

Equal opportunity through knowledge and research

Boxed In 2017-18: Women On Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television

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

Dr. Martha M. Lauzen

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Key Findings

For the last 21 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 in 2017-18. 11% had ensembles with equal numbers of female and male characters. 21% of the programs featured casts with more female than male characters. These percentages represent no change from 2016-17.

•Across platforms, females comprised 40% of all speaking characters. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 2016-17 when females accounted for 42% of all speaking characters. It is below the level achieved in 2012-13 when females accounted for 42% of all speaking characters (see Figure 1).

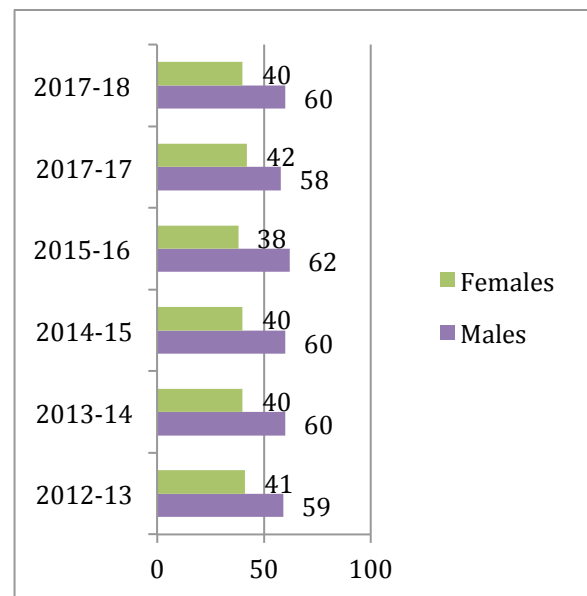
•By platform, females accounted for 41% of all speaking characters on broadcast network programs, 40% on cable programs, and 39% on streaming programs.

•Females comprised 40% of major characters on broadcast network, cable and streaming programs. This represents a decline of 2 percentage

Figure 1.
Historical Comparison of Females in Speaking Roles Across Platforms



Figure 2.
Historical Comparison of Females as Major Characters Across Platforms



points from 42% in 2016-17. It is also below the percentage achieved in 2012-13 of 41% (see Figure 2).

•The percentage of female characters featured on broadcast network programs in 2017-18 was lower than it was nearly a decade earlier in 2007-08. Last year, women comprised 41% of all speaking characters on broadcast network programs. This figure represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 43% in 2016-17. The level achieved in 2017-18 (41%) is also below that achieved nearly a decade ago in 2007-08 (43%).

•Across platforms, the percentage of Latina characters in speaking roles reached a historical high in 2017-18. The percentage of Latinas increased from 5% in 2016-17 to 7% in 2017-18. Despite this increase, Latinas remain the most underrepresented ethnic group when compared to their representation in the U.S. population. Black characters remained steady at 19% of all female characters in speaking roles. Similarly, the percentage of female Asian characters in speaking roles remained unchanged at 6% in 2017-18.

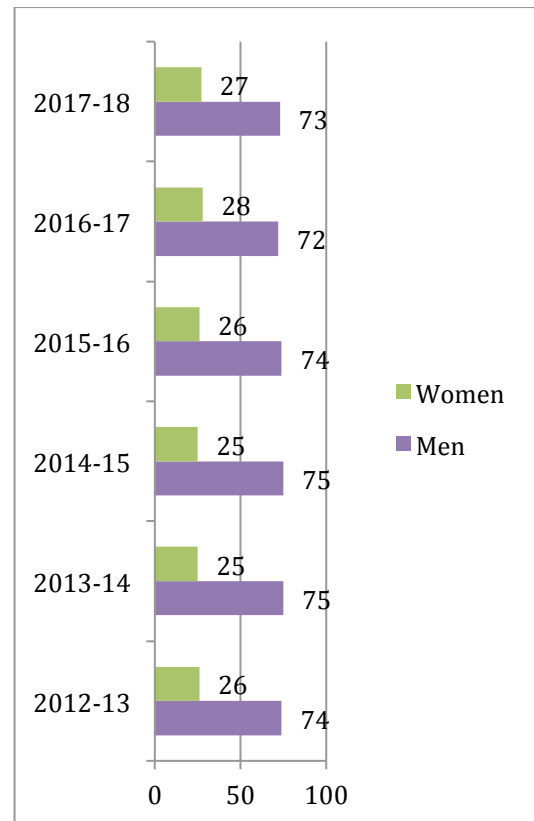
•Regardless of platform, male characters remain more likely than females to be identified by their occupational status, and to be seen at work, actually working. 76% of male characters but 63% of females had identifiable occupations. Further, 61% of males but 50% of females were seen in their work environment, 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, 58% of male characters and 42% of females were seen playing professional roles.

