BTS

BEHIND THE SCENES

A Research Study by the Think Tank For Inclusion and Equity

and Alton Carswell, MA, LMFT

THE STATE of INCLUSION and EQUITY in TV WRITING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Last year, when the Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity (TTIE) first embarked on the monumental task of surveying working TV writers on the state of inclusion and equity in TV writing, our hope was to identify the barriers to entry and career advancement for underrepresented writers, as well as the roadblocks and pitfalls to diversifying story content.

Additionally, our goal was to provide concrete recommendations to industry players and arm underrepresented writers with the tools and data necessary to help advance their own careers. Progress has been made, but there's still much room to grow.

This year's "Behind the Scenes: The State of Inclusion and Equity in TV Writing" continues to track important measures of representation in staffing and the writers room, and digs deeper into last year's findings and recommendations around TV development, as well as underrepresented TV writers experiencing bias, discrimination, and harassment. This year's report also reflects our own growing understanding around the issues of inclusion and equity, which is most captured by an intentional move away from talking about "diversity" and "diverse writers" to discussions of "representation" and "underrepresented" and/or, conversely, "overrepresented" writers. Certain sections may employ previous terminology to reflect the original survey question and wording. ("Underrepresented" writers include writers who identify as Women/Non-Binary, People of Color, LGBTQ+, and/or People with Disabilities. "Overrepresented" writers comprise writers who do not identify with the aforementioned groups.)

While it's no secret that representation in Hollywood is a problem, for underrepresented TV writers, the low wages associated with assistantships and fellowship participation, as well as the prevalence of unpaid development work, act as systemic barriers to entry for many. Then, once they do secure that coveted first writing job, underrepresented writers face additional barriers to promotion and advancement, which hinder career trajectory. 49.2% of underrepresented writers are forced to repeat the entry-level staff writer position at least once, whereas only 34.6% of overrepresented writers experienced this setback. Furthermore, 27.6% of underrepresented writers continue to repeat additional titles as they move up the ranks.

In terms of diversifying story content, many underrepresented writers must navigate a minefield of bias and discrimination over the course of their workdays. 39.4% of underrepresented TV writers reported witnessing the erasure and/or stereotyping of underrepresented characters in the writers room. 33.9% of underrepresented TV writers in development have been asked to change a character's identity to increase the odds of selling a project. And though underrepresented writers are often hired specifically because of their background or identity, when they speak openly to that experience in the writers room, it can lead to them getting fired, as 10.2% of respondents reported. Similarly, underrepresented writers are often brought in to develop content, specifically because their personal experience makes them the expert, but when it comes to creative leadership and showrunning, only 32.9% reported securing these roles if their show were to go to series.

What's more troubling is that 30.9% of underrepresented TV writers reported experiencing sexual harassment, while 58.0% reported experiencing other forms of harassment/bullying. In addition, 68.5% of underrepresented writers experienced discrimination while working or trying to get work in the TV industry, more than twice the rate of overrepresented writers (30.8%). The vast majority of these incidents went unreported and unresolved. Employers must learn to recognize that these issues are all connected and stem from a workplace culture that silences victims and favors offenders.

While all of these issues occur within very specific contexts to different people for different reasons, they nevertheless originate from the same root cause of implicit bias, insufficient management training/experience, and a toxic workplace culture. A number of industry players are taking encouraging action, as seen in the emergence of new initiatives and programs like inclusion riders and incubators that target representation both in front of and behind the camera. But, these are systemic issues at play and therefore a systemic, coordinated response is needed. Efforts seeking to further safe and equitable workplace environments must be fully-resourced and empowered for real industry-wide change to occur and last.

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TOP FINDINGS

68.5%

of underrepresented writers have experienced discrimination in the TV industry, over twice the rate of overrepresented writers (30.8%) [1]

- **49.2%** of underrepresented writers have repeated staff writer at least once. This jumps to **55.0%** for people of color. Comparatively, only **34.6%** of overrepresented writers have repeated staff writer at least once.[2]

- **27.6%** of underrepresented writers have repeated other titles (Excluding Staff Writer and EP).

- **18.8%** of respondents said there were no underrepresented writers at the upper-level in their most recent writers room. **45.2%** of respondents said there was only one.

- **39.4%** of respondents have witnessed erasure and/or stereotyping of underrepresented characters on their shows.

- **10.2%** of respondents report being fired for pushing back on stereotypical characters/storylines.

- Underrepresented writers are almost **25%** less likely to have sold a pitch or pilot compared to overrepresented writers.[3]

- **33.9%** of underrepresented writers have been asked to change a character's identity to increase the odds of selling a project.

- Only **32.9%** of underrepresented writers are assured creative leadership and showrunner status on their own shows in development.

[1] Comparative findings for overrepresented writers should be considered qualitative. See "Methodology & Limitations" for more information.
[2] Ibid
[3] Ibid

TOP RECOMMENDATIONS

→ COLLECT, TRACK, AND REVIEW inclusion and equity DATA FOR ALL TV WRITERS ROOMS, as well as within the ranks of non-writing producers, executives, and representatives. This data should include the LGBTQ+ and Disability communities and be made available (in full transparency) on an annual or bi-annual basis.

→ FULLY FUND an INDEPENDENT REPORTING SYSTEM for bias, discrimination, and harassment that protects victims. Formalize and enforce PENALTIES for offenders.

→ REVIEW and ELIMINATE bias and/or discrimination in staffing submissions and in development.

→ INCREASE the number of UNDERREPRESENTED PROFESSIONALS IN LEADERSHIP ROLES.

→ MANDATE MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING for all individuals with oversight and supervisory responsibility, including but not limited to showrunners, upper-level writers, non-writing producers, executives, agents and managers.

→ EXPAND and fully draw upon EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS to support underrepresented TV writers at all levels.

→ PROVIDE A LIVING WAGE for writers room support staff so individuals whose incomes are not subsidized by higher income families can accept these positions.

→ CREATE and COMMUNICATE a clear path toward advancement for support staff.

BACKGROUND

Many have said it before, but inclusion is good business. As the proliferation of streaming services continues, viewers are becoming more selective due to the increase in viewing options. Viewer tastes are changing.[4] But, what determines these choices and tastes?

For some viewers, choice may rely on representation and authenticity. It's no secret that many TV series struggle to portray characters from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds. In the last 5 years, the need to address the lack of inclusion and authenticity in television characters has increased as on-demand content has provided more choice to the viewer.[5]

In fact, millennials and younger viewers exhibit viewing habits that indicate that the hunger for diverse and varied content is on the rise. But it's not just younger-skewing viewers or viewers from underrepresented populations who demand diverse content. As the impact of globalization increases, research shows that the individual is seeking to know the "other," which means even traditional audiences seek diverse content.[6] The demographic numbers from The Hollywood Diversity Report of 2019 show an increasingly multicultural, multigenerational, and varied audience that seeks representation. What's clear is that programming today can no longer speak to limited audiences.

But, what exactly constitutes "diverse content?" What is sufficient representation? How does one determine authenticity? First, we need to know where we stand. According to the "See Jane 2019" report from the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2019 was an historic year for gender parity with regards to prominent characters in children's television. However, representation of people of color, LGBTQ+, and people with disabilities continues to lag or is virtually nonexistent.[7]

While some of these findings are encouraging, it's also important to differentiate between representation in front of the camera and representation behind it. Color-blind casting (the process of casting a character without taking ethnicity into account) was once considered radical and contributed to increased representation in front of the camera. However, as increasingly underrepresented audiences hunger for more authentic content, the *L.A. Times* reported that now "The ascendant norm is 'color-conscious casting,' which implies an understanding of the profound implications of skin color."[8] It's not just casting that should benefit from this practice, as it is the writers who bring these stories and characters to life. Underrepresented writers are best positioned to provide authenticity to both. When this does not happen, audiences are becoming increasingly vocal, as was the case for the recent "Magnum P.I" reboot, which came under fire when it was revealed that, while starring a Latinx lead, the writers room was reportedly devoid of Latinx voices.[9]

Why is this an issue? Take the microcosm of the scripted crime genre, one of the largest sectors of the TV industry, for which Color of Change recently issued a report. The report delves into how depictions of the criminal justice system are often skewed and misrepresent reality. For example, on crime shows, women of color were least likely to be victims of crimes (9%), which is categorically inaccurate. The low representation of women of color characters is likely due to the fact that women of color writers only account for 11% of writers across the genre. Women, in general, only accounted for 37% of writers across the genre. Ethnic representation in these writers rooms also lagged with 81% of showrunners and 81% of all writers identifying as White.[10] Perhaps, it is this connection between representation in front of the camera and representation behind it that begins to capture that elusive factor: authenticity.

Efforts to make content more authentic and writers rooms more inclusive do exist, but progress has been minimal. According to the WGA Inclusion Report Card for the 2019 staffing season, women and people of color continue to make gains in TV writer employment, but they remain underrepresented relative to their overall U.S. population, comprising 39% of writers rooms for women, and 30% of writers rooms for people of color.[11] Moreover, data from the 2017-2018 staffing season revealed that only 24% of showrunner roles were held by women and only 12% by people of color. Disabled writers only comprised 1% of employed TV writers and data for the LGBTQ+ community was unavailable.[12]

This brief review of the most current articles in the industry indicates that as viewing options increase, viewers are becoming more discerning and desiring of diverse content. Representation in front of the camera must move beyond stereotypical and problematic depictions. The best way to address this is to have more representation behind the camera. But, representation in writers rooms continues to lag and requires much improvement. Ultimately, while it's helpful to monitor and analyze trends in representation and hiring, only by investigating the specifics will we identify concrete opportunities for change. So, let's get into it!

Efforts to make content more authentic and writers rooms more inclusive do exist, but progress has been minimal.

[4] Moran, K. (2015). " If They're Trying to Say Something About My Culture ... I'm Confused": Recognizing and Resisting Authenticity in Latino-Themed Television, Mass Communication and Society, 18:1, 79-96, DOI: 10.1080/15205436.2014.893363

[5] Taylor, P., & Keeter, S. (2010). Millennials: A portrait of generation next. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from: https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf

[6] Gould, A. M. (2014) Millennial Media Consumption and the Birth of the Anytime, Anywhere Television Viewing Experience (Doctoral dissertation, Drexel University)

[7] Giaccardi, Soraya, Heldman, Rebecca Cooper, et al (2019), pg. 3-10, retrieved from: https://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/see-jane-2019/

[8] Gelt, Jessica. (2017). "Authenticity in casting: From 'colorblind' to 'color conscious,' new rules are anything but black and white." Retrieved from https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-cm-authenticity-in-casting-20170713-htmlstory.html

[9] De Moraes, Lisa (2018) "'Magnum P.I.' Stars Jay Hernandez But No Latinx Writers; Perdita Weeks Steals Show At Panel—TCA." Retrieved from: https://deadline.com/2018/08/magnum-p-i-jay-hernandez-but-no-latino-writers-perdita-weeks-does-stunts-cbs-tca-1202440530/

[10] Hunt, D. (2019), "Crime TV Report", Color of Change, 33. Retrieved from: https://hollywood.colorofchange.org/crime-tv-report/
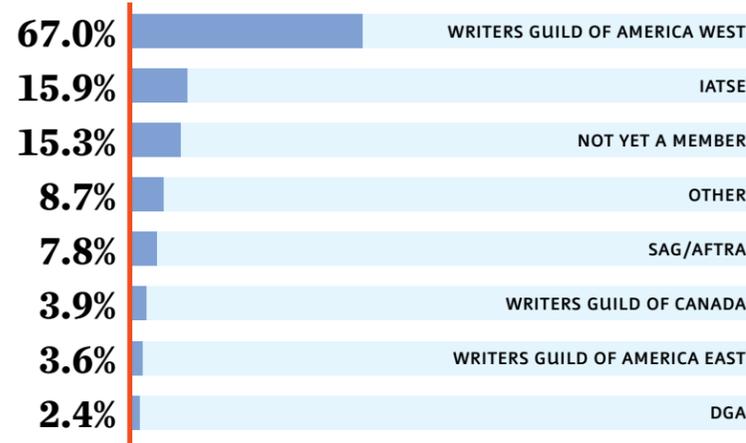
[11] WGAW (2019), "WGAW Inclusion Report Card: Update on 2019 Staffing Season," retrieved from: https://www.wga.org/uploadedfiles/the-guild/inclusion-and-equity/2019_wga_inclusion_report.pdf

[12] WGAW (2018), "WGAW Inclusion Report Card: 2017-2018 Staffing Season," retrieved from: https://www.wga.org/uploadedfiles/the-guild/inclusion-and-equity/wgaw_inclusion_report.pdf
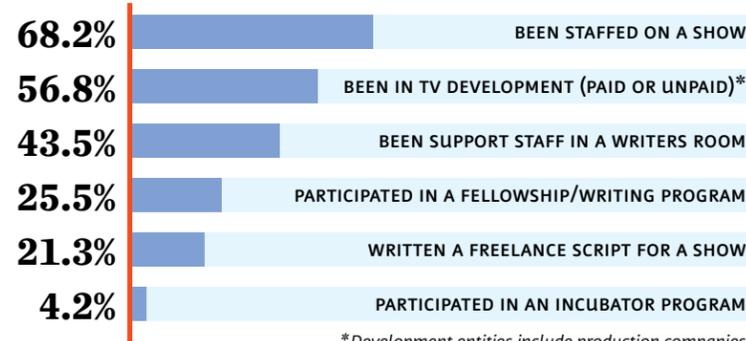
SURVEY PARTICIPANTS SNAPSHOT

TOTAL SAMPLE SIZE N=333
UNDERREPRESENTED TV WRITERS

Guild Membership

- 67.0% WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA WEST
- 15.9% IATSE
- 15.3% NOT YET A MEMBER
- 8.7% OTHER
- 7.8% SAG/AFTRA
- 3.9% WRITERS GUILD OF CANADA
- 3.6% WRITERS GUILD OF AMERICA EAST
- 2.4% DGA

In the past 5 years, have you...

- 68.2% BEEN STAFFED ON A SHOW
- 56.8% BEEN IN TV DEVELOPMENT (PAID OR UNPAID)*
- 43.5% BEEN SUPPORT STAFF IN A WRITERS ROOM
- 25.5% PARTICIPATED IN A FELLOWSHIP/WRITING PROGRAM
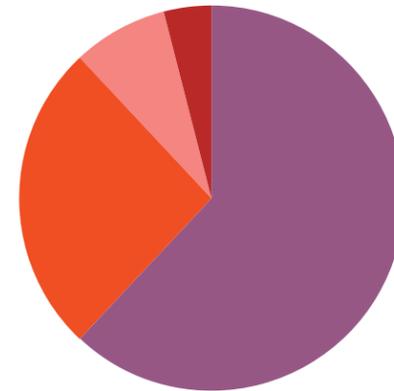- 21.3% WRITTEN A FREELANCE SCRIPT FOR A SHOW
- 4.2% PARTICIPATED IN AN INCUBATOR PROGRAM

*Development entities include production companies, studios, networks/cable outlets, streaming platforms.

