WOMEN AND MEN IN FILM
Gender Inequality Among Writers in a Culture Industry

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Distinctive features of culture industries suggest that women culture workers face formidable barriers to career advancement. Using longitudinal data on the careers of screenwriters, we examine gender inequality in the labor market for writers of feature films. We hypothesize and test three different models of labor market dynamics and find support for a model of cumulative disadvantage whereby the gender gap in earnings grows as men and women move through their careers. We suggest that the transition of screenwriting from a mixed to a male-dominated occupation parallels the "empty field" phenomenon described in a study by Tuchman of nineteenth-century novelists. The institutionalization of male dominance of the film industry in the 1930s and the typecasting of women writers has had a lasting impact on gender inequality, which shows little change through the early 1990s.

In previous research, we (Bielby and Bielby 1992) documented how unstructured labor market arrangements in the television industry generate a process of "continuous disadvantage," whereby women television writers are disadvantaged relative to men throughout their careers, regardless of their previous accomplishments in the industry. This model proved to be a better representation of the data than the model of "cumulative disadvantage," whereby men and women begin their careers with more or less similar opportunities, but women encounter a "glass ceiling," falling further and further behind their male counterparts over time. That research also rejected the hypothesis that the level of gender inequality among writers in the television industry had declined throughout the 1980s.

In our 1992 article, we argued that five distinctive features of the organization of production sustained this pattern of gender inequality among television writers: (1) the employment relation is based on short-term contracting for the duration of a specific project; (2) the quality and commercial viability of the completed work cannot be unambiguously evaluated based on technical and measurable features of

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the finished product, but it can only be evaluated post hoc; (3) career success is largely dependent on a writer's current reputation among a small group of "brokers" who match creative talent with commercial projects; (4) reputations are based on perceptions of an artist's success in currently fashionable styles or genres; and (5) the overwhelming majority of those who make decisions about matching creative talent to commercial projects are men. Given the skewed sex-ratio, women's marginal location within networks of decision makers, and the high levels of ambiguity, risk, and uncertainty surrounding employment decisions, social similarity and gender stereotypes are likely to have a strong impact on employment decisions. Indeed, empirical results of that study show that compared to male television writers of similar age, experience, and track record, women earn 11 to 25 percent less throughout their careers (Bielby and Bielby 1992).

This research examines whether a similar pattern of gender inequality exists among writers for feature film. There are good reasons to expect that the findings for television will apply to the feature film industry as well. The overall structure of the two industries is quite similar—what DiMaggio (1977) calls "centralized brokerage administration" and Faulkner and Anderson (1987) describe as "recurrent short-term contracting." Each of the five distinctive characteristics of television production apply to feature film as well.

However, there are differences between film and television production in their organization and business contexts, and some of these differences may be of consequence for labor market dynamics of writers and other "culture workers." First, the levels of ambiguity, risk, and uncertainty facing producers in feature film are substantially greater in the film industry than in television. Production costs are many times higher than in television, and predicting which film projects will become hits is much more difficult than in television. In their study of the film industry, Baker and Faulkner (1991, 286) observe, "Filmmaking is a tenuous enterprise. It occurs in a business and technical environment characterized by high stakes, risk, and uncertainty. It requires substantial investments of financial capital for properties, artists, and support personnel. And it entails high personal and career risks."

Compared to television network programmers, risk-adverse production executives in feature film might be more likely to imitate prior successful projects and to rely on rules of thumb that tend to typecast women writers. For example, no one wants to be the first to develop a script from a woman writer for a big-budget action-adventure film. In a recent interview, Callie Khouri, who won an Academy Award for her script for *Thelma & Louise*, put it this way:

> There is a certain stigma, I think that there is a set of expectations that women write a certain type of picture, so you don't look for an action movie that's written by a woman. You don't look for a thriller. There are certain types of movies that you don't expect to be written by a woman. People still call things "women's pictures." If it has a female audience then there is always a somewhat derogatory connotation to a so-called woman's picture. (Danquah 1994)

Carolyn Shelby who wrote *Class Action* has expressed similar sentiments:

> You come in with an action project, and they see you're a woman, and you can see it's not something they're comfortable with. They're thinking "small picture" rather than *Terminator 2* when you're sitting there talking to them. (Voland 1992)

Second, the level of uncertainty facing the writers themselves is greater in feature film than in television. Several thousand episodes of network, cable, and syndicated television series are produced in the United States each year, and the writers on the staff of a successful series can generally count on being employed for an entire season if not the series' entire run. In contrast, a film project is a one-shot deal, and only about 300 feature films are released domestically in the United States each year. At the same time, tens of thousands of individuals aspire to careers as screenwriters, and they register about 36,000 scripts or script treatments with the Writers Guild of America each year. In short, the labor market for film appears much more competitive than that for television writers, and as a result the barriers faced by women might be more formidable as well.

Third, in television, successful writer-producers (also known as "hyphenates") can become powerful brokers in the industry, gaining autonomy in running their own shows and negotiating long-term development deals. Women hyphenates such as Diane English, Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, Beth Sullivan, and Marcy Carsey have joined the ranks of male writer-producers such as Steven Bochco, Aaron Spelling, and Stephen J. Cannell in the industry elite. As research for the Writers Guild of America, West, shows, when women become writer-producers of ongoing series, the number of women writers employed increases substantially (Bielby and Bielby 1987, 1989, 1993). In feature film, in contrast, very few women have joined the ranks of top writers during the same period. Moreover, elite film writers might be very well paid, but unless they also direct, they have virtually no say in the production process. In the absence of arranging a writer-director hyphenate combination for film projects, writers find themselves pitted against directors over creative control of a film's final form (Baker and Faulkner 1991; Cox 1995; Robb 1994).

