

# Why

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Count

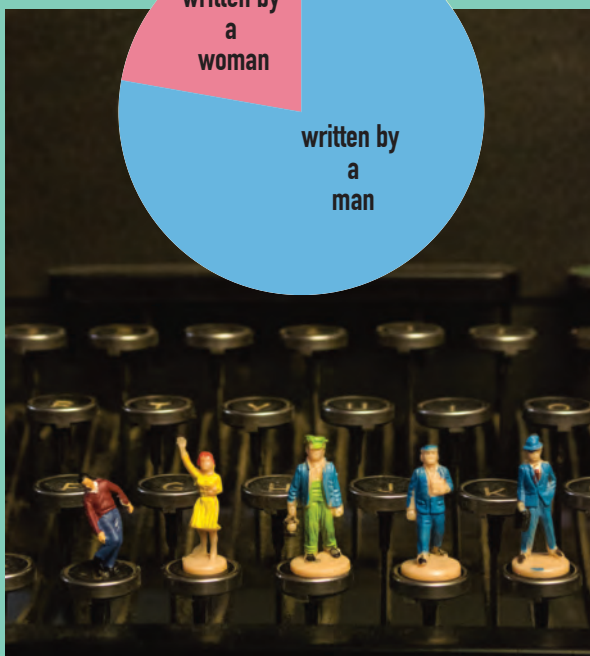
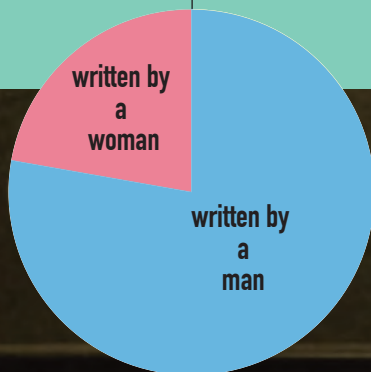
# Matters

**T**he Count is an ongoing study that asks the question, “Who Is Being Produced In American Theatres?” It is presented here for the first time using three years of data from productions in regional theatres in America. As you will learn later, only 22% of those productions were written by women. This means that **if life worked like the theatre, four out of five things you had ever heard would have been said by men.** That means you would have missed a lot, given the kinds of things you learn from women. And why are we missing the voices of women in the theatre? There is one simple answer: artistic directors and producers choose not to present their plays. Our task from here on is to determine how best to change the way people make the choices that silence the voices of women.

Sadly enough, this silencing is not limited to the theatre. At NPR, for example, in a

survey much like our Count, it was found that the percentage of women being interviewed, doing the interviewing or being the subject of the story – was exactly 20%. In the art museums, 80% of the art hanging on the walls is by men. The women’s work is stored in the basement. In orchestras, until the advent of blind auditions, 20% of the players were women. This 20% number is the real ceiling we are fighting in our lives and in our careers today. So what do we miss if we do not hear the voices of women? Half of life, that’s what. It would be like ignoring the stories of everything that happens in the night. Or the day. Women have lived half of the experience of the world, but only 20% of it is reported in the theaters. Imagine if the newspapers only presented 20% of the news. Well,

we can argue about how much they really cover. And I’ll tell you already, if you hadn’t guessed, that 20% of the news stories concern women, and are written by women. What we want is 50% of the airtime, 50% of the walls of the museum, 50% of the stage time in the




theaters and on the movie screens. We want life in the arts to represent life as it is lived in the world. We want to hear the whole human chorus, not just the tenors, basses and baritones.

Let's talk about the dangers of not hearing the voices of women. There are countries where the voices of women are completely silenced or drastically imperiled or threatened. Kept hidden and cloaked. Kept inside. And these countries, mainly in Africa and the Middle East are what? That's right, they are constant battlegrounds. Because women are not allowed to speak or to participate in the speaking, the men are just out there killing each other all the time.

When women's voices are silenced, the culture goes into what a UN friend of mine calls testosterone poisoning. I don't have to explain what that is, do I? It fills up the TV screens night after night. And until women's voices are heard in those lands, they are doomed to eternal warfare. Because it is women who say, let's try to understand people who are different from us, let's listen to what they have to say, let's find a way that they can live their lives and we can live ours. Let's work it out, so the children can survive. When men's voices are the only ones heard, the children are in grave danger. A world run by women would be a vastly different place. I am not saying the American theatre is overcome by testosterone poisoning. But I am saying that when women's voices are silenced, it is not a safe world for anybody. Women are the safety valve on the culture.

When women first began writing for the American theatre – that is what I call the modern era, when Beth Henley and I started writing, we assumed this whole fight would be over with by now. But it isn't. So I am challenging all of you to help us hear the voices of women in the world. That is the purpose of *The Count*. Not to establish quotas, not

■ If life worked like the theater, 4 out of 5 things you had ever heard would have been said by men.

to shame and blame those people who continue to produce only the plays of men, but to assure that the voice of women will be heard in this land. The graph below illustrates this problem and shows exactly who has been produced and in what percentage over the last three years in America. And the data was so clear, we didn't even have to use last names. 



# Who's Getting Produce



## Methodology For The COUNT

In order to maintain accurate and comparable data, each year, we created criteria, controls, and rules for the theatres, productions, and writers. Our goal is to compare apples to apples each year. However, if better methodology is discovered we will be able to amend our process and back-date data. If a new theater is suggested for the study, and it meets all criteria, we will include the theatre in future studies.

### CRITERIA FOR THEATERS:

- › Not-for-profit, regional theatres that met our criteria were studied. This includes Off-Broadway, Off-Off Broadway, but not Broadway theatres.
- › Produced at least three plays or musicals each season.
- › Had at least a ten-year history of professionally producing plays or musicals.
- › Was routinely reviewed by national or regional press.
- › Must have had three productions that ran longer than 21 performances each season (not including previews).

### CONTROLS FOR PRODUCTIONS:

- › A revival was any production that is produced more than ten years after the premiere.
- › A new production was a play or musical that was produced as a premiere, or within ten years of the original premiere.
- › We counted each season as September 1 – August 31.
- › In the event a production spanned across multiple seasons, we counted the production in the season in which the greatest number of performances took place.
- › We did not count devised theatre productions.

### CONTROLS FOR WRITERS:

- › To ensure the data was not skewed toward greater gender imbalance by revivals of classic plays, we did not count the writers of plays or musicals who died more than 50 years before the production being counted.
- › Transgender writers were counted by the pronoun they used to self-identify at the time the counted production took place.
- › Race was determined by researching how writers chose to self-identify in interviews or on their websites.
- › For adapted plays or musicals we counted the adapter, not the writer/s of the original work.
- › For translated plays or musicals we counted the original writer/s, not the translator.
- › For plays or musicals with multiple writers we split one count by how many writers there were. (I.E. for a musical with librettist, lyricist, and composer, each writer would be credited with one third of a percentage point.)

### DATA SOURCES:

- › We collected data primarily from each individual theatre's website.
- › In the rare case the website did not contain all the needed information, we looked at production reviews, playwright websites, and Doolee.
- › If we could not pull data from these sources, we reached out to the theater or writer/s to self-identify.

### ANNUAL STUDY:

- › In this first incarnation of The Count, we studied three consecutive years in order to present a fuller look at the industry.
- › Moving forward we will release the annual study which will include the data from the current year as well as data from all previous years of the study.
- › The next season we report will be the 2014-2015 season.

## THE COUNT TIMELINE

**SEVERAL YEARS AGO**  
Marsha Norman and Julia Jordan conceive The COUNT.

**FEBRUARY 2014**  
The Lilly Awards and the Dramatists Guild decide to fund a collaborative project to see how many women are being produced in the US.



# Counted in the U.S.?

153 theatres  
1486 unique authors  
2508 productions

THE KEY

- 62.7% ● American white men
- 14.0% ● American white women
- 10.6% ● foreign white men
- 2.5% ● foreign white women
- 6.0% ● American men of color
- 3.4% ● American women of color
- 0.4% ● foreign men of color
- 0.4% ○ foreign women of color

**JUNE 2014**  
DG Regional Reps, DG Ambassadors, and DG Staff make recommendations of theaters to include in The COUNT.

**SEPTEMBER 2014**  
First round data collection begins. Data collected by DG Regional Reps, DG Ambassadors, DG Staff, DG members, and DG Interns.

