

Indie Women: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women in U.S. Independent Film, 2024-25

by Martha M. Lauzen, Ph.D.

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Gender inequality at high-profile film festivals in the U.S. widened in 2024-25, as fests screened and/or streamed almost twice as many *narrative* features directed by men as by women. The fests featured an average of 13 films directed by men and 7 by directed by women. In 2023-24, the ratio was 11 to 7.

In addition, after two consecutive years in which the fests screened and/or streamed equal or slightly higher numbers of *documentary* features directed by women than men, that trend reversed in 2024-25 with docs directed by men outnumbering those by women, 12 to 10.

Behind-the-scenes women were more likely to direct, write, produce, edit, and shoot documentaries than narrative features. Overall, women comprised 45% of those working in behind-the-scenes roles on documentaries and 33% on narrative features.

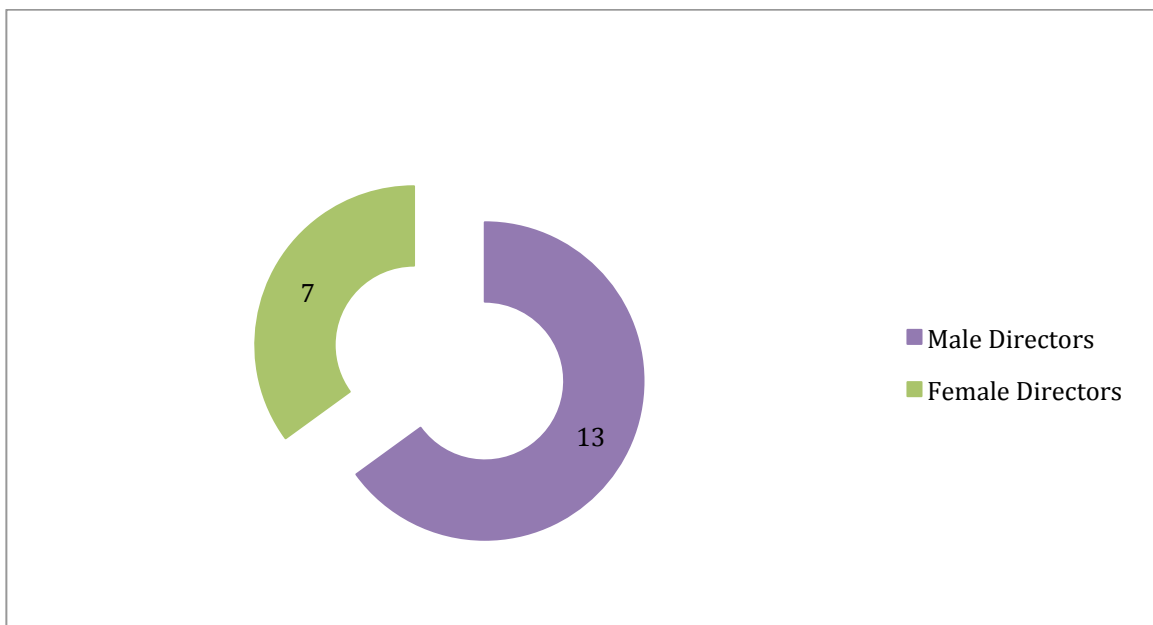
First conducted in 2008, the *Indie Women* project monitors the employment of behind-the-scenes women working on films screening and/or streaming at 20 high-profile film festivals in the U.S. It is the longest running and most complete historical record of women's participation in independent films appearing at film festivals available. 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 2024 through June 2025.¹ The report compares the most recent figures with those dating back to 2008. This year's study also tracks women's representation as composers.

Key Findings

•In 2024-25, the U.S. festivals considered in this study streamed and/or screened almost twice as many *narrative features directed exclusively by men* than with at least one woman director. The festivals streamed/screened an average of 13 *narrative* films directed by men, compared to an average of 7 films directed by at least one woman (see Figure 1). In 2023-24, the festivals streamed/screened an average of 11 narrative films directed by men and 7 directed by women.

Figure 1.

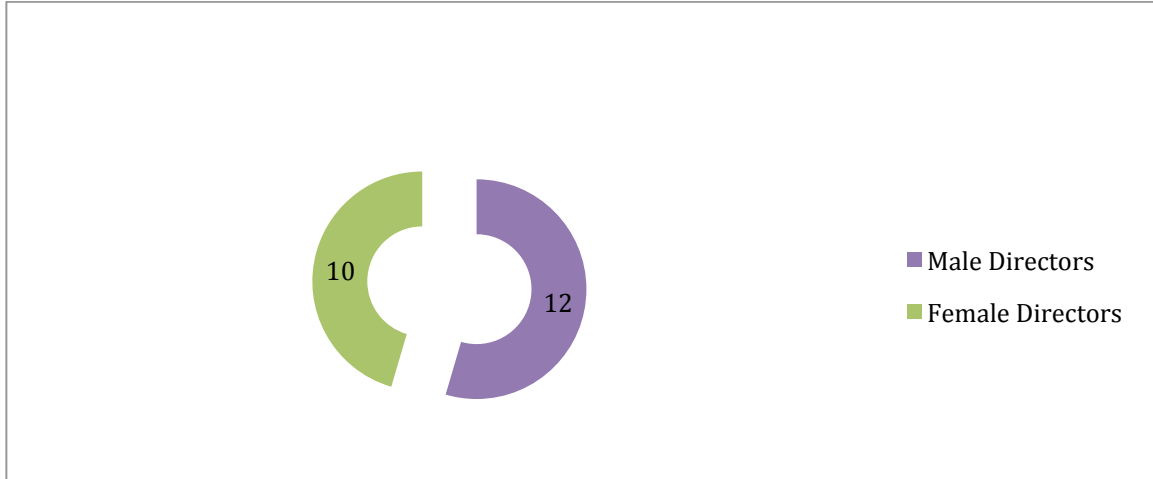
Average No. of Narrative Features Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Streamed/Screened at U.S. Festivals