•In 2017-18, women comprised 27% of all creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 28% in 2016-17 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.
Historical Comparison of Women and Men in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles Across Platforms



•**By platform, women accounted for 27% of behind-the-scenes individuals working on broadcast network programs, 28% on cable programs, and 27% on streaming programs.**

•**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 in 2017-18. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 28% in 2016-17, and an increase of only 1 percentage point from 26% in 2006-07.

•**Overall, programs employed behind-the-scenes women in relatively small numbers.** 69% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, only 13% of programs employed 5 or fewer men. 2% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 45% of programs employed 14 or more men.

•**Across platforms, women fared best as producers (40%), followed by executive producers (26%), writers (25%), editors (24%), creators (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, 86% had no women directors, 76% had no women editors, 75% had no women creators, 74% had

Figure 4.
Historical Comparison of Women and Men Creators Across Platforms



no women writers, 25% had no women producers, and 22% had no women executive producers.

•**The percentage of women creators has remained relatively stable since 2014-15 across platforms.** In 2017-18, women comprised 22% of creators. This figure is even with that achieved in 2014-15 (see Figure 4).

•**Across platforms, programs with at least 1 woman creator employed substantially greater percentages of women in other key behind-the-scenes roles and more major female characters than programs with exclusively male creators.** For example, on programs with at least 1 woman creator, women accounted for 27% of directors versus 13% on programs with no women creators. Similarly, on programs with at least 1 woman creator, women

comprised 45% of writers versus 16% on programs with no women creators.

•Across platforms, programs with at least 1 woman executive producer featured more female characters in speaking roles and major roles, 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, females accounted for 42% of major characters. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, females comprised 33% of major characters.

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 2017 through May 2018. 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, BET, Bravo, Discovery, Disney, E, Freeform, FX, HGTV, History, Nickelodeon, TBS, TLC, 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 2017-18, the study tracked 4,833 characters and 5,195 behind-the-scenes credits. Over 21 years – from 1997-98 to 2017-18 -- *Boxed In* has monitored over 38,700 characters and 50,700 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 one 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. In addition, the leadership status of each character was coded. For the purposes of this study, a character was considered a leader if s/he occupied a formal leadership position in an organization, government or group, and his/her instructions and/or behaviors were followed by two or more characters.

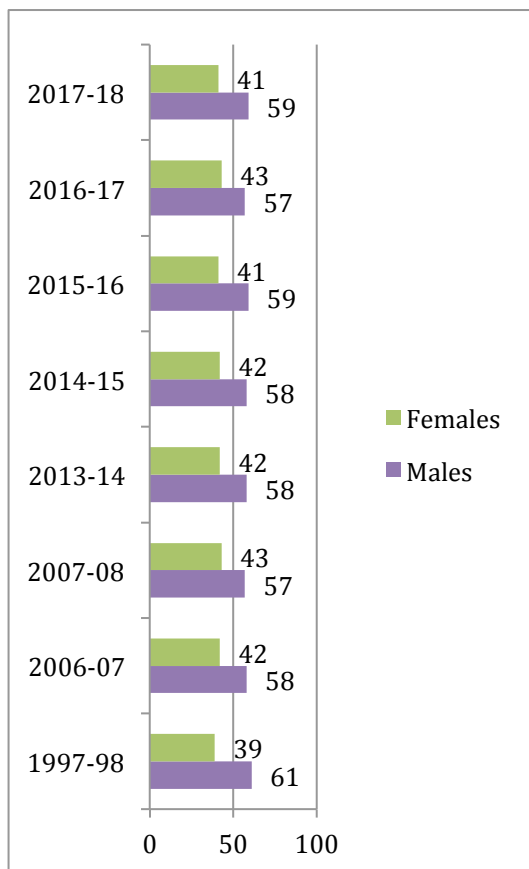
The findings of the study are divided into four major sections. The first section provides the findings for the broadcast networks, offering historical comparisons for 2017-18 with figures dating from 1997-98. The second section provides the findings for cable channels, and the third section examines 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 2017-18, females comprised 41% of all speaking characters appearing on broadcast network programs. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 43% in 2016-17. The figure is slightly below the percentage achieved a decade ago in 2007-08 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of All Speaking Female Characters on Broadcast Network Programs



