



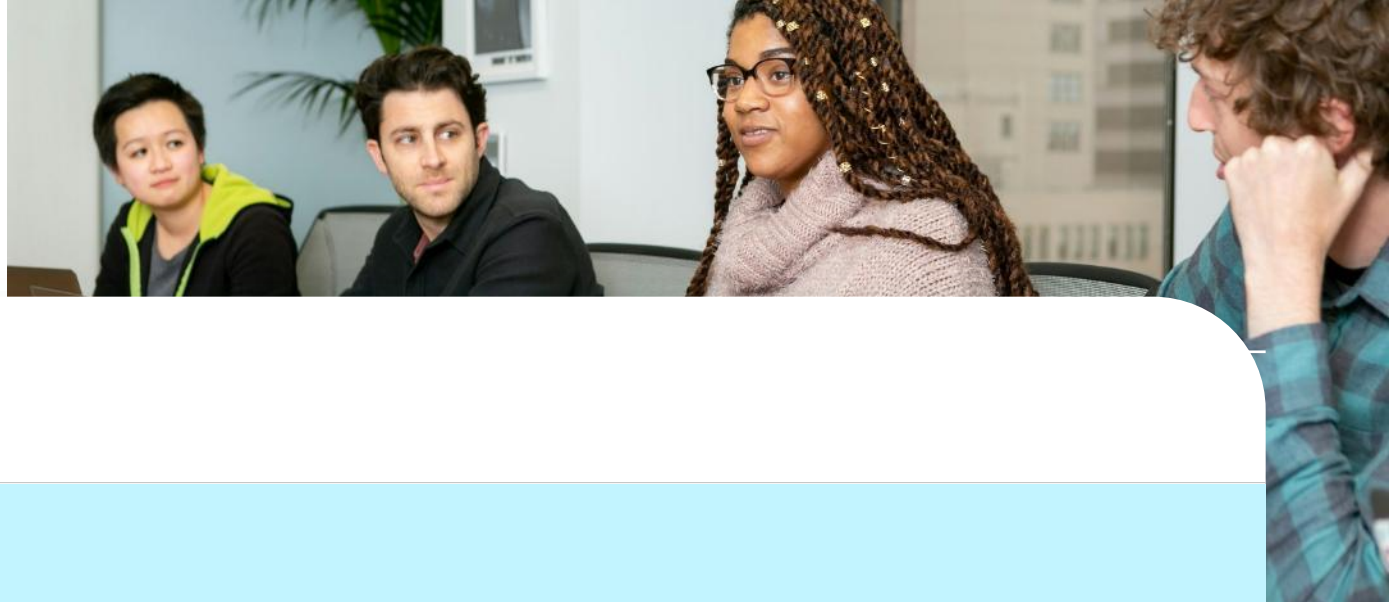
Behind the Scenes:

The State of Inclusion and Equity in TV Writing



October 2025

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Introduction



In the six years since TTIE's first **Behind the Scenes Report**, the television industry landscape has undergone significant transformations, including a pandemic, union strikes, and rollbacks on DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility) initiatives. Most recently, a widespread economic contraction has returned the industry to an ad-supported model across most platforms, which has created a dire need to grow viewership to increase ad revenue and corporate profits.



Despite this, audiences are fleeing traditional scripted media at an alarming rate, gravitating instead toward more diverse content found on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and other social media outlets. In this year's **Behind the Scenes Report**, TTIE and our partners at Horowitz Research will explore how changes in the creative process can reverse this trend to re-engage American audiences and revitalize the industry creatively and financially.

Thesis

Horowitz Research data show that American audiences yearn for inclusive, diverse stories that reflect the polycultural fabric of the United States. When unable to find those stories on television, they seek them out elsewhere, resulting in the current drop in traditional TV viewership.



To win back these viewers – and increase their much-needed ad revenue – media companies must cultivate a diverse, inclusive creative process so writers can create the shows and content that audiences crave. In short, authentic voices deliver eyeballs. The **Behind the Scenes Survey** data identify the challenges and barriers that continue to prevent these vital stories from being told.

Horowitz Research has found that, with the face of the United States changing and becoming more diverse, audiences expect content that feels authentic and reflects the diversity of the world around them:

- In 2018, 60% of consumers said that TV shows are more authentic when diverse voices are involved with writing, directing, and producing them.¹
- In 2022, more than half (56%) of consumers specifically sought out “opportunities to incorporate elements from other cultures into their own life, like through food/cooking/music/TV/etc.,” with younger audiences over-indexing on this polycultural, inclusive mindset.²

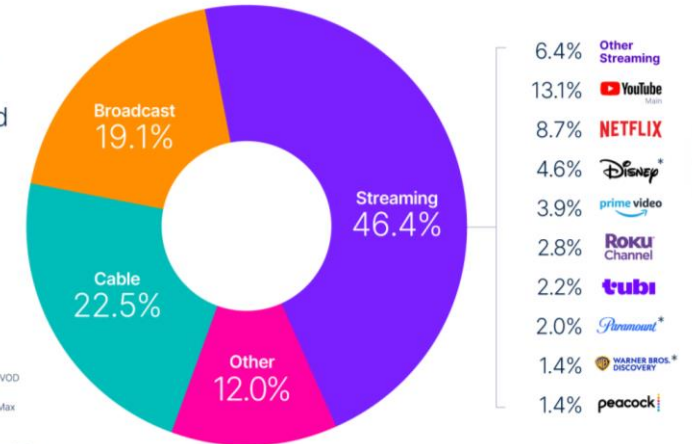
 Nielsen

The Gauge™

Nielsen's Total TV and Streaming Snapshot

August 2025

Total Day | Persons 2+



* Disney includes viewing on Disney+, ESPN+ and Hulu SVOD
* Paramount includes viewing on Paramount+ and Pluto
* Warner/Discovery includes viewing on Discovery+ and Max

