

## PGA Women's Impact Network

# STEPPING UP TO SET THE AGENDA FOR CHANGE

by Dana Kuznetzkoff

**The news is troubling, and there's no way to spin it: For the past 15 years, there has been no perceptible change in the proportion of women working behind the camera in the entertainment industry. The Celluloid Ceiling, a study by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University, in assessing 250 of the top-grossing U.S. movies of 2012, found that women comprised only 9% of directors, 15% of writers, and 25% of producers. (The 1998 numbers: directors 9%; writers 13%; producers 24%.) As the size of films' budgets drop (i.e., studio films to independent films to documentaries), the percentage of female participation rises. But even so, the lack of change over time at each level persists.**

Assessments like this one have prompted the creation of the **PGA Women's Impact Network** to broaden the Guild's commitment to diversity with a focus on gender inequity.

At the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, Sundance Institute Executive Director Keri Putnam and President of Women In Film Los Angeles Cathy Schulman announced the results of a first-of-its-kind research study examining gender disparity in American independent film in the last decade, followed by a plan of action to collaborate with other key organizations. Sundance/WIF's efforts inspired PGA member Lydia Dean Pilcher to reach out to colleagues on the East and West Coasts to ask: "Are we doing enough? Can we do more?" The responses from 50+ members, collected by Pilcher and Deborah Calla, Chair of the PGA Diversity Committee in LA, were resounding in favor of further action.

Pilcher, one of the Chairs of PGA Green, cites the progress that has emerged from direct collaboration with the major studios and independent production companies. "By using the same model of a national committee, I have no doubt that PGA can make a significant social impact around gender inequity in the entertainment industry," she asserts. The Guild's membership is 47% female. Not only are we uniquely positioned by the strength of our membership, but we have a wealth of resources to offer in terms of utilizing our relationships with studios, unions, fellow guilds, and other allied organizations."

The newly-formed PGA Women's Impact Network was approved as a national committee on November 11, 2013, at the Guild's All Boards of Delegates Meeting in Los Angeles.

### PGA Women's Impact Network Mission Statement

- To promote gender equity as part of the PGA's larger vision of diversity.
- To form a communication network within the PGA that will be focused on sharing information around examining and addressing barriers facing women in the entertainment industry. This network will support an organic practice of mentorship and celebrate contemporary and historical women's film and media culture.
- To create a portal for the PGA to interact with other external groups and initiatives that may benefit female producers.
- To support the Women Filmmaker Initiative created by the Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles, and reflect their program priorities: mentorship, finance education and access; raising awareness through research and information sharing with industry decision makers; and network building with key organizations committed to gender equity in the entertainment field.



Women's Impact Network Chairs Lydia Dean Pilcher (left) and Deborah Calla (right) with Sundance Institute Executive Director Keri Putnam, Women In Film President Cathy Schulman, and Women's Impact Network Co-Chair Joyce Pierpoline.



### Sundance Institute and Women In Film Los Angeles Study Examines Gender Disparity in Independent Film

The Sundance/WIF landmark study was led by professor Stacy L. Smith, Ph.D., a renowned expert on diversity and the media, of USC's Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism. In the report, Dr. Smith explores individual, financial and industrial frameworks that have limited female creative professionals in distinct ways, as well as pathways and opportunities utilized by successful women subjects.

One producer in the study stated, "The majority of films made, in terms of content, are men's stories... The stories [women] want to tell are women's stories, and those don't have the same commercial value. Or whether they really do have the same commercial capacity or not, they're [not] perceived to have the same commercial potential as stories driven by men."

