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GDI Film Study 2024

Women Take the Lead in
\$20-\$50M Film Budgets

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Executive Summary

Despite an increasingly fractured media environment where media consumers have many options to choose from for entertainment, young people are still watching movies. According to a recent survey by the Center for Scholars and Storytellers, “movies remain teens’ top choice for entertainment. When asked what they would do if time and money were no constraint, going to see a movie came out on top, far ahead of other activities like sports.”¹ Teens are watching films because the art form has the power to move audiences and make them feel seen and validated. Film is especially relevant for children’s social and behavioral development because children have a limited understanding of the world and much of what they know about the world comes from movies. But decades of media research suggest that movies often have problematic themes, reinforcing identity-based stereotypes and offering incomplete pictures of marginalized groups.² Measuring these issues is one way to bring them to light and foster change. For this reason, the Geena Davis Institute carries out research that analyzes who is on screen and how they are depicted, and then develops targeted recommendations for creators. This approach has served to bring more stories to the screen that deeply resonate with young audiences without reinforcing harmful stereotypes that limit their imaginations.

To contribute to the mission of the Geena Davis Institute, this study analyzes all films released in theaters or online via major streaming services, rated G, PG, and PG-13 in 2023, with a budget of over \$10 million USD, according to the trade database Luminate TV & Film, which resulted in 82 films. We used a content analytic methodology to analyze the films to identify themes and patterns.

Our analysis extends beyond top-grossing box office films, to reflect changes in film production and distribution. Box office figures exclude films made for streaming, which are also widely viewed. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a shift toward streaming platforms by halting productions, limiting theater attendance, and reshaping revenue models.

The COVID-19 pandemic-related shutdowns forced studios to halt productions, cut budgets, and prioritize quick recovery, likely presenting substantial challenges to advancing inclusion efforts in film production. Likewise, the recent writers’ and actors’ strikes that sought fair wages, protections around artificial intelligence, and sustainable work conditions in a changing media landscape may have sidelined longer-term inclusion initiatives as studios focussed on renegotiations. While this report is only a snapshot of one year of films, it reflects an industry in flux, balancing immediate recovery and long-term transformation goals. The setbacks from the pandemic and strikes have underscored the importance of inclusion, even as studios have had to adjust timelines and resources. Achieving meaningful and sustained representation will require renewed commitment and targeted support once stability returns. This renewed effort is vital because movie-going has prevailed and remains a beloved shared experience among family and friends.³

Below, we outline the key findings from this study.

Key Findings

Key Gender Findings

- ◆ Overall, female characters are just 37.8% of all characters on screen in the films analyzed, and nonbinary characters are just 0.1%.
- ◆ Just 35.3% of all leads are female characters. Of the female leads, 64.5% are white and 35.5% are people of color. Compare this with the top-grossing family films in 2019, where 48.2% of leads were female characters.⁴
- ◆ Of notable supporting characters, 44.4% of characters are female, while 36.9% of supporting characters and 35.8% of minor characters are female.
- ◆ Female characters are almost five times more likely than male characters to be objectified (3.3% compared with 0.7%) and three times more likely to be wearing sexually revealing clothing (7.4% compared with 2.5%).
- ◆ Male characters are more likely than female characters to be ages 50 and older (21.4% compared with 14.4%). This difference indicates a preference for younger female characters in family films.
- ◆ Across characters in all roles, male characters are significantly more likely than female characters to have an occupation (54.9% compared with 46.0%).
- ◆ For specific careers, male characters are significantly more likely than female characters to have a career in the armed forces/security/law enforcement (17.4% compared with 7.6%) and in sports-related fields (6.2% compared with 1.3%).
- ◆ Of characters with an occupation, female characters are significantly more likely than male characters to hold a STEM occupation (16.9% compared with 10.8%).
- ◆ Nearly 3 in 4 films pass the “Bechdel test.” The following criteria are necessary to pass the test: 1) at least two named female characters 2) who talk to each other, and 3) their conversation must be about something other than a man.
- ◆ Protagonists’ motivations do not vary by gender. We considered the following motivations for film storylines: 1) saving others, 2) knowledge or personal growth, 3) money or fame, 4) love, and 5) physical feats. The most frequent motivator for protagonists is “saving others,” followed by “knowledge or personal growth.”
- ◆ Female leads are more common among films with a budget of \$20–50 million, where they are 51.9% of leads. But male leads dominate in films with a budget of \$10–20 million, where they are 73.3% of leads, and in films with a budget over \$100 million, where they are 70.0% of leads.

Key Race/Ethnicity Findings

- ◆ White characters make up 59.5% of all characters, whereas characters of color make up 40.5% of characters. Black characters make up 20.5% of all characters, followed by Asian and Pacific Islander characters, who make up 11.6%, and Latinx characters, who make up 5.8% of all characters.
- ◆ Of leads, 36.4% are people of color.
- ◆ In PG-rated films, 61.9% of leads are people of color, but in PG-13 films, people of color are just 28.4% of leads. (No films in the sample had a G rating.)

- ◆ Characters of color are significantly more likely than white characters to be female characters (44.9% compared with 34.6%). This means that white characters are more often men, and characters of color are more often women.
- ◆ Among films with a budget over \$100 million, 40.7% of leads are people of color.
- ◆ Protagonists' motivations do not vary when comparing white characters to all characters of color. We considered the following motivations for film storylines: 1) saving others, 2) knowledge or personal growth, 3) money or fame, 4) love, and 5) physical feats.

Key LGBTQIA+ Findings

- ◆ LGBTQIA+ characters are nearly invisible in the films analyzed. We identify only 1.5% of characters who are LGBTQIA+ in films from 2023, whereas LGBTQIA+ people make up 7.6% of the U.S. population.⁵
- ◆ Just 2.9% of leads are LGBTQIA+.

Key Disability Findings

- ◆ Only 2.0% of characters in films from 2023 have a disability (inclusive of mental health condition, a cognitive, learning, behavioral, or physical disability), far below the share of people in the U.S. who have a disability, which is about 27.2%.⁶
- ◆ Just 1.0% of leads have a disability.
- ◆ Disabled leads appear only in films with budgets between \$50–100 million, films rated PG-13, and sci-fi/fantasy films.

Key Body-Size Findings

- ◆ Only 6.5% of characters in films from 2023 are fat. We prefer to use the term “fat” as a value-neutral descriptor, distancing from terms like “obese” or “overweight,” which are rooted in medical practices that often reinforce stigma and bias against larger bodies, nor is “fat” suggestive of being outside of some sort of “norm” or “average” (such as “plus size” or “bigger”).
- ◆ Fat characters are significantly more likely to be ages 50 and older, compared with characters who are not fat (27.7% compared with 18.0%).
- ◆ Just 2.0% of leads are fat.
- ◆ Fat characters appear only in films with a budget between \$10–20 million, and films with a budget between \$100 million and higher.

Key Age Findings

- ◆ Overall, 18.7% of characters in films from 2023 are ages 50 and older.
- ◆ Just 15.8% of leads are 50-plus.

Introduction

According to a recent survey by the Center for Scholars and Storytellers, “movies remain teens’ top choice for entertainment. When asked what they would do if time and money were no constraint, going to see a movie came out on top, far ahead of other activities like sports.”⁷

The film industry has faced significant disruptions in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic forced production halts, limited theater attendance, and altered distribution methods, accelerating a shift toward streaming platforms and reshaping traditional revenue models. In 2023, strikes by actors and writers further impacted the industry as writers and actors sought fair wages, protections around artificial intelligence, and sustainable work conditions in a changing media landscape. Given these disruptions, our analysis looks at films made in 2023 in the U.S. but is not limited to box-office numbers to determine which films to analyze. To capture the film industry more broadly, this analysis is inclusive of films made for streaming services, limited release films, and theatrical releases. Further, this report examines representations of gender, race, LGBTQ+, disability, and body size on screen in family films (rated G, PG, or PG-13) with a budget of over \$10 million, originating and distributed in the United States, according to the trade database Luminate TV & Film.