Methodology available @ www.nielsen.com/thegauge
Source: Nielsen National TV Panel plus Streaming Platform Ratings
Copyright © 2025 The Nielsen Company

Source: <https://www.nielsen.com/data-center/the-gauge/>

Per Nielsen's monthly The Gauge™ report:

- YouTube gains ground almost every month.
- YouTube's audience share equals more than half of cable's total viewership and is on track to outpace broadcast as a whole.

Thesis

In 2025, due to changes in the socio-political tenor of the United States, media companies face unprecedented pressure to reduce diversity, equity, and inclusion across the board. While that backlash is largely anecdotal, the commercial picture tells a very different story. Horowitz's 2024 data³ underscore that consumers are still drawn to on-screen diversity:

- 65% say they "love it" when they see content that gives them a glimpse of the experiences and lifestyles of people and communities from cultures that are not their own.
- 59% "love it" when they see diverse, multicultural people and themes.
- 57% "love it" when they see people with disabilities or other physical/mental conditions; 5% of Americans say they "hate" seeing this kind of content.
- Americans are also receptive to LGBTQIA+-themed content, with 36% saying they "love it" while only 27% say they hate it – a net positive of +9%.



Consumers Love/Hate

seeing content with...

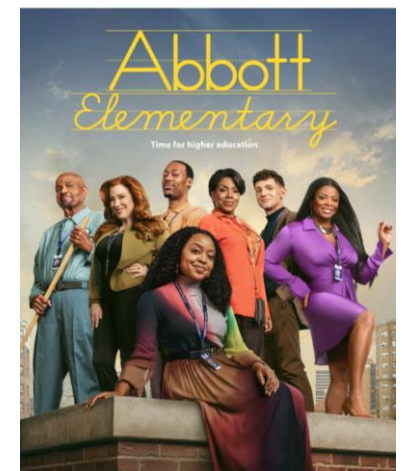
Content Type	Love (%)	Hate (%)
A glimpse of experiences/lifestyles from cultures not my own	65%	7%
People with disabilities or other physical/mental conditions	57%	5%
Diverse, multicultural people and themes	59%	8%
Bilingual characters that speak their two languages naturally	52%	9%
LGBTQIA+ people and themes	36%	27%

Source: State of Media, Entertainment, and Tech: Social, Cultural, & Political Shifts
© 2024, Horowitz Research

Thesis

On streaming platforms, the enormous popularity of foreign-language shows (e.g., *Squid Game*, *La Casa De Papel* aka *Money Heist*, K-dramas) and shows that reflect American diversity (e.g., *The Lincoln Lawyer*, *Abbott Elementary*, *The Pitt*, *Love on the Spectrum*) – all of which resonate across racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups – proves the American audience is ready and hungry for content that is inclusive, multicultural, multilingual, and even international.

Traditional players like Fox, ABC, The CW, TLC, and HGTV have also leaned into diverse, inclusive stories in shows like *9-1-1*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Will Trent*, *All American*, and *90 Day Fiancé*, among many other examples.



Thesis

American audiences, however, have been growing incredulous of companies' promises of inclusivity. **Four in ten (37%) consumers surveyed by Horowitz in 2024 believe companies just "check the box" but are not really invested in diversity.** This cynical hypothesis has been confirmed by the recent divestment in DEIA programs by major media conglomerates, as well as the cancellation of many diverse and inclusive shows.



In an increasingly competitive and fragmented environment for viewers, these decisions are short-sighted. The most recent Horowitz data - **a 2025 survey taking the pulse of American sentiment in the current socio-political environment**⁴ - underscore the responsibility Americans place on the media industry to continue to stand up for diversity and inclusion. Among American audiences, the desire to see inclusive content remains strong:



Two in three agree that "the media has a responsibility to help bridge the cultural, social, and political divides in our country through honest, thorough, and inclusive reporting and storytelling."

61% agree that "American media organizations have a responsibility to be inclusive of all cultures and communities in the United States in the content they produce."

Half (**48%**) of Americans agree that they would "be less likely to consume content from a media company that pulled away from diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives," while only **24%** disagree.

Republican legislators move to axe DEI from public schools, state agencies

Ban on D.E.I. Language Sweeps Through the Sciences

President Trump's executive order is altering scientific exploration across a broad swath of fields, even beyond government agencies, researchers say.

These Words Are Disappearing in the New Trump Administration

Black History, Pride Month and other events quietly vanish from Google calendars

Thesis



Today's audiences want resonant, polycultural, diverse, intersectional content.



That begins with the driving creative force in television programming: **THE WRITERS.**

But TTIE's

BEHIND THE SCENES SURVEY

of professional TV writers reveals that the systems determining who gets hired, who gets paid, and how they're treated continue to impede the process of telling authentic stories that grow viewership.



