

Living Archive: The Celluloid Ceiling

Documenting 26 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* compiles the findings from every year of the project in a single reference document.

The takeaway from this report is that while the percentages of women working in the roles considered have risen over the last quarter century, many of those gains have been meager. The percentage of women working as editors on the 250 top grossing films increased by a single point from 20% in 1998 to 21% in 2023. The percentage of women working as producers climbed 2 points, from 24% in 1998 to 26% in 2023. The percentage of women cinematographers rose just 3 points over the last 26 years, from 4% in 1998 to 7% in 2023. The percentage of women writers increased 4 points from 13% in 1998 to 17% in 2023. The percentage of women working as executive producers rose 6 points from 18% in 1998 to 24% in 2023. Directors, who have received the lion's share of attention on industry panels and in media reports, experienced the largest increase climbing 7 percentage points from 9% in 1998 to 16% in 2023.

The long-term trends in women's employment are often lost in the year-to-year fluctuations that reveal increases of a couple of percentage points one year, only to be followed by decreases the next. The longer timeline highlighted in this report provides a sobering historical record of the unrelenting underemployment of women in the mainstream film industry.

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 and strikes in 2021, 2022, and 2023, the study tracked only the top 100 and 250 films in those years.

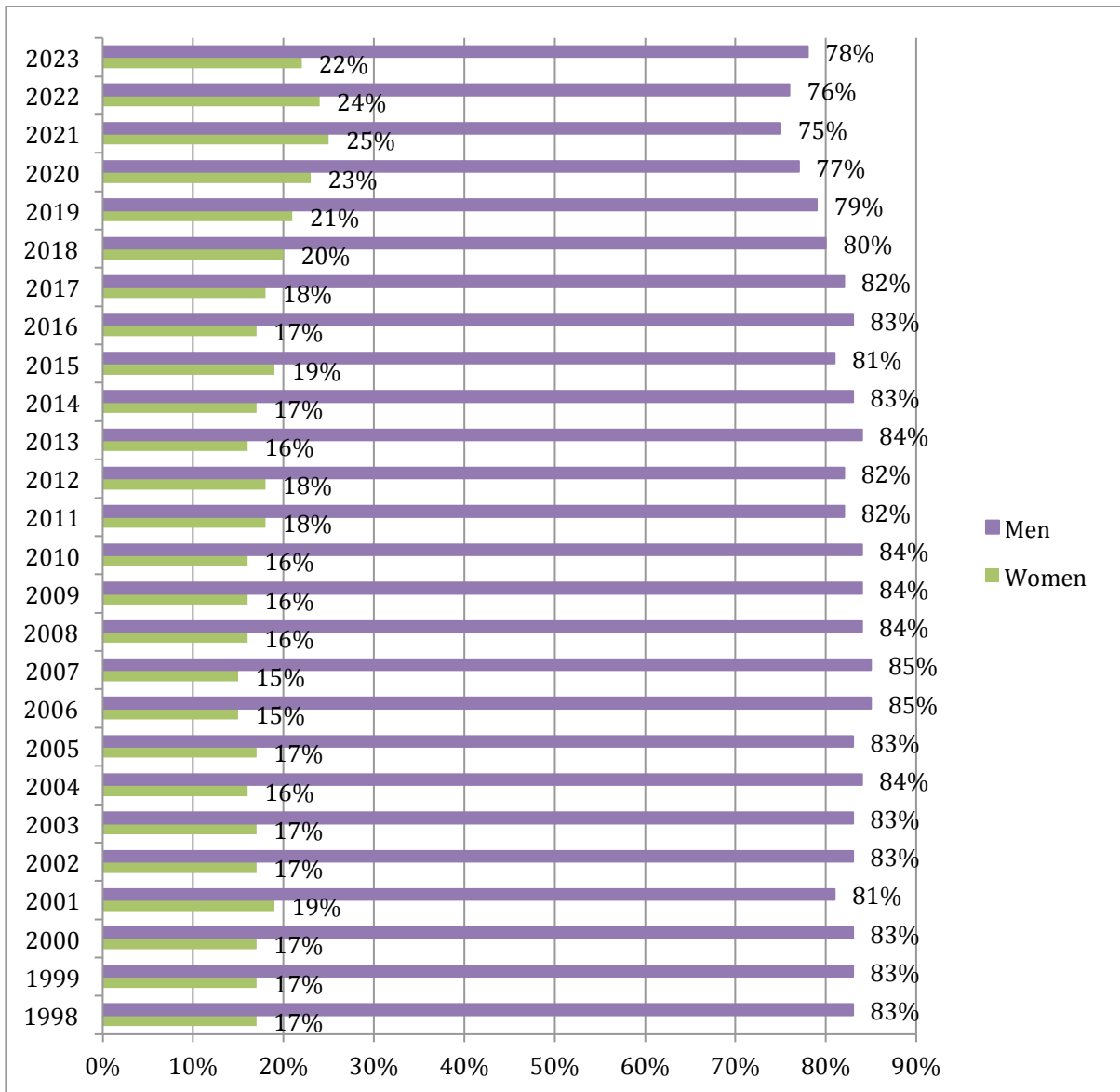
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Figure 1.

Women's Behind-the-Scenes Employment on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023 (includes Directors, Writers, Producers, Executive Producers, Editors, Cinematographers)



Summary statement: In 1998, women comprised 17% of individuals working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered on the 250 top (domestic) grossing films. In 2023, women accounted for 22% of these individuals, an increase of 5 percentage points over 26 years.

Figure 1a.

