

Turning Missed Opportunities Into Realized Ones The 2014 Hollywood Writers Report

Commissioned by the Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW), *The 2014 Hollywood Writers Report* provides an update on the progress of women, minority, and older writers on the employment and earnings fronts. Against the backdrop of momentous shifts in the diversity of audiences,¹ the report identifies missed opportunities for tapping into the rich reservoir of experiences and perspectives afforded by diverse writers.

Since 2009 — the last year considered in the previous report² — there has been modest progress for women and minorities in television, and gains for older writers in film. Women writers reduced the gender earnings gap in television in 2012, despite a small decline in the group's share of sector employment (from 28 percent to 27 percent). Minority television writers posted an increase in employment share (from 10 percent in 2009 to 11 percent in 2012), while also closing the earnings gap a bit with white male television writers. In the film sector, however, both women and minority writers continued to lag behind their white male counterparts, accounting for just 15 percent and 5 percent of sector employment, respectively. And on the film earnings front, the gaps for both women and minority film writers actually widened since the last report. Finally, older writers — particularly those aged 41 to 50 — claimed the largest share of employment in television and film, as well as the highest earnings in each sector. As previous reports have shown, however, the relative status of older writers tends to decline rather rapidly beyond the age of 60.

Earlier reports have also considered the impact of a recent WGAW initiative designed to address stagnation on the diversity front in the television. The Writer Access Project is a script-judging contest designed to identify excellent and experienced diverse writers and to connect them to showrunners and executives who are staffing television shows. Five years in, this initiative has facilitated the employment of diverse television writers at a variety of levels, from staff writer to writer/producer. But the findings of this report show much work remains to be done. Other industry players also will have to redouble their efforts if significant, sustained progress is to be achieved.

Below, specific findings from *The 2014 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

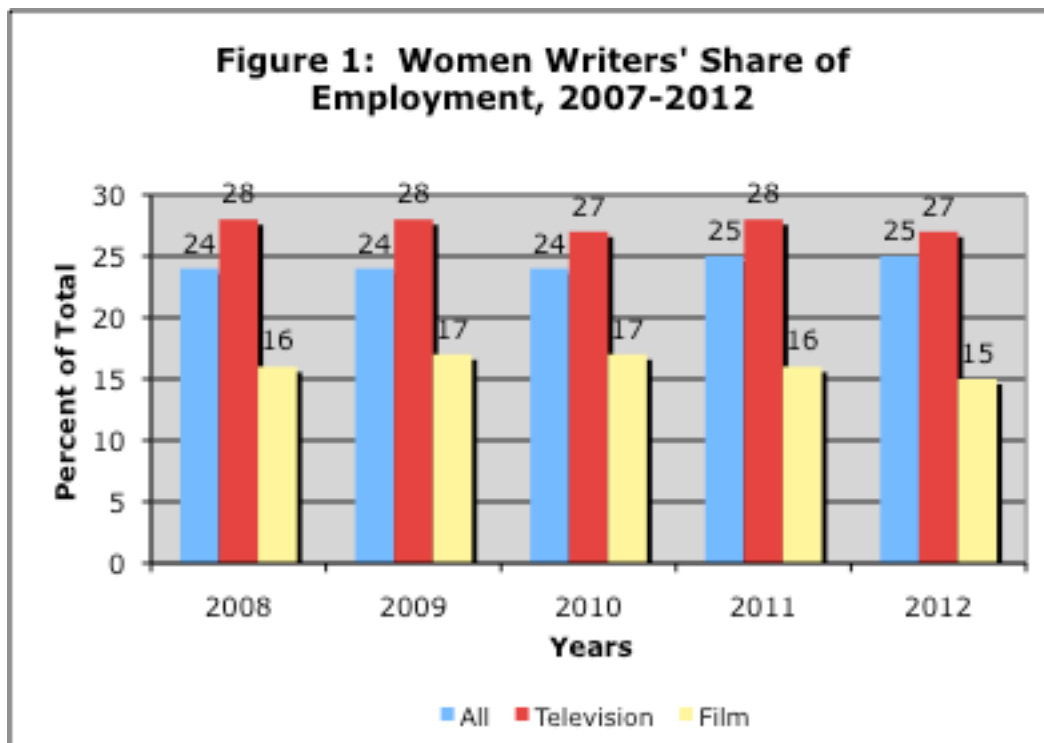
¹ Minorities accounted for nearly 37 percent of the U.S. population in 2010, and by 2012 the majority of babies born in the United States were non-white. Data also show that minorities watch a disproportionate share of television and theatrical films, while the increases in their consumer spending outpace the rest of the nation. See *2014 Hollywood Diversity Report: Making Sense of the Disconnect*, Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA.

² *The 2011 Hollywood Writers Report* considered employment and earnings in television and film through 2009. It can be accessed on-line at:
http://www.wga.org/uploadedFiles/who_we_are/hwr11execsum.pdf

specific areas in need of intervention so that it can collaborate with key industry players to turn missed opportunities into realized ones.

