



Equal opportunity through knowledge and research

Women in Independent Film, 2016-17

**Center for the Study of Women in Television &
Film, San Diego State University**

Dr. Martha M. Lauzen

May 2017

Key Findings

•**High profile film festivals in the U.S. screened three times as many narrative films directed by men as by women in 2016-17.** The 23 festivals considered in this study screened an average of 6 narrative films directed by at least one woman compared with an average of 18 features directed by men.

•**U.S. festivals screened almost twice as many documentaries directed by men as by women in 2016-17.** The festivals in this study screened an average of 7 documentaries directed by at least one woman compared with an average of 13 directed by men.

•**Overall, independent films screened 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 2016-17.** 72% of those working in these roles were males and 28% were females. This represents a recent historical high. It is an increase of 3 percentage points from 25% in 2015-16, and an increase of 4 percentage points from 24% in 2008-09.

•**Women's representation as directors on independent films screening at the festivals considered increased slightly from 28% in 2015-16 to 29% in 2016-17.** This is an increase of 7 percentage points from 2008-09.

•**Women continue to enjoy higher employment on documentaries than on narrative features.** Women accounted for 31% of individuals working on documentaries versus 26% of those working on narrative features.

•**Women are more likely to direct documentaries than narrative features.** Women accounted for 33% of directors on documentaries versus 25% of directors on narrative features.

•**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 74% of writers vs. 7% on films directed exclusively by men. On films with women directors, women accounted for 36% of editors compared with 17% on films directed exclusively by men. On films with women directors, women comprised 23% of cinematographers versus 6% on films directed exclusively by men.

Method

This report provides employment figures for domestically and independently produced feature-length documentaries and narrative films screening from June 2016 through May 2017 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. *Women in Independent Film* is the most comprehensive study of women's behind-the-scenes employment on independent films available.

The study tracks the sex of directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on every U.S. feature-length film screened at the festivals considered. In total, *Women in Independent Film* considers 10,943 credits on 1,472 films in 2016-17, and over 59,000 credits on more than 6,000 films over the period of 2008 to 2017.

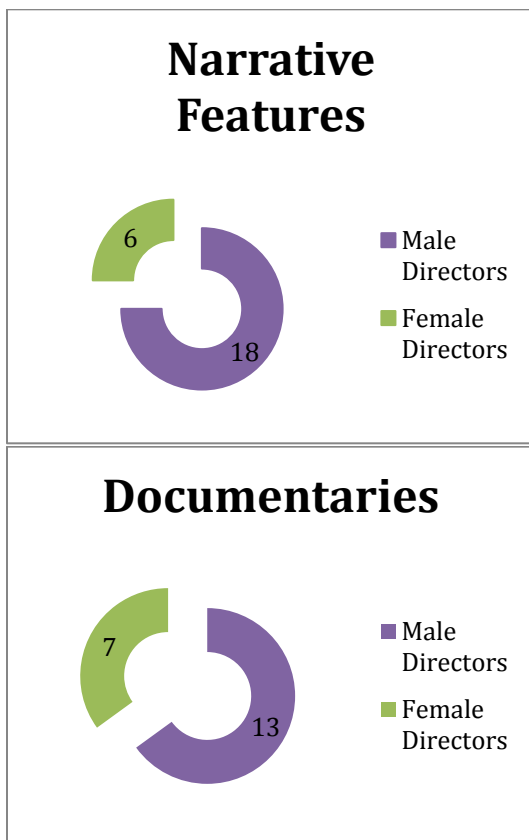
The findings of the study are divided into four major sections. The first section reports the overall figures for women working on documentaries and narrative features. The second section provides the numbers for women working on documentaries only, and the third section reports the figures for women working on narrative features only. The fourth section discusses important relationships between women directors and the gender of those working in other key behind-the-scenes roles.

This report provides comparisons of the data gathered for the present study (2016-17) with data collected from 2015-16, 2014-15, 2013-2014, 2011-2012, and 2008-2009.

