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## ***Boxed In 2016-17: Women On Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television***

**Center for the Study of Women in Television & Film, San Diego State University**

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## ***Key Findings***

**For the last 20 years, *Boxed In* has tracked women's representation in prime-time television. The project provides the most comprehensive historical record of women's on-screen portrayals and behind-the-scenes employment available. The study examines dramas, comedies, and reality programs appearing on the broadcast networks, basic and premium cable channels, and streaming services.**

**•Overall, 68% of the programs considered featured casts with more male than female characters.** 11% had ensembles with equal numbers of female and male characters. 21% of the programs featured casts with more female than male characters.

**•Across platforms, females comprised 42% of all speaking characters.** This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 2015-16 when females accounted for 39% of all speaking characters, and an increase of 2 percentage points from 40% in 2014-15.

**•Females accounted for 42% of major characters on broadcast network, cable and streaming programs.** This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 38% in 2015-16, and an increase of 2 percentage points from 40% in 2014-15.

**•The percentage of female characters featured on broadcast network programs was the same in 2016-17 as it was nearly a decade earlier in 2007-08.** Last year, women comprised 43% of all speaking characters on broadcast network programs. While this figure

represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 41% in 2015-16, it is the same percentage achieved in 2007-08.

**•Across platforms, programs are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse.** Black characters in speaking roles comprised 19% of all females in 2016-17, up from 16% in 2015-16. Asian characters accounted for 6% of all females in 2016-17, up from 4% in 2015-16. The percentage of Latinas increased from 4% in 2015-16 to 5% in 2016-17.

**•Broadcast network programs became more racially and ethnically diverse in 2016-17, with Black and Asian female characters achieving recent historical highs.** The percentage of Black females increased from 17% in 2015-16 to 21% in 2016-17. The percentage of Asian females increased from 5% in 2015-16 to 7% in 2016-17.

**•Latinas continue to be dramatically underrepresented on broadcast network programs.** Latinas accounted for only 5% of all female characters with speaking roles in 2016-17. This figure is even with the number achieved in 2015-16 and 2010-11.

**•Regardless of platform, gender stereotypes on television programs abound.** Female characters were younger than their male counterparts, more likely than men to be identified by their marital status, and less likely than men to be seen at work and actually working.

•***Across platforms, female characters were more likely than males to play personal life-oriented roles, such as wife and mother.*** In contrast, male characters were more likely than females to play work-oriented roles, such as business executive.

•***In 2016-17, women comprised 28% of all creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs.*** This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 26% in 2015-16.

•***The employment of women working in key behind-the-scenes positions on broadcast network programs has stalled, with no meaningful progress over the last decade.*** Women comprised 27% of all creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network programs. This represents no change from 2015-16, and an increase of only 1 percentage point since 2006-07.

•***Overall, programs employed behind-the-scenes women in relatively small numbers.*** 50% of programs employed 4 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, only 6% of programs employed 4 or fewer men. 3% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 47% of programs employed 14 or more men.

•***Across platforms, women fared best as producers (39%), followed by writers (33%), executive producers (28%), creators (23%), editors (22%), directors***

***(17%), and directors of photography (3%).***

•***Across platforms, startlingly high percentages of programs employed no women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered.*** 97% of the programs considered had no women directors of photography, 85% had no women directors, 75% had no women editors, 74% had no women creators, 67% had no women writers, 23% had no women producers, and 20% had no women executive producers.

•***On programs with at least 1 woman creator, females accounted for 51% of major characters, achieving parity with the percentage of girls and women in the U.S. population.*** On programs with exclusively male creators, females accounted for 38% of major characters.

•***Regardless of platform, programs with at least 1 woman creator featured substantially higher percentages women in other key behind-the-scenes roles.*** For example, on programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 57% of writers. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 21% of writers.

•***Across platforms, programs with at least 1 woman executive producer featured more female characters and had higher percentages of women directors and writers than programs with exclusively male executive producers.*** For example, on programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women accounted for 18% of directors. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women comprised 8% of directors.

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## Methods

This study examines the portrayal of female characters and employment of women in key behind-the-scenes roles on drama, comedy, and reality programs appearing on the broadcast networks, basic and premium cable channels, and on streaming services from September 2016 through May 2017. The study considers one randomly selected episode of every series appearing on the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, CW), basic cable channels (A&E, AMC, Animal Planet, BET, Discovery, Disney, Freeform, FX, History, TBS, TNT, USA), premium cable channels (HBO, Showtime), and streaming services (Amazon, Hulu, Netflix). Random selection is a frequently used and widely accepted method of sampling episodes from the population of episodes in a season.

