

Inclusion in the Director's Chair: Analysis of Director Gender and Race/Ethnicity Across the 1,700 Top Films from 2007 to 2023

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January 2024

USC Annenberg
Inclusion Initiative

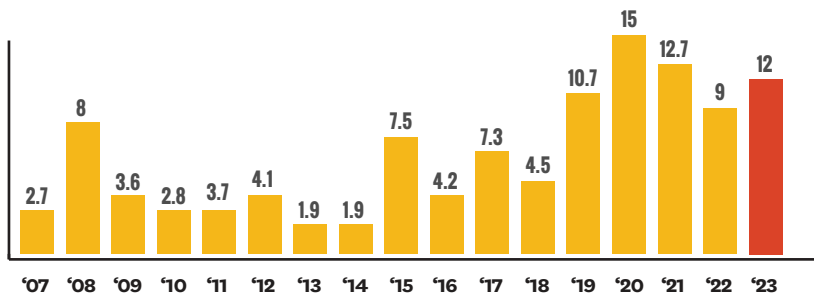
INCLUSION IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR: ANALYSIS OF DIRECTOR GENDER & RACE/ETHNICITY ACROSS 1,700 TOP FILMS FROM 2007 TO 2023

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PROGRESS HAS STALLED FOR WOMEN DIRECTORS

Prevalence of women directors across 1,588 films



Percentage of Women Directors Across 17 Years



Total Number of Directors

1,769

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.

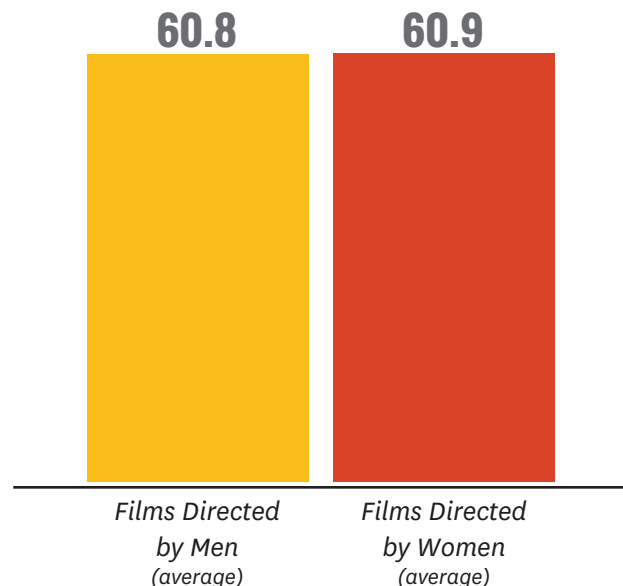
RATIO OF INDIVIDUAL MEN TO WOMEN DIRECTORS ACROSS 17 YEARS

9.8 TO 1

NO DIFFERENCE IN AVERAGE METACRITIC SCORES BY DIRECTOR GENDER

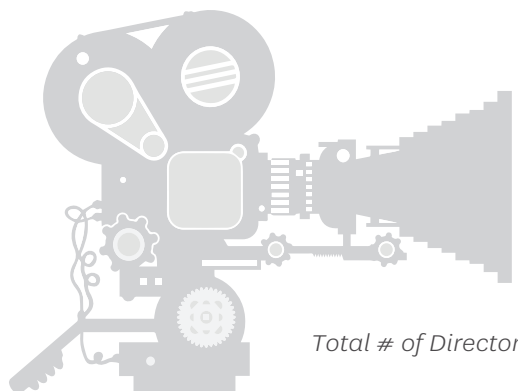
Median and average Metacritic score across 100 films from 2023

60.5 FILMS DIRECTED BY MEN
(midpoint)
VS.
52 FILMS DIRECTED BY WOMEN
(midpoint)



WOMEN DIRECTORS BY DISTRIBUTOR

Number of women directors across 1,588 films by distributor



20th Century	Paramount Pictures	Sony Pictures	Universal Pictures	Walt Disney Studios	Warner Bros.	Lionsgate	STX Entertainment	Other
9	3	16	27	12	18	7	3	12
210	182	253	295	198	274	143	23	191

107 OUT OF 1,769 DIRECTORS

WOMEN DIRECTORS ACROSS 1,588 TOP-GROSSING FILMS

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



THERE ARE

83

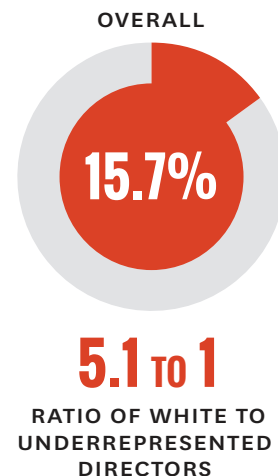
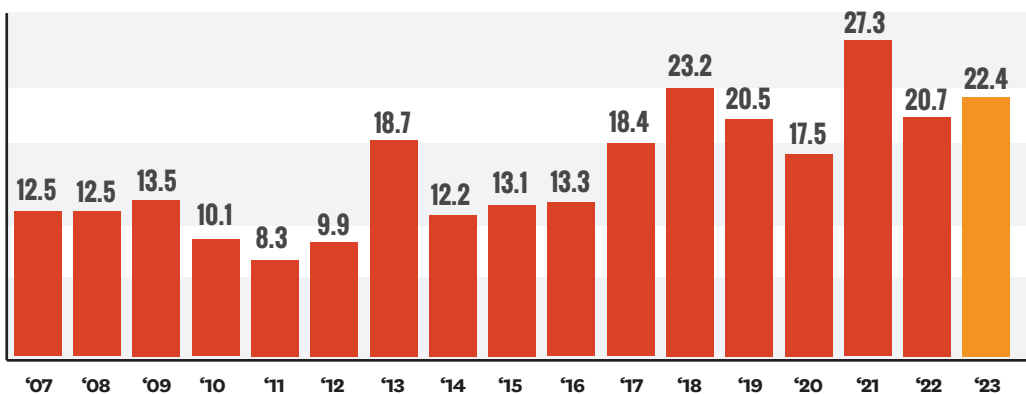
INDIVIDUAL
WOMEN
DIRECTORS
BETWEEN

2007
&
2023

*An asterisk denotes an underrepresented woman director.

