

Inclusion in the Director's Chair: Analysis of Director Gender and Race/Ethnicity Across the 1,600 Top Films from 2007 to 2022

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USC Annenberg
Inclusion Initiative

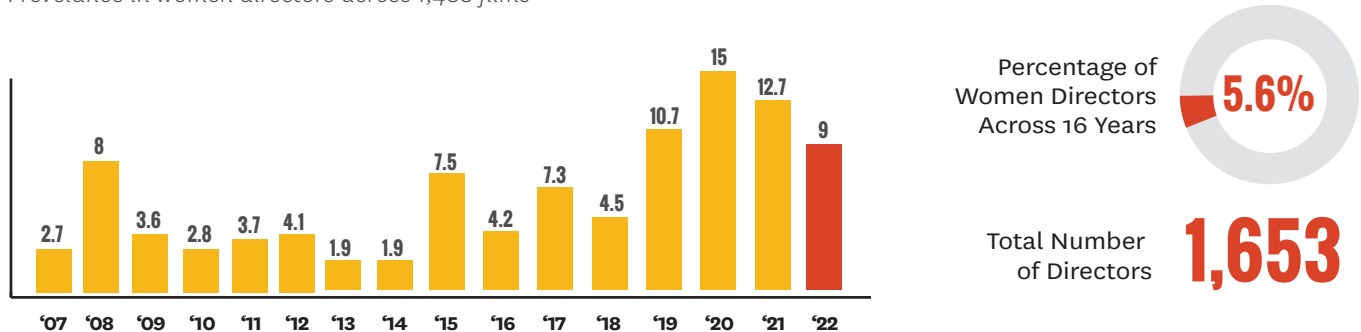
INCLUSION IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR: ANALYSIS OF DIRECTOR GENDER & RACE/ETHNICITY ACROSS 1,600 TOP FILMS FROM 2007 TO 2022

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PROGRESS HAS STALLED FOR WOMEN DIRECTORS

Prevalence in women directors across 1,488 films



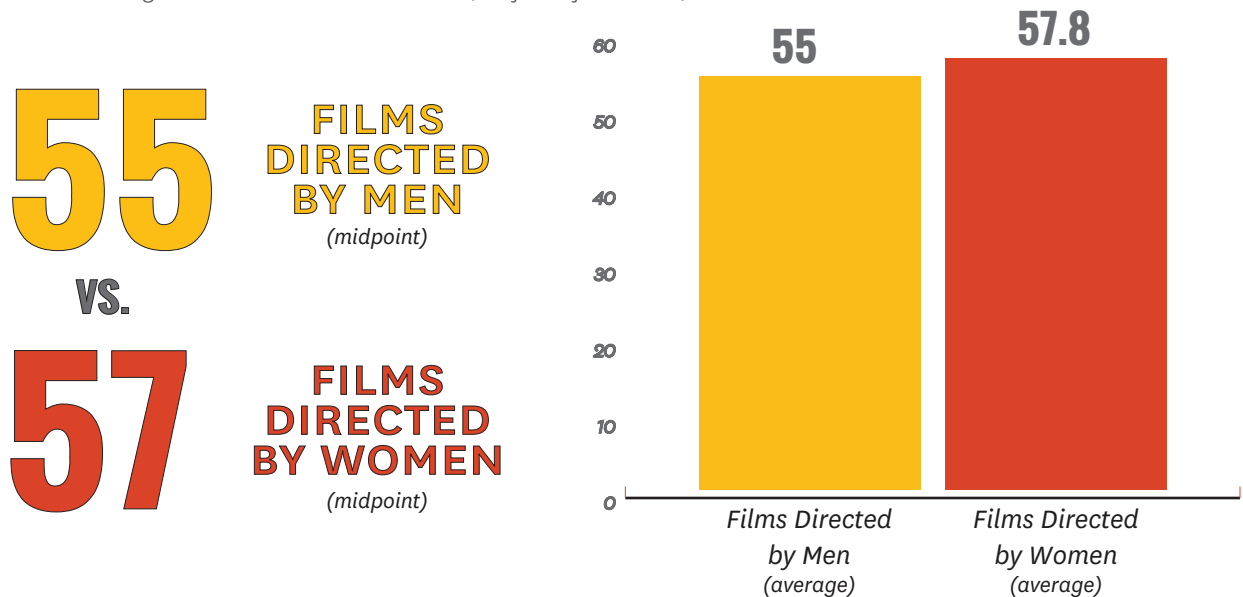
Sample sizes for 2020 (37 films) and 2021 (51 films) reflect the average market share of top-grossing films each year from 2007 to 2019. Data on the full 100 top films each year along with other samples are presented in the complete 2022 report and are not significantly different from what is reported here.

RATIO OF INDIVIDUAL MEN TO WOMEN DIRECTORS ACROSS 16 YEARS

11 TO 1

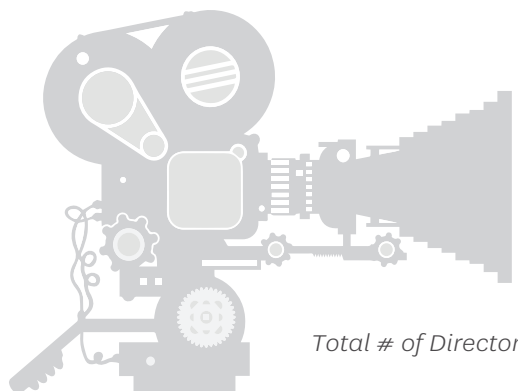
NO DIFFERENCE IN METACRITIC SCORES BY FILM DIRECTOR GENDER

Median and average Metacritic score across 1,488 films from 2007 to 2022



WOMEN DIRECTORS BY DISTRIBUTOR

Number of women directors across 1,488 films by distributor



| 20th Century | Paramount Pictures | Sony Pictures | Universal Pictures | Walt Disney Studios | Warner Bros. | Lionsgate | STX Entertainment | Other |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------|-------|
| 9 | 3 | 16 | 23 | 10 | 17 | 4 | 3 | 8 |
| 209 | 170 | 236 | 270 | 185 | 261 | 131 | 23 | 168 |

93 OUT OF **1,653** DIRECTORS

WOMEN DIRECTORS ACROSS 1,488 TOP-GROSSING FILMS

| | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Abby Kohn | Jennifer Flackett | Nancy Meyers |
| Angelina Jolie | Jennifer Lee | Nia DaCosta* |
| Anna Boden | Jennifer Yuh Nelson* | Niki Caro |
| Anna Foerster | Jessica M. Thompson | Nora Ephron |
| Anne Fletcher | Jessie Nelson | Olivia Newman |
| Autumn de Wilde | Jill Culton | Olivia Wilde |
| Ava DuVernay* | Jodie Foster | Patricia Riggen* |
| Betty Thomas | Julie Anne Robinson | Patty Jenkins |
| Brenda Chapman | Julie Taymor | Phyllida Lloyd |
| Cate Shortland | Kasi Lemmons* | Rosalind Ross |
| Catherine Hardwicke | Kat Coiro | Roxann Dawson* |
| Cathy Yan* | Kathryn Bigelow | Sam Taylor-Johnson |
| Chinonye Chukwu* | Kay Cannon | Sanaa Hamri* |
| Chloe Zhao* | Kimberly Peirce | Sarah Smith |
| Diane English | Kirsten Sheridan | Shari Springer Berman |
| Elaine Bogan | Lana Wachowski | Sharon Maguire |
| Elizabeth Allen Rosenbaum | Liesl Tommy* | Stacy Title |
| Elizabeth Banks | Lilly Wachowski | Stella Meghie* |
| Emerald Fennel | Lorene Scafaria | Susanna Fogel |
| Floria Sigismondi | Loveleen Tandan* | Susanna White |
| Gail Mancuso | Lucia Aniello | Thea Sharrock |
| Gina Prince-Bythewood* | Maria Schrader | Tina Gordon* |
| Greta Gerwig | Marielle Heller | Trish Sie |
| Halina Reijn | Melina Matsoukas* | |
| Hallie Meyers-Shyer | Mimi Leder | |



