

Inclusion in the Director's Chair: Analysis of Director Gender & Race/Ethnicity Across 1,800 Top Films from 2007 to 2024

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USC Annenberg
Inclusion Initiative

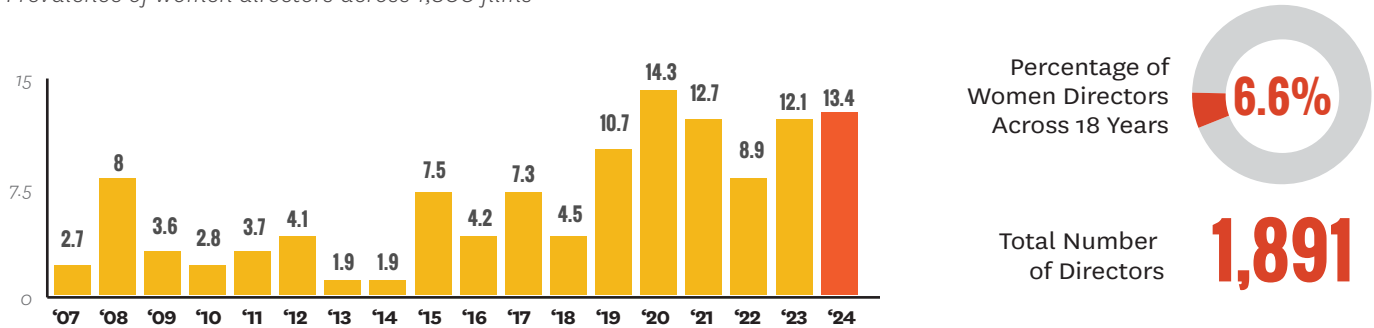
INCLUSION IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR: ANALYSIS OF DIRECTOR GENDER & RACE/ETHNICITY ACROSS 1,800 TOP FILMS FROM 2007 TO 2024

DR. STACY L. SMITH & THE USC ANNENBERG INCLUSION INITIATIVE



PROGRESS HAS STALLED FOR WOMEN DIRECTORS

Prevalence of women directors across 1,800 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 18 YEARS

8.7 TO 1

NO DIFFERENCE IN AVERAGE METACRITIC SCORES BY DIRECTOR GENDER

Median and average Metacritic score across 1,800 films from 2007-2024

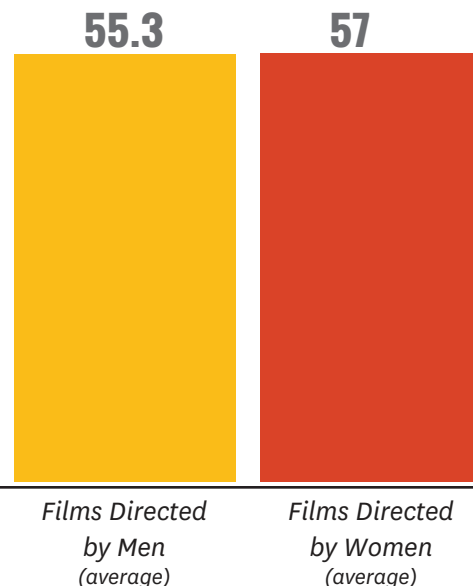
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FILMS DIRECTED BY MEN
(midpoint)

VS.

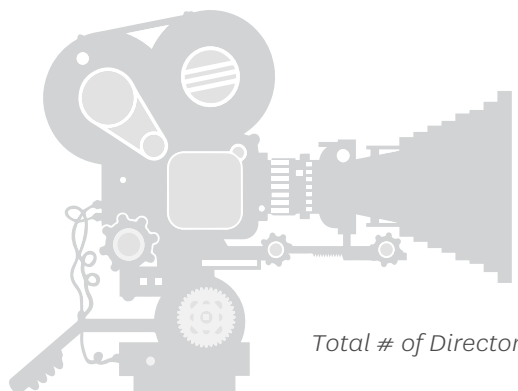
55

FILMS DIRECTED BY WOMEN
(midpoint)



WOMEN DIRECTORS BY DISTRIBUTOR

Number of women directors across 1,800 films by distributor



20th Century	Paramount Pictures	Sony Pictures	Universal Pictures	Walt Disney Studios	Warner Bros.	Lionsgate	STX Entertainment	Other
9	4	19	30	15	19	7	3	18
214	193	269	316	210	283	155	23	228

124 OUT OF **1,891** DIRECTORS

WOMEN DIRECTORS ACROSS 1,800 TOP-GROSSING FILMS

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



THERE ARE

98

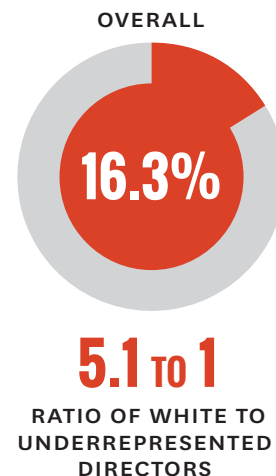
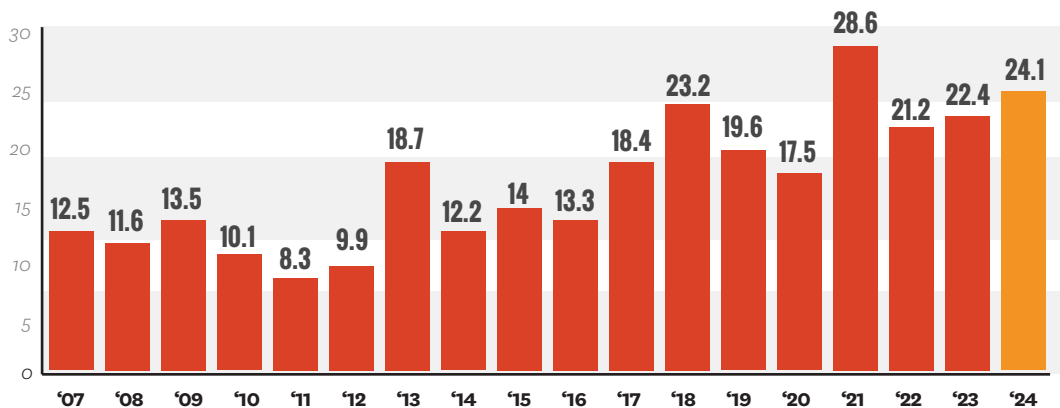
INDIVIDUAL
WOMEN
DIRECTORS
BETWEEN

**2007
&
2024**

*An asterisk denotes an underrepresented woman director.