Women Writers' Overall Employment Share Rises Despite Declining Film Share

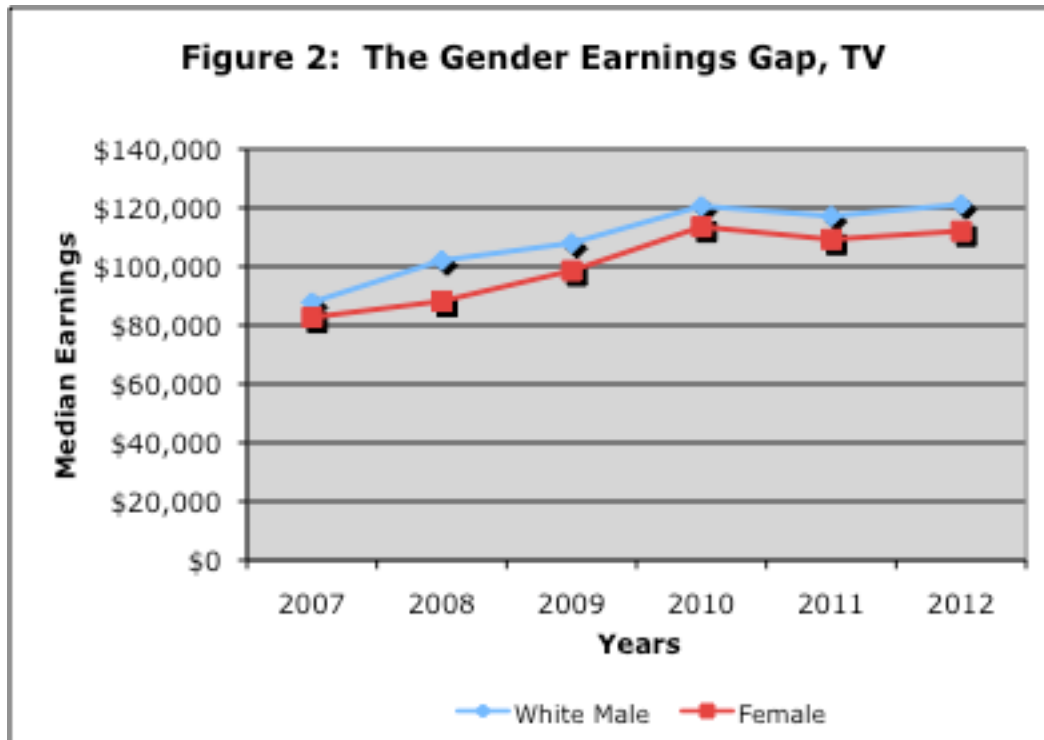
Since 2009, the last year examined in the previous report, women writers' overall share of industry employment rose by one percentage point to 25 percent (see **Figure 1**). This small increase in women's overall employment share was driven by the increase in television employment relative to film employment for all writers, and by the fact that women's share of employment has traditionally been higher in television than in film. Indeed, women's share of film employment declined two percentage points to 15 percent since the last report, while the group's share of television employment also fell, albeit only by a percentage point to 27 percent. The employment trend for women writers since 2008 is mixed: small gains in overall employment share due to the general rise in television sector employment, offset by small declines in the group's share of television and film employment. As a result, women remained underrepresented by factors of nearly 2 to 1 among television writers and more than 3 to 1 among film writers in 2012.



Gender Earnings Gap in Television Declines Slightly

The previous report showed that the gap in median earnings between women television writers and their white male counterparts reached \$9,400 in 2009, the last year examined in the report. Between 2009 and 2012, however, this earnings gap declined a bit to \$9,109 (see **Figure 2**). Median television earnings for women in 2012 were \$112,081,

compared to \$121,190 for white males. In other words, women television writers earned about 92 cents for every dollar earned by white males in 2012, up slightly from 91 cents in 2009. It is worth noting that women posted the lowest relative earnings over the six-year period, 86 cents, at the height of the Great Recession, in 2008. In that year, the median earnings figure for women television writers was just \$88,207, compared to \$102,086 for their white male counterparts.

