

Women Take on the Summer Box Office

By Juan Llamas Rodriguez

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In July, the Scarlett Johansson vehicle *Lucy* became the [fourth](#) film with a female protagonist to premiere at number one on this summer's domestic box office, following similar achievements from *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Maleficent*, and *The Other Woman*. Significantly, [records](#) showed that women made up [most](#) of these films' audiences. These successes, particularly salient in light of the [overall](#) decline in box office revenues, have [challenged](#) long-standing assumptions about the box office potential of female-centric films and thus have [reignited](#) calls for more leading roles for women.

Hollywood's long-standing credo against female protagonists rests on [three assumptions](#): that men watch more films in theaters; that women watch male-centric films but the opposite is not true; and that female-driven films are unsuccessful in crucial overseas markets. Yet, these assumptions are increasingly [unfounded](#). In the last couple of years, the percentage of female filmgoers in the domestic market has [continually surpassed](#) that of men. The latest surge in interest

for female-centered projects seems to stem not only from the significant [attention](#) garnered by changing audience demographics, but also from the fact that female audiences have taken to genres previously considered male-centric.

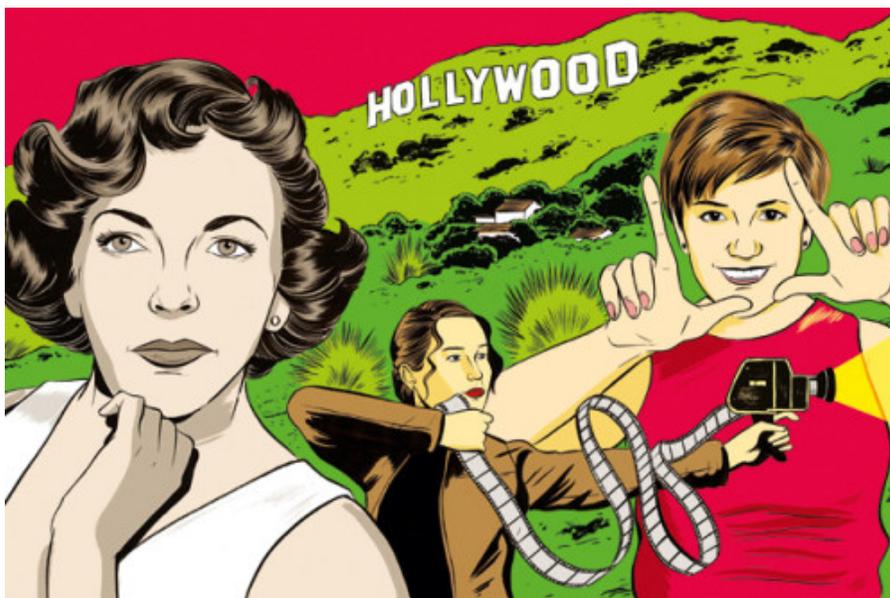


Nowhere is this shift more noticeable than in the case of superhero franchises. Notably, Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* opening weekend audience was 44% women, the [highest](#) percentage of female audience for any release from the studio. As well, the success of *Lucy* is said to have intensified the [call](#) for a stand-alone film featuring the Black Widow, Scarlett Johansson's character from *The Avengers* franchise .

Furthermore, Sony [plans](#) to release a film centered on a female superhero from the Spider-Man universe in 2017; Warner Bros. said it has plans for a Wonder Woman spin-off if its *Batman vs. Superman* and *Justice League* films are successful; CBS [committed](#) to a *Supergirl* television series if they approve of the

pilot; ABC will air *Agent Carter*, based on the Marvel character Peggy Carter, in January; and Marvel Comics is [introducing](#) a new comicbook series with a female character as Thor.

While these recent announcements are encouraging, they are far from an [overhaul](#) of the status quo. Last month, for instance, Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige attributed the lack of female superhero movies to an issue of timing but [sidestepped](#) any explicit commitments. And the potential Wonder Woman spin-off from Warner Bros. remains contingent on the success of their upcoming films. Moreover, demands from critics and audiences for more female-centric films are not entirely new. Similar calls were made after the [success](#) of franchises such as *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*, whose sequels grossed twice as much as their predecessors, and after [standalone hits](#) such as *Sex and the City*, *Bridesmaids* and Disney's *Frozen*. Whereas these cases were once considered [outliers](#), the continued success of female-driven films may be changing the perception of their broader value.



Still,

commentators argue that simply calling for films with female protagonists is only [part](#) of the solution. Less visible but no less important is the fact that women [comprise](#) barely 16% of all behind-the-camera talent. For instance, out of the top 600 grossing films of 2013, [less](#) than eight percent of writers and only two percent of directors were women. The [exclusion](#) of female talent should be an [urgent](#) concern for anyone invested in diverse onscreen representations. The recent superhero project announcements are no exception. *Guardians of the Galaxy* marked the first time a Marvel film had a female screenwriter, and Sony has now [hired](#) a woman to work on the script for its Spider-Man spin-off. Thus, if any new project is to signal substantial change, it will have to contend with diversity on both sides of the camera.