

Renaissance in Reverse?

The 2016 Hollywood Writers Report

Commissioned by the Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW), *The 2016 Hollywood Writers Report* provides an update on the progress of women, minority, and older writers on the employment and earnings fronts. Relative to their white male and younger counterparts, these groups of writers have traditionally faced underemployment and/or lower earnings in Hollywood's television and film sectors. This report focuses on changes in the groups' prospects since 2012, which must be considered in the context of major trends in the Hollywood industry. One of the most important industry trends is the volume of film and television production. While theatrical film production among the major studios has declined significantly since 2006,¹ the explosion in original programming across broadcast, cable, and digital platforms has ushered in a renaissance in television. Indeed, the increase in jobs in the television sector has more than offset the losses in film in recent years. How have women, minority and older writers fared in this expanding Hollywood context?

The previous report — which considered employment and earnings through 2012² — found modest progress for women and minorities in television, and gains for older writers in film. It noted that women writers had reduced the gender earnings gap in television, despite a small decline in the group's share of sector employment. By contrast, the report found that minority television writers had posted small increases in employment share and earnings relative to their white male counterparts by 2012. In the film sector, however, the report found stagnation for both women and minority writers as neither group had gained any ground on their white male counterparts. As a result, both groups remained seriously underrepresented among the corps of writers in both sectors. Meanwhile, the report noted that older writers (particularly those aged 41 to 50) claimed the largest share of employment in television and film in 2012, as well as the highest earnings in each sector.

The current report reveals a mixture of slow, forward progress, stalls and reversals on the Hollywood diversity front. Women writers have made small advances in television employment and earnings since 2012. Though women writers also made small gains in film employment, the report reveals they lost ground in sector earnings by 2014. For minority television writers, however, any advances in employment share and relative earnings have stalled since the previous report. Only in the film sector have minority writers enjoyed any gains since 2012 — a slight increase in their share of employment

¹ The number of films released by the major studios declined from 204 in 2006 to just 136 in 2014, a 33.3 percent decrease (see *Theatrical Market Statistics, 2014*, p. 21, Motion Pictures Association of America). Meanwhile, the number of writers employed in the film sector dropped 16.3 percent over the same period, from 1922 in 2006 to 1608 in 2014 (see Table 4 from the *2014* and *2016 Hollywood Writers Reports*).

² *The 2014 Hollywood Writers Report* considered employment and earnings in television and film through 2012. It can be accessed on-line at:
http://www.wga.org/uploadedFiles/who_we_are/HWR14.pdf

and a small closing of the earnings gap. Meanwhile, the corps of employed writers in television and film has continued to age since the last report. Older writers aged 51 to 60 became the highest paid television writers among the age groups by 2014, while writers aged 41 to 50 remained the highest paid in the film sector.

Below, key findings from *The 2016 Hollywood Writers Report* are summarized 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 collaborate with key industry players to facilitate progress on the industry diversity front.

Women Writers' Share of Television and Film Employment Rises

Since 2012, the last year examined in the previous report, women writers have made notable gains in television and film employment relative to their male counterparts. **Figure 1** shows women's share of television employment increased about 2 percentage points between 2012 and 2014, from 27 percent to 29 percent. This latter figure is the highest share on record for women television writers. The group also posted an increase of about 2 percentage points in its share of film employment over the period, from 15 percent to 17 percent. Its share of overall industry employment in 2014 was 26 percent, up 1 percentage point from the 25 percent figure posted in 2012. If we consider the 5-year period beginning in 2010, women writers made small, steady gains in television relative to their male counterparts but merely treaded water in film. That is, the group's share of television employment increased 2 percentage points between 2010 and 2014 (from 27 percent to 29 percent) but remained flat in film (17 percent). Women were underrepresented by factors of a little less than 2 to 1 among television writers and nearly 3 to 1 among film writers in 2014, both small improvements over the findings from the previous report for 2012.

Gender Earnings Gap in Television Continues to Shrink

The previous report showed that women television writers closed the gap in median earnings a bit with their white male counterparts by 2012, the last year examined in the report. This trend continued into 2014. Consistent with their gains in television employment since 2012 (see **Figure 1** above), women writers continued to enjoy gains in sector earnings compared to their white male counterparts as well (see **Figure 2**). In 2012, white male television writers earned \$124,905, while women earned \$113,350 (91 cents on the dollar). By 2014, white male sector earnings had increased by less than \$3,000 to \$127,768, compared to an increase of more than \$5000 for women to \$118,910 (93 cents on the dollar). It is worth noting that women posted the highest relative earnings over the study period, 96 cents, in 2010 and 2011, when the gender earnings gap nearly closed altogether. In 2011, for example, the gap between white male and female sector earnings was less than \$5,000 (\$116,504 and \$112,091, respectively).