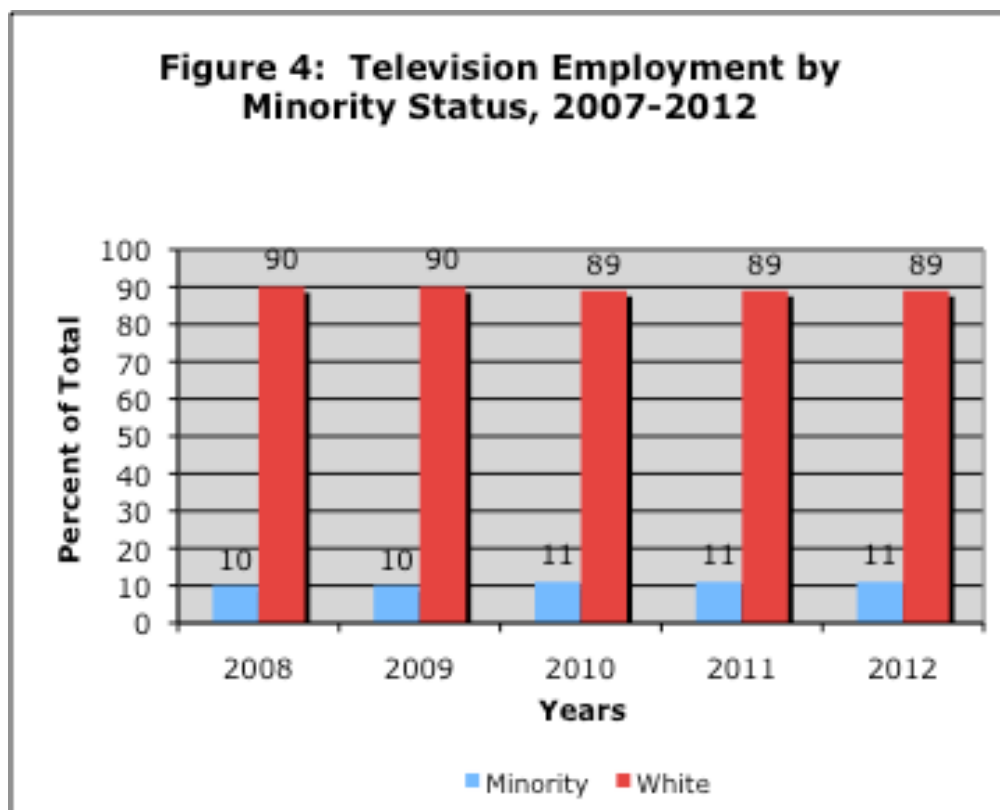
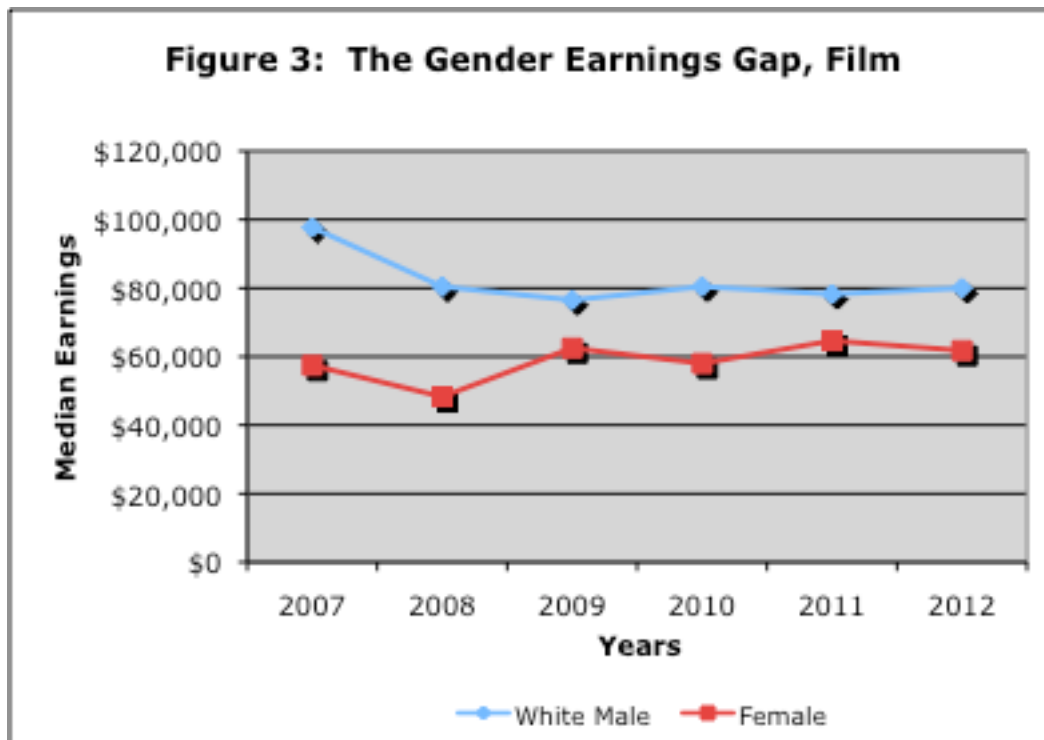


Gender Earnings Gap in Film Widens Again

The gender earnings gap in film has traditionally been greater than the gap in television. Thus it was worth noting that in the previous report the film gap had closed significantly in 2009, to just \$14,017 — which was less than half the \$40,291 gap evident two years earlier (see **Figure 3**). By 2012, however, the gender earnings gap in film had widened again, to \$18,224. In that year, the median earnings figure for women film writers was \$61,776, compared to \$80,000 for their white male counterparts. In other words, women film writers earned just 77 cents for every dollar earned by white male film writers in 2012, down from 82 cents in 2009.

Minority Share of Television Employment Increases Again

The previous report noted that the minority share of television employment had rebounded to 2005 levels by 2009 (10 percent), after declining by about a percentage point during the Great Recession. **Figure 4** shows this upward trend continued into 2012, when the minority share of television employment reached 11 percent — the highest



level in at least a decade. Despite recent fluctuations in the minority share, however, this recent peak 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 previous reports have concluded, it appears as if minority writers are at best treading water when it comes to their share of television employment, particularly when we consider that the nation is rapidly becoming more diverse.³

Minority Share of Film Employment Remains at a Low

The previous report revealed that — after about a decade of being stuck at 6 percent — the minority share of film employment actually dropped a percentage point to 5 percent in 2009. **Figure 5** shows the minority share in film remained at this relatively low level in 2012, which contrasts with the small rebound realized by minority television writers over the same period. As a result, minorities remained underrepresented by a factor of about 7 to 1 among employed film writers in 2012.

Television Earnings Gap for Minorities Closes a Bit

The previous report noted that the television earnings gap for minority writers had closed significantly in 2007, before opening again to its widest level in about a decade in 2009. **Figure 6** shows that a similar pattern of progress and retreat has manifested since 2009. Median earnings for minority television writers declined from \$107,272 to \$100,040 between 2011 and 2012, while earnings for white males in the sector increased from \$117,178 to \$121,190 over the same period. Thus the minority earnings gap — which closed to just \$9,906 in 2011 — more than doubled to \$21,150 in 2012.⁴ In other words, minority television writers earned just 83 cents for every dollar earned by their white male counterparts in 2012, down from the 92 cents earned just a year earlier. Nonetheless, the 2012 figure was an improvement over the 78 cents on the dollar minorities earned in 2009.

Film Earnings Gap for Minorities Widens Again

Minority writers have traditionally fared worse in the film sector than in television, both in terms of employment and earnings. While the previous report showed evidence of a notable closing of the film earnings gap for minorities, it ultimately concluded the closing

³ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the minority share of the nation's population increased to 36.3 percent in 2010, up from about 31 percent in 2000.