Women's Behind-the-Scenes Employment on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023 (includes Directors, Writers, Producers, Executive Producers, Editors, Cinematographers)

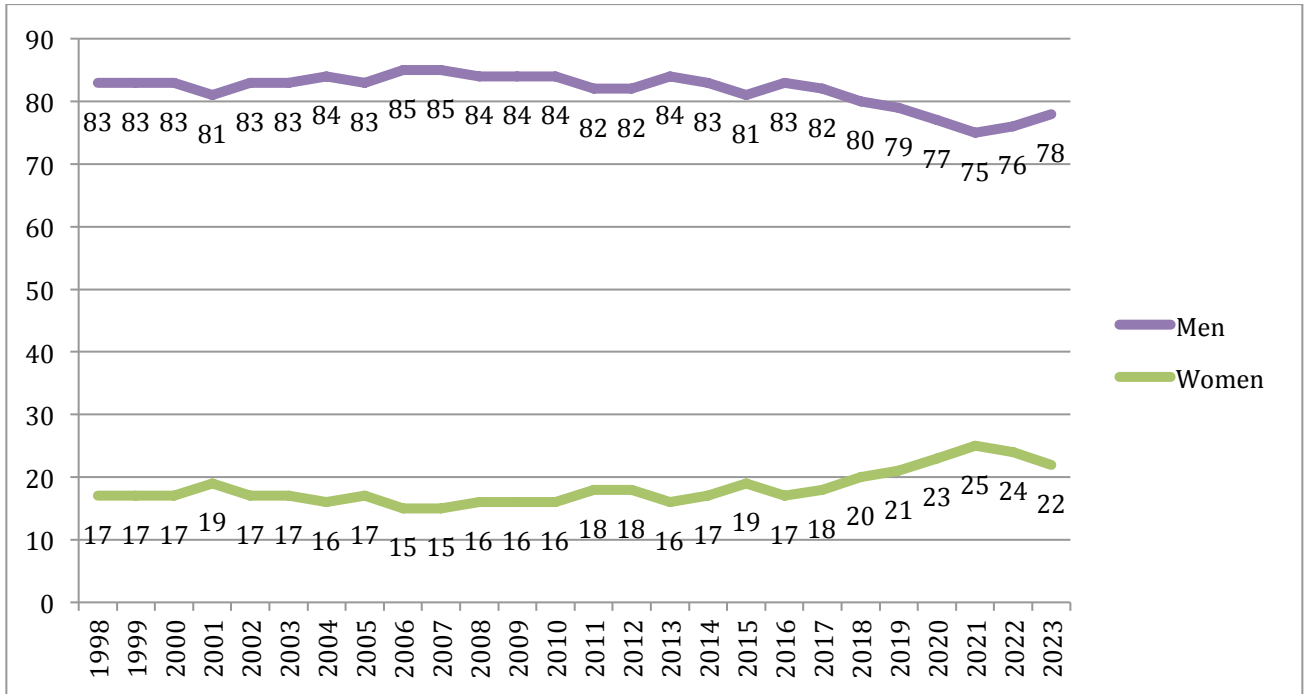
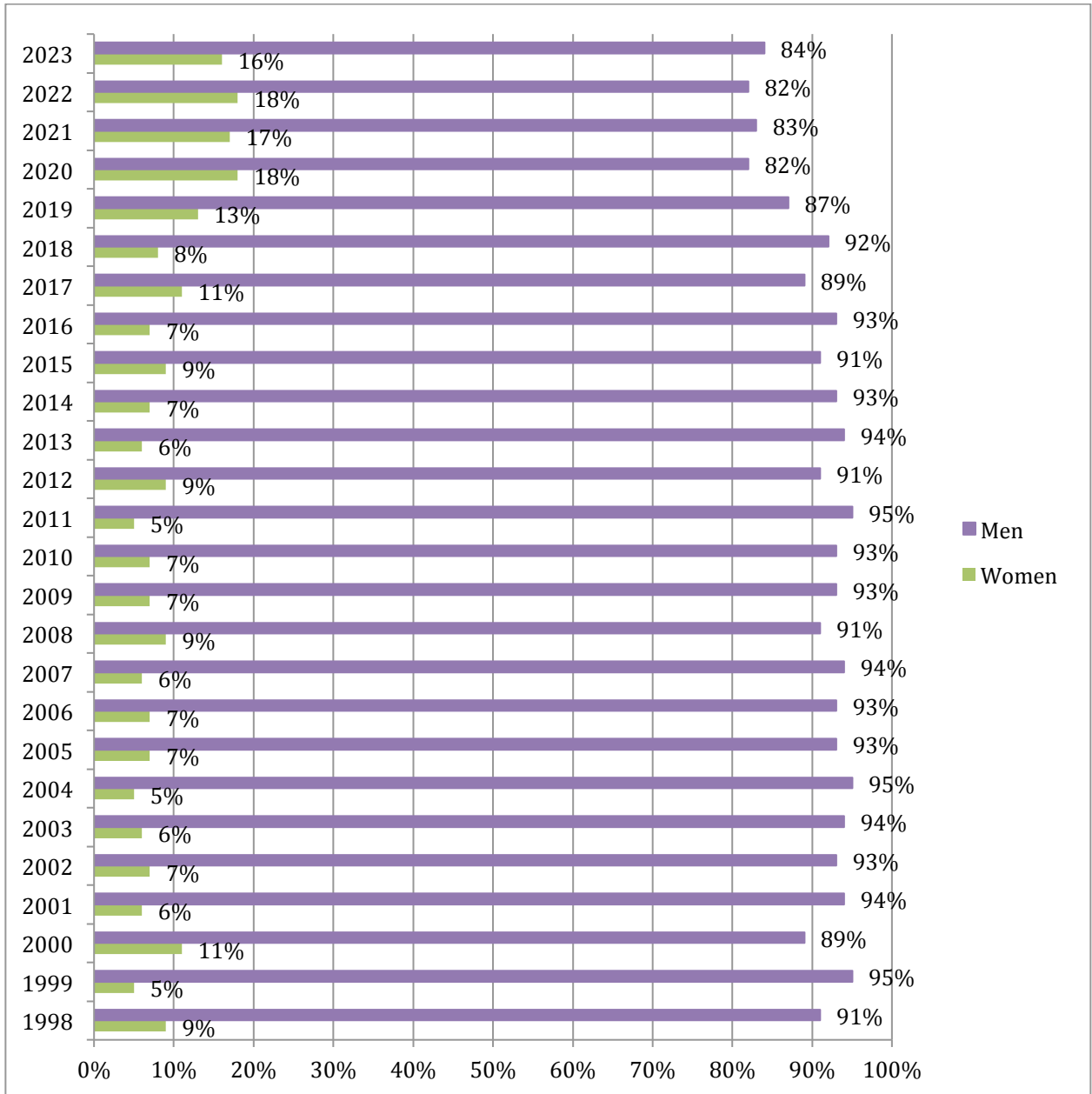


Figure 2.