THERE ARE

73

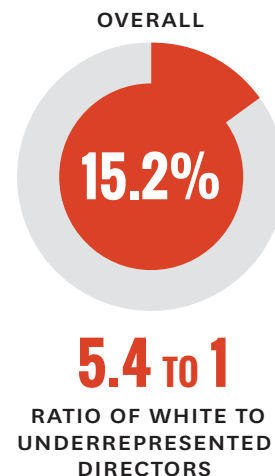
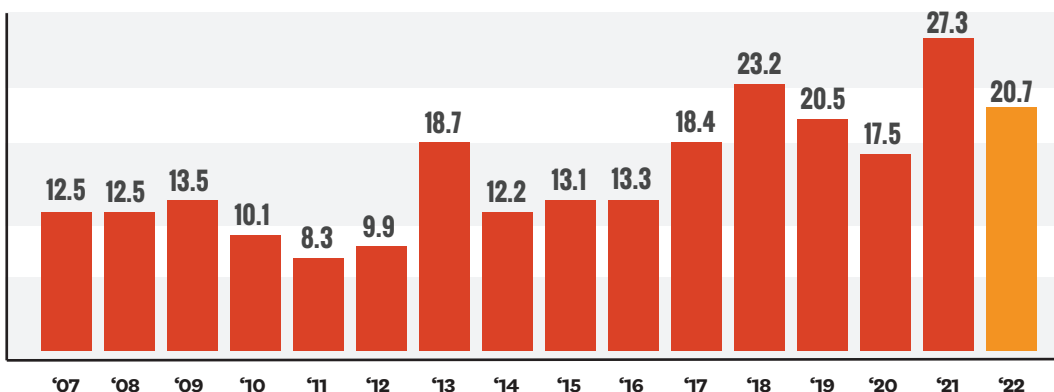
INDIVIDUAL
WOMEN
DIRECTORS
BETWEEN

2007
&
2022

*An asterisk denotes an underrepresented woman director.

UNDERREPRESENTED DIRECTORS BY YEAR

Percentage of underrepresented directors across 1,488 films



Sample sizes for 2020 (37 films) and 2021 (51 films) reflect the average market share of top-grossing films each year from 2007 to 2019. Data on the full 100 top films each year along with other samples are presented in the complete 2022 report and are not significantly different from what is reported here.

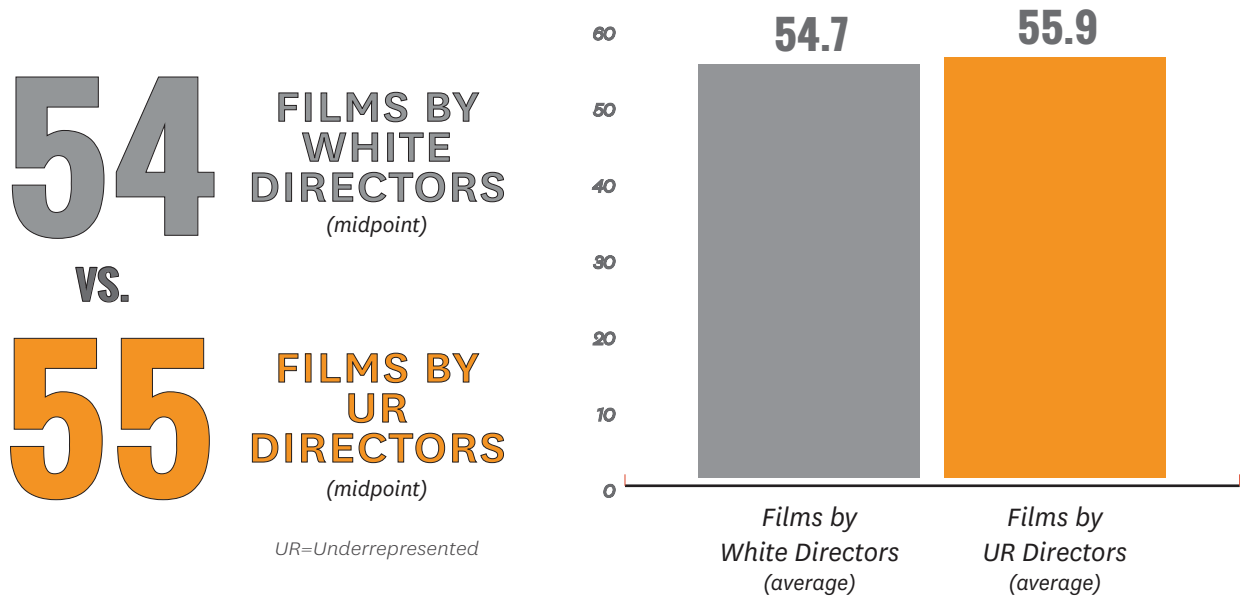
UNDERREPRESENTED DIRECTORS BY DISTRIBUTOR

Number and percentage of underrepresented directors across 1,488 films by distributor

| DISTRIBUTION COMPANY | # OF UR DIRECTORS | % OF UR DIRECTORS | TOTAL # OF DIRECTORS |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 20TH CENTURY | 29 | 13.9 | 209 |
| PARAMOUNT PICTURES | 17 | 10 | 170 |
| SONY PICTURES | 41 | 17.4 | 236 |
| UNIVERSAL PICTURES | 53 | 19.6 | 270 |
| WALT DISNEY STUDIOS | 18 | 9.7 | 185 |
| WARNER BROS. | 31 | 11.9 | 261 |
| LIONSGATE | 28 | 21.4 | 131 |
| STX ENTERTAINMENT | 1 | 4.4 | 23 |
| OTHER | 34 | 20.2 | 168 |
| TOTAL | 252 | 15.2 | 1,653 |