Sources:

1. State of Viewing and Streaming, © 2018, Horowitz Research
2. State of Viewing and Streaming, © 2022, Horowitz Research
3. State of Media, Entertainment, and Tech: Social, Cultural, & Political Shifts, © 2024, Horowitz Research
4. State of Media, Entertainment, and Tech: Social, Cultural, & Political Shifts, © 2025, Horowitz Research

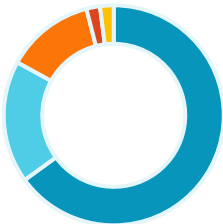
Methodology



The survey was fielded from April 24 to May 24, 2024. 694 online surveys were completed for a total of 724 responses received (30 respondents provided feedback twice; once for WGA and once for IATSE roles).

85% of the responses were from the live-action scripted TV genre, **13%** were from IATSE animation, and **2%** from comedy/variety.

SHOW GENRE



Hour-Long Drama	65%
Half-Hour Comedy	18%
IATSE Animation	13%
Kids Live Action	2%
Comedy/Variety	2%

CAREER LEVEL



Pre-Staff Writer	10%
Freelancer	11%
Lower-Level	26%
Mid-Level	14%
Upper-Level	24%
Showrunner	10%
Other	5%

	National U.S. Census*	2023-24 TV Series Writers*	Survey Responses (N=724)
Women	51%	45%	61%
Men	49%	53%	34%
Non-Binary/Other	n/a	<1%	3%
White	57%	45%	48%**
BIPOC	43%	40%	66%**
White Men	28%	27%	12%
White Women	29%	18%	19%
BIPOC Men	21%	17%	22%
BIPOC Women	22%	22%	41%
LGBTQIA+	n/a	12%	35%
Disabled Writers	n/a	3%	32%
55 and Over	30%	15%	10%



The survey was distributed to writers who had been staffed in a writers room, developed, worked as a showrunner/head writer/IATSE animation story editor, written freelance scripts, been support staff in a writers room, or participated in a fellowship in the last five years through official TTIE communication channels, including the organization’s website, social media, and newsletter. It was also sent directly to industry groups with language requesting they share the link with their networks/members. Given the self-selected nature of participation in this survey, the sample is over-representative of historically excluded groups and, therefore, well-suited to represent their particular experiences and perspectives.

- Throughout the report, we use “historically excluded” to recognize that these communities (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ people, Disabled people, and women) have been systemically denied access to economic, political, and cultural participation. Conversely to “historically excluded,” we employ the term “non-marginalized.”
- Please note that sample sizes for writers who identify as non-binary/other and/or transgender are too small to analyze and report findings on in TTIE’s survey.

Data Analysis



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A. SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN SECURING JOBS

How writers secure jobs is shifting. So, who gets staffed and how?



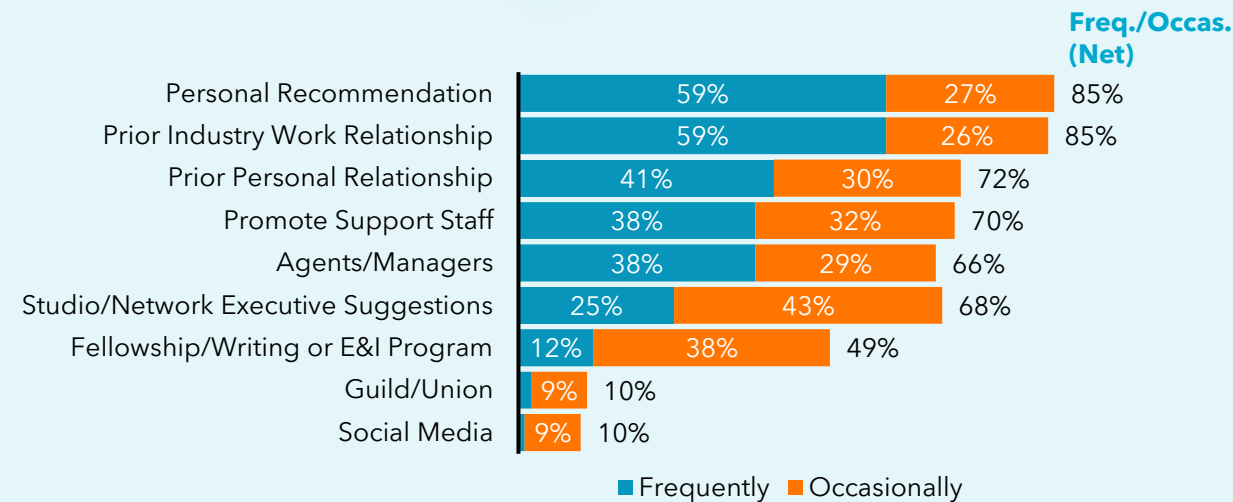
Relationships are key to being staffed in a writers room:

Nearly nine in ten showrunners say prior industry relationships (85%) or personal recommendations (85%) are most frequently considered when staffing their rooms.

**How Showrunners Find Writers
When Staffing Writers Rooms**



Among Showrunners, Head Writers, and
IATSE Animation Story Editors (N=128)



WHY IT MATTERS



Current hiring practices prioritize inner circles. The concern is that if those inner circles are homogeneous, the writers rooms will be too. These types of rooms too often produce the inauthentic stories audiences are fleeing.

Who breaks in today and how?

 Across those who have worked as a staffed writer or showrunner in the past five years, being promoted from assistant ranks (19%), writing samples (18%), and fellowships/writing programs (17%) played the biggest roles in securing their first job as a staffed TV writer.

