
Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles
Women Filmmakers Initiative

Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers

Research By:

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SUNDANCE
INSTITUTE

WOMEN IN FILM
WIF
LOS ANGELES

January 21, 2013

Dear Friends,

A year ago Sundance Institute and Women In Film launched a Women Filmmakers Initiative to foster the presence of females behind the camera. We began by creating a Mentorship Program, matching 17 Sundance-supported women directors and producers with leaders in the field. At the same time, we wanted to understand 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 study analyzing the systemic obstacles and opportunities facing women in American independent film. Led by USC Annenberg School's Professor Stacy L. Smith, a renowned expert on diversity and the media, the research examines gender differences in submissions and selections over multiple years for U.S. films in the Sundance Film Festival and in Sundance Institute Feature Film and Documentary Film Programs. The study also delves into qualitative interviews with a targeted group of independent female directors and producers, industry executives and thought leaders in the field.

Today we're delighted to present the first findings of Professor Smith's landmark research. Additionally, 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 a list of our inaugural Mentorship Program group.

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

Board President, Women In Film Los Angeles
President, Mandalay Pictures

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CASE STATEMENT

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Independent Women Filmmakers: Setting the Agenda for Change

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

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 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 in both top-grossing films¹ and critically acclaimed projects nominated for Best Picture Academy Awards over a 30-year period.² It is often as true for women producers as it is for women directors. Second, female producers and directors affect not only 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.³

These patterns are not restricted to cinema. A recent content analysis⁴ 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 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: gender of the storyteller matters.

Currently, the presence of women behind the camera in popular film is infrequent at best. Assessing 250 of the top-grossing U.S. movies of 2011,⁵ 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. This picture would seem to suggest that the traditional Hollywood economic model or power-structure is a leading impediment to access for women filmmakers.

Therefore, outside the studio system, one would imagine that the lower budgets and elastic employment structures in the independent film arena make way for women filmmakers to thrive.⁶ 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. From its position 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 opportunity. 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 Mentors and Mentees can be found on page 7.

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 this field to seek input on the initiative as it takes shape, and to work collectively to envision and build programmatic activity based around the research findings. A list of Allied Organizations can be found on page 5.

What remains 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.

ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS

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

American Film Institute

Alliance of Women Directors

Women In Film New York

Athena Film Festival / Women & Hollywood

Chapman University

Chicken & Egg Pictures

Film Independent

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media

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

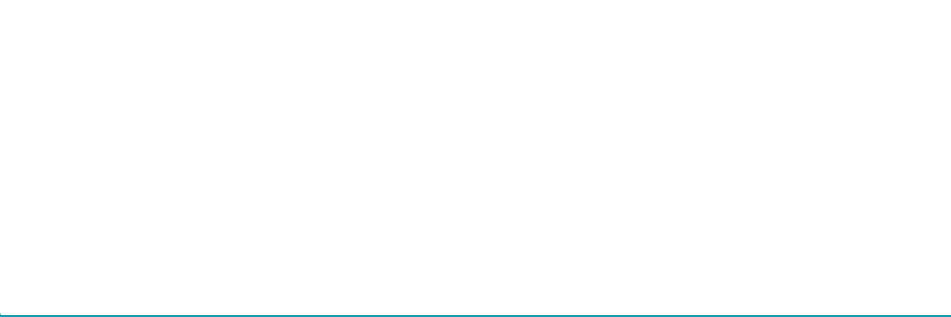
USC School of Cinematic Arts

Women Make Movies

Women Moving Millions

Women's Media Center

Note: List as of 12/21/12 and may be expanded



2012-2013 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

RESEARCH STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles

Women Filmmakers Initiative

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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 document 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 classified as U.S. narratives (534 films) or documentaries (286 films) between 2002 and 2012.

