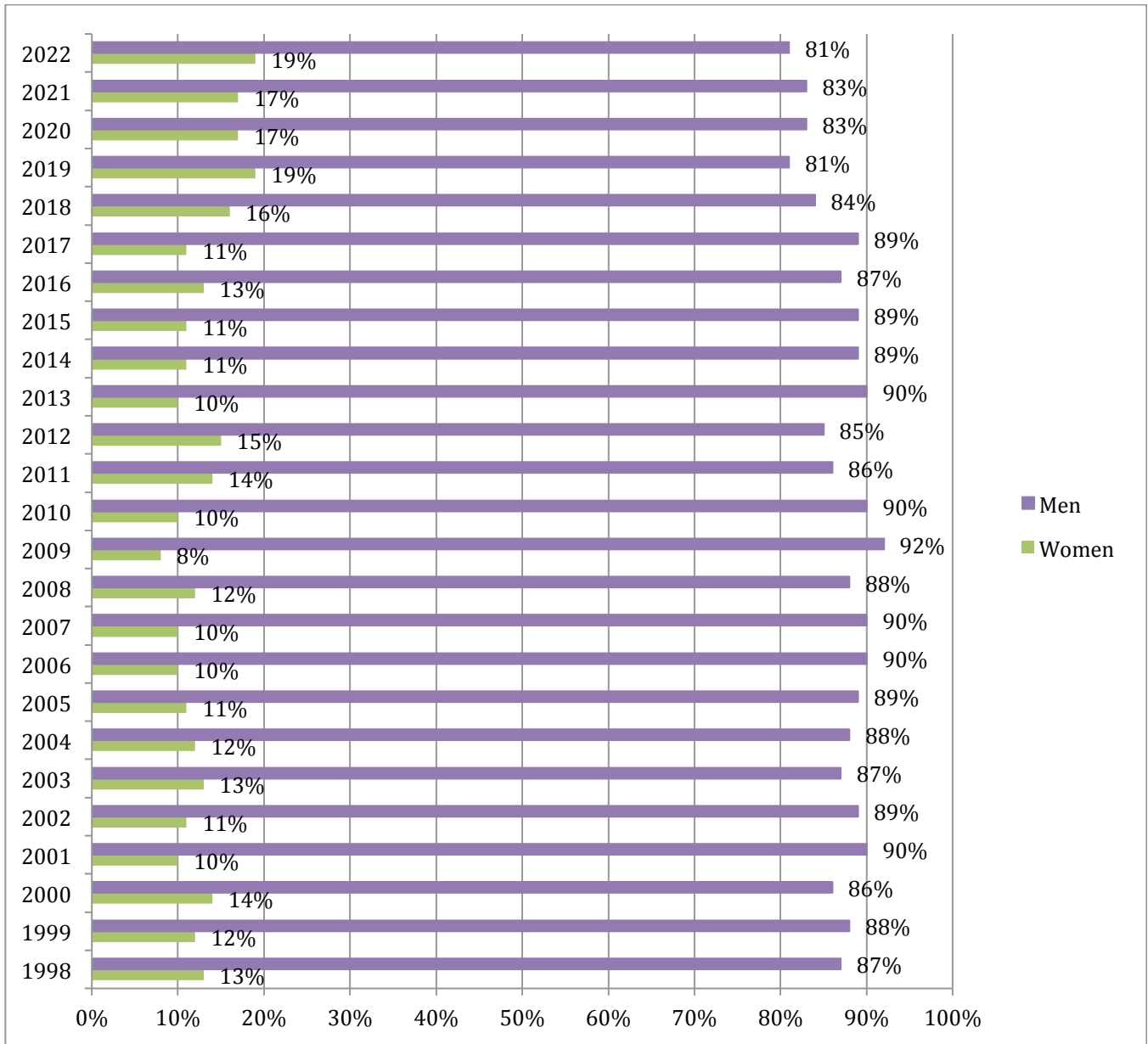


Figure 3.

Women's Employment as **Writers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022



Summary statement: Women accounted for 13% of writers in 1998. 25 years later, that percentage has increased 6 percentage points to 19% in 2022.

Figure 3a.

