

Female Filmmakers: The DC Film and Video Industry Landscape



Conducted for Women in Film and Video DC
by American University's Public
Communication Research Class

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Table of Contents

3

Situation Analysis

5

Census Research

6

WIFV Communication Audit

7

Recommendations

8

Materials for Use

- a. Press Release
- b. Persona
- c. Info-graphics

13

Appendix

1. Qualitative Research

- a. Methods
- b. Findings

2. Quantitative Research

- a. Methods
- b. Findings

3. Coded Interview Findings and Take-Away's

Situation Analysis

Women in Film and Video (WIFV) of Washington, D.C. is, “dedicated to advancing the professional development and achievement for women working in all areas of film, television, video, multimedia and related disciplines.” The non-profit is a leader in the industry, providing women in the arts with tools and support that are crucial to their careers.

WIFV of Washington D.C. is a chapter of Women in Film and Television International, which encompasses a global network of 40 chapters of female filmmakers. WIFTI is one of many organizations nationwide that aims to decrease the gender gap in media professions.

Other local organizations that provide support for female filmmakers are the D.C. Filmmakers and WomenArts. These two organizations empower artists by providing them with opportunities for support. The D.C. Filmmakers Organization is a geographic competitor to WIFV that hosts events and meet-ups. They serve as a resource for networking, filmmaking and facilitating industry friendships. The WomenArts Organization is an industry competitor that provides new opportunities for projects and hosts the annual Support Women Artists Now (SWAN) celebrations and fundraisers.

In addition to local competitors, the Sundance Institution's Women's Initiative is an aspirational competitor that, “fosters gender equality in American independent cinema by supporting women filmmakers to develop their stories and find audiences for their work, and to grow and sustain their careers.”

Similarly, the Geena Davis Institute on

Gender Media is a research-based organization working within the media and entertainment industry to, “engage, educate, and influence the need to dramatically improve, gender balance, reduce stereotyping and create diverse female characters in entertainment targeting children 11 and under.” With their international name recognition, these organizations provide a large network for women in film both emotionally and financially.

Media Professionals - The Gender Gap

According to the Women's Media Center, men are overrepresented in the media, as 64 percent of U.S. media professionals are men. The report unfortunately did not account for trans or non-binary individuals.

More men than women in 2012 worked as film writers, directors and producers for the top-grossing films of the year. Only 4 percent of the directors, 12 percent of writers and 20 percent of producers were women. The gender gap persists in the television industry as well. In 2012, men created 79 percent of cable programs and 75 percent of broadcast programs.

This gap may extend to younger generations of filmmakers as well. Though more women are enrolling in the New York Film Academy, male filmmaking majors outnumber females in this major by 20 percent.

Media Professionals - Across the Nation

Although Los Angeles and New York are traditional entertainment hubs, the landscape for media professionals in America is changing. Los Angeles dominates broadcast television, but its share of the film industry has dropped significantly in recent decades.

Situation Analysis

According to a UCLA report, the number of films made in LA has dropped 60 percent in the last 15 years. Cable television professionals have also spread out of California. No one region had the majority of cable television production in 2012; though LA had a significant chunk with 40 percent of cable dramas and comedies produced there.

Media Professionals - D.C.'s Creative Economy

Creative professionals play an essential role in D.C.'s economy. In 2013, the Office of the Deputy Mayor conducted an analysis and strategic plan for the District's "creative economy", with the overarching goal to increase tax revenues for the city.

The study defined the District's creative economy as industries that produce innovation and defined four sectors — arts and heritage, information and technology, professional services and culinary arts. Film and video fell into the information and technology section of the report, along with related positions like photographers and website producers.

The creative economy makes up 16 percent of all employment in the District, compared to 13 percent of the national employment. Media professionals in the region have reason to be optimistic, as wages have increased 37 percent for these fields, and the city continues to attract 1,000 residents and 1,000 jobs each month.

Still, most media companies in the region are small, creating few full-time positions. Two-thirds of these businesses have less than 10 employees, and only 3 percent of these companies have 100 or more employees.

Of the four creative sectors, information and technology is the second smallest. These 16,709 professionals account for 2 percent of employment in the District, on-par with the national average. From 2001 to 2012, wages increased 48 percent for these District professionals, though employment fell 67 percent, in line with national trends.