Figure 1: Women Writers' Share of Employment, 2010-2014

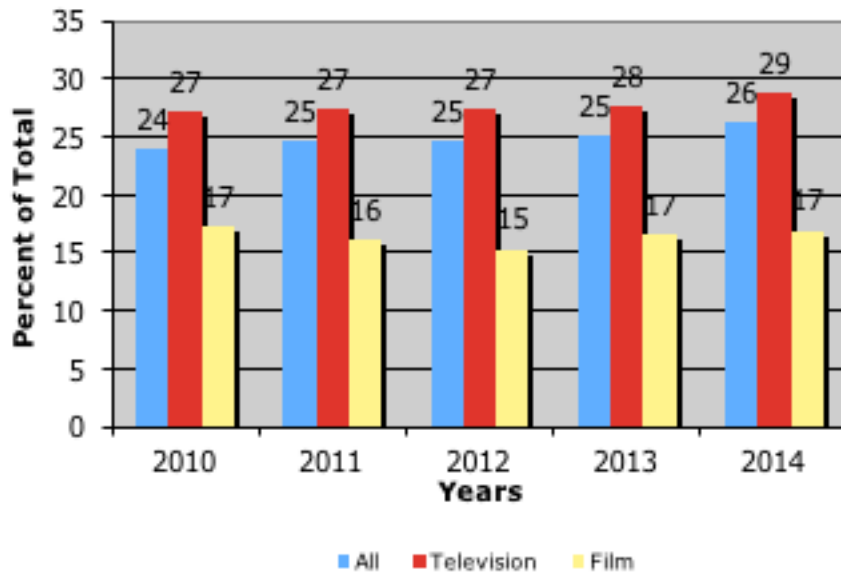
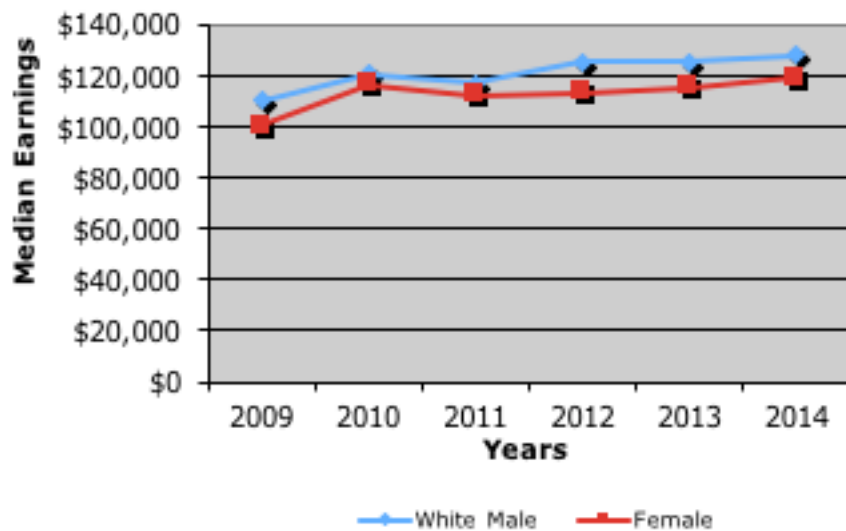
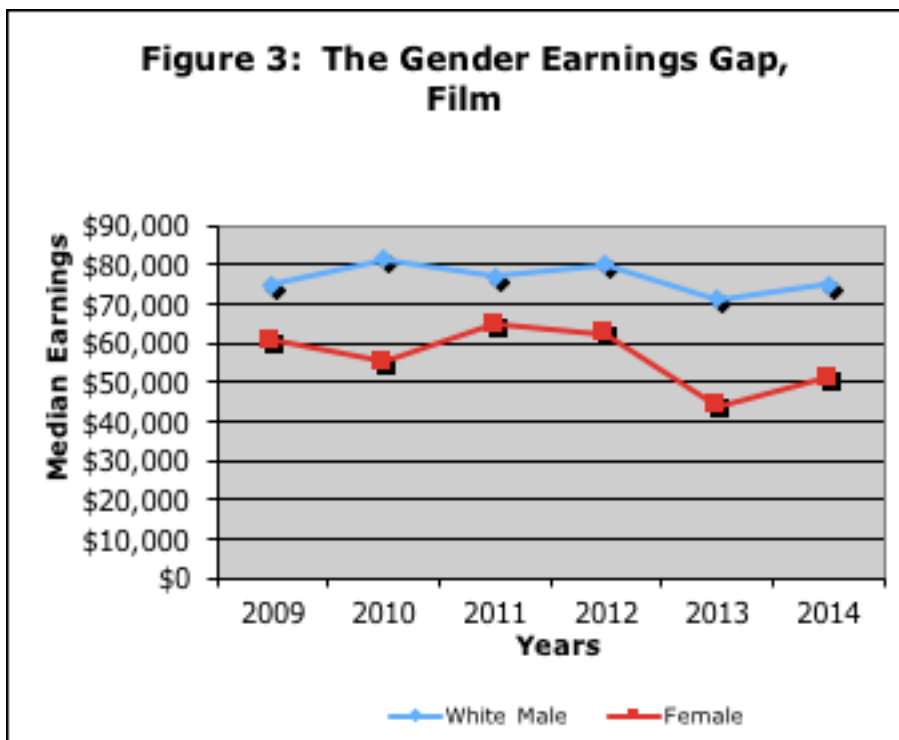


Figure 2: The Gender Earnings Gap, TV



Gender Earnings Gap in Film Continues to Widen

The gender earnings gap in film has traditionally been greater than the gap in television, and since the last report, it has widened even more (see **Figure 3**). In 2012, women film writers earned 78 cents for every dollar earned by their white male counterparts (\$62,138 versus \$80,000). By 2014, the relative earnings figure had dropped to just 68 cents. In that year, the median earnings figure for women film writers was \$50,938, compared to \$75,000 for white males. It's worth noting that the lowest relative earnings figure over the six-year period appeared a year earlier, in 2013, when women earned just 61 cents for every dollar earned by men (\$43,708 versus \$71,077).