Demographics

- 71.5% WOMEN/NON-BINARY
- 54.7% PEOPLE OF COLOR
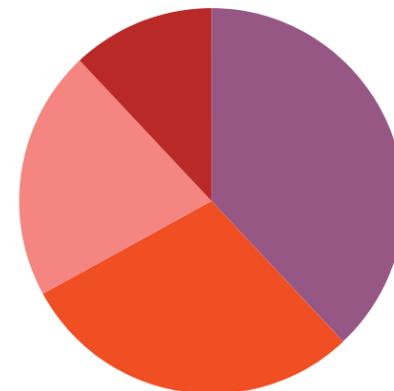- 31.2% LGBTQ+
- 7.5% PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
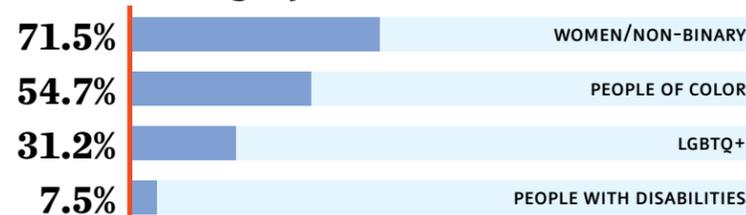
Genre

- 62.5% Hour-long Drama Writer
- 26.4% Half-hour Comedy Writer
- 7.2% Other
- 3.9% Kids/Animation Writer

Most Current Level

- 37.5% Lower-Level
- 29.1% Other/Assistant
- 21.0% Upper-Level
- 12.3% Mid-Level

Other Facts

7.8% Member of a Writing Team

3 years Median Years as a Working Writer

7-12 months Median Time Between Jobs

METHODOLOGY and LIMITATIONS

The survey was conducted online October 15th through December 1st, 2019, among 333 "underrepresented" working TV writers, writing program/fellowship participants and alumni, and writers room support staff.

Underrepresented writers include respondents from the following communities:[13]

- WOMEN/NON-BINARY
- PEOPLE OF COLOR
- LGBTQ+
- PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Additionally, a small reference group, consisting of 26 "overrepresented" writers—individuals who do not fall within any of the abovementioned categories—was included for comparative purposes, but the numbers should be considered qualitative, as the sample size prohibits statistically significant findings. Two salons were also conducted with 30 total participants to share and clarify preliminary survey findings, and solicit feedback in order to verify and validate analysis.

The survey was anonymous and contact was made via email, a networking event, and referrals from participating writers. The survey encompassed questions that asked respondents about their experiences as working TV writers and addressed the following topics: writing programs and staffing, the writers room, development, discrimination and harassment, as well as best practices and recommendations. As a result, sample sizes differ from question to question, based on the experiences of respondents. Additionally, personal testimonials from the survey and the salons have been included, but identifying information has been redacted to protect the anonymity of our respondents.

It is important to note that survey respondents were non-randomized and self-selected. At a most conservative reading, the survey results can only speak for those who took the survey. However, it is also important to note that, given the dearth of underrepresented TV writers in the field compared to the overall population[14], our survey sample comprises a significant percentage of working writers. According to the 2017-2018 WGAW Inclusion Report Card (complete numbers for the 2019 staffing season were unavailable), writers were hired for 2985 jobs in television, thus, excluding respondents in our sample who were still in the process of breaking in, our sample consists of 17.1% of all working women writers, 19.6% of all working writers of color, and 72.4% of all working writers with disabilities (comparative data for LGBTQ+ writers was unavailable). This is considered an "oversampling"[15] of underrepresented writers, which allows for more robust statistical interpretations when focused on these specific populations.

[13] An attempt was made to include lower-level writers over the age of 55 amongst our group of underrepresented writers, however the sample size was too small to include or form any statistical conclusions.

[14] WGAW (2019), "WGAW Inclusion Report Card: 2017-2018 Staffing Season," retrieved from: https://www.wga.org/uploadedfiles/the-guild/inclusion-and-equity/wgaw_inclusion_report.pdf

[15] Mercer, Andrew. (2016). "Oversampling is used to study small groups, not bias poll results" Retrieved from: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/25/oversampling-is-used-to-study-small-groups-not-bias-poll-results/

FINDINGS

STAFFING

Staffing, i.e. writing on other people's shows, is one of the main career trajectories for a TV writer. Historically, it follows the apprenticeship model whereby writers progressively gain the skills and experience necessary to create and run their own shows. For many writers, staffing also provides much needed job and financial security. For all these reasons, staffing is highly sought after, but not everyone has the same access and/or opportunity.

Staffing can be compared to a game of musical chairs. Once the music stops, someone will be without a seat, but you have to be in the room in the first place to have a shot. As our results demonstrate, underrepresented writers often are not invited into the room, facing additional challenges to accessing staffing opportunities and moving up the ranks. Respondents indicate that both issues are caused by systemic and interpersonal barriers that stymie career advancement and sustainability.

THE ASSISTANT ROUTE

Being an assistant or a member of the writers room support staff is a tried and true path for breaking into TV writing and getting staffed. Yet, it is by no means assured and brings certain challenges, including long hours, high stress, and inequitable treatment.

> "I have had bosses reward male assistant's lazy work, look the other way for male assistant's mistakes, and award male assistant career opportunities, while I and other female support staff were expected to work at 110% and were still seen as non-writers."

A recent survey by #PayUpHollywood, a movement to increase visibility of the plight of and improve working conditions for working assistants in Hollywood, found the following:[16]

- 64.4% of respondents reported making $50,000 or less per year. A minimum annual income of $53,600 is required to not be considered "rent-burdened" in Los Angeles (i.e. spending more than 30% of your income on rent).
- 67.6% of respondents reported having to work a second job to make ends meet.
- 78.2% of respondents reported their ethnicity as White; no other ethnicity comprised more than 10% of the total.
- 78.6% of respondents who reported receiving financial assistance from family or friends also identified their ethnicity as White, showing a linkage between people's ethnicities and the general ability of their families and peer groups to support their participation in low-paying careers that offer a path toward advancement. This privilege is not found among the majority of assistants of color.
- 104 respondents reported having an object thrown at them by a supervisor or colleague.

While these results are for all working assistants in Hollywood, writers room support staff in our survey confirmed many of these findings anecdotally. One of the most frequent issues cited was the need for a "livable wage." As one respondent aptly put it, "Pay writers room support staff a livable wage, so people from diverse/lower class backgrounds have the option of entering the industry."

Although recent efforts to address these issues via unionization are encouraging, they are still in the early stages. Some employers are acting to increase wages for assistants, but more needs to be done.

Wages are only the most immediate barrier to entry. Showrunners and other employers need to be honest about the viability of promotion when hiring assistants.

- "For those of us in support staff roles, don't keep us in these positions with the promise of moving us up and never do it. Or wait 3-4 seasons before there's any movement."

Finally, when offering promotions, showrunners and other employers need to make these opportunities inclusive and equitable.

- "Other non-diverse assistants were staffed over me, even though I was at a higher level and had a proven track record of performance."
- "A male coworker who I trained was promoted above me in less than one month. I wasn't given an opportunity to go for the job (it was a non-writing position, but far better pay)."

FELLOWSHIPS & THE "DIVERSITY SLOT"

Fellowships and writing programs can provide their participants with hands-on training, valuable mentorship, access to the industry, and potential placement in writers rooms. They present a tremendous opportunity for many entry-level TV writers, but as with the assistant route, sometimes just being able to take advantage of the opportunity is sometimes a barrier in itself:

> "I've gone through much of my life pursuing film and TV, and I have not been able to do things that other people were able to do. Doing an internship was like, oh my God, who are they kidding? Work for free? I have to pay my bills. So, that's an access issue."

Our findings indicate approximately 39.9% of underrepresented writers participated in a fellowship or writing program at some point in their career.[17] Responses show that these programs do benefit the majority of their underrepresented participants:[18]

- 60.2% secured representation.
- 57.9% secured staffing meetings.
- 51.1% were staffed on a show.

However, writing programs are by no means a guarantee of success, as nearly a quarter of underrepresented respondents (24.1%) say they did not experience any immediate career advancements.[19]

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[16] Alper, Liz. (2019). "#PayUpHollywood Releases Survey of 1,500 Entertainment Industry Assistants' Pay, Working Conditions" Retrieved from: https://medium.com/@elizabeth.alper/payuphollywood-releases-survey-of-1-500-entertainment-industry-assistants-pay-working-conditions-df84e4432056
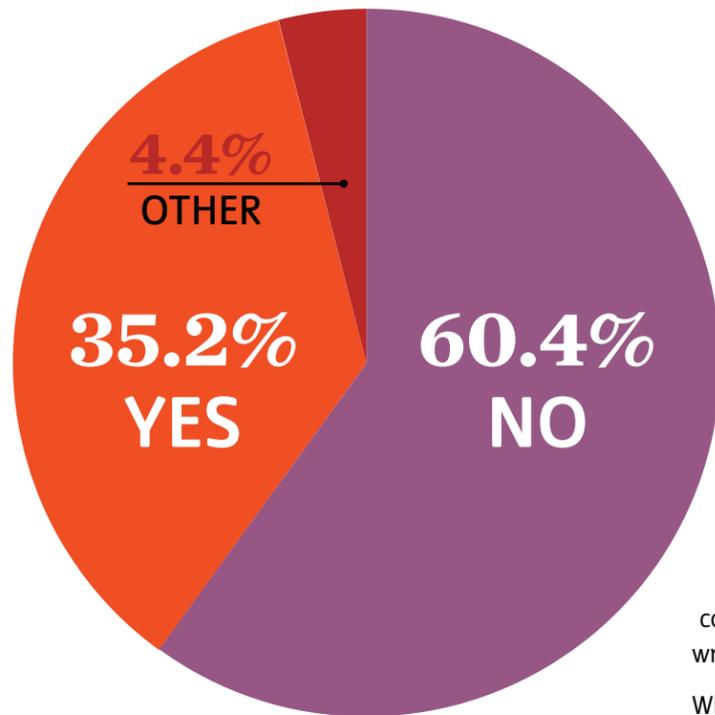
[17] N=333
[18] N=133
[19] N=133

"Diversity Slot Hire" as first or second job?

2018 Survey Results N=192

7.8% OTHER
42.2% YES
50% NO

2019 Survey Results N=227

4.4% OTHER
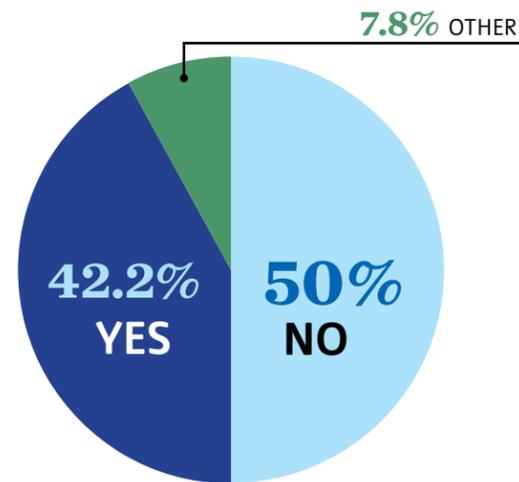35.2% YES
60.4% NO

The "diversity slot"—a financially-subsidized entry-level position on a writing staff—is the primary means by which program writers secure their first and, sometimes, subsequent early staffing opportunities. Although the "diversity slot" is not limited to program writers, it is filled predominantly with program writers. "Diversity slot" eligibility requirements are often similar to that of studio/network writing programs and fellowships.

When limiting respondents to those who have staffed in the past five years, 35.2% of survey respondents' first or second job was a "diversity slot hire."[20] This is approximately 7% lower than last year's version of the same question. What this implies is that diversity slot opportunities may have decreased in number or that underrepresented writers are entering the industry via other means (e.g. development).

This variance could also be due to the higher number of women, LGBTQ+, and disabled respondents in our pool this year and the fact that fellowships and studios/networks define eligibility criteria differently for their respective writing programs and "diversity slot" positions. Many do not account for gender, LGBTQ+, or disability status in their considerations, but should, as these communities continue to face significant underrepresentation in many writers rooms.

While these opportunities help underrepresented writers get their foot in the door, there can be negative consequences. Several survey respondents and salon participants mentioned the *stigma* of being a "program writer" or the "diversity slot hire" and the often erroneous perception that an underrepresented writer lacks talent equal to that of overrepresented writers, despite the rigorous vetting process to get into any given program:

"I've been repeatedly told by people that it was easy to get staffed as a woman of color (not the case!), while witnessing similarly-qualified straight White male writers get staffed/further opportunities right out of film school. I had to work harder to prove myself with tangible wins and fellowships before I could be taken seriously."

A funded diversity slot opportunity can be a double-edged sword: while it allows writers the opportunity to break in, it often comes at the price of lower pay, sub-par treatment, and not being afforded the opportunity to break through. In other words, once you're not free or subsidized, you're often back to square one or discarded, with 46.2% of "diversity slot hires" not being asked back or promoted for a subsequent season.[21]

The most common reasons given for not being asked back and/or promoted (when a reason was supplied) were:

- we are over budget (22.2%),
- we are going in a different direction (22.2%),
- and it didn't feel like the right fit (22.2%).

When asked if they believed the reason(s) they were given for not being asked back and/or promoted, 60.0% of "diversity slot hires" said "no."[22]

"The reason [I was told I wasn't coming back] was my voice didn't fit the show. And yet, both of my scripts for the show were not rewritten by the showrunner."

The issue is that when underrepresented writers fail to advance as a result of reasons entirely outside their control (e.g. budgetary/contractual reasons, bias, nepotism), many carry the additional stigma of being let go, extinguishing that all important "heat" or "buzz" that helps propel a career. Underrepresented writers are then left repeating levels and not moving up through the ranks. This is consistent with our findings from last year when we found that 73.4% of underrepresented writers have had to repeat a title at least once.[23]

46.2% of "diversity slot hires" [are] not being asked back or promoted for a subsequent season.

[21] N = 39

[22] N = 15. Findings should be considered qualitative in nature as the respondent pool for this subset of questions was not large enough to form statistically significant conclusions.

[23] N = 158

[20] N = 227

TITLE REPETITION & CAREER ADVANCEMENT

To dig deeper into these findings and identify where the bottleneck lies, two separate questions were posed in this year's survey, focusing on title repetition at the staff writer level, as well as beyond.

Repeated Staff Writer

49.2% [N=191]

of all underrepresented writers
have had to repeat staff writer at least once

34.6% [N=22]
OVERREPRESENTED
WRITERS

55.0% [N=120]
PEOPLE OF COLOR

49.2% of all underrepresented writers have had to repeat staff writer at least once, almost 15% more likely than overrepresented writers.[24] This number jumps to 55% for people of color. Additionally, 16.2 % of all underrepresented writers have had to repeat staff writer two or more times, with people of color experiencing a slightly higher rate of 20.0%.

"I was a staff writer for 13 episodes of [one network's] show. Then I was brought on to [another network's] show and told that my work at [the previous network] 'didn't count.' I would have to be a staff writer for 22 episodes before I could advance to Story Editor. But the first season of that [second network's] show was 16 episodes. So for 7 or 8 episodes of season 2, I was still a staff writer. Despite being overqualified...and despite selling a piece of development to [that second network]."

STAFF WRITER

STAFF WRITER

STAFF WRITER

[24] Comparative findings for overrepresented writers should be considered qualitative. See "Methodology & Limitations" for more information.

