

Indie Women: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women in Independent Film, 2018-19

by Martha M. Lauzen, Ph.D.

Copyright © 2019– All rights reserved.

Conducted since 2008, *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

•**The percentages of women working as directors, writers, producers, executive producers, and editors on independent films reached historic highs in 2018-19.** Women comprised 33% of directors, up 4 percentage points from 29% in 2017-18 (see Figure 1). Women accounted for 32% of writers, up 6 percentage points from 26% in 2017-18 (see Figure 2). Women made up 37% of producers, up 1 percentage point from 36% in 2017-18. Women comprised 32% of executive producers, up 6 percentage points from 26% in 2017-18. Women accounted for 29% of editors, up 2 percentage points from 27% in 2017-18.

•**Overall, women comprised 32% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on independent films in 2018-19.** This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 29% in 2017-18, and is a recent historic high.

Despite these gains, it is important to note that independent films employed more than twice as many men as women in key behind-the-scenes roles in 2018-19. 68% of those working as directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers were male.

Figure 1.

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Independent Films with Female Directors

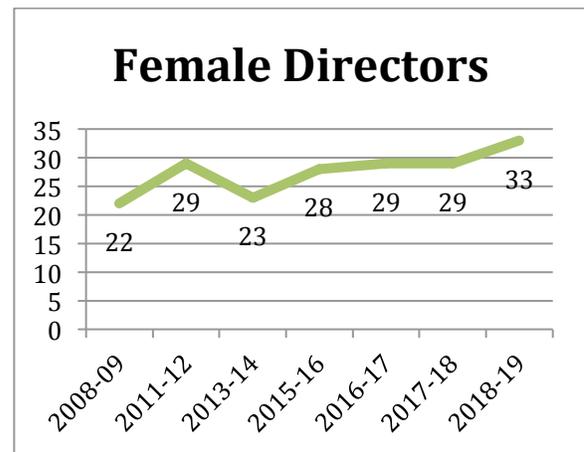
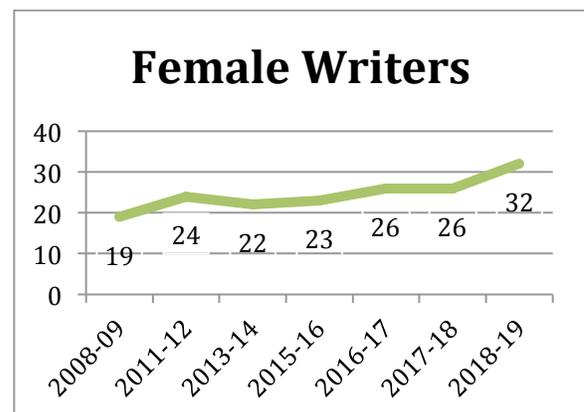


Figure 2.

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Independent Films with Female Writers



- 83% of the films had no women cinematographers, 73% had no women writers, 69% had no women editors, 65% had no women directors, 62% had no women executive producers, and 32% had no women producers.**

- Overall, high-profile festivals in the U.S. screened about twice as many films (documentaries and narrative features) directed by men as by women.** The festivals considered screened an average of 29 films by male directors and an average of 15 by female directors.

- In 2018-19, high-profile festivals in the U.S. screened more than twice as many narrative features directed by men as by women.** The festivals considered screened an average of 14 narrative films directed by men, compared to an average of 6 films directed by at least one woman (see Figure 3). Festivals screened an average of 15 documentaries directed by men versus an average of 9 documentaries directed by at least one woman (see Figure 4).

- Women continue to enjoy higher employment on documentaries than on narrative features.** Women accounted for 35% of those working in key behind-the-scenes roles on documentaries versus 29% of those working 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 72% of *writers* versus 11% on films directed exclusively by men.

Figure 3.
Average No. of Narrative Features Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Screening at High-Profile U.S. Festivals

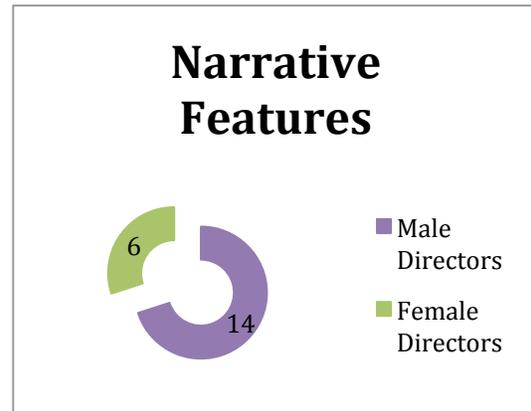
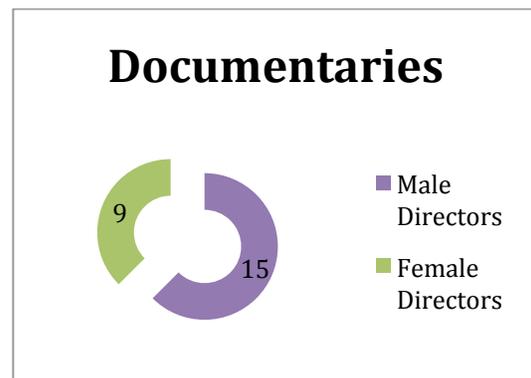


