



Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA

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Hollywood Diversity Brief: Spotlight on Cable Television

This brief is the first in a series of studies by the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA to explore the relationships between diversity and the bottom-line in the Hollywood entertainment industry. The Bunche Center's larger Hollywood Advancement Project, from which this brief stems, has three primary goals: 1) to generate comprehensive research analyses of the inclusion of diverse groups in film and television, including lead roles, writing, directing, producing, and talent representation; 2) to identify and disseminate best practices for increasing the pipeline of underrepresented groups into the Hollywood entertainment industry; and 3) to consider the broader implications of diverse industry access and media images for society as a whole.

The Data

The "Hollywood Diversity Brief: Spotlight on Cable Television" examines 1,076 television shows (including 844 cable and 219 broadcast shows) that aired during the 2011-12 season.¹ These shows were distributed across 61 cable and six broadcast networks. Variables considered in the analyses for this brief include the following:

- show genres
- racial status of lead cast members
- gender of lead cast members
- show creator racial status
- show creator gender
- writer diversity
- Nielsen ratings²

Data for this brief were compiled from a variety of sources industry stakeholders rely upon for day-to-day updates on industry developments.³ These sources include The Studio System, Variety Insight, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), and Nielsen. (See Table 1 on page 9 for a complete list of networks included in this study.)

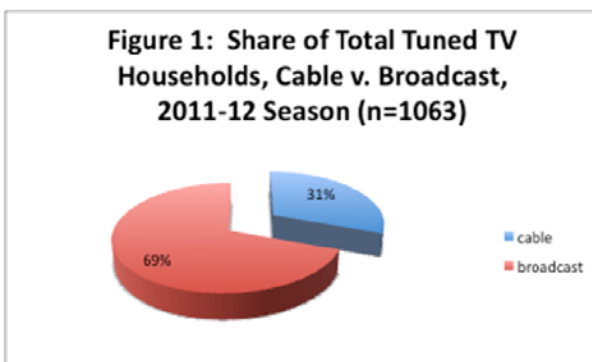


The Televisual Landscape

The past few decades have witnessed dramatic changes in the nature of television. What was once the province of just three major broadcast networks has morphed into a complex landscape of multiple broadcast networks, scores of cable networks, and nascent Internet content providers. Against this backdrop, the following headlines compare cable television to broadcast television during the 2011-12 season in terms of overall audience share and genres.

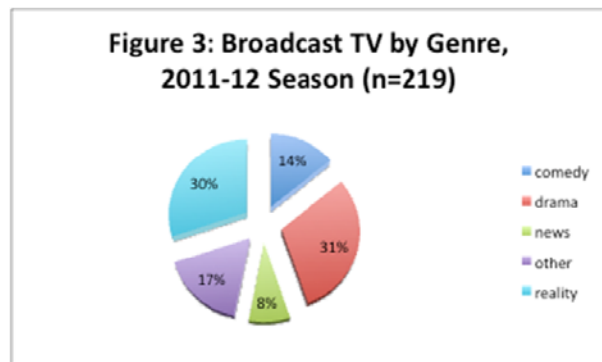
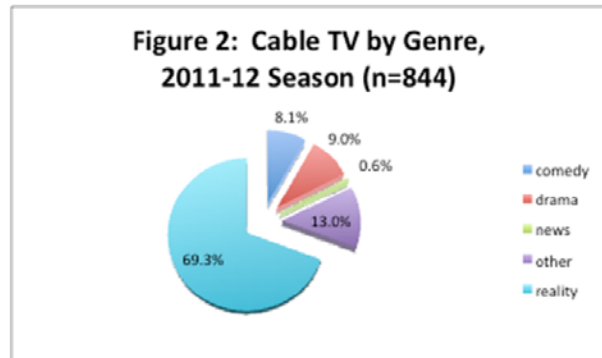
1. Nearly a Third of Households Tuned to TV Watch Cable Programming

When average audience size data are summed across all television shows for the 2011-12 season, **Figure 1** shows that cable accounted for about 31 percent of all households tuned to television.



2. Reality Shows Dominate Cable Programming

Figure 2 shows that nearly 70 percent of cable programming during the 2011-12 season consisted of reality shows. Other programming (which included animated, sports, and talk) followed with a 13 percent share. While **Figure 3** reveals that drama and comedy constituted the largest genres in broadcast television (31 percent and 30 percent, respectively), these genres were a less significant portion of cable television's total offerings (8.1 percent and 9 percent, respectively).



