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**Diversity on U.S. Public and Commercial TV, in Authorial and Executive-Produced
Social-Issue Documentaries**

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Abstract

Where are diverse makers and subjects most likely to be found in U.S. TV documentary?

This study compares commercial and public TV series, and also anthology formats (“authorial” series) and executive-produced formats. A content analysis for characters and makers showed that public TV authorial series are more diverse than either commercial or other public TV series. Executive-produced public TV does not show consistent commitment to diversity. Independent documentaries have diversity value both in commercial and public TV settings.

Issues of diversity are one potential measure of the difference between publicly-funded and commercial TV in the U.S., particularly for documentaries that concern political, cultural and socio-economic relations. Generally, one of the core principles historically driving cultural policy in the U.S. is the notion that actively supporting diversity supports democratic values and acts (Kidd, 2012). Despite the need for diversity in such programming, publicly-available information about public and commercial TV documentaries in relation to diversity is lacking. This study contributes such data.

People of color and women are underrepresented in American media overall and notably in broadcast and cable programming, even though ratings have been shown to be higher for programs featuring people of color and women (Hunt et al., 2014). Thus, continued underrepresentation appears to reflect not an economic bias, but rather systemic, if often unconscious, discrimination. This discrimination is significant because of longstanding research showing social effects of mainstream media representation (Berry, 2007). Bandura and other social-cognitive theorists argue that viewers, especially children, use media representations to form expectations or schema about categories of people, including themselves (Bandura 2002). Cultivation theorists have shown that the effects of television content transcend any particular program, with overarching messages and themes that infuse an environment of belief (Morgan et al., 2009).

Media production generally underrepresents women and minorities. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, the population in 2015 was projected to be 51% female and 37% non-white (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015). However, these proportions are not reflected, in surveys of diverse participation and representation in media fields. In 2015, an American Society of News Editors study found consistency over time in low

representation of minorities—between 12-14%; women’s participation has stayed steady over a decade at about 36% (ASNE, 2015). An RTDNA/Hofstra study (Papper, 2015) found that, at U.S. TV stations, the workforce is 42% female, but women held only 31% of news director positions, and that the minority workforce was 22%. In filmmaking, a five-year study by the Directors Guild of America (DGA) found that among first-time film directors, only 18% of available hires went to women, and only 13% of new director hires went to minorities. In cable comedies and dramas in 2011-12, among “show creators” (nearest equivalent to director), 26% were female and 7% were minorities.

The same patterns are found in speaking roles and characters. For cable comedies and dramas in 2011-12, about 37% of the lead actors were female, and 15% were minority (Hunt et al., 2014). A 2014 study of speaking roles for women on broadcast programs found that about 42% were female, and three-quarters of those were white (Lauzen, 2014). A study of a sampling of prime time network TV programming between 2000 and 2008 found that whites were overrepresented at 80% of the characters, and that only African Americans were at parity among minorities (Signorielli, 2009); overall, minority participation was declining.

In documentary, women have historically played a larger role, although often not matching their presence in the general population. A study of more than 11,000 filmmakers who participated in Sundance Institute events between 2002 and 2012 found that 42% of directors were women, while 75% of producers were female (Smith, Pieper, & Choueti, 2014). (No data were available for minorities.) A 2015 study of female makers of films showcased in 20 major film festivals in 2014-15 found more female directors in documentary (29%) than in scripted features (18%); overall, and considering

all major roles in making a film, women were only 26% of the total. Women were most likely to serve in a producer position. Proportions and roles were consistent over the last six years (Lauzen, 2015).

Public TV and Independent Documentary

Diversity is an important part of the claim for U.S. public broadcasting, and documentary—particularly, social-issue documentary—has been key to serving that claim. Public broadcasting in the U.S. was created in stages starting in 1938, with a dramatic new commitment of federal tax dollars and incentives in 1967, to be a non-commercial alternative to commercial broadcasting (Author removed for anonymity, 2000; Engelman, 1996; Day, 1995; Debrett, 2010). The Carnegie Commission, the blue-ribbon group that laid the template for the service the law authorized, called for “excellence in the service of diversity” (Debrett, 2010: 142). Classic historical arguments about the public interest in public media services, articulated by scholar/public intellectuals such as Blumler (Blumler, 1992) and Raboy (Raboy, 1995: 9), emphasize the powerful distinction between consumer and citizen for media services.

Public broadcasting is seen by such analysts and many early leaders, such as Bill Moyers and James Day (Day, 1995), as a mediating element in the public sphere, or the circulation of discourse about public affairs that creates public life (Garnham, 2000; Keane, 1991). As James Carey, among others, noted, media do not merely interpret reality but go far to create the reality we understand (Carey, 1989). Public television is a counterweight in the creation of reality predominantly shaped by interests of advertisers and the powerful, and diversity is key to that action.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which channels the federal dollars to stations and programs, announces on its website that “Digital, Diversity, and Dialogue are the framework for public media's service to America” and that it was founded “to champion the principles of diversity and excellence of programming, responsiveness to local communities, and service to all” (<http://cpb.org/aboutpb/>). The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) celebrates its female executive leadership and diversity of anchors (both in terms of gender and race) on its news program, *NewsHour* (Taibi, 2015).

The question of anchoring values for mission is important within public television, especially at a time when many competitors for viewer attention have arisen. American public television, once nearly the only venue for the social-issue documentarian, now finds rivals from HBO, National Geographic, A&E, CNN, ESPN and others, as well as streaming services such as Vimeo, YouTube, Netflix and Amazon. (Hamilton, 2015; Cieply, 2015; Gilbert, 2015). As a decentralized and majority privately-funded service, public television has always been cautious and controversy-averse (Author removed for anonymity, 2000: 85-120; Rowland Jr, 1986; Padovani and Tracey, 2003; Debrett, 2010: 133-157; Balas, 2007; McChesney, 1999). And yet enough legislators value it as a site to inform public discourse, among other things, to consistently allocate (without increasing) funds to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (McLoughlin and Gurevitz, 2013).

In this environment, diversity could also be a defining difference between public and commercial TV. But public TV has not demonstrated a consistent investment in diversity. A 2013 study found that public TV newsrooms actually lagged behind

commercial TV newsrooms generally for female representation (Marcotte, 2013). In 2015, women were twice as likely to be news directors in public TV stations as in commercial ones, but minority news directors' percentages were the same as in commercial stations—13% (Papper, 2015). Salaries are also skewed. A 2015 study of executive salaries showed that women hold 39 percent of top executive positions in TV and radio in the top 25 markets, more than double the percentage of women in top executive positions in the general workforce. But they earned only 83 cents for every dollar their male peers made (Mook, 2015). Only a third of PBS' board of directors were women in 2015, and less than a fifth were minorities.

Not all diversity data has been negative. Half of CPB's board, which is politically appointed, was composed of women in 2015, while almost a third of the board were minorities. A study of news reporting in the 2008 U.S. national elections found that public television featured the greatest diversity (Zeldes et al., 2012). The Independent Television Service, which co-produces with independent producers, also prioritizes diversity as a selection criterion.

In U.S. public television, documentaries are a small element in programming, but historically a large element in defining the difference between public and commercial broadcasting, particularly through diversity. Social-issue documentaries—documentaries that address the implications of social, political and economic arrangements and conflicts—have always been a distinctive feature of public television. Some of public TV's hallmark programming, including the series on the African-American civil rights movement, *Eyes on the Prize* and the celebrated documentary on African-American young men dreaming of success through basketball fame, *Hoop Dreams*, have come from

independent producers winning space on public TV for their topics. In a time of rapid change in journalism, social-issue documentaries may play an increasingly important role in exploring contemporary social issues.

The relationship between independent filmmakers making social-issue programs and public broadcasting has inevitably been contentious, since programmers have little incentive or appetite for controversy or even for topics that may seem negative or depressing (Bullert, 1997: 142-144; Debrett, 2010). At the same time, the relationship has been productive. Sustained pressure on public TV from independent producers, asserting the centrality of diversity in the mandate of public service TV, has been decisive in creating and maintaining space for such work, since the 1970s. The creation of the Independent Television Service (ITVS), a coproducer and showcaser of independent documentary work, was the product of a decade-long struggle of independent documentary filmmakers to get space on public TV. Series such as *POV* and *Independent Lens* (which is an ITVS series) are the result of independent filmmaker pressure on the system. In the last few years, independent filmmaker pressure twice secured good placement for the documentary series *POV* and *Independent Lens* on the major programming service PBS. (Author deleted for anonymity, 2012; Das, 2015; Fisher, 2015).

These conflicts have also surfaced the lack of reliable data on diversity, historically linked to public mission. This study addresses that lack.

Hypotheses

In conflicts over programming for public television, independent producers and some programmers have argued that independent, authorial programs serve the mission

of public television because of their diversity. To provide one measure of this, we conducted two kinds of content analysis on a contrasting set of television documentary series—“authorial” and “executive-produced.” We looked both at the racial/ethnic and gender characteristics of major characters in the programs and of directors and producers of the programs.

“Authorial” documentaries are produced by independent documentary producers who are not employed by the distributing broadcast network. These “authorial” works are then acquired and licensed by the distributing broadcast network to showcase publicly. Final choices about story, characters, crew (directors and producers) are made entirely by the independent decision-makers (directors and, to a lesser extent, producers), not the distributing broadcast network. In other words, the decisions—and ultimately, the implications for story and diversity of major roles behind the scenes—do not rely with broadcast executives. “Executive-produced” documentaries are produced and created by the professional in-house team employed by the broadcaster, with one executive producer in the ultimate final decision-making role. This categorization of “authorial” vs. “executive-produced” social-issue documentaries is an original contribution of this study. We hypothesized that:

H1: Authorial formats in public TV would be more diverse than authorial works in commercial TV, because of public TV’s historic diversity mandate.

H2: On public TV, the authorial documentary format would be more likely to be diverse than the executive-produced format, because decisions about content would be made by creative decision-makers who are independent of the broadcast network, and less controlled by the distributing network’s executive producer and his/her team.