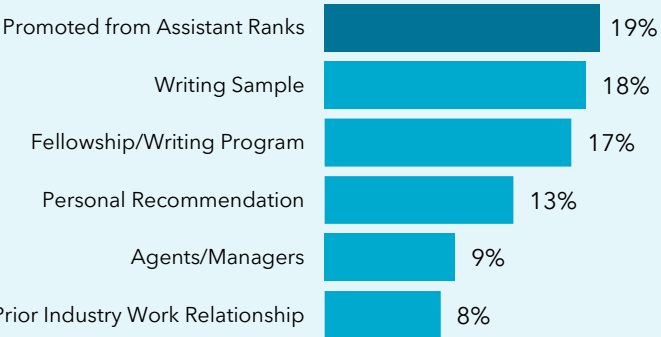
Currently, lower-level writers are most likely to report that their first staff writer jobs were a result of being promoted from assistant ranks (27%).

For mid-level and upper-level writers, fellowships/writing programs played one of the larger roles in securing their first staff writer jobs (25% and 19%, respectively).

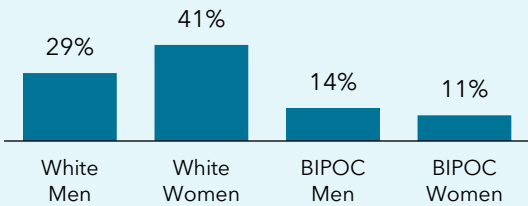
Played the Biggest Role in Securing Their First Job



Among Those Who Worked as Staffed Writer/Showrunner in Past Five Years (N=560)



"Promoted from Assistant Ranks"



By gender and ethnicity, white men and white women are far more likely to be promoted from assistant ranks than BIPOC men and BIPOC women.



WHY IT MATTERS



DEIA programs have long been the way to identify talented writers with POVs missing from the industry. But now, with the massive cuts to these programs, promotion from the assistant ranks is the main way for writers to get their first staff job. Although promoting from within is important, BIPOC assistants are often overlooked compared to their white counterparts.

Correcting inequities in hiring and promoting creates stronger writers rooms and better storytelling that will bring audiences back to traditional TV.

B. FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Financial sustainability is increasingly challenging for all writers.



Unpaid Work on Staff

One-third (**32%**) of showrunners or writers who staffed in rooms in the past five years report having to finish a script at least once while not receiving weekly pay. **12%** report doing so more than once.

While the sample size for non-marginalized writers is small ($N=15$), the data directionally suggest that historically excluded writers (**34%**) are more prevalently impacted by this practice than non-marginalized writers (**7%**).

Had to Finish Writing a Script While Not Receiving Their Weekly Pay at Least Once

32%

Data are comparable for writers who have worked in the past two years versus 3-5 years ago, **indicating that this practice is consistent and ongoing.**



WHY IT MATTERS



Writers finishing scripts without receiving their weekly pay is a WGA violation, but it keeps happening.

While this affects historically excluded writers more often, these wages are necessary for **everyone** to survive longer gaps between fewer jobs.

"Every writer I know who came into this business in the last five years feels hopeless and wonders if we'll be able to make careers happen."

- BTS Survey Respondent

"Several staff writers I know have left the industry entirely, unable to make ends meet and with no real job prospects."

- BTS Survey Respondent

B. FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

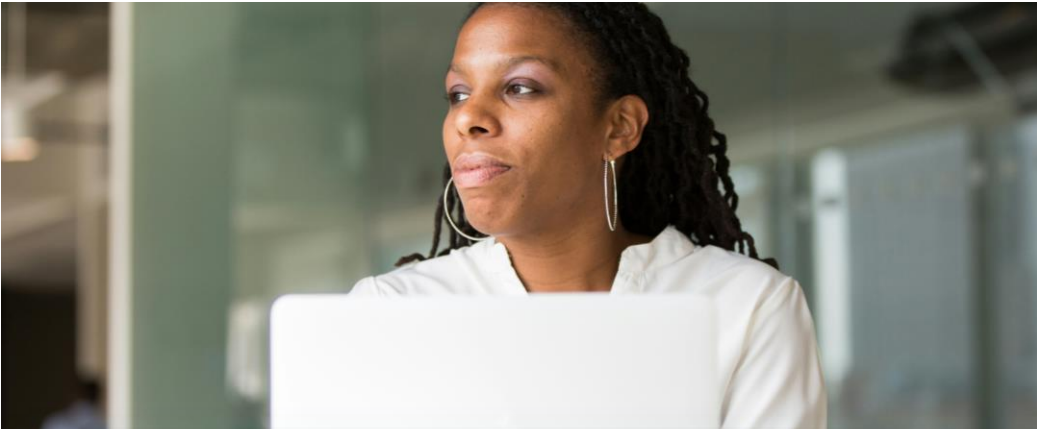
Historically excluded writers are less likely to be paid for development than their non-marginalized counterparts.



Unpaid Work in Development

Writers are more likely to be paid for development by studios (59%) or distributors (80%) than PODs (27%).*

However, there is a remarkable disparity in terms of who gets paid for development and who doesn't. While sample size might be small, directionally, non-marginalized writers are more likely to be paid for development than historically excluded writers.



WHY IT MATTERS



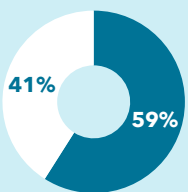
There's a long-held industry belief that development work is unpaid. Our data show that many writers are actually paid for development, but historically excluded writers are far less likely to get compensation than their counterparts. At a time when audiences want stories that better reflect the world around them, this practice hurts the very people who can help grow the industry's business.