•Last year, 42% of major characters were female. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 43% in 2016-17. For the purposes of this study, major characters appear in more than 1 scene and are instrumental to the narrative of the story.

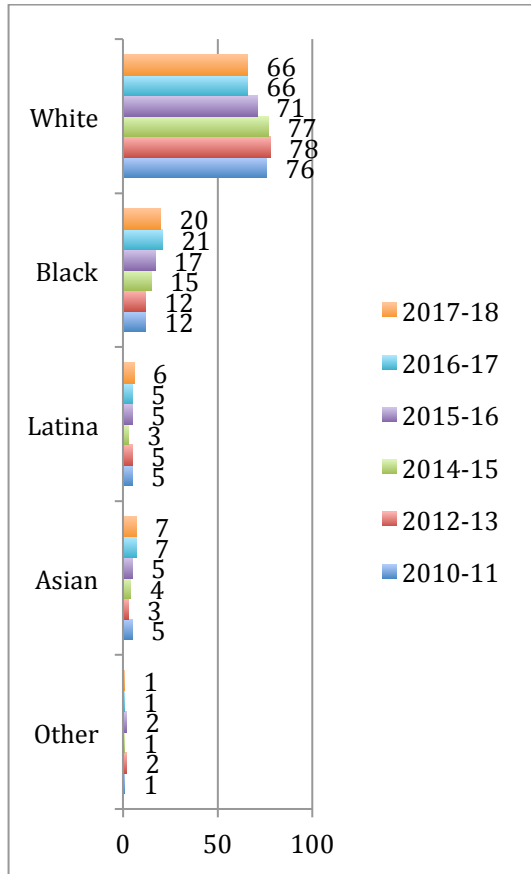
•Programs appearing on NBC featured the highest percentage of female characters (44%), followed by ABC (43%), Fox (40%), CW (39%), and CBS (37%).

•Females comprised 42% of characters on reality programs and comedy programs, and 41% of characters on dramas.

•In 2017-18, 66% of females were White (even with the percentage in 2016-17), 20% were Black (down 1 percentage point from 21% in 2016-17), 7% were Asian (even with the percentage achieved in 2016-17), 6% were Latina (up 1 percentage point from 2016-17), and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity (even with the percentage achieved in 2016-17). It should be noted that Latinas achieved a historical high in 2017-18. However, Latinas continue to be dramatically underrepresented on broadcast network programs in comparison with their representation in the U.S. population (see Figure 6).



*Figure 6.
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 (63%), whereas the majority of males were in their 30s and 40s (58%).

- Female characters experienced a precipitous decline in numbers from their 30s (37%) to their 40s (16%). The percentage of male characters also declined, but it was not as dramatic (from 34% to 24%).

- 39% of male characters were 40 and older but only 24% of female characters were 40 and older.

- Few characters of either sex age into their 60s and beyond. 5% of males but only 1% of females were 60 and above.

Women Behind the Scenes

- In 2017-18, 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 the last three years (see Figure 7).

