



Purpose-Driven Progress:

Advancing On-Screen Diversity and
Inclusion Through Accountability

TOOLKIT

Executive Summary

Surveys and market research find that audiences want to see broader on-screen diversity in entertainment and creative work,¹ and audiences are more loyal to brands that reflect their identities.² Audiences also seek content that represents them accurately on screen.³ Has the creative work kept up? To answer this question, Cannes Lions partnered with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media for a third time to assess representation in Cannes Lions Film and Film Craft creative work from 2006 to 2021, with a focus on character portrayals in creative work from 2021. This study examines representations of gender, race, LGBTQIA+ identity, disability, age, and body type. The executive summary presents the major findings.

REPRESENTATION OVERVIEW

Who Was Included?

From 2006 to 2021, representations of women and people of colour in Cannes creative work increased markedly. In 2021, Cannes Lions creative work nearly reached gender parity. Visually prominent female characters increased 13.7 percentage points across that timespan, from 33.9% in 2006 to 47.6% last year, which is the greatest share of female characters in Cannes Lions creative work between 2006 and 2021. And in their share of screen time and speaking time, we again see positive change: Female characters occupy 43.2% of screen time — an increase of about 3 percentage points from 2020 — and 44.3% of speaking time — an increase of about 2 percentage points from 2020.

Also, in Cannes Lions creative work from last year, the share of visually prominent people of colour increased 28.7 points, from 25.9% in 2006 to 54.6%, which is the largest share of characters of colour in all Cannes Lions creative work between 2006 and 2021.



FG Trade/E+ via Getty Images

The inclusion of other historically excluded groups remained stagnant in 2021 creative work. LGBTQIA+ representation has largely hovered around 2% for all visually prominent characters over the time period in which such representation was measured (2018–2021). For reference, in a study of 27 countries,⁴ about 2% of respondents identify as transgender or nonbinary, and 11% describe themselves as only, mostly, or equally attracted to people of the same sex.⁵ Representation of people with disabilities has varied between 2018 and 2021, but it peaked in 2019, at just 2.2% of all visually prominent characters. For reference, about 15% of the world’s population has a disability, according to the World Bank.⁶ The inclusion of characters ages sixty and older has not improved over the time period measured (2019–2021). For reference, about 13.5% of the world’s population is sixty-plus, according to United Nation global population estimates.⁷ Representation of people with a large body type has also not improved over the time period measured (2019–2021).

FIGURE 1 • Gender Representation in Cannes Lions Film and Film Craft Creative Work from 2006 to 2021

