



PARITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE SERIES: WHERE DO WE STAND?

SYNTHESIS OF EXISTING DATA
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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



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The complete and detailed synthesis is available on request and on <https://femmesdecinema.org>

ABOUT THE LAB FEMMES DE CINÉMA

The Lab Femmes de Cinéma is a think tank on the place of women in European cinema and audiovisual industry.

The Lab Femmes de Cinéma produced this note as part of its partnership with the CANNESERIES festival. The Lab also carries out an annual study on the place of women directors in Europe, organises workshops, masterclasses and produces a podcast.

The Sisley-d'Ornano Foundation is the founding sponsor of the Lab Femmes de Cinéma, STUDIOCANAL and the Collectif 50/50 are its partners.

I. THE AIM OF OUR SYNTHESIS

Series are at the core of the daily life of a significant part of the population...

Series have an important place in the lives of a growing number of people, **in 2019 in France, 66% of the population declare watching a series at least once a week**¹. These series have a real influence on the daily life of the spectators, for many they are an important way of approaching the world. To take just one example, let's think of the "Scully Effect". Actress Gillian Anderson played agent Dana Scully in the series THE X-FILES: in the late 1990s, a causal link between the broadcast of the series and an increasing number of women enrolling in scientific studies in the United States was quantified by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. Women who watched the series were 50% more likely to work in the STEM professions (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)².

In the world of series, who are the people behind and in front of the camera?

As part of our partnership with **CANNESERIES**, the Lab took an interest in this particularly key and impactful cultural medium. We wanted **to gather all the information that exists on the subject of the place of women and under-represented groups in series** and the audiovisual sector, to present a sort of inventory, a summary, of the data, the key figures, the major trends that run through series on a global and French levels. **Our aim is to question, in front of and behind the camera, what exists and what is still missing in the world of series.**



II. BEHIND THE SCREENS OF SERIES, MAINLY WHITE MEN

In the United States, showrunners are mainly white men

The showrunner is the most important and powerful person in the universe of series. Not only does he or she coordinate the creative and artistic aspect throughout the creation, writing, directing and production of a given series, but he or she also selects and steers the teams working on the project. In the **2016-2017** season, **80% of showrunners were men and 90% were white**³.

In the United States, positions of power are held by white men

In the 2020-2021 season, parity has not been achieved in any of the main creative and management positions: women represent **40% of series producers, 35% of series writers** and **31% of series directors**⁴. This season, women are **on average 33% behind the camera** in series production teams in the US⁵. In the **2019-2020** period in the US, **non-white people represent only 28% of the workforce**⁶.

In France too, men are over-represented in positions of power

In 2019, women represent **38% of the workers behind the camera** in the world of series⁷. In French television fiction, which therefore also includes TV films, the positions of power and creation are overwhelmingly held by men: **in 2018** women represented **8% of directors alone and 18% of directors if we add co-directors**⁸. Regarding screenplays, **in 2019, 22% of sole authors are women**, a figure that rises to **43% if co-authors are added**⁹. The majority of television dramas are therefore directed and written by men. This results in significant differences in terms of the production of episodes of series: **in 2018, 2% of the episodes broadcast were written and directed by women only, while 48% of the episodes were scripted and directed by men only**¹⁰.

This lack of gender diversity has a double impact: on the composition of the teams, but also on the representations on screen

Surveys show that the lack of gender diversity in the writer's room and in positions of power in the United States has consequences for the gender diversity of all the teams working behind the camera. When at least one woman is at the origin of the creation of the series, the teams have an average of 69% of women employed behind the scenes, compared to 20% of women employed in teams where no woman is at the origin of the creation of the series¹¹. **Moreover diversity has a strong impact on the characters portrayed on screen: in 2020-2021**, when at least one series creator is non-white, 53.8% of the series have a main character non-white, whereas when the creators are all white, this number drops to 24.8%¹².

III. INCREASING GENDER DIVERSITY ON THE SCREEN, BUT STEREOTYPES THAT RESIST

The importance of characters in a series

Studies show a direct link between the lack of gender diversity behind the camera and the fact that series are predominantly populated by white, able-bodied, heterosexual and cisgender people¹³.