*Figure 7.
Historical Comparison of Women
Working Behind the Scenes on
Broadcast Network Programs*



- 60% of the programs employed 5 or fewer women in the roles considered. 2% of programs employed 5 or fewer men.
- Only 3% of the programs employed 14 or more women in the roles considered. 61% employed 14 or more men.
- CW programs had the highest percentage of behind-the-scenes women (36%), followed by ABC (33%), NBC (25%), Fox (25%), and CBS (23%).
- Reality programs featured the highest percentage of women working behind the scenes (30%), followed by comedies (29%), and dramas (26%).

•Overall, women fared best as producers (40%), followed by writers (25%), executive producers (25%), editors (24%), creators (21%), directors (19%), and directors of photography (1%) (see Figure 8).

•In 2017-18, women comprised 21% of creators on broadcast network programs. This represents no change from 2016-17.

•Women accounted for 25% of executive producers working on broadcast network programs. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 26% in 2016-17.

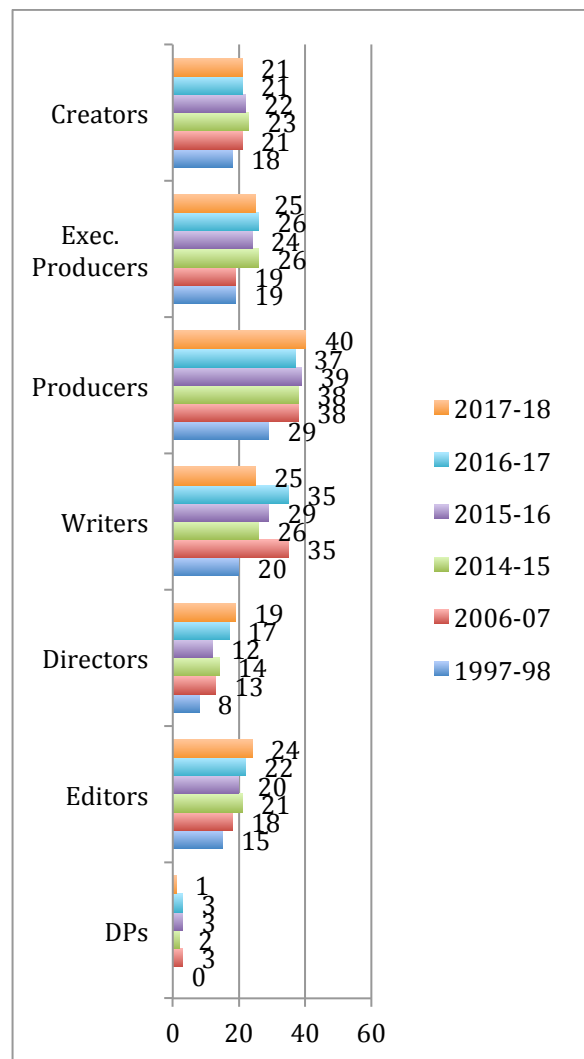
•In 2017-18, women comprised 40% of producers working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 37% in 2016-17.

•Women accounted for 25% of writers working on broadcast network programs. This represents a decline of 10 percentage points from 35% in 2016-17.

•Women comprised 19% of directors working on broadcast network programs last year. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 17% in 2016-17.

•In 2017-18, women accounted for 24% of editors working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 22% in 2016-17.

Figure 8.
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Behind-the-Scenes Women by Role on Broadcast Network Programs



- Women accounted for 1% of directors of photography working on broadcast programs last year. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 3% in 2016-17.
- In 2017-18, 99% of the broadcast programs had no women DPs, 81% had no women directors, 76% had no women editors, 73% had no women creators, 70% had no women writers, 16% had no women producers, and 15% had no women executive producers.

