



SUMMER 2021

I Am Not a Fetish or Model Minority:

Redefining What it Means to Be
API in the Entertainment Industry



Table of Contents

1	Executive Summary
2	Key Findings
3	Foreword
5	Introduction
6	Why Representation Matters
6	Historical and Contemporary Stereotypes and Tropes
9	Methodology
11	Findings
38	Interventions
40	Advisory Board
41	Endnotes



Executive Summary

In the past two years, the United States has seen a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes,¹ particularly surrounding COVID-19, which has had a disproportionate impact on the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities.² At the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, we believe that it is imperative that we investigate our cultural messaging surrounding marginalized groups. Therefore, we examined the portrayal of Asian people and Pacific Islanders within the film industry - both on screen and behind the scenes. Authentic representation should be informed by the API people who contribute to its creation, and it is important to ask whether they feel heard and seen.

In order to assess inclusion and representation of Asians and Pacific Islanders in entertainment as well as their experiences in the industry, we conducted three complementary studies:

First, we present an original analysis from a survey of respondents recruited by the Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment (CAPE) about their personal experiences, their perceptions of representation, and the industry as a whole. Individuals who took the survey currently work in or with the entertainment industry as talent, in agencies, or in public relations; over half of respondents indicated that they were in

positions of creative power, such as writers, directors, and producers.

- ▶ Second, we carry out a content analysis of 100 films -- the 10 top-grossing domestic films from each year between 2010-2019 -- to identify the state of API inclusion in popular films.
- ▶ Third, we carry out a content analysis of every film (124) produced or distributed by one of the major conglomerate³ or mini-major⁴ studios and their subsidiaries and/or the major streaming services with API actors in the main title cast from 2017-2020 in order to determine how API characters are portrayed in mainstream films when they are featured prominently.
- ▶ This study is unique because it combines content analysis of on-screen representation of API characters in film and a survey of members of API communities in the entertainment industry about representation. Therefore, our study contributes to an ongoing dialogue about the state of API representation and inclusion by not only assessing whether members of these communities are portrayed on screen, but also the nature of that portrayal, and speaking directly to API creators and industry members about their experiences and ideas about representation.

Key Findings

Survey Analysis

- ▶ The majority of surveyed members of API communities in the entertainment industry recruited by CAPE believe that “representation” means “portraying a group of people in an authentic way on screen” (97.6%), but less than half (42.9%) believe that “Hollywood” shares this opinion. This enormous gap signals that members of API communities in the industry do not feel they are aligned on the meaning of representation with “Hollywood.”
- ▶ The majority of respondents recruited by CAPE do not have a positive view of the state of API representation; 93.3% agree that API representation on screen is inadequate, and 95.1% agree that API representation behind the scenes is inadequate.
- ▶ Eighty percent of CAPE respondents surveyed have experienced microaggressions (80.9%), blatant racism (55.6%), and tokenization (72.5%) in the workplace.
- ▶ Only 43.5% of CAPE respondents surveyed feel that their voice is valued.

Content Analysis

- ▶ Asian people make up about 7% of the US population⁵ and Pacific Islanders about 0.4%⁶, but together only 4.5% of leads or co-leads in the top 10 grossing domestic films from 2010-2019 are API characters; 5.6% of supporting characters are API.
- ▶ Seventeen percent of female API characters are verbally objectified and 13.0% are visually objectified in the top 10 grossing domestic films from 2010-2019. This is more common for API women than white women and other non-API women of color. Characters who are visually and verbally objectified are treated in ways that separate their appearance from their individuality and personal agency.
- ▶ Even in films that feature API characters in the main title cast, nearly three-fourths of API characters are in supportive roles.
- ▶ According to our analysis of films featuring API characters in the main title cast, about a third of API characters embody at least one common API trope or stereotype (35.2%), such as the “Martial Artist,” (Asian trope) the “Model Minority,” (Asian trope) or the “Exotic Woman.”
- ▶ According to our analysis of films featuring API characters in the main title cast, API characters are written as “smart” and “hard-working,” (Asian tropes) but less often “sexy” and “funny.”
- ▶ API ethnic identity is most central to characters who are East Asian (49.2%) and least central to characters who are Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders (12.2%).

Foreword

By Michelle K. Sugihara, Executive Director of CAPE

At CAPE, we work to shift culture through storytelling to create a better world. For the past 30 years, we have fought for Asian and Pacific Islander (API) representation in film and television, because what we watch on our screens should reflect the world in which we live and project a better one.

In order to solve a problem, it's helpful to know its contours. Thus, we are honored and excited to partner with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media on this groundbreaking research study that provides critical insights on increasing authentic representation. According to another study by the Geena Davis Institute, "eighty percent of media consumed worldwide is made in the United States," so we have a responsibility to create authentic storylines and portrayals to push culture forward on a global scale.

Stories on screen are the quickest and most pervasive way to shape perception, and in turn, reality. Images matter. The images we see affect our perceptions of others, as well as of ourselves. They can affect the size of our dreams and even circumscribe our potential.

But stories on screen also have the power to create change.

In the time it takes to make a movie or create a television show, we can change what the future looks like. We have yet to have an Asian American or Pacific Islander US President (although we're closer than we've ever been) or a US Supreme Court Justice, but we can and should see them portrayed onscreen more often as such, and as leaders in general. People need to see it before they can believe it -- or as the Institute puts it, #SeeltBelt. When we have compelling stories with three-dimensional characters from diverse backgrounds, it fosters awareness, understanding, and acceptance.

Currently, there is a disconnect between the real life experiences of APIs and the quality and quantity of representation on screen and behind the scenes. For starters, we want to see more layered and nuanced portrayals, stories of mixed-race and multi-ethnic characters, and intersectional narratives. Stories that ignore or erase (or worse, mock) our humanity create the narrative foundation for how APIs are perceived and treated in the real world, which is why stereotypes are so damaging.

Asians in America face stereotypes of being quiet, submissive, nerdy, exotic, and foreign, among others. In contrast, Pacific Islanders – in addition to facing higher levels of erasure overall – face stereotypes of being primitive, simple, lazy, unintelligent, and unambitious, among others. Moreover, the conflation of our many communities under the API banner further compounds monolithic perceptions.

These inaccurate portrayals have profound and insidious consequences, which is why this is not just a representation issue, but a social justice issue. We see stereotypical portrayals of API characters on our screens again and again – if we see them at all – which have real world impacts. For example, the stereotypes that Asian Americans are hard-working but lack assertiveness and leadership savvy are so pervasive that, according to the Harvard Business Review, Asian Americans are the most likely to be hired, but the least likely to be promoted into management. Additionally, the stereotype of Hawaiians being “happy welcomers” to visitors and colonizers (aka the “Aloha spirit”), coupled with the “Hawai’i as paradise” trope, has led to detrimental effects on their land and scarce natural resources. Not to mention when we have a steady stream of stereotypes that dehumanize a group of people, it becomes psychologically easier to hurt them. Indeed, studies show that when people see Asians in America as being ‘foreign,’ they are more likely to treat them with hostility and to engage in acts of violence and discrimination against them.

This is why studies like this are crucial. The findings in this inaugural study and landmark survey help us understand the current landscape of API onscreen representation and better reconcile that representation with the lived experiences of APIs working in Hollywood.

CAPE is proud to add this groundbreaking research to the other ways we advance representation from script to screen through talent professional development programs, script consultations, studio and other corporate trainings, the CAPE Database, and supercharging film releases through GoldOpen.

But we still have a long way to go. The conversations are becoming increasingly complex and nuanced, including ethnic-specific casting, colorism, intricacies of intersectionality, body type, and who has the right to tell which stories. Additionally, we’d love to see studies specifically about Pacific Islander representation, as their experiences and issues are more akin to indigenous communities, including colonialism and imperialism, and deserve separate examination. It’s important to continue funding projects like this so we can all continue to move the needle and shift culture together, starting with the findings on the following pages. Here’s to a better tomorrow!

Michelle K. Sugihara is the Executive Director of CAPE (Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment). She is also an entertainment attorney, film producer, and adjunct professor for the Claremont Colleges’ Intercollegiate Department of Asian American Studies. She co-leads #GoldOpen, is on the leadership team of Time’s Up Entertainment Women of Color, and is a founding member of the Asian Pacific American Friends of the Theater. She is also an associate member of Cold Tofu, the nation’s premier Asian American comedy improv and sketch group. An avid public speaker, Michelle speaks and teaches across the country on various topics including Representation in Media, Women in Entertainment, Diversity and Inclusion, Leadership, and Improv for Non-Actors. IG: @capeusa; @michsugi. www.capeusa.org



Introduction

In the past two years, the United States has seen a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes,⁷ particularly surrounding COVID-19, which has had a disproportionate impact on Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities.⁸ At the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, we believe that it is imperative that we investigate our society's cultural messaging surrounding marginalized groups. Therefore, we examined the portrayal of Asian people and Pacific Islanders within the film industry - both on screen and behind the scenes. Authentic representation should be informed by the API people who contribute to its creation and it is important to ask whether they feel heard and seen.

In order to assess inclusion and representation of Asian and Pacific Islanders in Hollywood, we conducted three complementary studies. First, we present an original analysis from a survey of members of API communities within the entertainment industry recruited by CAPE about their personal experiences as well as their perceptions about representation. Second, we analyze the state of API inclusion in the top 10 domestic grossing films from 2010-2019. Third, we carry out a content analysis of 124 films with API actors in the main title cast from 2017 to 2020 in order to determine how prominent API characters are portrayed in mainstream films.

Much of the existing research on race and gender in entertainment media analyzes fictional representations of API characters, however, far less is known about the representation of Asians and Pacific Islanders working in Hollywood. We wanted to take a more holistic approach to better reconcile on-screen representation with the lived experiences of Asians and Pacific Islanders who work in entertainment media. Given that API characters are relatively few in comparison to other racial groups, we included two separate content analyses of API film representation.

We begin this report with an analysis of stereotypes and tropes associated with members of API communities to draw out how media representations reinforce discrimination against API communities. We then describe our methodological approach for this study, followed by a presentation of the major findings and recommendations for improving media representations of API characters and the state of the entertainment industry for Asians and Pacific Islanders who work in the field.

Why Representation Matters

Over the past century, film has become one of the most popular forms of media and, consequently, holds influence over cultural norms and values in particular. Film representation is crucial for understanding various communities, as it can frame how individuals understand their own roles in society and their concept of self, as well as how others see them.⁹ Additionally, research has shown that viewers substitute on-screen stereotypes for reality when they lack direct contact with certain racial groups. Therefore, the erasure and negative portrayals of racial and ethnic groups in film can contribute to narrow perceptions of communities and this can even aggravate racial tensions, as well as adversely affect how BIPOC¹⁰ individuals see themselves.¹¹ Given the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes in the U.S. since March 2020,¹² it is necessary that we take a closer look at how the film industry portrays Asian people on screen, and also that we ask members of API communities in the entertainment industry about their experiences and their perspectives on representation in their industry.

As the Asian population in the U.S. continues to grow¹³ it is important to ask whether flawed or negative depictions of these communities persist in U.S. films, and whether films fail to include or accurately reflect this diverse group.¹⁴ Examining portrayals of API characters in entertainment is essential as “representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation.”¹⁵

Historical and Contemporary Stereotypes and Tropes

MODEL MINORITY MYTH

One of the most prominent stereotypes associated with Asian Americans is the “Model Minority.” This term was introduced during the 1960s, during the rise of U.S. social movements confronting issues like the war in Vietnam, civil rights, and gender equality. In an influential piece featured in the *New York Times* in 1966, sociologist William Pettersen cemented a widespread stereotype of Asians as hard-working and compliant. He applauded Japanese Americans for overcoming discrimination, which was in stark contrast to Black Americans, who were treated as “problem” minorities.¹⁶ This pitted the Asian American community in direct opposition to Black Americans, who were still struggling against racial bigotry, poverty, and a heritage rooted in slavery. Despite Pettersen’s claims, this stereotype is a harmful myth that does not genuinely reflect the Asian American community’s experiences or history.