Method

Variables

In a content analysis approach, we treated three categories of social-issue documentaries as independent variables: Public TV authorial, commercial TV authorial and public TV executive-produced. Our dependent variables were the racial/ethnic and gender characteristics of directors, producers and major characters of the programs.

Sample

We considered the entire body of films produced in the 2014-15 season by the two authorial series on public television and two largest authorial series on cable television, as well as three executive-produced public television documentary series with similar content. These series all feature documentaries concerning social issues or social context of expression, rather than, say, nature, arts performance, reality-shows or instructional/how-to. This resulted in a comprehensive body of 165 documentaries that aired in either the 2014-2105 seasons in the U.S.

For commercial TV, we chose *HBO Documentaries* and *CNN Documentaries*, the largest such series for social-issue authorial work on commercial cable. For public TV, we chose *Independent Lens* and *POV*, the only national series featuring social-issue authorial documentary on PBS prime-time. They are all anthology formats; each film has its own authorial voice, and the series acts as a legitimating brand for their shared quality. This is evident in their promotion; for instance, ITVS has used the tagline, “A film festival in your living room” (Lisa Tawil, Independent Television Service, personal communication, Nov. 12, 2015).

For comparison of authorial with executive-produced series within public TV, we selected for analysis three executive-produced public TV series featuring documentaries also carried by public TV stations nationally on PBS prime-time. These series explicitly embrace a brand identity, look and feel for the series, and all work must conform to the branding; this is part of the explicit claim of the series. Its promotional materials depend on the series brand, not the individual program's distinctive voice. While such series give credit to individual makers, employ independent producers to work on these programs and sometimes even select programs based on pitches by them, they maintain control over the ultimate design and look of the program. We chose two series that feature social issues, *FRONTLINE* and *American Experience*, and *American Masters*, an arts series featuring the social context of performance.

For the 2014-15 season, we found 51 documentaries on cable TV series featuring authorial work—on *HBO* (39) and *CNN Documentaries* (12). On public TV authorial series, we found 46—on *Independent Lens* (19) and *POV* (27). On executive-produced public TV series, we examined *American Experience* (12), *FRONTLINE* (44), and *American Masters* (12).

Coding

A single coder, with close supervision by one of the principal investigators, coded the documentaries for the racial/ethnic and gender composition of both makers and characters, using public resources, including reviews, IMDB.com, and series and film websites. Additionally, we endeavored to check our work with series producers, successfully in all cases but *HBO Documentaries* and PBS' *American Masters*. Only three errors were reported from the series staff, all of underreporting; these errors were

corrected for the final reporting and analysis. Given this approach, we did not employ statistical methods (i.e., intercoder reliability) for this component of the work, as it was unnecessary given the direct verification of the data with programming executives. This approach parallels close the method used in a similar content study that examines race and gender diversity on entertainment TV (Smith, Choueti, Pieper, 2016).

In asking about racial/ethnic composition, our standard was whether at least one member of the relevant group was a U.S. minority within the federal categories of (with various terminologies) African American, Latino, Asian American, or Native/Pacific Islander. We also included people with Middle Eastern names. Because we were working only with public records, we used as indicators names, photographs and self-identification, e.g. on website biographies. For characters, in addition to promotional photos about the programs, we also drew on contextual information in narrative descriptions.

We also coded for presence of racial/ethnic minority, international and female characters in a major role. A major role was defined as any recurring character who shaped the narrative and/or moved the arc of the action or explanation; this definition resulted in no conflicts of interpretation or difficult decisions. In particular, experts were typically not counted as major characters unless their journey of discovery was the arc of the action. For international characters of color, we included Middle Eastern. In all cases, any maker or character who occurred in two categories, e.g. minority and female, was counted in both.

We contrasted programs that had any diversity, either gender or racial/ethnic, as represented by at least one person, with programs that had none. Thus, this was a simple

binary choice. We did not code for amount of diverse participation in any one program. Aside from resource conditions, we decided to take this binary approach because in this kind of documentary production, there are two decision-making roles in the crew: Director, and, to a lesser extent, producer. These are the sole and specific “production crew” members that were examined and coded for this study, as these two roles retain power over decisions in terms of story and characters, and thus, diversity decisions. To extrapolate, employing diverse individuals as camera operators and audio technicians has no bearing on the decision-making about the issues and stories conveyed to the viewing audience. Similarly, the decision to code only for “main character” was similarly meaningful, given that main characters in this kind of documentary drive the story forward, and thus, carry the reflection of gender and racial/ethnic diversity in the story experienced by the viewing audience.

Analysis

We grouped together the two public TV authorial series (*Independent Lens* and *POV*) and the two cable authorial series (*HBO Documentaries* and *CNN Documentaries*), because they are all “authorial” programs. For the executive-produced public TV series (on PBS), we treated them as a unit—“executive produced”—in almost all cases. In a few instances, we examined the two specific programming strands included in this “executive-produced” category (*American Experience*, *FRONTLINE*, *American Masters*) since differences even among these three programs are important for a closer look at public broadcasting as a whole.

We employed the chi-square test of independence to assess significant differences ($p < .05$) between the main categories of documentary distribution in the study (“public

TV authorial” compared to “cable TV authorial,” and “public TV authorial” compared to “public TV executive-produced”). We did not include tests larger than 2x2 given sample size limitations.

Results

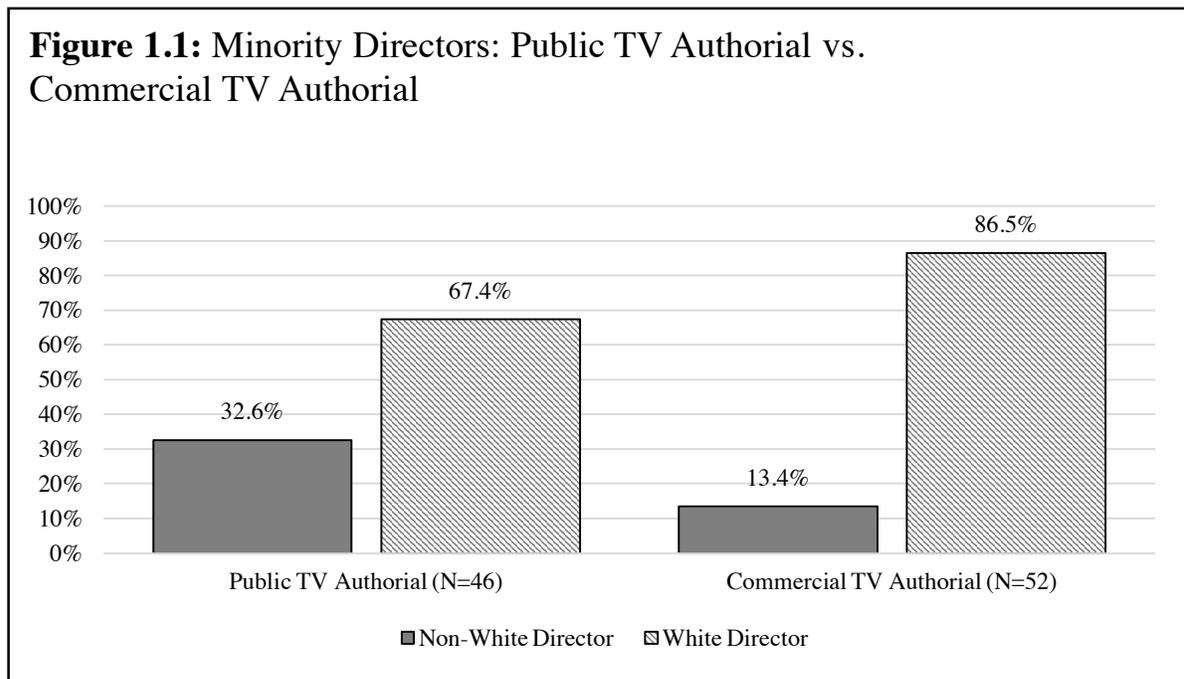
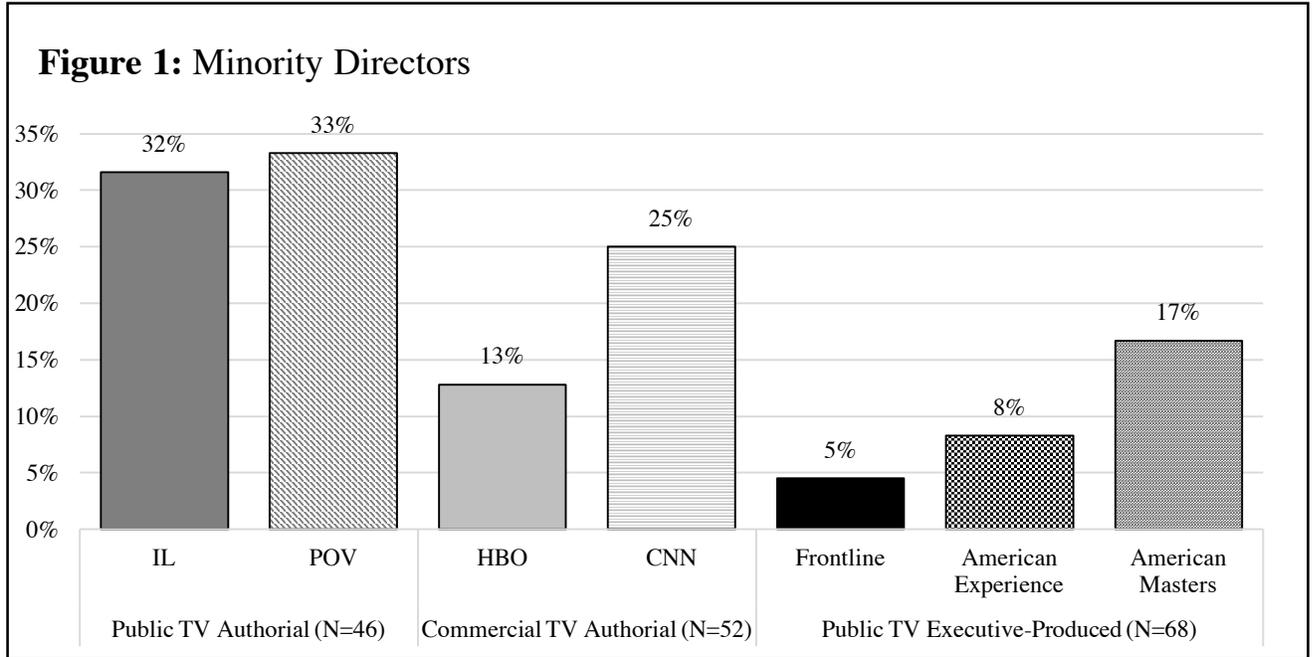
Across public TV (both authorial and executive-produced categories) and commercial TV, patterns emerge in terms of gender and racial/ethnic diversity among the ranks of creative decision-makers in documentaries (directors and producers), as well as lead characters. We present the total diversity findings across the three TV categories and all individual TV series strands in terms of both gender and race/ethnicity in three areas—directors, producers and lead characters. We find significant differences in several distinct areas: minority directors, female producers and minority lead characters coded as “international.” In the three areas in which significant differences are noted, authorial series in public TV—relative to both commercial TV authorial programs and public TV executive-produced programs—are more likely to be inclusive in terms of diverse representation.

