

# Boxed In 2019-20: Women On Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television

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Now in its 23rd year, *Boxed In* tracks the representation of females on screen and women’s employment behind the scenes in television. The study examines dramas, comedies, and reality programs appearing on the broadcast networks, basic and premium cable channels, and streaming services. The project provides the most comprehensive historical record of women’s portrayals and employment available.

## Key Findings

•**In 2019-20, programs on streaming services featured substantially more female protagonists than programs on cable or broadcast networks.** By platform, 42% of streaming programs had clearly identifiable sole female protagonists, 27% of cable programs had female protagonists, and 24% of broadcast programs featured female protagonists.

•**Streaming programs were just as likely to have female protagonists as male protagonists.** 42% of programs on streaming services had female protagonists, 42% featured male protagonists, and 16% had ensembles (see Figure 1).

•**Women reached historic highs as creators, directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and directors of photography on streaming programs.** The gains made by women working as directors and directors of

Figure 1.  
Percentages of Protagonists on Streaming Programs

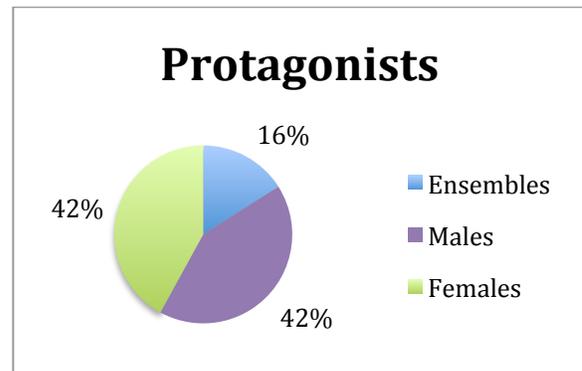
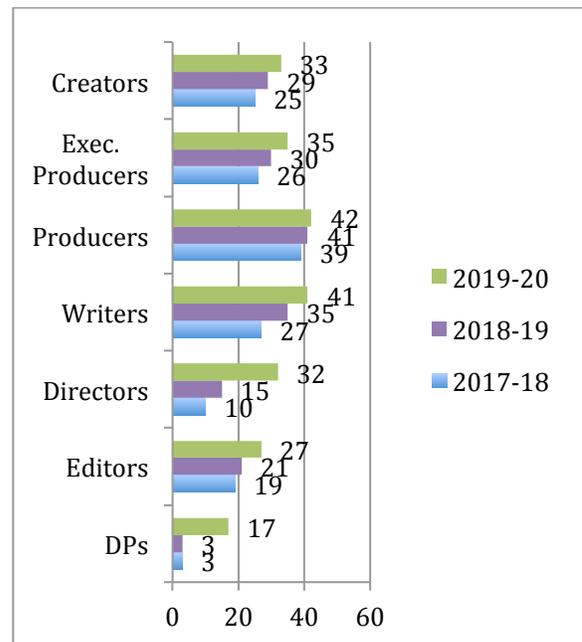


Figure 2.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles on Streaming Programs



\*includes Amazon, Hulu, Netflix, Apple TV+, Disney+

photography were particularly impressive (see Figure 2). The percentage of women directors increased from 15% in 2018-19 to 32% in 2019-20. The percentage of women working as directors of photography increased from 3% in 2018-19 to 17% in 2019-20.

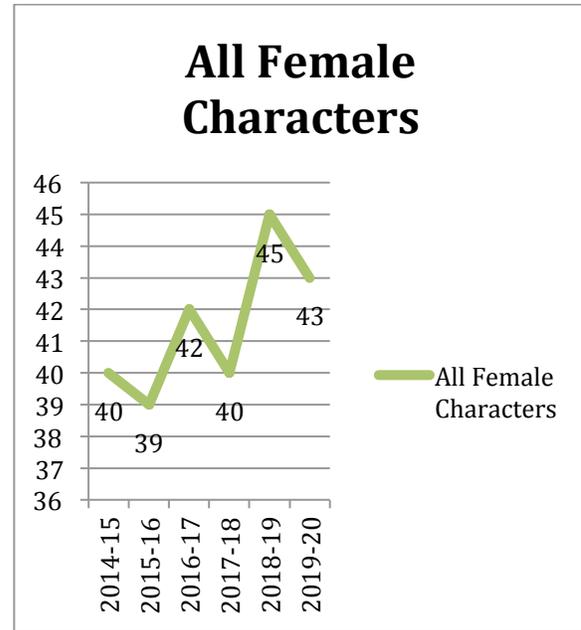
**•Across platforms, the percentage of female characters in speaking roles declined from 45% in 2018-19 to 43% in 2019-20 (see Figure 3).** By platform, females comprised 42% of speaking characters on broadcast programs, 44% of characters on cable programs, and 43% of characters on streaming programs.

**•Females comprised 45% of major characters on broadcast, cable and streaming programs.** This represents no change from 2018-19 (see Figure 4). By platform, females accounted for 44% of major characters on broadcast programs, 45% on cable programs, and 45% on streaming programs.

