
Unequal Opportunities

Gender Inequities and Precarious Diversity in the 1970s US Television Industry

ABSTRACT This article examines the precarity of labor for women working in US broadcast television during the long 1970s, focusing on interventions by government agencies, trade unions, and individual writers and producers, with a particular focus on the Writers Guild of America (WGA) 1974 Women's Committee Report, the first major statistical survey to track the representation of women as creatives within American television. This article puts qualitative and quantitative data in direct conversation: where one captures the nuances of personal experience and the other highlights the extent of inequality, together they help fill gaps in understanding the long history of struggles for equity in media production. **KEYWORDS** creative labor, media industries, media policy, quantitative research, race

Professional success in the American television industries has come disproportionately to able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gendered, Caucasian men from middle- to upper-middle-class backgrounds; historically such men have been the perpetual benefactors of a hierarchical system with built-in inequities of power and opportunity. While the number of women on-screen can be quantified by researchers and scholars, gender representation on set, in writers' rooms, and in network and studio offices is much more difficult to quantify. Whether by government officials, industry insiders, journalists, or academics, reports and research studies provide opportunities to inform the industry of current inequities and to articulate a set of goals (but also, often, values) to those in power in the media industries.¹ Recent data on the American television industry collected, analyzed, and visualized—for instance by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University, the Hollywood Diversity Report from the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles, and the University of Southern California's Comprehensive Annenberg Report on Diversity in Entertainment—has the power to inform, persuade, convince, or

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shame the media industries into addressing their efforts (or lack thereof) to diversify their employee pools.² Numbers only tell part of a story—mistakes, or omissions of categorizations, give an incomplete picture, and the data only includes those writers who succeeded in getting their projects made. Yet when put in conversation with qualitative research, these statistics can bring a richer argument to the corporate, and the cultural, conversation. Scholarship that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative measurements provides both context and data to better articulate problems to those interested in changing the status quo.

This essay examines a series of early attempts to expose and/or close the gender gap and push back against the sexism of the American television industry, looking at interactions between government agencies and networks, as well as between individual writers and industry organizations, during the 1970s. Current conversations about gender parity and racial inclusivity in television production need to be historicized, and much can be learned from understanding the long arc of such efforts. Here, my focus is on the Writers Guild of America (WGA) 1974 Women's Committee Report, the first major statistical survey that tracked the representation of women as creatives within American television. The work of the Women's Committee of the WGA would be a major influence on female actors who would soon conduct their own surveys on employment, as well as female directors who would do so for the Directors Guild of America's Women's Steering Committee, an organization that went on to sue Hollywood for hiring discrimination based on gender.³ The study appeared one year before the groundbreaking 1975 report from the British Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians union's Committee on Equality titled *Patterns of Discrimination against Women in the Film and Television Industries*.⁴ The fortieth anniversary of *Patterns of Discrimination* was commemorated at the 2016 Doing Women's Film and Television History conference in Leicester, England, which was the impetus for this special issue of *Feminist Media Histories*.

My reason for focusing specifically on writers in US television is both data driven and informed by the unique relationship American broadcasting has to the concept of diversity. The WGA, the first of the trade unions to survey gender discrepancies in the media industries, centered its first study on employment by gender on prime-time television. Since then, the guild has maintained this focus on television for two reasons: the overall employment of writers is significantly higher in television than in feature film, and the rate of turnover is slower (television series that run longer than one season can provide longer-term employment).⁵ Because of this, the number of active WGA members included in

the 1974 report is larger than if the committee had tallied film writers. Unfortunately, the report only covered prime-time television, and thus failed to track women's work in children's programming, daytime, news, etc. There was a second problem with the study—and many that followed, by the WGA and other trade unions. Data on women of color working within the industry was rarely made distinguishable—women of color were often categorized either with white women or men of color—both groups that were better represented in the industry than women of color.⁶ While the number of women of color working as writers in prime-time was often zero, that zero would have been a powerful detail. The politics of who is counted—and who decides what is worthy of counting—is a critical feminist issue.⁷ But even though the Women's Committee Report was flawed, it is still vital to explore, since I can compare this internal industry account with federal diversity studies that bookend it: the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) hearings on diversity in Hollywood and an FCC study, both in 1969, and the US Commission on Civil Rights report "Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television" from 1977.⁸ But again, data only tells part of the story.

In this essay, I examine these reports within a larger cultural history of writers working in American prime-time television, using interviews, press articles, and media histories to flesh out their experiences. Feminist media historians have done much to recover the work of women in the media industries and make it a part of the historical record—to reinstate what was omitted or marginalized from the central narratives of our field. Natalie Wreyford and Shelley Cobb in their *Feminist Media Histories* article "Data and Responsibility" (2017) state that while oral histories and interviews are the best record of women's experiences, quantitative data are crucial as well: "In order to counter meritocratic explanations that avoid structural prejudices, we contend that, in addition to allowing women's experiences to be heard, feminist research needs to be able to illustrate the extent of inequality, and quantitative data is best placed to do that. Through quantitative methods the missing women, while still not heard, can at least be made visible by their astonishing absence."⁹ What I want to do here is put qualitative and quantitative data in direct conversation. Where one fails to measure the nuance of personal experience and the other fails to capture the extent of inequality, together they may work to fill lost gaps in media history. Looking back on this moment using qualitative and quantitative data provides correctives to an industry that continues to struggle to employ women and people of color at a rate anywhere close to what would be expected given population numbers.