Minority Directors

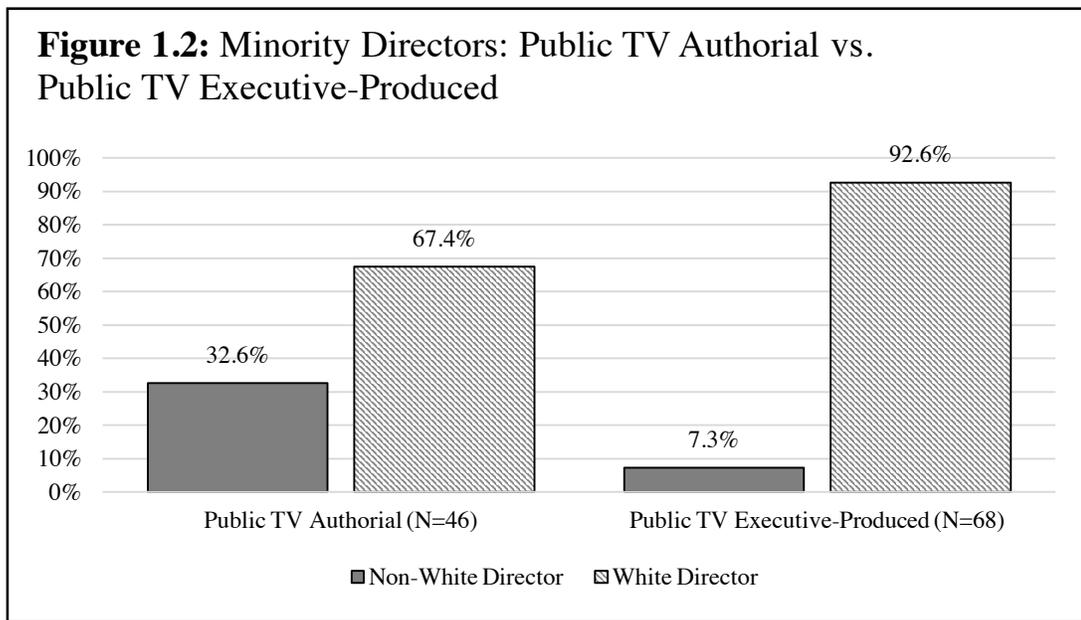
Comparing the two authorial cable series (distributed on HBO and CNN) and the two public authorial series, *Independent Lens* and *POV*, the two public TV series easily represent, at 33%, minority directors at more than double the rate of commercial series, at 13%. Public TV authorial programs were significantly more likely to distribute work by non-white directors than commercial TV authorial programming ($\chi^2 = 5.14$, $df = 1$, $p = .023$). Figure 1 illustrates minority directors in the authorial format across all programs.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the comparison between minority directors in authorial public TV and authorial commercial TV.

Figures 1, 1.1, 1.2: Minority Directors



*p < .05

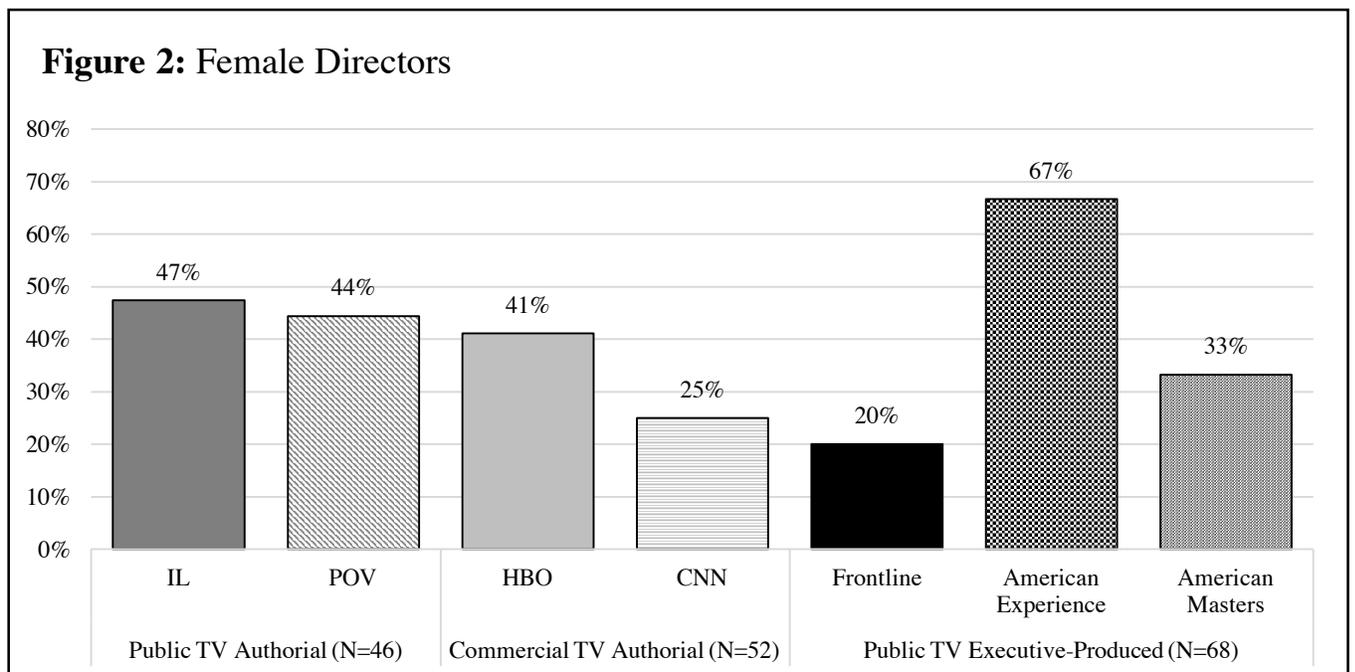


* $p < .05$

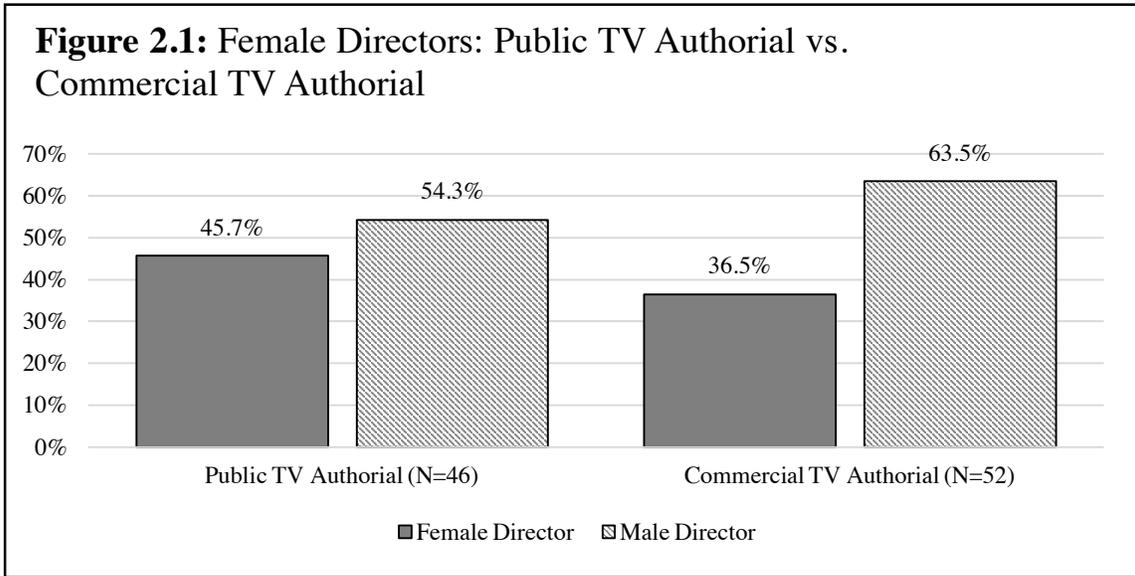
This pattern does not hold, however, for public TV as a whole. The two authorial public series are twice as likely to have at least one diverse director on each film as on *American Masters*, four times as many as on *American Experience*, and eight times as likely as on *FRONTLINE*. Two of the three other public TV series have a record on minorities that is dramatically worse not only than independents' public TV series but also commercial documentary series. Public TV authorial programs were significantly more likely to distribute work by non-white directors than public TV executive-produced programming ($\chi^2 = 12.09$, $df = 1$, $p = .001$). Figure 1.2 illustrates the comparisons between authorial public TV and executive-produced commercial TV.

