

BY ALEXANDRIA PALMER

# CHANGING GENDER REPRESENTATIONS IN TELEVISION



**Representation** is how media texts deal with and present gender, age, ethnicity, national and regional identity, social issues and events to an audience.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

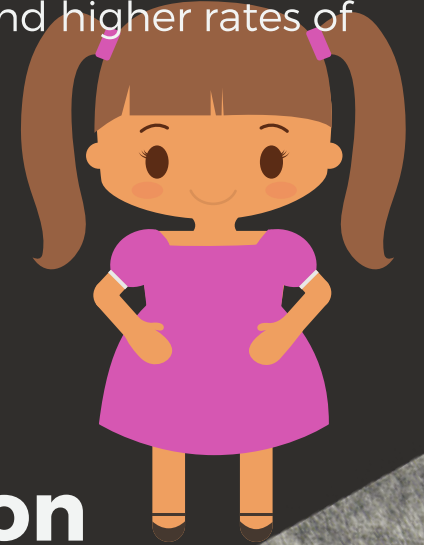
Media texts have the power to shape an audience's knowledge and understanding about these important topics. (BBC)

## WHO IS CREATING TELEVISION?

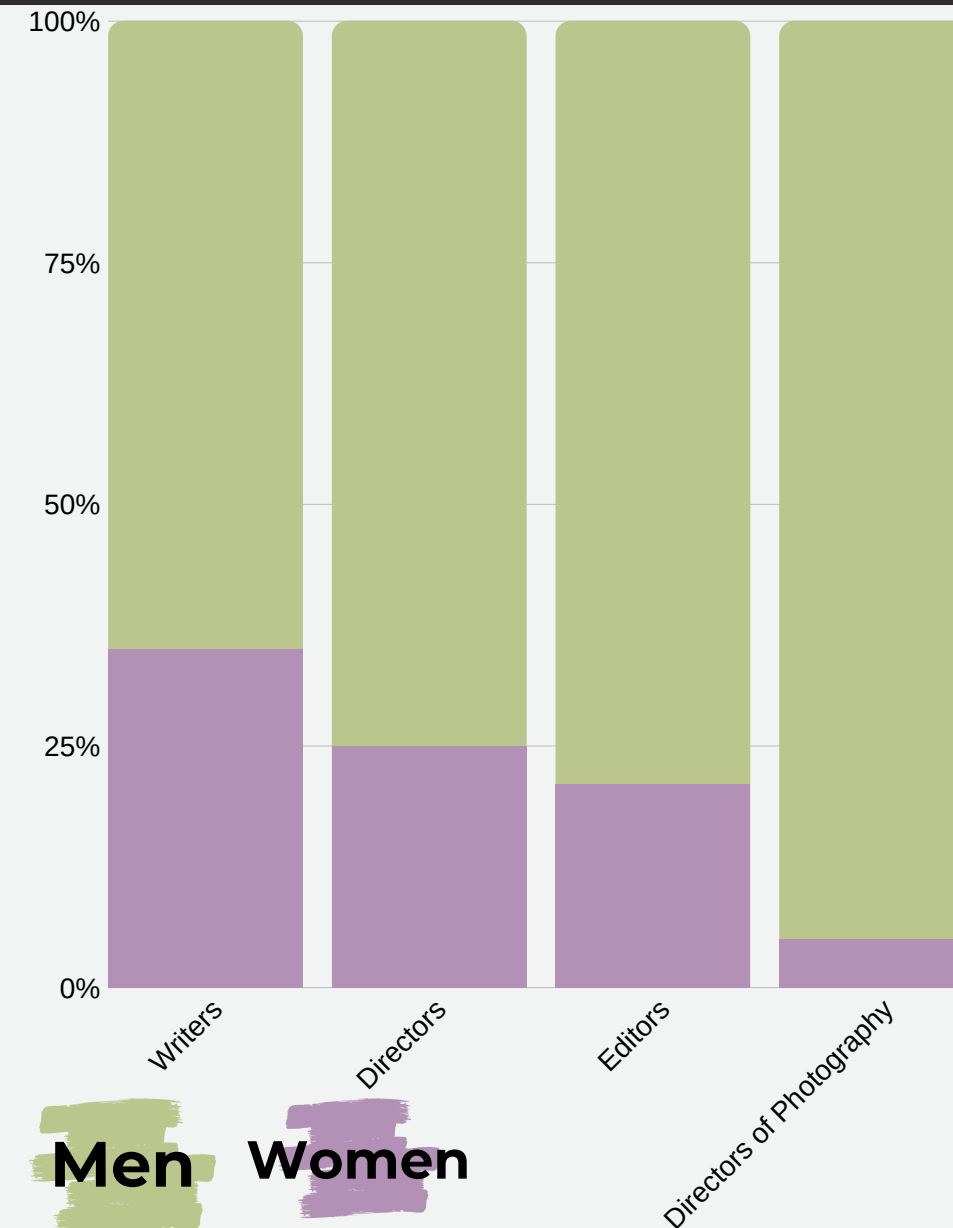
The television and film industry are notoriously male dominated fields. The lack of female representation as writers, directors, producers, etc. mean men are predominately telling women's stories.

