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Behind Every Great Man There Are More Men: Disparities for Women Filmmakers in the Film Industry

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Vassar College

“Behind Every Great Man There Are More Men.”
Disparities for Women Filmmakers in the Film Industry

A research thesis submitted to
The Department of Film

Bobbie Lucas

Fall 2014

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Someday hopefully it won’t be necessary to allocate a special evening [Women in Film] to celebrate where we are and how far we’ve come...someday women writers, producers, and crew members will be so commonplace, and roles and salaries for actresses will outstrip those for men, and pigs will fly.”

--Sigourney Weaver

For the women filmmakers who made films and established filmmaking careers in the face of adversity and misogyny, and for those who will continue to do so.

I would like to express my appreciation to the people who helped me accomplish this endeavor:

Dara Greenwood, Associate Professor of Psychology

Paul Johnson, Professor of Economics

Evsen Turkay Pillai, Associate Professor of Economics

I am extremely grateful for the valuable input you provided on my ideas and your willing assistance in my research.

To my wonderful friends—thank you for accepting my excuses of, “I can’t...I have to write my thesis,” and somehow managing to tolerate and validate me during this entire process.

To my unconditionally supportive parents—thank you for always believing in me, while also grounding me with the knowledge that as long as I try my best, I’ve done all that I can do.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis traces the progression of women filmmakers in Hollywood over the course of film history and explains how their roles were shaped by economics. In doing so, I have found that as film became a more solidified and profitable business enterprise, women's positions of authority in the industry declined, and a system of male domination emerged. In order to properly account for the impact of the economic changes on women film professionals, this narrative seeks to show how the wider, and often transforming, cultural, historical, economic, and social climates of the United States influenced the economics of the film industry. Specifically, this thesis intends to investigate how the changing economics of the film industry led to disparities for women employees. Each chapter focuses on different periods in film history and analyzes how the industry and national alterations impacted women as filmmakers. Additionally, every chapter ends with case study examples of women filmmakers who nevertheless have defied the odds and found successful careers, while also explaining how their personal stories fit into the larger social and economic climate of Hollywood during their respective time periods.

My analysis of women filmmakers mainly emphasizes producers, directors, and screenwriters in order to explore jobs that represent positions of power within the film industry. However, the results found within these areas of industry employment roughly correspond with women working in other areas such as cinematography and editing. Although female actresses and costume designers have found more job opportunities in Hollywood, their successes in these positions also reinforce the ways in which male authority has pigeonholed women into more "traditionally feminine" jobs. Therefore, all industry positions prove relevant to my study and demonstrate women's hardships in creating and managing careers in Hollywood.

Women's prominence during the silent era and subsequent unequal representations throughout the remaining film history suggest systemic reasons for the observed inequalities. This systemic absence and underrepresentation of women poses many questions in need of answers. Firstly, does the configuration of women filmmakers' industry presence depict the general trends of women (of all industries) in the United States labor force? Secondly, if differences do exist, to what extent has Hollywood's particular industry economics been responsible for the plights of female filmmakers in the industry? Lastly, were the economic gains of industry reconfigurations worth turning female filmmakers into an industry minority?

To start with the first question above, if women filmmakers' participation rates matched those of the total women's U.S. labor force participation rates, they would need to demonstrate a consistent and positively increasing pattern. In the United States, only 20 percent of all women worked for pay in 1900.¹ As shown below, women's participation rate increased from around 30 percent in 1947 to a peak rate of 60 percent in 2000, and while dropping slightly by 2012, remains fairly consistent today at a rate of 57 percent.

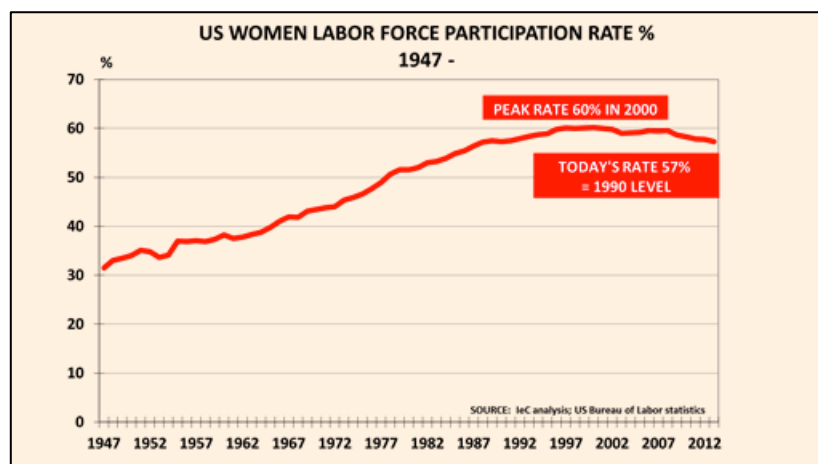


Figure 1. Graph of U.S. women labor force participation showing increasing rates, 1947-2012.

¹ Dora L. Costa, "From Mill Town to Board Room: The Rise of Women's Paid Labor," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 14, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 101.

Participation rates for women started to increase as a result of the shortage of male labor during World War II and continued to grow during the late 1940s when women remained in the workforce even after men returned home from war. Likewise, women's participation rates rose even quicker during the 1970s and 1980s as a result of Second Wave Feminism. With more liberal, modern views about equality and justice pervading American society (as well as the need—caused by inflation and rising costs—for 2 incomes in order to sustain standards of living), women have maintained higher participation levels in the workforce. Although a slight decline occurred in the early-mid 2000s, it influenced all areas of the labor force, including men's participation levels, and had more to do with “lingering business-cycle effects from the long economic boom of the late 1990s, which may have driven labor force participation rates to unsustainably high levels at that time”² than specific factors related to gender.

Regardless, the general trend for women in the labor force over the past 100 years positively increased while male labor force participation progressively decreased. Accounting for other influential factors, these trends held consistent across age groups for both men and women. By dividing age ranges into groups: ages 16-24, 25-54, and 55+, the most significant age groups in the male decrease and female increase of changing labor force participation rates were observed.

² Chinhui Juhn and Simon Potter, “Changes in Labor Force Participation in the United States,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 20, no. 3, (Summer 2006): 30.



Figure 2. Trends in labor force participation taking into account age group influence.³

According to the various age group participation rates, the age group 55+ contributed to the largest decrease in male labor force participation rates, although all three age groups did decline. Meanwhile in the female labor force, women 55+ slightly increased their participation, but the major growths occurred in the 16-24 age group, and more influentially in the 25-54 age group. The 16-24 year-old female participation rates rose from around 45 percent in 1948 and peaked around 60 percent. Even more impressively, the 25-54 year-old women participation rates went from around 35 percent in 1948 to roughly 75 percent in the early 2000s.

In order to properly assess why the 25-54 age group most influenced women's labor force participation rates, we must study one more categorical division of women in the workforce. By dividing women into married and unmarried subdivisions, the data depicts how the influx of

³ Chinhui, 30.

married women into the labor force led to such influential increases in women's overall labor force participation rates.

Year	All Women	Single Women	Married Women	Widowed, Divorced, or Separated
1900	20.6	43.5	5.6	32.5
1910	25.4	51.1	10.7	34.1
1930	24.8	50.5	11.7	34.4
1940	25.8	45.5	15.6	30.2
1950	29.0	46.3	23.0	32.7
1960	34.5	42.9	31.7	36.1
1970	41.6	50.9	40.2	36.8
1980	51.5	64.4	49.9	43.6
1990	57.5	66.7	58.4	47.2
2000	60.2	69.0	61.3	49.4
2009	59.2	64.2	61.4	49.3

Figure 3. Labor force participation rates of women, 1900-2009.⁴

As Figure 3 shows, single women and widowed/divorced/separated (women who have always worked to support themselves) maintained much smaller increases in participation levels.

However, married women's participation levels increased from under 6 percent in 1900 to over 61 percent in 2009. Combining both categorizations of married vs. single women and the most influential 25-54 age demographic into one graph, Figure 4 illustrates the significant impact that the rise of married women in the workforce had on women's general rates of labor force participation.

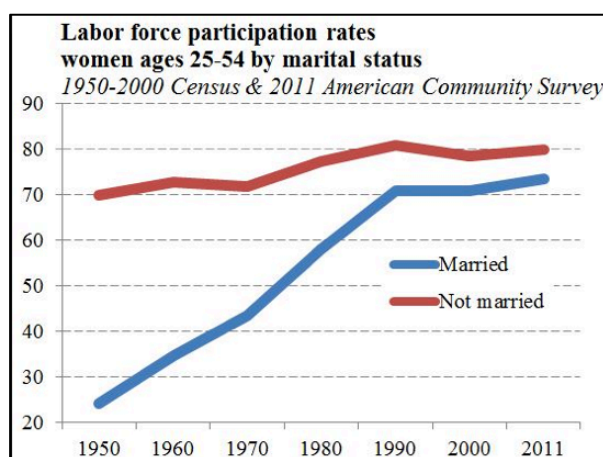


Figure 4. Graph of female labor force rates for ages 25-54.

⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2011* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2011), Table 596.

According to Chinhui Juhn and Simon Potter, the rise in married women in the workforce suggests “that women responded to their own wage effects and not on the impact of husband’s earnings....Women married to high-wage husbands increased their labor supply even faster than women married to low-wage husbands...Also, often wives of high-wage husbands are themselves highly educated and skilled, so it is likely that these women were responding to the higher skill premiums.”⁵ Increasing labor force participation rates led to “dramatic changes in women’s social and economic status, which can only be understood by looking to the past. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the ‘factory girl’ set the stage for the unmarried ‘office girl.’ The unmarried office girl paved the way for the entry of married women into the labor force in the late 1950s, even though this entry was primarily in dead-end jobs in the clerical sector.”⁶ Both the clerical sector and the introduction of part-time work in the 1950s allowed more married women and especially married women with children to enter the workforce. These women, even those who graduated from college, “were tracked into traditionally female sectors (education, nursing, secretarial work)...they left the labor force when their first child was born and only re-entered when all children were in school.”⁷ However by the 1970s, the increasing number of women in the workforce and attending college reduced the social stigma of a “working woman.” No longer did a working wife mean that a household was financially in trouble. With the rise in feminism and changing social standards as the youth of the 1960s’ “sexual revolution” reached adulthood, women demanded further equality in marriages, and divorce became more commonplace in society. The increased risk in divorce provided another reason for more working women—as solely depending on their husband’s job and income proved dangerous; if they were to divorce, the woman would have to support herself.

⁵ Chinhui, 36.

⁶ Costa, 101.

⁷ Costa, 109.

Given the consistent upward movement of women's overall labor force participation, similar growth in participation of women would be expected in the economy's individual industries. While professions such as nursing and teaching became primarily female, other professions, including theater directors, pilots, politicians, and doctors, have developed primarily against the grain of the overall female labor force participation rates. Female doctors especially have a hard time breaking into the medical profession. At a symposium on women in medicine, Dr. Renucci noted, "in 1905, women comprised 4 percent of physician graduates, a number that remained largely unchanged as late as 1965...By 2004, women accounted for 25 percent of physicians."⁸ Although growth has occurred, the disparities between male and female doctors remain blatantly evident.

The film industry also demonstrates opposing tendencies, with less overall growth than the medical field. Before discussing the discrepancies between women's general labor force participation and that of women in film, we must note that we actually do not have good figures on women's participation in the early film industry because so much of the information from silent cinema has been lost. Since the data does not exist, we would be rash to build anything more than theories. From what we do know, the general trend in the film industry contained a strong female presence during the silent era, a decline in women filmmakers during the configuration of the Hollywood Studio System, a continued lack of women during the post-war era, and an increased number of women since the 1970s and Second Wave Feminism, although gender inequalities are still glaring in the present day. The "up, down, down, up" pattern of the female labor force in the film industry contradicts the mostly consistent increase in the total female U.S. labor force participation rates. In addition, the women working in the film industry have extremely different participation rates depending on job category.

⁸ "From Past to Present: The Changing Demographics of Women in Medicine," *American Academy of Ophthalmology*, Newsletter, June 2008.

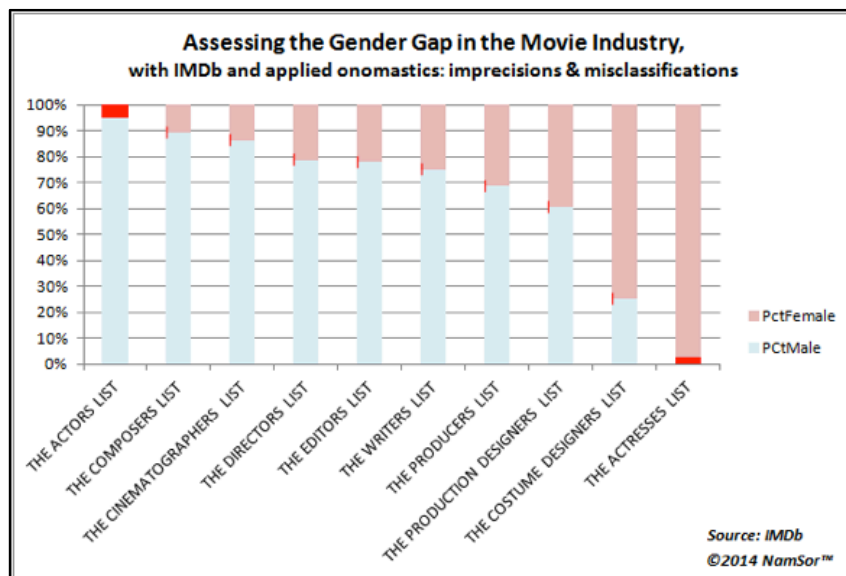


Figure 5. The resulting differences of women's rates of film industry jobs, 2014.

Like the overall labor force, more women work in jobs deemed “feminine,” such as costume design, than in more historically masculine categories like editing or directing. The gender gap has grown over time and resulted in major discrepancies in filmmaking jobs for women.

Why has this gender gap developed in film? For one thing, the film industry lacks the clear and established career ladder that is present in many other fields. In addition, the industry relies heavily on networking in what has become an “old boys’ network.” Thus, the film industry’s prevailing notions of authority differ greatly from those of other fields. Instead of relying on a bureaucratic form of authority, “rational-legal authority,”⁹ in which everything is structured hierarchically based on merit and performance, the film industry follows what the German political economist, Max Weber, described as a paternalistic form of authority. Weber asserted that this form of authority stems from personality, networking, and other informal systems that have their foundations and support in the societal acceptance of the patriarchy.

Finally, film industry trends diverged from the overall labor force’s increase in women in the 1940s-1950s because of Hollywood’s differing structures from typical American industries.

⁹ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947).

Filmmaking functioned as an unstable, quick moving business in which people often worked project to project for long, inflexible hours. This especially affected married women's participation in film, as the industry's nature prevented married women and mothers from opting to work "part time." Similarly while women found opportunities in other industries to work as secretaries and other clerical employees until their children were born and then to return after the children were grown, the film industry based itself on "proven successes." Therefore, employees found work by showing prominent, well-formed, and successful past bodies of work. With many people vying for chances to work in "forward thinking, forward moving" Hollywood, where you are "only as good as your last picture," and the availability of male filmmakers who could work on one project after another, women who left the workforce to have children found it difficult to return to the industry as their connections and places in the system had disappeared.

With the rise of women working in other higher paid industries outside of the home, skilled work became highly valued, and women flocked to feminine fields such as secretarial, teaching, and nursing jobs. The increased supply of professional women has benefitted firms needing highly skilled workers, but women's expanding career opportunities have hurt fields that traditionally depended upon women's labor.¹⁰ Fewer women, or at least lesser skilled and lower quality women, remained in childcare and domestic help work. Therefore, film industry women lost some of the affordable childcare that made working long hours on sets and in industry power positions feasible. Meanwhile most of the married male directors and studio heads had stay-at-home wives who could take care of the home and the children, so they could afford to work longer hours and focus all of their efforts on their careers.

In contrast, women who established careers in film often had to navigate work, marriage, and childcare. This juggling of career and family in an effort to maintain work-life balance

¹⁰ Costa, 102.

explains one important reason for the lack of women present in the film industry from the 1930s¹¹ to the 1970s, and the continuing discrepancies that exist today. Modeling the plight of every mother, women prove more likely to quit their jobs to take care of kids than their husbands. Even in the face of the more egalitarian present day marriages, women often sacrifice their careers because:

Structural impediments prevent people from acting on their egalitarian values, forcing men and women into personal accommodations and rationalizations that do not reflect their preferences... Women are still paid less than men at every educational level and in every job category. They are less likely than men to hold jobs that offer flexibility or family-friendly benefits. So, especially when women are married to men who work long hours, it often seems to both partners that they have no choice. Female professionals are twice as likely to quit work as other married mothers when their husbands work 50 hours or more a week and more than three times more likely to quit when their husbands work 60 hours or more.¹²

While “dual-earner families are now the norm, work policies are still designed for a labor force composed of full-time male workers with wives at home to take care of family obligations... This reinforces gender inequality over the long run. On average, when a woman leaves the workforce for a year to care for a child, she loses almost 20 percent of her lifetime earnings power.”¹³ Thus, many of the remaining disparities stem from both an outdated system of work compensation and the way in which the film industry functions, rewarding those in power and with successful track records.

In addition to structural reasons, disparities between the increasing trends of women in the workforce and the absence of women in the film industry stem from the economics of

¹¹ With the rise in unemployment as a result of the Great Depression, more women were forced to find jobs to help support their families. The losses in income caused many white women to enter the market and lay off their domestic help.

¹² Stephanie Coontz, “Why Gender Equality Stalled,” *New York Times*, Opinion, 16 February 2013.

¹³ Stephanie Coontz, “Women Have Come a Long Way, But Still Have Far to Go,” *Stephaniecoontz.com*, 16 March 2014, Accessed on 5 December 2014, <http://www.stephaniecoontz.com/articles/article99.html>.

Hollywood. As the Hollywood film industry solidified into a viable business venture, Wall Street investors became interested in investing in film. The monetary input from these capitalistic investors resulted in more funding available for filmmaking, but came at the price of corporate influences. This influence, while supposedly only “financial,” quickly spread to ideological with practices that encouraged unequal representations between the sexes because “economic categories and concepts are embedded in social contexts and connected to processes of social differentiation.”¹⁴ Males created and maintained control over economic theories, and by extension, societal beliefs on the economy and labor. Male authority over labor and economics emerged from the Victorian Era, a prominent time of gendered ideals. Drucilla Barker and Susan Feiner, authors of *Liberating Economics: Feminist Perspectives on Families, Work, and Globalization*, suggest:

During the Victorian Era, in the emerging capitalist industrial societies, women were increasingly defined as subservient to men. Women’s subordination rested on the belief that insurmountable differences separated the masculine from the feminine. As a result, radically different imperatives were imagined to govern the lives of women and men. Men were to be the breadwinners and rule makers...Laws, editorials, sermons, and scientific research endorsed the view that any woman whose behavior even hinted at autonomous action in the worlds of commerce, politics, religion, or education risked her sanity, her femininity, her fertility, and her very life.¹⁵

The Victorian era established the system of male superiority and female subordination that continued for centuries. As these systems continued over time, they became accepted as societal and cultural norms—engrained so much in people’s minds that most assumed the differences in men and women’s roles stemmed from biological not culturally constructed gender differences. Thus, men retained their power and furthered their own positions as creators and producers of laws, customs, labor, and economics. They had created a society in which women’s inferiority

¹⁴ Barker, *Liberating Economics*, 3.

¹⁵ Barker, *Liberating Economics*, 10.

was widely accepted and allowed men to maintain authority that gave them a monopoly on reason, logic, rationality, and economics. Moreover, Drucilla Barker and Edith Kuiper explain that the economic “conception of rationality that is constituted, in part, by an exclusion of the feminine is not a neutral position that can be occupied by anyone regardless of the contingent circumstance of identity—gender, race, or class. Instead, it is a subjective position predicated on a particular identity—that of propertied men of European ancestry—and claims to universality serve to obscure its particular nature.”¹⁶

The Victorian ideals inherent in economics spread even further when Wall Street investors encouraged the film industry to adopt their standard model of U.S. economics—Neoclassical economics—as the basis of Hollywood’s business strategies. Neoclassical economics rests on the discrepancies between the state of nature and the nature of human beings in which natural resources are scarce, but human wants are unlimited. These assumptions “allow neoclassical economists to define economics as the science of choice: the study of how societies allocate scarce resources among alternative uses. In this view, economics is an objective, gender-neutral, and value-free science that articulates the laws of economics.”¹⁷ However in practice, neoclassical economics proves less objective than economists have claimed. Subjectivity and inequalities exist in the economic model: first, because the model bases itself on the understanding of “economic man” and secondly, because the men who have created and are in charge of economic theories define and misperceive the ideas of rationality.

Neoclassical economics relies on the theory of rational choice, in which everyone arranges his own preferences logically and rationally based on time and income constraints and autonomously choose to maximize his own individual utilities, or self-interests. However,

¹⁶ Drucilla K. Barker and Edith Kuiper, eds., *Toward a Feminist Philosophy of Economics* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 9.

¹⁷ Drucilla K. Barker and Susan F. Feiner, *Liberating Economics: Feminist Perspectives on Families, Work, and Globalization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 4.

orthodox economic theory also emphasizes a central agent known as Homo *economicus*, or “Economic Man,” who “is possessed of masculine Cartesian virtues and exclusions.”¹⁸ In man’s economic agency, he competes and produces, rationally, in order to maximize his own profits, regardless of the effects on others around him. In fact, neoclassical economics posits that the economy works to regulate itself and support the collective well being of society only through the self-serving actions of every individual producer and consumer. Yet, these descriptions of neoclassical economic thought do not seem to suggest an “objective” depiction of a human “rational agent.” Instead, they define a subjective system in which one group remains subordinate to another group that holds power over cultural, societal, and economic thoughts surrounding American ideals of labor, economics, and society.

Neoclassical economics situates men as the prototype around which the world revolves. In fact, it literally uses the word “man” to describe the economic agent and positions men as the important and only component of the economic market while depicting women as non-economic actors. The underlying assumptions of those dualisms suggest that factors associated with economics—rationality, reason, logic, masculinity, and man—hold power and occupy more important roles than the “anti-economic” terms—irrationality, emotion, waste, femininity, and woman—carrying female connotations.

In this context, American businesses and their corresponding economic principles shape the viewpoints of American citizens and have created an unjust system in which women are perceived differently than men in the workforce and the general market economy. As such, these principles have directly influenced the formation of the Hollywood film industry and have led to a culture in which women filmmakers receive unequal treatment and struggle to establish careers.

While these widely held beliefs remained uncontested for much of post-Victorian era

¹⁸ Janice Peterson and Margaret Lewis, eds., *The Elgar Companion to Feminist Economics* (Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc., 1999), 149.

history, the feminist movements of the 1970s led to the beginnings of feminist economics. Begun by female economists who had navigated a male-dominated, misogynistic field, feminist economics served to question basic assumptions of economic theory like “economic man” and “rationality” in order to advocate for a more equal system that promotes the general well-being of society (by relying on the social, cultural, political, and historical in addition to the material) over the sole desire for profit maximization. Most importantly, feminist economics advocate “a reframing of the criteria for evaluating economic performance: Participants in an economic system should insist on a system that is fair; The economic system must be likely to provide an improved quality of life over time; *Economic security of the many should not be sacrificed by policies that benefit the few.*”¹⁹ Therefore, feminist economics argues that gender and race serve as important factors influencing the opportunities and agencies available to individuals, and that a reframing is necessary in order to overcome sexist oppression and gender inequality. They warn of the misconceptions that occur when people take the production-consumption divide as given and naturally created, explaining that in actuality the men in power created the divide, and how accepting it unquestioningly bolsters their control and influence.

Feminist economist, Gillian Hewitson “assessed the gender division of labor in the household as a social construct arising from society’s ideas on proper roles for men and women. This social construct relies on biological stereotypes of male and female roles, and not on the actual and far more equal division of labor between males and females that can be found in other species. Comparatively, human beings waste talents and skills by assigning each sex to a strictly demarcated sphere of life.”²⁰ Assigning jobs according to skills without factoring socially constructed ideas of gender would increase productivity and efficiency, lower costs, and increase profits. In addition, it would improve people’s quality of life, as they would work in areas that

¹⁹ Barker, *Liberating Economics*, 2.

²⁰ Barker, *Toward a Feminist Philosophy*, 60.

made them happy and improved their own individual and societal benefits. Overall, they assert that through systemic cultural, social, and corresponding economic changes, the world be rid of “socially damaging concentrations of power.”²¹ However, in order to overthrow the prevailing hierarchies, people of all genders, races, and classes must work to subvert the current systems and give up on competing for power.

These theories of feminist economics, while not taken seriously and highly contested by their male—and some female—counterparts, suggest ways to alter economic foundations that if changed, would open up economics and other industries to fairer representations in the work force. Given the film industry’s reliance on American economic tenets, changes in economics to a system that hoped to maximize consumer welfare as well as maximize profits could also influence Hollywood business practices and promote more opportunities for female filmmakers. Unfortunately, feminist economics’ lack of acceptance means that no changes within the film industry (or society at large) have occurred.

How have these economic notions affected the film industry? Hollywood’s reliance on the economic standards as set by male-dominated Wall Street consequentially caused many problems for female filmmakers, and the costs of those economic choices—in which women filmmakers became a minority group—were not worth the potential gains from such practices. The film industry, and American business as a whole, has become blinded by neoclassical economics and the search for increasing productivity and lowering costs at the expense of societal welfare, especially the welfare of “minority groups” in America, the largest of which is American women. Women in the film industry have especially been affected by the economic practices of businesses, and while the economic changes over the industry’s history proved that Hollywood was both profitable and able to sustain itself over the course of time, it did so unfairly

²¹ Julie A. Nelson, *Economics for Humans* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 92.

at the expense of women—women consumers, audience members, and most blatantly, women filmmakers.

CHAPTER ONE
Pioneering Women:
Market Forces in Early Hollywood, 1895-1925

The official beginnings of the American film industry date back to 1894 and the invention of Edison's kinetoscope. According to Karen Mahar, author of *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*, this new technology “emerged within an already masculinized context. The very first films were not an art form or a replacement for live theater, worlds where women existed as artists, actresses, playwrights, and managers, but commercialized sensations drawn from the highly masculinized setting of the inventor's laboratory.”¹ Kinetoscopes were designed as “peep shows” for one person at a time. Men comprised most of the audience in kinetoscope parlors and enjoyed watching women as dancing girls or in other compromising scenarios.

Interestingly, this masculine technological breakthrough ultimately resulted in a silent film era in which women served as prominent forces. The pioneers of the film industry struggled to enter into America's capitalistic market and solidify a developing market structure. Because society rejected film as a serious business, people working within film production forged their own path into industry stability by relying on economic forces of supply and demand and profit maximization. While cinema's quest for recognition as an industry is fascinating in and of itself, the truly remarkable aspect is the major role played by *women* in film's establishment as a competitive and lasting market.

The emergence of new moving image technologies created a brand new product that could be mass-produced, marketed, and distributed to consumers. Possessing minimal barriers to entry, an “un-concentrated” market quickly developed. Un-concentrated markets arise because of minimal market power concentration and low entry costs, allowing many firms to compete. “The

¹ Karen Ward Mahar, *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 9.

early film industry era possessed many of the characteristics that often define the initial stage of an industry's life cycle: small-scale production, rapid change, diverse designs, technical uncertainty and ease of entry."² As such, the film industry's focus in the beginning remained on producing a finished product that could be sold to consumers, and hopefully return a profit on initial investment.

In order to successfully complete a film, one needed capital. While relatively low by today's standards, filmmaking costs still existed—in 1920, the average feature cost between \$40,000 and \$80,000³—and so startup money for film financing was accepted from any willing donor. However, typical business investors—Wall Street aficionados, owners of profitable industries, and people from “Old Money”—shunned investment opportunities in film because they perceived it as too risky for the prospective reward, while others believed the short, silent “moving image films” merely existed as a disreputable passing fad.

In addition, the new industry needed labor, both actors and crew, to collaboratively work together to produce films. Given its status as a new industry, most people lacked proper training and skills to start out as experts in the field. Those brave enough to enter into the new trade often came from Europe or the theater world, areas in which women already held more prominent positions. Actors and workers migrated from theater to film in search of a more stable work cycle. During the early 1900s, theater groups traveled around the country performing different shows. However, the constant travel continuously disrupted people's normal lives and familial routines. Film offered these creative souls the chance to continue creating art but in a more stationary location. The reliance on collaboration in filmmaking necessitated many laborers, so the industry welcomed anyone willing to take a risk on the new venture. Film industry

² Harold Scott Wallace, “Innovation and the Evolution of the Early American Film Industry,” *ProQuest*, The University of Connecticut (1999): 24.

³ Michael Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry: Economic and Legal Analysis* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1960), 29.

participants worked tirelessly and collectively to churn out products, requiring employees to assist in any and every area, and so the early industry workers quickly became skilled in all areas of the process.