Female Directors

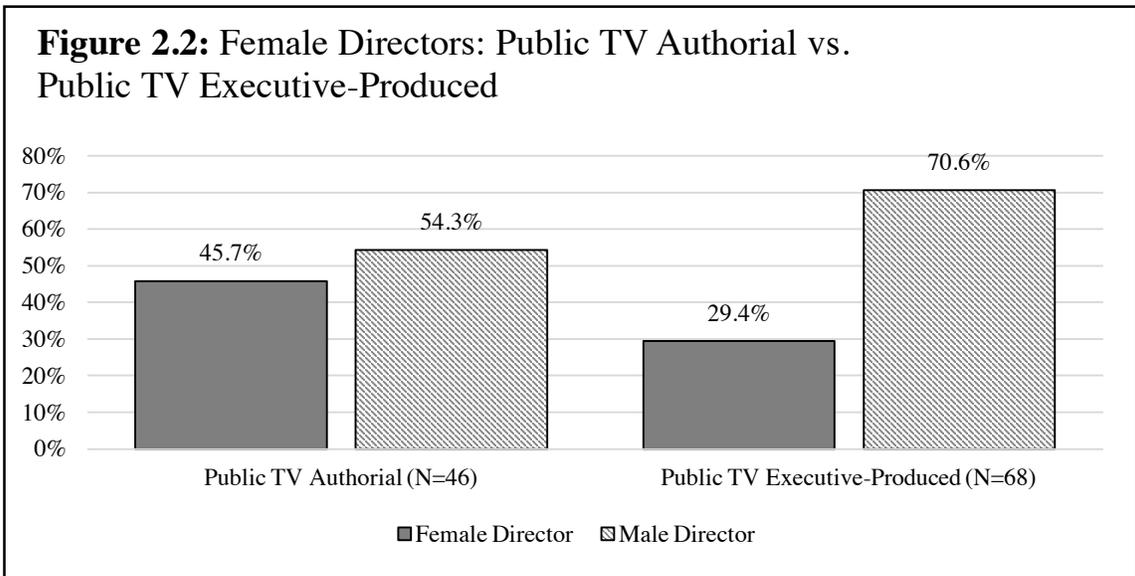
The place more likely to showcase work by women directors is an authorial public TV series. For female directors in authorial series, the two public series, at 46%—close to parity with the general population—outpace the commercial (37%). The public TV series were almost 25% more likely to have programs with at least one female director. The executive-produced series vary dramatically; two are significantly below even the cable TV series. *FRONTLINE* has only 20% of programs with at least one female director, the lowest of any series, either public or private; in *American Experience*, 67% of programs have at least one female director; and a third of *American Masters* programs do. Figure 2 illustrates the inclusion of female directors across all social-issue documentary categories. However, we did not find a statistically significant difference between public and commercial TV authorial programs; public and commercial authorial programs similarly represented female directors ($\chi^2 = 0.84, df = 1, p=0.36$). Figure 2.1 shows the comparison of female directors in authorial public and commercial TV.



In public TV as a whole, authorial public TV formats were not significantly more likely to include work of female directors than executive-produced public TV formats ($\chi^2 = 3.14$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.08$). Figure 2.2 shows the comparison of female directors in authorial public TV compared to executive-produced public TV.



*p < .05

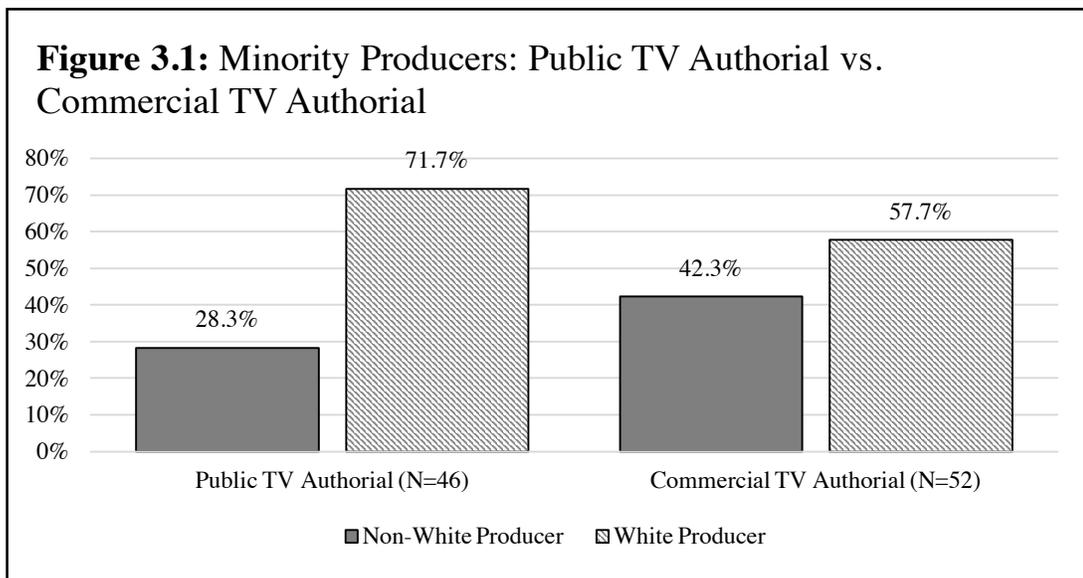
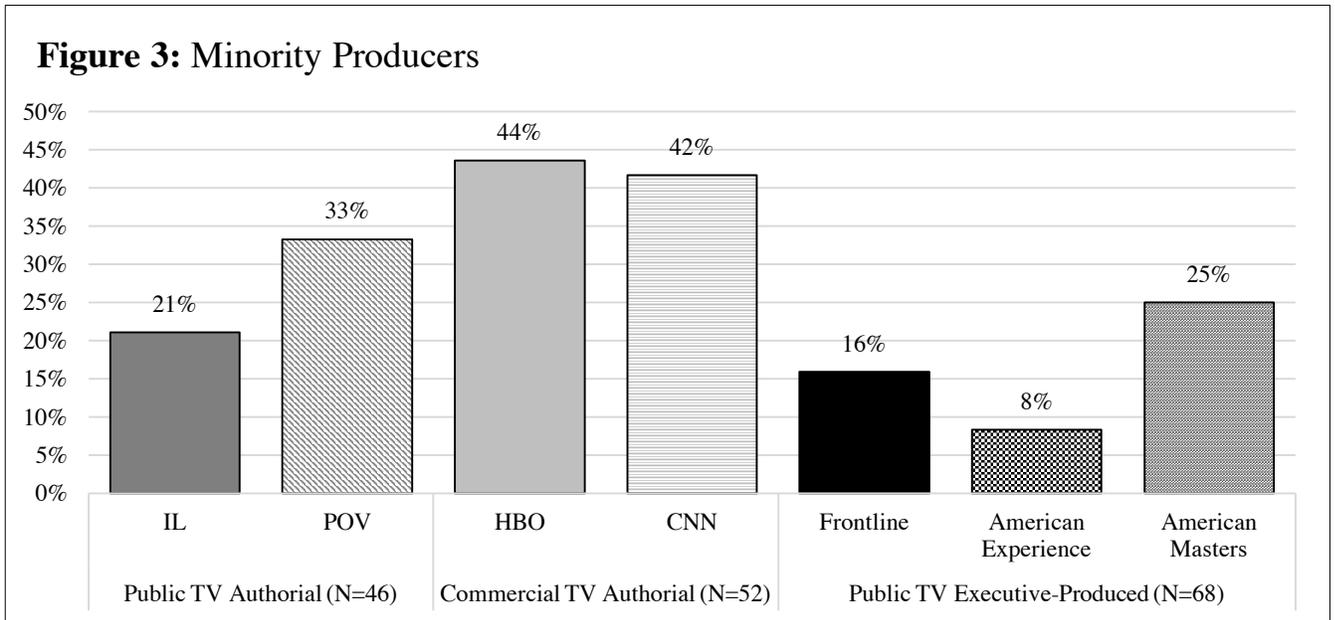


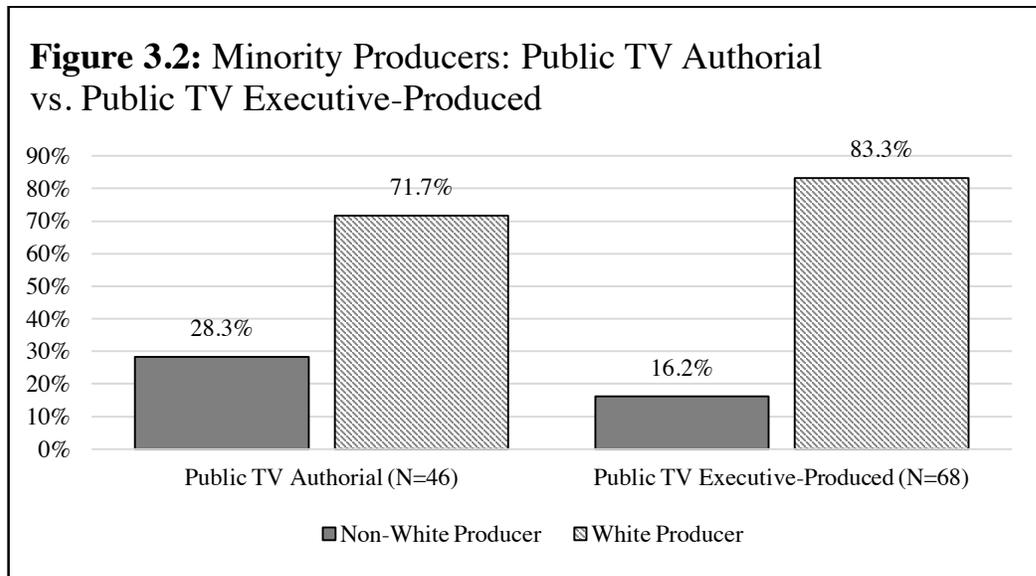
*p < .05

Minority Producers

Across all social-issue documentary TV categories examined, the majority of programs have at least one white producer: 72% white in public TV authorial (28% non-white), 58% white in commercial TV authorial (42% non-white), and 83% white in public TV executive-produced programs (16% non-white). Figure 3 illustrates the inclusion of non-white producers across all programs. However, in terms of the inclusion of minority producers between public TV authorial and commercial TV authorial, we did not find a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 2.09$, $df = 1$, $p=0.15$). Figure 3.1 shows the comparison between public TV authorial and commercial TV authorial in terms of minority producers. Additionally, we did not find meaningful differences in terms of minority producers in public TV authorial and public TV executive-produced programming ($\chi^2 = 2.41$, $df = 1$, $p=0.12$). Figure 3.2 shows the comparison between public TV authorial and public TV executive-produced formats.