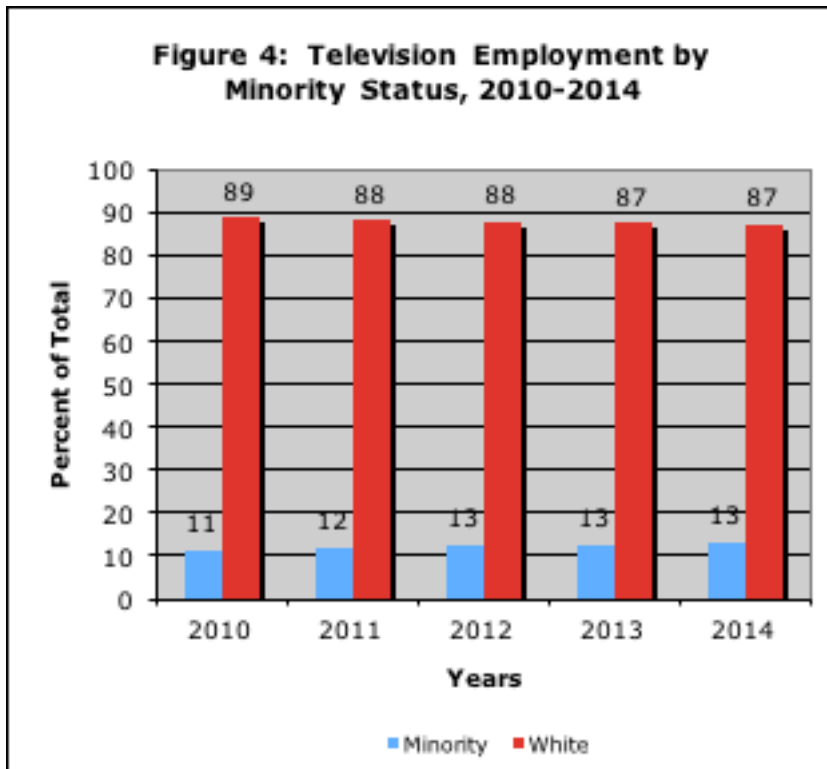


Minority Share of Television Employment Flat

The last two reports revealed small increases in the minority share of television employment, after it had declined by about a percentage point between 2006 and 2008. **Figure 4**, however, shows that the minority share of sector employment has remained flat at about 13 percent since 2012, the last year reported in the previous report.³ Still, this latest figure represents an increase of two percentage points over the 11 percent share minority television writers posted in 2010. There were 537 minority writers employed in the television sector in 2014 (186 African American, 135 Latino, 120 Asian American, 4

³ Note there may be small differences between this report and the last in minority figures for earlier years due to the incorporation of a “Multiracial” category in the current report, which has the effect of boosting minority figures slightly.

Native American, and 92 multiracial),⁴ compared to 3548 white writers. Because minorities constituted about 38 percent of the U.S. population in 2014, they remained underrepresented by a factor of nearly 3 to 1 among television writers. As previous reports have concluded, it appears as if minority television writers are at best treading water when it comes to their representation in sector employment, particularly when we consider how rapidly the nation is diversifying.⁵



Minority Share of Film Employment Increases Slightly

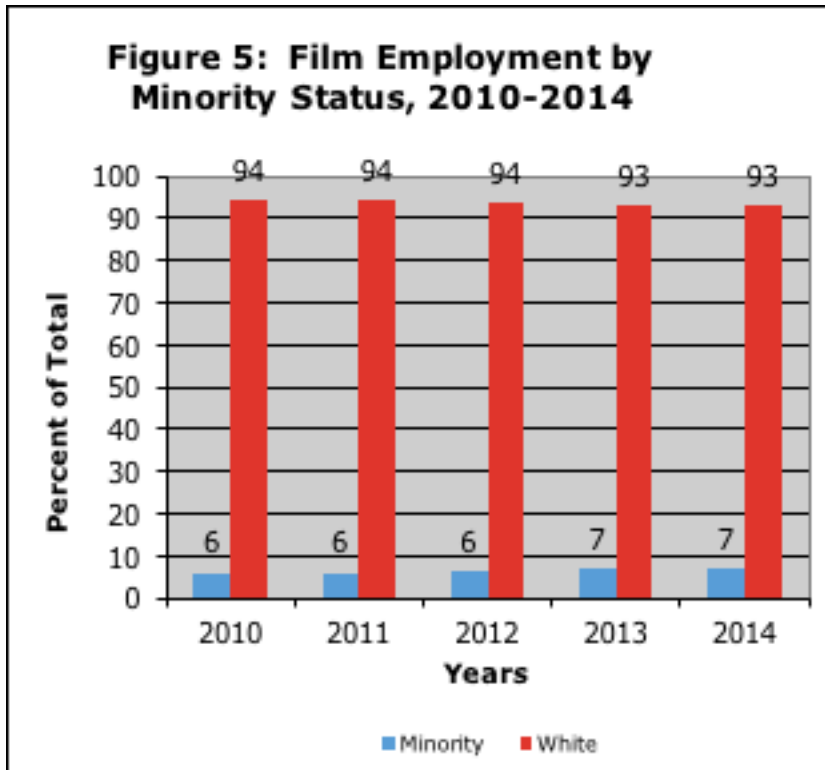
The last few reports revealed either no progress or slight declines in minority representation among the corps of film writers. **Figure 5**, however, shows the minority share of film employment has actually increased a percentage point to about 7 percent since 2012, the last year examined in the previous report. There were 114 minority writers employed in the film sector in 2014 (37 African American, 32 Latino, 21 Asian American, 2 Native American, and 22 multiracial)⁶, compared to 1494 white writers.

⁴ The gender breakdown for employed minority television writers in 2014 was as follows: 106 African American men and 80 women; 77 Latino men and 58 women; 53 Asian American men and 67 women; 3 Native American men and 1 women; and 47 multiracial men and 45 women.

⁵ The U.S. Census Bureau estimated the minority share of the nation's population at 37.4 percent in 2013, up considerably from the Census count of 31 percent in 2000.

⁶ The gender breakdown for employed minority film writers in 2014 was as follows: 26 African American men and 11 women; 28 Latino men and 4 women; 16 Asian American

Though the small gain for minority film writers since the last report contrasts with minority stagnation in the television sector, minority film writers have much farther to go before they catch up with their white counterparts. Indeed, minorities were collectively underrepresented by a factor of more than 5 to 1 among film writers in 2014.