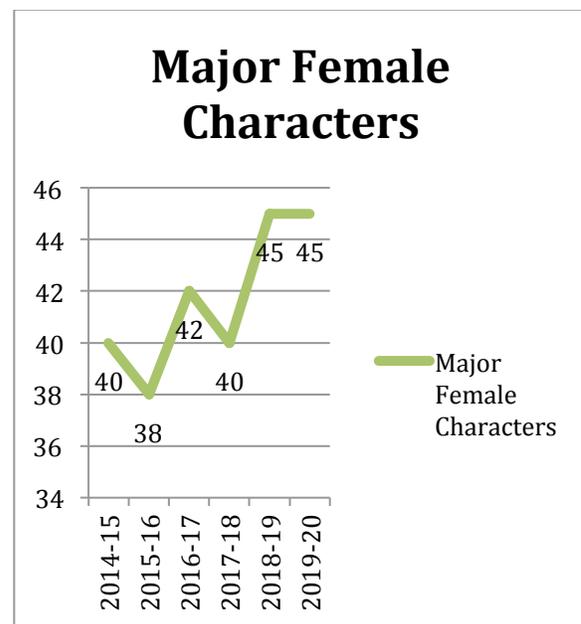
**•Across platforms, 29% of all programs featured clearly identifiable sole female protagonists, 37% had male protagonists, and 33% feature ensembles.**

**•Regarding race and ethnicity across platforms, 66% of female characters were White (down 4 percentage points from 70% in 2018-19), 20% were Black (up 3 percentage points from 17% in 2018-19), 8% were Asian (up 1 percentage point from 7% in 2018-19), 5% were Latina (down 1 percentage point from 6% in 2018-19), and 1% were of some other race of ethnicity (no change from 2018-19). Latinas remain dramatically underrepresented when**

*Figure 3.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of  
Females in Speaking Roles Across  
Platforms*



*Figure 4.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of  
Females as Major Characters Across  
Platforms*



*compared to their representation in the U.S. population.*

- The racial/ethnic representation of major female characters mirrored that for all female characters in speaking roles.** 66% of major female characters were White, 20% were Black, 8% were Asian, and 6% were Latina.

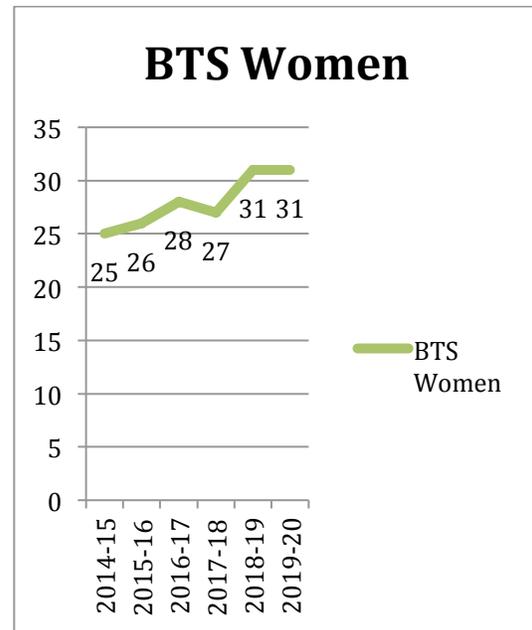
- Considering broadcast network programs only, over the last decade while the percentage of Black females has more than doubled (12% to 26%) and the percentage of Asian females has increased (5% to 8%), the percentage of Latinas has remained the same (5%).**

- Overall, female characters remain younger than males.** The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (58%), whereas the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (53%).

- Across platforms, male characters remain more likely than females to be identified by their occupational status, and to be seen at work, actually working.** 75% of male characters but 65% of females had identifiable occupations. Further, 57% of males but 47% of females were seen in their work environment, 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.** For example, 52% of female characters but 38% of males were seen playing personal-life roles. In contrast, 56% of

Figure 5.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles Across Platforms



males but 42% of females played work-oriented roles.

- Overall, women accounted for 31% of individuals working in key behind-the-scenes positions. This represents no change from 2018-19 (see Figure 5).** By platform, women comprised 30% of all creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography on broadcast programs, 31% on cable programs, and 35% on streaming programs.

- Programs employed relatively low numbers of women behind the scenes.** 63% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 16% of programs employed 5 or fewer men.

•Overall, women fared best as producers (39%), followed by writers (36%), executive producers (32%), directors (30%), creators (28%), editors (17%), and directors of photography (8%).

