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Female Filmmakers Initiative  
Co-Founded by Sundance Institute and Women In Film, Los Angeles

**Exploring the Careers of Female Directors:  
Phase III**

Research By:  
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with assistance from Ariana Case and Kathleen Walsh

Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative  
Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism  
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April 21, 2015

Dear Friends,

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

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

Our Phase II research, released at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival, studied Sundance Institute's Lab data and found that female directors were just as likely as their male counterparts to complete their films and be accepted into the top 10 film festivals; in other words robust support of female artists changes the landscape. The study also continued the qualitative inquiry, investigating gender-based perceptions among thought leaders in the field.

Today we're delighted to present Phase III, which explores how female directors fare after premiering at the Sundance Film Festival. We assess the types of films, distribution deals, and exhibition patterns of male and female U.S. Dramatic Competition directors. Then, through industry interviews with filmmakers, buyers, and sellers, we examine the unique impediments female filmmakers face. As you read the pages that follow, you'll uncover provocative information that will help unlock entrenched patterns in our field.

The Female Filmmakers Initiative continues to grow based on the priorities uncovered from our research. We'd like to thank The Harnisch Foundation, Morgan Stanley, Southern California BMW Centers, Susan Bay Nimoy and Leonard Nimoy, Norlien Foundation, Archer Gray, David E. Quinney III, Gruber Family Foundation, J. Manus Foundation, The Jacquelyn & Gregory Zehner Foundation, and LUNA for their generous support.

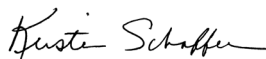
We look forward to working with you to advance our mutual commitment to establish sustainable gender equality in the film business.



Cathy Schulman  
President, Women In Film Los Angeles



Keri Putnam  
Executive Director, Sundance Institute



Kirsten Schaffer  
Executive Director, Women In Film Los Angeles



Caroline Libresco  
Director, Special Project & Senior Programmer  
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## ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS

Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles look to the following Allied Organizations for counsel and collaboration on the Women's Initiative.

**AFI Conservatory**

**Alliance of Women Directors**

**Alliance for Women Film Composers**

**Athena Film Festival**

**Chapman University**

**Chicken & Egg Pictures**

**Creative Capital**

**Film Fatales**

**Film Independent**

**Fledgling Fund**

**Ford Foundation**

**FUSION Film Festival at NYU**

**Gamechanger Films**

**Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media**

**The Harnisch Foundation**

**International Documentary Association**

**IFP**

**Impact Partners**

**Loreen Arbus Foundation**

**Loyola Marymount University**

**New York Women in Film & Television**

**Norlien Foundation**

**Paley Center for Media**

**Producers Guild of America**

**Reel Image Inc.**

**San Francisco Film Society**

**Stony Brook Southampton Graduate Arts**

**Tangerine Films**

**Time Warner Foundation**

**Tribeca Film Institute**

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

**USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism**

**USC School of Cinematic Arts**

**Women & Hollywood**

**Women in Film & Video, Washington DC**

**Women Make Movies**

**Women Moving Millions**

**Women's Media Center**

**Writers Guild of America**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, PHASE III

### Exploring the Careers of Female Directors: Phase III

#### Female Filmmakers Initiative Co-Founded by Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles

Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Dr. Katherine Pieper, and Marc Choueiti  
with assistance from  
Ariana Case and Kathleen Walsh

Over the last three years, we have examined the barriers and opportunities facing independent female filmmakers. Our new phase of research, Phase III, picks up where the last phase ended and focuses on one of the most underrepresented groups of women working behind the camera: **narrative directors**. Phase III research analyzes attributes of the movies that debuted in U.S. Dramatic Competition at Sundance Film Festival (SFF) between 2002 and 2014. Using quantitative data, we assessed the types of films, distribution deals, and exhibition patterns of male and female SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition directors. Then, through industry interviews with filmmakers, buyers, and sellers, we examined the unique impediments of female narrative directors. Below, the key findings from the report are presented.

### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

#### Stories, Distribution, and Exhibition of Films in SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition 2002-2014

- **Females directed one-quarter of the films in SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition between 2002 and 2014.** Of the 208 U.S. Dramatic Competition films at SFF between 2002 and 2014, 25.5 percent had a female director ( $n=53$ ) and 74.5 percent had a male director ( $n=155$ ). This translates into a gender ratio of 2.9 to 1.
- **Gender did not play a role in receiving theatrical distribution out of SFF Competition.** Of the 208 SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition movies, 177 received domestic distribution (85.1 percent) and 31 did not. Female-directed films (88.7 percent) were just as likely to receive distribution out of SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition as male-directed films (83.9 percent).
- **There are differences in the types of companies that distribute male- and female-directed films.** Movies with a female director (70.2%) were more likely than movies with a male director (56.9%) to be distributed by Independent companies with fewer financial resources and lower industry clout. Conversely, male-directed films (43.1%) were more likely than female-directed films (29.8%) to receive distribution from a Studio Specialty/Mini Major company. These latter companies have deeper pockets and greater reach.
- **Theatrical density was *not* related to director gender among SFF films with Independent distribution.** Male-directed and female-directed SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition films with Independent distribution were equally likely to be shown in 1-75 theatres as to be shown in 76-250+ theatres.

- **At the highest platform of theatrical distribution, above 250 screens, male directors outnumber female directors by a factor of 6 to 1.** Among films distributed by Studio Specialty/Mini Major companies, a greater percentage of male-directed films (32.1 percent,  $n=18$ ) were shown in 251+ theatres than female-directed films (21.4 percent,  $n=3$ ).
- **Gender is related to the types of stories told by directors in SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition.** Three-quarters of all SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition movies featured drama, comedy, and/or romance, with female-directed films (92.5 percent) more concentrated in these genres than male-directed films (69 percent). Lead character gender was also associated with director gender. Male-directed films were more likely to feature male leads whereas female-directed films were more likely to feature female leads.
- **The director gender gap is at its widest in top-grossing films.** Across 1,300 top-grossing films from 2002 to 2014, only 4.1 percent of all directors ( $n=59$  of 1,433) were female. This calculates into a gender ratio of 23.3 male directors to every 1 female director.
- **The prevalence of females decreases notably when moving from independent to mainstream film.** In 2014, there was a 25 percent difference between the percentage of female directors at SFF (26.9 percent) and the percentage of female directors across the top 100 films (1.9 percent). This is almost double the gap observed (12.7 percent drop) in 2002.
- **The results from this study demonstrate that female directors set out on a course that confirms and triggers a stereotype that may affect the deals they make and the opportunities they are offered.** As such, the choices female directors make early in their careers can have lasting financial consequences.

## QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

### Impediments Facing Female Directors

The previous phases of research have established the fiscal cliff women face as they move from independent to more commercial fare. To continue this inquiry, the qualitative section of the report uses data from 59 interviews (39 male, 20 female) with buyers and sellers who had, on average, 17.5 years of experience in the entertainment industry. We also conducted interviews with 41 female directors. Buyers and sellers were asked about the reasons for the lack of female directors in top 100 films. Respondents could mention, question, speculate or hypothesize about the topic. The major barriers that emerged were consistent with results from previous phases as well as other research. Those impediments were:

- **Perception of a Gendered Marketplace (44 percent):** Female directors are perceived to make films for a subset and/or less significant portion of the marketplace. In contrast, films by males are perceived to reach wide and lucrative segments of the market. One

explanation for this difference is the tendency to “think director, think male,” or to describe the job of a director or profitable film content in masculine terms. Sellers were more likely to offer statements in this category compared to buyers.