The second prong documents the qualitative experiences of female filmmakers through interviews with emerging and seasoned content creators as well as key industry gate-keepers. Here, we surveyed 51 individuals to unpack the specific obstacles that face 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 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 U.S. documentaries (34.5%).** Similar disparity by storytelling platform (narrative vs. 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, and 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 Non-Competition 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 having screened a film at the festival, participated in Labs, and/or been 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 Non-Competition 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 Non-Competition sections. This held across all five artistic positions (i.e., 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 (highs and lows) changes were more characteristic of female documentary directors and producers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Qualitative Findings: Obstacles & 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's 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 to lack 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 encouragement for early career women** (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 their belief that gender inequality is improving over time or is not any worse than in other industries.

RESEARCH STUDY

RESEARCH STUDY

*Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities
for Independent Women Filmmakers*

Research Study

Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles

Women Filmmakers Initiative

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First, we quantitatively document 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 classified as U.S. narratives (534 films) or documentaries (286 films) between 2002 and 2012.⁷

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 that face 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 1 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=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%

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Consistent with other research, the independent documentary culture appears to be more egalitarian than the culture surrounding independent narrative content creation.⁸

One-quarter (25.3%) of all content creators were female in narratives ($n=1,911$), whereas 39.1% were female in documentaries ($n=1,422$).⁹ We further examined specific behind-the-camera posts (see Table 1), finding that gender varies significantly by genre type.¹⁰ Just under 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.

RESEARCH STUDY

Next, we examined gender distribution by producer type (executive, producer/co-producer, associate, other) within genre.¹¹ Two trends are immediately apparent in Table 2.¹² 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: director and producer. The analysis for writers approached statistical significance. “Niche” films include films from Midnight, NEXT, and New Frontier, and Spotlight program 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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, when the results of the qualitative interviews illuminate 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).¹⁵ 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 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 and dovetail with the findings above.¹⁶ ***Males outnumber females only in the most prestigious producing categories—while females heavily populate and occupy the majority among 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 narratives 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 compare 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. Non-Competition). Deviations +7.5 percentage points from the norm are noted as a shift from typicality, as this percentage reflects 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. Non-Competition) and then documentaries (Competition vs. Non-Competition).

NARRATIVE DIRECTORS

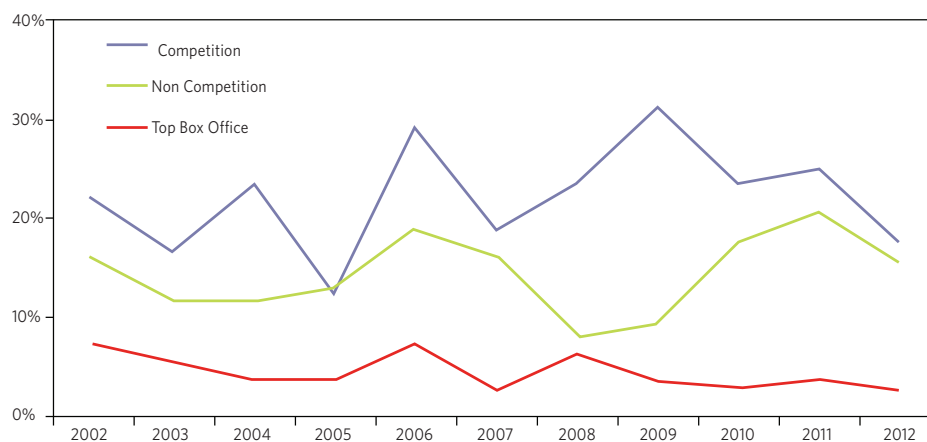
For competitive films, the Festival norm for female directors is 22.2% (range 12.5%-31.3%). Two years deviate from the competition norm, one above (2009) and one below (2005). For non-competitive films, the Festival norm for female directors is 14.5% (range 8.1%-20.6%). No years deviate by +7.5% and 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 2012.¹⁷ Across 1,220 directors, 95.6% of (n=1,166)

top-grossing directors 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 Non-Competition films (14.5%). Repeat males and females were found directing studio films. **After removing duplicates, there were 41 unique female helmers and 625 unique male helmers 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, 2009), pulling in opposite directions. For Non-Competition producers, the overall percentage of females is 30.4% (range 19%-38.7%). Two non-contiguous years deviate from the Festival norm (2006, 2008). Similar to data on directors, **neither meaningful nor sustained differences emerged over time.**

RESEARCH STUDY

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 Non-Competition 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 Non-Competition 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 (2006, 2007, 2011) the Festival norm and three years are below (2005, 2008, 2010).