UNDERREPRESENTED DIRECTORS BY YEAR

Percentage of underrepresented directors across 1,588 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 1,588 films by distributor

DISTRIBUTION COMPANY	# OF UR DIRECTORS	% OF UR DIRECTORS	TOTAL # OF DIRECTORS
20TH CENTURY	29	13.8	210
PARAMOUNT PICTURES	18	9.9	182
SONY PICTURES	43	17	253
UNIVERSAL PICTURES	54	18.3	295
WALT DISNEY STUDIOS	22	11.1	198
WARNER BROS.	36	13.1	274
LIONSGATE	31	21.7	143
STX ENTERTAINMENT	1	4.4	23
OTHER	44	23	191
TOTAL	278	15.7	1,769

METACRITIC SCORES FOR UNDERREPRESENTED DIRECTORS

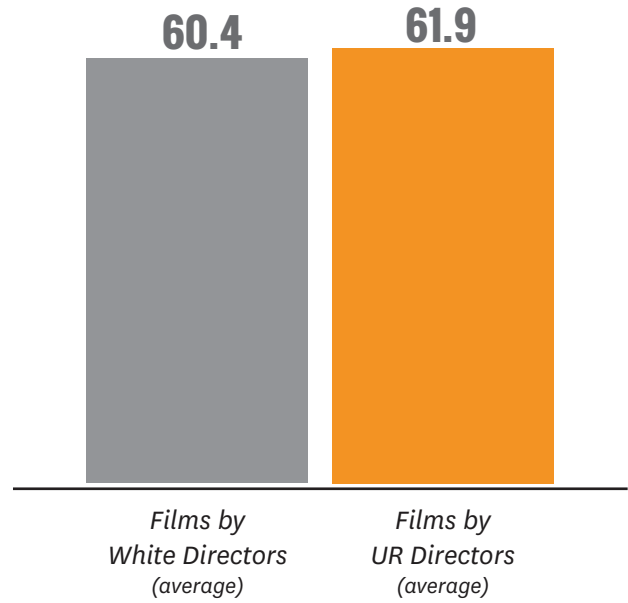
Median and average Metacritic score across 100 films from 2023

60.5 FILMS BY
WHITE
DIRECTORS
(midpoint)

VS.

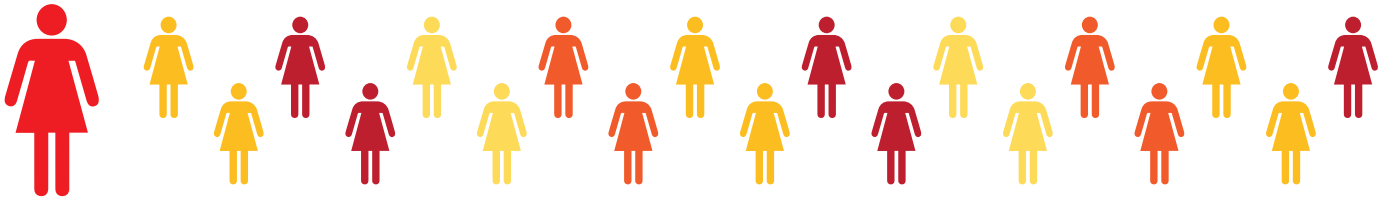
59.5 FILMS BY
UR
DIRECTORS
(midpoint)

UR=Underrepresented



HOLLYWOOD'S IMAGE OF A WOMAN DIRECTOR IS WHITE

Race/ethnicity of 83 individual women directors across 1,588 films



64 WOMEN
ARE WHITE

19 WOMEN
ARE FROM UNDERREPRESENTED RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

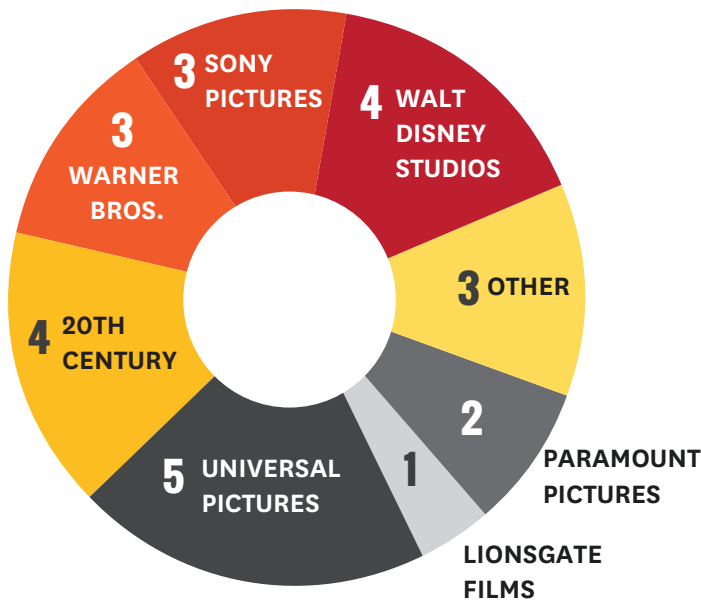
GENDER & UNDERREPRESENTED STATUS OF FILM DIRECTORS

Percentage and number of directors by gender and underrepresented status across 1,588 films from 2007 to 2023

INDICATOR	WHITE MEN	WHITE WOMEN	UR MEN	UR WOMEN
TOTAL %	79.6%	4.6%	14.3%	1.4%
TOTAL #	1,409	82	253	25
U.S. POPULATION	29.2%	29.7%	20.4%	20.7%

UNDERREPRESENTED WOMEN DIRECTORS BY DISTRIBUTOR

Number of underrepresented women directors of top-grossing films per distributor from 2007-2023



