

THE REP PROJECT

EMMY REPORT

2021

INTRODUCTION

This report analyzes representations of gender, race, disability, LGBTQ+ status, age, and body size for leading characters in Outstanding Drama and Outstanding Comedy series winners for as long as the Primetime Emmy Awards have been in existence. This study tells us whose stories have been elevated and whose stories remain invisible when it comes to television awards. The Emmys for Outstanding Drama and Outstanding Comedy Series have been awarded annually since the 4th Primetime Emmy Awards in 1952, making them the two longest-running and most notable Emmys awarded to scripted television programs. Given their prestige, these categories are especially important in signaling whose stories and lives matter more in society.

In 2020, the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (ATAS) publicly acknowledged that there is much work to be done when it comes to representation across Emmy winners.¹ ATAS adjusted the nominee formula to cast a wider net for potential winning shows,² but the organization has not diversified its voting ranks or instituted specific behind-the-scenes and on the screen diversity requirements for Emmy consideration. As the findings from this study show, the Emmys continue to erase the stories of traditionally marginalized groups in the US to an extent that demands immediate intervention.



KEY FINDINGS

OUTSTANDING DRAMA SERIES WINNERS

- Only one-in-three (35.4%) Outstanding Drama Series winners center women's lives.
- Only 2.3% of winners feature a lead of color.
- Only 4.5% of Outstanding Drama Series winners feature a lead with a disability.
- There has never been a winner that features an Asian, Black, Middle Eastern/North African (MENA), Native American/Pacific Islander, or South Asian lead.
- No Outstanding Drama Series winner has ever centered the story of an LGBTQ+ lead, a larger woman lead, or a woman lead ages 50+.

OUTSTANDING COMEDY SERIES WINNERS

- Women leads are underrepresented among Outstanding Comedy Series winners (43.1% compared to 50.8% of women in the US population).
- Only 3.3% of winners feature a lead of color.
- LGBTQ+ leads are well represented among winners compared to the US population (6.5% compared to 4.5%).
- There has never been an Outstanding Comedy Series winner that features an Asian, MENA, Native American/Pacific Islander, or South Asian lead.
- No Outstanding Comedy Series winner has ever centered the story of a larger woman lead, or a lead with a disability.

FULL REPORT

Identity Analysis

Women and girls make up over half the US population,³ but only one-in-three (35.4%) Outstanding Drama Series winners feature a woman lead or co-lead (hereafter referred to as “leads”). When it comes to Outstanding Comedy Series winners, women leads are underrepresented compared to the US population (43.1% compared to 50.8%). This means the Emmys for Outstanding Series are almost always awarded to television programs that tell the stories of the lives of boys and men.

Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) are nearly 40% of the US population, yet TV shows centering the lives of BIPOC characters are rarely awarded Emmys. Only 2.3% of leads in the Outstanding Drama Series winners and 3.3% of leads in the Outstanding Comedy Series winners are BIPOC characters (compared to 39.9% of the US population).

When it comes to the details of how BIPOC stories are erased in the most honored television programs, we find large gaps across all leads of color.

Of the Outstanding Drama Series winners, only three television programs have featured leading characters of color. In nearly 75 years, there has never been a Outstanding Drama Series winner that features an Asian, Black, MENA, Native American/Pacific Islander, or South Asian lead.

When it comes to the Outstanding Comedy Series category, only three winners have featured leads of color: *I Love Lucy* (1953), *I Love Lucy* (1954), and *The Cosby Show* (1985). This means ATAS rarely awards the Emmy for Outstanding Comedy Series to a program that revolves around the life of a Black or Latinx lead, and it has never given the award to a show featuring an Asian, MENA, Native American/Pacific Islander, or South Asian lead.

In terms of sexuality, no Outstanding Drama Series winner has ever centered the story of an LGBTQ+ lead, despite LGBTQ+ people making up 4.5% of the US population.⁵

In contrast, LGBTQ+ leads are well represented compared to the US population when it comes to Outstanding Comedy winners (6.5% compared to 4.5%).