**DEC 2014/JAN 2015**  
Volunteers double check original data.

**FEBRUARY 2015**  
Work with statistician to review the data.

**MAY 2015**  
Present information to DG Council.

**JULY 2015**  
Announce results of The COUNT at the DG National Conference in La Jolla, CA.

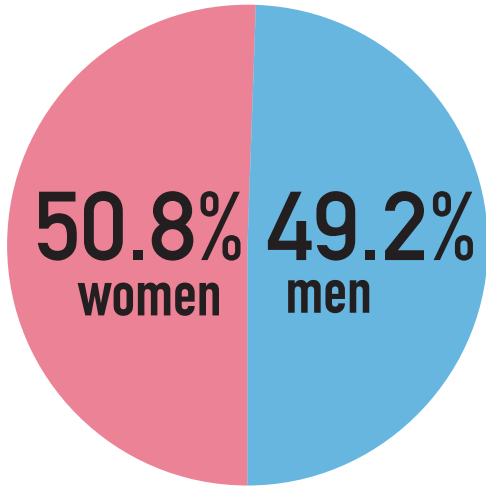
**NOV 2015**  
First annual report published.

THREE SEASONS  
2011-2012  
2012-2013  
2013-2014

**UNIQUE WRITERS:** These statistics represent each writer as one individual to be counted. Even though *Intimate Apparel* was produced several times by several theaters, Lynn Nottage is counted as a unique writer once.

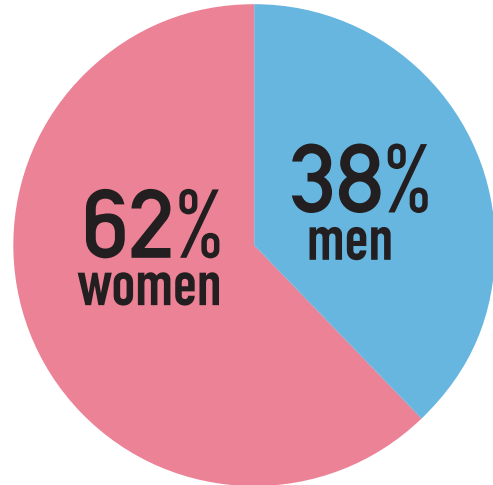
**UNIQUE PRODUCTIONS:** These statistics represent each production of a specific play or musical as a distinct production. Each time *Intimate Apparel* was presented is counted as a separate production.

U.S. GENDER



SOURCE: UNITED STATES CENSUS 2013

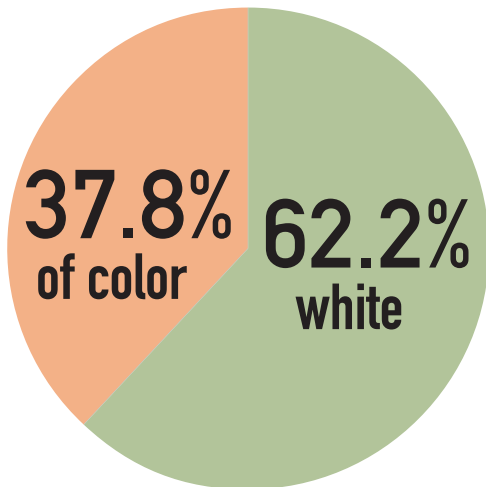
GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF 2013 BACHELOR'S DEGREES



SOURCE: AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES 2013

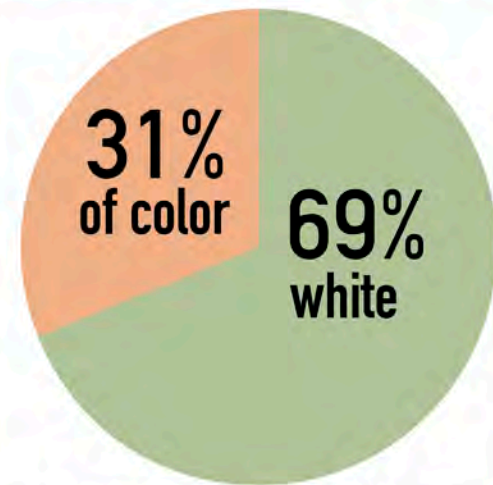
\*The percentage of gender has been tracked and stayed steady around 60% since 1967

U.S. RACE



SOURCE: UNITED STATES CENSUS 2013

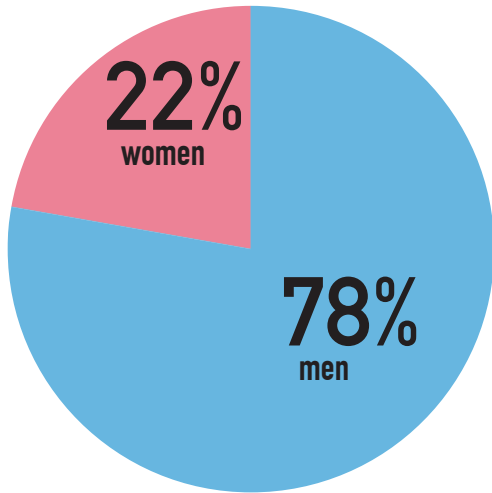
RACIAL/ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION OF 2013 BACHELOR'S DEGREE RECIPIENTS IN THE FINE & PERFORMING ARTS



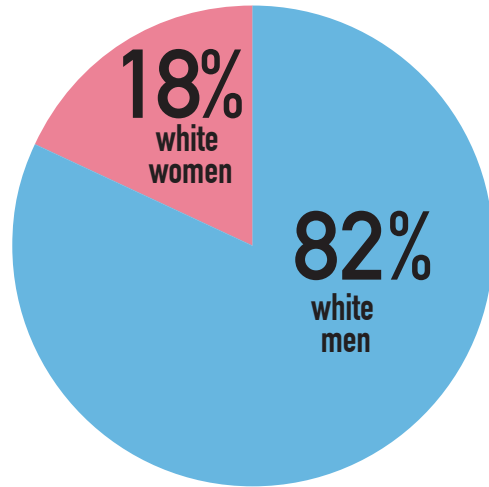
SOURCE: AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES 2013



