

19094 A YEAR OF FEMINIST FINALES

The year 2012 was a year of feminist finales for TV series. These shows ignited a conversation about what women could and couldn't do onscreen, but they also marked a new era behind the camera: the rise of the female show-runner. Their saturation of popular culture convinced streaming services starting to generate their own original content that female television writers, once considered "risky," might be worthwhile hires. Seven game-changing female-run shows premiered from 2013 to 2015. Each changed the way television viewers perceived women. And each will air its final episode in 2019. Shows about women made by women had always been rare. Networks perceived women as a niche audience and argued that there simply wasn't room for women's stories in prime time.

But with the rise of Netflix and Amazon, space became limitless, nullifying the sexist excuses of the past. The series 'Orange Is the New Black' could never have been made for a traditional network or cable outlet. It was not about just one difficult woman living in a man's world. The show was about dozens of women with different skin colors, sexual identities and body types – all locked up in one prison. Netflix was the only company interested and a year after the series debuted, Orange is the new Black was nominated for twelve Emmys and won three. Those awards attracted viewers. Netflix doesn't share traditional ratings but it is estimated that over five million people watched Orange's sixth season in 2018.

Streaming services began to seek out voices that might differentiate their libraries from those of the same networks that had ignored women for decades. At an Emmy Awards ceremony one female director shouted out: "Down with the Patriarchy!"

Recent comments about sexism, rape culture and gender identity may have been stoked by politics, but they were primed by pop culture. The female-run shows ending this year fundamentally altered the way television portrayed women – and how audiences perceived them in real life. One director often filmed the same events from both a man's and a woman's perspective, illuminating their misconceptions about one another.

Thankfully, we can no longer treat women's stories as curiosities to be scrutinized. When a woman can make a good show, a mediocre show or a truly terrible show without signaling something about her gender as a whole, then we might be getting somewhere.