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## Best leadership practices of female film directors

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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

BEST LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF FEMALE FILM DIRECTORS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Sara Carraway

July, 2020

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Sara Carraway

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my dad, Kamran Akrami.

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## ABSTRACT

Female film directors are highly underrepresented within the U.S. film industry, especially within narrative film (S.L. Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2013). In 2019, only 12% of directors in the top 100 grossing films were female (Lauzen, 2020). There are several obstacles female directors face in their careers. Financing is more difficult to obtain for female directors due to stereotypes of women as risky investments (P. Smith et al., 2013). Closely tied to financing, gendered networks and homophily can prevent women from making relationships with gatekeepers and accessing the same opportunities as men (Jones & Pringle, 2015; Wing-Fai et al., 2015). Having female film directors is an important factor in ensuring that diverse stories are brought to the screen and that women are represented in equal numbers to men (Hammer, 2009; S.L. Smith, Choueiti, Granados, & Erickson, 2010; P. S.L. Smith et al., 2013).

This study aimed to understand the phenomenon of successful female directors and how they are leaders in their field. The study asked the following four research questions:

RQ1: What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?

RQ2: What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?

RQ3: How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?

RQ4: What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?

To examine the best leadership practices of female film directors, the study employed a qualitative approach, using the qualitative method of phenomenology. Phenomenology allows the lived experiences of the participants to be examined and interpreted to distill the essence of the experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moerrer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas,

1994). For the study, 20 female film directors were recruited from the Director's Guild of America's online member directory. Participants were required to have directed three feature films (with preference given to narrative films), consent to an audio recording of the interview, and be available for a 45-60 minute in-person interview during the first two weeks of March 2020 in Los Angeles. Participants were asked 12 open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the data was coded for common themes. Lastly, the findings were summarized and the results were compared with the current literature.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Role of Films in U.S. Culture

Films are a central part of American culture (Jowett & Linton, 1989). As an art form it has captured the imagination of American audiences and kept its hold and popularity for decades. Through images, dialogue, and sound, films are able to mentally transport viewers into a different realm where they can vicariously experience the passion of a drama, the hilarity of a comedy, the excitement of an adventure, or the terror of a horror film without leaving their seat. The most artful and successful of narrative films create an emotional connection between the audience and characters to make us feel as if we have experienced the highs and lows of their journey on screen with them. Audiences find pleasure in having an emotional response to a film as it is formed from imaginative circumstances and may also connect to similar feelings they have experienced (Carroll, 2010).

Since the beginning of Hollywood, filmmakers in the United States have used the medium of film to tell stories, change minds, disseminate information, and create social change; both constructing and reflecting culture (Lukinbeal, 2004). In telling stories that mirrored society, narrative films made during the Great Depression not only gave audiences escapism but many reflected Americans' fears and anxieties surrounding the state of the economy (King, 2016). Documentaries have succeeded in changing minds and creating social change through informing viewers in what are often revealing or shocking presentations. McDonald's began discontinuing their 'Super Size' menu and integrated a healthy adult Happy Meal into its menu six weeks after Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* (2004) premiered at Sundance Film Festival (Pompper & Higgins, 2007). More recently the success of the documentary *Blackfish* (2013),

created enough public outrage and pressure for SeaWorld to discontinue shows with killer whales at their theme parks (Sperb, 2016).

Films have also been used as a form of soft power internationally to spread the United State's values and ideals (Cooke, 2016; De Zoysa & Newman, 2002). The United State's ability to do so has been attributed to its position in the world as an immigrant nation for which cultural exchange has always existed (Valladao, 1996). The spreading of American values and ideals has met varying degrees of success in different areas of the world. American films screened for audiences in the USSR successfully advertised Western values during the Cold War (Sorlin, 1998). Less successful were U.S. westerns exported to post-World War II Germany (which were interpreted by German audiences as examples of the U.S.'s history of racism towards Native Americans; Fay, 2008) and the use of film to attempt to change young Middle Eastern men's perception of the U.S. with the allure of the *American Dream* post 9/11 (Cooke, 2016; Miller & Rampton, 2001). However, Hollywood exports have remained a global mainstay due to their continued dominance in distribution and exhibition and the familiarity of the Hollywood formula to audiences around the world (Cooke, 2016).

Films have also bridged gaps between countries and served as a form of international relations. Many countries' governments allocate funds to "maintain a presence in the film industry" which "indicates that films are perceived as having considerable symbolic and cultural value" (Crane, 2014, pp. 365-366). Before the Cold War began, Hollywood produced pro-Soviet films to promote U.S. - USSR relations, such as *Mission to Moscow* (1943) and *Song of Russia* (1944; Blahova, 2010). Today, films are more likely to blend elements from different cultures or remake other countries' films in order to make them more marketable to a global audience and compete with local films (Martínez, 2015). Often this is due to co-productions between countries

where not only economic exchange occurs but a mix of cultural references that make their way into the film (Martínez, 2015). Whether filmed in Hollywood, Bollywood, Brazil, or Hong Kong, media are becoming increasingly similar in their archetypes, visuals, and narrative devices, creating a “global text” that is familiar to audiences around the world (Olson, 2000, p. 3). The less specific a film is to one particular culture, the more likely it is to be successful internationally (Meiseberg & Ehrmann, 2013).

### **Impact of Film Industry on U.S. Economy**

Films are an integral part of the U.S. economy. Data shows that the film and television industry has approximately 2.6 million jobs and \$177 billion in wages paid to industry professionals each year. Globally, U.S. film industry exports are \$17.2 billion. In total, there are 93,000 businesses in the industry and the vast majority are small businesses employing under 10 people. Local businesses and governments across the U.S. benefit, with \$44 billion going to 250,000 local businesses and \$29.4 billion generated in taxes at the state and federal levels annually (MPAA, 2019). Films do not only accomplish their economic impact on the U.S. economy through international exports, jobs, and supporting businesses, but through selling merchandise and promotional partnerships with other companies.

Synergy is the term used to refer to an organization that works at all levels to achieve a goal (usually profit). In movie studios, synergy is created through product placement within the film, merchandise inspired by it (of which other companies are typically licensed to manufacture a variety of items), and promotional tie-ins. Synergy allows studios to create a plan to maximize profits from the film and create a profitable brand far beyond the scope of the film and long after it has premiered (Lubbers & Adams, 2004). A recent and extremely successful example is the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, a conglomerate of superhero films released by Disney that are



connected through characters and story arcs that are faithful to the original Marvel comics (Calandro, 2019). Through this model, Marvel became the fourth largest licensor within cultural industries internationally. Marvel made \$5.78 billion by 2008 through the sales of licensed products (Johnson, 2012). Due to its success, the Marvel Cinematic Universe model is now emulated by other movie franchises (Acu, 2016).

## **Technology**

The beginning of film as a technology is traced back to Thomas Edison's lab where he created the kinetoscope and kinetograph, and made the first movie studio, the *Black Maria*. The proper technological equipment and architectural environment worked hand in hand to enable moving images to be captured. Other labs around the world (such as in Lyon, Berlin, and Leeds, England) also created some of the first moving images as precursors to movies as we know them today. Filmmaking pioneers sought to control light and design studio spaces that created the best conditions for capturing images. The technologies that drove further advances in film were created not only by filmmakers but also engineers, inventors, architects, and technicians (Jacobson, 2011).

Today, with sophisticated technology more widely available at a consumer level and social media now an accessible and vital marketing tool, independent filmmakers have more opportunity than ever before. They are more likely to have knowledge of how best to market and distribute their work. They also have further opportunities for distribution through current streaming service subscriptions and other online outlets such as YouTube (Tzioumakis, 2012). However, this has increased competition for funding and distribution opportunities as more and more films are produced and enter the market where there is unequal demand. Some industry experts predict that combined with the mergers of studios and closure of art house movie theaters

this will lead to the end of independent films in the U.S. market. Due to the dearth of opportunities available to women, they have historically been overrepresented in independent filmmaking. However, as the film market is still changing, yet unknown opportunities for independent filmmakers may be available (Reznik, 2018).

### **History of Women in Film**

In filmmaking, women have historically been underrepresented behind the camera, especially in directing (Hunt, Ramón, & Tran, 2019). However, early U.S. filmmaking included women in a variety of leadership roles as producers, directors, and studio heads, as well as critical roles behind the camera such as screenwriter, cinematographer, editor, etc. Roles were often interchangeable and women and men worked on sets together (Hearst, 2019). As the film industry became increasingly lucrative in the 1920's, men pushed women out of these roles to take control of the industry and profit themselves (Bielby & Bielby, 1996). Recent data on the top 250 highest grossing films from 2019 shows that women are most well represented in the areas of producing, editing, executive producing, writing, directing, and lastly cinematography (Lauzen, 2020). The following is a brief historical background on some of these central positions in the film industry, including of course the history of women's involvement in directing.

### **Writing**

One area in which women have historically excelled is writing. During the silent film era, female writers were very common. A woman, Frances Marion, was the highest paid screenwriter of the 1920s, and was a founding member and first vice president of the Writers Guild of America (then called the Screen Writers Guild; Bielby & Bielby, 1996). It is estimated during this time women represented approximately 50% (Martin, Clark, & Schlesinger, 1987) to even possibly 90% (McCreadie, 1994) of all U.S. screenwriters. The loss of female writers was

partially due to the changing organizational structure of film studios from the silent era to the introduction of sound to film, which made way for larger studios that operated on a hierarchy that excluded women from many of the roles they had already been performing (Smith-Doerr, 2010). Bielby & Bielby (1996) theorize that women were pushed out as per Tuchman and Fortin's (1989) empty field theory. Tuchman and Fortin's (1989) empty field theory posits that careers dominated by women early on, such as novel writing, have historically been taken over by men due to their assumption that women were not serious players in the arena or capable of elevating the craft to an art form. However, silent era female screenwriters were responsible for the creation of early screenwriting conventions. Overall historically, women have been more likely to excel as writers or directors in the arena of television rather than film (Bielby & Bielby, 1996).

### **Producing**

During the silent film era, several women transitioned from working as actresses to creating their own production companies. These women included Gene Gauntier, Florence Lawrence, Helen Gardner, and Marion Leonard (Agnew, 1913). By 1915, all these production companies were closed (Tracy, 2016). However, certain women continued to work as producers into the 20's. Most notably was Mary Pickford, a star actress (the first actress to make \$1 million) and one of the most powerful women in Hollywood. She went on to found United Artists alongside male contemporaries Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith, and Douglas Fairbanks and helped found the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Motion Picture Country House (Fischer, 2013).

### **Directing**

Unfortunately, since the beginning of the Academy Awards in 1927, only one woman (Kathryn Bigelow in 2010 for *The Hurt Locker*) has won Best Director (King, 2016; Lauzen, 2011), Hollywood's highest accolade in directing. Directing began as a non-gendered, less defined role, with many women directing during the silent era. Alice Guy-Blaché, Mary Pickford, Lois Weber, Cleo Madison, Mabel Normand, and Ruth Ann Baldwin are some of the most well known of early female directors, though these and many others' contributions are often overlooked by film historians. Many of the films that early female directors worked on tackled social issues and elevated the place of film within society to a more respected art form (Hearst, 2019). Universal Film Manufacturing Company had eleven female directors who worked on 170 films over nearly a decade, however by 1920 most had left the company due to changes in the company's culture and organizational structure (Cooper, 2010). Tracy (2016) argued that the publication of F.W. Taylor's study *The Principles of Scientific Management* in 1912 contributed to changes in the managerial structure of studios that led to the gendered and hierarchical systems they developed. The 1920's saw the role of director defined as an auteur role wherein a director's creative vision molded the film and those who worked successfully within the structure of the studio system became very influential and celebrated (Regev, 2016). However, by this time women were mostly excluded from the studio system as directors (Regev, 2016; Tracy, 2016).

### **Current Successes**

Although women faced increased difficulty accessing opportunities in the film industry after the silent era, they have found success in directing since, which is reflected in the climate of the industry today. As previously stated, only one woman has won best director at the Academy Awards (King, 2016) and only four have ever been nominated (Epitropaki & Mainemelis, 2016).

Some women in the U.S. film industry stand out however. Sofia Coppola is a critically acclaimed U.S. director who has received an Academy Award for her screenplay *Lost in Translation* (2003), which she also directed (Smaill, 2013). Coppola has also won the Cannes Best Director award in 2017 for *The Beguiled* (2017)—the first woman to do so since Yuliya Solntseva for *Chronicle of Flaming Years* (1961; Kiang, 2017). Ava DuVernay is a female director and woman of color who has had major recent successes with films such as *Selma* (2014), *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018), and *13th* (2016) (Holmes, 2019; Lopez-Littleton & Woodley, 2018; Ryzik, 2018). Patty Jenkins has written and directed *Monster* (2003) for which Charlize Theron received an Academy Award for Best Actress and directed the recent blockbuster success *Wonder Woman* (2017). *Wonder Woman* (2017) was the first female directed film to make over \$100 million during its opening weekend (Luscombe, 2017). However encouraging these successes may seem, women still face a slew of obstacles to achieving equality in the industry as the problem statement will show. However, it should be noted that women are becoming more and more vocal about Hollywood's gender inequalities with the rise of the Me Too and Time's Up movements in 2017 (Eckert & Steiner, 2018).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The statement of the problem will give a brief overview of several issues facing women in filmmaking today, particularly female directors. The representation of women in the filmmaking industry will be discussed, as well as the effect of representation and diversity on narratives and the role onscreen narratives play in culture.

**Representation.** Although the rise of technology and access to independent filmmaking has widened, female filmmakers face issues in being given opportunities to direct higher budget, studio backed films, and even independent or niche market filmmaking (Hankin, 2007).

Statistically they are more likely than male directors to be given a lower budget, although when controlling for outliers the films have similar ROIs (Miller, 2018). When more women are hired as directors there is the added benefit of more women being hired for other positions in the film as well, and there is a stark difference between the amount of women hired on a set when a woman is directing as compared to a man (Lauzen, 2019a). Crews are typically a male majority, which can influence the dynamics of a set (Hankin, 2007). For example in 2018, of the top 500 highest grossing films in the U.S., films with at least one female director had 71% female writers. However, solely male directed films had only 13% female writers (Lauzen, 2019a). Current data shows that there are approximately four male directors for every female director in the U.S. and that they are underrepresented in every key Hollywood employment area, although this is an improvement over prior years' data (Hunt et al., 2019). Hankin (2007) writes that film and media studies and feminist filmmaking scholarship have not focused on the tangible ways in which female directors are affected by sexuality and gender, such as motherhood or being one of the few women on a set. Hankin (2007) believes that scholarship on these issues is essential to helping undergraduate film students of all genders navigate their future career paths.

**Narratives.** Films have served to reinforce and reflect cultural stereotypes about women. These range from degrading images of women as sexual objects, to women as victims, homemakers, devils, and as threats to and/or threatened by other women (Blewett, 1974). Typecasting and devaluing women onscreen reflects the devaluation of women's roles and work behind the camera (Bielby & Bielby, 1996). In screenwriting, writers create characters and narratives that often reflect their own worldview, and these will be translated into images to be processed by the audience (Conor, 2015). Even if a woman has written a film's script, the director has control over the production and therefore any changes made to the narrative during

filming (Bielby & Bielby, 1996). For this reason, it is important to have female directors at the helm of films to interpret these narratives and bring more diverse perspectives to audiences.

**Diversity.** Overt racism and a lack of diversity in films has been an issue since the beginning of the U.S. film industry, from casting choices, use of blackface, and whitewashing (Neff, 1996). Negative stereotypes of racial minorities (Neff, 1996) and women (Blewett, 1974) have been pervasive. However, as U.S. audiences have become more diverse, films with diverse casts are more popular than films with racially or ethnically homogenous casts (Hunt et al., 2019). Like racial minorities, in the case of women there is an absence of diversity both onscreen and behind the camera. A study by Rogelberg and Rumery (1996) on team performance and gender found that teams with one female performed better than homogeneous male teams. However, in S.L. Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Case, and Choi's (2018) study, out of 1,584 people in above the line roles such as director, cinematographer, writer, etc., only 18.2% were female (81.7% male). Directing had a particularly stark disparity with only 7.3% of 109 directors being female, or put another way, 43 female directors in 1,100 films. Onscreen, women are less likely than men to have speaking roles. Out of 1,100 popular films made from 2007-2017 in the U.S. and 4,454 speaking characters only 31.8% of the characters were female (S.L. Smith et al., 2018).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to research the best practices of leading female film directors working in the United States. Through this study the author aims to gain insight on their success strategies in leading a cast and crew throughout the entire filmmaking process as well as their challenges. The author is also completing this study with the goal of understanding how they

measure their success in leadership and learning the recommendations they would provide to future women working as film directors.

### **Research Questions**

The following four research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study:

**RQ1:** What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?

**RQ2:** What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?

**RQ3:** How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?

**RQ4:** What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?

These research questions were chosen to discover the best practices of successful female filmmakers, including their leadership strategies on set, the challenges they face while doing their job, how they measure their success as leaders, and what recommendations they would provide to women entering the industry in the future.

### **Significance of the Study**

As the U.S. film industry becomes more diverse, more women will hold higher level positions such as director, producer, cinematographer, editor, etc. With the rise of the Me Too and Time's Up movements in Hollywood, women in entertainment are increasingly raising their voices to protest the prevalent sexist inequities and injustices present in the industry. By speaking with female directors regarding their experience this study will illuminate how they overcame obstacles such as sexism and having fewer opportunities than their male counterparts. It will also contribute to the literature on women's leadership in the film industry.



**Significance for studios.** The study is significant for studios and production companies looking to hire women as directors as it will showcase their leadership qualities and skills. Based on the findings, studios and production companies that read this study may give more consideration to women when hiring for leadership positions such as a film director.

**Significance for film schools.** Leaders at film schools who read this study may use it to find ways to better support their female students and help them start their careers in the film industry as directors.

**Significance for female directors.** Female directors will be able to take inspiration and gain insight from the experiences of the female directors interviewed in the study. As female directors' best practices and strategies are shared they will be able to apply the findings to their own work.

**Significance for women entering the film industry.** The significance of this study for women entering the film industry, particularly those who want to pursue careers as directors, is similar to those of working female directors mentioned above. Women entering the film industry as directors will be able to learn from the best practices reported here and apply them to beginning and navigating their own careers in the film industry.

For both female directors and women entering the film industry, this study may influence their strategies, decisions, and/or help them avoid pitfalls that the directors interviewed faced in their own careers.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

1. It is assumed that women working as film directors face unique challenges in their career.

2. It is assumed that women working as film directors utilize specific strategies and practices in navigating these challenges.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited as it will focus solely on female directors in the United States. While women are considered a minority within higher positions of the film industry, diversity within the population of female directors will not be controlled for. Depending on what filmmakers are available for participation in the study during the timeframe for interviews, the group may or may not have diversity in ability, race, sexual orientation, age, or socioeconomic status. This study also does not examine minority gender identities. Lastly, the author of this study is a woman and has worked on undergraduate level films as a director and writer. Therefore, she brings her own biases and assumptions to the study, however the effect of biases has attempted to be mitigated through bracketing and epoché (see Chapter 3).

### **Definition of Terms**

**Director.** A director on a film set is responsible for executing the vision of the film. This role oversees each department (production design, lighting, etc.) and person on set and directs them to work together and create a creatively cohesive product (Rooney & Belli, 2011). For the purposes of this study, we will only be studying U.S. directors that live and work in the U.S. and who are female.

**Female.** For the purposes of this study, female will be defined as a person who self-categorizes herself as a woman and considers her gender identity to be female. The reason for this is that self-categorization eliminates assumptions about gender and female or masculine traits that the researcher might make if defining the gender of the participants themselves (Wood & Eagly, 2015).

**U.S. film industry.** The U.S. film industry is considered a cultural industry in that it “involves the conveying of symbolic meaning through a communication process” (Lukinbeal, 2004, p. 307). In this study the U.S. film industry will be defined as any and all businesses engaged in creating or distributing films or otherwise profiting from films made in the U.S. (MPAA, 2019).

**Filmmaking Process.** The filmmaking process consists of three phases: pre-production, production, and post-production. During pre-production every aspect that needs to be set prior to the production phase is decided upon. Financing is secured, the director, cast, and crew is hired, a budget is set, locations and sets are chosen or created, etc. During production the film is shot and during post-production the film is edited and completed (Eliashberg, Elberse, & Leenders, 2006).

**Diversity.** The diversity of individuals contributes to populations with different perspectives and characteristics. Diversity is made of both primary and secondary characteristics. Primary characteristics include biological aspects such as age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and race. Secondary characteristics include socioeconomic status, religion, learning style, education level, status of being married or single, status of being a parent, etc. (Jones, 1999).

**Above the line roles.** Above the line roles in the film industry are those which represent the head creative positions on a set. These include positions such as director, producer, and cinematographer (S.L. Smith et al., 2018).

**Below the line roles.** Below the line roles on a film set include lower positions in the hierarchy of a film set, such as assistant director, boom operator, grips etc. (S.L. Smith et al., 2018).

**A Note on the Use of the Term *Female Director***

Whilst planning this dissertation and formulating the research and interview questions, the researcher felt some hesitation in using the term female director. The reason being that to label a director as female is to imply that the norm for a director is male and therefore a female director is abnormal. Some study participants expressed a desire not to be labelled by their gender when speaking of their profession. Participant D told a story wherein she asked a room full of students at a school to close their eyes and describe what a director looked like. All of the students described a male. This in mind, the researcher would not be able to conduct a study focused specifically on women without using this term. Sexism is a reality and unfortunately women have not yet achieved equality within the film industry. Therefore the researcher would like to note that the use of the term is solely to identify the participants who are the focus of the study and in no way to contribute to defining women as *the other*.

## **Chapter 1 Summary**

In Chapter 1, an overview of the historical and present context surrounding the research was given. This included the history of film's impact on U.S. culture, the impact of the film industry on the U.S. economy, the history of directing in the U.S. film industry, and the history of women in the U.S. film industry. The history of women in the U.S. film industry included the history of their roles and how they have changed over time. In the problem statement, the issues faced by women in the U.S. film industry and particularly by those working as directors were shown. These included issues concerning representation, diversity, narratives, and prejudice in hiring practices.

In Chapter 1, the researcher's purpose statement was also provided, with the three primary goals of research being to discover the success strategies and challenges for women working as directors, as well as learning how they measure their success as leaders and the

recommendations they would provide to aspiring female directors. The researcher's four research questions were also provided, in alignment with the purpose statement. The significance of the study was also reviewed, with studios and production companies, film schools, female directors, and women entering the film industry being the most affected groups. Assumptions of the study were provided, as were the limitations of the study. Limitations of the study were primarily concerned with diversity, as it cannot be controlled for and only participants available during our timeframe will be used. The other significant limitation is the perspective of the researcher, who has a background studying film and directing undergraduate student films. Lastly, a definition of terms used in the research was provided. The terms defined included director, female, film industry, filmmaking process, diversity, above the line roles, and below the line roles.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review attempts to provide a survey of topics pertinent to this dissertation on the best leadership practices of female film directors. The literature review will begin with a historical background on women's involvement in the United States film industry. Then it will review the reasons behind the gap in leadership between women and men, the portrayal of women in media, and studies made on female filmmakers' careers. It will also review the relationship between female filmmakers and family roles, networking, and mentorship. The experience of high-profile female directors working for studios as well as independent female and minority female directors will be examined. Lastly, the review takes a look at the role of education and film festivals in the career development of emerging female directors.

### **Historical Background**

The United States film industry of today is not reflective of its beginnings as an open space full opportunity for women. At its inception, women held many positions in the industry such as screenwriter and director that are today dominated by men (Mahar, 2001). The biggest actresses of the day went on to create their own studios and/or direct. Florence Lawrence, Marion Leonard, Gene Gauntier, Alice Guy Blaché, and Helen Gardner are a few notable examples (Agnew, 1913; Mahar, 2001). The most famous example of these is the first actress to earn a million dollars: Mary Pickford. Pickford transitioned from a successful career on the silent screen to found the still operative studio United Artists alongside D.W. Griffith, Charlie Chaplin, and Douglas Fairbanks. She was also a founding member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (an organization founded to advance the film industry) and the Motion Picture Country House, a retirement home for veterans of the industry (Fischer, 2013 ; Mahar, 2001). Stage actresses like Pickford that transitioned into film expected to have the same level of

creative input and control as they did working in the theater. As film actresses became more well known to the public and the concept of stardom was entering Hollywood, the creation of their own production companies allowed them to increase their profits and have creative control over their projects. The actresses turned directors and producers usually partnered with a male director or producer. These partnerships allowed women to have a man on their team who could aid in networking and doing business with other men who may not be comfortable with a woman or accepting of her in their space (Mahar, 2001).

With such early influence and high-profile successes in the silent film era, today's statistics on female leadership and involvement in the film industry provide quite a significant contrast. Studies on the top 250 highest grossing films made in the U.S. revealed that women only comprised 20% of above the line leadership positions on these films (director, producer, executive producer, editor, writer, and cinematographer) in 2018 and 21% in 2019 (Lauzen, 2019a; Lauzen, 2020). By 1925, the vast majority of female-owned studios closed and except for screenwriting, women were pushed out of leadership positions in Hollywood. This is thought to be due to moviemaking's status as a new industry, commonly associated with cheap amusement, and therefore illegitimate and "ungendered" (Mahar, 2001, p. 73). As the popularity and accessibility of film skyrocketed and became more lucrative, men claimed power over the industry (Mahar, 2001). Bielby and Bielby (1996) also attribute Tuchman and Fortin's (1989) empty field theory to the fall of women in film. The empty field theory argues that when women enter an industry and experience success, men eventually take notice and begin to enter the field to take advantage financially, devaluing women's achievements in the process and pushing them out.

Nevertheless, 1925 was nearly a century ago and female filmmakers still face issues today regarding their representation in the industry. Interestingly, today's film industry is popularly viewed as "a golden age of television for women" (Perkins & Schreiber, 2019, p. 1) in which female run, written, or female centered shows are labelled as feminist and women are perceived as having more opportunities than ever before, especially as independent filmmakers. This is regardless of recent statistics that show men continue to dominate behind the scenes roles in studio-backed and independent films (Lauzen, 2019b; Perkins & Schreiber, 2019).

This chapter will examine the literature regarding women and the leadership gap in the film industry, with special attention paid to female directors. It is typical of filmmakers to wear multiple hats in the industry throughout their careers and work globally, and the issue of representation is certainly not confined to the U.S. or female directors alone. Therefore, other filmmaking careers such as screenwriters and producers will be examined globally as well to uncover the literature's insights on this question.

### **Women and the Leadership Gap**

Leadership has long been gendered as male through the words associated with leadership traits and in many different industries and business sectors (Eagly & Karau, 2002; S.L. Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2014). In role congruity theory, it is thought that women leaders experience prejudice because the role of leader is viewed as incongruent with stereotypical female characteristics women are expected to have. Two prejudices may arise from this. One prejudice being that women are not held in the same regard as males when being considered to fill a leadership position. The second prejudice being that women who act as leaders with stereotypical male leadership characteristics may be ostracized or looked upon negatively because they are in violation of traditional female roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). An example of this in the film



industry is Dawn Steel, a former head of Paramount and the first woman to head a major film studio. She was nicknamed “Steel Dawn” and “The Tank” for her leadership skills (Weinraub, 1997). Harsh criticism and negative perceptions of female leaders are tied to gender role stereotypes (Goethals & Hoyt, 2017; Simon & Hoyt, 2013) and are a reason for the gap between men and women in powerful leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Goethals & Hoyt, 2017).

A study by Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra (2006) examined role congruity theory in a study on prejudice against women leaders in male gendered industries. They wanted to know if women would suffer from negative perceptions of their leadership depending on whether they worked in a female dominated, male dominated, or gender neutral industry. The researchers found that participants predicted men to be more successful regardless of industry type. Women were found not to experience prejudices only if they were working in an industry gendered as female, such as fashion. Women were predicted by participants to make less income than men over the course of their career. Women were also found to be gendered as masculine by participants, especially if they were working in a male dominated industry. These findings support Eagly and Karau’s (2002) role congruity theory. As statistics have shown, the film industry is male dominated and it would follow that role congruity theory could explain the perceptions of women’s leadership in the film industry as less skilled than that of men.

The theory of gender essentialism itself, which is often an undercurrent in discussions of leadership theory and the differences between men and women’s leadership, may prevent full understanding of the reasons behind the leadership gap. Gender essentialism posits that gender is fixed and tied to biological differences between men and women. However, this does not account for the theory that gender is socially constructed as argued by several scholars. If gender essentialism is the foundation on which women’s leadership is studied, then systemic prejudices

as found in patriarchal societies will be ignored. Female habits and traits may be viewed as problematic and as things to be changed to fit into the dominant male leadership construct. Instead of challenging the patriarchal norms that are the source of this viewpoint, women themselves may attempt to change their traits or habits (Dzubinski & Diehl, 2018). In order to be effective leaders, women are sometimes suggested to change their attire, work, and communication styles—again viewing female habits and styles themselves as an issue and reason for the lack of women’s upward movement in leadership (Baxter, 2017). Women may also decline to self-promote for fear of backlash in their workplace, although self-promotion is an important part of career success and obtaining leadership roles. The fear of backlash comes from the idea that promoting themselves and their work is incongruous with the female gender role (specifically the idea that it is a woman’s duty to support others) and will therefore be received negatively by those they work for (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010).

These concerns on gender essentialism are also echoed by Storberg-Walker and Madsen (2017), who reported the results of a symposium on women’s leadership at George Washington University. A reported concern was that gender theory is not considered or applied to all leadership theories, which in turn leads to reflecting the patriarchal norms in our societies rather than challenging them or examining how they are detrimental to the growth of women’s leadership. Patriarchal norms include the hierarchical view of leadership present in most leadership theories, but that may not be widely applicable to the experiences of women leaders. Participants in the symposium suggested that leadership theories may benefit from integrating current structural inequities that affect women rather than solely focusing on the leadership of individuals. However, studying and reporting on female leaders’ experiences is still valuable due

to the diverse and complex insight that can be gained, particularly in regards to the relationship between various women and patriarchal social structures.