The lack of formal structures in the open film market and the low costs attracted many women, as more formal, hierarchically structured industries contained too many impediments for women to rise through the ranks to positions of power. Dawn Sova stated, “Women had a major role in the early days of the American film industry because no rigid role distinctions had yet been set. Both men and women learned as they went, and there were no ‘experts’ to establish rules and regulations in the filmmaking business—whoever could achieve a desired result, male or female, got the job.”⁴ Unlike many men, women readily chose to take the gamble of accepting a film industry job. For men, film industry employment meant risking their family’s stability and livelihood by leaving other, more secure jobs. Meanwhile because the role of “primary breadwinner” usually went to the man and because women lacked adequate opportunities in many other industries, women could afford to take a chance and venture into the film industry.

As the industry flourished, emerging filmmakers looked to expand their potential. In order to produce an optimal level of output, filmmaking migrated in the early 1900s to Los Angeles, California where the vast open spaces and year-round warm weather allowed filmmakers to shoot all year instead of shutting down production during the winter months. Similarly, California’s diverse landscapes gave filmmakers a variety of options for film locations and scenes; they could choose from scenic settings, including: deserts, mountains, and beaches.

The mass movement to the West Coast furthered prospects for women. Now that the industry was physically distanced from Wall Street and other developed industries, the opportunity arose for it to advance creatively on its own. Removed from the patriarchal

⁴ Dawn B. Sova, *Women in Hollywood: From Vamp to Studio Head* (New York: Fromm International, 1998), 2.

domination and ideas of proper etiquette of East Coast society, the film industry flourished under a more creative atmosphere that encouraged the input and talent of any able body,⁵ regardless of gender. Women emerged as important, well-respected figures in all aspects of the industry—from directors to costume designers and editors. Linda Seger explained, “And it was open to women primarily because women already in the industry either directly supported other women or influenced them as role models. Under these conditions, women excelled. ... There were over thirty women directors prior to 1920”⁶ out of roughly 120 total American silent film directors.

Women also played an important part in the rise of film exhibition. To properly explain how women influenced film’s rising demand, we must first analyze the impact of nickelodeon theaters on the industry. As Charles Musser, expert on early American cinema, states, “the rapid proliferation of specialized storefront moving-picture theaters—commonly known as nickelodeons—created a revolution in screen entertainment. They would alter the nature of spectatorship and precipitate fundamental shifts in representation. Their explosive demand for product would not only increase film production but force its reorganization.”⁷ The ability to rent films led to the emergence of nickelodeon theaters as a viable business endeavor. Nickelodeon theaters opened most frequently in large urban areas and attracted crowds of blue-collar workers, willing and able to pay low “nickel prices” for entertainment. Renting films drastically altered film demand by creating a market for film distribution wherein theaters paid lower prices to rent movies. Therefore, they could afford to rent multiple films and play them continuously throughout the day. Ultimately the rental system encouraged constant changes of a theater’s film

⁵ Neal Gabler’s book, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, solidifies this point, but focuses on Jews—instead of women—as the societal “outcasts” that find a place in the emerging film industry. He describes how show business provided new opportunities to forge careers and make a living, away from the rigid East Coast structures that offered Jews no real opportunities for success or career advancement.

⁶ Linda Seger, *When Women Call the Shots* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 9.

⁷ Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Los Angeles: U. of California Press, 1994), 417.

program in order to keep audiences entertained and coming back, resulting in film entrepreneurs earning higher profits. The nickelodeons continued to grow and prosper, profiting even during the economic recession of 1907. Author, Russell Merritt explained:

By 1910 when the nickelodeon craze has reached its peak, more than 10,000 of these theaters had sprung up across the country, creating demand for between one hundred and two hundred reels of film every week. ... If we may believe the most conservative estimates, by 1910 nickelodeons were attracting some twenty-six million Americans every week, a little less than 20 percent of the national population. ... National gross receipts for that year totaled no less than \$91 million.⁸

All day film operation and the conciseness of each show lowered audience members' opportunity costs (the costs of a forgone opportunity when choosing to pursue a certain action) by allowing people to stop in to the theaters briefly as a respite from their other daily activities and responsibilities. The nickelodeon thus was unprecedented as a wholly democratic entertainment.⁹ Lowering costs and opening up the market to increase appeal of films as a consumable product changed the market for films and solidified the foundation and stability of film distribution and exhibition practices.

The expanding popularity of nickelodeons led to a spike in demand for films. As demand grew, the equilibrium point of supply and demand at which the optimal level of output is produced also increased. Rising demand consequently necessitated more supply and additional filmmakers to generate new movies. However, the increasing demand for films also stemmed from changing structures within the market as cultural and economic factors merged to compel major changes in the industry's dynamic.

Still the question remains, what exactly was women's role in the exhibition process? Women as both producers and consumers vitally changed the market by influencing the type of

⁸ Russell Merritt, "Nickelodeon Theaters 1905-1914: Building an Audience for the Movies", in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 62.

⁹ Wallace, 78.

films being produced. Women gained the power to alter industry conventions because financial legitimacy, the fundamental goal of all business seeking enterprises, could not be achieved until society accepted films as “culturally legitimate.” While the rise of nickelodeons increased the mass consumption and profitability of films, they also hindered the acceptance of the cinema as culturally legitimate because of nickelodeons’ lower class audiences and the controversy surrounding the types of films being made. Film producers and exhibitors believed the best way to combat the prevailing opinions was to secure cinema’s rightful place as culturally legitimate, a feat possible only with the help of women— especially clubwomen—given the widely-held Victorian ideal of women as moral guardians of the home.

Dawn Sova tells us, “before the advent of film, public entertainment held a shady reputation, and ‘respectable’ middle-class ladies and families rarely attended stage shows ... early filmmakers were clever enough to target a huge, untapped market of spectators with moderate financial means but a great desire to be entertained.”¹⁰ The “untapped market” of Progressive reformers, many of whom were middle to upper class clubwomen, questioned movies’ influences on American society. They advocated for an “Uplift Movement” wherein filmmaking would change their practices to create wholesome, cleaner films rather than the questionable films that they believed harmed children and other “impressionables” currently on display in cheap nickelodeon theaters. The progressive reformers wanted films to function as an expression of Progressive politics and social reform.

Market forces of supply and demand operated efficiently: as people demanded cleaner, decent films, producers supplied “morally acceptable” films created by the [believed] morally superior gender—women. As more refined feature films and movie picture palaces became the norm, film entrepreneurs started making their products so that they appealed to middle-class

¹⁰ Sova, 13.

women. These filmmakers altered their output for two financially based reasons: so that filmmakers could maintain control of the industry and tap into a new audience demographic. The new emphasis on morally acceptable films stemmed first from the 1909 threat of state regulation and censorship. “The very real possibility that both the films and theaters would be controlled by the state inspired producers and exhibitors to unite in 1909 under the rubric of ‘uplift’. ... From 1909 to the mid 1910s, the various factions of the American film industry were united in their effort to make moving pictures respectable, an effort that was by its very nature gendered.”¹¹

Secondly, the filmmakers believed that if they could bring women into the theaters, success was eminent because women would not go alone; women would bring families, husbands, and other women with them. This understanding proved both true and profitable. Although film admission statistics prior to 1922 are unreliable, the *New York Times* reported in 1920 that women comprised 60 percent of film audiences, and in 1927 the *Moving Picture World* set the figure as high as 83 percent.¹² While the exact proportion does not matter, the overall high percentage of women filmgoers shows women’s opinions and voices mattered, a feat not widely felt in the early days of America’s patriarchal society.

With women now as the target demographic, filmmakers needed to produce commodities that would encourage female spectatorship. They decided that in order to appeal to female audiences, films must reflect society’s nature and concerns, and, they hypothesized, women themselves would be the best filmmakers to appeal to other women. For example, Mahar notes, “in 1914, when Alice Guy Blaché faced a censorship crisis over *The Lure*, a film version of the white slavery stage play, a female censor stood up and said, ‘I think that only a woman could treat it with this delicacy. I think that Madame Blaché has succeeded very well.’ The film passed

¹¹ Mahar, 78.

¹² Koszarski, 30.

unanimously.”¹³ Women as both prime audiences and filmmakers fixed another of the industry’s moral and economic problems—“It was useful for the studios to be able to attribute such films to a woman’s direction because such attribution could rhetorically pitch the presumption of a middle-class white woman’s virtue against arguments that cinema posed a moral hazard and should be censored.”¹⁴ Therefore if women made a film, it was viewed as more decent and proper than a film made by men. The supply and demand of women filmmakers suddenly became more marketable. While it would be partially correct to contend that male moguls used women filmmakers as “pawns” in a larger game, we must understand that film executives use everything in the filmmaking process as pawns in the ultimate financial game of making profits.

Overall the changes in output and filmmaking practices gave women power in the film industry, and they used that influence to their own advantage. Women such as Lois Weber, Frances Marion, Mary Pickford and many others utilized their newfound positions to rise through the ranks of the industry, establishing a foothold in filmmaking that remains unmatched. Oftentimes, the women working in the industry found ways to produce films in a variety of genres that challenged assumptions of film’s role in America by focusing on topics affecting society. These films pushed for a new definition of moving pictures and emphasized a broad audience made up of women, children, immigrants, mature adults, and other categories of society. Amid the increase in women filmmakers and the new emphasis on social situation films, women achieved domination as film’s target audience.

With prices set, output adapting to audiences, and target demographic [women] discovered, film entrepreneurs now needed to maximize their own profits and optimize the market by capitalizing on their audiences’ desires. The rise in mass media led to the development

¹³ Mahar, 89.

¹⁴ Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (Chicago: U. of Illinois Press, 2010), 129.

of fan culture, and “fan magazines began to treat the movie fan as quintessentially female.”¹⁵

Women read the movie picture magazine and newspaper articles to learn more about the happenings in the industry and create connections with the films’ stars. Previously, film stars merely functioned as tools to act out the stories, but now the actors became attractions in and of themselves. As most of the fans involved in fan culture were female, female actresses developed the biggest fan following. Hilary Hallett, author of *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood*, asserts that “journalists like Adela Rogers St. Johns and Louella Parsons churned out the publicity that explained who mattered in the industry and why. Such women spun stories about heroines whose fearless navigation of the West’s preeminent modern city foretold their abilities to win once inconceivable renown.”¹⁶ The publicity from fan culture encouraged more people, women especially, to go to the movies. The fan culture infatuation with stars developed into a major box office draw, and “by 1914 *Motion Picture News*, a trade paper aimed at exhibitors, was reporting that ‘women and girls’ were the principle readers of ‘moving picture news,’ a remarkable shift of opinion given the emphasis on men a few years earlier. By the early twenties, some estimated that women occupied 75 percent of seats.”¹⁷

While magazines and papers about the film industry increased readership, the effects of fan culture spilled over into the rise of the film star. Growing film patronage led film entrepreneurs to “focus on the commercial possibilities in promoting specific stars.”¹⁸

Filmmakers set out to capitalize on stars’ newfound fame and hopefully create new stars.

Likewise, the growth in popularity and output of feature films exhibited stars’ talents. At first only filmmakers capitalized on the excess profits from stars and their ability to increase theater

¹⁵ Kathryn H. Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 51.

¹⁶ Hilary A. Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Los Angeles: U. of California Press, 2013), 15.

¹⁷ Hallett, 14.

¹⁸ Sova, 7.

admissions, but stars quickly realized they could use their power with audiences to demand higher wages and/or acquire greater control over their films.¹⁹ These stars, many of whom were female, obtained salaries that often either equaled or surpassed their individual contributions to box-office successes. However, they received the high wage rates because of their name power and recognition with fans. Stars, filmmakers, and businessmen knew that “the Hollywood star system was a business strategy designed to generate large audiences and differentiate entertainment programs and products, and has been used ... to provide increasing returns on production investments.”²⁰ Therefore, the laws of supply and demand govern stars’ salaries, ensuring that stars who have bigger fan followings and can secure larger audiences and greater film profits receive higher salaries. “The ‘stars’ became an economic necessity through which your producer got not only a ‘production’ value in the making of his or her picture, but a ‘trademark’ value, and an ‘insurance’ value, which were very real and very potent in guaranteeing the sale of this product to the cash customers at a profit.”²¹ Audiences continued to expand as feature films cornered the market, and even with higher salary and production costs, film entrepreneurs still collected returns on investments in the form of profits.

Personal consumption expenditures for motion pictures increased from less than \$100 million in 1909 to more than \$300 million by 1921. As larger and larger theaters were constructed, exhibitors began to realize that there was a tremendous disparity in drawing power between films featuring different movie players, and exhibitor demand for pictures with the most popular stars continually increased.²²

¹⁹ Even today, many women directors begin as stars. This transition from actress to director is how they gain power in the industry.

²⁰ Gorham Kindem, “Hollywood’s Movie Star System: A Historical Overview,” in *The American Movie Industry: The Business of Motion Pictures*, ed. Gorham Kindem (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U. Press, 1982), 79.

²¹ Halsey, Stuart & Co., “The Motion Picture Industry as a Basis for Bond Financing,” in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: U. of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 179.

²² Kindem, 82.

With stars providing incentives to go to the movies, filmmakers willingly paid higher wage costs in order to remain in control of their “gold mines.” The establishment of a star system became the prime way to stabilize and optimize production.

Problems arose when stars grew tired of fighting for raises and control over their films. As the industry solidified, Hollywood producers and distributors tightened their control over actors’ salaries and creative decisions. No longer was the creative input of any able-body encouraged. Instead, the formation of a firm hierarchy began in which actors battled to obtain the salaries and job prospects they believed they deserved. The power struggles seemed fruitless in the established market, so stars decided to use their “name brand” leverage power to leave and start their own independent studios. Actresses such as Dorothy Gish, Florence Lawrence, Clara Kimball Young, and Mary Pickford, for the most part anonymous in the early films, parlayed their familiarity with the business into the creation of their own studios.²³ In 1919, Mary Pickford, Charles Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, D.W. Griffith, and William S. Hart, five of the biggest and most prominent names in the film industry, announced the formation of their own distribution company to be owned and operated by the stars for the benefit of the public audiences, and thus, United Artists was born.

Creating independent production companies enabled stars to control their own careers. In addition, starting a company required low capital requirements; market power was more widely distributed; and independent distribution was accessible, especially given the “star power” of these newfound production company owners. Mahar explains:

Most frequently, directors and their stars split to form a new independent company named after the star. It was the autonomy of the director units that ultimately encouraged stars to take a better offer or to plunge into the independent field. ... Not only would the star’s popularity provide currency in the marketplace, but male partners typically stayed in the background,

²³ Sova, 2.

probably because of the traditional belief that an actress is ‘more popular when she is unattached to any man.’²⁴

While still a risk, stars entering the independent production world knew that they had a guaranteed product, their name, that would sell, and that their built in fan following and “ready-made” audience would secure them film investors and distributors. Thus, the rise of the independent movement began with female stars exercising their industry power and showing film entrepreneurs that they needed to rethink their business practices if they wanted to stay profitable.

To sum up, as the industry struggled to gain recognition as a business, film entrepreneurs navigated various economic practices in hopes of solidifying film as a stable industry in American society. In establishing a market structure, navigating changing supply and demand forces, and optimizing their returns through profit maximization, film proved itself worthy of investment. During film’s beginning in the silent era, the changing market configurations provided opportunities for women to gain power in the industry. The inability of society to take film seriously at the outset allowed women the chance to work in creative and high-powered positions. Rising demand from the creation of nickelodeons and the mandate for morally just films situated women as the target film audience and the better filmmakers. As females grew in numbers within filmmaking and film viewing, fan culture and rising industry profits encouraged the emergence of a “star system” in Hollywood, effectively favoring female actresses over their male counterparts. These actresses became name brands and used their names as leverage to start their own independent production companies and take creative control of their careers. As the film industry labored to organize itself during the silent era, women filmmakers took advantage of the freedom and rose through the ranks of the film industry, solidifying their place as pioneers in movie making history.

²⁴ Mahar, 61.

Case Study One:
Alice Guy Blaché, Director



Figure 6. Alice Guy Blaché.

In terms of female filmmaking pioneers, Alice Guy Blaché sets the standard. Blaché was “the first women film director in history (and arguably the first director, male or female, to bring a narrative film to the screen), Blaché directed, produced, and/or supervised nearly three hundred films in her lifetime. She then spent the rest of her life attempting to prove to others that she had done so.”²⁵

Born in 1873, Blaché spent several years living in France with her maternal grandmother before joining the rest of her family in Chile, where her father ran a successful publishing company. Shortly thereafter, her parents enrolled her at a convent school on the French border. After her father’s death, Blaché’s schooling changed, and she trained as a typist and stenographer. “Like many women who would follow after her into the film industry, Blaché broke into the business as a secretary. Leon Gaumont hired Blaché in 1895 when he opened a photographic studio and patented a motion picture camera.”²⁶ From 1896 to 1906, Blaché served as Gaumont’s head of production and is widely acknowledged as the filmmaker who developed the

²⁵ Acker, 7.

²⁶ Seger, 7.

idea of narrative filmmaking. Impressed with her work, Gaumont established a film studio for Blaché to produce fiction films, which she spent the next 10 years doing. After writing, producing and directing almost four hundred films for Gaumont, she went with her husband, Herbert Blaché, to the United States where he worked as the production manager for Gaumont's United States operations.

After a three-year domestic hiatus,²⁷ Blaché restarted her career in America. She spent the next ten years writing, directing, and producing over three hundred films for the Solax Company, the studio she created in Fort Lee, New Jersey in 1910. The Solax Company proved extremely successful and became the model for all other developing studios. By 1914, Blaché decided to make her husband the president of Solax so that she could concentrate her efforts on writing and directing. While the couple worked together personally and professionally, their relationship began to struggle—especially when Herbert resigned as president and opened a rival company—and by 1918, Herbert left to pursue a career in Hollywood. During this time, East coast film production floundered as many filmmakers moved west to California. Blaché directed her last film, *Tarnished Reputations*, in 1920; by 1922 she had auctioned off her film studio, claimed bankruptcy, returned to France, and never made a film again. She unsuccessfully returned to the United States in 1927 in the hopes of retrieving some of her old work. After that, she disappeared from filmmaking, returning only in the 1940s when her unhappiness over being left out of historical film industry records caused her to begin speaking engagements on “feminine psychology and filmmaking”²⁸ and work on writing her memoirs. She remained single and devoted her time to her children until she died in 1968 at the age of 94, at which point her children discovered and published Blaché's unpublished manuscript.

²⁷ During this time, Blaché took care of her first-born daughter and only went back to work and opened her own studio while she was pregnant with her second child.

²⁸ Acker, 10.

Though Blaché's career stagnated, she remains a true pioneer for women in the early film industry. Her career lasted over 24 years during which time she directed over 1,000 films. In addition, she “was honored in France as the first woman filmmaker in the world, at the Cinematheque Francais, and made a knight of the French Legion of Honor.”²⁹ She created female depictions onscreen that demonstrated women as strong and capable of taking charge of their own lives—in contrast with the traditional objectifications of women offered by male filmmakers.

Although much of her career shaped French film, her successes also influenced the American film industry. Her career trajectory exemplified the fluidity of film industry roles in the earliest years and how women could start at the bottom and work their way up. Lastly, through her own example, she created an atmosphere in which female filmmakers were encouraged to network in an “old girls’ network.”

Alice Guy Blaché's Well-Known Films

1896	The Cabbage Fairy
1897	Black Maria
1908	One Touch of Nature
1910	A Widow and Her Child
1910	The Pawn Shop
1913	Matrimony's Speed Limit
1917	A Man and a Woman
1920	Tarnished Reputations

²⁹ Acker, 10-11.

Case Study Two:
Lois Weber, Director



Figure 7. Lois Weber.

Lois Weber flourished as a director during the film industry's silent era. In addition to her many film credits, she gained distinction for being the first American-born woman director. Similarly to most filmmakers of the time period, Weber happened upon movie making while looking for a more stable, rooted career.

Weber first worked as a street-corner evangelist and, encouraged by family members, decided to try a career on stage. Although it seems like a drastic change, Weber accepted the challenge and looked at acting as a more efficient and easily accessible way to continue her missionary work, and hopefully to sort out her financial situation as well. Weber “was convinced that the theatrical profession needed a missionary, [her uncle] suggested that the best way to reach them was to become one of them, so she went on the stage filled with a great desire to convert her fellowman.”³⁰

In 1905 while traveling in a road company, she married the company's actor-manager, Phillips Smalley. For a while they both continued their individual careers, but the frequent separation wore on their relationship. Weber tried a short stint as a stay-at-home wife, but

³⁰ Koszarski, 223.

quickly realized that role was not for her. In 1908 after wishing to return to work and discovering that motion pictures required little travel, she applied for and acquired a job at Gaumont Film Studios under the creative direction of Herbert Blaché and his pioneering wife, Alice Guy-Blaché—the first French woman director. While Weber continued acting at Gaumont Film Studios, she branched out into other areas, including: writing and directing, making her the first woman to write, direct, produce, and star in a movie. Weber took risks in her projects, and her passion, beliefs, and creative vision always showed in her films. Over the next several years, Weber honed her craft and created distinctive expectations in audiences surrounding the serious moral tone and message of her films. Her frank depictions of modern life gained her a reputation as a director/writer who stirred audiences to passionate outrage.³¹

By 1916, Weber had produced and directed films through many of the early studios including Reliance Studio, Rex Company, Universal, and Bosworth Company. She chose to go back to Universal Studios where she was reported to be the most important and highest-paid director, making \$5,000 a week.³² While the reasons behind this decision pattern are unclear, Universal employed more women directors during the late teens than other studios. However, none quite reached the levels of success and fame that Weber obtained. Weber's power as a director—regardless of her gender—was solidified when Universal, under the direction of Carl Laemmle, agreed to finance and build a production unit for her over which she maintained complete creative control. Thus in 1917, she formed her own production company, Lois Weber Productions, and became “the only woman other than Alice Guy-Blaché to own and completely control a film studio.”³³ Having a guaranteed distribution deal from Universal and getting free rein to create films meant Weber could do what she set out to do—improve her fellowmen by

³¹ Ally Acker, *Reel Women: Pioneers of the Cinema 1896 to the Present* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1991), 13.

³² Seger, 8.

³³ Seger, 7.

preaching her messages of morality. Although her subtlety improved greatly in her later films, the thematic qualities of her auteurship carried over to establish “a ‘Weber film’ as a mark of quality that treated controversial subject matter, most typically of a sexual nature, in a moral manner and that entertained while sermonizing.”³⁴ Weber’s films focused on trademark themes of birth control, abortion, and divorce in the hopes of ascertaining film as a socially provocative and morally powerful art form.

By 1920, her success was unprecedented; Paramount lured her away from Universal with a \$50,000-per-picture contract, and half of all profits.³⁵ This success proved to be the greatest and last of her career, as the silent era and its openness to women peaked. Although she started as an actress, she won control and became a successful silent era director. She possessed the desired qualities and personal history to create content that encouraged progressive reform. Weber’s moralizing roots made her a prime candidate for film industry success. She possessed the desired ability to uplift film and make it a socially and morally acceptable form of entertainment that provided tools and teachings for societal reform.

Lois Weber’s Well-Known Films

1915	Hypocrites
1916	Shoes
1916	Where Are My Children?
1917	The Hand That Rocks the Cradle
1921	What do Men Want?
1921	Too Wise Wives
1921	The Blot
1927	Sensation Street
1934	White Heat

³⁴ Cooper, 137.

³⁵ Acker, 15.

Case Study Three:
Frances Marion, Screenwriter



Figure 8. Frances Marion.

During the silent era, female scenario writers thrived and were often the tops in their field. One such example was Frances Marion, the first woman, and second—and third—person, to win an Academy Award for Screenwriting.

Marion dropped out of school at age twelve. At age sixteen, she transferred to an art school in San Francisco until an earthquake destroyed it in 1906. After marrying young, Marion first worked as a journalist for the *San Francisco Reporter* before serving overseas as the first female combat war correspondent during World War I. When she returned home after the war, she moved to Los Angeles with her new [second] husband. Marion quickly realized domesticity and society life bored her, so she set out to fill her time. Marion established a close friendship with Adela Rogers St. Johns, a relationship that started Marion's career in the film industry. In 1915, Adela set up an appointment for Marion with Lois Weber, because Weber always looked for new people with whom to work. At the meeting, Weber offered Marion a job at Lois Weber Productions. "Lois was cognizant that she was hiring more than a bright and talented young woman; she was also ensuring a connection with a close friend of Adela Rogers, the rising star

reporter of the *Los Angeles Herald*.³⁶ Hired as an actress and writing assistant, Marion's perseverance and willingness to help in any film-related task quickly made her stand out. Marion soon became Weber's protégé, and Weber trained Marion in all aspects of the production business, from editing and costuming through set design and maintenance ... Although such training was exhausting, it prepared her to be aware of all aspects of the production when writing, thus making her later screenplays easier to produce.³⁷ As Marion's career blossomed, she remembered and acknowledged the support she received from other women, especially Weber. Marion stressed, "I owe my greatest success to women. Contrary to the assertion that women do all in their power to hinder one another's progress, I have found that it has always been one of my own sex who has given me a helping hand when I needed it."³⁸

After being mentored by Weber, Marion set out on her own. With her skills, self-deprecating humor, and versatile writing style, she embarked on a screenwriting career in the fledgling film industry. Marion ultimately created a career that spanned both the silent era and the beginnings of the "talkies." She wrote scripts for many of Hollywood's female stars, including many of Mary Pickford's most successful films. Marion's writings drastically influenced Pickford's career and helped create Pickford's star image.

In 1925, Marion expanded the reach of her career by forming her own production company, Frances Marion Pictures. Starting in 1917, Marion became the highest-paid screenwriter in Hollywood of either sex. At the height of her career, she was bringing in a salary to the tune of seventeen thousand dollars a week.³⁹ Marion won two Academy Awards in a row, for *The Big House* (Hill, 1930) and *The Champ* (Vidor, 1931). Marjorie Rosen described

³⁶ Cari Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1997), 37.

³⁷ Sova, 9.

³⁸ Quoted in Beauchamp, 12.

³⁹ Acker, 171.

Marion's films as "action dramas, glib and fast-paced, with gangsters and gun battles ...

Marion's films were without romance and alarmingly naturalistic, exactly the antithesis of...the archetypical 'women's pictures.'"⁴⁰

She continued to work into the 1950s and, over the course of her career, she wrote "325 scripts covering every conceivable genre. She also directed and produced half a dozen films, was the first Allied woman to cross the Rhine in World War I, and served as the vice president and only woman on the first board of directors of the Screen Writers Guild. ... She would have four husbands and dozens of lovers and tell her best friends she spent her life 'searching for a man to look up to without lying down.'"⁴¹ Of the 325 screenplays she wrote, about 130 were produced.⁴² Not only was Marion praised for her work and its influences on the canon of film history, but she also served as an icon, representing the many female screenwriters that maintained success and employment during the film industry's silent era. Women writers had a solidified place in the industry, and "half of all the films copyrighted between 1911 and 1925 were written by women."⁴³ Marion and the women with whom she interacted exemplified what can happen when a critical number of women exist in an industry—they can network and work together to help each other succeed, just as men routinely do.

Frances Marion's Well-Known Films

1917	The Poor Little Rich Girl
1917	Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm
1925	Stella Dallas
1926	The Son of the Sheik
1926	The Scarlet Letter
1930	The Big House
1931	The Champ
1933	Dinner at Eight
1936	Camille

⁴⁰ Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus* (New York: Coward McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 393.

⁴¹ Beauchamp, 11.

⁴² Seger, 8.

⁴³ Beauchamp, 11.

CHAPTER TWO
The Good Old Boys' Club:
Consequences of the "Central Producer System," 1926-1948

"The short answer to the question 'what happened to the female filmmaker?' is that she became marginalized as the film industry became a Wall Street-defined, vertically integrated big business."

—Karen Mahar, *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*

At the height of the silent era, the film industry successfully accomplished its primary goal of cultural legitimacy. Thus, film entrepreneurs moved on to secure acceptance of the film business as financially legitimate. Debating how to establish this lofty goal, they received a somewhat unwelcome answer—financial legitimacy would come with a rise in the number and types of financial investors in film. The development of sound films piqued many new, wealthy financial investors' interests, and they quickly flocked to film investment. However, the influx of investors led to the drastic restructuring of the film industry. Investors willingly endowed money only if their potential rewards for the ventures outweighed the risks. To limit possible threats on investment return, standardization of business practices arose in the film industry.

But what did this standardization entail? Part of the changes involved structuring a more hierarchical—and as a result, patriarchal—filmmaking dynamic, ultimately molding the film business into a large scale "industry" of mass production. As power and money flowed in, opportunities surfaced for industry insiders to attempt monopolization of the market. With film becoming more of a traditional business and less an expression of progressive politics and social reform, the alterations pushed women out of positions of power. Thus, the emergence of the Hollywood studio system showed that as film developed into a viable business enterprise, male domination occurred. Wall Street and other male industry investors' focuses on maximizing profits through mass production and monopolizing the market left no place, or discussion, for

women filmmakers involvement in the studio system, and any powerful women that remained proved rare exceptions to this rule.