UNDERREPRESENTED DIRECTORS BY YEAR

Percentage of underrepresented directors across 1,800 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.

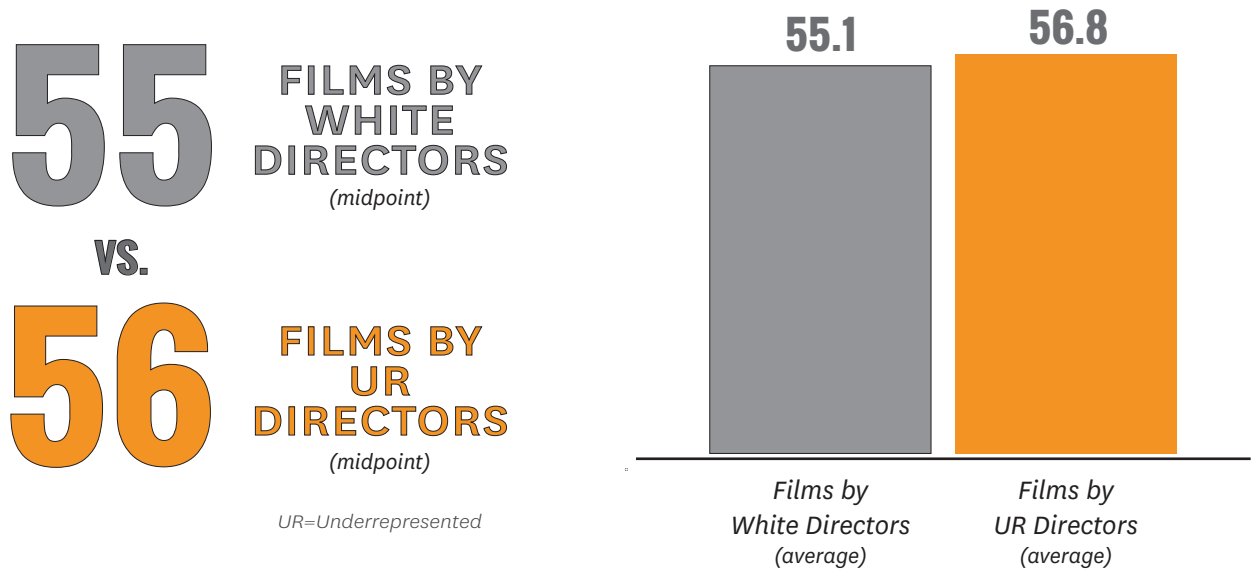
UNDERREPRESENTED DIRECTORS BY DISTRIBUTOR

Number and percentage of underrepresented directors across 1,800 films by distributor

DISTRIBUTION COMPANY	# OF UR DIRECTORS	% OF UR DIRECTORS	TOTAL # OF DIRECTORS
20TH CENTURY	29	13.5	214
PARAMOUNT PICTURES	19	9.8	193
SONY PICTURES	48	17.8	269
UNIVERSAL PICTURES	60	19	316
WALT DISNEY STUDIOS	26	12.4	210
WARNER BROS.	40	14.1	283
LIONSGATE	31	20	155
STX ENTERTAINMENT	1	4.3	23
OTHER	54	23.7	228
TOTAL	308	16.3	1,891

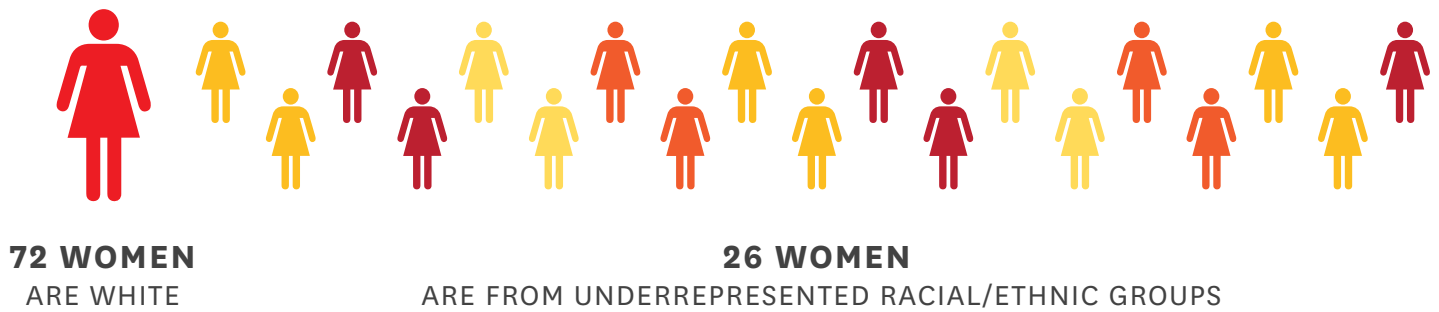
METACRITIC SCORES FOR UNDERREPRESENTED DIRECTORS

Median and average Metacritic score across 1,800 films from 2007-2024



HOLLYWOOD'S IMAGE OF A WOMAN DIRECTOR IS WHITE

Race/ethnicity of 98 individual women directors across 1,800 films



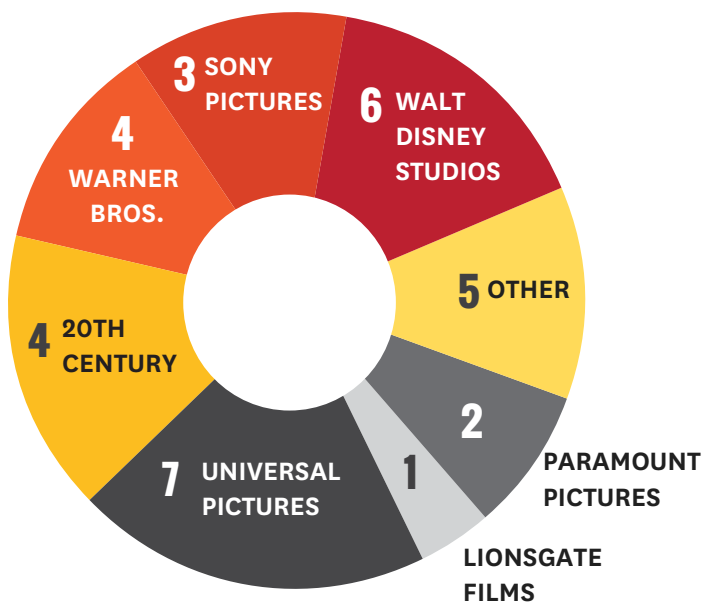
GENDER & UNDERREPRESENTED STATUS OF FILM DIRECTORS

Percentage and number of directors by gender and underrepresented status across 1,800 films from 2007 to 2024