This study is essential because the narratives we present in entertainment media tell us who holds significance and value in our society. To foster a cultural shift that empowers people from all identities, it is crucial for children to encounter diverse portrayals of characters in media that mirror the world they live in. This exposure helps to prevent the unintentional development of unconscious biases, and inoculates audiences against harmful stereotypes that persist.

Our research examines children’s and family programming to evaluate the influence of media on young audiences who are most vulnerable to media effects. Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of not seeing characters who resemble them in popular culture, since they are in a crucial stage of developing their identities and understanding their place in the world.

Data Collection and Methodology

The data for this study includes all theatrical releases (wide and limited) and streaming-only films, that are in English, rated G, PG, and PG-13 with a budget of over \$10 million, originating and distributed in the United States from 2023, according to the trade database Luminate TV & Film, by Variety. This resulted in 82 films. For this study, we used a content analysis methodology, which is an objective, systematic, and quantitative analysis of message characteristics. With this process, we trained our team of human expert coders to identify concepts under investigation, which garnered confidence in consistent and reliable data collection. For statistical analysis of group differences, we used chi-square tests to determine statistical significance, with p-values set to 0.05.

TABLE 1

Dataset for Family Films in 2023

	Family Films in 2023
Films	82
Total Characters	2,212
Lead Characters	102
Notable Supporting Characters	404
Supporting Characters	841
Minor Characters	864

In these 82 films, 2,212 characters were identified as lead, colead, notable supporting, supporting, or minor characters. Most analysis is at the character level.

Of the 82 films, 26 had a budget of over \$100 million. Twenty-two films had a budget of \$10–20 million, while 20 films had a budget of \$20–50 million, and 14 films had a budget of \$50–100 million, according to Luminate Film & TV.

TABLE 2

Number of Films By Their Budgets

	Total Films in Sample
10M to <20M	22
20M to <50M	20
50M to <100M	14
100M+	26

Source: Luminate TV & Film

None of these films were rated G. Twenty-seven were rated PG, and 55 were rated PG-13.

TABLE 3

Number of Films By Their Ratings

	Total Films in Sample
G	0
PG	27
PG-13	55

Source: Luminate TV & Film. *Note.* Two films rated NR (TV-14) and one film rated NR (13-plus) were counted as PG-13, and one film rated NR (TV-PG) was counted as PG.

Most of the films were animated features (18), followed by drama (16) and action (15). (See Table 4.)

TABLE 4

Number of Films by Their Genre

	Total Films in Sample
Animation Feature	18
Drama	16
Action	15
Comedy	14
Sci-fi/Fantasy	11
Horror	5
Thriller	3

Source: Luminate TV & Film



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Findings

Gender Representation

PROMINENCE AND INTERSECTIONS

Among all characters, male characters are more visible on screen — 62.1% of all characters are male. Only 0.1% of characters are nonbinary (Table 5).

TABLE 5

Gender inclusion in family films (all characters) in 2023

	Family Films in 2023
Male	62.1%
Female	37.8%
Nonbinary	0.1%

We also examine how often films passed the “Bechdel test.” To pass the test, three conditions must be met in the film: 1) two women, or two people of a marginalized gender, must have names, 2) talk to each other, and 3) and talk about something other than a man. The Bechdel test helps us further understand the driving narratives that girls and women have in film, and whether those narratives simply reinforce

the importance of men. Contrarily, if films pass the Bechdel test, it helps us understand that girls and women stand their own ground in film narratives and contribute to the story in their own way. In total, we find that 72.0% of films pass the Bechdel test, whereas 28.0% of the films do not.

Looking at how other identities intersect with gender, we find that female characters are significantly more likely than male characters to be people of color. Contrarily, male characters are significantly more likely than female characters to be ages 50 and older (Table 6).

TABLE 6

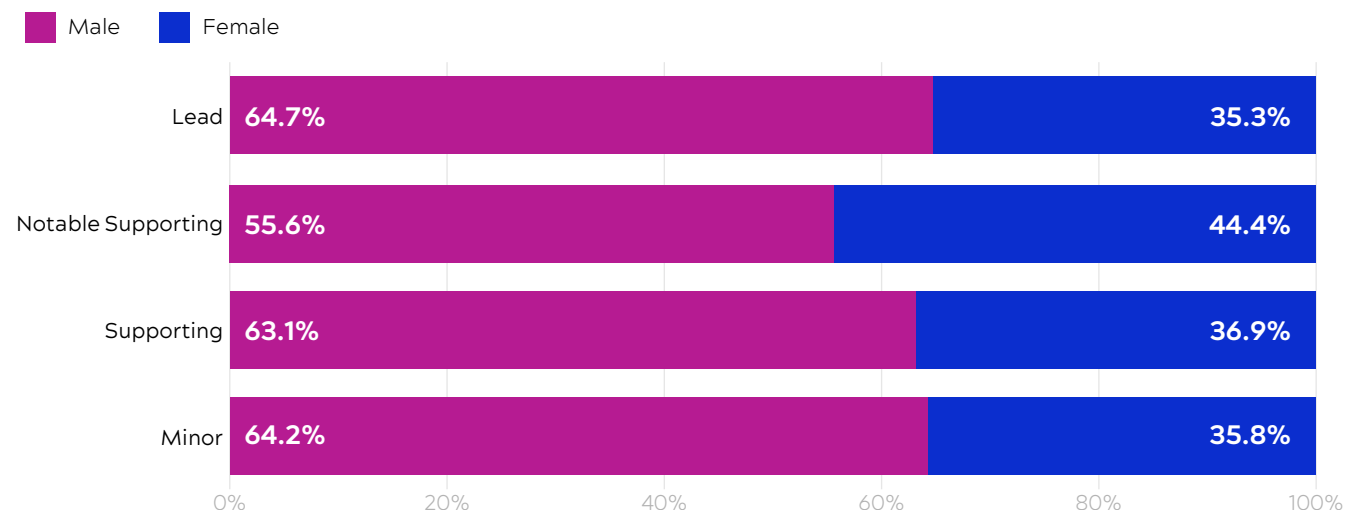
Gender at the intersection of other identities

	Male Characters	Female Characters
People of Color	36.4%*	46.8%*
LGBTQIA+	1.2%	1.7%
Disabled	2.0%	1.9%
Fat	7.2%	5.4%
50+	21.4%*	14.4%*

Note. Asterisk (*) indicates a statistically significant difference. Nonbinary characters were not included in statistical analysis because they accounted for only 0.1% of all characters.

As shown in Figure 1, male characters outnumber female characters in lead (64.7% compared with 35.3%), notable supporting (55.6% compared with 44.4%), supporting (63.1% compared with 36.9%), and minor roles (64.2% compared with 35.8%).

