

Recession and Regression

The 2011 Hollywood Writers Report

The 2011 Hollywood Writers Report provides an update on the progress of women, minority, and older writers on the employment and earnings fronts.

The previous report – released in 2009 by the Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW) – found little progress over earlier reports, revealing that white males continued to dominate employment opportunities and earnings in both the film and television sectors. While the situation was more mixed for older writers, women and minority writers experienced little progress, if any, relative to their male and white counterparts. The report announced a new WGAW initiative designed to address the stagnation in the television sector, the Writer Access Project, which is a script-judging contest designed to identify mid-level diverse writers who appeal to showrunners looking to staff their shows.

But since 2007, the last year covered in the previous Hollywood Writers Report, the nation's economic fortunes have taken a serious turn for the worse. The Great Recession of 2008, triggered by the “bursting of the bubble” in the nation's housing markets, was marked by a collapse of the financial markets, a tightening of credit, millions of housing foreclosures, millions of lost jobs¹, and significant declines in consumer spending. The impact on the Hollywood industry seems to have been felt most acutely in the film sector. Whereas television production was more or less flat between 2007 and 2009², the number of theatrical films produced in the United States declined 25.5 percent, from 909 to just 677.³ Meanwhile, the WGA unemployment rate increased 2.6 percentage points since the last report, from 45.8 percent in 2007 to 48.4 percent in 2009 -- which was driven by a 5.9 percent decline in the number of employed writers (from 4501 in 2007 to 4236 in 2009).

The road toward economic justice in America is a windy one, and progress has been most direct in good economic times. The current recession has clearly done little to help women, minority, and older writers move ahead in the Hollywood industry relative to their male, white, and younger counterparts. The present report shows that women writers remain stuck at 28 percent of television employment, while their share of film employment actually declined a percentage point since the last report to 17 percent. Although the minority share of television employment increased a percentage point to 10 percent (matching the shares evident in years immediately prior to the 2007 nadir), the

¹ Indeed, between June 2008 and June 2009, the U.S. unemployment rate increased 70.2 percent, from 5.7 percent to 9.7 percent.

² The number of comedies and dramas airing on television or cable in both seasons was virtually the same, 280 for the 2007-08 season and 283 for the 2009-10 season. Source: StudioSystem.com.

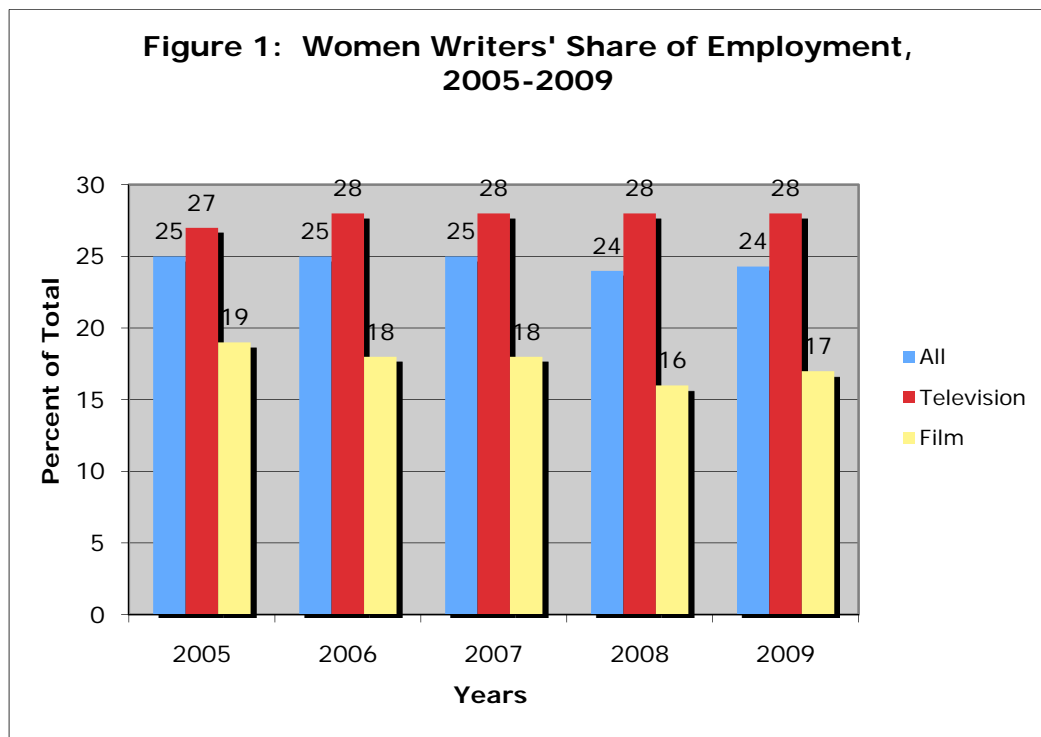
³ MPAA, “Theatrical Market Statistics, 2009,” p. 11.

group's share of film employment declined to just 5 percent – the lowest figure in at least ten years.

Below, specific findings from the 2011 Hollywood Writers Report are reviewed in order to document in greater detail recent trends in employment and earnings for women, minority, and older writers. The WGAW's goal is to employ these data to diagnose specific areas in need of intervention so that it can increase the impact of its ongoing Writer Access Project, as well as collaborate with key industry players to address the realities of recession and regression faced by diverse writers.

