

Equal opportunity through knowledge and research

# ***Boxed In 2018-19: 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*

September 2019

---

## Key Findings

For the last 22 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.

• *Across platforms, the percentage of female characters in speaking roles increased from 40% in 2017-18 to 45% in 2018-19. This represents a recent historic high (see Figure 1).* By platform, females comprised 44% of characters on broadcast programs, 45% of characters on cable programs, and 45% of characters on streaming programs.

• *Females comprised 45% of major characters on broadcast network, cable and streaming programs.* This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 40% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high (see Figure 2).

• *Overall, women accounted for 31% of individuals working in key behind-the-scenes positions. This represents a recent historic high, besting the previous high of 28% set in 2016-17 (see Figure 3).* Women working as creators, directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and directors of photography also reached historic highs on broadcast programs (31%), and cable programs (31%). Women accounted for 30% of behind-

the-scenes individuals working on streaming programs, down 2 percentage points from 32% in 2016-17.

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

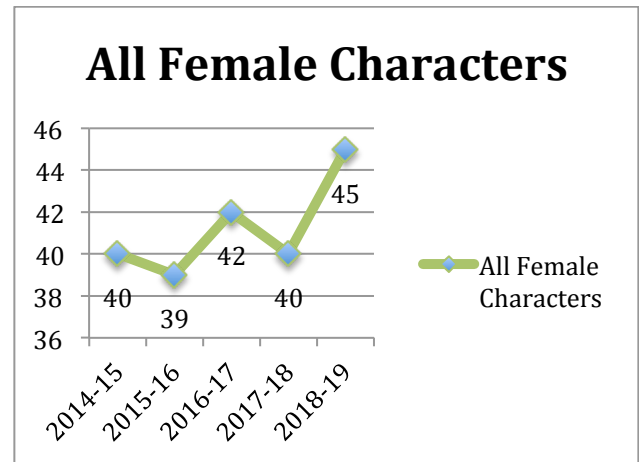


Figure 2.  
Historical Comparison of Females as Major Characters Across Platforms

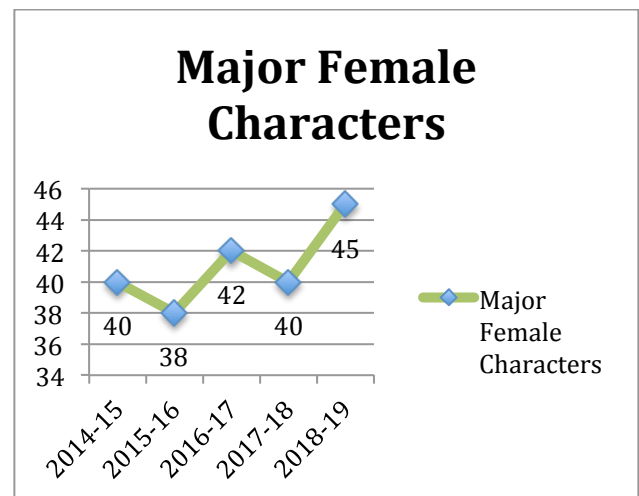
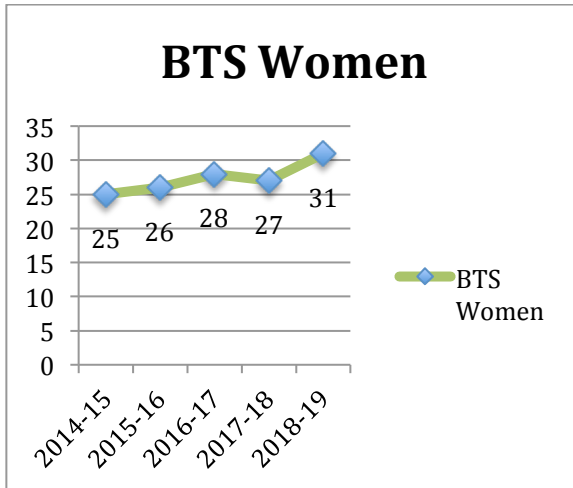


Figure 3.  
Historical Comparison of Women and Men in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles Across Platforms



•Overall, programs employed relatively low numbers of women behind the scenes. 52% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 17% of programs employed 5 or fewer men.

3% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 38% employed 14 or more men.