In 2016-17, the study tracked 4,109 characters and 4,310 behind-the-scenes credits. Over 20 years – from 1997-98 to 2016-17 -- *Boxed In* has monitored over 33,900 characters and 45,600 behind-the-scenes credits.

Information on behind-the-scenes credits and on-screen portrayals was collected by viewing every episode in the sample one or more times in its entirety.

The study considers the following behind-the-scenes credits: creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography. Every character who was seen speaking at least one line was included in the study. The attributes of each character that were coded include: sex, race, age, prominence of character (major vs. minor), marital status, and occupational status. For the purposes of

this study, major characters appeared in more than 1 scene and were instrumental to the narrative of the story.

The study also noted whether the characters were seen at work and actually working, and whether their roles were personal or professional in nature.

The findings of the study are divided into three major sections. The first section provides the findings for the broadcast networks, offering historical comparisons for 2016-17 with figures dating from 1997-98. The second section provides the findings for cable channels and streaming services. The third section reports findings for all of the programs considered, including those appearing on the broadcast networks, cable channels, and streaming services.

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## Findings for Broadcast Networks

### Females On Screen

•In 2016-17, females comprised 43% of all speaking characters appearing on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 41% in 2015-16. This figure is even with the level achieved in 2007-08 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of All Speaking Female Characters on Broadcast Network Programs



•Last year, 43% of major characters were female. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 41% in 2015-16. This figure is even with the percentage achieved in 2010-11. For the purposes of this study, major characters appeared in more than 1 scene and were instrumental to the narrative of the story.

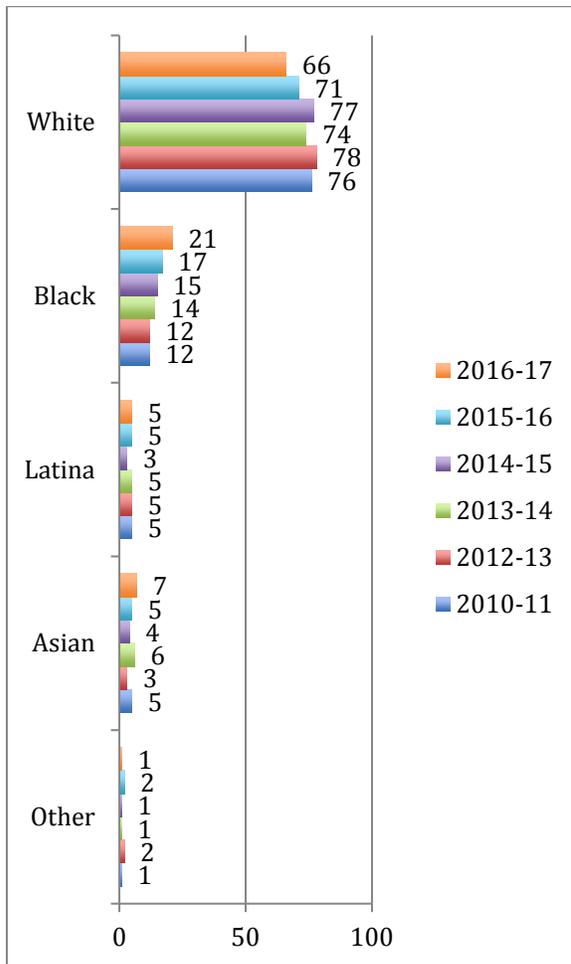
•Programs appearing on NBC featured the highest percentage of female characters (47%), followed by ABC (46%), CW (45%), CBS (39%), and Fox (38%).

•Reality programs featured the highest percentage of female characters (45%), followed by comedies (43%), and dramas (42%).

•Broadcast programs continue to become more racially and ethnically diverse (see Figure 2). In 2016-17, 66% of females were White (down 5 percentage points from 71% in 2015-16), 21% were Black (up 4 percentage points from 17% in 2015-16), 7% were Asian (up 2 percentage points from 5% in 2015-16), 5% were Latina (even with 2015-16), and 1% was of some other race or ethnicity (down 1 percentage point from 2% in 2015-16). It should be noted that Black females and Asian females achieved historical highs in 2016-17. However, Latinas continue to be dramatically underrepresented on broadcast network programs in comparison with their representation in the U.S. population.

