

# The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top U.S. Films of 2020

by Martha M. Lauzen, Ph.D.

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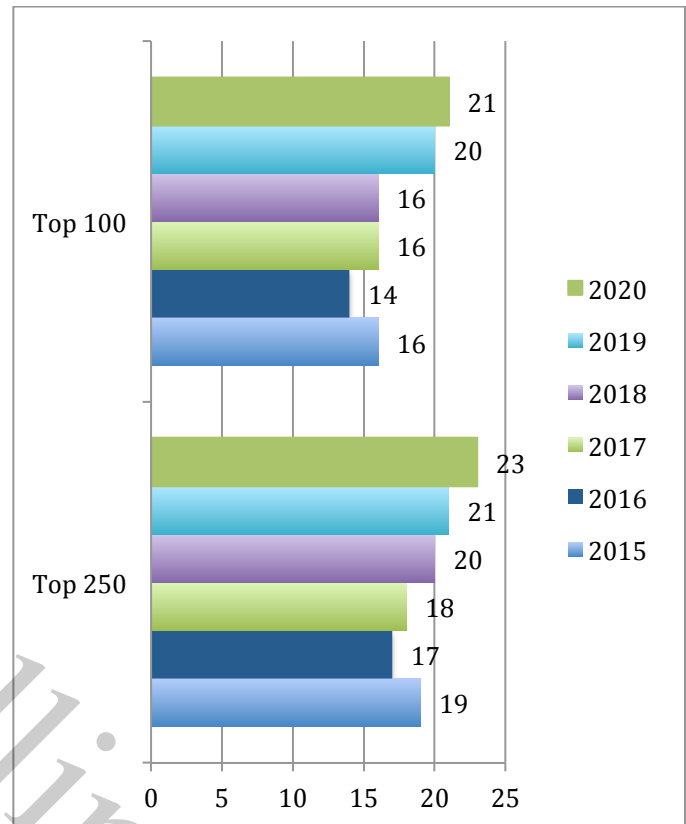
*The Celluloid Ceiling has tracked women’s employment on top grossing films for the last 23 years. It is the longest-running and most comprehensive study of women’s behind-the-scenes employment in film available.*

*Due to the interruption caused by COVID-19 in theatrical box office grosses, this year’s study monitors women’s employment on the top 100 and 250 U.S. films of 2020. (Previous years also included an analysis of the top 500 films.) This year’s report also considers women’s employment on recently released films included on the Digital Entertainment Group’s “Watched at Home” list from March through December.*

•In 2020, the percentages of behind-the-scenes women working on the top 100 and 250 (domestic) grossing films inched upward, reaching recent historic highs (see Figure 1).

•Women comprised 21% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 100 grossing films in 2020, up from 20% in 2019. Women working in these roles on the top 250 grossing films experienced a slight increase from 21% in 2019 to 23% in 2020.

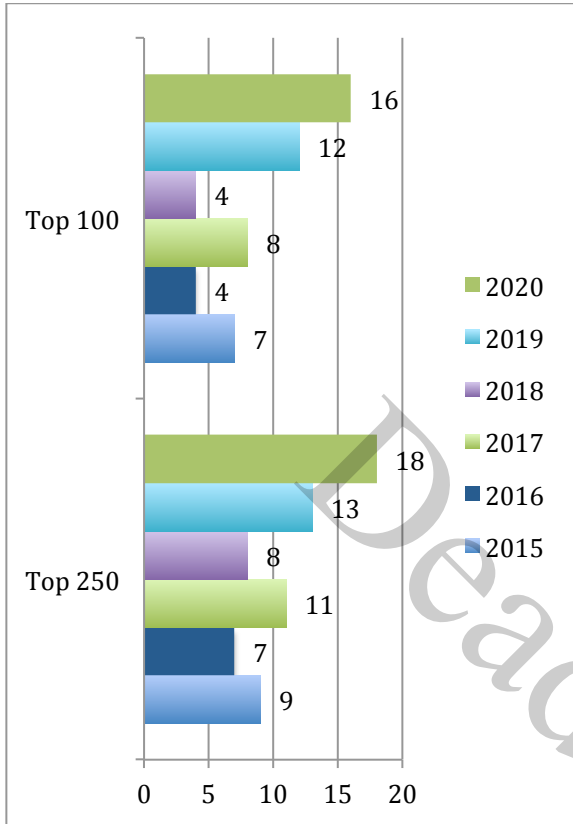
Figure 1.  
Comparison of Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women on Top 100 and 250 Films (Last Six Years)\*



