

# WGAW SCREEN INCLUSION REPORT 2021

For years, the Writers Guild of America West has called attention to the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the entertainment industry. As part of this ongoing effort, the Writers Guild of America West is releasing our annual Inclusion Report providing detailed data on the status of writers from historically underrepresented groups.

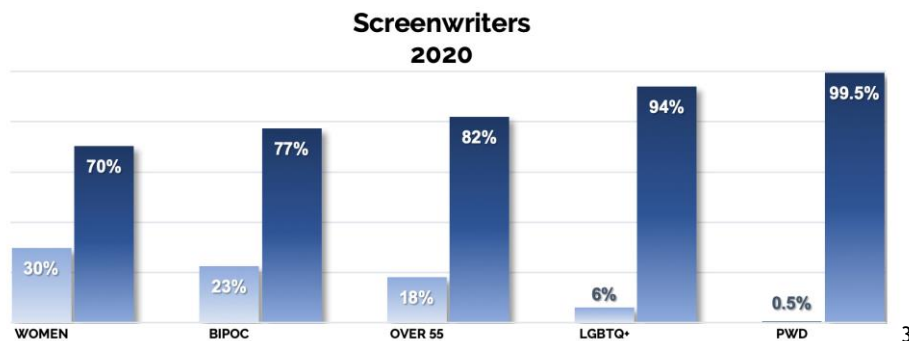
## OVERVIEW

This Screen Inclusion Report provides data on the feature film industry from the 2020 calendar year.<sup>1</sup> A separate TV Inclusion Report will be published after the conclusion of the 2020-2021 television season in the fall. Dividing the reports allows the Guild to share the latest numbers as soon as they are available.

This report expands the data included in two important ways. First, prior reports published employment and credits data for only the two largest underrepresented groups: Women and People of Color. Due to increased self-reporting by our members via the [WGAW's Find A Writer database](#), this will be the first report to include employment and credits data for LGBTQ+ Writers, Disabled Writers, and Writers Over 55. Secondly, this report shares key results from the WGAW Screen Survey, conducted in May of 2021.

From the 2020 data on the feature film industry, two major conclusions are clear:

- In 2020, historically underrepresented writers<sup>2</sup> continued to make progress in screen hiring, gaining a 3% overall increase in employment over 2019.
- However, these writers remain significantly underrepresented in the feature film industry.



<sup>1</sup> All writer employment and credits data are derived from WGA-covered projects and are based on WGAW writers for whom relevant demographic information is known. Except where otherwise noted, U.S. population data on ethnicity comes from the [U.S. 2020 Census](#). Data on gender, age, and disability comes from the [U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimate v2019](#).

<sup>2</sup> While the WGAW recognizes five categories of historically underrepresented writers, statistics for the combined group of "underrepresented writers" used in this report include four: Women, BIPOC Writers LGBTQ+ Writers, and Disabled Writers. Writers Over 55 as a category are not included in the combined statistics for Underrepresented Writers because the Guild's data does not adequately distinguish between highly successful writers who are still working after age 55 and those who experience barriers to entry due to age discrimination.

<sup>3</sup> The following abbreviations are used throughout this report: BIPOC for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; LGBTQ+ for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, etc.; Cisnet for cisgender heterosexual people; and PWD for People with Disabilities.

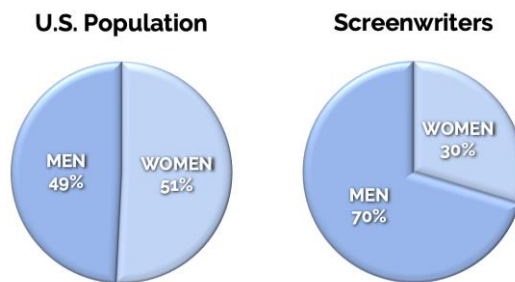
## SCREENWRITER EMPLOYMENT

As the Guild’s [2020 Inclusion Report](#) made clear, the feature business lags behind the T.V. business in the hiring of writers from underrepresented groups. However, the incremental gains over the last five years continued in 2020. Even in the face of a global pandemic and its impact on our industry, underrepresented writers achieved a 3% overall increase in hiring, making up 43% of the more than 2000 screenwriters hired in 2020.