•Fests streamed and/or screened more *documentaries directed by men* than by women in 2024-25. Festivals streamed/screened an average of 12 *documentaries* directed exclusively by men versus an average of 10 documentaries directed by at least one woman (see Figure 2). In 2023-24, fests screened and/or streamed more documentaries by women than by men (9 vs. 8). In 2022-23, fests screened equal numbers of documentaries directed by men and women (10 vs. 10).

Figure 2.

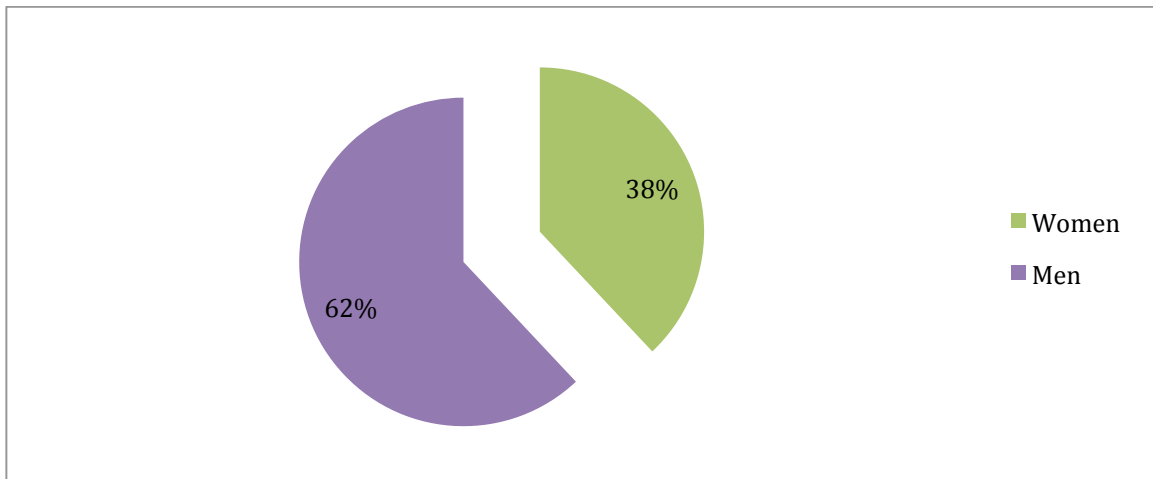
Average No. of Documentaries Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Streamed/Screened at U.S. Festivals



•In 2024-25, women comprised 38% of individuals working in key behind-the-scenes roles on U.S. independent features (narrative films and documentaries). This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 37% in 2023-24. Men continued to account for the majority (62%) 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 2024-25



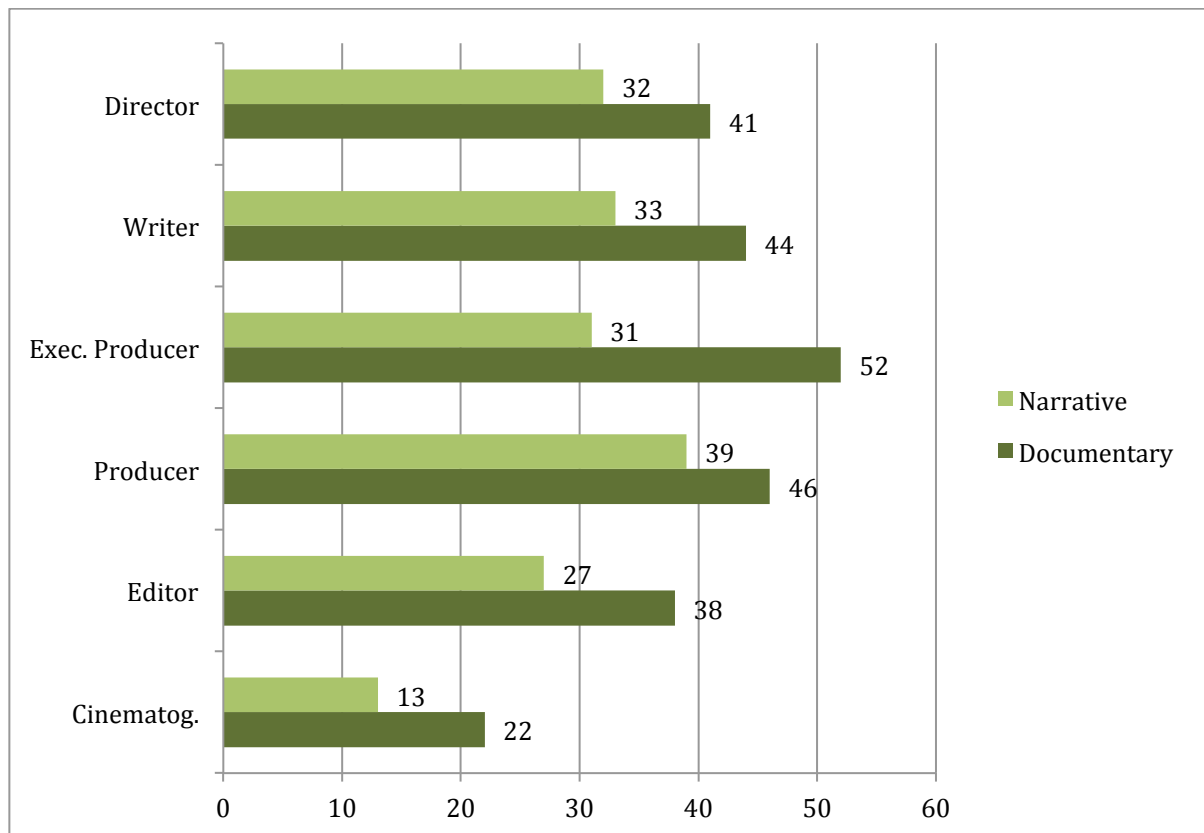
•On all films considered (narrative features and documentaries), women fared best as producers (42%), followed by executive producers (41%), directors (37%), writers (36%), editors (33%), and cinematographers (18%).