\*includes directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, cinematographers

•Women accounted for 16% of directors working on the top 100 grossing films in 2020, up from 12% in 2019 and 4% in 2018. Women comprised 18% of directors working on the top 250 films in 2020, up from 13% in 2019 and 8% in 2018. The percentages of women directing top 100 and top 250 films represent recent historic highs and also reflect 2 consecutive years of growth (see Figure 2).

*Figure 2.  
Comparison of Percentages of Women  
Directors Working on the  
Top 100 and 250 Films (Last Six Years)*



*Background*

For the last 23 years, this study has tracked women’s employment on the top 250 grossing films (international films and reissues omitted). The results are divided into four major sections. The first section reports the findings for the top 250 films, offering comparisons of percentages from 2020 with figures dating from 1998. The second section provides the numbers for the top 100 films, comparing this year’s figures with those from 1980, 1990, 2010, 2017, 2018, and 2019. The third section offers analyses of important relationships between women directors and those working in other key behind-the-scenes

roles, such as writers and editors. This year’s report monitored over 2,700 credits. Since 1998, the study has tracked approximately 73,000 credits.

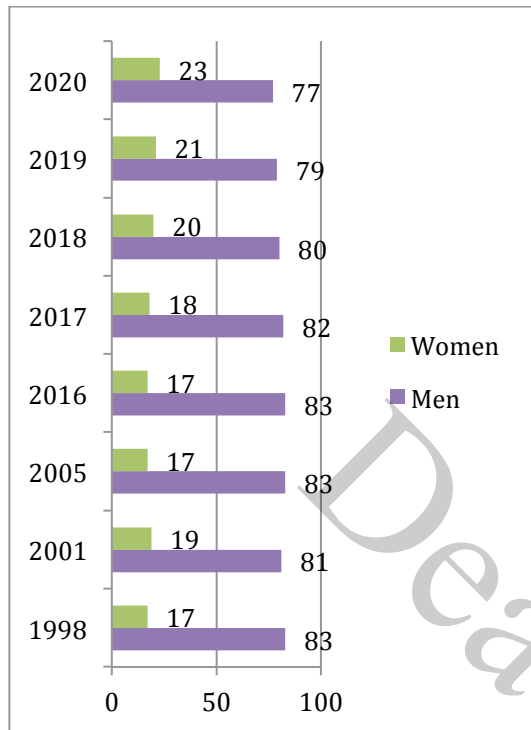
Figures for the top grossing films are based on numbers obtained from Box Office Mojo on January 1, 2021.

Due to the interruption caused by COVID-19 in theatrical box office grosses, this year’s study also tracked women’s employment on films included on the Digital Entertainment Group’s “Watched at Home” list from March through December. The list includes U.S. digital sales, digital rentals (VOD), DVD and Blu-ray. This list does not include premium VOD. Every recently released (2019, 2020) U.S. film that appeared on the weekly list at least once from March through December was included. The fourth section discusses the findings of this analysis.

*Findings / Top 250 Films*

- Women comprised 23% of all directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 250 films of 2020. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 21% in 2019 and a recent historic high. It also represents an increase of only 6 percentage points since 1998 (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of  
Behind-the-Scenes Women on Top 250  
Films*