- **Scarcity of Talent Pool and Experience (42 percent):** Industry decision-makers perceive that there is a scarcity of female directors and a small pool to choose from in top-grossing films. Those interviewed named, on average, three female directors who might be included on consideration lists. In contrast, 45 different women helmed one of the 100 top-grossing movies across 13 years, and over 100 different women brought a narrative film to Sundance Film Festival from 2002 to 2014. Buyers and sellers mentioned this impediment equally.
- **Women’s Perceived Lack of Ambition (25 percent):** Participants mentioned or questioned the degree of interest women have in 1) the directing position generally and 2) genre-based jobs, including action and tent-pole films. Sellers were more likely to report this impediment than buyers were. However, when asked directly about their ambitions, nearly half of female directors (43.9 percent) interviewed articulated an interest in larger-budget, action, or blockbuster films.
- **Industry Gender Imbalance (22 percent):** Responses described the skewed representation of women in the film industry. This includes the predominance of men in gatekeeping positions. A few responses mentioned an industry socialization process and/or culture (e.g., boy’s club) that is male-dominated. Buyers reported this barrier slightly more often than sellers.
- **Little Support and Few Opportunities (14 percent):** Individuals mentioned or questioned whether agents and managers are putting women up for jobs and the scarcity of chances or opportunities given to women. Buyers reported this barrier more than sellers.
- **Competence Doubted (12 percent):** The final barrier mentioned by participants refers to questions about female directors’ competence. Participants mentioned or speculated about beliefs that women “can’t handle” certain types of films or aspects of production, such as commanding a large crew. Sellers mentioned this impediment more often than buyers. When asked if their authority had been doubted, 70 percent of female directors interviewed answered that they had been challenged by a work colleague.

Across three years of research, it is clear that the film industry must grapple with not only the paucity of female directors working at its highest ranks, but also the image industry leaders hold regarding female directors. To journey from gender inequality to parity, decision-makers and advocates must work to alter their perceptions about what women can and want to do in their careers. This requires moving away from narrow and limiting stereotypes to conceptions of women that are as open and unbounded as those surrounding men. By making the choice to act strategically, the industry can bridge the gap between business, advocacy, and creativity to foster an environment in which it is possible for female directors to flourish.

# RESEARCH STUDY



# RESEARCH STUDY

## Exploring the Careers of Female Directors Phase III

Over the last three years, we have examined the barriers and opportunities facing independent female filmmakers.<sup>1</sup> This new phase of research, Phase III, picks up where the last phase ended and focuses on one of the most underrepresented groups of women working behind the camera: **narrative directors**. Phase III research explores the movies that debuted in U.S. Dramatic Competition at Sundance Film Festival (SFF) between 2002 and 2014. Our lens here is narrow and purposeful. Using quantitative data, we assess the types of films, distribution deals, and exhibition patterns of male and female SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition directors. Then, we examine the unique impediments of women narrative directors through industry interviews with filmmakers, buyers, and sellers.

Before embarking on the latest study, it is important to step back and recall a few of **the main findings** from the first two phases of research. In Phase I, female participation behind the camera (directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, editors) was assessed among U.S. films at SFF from 2002 to 2012. Cataloging the gender of 11,197 content creators, the results showed that females were underrepresented in independent film. Women were less likely to be content creators of narrative than documentary movies. From 2002 to 2012, 16.9 percent of U.S. narrative directors (versus 34.5 percent in docs) and 29.4 percent of U.S. narrative producers (versus 45.9 percent in docs) were women.

Additionally, Phase I findings from qualitative interviews with 51 industry thought leaders and filmmakers revealed major impediments to female directors' and producers' career progress. Working in a male-dominated industry, women must navigate gendered financial barriers and exclusionary hiring practices as they pursue movie-making. These obstacles are real, as only 4.4 percent of all directors were female across the 100 top films from 2002 to 2012. Clearly, females—particularly directors—face a steep fiscal cliff as they move from independent to more studio-based fare.

In Phase II, we began to address where the pipeline may crack or leak for females in the top leadership position: directing. We did this in two ways. First, we looked at artistic support programs at Sundance Institute from 2002 to 2013. While fewer projects at the Feature Film Program at Sundance Institute were helmed by women (66.4 percent male, 33.6 percent female), the female-directed films brought to the Labs were just as likely to finish as male-directed films. Further, 81.3 percent of all finished films went on to play at one of the top 10 festivals worldwide with no differences by gender. With the support that comes through selection to a Sundance Lab, female directors were just as likely as their male counterparts to succeed. Similar completion findings emerged for the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program.

We also returned to the qualitative interviews from Phase I, looking specifically at a subsection ( $n=34$ ) of industry leaders' perceptions of directors. When asked about the qualities of a successful narrative director, industry experts named twice as many traditionally masculine characteristics as feminine. This tendency to "think director, think male" is a form of occupational stereotyping that may bias who is considered for open directing assignments. The percentages of masculine to feminine traits were roughly equal when asking participants

about documentary directors, however. When asked about the composition of lists for open directing jobs for feature films, a subgroup of industry leaders indicated that there was a “smaller pool” of qualified female candidates.

Phase I and II research illuminates both the barriers and opportunities surrounding female filmmakers’ careers. The previous research also elicits more questions: Does distribution of male- and female-directed films at SFF differ in terms of company type or exhibition platform? What role do buyers’ and sellers’ perceptions play in the size and longevity of female directors’ careers? Do female helmers’ early storytelling choices affect their later directing opportunities?

Our new research investigation—Phase III of the Sundance Institute/Women in Film Los Angeles Female Filmmakers Initiative—was designed to address these queries. The report features two major sections:

- The first section focuses on SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition films from 2002 to 2014.<sup>2</sup> Gender differences were explored in the types of stories directors told at SFF, distribution deals received, and exhibition patterns. Hereafter, these films are referred to as SFF Competition films.
- The second section presents the results of 100 interviews with industry leaders ( $n=59$ ) and filmmakers ( $n=41$ ) designed to capture specific impediments facing female directors as they attempt to navigate larger-budgeted studio fare. Qualitative findings replicate and extend the earlier barriers which uniquely face female helmers, as first identified in Phases I and II.

We conclude the report by summarizing our key findings and providing next steps for future empirical research.

## **SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL U.S. DRAMATIC COMPETITION FILMS**

We explored the movies selected and screened at SFF in U.S. Dramatic Competition between 2002 and 2014. Competition films were the focus, as they are often helmed by novice directors seeking vocations as filmmakers. Further, SFF allows us to examine males and females launching from a similar starting point.

Gender differences emerged in the nature of SFF stories being told in Competition (i.e., genre, lead characters), the distribution deals received (i.e., company type), and exhibition patterns documented (i.e., widest point of release). Each of these factors is reviewed next. As with all of our reports, only differences of 5 percent or greater are noted below.

### STORYTELLING GENRES AND LEAD CHARACTERS

Across 13 years at SFF, a total of 208 Competition movies debuted.<sup>3</sup> SFF Competition films were bifurcated into two categories: those with a female director attached versus those without a female director attached. **Female-directed films represented a quarter (25.5 percent, n=53) and male-directed films three-quarters (74.5 percent, n=155) of the films screened at SFF Competition between 2002 and 2014.**

We assessed the genre of films brought to SFF.<sup>4</sup> Films were categorized as comedy, drama, and/or romance (solely or any combination), or featuring genres including, but not limited to, action, crime, horror, or thriller (solely or any combination). If one of the latter terms modified comedy, drama, or romance, it was placed in the second category rather than the first.

**Table 1**  
SFF Competition Films by Director Gender and Movie Genre

GENRE	MALE DIRECTED	FEMALE DIRECTED	TOTAL
Comedy, Drama, and Romance	69%	92.5%	75%
Action, Crime, Horror, and Thriller <sup>a</sup>	31%	7.5%	25%
<b>Total</b>	155	53	208

Note: SFF Competition films were categorized into one mutually exclusive group using information from IMDbPro, StudioSystem, or Box Office Mojo. a = Other genres that could fit into this category include: adventure, fantasy, mystery, sci-fi, sport, or war.

Gender varied by the genre of Competition movies. **Of the 208 films, female-directed movies were far more likely (92.5 percent) than those with only male direction (69 percent) to feature comedy, drama, and/or romance.** Only 7.5 percent of female-helmed films contained the crime, thriller, or sport descriptor whereas 31 percent of male-helmed films included these or other terms indicated in Table 1.

Turning to lead characters,<sup>5</sup> the 208 movies were categorized as having a male lead(s), a female lead(s), or both (co leads or ensemble). The results are shown in Table 2. Lead character gender was associated with director gender. **Male-directed films were more likely to feature male leads whereas female-directed films were more likely to feature female leads.** Male helmers were also more likely than female helmers to tell stories with male and female characters at the center. In sum, a director's gender seems to play a salient role in shaping and/or reinforcing the types of stories s/he wants to tell.