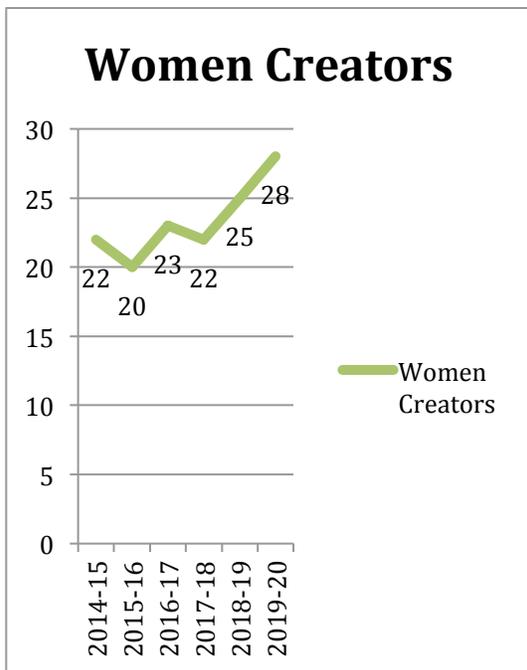
•Across platforms, startlingly high percentages of programs employed no women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 94% of the programs considered had no women directors of photography, 81% had no women editors, 76% had no women directors, and 73% had no women creators.

•The percentage of women creators continued to inch upward in 2019-20 after years of stagnation. In 2019-20, women accounted for 28% of creators, up from 25% in 2018-19 (see Figure 6). This represents a historic high.

•Across platforms, programs with at least 1 woman creator employed substantially greater percentages of women in other key behind-the-scenes roles and featured more female characters than programs with exclusively male creators. For example, on programs with at least 1 woman creator, women accounted for 69% of writers versus 20% on programs with no women creators.

•Programs with at least 1 woman executive producer featured more female protagonists, and more women in other key behind-the-scenes positions, than programs with exclusively male executive producers. For example, on programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women accounted for 39% of writers. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women comprised 12% of writers.

Figure 6.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Creators Across Platforms



## 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 2019 through May 2020. The study considers one randomly selected episode of series appearing on the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, CW), basic cable channels (A&E, AMC, Animal Planet, Bravo, Discovery, Disney, E, Freeform, FX, HGTV, History, Nickelodeon, TBS, TLC, TNT, USA), premium cable channels (HBO, Showtime), and streaming services (Amazon, Hulu, Netflix, Apple TV+, Disney+). In 2019-20, the study tracked over 4,100 characters and more than 4,200 behind-the-scenes credits. Over 23 years – from 1997-98 to 2019-20 -- *Boxed In* has monitored over 47,000 characters and more than 59,000 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 appear in more than 1 scene and are instrumental to the narrative of the story.

For the first time, the study also identified the protagonist(s) in each program. Protagonists are the characters from whose perspective the story is told.

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 four major sections. The first section provides the findings for the broadcast networks, offering historical comparisons for 2019-20 with figures dating from 1997-98. The second section provides the findings for cable channels, and the third section examines the findings for streaming services. The fourth section reports findings for all of the programs considered, including those appearing on the broadcast networks, cable channels, and streaming services.

## Findings for Broadcast Networks

### Females On Screen

•In 2019-20, females comprised 42% of all speaking characters appearing on broadcast network programs. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 44% in 2018-19. The current figure represents an increase of just 3 percentage points from 39% in 1997-98 (see Figure 7).

•44% of major characters were female in 2019-20. This represents no change from 2018-19. For the purposes of this study, major characters appear in

more than 1 scene and are instrumental to the narrative of the story.

•24% of broadcast programs featured clearly identifiable sole female protagonists in 2019-2020, 31% of programs had male protagonists, and 45% had ensembles. For the purposes of this study, protagonists are the characters from whose perspective the story is told.

•In 2019-20, 60% of all female characters in speaking roles were White (down 4 percentage points from 64% in 2018-19), 26% were Black (up 5 percentage points from 21% in 2018-19), 5% were Latina (down 2 percentage points from 7% in 2018-19), 8% were Asian (even with 2018-19), and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity (see Figure 8).

Figure 7.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of All Speaking Female Characters on Broadcast Network Programs



•Since 2010-2011, while the percentage of Black females has more than doubled (12% to 26%) and the percentage of Asian females has increased (5% to 8%), the percentage of Latinas has remained the same (5%).

•63% of major characters were White, 24% were Black, 6% were Latina, and 7% were Asian.

•Female characters continue to be younger than their male counterparts. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (62%), whereas the majority of males were in their 30s and 40s (57%).

•Female characters experienced a precipitous decline in numbers from their 30s (40%) to their 40s (17%). The percentage of male characters also