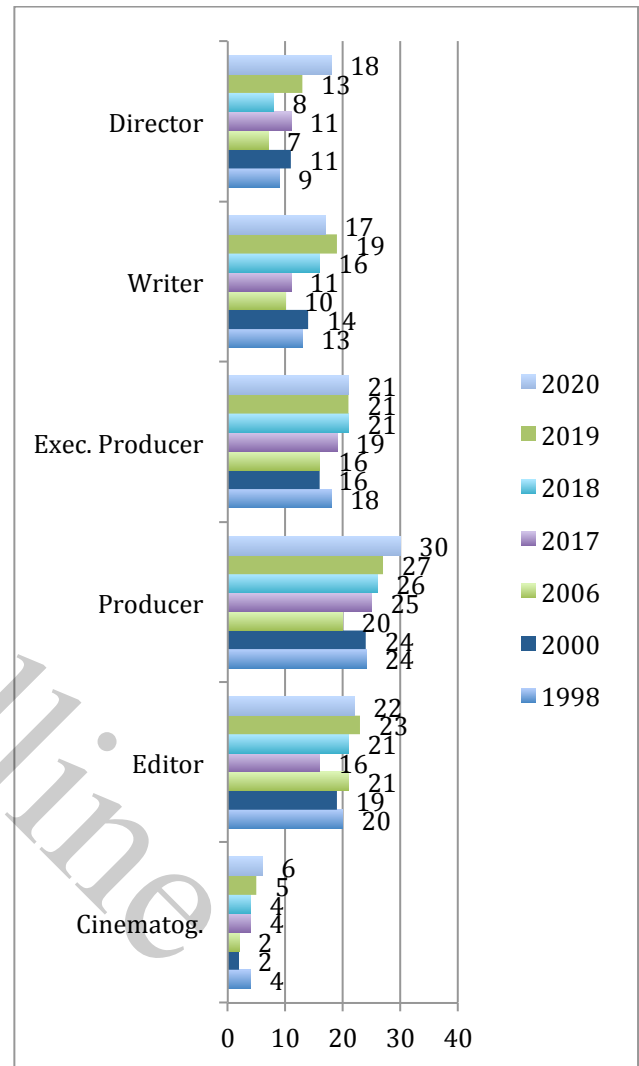


- Women fared best as producers (30%), followed by editors (22%), executive producers (21%), directors (18%), writers (17%), and cinematographers (6%).

- In 2020, the majority of films (67%) employed 0 to 4 women in the roles considered. 24% of films employed 5 to 9 women, and 9% employed 10 or more women. In contrast, 5% of films employed 0 to 4 men in the roles considered, 24% employed 5 to 9 men, and the remaining majority (71%) employed 10 or more men.

- Women comprised 18% of all directors working on the top 250 films of 2020. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 13% in 2019.

*Figure 4.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of  
Women Employed Behind the Scenes on  
Top 250 Films by Role*



This represents a recent historic high (see Figure 4).

- Women accounted for 17% of all writers working on the top 250 films of 2020. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 19% in 2019.

- Women comprised 21% of all executive producers working on the top 250 films

of 2020. This represents no change from 2019.

- Women accounted for 30% of all producers working on the top 250 films of 2020. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 27% in 2019, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 22% of all editors working on the top 250 films of 2020. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 23% in 2019.

- Women accounted for 6% of all cinematographers working on the top 250 films of 2020. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 5% in 2019, and a recent historic high.

- 80% of the top 250 films had no women directors, 73% had no women writers, 41% had no women executive producers, 26% had no women producers, 72% had no women editors, and 94% had no women cinematographers (see Figure 5).

*Figure 5.  
Percentages of Top 250 Films with No Women in Roles Considered*

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80% had no women directors  
 73% had no women writers  
 41% had no women exec. producers  
 26% had no women producers  
 72% had no women editors  
 94% had no women cinematographers

The majority (67%) of films employed fewer than 5 women in the above roles.