The gender identity of characters

In the United States, **in the 2019-2020 season**, 29% of series have a female lead character, 37% have a male lead character and 33% have more than one lead character, including at least one man and one woman¹⁴. **45% of the speaking characters are female**¹⁵. The majority of these characters are cisgender: transgender people (binary or non-binary) represent 0.4% of the speaking characters in the series in the **2020-2021 season**¹⁶. In France, 56% of the leading roles on screen but only 38% of the total characters are women¹⁷. The imbalance is mainly measured in terms of speaking time: **between 2008 and 2018, men hold two thirds of the speaking time in French fiction**¹⁸.

The perceived racial affiliation of the characters

In the **2018 - 2019 season** in the US, **65% of characters are white**¹⁹. In fact, over the 2019-2020 period and across all platforms, apart from black Americans, **all non-white racial categories are quantitatively underrepresented compared to their percentage in the US population**²⁰. This concerns in particular Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans. In France, according to the CSA in **2019**, only **13% of the characters** in French television fiction are perceived by viewers as non-white²¹.

LGBTQIA+ characters

LGBTQIA+ characters have never been so present on screen in US series. In the **2021-2022 season** they represent **12% of regular series characters**²². This is a real progression: in the 2020-2021 season they were only 9%²³. Although LGBTQIA+ characters are present on screen, they are rarely the protagonists of series. Out of 180 series scripts studied, **only 1.1% of the main characters are identified as LGBTQIA+**²⁴. In France, it is estimated that each year, out of the more than 140 roles offered in French series, **only 5 are LGBTQIA+ characters**, i.e. 3.5% of the characters²⁵.

Qualitative differences between the roles according to the gender of the character in the series

The series show **working men, women taking care of the home**, psychological and physical distinctions with female characters being notably softer and more sexualized than male protagonists²⁶. Differences in roles are also noticeable according to perceived racial affiliation: non-white characters are generally **absent** from the series, or **present but stereotyped**, or are sometimes even used for **highlighting the white protagonist**²⁷.

A growing mix of characters in the world of series

« With TV and streaming, [production studios] can take risks because the budget is lower, or because they have a pre-selected audience. »²⁸. Today, **broadcasting methods are diverse**, between those who watch series on terrestrial channels (NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox, TF1, France 2, M6, etc.), on cable channels (HBO, Showtime, AMC, CANAL+) or streaming on platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime, AppleTV, etc.)²⁹. In addition to this large number of broadcast channels, each channel offers a very wide range of different series. This leads to a **dispersion effect**: there is so much content that a certain number of viewers are targeted for each content. Stories involving more diversity and better representation are therefore not limited to niche series. When the story is well written and offers diverse and interesting characters, many people can appreciate, become interested in and even identify with the various characters in the series. **Spectators accustomed to identifying with the white, able-bodied, heterosexual hero gradually become accustomed to identifying with and having empathy for a whole range of other characters.**



IV. THE BEGINNING OF A CHANGE?

Series more inclusive than films

In the US, series are more inclusive than films in almost every category: behind the camera there are more women and more non-white people in the series than in the film industry. **In front of the camera**, there are more speaking female characters, more non-white characters in leading roles, more LGBTQIA+ characters and slightly more characters with disabilities³⁰. As far as the **French** industries are concerned, the figures on series characters are less precise and the comparison is therefore more complex. However, it would seem that films, although not very mixed and not very representative of French society, are slightly more representative than the world of series, which remains far behind...³¹.

Channels are investing in order to make a change

Some channels and platforms are aware about these issues and are actively seeking to show more gender diversity and representation on screen. Think of Netflix, which has invested \$100 million to improve gender balance in front of and behind the camera³², or CANAL+, whose director of original creation Arielle Saracco stated that « 50% of the series broadcast in 2019 [on CANAL+] were directed by women »³³.