Professional services were the largest creative economy sector in the District, which includes computer systems, graphic design and marketing. It composed 7 percent of District employment. The District's culinary sector lagged behind the national average by 2 percent. The smallest sector, arts and heritage, accounts for 0.7 percent of the city's employment, above the national average of 0.4 percent.

One goal of the Creative Economy Report is to change the D.C. film incentive fund. This program supports film professionals from outside the city, to encourage more production in the District. The report recommends that the fund shift its focus to digital technology, rather than traditional film techniques.

In addition to funding, another challenge film professionals face is the District's special constraints. It is difficult to build production facilities in the city, so opportunities with large production companies are sparse. Fortunately, the local government recognizes this concern and has developed tax incentive programs to attract corporations to the area. It is also working on more attractive opportunities such as loans and financing for creative businesses.



Census Research

	National Employment (people)	National Mean Hourly Wage	DMV Employment	DMV Mean Hourly Wage	
Actors	63,230	\$41.49	190	\$28.63	
Producers and Directors	92,510	\$43.38	2,080	\$40.68	
Audio and Video Equipment Technicians	55,440	\$22.03	1,190	\$23.70	
Broadcast Technicians	27,800	\$20.02	620	\$28.68	
Camera Operators, TV, Video, Motion Picture	16,860	\$25.26	340	\$33.67	
Film and Video Editors	21,920	\$33.41	390	\$36.49	
Total/Averages	277,760	\$30.93	4810	\$31.98	
					Above national average
					Below national average
		1.8% of the Film Industry is in the DMV			

WIFV Communication Audit

Women in Film and Video DC provide its members access to different services, resources and support. Their comprehensive website provides information about the organization, its members, its events, its programs and resources available to them. Visitors can also navigate out of the website to WIFV's social media platforms including YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Meetup.

From the website, it appears that WIFV offers its members many benefits including access to events such as workshops, seminars, roundtables, networking events, film screenings and film festivals; all events can be found on their month-by-month calendar of events.

WIFV's website also includes a list of all the programs that the organization runs, including awards events, job fairs, parties and showcases. In addition, the website details various scholarships and funds and includes the respective applications, making the process more convenient. In addition, the website includes information and applications for DC Film permits, as well as legal information and considerations, making the website a one-stop place for important documents needed for this profession.

In addition to the website, WIFV communicates with a newsletter, monthly membership meetings, and a listserv. Ultimately, it appears that WIFV offers many useful and diverse resources for its members that reflect some of the needs of the industry, however, there do not seem to be many resources that are specifically for female filmmakers exclusively.



Communication Strategy and Recommendations

Based on our qualitative findings, we have made the following recommendations on how to best appeal to and communicate with the women in the DC film and video industry. These recommendations are organized from the easiest tasks to implement to the more extensive.

Quick- Fixes

Finding: People look for many different types of grants and monetary assistance.

Our Recommendation: The WIFV website already includes funds and scholarships offered through the organization, but in addition to this, one option is to create a list of all possible grants in DC to help women expand their options.

Finding: The DC film and video industry has a strong community

Our Recommendation: We suggest continuing to promote the listserv, events, and other networking opportunities that the organization has to offer. In addition, it could be helpful to provide a list of WIFV contacts in other cities, as a tool to expand networks.

Intermediate Fixes

Finding: There are many film and video opportunities in other fields.

Our Recommendation: For networking events, panels, and discussions that involve employers and job search, we suggest including representation from or talk about other industries that have a need for film and video production. Marketing firms, communication firms, and other businesses have the need for video production within their larger organizations; we suggest promoting these opportunities and ways to search for jobs within these industries.

Structural Fixes

Finding: Many women in this industry did not initially go to school to study film and video. Rather, they came into this industry from other industries, jobs and fields of study.

Our Recommendation: We suggest trying to appeal to girls at a young age and communicate all the opportunities there are within the film and video industry. This could be executed by offering workshop classes on lighting, sound, camera operation, etc. for students in high school and college, as well as offering informational sessions/panels on the industry and encouraging attendance at film and TV festivals in DC. In addition, a mentorship program that pairs professionals with younger students could be a consideration as well.