17 years:
2007-2023
1,588 movies

ONLY
25 films directed by
underrepresented
women

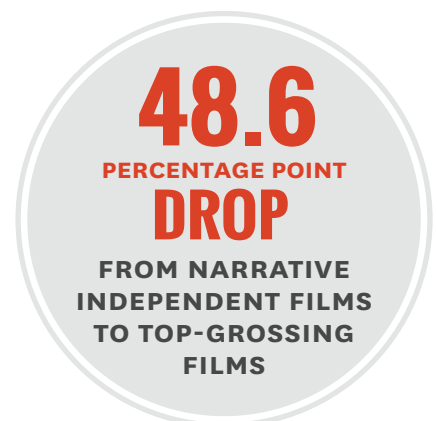
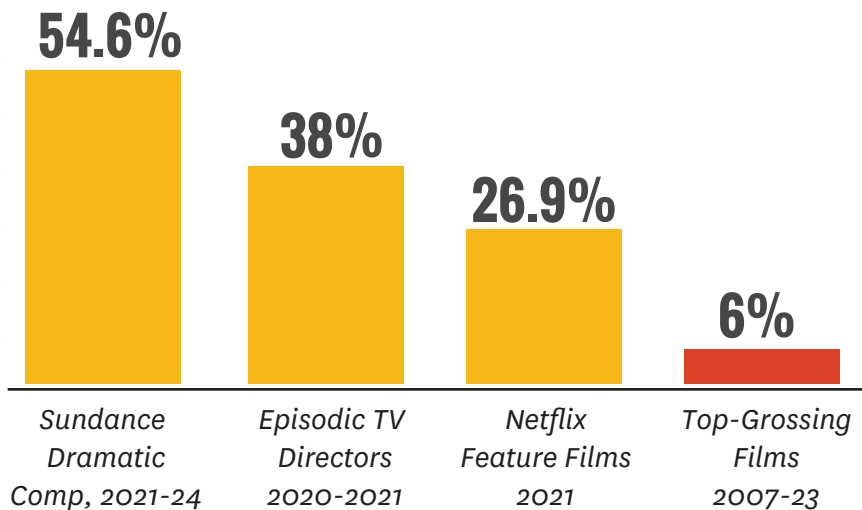
Other reflects films distributed by independent companies.

RATIO OF WHITE MEN TO UNDERREPRESENTED WOMEN DIRECTORS ACROSS 17 YEARS

56.4 TO 1

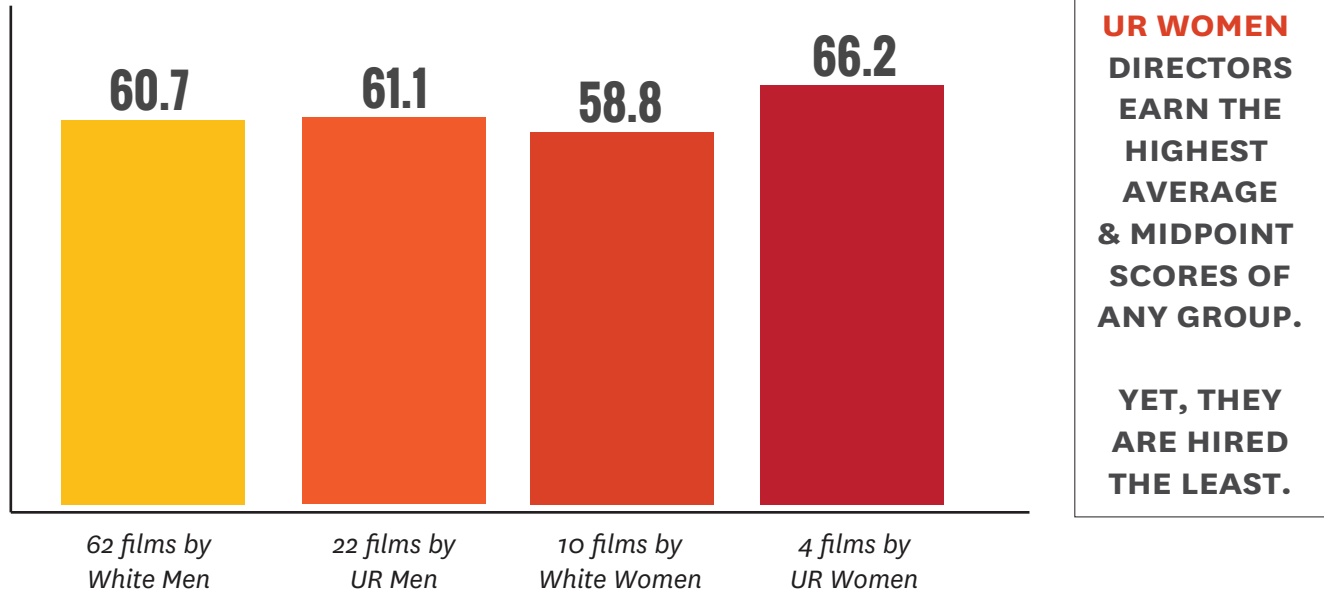
CAREER PROGRESS STALLS FOR WOMEN ON THE WAY TO TOP FILMS

Percentage of women directors by media platform



METACRITIC SCORES BY GENDER AND UNDERREPRESENTED STATUS

Average metacritic score by gender and race/ethnicity of directors, 2023



**Inclusion in the Director's Chair:
Analysis of Director Gender and Race/Ethnicity Across the 1,700 Top Films from 2007 to 2023**

Dr. Stacy L. Smith
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Annenberg Inclusion Initiative
USC

Yearly, we release *Inclusion in the Director's Chair* report to document the prevalence of women and people of color working in the top leadership position across the 100 most popular domestic films. The sample includes theatrically released, live-action movies, some of which were re-releases ($n=2$). No documentaries were a part of the sample. In total, we assessed 1,700 movies from 2007 to 2023 making this the largest and most rigorous assessment of directors and inclusion across top films to date.

Key Findings

Gender

A total of 116 directors were attached to the 100 top-grossing domestic films in 2023. Fourteen or 12.1% were women and 102 or 88% were men. This is a gender ratio of 7.3 males to every one female being hired.

The percentage of women directors in 2023 (12.1%) was not meaningfully different from 2022 (9%). The percentage has not changed notably since 2018 when 4.5% of directors were women. The percentage is in fact higher than 2007 when only 3 (2.7%) of helmers across the 100 top films were women. Overall, only 6% of 1,769 directors hired across popular films from 2007-2023 have been women.