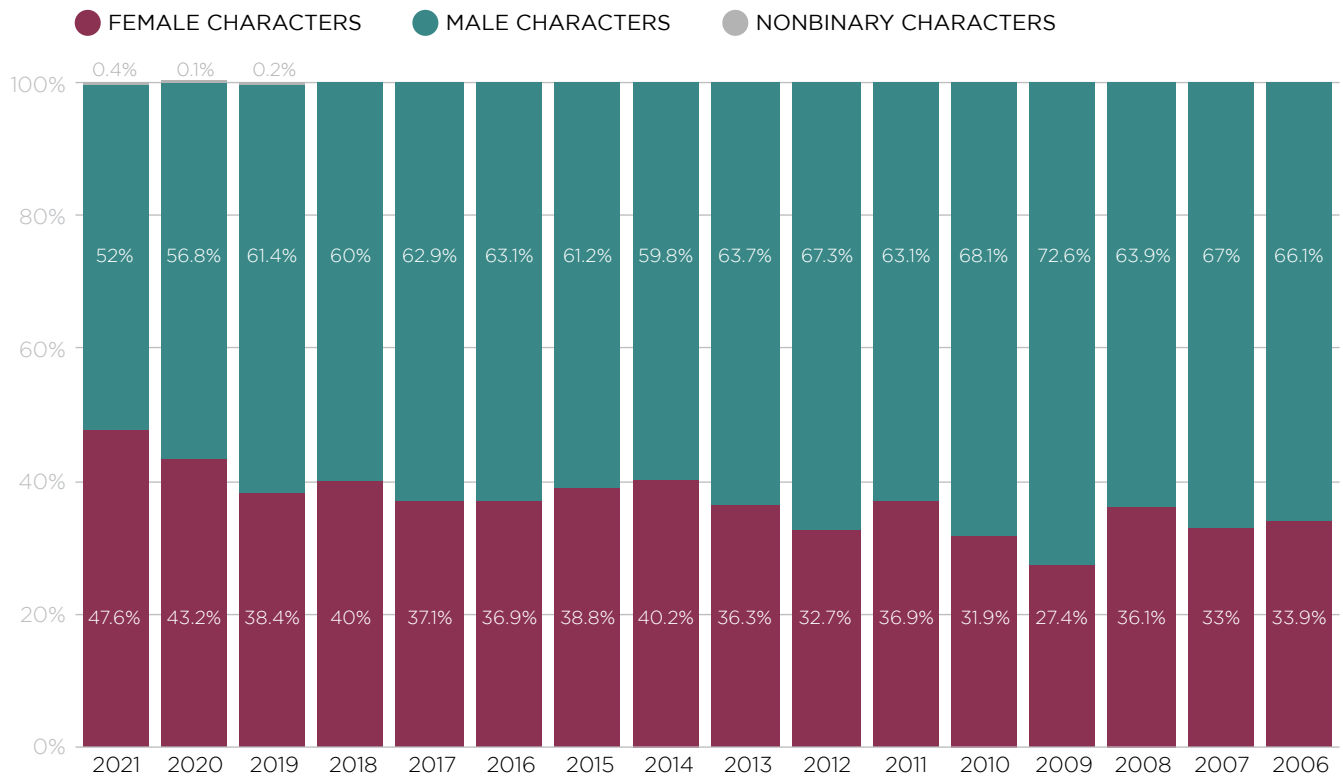


FIGURE 2 • Analysis of Female Screen Time and Speaking Time in Creative Work from 2006 to 2021