Cultural reasons for the changing dynamics of filmmaking also existed. The rise of the Jazz Age and the effects of the end of World War I¹ turned the American public away from the silent era (women dominated) morality and social-problem films and more toward entertainment films. Also known as “The Roaring Twenties,” the Jazz Age meshed African American traditions and ideals with white middle-class society. This urban, youth-oriented movement used jazz influence to rebel against the traditional culture and beliefs of the previous generations. As the flapper image synonymously developed with the Jazz Age, society no longer viewed women as completely morally superior to men.

The new viewer expectations for film content coincided with necessary changes in film form. As films grew in popularity and audiences demanded more advanced narratives through feature length films, production needed more capital. Producing multi-reel films required companies to pay higher crew salaries and production costs for the longer filming periods. In addition, stars of the silent era used their celebrity box office power to demand higher salaries. However, even with multi-reel films, the public and financial investors questioned the viability of silent films with large-scale rising costs surviving in a world where industries and technology kept changing. Film production companies remained split on how to handle the rising costs and lack of financial legitimacy. While many companies believed the answers lay in converting to sound films, “the larger companies seemed perfectly satisfied to maintain the status quo rather than make the capital expenditures and other untold adjustments that conversion to sound would

¹ The end of World War I brought prosperity and increased nationalism to the United States, encouraging a rise in celebration, happiness and entertainment. In addition, the crushing defeat in Europe obliterated the foreign film industry market and left the international film industry market wide open for America to sweep in and distribute its product.

require.”² The large companies worried that “other untold adjustments” meant giving up some of their studio’s power to Wall Street and other wealthy financial investors in return for the required capital. Because these studios started as private, family-owned companies, studio owners did not want to give up control to Wall Street “WASPs.”

However, Warner Bros. and Fox, “the Hollywood Jews who were most sensitive to their status as outsiders, had fewer qualms about sound, seeing it more as an opportunity to break into the front ranks than as a destabilizing upheaval.”³ Unsurprisingly, the first studio to release a sound film was Warner Bros. in 1927. Warner Bros. took the gamble for two main reasons. Firstly, Warner Bros. as a studio was in a financially precarious position and had less to lose than the major studios. Secondly, Warner Bros. ventured into sound because of the “Old Boys’ Network.” Jack Warner’s good friend, Leon Schlesinger, founded the Pacific Title & Art Studio in 1919 where he worked to produce title cards for silent films. As such, Schlesinger was very interested in staying in business by capitalizing on the conversion to sound film and agreed to help finance Warner Bros. first sound film. The sensation of the first real sound film, *The Jazz Singer*—“which, at a cost of \$500,000, was their most expensive picture yet,”⁴ put Warner Bros. on the map and began the race for sound films.

² Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1988), 136.

³ Gabler, 136.

⁴ Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2010), 63.



Figure 9. Warner Theatre advertising the “Supreme Triumph,” *The Jazz Singer*.

Neal Gabler explains, “Before *The Jazz Singer*, Hollywood waited. After *The Jazz Singer*, the rush to sound began. Producers realized it was a case of sink or swim.”⁵ The film’s success also lessened outside investors worries about industry stability, and they quickly sought investment opportunities with Warner Bros. and other adapting studios. Investors saw that the film industry willingly and successfully adapted to the changing technology, effectively resulting in box-office triumphs. Warner Bros. took a risk, investing over \$3 million dollars to outfit their picture palaces for sound. Economic Historian of film, Douglas Gomery, concluded that “in March 1927, Harry Warner knew what the costs of theatrical installation were: ‘In a theater of nine hundred or one thousand seats, it costs \$16,000; in the next size, the theater of about fifteen hundred seats, \$18,000; in the large theaters, \$22,000; in a theater like the Roxy, \$25,000. That is the actual cost to us [studios].’”⁶ Luckily, Warner Bros.’ big risk paid off. Audience reception of the sound film provided Warner Bros. with profits that stabilized the studio and put it in the running with other, more established production companies. Author of *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era*, Thomas Schatz, stated, “There was little to distinguish Warners’ early talkies other than their soundtracks, but still the money poured in. Warner [Bros.] was on a

⁵ Gabler, 145.

⁶ Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: Cromwell Press, 2005), 50-1.

roll, and not even the October 1929 stock market collapse slowed its momentum. In fact, the crash actually improved Warners' position in the industry.”⁷

The transition to sound opened up opportunities to try new technologies, capture additional audiences, and make higher profits—all of which attracted Wall Street investors. “Surveying the remarkable financial and technological transformations, *Fortune* magazine in 1930 heralded the advent of American talking movies as ‘beyond comparison the fastest and most amazing revolution in the whole history of industrial revolutions.’ But without questioning that the transition to sound in American movies was one of the greatest success stories of American capitalism, it must be understood not only as a revolution but as a counterrevolution.”⁸ Wall Street and other new financial investors’ capital investments in the film industry offset rising industry costs from conversion to sound films and allowed production of films to continue, expanding in lengths, genres and production values. As a result of newfound investor ventures, financial insiders likewise began to consider film a viable enterprise and regarded the industry as “financially legitimate” with acceptable “potential risk to reward ratios.” After the advent of sound films in the late 1920s, invested capital increased by 10 fold.

GROWTH IN INVESTED FILM CAPITAL, 1921-1930

Year	Funded Debt	Capital Stores, Reserves and Surplus	Total Invested Capital
1930	\$305,586	\$544,400	\$849,986
1929	227,066	425,599	652,665
1928	128,537	278,804	407,341
1927	105,465	165,798	271,263
1926	71,578	157,909	229,467
1925	35,935	129,182	165,117
1924	25,266	97,465	122,731
1923	22,703	77,723	100,426
1922	15,966	73,572	89,538
1921	9,691	68,539	78,230

Figure 10. Table on the growth in invested capital 1921-1930 (Unit \$1,000).⁹

⁷ Schatz, 66.

⁸ Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Random House Inc., 1975), 153.

⁹ *The Motion Picture Industry* (Poor’s Analytical Services, 1932), reprinted in Howard T. Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1933), 24.

Wall Street interests also led to a shift in ideology within the film industry. During the silent era, films comprised one of three major strands: Progressive films, pure entertainment films (like those of Charlie Chaplin), and sensationalist/entertainment films. In the restructurings to accommodate changing audience demands and the influx of male financial investors, films that stressed social reform and progressive politics (with Suffragism) disappeared. Instead, studios focused on adopting more efficiency measures to produce films at the lowest cost for the highest prospective profits. Film's emphasis on efficiency served to maximize producer surplus, the profits from the sale of produced films. With cultural legitimacy secured and placed on the back burner of entrepreneurs' production determinants, women lost some of their power.

The Great Depression explains another reason for the Studio Era's lack of women. Like other industries, the Depression hit Hollywood hard. With the stock market crash and the decline in the U.S. economy, American families suffered as people lost jobs, incomes, and life savings. As American industries attempted to revitalize the economy and stimulate job creation, men first and foremost received job opportunities, which reflected the traditional and patriarchal understandings that men's roles in the family consisted of being the "provider." Thus, families depended on the male's wage for support and economic stability. This reliance on men as providers makes economic sense when observed in the context of the 1920s-1930s where men had historically received higher levels of education, and within the patriarchal structure of American society, men had more job opportunities available to them. Similarly, the utter devastation and shock caused by the Stock Market Crash and the Great Depression pushed America as a nation toward frightened traditionalism, emphasizing historically traditional gender roles. According to the chart on "Labor Force Participation Rates of Women, 1900-2009," female labor force participation dropped from 25.4 percent in 1910 to 24.8 percent in 1930. This era presented the only period of overall female reduction in the workforce prior to the recession

problems of the 2000s. In the film industry, like other U.S. industries, traditionalism combined with patriarchal industry control and solidified film as a male dominated business.

Wall Street investors' funds came with a price—their direct involvement in industry business methods. Outside investors refused to accept any methods they deemed “un-businesslike” and often sent their own representatives to Hollywood to show studios how to work in order to attract the stock exchange. Tino Balio, expert on the history of the American film industry, explained:

the wiring of the nation's theaters and the construction of sound studios in Hollywood was financed largely by the Morgan and Rockefeller banking groups. In underwriting these stock issues, investment houses placed representatives on the board of directors of the respective film companies, where they worked hand in hand with top management to oversee fiscal matters. When motion picture films went under during the Depression, these same bankers installed themselves in the top management positions and took charge of the distressed companies.¹⁰

The effects of the Depression on the box office led Paramount in 1931 to appoint John Hertz, a retired millionaire and partner in Wall Street's Lehman Brothers, to the board of directors as chairman of the finance committee. Hertz used his time in power to reduce salaries, cut production costs by a third, and streamline distribution.¹¹

While Paramount provided one such example, these practices existed across the Hollywood studios. Wall Street businessmen wanted to harness the film industry's potential and create a more uniformly, hierarchically structured system, and thus instigated the formation of the studio system. Robert Sklar believed, “the development of the studio system was the fundamental source of change. As large studios began to produce sixty or seventy pictures a year, the centralization of administrative procedures became essential.”¹²

¹⁰ Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 23.

¹¹ Balio, *Grand Design*, 24.

¹² Sklar, 239.

Adolph Zukor developed the founding principles of the studio system with his Famous Players and then Paramount Pictures, founded in 1912. Gomery explains how “Zukor was smart and looked to see how other industries developed their corporate economic power. He borrowed their strategies and molded them to fit the movie business. Copying the star system from vaudeville, and world distribution from the French, Zukor took the star system and classic storytelling and made films into a factory-like system; and he developed a distribution division (Paramount) to sell his wares throughout the world.”¹³ The studio system established large-scale corporations that centralized filmmaking activities and limited its employees’ creative freedom at the production level in order to achieve efficiency. The major studios also acquired their own distribution systems and chain of first-run theaters. Paramount ended the era of the greatest theater expansion with nearly 1,000 theaters.¹⁴ The newly structured Hollywood studio system encouraged standardized, industrial production of films to increase productivity and number of outputs of production.

With efficiency and profit maximization as goals, the collaborative filmmaking style of the silent era disappeared, and the central-producer system emerged—with enhanced power. The central-producer system worked so that a central producer, studio head, or production head oversaw all of the studio’s ongoing productions. Acting like foremen on construction crews, the central producers ensured that filmmaking stayed on schedule and, hopefully, under budget. In addition, all of the central producers were male and knew each other via the “Old Boys’ Club.” Through networking, the men in power transitioned from one job to another, often moving between studios. Darryl F. Zanuck exemplified this network when he left Warner Bros. in 1933 over a salary dispute with Jack Warner. Merely a few days later, Zanuck partnered with Joseph

¹³ Gomery, 7.

¹⁴ Conant, 63.

Schenck to found 20th Century Pictures, Inc., later merging it into the Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation.

Because the studio system valued the producers and their business-savvy role above all others, the jobs of the directors and other filmmakers changed. With high box office returns on production emphasized as the ultimate goal of filmmaking, creativity no longer was considered as important an objective of filmmaking. Therefore, directors' roles shifted and "by 1925, investors were more interested in whether the director was keeping within time and cost schedule ... Directing, producing, and editing became masculinized. The average director was now a 'glorified foreman' chiefly valued for his administrative ability rather than his artistic learnings."¹⁵ As the role of the director shifted further into administrative overseeing, studio executives valued dominating directors who possessed the ability to lead and to discipline when necessary.

In the studio system, under the Wall-Street investors' influences of traditional business and neoclassical economics, women as directors seemed impossible, for the investors stereotyped women as emotional and soft; not to mention a more important, but unmentioned reason—men did not want to take direction from a woman. Likewise, as increased investment resulted in growing production values and costs, the men in charge refused to take "risks" on investments by hiring women filmmakers, instead choosing to pick a man with "astute financial understandings."

Film entrepreneurs and studio financiers strove to acquire market concentration power and ultimately to monopolize the market. Eight companies constituted the major and minor studios that promulgated the Hollywood studio system. These studios gained jurisdiction over the film industry through their control of all areas of production, distribution and exhibition.

¹⁵ Mahar, 196.

They exercised their power by enforcing unfair practices that continued their domination of the market. Through collusion, the major Hollywood studios achieved market concentration power that developed the industry into an oligopoly. By 1930, the motion picture industry had become, in economic terminology, a mature oligopoly. The Big Five and The Little Three [Universal, Columbia, and United Artists] worked together to represent their collective best interests, ultimately giving them “cartel” control of the market in which each held market power and could use its concentration power to increase individual studios’ profits, at the expense of consumers, stars, theater owners, and other lower level industry workers. The key way in which the majors and major-minors exploited their market power was through vertical integration.

Where did the studio system find the inspiration for its configuration? “The new kind of film that became rampant in the twenties—with Hollywood’s highly structured star system, division of labor, and control by a centralized management—was mirroring changes taking place in U.S. industry in general. Henry Ford, for example, was applying exactly the same principles to making cars.”¹⁶ Ford’s new model of mass-production, completed in 1913, emphasized and enforced the idea of production as inherently masculine. Ford established assembly line methods that dramatically reduced the price of cars so that average Americans could afford to buy them. Ford created a system that sold cheaply made cars to a mass market. Ford’s production ideas revolutionized American industry through the “assembly line” in which instead of a car being made start to finish by the same people, parts were added to the car as it moved down an assembly line. Therefore, workers no longer needed to learn to build cars. Instead, they only needed to know how to fix one part—establishing a system of specialization that greatly increased productivity and efficiency and drastically reduced production costs. With the rise of

¹⁶ Acker, xxiv.

mass production, Ford wanted to streamline production so he no longer offered cars in red, blue, and gray; instead, it was now available “in any color, so long as it was black.”

Ford also went beyond specializing his own production of cars by establishing a system of vertical integration wherein by the 1920s he additionally purchased a rubber plant in Brazil, coalmines in Kentucky, ships and a railroad. Ford sought vertical integration in order to ensure he would have raw materials to guarantee continuous production, and would eventually enable greater profits through increased producer surplus by not having to pay the raw materials costs for inputs, transportation or distributors.

How did the studio system model Ford’s automobile assembly line process of mass-production?

That system [film studio] was essentially a factory-oriented mass-production operation wherein revenues from distribution and exhibition enabled the studios to keep their production plants running at full capacity. This system enabled the major producer-distributors to turn out roughly one feature film per week along with assorted serials, shorts, newsreels, and so on. Hollywood’s principal product, of course, was the feature film, which in 1940 accounted for over 90 percent of the \$150 million invested in studio-based productions.¹⁷

In a 1957 issue of *Life* Magazine, Eric Hodgins stated, “most of the movies produced had a uniform mediocrity, but they were also uniformly profitable ... The million-dollar mediocrity was the very backbone of Hollywood.”¹⁸

Of the eight major Hollywood studios, “The Big Five” functioned as vertically integrated conglomerates that combined ownership of production studios, distribution divisions and substantial theater chains in order to control all areas of film markets. However, the distribution division situated itself as the core of the studio’s authority. Gomery argued, “The real power lay in control of international film distribution. This global power guaranteed the studio companies

¹⁷ Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1997), 41.

¹⁸ Eric Hodgins, "Amid Ruins of an Empire a New Hollywood Arises," *Life*, 10 June 1957, 146.

the maximum advantages for selling their films ... To make the most from their productions and to maximize profits from their theaters, the Big Five developed a complex set of distribution practices that ensured continuity of control through manipulation of trade agreements.”¹⁹ In order to affect bargaining relations, the studios developed practices based on price discrimination that allowed for generation of larger revenues through separating markets in terms of time and space, through multiple runs and clearances, and different admission prices.

In oligopolies, only a few firms interact in and control the market; in collusive oligopolies, these firms cooperate instead of competing in order to block entry into the market from other firms.²⁰ The eight main Hollywood firms continued to keep large competitors from entering the film business by adding more and more theaters to their studio’s chain, which also enabled the major firms to obtain effective indirect control of production. By monopolizing the final marketing outlet they successfully curtailed entry by independent producers.²¹ Gaining power through vertical integration and block booking succeeded as studios’ profits continued to rise. The integrate majors’ control of first-run theaters made it harder for independent productions to reach first-run screens. Without lucrative first-run exhibition, production financing was nearly impossible to secure. As such, the small independent production companies headed by women during the silent era disappeared because they could not compete in forging lucrative deals for distribution and exhibition.

Block booking and blind buying served as the most used tactics to increase revenues and indirectly control independently owned theaters. Both of these tools forced independent theaters

¹⁹ Gomery, 73.

²⁰ Mike Walden, “Economic Perspective: Collusive Oligopolies,” *North Carolina State University*, 6 November 2006, Accessed on 15 September 2014, http://www.ncsu.edu/project/calscommblogs/economic/archives/2006/11/collusive_oligo.html.

²¹ Conant, 72.

to take groups of films from the Big Five without seeing them first.²² Block booking enabled studios to sell multiple films to a theater as one block. Usually ten films comprised each block and typically included one attractive star-studded film and then a mix of lesser quality A-budget films and B movies. If they did not accept a block, they got no studio films at all—which meant they did not have the star names to attract an audience.²³ Block booking allowed studios to distribute all of the films they made and created a system in which the big budget films carried the weaker (or cheaply-made) ones, ensuring that outside exhibitors would have to purchase the studio's whole season of films.

In addition, the major studios' exhibition practices increased their monopoly power by offering them a guaranteed outlet for their products and a fairly predictable level of income. "By owning and operating picture palaces in all of the central cities around the United States, The Big Five had three-quarters of the average domestic box office take. Only after they granted their own theaters first and exclusive runs and soaked up as much of the initial wave of grosses as possible did the Big Five then permit independently owned theaters to scramble for the remaining bookings."²⁴ Oftentimes, it took months, or even years, after a film's premiere before the larger studios allowed the independent theaters to book their films. While the smaller Hollywood studios either did not own their own or as many theater chains, the minor studios also benefitted from the majors' chains because the minor studios' films often filled in the extra spots in the majors' theater bookings. "The five firms had a total of 2,371 theaters. Since these included the great majority of first-run theaters in major cities, the market control represented

²² Gomery, 74.

²³ Edward Jay Epstein, *The Big Picture: The New Logic of Money and Power in Hollywood* (New York: Random House Press, 2005), 6.

²⁴ Gomery, 71.

was much greater than ownership of one-eighth of the total theaters would indicate.”²⁵

Picture palaces provided another opportunity to capitalize on investment. In the 1910s, movie palaces started to replace smaller run theaters in large cities such as the Vitagraph Theater in New York City. “The efficient operation of the large houses required the showing of feature films that would attract large audiences at prices considerably higher than those usually charged for motion-picture entertainment. The prices at the Vitagraph Theater in 1914 ranged from twenty-five cents to one dollar”²⁶—a far cry from the era’s emphasis on nickel “nickelodeon” theaters. The end of World War I signaled the rise of the picture palace. These new theaters attracted audiences not by the quality of the pictures they offered, but by the sheer luxury and decadence of the theater itself. Modeled on upscale opera houses and live theaters, the movie palace’s elaborate architecture offered the American masses the chance to experience the lavishness usually only available to society’s upper class.

As the new spectacular theaters encouraged Americans to attend the movies, exhibitors and producers realized that “the picture palaces themselves became the main attraction.”²⁷ In fact, although the major studios owned theater chains consisted only of around 20 percent of the theaters in the country, they contained nearly 80 percent of the first-run houses and the most profitable subsequent-run houses ... located in the hubs of major metropolitan areas, these motion-picture palaces generated anywhere from 50 to 80 percent of the box office in any market and had the potential as a group of returning more than half the production costs of a given picture.²⁸ With theaters themselves drawing in crowds, the influence that earlier (female)

²⁵ Conant, 63.

²⁶ Ralph Cassady Jr., “Monopoly in Motion Picture Production and Distribution: 1908-1915,” in *The American Movie Industry: The Business of Motion Pictures*, ed. Gorham Kindem (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U. Press, 1982), 63.

²⁷ Mahar, 173.

²⁸ Balio, *Grand Design*, 7.

audiences had on demanding higher quality pictures disappeared as the spectacle and sensation of attending the movies became the main attraction.

The establishment of the Hayes Production Code also indirectly decreased the need to hire women behind the camera. The Production Code established the Production Code Administration in 1934, which stipulated what could and could not be portrayed onscreen. Ironically, studios paid for the PCA, ultimately allowing “potential threats to the studios, such as government censorship, to be countered by informal methods... Sometimes it seemed that the PCA was running the studios. This skillfully masked the fact that the studios paid for the cover.”²⁹ Thus, Wall Street investors and studio owners appeared as though censored by a Higher Power, when really Hayes acted as one of their own. The Production Code took power previously held by viewers, critics, and censors (many of whom were female) and placed it in the hands of one man, William Hayes—and by extension, gave the power back to the studios.

Likewise, stars lost some of their bargaining power as producers found ways to still make profits without having to give in to stars’ demands or high salary costs. These big box-office, often female, stars recognized their potential expendability and now needed to appease producers and studio executives in order to gain roles in films.

Suddenly, the major studios held the power, and the silent era’s independent star-production companies waned. As picture palaces competed with stars in drawing viewers, major studios started cooperating instead of just competing. Thus, “movie stars were still valuable, and were well compensated, but their outrageous competitive bidding for their services ended,”³⁰ regardless of star power. With industry growth’s marginalization of women filmmakers and small, independent production, stars no longer could easily transition between acting and producing/owning their own companies in order to control their own careers. Instead, they relied

²⁹ Gomery, 175.

³⁰ Mahar, 174.

on acting in the majors' films. Executives protected themselves against any potential unfavorable future market changes by using their power to establish star and director studio contracts.

In order to obtain work during the Hollywood studio system era, studios forced stars, directors and, oftentimes, screenwriters to sign contracts binding them to a specific studio for seven years. Meanwhile, the studio's commitment to the contract usually consisted of six-month periods. This allowed the studio to either renew the contract at the end of six months or let the agreement lapse, setting the employee free if the studio deemed them not worth the time or money established in the contract. The device of the standard long-term contract allowed studios and high-powered executives to maintain control over the supply of talent, Hollywood's commodity.³¹ Only the studio could end the agreement before the seven years ended. Tino Balio explained, "the contract did not provide reciprocal rights, meaning that an actor or actress could not quit to join another studio, could not stop work, and could not renegotiate for more money. In short, the contract effectively tied a performer to the studio for seven years. The option contract went further to include restrictive clauses that gave the studio total control over the star's image and services."³²

The option contract also gave the studio the right to dictate the films and film roles assigned to the actor. If the actor refused an assignment, the studio possessed the right to sue for damages or breach of contract and could extend the actor's contract to make up for the debated period. The studios claimed that the contract benefitted both sides, as developing talent required studios to undertake many expenses and added risk, given that a star may not pan out with audiences. Regardless, studios maintained heavy-handed control over production and stars' careers. In these contracts, their salaries varied depending on star level, but often remained at a maximum level of less than \$10,000 per week and with no percentage of net profits ... the stars

³¹ Sklar, 230.

³² Balio, *Grand Design*, 145.

became commodities to be shaped, manipulated, exhausted, and discarded rather than unique personalities to be catered to as temperamental, talented artists.³³ Female stars especially suffered, for without name-recognition bargaining power in the growing patriarchal and hierarchical Hollywood, they had no way to transition over into the production aspect of the industry, forcing them to remain undervalued and underpaid pawns of the studio system.³⁴

The rise of the studio system greatly contributed to the decline of female filmmakers. In a 1927 edition of *Liberty Magazine*, Charles Dunning wrote, “when Lois Weber warned would-be female directors in 1927 that they would ‘never get away with it,’ the age of the female filmmaker appeared to be over.”³⁵ Career-advice literature for women stopped suggesting creative filmmaking careers and began urging girls to think about at the time, feminized studio work, where women might become script girls or “secretaries to the stars.”³⁶

Industry profits continued to grow in the 1920s, attracting more investors. With rising production costs, the film industry needed to formalize its production structure and ensure that it operated at maximum efficiency. They transitioned from the open, creative atmosphere of the silent era that encouraged creativity and female filmmakers to a traditional “factory-like” model under a central-producer and domineering-administrative director, both of whom were usually male. Success and industry recognition followed these changes, causing moneymaking investors and studio heads to capitalize on potential gains from market concentration. The major Hollywood studios that developed agreed to collude in an industry-wide oligopoly that enabled

³³ Gorham Kindem, “Hollywood’s Movie Star System: A Historical Overview,” in *The American Movie Industry: The Business of Motion Pictures*, 84-5.

³⁴ In particular during this period, studio men treated the female stars as “putty” to be recrafted depending on the needs and desires of the studios and the men in power. This is depicted most clearly in the Judy Garland version of *A Star is Born* (Cukor, 1954). One example occurs when Garland’s character, Esther Blodgett, goes to pick up her paycheck from the studio and finds out that they arbitrarily changed her name to Vicki Lester without a warning or obtaining her consent.

³⁵ Charles S. Dunning, “The Gate Women Don’t Crash,” *Liberty*, 14 May 1927, 33.

³⁶ Mahar, 204.

studios to use their market power to ensure distribution and exhibition of their products through vertical integration and block booking. Studios further dominated the industry by controlling threats of director and star power and independence through long-term, binding contracts.

Overall, the establishment of the Hollywood studio system resulted in a centrally controlled monopoly that kept the industry's power in the hands of a few male businessmen, destroying the independent, woman-friendly, creative atmosphere that was possible during the silent era.

Case Study One:
Dorothy Arzner, Director



Figure 11. Dorothy Arzner.

“This extraordinary woman held her own in an all-male Hollywood of the thirties and forties ... She was, and remains after her death, the only woman able to build up a coherent body of work *within* the Hollywood system.”

—Ally Acker, *Reel Women: Pioneers of the Cinema 1896 to the Present*

Dorothy Arzner’s feature filmmaking and directing career spanned from the 1920s into the early 1940s. Arzner grew up in Los Angeles, California, where her father owned a restaurant often frequented by many Hollywood celebrities. She enrolled at the University of Southern California with aspirations of becoming a doctor but left during World War I to go work overseas in the ambulance corps. Returning home, she realized medicine was not for her and turned to the film industry to pursue a career as a director. Although Arzner grew up surrounded by celebrities at her father’s café, she chose a career mainly to gain financial independence from her father. However “it is crucial to appreciate the extent to which Arzner was able to make some career choices unavailable to other women—and men—precisely because of her father’s financial provisions for her. Arzner was aware of the fact that her father had provided generously

for her financial welfare, which meant that she could take career risks, knowing that she had an independent income to fall back on.”³⁷ Through connections with director William C. DeMille (and later Raoul Walsh), she acquired a job at Paramount Pictures by impressing DeMille with her declaration “that the only job she would consider was that of typing his scripts ... because there was no other way to learn an industry *except* from the ground up.”³⁸ Arzner began as a stenographer before receiving a promotion to scriptwriter.

Within six months, she started working as a film editor at Realart Studio, a subsidiary of Paramount. “As chief editor, she cut and edited fifty-two films before being recalled to Paramount to cut and edit the Valentino vehicle *Blood and Sand* (1922).”³⁹ Her revolutionary use of stock footage and intercutting to give the impression that Valentino actually fought a bull earned her praise from filmmakers and critics. As her successes increased, Arzner received an offer from Columbia to write and direct a feature film. When Paramount found out, Arzner said she would stay with them only if they offered her the opportunity to direct a prestigious “A” level picture. Paramount eventually agreed and offered Arzner the opportunity to direct *Fashions for Women* in 1927; she readily accepted. After directing four successful silent features, Paramount relied on Arzner to direct their first sound film, *The Wild Party* (1929). The triumph of this film under her direction allowed the film’s star, Clara Bow, to transition her career into the talkies. Continuing at Paramount throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Arzner directed a string of films before leaving the studio and her contract in 1932 to work as a freelance director for RKO, MGM and Columbia studios.⁴⁰ Following her departure from Paramount, Arzner directed fewer films while relying heavily on the hopes of producing another acclaimed hit. As a woman in a

³⁷ Judith Mayne, *Directed by Dorothy Arzner* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1994), 17.

³⁸ Acker, 24.

³⁹ Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary, eds., *Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1977), 21.

⁴⁰ Sova, 54.

man's business world, she could not afford to produce a failure or she would lose the respect of her male colleagues and her place in "the old boys' club."

In 1936, Arzner became the first female member of the Directors Guild of America. She continued to direct and produce films, although they slowly decreased in box office returns and critical acclaim. "Arzner was respected, but only as long as she was able to function productively—i.e., turn a profit—within the studio system."⁴¹ Finally in 1943, she stopped directing feature films. We might question why she, unlike all other women directors, remained working during the era of the male dominated studio system. Part of the reason for her ability to navigate the industry during a period emphasizing patriarchal hierarchy may be her "masculine persona" highlighted through her relationships, personality, and wardrobe choices, all rumored to stem from her alleged lesbianism. However, she also proved herself to be indispensable through her professional training in many areas of the film industry and her ability to competently produce financially savvy, box-office successful films. According to Karen Mahar,

Indeed, it seems the unique combination of Arzner's butch style, her economy as a filmmaker, and her competence—the latter learned at the very end of the industry's openness to women filmmakers—allowed her to enter the fully masculinized ranks of American directors. She may not have been one of the boys, but her refusal to voluntarily draw attention to her gender minimized the ideological challenge she presented to the masculine definition of movie directing.⁴²

In addition, she managed to work hard while maintaining a stable personal life—as exemplified through her long-lasting relationship with Marion Morgan, film and dance choreographer. Mahar continued, "Arzner always said that, even though she made the decision to leave Hollywood, she also felt that Hollywood had left her. ... She felt that the kind of pictures she was interested in making were no longer encouraged or supported in Hollywood. Throughout Arzner's career, the notion of a 'woman's director' had been ambivalent ... and her kind of

⁴¹ Mayne, 1.