The Lab's optimism about the future of series

The fact that the channels and platforms are addressing these issues is a good thing in terms of representation. **Everyone will be able to identify with a wider range of characters** and not just, as is largely the case now, white, thin, able-bodied, cisgender and heterosexual heroes. But this awareness-raising is also good news because **it is an unprecedented artistic renewal**. How many people with original ideas have not yet been given access to creative and directing positions in series? How many characters are still under-represented and waiting to populate our collective imaginations? **For any serial fan, the dizzying potential of stories yet to be told is more than exciting and promises great things for the future of series.**



ENDNOTES

- ¹ <https://www.leparisien.fr/culture-loisirs/series/vous-etes-66-a-regarder-des-series-au-moins-une-fois-par-semaine-19-10-2019-8176050.php>
- ² <http://www.slate.fr/story/160579/effet-scully-x-files-carrieres-femmes>
- ³ <https://variety.com/2016/tv/features/diversity-television-white-male-showrunners-stats-fox-nbc-abc-cbs-cw-study-1201789639/>
- ⁴ https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2020-21_Boxed_In_Report.pdf
- ⁵ Ibid
- ⁶ <https://womenandhollywood.com/resources/statistics/tv-statistics/>
- ⁷ <https://larevuedesmedias.ina.fr/series-tv-telefilms-parite-hommes-femmes-ecriture-realisation-production-etude-statistiques>
- ⁸ <https://www.cnc.fr/documents/36995/927212/La+place+des+femmes+dans+la+réalisation+de+fiction+diffusée+à+la+télévision.pdf/36311dec-b363-e3b2-9818-ea37eaf96729>
- ⁹ <https://larevuedesmedias.ina.fr/series-tv-telefilms-parite-hommes-femmes-ecriture-realisation-production-etude-statistiques>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.cnc.fr/documents/36995/927212/La+place+des+femmes+dans+la+réalisation+de+fiction+diffusée+à+la+télévision.pdf/36311dec-b363-e3b2-9818-ea37eaf96729>
- ¹¹ https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2019-2020_Boxed_In_Report.pdf
- ¹² <https://about.netflix.com/en/news/building-a-legacy-of-inclusion>
- ¹³ See our note in its entirety on the Lab website www.femmesdecinema.org
- ¹⁴ <https://womenandhollywood.com/resources/statistics/tv-statistics/>
- ¹⁵ Ibid
- ¹⁶ https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2020-21_Boxed_In_Report.pdf
- ¹⁷ <https://larevuedesmedias.ina.fr/series-tv-telefilms-parite-hommes-femmes-ecriture-realisation-production-etude-statistiques>
- ¹⁸ <https://larevuedesmedias.ina.fr/etude-television-femmes-realisatrices-fictions-series>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/diversity-improves-among-tv-actors-executives-still-overwhelmingly-white-and-male>
- ²⁰ <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2021/being-seen-on-screen/>
- ²¹ <https://www.csa.fr/content/download/258988/773154/version/1/file/Barom%C3%A8tre%20de%20la%20diversit%C3%A9%20de%20la%20soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9%20fran%C3%A7aise%20-%20vague%202019.pdf>
- ²² <https://tvline.com/2022/02/17/glaad-report-tv-lgbtq-representation/>
- ²³ Ibid
- ²⁴ <https://about.netflix.com/en/news/building-a-legacy-of-inclusion>
- ²⁵ <https://tetu.com/2020/06/23/les-series-francaises-toujours-a-la-traine-dans-la-representation-des-personnes-lgbt/>
- ²⁶ https://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/tvstereotypes_fiction.pdf
- ²⁷ <https://www.lemagducine.fr/cinema/dossiers/la-representation-des-personnes-non-blanches-dans-les-series-occidentales-10029722/>
- ²⁸ Ibid
- ²⁹ <http://www.slate.fr/story/185549/16-moments-histoire-series-tele-annes-2010>
- ³⁰ See our note in its entirety on the Lab website www.femmesdecinema.org
- ³¹ Ibid
- ³² <http://www.slate.fr/story/204479/netflix-investir-100-millions-de-dollars-diversite-equite-films-series>
- ³³ <https://larevuedesmedias.ina.fr/etude-television-femmes-realisatrices-fictions-series>