Within the context of US television policy and the public interest, the term “diversity” has a unique importance, but varied uses. The focus of this research is on gender, and as such I see it as imperative to first tease out some of the multiple meanings of diversity in relation to American broadcast television. In terms of identity categories, no one person is diverse; the word denotes that within a sample there is a range of difference. Diversity is necessarily intersectional and multiple; even its absence, a lack of diversity, or in this context the extreme under-employment of women of color, is critical to report. There has been a great deal of talk recently about increased diversity in Hollywood, but as Herman Gray incisively points out in “Precarious Diversity: Representation and Demography” (2016), telling the story of diversity fails to address the realities of systemic bias. Systems of inequality have long pervaded—even defined—the rituals of production within the American entertainment industries.¹⁰

Unlike the US film industry, American broadcast television has had since its inception a federal mandate to serve the public interest. Because broadcast television uses public airwaves for transmission, it is regulated under the Federal Communications Commission. A foundational pillar of the FCC rules for television broadcast licensees is to serve the public interest through diversity, competition, and localism. Diversity as a concept has been mobilized in four distinct, but imbricated, ways: in categories of programing (often thought of as genres, for example educational programming, news, children’s programming, et cetera); as a guarantor of a multiplicity of opinions within issue-based public affairs programs (viewpoint diversity); in the licensing of stations to owners of different means, backgrounds, and interests (ownership diversity); and in the hiring and recruitment of employees (equal-opportunity employment).¹¹ The FCC’s call for diversity as part of the public interest is tied to arguments that diversity of ownership, of the television workforce, and of expression would lead to a more robust and competitive environment, a healthier industry, and a satisfied audience.¹²

As Gray explains, there has long been an assumption that minority owners would serve as trustees of the public interest, and that diversity within the ownership category would ensure that the three other aspects of diversity would naturally follow within the broadcast landscape. The “reasonable expectation” was that female owners and owners of color would invest wholeheartedly in the recruiting and hiring of women and people of color, and in turn, would create programming that highlighted under-represented voices, offer a broad spectrum of ideas on topics, and welcome a range of audiences.¹³ But, as Jennifer Holt tracks in her history of US broadcast regulations, “This ‘reasonable expectation’

of content diversity following source diversity has guided policy-making and judicial decisions in the broadcast arena for many decades, and yet there still remains a genuine lack of gender, ethnic, and racial diversity in media ownership.”¹⁴ Diversity of ownership, according to FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn, was “trending incredibly downward” during President Barack Obama’s administration.¹⁵ This top-down approach of creating an inclusive television landscape by opening access to minority ownership has, as of yet, failed to ensure that television broadcasting does a significantly better job of serving the interests of under-represented groups than when ownership is in the hands of white men.¹⁶ One can suppose that this will continue to be the case during Donald Trump’s administration. In her book *Public Interests* (2016), Allison Perlman tracks how different advocacy groups such as the NAACP and the National Organization for Women (NOW) “consistently reconstituted the ‘public interest’ to direct regulators to value nonmarket concerns,” each time reaffirming the importance of issues of ownership and representation on-screen and behind the scenes.¹⁷ If federal regulation has thus far failed to ensure diversity of ownership, of employees, and still arguably of programming, regulators and scholars must better determine what works to move the dial and build lasting change.

From the late 1950s until the 1980s, non-male and nonwhite representation in American television existed primarily—almost exclusively—as on-screen talent. Yet a few women and people of color were successfully holding positions of power in the industry from the get-go (although that representation was almost entirely of white women and men of color). Even if the numbers of people who rose to such positions were only a handful, this history is vital to track as part of the narrative of inclusivity within the American media industries. In 1948 Frieda Hennock, a Jewish woman born in Eastern Europe, became the first female chairperson of the FCC. In 1949 Gertrude Berg, a New York Jewish entertainer, produced, wrote, and starred in her own series, *The Goldbergs* (CBS, 1949–51; NBC, 1952–53; Dumont, 1954). In 1950 Lucille Ball became the first woman to co-own a major television production studio, Desilu, with her husband Desi Arnaz, the first Latino president and CEO of a studio not just in Hollywood, but in the United States. By the end of the decade, Desilu was employing more than eight hundred people.¹⁸ Ball took the reins as president and CEO of Desilu in 1962; under her watch, it became the number one independent television production company in the United States.¹⁹ Five years later, Ball sold Desilu for \$17 million.²⁰ But as television became increasingly profitable, fewer women were able to reach positions of such power.²¹ While women

were present behind the scenes on television, representation became extremely limited, and for women of color, even more so.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, as television became a greater and greater cultural and economic powerhouse, and as business and creative operations solidified, white men increasingly took back whatever gains women had made in the industry. In this way, creative labor was not that different from white-collar professions. Sexism and racism were institutionalized, in that executives and producers usually looked to people with backgrounds, interests, and experiences similar to their own to fill positions. And given that most film and television producers were, and still are, white and male, the discrepancy in numbers is substantial. Women of color were at an overwhelming disadvantage.