This trend, while encouraging, should not be cited as proof that discrimination is vanishing or no longer exists. As further data in this report will show, significant disparities persist, and writers from underrepresented groups continue to face systemic barriers to equitable employment.

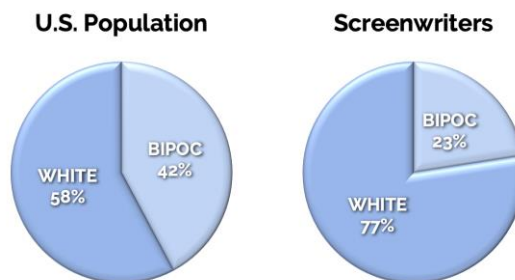
### Screen Hiring by Gender and Ethnicity

Despite the fact that women make up 51% of the U.S. population, only 30% of screenwriters employed in 2020 were women.



While women achieved a 3% increase over their 2019 share of employment, it is clear that sexism is still pervasive in the hiring of screenwriters. In the WGAW’s 2021 Screen Survey, 79% of women respondents reported experiencing discrimination, bullying, and/or harassment based on their gender - and 35% reported being asked about marital status or childcare while interviewing for Guild-covered work.

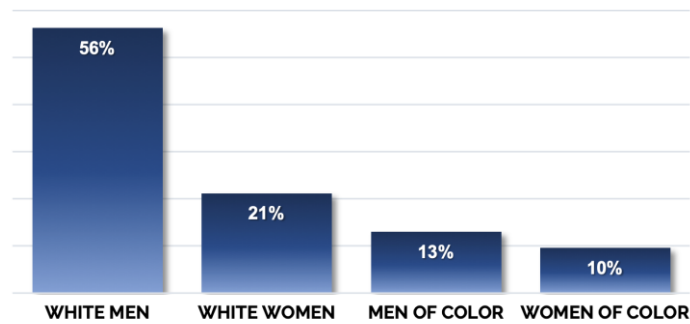
People of color also achieved a 3% increase in representation among working screenwriters, increasing their share from 20% in 2019 to 23% in 2020. However, as the charts below make clear, screenwriters of color remain underrepresented relative to their percentage of the overall U.S. population.



As noted throughout this report, discrimination does not end with hiring. In the WGAW’s 2021 Screen Survey, 76% of BIPOC respondents reported experiencing discrimination, bullying, and/or harassment based on their race/color in their professional careers.

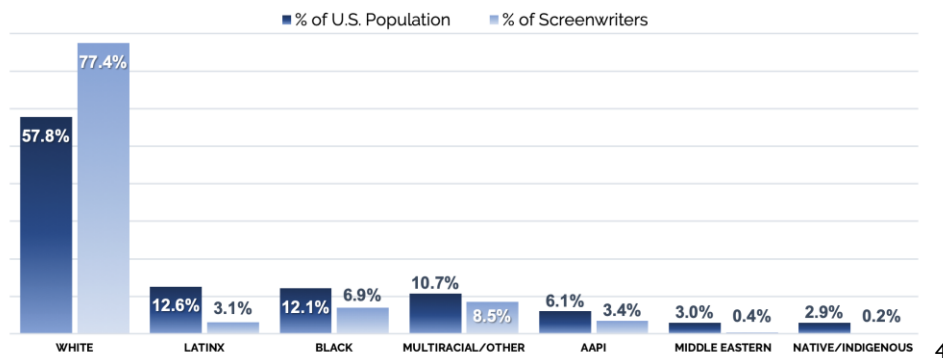
The intersectional analysis below reveals how discriminatory hiring patterns are compounded for members of multiple underrepresented groups. A breakdown by ethnicity and gender reveals that women of color held just 10% of screenwriting jobs in 2020 (up from 7% in 2019).

**Screenwriters by Gender and Ethnicity**



In contrast, the hiring of men of color showed no gains over 2019 – holding at just 13% of all screen jobs. White women had a slight uptick from 20% to 21%. When the data is broken down by major ethnicities, other disparities become evident.