•Women continue to enjoy higher employment on documentaries than on narrative features. Women accounted for 45% of those working in key behind-the-scenes roles on documentaries and 33% 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 9% of cinematographers.
- **Overall, women comprised 15% and men 85% of composers working on independent films in 2024-25.** This represents a decline of 3 percentage points from 18% in 2023-24.

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

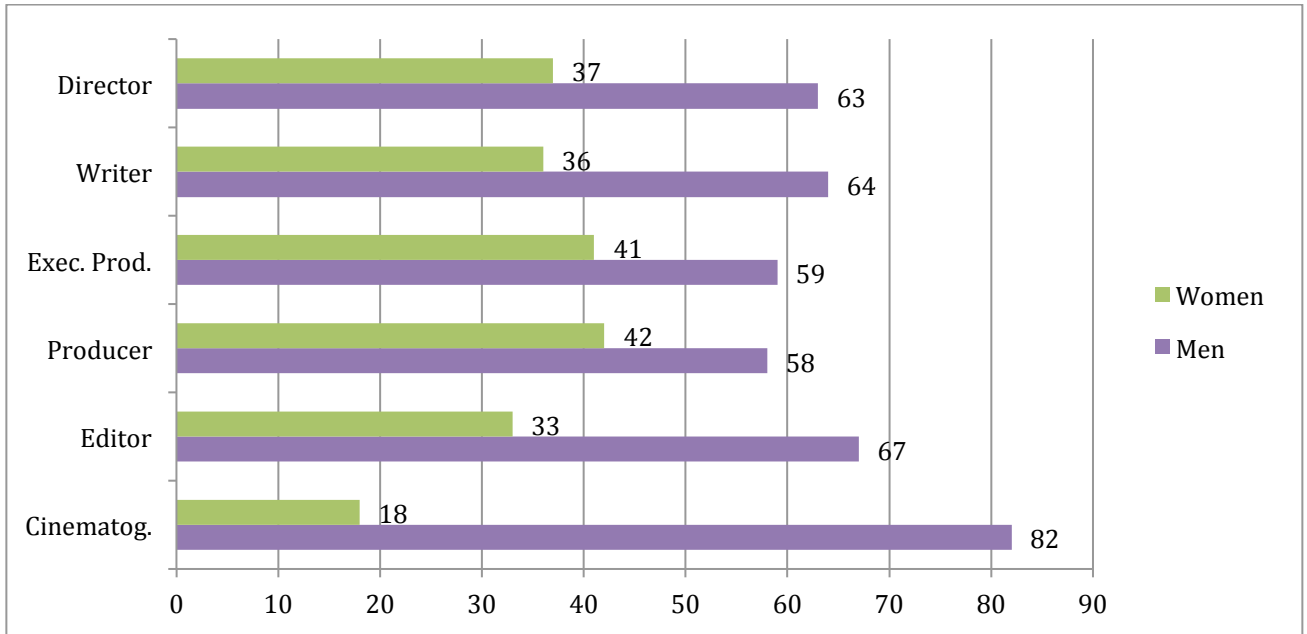
Women comprised 38% of directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on independently and domestically produced feature-length films in 2024-25 (see Figure 3 in Key Findings section). This represents a slight increase of 1 percentage point from 37% in 2023-24.

Women fared best as producers (42%), followed by executive producers (41%), directors (37%), writers (36%), editors (33%), and cinematographers (18%) (see Figure 5).

By role, women accounted for 37% of directors, down 4 percentage points from 41% in 2023-24. Women comprised 36% of writers, even with the percentage in 2023-24. Women made up 41% of executive producers, up 5 percentage points from 36% in 2023-24. Women accounted for 42% of producers, up 1 percentage point from 41% in 2023-24. Women comprised 33% of editors, down 1 percentage point from 34% in 2023-24. Women accounted for 18% of cinematographers, down 2 percentage points from 20% in 2023-24. Figure 6 provides a historical comparison of 2024-25 figures with those from prior years. None of the roles considered reached historic highs in 2024-25.

Figure 5.