### **Differences in Men and Women's Leadership**

Differences in men and women's leadership can be explained by the leadership styles each gender generally leans towards (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006). Women have been found to lead using a democratic style, with high follower involvement and participation (Goethals & Hoyt, 2017). Research shows that women tend to lead in a communal style which focuses on the needs of the group, whereas men generally lead in a more agentic style that focuses on individual goals and accomplishments (Carli & Eagly, 2011; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006). However, it is possible to combine communal and agentic styles for an *androgynous* style or employ neither style. An androgynous style indicates that the leader is adept at deploying different leadership skills based on the situation at hand (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Multiple studies have also shown women to be less likely than men to support unethical decision-making and more likely to make decisions supporting the social welfare of their communities (Eagly, Gartzia, & Carli, 2014). Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) and Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra (2006) say that women have an advantage over men in being effective leaders. However, ultimately differences in individual leadership are greater than any differences between groups, which are overall generalizations (Goethals & Hoyt, 2017).

**Transformational leadership.** Transformational leadership consists of four distinctive traits, called the '4-I's'. These are as follows: idealized leadership/charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. An idealized leader is one who is seen by their followers as someone to emulate. This is accomplished by giving their

followers their confidence in them and setting high goals for them. Inspirational motivation is the leader's use of emotion to gain followers confidence and to motivate them to achieve a common vision. Intellectual stimulation is the stimulation of followers' thought processes through encouraging new ideas, innovation, and questioning the status quo. Individualized consideration is the attention that the leader pays to the needs and concerns of the individual followers (Bass & Riggio, 2005). When comparing women's transformational leadership skills to men's, women are found to have higher scores on all four I's of transformational leadership. The greatest difference between women's and men's scores are on individualized consideration. The androgynous style of leadership previously mentioned which blends both communal and agentic styles is a method particularly conducive towards transformational leadership (Goethals & Hoyt, 2017).

A study by Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, and Martos (2012) found that femininity was a predictor of competence on the transformational leadership factors of individualized consideration and inspirational motivation. These factors are the most related to interpersonal relations in transformational leadership. Femininity, emotional clarity, (ability to perceive one's emotions), and emotional repair (ability to regulate emotions) were all predictors of the use of transformational leadership. A high emotional intelligence is a predictor of the use of transformational leadership for men and women (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). However, women have been found to score higher on tests of emotional intelligence than men (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). Research shows that transformational leadership is one of the most effective methods of leadership in organizations (Conger & Hunt, 1999; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Therefore, women may have an advantage over men in leadership as many are already using transformational leadership and/or have a high emotional intelligence.

**Transactional leadership.** Transactional leadership is concerned with the exchanges between leaders and their followers. Leaders may reward followers with contingent rewards when the followers act in accordance with leader expectations. Leaders may admonish followers if the followers fail to perform according to leader expectations in what is called ‘management by exception’. Female transactional leaders typically use contingent rewards more so than male transactional leaders, who usually use management by exception (Goethals & Hoyt, 2017). Contingent reward is found to be more effective than management by exception, another indication that women may have a leadership advantage.

**Participative and authoritarian leadership.** In a study by Rhee and Sigler (2015), preferences in leadership style and leader gender were tested between participative and authoritarian leadership. In the study, participative leadership styles included transformational and authentic leadership. Authoritarian leadership was considered to be a more traditionally masculine style of leadership. The results of the study concluded that the participative leadership style was preferred over authoritarian leadership regardless of gender. However, male leaders were preferred over female leaders overall. The researchers also found that the female leaders who did not act according to female stereotypes were rated as “less effective and less preferred than male leaders” (Rhee & Sigler, 2015, p. 109). These results support the previously discussed role congruity theory which posits that those acting in a role not stereotypical of their gender (such as a female leader) are viewed negatively by others (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

### **Images of Women in Media**

**Representations of female leaders and stereotype threat.** The representation of women in media (especially in television and film), may be related to the underrepresentation of women leaders in the film industry. Whether or not a relationship between the two exists is yet to be

proven, but it is worth examining the literature in regards to how the media portrays female leaders and women in general and the resulting effects on women's self-perception. In a study on the reasons for female underrepresentation in the field of mathematics, stereotype threat was found to have a strong effect on women's decision to enter mathematics related career paths (Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012). Stereotype threat may cause women to underperform in leadership roles or become less motivated to pursue leadership positions as well as feel unwelcome in their industry (Goethals & Hoyt, 2017; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Stereotype threat is situational and can therefore affect any group of people but is particularly detrimental to women in industries in which men are the majority or which are traditionally gendered as masculine (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

**Counteracting stereotype threat.** It is possible that stereotype threat and negative portrayals or sexist treatment of female leaders or women in the media may have an effect on women who enter the entertainment industry or those that are in the position to hire them (S.L Smith, Pieper, Choueiti, 2013). The presence of role models and women's self-efficacy regarding leadership can successfully counter the effects of stereotype threat (Goethals & Hoyt, 2017). The ambiance of an environment can also successfully counter stereotype threat through the use of objects in that environment. In a study by Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, and Steele (2009), two computer science classrooms at a college were decorated in two different ways to gauge whether or not the environment would affect male and female undergraduates' interest in that field. One classroom had items that were considered stereotypical of computer science, such as Star-Trek posters and video games, whilst the other had items non-stereotypical of computer science, such as posters depicting nature scenes. The results of the study found that while men's interest in the field was not affected by either environment, undergraduate women who studied in the non-

stereotypically decorated computer lab expressed more interest in pursuing computer science as a major. The results of Cheryan et al.'s (2009) study indicates that a person's learning about their belonging can be affected simply by their physical environment. The researchers' use of science fiction television and video game posters is a reminder of the powerful effects media messaging can have on our society.

**Studies on images and representation of female leaders in media.** In a two-part quantitative study by Simon & Hoyt (2013), the effects of media images on women's perceptions of themselves as leaders were tested. The first part of the study exposed one set of women to counter-stereotypical images of men and women in advertisements and another set to stereotypical images of men and women in advertisements. This study resulted in the women who viewed the counter-stereotypical images of men and women as holding a "more egalitarian attitude towards women's roles" (Simon & Hoyt, 2013, p. 238). The second part of the study sought to test whether counter-stereotypical or stereotypical advertisements would have a positive effect on women who viewed them before completing a leadership task. The results concluded that women who viewed the counter-stereotypical advertisement had higher leadership aspirations and more positive self-perceptions of themselves as a leader. The advertisement therefore successfully prevented the effects of stereotype threat (Simon & Hoyt, 2013).

In a similar study by Davies, Spencer, and Steele (2005), television advertisements with stereotypical gender roles were used to gauge women's leadership aspirations after viewing them. Women who viewed the advertisements with stereotypical gender roles were more likely afterwards to express interest in assuming a follower position rather than a leader position. In the second part of their study, women were exposed to both types of advertisements as well as two

different descriptions of a leadership position, each with different language. One description had loaded language referencing leadership as masculine, and one had neutral language. The neutral language description served to eliminate the vulnerability to stereotype threat the advertisements created.

A study of female leaders in the UK by Tischner, Malson, and Fey (2019) examined radio broadcast transcripts to analyze how internationally known female leaders were portrayed. Depending on how the transcripts described the leaders, they were either described as traditionally feminine, androgynous, or exceptional (a coding designating that the woman in question was very unlike other women in her traits- and per the researchers, often a veiled jab at the woman). Women were described as feminine in the broadcasts by mention of their appearance, clothing, and accessories. Women who were described as adequately feminine were presented as more likeable than those whose appearance did not conform to traditional female gender role standards. Women were also gendered traditionally feminine by highlighting their relationship to their family, especially to describe them as family oriented or a sacrificial mother figure. These descriptions of appearance and family roles were either absent from or barely mentioned in the profiles of men the authors also examined for comparison. The function of these descriptions in the broadcast served to maintain the role congruity of the women as feminine despite their positions as powerful leaders and therefore not challenge traditional notions of masculine and feminine roles.

These studies are indicators of how the portrayal of women in media may become a cycle. While recent statistics on the number of advertisements a person is exposed to each day have not been found by the researcher, as of 2007, it was estimated that a person may view up to 5,000 advertisements a day (Story, 2007). With the proliferation of screens in the form of



phones, tablets, wearable devices, computers/laptops, and digital signs it is estimated that 2020 will see an average of 8 screens per person (Bulling, 2016). This leaves plenty of opportunity for media and advertisements to reach us and influence our perceptions, including our beliefs towards gender roles. Young people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of stereotypes within the media. Exposure to stereotypical gender images may prevent young women from seeing themselves as leaders. Therefore, less young women may attempt to become the leaders the media and entertainment industry needs to ultimately change these images. Media images of women and girls transform into expectations that are held subconsciously and affect women and girls' decision-making and career choices (Hammer, 2009; Reinharz & Kulick, 2007). Whilst negative depictions of women onscreen may be myths or stereotypes, these depictions can transcend their fictional setting into the consciousness of the viewer. Audiences buy into the story, setting, and characters, making the images feel grounded in reality even when they are not (Hammer, 2009).

In the case of film, whether or not a female director is at the helm of the film affects how women are portrayed onscreen and how many girls and women are in the film (Hammer, 2009; S.L. Smith, Choueiti, Granados & Erickson, 2010; S.L. Smith et al., 2013). In an analysis of the top 100 most popular films from 2017, it was found that in female directed films (8 total) 43% of speaking characters were girls or women. However, in male directed films, women and girls only made up only 30% of on screen characters (S.L. Smith et al., 2018). When women direct, they have the opportunity to provide more representation to girls and women as well as more diverse viewpoints and characterizations.

**Representations of women and girls in narrative film.** The way in which women and girls are portrayed onscreen in narratives is critical. Media images of women can affect the self-

perception of women and the treatment of women in society. Women are often over-sexualized, unemployed (in favor of working in the domestic realm), and have less screen time and fewer speaking roles than men (Blewett, 1974; S.L. Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2012). A study of children's films released from 2006 to 2009 showed that approximately 60% of male characters were shown as having jobs whereas only approximately 30% of female characters did. None of the 300 female characters depicted with jobs were employed as business executives, medical doctors, politicians, or in the legal profession (S.L. Smith et al., 2012). Further analysis of children and family films showed that women were more likely than men to have the role of caregiver and to be in faithful romantic relationships. Conversely, male characters were seldom shown in nurturing roles.

Physical attraction factors into women and girls presence on screen more than men. Women and girls are more likely than men and boys to have thin bodies and for their bodies to be discussed as physically attractive in the film. Approximately 30% of the women in the films analyzed were shown wearing revealing clothing, compared to approximately only 8% of men. Women are also more likely to be seen on screen if they are young, whereas men enjoy screen time well into middle age (S.L. Smith et al., 2012). Interestingly, in an analysis on the makeup of characters in a women-only directed film festival (LUNAFEST), women were still found to be much more likely than men to be shown in revealing clothing or nude. The statistics on male and female attire in the films were very similar to those of the top 100 highest grossing movies in 2014 (S.L. Smith, Pieper, Choueiti, Case, 2015). This suggests that women are also affected by popular visual representations of females in media and do not necessarily change these expectations.

The consequences of limiting women's diversity in terms of occupation, physical attractiveness, and age can be severe. As previously mentioned, limiting the portrayals of women as leaders and in varied occupations on screen can affect young women and women's career choices (Hammer, 2009; Reinharz & Kulick, 2007). Representations of adolescent girls in Hollywood films don't often delve into the complexity of adolescence but favor oft-repeated stereotypes (Bain, 2003). Exposure to ideas such as thinness as an ideal and physical attractiveness as a woman's most important asset through media images can make young women vulnerable to body image dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety (Dalley, Buunk, & Umit, 2009; American Psychological Association, 2007). Repeated exposure can lead to women and girls continually comparing themselves to an unattainable ideal. In turn this not only leads to feelings of shame and inadequacy but also causes women and girls to have less mental space for other cognitive functions, impairing academic and/or work performance (American Psychological Association, 2007).

The characters in the family films studied by S.L. Smith et al. (2012) were nearly 80% white, with only 2% of speaking characters being minorities besides Black, Latino, or Asian. Teenage films in particular typically feature minorities only as supporting characters (Bain, 2003). Even when male minority directors are at the helm, they may not give female minorities the same screen time as males or give their characters as much weight. Beadling (2016) noted that in the previous two decades films directed by Native American men had few Native American female characters with developed personalities or stories. However, the Native American women in the films were not portrayed as the stereotypes found in mainstream Hollywood films, such as oversexualized princesses or squaws.

### **Studies on Female Filmmakers' Careers**

There have been several studies investigating the careers of female filmmakers. Some of the earliest studies found in the literature are by Bielby and Bielby. Bielby and Bielby (1992) studied male and female television screenwriters using career history data from 1982-1990. Their empirical analysis examined the wage gap between the male and female writers. They applied two models of labor market dynamics: cumulative disadvantage and continuous disadvantage. Bielby & Bielby (1992) found that between men and women with similar years of experience, women typically earned 25% less than men, and men made up at least 40% of all writers on every television series, even if the show had a female target audience. Their study supported the model of continuous disadvantage, wherein women begin their careers with decreased access to opportunities and this decreased access increasingly affects them negatively as their careers continue. Bielby & Bielby (1992) suggested that because most decision-makers such as studio heads are male, they are prone to gender bias and are more likely to hire male writers despite a female writer's credentials or previous successes. This gender bias is tied to the feelings of trust they attach to those who are similar to them. They view women as riskier and therefore men are more likely to be hired for long term commitments such as a multiple season series. The advantages that men have at the beginning of their careers is not lost but rather expounded upon as their careers progress. Bielby & Bielby (1992) noted that the model of continuous disadvantage is resistant to change due to the manner in which studios employ writers. Studios employ writers on a contractual basis. Contracts are typically short term and this leads to both female and male writers experiencing discontinuous employment. More recently in directing Lauzen (2012b) echoes this. She writes that the stereotypes males in power have of women directors as being risky hires are perpetuated because they are not hiring women. Due to men

being hired more, they have increased opportunities to expand their filmography, whilst women have less and therefore their careers progress at a slower rate.

Bielby & Bielby's 1996 follow up to their previous study expanded the research to screenwriters of feature films. In addition to applying the cumulative disadvantage and continuous disadvantage labor market dynamic models, they apply declining disadvantage as well. Declining disadvantage is a model wherein disadvantages decline as time progresses, in this case, the wage gap between men and women screenwriters. This study supported the model of cumulative disadvantage. Bielby and Bielby (1996) found that the longer women stayed in their careers as screenwriters, the larger the gap became between their earnings and the higher earnings of those of their male counterparts. A notable difference between Bielby & Bielby's two studies was that film screenwriters were found to begin earning about the same compensation regardless of gender, whereas female television screenwriters were paid less at the start of their careers. Nevertheless, in both studies the female screenwriters faced significant career setbacks and narrowed opportunities as compared to men (Bielby & Bielby, 1992, 1996).

### **Female Filmmakers and Family Roles**

Parenting has long been gendered as feminine, and therefore seen as the responsibility of the mother, but not the father (Wing-Fai, Gill, & Randle, 2015). This assumption is so steeped in our culture that it can be used by employers to discriminate against female employees, particularly in the film industry. Wing-Fai et al. (2015) term this *reasonable sexism*, that is, sexism which is under the guise of being a practical decision, or even a sympathetic one. Both women with and without children can be affected by reasonable sexism. However, in the UK at least, a higher percentage of men than women have children at home. This may indicate that women drop out of filmmaking careers as they have children, whereas men do not. It also

indicates that the film industry needs to view the balance of family and work as an industry problem, and not place the responsibility solely on women (Lauzen, 2012b).

Due to this perception, women may also be reticent to address their concerns regarding the challenges of parenting with employers. Issues may include childcare, work schedule, and overall boundaries concerning work. The can-do, entrepreneurial attitude expected of employees in the film industry may cause women to attempt to resolve these issues themselves without reaching out to their employer (Wing-Fai et al., 2015). Sixty-four percent of female directors interviewed by S.L. Smith, Pieper, Choueiti, and Case (2015) reported that family issues were an obstacle to maintaining their careers. Among these were general difficulty, personal issues, and deciding when to have children in consideration of the timing of their career. In interviews with 51 film executives and independent filmmakers, 19.6% reported that maintaining work and family balance was an obstacle for female filmmakers (S.L. Smith et al., 2013).

The pressures of balancing family and career were among the top issues filmmakers (of all genders) interviewed by Jones and DeFillippi (1996) mentioned. Many of the filmmakers interviewed had deferred starting a family or decided not to have one due to their career. One female casting director interviewed decided to move from working in film (wherein she was often gone for weeks on location and worked long hours) to working in regional television so she could spend more time with her children. She made this decision although she would make less money and have less opportunities to work in film in the future. The decision to maintain a presence in the film industry but at a less demanding pace than before is seen by Jones & DeFillippi (1996) as a career strategy. This strategy enables filmmakers to maintain their family life but still work in the media world. Nevertheless, employing this strategy can lead to financial losses and stagnant careers.

Other strategies used by filmmakers from research by Jones and Pringle (2015) include both partners in a family working together to handle childcare or family issues. One partner may work in a permanent job to support the family consistently whereas the second partner may work in the film industry where the flow of income is less stable. For couples who both work in the industry they may be able to successfully provide childcare to their children in between each other's work schedules, or they may decide to not raise a family and focus on their careers. Some women interviewed by Jones and Pringle (2015) decided to work in permanent jobs in film-related companies so they could support their children. Due to the proliferation of freelance jobs in the film industry, few people have access to work benefits such as paid parental leave, flexible hours, or onsite childcare. By working in a film-related company women were able to access these benefits and still remain in the industry.

At times, emerging female directors' careers are halted by the interruption of motherhood. A woman who has early success as a director may find it difficult to sustain if she decides to raise children. An example is director Shirley Barrett, who turned down directing two critically acclaimed films, *Erin Brockovich* (2000) and *American Beauty* (1999). Barrett chose not to pursue these opportunities due to having two small children she did not want to spend time away from. She believes that had she taken these job offers, her subsequent career would have had much more success (Aquilina, 2015). Barrett now counsels film school students to be strategic when planning their careers, and to leverage any interest in their work as quickly as possible to create opportunities for themselves before it dies out. Barrett's story indicates a larger cultural issue beyond the limiting gender roles in the film industry- if men can have children and continue their careers, women should be able to do the same. Another industry member in the UK, television writer Lisa Holdsworth, spoke about the relationship between the glass ceiling

and women's familial roles, saying that "if I had small children. . .the glass ceiling would be impenetrable for me" (Gorton, 2013, pp. 666-667). However, Holdsworth acknowledges that some of her female peers have children and still create high-quality work, indicating that a woman's ability to manage family and work life is highly personal and specific to their situation (Gorton, 2013).

## **Networking**

Networking plays an important role in the film industry. In S.L. Smith, Pieper, Choueiti, et al.'s (2015) study 71% of female directors reported that networking (along with mentorship) was a crucial way to support their careers. It can affect a person's ability to freelance, as well as their career trajectory. Networking is an informal recruitment practice and it is the main means of obtaining jobs in film. Informal recruiting practices are also known as "reputation economies" in which people are judged as capable of performing a job based on their reputation, likeability, and judgement by others in hiring positions (Wing-Fai et al., 2015, p. 56). Decisions are made on recommendations by trusted friends and peers. Whilst basing hiring decisions on a person's reputation may appear to be free of bias, it is not a clear cut strategy (Jones & Pringle, 2015).

Unfortunately, women and minorities in film may suffer from the domination of informal recruiting practices. Social networking events and opportunities may not be accessible to women and minorities, due to financial status or physical location. Networking also requires the maintenance of relationships and therefore it can be very time-consuming. Those working in film may be expected to spend time with their coworkers after a shoot. Networking can also include traveling to industry events and film festivals, which can impede those who have family responsibilities (Ellerson & Gbadamassi, 2019; Wing-Fai et al., 2015).



**Homophily.** Recruitment networks often suffer from homophily (Jones & Pringle, 2015; Wing-Fai et al., 2015). Those who are in positions of power are most likely to form relationships with and recruit those who are similar to them. Factors of similarity include appearance, gender, and socio-economic status. Women may find it difficult to be accepted into these groups and reap the benefits of them, which include work opportunities. Men are more likely to gain access to these networks and therefore obtain more job opportunities and experience. Lauzen (2011) speculates that the association of a successful woman with an even more successful man may help the woman garner a better reputation. Sexism and racism related to decisions made in networking is not necessarily conscious each time but often a byproduct of homophily (Wing-Fai et al., 2015). Members of the film industry have contended that those who are recruited into their networks must “fit in immediately” (Jones & Pringle, 2015, p. 39). *Homosocial reproduction* is another term related to homophily that describes the behavior of a dominant group that recruits and supports members who are similar to those already in the group. The dominant group will seek out those who share the same background, ideas, and opinions as them (P. Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012). It follows that the dominant group would therefore find members who share the same biases and prejudices as well. The nature of informal recruiting practices make it difficult to provide legal evidence when sexism and racism is present (Wing-Fai et al., 2015). Jones and Pringle (2015) call the issue of access to the film industry an ‘unmanageable inequality’ because the industry does not have the tools to make effective change, such as the government regulations other industries have (Wing-Fai et al., 2015).

**Emotional labor of women.** In order to find success within male dominated networks, many women are expected to change their mannerisms, personality, habits, etc. to fit in with their male peers. Jones & Pringle (2015) interviewed several women working freelance in the

film industry and their responses in the interviews give us insight to what fitting in in the film industry looks like. Women accepted sexism and gender inequality as part of the industry. They felt that in order to survive and remain competitive, they could not be seen as difficult to work with. Maintaining a positive attitude and not complaining is behavior meant to counter stereotypes of women as fussy or whining. This behavior went along with ignoring sexism on set in order to uphold their reputation as easy to work with and therefore continue to book jobs in the future. Jones and Pringle (2015) describe this behavior as emotional labor which women must engage in to survive and males as the dominant group are excluded from. Emotional labor also includes the expectation of managing both your emotions and the emotions of others around you. Due to stereotypes of “women’s assumed expertise in emotion management” (Arcy, 2016, p. 365), women are expected to perform emotional labor more than men in the workplace.

**Financial barriers and their relationship to networks.** The most-reported barrier to female directors’ success as reported from Sundance Film Institute’s sample of 51 independent filmmakers and film executives was gendered financial barriers. Approximately 43% of respondents mentioned it. Gendered financial barriers include funding pipelines wherein men are gatekeepers, especially in narrative independent film. Women also suffer from biases that view them as less confident than men when requesting financing, and as less commercially viable. This is part and parcel of film networks being dominated by men, which was the number two barrier to female directors listed by approximately 40% of Sundance Institute’s respondents (S.L. Smith et al., 2013).

During Sundance’s interviews, approximately 30% of the respondents were unconvinced that the data presented to them on women’s involvement in independent film was accurate. They contended that the film industry was not very different in gender equality than other industries,

and that women had more opportunities now than in the past. The data available does not back up these views. However, these comments show that there is a lack of understanding concerning the actual situation of female directors by gatekeepers in the industry. To this end, approximately 20% of respondents listed raising awareness as a means to begin solving the issue of women's representation in directing. The obstacles presented by male dominated networks in mainstream and independent film are less prevalent in documentary film. The documentary film world has many more women in leadership positions, and therefore its networks are more open to female filmmakers. Documentaries cost less to make as well, and therefore it is somewhat easier to fund them (S.L. Smith et al., 2013).

Networking does require a person to market themselves and show confidence. Female respondents in Wing-Fai et al.'s (2015) study noted that they felt men were better at selling themselves and their skills. Studies have shown that men are more likely than women to display self-confidence in achievement settings (Lenney, Browning, & Mitchell, 1980). Personal branding is of increasing value in today's world of internet access and social media. Research by (Sergey, Svetlana, & Evgenia, 2019) shows that those who engage in actively creating a personal brand are more ambitious and have greater career satisfaction. As women seek to enter networking groups and increase their likelihood of career growth, they will have to develop strong personal brands that can aid them in times of discontinued employment.

## **Mentorship**

Mentorship is a crucial part of developing a career in film. Mentors serve to provide the mentee with advice, networks, internship, and job opportunities. Along with networking, 71% of female directors interviewed by S.L. Smith, Pieper, Choueiti, et al. (2015) reported mentorship to be important to supporting female directors. Forty-three percent of these interviewees also

mentioned female directors could be supported by having a role model and/or encouragement from others. Mentorship may also be a way to circumvent the need for personal branding as necessary to those who begin networking without an in to decision-making circles (Sergey et al., 2019).

Sundance Film Festival, in accordance with USC Annenberg, created a mentorship program for female filmmakers. They paired mentors and mentees for a year in which mentees could receive advice and support from the mentors. Mentees were female but mentors were both high-profile male and female filmmakers. The results of the mentorship program were not recorded within their report, but mentees also received access to Sundance Institute labs and grant opportunities (S.L. Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2013).

### **High-Profile Female Directors**

While the experiences of successful high-profile female directors in Hollywood are unique, it is worth examining the peer reviewed literature on these outliers. Specific narratives and recurring, gendered critiques often follow successful women in Hollywood, particularly when these women are in a position that is associated industry-wide with men, such as director. Sofia Coppola is an example of a successful female director who withstands veiled sexism in critiques of her work. Her films are often criticized for being too feminine and even too beautiful, and by default in the eyes of some reviewers, frivolous and vapid. It should be noted that much of Coppola's work has centered on young women, particularly in times of change. Much of this narrative has been fueled by the media's interpretation of her life and their assumptions on how it has affected her work (Smaill, 2013). Alternatively, director Kathryn Bigelow has created more mainstream films, including war films (ex. *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and action films. Many of her films have particularly violent scenes.

She often chooses to cast women as the leads in films that would typically be considered as male genres. She has also been considered an auteur, although that is a term usually associated with male directors (Epitropaki & Mainemelis, 2016). While both successful, the difference between the media's reception of these two female filmmakers may possibly be rooted in the style of films they choose to direct and how they do or do not deviate from societal patriarchal expectations. Alternatively, in Bigelow's case, Lauzen (2011) argues that Bigelow deliberately avoids conversations about gender in order to manage the media's perceptions of her. Lauzen (2011) examined interviews Bigelow had done and noted her tendency to dismiss questions related to gender or downplay the effects of sexism in the industry. Lauzen also noticed that Bigelow and her crew associated Bigelow with stereotypically masculine traits such as toughness and control through stories told in interviews. Lauzen (2011) believes these are in part common self-defense tactics that many women who work in male-dominated industries employ. In the article Lauzen (2011) also writes about the sexist way in which articles written about Bigelow (typically by males) continually mention her physical attractiveness in relation to her age and/or her relationship with Hollywood director James Cameron. In Lauzen's (2011) words these journalists "are working through a complex sense-making process, trying to align Bigelow the woman with Bigelow the director" (p. 149).

Ava DuVernay is both a female filmmaker and a woman of color who is a successful director and a minority in the industry. Her films' subject matter has included the civil rights movement and the relationship between systemic racism and mass incarceration in the U.S., as well as a blockbuster science fiction fantasy film. DuVernay is aware of how rare her success is and how few minority women share her experience. In an interview, she recalled the experience of viewing a report from the DGA on diversity at studios and realizing that in 2014, she was only

one of two women of color who had made studio films that year (DuVernay & Young, 2016). She describes the feeling of such experiences as “having a moment that you look around and it’s not even a deep dive to understand the context. It’s so stark, it’s laid so bare right there. How much can you celebrate?” (DuVernay & Young, 2016, p. 39).

Directors Catherine Hardwicke and Julie Taymor are also directors who have experienced successes but have faced obstacles due to their gender. Catherine Hardwicke directed the young adult fantasy film *Twilight* (2008) on a tight schedule and budget of \$37 million and it profited \$3.3 billion worldwide. However, Hardwicke was not hired to film the sequel and of the five films in the female lead franchise she was the only female director. The success of *Twilight* allowed other films with teenage female leads to make their way to the box office, such as the Hunger Games franchise and *Divergent* (2014), although these were both directed by men. Nevertheless, Hardwicke’s success may have contributed to paving the way for other female directors such as Patty Jenkins (Muir, 2018). Despite the film’s financial success, film critics did not positively review *Twilight* (2008), perhaps due to its audience. As Bode (2010) writes: “for some reviewers, the teen girl audience taints the film, and the film taints the girl, and both are to be reviled” (p. 708), calling into question the biases through which the film may have been viewed by critics.

Julie Taymor, theater and film director who directed the films *Frida* (2002), *Across the Universe* (2007), and the stage musical *The Lion King* has also faced sexism as a director. Her film *Tempest* (2010) was negatively received by critics and she was fired from directing the stage musical *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*. Turner (2015) argues that the failures of *Tempest* and *Spider-Man* were due to Taymor confronting obstacles related to her gender as well as cultural and leadership obstacles. Both *Tempest* and *Spider-Man* incorporated female perspectives and

characters. Taymor cast Prospero as a woman instead of a man in *Tempest* and created a female character called Arachne for *Spider-Man* that was nixed from the production after Taymor's firing although originally being a lead in the musical. Turner (2015) posits that Taymor's inclusion of female characters and storylines challenged the cultural and institutional male hierarchies that her work was created within. He also writes that "while a male writer-director displaying agentic confidence in his vision might be hailed as an 'uncompromising artist,' a female writer-director such as Taymor making that same assertion. . . might conversely be considered obstructionist and uncooperative" (p. 700).

### **Independent Female Directors and Filmmakers' Experiences**

Far greater in number than Oscar award winning female directors are independent female directors. Independent film has long been viewed as more accessible to female filmmakers (Perkins & Schreiber, 2019). Recent 2018-2019 statistics show that there are more women in behind-the-scenes roles working on independent films than the top 250 grossing U.S. films, however it is only 32% compared to 20% (Lauzen, 2019b). Independent film has long been utilized as a career path for female directors and filmmakers to gain notoriety and an in to mainstream filmmaking. However, the trope of independence is also used to mask the state of underrepresentation that women still face in the industry (Perkins & Schreiber, 2019).