**Screenwriters by Ethnic Group**



In 2020, Latinx, Black, Multiracial/Other, and AAPI writers saw small increases in their share of employment compared with 2019, but representation for Latinx, Black and AAPI screenwriters is at approximately half or less of their relative percentages of the U.S. population. For Middle Eastern and Native/Indigenous screenwriters,

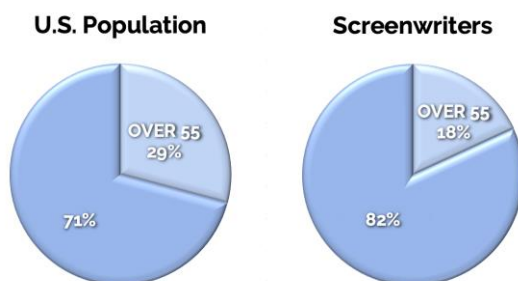
<sup>4</sup> Screenwriter employment figures in this chart are derived from the 1,747 screenwriters employed in 2020 for whom ethnicity data is available. AAPI denotes Asian, South Asian, and Pacific Islanders. “Native/Indigenous” denotes Native American, Indigenous, and First Nations. “Multiracial/Other,” a new category introduced in this year’s report, denotes writers who self-identified as more than one racial or ethnic group or who identified as “Other.” This change in methodology means that the Ethnic Group breakdowns in this year’s report and last year’s report are not a direct comparison; last year’s report included writers who self-identified as more than one racial or ethnic group in each relevant group solely for the Ethnic Group breakdowns. In order to match WGAW’s reported demographic data as closely as possible, the U.S. population figures presented in this report for the Latinx group only include people the census identifies as “one race” rather than the more typically quoted figure of 18.7%, which includes multiracial Latinx people. Figures for Black and AAPI groups only include people the census identifies as non-Hispanic and as one race or ethnicity. Population figures for Middle Eastern, and Native/Indigenous groups include people who may be members of more than one racial or ethnic group. U.S. population data on Middle Eastern Americans comes from the [TTIE Factsheet on MENA People](#), and U.S. population data on Native/Indigenous Americans comes from the [2020 Census Results on Race and Ethnicity](#).

discrimination leads to near total erasure, with employment numbers remaining flat and both groups continuing to have almost no representation at all.

One factor driving this discrimination may be that, based on self-reporting, BIPOC screenwriters can often be funneled towards stories presumed to match their ethnicity. In the WGAW's 2021 Screen Survey, 67% of BIPOC respondents reported that they were only or primarily offered work on projects that pertain to their diversity attributes.

### Screen Hiring by Age

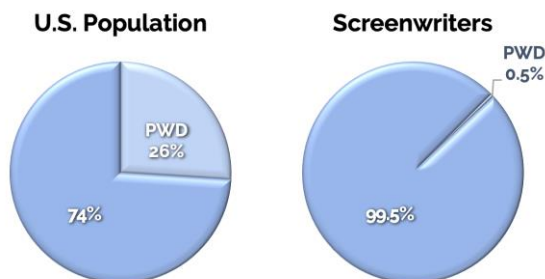
Writers Over 55 comprise the next largest group of disadvantaged writers, after women and people of color. Despite making up 29% of the US population, only 18% of screenwriters employed in 2020 were over 55.



It is worth noting that ageism in the entertainment industry does not affect all writers equally. While a small group of highly successful screenwriters continue working long after age 55, many more see diminished opportunities - or a complete lack of opportunity - as they age. Screenwriter employment data does not adequately distinguish between these groups. However, the data that is available on ageism is troubling. In the WGAW's 2021 Screen Survey, 84% of writers over 55 reported experiencing discrimination, bullying, and/or harassment due to their age.

### Screen Hiring by Disability

Despite People with Disabilities (PWD) making up 26% of the U.S. population, Disabled Writers were hired for only 0.5% of screenwriting jobs in 2020. No other group in this report faces such a profound gap between their representation in the U.S. population and their representation among screenwriters.

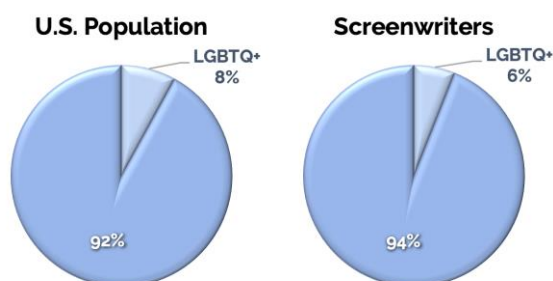


It is worth noting that some writers who may be classified as disabled by the U.S. Census may choose not to self-identify as disabled in the Guild’s database, for multiple reasons, including fear of facing the same ableist discrimination that makes this representation gap so stark. Still, in the feature film industry, Disabled Writers face many barriers to entry – both structural and social. Most notably: the deeply ingrained ableism of our industry; the virtual nonexistence of People with Disabilities in leadership roles, on screen, and in key creative positions; and facilities where writers work and pitch that often fail to meet ADA requirements. These are likely the same hurdles preventing People with Disabilities from becoming eligible to join the WGA – Disabled Writers comprise less than 1% of current WGAW members.