**Table 2**  
**SFF Competition Films by Director Gender and Lead Character Gender**

<b>GENDER OF LEAD(S)</b>	<b>MALE DIRECTED</b>	<b>FEMALE DIRECTED</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Male Lead(s)	57.4%	15.1%	46.6%
Female Lead(s)	19.3%	77.4%	34.1%
Both (Co lead, Ensemble)	23.2%	7.5%	19.2%
<b>Total</b>	155	53	208

Note: SFF Competition films were categorized into one of three mutually exclusive categories: male lead(s), female lead(s), or mixed (both male and female leads).

Together, the SFF helmers often told stories that fell along gender stereotypical lines. This was more pronounced among female than male directors. At least one study shows that gendered storytelling is related to industry leaders' perceptions of market forces.<sup>6</sup> ***As such, the choices female filmmakers make early in their careers can have lasting financial consequences.***

## **DISTRIBUTION, EXHIBITION, AND CRITICAL REVIEW**

In addition to the types of films male and female filmmakers create, we explored the life those films have outside of the festival space. Phase II revealed that with support from Sundance Labs, female-directed films were equally likely to be completed as male-directed films. There were also no gender differences in exhibition at prestigious (top 10) festivals worldwide. Our question in Phase III was: what happens when women enter the marketplace with their films?

To address this query, distribution patterns out of SFF Competition were examined.<sup>7</sup> Of the 208 movies, 177 (85.1 percent) received domestic distribution and 31 did not (14.9 percent). ***Female-directed films (88.7 percent, n=47) were just as likely to receive distribution out of SFF Competition as male-directed films (83.9 percent, n=130).***

Closer investigation of the types of distribution these films received reveals a more nuanced landscape. To begin, a general examination of the type of distributors was conducted. Film distributors<sup>8</sup> were grouped into Independent or Studio Specialty/Mini Major companies.<sup>9</sup> Independent companies were defined as smaller firms that generally distribute in a more limited release. Often, these companies do not have extensive marketing budgets. Studio Specialty/Mini Major companies, on the other hand, are larger entities with deeper pockets and greater reach. By examining distribution in this way, the signs of a gendered marketplace first appear.

Of the 177 movies from 2002 to 2014 receiving distribution, a total of 107 films (60.5 percent) received distribution from Independent companies. Of these 107, 74 had male directors attached and 33 had female directors attached. Compared to their presence at U.S. Dramatic Competition (25.5 percent of films), female-directed films perform slightly better (30.8 percent of films) when receiving distribution from Independent companies.

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A total of 70 movies (39.5 percent) received Studio Specialty/Mini Major distribution: 56 by male helmers and 14 by female helmers. Again, compared to the overall percentage of female titles in Competition, female-directed films fare slightly worse when receiving distribution from Studio Specialty/Mini Major companies (20 percent of films).

**Table 3**  
**SFF Competition Films by Director Gender and Distribution Type**

DISTRIBUTION TYPE	MALE DIRECTED	FEMALE DIRECTED	TOTAL
Independent Companies	56.9% (n=74)	70.2% (n=33)	60.5% (n=107)
Studio Specialty/Mini Major Companies	43.1% (n=56)	29.8% (n=14)	39.5% (n=70)
<b>Total</b>	130	47	177

Another way to think about these findings is to examine *within* gender differences across distribution type. As shown in Table 3, Independent companies distributed just over half of male-directed films (56.9 percent) and 43.1 percent were distributed by Studio Specialty/Mini Major companies. Male-helmed movies were almost equally likely to receive either type of distribution coming out of SFF.

For females, a different pattern emerges. Independent companies distributed 70.2 percent of their films. Studio Specialty/Mini Major companies distributed only 29.8 percent of female-directed fare. Female-helmed movies were over two times more likely to be picked up by *Independent* companies than by larger entertainment entities. **The majority of companies distributing movies by female directors have fewer financial resources and lower industry clout. This is the first clear evidence that a gendered marketplace intersects the careers of SFF male and female filmmakers in different ways.**

Examining the critical reception of these films further complicates the above patterns. Metacritic scores reduce critics' reviews to a single aggregate rating of a film between 0 (low) and 100 (high). Metacritic scores were obtained for 98 percent (n=174) of the 177 theatrically-released movies. Across the Independently distributed films, there was virtually no difference in the median Metacritic scores for male- (56) and female-directed movies (57). Further, female-helmed films (72.5) had a slightly higher median Metacritic score than male-helmed films (67.5) when distributed by Studio Specialty/Mini Major companies. **Despite punching at roughly the same weight in terms of critical reception, female-directed films were less likely to achieve distribution from more financially lucrative Studio Specialty/Mini Major outfits.**

**Table 4**  
**SFF Competition Films Receiving Independent Distribution by Director Gender and Widest Point of Release**

NUMBER OF THEATRES	INDEPENDENT DISTRIBUTION	
	Male Directed	Female Directed
1-75 theatres	91.9% (n=68)	90.9% (n=30)
76-250+ theatres	8.1% (n=6)	9.1% (n=3)
<b>Total No. of Films</b>	74	33

Given these differences, we wanted to examine whether director gender of SFF Competition films was related to exposure in the marketplace. Within distributor type, we categorized movies by widest point of theatrical release: 1-75 theatres, 76-250 theatres, or 251 or more theatres. Among Independent distributors, theatrical density was **not** related to gender of SFF helmers (see Table 4). **In other words, male-directed and female-directed SFF Competition films were equally likely to be shown in 1-75 theatres or 76-250+ theatres.** Only one male-directed movie (*The Spectacular Now*) was distributed by an Independent company and shown in more than 250 theatres.

Looking at Studio Specialty/Mini Major distribution, a different picture emerges. Table 5 reveals that at the lowest release level (1-75 theatres), male- and female-directed films were nearly equivalent. Roughly one-third of male-directed and one-third of female-directed movies receiving Studio Specialty/Mini Major distribution appeared in 1-75 theatres.

At a higher level (76-250 theatres), female-directed movies slightly outpaced male-directed movies. Of movies shown in 76-250 theatres, 42.9 percent were female-directed versus 35.7 percent male-directed. However, at the highest platform of theatrical distribution, this pattern reverses. A greater percentage of male-directed films (32.1 percent) were shown in 251+ theatres than female-directed films (21.4 percent). **At the level of distribution that offers the greatest potential for financial reward, male-directed movies far outnumbered female-directed movies by a factor of six to one.**

Overall, the findings in this section point to one of the first divisions between male and female directors when entering a gendered marketplace after SFF. **Female directors arrive at Sundance with films of equal quality as their male counterparts, yet they are less likely to receive distribution from companies near the top of the hierarchy. Additionally, even when females do achieve these potentially lucrative or prestigious deals, they are less likely to see their**

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*films released to a wide audience. These findings reinforce and extend our previous research conclusions. As market forces increase, the opportunities for female directors decrease.* Given this, it is imperative to explore the unique barriers that female directors face navigating the film industry post-SFF, which is the focus of the next section of the report.

Table 5  
SFF Competition Films Receiving Studio Specialty/Mini Major Distribution by Director Gender and Widest Point of Release

NUMBER OF THEATRES	STUDIO SPECIALTY/MINI MAJOR DISTRIBUTION	
	Male Directed	Female Directed
1-75 theatres	32.1% (n=18)	35.7% (n=5)
76-250 theatres	35.7% (n=20)	42.9% (n=6)
251+ theatres	32.1% (n=18)	21.4% (n=3)
<b>Total No. of Films</b>	56	14

### BARRIERS THAT INTERSECT THE CAREERS OF FEMALE FILMMAKERS

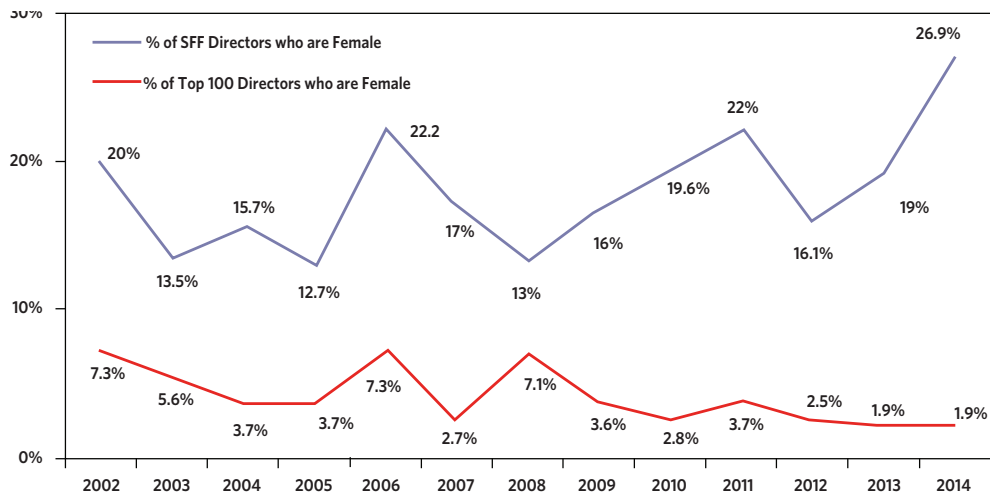
*The evidence above suggests that as female directors enter the marketplace with their films, distribution becomes one place where women are relegated to less financially lucrative platforms.* This is consistent with research findings from earlier phases of the Female Filmmakers Initiative, which demonstrated that as the financial stakes are raised, women's participation falls.