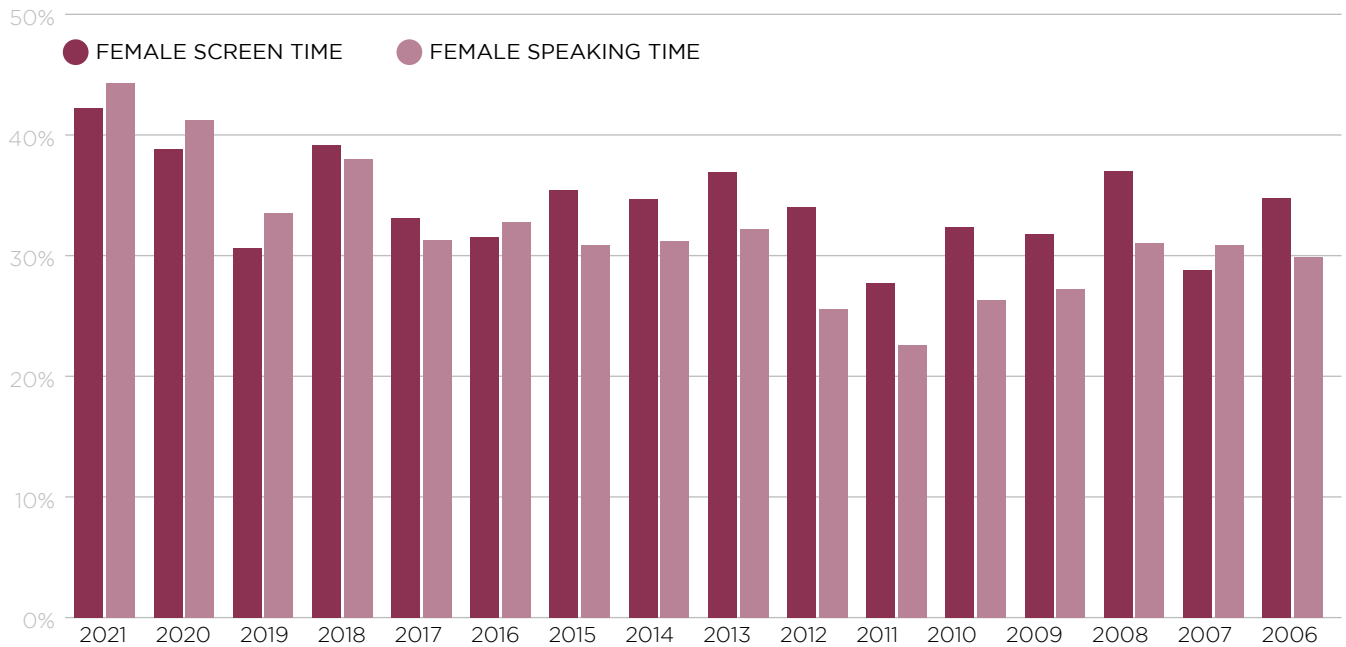


FIGURE 3 • Aggregated Racial Representation in Cannes Lions Film and Film Craft Creative Work from 2006 to 2021