**Sundance Institute study phase I.** Sundance Institute commissioned a three-year, three part study from USC Annenberg to analyze the hurdles that women in independent film face, particularly female directors. All three parts of this study used mixed-methods research. In the first phase of research, quantitative data on filmmakers' gender from 820 Sundance Film Festival (SFF) narrative and documentary films over a ten-year period of 2002 to 2012 were analyzed to ascertain the level of involvement of women in the films. Qualitative data was collected through

51 interviews with both new and veteran female filmmakers as well as industry gatekeepers. Interviews were focused on determining the participants' perspectives on the obstacles facing female filmmakers and the opportunities available to them (S.L. Smith et al., 2013).

**Sundance Institute study phase I quantitative results.** Phase I 's quantitative portion had several notable results. The ratio resulting from over 11,000 people working behind the camera on SFF films from 2002-2012 was 2.36 males to every 1 female. When looking at women's involvement on set, independent documentary filmmaking was found to be a more level playing field than narrative films. This concurs with previous research results from Lauzen (2012a). Almost 40% of directors, producers, writers, cinematographers, and editors (referred to by the researchers as 'content creators') were female in documentary films, but only around a quarter were female in narrative films. Female directors in particular represented 16.9% of directors in documentary films and 34.5% of directors in narrative films. When comparing the amount of narrative female directors working on different program selections (competition, niche, and premiere) at SFF, it was found that female directors were most prominent in the competition and niche categories. Premiere category films typically have larger budgets and better known actors/actresses, therefore the researchers attributed this discrepancy to the premiere category having more mainstream instead of independent films. Interestingly, the researchers also noted that films with the highest percentage of women working on them also all had these women in lower positions of power on the set regardless of genre. When women were in leadership positions on set, there was found to be more gender equality (S.L. Smith et al., 2013).

**Sundance Institute study phase I qualitative results.** The qualitative portion of Phase I addressed the barriers and opportunities for women in filmmaking, particularly directors and



producers in narrative film. The most cited barriers for women (in order of most to least reported) were gendered finance, male-dominated networks, stereotyping on set, work and family balance, exclusionary hiring decisions, and points of resistance. Gendered finance included women not being given access to or being given access to only limited funds for films. Reasons for this included men usually being in the position of power to finance a film, and women being seen as untrustworthy in regards to handling money or not confident in their ability to do so. The theme of male-dominated networks indicated that males were perceived as running the film industry and women not having access to the same professional networks and connections was an impediment to their career growth. On set stereotyping included sexism in the workplace for female filmmakers, whether through objectification or not being taken seriously in their position. Stereotype threat triggers (such as being closely watched by males while doing a task) were also cited as a possible reason for women underperforming on set. Participants often felt that their abilities were questioned on set. Balancing work and family was said by respondents to be more difficult for female filmmakers both because of traditional gender roles that encourage mothers to be primarily responsible for caregivers and the inflexibility of the film industry. Travel requirements, schedules, and even a lack of childcare in a film's budget may deter mothers from pursuing film full time or after having children. The theme of exclusionary hiring practices was reported as being a consistent barrier in the world of high budget, studio-backed films. Before being hired to direct, for example, female directors are expected to have prior experience directing a high budget film. However, they are also often limited to certain genres that are viewed as appropriate for a woman to direct and bring her perspective. As the study pointed out, of the 1,100 top box-office performers from 2002-2012 only 54 of the directors were women, and roughly two-thirds of those films directed by women

were either comedies, dramas, or romances. The last emergent theme from the qualitative portion of phase I was the industry's culture and points of resistance. Points of resistance were defined as ideas and beliefs about gender inequality that are held by those in the industry. Approximately 30% of those interviewed or surveyed had a belief that women were either more well-represented in the film industry as compared to the past or compared to other countries. Of these 30%, 66.7% of them reported that the statistics they were shown on women in the film industry appeared to be inaccurate. Much of these beliefs are reinforced if the person is assuming a token woman on set is a representation of equality and therefore hiring practices in the film industry are equitable (S.L. Smith et al., 2013).

**Sundance Institute study phase II quantitative results.** Phase II of the study was a deeper dive into the previous research. The quantitative portion of the study analyzed data on gender from 1,163 filmmakers and 82 films screened at SFF in 2013. The gender distribution of filmmakers at the Sundance Institute labs from 2002-2013 was also examined. The researchers wanted to see if any significant change existed in the participation of female directors and producers at SFF from 2002-2013, as well as how new filmmakers' careers were supported and how that support may have affected their careers. In looking at the competition and non-competition fields at SFF from 2002-2013, the researchers found no significant changes in the number of female directors and producers on either narrative or documentary films. At the Sundance Institute lab, 42.6% out of 432 fellows were female from 2002-2013. These women finished and exhibited their projects at approximately the same rate as male fellows (S.L. Smith et al., 2014).

**Sundance Institute study phase II qualitative results.** The qualitative portion of phase II expanded on phase I by taking data from 34 people interviewed who were veterans of the film

industry and mostly female. The researchers coded character traits present in their previous responses as masculine, feminine, or neutral, in accordance with previous studies done on gender stereotypes. Nearly half of the character traits mentioned were labelled as neutral, while one third was labelled as male and almost 20% were labelled as female. The researchers concluded that director was synonymous with male in many of the participants' views. When participants were asked to describe qualities related to a successful narrative director, the characteristics described were coded as male, with a ratio of more than 2:1 male to female coded characteristics (S.L. Smith et al., 2014).

**Sundance institute study phase III quantitative results.** The final phase III of Sundance and USC Annenberg's study focused on an area the researchers found women to be particularly underrepresented in: narrative directing. Quantitative data was pulled from films participating in the SFF U.S. Dramatic Competition (2002-2014). Of these films, it was found that only approximately a quarter of them had a female director. Director's gender did not affect whether or not films received theatrical distribution, however male directors were more likely to receive distribution from larger companies. The scope and density of theatrical distribution of films by independent companies was not affected by the director's gender. At larger studios however, films with theatrical distribution in over 250 theaters have 6 male directors for every 1 female director (S.L. Smith, Pieper, & Choueiti, 2015).

When examining the highest grossing films from the years 2002-2014 (a total of 1,300 films), it was found that only 4.1% of directors (59 directors) were female. The resulting ratio is 23.3 male directors for every single female director. This area is where the gap between male and female directors was at its highest. At SFF, the number of female directors dropped from almost 30% in independent films to less than 2% in mainstream films. Other notable findings included

the relation of gender to the genre of film and the gender of the lead role. Women were more likely to direct comedies, dramas, or romances (92.5% of directors) whereas 69% of male directors filmed these genres. S.L. Smith et al. 2015 concludes that the films female directors choose to create early on in their career could pigeonhole them into certain genres. This could affect their future career opportunities and finances.

**Sundance Institute study phase III qualitative results.** As the study's previous phases repeatedly highlighted finances as being a major block for female directors' careers, phase III's qualitative portion of the study included interviews with 59 experienced buyers and sellers in the entertainment industry as well as 41 female directors. They were asked their opinion on why women directed only 1.9% of SFF's top 100 films in 2014. The most reported reasons that came from the interviews (in order from most to least reported) were: perception of a gendered marketplace, scarcity of talent pool and experience, women's perceived lack of ambition, industry gender imbalance, little support and few opportunities for female directors, and doubt in female directors' competence. Participants reported a perception in the industry of women directed films as being narrowed to only a few genres and not widely marketable, whereas films with men at the helm were perceived to be widely marketable and lucrative. Buyers and sellers of films also noted that there are not as many films directed by women to choose from and they questioned women's interest in or ambition for directing larger budget films (although 43.9% of female directors interviewed expressed interest in doing so). Gatekeepers and male dominated networks were again mentioned in this portion of the study as a reason for female director's careers not advancing, as well as the part agents play in sending directors out to book jobs. Both buyers and sellers expressed doubts in regard to women's abilities to perform all aspects of

directing, whilst 70% of female directors interviewed said their abilities and authority had been questioned while on the job.

The results of all three studies are extremely valuable in demonstrating the obstacles that female filmmakers are facing today, as well as how little the industry continues to change for women. The onus is on gatekeepers to examine their beliefs and perceptions about women's abilities to direct, make financially successful films, and balance a career. Clearly, female directors are not regarded with the same confidence and possibilities as male directors. While there are few, current women in the industry in positions of power should continue to make efforts to give opportunities to emerging female directors and other filmmakers.

**Freelancing.** Many of those that work in the film industry work freelance, also known as being a free agent or having a boundaryless career. This can make it more difficult for women to work in the industry, as women are more likely to desire steady and stable work (although this is the overall preference for all genders) (Smith, 1998). As previously stated in this literature review, women may leave a career as a filmmaker due to its inflexibility (S.L. Smith et al., 2013). The film industry is highly unpredictable. A film may or may not be profitable, and they are high cost endeavors. If a person works on a film that is unsuccessful, they may be hard pressed to find work for a period of time. This makes working freelance in the film industry a high-pressure job (Jones & DeFillippi, 1996).

Jones and DeFillippi (1996) outline several necessary factors for a successful freelance career in film, which combine knowledge of the industry along with knowledge of the self. They term these factors as knowing what, why, where, whom, when, and how. Knowing what is industry knowledge, knowing why is the knowledge of personal motivation, knowing where is knowing your career path, knowing whom is related to networking, knowing when is knowing

how to manage time, and knowing how is knowledge of necessary skill sets, such as collaboration. Jones & DeFillippi (1996) posit that a strong why (reason or motivation) for pursuing film work is essential for filmmakers. If a person is not clear about the reason they have for pursuing such a demanding, fast-paced job, they may burn out and leave the industry. To manage the pressure of working freelance in film, they also provide a list of challenges, strategies, and implications for each of the previously reviewed factors necessary for success. Overall, challenges include balancing periods of unemployment and periods of busyness, as well as functioning on unstable income. Strategies include gaining credibility through experience and creating a portfolio of work, developing communication skills, and managing social capital.

Jobs tend to have high amounts of pressure attached to them to finish the job quickly so the film can begin returning its investment. Freelance workers are also constantly searching for their next job, which can cause stress and anxiety (Jones & DeFillippi, 1996; Wing-Fai et al., 2015). Those who enter as freelancers in the film industry are often expected to take on low-paying jobs or even work for free in order to build up their portfolio and gain experience (Wing-Fai et al., 2015). This is not a risk that everyone wanting to work in the film industry can take. However, competition is high with many people vying for jobs and access to networks (Jones & Pringle, 2015).

A study by Wing-Fai et al. (2015) explored the careers of female freelancers working in the film and television industry in the UK. Over 100 semi-structured interviews were conducted with freelancers. Various themes were established as being challenges to women working as freelancers in film and television. Among them included a culture of presenteeism (the expectation that an employee should be available at any time to work), family roles, and perception of family roles by employers as obstacles to being motivated and committed to the

job. Wing-Fai et al.'s (2015) results are further discussed under the female filmmakers and family roles section.

### **Experiences of Minority Female Directors**

Bielby & Bielby (1996) tested three models of labor dynamics on the earnings of male and female screenwriters of feature films, a more competitive and riskier market than that of television (featured in their prior 1992 study). They included minority women in their study and the data indicated that minority women may face more obstacles than non-minority women. This was mediated by differences in previous wages and employment. However, there was still not enough data for a statistically significant result. Bielby & Bielby attributed this to there being so few minority women in screenwriting at the time.

Having diverse female filmmakers who provide unique voices and diverse characters to their work can also attract niche audiences who may feel neglected by the entertainment industry. Examples in the animation field include Natasha Allegri, Shadi Petosky, and Rebecca Sugar who have all included LGBTQ+ and feminist narratives and storylines in their respective series (Perkins & Schreiber, 2019; Mihailova, 2019). Shelley Niro and Georgina Lightning are Native American directors who have created films about Native American women (*Kissed by Lightning* (2009) and *Older than America* (2008) respectively). These films are positioned within a cultural text that is familiar to Native American audiences but also use familiar Hollywood genre conventions to access both a Native and mainstream audience. Both films draw from Native American history while also authentically depicting the life of modern Native American characters. Similar to the tension described by Perkins & Schreiber (2019) for feminist filmmakers between being visible and resistant, and perhaps in addition to this tension, Niro and Lightning were expected to simultaneously create films that did justice to the Native American

community while also satisfying and not upsetting a larger mainstream audience. This is referred to by Beadling (2016) as a “double consciousness” (p. 135). Aurora Guerrero, a queer Latinx director, has also felt pressure from being expected to represent her community as well as pressure from her community itself:

There always is a responsibility that you carry. I don’t see how you can’t have an awareness of how your images can impact viewers and culture. How to negotiate that is hard sometimes because a real honest depiction can come across as problematic. (as cited in Alanis & Kompalic, 2018, p. 87)

Mills (2019) compared old Hollywood depictions of the “tragic mulatto” (p. 11) character to contemporary works made by black and biracial female directors. Mills (2019) found that while character portrayals often echoed the tragic mulatto stereotype, the narratives carried a feminist perspective as well. In order to reverse negative stereotypes and release minority filmmakers from the pressure of representing their entire community or population, it is necessary to have more diversity behind the camera (Mills, 2019).

However, selling work that features diverse casts can be an issue for female directors. S.L. Smith, Pieper, Choueiti, et al. (2015) found that approximately 30% of the female directors interviewed cited subject matter as a blockage to finding financing. Financing a film featuring a diverse cast, marginalized groups, or one that was in a stereotypically female genre (romantic comedies for example) or marketed towards females posed difficulties for the female directors interviewed. Some directors (14%) felt that they suffered from stereotyping. This included being pigeonholed into creating certain types of films or being dismissed due to biases and stereotypes about women.



It should be noted that research has found that there is no disadvantage at the box-office for films with diverse casts. In fact, they often perform better than films with homogenous casts (Hunt et al., 2019; Kuppuswamy & Younkin, 2019). One possible explanation for the lack of interest in films with diverse casts (besides the difficulties of female directors finding financing) is that studios are attempting to hire actors and actresses to pander to biased foreign consumers. However, research by Kuppuswamy and Younkin (2019) showed this to be untrue. Hiring diverse casts for a film does not limit its potential for success domestically or abroad. Cultural industries are one of the few industries wherein employers place the onus of bias on the consumer rather than the employer. Employers often argue that decisions are made due to consumer bias, and that biases are not internal or organizational issues. In S.L. Smith et al.'s (2013) interviews with independent filmmakers and film executives, 13.7% of interviewees listed exclusionary hiring as one of the issues facing female directors. The discrepancy between actual profits and the decisions made by gatekeepers (not financing female directors, hiring homogenous casts) show that the film industry truly is suffering from internal biases and, as Jones and Pringle (2015) describe, unmanageable inequalities.

### **Emerging Female Directors**

The fourth research question of this study (What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?) is aimed at understanding the advice that female film directors would give women entering the field and seeing how it relates to their best practices as a leader. For this reason the literature review also examines the current literature on the education and development of young female filmmakers.

### **Education**

Film schools allow students to develop relationships amongst their peers that they can sustain after graduation into their professional careers as future collaborators (Aquila, 2015; Edwards, 2009; Hardin, 2009). However, film schools have varying degrees of success in how they prepare their students for a career after their studies, particularly female students who are already underrepresented at the professional level. In a study by Orwin and Carageorge (2001), the experiences of young women in a university level film production program were studied. These women found themselves to be treated differently than their male peers, possibly due to their perception of the learning environment as male dominated. The female students in the program were not as likely to volunteer in class and appeared more reserved than their male peers.

Instead of excelling in screenwriting, which uses verbal intelligence (an intelligence women are typically more adept at than men) these female students floundered. When it came to initiating their own projects in class, they found defining their project subjects challenging. Orwin and Carageorge's (2001) results found that women in the program did not have as many opportunities to work on student projects as their male counterparts, and that they were not given as much instruction in or opportunity to work on technical equipment. Indeed, women are often discouraged from taking on roles that require a high amount of technical skill and are therefore traditionally gendered male (Wing-Fai et al., 2015). Orwin and Carageorge (2001) point out that a film set is a hierarchical environment and younger women may not feel comfortable in the role of director and/or young men may not feel comfortable taking direction from women. The researchers' made several suggestions to create a more inclusive environment for females based on their observations of the learning environment and interviews with the female students. This included assigning crews in order to build relationships between male and female peers early on

in the program, teaching students how to give and receive feedback in an academic, empathetic manner, and inviting female role models to visit classes.

Hardin (2009) also suggested that film professors teach students about the people who have worked and currently work in the film industry as a way to balance inequities regarding gender and diversity. Another suggestion by Orwin and Carageorge (2001) was to screen more female-directed films in classes, an easily implemented change but one that is easy to overlook. Excluding female-directed films as objects of study contributes to students' perceptions of the film industry as male-dominated. Other classroom suggestions included having female Teaching Assistants both as role models and to offer an alternative of teaching styles that may appeal to female students more. Female students also desired one on one teaching, slower teaching processes, and equipment workshops wherein they could refine their technical skills. Lastly, assessment was an issue to which there was no clear answer on how to improve the process. Creative work poses difficulties in assessment, and students questioned how important grades were to their future work in the film industry.

Further recommendations on education in creative industries such as film include teaching students how to network, create a portfolio, and teaching them specialized skills (Mietzner & Kamprath, 2013). A study on students in a film studies course allowed students to collaborate with their professors in creating the course assessments and projects. The researchers found that the experience was a positive one for both students and professors and created an engaging learning experience. One of the projects the students completed was creating video essays as part of their curriculum. Video essays allow film students to practice their craft whilst making an argument as they typically would within an essay (Bell et al., 2019). Video essays can communicate complex ideas through visuals and audio, and the subject of analysis is often a film

itself, making video essays particularly appropriate projects for film students (de Fren & Hart, 2017 ; Mistry & Sakota, 2017). Mistry and Sakota (2017) say that film studies and technical training should not be separated and that “film is the vehicle for and of research itself” (p. 113).

There is disagreement in the literature over whether students benefit most from a generalized or specialized education in their field. Even industry experts are not clear on which pathway has more long-term benefit for students (Mietzner & Kamprath, 2013). Mietzner and Kamprath (2013) assert that learning a specialization allows students the opportunity to work on higher-budget projects after they have graduated, due to the demand for that particular skill. However it could also be argued that students receiving a generalized education have more opportunity to learn varied skills and decide on which pathway they will pursue later.

Female students at the Sydney Film School are instructed using a hands-on approach that students have reported both helped them to narrow down their chosen area in filmmaking as well as equip them with a broad knowledge of the craft. The Sydney Film School has several notable female alumni such as directors Maya Newell and Gracie Otto (“Women of Sydney”, 2016). The practical approach to filmmaking teaches students about not only using modern and up to date video equipment but also traditional methods of filmmaking not found in most film schools, such as 16 mm film (Bird, 2015). Interestingly, the school appears to prepare its students for the realities of the industry, including the sexism female students may face. One alumni said: “I learnt straight away that the film industry is predominantly a boys club and you need to work twice as hard and be completely persistent to make it happen for you as a female filmmaker” (“Women of Sydney,” 2016, para. 4).

Other studies on film schooling show that women are more likely to have the skill sets necessary to work in a collaborative environment such as film (Hardin, 2009) which echoes the

research on women as transformational, communal leaders discussed previously. Hardin (2009) also states that in order for women to be comfortable in leadership positions on set (such as director) it is necessary that “the feminine is respected within the film production context” (p. 36). The idea that women need respect as leaders without attempts to change their leadership style to fit into a male paradigm aligns with role congruity theory as mentioned previously. Hardin’s (2009) study examined collaborative behaviors of film students working on productions at the Department of Film and Video at Columbia College Chicago. The study used the Wheelbook personality assessment created by John Bilby, which places people into one of several behavior role categories, each with a positive and negative condition. During the study, the student body makeup within the Department of Film and Video was 27% female, which, although low, was still higher than the representation of females in above the line roles in the film industry at the time.

In the two-year study, Hardin (2009) found that women displayed a wider spectrum of behaviors than men. The female students in the program were five times more likely than male students to have the personality type of Can-do Person/Dictator. This implies that the female students were more likely than male students to volunteer or step into leadership roles, unlike the female students in Orwin and Carageorge’s (2001) study. Women were also found to be more communal and aware of the team’s needs. A final important difference between the male and female students in Hardin’s (2009) study was that women were more likely to find roles on set that matched their specific areas of interest or filled in on roles as needed on set.

The results of Hardin’s (2009) assessments, interviews, and observations appear to show the female student body in the film department to be more confident in leadership positions than those in Orwin and Carageorge’s (2001) study, although the studies were completed within a few

years of each other. These differences in results may be accounted for by the school's culture or other factors such as the personalities of the students within the class at the time. Indeed Hardin's (2009) results for female students, although similar, differed between the first and second-year rounds of assessment. After 2007-2008, less female students fell into the Wheelbook category of Hard Worker/Doormat (although the majority of women and men in both years fell into the category of Teacher/Con Artist).

While these studies took place in the United States, other studies on film schooling have been conducted abroad and may give some insight into how U.S. film schools and the film industry can better support female film students into transitioning into a career in the film industry. Attending film school in the United States often leads to high amounts of student loan debt that cannot be paid off with an entry level job in film or freelance work. It is not considered a necessary precursor for a career in the industry (Jones & DeFillippi, 1996; Wing-Fai et al., 2015) and many film students must take higher-paying jobs outside of the film industry in order to cover student loan payments. However in countries like Australia, film school can help launch a career in film, though women filmmakers face many of the same prejudices as in the United States (Aquila, 2015).

Australia's film industry has one of the highest concentrations of female film directors globally, with 18% of its directors being female. This is due in part to government funding for film schools and federal grants to make films. Some of Australia's most prolific female directors such as Jane Campion, Jocelyn Moorhouse, and Gillian Armstrong began studying at Australian Film Television and Radio School before using their portfolios of student films to secure subsidies and grants from government agencies such as the Australian Council and the South Australian Film Corporation. However, funding in Australia has since moved toward co-

productions financed by non-government entities, making it more difficult for female filmmakers to make the transition from film school to a professional career in directing. (Aquila, 2015). This is in part due to the bias against women when female directors attempt to secure funding early in their careers (Aquila, 2015; Smith et al., 2014 ; S.L. Smith, Pieper, Choueiti, et al., 2015).

The United States at one point had training and education initiatives to monitor the inclusion of underrepresented groups in the film industry, such as women and minorities. In 1968 the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission held hearings on the involvement of minorities in the U.S. film industry. The hearings resulted in the U.S. Department of Justice issuing “a five year mandate calling for the creation of minority training programs at production companies, studios and networks” (Hawkins, 1996, p. 8). Unfortunately, the jobs and opportunities that resulted from this mandate were short lived. By 1975, the mandate had ended and minority training programs were few and far between (Hawkins, 1996).

## **Film Festivals**

Film festivals have served as a way to showcase films of emerging directors. They have traditionally been thought of as a pipeline from film school to being hired for a first job. Around the world, women have used film festivals to showcase their work, which may be niche, controversial, or outside the mainstream and therefore difficult to find financing for (S.L. Smith, Pieper, Choueiti, et al., 2015). Film festivals can be spaces for local as well as global networking (Ellerson & Gbadamassi, 2019). There was a rise in film festivals targeted at recruiting female participants in the 1970s (Ellerson & Gbadamassi, 2019; Heath, 2018) and now many film festivals targeted towards students and women exist. The proliferation of women’s film festivals in the 70s was a political and social statement in the United States and United Kingdom. They were run by volunteers, non-hierarchical in organization, and served not to create competition

among filmmakers but aimed to provide a space for women filmmakers to showcase their work. The women's film festivals of the 70s were also inventive in utilizing workshops, events, and panel discussions with filmmakers. This approach created a space for participants to gather and increase the visibility of their community. These festivals paved the way for film festivals centered on minority communities such as the LGBT/queer community (Heath, 2018). Many underrepresented filmmakers- whether women or part of minority groups, count on the existence of film festivals centered on their communities for exposure and support (Hankin, 2011).

LUNAFEST (sponsored by the Luna Bar company), for example, is a traveling film festival which exclusively screens the work of female directors. In order to gauge whether or not the films screened at their festival were reflective of the diversity and social change they desired to support, they commissioned a report from researchers at USC Annenberg's Media, Diversity, and Social Change Initiative. This report examined not only the careers of the female directors in their festival but statistics on the demographics of the characters in the films. Data from past LUNAFEST festivals showed that within their festivals 63% of the characters in the films were female and 81% of films had a female lead. However, the results of the study also showed that women in their films were more likely than males to be wearing revealing clothing or be shown nude. This result was said to be similar to trends found in the 100 highest grossing films from the previous year (S.L. Smith, Pieper, Choueiti, et al., 2015). It should be noted that LUNAFEST is a corporate film festival and whilst it gives an opportunity for young college aged women to be involved in the organization of the festival it is simultaneously aimed at marketing its product through the students (Hankin, 2011). Other festivals use student interns or volunteers to support the festival. For example, students have benefitted from film festivals at Australia's SAE Creative Media Institute, which places students at two of the country's biggest festivals. A



student works at the festival for an average of 80 hours doing audio and film work alongside professionals. The students accrue real world experience and make networking connections as well (Windsor, 2016).

In some areas of Africa, film festivals serve as a vehicle for women's leadership opportunities. Women have opportunities to work at both internationally known and local film festivals. Local film festivals such as the Cinéma Numérique Ambulant (CNA) located in multiple African countries, are focused on providing screenings of films to people who may be living in isolated rural areas or who may not have access to the cinema due to their socio-economic status. The films shown are African films, meant to educate and share cultural values that are meaningful to marginalized groups who may not see themselves in popular cinema. At these and other African film festivals, women are able to serve important functions such as organizers, jury members, presidents, and promoters at the festivals (Ellerson & Gbadamassi, 2019). However, some places in Africa still struggle with equally representing men and women at their film festivals. South Africa, for example, has a 115-year-old history of filmmaking. However, a study on their film festivals Durban International Film Festival and Encounters found that films made by male filmmakers dominated the film festival landscape whilst the films of women and particularly Black women were underrepresented (Engel, 2018).

Film festivals provide opportunities for filmmakers to connect with their communities as well as promote causes and gain visibility (Rastegar, 2009). Taiwanese female filmmakers have benefitted from film festivals such as the Women's Film Festival, which coincided with the women's rights movement in Taiwan. The Women's Film Festival partnered with multiple women's charities to create educational films and films based on the history of Taiwanese women (Huang, 2003). In Taipei, the inaugural Asian Lesbian Film and Video Festival of 2005

screened short films from countries in the Asia Pacific region. The film festival was considered by the organizers to be a form of social activism. It allowed the perspectives of lesbian filmmakers to be shown and gave lesbian women a space to discuss issues within their community. The organizers also hoped that it would encourage more lesbian women to enter filmmaking (Perspex, 2006). The Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival was one of the first public gatherings available for the Hong Kong LGBT community and in part aimed to counteract their discrimination. The festival began showing films targeted towards a gay male audience but in years with a female curator at the helm, more films directed by lesbian women were included. This is an example of both the opportunities for visibility film festivals give filmmakers and their communities, as well as how leadership can affect diversity, in this case the diversity of stories shown on screen (Qin, 2019).

## **Technology**

Accessibility to technology is of utmost importance to emerging filmmakers. Film is an art that relies on the use of technology to create it and view it. Due to this, technology acted as a gatekeeper in itself before consumer level video equipment became available. Milano (1976) wrote that “portable video and the Women’s Movement had sprung up together” (para. 7). In 1967 Sony released consumer level video recording equipment into the market and found independent filmmakers to be some of their most enthusiastic consumers (Milano, 1976). More independent filmmakers could then access a means of production and have control over the stories they wanted to tell.

Since the sixties, technology has rapidly improved and today consumers have more accessibility to video making technology than ever before. An array of video cameras are available to consumers as well as smartphones with high quality photo/video cameras. A number

of films have been shot with consumer level technology. Low-budget Oscar-winner *Once* (2007) was shot on a consumer level camcorder (Menendez-Otero, 2019). Today, many innovative and award-winning independent films have been shot on iPhones such as *Tangerine* (2015), which was shot on an iPhone 5S (Power, Aguilar, Young, & Elrick, 2016; Wolfe, 2015).

There are several advantages to filming on phones and consumer level cameras in addition to the accessibility to filmmaking they provide. Using a phone or handheld cameras allow the filmmaker to shoot inconspicuously in public places and create a sense of authenticity and intimacy. The informality of using a phone and little equipment also allow the actors to feel more at ease, especially useful when working with less experienced actors (Power et al., 2016; Wolfe, 2015). As consumer-level equipment is also portable and lightweight, it allows for spontaneous shooting and even aerial shots with the use of consumer drones. On smartphones, applications can be downloaded for the user to edit on their phone without having to upload their footage to a computer (Power et al., 2016). Taking advantage of the benefits of shooting with iPhones and consumer level phones can aid female filmmakers. There are even several film festivals made to showcase only independent films made using iPhones (Elrick, 2016).

Technology has also changed how films are distributed and made. The internet provides ultimate accessibility to filmmakers to upload and share their creations. Online crowd-funding platforms such as Kickstarter allow filmmakers to raise money for their projects. Websites such as YouTube and Vimeo can be used to upload content for free. Social media sites allow free marketing and promotion of films as well as a direct way to engage with fans and supporters. If a filmmaker has success with self-distribution on the internet this visibility may allow them to connect with people in the industry who have access to financing and opportunities. Other

filmmakers aim to build a fanbase online and create content for their own niche audience (Pavlov, 2016).

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

This literature review covered several topics which are both directly related to as well as enmeshed in the world of women in film. The film industry is complex, both to navigate as a career and to understand the multilayered factors which cause the film industry to have what Lauzen (2012b) calls a celluloid ceiling for women. Patriarchal systems in society enforce gender roles (Dzubinski & Diehl, 2018) which are impressed upon women through the media and which can influence women in their decisions concerning their career as well as the decisions of gatekeepers (S.L. Smith et al., 2013). This is especially true in the male-dominated film industry and position of film director.