Finding: People often work multiple jobs in this industry.

Our Recommendation: Create a resource that provides information on childcare in DC or create a program within the WIFV DC community that provides childcare support for working mothers.

Finding: It is difficult to obtain necessary permits and equipment in DC.

Our Recommendation: Permits are already available on the WIFV website, which is helpful. We also suggest trying to reform the application process to make it more efficient and useful.

Materials for Use

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
22 November 2014

Media Contact:

FEMALE FILMMAKERS SAY D.C. INDUSTRY HAS A LOT TO OFFER

Interview respondents all agreed that the film industry in D.C is full of opportunities, but needs improvements in order grow

WASHINGTON, D.C--The film and video industry in D.C, Maryland and Virginia (DMV) is receiving positive yet constructive feedback from female industry workers. According to a survey distributed by American University communications' students, 53 percent of female respondents said the health of the industry is somewhat strong or strong.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), less than 2 percent of industry employees register in the DMV area. Despite low numbers, there are a lot of opportunities and resources for those in the district. This was reiterated in several one-on-one interviews with female film and video employees. "I wouldn't leave D.C. if you paid me," said Mary Ratliff a filmmaker and writer based in D.C. "There is a sense of camaraderie rather than competition, and it helps breed talent and opportunities." Although many interviewees can agree the industry is growing in size and support, there is still a lot that needs to be done to improve the climate. The survey showed that 38 percent of respondents agree that the film industry does not support them financially. The common trend in 75 percent of interviews was: females filmmakers work more than one job. "I'm underemployed, but that's the nature of the business," Kerri Williams, a film talent in D.C. says, "long days, weekends and side jobs are common." BLS's census data reports the national film salary at \$66K a year on average. Comparatively, 76 percent of survey respondents earn less than this average.

When asked if gender influenced their careers in the film industry, 41 percent of female survey respondents answered said yes, while 0 percent of men agreed.

All eight female interviewees acknowledged experiencing some form of gender inequality in the industry. Autumn Moran a film talent in New York City who started her career in D.C., shared her thoughts on the gap in the industry, "I feel that's where being a woman actually hurts me because people will hire women but they don't trust that you have the experience to actually do something."

In addition to gender stereotypes, there were several other challenges mentioned throughout the interviews. Including the difficulty in acquiring equipment grants and permits in order to film in the DMV.

Methods

The Film and Video in DC survey was conducted by students in the Public Communication Research class at American University between November 14 and November 22, 2014. The survey was comprised of 43 total respondents with 28 fully completed responses and was distributed to the WIFV listserv and AU Film Alums. This survey was conducted using convenience sampling and does not have a traditional margin of error. Due to low number of respondents these are directional findings and are not generalizable.

Eight interviews were conducted between November 13 and November 19, 2014. These interviews were conducted over the phone as well as in person and were with women who have worked in the DC film and video industry, past and present. Below is the guide used for the interviews.

Persona



Creative Commons Photo by Pedro Ribeiro Simões

Career Path

Carrie is your typical D.C. filmmaker. At 26, the millennial director and producer tackles a variety of freelance jobs to make a living. Carrie has always enjoyed movies, but filmmaking was not her original career path. She studied business at George Washington University, but realized filmmaking excited her more as she moved through her education.

After interning with a small production company, Carrie went back to school to earn her master's in film from American University. She appreciates the tight-knit D.C. film community, which is more collaborative and less cutthroat than Los Angeles or New York.

Like many filmmakers, Carrie has to be a "Jack of all trades." Her clients often ask her to perform tasks outside her expertise, so Carrie has learned camera, lighting, sound, sales and social media skills in her still-young career.

For Carrie, the most rewarding projects are social documentaries. She loves educating people about a humanitarian issue through film. Independent films and documentaries are at the core of D.C.'s film industry, and Carrie knows she would have to move to New York or California to work on large, fiction projects.

Finances

Carrie earns \$40,000 each year. She loves working for the company she interned for as a production assistant, but this work alone does not support her financially. She works side jobs on nights and weekends to support herself. Workdays that last 10 to 12 hours are not

uncommon. The uncertainty of freelance work is stressful for Carrie, especially as she struggles to pay student loans.