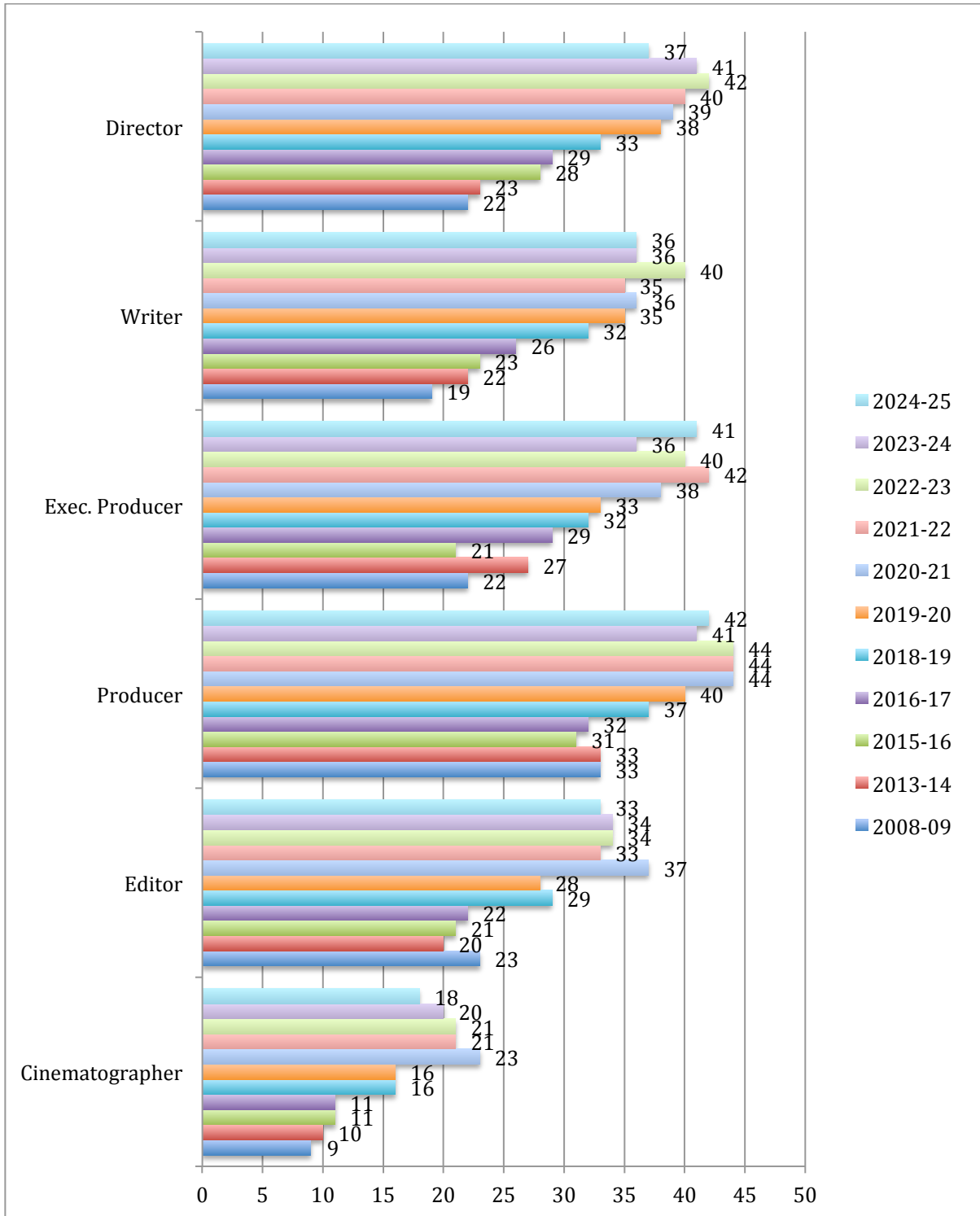
Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women and Men Working on Narrative Features and Documentaries by Role



Individuals who explicitly identify as nonbinary comprised less than one half of one percent in every role. 4 individuals identified as nonbinary directors, 3 as writers, 2 as producers, 1 as executive producer, 1 as editor, and 2 as cinematographers. 1 individual explicitly identified as a transgender director, 1 as a writer, and 1 as a producer.

Figure 6.