This literature review began by examining the history of women's involvement in film, which was originally quite prolific. The film industry was full of female trailblazers in writing, directing, producing, and editing (Mahar, 2001). This literature review sought to understand why entering the film industry is so difficult today and why women have made such little progress over the past several decades. This literature review was particularly concerned with understanding the career pathways of female film directors in the United States. However, due to the academic research available, film's place as a global commodity, and women's unequal status around the world, research performed on female filmmakers both in the United States and internationally was examined.

To understand the issues concerning female directors, the issues facing all women in leadership positions had to be examined as well. Differences in men's and women's leadership were examined, particularly in relation to their preferences towards transformational and

transactional leadership, as mentions of these styles of leadership were found in the literature on women in film. The research showed that women were adept at being transformational leaders, particularly due to their high levels of emotional intelligence.

Images of women in media examined two different facets of women's representation. First, the images of women leaders in the media and how those images affect women and girls' perception of their leadership abilities. Second, the images in films of women and girls in narrative films. All images of women and girls within the media can affect their psyche to create unconsciously held belief systems about their intelligence and abilities (Hammer, 2009; Reinharz & Kulick, 2007). It was noted that the presence of a female director is very important to representing women and girls onscreen with diverse perspectives and complex characteristics (Hammer, 2009; S.L. Smith et al., 2010; S.L. Smith et al., 2013).

Studies on female filmmakers' careers particularly looked at longitudinal research by Bielby and Bielby (1992) and Bielby and Bielby (1996), which provided detailed and comprehensive information on screenwriters' careers and compared the career paths of male and female screenwriters. Independent female directors and filmmakers' experiences were examined through data from a three-part study by USC Annenberg and Sundance Film Institute. This data gave insight into the statistics regarding women's participation at the Sundance Film Festival. High-profile female directors' experiences were also examined as well as the experiences of minority female directors.

To understand the ways in which female directors can successfully navigate career paths, education was explored. The results of a few studies on filmmakers' education gave insight into the challenges that U.S. film schools face, as well as what other countries such as Australia have done in order to help their graduates be successful. The role of film festivals as a pathway to job

opportunities was discussed, as well as the role of mentorship. Mentorship and networking play a particularly important role in creating a successful career in the film industry, as most workers are free agents. The issues that often occur in networking of homophily, emotional labor, and gendered financial barriers which disproportionately affect women were also discussed.

Overall, the barriers to women navigating a successful path as a female director are complex. There is not any one solution to solving this issue. Government regulation and government funding of films has been successful in other countries, however a change in the perceptions of women's abilities as leaders still needs to be changed at the gatekeeping level.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

Chapter 3 is a detailed description of this study's research design and methodology.

Under Re-Statement of Research Questions, the research questions guiding the study will be restated. The Nature of the Study section will explain the reasons for employing a qualitative approach in this study. The Methodology section will detail the phenomenological method used in the study, including its theory, structure, and the reasons behind using it. The Research Design portion of Chapter 3 will provide a detailed outline of how this study was completed. It includes specifications of the analysis unit used, population, and sample size. It also describes the process of purposive sampling and participant selection used in the study. The sampling frame, criteria for inclusion and exclusion of participants, and process of purposive sampling for maximum variation are also described.

After Research Design, Institutional Review Board standards and procedures are discussed under Protection of Human Subjects. This includes the procedure followed for soliciting and recruiting study participants. IRB procedures are continually discussed throughout the Data Collection, Interview Techniques and Interview Protocol sections. These three sections will provide detail on how interviews will be conducted in terms of exact procedures as well as interview strategies to be used- such as active listening, for example. The interview techniques used will be those as recommended by researchers Creswell & Creswell (2018) and Creswell & Poth (2018). The relationship between the research and interview questions will also be discussed, with attention paid to findings from the literature review and their effect on the chosen research questions. In Validity of the Study, the validity of the study instrument will be discussed, with a detailed description of the process of validating the research questions. This includes prima-facie validity, content validity, peer review validity, expert review validity, and

the overall reliability of the study. A statement of the researcher's personal bias and its possible impact on the research will be given. The use of bracketing and epoché to extenuate bias will also be explained in this section. In the 'Data Analysis' section, the coding process the researcher will use will be described. The coding process will include the use of interrater reliability and validity to strengthen and ensure the validity of the research. Lastly, the Chapter 3 summary will provide an overview of the study's plan from contacting participants for interviews to coding the resulting data.

### **Re-Statement of Research Questions**

Within this chapter the research methods employed to fulfill this study's purpose are described. The purpose of this study is to address and answer the following research questions:

RQ1 : What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?

RQ2 :What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?

RQ3 : How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?

RQ4 : What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?

### **Nature of the Study**

To address these research questions adequately, this study used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research approaches are used to create understandings centered on social issues through studying individuals or groups. It relies on textual data in the form of interviews and observations as well as image data. Quantitative research uses numerical data usually gathered through instruments such as questionnaires or surveys with predetermined answer choices that compare variables and test theories through statistical analysis. Mixed-methods approaches to



research utilize a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The goal of a mixed-methods approach is to have more detailed insights and evidence by using both research approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As this study used a qualitative approach to address the research questions, what follows is an overview of qualitative research's strengths and assumptions.

Qualitative research has several key characteristics and strengths that differentiate it from quantitative research. In qualitative studies, research is typically performed in the setting of the participant, i.e. the place where they are experiencing the issue. The interactions, conversations, and observations researchers have with the participants are therefore anchored by a real-life setting in lieu of contrived settings such as a laboratory. These interactions, interviews, and observations are part of the multiple sources of data that qualitative research relies on and which is one of the approaches strengths. Other sources of qualitative data can include documents, photos, audio, and audiovisual recordings.

Using varied sources of data allows the researcher to provide a complete picture of the issue being studied. This gives more diverse information than what a quantitative approach with predetermined answers such a survey would. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is a holistic approach that reflects the numerous factors that affect an issue or phenomenon. Another strength of qualitative research is its focus on the meanings and understandings of the participants in the study, rather than the viewpoint of the researcher or the literature.

Other key characteristics of qualitative research are found in the research process. Qualitative research has an emergent design process that allows flexibility as the research is being conducted. Several things may change throughout the course of research such as interview questions, settings, data collection methods, or adding participants. Changes reflect a reaction to

the depth and complexity of the issue and allow researchers to make new discoveries that would not be found through a linear data collection. Qualitative data is also characterized by a process of first inductive and then deductive data analysis. The qualitative research process begins with inductive analysis of data that includes classifying themes and identifying patterns after the data is collected. Afterwards, a deductive data analysis is conducted as the researcher evaluates whether or not more data evidence should be collected to support the themes.

Lastly, a very important differentiating factor in qualitative research is the researcher as an instrument of data analysis. In qualitative research the researcher themselves is an instrument of data collection and interpretation. Whereas in quantitative traditions instruments such as surveys or questionnaires are used to collect and interpret data, in qualitative methods the researcher themselves collect the data (in the form of interviews, documents, etc.) and interpret it through coding the data and organizing it into themes. Due to the intimate relationship between the researcher and the data collection process, reflexivity is a necessary and key component of qualitative research. Reflexivity is the reflection of the researcher on the ways in which their own biases and background (cultural, experiential, etc.) affect the themes, meaning, and overall direction of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

There are several philosophical worldview assumptions that can guide the research process, depending on the corresponding research design, methods, and procedures as well as the researchers' perspective. The four main philosophical worldviews are pragmatism, postpositivism, constructivism, and transformative. These worldviews can explain why a researcher chose qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches. Researchers can find themselves fostering one of these worldviews due to their area of study, past research experiences, or influences of peers or mentors. The postpositive assumption is typically

connected with quantitative research, while constructivism and transformative assumptions are connected with qualitative research and pragmatism is connected with mixed-methods research.

Postpositivism is a philosophy that uses the testing of variables to determine cause and effect outcomes. It is sometimes also referred to as the scientific method. It assumes that absolute truth is not possible to determine, but that knowledge is created through the collection of data and evidence for a law or theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Pragmatism is often used by mixed-methods researchers as it is not constrained to a single philosophical idea or research approach. Pragmatists desire to choose the best possible approach for the research question / topic at hand, which is often a blend of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Constructivist and transformative assumptions are most connected to qualitative research. Constructivism makes the assumption that people create meaning from their experiences and contextual settings (historical and cultural) therefore personal interactions between the researcher and participant will allow the researcher to access rich data (Crotty, 1998). It also assumes that inductive interpretations of data will be shaped by the experiences and background of the researcher, and while this must be addressed it is not necessarily a weakness of qualitative research.

## **Methodology**

There are five main approaches to qualitative research. These include narrative research, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Narrative research is an approach wherein researchers record stories of individual or group experiences. Stories can form as collaborations between the researcher and participants throughout the course of research. A common theme in narrative studies that is often examined is individual identity and self-reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnographies study a particular cultural group in their own environment typically through observations and interviews.

Ethnographies are usually conducted over a long period of time and stem from the fields of sociology and anthropology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Grounded Theory is a qualitative approach in which the data collected from the study is used to develop a new theory. The new theory is presented as a finding in the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, Creswell & Poth, 2018). In case studies, researchers study a particular individual, group, event, process, procedure, etc. Case studies also use interviews and field observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This study employed the qualitative approach of phenomenology. Phenomenology is an approach that studies the lived experiences of its participants and identifies the essence of that experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is used to understand and create meaning from the experiences of the participants (Moerrer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). It uses the researcher as a tool to uncover the common structure of the participants' experiences through interpretation of the collected data (Moustakas, 1994). Methods of collecting data in a phenomenological approach includes conducting interviews, making observations, and gathering documents and/or audiovisual and digital materials (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study used semi-structured interviews with open ended questions as its data collection method.

**Structured process of phenomenology.** This study is a descriptive phenomenology and has a specific structure to its research process. As described by Giorgi, Giorgi, and Morley (2017), the steps to conduct a descriptive phenomenology are as follows: First, an interview with the participant is conducted and the researcher transcribes it word for word, then thoroughly reads the transcript. Third, within a phenomenological attitude, the researcher codes the data carefully. The fourth step involves generalizing the participant descriptions in order to extract the psychological meaning behind them. For example, the meaning or message behind an anecdote told in an interview. In the fifth step, the researcher analyzes all the coded data to extract

common themes and structures and writes a description of the participants' experiences based on the data.

**Appropriateness of phenomenology methodology.** Phenomenology made a particularly appropriate fit in studying the experiences of female filmmakers. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, there is a dearth of female filmmakers in the United States, particularly working on high budget productions, and there are many contributing factors and potential explanations for this discrepancy. Semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection gave access to the stories and background of each participant and their career, which are rich details that cannot be gleaned in a quantitative study. Phenomenology specifically focuses on the lived experiences of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By interviewing female filmmakers who have broken the 'celluloid ceiling', the experience of female filmmakers could be understood in greater depth. In phenomenology the researcher has the ability to reflect on the participants' stories of practice and subsequently compare and analyze all the stories for common threads and themes (Danzig & Harris, 1996).

## **Research Design**

This is a qualitative study that uses a descriptive phenomenological approach. This research design was chosen to explore and understand the best practices and lived experiences of female film directors in the United States.

**Analysis unit.** The analysis unit for this study was a female film director based out of the Los Angeles area.

**Population.** The population for this study was all female film directors based in Los Angeles who met the criteria for inclusion. However, the study did not employ significance

testing. Any generalizations to other populations should be done with caution (F. Madjidi, personal communication, December 7, 2019).

**Sample size.** In qualitative research, the literature has varied viewpoints on the sample size needed in a study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend a sample size of 3-10 participants in a phenomenological study. In this study, a sample size of 15 women were selected from the population to be interviewed.

**Participant selection.** Participants were selected on the basis of their geographical location, amount of experience, and type of experience. Participants had to be female, be based in the Los Angeles area and have 10 years of experience as a director. Preference was given to directors of narrative films, as the literature review shows that female directors are most underrepresented in this area.

**Sampling frame.** The sampling frame was the Directors Guild of America online member directory, found at: <https://www.dga.org/Employers/EmployersSearch.aspx>. The member directory lists members by region and gender and provides contact information for members. When limited to female directors in the Los Angeles area, approximately 1,170 women appeared in the search.

**Criteria of inclusion and exclusion.** The following are the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of subjects that were used to create maximum variation in the sample.

Criteria for inclusion:

- Participant must self-identify as female.
- Participant must work in the Los Angeles area.
- Participant must have 10 years of experience working in the film and television industry.

- Participant must have directed 3 feature films, with preference given to narrative films.

Criteria for exclusion:

- Participant is not available for an interview during February or March 2020.
- Participant does not consent to audio recording of interview.

**Criteria for maximum variation.** Purposive sampling with maximum variation was used to select participants. Purposive sampling is a method of sampling that allows the researcher to hand select participants in order to create the best selection of participants for their study. The researcher uses their background knowledge to decide what types of participants would be best suited to their study. Using criteria for maximum variation allows qualitative researchers to choose diverse participants which will deepen the quality of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Before conducting this study, it was approved through Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All procedures in the study were completed in accordance with IRB's standards. The master list used was publicly available and participants were recruited through a pre-approved script (Appendix C). An informed consent form (Appendix B) was provided to the participants through email as well as at the interview and consent was obtained. The form was reviewed verbally with the participant prior to beginning the interview. This consent form included permission to be audio recorded during the interview and the option to review and edit their interview transcript if desired within a one week window. Participants' identities were kept confidential and participants were informed that all data and transcripts would be permanently erased from the researcher's USB key within three years. The USB key will be kept in a locked

fireproof safe (to which only the principal investigator has access to) in the principal investigator's garage for a maximum of three years, after which the files on the USB key will be deleted and the USB key destroyed. All audio files will be deleted after transcribing is completed. No identifying information of the participants was presented in the study. Participants were informed of the potential benefits and risks of the study in the informed consent form. The researcher did not have any conflicts of interest that prevented them from completing the study ethically and in accordance with IRB's standards.

### **Data Collection**

Specific data collection procedures were followed to ensure a smooth process and the integrity of the data collected. Potential participants that qualified for inclusion from the master list were contacted through an introductory email. The email script sent was previously approved by IRB and invites the director to be a participant in the study. When the invitation was accepted, a request was made for their full contact information. A personal interview was scheduled for the last week of February or first two weeks of March 2020.

On the day of each interview, the researcher planned to arrive 30 minutes early. The researcher brought two methods of recording the interview (in this case, two phones with recording capabilities and enough storage to record a full one hour interview). A pad of paper and pens were brought for note-taking during the interview. A printout of the research questions and interview questions with space to write beside each question were also brought for the researcher to take notes. Two copies of the informed consent form were brought to each interview. Prior to beginning the interview the researcher engaged in an introduction with the participant and light icebreaker conversation, then reviewed the Informed Consent form with the participant. After reviewing the Informed Consent form, the researcher briefly prepared the



participant for the interview by reviewing the procedures, the number of questions, and the approximate length of time the interview would take, and requesting permission to use recording devices and setting them up. During this time the researcher also reminded the interviewee that the interview is semi-structured and therefore there may be additional follow-up questions at the end of the interview.

Following each interview, the researcher thanked the participant for their time and asked if they could call or email them in the future should there be any additional questions. The researcher also gave the interviewee their contact information on a business card. The researcher then took the first opportunity they had that day to sit down and reflect upon the day's interview. This was done as soon as possible so that the researcher could recall as many details as possible. The researcher used note-taking (handwritten and typed) and voice recordings to record their impressions of the interview and the insights that they found. These notes were made to help the researcher easily recall details from the interview when they began synthesizing all of the interview data at a later date. Approximately 2-4 weeks after each interview, a handwritten expression of gratitude for the subject's participation was mailed to each person.

### **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol is essentially the researcher's blueprint of the interview, to be followed during each interview conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As previously stated in the Data Collection section, two copies of the Informed Consent Form, two recording devices, pens, and a pad of paper for notetaking will be brought to each interview. The final interview protocol used for the study is as follows. It was reviewed by the preliminary review committee before being granted approval and finalized by the dissertation committee. This protocol was

designed for a specific one-time usage, therefore the conventional methods of creating reliability for a data collection instrument did not apply.

#### Interview Protocol:

- Researcher will greet the interviewee, thank them for their time, and engage in an icebreaker to begin the conversation.
- Researcher will review the Informed Consent form with the participant, request permission to record and if given permission set up the recording devices. The researcher will also review the general number and content of interview questions, and the approximate time the interview will take.
- Researcher will remind the participant that the interview is semi-structured and that they may have follow up questions at the end.
- During the interview the researcher may take handwritten notes using the pen and notepad and will be an active listener, only asking extraneous questions if needed for clarification purposes.
- Researcher will ask any follow up questions at the end of the interview but stay within the allotted time frame. They will also ask the participant if they had anything else they would like to add.
- Researcher will thank the participant for their time and ask permission to contact them by phone or email if they have any further questions. Researcher will then give the participant their own contact information on a business card.
- As soon as possible that same day the researcher will take time alone to write down their reflections of the day's interview, either through typing, handwriting, or audio recording.

Researcher mailed a handwritten expression of gratitude for the subject's participation approximately 2-4 weeks after the interview.

### **Interview Techniques**

Face to face interviews as a data collection method have the advantage of giving the researcher control over the questions during the interview and allow the participant to provide historical information that the researcher may not have otherwise known or been able to access. There are several weaknesses of face to face interviews as well. They may not be held in the natural setting of the participant and the presence of the researcher may cause the participant to bias their answers. It is not guaranteed that the participant will be a well-articulated person who will communicate their ideas effectively, and the information obtained from the interview is always filtered through the perception of the interviewee. However, utilizing appropriate and research based interview techniques can allay some of these weaknesses and play an important part in collecting rich interview data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Interviews should be conducted in an area that is quiet and free of distractions. Interviewers should stay on task and stick to the subject matter, following the interview protocol closely. Interviews should be completed within the timeframe the researcher gave the interviewee. A respectful, courteous, and professional demeanor should be held throughout the interview. This involves asking few extraneous questions beyond essential clarifying questions, and being an active listener (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher of this study utilized these techniques to the best of their ability during the interviews.

**Relationship between research and interview questions.** The following table shows the relationship between the study's research and interview questions. The researcher developed interview questions with the intent of writing questions that corresponded directly to the research

questions. This table is the first draft of the research questions, before undergoing any peer or expert review.

Table 1

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions.*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Corresponding Interview Questions</b>
RQ 1: What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?	IQ 1: What obstacles in the directing process are most challenging to you? IQ 2: What unique challenges female directors face on set? IQ 3: Do you see differences in how women approach the art of directing?
RQ 2: What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?	IQ 4: What strategies do you use to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process successfully? IQ 5: How do you create a common goal or vision for the cast and crew to work towards?
RQ 3: How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?	IQ 6: How do you define your success as a leader? IQ 7: How do you measure your success as a leader?
RQ 4: What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?	IQ 8: What challenges do women entering the film industry as directors face today? IQ 9: What resources are available to new female directors? IQ 10: What role did mentorship play in your career's success?

*Note:* This table shows the study's four research questions along with the corresponding interview questions prior to peer or expert review.

**Validity of the study.** To ensure validity of the study, multiple methods of determining validity were employed. These methods included prima-facie and content validity, peer review validity, and expert validity.

***Prima-facie and content validity.*** Prima-facie validity was established through the creation of research and interview questions that directly correlated with one another. The research questions underwent peer and expert review and were approved by the dissertation committee before going forward with the study.

***Peer review validity.*** Peer review adds validity to the research by ensuring that the questions asked in the interview will accurately answer the research questions. Three doctoral students from Pepperdine's Ed.D. program in Organizational Leadership and Excellence in Innovations Program made up the preliminary peer review panel for this study. These students were also in the process of writing their dissertation at Pepperdine University and were using similar qualitative methodologies in their research. All of these students had completed coursework on qualitative and quantitative research design and analysis. For the review, they were given a summary of the study's research statement and a form with the research questions and corresponding interview questions (See Appendix D). The peer reviewers chose whether or not the question should be kept, taken out, or changed. If they believed the question should be changed then they were asked to provide a suggested revision.

In order to easily view all of the peer review feedback, the researcher created a spreadsheet that compared suggestions side by side. Based on the feedback, none of the interview questions corresponding to research questions one and two were changed, save for a typo in question two. Interview question seven was changed to include the word *measure*. By

Table 2

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions (Revised after Peer Review)*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ 1: What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?	IQ 1: What obstacles in the directing process are most challenging to you? IQ 2: What unique challenges do female directors face on set? IQ 3: Do you see differences in how women approach the art of directing?
RQ 2: What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?	IQ 4: What strategies do you use to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process successfully? IQ 5: How do you create a common goal or vision for the cast and crew to work towards?
RQ 3: How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?	IQ 6: How do you define your success as a leader? IQ 7: How do you track and measure your success as a leader?
RQ 4: What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?	IQ 8: What challenges do women entering the film industry as directors face today? IQ 9: What resources are available to new female directors? IQ 10: What role did mentorship play in your career's success? IQ 11: What advice would you give to aspiring female directors?

*Note:*. This table shows the four research questions and the corresponding interview questions revised according to the feedback from the peer reviewers. The interview protocol informed all other changes to the order and phrasing of questions.

including both of the words track and measure in the question the researcher is asking how the participant follows her growth and success as a leader and with what metrics if any does she measure this success. Lastly, one peer reviewer suggested asking for the participant's advice for

new female directors, and this was added as interview question 11 (corresponding to Research Question 4).

***Expert review validity.*** After the preliminary peer review, the research questions were also reviewed by a panel of three expert reviewers, the dissertation committee. The dissertation committee decided as a group whether the results of the recommended revisions were satisfactory. If there was not a majority agreement, the committee chair's decision was final. Table 3 shows the final interview questions chosen to address the research questions.

Several changes and additions to the interview questions were made after the expert review. An icebreaker was added in order to start the conversation by asking the participant to recall their favorite film they directed. The intent of the icebreaker is to make the participant comfortable and ease into the following interview questions. Interview Question two was rephrased. Interview question 4 was broken into four questions (4, 4a, 4b, and 4c). Question 4a and 4b were originally questions four and five, and question 4c, although rephrased, was originally question 10.

### **Statement of Personal Bias**

Qualitative research necessitates that the researcher is the instrument of data collection and analysis. For this reason, prior to beginning a study, a researcher must reflect upon her or his own underlying biases, assumptions, and values first (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the case of this study, the researcher was a woman who had a B.F.A in Film & Media Studies and who has aspirations to work in the film industry as a writer and director. As a personal bias this may be helpful in connecting with the participants during the interview. This may also lend to the researcher being a particularly attentive and active listener as this is a subject that is very meaningful to her.

Table 3

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions (Revised after Expert Review).*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ 1: What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?	Icebreaker: What has been your favorite movie to direct? <i>IQ 1: What challenges or obstacles did you face in directing this or other films?</i> <i>IQ 2: Are any of these challenges unique to women directors?</i> IQ 3: Do you see differences in how women approach the art of directing?
RQ 2: What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?	<i>IQ 4: How do you overcome the challenges we just discussed?</i> IQ 4a: How do you create a common goal or vision for the cast and crew to work towards? IQ 4b: <i>Were there any resources available to support your growth as a director?</i> <i>IQ 4c: Has mentoring played a role in your growth as a director?</i>
RQ 3: How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?	IQ 5: How do you define your success as a leader? IQ 6: How do you track and measure your success as a leader?
RQ 4: What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?	<i>IQ 7: If there was any one thing you could do differently or do over in your career, what would that be?</i> <i>IQ 8: Did you learn a lesson from that?</i> IQ 9: What advice would you give to aspiring female directors?

*Note.* This table reflects the changes made to the interview questions after the expert review performed by the dissertation committee. Interview questions in italics indicate questions or words that were changed by the committee.



**Bracketing and epoché.** Bracketing and epoché are techniques used by researchers to mitigate the effects of their biases and assumptions on the research results. Due to the existence of personal biases it is imperative that qualitative researchers use these techniques to preserve the integrity of the data and interpret the respondents' answers accurately (Giorgi et al., 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Putting aside biases through bracketing and epoché allows a researcher to adopt a "phenomenological attitude" (Giorgi et al., 2017, p. 178) in which she or he frees her or himself from preconceived ideas and judgements about the subject and approaches interviews with a receptive and open mind (Moustakas, 1994). As recommended by Tufford and Newman (2012), the method of bracketing used in this research will be journaling / note-taking. Journaling and note-taking throughout the entire research process, but especially during the coding and analysis, will allow the researcher to reflect upon data more fully and be aware of preconceptions and biases.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process followed these steps as recommended by Creswell & Creswell (2018):

#### **Step 1: Transcription**

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher (typed onto a Google document). The researcher listened to the recording multiple times for accuracy. It is during this early stage that participants had the option to review their transcript for accuracy if requested.

#### **Step 2: Reading the Data**

Data was read by the researcher for an overall sense of the data's meaning in its totality. The researcher read to pick up on the participants' attitudes and emergent themes. The researcher made notes on printed copies of the interview transcriptions.

### Step 3: Coding

Coding is the process in qualitative research in which data is organized according to categories present in the data. Data was coded using *in vivo* terms (words directly from the participants' interviews).

### Step 4: Themes and Description

In Step 4, themes were generated from the categories found in the coding process. All themes were supported by the words of the participants and showcased diverse perspectives. A description of the general perspectives of the participants supported by the interview data was written as well. This description included quotations from the participants, stories the participants shared, and contrasting participant perspectives.

### Step 5: Findings

The findings of the analysis were communicated through a discussion of the themes that were found in the data. This discussion included comparing and contrasting the findings of the study to the present literature on female film directors.

**Interrater reliability and validity.** To establish interrater reliability and validity, the data was triangulated by using two other coders for the data. These coders, like the preliminary peer review panel, were also Pepperdine students in the Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership program completing their dissertations under the Excellence in Innovations program. The two supplementary coders coded the data in addition to the author of the study. This was done to ensure that all the appropriate themes present in the data were recorded. It also helped to eliminate any potential biases of the researcher.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

Chapter 3 provided an in-depth explanation of the study's research design, methodology, and process. This qualitative study is a descriptive phenomenology on the best leadership practices of female film directors in the United States. Phenomenology was chosen as the methodology for its ability to interpret meaning from the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The population of the study was female film directors from the United States and the analysis unit for this study was a U.S. female film director based in the Los Angeles area with ten years of experience in the film and television industry who had directed at least three feature films. Preference was given to directors of narrative films. A sample size of 15 women were selected through purposive sampling with maximum variation. A publicly available master list was used from the Director's Guild of America website. In order to narrow down the master list, specific criteria for inclusion in and exclusion from the study were listed. Procedures for the protection of human subjects as determined by the Institutional Review Board were outlined. A detailed description of the data collection process of semi-structured interviews was given, as well as interview techniques and protocol. To ensure the study's validity, multiple methods of establishing validity were followed, including prima-facie validity, peer review validity (preliminary review of the research questions by peers), and expert-review validity (secondary review of research questions by the dissertation committee). A statement of personal bias was given in order to present the researcher's potential biases upfront. The techniques used for bracketing and epoché were explained in detail. Lastly, the steps followed for data analysis were outlined, including the triangulation of data through the use of two secondary coders.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

Female directors continue to be a minority in the United States film industry (Hunt et al., 2019, S.L. Smith et al., 2013). This study sought to analyze the challenges female film directors face in their work, the strategies they use to deal with those challenges, their definition of success in their work as a leader, and the recommendations they would make to women pursuing a directing career. To address these topics, the following research questions were chosen:

RQ1: What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?

RQ2: What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?

RQ3: How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?

RQ4: What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?

To answer these questions, 12 open-ended interview questions were written for participants. The interview questions underwent prima-facie and content validity to ensure that they accurately targeted the research questions. They also underwent peer-review and expert-review validity to further ensure their correlation with the research questions. Tables 1-3 in Chapter 3 show the evolution of the questions from their initial creation through peer and expert review. The final questions used for the study are as follows:

Icebreaker: What has been your favorite movie to direct?

- What challenges or obstacles did you face in directing this or other films?
- Are any of these challenges unique to women directors?
- Do you see differences in how women approach the art of directing?
- How do you overcome the challenges we just discussed?

- How do you create a common goal or vision for the cast and crew to work towards?
- Were there any resources available to support your growth as a director?
- Has mentoring played a role in your growth as a director?
- How do you define your success as a leader?
- How do you track and measure your success as a leader?
- If there was any one thing you could do differently or do over in your career, what would that be?
- Did you learn a lesson from that?
- What advice would you give to aspiring female directors?

As the interviews were conducted, two topics came up continually which were added as questions to subsequent interviews. The topics were the support of other women in the field and the reasons for staying in the field despite its difficulties. The emergent questions which were added to the interviews are:

Emergent Question 1: Have other women in the industry been supportive?

Emergent Question 2: What keeps you in the industry?

Sixteen of the participants answered the first question and 18 of the participants answered the second question. Chapter 4 reports the responses of the participants to these questions. It also gives an overview of the participants who participated in the study and the data collection process. The inter-rater review process that was used to validate the coding step of the data analysis process is also reviewed.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were all female film directors based in the Los Angeles area. Participants ranged in age from 35 to 74 years old. Each participant had directed at least three feature films. All of the participants also had experience working in television. The study aimed to have 15 participants but there was enough interest in the study and time to interview a total of 20 participants.

## **Data Collection**

Participants were recruited from the publicly accessible Director's Guild of America online member directory. The directory listed approximately 1,170 persons as female directors working in Los Angeles and this served as the master list for the study. From the master list, 193 women qualified for the study. Women were determined to be qualified by going through the criteria for inclusion. Their inclusion on the DGA master list ensured that they were based in Los Angeles and the Internet Movie Database ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)) was used to determine their years of experience in the industry (10 years required) and the number of feature films they had directed (three required). From the qualified participants, 129 potential participants were contacted using the email recruitment script (Appendix C). Some qualified participants were not able to be contacted because they did not have contact information on their Director's Guild profile. If their contact email could be publicly found elsewhere online such as a professional website then they were contacted. Emails were sent after receiving notice of IRB Approval (Appendix A) from February 18th - 29th, 2020. Twenty interviews were scheduled for the last week of February and first two weeks of March 2020.

