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Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles  
Women Filmmakers Initiative

**Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers  
Phase I and II**

Research By:

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Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative

Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism

University of Southern California

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January 20, 2014

Dear Friends,

Two years ago Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles launched a Women Filmmakers Initiative to foster gender parity for women behind the camera. Our first step was to understand the hard numbers and the root causes behind the paucity of American women filmmakers so we could address the problem head-on.

With that in mind, we commissioned a landmark study, authored by Professor Stacy Smith and her team at USC/Annenberg School, analyzing the systemic obstacles and opportunities facing women in American independent film. The first phase of research, released at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, examines gender differences for U.S. films at the Sundance Film Festival from 2002-2012. The study also delves into qualitative interviews with a targeted group of directors, producers, and industry executives. In January 2013 alone, the study generated 460 press placements totaling 555,542,782 audience impressions.

Today we're delighted to present the second phase of research on how women are faring in independent film. This new study updates Sundance Film Festival data to include 2013 numbers and delves into Sundance Institute's Lab data, analyzing the rate at which female filmmakers enter Sundance's artist labs and the rate at which they subsequently complete and exhibit their work. The Phase II study also continues further deep-dive qualitative inquiry, exploring gender-based perceptions among thought leaders in the field.

In the following pages you'll find our Case Statement exploring why a Women Filmmakers Initiative matters, a list of Allied Organizations who are providing their expertise to this project, and information on our first two mentorship groups.

The Women Filmmakers Initiative continues to grow based on the priorities uncovered from our research. We'd like to thank Dove, Norlien Foundation, The Harnisch Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Gruber Family Foundation, J. Manus Foundation, and Bakhti Chai for their generous support.

We look forward to working with you to advance our mutual commitment to establish gender equality in the independent film business.



Keri Putnam  
Executive Director, Sundance Institute



Cathy Schulman  
President, Women In Film Los Angeles  
President, Mandalay Pictures

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### Case Statement

**Independent Women Filmmakers: *Setting the Agenda for Change***

**Sundance Institute**

**Women In Film Los Angeles**

**University of Southern California**

*To be a person is to have a story to tell.* —Isak Dinesen (a.k.a. Karen Blixen)

*Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, the power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts.* —Salman Rushdie

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In our digital age, ideas and culture are increasingly shaped by the stories told with moving images. This context elevates film artists to an enormously influential role in determining how we see ourselves, one another, and the world around us. Yet the vast majority of films made and seen in the United States are written, directed, and produced by male filmmakers whose stories tend to reflect dominant themes and reinforce the status quo. What might the future look like for both men and women, given the full inclusion of a generation or two of truly empowered female perspectives in our media ecology?

There is a growing body of empirical research that documents how having a woman at the helm of a film can affect the types of stories being told. First, female directors are more likely to feature girls and women on screen than male directors. This is true both in top-grossing films<sup>1</sup> and critically acclaimed projects nominated for Best Picture Academy Awards over a 30-year period.<sup>2</sup> It is often as true for women producers as it is for women directors. Not only do female producers and directors affect the prevalence of girls and women on screen, they also impact the very nature of a story, or the way in which a story is told. Examining more than 900 motion pictures, one study found that violence, guns/weapons, and blood/gore were less likely to be depicted when women were directing or producing, and thought-provoking topics were more likely to appear.<sup>3</sup>

These patterns are not restricted to cinema. A recent content analysis<sup>4</sup> of war stories filed for news outlets during the first 100 days of three different international conflicts (Bosnia, Persian Gulf, Afghanistan) showed that female correspondents were more likely than their male counterparts to focus their news stories on the victims of war, abuses to human rights, and soldier profiles. Women put a human face on conflict-reporting, just as they do in film. Together, the evidence is quite clear: the gender of the storyteller matters.

Currently, the presence of women behind the camera in popular films is infrequent at best. Assessing 250 of the top-grossing U.S. movies of 2011,<sup>5</sup> one study found that only 5% of directors, 14% of writers, and 25% of producers were female. These statistics have fluctuated very little since 1998, seeming to suggest that the traditional Hollywood economic model or power-structure is a leading impediment to access for women filmmakers.

## ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS

These organizations have agreed to apply their expertise and resources to further the goals of the Women Filmmakers Initiative.

Outside the studio system, one would imagine that the lower budgets and elastic employment structures in the independent film arena might make way for women filmmakers to thrive.<sup>6</sup> Sundance Institute and Women In Film's new Women Filmmakers Initiative focuses specifically on women behind the camera in independent film in an effort to broaden an understanding of the statistics, barriers, and opportunities in this sector of the field.

As the first step in this new initiative, Sundance Institute and Women In Film have collaborated with Dr. Stacy Smith and her team at USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism on research to better comprehend the current representation of women in the field, and identify systemic obstacles or patterns that hinder women at key stages in their independent film careers. The research examines gender differences in submissions and selections for U.S. films in the Sundance Film Festival and in Sundance Institute Feature Film and Documentary Film Programs over multiple years. The study then delves into qualitative interviews with a targeted group of independent female directors and producers, industry executives, and thought leaders in the field. These interviews explore individual, financial, and industrial frameworks that limit female creative professionals in distinct ways, as well as pathways and parameters employed by successful women subjects.

The research study and the mentorship are focused on U.S. filmmakers. While Sundance Institute and the Sundance Film Festival support and present international work, the comparative gender studies available in the U.S. as well as our familiarity with the domestic marketplace framed our choice to limit our scope to U.S. filmmakers. Due to its role of shepherding new independent filmmakers from development through distribution, and given its high volume of submissions across all its programs, Sundance Institute is uniquely able to shed light on this crucial issue.

The results of the study, presented at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, will inform the development of a multi-year program and action-plan to address the challenges and optimize opportunities. These efforts began in 2012 when Sundance Institute and Women In Film launched a new fellowship program for emerging and mid-level American female directors and producers, pairing them with high-level mentors for a year-long advisory and support relationship. A list of the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 Mentors and Mentees can be found on page six and seven.

Many organizations and individuals, including a growing community of women directors and producers, are already working to create change in this arena. Collaborative work with other organizations is of critical importance to the success of this initiative. Sundance Institute and Women In Film have convened key organizations and individuals active in the field to seek input on the initiative as it takes shape, and to work collectively to envision and build programmatic activity based on the research findings. A list of allied organizations can be found on page five.

The next step is to accelerate that change by discovering, spotlighting, and forging more effective ways for women to succeed as the storytellers who shape our cultural landscape. Joining with allied organizations and individuals in the field, the ultimate goal is to create a world of film that truly reflects our diverse range of voices and perspectives.

**American Film Institute**

**Alliance of Women Directors**

**Women In Film New York**

**Athena Film Festival/Women & Hollywood**

**Chapman University**

**Chicken & Egg Pictures**

**Creative Capital**

**Film Independent**

**Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media**

**Harnisch Foundation**

**IFP**

**Impact Partners Women's Fund**

**Loreen Arbus Foundation**

**New York City Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting**

**Paley Center for Media**

**Producers Guild of America**

**Tangerine**

**UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television**

**USC School of Cinematic Arts**

**Women Make Movies**

**Women Moving Millions**

**Women's Media Center**

Note: List as of 1/8/14 and may be expanded

**2012-2013**  
**SUNDANCE INSTITUTE/WIF LA**  
 Women Filmmakers Mentorship Program

**2013-2014**  
**SUNDANCE INSTITUTE/WIF LA**  
 Women Filmmakers Mentorship Program

**Mentees**

Adele Romanski—*Producer/Director*  
 Alicia Van Couvering—*Producer*  
 Angela Tucker—*Producer/Director/Writer*  
 Ann S. Kim—*Producer/Director*  
 Aurora Guerrero—*Director/Writer*  
 Ava DuVernay—*Writer/Director*  
 Christine O'Malley—*Producer/Writer*  
 Danielle Renfrew Behrens—*Producer*  
 Diane Bell—*Director/Writer*  
 Jennifer Cochis—*Producer*  
 Katie Galloway—*Director/Writer/Producer*  
 Louise Runge & Samantha Housman—*Producers*  
 Mai Iskander—*Director/Producer/Cinematographer*  
 Ry Russo-Young—*Director/Writer*  
 Sara Colangelo—*Director/Writer*  
 Sophia Lin—*Producer*  
 Yoruba Richen—*Director*

**Mentors**

Gale Anne Hurd Valhalla Motion Pictures  
 Paula Wagner Chestnut Ridge Productions  
 Andrew Jarecki Producer/Director  
 Amy Israel Showtime Networks  
 Erin O'Malley Producer  
 James Schamus Focus Features  
 RJ Cutler Producer/Writer/Director  
 Liesl Copland William Morris Endeavor  
 Hannah Minghella Columbia Pictures  
 Debbie Liebling Red Hour Films  
 Pat Mitchell Paley Center  
 Cathy Schulman Mandalay Pictures  
 Jessica Yu Director Writer/Producer  
 Catherine Hardwicke Director/Producer  
 Rodrigo Garcia Director/Writer/Producer  
 Rowena Arguelles Creative Artists Agency  
 Morgan Spurlock Warpaint Company

**Mentees**

Brenda Coughlin—*Producer*  
 Jordana Mollick—*Producer*  
 Kim Sherman—*Producer*  
 Mari Heller—*Director*  
 Marta Cunningham—*Director*  
 Shola Lynch—*Director*

**Mentors**

Ava DuVernay—*Writer/Director/Distributor*  
 Suzanne Todd—*Producer*  
 Rowena Arguelles—*Agent, Creative Artists Agency*  
 Jill Soloway—*Writer/Director*  
 Nicole Holofcener—*Writer/Director*  
 Lydia Dean Pilcher—*Producer*

**Executive Summary**

**Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles**

**Women Filmmakers Initiative**

*Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers*

*Phase II-January 2014*

Stacy L. Smith, Ph.D.; Katherine Pieper, Ph.D. ;  
and Marc Choueiti

**Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative**

**Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism**

**University of Southern California**

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The aim of this study is to update and more deeply explore topics covered in our 2013 report, *Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers: Phase I*. That seminal investigation assessed the gender distribution of 11,197 content creators at Sundance Film Festival between 2002 and 2012. A qualitative component also grounded the research, unpacking the impediments and opportunities of female directors and producers via 51 in-depth interviews with emerging and seasoned female content creators and key industry thought leaders.

In this report, we have updated our inaugural study in three specific ways. First, a quantitative analysis was conducted on the gender of 1,163 content creators (directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, and editors) across 82 U.S. films selected and screened at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival (SFF). This allows for a snapshot of gender behind the camera at the 2013 Festival and illustrates if any change exists over the last 12 years.

Second, the gender distribution of filmmakers participating in Sundance Institute Feature Film Program (FFP) and Documentary Film Program (DFP) labs between 2002 and 2013 was documented. This was done to determine how many emerging female writers, directors, and producers receive critical artistic support as part of their filmmaking background, and how this may affect their careers, and the pipeline overall. Third, a deeper dive into the original qualitative interviews was undertaken to further explore obstructions facing female directors and producers in the narrative space. The goal was to understand how perceptions and practices within the broader film community may limit narrative female directors' careers. Below, our key quantitative and qualitative findings are illuminated.

**KEY FINDINGS**

**2013 Sundance Film Festival Snapshot of American Films**

Of the 1,163 content creators working behind the camera on 82 U.S. films at SFF in 2013, 28.9% were women and 71.1% were men. The presence of women differed by storytelling genre: 23.8% of content creators were women in narrative films whereas 40.4% were women in documentary films.

2013 was an extraordinary year for women in documentary filmmaking at SFF. 42.2% of documentary directors and 49.2% of documentary producers were women at the 2013 Festival. Focusing on directors specifically by program category, 46.4% of U.S. documentary competition directors were female as were 30.8% of documentary premiere helmers.

Female narrative directors saw gains and losses in 2013, but little overall change. For the first time, gender parity was achieved in U.S. dramatic competition movies in 2013 with 50% of all helmers being female. In contrast, only one of the 18 directors in the premieres section was a woman.

Sundance narrative directors in 2013 continue to outperform directors in the top 100 box office: Turning to the 100 top-grossing films of 2013, only 2 (1.9%) of the 108 helmers were female. This represents a 48.1% drop from the percentage of female directors in Sundance competition films to the percentage of female directors in top-grossing films.

Examining female participation at SFF as directors and producers from 2002 to 2013 revealed no meaningful change over time. Instead, the percentages of female participation often fluctuate but no continuous and sustained increases or decreases were observed across the 12 years. For dramatic features, females accounted for 24.4% of all competition helmers and 13.9% of all non competition helmers. In documentaries, the percentage of female competition directors is 41.7% and 25% of noncompetition helmers.

### **ARTIST SUPPORT THROUGH SUNDANCE INSTITUTE LABS**

Female storytellers compete and flourish at Sundance Institute labs. Of the 432 lab fellows between 2002 and 2013, a full 42.6% were female. Women comprised 39.3% of the fellows in the Feature Film Program (FFP) and 54.5% of the fellows in the Documentary Film Program (DFP).

FFP and DFP lab projects helmed by females finish strong with artist support. A total of 116 FFP projects were brought to the labs; 77 had male directors attached (66.4%) and 39 had at least one female director attached (33.6%). The percentage of lab projects completed did not vary by gender; roughly 41% of male-helmed and female-helmed projects were finished. Out of these completed films, 33.3% featured female directors. 81.3% of all finished films went on to play at the top 10 festivals worldwide. Again, no gender differences emerged in exhibition rate. A full third of these prestigious spots were awarded to female-helmed projects. Thus, female-directed stories consistently take up a third of the space whether in the labs, among completed projects, or at elite exhibition venues. Women are completing and exhibiting their work at just shy of their participation rates at the Labs.

Out of 48 DFP lab projects, 14 (29.2%) were helmed by males and 34 (70.8%) were helmed by at least one female. This translates into a gender ratio of 2.4 to 1, favoring female-directed non-fiction storytelling. Of 48 lab-supported projects, 85.4% have been completed ( $n=41$ ) and this finishing rate did not vary by gender. Among completed projects, 12 (29.3%) had a male director and 29 (70.7%) had a female director attached. Over half of these films (56.1%) went on to screen at one or more of the top 10 festivals worldwide. Female-helmed movies comprised 69.6% of these exhibited documentaries. In the DFP, female-directed projects take up over two-thirds of the space across labs, completed films, and leading exhibition arenas.

### **BARRIERS FACING FEMALE FILMMAKERS**

Our initial report revealed career obstacles that face female filmmakers, including gendered financial barriers, male-dominated industry networks, and stereotyping on set. We analyzed a subset of the original 51 interviews with industry thought leaders and seasoned content creators. When industry leaders think director, they think male. Traits were gathered from 34 narrative and documentary decision-makers and filmmakers. We explored whether attributes of successful directors reflect stereotypical characteristics of men or women. Nearly one-third of traits (32.1%) were coded as masculine and 19.3% feminine. For documentaries, the percentage of male-linked (23.1%) and female-linked characteristics (20.5%) was nearly equal. In narratives, masculine attributes (e.g., aggressive, a general rallying troops for combat) outnumbered feminine traits (e.g., collaborative, supportive) by a factor of over 2 to 1. The disparity between documentary and narrative traits reflects the gender balance seen among documentary directors and the gender imbalance in fictional content. Moreover, the lack of fit between perceptions of women and narrative directors reflects skewed cultural norms about leadership. Conceiving of the directing role in masculine terms may limit the extent to which different women are considered for the job.

Putting female directors on studio lists is limited by stereotypes. A group of 12 individuals working in the narrative realm were asked specifically about hiring directors into top commercial jobs. Two-thirds (66.7%) indicated that there is a smaller pool of qualified female directors. Half mentioned that stereotypically male films (i.e., action, horror) may not appeal as job opportunities to female directors. These findings illustrate how a reliance on stereotypes creates decision-making biases that weaken women's opportunities.

Despite the gains made by female storytellers in 2013 and the importance of lab support, these findings reveal where problems still exist. Until cultural stereotypes and perceptions of the directing role grow more flexible, moving from independent film to commercial arenas will remain a difficult prospect for female filmmakers.

### **Research Study**

**Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles**

**Women Filmmakers Initiative**

***Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers:  
Phase II-January 2014***

**Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Dr. Katherine Pieper, and Marc Choueiti**

**Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative**

**Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism**

**University of Southern California**

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The aim of this study is to update and more deeply explore topics covered in our 2013 report, *Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers: Phase I*. That seminal investigation assessed the gender distribution of 11,197 content creators at the Sundance Film Festival between 2002 and 2012.<sup>1</sup> A qualitative component also grounded the research, unpacking the impediments and opportunities of female directors and producers via 51 in-depth interviews with emerging and seasoned female content creators and key industry thought leaders.

In this report, we have updated our inaugural study in three specific ways. First, a quantitative analysis was conducted on the gender of 1,163 content creators (directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, and editors) across 82 U.S. films selected and screened at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival (SFF).<sup>2</sup> This allows for a snapshot of gender behind the camera at the 2013 Festival and illustrates whether any change has occurred over the last 12 years. An over-time analysis also updates last year's findings.

Second, the gender distribution of filmmakers participating in Sundance Institute labs between 2002 and 2013 was documented. This was done to determine how many emerging female writers, directors, editors, and producers received critical artistic support as part of their filmmaking experience and how this may have affected their careers—and the pipeline overall. Third, a deeper dive into the original qualitative interviews was undertaken to further explore obstructions facing female directors and producers in the narrative realm. The goal was to understand how perceptions and practices within the broader film community may limit narrative female directors' careers. Below, our key quantitative and qualitative findings are illuminated.



**QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS:  
2013 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL**

Of the 1,163 content creators at SFF in 2013, 28.9% were women and 71.1% were men.<sup>3</sup> This represents a gender ratio of 2.46 males to every one female behind the camera. Gender participation varied by genre (narrative, documentary), creative position (directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, editors), and program category (Competition, Premiere, and Niche—Midnight, NEXT, New Frontier, Spotlight, etc.). Please see the overview below.

**STORYTELLING GENRE**

Of the 82 U.S. Festival films in 2013, 63.4% were narratives and 36.6% were documentaries. Storytelling genre related significantly to the gender of the filmmakers,<sup>4</sup> a finding consistent with our previous research.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, 23.8% of content creators were female across narrative films whereas 40.4% were female across documentaries. Assessing specific positions behind the camera, reveals that the percentage of female directors, producers, and cinematographers varied by storytelling genre (see Table 1).<sup>6</sup> Females were far more likely to direct (42.2% vs. 19%), produce (49.2% vs. 24.9%), and shoot (28.6% vs. 11.5%) documentary films than narrative ones. There was no meaningful difference in the percentage of female writers or editors across the two storytelling genres in 2013.

**Table 1  
Females in Key Creative Positions by Genre**

CREATIVE POSITION	NARRATIVE	DOCUMENTARY	TOTAL
Director	19%	42.2%	28.7%
Writer	26.5%	25.9%	26.4%
Producer	24.9%	49.2%	31%
Cinematographer	11.5%	28.6%	19.7%
Editor	27.4%	28.6%	27.9%

Note: The relationship between gender and storytelling genre was significant within three creative positions: directors, producers, and cinematographers. Per cell, subtracting the percentage of females from 100 yields the percentage of males.

Given that more than 700 producers were attached to Festival films in 2013, we subdivided the credits into four mutually exclusive categories: 1.) executive/co-executive producer; 2.) producer/co-producer; 3.) associate producer; and 4.) other producer.<sup>7</sup> We were also interested in whether these job titles varied by gender.<sup>8</sup> Table 2 depicts two patterns we discovered. First, the percentage of female producers *decreased* in narrative films as prestige *increased* across three of the four job titles. Less than one-fifth of all executive or “other” producers in narratives were female. Second, the producing pattern in documentaries differed from the producing pattern in narratives. Fully half (51.7%) of executive producers of documentaries were female, 39.3% of producers were female, and 66.7% of associate producers were female.