People with disabilities make up 26% of the US population,⁶ yet leads with disabilities are vastly underrepresented among Emmy winners. When it comes to the Outstanding Drama Series category, only three winning programs have featured a lead with a physical, cognitive, communication, or mental health disability (all in the past two decades): *The Sopranos* (2004, 2007), *Homeland* (2012), and *Game of Thrones* (2015, 2016, 2018, 2019). No Outstanding Comedy Series winner has ever featured a lead with a disability.

FIGURE 1: WOMEN LEADS/CO-LEADS

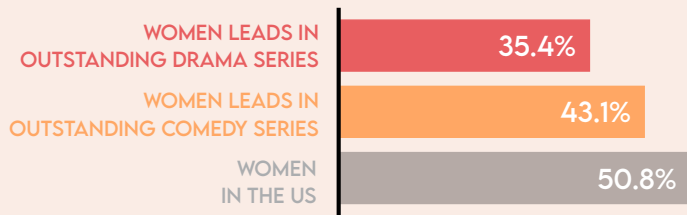


FIGURE 2: BIPOC LEADS/CO-LEADS

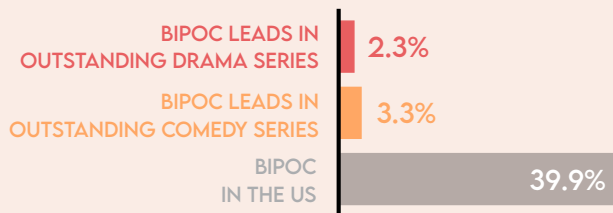


FIGURE 3: RACE/ETHNICITY OF LEADS/CO-LEADS

RACE/ETHNICITY	DRAMA	COMEDY	POPULATION ⁴
ASIAN	--	--	5.9%
BLACK	--	1.6%	13.4%
LATINX	2.3%	1.6%	18.5%
MENA	--	--	2.5%
NATIVE AMERICAN/ PACIFIC ISLANDER	--	--	0.2%
SOUTH ASIAN	--	--	0.1%
WHITE	97.7%	96.7%	60.1%

FIGURE 4: LGBTQ+ LEADS/CO-LEADS



FIGURE 5: LEADS/CO-LEADS WITH DISABILITIES



Intersectional Analysis

As an organization dedicated to intersectional gender justice, The Rep Project is especially interested in how women of different intersecting identities are represented.

As noted above, women leads are underrepresented in both Outstanding Drama and Outstanding Comedy Series winners. Of the television programs that feature women's stories, BIPOC women leads are virtually nonexistent.

Among television shows that won for Outstanding Drama Series, only one winner (*The Rockford Files*, 1978) has featured a woman lead of color (Rita Moreno). Among television shows that won for Outstanding Comedy Series, only one winner (*The Cosby Show*, 1985) has featured a woman lead of color (Phylicia Rashad).

In terms of sexuality, no television show featuring a lesbian or bisexual women's story has ever won for Outstanding Drama Series.

As noted above, LGBTQ+ leads are well represented among Outstanding Comedy Series winners (6.5% compared to 4.5% of the US population), but only 1.9% of women leads are LGBTQ+. Only one Outstanding Comedy Series winner centers the life of a lesbian or bisexual woman: *Fleabag* (2019).

In nearly 75 years of the Primetime Emmy Awards, only one Outstanding Drama Series, *Homeland* (2012), has ever centered the story of a leading woman with a disability. An Emmy has never been awarded in the Outstanding Comedy Series category to a TV show featuring a lead with a disability.

Among TV shows with women protagonists that have won for Outstanding Drama Series, none of the women leads were ages 50+. When it comes to Outstanding Comedy Series winners that feature women protagonists, 22.6% of the women leads were ages 50+. This is a mixed finding because previous research shows that older adults are commonly featured as a punchline in entertainment media.

No television show that has won an Emmy for Outstanding Drama or Comedy Series has ever featured the story of a woman who is fat.⁷ This is an important finding because it reinforces the idea that the lives of fat women matter little in US society, despite the fact that over 40% of Americans are classified as fat by the US government.⁸

Recent Emmy Winner Analysis

The Academy of Television Arts & Sciences recently acknowledged widespread issues with representation, and some progress has been made, but our analysis of winners in the last five years shows that the Emmys have a long way to go.