⁴² Mahar, 207.

woman's film, in 1943, no longer had a place."⁴³ Throughout her life, Arzner asserted, "You see, I was not dependent on the movies for my living, so I was always ready to give the picture over to some other director if I couldn't make it the way I saw it. Right or wrong, I believe this was why I sustained so long—twenty years."⁴⁴

Dorothy Arzner's Well-Known Films

1931	Working Girls
1932	Merrily We Go to Hell
1933	Christopher Strong
1934	Nana
1936	Craig's Wife
1937	The Bride Wore Red
1940	Dance, Girl, Dance
1943	First Comes Courage

⁴³ Mayne, 79.

⁴⁴ Acker, 21.

Case Study Two:
Lillian Hellman, Screenwriter



Figure 12. Lillian Hellman.

Female screenwriters during the Hollywood studio system had an easier time adapting to the changing industry and remained prominent members of the filmmaking community. The screenwriter, Lillian Hellman, entered into the film industry as a script reader, then rose to fame for writing a well-received Broadway play and returned to film only after establishing the foundation for her long-lasting playwriting career.

Born in 1905 in New Orleans, Louisiana, Hellman spent most of her childhood traveling back and forth between New York City and New Orleans, where she lived in a boarding house run by her aunts. Hellman's early life allowed her to "witness the diverse cultures within her national borders. ... She grew up surrounded by eccentric and avaricious relatives, who later appeared only thinly disguised in her plays."⁴⁵ After briefly attending Columbia University and New York University, she found a job at a publishing house. However, she left that job after marrying Arthur Kober, one of the publishing house's young writers, and moving with him to

⁴⁵ "Lillian Hellman – About Lillian Hellman," *American Masters (PBS)*, 30 December 2001. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/lillian-hellman/about-lillian-hellman/628/>.

Hollywood. MGM hired Hellman as a script reader, and in the 1930s, Hellman started her own professional writing career with the play *The Children's Hour* (1934), a gripping drama about how a defamatory lie of lesbianism by a privileged student destroys the lives of two teachers. *The Children's Hour* continued its Broadway run for more than two years, earning Hellman a Drama Critics' Circle Award. Hellman's success attracted the attention of Sam Goldwyn, and in the middle of the Depression, he offered her \$2,500 a week to write screenplays. Her first work after accepting the offer was a collaboration on a screenplay for an earlier play and silent film, *The Dark Angel* (1935).

Once the film's—and Hellman's—success was secured, Goldwyn purchased the rights to *The Children's Hour* for \$35,000 while it was still on Broadway. Hellman adapted her work to conform with the Motion Picture Production Code, effectively leaving out any mention of lesbianism and replacing that accusation with adultery.⁴⁶ In 1941 she adapted her play *The Little Foxes* for a film starring Bette Davis, earning Hellman an Academy Award nomination for Best Screenplay. She then worked with Dashiell Hammett to adapt her 1941 play *Watch the Rhine* for the 1943 movie, again starring Bette Davis,⁴⁷ and the two writers shared an Academy Award nomination for Best Screenplay.⁴⁸ Hellman's writings served as social criticisms, often focused on themes that reflected her [leftist] political and social ideologies. With Hellman's career in theater and film on the rise, she considered expanding into producing and directing.

However, everything changed with McCarthyism. Hellman stated, “shortly after the first blacklisting I was offered a contract by Columbia Pictures—a contract that I had always wanted—to direct, produce, and write, all three or any. And a great, great deal of money. But it

⁴⁶ Bernard F. Dick, *Hellman in Hollywood* (East Brunswick: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), 35-6.

⁴⁷ Bette Davis loved Lillian Hellman's work. The collaborations of the two women created an “Old Girls' Network” in a time of mainly male networks.

⁴⁸ Sova, 76.

came at the time of the famous movie conference of top Hollywood producers. They met to face the attacks of the Red-baiters and to appease them down. A new clause went into the contracts. ... I didn't sign the contract."⁴⁹ Eventually, Hellman's career suffered when she was called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the early 1950s. After refusing to give the names of Hollywood leftists, Hellman was blacklisted; her career halted for over a decade.

She re-emerged in the 1960s to write her last two screenplays. After that she continued writing for other mediums, started teaching and remained part of the social activism community. Hellman remained well known later in life for her memoirs and her public feud with Mary McCarthy. Regardless of the turns taken during her stage and film-writing career, she forged a career as "one of the most commercially successful dramatists of the American stage. ... She woke up America with tough-minded dramas about dishonesty, a power-hungry world, and the corrosive effects of greed on society. ... Only Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams had more successes."⁵⁰ Hellman's ability to create a screenwriting career in male dominated Hollywood occurred because she first established a career as a stage writer (and theater proved more accepting of women). Once she found success in theater, she was able to transition into film writing, and spent the rest of her career traversing the lines between theater and film.

Lillian Hellman's Well-Known Films

1935	The Dark Angel
1936	These Three
1937	Dead End
1941	The Little Foxes
1943	Watch on the Rhine
1943	The North Star
1977	Julia (based upon story by)

⁴⁹ Acker, 196.

⁵⁰ Acker, 194.

CHAPTER THREE
Trust Busting:
The Prolonged Absence of Women, 1948-1967

“The exhibition business was now an open market, and independent producers rushed in to serve the newly liberated theater chains, momentarily forcing the studios to renegotiate distribution terms for their product. Soon, however, it became apparent that the independents lacked both the capitalization and the organizational skills to keep theaters reliably supplied with exploitable product, and so rapidly, through the use of star power, spectacle, and new exhibition processes, the studios regained the upper hand.”

— Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Death of the Moguls: The End of Classical Hollywood*

From the start of the studios’ practices to gain market control and prohibit free entry into the market, the United States government began investigating the Hollywood studios. In 1938, the Justice Department initiated a suit, *United States vs. Paramount Pictures Inc. et al.*, usually called “The Paramount Case” in which the government accused the studios of violating antitrust laws.¹ Finally in 1948, The Supreme Court handed down the final Consent Decree ruling declaring the eight companies guilty. As a result, the decision mandated that studios alter their methods of film distribution and exhibition. Changes to the major studios’ business strategies consequentially led to the end of the Hollywood Studio System. As the major companies divested of theater chains and reconfigured their distribution practices, “The Golden Age of Hollywood” ended, and a new uncertain era began.

Although The Paramount Decision terminated some of the monopoly power held by the oligopoly and made independent film production easier than during the studio system, the major studios still retained power over the independent producers. Interestingly, while the rise of the studio system proved to be a major cause of the decline of women in the film industry, the end of

¹ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 299.

the majors' concentrated power did not lead to the rise of women filmmakers. Instead, business strategies emerged in which film production, distribution, and exhibition remained largely controlled by men. Women's inability to regain a foothold in the industry stemmed from three factors: first, the continued reliance on major studios for film distribution; second, the post-war changes in American economic and cultural structures; and third, the competition from the introduction of television.

The need for change in film industry practices stemmed from government regulation of American industries that eventually resulted in government intervention in Hollywood. Government trust busting began in America during the early 1900s to break up the large manufacturing conglomerates that emerged during the late 1800s and held excessive economic power. Owned by the richest American investors, these the large corporations started to dominate the nation's most important industries such as railroads and oil.² As questions arose to the economic fairness of these actions, the government began investigations into companies' economic practices, eventually ruling in many cases that their practices illegally and collusively worked to restrict trade. By mandate, the government forced the trusts to disengage and operate competitively as separate companies.

² In one such case, John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company used economic threats against competitors and rebate incentives with railroads to acquire a monopoly in the oil business. Ida Tarbell gained fame for her investigative "muckraking" journalism, which aimed for social reform and exposing corporate corruption that ultimately broke up the Standard Oil trust. Beginning as a magazine series, Tarbell's book called into question Rockefeller's reputation and described how he had formed a low profile company in order to buy competing oil companies at below-equilibrium price levels while also negotiating backdoor, unpublished shipping rates with major railroads. Tarbell advocated for banning Rockefeller's trust because it did not come about legally or naturally and instead relied upon unfair competition. As a result of the publicity and people's reactions to it, the government investigated and took legal action against Standard Oil. They conclusively ruled that Standard Oil Company acted as a trust in which concentrated market power operated to restrict free entry and competition in the market. Therefore, the government ruled that Standard Oil had violated the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 and must break the oil monopoly into over thirty separate companies that would compete with each other in the market for oil. / In. Steve Weinberg, *Taking on the Trust: The Epic Battle of Ida Tarbell and John D. Rockefeller* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2008), 221.

Arbitration over trusts in the Hollywood studios began in the 1930s and lasted, with appeals and infringements of rulings, into the late 1940s. In 1945, the second phase of *U.S. v. Paramount, et. al.*, commonly known as "The New York Equity Suit," began because of the expiration of the earlier Consent Decree from studios' lack of compliance. Throughout the New York trial, the Justice Department worked to show that the major Hollywood studios retained sole control of first-run theaters, and that the minor studios acted in collusion with the majors in order to ensure their own success in the industry. The court found all eight studios guilty of conspiring to restrain trade. These charges focused on block booking with a court decree that interpreted the problem with block booking to be, "that the copyright ownership of any film was, in actuality, a limited monopoly protected by the U.S. Constitution. Based on the precedent from other recent patent antitrust cases, the court declared that the combination of two separate copyrights threatened free trade and was considered illegal."³ The copyright on films functioned as the greatest source of monopoly power in the industry and granted the producer the right to prevent unlicensed duplications of the film prints and to control each single film's distribution. While the Constitution allowed for this monopoly power, the Hollywood studios misused their constitutional right by combining *two or more* copyrights to control admission prices and the marketing of other films. "A distributor cannot use the market power granted by the copyright in a "desirable" film to force exhibitors to license a second "undesirable" film."⁴ The combination among the eight defendants on the distribution side of licensing films to exhibitors served as an illegal extension of power and facilitated industry-wide collusion and manipulation of rights in order to gain more power and revenue.

³ J.A. Aberdeen, "The Independent Producers and the *Paramount* Case 1939-1948," *Cobbles.com*, Cobblestone Entertainment, n.d.
http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/paramountcase_3consent1940.htm.

⁴ *United States vs. Paramount Pictures, Inc., et. al.*, 334 U.S. 131, Supreme Court of the United States, 1948.

However, the last and most significant decree came as a result of the Second Paramount Case. The Supreme Court handed down its final ruling in 1949. They abolished block booking and declared that from then on, films would be sold on a picture-by-picture basis. In addition, they decided that studio disintegration was the best solution to the problems faced by independents in their inability to compete in the market for film production. The Supreme Court believed that in the absence of competitive bidding, divorcement was the only method for maintaining fair dealings between theaters and producers. When the Supreme Court refused another ruling, the six defendants accepted the following prohibitions:

1. "Tying the sale of one picture to that of another;
2. Stipulating admissions prices;
3. Establishing any fixed system of clearances (clearances, as used herein meaning the period of time stipulated in license contracts that must elapse between runs of the same feature within a particular area of in specified theaters⁵);
4. And granting to circuits any privileges other than the contract for each individual picture."⁶

According to Edward J. Epstein, "The court ordered the studios to divest themselves of either their distribution arms or their theaters. In either case, they would lose control over what was shown—and that control, as every studio owner realized, was the jugular of the studio system".⁷ Although both distribution and exhibition assisted in the Hollywood studios' control over the film industry, the Big Five decided to sell off their theaters, accept revenue losses from theater concessions, and remain production-distribution companies. All five major studios chose to sell off their theater chains because the power and profits gained from controlling distribution outweighed the losses from giving up their first-run theaters. By 1945, the studios owned either partially or outright 17 percent of the theaters in the country, accounting for 45 percent of the

⁵ "Final Decree," *Film History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1990), 42.

⁶ Kindem, 173.

⁷ Epstein, *The Big Picture: The New Logic of Money and Power in Hollywood*, 11.

film-rental revenue,⁸ and the rental received from a first-run exclusive showing on extended run might reach \$150,000.⁹ Theater profits included revenues made from ticket sales and concession stands. Yet, theater owners also possessed costs, as they had to pay distributors for the right to exhibit their film as well as pay wages for theater workers and costs for theater upkeep. In addition,

A preponderance of the cinemas owned by the Big Five were first-run houses. Collectively, the majors owned more than 70 percent of the first-run theaters in the 92 largest U.S. cities....However, generally speaking, the larger the city, the *smaller* the proportion of rental revenue amassed in the first-run. For example, in New York and Philadelphia (numbers 1 and 3 in 1940 population rank), the first-run accounted for 20 percent and 30 percent of rental revenues, respectively, while in Atlanta (number 28 in 1940 population rank), the first-run accounted for 80 percent of rental revenues.¹⁰

Owning theaters enabled studios to have more control and bargaining power when negotiating with non-affiliated theater chains for exhibition of the studio's films. However, the studio owned theaters *never* operated with only the exhibition of studio-produced films. They always relied on the output of independently and competing studio-produced films. Therefore, owning theater chains served more as another strategic tool for studios' distribution dealings with independently owned theaters than as a profit-maximizing business venue in and of itself. Meanwhile, maintaining control over distribution enabled the major studios, acting as middlemen, to make money both from the independent producers and the theater chains. The distributor controlled the product, allowing him to maintain the upper hand in contract negotiations.

Because *U.S. v. Paramount* broke up the oligopoly that existed under the studio system and encouraged competition and free market entry, it ultimately led to lower profits and much higher risk for the major studios. In dealing with independent theaters, or those theaters they did

⁸ William O. Douglas, *United States v. Paramount Pictures Inc.*, 334 U.S. 141, 167.

⁹ Conant, 72.

¹⁰ F. Andrew Hanssen, "Vertical Integration During the Hollywood Studio Era," *Montana State University*, 17 August 2007, 10.

not own, they used their own theaters as leverage in bargaining contracts. Studios told the theaters that if they refused the terms of the contract set up by the studio, then the theater would no longer get the film—resulting in the theater’s loss of profits and audiences. Forcing studios to divest of theater chains and mandating the end of coercive film distribution and exhibition practices gave bargaining power back to the independent theater owners. The Paramount Decision started the prolonged death of the studio system, giving rise to fewer barriers to entry in the market for films and the increase in independent production. In 1945, there were 40 independent producers; by 1957, the number of full time producers operating as independents was estimated at 165.¹¹ Lower taxes also provided incentives for the growth of independent production. Stars, writers, and directors in higher income tax brackets found that they could save money with tax write-offs by opening their own production companies and operating as corporate entities.

The foundation of the major studios was challenged and studios suddenly faced large increases in levels of risk for their output. They no longer possessed guaranteed exhibition outlets for their products. They also lost the security of having every film exhibited regardless of quality. Therefore, the studios looked to decrease output, focusing instead on producing fewer, but better quality films in what became known as the “package-unit system” of the 1950s. Consequently, the major Hollywood studios lost power and attempted to minimize losses by reducing their workforce and production costs. “In January 1946, there were 31,000 employees in Hollywood on a combined payroll of \$240 million (within 2 years, this number rose to \$314 million). By January of 1950, studios, through cutting operating costs and the number of employees, reduced the total payroll to \$230 million and the studio workforce to 17,500 employees. Thus, the studios managed to bring wages back to about the 1946 level, but only by

¹¹ *Motion Picture Herald*, 5 October 1957, 11, cited by Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry*, 37 & 113.

eliminating over one-third of their workforce in the span of two years.”¹² Instead, executives chose to stick with less risky business decisions—male filmmakers with proven records of success. These male filmmakers included: Alfred Hitchcock, Elia Kazan, Vincent Minnelli, John Huston, Billy Wilder, and John Ford. Having a track record of successful films before the war, Ford returned home and found work directing sixteen feature films and several documentaries. While these films varied greatly in their degrees of box-office and critical successes, Ford continued his career into the 1960s finding studios willing to overlook a box-office flop in return for an established director.

Risk minimization also carried over from a film’s director to its star. The number of films produced annually continued to decrease from an average of around 500 films per year during the studio system to about 250 films in 1959, a 50 percent drop from only a decade earlier.¹³ By 1963, the worst year for U.S. film production in fifty years, studios released only 121 feature films.¹⁴ With fewer films being produced, the opportunities available for actors and actresses decreased. Studios refused to take drastic risks in attempting to create new stars in fear of angering audiences and losing profits. For example, when the Warner Brothers decided to make a film version of the stage production of “My Fair Lady,” everyone believed that they would offer the lead part to Julie Andrews because she originated the part on Broadway, and her growing career suggested future Broadway star status. However, they offered the part to Audrey Hepburn because the studio executives believed she would ensure box-office success through her already established status as a “star” from films such as *Roman Holiday* (Wyler, 1953) and *Sabrina* (Wilder, 1954).

¹² Schatz, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s*, 333.

¹³ Tim Dirks, “Film History of the 1950s,” *AMC Filmsite*, Accessed on 22 November 2014, <http://www.filmsite.org/50sintro6.html>.

¹⁴ Tim Dirks, “The History of Film: The 1960s,” *AMC Filmsite*, Accessed on 22 November 2014, <http://www.filmsite.org/60sintro.html>.

Studios also exercised their dominance to retain stars, directors and writers under short-term studio contracts—not the seven year long contracts of the studio system days¹⁵—ensuring that independent productions would have a harder time hiring the well-known talent that could make a film bankable.

Studios' contractual influences enabled them to use their powers over hiring and eventual film distribution to control independent production. As independent production still functioned as a less secure business venture, finding investors remained a harder task than for majors. In the late 1940s, the film industry entered a period of downturn with lower profits. Peter Lev explained that starting in 1947, the “60 percent rule,” which stated that any feature film would always provide a box office return that equaled at least 60 percent of its negative costs, no longer held true. In fact, many films struggled to even make back 60 percent of the primary bank loans.¹⁶ Even the independent productions of important filmmakers like Frank Capra (*It's a Wonderful Life*, 1946) proved to be box office flops. With banks losing returns on their investments, they began cutting back their financing of individual pictures. They preferred to loan money to larger corporations with stability and financial assets. Therefore, “Instead of negotiating directly with a bank, an independent producer now needed a distribution agreement, a completion guarantee, and perhaps a loan guarantee from a leading distributor. So,

¹⁵ The shorter contracts were another factor that limited studios' powers. The end of the seven-year contracts occurred when actress Olivia de Havilland sued Warner Bros. for disagreements over her contract. While she completed her last Warner Bros. film in 1943, the studio informed her that six months had been added to her contract for times they had placed her on suspension for rejecting her assigned movie roles. Lawfully, the studios had a right to add the time to the contract. However with support from the Screen Actors Guild, the Supreme Court of California ruled in her favor in 1945, and studios' contract power became much more limited.

¹⁶ Peter Lev, *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen 1950-1959* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003), 25.

paradoxically, independent production became more and more dependent on the judgment and oversight of the major and minor Hollywood studios.”¹⁷

With tighter money and smaller budgets, independent producers often looked to the major studios to finance their films, to distribute them, or both. The reliance on studios forced the independent producers and filmmakers to submit to tighter control. Just as major film studios and production companies had an easier time finding the financing required to actually get their films made, major distribution companies also presented more straightforward opportunities for films to be released to wider audiences. In 1949, independents produced an estimated 20 percent of the films released by the eight Paramount case defendants [major studios].¹⁸ However, that number drastically increased by 1957. Looking at the chart below, major film distribution companies released a total of 382 films, 163 of which the major distributors themselves produced, and 219 of which were independently produced and then distributed through a major or major-minor studio.

Distribution company to release production	(1) Produced by distributor	(2) Independently produced	(3 = 1 + 2) Total to be released
Allied Artists	19	22	41
American International	11	3	14
Buena Vista (Disney)	5	2	7
Columbia	18	42	60
Loew's	19	17	36
Paramount	10	9	19
RKO Radio	13	6	19
Republic	7	22	29
Twentieth Century-Fox	17	25	42
United Artists	0	50	50
Universal-International	36	0	36
Warner Brothers	8	21	29
Totals	163	219	382

SOURCE: *Motion Picture Herald*, October 5, 1957, p. 11.

Figure 13. Table on distributed films completed in 1957.

¹⁷ Lev, 25.

¹⁸ *Business Week*, 6 May 1950, 98, reprinted in Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry*.

However, this chart neglects to mention or account for independent film distributors like Film Classics, which provided opportunities for independent film producers to release their products through channels free of major studio control. Although independent distribution offered an alternative to the standard method of distribution, it was not without its own obstacles; directors and producers with proven track records or name recognition had an easier time obtaining independent distribution. Similarly, independent distribution did not necessarily offer the guarantees of security and widespread distribution that major distributors afforded. Thus, while independent production rose after the collapse of the studio system (accounting for 57.3 percent of films released through a major distributor in 1957), major studios still dominated distribution and held the upper hand over independent film production.

Independent filmmakers reliance on the major studios to secure financing, distribution and/or exhibition of their films may explain why independent productions continued to avoid women filmmakers. Although some thought that the re-emergence of independent production would present the opportunity for an increase in women filmmakers, the truth was that women remained underrepresented in the industry and even suffered further reductions. Based on the history of women filmmakers during the silent era, independent production appeared to favor women more so than the Wall Street ruled major studios. However, independent reliance on the majors for distribution and financing meant that women were absent because male studio heads proved more likely to green light productions produced or directed by men. From 1949 to 1979, women directed only one-fifth of 1 percent of all films put out by the major studios.¹⁹ Women producers fared just as poorly in representation, and even female screenwriters, a more constant position for women, suffered reductions during the Post-World War II decades.

¹⁹ Sova, xii.

The end of World War II drastically altered the United States economy. During the war, America's booming economy fostered growth and development throughout American industries. While material and manpower shortages and worry over the Allied cause existed, women entered the workforce to fill the vacated positions as the men served overseas. America prospered, nationalism grew, and the United States emerged from World War II as a leading global power. According to Thomas Schatz, "At war's end, estimates put U.S. productivity at nearly half of the rest of the world combined. And at decade's end, as the British historian Robert Payne noted at the time, 'half of the wealth of the world, more than half of the productivity, nearly two-thirds of the world's machines are concentrated in American hands; the rest of the world lies in the shadow of American industry.'"²⁰ With the return home of millions of servicemen, America's economy proved stable enough to handle the resulting shifts in consumerism and industry. However, the film industry, which also recorded record revenues and profits during the war, suffered a postwar downturn that greatly contrasted with the prosperity of the rest of the nation. The decline in theater attendance resulted from the changing structures of the American family, a return to traditional ideals, and an increase in alternative means of entertainment.

The rise in number of marriages—caused largely by the returning soldiers—resulted in the growth in importance of the American family. The increasing number of marriages caused the birth rate to soar, beginning the official "baby boom" in 1948. Parents started looking for bigger homes to accommodate their growing families. The housing boom that developed encouraged the mass migration of Americans to the suburbs, and the ability to easily and cheaply purchase homes and automobiles further fostered the suburban movement. Yet, the suburbs proved detrimental for the film industry. The adverse affect on theater attendance occurred because the most profitable first-run theater houses were located in downtown areas of cities. So

²⁰ Schatz, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s*, 286.

now if suburbanites wanted to attend the movies, they incurred both additional transportation problems such as increased traffic congestion, and time (travel time) and monetary (paying for baby-sitters and rising parking/transit rates) costs.

What other adverse affects did the end of the war cause for the film industry? Women filmmakers, notably screenwriters (because female directors and producers were already in short supply), lost further ground in the film industry after the war. Women's influence seemed to disappear in the early 1950s as the traditional woman's film [films dominated by a female star] ended. As men returned from war, they took over the writing jobs women had ably done for the past fifty years. With the end of war and the return to more traditional ideals, women's image also changed—while some left the workplace and returned to the home, the general consensus of woman's depiction transformed from strong, independent American woman to homemaker who supported her family and hardworking husband. Following an increase in male screenwriters and ideological changes in society, the 1930s and 1940s films complete with spunky heroines ended, making room for 1950s films that pigeonholed women into roles as sex symbols or housewives.

Although the decline of female screenwriters paralleled the continued decline of female workers in the film industry, it contrasted with the increasing number of working women in the overall American labor force. When the men came home from war, they received their jobs back, often at the expense of the female employees because while women had been expected to help—and did so gladly—during the war, they were also expected to give up their jobs and return to homemaking the second the men returned to the workforce. However, “although 95 percent of the new women employees had expected when they were first hired to quit work at the end of the war, by 1945 almost an equally overwhelming majority did not want to give up their independence, responsibility, and income, and expressed the desire to continue working.”²¹ After

²¹ Coontz, 31.

the war, male management attempted to rid female workers from factories and other high-paying non-traditional jobs, yet for the most part they merely succeeded in downgrading the women to lower-paid, less skilled, “female jobs.”

Why did women improve employment across the general economy while losing ground in the film industry? As mentioned in the introduction, other industries rely on more stable structures in which previous job experience and skill afford employees the opportunity to work their way up the corporate ladder. Once hired, employees are guaranteed to keep their jobs unless fired for lack of skill or causing problems. So when men returned from war, they could take employment in open positions but could not force women to quit. Instead, their only true control was to hire more men for job openings and stop women from moving up in the industry’s ranks. Meanwhile in the film industry, people work on a picture-by-picture basis. Therefore while previous experience is still important, the need to constantly hire people for the newest film project enabled the “old boys network” that reigned supreme to hire men and push women out of the industry. Like other industries, film jobs for women proved scarce at higher levels. Female directors, producers, writers, editors remained minorities; there were no female cinematographers at this time; even costume designers (now a female dominated field) were mainly men, except for Edith Head. The jobs available to women in film lacked the pay and the challenges that had made wartime work so satisfying, encouraging women to define themselves in terms of home and family even when they were working.²² The male bosses and employers assumed that the male acted as the head of the family, and therefore, he needed a job and income to support his family. Meanwhile, the woman remained responsible for taking care of the family inside the home; if she wanted to continue to work, she could—so long as she did not neglect her duties at home.

²² Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 102.

Post-World War II and the beginning of the 1950s marked a transition to conservatism, emphasizing a return to traditional ideals. The 1950s conservative movement, most closely associated with the Republican Party, began to develop in the mid-1930s when politicians, American people, and businessmen collaborated to oppose President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. When Republicans took control of Congress in 1946, they opened investigations into communist infiltration of the government under President Roosevelt. Furthermore, Post-World War II nationalism and "Cold War Conservatism" stressed the need for unity, tradition, civility, Christian morality, and American democracy to prevent the spread of Communism.

With the American postwar economic prosperity, male providers found their disposable incomes rising. Likewise, their new suburban lives resulted in other opportunities for relaxation and entertainment activities. People began spending time in their homes where the men tinkered leisurely in their basement workshops and the children played in the family playroom; and when they ventured out of their homes, they remained in their local neighborhoods and participated in more "suburban" activities such as baseball and bowling teams, and suburban drive-in movie theaters. However, these alternative means of entertainment impacted the amount of movie theater attendance.

Variety reported that movie revenues fell 21 percent between 1946 and 1949, while the disposable income of Americans increased 22 percent.²³ During the war, government mandated all efforts and available non-necessity goods shipped to the men fighting overseas. Therefore, Americans willingly spent more than normal on going to the movies because it remained one of the few available leisure activities. This domestic goods shortage resulted in an overinflated sense of film industry success. When the war ended, consumers spent less at the movies and more on newly available consumer goods. With the 1950s emphasis on the nuclear family, the

²³ "Motion Picture Theatre Receipts: Key Cities Weekly Average by Months," *Variety*, 16 November 1949, 10.

biggest boom in consumer spending affected household goods. Stephanie Coontz explains, “Food spending rose by only 33 percent in the five years following the Second World War, and clothing expenditures rose by 20 percent, but purchases of household furnishings and appliances climbed 240 percent.”²⁴ Nearly the entire increase in the gross national product in the mid-1950s was due to increasing spending on consumer durables and residential construction, most of it oriented toward the nuclear family.²⁵ This focus on familial consumer spending presented a new model for success and utopia in which the family achieved a single-family house and a car and accepted its status as middle-class, a term people now aspired to with its associated connotations of domesticity and upward social mobility.

In particular, the rise of television emerged as the most influential competitor of the film industry. According to Epstein, “The number of television homes had grown from fewer than 1 million in 1948 to 120 million in 1962 and that Hollywood has lost over this same period half its weekly audience.”²⁶ Television’s dramatic growth suggests a negative correlation between the percent of households with television sets and the percent change in motion picture receipts. In order to confirm the effects, the major studios conducted their own research detailing television’s impact on box-office receipts. Paramount’s data released in 1950 concluded that families with television in the home decreased their film going by 20-30 percent.²⁷ Meanwhile, a 1951 Warner Bros. study revealed that television ownership was already responsible for a 3-4 percent drop in the overall U.S. film audience, with further declines on the way.²⁸ By the time Hollywood

²⁴ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 25.