Although the factors noted above are likely to generate greater gender inequality in feature film than in television, other differences between the two industries suggest a lesser degree of typecasting by gender of screenwriters compared to television writers. First, genre categories are much more highly institutionalized in television than in feature film. Although film genres such as "action-adventure," "romantic comedy," and "adult drama" are widely recognized, television genres are much more highly institutionalized in the organizational structures of the studios and networks. For example, each of the broadcast networks has separate development divisions for drama, comedy, daytime, and so on, whereas genre distinctions are not built into the film divisions of the major studios (Bielby and Bielby 1994). In television, female executives are likely to be segregated into divisions dealing with female-typed genres (e.g., television movies and miniseries, children's programming, daytime programming), whereas—at least officially—a woman vice

president of production at a film studio is not charged with working within a specific film genre. And by 1990, women accounted for nearly one third of the executives in the ranks of vice president or higher in the production divisions of the major film studios (Bernstein 1990).

Second, in television, advertising revenues are sold on the basis of the demographic composition of the audience. In television, *who* is watching can be as important as *how many* people are watching. For example, an action-adventure series in development at a network might be targeted to an 18- to 35-year-old male audience, and advertising rates might be set based on a network guarantee regarding the size of the audience within that age/gender group. In contrast, a film's profitability depends on the number of people who pay to view it. Although the film might be developed to appeal to a younger male audience, a ticket purchased by a 45-year-old woman earns the studio the same amount as one bought by a 19-year-old man. Thus, the less intense age/gender targeting of film audiences may reduce the incentive to typecast writers by gender. On the other hand, there is a tremendous amount of typecasting of "on screen" talent in feature film, where there is a widely held belief that a female star cannot successfully carry a big budget film. In the words of one studio head:

> It's almost impossible for a female to "open" a movie now. It just doesn't work. People don't come. A movie like *Ghost* succeeded conceptually, on its own terms, not because of Demi Moore. (Dutka 1990, 8).

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the often explicit devaluation of female talent on screen carries over to a devaluation of women's contributions to film off screen.

Overall, the similarities between television and feature film are probably more consequential than the differences. Although distribution channels differ, the same large corporations—the major studios—dominate production in both TV and film, and with the advent of new technologies of production and distribution, the distinctions between the two sectors of the entertainment industry are increasingly blurred. To a significant extent, the two sectors draw on the same pool of writers; in any given year, about one third of those writing for feature film are also employed in television. Thus, we expect the structure and dynamics of labor markets in the two sectors to be largely similar, although on balance, if there is a detectable difference in the levels of gender inequality, we expect it to be somewhat larger in film than in television.

Below, we first present an overview of women writers' participation in feature film from the silent era to the present, relying on both historical scholarship and quantitative data from the membership files of the Writers Guild of America, West. Then we describe the data, measures, models, and hypotheses used to assess alternative models of gender inequality in labor market dynamics among film writers. Following the presentation of our results, we discuss the implications of our findings for gender inequality in the mass media and in culture industries more generally.

WOMEN WRITERS' PARTICIPATION IN FEATURE FILM FROM THE SILENT ERA TO THE AGE OF THE BLOCKBUSTER

Film writing is one of the few professional occupations in which a labor force with a substantial female presence has been displaced by men. Many of the most successful early scenarists, as screenwriters of the silent film era were called, were women (Francke 1994; McCreadie 1994). The highest-paid writer of the 1920s was Frances Marion, whose silent credits include *Humoresque*, *Stella Dallas*, and *Love*, and who went on to write the sound films *The Champ* and *Dinner at Eight* (Schwartz 1982). Although definitive statistics are not available, estimates of the gender composition of screenwriters during the silent era (from the early 1900s to 1927) range from 50 percent (Martin and Clark 1987) to 90 percent (McCreadie 1994), and it is generally agreed that women screenwriters played a major role in establishing the narrative form and conventions of the film scenario (Francke 1994).

The process whereby screenwriting was transformed from a profession with substantial opportunities for women to one that became male dominated appears similar to that described by Tuchman (1989) in her account of the masculinization of authorship of the V ictorian novel. Tuchman's evidence indicates that before 1840 at least half of all novelists were women. She argues that the occupation of novelist was a relatively lucrative "empty field" for woman of the educated classes at this time, albeit one with relatively low prestige. Over the next half century, men "invaded" the empty field, drawn to the profession as demand increased and the field became more lucrative. Moreover, the centralization and rationalization that accompanied the industrialization of the publishing industry placed men in control of production and distribution. The transformation of authorship into "men's work" was legitimated ideologically in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as the narrative form of the novel was redefined as a valued cultural object, and a critical double standard was applied that valued the contributions of male novelists over women.

Tuchman suggests that the same process of invasion, redefinition, and institutionalization should be apparent in other professions that experience masculinization, even when the transformation occurs rapidly. The transformation of screenwriting in the late 1920s and early 1930s appears to fit this pattern. With the advent of sound movies in 1927, those with a talent for storytelling—playwrights, novelists, journalists—were recruited to Hollywood in large numbers (Beranger 1950; Schwartz 1982). The Depression accelerated the trend toward consolidation of production that began in the 1920s, so that by the early 1930s the financing, production, distribution, and exhibition of feature films was dominated by eight vertically integrated corporations: Warner Brothers, RKO, Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount, MGM, Universal, Columbia, and United Artists (Stanley 1978). This consolidation was accompanied by a rationalization of production, including writing. Under the studio system, the role of the scenarist had become elaborated, subdivided, and formalized (Staiger 1983). Within the story department of each studio, a story editor had responsibility for identifying viable literary properties for

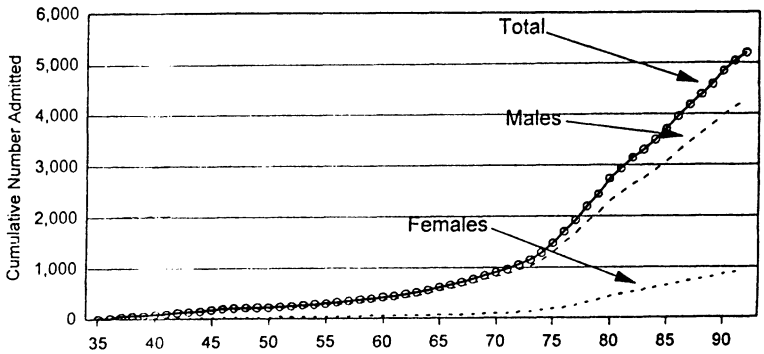

Figure 1: Cumulative Number of Screenwriters Admitted to WGA, West, by Gender, 1935-1992

producers and would supervise a dozen or so script readers who would evaluate books, plays, stories, or treatments for their cinematic potential. Studios generally relied on their own staff of screenwriters to write the actual scripts, with others such as continuity clerks and script clerks doing much of the routine work in processing the filming of a script (Work Projects Administration, American Guide Series 1941).