Women's Employment as **Directors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023



Summary statement: In 1998, women accounted for 9% of directors working on the 250 top (domestic) grossing films. In 2023, women comprised 16% of directors, an increase of 7 percentage points over 26 years.

Figure 2a.

*Women's Employment as **Directors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023*

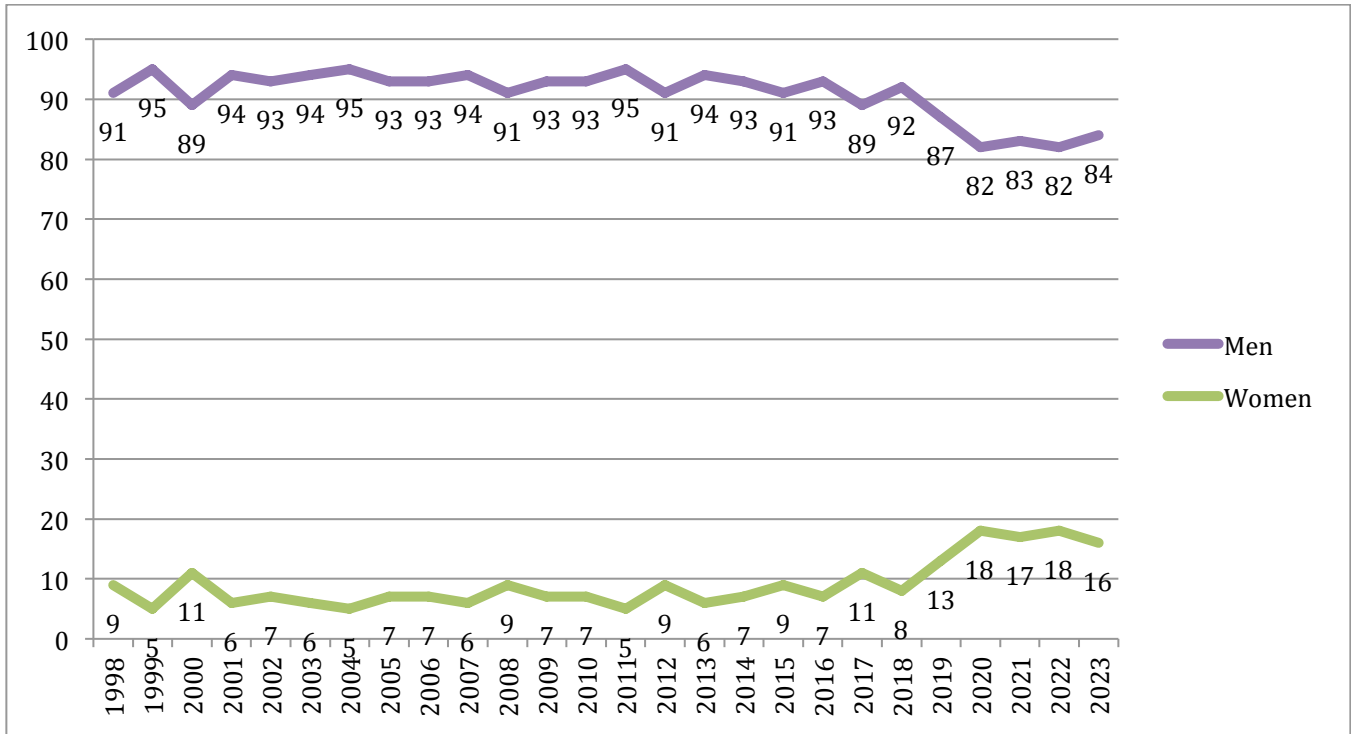
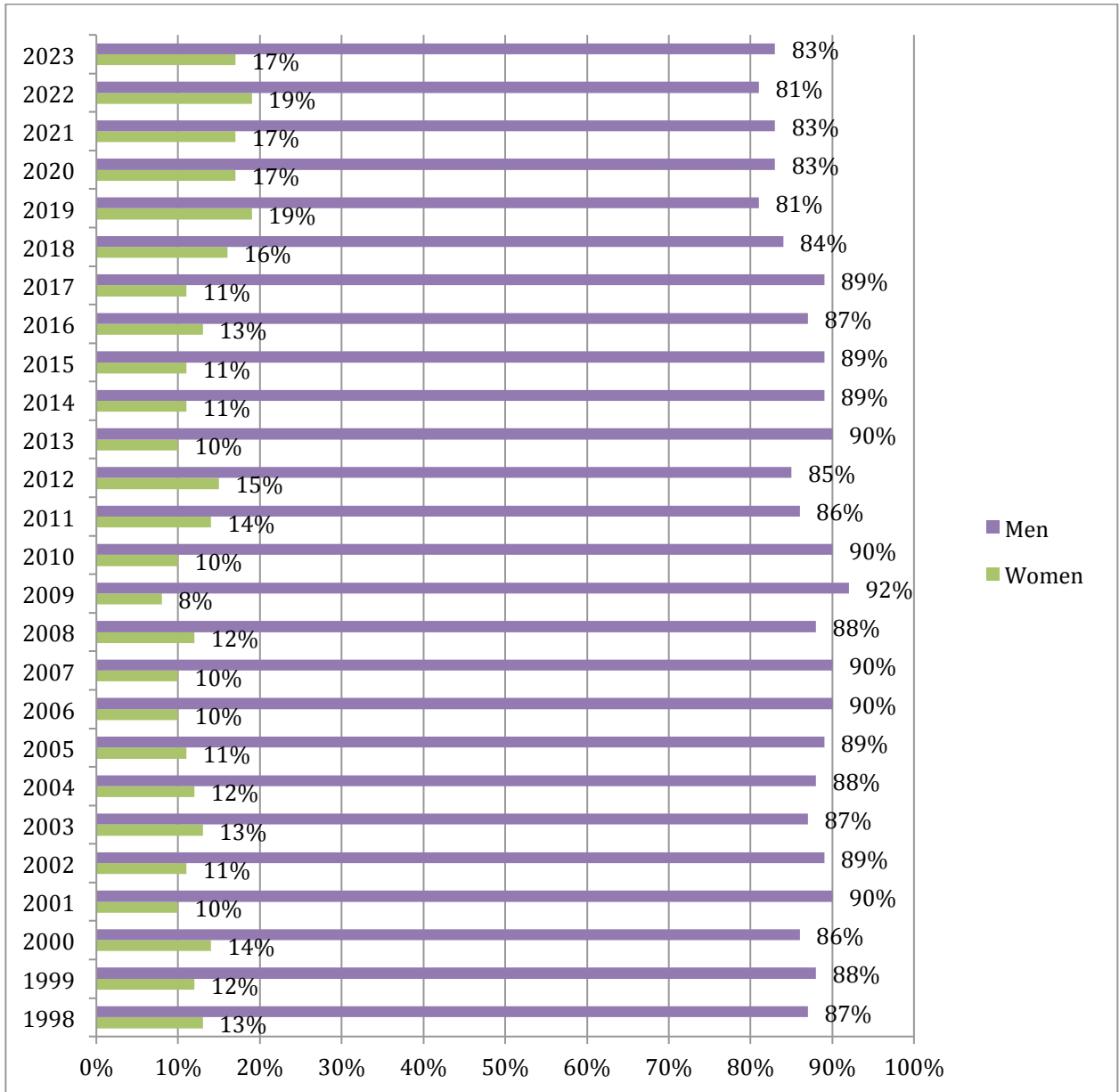