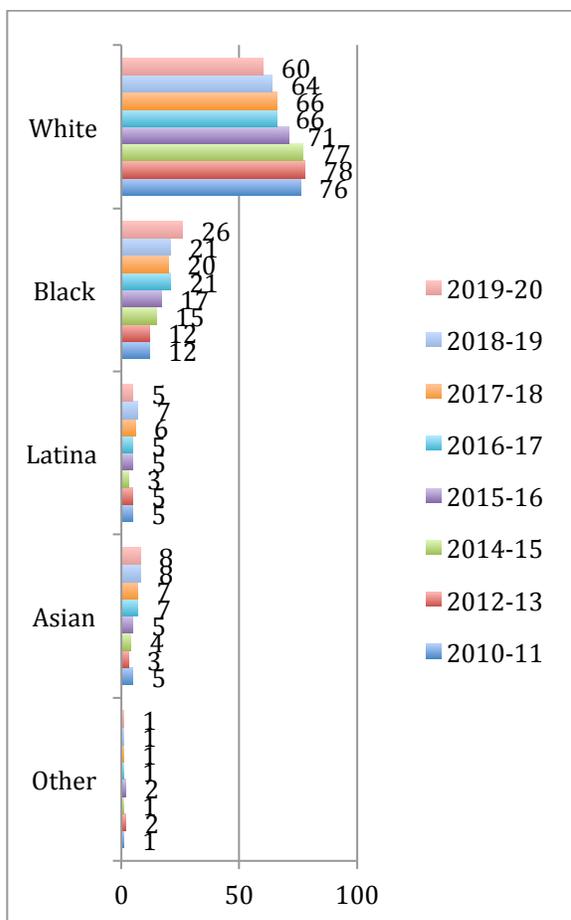
declined, but it was not as dramatic (from 33% to 24%).

- 44% of male characters were 40 and older but only 27% of female characters were 40 and older.

- Slightly more than twice as many males as females were in their 60s or older. 7% of males but only 3% of females were 60 and above.

Figure 8.

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

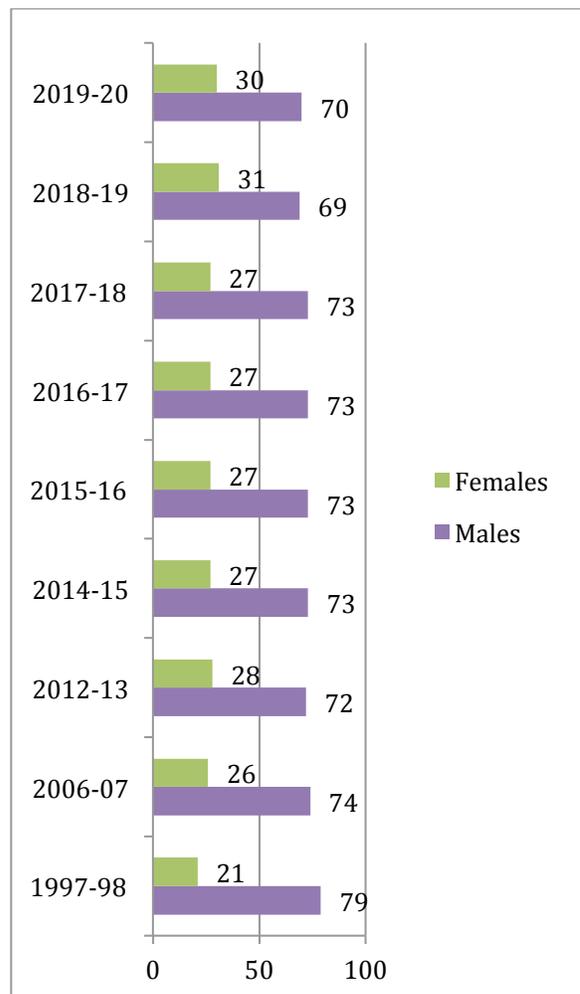


### Women Behind the Scenes

- In 2019-20, women accounted for 30% of all creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network programs. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 31% in 2018-19 (see Figure 9).

Figure 9.

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working Behind the Scenes on Broadcast Network Programs



- 65% of the programs employed 6 or fewer women in the roles considered. 6% of programs employed 6 or fewer men.

Only 2% of the programs employed 14 or more women in the roles considered. 51% employed 14 or more men.

- Overall, women fared best as producers (36%) and writers (36%), followed by executive producers (31%), directors (26%), creators (26%), editors (12%), and directors of photography (4%) (see Figure 10).

- In 2019-20, women comprised 26% of creators on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 25% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