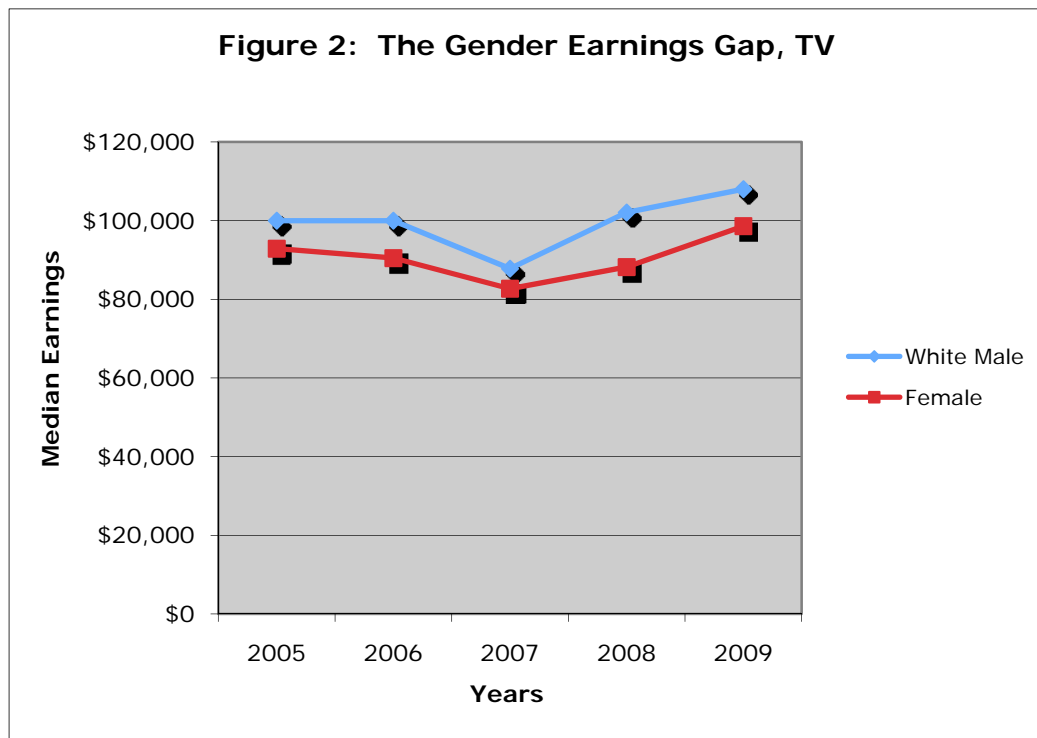
Women Writers' Overall Employment Share Declines

Since 2007, the last year examined in the previous report, women writers' overall share of industry employment has dropped one percentage point to 24 percent (see **Figure 1**). This overall decline was driven by a 1 percentage-point loss in the film sector, where women writers' share dipped from 18 percent in 2007 to 17 percent in 2009. Meanwhile, women writers' share of employment in the television sector remained stuck at 28 percent. The employment trend for women writers since 2005 consists of a small gain in television, offset by a slightly larger decline in film. As a result, women remained underrepresented by factors of nearly 2 to 1 among television writers and nearly 3 to 1 among film writers in 2009.



Gender Earnings Gap in Television Widens Again

The previous report showed that the gap in earnings between women writers and their white male counterparts closed significantly between 2006 and 2007, the last year examined in the report. Between 2007 and 2009, however, this earnings gap increased again, from \$5,109 in 2007 to \$9,400 in 2009 -- an 84 percent increase (see **Figure 2**). Median earnings for women in 2009 were \$98,600, compared to \$108,000 for white males. This earnings gap was greater than the one from four years earlier (\$7,100), the first year covered in the five-year graph. Only the earnings gap from 2008 (\$13,879) was significantly larger.



Gender Earnings Gap in Film Shrinks to Lowest Level in 8 Years

The gender earnings gap has traditionally been greater in the film sector than in television, and the previous report noted that the gap in film was growing. In 2007, median earnings for women film writers were just \$57,428, compared to \$97,719 for their white male counterparts (see **Figure 3**). By 2009, however, median earnings for women film writers had increased to \$62,500, while those for white males had decreased to \$76,517. These figures indicate a 62.5 percent decline in the gender earnings gap between 2007 and 2009, from \$40,291 to \$14,017. In fact, the 2009 earnings gap was the smallest in film since 2001, when the gap was only \$13,332. Nonetheless, this relative gain on the earnings front for women film writers was offset somewhat by the recent loss in employment share noted above (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 3: The Gender Earnings Gap, Film