Hollywood Diversity (or the Lack Thereof)

Historically, there has been a dearth of gender, racial, and ethnic diversity in film and television — both in front of and behind the camera.⁴ This reality has meant limited access to employment for women and minorities and a truncated domain of media images available for circulation in contemporary society. Media images contribute greatly to how we think about who we are, who we aren't, and who we hope to be. When marginalized groups in society are absent from the stories a nation tells about itself, or when media images are

rooted primarily in stereotype, inequality is normalized and is more likely to be reinforced over time through our prejudices and practices.⁵ The following headlines examine patterns in television employment in order to identify obstacles to and opportunities for advancement on the television diversity front.

1. Minorities Underrepresented by a Factor of More Than 2 to 1 Among Lead Roles in Cable

Figure 4 shows that minority actors/performers constituted just 15 percent of the lead roles⁶ in cable programming during the 2011-12 season. Because minorities collectively accounted for 36.3 percent of the U.S. population in 2010,⁷ they were underrepresented by a factor of more than 2 to 1 among lead roles in cable. Minorities claimed an even smaller share of the lead roles in broadcast television — just 11 percent (see **Figure 5**). This latter share corresponds to underrepresentation by a factor of more than 3 to 1.

Figure 4: Lead Role Racial Status, Cable TV Shows, 2011-12 Season (n=146)

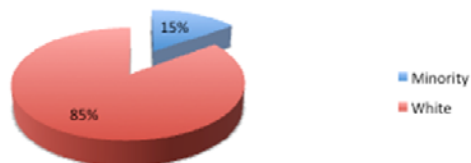
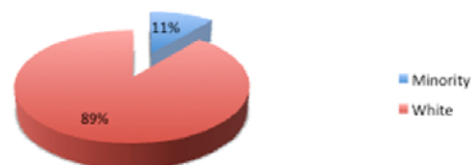


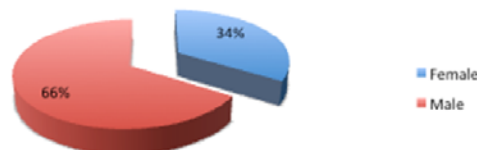
Figure 5: Lead Role Racial Status, Broadcast TV Shows, 2011-12 Season (n=145)



2. Women Account for Only About a Third of Lead Roles in Cable

Figure 6 shows that female actors/performers claimed just 34 percent of all lead roles in cable programming during the 2011-12 season. At a little more than half of the U.S. population, women would have to increase their share of lead roles by nearly 50 percent to achieve proportionate representation in cable television.

Figure 6: Lead Role Gender, Cable TV Shows, 2011-12 Season (n=500)

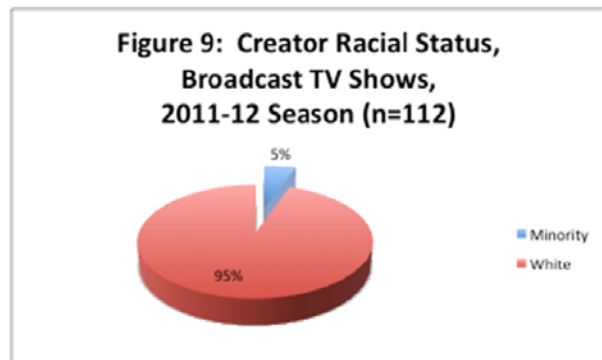
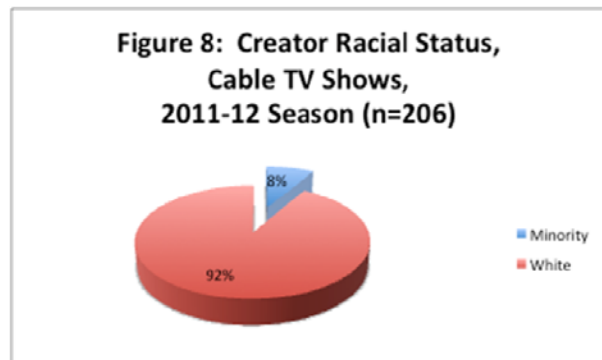


By contrast, **Figure 7** shows that women were closer to proportionate representation among lead roles in broadcast television, accounting for 45 percent of the roles.



3. Minorities Underrepresented by a Factor of Nearly 5 to 1 Among Creators of Cable Shows

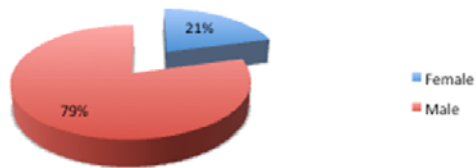
By successfully selling the concept for a television show, a show's creator sets the stage for a number of production choices that ultimately impact the degree of diversity in writing and casting. **Figure 8** shows that minorities were credited as creator in only 8 percent of cable shows for the 2011-12 season.⁸ At 36.3 percent of the U.S. population in 2010, minorities were thus underrepresented by a factor of nearly 5 to 1 among these important industry players. As **Figure 9** shows, the situation was worse in broadcast television — minorities were credited as creator in only 5 percent of the shows, which corresponds to underrepresentation by a factor of more than 7 to 1.