## Highlights of the Study include:

- **FEMALE-SPECIFIC FINANCIAL BARRIERS** emerged as the most frequently-cited barrier to women filmmakers. Interviews with content creators and industry gatekeepers yielded comments including the subject matter or sensibility of female-directed films being perceived as not commercially viable, confidence in a filmmaker's ability, amount of funding, access or knowledge about finance, and finance-specific confidence.
- **MALE-DOMINATED NETWORKS** permeate the upper ranks of the industry's corporate structure, resulting in a "tilt" toward male priorities (at the expense of female priorities) in both the corporate culture of the industry and the types of stories and projects supported by the studios, networks and major production and finance companies.
- **SOCIAL NORMS AND STEREOTYPES** about women and filmmaking were cited during production activities from financing through delivery. This incorporated the token status of females on set, objectification of women, which can contribute to lower performance, decreased technical resources or knowledge, and stereotype threat triggers. Gender equality on set is more common when females fill key leadership positions. This environment may also affect on-set experiences of emerging and/or seasoned content creators.
- **STRUGGLE FOR WORK/LIFE BALANCE** This was reported less often than the aforementioned financial barriers and male-dominated networks. But it is acknowledged that framing female unemployment after motherhood as a choice to "opt out," neglects the fact that this choice is made within a context of workplace practices, which do not support a healthy career and family balance.
- **EXCLUSIONARY HIRING PRACTICES** Female directors face a real restriction in the range of properties they are hired to helm, thus foreclosing the opportunities to gain the experience needed to later attach to larger budget films.

The full study can be found at:

<http://www.sundance.org/programs/women-filmmakersinitiative/>

Lydia and Deborah introduced the PGA Women's Impact Network at the November 2013 Sundance Institute/WIF Women and Finance Forum in LA, and PGA WIN will collaborate with Sundance on a similar finance forum planned for New York in the spring of 2014. These events are focused on midcareer support, and offer valuable opportunities to give accomplished female writers, directors and producers an overview of current film financing models, an understanding of what today's investors are looking for, and training to bolster and harness confidence in the course of raising money for productions.

One of the first initiatives that the Committee will focus on is an analysis of the existing diversity initiatives and training programs affiliated with studios, networks and other

organizations. Building on the PGA's solid member-driven profile in the realm of new media, another primary focus will be to facilitate the adoption of training programs for women in tech companies.

Television also will be a key area for PGA members to take the lead. In October 2013, the Directors Guild of America released a report reviewing more than 3100 episodes produced in the 2012–2013 network television season from more than 200 scripted television series, and found that male directors outnumbered female directors 4 to 1.

The World Economic Forum's current annual Global Gender Gap Report ranks the United States 23rd out of 136 countries in the status of women. The U.S. ranks particularly low by international standards in wage equality and in numbers of women in the legislative branch. Twitter and other social media networks have become a key tool for activists raising social and political awareness. With women comprising the majority of social network users, these media have shone a brighter spotlight on gender inequity across many sectors of life.

In business, for example, while the percentage of female Board members at Fortune 500 finance and insurance companies has nearly doubled from 10% in 1995 to 19% in 2012, those Boards are still overwhelmingly male. Consultants at McKinsey & Company found that the international companies with more women on their corporate Boards far outperformed the average company in return on equity and other measures. In fact, at such companies, operating profit was 56% higher.

In terms of the entertainment industry, there is encouraging news ahead for female perspectives in storytelling. At the recent Sundance/WIF Women and Finance Seminar, multiple panelists stated that female audiences, more than male, are now driving the VOD business. Howard Cohen, president of Roadside Attractions, said, "Movies by and about women have a bigger marketplace now than ever before." Stuart Ford of international sales company IM Global, echoed this, observing, "With the collapse of the male-driven DVD business, more buyers are looking for material that plays to female audiences on digital platforms."

The PGA Women's Impact Network seeks to connect interested Guild members of all genders through an active social media network. Everyone is invited to join and help our Guild set the agenda for change. A landscape of broader diversity in our industry not only will create a healthier culture, but will make us more effective and successful as producers. 🌱

Facebook: Producers Guild of America Women's Impact Network  
Twitter: @PGAWomen

*The PGA Women's Impact Network's leadership includes Chairs Lydia Dean Pilcher and Deborah Calla, and Co-Chairs Laura Allen, Caitlin Burns, Martha Cotton, Lynn Hendee, Joyce Pierpoline and Rachel Watanabe-Batton.*