Paid & Unpaid Development



Among Those in Development in the Past Five Years Who Have Developed Projects for Each (Varying Bases)

STUDIOS



● Mostly Paid
● Mostly Unpaid

"Mostly Unpaid"

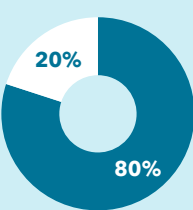
Hist. Excluded Writers

42%

Non-Marg. Writers**

19%

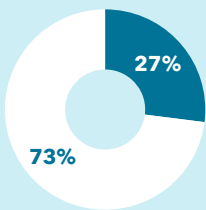
DISTRIBUTORS



21%

14%

PODS



74%

56%

**Directional data due to small base size.

*TTIE suspects these data might be even lower today compared to when the survey was fielded in May 2024, as the industry continues to contract.

B. FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

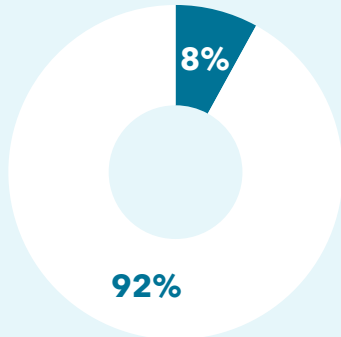
Fair pay for OWA work is critical.

92% of those in development who have pitched on OWAs (open writing assignments) based on IP (books, articles, comics, video games, etc.) have not been paid; only **8%** were paid to create their OWA pitches.

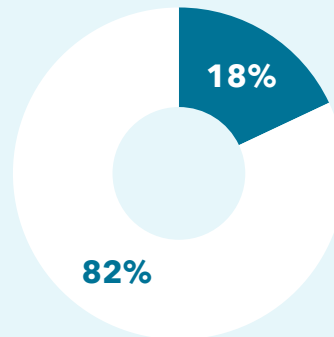
Of those who won an OWA IP bake-off, four in five (**82%**) were NOT paid to create the pitch to take out to buyers; only **18%** were paid.



Incidence of being paid/not paid among those who have pitched on an OWA based on IP in the past five years:



Incidence of being paid/not paid to develop the pitch to take out to buyers among those who won an OWA IP bake-off:



● Yes, it was paid
○ No, it was not paid

WHY IT MATTERS



Companies too often get writers to pitch for free on OWAs based on company-controlled IP. If the project doesn't move forward, writers walk away with nothing – not even their own work. Paying writers for development isn't just fair, it's essential for industry growth, sustainability, and diversification.

"Since Covid, my work has been mostly unpaid... I am expected to produce a high level of work while also trying to juggle or find jobs that will actually pay my bills."

- BTS Survey Respondent

B. FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

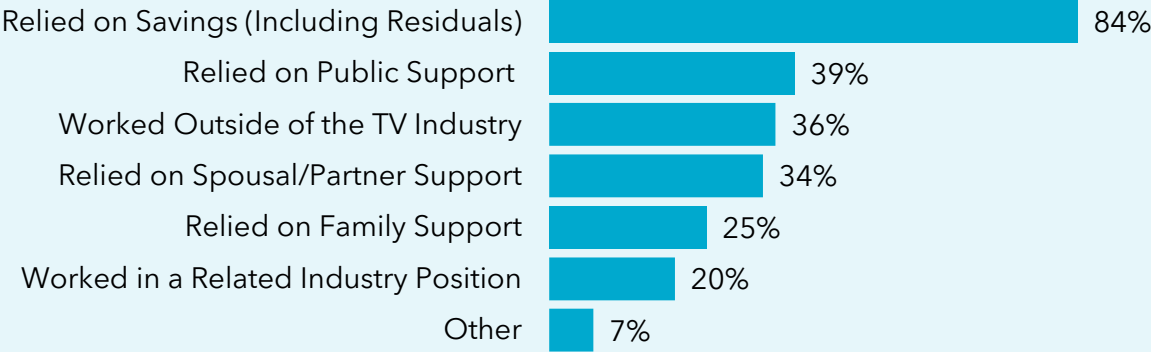
Work scarcity is increasing, hurting writers' ability to endure employment gaps.



At the time of the survey, nearly half (48%) of survey respondents had not yet found work post-strike.

The level of industry contraction was confirmed by recent WGA data showing there were approximately **37%** fewer WGA-covered series in the 2023-2024 season and a **42%** decline in the number of staff jobs overall.*

While the majority of writers (**84%**) relied on savings to make it through non-strike employment gaps, a full **four in ten** relied on public support, **34%** on spousal support, and **25%** on family support.



WHY IT MATTERS

As the industry continues to contract, weeks of employment become fewer and employment gaps become longer. Unpaid work not only affects writers' savings, but it also prevents them from qualifying for health insurance. And too often, all these issues more seriously impact historically excluded communities. Diverse voices drive viewership, but these writers can't tell their stories if they can't pay for basic necessities.

"It's just very hard to be an assistant or stay the course without family money or connections. I'm drowning financially with kids."

- BTS Survey Respondent



"For lower-level writers, especially those who don't have nest eggs or a partner who earns a more regular salary, [it's] damn near impossible and it makes me really sad."