Women's Employment as **Writers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022

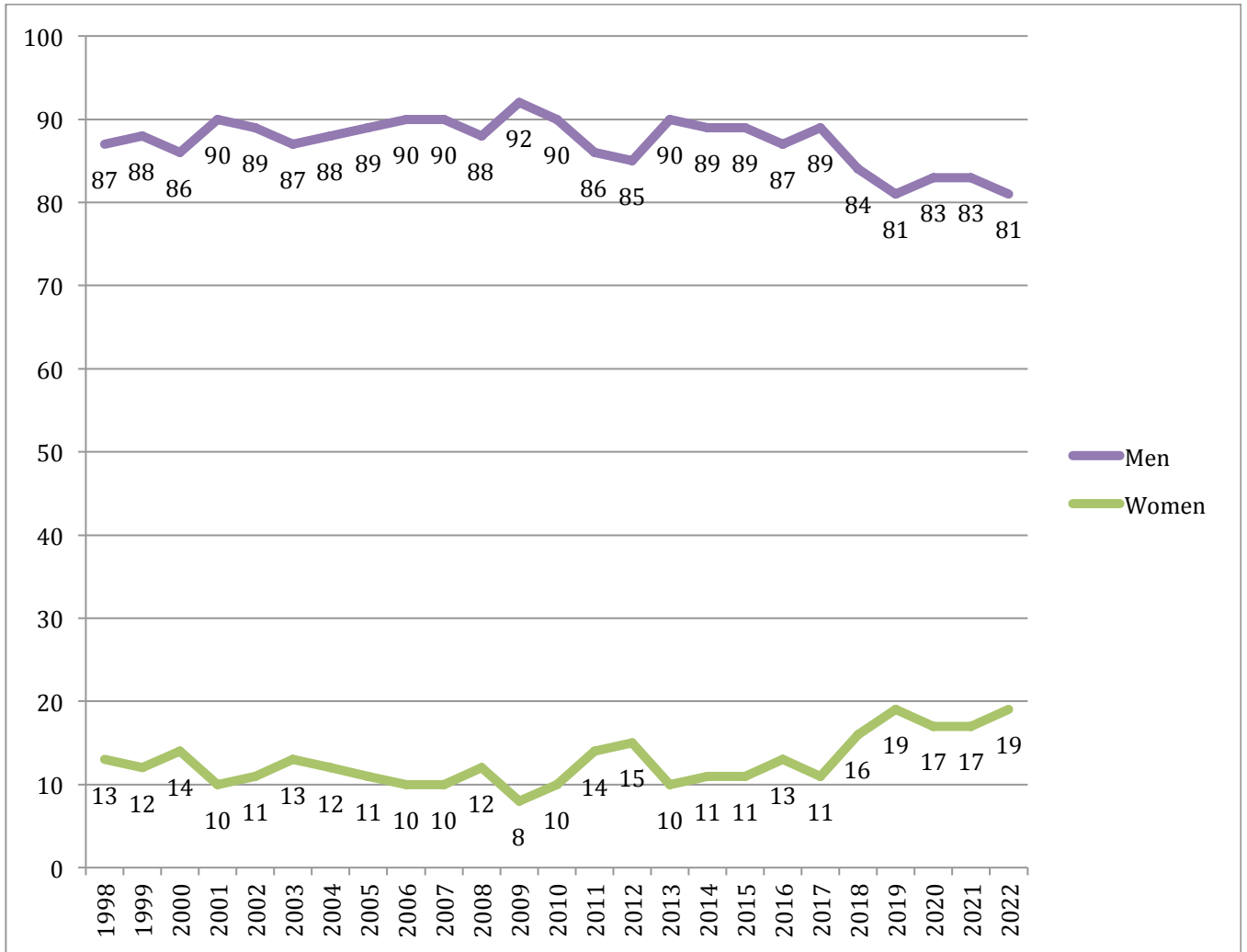
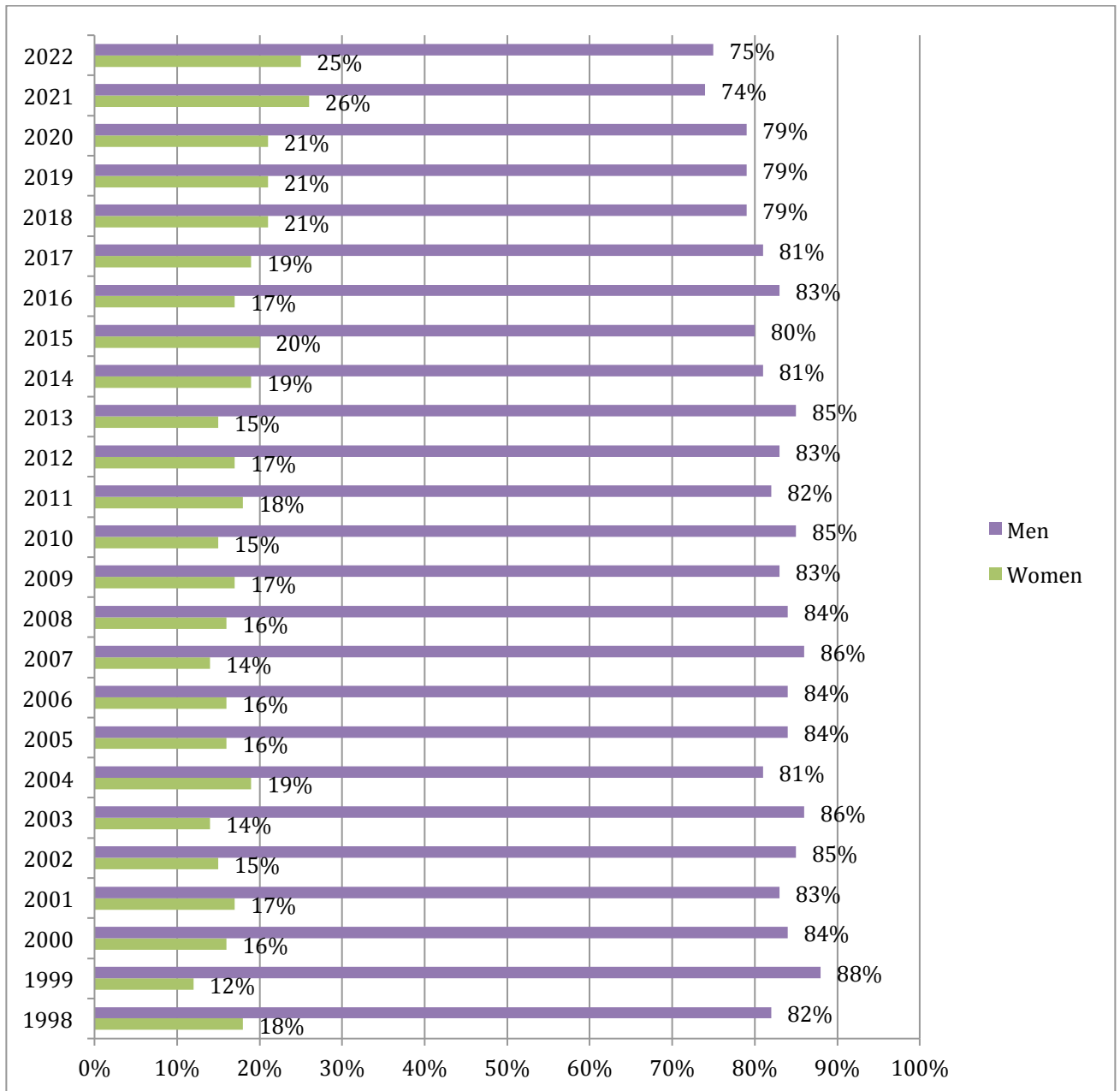