Significant industry-wide conversations about race, gender, and representation in television were sparked in 1969 after the two aforementioned government interventions by the FCC and the EEOC. The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers had articulated industry-wide nondiscrimination clauses after a series of NAACP protests in 1963, but still, the impact on the hiring of women and people of color was nominal at best.²² The 1960s had seen a series of federal rulings that defined nondiscrimination rights: the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibited wage discrimination based on gender; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited employment discrimination based on sex, race, color, religion, or national origin; and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, which ensured the rights of those over the age of forty against discrimination in the workforce. In 1967, in response to civil unrest, President Lyndon B. Johnson established the Kerner Commission, whose *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* detailed both problematic representations of African Americans in American media (in particular, representations of Black people not as they saw themselves, but rather as white people saw them) as well as a disturbing lack of African Americans employed in the production of American media.²³ The report called for the recruitment of more African Americans into journalism and broadcasting, and the promotion of those who were already employed in these industries who were qualified to advance.²⁴ The FCC asserted its authority over commercial or noncommercial broadcast stations in a formal policy that forbade employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin.²⁵ They determined at that time that women would not be included as an affected group.²⁶

That same year, the EEOC conducted a series of hearings over several days in Los Angeles to investigate employment opportunities for women and minorities

in a few key white-collar industries, including film and television. Reading through the testimony, network executives made a series of excuses for the astonishing under-employment of women and people of color, including but not limited to: the difficulty of finding qualified candidates, geographical barriers to finding or keeping employees, the time of year of the study (they claimed it did not accurately account for employment cycles), and that such a study could not be done on a creative industry like media making. The five EEOC commissioners pushed back. Commissioner Vicente Ximenes, addressing vice president of programs at CBS, Perry Lafferty, expressed his displeasure at Lafferty's excuses (good employees of color are hired away by the competition, jobs are difficult for anyone to get regardless of race, the uniqueness of the skills needed for creative work inevitably diminishes the hiring pool): "Sir, I find it incredible that across the board—not just in acting, professional, technical, or in manager's jobs—that Mexican Americans constitute such a very small number [of employees]. In thirty-two years CBS has been able to put on three officials and managers, one professional, four technicians, and twelve clerical workers. . . . There is across the board underutilization."²⁷ During a line of questioning with executives at NBC, Commissioner Elizabeth Kuck asked if NBC accepted applications from women for positions in professional and technical areas. Oscar Turner, director of personnel and labor relations for the West Coast, took the question:

TURNER: We accept applications from women in any field.

KUCK: Would you use them and consider them? It is one thing to accept the applications.

TURNER: In the administrative area, and I believe we have people in that area. But if you are talking about technicians, that is something else.²⁸

While women could apply, the implication was that NBC would not consider them viable candidates for technical positions.

The commissioners, five men of color and one white woman, unfortunately focused little attention specifically on the experience of women of color within the workforce. But some insight might be inferred by looking at a particular job area that was more open to women, namely office and clerical work. Included in the hearing documents was a chart detailing minority employment data for the three major networks within the city of Los Angeles. The EEOC learned that while African Americans held 7.4 percent of jobs in Los Angeles, networks were hiring them at a ratio of 2.9 percent. Mexican Americans, who were 10.1 percent of the reported labor force in the city, comprised only 0.9 percent of the labor

force at the networks in 1967 and 1.6 percent in 1968.²⁹ What stands out is not just the number of jobs, but also the rank of the positions people of color held. While 90 percent of all network jobs were deemed “white-collar jobs,” employees of color were represented at a rate of only 2.8 percent (African American) and 1.2 percent (Mexican American) in white-collar positions.³⁰ The number of male employees of color was surely larger than the number of women of color, yet it is arguably fair to surmise that employment of women would be higher within the office and clerical staff, as many women worked as secretaries, assistants, and typists at that time. There the number of employees of color were represented at a rate of 2.3 percent (African American) and 4.8 percent (Mexican American), still well below expectations given the employee pool in the city.

In their final report, the EEOC found discrimination in employment practices at the major studios and networks as well as in screen portrayals of women and minorities. Clifford Alexander, President Lyndon Johnson’s head of the EEOC, remarked of the hearing and the EEOC’s conclusions:

We didn’t have any enforcement power, but we recommended that the Justice Department bring “pattern and practice of employment discrimination” suits against the industry. . . . Unfortunately, at that point, you had Richard Nixon coming in as president and he did nothing about it. Our hearings did cause embarrassment, which is a good factor sometimes, of the industry and therefore many of the positions were at least opened up for the first time.³¹

The Department of Justice and the film and television companies that were a part of the hearings later agreed to establish “goals and timetables” to increase minority representation, but the focus of the conversation was on below-the-line work covered by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE).³² WGA West created a training called the “Open Door Program” designed to teach minority writers “the techniques necessary for teleplay and screen play writing,” but to date I have not uncovered data about this program’s members or effectiveness.³³

The Department of Justice never went so far as to impose legal sanctions. Their only lasting message to the industry was that further audits might occur—the next one in fifteen years. At the time, writers’ rooms were very small: series were overseen by a head writer (an executive producer who was often, but not always, a creator of the series) and a handful of writers who would be working full-time on the series. Many scripts were outsourced to freelance writers,

then polished by the writer-producers. Few people of color wrote scripts, and they were only marginally better represented as support staff to production heads. Some white women used male-sounding pseudonyms professionally, which they believe helped them land jobs. Writer Dorothy Catherine Fontana, a master of Western, science fiction, and action-adventure series, scripted two *Star Trek* episodes in 1969 as Michael Richards and regularly wrote using only her initials, D.C.³⁴

In December of 1970, the National Organization for Women petitioned the FCC to include women among the protected groups included in its equal-employment rulings. The FCC issued the amendment in May of 1971, stating:

[Women] constitute over 50% of the population and the history of employment discrimination against women is amply demonstrated by the comments in this proceeding. It is fully appropriate, in our judgment, for the attention of broadcasters to be drawn to the task of providing equal employment opportunity for women as well as for Negroes, Orientals, American Indians and Spanish Surnamed Americans.³⁵

At the same time, the American television industry, in part responding to government reports and mandates, to audience demographic changes, and to larger political and cultural shifts in the zeitgeist, began in the late 1960s and early 1970s to represent more women and people of color as central characters on television screens. Audiences saw an increase in racial and gender representation among stars of such prime-time series as *Julia* (NBC, 1968–71), *The Bill Cosby Show* (NBC, 1969–71), *The Flip Wilson Show* (NBC, 1970–74), *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970–77), *Maude* (CBS, 1972–78), and *Chico and the Man* (NBC, 1974–78). But while these series, long lauded as breakouts in terms of representation, featured more women and people of color on-screen, the staffing situation behind the scenes was not much improved, let alone close to diverse or inclusive. By the early 1970s white women were regularly writing television scripts, but many were employed by daytime programs such as soap operas rather than in prime-time—work that within the industry was considered less prestigious, and compensated at a significantly lower rate. Women who did land work in prime-time were often freelancers—which, overall, was much more common in the 1970s.