FIGURE 1

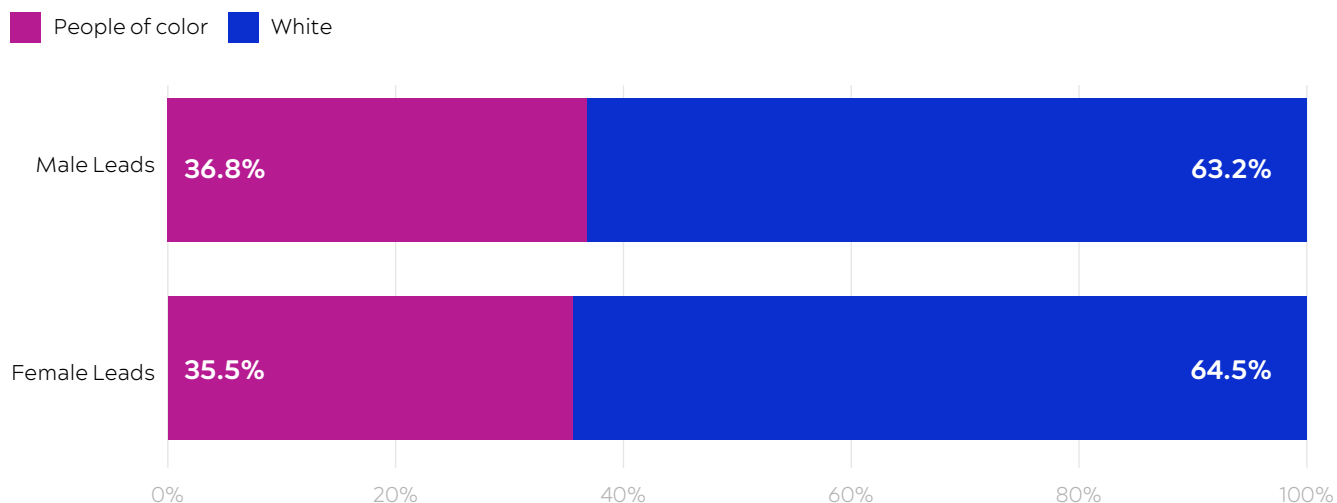
Gender prominence for all characters in family films in 2023

Note. Nonbinary characters were not included in statistical analysis because they accounted for only 0.1% of all characters. Notable supporting roles are significantly more likely than supporting roles to be male characters, and supporting roles are significantly more likely than notable supporting roles to be female characters.

Of female leads, 64.5% are white, and 35.5% are women of color. Of male leads, 63.2% are white, and 36.8% are men of color (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

Prominence by Gender and Race



Female leads are more common among films with a budget of \$20–50 million, where they are 51.9% of leads. Male leads dominate among the lowest budgets and highest budgets — they are 73.3% of leads in films with a budget of \$10–20 million, and 70.0% of leads in films with a budget over \$100 million.

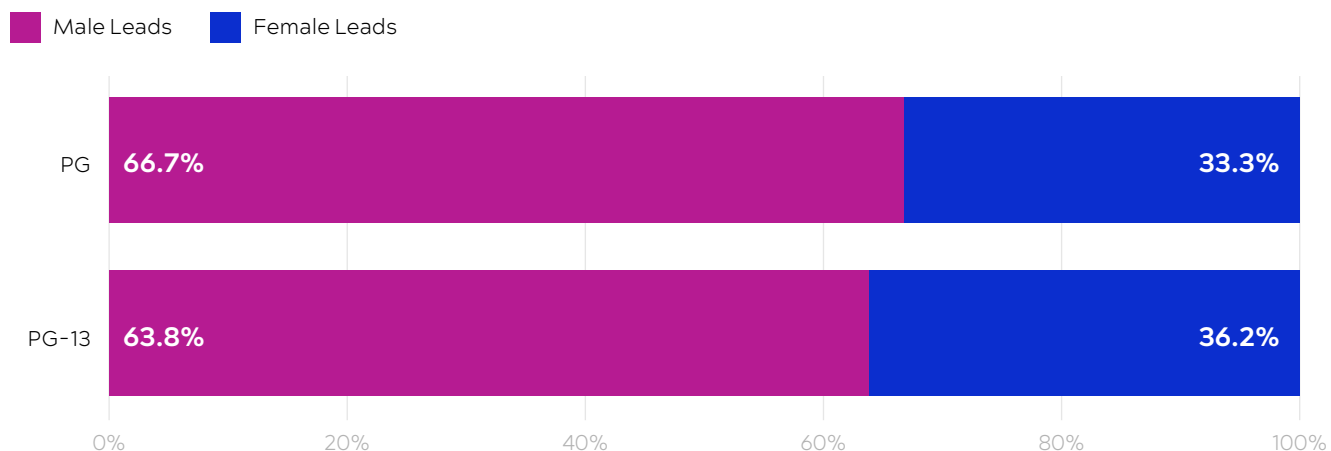
TABLE 7

Gender of Leads by Budget

	Male Leads	Female Leads
10M to <20M	73.3%	26.7%
20M to <50M	48.1%	51.9%
50M to <100M	66.7%	33.3%
100M+	70.0%	30.0%

Female leads are similarly common in PG and PG-13 films, as shown in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3

Gender of Leads by Rating

Female leads are most frequent in comedies (44.0%) and dramas (41.2%). Female leads are uncommon in sci-fi/fantasy (25.0%) and action (27.8%).

TABLE 8

Gender of Leads by Genre

	Male Leads	Female Leads
Action	72.2%	27.8%
Animation Feature	61.9%	38.1%
Comedy	56.0%	44.0%
Drama	58.8%	41.2%
Horror	66.7%	33.3%
Sci-fi/Fantasy	75.0%	25.0%
Thriller	100.0%	0.0%

ROMANCE AND SEXUALIZATION

In the films analyzed, female characters are sexualized more frequently than male characters. Specifically, female characters are almost five times more likely than male characters to be objectified (3.3% compared with 0.7%) and three times more likely than male characters to be shown wearing sexually revealing clothing (7.4% compared with 2.5%). In terms of romance, female characters are significantly more likely than male characters to be married or in a committed partnership (14.2% compared with 8.9%). However, female and male characters are equally shown in dating relationships, and kissing.

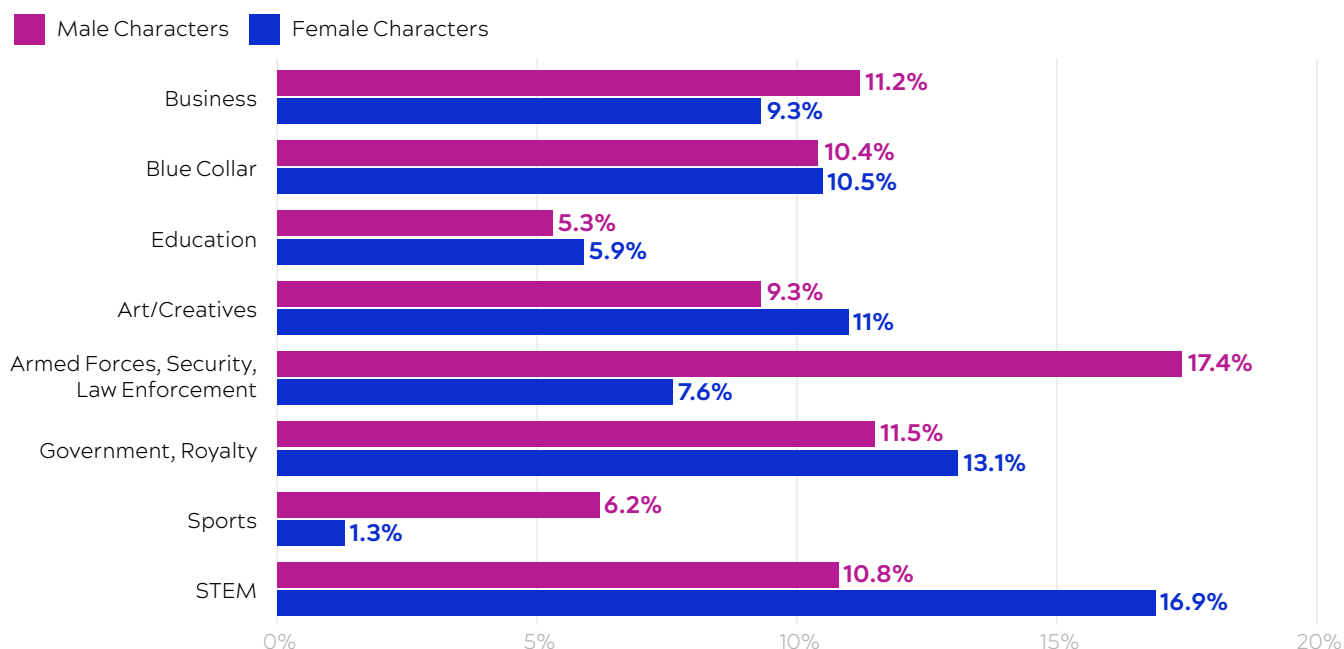
CAREERS AND LEADERSHIP

Across all characters in all roles, male characters are significantly more likely than female characters to have an occupation (54.9% compared with 46.0%). But female and male characters are equally likely to have a STEM occupation and to be a leader.