Figure 4.

*Women's Employment as **Executive Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022*



Summary statement: In 2022, women comprised 25% of executive producers, up 7 percentage points from 18% in 1998.

Figure 4a.

Women's Employment as **Executive Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022

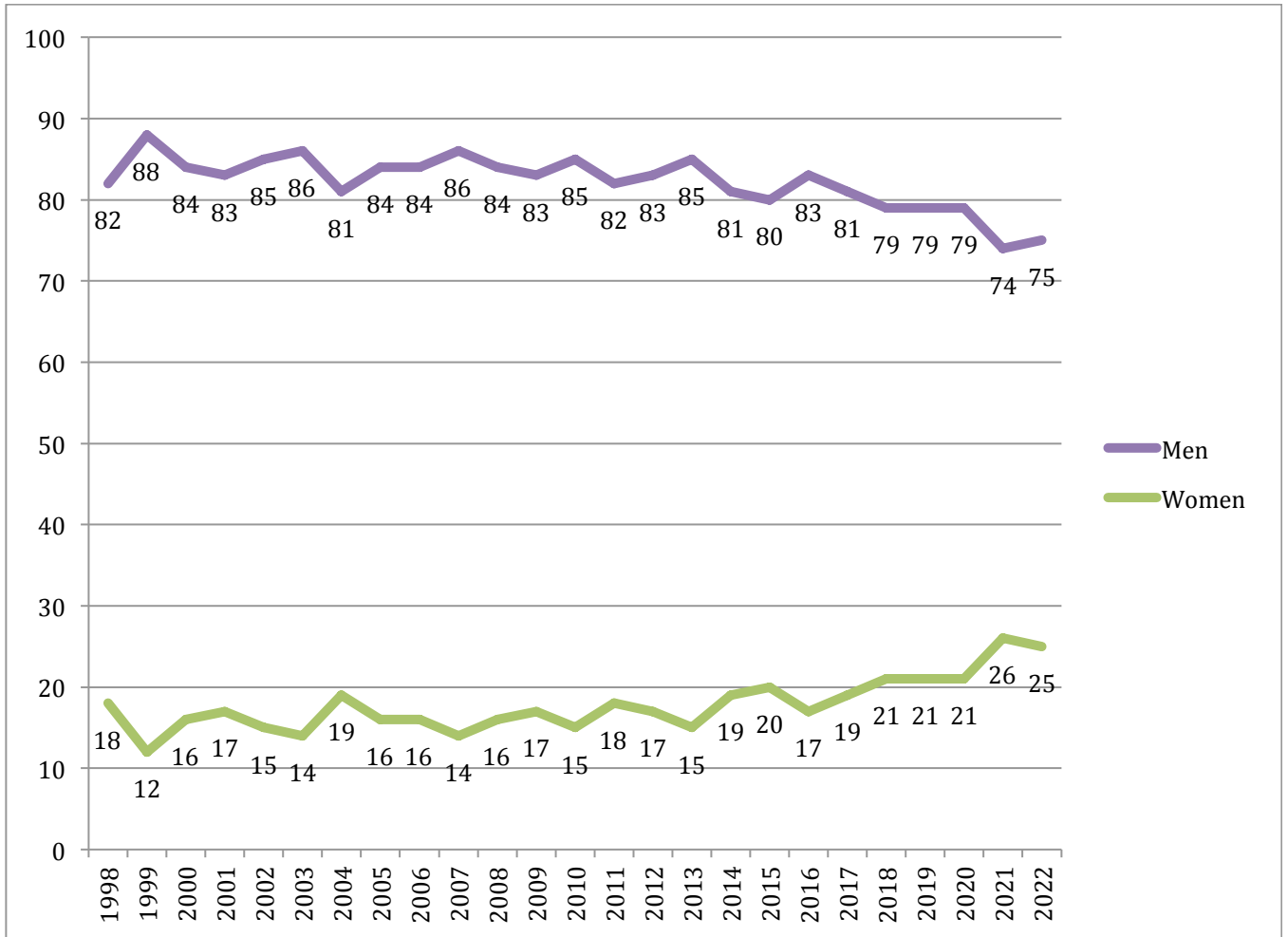
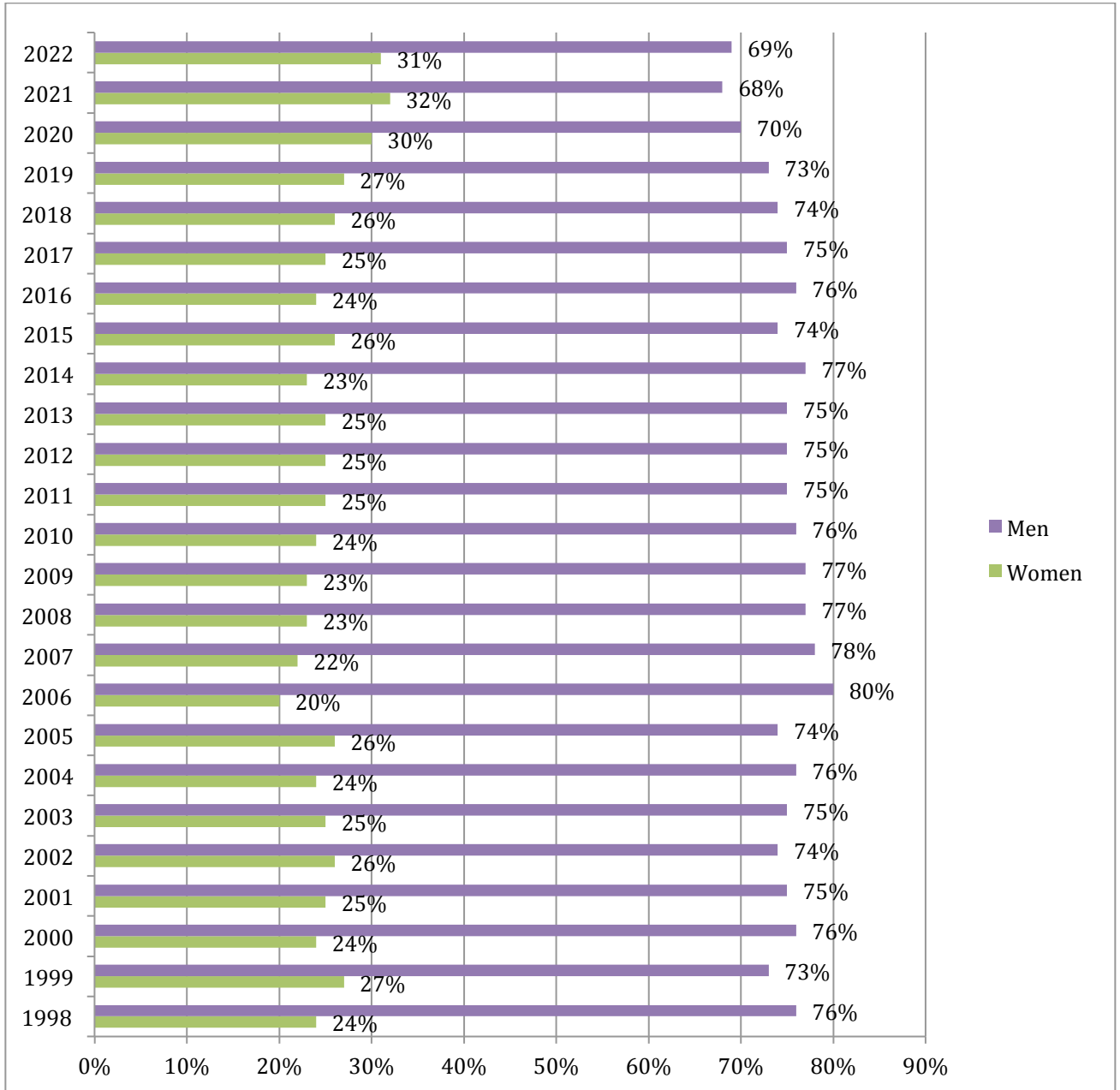