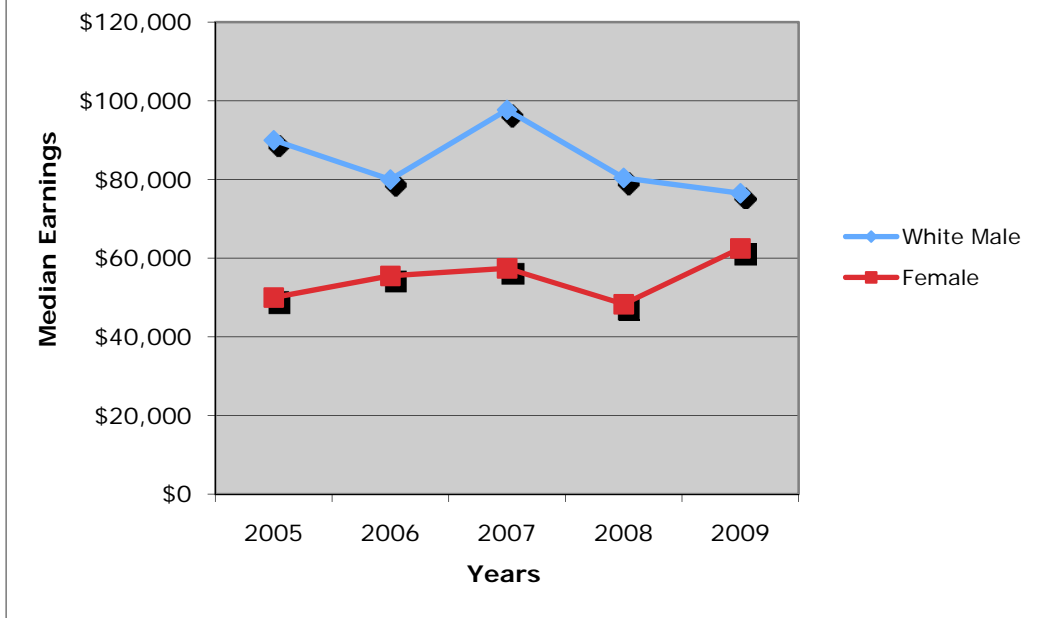
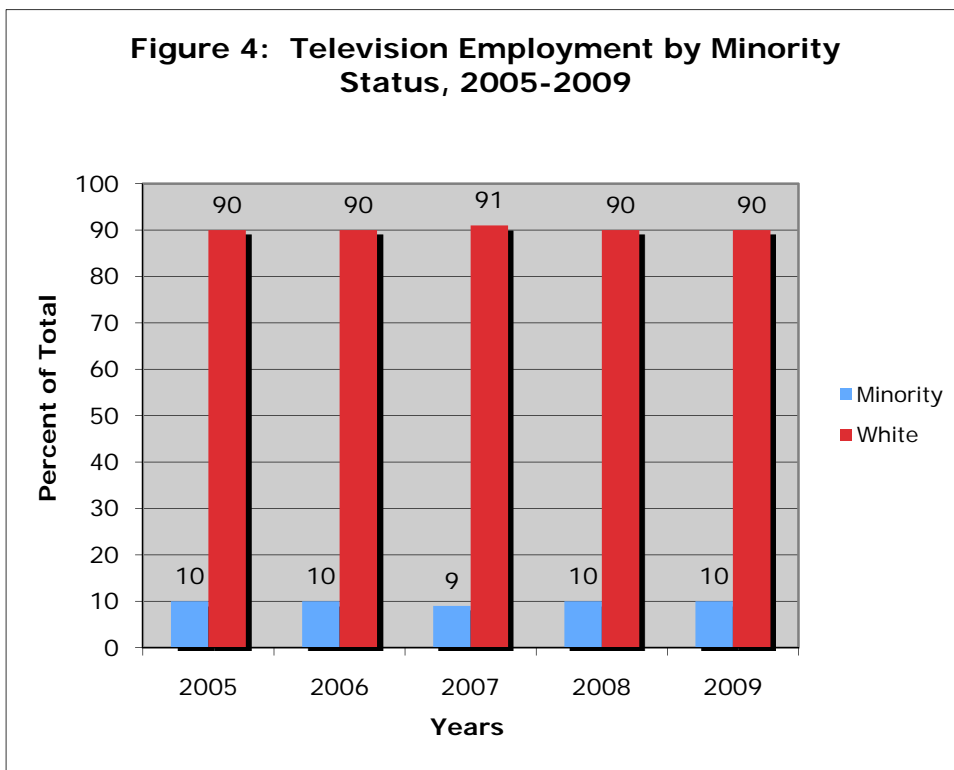


Figure 4: Television Employment by Minority Status, 2005-2009



Minority Share of Television Employment Rebounds to 2005 Levels

The previous report indicated that the minority share of television employment had declined one percentage point to 9 percent between 2005 and 2007, the last years examined in the report and its immediate predecessor. **Figure 4**, however, shows that the minority share of employment in the sector has rebounded to levels consistent with earlier reports. That is, between 2007 and 2009, the minority share increased one percentage point, from 9 percent to 10 percent. Nonetheless, this small increase in minority share is consistent with a longer-term trend in which minorities have been regularly underrepresented by factors of about 3 to 1 among television writers. As the previous report concluded, it appears that minority writers are at best treading water when it comes to their share of television employment, particularly as the nation itself becomes more diverse.⁴

Minority Share of Film Employment Declines to Lowest Level in at Least 10 Years

Between 1999 and 2008, minority writers remained stuck at about a 6 percent share of film sector employment. **Figure 5**, however, shows that the minority share of film employment actually declined by a percentage point since the last report, from 6 percent in 2007 to 5 percent in 2009. This latter figure represents the smallest minority share of film employment in at least ten years. As a result, minorities were underrepresented by a factor of about 7 to 1 among employed film writers in 2009.

Television Earnings Gap for Minorities Widens to Largest Level in at Least 10 Years

The previous report welcomed the good news of a significant closing of the television earnings gap for minority writers. But as we noted above with women writers, the earnings gap for minority writers appears to be widening again. In 2007 – the last year covered in the previous report – the median earnings for minority and white male television writers were \$77,128 and \$87,816, respectively (see **Figure 6**). But by 2009, the median earnings of minority television writers had only increased to \$84,675, compared to a larger increase to \$108,000 for their white male counterparts. As a result, the television earnings gap for minorities more than doubled since the last report, from \$10,688 in 2007 to \$23,325 in 2009. Since 1999, when the gap was only \$8,007, the gap has only approached the 2009 peak once, in 2005, when it was \$22,310.

⁴ Preliminary reports from the 2010 U.S. Census indicate that the minority share of the nation's population has increased to about 35 percent, up from about 31 percent in 2000.