Television Earnings Gap for Minorities Unchanged

The previous report noted that the television earnings gap for minorities shrank significantly in 2011, before widening again in 2012, the last year considered in the report. **Figure 6** shows that the widening of the gap between 2011 and 2012 held steady through 2014, when the median earnings figure for minority television writers collectively (\$102,492) was \$25,276 less than the figure posted by their white male counterparts (\$127,768). In other words, minority television writers earned about 80 cents for every dollar earned by white male television writers in 2014, virtually identical to the 79 cents on the dollar they earned in 2012. By contrast, minority writers had earned 91 cents for every dollar earned by their white male counterparts in 2011, when the gap momentarily approached closure.

men and 5 women; 2 Native American men and no women; 15 multiracial men and 7 women.

Figure 6: The Earnings Gap for Minorities, TV

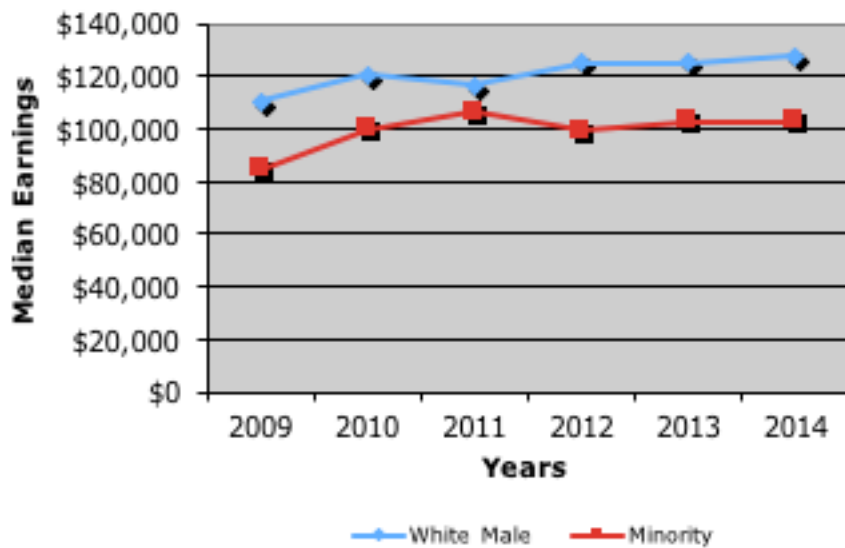
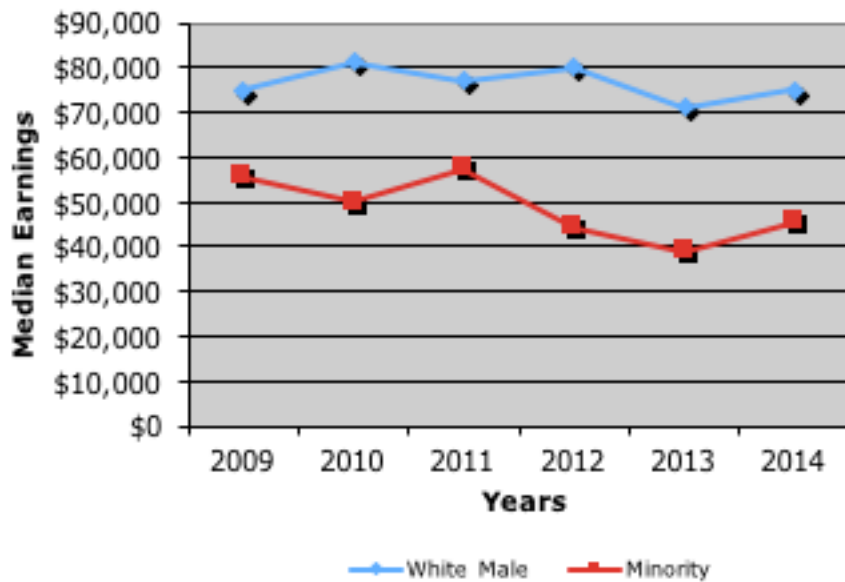