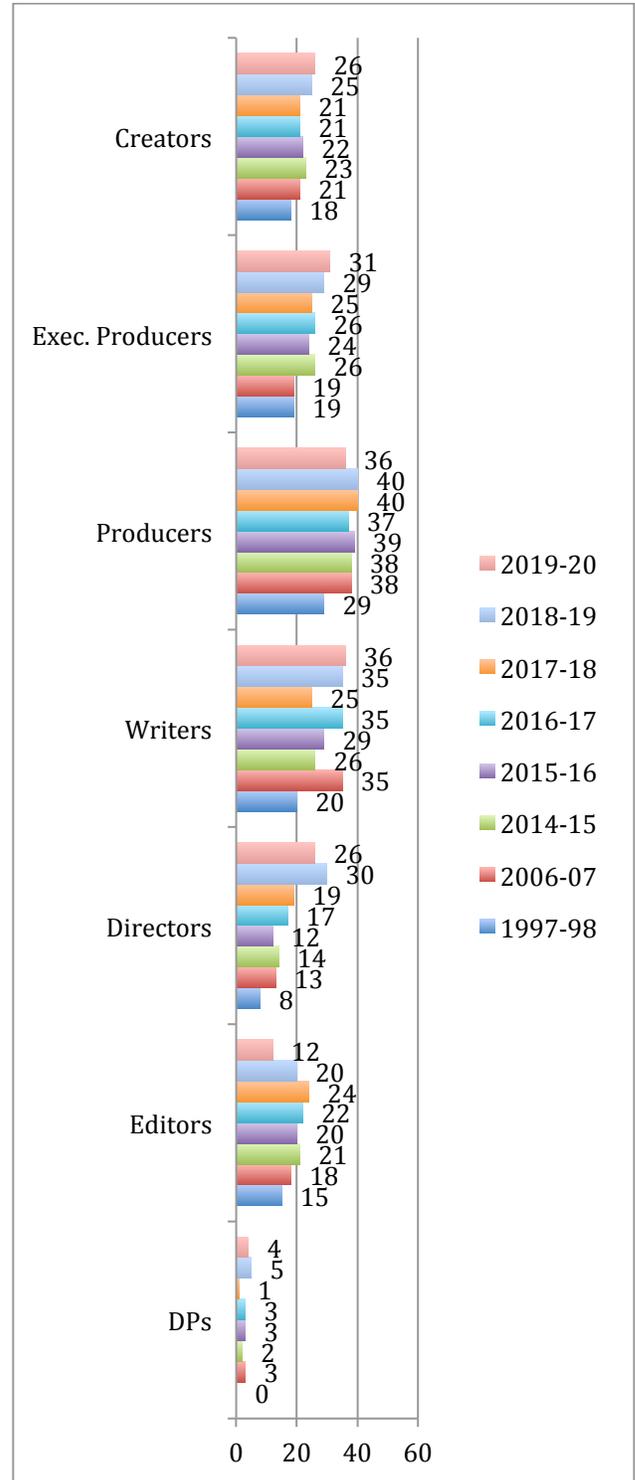
- Women accounted for 31% of executive producers working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 29% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- In 2019-20, women comprised 36% of producers working on broadcast network programs. This represents a decline of 4 percentage points from 40% in 2018-19.

- Women accounted for 36% of writers working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 35% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 26% of directors working on broadcast network programs last year. This represents a decrease of 4 percentage points from 30% in 2018-19.

Figure 10.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women by Role on Broadcast Network Programs



- In 2019-20, women accounted for 12% of editors working on broadcast network programs. This represents a decline of 8 percentage points from 20% in 2018-19, and is the lowest percentage of female editors since this study began.

- Women accounted for 4% of directors of photography working on broadcast programs last year. This represents a decrease of 1 percentage point from 5% in 2018-19.

- In 2019-20, 97% of the broadcast programs had no women DPs, 86% had no women editors, 75% had no women directors, and 71% had no women creators.

### *Findings for Cable (Basic and Premium) Programs*

#### *Females On Screen*

- In 2019-20, females accounted for 44% of *all speaking characters* on cable (basic and premium) programs. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 45% in 2018-19.

- Females comprised 45% of *major characters* on cable programs. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 47% in 2018-19. For the purposes of this study, *major characters* appear in more than 1 scene and are instrumental to the narrative of the story.

- 27% of cable programs featured clearly identifiable female protagonists, 41% had male protagonists, and 31% featured ensembles.

- Regarding race and ethnicity on cable programs, 71% of females were White (a decrease of 5 percentage points from

76% in 2018-19), 15% were Black (an increase of 1 percentage point from 14% in 2018-19), 4% were Latina (a decrease of 1 percentage point from 5% in 2018-19), 9% were Asian (an increase of 4 percentage points from 5% in 2018-19), and 1 percent 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 (56%), whereas the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (55%).

- 49% of male characters but 31% of female characters were 40 or older.

- The percentage of female characters dropped precipitously from their 30s (33%) to their 40s (18%). The number of male characters dropped by only a single percentage point (28% to 27%).

- More than twice as many male characters (10%) as female characters (4%) were 60 or older.

#### *Women Behind the Scenes*

- Women comprised 31% of creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on cable programs in 2019-20. This represents no change from 2018-19.

- Women fared best as producers (43%), followed by directors (37%), writers (32%), executive producers (32%), creators (26%), editors (16%), and directors of photography (6%) (see Figure 11).

- Women comprised 26% of creators working on premium and basic cable programs in 2019-20, an increase of 4 percentage points from 22% in 2018-19. It is a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 32% of executive producers working on premium and basic cable programs in 2019-20, even with the percentage achieved in 2018-19.

- Women comprised 43% of producers working on premium and basic cable programs in 2019-20, an increase of 3 percentage points from 40% in 2018-19. It is a recent historic high.