Looking more closely at characters with an occupation, the most common type of occupation included careers in the armed forces/security/law enforcement (14.1%), followed by STEM (12.8%), and government/royalty (12.0%). Male characters are significantly more likely than female characters to have a career in the armed forces, security, or law enforcement (17.4% compared with 7.6%) and in sports (6.2% compared with 1.3%). But female characters with an occupation are significantly more likely than male characters to have a career in STEM (16.9% compared with 10.8%). (See Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

Career types and gender for all characters in family films in 2023



Note. Male characters are significantly more likely than female characters to have a career in the armed forces, security, or law enforcement, and in sports. Female characters are significantly more likely than male characters to have a career in STEM. Careers outside of the indicated categories were rare, and coded as “miscellaneous.”

PRIMARY MOTIVATIONS

Finally, we investigated the primary motivations of leading characters. Leading characters' primary motivation is what narratively drives leading characters in the film. We consider the following primary motivations:

- ◆ **Saving or Protecting Others:** This is when a character is saving or protecting their family, partner, or loved one.
- ◆ **Knowledge/Growth:** This is when a character wants to go back to school, work toward a specific goal, or learn something new.
- ◆ **Money/Fame:** This is when a character is motivated to accomplish something for the sole purpose of money and/or fame.
- ◆ **Love/Sex:** This is when a character has a love interest, and their role in the film is to get them to fall in love with them or have sex with them.
- ◆ **Physique:** This is when a character is motivated by physical activity, their body, or build.

Primary motivations do not vary by gender. However, no female characters are motivated by money or fame, and no male characters are motivated by physique.

TABLE 9

Primary motivators by gender in family films in 2023

	Male Characters	Female Characters
Saving or Protecting Others	56.7%	51.6%
Knowledge/Growth	23.3%	32.3%
Money/Fame	10.0%	0.0%
Love/Sex	10.0%	9.7%
Physique	0.0%	6.5%

Note. Motivators were coded only among leading characters.



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Race/Ethnicity Representation

Prominence and Intersections

Among all characters, we find that the majority of characters are white (59.5%); 40.5% of characters are people of color. Of all characters of color, Black characters are the most frequent on screen, followed by Asian or Pacific Islander. Native characters are the least common (See Table 10).

TABLE 10

Race Inclusion in family films (all characters) in 2023

	Share of Characters
White	59.5%
All POC	40.5%
Black	20.5%
Asian and Pacific Islander	11.6%
Latinx	5.8%
Middle Eastern and North African	1.7%
Native	0.1%
Ambiguous, Nonwhite Race	0.4%
Multiracial	0.4%

Note. For characters who were white and POC, we coded them under the indicated marginalized identity. Characters who are multiracial include only those with two marginalized identities.

With an intersectional lens, we find that characters of color are significantly more likely than white characters to be female, but white characters are significantly more likely than characters of color to be 50 and older. Characters of color and white characters possess marginalized identities, such as disabilities and LGBTQIA+ identities, at similar rates (Table 11).

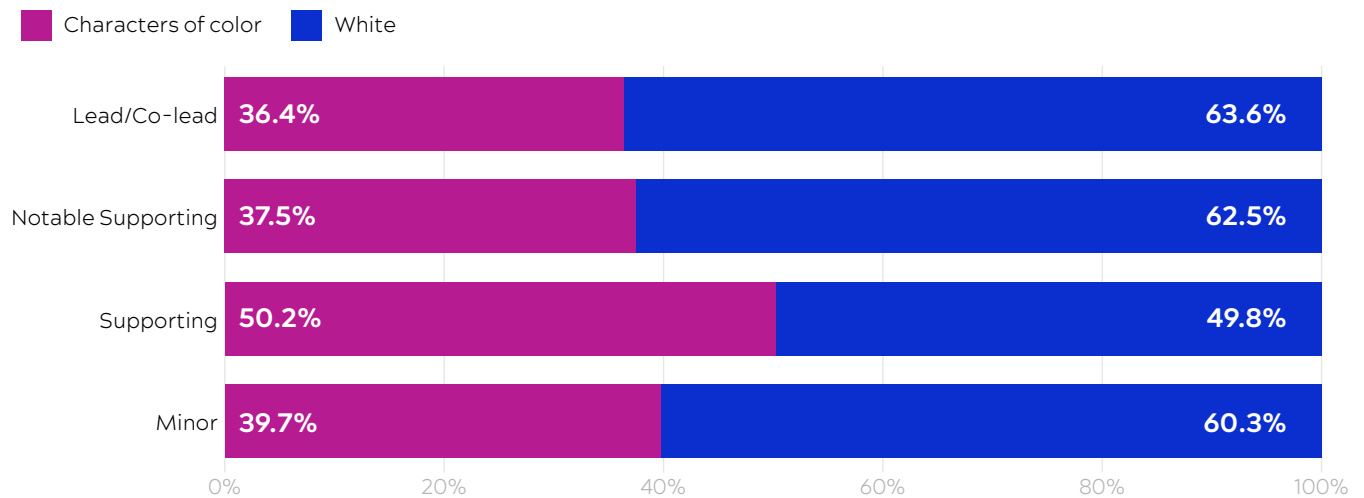
TABLE 11
Race at the intersection of other identities

	Characters of Color	White Characters
Female	44.9%*	34.6%*
LGBTQIA+	1.4%	1.7%
Disabled	1.4%	1.8%
Fat	6.9%	6.0%
50+	13.9%*	23.0%*

Note. Asterisk (*) indicates a statistically significant difference.

When looking at the types of prominence across race, white characters outnumber characters of color in leading roles (63.6% compared with 36.4%), supporting roles (62.5% compared with 37.5%), minor roles (60.3% compared with 39.7), but not notable supporting roles (49.8% white, 50.2% characters of color).

FIGURE 5
Racial Prominence for all characters in family films in 2023



Note. Notable supporting roles are significantly more likely than minor roles and supporting roles to be characters of color. Minor roles and supporting roles are significantly more likely than notable supporting roles to be white characters.

Leads of color are most common in films with larger budgets. They are 40.7% of leads in films with budgets over \$100 million, and 88.9% of leads in films with budgets between \$50–100 million.

