

# Cinematic Sisterhood

An Evolving Collaboration Between the Women's Fund and Milwaukee Film

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Executive Director

Milwaukee Film

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# WF Special Grant 2025

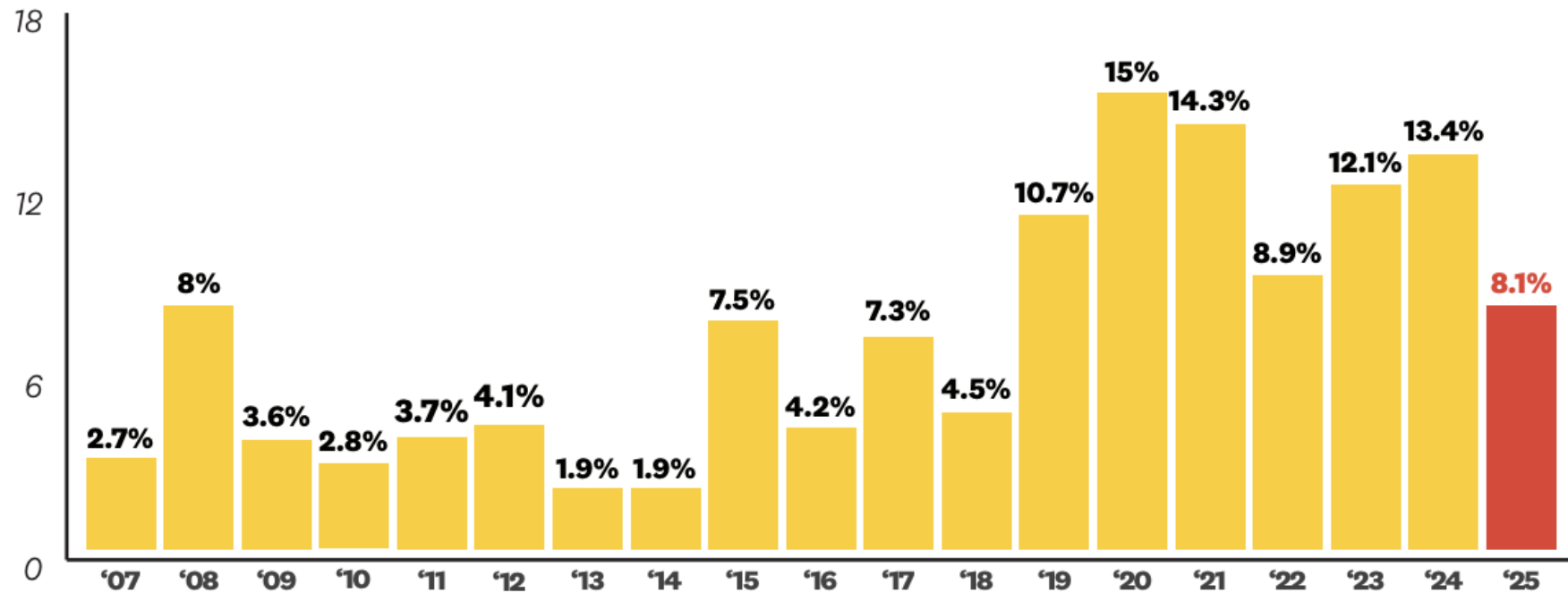
- The Goal: A Named, Monthly Series Celebrating the Work of Women and Gender-Nonbinary Directors
- Why? Despite the Milwaukee Film Festival's commitment to gender parity in festival film programming and key positions (programming, projection), it is more difficult to program films year-round directed by women.
- This problem reflects the wider filmmaking industry.

# The Importance of Cinematic Sisterhood: Directing

- Of the directors or co-directors of the top 100 grossing US films in 2025, only 9 were women.
- This is the lowest number since 2018.
- The previous high before 2019 was 2008.
- 2025 is roughly equivalent to 2008's numbers, which was roughly equivalent to the previous high achieved in 1998.
  