Upon agreeing to participating in the study, all participants were emailed an informed consent form and given an opportunity to ask questions and/or review it together in person at the

Table 4

*Dates of Participant Interviews*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
Participant A	February 27th, 2020
Participant B	March 3rd, 2020
Participant C	March 5th, 2020
Participant D	March 5th, 2020
Participant E	March 5th, 2020
Participant F	March 6th, 2020
Participant G	March 6th, 2020
Participant H	March 6th, 2020
Participant I	March 7th, 2020
Participant J	March 9th, 2020
Participant K	March 10th, 2020
Participant L	March 10th, 2020
Participant M	March 10th, 2020
Participant N	March 11th, 2020
Participant O	March 11th, 2020
Participant P	March 12th, 2020
Participant Q	March 13th, 2020
Participant R	March 13th, 2020
Participant S	March 15th, 2020
Participant T	March 15th, 2020

*Note.* The participant letter was determined by the order of interviews. The first interviewee was Participant A and the last interviewee was Participant T, for example.

time of the interview. Some participants were not in Los Angeles during the first two weeks of March or were not able to meet due to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore three of the interviews were completed using Zoom (an online video conferencing tool) and three were completed via telephone. The remaining 14 interviews were all completed in person at a location of the participant's choice. Confidentiality was maintained by the researcher for all participants, which allowed participants to feel more comfortable in opening up and expressing their honest views and opinions during the interviews. The participants were requested to give a 45-60 minute interview. The shortest interview was approximately 20 minutes and the longest was approximately an hour and a half, not including introductions and pleasantries.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process followed the steps recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018) for a qualitative study. During the interviews the audio was recorded on two devices with audio recording capability (in case one should fail), and extensive handwritten notes were taken by the researcher. Prior to the interview, the researcher practiced epoché by attempting to mentally store away their biases and preconceived ideas about the careers and obstacles of female directors. This allowed the researcher to adopt a phenomenological mindset (Giorgi et al., 2017; Moustakas, 1994). Sometime after the interview, the researcher practiced bracketing by writing down their reflections of the interview in a journal. This is a method of bracketing, as well as the handwritten notes that were taken during the interviews (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher onto a Google document. The researcher transcribed the interviews herself to avoid compromising the data through a third-party transcription service as well as to begin absorbing and processing the data sooner. Only one participant requested to review their transcript (an option given in the informed consent form)



and she did not make any changes to the transcription. After all the interviews were completed and transcribed, the researcher began reading the transcripts in full and making notes of emergent themes. Afterward, a Google spreadsheet was created to code the participants' transcripts. The data was coded using in-vivo terms, that is the words of the participants, directly from the transcripts. Themes were then created from the codes which reflected the participants' perspectives. A rich, detailed description was written to accompany these themes. Lastly, a discussion surrounding the findings and themes was written. This discussion included quotations and anecdotes from the participants to illustrate and accurately express their meaning.

### **Inter-Rater Review Process**

An inter-rater review process was utilized to validate the coding done by the researcher. Two peer-reviewers analyzed the coding document for accuracy. The peer-reviewers were doctoral students at Pepperdine University, also in the EIP program and therefore familiar with the phenomenology methodology. The coding document provided to the reviewers had the participants' responses coded with in-vivo terms, as well as the original questions and themes which were found for each question by the researcher. The reviewers analyzed the codes and

Table 5

#### *Inter-rater Coding Suggestions and Modifications*

Interview Question	Codes	Suggestion	Modification
IQ2	women on women hate	Include in recommendations for future research	Included in Emergent Question 1 as well as recommendations for future research

themes and provided their feedback and suggestions for revision. These are provided in the table below along with the modifications made.

## **Data Presentation**

The data from the interviews is presented by order of research question, with the results from the interview questions corresponding to the first research question presented first and so on. The themes which emerged from the coding process are presented along with direct quotes from participants to further enhance meaning. A chart showing the frequency of responses was provided as a visual reference for each question.

### **Research Question 1**

RQ1: What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?

The first research question had the following three corresponding interview questions:

IQ 1: What challenges or obstacles did you face in directing this or other films?

IQ 2: Are any of these challenges unique to women directors?

IQ 3: Do you see differences in how women approach the art of directing?

**Interview Question 1.** “What challenges or obstacles did you face in directing this or other films?”

A total of 20 answers to this question were found in the participant responses and the four common themes that emerged from coding were financing, creative challenges, budget/time constraints, and hiring (see Figure 1).

Interview Question 1  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)

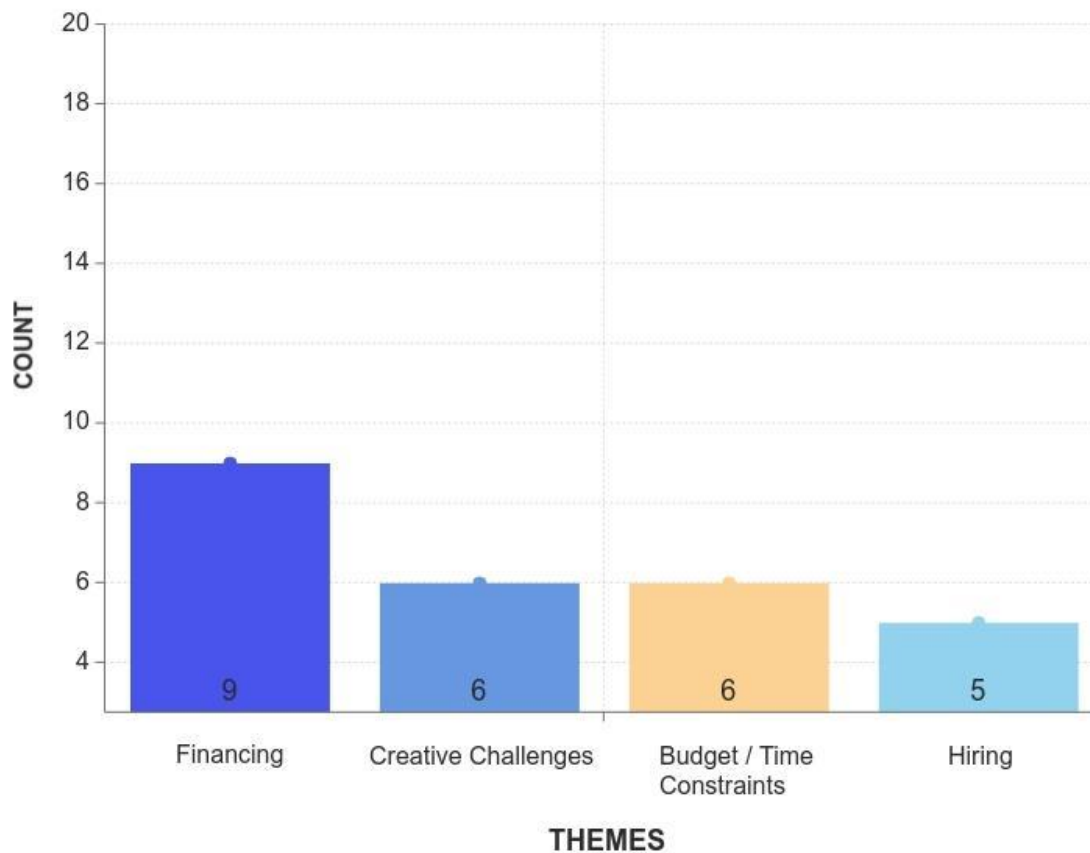


Figure 1. The four themes which resulted from the coding of Interview Question 1: Financing, creative challenges, budget/time constraints, and hiring.

**Financing.** Accessing financing was reported in nine participant responses as a challenge or obstacle to directing films. Financing included self-financing, independent financing, and convincing investors and producers to finance. Participant R said “finance was probably the most challenging aspect”, and Participant F “the challenge was convincing the entities that were going to be able to make it happen financially that this was a legitimate project.” In addition, Participant B stated “the biggest barrier to entry in terms of an independent film is financing.”

Participant E felt that “the kind of film I’m telling, which is female-driven- black female driven, is harder to raise money for.”

**Budget and time constraints.** Constraints due to budget and time were also mentioned in six participant responses. Budget and time constraints including keeping on schedule and in budget, having enough budget and time to achieve the vision, and the budget not allowing for creativity. Participant D said “the greatest challenge is to achieve a high level of creative output within the budget and monetary restraints.” Participant E stated that budget issues create “trickle-down challenges . . . it restricts the creative vision and the execution, the production value.” Participant G said that “if you don't have the money and time that you need to realize not just your vision but what you have signed on to do and promised to do, that's extraordinarily stressful.”

**Hiring.** Hiring was also mentioned as frequently as budget as an obstacle or challenge, in six participant responses. Issues with hiring included not being able to take the crew you want on location and having to hire locally, not being able to hire who you want, not having the right people around you, and hiring in the casting process. Participant H said a challenge of shooting on location was that “you can't really take that many people because they want to hire locally.” Participant K spoke about the hiring challenges on her first feature: “I had to hire local support. . . There was a bit of an old school mentality around things . . . I was like well the way it's done doesn't work, why can't we change that rule?” Participant L spoke about not being allowed to hire her own team on her first feature, and that the studio may have felt that “we have to protect her, you know, we got to get the right people around her. She doesn't know which people are the right people.” She also feels that had she been able to hire who she wanted she “would have definitely had better end product.”

***Creative challenges.*** The fourth theme found in responses was creative challenges. Creative challenges were mentioned in five of the responses. Creative challenges included creating a film that matched the vision despite budget / time constraints, creative challenges to do with the nature of a particular film they had directed, and being flexible and creative with changes that occurred during shooting. Participant B said “you have to hurdle two things: the business and the creativity and pray that it comes together in a beautiful way, you know, and if you can't manage both it's- it's just uphill.” Participant D found that “the greatest challenges are getting the right pieces together to create the story you envision, you know, creating the most optimal expression . . . within the budget, within the schedule.”

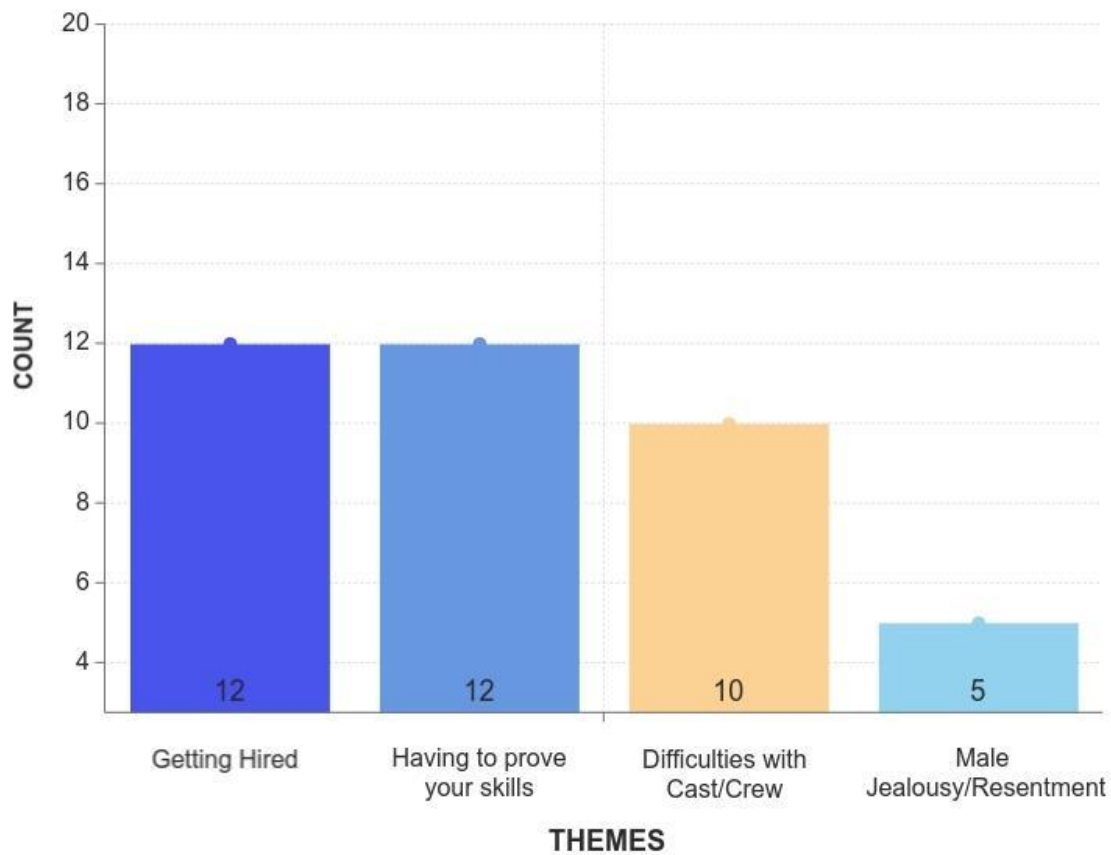
**Interview question 2.** “Are any of these challenges unique to women directors?”

The second interview question yielded four themes from 26 responses: getting hired, having to prove your skills, difficulties with cast/crew, and male jealousy/resentment (see Figure 2).

***Getting hired.*** Getting hired as a director was mentioned in 12 of the participant responses. Hiring issues included not being re-hired despite previously directing successful work for their employers, men with equal or less experience being hired over them repeatedly, not being hired due to gender or parental status, and not being hired because a studio had already hired female directors. Participant C spoke about not being able to direct a film she pitched after directing a successful feature, nor the feature’s sequel:

I figured since I had made \$200 million dollars for the studio on a \$14 million dollar budget . . . that they would just automatically give me the job . . . and I didn’t get the job and I was astounded. Even the fact when I did the first movie . . . I wasn’t allowed to direct the sequel. Women get treated very differently than men.

Interview Question 2  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)



*Figure 2.* The coding of Interview Question 2 resulted in four themes: getting hired, having to prove your skills, difficulties with cast/crew, and male jealousy/resentment.

Participant F was attached to direct a film but was “let go from that because I was pregnant, because they didn't want a pregnant film director.” She did add that “in their defense (the studio) I was pregnant on the next film we did.” Participant D said hiring challenges were a constant issue in her career:

I just kept . . . getting passed up for all these guys who didn't know half of what I knew.

Had half of creative ability and potential and I would literally watch them get to direct, get to direct, and I would just have to, you know, just endure. It happened over and over again for years.

***Having to prove your skills.*** Women feeling as if they had to prove their skills was a response that also appeared in 12 participant responses. Having to prove skills included having to prove one's ability to the cast and crew before being accepted, enduring increased scrutiny of their work, and participants feeling that as women they needed to work twice as hard in order to be respected. Participant J said, "you always have to be ready to defend what you're doing, why you're doing it, why you didn't choose one of the alternatives . . . I got the sense like, would I be getting some of these questions if I were a dude?" Participant H said "I think they (studios) are tougher on you. I don't think you get the same kind of freedom at every turn that men do. I think you get questioned a lot more." Participant G spoke about how her gender influences perceptions of her on set:

I have a lot of technical experience but as a woman I've always had to prove myself. So the first few days of production are spent with . . . the tech crew assuming that I don't know something and then realizing that I do. Now once they realize that I do everything's fine.

***Difficulties with cast/crew.*** Difficulties with cast/crew was reported in 10 responses from participants. This included being disrespectful either through not listening or making disrespectful and sometimes sexist comments. Participant N said "you have the crew looking at you like who is this girl here, you know telling me what to do and leading this crew and she doesn't even know what she's talking about." Participant M told a story about a male Assistant

Director who decided to begin shooting without her direction. Participant L said that during the production of her first feature film she

definitely got hazed, especially most of the COUNTRY crew. . . It was always all guys, you know there's very few women on crew . . . generally you squint . . . and on any day on set most of the crew is guys, I'd say like 90 to 95%.

Participant K also experienced issues with male crew members, such as

older men who are in the crew who couldn't even look me in the eye. I'm the director, I'm saying okay, this is what I think we should do here and the person's just, the whole time, looking at my producer. . . there were definitely people like that who you could just tell felt uncomfortable that I was a woman giving direction.

***Male jealousy/resentment.*** Males being jealous or resentful of a female director is closely tied to the theme of cast/crew not taking direction and was mentioned in five responses to the second interview question. Male jealousy included males on set feeling emasculated, jealous, resentful, or harboring animosity towards female directors. Participant A said of her experience, "back then you kind of thought of the director as being more of an auteur, that they were in command. And I think that a lot of men are challenged by that, or feel emasculated by that."

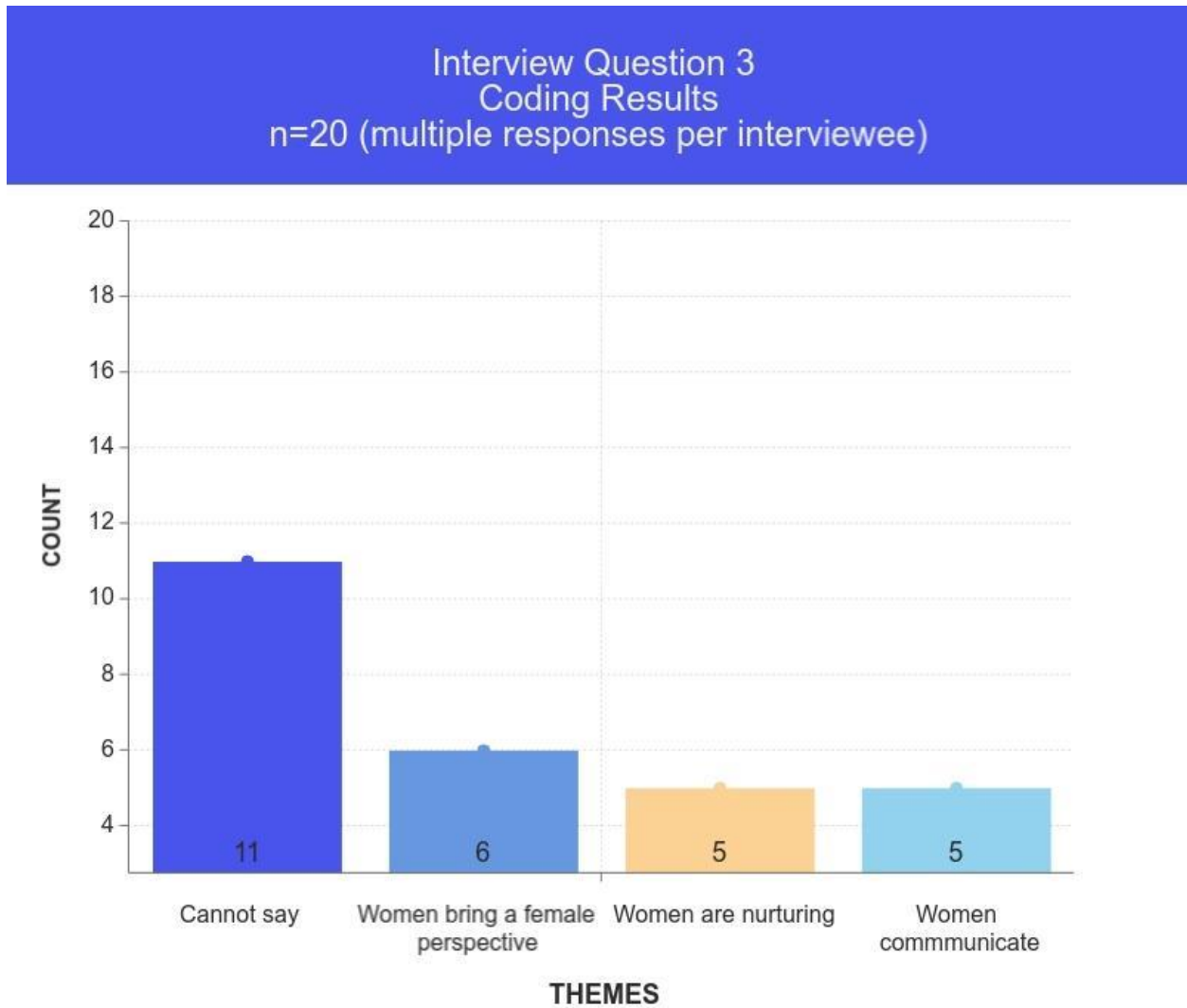
Participant B, who also directed television in addition to film told the following story:

First day on the set of a TV show. I meet the AD, white guy . . . I was in some kind of, like a female parity program. So these are words out of his mouth: "Ugh when they let women like you come through these programs, that means I'm never going to get a chance to direct." He says this to my face. You know, he's the AD. Would he say that to a man? No. So you're already starting with this kind of animosity towards you because you're there as a woman that the network put there. Like oh you're skipping steps. Never



mind my vast experience, career, education, and creativity that I assure you that you don't have. I guarantee it.

**Interview question 3.** “Do you see differences in how women approach the art of directing?”



*Figure 3.* The four themes that resulted from the coding of Interview Question 3: cannot say (whether or not women and men direct differently), women bring a female perspective, women are nurturing, and women communicate.

The second interview question had 15 responses and four themes emerged (see Figure 3). Some women felt unable to answer the question (cannot say), and the other three themes were as follows: women bring a female perspective, women are nurturing, and women communicate.

***Cannot say.*** The most common theme (which appeared in 11 responses) was that participants did not feel equipped to answer the question. This response was either due to not having been around many directors on set, or not wanting to make generalizations according to gender. Participant R said of her directing experience:

directing is incredibly lonely because even though you're on a set surrounded by people you're sort of separated from everyone else as well and . . . you're the leader and so then you don't work with other directors, you know.

Similarly, Participant H said “I haven’t been on set with a lot of female directors. There wasn’t the opportunity when I was shadowing other directors to do that. . . I’m always curious because I don’t know.” Participant G said, “I don’t know that I can draw a hard line gender-wise” and Participant D said:

I believe that we're so unique as individuals no matter what our gender that we bring all different aspects to it (directing) . . . I don't believe that we can generalize according to gender and I think that as long as we do that there will be a bias.

***Women bring a female perspective.*** The second theme which was present in six participant responses is that women bring a female perspective to their work. Bringing a female perspective to the role of director was reported by participants as being in the form of creative choices and as a benefit to working with actors. Participant I said she uses her feminine perspective when working with actors:

I think women are more emotional . . . When I watch my male friends that direct they go more for the shot . . . and I go more for the emotion. Sometimes I don't even care where the camera's at. Just make sure it's in focus. They take forever to set up the shot and I take forever to get to the emotion.

In a similar vein Participant Q said "it helps me be a better director to bring in those qualities of being a woman. Not to mention how comfortable I am talking about emotion and working with an actor through an emotional performance." Participant P spoke about how her perspective as a woman affects her shots and framing:

The other thing that I think is really different is my eye versus a male eye and where I choose to place the camera. . . let me give you an example. . . the reason I love Patty Jenkins and her portrayal of Wonder Woman is that everywhere she placed the camera Wonder Woman was never a sex symbol. She was strong and she was beautiful but she was never sexy overtly. Then you know we go and see the other DC films where Wonder Woman plays a role with Batman and you know, Superman and all of that and all of a sudden, she does the exact same move- her signature move where she sweeps her leg but then we see a little crease of her bottom. And that's male perspective and it's so insidious that we don't recognize it.

***Women are nurturing.*** Five participant responses said that women were more nurturing directors than men. Nurturing directing traits included empathy, kindness, and emotional consciousness. Participant N said "some men are not as nurturing and I think . . . most women have that naturally so some actors respond to that." Participant F said that "women do tend to want to bring out the very best in other creative collaborators." Participant L stated that "I have a

softer approach and I think that has been much more accepted nowadays from the crew and from the cast.”

***Women communicate.*** Women’s communication skills were also mentioned in five participant responses. Communication skills included the ability to collaborate with others, listen, and share a vision. Participant Q said, “there are some things women do really well like stay calm, listen, show respect.” Participant N said that “communication is huge and again male directors don't always share information as easily as some women directors. . . I think it’s ego.” Participant K also said she “would say that most female directors are more collaborative.”

## **Research Question 2**

RQ2: What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?

The second research question had the following four corresponding interview questions:

IQ4: How do you overcome the challenges we just discussed?

(4a) How do you create a common goal or vision for the cast and crew to work towards?

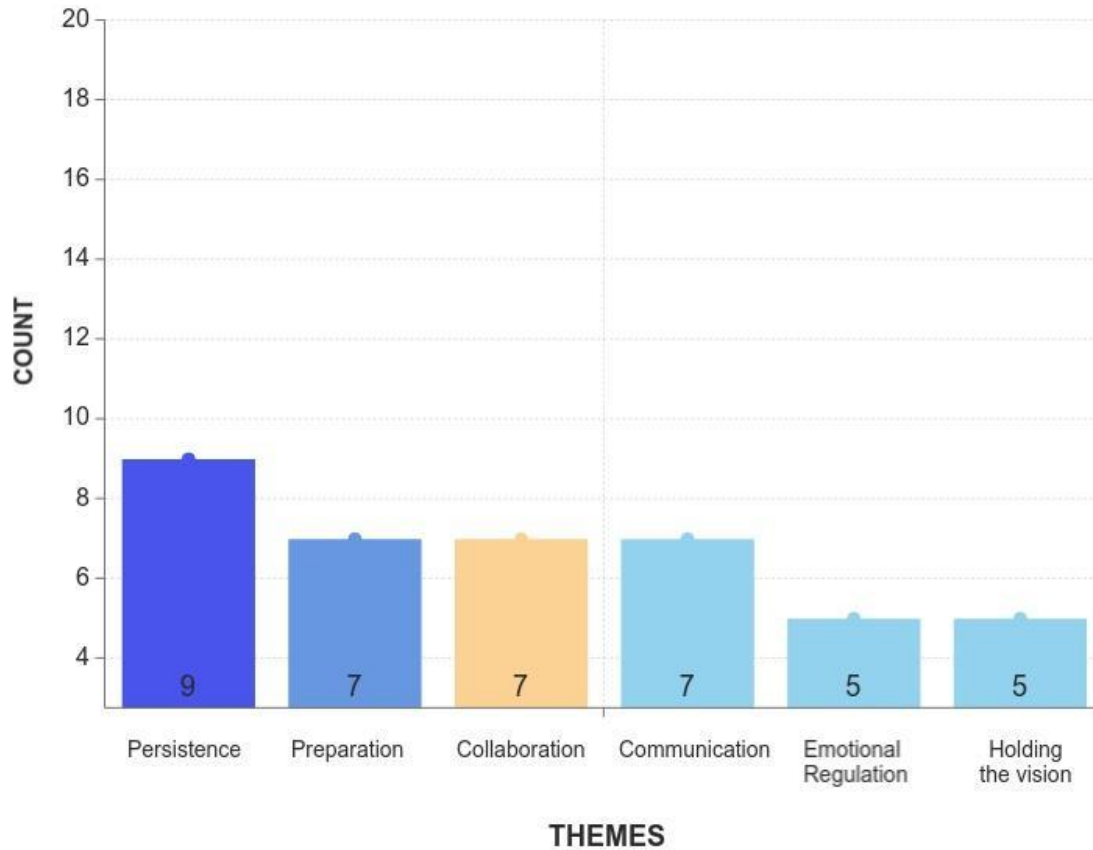
(4b) Were there any resources available to support your growth as a director?

(4c) Has mentoring played a role in your growth as a director?

**Interview question 4.** “How do you overcome the challenges we just discussed?”

The fourth interview question had 31 responses and six themes emerged. The themes are: persistence, preparation, collaboration, communication, emotional regulation, and holding the vision (see Figure 4).

Interview Question 4  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)



*Figure 4.* Six themes emerged from coding Interview Question 4: persistence, preparation, collaboration, communication, emotional regulation, and holding the vision.

**Persistence.** Persistence was mentioned in nine participant responses as a strategy to overcome challenges in directing. Participant B said “we swallow it and keep it moving as women. Because the minute you complain- you know, you’re already blacklisted but you don’t want that kind of reputation as well.” Participant N stated that “you just have to push yourself hard to be able to . . . not give anyone a reason to say that you didn’t do it to the best of your ability.” Participant M, who saved \$100,000 to self-finance her first feature film, said “you just

have to keep hustling and pushing and pushing and pushing. I just think, not give up whether it's a feature or whatever you want to do.”

***Preparation.*** Preparation as a means of overcoming obstacles and challenges was mentioned in seven participant responses. Preparation included preparing for working on set as well as preparing for opportunities. Participant J said, “even in preparation for film time is of the essence, everything is expensive” and Participant L, who also directs television, gave this example:

I'm like ridiculously, ridiculously over prepared. . . If I walk onto an episode I've watched every single—even if it's like in its seventh season, I watch every single darn episode a couple of times. I've done frame grabs. I've divided it up into like, you know, what a particular location, you know say they have some stand in sets, cause usually like 50% at least of their scenes are done on stages and so I'll have like organized by stages, all the frame grabs of how they've shot every room . . . and how they light and their key light and I've talked to the producers about what their favorite episodes are and why and I've studied that and I've gone to the editor. Stuff that most directors don't even- it doesn't even occur to them to do.

***Collaboration.*** Collaboration was mentioned in seven participant responses to Interview Question 4. Participants spoke about the importance of not only collaborating with others but having supportive people around you to collaborate with in order to overcome obstacles and challenges whilst directing. Many participants likened filmmaking to a team sport. Participant G said “filmmaking . . . is like a team sport and you can't have anybody on the team who's not good and you can't have anybody on the team who isn't happy.” Participant H “build the best team you can and prepare like you're going into battle.” Participant B said “as a team player you

incorporate people into the storytelling process and let them contribute without giving up power.” Participant A said “you don’t want to just lock people in. They need latitude, to be creative in their own right, and contribute.”

**Communication.** The use of communication to overcome obstacles and challenges was reported in seven participant responses. Communication included communicating with the cast and crew as a whole, as well as communicating with individuals to resolve issues. Participant I stated that she was a “very open, very direct communicator” and that it was important to her to “leave people in power during my communications.” Participant K says that she uses the following communication strategy:

radical vulnerability, just being really honest . . . I want to start from a position of “are you okay?” and let them tell me if something's going on in their personal life rather than . . . just attacking them . . . I think sometimes that catches people off guard and it actually works really well because then they realize . . . that I'm seeing it, you know and that it's an issue.