In the previous phases, the prevalence of female directors at SFF has been contrasted with the percentage of female directors of the 100 top-grossing films in the same time frame. Adding data from 2014 reveals that once again (see Figure 1), women at SFF outpaced their colleagues in the more commercial arena. **Female directors of top-grossing films have decreased in the last 13 years, with female helmers clocking in at just 4.1 percent (n=59 of 1,433) of directors across the 1,300 top movies in this time frame. This calculates into a gender ratio of 23.3 male directors to every 1 female.**

By contrast, women represented 18 percent ( $n=126$ ) of all SFF narrative directors over the same period, a gender ratio of 4.55 males to every 1 female.<sup>10</sup> **In 2014, there was a 25 percent difference between the percentage of female directors at SFF (26.9 percent) and the percentage of female directors across the top 100 films (1.9 percent). This is almost double the gap observed (12.7 percent drop) in 2002.**

**The three phases of research have established the fiscal cliff women face as they move from independent to studio fare. The qualitative section of the report uses data from 100 targeted interviews to explore the reasons for this commercial precipice and the factors that explain the decrease in female directors.** Here, the goal was to illuminate why women's careers stall out and determine what factors contribute to the lack of women directing higher-budgeted fare.

**Figure 1**  
**Percentage of Female Directors across SFF and 100 Top-Grossing Films 2002 to 2014**



Three key groups involving 100 participants were interviewed. Across the first two groups ( $n=59$ ) listed below, the sample was 66.1 percent male ( $n=39$ ) and 33.9 percent female ( $n=20$ ) with an average of 17.5 years of experience working in the film industry.

- The first group consists of buyers, namely executives and/or financiers in independent and more commercial filmmaking.
- The second group is comprised of sellers, or agents, managers, sales agents, and those familiar with film sales.<sup>11</sup>
- The third group is composed of 41 female directors whose movies were selected and screened at SFF after the year 2000.<sup>12</sup> These female directors were asked about goals and experiences related to their careers.

Buyers and sellers were presented with data on the percentage of female directors across the 100 top-grossing films in 2007 (3 percent) and 2013 (2 percent) and asked specifically where women fall out of the hiring process.<sup>13</sup> Spontaneous responses were scrutinized for



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the presence of multiple thematic elements. Several types of comments were included in the analysis: assertions, questions, assumptions about other individuals' perspectives, personal experiences, or anecdotes. Many individuals stated that they were speculating or hypothesizing about the topic, and others relied on perceptions about the industry at large, while disclaiming that their own experience was not reflective of the wider industry ideas they cited.

Results are presented in Table 6 in terms of spontaneous responses across the 59 buyers and sellers interviewed. Below, each barrier is described, indicating why it presents an impediment, what theoretical or empirical research illuminates about each obstacle, and how responses differed between buyers and sellers, where appropriate. Women filmmakers' responses and experiences will also be included throughout as a confirmation or contradiction of industry perceptions.

**Table 6**  
**Categories for Spontaneous Responses Regarding the Lack of Female Directors**

<b>BARRIER</b>	<b>% REPORTING</b>
<b>Perception of a Gendered Marketplace</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Scarcity of Talent Pool and Experience</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>Women's Perceived Lack of Ambition</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Industry Gender Imbalance</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Little Support and Few Opportunities</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Competence Doubted</b>	<b>12%</b>

*Note:* In their responses, participants may have made comments regarding more than one category. As such, the column percentages do not total to 100 percent.

### PERCEPTION OF A GENDERED MARKETPLACE

The first major barrier relates to how a gendered marketplace has been constructed through industry perceptions. After being asked to explain why few females direct top-grossing films each year, 44 percent of respondents answered by situating female directors within the current film marketplace. Answers included, but were not limited to, characterizing women and their work through the lens of genre or story type, the Hollywood business model, film size, and/or audiences served.<sup>14</sup>

Why does the perception of a gendered marketplace create an impediment? First, films that interest female directors are perceived to be in conflict with the prevailing business model of Hollywood. Second, the types of films female directors initially and sometimes repeatedly

make are viewed as poor samples for the genres and scope of films in the top 100 each year. Third, women are deemed to work on smaller, more independent films. Together, these perceptions suggest that female directors make films for a subset or less significant portion of the marketplace. This maps on to what one study has termed “negative female market forces.”<sup>15</sup> To the extent that women confirm the perception that they create smaller, personal stories in select genres, their career opportunities may be constrained.

In contrast, the profitable and lucrative segments of the marketplace are cast in a masculine light. Respondents also discussed how males fit into the marketplace: 32 percent stated that Hollywood privileges male audiences and films that appeal to boys and men. These films were described using terms including, but not limited to, action, comic book, and IP-driven properties. Given that the vast majority of top-grossing films have been directed by men over the past 13 years, this ties male directors and their work to what one study called “positive male market forces.”<sup>16</sup> **Whereas females are perceived to fill a limited slice of the market, the territory that males can fill is limitless.**

The experience female directors have may not be relevant for the male-appeal movies perceived to saturate the marketplace, but it should translate to certain films in female-friendly genres. The perception and the reality of women’s experience is linked to character-driven movies, especially comedies, dramas, and/or romances. The popular press may create a belief that these films are less likely to be made through reporting about the decline of romantic comedies or dramatic films.<sup>17</sup> Yet, this appraisal may actually underestimate the number of films that do in fact match female directors’ experience. Across the top 100 films, 30 percent ( $n=378$ ) of fictional movies from 2002 to 2014 fit the genres of comedy, drama, and/or romance. No significant increases or decreases were observed across this 13-year time frame.<sup>18</sup> However, just 33 (8.7 percent) of the films had a female director attached during that time period and 345 (91.3 percent) did not. **Even when women have an initial film or body of work that may translate to larger films in genres that match their experience, they are not given the opportunity to direct.**

If experience within a genre is not sufficient to establish that a female director is appropriate to helm a film, perhaps it is the lead character and the genre that must both pull female. Using available data from yearly studies of top-grossing films conducted by the Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative, we examined the genre and lead character of the top 100 films from 2007 and 2013. In 2007, there were eight films with a female lead or co lead character in the genres of comedy, drama, and/or romance. Five of these films had a different writer and director, *ostensibly* making these open directing assignments.<sup>19</sup> None of these movies had a woman at the helm. In 2013, six films had a female lead or co lead in the same genres, and four of these were seemingly open directing opportunities. Not one of these movies had a female director either. These numbers suggest there may be few job prospects that conform to women’s experience. **However, even when the story is female-driven and the genre is comedy, drama, and/or romance, women are still not directing top-grossing films.**

## RESEARCH STUDY, PHASE III

The explanation that women lack experience in certain genres cannot fully account for the decline in the percentage of female directors between independent and mainstream fare. The fit between women and the role of the director may also be a factor. Researchers have investigated this lack of fit by examining the incongruity between beliefs about women and perceptions of leadership roles more generally. **Conceptions of leader roles consist of a set of traits or behaviors that researchers describe as agentic, or “an assertive, controlling, and confident tendency.”<sup>20</sup> Whereas traditionally masculine stereotypes overlap with agentic traits, existing norms regarding female attributes, behaviors, or occupations do not. Women may be seen as nurturing, kind, or helpful, which conforms to a set of traits described as “communal.”<sup>21</sup>** As directors, women may not be perceived to have the attributes that leaders require, and may not be thought of as “the best person for the job.”