Overall Findings for Documentaries and Narrative Features Screening at Festivals

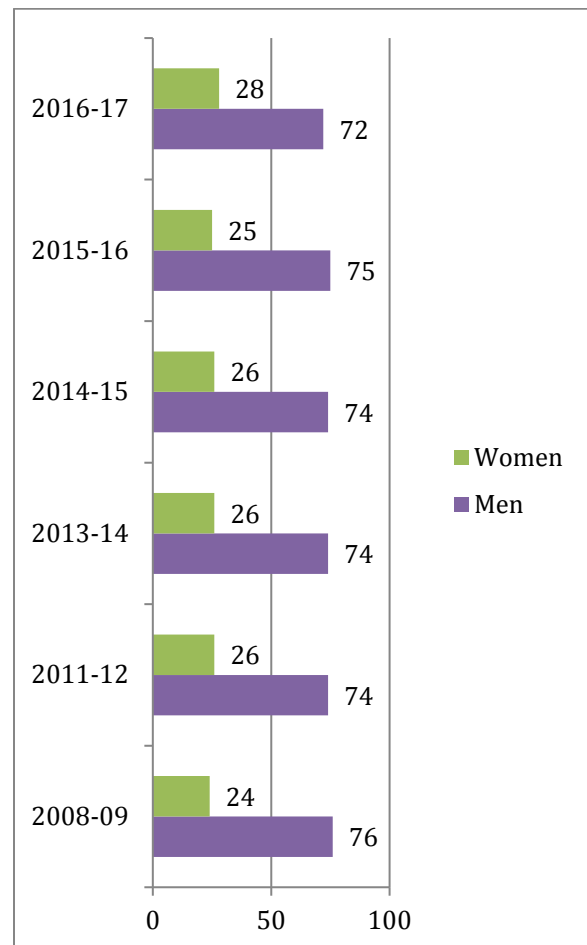
- The festivals considered in this study screened an average of 6 narrative features directed by at least one woman versus an average of 18 narrative features directed exclusively by men (see Figure 1).
- The festivals screened an average of 7 documentaries directed by at least one woman compared with an average of 13 documentaries directed exclusively by men.

*Figure 1.
Average No. of Films Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Screened at Festivals*



- Women accounted for 28% of directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on domestically and independently produced feature-length films (documentaries and narrative features). This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 2015-16, and an increase of 4 percentage points from 2008-09. This number represents a recent historical high (see Figure 2).

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



- On all of the films considered, women fared best as producers (32%), followed by directors (29%), executive producers (29%), writers (26%), editors (22%), and cinematographers (11%) (see Figure 3).

- In 2016-17, women comprised 29% of directors working on the films considered. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 28% in 2015-16, and an increase of 7 percentage points from 22% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 26% of writers on the films considered in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 2015-16, and an increase of 7 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09. This is a recent historical high.

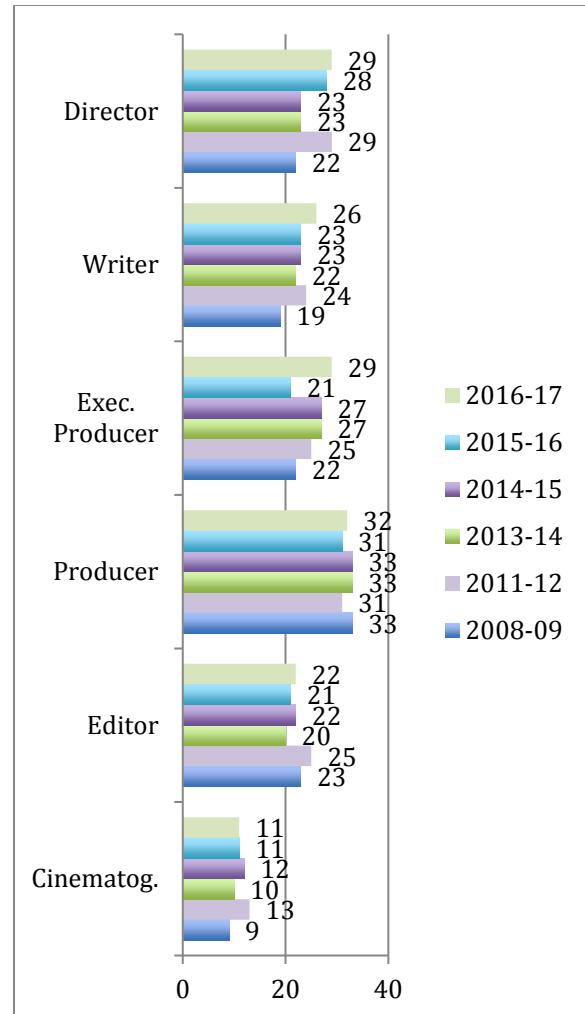
- Women accounted for 29% of executive producers in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 8 percentage points from 21% in 2015-16, and an increase of 7 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09. This is a recent historical high.