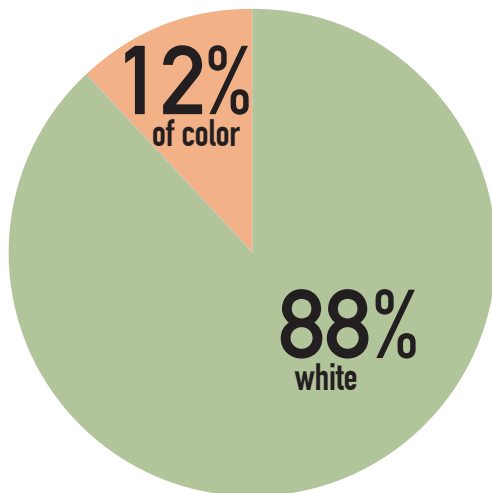
UNIQUE PRODUCTIONS  
BY GENDER



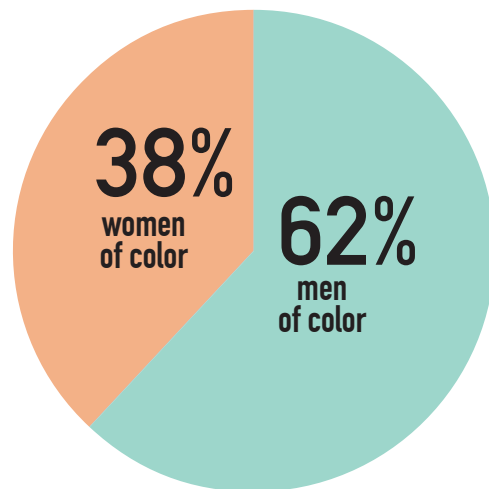
UNIQUE PRODUCTIONS  
BY RACE & GENDER



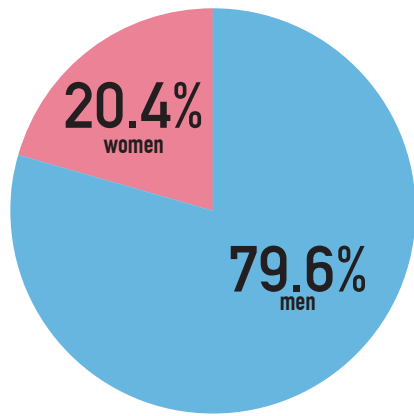
UNIQUE PRODUCTIONS  
BY RACE



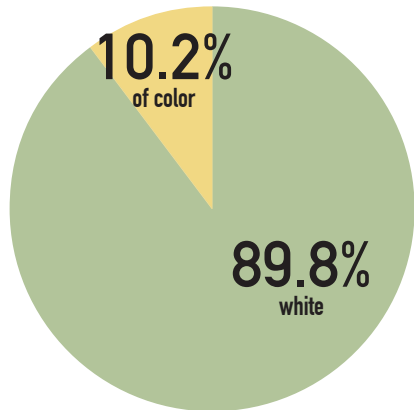
UNIQUE PRODUCTIONS  
BY RACE & GENDER



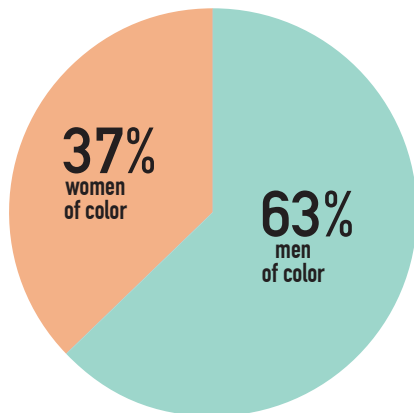
UNIQUE WRITERS  
BY GENDER



UNIQUE WRITERS  
BY RACE



UNIQUE WRITERS  
OF COLOR BY GENDER



UNIQUE WRITERS

by gender, race & nationality

0.4% foreign women of color

2.5% foreign white women

3.4% American women of color

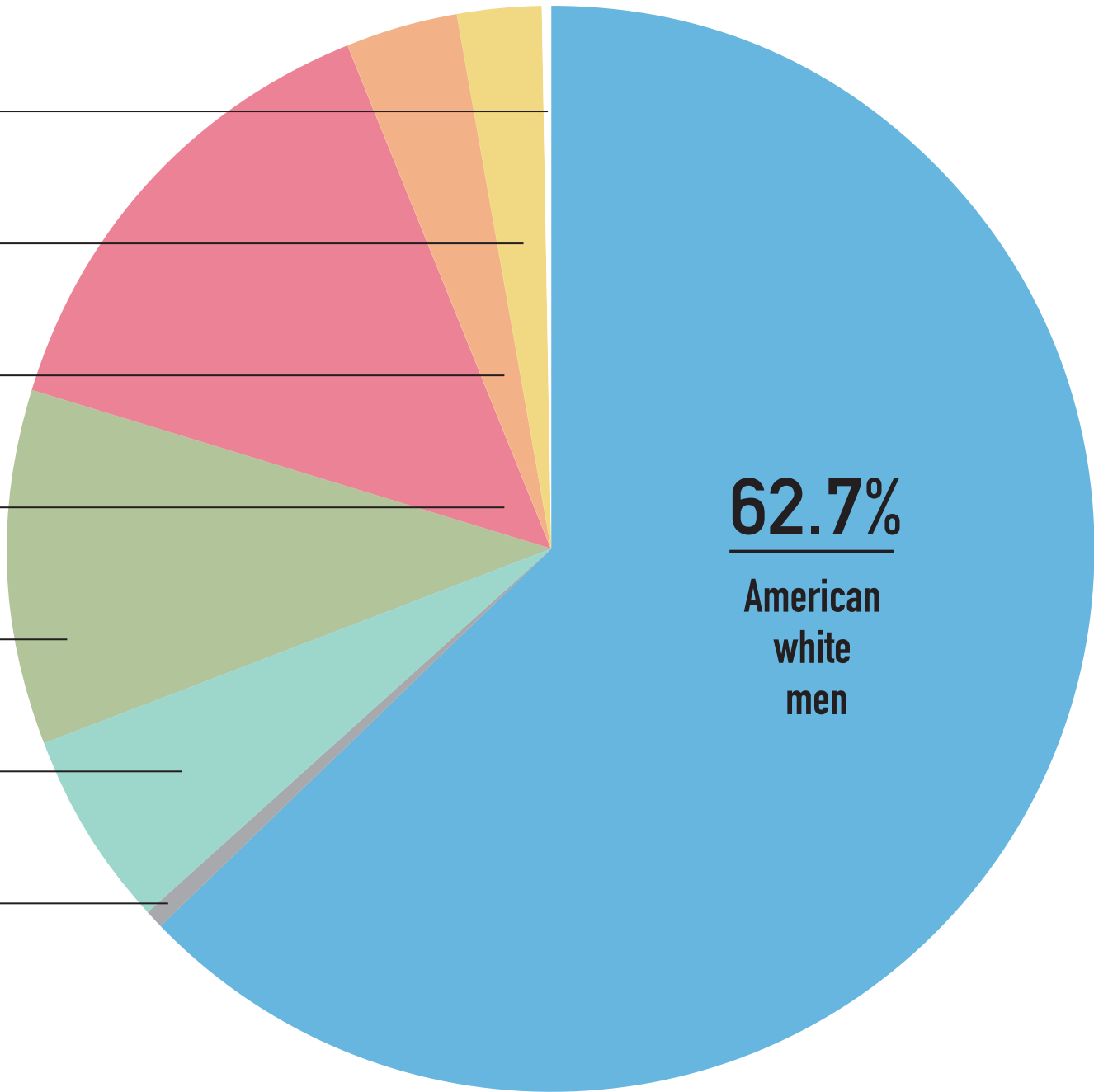
14.0% American white women

10.6% foreign white men

6.0% American men of color

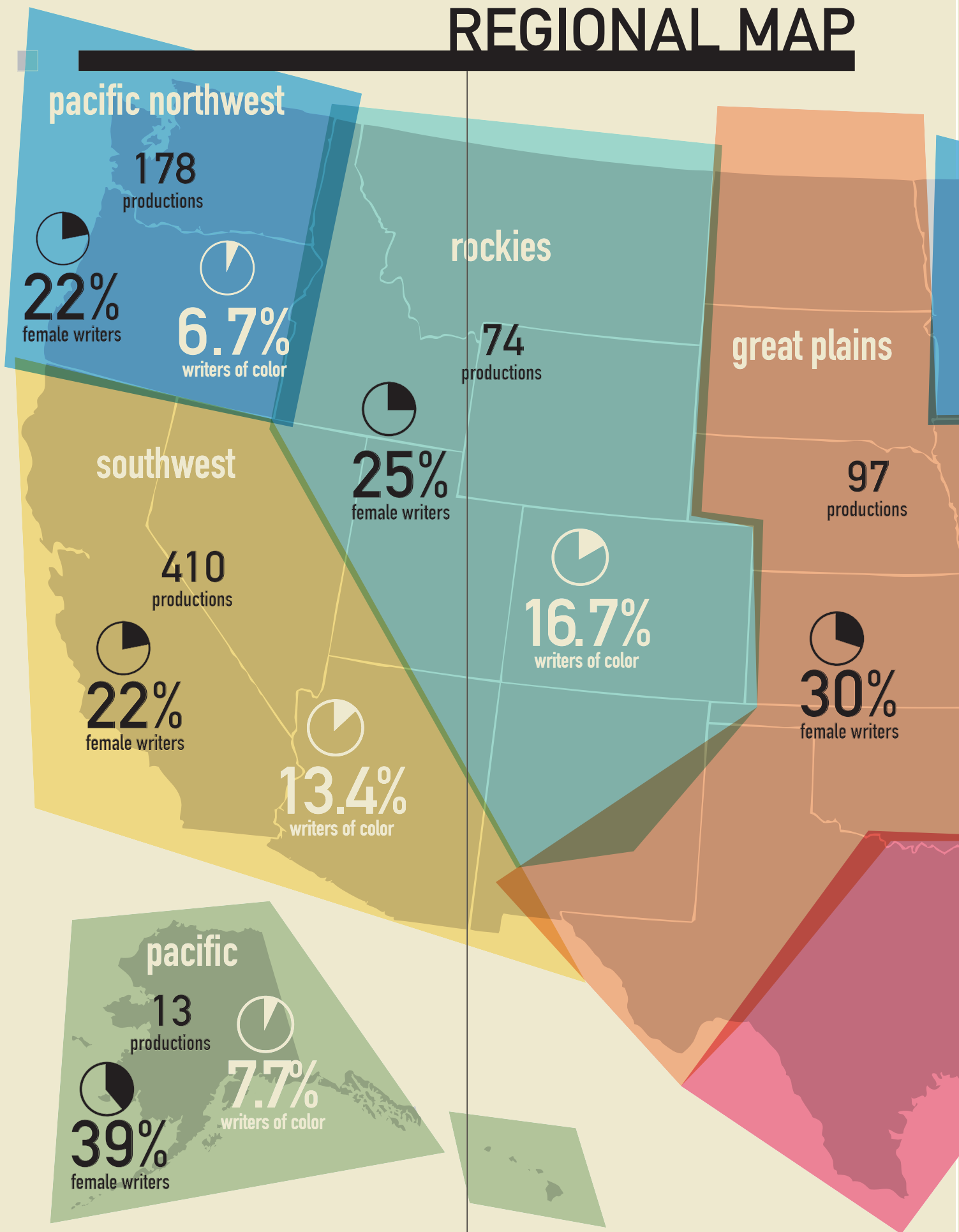
0.4% foreign men of color

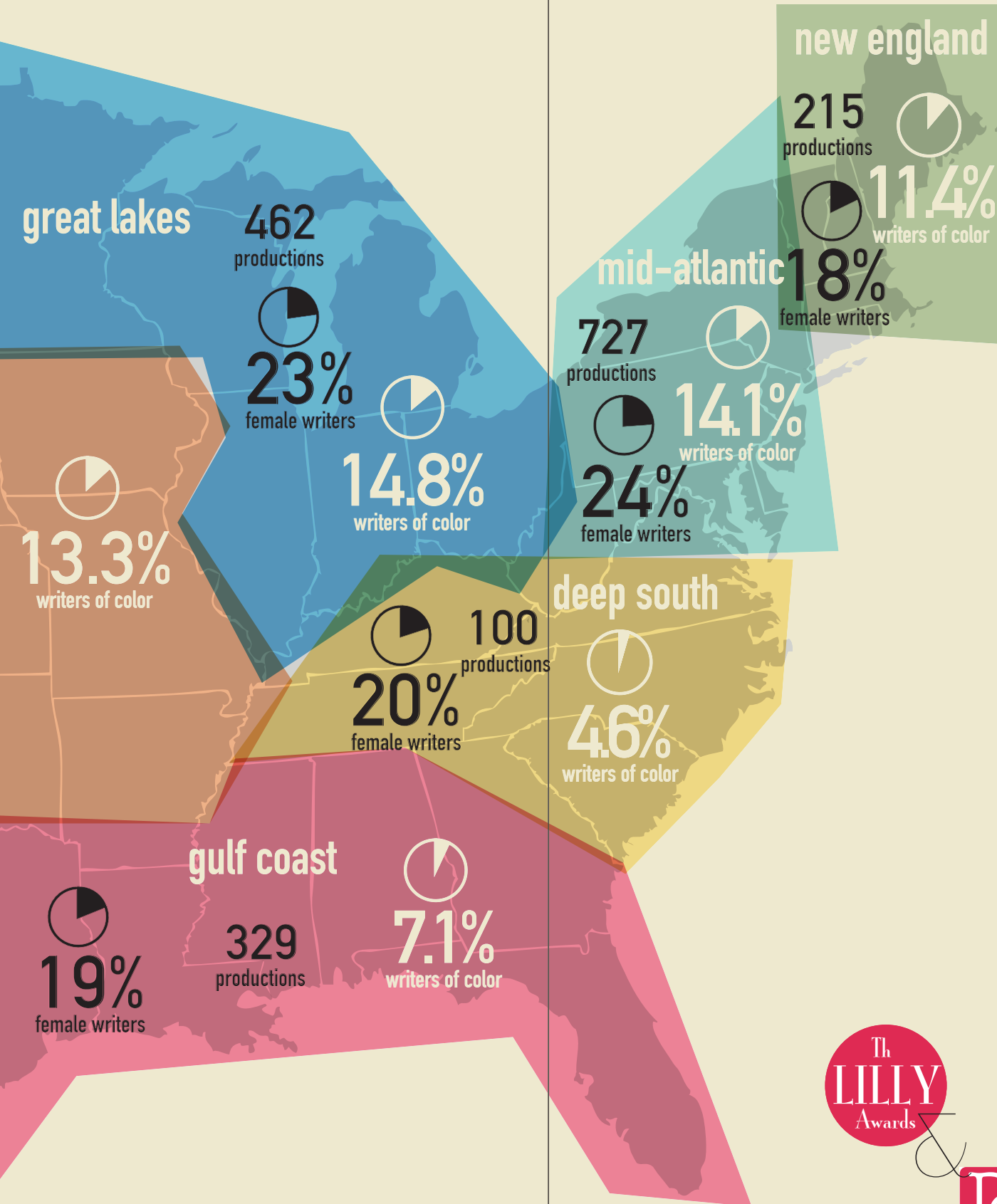






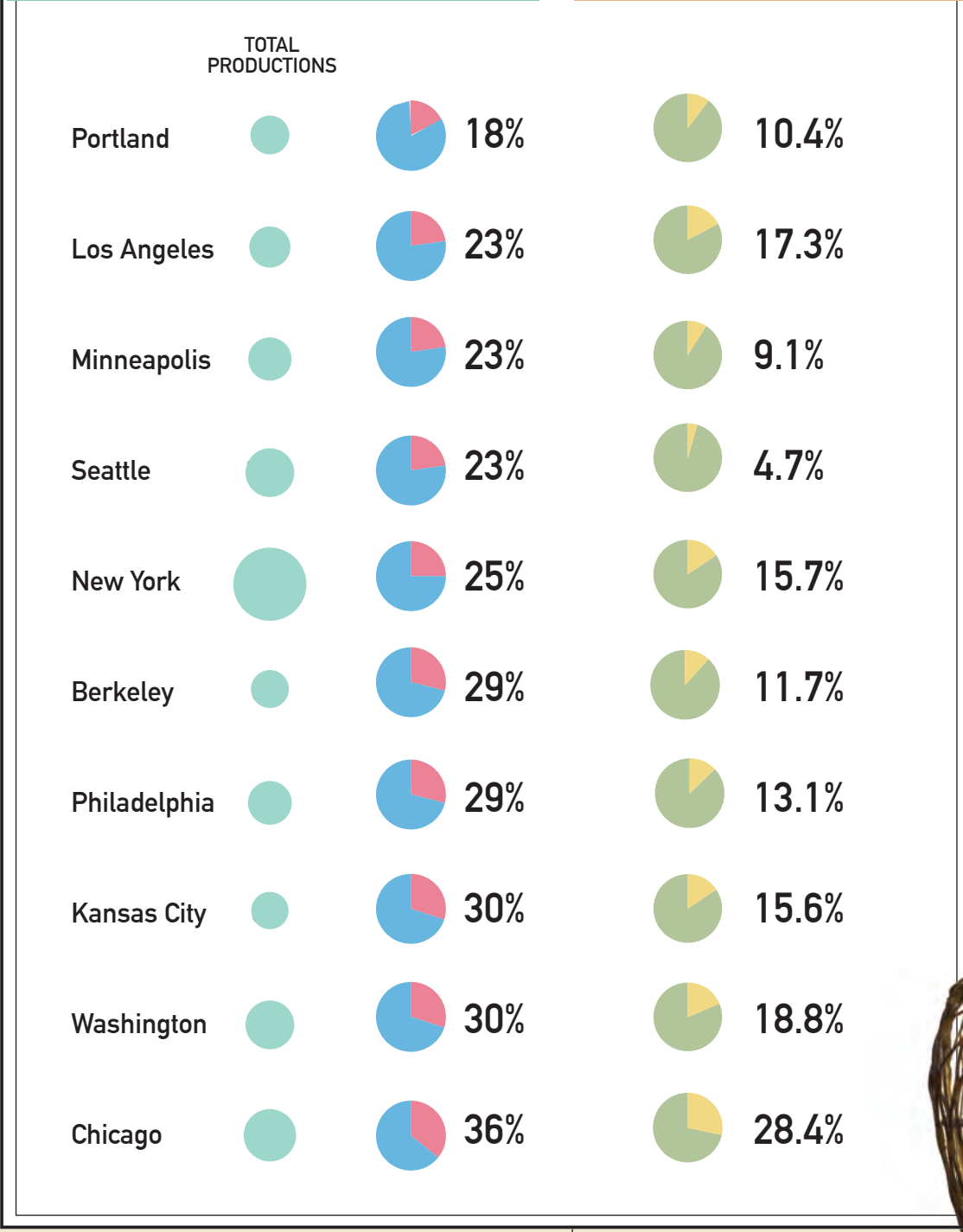
# REGIONAL MAP





Selected Cities Productions OF FEMALE WRITERS

OF WRITERS OF COLOR



# THE THEATERS:

## LIST OF ALL THEATERS COUNTED

ACT Theatre  
 Actor's Express  
 Actors Theatre of Louisville  
 Alley Theatre  
 Alliance Theatre  
 American Conservatory Theatre  
 American Repertory Theater  
 Arden Theatre Company  
 Arena Stage  
 Arizona Theatre Company  
 Arkansas Repertory Theatre  
 ArtsWest Theatre  
 Asolo Repertory Theatre  
 Atlantic Theater Company  
 Aurora Theatre Company  
 Bay Area Children's Theatre  
 Berkeley Rep  
 Boston Playwrights' Theatre  
 Broward Stage Door Theatre  
 Bucks County Playhouse  
 Capital Repertory Theatre  
 Center Stage  
 Center Theatre Group  
 Central Works Theater  
 Chicago Shakespeare Theater  
 Children's Theatre Company  
 Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park  
 City Theatre (Pittsburgh)  
 Cleveland Play House

Colony Theatre  
 Court Theatre  
 Curious Theatre Company  
 Dallas Theater Center  
 Denver Center Theatre  
 Company  
 Drury Lane  
 Ensemble Studio Theatre  
 Ensemble Theatre Cincinnati  
 Everyman Theatre  
 Florida Repertory Theatre  
 Florida Studio Theatre  
 Ford's Theatre  
 Gable Stage  
 Geffen Playhouse  
 George Street Playhouse  
 Geva Theatre Center  
 Goodman Theatre  
 Goodspeed Musicals  
 Guthrie Theatre  
 Hartford Stage  
 History Theatre  
 Horizon Theatre Company  
 Indiana Repertory Theatre  
 InterAct Theatre  
 Kansas City Repertory  
 La Jolla Playhouse  
 La Mirada Theatre for the  
 Performing Arts

Laguna Playhouse  
 Lincoln Center Theater  
 Long Wharf Theatre  
 Lookingglass Theatre  
 Lyric Stage Company of Boston  
 Magic Theatre  
 Magik Theatre  
 Maltz Jupiter Theatre  
 Manhattan Theatre Club  
 Marin Theatre Company  
 Marriott Theatre  
 MCC Theater  
 McCarter Theatre  
 Meadow Brook Theatre  
 Merrimack Repertory Theatre  
 Milwaukee Repertory Theater  
 MusicalFare Theatre  
 New Group  
 New Jersey Repertory  
 Company  
 New Repertory Theatre  
 New York Theatre Workshop  
 North Carolina Stage  
 Northern Stage Company  
 Northlight Theatre  
 Olney Theatre Center  