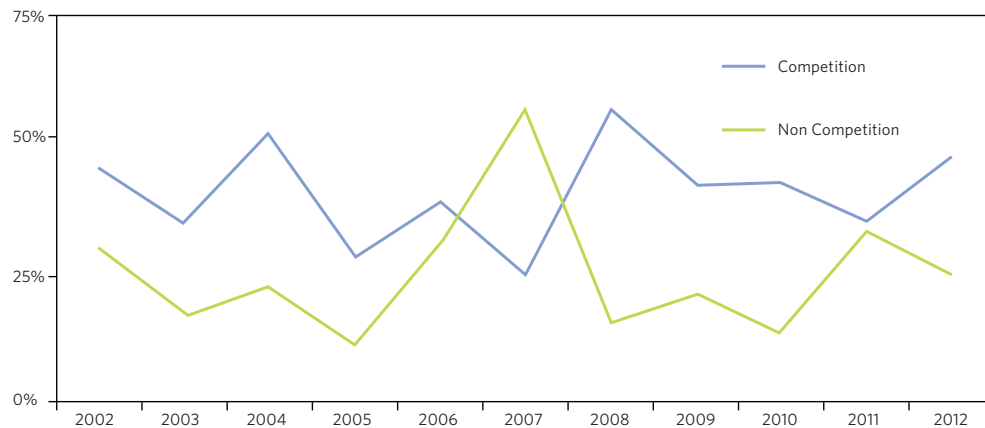
DOCUMENTARY PRODUCERS

The percentage of female documentary producers across 11 years was also examined. In Competition films, 47.4% of producers or co producers are female (range 37.2%-63%). Four years vary from the Festival norm for female producers, one above (2002) and three below (2003, 2005, 2011). Non-Competition documentaries differ from Competition documentaries when it comes to female producer participation. The industry norm for female producers in Non-Competition 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 Non-Competitive 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, 2008) and three years are below (2006, 2009, 2010). For Non-Competition films, the industry norm for female associate producers was 53.3% (range 28.6%-83.3%) with four years below (2004, 2005, 2007, 2010) this norm and five above (2002, 2006, 2008, 2009, 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 over-time data. **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.

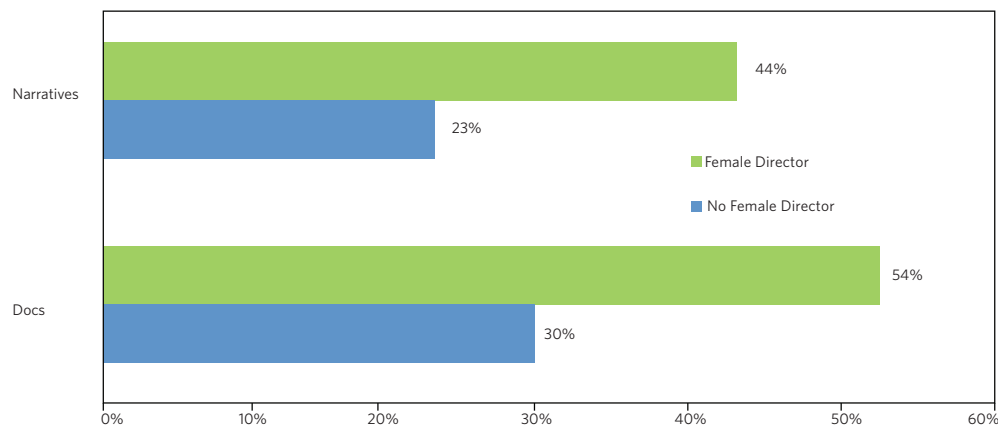
Second, one type of disparity between narrative and documentary films is evidenced over time. Six years demonstrate that female documentary directors comprised 40-50% or more of helmers in the Competition films. Even the lowest percentage of Competition documentary directors (25% in 2007) is still higher 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 be 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 gate-keeping positions (i.e., director, writer, producer, cinematographer, editor) was 8 (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.

