

## **WGAW 2015 TV Staffing Brief**

The 2015 TV Staffing Brief examines employment patterns for 2724 writers<sup>1</sup> working on 292 television shows during the 2013-14 season.<sup>2</sup> These shows aired on 36 broadcast and cable networks and were subject to Writers Guild of America entertainment industry bargaining agreement. The data analyzed in this brief were collected for each show during the course of ongoing Guild business.

This brief highlights three groups of writers who traditionally have been underemployed in the Hollywood entertainment industry — women, minority, and older writers. It documents the employment experiences of these groups of writers relative to their male, white, and younger counterparts in order to assess the degree to which progress is being made in television sector diversity. The findings in the brief will be included later this year in the 2015 Hollywood Writers Report, the ninth report in a series that considers patterns in employment and earnings in both the television and film sectors. Using these reports as a diagnostic tool, the WGAW seeks to collaborate with other industry stakeholders in efforts to increase the employment opportunities of all writers.

### **Losing Ground**

Over the years, the fortunes of diverse writers in the television sector have ebbed and flowed. While the general pattern consists of an upward trajectory in diverse sector employment, the rate of progress has failed to keep pace with the rapid diversification of the nation's population. This is significant not only in terms of employment opportunity but also in terms of industry bottom-line considerations. Indeed, research is beginning to confirm the common-sense notion that increasingly diverse audiences desire more diverse storytelling.<sup>3</sup> When diverse voices are marginalized or missing altogether in the writer's room, it is less likely that the stories told will hit the mark.

Findings from the previous report in this series — the 2013 WGAW TV Staffing Brief — revealed pockets of promise for diverse television writers amidst minimal overall progress. It showed that while women writers had made small gains in overall staff employment and in executive producer positions since the last report, they remained significantly underrepresented among the writers staffing television shows. Similarly, the report found that although minority television writers had nearly doubled their share of staff positions since the turn of the century, these writers remained far from reaching anything resembling proportionate representation due to minorities' rapidly increasing share of the overall population. And despite the fact that older writers have recently

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<sup>1</sup> The term “ staff writers” is used in this brief to refer to the writers and writer/producers working on a television show staff for all or part of the season. Due to missing values for gender, race/ethnicity, and age, table totals do not always equal 2724 writers.

<sup>2</sup> The 2013-14 season is defined as September 1, 2013-August 31, 2014. Five syndicated programs were also included in the analysis.

<sup>3</sup> See the 2014 Hollywood Diversity Report: Making Sense of the Disconnect, Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA, February 2014.

claimed a majority share of television staff positions and increased their dominant hold on executive producer positions, the previous report noted that these writers still face steeply declining employment prospects as they age.

Findings from the 2015 WGAW TV Staffing Brief reveal that little has changed since the 2011-12 season. In fact, women and minorities have lost a little ground relative to their male and white counterparts since the last brief, both in terms of overall staff positions and in the all-important executive producer ranks. Meanwhile, although writers over 40 continued to claim a majority of all staff writer positions, data from the 2013-14 season show that their employment prospects drop precipitously after age 50.

Below, these general trends are examined more closely.

## **The Headlines**

### *Women Writers' Share of TV Staff Employment Declines*

Since the last staffing brief, women writers' share of television staff employment declined by 1.5 percentage points — from a high of 30.5 percent during the 2011-12 season to 29 percent during the 2013-14 season (see **Figure 1**). This two-year drop erases some of the slow but steady progress women writers have made in the sector since 2001, when their share of employment stood at only 26.8 percent. At slightly more than half of the U.S. population, women remain underrepresented among staff writers by nearly 2 to 1. There were 791 women writers employed across the 292 shows examined in this brief for the 2013-14 season (see **Table 1**).<sup>4</sup>

### *Minority Writers' Share of TV Staff Employment Declines*

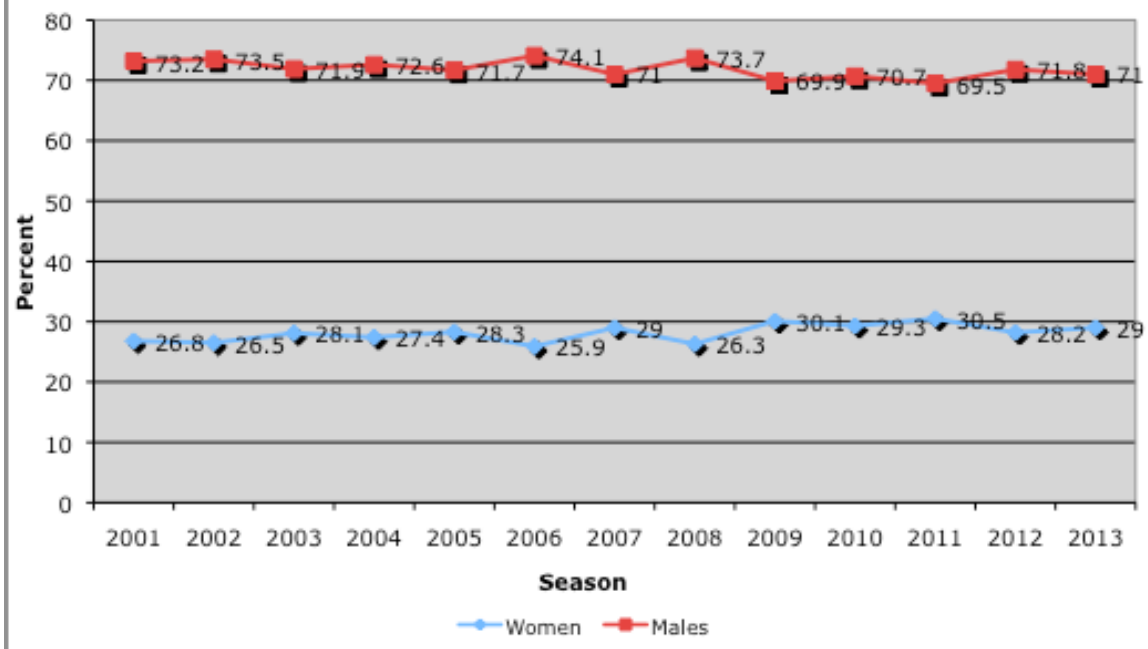
The previous staffing brief revealed that the minority share of television staff employment peaked at 15.6 percent during the 2011-12 season, more than doubling the share the group enjoyed at the turn of the last century. By the 2013-14 season, however, some of these gains were erased. That is, the minority share of staff employment declined by 1.9 percentage points between the seasons, to 13.7 percent in 2013-14 (see **Figure 2**). Because minorities accounted for a little over 37 percent of the U.S. population in 2013, they were thus underrepresented by a factor of nearly 3 to 1 in television staff employment. There were 372 minority writers employed on the 292 shows examined for the 2013-14 season.