Figure 3.

Women's Employment as **Writers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023



Summary statement: In 1998, women comprised 13% of writers working on the 250 top (domestic) grossing films. In 2023, women accounted for 17% of writers, an increase of 4 percentage points over 26 years.

Figure 3a.

Women's Employment as **Writers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023

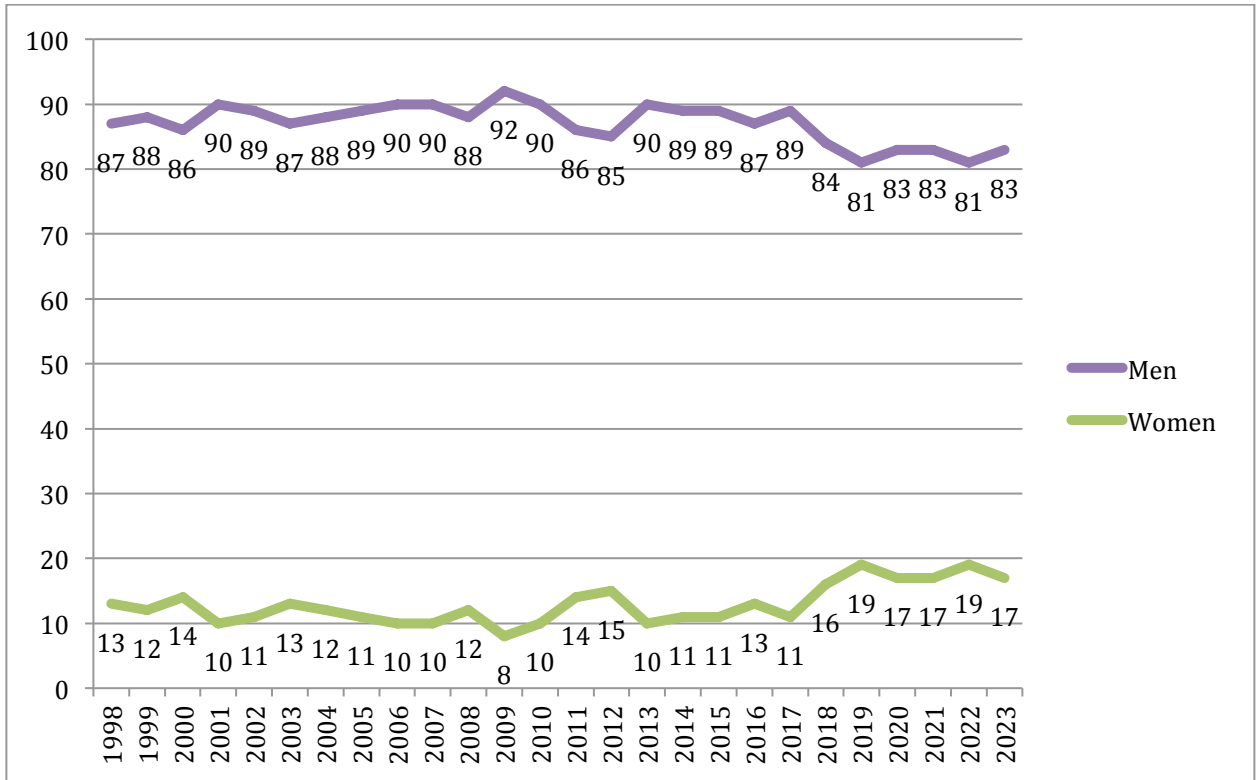
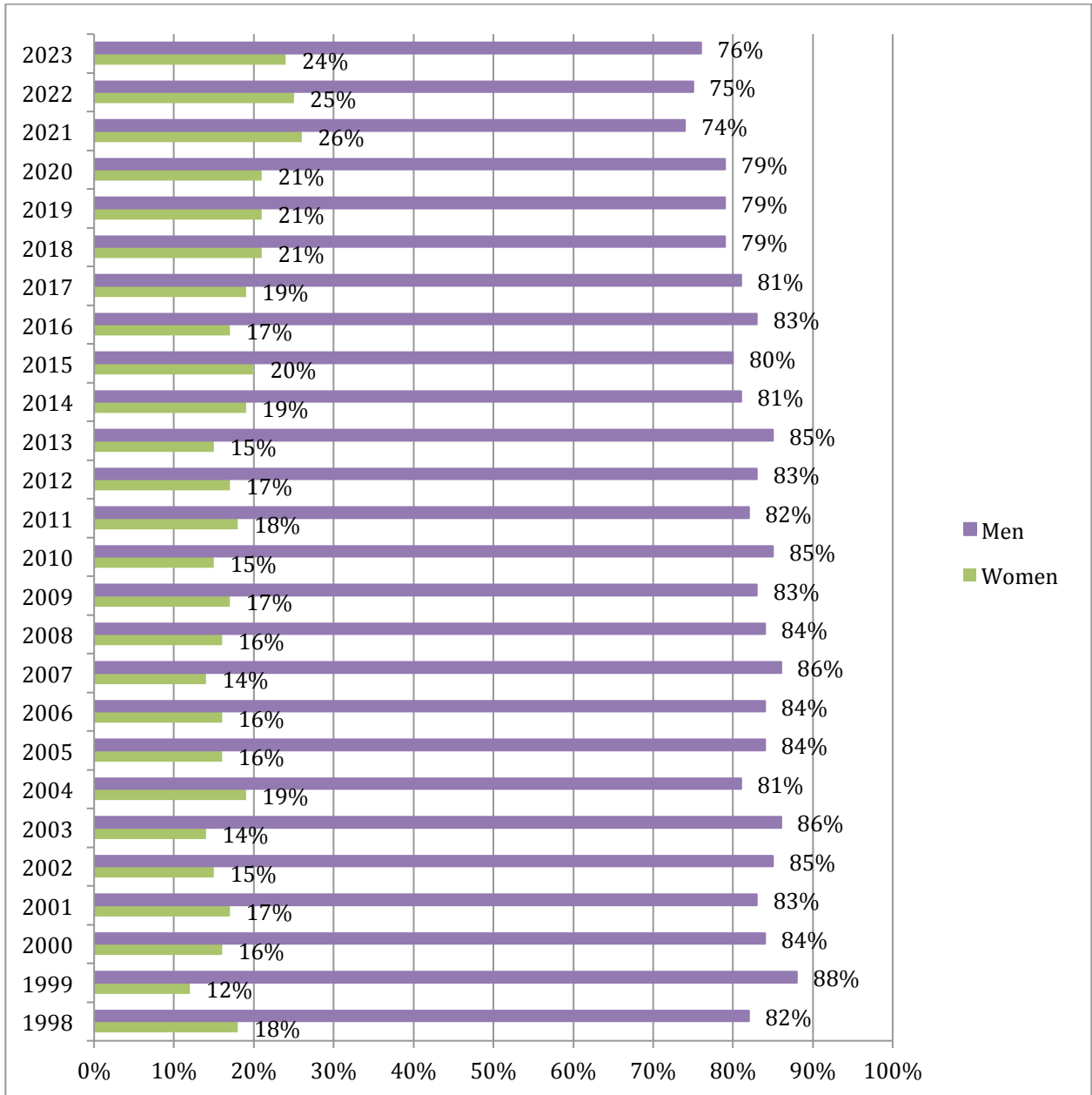