**Children** are now more and more frequently exposed to media and representations of what it means to be a man or women in society. These **stereotypes** are particularly **damaging** to young women and can cause lower ambition in school, lower career achievement, body issues and higher rates of depression. (Fredrickson)

*"Women on screen are more likely to play "personal life-oriented roles," while men on screen were more likely to play "work-oriented" roles." (Boboltz)*

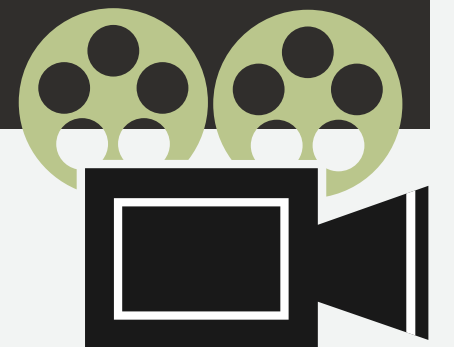


**Representation = Inspiration**



## FILM IS EVEN WORSE!

Female film directors nearly doubled from 2016 to 2017 – but only to about 12.6 percent of all directors. (Blair)



# Representations of Women, Written by Men...

## CHARLIE'S ANGELS (AIRED 76' - 81')

Three beautiful women fight crime for their mysterious male boss. The original TV show features rampant objectification of women and the use of rape lightheartedly.

*"There's objectification of women; careless, casual portrayal of violence toward women; and then lines written for said women to minimize // pretend like the above violence never happened. What the hell did that teach the audience?"*

*(Phelan)*

## STEREOTYPES OF WOMEN

- Thin and beautiful
- Soft spoken
- Sexualized
- Mother or Wife
- Emotional
- Passive



*(Photo by ABC Photo Archives/ABC via Getty Images)*

# Representations of Women, Written by Women...

## ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK

This show is based on Piper Kerman's memoir about her time in prison and was adapted for television by Jenji Kohan. It's writing focuses on a women's prison and the stories of each of the women and how they got where they are.