Though some of these programs were comparatively progressive in their thinking about racial or gender inclusivity (few were both), the experience of women working on series often involved playing educator to male colleagues about sexism. Treva Silverman, who wrote some of the funniest *Mary Tyler*

Moore Show episodes, also worked for a time as an executive story consultant. In this role, she spent time in the writers' room. Later recalling her experiences with the show's male writers and producers, she noted: "I wouldn't say they were sexist; I would say they were in some ways kind of unthinking."³⁶ When Silverman saw sexism in a script and pointed it out, the head writers were responsive. In these best-case scenarios, producers responded well to criticism and made adjustments—but with virtually all series run by white men, the parameters of inclusivity were still determined by white men. White women still rarely broke through barriers to become creators and producers, and women of color even less frequently: virtually all women who were hired were white, virtually all people of color hired were men.

During the early 1970s, a number of women working in film and television began talking about their experiences, sharing stories, and building alliances. At the request of WGA member Dana Gould, a special meeting was organized for women writers in the union. Gould remembered, "I was sure that other women writers would feel the same way about wanting to talk to each other and [see] if we had been discriminated against [and] in what way."³⁷ Out of this meeting in 1972, the Women's Committee of the WGA was formed—one of a number of new organizations designed to support women in Hollywood. In 1972 the Screen Actors Guild also formed a Women's Committee. In 1973 the nonprofit networking and mentoring organization Women in Film was established. And in 1974 AFI's Directing Workshop for Women began. Maya Montañez Smukler, in her 2018 study of female film directors of the 1970s, *Liberating Hollywood*, notes that feminist community building started in this era between organizations such as the WGA, the Screen Actors Guild, the Directors Guild of America, Inter-Studio Alliance of Women, Rights of Women Playwrights (New York), the National Organization for Women Image Committee, and the Actors Equity and Publicists Guild Local 818.³⁸ In 1972 the WGA and the Screen Actors Guild initiated conversations with networks around their hiring practices.

The Women's Committee of the WGA decided to survey membership in order to better understand hiring practices in television. The WGA reported that only 13 percent of its membership was female, but the Women's Committee believed that beyond their small overall percentage within the organization, women were also grossly underemployed compared to their male counterparts. In other words, the rate at which they were hired onto television series or to write films was nowhere close to that 13 percent.³⁹ In 1974 the Women's Committee organized a survey spearheaded by three television writers for the WGA: Noreen

Stone (who later wrote *Amy* [1981] and for *Dynasty* [ABC, 1981–89]), Joyce Perry (writer on *Days of Our Lives* [NBC, 1965–], *Room 222* [ABC, 1969–74], and *Land of the Lost* [NBC, 1974–76]), and Howard Rodman (writer on *Route 66* [CBS, 1960–64] and creator of *Harry O* [ABC, 1974–76]). The survey tallied the genders of all writers paid by the networks to write prime-time series during the 1973 season.⁴⁰ Of the 106 television production companies it surveyed, sixty-one had posted no writing credits at all for women.⁴¹ Of the sixty-two prime-time series identified in the survey, twenty-six of them (approximately 42 percent), had never hired a single female writer, and seven (11 percent) had only hired one woman.⁴² The Women’s Committee’s hunch was in fact correct: although 13 percent of the guild’s members were women, only 6.5 percent of the current season’s television series had ever hired a female writer on staff or as a freelance writer.⁴³ Long-running series like *Adam-12* (NBC, 196–75), which by 1973 had amassed 139 episodes, and *The FBI* (ABC, 1965–74), which had 230 episodes by 1973, had never credited a female writer. Even series with female leads did not all fare well according to the survey. *Here’s Lucy* (CBS, 1968–74) only credited women writers for four of its 119 episodes. And here is where data fails to tell the whole story: while the number of scripts written by women were recorded, their names were not. Because of this, and because a number of women freelanced on multiple series, we cannot yet glean a clear picture of exactly how many individual women were working as writers that season.

The results of the survey were distributed not just to members of the guild, but to all companies, studios, and networks that were contracted signatories employing guild members.⁴⁴ Michael Franklin, executive director of the WGA at the time, emphasized in his memo that accompanied the survey report: “While we do not favor the employment of one writer over another and we do not and will not recommend any particular writer for employment, we do want all of our members to have an equal chance at employment.”⁴⁵ Franklin’s memo did some good, at least for a while. The effect of the study—as well as the larger women’s rights movement—helped break barriers of entry for some, mostly white, women. After it was sent out, Jean Rouverol Butler, a veteran soap opera showrunner, recalled “a sudden rush of—at least—tokenism on the part of producers.”⁴⁶ Sue Cameron, a columnist for the *Hollywood Reporter*, remembers the impact as well: “That survey was an explosion. . . . It woke up the city. Then people started being careful and the press releases I got tried to emphasize which woman they’d just hired on which project.”⁴⁷ The industry took note, and that year, white women didn’t just get more jobs, they finally started to receive accolades from their peers. In 1974 Treva Silverman, Joanna Lee, and Fay Kanin won