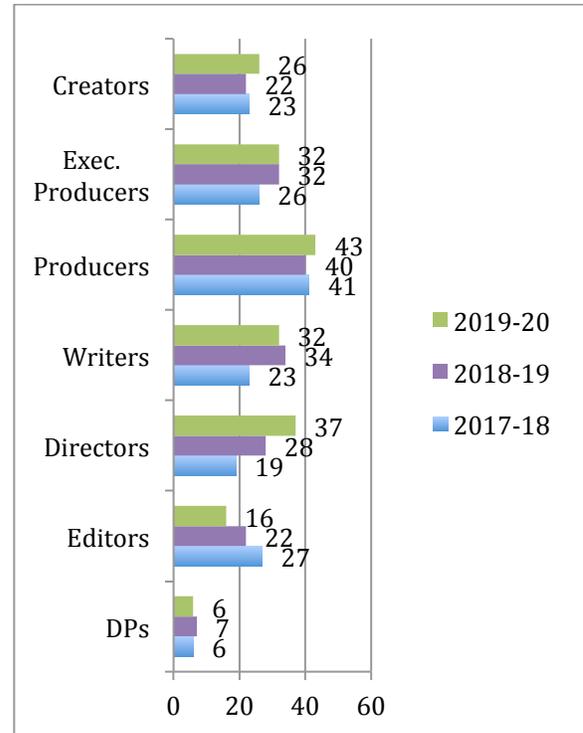
- Women accounted for 32% of writers working on premium and basic cable programs in 2019-20, a decline of 2 percentage points from 34% in 2018-19.

- Women comprised 37% of directors working on premium and basic cable programs in 2019-20, an increase of 9 percentage points from 28% in 2018-19. It is a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 16% of editors working on premium and basic cable programs in 2019-20, a decrease of 6 percentage points from 22% in 2018-19. It is a recent historic low.

- Women comprised 6% of directors of photography working on premium and basic cable programs in 2019-20, a decrease of 1 percentage point from 7% in 2018-19.

Figure 11.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles on Cable Programs



### Findings for Streaming Programs

#### Females On Screen

- In 2019-20, females accounted for 43% of *all speaking characters* on streaming programs. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 45% in 2018-19.

- Females comprised 45% of *major characters* on streaming programs. This represents a decline of 3 percentage points from 48% in 2018-19. For the purposes of this study, *major characters* appear in more than 1 scene and are instrumental to the narrative of the story.

- 42% of streaming programs featured clearly identifiable sole female *protagonists*, 42% had male protagonists, and 16% featured ensembles. For the purposes of this study, *protagonists* are the characters from whose perspective the story is told.

- Regarding race and ethnicity on streaming programs, 65% of females were White (a decline of 3 percentage points from 68% in 2018-19), 18% were Black (an increase of 3 percentage points from 15% in 2017-18), 9% were Latina (an increase of 2 percentage points from 7% in 2018-19), 8% were Asian (a decrease of 1 percentage point from 9% in 2018-19), and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity.

- Female characters were younger than their male counterparts. 55% of female characters were in their 20s and 30s, whereas 44% of male characters were in their 30s and 40s.

- 42% of male characters and 30% of female characters were 40 or older.

- Streaming programs featured 3 times as many male characters 60 and older (9%) as female characters (3%).

### Women Behind the Scenes

- Women comprised 35% of creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on streaming programs in 2019-20. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 30% in 2018-19.

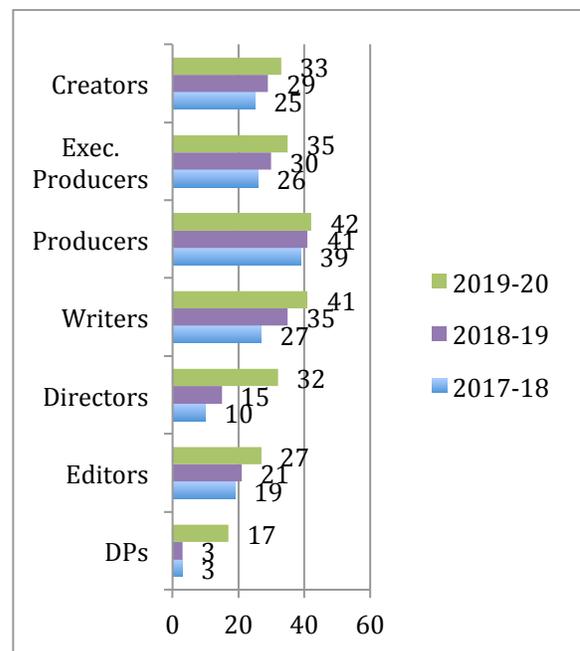
- 50% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 8% employed 5 or fewer men.

- 6% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 24% employed 14 or more men.

- Women fared best as producers (42%), followed by writers (41%), executive producers (35%), creators (33%), directors (32%), editors (27%), and directors of photography (17%) (see Figure 12). These are all historic highs.

(Note: Even without the addition of Apple TV+ and Disney+ in 2019-20, behind-the-scenes women at the remaining streamers - Amazon, Hulu, Netflix - still experienced historic highs.)