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

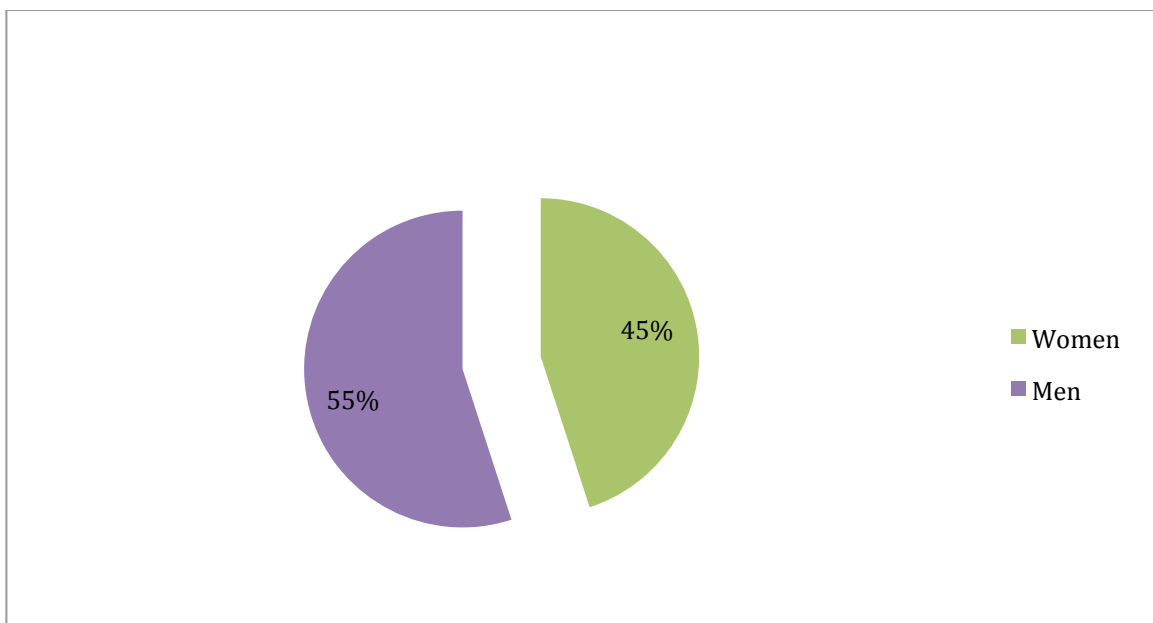


Findings for Documentaries Only

Women comprised 45% and men 55% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on documentaries in 2024-25 (see Figure 7). This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 44% in 2023-24.

Figure 7.

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



Women fared best as executive producers (52%), followed by producers (46%), writers (44%), directors (41%), editors (38%), and cinematographers (22%) (see Figure 8).

Figure 8.

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

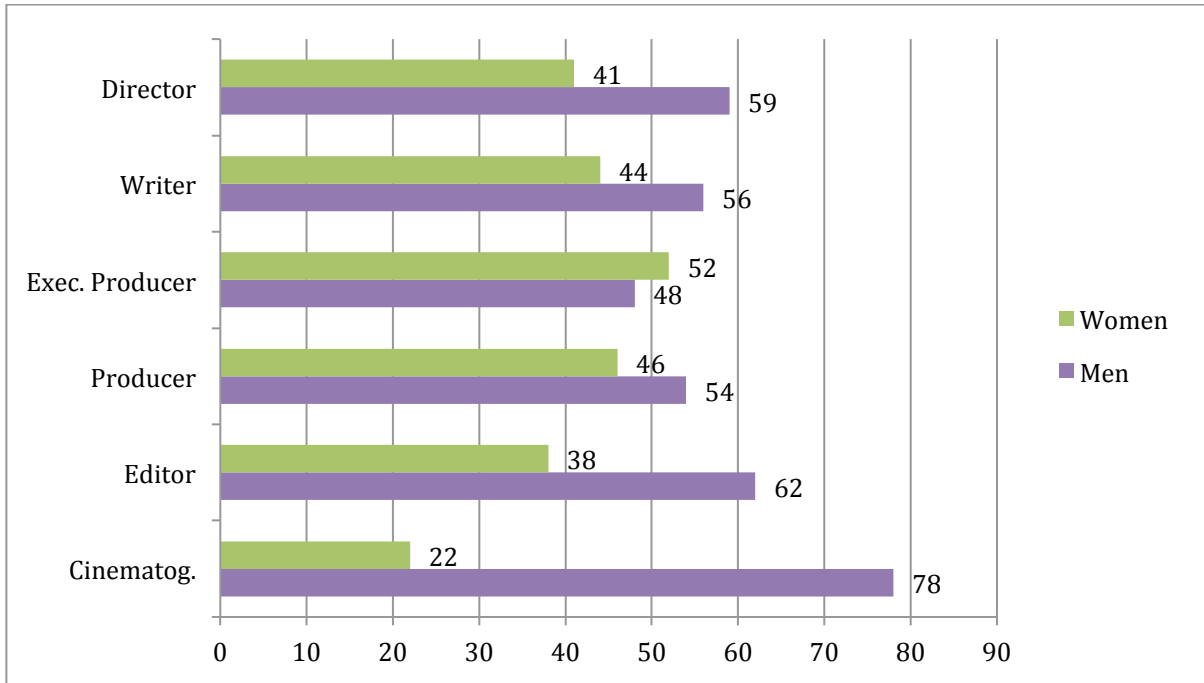
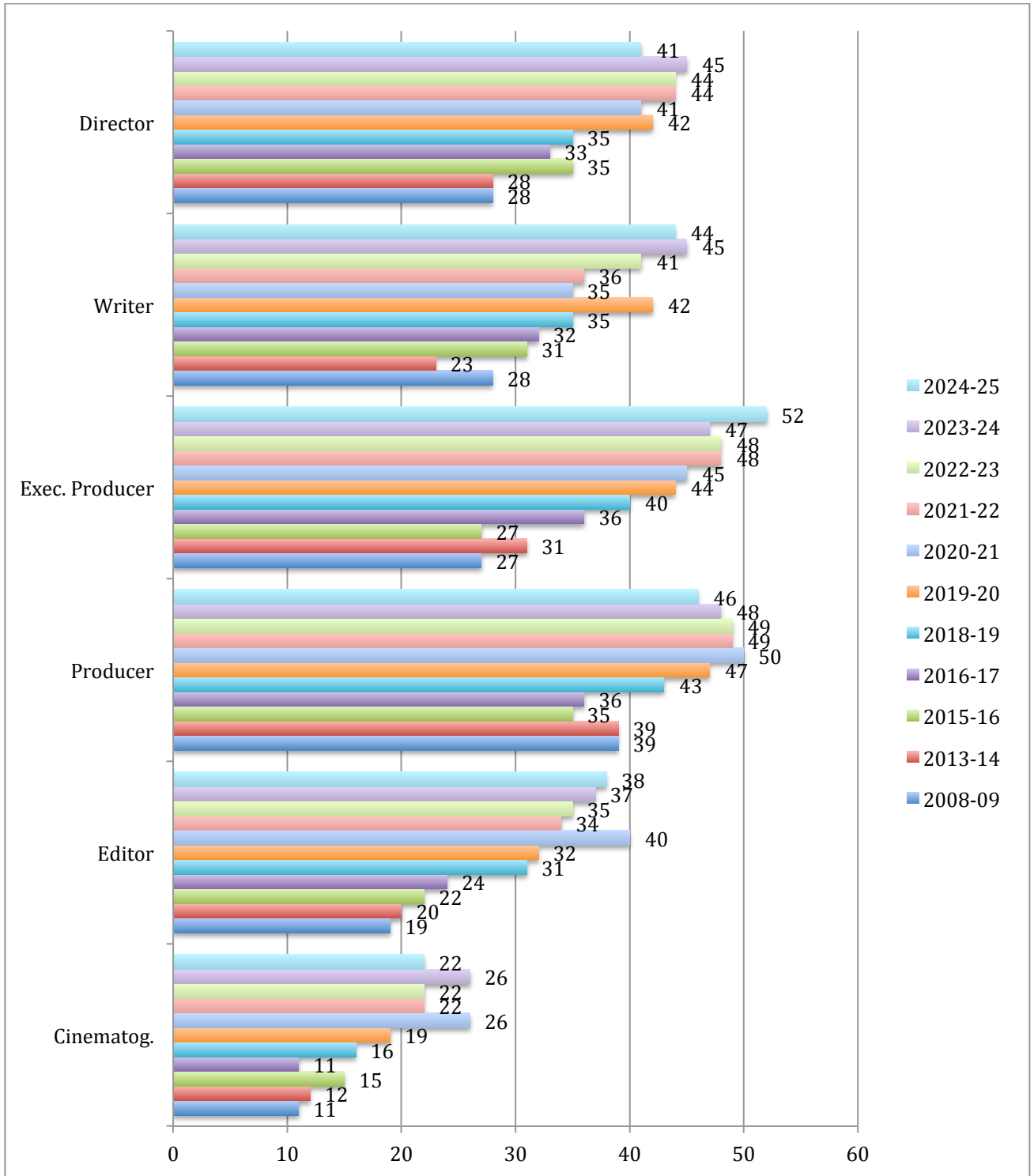