Emmy Awards (with Silverman and Kanin both also winning the short-lived Super Emmy for Writer of the Year in their categories): Silverman for outstanding writing in a comedy series for her work on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Lee for best writing in drama for *The Waltons* (CBS, 1972–981), and Kanin for best writing in drama for an original teleplay for the made-for-TV movie *Tell Me Where It Hurts* (CBS, 1974). A year later Susan Harris, who had written for *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971–79) and *Maude*, reached a new level of success when a series she created, *Fay* (NBC, 1975–76), was picked up; in 1977 it happened again with her series *Soap* (ABC, 1977–81).⁴⁸

But women's minor gains both at the level of individual producers as well as at some studios were short-lived. The 1974 WGA report led to micro-changes during the following season, but not sweeping institutional change. Women were slightly more welcome, but for the most part, the numbers of women working were filling what retrospectively look like unofficial quotas. Gail Parent remembered being the only female writer on *The Carol Burnett Show* (CBS, 1967–78): "CBS used to drag me out for publicity, saying, 'See? We have a woman.'"⁴⁹ Barbara Corday, who co-created *Cagney & Lacey* (CBS, 1982–88) with her writing partner, Barbara Avedon, recalled that rarely would there be more than one woman or a team of women on a particular writing staff, and that often when she and Avedon went out for jobs, they would be in competition with other women for the one spot available to them.⁵⁰ Where before there had been little opportunity, at least now there was access. But in the press, arguably much like today, small gains often make big news. In a 1976 *Variety* article titled "Gays, Gals, Goys: And All Those Other Minorities on Media," Howard Suber noted, "There is no question about it: minorities are not only receiving unprecedented attention, they are receiving unprecedented popularity."⁵¹ But there were no long-term promises, or even goals. And as Suber's article suggests, the *attention* to new positions was more significant than the *actual* numbers of jobs added. Franklin, then WGA executive director and later executive director of the Directors Guild of America, was a key ally for women in the industry at the time. But when I interviewed him decades later, it became clear that his commitment to the general cause was profoundly limited. He recalled: "I had meetings with several women, four or five women, who had formed a[n advocacy] group. And I tried, and we had little gains. We made all kinds of threats to the studios, and we filed suit for the women, and got something, but it was still bad. But with the women writers from the Guild there wasn't anything done. We ignored them." His final sentence was delivered with a chuckle. When I didn't laugh, he added, "There were a number of women

that were successful writers, but it was obvious there should have been more.”⁵² Sexism was so institutionally ingrained that even Franklin, the WGA Women’s Committee’s strongest advocate in their campaign for equity, was hindering the cause even as he championed it. These entanglements of studios, individual personalities, unions and guilds, and the money at stake made advancing toward equity (or even just representation) a difficult campaign. A report could instigate action, a threat could attract powerful press, but major, industry-wide policy changes—especially when a union was making demands rather than employers—were ultimately not something that the guilds, studios, or networks were willing to take on.

The national discourse on equality, the civil rights and women’s rights movements, as well as internal industry factors like the work of the WGA Women’s Committee study and later studies by the Women’s Committees of the Screen Actors Guild and Directors Guild of America, helped break barriers on a slow but increasing number of films and television series over the course of the next decade. Women and people of color working in the industry were supported by campaigns directed at studios and networks from external advocacy organizations, including the National Organization for Women, Asian Americans for Fair Media, the National Black Media Coalition, Black Citizens for Fair Media, Bilingual-Bicultural Coalition on the Mass Media, the National Latino Media Coalition, the Puerto Rican Media Action and Educational Council, and the American Indian Press Association, who were calling for “more positive, more diverse, and more realistic portrayals” of the communities these groups represented.⁵³ But as mentioned earlier, representation on-screen did not guarantee representation in writers’ rooms. And ultimately, without any official mandate for policy change, individual studios and producers fell back into old habits; within a few seasons, the numbers of women and people of color were no longer of issue or concern to those in charge. In 1976 the California Advisory Committee to the US Commission on Civil Rights set out to investigate whether professional opportunities for people of color and for women in the entertainment industry in the Southern California region had increased since the 1969 federal studies. The committee invited all parties who had testified before the EEOC in 1969 to update their reports and detail their progress on eliminating discriminatory practices. A number of studios (including Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner Bros.) and the trade union representing many below-the-line employees, IATSE, refused to comply with the request, and other industry organizations failed to send representatives to the open-session meetings. To this nonresponse from the industry, committee chair Herman Sillas stated, “I think

it raises some serious questions of commitment on the part of studios who refuse to appear to display whatever their commitment is in terms of [equal employment opportunity].” They had to be subpoenaed to testify.⁵⁴

It is worth pointing out that while women and people of color were rarely working above the line, there were a number of women employed in the production of television series. They were in on meetings and on set—but at the margins, working as assistants or support staff to executives and creatives.⁵⁵ A good number of women worked as script supervisors (then known as “script girls”) and for producers. When I interviewed Norman Lear about his writers’ room, he declared that women were critical to the functioning of his productions in the 1970s. And yet he rarely hired women in above-the-line roles. In conversation and in his memory, Lear states that they “produced” the show—that they were the glue:

For me, it has nothing to do with color or sex. That was true of everybody in our little club. Most of the people could have been in the writers’ room. There was never a show that was just produced by men. They were all women. The people who held it together—kept the schedules, kept everybody on time—were women. They carried the script, they knew every word, they had every schedule, and they had every relationship that mattered, that the director didn’t have. They were all women. . . . The glue. The glue was all women.⁵⁶