When it comes to Outstanding Drama Series winners, we find that:

FIGURE 6: WOMEN LEADS/CO-LEADS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

RACE/ETHNICITY	DRAMA	COMEDY	POPULATION
ASIAN WOMEN	--	--	5.9%
BLACK WOMEN	--	1.9%	13.4%
LATINX WOMEN	2.2%	--	18.5%
MENA WOMEN	--	--	2.5%
NATIVE AMERICAN/ PACIFIC ISLANDER WOMEN	--	--	0.2%
SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN	--	--	0.1%
WHITE WOMEN	97.8%	98.1%	60.1%

FIGURE 7: LGBTQ+ STATUS OF WOMEN LEADS/CO-LEADS

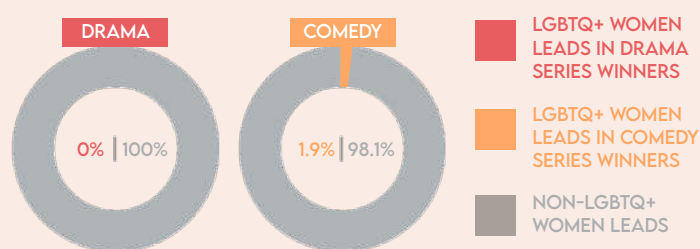


FIGURE 8: DISABILITY STATUS OF WOMEN LEADS/CO-LEADS

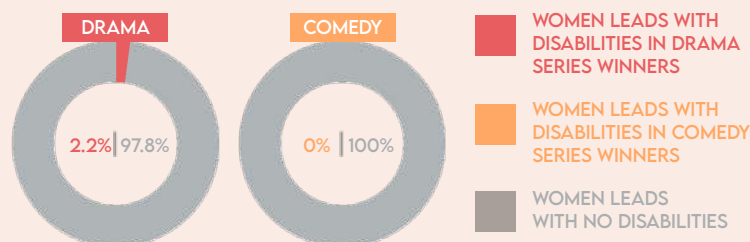


FIGURE 9: AGE OF WOMEN LEADS/CO-LEADS

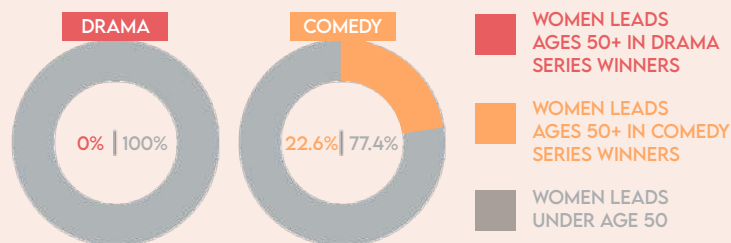
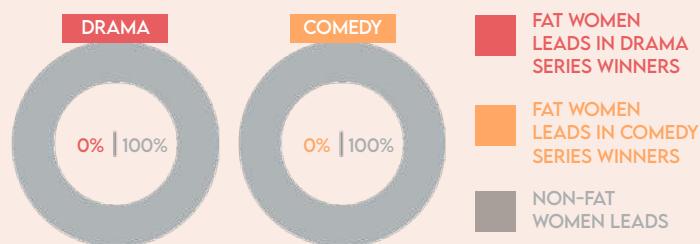


FIGURE 10: BODY SIZE OF WOMEN LEADS/CO-LEADS



- Representations of gender have improved in the past five years, with four winners centered on the lives of women characters (*Game of Thrones* 2016, 2018, 2019 and *Handmaid's Tale* 2017).
- No BIPOC or LGBTQ+ characters are featured as leading characters in the Outstanding Drama Series winners.
- Representations of disability have improved in the past five years, with three winners centering the lives of characters with disabilities (*Game of Thrones* 2016, 2018, 2019).

When it comes to Outstanding Comedy Series winners, we find that:

- Representations of gender have greatly improved in the past five years, with all five winners centered on the lives of women characters (*Veep* 2016, 2017, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* 2018, *Fleabag* 2019, and *Schitt's Creek* 2020).
- No BIPOC characters or characters with a disability are featured as leading characters in the Outstanding Comedy Series winners.
- Representations of LGBTQ+ people have improved in the past five years, with two winners centered on the lives of LGBTQ+ characters (*Fleabag* 2019, and *Schitt's Creek* 2020).