⁴ It appears as if these shifts in relative earnings may have been driven at least in part by the different rates of employment growth for minorities and white males between 2010 and 2012 — a period of marked growth in overall television employment. That is, minority employment in television increased by 10.7 percent between 2010 and 2011, when the gap closed dramatically, but by only 6.6 percent between 2011 and 2012, when the gap reopened. By contrast, the increases in white male television employment were more stable over the period (5.5 percent between 2010 and 2011 and 5.1 percent between 2011 and 2012).

Figure 5: Film Employment by Minority Status, 2008-2012

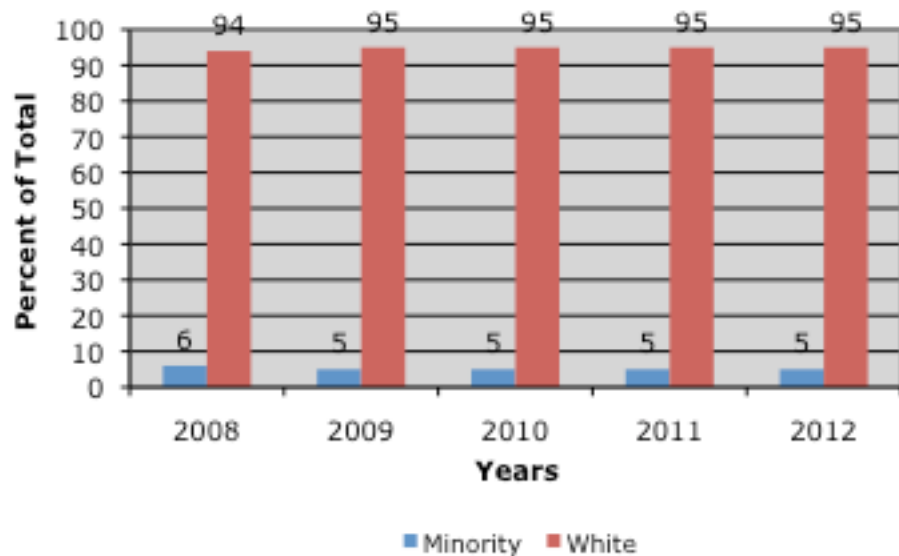
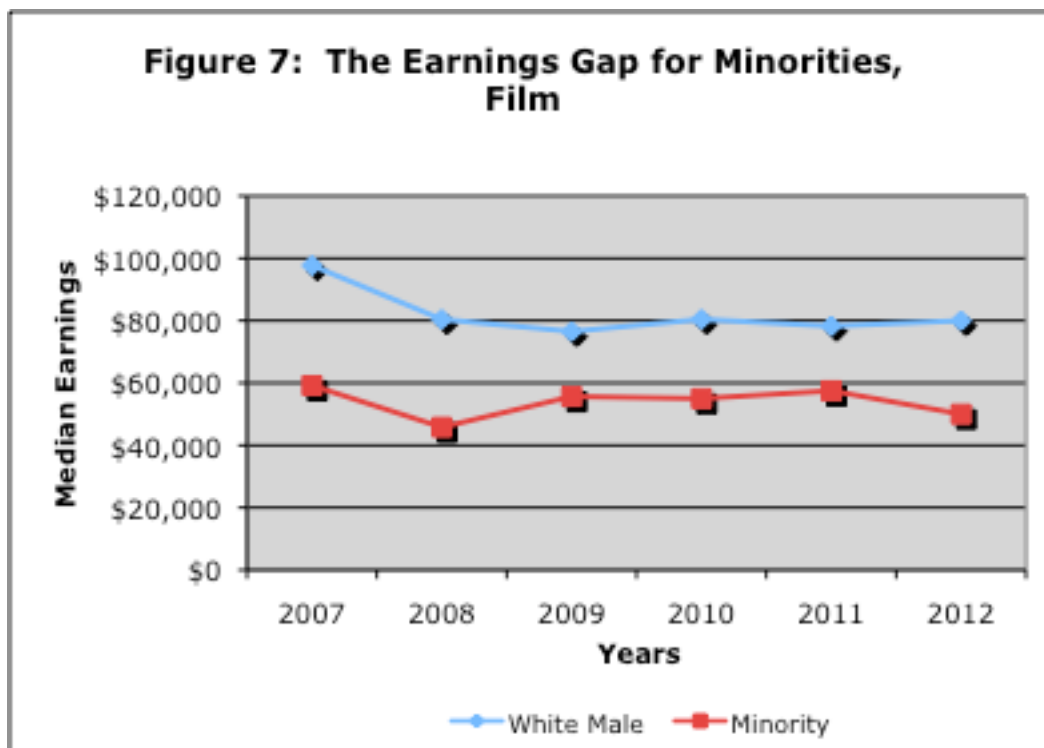


Figure 6: The Earnings Gap for Minorities, TV



of the gap was driven more by a significant decline in the earnings of white males (due to the Great Recession) than in any real gains by minority writers. **Figure 7** suggests business-as-usual has returned to sector earnings, as median earnings for minority writers declined between 2009 and 2012 (from \$55,653 to \$50,000), while they increased for white male writers over the same period (from \$76,517 to \$80,000). As result, the minority earnings gap in film widened again to \$30,000 in 2012, and minority film writers earned just 63 cents for every dollar earned by their white male counterparts.



