

Film industry: There's a reel gender gap

Dearth of women in key positions in the B.C. industry

Marke Andrews
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Women in film

The B.C. Institute of Film Professionals didn't find that women are "seriously under-represented" in key positions in the industry, according to a new report. But it did find that women are not one director of photography in 27 independent Canadian film productions made in the province between 2002 and 2006.

11% of directors

11% of editors

7% of writers

0% of directors of photography

58% of producers made the province's list

35% of producers made the province's list

69% of producers have completed study on their production



CREDIT: Vancouver Sun Illustration

Among the report's recommendations was more monitoring of gender by funding agencies such as Telefilm Canada and the National Film Board.

Despite making up half of the population and 40 per cent of film students, women are seriously under-represented in key "above-the-line" positions in the British Columbia film industry, a new study reports.

The study, conducted by independent producer Cari Green for the B.C. Institute of Film Professionals (BCIFP), examined 27 independent Canadian film productions made in the province between 2002 and 2006, and found that women accounted for just 11 per cent of directors, 11 per cent of editors, seven per cent of writers and not one director of photography.

The one bright spot was in the area of production, where 49 per cent of the producers of these films were women.

("Above-the-line" positions in film generally refer to key creative positions such as producer, director, writer and actor, although this survey excluded actors and included editors and cinematographers.)

In a survey of 213 women in the business, 58 per cent of the 149 respondents reported annual income less than \$40,000, 35 per cent less than \$20,000. Average income for B.C. women in the overall workforce is \$25,000.

Of 182 respondents, 69 per cent reported they have to supplement their film career by taking other work. Of these, 10 per cent said more than three-quarters of their income was earned outside the industry.

Just nine per cent said they were able to move between the independent and service sectors of the industry. Service productions are those shot by foreign, primarily American, studios.

BCIFP president Eileen Hoeter said the numbers in the survey don't come as a shock -- studies in the U.S. and British film industries reveal a similar gender gap -- but she finds them discouraging.

"We did a study in 1986 with women in film, and the [gender] numbers were not great," said Hoeter. "You kind of presume that things have gotten better, but they haven't, and that's frustrating."

Canadian women have had success in the industry. Toronto-based director Deepa Mehta's film *Water* is nominated for a foreign-language-film Oscar, and B.C. director Julia Kwan's *Eve & the Fire Horse* was a hit at last year's Sundance Film Festival.

"If women do get up to that level, they do great work. It's just getting them to that next level that's the problem," said Hoeter.

Among the report's recommendations was more monitoring of gender by funding agencies such as Telefilm Canada and the National Film Board.

"We need [funding organizations] to start looking at this and to make them aware that when projects are green-lit, is it even considered that all of these are male stories with male protagonists? Is it even on their radar?"

Hoeter thought a quota system would not be a bad idea.

"For instance, if you're shooting a television series, it could be that of the 13 episodes, [a set] per cent could be directed by women," said Hoeter. "It doesn't even have to be 50 per cent. You could say at least three must be directed by women, or something."

A study last year by San Diego State University communications Prof. Martha Lauzen showed that of the 250 top-grossing films of 2005, only seven per cent were directed by women, and 26 per cent had at least one female producer.

Despite the gloomy picture, 80 per cent of 155 respondents to the BCIFP survey stated they intend to stay in industry.

mandrews@png.canwest.com

WOMEN IN FILM

The B.C. Institute of Film Professionals report found that women are "seriously under-represented" in the province's film industry, particularly at the higher levels. Out of 27 independent feature films that were produced in B.C. between 2002 and 2006, women constituted only:

11% of directors

11% of editors

7% of writers,

0% of directors of photography

58% of female film professionals in B.C. reported income (2004) below \$40,000.

35% reported income (2004) below \$20,000.

69% reported they have supported their primary film career by taking other work.

Source: B.C. Institute of Film Professionals

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