INDICATOR	WHITE MEN	WHITE WOMEN	UR MEN	UR WOMEN
TOTAL %	78.8%	4.9%	14.6%	1.7%
TOTAL #	1,491	92	276	32
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 2007-2024



18 years:
2007-2024
1,688 movies

ONLY
32 films directed by
underrepresented
women

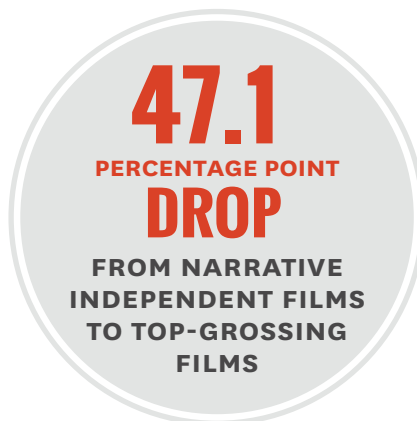
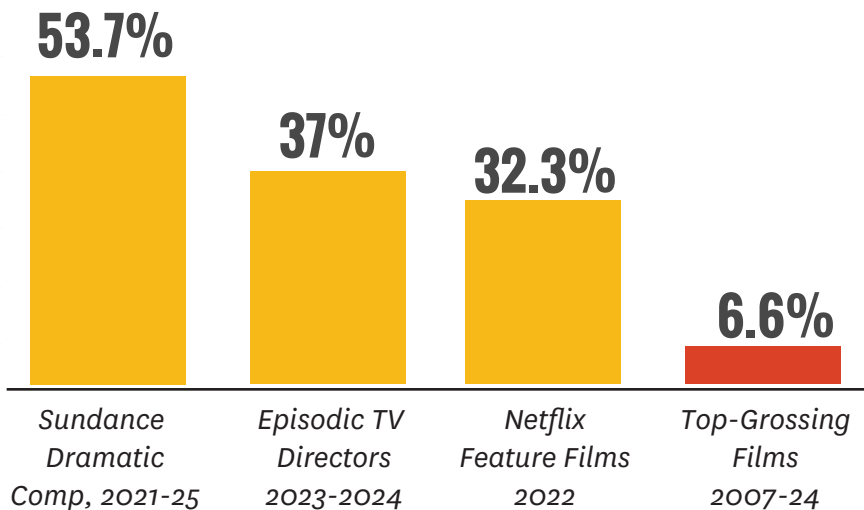
Other reflects films distributed by independent companies.

RATIO OF WHITE MEN TO UNDERREPRESENTED WOMEN DIRECTORS ACROSS 18 YEARS

46.6 TO 1

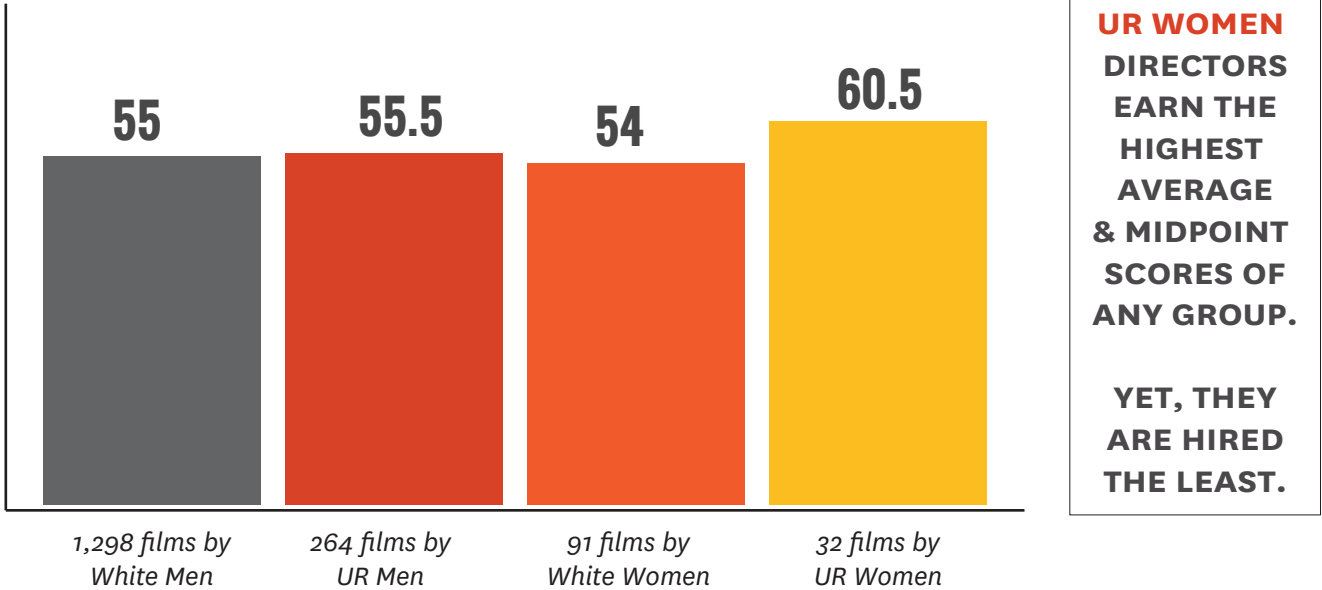
CAREER PROGRESS STALLS FOR WOMEN ON THE WAY TO TOP FILMS

Percentage of women directors by media platform



METACRITIC SCORES BY GENDER AND UNDERREPRESENTED STATUS

Median Metacritic score by gender and race/ethnicity of directors, 2007-2024



**Inclusion in the Director's Chair:
Analysis of Director Gender and Race/Ethnicity Across the 1,800 Top Films from 2007 to 2024**

Dr. Stacy L. Smith
&
Dr. Katherine Pieper
Annenberg Inclusion Initiative
USC

Each year, we examine inclusion of directors across the 100 most popular films as listed on Box Office Mojo. We focus on director gender and race/ethnicity, as we have done since 2007. In total, we have evaluated helmers across 1,800 movies and 18 years. Only theatrically released fictional movies were included (as well as re-releases) in the sample. As such, all documentaries or TV episodes appearing in theaters were removed prior to analysis.