•Regarding race and ethnicity across platforms, 70% of female characters were White (up 3 percentage points from 67% in 2017-18), 17% were Black (down 2 percentage points from 19% in 2017-18), 7% were Asian (up 1 percentage point from 6% in 2017-18), 6% were Latina (down 1 percentage point from 7% in 2017-18), and 1% were of some other race of ethnicity (no change from 2017-18). Latinas remain dramatically underrepresented when

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

•Overall, female characters were younger than males. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (56%), whereas the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (59%).

•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 66% of females had identifiable occupations. Further, 56% of males but 44% 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, 53% of female characters and 39% of males were seen playing personal-life roles.

•After years of stagnation, the employment of women working in key behind-the-scenes positions on broadcast network programs inched upward in 2018-19, increasing from 27% in 2017-18 to 31% in 2018-19. It is unclear whether 2018-19 marked the beginning of an upward trend in women's behind-the-scenes employment or represented a single good year amidst overall stagnation.

•Across platforms, women fared best as producers (40%), followed by writers (35%), executive producers (30%),

*directors (26%), creators (25%), editors (21%), and directors of photography (5%).*

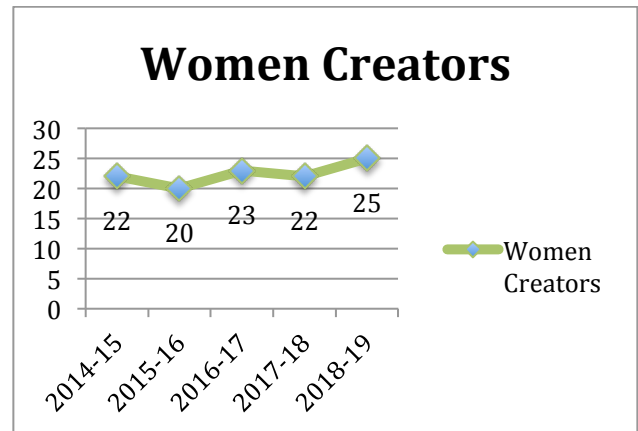
**•Across platforms, startlingly high percentages of programs employed no women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered.** 96% of the programs considered had no women directors of photography, 79% had no women directors, 77% had no women editors, and 77% had no women creators.

**•The percentage of women creators inched upward in 2018-19 after many years of stagnation.** In 2018-19, women accounted for 25% of creators, up from 22% in 2017-18. It is unclear whether 2018-19 marked the beginning of an upward trend in the percentage of women creators or if it represented a single year of improvement (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 featured more female characters in major and speaking roles than programs with exclusively male creators.** For example, on programs with at least 1 woman creator, women accounted for 65% of writers versus 19% 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

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



woman executive producer, women accounted for 38% of writers. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women comprised 12% of writers.

---

## 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 2018 through May 2019. 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).

In 2018-19, the study tracked over 5,100 characters and more than 5,000 behind-the-scenes credits. Over 22 years – from 1997-98 to 2018-19 -- *Boxed In* has monitored over 43,000 characters and more than 55,000 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 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.

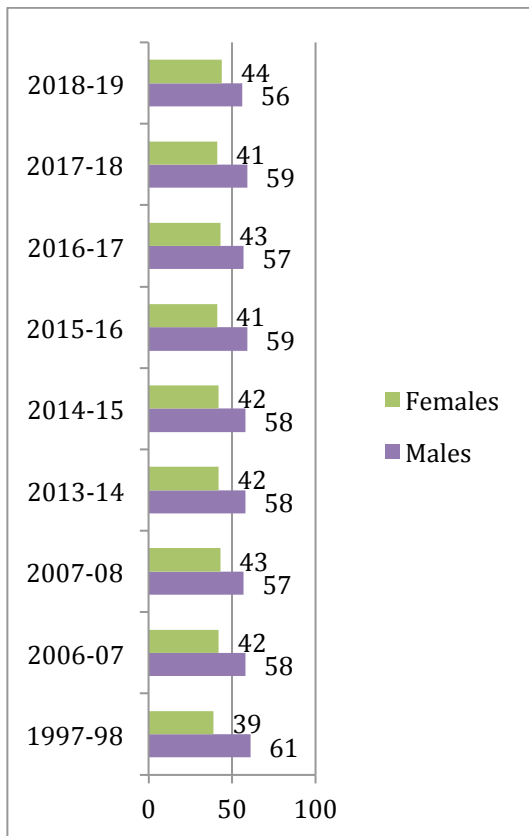
The findings of the study are divided into four major sections. The first section provides the findings for the broadcast networks, offering historical comparisons for 2018-19 with figures dating from 1997-98. The second section provides the findings for cable channels, and the third section examines 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 2018-19, females comprised 44% of all speaking characters appearing on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 41% in 2017-18. The figure represents a recent historic high, but exceeds the prior high of 43% set in 2016-17 by just 1 percentage point (see Figure 5).