Figure 7: The Earnings Gap for Minorities, Film



Film Earnings Gap for Minorities Shrinks a Bit

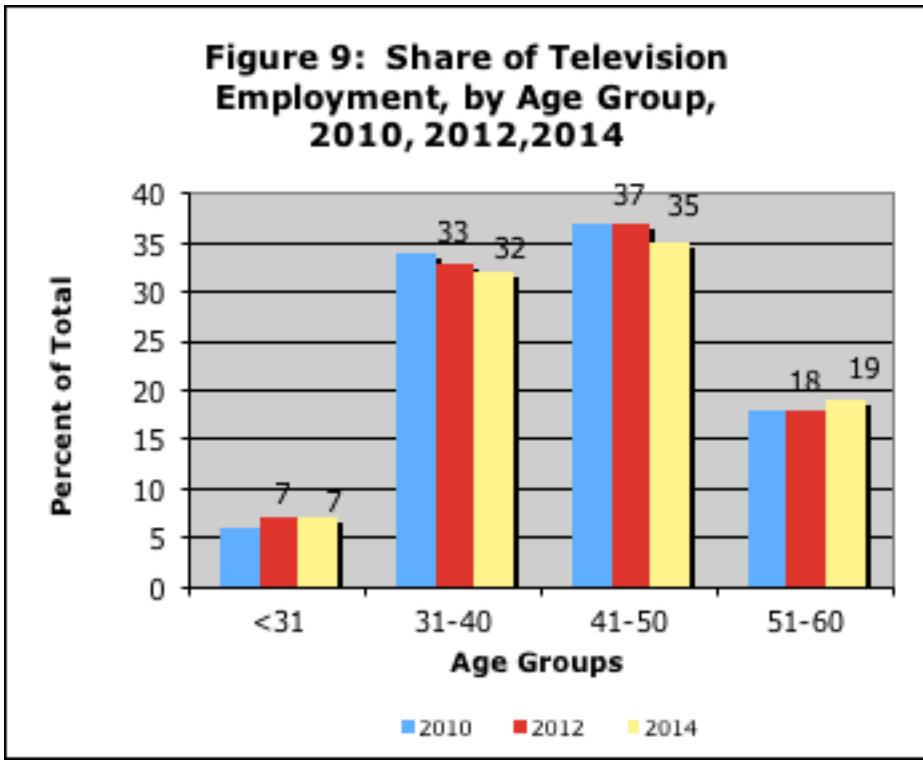
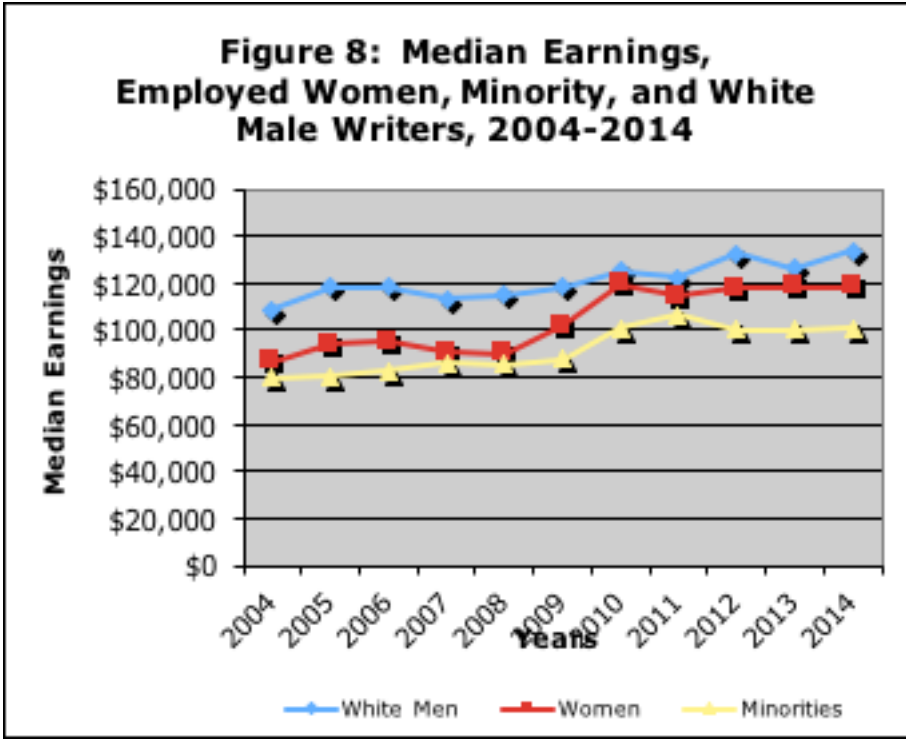
As earlier reports have documented, minority writers usually fare worse in the film sector than in television, both in terms of employment opportunities and earnings. **Figure 7** shows that despite momentary narrowing in 2009 and 2011, the gap between the median earnings of minority film writers and their white male counterparts has remained significant in recent years. Indeed, the median earnings of minority film writers in 2014 (\$45,500) was \$29,500 less than the figure posted by their white male counterparts (\$75,000). Still, it's worth noting that this gap was a slight improvement over the \$35,625 gap evident in 2012, the last year considered in the previous report. In 2014, minority film writers earned 61 cents for every dollar earned by white male film writers, up from the 55 cents on the dollar figure posted for 2012.

White Males Continue to Dominate in Overall Earnings; Women and Minorities Gain No Ground

The previous report noted small gains for women and minority writers in overall median earnings relative to their white male counterparts. But as **Figure 4** shows, neither group has gained any ground on white men since 2012, the last year considered in the previous report. In 2014, overall median earnings for women were \$118,293, compared to \$133,500 for their white male counterparts. The resulting gender gap in overall earnings of \$15,207 that year was actually a bit larger than the \$14,272 gap evident in 2012. For minorities, the overall earnings gaps were nearly identical in 2014 and 2012 — \$32,851 and \$32,238, respectively. In 2014, minority writers posted overall median earnings of just \$100,649, compared to \$133,500 for their white male counterparts. As a result of these developments, the relative earnings figures for women and minority writers were flat between 2012 and 2014. That is, women writers earned 89 cents for every dollar earned by their white male counterparts in 2012 and 2014, while the figure for minorities was virtually unchanged at 75 cents on the dollar in 2014 and 76 cents in 2012.