Figure 12.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles on Streaming Programs



- Women comprised 33% of creators working on streaming programs in 2019-20. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 29% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 35% of executive producers working on streaming programs in 2019-20. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 30% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 42% of producers working on streaming programs in 2019-20, an increase of 1 percentage point from 41% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 41% of writers working on streaming programs in 2019-20, an increase of 6 percentage points from 35% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 32% of directors working on streaming programs in 2019-20, an increase of 17 percentage points from 15% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 27% of editors working on streaming programs in 2019-20, an increase of 6 percentage points from 21% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 17% of directors of photography working streaming programs in 2019-20, this represents an increase of 14 percentage points from 3% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

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

### *Females On Screen*

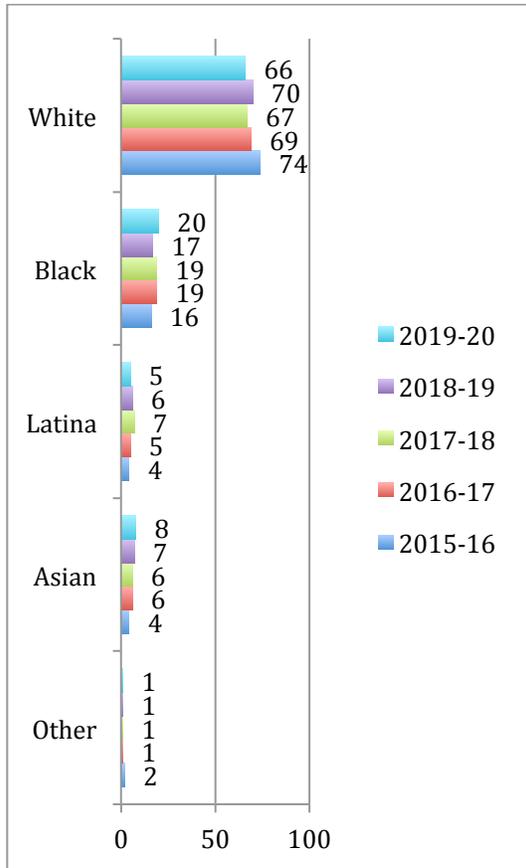
- In 2019-20, females accounted for 43% of *all speaking characters* on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs. This represents a decrease of 2 percentage points from 45% in 2018-19.

- Females accounted for 45% of *major characters* on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs. This represents no change 2018-19. For the purposes of this study, *major characters* appear in more than 1 scene and are instrumental to the narrative of the story.

- 29% of all programs featured clearly identifiable sole female *protagonists*, 37% had male protagonists and 33% featured ensembles. For the purposes of this study, *protagonists* are the characters from whose perspective the story is told.

- Regarding the race and ethnicity of female characters in *speaking roles*, 66% of females were White (down 4 percentage points from 70% in 2018-19), 20% were Black (up 3 percentage points from 17% in 2018-19), 5% were Latina (down 1 percentage point from 6% in 2018-19), 8% were Asian (up 1 percentage point from 7% in 2018-19), and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity (no change from 2018-19) (see Figure 13).

Figure 13.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of  
Race and Ethnicity of Female  
Characters



- Regarding the race and ethnicity of female characters in *major roles*, 66% of females were White, 20% were Black, 8% were Asian, and 6% were Latina.

- Overall, female characters were younger than males. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (58%), whereas the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (53%).

- Female characters experienced a precipitous decline from their 30s to their 40s. 35% of females were in their

30s but only 18% were in their 40s. Male characters also experienced a decline in numbers but it was not as dramatic. 29% of male characters were in their 30s but 24% were in their 40s.

- 30% of female characters but 45% of males were 40 and older.

- While few characters age into their 60s and beyond, male characters were more likely than females to fall into this age cohort. 8% of male characters but only 3% of females were 60 or older.

- Viewers were more likely to know the marital status of female than male characters. 51% of females but 42% of males had a known marital status.

- Viewers were more likely to know the occupational status of male characters than female characters. 75% of male characters and 65% of female characters had an identifiable occupation.

- Males were more likely than females to be seen at work and actually working. 57% of male characters and 47% of females were seen in their work setting, actually working.

- Female characters were more likely than male characters to play personal life-oriented roles such as wife and mother. 52% of females but 38% 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. 56% of males but 42% of females played work-oriented roles.

*Women Behind the Scenes*

- Overall, women comprised 31% of creators, directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs in 2019-20. This represents no change from 2018-19.

- 63% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 16% of programs employed 5 or fewer men.

3% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 32% of the programs considered employed 14 or more men.

- Women fared best as producers (39%), followed by writers (36%), executive producers (32%), directors (30%), creators (28%), editors (17%), and directors of photography (8%) (see Figure 14).