It is important to note that any individual can become disabled - and likely will, if they live long enough. However, disability is most prevalent among women (25%), non-Latinx American Indians / Alaska Natives (40%)<sup>5</sup>, and non-Latinx Black Americans (25%)<sup>6</sup>. Although the number of self-identified writers with disabilities is insufficient to enable analysis by additional factors such as age, ethnicity, or gender, those who belong to multiple underrepresented groups likely face compounded discrimination.

### Screen Hiring by Sexual and Gender Identity

The best data available puts LGBTQ+ Americans at roughly 8% of the U.S. adult population.<sup>7</sup> In 2020, LGBTQ+ Writers were hired for 6% of screenwriting jobs.



However, the fact that LGBTQ+ screenwriters fare better in this chart than other underrepresented groups does not mean that they do not face discrimination in the workplace and erasure of LGBTQ+ characters in their stories. According to a [recent survey of 158 members of the LGBTQ+ Writers Committee](#), 22% report having been the target of overt discrimination and/or harassment in an industry setting. Meanwhile, over half of the surveyed writers reported experiencing microaggressions based on their identity. Unfortunately, the most targeted individuals are often the most underrepresented and those who have multiple intersectional identities: transgender, non-binary, intersex, BIPOC, disabled, over 55, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

<sup>6</sup> Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/materials/infographic-disabilities-ethnicity-race.html>

<sup>7</sup> The U.S. 2020 Census is the first to ask questions about sexual and gender identity. Until that data is available, the best available estimate comes from the Census Bureau’s bi-weekly [Household Pulse Survey](#). The most recent data at the time of publication of this report can be found here: [https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/hhp/2021/wk35/ctc1\\_week35.xlsx](https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/hhp/2021/wk35/ctc1_week35.xlsx)

Ironically, studios frequently blame hiring discrimination against LGBTQ+ Writers and Disabled Writers on the very laws meant to protect them from discrimination, claiming they cannot legally inquire about sexual/gender identity or disability. It is worth noting, however, that the [WGA's Find A Writer database](#) currently lists 1,092 of writers who publicly self-identify as LGBTQ+ and 211 writers who publicly self-identify as Disabled, all of whom would no doubt welcome more job opportunities.

## SCREEN HIRING BY STUDIO

At the root of these disparities are the acquisition and hiring decisions made by producers and executives at the studios. The following charts break down the hiring of women and people of color in screen by major studio for 2020.<sup>8</sup>

### Screenwriters - Women by Studio

Rank		Studio	Screenwriters Hired <sup>9</sup>		Women Screenwriters Hired		% of Women Screenwriters	
2020	2019		2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019
1	2	Walt Disney Studios	317	367	108	118	34%	32%
2	7	Sony Pictures	194	216	59	51	30%	24%
3	5	Universal Pictures	227	222	68	60	30%	27%
4	4	Netflix	277	207	81	56	29%	27%
5	6	Viacom Paramount	236	240	64	58	27%	24%
6	8	Warner Media	227	238	57	55	25%	23%
7	3	Lionsgate Films	85	72	21	21	25%	29%

In 2020, Walt Disney Studios led the majors in the hiring of women screenwriters. Sony Pictures improved significantly from 2019, jumping from 7th to 2nd. Lionsgate slipped significantly in the hiring of women screenwriters, from 3rd in 2019 to 7th in 2020.

### Screenwriters - People of Color by Studio

Rank		Studio	Screenwriters Hired <sup>10</sup>		BIPOC Screenwriters Hired		% of BIPOC Screenwriters	
2020	2019		2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019
1	2	Warner Media	195	204	57	49	29%	24%
2	1	Universal Pictures	200	189	53	51	27%	27%
3	5	Walt Disney Studios	279	312	73	60	26%	19%
4	3	Lionsgate Films	79	63	19	14	24%	22%
5	4	Netflix	240	188	50	40	21%	21%
6	7	Sony Pictures	161	178	33	32	20%	18%
7	6	Viacom Paramount	204	209	40	40	20%	19%

Warner Media and Universal claimed the top two positions in the hiring of screenwriters of color for the second year in a row. Walt Disney Studios improved significantly from 2019, with a 7% increase in hiring of screenwriters of color in 2020, while Viacom/Paramount and Sony continue to rank lowest among these studios.