²⁵ Clifford Clark Jr., “Ranch-House Suburbia: Ideals and Realities,” in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 188.

²⁶ Epstein, *The Big Picture*, 220.

²⁷ “20-30% Family B.O. Cut Via Home TV,” *Variety*, 15 February 1950.

²⁸ “TV’s Impact a Puzzler,” *Variety*, 22 March 1950.

realized its mistake in rejecting television as a passing fad, television already had acquired a stronghold in American entertainment.

Did television impact women workers? Although the postwar film industry possessed a systemic absence of women filmmakers, women gained some opportunities working in television. Similar to film during the silent era, television became the pioneering frontier. At a time when her film directing career was failing, Ida Lupino found work as a television director. Lucille Ball transitioned from B-list film star to a female television sensation, ultimately becoming the first woman to run a major television studio, Desilu. While Hollywood remained fixated on profit maximization, cost reduction, and box-office hits through male dominated films—evident in the rising influence of the Western genre—and as encouraged by their Wall Street investors and overseers, television provided an open industry that sought to create content accessible to the masses. The riskiness of the venture and the direct competition with the film industry required acceptance of any able-bodied worker regardless of gender. As television proved successful and continued to grow in terms of programs and networks, more people were required to create and produce content. The law of supply and demand favored women in television, at least at the beginning. Emerging stations and shows needed good writers, and if a woman demonstrated suitable writing abilities, she obtained employment. However, like film, women in decision-making positions remained categorically absent from the television industry. Furthermore, as the television industry developed into a “proper” and respected business—run by male dominated networks—the number of women working in the lower ranks of the industry systemically shrank.

With government intervention in to the major studios’ collusive and anti-competitive strategies, the classic Hollywood system ended. Navigating forced changes in their business strategies such as divestiture of theater chains and less constricting distribution practices enabled the rise of independent film production. However, independent production often still relied on

major studios for film distribution or financing assistance. Thus, the decline of the studio system did not result in the systemic growth of women filmmakers. The continued lack of women working in the studios makes sense—male domination and the economic and cultural changes in American post-World War II society ensured that filmmaking remained in the hands of the men. The end of the war forced many women to give up their places in the workforce for the returning men. The rise in nationalism from America's success in the war and new status as a world power led to an increase in conservative and traditional ideology in which men function as providers and women serve as homemakers. Families grew, and a vast movement to the suburbs occurred, encouraging a new way of life far removed from the fast-paced city life. Lastly, the postwar economic boom provided American consumers with an increase in disposable income that they could spend on a wider range of goods and leisure activities than just attending the movies. The rise of television further spurred the decline in movie attendance as people could access entertainment for free without leaving their homes. At the end of this era, the Hollywood film industry was struggling to navigate the unfavorable situation it faced. In order to survive and hopefully prosper, the film executives sought to recapture a movie audience and regain lost profits. In times of instability, the industry refused to take drastic risks on unproven women and instead turned again to male filmmakers. Regardless of the economic circumstances, women professionals were locked out.

Case Study One:
Betty Comden, Screenwriter



Figure 14. Betty Comden.

In an era where women screenwriters and filmmakers struggled to find work, Betty Comden emerged a successful anomaly. She maintained a six-decade long writing partnership with Adolph Green during which the musical-comedy duo wrote lyrics and screenplays for some of the most beloved and successful Hollywood musicals and Broadway shows of the mid-20th century.

Born Elizabeth Cohen in Brooklyn, New York, and raised by her lawyer father and her schoolteacher mother, Comden enjoyed a fairly traditional childhood before attending New York University and graduating in 1938 with a degree in Drama. Her desire to act led her to change her surname to Comden, act with the Washington Square Players, and become friends with Adolph Green, another aspiring actor. “In the late 1930s, Green's friend, Judy Tuvin (later known as the Oscar-winning actress Judy Holliday) brought in Comden and Green to perform with her in a satiric nightclub act at the Village Vanguard in New York City.”²⁹ Oftentimes one

²⁹ Mary Rourke, “Betty Comden, 89; Winner of 7 Tony Awards Co-Wrote Many famous Show Tunes, Screenplays,” *LA Times*, Obituaries, 25 November 2006.

of Green's friends, a talented young musician named Leonard Bernstein, dropped by and accompanied them on the piano. In 1944, Bernstein approached Comden and Green about working with him on a new project—Bernstein and choreographer, Jerome Robbins, wanted to expand the ballet "Fancy Free" into a Broadway musical. Comden and Green agreed to write the book and lyrics, resulting in the smash hit, "On the Town," the story of three sailors on leave.

While continuing to write books and scores for Broadway, Comden and Green shifted focus to musical screenplays. They wrote *Good News* in 1947 and *The Barkleys of Broadway* in 1949, which marked the film reunion of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. Next, they adapted *On the Town* for the screen in 1949 and wrote the witty screenplay for Minnelli's successful 1953 film *The Band Wagon*, a story in which Comden and Green modeled the characters of Lester and Lily, a husband-and-wife musical writing team, after themselves.³⁰ Their screenplays for *The Band Wagon* and *It's Always Fair Weather* earned Comden and Green Oscar nominations. However, their most successful film was *Singin' in the Rain* (Kelly, 1952). They continued to write many songs for popular Broadway shows including "New York, New York," "Make Someone Happy," and Peter Pan's hit song, "Never Never Land." Comden and Green's last major Broadway show was 'The Will Rogers Follies,' a 1991 Ziegfeld-style extravaganza starring Keith Carradine. Despite mixed reviews, the show ran for two and a half years and won six Tony Awards, including one for the music and lyrics. In 2006, Comden died at the age of 89 from heart failure.

Although she influenced both American film and theatre history, her principle success was in theatre. Comden was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1980 and the American Theater Hall of Fame in 1981. She also acted in plays sporadically over the course of

³⁰ Comden and Green spent so much time together that many people assumed they were married. However, their relationship remained strictly platonic as Comden was married and had two children with Steven Kyle, a designer and businessman, from 1942 until his death in 1979, after which she never remarried.

her career, satisfying her initial desire to become an actress. In an era with few women filmmakers and screenwriters, Comden's theatrical successes paved the way for her to transition into film writing. Comden's movement into film depicted a sentiment of the time period—the only women included in filmmaking were those who first made a name for themselves in other creative fields or areas of the entertainment industry.

In addition, the fact that Comden partnered with a man helped her career to prosper. Green and Comden's six-decade long working relationship was the longest-running creative partnership in theater history and continued until Green's death in 2002, at which point in an on-stage tribute to Green, Comden lamented, "It's lonely up here."³¹ Outside of her own acting and some later accolades for her work, audiences and entertainment executives viewed Comden as part of a writing team. Because the other half of her "team" was male, Comden successfully traversed between stage and screen in a system that otherwise looked to exclude her and other women. Had Comden written with another woman instead of Green, her career might not have been as fruitful.

Betty Comden's Well-Known Films

1947	Good News
1949	The Barkleys of Broadway
1949	On the Town
1952	Singin' in the Rain
1953	The Band Wagon
1955	It's Always Fair Weather
1958	Auntie Mame
1960	Bells Are Ringing

³¹ Robert Berkvist, "Betty Comden, Lyricist for Musicals, Dies at 89," *New York Times*, 23 November 2006.

CHAPTER FOUR
The American New Wave:
Effects of a Youth-Oriented Hollywood, 1968-1975

With the remarkable achievement of high profits from low budget, anti-hero films, executives were encouraged to produce films with “formulas and aesthetics that would excite the core audience of moviegoers—now composed almost entirely of adolescents and young adults.”

—Paul Monaco, *The Sixties: 1960-1969*

The late 1960s-1970s brought about a complete change in American cultural ideology, which ultimately influenced the operations and strategies of the film industry. While the postwar decades emphasized conservatism and the rise of the middle class suburban family, the late 1960s foregrounded a new set of anti-establishment beliefs originating from the younger members of society. As the baby boomers came of age, they rejected the traditions under which they grew up, advocating instead for “sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll.” Furthermore, the solidification of television as a staple in American households forced Hollywood to compete for a mass audience and movie theater attendance. With adults and older Americans staying home to watch television, film executives began to understand, through the successes of a few standouts, that films needed to target younger audiences, and that in order to do so they must create stories reflecting the beliefs and lives of American baby boomers. Bringing in a new generation of film-school-educated male filmmakers accomplished these goals and brought a new style of filmmaking that some call the American New Wave. Complex themes, innovative filming styles, and morally ambiguous, anti-establishment tones dominated New Wave cinema. In addition, the lapse of the Production Code and the consequential rise of the Rating System allowed for a broader range of expression (and also outright misogyny). While men still dominated both the studio produced films and independent cinema, a few small-scale feminist independent films produced by women, as well as feminist film theory, began to emerge, indicating that women’s acceptance of both their belittling depictions onscreen and absence in the industry had ended.

The historical, political, and cultural landscape faced many challenges during the 1960s. Politically divisive situations occurred including the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., the Civil Rights Movement, and American military intervention in Southeast Asia. More so than any other political issue of the decade, the Vietnam War, and the protests that arose against it, forced many to question the nation's sense of direction and basic institutions and led to widespread challenges in American fundamental values. By the second half of the 1960s, most people lost the optimism that had dominated the public's perception of America and its worldwide position during the 1950s. In an attempt to offset the political upheavals of the decade, government and political officials encouraged pride in America through focus on the social justice issues and economic prosperity that the nation faced. Yet, these massive changes did not truly transform the political and economic structures of the United States. In actuality, "social and cultural changes that spread farthest, fastest, and most tellingly across the United States were the shifts in mores, attitudes, and behaviors that constituted the 'sexual revolution.' The late 1960s proved far more revolutionary culturally than politically."¹ Although divided views and heated discussions on social and political issues of the era occurred, the social issues tended to gather more direct responses and emotional outrage because they ultimately affected the daily lives of the American people.

The FDA's permission of the sale of birth control pill in 1960 garnered such attentions and acted as the spark that really ignited the sexual revolution. Ideology of the sexual revolution encouraged the liberation/rebellion of young teenagers to do what they want instead of basing all decisions on the older generation's traditional values. Yet, the sexual revolution did not really advocate for women's sexual equality. Author of *The Sixties: 1960-1969*, Paul Monaco, noted, "The sexual revolution constituted a demonstrable shift in behavioral mores that did not

¹ Paul Monaco, *The Sixties: 1960-1969* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001), 5.

necessarily redefine gender roles. Moreover, the more politicized forms of protest of the late 1960s were not inherently based on greater altered concepts of masculinity and femininity. Women were active in the ranks of the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and other counterculture causes, yet all of these movements were led by men.”² Women within “movement politics” advocated for the rights of many other marginalized groups, and yet often suffered from systemic inequalities in the continually perpetuated hierarchy of male superiority.

In response to the revolution in American social values, MPAA president, Jack Valenti, advocated for a new filmmaking climate of creative freedom. The result was the change from the Hayes Production Code to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Rating System in 1968, which facilitated the advancement of the American New Wave and proved crucial to all of the industry changes during the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. The Rating System shifted the burden from the producer, allowing him to make any kind of film he wanted. After the completion of the film, the MPAA would watch the film and decide on its rating based on the film’s content including language, violence, and sex. In order to compete with the frankness of European films, the MPAA’s new rating system was modeled on Great Britain’s system and established that all films produced and/or distributed by the MPAA companies must carry a rating of suitability: ‘G,’ ‘M’ (later changed to ‘PG’), ‘R,’ or ‘X’ (changed to ‘NC-17’ nearly 3 decades later). While the Rating System designations would go through several variations over the next few decades, the basic premise for the present day model remained the same. Because the Ratings System worked to restrict the audience and not the filmmakers, films gained the power to depict violence, harsh language, and sex. This new creative freedom meant that films now sometimes attracted audiences solely because they notoriously pushed the envelope in their portrayals of violence, sex, and nudity. However depending on the degree shown, the depictions

² Monaco, *The Sixties: 1960-1969*, 121.

might also result in a higher rating than producers hoped for and inevitably lead to a smaller audience. Regardless, the Rating System “provided excellent public relations for the movie industry and was widely accepted by the public. Hollywood appeared to be doing something proactive and positive about what sorts of movies America’s youth would be seeing,”³ ensuring that a film would reach its target market in the 17-25-year-old age group.⁴

With the rise of a Rating System, studios realized the importance of figuring out a film’s target demographics, and catering to that specific audience in order to maximize profit potential. The new MPAA Ratings System furthered the sexual revolution and the aforementioned changing target film demographics to a younger and more liberal audience and resulted in fewer but more fervent moviegoers.

With the move to the suburbs, and the rise of alternative forms of recreational activities, industry executives looked more closely at the demographics of people attending the movies. As the number of American homes with televisions grew, Hollywood realized that older adults proved more likely to stay home and watch television while the youthful baby boomers, with lower time costs and a smaller, but entirely disposable income chose to go to the movies. During the mid-1960s, marriage ages rose, and college became more affordable through the increases in Federal Student Aid, community colleges, and other governmental involvement in higher education. Governmental loans, higher levels of education, and people’s increasing age at marriage ensured larger levels of disposable income for single and independent young people, which they could now afford to spend on consumer goods and entertainment. Not to mention, the baby boomers were a profitable target movie audience, given that their age group comprised the largest portion of Americans. The teens also possessed the abilities to safeguard the future success of the film industry through both present and future consumer demand. Therefore, if

³ Monaco, *The Sixties: 1960-1969*, 65.

⁴ Cook, 71.

parents and other adults stayed home to watch television, teenagers and young adults decided to go to the movies. Likewise, the available television content of the time period focused: on news content for adults; cartoons for children; and other traditional, family oriented programming. Similarly, the fact that the broadcast networks, owned and operated by older, more conservative men who usually employed likeminded adults, ran the television stations and shows meant that “counterculture” teenagers needed to reject the medium and find alternative means of entertainment that coincided with their own philosophies and values.⁵ Whereas the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) strictly regulated television, movies were subjected only to the loosened hold of the Ratings System.

While the Production Code enforced a certain code constraining violence, behavior, etc., the loss of those standards with the rise of the Rating System led to films, such as *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969), with outright misogyny and the prevalence of themes focusing on rape and humiliating women—topics that depict male fantasies about getting back at women. Given that these films were made by men and appealed greatly to a youthful male audience, their lack of concern for women remains unsurprising. However, the sexual and violent themes also explain why older, conservative generations’ attendance at the movies decreased.

With the end of the 1960s, the period of rapid American economic expansion slowed and inflation began to rise. Suddenly, America’s post-war economic prosperity was over and Americans found themselves reevaluating their spending habits.

The economic changes facing America also influenced the workings of the Hollywood film industry. Between 1969 and 1971, an industry-wide recession occurred in Hollywood that stemmed from the overproduction boom of 1966-1968, which included a large number of

⁵ Counterculture came to television in 1967 with both *The Smothers Brothers* and *Laugh-In*. However, these shows still acted as the exception to the rule and were subject to stricter codes on television than the loosening strictures of the movie industry.

unprofitable big-budget musicals that hoped to capitalize on the massive success of *The Sound of Music* (Wise, 1965). However, losses followed on some very expensive films like *Hello, Dolly!* (Kelly, 1969), showing that a regular, predictable, family film audience no longer existed. Unsuccessful in its attempts to reach the broad audience for blockbusters it used to rely on, Hollywood suffered great profit losses and attendance figures continued to shrink. Forced to rely on predictions and crude algorithms (based on past box-office hits), executives encountered greater risks as profitable and well-received movies comprised only a small portion of film output each year. “Every year big-budget pictures with top stars and ‘sure-fire’ box-office potential flopped miserably. Every year a low-budget film with no clear expectations of success brought crowds. It was like playing the lottery—somebody always won, and though your chances were small, you still bought a ticket in the hope lightening would strike you.”⁶ Looking for ways to hedge against risk, industry executives struggled to determine market trends. Yet, the landmark films of the late 1960s provided Hollywood with key information on an important audience demographic that would lead them out of economic hardships and, ultimately, into profits bigger than they could have ever imagined with the blockbuster domination.

Films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1967), *Easy Rider*, and *M*A*S*H* (Altman, 1970) exemplified that a demand existed and money could be made on low-budget youth movies, Hollywood’s new production model. With production costs just under \$300,000 through principal photography,⁷ *Easy Rider* demonstrated to film executives and other industry professionals that young audiences did not necessarily want big-budget spectacle films. Similarly, even though Warner Bros. funded *Bonnie and Clyde*, the film only received a budget of \$1.8

⁶ Sklar, 302.

⁷ Monaco, 186-7.

million, a number that was well below the average for a normal studio picture.⁸ Instead, the films comprised low-budgets and small casts, but offered fresh creative visions. With the films' themes of alienation, violence, and sexuality, they attracted their target audiences of high school and college age youths who believed in the counterculture revolution. These films impacted the film industry by exemplifying the effect a smaller film could have on audiences. The production's success allowed new, innovative talents such as Robert Altman and Hal Ashby, a chance to direct feature films since "it was assumed that only youth knew how to communicate with the young audience that after all constituted the bulk of most frequent movie goers."⁹

As studio control still rested in the hands of an older, more conservative generation of male executives, the success of films like *Easy Rider* and *Bonnie and Clyde* perplexed those in power. As British director John Boorman stated, "There was a complete loss of nerve by the American studios at that point... They were so confused and so uncertain as to what to do, they were quite willing to cede power to the directors."¹⁰ Thus emerged a group of young, hip, drug-taking, Oedipal, male directors who slowly were gaining the potential to overthrow the monopoly power of Warner Bros. and other established studios.

Consequently during the 1960s and 1970s, a new group of independent filmmakers rose to power. They differed from earlier generations because the new, young filmmakers made films that reflected their knowledge of film as an art, integrating film history they learned at American university film programs. These "Film School Brats" included only heterosexual males such as Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, and Steven Spielberg, who made films that reinvigorated the Hollywood film industry. The new generation of directors "revamped traditional genre

⁸ Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of the New Hollywood* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), 194.

⁹ Thomas M. Pryor, "1969-74: Years of Change and Challenge," *Variety*, 29 October 1974, 6.

¹⁰ Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'N' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 22.

formulas that had worked during Hollywood's classical period, spicing them up with liberal doses of sex and violence."¹¹

The new directors of the 1970s learned many of the technical aspects of production, as well as film budgeting and marketing, both from their university film school educations and from apprenticing under already established directors, as Francis Ford Coppola did under producer-director Roger Corman at American International Pictures (AIP). Yet, they found success because of their perseverance, artistic visions, and formal film school educations. "What they [young directors] offered was fresh creative talent and adaptability to a system in the midst of radical change. Their youth guaranteed their ability to address the new audio-visual sensibility of an audience, like themselves, that had grown up watching television. And, as far as the studios were concerned, their relative inexperience as first- and second-time directors meant that they could be hired for much less than the established talent."¹² For example, by 1959 William Wyler contracted a salary of \$1,000,000 for *Ben-Hur*; meanwhile Mike Nichols earned \$250,000 for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966), and Francis Ford Coppola received a salary of only \$175,000 for *The Godfather* (1972).

In an industry reliant upon networking and connections, the younger generation of directors relied upon a system of male mentoring in the old boys' network. Coppola emerged as the "vanguard figure of this new breed of directors."¹³ He used his newfound prominence to mentor and guide the rest of the generation's talented filmmakers, including George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Martin Scorsese. Although the practice of supporting new filmmakers encouraged the expanding of the types of films being made and the range of people making them,

¹¹ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America of Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 43.

¹² David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 133.

¹³ Cook, 133.

the nurturing of the careers of the “Hollywood Brats” led, yet again, to a system created by and for men. Just like Coppola, other male directors began mentoring young, mainly male, directors. Often, men mentor other men because it is easier for the male mentor to connect with, establish, and maintain a lasting bond the younger male—as the older man sees himself in the new talent, and the young director aspires to the achievements and prominence of the older mentor.

As older Hollywood filmmakers began to retire, the new generation stepped in and transformed the structure of filmmaking practices and power. With the increasingly popularity of film theory and film school education, filmmakers, especially directors, gained acclaim and status for their role in filmmaking, and film directors started to obtain more power and autonomy in the creation of their films. The director’s status “was abetted by growing familiarity in the United States with French New Wave polemics that insisted on directors (often writer-directors) as auteurs, or authors, of films. The industry’s crisis further shifted emphasis away from studios and producers toward individualistic directors whose vision or style could capture public and critical attention.”¹⁴ The new generation of American directors copied the films of the French New Wave—a style that rejected previously produced big, old-fashioned production films and which the auteurs viewed as *le cinema de papa*, or “Dad’s cinema.” The French New Wave comprised one type of European Art Cinema and worked to change traditional film form and stylistic conventions. The French New Wave emphasized an aesthetic style that rejected the traditional linear narrative, focusing instead on filmmaking techniques like the long tracking shot, location shooting, jump cutting, and rejection of the 180-degree line. These cinematic changes allowed for a style that expressed complex ideas in a subjective and emotionally engaging way, while leaving narrative questions unanswered and allowing viewers to come up with their own interpretations in order to emotionally connect the film with their own lives and sense of truth.

¹⁴ Sklar, 323.

Exported to America,¹⁵ the films of the French New Wave became so popular in the American art film scene that an American New Wave cinema developed to compete with the European art films. The changes to American filmmaking styles shifted the importance of film marketing and production from emphasis on the star, studio, or audience demographics to selling a film based on the name of the director. Now, viewers started to describe films as “a Scorsese film,” “a Spielberg film,” etc. and chose what films they went to see accordingly. The new generation of young, visionary film school-graduates who successfully integrated into Hollywood as directors did so just in time. As executives realized the power of a director’s name on the creation of a film’s audience, they began to focus film financing on less risky films with the established film-school directors. With the name brand importance of a film’s director and the focus on the director as the source of the film’s creative vision, the studios that produced and distributed the films looked to minimize risk and maximize returns. Although the decade had been open enough to allow for new filmmaking styles, genres and filmmakers, the industry’s openness extended only so far—and with that, the brand name had to be male.

But what about the women? The studios still refused to acknowledge filmmaking opportunities for women, and instead placed their financial gambles into the hands of the new generation of male filmmakers. As Scorsese, Lucas, Spielberg, and the others’ successes accumulated, Hollywood executives viewed their box-office returns and film grosses as proof that their industry alterations, and its limits, were economically efficient.

However, women filmmakers still existed. Like the male “Film School Brats” of the 1960s who revitalized Hollywood, some “Art School Gals” found success on their own with the

¹⁵ The French New Wave occurred during a period in history where imports flooded into America. This resulted in a trade deficit in America where many low priced and high quality imports entered into the U.S. market and competed against American made products. New Wave films encouraged the further loosening of American regulations against sexuality, nudity, and violence in films and the creation of American-produced films with similar themes.

creation of independent, feminist films. In the 1960s, a small number of women began to produce films as expressions of their own subjective visions. Some of these women started their careers in other art forms and gained formal training in art schools. They often used realism or documentary styles in their films in order to give voices to women and their stories. They viewed this as a vital strategy that served to offer viewers stories about women that male filmmakers neglected to make and to counteract negative images of women as depicted by men in mainstream Hollywood.¹⁶ During this movement, filmmakers like Barbara Loden, Shirley Clarke, and Claudia Weill emerged. In 1970, Loden wrote, produced, directed, and starred in her own independent film, *Wanda*, which used a low-budget, cinéma vérité style of filmmaking to show a semi-autobiographical portrait of a passive and disconnected coal miner's wife. Other feminist filmmakers produced films dealing with the trials facing women in their daily lives or from the expectations of society. These films included *The Women's Film* (Alaimo, 1971), *Hester Street* (Silver, 1975), and *Girlfriends* (Weill, 1978) and played a part in encouraging consciousness raising during the early days of the feminist movement.

Women's ability to regain any sort of systemic filmmaking capacity stemmed from the resurgence of feminism in the form of "Second-Wave Feminism." Similarly to First-Wave Feminism, Second-Wave Feminism—spurred on by the Civil Rights Movement—occurred from the 1960s and arguably waned during the conservative 1980s and sought to affect legislative changes by raising awareness about the "social/historical position of women as subordinated, oppressed, or exploited within dominant modes of production [i.e. capitalism] and/or by the social relations of patriarchy or male domination."¹⁷ Rejecting the domesticity and traditionalism of the 1950s, the 1960s and 1970s functioned as a period of drastic change for women; they

¹⁶ Harriet Margolis, "Film and Feminism," In *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, ed. Helen Tierney (Greenwood Press, 2002), Accessed on 10 November 2014, <http://www.gem.greenwood.com>.

¹⁷ Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (Boston: Routledge, 1982), 4.

returned to work, sought higher levels of education, gained independence and began demanding more opportunities outside of the home. While Second-Wave Feminism started in the U.S. with *The Feminine Mystique*, a 1963 book by Betty Friedan about educated white women and their lives as suburban housewives, other key works emerged that criticized sexist images in society and the media. These key texts included the 1973 book, *Popcorn Venus*, by Marjorie Rosen and *From Reverence to Rape*, a 1987 book by Molly Haskell, which both analyze the changing depictions of women characters in film, the role of female audiences, and how those two factors work together to explain women's role in society. The emphasis on film and feminism fostered a new interest in women seizing control of the means of production. Organizations such as the National Organization for Women (founded in 1967) appeared to support these changes.

Similar associations to ignite change arose throughout the film industry. "Prior to 1973, the only women's group in film was the Motion Picture Mothers, which began in the early 1930s and whose members raised money, volunteered, and met for lunch. Women in Film had another agenda—to improve roles for women and help them move into decision-making positions within the corporate structure."¹⁸ Opting to accomplish their goals by working within the existing industry structures, Women in Film set out to help each other in order to promote women into key industry positions—those with decision-making powers, and ideally the power to green-light movies, such as studio executives, directors, producers and writers. Women in Film spurred the organization of other groups for women in film. While catering to different areas of the entertainment industry, most had similar goals of first creating more opportunities for women in film and then working to develop an identity and power in the industry that allowed women to do more than just fit into the "old boys' club." A major breakthrough for women came in 1973

¹⁸ Seger, 38.

when Julia Phillips became the first woman producer to share an Academy Award for Best Picture, for *The Sting*.¹⁹

Why didn't these women break through? Although women used film as a platform for social activism in the 1960s and early 1970s, finding funding and distribution for their films proved almost impossible. In a time before and on the cusp of film festivals,²⁰ women were forced to distribute the films themselves in alternative venues such as church recreation rooms and women's crisis centers. In 1972, Women Make Movies was established to address the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in the media industry. The organization served as a means of alternative, nonprofit distribution for women's films. Regardless of the achievements women made during this time period, these independent, nonprofit organizations could not fully compete with mainstream Hollywood. While women refused to remain absent from the film medium any longer, they struggled to enter into the oppressive male dominated, hierarchical system of Hollywood. Furthermore, the social problem films made by women (which proved successful in the silent era) seemed to no longer hold a place in an industry so heavily focused on profits and economic efficiency.

American ideology changes drastically in the 1960s and 1970s; inflation became a prevalent issue in the economy; the post-war period of rapid American economic expansion ended. All of these factors resulted in transformations in the business operations of the film industry. A sexual revolution started by the comings of age of the baby boomers occurred in which the young adults rejected the conservatism of their parents and believed in a counterculture, anti-establishment culture. As television established its place in society, the young baby boomers became the target audience for movie theater attendance. Ultimately gaining more attention and power to advocate for their own beliefs, the necessity of the baby

¹⁹ Sova, 153. She shared this honor with her husband, Michael Phillips, and Tony Bill.

²⁰ Women's film festivals started in 1972.

boomer generation's attendance at the movies led to a new generation of male directors and the influx, during a trade deficit, of French New Wave cinema to create an auteurist American New Wave style of filmmaking. Furthermore, the lapse of the production code and establishment of a rating system provided a structure in which a wider range of films could be made, especially films that appeal to the more risqué desires of the 1960s teenagers. Lastly, the counterculture movement, fight for civil rights equality, and rejection of 1950s traditionalism resulted in the beginnings of a feminist movement. Although early in the undertaking, feminist film emerged as an art form focused on social critiques and fair—yet complex—representations of women. However, with no outlets for distribution of these films and in a time before the height of Second-Wave feminism, the effects of feminist films remained fairly limited.

Case Study One:
Elaine May, Director



Figure 15. Elaine May.

Elaine May worked as a film writer and director in the 1970s, making her a historically important icon and role model for other future women filmmakers. Like Betty Comden and many other women before her, May established a career in the film industry after having already made a name and career in theater. She managed to carve a niche for herself in the film industry, although she never managed to fully live up to the reputation and expectations placed upon her as a groundbreaking female filmmaker.