Findings for Cable (Basic and Premium) Programs

Females On Screen

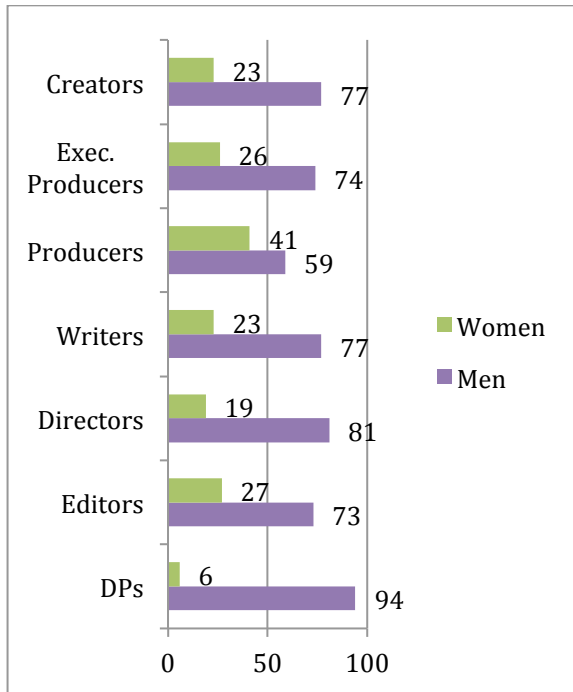
- In 2017-18, females accounted for 40% of *all speaking characters* on cable (basic and premium) programs. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 36% in 2016-17.
- Females comprised 39% of *major characters* on cable programs. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 34% in 2016-17. For the purposes of this study, *major characters* appeared in more than 1 scene and were instrumental to the narrative of the story.
- Regarding race and ethnicity on cable programs, 69% of females were White, 19% were Black, 6% were Latina, 5% were Asian, 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 (59%), whereas the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (53%).

- 43% of male characters but only 24% of female characters were 40 or older.
- Few characters were in their 60s or older. 8% of male characters but only 2% of female characters were 60 or older.

Women Behind the Scenes

- Women comprised 28% of creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on cable programs in 2017-18. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 27% in 2016-17.
- 77% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 26% employed 5 or fewer men.
- 1% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 22% employed 14 or more men.
- Women fared best as producers (41%), followed by editors (27%), executive producers (26%), writers (23%), creators (23%), directors (19%), and directors of photography (6%) (see Figure 9).
- Women comprised 23% of creators working on premium and basic cable programs in 2017-18.
- Women accounted for 26% of executive producers working on premium and basic cable programs in 2017-18.

*Figure 9.
Comparison of Women and Men
Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles
on Cable Programs
in 2017-18*



- Women comprised 41% of producers working on premium and basic cable programs in 2017-18.
- Women accounted for 23% of writers working on premium and basic cable programs in 2017-18.
- Women comprised 19% of directors working on premium and basic cable programs in 2017-18.
- Women accounted for 27% of editors working on premium and basic cable programs in 2017-18.
- Women comprised 6% of directors of photography working on premium and basic cable programs in 2017-18.

•95% of the programs had no women directors of photography, 89% had no women directors, 82% had no women creators, 82% had no women writers, 75% had no women editors, 35% had no women producers, and 27% had no women executive producers.

Findings for Streaming Programs

Females On Screen

- In 2017-18, females accounted for 39% of *all speaking characters* on streaming programs. This represents a decline of 5 percentage points from 44% in 2016-17.
- Females comprised 41% of *major characters* on streaming programs. This represents a decline of 6 percentage points from 47% in 2016-17. For the purposes of this study, *major characters* appeared in more than 1 scene and were instrumental to the narrative of the story.

• Regarding race and ethnicity on streaming programs, 66% of females were White, 17% were Black, 9% were Latina, 7% were Asian, and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity.

• Female characters were younger than their male counterparts. 49% of female characters were in their 20s and 30s, whereas 57% of male characters were in their 30s and 40s.

• 42% of male characters but only 33% of female characters were 40 or older.

• Few characters were in their 60s or older. 7% of male characters and 5% of female characters were 60 or older.

Women Behind the Scenes

•Women comprised 27% of creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on streaming programs in 2017-18. This represents a decline of 5 percentage points from 32% in 2016-17.

•66% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 2% employed 5 or fewer men.

•5% of programs employed 13 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 61% employed 13 or more men.