Furthermore, 27.6% of our underrepresented writers repeated other titles (excluding Staff Writer and EP), compared to 42.3% for overrepresented writers.[25] While these results may be counter-intuitive, what we're actually seeing are two types of title repetition. For our overrepresented sample, title repetition appears to occur around the Co-Executive Producer level, which is consistent with industry practices. Meanwhile, in our underrepresented sample, title repetition is happening at lower levels, which is not standard practice and signifies a roadblock to career advancement.

In addition to title repetition, 13.0% of underrepresented writers surveyed had to accept demotions in title and pay in order to staff. They are experiencing barriers to career advancement at the entry point and then continuously as they move up the ranks, and at greater levels compared to overrepresented writers.

Have you repeated titles other than Staff Writer? "yes"

Executive Producer

42.3% [N=20]
OVERREPRESENTED

27.6% [N=174]
UNDERREPRESENTED

Co-Executive Producer
Supervising Producer
Producer
Co-Producer
Executive Story Editor
Executive Story Editor
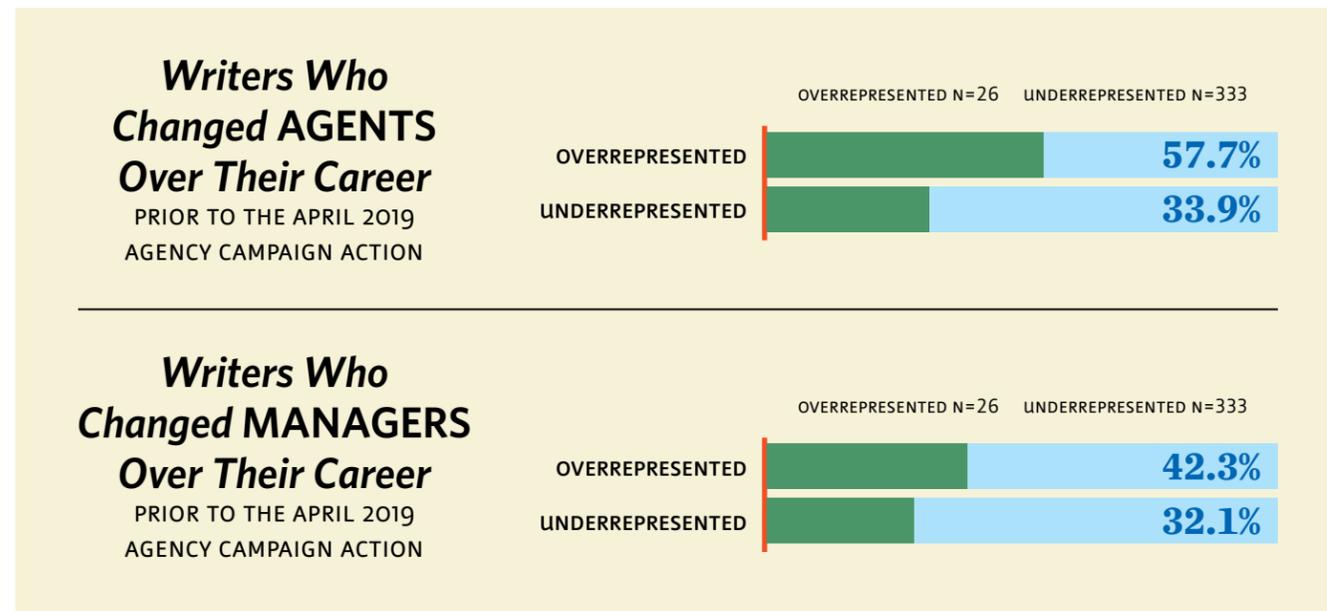Story Editor
Staff Writer

[25] Ibid

STAFFING—AGENTS & MANAGERS

Staffing is a paradox: reps can help you land that critical first opportunity, but often you need that first opportunity to help land a rep. Similarly, reps can be instrumental in helping to advance one's career, but conversely sometimes reps, themselves, can be obstacles to advancement.

Two of the issues in last year's report were sub-standard service on the parts of reps and turnover—changing reps over the course of one's career. Interestingly, underrepresented writers were much less likely to have changed agents compared to overrepresented writers. Only 1/3 of underrepresented writers changed agents, compared to over half of overrepresented writers.[26] Comparatively, underrepresented writers were also much less likely to have changed managers.

Writers Who Changed AGENTS Over Their Career
PRIOR TO THE APRIL 2019 AGENCY CAMPAIGN ACTION

OVERREPRESENTED N=26   UNDERREPRESENTED N=333

OVERREPRESENTED	57.7%
UNDERREPRESENTED	33.9%

Writers Who Changed MANAGERS Over Their Career
PRIOR TO THE APRIL 2019 AGENCY CAMPAIGN ACTION

OVERREPRESENTED N=26   UNDERREPRESENTED N=333

OVERREPRESENTED	42.3%
UNDERREPRESENTED	32.1%

Most survey respondents who changed reps did so multiple times, especially those with longer careers. Switching most often occurred when careers hit roadblocks or when writers sought to change the course of their careers.

> "I felt like they weren't looking out for my best interests and had steered me toward jobs that either didn't pay or they didn't fight in negotiations for better pay."

Many other respondents reported being dropped by their agents, while others stated that the relationship was effectively severed when their agents stopped trying to get them work. Not surprisingly, sometimes the reasons given were suspect and possibly due to bias, as one respondent stated:

> "My agent dropped me after not staffing for the first time in 3 seasons. I suspect the larger reason was because he/agency did not like the subject matter of my pilot (depicting [redacted] in a positive light)."

[26] Comparative findings for overrepresented writers should be considered qualitative. See "Methodology & Limitations" for more information.

Writers who changed reps by choice (not because they were dropped) understood that, in the end, they're the ones who must steer the ship and ensure that their interests were being protected. Many underrepresented writers feel less confident than their counterparts in securing new representation, even if they want it.

> "A lot of diverse writers feel lucky to find representation. So, they're not apt to consider leaving. And, also, they don't have the resources."

> "It's a sense of self-worth that many underrepresented writers lack. All writers are neurotic, but perhaps, because many straight White guys haven't been in a marginalized class or experienced some of the obstacles underrepresented writers face, they have a greater sense of self-worth."

This seems to suggest that many underrepresented writers may be internalizing the stigma associated with being an underrepresented writer, "program writer," or "diversity slot hire." This can lead to very real negative career consequences.

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

As is the case for much of the industry's practices, underrepresented writers face additional barriers and obstacles when navigating the realm of staffing. There may be only one or a set few slots in the room for an underrepresented writer (if any at all). And once they are staffed, climbing the ladder can be exceptionally challenging. To level the playing field, showrunners, studios, networks, agents and managers must actively work to remove bias and discrimination from the hiring lens and advocate for and provide equitable pay and advancement opportunities to ensure that writers rooms truly reflect society at large and opportunities are increasingly based on merit, talent, and fit.
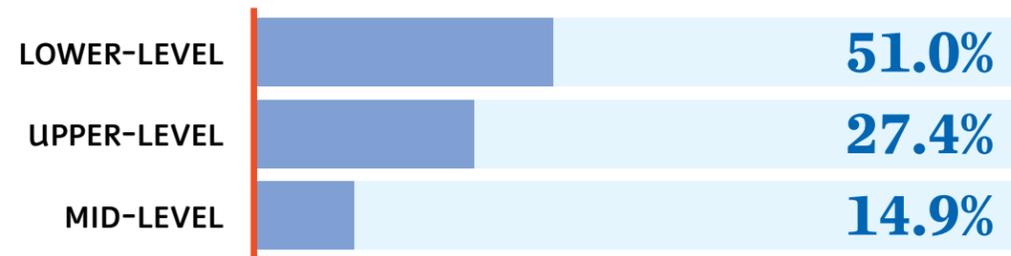
Many underrepresented writers feel less confident than their counterparts in securing new representation...

THE WRITERS ROOM

In 2018 TTIE collected data from writers about their career-wide experiences. This year's survey honed in on writers experiences around inclusion and equity in their most recent writers room during the period of January 2018 to December 2019.

Level of Writer Staffed JAN 2018 – DEC 2019

ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=208

LOWER-LEVEL	**51.0%**
UPPER-LEVEL	**27.4%**
MID-LEVEL	**14.9%**

6.3%
WOMEN
N=143

16.9%
PEOPLE OF COLOR
N=136

38.7%
LGBTQ+
N=62

WRITERS ROOM

Were you the only [...] on the writing staff?

91.7%
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES N=12
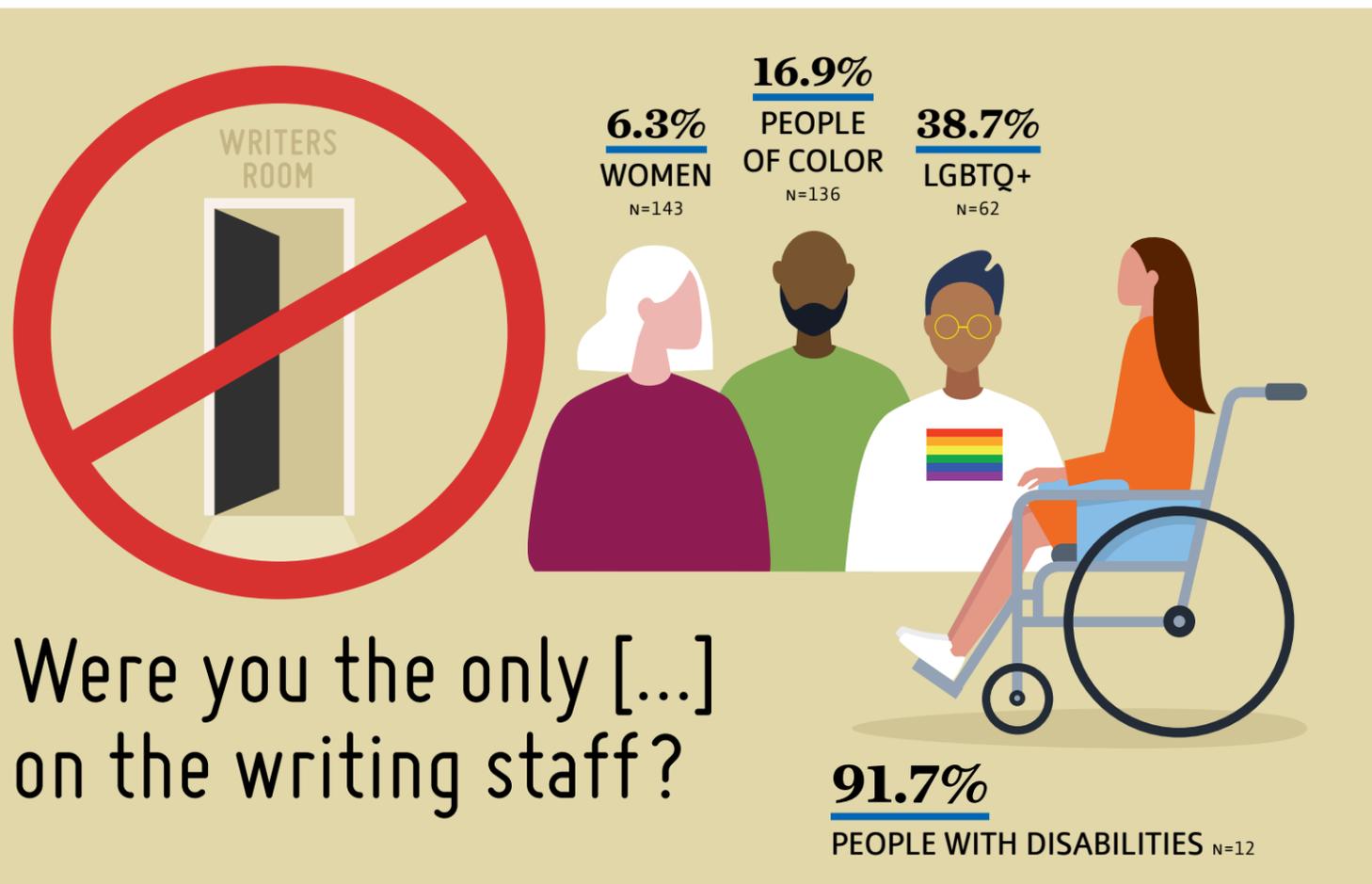
REPRESENTATION IN THE WRITERS ROOM

TTIE asked underrepresented writers if they were the only [...] in their room. 16.9% of POCs, 6.3% of Women, 38.7% of LGBTQ+, and 91.7% of people with disabilities reported being the only person from their group(s) in the room.

TODAY'S ROOMS FALL INTO A HANDFUL OF GENERAL CATEGORIES:

- **LEGACIES**: Rooms still run and staffed exclusively by overrepresented writers—often all cisgender, heterosexual, White, able-bodied men. These rooms typically suffer from a lack of representation and, often, an old boy's club type mentality.

- **TOKENS**: Rooms that have token representation from underrepresented populations, even though the show may have more representation onscreen. For example, one survey respondent commented: "The show was about my culture and I was the only diverse writer. It was a difficult experience." Another said: "As of today there are no remaining upper level POC writers on that show and ZERO Black women on a show that stars a Black woman."

- **MIRRORS**: Rooms that are comprised entirely of writers who share the same underrepresented background as the lead character(s). "I was staffed on a show about a Mexican family. All of the writing staff, including the EP, were Latino. So, I did not experience diversity stereotyping." Although these rooms tend to be much needed havens for underrepresented writers, they may benefit from other underrepresented perspectives as well.

- **INCLUSIVES**: Rooms that staff writers from many backgrounds, and whose shows reflect underrepresented perspectives both on screen and behind the camera.

TTIE would like to see more rooms like the latter, where people from all backgrounds can contribute safely and productively toward telling engaging, authentic stories.

"The current room I'm in is by far the most diverse, inclusive, thoughtful group of writers I've worked with. The showrunner is a woman [redacted] who feels so strongly about representation in the room, in scripts, on camera, behind the camera. It's been such a rewarding experience, and so drastically different from every other writing job I've had."