**Emotional regulation.** Five responses mentioned regulating emotions as a strategy. Emotional regulation responses included staying calm on set, not showing anger, and not engaging in arguments. Participant J said of dealing with on set issues: “don't panic, look at the options, look at the underlying issues and make the best decision you can and then lean into it.” Participant P said “I don't take anything personally . . . if producers are scared to death that tells me about them, it doesn't tell them about me.” Both Participant I and Participant Q recommended practicing meditation to help in regulating your emotions.

**Holding the vision.** Holding and maintaining the vision as a director was mentioned as a strategy in five participant responses as well. Knowing the vision was used as a strategy to

overcome gender bias, to access financing, to keep the production on track, resolve conflicts, and for personal motivation. Participant S said “if you have a strong vision people don’t care about gender.” Participant E said she uses self-talk to remind herself that “this is bigger than me, this is not about me . . . I have a film to finish well.” Participant D said that working on projects she cares about “got me through some of the very most difficult times. . . because it’s bigger than all of us, it’s a story that has . . . taken off and has something to give and contribute back in the world.” Participant P said she handles conflict by “being the keeper of the vision and being able to communicate what that vision is, so that the person falls in alignment with it.”

**Interview question 4a.** “How do you create a common goal or vision for the cast and crew to work towards?”

Interview Question 4a yielded 27 responses from participants and four themes emerged: communication, collaboration, respect, and visual / audio references (see Figure 5).

**Communication.** Using communication to galvanize a cast and crew to work towards the same vision was mentioned as a strategy in 17 participant responses. Communication included speaking with the crew or individual crew members directly, having meetings, and sharing challenges. Participant O said “it takes communication . . . that was a learning curve for me in terms of how the system is meant to work.” Participant F said that a director should:

try and imbue a sense of excitement . . . you have to have enough passion yourself in the way that you want the piece to be or the shot to be or the costume to be or the production design to be. Otherwise . . . the production is rudderless and it doesn't have somebody steering it.



Interview Question 4a  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)

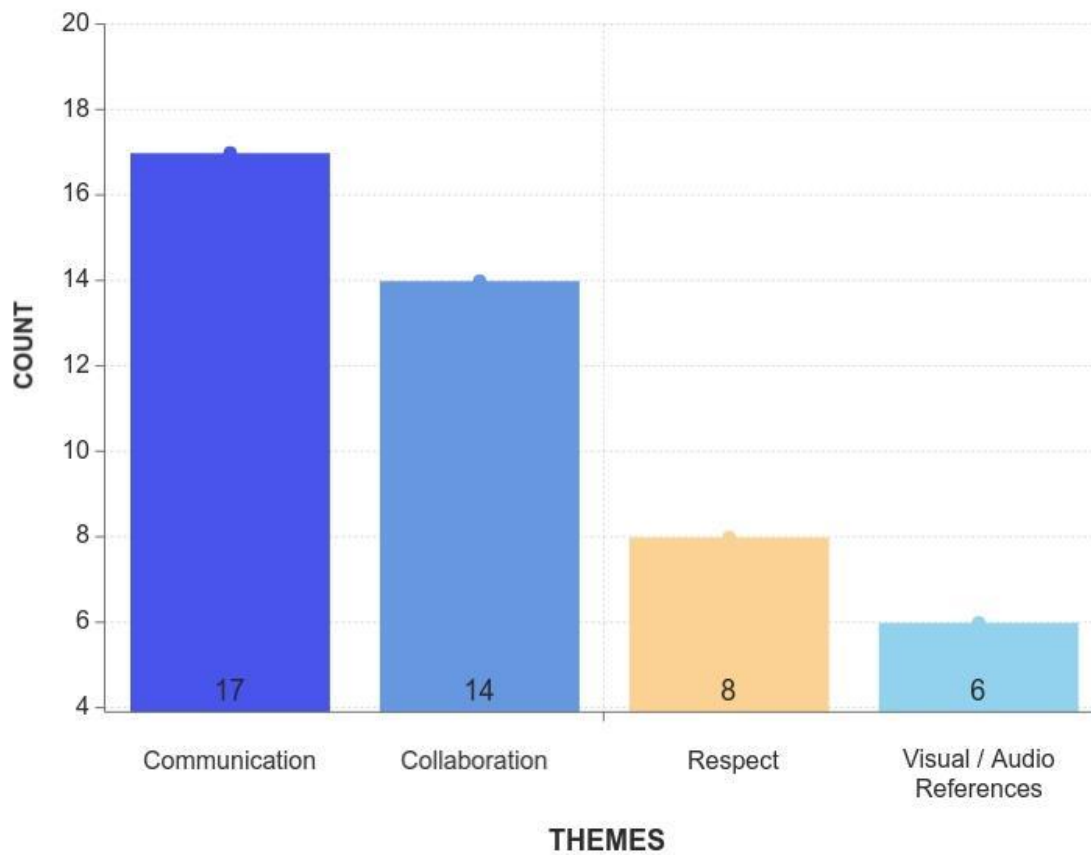


Figure 5. The resulting themes from coding interview question 4a: communication, collaboration, respect, and visual/audio references.

Participant N says “it's just communicating that vision with everyone. And I mean everyone that's willing to hear as many times as possible ad nauseum just to make sure that everyone's on the same page.”

**Collaboration.** There were 14 participant responses that mentioned using collaboration to lead the cast and crew. Responses specified collaborating with the cast and crew, inviting the cast and crew to lend ideas, and the value of collaboration. Participant B advised directors to “incorporate people into the storytelling process and let them contribute without giving up

power.” Participant N said “I like to allow for everyone in the crew to feel like they have a voice and so I always tell them if you have a better idea . . . you know, I may not use it but to share it with me because you never know.” Participant M said “I think that's what the best leaders do . . . inspire people to dig inside themselves to bring out their strength and their talent.”

**Respect.** Showing respect to those you work with was mentioned in eight participant responses. Participants felt respect helped the cast and crew feel valued, created an inclusive environment, and inspired them to do their best work. Participant Q said respect does not mean giving up power: “I find that if you are warm and likable and appreciative then people want to work hard for you. And that doesn't mean that you roll over and like every single thing.” Participant A spoke about the reciprocity of respect: “I think people very quickly understand that you know how good they are, you’ve hired them because they’re good, and you respect them. And I think in turn that respect is returned.” Participant M said respect is part of her leadership: “I'm a director who likes to lead people by making them feel comfortable, respected . . . like I trust their opinion and I trust their experience.”

**Visual and audio references.** Visual and audio references were cited by six participants as a strategy to lead the cast and crew. Participants spoke about how they reach out to cast and crew members to share their vision through video and audio references. Participant B said “I create a lookbook . . . then what happens is it allows them to open up their idea book in their heads and like true creatives will come back to you and say what about this?” Participant L said “I'll do mixes of like music and look books and be like, hey do you have a minute? I want to show you this inspiration that I had for this particular scene . . . and try to get people excited.” Participant K said she uses music for “getting people in the right headspace so that everyone on

set is sort of feeling it too. It's not like what we're doing here is separate from you setting up crafty here. . . we're all part of this whole.”

**Interview question 4b.** “Were there any resources available to support your growth as a director?”

Participants responded with 10 different answers to interview question 4b, which yielded five themes: individuals, no/very few resources, organization, observation, and making films (see Figure 6).

**Individuals.** Help from individuals was cited as a resource in nine participant responses. Participants described individuals as helping them access resources such as film equipment, industry contacts, and financing. Participant I said “I had lots of support from other people. I had access to equipment. Being a female African-American director there were a lot of people who really wanted to help me . . . it was from my network and it was before social media, you know, just word of mouth.” Participant D said “a friend of mine funded a short film I did” and Participant O said “I had very few resources and I had as I said, I had these few directors who were friends who I would take out to dinner and beg to give me guidance.”

**No resources or very few resources.** When asked what resources supported their growth as a director, eight participant responses were that the participants did not have resources or had very few resources available to them. Participant G said, “no . . . I look back on it and it's a miracle I became a director.” Participant N said “there weren’t a lot of resources . . . it took me a

Interview Question 4b  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)

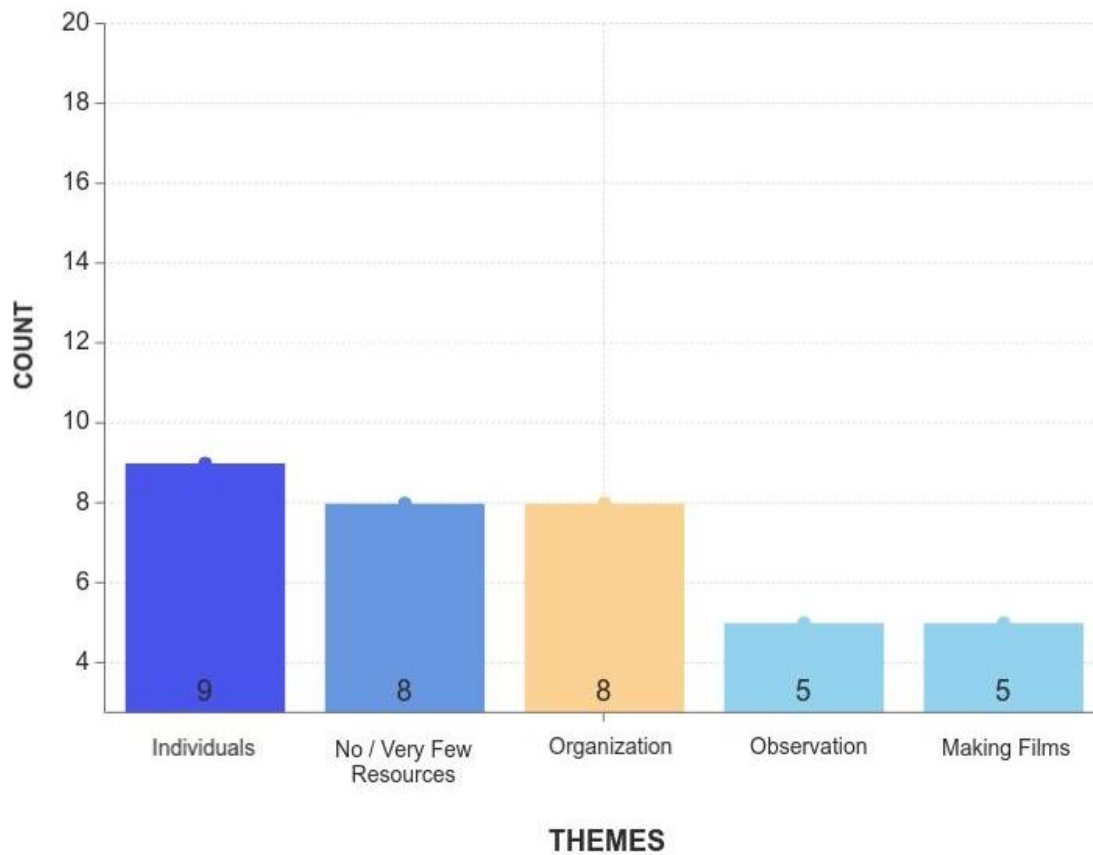


Figure 6. Interview question 4b's coding resulted in five themes: individuals, no/few resources, organization, observation, and making films.

long time to even find this one class that is unbelievable that taught me so much and I had already directed two or three movies.”

**Organization.** Resources from organizations, including industry organizations and film studios, was mentioned in eight participant responses. The resources these organizations gave participants included grants or scholarships from contests, access to film equipment, and connections in the industry. Participant D told how winning a series of contests held by an online platform for filmmakers “led to them financing a web series that I wrote and directed . . . one of

the first web series ever.” Participant J said “the production company that continues to this day to represent me . . . has been a really really fabulous resource. They . . . introduced me to other directors, other female directors, . . . helped me get my foot in the door with commercials and then they also really helped me get my theatrical agent for movies.” Participant T participated in a women’s directing workshop at a film school and received money to produce her first short. She described the experience as giving her “confidence, collaboration, and friends for life.”

**Observation.** In five responses, participants mentioned observation as a resource for their growth as a director. Observation included being on-set, either working on set (in any position) or shadowing another director. Participant G said working as a script supervisor allowed her to be “literally just attached to the hip to the director and that was my film school.” Participant K said she learned by “just throwing myself on set so I was assisting producers, directors, being a PA- like all of it. I did some camera work and was just learning by doing honestly.” Participant L worked in the film industry as an assistant prior to directing which “demystified the industry a little bit by having been on the other side and so when I went to go do my film, my short film, I kinda had a better understanding of how to do it.”

**Making films.** Making films also appeared in five responses as a resource for participants’ growth as a director. Making films including making experimental work, short films, as well as what directors learned making their first feature films. Participant K said “I just started doing my own work like getting friends together and doing a web show. I was writing, directing, acting, doing it all and just learning by putting it out there. . . and figuring out my own set of rules.” Participant H said that “when I started shooting I would find a band and be like, can I shoot a video for you? And I would basically just design the set myself.” Participant F said she and her partner started their own animation company after film school and “bit by bit started

doing like title sequences and commercials and music videos and then that led to FILM. So it was a gradual place but I think what I learned from that is that you have to create your own world to operate within.”

**Interview question 4c.** “Has mentoring played a role in your growth as a director?”

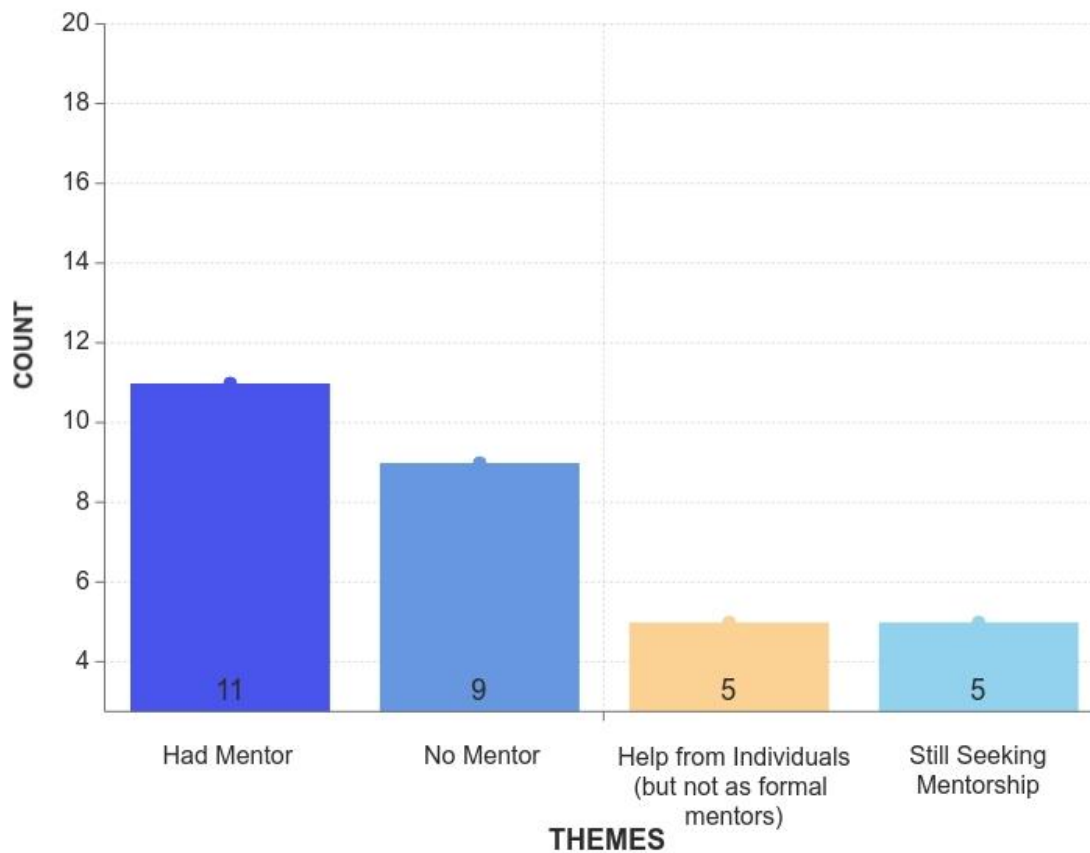
Interview Question 4c resulted in 13 separate from the participants, which resulted in four themes: yes (mentoring played a role), no (mentoring did not play a role), individuals helped (but not as a formal mentor), and still seeking mentorship (see Figure 7).

*Yes, mentoring played a role.* In 11 responses participants said that having a mentor played a role in their growth as a director. Mentors gave advice, access to financing and networks, and job opportunities. Participant E’s mentor gave her the opportunity to direct her first feature:

a mentor, a man who was a big-time man in the industry noticed my gift and was like, I think you could- you've written this so specifically that I think you could direct it and I will put the resources and the money and the people around you to do it and to accommodate your inexperience.

Participant I said her mentors were “very instrumental in helping to shape my career as a director” and provided her with access to equipment, networks, and financing. Participant H worked with her mentor for years:

Interview Question 4c  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)



*Figure 7.* The four resulting themes from coding Interview Question 4c: had mentor, no mentor, help from individuals (but not as formal mentors), and still seeking mentorship.

So I decided to go work for a director who agreed that my job would be much more of an apprenticeship than an assistant . . . we drove to set together, I went to every day of editing with him, I went to color timing, any meeting with an actor, like it was a much cooler job than I ever could have imagined and I learned a lot that way . . . We prepped an entire movie for a year that we didn't end up directing and scouted like three

countries . . . it was interesting to see and realize that like if I was in the same position I was pretty capable of doing the job.

***No, mentoring did not play a role.*** Nine participants responded that mentoring did not play a role in their growth. However, many participants cited the importance of mentorship and how they wished they had a mentor early in their careers. Participant O said “there was no such thing as mentors in those days.” Participant B said she has just recently found a potential mentor:

I cannot name one mentor I have had in this industry my whole career and I have recently met someone who is I feel like becoming a mentor and only because I failed so much on the surface that I just had to run it by someone and she's like, you know that happened to me too and this is it what I would do differently. So she's de facto becoming my mentor just because of me hitting- like flatlining.

***Individuals helped but not as a formal mentor.*** Five responses from participants said they had individuals who helped or inspired them in their careers, but who were not necessarily mentors. Participant E said besides the mentor that helped her begin her directing career “I have another semi mentor who's huge in the industry, A-list producer . . . he's not as much hands-on . . . he'll give me directions instead of driving me there.” Participant A said a producer she worked with “probably mentored me in the style that I learned because he just taught the whole team . . . but not formally.”

***Still seeking mentorship.*** Five participant responses also mentioned the participant would still like to have a mentor, even if they were in a late stage of their career. Such as Participant T, who said “I’m 73 and I would still like a mentor.” As Participant F said “I would still love to have a mentor and I reach out to other filmmakers the whole time really to get input and



feedback.” Participant M shared what she’s learned from reaching out to other directors for mentorship throughout her career:

I have come to realize that these guys help guys that even look like them. The nerdy glasses, the baby, you know the same. And you're like well, of course he's helping him, he looks like a younger- and you can even say that about Oprah and Ava. Like shit man, people really help people that remind them of themselves. So who's gonna- who am I gonna find that reminds me of me? Nobody. Cause there doesn't exist a woman that has the career that I want.

### **Research Question 3**

RQ3: How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?

The third research question had the following two corresponding interview questions:

IQ 5: How do you define your success as a leader?

IQ 6: How do you track and measure your success as a leader?

**Interview question 5.** “How do you define your success as a leader?”

In total, there were 13 different responses to this question. From the responses three themes emerged: matching original vision to end result, cast/crew satisfaction, and career longevity (see Figure 8).

***Matching original vision to end result.*** Five responses defined leadership success as matching the original vision or goal for the film to the end product. Matching the original vision to the end result included the director being satisfied creatively with the work, and feeling that the story was communicated effectively. Participant A said “I’m a very visual person, I did photography. So it was that aesthetic. You know I was never satisfied until it really looked and felt right, had a rhythm that I wanted, you know had an essence about it.” Participant B said one

Interview Question 5  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)

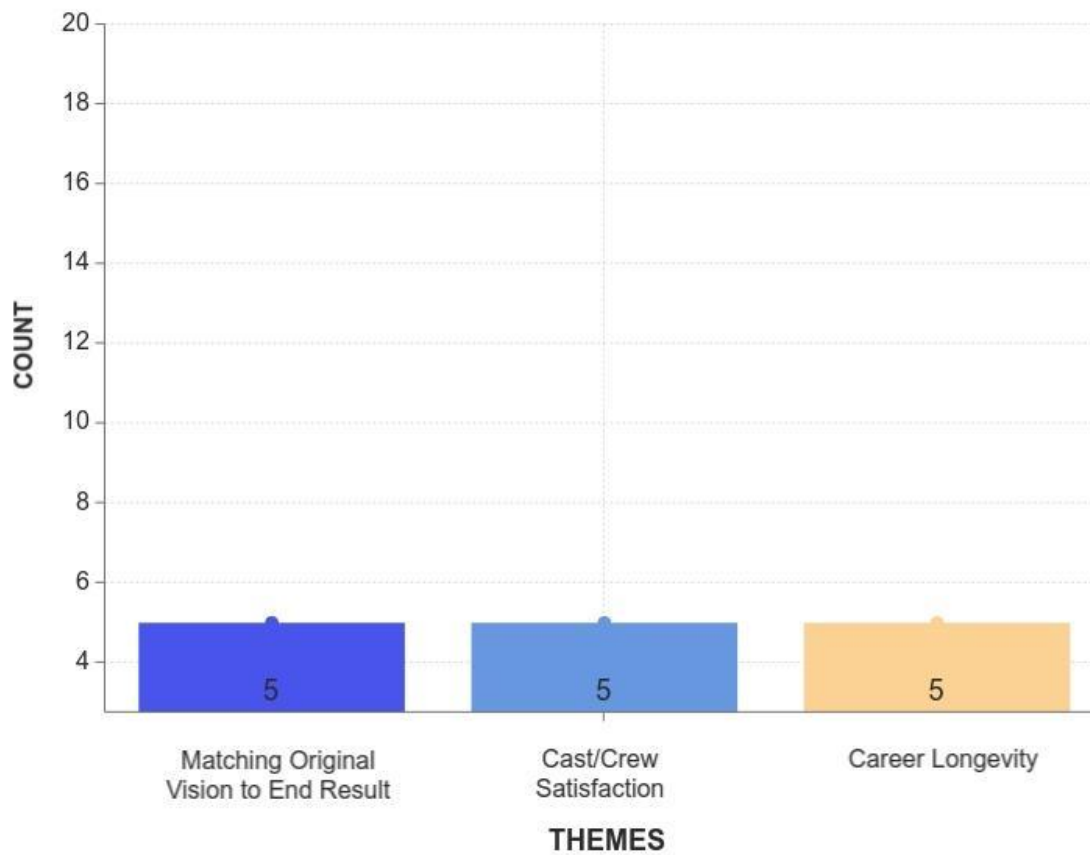


Figure 8. The three themes which emerged from coding Interview Question 5: matching original vision to end result, cast/crew satisfaction, and career longevity.

of the ways she defines her success is by examining if “the finished product is what I wanted to articulate . . . creatively, story-wise, message-wise.”

**Cast/crew satisfaction.** Cast/crew satisfaction was mentioned as a definition of leadership success in five responses as well. Cast/crew satisfaction included satisfaction with the director’s leadership, the cast/crew being proud of the work, and the cast and crew feeling that they were included as collaborators. Participant R defines her success by her ability to create “an

environment where everyone feels comfortable to do their best work.” Participant N says she also feels successful when she’s made a “collaborative environment where everyone's feeling good, feeling heard, taking pride in what they're doing.” Participant Q spoke about how she defines her success as a leader when directing an episode of television:

I find if I'm invited back on a show then I've been lovely to work with and the crew has liked me and the cast has liked me and my bosses have liked me and I've been collaborative and nice to be around and I mean . . . leadership is the experience of working with you. . . if my episode is good I'm a good director. If I'm invited back then I'm a good director and a good leader.

***Career longevity.*** Career longevity as a director and still working in the industry was also mentioned in five responses as a definition of success. Participant G stated “you know you're successful if you continue to believe in yourself. If you don't give up even if you have to step out for a while and step back in.” Participant F said her success is a “a conviction of the longevity of my own journey.” Participant H defines her “success by like not giving up because I have seen like many people just give up or change course or do something else.”

**Interview Question 6.** “How do you track and measure your success as a leader?”

The sixth interview question had 16 different answers from the participant interviews and three themes emerged: progress tracked by daily results, reception, and small victories (see Figure 9).

Interview Question 6  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)

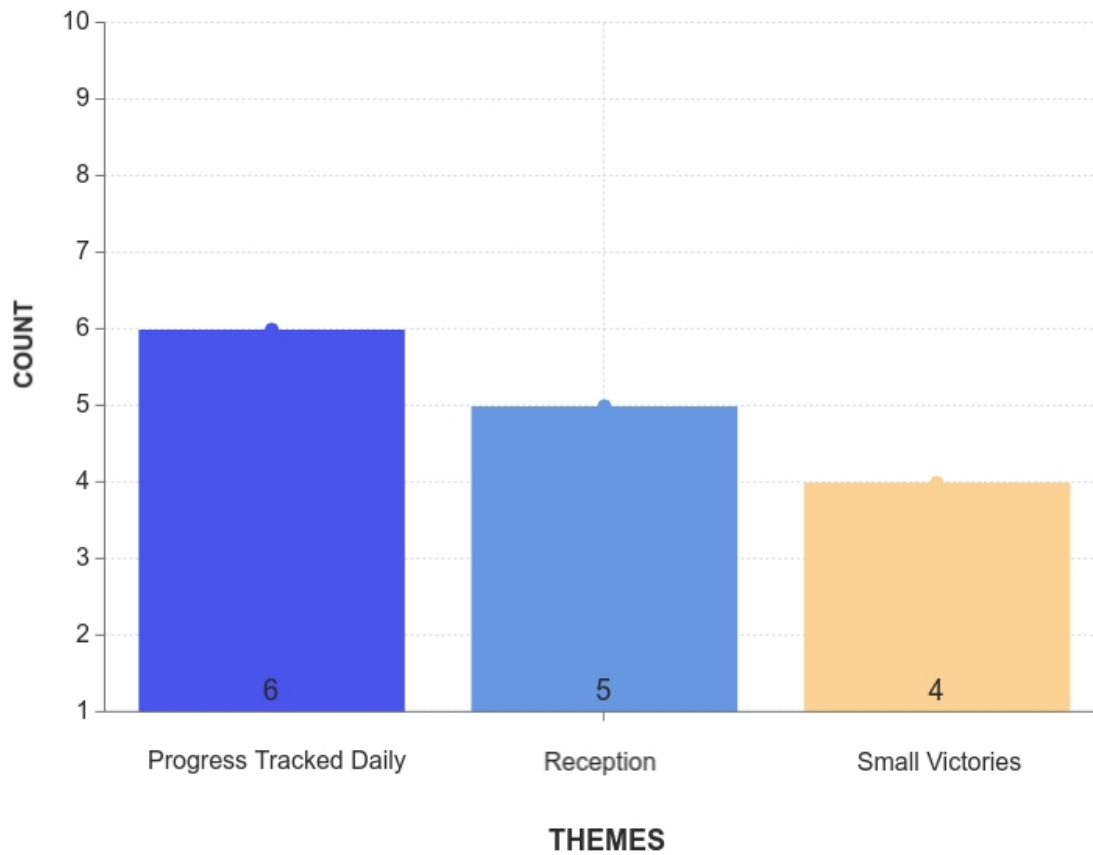


Figure 9. The coding of interview question six resulted in three themes: progress tracked daily, small victories, and reception.

***Progress tracked by daily results.*** Progress tracked by daily results appeared in six participant responses. Tracking and measuring success by daily results included whether or not the director got all the shots they needed that day, as well as progress that could be tracked scene by scene. These responses overall demonstrated a step by step or moment by moment method of tracking results which kept the focus on the present moment. Participant C tracks “day by day on the set. Is this the most comedy I can get out of these pages I’m shooting?” Participant N said “I think it's when I feel that I have done everything I was capable of in a scene to make sure that it

ended up- it's never exactly how you imagine but hopefully better than you imagine.” Participant I also said “if I make my days every day. If I make my day. I'm gonna shoot 10 pages, I need to complete those pages if . . . I only get through four that's not successful to me.”

**Reception.** Measuring success by the reception of the film by audiences was mentioned in four participant responses. Participant O said that she measures success “by what it feels like to sit in the audience.” Participant H said that “if it does really well, that’s ultimate success. People loved it, people watch it, people come up to you on the street tell you how much they enjoyed it, like that’s huge.” Participant E said the following about audience reception:

When they stand up and get passionate about something like “that guy pissed me off because he da da da”. . . or “I love when” or just something that relates to them, like they forgot to even comment on your film because they just got lost. That's to me the ultimate level to know the growth.

**Small victories.** The theme of tracking success by small victories was described by four participants. Participant J gave the following examples:

Maybe it’s taking a C+ script and making it a B+ script . . . or taking a dancer who’s not normally known for acting and giving them some real comedic scenes . . . developing them a little bit as an actor to where they can hold a scene . . .faking one city for another city, faking one season for another season, things that just seemed insurmountable and now when people watch the movie it never even occurred to them this didn’t take place in that city or this time of year . . . I think it’s important to see those as successes.

**Other method of interest.** While this was only mentioned by one participant and was not a theme, the following method of tracking and measuring success by Participant K was noteworthy for its use of self-reflection to foster growth:

What I do still today is I have a document where I write after each shoot, I write what I learned from it. I'm teaching myself right . . . next time do this differently or . . . I just keep a rolling document of everything that I learned. I feel like that's super helpful because it just sort of solidifies the experience. I'm gonna build, I'm gonna be constantly growing and building upon . . . it's like you don't get to a place- I don't believe you get to a place where you're like 'cool I'm done I know everything about directing!'. It's like always new challenges.

#### **Research Question 4**

RQ4: What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?

The fourth research question had the following three corresponding interview questions:

IQ 7: If there was any one thing you could do differently or do over in your career, what would that be?