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



•44% of *major characters* were female. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 42% in 2017-18. For the purposes of this study, *major*

*characters* appeared in more than 1 scene and were instrumental to the narrative of the story.

•In 2018-19, 64% of females were White (down 2 percentage points from 66% in 2017-18), 21% were Black (up 1 percentage point from 20% in 2017-18), 7% were Latina (up 1 percentage point from 6% in 2017-18), 8% were Asian (up 1 percentage point from 7% in 2017-18), and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity (even with the percentage achieved in 2017-18) (see Figure 6). It should be noted that Latinas achieved a recent historic high in 2018-19. However, they continue to be dramatically underrepresented in broadcast network programs when compared with their representation in the U.S. population.

•Female characters continue to be younger than their male counterparts. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (60%), whereas the majority of males were in their 30s and 40s (57%).

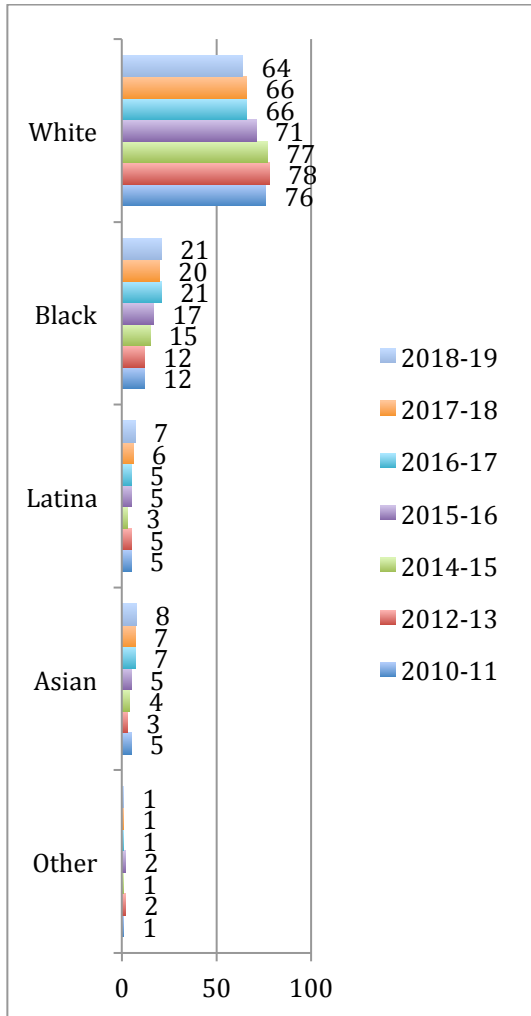
•Female characters experienced a precipitous decline in numbers from their 30s (38%) to their 40s (17%). The percentage of male characters also declined, but it was not as dramatic (from 32% to 25%).

•42% of male characters were 40 and older but only 27% of female characters were 40 and older.

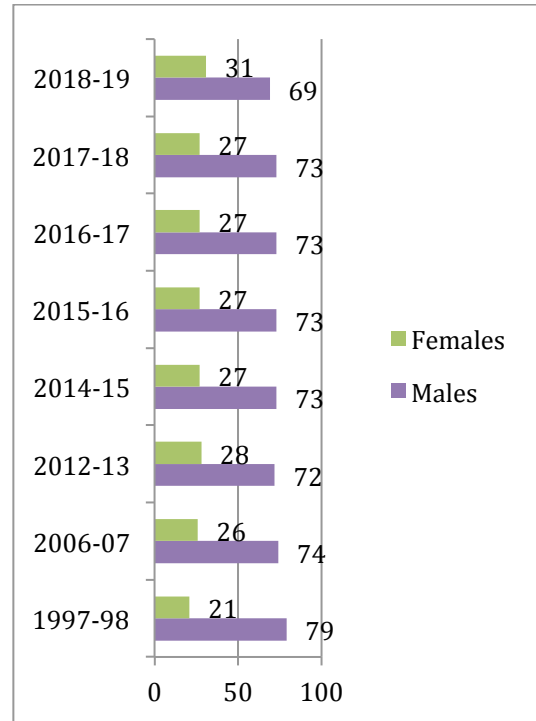
•Slightly more than twice as many males as females age into their 60s and beyond. 7% of males but only 3% of females were 60 and above.