Figure 9 provides a historical comparison of 2024-25 figures with those from prior years. By role, women comprised 41% of directors, down 4 percentage points from 45% in 2023-24. Women accounted for 44% of writers, down 1 percentage point from 45% in 2023-24. Women made up 52% of executive producers, up 5 percentage points from 47% in 2023-24, and a historic high. Women comprised 46% of producers, down 2 percentage points from 48% in 2023-24. Women accounted for 38% of editors, up 1 percentage point from 37% in 2023-24. Women made up 22% of cinematographers, down 4 percentage points from 26% in 2023-24.

Figure 9.

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Documentaries by Role

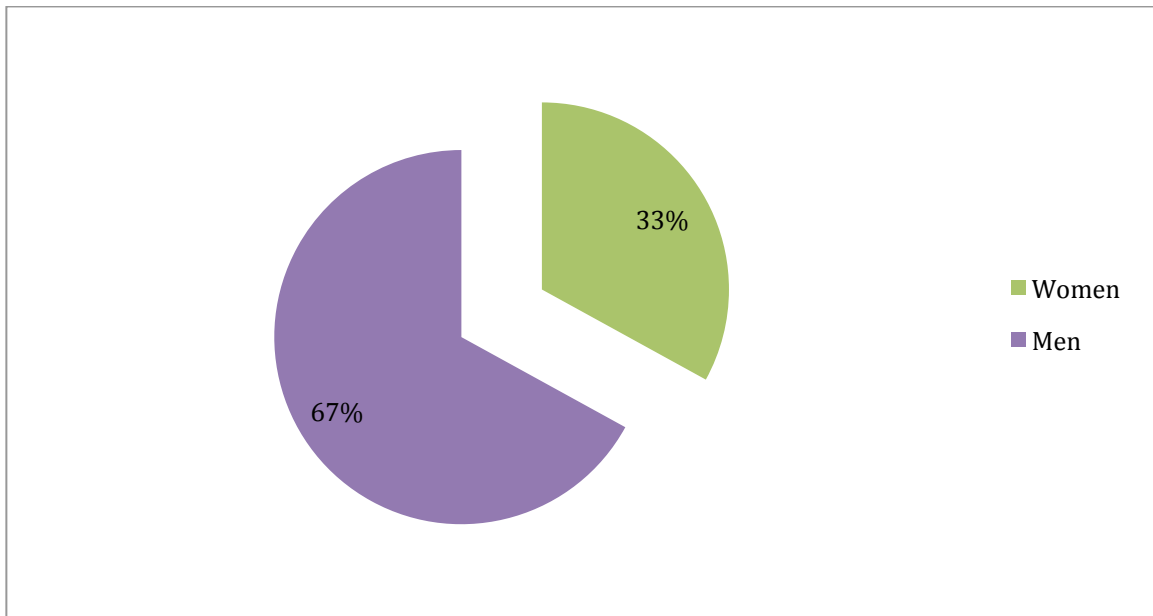


Findings for Narrative Features Only

Overall, women comprised 33% and men 67% of individuals working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered on domestically and independently produced narrative features in 2024-25 (see Figure 10). For women, this represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 32% in 2023-24.