When we consider individual racial/ethnic groups (see **Table 1**), we find that much of the gain in the minority share of television staff employment since the 2001-02 season can be attributed to increases in the Asian and Latino shares. That is, the Asian share increased by nearly 2 percentage points (from 1.1 percent in 2001-02 to 2.9 percent in 2013-14),

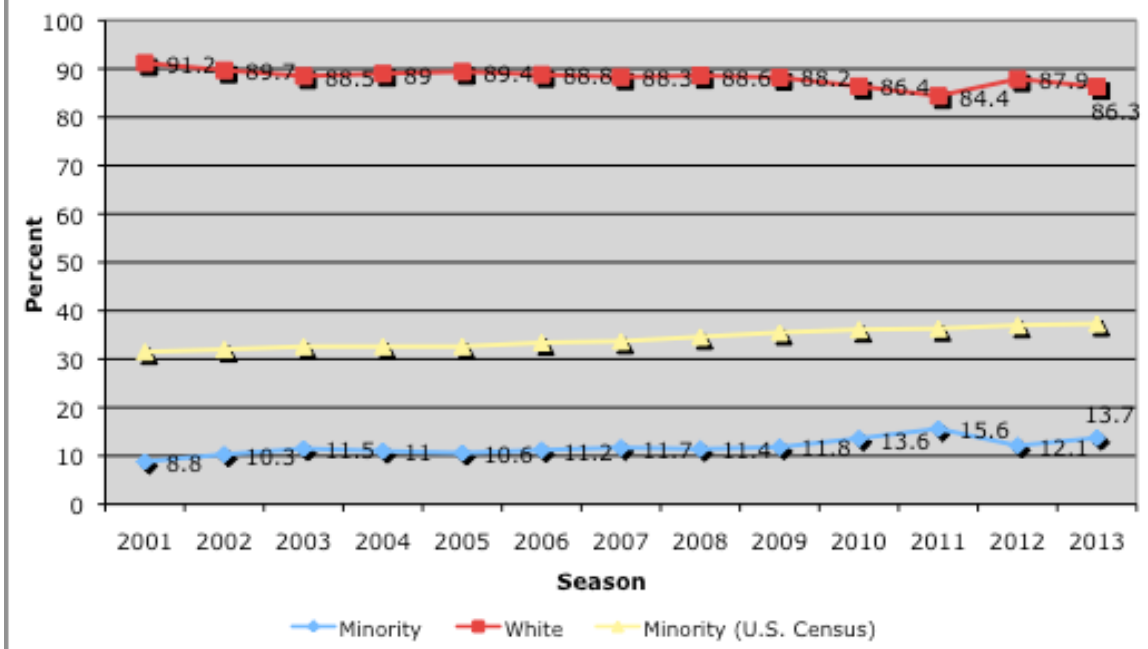
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<sup>4</sup> All tables are presented in the Appendix.

**Figure 1: Women Writers' Share of TV Staff Employment**



**Figure 2: Minority Writers' Share of TV Staff Employment**



while the Latino share increased about a percentage point over the same period (from 1.9 percent to 2.8 percent). By contrast, the black share of staff employment decreased by .7 percentage points over the period (from 6.1 percent during the 2001-02 season to 5.4 percent in 2013-14). There were 146 black writers, 79 Asian writers, 75 Latino writers, 70 multiracial writers, and 2 native writers staffing the shows examined for the 2013-14 season. It should be noted that some of the changes in the numbers for specific minority groups over the years can be attributed to the increase in the share of writers identified as “multiracial”<sup>5</sup> between the 2011-12 and 2013-14 seasons (from 1.5 percent to 2.6 percent).

### *Older Writers’ Majority Share of TV Staff Employment Increases*

Since the 2011-12 season — the last season examined in the previous staffing brief — the over-40 share of staff employment has increased 1.4 percentage points to 57 percent (see **Table 1**). This increase continues the general upward trajectory of staff employment share for older writers evident over the past decade or so (see **Figure 3**). Indeed, between the 2001-02 and 2013-14 seasons, the over-40 share of television staff employment increased by more than 15 percentage points, from 41.8 percent to 57 percent. **Figure 3** shows that the largest year-to-year gain for older writers, 6.7 percentage points, occurred between the 2010-11 and 2011-12 seasons, when older writers first claimed the majority of staff employment.