Figure 4.

*Women's Employment as **Executive Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023*



Summary statement: In 1998, women comprised 18% of executive producers working on the 250 top (domestic) grossing films. In 2023, women accounted for 24% of executive producers, an increase of 6 percentage points over 26 years.

Figure 4a.

Women's Employment as **Executive Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023

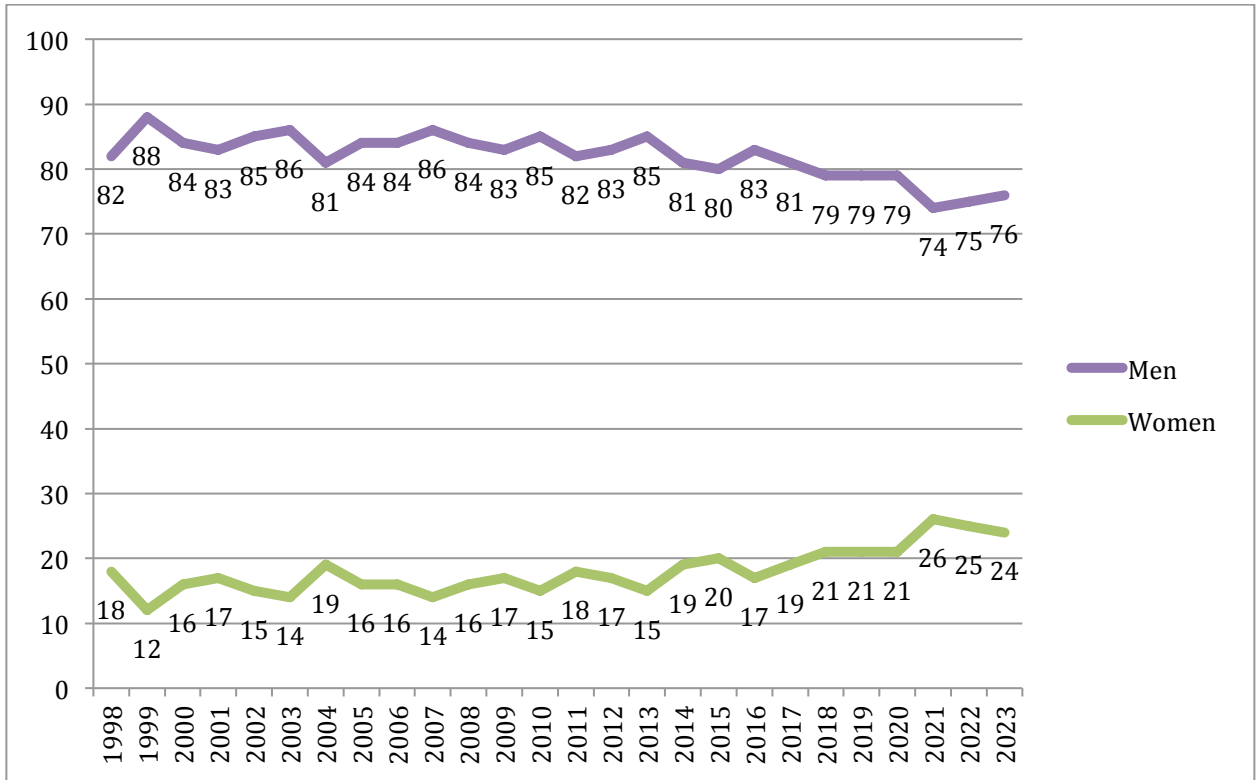