But while they may have held the production together, women were rarely allowed to attain positions of creative, managerial, or economic power, in Lear’s Tandem Productions or elsewhere. Their jobs rarely put their names in the credits. Esther Rolle, who played Florida on Lear’s series *Good Times* (CBS, 1974–79), pushed hard not just to have Black writers working on the series, but Black female writers. And yet none from the latter group are credited.⁵⁷ In Lear’s memory, women played the role of managers in charge of group cohesion on set and in the writers’ rooms—but impressive job titles as TV creatives weren’t available to them. Being a writers’ assistant was seen as secretarial work—and beneath a man, especially a white man. And the narratives of women’s histories have been erased or uncredited. Men of color who got jobs as writers’ assistants experienced the work differently. Ralph Farquhar, who later was a writer-producer on *Married . . . with Children* (Fox, 1987–97) and *Moesha* (UPN, 1996–2001), got his start on *Happy Days* (ABC, 1974–84) as a writers’ assistant: “But you want to know something funny? . . . Being a 6-foot-2 Black man, nobody asked me to type anything, so I just sat there and wrote my own scripts.”⁵⁸

In the following years, internal reports and external government studies detailed the degree to which the industry had slid back into routines of inequity. In 1977 the US Commission on Civil Rights, while documenting the status of women and people of color primarily around on-screen representation and behind-the-scenes employment at television stations, addressed the problems of above-the-line representation in their report “Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television.” The numbers in their account reflect a profoundly unequal playing field. Despite advances in representations on-screen, portrayals were still stereotyped; white males continued to hold the overwhelming majority of decision-making positions; licensees were regularly misreporting the employment status of women and people of color to give the impression that they were holding more powerful positions than they actually were; and employment of women, in particular minority women, was predominantly within clerical positions or (less often, but still common) as on-air talent. “Increased visibility on the screen without comparable representation in decision making positions suggests that minorities and women serve merely as window dressing.”⁵⁹ The committee then laid out a ten-part list of recommendations for the federal government to reconsider how licensees would be evaluated in the future. The Commission on Civil Rights reasoned in its study that increased minority representation behind the scenes would lead to increased quality of minority representation on-screen. And yet, as discussed earlier regarding diversity of ownership, this assumption has proven to be flawed. As Herman Gray notes, data might engender discussion, but cannot ensure continued or meaningful change at a systemic level, nor necessarily less stereotyped representations on-screen.⁶⁰

A number of women of color did get their start writing for prime-time television around this time. Series like *The Jeffersons* (CBS, 1975–85) employed a few women on a freelance basis and gave some of them opportunities for advancement, including Vida Spears, Sara Finney Johnson (who worked her way up from production associate to writer on the show), and actress Marla Gibbs (who wrote her first episode of television for the series). Winifred Hervey was hired by Gary Marshall to write for *Laverne & Shirley* (ABC, 197–83) and *Mork & Mindy* (ABC, 1978–82). But for those few women of color who did write on series during this era, one success did not guarantee that a next one would follow. Kathleen McGhee-Anderson, after graduating cum laude from Spelman College and attending film school at Columbia University, landed a job on *Little House on the Prairie* (NBC, 1974–83) in 1981. But her success

there failed to open doors for her in the way that her counterparts experienced the profession:

I thought I was on my way. . . . But I was not because I was an African American woman during a time when women were not normally writing and not hired to be on staff, let alone an African American woman. That is how they saw me. So, when I walked into those rooms for an interview, I was not their vision of what a successful creative person looked like.⁶¹

In 1983, of the one hundred African American writers surveyed by the Black Writers Committee of the WGA, only eight were working on a full-time basis.⁶² A WGA Women's Committee Report from 1984 showed that of the seventy-five prime-time series in the 1982–83 season, thirty-seven shows listed no women in their writing credits; out of a total of 2,309 staff writing credits on all series, 1,904.5 (82 percent), were attributed to men; and in-house network productions at ABC had not hired a single female writer.⁶³ Even MTM studios, which had been more progressive than many other production studios in terms of content, in fact employed the least number of women writers.⁶⁴

As in the past, this new set of reports would engender industry conversations, and in the ensuing years slight upticks—and then downslides—would occur.⁶⁵ Notably, the next audit by the EEOC was in 1984 by then-chair Clarence Thomas; the report reached his desk, but failed to get the support needed by a chairperson to make an impact on the industry. Given that the current EEOC case will head up to a Trump-elected EEOC chair who voted against the collection of wage data by demographic, and considering the current Republican-majority leadership across all three branches of federal government, the likelihood that the government will sanction Hollywood for discriminatory hiring anytime soon seems low.

Current conversations about gender parity and calls for racial inclusivity in television production need to be historicized, and a great deal can be learned from understanding the long arc of these debates. Much historical research on gender in the television history has detailed representation on-screen, but increasingly, journalists, documentarians, media practitioners, and scholars are recuperating the long history of women working behind the scenes in film and television, in the United States and globally. But there is much more work to do. In “Data and Responsibility,” Wreyford and Cobb call for feminist scholars to embrace data as part of the record of feminist media history. While the data is incomplete, in particular in terms of representation of women of color, a recuperation of histories compiled by government organizations,

external advocacy groups, companies, industry organizations, and individuals to make the industry more inclusive is vital. While past studies, both qualitative and quantitative, present as many omissions as they do answers, together we as researchers can ally our new studies and these older histories to better see the past, contextualize the present, and map the future of the field. ■

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NOTES

1. Dave O'Brien, Kim Allen, Sam Friedman, and Anamik Saha, "Producing and Consuming Inequality: A Cultural Sociology of the Cultural Industries," *Cultural Sociology* 11, no. 3 (2017): 271–82.