TABLE 12

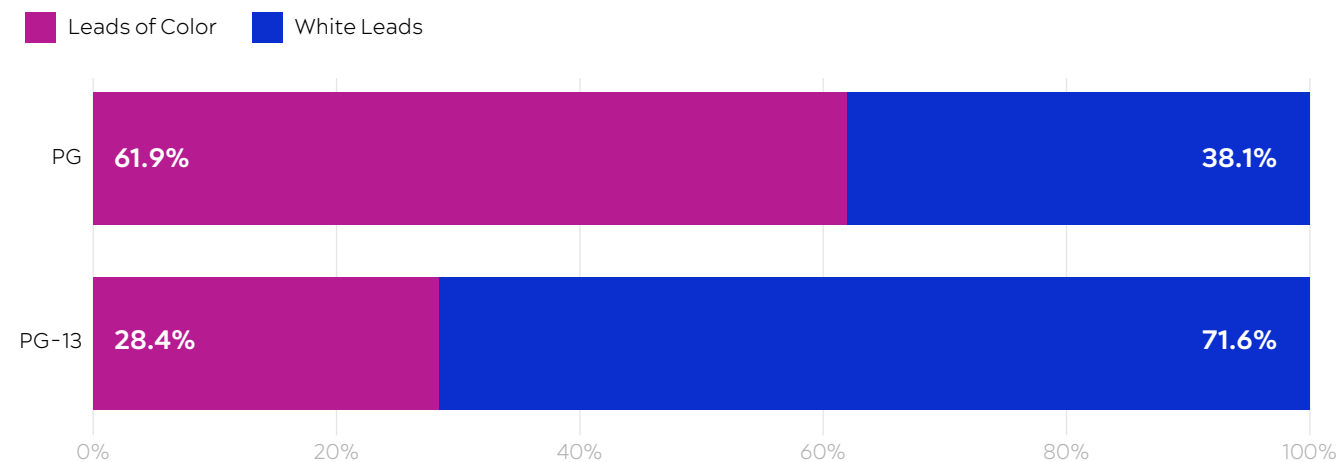
Race of Leads by Budget

	White Leads	Leads of Color
10M to <20M	69.0%	31.0%
20M to <50M	82.6%*	17.4%*
50M to <100M	11.1%*	88.9%*
100M+	59.3%	40.7%

Note. Asterisk (*) indicates a statistically significant difference.

Leads of color are more often starring in PG movies, where they are 61.9% of leads. In movies rated PG-13, leads of color are just 28.4%. These differences are statistically significant.

FIGURE 6

Race of Leads by Rating

Note. Leads of color are significantly more likely than white leads to be in PG rated movies, but white leads are significantly more likely than leads of color to be in PG-13 rated movies.

Leads of color are most common in sci-fi/fantasy films (54.5%) and action films (52.9%). Leads of color are least common in comedies (16.0%) and horror films (16.7%).

TABLE 13

Race of Leads by Genre

	White Leads	Leads of Color
Action	47.1%	52.9%
Animation Feature	66.7%	33.3%
Comedy	84.0%	16.0%
Drama	52.9%	47.1%
Horror	83.3%	16.7%
Sci-fi/Fantasy	45.5%	54.5%
Thriller	66.7%	33.3%

ROMANCE AND SEXUALIZATION

Characters of color and white characters are both equally shown as objectified, in sexually revealing clothing, in relationships, dating, or in married or committed partnerships. Likewise, characters of color and white characters are equally shown kissing.

CAREERS AND LEADERSHIP

In terms of careers, characters of color and white characters are equally shown with an occupation, in a STEM occupation, and as leaders.

PRIMARY MOTIVATIONS

In Table 7, we present how primary motivations of leading characters varied by race; none of these differences are statistically significant. No characters of color are motivated by physical feats or physique (Table 14).

TABLE 14

Primary motivators by race in family films in 2023

	White Characters	Characters of Color
Saving or Protecting Others	51.1%	56.7%
Knowledge/Growth	29.8%	23.3%
Money/Fame	4.3%	10.0%
Love/Sex	12.8%	10.0%
Physique	2.1%	0.0%

Note. Motivators were coded only among leading characters.



LGBTQIA+ Representation

Prominence and Intersections

Just 1.5% of characters are LGBTQIA+. The overwhelming majority of characters are not LGBTQIA+ (Table 15).

TABLE 15

LGBTQIA+ Inclusion in family films (all characters) in 2023

	Share of Characters
LGBTQIA+	1.5%
Not LGBTQIA+	98.5%

LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ characters are equally portrayed as possessing other marginalized identities. Because there are such few cases of LGBTQIA+ characters, it is likely we did not have enough statistical power to identify meaningful differences. It is noteworthy, however, that no LGBTQIA+ characters are identified as disabled, given that LGBTQIA+ people are twice as likely as straight individuals to struggle with a mental health issue.⁸

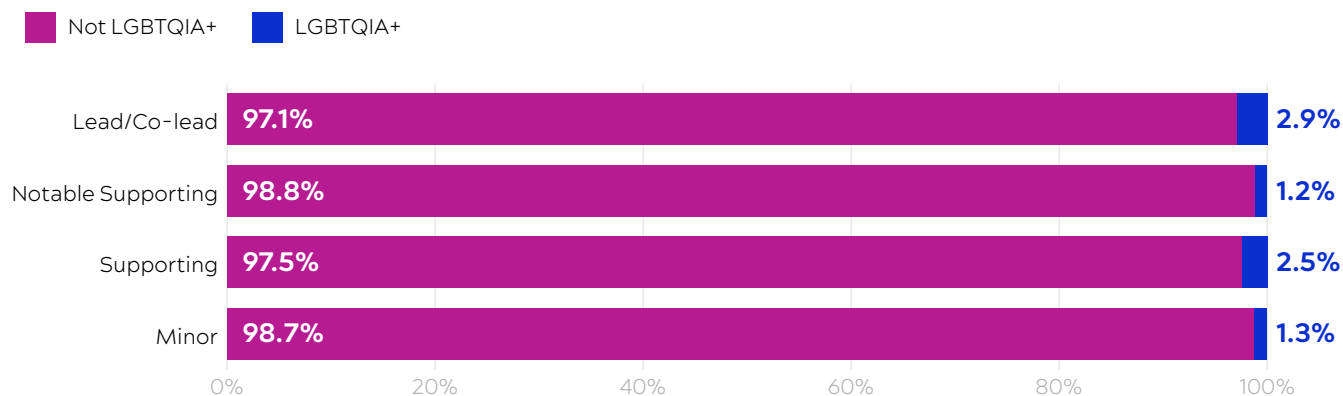
TABLE 16

LGBTQIA+ identity at the intersection of other identities

	LGBTQIA+	Not LGBTQIA+
Female	45.2%	37.7%
POC	36.7%	40.6%
Disabled	0.0%	2.0%
Fat	11.8%	6.4%
50+	17.6%	18.7%

For the types of role prominence, LGBTQIA+ characters are underrepresented as lead/co-leads (97.1% compared with 2.9%), supporting (98.9% compared with 1.2%), notable supporting (97.5% compared with 2.5%), and minor roles (98.7% compared with 1.3%). However, we do not identify any statistically significant differences for any types of roles by LGBTQIA+ status.

FIGURE 7

LGBTQIA+ prominence for all characters in family films in 2023

LGBTQIA+ leads are rare but are most common in budgets between \$20–50 million, followed by budgets in between \$10–20 million. LGBTQIA+ leads do not appear in any budgets between \$50–100 million or above \$100 million.