Some of the more established women writers of the silent era continued to thrive under the studio system (Francke 1994; McCreadie 1994; Schwartz 1982). Among them were Frances Marion, who was a founding member and first vice president of the Screen Writers Guild (the predecessor of the Writers Guild of America), and Anita Loos, whose credits range from *Intolerance* (1916) to *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). However, the male "invasion" of the profession was an accomplished fact by the mid-1930s. Membership statistics from the Writers Guild of America, West, show that women accounted for less than 15 percent of those working as screenwriters in the late 1930s (see Figures 1 and 2). In sharp contrast to the early years of the industry—when the lines dividing production roles were fluid and women moved with relative ease across the tasks of scenarist, editor, director, and producer—under the studio system, women writers were likely to be assigned to administrative or support roles such as reader or script supervisor (Francke 1994) or as "corpse rougers" who "brightened the dialogue of other people's scripts" (Mary McCall, Jr., quoted in McCreadie 1994, 111).

The institutionalization of the male invasion of the screenwriting profession was legitimated by the typecasting of women writers. Women's work on story adjustments, scene polishes, and dialogue rewrites was regarded as the "tyranny of the woman writer" by male writers of the time (Frances Marion, cited by McCreadie 1994, 28). Studio chiefs believed women were especially well suited for writing for "women's films," for writing dialogue for female stars, and for infusing the "women's angle" into films more generally (Francke 1994). Of course, the reality is quite different; women screenwriters have been associated with successful scripts

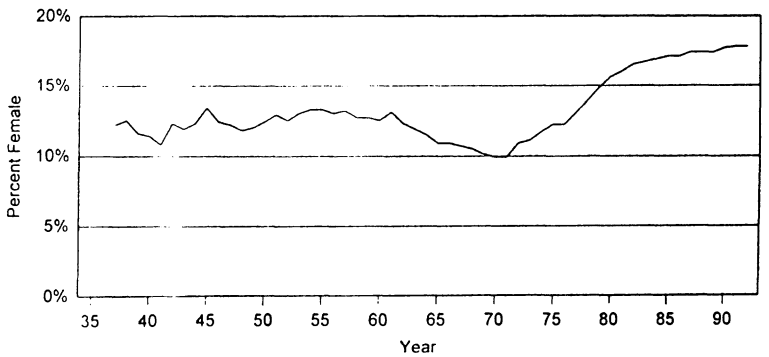

Figure 2: Gender Composition of the Cumulative Membership, Screenwriter Members of the WGA, West, 1936-1992

in every film genre, and many "women's films" have been scripted by men.[1] But the ideology that women's talents are best suited for women's themes or female stars (an ideology shared by many women writers themselves) legitimates the notion that outside of narrow genres and specialties, screenwriting is men's work.

With men's dominance of screenwriting fully institutionalized, the decline of the studio system and the trend toward independent production during the 1950s had little impact on women's representation among screenwriters. From the 1950s through the early 1960s, women continued to constitute about 12 to 13 percent of those entering the screenwriting profession. Perhaps not coincidentally, the decline in women's representation among new screenwriters from 1962 through 1971 to its lowest level in the history of the industry (see Figure 3) corresponds exactly with the era feminist film critic Molly Haskell (1987, 323) calls "the most disheartening in screen history" regarding the portrayals and prominence of women.

Not until the early 1970s is there a noticeable increase in women's representation among those entering the profession: from 1972 to the present, women have accounted for about one in five screenwriters qualifying for membership in the Writers Guild (Figure 3). It is not clear what accounted for the modest upturn in women's representation in the early 1970s. On the one hand, feminist themes were beginning to appear in commercially successful films of the 1970s such as *Klute* (1971), *Alice Doesn't Live Here* (1974), *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), and *An Unmarried Woman* (1977),[2] and women in the industry began organizing to advance their interests through groups such as Women in Film and the Women's Committee of the Writers Guild of America. These developments may have both encouraged talented women to pursue careers in the industry and persuaded producers to be more open toward material from women screenwriters. On the other hand, the early 1970s also marked the beginning of the "blockbuster" era, which greatly increased the financial risk involved in pursuing projects with potential box office sales in excess of $100 million (Baker and Faulkner 1991). Increasingly, the "blockbuster" mentality encouraged producers to seek out established directors,

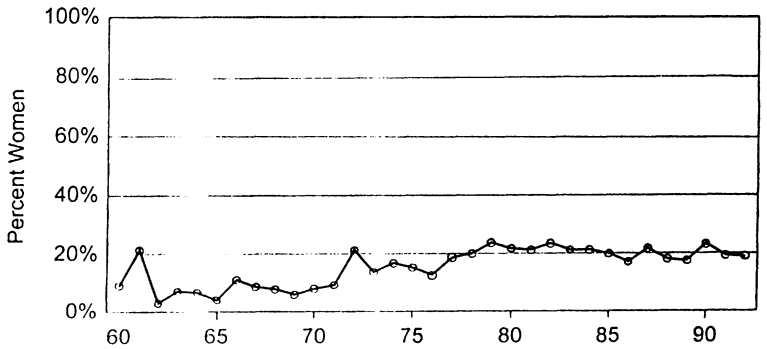

Figure 3: Women as a Percentage of Screenwriters Admitted to WGA, West, Annually, 1960-1992

writers, and actors who have track records of consistent success and forgo serious consideration of writers who seek to transcend proven formulae and established genres. As a result, the salaries of a small group of elite screenwriters have been bid up to levels in excess of $750,000 per film, while the gap in career trajectories between this group and other screenwriters widens. *Daily Variety* analyst Paul F. Young observes:

> Why the red carpet? Studio executives and agents unanimously agree that a writer can't "open" a film like a star. But veteran agents and producers alike say the trend to shop at Tiffany reflects the paranoia felt by studio executives who don't read much themselves, or who fear rocking the corporate boat. Says one high-profile producer, "I can't get the studio to pay a writer *less* than $750,000. It makes them nervous. Another producer with a studio deal explains, "They think an expensive writer will get it right the first time. And if he doesn't, the executive has protected himself by using a pre-approved writer" (Young 1995, 5, 18).