Figure 5: Film Employment by Minority Status, 2005-2009

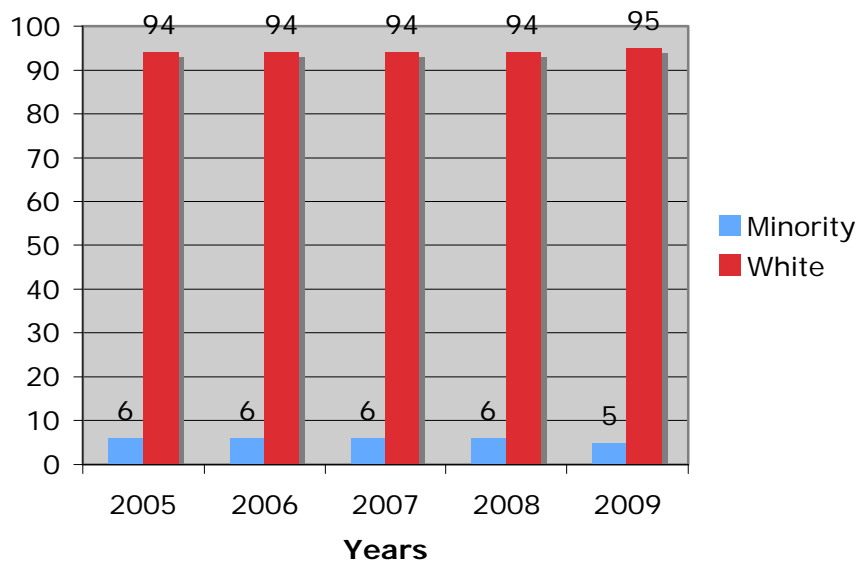
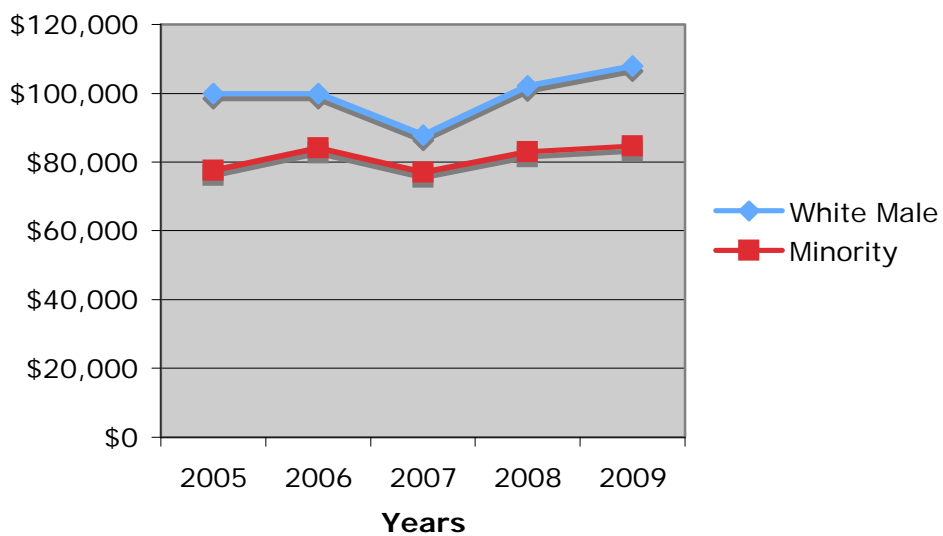
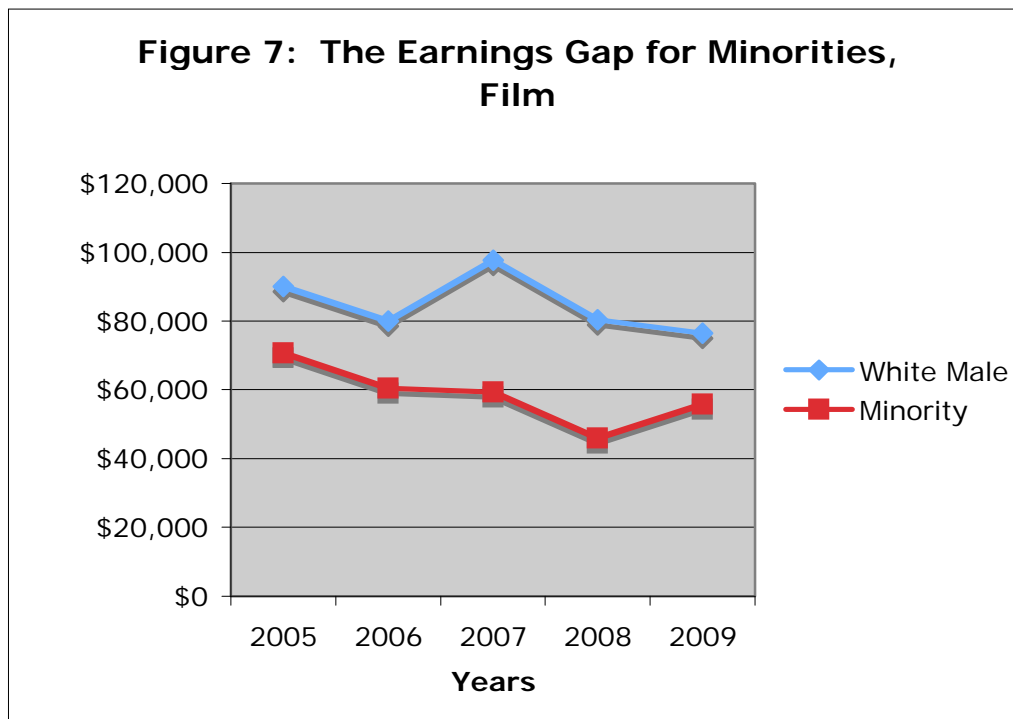


Figure 6: The Earnings Gap for Minorities, TV



Film Earnings Gap Closes a Bit After Peaking in Last Report

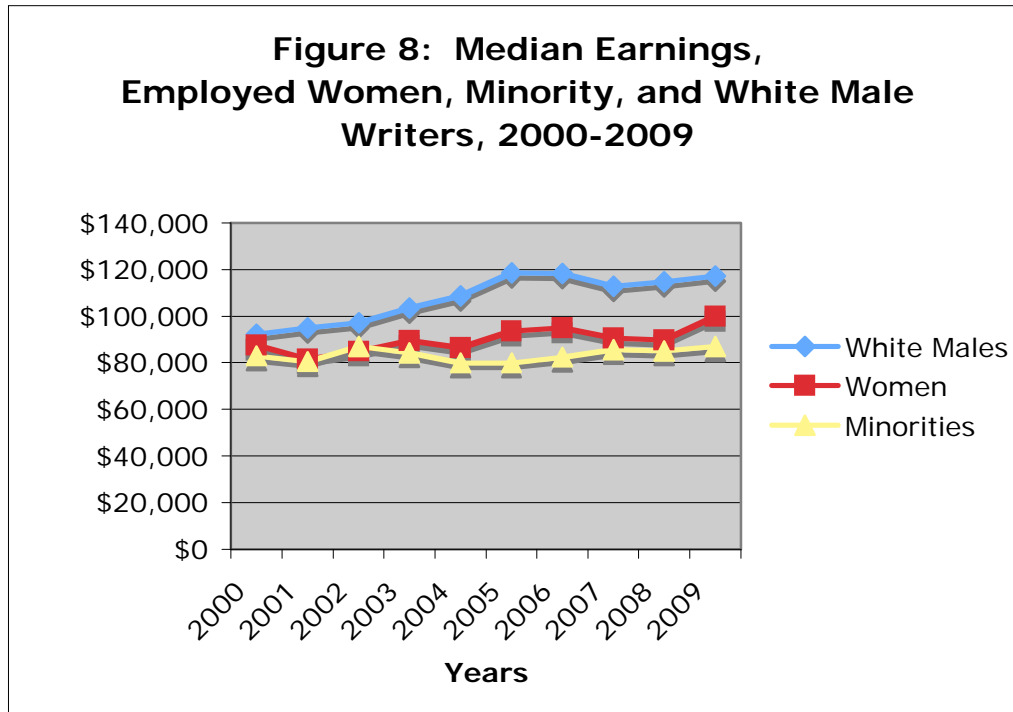
As noted above for women, the earnings gap in film for minority writers also closed a bit since 2007, the last year covered in the previous report. In 2007, median earnings for minority writers in the sector were \$59,177, compared to \$97,719 for their white male counterparts (see **Figure 7**). By 2009, however, earnings for both groups had fallen, as the film sector appears to have taken the biggest hit in the recession. Median earnings for minority and white male writers in 2009 were \$55,653 and \$76,517, respectively. The 45.9 percent reduction in the film earnings gap – from \$38,542 in 2007 to \$20,864 in 2009 – was driven by the much larger decline in the earnings of white males over the period, not by any real gains by minority writers.