 Oregon Shakespeare Festival  
 Orlando Shakespeare Theater  
 Palm Beach Dramaworks  
 Paper Mill Playhouse  
 Park Square Theatre  
 Pasadena Playhouse  
 People's Light & Theatre  
 Company  
 Perseverance Theatre  
 Philadelphia Theatre Company  
 Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera  
 Pittsburgh Public  
 Playwrights Horizons  
 Portland Center Stage  
 Portland Playhouse  
 Portland Stage Company  
 Primary Stages  
 Purple Rose Theatre Company  
 Rattlestick Playwrights Theater  
 Round House Theatre

Roundabout Theater Company  
 Sacramento Theatre Company  
 Salt Lake Acting Company  
 San Diego Repertory Theatre  
 San Francisco Playhouse  
 Seattle Children's Theatre  
 Seattle Repertory Theatre  
 Second Stage Theatre  
 Shotgun Players  
 Signature Theatre  
 Signature Theatre Company  
 South Coast Repertory  
 Southern Rep  
 Stages Repertory Theatre  
 Steppenwolf Theatre Company  
 Studio Theatre  
 Syracuse Stage  
 Taproot Theatre  
 The 5th Avenue Theatre  
 The Coterie  
 The Flea Theater  
 The Irish Repertory Theatre  
 The Jungle Theater  
 The Old Globe  
 The Public Theater  
 The Repertory Theatre of  
 St. Louis  
 Theater J  
 Theatre Three  
 TheatreWorks  
 Toby's Dinner Theatre  
 Triad Stage  
 Trinity Repertory Company  
 Two River Theater  
 Unicorn Theatre  
 Utah Shakespeare Festival  
 Victory Gardens Theater  
 Village Theatre  
 Vineyard Theatre  
 Virginia Repertory Theatre  
 Walnut Street Theatre  
 Westport Country Playhouse  
 Williamston Theatre  
 Wilma Theater  
 Woolly Mammoth  
 ZACH Theatre

PROJECT CONCEIVED BY:

Julia Jordan and Marsha Norman

PROJECT FUNDED BY:

Dramatists Guild and Lilly Awards

RESEARCH MANAGED AND REPORT WRITTEN BY:

Julia Jordan and Rebecca Stump

STATISTICS BY:

Lilei Xu, PhD in Economics from Harvard

GRAPHICS BY:

Bekka Lindström

RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY:

Guild Staff, Regional Reps, Ambassadors,  
 Council Members, Fellows, Members & Interns.

# RESPONSE to The

## Rehana Lew Mirza

Upon seeing the statistics from The Count, I turned to the person on my right and asked if the Dramatists Guild was handing out arsenic to swallow with these numbers. On my left was my husband Mike Lew. We couldn't make eye contact through the tears. Up until this moment, our semi-serious joke had been that I was a "2 for 1" as a woman of color, meaning I'd be twice as likely to be produced. But the facts were laid bare: female-authored productions hover at only 22%. Women of color comprise only 3.4%. Given these statistics, my chances of production are grim. Mike has a slightly better shot; men of color comprise a whopping 6%. In that moment, I realized how arbitrary and infelicitous "feelings" are. Mike and I had both "felt" that I was more likely to be produced. But the numbers said otherwise. And I'm sure the American theatre "feels" they are moving towards diversity and inclusion. But the numbers say otherwise too.