**Table 2  
Female Producer by Type and Genre**

GENRE TYPE	EXECUTIVE	PRODUCER	ASSOCIATE	OTHER
Narrative	17.7%	29.7%	36.7%	17.4%
Documentary	51.7%	39.3%	66.7%	75%

Note: Per cell, subtracting the percentage of females from 100 yields the percentage of males.

On the whole, documentaries were more egalitarian than narratives in 2013. One major reason for this may be found in the results of the producing analysis. There was a 34% difference between the percentage of female executive producers in narrative and documentary films. Extrapolating from these figures, the documentary space may contain more female financiers and/or male financiers willing to fund or support female-directed stories than the narrative area. It should also be noted that the percentage of females in documentary filmmaking in 2013 outperforms the percentage of females in narrative filmmaking across every producing type and creative position save one: writing. This latter finding may relate to the fact that not all documentaries attribute writing credits.

**FESTIVAL PROGRAM CATEGORY**

To assess where females’ films were programmed at the 2013 Festival, we subdivided the 82 U.S. movies into three categories: Competition films, Premiere films, and Niche films. The analyses for narrative and documentary films were run separately, given the differences noted above. Due to the small sample sizes within program categories, statistical analyses were not conducted. Rather, the trends outlined below emerged.

Within narrative films, the highest percentage of females across all creative positions was found in the competition area (see Table 3). Female directors, writers, and editors were far more likely to be connected with Competition films than Premiere or Niche films (the Spotlight, Midnight, New Frontier, and NEXT categories). Although it was a banner year for females in Competition films, it must be noted that only one woman directed a film in the Premiere category at the 2013 Festival, which contained 15 films.

**Table 3  
Female Narrative Content Creators by Festival Program Category**

NARRATIVE	COMPETITION FILMS	PREMIERE FILMS	NICHE FILMS
Director	50%	5.6%	10.3%
Writer	47.6%	18.5%	20%
Producer	28.2%	20.5%	25.5%
Cinematographer	18.8%	6.7%	10%
Editor	42.1%	15.8%	25%

Note: The relationship between Festival program category and content-creator gender was significant for directors and writers only. Per cell, subtracting the percentage of females from 100 yields the percentage of males.

Table 4 assesses producing credits by Festival program category. As stated in our initial report, as the power of producing level increased in dramatic competition films, the percentage of participating females decreased. Aside from “other” credits, a similar pattern emerged across Premiere and Niche films.

**Table 4**  
Type of Female Narrative Producer and Festival Program Category

FESTIVAL GROUPING	EXECUTIVE	PRODUCER	ASSOCIATE	OTHER
Competition	15.4%	38.6%	46.7%	0%
Premiere	18.8%	20.8%	25%	25%
Niche	19.2%	28.6%	34.6%	16.7%

Note: Per cell, subtracting the percentage of females from 100 yields the percentage of males. When cells equal 0, there are no female producers in this category.

Focusing on documentary films, we examined whether gender within creative positions was related to program category (see Table 5). Gender parity existed for directors in both Competition (46.4% female) and Niche (50% female) documentary films. Within Niche films, gender equality was apparent among editors (50% female), and cinematographers tipped the scales to the female side (66.7%). However, the number of films in the Niche grouping is low, and thus, the results should be interpreted cautiously. Competition and Premiere films had a substantially higher percentage of female producers than did Niche films.

**Table 5**  
Female Documentary Content Creators by Festival Program Category

NARRATIVE	COMPETITION FILMS	PREMIERE FILMS	NICHE FILMS
Director	46.4%	30.8%	50%
Writer	26.7%	28.6%	20%
Producer	55.1%	46.7%	26.7%
Cinematographer	30.8%	22.2%	66.7%
Editor	24.1%	33.3%	50%

Note: Per cell, subtracting the percentage of females from 100 yields the percentage of males.

Table 6 shows the percentage of female producers by type of credit. In comparison to executive or “other” types of producers in Premieres, females were more likely to be associates and less likely to be producers or co-producers. Turning to Competition films, roughly half of all executive producers and producers were female. Even still, the highest percentages of women were in associate producing or “other” categories.

**Table 6**  
Type of Female Documentary Producer and Festival Program Category

FESTIVAL GROUPING	EXECUTIVE	PRODUCER	ASSOCIATE	OTHER
Competition	50%	48.9%	73.3%	100%
Premiere	58.1%	25%	85.7%	60%
Niche	0%	42.9%	20%	N/A

Note: Per cell, subtracting the percentage of females from 100 yields the percentage of males. “N/a” indicates that no individuals, male or female, were “other” producers at the Festival in the Niche grouping.

Summing up, a few notable trends become evident when we look at specific Festival programs. Twenty-thirteen was an exceptional year for females in Dramatic Competition with gender at parity or near parity among directors, writers, and editors. For female narrative producers, however, the year was not as worthy of celebration. Less than one-fifth of all executive producers were female, and associate producer was the most commonly held credit across two of the three program categories.

In documentaries, female directors filled roughly half the jobs behind the camera in Competition and Niche films. A full two-thirds of all cinematographers in Niche films were female, a creative position traditionally occupied by men.<sup>9</sup> Given many of these atypical results, it becomes important to examine how the gender distribution in 2013 compares to the gender distribution found in previous years.

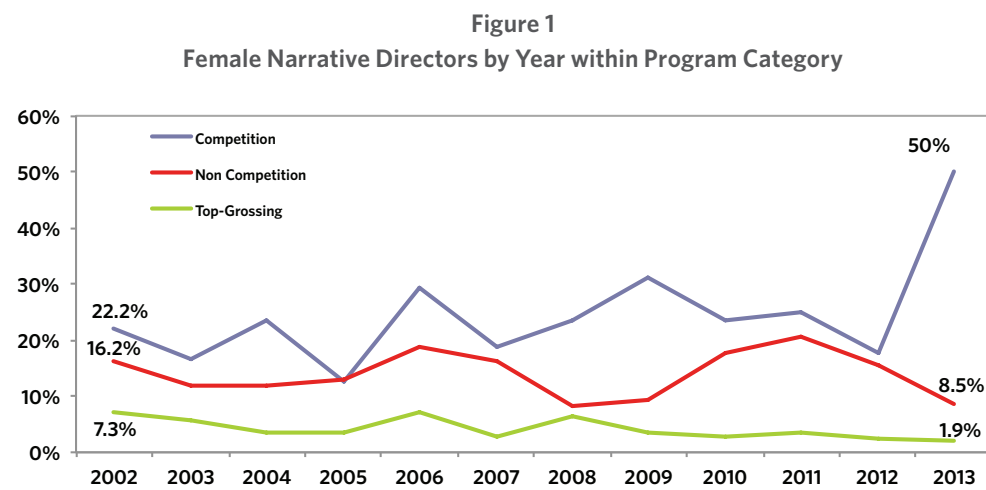
**CHANGE OVER TIME:  
FEMALE DIRECTORS AND PRODUCERS AT SFF FROM 2002-2013**

This section of the report examines whether the percentage of female content creators at the SFF has changed over time. Because Sundance Institute and WIF-LA’s Women Filmmakers Initiative focuses on directors and producers, only the percentages of females within these two creative positions were explored. We assessed change in two steps, using the exact same procedure as our 2013 report.

The first step was to compare yearly percentages of female directors and producers to the 12-year Festival norm within storytelling genre (narrative, documentary) and program category (Competition, noncompetition). Here, the Festival norm refers to the percentage of females within a particular category across all 12 years. For example, the 12-year norm or overall percentage of female directors in Competition films is 24.4%. Only departures of +7.5% from that Festival norm were documented. This percentage point was based on the fact that simply adding one director in the Competition category could cause a shift of 6.25%. Second, we stipulated that three contiguous years had to evidence an increasing or decreasing trend relative to the Festival norm. Only then would we indicate that there was meaningful change. Findings for narrative and documentary filmmakers are presented separately, focusing on directors and then producers.

**NARRATIVE**

Within Dramatic Competition films, the 12-year Festival norm for female directors was 24.4%. As shown in Figure 1, three years deviated meaningfully from this norm with two years charting below the norm (2003=16.7%; 2005=12.5%) and one year charting above (2013=50%). The high percentage of female directors in 2013 is an outlier in comparison to the percentage of female directors across all other years. Focusing on noncompetition films, the percentage of female directors across 12 years at SFF was 13.9%. No years meaningfully deviated (+7.5%) above or below the Festival norm.



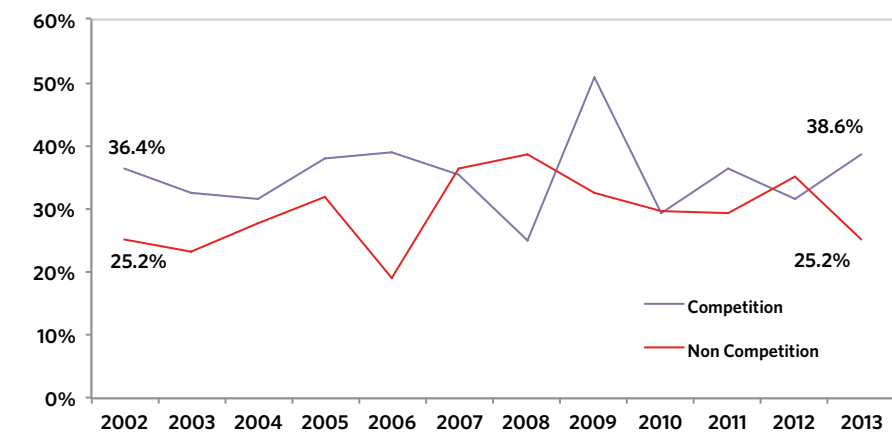
The conclusion that there has been no meaningful change over time in either the Competition or Noncompetition sections of the Festival is further illustrated by the overall percentage of female directors at SFF. Between 2002 and 2012, 16.9% of directors across both Competition and noncompetition films were women. In 2013, the percentage of female narrative directors was 19% (see Table 1). This computes to a new 12-year overall percentage of female directors that equals 17.1%.

To update our previous findings, we again incorporated the percentage of female directors in the 100 top-grossing films in the U.S. from 2002 to 2013.<sup>10</sup> Out of 1,328 top-grossing directors, 95.8% were male (n=1,272) and 4.2% were female (n=56). Put differently, the ratio is more than 22 male directors working behind the camera to every one female director. In 2013, there was a 48.1% drop from the percentage of female directors in Sundance Competition films to the percentage of female directors in top-grossing films. A few potential explanations for this drastic decline are explored in the qualitative section of this report.

Turning to producing credits (see Figure 2), we assessed the percentage of female producers (including co-producers) over time. In Competition films, the 12-year Festival norm for female producers was 35.1%. Two years meaningfully differed from the norm—one above

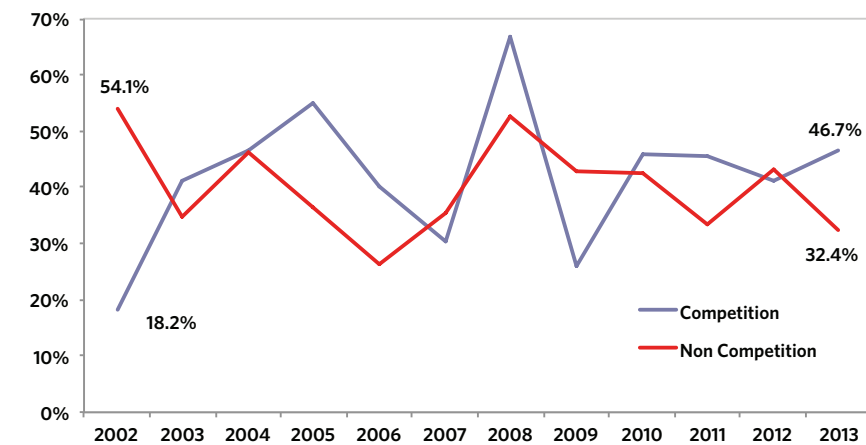
(2009=50.8% female) and one below (2008=25% female). In noncompetition films, 29.8% of producers were female, and two years diverged from the Festival norm (2006=19%; 2008=38.7%). Clearly, the criteria for change among female producers in Competition or noncompetition films were not met.

**Figure 2**  
Female Narrative Producers by Year within Program Category



The 12-year Festival norm for female associate producers in narrative Competition films was 40.7%. Three years were below this norm (2002, 2007, and 2009) and two years were above (2005 and 2008). Noncompetition films featured females in 40.1% of all associate-producing posts. Two years were higher than the Festival norm (2002 and 2008) and two years were lower (2006 and 2013). Despite the deviation, the criteria for meaningful change across three contiguous years within program category (Competition, noncompetition) were not met.

**Figure 3**  
Female Narrative Associate Producers by Year within Program Category



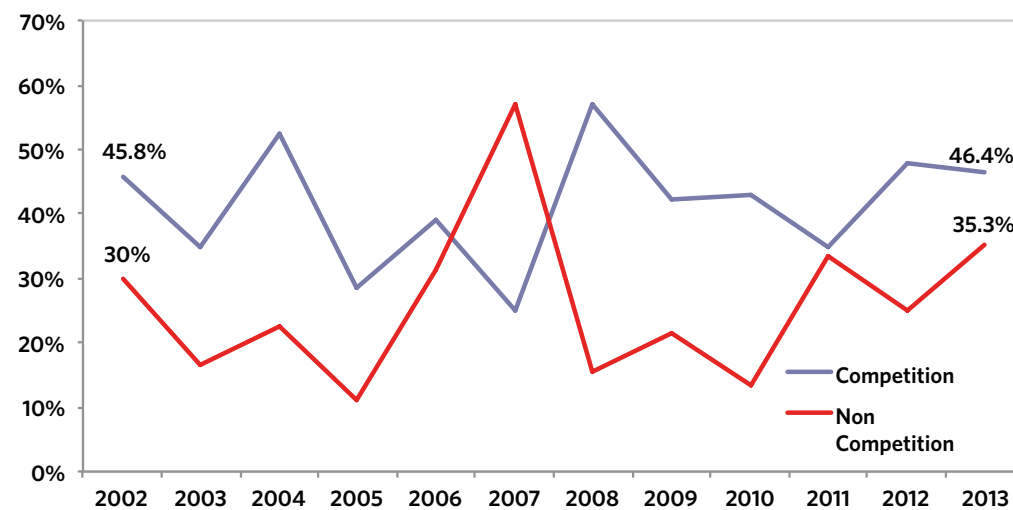
Taken together, the findings indicate two major trends in the percentage of female directors and producers in narrative films at SFF between 2002 and 2013. First, the patterns over time reveal increases and decreases across 12 years. This ongoing variability may represent the effect of programmers acting as curators rather than executives focusing on corporate gains. We see this evidenced in the unchanging numbers of female participation behind the camera in our top-grossing film findings and other research investigations.<sup>11</sup> In concert, these results suggest that, when the influence of market forces enters the storytelling equation, females are more likely to be factored out. Second, there has been no meaningful change over time. This is true of the percentage of both female directors and female producers (producers/co-producers, associate producers).

**DOCUMENTARY**

Figure 4 displays the percentage of female directors in documentary films. In Competition films, the 12-year Festival norm was 41.7% female with two years above (2004 and 2008) and two years below (2005 and 2007). Interestingly, in a full 7 of the 12 years at SFF, females comprised 40% or more of the directors within Competition documentaries. In noncompetition documentary films, females made up 25% of directors between 2002 and 2013. Three years were above this norm (2007, 2011, and 2013) and four years below (2003, 2005, 2008, and 2010). None of these variations were contiguous, and thus, no substantive change occurred over time.

It is interesting to note, however, one other meaningful finding. The sheer number of female directors in 2013 Competition and noncompetition documentary films is the highest across the 12-year sample (13 in Competition, 6 in noncompetition). This is not reflected in the percentages in Figure 4 because the percentages reflect the total number of males and females. Thus, 2013 was an atypical year for female directors in both narrative and documentary Competition films.

**Figure 4**  
Female Documentary Directors by Year within Program Category



In terms of producers (see Figure 5), a full 47.5% were female in Competition films across the 12-year time frame. One year was meaningfully above the norm (2002), and three years were below (2003, 2005, and 2011). In noncompetition fare, 34% of producers were female between 2002 and 2013. Three years deviated above the norm (2003, 2007, and 2011) and three years below (2004, 2005, and 2008). Thus, it appears that across Competition and noncompetition documentary films, the percentage of female producers has not meaningfully changed.

**Figure 5**  
Female Documentary Producers by Year within Program Category



Looking at associate producers, the percentage of females in Competition films was 63.8% across 12 years at SFF (see Figure 6). Three years were above (2003, 2008, and 2013) and three years were below (2006, 2009, and 2010) the Festival norm. In terms of noncompetition films, the percentage of associate producers who were female was 53.7%. Substantial variability existed across the 12-year sample, with five years above (2002, 2006, 2008, 2009, and 2012) the Festival norm and four years below (2004, 2005, 2007, and 2010). None of the deviations in Competition or noncompetition films were contiguous, and thus no meaningful change in the percentage of female associate producers has occurred over time.

**Figure 6**  
Female Documentary Associate Producers by Year within Program Category



To sum up, the aim of this last section was to examine female participation as directors and producers across 12 years of SFF Documentary Competition and noncompetition films. No meaningful changes were noted over time. In 7 out of 12 years, females comprised 40% or more of the directors in the Documentary Competition. Since 2002, the highest number of documentary directors appeared in 2013 Competition and noncompetition films.

Despite the lack of sustained change over time, 2013 was an exceptional year for quite a few female directors in both narrative and documentary storytelling. This critical mass emerges at a time when the presence of women in film has become a cultural concern. Other Festival programs (e.g., NEXT, a section where more than half of all films were directed by females at the 2013 SFF) may be important to examine because they showcase new talent and may also be places where female participation is growing. Yet we know little about the antecedents of these female filmmakers and how early career- or project-based support may propel women into the pipeline. Examining this factor is the focus of the next section of the report.

**ARTISTIC SUPPORT:  
SUNDANCE INSTITUTE LAB FELLOWS BY GENDER FROM 2002-2013**

As we have just seen, the SFF represents one outlet through which women are able to achieve visibility and/or support. Apart from this, the broader context in which female filmmakers develop their work and artistic craft is of interest. In this section, we explore female participation in Sundance Institute filmmaker labs to gauge female intention and qualification to direct and produce. Consistent with our approach to the Festival analysis, we only focus on filmmakers working within the U.S. system.<sup>12</sup>

Two pillars of artist support at Sundance Institute are the Feature Film Program (FFP) and the Documentary Film Program (DFP). The FFP supports directors, writers, and producers of narrative stories while the DFP supports directors, editors, and producers of nonfiction films. Because acceptance into Sundance Institute’s programs is merit based and highly competitive, these findings are a good indication of the number of female filmmakers creating quality projects in the independent pipeline.

Overall, a total of 432 individuals were lab fellows across the 12-year time frame between 2002 and 2013.<sup>13</sup> Less than half (42.6%) of all fellows were female ( $n=184$ ), and 57.4% were male ( $n=248$ ). We also examined male and female participation in specific labs within the FFP and DFP.<sup>14</sup> The high percentage of women across both lab programs raises an interesting question of whether labs bolster the pipeline for female filmmakers toward production or exhibition, which is addressed in the next section of the report.