Figure 2.

*Historical Comparison of Percentages of Female Characters by Race/Ethnicity on Broadcast Network Programs*



- Female characters continue to be younger than their male counterparts. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (65%), whereas the majority of males were in their 30s and 40s (61%).

- Female characters experienced a precipitous decline in numbers from their 30s (40%) to their 40s (14%). The percentage of male characters also declined, but it was not as dramatic (from 35% to 26%).

- 42% of male characters were 40 and older but only 22% of female characters were 40 and older.

- Few characters of either sex age into their 60s and beyond. 4% of males and 2% of females were 60 and above.

*Women Behind the Scenes*

- In 2016-17, women accounted for 27% of all creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network programs. This represents no change from last year, and an increase of only 1 percentage point from 26% in 2006-07 (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3. Historical Comparison of Women Working Behind the Scenes on Broadcast Network Programs*



- 48% of the programs employed 4 or

fewer women in the roles considered. Only 3% of programs employed 4 or fewer men.

- Only 2% of the programs employed 13 or more women in the roles considered. 64% employed 13 or more men.

- Overall, women fared best as producers (37%), followed by writers (35%), executive producers (26%), editors (22%), creators (21%), directors (17%), and directors of photography (3%) (see Figure 4).

- Women comprised 21% of creators on broadcast network programs. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 22% in 2015-16.

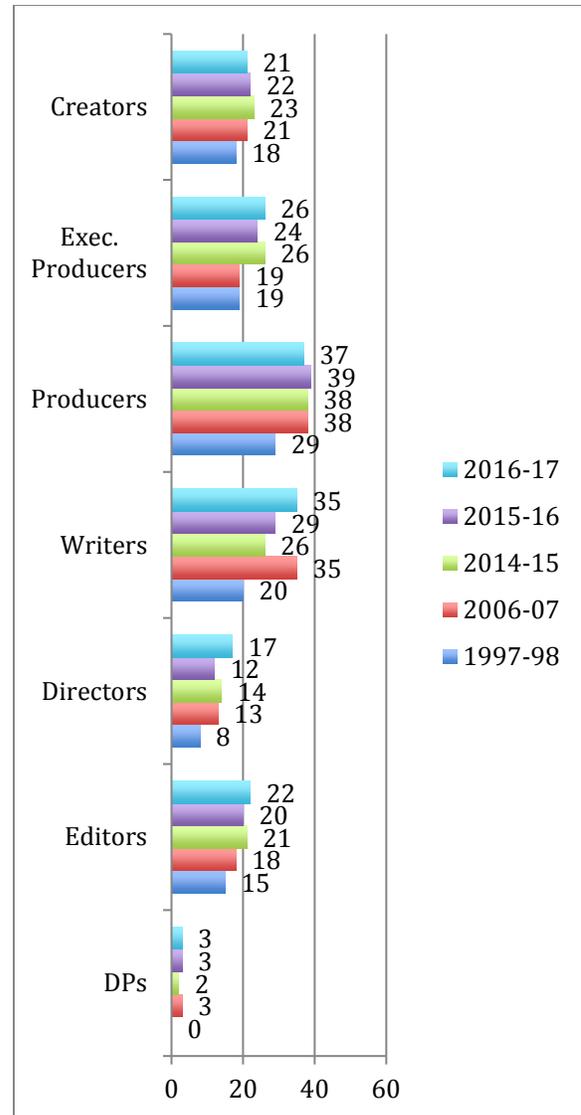
- Women accounted for 26% of executive producers working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 24% in 2015-16.

- In 2016-17, women comprised 37% of producers working on broadcast network programs. This represents a decrease of 2 percentage points from 39% in 2015-16.

- Women accounted for 35% of writers working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 29% in 2015-16.

- Women comprised 17% of directors working on broadcast network programs last year. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 12% in 2015-16.

*Figure 4.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women by Role on Broadcast Network Programs*



- In 2016-17, women accounted for 22% of editors working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 20% in 2015-16.

- Women accounted for 3% of directors of photography working on broadcast programs last year. This represents no change from 2015-16.

- 97% of the broadcast programs had no women DPs, 84% had no women directors, 78% had no women editors, 75% had no women creators, 63% had no women writers, 18% had no women executive producers, and 15% had no women producers.