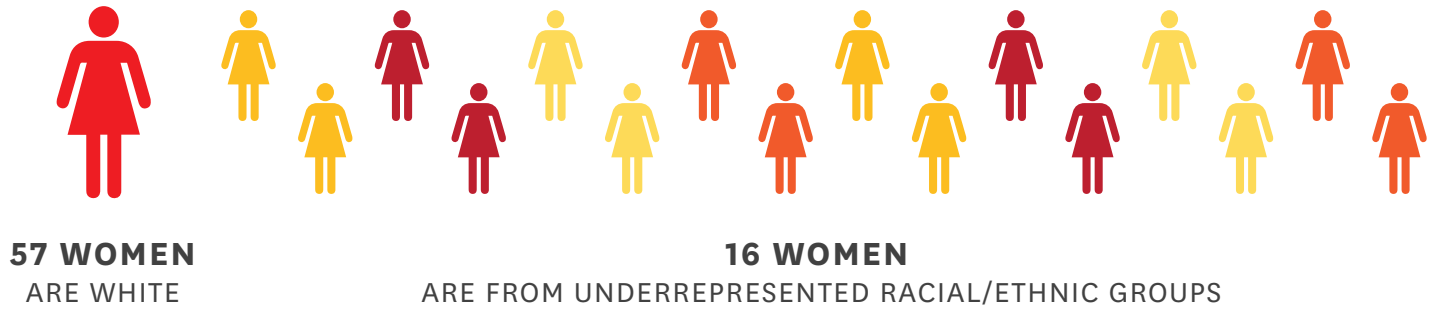
METACRITIC SCORES FOR UNDERREPRESENTED DIRECTORS

Median and average Metacritic score across 1,488 films from 2007 to 2022



HOLLYWOOD'S IMAGE OF A WOMAN DIRECTOR IS WHITE

Race/ethnicity of 73 individual women directors across 1,488 films



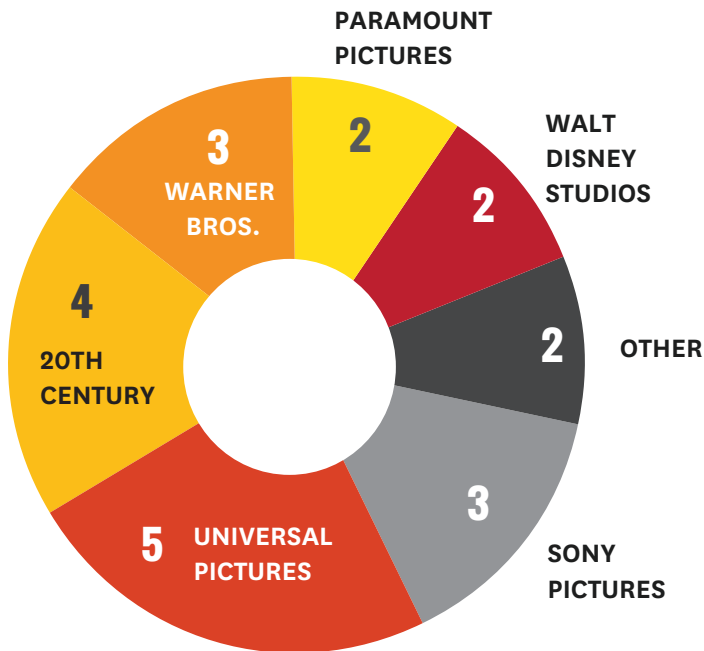
GENDER & UNDERREPRESENTED STATUS OF FILM DIRECTORS

Percentage and number of directors by gender and underrepresented status across 1,488 films from 2007 to 2022

| INDICATOR | WHITE MEN | WHITE WOMEN | UR MEN | UR WOMEN |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------|--------|----------|
| TOTAL % | 80.4% | 4.4% | 14% | 1.3% |
| TOTAL # | 1,329 | 72 | 231 | 21 |
| U.S. POPULATION | 29.4% | 29.9% | 20.1% | 20.6% |

UNDERREPRESENTED WOMEN DIRECTORS BY DISTRIBUTOR

Number of underrepresented women directors of top-grossing films per distributor from 2007-2022



16 years:
2007-2022
1,488 movies

ONLY

21 films directed by
underrepresented
women

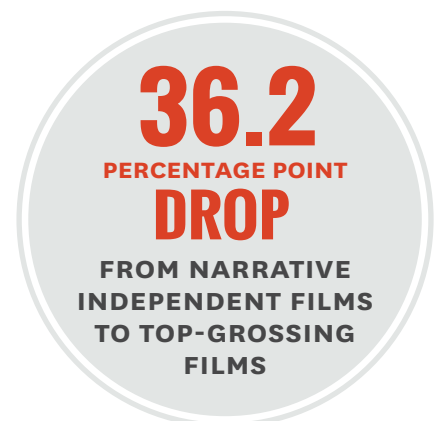
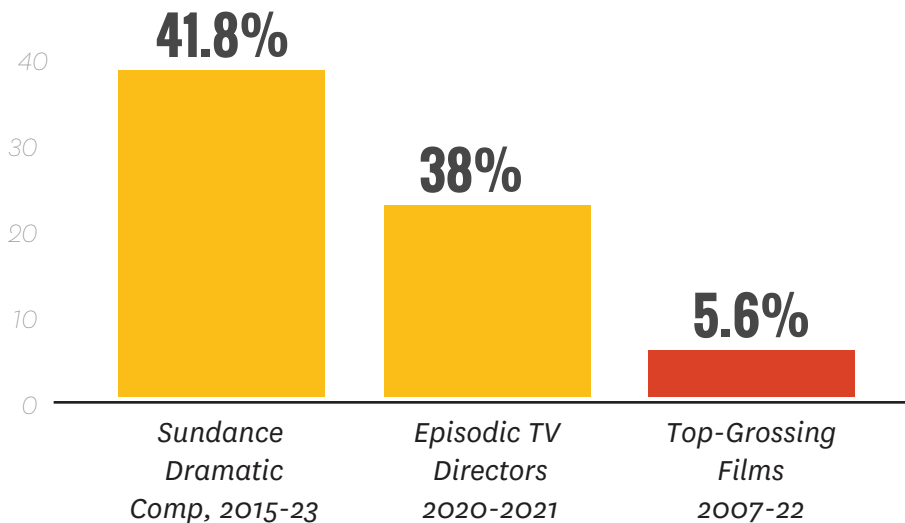
Zero underrepresented women directors worked on top-grossing films from Lionsgate or STX Entertainment. Other reflects films distributed by independent companies.

RATIO OF WHITE MEN TO UNDERREPRESENTED WOMEN DIRECTORS ACROSS 16 YEARS

63.3 TO 1

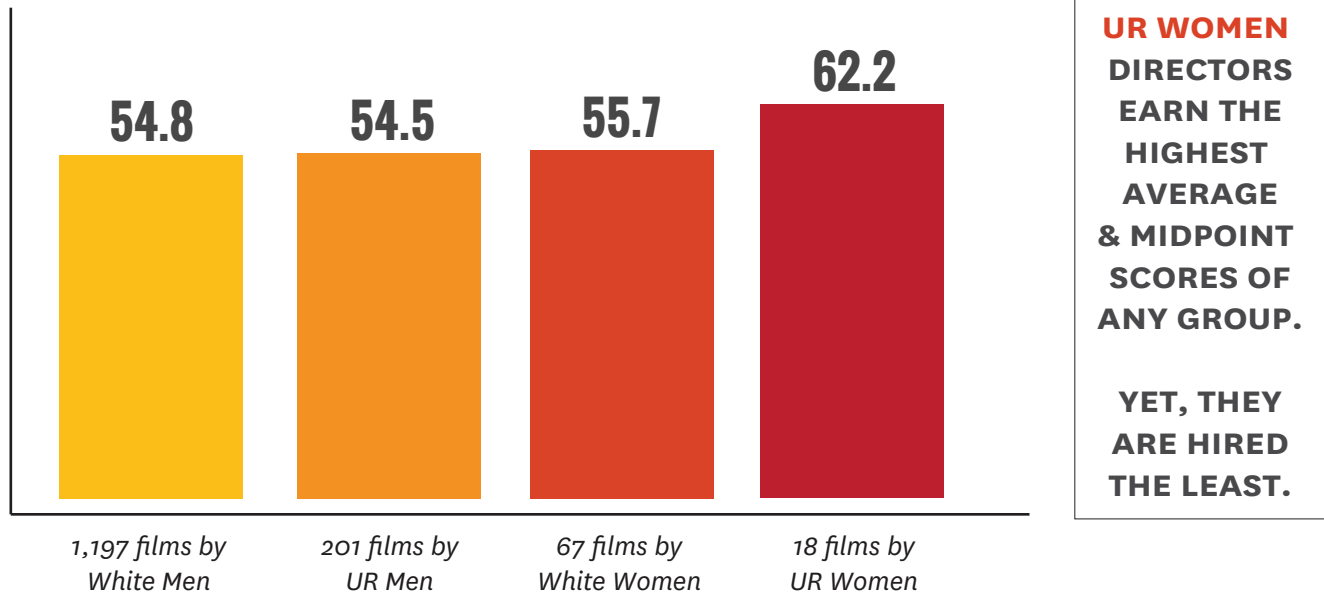
PIPELINE PROBLEMS: CAREER PROGRESS STALLS FOR WOMEN

Percentage of women directors by media platform



METACRITIC SCORES BY GENDER AND UNDERREPRESENTED STATUS

Average metacritic score by gender and race/ethnicity of directors, 2007-2022



**Inclusion in the Director's Chair:
Analysis of Director Gender and Race/Ethnicity Across the 1,600 Top Films from 2007 to 2022**

Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Dr. Katherine Pieper, & Sam Wheeler
Annenberg Inclusion Initiative

Each year, we examine specific demographics (gender, race/ethnicity) of directors across the 100 top domestic fictional films in North America. Directors are singled out in our work as they occupy the top leadership position in movie production. Using Box Office Mojo, we identified the highest earning fictional films released theatrically after excluding documentaries and any other content not constituting a movie. The films were produced locally and abroad and distributed by an array of companies. In total, our longitudinal sample comprised 1,600 films released theatrically from 2007 to 2022. Below, key findings are presented by gender, race/ethnicity and the intersection of these identities.

Key Findings

Gender. A total of 111 directors were hired across the 100 top fictional films of 2022. Of these, 91% were men and 9% ($n=10$) were women. This is a gender ratio of 10.1 male directors to 1 every one female director hired.

The 10 women were: Olivia Newman (*Where the Crawdads Sing*), Gina Prince-Bythewood (*The Woman King*), Olivia Wilde (*Don't Worry Darling*), Jessica M. Thompson (*The Invitation*), Kat Coiro (*Marry Me*), Rosalind Ross (*Father Stu*), Halina Reijn (*Bodies, Bodies, Bodies*), Kasi Lemmons (*Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody*), Chinonye Chukwu (*Till*), and Maria Schrader (*She Said*).

There was **no change** between 2021 (12.7%) and 2022 (9%). In comparison to 2007, there has been a 6.3 percentage point increase but no meaningful deviation from 2008 (8%).

A total of 73 individual women and 770 individual men were hired to direct a motion picture across the 16-year sample time frame. This was a gender ratio of 10.6 men to every 1 woman. 78.1% of the female directors but 54.8% of the male directors only helmed one top-grossing film from 2007-2022.

The top performing male director was Tyler Perry, with 18 films. The top women directors were Anne Fletcher and Lana Wachowski with 4 films each.

In terms of distributor, Sony Pictures Entertainment (5) worked with the most women directors in 2022 followed by Universal Pictures (2) and all other distributors (2). Over 16 years, however, Universal Pictures was the top performer among major distributors. In 2022 and five years after the explosion of the #MeToo and Times Up movement, Lionsgate, Paramount Pictures, STX Entertainment, 20th Century and Walt Disney Studios did not hire or acquire one film with a woman at the helm.

There was no difference in average Metacritic scores – a measure of quality -- by gender. Male-directed films, on average, achieved a score of 55 ($range=9-100$) while female-directed films received a score of 57.8 ($range=22-95$). On a standard academic grading scale (i.e., A-F), male- and female- directed films both land in the mid to high “F” or failure range.

Women comprised 41.8% of directors in U.S. Dramatic Competition at Sundance Film Festival from 2015-2023 and 38% of helmers across episodic television from 2020-2021. Clearly, there is still a steep drop off

in access and opportunity for women directors from independent and television spaces to directing top fictional fare when women comprised only 5.6% of helmers from 2007-2022.

Race/Ethnicity. 20.7% ($n=23$) of helmers across the 100 top films of 2022 were from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group. Of these, 11 were Asian, 5 were multiracial/multiethnic, 4 were Black, and 3 were Hispanic/Latino. This represented 3.8 White directors for every 1 underrepresented director. Twenty of the underrepresented directors were men and only 3 were women.

From 2021 to 2022, there was a 6.6 percentage point **decrease** in underrepresented directors. Though, 2022 was on par with 2019 (20.5%) and 2020 (17.5%) but significantly higher than 2007 (12.5%).

A total of 712 individual White directors and 131 individual underrepresented directors worked between 2007 and 2022. This was ratio of 5.4 White directors to every 1 underrepresented director. As noted earlier, the top performer sample-wide was Tyler Perry (18 films) followed by Jaume Collet-Serra (8 films). Four underrepresented directors have made 7 movies each across the sample time frame: Antoine Fuqua, M. Night Shyamalan, Malcom D. Lee, and Tim Story.

In terms of White directors, Steven Spielberg held the top spot with 12 films followed by Clint Eastwood (11 films) and Ridley Scott (9 films). A full 64.9% of underrepresented directors and 55.3% of White directors worked only once across the 16-year sample.

Universal Pictures was the top performer among major studios when it came to working with underrepresented directors in 2022. Almost 20% of Universal's movies from 2007 to 2022 were helmed by non-White directors. Universal was second to Lionsgate overall from 2007 to 2022, where 21.4% of directors were underrepresented. Sony Pictures Entertainment was a close third as 17.4% of all helmers they worked with across the last 16 years were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Three companies did not work with an underrepresented director in 2022: Lionsgate, STX Entertainment, and 20th Century.

No difference emerged across average Metacritic scores for White directors (54.7, *range*=9-100) and directors from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (55.9, *range*=11-99). As such, the quality of the films made by underrepresented directors was on par with those made by White directors for the last 16 years.

Between 2015 and 2023, a total of 41.8% of U.S. Dramatic Competition directors at Sundance Film Festival were underrepresented. This is consistent with U.S. Census benchmarking at 40.7%. According to the Directors Guild of America's latest statistics, 34.5% of episodic television directors were from historically marginalized racial/ethnic groups. Yet, when it comes to top-grossing films, underrepresented directors helmed only 15.2% of all movies from 2007 to 2022.

Women of Color. Only 2.7% ($n=3$) of all directors in 2022 were women of color. Those three women were Gina Prince-Bythewood (*The Woman King*), Kasi Lemmons (*Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody*) and Chinonye Chukwu (*Till*).

Across all 16 years of the sample, women of color were hired as directors on only 21 movies. This translates into 1.3% of all directing opportunities or a ratio of 63.3 White directors to every 1 woman of color.

The 21 directing jobs were held by 16 different women. Only 5 women of color have worked more than once across the 16-year sample: Ava DuVernay, Gina Prince-Bythewood, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, Kasi Lemmons, and Stella Meghie. Consistent with findings in the gender and race/ethnicity section, Universal Pictures was the top performer overall in attaching women of color to direct their studio's movies.

The movies made by women of color had the highest average critical reception or Metacritic score (62.2, *range*=44-93) in comparison to films by White males (54.8, *range*=9-100), underrepresented males (54.5, *range*=11-99), and White females (55.7, *range*=22-95). Thus, women of color worked the least but produced the highest quality films in comparison to their peers.

Examining the directors of Sundance Film Festival's U.S. Dramatic Competition movies from 2015-2023, 18.8% were women of color. Further, 13% of all episodic directing jobs went to underrepresented women, according to the DGA's latest statistics for the 2020-21 television season.