What I take away from The Count is that theatres are NOT producing the BEST plays; they're merely ascribing higher value to plays that show a particular (hegemonic) perspective. Theatres are tacitly allowing unconscious bias to permeate the industry, and until we find ways of holding decision-makers accountable for excluding women (and men of color), they will have no incentive to change. After all, "feelings" are overwhelmingly

convincing. Everyone "feels" they are doing the best they can do.

I'd like to think that upon seeing these numbers, we as a collective community will freak the fuck out and do more than the best we can do. But I was at Julia Jordan's first town hall on gender parity in 2008, and since then female representation has only crept up 5%. So I wonder how honest we're being with one another about actually *wanting* change, or about the role of theatre as a vital, visceral window on the world. I'm not sure theatres care that representation on their stages is increasingly disparate from their surrounding communities. Millennials (18-34) make up a quarter of the country, and of those, nearly half are minorities. But you're not seeing them in our theatres. Women are half the population, and people of color are 37%. But you're not seeing them being produced. What happens when nuanced and diverse representations of these demographics are completely absent from theatre? I actually worry that instead of theatre opening us up to new experiences, we are creating an empathy problem. We are effectively censoring alternate perspectives to the point that instead of shining a light on humanity, the plays we see merely confirm



# COUNT

privileged experience.

Sometimes when I mention this stuff in public, inevitably an older white man will tell me, “If you can’t take it, get out of the theatre.” The thing is, according to these statistics, I’m already 96.6% out of the theatre. Ultimately, Mike and I have to believe that the value of our plays will transcend statistics. Yet *The Count* shows that there is a toxic systemic bias at play which we cannot overcome on our own, no matter how much we believe in our plays.

*REHANA LEW MIRZA's productions: Soldier X (Ma-Yi; Kilroy's selection; NYSCA Commission); Lonely Leela (LPAC); and Barriers (Desipina; AATC). Awards: NNPN commission via InterAct, IAAC/Lark residency, TCG/New Georges fellowship, Tofte Lake residency, E.S.T./Sloan commission. Affiliations: Ma-Yi Writers Lab and Primary Stages' Dorothy Strelsin Writers Group. MFA: Columbia University. BFA: NYU's Tisch.*

## Mario Correa

It's raining men! Anglo men, to be exact. So says the “name cloud” depicting the country’s most-produced dramatists, a bubble of gender and race (oh, what a bubble!) that’s rightly stirred plenty of conversation. When I first saw the graphic on Twitter, my mind immediately went to a very dark, very white place: The Sunday “Vows” section of *The New York Times*. Why? Because, much like that weekly announcement of America’s Top Marriages, the name cloud is oh-so-anglo.