Our quantitative data on film writers' employment and earnings cover the years 1982 to 1992. This period is of interest because of potentially countervailing forces affecting the careers of women writers. On the one hand, by the mid-1980s the talent guilds for writers, directors, and actors were issuing statistical studies documenting women's underrepresentation in the industry, and the industry press began giving widespread coverage to the issue of gender discrimination. And as noted above, during the same period, women were finally moving into the top executive ranks of the motion picture studios, paralleling women's gains in management in other sectors of the economy. On the other hand, men's dominance of screenwriting (and all other aspects of the industry) had been fully institutionalized for half a century, and the business environment of the period appears not to be conducive to innovative ways of reaching out to groups previously excluded by the industry. Given these countervailing if not contradictory trends, it is not surprising that many feminist film analysts look on the past decade as "the age of ambivalence" (Haskell 1987; also see Francke 1994). Our data allow us to bring systematic

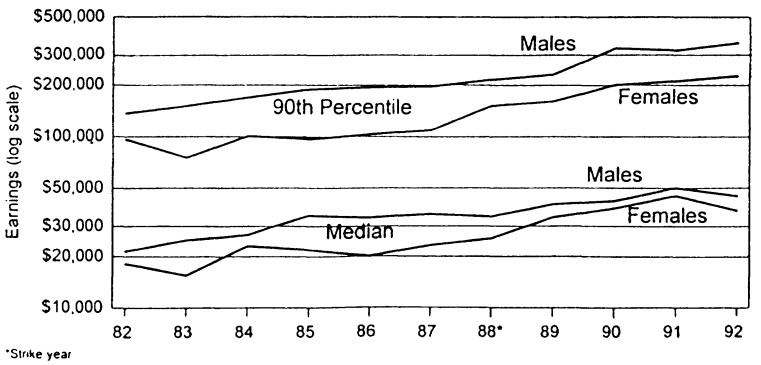

Figure 4: Gender Differences in Earnings among Employed Screenwriters at Median and at 90th Percentile, 1982-1992

quantitative evidence to bear on the question of whether efforts to challenge men's institutionalized dominance are beginning to create new opportunities for women writers.

An overview of trends in employment and earnings of screenwriters suggests that women writers are encountering an impenetrable glass ceiling in the era of the blockbuster. From 1982 through 1992 there was no perceptible change in the gender composition of those employed in screenwriting; women accounted for about 18 percent of employed screenwriters throughout this period. (In comparison, according to 1990 census statistics, women account for 49.5 percent of all authors in the United States.) Figure 4 shows gender differences in earnings trends over the same period. While the gender gap in median earnings closed modestly from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, in both absolute and relative terms the gap at the 90th percentile is significantly greater in the early 1990s than it was in 1982. In other words, among the industry's most successful screenwriters, women are falling further behind their male counterparts.

These descriptive statistics tell just part of the story. For example, one cannot tell from these statistics whether the closing of the gender gap in median earnings is simply attributable to the increasing levels of experience of women screenwriters. Nor can one compare the career trajectories of men and women screenwriters who enter the industry at the same time. With multivariate analyses we can explore the dynamics of disadvantage faced by women film writers that generate the overall trends. How great is the disadvantage faced by women writers—in terms of employment and earnings—compared to men with similar qualifications and track records? Do labor market dynamics generate a pattern of "cumulative disadvantage" whereby men and women begin their careers with more or less similar opportunities, but with women subsequently encountering a "glass ceiling" as the careers of their male counterparts take off? And finally, is the magnitude of women's disadvantage declining over time as more women move into positions of power and authority in the industry?

DATA, MEASURES, AND MODELS

The data for our study describe the employment and earnings trajectories of 4,093 screenwriters who were employed at least once during the period from 1982 through 1992. These data are from the employment and membership records of the Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW). Each quarter, guild members report earnings from all employment covered by the "MBA," the WGAW's major collective bargaining agreement with producers. Because virtually all active producers are signatory to the MBA, these earnings declarations cover nearly all writing for feature films produced in Hollywood.

In their earnings declarations, members report total earnings; employing organization; type of employment; whether the writing is for screen, television, radio, or pay-TV; the title of the film, series, or program; and its length. In most cases, writers also report whether they worked on a first draft, polish, final draft, revision, and so forth.

Our model is a pooled cross-section time series specification of the form:

$$Y_{ict} = a + b_1X_i + b_2W_{it} + Z_c + d_t + e_{ict} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{ict} is log earnings for the *i*th individual in cohort c in year t, and cohort is defined as year admitted to membership in the Writers Guild of America. Attributes of individuals that do not vary over time (e.g., minority status) are included in X_i and individual traits that vary over time (e.g., years of experience) are included in W_{it}. The term Z_c captures effects on earnings that are unique to a specific cohort over time, while d_t captures year-specific effects on earnings. The disturbance, e_{ict} is assumed to have a mean of zero and constant variance and to be uncorrelated with the other independent variables.

Minority status is represented by a binary variable coded 1 for minority writers and 0 otherwise. Gender is coded 1 for females, 0 for males. Work experience is measured in two ways. The first is years of membership in the WGAW. Because less than half of all writers are employed in any given year, years of membership does not equal years of employment experience. Consequently, in some models we also include binary variables for lagged employment status one, two, and three years prior to year t.

Age is measured as year t minus year of birth. Year effects are captured by 10 binary variables, with 1982 as the reference category. Cohort effects are captured by two binary variables, the first coded 1 for those admitted to the WGAW prior to 1971 and the second coded 1 for those admitted between 1971 and 1975. Finally, because many writers work in both television and film, our models include a binary variable coded 1 if the writer received earnings from work in television during year t.