Representation at the upper-level is still lacking. 18.8% of respondents said the upper-level writers in their most recent room are/were all cisgender, heterosexual, White, able-bodied men. 45.2% of respondents said there was only one underrepresented writer at the upper-level.
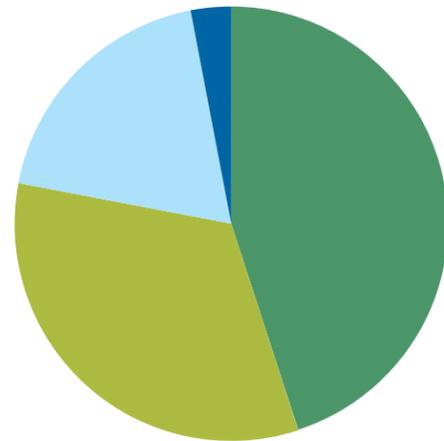
At Least One Upper-Level Underrepresented Writer on Staff?
ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=208

- **45.2%** YES, ONLY ONE
- **33.2%** YES, MORE THAN ONE
- **18.8%** NO
- **2.9%** OTHER

With power at the top consolidated amongst writers who may not have the background or experiences that foster cultural sensitivity, it can be unsafe to flag problematic material for review. When underrepresented writers are relegated to the lower levels, it is difficult to be the voice of dissent. This is why more upper-level underrepresented writers are needed to both amplify and protect lower-level underrepresented writers.
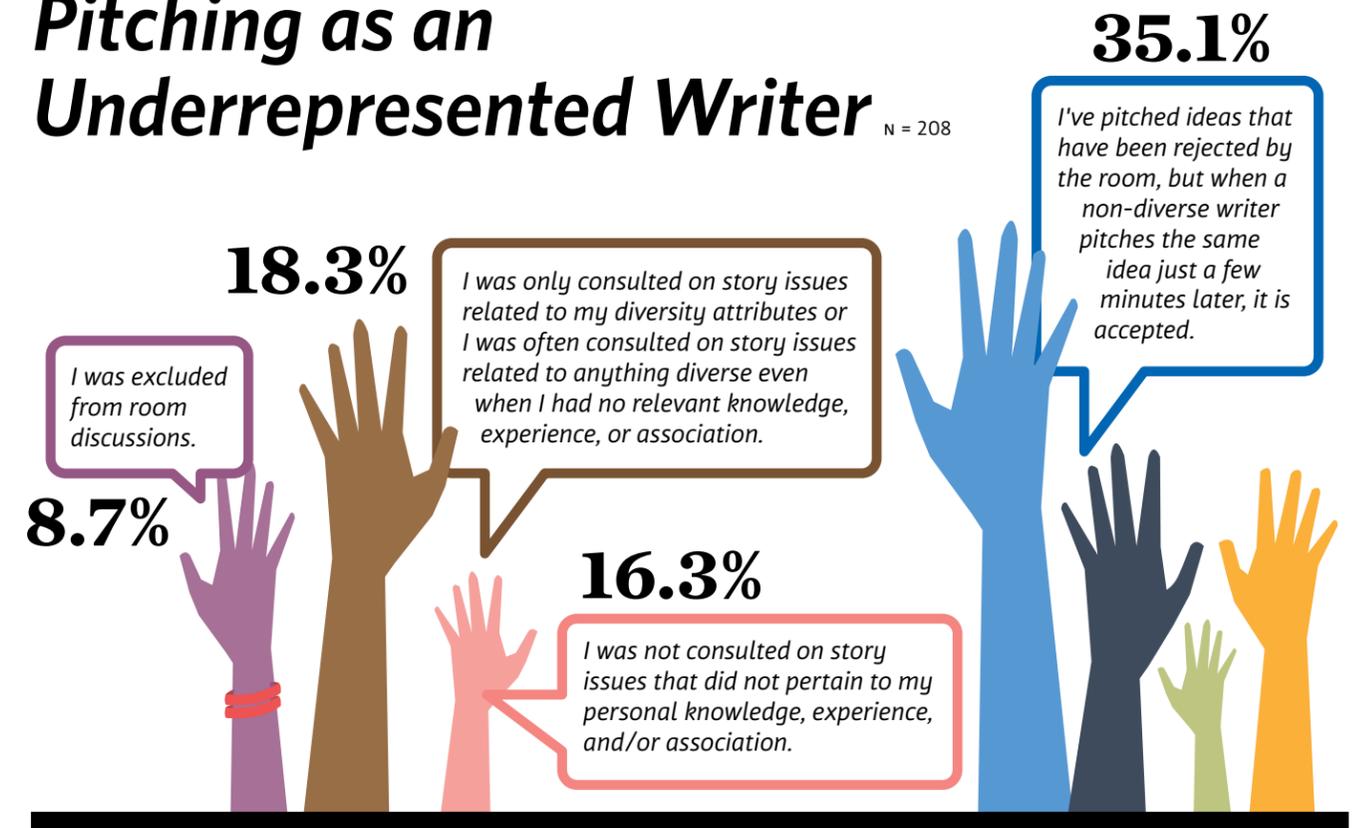
ROADBLOCKS TO PITCHING IN THE ROOM

Writers room dynamics continue to present unique challenges for underrepresented writers, with 35.1% of respondents noting that their pitches are often rejected by the room, but if an overrepresented writer re-pitches the idea a few minutes later, it is embraced. This dynamic speaks to the implicit bias towards writers from underrepresented groups not being "experts" in storytelling. This often results in these writers not being seen or heard in the room.

"My opinions are often dismissed because I am [REDACTED], whereas my cis-het White male counterparts are viewed as the experts on everything relative to storytelling. My years of experience don't count for as much as theirs, even when I have more years than they do."

Another challenge facing underrepresented writers is the assumption that they have a limited function in a writers room. 18.3% of respondents affirmed, "I was only consulted on story issues related to my diversity attributes or I was often consulted on story issues related to anything diverse even when I had no relevant knowledge, experience, or association."

Pitching as an Underrepresented Writer N = 208

8.7%
I was excluded from room discussions.

18.3%
I was only consulted on story issues related to my diversity attributes or I was often consulted on story issues related to anything diverse even when I had no relevant knowledge, experience, or association.

16.3%
I was not consulted on story issues that did not pertain to my personal knowledge, experience, and/or association.

35.1%
I've pitched ideas that have been rejected by the room, but when a non-diverse writer pitches the same idea just a few minutes later, it is accepted.

16.3% of respondents replied, "I was not consulted on story issues that did not pertain to my personal knowledge, experience, and/or association."

That being said, it is worth noting that 26.2% of respondents said they have not experienced any of these issues in their current rooms. Many noted that they believe the reason driving this is that their showrunner is also a member of one or more underrepresented groups. However, many others cited that, although they haven't experienced these issues on their current shows, they have experienced most or all of these issues on previous shows, with some saying it was so unbearable on some jobs that they quit.

MANY RESPONDENTS OPTED TO SHARE SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES SUCH AS THESE:

"These issues haven't been issues on my current show, but on the last show I worked on, I did notice them. In particular, when an African-American writer (producer) would pitch, the other writers rarely took note. But when I, [a lower level but not African-American] writer, would re-pitch and give credit to the African-American writer, they would be more likely to listen. It was frustrating to see good ideas sometimes fall to the wayside because of clear inherent bias."

This speaks to the benefit of underrepresented writers amplifying each other's voices in the room or having overrepresented writers amplify them in order to be seen and/or heard.

Other writers report being called out on their "tone" or for being "problematic" because they pushed for non-stereotypical characters or storylines. One upper level writer was sent to human resources:

> "I was sent to HR for my 'tone' in pushing back. I feel this was a preemptive strike and a way to silence me from having an opinion."

These types of implicit biases often lead to frustration and sublimated stress that can be expressed in other ways in the room that are not always productive, further hindering underrepresented writers in the workplace. Showrunners, who seek to foster a safe writers room, should learn to recognize that there may be underlying reasons for altered behavior from underrepresented writers. They should ask the right questions to uncover root causes, and when needed, find ways to correct a room's inequitable dynamic, because when the showrunner is part of the problem, it has additional complications:

> "The showrunner rarely interacted with me, but I witnessed and repeatedly spoke up about his abusive behavior to the [other] POC writers and support staff. I also reported a racist script to the [network's diversity] department and [to the studio's HR department]. How these issues were mis-handled is ultimately why I left the show."

BARRIERS TO AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING IN THE ROOM

28.4% of respondents said they experienced pushback when pitching non-stereotypical characters or storylines for underrepresented communities.[27] One respondent shared that they were "looked at to approve of diverse story or character attributes, but received push-back when I did not provide that approval or corrected/challenged certain ideas."

Another writer shared: "Studio exec wanted to know why we were 'so angry' when lead characters were made White instead of POC as showrunners wanted. Network vetoed the idea, saying it was 'too P.C.' to have a mixed-race family."

This speaks to the persistent issue of whitewashing underrepresented characters (i.e. erasure). Nearly 40% of respondents witnessed this issue on their most recent shows.[28]
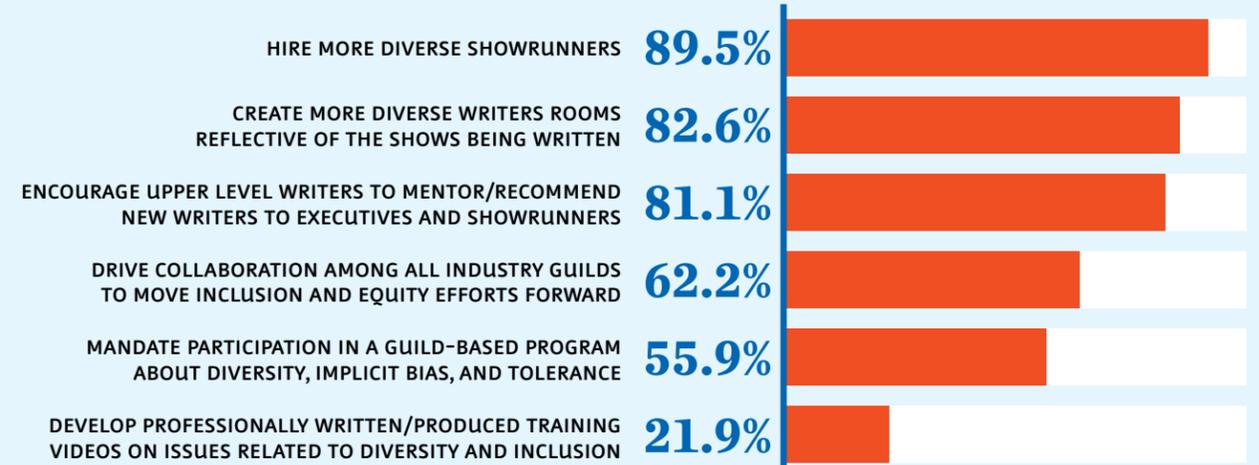
In addition, approximately 70% of underrepresented writers still report experiencing microaggressions[29]— a form of bias that can negatively impact job performance. "There would be off-color comments toward me about my ethnicity on a semi-regular basis." Being in a writers room and constantly pitching creative ideas is challenging for all writers, but also having to internalize and push past a constant barrage of subtle and not-so-subtle attacks on one's identity is demoralizing, humiliating, and exhausting. One upper level writer belonging to an underrepresented population referred to it as "death by a thousand paper cuts."

27 N = 208
28 N = 208
29 Microaggressions are casual indignities that communicate denigrating and derogatory slights or insults towards others, particularly individuals from marginalized backgrounds.

Writers Room Best Practices ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=333

HIRE MORE DIVERSE SHOWRUNNERS	**89.5%**
CREATE MORE DIVERSE WRITERS ROOMS REFLECTIVE OF THE SHOWS BEING WRITTEN	**82.6%**
ENCOURAGE UPPER LEVEL WRITERS TO MENTOR/RECOMMEND NEW WRITERS TO EXECUTIVES AND SHOWRUNNERS	**81.1%**
DRIVE COLLABORATION AMONG ALL INDUSTRY GUILDS TO MOVE INCLUSION AND EQUITY EFFORTS FORWARD	**62.2%**
MANDATE PARTICIPATION IN A GUILD-BASED PROGRAM ABOUT DIVERSITY, IMPLICIT BIAS, AND TOLERANCE	**55.9%**
DEVELOP PROFESSIONALLY WRITTEN/PRODUCED TRAINING VIDEOS ON ISSUES RELATED TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION	**21.9%**

Even more telling, 10.2% of respondents reported being fired for pushing back on stereotypical characters/storylines. If one of the purposes of diversifying a writers room is to depict underrepresented communities in more authentic ways, why are underrepresented writers being silenced and fired for doing their job by offering their unique voices? At networks where this practice is commonplace, it begs the question: Is the network's commitment to inclusion and equity simply lip service and the hiring of underrepresented writers merely to check a box?

MOVING FORWARD

There are solutions to these issues and many efforts are already under way. As stated before, TV writing is very much a relationship-based industry—opportunities often depend on who you know. It's incumbent upon showrunners and upper-levels, who possess influence and decision-making power in the hiring process, to lead by example in setting healthy and safe room cultures and advocating for increased representation in writers rooms. But that's not enough, the ranks of showrunners and upper-levels can also benefit from increased representation. For example, a common theme from survey respondents and salon participants was that hiring more underrepresented showrunners leads to work spaces where they feel heard, safe, and like members of the team. Of course, showrunners and upper-level writers do not work in a vacuum and require strong partners throughout the system to remedy these issues effectively.

Pitching nonstereotypical, underrepresented characters or storylines...

ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=59

69.5%
"I experienced micro-aggressions."

10.2%
I was fired.

8.5%
It affected my ability to be rehired by the studio/network.

6.8%
I was not assigned a script.

6.8%
I was excluded from the writers room.

DEVELOPMENT

Last year's BTS Report revealed a trend of underrepresented writers selling their first project when they had no television credits or were still at the lower level, suggesting that, for underrepresented writers, development may be an easier path into the industry or a better means of continuing work in the industry than traditional staffing. As a result, this year's survey delved deeper into how underrepresented writers are navigating many aspects of the development process. Although some results are encouraging, there are many concerning issues during development, which further challenge underrepresented writers' career development and remuneration.

THE BUSINESS OF SELLING A PROJECT

Similar to last year, this year's survey confirms the trend that underrepresented writers are finding more opportunities on the development side. 53.5% of respondents sold their first project before they were a working writer or while still a lower level writer. ("Sold" was defined as money exchanging hands.) The unfortunate flipside to this is that many of these underrepresented writers are developing for free. 39.7% of respondents said they have developed pitches or pilot scripts with no money up front.[30]

Level of Writer When Sold First Project

%	Level
19.3%	NO TELEVISION CREDIT
14.9%	STAFF WRITER
14.0%	STORY EDITOR
11.4%	SUPERVISING PRODUCER
11.4%	CO-PRODUCER
1.8%	EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
5.3%	PRODUCER
5.3%	EXECUTIVE STORY EDITOR
4.4%	FEATURE WRITER
3.5%	CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
0.9%	EXECUTIVE PRODUCER/SHOWRUNNER
7.9%	OTHER

ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=114

Production companies and studios appear to be the primary offenders in this respect. Further, 42.9% of respondents who partnered on projects with a production company or studio had to accept if/come deals, which withhold compensation from writers for any work done until the project is set up with a distribution entity.[31] (Note: This may be true for other writers as well.)

I have been asked to develop a project without pay by...

ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=189

74.6% *Production Company or POD*

27.5% *Studio*

11.1% *Network/Cable or Streaming Platform*

10.1% *Other*

In addition to not being paid for development, underrepresented writers are 25% less likely to sell a pitch or pilot (for compensation) compared to overrepresented writers.[32] So, even though there may be many underrepresented writers with projects in development, those projects are having a harder time finding distributors, despite the increasing demand for content by and about underrepresented communities.