2. The most recent studies of television from these centers include Martha M. Lauzen, "Boxed in 2016–17: Women on Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television," Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, San Diego State University, September 2017, https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2016-17_Boxed_In_Report.pdf; Darnell Hunt, Ana-Christina Ramón, Michael Tran, Amberia Sargent, and Vanessa Díaz, "2017 Hollywood Diversity Report: Setting the Record Straight," UCLA Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, 2017, <https://bunchecenter.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/82/2017/04/2017-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2-21-17.pdf>; Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, and Katherine Pieper, "Inclusion or Invisibility? Comprehensive Annenberg Report on Diversity in Entertainment," Institute for Diversity and Empowerment at Annenberg (IDEA), USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, https://annenberg.usc.edu/sites/default/files/CARDReport_FINAL.pdf.

3. See Maya Montañez Smukler's forthcoming *Liberating Hollywood: Women Directors and the Feminist Reform of 1970s American Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018).

4. ACTT, *Patterns of Discrimination against Women in the Film and Television Industries* (London: ACTT, 1975).

5. "Between 1949 and 1979, according to the Committee's findings, 7,332 feature films were made and released by major distributors. Fourteen—0.19%—were directed by women." Maya Montañez Smukler, "Liberating Hollywood: Thirty Years of Women Directors," *CSW Update Newsletter*, UCLA Center for the Study of Women, 2011, available at <https://escholarship.org/content/qt3pd5t9m6/qt3pd5t9m6.pdf>.

6. Wherever possible I have tried to tease out these details specifically, but often I choose to include research on the experiences of people of color that does not detail race rather than exclude this information entirely.

7. See *Feminist Media Histories* 3, no. 3 (2017), a special issue on "Data as Media."

8. US Commission on Civil Rights, "Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television" pamphlet, 1977.

9. Natalie Wreyford and Shelley Cobb, "Data and Responsibility: Toward a Feminist Methodology for Producing Historical Data on Women in the Contemporary UK Film Industry," *Feminist Media Histories* 3, no. 3 (2017): 108.

10. Herman Gray, "Precarious Diversity: Representation and Demography," in *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor*, ed. Michael Curtain and Kevin Sanson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 241–53.

11. On viewpoint diversity and ownership diversity see Antoine Cook Bush and Marc S. Martin, "FCC's Minority Ownership Policies from Broadcasting to PCS," *Federal Communications Law Journal* 48, no. 3 (1996): 435.

12. Howard Kleiman, studying content diversity and minority and gender licensing policies, shows that ownership of stations by historically underrepresented demographic groups by no means guarantees accurate proportional representations of those same groups. Howard Kleiman, "Content Diversity and the FCC's Minority and Gender Licensing Policies," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 35, no. 4 (1991): 411–29.

13. Mara Einstein, *Media Diversity: Economics, Ownership, and the FCC* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 24, 35–36. Einstein also points to Laurie Mason, Christine M. Bachen, and Stephanie L. Craft, "Support for FCC Minority Ownership Policy: How Broadcast Station Owner Race or Ethnicity Affects News and Public Affairs Programming Diversity," *Communication Law and Policy* 6, no. 1 (2001): 37–73.

14. Jennifer Holt, "A History of Broadcast Regulations: Principles and Perspectives," in *A Companion to the History of American Broadcasting*, ed. Aniko Bodroghkozy (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 182. For further discussion see Einstein, *Media Diversity*, 35–36; Kleiman, "Content Diversity and the FCC's Minority and Gender Licensing Policies," 411–29.

15. Quoted in Holt, "A History of Broadcast Regulations," 183.

16. Einstein's book offers an extensive examination of the complex relationship between media ownership and diversity, in particular during the Fin-Syn era. See Einstein, *Media Diversity*, 40–111.

17. Allison Perlman, *Public Interests: Media Advocacy and Struggles over US Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 182.

18. Mary Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in US Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 59.

19. B. R. Smith, "Desi Arnaz," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 2nd ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Routledge, 2013), 137–38.

20. Nina C. Leibman, "Lucille Ball," in *Encyclopedia of Television*, 205.

21. While Arnaz was a pioneer, it wouldn't be until 1974 that another Latino actor, Freddie Prinze, would carry the lead on a US television series; see Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in US Eyes*, 60. As for Latinx media executives, opportunities have overwhelmingly existed on Spanish-language networks, or overseeing global brands within Latin America. There has been more representation among station owners than among network or programming executives, and men held those positions. In 1951 Raul Cortez started the independent station KCOR-TV in San Antonio, Texas. In the 1961 Emilio Azcárraga Milmo began to amass a chain of television stations within the United States, creating SIN (Spanish International Network) and the US outlet for his international entertainment

conglomerate, Televisa. In 1986 anti-monopoly charges from the US government forced Azcárraga to sell his stations. J. Preston, "Emilio Azcárraga Milmo, Billionaire Who Ruled Mexican Broadcasting, Is Dead at 66," *New York Times*, April 18, 1997, A27.

22. AMPTP studio heads, casting directors, labor relations representatives, and personnel executives, as well as leaders in the major creative guilds, were targeted within the EEOC report.

23. Kerner Commission, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1968). For an interesting discussion of the ramifications of this report see Vicki Mayer, *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 12–13. The Kerner Commission's full official name was the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders.

24. Kerner Commission, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 10.

25. FCC, "Petition for Rulemaking to Require Broadcast Licensees to Show Nondiscrimination in Their Employment Practices," 18 FCC 2d 240 (1969).