I say ‘anglo’ rather than ‘white’ because race is tricky to categorize, of course, and not just in a Rachel Dolezal-kind-of-way. 37% of our country is non-white, including Hispanic, according to Pew Research Center. I’m one of those Hispanics (I prefer

Latino, though I couldn’t tell you why), born in Chile and later “naturalized” a U.S. citizen (before that, totally unnatural). And though I look like many of the folks—the guys—in this name cloud, my life experience is probably different from that of your typical Richard, John, or—the cloud’s big winner—David. (Poor David, it’s not his fault!)

As someone who often writes about politics, I can’t help but compare the makeup of *The Count* to that most beloved of institutions, Congress. Few of us see the Congress—with its ludicrously gerrymandered districts and overwhelmingly white, male composition—as particularly representative of our country. And yet Congress is a veritable Electric Company of diversity compared with the makeup of writers being produced in American theatres today. According to Pew, non-whites (including Hispanics) make up only 17% of Congress’ membership. And yet that’s still five percentage points higher than the share of productions attributable to non-white writers, according to *The Count*: 12%. The last time Congress had only 12% minority representation? 2001. We’re being out-performed by the Congress, folks. How’s that for a call to action?

So let’s take a look at one piece of this puzzle: Latinos. How do we get more works by Latino writers—women and men—produced? How



do we remind theatres and producers that our names may be funny, but our stories aren't (unless we mean them to be.) If only we had a critically adored Broadway smash written and composed by one of our—d'oh! *Hamilton* centers on the whitest people ever, of course—our Founding Fathers—the kind of work you might expect to be written by a Richard, a John, a David. And yet it's Lin-Manuel, smack in the heart of our culture, but nowhere to be found on the name cloud, who's cracked this nut wide open (ditto the great Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori, also cloud-less).

The silver lining in all this? With *Hamilton*, with *Fun Home*, with other successes by non-white and non-male writers, our industry is bound to take notice, right? Right? I mean, if we can't do better than Congress, let's at least do better than "Vows."

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MARIO CORREA's *Tail! Spin!*, a New York Times "Critic's Pick," played an acclaimed, extended run off-Broadway last season. His latest, *Commander*, about an openly gay candidate for President, was Runner-Up for the National Latino Playwriting Award and opened the 2015 Baltimore Playwrights Festival. [www.mariocorrea.com](http://www.mariocorrea.com)

## Keep Counting and Then...

# by Maxie Rockymore

I am very happy that the Dramatists Guild and the Lilly Awards Foundation are counting. There are a lot of rules, euphemisms, theories and beliefs about the importance of counting things. Then from there as it usually goes the collective, "we" have conversations about what matters and what counts. We would all agree that most of the time counting something implies that there is some inherent value in the things that are being counted.

So, The Lillys counted the number of theatres which met a set criteria, that included: regional stature, number of productions, a proclivity to produce new work, and to

produce the work of living playwrights. And most importantly, they looked at the demographics of the selected theatre cohort and found that of the 2,605 productions between 2011 and 2014, that were counted, sixty-two percent of those productions were plays written by white men. Twenty-two percent of the productions were from plays written by women. Twelve percent were written by people of color, including my unique cohort: women of color, three percent. And over all, of special note, is the fact that male gender status is the most important denominator for production, with eighty-two percent of white writers being male and sixty-three percent of writers of color also male.

Again, I commend The Lillys because we now have data. We now have a statistical baseline to use as a reference point going forward to determine if things are getting better, worse or remain the same. We now have proof that our hunches, anecdotes, and fears about female gender and racial inequities in American theatre are correct, validated. And we will now continue to collect, analyze, admire the problem, and report on the data longitudinally.

But what then? What good is counting and tracking the data if the collective "we" do not act on it? We, in the artistic or theatre world would like to think of ourselves as being different, of being more diverse and inclusive than other sectors of American society. And guess what? What a surprise that theatre also is a white boys club! As with any club, exclusivity is the key. Who gets to be in and who is kept out matters, it counts.

Therefore, there need to be conversations in the boardrooms of theatres, at donor meetings, on golf courses, at lunch meetings, and in dressing rooms.



The conversation needs to go something like this: “Man, did you see the data from The Count? What does that mean for us, for our theatre?” And the response should be (given that by nature I am always black, female and hopeful), “Yeah, I read that. Let’s do something about it!” The truth of the matter is that institutional change and inclusivity boils down to organizational will. The organization has to willing to change and that change starts with conversation.

However, there is always one more conversation to be had, and that is in the bedroom. I challenge the collective “we” to talk with their white boys, their white men, their white male partners and say, “hey can we talk. What are you, we, going to do about the gender and racial ethnic inequities in our local theater community?” I don’t know what the answer will be, but I hope that there is meaningful and purposeful conversation. Then, I hope that there is some action. I hope someone jumps out of bed with a clear goal in mind to take action and make changes. If not, I hope someone is kicked out of bed and not allowed a peaceful sleep of counting sheep.

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*MAXIE ROCKYMORE is completing her MFA in Writing (playwriting) at the University of Nebraska, Omaha and will graduate August 2015. Maxie hails from Minneapolis, MN and had her one act play, Straight Yellow Jacket produced at The New African Theatre, in Cleveland, Ohio, May 2014. Another of Maxie’s plays was a 2013 semi-finalist at the Eugene O’Neill Conference.*

## Does The Count Matter?

by Jonathan Reynolds

It depends on its interpretation and what happens next.

The numbers are big, but as the desired outcome supported by this study was announced at a DG Council meeting well before the research was concluded, they’re hardly a surprise. Men have dominated playwriting—except recent fiction and poetry—since the time of Euripides. It doesn’t mean

women weren’t equally or more important things, they just weren’t writing plays until recently. As no analysis of The Count is offered, the study is open to several interpretations.

One interpretation is that white men write more plays than women and minorities and therefore have more work produced. No evidence of this is offered in The Count, and it would be useful to compare the numbers of plays written and submitted by men with those by women as well as the percentage of each produced. If, for instance, 1000 men wrote one play each and 50% of them were produced, and 500 women wrote one play each and 60% of them were produced, women would have a smaller number of productions but a larger percentage.

A more troubling interpretation is that there is bias against women and minority playwrights—or bias in favor of white male playwrights. But there’s no evidence of this either. Nowhere is a commercial producer cited as saying, “This play I’m producing is making a lot of money but I’m closing it because it’s written by a woman,” or of an artistic director of a not-for-profit saying, “I love this play but I’m not including it in our season because it’s by a woman.” Not only is there no evidence of this, it’s a tricky proposition to prove logically without recalling Middleton’s deeply dark Jacobean drama *Women Beware Women* and claiming, as the economist Emily Glassberg Sands did in a 2009 *New York Times* story, that theatre women are biased against themselves: more than half the not-for-profit artistic directors in America are women, more than two-thirds of the literary managers in New York are women, women make up the majority of the national and New York audience, and one only need look at a *Play-*





bill or watch the Tonys to see the brigades of women commercial producers.

Whether Sands is right or not, what troubles me about this study is that it reduces our (ideally) imaginative and creative theatre world to the bean-counting universe of identity politics. The moment an art form takes into consideration any criteria for artistry other than merit—such as the race, gender, sexual leaning, ethnicity, or age of the artist—it signifies the starter's pistol for the devolution of that form from art into the data-drive, quantifiable, and much less inspired arenas of politics and sociology.

The numbers of this study don't concern me as much as what may be done in their name: the establishment of some sort of mandated, enforceable quota system based not on merit but on the gender, race, ethnicity of the artist. This, and its flip-side, the exclusion of anyone based on these considerations, should be anathema to any art form.

Subscribing to such criteria will further marginalize the theatre, just another victim of political correctness. Imagine if, in a creatively parallel field, it were mandated that 51% of the inventions in the country had to be conceived by women, 13% by blacks, 17% by Hispanics, and 1% by American Indians. Of these, 7% from each group would have to be designed by LGBTQs. Usefulness and popularity of the invention would be secondary considerations. Imagine MoMa or the Metropolitan Opera held to these standards.