Raised by a theater director father and an actress mother, May obtained firsthand experience of life onstage starting at a very young age. She often performed with her father in his traveling Yiddish theater company. Travelling around the country with her parents, May attended over 50 schools by the time she reached middle school and hated school so much that she dropped out at age 14. She married at age 16, had a child, and eventually divorced. After her divorce, May studied acting and attended University of Chicago, one of the few colleges that accepted students without diplomas. May joined an off-campus improvisational theater group, The Compass Players, becoming one of its first members. Shortly after, Mike Nichols also joined

the group, beginning the comedy duo act of May and Nichols. (Again like Comden, May's career flourished after she paired with a man.) May and Nichols began developing improvised comedy sketches together and moved on to cabaret, television and Broadway performances. After seven years, they split amicably with Nichols moving on to film and gaining success for films such as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *The Graduate*. Meanwhile, May turned to playwriting "and quickly distinguished herself as a writer and director of such impressive plays as *Death Defying Acts* (1995) and *Not Enough Rope* (1962) that matched her mordant wit with dark satire. The resolute independence of vision and voice embodied by May's comedic and theatrical work immediately defined her subsequent career as a filmmaker and placed her in inevitable and frequent conflict with the hierarchical creative process favored by Hollywood."²¹

In 1971, May made her film writing, acting, and directing debut with the screwball comedy, *A New Leaf*. Her work on this film "nearly single-handedly opened the doors to directing Hollywood films for women."²² *The Heartbreak Kid* immediately followed in 1972. Both films established her credibility as a director of comedies and "effectively challenged traditional audiences and expectations for American film comedy with their distinctly unflattering portraits of incurably self-absorbed characters willing to sacrifice anything or anyone to live out their selfish and quixotic dreams of success. They accomplished this by updating the Thirties screwball comedy of remarriage for the Seventies age of the anti-hero."²³

In the midst of her directorial successes, May kept up her screenwriting with *A New Leaf*, *Mickey and Nicky*, and *Heaven Can Wait* (1978). May continued on directing *Mickey and Nicky* in 1976, which provided lackluster returns and diminished her directorial power until she teamed with Warren Beatty in 1987 to direct her final film, *Ishtar*. *Ishtar* starred Dustin Hoffman and

²¹"The Comic Vision of Elaine May," *Harvard Film Archive*, Accessed 3 November 2014. <http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa/films/2010octdec/may.html>.

²² Acker, 81.

²³ "The Comic Vision of Elaine May."

Beatty and “was the highest budgeted film a woman had been permitted to direct to date [1991].”²⁴ Unfortunately, the film turned out to be “a historic phenomenon and box-office disaster.”²⁵ “The hurricane of bad press that greeted *Ishtar* focused much more on the film’s bloated budget than its creative merits. It became a poster child for Hollywood waste, a cautionary warning of the dangers of going over schedule and over budget.”²⁶ Since the colossal failure of *Ishtar*, May has not directed another film. However, she did reunite with Nichols for *The Birdcage* in 1996, for which May wrote the screenplay and Nichols directed. May then earned a Best Screenplay Academy Award nomination for *Primary Colors* (Nichols, 1997). She returned to Broadway in 1998 to perform one-acts co-written by Alan Arkin and herself.

Her early successes in theater and her partnership with Nichols gave May an advantage in the film industry. In addition, May’s filmmaking style rejected a feminist ideology, instead focusing on smart and subversive screwball comedies that captured her comedic styling, as well as the mood of the time period. Her more mainstream stylistic tendencies set her apart from the other women directing in the 1970s and 1980s and afforded her the opportunity to direct prominent, widely distributed, big budget films.

Elaine May’s Well-Known Films	
1971	A New Leaf
1972	The Heartbreak Kid
1976	Mikey and Nicky
1987	Ishtar

²⁴ Acker, 83.

²⁵ Acker, 83.

²⁶ Nathan Rabin, “Unpacking the Short but Prickly Filmography of Elaine May,” *A.V. Club*, 24 January 2013. <http://www.avclub.com/article/unpacking-the-short-but-prickly-filmography-of-ela-91503>.

CHAPTER FIVE
The Blockbuster Era:
Too Big to Fail, 1975-1993

Women continued their Second-Wave Feminist Movement until the early 1980s, demanding equality in society, the home, and the workplace. Although this movement succeeded in offering women more opportunities for power and authoritative positions in the film industry, as well as other industries, gender gaps continued to exist, and crucial film industry control remained in the hands of mostly male studio heads.

In 1975 the success of Spielberg's *Jaws* led to the end of the era of independent filmmaking and the rise of the Hollywood Blockbuster¹ Era. In keeping with industry economic goals, the "blockbuster," a high-budget production aimed at mass markets, allowed studios and financial investors new prospects to maximize profits. Given the scale and costs of producing a blockbuster, only major studios "had both the organization to distribute films in domestic and international markets, and the resources to finance production in the context of rapidly escalating costs."² Thus, the blockbuster era shifted Hollywood business practices, emphasizing profit maximization, risk minimization, and the beginnings of corporate synergy through the production of blockbuster films made by—and for—men.

However, women did make strides in the industry. Sherry Lansing broke through the glass ceiling in 1980 when she became the first woman to head an existing studio as president of production at 20th Century Fox.³ She became a figurehead for women in film, showing that while in the minority, women could fully rise up the corporate ladder. In addition, she produced films

¹ The term "blockbuster" had already existed, but the success of *Jaws* changed the meaning from a film that had positive audience response and earned a lot of money at the box office to a word that described a genre and style of filmmaking, emphasizing an event film with vast commercial appeal. Instead of focusing on the film's success and popularity with the audience, "blockbuster" came to define the film's budget and marketability across platforms.

² Cook, 26.

³ Seger, 49.

with female protagonists and antagonists, proving for the first time since the 1940s that a female film audience existed.



Figure 16. Sherry Lansing.

Other women followed in Lansing's footsteps, working diligently to prove their abilities and obtain positions of power in Hollywood. In 1984, Gale Ann Hurd co-wrote and produced *The Terminator*. The film's success coupled with the \$82 million U.S. grosses of her other film, *Alien*, "gave Hurd credibility, and positioned her as one of the few women to be given a free hand in producing big-budget, big-set films."⁴ Lansing's trailblazing status made way for Amy Pascal and Stacey Snider to become studio executives at Columbia and Universal respectively in the early 1990s.

The efforts to encourage women filmmakers and foster new or more fruitful careers influenced the emergence of new histories about early silent era women filmmakers as well as festivals for women's films. The feminist intervention raised awareness of looking to the past in order to successfully mold the present into a more equal future. Film journals and festivals devoted specifically to women's cinema arose. Many of these groundbreaking achievements for women in film occurred in 1972, such as the selling of the first feminist film magazine, *Women & Film*, and the founding of Women Make Movies (Started by Ariel Dougherty and Sheila Paige with the specific aim of training women to become filmmakers), but their effects continued on throughout the 1970s and 1980s, gaining more momentum along the way.

⁴ Sova, 172.

By the late 1970s, Women Make Movies expanded to include a distribution service in response to the lack of distribution and exhibition opportunities for women's films. Robin Blaetz explained:

In June 1972, the First International Festival of Women's Films was held in New York City, followed two months later by "The Women's Event" at the Edinburgh International Film Festival... On one level, these festivals were quite similar; each one exhibited a transhistorical accumulation of feature, documentary, and experimental films by women, from the silent period to the present... The intention is clear. The attendee is to be amazed and inspired by the plethora of women's work and the degree to which the films and their makers have been excluded from the field.⁵

The topics of the programs, as well as the ensuing discussions and coverage of the events, varied broadly and included: depictions of women in film, scriptwriting, women in television, programming, exhibition, distribution, editing, directing, and acting. Overall, "the struggle to articulate whether women would be best served by analyzing the long history of misogynist imagery and women's attempts to work within the classical Hollywood system or by making images of themselves from scratch pervaded this period of feminist film studies."⁶ Women of this time dealt with many challenges including how to enter into the industry, get their works made and seen by audiences, as well as figure out how to position their projects and the past works of women in film both within the feminist movement of the 1970s and within a broader range of man-made films that span all of film history. While public knowledge of women and film expanded, audience viewership remained difficult.

Although film festivals began back in the early 1900s, festival distribution had influenced the cultural elites but never guaranteed theatrical distribution or the possibilities of mass viewership by the general public. All of this changed with *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (Soderbergh, 1989). *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* won the Palme d'Or at the 1989 Cannes Film Festival and

⁵ Robin Blaetz, ed., *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

⁶ Blaetz, 3.

became the catalyst in revolutionizing the “independent” film movement in the early 1990s. Made for 1.2 million dollars, the film grosses 36.7 million worldwide, received critical acclaim, and received an Academy Award nomination for Best Screenplay. This-low budget film’s unprecedented international success ignited the 1990s independent film production boom, turned the small independent Sundance film festival into a major Hollywood marketplace, and demonstrated that smaller, cheap independent films had the potential to make money and win critical acclaim. As film festivals grew in popularity, they offered opportunities for industry executives and audiences to see a wider range of films, for independent films to obtain wider audiences, critical acclaim, and potentially wide scale distribution from a major distributor. This new booming independent production scene increased the opportunities available to filmmakers, especially women. Now they could show their films in well-respected festivals and hopefully foster connections and a body of work that would prove to industry executives that they had experience and could be trusted with larger-budget, studio films.

However, the extensive network of men in power and the industry’s changing business model as a result of the success of Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975) hindered women’s efforts for true equality in mainstream Hollywood filmmaking. David Cook explained:

Jaws emphatically marked the arrival of the New Hollywood by recalibrating the profit potential of the blockbuster and redefining its status as a marketable commodity. In terms of marketing, it was the first “high concept” film—in the sense of a film whose conceptual premise and story is easily reducible to a salient image (or simple phrase/tag-line), which then becomes the basis for an aggressive advertising campaign keyed to merchandising tie-ins and ancillary markets, creating “synergy” between film, products, and related media ... *Jaws* was the paradigm for what Thomas Schatz calls “the high-cost, high-tech, high-speed” thriller that became the major Hollywood genre of the eighties and nineties.⁷

Based on the best selling novel, *Jaws* became a cultural phenomenon. The film’s “high concept” image—a frightening, large-toothed shark lurking under the surface of the water as a person

⁷ Cook, 40.

unknowingly swims directly above—appeared in all of the film advertisements as well as on book covers, soundtracks, posters, and other ancillary merchandise.

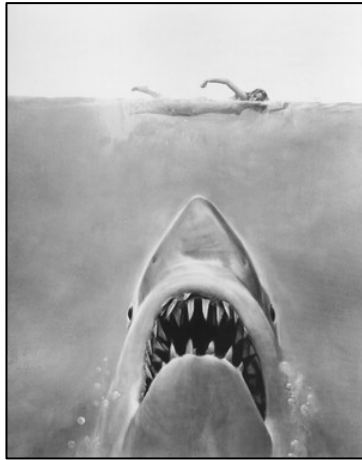


Figure 17. *Jaws* “high concept” image.

The *Jaws* marketing strategy attempted to create a national audience for the film prior to its release by engaging in an intensive advertising campaign covering all media outlets including an eight month long talk show circuit—*Jaws* was the first motion picture to use national television advertising in conjunction with a nationwide release⁸—and a television/film preview trailer that combined the ominous film score with the high concept shark image. By the end of the summer, the movie, the book, and hundreds of product tie-ins (T-shirts, toys, beach bags) had raised sharks to a level of a national fetish, 25 million tickets had been sold, and the film had earned nearly \$100 million in domestic rentals. *Jaws* drastically changed the idea of the blockbuster and returned to the early cinema’s idea of a “cinema of attractions” playing on viewers’ fears, curiosities, and emotions as they engaged with the on screen spectacle.

Films with similar strategies—*King Kong* (Guillermin, 1976), *The Deep* (Yates, 1977), and *Alien* (Scott, 1979)—emerged to capitalize on the *Jaws* phenomenon. These films along with other early 1970s films that earned exceptionally high profits—*The Godfather* (Coppola,

⁸ Arthur De Vany, *Hollywood Economics: How Extreme Uncertainty Shapes the Film Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 122.

1972) and *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973)—showed that studios could still make money, but only if they rethought their business tactics. Executives now argued that each film produced through marketing must create its own audience, so producers and studio executives embarked on risky ventures in hopes of finding an audience and earning back invested capital. The new market system of viewership and audience creation suggested that only a few films each year would make large profits, while the rest would break even or suffer losses. Such a strategy rested on ensuring the success of the big picture and minimizing the risk of the year's other—lesser—films. The resulting theory said, “History suggested that pictures with big budgets had the best chance of succeeding in a volatile market, but also—very clearly—that there was no way to guarantee a hit...Indeed, by 1977 the top six of the 199 major films released accounted for one-third of the year's income, and the top thirteen for half (of those thirteen, all but one were distributed by a major⁹).”¹⁰ The 1970s formation of the “blockbuster mentality” in the film industry drastically increased the power of the major studios, since only they possessed the stability, resources and organization to handle the extensive network required for film distribution and rising production costs. As a result of the formation of the blockbuster, studios shifted their efforts to producing fewer, but bigger films each year. In 1937, their product [film] output surged to over 500 feature films; in 1978, this figure dropped to 354 releases.¹¹ Studios believe that the potential gains from blockbusters and other tent pole films offset the risks and costs of high production budgets. Hollywood's blockbuster focus resulted in the rise of a “certainty effect” wherein securing the production, distribution, and finances for a large and expensive project is accomplished much easier than producing a smaller project with lesser or unknown individuals.

⁹ At this time, some of the non-major distributors included Crown International Pictures, American International Pictures (AIP), Embassy Pictures Corporation, Bryanston Distributing Company, and New World Pictures (founded by Roger Corman after he left AIP).

¹⁰ Cook, 25.

¹¹ Tim Dirks, “The History of Film: The 1970s,” *AMC Filmsite*, Accessed 16 November 2014, <http://www.filmsite.org/70sintro.html>.

The youth audience and the move to the suburbs further aided the financing of blockbusters. Thomas Schatz indicated, “The industry conceptualization of the youth market was shifting from the politically hip, cineliterate viewers to even younger viewers with more conservative tastes and sensibilities. Demographically, this trend reflected the aging of the front-end baby boomers and the ascendance of their younger siblings and children—a new generation with time and spending money and a penchant for wandering suburban shopping malls and repeatedly viewing their favorite films.”¹² Between 1965 and 1970, the number of U.S. shopping malls increased from about 1,500 to 12,500; by 1980 the number would reach 22,500.¹³ The number of indoor theaters, which had held remarkably steady from 1965 to 1974 at just over 10,000, began to increase sharply in 1975 and reached a total of 22,750 by 1990, due largely to the surge of mall-based “multi-plex” theaters.¹⁴ As suburbanization proved its permanence during the 1960s and 1970s, the increasing number of shopping malls offered more convenient commutes for shoppers and allowed parents a place to drop off their teenagers. Consequentially, the number of indoor movie theaters increased, and the mall movie theaters replaced the first-run theaters in large cities as the most important areas for exhibition.

In order to attract this younger audience to theaters, the films needed to lure them away from their homes and their television sets. Executives realized the most successful way to differentiate their product from television involved creating an onscreen spectacle through the use of sound and special effects. George Lucas capitalized on this understanding when he worked with Dolby Stereo to design the soundtrack for *Star Wars* (1977). Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale explain:

¹² Thomas Schatz, “The New Hollywood,” In *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, eds. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), 19.

¹³ Tino Balio, “Introduction to Part 1,” In *Hollywood in the Age of Television*, ed. Tino Balio (New South Wales: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 29.

¹⁴ “Theatrical Data” section in “1990 U.S. Economic Review,” *MPAA* (New York, Motion Picture Association of America, 1991), 3.

Opening with the old Fox fanfare, John Williams's main title theme, the roar of high-speed spacecraft, and the sounds of explosions and laser fire in space and in the interior of Princess Leia's spaceship, *Star Wars* underlined the importance of sound from its very beginning...It is not until the initial exchange between Luke Skywalker and Aunt Beru, some twenty minutes into the film, that we hear the sound of human voices unmediated by any form of on-screen technology.¹⁵

Similarly, visual design and special effects distinguished the film from television and attracted the desired teenage audience, as well as viewers of all ages. Lucas also redefined the idea of special effects in *Star Wars* with the introduction of a cost-effective computerized motion-control system. Not only did *Star Wars* succeed in drawing an audience to the theaters, it also broke the box-office records set by *Jaws* and maintained its newfound status as the top-grossing film of all time until *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* surpassed it in 1983.

Follow *Jaws'* methods of audience creation, studios launched large-scale marketing campaigns by placing 30-second commercial advertisements on television and expanding print advertisements. Consequentially film costs rose; by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the average cost of a feature film was somewhere between \$8 to \$10 million and that the majors were likely to spend in in the region of \$17 million per year on advertising.¹⁶ The costs of marketing, though expensive, proved necessary to capturing the attentions of consumers with many other opportunities for consumption and entertainment.

How else could studios capture audiences' attentions? "While stars could not guarantee box-office success, in the volatile post-studio marketplace they at least seemed to offer a dependable hedge against risk."¹⁷ Consequently, stars' fees and contract agreements rose in proportion with their perceived "bankability." To ensure a film's success, studio executives often agreed to higher wages and more perks in a truly bankable star's contract, knowing that the stars

¹⁵ Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale, *Epics, Spectacles, and Blockbusters* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 218.

¹⁶ Hall and Neale, 225.

¹⁷ Cook, 26.

have power over the general public. While they cannot necessarily guarantee an audience for a film, they often have their own fan backing. Likewise, stars function as one of the few “brand names” in the industry. By taking a role in a film, the star endorses the product—the film—as worthwhile. This brand power resulted in the rise of well-known stars’ contract fees into the millions of dollars per picture (In comparison, movie star salaries of the 1940s averaged between \$150,000 and \$300,000, which equals about \$700,000 - \$1,500,000 in inflation-adjusted dollars in the 1980s). Likewise “in an era of rapidly escalating blockbuster budgets, studios were more unwilling than ever to take casting risks.”¹⁸ By producing fewer films each year, a smaller number of roles and opportunities—by studios and fan clubs—existed to create new stars. Instead, that job fell to television. Thus, studios had to outbid each other and television networks for the existing stars, giving the power to the stars to drive up their costs and demands, and resulting in further heightened production costs from stars’ contract-stipulated wage payments. Giving back the power and control studios had unilaterally held during days of star contracts, stars often used their higher pays and industry influence to take control of their careers by once again forming their own production companies. Suddenly, stars could actively participate in the production side of the industry, as Barbra Streisand did when she formed her own production company, Barwood, Films, and ventured into producing and directing, as well as starring in her own films.

However, the gap between independents and studios grew as technological advancements and increased globalization throughout the 1960s resulted in media businesses merging and becoming mere subsections of corporate conglomerates, large multinational businesses that control many different aspects of the entertainment industry. Corporations wanted to acquire the studios regardless of their undervalued stocks because the studios possessed significant holdings

¹⁸ Cook, 339.

in real estate, film libraries, and working production facilities. By 1970, four of the major Hollywood studios—Universal, Paramount, Warner Bros., and United Artists had merged with conglomerates. With conglomeration, Universal, Warner Bros., and Paramount thrived. More importantly, they prospered because 1970s conglomerate affiliation increased a distributor's market share. The corporate control meant that the major studios now had more resources, especially capital, available to put toward film distribution. Studios within conglomeration were viewed as more secure investments, and the power boost from the overseeing corporations inevitably reduced the likelihood of successful competition from independent distributors.

Corporations and the major studios found ways to obtain additional revenues on films in the 1970s with the introduction of the VHS tape. Although ancillary markets had technically already existed, as evidenced by the sales of movie soundtracks, the ability to rent or purchase films after the end of their theatrical runs encouraged the blockbuster system. In 1975, the “home-video revolution” began with the introduction of Sony's Betamax videotape recorder. By 1977, the VHS emerged as a less expensive and more efficient alternative; the VHS quickly dominated the market. Although Hollywood first responded negatively to the new technologies, they soon realized the profitable benefits of the home-video market, as the key commodity for sale on VHS was the Hollywood film. The era of the VHS tape encouraged a video rental market where consumers could go to the local Blockbuster video rental store and pay a small fee to rent the film for a few days. Video rental allowed studios to make more money off of a product after ending its theatrical release. Through the rental process, the studio made money from the individual consumers and the rental corporations that paid fees to rent out the films. Ancillary markets perpetuated the blockbuster system, as the most profitable rental films tended to be the blockbusters. In addition, these films created opportunities to expand revenues and content into other multi-media platforms.

How much had Hollywood changed from the blockbuster mania and corporate takeovers? Struggling to adapt after the successful integration of television into the entertainment marketplace, major Hollywood studios turned to the production of blockbuster films as the answer to their economic troubles. Blockbusters provided opportunities for studios to create huge spectacle features with clear audio and visual technological accomplishments that television could not achieve. Likewise, blockbuster films with successful marketing campaigns could obtain audiences and box-office revenues guaranteed to earn profits. With conglomerate mergers, the parent companies encouraged blockbuster films that would produce large publicity and profits and discouraged smaller, character driven narratives.

Did this studio and corporate power disregard women filmmakers? Although Hollywood maintained its focus on risk minimization and high profits by creating blockbusters made by men for the youth and male demographics, Second Wave feminists and post-Second Wave feminists found a creative outlet with the re-emergence of independent film production and the introduction of women's film festivals and organizations focused on securing distribution of female-made films. With women establishing a foothold in the independent scene, they hoped to parlay that experience into mainstream Hollywood. Encouraged by the few females who found success in powerful, decision-making positions, women filmmakers believed with perseverance and a little more time that they would infiltrate Hollywood and the major studios, ultimately altering the male-dominated system to a more gender-equal system. Unfortunately, they were wrong.

Case Study One:
Penny Marshall, Director



Figure 18. Penny Marshall.

Like many of the female directors before her, Penny Marshall's career as a director started only after she already established herself as an actress. Marshall's success playing Laverne on the hit television sitcom *Laverne and Shirley* provided her with the clout to expand her career beyond the scope of acting. With the help and encouragement of more successful, male industry friends, Marshall took up directing and gained box office and critical acclaim, ultimately enabling her to do what she always wanted: "be one of the boys."

Growing up in the Bronx, Carole Penny Marshall was surrounded by creativity. Her mother owned and ran the Marjorie Marshall Dance School, and her father directed industrial films before eventually becoming a producer. In addition, her siblings also went on to find success in the entertainment industry—her brother, Gary Marshall, as an actor, director, and television producer, and her sister, Ronny Hallin, as a television producer. After graduating high school, Marshall attended the University of New Mexico at the request of her mother who wanted Marshall to lose her New York accent, but Marshall unsuccessfully followed her mother's plans for her life. According to Acker, "She majored in math and psychology, flunked

on the accent, married a football player, had a baby, and divorced a football player, all in rather quick succession. The next thing she knew she was on her big-brother Gary's doorstep wondering what to do with her life."¹⁹

After moving to Los Angeles in 1967 for a fresh start, her brother Gary became one of her mentors. Already a successful Hollywood writer who was known for credits such as his writing on *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, Gary used his industry insider status to cast Marshall in smaller acting parts. Her big break came when Gary, then the creator/part-time writer on *Happy Days*, cast Marshall and Cindy Williams as guest stars in which they appeared in one episode as wise-cracking dates for Fonzie and Richie. However, they proved to be such a hit with the studio audience that they appeared in five more episodes, and Gary Marshall decided to create a spin-off series, *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983), around the two characters. Along the way in 1971 Marshall married actor/director Rob Reiner, and they divorced by 1979.

With the encouragement of her brother, Marshall directed four episodes of *Laverne and Shirley*. However after the show ended, Marshall struggled to find other acting roles. In 1985, Marshall's friend Whoopi Goldberg asked her to take over the direction of her newest film, *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, as the film was struggling a mere ten days into production. Although nervous, Marshall acquiesced. "'For me it was just something to do,' Marshall said. 'If I failed, I had my excuse: I was an actress, not a director.' Although critics were underwhelmed by the result, she did salvage the movie, and pal James L. Brooks gave Marshall her second directing job: *Big* (1988), starring Tom Hanks."²⁰ With *Big*'s box-office success, Marshall became the first female director ever to gross more than \$100 million at the box office with one movie.²¹ The

¹⁹ Acker, 90.

²⁰ George Kalogerakis, "Penny Marshall: *The Preacher's Wife* Director Finds Peace in a Riot of Work," *People*, vol. 46, no. 26, 23 December 1996.

²¹ "Penny Marshall," *Biography.com*, 4 December 2014, <http://www.biography.com/people/penny-marshall-9542495>.

success of *Big* enabled Marshall to continue making big budgeted projects. Her next film, *Awakenings* (1991), earned an Academy Award nomination for best picture. Immediately following, she directed the 1992 film, *A League of Their Own*, which cast Geena Davis, Rosie O'Donnell and Madonna as players in a short-lived women's professional baseball league. *A League of Their Own* also grossed more than \$100 million, making Marshall the first woman director with two such successful blockbusters films. In the end, Marshall's directing career peaked with *A League of Their Own*. While she went on to direct the 2001 film, *Riding in Cars with Boys*, she found the opportunities for work decreasing and instead began to focus her career mainly on small acting cameos, producing, and directing a few episodes of television shows.

Marshall's career flourished because of her personal connections with many of the industry's well-known male directors and producers—her brother, [Gary] Marshall; her then-husband, Rob Reiner; and James L. Brooks. As a result, Marshall found an open and inviting industry network that wasn't available to many other women. Nonetheless, even her connections and directorial successes extended only so far in Hollywood.

As the film industry changed and began to favor, more than ever, the blockbuster emphasizing the younger audiences, Marshall found herself displaced and struggling to navigate the changing Hollywood dynamics. In a recent interview, Marshall stated:

I don't do the movies they do now. Most of the movies I did, I could not do today. Because they're not horror, they're not vampires, they're not car crashes, and they're not superheroes. I like a nice story. I have a couple of scripts but they won't get done...*A League of Their Own*, I couldn't have made today. And it's too bad—because it went into the National Archives this year. But they don't care. I have a baseball movie about the Negro leagues, but baseball movies don't sell overseas. And it's all black—that doesn't sell overseas either!...If you think about it, \$100 million at the box office probably means nothing today. But there are plenty of female directors. . . they're just all in television.²²

²² Julie Miller, "Penny Marshall on *Big*'s 25th Anniversary and Why She Gave Up Her Courtside Lakers Tickets," *Vanity Fair*, 9 December 2013.

Penny Marshall's Well-Known Films

1986	Jumpin' Jack Flash
1988	Big
1990	Awakenings
1992	A League of Their Own
1994	Renaissance Man
1996	The Preacher's Wife
2001	Riding in Cars with Boys

Case Study Two:
Dawn Steel, Producer



Figure 19. Dawn Steel.

Dawn Steel made a name for herself in the film industry by defying female stereotypes and working her way up the Hollywood ladder until she became one of the first women to run a major Hollywood studio. Along with Sherry Lansing, Steel's successful career trajectory situated her as a role model for other women in the film industry.

Born in the Bronx, Steel grew up in a poor, working class family of Jewish immigrants. "The story of her life was far from ordinary and, like those of many other wealthy and successful moguls in Hollywood, self-invented."²³ After her father suffered a nervous breakdown, her mother worked to support her family. Steel worked her way through school, attending Boston University for one year before running out of money. She then transferred to New York University where she spent two years studying marketing. "Steel never finished her schooling and in 1968 began full-time employment, determined not to be a mere receptionist or secretary in

²³ Bernard Weinraub, "Dawn Steel, Studio Chief and Producer, Dies at 51," *New York Times*, 22 December 1997.

an era when women were fighting for equal position in the workforce.”²⁴ Steel worked as a merchandiser for *Penthouse Magazine*, earning praise for her shameless, but successful marketing triumphs. Impressed by her marketing skills, Steel’s friend, a junior Paramount executive, invited her out to Los Angeles to try working in the film industry. In 1978, she started at Paramount Pictures where she planned marketing tie-ins for *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Wise, 1979).

Steel continued at Paramount as a young executive, and with the success of *Flashdance*—a film Steel alone advocated for—in 1983, her career took off. By 1985, she held the title of Senior Vice-President, Production, at Paramount. With this new title, she received credit for such films as *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *The Accused* (1988). Although her career thrived, “her personal publicity started to make her more enemies at corporate Paramount.”²⁵ In 1989 immediately after giving birth to her daughter, she learned from a headline in *Variety* that she was no longer President of Production at the studio.

Soon after, Steel took a job offer as President of Columbia Pictures, becoming the first woman to head a major Hollywood studio. She achieved great success at Columbia with the production of such films as: *Postcards from the Edge* (1990), *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), *Ghostbusters II* (1989), *The Karate Kid Part II* (1989), and many others. She continued to work there until 1989 when Sony bought Columbia. After settling her contract, she went to join Michael Eisner at Disney. During her time at Disney, she succeeded in producing films and getting her name on the credits. In the mid-1990s, Steel started to receive Chairman and Chief Executive job offers at Turner Pictures, but negotiations broke down from contract disputes and rumors about Steel’s ailing health. Instead she went on to found Atlas Entertainment and work as an independent producer until she died in 1997 at the age of 51 from an inoperable brain tumor.

²⁴ Tony Sloman, “Obituary: Dawn Steel,” *Independent UK*, 24 December 1997.

²⁵ Sloman, “Obituary: Dawn Steel.”