26. US Commission on Civil Rights, "Window Dressing on the Set," 75.

27. EEOC, *Hearings before Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Utilization of Minority and Women Workers* (Washington, DC: EEOC, 1969), 310.

28. EEOC, *Hearings before Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Utilization of Minority and Women Workers*, 330.

29. EEOC, "Background Data on Three Major Networks in Los Angeles," in *Hearings before Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Utilization of Minority and Women Workers*, 357.

30. EEOC, "Background Data on Three Major Networks in Los Angeles," 357.

31. Ronda Racha Penrice, "The Hollywood Diversity Fix," *Baltimore Times*, February 28, 2016, <http://baltimoretimes-online.com/news/2016/feb/28/hollywood-diversity-fix/>.

32. David Robb, "EEOC Begins Interviews with Female Directors in Discrimination Probe," *Deadline*, October 16, 2015, <https://deadline.com/2015/10/female-directors-discrimination-probe-eeoc-interviews-1201585045/>.

33. US Commission on Civil Rights, "Window Dressing on the Set," 24. It is unclear whether these writers included white women or women of color.

34. Dorothy Fontana, interview with Karen Herman, Television Academy Foundation, December 29, 2003, <https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/dorothy-fontana>.

35. US Commission on Civil Rights, "Window Dressing on the Set," 75.

36. Treva Silverman, interview with Allan Neuwirth, Television Academy Foundation, September 18, 2007, <http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/treva-silverman>.

37. Dana Gould, Writers Guild Oral History Project interview, August 22, 1978, Writers Guild Foundation Library and Archive, Shavelson-Webb Library, Los Angeles.

38. Smukler, *Liberating Hollywood*, 89.

39. Michael Franklin, memo from the WGA to all signatories to the 1973 WGA Minimum Basic Agreement contract, April 8, 1974, Writers Guild Foundation archives, Shavelson-Webb Library, Los Angeles. The WGA has continued to keep closer track of

the employment of women and people of color in television than in film, for the reasons stated at the outset of this essay.

40. They narrowed the data to series on air in September 1973.

41. WGA Women's Committee, "Women's Committee Statistics Report," November 7, 1974, Writers Guild Foundation archives, Shavelson-Webb Library, Los Angeles. They focused on writers who were paid for work, but did not collect financial data.

42. Michael Franklin, memo from the WGA to all signatories to the 1973 WGA MBA. The memo does not indicate whether these women were staff writers or freelancers.

43. The same woman could be hired on multiple shows as a freelancer, so this 6.5 percent of series did not even ensure the employment of half of the female membership of the guild.

44. Writers Guild of America West, memo to all signatories to the 1973 WGA MBA, April 8, 1974.

45. Michael Franklin, memo from the WGA to all signatories to the 1973 WGA MBA.

46. Jean Rouverol Butler, interview by Howard Suber, Suber Files, tape 6, Writers Guild Foundation archives, Shavelson-Webb Library, Los Angeles.

47. Quoted in Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood* (New York: Macmillan, 2002), 9.

48. Harris later went on to create *Benson* (ABC, 1979–86) and *The Golden Girls* (NBC, 1985–92).

49. Quoted in Jennifer Armstrong, "The Secret History of Women in Television," *Bust*, n.d., <https://bust.com/feminism/14511-the-secret-history-of-women-in-television.html>.

50. Barbara Corday, author interview, August 30, 2013.

51. Howard Suber, "Gays, Gals, Goys: And All Those Other Minorities on Media," *Variety*, January 7, 1976, 22.

52. Michael Franklin, author interview, August 8, 2013.

53. US Commission on Civil Rights, "Window Dressing on the Set," 25, references the following studies: "The Asian Image in the United States: Stereotypes and Realities," Asian Americans for Fair Media, New York, 1977; "Guidelines for the Treatment of Women in the Media and a Checklist for the Portrayal of Women in Entertainment Programming and Advertising," National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, Washington, DC.

54. US Commission on Civil Rights, "Window Dressing on the Set," 2, 1.

55. For a discussion of the long history of women working as assistants in Hollywood see Erin Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016). While Hill's book focuses on the earlier film studio era, it offers media studies scholars an excellent model for uncovering and recuperating the significance of women's labor within the media industries as secretaries, assistants, and clerical workers.

56. Norman Lear, author interview, August 20, 2013.

57. Eugenia Collier, "Black Shows' for White Viewers," *Freedomways* 14 (1974): 211.

58. Quoted in Andy Meisler, “On TV, Showing Life as Lived,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1996, C11.

59. US Commission on Civil Rights, “Window Dressing on the Set,” 148.

60. Gray, “Precarious Diversity,” 241–53.

61. Chelsea Battle, “Kathleen McGhee-Anderson: A Pioneer on the Television Frontier,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 28, 2013, <https://lasentinel.net/kathleen-mcghee-anderson-a-pioneer-on-the-television-frontier.html>.

62. Calvin Kelly interviewed by Charles Sullivan of the Black Writers Committee, *WGA West Newsletter*, December 1983, 2.

63. The Women’s Committee, “Employment Statistics for Male and Female Writers: Television and Feature Films,” report prepared for the board of directors of WGA West, Los Angeles, 1984, 11, 13.

64. MTM employed 8 percent. Orion, the studio behind *Cagney & Lacey*, was the highest, employing 35 percent. The Women’s Committee, “Employment Statistics for Male and Female Writers,” 10.

65. For example William T. Bielby and Denise D. Bielby, *The 1987 Hollywood Writers’ Report: A Survey of Ethnic, Gender and Age Employment Factors* (West Hollywood, CA: Writers Guild of America West, 1987).