Figure 5.

*Women's Employment as **Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022*



Summary statement: In 1998, women comprised 24% of producers. 25 years later, that percentage has increased 7 percentage points to 31% in 2022.

Figure 5a.

Women's Employment as **Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022

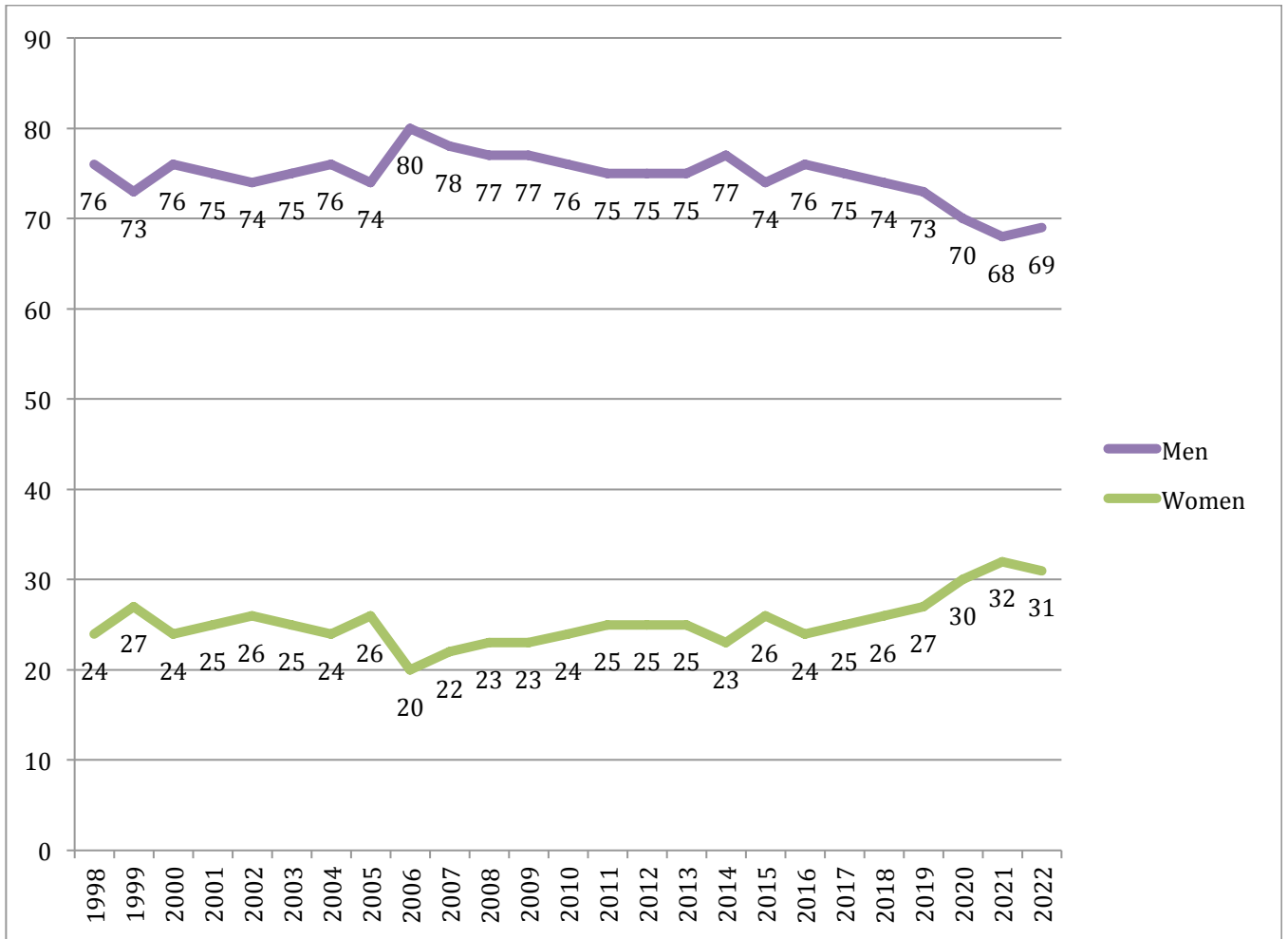
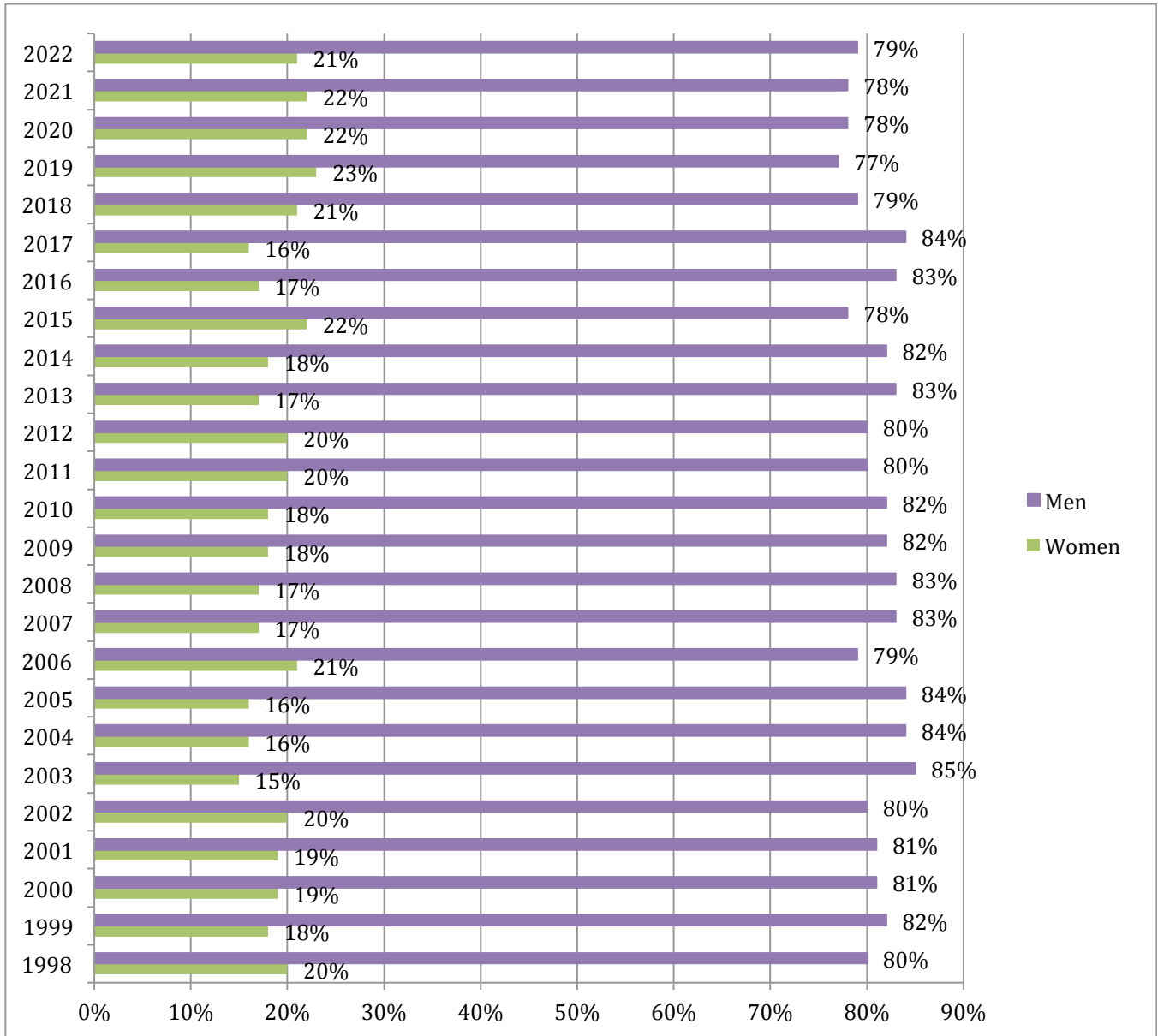