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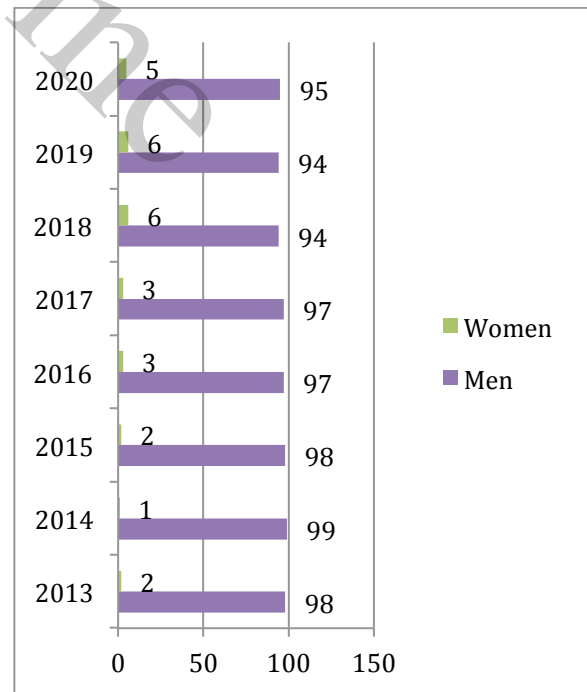
*Additional Role/ Composers*

- Women comprised 5% of composers working on the top 250 grossing films of 2020. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 2019 (see Figure 6). 94% of films had no female composers in 2020.

*Findings / Top 100 Films*

- Women comprised 21% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 100 films of 2020. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 20% in 2019, and a recent historic high.

*Figure 6.  
Recent Historical Representation of Women and Men as Composers on the Top 250 Films*



- Women fared best as producers (28%), followed by executive producers (21%), editors (18%), directors (16%), writers (12%), and cinematographers (3%).

- Women comprised 16% of directors working on the top 100 films of 2020. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 12% in 2019, and a recent historic high (see Figure 7).

- Women accounted for 12% of writers working on the top 100 films of 2020. This represents a decline of 8 percentage points from 20% in 2019.

- Women comprised 21% of executive producers working on the top 100 films of 2020. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 19% in 2019, and a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 28% of producers working on the top 100 films of 2020. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 26% in 2019, and a recent historic high.

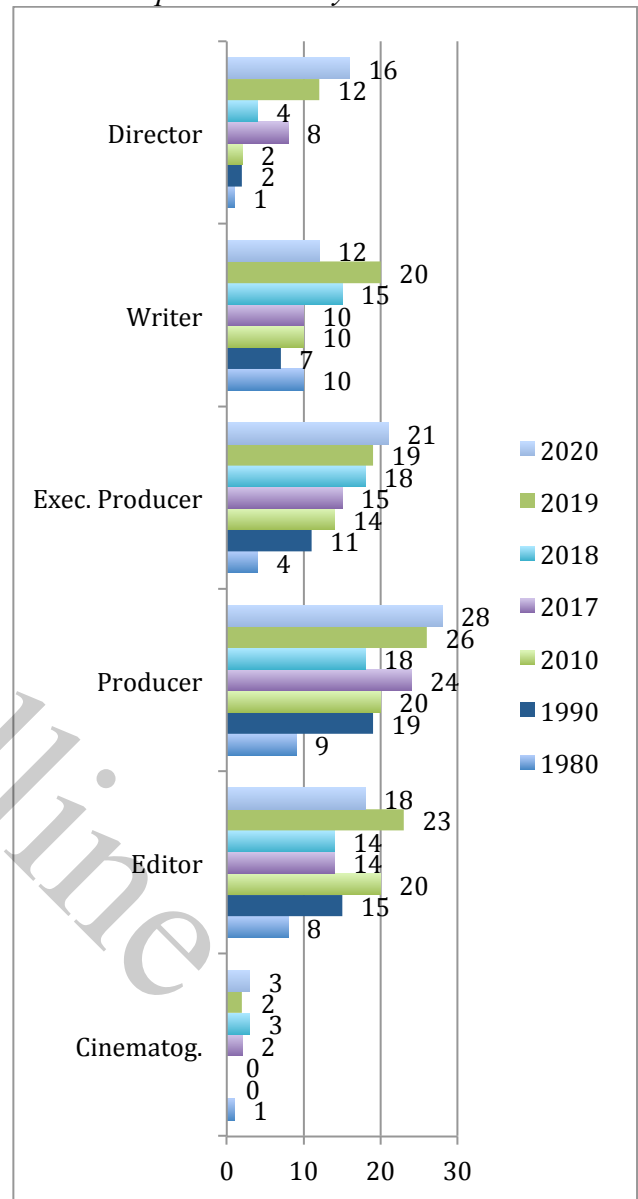
- Women comprised 18% of editors working on the top 100 films of 2020. This represents a decline of 5 percentage points from 23% in 2019.