The word "parity," which generally (but not always) means equality, has been associated with this project frequently. While I embrace equality of opportunity enthusiastically, I believe equality of outcome has no place in art.

So...what happens next?

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*JONATHAN REYNOLDS has had ten plays produced in New York, most notably Stonewall Jackson's House, which was short-listed for the Pulitzer, and Geniuses, which wasn't. Five screenplays produced. He wrote a food column for The New York Times for six years and was Treasurer of our Guild for five. He lives with the artist and set designer, Heidi Ettinger. Between them they have five sons.*



## Hard Crimson

# by Velina Hasu Houston

*"The rim/ Of the sky will be the colour of hard crimson..."* – Anna Akhmatova

According to the results of The Count study, people like me currently represent a mere 3.4% of produced playwrights in the U.S. But the good news is that I live in the Pacific region of this country, which, out of thirteen productions, produced 39% of plays by female writers between 2010 and 2014 (a larger sampling might reduce that percentage). Nationally during the same period, male writers' works represented 78% of produced plays. According to the Center for American Progress, women are about 50.8% of the U.S. population, earn about 60% of all undergraduate and master's degrees including about 40% of all business and management master's degrees, and earn about 47% of law and medical degrees. They comprise 47% of the national labor force and "59% of the college-educated, entry-level workforce." Despite these numbers, women trail behind men in leadership positions across most industries. It seems safe to deduce that this is so in the dramatic arts as well. The lag is even greater when one considers writers of color, and especially female writers of color. In so many theatre settings, I have heard white artists state that artists of color have it so easy because they are in demand and white writers have nothing to offer racially, but the numbers are reflecting that talk of diversity is not playing out in the reality of what is being produced on U.S. stages. On the other hand, I have heard the diversity tête-à-tête, but the solution has been to draw more whites into the arena (white females), thereby bypassing the need to integrate color. According to the Knowledge Center, people of color are about 39% of the U.S.



population (57% by 2060) and comprise about 34% of the labor force. Theatres that focus solely on non-white cultures are ghettoized, anti-black, or resistant to diversity among their own ranks while demanding it from the white majority. The hard crimson color of the rim of the sky is deepening. Perhaps one does not notice it on a day-to-day basis, but it is happening nonetheless. Hearts are on fire and thunder is afoot. I exist in a multiethnic family that includes Asian, black, Latino, and Native American Indian heritages as well as white and Jewish ethnicities.



Inclusivity is a human thing, not just an idea. I also exist in a professional field where my voice as a woman and as a person of color is generously underrepresented. Still, I listen for the thunder and watch the hard crimson color in the belief that art can be bigger, more ethical, and more conscientiously expansive than other industries. Or can it?

VELINA HASU HOUSTON's career began at Manhattan Theatre Club and expanded to notable theatres internationally including 21 commissions, three being filled currently at Pasadena Playhouse, Los Angeles Opera, and Playwrights' Arena-Center Theatre Group. She is creator/director MFA in Dramatic Writing, USC School of Dramatic Arts. Archives: Library of Congress, Huntington Library. <http://www.velinahasuhouston.com>

## Dana Levinson

My first thought when looking at this study and these graphics is that we need far more diverse representation in theatre. I think this goes not only for writers, but it seems that most sub-fields of theatre, casting, directing, producing, etc. are dominated by white cis-gender men. Now that's not to knock white cis-gender men! But where it becomes problematic is in terms of the kinds of stories that are told in a commercial setting. Women, people of color, LGBTQIA people, inherently bring different perspectives to their storytelling because they have different life experiences. I am a big believer that theatre, and the arts generally, have a unique ability to humanize those that may otherwise be seen as 'other' or dehumanized for their difference. Elevating the voices of writers and theatre makers that are themselves part of marginalized groups is important because it helps broaden our audience's perspective, and perhaps forces them to confront the collective humanity of all of us.

Of course, this year it was wonderful to see the history-making win for Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron for their wonderful work on *Fun Home*.

The fact that this history-making moment happened off-screen is problematic, but that's another conversation.

Not only was it history-making because they were the first female writing team to win the Tony for Best Original Score, but because the show was a heavily female driven show that passed the Bechdel test, named for the real life woman that their show is based on, Ali-



son Bechdel. There was a sense when this Tony win happened that we were somehow turning a corner in terms of representation, but upon looking at these graphics, clearly we are not. Looking at the graphics, women only had a small uptick in representation in the past few years, let alone the representation for LGBTQIA voices and the voices of people of color.

What I question is where does the disconnect take place? Personally, I know many writers of color and many female writers. I am a female writer myself. Is it that there's simply a dearth of minority and female theatre writers? That doesn't seem to be my own experience, however my social and work circle is hardly a scientific sampling. Or is it that producers and theatre companies are not taking risk on new work, let alone new work written by minority groups or women that address issues in these communities because they are seen as even more risky? My instinct is the latter. However one only needs to look as far as shows like *Fun Home*, and *In the Heights*, to see that a story by and about women or a minority group, can win both critical acclaim and commercial success. Regardless of the root cause, the beginning of solving an issue is diagnosing it. So I applaud the Dramatists Guild for releasing these graphics and studies so that we can all see how much further we need to go.

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DANA LEVINSON is a composer/lyricist and orchestrator. *Music and Lyrics*: 5th Republic, MADAME, Báthory. *Arranging/Orchestration*: Gypsy of the Year: Avenue Q, Joanna Gleason: In Bloom, Well Strung, LUDO's Broken Bride, San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus. *Film Scoring*: The Waystation in the Stars, Monica's Mixing Bowl. Dana is a 2014/2015 Dramatists Guild Fellow.

## Steven Dietz

I commend the Guild and The Lilly Awards for producing this troubling, potent and astonishing study. This information struck a very personal chord with me. The Count asks my 30+ years of opportunity and access to come face-to-face with the work of my students, my colleagues, and my wife.

I see my first name in the "name cloud" but I do not know if I'm the "Steven" or a part of the "Steven" that generated that data. I do know that I have been the recipient of actual (non-ironic) outrageous good fortune over the length of my (primarily regional) career. This study asks me the necessary and difficult question of whether a portion of that success—perhaps a large portion of that success—is a result of being a white, male writer.

The only honest answer to that question is yes.

So what am I to do with this information? How am I to defend my own career in this context? (I speak in the first person here with intent: I seek to represent no one's conclusions but my own.)

Do I tell myself that the compelling new plays by women are simply not out there? I know that to be categorically wrong. In the ten years I have taught in the MFA playwriting program at UT/Austin, the clear majority of our writers have been women. Many have seen some early career success (Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, Kimber Lee, Meghan Kennedy, Diana Grisanti); still others are growing their circle of influence in the field (Jenny Connell Davis, Erica Saleh, Katie Bender, Sarah Saltwick, Gabrielle Reismann, Diana Lynn Small, among others). And yet with all the opportunities afforded graduates of select MFA programs, these women remain on the outside looking in at the "Davids," "Marks," "Bruces," "Michaels" and "Johns."





More troubling—and still more personal—to me are the gifted and important mid-career women playwrights who don't get the "MFA bounce" yet continue to produce ambitious, engaging and impactful new plays. We all have our lists but mine includes Julie Marie Myatt, Elizabeth Heffron, Laura Schellhardt and my wife, Allison Gregory. These women and their cohort are in an astonishingly fecund period of theatre-making just now, but you would barely know that from the listings in *American Theatre* magazine. Their access to production is simply not commensurate with the scope, reach and power of the work they are making.

So do we have too few new plays? Or are too many of our plays written by a narrow constituency of playwrights?

If I believe the number of productions in the field is fluid—that the pie can be made bigger—then I can continue to advocate for *expansion*. This "do more new plays" model implies that as we homestead more space on our seasons for new work there will inevitably be greater and fairer representation. In candor, I prefer this model because it costs me nothing. The production of under-represented playwrights becomes—once again, as ever—the responsibility of

producers, artistic directors and their theatres.

However, if I believe the number of productions is essentially fixed—that the pie is not going to get bigger any time soon—then I must engage the idea of *redistribution*. This is the "do less of those plays and more of these plays" model. And in this model, the new and overdue productions need to come from—or at the expense of—other writers themselves. And that means me.