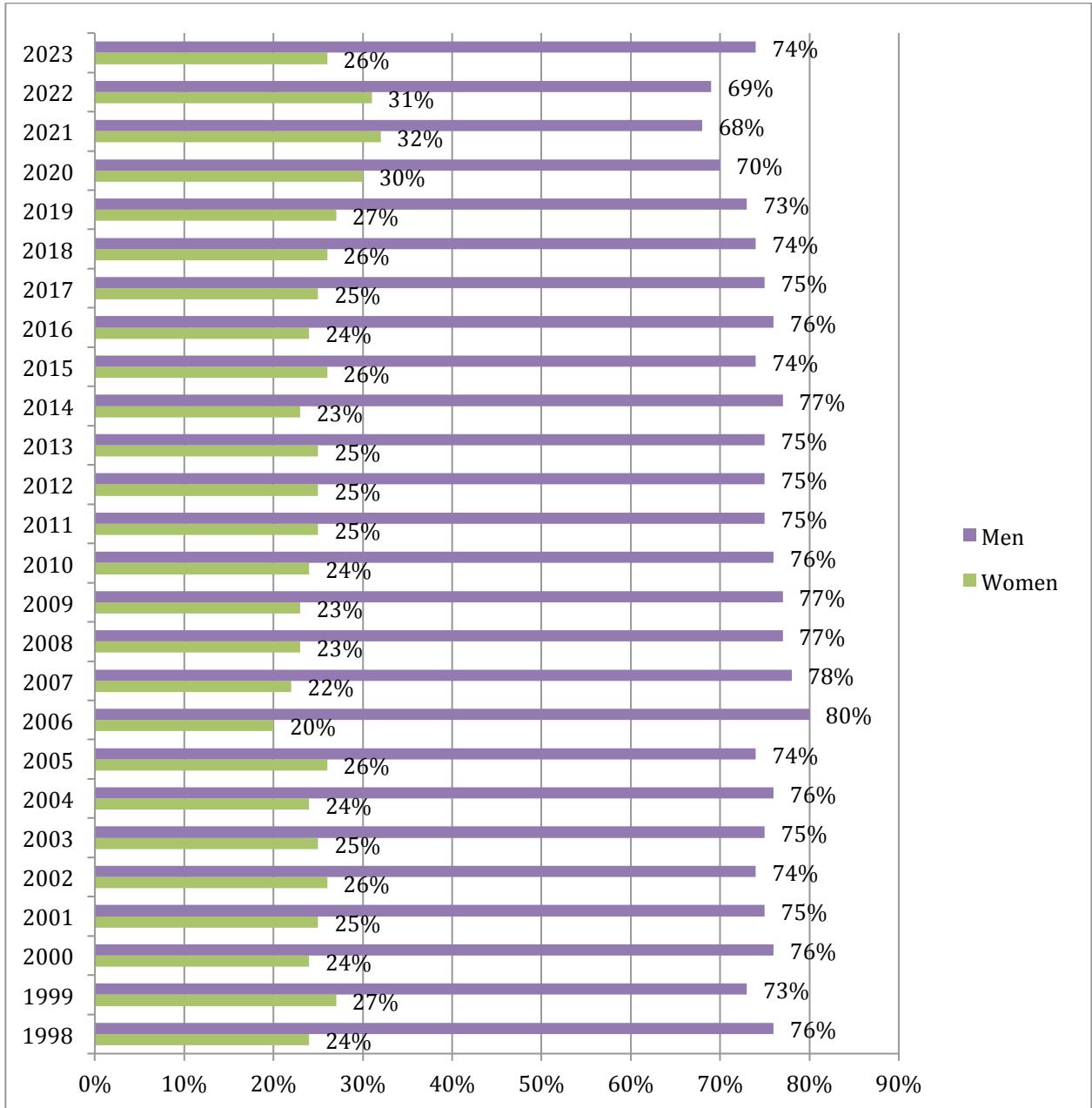


Figure 5.

*Women's Employment as **Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023*



Summary statement: In 1998, women comprised 24% of producers working on the 250 top (domestic) grossing films. In 2023, women accounted for 26% of producers, an increase of 2 percentage points over 26 years.

Figure 5a.

Women's Employment as **Producers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023