White Males Continue to Dominate in Overall Earnings; But Women Close the Overall Earnings Gap, While Minorities Lag Behind

The previous report noted that while white male writers continued to dominate in overall earnings, minority writers had closed much of the gap with women writers by 2007. Indeed, minority writers earned \$85,760 in 2007, compared to \$90,767 for women writers and \$113,000 for white male writers (see **Figure 8**). By 2009, however, minorities lagged further behind women and white males in terms of overall earnings. Median earnings for minority, women, and white male writers in 2009 were \$87,225, \$100,000, and \$117,343, respectively. For minority writers, these figures reveal a 10.6 percent widening of the earnings gap with white male writers (from \$27,240 in 2007 to \$30,118 in 2009), and a more than doubling of the earnings gap with women writers (from \$5,007

in 2007 to \$12,775 in 2009). Meanwhile, the overall earnings gap between women writers and their white male counterparts closed 22 percent since the last report (from \$22,233 in 2007 to \$17,343 in 2009). Nonetheless, the longer-term view underscores just how dominant white male writers have been on the overall earnings front in recent years. Since 2000, the earnings gap between women and white males has nearly quadrupled (from \$4,735 to \$17,343) and the earnings gap between minorities and white males has tripled (from \$9,439 to \$30,118).



Employment Share for Largest Group of Older Television Writers Increases

Previous reports indicated that the employment share for writers aged 41 to 50 had remained unchanged at 35 percent since at least 2001. **Figure 9** reveals, however, that this group of older writers enjoyed a 2 percentage-point gain in its share of employment between 2007 and 2009, up to 37 percent. Meanwhile, the employment share of writers younger than 31 held steady at just 6 percent, while the share of writers aged 31 to 40 declined a percentage point to 36 percent and the employment share of writers aged 51 to 60 continued to decline -- from 19 percent in 2007, to 18 percent in 2008, and to just 17 percent in 2009. Considered in tandem, these findings suggest that the employment prospects of most writers peak between the ages of 41 to 50 and then begin to wane rather dramatically thereafter.

Figure 9: Share of Television Employment, by

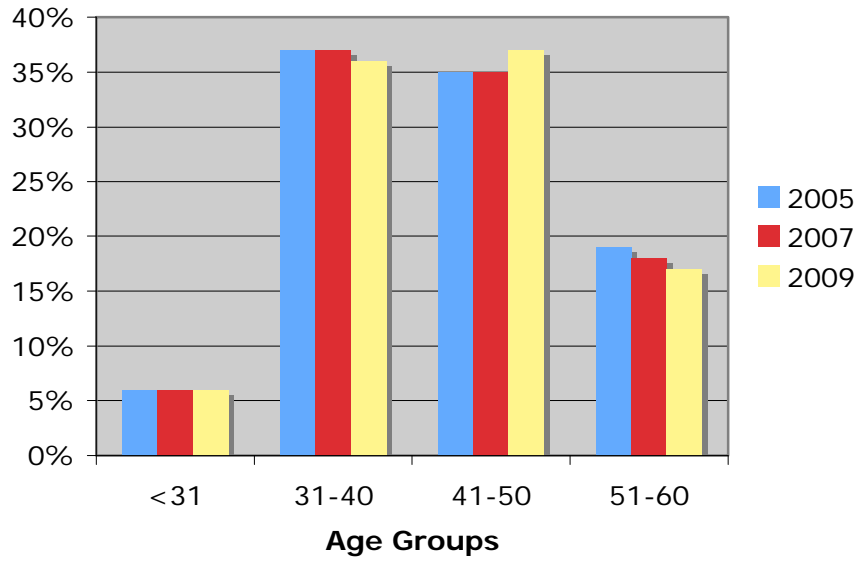
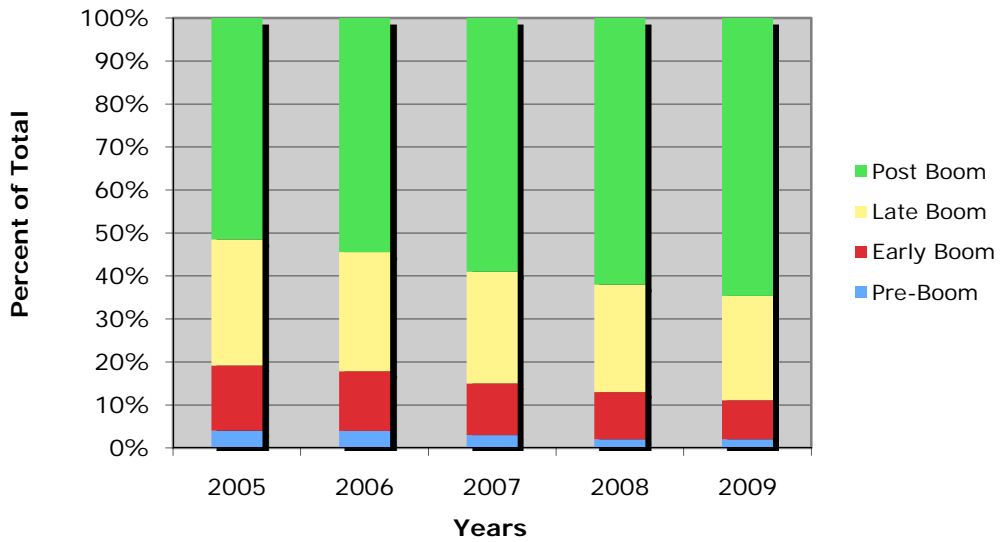