<sup>8</sup> Data on the hiring of other major underrepresented groups by studio is not included in this report. As noted elsewhere, the Guild's employment data on Writers Over 55 doesn't adequately differentiate between the few highly successful screenwriters and the larger group of middle-class screenwriters, and thus, a breakdown by studio would not provide useful data on age discrimination. The numbers of LGBTQ+ and Disabled screenwriters hired by studios in 2020 are small enough that publishing a breakdown by studio might raise privacy concerns.

<sup>9</sup> In this chart, "Screenwriters Hired" refers to the total number of writers hired for whom the WGAW has a gender identified. The number of writers with no gender identified was less than 1% of the total.

<sup>10</sup> In this chart, "Screenwriters Hired" refers to the total number of writers hired for whom the WGAW has a race or ethnicity identified. The number of writers with no race or ethnicity identified was 15% of the total.

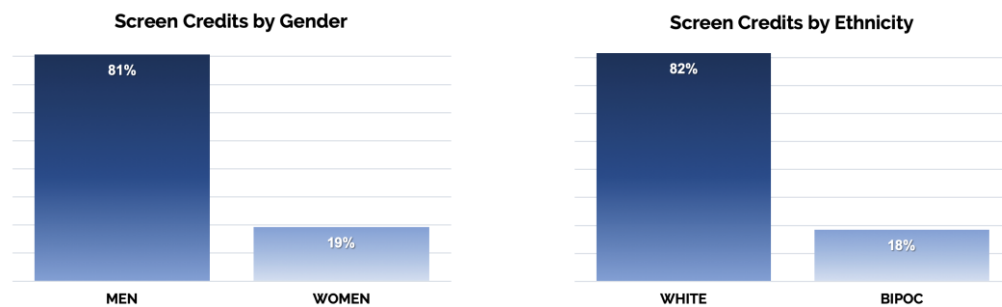
## SCREEN CREDITS

A writer's credits play a crucial role in determining status in the industry and are another important measure of inclusion and equity. It is important to note, however, that comparing employment data from the previous section with the screen credits data in this section is an inexact process. Screen credits are rarely determined in the same year that a writer is employed to write a film; thus, screen credits are a lagging indicator, and the employment and credits numbers for 2020 are largely drawn from two different sets of film projects. Moreover, many screenwriters are employed on projects that are never produced and thus do not receive screen credit.

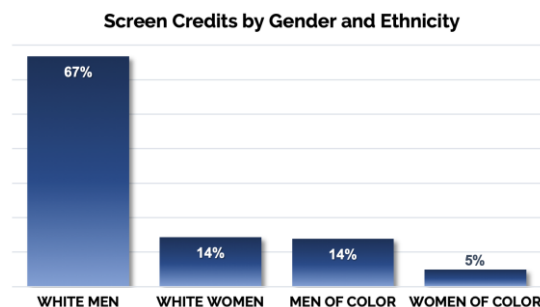
With that in mind, an examination of screen credits in 2020 reveals similar inequities to those documented in the previous section. Of the several hundred writers with credits determined in 2020, just 33% were from one of four major underrepresented groups: Women, BIPOC, Disabled Writers, and LGBTQ+ Writers.<sup>11</sup>

### Screen Credits by Gender and Ethnicity

In 2020, women received 19% of screen credits - no change from 2019. People of color received 18% of screen credits, a 1% drop from 2019.



Here again, an intersectional analysis reveals how discriminatory hiring patterns go on to impact screen credits, particularly for members of multiple underrepresented groups - with women of color receiving the smallest share of screen credits in 2020.



Year over year, the numbers in the previous chart are essentially flat, with only minor changes in the percentages of credits for men and women of color.