Women comprised 83 of 899 unique directors (9.2%) working across the 17-year sample. The top women performers were Anne Fletcher and Lana Wachowski with 4 movies each. Greta Gerwig directed 3 films. Fifteen different women directed 2 movies: Ava DuVernay, Catherine Hardwicke, Elizabeth Banks, Gina Prince-Bythewood, Jennifer Lee, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, Julie Anne Robinson, Kasi Lemmons, Nancy Meyers, Nia DaCosta, Olivia Wilde, Patty Jenkins, Phyllida Lloyd, Sarah Smith, and Stella Meghie. 78.3% of women directors only made one feature film across the 17 years evaluated whereas 55.8% of men did.

A full 816 men (90.8%) were employed one or more times across the 17 years. The top performer was Tyler Perry with 18 films followed by Steven Spielberg with 12, Clint Eastwood with 11, and Ridley Scott with 10. Seven male directors have helmed 8 different movies and 9 have helmed 7 different movies.

In terms of distributor, Universal Pictures (4 hired) had the strongest showing in terms of hiring women helmers, followed by Lionsgate (3 hired) and then Walt Disney Studios (2 hired).

Across the 17 years evaluated, a total of 27 women (9.2%) have been hired by Universal Pictures to direct a top-grossing film. Universal Pictures was followed by Warner Bros. (6.6%), Sony Pictures Entertainment (6.3%) and Walt Disney Studios (6.1%). Lionsgate (4.9%) and 20th Century (4.3%) have dismal track records and Paramount Pictures (1.6%) is dead last.

There has not been one year in the 17 evaluated where every major distributor hired a woman director whose film was in the top 100.

There is no difference in the critical reception (Metacritic scores) by director gender. Female-directed films (*Mean*=60.9, *Median*=52, *Range*=33-94) perform no differently than male-directed films (*Mean*=60.8, *Median*=60.5, *Range*=30-92).

To contextualize the inclusion crisis facing women directors in top films, we looked at the pipeline to directing feature films as well as the percentage of women helming Netflix content. Of the 44 directors at U.S. Dramatic Competition at the Sundance Film Festival from 2021-2024, a full 54.6% were women and 45.4% were men. DGA statistics reveal 38% of episodic television directors across the 2020-21 season were women. Across 65 Netflix fictional films in 2021, 26.9% of directors were women. Clearly, the pipeline and hiring practices at Netflix value women directors in ways the legacy studios do not.

Race/Ethnicity

Across the 100 top-grossing films of 2023, a total of 26 directors (22.4%) were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Fourteen were Asian (53.8%), 8 were Black (30.8%), 2 was Hispanic/Latino (7.7%) and 2 was multiracial/multiethnic (7.7%). Only 4 (15.4%) of the underrepresented directors were women.

The number or percentage of underrepresented directors has not changed. 2023 (22.4%) was no different than 2022 (20.7%) in hiring practices. There has been no real meaningful increase since 2016, when 13.3% of helmers were not White. The pledges to support inclusion post George Floyd's murder and #StopAsianHate were performative acts by the entertainment industry and not real steps towards fostering change.

Of the 899 unique or individual directors across the 17 year sample, 16.5% ($n=148$) were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups and 83.5% ($n=751$) were White. This is a ratio of 5.1 White directors for every 1 underrepresented director hired. Of the underrepresented directors, Tyler Perry was the top performer with 18 films, followed by 4 underrepresented men with 8 movies each (Jaume Collet-Serra, Antoine Fuqua, M. Night Shyamalan, and Tim Story). Two underrepresented men directed 7 films across the 17-year time frame (Malcolm D. Lee and James Wan).

For White directors, the top performer was Steven Spielberg, with 12 movies in 17 years, followed by Clint Eastwood (11 films), and Ridley Scott (10 films). David Yates, Michael Bay, and Guy Ritchie each appeared 8 times across the 17 years examined. Finally, 7 white men directed 7 top-grossing films each between 2007 and 2023 (Nicholas Stoller, Peter Berg, Shawn Levy, Zack Snyder, Francis Lawrence, Steven Soderbergh, and Christopher Nolan).

"Other" (non-legacy) distributors were really doing the work of inclusion behind the camera in 2023. Ten different movies released by "other" companies than the majors featured a director from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group. Included in "other" are A24, Crunchyroll, Angel Studios and United Artists Releasing. Warner Bros. was the next top performer in 2023 with 5 films and Walt Disney Studios with 4.

Looking across the 17 years, Lionsgate had the highest percentage of films with an underrepresented director attached (21.7%), followed by Universal Pictures (18.3%) and Sony Pictures Entertainment (17%). All of these percentages are grossly below U.S. Census (41.1%), however.

Films with at least one underrepresented director attached received an average Metacritic score of 61.9 (*Median=59.5, Range 33-94*) whereas those with only White directors attached received an average 60.4 (*Median=60.5, Range=30-89*). Every single year these data reveal the same pattern: underrepresented directors often perform the same or slightly better than their white peers yet work substantially less.

Women of Color

Only 4 women of color (3.4%) helmed one of the 100 top-grossing films of 2023. Three of those women were Asian (Adele Lim, *Joy Ride*; Celine Song, *Past Lives*; Fawn Veerasunthorn, *Wish*) and one was Black (Nia DaCosta, *The Marvels*).

The percentage of women of color directors in 2023 was not different from 2022 (2.7%). Across 17 years, the percentage of women of color directing top films is at the floor (1.4%) and well below U.S. Census (20.7%). Men of color (14.3%) were more likely to be hired to direct a feature film in the top 100 than women of color (1.4%) or white women (4.6%).

Only 25 top-grossing movies across 17 years have been helmed by a woman of color. These 25 jobs were filled with 19 different women of color. Six of these directors have had more than one film in the top 100: Ava DuVernay (2), Gina Prince-Bythewood (2), Jennifer Yuh Nelson (2), Kasi Lemmons (2), Nia DaCosta (2), and Stella Meghie (2).