**Table 7**  
Feature Film Program Lab Fellows by Gender and Lab

LAB	MALES	FEMALES
Screenwriters Labs (January)	64.5% ( $n=80$ )	35.5% ( $n=44$ )
Directors & Screenwriters Labs (June)	61.4% ( $n=78$ )	38.6% ( $n=49$ )
Creative Producing Labs	41.4% ( $n=12$ )	58.6% ( $n=17$ )
Total	60.7% ( $n=170$ )	39.3% ( $n=110$ )

Beginning with the FFP, a total of 39.3% of lab fellows were female from 2002 to 2013. In the Screenwriters and Directors Labs, females comprised 35.5% (January) to 38.6% (June) of fellows. The highest percentage of female filmmakers (58.6%) was found in the Creative Producing Labs.

## RESEARCH STUDY, PHASE II

**Table 8**  
Female Participation in Feature Film Program Labs: 2002-2013

LAB	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Screenwriters (Jan.)	20%	40%	29%	27%	37%	33%	30%	22%	40%	36%	64%	45%
Directors/Writers (June)	33%	50%	33%	33%	50%	45%	40%	25%	60%	44%	23%	33%
Creative Producing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	33%	80%	67%	67%	50%

Note: The percentages per cell have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Per cell, subtracting the percentage of females from 100 yields the percentage of males. "N/a" indicates that the lab did not exist.

Although these participation rates are high, have they changed over time? To answer this question, we charted female attendance at the labs across 12 years. Two trends are readily apparent in Table 8. First, the percentage of aspiring female screenwriters and directors is substantial across the 12-year time frame. In fact, gender parity (or approaching) was reached in a quarter (6 out of 24) of all January and June writing and/or directing labs. Second, and not surprisingly, females dominated the creative producing area.

From our data regarding the SFF, it is already clear that the documentary genre is more welcoming to females than the narrative one. Correspondingly, female participation is higher in the DFP than the FFP (see Table 9). Examining the total DFP fellows, more than half (54.5%) were females across the two labs evaluated. Females comprised 53.2% of the fellows in the Documentary Edit and Story Labs and 59.3% in the Creative Producing Labs.

**Table 9**  
Documentary Film Program Lab Fellows by Gender and Lab

LAB	MALES	FEMALES
Documentary Edit and Story Labs	46.8% (n=44)	53.2% (n=50)
Creative Producing Labs	40.7% (n=11)	59.3% (n=16)
Total	45.5% (n=55)	54.5% (n=66)

We also examined trends in the DFP labs over time (see Table 10). In the Documentary Edit and Story Labs, females comprised half or more of the lab fellows across 6 of the 10 years evaluated. Female producers overshadowed male producers in the Creative Producing Labs in all but two years. Together, these findings reassert that the documentary sphere is an open field where female storytellers are flourishing.

**Table 10**  
Female Participation in Documentary Film Program Labs: 2002-2013

LAB	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Doc. Edit. and Story	0%	100%	50%	43%	83%	80%	40%	64%	32%	58%
Creative Producing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	67%	50%	80%	43%	67%

Note: The percentages per cell have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Per cell, subtracting the percentage of females from 100 yields the percentage of males. "N/a" indicates that the lab did not exist.

We also analyzed the New Frontier Lab, which began in 2011. This lab is for filmmakers forging "interactive, immersive, or experimental projects," often containing elements of both narrative and documentary storytelling.<sup>15</sup> Of the 31 individuals participating as fellows, 25.8% were female. This percentage has varied little over the last three years (see Table 11).

**Table 11**  
New Frontier Lab Fellows by Gender and Year

GENDER	2011	2012	2013
Males	66.7% (n=6)	80% (n=8)	75% (n=9)
Females	33.3% (n=3)	20% (n=2)	25% (n=3)

Collectively, the lab findings reveal that female interest and competitiveness in narrative and documentary filmmaking are high. Given that so many women are seeking project-based support, the next section examines what happens to female-driven projects after they leave Sundance Institute labs.

### FROM LAB TO SCREEN: FILM COMPLETION AND EXHIBITION AFTER PARTICIPATING IN SUNDANCE INSTITUTE LABS

Our analysis continues by looking at the completion and exhibition rates of all Sundance Institute lab projects.<sup>16</sup> Only DFP and FFP lab-supported projects between 2002 and 2012 and helmed by filmmakers working within the American system were considered.<sup>17</sup> We excluded all but a handful of 2013 lab projects because the typical gestation time of a film is often longer than a single year. However, a few projects either returned to the labs in 2013 or were slated for a 2014 Sundance premiere. These were included in our assessment.

Projects were divided into two categories: those with at least one female director supported in the labs versus those with only male directors. We then asked a few questions about each lab project. Did the filmmaker complete his/her movie? If yes, was the movie screened at any of the top 10 festivals worldwide (i.e., Cannes, Sundance, Toronto, SXSW, IDFA, Venice, Berlin, IFFR, New York, Telluride)? The list of top 10 festivals was derived from Indiewire.<sup>18</sup>

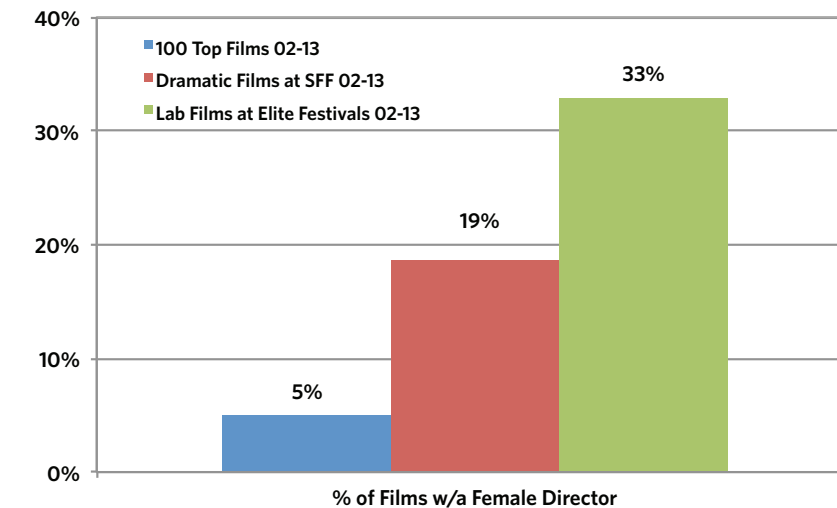
A total of 116 projects were supported as part of the FFP. Seventy-seven of these projects were male directed (66.4%), and 39 were directed by females (33.6%), a ratio of almost two to one. Of the 116 projects, 48 were completed. Of the completed projects, 32 (66.7%) had a male director attached, and 16 (33.3%) had a female director. The gender ratio of projects brought to the labs matches the gender ratio of completed films. *Although there is a gender imbalance, the percentage of women does not shrink from lab to screen.* What are the implications of these findings? Adding more women-driven projects to the labs should result in more female-directed films.

Another way of examining the success of lab-supported projects is to assess completion within each gender. Comparing finished films by female directors ( $n=16$ ) to all female-driven projects ( $n=39$ ) yields a completion rate of 41%. A parallel analysis of completed male-directed films ( $n=32$ ) to all male-driven projects ( $n=77$ ) provides nearly the same rate of completion: 41.5%. Why is this comparison important? It demonstrates that projects by female directors are just as likely to be completed as ones by males after receiving lab support. This further suggests that, when provided with artistic support, emerging female directors move to completion at the same rate as emerging male directors. So the continuum from artistic support to film completion is not a locus for pipeline cracks or leaks.

Beyond looking at the completion rate, we assessed the festivals where finished films ( $n=48$ ) were screened. One or more of the top 10 festivals worldwide selected and screened 81.3% ( $n=39$ ) of them. Of these 39 movies, a full 33.3% ( $n=13$ ) featured at least one female director. The percentage of female-directed films going on to festivals is just shy of the percentage of females participating in the Screenwriters and Directors Labs (January=35.5% female, June=38.6% female; see Table 7). Very simply, labs launch female filmmakers into lauded exhibition spaces.

To further contextualize the percentage of lab-supported female-directed films screened at elite festivals (see Figure 7), we compared this statistic (33%) to two other data points. First, 33% is *substantially higher* than the percentage of narrative films directed by a female at the SFF between 2002 and 2013 (18.6%). Second, 33% also dramatically exceeds the percentage of female-directed films across 100 top-grossing movies between 2002 and 2013 (4.7%). Together, these statistics pose two crucial questions that must be addressed by future research: what happens to emerging female filmmakers after exhibiting a first feature? And how do the career trajectories of female directors differ from those of their male counterparts especially if they are equally successful after the labs?

Figure 7  
Percentage of Narrative Films with Female Directors across Exhibition Platforms



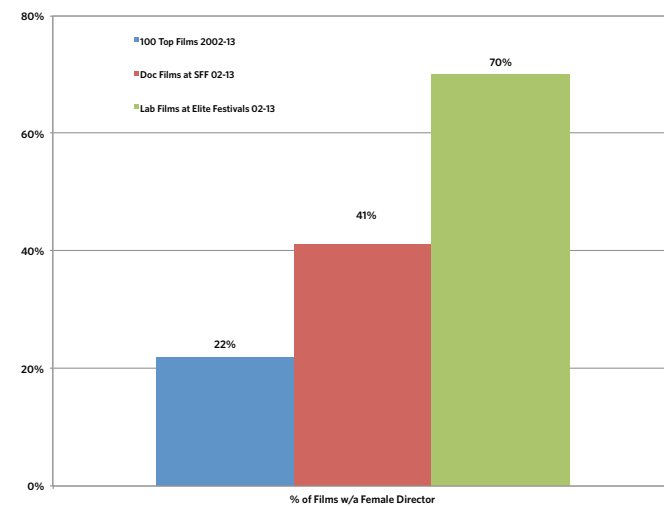
The lab-to-screen process in the DFP tells a different story. Out of 48 lab-supported projects, 14 (29.2%) were helmed by a male and 34 (70.8%) were helmed by a female. This translates into a gender ratio of 2.4 to 1, favoring female to male directed documentaries. Of 48 lab-supported projects, 85.4% have been completed ( $n=41$ ). Of the completed projects, 12 (29.3%) had a male director, and 29 (70.7%) were directed by women. Once again, the gender ratio of films entering the labs matches that of the completed films. In the DFP, however, this ratio skews toward females. *Consistent with our already-stated findings, when more women attend the labs, more female-directed films are completed.*

As in the earlier analysis, we also considered the completion rates of projects by gender. Comparing the number of male-directed projects finished after the labs ( $n=12$ ) to those entering the labs ( $n=14$ ) yields a completion rate of 85.7%. Female-driven projects are just as likely to be completed as male-driven projects with 29 of 34 projects (85.3%) finished after the labs. *Again, these findings demonstrate that lab support benefits men and women equally.*

Turning to festival exhibition platforms for completed DFP lab projects, we considered both the top 10 festivals and a broader range of the top 11 to 90 film festivals. These were included because some prominent documentary film festivals are not part of the top 10. Among the 41 completed documentaries, 23 (56.1%) were selected and screened at one or more of the top 10 festivals worldwide. More than two-thirds (69.6%,  $n=16$ ) of these films were directed by at least one female. Further, 85.4% ( $n=35$ ) of completed projects were selected and screened at a top 11 to 90 film festival. Of these 35, 71.4% ( $n=25$ ) had a female director attached. In the DFP, women actually over performed relative to their percentage of participating in the Documentary Edit and Story Labs (53.2%).

We once again compared the percentage of female-directed documentaries at the top 10 festivals to other domains. The percentage of lab-supported, female-directed documentaries competing at top 10 festivals worldwide (70%) is substantially higher than the percentage of documentaries (41.1%) directed by women at the SFF between 2002 and 2013. The percentage of completed and screened lab projects directed by women is also remarkably higher than that of female-directed films among the 100 top-grossing documentaries (22%) from 2002 to the present day.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 8**  
Percentage of Documentary Films with Female Directors across Exhibition Platforms



Examining artist support has addressed several critical issues. First, participation rates in Sundance Institute labs demonstrate that women are clearly interested in filmmaking and submit competitive projects to a highly selective application process. Second, lab-supported projects directed by women are finished at rates equal to those directed by men. Third, projects incubated in the labs and then completed go on to screen at elite festivals. These conclusions clearly indicate that labs may level the playing field for female filmmakers.

However, the overall figures for women directors at the SFF and in top-grossing films are still much lower than these findings. This conclusion leads to several queries ripe for future research. After the labs, are women and men receiving equivalent financing for their first features? Do females' films receive premium exhibition opportunities in equal numbers to films by males? Are films by women sold and distributed on a par with films by men? Do these movies perform at the same level? Do females receive major agency representation at rates equal to their male counterparts? At what rate do emerging female directors complete their second films as compared to male directors? Answering these questions is crucial to deepening our understanding of the impediments that still face female filmmakers.

**QUALITATIVE STUDY:  
PERCEPTIONS OF DIRECTORS AND THE PIPELINE TO SUCCESS**

In our previous report, we analyzed responses from industry thought leaders and working filmmakers regarding barriers and opportunities for women in independent and studio films. In this investigation, we returned to a subset of those interviews in an effort to understand more completely how perceptions and practices related to hiring or supporting filmmakers may impede females behind the camera.<sup>20</sup> We utilized responses from 34 of the individuals initially interviewed or surveyed, asking questions targeted to areas of particular expertise. These individuals were decision-makers in the industry, as well as seasoned filmmakers in both narrative and documentary domains. The sample was 85.3% female (n=29) and 14.7% male (n=5) with an average age of 48.6 years among those who provided it; their industry experience averaged 23.7 years. More than half the individuals (67.6%, n=23) worked in narrative films and 32.3% (n=11) in documentaries.<sup>21</sup>

The following section of the report considers three explanations for the lower number of women in filmmaking, particularly in narratives. First, we assessed the perceptions about the role of a director and how they may relate to stereotypical traits. Second, we examined biases in decision-making about female directors. Finally, we explored how directors come to the attention of industry leaders.

**“THINK DIRECTOR—THINK MALE”**

To examine the perceptions of filmmakers, we asked industry thought leaders and content creators to identify attributes of successful directors.<sup>22</sup> Previous research has demonstrated that the qualities of managers are more likely to be associated with traditionally masculine traits.<sup>23</sup> Each of the characteristics mentioned by individuals interviewed or surveyed was coded as masculine, feminine, or neutral. The list of masculine, feminine, and neutral traits came from studies examining gender stereotypes<sup>24</sup> and gendered attributes of managers or career outcomes.<sup>25</sup> Examples of masculine traits included being authoritative, bold, and confident, while feminine traits were exemplified by characteristics such as acting compassionate, nurturing, and open.

Among all 34 individuals, 109 nonoverlapping traits were mentioned. Close to one-third of those traits (32.1%) were coded as masculine, and 19.3% were identified as feminine. The remaining 48.6% were classified as neutral. In line with previous research on managers, the role of a director is perceived as requiring more traditionally male, rather than female, attributes.<sup>26</sup>

Our earlier findings revealed differences in the prevalence of females among documentary and narrative directors at the SFF and Sundance Institute labs. In light of this, we separated the traits listed by our interview participants into two categories: those offered about documentary directors and those stated about narrative directors. When asked about the qualities of successful narrative directors, masculine attributes outnumbered feminine characteristics by a ratio of more than two to one.<sup>27</sup> Masculine director traits included being aggressive or ambitious or acting like a general rallying troops for combat.



In contrast, feminine traits included being collaborative, supportive, and understanding. Parallel to the research on managers, when individuals think director, they think male.<sup>28</sup>

Implicit biases that favor male qualities in directing may be ingrained, unconscious, and problematic. Scholars have argued that linking perceptions about leaders to gender stereotypes can adversely impact women because of the incongruous nature of stereotypical images of women and those of leaders.<sup>29</sup> Two processes account for this asymmetry. First, women are not attributed leadership ability because traits associated with leaders or directors are more stereotypically masculine. Second, when women are leaders, they must model masculine leadership traits. In doing so, female leaders must deviate from expected gender roles. A woman acting against societal gender norms may experience negative consequences.<sup>30</sup>

The penalties for violating stereotypes of women or leaders takes several forms. Women leaders in male-dominated roles or those who display a more masculine (e.g., autocratic) style are evaluated less favorably than men.<sup>31</sup> Ratings of leadership effectiveness may also be lower for women in male-dominated roles or those who have more male subordinates.<sup>32</sup> Some research suggests that the upper echelons of leadership are likely to be more aligned with masculine traits and thus more incongruous for women.<sup>33</sup> The corporate structure of commercial filmmaking may be one reason why it is still described in more masculine terms.

The documentary film arena is an interesting counterpoint. When respondents were asked to name qualities of successful documentary directors, they provided a nearly equal percentage of traits that were masculine (23.1%; e.g., assertive, determined, driven) and feminine (20.5%; e.g., accommodating, intuitive, patient). The more egalitarian descriptions of a successful director may stem from the higher percentage of women working in the documentary field or from the lower budgets and smaller crews often required in this type of filmmaking. As one advocacy group recommends, employing more feminine attributes to describe leadership qualities may attract more women to these roles.<sup>34</sup> It may also help lower the barriers to entry for women. Most importantly, these responses reveal that documentary filmmaking is more than a space with democratized funding—it is a place with democratized *thinking*.

#### GETTING ON THE LIST

The next set of questions explored the consequences of considering directing as a more masculine activity. We asked a smaller group of thought leaders ( $n=12$ ) in the narrative realm specifically about putting female directors on the lists at studios for directing consideration or whether there was hesitation in proposing a female director or producer for projects that were not female centric.<sup>35</sup> These questions were designed to ascertain barriers that might keep women from being hired at the top level of the film industry.

Two-thirds (66.7%) of the 12 individuals interviewed indicated that there is a smaller pool of qualified or experienced female directors than male ones. While this is certainly the case among established directors of top-grossing films, the pipeline from independent film reveals numbers of women that are by no means insignificant. More than 100 (17.1%) of the 648 directors of U.S. narrative films at the SFF between 2002 and 2013 were female. The number of women working in independent film shows that there is more interest in directing and there are more

qualified or experienced female directors available than what is suggested by the number of women directing top-grossing films.

Outside of the independent filmmaking domain, the lack of qualified female managers or leaders for hire or promotion may be ameliorated by having more women in key roles throughout the organization. In other industries, the presence of women at particular job levels is related to the number of women on staff. A study of women in higher education demonstrated that the presence of female administrators increased the likelihood of female faculty members.<sup>36</sup> One study of savings and loan companies found that having a woman in a managerial role was associated with the probability of women being hired or promoted at her level.<sup>37</sup> Women in positions of influence are key gatekeepers who can diversify organizations.

Our 2013 report demonstrated that independent female narrative directors work with 21% more women in key creative roles than do their male counterparts.<sup>38</sup> Other studies have extended this finding to show that female directors showcase more women on screen.<sup>39</sup> Can having more women in green-lighting roles who can expend social capital on behalf of female directors help expand the pool? This is another question for future research.

Half of the individuals interviewed also mentioned that films that are stereotypically male (e.g., action or horror films) may not appeal as job opportunities to female directors. This bias regarding female interest reinforces existing beliefs about women and narrows their possibilities. Further, this stereotype about female preferences is inconsistent with female audiences. The box-office performance of action films and those with male leads suggests that women do go to see movies about men. Yet perceptions about what women like does not seem to stretch to include the idea that females may want to *create* content that features males or seems more masculine. This contradiction prompts two questions: Do female directors self-select more stereotypical feminine subjects? Or do industry decision-makers slot women into certain genres due to their stereotypical beliefs?