Figures 3, 3.1, 3.2: Minority Producers



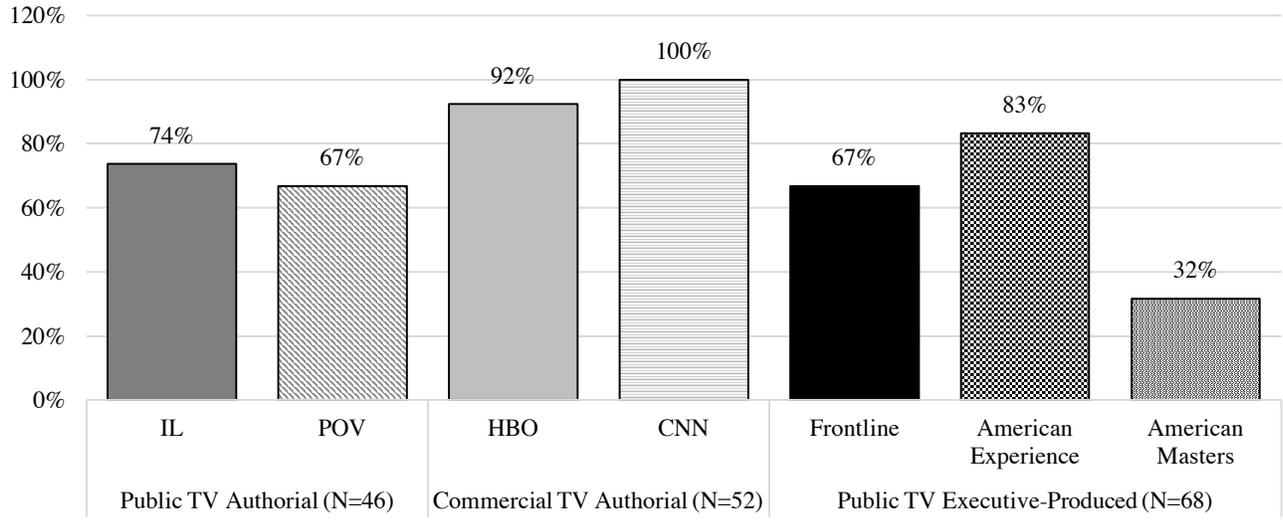


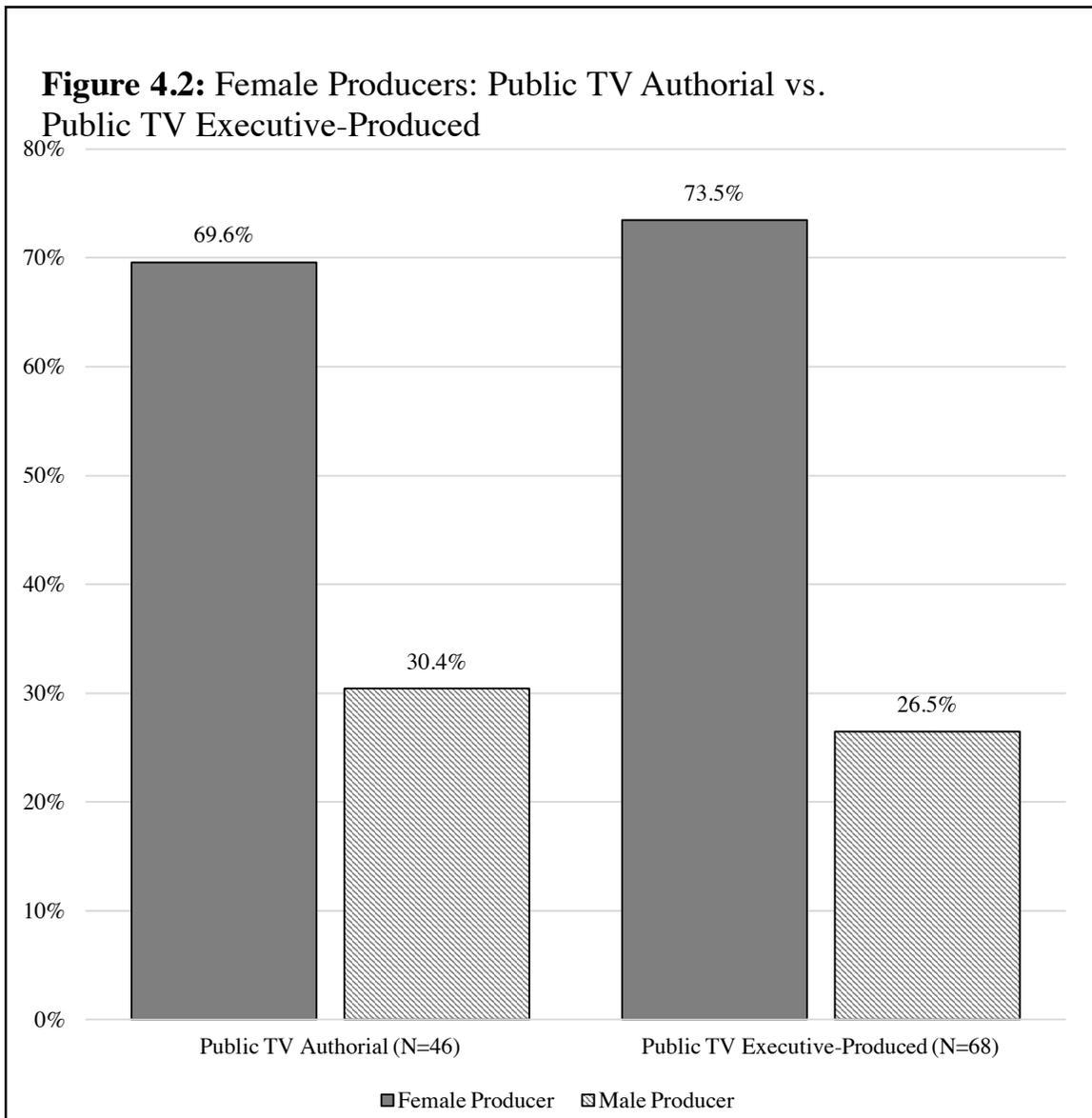
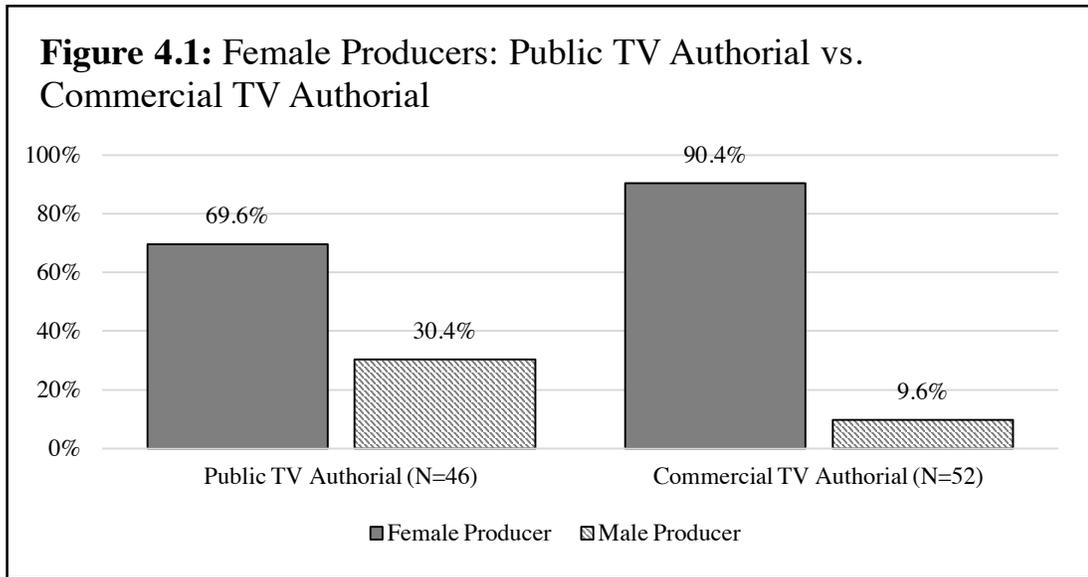
Female Producers

Commercial TV authorial programs were significantly more likely to distribute work produced by female producers than public TV authorial programming ($\chi^2 = 6.77$, $df = 1$, $p = .009$). Figure 4.1 illustrates the comparison of female producers in authorial public TV compared to authorial commercial TV. There were no significant differences, however, between “public TV authorial” and “public TV executive-produced” programming in terms of female producers ($\chi^2 = 0.21$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.64$). Figure 4.2 shows the comparison of female producers in authorial public TV versus executive-produced public TV.