The breakdown of distributors attaching women of color to studio films across our 17-year sample is as follows: Universal Pictures (5 out of 295 movies), Walt Disney Studios (4 out of 198 movies), 20th Century (4 out of 210) movies, Sony Pictures Entertainment (3 out of 253 movies), Warner Bros. (3 out of 274 movies), Paramount Pictures (2 out of 182 movies), and Lionsgate (1 out of 143 movies).

Women of color out-perform the other three groups with the highest average Metacritic score (*Mean=66.2, Median=62, Range=47-94*). The next highest groups were underrepresented (*Mean=61.1, Median=59.5, Range=33-92*) and white males (*Mean=60.1, Median=60.5, Range=30-89*) followed by white females (*Mean=58.8, Median=57.5, Range=33-84*).

Conclusion/Solutions

Women and people of color are not being hired in ways that represent their proportion in the U.S. or their percentage in the pipeline using numbers from the Sundance Film Festival, episodic television directors, or even Netflix features. If past behavior is a predictor of future action, then we will not see these numbers move any time soon. Surely, the major distributors are having difficulty greenlighting films with women and people of color attached as helmers. Given this, we conclude our report with three tangible solutions for change:

- Proof of Concept Accelerator with Cate Blanchett, Coco Francini & Dr. Stacy L. Smith
- Filing a formal Title VII complaint with the EEOC
- A roadmap for changing hiring practices at the legacy and mini-major studios.

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Yearly, we release *Inclusion in the Director's Chair* report to document the prevalence of women and people of color working in the top leadership position across the 100 most popular domestic films. The sample includes theatrically released, live-action movies, some of which were re-releases ($n=2$). No documentaries were a part of the sample. In total, we assessed 1,700 movies from 2007 to 2023 making this the largest and most rigorous assessment of directors and inclusion across top films to date.¹

It is important to note that only 5 percentage points or greater will be used to demarcate differences between groups or change over time. We do this to minimize reporting trivial deviations. Below, we focus on the prevalence of women directors then turn to underrepresented racial/ethnic helmers. Within each section, we present 2023 findings first followed by comparisons to 2022 and then 2007.

Gender

A total of 116 directors were attached to the 100 top-grossing domestic films in 2023. Fourteen or 12.1% were women and 102 or 88% were men. This is a gender ratio of 7.3 males to every one female being hired. The fourteen women are listed here in order of box office prowess: Greta Gerwig (*Barbie*), Emma Tammi (*Five Nights at Freddy's*), Nia DaCosta (*The Marvels*), Elizabeth Banks (*Cocaine Bear*), Fawn Veerasunthorn (*Wish*), Nia Vardalos (*My Big Fat Greek Wedding 3*), Sofia Coppola (*Priscilla*), Kelly Fremon Craig (*Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*), Faryn Pearl (*Ruby Gillman: Teenage Kraken*), Adele Lim (*Joy Ride*), Laura Terruso (*About My Father*), Emma Seligman (*Bottoms*), Emerald Fennell (*Saltburn*) and Celine Song (*Past Lives*).

Has the percentage of women directors changed over time? As displayed in Table 1, the percentage of women directors in 2023 (12.1%) was not meaningfully different from 2022 (9%). Matter of fact, the percentage has not changed notably since 2018 when 4.5% of directors were women. The percentage is in fact higher than 2007 when only 3 (2.7%) of helmers across the 100 top films were women. Overall, only 6% of directors hired across the 1,700 most popular films from 2007-2023 have been women! So much for progress, particularly when women are over 50% of the U.S. population.²

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
2023	88% (n=102)	12% (n=14)	116
Overall	94% (n=1,662)	6% (n=107)	1,769

Next, we assessed how many unique or individual directors worked across the 1,700 top films. The total number of directors reduces from 1,769 to 899 individuals who were employed one or more times. Women comprised 83 of these directors (9.2%). For women helmers, the top performers were Anne Fletcher and Lana Wachowski with 4 movies each. Greta Gerwig directed 3 films. Fifteen different women directed 2 movies: Ava DuVernay, Catherine Hardwicke, Elizabeth Banks, Gina Prince-Bythewood, Jennifer Lee, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, Julie Anne Robinson, Kasi Lemmons, Nancy Meyers, Nia DaCosta, Olivia Wilde, Patty Jenkins, Phyllida Lloyd, Sarah Smith, and Stella Meghie.

Table 2
Women Directors 2007 to 2023

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

We also assessed the number of unique men that helmed movies across the sample time frame. A full 816 men (90.8%) were employed one or more times across the 17 years. The top performer was Tyler Perry with 18 films followed by Steven Spielberg with 12, Clint Eastwood with 11, and Ridley Scott with 10. Seven male directors have helmed 8 different movies (David Yates, Jaume Collet-Serra, Michael Bay, Antoine Fuqua, Guy Ritchie, M. Night Shyamalan, Tim Story) and 9 have helmed 7 different movies (Malcolm D. Lee, Nicholas Stoller, Peter Berg, Shawn Levy, Zack Snyder, Francis Lawrence, Steven Soderbergh, Christopher Nolan, James Wan).