Additionally, 41.7% of individuals stated or noted perceptions or beliefs held by others about females' fitness for the job of being a director, reflecting their implicit biases about women's capabilities or desires. The same percentage (41.7%) declared that females were judged more harshly in the director's chair than were their male counterparts, suggesting that the standards or stereotypes about women and men are different when considering directing.

These responses seem to dovetail closely with the findings previously discussed regarding the attributes assigned to directors. They also provide a further and more topical illustration of the consequences of working in a male-typed domain. First, these categories legitimize the perceived lack of fit between stereotypically feminine attributes and what is considered a more masculine job of directing a film. Second, these statements extend the idea that the content of certain movies is perceived to be more appealing to males. Finally, the assertions about harsher penalties for female directors appear to illuminate one of the central elements of role-congruity theory—females face consequences when acting incongruously with their prescribed gender roles.

### THE PIPELINE FOR DIRECTORS

With a better understanding of how industry members conceive of directors and how individuals are brought into top industry positions, we examined the pipeline for emerging talent. Twenty decision-makers across narrative and documentary film were asked how directors come to their attention and are noticed as someone they would seriously consider hiring or representing.<sup>40</sup>

Two primary response categories emerged. A full 80% of those interviewed stated that being exposed to a filmmaker's body of work is one means of discovering talent. The most frequent indications specifically mentioned were short films and film festival screenings.<sup>41</sup> Having women's shorts and features programmed and screened by decision-makers at notable festivals is an important step in creating a conduit for further career success.

In addition to demonstrating a body of work, 45% of the individuals interviewed mentioned receiving recommendations or referrals from others. This use of relationships for career development illustrates how networks can provide instrumental benefits like exposure to decision-makers and information.<sup>42</sup> As we described in our previous report, male-dominated industry networks were cited as a barrier for female directors.<sup>43</sup> In this context, networks may benefit male directors who are connected to industry leaders or are able to form relationships that provide information about career prospects. Female directors may lose out on opportunities that could help them move farther along the trail to career sustainability or success.

Through this exploration of the pipeline for female directors, both opportunities and barriers emerge. Offering decision-makers more chances to see work created by women should be one way to open up possibilities for hiring and supporting them. Similarly, helping women forge industry connections or developing the means by which female directors can be recommended or referred to producers and agents may increase representation. However, as we already noted, the perception of successful directors within the narrative realm still skews toward the masculine. Focusing on documentaries reveals how embracing an egalitarian understanding of the director's role may facilitate a balanced arena. Until there is more parity in thinking about what makes a qualified director, the pathway for female narrative directors may continue to be a thorny one.

### CONCLUSION

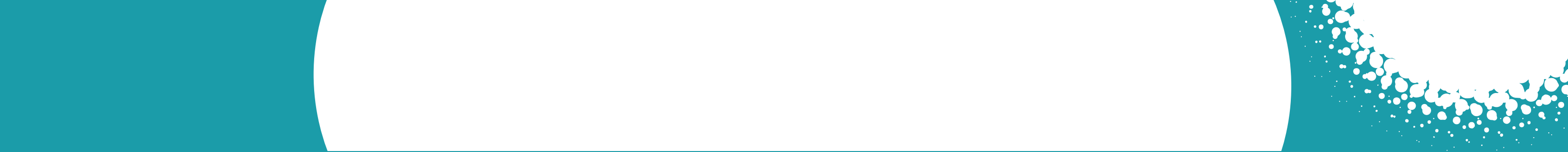
The purpose of this current report was to update and advance our knowledge of female content creators in independent cinema. To that end, we examined the participation rates of female directors, producers, writers, cinematographers, and editors at the 2013 SFF and supplemented our prior analyses that studied the pattern over time. We also considered women's attendance at Sundance Institute filmmaker labs. Finally, we returned to a subset of qualitative interviews to better understand perceptions of directors and how the broader industry conceives and promotes those who are talented. Two key conclusions are apparent from these analyses.

Documentary films continue to be an arena where female filmmakers are thriving. Across all but one production category at the 2013 SFF, more women were working in nonfiction storytelling than in fiction. This was especially true in the producing area, where more than half of executive producers in 2013 were female. Gender parity also existed across the film festival categories of Competition and Niche for documentary film directors, and in 7 of the 12 years studied, at least 40% of directors in the Documentary Competition were female. Similarly, women comprised more than half of filmmakers in the Documentary Edit and Story Lab. More than two-thirds of completed documentary-lab film projects that screened at the top 10 festivals were directed by women. According to our qualitative analysis, it appears that the higher percentages of women in the documentary arena may be partly explained by the more egalitarian perception of the role of directors there.

In stark contrast, women have not made great strides as independent narrative filmmakers. Although the percentage of women directors in the SFF Dramatic Competition reached a record high of 50% in 2013, the overall percentage of narrative female directors across 12 years at SFF is 17.1%. This lack of parity extends to other production roles, especially executive producers and producers at SFF.

In terms of overall artistic support, fewer women than men attend Sundance Institute Feature Film Program writing and directing labs, though this percentage changes from year to year and occasionally reaches parity. For example, this year, for the first time, the number of women attending the January Screenwriters Lab will be greater than the number of men when international filmmakers are included (not the focus of this report). Fellows also have access to a year-round system of support, including direct artist grants and extensive, customized resources and ongoing mentoring. Furthermore, as evidenced by the fact that female-directed lab projects are completed at equal rates to those directed by men and lab projects often go on to play at elite film festivals, it is clear that labs may level the playing field for female filmmakers.

These conclusions lead to several questions for future research investigations and discussions. Although we explored lab participation, the benefits of other early career training remain unknown. Looking back earlier in women's careers, are film schools training males and females in production classes in equal numbers? Do film schools have the same impact as lab attendance on filmmakers' success? In addition to Sundance labs, how does support from other



institutions differ by gender, and does assistance have a similar effect on project completion and exhibition? Other avenues for research and inquiry are also needed to explore what happens after women complete their first feature. What are the key obstacles that prevent women from making their second films or moving into more commercial arenas? How and why are industry gatekeepers relying on stereotypes or mythologizing when developing female-helmed projects or hiring directors? What conditions would be optimal for women in positions of influence to advocate for and expend social capital on behalf of emerging female storytellers? Addressing these knowledge gaps will provide a more holistic look at the barriers and potential remedies to gender imbalance in the film industry.

The findings in this report are limited by a few factors. Although Sundance is the premiere film festival in the U.S., independent film is a wider and more varied domain. By considering gender prevalence only at the Sundance Institute and the SFF, we may have underestimated the number of women working in independent film more broadly. Because the SFF and Sundance Institute labs function as agenda setters for other festivals and for other immersive artist-development programs worldwide, however, data from the Festival serves as one barometer for how women may fare. Support from other organizations may be as effective as Sundance lab attendance as films move toward completion.

In the qualitative portion of this study, the small sample size for the interviews restricts our ability to generalize our findings broadly. We collected responses from 34 industry representatives regarding traits of successful directors and even fewer industry leaders for other questions. The female-heavy sample also means that pertinent observations from male decision-makers may not be completely represented. Including more individuals responsible for green-lighting and financing films might expand our understanding of how women face impediments as they move along the pipeline from independent film to studio or top-grossing projects. Despite these limitations, the consistency among the answers provides a degree of confidence that the findings in this investigation represent broader views from certain industry segments.

Tackling the gender disparities presented in this report will require more than just programmatic interventions. Of primary importance is creating value around women's contributions and leadership styles. Hiring and promoting women at every level of management are two means of accomplishing change. Finally, advocates can highlight female involvement in the documentary realm as a bellwether for the narrative sphere. When given the opportunity, women step into key creative positions, adding unique visions and voices to the cinematic landscape.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Works Cited &amp; Notes

<sup>1</sup> Smith, S.L., Pieper, K., & Choueiti, M. (2013). Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers. Report prepared for Sundance Institute and Women in Film Los Angeles.

<sup>2</sup> Similar to our earlier investigation, several films at Sundance Film Festival (SFF) were excluded from analysis: 1) movies in the World Cinema category; 2) short films running 49 minutes or less; and 3) movies that did not originate—in whole or part—domestically in the U.S.

<sup>3</sup> For this analysis, we only looked at U.S. films that screened at the 2013 SFF with a running time of at least 50 minutes. After the list of films was generated, one research assistant looked up all the directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, and editors associated with each film in IMDbPro. A second research assistant checked the first research assistant's work. This was done on March 7, 2013, and reflects all the information on IMDbPro per fillm up until that date.

We then compared the names and positions from IMDbPro to the SFF 2013 program. All individuals credited in one or both of the sources were included in the analysis. If credits differed between the SFF program and IMDbPro, we used what was listed in the Festival catalog. After comparing the two sources, we searched for duplicate names within creative position (directors, writers, etc.) following the procedures we set forth in our last report (see Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2013, footnote 7, pp. 35–36). Then another set of research assistants rechecked the data for errors.

Each individual in this analysis was researched for biological sex. We used online sources (IMDbPro, Studio System), calls to agents, and previous MDSC Initiative research to confirm the gender of each individual in this data set, and the source of the information was tracked for each credited person. A final three research assistants checked the data for errors and the accuracy of each source before we analyzed the numbers.

<sup>4</sup> A significant chi square was obtained between storytelling genre (narrative, documentary) and content-creator gender (male, female):  $X^2(1, 1163)=33.36, p<.01, \Phi=.17$ .

<sup>5</sup> Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Three out of the five chi squares were significant for storytelling genre (narrative, documentary) and gender (male, female): directors,  $X^2(1, 108)=6.89, p<.01, \Phi=.25$ ; producers,  $X^2(1, 717)=36.97, p<.01, \Phi=.23$ ; cinematographers,  $X^2(1, 117)=5.40, p<.05, \Phi=.215$ . Gender of writers and editors did not vary with storytelling genre.

<sup>7</sup> In our original study, more than 6,900 producing credits materialized across 820 films. With the guidance of Sundance Institute, all producing titles were collapsed into four mutually exclusive categories: 1) executive producers/co-executive producers; 2) producers/co-producers/

consulting producers; 3) associate producers/co-associate producers/additional associate producers; 4) other (i.e., field, line, supervising, post, coordinating, etc). We employed the same scheme for the 2013 Festival data.

It should be noted that producers' names were allowed to duplicate across categories but not within them. To illuminate, an individual with an executive producer and associate producer credit was counted twice. An individual listed on IMDbPro as a producer and co-producer was only counted once because these two credits are *within* the same category.

<sup>8</sup> Within storytelling genre, the chi square analyses were significant for gender (male, female) and producer type (executive, producer, associate, other): narrative,  $X^2(3, 538)=13.41, p<.01, V^*=.16$ ; documentary,  $X^2(3, 179)=8.88, p<.05, V^*=.22$ . For the documentary analysis, two cells had low frequencies, and thus the results should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> For this analysis, we used domestic figures (films released in the U.S and Canada) from BoxOfficeMojo.com. The data reflect the top 100 films as of January 3, 2013. Each film on the list was looked up in IMDbPro to check for a single or multiple director(s). After a list of directors was established, a photo was collected to determine the biological sex of each director. The list and photos were checked for accuracy by two of the study's authors before analysis. In this particular examination, there were a total of 108 directors; only 2 were female.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, S.L., Choueiti, M., Scofield, E., & Pieper, K. (2013). Gender Inequality in 500 Popular Films: Examining On-Screen Portrayals and Behind-the-Scenes Employment Patterns in Motion Pictures Released between 2007-2012. Report prepared by the Media, Diversity, and Social Change (MDSC) Initiative. Los Angeles: Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

<sup>12</sup> Fellows were categorized as American if they work primarily in the U.S. film system. These designations were provided by program administrators from Sundance Institute in the Feature Film Program, Documentary Film Program, and New Frontier Program.

<sup>13</sup> Not every Sundance Institute lab was evaluated in this analysis. In particular, the fellows and attendees of the Composers Lab were excluded. This is true of both the overall lab analysis as well as the section examining projects from lab to screen.

<sup>14</sup> In the fall of 2012 and 2013, we collected all lab documents from Sundance Institute dating as far back as 2002 when applicable. From the Feature Film Program (FFP), we retrieved records on the January Screenwriters Lab (2002-2013), June Directors and Screenwriters Lab (2002-2013), and Creative Producing Lab (2009-2013). From the Documentary Film Program (DFP), we looked at information on the Documentary Edit and Story Lab (2004-2013) as well as the Creative Producing Lab (2009-2013). We also analyzed data from the New Frontier Lab from its inception in 2011 to 2013.

Sundance Institute lab books for each year contained a list of fellows who attended the lab alongside synopses of their projects. We began by collecting and organizing all fellows and their projects into a data file by reading through the summary of individuals and examining their biographies in each lab book. Information was collected about individuals' biological sex using biographical information in lab books or information found online (e.g., IMDbPro, Studio System, blog posts, filmmakers' websites). This data was checked for accuracy from start to finish a total of three times: in December 2012 by the authors, by 31 research assistants in October 2013, and in December 2013 by a team of two research assistants. The biological sex was confirmed for all lab fellows in this sample; hence, there are no missing values.

Above, we present the gender distribution of all fellows ( $n=432$ ) working within the American film industry. A particular fellow may have attended more than one lab, however. Because of this fact, we calculated the number of unique filmmakers participating in the labs to see how this may have affected the overall gender distribution. A total of 347 unique filmmakers attended one or more labs between 2002 and 2013. The gender distribution of unique filmmakers was virtually identical to the percentage without duplicates: 57.3% male ( $n=199$ ) and 42.7% female ( $n=148$ ).

<sup>15</sup> The New Frontier description comes from Sundance Institute's website, paragraph 4: <http://www.sundance.org/programs/new-frontier-story-lab/>

<sup>16</sup> For this analysis, we stipulated two things: 1) the project had to feature at least one individual working in the American system; 2) only projects with a director attached and supported by the FFP (i.e., January Screenwriters, June Screenwriters and Directors, Creative Producing) or DFP (i.e., Documentary Edit and Story, Creative Producing) labs were considered for analysis. Thus, only projects receiving support for screenwriters, producers, or editors were considered in this analysis.

<sup>17</sup> A total of 164 projects met this restricted definition (116 in the FFP, 48 in DFP). Projects brought solely to the New Frontier lab were excluded, given that such experimental storytelling may not necessarily be exhibited in traditional ways.

<sup>18</sup> Compiling data on each lab project's completion and release involved several steps. First, every film was looked up in IMDbPro between 12/11/2013 and 1/3/2013 to ascertain whether it was completed/released or in production. For films that had no IMDbPro listing, a broader Internet search was undertaken to determine whether the film had been completed or not. When possible, individuals connected to the film were contacted by phone or email to ascertain the status of their lab projects. Determination of a film's completion status was confirmed by a second researcher and Sundance Institute staff members in the FFP and DFP. In some cases, information from Institute staff indicated that films had been completed. For a few projects, their release status could not be corroborated by public information. Those films were coded as "not completed or released."

Release information on completed films in the FFP was obtained by analyzing the IMDbPro information. When this was not comprehensive, additional information was sought to determine

if a film had played at one of the top 10 or top 11-90 film festivals. Research assistants made initial judgments, and the study authors later confirmed these assessments.

For DFP films, additional steps were also taken to evaluate whether films had been completed and released. Each project was looked up in the StudioSystem database and on PBS's ITVS and POV websites. In addition, the film website, Facebook page, and/or press kit were analyzed. Collectively, this information was used to determine the release status for each DFP project. Once again, research assistants and one of the study authors made initial judgments that were later confirmed by another of the authors.

The list of the top 10 festivals was obtained from Brian Brooks's May 12, 2010, Indiewire article (10 Best Fests: A Directory). Available online at [http://www.indiewire.com/article/50\\_films\\_and\\_a\\_top\\_ten\\_for\\_indiewires\\_new\\_festival\\_directory](http://www.indiewire.com/article/50_films_and_a_top_ten_for_indiewires_new_festival_directory). In addition to the top 10, the same Indiewire article featured the top 11-90 film festivals. We analyzed the percentage of lab-supported narrative and documentary films exhibited at festivals on this list by director gender. For completed lab projects ( $n=48$ ) coming out of the FFP, 36 (75%) went to a top 11-90 domestic or international festival. Of these 36, 33% ( $n=12$ ) were helmed by a female director, and 67% ( $n=24$ ) were helmed by a male one. These findings are remarkably similar to the percentages found in the top 10 and are excluded to avoid redundancy. The findings for the top 11 to 90 festivals for DFP projects are included in the body of the report because this list includes a wider range of documentary-serving exhibition spaces and more accurately reflects the festival performance of completed DFP projects.

<sup>19</sup> The list of the 100 top-grossing documentaries from 1982 to the present day was retrieved from Box Office Mojo (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=documentary.htm>) on January 3, 2014. See the website for inclusions and exclusions. The list from 2002 to the present was obtained by excluding films released before 2002 until a total of 100 films was reached.

<sup>20</sup> The original interview procedure is detailed in Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2013. This analysis examines data from the executive/high-level talent interviews ( $n=22$ ) and the survey of female directors and producers ( $n=12$ ) who were part of the 2012 Sundance Institute class (e.g., screened a film at the festival, attended a lab, received funding). Interviews and surveys took place in the fall of 2012. Four individuals in the initial sample did not provide their age and are not included in the average.

<sup>21</sup> To facilitate confidentiality, survey participants provided an age range. Respondents ranged in age from 25 to 54 ( $n=10$ ). Two individuals did not provide their age.

<sup>22</sup> Participants were asked the following: *Given your experience in [narrative/documentary] filmmaking, I am curious about your thoughts on "successful" directors and producers. By successful, I am referring to those content creators that have made profitable films over the course of their careers, or who are able to sustain themselves financially through their work as producers or directors. In the*

*area of [narrative/documentary] filmmaking...What are some words or characteristics you would use to describe a successful director? Are there any other traits?* Each trait that was mentioned was recorded, and identical or highly similar traits were collapsed to form a list of nonoverlapping characteristics. Two of the study authors used stereotypical traits identified in other studies (see the next note) to code each characteristic as masculine, feminine, or neutral. When traits were not on the list, synonyms were found which could be compared to the list of those traits identified in other studies. Narrative and documentary categories were determined based on the individual participant's experience in the industry.

<sup>23</sup> Schein, V.E. (1973). The relationships between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 57(2), 95-100. Schein, V.E. (1975). Relationships between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics among female managers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60(3), 340-344. Massengill, D., & Di Marco, N. (1979). Sex-role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics: A current replication. *Sex Roles*, 5(5), 561-570. Martell, R.F., Parker, C., Emrich, C.G., & Crawford, M.S. (1998). Sex stereotyping in the executive suite: "Much ado about something." *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality*, 13(1), 127-138. Heilman, M.E., Block, C.J., Martell, R.F., & Simon, M.C. (1989). Has anything changed? Current characterizations of men, women, and managers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74(6), 935-942.

<sup>24</sup> Bem, S.L. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 42(2), 155-162. See table 1. Hosoda, M., & Stone, D.L. (2000). Current gender stereotypes and their evaluative content. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 90, 1283-1294; see table 2, p. 1289; and table 3, p. 1290. Only favorable and neutral attributes were used because the question specifically asked about successful directors.

<sup>25</sup> Schein 1973; 1975. Martell et al., 1998. Abele, A.E. (2003). The dynamics of masculine-agentic and feminine-communal traits: Findings from a prospective study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(4), 768-776. Sy, T., Shore, L.M., Strauss, J., Shore, T. H., Tram, S., Whiteley, P., & Ikeda-Muromachi, K. (2010). Leadership perceptions as a function of race-occupation fit: The case of Asian Americans. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(5), 902-919.