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

The previous report noted that although white male writers continued to dominate in overall earnings, women had closed the gap significantly by 2009, while minorities continued to lag behind. **Figure 8** suggests the same general pattern held sway between 2009 and 2012 — a period in which women writers made gains in overall earnings relative to white males and minority writers gained little ground. In 2012, the overall earnings figure for white male writers was \$130,058, compared to \$117,008 for women writers and \$100,100 for minority writers, respectively. These figures represented increases for all groups since 2009, when overall earnings were just \$117,343 for white male writers, \$100,000 for women writers, and \$87,225 for minority writers. As a result, the overall earnings gap for minority writers remained stable over the period, \$30,118 in

Figure 8: Median Earnings, Employed Women, Minority, and White Male Writers, 2002-2012

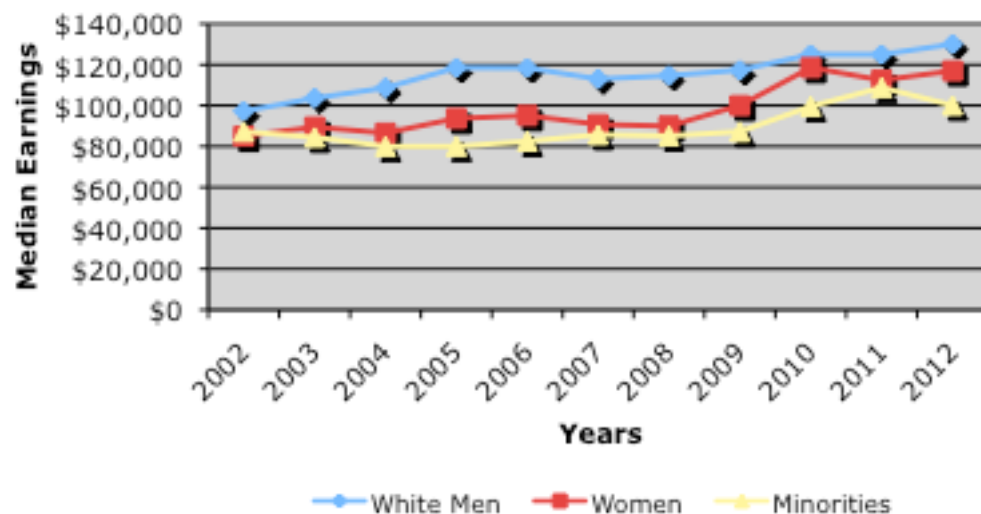
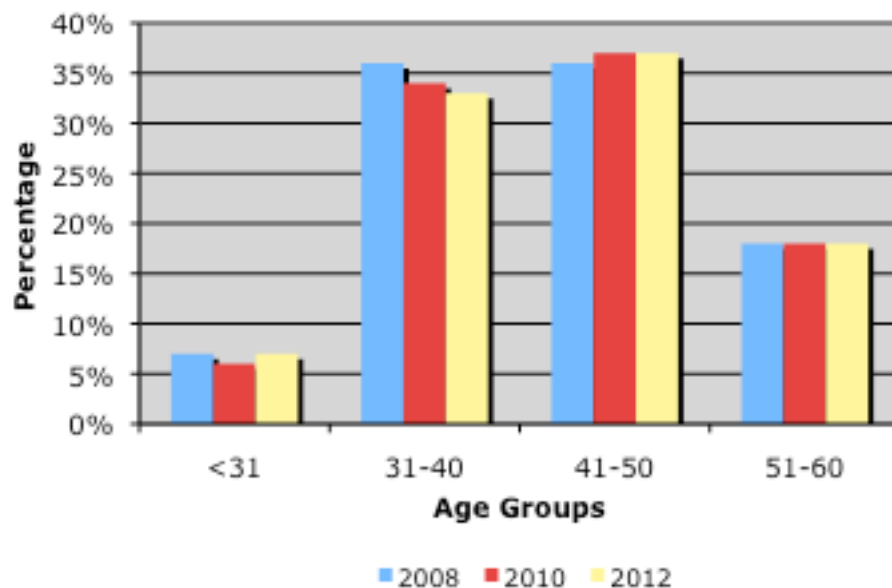


Figure 9: Share of Television Employment, by Age Group



2009 versus \$29,958 in 2012. For women, however, the overall earnings gap declined from \$17,343 in 2009 to just \$13,050 in 2012. In other words, across all employment, women writers earned 90 cents for every dollar earned by white males in 2012, while minority writers earned about 77 cents. It's worth noting that relative earnings for minority writers across all employment peaked in 2002, when they earned 90 cents for every dollar earned by their white male counterparts — the same as women in 2012.