Figure 10.

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



Women fared best as producers (39%), followed by writers (33%), directors (32%), executive producers (31%), editors (27%), and cinematographers (13%) (see Figure 11).

Figure 11.
Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women and Men Working
on Narrative Features by Role

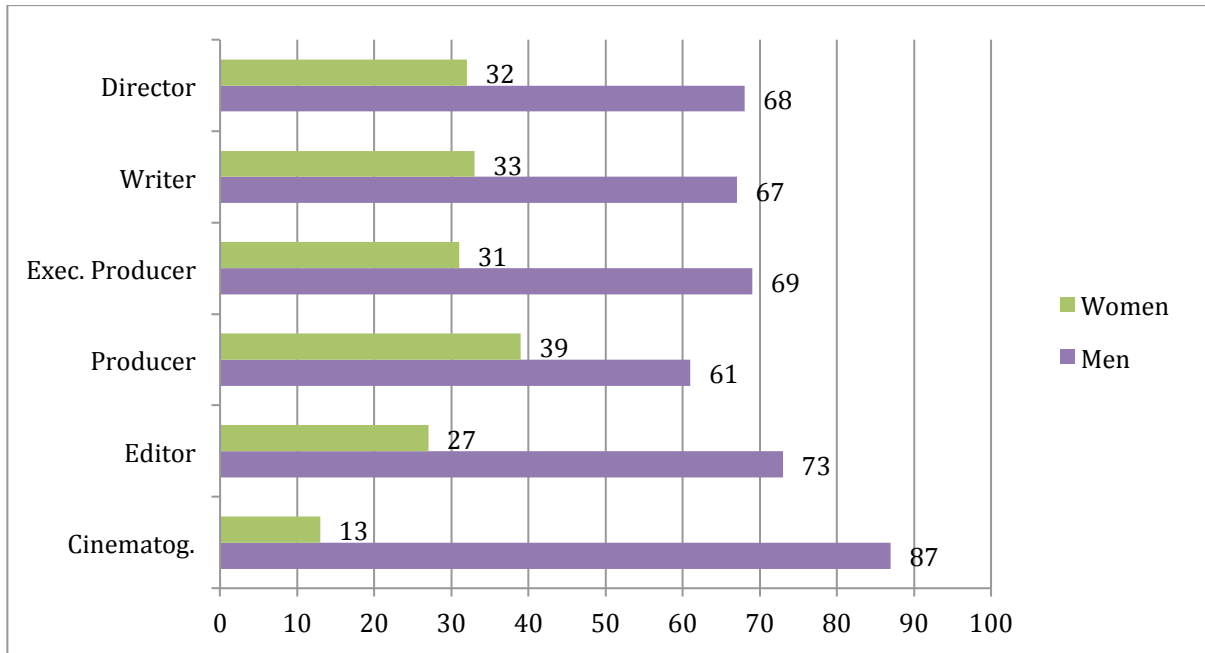
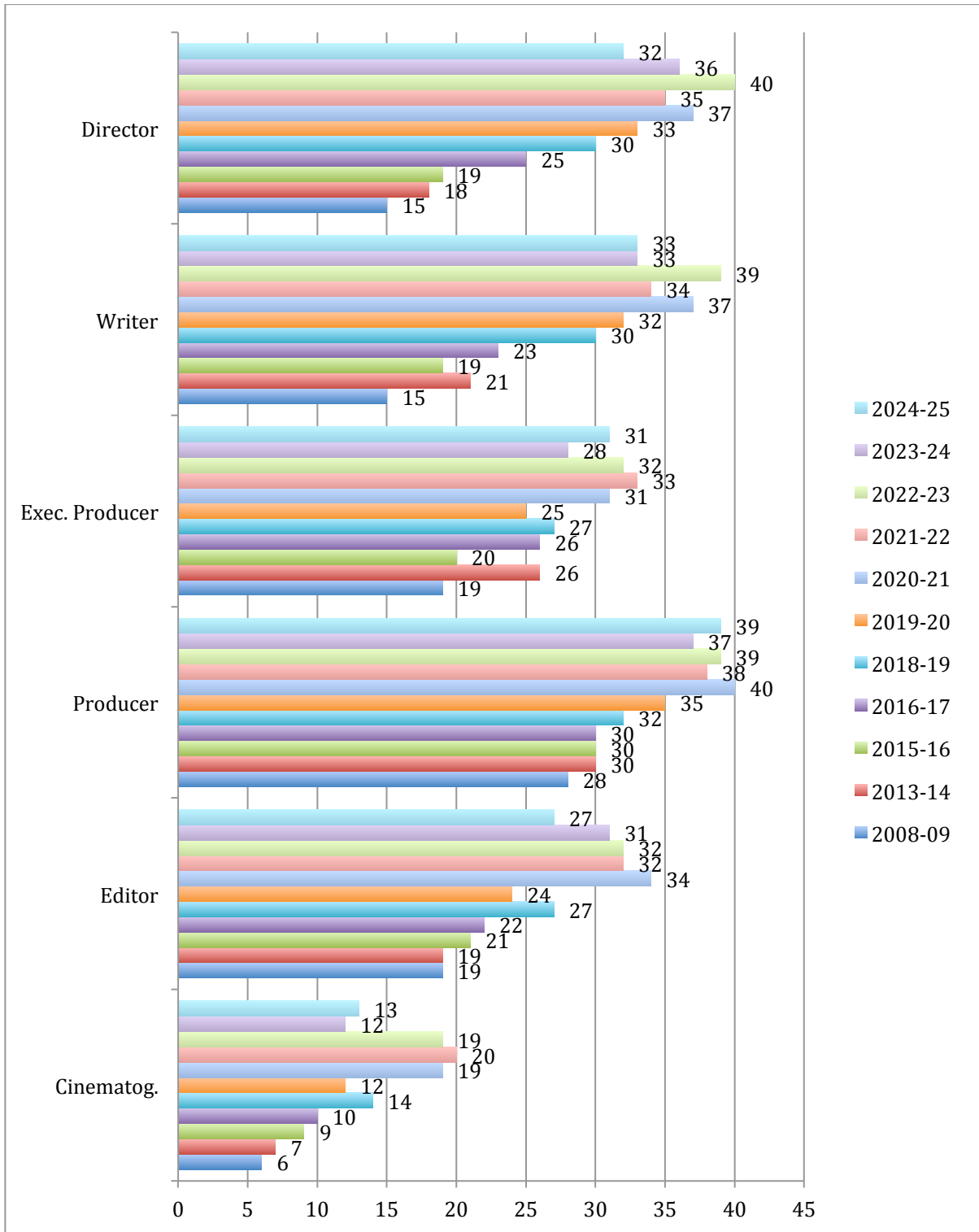