Descriptive statistics reporting gender differences in age, experience, and employment appear in Table 1. On average, women screenwriters employed at least once between 1982 and 1992 are younger and have fewer years of experience than their male counterparts. Just more than one third of the men and women screenwriters were employed in feature film in 1992, and about 30 percent were employed in television. Finally, Table 1 shows that writers of color are virtually absent in the

TABLE 1: Means by Gender on Age, Experience, Employment, and Minority Status, WGA West Members Employed at Least Once in Film, 1982-1992

Variable	*Metric*	*Female Means (N = 752)*	*Male Means (N = 3,341)*
Cohort (year admitted to WGA)			
Pre-1971	0-1	0.064	0.155
1971-75	0-1	0.094	0.110
1976-80	0-1	0.243	0.226
1981-85	0-1	0.258	0.196
1986-90	0-1	0.270	0.251
1991-92	0-1	0.070	0.062
Years experience in 1992		10.5	12.8
Age in 1992			
<30	0-1	0.025	0.032
30-39	0-1	0.262	0.257
40-49	0-1	0.460	0.369
50-59	0-1	0.141	0.160
60-64	0-1	0.020	0.051
65+	0-1	0.040	0.080
Age NA	0-1	0.052	0.052
Employed in film, 1992	0-1	0.359	0.379
Employed in TV, 1992	0-1	0.309	0.290
Employed (TV or film):			
1982	0-1	0.360	0.392
1983	0-1	0.390	0.412
1984	0-1	0.408	0.433
1985	0-1	0.457	0.479
1986	0-1	0.489	0.509
1987	0-1	0.517	0.534
1988 (strike year)	0-1	0.495	0.508
1989	0-1	0.539	0.552
1990	0-1	0.553	0.594
1991	0-1	0.555	0.571
1992	0-1	0.552	0.559
Minority status	0-1	0.035	0.030

industry, accounting for just more than 3 percent of the screenwriters employed from 1982 through 1992. Indeed, because so few women of color are employed to write for feature film (only 26 over the 11-year period), our statistical models are not able to provide reliable estimates of the interaction of race and gender as they influence the earnings of screenwriters.

CUMULATIVE VERSUS CONTINUOUS DISADVANTAGE: HYPOTHESES

Table 2 summarizes our hypotheses regarding the determinants of earnings under alternative conceptualizations of labor market dynamics. The main effects of

TABLE 2: Hypothesized Effects of Independent Variables on Earnings for Different Models of Labor Market Dynamics

Variable	*Cumulative Disadvantage*	*Continuous Disadvantage*	*Declining Disadvantage*
Female	–	–	–
Experience (years in industry)	∩	∩	∩
Lagged employment	+	+	+
Lagged earnings	+	+	+
Gender interactions			
Female by			
Experience	–	0	?
Lagged employment	–	0	?
Lagged earnings	–	0	?
Year	?	?	–

NOTE: Hypothesized relationships: + = hypothesized positive relationship, – = hypothesized negative relationship, ∩ = hypothesized curvilinear relationship (increasing at a decreasing rate), ? = no relationship hypothesized.

gender, experience, and control variables are assumed to be the same across models. Each assumes a net negative effect of being female, effects of years of experience that increase at a decreasing rate, and positive effects of prior employment and earnings.

The three models of labor market dynamics, "cumulative disadvantage," "continuous disadvantage," and "declining disadvantage," are differentiated by their implications for interaction effects by gender. We choose between the cumulative disadvantage and continuous disadvantage models based on interaction effects between gender and experience, between gender and prior employment, and between gender and prior earnings.

The cumulative disadvantage model assumes that access to opportunity early in the career pays off more for men than for women. As a result, the gender gap in wages is expected to increase with experience. In other words, according to the cumulative disadvantage model, the net returns to experience are expected to be lower for women than for men (i.e., a negative interaction between gender [coded 1 for female] and the experience variables). Similarly, if women have more volatile careers and find it difficult to sustain career success from year to year, then the impact of prior earnings and employment should be lower for women than for men. Accordingly, the cumulative disadvantage model also predicts a negative interaction between gender and the lagged employment and earnings variables.

In contrast to the cumulative disadvantage model, the continuous disadvantage model implies a pervasive bias against women that affects them equally through all stages in their careers. Under the continuous disadvantage model, the earnings disparity between men and women at entry is neither greater nor worse than at later stages in the career. According to this model, the shape of the earnings trajectory

over the course of a career is the same for men and women, but women start their careers with a substantial earnings "penalty" and never catch up. Thus, the continuous disadvantage model implies *no* interaction between gender and measures of experience, prior employment, and prior earnings; but it implies a strong "main effect" of gender, with women earning significantly less than men with similar levels of experience.

Neither the cumulative disadvantage nor the continuous disadvantage model provides an explicit prediction about trends over time in the aggregate gender gap in earnings. Over time and net of all other factors in these two models, the earnings gap between men and women might be increasing, decreasing, or not changing at all. In contrast, according to the model of declining disadvantage, there is a trend toward an erosion of gender barriers and a resulting decline in the gender gap in earnings over time. According to this model, whether the underlying dynamic is one of cumulative or continuous disadvantage, forces are at work that are slowly but surely dismantling the sources of that disadvantage. Thus, the declining disadvantage model predicts that the impact of gender declines over time (a negative interaction between gender [coded 1 for female] and year).

In sum, if we find strong evidence of lower returns among women than among men in the effects of experience, prior employment, and prior earnings (i.e., negative interactions between gender and each of these traits), then the cumulative disadvantage model will be favored over the continuous disadvantage model. In contrast, if there is a large net effect of gender but no interaction of gender with measures of experience, prior employment, or prior earnings, then the continuous disadvantage model will be favored. Regardless of the outcome of this comparison, a large negative interaction of female-by-year will provide evidence of declining disadvantage, that is, an erosion of gender barriers over time.[3] Absence of such an interaction will suggest that the barriers faced by women writers have persisted throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, despite women's increasing representation in positions of power and responsibility, and despite increased attention to the problem of gender bias in the industry.