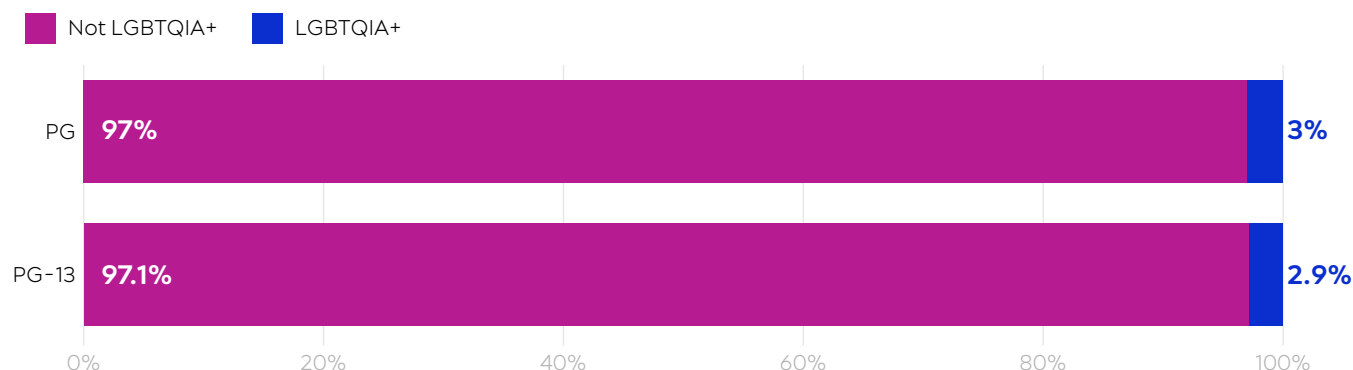
TABLE 17

LGBTQIA+ Leads by Budget

	LGBTQIA+ Leads	Non-LGBTQIA+ Leads
10M to <20M	3.3%	96.7%
20M to <50M	7.4%	92.6%
50M to <100M	0.0%	100.0%
100M+	0.0%	100.0%

LGBTQIA+ leads are almost equally cast in PG and PG-13 films. In movies rated PG, LGBTQIA+ leads are 3.0% and in movies rated PG-13, LGBTQIA+ leads are 2.9%.

FIGURE 8

LGBTQIA+ Leads by Rating

LGBTQIA+ leads appeared only in drama films (11.8%) and animation feature films (4.8%). LGBTQIA+ leads do not appear in any action, comedy, horror, sci-fi/fantasy, or thriller films.

TABLE 18

LGBTQIA+ Leads by Genre

	LGBTQIA+ Leads	Non-LGBTQIA+ Leads
Action	0.0%	100.0%
Animation Feature	4.8%	95.2%
Comedy	0.0%	100.0%
Drama	11.8%	88.2%
Horror	0.0%	100.0%
Sci-fi/Fantasy	0.0%	100.0%
Thriller	0.0%	100.0%

ROMANCE AND SEXUALIZATION

In terms of romance and sexualization, LGBTQIA+ characters are significantly more likely than non-LGBTQIA+ characters to be wearing sexually revealing clothing (16.7% compared with 4.2%), in a relationship or dating (33.3% compared with 4.3%), and kissing (25.0% compared with 6.4%). But LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ characters are portrayed equally in terms of being shown married or in a committed partnership and objectification.

CAREERS AND LEADERSHIP

LGBTQIA+ characters and non-LGBTQIA+ characters are equally shown in portrayals of careers and leadership.

PRIMARY MOTIVATIONS

In Table 10, we present how primary motivations of leading characters vary by LGBTQIA+ identity; none of these differences are statistically significant. However, no LGBTQIA+ characters are motivated by knowledge/growth, money/fame, and love/sex.

TABLE 19

Primary motivators by gender in family films in 2023

	Non-LGBTQIA+ Characters	LGBTQIA+ Characters
Saving or Protecting Others	54.5%	66.7%
Knowledge/Growth	27.3%	0.0%
Money/Fame	6.8%	0.0%
Love/Sex	10.2%	0.0%
Physique	1.1%	33.3%

Note. Motivators were coded only among leading characters.



Maskot/Maskot via Getty Images

Disability Representation

Prominence and Intersections

While disabled people comprise 27.2% of the U.S. population,⁹ we identify only 2.0% of characters as disabled in family films in 2023 (Table 20).

TABLE 20

Disability Inclusion in family films (all characters) in 2023

	Share of Characters
Disabled	2.0%
Not Disabled	98.0%

We do not identify any statistically significant differences between disabled and nondisabled characters at the intersection of gender, race, LGBTQIA+ identity, and body size. However, as shown in Table 10, no disabled characters are LGBTQIA+.

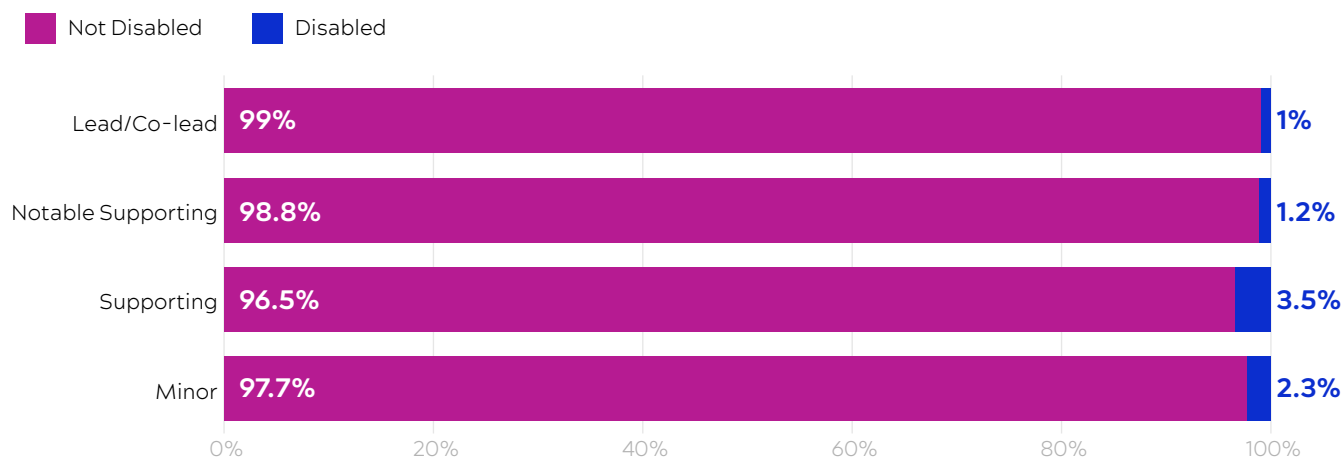
TABLE 21

Disability status at the intersection of other identities

	Disabled	Not Disabled
Female	36.4%	37.8%
POC	34.4%	40.6%
LGBTQIA+	0.0%	1.6%
Fat	4.5%	6.5%
50+	16.7%	18.7%

Nondisabled characters outnumber disabled characters in leading roles (99.0% compared with 1.0%), supporting roles (98.8% compared with 1.2%), notable supporting roles (96.5% compared with 3.5%), and minor roles (97.7% compared with 2.3%). See Figure 5 for a distribution of prominent roles and disability status.

FIGURE 9

Disability prominence for all characters in family films in 2023

Note. Minor roles are significantly more likely than notable supporting roles to be nondisabled, but notable supporting roles are significantly more likely than minor roles to be disabled.

Disabled leads appear only in films with budgets between \$50–100 million, at 6.7%. Disabled leads do not appear in any film budgets between \$10–20 million, \$20–50 million, and above \$100 million.