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Each year, we examine specific demographics (gender, race/ethnicity) of directors across the 100 top domestic films released in North America. Directors are singled out in our work as they occupy the top leadership position in movie production. Using Box Office Mojo, we identified the highest earning fictional films released theatrically after excluding documentaries and any other content not constituting a movie.¹ The films were produced locally and abroad and distributed by an array of companies. In total, our longitudinal sample comprises 1,600 films released theatrically from 2007 to 2022.²

Due to the pandemic, we had to calculate the 100 top movies differently in 2020 and 2021 (See footnote 3). In short, many movies failed to behave in the marketplace like previous years by earning at least \$20 million at the box office. Given that the top films each year drive roughly 91% of the theatrical revenue across all movies released, we took the films that captured this share in 2020 and 2021 and designated those as the “top movies.” More specifically, these “top movies” are what comprised the sample for those years in this report.

Given that the reality of COVID-19 is here to stay, 2022 is probably a decent reflection of what the box office will look like in the years to come. As such, we have returned to sampling the 100 top fictional films with an understanding that only roughly half (i.e., earning \$20 million or more) reflect what occurred in 2007-2019 of our longitudinal sample.

This short report is divided into four major sections. We first look at the gender distribution of directors and then focus on race/ethnicity. The third section illuminates how often women of color worked as directors of top-grossing films. Not only do we examine the prevalence of employment by group membership in each section, but also the frequency of work across the sample time frame, major studio and mini-major hiring practices, Metacritic scores, and relevant pipeline statistics (Sundance Film Festival, Directors Guild of America). The paper concludes with a summary of the findings and solutions for change.

As with all our work, we only make noise about differences between groups of 5 percentage points or greater. This approach was taken to avoid discussing trivial deviations of only 1-2%. Below, we explicate patterns for 2022 and then compare those findings to 2020 and 2007.

Gender

A total of 111 directors were hired across the 100 top fictional films of 2022. Of these, 91% were men and 9% were women. This was a ratio of 10.1 male directors to every one female director. In order of box office earnings, the 10 women were: Olivia Newman (*Where the Crawdads Sing*), Gina Prince-Bythewood (*The Woman King*), Olivia Wilde (*Don't Worry Darling*), Jessica M. Thompson (*The Invitation*), Kat Coiro (*Marry Me*), Rosalind Ross (*Father Stu*), Halina Reijn (*Bodies, Bodies, Bodies*), Kasi Lemmons (*Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody*), Chinonye Chukwu (*Till*), and Maria Schrader (*She Said*).

Did the percentage of women directors change over time? There was no meaningful differences between 2021 (12.7%) and 2022 (9%). In comparison to 2007, however, there was a 6.3 percentage point increase but no meaningful deviation from 2008 (8%). All of these statistics are well below U.S. Census, which estimates that 50.5% of the population is comprised of girls and women.⁴

Table 1
Director Gender of Fictional Films by Year

| Year | Males | Females | Total |
|----------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 2007 | 97.3% (n=109) | 2.7% (n=3) | 112 |
| 2008 | 92% (n=103) | 8% (n=9) | 112 |
| 2009 | 96.4% (n=107) | 3.6% (n=4) | 111 |
| 2010 | 97.2% (n=106) | 2.8% (n=3) | 109 |
| 2011 | 96.3% (n=104) | 3.7% (n=4) | 108 |
| 2012 | 95.9% (n=116) | 4.1% (n=5) | 121 |
| 2013 | 98.1% (n=105) | 1.9% (n=2) | 107 |
| 2014 | 98.1% (n=105) | 1.9% (n=2) | 107 |
| 2015 | 92.5% (n=99) | 7.5% (n=8) | 107 |
| 2016 | 95.8% (n=115) | 4.2% (n=5) | 120 |
| 2017 | 92.7% (n=101) | 7.3% (n=8) | 109 |
| 2018 | 95.5% (n=107) | 4.5% (n=5) | 112 |
| 2019 | 89.3% (n=100) | 10.7% (n=12) | 112 |
| 2020 | 85% (n=34) | 15% (n=6) | 40 |
| 2021 | 87.3% (n=48) | 12.7% (n=7) | 55 |
| 2022 | 91% (n=101) | 9% (n=10) | 111 |
| Overall | 94.4% (n=1,560) | 5.6% (n=93) | 1,653 |

Next, we were interested in how frequently women helmed top-grossing films. A total of 73 individual women (see Table 2) and 770 individual men were hired to direct a motion picture across the sample time frame. This was a gender ratio of 10.6 men to every 1 woman. The top women directors were Anne Fletcher and Lana Wachowski with 4 films each. An additional 14 women directed two films across the sample: Ava DuVernay, Catherine Hardwicke, Gina Prince-Bythewood, Greta Gerwig, Jennifer Lee, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, Julie Anne Robinson, Kasi Lemmons, Nancy Meyers, Olivia Wilde, Patty Jenkins, Phyllida Lloyd, Sarah Smith, and Stella Meghie. Interestingly, 78.1% of the women directors only received one opportunity to helm a top-grossing film across the years evaluated.

Table 2
Women Directors 2007 to 2022

| | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Abby Kohn | Jennifer Flackett | Nancy Meyers |
| Angelina Jolie | Jennifer Lee | Nia DaCosta |
| Anna Boden | Jennifer Yuh Nelson | Niki Caro |
| Anna Foerster | Jessica M. Thompson | Nora Ephron |
| Anne Fletcher | Jessie Nelson | Olivia Newman |
| Autumn de Wilde | Jill Culton | Olivia Wilde |
| Ava DuVernay | Jodie Foster | Patricia Riggen |
| Betty Thomas | Julie Anne Robinson | Patty Jenkins |

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Brenda Chapman | Julie Taymor | Phyllida Lloyd |
| Cate Shortland | Kasi Lemmons | Rosalind Ross |
| Catherine Hardwicke | Kat Coiro | Roxann Dawson |
| Cathy Yan | Kathryn Bigelow | Sam Taylor-Johnson |
| Chinonye Chukwu | Kay Cannon | Sanaa Hamri |
| Chloe Zhao | Kimberly Peirce | Sarah Smith |
| Diane English | Kirsten Sheridan | Shari Springer Berman |
| Elaine Bogan | Lana Wachowski | Sharon Maguire |
| Elizabeth Allen Rosenbaum | Liesl Tommy | Stacy Title |
| Elizabeth Banks | Lilly Wachowski | Stella Meghie |
| Emerald Fennel | Lorene Scafaria | Susanna Fogel |
| Floria Sigismondi | Loveleen Tandan | Susanna White |
| Gail Mancuso | Lucia Aniello | Thea Sharrock |
| Gina Prince-Bythewood | Maria Schrader | Tina Gordon |
| Greta Gerwig | Marielle Heller | Trish Sie |
| Halina Reijn | Melina Matsoukas | |
| Hallie Meyers-Shyer | Mimi Leder | |

Focusing on male directors, Tyler Perry was the top performer with 18 films across 16 years. Steven Spielberg had 12 films followed by Clint Eastwood with 11 movies. Ridley Scott directed 9 films and David Yates, Jaume Collet-Serra, and Michael Bay each had 8 movies. Nine men have directed 7 films each. In contrast to female directors, 54.8% of male directors only worked on one major motion picture across the sample time frame.