Figure 4.
Average No. of Documentaries Directed by At Least One Woman vs. Average No. of Films Directed Exclusively by Men Screening at High-Profile U.S. Festivals



On films with at least one female director, women accounted for 45% of *editors* versus 21% on films directed exclusively by men. On films with at least one female director, women comprised 27% of *cinematographers* versus 10% on films directed exclusively by men.

This study provides employment figures for domestically and independently produced feature-length documentaries and narrative films screening from July 2018 through June 2019 at the following 22 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; 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 over 10,700 credits on more than 970 films in 2018-19, and over 80,000 credits on almost 8,000 films over the period of 2008 to 2019.

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

- Overall, high-profile festivals in the U.S. screened almost twice as many films directed by men as by women. The festivals considered in this study screened an average of 15 films (narrative features and documentaries) directed by at least one woman versus an average of 29 films directed exclusively by men.
- High-profile festivals in the U.S. screened more than twice as many narrative features directed by men as by women. The festivals screened an average of 6 *narrative* features directed by at least one woman versus an average of 14 narrative features directed exclusively by men (see Figure 3).
- The festivals screened an average of 9 feature-length *documentaries* directed by at least one woman versus an average of 15 directed exclusively by men (see Figure 4).
- 32% of the independent films considered employed 0 or 1 woman, 45% employed 2 to 5 women, 17% employed 6 to 9 women, and 6% employed 10 or more women. In contrast, 10% of the films employed 0 or 1 man, 26% employed 2 to 5 men, 34% employed 6 to 9 men, and 29% employed 10 or more men.
- Women comprised 32% of directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on independent films in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 29% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high (see Figure 5).

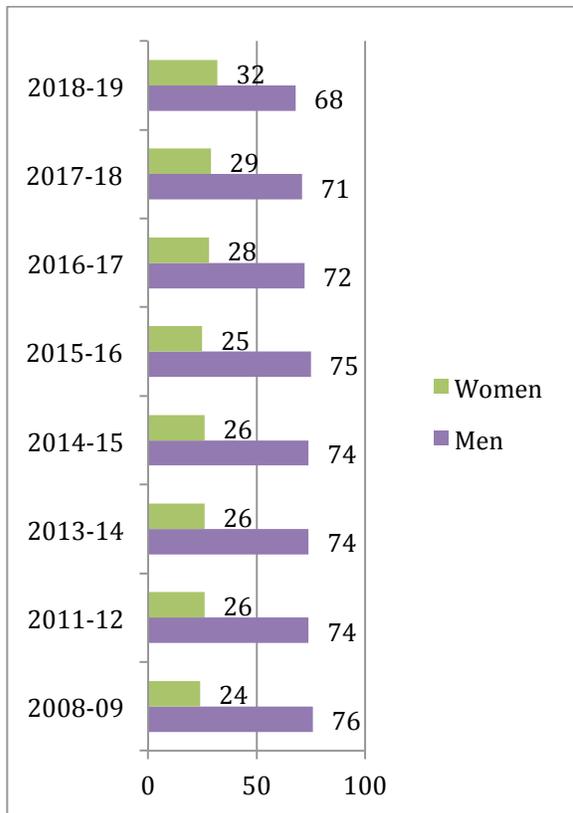
- Women fared best as producers (37%), followed by directors (33%), executive producers (32%), writers (32%), editors (29%), and cinematographers (16%) (see Figure 6).