Corps of Employed Television Writers Continues to Age

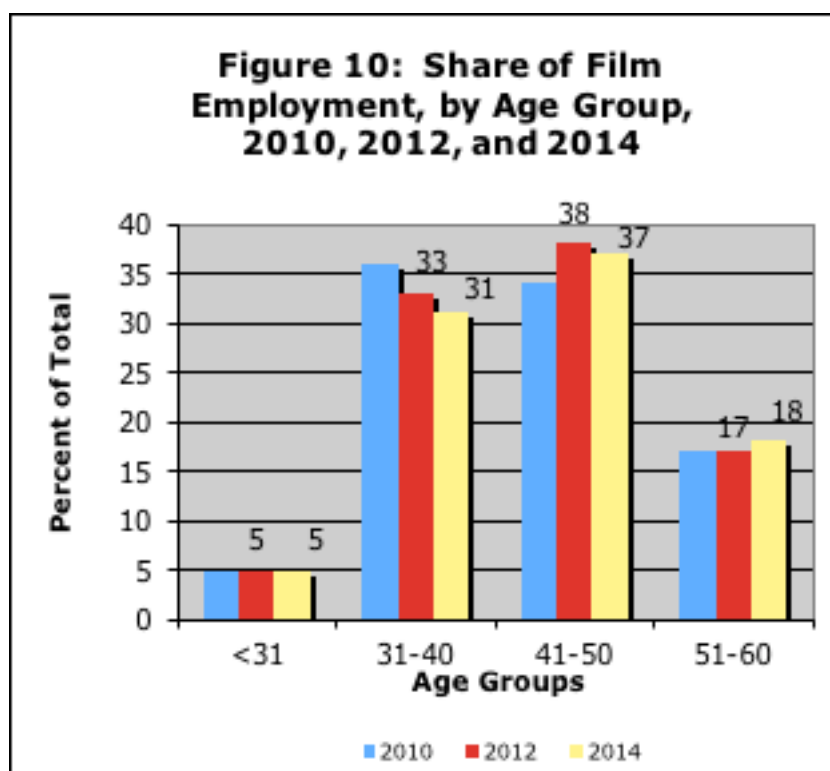
The previous report revealed no change in employment share for television writers aged 41 to 50 between 2009 and 2012, when the group enjoyed the highest shares of any age group (37 percent). **Figure 9** shows that though television writers aged 41 to 50 continued to claim the largest employment share in 2014, that share has declined by 2 percentage points since 2012 to 35 percent. Meanwhile, the employment shares for younger writers has remained flat since the last report or declined. Television writers aged 31 to 40 experienced a 1 percentage point decline in employment share between 2012 and 2014 (from 33 percent to 32 percent), while the share claimed by those younger than 31 remained flat (7 percent). Among the age groupings, it was only television writers over 50 who enjoyed gains in employment share since the last report. The largest of those groups, television writers aged 51 to 60, enjoyed a 1 percentage point increase in employment share between 2012 and 2014 (from 18 percent to 19 percent), after experiencing no gains during the period examined in the previous report. As noted in the previous report, the corps of employed television writers is aging as a whole, and older



writers continue to improve upon their shares of sector employment. In 2014, writers over 40 claimed 61 percent of sector employment, up from 60 percent in 2012.

Corps of Employed Film Writers Continues to Age

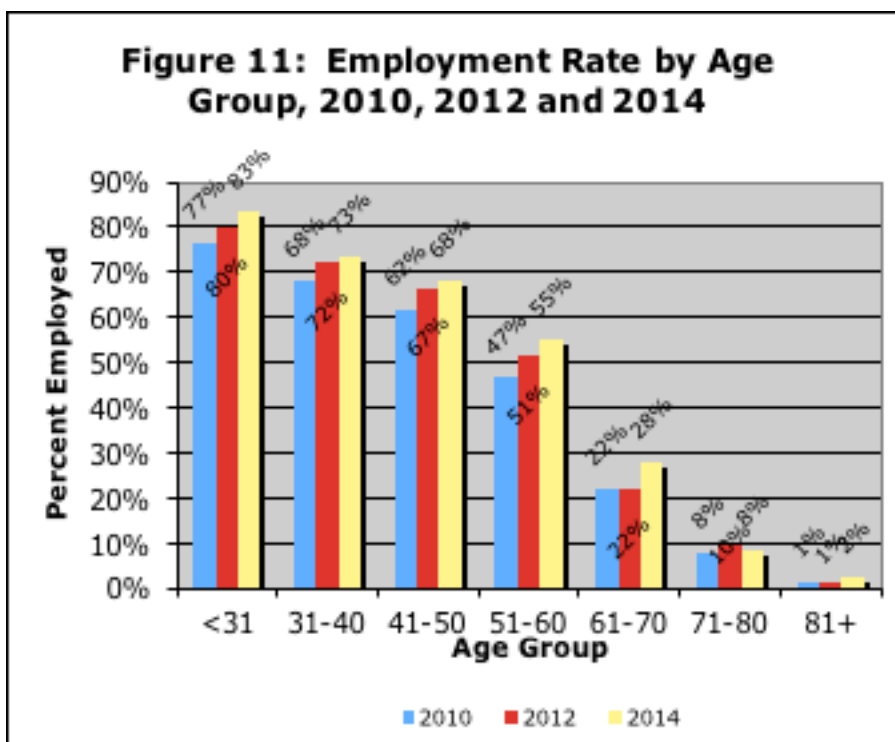
Paralleling the pattern evident in television, the corps of writers employed in the film sector has also aged since the previous report — despite a decline of 1 percentage point in the share claimed by the largest group of older writers (writers aged 41 to 50). Film writers aged 41 to 50 accounted for 37 percent of all sector employment in 2014, down from 38 percent in 2012 (see **Figure 10**). But their older colleagues, film writers aged 51 to 60, enjoyed an increase of 1 percentage point in employment share between 2012 and 2014 (from 17 percent to 18 percent). The employment shares for younger film writers have either declined or remained flat since the last report. Writers aged 31 to 40 saw their collective share of sector employment shrink from 33 percent in 2012 to just 31 percent in 2014, while the shares for the youngest film writers (those younger than 31) remained flat at 5 percent. In 2014, writers over 40 combined for nearly two thirds of sector employment (64.6 percent), up from about 62 percent in 2012.