### *Minority Writers Continue to Staff 60-Minute Shows More Frequently than 30-Minute Shows*

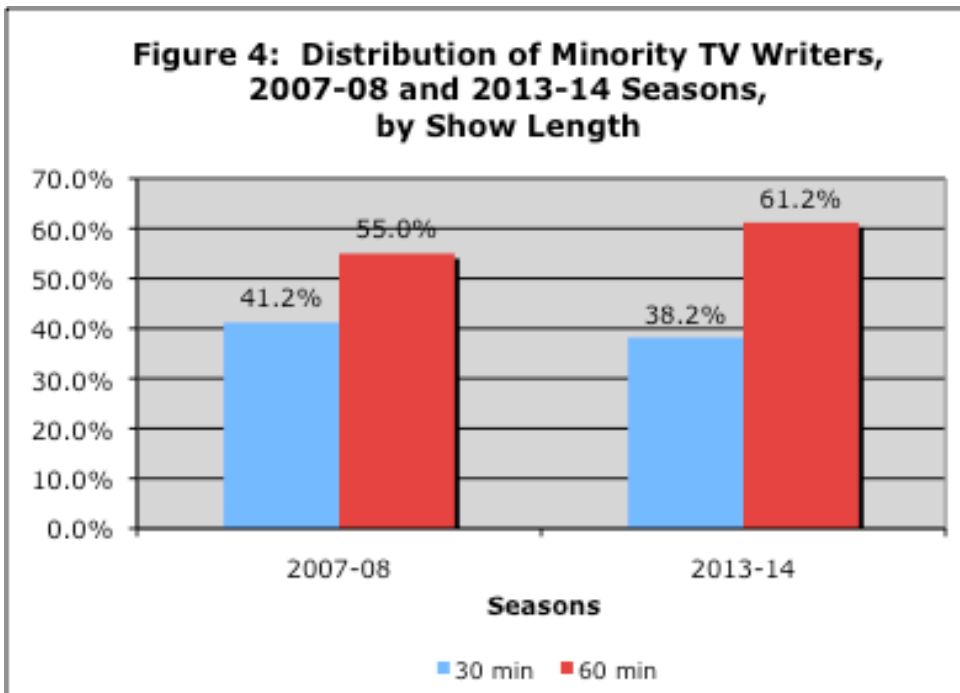
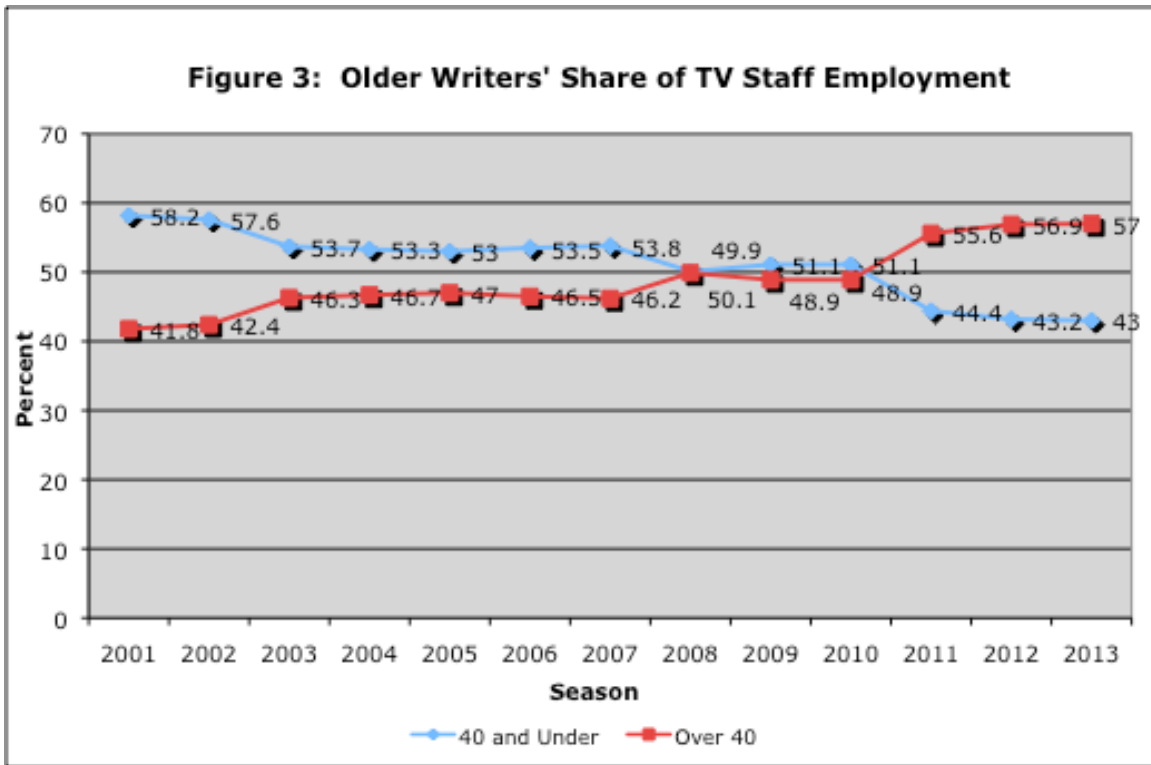
The previous staffing brief revealed that minority writers were considerably more likely to staff television dramas than sitcoms — 62.5 percent of minority staff writers versus 30.9 percent of these writers. **Figure 4** shows that in terms of show length, little has changed since the 2011-12 season. That is, during the 2013-14 season, 61.2 percent of minority staff writers worked on 60-minute shows (which were mostly dramas), while only 38.2 percent worked on 30-minute shows (which were mostly sitcoms).<sup>6</sup> Previous Hollywood Writers Reports, however, noted that minority television writers tended to be ghettoized on sitcom staffs, particularly on black-themed sitcoms. As the numbers of these types of programs ebbed and flowed on the schedule over the years, so did the employment prospects for minority television writers. Indeed, until the recent rise of multicultural dramas like ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Scandal*, there had been few

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<sup>5</sup> Writers who reported belonging to more than one racial or ethnic category were coded as “multiracial” and counted as part of minority writer totals for the analyses in this report. Native writer numbers, because they are so small relative to those for other groups, have been particularly impacted by the rise in writers identified as “multiracial” since the 2011-12 season.

<sup>6</sup> Please note that, unlike in previous seasons, show length was used as a proxy for show genre for 2013-14 analyses. A relatively small number of shows in the 30-minute and 60-minute categories were of genres other than sitcom and drama, respectively (see below).

successful television dramas that featured a critical mass of minority leading roles or writers. But by the 2013-14 season there were a host of other 60-minute shows with sizable numbers of minority staff writers (see below).

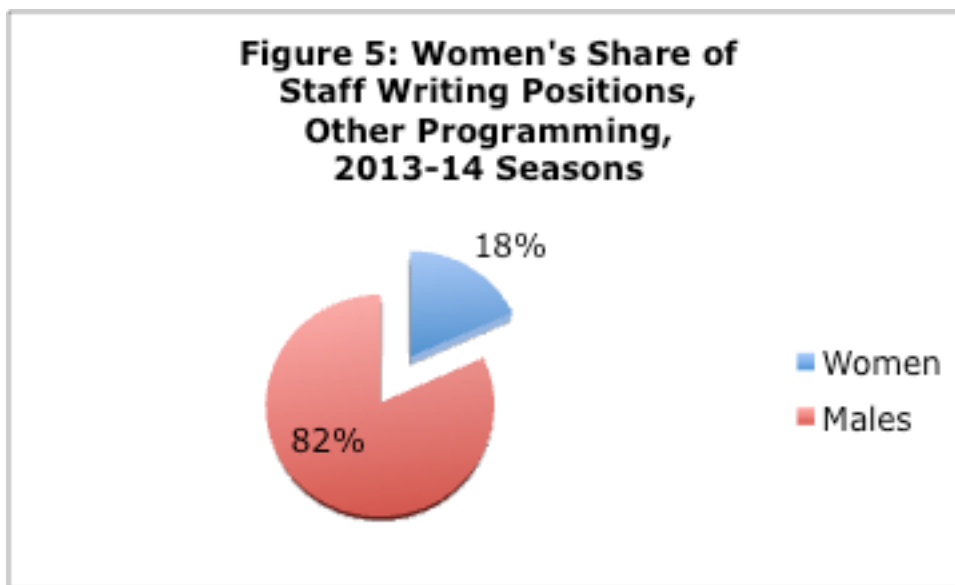


At the same time, the black-themed sitcoms of the kind that aired on the defunct UPN and WB networks in the early 2000s have all but disappeared. These sitcoms for years accounted for the majority of employed black staff writers.<sup>7</sup> The removal of the shows from the air, combined with the “typecasting” of black writers, partially explains why the black share of minority staff writers has declined since 2001-02. By contrast, the Latino and multiracial shares of minority staff writers have been growing in recent years, and during the 2013-14 season, fully 65.3 percent of Latino television writers (49 writers) and 69.6 percent of multiracial writers (48 writers) staffed 60-minute shows. (**Table 2** presents the staffing breakdowns for each highlighted group of writers by show length, from the 2007-08 to 2013-14 seasons.)