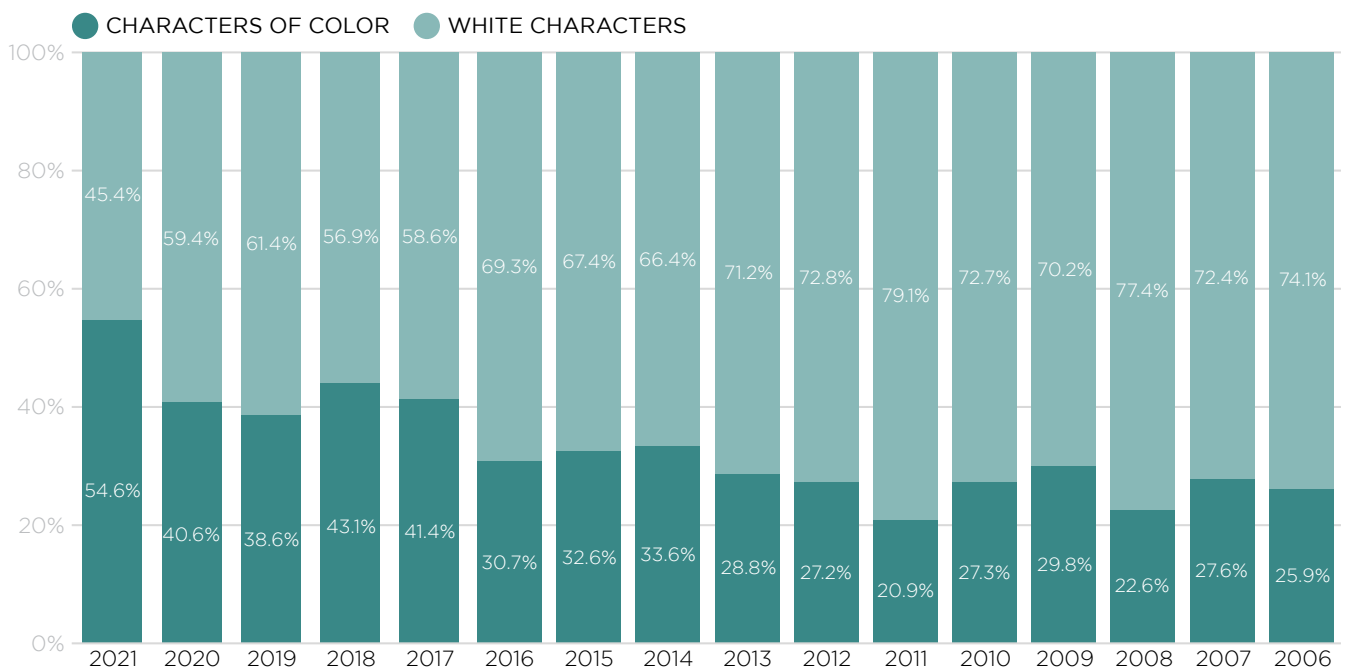
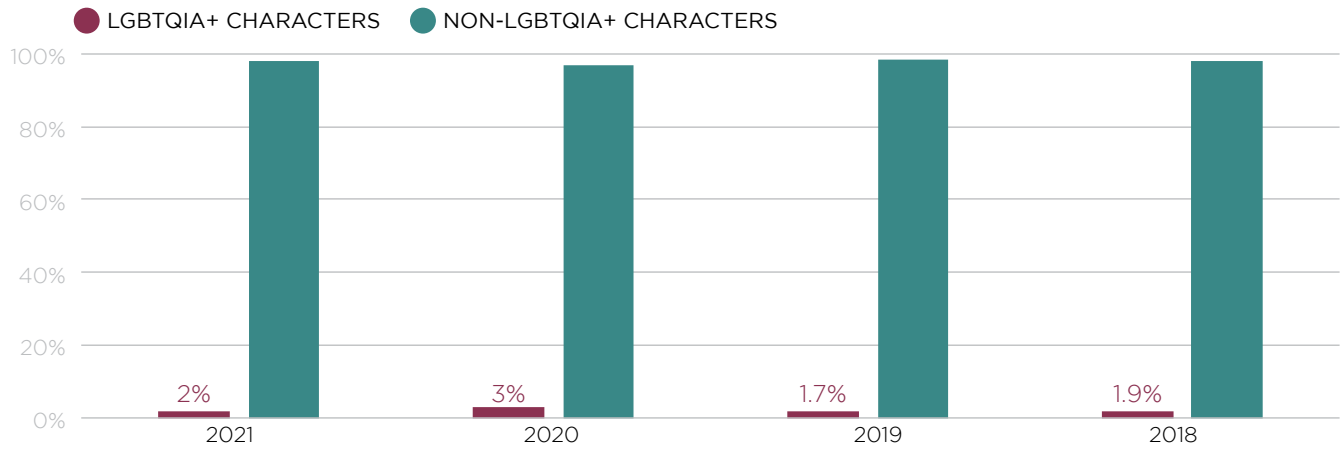
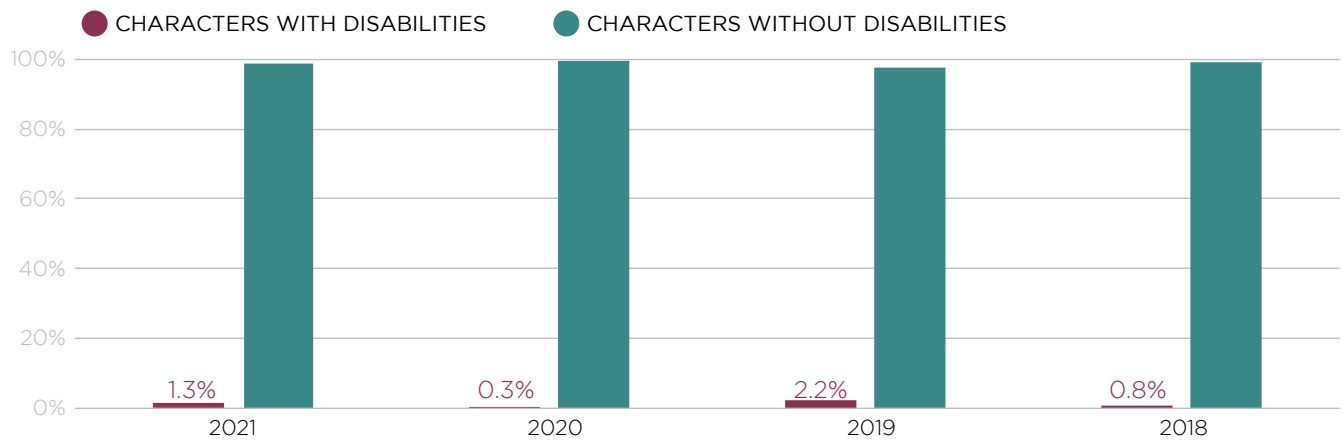