[30] N = 189

[31] N = 189

[32] Comparative findings for overrepresented writers should be considered qualitative. See "Methodology & Limitations" for more information.
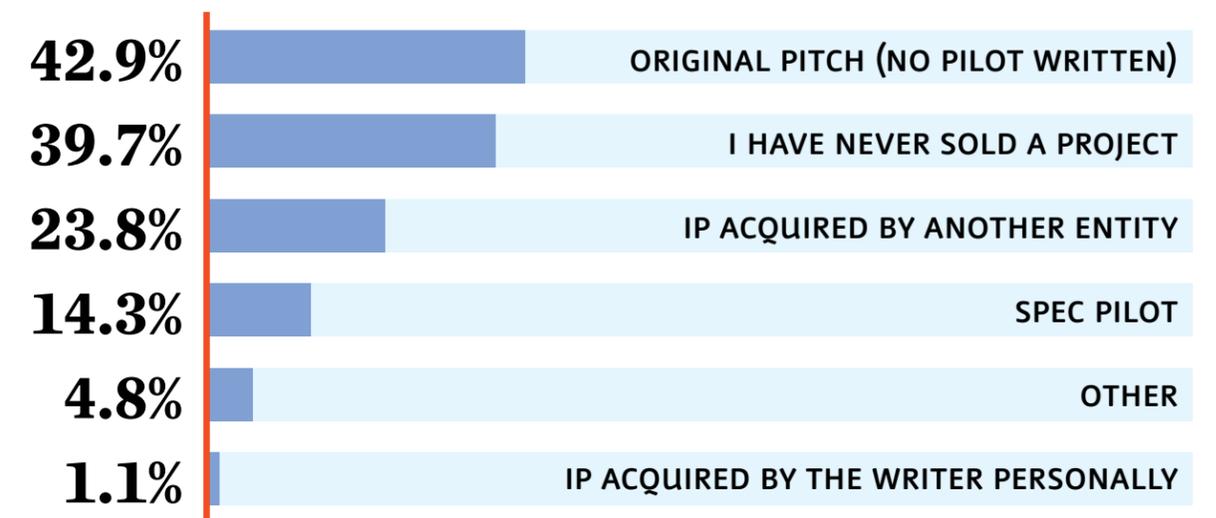
Pilots that have $OLD!

84.6% OVERREPRESENTED N=26

60.3% UNDERREPRESENTED N=189

Of those projects by underrepresented writers that have sold, 42.9% were original pitches. Although this may seem like an encouraging statistic, it may actually be an indicator that underrepresented writers have trouble gaining access to established intellectual properties (IP) and/or open writing assignments. With more and more purchased projects being based on IP, being denied access to this material is another roadblock to increasing the number of shows created and showrun by underrepresented writers.

If you have sold a project that was in development, what type of project was it? ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=189

%	Type
42.9%	ORIGINAL PITCH (NO PILOT WRITTEN)
39.7%	I HAVE NEVER SOLD A PROJECT
23.8%	IP ACQUIRED BY ANOTHER ENTITY
14.3%	SPEC PILOT
4.8%	OTHER
1.1%	IP ACQUIRED BY THE WRITER PERSONALLY

This is not the only reason why there are so few showrunners from underrepresented communities. Survey results show that only 32.9% of underrepresented writers were guaranteed the showrunner title if their sold projects were to go to series, whereas 42.3% of overrepresented writers were able to secure this title.[33] The question is why?

> "As an 'emerging' writer of color [in development], you need many value-additive elements as a pre-condition of going out with a project, i.e. an established, usually White, male writer and/or exclusively A-list talent [attached]. My White peers have had fewer hoops to jump through regarding [going out for] pitches, OWAs, etc."

Part of the issue may be experience or level, but it also seems that underrepresented writers bear an inequitable burden of proof with regards to their worth and value. This may be in part related to general stigmas mentioned earlier and the erroneous perception that underrepresented writers are somehow "less than" their overrepresented counterparts, even if they possess the same or more years of experience.

Assured Showrunner Credit

CONTRACT

42.3%
OVERREPRESENTED N=21

CONTRACT

32.9%
UNDERREPRESENTED N=152

[33] Comparative findings for overrepresented writers should be considered qualitative. See "Methodology & Limitations" for more information.

OPPORTUNITIES & BARRIERS TO AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING

In addition to the business of selling a project, underrepresented writers find there are limitations to the types of projects they are asked to develop. 51.3% of underrepresented writers say they are approached to develop because of their particular identity characteristics.[34] This speaks to the pervasive belief that underrepresented writers can only write about their own specific backgrounds—i.e. they aren't qualified to write about anything else.

> "...people ALWAYS want the main character to be exactly like me. It's like they think, because I'm [redacted], that's all I can write. And that couldn't be further from the truth. I could write anything if someone were to give me a chance."

Even when deemed the "expert" to develop a "diverse content" project due to their identity characteristics, underrepresented writers encounter roadblocks to telling authentic stories with authentic characters from underrepresented communities.

33.9% of underrepresented writers have been asked to change a character's identity to increase the odds of selling a project.[35] Many of these writers felt their work was marginalized if it didn't reflect the "dominant culture." Producers often blamed "the market," casting restrictions, or international viability when trying to convince writers to remove underrepresented characters.

- "I was told to make the lead in my [Asian country]-set thriller White because Asian actors will hurt its marketability."
- "On a script with an African-American lead, a producer said to make the lead White in order to get casting."

Change Character's Identity to Sell?
ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=189

5.3% OTHER

33.9% YES

60.8% NO

33.9% of underrepresented writers have been asked to change a character's identity to increase the odds of selling a project

- "I was told by a show exec to change the race of my series' main character from Black to White because 'African Americans are challenging internationally' for audiences and sales."

Conversely, many respondents also reported having been asked to craft characters for "color-blind casting," which assumes the race, gender, culture, or any other defining traits of a character or community are irrelevant, and therefore mutable. As discussed earlier, viewers are becoming increasingly more discerning and critical of this practice,[36] something reflected in a move towards "color-conscious casting" whereby "the profound implications of skin color" and other identity characteristics are not ignored, but acknowledged and incorporated into the creative process.[37] Underrepresented writers are precisely those positioned to best inform this process.
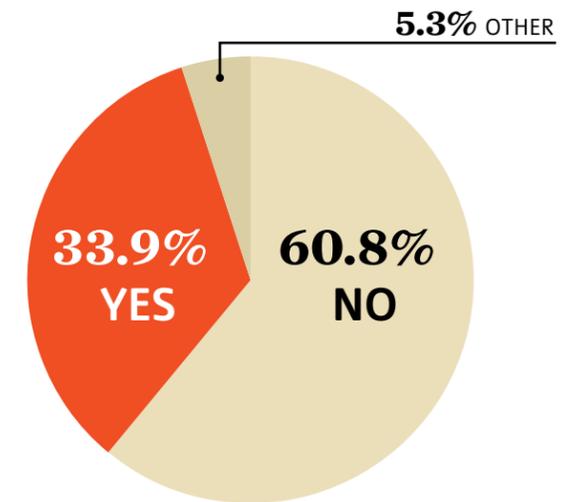
[34] N = 189
[35] N = 152
[36] De Moraes, Lisa (2018) "'Magnum P.I.' Stars Jay Hernandez But No Latinx Writers; Perdita Weeks Steals Show At Panel—TCA." Retrieved from: https://deadline.com/2018/08/magnum-p-i-jay-hernandez-but-no-latino-writers-perdita-weeks-does-stunts-cbs-tca-1202440530/
[37] Gelt, Jessica. (2017). "Authenticity in casting: From 'colorblind' to 'color conscious,' new rules are anything but black and white." Retrieved from: https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-cm-authenticity-in-casting-20170713-htmlstory.html

"When I and a fellow staff writer were pitching a show with our showrunner producing, we made a board with actors' pictures on it. [...] My showrunner looked at the board and told us it was too White and that looked bad. [...] his point was about salability. He was the type of showrunner who checked off diversity boxes, but did not actually walk the walk with telling authentic stories, or with listening to thoughts and opinions of his diverse staff."

Both of these barriers to authentic storytelling (underrepresented writers feeling pressure to change the identity and focus of their characters/stories and overrepresented writers nominally changing characters/stories without sufficient attention to the deeper implications) are often the result of the showrunner who has been paired with the underrepresented writer and/or the covering exec on the project not being from an underrepresented community. They are thus giving notes from a POV that does not necessarily identify with the themes, characters, and stories central to the script. As noted earlier, this practice contributes to erasure, stereotyping and the marginalization of the communities being depicted. For example, as one survey respondent stated, "Every time I pitch a show with an Asian POV, the studio and network executives are quick to dehumanize the characters." As other studies have demonstrated, "authenticity" is becoming an increasing factor in viewer choice and show marketability,[38] and in particular for younger-skewing viewers.[39]

OPENING DOORS

For underrepresented writers, the barriers to selling and telling authentic stories about underrepresented communities are inextricably linked and connected to the issue of gatekeepers: those with the power to purchase projects and those with the power of oversight in shaping those projects. The key is for those in power to recognize if/when they do not have the appropriate perspective to evaluate and/or give notes on a project about underrepresented communities. It is important to be curious and to seek counsel or hire experienced professionals, preferably from those underrepresented communities, to aid in this endeavor. Removing barriers to authentic storytelling will assuredly lead not only to more authentic representation in front of and behind the camera, but also to increased market success.
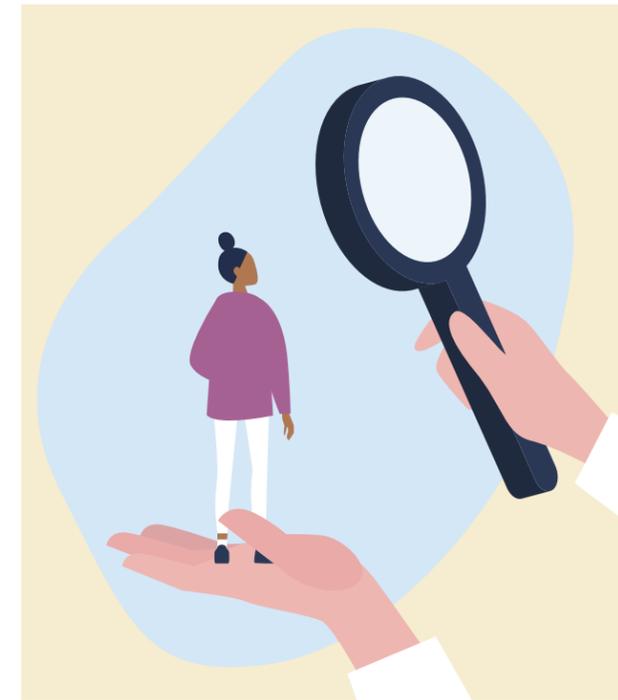
DISCRIMINATION *and* HARASSMENT

Discrimination and harassment in all their forms can impinge on writers' ability to do their best work and can often times derail careers. In recent years, much needed focus and awareness have been brought to the issue of sexual harassment.[40] In addition to sexual harassment, underrepresented writers often face a hiring climate and workplace culture that tolerates or ignores discrimination, bullying, and even outright, targeted harassment.

DISCRIMINATION

According to our survey, underrepresented writers encountered discrimination at more than twice the rate of overrepresented writers, 68.5% to 30.8%.[41]

Our data shows that writers' confidence in their assertion that they've experienced discrimination is much higher among upper-level writers than lower and mid-level writers. Upper-level writers have longer careers to measure against those of their peers, so trends may be more apparent to them. Another reason some respondents were not sure they experienced discrimination was because discrimination is difficult to prove legally, and frequently writers may not be privy to the reasons they did not secure a position or make a sale. For example, one writer said, "I think my religious identity has made showrunners uncomfortable, but I don't know for certain that it affected hiring." Additionally, writers have scant ways of knowing about positions they've missed out on if they don't even know the positions exist. Another writer wrote, "It is SO hard to tell but I don't think my reps pitch me as hard as male clients. I think they see outside-the-box opportunities for male clients that they don't consider for me. The same goes for execs, producers, etc.—not considering and championing me as much as they do males."

WRITERS WHO EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION

(% YES / NOT SURE)

UNDERREPRESENTED (N=228)   OVERREPRESENTED (N=26)

68.5%
UNDERREPRESENTED

30.8% OVERREPRESENTED

38 Moran, K. (2015). " If They're Trying to Say Something About My Culture...I'm Confused": Recognizing and Resisting Authenticity in Latino-Themed Television, Mass Communication and Society, 18:1, 79-96, DOI: 10.1080/15205436.2014.893363

39 Taylor, P., & Keeter, S. (2010). Millennials: A portrait of generation next. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from: https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf

40 For purposes of this survey, sexual harassment was defined as an employee feeling pressured within the workplace to accept sexual advances from a supervisor or other co-worker to protect the security of their job and/or influence career advancement.

41 Comparative findings for overrepresented writers should be considered qualitative. See "Methodology & Limitations" for more information.

When unpacking the numerous experiences shared by respondents, qualitative evidence suggests that discrimination frequently happens during the hiring process. It may result in a writer not getting hired or even being considered, often due to inalienable identity traits.

- *"I came out as having a disability 2 years ago [...]. I went from 7 years of consistent staff jobs to being completely shut out of the industry."*

- *"I feel certain that the fact that I am openly gay has kept me from being considered for certain opportunities like writing for a 'non-gay' show."*

- *"Have heard feedback that I was not Black enough for one showrunner."*

- *"We can't hire someone in their 30's because their bosses will be younger than them."*

TOKENISM AND PIGEON-HOLING, as detailed earlier, severely limit which employment opportunities underrepresented writers are ultimately considered for and were often used to justify why those writers were barred from an opportunity:

- *"I've been offered jobs 'helping' a younger straight White male showrunner get the female characters right. [But not the actual showrunner job itself.]"*

- *"We already have another Indian person."*

- *"We already have a woman on staff, so we don't need you also."*

PAY DISCRIMINATION AND DISPARITIES were also raised by numerous respondents and are most pointedly reflected by the issue of title repetition, as detailed in our staffing section. But discrimination may also be present in the form of being paid scale while others in the same position make more, or being passed over for promotion or additional episodes. One woman of color wrote, "I've been passed over for promotion, extra eps not assigned, not been sent on set despite proving myself a million times over." Another female respondent shared, she "was not given a raise along with a male assistant who got the same rate, was told this was because 'he's older.'" And, to make matters worse, this issue often compounds over time, as one respondent shared:

> "I had to repeat Staff Writer three times as a 'diversity hire.' When I was finally promoted to Executive Story Editor, I still had to accept a lower pay rate. Due to these quotes, I would receive (but refuse) [lower] payment offers [for future title increases]."

...qualitative evidence suggests that discrimination frequently happens during the hiring process.

BIAS/MICROAGGRESSIONS

Discrimination is not always overt and sometimes manifests itself in seemingly smaller ways like being ignored, treated with disrespect, and sometimes even prevented from carrying out one's job functions. These discriminatory practices are rooted in bias, whether implicit or explicit, and can damage writers' abilities to perform their jobs and excel in their careers.