**Figure 6.**  
*Historical Comparison of Percentages of Female Characters by Race/Ethnicity on Broadcast Network Programs*



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



*Women Behind the Scenes*

•In 2018-19, women accounted for 31% of all creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and directors of photography working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 27% in 2017-18 (see Figure 7). This is a recent historic high, up from the previous high of 28% achieved in 2012-13.

•53% of the programs employed 5 or fewer women in the roles considered. 1% of programs employed 5 or fewer men.

Only 3% of the programs employed 14 or more women in the roles considered. 54% employed 14 or more men.

•Overall, women fared best as producers (40%), followed by writers (35%), directors (30%), executive producers (29%), creators (25%), editors (20%), and directors of photography (5%) (see Figure 8).

•In 2018-19, women comprised 25% of creators on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 21% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.



•Women accounted for 29% of executive producers working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 25% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

•In 2018-19, women comprised 40% of producers working on broadcast network programs. This represents no change from 2017-18.

•Women accounted for 35% of writers working on broadcast network programs. This represents an increase of 10 percentage points from 25% in 2017-18, and is even with the figure achieved in 2016-17.

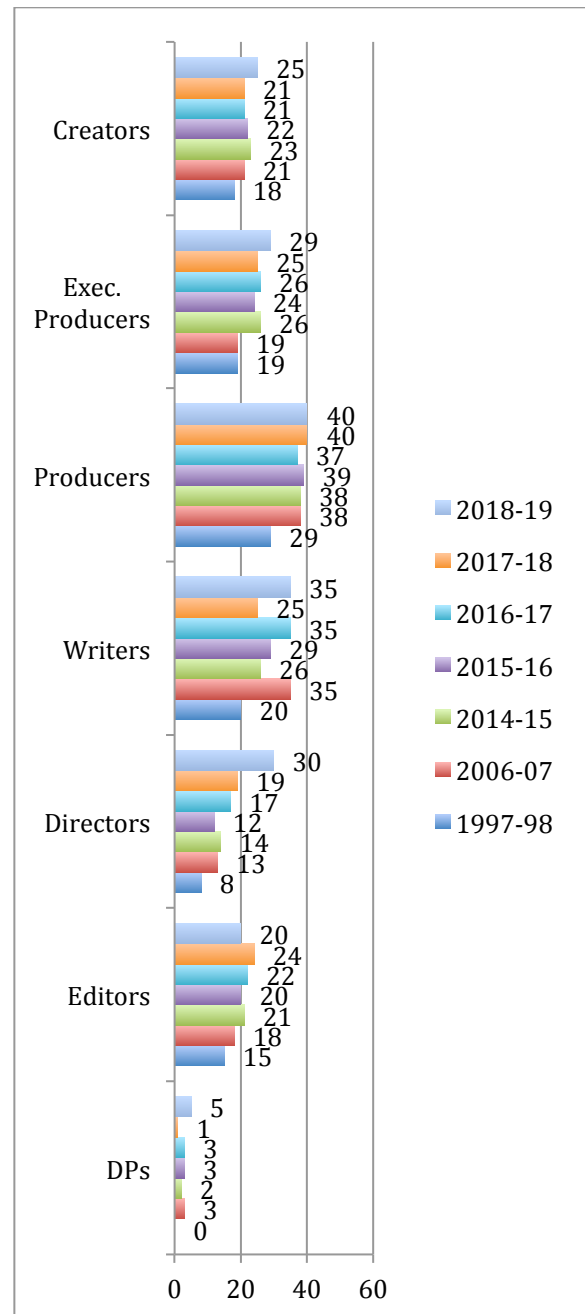
•Women comprised 30% of directors working on broadcast network programs last year. This represents an increase of 11 percentage points from 19% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

•In 2017-18, women accounted for 20% of editors working on broadcast network programs. This represents a decline of 4 percentage points from 24% in 2017-18.