FIGURE 4 • LGBTQIA+ Representation in Cannes Lions Film and Film Craft Creative Work from 2018 to 2021



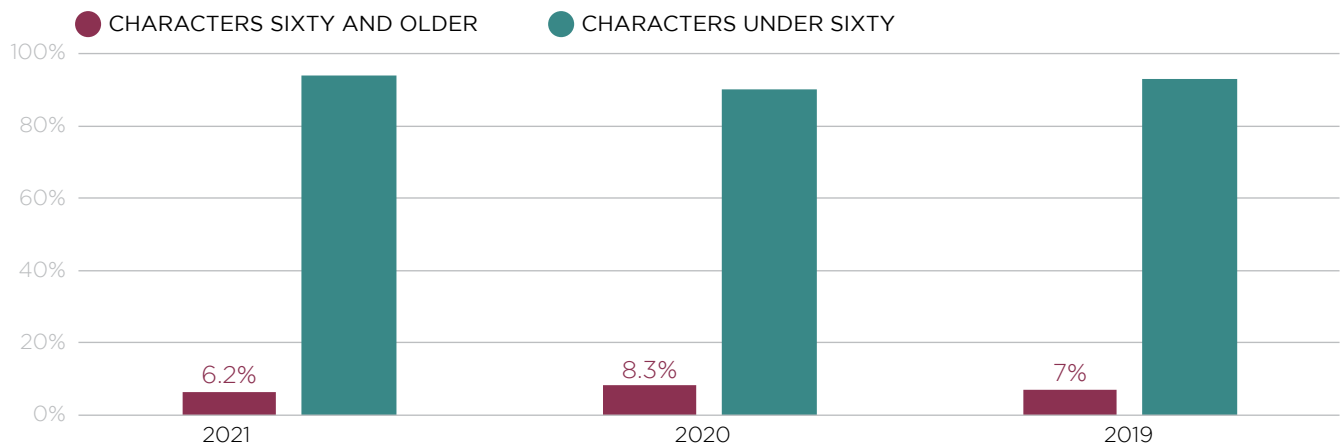
Note: Characters with disabilities were not measured in 2006 through 2017.

FIGURE 5 • Disability Representation in Cannes Lions Film and Film Craft Creative Work from 2018 to 2021



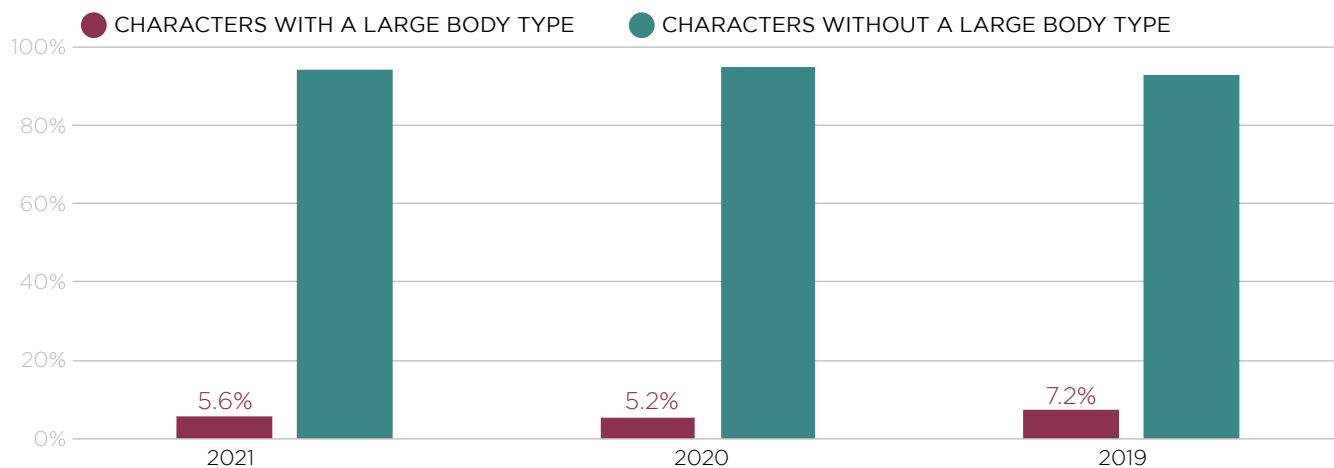
Note: Characters with disabilities were not measured in 2006 through 2017.