- *"There's a different standard for writers of color. White writers (especially men) with less experience are given more responsibility, more benefit of the doubt. As a woman of color, you make one 'mistake' and it's assumed that you're not up to the job. How do you learn, how do you progress when people are so quick to question your validity and worth?"*

- *"For every room I've been in there has always been another lower level writer who has had a long-term relationship with the showrunner. For each job, that person has been White and has been allowed to make mistakes that would've gotten me fired. This other person is also always invited to participate in a second season."*

Microaggressions[42] manifest in many ways and typically have a cumulative effect, proving a substantive burden and distraction from targeted writers' work. Many studies correlate experiencing microaggressions with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Our survey respondents report being prodded about their racial identities, diminished because of their gender, and teased about their sexualities:

- *"Was called racial slurs as a 'joke,' was told I was too sensitive if I reacted."*

- *"While producing on set as a staff writer, the director announced to me at video village, in front of quite a few people, that I was being 'such a good little girl' because I hadn't noted him on anything up until that point."*

- *"Higher level male co-executive producer...likes to make a lot of gay jokes. Also, always likes to point out that I'm gay. As if he sees me as gay first and a person second."*

Working writers have incredible jobs—jobs millions of people dream of holding. Yet, toxic work environments and cultures are all too common in TV writers rooms. One writer described their 2019/2020 season writers room as a "toxic cesspool." Perhaps then, it is little surprise when bias and discrimination mount to outright harassment.
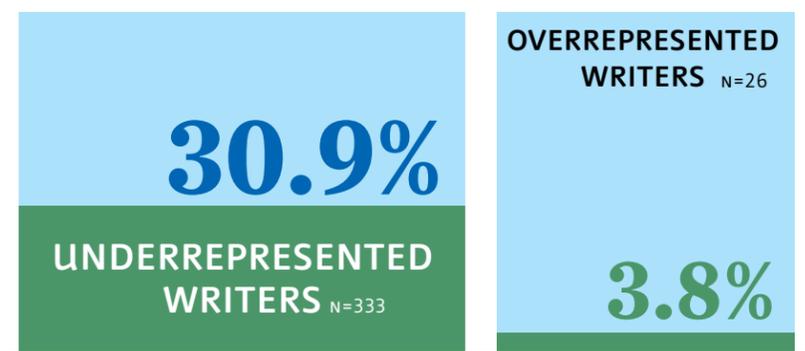
SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Over the past few years, numerous individuals and groups like Time's Up and #MeToo have shed much needed light and urged action with regards to sexual harassment. Our findings nevertheless suggest that there's still much room to grow, with underrepresented writers experiencing almost eight times the rate of sexual harassment as overrepresented writers (30.9% compared to 3.8%).[43] For the purposes of this survey, sexual harassment was strictly defined as an employee feeling pressured within the workplace to accept sexual advances from a supervisor or other co-worker to protect the security of their job and/or influence career advancement. However, it is important to note that federal labor law tends to be much more expansive in what constitutes sexual harassment, further including such actions as "requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature."[44]

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[42] Microaggression: Whether intentional or unintentional—verbal, nonverbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative connotations about a particular culture. Term originated in 1970's with regards to racial microaggressions.

[43] Comparative findings for overrepresented writers should be considered qualitative. See "Methodology & Limitations" for more information.

[44] U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission. "Sexual Harassment." Retrieved from: *https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/sexual_harassment.cfm*

Sexual Harassment % Yes/Not Sure

UNDERREPRESENTED WRITERS N=333	OVERREPRESENTED WRITERS N=26
30.9%	**3.8%**

Sexual Harassment by Gender
% Yes/Not Sure

WOMEN N=238	MEN N=121
35.5%	**16.5%**
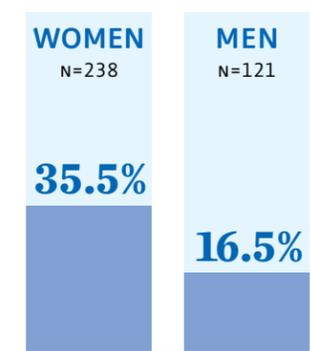
Perhaps, not surprising, women experience the highest rates of sexual harassment, more than twice the rate of men.

While respondents' experiences didn't always fit our survey's definition of sexual harassment, the incidents did often meet the federal definition of sexual harassment and warranted reporting here. Respondents who selected "unsure" described experiences such as:

- "I was given a [sex toy] by the (all male) writing staff. The writers knew it was wrong to do because they waited to give it to me until after the studio executives left the building."

- "As an assistant... I was asked to leave the room so the showrunner could discuss [redacted] sex fantasies he had about our star and a guest star."

Over 70 other writers shared harrowing experiences of sexual harassment. Their stories included a male writer pretending to "fuck me in the hallway behind my back" then later denying it when the female writer turned around. A male boss leaving nude photos in plain view of a female staffer in his office. These aren't just interpersonal problems, but a sign of a toxic workplace that turns a blind eye to abuse and favors offenders. As one respondent wrote:

"I was constantly sexually harassed by my showrunner. When he realized he wasn't going to get anywhere with me, he retaliated by telling [the network] I had a substance abuse problem, and got me blacklisted from the network for a few years."

The type of problematic behavior and toxic work culture that allows for sexual harassment also perpetuates a workplace that nurtures other forms of harassment and bullying.

HARASSMENT & BULLYING

In an eye-opening statistic, a majority of underrepresented writers (58.0%) also experienced harassment and/or bullying, other than sexual harassment, while working or trying to get work in the television industry.

Some examples of bullying indicated a cutthroat, competitive work culture where "assistants bully each other in hopes of getting ahead." Writers also bully and harass each other. One lower-level respondent reported "bullying from mid-level, male writers." There were also numerous examples where those in supervisory and senior roles abused their positions, bullying and harassing those in junior and support roles. These issues are not limited to the writers room, but occur throughout the various junctures of writing and production:

"A line producer called me 'Pussy.' A lead actor shouted 'stab the [redacted]' while wielding a prop-knife at me in front of cast and crew on set. He went unpunished and the showrunner did nothing when told."

Writers Who Experienced Other Forms of Harassment and/or Bullying

42% NO	58% YES /not sure

ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=193
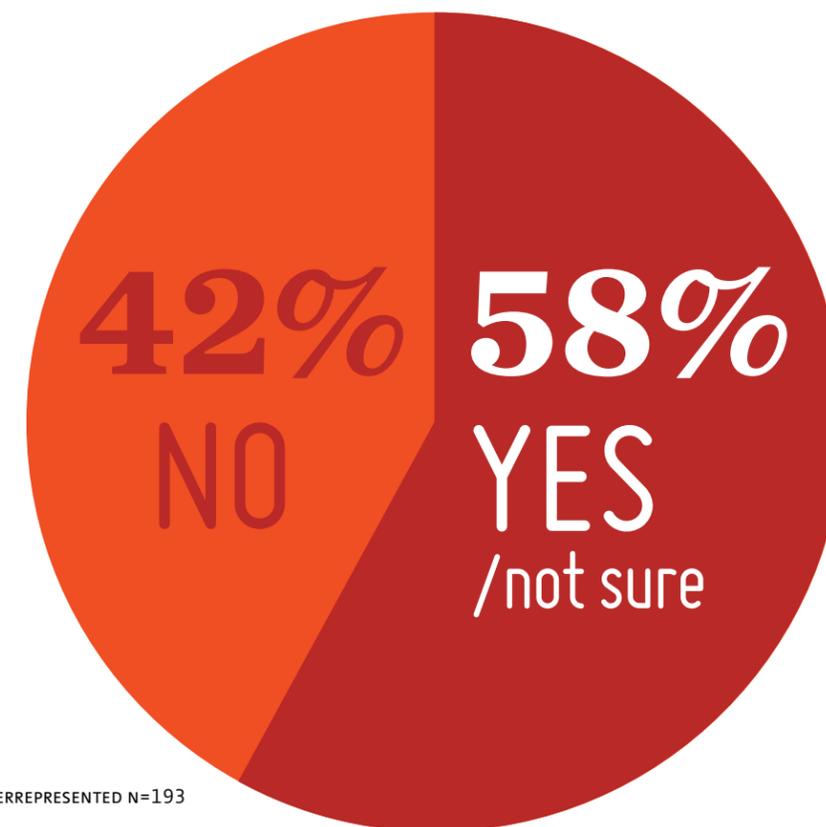
"I was on a show where myself and two other writers of color quit because of extreme bullying from the White male EP and White showrunner. When we collectively questioned the portrayal of characters of color in the show, we were told it wasn't our show and to be quiet and write what we're told to write. The White male EP was also extremely misogynistic and made all kinds of disparaging and bullying comments to me."

While rarer, harassment and bullying sometimes escalate to assault. And, while the survey did not specifically address assault, we received multiple stories of sexual assaults as well as other forms of aggressive contact and abusive behavior. One story detailed a male boss cornering a female writer in a room and pressing himself against her. Another story described how a fellow writer "body-checked them in the writers room, passing it off as accidental, but never stopped to acknowledge or apologize." Another shared, "I've had multiple bosses yell at me, throw objects, cuss me out, steal written material from me and ask me to do unethical things for them."

Of concern, we noticed a trend toward qualifying and minimizing language in our qualitative data. One respondent was clear that an incident they experienced happened, but "not for a long time." Or "This person did apologize a few days after the incident." And "Some guys have been inappropriately handsy, but nothing worthy of a full #MeToo."

There are a multitude of reasons as to why people may minimize their experiences in this light, but it bears mentioning that maintaining one's sense of power can be an important tool in finding ways to move forward, especially in a workplace where one may face their aggressor daily. Minimization may also contribute to underreporting due to the fact that, under current systems, many feel it's frequently a professionally risky proposition, even in seemingly clear-cut cases.

TO TAKE ACTION OR NOT TO?

When encountering discrimination or harassment, a majority of underrepresented writers (55.3%) did not take any action at all.

For those who did take action, most of it was indirect. Some followed up with a supervisor or upper-level writer to mixed results. Others benefited from finding allies in the room, who helped by actively supporting more inclusive room culture. Writers also reported the incidents to their reps, only feeling comfortable enough to do so when they were no longer on the job in question. Some respondents documented their experiences in case contemporaneous notes may be needed at a later date. It is important to note that very few actually reported the incident to HR, which is one of the primary recourses for resolving such matters.

Actions Undertaken After Harassment/Discrimination
ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N = 246
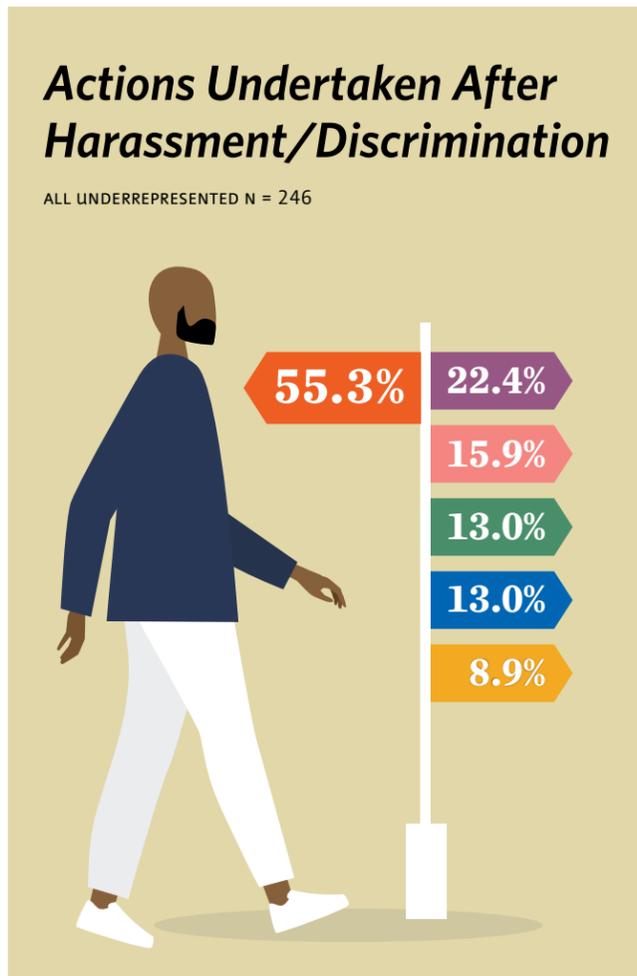
55.3% → I DID NOT TAKE ACTION

22.4% → FOLLOWED UP WITH A SUPERVISOR OR UPPER-LEVEL

15.9% → I REPORTED IT TO MY MANAGER

13.0% → I REPORTED IT TO MY AGENT

13.0% → DOCUMENTED THE INCIDENT FOR LATER REVIEW

8.9% → REPORTED THE INCIDENT TO HR AT THE STUDIO/NETWORK
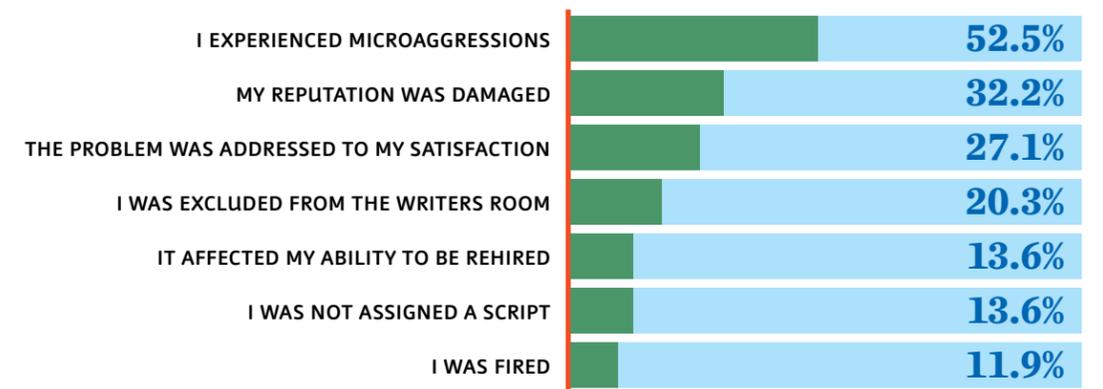
Why Writers DIDN'T Take Action
ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N = 242

I WAS CONCERNED THIS WOULD DAMAGE MY REPUTATION	72.7%
I WAS CONCERNED I WOULD BE SEEN AS OVERLY SENSITIVE	69.8%
I DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING WOULD CHANGE	59.1%
I WAS CONCERNED I WOULD EXPERIENCE MICROAGGRESSIONS	54.5%
I WAS CONCERNED IT WOULD AFFECT MY ABILITY TO BE REHIRED	49.6%
I WAS CONCERNED I WOULD BE FIRED	45.5%
I WAS CONCERNED THAT I'D BE EXCLUDED FROM THE WRITERS ROOM	32.2%
I WAS CONCERNED I WOULD NOT BE ASSIGNED A SCRIPT	21.1%

For respondents who chose not to take action, most underrepresented writers were concerned it would damage their reputation (72.7%), or that they would be seen as overly sensitive (69.8), and that even if they did take action, nothing would change (59.1%). Are these fears well-founded? Unfortunately, it appears so.

Writers Who DID Take Action
ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N = 59

I EXPERIENCED MICROAGGRESSIONS	52.5%
MY REPUTATION WAS DAMAGED	32.2%
THE PROBLEM WAS ADDRESSED TO MY SATISFACTION	27.1%
I WAS EXCLUDED FROM THE WRITERS ROOM	20.3%
IT AFFECTED MY ABILITY TO BE REHIRED	13.6%
I WAS NOT ASSIGNED A SCRIPT	13.6%
I WAS FIRED	11.9%

After taking action, 52.5% of underrepresented writers experienced microaggressions and 32.2% reported that their reputation was damaged, in addition to other work-related punitive consequences.

- "Although my manager did not drop me, he stopped sending me out. When I questioned him about it later, he said he lost faith in my talent, wondering 'if these showrunners were just bringing you into their rooms because they wanted to sleep with you, rather than because of your talent.'"

- "I was singled out by the [redacted] EP and [redacted] showrunner and bullied, threatened, told I had 'no right to talk to my reps and needed to keep my mouth shut before damaging the show any further.'"

- *"I had to repeat a level (staffing-wise) at the last minute, even though contractually this was prohibited—I had to sign a new contract—and then the showrunner systematically excluded me from EVERY part of the writing process for a year. It was a campaign of psychological torture, which is not a term I use lightly."*

As for when writers reported incidents to HR, the response was frequently problematic and detrimental for victims, while favoring and sometimes even rewarding offenders.