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

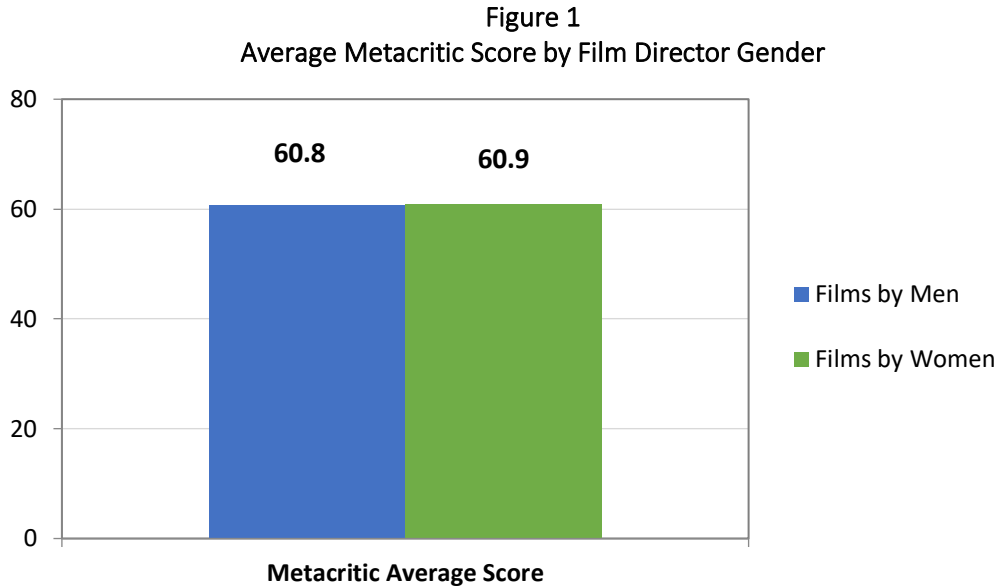
Company	Lionsgate	Paramount Pictures	Sony Pictures Entertainment	STX Entertainment	20th Century	Universal Pictures	Walt Disney Studios	Warner Bros.	Other
# of Women Directors in '23	3	0	0	0	0	4	2	1	4
# of Women Directors '07-'23	7	3	16	3	9	27	12	18	12
% of Women Directors '07-'23	4.9%	1.6%	6.3%	13%	4.3%	9.2%	6.1%	6.6%	6.3%
# of Directors Overall '07-'23	143	182	253	23	210	295	198	274	191

Each movie was also assessed for distributor. We examined the major studios plus Lionsgate and STX Entertainment. This analysis will only focus on companies that distributed at least 100 movies over the sample time frame. Thus, STX Entertainment is presented in the chart but we do not evaluate their performance in light of how few movies they distribute.

Table 3 illuminates a few trends. First, 2023 was similar to every other year in our sample. In explanation, every company did not hire at least one-woman director across the movies evaluated. Universal Pictures ($n=4$) had the strongest showing in terms of hiring women helmers, followed by Lionsgate ($n=3$) and then Walt Disney Studios ($n=2$).

Turning to over time, Universal Pictures is again the top performer. Across the 17 years evaluated, a total of 27 women (9.2%) have been hired by Universal Pictures to direct a top-grossing film. Universal Pictures was followed by Warner Bros. (6.6%), Sony Pictures Entertainment (6.3%) and Walt Disney Studios (6.1%). Lionsgate (4.9%) and 20th Century (4.3%) have dismal track records and Paramount Pictures (1.6%) is dead last. Given that many of these companies fail to court half of the audience and engage in exclusionary hiring practices, it is not surprising the film industry is falling apart.

After distributor, we were interested in the critical reception of films by director gender. For this analysis, we siphoned the 2023 films into two categories: those with at least one female director attached and those with only male direction. We then looked up the Metacritic score for each film, which is a weighted average of reviewers' scores. For the handful of films missing a Metacritic score, we used Rotten Tomatoes scores. Two films were missing Metacritic and Rotten Tomatoes scores and thus were not included in the analysis.



As shown in Figure 1, there is no difference in the critical reception by gender. Female-directed films (*Mean*=60.9, *Median*=52, *Range*=33-94) perform no differently (.01) than male-directed films (*Mean*=60.8, *Median*=60.5, *Range*=30-92). The highest scoring woman directed movie (94) was *Past Lives* by Celine Song. The film directed by a man receiving the highest critical review was *The Boy and the Heron* (92) by Hayao Miyazaki. The lowest scoring films did not differ by gender (*Five Nights at Freddy's*=33, Director=Emma Tammi; *Expend4bles*=30, Director=Scott Waugh).

To contextualize the inclusion crisis facing women directors in top films, we looked at the pipeline to directing feature films. First, we examined the gender breakdown of directors in U.S. Dramatic Competition at the Sundance Film Festival from 2021-2024. Of the 44 directors, a full 54.6% were women and 45.4% were men. Looking next at the DGA statistics of directors of episodic television, women comprised 38% of helmers across the 2020-2121 season.³ Finally, we examined the percentage of women directors of Netflix fictional films across 2021. A full 26.9% of directors across 65 movies were women. Clearly, if women only comprise 6% of directors from 2007 to 2023, there is a major fiscal cliff facing them from independent, episodic, and streaming fare to blockbuster movies.

Overall, women have made few gains when it comes employment patterns in the director's chair. In the last year, only 12.1% of helmers were women across the 100 top films in 2023. Clearly, gender is still an inhibiting characteristic to job security. Now, we turn our attention to another identity characteristic that affects hiring: race/ethnicity.

Race/Ethnicity

Across the 100 top-grossing films of 2023, a total of 26 directors (22.4%) were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Fourteen were Asian (53.8%), 8 were Black (30.8%), 2 was Hispanic/Latino (7.7%) and 2 was multiracial/multiethnic (7.7%). Only 4 (15.4%) of the underrepresented directors were women.

The number or percentage of underrepresented directors has not changed. 2023 (22.4%) was no different than 2022 (20.7%) in hiring practices. There has been no real meaningful increase since 2016, when 13.3% of helmers were not White. Clearly, the pledges to support inclusion post George Floyd's

murder and #StopAsianHate were performative acts by the entertainment industry and not real steps towards fostering change.

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
2023	77.6% (n=90)	22.4% (n=26)	116
Overall	84.3% (n=1,491)	15.7% (n=278)	1,769

Of the 899 unique or individual directors across the 1,700 films examined, 16.5% (n=148) were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups and 83.5% (n=751) were White. This is a ratio of 5.1 White directors for every 1 underrepresented director hired. Of the underrepresented directors, Tyler Perry was the top performer with 18 films, followed by 4 underrepresented men with 8 movies each (Jaume Collet-Serra, Antoine Fuqua, M. Night Shyamalan, and Tim Story). Two underrepresented men directed 7 films across the 17-year time frame (Malcolm D. Lee and James Wan).