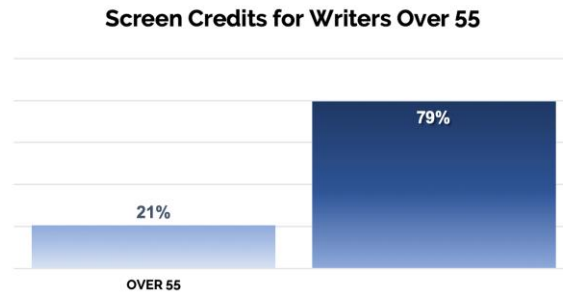
<sup>11</sup> Throughout this report, writers with multiple credits on a script were only counted once.



A breakdown by major ethnicities reveals similar patterns of discrimination to those seen in screenwriter employment, with every group other than white writers receiving a single digit percentage of screen credits in 2020 - and a smaller share of credits than their respective share of the U.S. population.<sup>12</sup>

### Screen Credits by Age

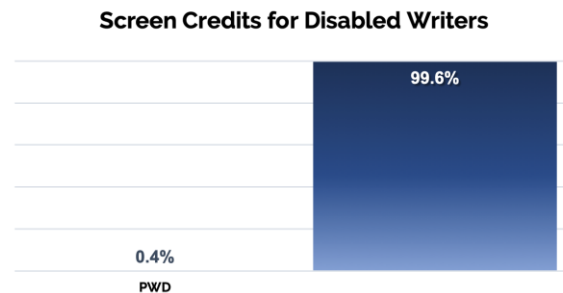
Writers Over 55 received 21% of screen credits, despite making up 29% of the U.S. population.



This includes both highly successful screenwriters who continue working well after age 55 and the larger group of middle-class screenwriters who may see their opportunities limited by ageism.

### Screen Credits by Disability

In 2020, Disabled Writers received just 0.4% of screen credits - a pattern of discrimination almost identical to that revealed by the 2020 employment data set.

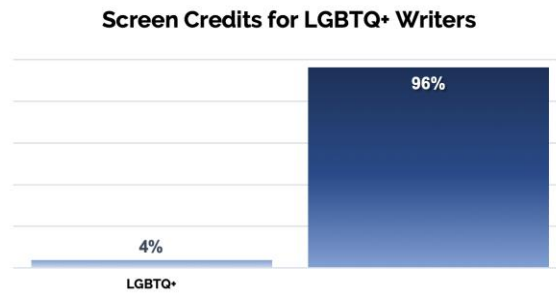


As mentioned above, this disparity may partially result from under-reporting, since disability status is based on self-identification. It is also worth noting, however, that many Disabled Writers do not have a choice about concealing their disability - nor should any writer have to conceal their identity as a condition of employment or credit.

### Screen Credits by Sexual and Gender Identity

<sup>12</sup> The comparatively smaller dataset of credited writers on produced projects combined with the low numbers of BIPOC writers in screen leaves the individual percentages of screen credits by ethnic group too small to be meaningfully reported.

While LGBTQ+ writers' share of screenwriting jobs (6%) was only slightly smaller than their share of the U.S. population (8%), they received a smaller share of screen credits in 2020 - just 4%.



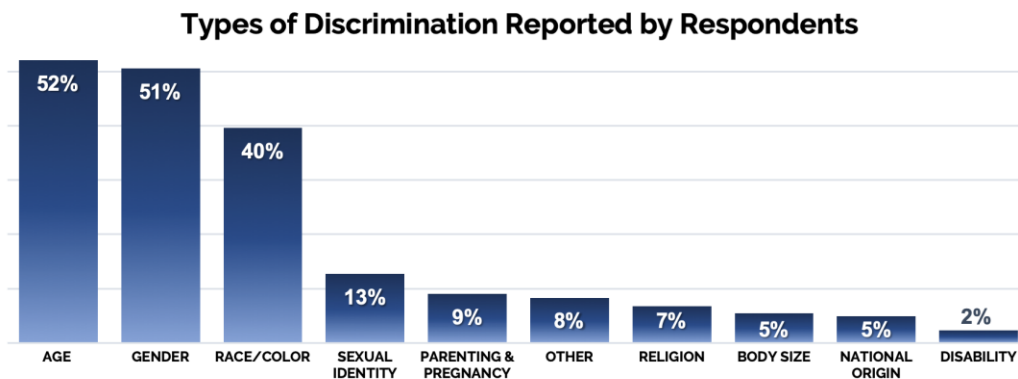
It is again important to remember that, for reasons explained at the start of this section, 2020 screen credits data and 2020 screenwriter employment data are two different data sets. It is therefore possible that the variance between the employment and credits for LGBTQ+ writers is merely an annual fluctuation - or even a sign of a positive trend, since credits are frequently determined a year or more after writers are employed.