Figure 10: Employed TV Writers by Generation Cohort, 2005-2009



Post Baby Boomers Continue to Increase Their Majority Share of Television Employment

Consistent with earlier reports, the general demographic process by which newer cohorts of writers replace older ones continues. In 2009, Post Baby Boom Generation writers (born after 1962) accounted for 64 percent of television employment, up from 59 percent in 2007 (see **Figure 10**). By contrast, writers from all other generation cohorts experienced declines in employment share between 2007 and 2009. That is, the employment share of Pre-Baby Boom Generation writers (born before 1946) declined from 3 percent to 2 percent, Early Baby Boom Generation writers (born between 1946 and 1953) declined from 12 percent to 9 percent, and Late Baby Boom Generation writers (born between 1954 and 1962) declined from 26 percent to 24 percent.

Post Baby Boomers Continue to Increase Their Majority Share of Film Employment

The pattern in employment share by generation that is evident in television is more pronounced in film. Between 2007 and 2009, the employment share of the youngest writers -- Post Baby Boom Generation writers -- increased from 62 percent to 66 percent, nearly two-thirds of all film employment (see **Figure 11**). Meanwhile, the shares of Late Baby Boom Generation writers and Early Baby Boom Generation writers declined between 2007 and 2009 -- from 24 percent to 21 percent, and from 12 percent to 10 percent, respectively. The lone exception to the pattern observed for television involves the oldest generation of film writers, Pre-Baby Boom Generation writers. This cohort of film writers has held on to its 4 percent share of sector employment since 2007.

Employment Rate Flat for Largest Group of Older Writers; it Decreases for Youngest Writers

In the simplest terms, “employment rate” is a measure of the percentage of those seeking work that actually finds it. In Hollywood Writers Reports this rate is defined as the share of current guild members who are actually employed in some capacity during the year in question. **Figure 12** shows that the employment rate for the largest group of older writers, those aged 41 to 50, has remained flat at 61 percent since 2005. Meanwhile, the employment rate for writers aged 31 to 40 also has held steady since 2005, but at the somewhat higher rate of 68 percent. By contrast, the employment rate for the youngest group of writers, those under 31, declined by four percentage points since the last report, from 80 percent in 2007 to 76 percent in 2009. All other groups of older writers posted 1 percentage-point declines in employment rate since the last report, with the exception of writers aged 61 to 70, whose employment rate increased from 21 percent in 2007 to 22 percent in 2009. As in previous reports, the steep downward trend in the chart’s bars shows how it’s generally harder for guild members to find work as they age.