TABLE 22

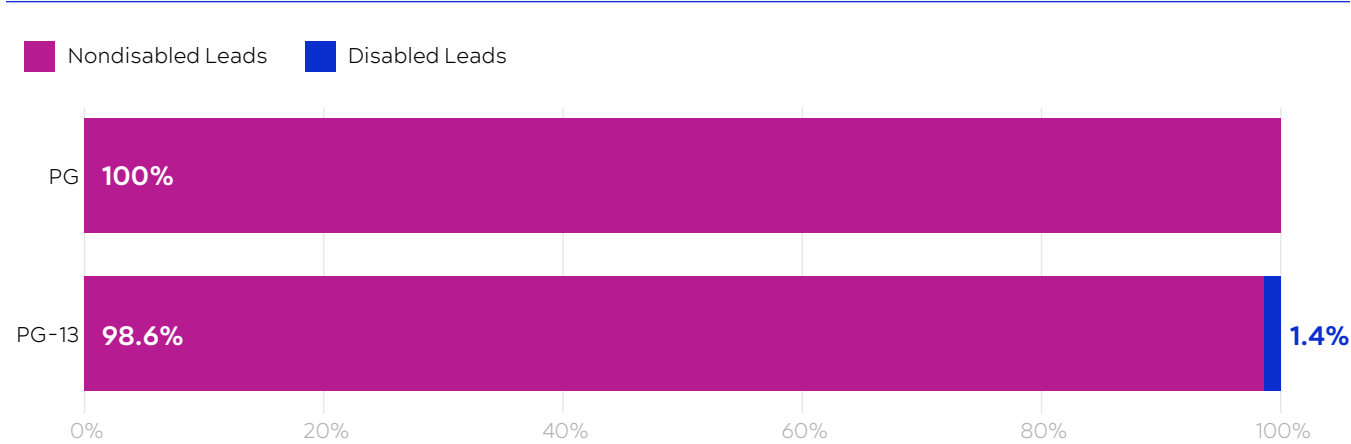
Disability Status of Leads by Budget

	Disabled Leads	Nondisabled Leads
10M to <20M	0.0%	100.0%
20M to <50M	0.0%	100.0%
50M to <100M	6.7%	93.3%
100M+	0.0%	100.0%

Disabled leads do not appear in any PG films in our sample, but they make up 1.4% of leads in PG-13 films.

FIGURE 10

Disability Status of Leads by Rating



Disabled leads appear only in sci-fi/fantasy films, and do not appear in any action, animation feature, comedy, drama, horror, or thriller films.

TABLE 23

Disability Status of Leads by Genre

	Disabled Leads	Nondisabled Leads
Action	0.0%	100.0%
Animation Feature	0.0%	100.0%
Comedy	0.0%	100.0%
Drama	0.0%	100.0%
Horror	0.0%	100.0%
Sci-fi/Fantasy	8.3%	91.7%
Thriller	0.0%	100.0%

ROMANCE AND SEXUALIZATION

As noted in Table 9, there are very few cases of disabled characters. That said, we do not identify any statistically significant differences by disabled characters versus nondisabled characters for romance and sexualization. We do not identify any disabled characters who are objectified, in a relationship, or dating.

CAREERS AND LEADERSHIP

Disabled characters and nondisabled characters are equally shown with occupations, STEM occupations, and as leaders.

PRIMARY MOTIVATIONS

In Table 24, we present how primary motivations of leading characters vary by disability status; none of these differences are statistically significant. However, disabled characters are motivated exclusively to save or protect others.

TABLE 24

Primary motivators by disability status in family films in 2023

	Disabled Characters	Nondisabled Characters
Saving or Protecting Others	100.0%	54.4%
Knowledge/Growth	0.0%	26.7%
Money/Fame	0.0%	6.7%
Love/Sex	0.0%	10.0%
Physique	0.0%	2.2%

Note. Motivators were coded only among leading characters.



FG Trade Latin/E+ via Getty Images

Fat Representation

Prominence and Intersections

Fat characters comprised 6.5% of all characters in family films in 2023 (Table 25).

TABLE 25

Fat inclusion in family films (all characters) in 2023

	Share of Characters
Fat	6.5%
Not Fat	93.5%

Fat characters and characters who are not fat are equally female characters, characters of color, have an implied race, disabled, and are LGBTQIA+. However, fat characters are significantly more likely than characters who are not fat to be 50 years or older (27.7% compared with 18.0%).

TABLE 26

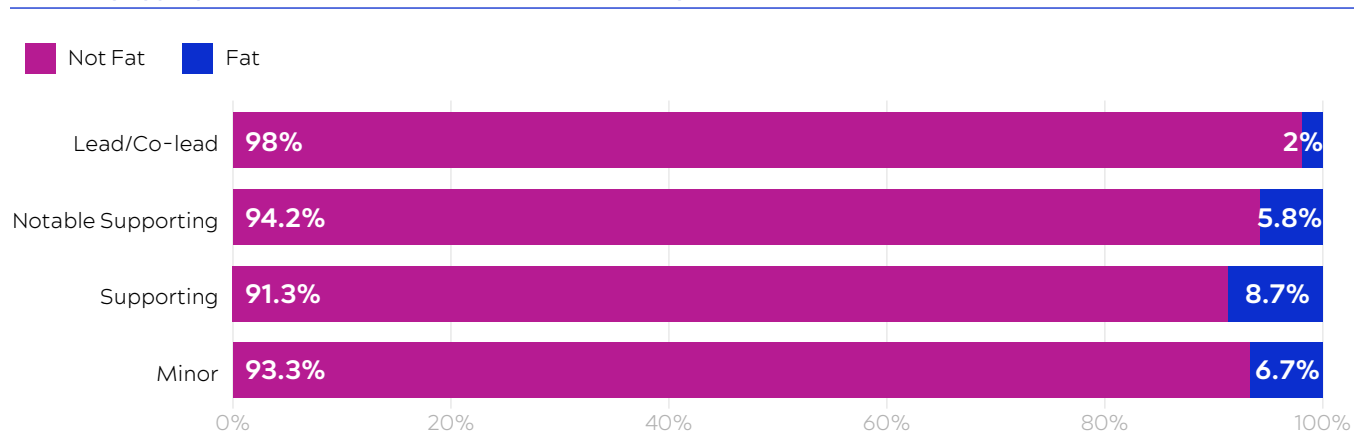
Fat body type at the intersection of other identities

	Fat	Not Fat
Female	31.5%	38.3%
POC	43.9%	40.3%
Disabled	1.4%	2.0%
LGBTQIA+	2.8%	1.5%
50+	27.7%*	18.0%*

Note. Asterisk (*) indicates a statistically significant difference.

Characters who are not fat outnumber fat characters in leading roles (98.0% compared with 2.0%), supporting roles (94.2% compared with 5.8%), notable supporting roles (91.3% compared with 8.7%), and minor roles (93.3% compared with 6.7%). We do not identify any statistically significant differences for fat characters and characters who are not fat in their prominence.

FIGURE 11

Fat body type prominence for all characters in family films in 2023

Fat leads evenly appear in films with budgets between \$10–20 million and over \$100 million at 3.3%. They do not appear in any films with budgets between \$20–50 million, and \$50–100 million.

TABLE 27

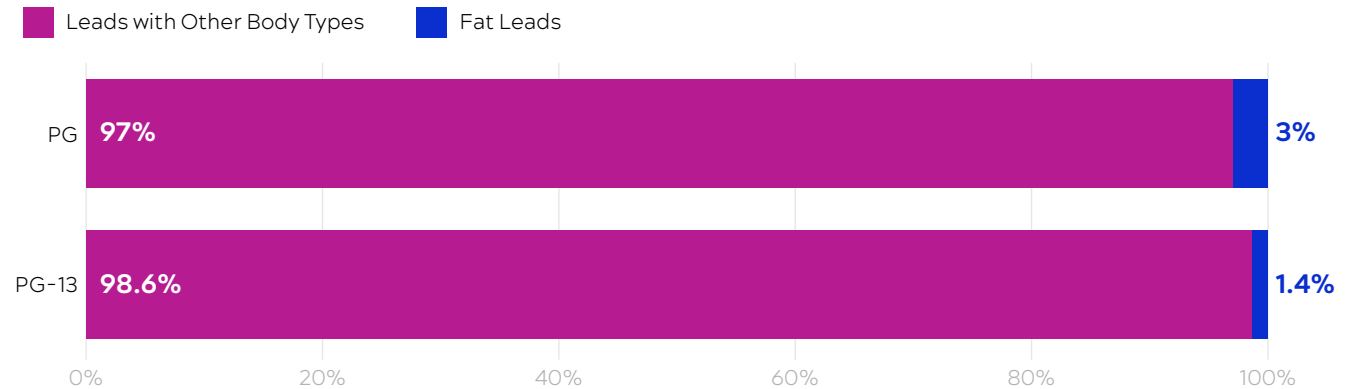
Fat Body Type of Leads by Budget

	Fat Leads	Leads With Other Body Types
10M to <20M	3.3%	96.7%
20M to <50M	0.0%	100.0%
50M to <100M	0.0%	100.0%
100M+	3.3%	96.7%

Fat leads are more common in films rated PG at 3.0%, and appear in only 1.4% of films rated PG-13.