Carrie dislikes applying to government grants but makes time to do so out of necessity. She prefers private sector work, which pays well and is not linked to grants. Sometimes Carrie wishes a large film studio would relocate to D.C., but she knows the city's high expenses and limited space keeps these businesses away.

Industry Observations

Still, Carrie has faith in strength and future of the District's film industry. She recognizes the exceptional talent and opportunities here. Many organizations, political campaigns and marketing firms rely on freelance filmmakers to produce videos. Carrie wishes these opportunities were better publicized, especially in the winter, a slow season for filmmakers.

Carrie also struggles to find equipment and permits for her own passion-projects. Red tape makes filming in the District challenging, but quirky locations outside of the city have made her work stand out at film festivals.

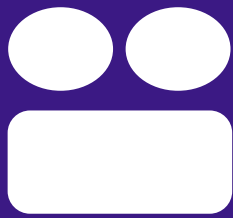
She knows film is a male-dominated industry. She often feels less confident than her male counterparts and less trusted by her clients. She has been told not to pick up heavy equipment and has been turned down for jobs, despite being well-qualified. On a film crew, Carrie is often the only woman, but she likes proving herself by going toe-to-toe with the men. Brutal weather conditions and long hours do not phase her, so Carrie is often called "one of the boys."

Female mentors have supported Carrie with friendly advice throughout her career; although she wishes she had more access to experienced female filmmakers. Career development workshops would also boost her confidence and skills. She likes the WIFV listserv but wishes she had more time to attend formal networking events.

Work-Life Challenges

Work-life balance presents problems for Carrie, and she finds it difficult to schedule time with friends. Despite her long hours, Carrie sets aside an hour each day to unwind. She does not want to burn out at 26 years old. Though she loves critically acclaimed films, Carrie often indulges in guilty pleasure movies like "Sister Act 2" in her downtime.

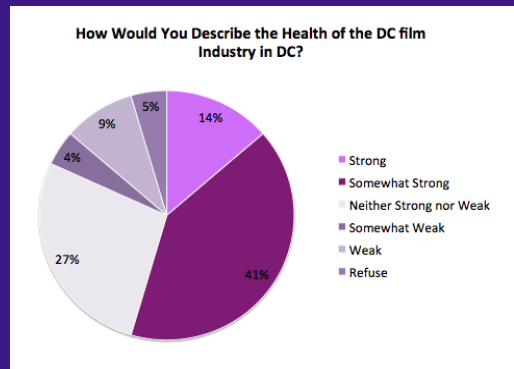
She has thought about starting a family in a few years, but she is not sure how she would do so given the uncertainty and demands of her job. As she advances in her career, Carrie also fears ageism. Filmmaking is a young person's game in many ways, as older women are seen as unable to handle the physical demands of the job.



D.C. on the Rise

The DC film community is on the rise. Women in the industry say that DC is a strong city for film and that will only continue to grow. DC has grown over the last 5 years and will continue to be a great city for film and video.

Women say that the DC film industry feels like a family and has a strong sense of comradery, especially among female filmmakers.



Data taken from WIFV survey question and qualitative interview findings.
*small sample size, results are not generalizable, directional results



What are Women in Film and Video Saying?



Taken from eight interview transcriptions of women in the film and video industry. The names remain anonymous for privacy

Women in the film and video industry expressed frustration with limitations that come with living and working in Washington, D.C. However, women say that the industry is growing and the amount of opportunities for women in film and video is on the rise. Compared to other film towns, D.C. provides a unique sense of camaraderie and allows female filmmakers to be a part of a community, rather than struggle against the competition.

Appendix

Qualitative Research: Research and Methods

- **DC is a difficult place to get permits and equipment**

"Getting federal loans in DC is too difficult, so I don't even bother"

- **The DC film and video industry is growing**

"In DC, I feel like there's opportunities around the corner all the time. Like you miss one and didn't get that job there's another one tomorrow. There is stuff coming up constantly."

"Because DC is not a state it is very hard to put together programs or parts of industry partners, but conversations are starting to open up about how to help the industry."