Figures 4, 4.1, 4.2: Female Producers

Figure 4: Female Producers





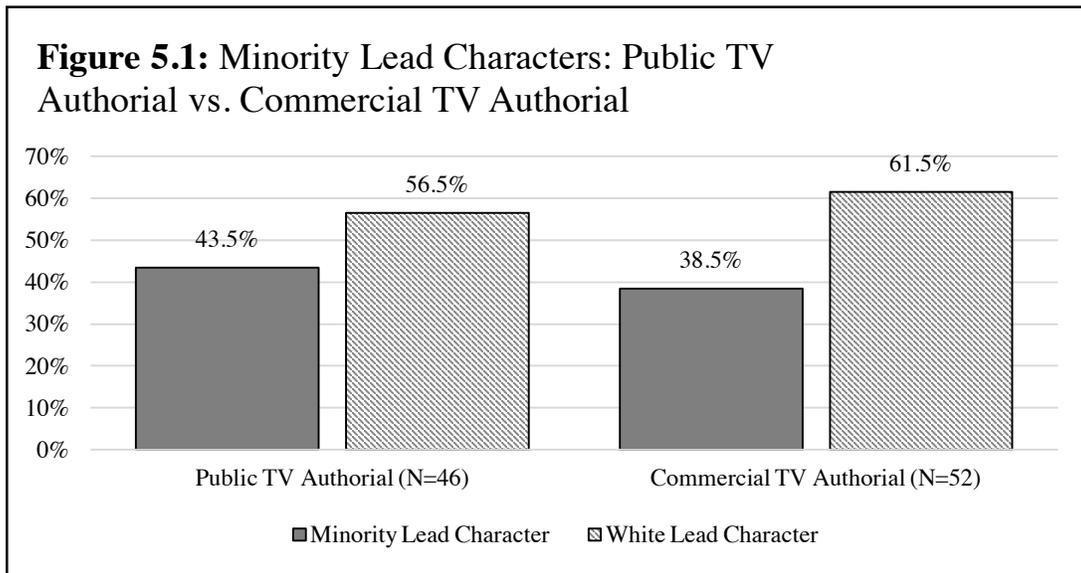
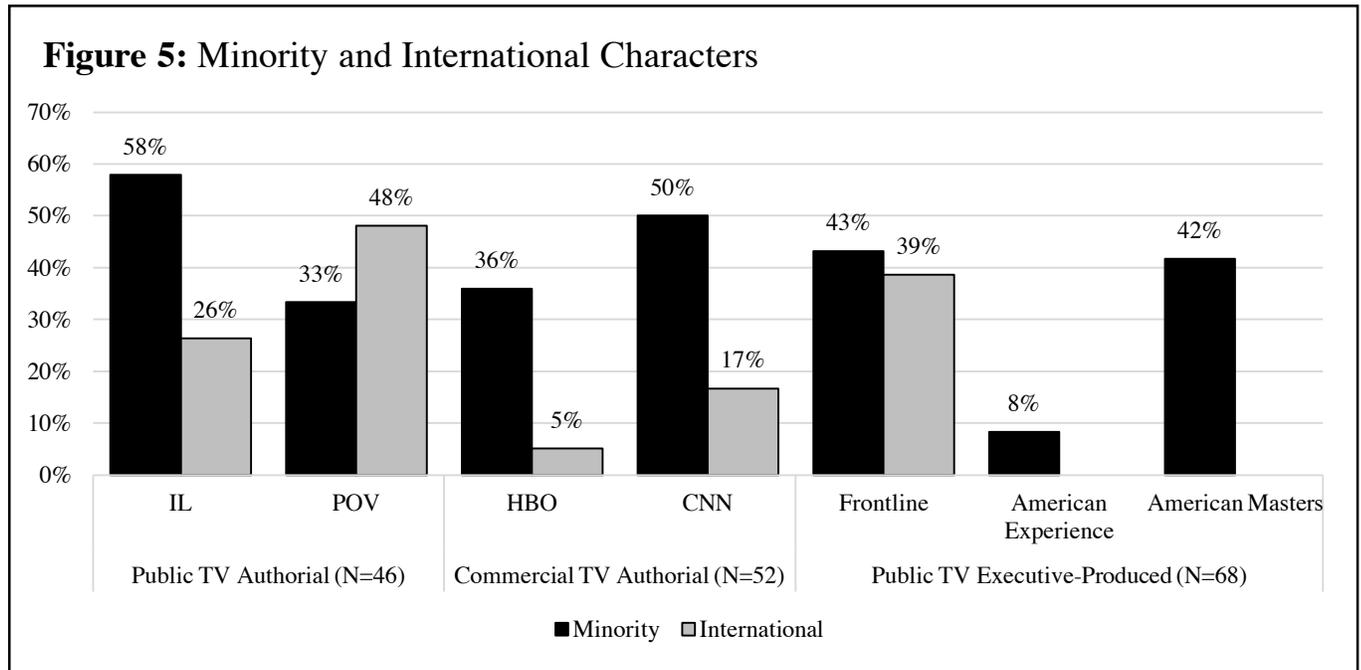
Minority Lead Characters

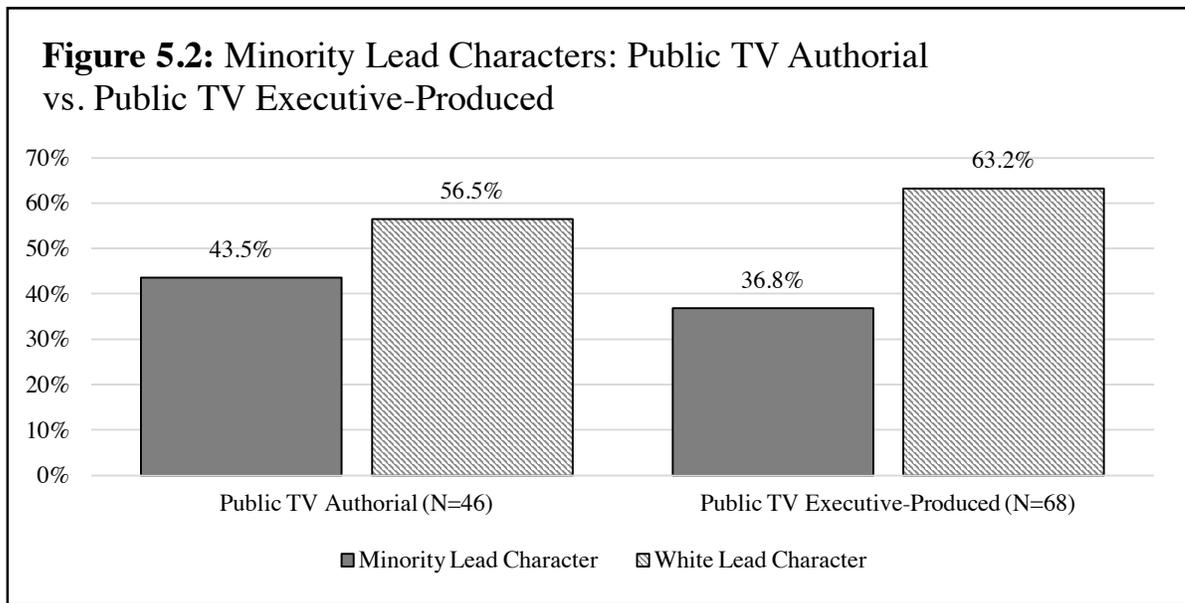
Minority lead characters are slightly better represented in public authorial series than in commercial authorial series, but not at a level of statistical significance.

Independent Lens and *POV* together have 44% of programs with at least one leading minority character, while HBO and CNN have 40% of programs with at least minority character.

Executive-produced public series vary widely. About 43% of *FRONTLINE* programs feature a leading minority character, and *American Masters*, which showcases famous talent including African Americans Misty Copeland and Quincy Jones, has 42%. But only 8% (or one film) of *American Experience* programming featured a minority major character. Figure 5 showcases minority and international major characters across all programs and formats. We did not find statistically significant differences between public TV authorial and commercial TV authorial formats with regard to minority major characters ($\chi^2 = 0.25$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.61$). Figure 5.1 illustrates the comparison of public TV and commercial TV authorial programs for minority lead characters. Similarly, we did not find statistically significant differences between public TV authorial and public TV commercial formats with regard to minority lead characters ($\chi^2 = 0.52$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.47$). Figure 5.2 shows the comparison of public TV authorial and public TV executive-produced formats in terms of minority lead characters.

Figures 5, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4: Characters: Minority and International



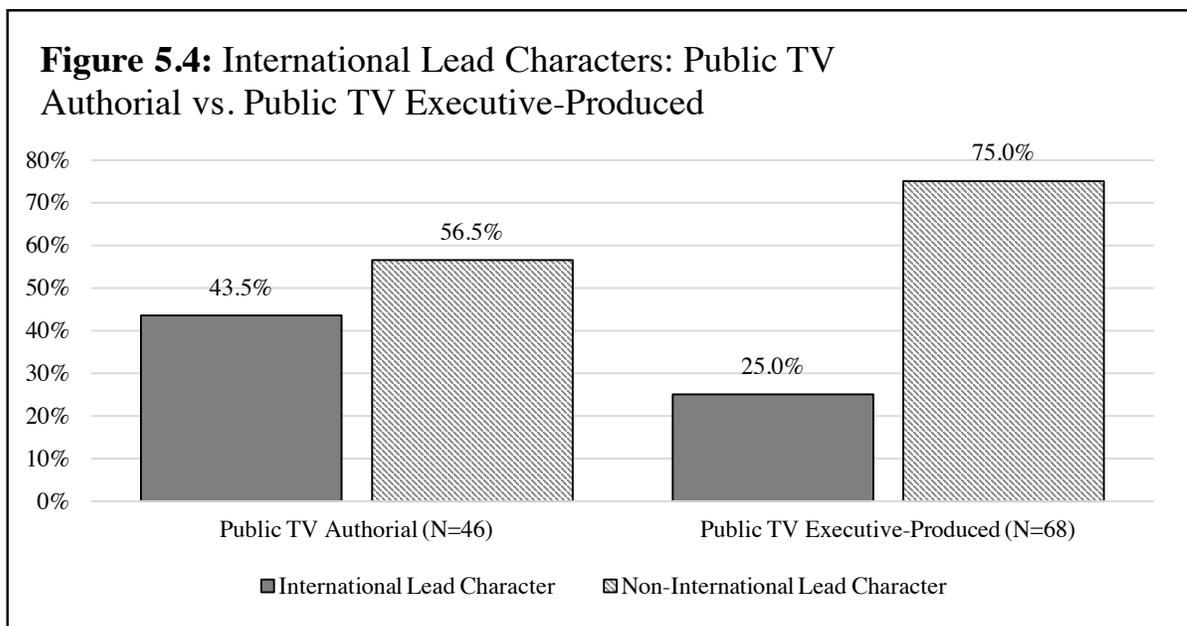
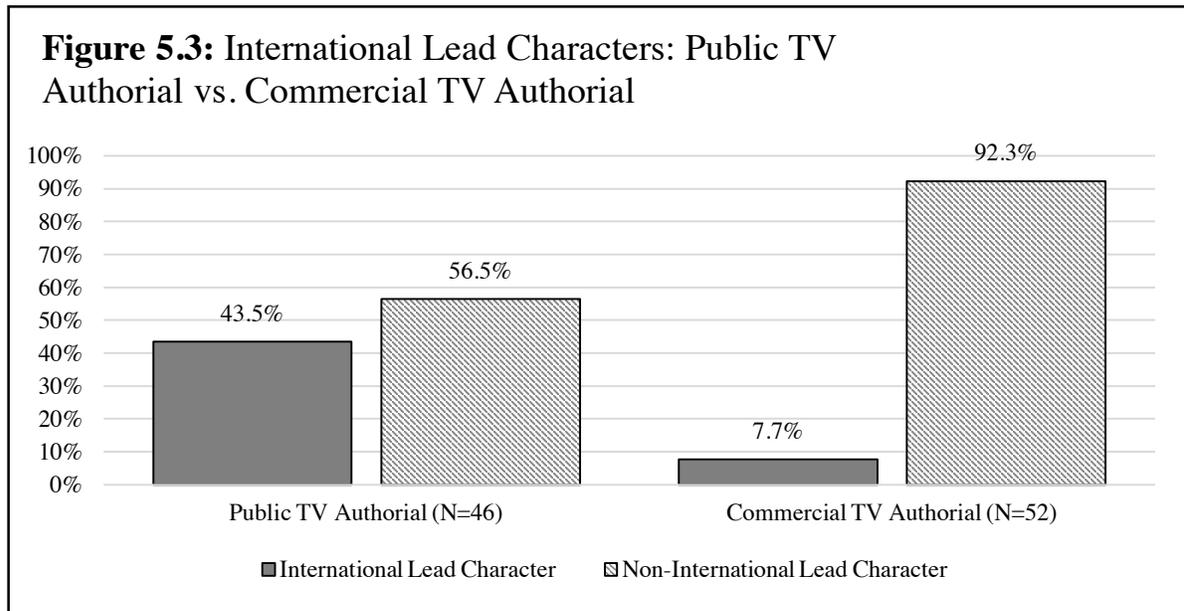