### Findings for Cable and Streaming Programs

#### Females On Screen

- In 2016-17, females accounted for 36% of *all speaking characters* on cable programs. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 33% in 2015-16.

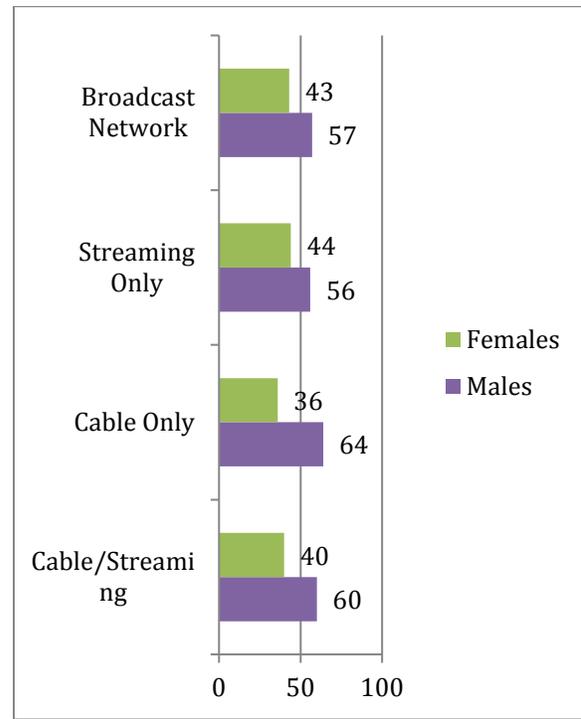
- Females comprised 44% of *all speaking characters* on streaming programs. This represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 38% in 2015-16.

- Streaming programs now feature slightly more female characters (44%) than broadcast network programs (43%) (see Figure 5).

- In 2016-17, females accounted for 34% of *major characters* on cable programs. This represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 28% in 2015-16. For the purposes of this study, *major characters* appeared in more than 1 scene and were instrumental to the narrative of the story.

- Females comprised 47% of *major characters* on streaming programs. This

Figure 5.  
Comparison of Percentages of Female Speaking Characters by Platform



- represents an increase of 8 percentage points from 39% in 2015-16. Overall, females accounted for 40% of major characters on cable and streaming programs.

- Streaming programs now feature more *major female characters* (47%) than broadcast network programs (43%).

- Regarding race and ethnicity on cable and streaming programs, 73% of females were White, 16% were Black, 5% were Asian, 5% were Latina, and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity.

- Female characters were younger than their male counterparts. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (58%), whereas the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (58%).

- 49% of male characters but only 32% of female characters were 40 or older.

- Few characters were in their 60s or older. Programs featured twice as many males in their 60s and above as females. 8% of male characters but only 4% of female characters were 60 or older.

### Women Behind the Scenes

- Women comprised 30% of creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working *on cable and streaming programs* in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 25% in 2015-16.

- Women accounted for 27% of behind-the-scenes individuals working *on cable programs* in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 22% in 2015-16.

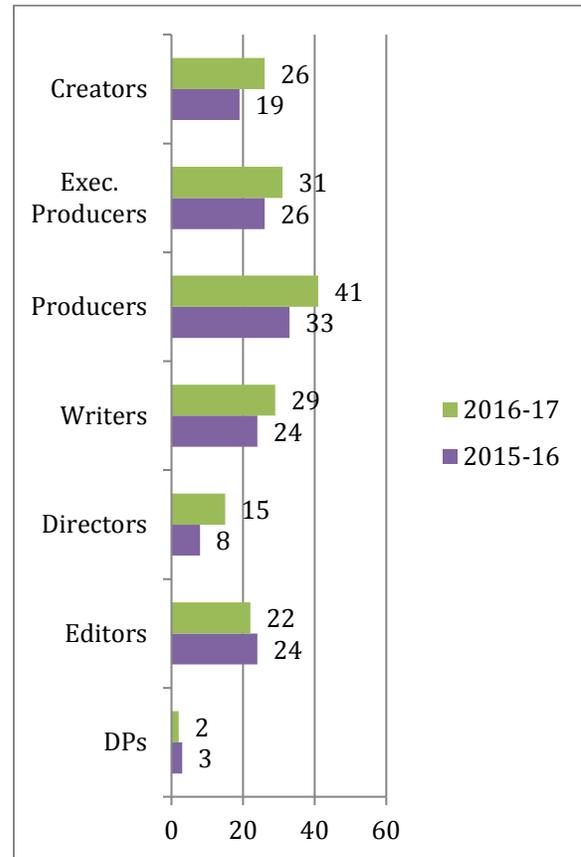
- Women comprised 32% of behind-the-scenes individuals working *on streaming programs* in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 27% in 2015-16.