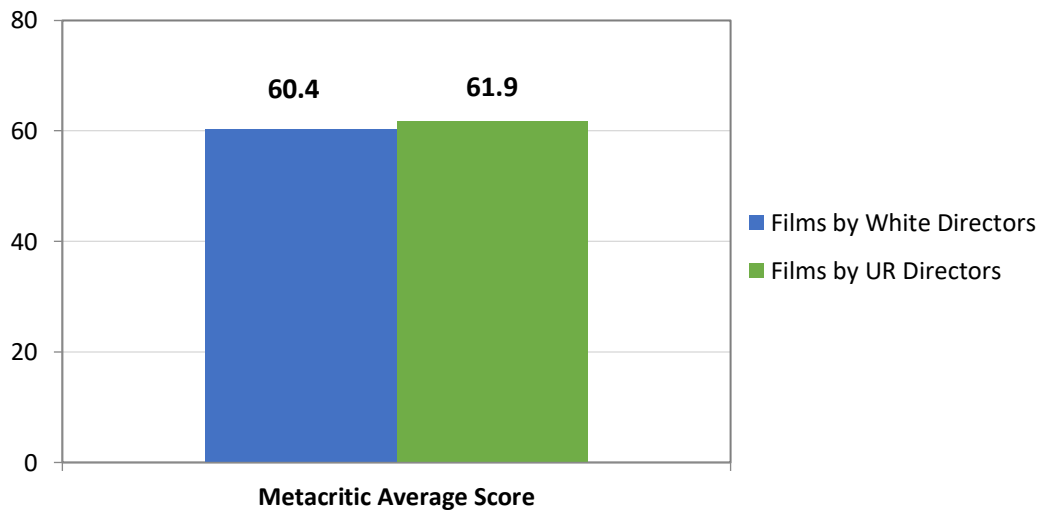
For White directors, the top performer was Steven Spielberg, with 12 movies in 17 years, followed by Clint Eastwood (11 films), and Ridley Scott (10 films). David Yates, Michael Bay, and Guy Ritchie each appeared 8 times across the 17 years examined. Finally, 7 white men directed 7 top-grossing films each between 2007 and 2023 (Nicholas Stoller, Peter Berg, Shawn Levy, Zack Snyder, Francis Lawrence, Steven Soderbergh, and Christopher Nolan).

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 '23	3	1	2	0	0	1	4	5	10
# of UR Directors '07-'23	31	18	43	1	29	54	22	36	44
% of UR Directors '07-'23	21.7%	9.9%	17%	4.4%	13.8%	18.3%	11.1%	13.1%	23%
# of Directors Overall	143	182	253	23	210	295	198	274	191

When we turn to distributor, at least three trends are apparent in Table 5. First, other distributors were really doing the work of inclusion behind the camera in 2023. Ten different movies featured a director from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group. Included in “other” are A24, Crunchyroll, Angel Studios and United Artists Releasing. Warner Bros. was the next top performer with 5 films and Walt Disney Studios with 4. Like the findings for women directors, at least two studios did not hire at least one director from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group.

Figure 2
Average Metacritic Score by Film Director Underrepresented Status



We next looked at critical reception using the same procedure noted above. Films with at least one underrepresented director attached received an average Metacritic score of 61.9 (*Median*=59.5, *Range* 33-94) whereas those with only White directors attached received an average 60.4 (*Median*=60.5, *Range*=30-89). Every single year these data reveal the same pattern: underrepresented directors perform

the same or slightly better than their white peers yet work substantially less. You do the math. Smells like discrimination to us.

Pivoting to the pipeline, we looked at the same three sources reported in the gender section. In U.S. Dramatic Competition at Sundance Film Festival from 2021-2024, a full 52.3% of directors were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. This statistic is above U.S. Census, which indicates that 41.1% of the population identifies with an underrepresented race/ethnicity.⁴ For the 2020-2021 TV season, the DGA reports that 34.5% of helmers were not white. Looking at Netflix 2021 helmers, a full 22.4% were from historically marginalized races/ethnicities. These results are clear. The pipeline has the talent, but the film industry is resistant to hire directors from non-white backgrounds. In the next section we intersect gender and race/ethnicity, to examine the opportunities behind the camera for women of color.

Women of Color

Only 4 women of color (3.4%) helmed one of the 100 top-grossing films of 2023. Three of those women were Asian (Adele Lim, *Joy Ride*; Celine Song, *Past Lives*; Fawn Veerasunthorn, *Wish*) and one was Black (Nia DaCosta, *The Marvels*). The percentage of women of color directors in 2023 was not different from 2022 (2.7%). As shown in Table 6, the percentage of women of color directing top films across 17 years is still at the floor (1.4%) and well below U.S. Census (20.7%). The table also reveals that men of color (14.3%) were more likely to be hired than women of color (1.4%) or white women (4.6%).

**Table 6
Gender & Underrepresented Status of Directors from 2007-2023**

Directors	White Males	White Females	UR Males	UR Females
Total %	79.6%	4.6%	14.3%	1.4%
Total #	1,409	82	253	25
U.S. Census ⁵	29.2%	29.7%	20.4%	20.7%

Only 25 top-grossing movies across 17 years have been helmed by a woman of color. These 25 jobs were filled with 19 different women of color. Each of these women is listed in Table 7. Six of these directors have had more than one film in the top 100: Ava DuVernay (2), Gina Prince-Bythewood (2), Jennifer Yuh Nelson (2), Kasi Lemmons (2), Nia DaCosta (2), and Stella Meghie (2). The distributors that released films directed by women of color are displayed in Table 8.