To investigate this idea, the tendency to utilize masculine-typed terms while describing directors, attributes of helmers, or of movies was evaluated.<sup>22</sup> Across both spontaneous and prompted answers, 37 percent of the individuals interviewed evoked stereotypically male words or phrases in their responses. Industry leaders “think director, think male,” a finding that confirms results from Phase II as well as a robust body of literature in the management arena.<sup>23</sup> Individuals referred to the director as similar to General Patton, or requiring one to be “tough as nails” and used descriptive terms for the role such as commanding, aggressive, or domineering. Masculine terms, such as “muscular” or “testosterone-driven,” were also used to categorize the prevailing and revenue-generating content created by Hollywood. **Thus, beliefs about women and the stories they tell may be incongruent with perceptions of the role of the director and of profitable content.**

Buyers and sellers differ in the frequency of responses that fall under the gendered marketplace barrier. A higher percentage (48 percent) of sellers compared to buyers (39 percent) relied on this barrier to explain the lack of female directors in mainstream films. **Sellers are responsible for ensuring that directorial candidates and their films are considered and valued in the hiring process and the international market. So their perceptions of a business in which commercial viability is limited by gendered barriers may influence the opportunities they offer female clients, the significance they place on female-helmed films, and even estimations of women’s career prospects.** The remaining obstacles identified in this study flow from and reinforce this first major impediment, reflecting how perceptions of a gendered marketplace can shape how individuals view and evaluate groups of people.

### SCARCITY OF TALENT POOL AND EXPERIENCE

The second obstacle referred to the scarcity of female directors and the experience women have with the craft of directing. **Of those interviewed, 42 percent cited that a small pool of women work as directors.** The perception that there are “not enough” women to choose from is illustrated by the few respondents who stated that women directors lack a body of work or experience. Buyers and sellers mentioned this impediment equally.

Industry members perceive that the profession lacks female directors, possibly due in part to the very few films each year that are in line with female helmers' experience (i.e., those featuring female lead characters in genres of comedy, drama, and/or romance). In a separate question, industry buyers and sellers were asked to name women who appear on consideration lists. Most frequently, participants named zero female directors and on average named three women (range=0–24). Of the 49 people queried, 29 individuals named at least one director. In total, 60 names were generated spontaneously.<sup>24</sup> The perception of a small pool of directors may be due in part to industry members' own lack of familiarity with female helmers.

The top names mentioned appear in Table 7. These women's work spans genres (action, comedy, crime, drama, horror, romance, thriller, war), budget size, experience levels, and directing platform (TV, film).

**Table 7**  
**Top Female Directors Mentioned by Participants**

Kathryn Bigelow	Angelina Jolie
Lisa Cholodenko	Jennifer Kent
Ava DuVernay	Michelle MacLaren
Nicole Holofcener	Kimberly Peirce
Patty Jenkins	Lynn Shelton

Note: To be included in the table, female directors were mentioned at least four times or more across the interviews. The list in Table 7 appears in alphabetical order, not by number of times cited by study participants.

While the pool of women may be smaller than that of men, it may not be as small as industry leaders perceive. The number of eligible female directors can be easily estimated through empirical data. **While the buyers and sellers in this investigation are correct that women are outnumbered among directors of top-grossing films each year, a total of 110 women directed one or more narrative films at Sundance Film Festival across 13 years, and 45 different women have helmed a film that grossed over roughly \$25 million in the same period.** Female directors may be found in other spaces as well. A recent Directors Guild of America report showed that females comprised almost 20 percent ( $n=86$ ) of first-time helmers ( $n=479$ ) across five years of fictional TV programming.<sup>25</sup> **While there are certainly fewer female directors compared to their male counterparts, women are not as infrequent as industry leaders' memories may suggest. The inability to correctly recall the size of the talent pool of qualified female candidates may limit the opportunities women directors receive.** A more systematic process is needed, one which circumvents a reliance solely on memory and accurately estimates the size of the pool of candidates.

## PERCEIVED LACK OF AMBITION

The third obstacle is the perception that women lack ambition or interest in directing generally or in top directing jobs. This barrier was referenced by 25 percent of the sample.<sup>26</sup> Buyers and sellers shared perceptions and conjectured about female directors' ambitions for and interest in genre-based jobs as well as action and tent-pole films.

## RESEARCH STUDY, PHASE III

This view of women could affect the help female directors receive navigating their careers and the opportunities they are offered. The first films that women make may also set the stage for buyers and sellers to develop a perception of a woman's goals that is skewed toward lower-budget or dramatic fare.

Female directors and their storytelling choices may be susceptible to a phenomenon called *stereotype threat*. Stereotype threat can occur when members of a disadvantaged group become vulnerable to confirming a negative stereotype. Research demonstrates that when stereotype threat occurs, performance or ambition in the affected domain can be reduced.<sup>27</sup> One study on stereotype threat illustrates that female students very engaged in math self-selected careers in verbal occupations over quantitative fields after being prompted with a female stereotype. Those who did not receive the prompt did not differ in their interests.<sup>28</sup>

The early films women make may reflect a propensity to reduce their vulnerability to stereotype threat. Stereotypically masculine films, such as those in action or horror genres, may require the use of stunts, larger crews, and/or technology to create visual or special effects. In contrast, comedies, dramas, and romantic films may require fewer of these skills or tools, and thus may be one of many reasons they appeal to women. Later in their careers, women may have developed methods of coping with the effects of stereotype threat. By that time, however, the experience and body of work female directors have amassed may offer them little career flexibility to pursue different genres or higher-budgeted projects.

One means of judging female directors' career ambitions is to ask them directly. As part of an interview about their careers, 41 female filmmakers were asked about their interest in directing large-budget, action, or blockbuster films.<sup>29</sup> Almost half (43.9 percent,  $n=18$ ) stated they were interested. When asked to explain the appeal of helming these movies, directors offered a range of responses. Nearly three-quarters of the interested group (77.8 percent,  $n=14$ ) reported enjoying those types of movies. Over a third (38.9 percent,  $n=7$ ) anticipated the challenge or opportunity the job would provide. A few females (22.2 percent,  $n=4$ ) indicated that a job of that size would offer the chance to advocate for women on screen. **When asked directly about their ambitions, nearly half of female directors articulated an interest in action or larger-budgeted films.**

In addition to the women who stated that they were definitely interested in directing action or blockbuster films, 21.9 percent ( $n=9$ ) said they would be interested only under certain circumstances. For the majority of those women, this meant being drawn to something about the material. The remaining women offered reasons they were not interested including, but not limited to, being opposed to making those types of films, or dislike of movies in those genres.

Beyond the issue of misdiagnosing women's interest in larger-budget films, **the perception that women lack ambition was mentioned or questioned more often by sellers (35 percent) than buyers (14 percent).** Given the role that agents and sales agents play in advocating for female directors' careers, these are two groups that require a clear knowledge of women's interests and goals. **Overall, buyers and sellers may need to be more attuned to the actual career ambitions of female directors.**

## INDUSTRY GENDER IMBALANCE

The fourth impediment cited by individuals as an explanation for shortened careers was the skewed representation of women in the industry. Over one-fifth (22 percent) of responses described predominance of men in gatekeeping positions, particularly when it comes to hiring. There was a difference between buyers (25 percent) and sellers (19 percent) in this category.

The evidence that males are a majority in non-directing careers across the entertainment industry is robust. Males outnumber females as writers and producers in top-grossing films both domestically and internationally, as well as in independent films at SFF.<sup>30</sup> In Phase I, male-dominated industry networks were also mentioned as a barrier to women's advancement by 39.2 percent of those interviewed. ***Navigating a field in which women are the minority may create obstacles, especially in terms of networking.*** Research demonstrates that some women's social networks offer fewer job leads or quality job leads than their male counterparts.<sup>31</sup> Informal recruitment practices and a "macho culture" were reported obstacles faced by women in one study of film and television employment in the U.K.<sup>32</sup> The numerical disadvantage women face as filmmakers may further reinforce the impressions that gatekeepers hold.

