

Boxed In: Women On Screen and Behind the Scenes in the 2007-08 Prime-time Season

by Martha M. Lauzen, Ph.D.

Copyright © 2008 – All rights reserved.

The percentage of female characters appearing on broadcast network programs inched up slightly during the 2007-08 prime-time season while the percentage of women working behind the scenes remained stable.

On screen, females accounted for 43% of all characters last season, up one percentage point from the 2006-07 season. This figure represents a historical high. However, female characters continued to be significantly younger than their male counterparts. For example, 70% of all characters in their 50s and 61% of all characters in their 60s were male. Females 40 and older comprised 11% of all characters. In contrast, males 40 and older accounted for 21% of all characters.

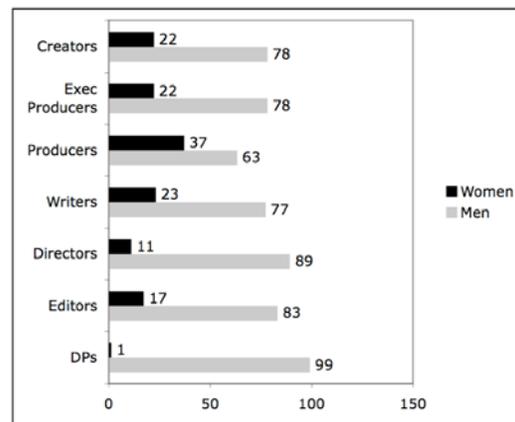
Women comprised 26% of all creators, executive producers, producers, directors, writers, editors, and directors of photography working on situation comedies, dramas, and reality programs. This percentage represents no change from last season. Women writers and directors of photography experienced significant declines this year. The percentage of women writers dropped from 35% in the 2006-07 season to 23% in 2007-08. The percentage of women directors of photography declined from a

meager 3% in 2006-07 to a microscopic 1% in 2007-08

Findings/Behind the Scenes

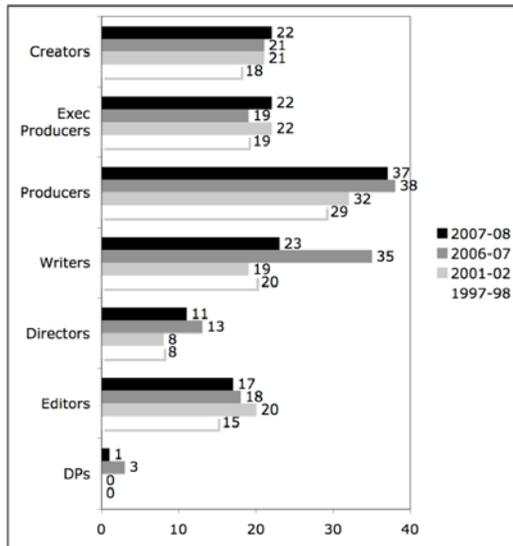
- This study examined 2,407 individuals working behind the scenes on one randomly selected episode of every prime-time drama, situation comedy, and reality program airing on ABC, CBS, CW, Fox, MyNetworkTV, and NBC.
- Overall, women fared best as producers (37%), followed by writers (23%), creators (22%), executive producers (22%), editors (17%), directors (11%), and directors of photography (1%) (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1.
Percent of Behind-the-Scenes Women and Men during the 2007-08 Season



- The representation of behind-the-scenes women did not vary significantly by program genre. Dramas, situation comedies, and reality programs all employed an average of 5 women behind the scenes. In contrast, dramas and

Figure 2.
Historical Comparison of
Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes
Employment of Women



reality programs employed an average of 14 men, and situation comedies an average of 13 men behind the scenes.

- Women comprised 23% of writers. This represents a dramatic decline (12 percentage points) from the 2006-07 season but an increase of 3 percentage points from a decade ago. The historical high recorded in the 2006-07 season was more likely a fluke than an indication of significant growth in the percentage of women writers. In 2007-08, 78% of the programs considered had no women writers.
- Women comprised 1% of directors of photography. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points since the 2006-07 season. Ninety nine percent (99%) of the programs considered had no women directors of photography.

Findings/On Screen

- This study examined 2,274 characters appearing on one randomly selected episode of every drama, situation comedy, and reality program airing on ABC, CBS, CW, Fox, MyNetworkTV, and NBC during the 2007-08 prime-time season.
- Programs airing on the CW featured the highest percentage of female characters (51%), followed by ABC (47%), MyNetworkTV (44%), CBS (43%), NBC (40%), and Fox (35%).
- Overall, female characters were significantly younger than their male counterparts. The majority of female characters (63%) were in their 20s and 30s. The majority of male characters (57%) were in their 30s and 40s.
- Female characters were overwhelmingly white (73%), followed by African-Americans (16%), Latinas (5%), and Asians (4%).
- For the first time since this study began, female characters were not significantly more likely to be identified by their marital status than male characters. However, male characters were significantly more likely than female characters to have an identifiable occupation.

Report compiled by Dr. Martha M. Lauzen, Executive Director, Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, 92182, 619.594.6301