- Information from Dr. Stacey L. Smith's work for the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, published December 2025 - [Annenberg.usc.edu](https://annenberg.usc.edu)

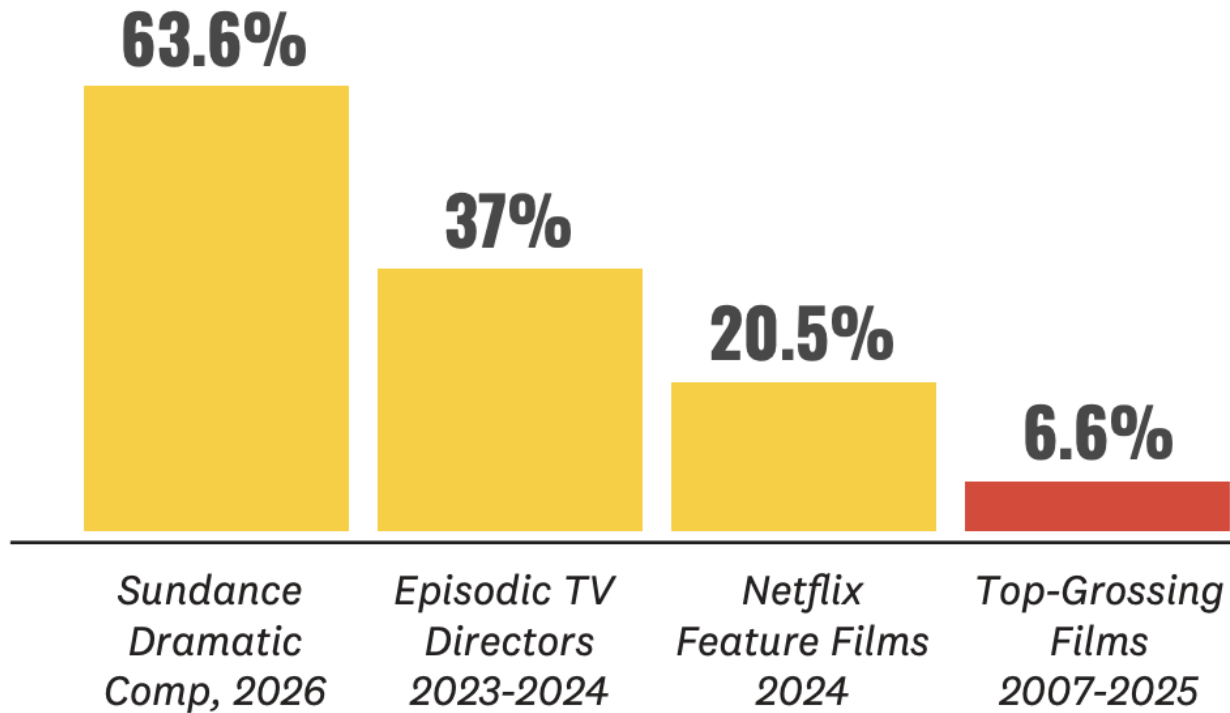
## PROGRESS HAS STALLED FOR WOMEN DIRECTORS