•Women fared best as producers (39%), followed by writers (27%), executive producers (26%), creators (25%), editors (19%), directors (10%), and directors of photography (3%) (see Figure 10).

•Women comprised 25% of creators working on streaming programs in 2017-18.

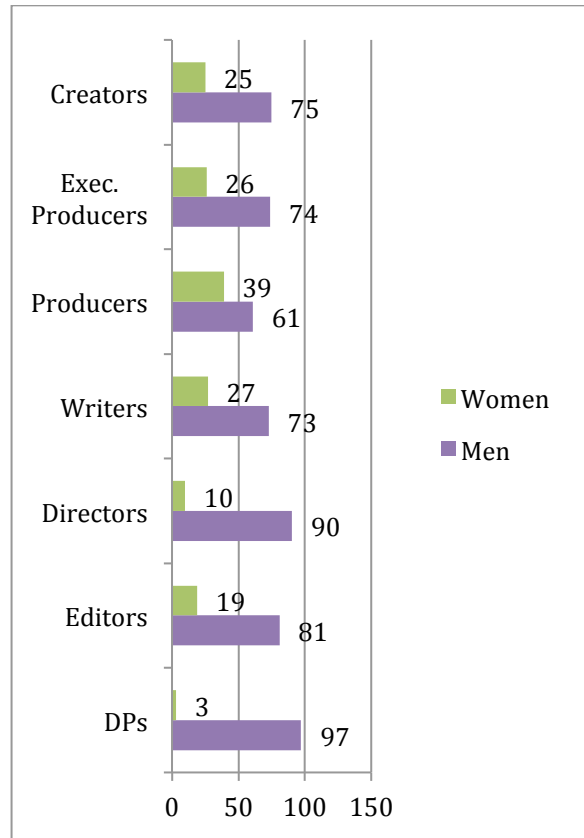
•Women accounted for 26% of executive producers working on streaming programs in 2017-18.

•Women comprised 39% of producers working on streaming programs in 2017-18.

•Women accounted for 27% of writers working on streaming programs in 2017-18.

•Women comprised 10% of directors working on streaming programs in 2017-18.

*Figure 10.
Comparison of Women and Men
Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles
on Streaming Programs
in 2017-18*



•Women accounted for 19% of editors working on streaming programs in 2017-18.

•Women comprised 3% of directors of photography working streaming programs in 2017-18.

•98% of the programs had no women directors of photography, 90% had no women directors, 81% had no women editors, 66% had no women writers, 63% had no women creators, and 29% had no women executive producers, and 22% had no women producers.

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

Females On Screen

- In 2017-18, females accounted for 40% of *all speaking characters* on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 42% in 2016-17.

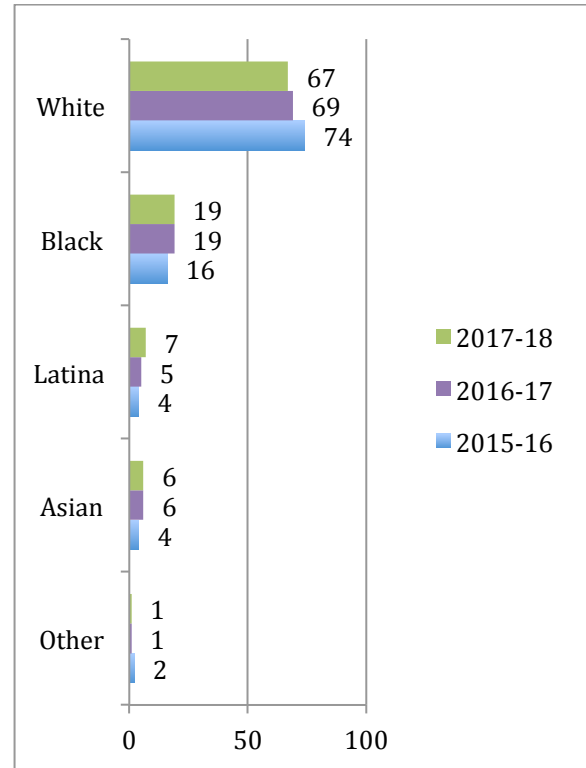
- Females accounted for 40% of *major characters* on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 42% in 2016-17. For the purposes of this study, *major characters* appeared in more than 1 scene and were instrumental to the narrative of the story.