One way to think about industry imbalance is to consider the pipeline or places of industry socialization. Although mentioned by only a few study participants, film schools and/or artist support programs might be places where norms about content creators are shaped. Despite existing knowledge of women's underrepresentation in other roles, the enrollment of women in film schools is still not well-known. Although blog posts and other popular press articles report that females comprise 50 percent of film school attendees, we are not aware of one independent empirical study in the U.S. that has been published on the percentage of women in directing programs at film schools.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the inclusion of non-production majors in available statistics may misrepresent women's interest in directing or content-creation careers (e.g., cinematography). Clear and accurate data is imperative to obtain in order to precisely estimate the pipeline of females entering the profession and what that means for industry socialization.

Another means of gauging females' interest level in directing is to assess the gender composition of training or artist support programs. Our analysis of 12 years of filmmaker participation at Sundance Institute Feature Film Directors and Screenwriters Lab demonstrated that females comprised 38.6 percent of participants. Additionally, female-directed projects that received Sundance Lab support were completed at the same rate as male-directed projects. ***Early career support through a Lab can level the playing field for females and may help establish the interest level women have in a directing career.***

### LITTLE SUPPORT AND FEW OPPORTUNITIES

This barrier focuses on the lack of support women receive to pursue careers in film directing. Whether agents and managers are putting women up for jobs, and the scarcity of chances or opportunities given to women, were mentioned or questioned by 14 percent of individuals.<sup>34</sup>

***The structure of the entertainment industry is such that brokered employment relies on advocates whose role is to facilitate job acquisition. These transactions take place within a system that is highly reliant on stereotyping, and as some report, this “pigeonholes” content creators into genres or film types that reflect their previous work or who they are.***<sup>35</sup>

Advocates play an important role in shaping and bolstering women’s ambitions. Evidence above demonstrates that women are interested in directing large budget or action films. Of the women who indicated they were interested in directing larger films ( $n=18$ ), 44.4 percent ( $n=8$ ) had mentioned their interest to their representative. ***Women may need encouragement to articulate their goals to the individuals who can facilitate career opportunities.***

Buyers and sellers do not equally report this barrier. Buyers (18 percent) were more likely to indicate that women lack support in pursuing jobs than sellers were (10 percent). Yet, both groups equally have the opportunity to request or suggest female candidates for open jobs. Agents or executives who ask women directly about their interest in large budget or masculine genres may discover that some female directors are willing to consider the opportunity.

### COMPETENCE DOUBTED

The final barrier mentioned by participants refers to questions about female directors’ competence. ***Of individuals interviewed, 12 percent mentioned or speculated about beliefs that women “can’t handle” certain types of films or aspects of production, such as commanding a large crew.***

Though women may feel certain of their own ability, others’ judgments may not be so assured. One meta-analytic study demonstrated that in a masculine domain, raters are more likely to select men over women for jobs.<sup>36</sup> In one study, females were less likely than males to be viewed as hireable because raters viewed women as less competent than males even with identical qualifications.<sup>37</sup> Evaluations of women’s leadership are lower in organizational contexts that may traditionally favor men (i.e., athletics, business, manufacturing) or when the leader role is more likely to be held by men.<sup>38</sup> Women’s effectiveness as leaders may be devalued in male-dominated roles or with mostly male subordinates.<sup>39</sup> To the extent that these categories accurately reflect the nature of film production, this may explain the reservations of decision-makers.

In creative situations with many hands required to fulfill the goal of bringing a story to the screen, some resistance to the director's authority is expected, regardless of gender. To specifically investigate this topic, women were asked if their authority had ever been resisted.<sup>40</sup> A full 70 percent ( $n=28$ ) of women answered that they had been challenged by a work colleague. Producers (32.1 percent,  $n=9$ ) were mentioned most often, followed by a crew member (21.4 percent,  $n=6$ ) or talent (21.4 percent,  $n=6$ ). Conflict with producers or financiers may be inevitable when creativity and resources are at odds, but it may also reflect the doubts decision-makers have about women's creative leadership or stewardship. Women directors also stressed that they found ways to cope and deal with individuals who did not respect their authority. It would be instructive to examine the experiences of male directors to understand how typical these conflicts are.

**Across respondents, sellers (19 percent) were more likely to mention prospective doubt in female directors' abilities than buyers (4 percent).** The perception that women will not be trusted by executives could discourage sellers from putting women's names forward. This bias may also be explicitly or implicitly communicated to their female clients. **Of the female directors who indicated they were definitely interested in directing an action or large budget film, 61.1 percent ( $n=11$ ) reported that it was unrealistic for them to pursue those opportunities or that they would not seriously be considered for those jobs.** The lack of women directing large-budget films reflects not only skepticism about their abilities, but reinforces female directors' own beliefs that their industry may not view them as qualified for the task.

The qualitative data presented here reveal not only the barriers facing female directors but the tension between the beliefs of buyers and sellers in the industry. Although each group was represented across all categories of responses, they differed in key ways. Buyers were most likely to report that women are not supported and do not receive opportunities to work on higher budgeted fare. These individuals pointed to industry advocates who must bring women to their attention in order for change to occur. Taking this view, buyers are willing to work with women but unable to do so if they have no opportunity to consider female candidates.

Sellers, on the contrary, were more likely to rely on perceptions of an existing gendered marketplace, and to question women's ambition and the the beliefs that industry decision-makers hold regarding female directors' competence. From their position as brokers of opportunity, sellers offered perceptions of both their clients and colleagues that ostensibly limit the deals sellers can field on behalf of women. Viewed this way, sellers appear happy to procure more prospective employment for their female clients, if only women were interested and buyers were open.



## RESEARCH STUDY, PHASE III

***In truth, buyers and sellers can work independently or interactively to influence the filmmaking ecosystem on behalf of female directors.*** Clear communication between buyers and sellers—and their clients—may be one way to foster this progress. The barriers above reveal how, currently, ideologies and implicit biases can play subtle and significant roles in decision-making and perceptions of women in the industry. Complicating these perceptions are the actions and experiences of female directors themselves. The results from this study in particular demonstrate that female helmers set out on a course that confirms and triggers a stereotype that may affect the deals they make, the material they receive, and the opportunities they are offered.

Overall, the career barriers illuminated here demonstrate that women face a continuous disadvantage from the time they enter the entertainment industry that persists throughout their careers. These barriers are predominantly based on who women are—they cannot escape entrenched and restrictive gender stereotyping in the marketplace in which they conduct transactions. The occupational roadblocks that follow from this narrow perception limit the estimations of how many females work as directors, their ambition, the support they receive, their competence, and even observations related to gender disparities across the industry.

The purpose of this investigation was twofold: First, quantitative data on the careers of male and female filmmakers were collected to determine how occupational trajectories converge or diverge after screening a feature film at SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition. Second, qualitative data were assessed to understand the barriers facing female directors as they move from independent to mainstream filmmaking. Three major trends emerged across the study.

First, the ***prevalence of female directors at SFF establishes that a pipeline to mainstream filmmaking can and does exist***. Over the last 13 years, 25.5 percent of the films in U.S. Dramatic Competition have been directed by a woman. Moreover, across all U.S. narrative films, there were more than 100 different female directors. Though Sundance Film Festival represents just one place where women exhibit films, it also serves as a barometer of interest and talent. Further, these women are telling stories in genres and about characters that Hollywood continues to make each year. More than three-quarters of the films created by women feature a female lead character, and more than 90 percent were in the genres of drama, comedy, or romance. SFF represents a crucial pipeline from independent to mainstream film for female storytellers.

The second key finding is that ***distribution disrupts the pipeline for female storytellers***. The careers of male and female directors begin to diverge as they engage in transactions with the industry. Phase II research demonstrated that after participating in a Sundance Lab, female narrative directors completed and exhibited their films at the same rate as male narrative directors. That finding was extended in this investigation as female directors were just as likely to receive domestic theatrical distribution as their male counterparts. However, the similarities end there. Females were more likely to receive distribution from Independent companies than the more lucrative or prestigious Studio Specialty/Mini Major distributors. For the few females who were picked up by these companies, this gap widens even further at the highest level of distribution where women were underrepresented by a factor of six to one.