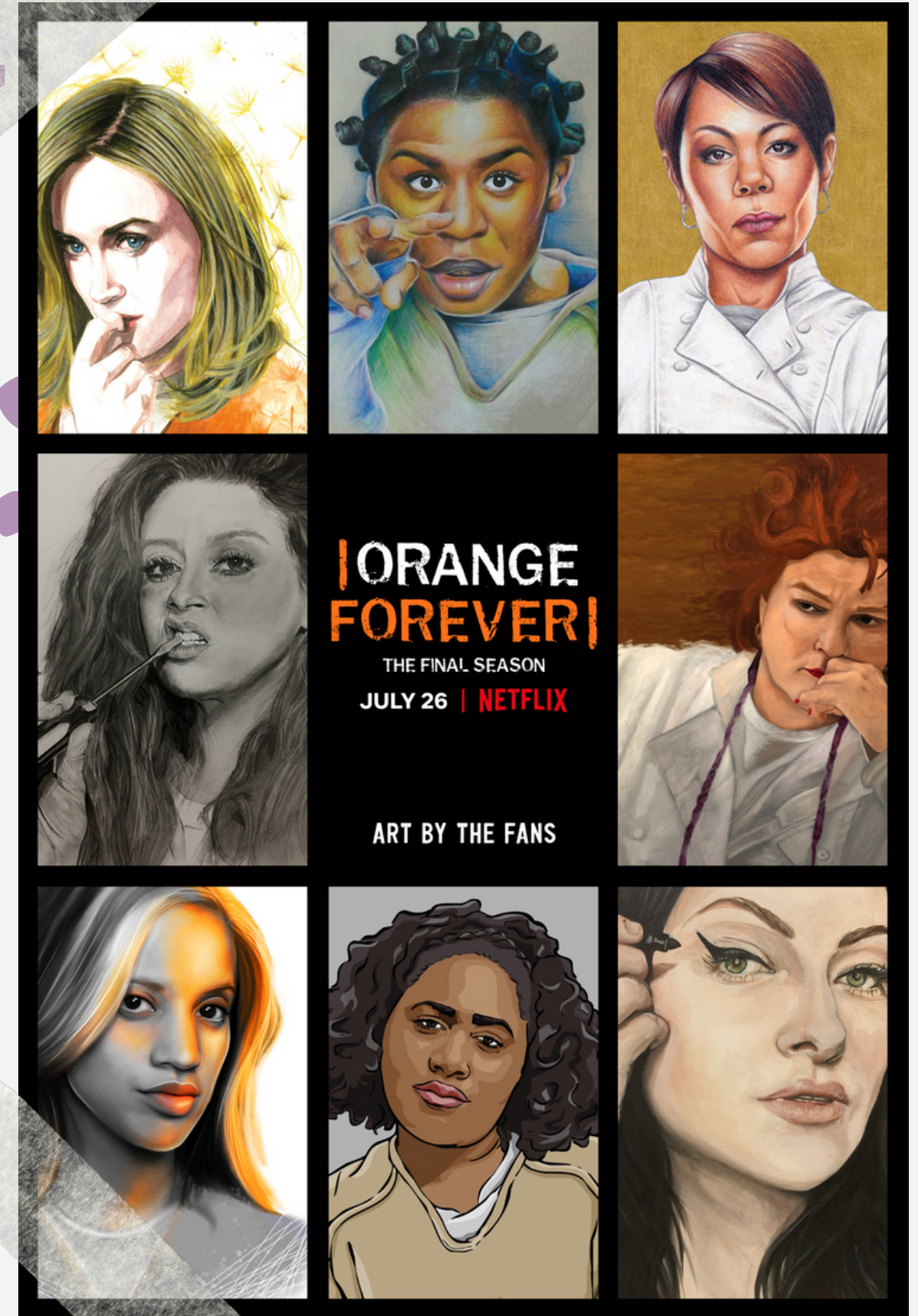
It takes place in a prison which has usually been a masculine setting and the characters consistently break stereotypes.

## BECHDEL TEST

The Bechdel test is a pass or fail test which gages gender equality in film and television. It is based on three very simple details. **It must:**

- 1) have at least two women in it, who
- 2) talk to each other, about
- 3) something other than a man.

"Orange broke the mold in just about every conceivable way. When it came to **representation**, this wasn't merely the first prestige show since *The Wire* built around poor and nonwhite people—or the rare program intended for a general audience that featured more than a token queer regular. It also endowed each of these characters with **stereotype-defying** specificity... For once, women whom mainstream society habitually ignored were being represented in pop culture as individuals with **virtues** and **flaws**, rather than as a monolithic mass of degenerates or vixens." (Berman, 2019)



# Bibliography



Berman, J. (2019, July 22). Orange Is the New Black Is the Decade's Most Important Show. Retrieved from <https://time.com/5631804/orange-is-the-new-black-season-7-legacy/>.