It is also important to note that hiring and credits are not the only measure of discrimination. In the WGAW's 2021 Screen Survey, 48% of LGBTQ+ writers reported that they were only or primarily offered work on projects that pertain to their diversity attributes, compared with 27% of cishet writers. In addition, 53% of LGBTQ+ writers reported experiencing discrimination, bullying, and/or harassment based on their sexual orientation over the course of their careers.

## SCREEN SURVEY RESULTS

In May of 2021, the WGAW conducted a survey of more than 2000 writers who indicated they have been actively pursuing screen work in the last three years, with a focus on the diversity, equity, and inclusion issues impacting their careers. The full set of survey results is extensive and will be used by the Guild to determine future actions on DEI issues in the feature film industry. The major findings are presented here.

In considering this information, it is important to remember that - unlike the Guild's empirical data on employment and hiring - this survey data is based on subjective assessments by our members and includes only the experiences of those writers who took time to respond. With that in mind, the results are as follows:

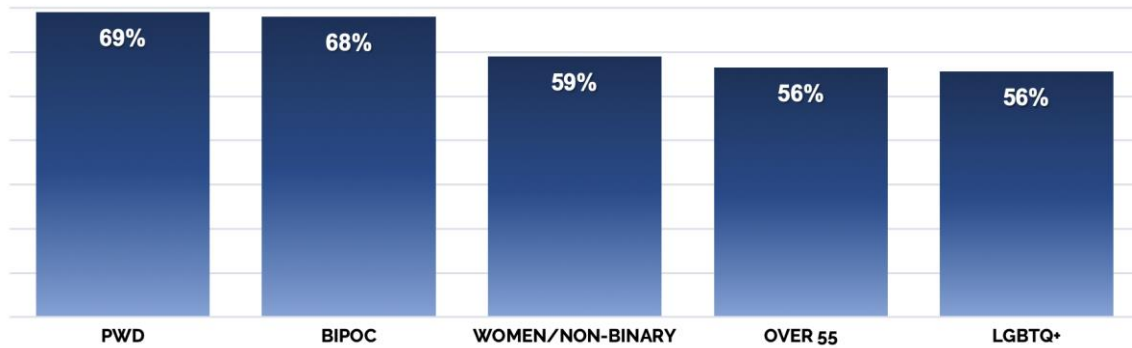


The chart above details responses to the question “If you've experienced any form of discrimination, bullying, and/or harassment over the course of your professional career, how would you categorize it?” In data from the full survey group, it is clear that Age and Gender discrimination are most prevalent, followed closely by discrimination based on Race/Color. Within each group, however, the reports of group-specific discrimination are far higher:

- 84% of Writers Over 55 reported discrimination based on Age.
- 79% of Women/Non-Binary Writers reported discrimination based on Gender.
- 76% of BIPOC Writers reported discrimination based on Race/Color.
- 53% of LGBTQ+ Writers reported discrimination based on Sexual Identity.
- 33% of Disabled Writers reported discrimination based on Disability.

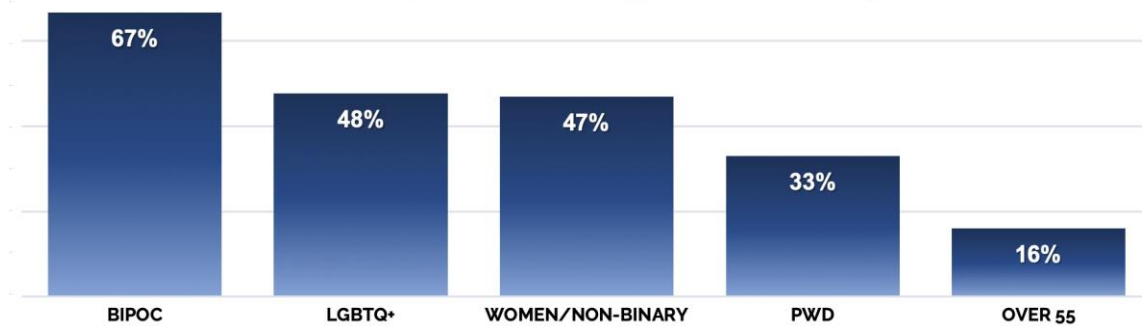
The survey results also shed light on the forms of discrimination screenwriters face. For example, in response to the question “While interviewing for a Guild-covered job, have you ever felt that you were excluded from certain opportunities due to your identity or background?”, 69% of Disabled Writers and 68% of BIPOC Writers answered “Yes.” This form of job discrimination was also reported by more than 55% of Women/Non-Binary Writers, Writers Over 55, and LGBTQ+ Writers.