The third notable result is that ***perceptions of profit potential disintegrate the pipeline for female directors***. The chief impediment that emerged from the qualitative findings is that a view of a gendered marketplace limits the perception of women's career potential. Industry leaders may hold an implicit association between females and less commercial stories as well as tacitly associate the role of director with a masculine enterprise. Holding these beliefs—even subconsciously—may set up an impenetrable obstacle for many female directors. Women's earliest storytelling experiences may reflect and reinforce the stereotype, directing their later career prospects to a less lucrative set of films. Following this, buyers and sellers may perceive that women lack the ambition or competence to direct the larger, commercial properties that open doors and create later opportunities. The few women who successfully navigate the stereotypical role of the female director find themselves in a "small pool."

Despite the conclusions gleaned in this investigation, there are a few limitations to this research. First, the quantitative data were based on participation at a single film festival. This was done to ensure that all the filmmakers in the sample had a common experience and point of entry into the industry. Examining other festivals and a different set of films and/or

filmmakers might alter the conclusions demonstrated here. Second, the qualitative data were based on responses from industry decision-makers who volunteered to participate. As such, the individuals who were willing to discuss the topic may be different from those who refused to participate. However, the consistency of the responses provided suggests that our data represent widely held industry beliefs about female directors. Further, the findings illuminate and reinforce the results from at least four other investigations.<sup>41</sup>

Continuing and extending the research presented here is an important step toward understanding and addressing the ongoing lack of female film directors. Four particular investigations are important to consider:

- First, in order to truly understand the pipeline and interest in directing among women, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive study of film school enrollment and experiences. This study should illuminate women's ambition to direct narrative features, and the circumstances under which females pursue directing.
- Second, further research on the perceptions and role of sales agents in the financing process would provide an essential indication of how independent film might achieve greater gender parity before movies are even made.
- Third, enlisting econometricians to analyze the relationship between market forces and gender is a key next step. Sophisticated economic models and revenue patterns must be analyzed to determine how genre, lead characters, and directors—male or female—influence the profitability of films, while taking into account a variety of production, distribution, and exhibition factors.
- Fourth, examining pathways to systemic change in other fields is crucial to addressing this seemingly intractable problem in Hollywood. By doing so, the levers of change can be identified and utilized within this unique ecosystem.

Across three years of research, it is clear that the film industry must grapple with not only the paucity of female directors working at its highest ranks, but also the image industry leaders hold regarding female directors. To journey from gender inequality to parity, decision-makers and advocates must work to alter their perceptions about what women can and want to do in their careers. This requires moving away from narrow and limiting stereotypes to conceptions of women that are as open and unbounded as those surrounding men. By making the choice to act strategically, the industry can bridge the gap between business, advocacy, and creativity to foster an environment in which it is possible for female directors to flourish.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, S.L., Pieper, K., & Choueiti, M. (2014). *Exploring the Barriers and Opportunities for Independent Women Filmmakers Phase I and II*. Report prepared for Sundance Institute and Women in Film Los Angeles, Female Filmmakers Initiative.

<sup>2</sup> The data for these analyses come from publicly available information housed in sources such as IMDbPro, StudioSystem/inBaseline, or *Variety* Insight.

<sup>3</sup> A total of 16 films were in U.S. Dramatic Competition per year for 13 years (208 total). *Love in the Time of Money* was not considered a Competition movie by programmers in 2002 and thus was excluded. Several films in the sample were co-directed. In these cases, the film was only counted once. Two films were directed by a male and female pair. These films were counted as female-directed films during any gender analysis, which is consistent with decisions made in our previous research.

<sup>4</sup> The genre distinctions were obtained from three sources in the following order: IMDbPro, StudioSystem, and Box Office Mojo. The latter two websites were only consulted if information was not available from IMDbPro. Competition films featured between one and three genre labels. For 47 films, drama appeared alongside these descriptors: action, adventure, crime, fantasy, horror, mystery, sci-fi, sport, thriller, and/or war. Among this group, drama co-occurred with two categories most frequently: crime ( $n=18$ ) and thriller ( $n=15$ ). The remaining 14 films were labeled with combinations of drama and one or more other descriptors from those listed above. Besides these 47 films, an additional five films were categorized with crime, horror, and/or thriller without the drama marker. Twenty films had three genre labels.

<sup>5</sup> A list of all the U.S. Dramatic Competition movies was given to Sundance Institute (SI) Programmers to crowdsource the lead character judgments. After the list was completed, one of the study authors confirmed the SI Programmers' judgments using multiple sources: Sundance Online Archive, Metacritic summary, IMDbPro, Wikipedia, *The New York Times*, *Variety*, or *Hollywood Reporter* review, and the movie's trailer. Resolving discrepancies occurred two ways: 1) further questioning SI Programmers, and/or 2) emailing directly the movie's director(s) or producer(s). Given the way these judgments were made, these results should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, S.L., Granados, A., Choueiti, M., Erickson, S., & Noyes, A. (2011). *Changing the Status Quo: Industry Leaders' Perceptions of Gender in Family Films*. Executive summary and report prepared for the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media.

<sup>7</sup> Domestic distribution was coded as "present" when a company was listed as the U.S. (or domestic) theatrical distributor on IMDbPro or StudioSystem. When IMDbPro listed "All Media" as the distribution, StudioSystem designations were used to corroborate domestic theatrical distribution. In most cases, when an "All Media" designation was present, StudioSystem listed a domestic or worldwide theatrical distributor. When a distributor was absent or no theaters were listed for widest point of release, the film was considered "not distributed."

## WORKS CITED & NOTES, PHASE III

<sup>8</sup>. Distinctions for domestic distributors were made using a classification system generated from Wikipedia and amended to reclassify film divisions of television networks owned by major studios. Information on distribution was garnered from IMDbPro and StudioSystem during August and September 2014. Ownership changes among distributors may have occurred. The coding scheme for distributors was based on present-day classifications and did not always take into account the historical standing of different companies. Additionally, as film databases update frequently, distribution information may have been altered online after the data for this study was pulled. For face validity, the list of Independent and Studio Specialty/Mini Major distributors was shown to one of the study funders. Given her expertise in this area, a few companies were moved from one list to the other.

Using *Variety's* definition, Mini Majors are: "Big film production companies that are supposedly smaller than the majors although such companies as Miramax, Polygram and New Line compete directly with the big studios" (Source: <http://variety.com/static-pages/slanguage-dictionary/#m>). Studio Specialty distributors are any subsidiary of a major film studio, including art house, indie, and television film divisions. When multiple distributors were listed across both types (Independent and Studio Specialty/Mini Major), the highest level (Studio Specialty/Mini Major) was coded.

<sup>9</sup>. The company designations were categorized into two groups: 1) Independent or 2) Studio Specialty/Mini Major. There were more than 50 Independent distribution companies. For examples of either Independent or Studio Specialty/Mini Major companies, please contact the authors.

Metacritic scores were only evaluated at the company level and not by level of distribution density. This is due to the fact that so few films with female directors were distributed at the 76–250 level by Independent distributors and at all levels by Studio Specialty/Mini Major companies. Even though the median is reported for the Studio Specialty/Mini Major category, differences should be interpreted with caution because of the small sample.

<sup>10</sup>. Transgender individuals were coded as the gender they identified with at the time the film premiered at SFF or in the top-grossing sample. Information was obtained by the research team to determine how individuals publicly referred to or expressed their gender at the time of a film's creation or release.

<sup>11</sup>. A total of 28 executives across independent and commercial filmmaking, and 31 agents, managers, sales agents, or those with sales experience, were interviewed. Across both of these groups, the sample had an average age of 47.22 years among those who provided it. The majority of the sample identified their racial and/or ethnic background as White (86.4 percent,  $n=51$ ), with 8.5 percent ( $n=5$ ) identifying another or multiple racial/ethnic origins and 5.1 percent ( $n=3$ ) not reported.

<sup>12</sup>. Of the 41 female directors interviewed, 73.2 percent identified as White ( $n=30$ ) and 26.8 percent as another or multiple racial and/or ethnic origins ( $n=11$ ) and had an average age of 42.6 years.