Employment Share for Largest Group of Older Television Writers Unchanged

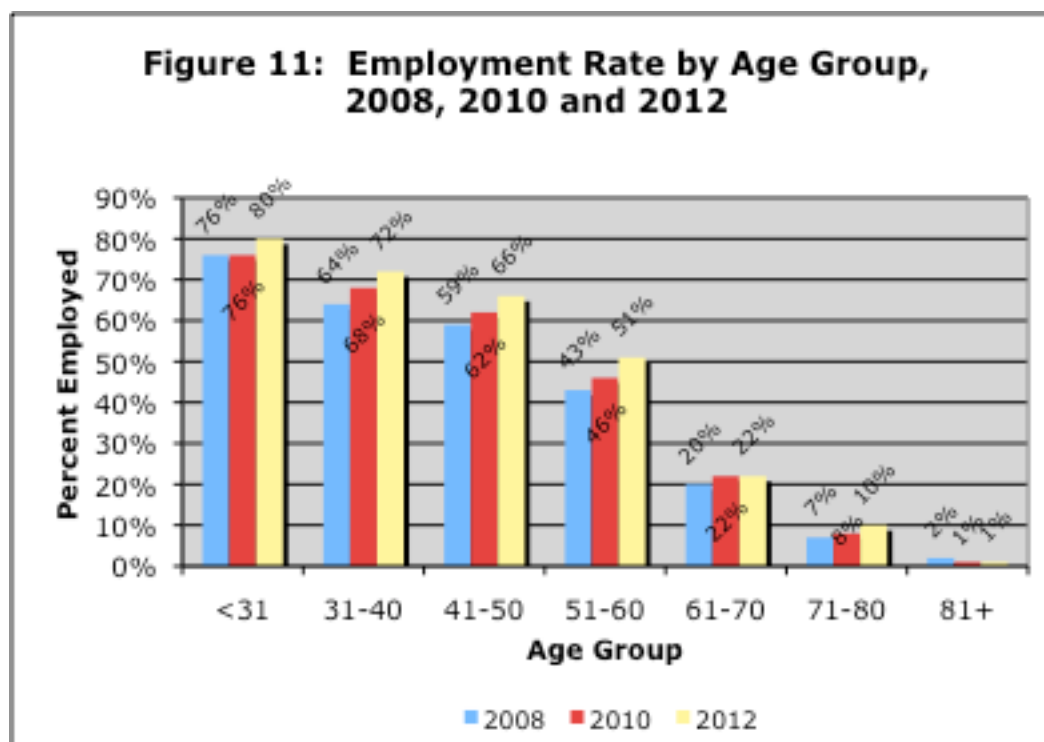
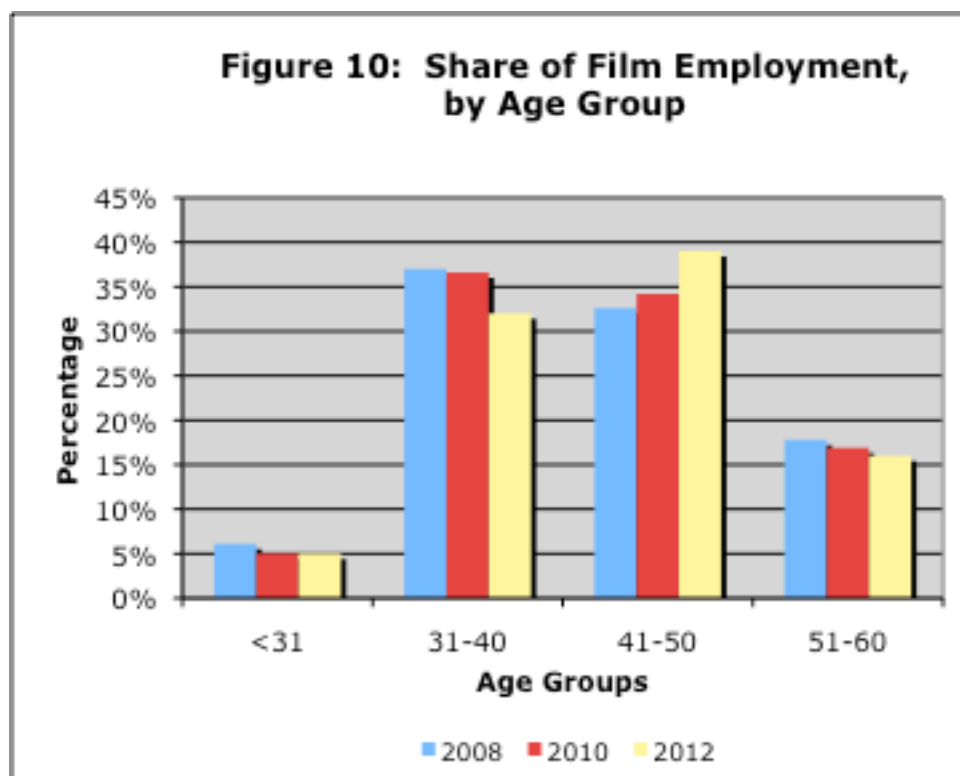
The previous report revealed a 2 percentage-point gain in employment share for television writers aged 41 to 50 between 2005 and 2009, increasing a 35 percent share that had remained unchanged since 2001. **Figure 9** shows there have been no additional gains for this group of older writers since 2009, its share remaining at 37 percent in both 2010 and 2012. By contrast, younger writers aged 31 to 40 posted steady declines in television employment share between 2008 and 2012 — from 36 percent in 2008, to 34 percent in 2010, to 33 percent in 2012. As recently as 2007, this younger group of writers claimed the single largest share of sector employment, 37 percent. Meanwhile, the employment shares for the youngest group of television writers, those younger than 31, and the older group of television writers aged 51 to 60 remained flat between 2008 and 2012 — 7 percent and 18 percent, respectively. In short, while the corps of employed television writers has aged a bit since 2008, the gains in employment share for television writers aged 41 to 50 have come almost exclusively at the expense of those aged 31 to 40.

Older Writers Aged 41 to 50 Claim Largest Share of Film Employment

Since 2008, writers aged 41 to 50 have replaced younger writers aged 31 to 40 as the age group enjoying the largest share of film employment (see **Figure 10**). In 2008, the younger group of writers claimed 37 percent of all film employment, compared to just 33 percent by the older group. The positions were flipped by 2010, with writers aged 41 to 50 posting a 39 percent share of film employment — a 6 percentage point increase — while the share for writers aged 31 to 40 dropped by 5 percentage points to 32 percent. Meanwhile, the shares of film employment for the other age groups declined over the study period, from 6 percent to 5 percent for writers under 31, and from 18 percent to 16 percent for writers aged 51 to 60.