"If you want to do fiction films you should probably be in LA, but if you want to work in nonfiction I'd say this is the place to be even if you may not be shooting on all the stuff here...this is where you get the job."

- **The DC film and video industry has a strong and supportive community**

"I wouldn't leave D.C. if you paid me," a female filmmaker and writer based in D.C. "There is a sense of camaraderie rather than competition, and it helps breed talent and opportunities."

- **Women in this field have experienced sexism and ageism**

- **Some have lost jobs, some have been looked down upon**

"I feel that's where being a woman actually hurts me because people will hire women but they don't trust that you have the experience to actually do something."

"this is the south, people forget that, being ethnic, short, old, female - this presents so many red flags and become a burden when applying for a job."

- **Women in this field have had positive experiences**

- **While they may surprise people that as women they are capable of doing this work, they have not necessarily lost any jobs because of their gender**

"There's been times when people thought I couldn't do something, because of my age or my gender, but that pushed me to work harder, I had tough skin so I didn't let things bother me."

- **A greater variety of film and video opportunities should be publicized; opportunities to do film and video in other industries such as PR and Marketing**

- **People are looking for as many grants as possible**

- **Women often work multiple jobs in this industry**

"I'm underemployed, but that's the nature of the business," a female film talent in D.C. says, "Long days, weekends and side jobs are common."

- **Many come into the film and video industry from other professions and areas of interest**

Methods

Eight interviews were conducted between November 13 and November 19, 2014. These interviews were conducted over the phone as well as in person and were with women who have worked in the DC film and video industry, past and present. Below is the guide used for the interviews.

Informed Consent

American University students are conducting this interview, the information will be used for research purposes. Participation in this interview is completely voluntary and it is designed to be approximately a half hour in length. Please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer. If you approve, this interview might be recorded as well for purposes of clarity. If you are ok with this, let's continue.

Background

As a filmmaker, I'm sure you have a long list of great films. What are your top 3 favorite movies?
Have you always been an artist? When did you first fall in love with films/filmmaking?
Is there a specific moment or memory you have that led you to chose this career?
What was your education/training?
Who are some of your inspirational mentors in the field?

Career

Briefly describe your career path experience. How did you get to where you are today?
What kind of work do you do?
Do you work part time or full time?
What does a typical workday look like for you?
How did you end up in DC specifically? How did you break into the DC market?
Do you feel there are any benefits to being a filmmaker based in DC?

Are there any resources available to you as a filmmaker in DC? As a woman in this industry?
What do you feel are the greatest opportunities/ accomplishments/ or successes you have had in your career?
Have you faced any challenges in your career?
Do you feel you have faced any challenges in your career because you are a woman? If you are comfortable sharing, can you tell me more about these challenges?
If there was anything you could have in terms of career support, what would it be?
What are your career aspirations later down the road?

Work/ Life Balance

How many hours of downtime do you have in a week? What do you fill this time with?
Do you feel like you have time for other activities outside of work?
Do you think filmmaking supports you financially? If not, what other ways do you support yourself?
Do you keep your career and personal life separate?
Talk a little bit about the importance of networking and connections in your field.

Industry

Have you heard of DC's Film Economic Incentive Fund? Have you benefitted from it?
How would you describe the health of the film industry in DC?
Could filmmakers and corporations in DC benefit from more federal loans?

Quantitative Research: Research Methods

Research

Survey Top Findings

- **How would you describe the health of the DC film industry?** - 54.5% strong or somewhat strong
- **Does this career fully support you financially?** - 52.4% yes, 38.1% no
- **Does gender influence your career?** - 33.3% yes 33.3% no 23.8% unsure
- **What is your annual income?** - 57%: \$20,000-\$50,000 per year, 4.8% \$60,000-\$70,000 per year

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Coded Interview Take-Away's

AU Alum, works primarily with commercial and corporate film

- found film through journalism and other jobs
- works freelance and works multiple jobs at a time
- could not support herself financially relying just on her job (is married)
- the DC community feels more like comradery than competition
 - it is more of a family than a business, not like LA
- sexism very present still in the industry as a whole
- DC is a difficult place to get permits and equipment because of supply and demand