Figure 11: Employed Film Writers by Generation Cohort, 2005-2009

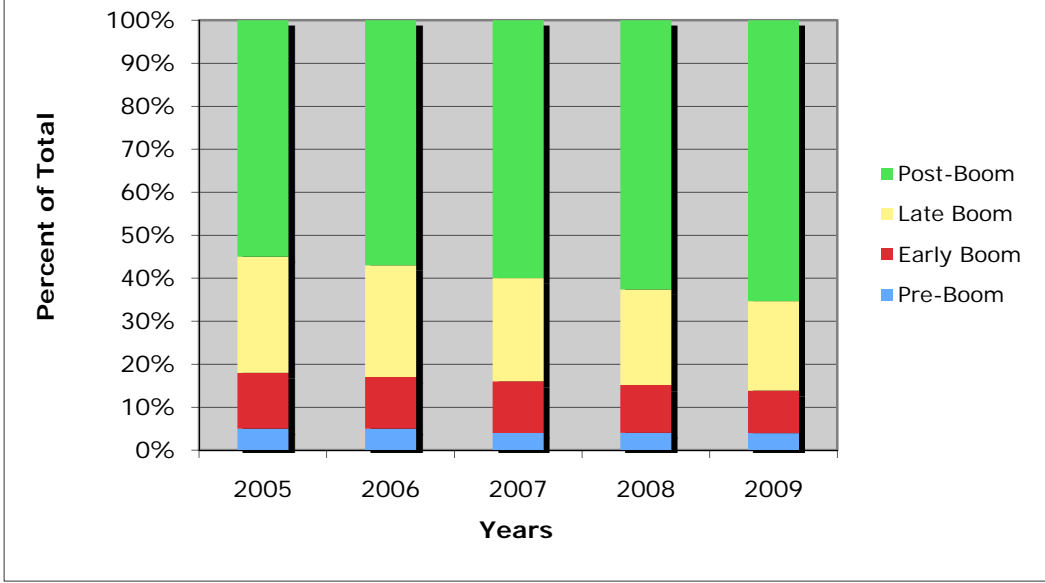
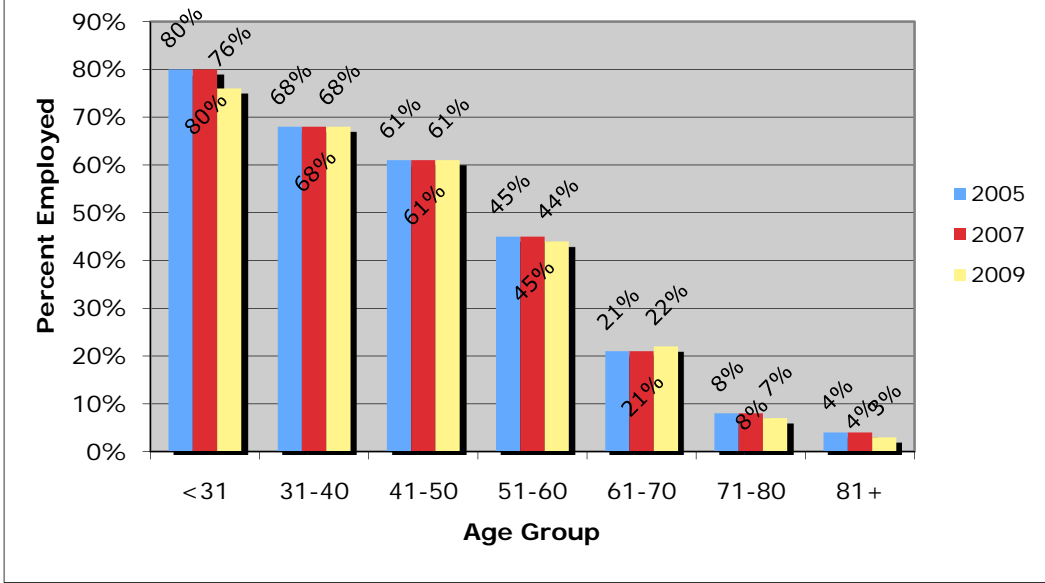
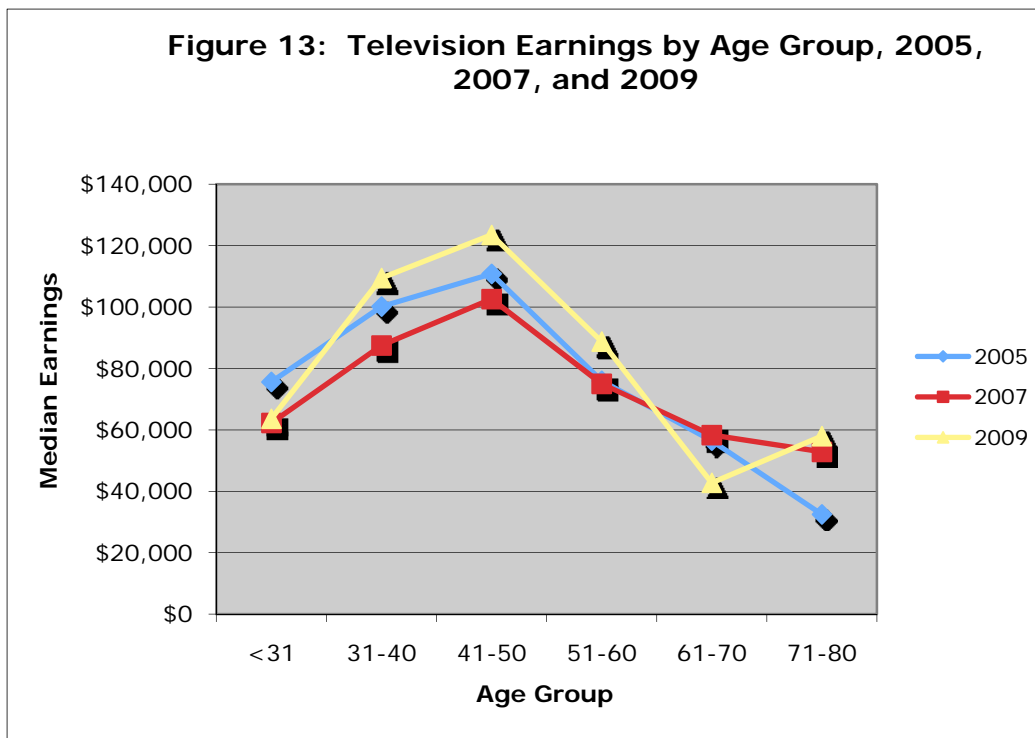


Figure 12: Employment Rate by Age Group, 2005, 2007 and 2009



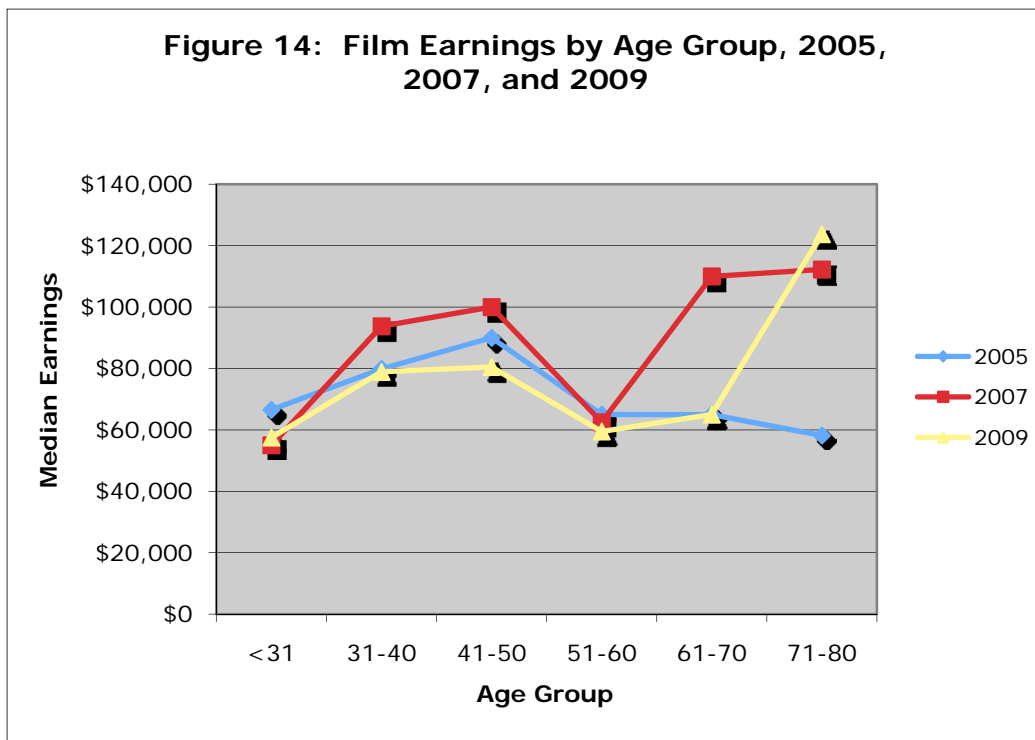
Television Earnings Continue to Peak Among Older Writers