Employment Rate Increases for All Groups of Writers 60 and Under

“Employment rate” is a measure of the percentage of those seeking work that actually finds it. In this report series, “employment rate” is defined as the percentage of current Guild members who are actually employed in some capacity during the year in question. **Figure 11** shows that employment rate increased for all age groupings of writers 60 and



under in 2012. Most notably, the employment rate for the largest group of older writers, those aged 41 to 50, increased to 66 percent, a rate that exceeded the 64 percent figure posted by younger writers aged 31 to 40 in 2008. This finding is significant because previous reports show clearly that the employment rate for Hollywood writers generally declines steeply with age. Though this overall pattern was still evident in 2012 — as marked by the downward trend in the chart's bars — the recent gains in employment rate for most age groupings, particularly writers between 41 and 60, have distorted the pattern a bit. As a result, the drop off in employment rate beyond age 60 was somewhat more pronounced in 2012 than in earlier years. In short, while Hollywood writers generally find it more difficult to secure work as they age, older writers 60 and under appear to have been a bit more successful in doing so in 2012 than in other recent years.

Television Earnings Continue to Peak Among Older Writers

In recent years, median earnings in television have been highest among older writers aged 41 to 50. **Figure 12** shows that this pattern continued in 2012, with television writers aged 41 to 50 posting median earnings of \$141,698, a figure more than \$25,000 above any other age group. Meanwhile, median earnings for television writers aged 51 to 60 (\$116,428) approximated those for younger writers aged 31 to 40 (\$116,556) in 2012 — thus eliminating a sizable earnings advantage observed in 2010 and 2008 for the younger group of writers relative to the older one. Indeed, television writers aged 31 to 40 constituted the only age group under 70 to post a decline in median earnings between 2010 and 2012 (from \$125,210 to \$116,556). It's worth noting that the deviation from the age-earnings curve observed in the previous report — in which the median earnings of writers aged 71 to 80 surpassed those of writers aged 61 to 70 in 2008 and 2009 — had altogether disappeared by 2012.⁵

Older Writers Aged 41 to 50 Become Highest Paid Film Writers

In the previous two reports median earnings peaked among the oldest group of film writers, those aged 71 to 80. **Figure 13** shows this pattern came to an end in 2012, when older writers aged 41 to 50 stood alone as the highest paid age grouping of writers in film, with median earnings of \$93,750. Writers aged 71 to 80 fell to second place in 2012 (\$75,000), followed by writers aged 31 to 40 (\$72,465). The lowest median earnings were posted by film writers less than 31 (\$50,000) and those aged 61 to 70 (\$50,000).

⁵ The 71-to-80 age group is particularly vulnerable to shifts in median income due to its relatively small size — just 11 writers in 2010 and 20 by 2012. Nonetheless, the graph shows that writers who manage to persist this long in their careers tend to be relatively highly paid.

Figure 12: Television Earnings by Age Group, 2008, 2010, and 2012

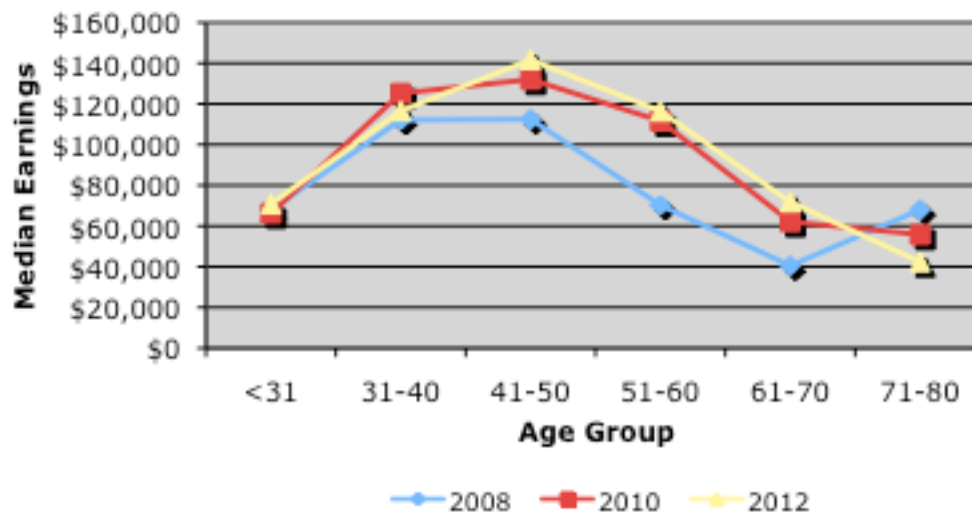
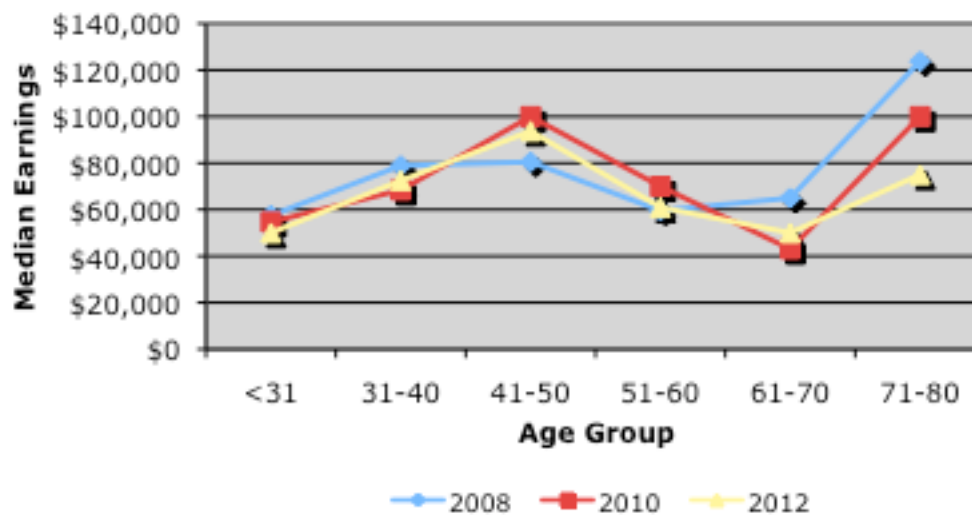