I will be asking my agent and publishers to inform me when they are asked to license a play of mine to a LORT or NNPN theatre for a season of all (or predominantly all) white, male writers. Though I have limited clout with these theatres (I cannot make them do a play of my choosing), I will ask them to consider moving my play to another year, or possibly not doing it at all—so that a playwright from an under-represented constituency can be produced in its place.

This plan is personal, inadequate and wholly imperfect (unlike the sweet dream of an expanded field with productions for all), but it costs me something. And thus, it feels real to me. I have no illusion that it will make a dent in the data I have in front of me, but I hope it will let me continue to honestly look my students, my colleagues, and my wife in the eye.

Greater representation—however it is achieved—is not reparations for the inequities of the past. It is recognition of the diverse artistry of the present.

There is much more for me to learn and do here. But I hope, with these words, to make a start.

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STEVEN DIETZ's recent plays include *On Clover Road* and *Rancho Mirage* (both NNPN Rolling World Premieres), *Bloomsday* (ACT, Seattle), and *The Shimmering*. He teaches graduate playwriting and directing at UT/Austin. 

[Ed. Note: These responses were written based on the preliminary report presented at the Guild's 2015 National Conference. The full report printed in this issue was not available until just before press time.]

# Why Parity?

**P**eople often ask us what it's like being married to another playwright. Answer: we talk about theatre *all the time*. Over the past few years, a big topic of conversation in our house has been the issue of gender parity and ethnic and racial diversity in the American theatre. For us, as throughout the theatre world, The Count has catalyzed discussion on these issues. In this article we'd like to share some of the ideas coming out of the think-tank known as our apartment.

The numbers of The Count are useful because they lift us above the experience of any one playwright to give us a broad view of the field as a whole. Without numbers, there are only whining playwrights and their personal feelings. And the fact is, every single playwright has at some point believed that they wrote a better play than someone else who got produced. So when playwrights who aren't white men say that they're not getting the chances they deserve, it's easy to think, "Right, join the club. That's what it's like to be a playwright." And for those inclined to dismiss claims of bias, the Annie Bakers, Sarah Ruhls, Lynn Nottages, and Tarell McCraney's of the world are "proof" that white women and men and women of color are doing just fine, or even that they're dominating the field in some way. But the numbers show otherwise. The numbers make it inarguably clear that these shining lights are exceptions to the rule. Institutional bias is not just a *feeling*; the majority of production opportunities for



new plays in this country are given to white men. And unless we believe that white men are inherently better playwrights than everyone else, we have to accept that the numbers are the result of an implicit, systemic bias on the part of producing organizations. This bias is unfair and should be corrected.

However. We believe that this is as far as the fairness argument takes us. Theatres don't exist to be fair to people, they exist to put up the best plays they can put up. So it's understandable why calls for fairness, however just they may be, tend to fill decision-makers at theatres with fear. They fear that an agenda of fairness will result in decisions about individual plays being made by committee instead of out of passion. They fear that they'll be forced to choose plays of lower quality in order to fulfill a social-justice mandate. They fear that their audience will be alienated by work that is too "specific," not "universal" enough. We know that these fears are unfounded—we refer you to Emily Sands' 2009 Princeton study for the numbers on how well plays by women, for example, do at the box office. But at the same time, we're also

**And unless we believe that white men are inherently better playwrights than everyone else, we have to accept that the numbers are the result of an implicit, systemic bias on the part of producing organizations.**

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wary of fairness as a primary value in art making. Nobody wants to see a play just because it was that playwright's turn to be produced. Nobody wants to work on a play chosen for that reason. And frankly, no writer wants to be the writer who's being produced just because it's her ups at bat. Everybody can agree that the plays we want to make and the plays we want to see are the plays that set an audience on fire.

What sets an audience on fire?

We suggest that the answer can be found in the very word engendering so much anxiety: diversity. A diversity of perspectives is the fundamental

requirement for dramatic action. Plays are made of the inevitable, unavoidable limitation of any individual perspective, the incompleteness of any single narrative, and the dire consequences of believing your own narrative is sufficient or globally true. It's the human condition: From where I'm standing, I can see all kinds of things that you can't see because you're standing somewhere else, and you don't even know to wonder about what I see, because you could only know it exists if you were standing where I'm standing. This phenomenon of limited consciousness is our medium as dramatists: in essence, all plays are about what we can't know and what it costs us. We see this play out in its most exquisite, terrible form at climactic dramatic moments—the tomb scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, for example. But all pieces of theatre turn on this reality: the essential human experience of limited consciousness.

And yet, the theatre performs a sweet, miraculous paradox: through witnessing people stumbling around on stage trapped inside their limited perspectives, we in the audience are liberated from our own silos of isolation, if only for a moment. Theatre makes us see our separateness so that we may feel our connectedness. We feel the joy of participating in something larger than ourselves—theatre offers the unique pleasure of a group process of imaginative construction, as a play only exists in the moment of co-creation with an audience. And then there is the transcendent expansion of the soul we feel when someone else's humanity is made legible to us on stage. The more separate we as spectators think we are from that character to begin with, the bigger the leap across the empathetic divide a piece of theatre allows us to make, the more thrilled we are.

We think this is a big reason why *Hamilton* is selling more tickets than anything else, and why Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* is giving people a transformative feeling they can't get over. These theatre pieces make people literally vibrate with excitement, because they expand their audiences' empathetic awareness in so many different directions at once. You can be there in the audience at *Hamilton*, and Busta Rhymes is also there and so is Tim Geithner, and it's not that you see your story on stage and Busta sees his and Tim sees his. It's that everyone is crossing over multiple divides together, recognizing the humanity in strangers and recognizing the strangers in themselves. This is what lights an audience on fire. This is what breaks box office records. This is what keeps the fabulous invalid from ever sinking into its perpetually predicted grave. People feel ecstatic pleasure in having their sphere of empathy expand. They can't get enough of it. It's like crack.

The diversity that makes this expansion possible isn't only about demographics. A diversity of perspectives is inextricably connected to a diversity of styles, linguistic forms, genres, scales—a delicate, internal play offers one kind of way to bridge the empathetic gap, a big sweeping epic offers another.

And yet, demographics are a really important part of diversity. Theatre is a social art, and it wants to tell stories about society. The limited-perspective experience of standing in different places in a room applies on a societal scale, too, to standing in different places in the culture. If you're a writer standing in one specific place on the cultural landscape, you can see things that other writers can't see, no matter how open-minded they are, simply because they're not facing the same direction. They can't even imagine the things you can see—they don't even know to wonder about them. And part of what culture does is to tell you what other people see. So the more perspectives we're allowed to occupy by proxy in our theatres, the richer our culture becomes, and the better every writer has the potential to get. Ultimately, an expanding diversity of perspectives is a *corrective*




to the reductive identity politics institutions fear, because it undermines demographic generalizations and enriches the common culture we all share.

So, producers are afraid of the wrong thing if they're afraid to program a multiplicity of voices in their seasons. They should be afraid that they're never going to make that intoxicating, transformative thing happen in their theatres. They should be afraid that their audiences will never know the ecstatic joy of empathetic expansion only theatre can offer. Everyone knows what it feels like when a show is electric. Diversity of viewpoints is the very soul of that electricity.

And now for some good news about art and fairness. Because we were curious—and obsessively speculating about it all the time over breakfast—we put together the gender numbers for the last few off-Broadway seasons in New York. And we found that there are a number of major not-for-profit theatres that are now operating at or above parity for new plays, on average over a couple of years. So

it appears that what Marsha Norman says is true: the way for theatres to achieve diversity is for artistic directors to choose plays by diverse writers. It's not more magic than that. And now we can see positive examples of theatres who have integrated diversity seamlessly into their aesthetic ethos and who have not suffered, who on the contrary have experienced this new polyphony as an injection of vitality into the bloodstream of their organizations.

We're excited for this trend to continue, and to be sustained. Historically, heartening spikes of diverse representation like the one we're in now have always been followed by drifts back down into the culturally comfortable zone of 17-22% (for women playwrights), where the numbers have then remained lodged for decades. We don't want that to happen again, and we think it's this argument about the nature and purpose of theatre that needs to be made to keep the numbers from slipping. A push for fairness is a quick fix—the meaning of theatre is forever. That's why parity. 

Julia Jordan, Rebecca Stump, Lisa Kron & Marsha Norman after the presentation of *The Count* at the Guild's 2015 National Conference in La Jolla, CA.

