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# Ninety-Six Years of Data Reveals Persistence of Women's Underrepresentation Behind the Scenes

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At the 96th Academy Awards®, there will be just one woman among the five nominees for best director: Justine Triet, who directed *Anatomy of a Fall*. This isn't new: Just eight women have been nominated for the best director award since the first awards in 1929.<sup>1</sup> The first woman to be nominated was Lina Wertmüller for her film *Seven Beauties* (1975), and it wasn't until Kathryn Bigelow, with *The Hurt Locker* (2009), that a woman won the award. Although opportunities are expanding, for decades women have faced exclusion, discrimination, and harassment in the entertainment industry, which hampers their access and career potential. Further, research suggests that female directors, alongside directors of color of all genders, face biases in project selection, budgeting, and distribution — limiting their potential for success even when given the opportunity to helm a film.<sup>2</sup> These issues lead to a smaller pool of women in prestigious roles, or working on prestigious films, which are favored (over comedies for example) by the academy members who vote on these matters. In this report, the Geena Davis Institute looks back at 96 years of Oscars® data to assess the state of women's representation behind the scenes in three award categories:

- ◆ Best director
- ◆ Best original screenplay
- ◆ Best adapted screenplay

This year, at least one woman is nominated in each of these categories, which is just the fifth time this has happened. (The previous years are 1993, 2003, 2017, and 2020.) These gender-neutral, prestigious categories will help clarify how little recognition women in the film industry receive, and if anything has changed since 1929.

## Methodology

We used the Oscars® awards database and Wikipedia tables for the gender-neutral categories of best director, and best screenplay, either original or adapted, and noted the year the film was released, director, nominee(s), and film.<sup>3</sup> Regarding nominees for best original screenplay and best adapted screenplay, we used software that relies on historical records from the Social Security Administration to model gender from first name, and we hand-checked any name that was modeled with less than 95% certainty that the name belonged to a man. Background research on all these categories was carried out to confirm that none of the nominees or winners were nonbinary or transgender.

# Findings

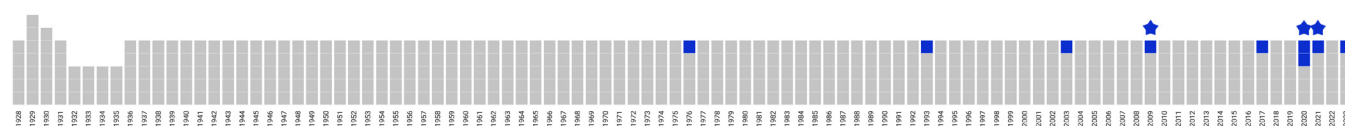
## Best director

A woman has been nominated for best director nine times in Oscars® history, with Jane Campion having been nominated twice (for a total of eight women receiving the nomination). This year, Justine Triet received a nomination for *Anatomy of a Fall*. Many expected more women would be nominated to this category, like Greta Gerwig for *Barbie*, or Celine Song for *Past Lives*, but they were not. However, *Barbie* and *Past Lives* (as well as *Anatomy of a Fall*) were nominated for best picture, which is a category that accepts 10 nominees. For best director, there are only 5 nominees.

Since 1929, just 1.9% of all best director nominees have been women, and only three women have won: Kathryn Bigelow for *The Hurt Locker* (2009), Chloé Zhao for *Nomadland* (2020), and Jane Campion for *The Power of the Dog* (2021), which together are 3.1% of all winners. If Triet wins this year, she will be just the fourth woman to win this award.

FIGURE 1

### Female nominees and winners for best director, 1928 to 2023



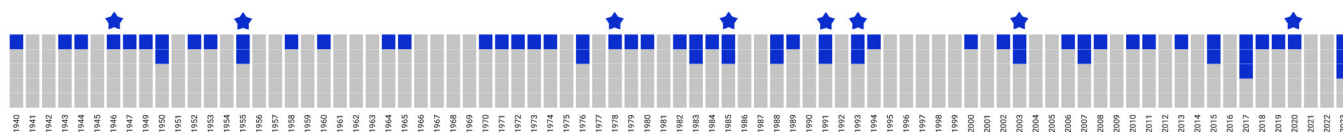
Note: Each square represents a nominated film. The colored squares represent a film directed by a woman. Stars indicate that a woman won best director that year. In the earliest years, there were no official nominations, but research by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences® have identified de facto nominees for those years. The years listed denote the year that the film was released, not the year when the award show occurred.

## Best original screenplay

Sixty-two films nominated for best original screenplay were written or co-written by a woman, which is just 14.9% of all films nominated for the award. Three of these are from this year: *Anatomy of a Fall* (Justine Triet, co-written with Arthur Harari), *May December* (Samy Burch), and *Past Lives* (Celine Song). Only eight times has a film written or co-written by a woman won (9.8% of all winners), including *Thelma & Louise* (1991), written by Callie Khouri. The other women who have won are: Muriel Box for *The Seventh Veil* (1946), Sonya Levien for *Interrupted Melody* (1955), Nancy Dowd for *Coming Home* (1978), Pamela Wallace for *Witness* (1985), Jane Campion for *The Piano* (1993), Sofia Coppola for *Lost in Translation* (2003), and Emerald Fennell for *Promising Young Woman* (2020).