*Prevalence of women directors across 1,900 films*



## CAREER PROGRESS STALLS FOR WOMEN ON THE WAY TO TOP FILMS

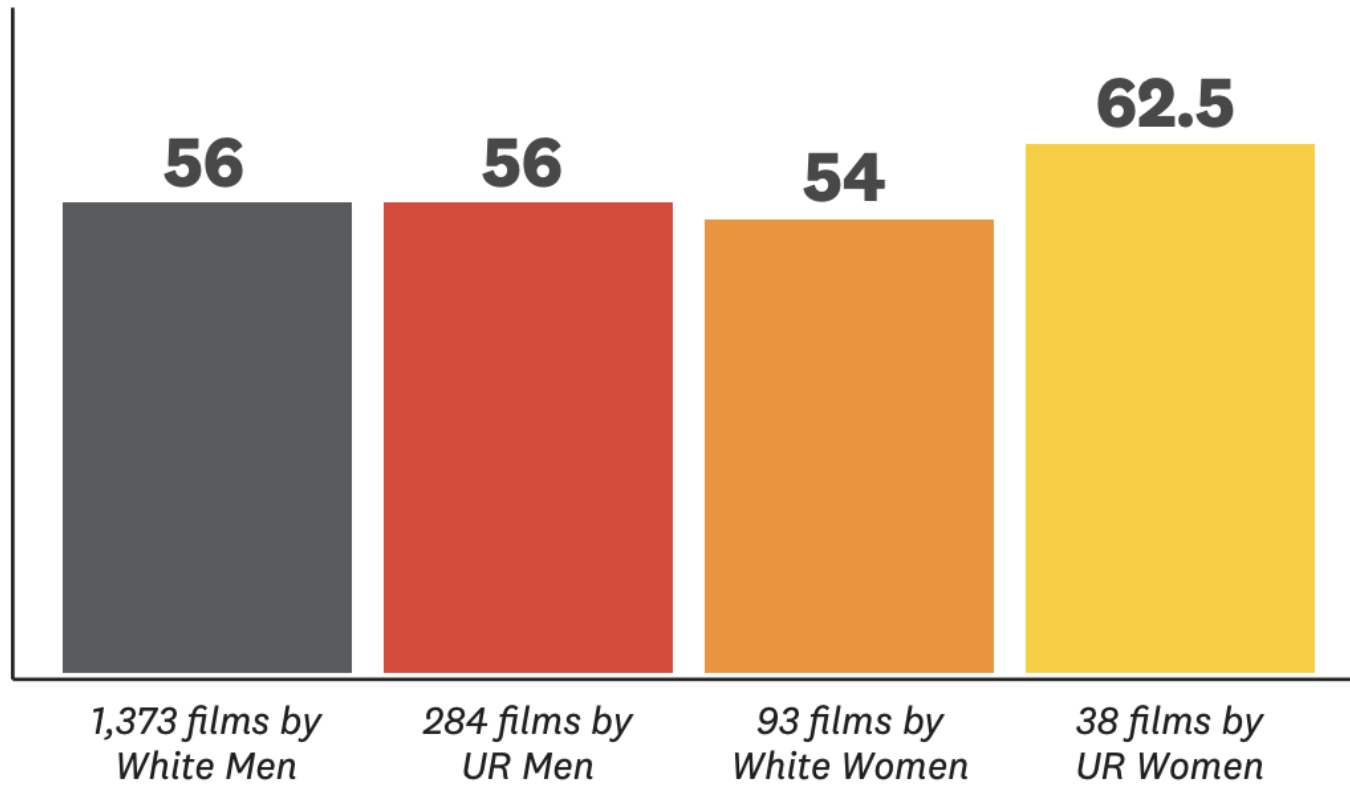
Percentage of women directors by media platform