- In 2016-17, women comprised 32% of producers. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 31% in 2015-16, and a decrease of 1 percentage point from 2008-09.

- In 2016-17, women comprised 22% of editors. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 21% in 2015-16, and a slight decline of 1 percentage point from 23% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 11% of cinematographers in 2016-17. This represents no change from 2015-16, and an increase of 2 percentage points from 9% in 2008-09.

*Figure 3.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Independent Features by Role*



- This year’s study also tracked women’s representation as composers. In 2016-17, women accounted for 9% of composers. This represents no change from 2014-15, and a slight decline of 1 percentage point from 2013-14.

Findings for Documentaries Only

- Overall, women comprised 31% of individuals working on documentaries in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 29% in 2015-16.

- Women fared best as producers (36%) and executive producers (36%), followed by directors (33%), writers (32%), editors (24%), and cinematographers (11%) (see Figure 4).

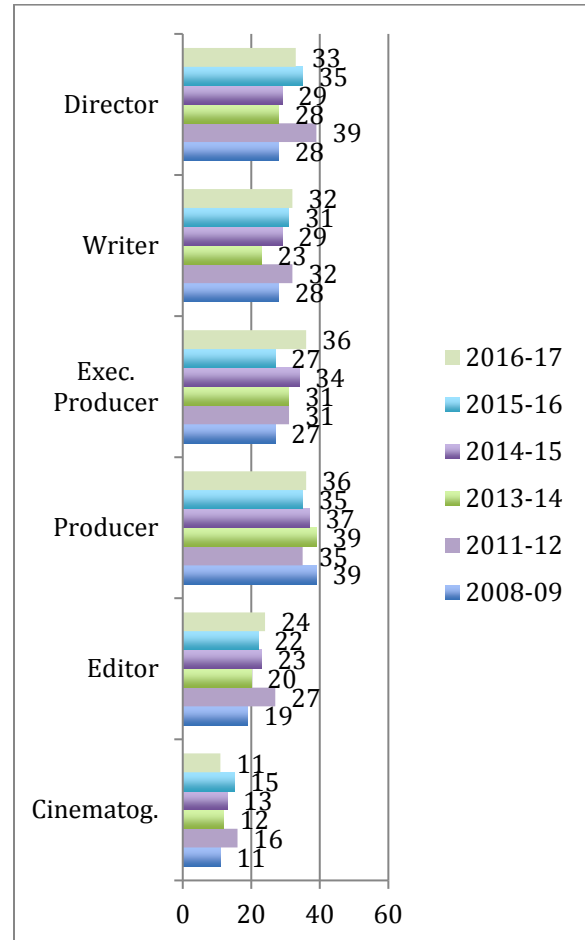
- Women comprised 33% of directors working on documentaries screening at the festivals considered in 2016-17. This represents a decrease of 2 percentage points from 35% in 2015-16, and an increase of 5 percentage points from 28% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 32% of writers working on documentaries in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 31% in 2015-16, and an increase of 4 percentage points from 28% in 2008-09.

- Women comprised 36% of executive producers working on documentaries in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 9 percentage points from 27% in 2015-16 and in 2008-09. This is a recent historical high.

- Women accounted for 36% of producers working on documentaries in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 35% in 2015-16, and a decrease of 3 percentage points from 39% in 2008-09.

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



- Women comprised 24% of editors working on documentaries in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 22% last year, and an increase of 5 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 11% of cinematographers working on documentaries in 2016-17. This represents a decrease of 4 percentage points from 15% last year, and is even with the figure from 2008-09.

- This year’s study also considered composers. Women comprised 5% of composers working on documentaries in 2016-17. This represents a decline of 4 percentage points from 9% in 2014-15.

Findings for Narrative Features Only

- Overall, women comprised 26% of individuals working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered on narrative features in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 23% in 2015-16.