Steel worked to help other women achieve filmmaking jobs in male-dominated Hollywood. Nora Ephron, who was given her first directorial job by Steel, remarked that, “Dawn certainly wasn't the first woman to become powerful in Hollywood, but she was the first woman to understand that part of her responsibility was to make sure that eventually there were lots of other powerful women. She hired women as executives, women as producers and directors, women as marketing people. The situation we have today, with a huge number of women in powerful positions, is largely because of Dawn Steel.”²⁶

Dawn Steel's Well-Known Films

1983	Flashdance
1984	Footloose
1986	Top Gun
1987	Fatal Attraction
1987	The Untouchables
1988	The Accused
1989	Ghostbusters II
1990	Casualties of War

²⁶ Weinraub, “Dawn Steel, Studio Chief and Producer, Dies at 51.”

CHAPTER SIX
Many Means of Distribution:
The Gender Gap Continues, 1994-Present

The effects of the blockbuster era have carried over into the present day film industry. Studios have turned to making each of their wide release films into a blockbuster with an intensive advertising campaign and a focus on a young audience demographic. With the increase in both the number and scale of millennium blockbuster films, the importance of the film's opening weekend and home entertainment market arose as vital factors for a film's ultimate success. In addition, the ability for a film to create a sequel, series, or franchise provided extra leverage in securing production, distribution, and exhibition from studios and conglomerate companies focused solely on "the bottom line," i.e. profits. Furthermore, the technological advancements of the 21st century resulted in many new technologies, including the internet that have changed the way audiences view entertainment. New media platforms emerged and opened up the market to new means of distribution and previously untapped audiences. Systems such as DVDs, Video on Demand, and Netflix allowed products, even without theatrical distribution, to be seen by consumers. Likewise, the ease of technology's advancement created a market in which international viewership is key to a film's success. During Classical Hollywood, international distribution accounted for roughly 35 percent of the box office, but according to the MPAA, in 2013 70 percent of studios annual box-office revenues now come from international markets. In their attempts to minimize risks, Hollywood executives continued making fewer, bigger budget films and have maintained male-dominated control of the industry.

Women have managed to continue finding successes in television and independent production. However, even with the increase in content and platforms for distribution, the mounting inability to find funding outside of mainstream and international channels halts women and other independent filmmakers from threatening the major studios' control over the film

industry. With increased frustrations over the lack of female filmmakers in mainstream Hollywood, women and other minorities have begun voicing complaints through organized pressure. In response, executives have asserted that the reason for the scarcity stems from the shortage of content and audience demand. However, the real reason—that the economics of big, budget franchises prove more profitable for the corporate investors—remains the truth behind the discrepancies in representation.

Film distribution continues as the most important part of film production. Nowadays, major studio-distributed films comprise the only films receiving wide-release in 3,000 theaters. With each of these films hoping to dominate box-office returns and outperform the other films, competition has increased and the risk of failure looms over each production. Although producing many smaller, more reasonably priced films offers less risk, it also promises less reward, and in an era of blockbuster mania, producing only “independent style” films would never cover costs because independent film production costs also increased, or provide the required returns to a major studio. In today’s world, hyper-concentration exists; less than 5 percent of movies earn about 85 percent of all profit in the business.¹

With such high-cost, high-risk films, films must start making money as soon as they are released. Now, blockbuster films spend millions on marketing campaigns in which they use extensive multi-platform advertising, capitalizing on stars with box-office power and a national wide-release opening to launch a movie’s run and fully capitalize on the film’s opening weekend. The blockbuster mentality emphasizes the idea that “the opening is the most critical event in a film’s commercial life.”² If a film does not do as well as expected/projected during its opening weekend, it most likely will never recover those lost profits, and may become a “blockbuster flop,” as evidenced by recent studio blockbuster failures, *John Carter* (Stanton, 2012) and *The*

¹ De Vany, 261.

² De Vany, 122.

Lone Ranger (Verbinski, 2013).³ With the success of a few blockbusters per year serving to offset the costs and/or losses of a studios other films, studios cannot afford a blockbuster failure. In fact, the film industry has reached a point where “there is no typical movie because box-office revenue outcomes do not converge to an average, in fact they diverge over all scales.”⁴ While the consequences of a blockbuster failure are higher, the potential rewards if successful encourage the massive advertising campaigns. Studios justify blockbuster marketing expenditures by arguing that the advertising leads to huge opening-weekends, and those opening weekend audiences turn the movie into an “event” via free advertising methods such as word-of-mouth, ensuring more viewers and profits that eventually offset the expensive marketing and production costs.

The first truly female-audience driven blockbuster film, and the one against which all future female audience hits were measured, stemmed from male direction and studio misgivings. Director James Cameron’s 1997 film, *Titanic*, opened in the U.S. on December 19, 1997 and remained as the highest weekly grossing film at the box office for fifteen weeks. It went on to make \$1.8 billion worldwide and to win eleven Oscars, including best picture and best director. With an eventual \$200 million dollar budget, the film received a green light for production only with the costs (and risks) split between two major studios—Paramount and Fox. Likewise, Cameron’s track record for prosperous films, although mostly in the sci-fi genre, encouraged production of his film. The capturing of the mainly female audience resulted from the love story narrative and the star power of Leonardo DiCaprio. Atypical of Hollywood blockbusters’ perceived audience demographic, teenagers and young adult males, *Titanic*’s female audience

³ The *Lone Ranger* opened on July 4th weekend, but only managed to gross \$48 million in its first 5 days in the domestic market, along with around \$24 million in its overseas release. However, with such low box-office receipts, given the film’s \$200-\$250 million dollar budget, it remains unlikely that it will ever fully return revenues to Disney.

⁴ De Vany, 67.

base caused many to question the prevailing, and incorrect, notion that women did not go to the movies and did not comprise a profitable box office film. Critics and consumers believed that *Titanic*'s box-office profits would show studio executives that women wanted more stories geared to a female audience, and if made, they would pay to go to the movies. Yet, more female driven blockbusters did not emerge in the wake of *Titanic*. With its short historical memory, Hollywood had—for a time—rediscovered the female audience, but the thought left as quickly as it came. However in the late 2000s, studio executives again started tapping into the other side of their target demographics—the young girls. After the major triumph of the *Harry Potter* series, studios and producers looked for more young adult novels and series to capitalize on the market. In doing so, they discovered that young females can, just like young men, secure the success of a franchise, as demonstrated by *Twilight* (Hardwicke, 2008), *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012) and *Divergent* (Burger, 2014).

Many people supposed that the lack of films starring women and targeted at female audiences post-*Titanic* originated from male-dominated studio executives choosing what gets made and who gets to make it. Male directors and producers with more established track records and more experience proved the “certainty effect” that exemplified Hollywood’s blockbuster focus. The “certainty effect” stated that securing production, distribution, and the necessary finances for a large and expensive project is accomplished much easier than producing a smaller project with lesser or unknown individuals.

The certainty effect greatly hindered women’s efforts for equality in the film industry. With the release of fewer films each year and the studio executives’ emphasis on risk minimization, filmmaking remained in the hands of those—usually men—with proven hit films. While exceptions to the rule do exist, the male dominated system forces women to fight an uphill battle against the ever-present gender gap. In 2013, “filmmakers with XX chromosomes

accounted for only 16 percent of the directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors and cinematographers on those films—a drop of 1 percent from 1998. And only 6 percent of the top films were helmed by women, down from 9 percent.”⁵ Other female driven blockbuster films (encompassing large female casts, audiences, and often female filmmakers) such as *Mamma Mia!* (Lloyd, 2008) and *Bridesmaids* (Feig, 2011) have succeeded even in the face of reluctance from studio executives and criticism from film critics.

Bridesmaids proved what a strong opening weekend and continued word-of-mouth advertising can achieve for a blockbuster film—with a budget of only \$32.5 million, *Bridesmaids* grossed over \$26 million on its opening weekend, and went on to gross over \$169 million domestically and \$120 million internationally for a total of around \$290 million dollars.⁶ Universal Studios rejoiced in the film’s success, as did women filmmakers and women moviegoers. However, *Bridesmaids* does not stand out as a true success story for women filmmakers. Although co-written by female writers, Annie Mumolo and Kristen Wiig, the film’s director, Paul Feig, and producers, Judd Apatow, Barry Mendel, and Clayton Townsend, were all men. The male control of this film demonstrates why studio executives took a risk and agreed to produce the film even with a female cast. In an era of comic book and super hero driven franchises, a comedy about and starring all women made studios nervous. However, with the support of industry heavyweights, Apatow and Feig, the studio felt more secure in taking a risk.

The problem remains that in this male dominated system “blockbuster risks” comprise a broadly appealing box office comedy starring well-known SNL comedians and a film starring Meryl Streep. If these successes seem “shocking,” female industry equality is farther away than we think. Even films like *Mamma Mia!* possess smaller budgets than their male blockbuster

⁵ Nicole Sperling, “Behind Every Great Film, Not Enough Women,” *Entertainment Weekly*, 24 January 2014.

⁶ Ray Subers, “Weekend Report: ‘Thor’ Holds on to the Throne, ‘Bridesmaids’ a Strong Second,” *Box Office Mojo*, 16 May 2011. Accessed 25 May 2013.

counterparts. During a publicity interview while promoting the film, Meryl Streep stated, “we didn’t have the *Batman* budget, or the *Superman* budget, or any *man* budget.” The reason for lack of movies directed by women does not stem from a shortage of female directors. Instead, the problem lies in the “catch-22” cycle of film financing in which studio heads and producers hesitate to give big budgets to females without proven track records. Consequently, women cannot prove their abilities without being given a chance to succeed. In addition, few women making blockbuster films results in an unfairly sexist system in which women get less credit for box-office successes and more blame for failure.

The female film-financing problem also carries over into independent film production. “According to a 2012 study commissioned by Sundance Institute and Women in Film (WIF) Los Angeles, financing was the most frequently cited barrier for female directors and producers of independent films.”⁷ However the chart below shows that the higher the grosses a film makes, the less likely it is to be directed by a woman. In addition, the overall number of top grossing films directed by women decreased in recent years.

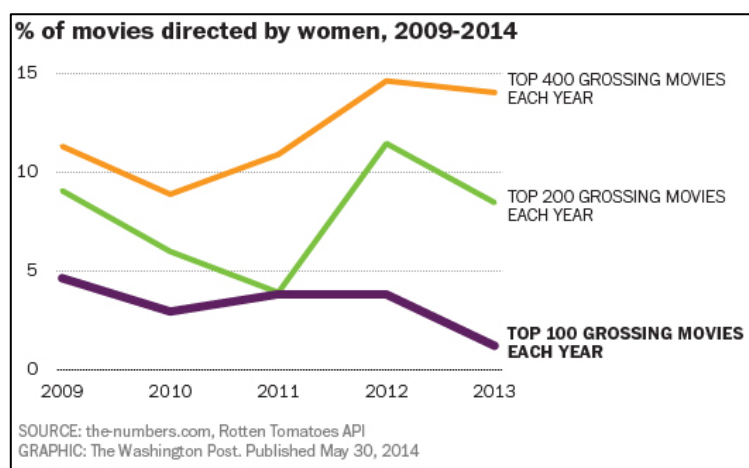


Figure 20. The chart shows a negative correlation between film grosses and women directors.

⁷ Caryn James, “5 Takeaways from the Sundance Institute/Women in Film Financing Intensive,” *Sundance.org*, 21 May 2014.

Since the collapse of the studio system, the role of the director in the filmmaking process increased, especially in terms of constructing the film's overall creative vision. Thus, "today directors, even more than stars, are crucial to the traffic in film production that energizes the Hollywood community. A movie can be made without a star...but without a director, no production can get a green light from a studio."⁸

Along with the importance of the director's name brand, studios also acknowledge the need to build a film audience through massive advertising campaigns. In order to successfully do so, they need to determine what group of consumers comprised their key demographic. Yet, questions remain as to what extent the film creates the audience versus the audience creating the film. With the previous accounts of studios often ignoring women audiences or worrying about the risks of production, such as those for *Mamma Mia!*, *Titanic*, and *Bridesmaids*, we must closely examine the studios' desired characteristics for a film audience. We begin to realize that like the 1970s teenage demographic, the studios of this era also want to attract young consumers (although slightly older than the teenagers of the New Wave) because younger consumers, often single or without family obligations, have higher portions of disposable incomes. Proving susceptible to the massive advertising campaigns, they willingly go to the movies and spend extra money to consume massive quantities of snacks such as soda and movie theater popcorn. Concession purchases incentivize movie theater chains to book films for wide release. In addition, this younger audience demographic also is most likely to buy merchandise and other licensable products, allowing the studios to make merchandising "tie-in" deals that pay for films' publicity expenditures. Overall, the studios' advertising campaigns targeted at the young

⁸ Epstein, *The Big Picture*, 269.

demographics have proven successful. According to the 2013 MPAA Theatrical Market Statistics, the largest portion of frequent moviegoers ranging in ages from 18-39.⁹

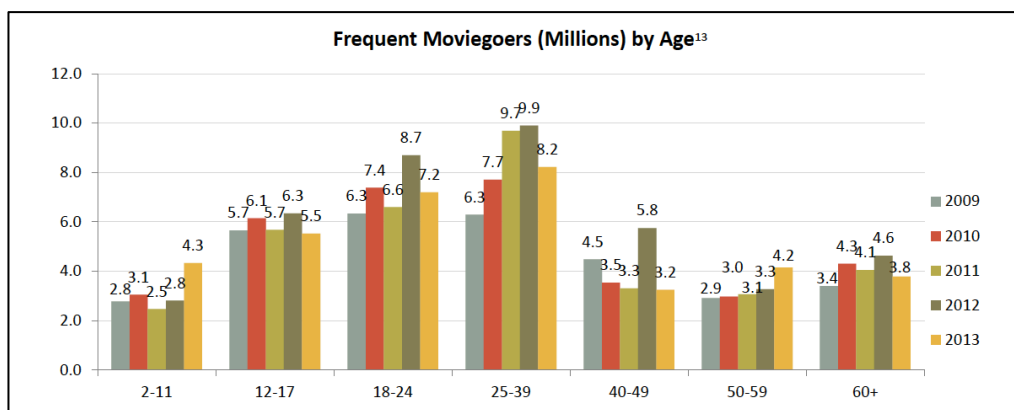


Figure 21. Table on the 2013 statistics show the most frequent moviegoers comprise the 18-24 and 25-39 age groups.

Given that the studios tend to ignore a rather large female audience—women make up 51 percent of the population and comprise 52 percent of the movie going audience¹⁰—it seems odd that more films specifically targeting their gender do not exist. Furthermore, nothing in the MPAA Statistics even suggests the notion of gender in terms of target audiences. Instead the statistics emphasize first and foremost the separation of movie audience by age groups. Therefore, the prevailing notion that lack of female demand contributes to the lack of female driven films conceals part of the picture.

In actuality, box office attendance influences film market demographics mainly in the sense that it relies the notion that film audiences will buy the ancillary merchandise and return for sequels. These factors prove that while both sexes of the target 18-39 year-olds comprised the key audience demographics, the solution to a successful film, especially a blockbuster, relies upon the young male audience. Young males fuel the (male driven) blockbuster mentality, encouraging films based on comic books, video games, or superheroes and that have car chases, bombs, and special effects—and a plethora of ancillary merchandise.

⁹ “2013 Theatrical Market Statistics,” *MPAA* (2013): 4.

¹⁰ “2013 Theatrical Market Statistics,” *MPAA* (2013): 4.

Studios also realize the blockbuster hits targeted to these young boys open up many opportunities for sequels, series, or similar genre films. Sequels, series, and genre films provide another way to maximize the potential for films' successes given the product's built in audience. Sequels already possess an audience—those who went and saw the first film. Thus, sequels offer studios less of a risk because they know an audience exists, and given the success of the first film, can project “high returns” to be even higher while not worrying about the possibility of a major box-office failure. Studios today, as a former executive explained, tend to green-light four types of movies for wide openings: remakes, sequels, television spin-offs, or video game extensions.¹¹

Blockbuster films' profit maximization relies on accessing target demographics, remaking similar “male-dominated” films, and earning profits from the sale of film's ancillary merchandise, consequentially leaving female consumers entirely out of the equation. The male studio controlled blockbuster era created a profit-driven system in which women have neither supply or demand side power to choose what films are made. Although recent female driven blockbuster films (some made by women, while others starred women) proved successful, the majority of widely distributed films cater to the male consumer. Perhaps part of the problem rests on the fact that most of the people, producers, directors, and studio executives that have the power to green light films are men. Therefore, they agree to produce films they believe will turn profits, and these films turn out to be films about and made by men. In addition to the systemic problems of inequality in the film industry, the lack of female centered films also stems from the fact that women more willingly go to see films with male driven protagonists than men willingly go to see films with female protagonists. *The Avengers* (Whedon, 2012) reported an opening weekend audience in which, “while men outnumbered women, it wasn't to an extreme extent;

¹¹ Edward Jay Epstein, *The Hollywood Economist: The Hidden Financial Reality Behind the Movies* (New York: Melville House, 2010), 149.

men made up 60 percent of the film's audience."¹² Whereas *Sex and the City* (King, 2008) had an audience comprised of 85 percent women.¹³ This inequality originates from the patriarchal structures inherent in our world, forcing women to adapt to a male dominated status quo, and allowing men to reject female domination as "other."

However, women managed to maintain female driven stories both made and starring women in the independent film world. Its openness to character-driven stories has long promoted independent film as more accepting of women and other marginalized filmmakers. With lower budgets and production levels, the risks of production remain much lower than those of blockbusters. Furthermore, investment usually comes from private investors or is secured through producers, and does not rely on major studios as financiers and distributors. As the independent film route has fostered many women filmmakers' careers, it has done so at the expense of women fully gaining equality in the film industry. Independent film production has enabled Hollywood studios to ghettoize women filmmakers such as Debra Granik, Jerusha Hess, and Ava DuVernay (as well as other minority groups), into a playground where they are allowed to make their art, but not the bigger films. As the bigger studio-distributed films cast major stars and receive wide distribution and mass audience attention, keeping women in the independent field inhibits their careers and maintains the status quo of Hollywood in which money, men, and traditional blockbuster narratives reign supreme.

Furthermore, women's reliance on the independent market causes problems when Hollywood blockbusters threaten the very foundation of independent production. Although not widely released in theaters, these women's independent films have found audiences with the rise of home entertainment options—Video on Demand, Netflix, DVD sales, film festivals, etc.—but

¹² John Young, "Box Office Report: 'The Avengers' Scores Biggest Opening Weekend of All Time," *Entertainment Weekly*, 6 May 2012.

¹³ Melissa Silverstein, "Memo to Hollywood: Women Go to the Movies Too," *Washington Post*, 29 June 2012.

rising costs and lack of funding opportunities for independent have resulted in the reduction of film productions. The erosion of this market risks the demise of female progress in the industry. From 2000-2005, independent films regularly accounted for around 25 per cent of the domestic box office, but by the end of the decade the figure had fallen to around 18 per cent.¹⁴ Within this new system, unless produced by a Hollywood studio, a film's ability to secure U.S. distribution before finished production is almost impossible. Thus, "for all practical purposes the value of the U.S. market for financing a movie is virtually zero. As a result, a producer has to depend almost entirely on the foreign markets for financing. To be sure, foreign distributors, no longer confident that independent films would have the publicity and the hype that goes with an American release, have greatly reduced the amount they are willing to commit."¹⁵ Similarly, large blockbuster films have spent so much on their initial marketing campaign that their domestic earnings mainly go to offsetting advertising costs.

Therefore, studios need to look abroad to begin earning back money on their investments, and in an era of increasing globalization, international markets are widely and easily accessible. Today, filmed entertainment is America's second largest net export. During the new millennium, theater admissions in America declined but rose steadily overseas. In 2004, a record number of more than 1 billion tickets were sold in the European Union alone. The international box office rose steadily over the decade, reaching a \$20 billion benchmark in 2010.¹⁶ According to the MPAA, in 2013, \$25 billion of the \$35.9 billion total global box office grosses, or 70 percent, came from the international box office.¹⁷ As shown, this international influence has increased each year since 2009.

¹⁴ Tino Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium* (London: BFI, 2013), 114.

¹⁵ Epstein, *The Hollywood Economist*, 175.

¹⁶ Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium*, 10.

¹⁷ "2013 Theatrical Market Statistics," *MPAA* (2013): 4.

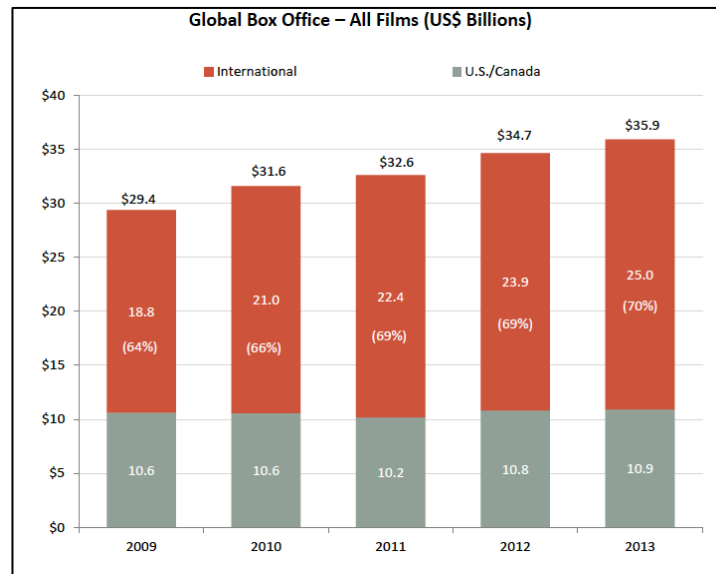


Figure 22. Table showing the increasing global box office receipts.

With major Hollywood releases earning more money abroad than in the U.S., film executives must find ways to minimize costs in those international markets. Overseas prominence complicates matters because studios need to secure distribution and theater deals in foreign countries as well. Likewise, all of the publicity and advertising material must be translated and made to fit with the country’s cultural standards. Similarly, the film must be translated and dubbed, and the soundtracks remixed. As a result of these costly enterprises, studios believe the formula for successful international bookings is a film “short on dialogue, long on action.”¹⁸ While jokes or character revelations often lose something in translation, an action sequence needs no translation.

In addition, the available home video markets—DVDs, Netflix, and Video on Demand—reinforce the emphasis on blockbusters and sequels because the movies customers rent or buy tend to be the same films that qualify as successful “hits” during their theatrical releases. In addition, the ancillary markets created through home video provide substantial (previously inaccessible) revenue. The rise of DVDs also encouraged the purchase of films, generating more

¹⁸ Epstein, *The Hollywood Economist*, 163.

revenue streams. “In 1999, DVDs represented 11 percent of the studios’ home entertainment revenues...by 2003, DVDs represented 76 percent of the studios’ home entertainment revenues...In 2004, U.S. households spend \$27 billion on DVD software while overseas consumers spent \$24.6 billion. Meanwhile consumer spending on the box office was roughly half that amount.”¹⁹ These figures prove that audiences prefer to watch films at home at their own convenience, and at a cheaper price.

However in the past few years, DVD sales have decreased as new means of home viewing became available to consumers. Internet sites like Amazon Instant Video, Netflix, etc. have emerged and allow viewers to pay a fixed monthly price in order to access any film on the site (with rights purchased from the studio/distributor). Another alternative means of distribution and the newest system, Video on Demand, allows consumers to rent a film on their televisions for a cheaper price on the same day it is released for home distribution. Video on Demand has gone further—at this point only with less successful films—to allow viewers to rent the film at home while it is still in theaters in order to maximize potential revenues from all consumers. These various technologies offer more options for watching and allow audiences to be more selective in their choices of film content. With an overabundance of films, audiences discern what to watch based on what they have heard about from others—thus further perpetuating the blockbuster cycle.

With the corporate mergers of the 1960s-1980s, synergy emerged as an important term in Hollywood production and has become even more important today with the millennium’s advancements in technology and the rise of alternative means of distribution. These conglomerates own some or all of the following: the major studios that make Hollywood movies, theme parks, sports teams, television channels, cable television distributors, and movie theater

¹⁹ Hall and Neale, 257.

chains. In addition, these corporations—Time Warner, Viacom, The Walt Disney Company, etc.—distribute America and the world’s newspapers, magazines, books, television shows and other forms of mass media. With such diversified holdings, the movie business no longer functions as the principal part of a conglomerate’s financial state. While it may still hold politically or socially strategic significance to the company, especially in terms of the prestige and attention gained from going to the Academy Awards, studios now play a minor role in the revenues of parent companies. Thus, studios maintain subordinate positions in which they are forced to increase their own profitability to please the larger conglomerate owners. Tino Balio notes, “Hollywood entities are run by corporate decree: mandates on profitability are set by Wall Street, and the corporate soldiers salute and enforce.”²⁰ Thus, conglomerate control operates as the motivating factor behind studios’ risk-aversion, profit-driven blockbuster mentality.

Studios realized that the value they create comes from licensable products for current and future consumers and not in the number of tickets sold at the box-office. “The concept of synergy now drives current Hollywood production, wherein the film acts as an advertisement for other related products (and vice versa)—CDs, movie novelizations, comic books, fast food franchises, posters, toys, games, action figures, theme park rides, clothes, and other assorted collectables,” writes Benshoff. He continues, “All of this media saturation convinces filmgoers of these films’ alleged importance. Independent films, which tend to offer the viewpoint of various marginalized groups, are frequently lost in the media flurry surrounding the more formulaic Hollywood output, films that still tend to center on white patriarchal capitalist ideals.”²¹ Merchandising promotes a film’s brand and, when successful, creates an enormous revenue stream. Accordingly, Hollywood relies heavily on “The Midas Formula.” The Midas Formula contains roughly nine stipulations arguing that profits come not from squeezing down

²⁰ Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium*, 23.

²¹ Benshoff, 44.

costs of film production but from creating films with licensable properties that could, over time, generate profits in other media. These formula points include:

1. Films are based on children's fare—stories, comic books, theme park rides (establishing a pre-existing audience); 2. They contain only chaste or strictly platonic relationships between the sexes (This ensures the movie gets the PG-13 or better rating necessary for merchandising tie-ins and for placing ads on children's TV programming.); 3. They include characters for toy and game licensing; 4. They end happily, with the hero prevailing over powerful villains and supernatural forces (and thus lend themselves to sequels).²²

At this point, a single successful licensing franchise can secure the profitability of a studio for a year's worth of films. *Harry Potter* sustained Warner Bros.; *The Hunger Games* put Lionsgate on the map; and Paramount profited from distributing many of the *Indiana Jones* films. "While only a small portion of studio films contain licensable characters, those few characters exert enormous influence over retail sales. In 2000, movie based characters brought in \$40 billion in worldwide global sales and accounted for over one third of sales for the entire licensing industry."²³ Profits and revenue streams of this level ensure the happiness of the studio's larger parent company and the conglomerate's Wall Street owners.

Although Wall Street control, prevalence of male executives, and the reliance on male driven blockbusters and international markets account for the lack of females in power in the industry, women's fight for independence and equality along with their small but marginal growth in industry positions call into question whether factors other than economics contribute to the systemic disparities in the film industry. Looking at the problems women have securing film funding brings to light many other inherently sexist and stereotypical issues. Part of the problem may stem from the importance of the international box office. While women in America have made significant strides in equality, some outright misogyny still functions, and many other

²² Edward Jay Epstein, "The Midas Formula," *Slate* (2005), Accessed on 14 November 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/the_hollywood_economist/2005/05/the_midas_formula.html.

²³ Epstein, *The Big Picture*, 227.

nations around the world the world outside of Europe remain strictly patriarchal societies in which women are subservient to men. Given the aforementioned significance of the international movie audience, a feminist, “female-equality-based” film (or really just a film made by or starring women) may falter at the international box office.

Can this inherent inequality change? With men in power in the film industry, and society at large, they choose what films get made and who makes them. Men choose other men more often than they choose women, simply because they relate easier to men and trust them. Also, hiring another man or having a man as a boss does not threaten another man’s masculinity. Whereas, having women as bosses often present problems that stem back to traditional patriarchal views of the roles of men versus women. “Management research has shown that employees are often reluctant to have a woman supervisor... Earlier studies have shown that people in North America, Europe and Asia agree that men are perceived to be more qualified as managers than women are, although men report this perception more strongly than women do,” Michele A. Paludi explains. “Male subordinates have been found to react more negatively than women subordinates to women leaders, and men tend to favor competent men over equally competent women, whereas women respond similarly to equally competent candidates.”²⁴ The results of the “equally competent” study suggest because of the inherent inequalities for women in the workplace, men maintain dominance and do not want to give up their majority positions, for fear of permanently losing control.