FINDINGS FROM MULTIVARIATE MODELS

We choose between the cumulative and continuous disadvantage models of gender inequality in labor market dynamics based on whether there are interactions between gender and measures of experience, prior employment, and prior earnings, and we evaluate the declining disadvantage model based on whether there is a negative interaction between gender and year. Accordingly, our analytic strategy is to estimate and contrast models with and without gender interactions and to assess whether statistically significant gender interactions correspond to the patterns hypothesized by the cumulative and declining disadvantage models as summarized in Table 2. To fully exploit the longitudinal data, we estimate and test models under

three alternative specifications. The first specification (Models 1 and 2) includes our measure of experience, but not lagged employment and lagged earnings. This specification has the advantage of exploiting all 11 years of data from 1982 through 1992, reflecting the earnings trajectories of the 4,093 writers who worked at least once during that period. The second specification (Models 3 and 4) adds binary variables for whether a writer was employed in years t-1, t-2, and t-3. Because data on employment are not available for years prior to 1982, estimates for this specification are based on a shorter time span, from 1985 through 1992, and pertain to the 3,645 writers who worked at least once during this period. The final specification (Models 5 and 6) includes effects of earnings in years t-1 and t-2 and is limited to writers with at least one employment spell of three consecutive years between 1983 and 1992 (i.e., nonzero earnings in years t, t-1, and t-2). Accordingly, the results of this specification apply to a select subgroup of 1,606 more successful writers with relatively continuous employment histories in the industry.

Results for the first two specifications (Models 1 through 4) appear in Table 3 and for the third specification (Models 5 and 6) in Table 4. The results for the models with no gender interactions (Models 1 and 3 in Table 3) show a substantial net disadvantage faced by women writers compared to men of similar age, experience, minority status, and recent employment history. Evaluated at the mean, the effect of being female of –.282 in Model 1 corresponds to a net gender gap in earnings of 25 percent, and the effect of –.234 in Model 3 corresponds to a net gender gap of 21 percent. Thus, if there were no gender interactions, we would conclude that women writers face an earnings penalty of 21 to 25 percent throughout their careers. However, because results reported below reveal significant gender interactions, the 21 to 25 percent estimate of the earnings penalty represents an average across a gender gap in earnings that is in fact contingent on the amount of experience screenwriters have in the industry.

Overall, the results support the model of cumulative disadvantage. First, in each instance, a global test of the gender interactions rejects the null hypothesis of no interaction (see row labeled "all interactions" at the bottom of Tables 3 and 4). Models 2, 4, and 6 (with interactions) provide significant improvement in fit over Models 1, 3, and 5 (without interactions), respectively. Second, specific tests of the gender-by-experience interactions reject the null hypothesis of no interaction in all three comparisons (see row labeled "experience interactions" at the bottom of Tables 3 and 4). In each instance, the estimated parameters for the linear and quadratic experience effects imply that earnings increase with experience at a decreasing rate for men, and the gender-by-experience interaction implies that the rate of earnings growth is slower for women than for men (or even negative for women). In other words, the gender gap in earnings grows as screenwriters move through their careers, even after controlling for gender differences in prior career success. The pattern of cumulative disadvantage with years of experience is portrayed in Table 5, based on the main and interaction effects of gender and experience estimated in Models 2, 4, and 6. Although the precise pattern depends

TABLE 3: Determinants of Earnings among All Employed Film Writers 1982-1992[a]

Variable	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*
Cohort				
Pre-1971	0.163**	0.140*	0.532**	0.506**
1971-75	–0.057	–0.062	0.246**	0.240**
Year				
1983	0.046	0.066	—	
1984	0.205**	0.214	—	
1985	0.330**	0.368**	—	
1986	0.372**	0.420**	0.047	0.061
1987	0.471**	0.515**	0.150**	0.167**
1988 (strike year)	0.485**	0.494**	0.103*	0.081
1989	0.596**	0.596**	0.283**	0.258**
1990	0.702**	0.706**	0.413**	0.387**
1991	0.776**	0.792**	0.450**	0.426**
1992	0.777**	0.782**	0.436**	0.403**
Age 30-39	–0.063	–0.067	–0.159**	–0.164**
Age 40-49	–0.186**	–0.192**	–0.236**	–0.242**
Age 50-59	–0.548**	–0.554**	–0.448**	–0.455**
Age 60-64	–0.864**	–0.881**	–0.725**	–0.741**
Age 65+	–1.074**	–1.088**	–0.928**	–0.945**
Age NA	–0.329**	–0.337**	–0.272**	–0.281**
Experience	0.0795**	0.0854**	0.0017	0.0073
Experience squared	–0.0016**	–0.0018**	–0.0003*	–0.0004**
Female	–0.282**	–0.045	–0.234**	–0.203*
Minority	–0.243**	–0.207*	0.010	0.018
TV employment	–0.274**	–0.301**	–0.171**	–0.215**
Lag TV employment			–0.024	–0.019
Employed—lag 1	—	—	0.495**	0.515**
Employed—lag 2	—	—	0.435**	0.424**
Employed—lag 3	—	—	0.479**	0.474**
Interactions, Female by				
Experience	—	–0.0374**	—	–0.0389**
Experience^2	—	0.0010**	—	0.0010**
1983	—	–0.118	—	—
1984	—	–0.066	—	—
1985	—	–0.240	—	—
1986	—	–0.293	—	–0.067
1987	—	–0.290	—	–0.114
1988	—	–0.072	—	0.123
1989	—	–0.021	—	0.148
1990	—	–0.046	—	0.150
1991		–0.116		0.137
1992		–0.053		0.191
TV employment	—	0.173*	—	0.256**
Minority	—	–0.250	—	–0.069
Employed—lag 1			—	–0.097
Employed—lag 2			—	0.057
Employed—lag 3			—	0.048

(continued)

TABLE 3 Continued

Variable	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*
Constant	9.823	9.788	9.789	9.786
Root mean squared error	1.393	1.392	1.300	1.299
R^2	0.081	0.084	0.186	0.188
N (person-years)	14,439	14,439	11,296	11,296
Tests	df	F *ratio*	df	F *ratio*
All interactions	14	2.009*	14	2.271**
Experience interactions	2	6.793**	2	5.741**
Lag employment interactions	—	—	3	0.727
Year interactions	10	1.042	7	1.497

a. Pooled cross-sectional time-series regression models, ordinary least squares estimates. Dependent variable is log earnings.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

on whether prior employment and earnings are controlled, Table 5 shows that for each model the net gender gap in (log) earnings increases dramatically with years in the industry. At career entry, the gender gap in earnings is as low as 4 to 6 percent (and not statistically significant according to the estimates of the main effects of gender in Models 2 and 6). But the results in Table 5 show that within five years of career entry, the gender gap in earnings grows to 20 percent or more, and by the fifteenth year the gap is on the order of 40 percent or more.