Table 3
and % of Women Directors Across Top Grossing Fictional Films by Distributor

| Company | Lionsgate | Paramount Pictures | Sony Pictures Entertainment | STX Entertainment | 20th Century | Universal Pictures | Walt Disney Studios | Warner Bros. | Other |
|--------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------|
| # of Women Directors in '22 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| # of Women Directors '07-'22 | 4 | 3 | 16 | 3 | 9 | 23 | 10 | 17 | 8 |
| % of Women Directors '07-'22 | 3.1% | 1.8% | 6.8% | 13% | 4.3% | 8.5% | 5.4% | 6.5% | 4.8% |
| # of Directors Overall '07-'22 | 131 | 170 | 236 | 23 | 209 | 270 | 185 | 261 | 168 |

Pivoting to distributors, we were interested in how frequently different companies worked with women directors. As shown in Table 3, the mode for 2022 was 0 or hiring no women directors. Put differently,

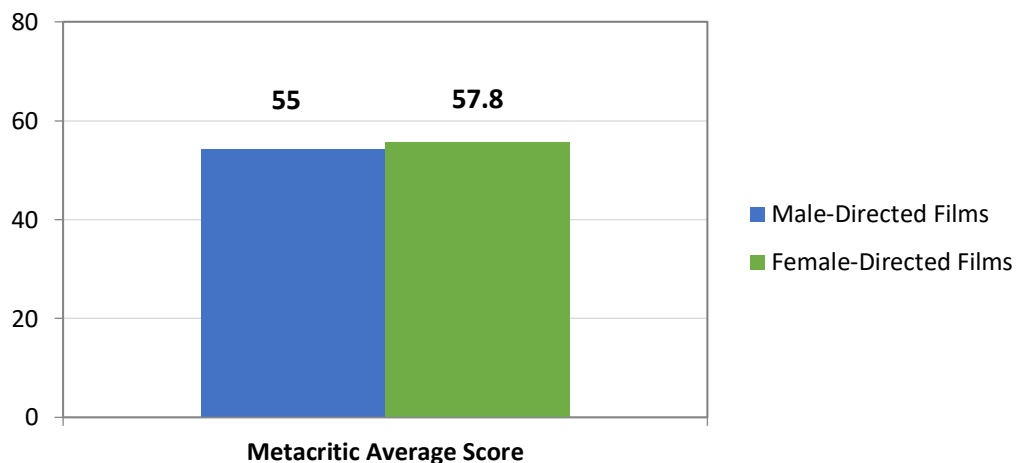
five years after the #MeToo and Times Up movement, Lionsgate, Paramount Pictures, STX Entertainment, 20th Century and Walt Disney Studios did not hire or acquire one top-grossing film with a female at the helm. So much for public commitments to women directors.

Sony was the top performer in 2022, followed by Universal Pictures and all “other” distributors. When we focused across the last 16 years, STX Entertainment had the highest share of women directors but the lowest overall volume of distributed movies. Of the major studios, Universal Pictures outperformed all other companies. ***It is important to note that once again, there was not a single year where every major distributor had at least one film directed by a woman.***

In addition to distributor, we examined whether the quality of movies differed by gender. We used Metacritic scores for this analysis. Metacritic numbers are computed by the company using critics’ review scores and range from 0-100. We first divided the sample into those films directed by at least one woman and those films directed by men only. Then, we computed the average Metacritic score across the two groups for comparison purposes.

As shown in Figure 1, there was no difference in average Metacritic scores by gender. Male-directed films, on average, achieved a score of 55 (*range=9-100*) while female-directed films received an average score of 57.8 (*range=22-95*). One other caveat is important to note. On a standard academic grading scale (i.e., A-F), male- and female- directed films both landed in the mid to high “F” range. As such, the concept of film being an exclusive and prestigious art form is challenged by the overall lack of quality in the material being produced and distributed.

Figure 1
Average Metacritic Score by Film Director Gender



Lastly, we examined the pipeline for women directors. Here it was important to compare the percentage of women directors across the top-grossing films from 2007 to 2022 (5.6%) to a) the percentage of those helming a movie in U.S. Dramatic Competition at the Sundance Film Festival and b) those working behind the camera in episodic television, according to the DGA.⁵ These represent two pathways to directing a major motion picture. Women comprised 41.8% of directors in U.S. Dramatic Competition from 2015-2023 and 38% of helmers across episodic television in the 2020-2021 season. Clearly, there is still a steep drop off in access and opportunity for women directors from independent and television spaces to directing top fictional fare. The exact opposite was true of male directors.

Summing up, women directors accounted for less than 10% of all helmers across the 100 top-grossing films of 2022. Universal Pictures was the top performer across major studios from 2007-2022 while Sony Pictures Entertainment was the top performer this last year. Though they work substantially less behind the camera across commercial films, the quality of female-directed fare is marginally higher than the quality of male-directed fare. Considering the pipeline, a fiscal cliff continues to face women as they navigate moving from the independent and television spaces to larger-budget narrative movies.

Race/Ethnicity

Turning to race/ethnicity, 20.7% ($n=23$) of all helmers across the 100 top films of 2022 were underrepresented. Of the 23, 11 were Asian, 5 were multiethnic/multiracial, 4 were Black, and 3 were Hispanic/Latino. This represented 3.8 White directors for every 1 underrepresented director. Twenty of the underrepresented directors were men and only 3 were women.

Has the percentage of underrepresented directors changed over time? Yes. From 2021 to 2022, there was a 6.6 percentage point **decrease**. Though, 2022 was on par with 2019 (20.5%) and 2020 (17.5%) and significantly higher than 2007 (12.5%).

Table 4
Director Underrepresented Status of Fictional Films by Year

| Year | White | Underrepresented | Total |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| 2007 | 87.5% ($n=98$) | 12.5% ($n=14$) | 112 |
| 2008 | 87.5% ($n=98$) | 12.5% ($n=14$) | 112 |
| 2009 | 86.5% ($n=96$) | 13.5% ($n=15$) | 111 |
| 2010 | 89.9% ($n=98$) | 10.1% ($n=11$) | 109 |
| 2011 | 91.7% ($n=99$) | 8.3% ($n=9$) | 108 |
| 2012 | 90.1% ($n=109$) | 9.9% ($n=12$) | 121 |
| 2013 | 81.3% ($n=87$) | 18.7% ($n=20$) | 107 |
| 2014 | 87.8% ($n=94$) | 12.2% ($n=13$) | 107 |
| 2015 | 86.9% ($n=93$) | 13.1% ($n=14$) | 107 |
| 2016 | 86.7% ($n=104$) | 13.3% ($n=16$) | 120 |
| 2017 | 81.6% ($n=89$) | 18.4% ($n=20$) | 109 |
| 2018 | 76.8% ($n=86$) | 23.2% ($n=26$) | 112 |
| 2019 | 79.5% ($n=89$) | 20.5% ($n=23$) | 112 |
| 2020 | 82.5% ($n=33$) | 17.5% ($n=7$) | 40 |
| 2021 | 72.7% ($n=40$) | 27.3% ($n=15$) | 55 |
| 2022 | 79.3% ($n=88$) | 20.7% ($n=23$) | 111 |
| Overall | 84.8% ($n=1,401$) | 15.2% ($n=252$) | 1,653 |

When we look at unique directors, a total of 712 White directors and 131 underrepresented directors worked between 2007 and 2022. This was ratio of 5.4 White directors to every 1 underrepresented director. As noted earlier, the top performer sample-wide was Tyler Perry (18 films) followed by Jaume Collet-Serra (8 films). Four underrepresented directors made 7 movies each across the sample time frame: Antoine Fuqua, M. Night Shyamalan, Malcom D. Lee, and Tim Story. In terms of White directors, Steven Spielberg held the top spot with 12 films, followed by Clint Eastwood and Ridley Scott with 11 and