Figure 12 provides a historical comparison of 2024-25 figures with those from prior years. By role, women comprised 32% of directors, down 4 percentage points from 36% in 2023-24. Women accounted for 33% of writers, even with the percentage achieved in 2023-24. Women made up 31% of executive producers, up 3 percentage points from 28% in 2023-24. Women comprised 39% of producers, up 2 percentage points from 37% in 2023-24. Women accounted for 27% of editors, down 4 percentage points from 31% in 2023-24. Women made up 13% of cinematographers, up 1 percentage point from 12% in 2023-24.

Figure 12.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Narrative Features
by Role



Findings for Composers

Overall, women comprised 15% and men 85% of composers working on independently and domestically produced narrative and documentary films in 2024-25. This represents a decline of 3 percentage points from 18% in 2023-24.

Composers, who happen to be women, fared slightly better on documentaries than narrative features. Women accounted for 16% of composers working on documentaries (down 8 percentage points from 24% in 2023-24) and 14% of composers working on narrative features (down 1 percentage point from 15% in 2023-24).

When a film had at least one woman director, women accounted for 26% of composers. When a film had exclusively men directors, women comprised just 8% 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 13).

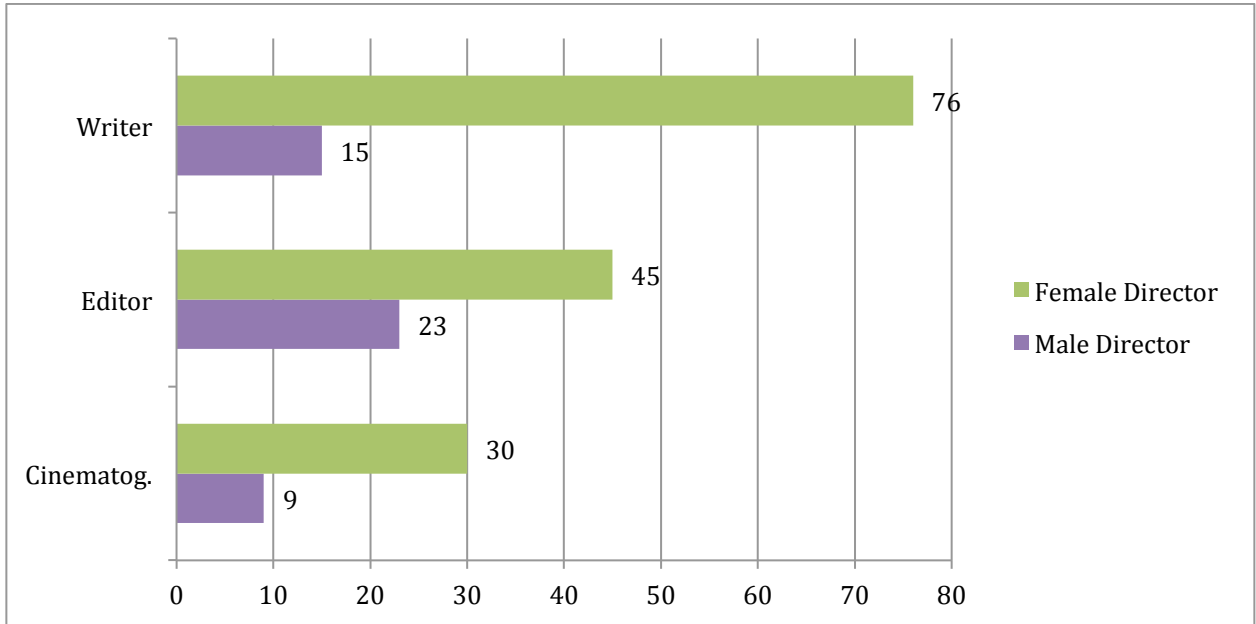
On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 76% of writers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 15% of writers.

On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 45% of editors. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 23% of editors.

On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 30% of cinematographers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 9% of cinematographers.

Figure 13.

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 more than 11,900 credits on over 800 films in 2024-25, and over 136,000 credits on more than 12,300 films over the period of 2008 to 2025.

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.