<sup>13</sup> Buyers and sellers were presented with data on the percentage of female directors across the 100 top-grossing movies of 2007 (3 percent) and 2013 (2 percent). They were asked: *Given these figures, where do you think females fall out of the hiring process?* In addition to spontaneously answering this question, individuals were asked about several potential factors that were not mentioned or were relevant to their experience, including: *genre, budget size, production insurance/completion bonds, hearing negative or positive comments about female directors, work/family balance, agents, executives, and the international market.* All responses were transcribed from audio recordings and checked twice by members of the research team. Two of the study authors analyzed the responses for theoretically relevant elements. Responses were coded multiple times to refine the categories used. In this investigation, only the spontaneous responses were examined. Only when coding the “Think Director, Think Male” category were answers to follow-up prompts assessed. The unit of analysis is the entire response, and individuals could fit into multiple categories. Several types of comments were included in the analysis: assertions, questions, assumptions about other individuals’ perspectives, personal experiences, or anecdotes. Responses in text reflect speculation, hypothesizing, perceptions, and others’ and own experiences on the part of the individuals interviewed.

<sup>14</sup> Of the responses in this category, over 90 percent made comments about the marketplace and female directors that provided an explicit link. Other comments implicitly related a gendered marketplace to female directors. By the same token, over 80 percent of the responses regarding male directors or content explicitly linked males to the marketplace.

<sup>15</sup> Smith et al. (2011).

<sup>16</sup> Smith et al. (2011).

<sup>17</sup> Romano, A. (2014, July). The Romantic Comedy is Dead. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved from: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/07/the-romantic-comedy-is-dead.html>. Sperling, N. (2015, January). Adult dramas in decline. *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved from <http://www.ew.com/article/2009/06/05/adult-dramas-decline>. Brodesser-Akner, C. (2012, December). Can the Romantic Comedy be Saved? *Vulture*. Retrieved from: <http://www.vulture.com/2012/12/can-the-romantic-comedy-be-saved.html>. Harris, M. (2011, February). The Day the Movies Died. *GQ*. Retrieved from: <http://www.gq.com/entertainment/movies-and-tv/201102/the-day-the-movies-died-mark-harris>.

<sup>18</sup> Genre coding was conducted using IMDbPro distinctions. So that comparisons to SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition films could be made, we divided the movies into two mutually exclusive groups: comedy, drama, and/or romance versus all else. If these terms were modified by action, adventure, crime, fantasy, horror, mystery, sci-fi, sport, thriller, war, and/or western, they were included into “all other.” Biographies, family, history, and/or musical genres were decided on a case-by-case basis. Two genres posed a challenge: documentary and animation. Both are a style of presentation and not considered a genre. As such, the other labels that co-appeared with animation or documentary determined how a film was categorized. We analyzed the prevalence of comedies, dramas, and/or romances over 13 years both with and



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without each label (alone or in combination). Neither analysis changed the overall stability of comedy, drama, and/or romance films released across the 13 year period. In text, we report fictional films including animated movies. Removing both animated and documentary films reduces the total number of films considered to 1,154, with 354 movies in the comedy, drama, and/or romance genres. Of these 354 films, 8.5% were female-directed and 91.5% were male-directed.

<sup>19</sup> For this analysis, we treated films where a different director and writer were credited as open directing assignments (ODA). It may be the case that the directors of these movies became attached to the project through a process other than an ODA. The data in this paragraph are used as an example and not a definitive list of ODAs in these genres for the years reported.

<sup>20</sup> Eagly, A.H., & Karau, S.J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573-598. See p. 574.

<sup>21</sup> Eagly & Karau (2002). See pp. 574 and 575.

<sup>22</sup> To code this variable, the use of masculine or agentic characteristics was captured throughout participants' spontaneous and prompted answers. That is, at any time during their initial answer, or their responses to follow-up prompts, these traits could be used. Examining only spontaneous answers would reduce the presence of this category to 19 percent. Traits were considered masculine or agentic if they matched qualities that were referenced in Phase II. See footnotes 23, 24, and 25. Additional words that were synonyms or logical extensions of these terms were coded as masculine or agentic.

<sup>23</sup> See Ryan, M.K. & Haslam, S.A. (2007). The glass cliff: Exploring the dynamics surrounding the appointment of women to precarious leadership positions. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(2), 549-572. Schein, V.E. (2001). A global look at psychological barriers to women's progress in management. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4), 675-688.

<sup>24</sup> During a series of questions regarding the process of attaching or identifying potential directors for a film project, buyers ( $n=27$ ) and sellers ( $n=22$ ) were asked about the specific women who might be considered for a film. Buyers were asked: *Are there lists or genres where women are more or less likely to be considered? Which women appear on these lists?* Sellers were asked: *Which women, if any, are considered for open directing assignments?* Responses were scrutinized for the names of individual directors by two of the study's authors.

<sup>25</sup> Directors Guild of America (January, 2015, Paragraph 1-2). *DGA Five-year Study of First-Time Directors in Episodic Television Shows: Women and Minority Directors Face Significant Hiring Disadvantage at Entry Level*. Retrieved from: <http://www.dga.org/News/PressReleases/2015/150108-DGA-Five-Year-Study-of-First-Time-Directors-in-Episodic-Television.aspx>

<sup>26</sup> One comment seemed to suggest a lack of ambition by female directors. The comment was clarified in a later response and did refer to female directors' lack of interest in certain films. If that response was not included, the percentage of individuals mentioning this barrier drops to 24 percent.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, P.G., Spencer, S.J., Quinn, D.M., & Gerhardstein, R. (2002). Consuming images: How television commercials that elicit stereotype threat can restrain women academically and professionally. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(12), 1615--1628. See Studies 1 and 2.

<sup>28</sup> Davies et al. (2002). See Study 3, p. 1625.

<sup>29</sup> Female directors were asked: *Action or blockbuster movies are consistently produced by Hollywood studios. Typically, these are films with budgets over \$70 million. Are you interested in directing opportunities of this type? Why or why not?* Responses were aggregated and coded by two of the study authors.

<sup>30</sup> Smith et al. (2014a). Smith, S.L., Choueiti, M., & Pieper, K. (2014b). *Gender Inequality in 600 Popular Films: Examining On Screen Portrayals and Behind-the-Scenes Employment Patterns in Motion Pictures Released between 2007-2013*. Los Angeles, CA: Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. Smith, S.L., Choueiti, M., & Pieper, K. (2014c). *Gender Bias Without Borders: An Investigation of Female Characters in Popular Films Across 11 Countries*. Report prepared for the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media.

<sup>31</sup> McDonald, S., Lin, N., & Ao, D. (2009). Networks of opportunity: Gender, race, and job leads. *Social Problems*, 56(3), 385-402. Huffman, M.L. & Torres, L. (2002). It's not only "who you know" that matters: Gender, personal contacts, and job lead quality. *Gender & Society*, 16(6), 793-813.

<sup>32</sup> Randle, K., Wing-Fai, L., & Kurian, J. (2007). Creating difference: Overcoming barriers to diversity in UK film and television employment. *Creative Industries Research and Consultancy Unit, The Business School, University of Hertfordshire*.

<sup>33</sup> Other countries may have data on the enrollment of women in directing programs, but we are not aware of any independent investigation on this topic in the U.S. There is one paragraph in a journal article from the late 1990s that mentions the prevalence of women in film schools.

<sup>34</sup> One response mentioned the scarcity of second chances for women rather than general opportunities.

<sup>35</sup> Randle et al. (2007). Pieper, K.M., Choueiti, M., & Smith, S.L. (2014). *Race & Ethnicity in Independent Films: Underrepresented Directors and the Barriers They Face*. Working paper.

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<sup>36</sup> Davison, H.K. & Burke, M.J. (2000). Sex discrimination in simulated employment contexts: A meta-analytic investigation. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 56, 225-248.

<sup>37</sup> Moss-Racusin, C.A., Dovidio, J.F., Brescoll, V.L., Graham, M.J., & Handelsman, J. (2012). Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(41), 16474-16479. See p. 16476.

<sup>38</sup> Eagly, A.H., Makhijani, M.G., & Klonsky, B.G. (1992). Gender and the evaluation of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111(1), 3-22. See p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Eagly, A.H., Karau, S.J., & Makhijani, M.G. (1995). Gender and the effectiveness of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(1), 125-145. See p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> A total of 40 female directors were asked: *As a director, have you ever felt that someone you worked with resisted your leadership or vision? When did that happen? How did you respond?* Two of the study's authors coded the responses for whether women had experienced resistance and who resisted their leadership.

<sup>41</sup> Smith et al. (2011), (2014a, Phase I and Phase II). Pieper et al. (2014).