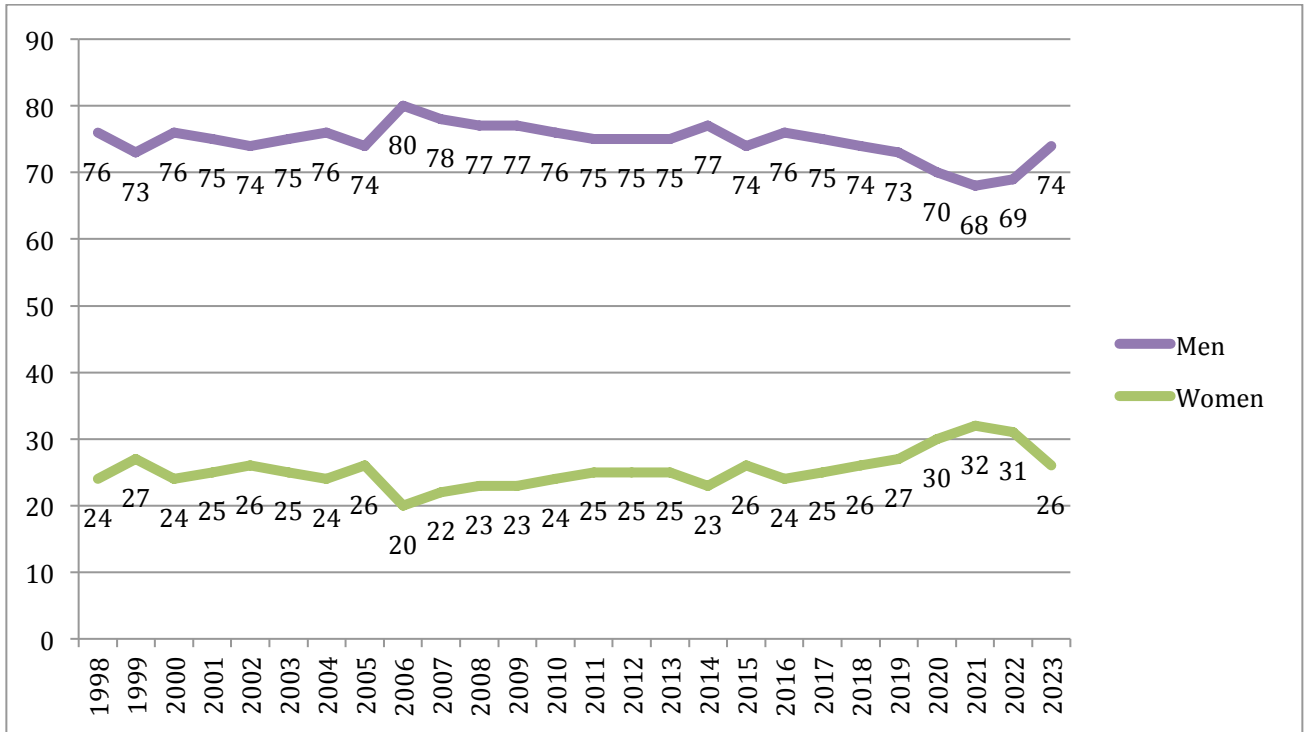
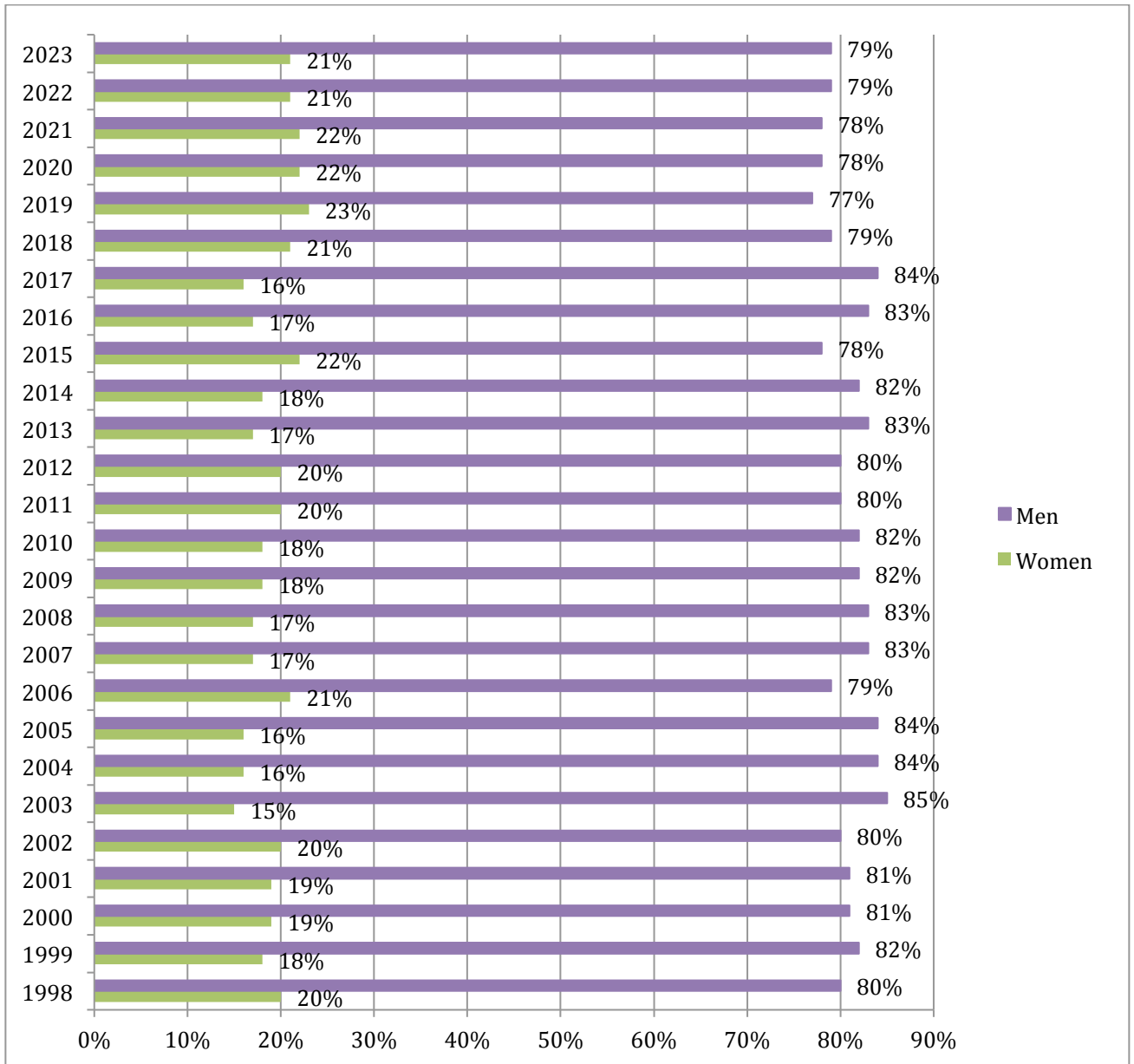


Figure 6.

*Women's Employment as **Editors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023*



Summary statement: In 1998, women accounted for 20% of editors working on the 250 top (domestic) grossing films. In 2023, women comprised 21% of editors, an increase of 1 percentage point over 26 years.

Figure 6a.

Women's Employment as **Editors** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023

