

## TV shows with diverse writers rooms, casts resonated with pandemic audiences

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Issa Rae, left, and Yvonne Orji in the HBO program "Insecure." Credit: HBO

The latest [UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report](#), published today, reveals that television viewers during the COVID-19 pandemic leaned into content that came out of diverse writers rooms and that featured diverse casts.

"We have seen this appetite for diverse content repeated over the history of our analyses," said Darnell Hunt, co-author of the report and UCLA's dean of social sciences. "The fact that shows with diverse writers rooms did well last year also illustrates that audiences are looking for authentic portrayals."

The report, which covers statistics for the 2019–20 TV season, tracks racial and [gender diversity](#) among key job categories, as well as ratings and social media engagement for 461 scripted shows across 50 broadcast, [cable](#) and streaming providers.

The new study found a continued correlation between the racial makeup of shows' writers and TV ratings. For example, among households of all races in 2019–20, the scripted broadcast shows that earned the highest ratings were those in which people of color made up between 31% and 40% of the credited writers.

Overall, [racial diversity](#) improved in almost every job category tracked by the report, and representation among [women](#) improved in about half of the job titles.

And for the first time in the report's history, people of color had a higher percentage of scripted broadcast TV acting roles, 43.4%, than their overall percentage of the U.S. population.

Across all three platform types, there were more people of color credited as writers than in the previous report. Overall, people of color made up 26.4% of the credited writers for broadcast series last season (up from 23.4%), 28.6% of credited writers for cable (up from 25.8%) and 24.2% of credited writers for streaming (up from 22.8%). Most of those modest gains were recorded by women, according to the study.

But people of color are still largely underrepresented among TV writers,

given that 42.7% of Americans are nonwhite.

## **Lagging representation among Latino actors, directors**

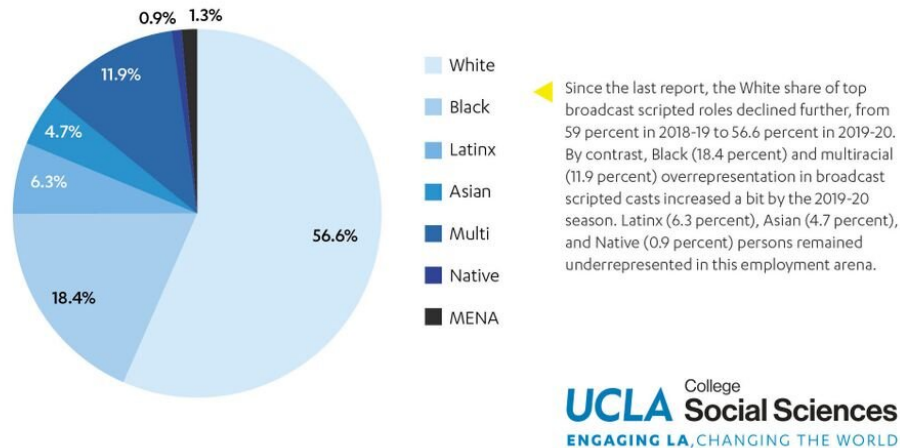
Latino representation in all job categories remained flat from the previous year, and Latinos hold far fewer TV jobs than their share of the U.S. population overall would predict. Latino actors held just 6.3% of broadcast TV roles, 5.7% in cable and 5.5% in streaming. Meanwhile, Latino directors were responsible for only 5.4% of broadcast TV episodes, 3.5% of cable episodes and 3.0% of streaming episodes.

"This UCLA report clearly demonstrates that more work is necessary to achieve more accurate representation and truly authentic portrayals in American television," said U.S. Rep. Joaquin Castro of Texas. "I hope this report encourages entertainment executives to reevaluate their systems for recruiting, retaining, and promoting Latinx talent, work in earnest to make changes, and create a more inclusive culture."

According to the report, a significant proportion of 2019–20 TV content—35% of broadcast shows, 22.9% of cable and 25.7% of streaming—was made in Los Angeles, where census data shows that 48.6% of the population is Hispanic or Latino.

"Diversifying the workforce means bringing equity to the economy and ensuring inclusionary practices in Hollywood," said California State Assemblywoman Wendy Carrillo. "As Latinos make up the largest population in the state of California, yet only a dismal percentage in Hollywood, I'm looking forward to ensuring the Latinx community is not subsidizing its own exclusion via California's Film Tax Credit Program, which the legislature oversees."

Share of Roles, by Race, Broadcast Scripted Shows, 2019-20 Season (n=815)



The percentage of broadcast TV roles by race for the 2019–20 season. Credit: UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report

The Hollywood Diversity Report recently received funding from the state of California that will enable UCLA researchers to continue to support such progress.

## Diversity in acting

Over the decade since the Hollywood Diversity Report began, diversity has improved the most among acting jobs, especially in TV, compared with all other TV and movie job types. In 2019–20, television shows with majority-nonwhite casts were more prevalent than ever.

For the first time since the researchers began tracking data, a plurality of shows on cable (28.1%) and streaming platforms (26.8%) featured casts in which the majority of actors were nonwhite. And 32.1% of broadcast shows had majority-nonwhite casts, up from just 2.0% in the first report, which covered the 2011–12 season.

The new report provides further support for the fact that audiences favor shows with diverse casts. During 2019–20, among white households, ratings for scripted broadcast shows were highest for shows whose actors were 31% to 40% nonwhite. Among Black households, scripted broadcast shows with the highest ratings were those in which casts were more than 50% nonwhite.

For streaming programming, which is dominated by Netflix, ratings among white, Black and Asian households were highest for shows with casts that were from 31% to 40% nonwhite.

The report's authors also analyze audiences' interaction with TV programs on social media, and how those trends correspond with cast diversity. For scripted cable shows during 2019–20, for example, they found that programs with majority nonwhite casts had the highest engagement on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. And for streaming shows, audience engagement on Twitter specifically was highest for programs with majority nonwhite casts.

## **Mixed progress among show creators**

Another area in which diversity improved was among show creators. That's an important datapoint because show creators have influence over which stories are developed, whose stories they represent and how they're told, said Ana-Christina Ramón, co-author of the report and the director of research and civic engagement in the UCLA Division of Social Sciences.

Women made up 29.0% of the creators of scripted cable shows, up nearly 7 percentage points over the prior season, marking the largest one-year gain for women in that job category since the report began. And people of color made up 20.6% of scripted cable show creators in 2019–20, up from 14.5% the previous season and nearly triple the share (7.4%) from 2011–12.

However, women held creator positions for fewer broadcast shows in 2019–20 (24.1%) than they did the prior year (28.1%)—and even fewer than women held in 2011–12 (26.5%).

"We also see that when women and people of color hold high-level creative positions, there is greater diversity down the line in casting and likely for crew hiring," Ramón said. "Women and people of color are still very underrepresented in these and other behind-the-camera jobs, which is why this report continues to exist."

Other takeaways:

- The number of acting roles for women in 2019–20 was nearly equal to those of men across all three platform types. Women made up 46.3% of total cast in scripted broadcast shows, 45.3% in cable and 46.9% in streaming.
- Trans and nonbinary actors were virtually absent across all platforms.
- Out of a total 2,932 credited actors, just 13 were Native people, including just three Native women.
- People of color directed 25.8% of broadcast episodes, 27.2% of cable and 21.4% of streaming, up from 24.3% and, 22.9% and 18.2% in the 2018–19 season.
- Women directed 30.6% of [broadcast](#) episodes, 31.3% of cable and 33.4% of streaming, up from 29.3%, 29.7% and 29.1% the prior season.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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