Key Findings

Gender. A full 112 directors were responsible for the 100 top films of 2024. Only 13.4% of those helmers were women ($n=15$) and 86.6% were men ($n=97$). This calculates into a gender ratio of male directors to female directors of 6.5 to 1.

The percentage of women directors in 2024 (13.4%) was *not* significantly different from 2023 (12.1%). However, the last two years show the strongest hiring practices numerically across the 18-year sample. Hiring of women directors in 2024 (13.4%) was notably higher than in 2007 (2.7%).

A total of 955 distinct directors worked across the 18-year sample. A full 857 were men and 98 were women.

The top performing women directors were Anne Fletcher (4 films), Lana Wachowski (4 films), and Greta Gerwig (3 films). Seventeen different women have helmed 2 top 100 movies over 18 years.

Other companies (e.g., A24, Neon, etc.) outside of the legacy studios or mini majors distributed the highest number of films with women helmers in 2024 (5 movies) followed by Universal Pictures (3 movies) and Sony Pictures Entertainment (3 movies). Lionsgate and 20th Century did not have any women directors in 2024 attached to their top-grossing films. In terms of the legacy studios, Universal Pictures has attached the highest number and percentage of women directors (9.5%, $n=30$) to top films across this 18-year evaluation.

When we look at critical reception of films (i.e., Metacritic scores) across 18 years, male directed fare was not evaluated any more or less favorably than female directed fare. This was true for Metacritic averages (55.3=men, 57=women) and medians (55=men, 55=women) across the entire sample time frame (2007-2018).

There is 47.1 percentage point drop from women's participation as directors in independent film to helming a top-grossing picture. More specifically, 53.7% of directors in U.S. Dramatic Competition movies at Sundance Film Festival between 2021-2025 were women. In contrast, only 6.6% of helmers were women across 1,800 top-grossing films.

Race/Ethnicity. Of the 112 directors of the 100 top movies of 2024, 75.9% ($n=85$) were white and 24.1% ($n=27$) were from an underrepresented racial/ethnic background. The overall percentage is remarkably lower (17.5 percentage points) than the percentage of individuals identifying as underrepresented in the U.S. population (41.6%).

Of the 27 underrepresented directors of 2024, 44.4% ($n=12$) were Asian, 25.9% ($n=7$) multiracial/multiethnic, 11.1% ($n=3$) Hispanic/Latino, 7.4% ($n=2$) MENA, 7.4% ($n=2$) Black, and 3.7% ($n=1$) Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

The overall percentage of underrepresented directors in 2024 (24.1%) did not differ from the percentage in 2023 (22.4%). However, the percentage of underrepresented directors in 2024 was substantially higher (11.6 percentage points) than the percentage in 2007 (12.5%).

Turning to individual directors, a full 787 were white and 168 (17.6%) were underrepresented. This computes to 4.68 white directors hired to every 1 underrepresented director. Of these unique directors, the top performer was Tyler Perry with 18 films followed by M Night Shyamalan (9 films), Jaume Collet-Serra (8 films), Antoine Fuqua (8 films), and Tim Story (8 films).

In terms of distributors, “other” companies (e.g., A24, Neon, etc.) outside of the legacy studios or mini majors released 9 movies with underrepresented directors in 2024 and 23.7% of all top 100 movies from 2007 to 2024. Universal Pictures also performed well, with 19% of their movies helmed by underrepresented directors over 18 years and 5 films in 2024. Lionsgate has historically worked with or acquired movies with underrepresented directors at the helm (20%), though they did not have any films with an underrepresented director attached in 2024.

When looking across the 18-year sample, there is virtually no difference in average (55.1 vs. 56.8, respectively) or median (55 vs. 56, respectively) Metacritic scores for films directed by white or underrepresented helmers.

There is a 33.7 percentage point drop between underrepresented directors showcasing their films in the U.S. Dramatic Competition (2021-2025) section of the Sundance Film Festival (50%) and helming a top-grossing motion picture (16.3%) between 2007 and 2024.

Women of Color. Of the 112 directors across the 100 top films of 2024, only 6 or 5.3% were women of color. Three of those 6 women were multiracial/multiethnic, 2 were Asian, and 1 was Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Over time, only 1.7% ($n=32$) of all directing jobs were filled with women of color. Yet, women of color comprise roughly 20.7% of the U.S. population.

Not one company has hired at least 10 women of color to helm a popular movie across the last 18 years. Across the 18-year sample, Universal Pictures (7) and Walt Disney Studios (6) have hired the most women of color directors whereas Lionsgate (1) and STX Entertainment (0) have hired the least.

Underrepresented women directors (60.5) scored significantly higher than white women directors (54) underrepresented men directors (55.5) and white men directors (55) on median Metacritic scores across the last 18 years. The same was true for average scores, with women of color directors (62.3) earning the highest critics’ scores for their films compared to white women (55.2), white men (55.1), and underrepresented men (56.2). Yet, women of color directors work the least among these 4 identity groups.

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Each year, we examine inclusion of directors across the 100 most popular films as listed on Box Office Mojo.¹ We focus on director gender and race/ethnicity, as we have done since 2007. In total, we have evaluated helmers across 1,800 movies and 18 years. Only theatrically released fictional movies were included (as well as re releases) in the sample. As such, all documentaries or TV episodes appearing in the theaters were removed prior to analysis.