FIGURE 6 • Age Representation of Characters in Cannes Lions Film and Film Craft Creative Work from 2019 to 2021



Note: Characters ages sixty and older were not measured in 2006 through 2018.

FIGURE 7 • Body-Type Representation in Cannes Lions Film and Film Craft Creative Work from 2019 to 2021



Note: Character body type was not measured in 2006 through 2018.

Intersectional Findings Overview

Intersectional analysis of the 2021 Cannes Lions creative work reveals that male and female characters were similarly diverse. As shown in Figure 8, the share of male and female characters who were people of colour, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, and ages sixty and older was much the same. Male characters were slightly more likely to have a large body type (6.8% of all male characters, compared with 4.5% of female characters) and, therefore, represented more body-type diversity than seen in female characters.

TABLE 1 • Intersectional Analysis of Gender in Cannes Lions Film and Film Craft Creative Work in 2021

IDENTITY	2021	
	FEMALE CHARACTERS	MALE CHARACTERS
BIPOC	55.6%	54.0%
LGBTQIA+	1.4%	2.0%
People with Disabilities	1.6%	1.1%
Sixty and Older	5.7%	6.9%
People with Large Body Types	4.5%	6.8%

How Were Groups Portrayed?

GENDER

Overall, the analysis of how characters were portrayed suggests that female characters in 2021 Cannes Lions creative work had less autonomy than male characters, but their portrayals improved from previous years. For example:

- In 2021 creative work, more men than women were shown in an occupation (+5%). In 2020, that gap was 12%. In 2019, that gap was 9%.
- In 2021 creative work, more men than women were shown with authority (+4%). In 2020, that gap was 6%.
- In 2021 creative work, more men than women were shown as leaders (+3%). In 2020, that gap was 5%. In 2019, that gap was 6%.

Another marked change is that fewer women were shown in revealing clothing:

- In 2021 creative work, 5.0% of female characters were shown in revealing clothing — a decline from 2019, when 10.8% of all female characters were shown in revealing clothing.

RACE/ETHNICITY

Overall, the analysis of how characters were portrayed suggests that characters of colour in 2021 Cannes Lions creative work were more social and socially engaged and more physically active than white characters:

- In 2021 creative work, more characters of colour than white characters were shown socializing (+8%). In 2020 and 2019, there were no significant differences between white characters and characters of colour shown socializing.
- In 2021 creative work, more characters of colour than white characters were shown exercising (+4%). In 2020 and 2019, there were no significant differences between white characters and characters of colour shown exercising.
- In 2021 creative work, more characters of colour than white characters were shown in the outdoors (+6%). In 2020, characters of colour were also more likely than white characters to be in the outdoors (+7%). In 2019, there was no significant difference.