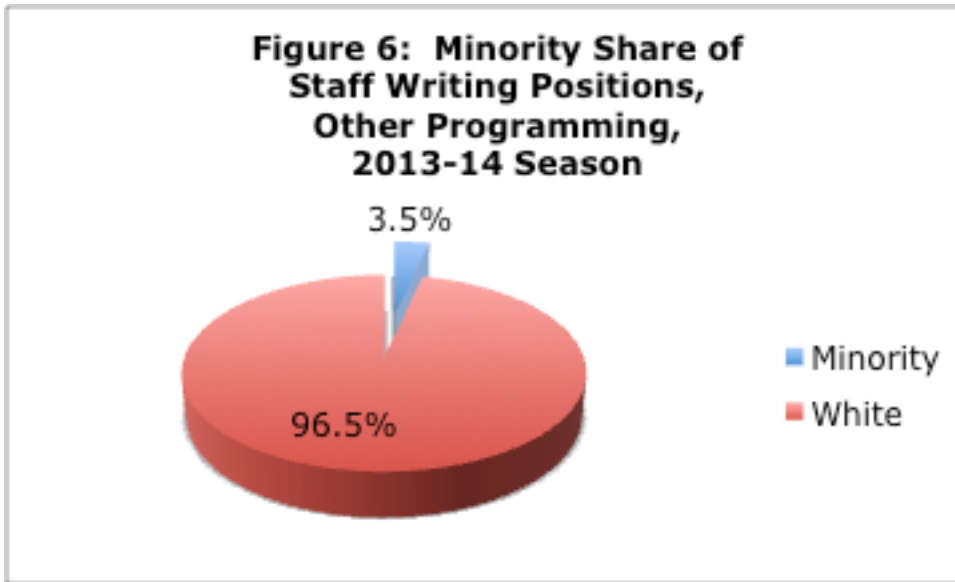
### *Writing Staffs Much Less Diverse for Other Programming*

The writing staffs for other types of programming (e.g., late night, talk, game shows, etc.) were much less diverse for the 2013-14 season than those for sitcoms and dramas.

**Figure 5** shows that women occupied only 18 percent of the staff positions on these shows (compared to 29 percent overall), while **Figure 6** shows that minorities claimed only 3.5 percent of these positions (compared to 13.7 percent overall). Women were thus underrepresented by a factor of nearly 3 to 1 on these show staffs and minorities by nearly 11 to 1.

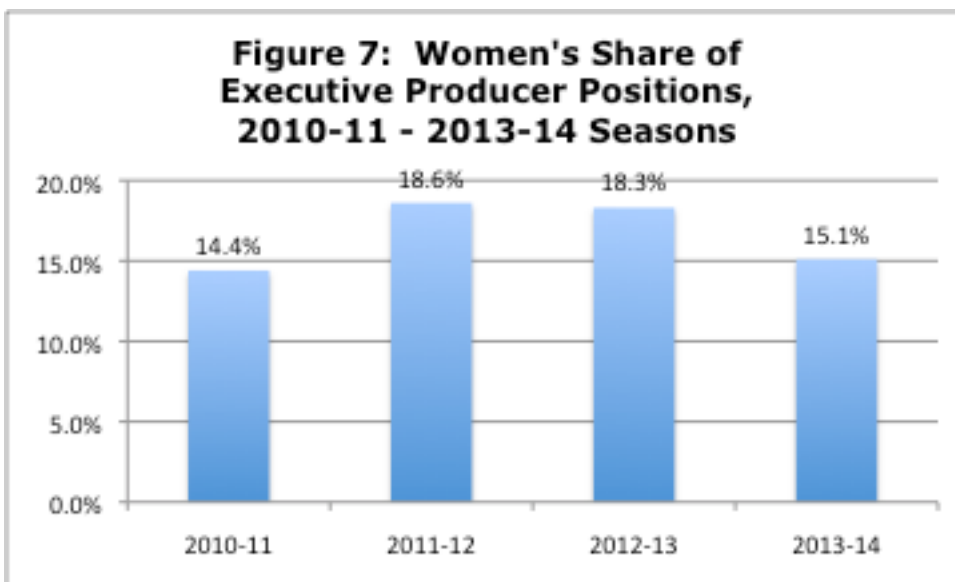


<sup>7</sup> See The 2007 Hollywood Writers Report: Whose Stories Are We Telling? Writers Guild of America, West, May 2007, p. 42.



*Women's Share of Executive Producer Positions Declines*

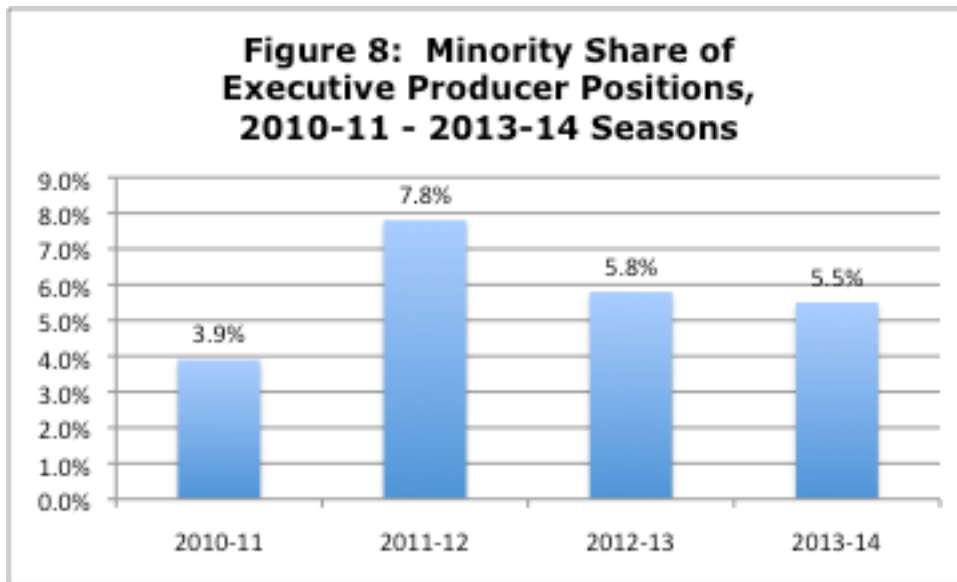
Previous WGAW reports show that males (particularly white males) have traditionally dominated the high-status position of executive producer in the television sector. Data from the 2013-14 season reveal that little has changed in this regard. In fact, women accounted for just 15.1 percent of the executive producer positions during the 2013-14 season (see **Table 3**), which represents a decline of 3.5 percentage points from the 18.6 percent share posted for the 2011-12 season. Of the 457 executive producers positions in 2013-14, women occupied 136. As women represent slightly more than half of the U.S. population, the group was underrepresented by a factor of more than 3 to 1 among the writers who ran television shows in 2013-14. Males of all ethnic/racial backgrounds combined, by contrast, were greatly overrepresented, occupying 84.9 percent of these powerful positions. **Figure 7** charts the changes in women's share of executive producer positions between the 2010-11 and 2013-14 seasons.