**Table 7
Women of Color Directors From 2007 to 2023**

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

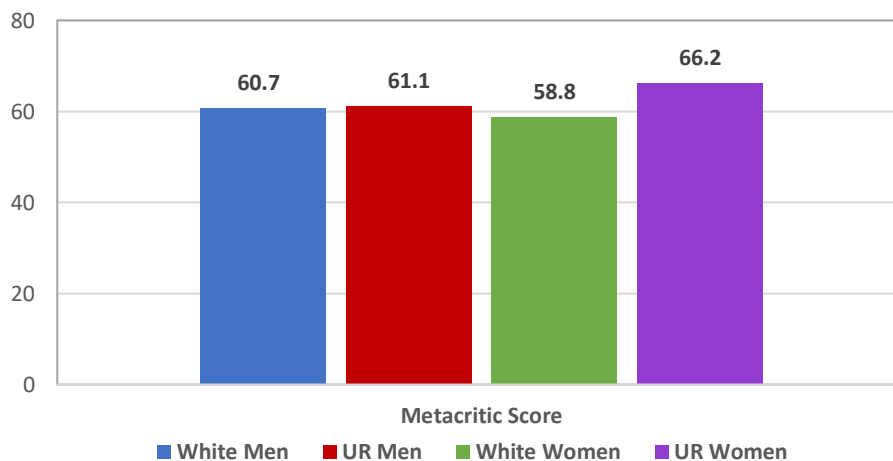
Table 8
and % of Underrepresented Women Directors Across Top Films from 2007-2023 by Distributor

Company	Lionsgate	Paramount Pictures	Sony Pictures Entertainment	STX Entertainment	20th Century	Universal Pictures	Walt Disney Studios	Warner Bros.	Other
# of UR Women Directors	1	2	3	0	4	5	4	3	3
# of Directors Overall	143	182	253	23	210	295	198	274	191

In terms of Metacritic scores, we were once again interested in how identity of the director aligns with average critical review marks. We divided the sample at the film level into one of four mutually exclusive categories: White men directors, White women directors, underrepresented men directors, and underrepresented women directors. Then, we computed the average, median, and range of Metacritic scores for each grouping.

The results of average Metacritic score by identity group are in Figure 3. Women of color out-perform the other three groups with the highest average Metacritic score (*Mean=66.2, Median=62, Range=47-94*). Undoubtedly, this is due to Celine Song's 94 Metacritic score with the critically acclaimed *Past Lives*. The next highest groups were underrepresented (*Mean=61.1, Median=59.5, Range=33-92*) and white males (*Mean=60.1, Median=60.5, Range=30-89*) followed by white females (*Mean=58.8, Median=57.5, Range=33-84*).

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



Conclusion

Overall, the results from this research brief are clear. Women and people of color are not being hired in ways that represent their proportion in the U.S. or their percentage in the pipeline using numbers from the Sundance Film Festival, episodic television directors, or even Netflix features. If past behavior is a predictor of future action, then we will not see these numbers move any time soon. Surely, the major distributors are having difficulty greenlighting films with women and people of color attached as helmers. Here are three simple solutions for change.

First, it is critical to address the barriers that prevent more women from working across top-grossing movies. Two notable impediments, which we have identified in previous research, are access to financing and ensuring that women have samples of their work that move them toward top-grossing fare. With the Proof of Concept Accelerator program, we aim to deal with both of these obstacles. The program offers up to 8 women, trans, or non-binary directors \$50,000 to create a short film that serves as a proof of concept for a feature film. Launched by Dr. Stacy L. Smith, in partnership with Cate Blanchett and Coco Francini of Dirty Films and supported by the Netflix Fund for Creative Equity, the program takes aim at the very reasons we see little progress toward equality in the data presented in this report.

A second tactic is to use external pressures to create change. In 2015, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received letters requesting an investigation into studio hiring practices. While the results of such an inquiry have not been made public, there is no reason that activists cannot once again call for governmental regulators to ensure that fair employment practices are operating in the entertainment industry. The data tell the story of little change—asking for an accounting of why there has been no movement is one best taken up by bodies that exist to eliminate discrimination and biased labor practices. This data in this report seem to present a clear case of a Title VII violation as well as fertile ground for a complaint to be filed with the EEOC.

Third, studios could simply change their hiring practices. It's a refrain we have long repeated, but seems to only take root when convenient or something tragic occurs. Diversified candidate lists, uncoupling the identity of the lead from the identity of the director for white male-led films, and eliminating biased language centering on "risk" and "muscularity" are critical. It has been roughly 10 years since we coined a phrase that originated in the management literature, and which still guides decisions today. When the entertainment industry thinks director, they still think male. In particular, they think white male.

There are a few limitations to the report presented here. First, we focus on box office performance, which remains somewhat volatile until year-end films end their theatrical run in Q1 of the following year. For that reason, the films included here are top movies released before the end of 2023 and they may change rank slightly. However, the list does include major studio releases for the year and reflects the hiring practices of those companies (as well as independent distributors)—and thus serves as a guidepost for thinking about progress in the director's chair. Second, because the focus is on top-grossing movies, there may be additional women and/or people of color working as directors across lower-earning films. Given the pipeline figures we present on independent fare, we think this is likely. Because our intent is to capture hiring practices, however, we remain focused on those films that have the muscle of major or significant industry capital behind them in the marketplace.

This report offers a contrast to those who might celebrate the dawning of change in Hollywood after a year in which *Barbie* topped the box office. One film or one director are simply not enough to create the sea change that is still needed behind the camera. Until studios, executives, and producers alter the way

they make decisions about who is qualified and available to work as a director on top-grossing films, there is little reason to believe that optimism is warranted.

Footnotes

1.The sample for 2023 films was pulled from Box Office Mojo on December 31th 2023 (12:30 pm). As such, the list of "Top 100" movies may change if the list was sampled at a later date, as some movies are released to theaters. One other caveat about the sample is important to note. In 2020 and 2021, we modified the sample of "Top 100" movies to account for the changes in the domestic box office due to the pandemic. All of those were detailed in our *Inclusion in the Director's Chair Report* for 2021 and 2022 (see footnote 3). If there are sampling questions about those two years, please consult those manuscripts which are posted on our website, <https://annenberg.usc.edu/research/aij>.

2.U.S. Census (2023). Quick facts. Retrieved December 31, 2023 from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

3. Directors Guild of America (2022). *DGA Inclusion Report Reveals Continued Incremental Gains for Directors in 2020-21 TV Season, Despite Pandemic*. Retrieved from: <https://dga.org/News/PressReleases/2022/220505-Episodic-TV-Inclusion-Report.aspx>.

4.U.S. Census (2023).

5.U.S. Census (2023).