In recent years, median television earnings have been highest among writers aged 41 to 50. **Figure 13** shows that this pattern continued in 2009, with television writers aged 41 to 50 posting median earnings of \$123,500. Meanwhile, television writers aged 31 to 40 had the second-highest median earnings (\$109,471), followed by writers aged 51 to 60 (\$88,784), writers under 31 (\$63,632), writers aged 71 to 80 (\$57,967), and writers aged 61 to 70 (\$42,775). Indeed, the only deviation in 2009 from the curves for 2005 and 2007 concerned television writers aged 71 to 80, whose median earnings then surpassed those of writers aged 61 to 70.



Writers Aged 71 to 80 Remain Highest Paid Film Writers

Repeating a development identified in the previous report, the oldest group of film writers posted the highest median earnings in 2009 (see **Figure 14**). That is, film writers aged 71 to 80 had median earnings of \$123,750 in 2009, which exceeded the figure for the second-place group of film writers, those aged 41 to 50 (\$80,500), by more than \$40,000. Recall that in the television sector this latter group was the highest paid group of writers. Meanwhile, film writers aged 31 to 40 posted earnings of \$78,918, followed by writers aged 61 to 70 (\$65,000) and writers aged 51 to 60 (\$59,500). Also contrary to the pattern in television, the youngest group of film writers -- those under 31 -- had the lowest median earnings (\$57,500).



Overcoming Barriers, Facilitating Progress

The present report underscores just how precarious gains on the diversity front have been in the Hollywood industry. As the nation grappled with the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, the few hopeful signs for women and minority writers discussed in the previous report either disappeared or seemed considerably less encouraging by 2009. For women writers, this meant a decline in overall employment share – which left women underrepresented by factors of nearly 2 to 1 in film and 3 to 1 in television -- and a widening of the gender earnings gap in the television sector. Although the minority share of television employment rebounded back to 2005 levels by 2009, minority writers remained underrepresented in sector employment by more than 3 to 1. And minority film writers actually saw their share of sector employment drop to the lowest level in at least ten years. While the earnings gaps in film decreased for both women and minority writers in 2009, these declines were due more to a sharp decline in white male earnings in the recession-impacted sector than to any real earnings gain for either group of diverse writers.

Consistent with previous reports, however, the story for older writers was more complex. While older writers remained the highest paid writers in the film and television sectors, their employment prospects generally declined rather precipitously after age 50.

The previous Hollywood Writers Report underscored the need to go beyond business-as-usual industry practices if any real progress is to be made on the industry diversity front. Toward this end, the Writers Guild of America West (WGAW) in 2009 announced a new

initiative aimed at enlisting its own membership in the process of identifying and recognizing outstanding, yet underutilized diverse writing talent. The Writers Access Project is a WGAW-sponsored script-judging contest in which active showrunners review spec scripts from diverse writers with an eye toward selecting honorees they would feel comfortable hiring for their own show staffs. The idea is *both* to identify “showrunner-certified” talent for the broader television sector *and* to expose the judges (i.e., potential employers themselves) to the richness of the talent pool of diverse writers. Contestants compete in four categories – women writers, minority writers and writers with disabilities, older writers, and LGBT writers – categories associated with the guild’s major diverse writer committees. Submissions are grouped by genre (drama or comedy) and subjected to two rounds of judging by multiple readers. The first cycle of the project was held in 2009, with successive cycles held in 2010 and 2011.

The 2009 cycle enlisted more than 149 judges and featured 156 submissions, 65 semi-finalists, and 31 honorees. Seventeen of the honorees were eventually hired as staff writers (54.8 percent), 12 in drama and 4 in comedy. Seven of the honorees hired in drama were minorities (three African Americans, two Latinos, and two Asian Americans), and four of the honorees hired in comedy were minorities (two Asian Americans, one African American, and one Latino). One woman honoree was hired in drama.

Submissions declined in subsequent cycles due largely to contest rules preventing the resubmission of scripts judged in earlier cycles. Nonetheless, the 2010 cycle enlisted 103 judges and featured 93 submissions, 41 semi-finalists, and 19 honorees. Seven of the 19 honorees were eventually hired, all in drama. Five of the those hired were minorities (two African Americans, one Latino, one Native American, and one Asian American) and two were women. Final numbers for the 2011 cycle are forthcoming.

Interventions like the Writers Access Project are an important first step toward the goal of diversifying the contingent of storytellers whose work fuels the Hollywood industry. Subsequent steps forward, as previous reports have concluded, also will require a renewed commitment on the part of other industry players – the networks, studios, and agents – to go beyond what has been done in the past to address stagnation and regression on the industry diversity front. From the initial project pitch to project completion, each phase of the production pipeline has the potential to serve as a barrier to or facilitator of increased diversity among industry writers. The WGAW is committed to working with the rest of the industry to ensure that the production pipeline is shaped less by the former and more by the latter. Diversity is not a luxury, not even in tough times. The Hollywood industry, in the final analysis, depends on increasingly diverse audiences *and* on the stories to which they can relate.

Study Data

This summary is based on findings from the 2011 Hollywood Writers Report, the eighth in a series of reports released by the WGAW that examines employment trends for writers in the Hollywood industry. The 2011 report updates the 2009 Hollywood Writers

Report, providing data for the latest two years not covered in the previous report (i.e., 2008 and 2009). It also includes updated analyses of data extending back to 2005 in order to consider any trends evident over the five-year period 2005-2009. Study data come from the computerized files of the WGAW, which are based on member reports of employment and earnings. The Guild collects these reports during the course of business in order to establish member dues. A more detailed discussion of data and research methods is available in the full report.