White characters were more likely than characters of colour to be shown having authority, working, and being funny:

- In 2021 creative work, more white characters than characters of colour were shown as an authority (+2%). In 2020 and 2019, there were no significant differences in portrayals of authority.
- In 2021 creative work, more white characters than characters of colour were shown working (+3%). In 2020, that gap was 9%. In 2019, that gap was 3%.
- In 2021 creative work, more white characters than characters of colour were shown in an office (+6%). In 2020 and 2019, white characters were also more likely than characters of colour to be shown in an office, but the gap was smaller.
- In 2021 creative work, more white characters than characters of colour were shown as being funny (+4%). In 2020, characters of colour were more likely than white characters to be shown as funny (+4%). In 2019, there were no significant racial differences in portrayals of humour.

LGBTQIA+

Overall, the analysis of how characters were portrayed suggests that LGBTQIA+ characters in 2021 Cannes Lions creative work were social, active, and engaged. For example:

- LGBTQIA+ characters were much more likely than non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown socializing (72.2% compared with 45.4%). In 2020, LGBTQIA+ characters were also more likely than non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown socializing (54.1% compared with 30.6%). In 2019, there was no significant difference.
- In 2021 creative work, LGBTQIA+ characters were twice as likely as non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown eating/drinking (13.0% compared with 7.7%).
- In 2021 creative work, LGBTQIA+ characters are nearly four times as likely as non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown cooking (5.6% compared with 1.6%). In 2020 and 2019, there were no significant differences.
- LGBTQIA+ characters were nearly ten times more likely than non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown in a restaurant or bar (24.1% compared with 2.5%). In 2020 and 2019, there were no significant differences.
- LGBTQIA+ characters were four times as likely as non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown in a car (14.8% compared with 3.4%). In 2020, LGBTQIA+ characters were seven times more likely than non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown in a car (27.0% compared with 3.8%). In 2019, there was no significant difference.

LGBTQIA+ characters were less likely than non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown working, however:

- In 2021 creative work, non-LGBTQIA+ characters were twice as likely as LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown working (21.9% compared with 11.1%). This gap is shrinking, however. Non-LGBTQIA+ characters were four times as likely as non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be shown working in 2020 (22.4% compared with 5.4%), and nearly three times as likely in 2019 (18.9% compared with 6.8%).

DISABILITY

As reported above, disability representation is low — just 1.2% of all characters in Cannes Lions 2021 creative work. Due to the small number of characters, we did not carry out statistical analysis of their portrayals.



Thomas Barwick/Digital Vision via Getty Images

AGE (SIXTY AND OLDER)

Overall, the analysis of how characters were portrayed in 2021 Cannes Lions creative work suggests that characters ages sixty and older were more social and domestic but less physically active than younger characters. For example:

- In 2021 creative work, more sixty-plus characters than characters under sixty were shown cooking and socializing. There is a 3-point gap between sixty-plus characters and characters under sixty shown cooking (4.2% compared with 1.5%), and an 8-point gap between those groups shown socializing (53.3% compared with 45.4%). In 2020 and 2019, there were no significant differences.
- In 2021 creative work, more characters under sixty than those sixty and older were shown exercising. There is a 9-point gap between characters under sixty and sixty-plus characters (15.2% compared with 6.7%). In 2020 and 2019, there were no significant differences.
- In 2021 creative work, more sixty-plus characters than characters under sixty were shown in a bedroom. There is a 4-point gap between sixty-plus characters and characters under sixty (6.5% compared with 2.4%). In 2020 and 2019, there were no significant differences.

BODY TYPE

Overall, the analysis of how characters were portrayed suggests that characters with a large body type were broadly similar to characters with other body types. The only significant difference was in who was shown at a sporting event:

- Characters with a large body type were less likely than characters without a large body type to be shown at a sporting event (3.4% compared with 8.1%). In 2020 and 2019, there were no significant differences.
- There were no statistically significant differences between characters with a large body type and other characters in leadership or authority.

Conclusion

In 2021, Cannes Lion Film and Film Craft creative work increased the inclusion of female characters and characters of colour, compared with previous years.