Below, the paper has four sections. First, we present the gender of helmers across the 100 top films of 2024. The second section focuses on directors' race/ethnicity. The intersection of race/ethnicity with gender appears in the third section of this report. This research brief concludes by summarizing the findings and offering solutions for change. As with all of our reports, only 5 percentage point or greater differences are noted. For most analyses, we compare the 100 top films of 2024 to the 100 top films of 2023 and then to 2007.

Table 1
Director Gender of Fictional Films by Year

Year	Men	Women	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	85.7% (n=54)	14.3% (n=9)	63
2022	91.1% (n=103)	8.9% (n=10)	113
2023	87.9% (n=102)	12.1% (n=14)	116
2024	86.6% (n=97)	13.4% (n=15)	112
Overall	93.4% (n=1,767)	6.6% (n=124)	1,891

Gender

A full 112 directors were responsible for the 100 top films of 2024. Only 13.4% of those helmers were women ($n=15$) and 86.6% were men ($n=97$). This calculates into a gender ratio of male directors to female directors of 6.5 to 1. Here is a list of the 15 women working across the 100 top movies of 2024: Anna Halberg (*Tarot*), Arkasha Stevenson (*The First Omen*), Coralie Fargeat (*The Substance*), Dana Ledoux Miller (*Moana 2*), Gabriela Cowperthwaite (*I.S.S.*), Halina Reijn (*Babygirl*), Ishana Shyamalan (*The Watchers*), Kelly Marcel (*Venom: The Last Dance*), Rose Glass (*Love Lies Bleeding*), Samantha Jayne (*Mean Girls*), Sam Taylor-Johnson (*Back to Black*), S.J. Clarkson (*Madam Web*), Stephanie Stine (*Kung Fu Panda 4*), Zelda Williams (*Lisa Frankenstein*), and Zoë Kravitz (*Blink Twice*).

The percentage of women directors in 2024 (13.4%) was *not* significantly different from 2023 (12.1%). See Table 1. However, the last two years show the strongest hiring practices numerically across the 18-year sample. It is important to note that the percentage of women directors in 2024 was notably higher than in 2007 (2.7%).

We also examined the number of unique or individual men and women working as directors across the 100 top films from the last 18 years. The 1,891 directors across the sample time frame reduces to 955 distinct helmers. A total of 857 were men and 98 were women, which is a gender ratio of hiring 8.74 men to every 1 one woman.

The top performing women were as follows: Anne Fletcher (4 films), Lana Wachowski (4 films), and Greta Gerwig (3 films). Seventeen different women have helmed 2 top 100 movies over 18 years: Ava DuVernay, Catherine Hardwicke, Elizabeth Banks, Emerald Fennell, Gina Prince-Bythewood, Halina Reijn, Jennifer Lee, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, Julie Anne Robinson, Kasi Lemmons, Nancy Meyers, Nia DaCosta, Olivia Wilde, Patty Jenkins, Phyllida Lloyd, Sam Taylor-Johnson, Sarah Smith, and Stella Meghie. A list of all 98 women can be found in Table 2.

Table 2
Women Directors 2007 to 2024

Abby Kohn	Gina Prince-Bythewood	Mimi Leder
Adele Lim	Greta Gerwig	Nancy Meyers
Angelina Jolie	Halina Reijn	Nia DaCosta
Anna Boden	Hallie Meyers-Shyer	Nia Vardalos
Anna Foerster	Ishana Shyamalan	Niki Caro
Anne Fletcher	Jennifer Flackett	Nora Ephron
Anna Halberg	Jennifer Lee	Olivia Newman
Autumn de Wilde	Jennifer Yuh Nelson	Olivia Wilde
Arkasha Stevenson	Jessica M. Thompson	Patricia Riggen
Ava DuVernay	Jessie Nelson	Patty Jenkins
Betty Thomas	Jill Culton	Phyllida Lloyd

Brenda Chapman	Jodie Foster	Rosalind Ross
Cate Shortland	Julie Anne Robinson	Rose Glass
Catherine Hardwicke	Julie Taymor	Roxann Dawson
Cathy Yan	Kasi Lemmons	Sam Taylor-Johnson
Celine Song	Kat Coiro	Samantha Jayne
Charise Castro Smith	Kathryn Bigelow	Sanaa Hamri
Chinonye Chukwu	Kay Cannon	Sarah Smith
Chloe Zhao	Kelly Fremon Craig	Shari Springer Berman
Coralie Fargeat	Kelly Marcel	Sharon Maguire
Dana Ledoux Miller	Kimberly Peirce	S.J. Clarkson
Diane English	Kirsten Sheridan	Sofia Coppola
Elaine Bogan	Lana Wachowski	Stacy Title
Elizabeth Allen Rosenbaum	Laura Brousseau	Stella Meghie
Elizabeth Banks	Laura Terruso	Stephanie Stine
Emerald Fennell	Liesl Tommy	Susanna Fogel
Emma Seligman	Lilly Wachowski	Susanna White
Emma Tammi	Lorene Scafaria	Thea Sharrock
Faryn Pearl	Loveleen Tandan	Tina Gordon
Fawn Veerasunthorn	Lucia Aniello	Trish Sie
Floria Sigismondi	Maria Schrader	Zelda Williams
Gail Mancuso	Marielle Heller	Zoë Kravitz
Gabriela Cowperthwaite	Melina Matsoukas	

Pivoting to the unique men directors, the top performer was Tyler Perry with 18 films. Steven Spielberg clocked in with 12 films and Ridley Scott and Clint Eastwood both had 11 films. Guy Ritchie and M. Night Shyamalan had 9 movies a piece and 7 male directors each had 8 films (David Yates, Christopher Nolan, Jaume Collet-Serra, Antoine Fuqua, Tim Story, Michael Bay, Shawn Levy).

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 '24	0	1	3	0	0	3	2	1	5
# of Women Directors '07-'24	7	4	19	3	9	30	15	19	18
% of Women Directors '07-'24	4.5%	2.1%	7.1%	13%	4.2%	9.5%	7.1%	6.7%	7.9%

# of Directors Overall '07-'24	155	193	269	23	214	316	210	283	228
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We were also interested in the distributors that worked with women directors. Given the low frequency of films distributed by STX Entertainment, we have included them in the table but will not report on their patterns of employment. As shown in Table 3, “other” distributors outside of the legacy studios or mini majors onboarded the highest number of women helmers in 2024 (5 films) followed by Universal Pictures (3 films) and Sony Pictures Entertainment (3 films). Lionsgate and 20th Century did not have any women directors in 2024 attached to their top-grossing films. In terms of the legacy studios, Universal Pictures has attached the highest number and percentage of women directors (9.5%, $n=30$) to top films across this 18-year evaluation.