•Women accounted for 5% of directors of photography working on broadcast programs last year. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 1% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

•In 2017-18, 96% of the broadcast programs had no women DPs, 76% had no women editors, 71% had no women creators, and 70% had no women directors.

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





---

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

### *Females On Screen*

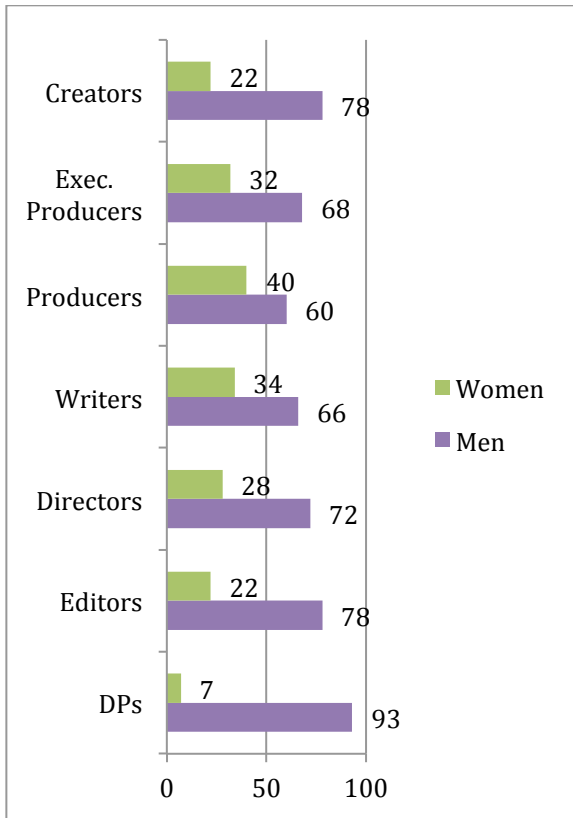
- In 2018-19, females accounted for 45% of *all speaking characters* on cable (basic and premium) programs. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 40% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.
- Females comprised 47% of *major characters* on cable programs. This represents an increase of 8 percentage points from 39% in 2017-18. 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, 76% of females were White (an increase of 7 percentage points from 69% in 2017-18), 14% were Black (a decrease of 5 percentage points from 2017-18), 5% were Latina (a decrease of 1 percentage point from 6% in 2017-18), 5% were Asian (even with 2017-18), and less than 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 (55%), whereas the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (64%).
- 46% of male characters but only 32% of female characters were 40 or older.

- Few characters were in their 60s or older. 7% of male characters but only 4% of female characters 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 2018-19. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 28% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.
- 78% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 38% 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 (40%), followed by writers (34%), executive producers (32%), directors (28%), editors (22%), creators (22%), and directors of photography (7%) (see Figure 9).
- Women comprised 22% of creators working on premium and basic cable programs in 2018-19, a decline of 1 percentage point from 23% in 2017-18.
- Women accounted for 32% of executive producers working on premium and basic cable programs in 2018-19, an increase of 6 percentage points from 26% in 2017-18.

*Figure 9.  
Comparison of Women and Men  
Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles  
on Cable Programs  
in 2018-19*



- Women comprised 40% of producers working on premium and basic cable programs in 2018-19, a decrease of 1 percentage point from 41% in 2017-18.

- Women accounted for 34% of writers working on premium and basic cable programs in 2018-19, an increase of 11 percentage points from 23% in 2017-18.

- Women comprised 28% of directors working on premium and basic cable programs in 2018-19, an increase of 9 percentage points from 19% in 2017-18.

- Women accounted for 22% of editors working on premium and basic cable programs in 2018-19, a decrease of 5 percentage points from 27% in 2017-18.

- Women comprised 7% of directors of photography working on premium and basic cable programs in 2018-19, an increase of 1 percentage point from 6% in 2017-18.

### *Findings for Streaming Programs*

#### *Females On Screen*

- In 2018-19, females accounted for 45% of *all speaking characters* on streaming programs. This represents an increase of 6 percentage points from 39% in 2017-18. It is an increase of 1 percentage point from 44% in 2016-17, and a recent historic high.