Although the inclusion of female characters increased in 2021, there is some evidence that their portrayals were reinforcing harmful stereotypes about power and authority. In 2021, just as in 2020 and 2019, female characters were less likely than male characters to be leaders, authorities, or in occupations.

Portrayals of people of colour in 2021 Film and Film Craft creative work suggests positive developments. Although characters of colour were less likely than white characters to be shown as an authority, they were as likely to be leaders and hold an occupation. Moreover, other common racial tropes in advertising were subverted, such as the “Great White Outdoors;”¹³ the analysis found that characters of colour were more likely than white characters to be shown in the outdoors.

It is our hope that these improvements in the share of women and people of colour on screen are not a blip but instead the start of a new direction in representation in Film and Film Craft creative work. We also hope that subsequent creative work will continue to subvert racial stereotypes and tropes and develop content that shows female characters as autonomous as male characters. Finally, we hope that this report draws attention to the underrepresentation of people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ people, people ages sixty and older, and people with a large body type, thereby inspiring more diverse and inclusive creative work in the future.

Recommendations

GENDER

- Increase the number of female characters shown in leadership positions and with authority, to counter common stereotypes about gender and power.
- Show more female characters working and at work, to improve the quality of female representation. Having more male characters than female characters shown in these roles may reinforce the “male breadwinner” model, which isn’t a reality for the majority of American families, who hold dual incomes.
- Reduce sexualised depictions of female characters, to subvert visual objectification and dehumanising characterisations of women.
- Increase on-screen speaking time for female characters, to show that the voices of women are equally important as those of men.

RACE

- Increase the number of characters of colour shown working and in work settings, to offer more positive depictions of people of colour in the workplace.
- Show more characters of colour as authorities, to create more inclusive depictions of people with power or expertise.
- Continue to show characters of colour in the outdoors, to create content that actively subverts racial stereotypes about recreational activities.

LGBTQIA+

- Significantly increase overall representations of prominent LGBTQIA+ characters, to match their true prevalence in the population. LGBTQIA+ characters comprised only 2.0% of prominent characters in 2021 creative work, but 11% of the global population identify as attracted to their same sex.
- Increase representations of LGBTQIA+ characters in the workplace; LGBTQIA+ representation in the workplace has been low for all years examined (2018 to 2021).
- Show more LGBTQIA+ characters at sporting events, to subvert heteronormative stereotypes (particularly about gay men) surrounding who enjoys watching sports as a form of leisure.
- Avoid hypersexualised depictions of LGBTQIA+ people (including revealing clothing), to counter pernicious negative stereotypes related to some categories of sexual identity and sexual orientation.

DISABILITIES

- Significantly increase the number of visibly prominent characters with disabilities, with the aim of approaching their actual prevalence in the population. People with disabilities were virtually absent in 2021 Cannes Lions creative work, comprising only 1.3% of characters on screen.
- Keep in mind that disability is multifaceted and may include physical, cognitive, and/or communication aspects.

AGE

- Increase prominence of characters ages sixty and older in creative work, to better reflect their prevalence in the population (34% in the United States). Representation of sixty-plus persons in 2021 decreased by 2.1% from 2020.
- Continue to depict characters ages sixty and older as intelligent and active, to counter stereotypes surrounding declining physical and cognitive ability.

BODY TYPE

- Significantly increase the inclusion of people with a large body type, who were only 5.6% of visible prominent characters in 2021 Cannes Lions creative work.
- Ensure body-type diversity for both male and female characters; we observed slightly greater body-type diversity for men than for women.
- Increase counter-stereotypical portrayals of larger body types, including participation in exercise activities, prominence in beauty and cosmetics products, and demonstrations of intelligence, authority, and leadership.

ABOUT THE GEENA DAVIS INSTITUTE ON GENDER IN MEDIA

Founded in 2004 by Academy Award Winning Actor Geena Davis, the Institute is the only research-based organization working collaboratively within the entertainment industry to create gender balance, foster inclusion and reduce negative stereotyping in family entertainment media.

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