Given how few women directors get the access and opportunity to work across top films, it is important to evaluate whether gender is related to critical review. Put differently, we were curious if films with male directors are evaluated higher (in terms of critics’ reviews) than films with female directors. To address this query, we first separated the 2024 sample into 2 bins: one with films helmed by women and one with films helmed only by men. Then, we looked at the average and median Metacritic scores as well as the minimum and maximum scores across the two groups. We repeated this process and analysis across the entire 18-year sample as well.

The results are depicted in Table 4. In 2024, films directed by men ($mean=59.6$) had significantly higher average Metacritic scores than did films directed by women ($mean=53.4$). The difference between median Metacritic scores for male and female directed fare was also significant. Men directors’ (62) median score was significantly higher than women directors in 2024 (53.5). When we look to the over time Metacritic scores across all 18 years, on the other hand, the averages and medians of films directed by males and females do not differ!

Table 4
Average & Median Metacritic Score by Director Gender: 2007-2024

Metacritic	2024		2007-2024	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Average	59.6	53.4	55.3	57
Median	62	53.5	55	55
High	91	78	100	95
Low	22	26	7	22

Each year we also evaluate the pipeline (i.e., Sundance Film Festival) and job opportunities (i.e., Netflix, television) for women directors. In terms of U.S. Dramatic Competition at the Sundance Film Festival from 2021-2025, a full 53.7% of the directors were women.² Based on Directors Guild of America (DGA) analyses, a full 37% of all episodic directors were women in the 2023/24 season and 39% in the 2022/23 season.³ Turning to Netflix movies, a full 32.3% of directors were women across 63 U.S. originals in 2022.⁴ Given the percentage of women working as directors in

streaming, television and at Sundance, it is clear the exclusionary hiring problem for women directors resides squarely with the legacy studios and mini majors.

Overall, 2024 was a status quo year for women directors. The last 5 years tend to have women directors in the double digits, hovering from a low of 9% to a high of 15%. Yet, other arenas for visibility (Sundance Film Festival) and employment (TV, streaming) were 2 to 3 times higher in terms of women's share of directing work. This is surprising given that female director's Metacritic scores across 18 years were just as strong as their male counterparts.

Race/Ethnicity

Of the 112 directors of the 100 top movies of 2024, 75.9% ($n=85$) were white and 24.1% ($n=27$) were from an underrepresented racial/ethnic background. The overall percentage is remarkably lower (17.5 percentage points) than the percentage of individuals identifying as underrepresented in the U.S. population (41.6%).⁵ Of the 27 underrepresented directors of 2024, 44.4% ($n=12$) were Asian, 25.9% ($n=7$) multiracial/multiethnic, 11.1% ($n=3$) Hispanic/Latino, 7.4% ($n=2$) MENA, 7.4% ($n=2$) Black, and 3.7% ($n=1$) Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Table 5
Director Underrepresented Status of Fictional Films by Year

Year	White	Underrepresented	Total
2007	87.5% ($n=98$)	12.5% ($n=14$)	112
2008	88.4% ($n=99$)	11.6% ($n=13$)	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% ($n=92$)	14% ($n=15$)	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	80.4% ($n=90$)	19.6% ($n=22$)	112
2020	82.5% ($n=33$)	17.5% ($n=7$)	40
2021	71.4% ($n=45$)	28.6% ($n=18$)	63
2022	78.8% ($n=89$)	21.2% ($n=24$)	113
2023	77.6% ($n=90$)	22.4% ($n=26$)	116
2024	75.9% ($n=85$)	24.1% ($n=27$)	112
Overall	83.7% ($n=1,583$)	16.3% ($n=308$)	1,891

Has the percentage of underrepresented directors changed over time? The overall percentage of underrepresented directors in 2024 (24.1%) did not differ from the percentage in 2023 (22.4%). However, the percentage of underrepresented directors in 2024 was substantially higher (11.6 percentage points) than the percentage in 2007 (12.5%).

Turning to unique or individual directors, a full 787 were white and 168 (17.6%) were underrepresented. This computes to 4.68 white directors hired to every 1 underrepresented director. Of these unique directors, the top performer was Tyler Perry with 18 films followed by M Night Shyamalan with 9 films. Jaume Collet-Serra, Antoine Fuqua, and Tim Story each have 8 films across the 18-year sample and James Wan, Malcolm D. Lee, and Jon M. Chu have 7 films.

The top performers for white directors were as follows: Steven Spielberg (12 films), Ridley Scott (11 films), Clint Eastwood (11 films), Guy Ritchie (9 films), David Yates (8 films), Christopher Nolan (8 films), Michael Bay (8 films), Shawn Levy (8 films), Tim Burton (7 films), Matthew Vaughn (7 films), Zach Snyder (7 films), Francis Lawrence (7 films), Nicholas Stoller (7 films), Peter Berg (7 films), James Mangold (7 films), Todd Phillips (7 films), and Steven Soderbergh (7 films).

To examine the companies working with underrepresented directors, we looked at the legacy studio distributors and mini majors. As shown in Table 5, the top performer was “other” distributors with 9 movies in 2024 and 23.7% of all top 100 movies from 2007 to 2024. Universal Pictures also performed well, with 19% of their movies helmed by underrepresented directors over 18 years and 5 films in 2024. Lionsgate has historically worked with or acquired movies with underrepresented directors at the helm (20%), though they did not have any films with an underrepresented director attached in 2024.

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 '24	0	2	5	0	0	5	3	3	9
# of UR Directors '07-'24	31	19	48	1	29	60	26	40	54
% of UR Directors '07-'24	20%	9.8%	17.8%	4.3%	13.5%	19%	12.4%	14.1%	23.7%
# of Directors Overall	155	193	269	23	214	316	210	283	228

In terms of Metacritic scores, we looked at the strength of stories told from the lens of underrepresented and white directors. Our approach to splitting the 2024 sample as well as all 18 years followed what we outlined above with gender. In 2024, while white directors did not differ in average Metacritic scores ($mean=59.3$) than underrepresented directors ($mean=57.1$), the former group had a significantly higher median (62) Metacritic than the latter group (57.5). When looking across the 18-year sample, there is virtually no difference in average or median Metacritic scores between these two groups (see Table 6). Thus, the quality of the directing cannot be a reason cited for not hiring underrepresented helmers on top films.