- Women comprised 28% of creators working on all of the programs considered in 2019-20. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 25% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

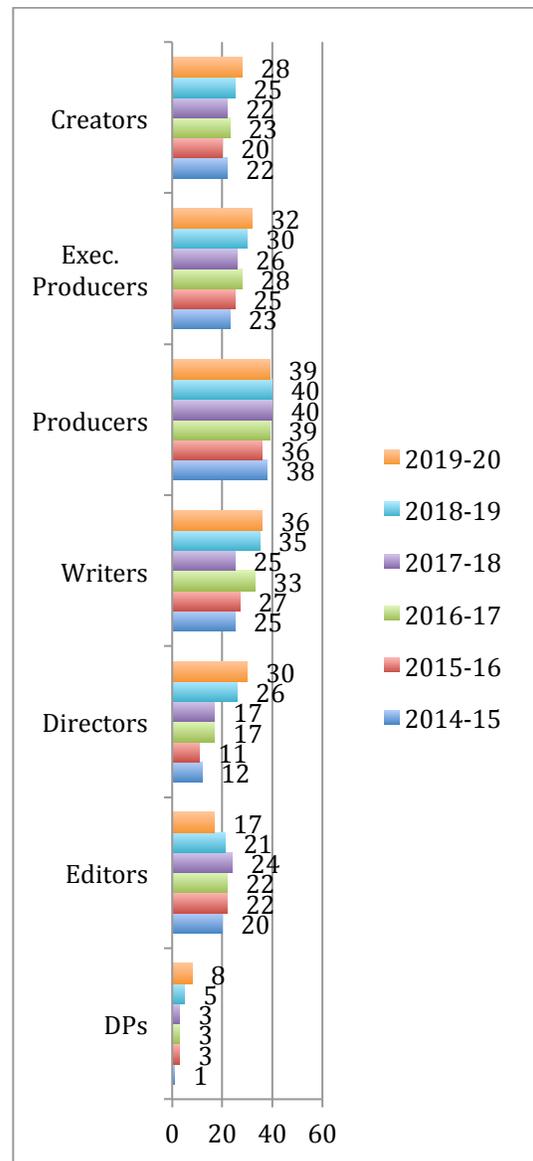
- Women accounted for 32% of executive producers working on all of the programs considered. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 30% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 39% of producers working on all of the programs considered in 2019-20. This represents a

decline of 1 percentage point from 40% in 2018-19.

- Women accounted for 36% of writers working on all of the programs considered. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 35% in 2018-19, and a new historic high.

*Figure 14.  
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Women Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles*



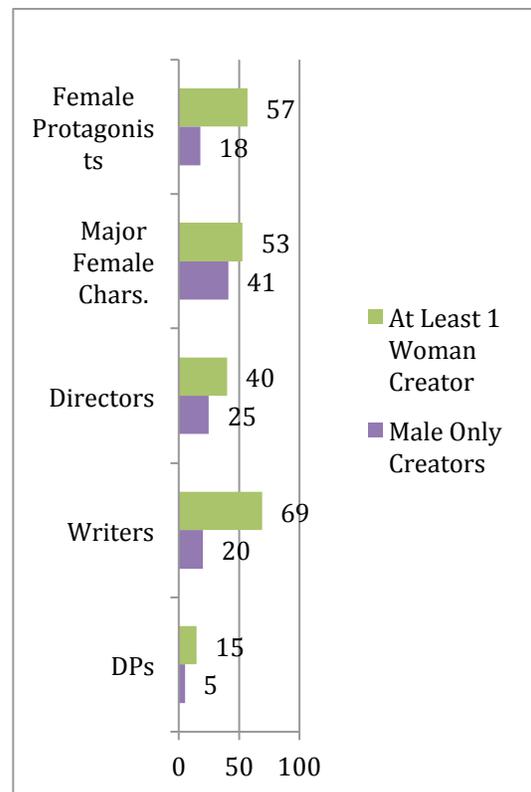
- Women comprised 30% of directors working on all of the programs considered in 2019-20. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 26% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.
- Women comprised 17% of editors working on all of the programs considered. This represents a decline of 4 percentage points from 21% in 2018-19.
- Women accounted for 8% of directors of photography working on all of the programs considered in 2019-20. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 5% in 2018-19, and a recent historic high.
- Overall, 94% of the programs considered had no women directors of photography, 81% had no women editors, 76% had no women directors, and 73% had no women creators.

### Important Relationships

- Programs with at least 1 woman *creator* featured more female protagonists and major female characters than programs with exclusively male creators (see Figure 15). Programs with women creators include percentages of female characters that match or slightly surpass the representation of females in the U.S. population.
- 57% of programs with at least 1 woman creator had female protagonists. In contrast, 19% of programs with exclusively male creators had female protagonists.

- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, females comprised 53% of major characters. On programs with exclusively male creators, females accounted for 41% of major characters.
- Programs with at least 1 woman creator had substantially higher percentages of women directors, writers, and directors of photography than programs with exclusively male creators.
- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 40% of directors. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 25% of directors.

Figure 15.  
Comparison of Programs with at Least 1 Woman Creator vs. Programs with Exclusively Male Creators



- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 69% of writers. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 20% of writers.

- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 15% of directors of photography. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 5% of directors of photography.

- Programs with at least 1 woman *executive producer* were substantially more likely to have female protagonists, and had higher percentages of women directors and writers than programs with exclusively male executive producers.

- 32% of programs with at least 1 woman executive producer featured clearly identifiable sole female protagonists versus 19% of programs with exclusively male executive producers.

- On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women accounted for 32% of directors. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women comprised 19% of directors.

- On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women accounted for 39% of writers. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women comprised 12% of writers.