This myth characterizes all Asian Americans as successful and well-adjusted because they are quiet, docile, and have a strong work ethic.¹⁷ Although these qualities seem positive on the surface, they paint an entire community with one monolithic brush and ignore the difficulties that Asian Americans face. For instance, although some Asian American ethnic groups are more affluent, others, such as Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian and Khmer, are less affluent than average.¹⁸ Additionally, the stereotype is most often associated with people with East and/or South Asian heritage, and therefore assumes that certain ethnic groups are more intelligent and hard-working than

others. Additionally, this myth conceals anti-Asian American racism by making certain ethnicities in the Asian American community invisible from broader society. They are labeled as outsiders, excluded from larger discussions about systemic oppression, and denied anti-racist initiatives because it is assumed that they have already overcome adversity and do not face racism.¹⁹

FOREVER FOREIGNER

Another common Asian stereotype is the “Forever Foreigner.” The “Forever Foreigner” stereotype presents Asian Americans as foreigners with allegiance to their ancestral countries. Rather than being seen as citizens born and raised - or as having generations of family - in the United States, they are seen as disloyal or as foreign enemies. Given significant Chinese migration in the 1800s to the United States as a labor source for the railroad and divisions with Japan in World War II, Asian Americans were viewed as outsiders to American culture with questionable motives and eventually incarcerated in camps in the 1940s; furthermore, laws prevented Asian immigration until the 1970s.²⁰ Together, the “Model Minority” and the “Forever Foreigner” stereotypes categorize Asian American people as outsiders, often disregarded in broader discussions about race, ethnicity, and discrimination in the U.S.²¹ Discussing and dissecting these stereotypes and how they relate to “othering” takes on renewed urgency, given the rise in violence against Asians in the US.²² “Othering” consists of applying principles that classify individuals into groups of us versus them, where “us” is the dominant in-group; “othering” does tend to emerge surrounding crises like pandemics, with racial minority groups being blamed.²³ As University of Maryland professor of Government and Asian American Studies Janelle Wong put it, “I think this surge [in violence] is [driven by] the rhetoric that political leaders have been using ... but I don’t think we would have seen the spike in anti-Asian bias without a pretty strong foundation rooted in the ‘Forever Foreigner’ stereotype.”²⁴ This illustrates how film and media depictions can provide a foundation for further discrimination, oppression or violence.

Additional Asian American stereotypes and tropes persist in film. In line with the “Model Minority” stereotype, in the early days of film and television Asian American men were initially cast as effeminate laundry workers and cooks and more recently have been typecast as nerdy, sidekicks, or math geniuses.²⁵ Asian American men are less often cast as romantic love interests because Asian American characters are often emasculated and portrayed as unattractive, confirming a persistent stereotype that they are undesirable to women.²⁶ Some other stereotypes include API people being portrayed as stoic and impolite, or API women as giggling and passive.²⁷ Asian American representations also include people who speak in heavily accented English, thus reinforcing the “Forever Foreigner” stereotype.²⁸

Along with stereotypes associated with API communities overall, regional stereotypes and tropes also inform our notions of how members of API communities should act, dress and think. Historically, East Asian men were associated with the image of the “Yellow Peril,” echoing Western fears that Asians, in particular Chinese and Japanese during WWII, would obstruct Western values, such as democracy and Christianity.²⁹ This image was typified by the role of Dr. Fu Manchu, a villain intent on world domination, often played by white actors in yellowface (such as Mickey Rooney’s portrayal of a buffoonish, bucktoothed Mr. Yunioshi in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*).³⁰ On the other hand, East Asian women are depicted frequently as either the “Lotus Blossom/China Doll/Geisha Girl”- a character who is submissive and innocent while remaining sexually available, or as the seductive “Dragon Lady,” a cold and calculating character who uses her feminine wiles to deceive and trap men.³¹

Often, South Asian Americans are depicted in science-related occupations such as medicine, engineering, and computing, or in service industry occupations such as motel owners, gas station owners, or cab drivers.³² Specifically, South Asian women are often cast as the exotic love interest who is mysterious and seductive.³³ People with South Asian heritage are also depicted as very devout gurus, yogis, or swamis. South Asian men are depicted as nerdy,

socially awkward, and work or school-focused. Both South Asian men and women are also portrayed as overbearing, strict parents.³⁴

Pacific Islanders and Southeast Asian Americans appear in film even more rarely than Asian Americans with East Asian and South Asian heritage. Pacific Islanders are often depicted as either happy-go-lucky, simple people who lack ambition and intellect, or as aggressive “savages.”³⁵ They are assumed to be fat, violent, and unintelligent, and Pacific Islander women are often represented as hula dancers. Southeast Asian American women are usually represented in films as service workers who are nail salon owners or nail technicians, massage therapists or sex workers.³⁶ On the other hand, Southeast Asian American men are often depicted as lazy alcoholics who leave their work undone and/or are violent.³⁷

These stereotypes likely have consequences for API communities, especially over the past year and a half, given the rise in anti-Asian violence and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on API communities’ health and well-being. Research shows that stereotypes can lead to dehumanization, and dehumanization can pave the way for hatred and cruelty.³⁸ Previous research has found that the dehumanization of refugees is associated with anti-refugee attitudes and behaviors.³⁹ Similarly,

dehumanization has influenced attitudes toward immigrants in the U.S.⁴⁰ Hate crimes against Asian Americans have risen by 169% in the first quarter of 2021, compared to the same time period in 2020, and approximately 3,800 hate incidents have been reported over the last year.⁴¹ Much of this is likely exacerbated by politicians and other political commentators who refer to COVID-19 as the “China Flu” and the “Kung Flu”.⁴² The coronavirus epidemic has also caused adverse health consequences for the API community. Among those who tested positive for COVID, API patients were 57% more likely to be hospitalized and 49% more likely to die compared to white counterparts with similar socioeconomic backgrounds and underlying health conditions. These alarming numbers have arguably received less attention than other affected communities.⁴³

But stereotypes, even those that seem harmless or even positive, can have a profound effect on society as they create unrealistic, and often negative, expectations and assumptions. Effective representations can help fight and break down stereotypes that can be detrimental to individuals and limiting to society. This will ultimately produce richer stories, new voices, and fresh perspectives in our media. Original storylines and perspectives are also a way to shine in a crowded media landscape.



Methodology

In order to assess the representation of APIs in the entertainment industry, we conducted three complementary studies:

An original analysis that surveys API people within the industry about both their personal experiences and their perceptions about representation.

- ▶ A content analysis of the top 10 domestic grossing films from 2010-2019 in order to assess the state of API inclusion in popular films.
- ▶ A content analysis of 124 films with API actors in the main title casts from 2017 to 2020 in order to better understand the portrayal of the most prominent API characters in mainstream films.

Survey Methodology

To understand the experiences and perceptions of members of API communities in the entertainment industry, we partnered with the Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment (CAPE), an organization that seeks to advance the representation of Asian and Pacific Islander creatives in entertainment. CAPE released the survey to their email list on June 16, 2021

and sent reminder emails on June 24 and June 29, 2021. The survey ran for two weeks, closing on June 30, 2021. In total, 329 respondents who identified as API completed the questionnaire.

The survey asked respondents to provide their personal employment background, including their job function and their time in the industry, as well as their demographic information. We also asked respondents questions about their experience as an API creator, such as their encounters with racism and/or microaggressions, and the extent to which they have felt tokenized at work. We presented respondents with questions regarding representation both on screen and behind the scenes. These questions were framed on three levels: their personal opinion, their perception of their most recent boss's opinions, and their perception of the opinions of "Hollywood" as a whole. We also asked a series of open-ended questions in order for respondents to have space to provide more context about the issues of API diversity in the entertainment industry. These included questions about a role that was meaningful to them, changes they would like to see, things from their lives they have never seen on screen, and what they think others do not understand about representation.

Content Analysis Methodology

For the first content analysis study, we analyzed the top 10 domestic grossing films from 2010-2019 in order to assess the state of API inclusion in popular films.⁴⁴ Across 100 films we collected data on 3,003 characters -- 111 leads or co-leads, 1,296 supporting characters, and 1,596 minor characters.

Given that the roles for API characters in top-grossing films are rare, we conducted a second content analysis study to determine how API characters are portrayed in mainstream Hollywood films. This analysis helped to uncover what sort of characters are played by members of the API community in films more broadly. For this study, we examined 124 films from 2017 to 2020 with API actors in the main title cast. We used Variety Insight, a database of talent, producers, creators, and projects in entertainment, to identify the films in our database; Variety Insight only incorporates verified information in their data. Using their search function, we identified all films that had actors who were East Asian, South Asian, Southeast

Asian, or Pacific Islander in the title cast and that met the following criteria: 1) produced in the United States, 2) released between 2017-2020, and 3) produced or distributed by one of the major conglomerate⁴⁵ or mini-major⁴⁶ studios and their subsidiaries and/or the major streaming services.⁴⁷ The final list included 124 films featuring 225 API main title characters.

For each film in the dataset, we analyzed the treatment of all of the API characters in the title credits. Characters' demographic information (age, sex, race, skin tone, sexual orientation, class) as well as any other potential minoritized features such as disability, body size, or mental illness. Further, they assessed whether the characters were from immigrant families, engaged with their cultures, encountered and/or reacted to racism, and experienced violence. They also measured personality traits, role prominence, and whether the character embodied or subverted API tropes and stereotypes.

We also assessed several film-level questions, including the number of API characters in the title cast, the centrality of Asian or Asian-American culture in the film, the use of racism, and the prominence and treatment of API characters outside of the main cast.



Findings

SURVEY ANALYSIS

An overview of the survey respondent pool is presented in Table 1. Slightly more than half of respondents are East Asian (53.8%); 16.1% are Southeast Asian, and 16.4% are multi-ethnic, followed by about 8% South Asian, and 5% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Most of the respondents in our pool are cis women (64.4%), identify as straight (75.0%), and do not indicate that they have any disabilities

(85.4%). The respondent pool varies in age but 36.5% are 18-34, 34.7% are 35-54, and 8.8% are 55 or older. About 20 percent of respondents did not provide their date of birth. The pool also varies by how long respondents have been in the entertainment industry. About a third of the respondents have been in the industry for 1-8 years (37.7%), with about a third of respondents in the industry for 9-15 years (30.4%), and about a third of respondents in the industry for 16 years or longer (31.3%).

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

	TOTAL PERCENT
Race/Ethnicity	
East Asian	53.8%
Multi-ethnic	16.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	4.9%
South Asian	7.6%
Southeast Asian	16.4%
Gender	
Male	32.2%
Female	64.4%
Non-binary	1.5%
Other (or prefer not to say)	1.8%

LGBTQIA+

Straight	75.1%
Gay or Lesbian	5.8%
Bisexual or Pansexual	7.6%
A/Demisexual	1.5%
Other (or prefer not to say)	10.0%

Age

18-34	36.5%
35-54	34.7%
55+	8.8%
Did Not Respond	20.2%

Disabled

Yes (Communication, Cognitive, Physical)	6.4%
No	85.4%
Other (or prefer not to say)	5.8%

Years in the Industry

1 - 8	37.7%
9 - 15	30.4%
16+	31.3%
Did Not Respond	0.6%

The survey respondents come from all across the entertainment industry, but the majority were in creative positions. The participation by respondents from different roles in entertainment media will give a broader perspective on API representation in the industry. In Table 2, we identify the various roles and positions respondents fill across the industry. Given that many people working in entertainment take on multiple projects and multiple positions

within projects, respondents were given the choice to select multiple options. About half (50.8%) of respondents identified themselves as “writers” and one-third (33.7%) identified as “on-screen talent.” Almost 30 percent (28.3%) identified themselves as “producers,” and 18.7% as “directors.” Other roles filled by respondents include studio or production company employees, post-production talent, animators, public relations experts, and administrative workers.