Table 6
Average & Median Metacritic Score by Director Gender: 2007-2024

Metacritic	2024		2007-2024	
	White	Underrepresented	White	Underrepresented
Average	59.3	57.1	55.1	56.8
Median	62	57.5	55	56
High	91	82	100	99
Low	22	28	7	11

Finally, we explored the access and opportunities underrepresented directors were given at the Sundance Film Festival, on Netflix's streaming platform, and across the larger episodic television environment. Within U.S. Dramatic Competition at Sundance Film Festival, 50% of directors from 2021-2025 were from underrepresented racial/groups.⁶ Utilizing DGA results, a full 39% of directors were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups across the 2023/2024 television season.⁷ The same percentage was found in the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 seasons. Finally, 16.9% of Netflix U.S. original films in 2022 were helmed by underrepresented directors.⁸

In total, underrepresented directors were doing better in 2024 than women in terms of securing work on top films. However, the percentage of underrepresented helmers across the most popular films still falls short of proportional representation with the U.S. population (41.6%). In the next section, we continue to look at gender and race/ethnicity of directors. Here, we examine access and opportunity through an intersectional lens.

Women of Color

Of the 112 directors across the 100 top films of 2024, only 6 or 5.3% were women of color. Three of those 6 women are multiracial/multiethnic (Gabriela Cowperthwaite, Zelda Williams, Zoë Kravitz), 2 were Asian (Ishana Shyamalan, Stephanie Stine), and 1 was Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Dana Ledoux Miller). Over time, only 1.7% ($n=32$) of all directing jobs were filled with women of color. Yet, women of color comprise roughly 20.7% of the U.S. population (see Table 7).⁹ A list of all the women of color working across the 18-year sample can be found in Table 8.

Table 7
Gender & Underrepresented Status of Directors from 2007-2024

Directors	White Males	White Females	UR Males	UR Females
Total %	78.8%	4.9%	14.6%	1.7%
Total #	1,491	92	276	32
U.S. Census	29.2%	29.7%	20.4%	20.7%

Table 8
Women of Color Directors From 2007 to 2024

Adele Lim (1)	Jennifer Yuh Nelson (2)
Ava DuVernay (2)	Kasi Lemmons (2)
Cathy Yan (1)	Loveleen Tandan (1)
Celine Song (1)	Melina Matsoukas (1)
Charise Castro Smith (1)	Nia DaCosta (2)
Chinonye Chukwu (1)	Patricia Riggen (1)
Chloé Zhao (1)	Roxann Dawson (1)
Dana Ledoux Miller (1)	Sanaa Hamri (1)
Fawn Veerasunthorn (1)	Stella Meghie (2)
Gina Prince-Bythewood (2)	Stephanie Stine (1)
Gabriela Cowperthwaite (1)	Tina Gordon (1)
Ishana Shyamalan (1)	Zelda Williams (1)
Liesl Tommy (1)	Zoë Kravitz (1)

Note: The parenthetical contains the total number of times they directed a movie across the 1,800 top films.

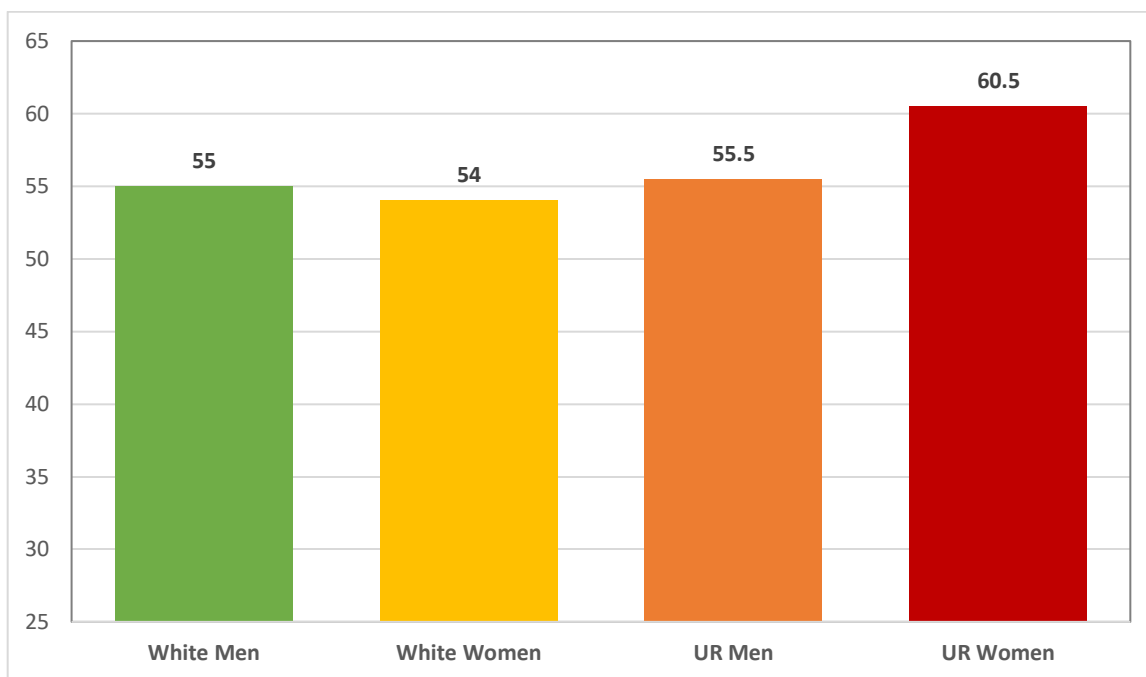
Focusing on distributor, Table 9 illuminates the total number of jobs secured by women of color across 18 years of popular movies. Two trends are apparent. First, not one company has hired at least 10 women of color to helm a popular movie in 18 years. Second, Universal Pictures and Walt Disney Studios have hired the most women of color directors whereas Lionsgate and STX Entertainment have hired the least.