While strides have been made toward equality, women still have a long way to go. In the 87 years of the Academy Awards, only one woman has won best director—Kathryn Bigelow in 2008 for *The Hurt Locker*. Bigelow’s win also marked a triumph for women filmmakers in

²⁴ Michele A. Paludi, ed., *The Psychology of Women at Work: Challenges and Solutions for Our Female Workforce. Volume 1: Career Liberation, History, and the New Millennium* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 43.

deconstructing the problematic assumptions of what types of films women should make. While many thought that the awarding of this prestigious honor to Bigelow emphasized a change in the Academy's thinking—and by extension, that of the entire film industry—it may just have been a “statistical outlier.” Commentary erupted over the lack of diversity in the 2015 Academy Award nominations. Besides the apparent scarcity of racial diversity of the nominees, no female cinematographers, editors, or directors received nominations. The absence of female directors was especially disheartening given the attention that both Angelina Jolie's *Unbroken* (2014) and Ava DuVernay's *Selma* (2014) received before and after their releases. Although Jolie's lack of a nomination may have resulted from the lackluster critical reception the film faced, DuVernay's Oscar snub indicates problems stemming from the nomination process itself. Given that the voting Academy is 94 percent Caucasian and 77 percent male—and 86 percent of the Academy is over the age of 50—prejudices and stereotypes inherent in the white, patriarchal, tradition-based Academy still endure and show themselves in who the members choose to nominate for their work.²⁵ The Academy Awards and the surrounding outrage over the nominations serve as a symbol of the “blinkered, fossilized industry that offers so few opportunities to women and minorities.”²⁶ These inequalities and snubs will continue until structural reconfigurations within the industry occur.

Women have tried to gain positions of power by working within the system, but maybe they must overthrow the system in order to gain true equality. Nonetheless, easy answers for achieving their goals do not exist, but the support and mentorship of women who have already broken through the glass ceiling continues to grow in the film industry, ensuring that someday women may secure true equality. The questions remain “when and how?”

²⁵ John Horn, Nicole Sperling, and Doug Smith, “Movie Academy: Oscar Voters Overwhelmingly White, Male,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 February 2012.

²⁶ Manohla Dargis, “Lights, Camera, Taking Action,” *New York Times*, 21 January 2015.

Given the higher levels of risk studios now take in making such big-budget films, Hollywood films no longer seek to challenge traditional ideologies or create new aesthetic innovations. Instead, studio films adhere to formulas and genres proven successful in the past. Often the films produced “uphold the centrality of white patriarchal capitalism.”²⁷ Through these productions, Hollywood narratives and stylistic tendencies have remained similar to those released during the classical years. Also, Hollywood’s economic goals—even with changing distribution and exhibition practices—remain the same: maintain control of the market through market concentration in order to secure risk minimization and profit maximization. As conglomerates grow in power and studios churn out blockbuster after blockbuster, the companies ensure the marginalization of certain sectors of film audiences, women, other minority filmmakers, and small independent film production. The blockbuster strategy’s inherent cycle of minimizing risk through “tried and true methods” intrinsically creates a system of traditional, patriarchal male domination. Until the system’s structure changes or economic factors shift and force the creation of a new arrangement, women remain unable to obtain true equality in the film industry and successful women/women’s films continue to be viewed as “exceptions to the rule.”

²⁷ Benshoff, 45.

Case Study One:
Kathryn Bigelow, Director



Figure 23. Kathryn Bigelow.

Among female film directors of the blockbuster era, Kathryn Bigelow stands out. Although some women directors found work and success directing romantic comedies and other “chick flicks,” Bigelow broke drastically from those conventions. She gained fame as an auteur for directing films that dealt with violence and codes of masculinity, themes traditionally emphasized as “masculine.” In 2008, Bigelow won two back-to-back Academy Awards, both for Best Director and Best Picture, for her film, *The Hurt Locker*. Bigelow’s Best Director Oscar win made her the first woman in history to win an Oscar for best directing.

Born in San Carlos, California in 1951, Bigelow grew up an only child with a fairly normal childhood. Her earliest creative endeavors centered on painting and led her to enroll at San Francisco Art Institute in 1970, becoming one of the “Art Girls” of the New Hollywood. Gaining acceptance into the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Independent Study Program in New York City, she relocated and began apprenticeships under some well-known artists including Vito Acconci and Lawrence Weiner. In a *TIME* Magazine interview, Jessica Winter wrote, “As a young artist, Bigelow had a thought-provoking conversation with a friend of a friend by the name of Andy Warhol. ‘Andy was saying that film is way more populist than art—

that art's very elitist, so you exclude a large audience,' she [Bigelow] recalls... 'Art requires that you come to it with a certain amount of information, a context. And you don't necessarily need that with film. A movie is accessible, available. That was exciting to me from a political standpoint.'"²⁸ Shortly thereafter, she worked with the Art & Language collective and during that time began a short film, *The Set-Up* (1978) that served as a 20-minute deconstruction of violence in film. Filmmaker Milos Forman saw an early version of *The Set-Up* and offered her a scholarship to a Columbia University graduate program²⁹ where she earned her master's degree studying theory and criticism.

In 1982, Bigelow co-directed her first full-length feature film, *The Loveless*. She went on to direct *Near Dark* in 1987 before making a trilogy of action films in the 1990s—*Blue Steel*, *Point Break*, and *Strange Days*—that merged her filmmaking style with the market demands of mainstream filmmaking. Her 1995 film, *Strange Days*, failed commercially, but gained some positive reviews. Bigelow worked on *Strange Days* with her ex-husband, James Cameron, who wrote and produced the film. Bigelow had married Cameron in 1989, and her marriage to him provided her with opportunities for directing and making industry connections. Although they divorced in 1991, her marriage to a strong, respected industry insider helped her break in and establish herself in Hollywood.

Bigelow continued directing in the 2000s, although with a slow start at the beginning of the millennium after the disappointment of *K-11: The Widowmaker* (2002), a summer blockbuster flop. She went on to meet Mark Boal, writer, and eventual producer, of *The Hurt Locker*. Bigelow has said, "Mark opened up a window for me onto how you can make a film that's part of the current conversation...*The Hurt Locker* was an opportunity to make a deep dive into content that was contemporaneous, an opportunity to reflect in a way that might make you

²⁸ Jessica Winter, "Kathryn Bigelow: The Art of Darkness," *TIME Magazine*, 4 February 2013, 1.

²⁹ Winter, 2.

uncomfortable, which was something we continued with *Zero Dark Thirty*.³⁰ *The Hurt Locker* (2008), and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) earned Bigelow, respectively, the biggest critical praise and commercial successes of her career thus far. In a *New York Times* article, Manohla Dargis stated:

Kathryn Bigelow's two-fisted win at the 2010 Academy Awards for best director³¹ and best film for *The Hurt Locker* didn't just punch through the American movie industry's seemingly shatterproof glass ceiling; it has also helped dismantle stereotypes about what types of films women can and should direct. It was historic, exhilarating, especially for women who make movies and women who watch movies, two groups that have been routinely ignored and underserved by an industry in which most films star men and are made for and by men.³²

Kathryn Bigelow's Well-Known Films

1981	The Loveless
1987	Near Dark
1989	Blue Steel
1991	Point Break
1995	Strange Days
2000	The Weight of Water
2008	The Hurt Locker
2012	Zero Dark Thirty

³⁰ Winter, 3.

³¹ Coming full-circle, Bigelow beat ex-husband, James Cameron, for best director and effectively triumphed over Cameron's *Avatar*, (at that point) the highest grossing movie of all time.

³² Manohla Dargis, "How Oscar Found Ms. Right," *The New York Times*, 10 March 2010, AR1.

Case Study Two:
Nora Ephron, Screenwriter

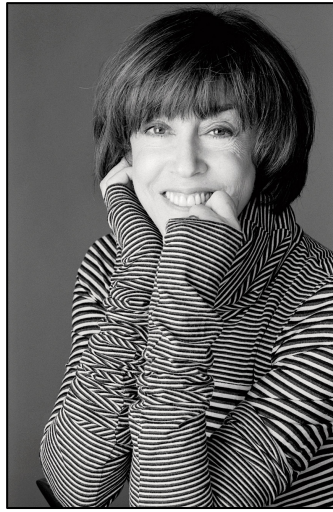


Figure 24. Nora Ephron.

Nora Ephron's career spanned many decades, mediums, and genres, encompassing her love and fascination with the world around her. However, Ephron was, first and foremost, a writer. Through her screenwriting, Nora Ephron revitalized the modern romantic comedy and proved that the romantic comedy genre could offer blockbuster success by attracting both male and female audiences.

Ephron grew up as a Hollywood child; her parents were the prolific playwriting and screenwriting duo, Phoebe and Henry Ephron, and together they wrote some of the most quintessential 20th Century Fox screenplays of the 1950s, including *There's No Business Like Show Business* and *Carousel*. Being surrounded by professional writers showed Ephron what to do to survive in the industry. Her parents encouraged creativity and modeled first hand the value of writing. After graduating high school in Beverly Hills, Ephron enrolled in Wellesley College where she spent her time writing for the college newspaper. After graduating, she worked briefly as an intern in the White House of President John F. Kennedy before obtaining a job at the *New York Post*. Ephron's career grew as she wrote columns for *Esquire*, *Good Housekeeping*, and

other magazines. She helped her then husband Carl Bernstein rewrite the screenplay for *All the President's Men*. Although their version of the screenplay did not make the final cut, it did open up other screenwriting opportunities for her, as did the opportunities presented from her marriage to Bernstein, a powerful man in both Hollywood and Washington. After her marriage ended, she started her book-writing career with the 1983 novel—*Heartburn*—modeled on her marriage to a philandering husband.

Ephron's screen career was recognized for her emphasis on female characters and their struggles. In 1983, Ephron officially began her screenwriting career with the script *Silkwood* directed by Mike Nichols and starring Meryl Streep as Karen Silkwood, a union activist at a plutonium plant. *Silkwood* earned Ephron an Academy Award nomination for best original screenplay. In 1986, she teamed up with Nichols and Streep again, writing the screenplay for the film adaptation of her novel, *Heartburn*, which earned praise for showing a woman struggling to balance a family and a disappointing marriage with her career ambitions. The film *When Harry Met Sally...* earned Ephron her second Academy Award nomination for best original screenplay and went on to revitalize the traditional romantic comedy. Transitioning into directing, Ephron became “a rare ‘triple-hyphenate’ as writer, director and producer. But making movies for and about women was a battle, at times. She observed how, to male studio moguls, ‘a movie about a woman’s cure for cancer is less interesting than a movie about a man with a hangnail.’”³³ She continued writing, earning a third and final Academy Award nomination for best original screenplay for *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), which also served as one of the highest grossing films of 1993. Ephron went on to write and direct *You’ve Got Mail* (1998), *Hanging Up* (2000), and *Bewitched* (2005) before writing and directing her last film, *Julie & Julia* (2009), that earned Meryl Streep an Oscar nomination for Best Actress. Nadia Sandhu perceived, “The secret to her

³³ Adam Bernstein, “Nora Ephron, Prolific Author and Screenwriter, Dies at 71,” *Washington Post*, Obituaries, 26 June 2012.

success was crafting smart, funny, and morally confused heroines who dealt with real life issues in idealized rom com settings. Everyone knew when they were watching a Nora Ephron film, and her work has become the gold standard against which other rom coms are compared.”³⁴

Ephron died in June 2012 from complications with leukemia. However, her writing and filmmaking influence lives on. Over the years she advocated greatly for women’s equality, proving through her own hard work and determination that women could succeed in male dominated fields. In addition, “She brought a strikingly light-hearted touch to her deeply felt belief in women’s rights,”³⁵ stating to Newsday in 1976, “I [Ephron] have always thought it was a terrible shame that the women’s movement didn’t realize how much easier it was to reach people by making them laugh than by shaking a fist and saying don’t you see how oppressed you are.”³⁶ In her 1996 Wellesley Commencement speech, she urged the graduates to “be the heroines of their own lives, not the victims.” Although Ephron was a strong, independent woman who advocated for other likeminded women, “she hated being called a successful ‘woman director.’ In her eyes that was marginalizing things. She was a *director*, and a good one. She also hated the term ‘chick flick’ saying, and rightly so, that men liked coming to her movies too.”³⁷

Nora Ephron’s Well-Known Films

1983	Silkwood
1986	Heartburn
1989	When Harry Met Sally...
1992	This Is My Life
1993	Sleepless in Seattle
1994	Mixed Nuts
1998	You’ve Got Mail
2009	Julie & Julia

³⁴ Nadia Sandhu, “The Passing of a Chick Flick Auteur- Nora Ephron,” *Entertainmentmaven.com*, 27 June 2012, Accessed on 21 October 2014. <http://entertainmentmaven.com/2012/06/27/the-passing-of-a-chick-flick-auteur-nora-ephron-nadia-sandhu/>.

³⁵ Bernstein, “Nora Ephron, Prolific Author and Screenwriter, Dies at 71.”

³⁶ Bernstein, “Nora Ephron, Prolific Author and Screenwriter, Dies at 71.”

³⁷ Pete Hammond, “Nora Ephron: She Did It All With Style,” *Deadline*, 26 June 2012.

Case Study Three:
Kathleen Kennedy, Producer



Figure 25. Kathleen Kennedy.

Nominated for over 120 Academy Awards throughout her producing career, Kathleen Kennedy has become a Hollywood legend. In 2012, her career expanded further when George Lucas personally selected her as the new Co-Chair of Lucasfilm after its acquisition by Disney.

Kennedy was born and raised in Berkeley, California by an attorney father and a mother who was a former theater actress. After graduating high school, Kennedy went to San Diego State University and majored in telecommunications and film. In her last year of college, Kennedy got a job at KCST, a local San Diego television station, working in various positions as a camera operator, video editor, floor director and production manager. While Kennedy thought she was hired for her passion and commitment to film, she found out much later that her hiring at the news station actually resulted from the lack of women in technical positions. According to Kennedy, “I was part of a quota system there, which I didn't even know existed...And these lawyers watched me, to see what the impact (of her hiring) had been. It was an amazing thing. There's no question I'm indebted to people who were looking out for women.”³⁸

³⁸ Marco R. Della Cava, “Innovators and Icons: Lucasfilm’s Kathleen Kennedy Has Produced Quite a Career,” *USA Today*, 6 June 2013.

Kennedy went on to produce a local talk show before moving to Los Angeles and securing her first film production job as a production assistant working for screenwriter John Millus on Steven Spielberg's film, *1941*. After the filming, Spielberg hired Kennedy as his secretary. Kennedy's production knowledge and ideas proved valuable to Spielberg, and soon after starting, she became a full-fledged producer on *E.T.: Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). While continuing producing and executive producing alongside Spielberg, Kennedy also collaborated with many other important filmmakers, including Martin Scorsese, Clint Eastwood, and Barry Levinson. In 1981, Kennedy and Spielberg co-founded and ran the successful production company Amblin Entertainment along with Kennedy's future husband, Frank Marshall. Kennedy served as president of Amblin Entertainment until 1992 when she and Marshall formed their own production company, The Kennedy/Marshall Company.³⁹ She stepped down from this company in May 2012, leaving Marshall solely in charge, in order to become co-Chair of Lucasfilm alongside George Lucas.⁴⁰ When The Walt Disney Company purchased Lucasfilm, they promoted Kennedy to president. In a 2013 *Hollywood Reporter* article, Kim Masters wrote, "Disney has said Lucasfilm generated about \$215 million in licensing revenue in 2012 without having released a *Star Wars*-related movie in five years. Managed correctly, *Star Wars* by far is the most valuable franchise in Hollywood, making Kennedy—its new steward—one of the most powerful figures in entertainment."⁴¹

Although impressive in its own right, Kennedy's producing work cannot be viewed without also acknowledging her help and influence in expanding the role of women in the entertainment industry. Throughout her career, Kennedy has received awards for using her own

³⁹ A Santa Monica based company with a deal at Dreamworks.

⁴⁰ The deal was made with the stipulation that Lucas would eventually retire, leaving Kennedy as the Chair.

⁴¹ Kim Masters, "Lucasfilm's Kathleen Kennedy on 'Star Wars,' 'Lincoln,' and Secret J.J. Abrams Meetings," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 30 January 2013.

film work and career to increase women's influence in film, as well as for supporting and mentoring the next generation of filmmakers and executives. Speaking about her experiences working with Kennedy on *Lincoln*, Sally Field said, "In an industry that is not and has not been female friendly ... Kathy has beaten those odds the only way a woman can—by being so much better than most everyone else."⁴²

Ironically, Kennedy's success in the industry started from being hired as part of a mandate for affirmative action via government intervention. She broke into the industry at a time when the lack of equality started to garner attention. Furthermore, her career prospered through her connections with powerful Hollywood men: Steven Spielberg and her husband, Frank Marshall.

Kathleen Kennedy's Well-Known Films

1982	E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial
1985	The Color Purple
1993	Schindler's List
1995	The Bridges of Madison County
1999	The Sixth Sense
2005	Seabiscuit
2008	The Curious Case of Benjamin Button
2011	War Horse
2012	Lincoln

⁴² Rebecca Ford, "CiemaCon: Kathleen Kennedy Honored with Pioneer of the Year Award," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 17 April 2013.

CONCLUSION

Economic theory describes the allocation of scarce resources—land, labor, and capital—subject to cost constraints, the idea of economic efficiency, and producers’ and consumers’ desires to maximize their own utility. However, the decision-making that serves as the foundation of economics also relies on the idea of opportunity costs, the value of the best forgone option, in a situation where, given limited resources, a choice needs to be made between several mutually exclusive alternatives. Ultimately, the resulting economic decision depends on how the chooser defines the idea of “value.”

In tracing the historical, cultural, and economic development of the film industry throughout this thesis, I have found that film industry executives and other filmmaking males in power made choices that defined value as the maximization of their profits. Meanwhile, the resulting opportunity costs of these choices proved to be the unequal representation of women and other minority groups within the Hollywood industry. The male decision-makers believed that the value of collective wellbeing and equality measured differently—and ultimately, less importantly—than the value of money.

As the film industry established itself and proved its capabilities in money-making and risk-taking business ventures, it began to attract the interest of investors and other wealthy businessmen who built movie-making into the big business it has become. However in doing so, the early film pioneers gave up their own autonomy and sacrificed their creative freedom for money and prestige. When film began as a technological art form that other solidified industries rejected as unstable, women discovered many opportunities for employment. While many men refused to leave their other steady jobs, which provided income to support their families, women with fewer employment opportunities or who worked lower paying, lower quality jobs could afford to take those risks. Their creativity, insightfulness, and willingness to work bolstered the

film industry and furthered its brand beyond “moving images” to movies with more complex visual and narrative elements. With the invention of sound films, Wall Street investors changed their opinions of the film industry, and suddenly silent era female filmmakers found themselves pushed out of the industry that they had helped create through their labor and creative visions. The following periods of first, the rise of the studio system and then, the subsequent decline of the studio system encouraged a male-dominated business that modeled other American industries in its factory-like precision and hierarchy of male executives. Although independent cinema rose again in the 1950s and 1960s, women remained structurally absent as they did not have past career successes or the necessary respect and trust from male executives to prove themselves worthy of a “risky” investment. By the 1970s, Second Wave Feminism advocated for gender equality in the home and the labor force. While women did make strides in the film industry, with the number of female directors, producers, screenwriters, and studio executives increasing, their participation rates still paled in comparison to men. These disparities continue in the present day, and must be acknowledged.

In analyzing the personal lives of the twelve female producers, directors, and screenwriters, as examined in this thesis’ case studies (women who forged careers and found success in Hollywood), I have discovered that 11 of the 12 women were married, at least once. The one unmarried woman, Dorothy Arzner, remained unmarried because she was a lesbian in the 1940s. Meanwhile, of the 11 married women filmmakers, 8 were divorced (some married and divorced up to 4 times), and 7 had children. Of the 7 with children, 6 of those women worked in the post-studio system eras; this suggests that since fewer married American women generally worked during the silent era, by choosing to remain in the labor force, they often gave up the idea of having children. Therefore as women in the workforce grew, more women managed to have both careers and families.

BREAKDOWN OF CASE STUDIES: ANALYZING FEMALE FILMMAKERS' LIVES

Name	Married	Divorced	Children
Alice Guy Blaché	X	X (Separated)	X
Lois Weber	X	X	
Frances Marion	X	X	
Lillian Hellman	X	X	
Dorothy Arzner			
Betty Comden	X		X
Elaine May	X	X	X
Penny Marshall	X	X	X
Dawn Steel	X		X
Kathryn Bigelow	X	X	
Nora Ephron	X	X	X
Kathleen Kennedy	X		X

Figure 26. This chart outlines the statuses of the women filmmaker case studies examined in this thesis in terms of rates of marriage, divorce, and motherhood.

However, women still struggled to balance home lives with the pressures of successful careers, as depicted in these 12 female filmmakers' high divorce rates (75 percent). The stresses from taking care of children, maintaining a happy marriage, and fostering a successful career in a male dominated field place more of a burden on women than their male counterparts (especially for these specific women who often married men also working in the film industry in positions of just as much, if not more, power).

Although I do not want to negate the progress that women have made across the labor force, and especially in the film industry, the discrepancies between women and their male counterparts are appalling. All of these women's career successes situate them first as "women"

instead of as “filmmakers,” proving that they still operate within a misogynistic, unequal system created and controlled by men in ways that maintain the gendered status quo and preserves the male hierarchies. I think that oftentimes the argument of “female progress” actually becomes a tool of complacency in which women and men write off the need for equality and drastic changes to the system of oppressions and injustices that exist in our world, instead allowing them to feel that progress is happening slowly and naturally within the prevailing systems, and thus those systems do not need to change. However, the systems do need to change as they promote a gendered social hierarchy that works to inhibit true equality in order to keep power in the hands of the men. Yet, because people believe that equality is coming, they can often forget in their daily lives that the discrepancies between men and women exist. Furthermore, the men in power encourage complacency and want people to keep quiet in regards to the inequalities still present in the labor force.

Regardless, the discriminations persist, as we are reminded by the latest film industry dilemma—the Sony Hack. On Monday, November 24, 2014, Sony Entertainment employees arrived at work to find out that their corporate network had been hacked. The hackers stole many confidential documents and made them available for download on file-sharing networks, allowing (primarily) journalists to access them and write stories about Sony’s private information. The latest round of leaked Sony documents revealed a drastic pay gap between male and female Sony staffers in which:

According to a spreadsheet listing top exec salaries, Hannah Minghella, who serves as co-president of production at Columbia Pictures, makes about \$1 million less per year (\$1.5 million) than her male counterpart with the same job, Columbia Pictures co-president of production Michael De Luca (\$2.4 million). According to the spreadsheet, which lists the salaries of 6,000 employees, 17 of the employees were making \$1 million or more, but only one of those was a woman. The spreadsheet also showed that the top salaried Sony executives were 88%

white and 94% male.¹

This hack shows both the remaining gender inequalities in the film industry as well as the problematic way in which the system tries to bury the information on its unfair dealings. The studios ultimately use economics to undermine women's authority and agency in the film industry.

In addition, studios have consistently undervalued female consumers, especially since the rise of the blockbuster and the conglomerates' financial dependencies on franchises. By shutting out half of the country, as both consumers and producers, studios have put themselves in a worse position. Yet, they refuse to acknowledge these problems and have lost sight of the fact that not everything is about making money. Instead the studios and industry executives focus their efforts on profit maximization and increasing their own levels of market concentration. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, the history of the film industry's systemic transformations stem from changes in the economic structures of industry, consumers, and general American society. While the economic reasons cannot fully be separated from the social, cultural, and historical influences in American society, the film industry's economic modifications over the course of film history demonstrate their correlation with changes in film output, target audience demographics, and chosen genres and filmmakers. Thus, until the economics shift in a way that proves advantageous and profitable for women, I believe that disparities for women filmmakers will continue to exist.

However, the prevailing economic structures and work-life balance obstacles that women face are not the only issues that female filmmakers must overcome to establish equal representation and fairer employment opportunities. The other major factor involves the cultural

¹ Aly Weisman, "Leaked: Jennifer Lawrence Got American Hustled in Sony Deal," *Business Insider*, 14 December 2014, Accessed on 15 December 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/jennifer-lawrence-paid-less-than-male-co-stars-2014-12>.

and social working environment that women filmmakers must navigate. While prevalent in many fields throughout American history, Hollywood remains one of the strongest examples of an industry in which men continue to hold authority, prestige, and power. In addition, they often manipulate the industry to their advantage in order to ensure that the status quo and patriarchal domination do not change. Thus, they view women with power and in positions of authority as threatening to men, and moreover as threatening to the control men have over the industry.

Modeling the rest of American society, film industry jobs remain largely segregated by gender. Female actresses abound, and women hold most of the jobs as hair and makeup stylists, costume designers, and those dealing with script continuity; meanwhile, union crew members, as well as cinematographers, musicians, editors, and directors comprise mainly men. These different positions show that work, through cultural and historical constructs, has gained gendered connotations in which men hold jobs that require physically intensive labor or decision-making and authoritative positions while women find employment working with fashion, style, and other creative “feminine” industry fields. To reach equal representations of women and men that actually “maximize efficiency” as well as the collective wellbeing, people must deconstruct the gendered connotations of labor, and more evenly distribute power. However, this cooperative dismantling of prevailing power structures and resulting redistribution of authority appears highly unlikely. Harriet Bradley asserts:

What none of the post-industrial forecasters are able to do is to explain how we get from the here of sex-typing and segregation to the there of sex parity and co-operation. This is because all share a deterministic view of change as following automatically from only technological and economic requirements, ignoring the realities of power. Dominant social groups of whatever kind do not yield their privilege, prestige, and power voluntarily. They will manipulate their advantage to ensure that whatever changes occur remain compatible with their own continued supremacy.²

² Harriet Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work: A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 233.

Thus, change will not be automatic. Instead, it will result from political and economic actions of the groups involved including the government, feminists, women, and men. Women must advocate for their own changes but they need support from men in authority as well as the government in order to successfully subvert the dominant systems and create lasting structural and cultural changes in society.

Although female labor has been increasing, no systemic or political changes occurred to increase influences of affirmative action and encourage redistributions of power and truly equal opportunities for women. While overall employment of women in the workforce has increased since the world wars, “the process of female substitution or ‘dilution’ was overseen by male trade unionists in such a way that the authority of men within the workplace was not challenged... Wartime experience is significant because it reveals to us the extent to which the sexual division of labor is an artificial construct and not a ‘natural’ effect of sex differences in physique and personality. It also provides a salutary example of how rapidly change can occur if the ‘national will’ and governmental power is behind it.”³ Thus, gender as an artificial construct in relation to society and labor shows that “gender means something quite different from biological sex. Gender is the *social meaning* given to biological differences between the sexes; it refers to cultural constructs rather than to biological givens.”⁴

Therefore, society creates and perpetuates the prevailing ideas of gender and “gender norms.” As such, those understandings must be deconstructed by society in order for equality to begin. However, the corruptive and alluring nature of power coerces those in authority—the men—to fear any changes to prevailing power structures and to fight against any competition for power by displaying their own hierarchical powers. Men display their control by reinforcing

³ Bradley, 48.

⁴ Edith Kuiper and Jolande Sap, eds., *Out of the Margin: Feminist Perspectives on Economics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 2-3.

socially constructed gender norms historically in the home and the workforce. In addition, “feminist economics argues that gender inequality stems from a system of gendered power relations that permeate the whole economy and underpin norms for male and female roles and responsibilities. Individuals themselves absorb these norms, which constrain their choices and structure the ways in which they define themselves. Not only are preferences endogenous, but also the sense of self.”⁵

Using male-dominated power structures, women throughout history have been socialized not to assert themselves. Male authority resulted in sexism and outright misogyny. However, awareness over time led to criticisms of institutionalized oppressions and inequalities. Feminists specifically have advocated for changes within society. The film industry represents one facet of a larger institution. Hollywood functions as a subsection of both American society and the world as a whole. As such, it models issues and problems of the larger world while also having problems and injustices unique solely to the film industry. While the inequalities faced by women are not exclusive to the film industry, the ways in which female disparities have emerged and continued over time prove distinctive to this field. The fact that film, in its beginnings, was open to female filmmakers, but shut them out with the establishment of filmmaking as a viable business enterprise that was accepted and influenced by Wall Street shows how gender norms are constructed.

As such, the changing economics of the Hollywood film industry have resulted in disparities for women filmmakers, but these economic influences must also account for the socially constructed views of women versus men as created and maintained by the patriarchy. For lasting changes to occur in women’s representation in filmmaking, they must gain positive influence in society and people’s understandings of women as well as create a system in which

⁵ Irene Van Staveren, Diane Elson, et. al., eds., *The Feminist Economics of Trade* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

the economics profitably supports the idea of women filmmakers and government intervention pressures equality through affirmative action and other policies. While women have made progress in American society and the film industry since the dawn of the studio system days, they still have a long way to go before true equality will be achieved. The disparities facing female filmmakers matter because when their artistic and ideological points of view are missing, “the issues, concerns, and sensibilities of half the world’s population are missing in action and, since most people do not even think about it, they view the situation as simply the way things are.”⁶ Without equal representation of female filmmakers, we are forced to dream and experience the world in male terms.

⁶ Jane Fonda, “Lily and Jane Do Sundance,” *JaneFonda.com*, 2 February 2015, Accessed on 3 February 2015, <http://www.janefonda.com/lily-jane2-do-sundance/>.

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