Figure 13: Film Earnings by Age Group, 2008, 2010, and 2012



Realizing Missed Opportunities

The current report presents the good news of small rebounds for vulnerable groups of diverse writers, in certain sectors, since the easing of The Great Recession. Specifically, it shows there has been modest progress in the past few years for women and minorities in television, while older writers have posted gains in film. But much work remains to be done on the industry diversity front, as women and minorities remain severely underrepresented among the ranks of Hollywood writers, particularly in film. Similarly, though older writers have recently made strides in employment and earnings in both sectors, their employment prospects continue to fall precipitously beyond age 60. As a consequence, opportunities to tell the types of stories that are more likely to resonate with increasingly diverse audiences have been far from realized.

Earlier reports in this series have consistently underscored the need to go beyond business-as-usual hiring 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 Writer Access Project (WAP) 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 five categories — women writers, minority writers, writers with disabilities, older writers, and LGBT writers — categories associated with the Guild’s major diverse writer committees. Submissions are grouped by genre (drama or comedy) and subjected to two rounds of judging by multiple readers. The first cycle of the project was held in 2009, with successive cycles held each year since.

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 four 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 after the initial cycle,⁶ due largely to contest rules preventing the resubmission of scripts judged in earlier cycles, but rebounded to an all-time high of 164

⁶ Nonetheless, the program continued to pay dividends in terms of diverse employment. For example, seven of the 19 honorees from the smaller 2010 cycle were eventually hired, all in drama.

(106 in drama and 58 in comedy) for the 2014 cycle. This latest cycle featured 35 semi-finalists, 19 honorees, and 93 WGA writer/producers serving as judges.

The WAP was conceived from the beginning with a dual function — both 1) to benefit mid-career diverse television writers by improving their access to those making hiring decisions during staffing season and 2) to serve as a resource for showrunners who are looking for diverse writers for their staffs. Five years in, the program continues to pay dividends. Honorees have gone on to obtain staff employment and many have moved up the ranks from staff writer into story editor or producer-level writing jobs. Showrunners are beginning to see the WAP as a trusted source — recommended by their peers — of quality, experienced TV writers from a wide variety of diverse backgrounds. In this capacity, the program provides an additional hiring resource beyond the writer referrals coming from talent agents and industry executives. This is especially significant in light of the underrepresentation of diverse writers on the rosters of the major agencies. Amidst the staffing season rush, the WAP offers a valuable resource for both sides of the hiring equation.

In 2013, the WGAW introduced a Feature Access Project (FAP), modeled after its successful television initiative. For FAP consideration, qualified minority writers were invited to submit a current, feature-length, unproduced spec script. Entries were read and scored on a blind submission basis by a panel of judges comprised of WGAW members recruited by the FAP Advisory Committee. The selected scripts are publicized and made available to entertainment industry decision-makers — including producers, studio executives, agents and managers — to help raise the writers' profiles and generate potential employment opportunities. Now in its second year, the FAP is being reviewed by WGAW to determine its effectiveness. The paths into feature film writing are less clearly defined than the ones for television writers, and there are simply fewer jobs today in the feature film arena. Thus, finding solutions to the lack of diversity among feature film writers remains a vexing challenge.

In short, interventions like the Writer Access Project and Feature Access Project are important first steps toward the goal of diversifying the contingent of storytellers whose work fuels the Hollywood industry. Before we are likely to realize meaningful, sustained change, however, other industry players — the networks, studios, and agents — will have to go well beyond what they have routinely done in the past to address the troubling shortfalls evident on the diversity front among writers. The project development process, for example, sets the stage for a number of creative decisions that ultimately impact not only story content but also the inclusion of diverse talent. Networks, studios, and agents must place diversity front and center during the development process in order to ensure that it remains throughout production. Only then will the industry effectively tap into the rich reservoir of experiences and perspectives afforded by diverse talent. Only then will the industry position itself to make the most of opportunities afforded by audiences whose story needs are becoming more diverse by the minute.

Study Data

This summary is based on findings from *The 2014 Hollywood Writers Report*, the ninth in a series of reports released by the WGAW that examines employment trends for writers in the Hollywood industry. The 2014 report updates *The 2011 Hollywood Writers Report*, providing data for the latest three years not covered in the previous report (i.e., 2010, 2011, and 2012). It also includes updated analyses of select data extending back to 2002 in order to consider any trends evident over the ten-year period 2002-2012. 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.

About the Author

Darnell Hunt is director of the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA and professor of sociology. He has written extensively on media and diversity issues, including several books, and numerous scholarly and popular articles. Dr. Hunt authored the previous four installments of *The Hollywood Writers Report*, which the Writers Guild of America released in 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2012. He also was lead author of the *2014 Hollywood Diversity Report*, the first in a series of reports by the Bunche Center on the overall state of industry diversity, and author of the *African American Television Report*, released by the Screen Actors Guild in 2000. Prior to his academic positions, he worked in the media (for NBC) and as a media researcher for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' 1993 hearings on diversity in Hollywood.