4. Women Underrepresented by a Factor of More Than 2 to 1 Among Creators of Cable Shows

Figure 10 shows that women were credited as creator in 21 percent of cable television shows for the 2011-12 season. At a little more than half of the U.S. population, women were underrepresented by a factor of more than 2 to 1 among these important industry figures.

**Figure 10: Creator Gender,
Cable TV Shows,
2011-12 Season (n=216)**

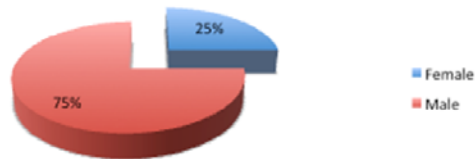


By contrast, **Figure 11** shows that the female share of show creators in broadcast television was slightly larger — 25 percent — corresponding to underrepresentation right at a factor of 2 to 1.

Diversity and the Bottom-Line: Casting, Writing, Ratings

It has long been argued that decision-making in the Hollywood entertainment industry is primarily driven by bottom-line considerations.⁹ To the degree that diversity concerns factor into the process, the argument goes, they do so primarily with respect to their impact on profits. In television, of course, ratings are an important measure of a show's potential profitability. All things equal, the higher the rating the better for the bottom-line. The following headlines reveal important

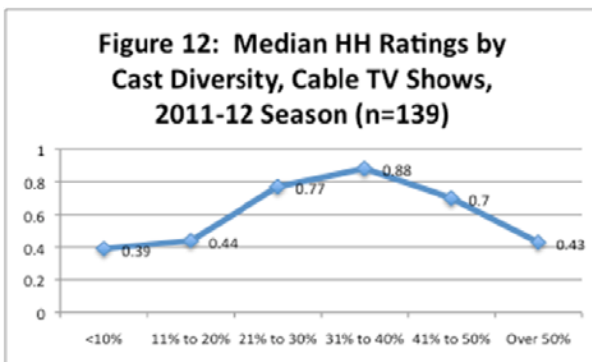
**Figure 11: Creator Gender,
Broadcast TV Shows,
2011-12 Season (n=116)**



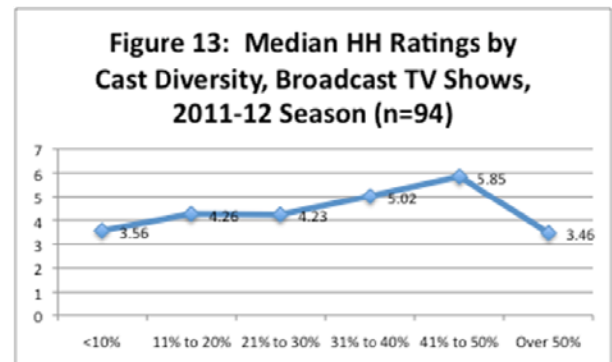
patterns concerning ratings and the degree of diversity in television casting and writing.¹⁰

1. Cable Ratings Peak Among Shows with Casts that Reflect Nation's Racial Diversity

Figure 12 reveals that during the 2011-12 season median household ratings were highest among cable television shows with casts that were from 31 percent to 40 percent minority (0.88 ratings points). The



percentage range for this category, of course, encompasses the overall minority share of the U.S. population in 2010, 36.3 percent. Examples of shows in this category include: *A.N.T. Farm* (Disney), *The Closer* (TNT), and *Falling Skies* (TNT). By contrast, ratings were lowest among shows with casts that were 10 percent minority or less (0.39 ratings points), a category that included the largest number of cable shows in the analysis (52 shows). **Figure 13** shows that the importance of diversity to the bottom-line was just as pronounced in broadcast television during the 2011-12 season. That is, median household ratings peaked among broadcast television shows that were from 41



percent to 50 percent minority (5.85 rating points). As with cable programming, median ratings were considerably lower among broadcast television shows with casts that were 10 percent minority or less (3.56 rating points).

2. Cable Ratings Lowest Among Shows with Least Diverse Writing Staffs

Figure 14 reveals that during the 2011-12 season median household ratings were lowest among cable television shows with writing staffs that were 10 percent minority or less (0.45 rating points). These 58 cable shows represented nearly two thirds of the shows in the ratings analysis. By contrast, ratings peaked among shows with writing staffs that were from 11 percent to 20 percent minority (0.85 rating points) and from 41 percent to 50 percent minority (0.81 rating points). Among the eight cable shows in these latter two categories are the following: *In Plain Sight* (USA), *Common Law* (USA), and *Southland* (TNT).