**57**  
PERCENTAGE POINT  
**DROP**  
FROM NARRATIVE  
INDEPENDENT FILMS  
TO TOP-GROSSING  
MOVIES

## METACRITIC SCORES BY GENDER AND UNDERREPRESENTED STATUS

Median Metacritic score by gender and race/ethnicity of directors from 2007-2025



**UR WOMEN**  
DIRECTORS  
EARN THE  
HIGHEST  
AVERAGE  
& MIDPOINT  
SCORES OF  
ANY GROUP.

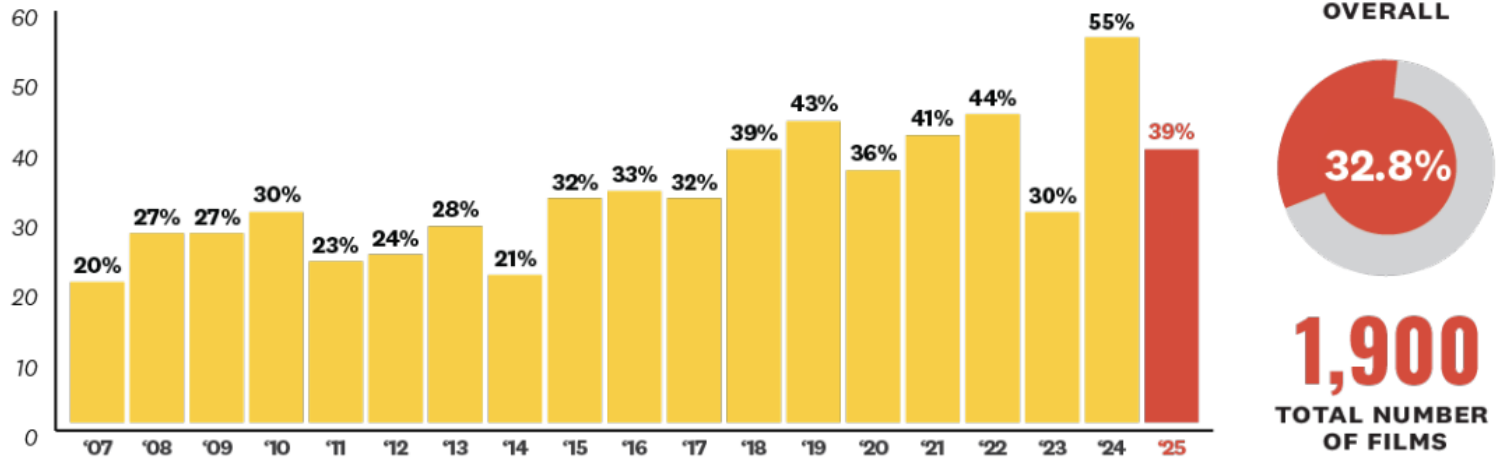
**YET, THEY  
ARE HIRED  
THE LEAST.**

# The Importance of Cinematic Sisterhood: On-Screen Representation

- Of the 100 top-grossing films in 2025, 39 featured a girl or woman in a lead/co-lead role.
- This is a significant decrease from 2024's historic high of 55 films.
- Though a significant increase from the 20 female-identified leads observed in 2007, it reflects a return to the percentage of girls/women leading top movies in 2018.
- Information from Dr. Stacey L. Smith's work for the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, published February 2026 – [Annenberg.usc.edu](https://annenberg.usc.edu)

## A RECENT HISTORY OF WOMEN & GIRLS AS PROTAGONISTS IN MOVIES

Prevalence and percentage of female leads or co leads across 1,900 films by year

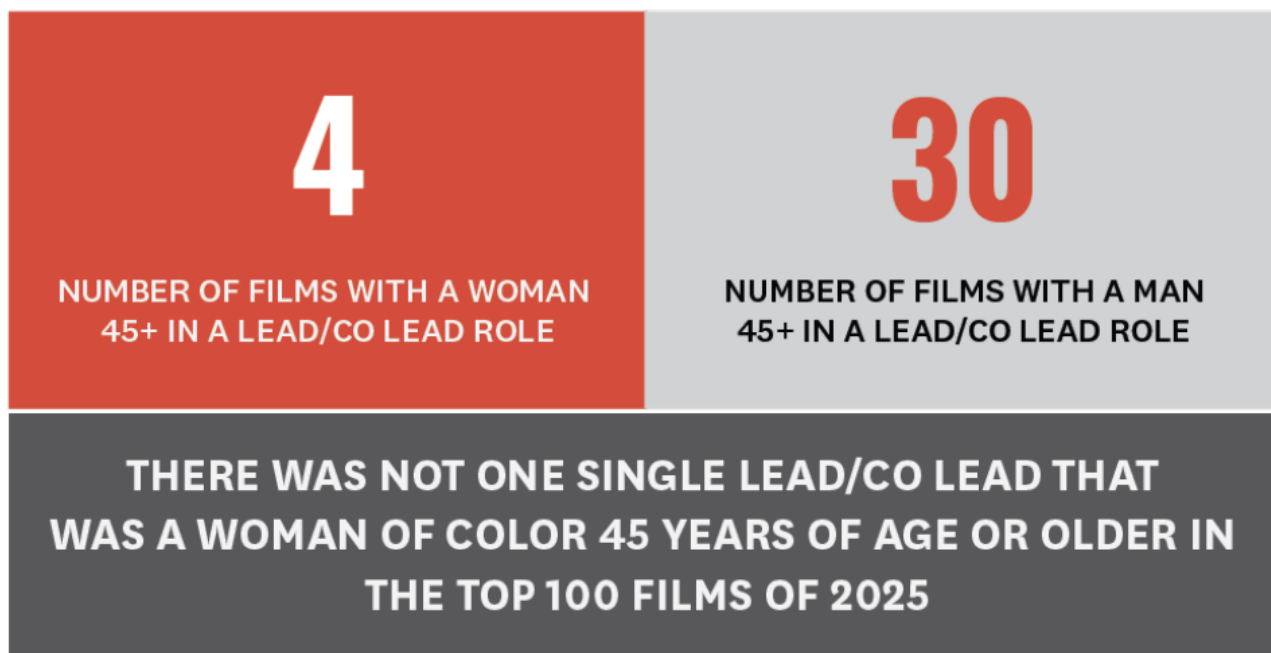


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## **WOMEN 45 AND OLDER ARE RARELY SHOWN AS LEADS**

*Of the 100 top-grossing films in 2025, the number with leads/co leads age 45 and older...*