- 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, 67% of females were White (down 2 percentage points from 69% in 2016-17), 19% were Black (no change from 2016-17), 6% were Asian (no change from 2016-17), 7% were Latina (up 2 percentage points from 5% in 2016-17), and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity (no change from 2016-17) (see Figure 11).

- Overall, female characters were younger than males. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (59%), whereas the majority of male

Figure 11.
Historical Comparison of Race and
Ethnicity of Female Characters



characters were in their 30s and 40s (56%).

- Female characters experienced a precipitous decline from their 30s to their 40s. 33% of females were in their 30s but only 16% 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 24% 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. 7% of male characters but only 2% of females were 60 or older.

- Viewers were more likely to know the occupational status of male characters

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than female characters. 76% of male characters and 63% of female characters had an identifiable occupation.

- Males were more likely than females to be seen at work and actually working. 61% of male characters and 50% 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. 48% of females but 34% 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. 58% of males but 42% of females played work-oriented roles.

- Males were twice as likely as females to be portrayed as leaders. 8% of male characters but 4% of females were leaders. For the purposes of this study, a character was considered a leader if s/he occupied a formal leadership position in an organization, government or group, and his/her instructions and/or behaviors were followed by two or more characters.

#### *Women Behind the Scenes*

- Overall, women comprised 27% of creators, directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs in 2017-18. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 28% in 2016-17.

- 69% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles

considered. In contrast, 13% of programs employed 5 or fewer men.

- 2% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 45% of the programs considered employed 14 or more men.

- Women fared best as producers (40%), followed by executive producers (26%), writers (25%), editors (24%), creators (22%), directors (17%), and directors of photography (3%) (see Figure 12).

- Women comprised 22% of creators working on all of the programs considered in 2017-18. This represents a decline of 1 percentage point from 23% in 2016-17.

- Women accounted for 26% of executive producers working on all of the programs considered. This represents a decline of 2 percentage points from 28% in 2016-17.

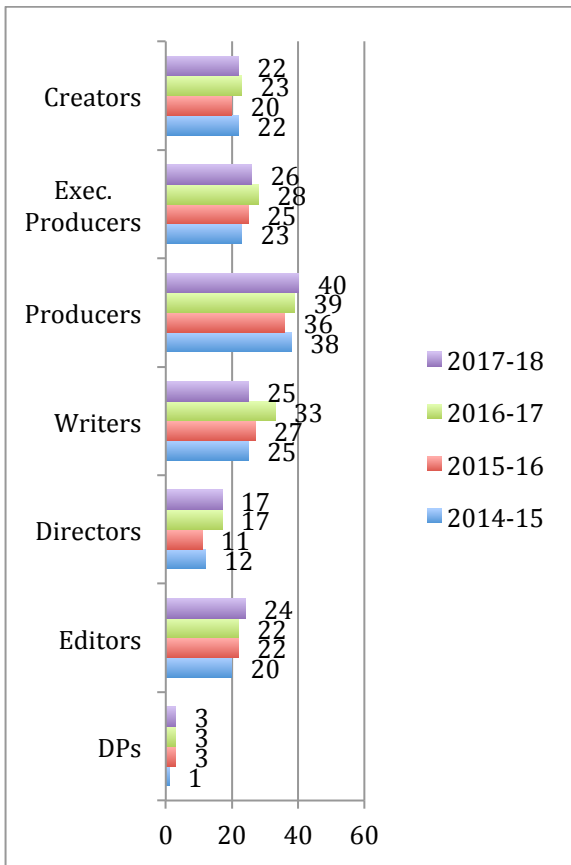
- Women comprised 40% of producers working on all of the programs considered in 2017-18. This represents an increase of 1 percentage point from 39% in 2016-17.