Figure 6.

*Women's Employment as **Editors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022*



Summary statement: In 1998, women accounted for 20% of editors. 25 years later, that percentage increased just 1 percentage point to 21% in 2022.

Figure 6a.

Women's Employment as **Editors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022

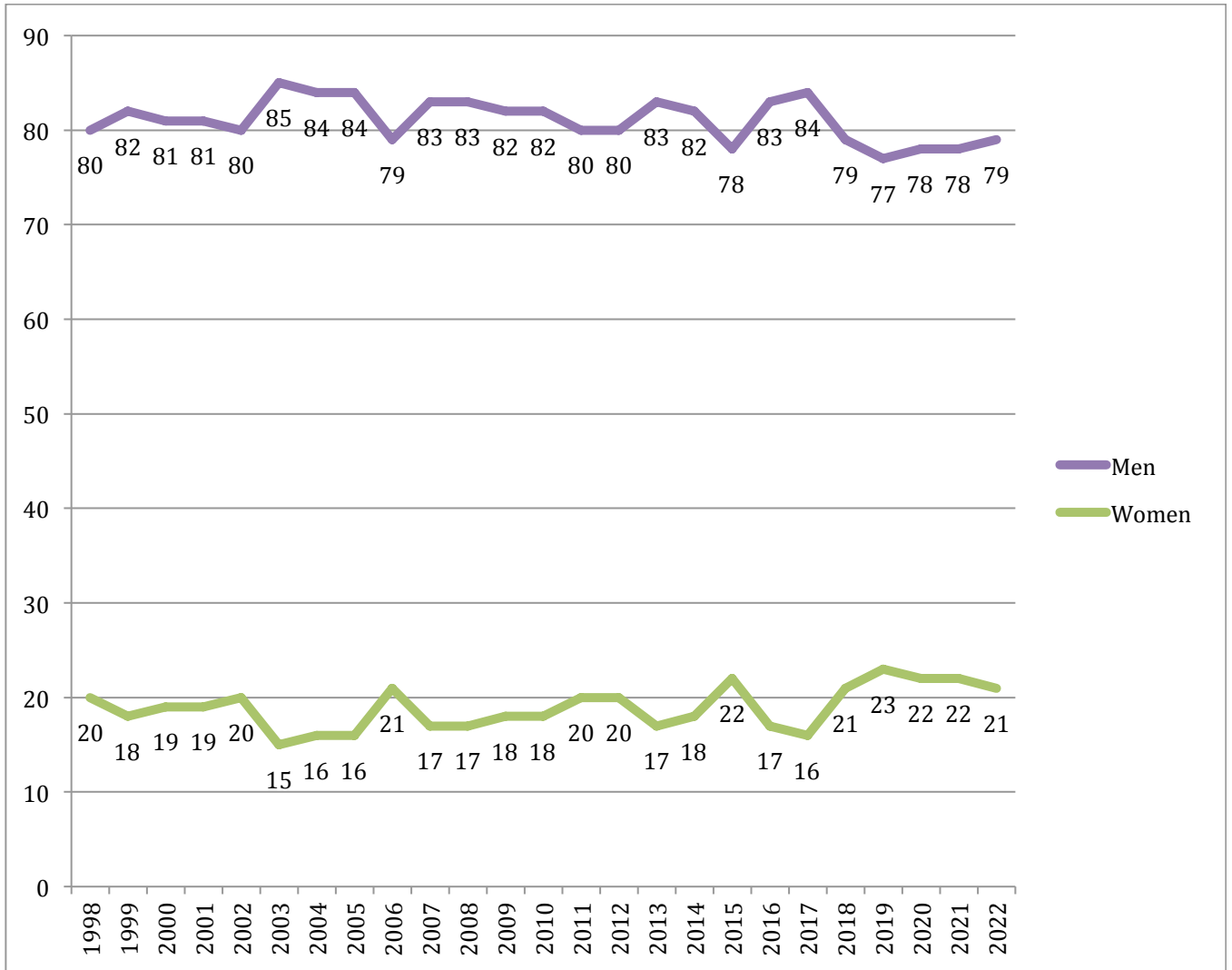