- In 2018-19, women comprised 33% of directors. This figure represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 29% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

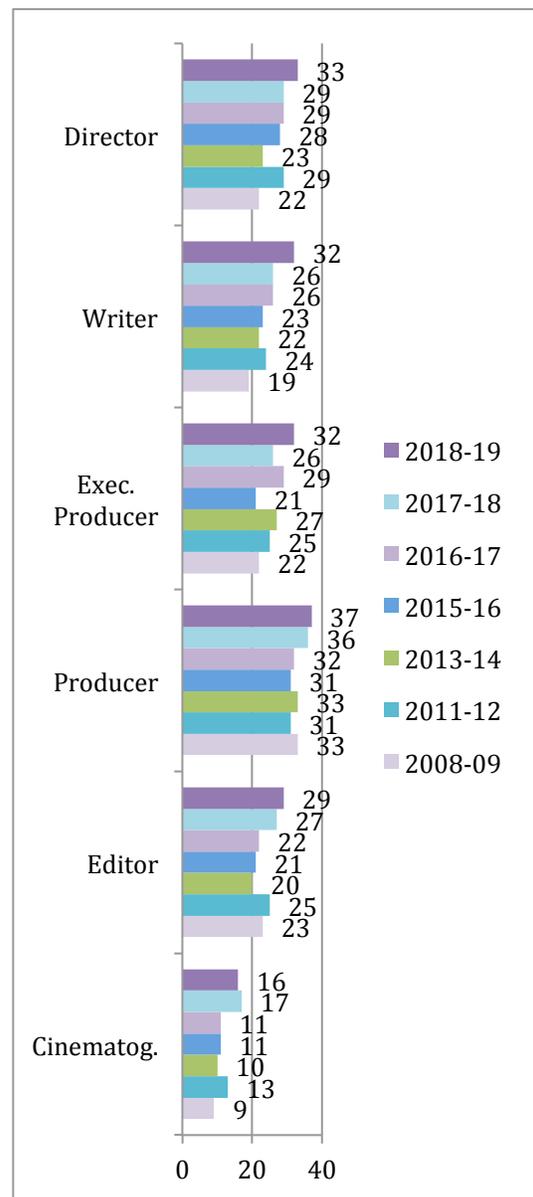
- Women accounted for 32% of writers in 2018-19. This figure represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 26% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 32% of executive producers in 2018-19. This figure represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 26% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

*Figure 5.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women Working on Independent Films*



*Figure 6.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Independent Films (Documentaries and Narrative Features) by Role*



- Women accounted for 37% of producers in 2018-19. This figure represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 36% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 29% of editors in 2018-19, up 2 percentage points from 27% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 16% of cinematographers in 2018-19, down 1 percentage point from 17% in 2017-18.

- 83% of the independent films screening at the festivals had no women cinematographers, 73% had no women writers, 69% had no women editors, 65% had no women directors, 62% had no women executive producers, and 32% had no women producers.

Findings for Documentaries Only

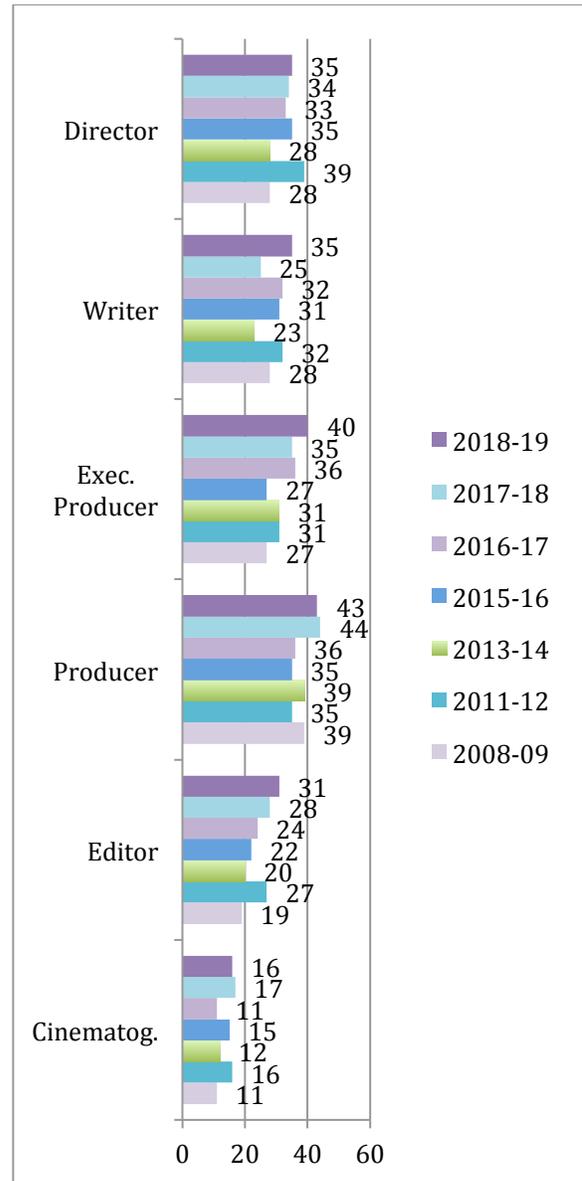
- Women comprised 35% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on documentaries in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 34% in 2017-18.