IQ 8: Did you learn a lesson from that?

IQ 9: What advice would you give to aspiring female directors?

**Interview question 7 & 8.** “If there was any one thing you could do differently or do over in your career, what would that be?” and “Did you learn a lesson from that?”

Interview Questions 7 and 8 had 22 responses from participants and yielded four themes: I wouldn't change anything / anything significant, networked more, started directing earlier, and had more confidence (see Figure 10).

Interview Question 7 & 8  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)

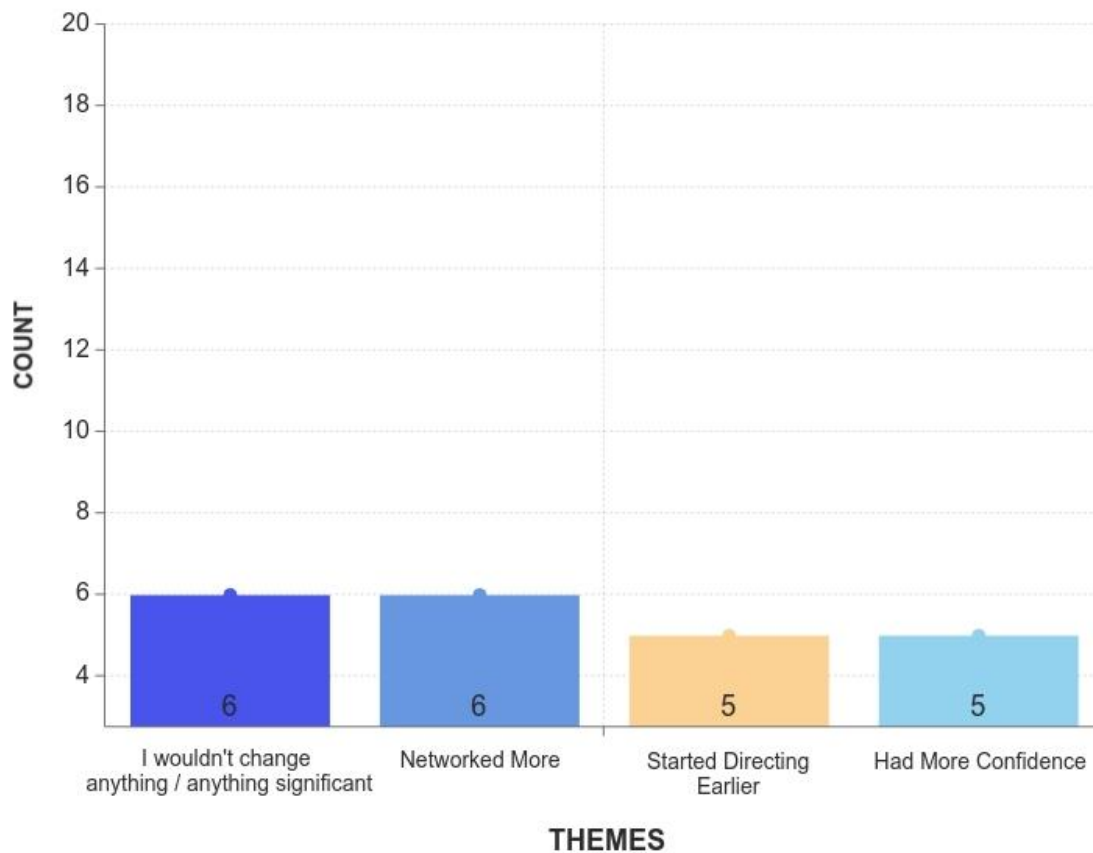


Figure 10. Interview Questions 7 and 8 were coded together and resulted in the following themes: I wouldn't change anything/anything significant, networked more, started directing earlier, and had more confidence.

***I wouldn't change anything / anything significant.*** Six participant responses said that the participant would not change anything in their career, or the changes that they would make were not significant changes. Participant O said "it's all been as great as it could possibly be. Absolutely no regrets at all, none, zero." Participant B reflected, "If I had done something differently I just don't know that I would have the outcome- the good outcome that I live and experience now. And the hard outcomes I feel are manageable because there's so much good."

***Networked more.*** Another six participants responded that if they were doing their career again, the participants would have networked more. Participant E said she learned that “your desire to create is no more important than your ability to network.” Participant G explained how in retrospect networking more could have been beneficial to her career:

I dropped into the Hollywood system of you know agents getting jobs for you and I didn't understand and- this wasn't true for the men- that I needed to be getting those jobs for myself. I wasn't social . . . that's my big regret and the thing is I could have been because I'm socially comfortable it's just . . . I don't have a lot of interest in it, you know, I don't care about the parties and I don't care about showing up somewhere and being seen and that was a mistake.

***Started directing earlier.*** From the participant responses, five were that participants wished they had started directing earlier. Participant J said:

I wish that I had been playing with cameras a lot more consistently. . . the story that you're telling the performance that you're capturing really does change depending on how you shoot it and how you edit it. And I came late to that realization and came late to that game.

Participant T said she would “learn her craft earlier.”

In relation to both this theme and the subsequent theme (had more confidence), Participant H said that she:

would have started shooting stuff earlier. I think I was so afraid. I looked at men doing it and I looked at all the successful male directors out there and I said like, I'm just a girl like I don't know if I'm qualified to do that. They never said that to themselves.



***Had more confidence.*** The importance of having confidence and how that would have benefited their directing careers starting out was mentioned in five participant responses.

Participant K answered:

I would be less hesitant or doubtful of myself and my ideas. I think when I was starting off I was because I was like, oh I didn't go to film school, I don't really know what I'm doing and that would kind of get in the way a lot . . . you need to just cut out the self-doubt and put it out in the world.

Participant N said that a lack of confidence made it difficult to ask for help, and if she were starting over she:

would ask others for help early on. There was a point where I felt like well I couldn't ask people because then they'd realize I don't know what I'm doing but in retrospect you actually have to ask people that have done it before so they can help you along the way.

**Interview Question 9.** “What advice would you give to aspiring female directors?”

For the ninth interview question participants gave 49 different responses, from which emerged nine themes: collaborate/find a team, create your own work, make work you believe in, be persistent, choose your path carefully, learn screenwriting, learn your craft, watch movies, and network (see Figure 11).

Interview Question 9  
Coding Results  
n=20 (multiple responses per interviewee)

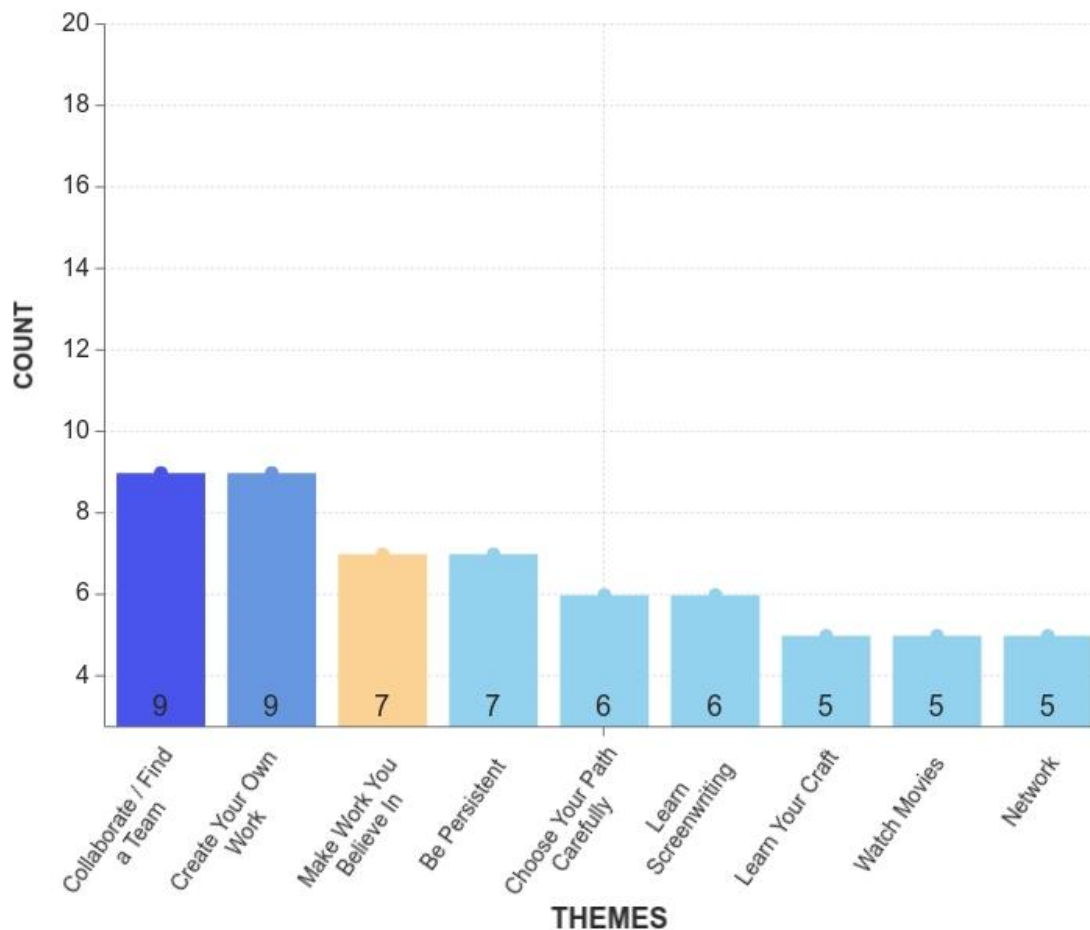


Figure 11. Coding interview question nine resulted in nine themes: collaborate/find a team, create your own work, make work you believe in, be persistent, choose your path carefully, learn screenwriting, learn your craft, watch movies, and network.

***Collaborate / find a team.*** One of the two most common themes (appearing in nine responses) was collaborate / find a team. This theme included finding other industry professionals to work with, with an emphasis on finding people you can trust and work with throughout your career. Participant F explained the importance of creating a filmmaking team:

I would say as a filmmaker, as a director, you need your team . . . working without a team means that you haven't got the short hand, everything becomes a process of how we're gonna work together, how we're gonna find a common language, when in actual fact, it's such a hard undertaking anyway to get through your day and make your scenes and keep on track that the most important thing is that everybody is in sync from the get-go.

Many participants advised that while having collaborators and supporters is important, it's also key to choose who you surround yourself with carefully. As Participant G said "it's about making real solid friends and allies and making it in the right environment."

***Create your own work.*** The other most common theme (nine participant responses as well) was create your own work. Creating your own work included making your own films at any level, and finding work for yourself. Participant J emphasized the accessibility aspiring filmmakers have to technology today:

It's so easy now to just grab a camera and they even have those like microphones that record fabulous sound right off your camera . . . You get free editing software with your computer now with your iPad -like the software that used to cost thousands of dollars and wasn't even this powerful. So now there's no excuse not to be making stuff and it can be crappy.

Participant G says creating your own work is especially important for women:

The advice is just keep directing. Anything and everything you can even if you're just making a bunch of shorts with your iPhone. It's your work that is going to give you the skill that you need so that when you get the job you succeed. The last thing you want to have happen is that you get lucky enough to get the job and you fail because the women are not allowed to fail.

***Make work you believe in.*** Make work you believe in was a theme found in seven participant responses. Participants described this as taking on projects that are meaningful to the filmmaker and/or told a personal story, had an important message for the audience, and generally doing work that the filmmaker is proud of. Multiple participants stressed the importance of filmmakers finding their voice early. Participant B said that to:

. . . sell yourself out to please other people you're not a storyteller. You're a pencil pusher, you're a journeyman director where nobody cares about your voice. If you care about your voice, cultivate it and honor it or else it will go away and it is not required to come back.

Participant D said that she would encourage aspiring filmmakers to “dig deep and go with what you really, really are drawn to, really excited. That's gonna be interesting. That's gonna be good.”

Participant R advises to “choose stories that resonate with you, that are truthful.”

***Be persistent.*** The value of persistence was mentioned in seven participant responses as well. Persistence included not giving up and being patient with your career. Participant L said that “when you hear no it needs to be like a battle cry for you to turn it into a yes.” Participant K pointed out that “persistence and perseverance go a long way in this industry.” Participant Q advised “be prepared for the long haul, it’s a very slow build. It’s a long game.”

***Choose your path carefully.*** Six participant responses included advice for aspiring female directors to be careful when making career decisions. The reasons to do so included balancing work and family life, as well as ensuring that the person makes decisions that will enable them to direct. Participant G shared the advice that she gives to her own female students:

If you're going to be a director . . . you've got to develop the skill. You know, so whatever path you put yourself on that's probably the path you're going to be on. Now there can be

a stepping stones path, you know, coming up through the crew, being a DP, being an editor, that sort of thing so that you're meeting the right people, you're working in the industry. But if you go for producing the odds are you'll never be a director. Yeah. So believe in yourself and put yourself on the path . . . as young as possible.

Participant B and Participant E shared advice related to decision making that affects your family life. Participant B said:

don't put your family on hold for this industry. Cause you'll get on the other side of it and I have 40 year old friends who are pining to have babies and their body is not agreeable. Don't be that person, don't put your life on hold for this career that I just believe won't love you back in the way that you love it.

Participant E also cautioned “if you’re under 30 and definitely if you're under 25 be more conscious about your decisions. Because you're gonna make them whether they're conscious or unconscious.”

***Learn screenwriting.*** From the responses, six participants gave advice related to the importance of learning screenwriting to aid a director’s storytelling skills, create their own content, or advance their career. Participant R shared her thoughts on the importance of screenwriting for female directors: “if women, you know female directors really understand the craft of storytelling from the script form then I feel like we're going to get a, a more true kind of representation of storytelling from a female artist perspective.” Participant M said that writing in television is particularly useful because an “opportunity can come when you get to direct. Whereas when you’re a director in TV you don't get to write a script. Do you know what I mean? You can't go in the writer's room. So it's more opportunity.” Participant B also said:

the thing that you have to do well is write. That's it. That's what gets you in the door . . . because people need content. Content is king. They can get anybody to direct anything. You're not gonna come in and say I'm a skilled director. But you have something that's powerful in the writing? They'll listen to you.

***Learn your craft.*** Learn your craft was a theme found in five participant responses. To learn your craft includes honing directing skills and learning about every aspect of filmmaking. Participant H said that from her experience a director should learn everyone's roles on set because "the worst thing is to go on set and be a director who doesn't understand what everyone's job on set is or to not understand why things are taking a long time or what people are doing." As Participant A advised: "Learn your craft. It gives you confidence, and it gives you a skill set other people will respect."

***Watch movies.*** Watching movies was given as advice for aspiring female filmmakers in five responses. The benefits of watching movies included learning how stories are told and understanding framing, etc. Participant P watched films with a method and purpose, as she explains:

Resources were me watching films . . . I didn't go to film school so instead what I did was. . . I listed all the directors who had had long careers and I went on IMDb and I started watching the earliest movie I could find of theirs and then watched them consecutively so I could see their growth and what they learned. And then I got to see like the theme-ologies of what their interests were which was really neat to see.

***Network.*** Building a network was advice in five participant responses. Participant H provided a proactive networking strategy she uses herself:

Make a list of a bunch of shows or movies that you like. Go through the entire list of

every person that worked on them. Go on your Facebook and see if you know anyone who's friends with any of those people. Write to them, ask them if they'll have a coffee with you, ask them if they can introduce you to someone and then just be willing to work. Participant Q says “building relationships now that pay off years in the future” is important, and Participant E counseled aspiring directors to be aware that “powers that be people- they will give money, resources, and opportunities to people that they like and know.”

### **Emergent Questions**

The following emergent questions were added to the interviews based on information from the first few participant interviews:

EQ 1: Have other women in the industry been supportive?

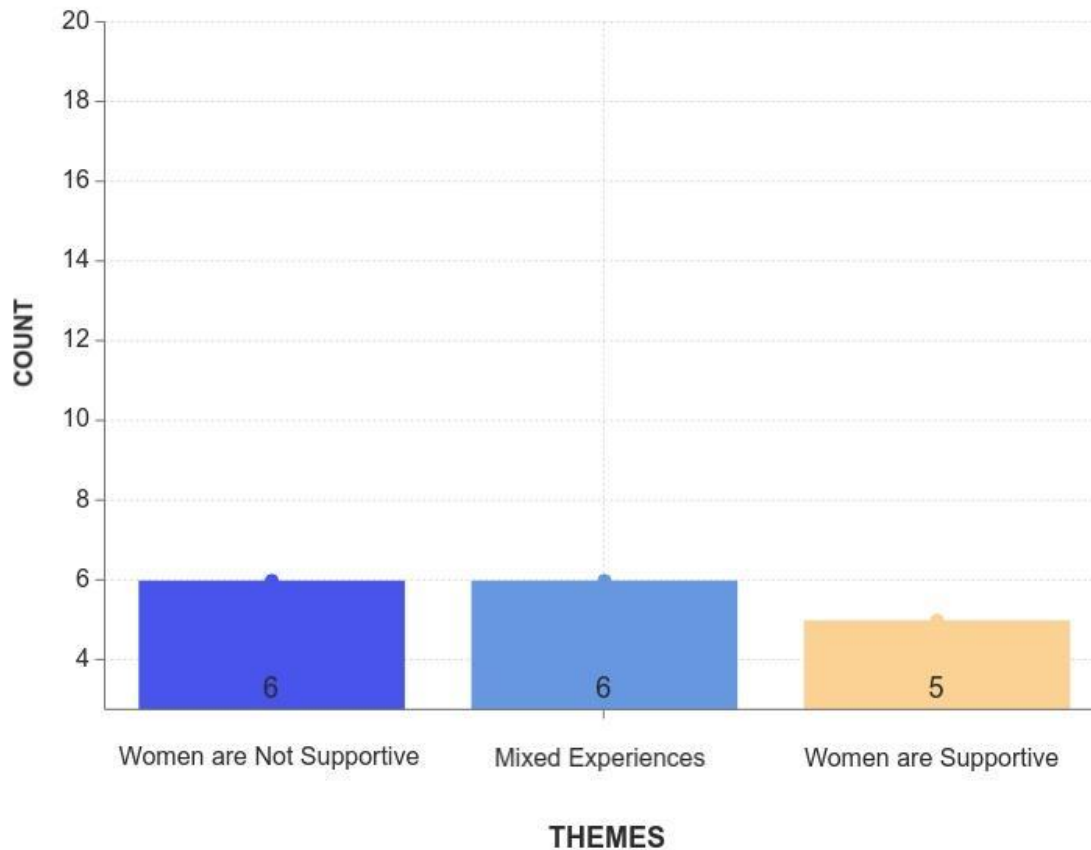
EQ 2: What keeps you in the industry?

**Emergent question 1.** “Have other women in the industry been supportive?”

Sixteen participants answered EQ 1. A total of three themes emerged from their answers: women are not supportive of other women in the industry, women are supportive of other women in the industry, and mixed experiences with support from women in the industry.

*Women are not supportive of other women in the industry.* Six participant responses were that women are not supportive of other women in the industry. Participant B said that especially in regard to television, “women on women hate . . . it’s real. It’s real because every given show they’re only gonna have so many women. So, not everyone’s inclined to help you succeed because you may take their spot you know?” Participant O reflected that “the saddest thing in my career is that the people who were the least supportive to me were other women.” Participant E says the lack of support she’s experienced from other women may not be due to an absence of desire but an absence of resources:

Emergent Question 1  
Coding Results  
n=16 (multiple responses per interviewee)



*Figure 12.* Coding the first emergent question resulted in three themes: women are not supportive, women are supportive, and mixed experiences.

I've never had a female mentor or a female look after me or, or offer me guidance . . . I think it's more that they are in this fight for their own survival so to speak for women in the industry. So there's not a lot of mental or whatever resources for other women because they're trying to swim to the shore in this male dominated industry.



***Women are supportive of other women in the industry.*** On the other hand, five participants responded that women did support them in the industry. Participant L said that early in her career “I was warned that I was gonna have the most cutthroat experiences with women. In general I haven’t really had any problems at all.” Participant Q said that she has “found the community of women directors that have been emerging in the time that I have been emerging and most of, not all- most of the women who have come before us are all really supportive of each other.”

***Mixed experiences with support from women in the industry.*** Six participants responded that they had mixed experiences with receiving support from other women in the industry. Participant J said in her career “women have been lovely to me, but honestly most men have too and to the extent that I feel like there might be discrimination on some level, I honestly think it's been equal men and women doing it.” In Participant R’s experience she found “a lot of women that don't support women and I just think that is tragic. . . the way that I try to overcome these kind of adversities is to team up with other strong women.”

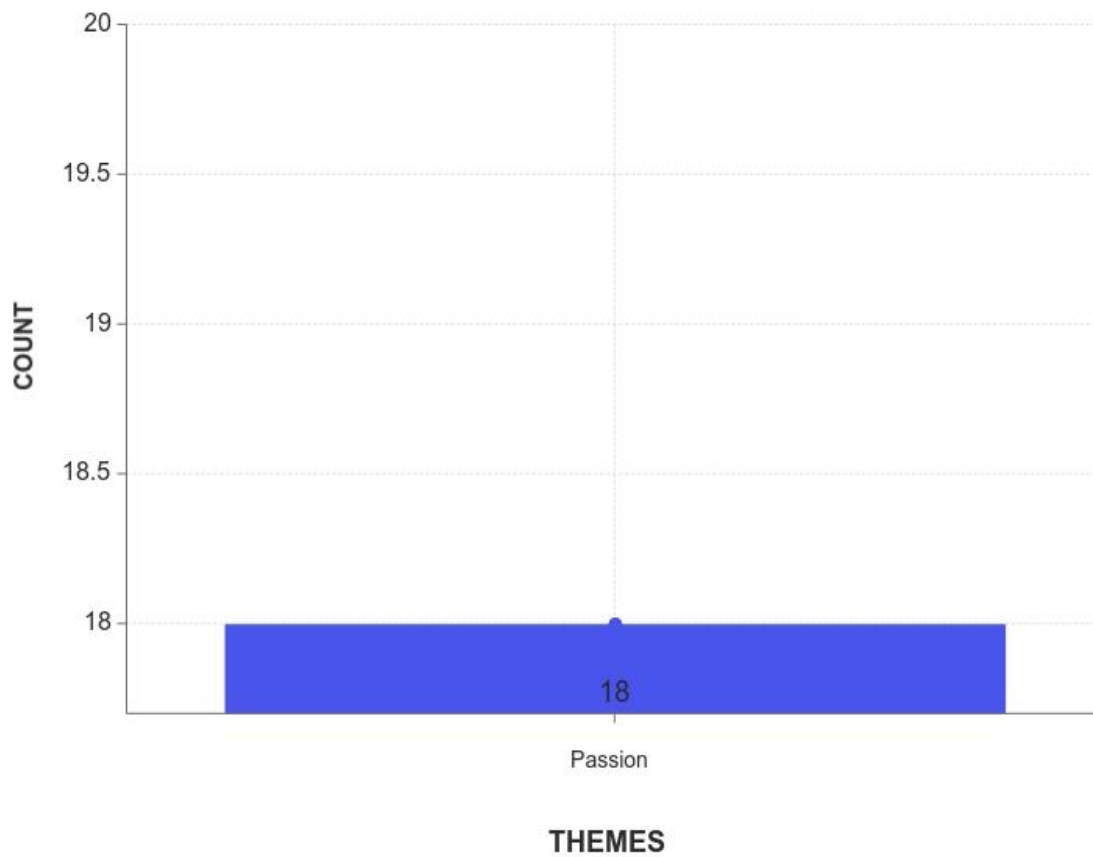
**Emergent question 2.** “What keeps you in the industry?”

All 18 respondents to this question replied that their love for the industry is what has kept them working, making passion the one emergent theme from this question.

***Passion.*** Passion included a love for both the creativity and artistry involved in the industry as well as its challenges. Participant A reflected on the joys her career brought her:

I love—I mean, my friends, the people that I’ve met, the places I have gone, it’s a fabulous way of life. And they are among—they just are wonderful people. They all have high skills and good vision, and you know it’s the best job in the world if you can get it.

Emergent Question 2  
Coding Results  
n=18 (multiple responses per interviewee)



*Figure 13.* Coding Emergent Question 2 resulted in one theme: passion.

Participant Q said that despite having a family she “had to stay committed to my life because I love it and it’s who I am . . . love the set life, love the long hours, love going on location.”

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

In summary, Chapter 4 reviewed the research questions and corresponding interview questions and the participants. It also provided an explanation of the inter-rater coding process, data analysis process, presentation of data, and results of the data collection process. The findings of each research question and corresponding interview question themes were displayed

in a frequency chart and discussed in detail with quotations and anecdotes directly from the participant transcripts. In total, 47 themes were generated from the data analysis of the original interview questions. The table below provides a summary of the research questions and themes found in the data analysis.

Table 6

*Summary of Themes*

<b>RQ1</b> <i>What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?</i>	<b>RQ2</b> <i>What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?</i>	<b>RQ3</b> <i>How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?</i>	<b>RQ4</b> <i>What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?</i>
Financing	Persistence	Matching Original Vision to End Result	I Wouldn't Change Anything / Anything Significant
Creative Challenges	Preparation	Cast/Crew Satisfaction	Networked More
Budget/Time Constraints	Collaboration	Career Longevity	Started Directing Earlier
Hiring	Communication	Progress Tracked by Daily Results	Had More Confidence
Getting Hired	Emotional Regulation		Collaborate/Find a Team
Having to Prove Your Skills	Holding the Vision		Create Your Own Work
Difficulties with Cast/Crew	Communication		Make Work You Believe In
Male Jealousy/Resentment	Collaboration		Be Persistent
Cannot Say (if Women direct differently than men)	Respect		Choose Your Path Carefully

(continued)

Table 6

*Summary of Themes*

Women Bring a Female Perspective	Visual/Audio References		Learn Screenwriting
Women are Nurturing	Individuals		Learn Your Craft
Women Communicate	No/Few Resources		Watch Movies
	Organization		Network
	Observation		
	Making Films		
	Yes (Mentoring Played a Role)		
	No (Mentoring Did Not Play a Role)		
	Individuals Helped (But Not as a Formal Mentor)		
	Still Seeking Mentorship		

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Despite the economic impact and breadth of entertainment industry jobs in the United States, women continue to be underrepresented, especially in film directing (Hunt et al., 2019). Films are not only entertainment but cultural tools which reflect and communicate cultural values (Lukinbeal, 2004). Reaching gender equality in the industry will elevate the storytelling diversity in films (Hammer, 2009; S.L. Smith et al., 2010; S.L. Smith et al., 2013). To begin to reach gender equality, it is necessary to examine the obstacles and challenges successful female film directors have faced and how they have overcome them. Doing so can empower the next wave of female directors and aid them in navigating their careers.

This phenomenological study of female film directors aims to add to the existing literature on female film directors in the United States film industry. The study's findings on female film directors' obstacles and challenges, and success and leadership strategies will inform industry leaders, female directors, and women entering the industry. The resulting findings from the study will provide female film directors with best practices to follow for overcoming challenges, galvanizing a cast and crew to work towards the directors' vision, and ideas to consider for how to track and measure their leadership success. A model for starting and sustaining a career as a film director for women is also provided.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study was conducted using the qualitative method of phenomenology. The qualitative research path was chosen as it enabled the researcher to collect information from participants in a natural setting through semi-structured interviews which garnered more detail than a quantitative approach would have allowed. The phenomenological approach was chosen for its focus on interpreting the lived experience of participants and distilling the essence of the

experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moerrer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The career of a film director does not have a clear path, as Participant B describes:

It's deeply complicated to raise money and/or to be ushered into the industry in a way that you can create your own work and/or direct other films as well. That's kind of unheard of like in any other industry like if you're a lawyer you go to law school, you graduate, you work at a firm, you work your way up the ladder it's- it's- everything is foreseeable and almost predictable and it's not the same in this industry.

Therefore, due to the varied paths through which women access the industry and enter directing, it was necessary to choose a methodology that allowed the detail and circumstantiality of each participant's journey to be heard. Out of the five methodologies used by qualitative researchers (narrative research, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study; Creswell & Creswell, 2018), phenomenology was deemed by the researcher of this study to be the most fitting. This study's analysis unit was a female film director living in the Los Angeles area of the United States, and the study's population were all of the female film directors in Los Angeles who met the criteria for inclusion as outlined in Chapter 3. A sample size of 15 women were planned to be used for the study but five additional eligible women were available for interviews, therefore the researcher decided to include them as well for a total sample size of 20. The participants were required to work in the Los Angeles area, self-identify as female, have 10 years of experience working in the film and television industry, and have directed at least three feature films. The criteria for exclusion were being unavailable for an interview in February or March 2020 and not consenting to audio recording of the interview. Participants were recruited from the Director's Guild of America member directory (<https://www.dga.org/Employers/EmployersSearch.aspx>), a publicly available online directory with a search criteria tool that

allows the user to specifically search for female directors working in the Los Angeles area. The 20 participants ranged in age from 35 to 74 years old and all also had experience working in television.

Interviews were conducted from February 27th - March 15th, 2020. Fourteen of the interviews were conducted in person (in a location convenient to the participant), whilst three were conducted via phone and three were conducted over Zoom. The telephone and Zoom interviews were done due to accommodate participant travel/convenience or concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants answered 12 open ended interview questions in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. The questions were developed through prima-facie validity as well as peer and expert review validity, as discussed in Chapter 3. Interviews were audio recorded (with permission from the participant obtained through the Informed Consent form in Appendix B), and transcribed by the researcher for coding. Handwritten notes and journal entries were used as a method of bracketing during data collection.

After transcription, coding (using in vivo terms) was performed through use of a Google Sheet which tabulated participant responses and the resulting themes for each question. The coding underwent interrater review from two of the researcher's peers to ensure the accuracy of the coding. Afterwards, the study's findings were summarized in Chapter 4, which included bar graphs showing the resulting themes and quotes from the participants on each theme. Chapter 4 also included the results of the themes found in two emergent questions that were added to the interviews after the first few interviews were completed.