TABLE 2. API RESPONDENTS ROLES IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Role	% of sample (can select more than one)
On-screen Talent	33.7%
Writer	50.8%
Producer	28.3%
Director	18.8%
Distribution	0.6%
Agency/Agent	2.1%
Studio/Production Company	13.7%
Administrative	6.4%
Public Relations	4.6%
Other	6.1%
Pre-Production	4.9%
Production	8.5%
Post-Production	9.7%
Animator	1.7%

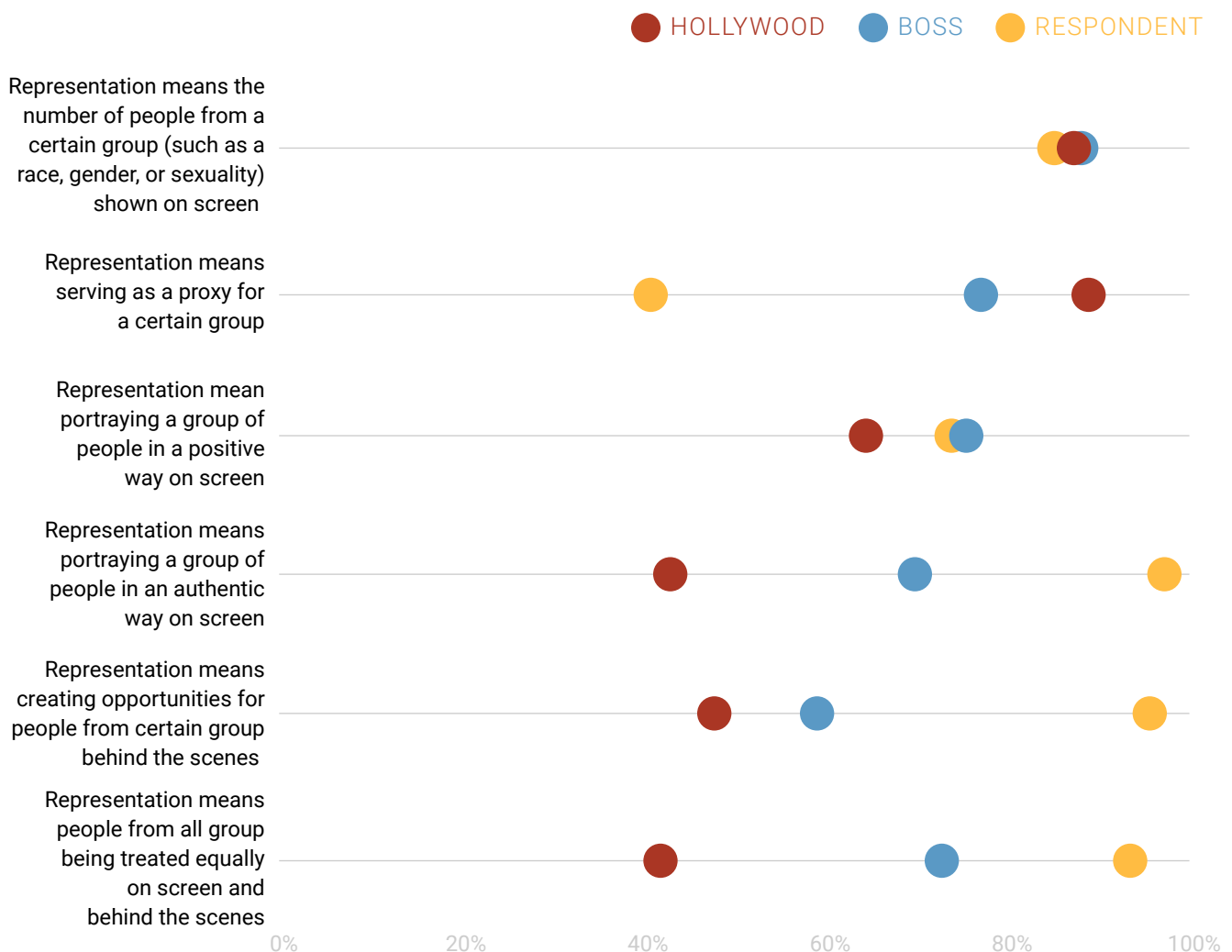
WHAT DOES REPRESENTATION MEAN TO YOU?

Although there is new attention being paid to API on-screen representation, ideas about what it means to be truly “represented” vary considerably in the entertainment industry. To get a sense of what representation means to our respondents, we asked them to report whether they agreed or disagreed with six definitions of “representation.” We also asked respondents to approximate whether their most recent boss as well as “Hollywood” (or the entertainment industry overall) would agree or

disagree with the six definitions of representation to get a sense of how aligned respondents in our pool are with some of the potential gatekeepers (bosses, “Hollywood”) in the industry. The results are presented in Chart 1.

Nearly all (97.6%) API respondents agree that representation means “portraying a group of people in an authentic way on screen.” However, only 42.9% agree that Hollywood agrees with this definition of representation, an enormous gap; respondents were less critical of their boss, with 69.8% of respondents

CHART 1. WHAT DOES “REPRESENTATION” MEAN?



indicating that they believe their boss would agree with this definition of representation. A respondent's approximation of the views of their boss might reflect what they see at work daily, which will vary across individuals' experiences; however, it is still a useful proxy for that state of representation in the industry. Similarly, 93.6% of respondents agree that representation means "people from all groups being treated equally on screen and behind the scenes," but only 42.0% believe that Hollywood would agree whereas 72.8% believe their boss would agree. And 95.7% of respondents agree that representation means "creating opportunities for people from certain

groups behind the scenes," but only 47.9% believe that Hollywood would agree and 59.1% believe their boss would agree with this definition.

Respondents believe that Hollywood is mostly likely to agree that representation means "serving as a proxy for a certain group" (89.3%), and "the number of people from a certain group (such as a race, gender, or sexuality) shown on screen" (87.4%). These are less transformative definitions of representation and likely reflect the belief that the industry as a whole is not yet embracing more meaningful notions of representation.

TABLE 3. WHAT DOES "REPRESENTATION" MEAN? (TIME IN INDUSTRY)

Percent Agree	Respondent		
	1-8	9-15	16+
Representation means the number of people from a certain group (such as a race, gender, or sexuality) shown on screen	84.7%	90.0%	80.4%
Representation means serving as a proxy for a certain group	35.8%	42.9%	46.5%
Representation means portraying a group of people in a positive way on screen	75.8%	70.0%	75.2%
Representation means portraying a group of people in an authentic way on screen	99.2%	98.0%	95.1%
Representation means creating opportunities for people from certain groups behind the scenes	98.4%	97.0%	91.2%
Representation means people from all groups being treated equally on screen and behind the scenes	94.4%	96.0%	90.2%

Views of representation do not vary widely across time in industry, yet those who have been in the industry for the least amount of time are more likely to agree that representation is about creating opportunities behind the scenes and also being treated equally on screen and behind the scenes than respondents who have been in the industry for 16 or more years. This could signal a new shift in the industry among the newer generations with respect to understanding how representation behind the scenes influences representation or that more time in the industry changes individuals' priorities.

Among all API respondents, both men's and women's views of representation are also largely similar. Women are more likely to agree that representation

means portraying a group of people in a positive way on screen (76.2% compared to 70.8%), and more likely to agree that representation means people from all groups are treated equally on screen and behind the scenes (95.3% compared to 89.6%).

We also asked respondents to tell us whether a list of 9 adjectives accurately describes the current status of API representation in Hollywood and to approximate a response for their most recent boss and Hollywood. The results are presented in Chart 2.

Respondents are *least* likely to agree that "adequate behind the scenes" (4.9%), and "adequate on the screen" (6.7%) describe API representation, followed by "diverse" (15.3%), and "positive" (28.0%). A

TABLE 4. WHAT DOES "REPRESENTATION" MEAN? (GENDER)

Percent Agree	Respondent		Boss		Hollywood	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Representation means the number of people from a certain group (such as a race, gender, or sexuality) shown on screen	86.3%	83.0%	87.3%	91.0%	86.4%	89.0%
Representation means serving as a proxy for a certain group	38.3%	48.6%	75.1%	82.0%	89.3%	89.0%
Representation means portraying a group of people in a positive way on screen	76.2%	70.8%	76.0%	76.0%	63.1%	66.0%
Representation means portraying a group of people in an authentic way on screen	97.2%	98.1%	68.3%	73.3%	41.7%	46.0%
Representation means creating opportunities for people from certain groups behind the scenes	95.7%	95.2%	67.3%	74.0%	46.1%	52.0%
Representation means people from all groups being treated equally on screen and behind the scenes	95.3%	89.6%	72.5%	75.0%	36.9%	52.0%

majority of respondents agree that more negative descriptions accurately reflect API representation in Hollywood such as “harmful” (66.1%) “discouraging”

(65.7%), and “stereotypical” (91.8%). However, the vast majority of respondents agree that API representation in Hollywood is “important” (93.9%), and that it is “improving” (85.7%).

CHART 2. DESCRIPTIONS OF API REPRESENTATION IN HOLLYWOOD

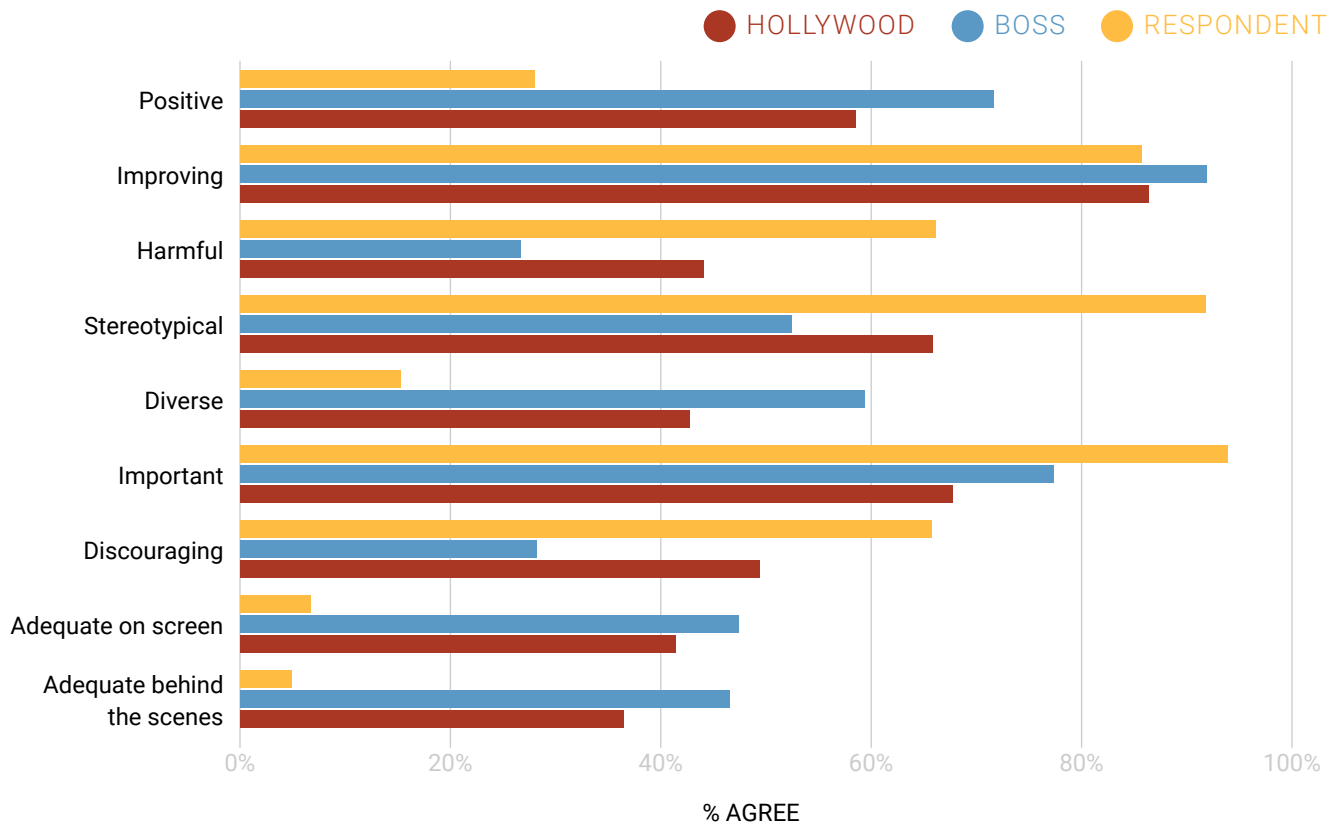


TABLE 5. DESCRIPTIONS OF API REPRESENTATION IN HOLLYWOOD (TIME IN INDUSTRY)