<sup>26</sup> Schein 1973; 1975; Massengill & Di Marco 1979; Heilman et al. 1989; Martell et al., 1998.

<sup>27</sup> The specific percentages were masculine traits=34.6% and feminine traits=16%. Neutral traits totaled 49.4%.

<sup>28</sup> This term is used across authors in the literature to refer to the pattern identified in Schein's work (1973; 1975) and subsequent tests of the stereotype.

<sup>29</sup> Eagly, A.H., & Karau, S.J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573-598. "When a stereotyped group member and an incongruent social role become joined in the mind of the perceiver, this inconsistency lowers the evaluation of the group member as an actual or potential occupant of the role. In general, prejudice

## WORKS CITED & NOTES, PHASE II

toward female leaders follows from the incongruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leader roles"; see p. 574.

30. Eagly & Karau, 2002, 576. Burgess, D., & Borgida, E. (1999). Who women are, who women should be: Descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotyping in sex discrimination. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 5(3), 665–692; see p. 667.

31. Eagly, A.H., Makhijani, M.G., & Klonsky, B.G. (1992). Gender and the evaluation of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111(1), 3–22. Also see Eagly & Karau, 2002, 579–586; and Burgess & Borgida, 1999, for a review of relevant studies.

32. Eagly, A.H., Karau, S.J., & Makhijani, M.G. (1995). Gender and the effectiveness of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(1), 125–145. Also see Eagly & Karau, 2002, 586–588; and Burgess & Borgida, 1999, for a review of relevant studies.

33. Huddy, L., & Terkildsen, N. (1993). The consequences of gender stereotypes for women candidates at different levels and types of office. *Political Research Quarterly*, 46(3), 503–525; see p. 510. The authors state, "There was no significant interaction between level and type of office, resulting in a simple hierarchy with the good president seen as the most instrumental, the local council member the least, and the good mayor and member of Congress as intermediate" (510). There was significant interaction by type of office and warmth/expressiveness traits such that the office of president was rated higher than other offices, but the authors state that "this, however, was mostly caused by higher ratings on positive traits in the warmth and expressiveness scale—warm, gentle, sensitive, and cautious—rather than neutral or negative traits, such as feminine, emotional, or talkative" (510). Martell et al., 1998 found that successful managers received higher ratings on scales measuring traits of being a change agent or having managerial courage. These scales were also skewed according to sex: males were rated higher than females. However, for general leadership ability, there were no differences in ratings of male and female managers when the "successful" label was provided. When the label was not there, males rated significantly higher than females (134–135).

34. Bhatt, M., Payne, R., Feldt, G., & Litzenberger, A. (2013). Leadership fictions: Gender, leadership and the media. A report by Fem Inc. and Take the Lead. Available online at [http://www.taketheleadwomen.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/FEM-Inc.\\_Leadership-Fictions.pdf](http://www.taketheleadwomen.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/FEM-Inc._Leadership-Fictions.pdf)

35. Participants were asked three questions: *Is there hesitation to propose a female director/producer for a project that is not "female centric" for fear of having to fight harder for it? Are there any other reasons that might create hesitation to propose a female director? Is there a higher bar for female directors/producers to be put on lists consistently?* Despite the inclusion of producers in the question, many of the responses were general or referred specifically to female directors or both directors and producers. Participants were chosen to answer these questions based on their experience working in narrative film and with studio decision-makers. As with the earlier

research, two of the study authors aggregated and coded the responses.

36. Bach, R.L., & Perrucci, C.C. (1984). Organizational influences on the sex composition of college and university faculty: A research note. *Sociology of Education*, 57, 193–198; see p. 196.

37. Cohen, L.E., Broschak, J.P., & Haveman, H.A. (1998). And then there were more? The effect of organizational sex composition on the hiring and promotion of managers. *American Sociological Review*, 63, 711–727; see p. 719. "Having higher proportions of female managers at the focal job level improved the probability of hiring and promoting other women into that level. This effect was especially strong for promotion" (emphasis in the original).

38. Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2013, 21.

39. Smith, Choueiti, Scofield, & Pieper, 2013, 1.

40. Twenty individuals from the executive/high-level talent sample were asked the question, *Thinking about the kind of person you just described [a successful director], how does someone like that first come to your attention and become someone you would seriously consider hiring/representing?* Two of the study authors aggregated and coded the responses. Coding focused on identifying commonly occurring themes or responses. The unit of analysis was the individual response, and answers were permitted to fit into multiple categories. As with the earlier questions, responses could include speculation, assertions, perceptions, personal experiences, or the experiences of others. Answers were further broken down to determine specific exhibition platforms and the nature of the individuals who provided references.

41. Short films (n=7) were specifically mentioned most frequently by respondents, followed by presence at film festivals (n=5), although the second-highest number of responses mentioned viewing a filmmaker's "general body of work" (n=6). Since that response did not offer a specific means of viewing the content, it is not included in the report text.

42. Ibarra, H. (1993). Personal networks of women and minorities in management: A conceptual framework. *Academy of Management Review*, 18(1), 56–87; see pp. 58–59 for a review of informal and instrumental networks.

43. Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2013, 24.

Executive Summary

Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles

Women Filmmakers Initiative

*Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers*

*Phase II-January 2013*

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and Marc Choueiti

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The purpose of this research is to examine how females are faring in American independent film. Studies have been conducted in the past on women in the mainstream U.S. film industry, but little research has yet been done in the U.S. independent film arena. To this end, we developed a research strategy with a two-prong approach.

First, we quantitatively documented the involvement of female content creators of U.S. films at the Sundance Film Festival, assessing the gender of 11,197 directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, and editors across 820 films that were classified as either U.S. narratives (534 films) or documentaries (286 films) between 2002 and 2012.<sup>7</sup>

The second prong documents the qualitative experiences of female filmmakers through interviews with emerging and seasoned content creators as well as key industry gatekeepers. Here, we surveyed 51 individuals to unpack the specific obstacles facing female directors and producers in the independent film arena. We also assessed participants' perceptions of opportunities that may increase women's involvement behind the camera. Below is a summary of key findings.

*Quantitative Findings: American Films at the Sundance Film Festival from 2002–2012*

- **At the Sundance Film Festival from 2002–2012, one quarter (25.3%,  $n=1,911$ ) of all narrative content creators (i.e., directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, editors) were female and 39.1% ( $n=1,422$ ) of all documentary content creators were female.** This translates into a behind-the-camera gender ratio of 2.96 males to every 1 female in narratives and 1.56 males to every 1 female in documentaries.
- **Females were half as likely to be directors of U.S. narratives (16.9%) than of U.S. documentaries (34.5%).** A similar disparity in these two storytelling platforms (narrative and documentary) was found among female writers (20.6% vs. 32.8%), female producers (29.4% vs. 45.9%), female cinematographers (9.5% vs. 19.9%), and female editors (22% vs. 35.8%).



- Female directors of Sundance Film Festival U.S. narrative films exceed those of the top 100 box-office films. Of the top-grossing films, Sundance has been a pipeline for many female directors.** At the Sundance Film Festival, female directors comprised 22.2% of the narrative competition categories and 14.5% of the noncompetition categories (Premieres and Niche—Midnight, NEXT, New Frontier, Spotlight). As a comparison, only 4.4% of directors were female across the top 100 box-office films each year from 2002 to 2012. This represents a very steep fiscal cliff for women moving from directing independent to studio films. Further, there were only 41 unique female directors across 1,100 top-grossing movies. Of these, 41.5% had come through Sundance Institute’s programs as content creators who screened a film at the Festival, participated in Labs, and/or were award recipients.
- Documentary filmmaking is an arena where women directors thrive.** From 2002 to 2012, 41.1% of documentary competition directors were female. Six years of the 11-year sample demonstrated that females comprised 40-50% or more of documentary competition directors. Even the lowest percentage of female competition directors (25%) is still higher than the Festival norm for narrative competition films (22.2%). Interestingly, only 23.8% of noncompetition documentary directors were female across the 11-year sample.
- Female directors are important for facilitating behind-the-camera equality.** When compared to films directed by males, those directed by females feature more women content creators (writers, producers, cinematographers, editors) behind the camera. This is true in both narratives (21% increase) and documentaries (24% increase).
- Across all behind-the-camera positions, females were most likely to be producers. As the prestige of the producing post increased, the percentage of female participation decreased.** This trend was repeatedly observed in both narrative and documentary filmmaking. Less than one-third of all narrative producers, but just over 40% of associate producers were female. In documentaries, 42.5% of producers and 59.5% of associate producers were female.
- Gender of content creators varied by Sundance Film Festival program section.** Competition films had a higher percentage of female content creators than did films in the Premieres section or films from other noncompetition sections. This held across all five artistic positions (directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, editors) and storytelling platforms (narrative, documentary). Among three of the five artistic positions, Premieres had the lowest percentage of females in both narratives and documentaries.
- No sustained (e.g., three or more years) increases or decreases were observed in the percentage of female directors or producers in narrative or documentary films shown at the Sundance Film Festival from 2002–2012.** Rather, the percentage of female directors and producers often increased and then decreased from one year to the next at the Festival. Year-to-year, changes—highs and lows—were more characteristic of female documentary directors and producers.

*Qualitative Findings: Obstacles and Opportunities Facing Female Directors and Producers*

Women face significant barriers to becoming directors and producers in American independent narrative film. Our sample of 51 independent filmmakers and executives/high-level talent spontaneously mentioned five major areas that hamper women directors’ career development:

- Gendered Financial Barriers** (43.1%)

  - (a) Independent narrative film relies on a funding structure that is primarily operated by males.
  - (b) Female-helmed projects are perceived as lacking commercial viability.
  - (c) Women are viewed as less confident when they ask for film financing.
- Male-dominated networks** (39.2%)
- Stereotyping on set** (15.7%)
- Work and family balance** (19.6%)
- Exclusionary hiring decisions** (13.7%)

Additionally, 29.4% of respondents questioned the veracity of data on the low number of women in independent film, expressed that the situation for women was improving over time, or disclosed that the state of gender equality for females in independent film was not different than other industries. These points of resistance illustrate how industry perceptions may unknowingly perpetuate barriers for female directors and producers.

Documentaries represent a more female-friendly arena than narrative film. Of the individuals who mentioned a gendered financial barrier, 36.4% indicated that the documentary community has a more democratized funding structure, is led by other women, and that lower thresholds for funding present fewer hurdles to creating films. Additionally, the points of entry and crew leadership requirements are perceived to create an environment in which women can succeed.

Opportunities exist to improve the situation for women in independent film. Individuals mentioned three key ways to change the status quo:

- Mentoring and encouraging women early in their careers** (36.7%)
- Improving access to finance** (26.5%)
- Raising awareness of the problem** (20.4%)

This last strategy may be particularly salient, given that some respondents indicated a belief that gender inequality is improving over time or is not any worse than in other industries.

## RESEARCH STUDY

*Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities  
for Independent Women Filmmakers,  
Phase I*

### Research Study

**Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles**

**Women Filmmakers Initiative**

*Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers*

*Phase II-January 2013*

Stacy L. Smith, Ph.D.; Katherine Pieper, Ph.D.;  
and Marc Choueiti

**Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative**

**Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism**

**University of Southern California**

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The purpose of this research is to examine how females are faring in American independent film. Studies have been conducted in the past on women in the mainstream U.S. film industry, but little research has yet been done in the independent film arena. To this end, we developed a research strategy with a two-prong approach.

First, we quantitatively documented the involvement of female content creators of U.S. films at the Sundance Film Festival, assessing the gender of 11,197 directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, and editors across 820 films that were classified as either U.S. narratives (534 films) or documentaries (286 films) between 2002 and 2012.<sup>7</sup>

The second prong documents the qualitative experiences of female filmmakers through interviews with emerging and seasoned directors and producers as well as key industry gatekeepers. Here, we surveyed 51 individuals to unpack the specific obstacles facing female directors and producers in the independent film arena. We also assessed participants' perceptions of opportunities that may increase women's involvement behind the camera. Below is a summary of the major areas explored.

### QUANTITATIVE STUDY

#### **SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL SELECTIONS**

Across 11 years (2002–2012) of programmed U.S. feature-length films at the Sundance Film Festival, 29.8% of content creators (directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, editors) were female. This translates into 2.36 males to every one female behind the camera. Significant findings were found regarding content-creator gender in three areas: storytelling genre (narrative vs. documentary), creative position (director, writer, producer, cinematographer, editor), and Festival program section (Competition, Premieres, and Niche categories—Midnight, NEXT, New Frontier, Spotlight).

GENDER BY STORYTELLING GENRE

Table 1  
Females in Key Creative Positions by Genre Type

CREATIVE POSITION	NARRATIVE	DOCUMENTARY	TOTAL
Director	16.9%	34.5%	23.9%
Writer	20.6%	32.8%	23.3%
Producer	29.4%	45.9%	34.3%
Cinematographer	9.5%	19.9%	14.3%
Editor	22%	35.8%	27.7%

Consistent with other research, the independent documentary culture appears to be more egalitarian than the culture surrounding independent narrative content creation.<sup>8</sup> One quarter (25.3%) of all content creators were female in narratives (n=1,911), whereas 39.1% were female in documentaries (n=1,422).<sup>9</sup> We further examined specific behind-the-camera posts (see Table 1), finding that gender varies significantly by genre type.<sup>10</sup> Just fewer than 17% of directors were female in the narrative film category, which is less than half of the percentage of female directors in documentaries (34.5%). A large gap was observed between female producers in narratives (29.4%) and documentaries (45.9%). Narratives were also less likely than documentaries to feature female writers, cinematographers, or editors in storytelling (see Table 1).

GENDER BY CREATIVE POSITION

Table 2  
Female Producer by Type and Genre

GENRE TYPE	EXECUTIVE	PRODUCER	ASSOCIATE	OTHER
Narrative Females	20.6%	31.9%	40.6%	41.2%
Documentary Females	36%	42.5%	59.5%	67.9%

Note: Per cell, subtracting the percentage of females from 100 yields the percentage of males.

Next, we examined gender distribution by producer type (executive, producer/co-producer, associate, other) within genre.<sup>11</sup> Two trends are immediately apparent in Table 2.<sup>12</sup> First, the percentage of females increases as producer status or authority decreases. **Stated differently, the highest percentages of women congregate in the positions with the least power.** This is true in both narratives and documentaries. Second, females comprise well over half of all associate or “other” producers in documentary storytelling.

GENDER BY FESTIVAL PROGRAM SECTION/NARRATIVE FILMS

Table 3  
Female Narrative Content Creators by Festival Program Category

NARRATIVE	COMPETITION FILMS	PREMIERE FILMS	NICHE FILMS
Director	22.2%	11.4%	16.3%
Writer	25.5%	18.7%	18.4%
Producer	31.6%	26.8%	29.4%
Cinematographer	10.3%	8.5%	9.4%
Editor	24.1%	21.6%	20.6%

Note: The relationship between gender and Festival programming was significant across two analyses: those for director and producer. The analysis for writers approached statistical significance. “Niche” films include films from the Midnight, NEXT, New Frontier, and Spotlight categories.

To look at the placement of each U.S. film at the Festival, we sifted all the movies into three broad categories: Competition, Premiere, and Niche (all other program sections). We then assessed the percentage of female filmmakers in five major creative roles (i.e., directors, producers, writers, cinematographers, editors) within narratives and documentaries separately. Table 3 illuminates the percentage of narrative female filmmakers by Festival program category.<sup>13</sup> When compared to **female directors in the niche category, female directors were more likely to appear in Competition films and less likely to appear in Premiere films.** Given that Premiere films often have higher budgets and more prominent talent attached, this downward trend in female involvement is likely due to moving from the independent space toward more commercial fare. A similar but less-pronounced trend emerged among female producers. The remaining analyses were not significant.

Table 4  
Type of Female Narrative Producer by Festival Program Category

FESTIVAL GROUPING	EXECUTIVE	PRODUCER	ASSOCIATE	OTHER
Competition	21%	34.7%	40.3%	47%
Premieres	19%	31%	43.8%	26.8%
Niche	22%	29.9%	38.9%	44.2%

Table 4 shows type of producing credit by Festival program section for narrative films. **The prestige of producing credits is inversely related to female participation, particularly in Competition and Niche films.**<sup>14</sup> If executive producing is equated with holding the purse strings, then less than a quarter of all females across 11 years of U.S. narrative Festival films are calling the shots financially. This finding is expanded upon below, with the results of the qualitative interviews illuminating barriers related to female content creators and financing.

GENDER BY FESTIVAL PROGRAM SECTION/DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Table 5  
Female Documentary Content Creators by Festival Program Category

NARRATIVE	COMPETITION FILMS	PREMIERE FILMS	NICHE FILMS
Director	41.1%	20%	25%
Writer	38.3%	11.8%	30.4%
Producer	51.2%	38.1%	37.7%
Cinematographer	23.4%	18.9%	13.2%
Editor	41.3%	22%	28.5%

When we turn to documentaries, Competition films were the most female-friendly arena for content creators (see Table 5).<sup>15</sup> Women comprised more than 40% of the directors and/or editors (41.3%) in U.S. Documentary Competition across 11 years at the Festival. Fully half (51.2%) of all producers in the same category were female. **Analogous to narratives at the Sundance Film Festival, three of the five analyses revealed that female participation in documentaries is lowest in the Premieres section.**

In Table 6, we look more closely at the types of producing credits females are receiving in the documentary arena by Festival grouping. The trends are quite clear, dovetailing with the findings above.<sup>16</sup> **Males outnumber females only in the most prestigious producing categories—while females heavily populate and occupy the majority of less influential roles on set** (associate producer, other). This is true across all three Festival groupings. One quarter of executive producers in the Premieres category were female, whereas 41.5% were in the Competition category.

Table 6  
Type of Female Documentary Producer by Festival Program Category

FESTIVAL GROUPING	EXECUTIVE	PRODUCER	ASSOCIATE	OTHER
Competition	41.5%	47.4%	63.1%	74.1%
Premieres	25%	34%	53.6%	63.2%
Niche	29.9%	34.9%	53.2%	52.4%

Overall, the results reveal striking gender differences by content creator position, storytelling platform, and even Festival program category. Among the five content-creator positions (director, writer, producer, cinematographer, editor), the two most male-dominated filmmaking positions are directors and cinematographers in narrative filmmaking, and writers and cinematographers in documentary filmmaking. Documentary filmmaking is more female-friendly than narrative filmmaking in almost every content creator position, save writers in the Premieres category. The egalitarian nature of documentary filmmaking is addressed later in this report, when we examine perceived barriers (or lack thereof) facing female content creators in independent film.

CHANGES IN FEMALE FESTIVAL PARTICIPATION OVER TIME

This section seeks to address whether any changes have occurred in the percentage of female directors and producers at the Sundance Film Festival between 2002 and 2012. We focus only on directors and producers, because these two creative positions are the focus of the inaugural Sundance/Women In Film Mentorship Program.

Change was assessed in two steps. First, we compared each year’s percentage of female directors and female producers to the overall Festival norm by storytelling genre (narrative vs. documentary) and program category (Competition vs. noncompetition). Deviations +7.5 percentage points from the norm are noted as a shift from typicality, as this percentage reflects a greater change than simply adding a single director (6.25%) in one year. **When three or more contiguous years show a similar upward or downward trend from the Festival norm, we indicate change has occurred.** In the following section, trends over time are discussed by position (director vs. producer), first with regard to narratives (Competition vs. noncompetition) and then documentaries (Competition vs. noncompetition).