- Females comprised 48% of *major characters* on streaming programs. This represents an increase of 7 percentage points from 41% in 2017-18. 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, 68% of females were white (an increase of 2 percentage points from 66% in 2017-18), 15% were black (a decrease of 2 percentage points from 17% in 2017-18), 7% were Latina (a decrease of 2 percentage points from 9% in 2017-18), 9% were Asian (an increase of 2 percentage points from 7% in 2017-18), 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 54% of male characters were in their 30s and 40s.

- 39% of male characters and 31% of female characters were 40 or older.
- Few characters were in their 60s or older. 6% of male characters and 6% 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 streaming programs in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 27% in 2017-18, but a decrease of 2 percentage points from 32% in 2016-17.

•62% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 3% employed 5 or fewer men.

3% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. 44% employed 14 or more men.

•Women fared best as producers (41%), followed by writers (35%), executive producers (30%), creators (29%), editors (21%), directors (15%), and directors of photography (3%) (see Figure 10).

•Women comprised 29% of creators working on streaming programs in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 25% in 2017-18.

•Women accounted for 30% of executive

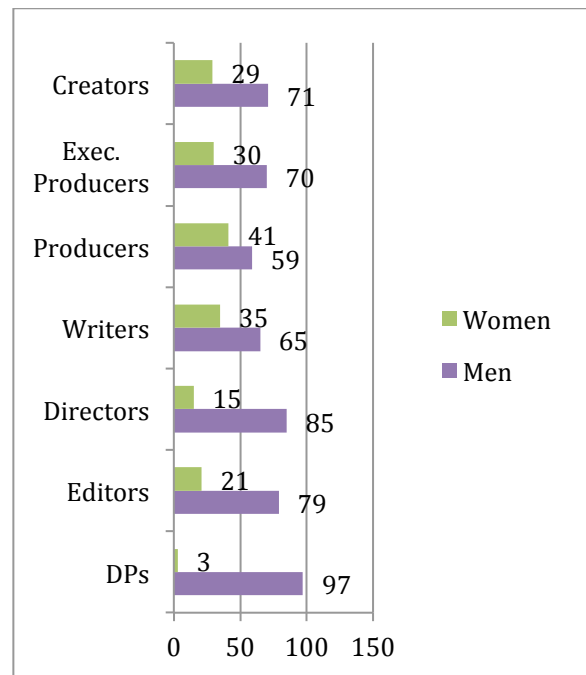
producers working on streaming programs in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 26% in 2017-18.

•Women comprised 41% of producers working on streaming programs in 2018-19, an increase of 2 percentage points from 39% in 2017-18.

•Women accounted for 35% of writers working on streaming programs in 2018-19, an increase of 8 percentage points from 27% in 2017-18.

•Women comprised 15% of directors working on streaming programs in 2018-19, an increase of 5 percentage points from 10% in 2017-18.

*Figure 10.  
Comparison of Women and Men  
Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles  
on Streaming Programs  
in 2018-19*



- Women accounted for 21% of editors working on streaming programs in 2018-19, an increase of 2 percentage points from 19% in 2017-18.

- Women comprised 3% of directors of photography working streaming programs in 2018-19, this represents no change from 2017-18.

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

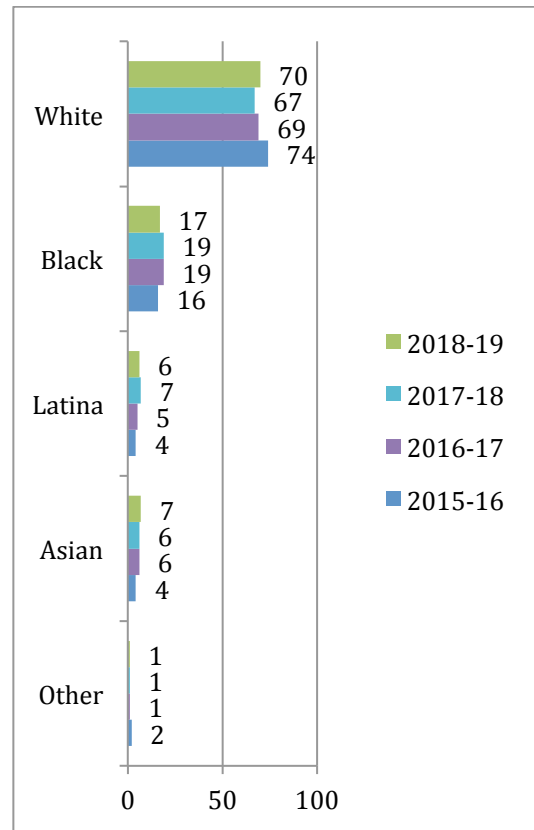
*Females On Screen*

- In 2018-19, females accounted for 45% of *all speaking characters* on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 40% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