% Agree	All Respondents	1-8 Years	9-15 Years	16+ Years
Positive	28.0%	23.4%	28.0%	32.0%
Improving	85.7%	87.9%	86.0%	82.5%
Harmful	66.1%	68.5%	65.7%	63.7%
Stereotypical	91.8%	92.7%	91.0%	91.3%
Diverse	15.3%	15.3%	13.0%	16.8%
Important	93.9%	93.5%	94.0%	94.2%
Discouraging	65.7%	54.8%	75.0%	68.9%
Adequate on Screen	6.7%	10.5%	3.0%	5.8%
Adequate Behind the Scenes	4.9%	5.6%	5.0%	3.9%

There are a few notable differences in how API representation is viewed depending on how long respondents have been in the entertainment industry (which may also be a function of the age of the respondent). Respondents who have been in the industry for 16 or more years are more likely to agree that API representation is “positive” than respondents who have been in the industry for 8 or fewer years (32.0% compared to 28.0%). Respondents who have been in the industry for less time are more likely to agree that API representation is adequate on screen compared to respondents who have been in the industry between 9 and 15 years or 16 or more years,

albeit it is still a very small share (10.5% compared to 3.0% and 5.8%). But across time in industry, respondents were in agreement that representation behind the scenes is not adequate.

Male and female respondents have similar views about API representation in Hollywood, however women are more likely than men to agree API representation is “harmful” (68.7% compared to 60.4%), and “discouraging” (67.5% compared to 60.4%). This is also reflected in the trend that women were less likely to believe that API representations in Hollywood were adequate, positive or adequate on screen versus men.

TABLE 6. DESCRIPTIONS OF API REPRESENTATION IN HOLLYWOOD (GENDER)

% Agree	All Respondents	Women	Men
Positive	28.0%	27.4%	29.2%
Improving	85.7%	84.4%	90.6%
Harmful	66.1%	68.7%	60.4%
Stereotypical	91.8%	93.9%	86.8%
Diverse	15.3%	15.2%	16.2%
Important	93.9%	92.9%	97.2%
Discouraging	65.7%	67.5%	60.4%
Adequate on Screen	6.7%	6.1%	8.5%
Adequate Behind the Scenes	4.9%	4.7%	4.7%

EXPERIENCES IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Ideas about representation are likely informed by respondents' experiences in the industry. We asked respondents to tell us whether they had experienced things like being tokenized in the workplace, if they had been the only API person in the room, or whether they have been subject to racism or microaggressions at work. Chart 3 presents the percent of respondents who agree with these statements, and also breaks these responses down depending on how long respondents have been in the industry. For most experiences, time in the industry does not correlate

with worse experiences, suggesting that some experiences are universal for API individuals who work in entertainment.

Looking at all respondents, the vast majority say that they are often the only API person in the room (89.4%), and that they have to work harder than other people just to be seen as equal (87.8%). A staggering 80.9% say that they have experienced microaggressions at work, and 72.5% say that they have felt tokenized at work. More than half of respondents (55.6%) say that they have experienced blatant racism at work, and only 43.5% agree that their voice is valued by the industry.

CHART 3. API EXPERIENCES IN THE INDUSTRY

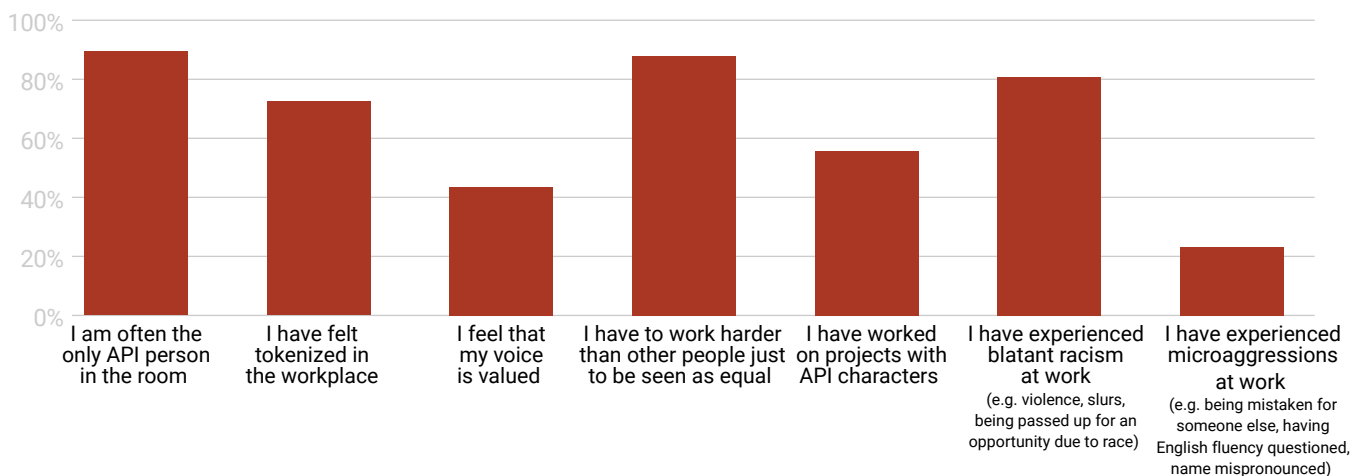


TABLE 7. API EXPERIENCES IN THE INDUSTRY (GENDER)

% Agree	All Respondents	Women	Men
I am often the only API person in the room	89.4%	88.2%	91.5%
I have felt tokenized in the workplace	72.5%	76.8%	63.2%
I feel that my voice is valued	43.5%	47.4%	36.8%
I have to work harder than other people just to be seen as equal	87.8%	89.6%	83.0%
I have experienced blatant racism at work (e.g. violence, slurs, being passed up for an opportunity due to race)	55.6%	56.1%	51.9%
I have experienced microaggressions at work (e.g. being mistaken for someone else, having English fluency questioned, name mispronounced)	80.9%	83.5%	75.5%
I have worked on projects with API characters	23.2%	26.1%	17.9%

CONTENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS

Next, we present findings from two content analyses. The first is a content analysis of the top ten domestic-grossing films from 2010-2019. The second is a look at all mainstream US films that feature API actors in their main title casts from 2017-2020.

ANALYSIS 1: TOP TEN DOMESTIC-GROSSING FILMS FROM 2010-2019

Top-grossing films tend to be those with larger budgets, and in the decade we analyzed the top-grossing films included several franchises such as the Hunger Games, Jumanji, and films from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Thus, whether franchises include API representation impacts on whether API characters exist in data with these parameters. Our analysis of U.S. top-grossing domestic films shows that API leads

and co-leads are rare. Asian people make up about 7% of the US population⁴⁸ while Pacific Islanders make up about 0.4%⁴⁹, but only 4.5% of leads or co-lead roles in the top ten domestic grossing films in the U.S. from 2010 through 2019 are played by API actors. Ninety percent of leads or co-leads in these films are white, while 2.5% are Black, 1.8% are Middle Eastern, and 0.9% are Latinx. Of the API leads or co-leads, all are men (and 2 of the 5 are Dwayne Johnson in the Jumanji franchise). From 2010 to 2013, there were no API leads or co-leads. Since 2014, the representation of these communities in leading roles has been steadier, but not transformative.

API representation in supporting roles has varied between 2010 and 2019, reaching a peak of 10.4% of all supporting characters in 2015. Overall, from 2010 to 2019, 5.6% of supporting characters were API.

TABLE 8. YEAR TO YEAR API RACE/ETHNICITY OF LEADS/CO-LEADS

Year	API (%)	BIPOC, non-API (%)	White (%)
2019	9.1%	18.2%	72.7%
2018	10.0%	20.0%	70.0%
2017	10.0%	--	90.0%
2016	9.1	--	90.9%
2015	--	7.7%	92.3%
2014	10.0%	--	90.0%
2013	--	--	100.0%
2012	--	--	100.0%
2011	--	8.3%	91.7%
2010	--	--	100.0%

CHART 7. RACE/ETHNICITY OF LEADS/CO-LEADS FROM (2010-2019 AGGREGATED)



*Excludes animated, non-human characters, and characters with indiscernible race/ethnicity.

TABLE 9. YEAR TO YEAR RACE/ETHNICITY OF SUPPORTING CHARACTERS FROM 2010-2019

Year	API (%)	BIPOC, non-API (%)	White (%)
2019	3.7%	27.2%	66.2%
2018	9.9%	29.8%	60.3%
2017	3.8%	19.1%	75.6%
2016	9.2%	25.0%	65.8%
2015	10.4%	17.9%	71.7%
2014	5.9%	13.5%	80.6%
2013	2.9%	15.3%	81.8%
2012	3.9%	10.4%	85.7%
2011	8.8%	25.6%	64.8%
2010	0.8%	9.2%	90.0%

*Excludes animated, non-human characters, and characters with indiscernible race/ethnicity.

CHART 8. RACE/ETHNICITY OF SUPPORTING CHARACTERS AGGREGATED (2010-2019 AGGREGATED)



*Excludes animated, non-human characters, and characters with indiscernible race/ethnicity.

Like supporting roles, the representation of API characters in minor roles has varied over time, and therefore there is not a clear upward trend. Overall, in top 10 films from 2010 to 2019, Asian American and Pacific Islanders are cast for 5.7% of minor character roles.

Among racial and ethnic groups, API characters are more likely to display racial tropes than most

other groups; 19.0% of lead/co-lead/supporting API characters embodied a racial trope. Indigenous or Native American characters were the most likely to display racial tropes (34.6%), followed by Latinx characters (14.2%), Middle Eastern characters (12.0%), and Black characters (9.0%). Common Asian tropes observed were the “Martial Artist,” the “Exotic Woman,” and the “Yakuza Princess or Yakuza Crime Boss.” We did not observe Pacific Islander tropes.

TABLE 10. YEAR TO YEAR RACE/ETHNICITY OF MINOR CHARACTERS FROM 2010-2019

Year	API (%)	BIPOC, non-API (%)	White (%)
2019	4.9%	20.2%	61.3%
2018	5.6%	14.6%	76.4%
2017	6.0%	15.7%	77.7%
2016	5.8%	19.4%	70.9%
2015	7.6%	9.7%	81.3%
2014	8.8%	10.1%	80.6%
2013	1.9%	11.3%	86.9%
2012	7.2%	12.7%	79.5%
2011	3.8%	12.0%	83.6%
2010	4.3%	7.1%	87.9%

**Excludes animated, non-human characters, and characters with indiscernible race/ethnicity.*

CHART 9. RACE/ETHNICITY OF MINOR CHARACTERS AGGREGATED (2010-2019 AGGREGATED)



Asian American women are often portrayed as the “Exotic Woman” trope and are hypersexualized in popular culture. Many researchers point to the 1875 Page Act as a pivotal event that began the fetishization of Asian women in the United States. This act superficially profiled Asian women (specifically Chinese women) as prostitutes, who would transmit venereal diseases and serve as temptations for white men⁵⁰. In addition, American troops involved in conflict in Asia in the 20th century (e.g. Korea, Japan, Phillipines and Vietnam) who had encounters with Asian sex workers came home with their wartime perceptions of all Asian women as

submissive and sexually available⁵¹. This fetishization of Asian women also appeared in popular culture, where stereotypes dominated depictions of Asian and Asian American women, resulting in two binary and highly sexualized tropes known as the Lotus Flower and the Dragon Lady.⁵²

Sexual objectification refers to the process of treating someone like a sexual object by focusing on sexualized parts of someone’s body. We measured sexual objectification of characters through degree of nudity, and visual and verbal objectification. Visual objectification occurs when the camera focuses on

TABLE 11. PERCENTAGE OF BIPOC LEAD/CO-LEAD/SUPPORTING CHARACTERS PORTRAYED AS A TROPE

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage (%) Portrayed as Racial Trope
API	19.0%
Indigenous	34.6%
Hispanic/Latinx	14.2%
Middle Eastern	12.0%
Black	9.0%

specific body parts, pans up and down the character's body, or when slow motion is used to accentuate the body in a sexual manner. Verbal objectification includes cat calling and making comments about a person's physical appearance to others. In the films we analyzed, the biggest differences emerge around verbal objectification – API women are more likely to be verbally objectified (17.4%) than white women (9.0%), and non-API BIPOC women (7.4%).