- Women accounted for 3% of cinematographers working on the top 100 films of 2020. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 2% in 2019.

*Additional Role/Composer*

- Women comprised 5% of composers working on the top 100 films of 2020. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 6% in 2019. 95% of films had no women composers.

*Figure 7. Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Employed Behind the Scenes on Top 100 Films by Role\**



*\*Note that relatively minor fluctuations in the numbers affect this sample to a greater extent than the other sample included in this report due to its smaller size.*

*Top 250 Films/Comparison of Films with at Least One Female Director vs. Films with Exclusively Male Directors*

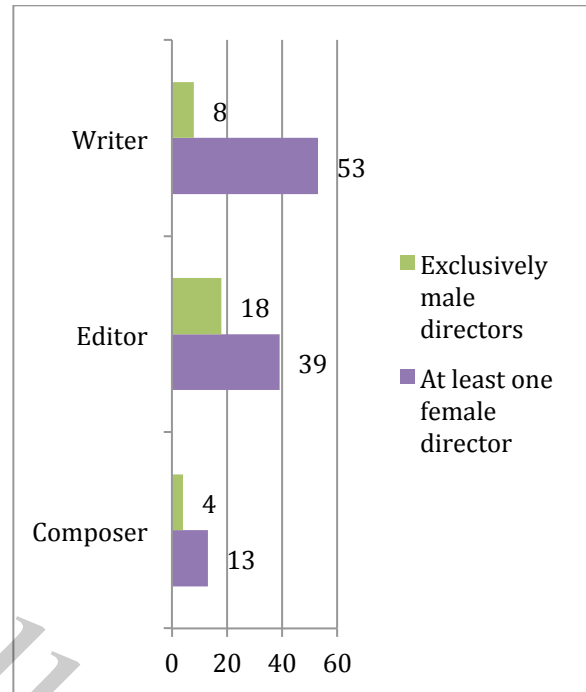
- Films with at least one female director employed substantially higher percentages of women in other key behind-the-scenes roles than films with exclusively male directors (see Figure 9).

- On films with at least one female director, women comprised 53% of writers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 8% of writers.

- On films with at least one female director, women comprised 39% of editors. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 18% of editors.

- On films with at least one female director, women comprised 13% of composers. On films with exclusively male directors, women accounted for 4% of composers.

*Figure 9. Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Films with at Least One Female Director vs. with Exclusively Male Directors*



film that appeared on the weekly list at least once was included.

Note, there is a good deal of overlap between the lists of the watched at home films and the top grossing films at the box office. 63% of the films on the watched at home list also appear on the list of top grossing films.

- Women comprised 19% of all directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the watched at home films. This percentage is slightly lower than the 21% achieved on the top 100 grossing films.

*Findings/Watched at Home Films*

Due to the interruption caused by COVID-19 in theatrical box office grosses, this year’s study also tracked women’s employment on films included on the Digital Entertainment Group’s “Watched at Home” list from March through December. The list includes U.S. digital sales, digital rentals (VOD), DVD and Blu-ray. This list does not include premium VOD. Every recently released (2019, 2020) U.S.

- Women accounted for 9% of directors working on the watched at home films. For comparison, women comprised 16% of directors working on the top 100 grossing films (see Figure 10).

- Women made up 12% of writers working on the watched at home films. For comparison, women accounted for 12% of writers on the top 100 grossing films.

- Women comprised 15% of executive producers working on the watched at home films. For comparison, women accounted for 21% of executive producers on the top 100 grossing films.

- Women made up 31% of producers working on the watched at home films. For comparison, women accounted for 28% of producers on the top 100 grossing films.

- Women comprised 19% of editors working on the watched at home films. For comparison, women accounted for 18% of editors on the top 100 grossing films.

- Women made up 3% of cinematographers working on the watched at home films. For comparison, women also accounted for 3% of cinematographers on the top 100 grossing films.

Figure 10.

Comparison of Percentages of Women Working on Watched at Home and Top Grossing Films