- 53% of programs employed 4 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. Only 10% employed 4 or fewer men.

- 4% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 41% employed 14 or more men.

- Women fared best as producers (41%), followed by executive producers (31%), writers (29%), creators (26%), editors

Figure 6.  
Comparison of Women Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles on Cable/Streaming Programs in 2015-16 and 2016-17



(22%), directors (15%), and directors of photography (2%) (see Figure 6).

- Women comprised 26% of creators working on cable and streaming programs in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 7 percentage points from 19% in 2015-16.

- Women accounted for 31% of executive producers working on cable and streaming programs in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 26% in 2015-16.

•Women comprised 41% of producers working on cable and streaming programs in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 8 percentage points from 33% in 2015-16.

•Women accounted for 29% of writers working on cable and streaming programs in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 24% in 2015-16.

•Women comprised 15% of directors working on cable and streaming programs in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 7 percentage points from 8% in 2015-16.

•Women accounted for 22% of editors working on cable and streaming programs in 2016-17. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 24% in 2015-16.

•Women comprised 2% of directors of photography working on cable and streaming programs in 2016-17. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 3% in 2015-16.

•98% of the programs had no women directors of photography, 88% had no women directors, 74% had no women creators, 73% had no women writers, 73% had no women editors, 32% had no women producers, and 25% had no women executive producers.

### ***Findings for All Programs -- Broadcast Networks, Cable and Streaming Programs***

#### *Females On Screen*

• In 2016-17, females accounted for 42% of *all speaking characters* on broadcast

network, cable, and streaming programs. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 39% in 2015-16, and an increase of 2 percentage points from 40% in 2014-15.

•Females accounted for 42% of *major characters* on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 38% in 2015-16, and an increase of 2 percentage points from 40% in 2014-15. For the purposes of this study, *major characters* appeared in more than 1 scene and were instrumental to the narrative of the story.

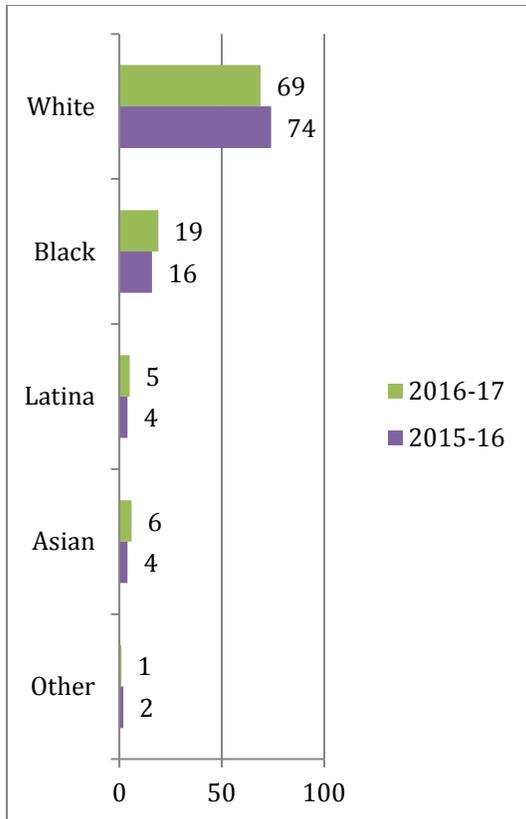
•Streaming programs featured the most *major female characters* (47%), followed by broadcast programs (43%), and cable programs (34%).

•Overall, 68% of the programs considered featured casts with more male than female characters. 11% had ensembles with equal numbers of female and male characters. 21% of the programs featured casts with more female than male characters.

•Regarding racial and ethnic diversity, 69% of females were White (down 5 percentage points from 74% in 2015-16), 19% were Black (up 3 percentage points from 16% in 2015-16), 6% were Asian (up 2 percentage points from 4% in 2015-16), 5% were Latina (up 1 percentage point from 4% in 2015-16), and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity (down 1 percentage point from 2015-16) (see Figure 7).