### Respondents Reporting Hiring Discrimination



In addition to feeling excluded from job opportunities, respondents from underrepresented groups also report discrimination in the types of stories they are hired to tell. When asked if “you were only or primarily offered work on projects that pertain to your diversity attributes,” their responses were as follows:

### Respondents Only or Primarily Offered Work on Projects Pertaining to their Identity



Further illustration of issues in hiring came from responses to the following two questions:

- While being represented for jobs by your Agent or Manager, have you ever been told that that the employer was looking for a writer of a different age, gender, sexual identity, race, disability or cultural background?
- While interviewing for a Guild-covered job, have you ever been told that they were looking for a writer of a different age, gender, sexual identity, race, disability or cultural background?

Of the more than 2000 screenwriters surveyed, **86%** reported being told by an agent or manager that an employer was looking for a writer of a different age, gender, sexual identity, race, disability, or cultural background, and **77%** of writers reported being told the same thing while being interviewed for a Guild-covered job.

While it should be noted that employers and representatives may be using these factors as an excuse with writers who are not hired for other reasons, the fact remains that this is what writers are reporting that they are told. This messaging was reported at a rate of 60% or greater by every group surveyed, and two groups reporting this message the most were men (including men from underrepresented groups) at 92% and whites (including whites from underrepresented groups) at 90%.

These survey results illustrate the types of challenges that writers report as they pursue employment in screen. In addition, they show how important it is that studios and producers exercise caution to ensure that efforts to drive progress on DEI issues do not end up merely practicing different forms of discrimination.

## CONCLUSION

The Writers Guild of America exists to protect the wages and working conditions of all writers. This report has been created in an effort to fulfill those responsibilities and to inform the dialogue and actions within our industry surrounding these issues.

**The WGAW urges all studios, producers, executives, agents, managers, and lawyers to use the information provided in this report to adjust their business practices to work toward real solutions.**

While doing this work, it is also important to remember that **inclusion and equity efforts do not end with hiring and credits**. This report deals primarily with the WGAW's data on employment and credits, but there is ample evidence that, once employed, writers from underrepresented groups encounter ongoing obstacles. In addition to the WGAW survey detailed in this report, surveys by the [Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity](#) and a WGAW-commissioned study by UCLA's Professor and Dean of Social Sciences Darnell Hunt entitled "[The State of Career Advancement for Diverse Hollywood Writers: Surveying Pitfalls and Best Practices](#)" document various types of bias, tokenism, and harassment that writers from underrepresented groups face in the workplace.

While it will take work from individuals and companies across our industry to change the status quo, credit for the progress that has been made belongs, first and foremost, to the writers from underrepresented groups who work not only to write excellent scripts and tell great stories, but also to open doors for themselves and the writers who will come after them.

To help underrepresented writers continue to drive meaningful change, the WGAW's Inclusion & Equity Department provides staff and support for a number of programs and committees, including the [TV Writer Access Project](#) and [Feature Writer Access Project](#), the [Asian American Writers Committee](#), the [Career Longevity Committee](#), the [Committee of Black Writers](#), the [Committee of Women Writers](#), the [Disabled Writers Committee](#), the [Latinx Writers Committee](#), the [LGBTQ+ Writers Committee](#), the [Native American & Indigenous Writers Committee](#), and the newly-formed [Middle Eastern Writers Committee](#). These committees work to solve problems faced by their members and hold events to help underrepresented writers connect with those that can hire them. Anyone in a position to hire writers or help advance their careers is welcome to contact these committees to inquire about attending one of their events.

With transparency, accountability, and continued effort, we can end discrimination against underrepresented writers and increase diversity, equity, and inclusion across our industry.