In our survey, one of the common suggestions for API characters was for more romantic roles and love

stories. These stories are especially scarce for API men,⁵³ something that API male actors are keenly aware of.⁵⁴ These types of stories for API characters do appear to be missing from top-grossing films. When compared with white characters and non-API BIPOC characters, API characters are most likely to be single (83.3%), and least likely to be married (12.8%), but not considerably less likely to be depicted in sex scenes. Still, recently there has been a concerted effort to reverse the trope that Asian men are not desirable or attractive.⁵⁵

CHART 10. PERCENT OF FEMALE LEAD/CO-LEAD/SUPPORTING CHARACTERS SEXUALIZED

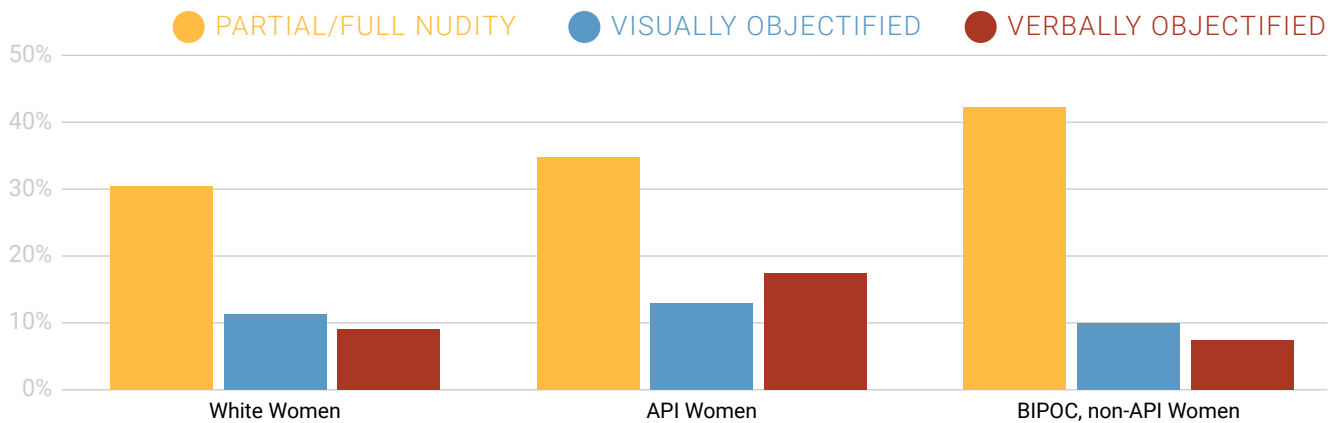
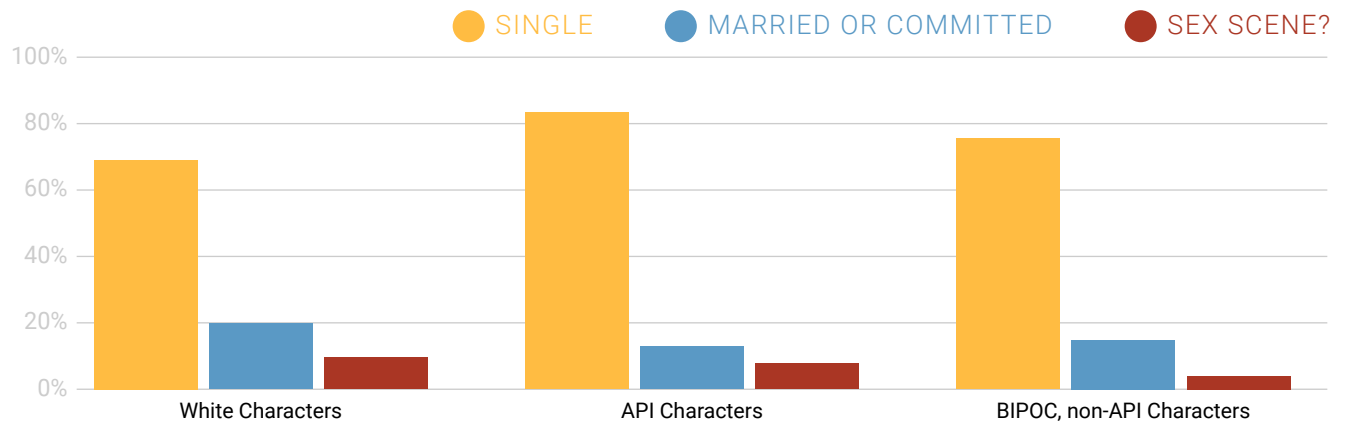


CHART 11. PERCENT OF LEADS/CO-LEADS/SUPPORTING CHARACTERS IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS



ANALYSIS 2: ALL MAINSTREAM US FILMS THAT FEATURE API ACTORS IN THEIR MAIN TITLE CASTS FROM 2017-2020

Given that API characters are rare in the top 10 domestic grossing films, it is difficult to identify what sort of opportunities they are given in film, more broadly. To home in on the opportunities for API characters in mainstream films we carry out a secondary content analysis of every US studio or major streaming service film from 2017-2020 that featured an actor of Asian or Pacific Islander heritage in the main title cast. This sample of films is therefore identified for its inclusion of API actors.

Even though we are analyzing only films that feature API actors, the vast majority of the roles played by API actors in the films we analyzed were supporting character roles (72.6%). Just 13.3% of API characters

were in leading roles, while 8.9% were in co-leading roles. About 5% played minor roles, a small percentage given that we deliberately selected films that featured API actors in the main title cast.⁵⁶

In the films we analyzed, API actors are most likely to play characters who are East Asian (57.5%) followed by South Asian (20.4%), Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (7.1%), and Southeast Asian (3.1%). About 12% of API actors are cast to play characters who are not explicitly API.

About half of the API characters in the films we analyzed are men (49.1%) and about half are women (50.1%). Most API characters are cis and straight (96.0%) but about 4% are cast in LGBTQIA+ roles. Just 1.8% of API characters have a disability, and most are middle class (71.2%). Looking at body type, 8.0% are very muscular and 6.7% have larger body types.

TABLE 12. DESCRIPTION OF API MAIN TITLE CAST CHARACTERS

Character Demographics	Percentages
Race/Ethnicity	
East Asian	57.5%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	7.1%
South Asian	20.4%
Southeast Asian	3.1%
Character is Not Asian	12.0%
Gender	
Male	49.1%
Female	50.9%
Transgender/Non-binary	0.0%
LGBTQIA+	
Straight	96.0%
Gay/Lesbian	2.7%
Bisexual/Pansexual/Queer	1.3%
Asexual	0%

Character Demographics	Percentages
Age	
Child (1-12)	4.0%
Teen (13-19)	14.6%
20s (20-29)	24.3%
30s (30-39)	23.5%
40s (40-49)	15.9%
50+	13.4%
NA/Other	4.4%
Class	
Poor/working Class	4.9%
Middle Class	71.2%
Upper Class	19.0%
NA	4.9%
Skin Tone	
Light Tones	19.5%
Medium-light Tones	42.0%
Medium Tones	20.4%
Medium-dark Tones	9.7%
Dark Tones	8.4%
Other	0.0%
Role Type	
Leading Character	13.3%
Co-leading Character	8.9%
Supporting Character	72.6%
Minor Character	5.3%
Disability	
Non-Disabled	98.2%
Disabled	1.8%

Character Demographics **Percentages**

Body Size

Somewhat or Very Thin	34.5%
Average	45.6%
Somewhat or Very Large	6.7%
Very Muscular	8.0%
NA	5.3%

Rarely are API actors placed in leading roles - they are only a lead or a co-lead 22.6% of the time. Far more often, they are cast in supporting roles (72.0%).

When looking at several of these demographics through the lens of film ratings, we see that G-rated films only have East Asian and South Asian characters. PG and PG-13 both primarily have East Asian characters, with some representation for other groups, though for PG, there are nearly twice as many Asian female characters than male. R-rated films, however, are almost entirely East Asian (49.2%) and

South Asian (44.6%) characters. Despite not having any Southeast Asian characters, films that were not rated because they were made for streaming services otherwise have the most balanced ethnic representations.

When considering role type, PG films were the most likely to have API leads, though those numbers remain low at only 16%. When considering leads alongside co-leads, PG-13 displays the best API representation (13.70% and 11.6%, respectively). Not rated films had the highest rate of API minor characters (80%).

CHART 12. API CHARACTERS AND PROMINENT ROLES

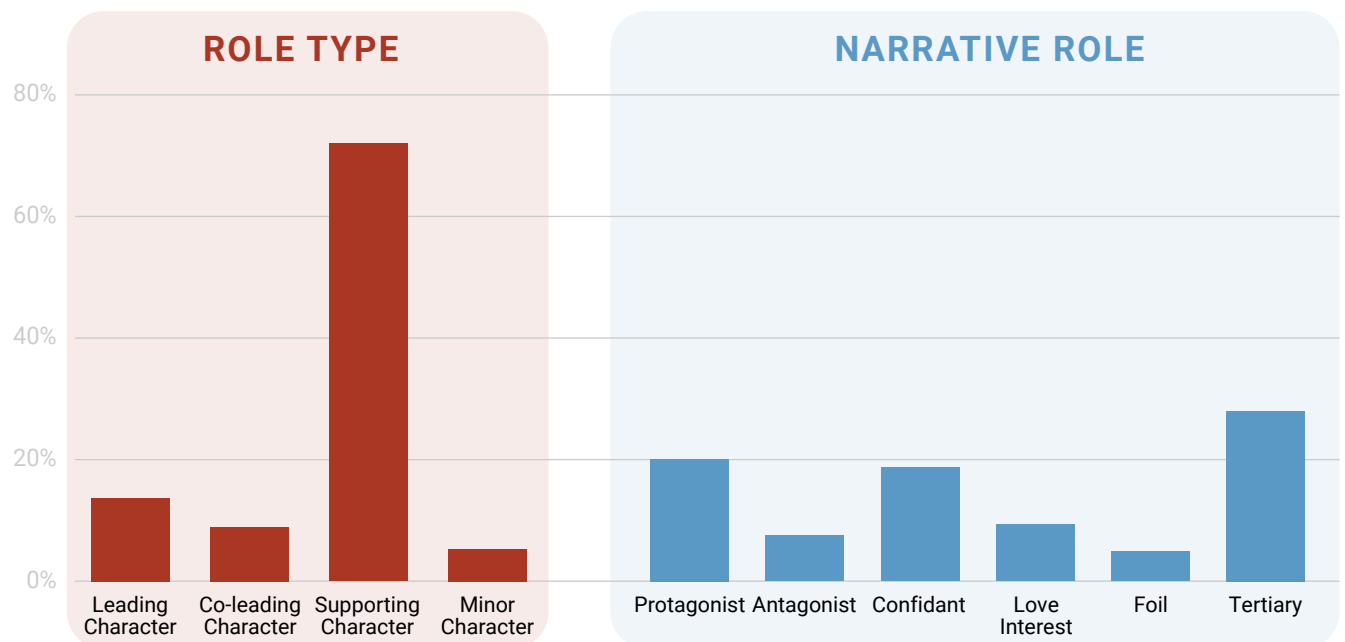


TABLE 13. CHARACTER DEMOGRAPHICS AND ROLE TYPES BY FILM RATING

Character Demographics	G	PG	PG-13	R	NR
Race/Ethnicity					
East Asian	50.0%	82.0%	73.7%	49.2%	46.7%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0%	4.0%	12.6%	1.5%	20.0%
South Asian	50.0%	10.0%	10.5%	44.6%	33.3%
Southeast Asian	0.0%	4.0%	3.2%	4.6%	0.0%
Gender					
Male	50.0%	34.0%	51.6%	44.6%	20.0%
Female	50.0%	66.0%	48.4%	55.4%	80.0%
Transgender/Non-binary	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Role Type					
Lead	0.0%	16.0%	13.7%	7.7%	6.7%
Co-Lead	0.0%	0.0%	11.6%	9.2%	13.3%
Supporting Character	50.0%	80.0%	69.5%	75.4%	0.0%
Minor Character	50.0%	4.0%	5.3%	7.7%	80.0%

Within our analysis, we focused on several variables that spoke to characters' racialized experiences. For the characters who were indeed Asian (as opposed to those in which an Asian actor played a non-Asian character, which can occur when an actor is white-passing or when they are voicing an animated character), we measured whether Asian identity was central to the character (it was for 40.2% of them), whether they were American (58.8% were), if they came from immigrant families (9.1% did), if they encountered racism (7.0% did), and whether they showed appreciation for their Asian identities (33.7% did).