Table 9
and % of Underrepresented Women Directors Across Top Films from 2007-2024 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	7	6	4	5
# of Directors Overall	155	193	269	23	214	316	210	283	228

Finally, we examined Metacritic scores (average, median) from 2007 to 2024 across four identity groups: white men, white women, underrepresented men and underrepresented women.¹⁰ We repeated the same process as we did in the gender and race/ethnicity sections. As shown in Figure 1, underrepresented women (60.5) scored significantly higher than white women (54) underrepresented men (55.5) and white men (55) on median critic's scores across the last 18 years. The same was true for average scores, with women of color (62.3) earning the highest critics' scores compared to white women (55.2), white men (55.1), and underrepresented men (56.2).

Figure 1
Median Metacritic Score by Director Gender and Underrepresented Status



Women of color continue to receive the fewest opportunities to work behind the camera in Hollywood. This is made particularly clear when reviewing the findings on how often distributors at legacy and mini major studios attach a woman of color to a film. In nearly 2 decades, not one company has attached at least 10 women of color to their films.

Conclusion

Each year, we examine the prevalence of women and people of color working as directors on the most popular films released theatrically. The results this year offer three particular insights into patterns of representation behind the camera.

Hiring Practices Show Little Progress in Recent Years

The percentage of women and people of color working as directors on top movies has reached a plateau. The numbers in 2024 reflect significant progress from the doldrums of 2013 and 2014 (for women) and 2011 or 2012 (for underrepresented individuals), which merits recognition. However, the figures this year reflect a holding pattern rather than a continual climb toward change. Though this does mean that women and people of color are getting opportunities to direct films, there is still a gap between work in other media (e.g., independent film, TV and streaming series) and in top movies. Until this gap narrows further, celebrations around the progress for women and people of color as directors will remain muted.

Women of Color Continue to Face Exclusion

Over 18 years, there has been little progress for women of color working as directors of top-grossing films. Only 1.7% of all directing positions from 2007 to 2024 were held by women of color. This culminated in 5.4% or 6 jobs across the top 100 movies in 2024. Not one distributor has hired at least 10 women of color across 18 years of filmmaking. Additionally, only 6 women of color have directed at least 2 films in the top 100-- and not *more* than 2 movies in the same time frame. In other words, there is a cap on the number of opportunities for women of color overall *and* on the number of opportunities allotted to specific women of color. This means that audiences have few chances to see work by women of color directors and women of color have little probability of generating the same amount of wealth and status in Hollywood as their white male peers.

Directing Opportunity is Not Linked to Directing Performance

For women and people of color working as directors in Hollywood, the prevalence of employment is clearly uncoupled from overall performance behind the camera. In looking at Metacritic scores for films across the sample, there was no difference between critics' rankings of films by underrepresented and white directors in 2024. While there were significant deviations for women directors in 2024, this was not mirrored in data for the last 18 years. Put differently, the quality of films created by women and people of color overall is not significantly different from those made by white or male directors. Women of color, in fact, earn significantly *higher* critics scores compared to all other groups across the past 18 years. These findings suggest that the limits placed on women and people of color are not because they make less quality content, but because decision-making processes result in exclusion.

Opportunities for Change

Creating real and lasting progress requires investing in approaches that will result in changes to decision-making. We have presented these in multiple previous reports—diversifying the list of potential candidates for open directing jobs; disentangling the identity of the film's lead from the identity of the director; and using language that does not prime gender stereotypes (e.g., describing a director as “captaining a ship,” etc.) are three critical examples.

One additional solution is also important to consider. The list of top-grossing film directors is populated by men who, crucially, have more than one opportunity to helm a major motion picture. These repeated at-bats are not offered to women. Until hiring practices result in first-time and multiple-time directors, it will be difficult to see true change.

Limitations

A few limitations must be noted with this research investigation. First, as the box office for 2024 has not fully closed, the films included in this report may not reflect the final annual list of top movies in several months. Films may shift and other directors may be added to the top 100. However, this report does include major studio releases and significant films with theatrical distribution from other companies and as such reflects the major hiring decisions of the year. Second, because the focus on this report is the top-grossing films of the year, independent fare and movies with lower box office earnings (or those released to streaming services) are not included. These films may be more likely to include women or people of color as directors. Since our intent is to assess hiring practices across major distributors as well as those with significant capital investments, the focus on the top 100 films was appropriate and details about other films may be found in future reports.

As the film industry faces contraction and uncertainty, it is clear that the playbook for hiring continues to revert to the status quo. Yet, in an industry driven by creativity, fostering new voices and new stories is paramount. The data in this report indicates that for now, Hollywood decision-makers are content to believe that storytelling success rests in the hands of one identity group. Until that belief system changes, there will be little progress for women and people of color behind the camera in film.

Notes

1. To determine the 100 top films of 2024, Box Office Mojo was pulled on December 30th 2024 at 2:00 pm PT. Because some films were just beginning their theatrical run, the final list of 100 top movies may be different if the study was conducted at a later date. As such, the findings should be interpreted with caution.
2. Smith et al. (2024a). *Unpublished data on directors at the Sundance Film Festival*. Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. Los Angeles, CA.
3. Directors Guild of America (n.d.). DGA Publishes Inclusion Hiring Data in Episodic Television Over the 2023-2024 Season. Retrieved December 28th, 2024 from https://www.dga.org/News/PressReleases/2024/241025_Episodic_TV_Inclusion_Report_23-24#:~:text=An%20analysis%20of%201%2C430%20DGA,which%20rose%20from%2018%25%20ten
4. Smith et al. (2024b). *Unpublished data on directors of U.S. Original films streamed on Netflix*. Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. Los Angeles, CA.
5. U.S. Census (2023). Quick facts. Retrieved December 31, 2023 from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>
6. Smith et al. (2024a).
7. Directors Guild of America (n.d.).
8. Smith et al. (2024b).
9. U.S. Census (2023).
10. Three films had a white female director and an underrepresented male director (*Ron's Gone Wrong; Spirit: Untamed; Mean Girls*). For analyses in which only gender or underrepresented status was evaluated, the films were included as having at least one female director and at least one underrepresented director. For this analysis, however, each of these films was analyzed as having a white female director.