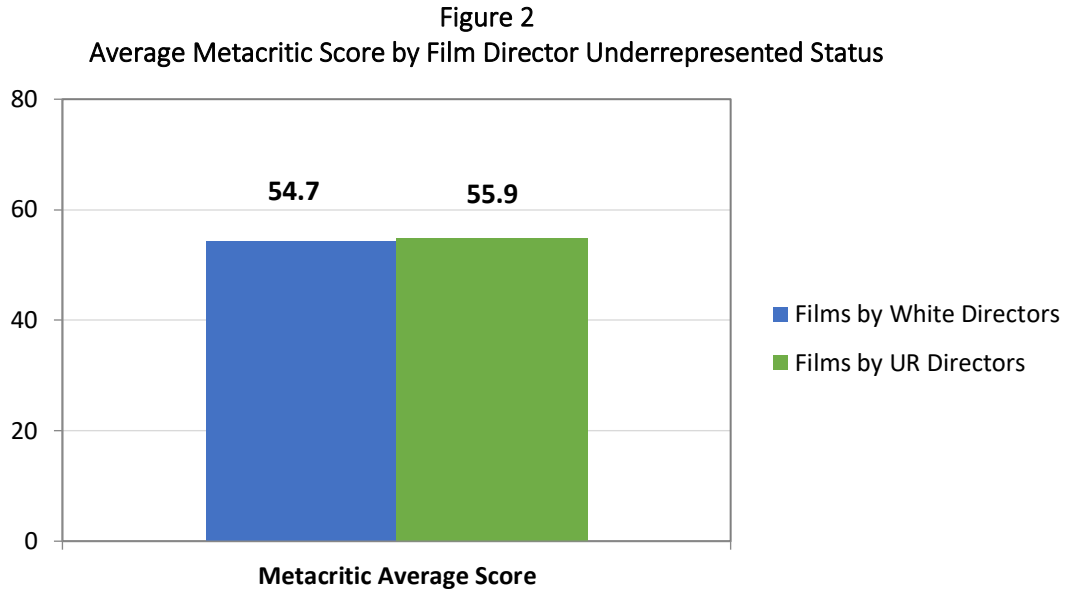
9 films, respectively. A full 64.9% of underrepresented directors and 55.3% of White directors worked only once across the 16-year sample.

Employment patterns by distributor can be found in Table 5. Universal Pictures was the top performer when it came to working with underrepresented directors in 2022. Almost 20% of Universal's movies from 2007 to 2022 were helmed by non-White directors. Universal was second to Lionsgate across the sample, where 21.4% of directors were underrepresented across the last 16 years. Sony Pictures Entertainment was a close third as 17.4% of all helmers they worked with across the last 16 years were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Three companies failed to work with an underrepresented director in 2022: Lionsgate, STX Entertainment, and 20th Century.

Table 5
and % of Underrepresented Directors Across Top-Grossing Fictional Films by Distributor

| Company | Lionsgate | Paramount Pictures | Sony Pictures Entertainment | STX Entertainment | 20th Century | Universal Pictures | Walt Disney Studios | Warner Bros. | Other |
|---------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------|
| # of UR Directors '22 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 8 |
| # of UR Directors '07-'22 | 28 | 17 | 41 | 1 | 29 | 53 | 18 | 31 | 34 |
| % of UR Directors '07-'22 | 21.4% | 10% | 17.4% | 4.4% | 13.9% | 19.6% | 9.7% | 11.9% | 20.2% |
| # of Directors Overall | 131 | 170 | 236 | 23 | 209 | 270 | 185 | 261 | 168 |

Films' average Metacritic scores by director race/ethnicity are illustrated in Figure 2. No difference emerged across average Metacritic scores for White directors (54.7, *range*=9-100) and directors from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (55.9, *range*=11-99). Like women directors, films by underrepresented directors have punched at the same weight as the majority group (e.g., films by White directors) for the last 16 years.



The pipeline for underrepresented directors was also examined. Between 2015 and 2023, a total of 41.8% of U.S. Dramatic Competition directors at Sundance Film Festival were underrepresented. This is consistent with U.S. Census benchmarking at 40.7%.⁶ According to the latest DGA statistics, 34.5% of episodic television directors were from historically marginalized racial/ethnic groups. Yet, when it comes to top-grossing films, only 15.2% of directors were underrepresented across top movies from 2007 to 2022. Similar to women directors, there is a lack of carryover from working in the independent and/or television space to top-grossing feature films.

While this section focused on all people of color, the next section was designed to intersect gender and race/ethnicity. In particular, we were interested in how women of color fared behind the camera on Hollywood's top films.

Women of Color

Only 2.7% ($n=3$) of all directors in 2022 were women of color. Those three women were Gina Prince-Bythewood (*The Woman King*), Kasi Lemmons (*Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody*) and Chinonye Chukwu (*Till*). Across all 16 years of the sample (see Table 6), women of color were hired as directors on only 21 movies. This translated into 1.3% of all directing opportunities or a ratio of 63.3 White male directors to every 1 woman of color.

Table 6
Gender & Underrepresented Status of Directors from 2007-2022

| Directors | White Males | White Females | UR Males | UR Females |
|--------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------|------------|
| Total % | 80.4% | 4.4% | 14% | 1.3% |
| Total # | 1,329 | 72 | 231 | 21 |
| U.S. Census ⁷ | 29.4% | 29.9% | 20.1% | 20.6% |

The 21 directing jobs were held by 16 different women of color. Their names can be found in Table 7, along with the total number of movies they have directed in our sample. As illuminated in the Table, only

5 women of color have worked more than once across the 16-year sample: Ava DuVernay, Gina Prince-Bythewood, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, Kasi Lemmons, and Stella Meghie. Consistent with findings in the gender and race/ethnicity sections, Universal Pictures once again was the top performer in attaching women of color to direct their studios' movies across the 16-year sample (see Table 8).

Table 7
Women of Color Directors From 2007 to 2022

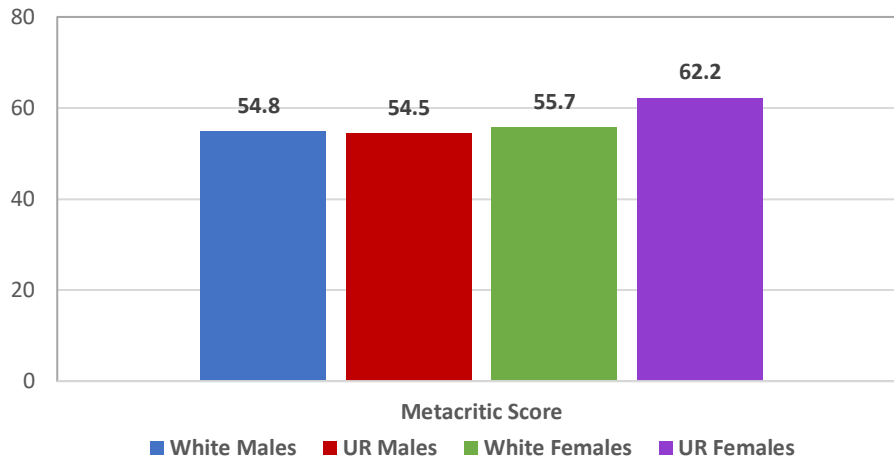
| | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Ava DuVernay (2) | Loveleen Tandan (1) |
| Cathy Yan (1) | Melina Matsoukas (1) |
| Chinonye Chukwu (1) | Nia DaCosta (1) |
| Chloe Zhao (1) | Patricia Riggen (1) |
| Gina Prince-Bythewood (2) | Roxann Dawson (1) |
| Jennifer Yuh Nelson (2) | Sanaa Hamri (1) |
| Kasi Lemmons (2) | Stella Meghie (2) |
| Liesl Tommy (1) | Tina Gordon (1) |

Table 8
and % of Underrepresented Women Directors Across Top Films from 2007-2022 by Distributor

| Company | Lionsgate | Paramount Pictures | Sony Pictures Entertainment | STX Entertainment | 20th Century | Universal Pictures | Walt Disney Studios | Warner Bros. | Other |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------|
| # of UR Women Directors | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| # of Directors Overall | 131 | 170 | 236 | 23 | 209 | 270 | 185 | 261 | 168 |

Turning to critical review, we assessed Metacritic scores for films by four groups of directors: White males, underrepresented males, White females, and underrepresented females. As shown in Figure 3, the results reveal an all-too-common story. The movies made by women of color had the highest average critical reception score (62.2, *range*=44-93) in comparison to White males (54.8, *range*=9-100), underrepresented males (54.5, *range*=11-99), and White females (55.7, *range*=22-95). Despite these findings, women of color had fewer opportunities to direct than individuals in the other identity groups.