- *"I endured many inappropriate comments from my supervisor that I had to just laugh at and brush off. When I did bring the issue up to HR, the show was shut down and the entire team (except for the supervisor who was making the inappropriate comments) was laid off."*
- *"I did in fact call HR and called to report a union violation. I begged them not to tell my boss (because he was committing the violation). I was afraid I'd never work again if I escalated the complaint…the HR woman laughed at me and gave my name directly to my bosses and claimed she 'had to' tell them since I wasn't giving much specific info (just in case)."*

> *"I asked my studio HR person what would happen if I filed a complaint against an abusive showrunner and was told that the studio would put me 'on a list' of people who had complained."*

The notion of a "list" is not something new and was brought up frequently in both this year's and last year's survey. Participants across both salons were nearly unanimous in their distrust of HR and its ability to rectify such issues. There is a serious problem when the entity charged with resolving matters of discrimination and harassment employs scare tactics, violates confidentiality, and sometimes further harasses and/or discriminates against the victim reporting.

On the bright side, over a quarter (27.1%) of underrepresented writers reported the problem was addressed to their satisfaction. What this tells us is that there are good actors and there are some not so good ones. Each writers room, set, and any other workplace TV writers navigate over the course of their jobs is a microcosm of the industry. They are also each an opportunity to advance best practices and nurture work cultures that promote inclusion and safety.

These findings broadly underscore the urgency of immediate implementation of more substantive solutions. Many have identified the need for exit interviews, so the narrative for why a writer quit or was let go is not solely written by the showrunner. In addition, numerous reports and efforts have advocated for an independent, third-party reporting system that can address these obvious and persistent problems, provide safety for victims to report harassment, and create a path toward meaningful resolutions. This was echoed by a number of respondents in our survey.

THE ROAD FORWARD

Discrimination and harassment in all its forms pose a substantive problem for writers, but disproportionately impact writers from underrepresented groups. Writers' willingness to share their highly personal stories reflects their need to be heard and desire to create meaningful, lasting change in their workplaces.
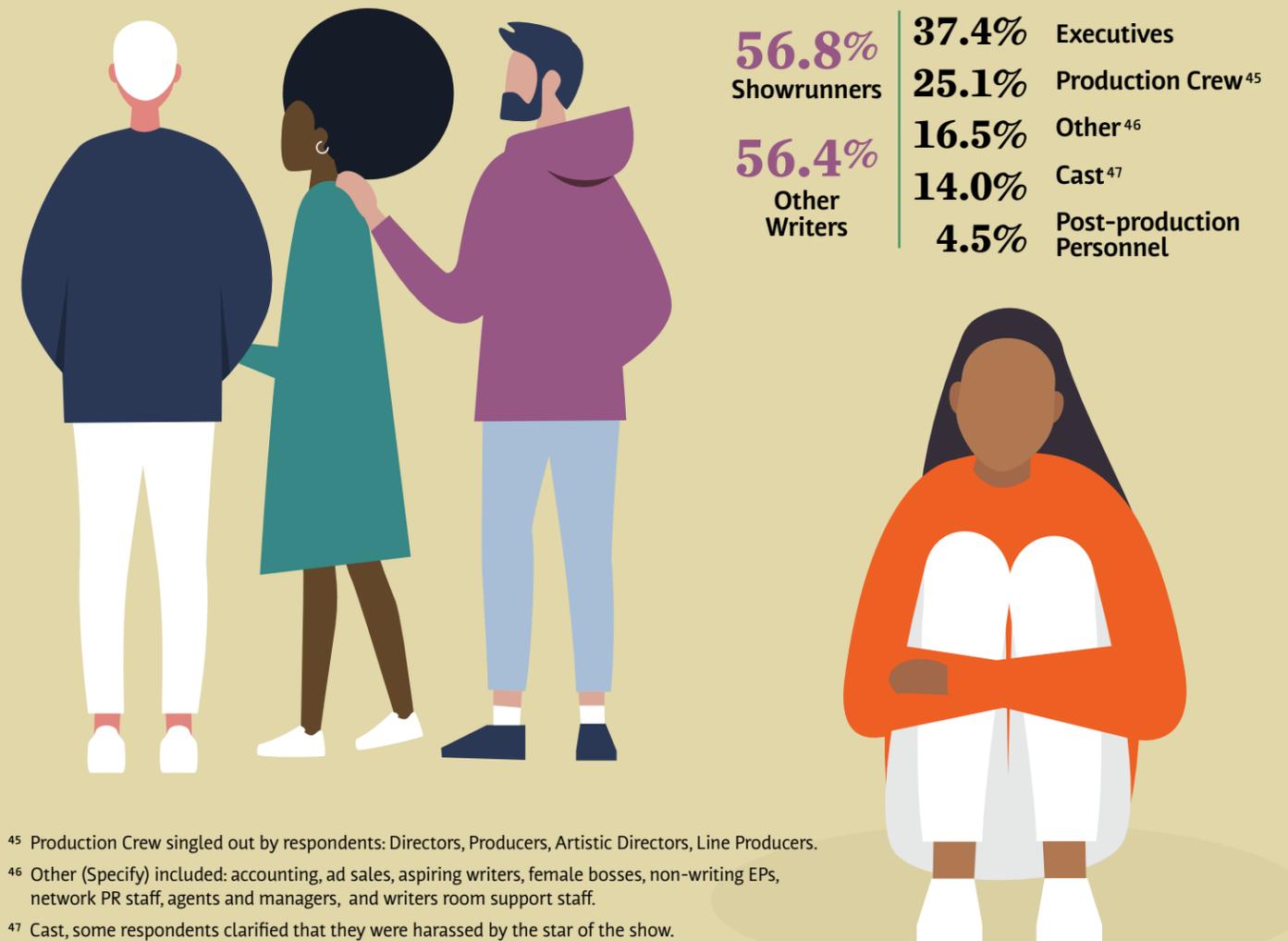
The majority of underrepresented writers identified showrunners and other writers in their room as the most frequent sources of discrimination and/or harassment. Given how much time writers spend together, this may seem obvious, but what this also implies is that the seeds to the solution lie in educating showrunners and others in positions of authority about their management role in combating toxic work environments.

We must address the institutional practices and flawed reporting systems that contribute to the protection of toxic work environments in order for us to create meaningful, lasting change. Only by making workplaces safe for everyone can the industry hope to tell authentic stories that reflect the fabric of America and the world at large.

Source of Discrimination and/or Harassment

ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N = 243

56.8% Showrunners	**37.4%** Executives
	25.1% Production Crew [45]
	16.5% Other [46]
56.4% Other Writers	**14.0%** Cast [47]
	4.5% Post-production Personnel

[45] Production Crew singled out by respondents: Directors, Producers, Artistic Directors, Line Producers.

[46] Other (Specify) included: accounting, ad sales, aspiring writers, female bosses, non-writing EPs, network PR staff, agents and managers, and writers room support staff.

[47] Cast, some respondents clarified that they were harassed by the star of the show.

WGA INTERVENTIONS

This year brought with it a number of promising developments, many undertaken by the Writers Guild of America with regards to mentorship and staffing support, particularly during the ongoing negotiations with talent agencies.

MENTORSHIP

Mentorship was one of the top recommendations from last year's survey. This year we delved deeper into the WGA Mentorship Program, which was originally created to compensate for the lack of training provided to new writers at the beginning of their careers. By inquiring into the experiences of mentees, we hope to identify what's working and explore ways to improve upon an existing and necessary program.

The overall satisfaction rate for the WGAW Mentorship program was 40.0%. While these results are mixed, there is no question many participants in the program had a very positive experience. Respondents identified several factors leading to a fulfilling mentorship:
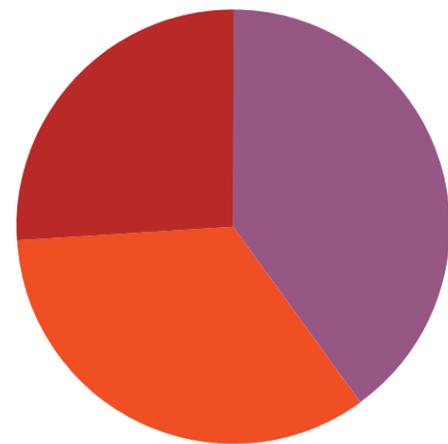
WGA Mentorship Program Satisfaction
ALL WGAW MEMBERS N=105

- **40.0%** SATISFIED
- **34.3%** NEUTRAL
- **25.7%** DISSATISFIED

• Their mentor's consistent engagement.

• The interests of the mentor and mentees were aligned.

• Fellow mentees shared interests, bonded, and helped each other during staffing.

As one respondent commented, "Our group meets regularly. I'm friends with the people in my group. We share information on hiring."

Reasons for a neutral or dissatisfactory experience seemed to stem from three main issues:

• Mentors were not available.

• Mentors were minimally engaged and/or lacked follow-up.

• Mentors were unable to speak to issues of lower-level and/or underrepresented writers.

Although the first two issues would be true of any volunteer program (some mentors will be more engaged than others), the last issue speaks much more to the issue of appropriate pairings.

> "It's been a good connection and the mentor is very pleasant and listens but he's very removed from the experience of new writers just starting...so he often is at a loss for practical career advice for our group's level."

Mentorship isn't always about access to an "important person." For many underrepresented writers and writers just starting out, mentorship is about gaining much-needed guidance relative to their level and particular job experiences.

> "My mentor can't speak to the specific problems I'm encountering as a woman of color. (He is a well-intentioned White male who came up in the industry over a decade ago.) Also, given the mentor meetings are group settings, I don't feel comfortable airing some of my more sensitive issues."

Mentorship is crucial to learning the industry and how to advance one's career. Mentorship for underrepresented writers is even more crucial for learning how to navigate the minefield of politics surrounding the bias and discrimination they will undoubtedly encounter at many junctures. Particular care should be taken in matching underrepresented writers with mentors who can validate and speak to the unique challenges they face in the industry.
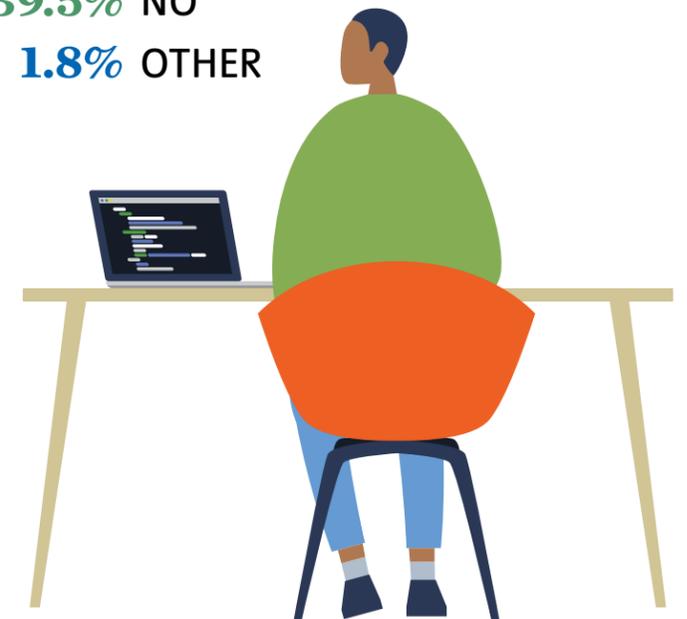
STAFFING TOOLS

As a result of the ongoing negotiation between the WGA and talent agencies, the guild featured a new, online service—THE WGA STAFFING & DEVELOPMENT PLATFORM.
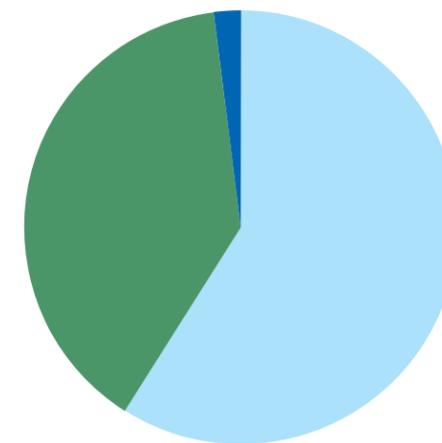
WGA Platform Usage
ALL WGAW MEMBERS N=223

- **58.7%** YES
- **39.5%** NO
- **1.8%** OTHER

A majority of underrepresented writers have utilized the platform and experienced positive results. Many have...

· Established contact with executives and secured generals.

· Had samples downloaded which led to staffing meetings.

· Gotten staffed on a show.

· Connected with producers to secure development opportunities.

There were also many who were skeptical about the effectiveness of the tools. They questioned how pervasive usage is amongst executives and showrunners. One respondent mentioned that "I have had several friends that work in development who do not utilize this tool because they simply have no idea how to use it, or what benefits they can get from it." Others were critical of how up-to-date the data was. This lack of trust in the platform led many to use the staffing tools more as an information resource, leveraging the information to activate their network and reps to advocate on their behalf.

Creating new tools and means to advance the careers of TV writers are by no means easy and the WGA should absolutely be applauded for undertaking this huge initiative. The platform is still in its first year and the WGA continues to invest manpower to outreach, education, updating data, and tool improvements. To that end, survey respondents provided the following feedback to help further these initiatives:

· Provide more interactivity within the platform, such as read receipts and download notices.

· Train executives, producers, and showrunners on how to use the platform.

· Provide additional training to union members on how to better utilize allotted submissions.

Considering some of the suggestions from members above can only make the tools better and further enable writers to advocate for themselves and advance their careers.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this year's report are encouraging, but nevertheless reveal that underrepresented TV writers continue to navigate a minefield of bias, discrimination, and harassment in the writers room and through all facets of development and production. These are systemic and pervasive barriers to representation and advancement. They not only cost underrepresented TV writers, but also hurt the bottom line. Given this, only through a systemic and pervasive response will the TV industry transform into something truly for everyone and by everyone. As working writers, we would be remiss to poke holes without providing pitches for fixes.

SHARED RECOMMENDATIONS

Networks, studios, production companies, agents and managers, showrunners, upper-levels, and guilds/unions all have a role to play and many are already spearheading important initiatives. It is absolutely crucial that all TV industry players work together to address the inclusion and equity problem. If resources are shared, the impact will be both exponential and long-lasting. Specific recommendations for all industry players include the following:

→ COLLECT, TRACK, AND REVIEW inclusion and equity DATA FOR ALL TV WRITERS ROOMS, as well as within the ranks of non-writing producers, executives, and representatives. This data should include the LGBTQ+ and Disability communities and be made available (in full transparency) on an annual or bi-annual basis.

→ FULLY FUND an INDEPENDENT REPORTING SYSTEM for bias, discrimination, and harassment that protects victims. Formalize and enforce PENALTIES for offenders.

→ REVIEW and ELIMINATE bias and/or discrimination in staffing submissions and in development.

→ INCREASE the number of UNDERREPRESENTED PROFESSIONALS IN LEADERSHIP ROLES.

→ MANDATE MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING for all individuals with oversight and supervisory responsibility, including but not limited to showrunners, upper-level writers, non-writing producers, executives, agents and managers.

→ EXPAND and fully draw upon EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS to support underrepresented TV writers at all levels.