International Characters of Color

Commercial TV series are considerably more parochial than public broadcasting. HBO and CNN together only featured 8% of programs with a major international character of color. By contrast, *Independent Lens* and *POV* had 39% of their programs with such a character. Executive-produced public series differed widely. *FRONTLINE* also featured 39% of programs with an international character of color, expectably for a public affairs program. *American Masters* did not have any, and *American Experience* had one program, *Last Days in Vietnam*, which featured an international setting but characters who immigrated to the U.S. and thus were counted as U.S. minorities. Public TV authorial programs were significantly more likely to distribute work featuring international lead characters than commercial TV authorial programming ($\chi^2 = 13.86$, $df = 1$, $p = .0001$). Figure 5.3 illustrates the comparison between authorial public TV programming and authorial commercial TV programming. However, we did not find meaningful differences in terms of international lead characters in public TV authorial

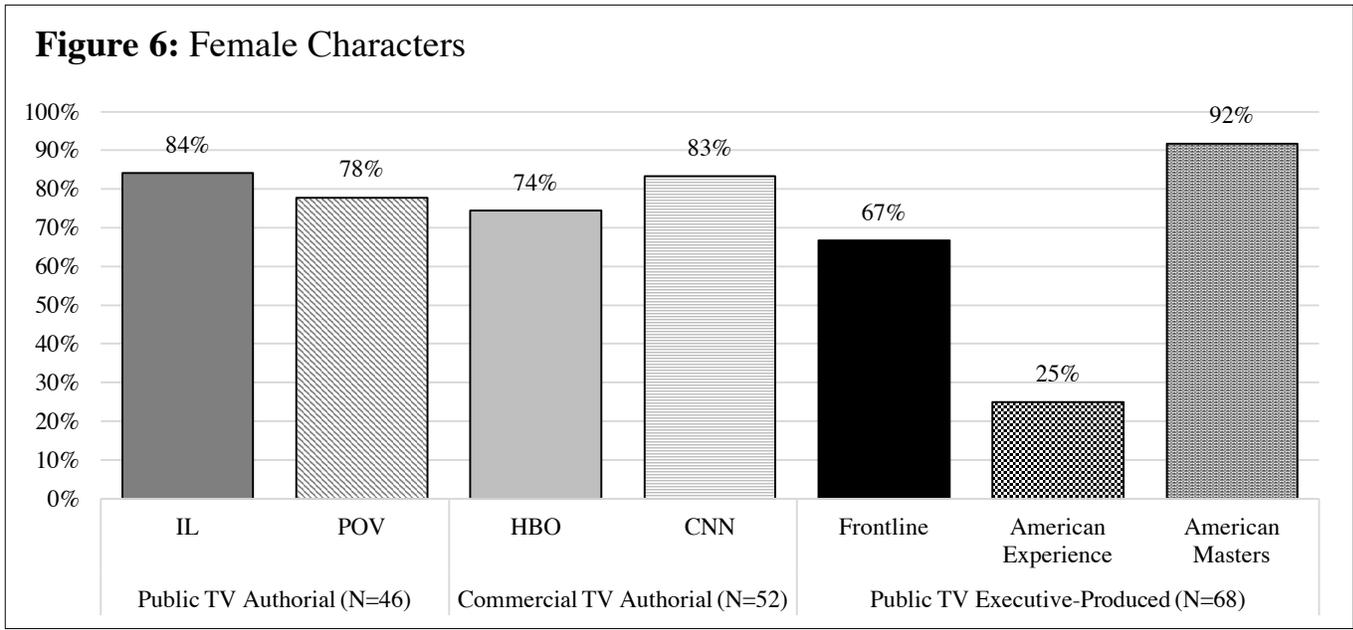
compared to public TV executive-produced programming ($\chi^2 = 2.58, df = 1, p=0.11$).

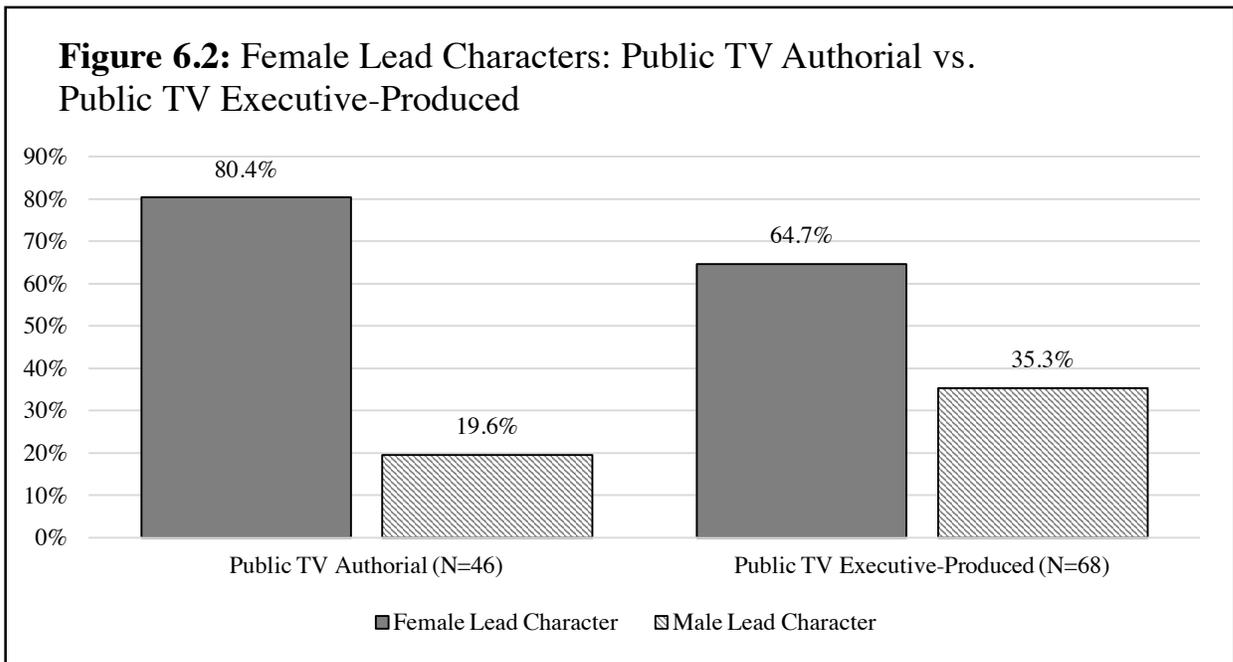
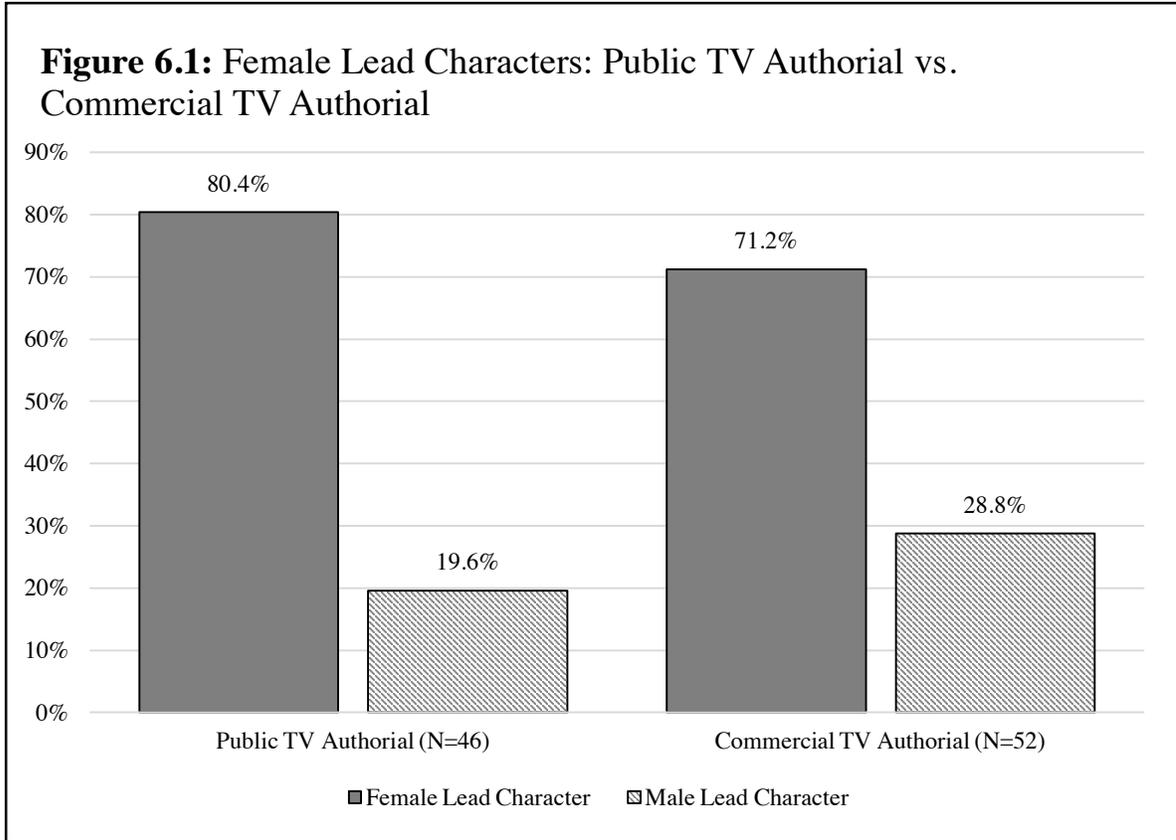
Figure 5.4 shows the comparison between authorial public TV and executive-produced public TV formats.