Employment Rate Increases for All Groups of Writers 70 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 has increased for all age groupings of writers 70 and under since the last report. The biggest single percentage-point gain in employment rate among the age groupings was enjoyed by older writers aged 61 to 70. In 2014, the

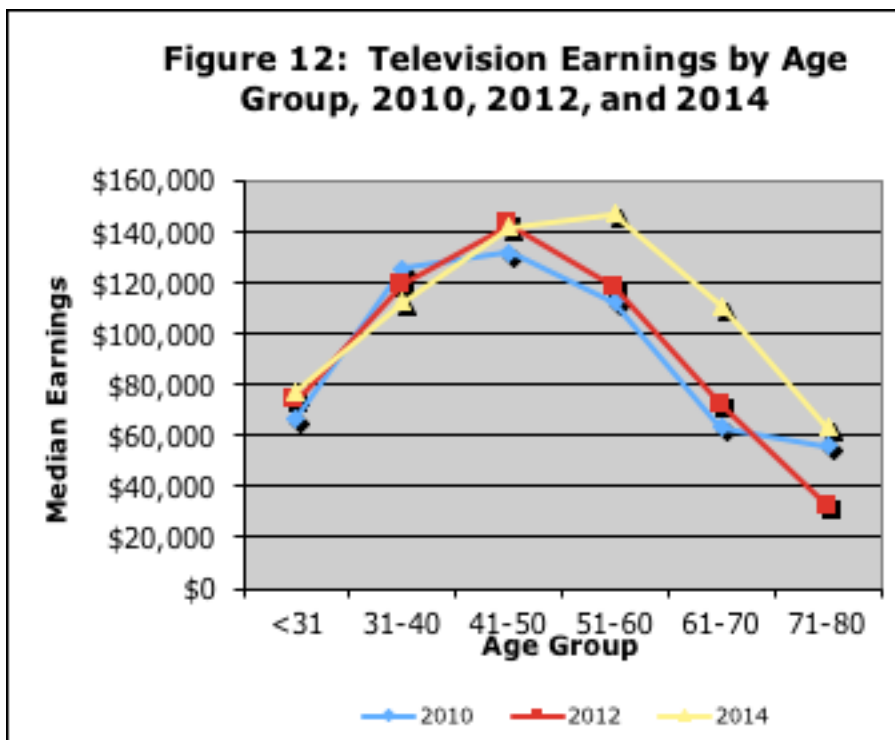
group's employment rate was 28 percent, up 6 percentage points from the 22 percent figure posted for 2012. Following closely behind, writers aged 51 to 60 have experienced an increase of 4 percentage points in employment rate since the last report – from 51 percent in 2012 to 55 percent in 2015. The largest group of writers among the age groupings, those aged 41 to 50, posted a gain of 1 percentage point (from 67 percent in 2012 to 68 percent in 2014). Consistent with earlier reports, employment rates were generally higher among younger writers, as employment is a condition of WGA membership and younger writers were more likely to have recently joined the Guild. But the gains since the last report in employment share were more modest for younger writers relative to their older counterparts. While the very youngest writers (those under 31) enjoyed a gain of 3 percentage points in employment rate to 83 percent (just half the gain of writers aged 61 to 70), the largest group of younger writers (those aged 31 to 40) saw a gain of only 1 percentage point (from 72 percent in 2012 to 73 percent in 2014). By contrast, the employment rate for writers aged 71 to 80 actually declined between reports, from 10 percent in 2012 to just 8 percent in 2014.



Older Writers Aged 51 to 60 Become Highest Paid Television Writers

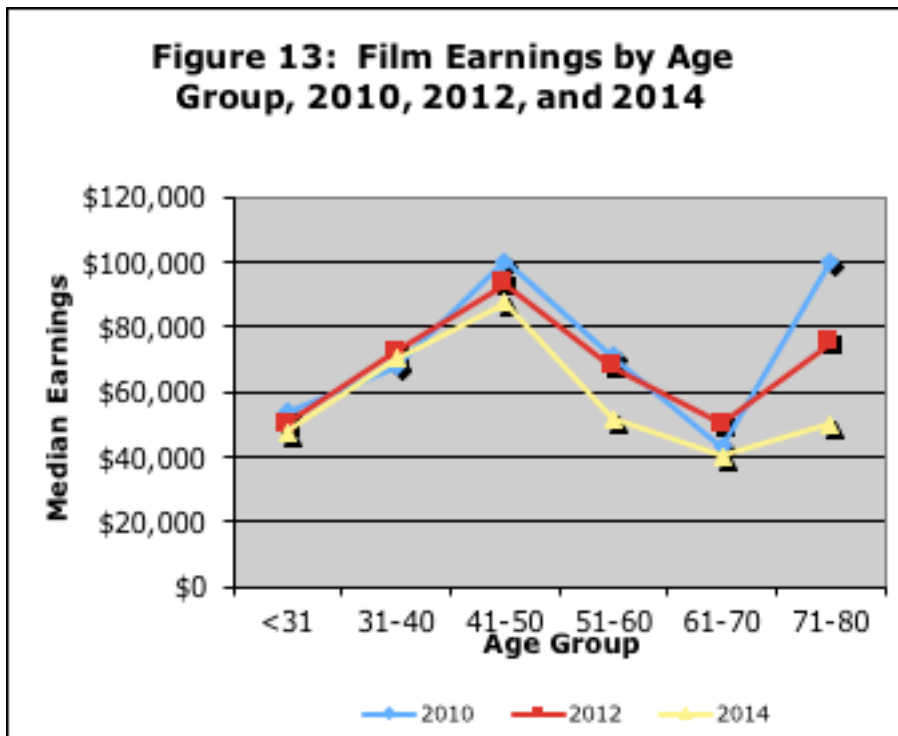
In recent years, median earnings in television have been highest among older writers aged 41 to 50. **Figure 12** reveals this pattern shifted in 2014, when television writers aged 51 to 60 posted the highest median earnings of \$146,465, a figure more than \$5,000 above that of their older counterparts aged 41 to 50 (\$141,319). Meanwhile, median earnings for television writers aged 61 to 70 (\$110,337) approximated those for younger writers aged 31 to 40 (\$112,268) in 2014 — thus eliminating a sizable earnings advantage

observed in 2012 and 2010 for the younger group of writers relative to the older one. Indeed, writers over 50 enjoyed most of the increases in median sector earnings since the last report. Writers aged 71 to 80, for example, nearly doubled their earnings between 2012 and 2014 (from \$32,216 to \$63,000). By contrast, the gain in median earnings posted by television writers younger than 31 was much smaller, just a little over \$3,000 (from \$73,601 in 2012 to \$76,993 in 2014).