When we consider individual television networks, **Table 4** shows that for only three networks during the 2013-14 season did women account for shares of executive producers positions that approached or exceeded women’s share of the overall population: Sundance (100 percent), E! (57.1 percent), and ABC Family (41.7 percent). By contrast, five networks were notable in 2013-14 for having executive producer corps in which women accounted for particularly small shares: Fox (2.3 percent), NBC (2.7 percent), Comedy (8 percent), Nickelodeon (9.1 percent), and HBO (9.5 percent).

*Minority Share of Executive Producers Declines*

The previous staffing brief noted a doubling of the minority share of executive producer positions between the 2010-11 and 2011-12 seasons (from 3.9 percent to 7.8 percent). But since the 2011-12 season, the minority share of these powerful positions has declined 2.4 percentage points to 5.5 percent during the 2013-14 season (see **Table 3**). As a result of this most recent decline, minorities were underrepresented by a factor of nearly 7 to 1 among executive producers. **Figure 8** charts changes in the minority share of executive producer positions between the 2010-11 and 2013-14 seasons.

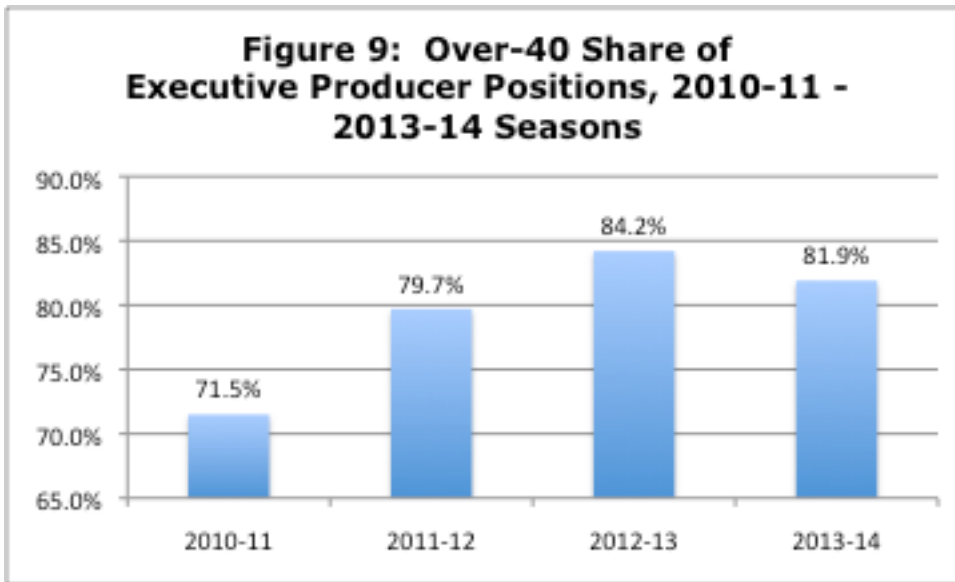


When we consider individual television networks, **Table 4** shows that minorities only accounted for a significant share of the executive producer positions on three networks: the black-oriented BET cable network, where all of the six executive producers were minority writers (100 percent); the Latino-oriented El Rey network, where one of the two executive producers were minority writers (50 percent); and FX, where 3 of the 20 executive producers were minority writers (15 percent). With the exception of the CW (9.5 percent), the minority shares of executive producer positions on the other major broadcast networks were particularly low — 0 percent on NBC, 4.2 percent on ABC, 4.7 percent on Fox, and 4.9 percent on CBS.



### *Older Writers Continue to Dominate Executive Producer Ranks*

Despite findings from earlier Hollywood Writer Reports documenting the decline in overall employment prospects for writers as they age, writers over 40 continue to dominate the high-status ranks of executive producers. **Table 3** shows that writers over the age of 40 occupied 81.9 percent of the executive producer positions during the 2013-14 season, an increase of 2.2 percentage points over the figure reported in the last TV Staffing Brief for the 2011-12 season (79.7 percent). **Figure 9** charts changes in the over-40 share of executive producer positions between the 2010-11 and 2013-14 seasons.