Although the gender gap in earnings increases with years in the industry, we find no evidence that the effects of prior employment on earnings are greater for men than for women (see row labeled "lag employment interactions" at the bottom of Table 3 and "lag earnings interactions" in Table 4). Nor do the results in Tables 3 and 4 show any evidence of declining disadvantage, because the gender-by-year interaction is not statistically significant. That is, there is no statistical evidence that the disadvantages faced by female screenwriters are declining over time. In each instance, we fail to reject the null hypothesis of no gender-by-year interactions (row labeled "year interactions" at the bottom of Tables 3 and 4).[4] In short, with respect to the impact of gender on earnings, consistent with research on television writers (Bielby and Bielby 1992), the structure of disadvantage was essentially static during the 1980s and early 1990s. The apparent decline in the gender gap in median earnings shown in Figure 4 is actually a spurious trend generated by shifts over time in the number of years of experience women screenwriters have relative to men.[5]

In sum, our findings support a model of cumulative disadvantage whereby the gender gap in earnings grows with years of experience in the industry. Women writers in the industry face gender barriers that reduce their earnings substantially compared to men of similar age and experience, and these barriers increase the

TABLE 4: Determinants of Earnings among Film Writers Employed in Three Consecutive Years, 1985-1992[a]

Variable	*Model 5*	*Model 6*
Cohort		
Pre-1971	0.074	0.049
1971-75	0.078	0.071
Year		
1986	–0.142*	–0.141*
1987	–0.060	–0.068
1988 (strike year)	–0.130*	–0.136*
1989	0.030	0.002
1990	0.117*	0.127*
1991	–0.085	–0.122*
1992	–0.069	–0.117
Age 30-39	–0.023	–0.023
Age 40-49	–0.119	–0.120
Age 50-59	–0.220**	–0.221**
Age 60-64	–0.393**	–0.397**
Age 65+	–0.274**	–0.280**
Age NA	–0.068	–0.068
Experience	0.0050	0.0096
Experience^2	–0.0001	–0.0002
Female	–0.039	–0.060
Minority	0.009	0.010
TV employment	–0.244**	–0.279**
Lag TV employment	0.122**	0.129**
Employed—lag 3	0.062*	0.062*
Log earnings—lag 1	0.518**	0.519**
Log earnings—lag 2	0.267**	0.263**
Interactions, female by		
Experience	—	–0.0405*
Experience squared	—	0.0011*
1986	—	0.021
1987	—	0.084
1988	—	0.071
1989	—	0.198
1990	—	–0.058
1991		0.302*
1992		0.347*
Minority	—	–0.039
TV employment		0.248**
Employed—lag 3	—	0.0472
Log earnings—lag 1	—	–0.0189
Log earnings—lag 2	—	0.019
Constant	2.526	2.556
Root mean squared error	0.968	0.967
R^2	0.500	0.502
N (person-years)	5,049	5,049

Tests	df	F *ratio*
All interactions	14	1.708*
Experience interactions	2	3.072*
Lag earnings interactions	2	0.134
Year interactions	7	1.84

a. Pooled cross-sectional time-series regression models, ordinary least squares estimates. Dependent variable is log earnings.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

TABLE 5: Estimates of Cumulative Disadvantage: Net Effect of Gender on Log Earnings at Different Levels of Industry Experience

	Model 2	*Model 4*	*Model 6*
Years of Experience	*No Lags*	*Net of Lag Employment*	*Net of Lag Employment, Earnings*
0 Years	–0.045	–0.203	–0.060
1 Year	–0.081	–0.241	–0.099
5 Years	–0.207	–0.373	–0.235
10 Years	–0.321	–0.492	–0.356
15 Years	–0.386	–0.561	–0.422
20 Years	–0.402	–0.581	–0.433

longer they work as screenwriters. We also found no evidence that the barriers faced by women screenwriters are eroding over time. Our confidence in these results is reinforced by two features of our analysis. First, by using a pooled cross-section design, we are exploiting both intra- and interindividual variation, and with such large sample sizes we certainly would have detected substantively significant interactions by year had they existed.[6] Second, the pattern of coefficients for the control variables is consistent with what we know about the structure of the labor market for screenwriters. Year effects increase monotonically. Older writers face a net disadvantage, consistent with descriptive statistics for the industry (W. Bielby and D. Bielby 1993) and with findings for television writers (D. Bielby and W. Bielby 1993). Minority writers are disadvantaged according to models 1 and 2, although the other models show this to be largely mediated by differences between minority and nonminority writers in prior employment and earnings.[7] Finally, the effect of work in television is negative in all our models, consistent with the notion that writers achieving success in television are less likely to be pursuing film work, where the odds of success are much lower.

CONCLUSION

Women compose about half of those who are classified as authors by the U.S. Census, but the screenwriting profession is more than 80 percent male. Those women who are able to break into the profession experience a process of cumulative disadvantage: the longer they work in the industry, the more their earnings lag behind their male counterparts. It has not always been this way. In the early years of the industry, women participated fully in the writing of film narratives and were among the highest-paid scenarists in the industry. However, in the late 1920s and 1930s, the profession went through a transition that Tuchman (1989) has described as the "empty field" phenomenon. As filmmaking became industrialized and rationalized, men dominated key roles in corporate channels of production, distribution, and exhibition. As screenwriting became more lucrative, men entered the

profession in large numbers, and their dominance was legitimated by an ideology that valued men's contributions across the board but considered women's talent as appropriate only for a narrow range of genres. By the end of the 1930s, male dominance of the profession was fully institutionalized, and with the exception of a slight upturn in the early 1970s, women's representation among screenwriters has changed little over the last half century.