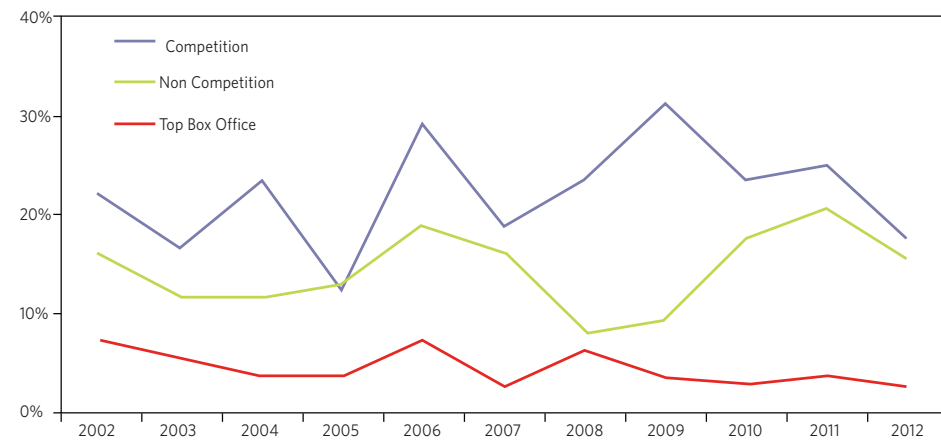
NARRATIVE DIRECTORS

For competitive films, the Festival norm for female directors is 22.2% (range 12.5%-31.3%). Two years deviate from the competition norm—one above (2009) and one below (2005). For noncompetition films, the Festival norm for female directors is 14.5% (range 8.1%-20.6%). No years deviate by +7.5% and thus no sustained changes have occurred over time.

As a point of comparison, we examined the percentage of female directors across the 100 top box office films between 2002 and 2012.<sup>17</sup> Across 1,220 directors, 95.6% of (n=1,166) the top-grossing ones were male and only 4.4% (n=54) were female. The percentage of female directors deviated little over time and is below the Festival norm for both competition (22.2%) and noncompetition films (14.5%). Repeat males and females were found directing studio films. **After removing duplicates, there were 41 unique females at the helm and 625 unique males at the helm across 11 years and 1,100 movies. This calculates into a ratio of 15.24 male directors to every 1 female director.** The range of movies directed by males (1-12 films) and females (1-4 films) also differed, with women facing a more restricted range. However, over half of men (57.6%) and over three-fourths of women (80.5%) only directed one top box-office film across the 11 years.

To further compare the studio world to the independent sphere, we examined whether female directors experienced or had roots in any Sundance-related artistic programs. **Of the 41 women directing top-grossing films, a full 41.5% (n=17) were supported by Sundance Institute through the Festival, Labs, or fellowship/award programs.** Sundance Institute seems to be a strong and consistent force in supplying and/or reinforcing the pipeline of female directors for studio-based fare.

**Figure 1**  
Female Narrative Directors by Year within Festival Program Category



**NARRATIVE PRODUCERS**

We also examined trends over time across producers and associate producers. The Festival percentage of female producers in competitive narrative films across 11 years is 34.7% (range 25%–50.8%). Only two years deviate from this norm (2008 and 2009), pulling in opposite directions. For noncompetition producers, the overall percentage of females is 30.4% (range 19%–38.7%). Two non-contiguous years deviate from the Festival norm (2006 and 2008). Similar to data on directors, **no meaningful or sustained differences emerged over time.**

**NARRATIVE ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS**

Females comprise 40.3% of all narrative associate producers in competition (range 18.2%–66.7%). Five years deviate from the overall percentage. Yet, none of these changes are in the same direction and contiguous. For noncompetition films the norm for associate producers is 40.8% female (range 26.3%–54.1%). Four years pull away from the Festival norm—two positively and two negatively. **Again, no sustained changes are observed over time.**

**DOCUMENTARY DIRECTORS**

For Festival competition films, the norm for female documentary directors is 41.1% (range 25%–57.1%). Four years deviate from the overall Festival percentage, but not in a way that

demonstrates meaningful change (Figure 2). For noncompetition films, six years deviate from the overall industry norm of 23.8% female directors (range 11.1%–57.1%). There are no meaningful changes over time, though three years are above the Festival norm (2006, 2007, and 2011) and three years are below (2005, 2008, and 2010).

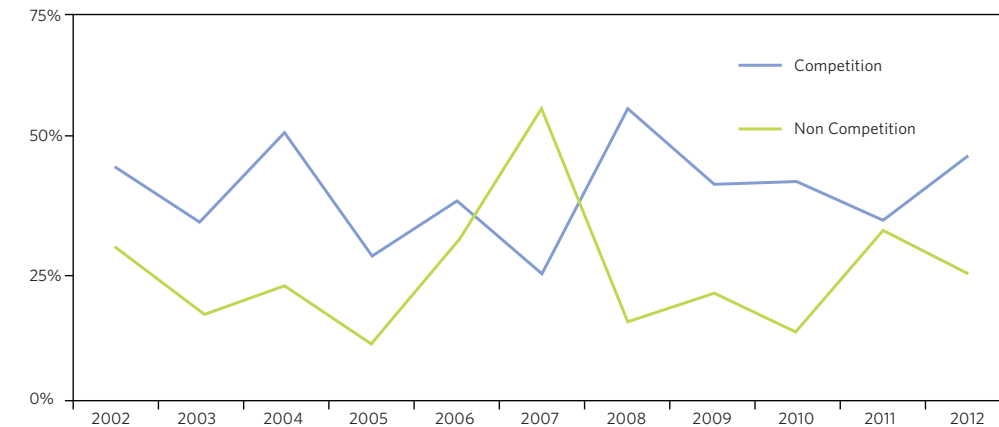
**DOCUMENTARY PRODUCERS**

The percentage of female documentary producers across 11 years was also examined. In competition films, 47.4% of producers or coproducers are female (range 37.2%–63%). Four years vary from the Festival norm for female producers—one above (2002) and three below (2003, 2005, and 2011). Noncompetition documentaries differ from competition documentaries when it comes to female producer participation. The industry norm for female producers in noncompetition documentaries is 34.7% (range 14.3%–54.2%), with five of the 11 years deviating from the overall percentage. A spike in the percentage of female producers is observed in 2007, only to see a steep drop in 2008. Despite these variations, **no sustained changes were observed over time among female producers within competitive or noncompetitive documentary films.**

**DOCUMENTARY ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS**

For competition films, the norm for female associate producers is 63.1% (range 45.5%–88.9%). Two years are above the industry norm (2003 and 2008) and three years are below (2006, 2009, and 2010). For noncompetition films, the industry norm for female associate producers was 53.3% (range 28.6%–83.3%) with four years below (2004, 2005, 2007, and 2010) this norm and five above (2002, 2006, 2008, 2009, and 2012). Even with this substantial variability, **there are no sustained changes over time.**

**Figure 2**  
Female Documentary Directors by Year within Festival Grouping



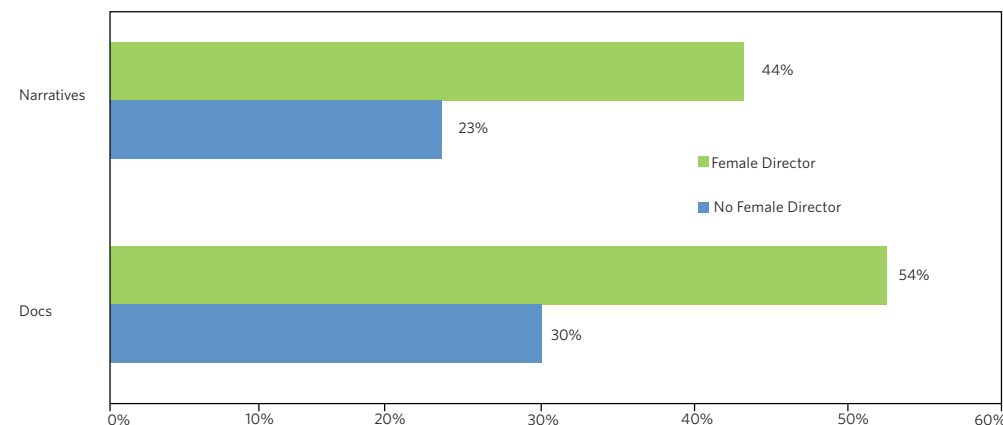
Taken together, at least two conclusions can be reached about the data taken over time. **Compared to Festival norms, no sustained (three or more years) increases or decreases were observed in the percentage of female directors or producers in narrative or documentary movies shown.** Rather, the percentage of female directors and producers seems to naturally increase and decrease from year to year. The contrast here is to the world of studio films, where year-to-year percentages of female directors in top-grossing box office films deviate very little.

Second, one type of disparity between narrative and documentary films is evidenced over time. Six years demonstrate that female documentary directors comprised 40–50% or more of directors in the competition films. Even the lowest percentage of documentary competition directors (25% in 2007) is still higher than the Festival norm for narrative competition films (22.2%). **These findings illuminate that, in some independent spaces, females are thriving as directors. As we discuss below, it may be the case that there are fewer barriers facing female directors in documentaries than in narratives.** The documentary findings illustrate what the world of narrative storytelling might look like for female directors and producers without the obstacles or biases that currently impede women’s progress behind the camera.

**WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES PROMOTE ON SET GENDER EQUALITY**

All of the above analyses allowed duplicate names per film to appear across production credits. For instance, a director and writer may have been the same individual and, thus, were counted twice in one film. This happens quite frequently in independent and studio fare. We decided to remove every duplicate name per movie to assess how many males and females—on average—work on set. For the 820 narrative and documentary films, the average number of males working in one of the five key gatekeeping positions (director, writer, producer, cinematographer, editor) was eight (range 0–29) whereas the average number of females was 3.5 (range 0–18). This indicates that females are populating independent film less than half as frequently as males.

**Figure 3**  
Percentage of Females On Set by Genre & Director Gender



Using the total number of unique males and females, we then calculated the mean number of women on set. Then we tested whether females are advocating for or hiring other females by partitioning the films into two groups: those with one or more female directors (26%, n=213) vs. those with no female directors (74%, n=607). **In both narrative and documentary, the results support this idea of “homophily” or group-based advocacy (see Figure 3)**<sup>18</sup>

**The percentage of females on set increases 21% in narratives and 24% in documentaries with females at the helm.** These findings suggest that many female directors populate their movies with roughly gender-balanced crews. Another possibility is that female producers are attaching female directors, writers, cinematographers, and/or editors to their properties. **Either way, the findings suggest that gender equality on set is more common when females fill key leadership positions.** This type of environment may also affect on-set experiences of emerging and/or seasoned content creators, as will be demonstrated later when we overview the results from the qualitative interviews.

**SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL SUBMISSIONS**

The number of films submitted to the Sundance Film Festival by male and female directors from 2009 to 2012 was assessed<sup>19</sup> A total of 7,567 feature-length U.S. films were submitted across these four years. Females comprise 20.7% of all the gender-identified at the helm (n=8,524).

**NARRATIVE SUBMISSIONS**

Given the findings earlier on Festival selections, we would expect that the rate of submissions for female narrative directors would be substantially lower than documentaries. This is exactly what the data reveal. **Between 2009 and 2012, women directors submitted a total of 13.1% of all narrative film submissions (n=605) and male directors submitted a total of 86.9% (n=4,002).** This calculates to 6.61 male directors to every 1 female director. We find remarkable stability in the percentage of films submitted yearly by females at the helm. The difference between the lowest to the highest point statistic is 1.2%. Table 7 provides the percentages of female directors programmed at the Sundance Film Festival from 2009 to 2012. Women directors mildly outperform their submission rates by 2.5% (low) to 9% (high).

Table 7  
Female Narrative Directors Submitted vs. Programmed Films by Year

YEAR	SUBMITTED	PROGRAMMED	DIFFERENCE
2009	13.6%	16.7%	+3.1%
2010	12.4%	19.6%	+7.2%
2011	13%	22%	+9%
2012	13.6%	16.1%	+2.5%

**DOCUMENTARY SUBMISSIONS**

Focusing on documentaries, a total of 29.6% of submitting directors were female (n=1,160). **Male documentary directors submitted 2.38 times more frequently than female documentary directors (see Table 8).** For females, the percentage of submitted documentaries decreases slightly across the four years of submission data (313 films in 2009, 276 films in 2012). Yet the percentage of female directors programmed increases (+8.6%) between 2009 and 2012.

Table 8  
Female Documentary Directors Submitted vs. Programmed Films by Year

YEAR	SUBMITTED	PROGRAMMED	DIFFERENCE
2009	31.6%	33.3%	+1.7%
2010	28.5%	30.6%	+2.1%
2011	29%	34.3%	+5.3%
2012	29.4%	41.9%	+12.5%

**In sum, the submission data reveals that women are far less likely than men to submit narrative feature films to the Festival.** However, females are submitting almost two times as many documentaries as they are narratives. It is safe to say that many females show an interest in directing, but their storytelling proclivities may be more genre specific. Tables 7 and 8 reveal that the percentage of female directed films programmed at the Festival is slightly higher than the percentage of female directed submissions. This suggests that the content females are submitting to the Festival may be of a slightly higher artistic caliber than the content their male counterparts are submitting. Or males may be more willing than females to submit work that is unfinished or in progress. This last issue may pertain to levels of confidence in filmmaking, which we examine in the qualitative portion of this report.

**FEMALE FILMMAKERS RECEIVING SUNDANCE INSTITUTE ARTIST SUPPORT (LABS, FELLOWSHIPS, FUNDING)**

Up to this point, we have been focusing on gender representation related to the Sundance Film Festival. Now, we turn our attention to projects receiving support from Sundance Institute’s artist development programs, which offer a view of projects from development through completion. The Sundance Institute defines support broadly and encompasses program (labs, conferences, summits) as well as financial (fellowships and grants) assistance as part of the Feature Film Program (FFP), Documentary Film Program (DFP), and Native and Indigenous Programs.

Sundance Institute offers artist development programs for narrative screenwriters, directors, and producers, and documentary directors and producers. Across these categories—and focusing specifically on labs, conferences or summits—the percentage of female artists supported from 2002 to 2012 is 43%. Looking specifically at the narrative artists, the female percentage is 39.9%; and the documentary artist female percentage is 48.1%. It is worth noting the gender distribution in some of the Labs is near parity. For instance, a full 44.2% (n=46) of all those at the helm attending the narrative Directors Lab were female between 2002 and 2012. From 2004 to 2012, 48.9% (n=46) of the fellows were female in the Documentary Edit and Story Lab. While again documentary artists come closer to parity than narrative, the percentages are significantly higher in both categories for this development and production support than for the Sundance Film Festival submissions, selections, or for films reaching the marketplace.<sup>20</sup>

With women faring significantly better on a percentage basis in terms of support during development and production, there is room for more research and analysis on pipeline once production is complete, including the rates of production, festival exhibition, and distribution of these female artists’ work. Where do the female filmmakers and their projects begin to lose ground and how does receiving support affect their chances? Our Sundance Film Festival statistical analysis offers us one valuable lens on the success of projects post-lab or after receiving financial assistance: considering by gender the percentage of all the movies selected and screened at the Sundance Film Festival between 2002 and 2012 that received program or financial assistance from Sundance Institute. By looking at these figures, we begin to illuminate whether Sundance Institute is a pipeline for female filmmakers and the visibility of their stories.

Across the 820 Sundance Film Festival movies from 2002-2012, a total of 14.9% (n=122, 59% narratives, 41% documentaries) received some form of artistic support (Lab, conference/ summit, fellowship, grant) via Sundance Institute. Of the 122 films, a total of 186 different filmmakers received support from Sundance Institute prior to having their film selected for the Festival. A full 39.2% of those supported were females (n=73) and 60.8% were males (n=113).

As noted earlier in this report, gender differences often emerge across storytelling platform (narratives, documentaries). So, we examined support males and females received within each of these genres. Among narratives selected for the Sundance Film Festival between 2002 and 2012, a total of 110 filmmakers benefitted from Sundance Institute support. Two-thirds of artists receiving program and/or financial support were male (67.3%, n=74) and one-third were female

(32.7%, n=36). Contextualizing this latter statistic is important. The percentage is over 10% higher than the percentage of female directors in the narrative Competition category (22.2%) between 2002 and 2012. Also, the percentage of females moving from support to Festival is more than twice as high as the percentage of female directors submitting a movie (13.1%) to the Festival between 2009 and 2012.

Turning to documentaries selected for the Sundance Film Festival, a total of 76 content creators received artistic support. Just over half of those receiving assistance were males (51.3%, n=39) and just under half were female (48.7%, n=37). Stated differently, a full 49% of documentary filmmakers supported were female artists. As a comparison, the percentage of females receiving assistance is almost 20% higher than the percentage of female directors submitting a documentary (29.6%) to the Festival between 2009 and 2012. The percentage is even higher than the percentage of female directors in the documentary Competition category (41.1%).

Overall, the findings are quite clear. **Receiving creative or financial support during development or production has played a crucial role in facilitating the promotion of female storytellers in the independent space.** This finding is true for female narrative and documentary filmmakers.

**QUALITATIVE STUDY**  
**BARRIERS**

As noted earlier, we conducted both in-depth and short interviews, as well as surveys with a total of 51 emerging and seasoned content creators as well as key industry gatekeepers.<sup>21</sup> Individuals answered several questions on barriers faced by female directors and producers.<sup>22</sup> Responses were scrutinized multiple times for frequently occurring themes and theoretically relevant information. In particular, we were interested in how individuals described barriers for directors and producers in narrative film, and how such descriptions might perpetuate gender imbalance behind the camera.<sup>23</sup> Results are presented in terms of trends across these 51 individuals. **Table 9 illuminates the response categories most often spontaneously cited as impediments by respondents in our sample.**

**Table 9**  
**Response Categories for Spontaneously Identified Barriers**

GENDERED FINANCE	43.1%
Male-Dominated Networks	39.2%
Stereotyping on Set	15.7%
Work & Family Balance	19.6%
Exclusionary Hiring Decisions	13.7%
Points of Resistance	29.4%

**GENDERED FINANCE**

The most often cited barrier is finance, or the process of allocating resources to filmmakers. Funding a film represents a challenge to any filmmaker, not only females. Across the sample, 37.2% of respondents indicated that they thought general finance barriers created difficulty for independent filmmakers. Participants recounted difficulty acquiring funds due to changing distribution agreements, economic recession, or lack of experience. In a highly competitive environment, we expected that participants would cite obtaining finance as a barrier.

Specific mentions of gendered finance (i.e., a female-specific financial barrier) emerged, however. Individuals had to directly compare males and females or make statements about men or women in relation to finance in order to be counted. Comments referenced descriptions of financiers, confidence in a filmmaker’s ability, material or subject matter of a film, amount of funding, access or knowledge about finance, and finance-specific confidence. **43.1% of those questioned said that they thought females faced a finance-related barrier.** Several trends emerged within this category. Here are a few examples:

*“Because there are so few women who control the means of financing films.” -Producer*

*“I think despite the strides women have made since the 1950s, there is still a feeling that women cannot be trusted with money. It is predominantly men who are in charge of (or in possession of) the money that is invested in films, and they are frequently more comfortable having men manage that money.” -Director/Producer*

*“The majority of films made in terms of content are men’s stories... the stories they (women) want to tell are women’s stories, and those don’t have the same commercial value, or whether they really do have the same commercial capacity or not, they’re [not] perceived to have the same commercial potential as stories driven by men.” -Producer*

Responses indicated that **those who hold the purse strings are overwhelmingly male.** In other business domains (e.g., technology) female investors are also typically outnumbered by males.<sup>24</sup> Three studies provide preliminary evidence that female investors may not be more likely to invest in a female-owned business than a male-owned business.<sup>25</sup> Multiple respondents also reported that the subject matter or sensibility of female-directed films (and to some extent, female-produced films) is not perceived to be commercially viable. Our own research with studio films suggests that the gender composition of the cast plays less of a role in a film’s financial success than production budgets and other exhibition factors (i.e., story strength, distribution density).<sup>26</sup> Other evidence indicates that female filmmakers’ production budgets are typically lower than male filmmakers’ budgets.<sup>27</sup> This impediment is double-barreled: if females lack access to financiers and receive less funding for their projects, filmmakers face a disadvantage before they even begin production.