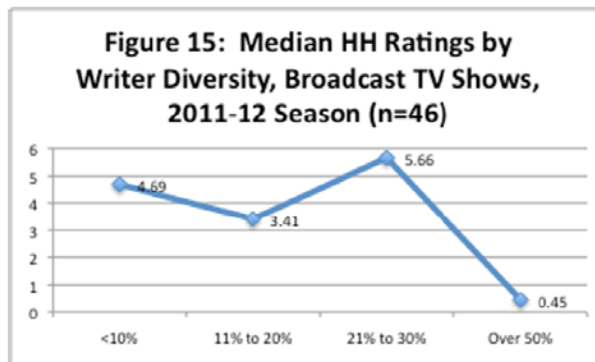
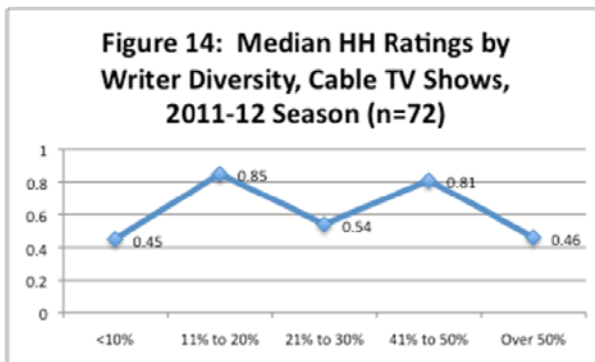


Figure 15 shows that the relationship between writing staff diversity and ratings was dissimilar for broadcast television. That is, the broadcast shows with the least diverse staffs did *not* post the lowest ratings during the 2011-12 season. But it should be noted that the broadcast shows with the *highest* ratings (5.66 rating points) had writing staffs that were significantly more diverse — from 21 percent to 30 percent minority — than those of most broadcast shows.



Conclusion

This Hollywood Diversity Brief has documented an apparent disconnect between the industry's professed focus on the bottom-line and actual television staffing practices. That is, while the cable television shows enjoying the highest ratings during the 2011-12 season tended to reflect the nation's racial and ethnic diversity in terms of their casts and writing staffs, minorities were nonetheless woefully underrepresented on both fronts across most television shows. This disconnect does not bode well for the future of the industry. More than a third of the U.S. population is currently minority, and the population continues to diversify at a dizzying rate. Indeed, for the first time, the

majority of babies born in the United States in 2012 were non-white; by 2042 the nation's white population is projected to no longer constitute the majority. This new emerging America will undoubtedly continue to express its diversifying experiences and tastes by making programming choices that resonate more faithfully with them. The bottom-line interests of cable television — and the rest of the Hollywood industry — would be advanced by implementing staffing and programming practices that are in sync with these changes.

References

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Quinn, E. (2012). "Closing Doors: Hollywood, Affirmative Action, and the Revitalization of Conservative Racial Politics." *The Journal of History*, September, 466-491.

Endnotes

1. The 2011-12 season includes programming that aired between September 1, 2011 and August 31, 2012.
2. Defined as the percentage of the universe of households (HHs) tuned to a particular TV program during the average minute of the program. This includes incremental viewing to programs watched at the time of the telecast as well as watched in DVR playback that occurs within 7 days of the original telecast.
3. Total numbers for the various analyses in this brief may deviate from the overall total for the number of shows considered (n=1076) due to missing values for some cases (e.g., most reality shows do not identify a cast) or to focused analyses on a subset of show genres.
4. Hunt (2005), Hunt (2007), and Quinn (2012).
5. Entman and Rojecki (2000), and Hunt (2005).
6. "Lead role" is defined in this brief as the first credited actor/performer for a given show's list of cast members.
7. U.S. Census Bureau.
8. The analysis of creator racial status was limited to cable and broadcast shows with individuals clearly credited as "creator."
9. Hunt (2005).
10. Only dramas and comedies are considered in these analyses.

Table 1: Networks included in the study

A&E	IFC
ABC	ION Television
ABC Family	Investigation Discovery
AMC	Lifetime
Adult Swim	Logo
Animal Planet	MSNBC
BBC America	MTV
BET	NBC
Biography	NBCU
Bravo	National Geographic
CBS	Nickelodeon
CMT	Nick Jr.
CNBC	OWN
CNN	Oxygen
CW	PBS
Cartoon Network	Reelz
Cinemax	Science Channel
Comedy Central	Showtime
DIY	Spike
Destination America	Starz
Discovery	Style Network
Disney	Sundance Channel
Disney XD	Syfy
E!	TBS
ESPN	TLC
ESPNU	TNT
FX	TVGN
Food Network	TVLand
Fox	TeenNick
HBO	Travel Channel
HGTV	TruTV
Hallmark Channel	USA
History Channel	VH1
	WEtv



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