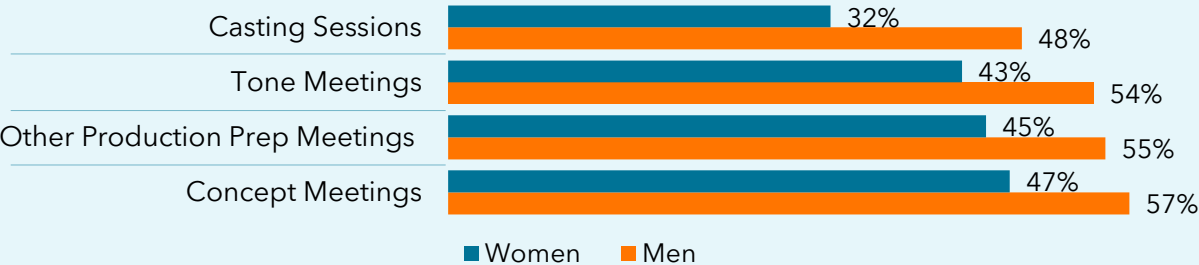
- BTS Survey Respondent

C. CAREER-BUILDING DISPARITIES

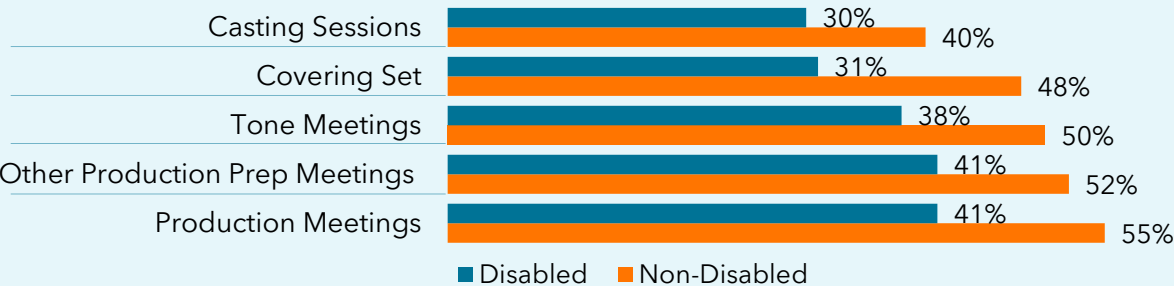
Once hired, historically excluded writers encounter inequitable access to career-building skills.



Survey data reveal that men get more opportunities to acquire career-building production skills than women.



Disabled writers greatly under-index compared to their non-disabled counterparts for the opportunity to participate in career-building activities.



WHY IT MATTERS



When women and Disabled writers lack equal access to career-building skills, it doesn't just hurt them, it weakens entire shows. All writers need to know how the script process, pre-production, production, and post-production work to make writers rooms and shows stronger and to create better future showrunners.

D. INEQUITABLE LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

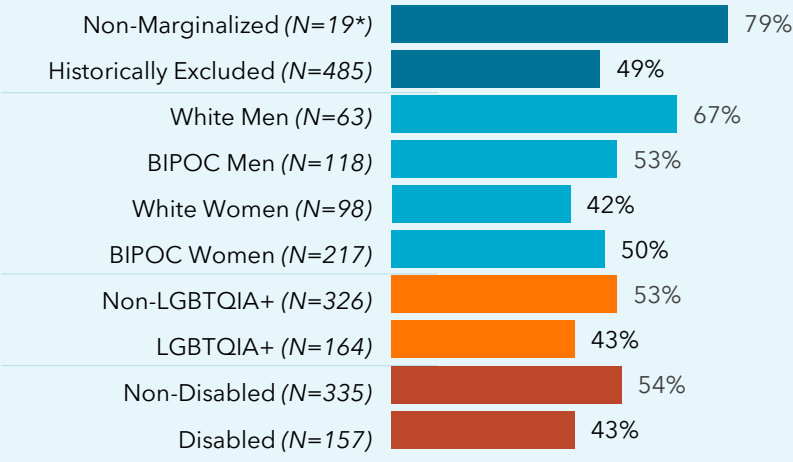
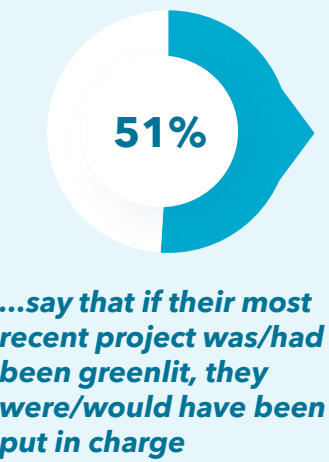
Historically excluded writers are less empowered to lead their own projects.



Among writers in development, half (51%) say that if their most recent project was/had been greenlit, they were/would have been made the showrunner, head writer, or IATSE animation story editor.

As shown in the chart below, **BIPOC** writers (regardless of gender) and **white women** are less likely to be put in charge of their shows than white men.

Similarly, **LGBTQIA+** and **Disabled** writers are less likely to be put in charge of their greenlit projects than their counterparts.



WHY IT MATTERS



When historically excluded writers are not put in charge of their own projects, their stories often become diluted or stereotypical and trope-y. Today's audiences can tell the difference and will go elsewhere to find content that feels more authentic if the industry doesn't provide it.

E. TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Harassment, discrimination, bullying, and microaggressions persist in the industry.

About half (45%) of all survey respondents report having experienced some form of microaggressions, harassment, discrimination, and/or bullying at work - or while interviewing to procure work - at least occasionally, from March 2022 to May 2024.