**Finally, female directors and producers are perceived to lack confidence and are assumed to be less trustworthy with financial resources.** Nine participants who were surveyed or interviewed indicated that female content creators bear some responsibility for convincing male financiers



of their ability to helm a project or for lack of access to funding. Some evidence exists that a solo female in a group of men performs worse on a traditionally masculine task than a female in a same-gender group.<sup>28</sup> At least one study suggests that this may occur in non-gender stereotyped domains as well.<sup>29</sup> Women's confidence may be dependent on the situation,<sup>30</sup> and thus judgments made about female confidence may be misleading. **When females must present financial information to male funders, the combination of the task and the situation may negatively impact their levels of confidence, and hence, their likelihood of receiving funding.**

#### MALE-DOMINATED NETWORKS

The second major barrier reported was that film is still perceived to be a male-dominated industry. This category refers to comments regarding the composition of industry-specific groups, contingencies, or situations. It also included comments about relationships, communities, or support provided by collections of individuals. Of those queried, 39.2% of respondents indicated that networks posed a barrier to female content creators. Examples of these statements are below:

*"I think that the film industry is a very male-dominated, commerce-driven industry, and there are not a lot of females working in the top of the corporate structure. If you don't have that, I think that...those echelons tend to be dominated more by male culture than female culture."* -Producer

*"I think in that way for both directors and producers there is still a bit of a boys club, for lack of a better term. I think that socially they're helped by the fact that they can all go off and play golf and hang out and have stronger social relationships outside of the business, and I think sometimes that helps men."* -Executive

The configuration of networks in narrative film is heavily male, and individuals in our sample framed it as a "boys club." Researchers describe this propensity for people to develop relationships with similar others as homophily.<sup>31</sup> Networking and building relationships are viewed as an important component of career advancement.<sup>32</sup> Given that males are already similar on a salient dimension, they may have an advantage over females in the strength and number of professional contacts in their network. One researcher suggests and supports the idea that women form more sex-diverse networks than men in professional settings in order to obtain instrumental resources (i.e., advice).<sup>33</sup> These findings have implications for females in the film industry. A lack of key connections might limit a woman's job prospects and income, given the reliance on network-based resources and word-of-mouth hiring practices. For example, on average, male directors of narrative independent films work on sets where the gender divide is heavily weighted (77%) male. In contrast, when a female is at the helm of a narrative project, our findings reveal that up to 44% of key above-the-line jobs are awarded to women.

#### ON-SET STEREOTYPING

The third arena in which respondents spontaneously indicated a barrier was production. In our scheme, production activities ranged from anything that occurred from the time a film was financed to when it was delivered. **This incorporated social norms and stereotypes about women and filmmaking, the token status of females on set, objectification of women, the composition of**

**crews, environmental factors, decreased technical resources or knowledge, and stereotype threat triggers.** Production was named by 15.7% of our respondents as an arena in which women are disadvantaged. Responses included:

*"I feel like the older actors that I've dealt with, male actors, have a harder time taking direction or then start to very subtly direct me back. One in particular this past summer, he was a great actor and a great guy, and I really liked him, but he started taking over in very subtle ways and telling the other actress to maybe try it this way, and I was like, 'no, let me say that to her.'"* -Director

*"I would assume that there's more bias against female narrative directors in the sense that female narrative directors have to run sets even on low-budget films that have fairly large crews, right? So they have to be seen as the leaders of large crews of people, many of whom are working-class middle-aged guys who drive trucks and set lights and things like that. And I would bet that there's a kind of built-in bias against prospective female directors starting out that people don't project them into that position as easily as they project younger males."* -Executive

A woman's confidence and ability to command a group of people to achieve her vision was repeatedly questioned. Broad research on the concept of stereotype threat exists in academic literature, which predicts lowered task performance for members of a stereotyped group in situations in which negative stereotypes are activated.<sup>34</sup> For women, subtle or explicit cues, including undertaking a task in the presence of males,<sup>35</sup> can have a detrimental effect on masculine-typed task execution, such as a math test.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, objectification can contribute to anxiety and lower performance.<sup>37</sup> The role of a director, a traditionally male occupation, and the environment on set may elicit a similar psychological effect for females.

As directors and producers, females may be evaluated poorly if they violate stereotypes about their gender or stereotypes about the role they play in production, a double-bind described by role congruity theory.<sup>38</sup> Consistent with this explanation, individuals in our sample indicated that women are naturally more collaborative, nurturing, or helpful, and gravitate to those roles. When women demonstrate aptitude as assistants, it may be difficult for them to move out of stereotyped positions into those with more authority in film production. This is evidenced by our earlier finding that females in independent film are more prevalent in producer roles with lower clout, such as associate or other categories.

#### WORK/LIFE BALANCE

The fourth category mentioned most often among respondents was balancing work and family life. **This group of responses referred specifically to the role of children, relational partners, or other family considerations in success or pursuit of a filmmaking career. Although this may be perceived as the primary struggle for female filmmakers, our participants reported barriers in finance and male dominated networks more often than the challenge of balancing work and family life.** The struggle for work/family balance was cited by 19.6% of the sample as an obstruction that women face in independent film. Individuals cited the work environment and demands of directing and producing as being incompatible with those of parenthood, specifically because of traditional gender roles. One example is the following:

“There are a lot of women who find self-esteem from parenting, they don’t need to join the workforce, and if they are going to join the workforce, they don’t need to join it in a way that demands so much time and energy... I think for women to be successful in this business they have to be willing to give up identifying as a great mom.” **-Director**

**While the choice to privilege caregiving over career may explain some discrepancies in female employment, it is an insufficient rationalization to use as a reason for the steep drop-off for women in independent narrative and studio films.** Framing female unemployment after motherhood as a choice to ‘opt out,’ neglects the fact that this choice is made within a context of workplace practices which do not support career and family balance.<sup>39</sup> Researchers describe these workplace tensions such as “the amount, pace, and inflexibility of work,” an organizational culture which assigns women to part-time work but full-time duties, and deteriorating status and influence as a function of motherhood.<sup>40</sup> In the realm of narrative filmmaking, such practices may include inflexibility in work or production schedules, travel requirements, or budgets that do not extend to cover child care.

#### PIPELINE / EXCLUSIONARY HIRING PRACTICES

The *process of hiring directors* outside of the independent sphere was mentioned as the fifth major barrier. To be included as data in this section, individuals had to spontaneously mention processes related to hiring a female for a film or project that was studio-supported or had a budget higher than most independent films (i.e., budgets of multiple millions of dollars). 13.7% of respondents indicated that female directors face a hurdle when they attempt to move into the studio world.

“Generally what happens when you look to [hire] somebody is the man will have more experience. So unless you’re making a very conscious effort for why you want to hire a female, if you looked to résumés and one person had done 20 movies and one person had done 10 movies, and you’re looking for experience, then you might choose the male.” **-Producer**

Two primary and related factors seem to determine whether female directors are seen as viable candidates for studio directing positions. First, women must be perceived to have appropriate experience directing films at the studio or bigger budget level. Second, a few responses indicated that there is a limited range of genres that are perceived to be female-friendly. This latter theorizing is consistent with the studio findings presented above. Only 54 female directors are associated with the 1,100 top box-office performers from 2002 to 2012. Of those, nearly two thirds (64.8%) of the movies helmed were some form of drama, comedy, or romance. **Female directors face a real restriction in the range of properties they are hired to helm, and these story types do not give them the experience they need to later attach to larger budget films.**

All the barriers explored above relate to different aspects of filmmaking, and all can be framed as decisions or issues that arise as an individual film is made, rather than being specific to the gender of directors or producers.

#### INDUSTRY CULTURE AND POINTS OF RESISTANCE

**The sixth most often cited spontaneous barrier was points of resistance, a category that refers to beliefs or perceptions about gender inequality held by industry members.** This barrier is more subtle, but no less problematic, than the five described above. In our interviews and surveys, 29.4% of participants made statements that fell into one of the following three categories. 66.7% of individuals within the points of resistance category stated that the numbers we presented them with seemed inaccurate. 40% within the points of resistance category signaled that problems were not as severe as in the past or would not persist for women in the film industry. A further 33.3% indicated that gender inequity was not more severe in the film industry than in other industries.<sup>41</sup>

“I would imagine that percentage was lower a decade ago or 20 years ago. So, I think the good news is it’s probably—it’s probably increasing.” **-Executive**

Individuals who judge the state of gender equity based on token females may incorrectly perceive that hiring practices for females are fair.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, individuals who compare the current state of gender equality with the past are more likely to believe that women face less inequality in the present than those who draw comparisons between women and men.<sup>43</sup> Both of these biases are likely to affect estimates of or action around the number of female directors and producers in independent film.

Moving away from impediments related to gender, female content creators are not the only underrepresented group in filmmaking. We refer to this final barrier as complicating factors, as 23.5% of participants referenced two additional obstacles that confront filmmakers. 17.6% of the individuals we spoke to indicated that racial and ethnic minority content creators face similar barriers. **Race was mentioned as “a complicating factor,” as issues due to gender and ethnic background were not easily disentangled.** Another 11.8% extended this statement to those directors and producers who do not come from wealthy or upper-class backgrounds. **Individuals indicated that socio-economic status not only made it feasible to live on meager film incomes, but it serves as an entrée in to the networks of financiers and decision-makers.**

#### THE DOCUMENTARY MODEL

On a more positive note, a world without these barriers is not unimaginable. **The community that exists in documentary filmmaking already demonstrates how the issues facing women in the narrative realm could be addressed.** Not all films are created equally—there are important differences in financing and stereotyping by storytelling genre. These are described below.

As in the narrative world, funding for documentaries is difficult to find. However, documentary financing was cited by multiple (36.4% within finance category) individuals as being more “egalitarian” or “democratized” and therefore more able to provide funding to female-helmed films. Here is one example:

*“In documentary there is a group of funders who are very focused on supporting women and minorities, and I don’t think there is an equivalent group of funders in the feature world who care about that issue in particular.” –Producer*

Many documentary funders are perceived to have a mandate or charge that allows them to support diverse stories and storytellers—including females. Women can also approach documentary funders—who are more often females, according to our respondents—in a situational context that may maximize their confidence. When females are tested in the presence of male and female peers or a completely same-sex group, they perform better than when they are the only female in a group.<sup>44</sup> Writing a grant or developing a reel and submitting it for review may reduce the likelihood that women will experience the confidence traps involved with financiers in the narrative world.

*“I do think in documentaries that there are, relative to other fields, at least in the public broadcasting world, there are more women that have leadership roles.” –Executive*

Respondents in our sample also indicated that the point of entry for documentary filmmaking—lower technical needs, fewer crew members, and less structured production hours—made it easier for women to excel.

*“I think part of the directing is that it’s an easier medium to gain access to with smaller crews—if you’re fighting to gain control it’s easier to do it over a doc crew than a huge narrative. I feel like a doc director at times is closer to a producer than a narrative director.” –Director/Producer*

Stereotypes of females may be less salient on a documentary crew, particularly if there are more women involved. In one study, when females were primed with a stereotype and undertook a leadership task in an all-female group, they had lower self-reported anxiety than women who received the stereotype priming in a mixed-sex group.<sup>45</sup> According to our participants, females are abundant and visible in the documentary world. Participants in our study named women in decision-making roles at networks, production companies, and granting agencies who sought to support female documentary filmmakers and their work. **They also discussed the apprenticeship model that exists in documentary and enables women to build their skills and contacts before working alone. The larger percentage of women in decision-making roles and in production as part of the documentary community may be more welcoming to female directors and producers.**

Other respondents asserted that women were naturally more drawn to the medium of documentary filmmaking and the stories themselves. In terms of other impediments faced by narrative filmmakers, documentaries may be more accessible as well. **Flexible production schedules over longer periods of time make it more possible to structure a filmmaking career around the demands of family life.** The female-friendly production environment in the documentary domain, or experiences during film school, may influence choices women make early in their careers, more than innate gender differences.

While certain disadvantages do persist in documentary film—namely, lower production costs resulting in lower salaries—women have achieved a degree of parity in documentary films. For example, women comprised over 40% of documentary directors in Competition films at the Sundance Film Festival in six of the last eleven years. Democratized fundraising processes, more females in positions of influence, smaller crews with more women in technical roles, and flexible production schedules all exist for female documentarians. This demonstrates that not only do women *want* to make films, but when conditions are facilitative rather than inhibitive, they *do* make films.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO CREATE CHANGE IN INDEPENDENT FILM

In addition to interviewing and surveying content creators and executive/high level talent about barriers facing females in the film industry, we asked about **how to create change around this issue**. Across 51 individuals, we received a few<sup>46</sup> potential solutions to address the obstacles female filmmakers must overcome to be successful. In this section, we review the most frequently stated ideas that emerged from individuals working within the film industry.

### MENTORSHIP

The benefits and values of **mentorship and encouragement** were mentioned by 36.7% of our sample. Influential industry members—particularly successful women—who commit to providing advice and encouragement to younger females are viewed as a primary way to bolster women’s industry ambitions and longevity. A meta-analysis of more than 40 studies reveals that mentorship is related to important career outcomes, such as compensation, promotion, and career satisfaction.<sup>47</sup> Mentors typically provide two functions: career-enhancement and/or psychosocial support.<sup>48</sup> Career mentoring has a stronger association with compensation and promotions than psychosocial mentoring, though both types have a significant influence on an individual’s career.<sup>49</sup>

However, two studies in more hierarchical organizations reveal that a male mentor or a history of male mentorship is associated with higher levels of compensation, and one of these investigations reveals that for women, female mentors are associated with socio-emotional support.<sup>50</sup> High-profile business women have stated that the most important function mentors or career sponsors can serve is to provide visibility for their protégés in key contexts.<sup>51</sup>

Mentors should offer more than mere social support to their protégés. For example, by **increasing the visibility of their female mentee in key industry networks**, mentors can reduce the negative impact of male-dominated cliques or create new pathways to financiers. Female protégés should also be socialized to the positive impact of mentors, and the value of having male mentors as well as supportive female contacts within the industry.

### FINANCIAL ACCESS

Providing female filmmakers with *alternative sources of financing* was cited by 26.5% of our sample as a way to create change. Whether via the provision of new grants, tax incentives, or private equity, participants mentioned that women in particular can do more to support fledgling female directors and producers, as well as those who have experience. Looking to the documentary funding model may be especially appropriate in this domain. Although the funding thresholds for documentary films are lower, **a more democratized process allows female filmmakers to request resources at different stages of their projects.**

Funders should assist female directors with an eye not only to the artistic potential of their projects, but to helping movies attain commercial success (e.g. return on investment as appropriate to the context of their budget and genre) as well. Given the high hurdles females must surmount to retain employment at the studio level, helping women develop, make, and promote films that cross stereotypical genre lines may increase their visibility in the industry. **Constructive feedback on pitching, as well as providing education on financial models to early career filmmakers was also mentioned as a potential opportunity.**

### RAISING AWARENESS

Finally, 20.4% of participants indicated that *raising awareness* by educating industry members and sensitizing them to this issue would yield change. Yet, earlier in our interviews, we found resistance to the idea that gender representation behind the camera was a key industry issue. A set of studies found that when comparisons are made between past and current levels of female participation, misperceptions of equality are more likely to occur.<sup>52</sup> The challenge for industry leaders concerned with this issue is twofold. **The problem of female participation in independent and studio film must be made more salient and linked to both profitable and prosocial outcomes. Additionally, when the problem is publicized, direct comparisons must be made to current levels of male participation in narrative filmmaking to foster change in this arena.**

Beyond awareness, when industry leaders and employers are sensitized to this issue, the approach must be solution-oriented. Although we received quite a few suggestions, some people said they did not know or were uncertain how to create opportunities for female filmmakers. Forging an environment open to gender parity may begin by providing industry leaders with concrete action steps that encourage a solution-oriented perspective.

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to assess how females are faring in independent film. We examined the gender distribution of 11,197 content creators (directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, and editors) across 820-programmed films at Sundance Film Festival between 2002 and 2012. We also undertook a qualitative study to determine the obstacles and opportunities facing female filmmakers in the U.S. independent film industry. Further, we compared rates of participation in independent film with popular studio fare over the last eleven years. From the data we gathered as part of this ambitious endeavor, we have gleaned a few general findings.

Narrative and documentary film are worlds apart with regard to rates of female participation and impediments to success. Both the quantitative data presented at the front of the report and the qualitative data at the end reveal genre-based differences for women. The arena in which women are the most vulnerable to external pressure is narrative filmmaking. A variety of reasons are presented above, but particularly as they work with larger budgets, the pipeline between independent film and the studio world narrows, allowing few females to push through. As a comparison, the documentary sphere has a healthy number of females who participate at Sundance and who face fewer inequitable practices during their careers. This space offers a compelling contrast and an idea of what might be possible for women in a world with fewer barriers.

We asked industry professionals how they would create opportunities for women, and found few innovative ideas. Most of the options provided above facilitate movement of *individual* female content creators—most likely, female producers—into more established roles. They do little, though, to challenge systemic issues of inequality that may still exist in the film industry. Assisting women as they navigate these obstacles and sensitizing decision-makers to the very real injustices females face should be a priority for concerned groups in the future.

Several priorities are clear. **The career sustainability of female filmmakers—both narrative and documentary storytellers—must be enhanced by examining hiring and financing practices.** Issues of work and family balance, which serve as one method of minimizing the impact of imbalanced production environments and biases in financial investing, need to be addressed. **Finally, valuing the artistic merit of female-created stories and recognizing their commercial appeal is crucial for future change.**

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- <sup>6</sup>Lauzen, M.M. (2012). Independent women: Behind-the-scenes representation on festival films. *Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University*.
- <sup>7</sup>Using the 2002-2012 Sundance Film Festival Programs, we assessed every feature film (n=825) for content creator biological sex. Several types of movies were excluded from analysis: 1) any film in the "World" categories, 2) any short film (49 minutes or less), and movies that did not originate in whole or part domestically (U.S.). Additionally, 5 non-narrative and non-documentary films were excluded from analysis (i.e., *A Darkness Swallowed*, *Dysfunktional Family*, *Silt/Field Studies #3*, *Hit REcord at the Movies*, *Frontier 6*).
- To assess biological sex of content creators, we looked up each listed movie in the SFF program on IMDb.Pro between September 1–14<sup>th</sup>, 2012. A page was generated for each film, and all individuals in the five content creator categories (director, writer, producer, cinematographer, editor) were listed. Then, all of the individuals listed per movie in the SFF program were checked against the IMDb.Pro list, and any missing or additional names/titles were added. Each individual was then evaluated for biological sex using IMDb.Pro, *New York Times*, or other sources (i.e., online images, news articles, film websites). Every name was evaluated by one research assistant and confirmed by a second. In cases where disagreements emerged, one of the study authors adjudicated.