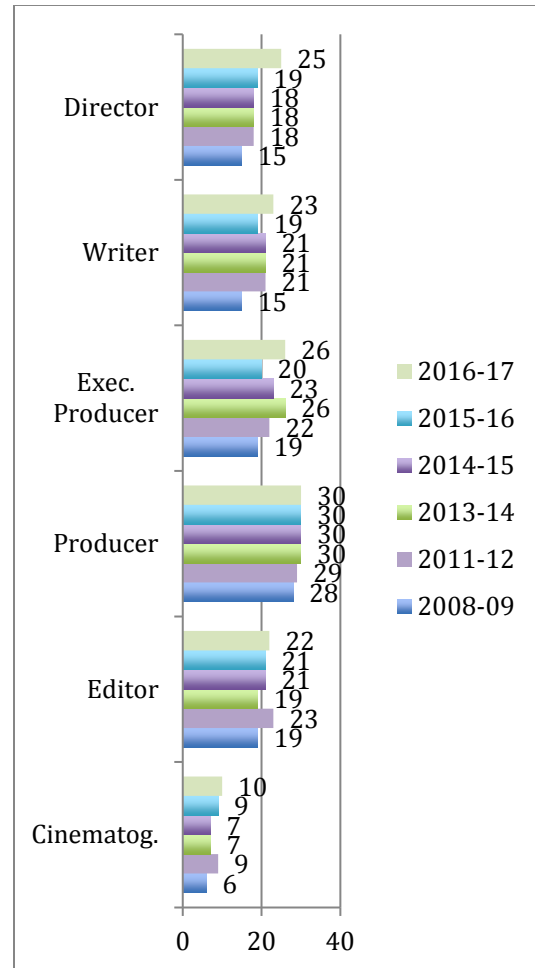
- Women fared best as producers (30%), followed by executive producers (26%), directors (25%), writers (23%), editors (22%), and cinematographers (10%) (see Figure 5).

- Women accounted for 25% of directors working on narrative features screening at the festivals considered in 2016-17, an increase of 6 percentage points from 19% in 2015-16, and an increase of 10 percentage points from 15% in 2008-09. This is a recent historical high.

- In 2016-17, women comprised 23% of writers working on narrative features. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 19% in 2015-16, and an increase of 8 percentage points from 15% in 2008-09. This is a recent historical high.

- Women accounted for 26% of executive producers working on narrative features in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 20% in 2015-16, and an increase of 7 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

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



- In 2016-17, women comprised 30% of producers working on narrative features. This is even with the figure from 2015-16 but represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 28% in 2008-09.

- Women accounted for 22% of editors working on narrative features last year. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 2015-16 and represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 19% in 2008-09.

- Women comprised 10% of cinematographers working on narrative features in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 9% in 2015-16, and an increase of 4 percentage points from 6% in 2008-09. This is a recent historical high.

- Women comprised 11% of composers working on narrative features. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 8% in 2014-15.

Important Relationships

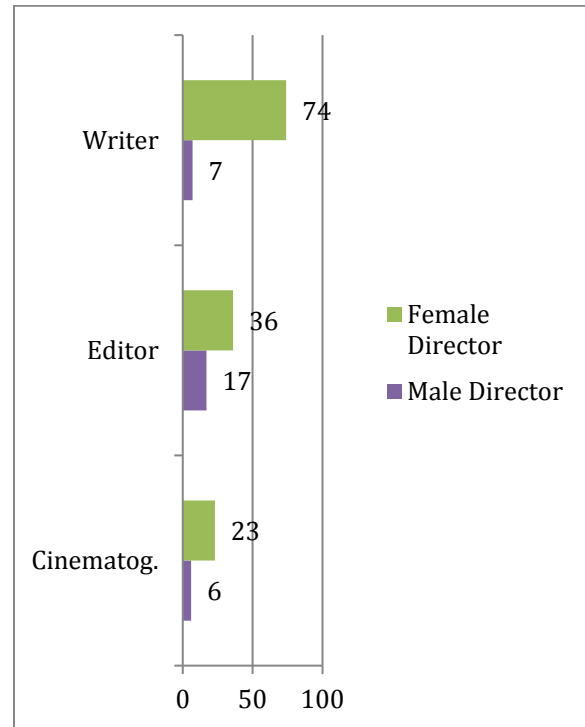
- Films with at least one woman director had higher percentages of women writers, editors, and cinematographers than films with exclusively male directors (see Figure 6).

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 74% of writers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 7% of writers.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 36% of editors. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 17% of editors.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 23% of cinematographers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 6% of cinematographers.

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



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 up-to-date 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> or contact Dr. Lauzen at lauzen@mail.sdsu.edu.