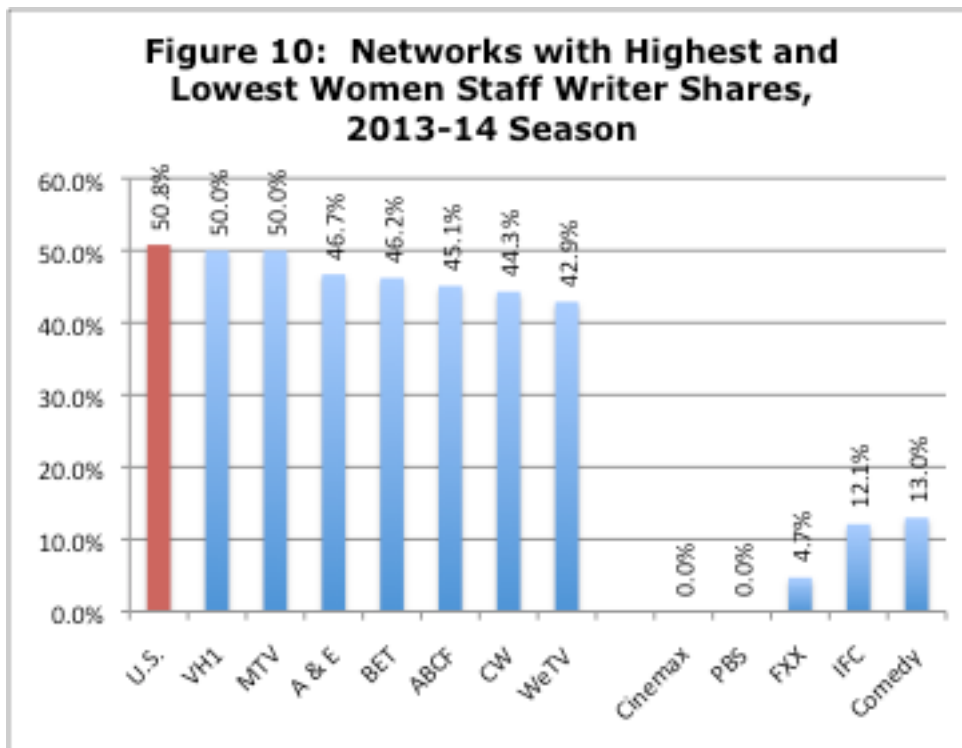


### *Women Writers' Share of Employment Highest on Cable Networks*

Consistent with findings from the previous staffing brief, women writers' share of employment during the 2013-14 season was highest on cable networks. **Table 5** shows that with the exception of the CW, where women claimed 44.3 percent of the staff positions during the season, women only approached proportionate representation among staff writers at cable networks: VHI (50 percent), MTV (50 percent), A & E (46.7 percent), BET (46.2 percent), ABC Family (45.1 percent), and WeTV (42.9 percent). By contrast, Cartoon (0 percent), Cinemax (0 percent), PBS (0 percent), FXX (4.7 percent), IFC (12.1 percent), and Comedy (13 percent) were notable for women occupying relatively small shares of the networks' staff positions. **Figure 10** charts the networks with the highest and lowest women staff writer share for the 2013-14 season, compared to women's share of the overall U.S. population (50.8 percent).

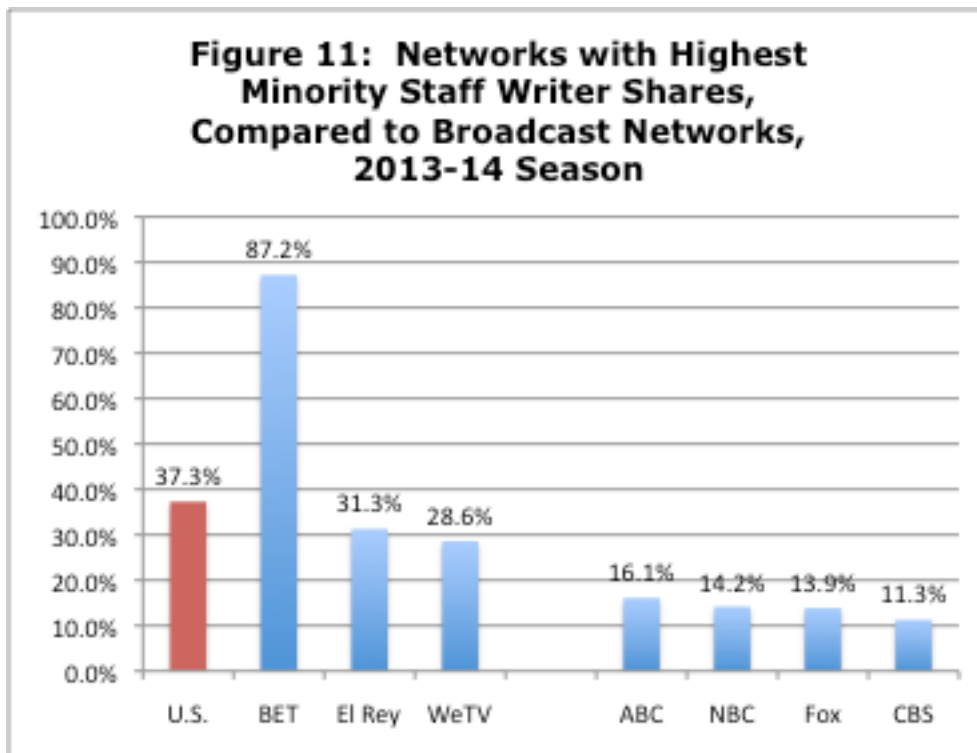
*Minority Writers Approach or Exceed Proportionate Representation at Only Three Networks*

**Table 5** reveals that for the 2013-14 season minority staff writers approached or exceeded proportionate representation at just three networks: BET (87.2 percent), El Rey (31.3 percent), and WeTV (28.6 percent). It's worth noting that two of these three cable networks, BET and El Rey, were explicitly aimed at minority audiences. By contrast, minorities were underrepresented by a factor of more than 2 to 1 among staff writers at the major broadcast networks. Minorities claimed 16.1 percent of the positions at ABC, 14.2 percent of the positions at NBC, 13.9 percent of the positions at Fox, and just 11.3 percent of the positions at CBS (where minorities were actually underrepresented by a factor of more than 3 to 1 among staff writers). **Figure 11** charts the networks with the highest minority staff writer shares for the 2013-14 season, compared to the minority shares for the broadcast networks. The minority share of the overall U.S. population (37.3 percent) is plotted in red.



**Table 6** presents a breakdown of minority-occupied staff positions by specific racial/ethnic group and network. Though the minority *shares* of staff positions are generally lower on the broadcast networks than on minority-oriented cable networks (see above), the table reveals that broadcast networks generally employ the largest *numbers* of minority staff writers. Of course this is due to the fact that the major broadcast networks air more original programming (and thus have more staff writers associated with them) than the cable networks. Nearly two-thirds of all black staff writers (64.5 percent)

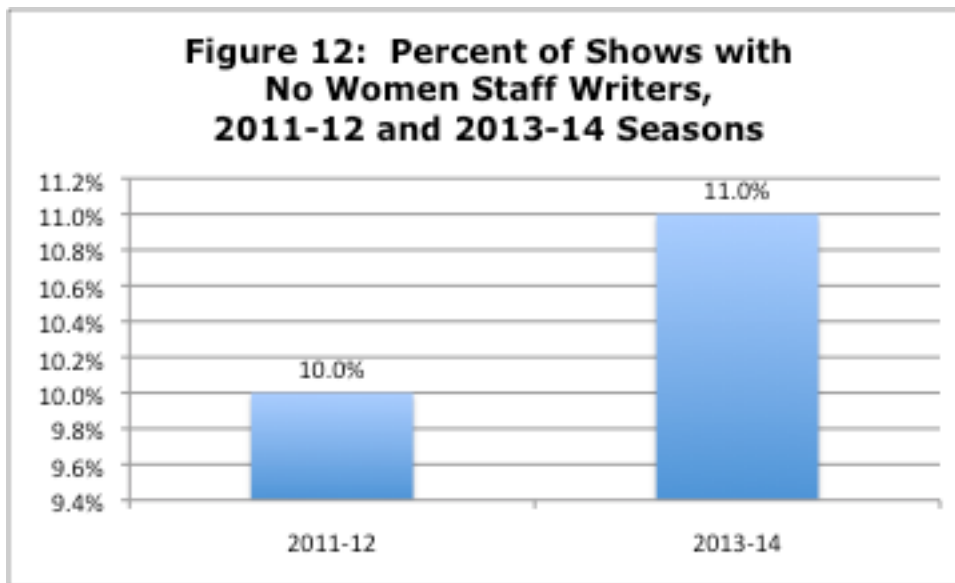
worked for shows airing on five networks during the 2013-14 season. BET, with 32 black staff writers, was the only cable network with a sizeable number of black staff writers. The other networks with relatively large numbers of black staff writers were all major broadcast networks: NBC (21 writers), ABC (14 writers), CBS (13 writers), and Fox (11 writers). For Asian staff writers, 61.5 percent were concentrated on five broadcast networks during the season: CBS (16 writers), ABC (10 writers), Fox (10 writers), NBC (7 writers), and CW 5 writers). Finally, for Latino writers, 58.7 percent worked for shows airing on just five networks. Only one of these networks, ABC Family (6 writers), was a cable network. The other networks with notable numbers of Latino staff writers included ABC (11 writers), Fox (11 writers), NBC (9 writers), and CBS (7 writers).