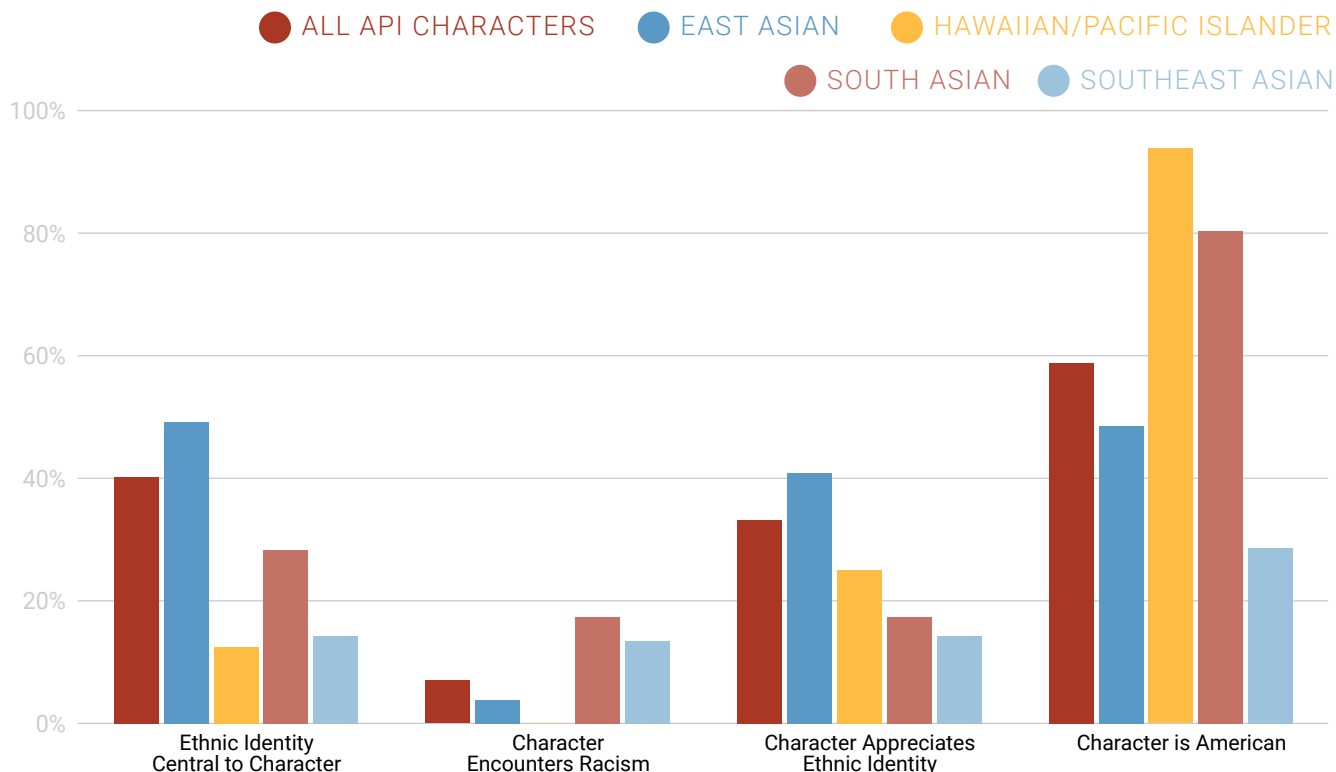
Within the sample, racialized characterizations and experiences varied by ethnic group. A little over half of the characters were American (58.8%), but less than a third (28.6%) of Southeast Asian characters were American, suggesting that the "Forever Foreigner" stereotype is more salient for this ethnic group.

Overall, East Asian characters were the most likely to have their identity central to their story (49.2%) and

to show appreciation for their heritage in some way (40.8%). This shows a healthy balance of East Asian storytelling. However, this was much less balanced for other Asian ethnic groups, suggesting that actors from these backgrounds are much more likely to be cast in roles that aren't written specifically for a character of their ethnicity, or that other ethnic groups' stories are less likely to be written for film.

We also examine whether API characters encounter racism. While racism is clearly a negative experience for any person of color, it is unfortunately a somewhat common occurrence. Showing the realities of racism in storytelling helps to reflect authentic experiences and to bring attention to the problems of racism in modern culture. 17.4% of South Asian characters encountered racism, which was the most common group. Hawaiian and Pacific Islander characters did not encounter any racism in the films we analyzed. 14.3% of Southeast Asian characters encounter racism while just 3.0% of East Asian characters do.

CHART 13. RACIALIZED VARIABLES BY ETHNIC GROUP



Another form of discrimination that some members of the API community face (like other people of color) is colorism. Colorism is discrimination based on skin color⁵⁷; broadly, individuals with dark skin tone face stigmatization, prejudice⁵⁸, and even less social mobility⁵⁹. In the entertainment industry, colorism surfaces when light skin actors of color are cast in lead roles more often than dark skin actors of color. Criticisms of colorism in the entertainment industry have resurfaced recently, but they are not new.⁶⁰

We examined API characters through the lens of colorism by looking at character's skin tone and didn't find clear evidence of colorism towards the API characters in our sample -- there wasn't a clear

difference in skin tone for API characters who played leads and API characters who were not leads.

When we examine these by film rating, we find that G-rated films do not display any racialized variables. Asian identity is central to the character about half the time in PG (56%), PG-13 (50.5%), and unrated films (40%), but is much less so in films that are rated R. Similarly, about half of characters appreciate their Asian identity in PG (52%), PG-13 (42.1%), and unrated (40%) films, whereas in R films, only 15.4% of characters do. No racism exists in G or PG-rated films and is nearly non-existent in PG-13 (3.2%). It is slightly more common in R (13.8%) and unrated (13.3%) films.

TABLE 14. RACIALIZED VARIABLES BY FILM RATING

	G	PG	PG-13	R	NR
Asian Identity Central to Character	0.0%	56.0%	50.5%	23.1%	40.0%
Character Encounters Racism	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%	13.8%	13.3%
Character Appreciates Asian Identity	0.0%	52.0%	42.1%	15.4%	40.0%

TABLE 15. COLORISM IN CASTING

Skin Color	Light	Med-Light	Med	Med-Dark
Lead	12.2%	40.8%	38.8%	8.2%
Not Lead	24.1%	47.5%	17.1%	11.4%

Within the sample, we measured several personality traits to see how API characters are portrayed on screen. As we might expect considering “Model Minority” stereotypes, about half of the characters were written to be smart (59.3%) and hard-working (46.5%). However, only about a third displayed leadership traits (29.2%) or were seen as cool (29.2%). While less than a quarter of the API characters were funny (23.45%), audiences were asked to laugh at nearly half of them (43.4%), suggesting that they often serve as the punchline.

Furthermore, we found that several of the racialized experiences were significantly related to two character traits – “sexy” and “funny.”

Of the many traits we measured, whether or not a character was “sexy” was the most likely to be statistically significant. While API characters are often objectified or fetishized - that is, they are viewed as sexualized objects with little to no agency - they are rarely given the opportunity to be seen as sexy in and of itself. In entertainment, sexiness is nearly obligatory for success and entertainment. However, API characters are not often given the opportunity to be seen that way. Overall, only 21.6% of Asian main title characters are seen as sexy. We also consider which racialized experiences correlate with a character’s sexiness. When Asian identity is central to a character – that is, when a character is written to be

CHART 14. TRAIT ANALYSIS OF API CHARACTERS

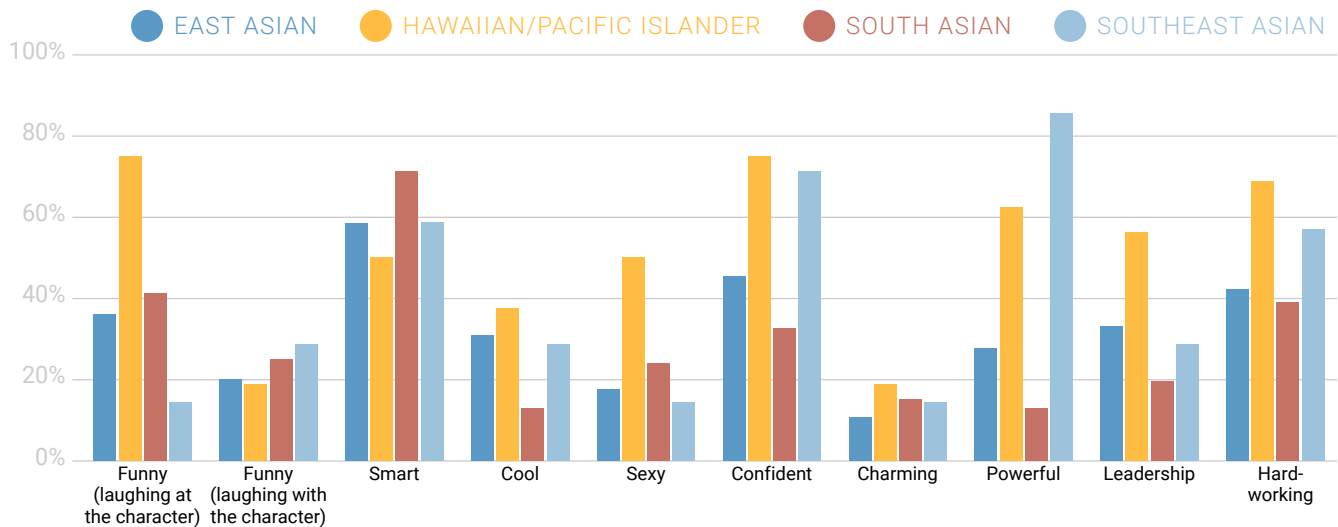


TABLE 16. ANALYSIS OF HUMOR AND SEXINESS OF API CHARACTERS

	API Identity Central to Character	API Identity Not Central to Character
Sexy	12.5%	27.7%
Not Sexy	87.5%	72.3%
	Character is American	Character is Not American
Funny	25.6%	12.8%
Not Funny	74.4%	87.2%
Sexy	28.2%	12.8%
Not Sexy	71.8%	87.2%
	Character Appreciates Their API Identity	Character Does Not Appreciate Their API Identity
Sexy	12.1%	26.3%
Not Sexy	87.9%	73.7%

Asian, rather than just cast with an Asian actor – they are considered sexy 12.5% of the time, compared to 27.7% of the time when that identity is not central. Similarly, if the character shows appreciation for that identity, they are also sexy less often (12.1%) than those who do not (26.3%). Finally, Asian American characters are sexy more often (28.2%) than those who are not American (12.8%).