This article looks at how the show Orange Is the New Black has pushed boundaries in television and portrayed women in a non-stereotypical way. It's not merely not sexualizing women but its showing storylines with trans women and women of color who are very under-represented in television. I used this show as an example of how media created by women can show broader and deeper stories regarding women.

Blair, E. (2019, February 21). Hollywood Diversity Report Finds Progress, But Much Left To Gain. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/21/696471501/hollywood-diversity-report-finds-progress-but-much-left-to-gain>.

This article talks about the lack of diversity in Hollywood media productions. In a diversity report, it found women and people largely under-represented behind the camera and in production. I used this information to show that although television representation is sub-par, film production is even worse.

Boboltz, S. (2017, September 12). TV Still Perpetuates A Whole Mess Of Gender Stereotypes. Retrieved from [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/tv-gender-stereotypes-boxed-in-report-2017\\_n\\_59b814cce4b02da0e13cac47](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/tv-gender-stereotypes-boxed-in-report-2017_n_59b814cce4b02da0e13cac47).

This article talks about gender stereotypes in television which depict women in stereotypical roles such as mother, homemaker, caretaker while men are more likely to be successful in their careers and breadwinners. It adds that this might be due to the lack of women behind the camera. I added a quote from the article regarding those representations and how they affect children's perceptions of gender.

# Bibliography



Frederickson, A. (2017). 73.2 Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice: Gender Representation in Media. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 56(10), S108.

This article assesses the damage to children by representations in the media they are consuming. The availability of the internet has expanded and children are growing up seeing many more different types of content. The stereotypes of boys and girls can be damaging to young girls' self-esteem and can have lasting effects. I reworded this information in my slide to show why representation on camera and behind the scenes is important.

Garber, M. (2015, August 25). How the Standard for Women in Culture Became Known as the 'Bechdel Test'. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/08/call-it-the-bechdel-wallace-test/402259/>.

This article talks about the Bechdel Test which gauges how gender equal a piece of film or television is. Surprisingly, many films have, and still do, fail the very simple test. The idea of it shows that many narratives are written with women as props rather than complex human characters. I used this on the slide about women creating narratives in television to make the point that many current shows and films don't even pass this simple test.

Goff, Ivan. (Creator) Roberts, Ben. (Creator). (1976). *Charlie's angles* [Television series]. Beverly Hills, CA: ABC.

*Charlie's Angels* is a show that's been rebooted several times now. The original has the same premise as the others, three beautiful women are detectives who fight crime together. This version, however, comes off as dated and sexist in its writing. I used this show as an example of sexist representations of women in male-created and written television.

# Bibliography



Kohan, Jenji. (Creator). (2014). Orange is the new black [Television series]. Santa Monica, CA: Netflix.

Orange Is the New Black is a show based on a memoir by Piper Kerman called Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison. I used this show as an example of television shows written and/or created by women and how they tend to show broader and more complex representations of women and people of color.

Lauzen, Martha M. Boxed In 2018-19: Women On Screen and Behind the Scenes in Television. Retrieved from [https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2018-19\\_Boxed\\_In\\_Report.pdf](https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2018-19_Boxed_In_Report.pdf)

This report looks at representations of women who work behind the scenes in the production of television. It is based on the most recent year's data from television productions. I used this data to create a bar graph that shows the disparity between women and men in different roles behind the scenes.

Phelan, Hayley. A Feminist Re-Watches Charlie's Angels. Retrieved from <https://www.manrepeller.com/2016/10/charlies-angels-sexism.html>

This article reviews the original Charlie's Angels as the writer re-watched the program. She writes that she had remembered the beautiful fashion from the old show but on second watch she now notices the rampant sexism. I use this as an example of men writing about women through the male gaze.

# Bibliography

What is Representation? - GCSE Media Studies Revision - BBC Bitesize. (n.d.). Retrieved December 6, 2019, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z9fx39q/revision/1>.

This article from BBC looks at what representation means, specifically in media, and its power to change perception. It details how these representations of gender are formed using audio, visual cues, etc. I used this information to define representation on my slide and states its power to change understanding.