- Not surprisingly, women are more likely to report experiencing these than men.
- BIPOC writers are also more likely to have experienced microaggressions (52% vs. 33% among white writers) or felt tokenized (51% vs. 28% among white writers) at least occasionally.

Notably, the culture of harassment exists at all levels of the industry:

Four in ten (39%) respondents report experiencing discrimination, bullying, microaggressions, and/or harassment from their showrunner, nearly half (47%) report it coming from other writers, 28% from studio/network/streaming executives, and 23% from production company/POD executives.

THIS UNDERSCORES THE NEED FOR A CULTURAL SHIFT AT ALL LEVELS OF THE INDUSTRY.

Have Worked in Past Two Years; Frequently/Occasionally (Net)	Women	Men	BIPOC Women	BIPOC Men	White Women	White Men
Base	394	217	270	136	120	79
Being Talked Over	58%	39%	56%	43%	62%	32%
Microaggressions	54%	32%	60%	36%	38%	25%
Feeling Invisible	49%	36%	49%	38%	48%	35%
Feeling Tokenized	46%	30%	54%	36%	30%	22%
Outright Discrimination, Harassment, and/or Bullying	25%	18%	26%	18%	22%	19%

Statistically, significantly higher than counterparts.



WHY IT MATTERS

Too many writers experience discrimination or harassment from their own showrunners or fellow writers. What's more disturbing is that these numbers barely change from year to year (see **Behind the Scenes Report 2022**). Toxic work environments squash creativity. Imagine how much more creative and productive a staff could be when they feel valued and respected.

“Even as showrunner, as a Black woman, I have been tokenized and disrespected by [the platform] who bought my series and I know for a fact that they don’t treat their white male showrunners with the level of disrespect that they gave me at times, not all the time, but frequently.”
- **BTS Survey Respondent**

E. TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Reporting experiences of discrimination, bullying, harassment, etc. can be a double-edged sword.



70% of respondents in our survey who experienced discrimination, bullying, microaggressions, and/or harassment did not take any action.

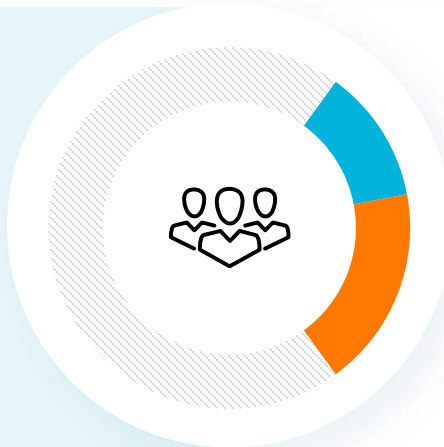
Half did not think it would make a difference (**51%**), were worried it would impact their future work (**50%**), or were worried it would hurt their professional development at their current job (**41%**).

Women and **BIPOC** respondents are more likely than their counterparts to say they didn't take action due to not wanting other people like them to be seen negatively because of their actions.



"It can sometimes be more harmful than helpful if you speak up. If you're labeled a problem, it can be much harder to procure work in the future. And I'm Black and also a woman, so... I feel like I have to choose my battles."

- BTS Survey Respondent



12%

Took action; went well

18%

Took action; went poorly

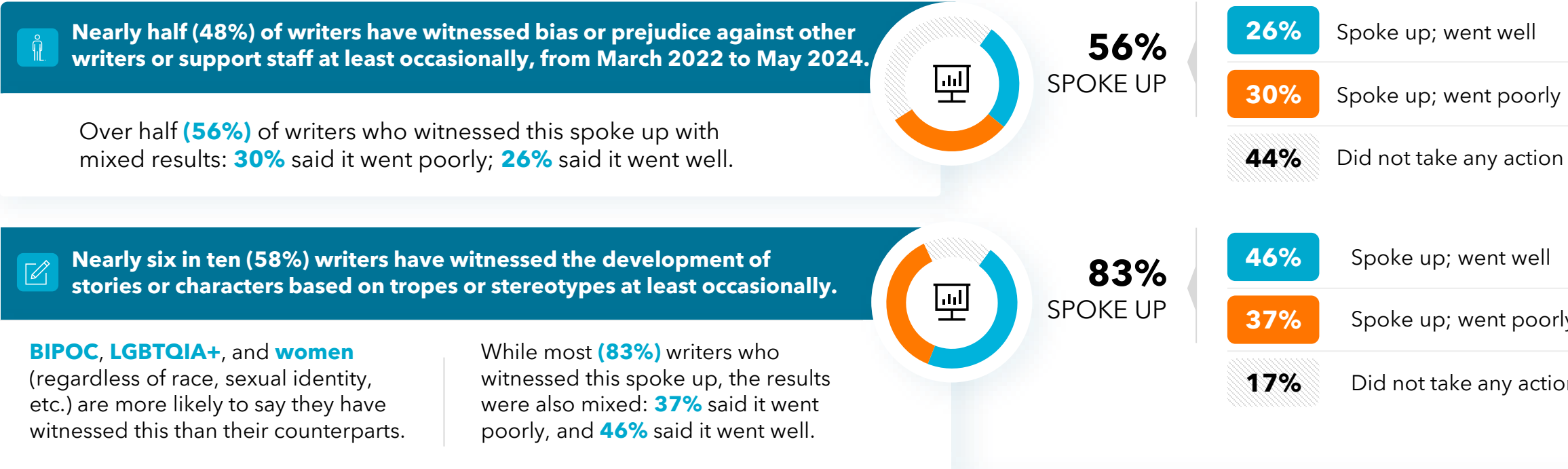
70%

Did not take any action

PITFALLS OF TAKING ACTION:

60% of those who took action said it went poorly; this rate was even higher among **Disabled** and **LGBTQIA+** respondents, particularly **BIPOC women who are LGBTQIA+**.