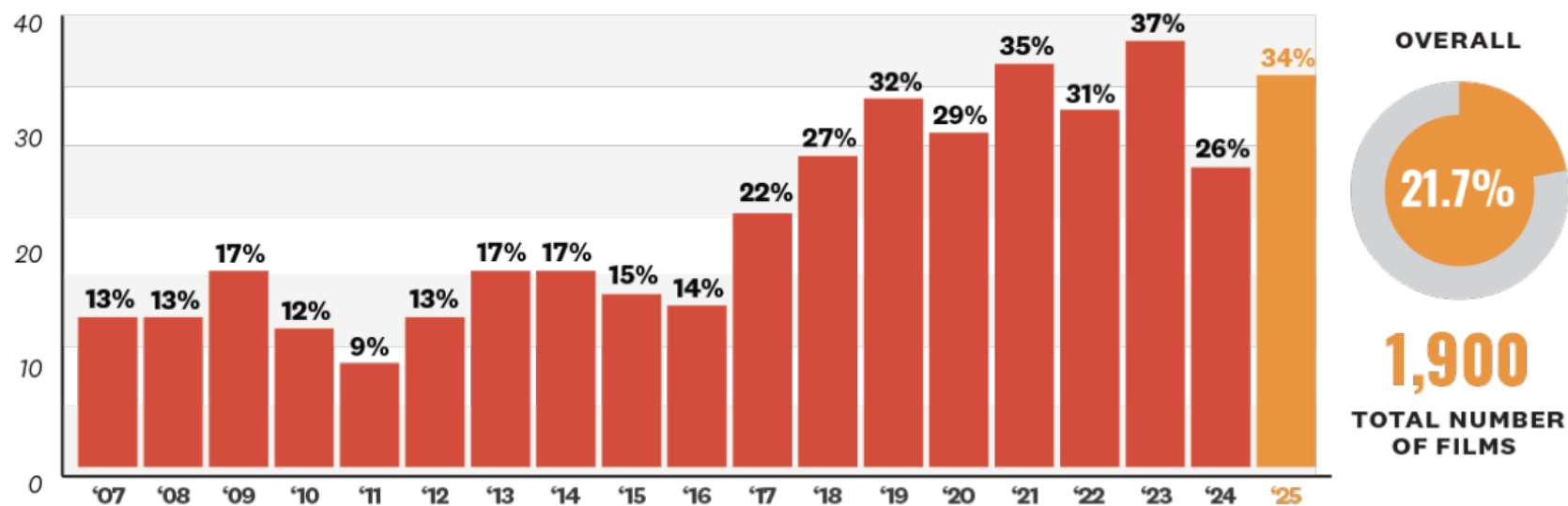


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## UNDERREPRESENTED PROTAGONISTS REBOUND FROM 2024

Percentage of underrepresented leads or co leads across 1,900 films by year



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# Cinematic Sisterhood 2025

- Programming (almost) monthly from July 2025 – January 2026
- Blend of fiction and documentary, low-budget and Hollywood (and BBC) productions
  - She Rises Up – with filmmaker Q&A and discussion on entrepreneurship
  - Queen of My Dreams – with filmmaker Q&A
  - Arrest the Midwife – with panel on documentary ethics including filmmakers of this and three additional documentaries
  - Rachel Talalay Retrospective: Tank Girl, Sherlock, Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare
  - Wisdom of Happiness – with talkback



## Take a Seat for Cinematic Sisterhood 2026

- Presenting Sponsor: Tracey Thomas
- Thank you, Tracey!!!
- Thank you to everyone who is supporting the Take a Seat Cinematic Sisterhood section of this theater!
- Aiming for a June kickoff, year-round screenings, and another luminary guest this fall!

# Introducing... JoAnne Williams!

- Broadcast Journalist Extraordinaire, Filmmaker, and Lifelong Influencer
- Select Accomplishments Include:
- Hosting the Teen Talk Show on WAWA-1890 AM – in high school!
- Working for WGN-TV, WMTJ, WITI, MPTV, Cardinal Stritch, UPAF, United Way
- Emmy-award winner for *Crossing the Bridge: A Black Nouveau Special*, and recipient of the Silver Circle Award for 25 years in Television from the National Association of Television Arts & Sciences
- Director of Feature Film: *The Exchange. In White America. Kaukauna & King 50 Years Later*