- Women fared best as producers (43%), followed by executive producers (40%), directors (35%), writers (35%), editors (31%), and cinematographers (16%) (see Figure 7).

- Women comprised 35% of directors working on documentaries in 2018-19, up 1 percentage point from 34% in 2017-18. This is down from the recent historic high of 39% achieved in 2011-12.

- Women accounted for 35% of writers working on documentaries in 2018-19, up 10 percentage points from 25% in 2017-18. This represents a recent historic high.

*Figure 7.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Documentaries by Role*



- Women comprised 40% of executive producers working on documentaries in 2018-19, up 5 percentage points from 35% in 2017-18. This represents a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 43% of producers working on documentaries in 2018-19, down 1 percentage point from 44% in 2017-18.

- Women comprised 31% of editors working on documentaries in 2018-19, up 3 percentage points from 28% in 2017-18. This represents a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 16% of cinematographers working on documentaries in 2018-19, down 1 percentage point from 17% in 2017-18.

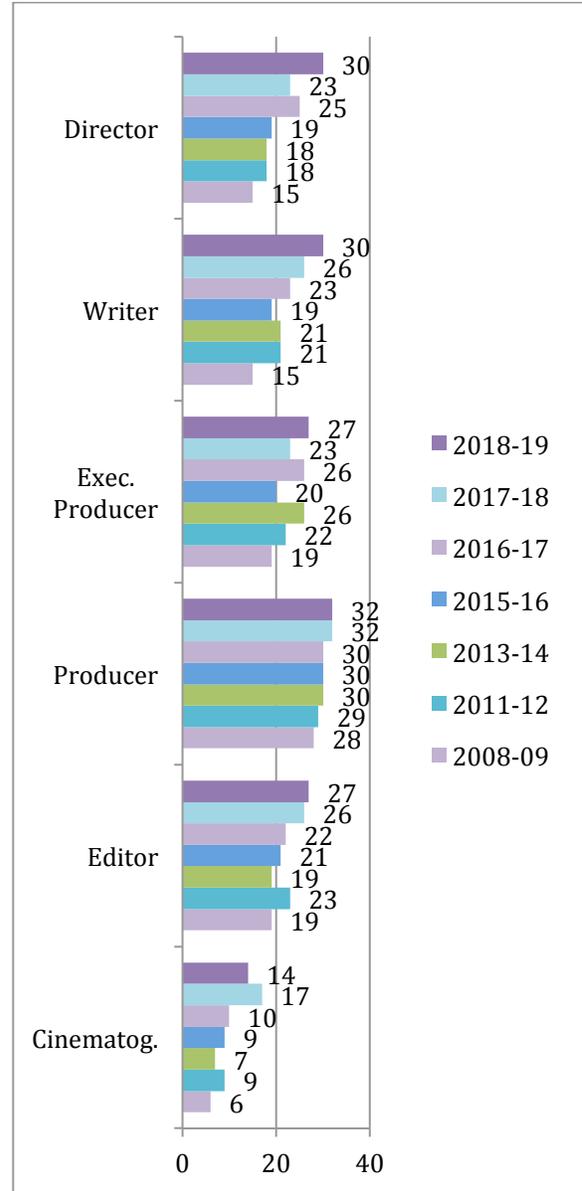
Findings for Narrative Features Only

- Overall, women comprised 29% of individuals working in the behind-the-scenes roles considered on narrative features in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 26% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

- Women fared best as producers (32%), followed by directors (30%), writers (30%), editors (27%), executive producers (27%), and cinematographers (14%) (see Figure 8).

- Women accounted for 30% of directors working on narrative features in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 7 percentage points from 23% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

*Figure 8.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Narrative Features by Role*



- Women comprised 30% of writers working on narrative features in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 26% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 27% of executive producers working on narrative features in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 23% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 32% of producers working on narrative features in 2018-19, even with the percentage achieved in 2017-18.

- Women accounted for 27% of editors working on narrative features in 2018-19, up 1 percentage point from 26% in 2017-18. This represents a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 14% of cinematographers working on narrative features in 2018-19, down 3 percentage points from 17% in 2017-18.

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 9).

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 72% of writers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 11% of writers.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 45% of editors. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 21% of editors.

- On films with at least one woman director, women comprised 27% of

cinematographers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 10% of cinematographers.

*Figure 9.
Comparison of Employment of Behind-the-Scenes Women on Films with At Least One Woman Director vs. Films with Exclusively Male Directors*