- Women accounted for 25% of writers working on all of the programs considered. This represents a decline of 8 percentage points from 33% in 2016-17.

- Women comprised 17% of directors working on all of the programs considered in 2017-18. This represents no change from 2016-17.

- Women comprised 24% of editors working on all of the programs

Figure 12.  
Historical Comparison of Women Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles

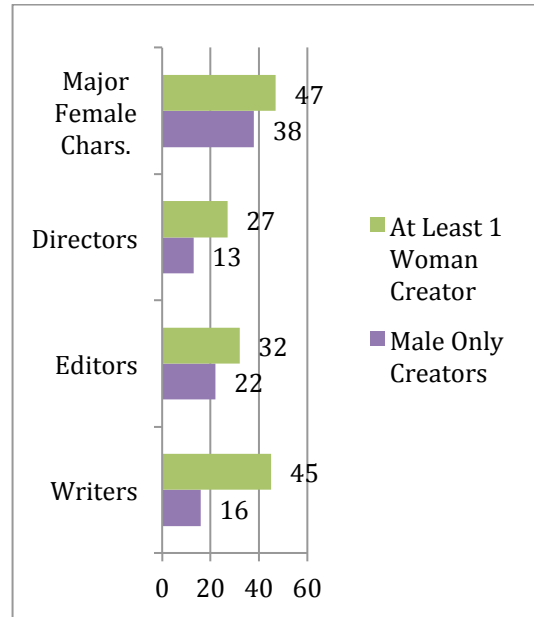


considered. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 2016-17.

- Women accounted for 3% of directors of photography working on all of the programs considered in 2017-18. This represents no change from 2016-17.

- Overall, 97% of the programs considered had no women directors of photography, 86% had no women directors, 76% had no women editors, 75% had no women creators, 74% had no women writers, 25% had no women producers, and 22% had no women executive producers.

Figure 13.  
Comparison of Programs with at Least 1 Woman Creator vs. Programs with Exclusively Male Creators



*Important Relationships*

- Programs with at least 1 woman creator featured more major female characters than programs with exclusively male creators (see Figure 13).

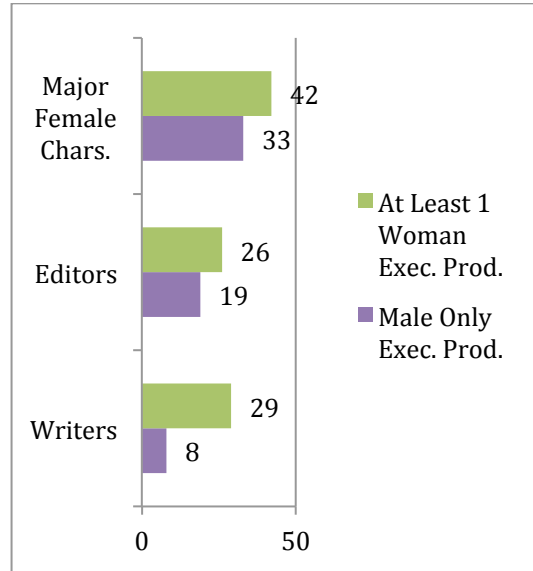
- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, females comprised 47% of major characters. On programs with exclusively male creators, females accounted for 38% of major characters.

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

- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 27% of directors. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 13% of directors.

- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 45% of writers. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 16% of writers.
- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 32% of editors. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 22% of editors.
- Programs with at least 1 woman *executive producer* featured more major female characters, and had higher percentages of women writers and editors than programs with exclusively male executive producers (see Figure 14).
- On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, females accounted for 42% of *major characters*. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, females comprised 33% of *major characters*.
- On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women accounted for 29% of writers. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women accounted for 8% of writers.
- On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women comprised 26% of editors. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women accounted for 19% of editors.

*Figure 14.  
Comparison of Programs with at Least 1  
Woman Executive Producer vs.  
Programs with Exclusively Male  
Executive Producers*



### *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@sdsu.edu](mailto:lauzen@sdsu.edu).

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