Works in broadcast news and television

- people rely heavily on DC for pre and post production for the news
- has had great experiences as a female
- works freelance
 - has always had multiple jobs, even when she is a producer on a show
- the DC community is booming
 - the industry is community and neighborhood based collaboration which makes it a great city for film

Producer and filmmaker who owns her own company (DUO - Do Unto Others)

- interned for Nickelodeon and has worked in DC, Pennsylvania, LA and Florida
- DC is a political focused town which makes for a diverse business environment
- DC is a great backdrop archaeologically and for connections
 - comradery is huge in the DC industry, not competitive like LA
- DC is becoming a new hub for film and tv especially in the last 5 years
 - scandal, house of cards
- Faces sexism
 - assumed that she cannot do certain jobs because of what she looks like
 - not enough all female directors, crews and film festivals

AU Alum, worked in video production

- A greater variety of opportunities should be publicized; opportunities to do film and video work for PR, marketing, nonprofits and other businesses.
- There are a lot of job opportunities in DC if you actively look for them
- It is very difficult to get the necessary permits to actually shoot in DC
- The WIFV listserv is an invaluable resource

Works as a communication professor and owns her own film company

- used to run a private school, but was not passionate and decided to go to film school
- did not want to start on bottom rung as PA, so started constant movement cinema with her business partner
- works part-time as professor, still in grad school, and picking up freelance film work
- searched for women and minority grants, difficult to support self financially. submitting feature film to sundance to be eligible for more future grants
- filmmaker seen as man's job, "guys club", so got away from that with own, female-centered company
- opportunity from documentary standpoint in dc, but not easy for fiction with permits
- knows about some resources but does not use them.

Works as camera operator in NYC

- did not start career in film. went to film school after laid off from advertising during recession
- worked in dc after school, joined union and moved to nyc. wish she had moved sooner so she'd be further along in her career

- 12-14 hour work days (nyc) works 2 jobs, on crew for two TV shows
- dc - small community, friendly, easier to meet people. easier to stand out from the crowd and move up. corporate, political, commercial work opportunities. but limited union jobs and not good for fiction work
- dc - few women on crews. nyc- more women on crews.
- dc- sometimes opportunities because a rarity as a woman but other times not given a chance because not stereotypical camera person.
- challenges - constantly unemployed and looking for work as freelancer. seasonal work, work hard in dc summer to save enough for winter
- people dont trust that as a woman have enough experience to shoot a union movie
- heavy equipment and over-chatty people : challenges face as woman filmmaker
- wishes the union helped get work for its members
- camera person - not a job for older people. or pregnant women
- work-life balance difficult, hard to keep plans with people

Media Services Account Executive - Productions

- wanted to go into film but thought film school was limiting so went to U of Richmond for business and english, marketing.
- internship with Henniger (in Virginia), worked there as sales assistant then project management, then at discovery communications then henniger
- networking so important, still in touch with woman who first hired her as an intern
- hiring freelancers and figuring out logistics for clients who want videos produced
- her network, friends as here so would not consider moving unless huge opportunity
- opportunities - pbs, smithsonian, discovery, news networks, research tools - national archives.
- in WIFV listserv, useful tool.
- small community, great talent here. work with same people a lot. great quality talent - why networking important
- hidden secret - dc has so much talent
- resources - WIFV events, networking groups for women - PR, tech, telecomm
- crew - usually only woman on a film crew. have to be comfortable in tough conditions, "one of the boys", push back if someone tries to bully you
- wish had a mentor who had more experience than her
- work-life balance super important and possible for her
- opportunity - healthy industry. organizations want higher production quality videos. but sometimes people are asked to do all jobs at once (lighting, script, editing etc.)
- personal network helps get locations to shoot, dont try near landmarks tho
- women's mentality more cautious than mens. dont want to seem like dont know what shes doing

DC camera operator and producer

- underemployed
 - would not be able to sustain herself financially just on this career
 - works multiple jobs both in and outside the industry
- DC is a tv town
 - red tape make it difficult to shoot in the district
 - permits, traffic, and events prohibit you and can shut you down whenever
- faces sexism and ageism
 - has been fired and looked down on for the assumption that she cannot do certain jobs because of what she looks like and how old she is
 - women are the strongest multi taskers in the industry and are integral to its success, but are seen as hindrances