The typecasting of women writers seems as prevalent today as it was when "women's pictures" were at the height of their popularity in the 1930s and 1940s. Bettye McCartt, a prominent Hollywood talent agent, describes her encounters with typecasting as follows:

> When we get a call for a writer, they'll say, "Who do you have who can write an action-adventure piece?" If I suggest a woman, well they laugh at me. There are certain genres where a woman won't even be considered. By the same token, they'll call and say, "What woman writers do you have for a piece on so-and-so" (Writers Guild of America, West 1990, 12).

Although we have no quantitative data on the extent of typecasting of women writers, it is easy to imagine how it generates a pattern of cumulative disadvantage. The typical woman writer is likely to break into the industry writing material that is either currently fashionable or viewed by producers as appropriate for a woman writer, and she is paid at a rate comparable to that for a new male writer (Guild minimums under the collective bargaining agreement place a floor on compensation of novice writers). But as her career progresses, the woman writer's opportunities are limited to a narrow range of genres, whereas her male counterpart faces no such limitations. Even if she achieves a modest degree of success as a screenwriter, her long-term marketability is vulnerable to the inevitable cycles in the popularity of specific genres in the way that a male writer's is not. Such a dynamic is consistent with anecdotal accounts from women writers and their agents, and it is with our empirical findings of cumulative gender disadvantage in earnings, even when women writers are compared to men who have similar patterns of employment and earnings over a three-year period.

Among feature film writers, a gender gap in earnings emerges and widens over the course of writers' careers. Our earlier research (Bielby and Bielby 1992) detected a different dynamic in the labor market for television writers. For them, there is a substantial earnings gap at career entry that persists throughout the career. The two patterns probably reflect different routes to career entry in film and television. In film, there are more ways for both male and female aspiring writers to participate at the periphery of the labor market (e.g., by selling an option on a story or treatment, by doing a rewrite or "polish" on a screenplay). Typically, both male and female film writers start at the margins of the industry, and although few succeed beyond that level, men have better prospects for breaking into the ranks of successful writers of feature film, and success breeds success once they do. In contrast, the market for television writers is more highly structured. An aspiring

writer either participates by gaining access to the interconnected social network of writer-producers, studio development executives, and network programmers or does not participate at all. In that kind of market, women writers are likely to face a substantial disadvantage from the very beginning.

Despite the somewhat differing dynamics of cumulative versus continuous disadvantage, it is important to recognize that there is substantial gender stratification in both segments of the industry, and in neither film nor television have we found any evidence of a decline since the early 1980s in the barriers faced by women writers. The similarities in the organizational, business, and labor market arrangements in television and film are no doubt more important than the differences in understanding the nature of those barriers. Short-term contracting in a context of ambiguity, risk, and uncertainty encourages the reliance on closed social networks of interpersonal ties and the use of informal, subjective criteria for the hiring and evaluation of writers and other creative workers. A large body of social research demonstrates that these are precisely the conditions under which gender stereotypes reinforce structural barriers to women's career advancement (Bielby 1992; Deaux 1984; Eagly and Wood 1982; Williams and Best 1986), especially when there is no system for holding those responsible for decisions about hiring and compensation accountable for doing so in a way that is free from bias (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978; Tetlock 1985). So in one sense, our findings are exactly what one would expect from established theories of gender inequality in the workplace. At the same time, prevailing theories of gender-segregated job ladders and a bureaucratically legitimated gendered division of labor (Acker 1990) are less relevant to television, film, and related media industries than they are to the corporate, government, blue-collar, and pink-collar settings that have been the focus of most research on gender inequality in the workplace. Although there is some research and theory on how gender is created and reinforced symbolically in the workplace (Cockburn 1985; Hearn and Parkin 1983; Hochschild 1983), none of it addresses how it occurs in mass culture industries that deliberately and self-consciously attempt to reflect and trade on cultural idioms about gender. The women and men who finance, write, produce, market, and distribute feature films and television programming are "doing gender" in a way that simultaneously shapes the work experiences and opportunities of those who participate in the industry and determines the images of gender consumed by a global audience. Mass culture industries are sites where symbolic representations of gender are literally produced, and they provide new challenges to the way we understand gender inequality in organizations. Our research highlights the importance of attending to the industrial context, social networks, organizational arrangements, and the symbolic content of the commodities produced to fully understand the barriers to women's full participation in the production of media narratives.

NOTES

1. Even feminist film critics are vulnerable to these stereotypes. McCreadie (1994) suggests that the rise of "women's films" in the 1940s opened new opportunities for women writers, which then declined with the demise of that genre in the postwar period. But Writers Guild of America, West membership statistics suggest that women's representation among screenwriters remained steady at about 13% from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s (Figure 2). Thus, although it is widely believed that women are best suited for writing almost exclusively for women's films, for approximately three decades, women's representation among screenwriters remained constant regardless of the dominant genre of the day.

2. None of these films was written by a woman.

3. Strictly speaking, if the cumulative disadvantage model is favored over the model of continuous disadvantage, then a process of declining disadvantage would imply a three-way interaction between time, gender, and the effects of experience, prior employment, and prior earnings.

4. Although the hypothesis that the year-by-gender interaction coefficients are jointly zero cannot be rejected, the point estimates seem to suggest a pattern of declining gender effects over time. To examine this possibility, we replaced the 10 binary interaction terms, female × (year – 1982). This provides a more powerful 1 degree of freedom test of the hypothesis that the gender gap in earnings declined linearly from 1982 to 1992. However, even with this more powerful test, the null hypothesis of no interaction could not be rejected.

5. From the early 1980s to the early 1990s, there was a substantial shift in employment favoring younger writers. So by the end of the period covered by our study, the industry was relying more heavily on writers who were just launching their careers. Because the gender gap in earnings is smaller among writers who are early in their careers, this trend has the effect of attenuating the bivariate association of gender and earnings, even though the net gender gap, controlling for experience, is not shrinking.

6. Moreover, inspection of collinearity diagnostics indicated that our failure to detect interaction is not due to inflated levels of sampling variation and covariation.

7. As noted above, because so few minority women are employed as screenwriters, we are unable to obtain reliable estimates of the interaction of minority status and gender. In each of our models, the interaction of female by minority status is negative (substantially so in model 1), suggesting that minority women face additional barriers. However, due to the small number of cases, the test of the interaction has very little power, and even a substantial gender-by-minority status interaction would fail to be detected as statistically significant in our models.

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