*Eleven Percent of TV Shows Have No Women Writers on Staff*

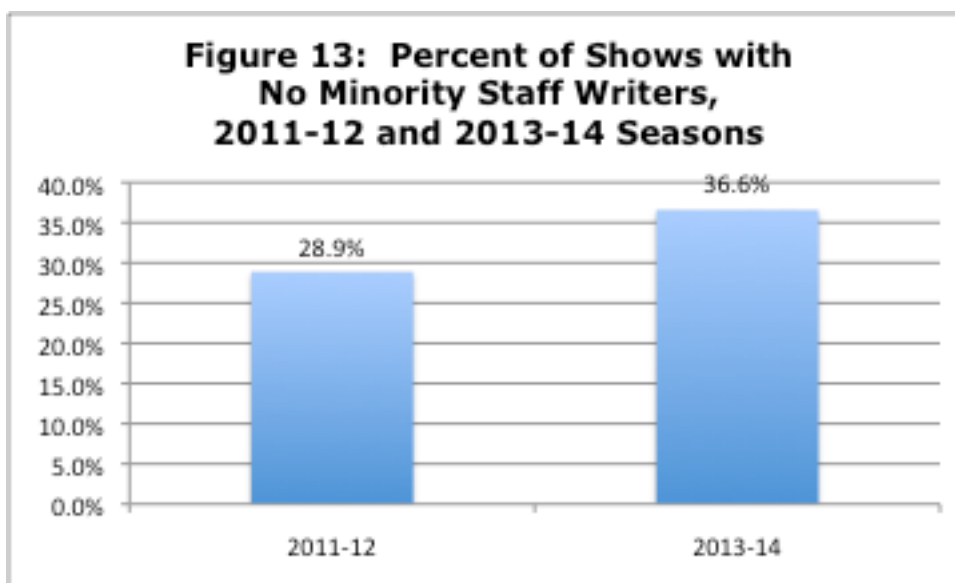
**Table 7** presents an alphabetical listing of the 292 television shows examined for the 2013-14 season, with figures on the female, minority, and over-40 shares for each show staff. Thirty-two of the shows on the list (11 percent) had no women writers on staff, which is a 1 percentage point increase from the previous staffing brief’s finding for the 2011-12 season, when 10 percent of the 190 shows examined employed no women writers on staff (see **Figure 12**). The top 5 five shows for women writers during the 2013-14 season — ranked in terms of women’s share of staff positions — were A & E’s *Bates Motel* (80 percent), BET’s *Being Mary Jane* (80 percent), the CW’s *Hart of Dixie* (75 percent), the CW’s *The Carrie Diaries* (71.4 percent), and VH1’s *Single Ladies* (71.4 percent). Departing from findings reported in the previous staffing brief — which

revealed that all of the top shows for women staff writers aired on cable networks — two of the top shows for women writers during 2013-14 season aired on the CW, a broadcast network whose audience demographics are skewed towards women and younger viewers.



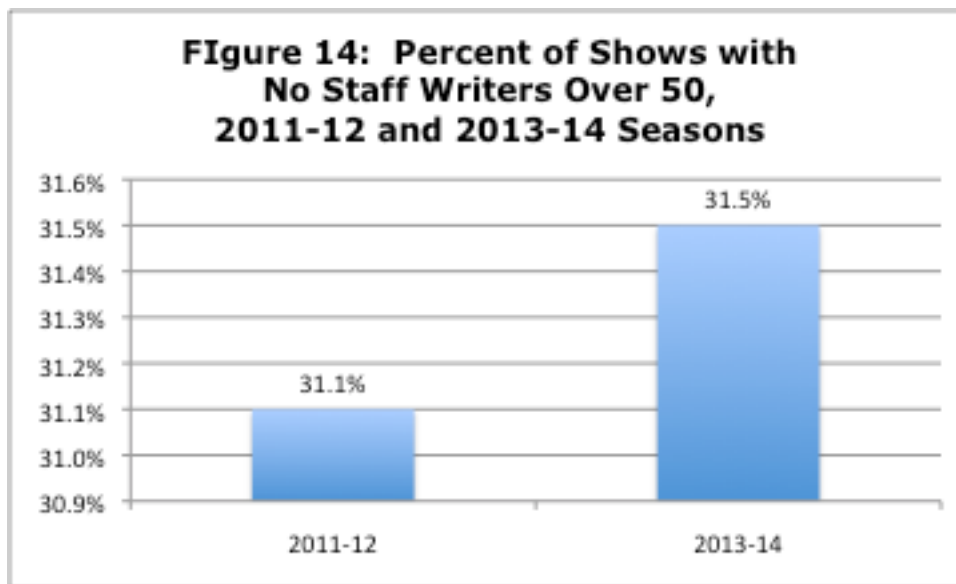
*More Than a Third of TV Shows Have No Minority Writers on Staff*

During the 2013-14 season, 107 of the 292 television shows examined (36.6 percent) had no minority writers on staff (see **Table 7**). This figure is a 7.7 percentage point increase over the 28.9 percent figure reported in the previous staffing brief for the 2011-12 season (see **Figure 13**). The top five shows ranked by minority share of staff positions were all black-themed and aired on cable networks — four of the five on BET. The shows included: BET’s *Let’s Stay Together* (100 percent), BET’s *The Game* (87.5 percent), VH1’s *Single Ladies* (85.7 percent), BET’s *The Real Husbands of Hollywood* (81.8 percent), and BET’s *Being Mary Jane* (80 percent).