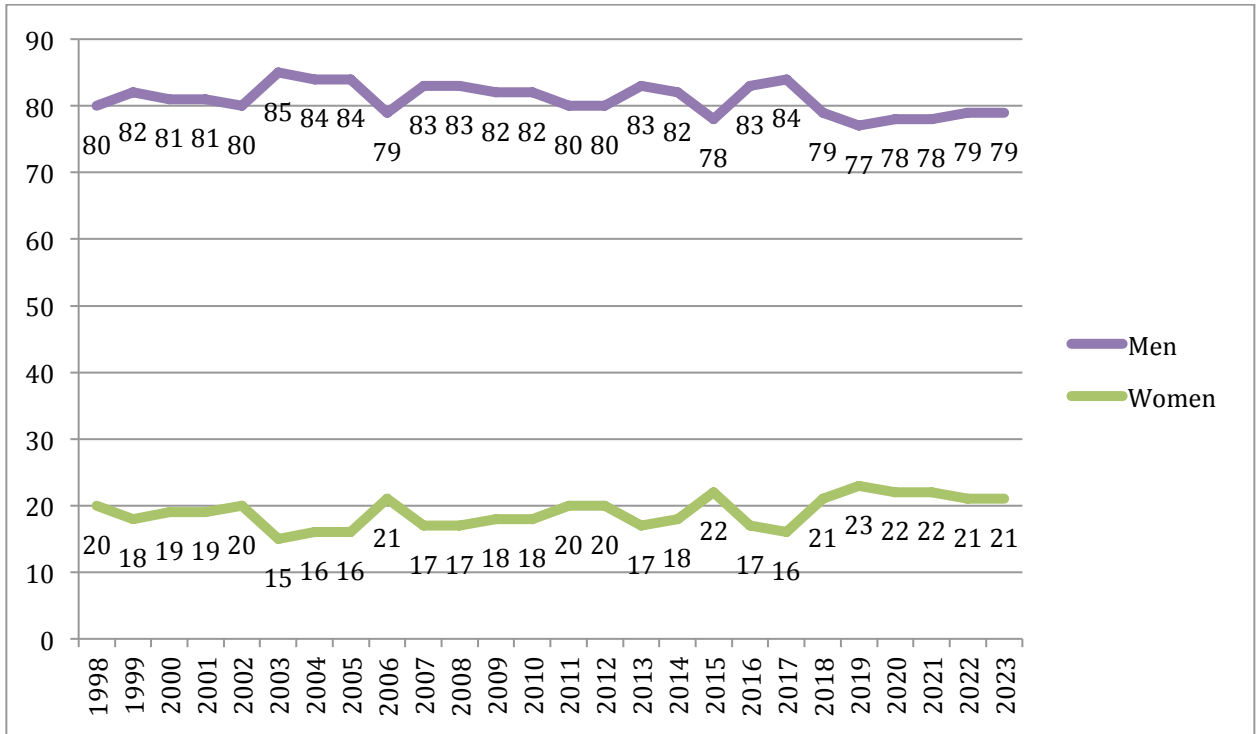
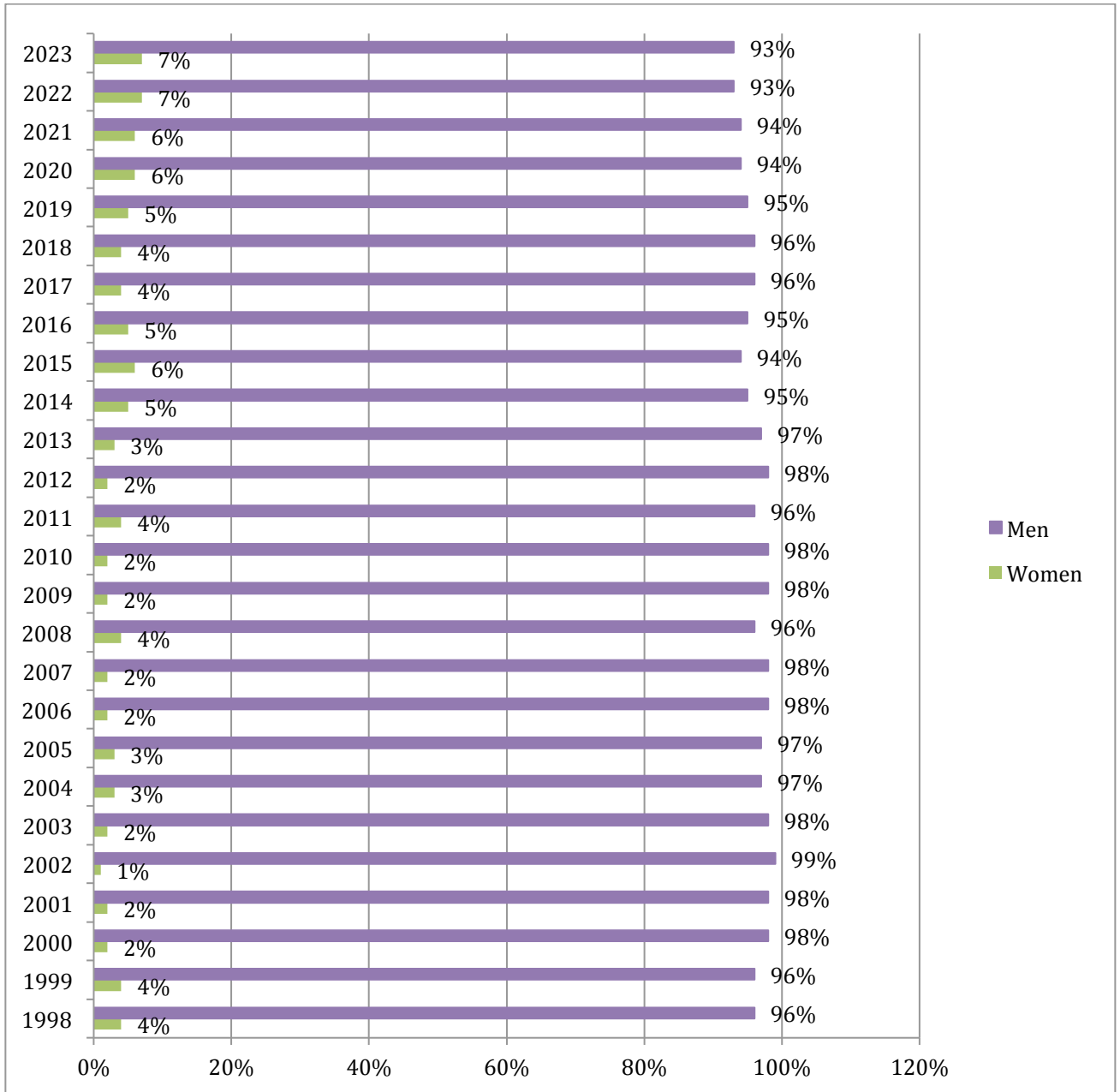


Figure 7.

Women's Employment as Cinematographers on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023



Summary statement: In 1998, women comprised 4% of cinematographers working on the 250 top (domestic) grossing films. In 2023, women accounted for 7% of cinematographers, an increase of 3 percentage points over 26 years.

Figure 7a.

Women's Employment as **Cinematographers** on the 250 Top (Domestic) Grossing Films in Every Year from 1998 through 2023