In some cases, the content creators' biological sex was impossible to ascertain ( $n=119$ ) across the 11-year sample. We turned to babynames.com to assess biological sex of these individuals. All but nine names could be categorized (i.e., the names were unisex or listed by initials). Some groups/companies/organizations were credited for various positions across the films. When two or more individuals were credited under a group name (e.g., *Radio Silence*, *Tectonic Theatre*) for directing or writing, each individual in the group received credit for his/her involvement on the film.

Prior to analyses, duplicates within content creator title were removed save producers. For producers, we allowed names to repeat across levels (executive producer, producer/co, associate, other) but not within. After all judgments were completed and applicable duplicates removed, a final pass through the data file was made looking at coding decisions involving gender-neutral names (i.e., Chris, Dana, Kerry), as well as year, storytelling genre (narrative, documentary, can't tell), and Festival category (Drama, Doc, Premiere, Niche).

<sup>8</sup> Lauzen, M. (2012). *Independent women: Behind-the-scenes representation on festival films*. Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film. San Diego, CA.

<sup>9</sup> A chi-square analysis revealed a significant relationship between genre (narrative, documentary) and content creator sex (male, female):  $X^2(1, 11,197) = 224.78, p < .05, \Phi = .14$ .

<sup>10</sup> Chi-square analyses were conducted on the biological sex (male, female) of content creators within *story type* (narrative, documentary) for the five key artistic positions. All five analyses were significant: directors,  $X^2(1, 968) = 39.20, p < .05, \Phi = .20$ ; writers,  $X^2(1, 1,111) = 15.70, p < .05, \Phi = .12$ ; producers,  $X^2(1, 6,949) = 176.75, p < .05, \Phi = .16$ ; cinematographers,  $X^2(1, 1,038) = 22.86, p < .05, \Phi = .15$ ; editors,  $X^2(1, 1,131) = 25.80, p < .05, \Phi = .15$ .

<sup>11</sup> Originally, there were over 6,900 producers with more than 35 different types of credits listed on IMDb.Pro across the sample of films. Based on discussions with Sundance Institute, we sorted the producers into a six level variable (i.e., executive/co-executive producer, producer/consulting producer, associate producer, co-producer, line/supervising/field, other). This scheme was further refined into four global categories: (1) executive producers/co ex producers; (2) producers/co producers/consulting producers; (3) associate producers/co associate producers/additional associate producers; and (4) other (i.e., field, line, supervising, post, coordinating, stage, etc).

Producers were allowed to duplicate across these four categories but not within. For instance, an individual receiving an executive producing credit and a co producing credit would be counted twice in this analysis. Someone receiving "producing" and "co producing" credits would only be counted once, given that these two labels are both within the same category.

<sup>12</sup> For narrative films, the chi square for biological sex by producer type was significant,  $X^2(3, 4,881) = 129.22, p < .05, V^* = .16$ . The same analysis was significant for documentary films,  $X^2(3, 2,066) = 94.97, p < .05, V^* = .21$ .

<sup>13</sup> Two analyses were significant for biological sex by narrative festival grouping (competition, premieres, niche): *director sex*,  $X^2(2, 585) = 6.90, p < .05, V^* = .11$ ; *producer sex*,  $X^2(2, 4,882) = 8.45, p < .05, V^* = .04$ . A chi square for writer sex by festival category was marginally significant,  $X^2(2, 867) = 5.49, p > .05, V^* = .08$ .

<sup>14</sup> Analyses were conducted within narrative festival grouping looking at the relationship between biological sex and producing credit (executive, co/producer, associate producer, other). Significant effects were found for competition films  $X^2(3, 1,673) = 54.10, p < .05, V^* = .18$ ; premieres  $X^2(3, 1,490) = 45.42, p < .05, V^* = .18$ ; and niche films  $X^2(3, 1,718) = 37.96, p < .05, V^* = .15$ .

<sup>15</sup> For documentaries, significant relationships emerged between Festival grouping (Competition, Premiere, Niche) and *director sex*  $X^2(2, 383) = 12.29, p < .05, V^* = .18$ ; *writer sex*  $X^2(2, 244) = 9.10, p < .05, V^* = .19$ ; *producer sex*  $X^2(2, 2,067) = 35.38, p < .05, V^* = .13$ ; *cinematographer sex*  $X^2(2, 478) = 6.52, p < .05, V^* = .12$ ; and *editor sex*  $X^2(2, 464) = 10.34, p < .05, V^* = .15$ .

<sup>16</sup> Similar to narratives, the relationship between biological sex and different producing credits was assessed. Significant associations were found across *Competition documentaries*,  $X^2(3, 1,255) = 56.74, p < .05, V^* = .21$ ; *Premieres*  $X^2(3, 236) = 19.14, p < .05, V^* = .28$ ; and *Niche documentaries*  $X^2(3, 575) = 19.10, p < .05, V^* = .18$ .

<sup>17</sup> The top 100 box office performers from 2002 to 2012 were retrieved from Box Office Mojo. The directors were evaluated for biological sex, after building grids of the content creators for each of the films from IMDb.Pro. A total of 1,220 directors were assessed for biological sex (see Footnote 1 for approach). The top 100 for 2012 was pulled on January 6th, 2013. As such, some films were still playing in theatres and thus the 2012 findings should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>18</sup> We calculated t-tests on the percentage of females in films by *director biological sex* (female helmer vs. no female helmer). The analysis was significant for narratives ( $t = -12.74, df = 532, p < .01$ ) and documentaries ( $t = -10.46, df = 284, p < .01$ ).

<sup>19</sup> We received a list from Sundance Institute of all the feature length submissions for four years of Festival programming (2009-2012). There were a total of 7,567 films submitted. Each movie was looked up to assess whether the film featured more than one director. Over eight hundred ( $n=892$ ) films had more than one director, which translated to an additional 1,056 directors. Of all 7,567 submissions, 157 films and their directors could not be confirmed. In these instances, we used the information provided with the submission data (i.e., director name, sex). However, some submitters only listed the film title and failed to enter director information. No information could be located online for 65 films and their directors. Also, an additional 20 submitted documentaries could be found online but were listed as not having a director. Together, these 85 films had to be excluded from analysis. In addition, a total of 18 films were misclassified when submitted. They were originally narratives but our online search revealed that they were in fact documentaries.

8,355 individuals were assessed for gender in the Festival submission data. We were not able to

confirm the gender of an additional 183 directors. Using babynames.com, we were able to assign “male” or “female” based on 169 content creators’ first names. In total, 8,524 (8,355+169) directors were evaluated for biological sex. Outside of that number, a total of 14 names are still “can’t tell” and thus excluded from analysis.

<sup>20</sup> For all lab and conference/summit data analyses, all duplicate names were not included.

<sup>21</sup> Two groups were interviewed: emerging to mid-level female filmmakers and executives/high-level talent in the independent film community and studio-based positions. We also surveyed female directors and producers who were part of last year’s Sundance Institute class (i.e., screened a film at the Festival, participated in a Lab, received funding). Individuals were queried in the fall of 2012 (Sept. to Nov.).

These individuals represented several facets of the industry, including directors, producers, director/producers, executives, or others. Forty-six participants were female (90.2%), and five were male. The average age was 42.94 years, among those who provided it. Four individuals did not provide their age, and thus are not included in the total. Individuals surveyed online indicated their age within a range, so as to ensure anonymity. Age ranges provided were: 25-39 years ( $n=5$ ); and 40-54 ( $n=5$ ). Two individuals did not provide their age.

Two groups identified their industry experience as emergent (0-2 feature films with the second film not yet released;  $n=6$ ), mid-career (more than two released/completed films with a third in development;  $n=9$ ), or established (four or more released/completed films;  $n=14$ ). Executives/high-level talent provided the number of years they had worked in the film industry. On average, this latter group had 23.73 years of experience.

<sup>22</sup> Executives and high level talent answered four questions about the lack of female content creators, and three of those questions were also posed to women who participated in an anonymous survey. Questions were adapted from Sinclair, A., Pollard, E., & Wolfe, H. (2006). *Scoping study into the lack of women screenwriters in the UK: A report presented to the UK film council*. Brighton, England. Additionally, executives and high-level talent were presented with data from a study of independent film (i.e., Lauzen, M. (2009). *Independent women: Behind-the-scenes representation on festival films*. Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film. San Diego, CA).

The questions answered were: 1. *Why do you think there are so few female directors of independent films?* 2. *Why do you think there are so few female producers of independent films?* 3. *Why are there more females in documentary filmmaking than narrative filmmaking?* 4. *Although there are more female documentary filmmakers, women still haven’t achieved equality with men in this domain. Why do you think this is?* Individuals completing the online survey did not answer the fourth question.

Emerging to mid-career female content creators were asked specifically: 1. *What barriers have you faced as a director/producer in independent film?* 2. *Are these problems due to the fact that you*

*are a woman or do they affect male directors/producers?* Twenty-nine emerging to established content creators were asked the first question. Seventeen emerging to established content creators were asked both questions.

All responses were aggregated and analyzed by two of the study authors. Coding of qualitative interviews focused on several theoretically relevant elements that could occur at multiple stages of film financing, development, and/or production. In this section, the unit of analysis is an individual’s response to a single question. Thus, answers range in length by question and by respondent, and may fit into multiple categories. Five major categories were evaluated at two levels (i.e., macro vs. micro), and seven categories evaluated at a single level. Several types of comments could be made, and all were considered legitimate, including assertions, speculation, perceptions, personal experience, and recounting of other’s experiences.

For the first five categories, to be coded as present, individuals were required to explicitly mention gender in their responses. That is, indicating that a barrier existed was not enough—only individual responses that drew a comparison between males and females or were specifically about one gender versus all people were included.

Additionally, responses for these categories were coded with regard to how gender was discussed. A number of dimensions were considered, including but not limited to, abilities, attributes, or prevalence. Responses were coded as *Male* when respondents discussed differences along a dimension related to men. Those responses could be *positive* or *negative* (i.e., assert that males have an advantage over females; or that males are at a disadvantage relative to females along some dimension). Responses could also be coded as *Female* when respondents discussed difference on a dimension in relation to women. Similarly, responses were *positive* or *negative* (i.e., assert that females have an advantage over males or that females are at a disadvantage relative to males along some dimension). *Neutral* responses asserted that males and females do not differ along a dimension, or that differences between genders do not favor either males or females.

<sup>23</sup> Language framed in regard to male advantage, for example, may indicate that men outperform or outnumber women. Comments worded which stress female disadvantage subtly or overtly blame females for their perceived lack of a particular trait or ability. We wanted to assess whether responses were framed in a way that empowered or impeded women.

<sup>24</sup> Becker-Blease, J.R. & Sohl, J.E. (2010). The effect of gender diversity on angel group investment. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 35(4), 709-733 (See p. 718). Nelson, T., Maxfield, S., & Kolb, D. (2009). Women entrepreneurs and venture capital: Managing the shadow negotiation. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 1(1), 57-76 (See p. 58-59).

<sup>25</sup> Becker-Blease, J.R. & Sohl, J.E. (2007). Do women-owned businesses have equal access to angel capital? *Journal of Business Venturing*, 22, 503-521. Across five years investigated, the researchers found that funding was awarded in only three years by angel investment groups to businesses of similar gender composition (i.e., angel portals with a high proportion of males

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to male-owned businesses; angel portals with a high proportion of females to female-owned businesses) (See p. 517). Becker-Blease, J.R. & Sohl, J.E. (2010). The researchers' results did not support the theorizing that homophily is contributing to angel investors' decisions to fund male-owned and female-owned businesses (See p. 721). Harrison, R.T. & Mason, C.M. (2007, May). Does gender matter? Women business angels and the supply of entrepreneurial finance. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 445-472. See p. 457. This study indicated that female angel investors in the UK were only "marginally more likely" to support a female-owned business than male angel investors (See p. 462). Taken together, these studies suggest that female-owned businesses may not have an advantage relative to male-owned businesses in receiving funding from female investors.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, S.L., Weber, R., & Choueiti, M. (2010, August). *Female characters and financial performance: An analysis of 100 top-grossing films at the box office and dvd sales*. Paper presented at a poster session at the annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Denver, CO (See p. 27-28).

<sup>27</sup> Cerridwen, A., & Simonton, D.K. (2009). Sex doesn't sell - nor impress! Content, box office, critics, and awards in mainstream cinema. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*. 3, 200-210 (See p. 208).

<sup>28</sup> Sekaquaptewa, D. & Thompson, M. (2003). Solo status, stereotype threat, and performance expectancies: Their effects on women's performance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 39, 68-74. When women took an oral math exam in a public setting, they performed better when they believed there were other females in the group being tested as opposed to being a solo female (See p. 71-72). Inzlicht, M. & Ben-Zeev, T. (2000). A threatening intellectual environment: Why females are susceptible to experiencing problem-solving deficits in the presence of males. *Psychological Science* 11(5) 365-371. Women who took a math test in a group with two male peers performed worse on the diagnostic than those women in a group with a male and a female peer. In turn, the latter group performed worse on the math test than women in a same-sex group (See p. 368). In line with these findings, Kanter's (1977) work on tokenism illuminates other ways in which the gender composition of a group can impact females experiencing solo status or what Kanter refers to as "skewed" group membership. For a review, see Kanter, R. M. (1977) *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books (See p. 208-209).

<sup>29</sup> Thompson, M. & Sekaquaptewa, D. (2002). When being different is detrimental: Solo status and the performance of women and related minorities. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 2(1), 182-203. Evaluating test performance in a non-stereotyped domain, the researchers found that "when participants learned the information as a nonsolo but were tested as solos, women performed more poorly than men" (See p. 187).

<sup>30</sup> Endres, M.L., Chowdhury, S.K., & Alam, I. (2008). Gender effects on bias in complex financial decisions. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 20(2), 238-254 (See p. 245). Lenney, E. (1977). Women's self-confidence in achievement settings. *Psychological Bulletin*, 84(1), 1-13 (See p. 10).

<sup>31</sup> Becker-Blease, J.R. & Sohl, J.E. (2007) (See p. 508).

<sup>32</sup> Lyness, K.S. & Thompson, D.E. (2000). Climbing the corporate ladder: Do male and female executives follow the same route? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(1), 86-101 (See p. 95). Forret, M.L., & Dougherty, T.W. (2004). Networking behaviors and career outcomes: Differences for men and women? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(3), 419-437 (See p. 428-429).

<sup>33</sup> Ibarra, H. (1992). Homophily and differential returns: Sex differences in network structure and access in an advertising firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37(3) 422-447 (See p. 434-435). Ibarra, H. (1993). Personal networks of women and minorities in management: A conceptual framework. *The Academy of Management Review*, 18(1), 56-87 (See p. 67-68).

<sup>34</sup> Nguyen, H.D., & Ryan, A.M. (2008). Does stereotype threat affect test performance of minorities and women? A meta-analysis of experimental evidence. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(6), 1314-1334 (See p. 1314-1315). Spencer, S.J., Steele, C.M., & Quinn, D.M. (1999). Stereotype threat and women's math performance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 35, 4-28 (See p. 5).

<sup>35</sup> Sekaquaptewa, D. & Thompson, M. (2003) (See p. 71-72). Inzlicht, M. & Ben-Zeev, T. (2000) (See p. 368).

<sup>36</sup> Nguyen, H.D., & Ryan, A.M. (2008) (See p. 1325). Spencer, S.J., Steele, C.M., & Quinn, D.M. (1999) (See p. 12 and 16).

<sup>37</sup> Frederickson, B.L., & Roberts, T. (1997). Objectification Theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21,173-206 (See p. 182). Fredrickson, B.L., Roberts, T., Noll, S.M., Quinn, D.M., & Twenge, J.M. (1998). That swimsuit becomes you: Sex differences in self-objectification, restrained eating, and math performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(1) 269-284 (See p. 279). Quinn, D.M., Kallen, R.W., Twenge, J.M., & Fredrickson, B.L. (2006). The disruptive effect of self-objectification on performance. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 30, 59-64 (See p. 62).

<sup>38</sup> Eagly, A.H. & Karau, S.J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573-598 (See p. 586).

<sup>39</sup> Williams, J.C. (2007). The opt-out revolution revisited. *The American Prospect*, 18(3), A12-A15 (See p. A12). Williams, J.C. & Cohen Cooper, H. (2004). The public policy of motherhood. *Journal of Social Issues*, 60(4), 849-865 (See p. 852).

<sup>40</sup> Stone, P. & Lovejoy, M. (2004). Fast-track women and the "choice" to stay home. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 596, 62-83. (See p. 68-70). Williams, J.C. & Cohen Cooper, H. (2004) (See p. 852 and 854).

<sup>41</sup> These percentages are calculated within category. A total of 15 individuals made a statement



that fell into one of three categories: questioning the numbers in regard to female participation ( $n=10$ ); denial or ignorance of a problem ( $n=6$ ); or drawing a comparison to other industries ( $n=5$ ). Although a few individuals made statements that fell into multiple domains within the category, the overall percentage is calculated with each individual included only once.

<sup>42</sup> Danaher, K. & Branscombe, N.R. (2010). Maintaining the system with tokenism: Bolstering individual mobility beliefs and identification with a discriminatory organization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 49, 343-362 (See p. 355). Additionally, see review in Schmitt, M.T., Spoor, J.R., Danaher, K., & Branscombe, N.R. (2009). Rose-colored glasses: How tokenism and comparisons with the past reduce the visibility of gender inequality. In M. Baretto, M.K. Ryan, & M.T. Schmitt (Eds.), *The Glass Ceiling in the 21st Century: Understanding Barriers to Gender Equality*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association (See p. 53-54).

<sup>43</sup> Spoor, J.R. & Schmitt, M.T. (2011). "Things are getting better" isn't always better: Considering women's progress affects perceptions of and reactions to contemporary gender inequality. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 33(1), 24-36 (See p. 28).

<sup>44</sup> Sekaquaptewa, D. & Thompson, M. (2003) (See p. 71-72). Inzlicht, M. & Ben-Zeev, T. (2000) (See p. 368).

<sup>45</sup> Hoyt, C.L., Johnson, S.K., Murphy, S.E., & Skinnell, K.H. (2010). The impact of blatant stereotype activation and group sex-composition on female leaders. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21(5), 716-732 (See p. 728-729).

<sup>46</sup> For example, there were suggestions to reach younger females in adolescence or during film school to encourage careers as directors or producers. Other ideas included ensuring that more female decision-makers were empowered to support emerging female filmmakers.

<sup>47</sup> Allen, T.D., Eby, L.T., Poteet, M.L., & Lentz, E. (2004). Career benefits associated with mentoring for protégés: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(1), 127-136 (See p. 130).

<sup>48</sup> Kram, K.E. & Isabella, L.A. (1985). Mentoring alternatives: The role of peer relationships in career development. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 28(1), 110-132 (See p. 111). Ragins, B.R. & Cotton, J.L. (1999). Mentor functions and outcomes: A comparison of men and women in formal and informal mentoring relationships. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84(4), 529-550 (See p. 529).

<sup>49</sup> Allen, T.D., Eby, L.T., Poteet, M.L., & Lentz, E. (2004) (See p. 131).

<sup>50</sup> Ragins, B.R. & Cotton, J.L. (1999) (See p. 539). Dreher, G.F., & Cox, Jr., T.H. (1996). Race, gender, and opportunity: A study of compensation attainment and the establishment of mentoring relationships. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81(3), 297-308 (See p. 304).

<sup>51</sup> Mainiero, L.A., Williamson, A.P., & Robinson, G.S. (1994). Getting anointed for advancement: The case of executive women. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 8(2), 53-67 (See p. 61).

<sup>52</sup> Spoor, J.R. & Schmitt, M.T. (2011) (see p. 28 and 31).