- Females accounted for 45% of *major characters* on broadcast network, cable, and streaming programs. This represents an increase of 5 percentage points from 40% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high. For the purposes of this study, *major characters* appeared in more than 1 scene and were instrumental to the narrative of the story.

- Regarding the race and ethnicity of female characters in *speaking roles*, 70% of females were White (up 3 percentage points from 67% in 2017-18), 17% were Black (down 2 percentage points from 19% in 2017-18), 6% were Latina (down 1 percentage point from 7% in 2017-18), 7% were Asian (up 1 percentage point from 6% in 2017-18), and 1% were of some other race or ethnicity (no change from 2017-18) (see Figure 11).

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



- Regarding the race and ethnicity of female characters in *major roles*, 71% of females were White, 17% were Black, 6% were Latina, 6% were Asian, and less than 1 percent were of some other race or ethnicity.

- Overall, female characters were younger than males. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (56%), whereas the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (59%).

- Female characters experienced a precipitous decline from their 30s to their 40s. 36% 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. 34% of male characters were in their 30s but 25% 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 4% of females were 60 or older.

- Viewers were more likely to know the occupational status of male characters than female characters. 75% of male characters and 66% of female characters had an identifiable occupation.

- Males were more likely than females to be seen at work and actually working. 56% of male characters and 44% 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. 53% of females but 39% 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 2018-19. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 27% in 2017-18.

- 52% of programs employed 5 or fewer women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 17% of programs employed 5 or fewer men.

- 3% of programs employed 14 or more women in the behind-the-scenes roles considered. In contrast, 38% of the programs considered employed 14 or more men.

- Women fared best as producers (40%), followed by writers (35%), executive producers (30%), directors (26%), creators (25%), editors (21%), and directors of photography (5%) (see Figure 12).

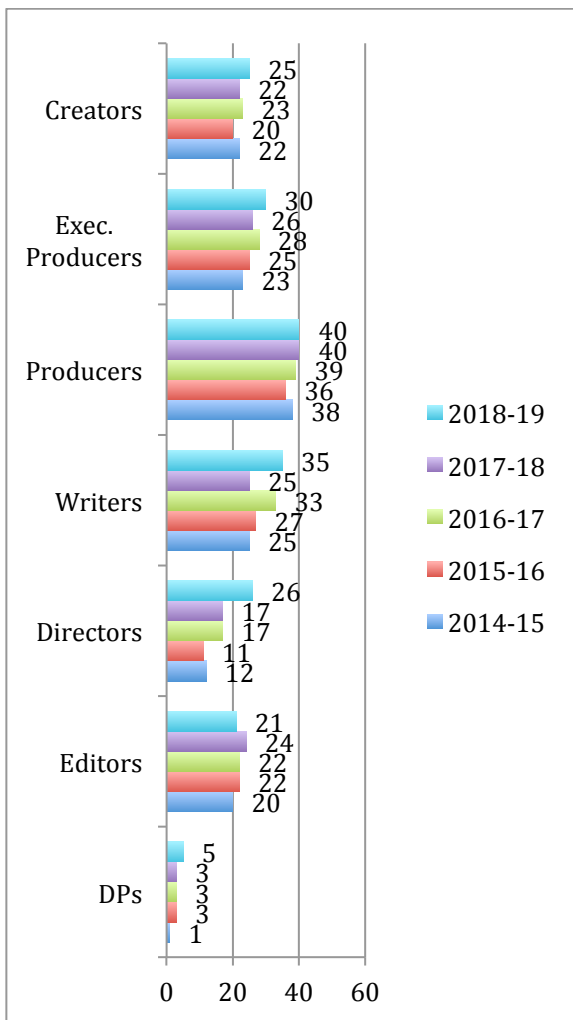
- Women comprised 25% of creators working on all of the programs considered in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points from 22% in 2017-18, and is a recent historic high.

