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‘Priscilla’, The New Sofia Coppola Movie That Sparks Debate About Female Representation in the Film Industry.

The movie adds to the recent rise in female-directed successful movies.

With 2023 nearly coming to an end and 2024 around the corner, expectation for the release in the UK of the new ‘Priscilla’ movie, grows. The movie is the most recent Sofia Coppola’s project, and is a biopic intended to reveal Priscilla Presley’s perspective of her marriage with the rock legend Elvis.

In the recent years, Coppola has gained recognition as a writer and director for movies like ‘The Virgin Suicides’ or ‘Marie Antoinette’, with recurrent themes that revolve around the complexity of human relationships, particularly women.

Alongside other female directors like Greta Gerwig or Chloé Zhao, she managed to find her space in a male-dominated industry.

This year, possibly one of the most awaited movies of the year, Greta Gerwig’s ‘Barbie’, generated over [one billion dollars](#) during the first two weeks after its release. And, with releases like Cocaine Bear, Saltburn or Past Lives, 2023 has been a prolific year for women in the film industry.

However, the gender gap is still existing and notable. Throughout the past 30 years, the presence and image of women in film has improved, but there is still a severe misrepresentation and lack of female roles, both in front of the camera and behind the scenes.

Bechdel tested movies

Percentage of movies that pass the Bechdel test from 1985 to 2013



Chart: Irene Molina • Source: GitHub • Created with Datawrapper

Following a standard as simple as the [Bechdel Test](#), a measure of the representation of women in different kinds of fiction, it is clear that female characters are often superficial and revolve around their male protagonist. A movie will pass the Bechdel test if it has at least two named women, who have a conversation that isn't about a man, and some of the most famous movies in the past few decades, like The Lord of the Rings saga or The Avengers, [fail it miserably](#).

For [Meritxell A. Valls](#), writer and director of movies like 'The Flapping of the Hummingbird' or 'Echo', a lot of work is yet to be done. "There is still a lot of people who resist losing power to a woman, there still are sexist views in the industry, and many voices to be heard before we can reach real equality," she said.

"Sometimes I stop a movie half-way through because I can't stand seeing a woman playing a sexist role, where she is a brainless doll in an unrealistic reality".

One quick look at some of the most prestigious [movie criticism sites](#) will reveal that

Female-directed movies

Percentage of movies directed or co-directed by women in three prestigious top 100 movies of all times lists (A being male-directed movies and B being movies directed/co-directed by women).

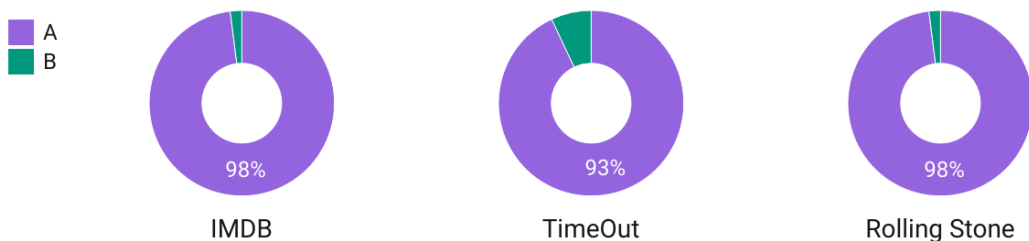


Chart: Irene Molina • Source: IMDB, TimeOut, RollingStone • Created with Datawrapper

women still have a much harder access to positions of power in the industry. According to Valls, "the intrinsic sexism in the industry made it impossible for women to get recognition".

As for the younger generations, they are very aware of the issue, but also hopeful. "With the majority of investors being men, films made by men are favoured, as there are not many women in the field for them to make a change. Women in this industry have to make twice the effort to be taken seriously," said Christos Vakirtzis, film student at UAL. "In recent years I have seen some change in these gender standards with more female creators being seen on the "popular radar", he added.

Looking forward, the success of emerging female directors brings optimism to many, Valls among them. "I can only hope that, in 40 years, those lists will be more diverse. Women have a lot of stories to tell," she added.

Word count: 550 words

Reflection:

When trying to come up with an idea for this project, I explored several of my interests in order to find something that I could link to data and get nice infographics from. As I am a film enthusiast, I was aware of the recent and upcoming releases of films I wanted to see. When thinking about movies like *Past Lives*, *Barbie* or *Saltburn*, I started reflecting on how their portrayal of women and women relationships are very different to the one we see in classic movies. As *Priscilla*, directed by Sofia Coppola, is about to be released in the UK, I thought it was interesting to use this as a news angle. I then decided that I wanted to explore the role of women in the film industry and its evolution.

I started by looking at datasets that I could turn into graphics through DataWrapper and came across a really interesting one about movies who pass (or don't) the Bechdel test (explained in the article) throughout the years. I cleaned the data, deleted whatever wasn't relevant to my article, and created a PivotTable showing the percentages of movies which pass the test.

I turned it into a 'stacked columns' chart, as the way it compares the percentages is very visually clear and easily understandable, as well as impacting.

The second data set was created with data that I collected myself, by analysing different top 100 best movies lists such as IMDB's or The Rolling Stone's. I put the data into a spreadsheet and created a PivotTable that showed how many of those were female-directed. After, I created a donut chart, which makes it very clear how little women there are in directing roles.

I tried to make my graphics suitable for people with visual impairments but, thinking about it now, I should have made one colour significantly darker/lighter than the other.

My main problem when approaching this project were the interviews. I was concerned that I wasn't going to find relevant interviews, and I should have started looking for interviewees earlier. My second interviewee, Christos, didn't reply until two days before the assignment was due, which was very stressful. However, I am very happy with my main interview, Meritxell A. Valls, as she is a very relevant director in Spain at the moment who has been nominated to several prizes for her work and has won some of them.

Overall, I believe I managed to communicate the story mainly through data properly, as I tried to relate the graphics to my interviews in order to maintain the readers' attention. Even though I faced some issues and there are things that I would have liked to do differently, I am satisfied with the result.

Interviewee details:

- Christos Vakirtzis

Date of the interview: 13/12/2023

Film student at UAL
Christosvak2@gmail.com

○ Meritxell A. Valls
Date of the interview: 10/12/2023
Director and writer
meritxellavalls@gmail.com