### *Older Writers' Share of Staff Positions Declines Sharply After 50*

**Table 7** reveals that only seven of the 292 television shows examined for the 2013-14 season (2.4 percent) had no writers on staff over the age of 40. Consistent with findings above about other gains older television writers have enjoyed relative to their younger counterparts, this latter figure is a 1.7 percentage point improvement over the 4.1 percent figure for the 2011-12 season cited in the previous staffing brief. Similarly, 37 of the 292 shows examined for the 2013-14 season (12.7 percent) featured writing staffs in which 100 percent of the positions were occupied by writers over the age of 40 — up from 22 of the 190 shows examined for the 2011-12 season (11.6 percent). But as older writers enter their 50s, their prospects for staff employment decline significantly. **Figure 14** shows that nearly a third of the shows examined for the 2013-14 season (92 of 292, or 31.5 percent) had no writers over 50 on staff, which was similar to the figure posted for the 2011-12 season (31.1 percent).



### **Conclusion: Making Up Lost Ground**

Despite periodic advances and pockets of promise, past WGAW Hollywood Writers Reports and TV Staffing Briefs have consistently offered the same conclusion: much work remains to be done before diverse writers are adequately incorporated into the television industry, and we are losing ground in this effort as the nation races toward the not-too-distant day when it becomes majority minority. To be sure, findings from the present staffing brief repeat this refrain. Not only were minorities still underrepresented by factors of nearly 3 to 1 among all staff writers and nearly 7 to 1 among executive producers during the 2013-14 season, but women television writers also continued to tread water, at best, relative to their male counterparts. That is, women were underrepresented by factors of nearly 2 to 1 among all staff writers and more than 3 to 1 among critical executive producer positions. Meanwhile, older writers — who were represented on nearly every show staff during the 2013-14 season — saw their fortunes

drop precipitously beyond age 50, when they were absent from nearly a third of all shows.

Findings like these highlight a glaring disconnect between the increasing diversity of audiences and business-as-usual practices in the Hollywood industry. The fact is that writers' rooms simply do not reflect the America of today or the America that is steadily emerging. These all-important spaces typically fail to include the diversity of voices and perspectives necessary for breathing life into characters and imagining situations that diverse audience are likely to relate to. Indeed, recent research showing that diverse audiences prefer diverse storytelling points to another inescapable conclusion: failures on the diversity front increasingly will become failures in terms of the bottom-line of ratings.

To address the industry's longstanding diversity problem, the Writers Guild of America West (WGAW) in 2009 announced a new initiative aimed at enlisting its own membership in the process of identifying and recognizing outstanding, yet underutilized diverse writing talent. The TV Writers Access Project (TV WAP) is a WGAW-sponsored script-judging program in which active showrunners and executive producers review spec scripts from diverse writers in order to identify experienced writers with top-level writing skills. The idea is *both* to identify "showrunner-certified" talent for the broader television sector *and* to expose the judges (i.e., potential employers themselves) to the richness of the talent pool of diverse writers. Eligible WGA members compete in five categories — women writers, minority writers, writers with disabilities, older writers, and LGBT writers — categories associated with the guild's major diverse writer committees. Submissions are grouped by genre (drama or comedy) and subjected to two rounds of judging by multiple readers. The first cycle of the project was held in 2009, with successive cycles held in 2010, 2011, and 2013.

The 2009 TV WAP cycle enlisted more than 149 judges and featured 158 submissions, 65 semi-finalists, and 30 honorees. Twenty-one of the honorees were eventually hired under WGAW contracts (67.7 percent) — 15 in drama and six in comedy. Drama hires included five producer-level writers, four story editors or executive story editors, three staff writers, one feature writer, one daytime writer, and one pilot writer. Comedy hires included two staff writers, three story or executive story editors, and one web series writer. In terms of WGAW diversity categories,<sup>8</sup> eight women, five African Americans, two Asians, one Latino, and one 55-and-over member were hired in drama, while five women, three Asians, two African Americans, and one Latino were hired in comedy.

Submissions declined in subsequent TV WAP cycles due in part to rules preventing the resubmission of scripts judged in earlier cycles. Nonetheless, the 2010 cycle enlisted 103 judges and featured 95 submissions, 41 semi-finalists, and 21 honorees. Eleven of the 21

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<sup>8</sup> Numbers may not exactly match because some individual writers are counted more than once due to their gender, minority, and/or age statuses. Also, writing teams are counted as a single "honoree" or "writer" in the earlier figures.

honorees were eventually hired (52.4 percent) — ten in drama and one in comedy. Drama hires included two producer-level writers, three story editors, one staff writer, one pilot writer, one freelance script writer, one web series writer, and one feature writer. One staff writer team was hired in comedy. In terms of WGAW diversity categories, seven women, one African American, one Latino, one Asian, and one American Indian were hired in drama, while two women, and two African Americans were hired in comedy.

The 2011 TV WAP cycle enlisted 73 judges and attracted 78 submissions. Thirteen honorees were selected, 10 in drama and three in comedy. Four of the honorees were hired under WGAW contracts (30.8 percent) — three in drama and one in comedy. Drama hires included one executive story editor and one pilot writer. One female comedy writer was hired to write pilot and feature scripts. In terms of WGAW diversity categories, one woman and two Latinos were hired in drama, while one woman was hired in comedy.

The 2013 TV WAP cycle enlisted 93 judges and attracted 144 submissions — 45 in the minority writer category, 42 in the women writer category, 38 in the older writer category, 16 in the LGBT writer category, and three in the writers with disabilities category. Ten honorees were selected, four in comedy and six in drama. In terms of WGAW diversity categories, five of the honorees were minorities, six were women, two were over 55, and one was LGBT.

Interventions like the TV Writers Access Project are an important first step toward the goal of diversifying the contingent of storytellers whose work fuels the Hollywood industry. Subsequent steps forward, as previous reports have concluded, also will require a renewed commitment on the part of other industry players — the networks, studios, and agents — to go beyond what has been done in the past to address the status quo on the industry diversity front. From the initial project pitch to project completion, each phase of the production pipeline has the potential to serve as a barrier to or facilitator of increased diversity among industry writers. The WGAW is committed to working with the rest of the industry to ensure that the production pipeline is shaped less by the former and more by the latter. The Hollywood industry, in the final analysis, depends on increasingly diverse audiences *and* on the stories to which they can relate.

### **About the Author**

Darnell Hunt is director of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA and professor of sociology. He has written extensively on media and diversity issues, including several books and numerous scholarly and popular articles. Dr. Hunt also authored the previous four installments of *The Hollywood Writers Report*, which the Writers Guild of America released in 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2012. Prior to his academic positions, he worked in the media (for NBC) and as a media researcher for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' 1993 hearings on diversity in Hollywood.