Older Writers Aged 41 to 50 Remain Highest Paid Film Writers

In the previous report, writers aged 41 to 50 became the highest paid writers in the film sector, ending a pattern in which median earnings in the sector had previously peaked among the oldest group of writers, those aged 71 to 80. **Figure 13** shows this pattern continued in 2014, when older writers aged 41 to 50 again posted the highest median earnings in the film sector (\$87,500). Writers aged 71 to 80 slipped to fourth place (\$50,000), replaced by younger writers aged 31 to 40 who claimed second place (\$70,000). Writers aged 51 to 60 had the third highest sector earnings (\$51,759), while those younger than 31 (\$47,500) and aged 61 to 70 (\$40,069) trailed. It is worth noting that since the last report, median earnings in the sector have declined for every age grouping, which mirrors the decline in theatrical film releases by the major studios since 2006.



Renaissance in Reverse

Since the previous report, television production has continued to flourish, while major theatrical film releases have stagnated. In this context, white males maintained their dominant hold on employment and earnings in both the television and film sectors, despite a few small gains for women and minorities. Women writers increased their share of television sector employment from 27 percent to 29 percent between 2012 and 2014, and increased their relative earnings to 93 cents on the dollar. Though women writers also made small gains in their share of film employment (from 15 percent to 17 percent), their relative earnings in the sector fell to 68 cents on the dollar by 2014. For minority television writers, however, both employment share (13 percent) and relative earnings (80 cents on the dollar) have been flat since the previous report. Only in the film sector have minority writers enjoyed any gains since 2012 — a slight increase in their share of employment (from 6 percent to 7 percent) and a small closing of the earnings gap (from 55 cents to 61 cents on the dollar). In the end, women and minorities remained severely underrepresented among the corps of film and television writers (for women, by a factor of nearly 2 to 1 in television and nearly 3 to 1 in film; for minorities, by a factor of nearly 3 to 1 in television and more than 5 to 1 in film). Meanwhile, the corps of employed writers in television and film has continued to age since the last report. Older writers aged 51 to 60 became the highest paid television writers among the age groups by 2014, while writers aged 41 to 50 remained the highest paid in the film sector. And despite the longstanding pattern of declining employment prospects with age, older writers aged 51 and 70 enjoyed notable increases in employment rate since the last report.

As earlier reports in this series have concluded, business-as-usual hiring practices will not

yield any real progress on the industry diversity front. Progress has been slow at best for women and minority writers in an era of television renaissance, while film sector stagnation has witnessed either anemic advances or actual reversals of fortune for groups of writers that remain woefully underrepresented in both sectors. In an effort to help break the business-as-usual cycle on the diversity front, the Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW) in 2009 established the TV Writers Access Project and in 2013 the Feature Access Project (Feature WAP). These script-judging initiatives are aimed at enlisting Guild membership in the process of identifying and recognizing outstanding, yet underutilized diverse writing talent.

The TV WAP relies upon active showrunners to 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 to the richness of the talent pool of diverse writers. Contestants compete in five categories — women writers, minority writers, writers with disabilities, writers 55 and older, 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. Since 2009, the TV WAP has produced more than 100 honorees, many of whom have gone on to secure staff positions or freelance work. The most recent cycle of the TV WAP (2015/2016) enlisted 100 judges and featured 173 submissions, 31 semi-finalists and 17 honorees (one writing team).

The Feature WAP is modeled after the WGAW’s successful television initiative but focuses on theatrical film writing. Qualified minority writers (and since 2015 women and writers 60 and over) are invited to submit a current, feature-length, unproduced spec script. Entries are read and scored on a blind submission basis by a panel of judges comprised of WGAW members recruited by the Feature WAP 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. In its third cycle (2015), the Feature WAP attracted 314 submissions (of which 19 were teams). Eleven projects were selected for a total of 12 honorees (1 team).

For nearly three decades, the Hollywood Writers Report series has championed the cause of increasing diversity among the ranks of television and film writers. This issue is a critical one because the Hollywood industry plays a major role in the process by which a nation circulates stories about itself. To the degree that female, minority and older voices are left out of this process, large segments of America’s increasingly diverse audiences are denied access to characters and situations that resonate most fully with all of our experiences. If this rationale is not compelling enough, recent evidence suggests that diversity among writers is also good for the bottom line. It turns out that television shows with writers rooms that roughly reflect the diversity of America’s population tend

also to have the highest median ratings.⁷ The WGAW remains committed to working with other industry players — the networks, studios, and agents — in an effort to move forward on the diversity front, not only for the good of the nation but also in the name of good business.

Study Data

This summary is based on findings from *The 2016 Hollywood Writers Report*, the tenth in a series of reports released by the WGAW that examines employment trends for writers in the Hollywood industry. The 2016 report updates *The 2014 Hollywood Writers Report*, providing data for the latest two years not covered in the previous report (i.e., 2013 and 2014). It also includes updated analyses of select data extending back to 2009 in order to consider any trends evident over the six-year period 2009-2014. 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, where he is also 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 five installments of *The Hollywood Writers Report*, which the Writers Guild of America released in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2014. He also was lead author of the *2014, 2015 and 2016 Hollywood Diversity Reports*, the first three 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.

⁷ *2015 Hollywood Diversity Report: Flipping the Script*, Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.