FIGURE 2

## Female nominees and winners for best original screenplay, 1928 to 2023



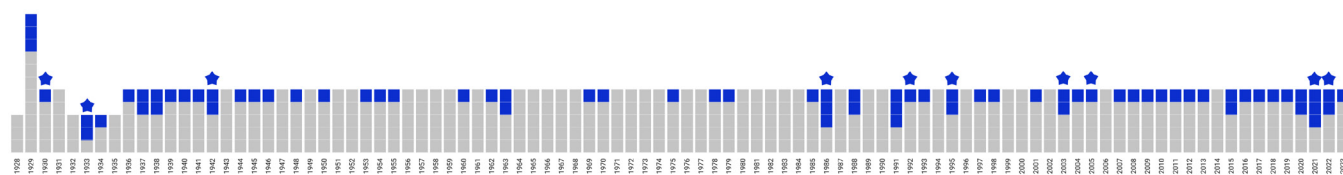
Note: Each square represents a nominated film. The colored squares represent a film written or co-written by a woman. Stars indicate a woman was listed in a writing role for a film that won best original screenplay. In the earliest years there were no official nominations, but research by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences® have identified de facto nominees for those years. The years listed denote the year that the film was released, not the year when the award show occurred.

## Best adapted screenplay

Seventy-five films nominated for best adapted screenplay were written or co-written by a woman, which is 15.8% of all films nominated for the award. This year, Greta Gerwig (with Noah Baumbach) was nominated for *Barbie*. Of the 74 films nominated written or co-written by a woman, 10 won, which is 10.5% of all winners. These include: Frances Marion for *The Big House* (1930), Sarah Y. Mason for *Little Women* (1933), Claudine West for *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), Ruth Praver Jhabvala for *A Room with a View* (1986), and *Howards End* (1992), Emma Thompson for *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), Philippa Boyens and Fran Walsh for *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003), Diana Ossana for *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), Sian Heder for *Coda* (2021), and Sarah Polley for *Women Talking* (2022).

FIGURE 3

## Female nominees and winners for best adapted screenplay, 1928 to 2023



Note: Each square represents a nominated film. The colored squares represent a film written or co-written by a woman. Stars indicate a woman was listed in a writing role for a film that won best adapted screenplay. In earlier awards years there were no official nominations, but research by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences® have identified de facto nominees. Additionally, sometimes there were fewer than five “nominees,” or more than five. The years listed denote the year that the film was released, not the year when the award show occurred.

TABLE 1

## Summary of gender diversity of nongendered Oscars® awards, 1928 to 2023

Award	Share of nominees featuring a credited woman	Share of winners featuring a credited woman
Best director	1.9%	3.1%
Best original screenplay	14.9%	9.8%
Best adapted screenplay	15.8%	10.5%

# Conclusion

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Our analysis of 96 years of Oscars® data shows growing inclusion of women in the gender-neutral categories we looked at, but there is still a very long way to go toward gender parity. And while our analysis only looked at gender differences, it is important that efforts to improve representation (and accolades) behind the scenes take an intersectional approach. For example, seven of the eight women who have been nominated for best director are white. Intersectionality recognizes that discrimination can vary depending on women's race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, income, age, whether they are transgender, or if they are disabled. The role of social movements and activism has helped draw attention to women's underrepresentation, including women from other marginalized identities, and with additional buy-in from studios and executives, the disparity will surely improve.

The numbers shared in this report are a stark reminder that equality requires intent. We hope that this report (and others like it) encourages creators, executives, and decision-makers at all levels of the industry to examine existing practices and make changes that will provide opportunities to capitalize on the abundance of talented women with diverse identities in the industry.

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## ENDNOTES

1. In the earliest years of the Oscars®, there were no official nominations, but research by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences® have identified de facto nominees for those years.
2. Karniouchina, E.V., Carson, S.J., Theokary, C., Rice, L., & Reilly, R. (2023). Women and Minority Film Directors in Hollywood: Performance Implications of Product Development and Distribution Biases. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 60(1), 25-51.
3. Over the last 96 years of the Oscars®, award category names have changed. For our analysis, the best director category includes the previous and current categories known as best director, comedy picture; best director, dramatic picture; and best director. Best original screenplay includes the previous and current categories known as best story and screenplay; best screenplay - original; best story and screenplay written directly for the screen; best story and screenplay based on factual material or material not previously produced or published; best screenplay written directly for the screen based on factual material or on story material not previously published or produced; best screenplay written directly for the screen; best story and screenplay based on material not previously published or produced; best writing (original); best story and screenplay; and best original screenplay. Best adapted screenplay includes the previous and current categories known as best screenplay based on material from another medium; best screenplay adapted from other material; best adaptation; best writing (adaptation); best writing; best writing, adaptation; best writing, screenplay; best screenplay; best screenplay - adapted; best screenplay based on material previously produced or published; and best adapted screenplay.

# About the Geena Davis Institute

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Since 2004, the Geena Davis Institute has worked to mitigate unconscious bias while creating equality, fostering inclusion and reducing negative stereotyping in entertainment and media. As a global research-based organization, the Institute provides research, direct guidance, and thought leadership aimed at increasing representation of marginalized groups within six identities: gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, disability, age, and body type. Because of its unique history and position, the Institute can help achieve true on-screen equity in a way that few organizations can. Learn more at [www.seejane.org](http://www.seejane.org).