Female Lead Characters

Authorial series on commercial and public TV both showcase many women as major characters, relative to males as lead characters; 80% of public TV authorial programs and 71% of commercial TV authorial programs include women in this way. However, we found no statistically significant differences between commercial or public TV on this issue ($\chi^2 = 1.14, df = 1, p = 0.29$), or between public TV authorial vs. executive-produced programming ($\chi^2 = 3.30, df = 1, p=0.07$). Figure 6 illustrates female major characters across all programming formats and titles. Figure 6.1 illustrates the comparison between public TV authorial and commercial TV authorial with regard to female major characters. Figure 6.2 shows the comparison between public TV authorial and public TV executive-produced formats.





Discussion

In a still-evolving digital media landscape, with marketplace competition from cable TV and online streaming networks, public TV in the U.S. maintains its original mandate to uphold a public interest mission. Such a mission includes showcasing documentary programming that reflects the U.S. during a period of demographic transition. Featuring diverse storytellers—directors and producers—and telling diverse stories on screen can serve this mission.

In this study, we make an original contribution by articulating and examining two types of social-issues documentaries based on the decision-making power of the storytellers: “authorial” documentaries, or those produced externally and acquired by TV networks, and “executive-produced” documentaries, or those produced largely inside the TV networks. We identified two main creative positions in social-issue documentary production—directors and producers—although they serve distinct roles in the decision-making process. Directors are responsible for the vision, direction, argument and perspective of the work. Both decision-making authority and recognition come to the director. Producers, on the other hand, serve in a kind of workhorse role in independent documentary production, although the nature of the work is highly varied. Being a producer can include writing a grant proposal, making a partnership connection, arranging the logistics of a shoot, finding the personnel for post-production, directing shoots in the field or more. Many producers frequently contribute creatively to the project, but the producer executes the vision of the director, and does not necessarily get the recognition or other rewards for the creative vision or the completed work. Women and minorities are often found in this role, which can often relegate them to work without

the same level of public recognition for their work, which is relevant to finding new career opportunities in documentary production.

Compared with census data and demographics from other parts of television, both women and minorities in the U.S. are underrepresented as documentary directors on U.S. TV. Looking at our two main hypotheses, we found varied results in terms of inclusion and representation for both women and racial/ethnic minorities as key creative decision-makers (directors and producers) and as major characters. In terms of our first hypothesis—that is, that authorial formats in public TV would be more diverse than authorial works in commercial TV, because of public TV’s historic diversity mandate—we find some limited evidence. Authorial public TV is significantly more likely to showcase works by non-white minority directors than authorial commercial TV, and is also more likely to include major international characters than authorial commercial TV. However, when compared to commercial authorial TV, authorial public TV is not significantly more likely to showcase works by female directors, or to include major minority lead characters. In fact, commercial authorial TV is more likely than public authorial TV to spotlight work of female producers. This finding, however, may be seen as evidence of the lesser workhorse role. With regard to our second hypothesis—that is, that authorial public TV would be more diverse than executive-produced public TV, given decision-making power with independent producers in the former category—we find that public TV authorial programming is significantly more likely to showcase works by non-white minority directors than executive-produced public TV, offering some validation. No other meaningful differences were revealed in our analysis for this category.

Examining statistically significant differences between social-issue documentary categories alone fails to capture the complete portrait of diversity in social-issue documentary. To delve deeper, we consider a larger aggregate portrait.

Authorial public TV series offer a bigger showcase for both women and minorities than executive-produced programs or cable TV. The public, authorial series *Independent Lens* and *POV* consistently demonstrate greater participation from women and minorities as directors, compared with other series. The focus on “authorial” compared with “executive-produced” is meaningful, as they convey decision-making power in the issues and storytelling ultimately experienced by the viewing audience. In the case of “authorial” documentaries, creative decisions are made by independent producers who are not employed by the distributing broadcaster, and therefore, may be assumed to be free of internal decision-making politics and to be reflective of their communities. In the case of “executive-produced” documentaries, creative decisions are made by executives employed by the distributing broadcaster, not by independent producers reflecting their communities and realities.

Women are overrepresented both in commercial and public TV documentary series as producers, and minorities are overrepresented as producers in commercial series. These are the areas of production that get less credit and have less decision-making authority. No public TV series has as much minority and female participation among producers as do HBO and CNN.

Considering lead characters, public authorial series are more likely to carry programs that showcase at least one minority character than any other category, either cable authorial or executive-produced public TV. They are about as likely as commercial TV to have a

program that showcases at least one female character. Public TV is more likely to feature programs with at least one international character of color than cable TV; authorial public TV is most dependably international.

Thus, both public TV and authorial voices matter in increasing diversity, and the two categories together make it much more likely. Both *Independent Lens* and *POV* far outstrip other public TV series and cable TV series in showcasing minority-status directors and characters. Independent voices bring diversity to U.S. TV viewers, both in terms of gender, and international and minority-status perspectives. Across all categories of programming, though, creative decision-making roles are dominated by white, male directors and female workhorse producers.

More generally, this study shows the value of independent filmmakers and the programs that showcase them, *Independent Lens* and *POV*, to a service that is partly funded by national, state and local tax dollars. As well they validate the claims of the Corporate for Public Broadcasting on its website that “Digital, Diversity, and Dialogue are the framework for public media's service to America” and that it was founded “to champion the principles of diversity and excellence of programming, responsiveness to local communities, and service to all.” This study also demonstrates the fragility of that claim, since neither of the two series have commitments from many of the public TV stations to be carried at feed, nor do they have a commitment from PBS for a stable place in the prime-time lineup. Other public TV documentary series do not demonstrate a commitment to diversity in either makers or characters.

Public TV’s authorial series offer both minority and women directors opportunities not as evident elsewhere. This is in great part because the space created and

maintained for them on public TV has been so zealously fought for by women and minority producers, funders and non-profit allies. Such pressure could not have been brought at all upon commercial entities such as HBO and CNN. This was a point that one of the veteran organizers of independent documentary pressure actions, Kartemquin production house co-founder Gordon Quinn, made consistently in the latest round of conflict. “We value public TV,” he said in a public hearing, “because when we have something to say, you have to listen—because you’re public. You are accountable, because you are taxpayer-funded” (Author removed for anonymity, 2015). Thus, the productive tension between independent filmmakers and the public TV system, focused on diversity, generates an important public-sphere effect. But the site for this work is precarious.

Limitations

This study’s conclusions are built primarily on one-season’s data, with some support from a previous, one-season study the year before. They measure only whether at least one female or member of a minority group appeared as a maker or character, with comparisons from a previous, more limited study. Thus, conclusions from this data are limited. One might like to know if inclusion of racial/ethnic minorities as directors or producers makes a difference in showcasing people of color as lead characters and storylines, and which roles are influential. But this study, limited by resources, does not distinguish between different roles of producers, nor does it identify which productions might be more heavily staffed with women or minorities, since it only assesses whether at least one member of the group was included in the category. (We strongly suspect that if the total number of women and minorities were included, the authorial public TV

programs would be even more strongly differentiated.) One might also like to know if today's producers are tomorrow's directors, but that would need, at a minimum, longitudinal data. We strongly believe similar studies to this one, providing such comparative data, would be useful. One might want to differentiate between a minority subject who is already famous, such as Misty Copeland, and a minority subject whose story would otherwise be unknown, since it is easier to market a film with celebrities in it, but this would need closer content analysis than we had the resources to do.

Conclusions

Public TV is currently not demonstrating a system-wide commitment to diversity. Nor, with recent competition from cable channels and evidence here of significant representation of women and minority producers, and in some cases characters, on cable authorial series, can it claim to be a unique site for the stories that traditionally have been neglected by commercial television programmers.

The results of this study suggest that U.S. public television, while still a uniquely valuable place for minority and women independent makers and a site for storytelling that otherwise may not reach television publics, has competition from cable, particularly for more established makers and for women. Although commercial television does not feature as many women and minority directors as public authorial TV, it employs more women and minorities in secondary roles than public authorial series do. Although public TV's independent series showcase many more international figures of color than commercial and outdistance commercial TV for stories featuring women and U.S. minorities, commercial TV showcases more such stories than some other leading public TV documentary series.

Public TV has ready material to bolster its claim to diversity. But while *Independent Lens* and *POV* outperform commercial series in giving leadership roles to women and minorities, and showcasing them in speaking roles, public TV does not support them with secure placement on the PBS schedule or with encouragement from PBS to increase station carriage. Nor do other public TV series or PBS repeat the diversity pattern evident in public TV's authorial programs in other documentary series. Without such a claim, commercial TV can offer stiff rivalry for some of those productions. They are most likely to select the ones easiest to promote, which are rarely the diverse, underrepresented voices. At risk, both on cable and on public TV, are first-time filmmakers, voices from the hinterlands, perspectives that lack easy promotion and diverse issues shielded by conventional wisdom from mainstream media.

Diversity, particularly brought by independent voices, would reinvigorate and integrate into the core of public TV organizations' operations the diversity mandate that played such an important role in its creation and is now kept alive primarily by strenuous grassroots political pressure.

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