RESEARCH STUDY

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)***¹⁸

The percentage of females on set increases 21% in narratives and 24% in documentaries with female helmers. 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 assessed¹⁹ A total of 7,567 feature-length U.S. films were submitted across these four years. Females comprise 20.7% of all gender-identified helmers ($n=8,524$).

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 female helmers. 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/or grants) assistance as part of the Feature Film Program (FFP), Documentary Film Program (DFP), or 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 helmers 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 marketplace²⁰

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: to consider 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 gate-keepers.²¹ Individuals answered several questions on barriers faced by female directors and producers.²² 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.²³ 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%

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GENDERED FINANCE

The first and 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 1950's, 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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).²⁶ Other evidence indicates that female filmmakers' production budgets are typically lower than male filmmakers' budgets.²⁷ 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.²⁸ At least one study suggests that this may occur in non-gender stereotyped domains as well.²⁹ Women's confidence may be dependent on the situation,³⁰ 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 boy's 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 "boy's club." Researchers describe this propensity for people to develop relationships with similar others as homophily.³¹ Networking and building relationships are viewed as an important component of career advancement.³² Given that males are already similar on a salient dimension, they may have an advantage over females in the strength and/or 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).³³ 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***

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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.³⁴ For women, subtle or explicit cues, including undertaking a task in the presence of males,³⁵ can have a detrimental effect on masculine-typed task execution, such as a math test.³⁶ Additionally, objectification can contribute to anxiety and lower performance.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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:

“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 care giving 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.**

The barriers explored above all 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.

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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.⁴¹

"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.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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—and 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.

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While certain disadvantages do persist in documentary film—namely, lower production costs result 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 that 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 few⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ Mentors typically provide two functions: career-enhancement and/or psychosocial support.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

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.⁵² 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 to allow 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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⁵Lauzen, M.M. (2012). The celluloid ceiling: Behind-the-scenes employment of women on the top 250 films of 2011. *Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University*.

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⁷Using 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 1-14th 2012. A page was generated for each film and all individuals in the 5 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, NY 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 9 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).

⁸ 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.

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

¹⁰ 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, $X^2(1, 1,131) = 25.80, p < .05, \Phi = .15$.

¹¹ 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 executive 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.

¹² 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, $X^2(3, 2,066) = 94.97, p < .05, V^* = .21$.

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^{13.} 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, $X^2(2, 867) = 5.49, p > .05, V^* = .08$.

^{14.} 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 $X^2(3, 1,718) = 37.96, p < .05, V^* = .15$.

^{15.} 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* $X^2(2, 464) = 10.34, p < .05, V^* = .15$.

^{16.} 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* $X^2(3, 575) = 19.10, p < .05, V^* = .18$.

^{17.} 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.

^{18.} 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 ($t = -10.46, df = 284, p < .01$).

^{19.} 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.

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

²¹ 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.

²² 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.

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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, or 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.

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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).

²⁵ 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 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.

²⁶ 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).

²⁷ 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).

²⁸ 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).

²⁹ 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).

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- ³¹ Becker-Blease, J.R. & Sohl, J.E. (2007) (See p. 508).
- ³² 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).
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- ³⁵ Sekaquaptewa, D. & Thompson, M. (2003) (See p. 71-72). Inzlicht, M. & Ben-Zeev, T. (2000) (See p. 368).
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⁴⁰ 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).

⁴¹ 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.

⁴² 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).

⁴³ 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).

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

⁴⁵ 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).

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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).

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