Figure 3
Average Metacritic Score by Gender and Underrepresented Status of Director



Finally, we assessed the participation of women of color across the pipeline of directing opportunities. Examining the directors at the Sundance Film Festival’s U.S. Dramatic Competition section from 2015-2023, 18.8% were women of color. Further, 13% of all episodic directing jobs went to underrepresented women, according to the DGA’s latest statistics for the 2020-2021 television season. These findings illuminate that the talent does in fact exist in the pipeline. However, producers and studio executives do not consider and/or attach underrepresented women in the top leadership position behind the camera.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to provide an update to our previous work establishing the prevalence of women and underrepresented directors across popular movies. From 2007 to 2022, we examined the top-grossing films each year. There are a few major findings from the study, reviewed below.

#1 The Pace of Change Has Been Slow for Women Directors

It has been 7 years since the ACLU petitioned the EEOC to examine hiring practices surrounding women directors,⁸ and 10 years since the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative released its first report on women directors with Sundance Institute and Women in Film Los Angeles.⁹ These industry moments have culminated in small gains for women directors in popular films. In 2022, less than 10% of all top-grossing directors were women, with the high watermark in 2020 when 15% of popular directors were women.

Industry advocates have made claims regarding their support for women—funding programs and fellowships, adding women to consideration lists for open jobs. Yet at the point when support matters most—*hiring*—there are still barriers that prevent women from working on the top movies released each year. One such barrier is repeat opportunities. More than three-quarters of the women directors in the sample have helmed only one popular movie in the 16 years we studied, while this is true for just over half of men. For the numbers to change, companies from the major studios to independent distributors must not only hire women behind the camera, and *more than once*, they must provide the marketing and publicity support that films need to reach broad audiences. Until that happens, we will continue to see the numbers for women creep slowly forward.

#2 Underrepresented Directors Mostly Retained Gains from Prior Years

Since 2018, the film industry has generally maintained a consistent pattern of hiring directors from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. The percentage peaked slightly in 2021 (27.3%) before settling back to 20.7% in 2022. However, the results suggest that studios and distributors allocate roughly the same amount of opportunities to underrepresented directors each year. While this trend represents overall progress, it also falls short of both pipeline and population figures.

For example, 34.5% of episodic directors were underrepresented, according to 2020-21 DGA statistics. At the Sundance Film Festival, more than 40% of directors in U.S. Dramatic Competition were underrepresented. There is still a drop off for directors as they move to top-grossing movies. As companies seek to honor commitments made in the wake of 2020's racial reckoning, one place to begin is by opening up access across their slate for people of color to work as directors.

#3 Hiring Women of Color was the Exception, Not the Rule

The gains and plateau for underrepresented directors were primarily experienced by men of color. Only 3 women of color directed a top-grossing movie in 2022, and fewer than 2% of all directors in 16 years were women of color. In 2022, the women of color who worked on popular movies received critical and box-office success for their work. This is no surprise, as films by women of color earned the highest average Metacritic scores compared to white men, white women, and underrepresented men. Two of the women of color who worked in 2022 were repeat directors, which is notable. However, this also speaks to the failure of studios and distributors to identify and support talented women of color directors by hiring them for films on their slates.

Our previous work suggests that women of color have found opportunities on streaming platforms. The pipeline analysis shows that women of color have more chances to work in episodic content or as helmers of independent movies. While we applaud changes in other areas, these findings reveal how short-sighted and slow major studios have been to recognize talent and hire women of color for their movies.

Limitations

A few limitations must be noted, as with all research studies. First, the paper focuses on the 100 most popular films of 2022—thus, films that were less popular or earned less at the box office were not considered. Including less popular films might change the results slightly, but also would provide a different perspective on industry practices. In previous years, we have supplemented the analysis of popular movies with an examination of studio slates and streaming platforms. We intend to continue this practice in future reports.

Solutions

Despite the findings outlined above, there are ways to improve inclusion behind the camera for women and people of color as directors. Many of these solutions we have advanced before, but clearly merit repetition.

First and most importantly, studios and distributors must move from *consideration* to *hiring*. While we urged agents and executives in 2015 to add women to their consideration lists—and were met with success—simply putting a name on a list is not enough. What stands in the way of moving women from a

list to signing a contract? Presumably several things, but one item to change immediately is to address the cognitive biases that facilitate slanted decision-making. From the likelihood that executives continue to “think director, think male” to discounting the competence and experience of women and people of color, instituting checks in the evaluation process of potential directors is critical. Criteria-based decision-making are an important way to ensure equity and in an industry that is slow to change, are likely essential. Perhaps executives at other studios should look to a distributor who has successfully increased representation behind the camera and ask themselves, “what would Donna Langley do?” A wristband with this phrase (e.g., “WWDD”) might also be helpful as a reminder.

Second, as we have mentioned throughout the report, White male directors benefit from repeat opportunities more often than women and people of color. While women and underrepresented directors may move back and forth between episodic and feature directing opportunities, or from theatrical release to streaming platforms—so do White men. Hiring women and people of color more than once across popular motion pictures is one important solution for change. While the pipeline continues to fill with talented new voices, it seems the film industry is content to ignore those who have already proven themselves capable.

Finally, studios and distributors must evaluate the ways that movies by women and underrepresented directors are marketed and made available to audiences. The findings in this report reveal that the quality of a film has very little to do with the gender or racial/ethnic identity of the person in the role of a director. Interrogating the allocation of resources at the studio level for films by and about women and underrepresented communities is a key way to begin to address ongoing disparities that result in what seems to be differential performance at the box office.

Each year, we provide an update to our work and chart the progress made for women and people of color behind the camera. For many of the years we have provided this data, there has been little or incremental change. The explanation for the lack of progress is simple: too few women and people of color are hired for top directing jobs. Ultimately, the solution is also straightforward: hire more women and people of color to direct top movies. Despite the simplicity of the solution, change remains elusive.

Footnotes

1. From time to time, Box Office Mojo includes content that is not considered a fictional feature film. Documentaries, live concerts, a compilation of short films, or television content are excluded prior to constructing our yearly list. The list for 2022 was pulled on December 31st, 2022 (at 1:30 pm PT) focusing on all within year releases. Thus, any updating by Box Office Mojo in early January may change the number and percentage of women and/or underrepresented directors.
2. All of the details surrounding the methodology for this report can be found in the footnotes and text of previous releases of *Inclusion in the Director's Chair* on the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative's website (<https://annenberg.usc.edu/research/aii>). For inquiries, please email aii@usc.edu
3. Last year's *Inclusion in the Director's Chair* report provided an in-depth rationale for examining a certain market share of films rather than strictly the top 100. This approach was defensible for the last two years, but it has limitations. In particular, the distributors may not be given "credit" for inclusive hiring practices if the movie was outside of our sampling guidelines. However, the film falling outside of the 91% market share demarcation would have never appeared on any "top 100" list based on the criteria (roughly \$20 million at domestic box office) used from 2007-2019.
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