Within the study, we looked for 26 different tropes and stereotypes that have historically been attributed to Asian characters in cinema. About a third of the characters in the sample embodied at least one of these (35.2%). However, surprisingly, no particular

trope or stereotype stood out as more common than others. The most prevalent were “Martial Artists” (5.5% of characters), the “Model Minority” (5%), “Nerds” (4.5%), “IT/Tech workers” (4.5%), and “Foreigners” (4.5%). However, very few stereotypes were deliberately subverted, either. Therefore, while tropes and stereotypes are still commonly applied to API characters, no individual stereotype stands out as more prominent than any others.

Notably, the “Nerd” trope was only present when Asian identity was not central to the character. As we might expect, the “Martial Artist” trope was more common among non-American characters.

CHART 15. TROPE AND STEREOTYPE ANALYSIS OF API CHARACTERS

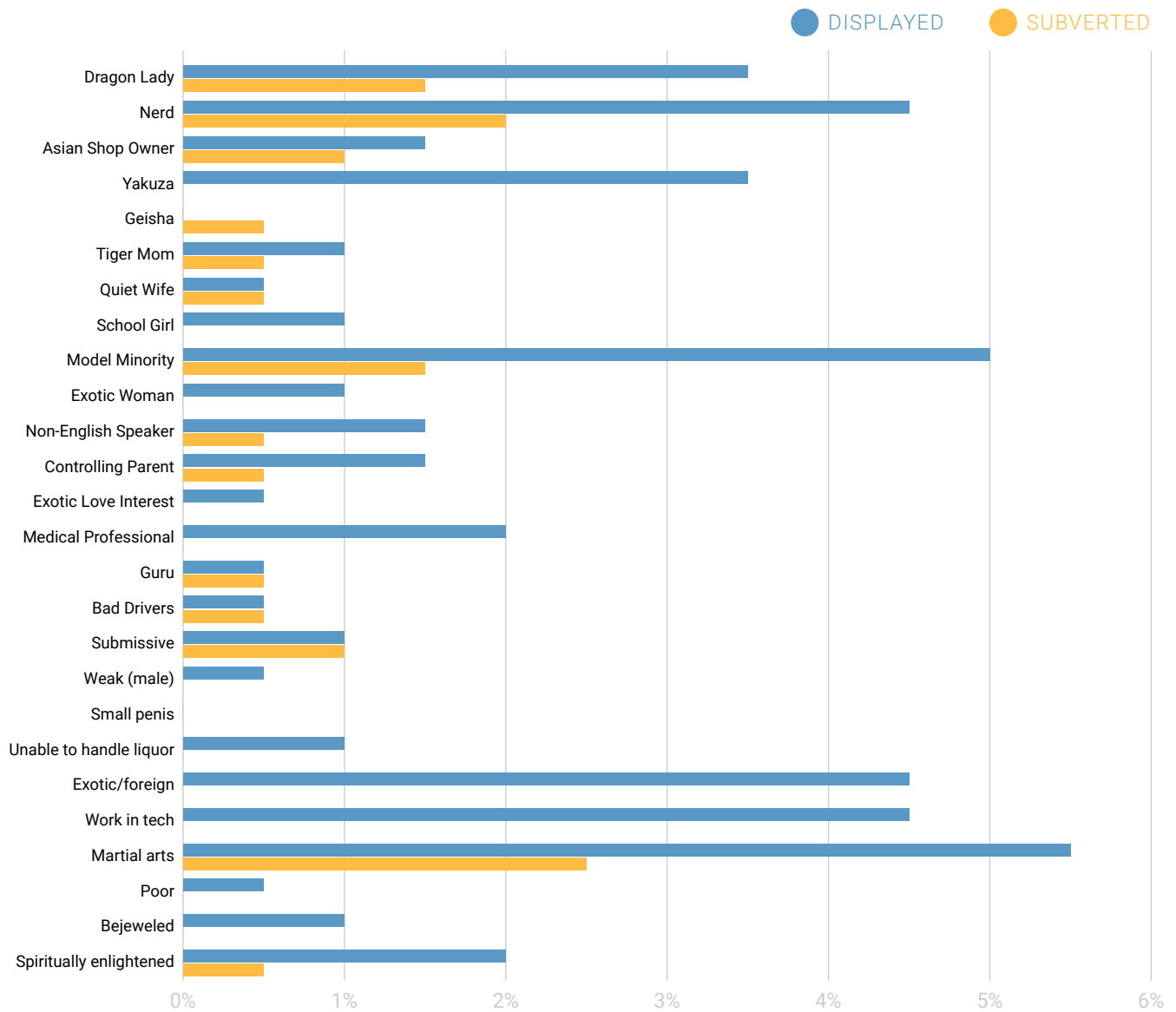


TABLE 17. THE NERD TROPE BY CENTRALITY OF ASIAN IDENTITY TO CHARACTER

	Asian Identity Central to Character	Asian Identity Not Central to Character
A Nerd	0.0%	7.6%
Subverting the “Nerd” Stereotype	0.0%	3.4%

TABLE 18. THE MARTIAL ARTIST TROPE BY AMERICAN NATIONALITY

	Character is American	Character is Not American
Martial Artist Trope	2.6%	10.3%
Subverting the “Martial Artist” Trope	0.0%	6.4%

Finally, API characters displayed a range of occupations. The most common were professional roles (15.6% of main title API characters), such as lawyers and scientists. However, despite the stereotype that Asian people are medical professionals, only one character in the sample was a doctor. Nearly 15% of adult characters were students and 11.6% fell into the “other” category, which primarily consisted of royalty, ninjas, and superheroes.

Given the stereotype that Asian Americans (especially East and South Asians) work in STEM, we also assessed how prevalent this was in the films

analyzed. Among all of the Asian characters in the sample, 12.8% worked in STEM positions.

In addition to analyzing the traits of individual characters, we also determined the nature of API representation in the films overall. Despite all of these films having at least one API actor in the main title cast, Asian culture was only central to the plot 16.3% of the time. Further, we measured whether any API characters encountered racism, as nearly all Asian-American people report experiencing it.⁶¹ However, racism was present in less than ten percent of the films. While two-thirds (66.7%) of the films did have other API characters outside of the main title cast, those characters were stereotyped 41.5% of the time.

TABLE 19. API CHARACTERS AND PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS

Professional Occupations	Percentages
Administrative	1.5%
Can't Tell	9.0%
Crime	6.5%
Management	5.0%
Professional	15.6%
Military	5.0%
Not Applicable	5.0%
Other	11.6%
Retired	4.5%
Sales	2.5%
Service	12.6%
Student	14.6%
Unemployed	6.0%

We also measured the extent to which racism is used as narrative shorthand to show that a character is unlikeable, which only occurred in 5.69% of the films. Anti-Asian slurs appeared in 3.3% of films.

When considering differences by film rating, we see that G and PG-Rated films have the lowest

percentages of most of these racialized variables. G films display none of them whatsoever, and only 46.2% of PG films had any other API characters. Notably, films that were not rated because they were made for streaming services were much more likely to show racism realistically (40.0%) and all of them featured other API characters.

TABLE 20. PREVALENT THEMES IN FILMS FEATURING API CHARACTERS, BY FILM RATING.⁶²

	Films Overall	G	PG	PG-13	R	NR
Asian Culture Central to the Plot	16.26%	0.0%	11.5%	27.7%	7.1%	20.0%
Racism Shown Realistically*	8.94%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	16.7%	40.0%
Racism as a Shorthand for Unlikeability	5.69%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	11.9%	0.0%
Slurs Used	3.25%	0.0%	0.0%	6.4%	2.4%	0.0%
Any Other API Characters*	66.67%	0.0%	46.2%	83.0%	59.5%	100.0%
Other API Characters Stereotyped (within films with other API characters)*	41.46%	0.0%	33.3%	41.0%	48.0%	0.0%

Note: Variables denoted with asterisks reflect differences that are statistically significant.

Interventions in Partnership with CAPE and Gold House

To further improve API representation in entertainment media, we recommend the following interventions:

MORE diverse representations of the API communities:

- ▶ Cast more API actors in authentic and leading roles. The API communities are not a monolith; the entertainment industry should work to represent these communities authentically.
- ▶ One of the most common suggestions from respondents surveyed is to see more portrayals of mixed-race and multi-ethnic characters and families.
- ▶ Disaggregate data when possible -- break down future analysis by ethnicity, gender, or other key characteristics for more precision and understanding.
- ▶ Expose the Model Minority stereotype as a myth. For example, the Model Minority myth depicts many ethnicities in the Asian American community as successful in academics and wealth. In reality, Asian Americans have some of the widest variances in educational attainment and corporate success.⁶³ Furthermore, research has shown

that Asian Americans are the most economically divided group in the United States in terms of wealth.⁶⁴ This refutes the assumption that all Asian Americans are equally prosperous and reinforces that ethnic differentiations matter in analyses of API communities.

- ▶ Advocate for more Pacific Islander and Southeast Asian inclusion in API representation, as East Asian heritage is most likely to be represented. As a survey respondent emphasized, there is a need for “more API executives and creatives in front of and behind the camera...more [inclusion] of South and South East Asians and Pacific Islanders. There’s virtually no Pacific Islander representation...[there should be] more access and opportunity because there is not a lack of talent.”

MORE access to funding, investments, and opportunities:

- ▶ Greenlight stories written about API characters by API writers.
- ▶ Invest in the API talent pipeline by supporting nonprofit organizations and film festivals that are committed to fortifying the pipeline, and through mentorship and fellowship opportunities. As a respondent from the survey noted, “there aren’t

enough paths, mentorships or opportunities that specifically address the Asian American community” in entertainment media.

- ▶ Invest in the production and marketing budgets of API-led films to ensure they reach mainstream audiences and are not only seen by API communities. At the same time, however, ensure that API critics and journalists are given opportunities to cover films visibly and candidly. That way, they can identify any problems and elevate the best API-led films with wider audiences.
- ▶ Hire and empower more API entertainment executives and leaders who can advocate for meaningful investments in API stories.

MORE balance in storytelling:

- ▶ Good representation creates more opportunities in everyday stories and tells more stories overall that speak to individual ethnic experiences. Cast more API actors in movies of all genres so API people can see themselves as superheroes and romantic leads. But also create more projects that speak to unique API experiences.

- ▶ Recognize the difference between representation and tokenization. One respondent highlighted that, “there is a fine line between tokenization and representation.”
- ▶ When telling API stories, show the good and the bad. Let API characters be dynamic, funny, flawed, and messy, and avoid reinforcing common tropes or stereotypes. Humanizing API characters begins with multidimensional portrayals. As one respondent put it, “I would like to see us as empowered and edgy.” When someone is portrayed as simply a Model Minority or a Shop Owner, flattens their character and neglects more dimensionality.
- ▶ Recognize that racism is unfortunately real and that pretending it does not exist contributes to the problem.⁶⁵ The cultural assumption that Asians don’t face racism in this country because they are stereotyped as being “successful” is harmful and contributes to violence against Asian people.
- ▶ Center API characters and experiences. Move APIs to the center of the frame rather than keeping them on the margins as a sidekick or un/underdeveloped character supporting a white protagonist.
- ▶ Tell more varied stories and be mindful of overrepresented stories. There is a danger in the single story. For example, not all Vietnamese stories need to be about the Vietnam War or the trauma of being a refugee.