•Overall, female characters were younger than males. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (63%), whereas the majority of male

*Figure 7.  
Comparison of Race and Ethnicity of  
Female Characters on All Programs in  
2015-16 and 2016-17*



characters were in their 30s and 40s (59%).

- Female characters experienced a precipitous decline from their 30s to their 40s. 37% of females were in their 30s but only 17% were in their 40s. Male characters also experienced a decline in numbers but it was not as dramatic. 32% of male characters were in their 30s but only 26% were in their 40s.

- While few characters age into their 60s and beyond, male characters were more likely than females to fall into this age cohort. 5% of male characters but only 3% of females were 60 or older.

- Viewers were more likely to know the marital status of female characters than male characters. 50% of female characters but only 43% of male characters had a clearly identifiable marital status.

- Viewers were more likely to know the occupational status of male characters than female characters. 79% of male characters and 73% of female characters had an identifiable occupation.

- Males were more likely than females to be seen at work and actually working. 54% of male characters but 44% of females were seen in their work setting, and actually working.

- Female characters were more likely than male characters to play personal life-oriented roles such as wife and mother. 38% of females but 29% of males played roles related to their personal lives. Male characters were more likely than females to play work-oriented roles such as business executive or attorney. 60% of males but 48% of females played work-oriented roles.

#### *Women Behind the Scenes*

- Overall, women comprised 28% of creators, directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 26% in 2015-16, and an increase of 3 percentage points from 25% in 2014-15.

- 50% of programs employed 4 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles

considered. In contrast, 6% of programs employed 4 or fewer men.

- 3% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 47% of the programs considered employed 14 or more men.

- Women fared best as producers (39%), followed by writers (33%), executive producers (28%), creators (23%), editors (22%), directors (17%), and directors of photography (3%) (see Figure 8).

- Women comprised 23% of creators working on all of the programs considered in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 20% in 2015-16.

- Women accounted for 28% of executive producers working on all of the programs considered. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 25% in 2015-16.

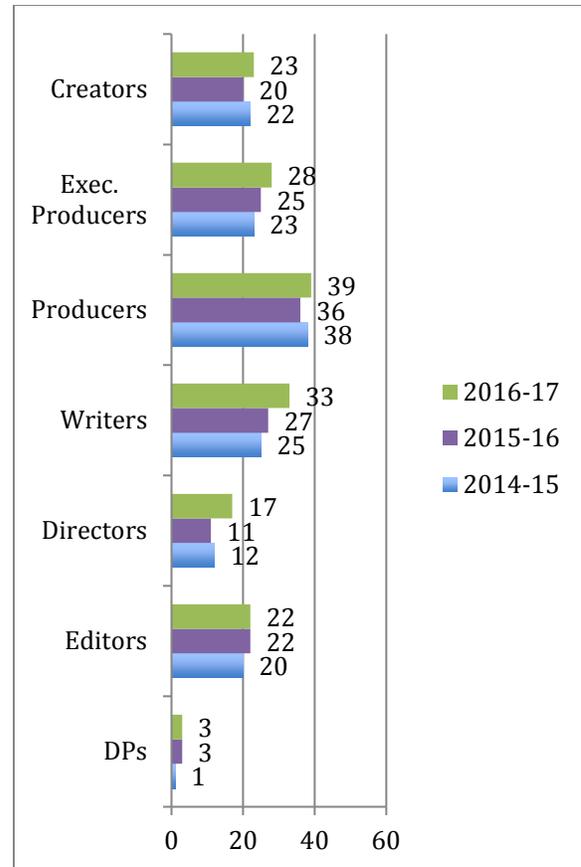
- Women comprised 39% of producers working on all of the programs considered in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 36% in 2015-16.

- Women accounted for 33% of writers working on all of the programs considered. This represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 27% in 2015-16.

- Women comprised 17% of directors working on all of the programs considered in 2016-17. This represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 11% in 2015-16.

- Women comprised 22% of editors

*Figure 8.*  
*Women Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles in 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17*



working on all of the programs considered. This represents no change from 2015-16.

- Women accounted for 3% of directors of photography working on all of the programs considered in 2016-17. This represents no change from 2015-16.

- Overall, 97% of the programs considered had no women directors of photography, 85% had no women directors, 75% had no women editors, 74% had no women creators, 67% had no women writers, 23% had no women producers, and 20% had no women executive producers.