→ PROVIDE A LIVING WAGE for writers room support staff so individuals whose incomes are not subsidized by higher income families can accept these positions.

→ CREATE and COMMUNICATE a clear path toward advancement for support staff.
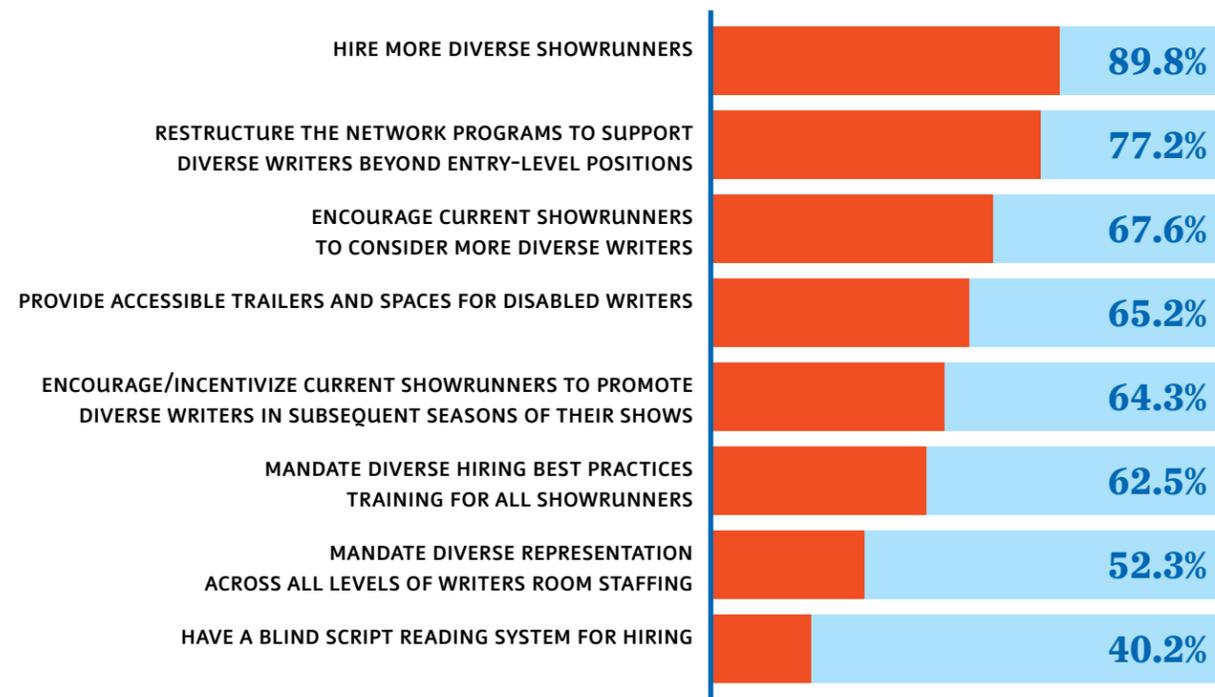
NETWORK/STUDIO/PRODUCTION COMPANY RECOMMENDATIONS

Since networks, studios, and production companies share oversight for employment and workplaces, it is incumbent upon these entities to ensure that these workplaces are safe, inclusive and equitable for all employees, including underrepresented TV writers. Similar to last year, networks and studios play an important role in advocating for underrepresented talent and stories.

Respondents felt that the following were the top three ways networks and studios could support the equal treatment and promotion of underrepresented writers: by hiring more underrepresented showrunners, by restructuring programs and policies that increase representation from underrepresented communities, and by encouraging and educating showrunners on the importance of representation and inclusion in hiring and promotion. New to this year's survey is the importance of accessible trailers and spaces for disabled writers, which ranked fourth at 65%.

Networks/Studios and Supporting Underrepresented Writers
(ALL UNDERREPRESENTED N=333)

HIRE MORE DIVERSE SHOWRUNNERS	89.8%
RESTRUCTURE THE NETWORK PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT DIVERSE WRITERS BEYOND ENTRY-LEVEL POSITIONS	77.2%
ENCOURAGE CURRENT SHOWRUNNERS TO CONSIDER MORE DIVERSE WRITERS	67.6%
PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE TRAILERS AND SPACES FOR DISABLED WRITERS	65.2%
ENCOURAGE/INCENTIVIZE CURRENT SHOWRUNNERS TO PROMOTE DIVERSE WRITERS IN SUBSEQUENT SEASONS OF THEIR SHOWS	64.3%
MANDATE DIVERSE HIRING BEST PRACTICES TRAINING FOR ALL SHOWRUNNERS	62.5%
MANDATE DIVERSE REPRESENTATION ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF WRITERS ROOM STAFFING	52.3%
HAVE A BLIND SCRIPT READING SYSTEM FOR HIRING	40.2%

Similar to last year, networks and studios play an important role in advocating for underrepresented talent and stories.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NETWORKS/STUDIOS/PRODUCTION COMPANIES INCLUDE:

- HIRE MORE SHOWRUNNERS & EXECUTIVES FROM UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS.

- MANDATE AND STANDARDIZE IMPLICIT BIAS, DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT AND GENERAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING for all showrunners (i.e. not just new showrunners), upper-level writers/producers, non-writing producers, and executives overseeing shows/productions.

- INCENTIVIZE showrunners to retain and promote underrepresented writers. PENALIZE shows (and showrunners/upper-levels/non-writing producers/executives) who abuse these incentive programs.

- FORMALIZE AND FULLY-FUND A NEUTRAL, 3RD PARTY REPORTING SYSTEM for victims of harassment and/or discrimination.

- INSTITUTE ANONYMOUS AND CONFIDENTIAL EXIT INTERVIEWS with every writer to help remove bias and/or discrimination in the hiring/firing/rehiring process.

- SEEK RECOMMENDATIONS from former support staff and lower-level co-workers when hiring showrunners, upper-level writers, non-writing producers, etc.

- PROVIDE AND INCREASE PAID DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

- INCREASE AUTHENTIC CONTENT depicting characters from underrepresented populations, created and showrun by writers from those communities.

- INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY ACROSS WORKSPACES with input from members of the disability community.

- EXPAND AND STANDARDIZE fellowship/writing program opportunities to include all underrepresented writers (i.e. women/non-binary individuals, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities) and share best practices.

- PROVIDE A LIVING WAGE for writers room support staff so individuals whose incomes are not subsidized by higher income families can accept these positions.

- CREATE AND COMMUNICATE a clear path toward advancement for support staff.

AGENCY/MANAGEMENT COMPANY RECOMMENDATIONS

Although writers completed this survey at a time when all large agencies and most mid-sized agencies could not represent writers, there were some writers repped by agents. Some writers were at agencies that had signed the WGA code of conduct, while other writers did not fall under WGA jurisdiction (e.g. animation writers, support staff):

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AGENCIES AND MANAGEMENT COMPANIES INCLUDE:

- HIRE MORE AGENTS AND MANAGERS FROM UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS.
- EXPAND the types of shows and title levels to which underrepresented writers are submitted, moving beyond theme or financial incentive as a motivating factor.
- NEGOTIATE equitable development deals (quotes/fees, titles, etc.) for underrepresented clients to afford them greater control over their projects.
- ADVOCATE for paid development opportunities to reduce the amount of free work.
- FOSTER increased communication and SUPPORT for underrepresented TV writers to ensure abuses are being heard and addressed.

SHOWRUNNER/UPPER-LEVEL/NON-WRITING PRODUCER RECOMMENDATIONS

While showrunners often shoulder the blame when things go awry, many showrunners are working hard to integrate inclusion and equity into their hiring and management practices. But there are many who are not.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SHOWRUNNERS, UPPER-LEVEL WRITERS, AND NON-WRITING PRODUCERS INCLUDE:

- HIRE, RETAIN, and PROMOTE underrepresented writers.
- PARTICIPATE in implicit bias and management training, even if not mandated.
- SIGN-ON and ADHERE to a showrunner's code of conduct.
- ASSIGN freelance opportunities to underrepresented writers and support staff.
- PROVIDE MENTORSHIP to underrepresented writers on staff and in development.
- HIRE underrepresented assistants and PROVIDE A LIVING WAGE for writers room support staff so individuals whose incomes are not subsidized by higher income families can accept these positions.
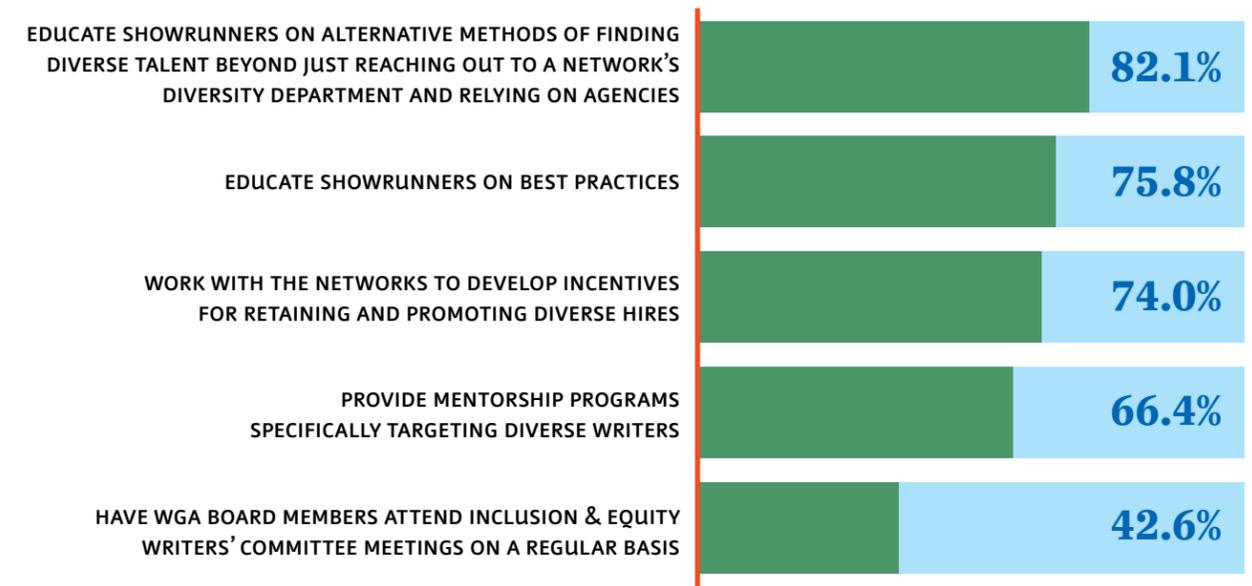- CREATE and COMMUNICATE a clear path toward advancement for support staff.

While many of these solutions and practices are available, they are not mandatory and often suffer from low participation. As several survey respondents and salon participants expressed, the reason why it's so important that showrunners, upper-level writers, and non-writing producers participate in and stand to benefit from these types of mandatory trainings, is because "the showrunner very much sets the tone." Good or bad, "it all stems from that."

GUILD/UNION RECOMMENDATIONS

Since guilds and unions are responsible for collective bargaining and working in the interests of all writers, there are clear opportunities to work with industry players to advance and improve working conditions, not just for underrepresented writers, but for all writers. Similar to last year, survey respondents identified showrunners and networks as the primary targets for guild efforts regarding inclusion and equity.

Guilds and Supporting Underrepresented Writers

(ALL WGAW MEMBERS N=223)

EDUCATE SHOWRUNNERS ON ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF FINDING DIVERSE TALENT BEYOND JUST REACHING OUT TO A NETWORK'S DIVERSITY DEPARTMENT AND RELYING ON AGENCIES	82.1%
EDUCATE SHOWRUNNERS ON BEST PRACTICES	75.8%
WORK WITH THE NETWORKS TO DEVELOP INCENTIVES FOR RETAINING AND PROMOTING DIVERSE HIRES	74.0%
PROVIDE MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS SPECIFICALLY TARGETING DIVERSE WRITERS	66.4%
HAVE WGA BOARD MEMBERS ATTEND INCLUSION & EQUITY WRITERS' COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON A REGULAR BASIS	42.6%

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GUILDS AND UNIONS INCLUDE:

- EDUCATE showrunners on alternative methods to finding underrepresented talent (i.e. beyond just reaching out to a network's diversity department and relying on agencies).
- ESTABLISH a "Showrunner Think Tank" to identify and disseminate best practices.
- INCORPORATE these trainings and best practices into the WGA Showrunners' Training Program.
- CREATE and ENFORCE a code of conduct for all working writers and for showrunners, specifically.
- ESTABLISH clear guidelines for title promotion in the WGA Minimum Basic Agreement.
- EXPAND and fully draw upon MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS to support underrepresented writers at all levels.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS

THINK TANK FOR INCLUSION & EQUITY (TTIE) is a consortium of working TV writers, spanning emerging writers to showrunners, from various backgrounds and working across various segments of the TV industry (Network/Cable/Digital, Drama/Comedy, Animation, etc.). TTIE is committed to increasing inclusion and improving working conditions for all TV writers, but in particular those from underrepresented backgrounds. In 2018, TTIE became a grantee of the Pop Culture Collaborative and a collaborative project of Women in Film.

ALTON CARSWELL is a Media Psychologist who has over 20 years' experience working for social justice in the field of Media and Psychotherapy. He is a clinical psychotherapist and user experience research consultant. Alton's educational experience includes a bachelor's degree in visual arts and media from the University of California San Diego, a master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Antioch University Los Angeles, a master's degree in Media Psychology from Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara, where he is presently completing his dissertation as a PhD candidate. Alton's body of work focuses on LGBTQ issues, ethnic imagery, visual literacy, and health interventions. Most recently he consulted with Revry, the first LGBTQ streaming media application and service, providing content and demographic analysis.

POP CULTURE COLLABORATIVE was established in 2016 and is a philanthropic resource and funder learning community that uses grantmaking, convening, narrative strategy, and research to transform the narrative landscape around people of color, immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and Native people—especially those who are women, queer, transgender, and/or disabled. The Collaborative believes there is an opportunity—and that philanthropy has a responsibility—to build a field capable of shaping popular culture to reflect the complexity of the American people and make a just and pluralistic future feel real, desirable, and inevitable. Through partnerships between the social justice sector and the pop culture industries, the Collaborative believes activists, artists, and philanthropists can encourage mass audiences to reckon with the past and rewrite the story of our nation's future. The Pop Culture Collaborative is a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

WOMEN IN FILM advocates for and advances the careers of women working in the screen industries—to achieve parity and transform culture. Founded in 1973, Women In Film supports all women working in film, TV, and digital media from emerging to advanced career. Its distinguished programs include: mentoring, speaker & screening series, production training program, writing labs, film finishing funds, a sexual harassment help line, and an annual financing intensive. It advocates for gender parity through research, media campaigns and ReFrame, a collaboration with Sundance Institute. Women In Film honors the achievements of women in Hollywood through the legacy series, annual Emmy and Oscar parties and its signature event, the Crystal + Lucy Awards. Membership is open to all media professionals and more information can be found on its website: *www.womeninfilm.org*

" It is absolutely crucial that all TV industry players work together to address the inclusion and equity problem. If resources are shared, the impact will be both exponential and long-lasting."

#WriteInclusion

TTIE
Think Tank for
Inclusion & Equity

POP
CULTURE
COLLAB

WOMEN IN FILM TV MEDIA DIGITAL
WIF
LOS ANGELES