Advisory Board



Celebrating 30 years, CAPE (Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment) advances representation for Asian American and Pacific Islander storytellers in Hollywood in three ways:

- ▶ (1) Nurturing and engaging creative talent and executive leadership
- ▶ (2) Providing cultural content consulting and talent referrals
- ▶ (3) Championing projects for critical box office and streaming success

Through our industry-renowned programs such as the CAPE New Writers Fellowship and the CAPE Leaders Fellowship, our consulting and talent referral services, the CAPE Database, and #GoldOpen, CAPE is breaking barriers to representation from the writers' room to the boardroom to the living room. www.capeusa.org



Gold House is the premier nonprofit collective of Asian and Pacific Islander (API) founders, creative voices, and leaders dedicated to enabling authentic multicultural representation and societal equity. Our ventures include uniting APIs and other marginalized communities to fight for equality (All of Us Movement, Stop Asian Hate Movement); championing authentic API representation through media to reshape public opinion (Gold Open, Gold Records, A100 List); and accelerating economic success and commercial representation through API founders (Gold Rush, Founder Network, Angel Network). To learn more, visit www.goldhouse.org or follow @GoldHouseCo on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

HOW TO CITE THIS STUDY:

McTaggart, Ninochka, Michele Meyer, Meredith Conroy, Romeo Perez, Cameron Espinoza, Sarah Trinh, Pamela Campos, Emma Burrows, Jenna Virgo, Camryn Brennan, Isabel Dolan, Cris Ackel, and Sofie Christensen. 2021. "I Am Not a Fetish or Model Minority: Redefining What it Means to Be API in the Entertainment Industry." Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media.

ENDNOTES

1. Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism. (2021). "Report to the Nation: Anti-Asian Prejudice & Hate. Crime." California State University, San Bernardino. <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/Report%20to%20the%20Nation%20-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%20Final%20Draft%20-%20As%20of%20Apr%2030%202021%206%20PM%20corrected.pdf>
2. <https://APIdata.com/covid19/>
3. NBCUniversal, ViacomCBS, WarnerMedia, Walt Disney Studios, and Sony Pictures
4. Lionsgate, Amblin, MGM, or STX
5. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>
6. <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2020/demo/aian-population.html>
7. Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism. (2021). "Report to the Nation: Anti-Asian Prejudice & Hate. Crime." California State University, San Bernardino. <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/Report%20to%20the%20Nation%20-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%20Final%20Draft%20-%20As%20of%20Apr%2030%202021%206%20PM%20corrected.pdf>
8. <https://APIdata.com/covid19/>
9. Besana, T., Katsiaficas, D. & Loyd, A.B. (2019). "Asian American media representation: A film analysis and implications for identity development," *Research in Human Development*, 1, 201-225. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15427609.2020.1711680>
10. BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and people of color. The BIPOC acronym originated from this term "people of color," which, in an effort to redefine its negative connotations, centers the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrates solidarity between communities of color.
11. Yuen, N.W. (2016). *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
12. Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism. (2021). "Report to the Nation: Anti-Asian Prejudice & Hate. Crime." California State University, San Bernardino. <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/Report%20to%20the%20Nation%20-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%20Final%20Draft%20-%20As%20of%20Apr%2030%202021%206%20PM%20corrected.pdf>
13. Budiman, A. & Ruiz, N.G. (2021). "Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the U.S." Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/09/asian-americans-are-the-fastest-growing-racial-or-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s/>
14. Besana, T., Katsiaficas, D. & Loyd, A.B. (2019). "Asian American media representation: A film analysis and implications for identity development," *Research in Human Development*, 1, 201-225. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15427609.2020.1711680>
15. Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). "Living with television: The violence profile," *Journal of Communication*, 26, 172-199.
16. Chin, M.M. & Yung-Yi, D.P. (2021). "The 'model minority' myth hurts Asian Americans – and even leads to violence." *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/04/19/model-minority-myth-hurts-asian-americans-even-leads-violence/>
17. Abrams, Z. (2021). "The mental health impact of anti-Asian racism," *Monitor on Psychology*, 52:5, 22. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/07/impact-anti-asian-racism>
18. Chou, R., & Feagin, J. R. (2008). *The myth of the model minority : Asian Americans facing racism*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
19. Chin, M.M. & Yung-Yi, D.P. (2021). "The 'model minority' myth hurts Asian Americans – and even leads to violence." *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/04/19/model-minority-myth-hurts-asian-americans-even-leads-violence/>
20. Tuan, M. (1998). *Forever foreigners or honorary whites?: the Asian ethnic experience today*. Rutgers University Press.
21. Abrams, Z. (2021). "The mental health impact of anti-Asian racism," *Monitor on Psychology*, 52:5, 22. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/07/impact-anti-asian-racism>
22. Grover, A., S. B. Harper, and L. Langton. (2020). "Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 45: 647-667 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12103-020-09545-1>
23. Taylor, S. (2019). *The psychology of pandemics: Preparing for the next global outbreak of infectious disease*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
24. Zhou, L. (2021). "Why violence against the Asian American community is on the rise during the Covid-19 pandemic." *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/4/21/21221007/anti-asian-racism-coronavirus-xenophobia>
25. Kim, D.Y and L.J. Dance. (2006). "Korean-Black relations: Contemporary challenges, scholarly explanations, and future prospects" in *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and Commonality*, ed. Hazel McFerson. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
26. Adachi, J., Cape, R., Kim, D. D., & Asian American Media Mafia Productions. (2006). *The slanted screen*.
27. National Stereotypes / Asia. (2021). TV Tropes. <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/NationalStereotypes/Asia>.
28. National Stereotypes / Asia. (2021). TV Tropes. <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/NationalStereotypes/Asia>.
29. Asian Immigration: The "Yellow Peril." (2013). *Race in the United States, 1880–1940*. Student Digital Gallery. BGSU Libraries. <https://digitalgallery.bgsu.edu/student/exhibits/show/race-in-us/contributors-to-the-exhibit>
30. Yang, J. (2014). "The Mickey Rooney role nobody wants to talk much about." *The Wall Street Journal*. https://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2014/04/08/the-mickey-rooney-role-nobody-wants-to-talk-about/?reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink
31. Espiritu, Y. L. (1997). *Asian American women and men: Labor, laws, and love*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
32. Claus, P. et al. (2002). *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia*. Philadelphia: Routledge.
33. Mahdawi, A. (2017). "From Apu to Master of None: how US pop culture tuned into the south Asian experience" *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/may/09/from-apu-to-master-of-none-how-us-pop-culture-tuned-into-the-south-asian-experience>
34. Shah, O. (2018). "To The South Asian Men Dominating TV: Don't Leave Your Sisters Behind." *HuffPost Canada*. https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/osman-shah/south-asian-stereotypes-tv_b_16678866.html
35. Hereniko, V. (2021). "Representations of Pacific Islanders in Film and Video." *The Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival*. <https://www.yidff.jp/docbox/14/box14-3-e.html>

36. National Stereotypes / Asia. (2021). TV Tropes. <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/NationalStereotypes/Asia>.
37. National Stereotypes / Asia. (2021). TV Tropes. <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/NationalStereotypes/Asia>.
38. Musolff, A. (2014). "Metaphors: Sources for intercultural misunderstanding?" *International Journal of Language and Culture*. 1, 42–59. doi: 10.1075/ijolc.1.1.03mus.
39. Bruneau, Emile, Nour Kteily, and Lasse Laustsen. (2018). "The unique effects of blatant dehumanization on attitudes and behavior towards Muslim refugees during the European 'refugee crisis' across four countries." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 48 (5): 645-662 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ejsp.2357>
40. Utych, Stephen. (2018). "How Dehumanization Influences Attitudes Toward Immigrants." *Political Research Quarterly* 71 (2): 440-452.
41. Cheng, C. (2021). "Understanding today's anti-Asian violence by looking at the past." UCLA. <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/anti-asian-hatred-karen-umemoto-david-yoo>
42. Fung, K. (2021). "30% of Anti-Asian Incidents in 2020 Used Rhetoric Like "China Virus," "Kung Flu," Report Says." *Newsweek*. <https://www.newsweek.com/30-anti-asian-incidents-2020-used-rhetoric-like-china-virus-kung-flu-report-says-1577189>
43. Yee, A. (2021). "COVID's outsize impact on Asian Americans is being ignored." *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/covids-outsize-impact-on-asian-americans-is-being-ignored/>
44. Based on Box Office Mojo rankings for in-year releases.
45. NBCUniversal, ViacomCBS, WarnerMedia, Walt Disney Studios, and Sony Pictures
46. Lionsgate, Amblin, MGM, or STX
47. Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, AppleTV+, or HBO Max
48. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>
49. <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2020/demo/aian-population.html>
50. Kang, C, and P. Cacherero. 2021. How a long history of intertwined racism and misogyny leaves Asian women in America vulnerable to violence." *Time*. <https://time.com/5952819/history-anti-asian-racism-misogyny/>
51. Kang, C, and P. Cacherero. 2021. How a long history of intertwined racism and misogyny leaves Asian women in America vulnerable to violence." *Time*. <https://time.com/5952819/history-anti-asian-racism-misogyny/>
52. Kang, C, and P. Cacherero. 2021. How a long history of intertwined racism and misogyny leaves Asian women in America vulnerable to violence." *Time*. <https://time.com/5952819/history-anti-asian-racism-misogyny/>
53. Yuen, N.W, Smith, S., Pieper, K., Choueiti, M., Yao, K. & Dinh, D. (2021). "The Prevalence and Portrayal of Asian and Pacific Islanders across 1,300 Popular Films." USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii_API-representation-across-films-2021-05-18.pdf
54. Vorrasi-Banis, L. (2021). "George Takei, Danny Pudi, More Reflect on Hollywood's Portrayal of Asian Men, and What Needs to Change." *Entertainment Weekly*. <https://ew.com/celebrity/asian-men-hollywood-representation-roundtable/>
55. Vorrasi-Banis, L. (2021). "George Takei, Danny Pudi, More Reflect on Hollywood's Portrayal of Asian Men, and What Needs to Change." *Entertainment Weekly*. <https://ew.com/celebrity/asian-men-hollywood-representation-roundtable/>
56. A minor character in the main title cast tended to be a well-known actor who had a small role but was given a main title credit, such as Fred Arimisen who played a minor role in *Battle of the Sexes*, but was still in the main title cast.
57. Bonilla-Silva, E. 2017. *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Inequality in America*. 5th ed. New York: Routledge.
58. Keith, V. M., Nguyen, A. W., Taylor, R. J., Chatters, L. M., Mouzon, D. M. 2017. "Microaggressions, Discrimination, and Phenotype among African Americans: A Latent Class Analysis of the Impact of Skin Tone and BMI." *Sociological Inquiry* 87(2):233–55.
59. Burton, L. M., E. Bonilla-Silva, V. Ray, R. Bucklew, E. Hordge Freeman. "Critical Race Theories, Colorism, and the Decade's Research on Families of Color." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72 (3): 440-459. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00712.x>
60. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/hollywoods-colorism-problem-cant-be-ignored>
61. Ruiz, N. G., J. M. Horowitz, and C. Tamir. 2020. "Many Black and Asian Americans say they have experienced discrimination amid the COVID-19 pandemic." *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/01/many-black-and-asian-americans-say-they-have-experienced-discrimination-amid-the-covid-19-outbreak/>.
62. Some films made for streaming services used TV ratings systems. For the purposes of these analyses, they have been assigned the MPAA counterpart. NR stands for "not rated," which applied to some streaming films as well.
63. Dang, E., Huang, S., Kwok, A. Lung, H., Park, M., and E. Yueh. (2020). "COVID-19 and advancing Asian American recovery." *McKinsey & Company*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-advancing-asian-american-recovery>.
64. Kochhar, R and A. Cilluffo. (2018). "Income inequality in the U.S. is rising most rapidly among Asians." *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/07/12/income-inequality-in-the-u-s-is-rising-most-rapidly-among-asians/>.
65. Nguyen, V.T. (2020). "Asian Americans are still caught in the trap of the 'Model Minority' stereotype. And it creates inequality for all." *Time*. <https://time.com/5859206/anti-asian-racism-america/>