### Important Relationships

- Programs with at least 1 woman *creator* featured more female characters overall and more major female characters than programs with exclusively male creators (see Figure 9).

- Programs with at least 1 woman *creator* had higher percentages of women directors and writers than programs with exclusively male creators.

- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, females comprised 51% of *major characters*. On these programs, the percentage of female characters achieved parity with female’s representation in the U.S. population. On programs with exclusively male creators, females accounted for 38% of *major characters*.

- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, females comprised 49% of *all speaking characters*. On programs with exclusively male creators, females accounted for 39% of *all speaking characters*.

- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 33% of directors. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 9% of directors.

- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 57% of writers. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 21% of writers.

Figure 9.  
Comparison of Programs with at Least 1 Woman Creator vs. Programs with Exclusively Male Creators

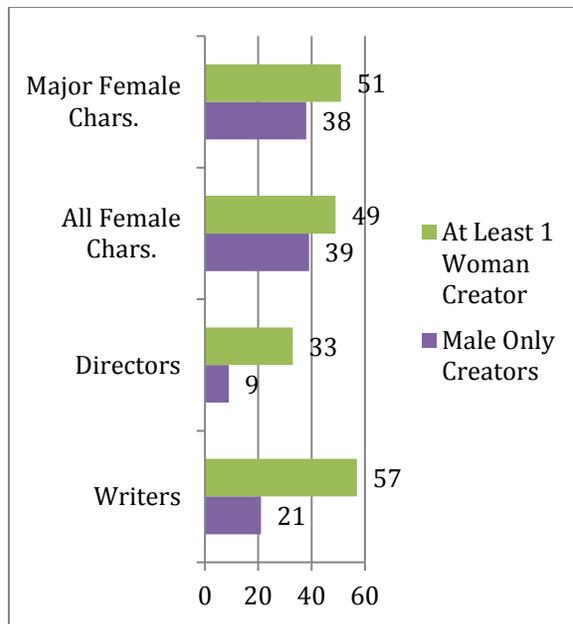
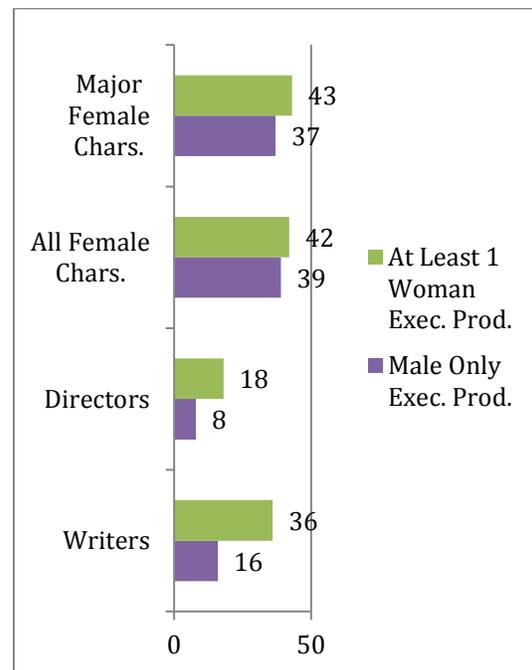


Figure 10.  
Comparison of Programs with at Least 1 Woman Executive Producer vs. Programs with Exclusively Male Executive Producers



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•Programs with at least 1 woman *executive producer* featured more female characters overall and more major female characters, and had higher percentages of women directors and writers than programs with exclusively male executive producers (see Figure 10).

•On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, females accounted for 43% of *major characters*. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, females comprised 37% of *major characters*.

•On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, females comprised 42% of *all speaking characters*. On programs with exclusively male creators, females accounted for 39% of *all speaking characters*.

•On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women accounted for 18% of directors. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women accounted for 8% of directors.

•On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women comprised 36% of writers. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women accounted for 16% of writers.

### *About the Center*

The *Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film* at San Diego State University is home to the longest running and most comprehensive studies of women's behind-the-scenes employment and on-screen portrayals. Dedicated to producing extensive and timely research on women in film and television, studies generated by the Center provide the foundation for a realistic discussion of women's employment and representation. For more information, visit the Center's website at

<http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu> or contact Dr. Lauzen at [lauzen@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:lauzen@mail.sdsu.edu).