- Women accounted for 30% of executive producers working on all of the programs considered. This represents an increase of 4 percentage points from 26% in 2017-18, and is a recent historic high.

- Women comprised 40% of producers working on all of the programs considered in 2018-19. This represents no change from 2017-18.

- Women accounted for 35% of writers working on all of the programs considered. This represents an increase of 10 percentage points from 25% in 2017-18, and an increase of 2 percentage points from 33% in 2016-17. It is a recent historic high.

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



•Women comprised 26% of directors working on all of the programs considered in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 9 percentage points from 17% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

•Women comprised 21% of editors working on all of the programs considered. This represents a decrease of 3 percentage points from 24% in 2017-18.

•Women accounted for 5% of directors of photography working on all of the programs considered in 2018-19. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 3% in 2017-18, and a recent historic high.

•Overall, 96% of the programs considered had no women directors of photography, 79% had no women editors, and 77% had no women creators.

### Important Relationships

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

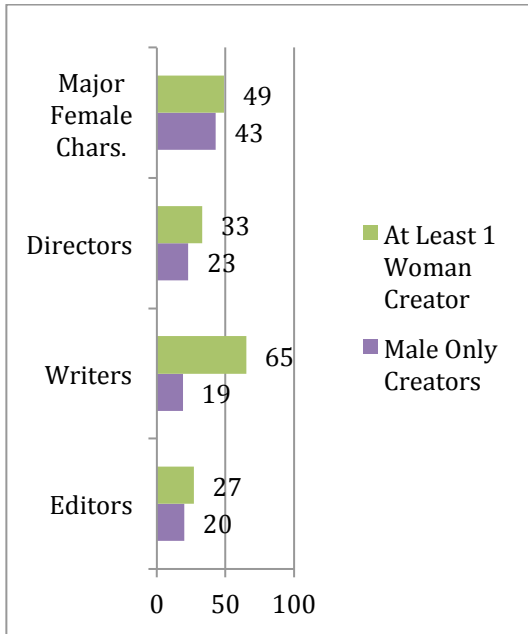
On programs with at least 1 woman creator, females comprised 49% of major characters. On programs with exclusively male creators, females accounted for 43% of major characters.

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

•On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 33% of directors. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 23% of directors.



*Figure 13.*  
*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 65% of writers. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 19% of writers.

- On programs with at least 1 woman creator, women comprised 27% of editors. On programs with exclusively male creators, women accounted for 20% of editors.

- Programs with at least 1 woman *executive producer* featured more major female characters, and had higher percentages of women directors, 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 46% of major characters. On

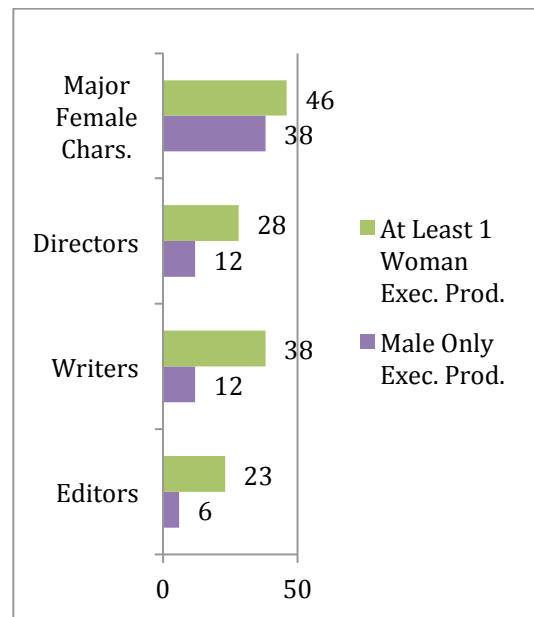
programs with exclusively male executive producers, females comprised 38% of major characters.

- On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women accounted for 28% of directors. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women comprised 12% of directors.

- On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women accounted for 38% of writers. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women accounted for 12% of writers.

- On programs with at least 1 woman executive producer, women comprised 23% of editors. On programs with exclusively male executive producers, women accounted for 6% 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 discussion, activism, and reform. 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).

Copyright © 2019 – All rights reserved.