## **Discussion of Findings**

This study has aimed to highlight the best practices of female film directors. Of the approximately 1,170 female directors working in Los Angeles found on the Director's Guild of

America online directory, only 193 qualified for the study, approximately 16.2%. This was due to the requirement of directing three feature films to be included in the study. While the researcher was in the process of purposive sampling, she noted that many more women on the DGA list had credits for directing television than film. The researcher knew that more women worked as directors in television than film through her research for the literature review, but the participant recruitment/selection process truly brought the difference into contrast. Many participants interviewed expressed feeling that their careers were not successful. However, the researcher would like to state that based on the low percentage of women that qualified for the study from the DGA list, the participants truly are examples of success, and most participants still continue to strive for even greater success. Therefore, the findings from this study can provide practical recommendations and guidance for aspiring female directors. Each of the themes found for each research question are shown below (see Figures 14, 15, 16, & 17).

#### **Research Question 1**

<b>IQ 1</b>	Financing	Creative Challenges	Budget/Time Constraints	Hiring
<b>IQ 2</b>	Getting Hired	Having to Prove Your Skills	Difficulties with Cast/Crew	Male Jealousy/Resentment
<b>IQ 3</b>	Cannot Generalize	Women Bring a Female Perspective	Women are Nurturing	Women Communicate

*Figure 14.* All themes generated from research question 1 and their corresponding interview questions.



## Research Question 2



*Figure 15.* All themes generated from research question 2 and their corresponding interview questions.

## Research Question 3 Themes



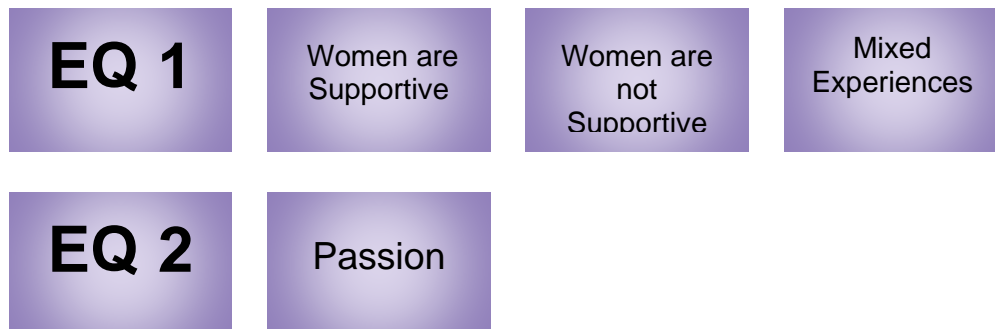
*Figure 16.* All themes generated from research question 3 and their corresponding interview questions.

### Research Question 4 Themes



*Figure 17.* All themes generated from research question 4 and their corresponding interview questions.

### Emergent Questions Themes



*Figure 18.* All themes generated from the emergent questions and their corresponding interview questions.

The results for each research question are discussed below. Results will be compared and contrasted with the existing literature.

**Results for Research Question 1 (RQ1).** The first research question asked “What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors?” The findings from the interviews identified the following major challenges and obstacles that were specifically unique to female directors:

- Accessing financing is a challenge for female film directors and some find they need to self-finance their projects.
- After completing the challenge of accessing financing, women are often given lower budgets than men, which creates restrictions in terms of the time and resources available to complete the film.
- Hiring can be difficult due to directors having to hire locally, which is not gendered. However, in certain cases (especially in the case of a woman directing her first feature film) studios may not allow women to choose all of their crew. Difficulties with cast/crew can arise if the director is not able to choose key positions on set such as the director of photography or assistant director.
- Women are often passed up for men for directing jobs, despite having similar or more experience, or being successful directors.
- Male jealousy/resentment towards female directors can create challenges on set. Men often don't feel comfortable taking direction from a woman and female directors feel pressure to prove themselves on set.

- Overall directing style cannot be generalized according to gender. However, women may bring certain strengths such as their perspective, an ability to create a nurturing and inclusive on-set environment, and communication skills.

**Discussion of RQ1.** Several of the study's findings echo current literature on female directors. The participants' difficulty in finding financing is reflected by a study on filmmakers and film executives from S.L. Smith et al. (2013) in which gendered finance was the most reported barrier for women. S.L. Smith et al. (2013) also found that exclusionary hiring practices lead to women not being hired by studios for high budget films, and women were expected to have already successfully directed high budget films before they were hired. The women in this study expressed that it was difficult to be hired due to their gender and that they were often passed up for men regardless of their experience level or abilities. Participants also expressed that they felt the need to prove themselves on set, or that they were challenged by male crew/cast who did not feel comfortable taking direction from a female director. The participants in S.L. Smith et al.'s (2013) study also reported feeling challenged on set due to their gender and experiencing sexism. S.L. Smith et al. (2013) bring up an important point in their study, that the pressure can cause female directors to suffer the effects of stereotype threat and therefore not perform at their highest level. Participants did not describe any situations in which it appeared that stereotype effect occurred, but it is certainly possible that participants have experienced it in their careers. Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra (2006) completed a study to understand whether the domination of an industry by a certain gender would affect the perceptions of a woman's leadership abilities. Whilst women did not experience prejudice in female dominated industries, men were perceived to be more successful in every industry.

Overall, participants felt that differences between male and female directors due to gender could not be generalized. As Participant D said she is “looking forward to a generation of directors being judged on their abilities not their gender.” Dzubinski and Diehl (2018) and Storberg-Walker and Madsen (2017) assert that generalizations cannot be made due to gender. A participant in the symposium report by Storberg-Walker and Madsen also pointed out that “inequities start way before people enter an organization” (p. 4). This implies that research on women and leadership roles needs to delve deeper beyond women who have already started their careers.

However, some participants felt that women had certain strengths such as creating nurturing, inclusive environments and communicating. These strengths possibly point to high degrees of emotional intelligence. When testing for emotional intelligence, women have scored higher than men (Mayer et al., 1999). Goethals and Hoyt (2017) found that women achieved higher scores than men on all four Is of transformational leadership (inspirational motivation, idealized leadership/charisma, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation), although again they asserted that differences in the leadership of individuals were more significant than simply generalizing between groups, a feeling reflected in many of the responses of this study’s participants. Lopez-Zafra et al. (2012) found that femininity predicted ability in individualized consideration and inspirational motivation, two of the pillars of transformational leadership. These factors are responsible for interpersonal relations in transformational leadership such as communication and collaboration.

**Results for research question 2 (RQ2).** The second research question asked “What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?” The following major success strategies were found from the interviews:

- The road to becoming a working director is long, however persistence is key.
- Preparation is the best defense against challenges and obstacles.
- Collaboration makes the end product stronger. However directors should balance collaboration with leadership. Visual and audio references are key in communicating the director's vision to the cast and crew. Communication includes creating an inclusive environment by showing respect to everyone and their role in the production.
- Learning to direct can be done both through observation by working for others on set in any position, and taking a DIY style approach to directing.
- Networking is crucial to thriving in the business.
- Mentorship is extremely helpful in starting careers and expanding protege's knowledge of the industry.

**Discussion of RQ2.** The finding that networking is crucial to building a career in the film and television industry is supported by research by S.L. Smith, Piper, Choueiti, et al. (2015), whose study of female directors found that 71% of female directors reported both networking and mentorship to be useful in supporting their careers. Although not all participants in this study had the opportunity to have a mentor, participants unanimously agreed that mentorship was beneficial to aspiring film directors. Participants also recommended learning through observation on set and making films themselves as a resource. This makes sense when considering that film school is not considered to be a prerequisite for entering the film industry (Jones & DeFillippi, 1996; Wing-Fai et al., 2015). Most film schools offer some sort of on set experience whether in class or through internships. However, those wishing to enter the film industry can also simply begin working in film and make their way up the film set hierarchy. This recommendation also

aligns with the fact that today video making technology is widely accessible at the consumer level (Pavlov, 2016; Tzioumakis, 2012).

Returning to Lopez-Zafra et al. (2012), in addition to femininity, emotional regulation was also a predictor of competence in individualized consideration and inspirational motivation. Emotional regulation was mentioned in 16% of responses to Interview Question 4 (on how to overcome challenges). Participants also stressed the importance of collaboration on set, but many participants also mentioned that collaboration should be balanced with firm leadership. Women have been found to employ a communal style of leadership which focuses on group needs more so than men, who typically employ agentic leadership styles (Carli & Eagly, 2011; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006). Many women in the study expressed creating an inclusive environment for the cast and crew as being part of their strategy to lead the set and guide everyone towards achieving the vision of the film. Goethals and Hoyt (2017) assert that an androgynous style of leadership which combines both communal and agentic leadership to be particularly suited towards transformational leadership, which as previously discussed research has shown women to excel in.

Many participant responses for research question 2 can be applied to the transformational leadership style:

***Idealized leadership/charisma.*** Bass and Riggio (2005) say this factor of transformational leadership (wherein the leader is seen as a person to emulate) is accomplished by the leader having high expectations for their followers and having confidence in them. Participants mentioned giving their crew respect and honoring their work as a leadership practice.

***Inspirational motivation.*** This part of transformational leadership requires the leader to inspire followers through being optimistic and planning ahead (Bass & Riggio, 2005). As directors, participants often mentioned how it was their job to be the driving force of the film through their energy. Participant G said she makes it her “mission to be the most positive person on set.” She also said the following in what is a description of both idealized leadership/charisma and inspirational motivation:

The energy of the crew depends on the director. . . their level of happiness . . .and the job can be just brutally hard, the conditions can be brutally hard, but if they feel appreciated and they feel like their skills and talents are being appreciated and utilized and respected they will be happy.

***Intellectual stimulation.*** This pillar of transformational leadership is indicated by the leader’s encouragement of the followers’ creativity and innovation (Bass & Riggio, 2005). It is perhaps the strongest aspect of transformational leadership that appears in the participant responses. Collaboration was a theme that was repeated over and over again in multiple interview questions. Participants utilized tools such as audio and visual references to communicate to cast and crew members in all positions the vision of the film. Participants also communicated to the cast and crew that they welcomed ideas from everyone in order to foster collaboration and create the strongest result.

***Individualized consideration.*** This aspect of transformational leadership indicates that the leader pays attention to the needs of individual followers (Bass & Riggio, 2005). Participants reported reaching out to and getting to know as many people on set as possible as a leadership strategy in galvanizing the cast and crew. Participants also reported conflict resolution strategies



wherein they approached individuals to discuss issues and approached the person from a place of empathy and understanding.

**Results for research question 3 (RQ3).** The third research question asked “How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?” These are the findings from the interviews:

- Success for a film director means that they were able to successfully overcome challenges and obstacles and communicate their vision effectively so that the final film matches the original vision.
- Cast and crew satisfaction after working for a director is an indication of the director’s leadership ability.
- Career longevity indicates that the director is successful because they have been persistent throughout their career despite the inevitable obstacles and challenges of a very competitive industry.
- Success is measured or tracked using a practical approach such as if the goals for the day were met, if the film came in on budget and on time, etc.

**Discussion of RQ3.** In Research Question three, most participants tracked their success on a day to day basis, determining success by whether or not they had met their goals for that day. Some directors even tracked their success by smaller moments such as scene to scene. This fits in the context of the practical realities of working on set, along with tracking success by staying within budget and on schedule. On a level of personal and artistic success however, participants responded that they felt successful when the end result matched their original vision and when the cast and crew was satisfied. A pride in persisting and continuing to work and direct was also a mark of success for many participants. A study by Murphy and Ensher (2008) found

that on television sets, directors with the most successful leadership were able to integrate the contributions of the cast and crew swiftly in order to create the best results. Our participants said they felt successful when their cast and crew were proud of their work and felt like they had been creative collaborators. The value of collaboration on a set to enhance creativity is “worth more than gold to filmmakers” (Hodge, 2009, p. 19).

**Results for research question 4 (RQ4).** The fourth research question asked “What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?” Below is the following advice and recommendations that were found:

- Aspiring female directors should be persistent and develop a thick skin for rejection. Patience is essential in a career that can take decades to develop.
- Networking is absolutely vital, but focus on making strong, meaningful connections. Finding collaborators to work with can help make your work stronger, especially if you work with the same collaborators throughout your career.
- Don’t allow a lack of confidence to deter you from a directing career. It is beneficial to start as early as possible and be strategic when planning your career path. Know how you’ll support yourself and be conscientious of your decisions regarding motherhood. Very few directors leave the industry and return later.
- Learn every aspect of filmmaking to enhance your knowledge and ability to direct a set. Learning screenwriting can give you more opportunities in the industry as well as deepen your storytelling abilities.
- Create your own work as you cannot rely on others to give you opportunities to direct. Creating your own work also gives you the time and space to learn by doing and make mistakes. Make work you believe in and stand by to develop your voice.

**Discussion of RQ4.** The findings from research question four echoed some of the advice found in the literature for aspiring female film directors. For example, choosing your path carefully echoes the research of Aquilia (2015) and Hankin (2007), who write about the effects and implications of being a mother and having a career in the film industry. Jones and DeFillippi (1996) made several recommendations for a successful career in the film industry which were also made by our participants such as knowing your career path, having knowledge of the craft, networking, and collaborating. The value of persistence was also highlighted in a study on freelance female filmmakers by Jones and Pringle (2015). Their participants did experience sexism and gender inequality in the industry, however they looked past it in order to keep working, in part due to their desire to have a good reputation and continue getting hired. The advice from our participants addresses sexism but also that building a career for a female director takes time and therefore patience is of the utmost importance.

According to the participants, confidence is important too. Research shows that women sometimes steer away from self-promotion in the workplace, although it is necessary for career advancement. This is in part due to fear of backlash from not embodying stereotypes of female gender roles by appearing assertive or ambitious (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). The advice from our participants tells the aspiring female director to have confidence and promote herself through networking and developing her voice. Many participants expressed a wish that they had begun working as directors sooner and gave the advice to start as early as possible.

**Results for emergent questions.** The two questions which emerged during the early interviewing process and were added to subsequent interviews were EQ1: “Have other women in the industry been supportive?” and EQ2: “What keeps you in the industry?” The findings from these two questions are as follows:

- Overall, there is mixed support for women from other women in the industry. It is not clear if today's increased discussion and support of women in film is more a talking point than a plan of action.
- Most women continue to stay in the industry despite its challenges due to their passion for filmmaking.

**Discussion of emergent questions.** The question of whether or not women support other women in the industry (EQ 1) received mixed answers and it is certainly an area that warrants further study. The sexism described by participants in Jones and Pringle's (2015) study as well as S.L. Smith et al.'s (2013) study did not specify whether the sexism experienced at work came from males or females. The second emergent question indicates that those women working in the film industry are truly dedicated to their craft and this was evidenced by the participant responses to this question. As Participant R said, she continues to work in the industry due to her "trust and belief in the importance of diversity in storytelling . . . because it is then reflected in our world and our culture." Such responses from participants indicate that they have a strong 'why' or reason behind their personal motivation that inspires them to continue working in what is an unpredictable industry (Jones & DeFillippi, 1996).

### **Models for Starting and Sustaining a Career as a Film Director**

The following models outline recommended practices for beginning a career as a film director and sustaining that career.

## Essential Elements for Starting and Sustaining a Career as a Film Director



*Figure 19.* Model of essential elements for starting and sustaining a career as a film director.

The three essential elements for beginning and sustaining a career in film directing, particularly for women, are: persistence, passion and knowledge. Persistence involves understanding that the path towards becoming a full-time film director is long and it may take years or even decades to reach that level. An aspiring film director should prepare to be in the industry for a long time, however this persistence and patience can pay off over time. Aspiring film directors should make sure to be conscientious when making decisions about their career, and the participants in this study recommend aspiring directors begin their career early as possible. Passion includes having the motivation to stay within the industry. The industry is unpredictable, and filmmakers often work freelance, so passion is necessary to begin and sustain

a career. Knowledge includes knowing the craft of filmmaking so that the aspiring director is a better collaborator and prepared for opportunities to direct when they do arrive. Aspiring directors can supplement their knowledge through the study of film. Screenwriting was noted by some participants as especially useful to learn so directors don't have to rely on others for content. Screenwriters are also able to attach themselves as directors when selling a script.

The action steps aspiring film directors must take include networking, experiential learning, and creating opportunities. Networking includes attending industry events, and becoming active in organizations such as the DGA, Film Fatales, and Women in Film (these organizations were recommended by the participants). The goals of networking should be to connect to people who can provide financing opportunities as well as potential collaborators and mentors. Ideally, early in their career the aspiring film director will find a mentor to guide them through the industry, as well as collaborators they will work with throughout their career. Experiential learning is defined as learning through observation and experience (Kolb, Boyatzis, Mainemelis, 2000). Aspiring film directors can achieve this through working on set as well as creating their own work. The participants recommend aspiring film directors begin creating their own work as soon as possible on any scale to gain experience and begin refining their voice as a director. Creating opportunities means to be proactive in developing your career. The participants stressed that it is unlikely anyone will hand you a directing job, therefore taking advantage of resources such as organizations and your network, making your own films, and writing your own content will aid in moving your career forward.

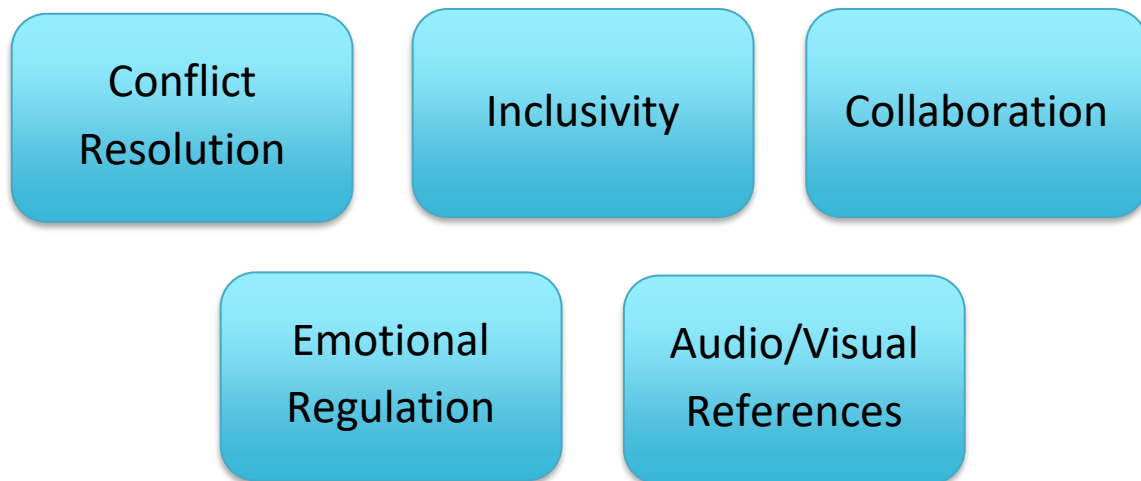
These elements and action steps are repeated throughout the career of a film director in a model of continuous growth. Persistence and passion are needed to sustain a career, and with continuous advances in technology and the industry there is always something new to learn

related to the craft. The action steps of networking, experiential learning, and creating opportunities are also repeated to make further connections and find collaborators or mentors, refine filmmaking skills and voice, and move forward to better opportunities.

### **Model for On-Set Leadership**

The following model provides best practice recommendations for directing leadership based off of the insights from the interviews.

## **Open Leadership Model for Best Practices in Directing**



*Figure 20.* Leadership model for best practices in directing.

The open leadership model for best practices in directing has five elements: conflict resolution, inclusivity, collaboration, emotional regulation, and audio/visual references. This model was created based off of the participant answers to Research Question 2. While these recommendations are mostly geared towards working on set they can be applied to pre and post production leadership as well. Open leadership includes being an approachable leader who values and is a clear communicator. Conflict resolutions includes being able to work with different personalities and understand how to negotiate conflict. Some participants recommended

studying psychology to better approach conflict and leadership. Conflict resolution should begin from a place of empathy and understanding. Creating an inclusive set means that the director is accepting of everyone on set without prejudices and shows their respect for the cast and crew and their skills. Inclusivity also means that no person's job on set is undervalued and everyone is treated as a creative collaborator. Collaboration combined with open leadership means that leaders should be open to ideas from everyone. Director leaders should communicate this openness and encourage collaboration so that the final result is stronger. However, directors should be firm and also communicate that they are the final decision maker on set. Emotional regulation involves the director being in control of their emotions, knowing when to keep emotions private and when to show them in order to control the energy on set as well as connect with the cast and crew and share struggles together. Keeping a positive outlook and being energetic and optimistic as a leader encourages everyone else on set. Audio and visual references can be used to communicate to the cast and crew the vision the director has for the film. Many participants expressed using these tools to communicate the vision to as many people on set as possible, repeatedly. Participants also expressed that they reached out to individuals on set as often as possible to communicate their vision and make them excited about contributing to the film.

### **Implications of the Study**

Despite growing public awareness of the lack of female representation in the film industry, the industry still faces a long road ahead to change. However, the findings from this study on the best leadership practices of female film directors can hopefully shed light for studios, current female directors, aspiring female directors, and film schools.



**Studios.** If the reason that studios and production companies hire women less is based on biases and assumptions about gender, this study points towards gender differences not affecting directing style. If anything women may bring certain strengths to directing, such as communication, a nurturing approach, creating inclusive and collaborative environments, and offering unique perspectives. Therefore those in hiring positions at studios and production companies that read this study may consider giving women more opportunities. Studios and production companies that would like to see women succeed as directors can also benefit from the advice of the participants for aspiring female film directors and consider implementing mentorship programs, for example.

**Female directors.** Current female directors can use the results of this study to modify their own navigation of their career path as well as use the leadership strategies the participants have used to succeed in leading their sets. Female directors may also consider becoming mentors for aspiring female directors.

**Aspiring female directors.** Aspiring female directors may benefit most of all from the wealth of advice participants shared for women entering the industry as well as the experiences of their own careers. Concentrating on key areas such as networking, collaboration, skill development, and taking actions such as finding a mentor and creating films can give aspiring female film directors a leg up as they navigate the industry.

**Film schools.** Film schools can use the results of this study to enhance their directing programs and support their female students in the most effective ways possible. Connecting female students with mentors, teaching both the craft and business aspects of film, and instilling in students the importance of networking and persistence can help them succeed.

## **Study Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has found 7 major key findings for best leadership practices in film directing, based on the experiences the participants shared in their interviews. They are the following:

1. Collaboration balanced with firm leadership is key for both career development and leadership as a director.
2. Communication skills are necessary for a director's leadership, especially when communicating the vision of the film to the cast and crew.
3. Preparation can help prevent and overcome obstacles and challenges.
4. Networking is needed to make allies in the industry, but women should focus on making strong friendships and finding lifelong collaborators.
5. Mentorship is highly beneficial for aspiring female film directors.
6. Perseverance and patience are needed to make a career as a director in film and television.
7. Gender alone cannot determine a person's directing style or abilities.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are a few areas the researcher recommends for future research. One area of study is methods in which women can support each other in the industry. As the women in this study had mixed experiences with receiving support from other women in the industry, it may be beneficial to further study how women can create networks of support for each other. Participant H said she has a group of friends who are female directors and "as we were offered opportunities we basically all started recommending each other and if we had to turn down a job we were like 'but here's five women that we fully stand behind you hiring'." It seems unlikely that women can

progress in the industry without female friendships and support, therefore investigating the ways that such support can be cultivated could help progress parity in the industry.

Based on the feedback from the interviews as well as the results of the literature review, the leadership of film directing itself could be further studied. Participant Q expressed that leadership “should be part of the dialogue and part of the curriculum.” This study examines both leadership challenges and strategies, but further study using other methodologies would certainly contribute to and strengthen this area of literature.

### **Final Thoughts**

After completing the interviews, the author reflected that it seemed that those who had a more positive attitude towards their careers felt both more successful and confident when overcoming obstacles within their career. A study on entrepreneurs found that a positive outlook and feeling of autonomy positively affected income, and career satisfaction and passion (Mabunda Baluku, Kikooma, & Otto, 2018). Filmmaking can be a very entrepreneurial career and therefore these findings may apply to film directors as well. As previously stated, many of the women interviewed did not feel successful or satisfied with their level of success. This may be related to either women’s self-esteem, or feelings of imposter syndrome, the idea that a person does not deserve their success despite having achieved it and they attribute their success to factors outside of themselves (Schubert & Bowker, 2019). The backlash avoidance model indicates that women may not promote themselves in their career for fear of backlash from appearing not to conform to gender roles (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). This may also affect women’s desire to define themselves or their career as successful.

The researcher aimed to discover and understand the best leadership practices of successful female film directors in an industry where women are underrepresented. In utilizing

the phenomenology methodology the researcher aimed to accurately reflect the lived experiences of the participants. However there is no study that could fully translate the wisdom and depth of the experiences the twenty participants generously shared with the researcher. The researcher was drawn to this topic as a former film student with a love for films and desire to direct herself. The researcher cannot adequately express her gratitude to the participants for giving their time, trust, and openness. The experience of interviewing the participants and learning their stories is one she will always cherish. She hopes that this study will help future female film directors navigate and flourish in their careers and thanks the participants for making that a possibility.

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB Approval Notice



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 18, 2020

Protocol Investigator Name: Sara Carraway

Protocol #: 20-02-1275

Project Title: Leadership Practices of Female Film Directors

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Sara Carraway:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

## APPENDIX B

### PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

#### *Graduate School of Education and Psychology*

#### **INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

#### **LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF FEMALE FILM DIRECTORS**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sara Carraway, Ed.D. Candidate, under faculty advisor Dr. Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. at Pepperdine University, because she is the principal investigator. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to research and analyze the best practices of female film directors in the United States, specifically those based in the Los Angeles area.

#### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview with 12 open-ended questions. Questions will focus on best leadership practices and career obstacles and challenges. The interview will only take approximately 45-60 minutes and be held in a location convenient to you. Participants will be audio recorded and cannot participate if they do not consent to audio recording.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study include:

- Psychological discomfort if participant recalls unpleasant memories during interview
- Transcripts and data will be stored on a USB key in a locked fireproof safe in the principal investigator's residence (a safe which only the principal investigator has access to), but should the safe be broken into and the USB key taken the transcripts could be compromised.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include:

- Contribution to the literature on female film directors in the United States
- Advocating for women's inclusion in the film industry
- Allowing your expertise and experiences to educate, inspire, and empower future female directors and filmmakers

### **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

This study is voluntary and therefore there is no payment or compensation provided for participation.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if I am required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if you tell me about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored on a USB key in a locked fireproof safe in the principal investigators place of residence, and will only be available to the principal investigator. The data will be stored for a maximum of three years. The data collected will be transcribed and coded by the principal investigator. It will also be de-identified so that should a breach in the security occurs, the data will not be linked back to you. De-identification includes replacing your name with a code such as "Participant A, B, etc.". All transcriptions and data will be erased in approximately three years. Audio recordings will be deleted immediately upon the completion of transcription. Transcription will be completed by the principal investigator. If requested the participant has the right to review and edit audio recordings for one week from the date of the interview. After this one week period the data will be in the process of coding.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items with which you feel comfortable. Your relationship with your employer will not be affected whether or not you participate in this study or to what extent you participate.

### **EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY**

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

### **INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Sara Carraway at [email.edu](mailto:email.edu) or her dissertation chairperson Dr. Farzin Madjidi at [email.edu](mailto:email.edu) if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

### **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045. phone or email.edu

### **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

### **AUDIO RECORDING**

- ☐ *I agree to be audio-recorded*
- ☐ *I do not want to be audio-recorded*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### **SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of his/her questions. In my judgment the participants are knowingly, willingly, and intelligently agreeing to participate in

this study. They have the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. They also have been informed that participation is voluntary and that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

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Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

## APPENDIX C

### Recruitment Script

Dear [Name],

My name is Sara Carraway. I am an Organizational Leadership doctoral student at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. I am currently working on my dissertation entitled, *Best Practices of Female Film Directors*. The purpose of this study is to research the best practices in leadership of female film directors and illuminate the obstacles and challenges female directors face in the film industry and how they overcame them. I came across your information on the Director's Guild of America website directory and believe you would be an excellent person to interview for the study. Participating in the study requires an in-person interview in a location of your choice that will last approximately 45-60 minutes, during the week of February 17th-23rd. If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email and we will setup a time and place to meet.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sara Carraway  
Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology  
Status: Doctoral Student

## APPENDIX D

### Peer Reviewer Form

Dear Reviewer:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The table below is designed to ensure that may research questions for the study are properly addressed with corresponding interview questions.

In the table below, please review each research question and the corresponding interview questions. For each interview question, consider how well the interview question addresses the research question. If the interview question is directly relevant to the research question, please mark “Keep as stated.” If the interview question is irrelevant to the research question, please mark “Delete it.” Finally, if the interview question can be modified to best fit with the research question, please suggest your modifications in the space provided. You may also recommend additional interview questions you deem necessary.

Once you have completed your analysis, please return the completed form to me via email to sara.carraway@pepperdine.edu.

Thank you again for your participation,

Sara Carraway

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question
RQ1: What challenges are encountered/faced by female film directors when directing?	<p>IQ1: What obstacles in the directing process are most challenging to you?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></p> <p>b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></p> <p>c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

	<p>IQ2: What unique challenges female directors face on set?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>IQ3: Do you see differences in how women approach the art of directing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>RQ2: What success strategies are used by female film directors to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process?</p>	<p>IQ4: What strategies do you use to lead a cast and crew through the filmmaking process successfully?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview</p>



	<p>questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>IQ5: How do you create a common goal or vision for the cast and crew to work towards?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</li> </ol> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>RQ3: How do female film directors measure their success as a leader?</p>	<p>IQ6: How do you define your success as a leader?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</li> </ol> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>IQ7: How do you measure your success as a leader?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</li> </ol> <hr/> <hr/>

	<p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>RQ4: What recommendations would female film directors provide to future women entering the industry as a director?</p>	<p>IQ8: What challenges do women entering the film industry as directors face today?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</li> </ol> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>IQ9: What resources are available to new female directors?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</li> </ol> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>IQ10: What role did mentorship play in your career's success?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b>:</li> </ol> <hr/> <hr/>

I recommend adding the following interview questions:

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