Writers experience mixed results when speaking up against harassment, discrimination, bullying, etc.



"When I spoke to my showrunner about ongoing, toxic behavior from an upper-level writer, the showrunner then went to said writer and divulged both my name and the details of what I'd discussed with my boss in confidence. That upper-level writer thereafter stonewalled/ignored me in the room."
- **BTS Survey Respondent**

WHY IT MATTERS

Writers do their best work in environments free of toxic behavior (like discrimination and harassment) and where a free flow of ideas is encouraged. This is where authentic storytelling thrives. These are the shows audiences show up for.

F. LEADERSHIP TRAINING SCARCITY

Those in leadership positions (showrunners, execs, etc.) lack the guidance and necessary tools to navigate challenging dynamics.



WHY IT MATTERS



When leaders don't have the tools to manage diverse workforces and prevent toxic behavior, creativity and storytelling suffer. Properly trained leaders inspire their staff to create bold, authentic stories that connect with today's more discerning audiences.



"The amount of harassment and microaggressions I've experienced dropped drastically when working in positive, collaborative rooms. Leadership really makes all the difference!"

- BTS Survey Respondent



"I shared my experience with the showrunners and they took immediate action to address the situation. When they realized the abuse continued, they involved HR and appropriate actions were taken. So grateful to my bosses for handling the situation so completely!"

- BTS Survey Respondent

Conclusion



The industry stands at an inflection point. Audiences are migrating to platforms where authentic voices thrive, while traditional television and streaming cling to stories and practices that produce exactly the homogeneous content driving viewers away. The Horowitz data show consumers still want diverse storytelling from traditional media, but that window is closing. The industry must act quickly if it is to meet demand.



Writers from historically excluded communities bring essential lived experiences that connect with American audiences who want stories that reflect the world around them. To accomplish this, these writers and their stories need support from all aspects of the industry. This is especially true for communities currently facing unprecedented neglect, scrutiny, and/or violence – the Disabled, immigrant, and trans communities, in particular. In today's political climate, their stories become not just commercially valuable but culturally vital.



The barriers we've identified – exclusionary hiring practices, inequitable compensation and access to career-building opportunities, financial instability caused by paid work scarcity, toxic work environments, and inadequate leadership training – affect all writers. These aren't just diversity issues – they're sustainability issues that threaten the entire creative workforce, and therefore, the industry as a whole.

But this isn't a story about decline – it's a roadmap for an industry ready to evolve. By addressing these specific issues, the industry can better tap into its creative potential and deliver more of the authentic storytelling audiences crave.



Sustainable and equitable career paths, fair compensation, and respectful work environments benefit every writer, every story, and ultimately, every show. When the industry invests in systemic improvements supporting all writers, it creates breakthrough content that wins awards, builds devoted fan bases, and drives commercial success. The question isn't whether the industry can afford these changes – it's whether it can afford not to make them.

We at TTIE believe in our industry's ability to adapt and grow and, in the coming months, will release recommendations and resources for several segments of the industry (including reps, executives, showrunners, writers, and unions) to help drive the change we all seek.



CONSIDER WHAT THE BEHIND THE SCENES DATA REVEAL:

- Nearly six in ten (**58%**) writers have witnessed stories developed using tired tropes or stereotypes.
- **Eight in ten** survey respondents say there should be more diversity in executives covering shows and development projects that include historically excluded storylines.
- But there is hope: Three-quarters (**73%**) of writers rooms employ historically excluded writers to help create more authentic stories.

About



Horowitz Research is a leading provider of market research and consumer insights with an expertise in media and multicultural consumers. They have been conducting Hispanic and multicultural research for over 25 years. In addition to a series of annual syndicated studies on the media, telecommunications, and technology industries, Horowitz offers a full suite of quantitative and qualitative research services.

For more information, visit www.horowitzresearch.com



adrianaw@horowitzresearch.com



914.325.4516



TTIE is an intersectional group of professional TV writers comprised of BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, Disabled, and women writers, from emerging voices to showrunners. TTIE (pronounced tie) is committed to fostering accurate and authentic storytelling in the entertainment industry, as well as improving working conditions for all TV writers, especially those from historically excluded communities.

For more information, visit www.writeinclusion.org



info@writeinclusion.org

Resources



#WriteInclusion Factsheets: Tips for Accurate Representation

Our highly vetted and research-driven one-pagers help storytellers craft non-stereotypical representations of historically excluded characters and stories. Made in partnership with social justice researchers and organizations, these factsheets are designed as a tool to guide storytellers away from harmful stereotypes and call in more inclusive, authentic narratives.

[Learn More](#)



TTIE Consulting & Training

Reach out to learn how we use quantitative data along with the professional insights and experiences of our writers to help showrunners, executives, and DEIA departments hone their efforts toward more inclusive writers rooms and productions.

[Reach Out](#)



The Entertainment Industry Helpline

The Hollywood Commission offers a non-crisis helpline to help entertainment workers address workplace harassment, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse.

[Get Help](#)



Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

Learn more at www.writeinclusion.org