FIGURE 11: RECENT OUTSTANDING DRAMA SERIES & OUTSTANDING COMEDY SERIES REPRESENTATIONS

YEAR	OUTSTANDING DRAMA SERIES WINNER	WOMAN LEAD	BIPOC LEAD	LGBTQ+ LEAD	LEAD WITH DISABILITY	YEAR	OUTSTANDING COMEDY SERIES WINNER	WOMAN LEAD	BIPOC LEAD	LGBTQ+ LEAD	LEAD WITH DISABILITY
2020	<i>SUCCESSION</i>	NO	NO	NO	NO	2020	<i>SCHITT'S CREEK</i>	YES	NO	YES	NO
2019	<i>GAME OF THRONES</i>	YES	NO	NO	YES	2019	<i>FLEABAG</i>	YES	NO	YES	NO
2018	<i>GAME OF THRONES</i>	YES	NO	NO	YES	2018	<i>THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL</i>	YES	NO	NO	NO
2017	<i>HANDMAID'S TAIL</i>	YES	NO	NO	NO	2017	<i>VEEP</i>	YES	NO	NO	NO
2016	<i>GAME OF THRONES</i>	YES	NO	NO	YES	2016	<i>VEEP</i>	YES	NO	NO	NO

METHODOLOGY

The data generated in this report was produced through a content analysis conducted by trained researchers. Our final dataset included 130 leading and co-leading characters from the Outstanding Drama Series winners and 123 leading and co-leading characters from the Outstanding Comedy Series winners from 1952 through 2020. For this analysis, leading characters are coded as characters that drive the story. Co-leads are defined as two characters who drive the storyline equally. For ensemble casts, the leading character is the character who is most driving the story. Characters nominated in the Outstanding Actor/Actress in a Leading Role categories were automatically considered leads/co-leads for the Outstanding Drama Series and Outstanding Comedy Series television programs in which they appeared.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The Representation Project is a leading global gender justice non-profit organization. We use films, education, research, and activism to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes. In 2011, Jennifer Siebel Newsom founded The Rep Project in response to the overwhelming public demand for ongoing education and social action in support of her first film, *Miss Representation*. Since then, Siebel Newsom has released two more acclaimed films, *The Mask You Live In* (2015) and *The Great American Lie* (2019). The organization also runs a global youth filmmaker program to train the next generation of change agents. The Rep Project is also known for its impactful social activism campaigns, including #NotBuyingIt, #AskHerMore, and #RespectHerGame.

ENDNOTES

1. Arkin, D., Marshall M. and J. Wu (2020). Emmy Nominees are diverse this year. But that hasn't always been the case, data analysis shows. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/awards/emmy-nominees-are-diverse-year-hasn-t-always-been-case-n1240301>
2. Lawler, K (2020). Emmy Changes Nomination Rules, Aiming for More Diversity and Inclusivity Among Contenders. *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/tv/2020/06/18/emmy-nominations-rule-change-aims-more-diversity-and-inclusion/3213111001/>
3. Howden, L.M. and J.A. Meyer (2011). Age and Sex Composition: 2010, 2010 Census Briefs, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf>
4. United States Census (2019). Quick Facts, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>
5. Newport, F. (2018). In U.S., LGBT Rises to 4.5%. Gallup, May 22, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/234863/estimate-lgbt-population-rises.aspx>
6. Centers for Disease Control (2020). Disability Impacts All of Us. https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/documents/disabilities_impacts_all_of_us.pdf
7. We are intentionally using the word "fat" because it is not an insult. We are part of a growing number of organizations and individuals reclaiming the word "fat." We celebrate bodies in whatever form they come, with bumps, lumps, stretch marks, and curves.
8. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018). FastStats: Obesity and Overweight, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/obesity-overweight.htm>
9. The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences started the Primetime Emmy Awards in 1949, honoring the best television programs of 1948. ATAS switched from one overall winner to two separate overall winners (one for Outstanding Drama Series and one for Outstanding Comedy Series) for the 4th annual Primetime Emmys in 1952. In 1965, ATAS tried out a new format which disincorporated the Outstanding Drama and Outstanding Comedy Series awards categories, although they went back to their previous format in the following year. For the purposes of this study, we did not include the four years without Outstanding Drama and Outstanding Comedy Series winners.