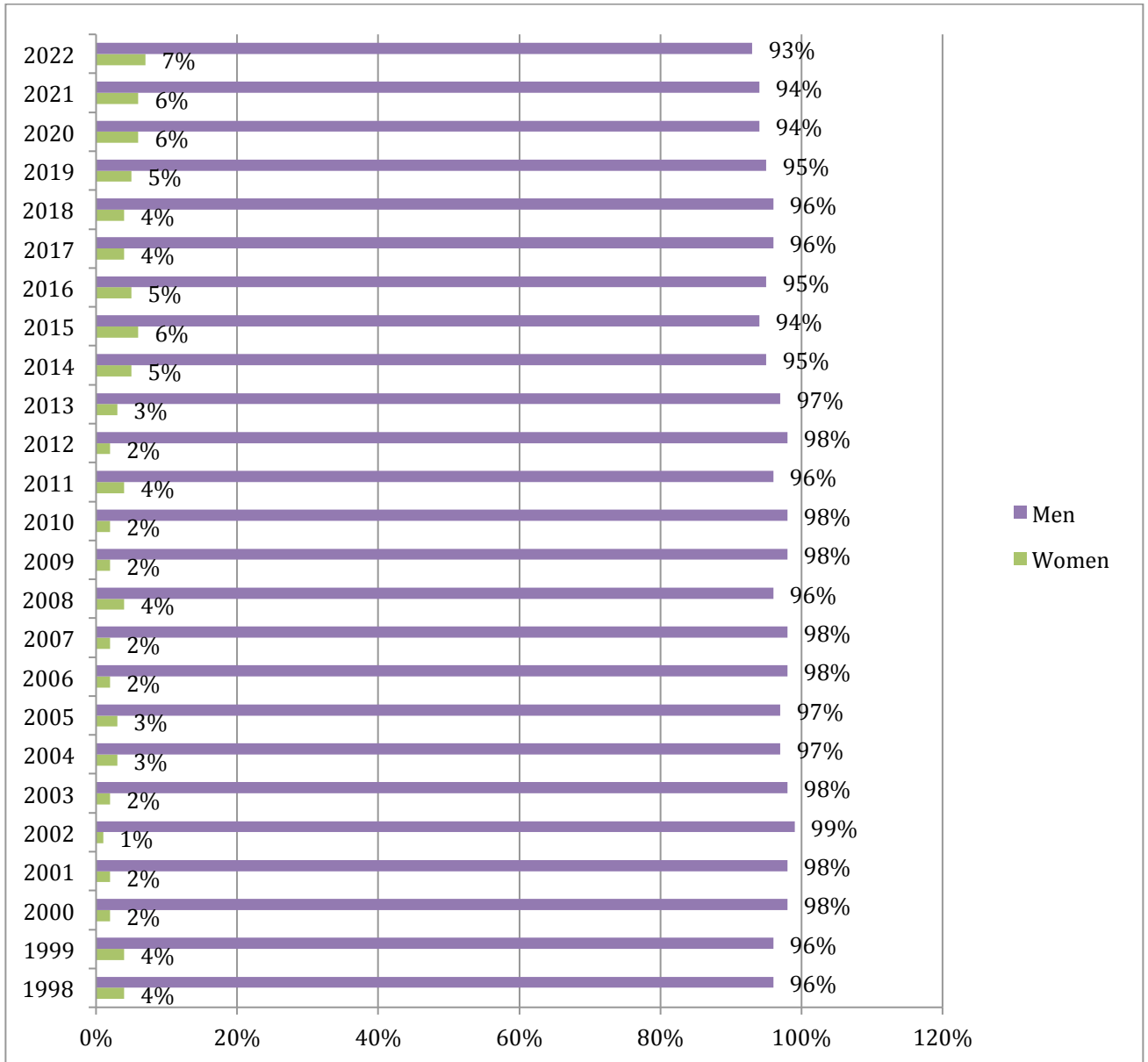


Figure 7.

Women's Employment as Cinematographers on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022



Summary statement: In 1998, women comprised 4% of cinematographers. 25 years later, that percentage has increased only 3 percentage points to 7% in 2022.

Figure 7a.

Women's Employment as **Cinematographers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2022