FIGURE 12

Fat Body Type of Leads by Rating



Fat leads appear in only comedy (4.0%) and drama (5.9%) films. They do not appear in any action, animation feature, horror, sci-fi/fantasy, or thriller films.

TABLE 28

Fat Body Type of Leads by Rating

	Fat Leads	Leads With Other Body Types
Action	0.0%	100.0%
Animation Feature	0.0%	100.0%
Comedy	4.0%	96.0%
Drama	5.9%	94.1%
Horror	0.0%	100.0%
Sci-fi/Fantasy	0.0%	100.0%
Thriller	0.0%	100.0%

ROMANCE AND SEXUALIZATION

We do not identify any statistically significant differences by characters who are fat versus characters who are not fat for romance and sexualization.

CAREERS AND LEADERSHIP

For occupations, fat characters are significantly more likely than characters who are not fat to have an occupation (63.4% compared with 50.6%). However, fat characters and characters who are not fat are equally shown as having a STEM occupation and as leaders.

PRIMARY MOTIVATIONS

In Table 29, we present how primary motivations of leading characters vary by body type; none of these differences are statistically significant. However, no fat characters are motivated by saving or protecting others, love/sex, or physique.

TABLE 29

Primary motivators by body type in family films in 2023

	Fat Characters	Characters Who Are Not Fat
Saving or Protecting Others	0.0%	56.2%
Knowledge/Growth	50.0%	25.8%
Money/Fame	50.0%	5.6%
Love/Sex	0.0%	10.1%
Physique	0.0%	2.2%

Note. Motivators were coded only among leading characters.



Kobus Louw/E+ via Getty Images

Age Representation

Prominence and Intersections

The majority of characters identified in the sample are under 50 years old — only 18.7% are 50 years or older.

TABLE 30

Age inclusion in family films (all characters) in 2023

	Share of Characters
50+	18.7%
Under 50	81.3%

Regarding age intersectionality, we identify a few significant patterns. First, characters who are under 50 years old are significantly more likely than characters 50 years or older to be female characters and characters of color. But characters 50 years or older are significantly more likely than characters under 50 to be fat.

TABLE 31

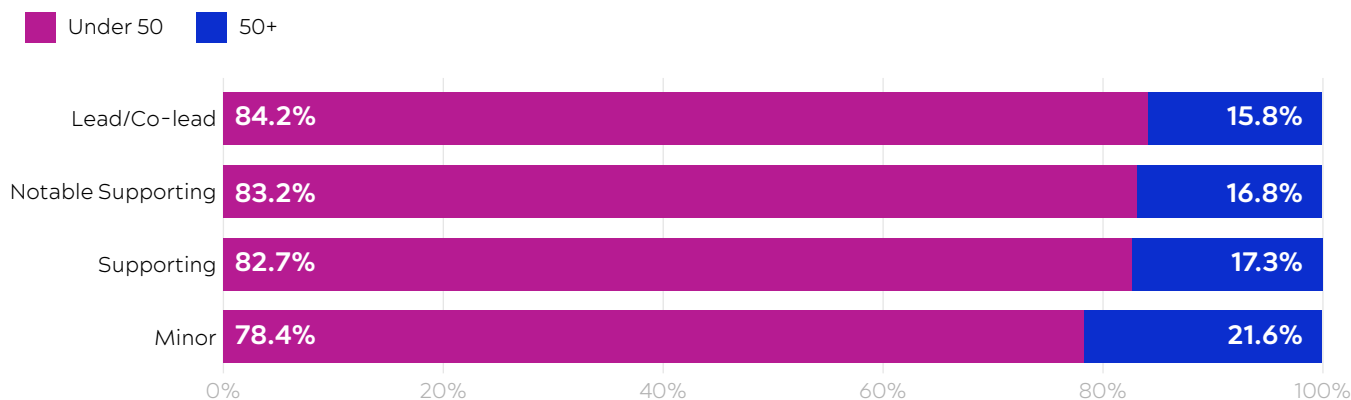
Age at the intersection of other identities

	50+	Under 50
Female	29.5%*	40.3%*
POC	29.1%*	43.2%*
Disabled	1.5%	1.7%
Fat	9.8%*	5.9%*
LGBTQIA+	1.5%	1.7%

Note. Asterisk (*) indicates a statistically significant difference.

For age prominence, characters under 50 outnumber all types of roles — lead/co-lead (84.2% compared with 15.8%), supporting (83.2% compared with 16.8%), notable supporting (82.7% compared with 17.3%), and minor (78.4% compared with 21.6%). We do not identify and statistically significant patterns.

FIGURE 13

Age prominence for all characters in family films in 2023

In total, 50-plus leads are more common in films with smaller budgets. They are 25.9% of leads in films with budgets between \$20–50 million, and 20.0% of leads in films with budgets between \$10–20 million.

TABLE 32

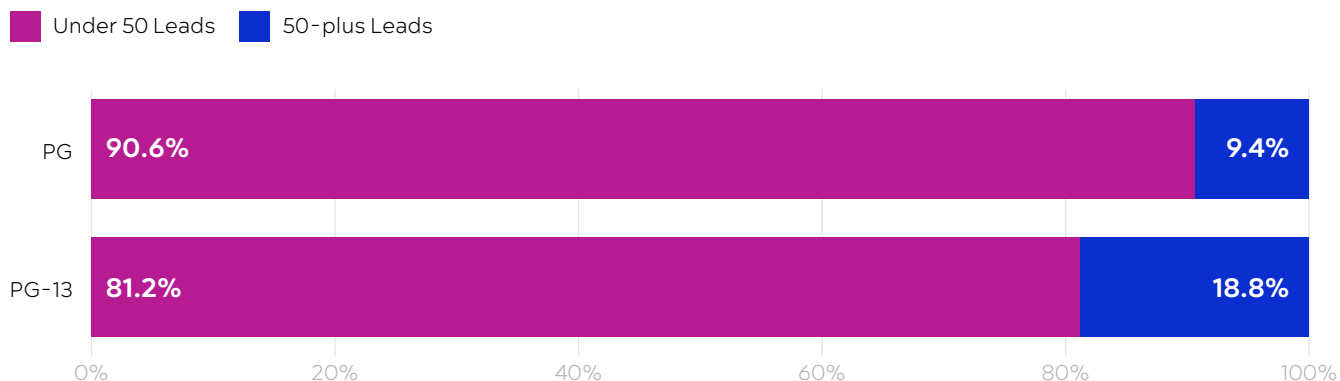
Age of Leads by Budget

	50-Plus Leads	Under 50 Leads
10M to <20M	20.0%	80.0%
20M to <50M	25.9%	74.1%
50M to <100M	7.1%	92.9%
100M+	6.7%	93.3%

Leads who are 50-plus appear in 18.8% of films rated PG-13 and 9.4% of films rated PG.

FIGURE 14

Age of Leads by Rating



Leads who are 50-plus more commonly appear in drama films (29.4%), followed by comedy (28.0%), action (11.1%), and animation feature (10.0%). However, 50-plus leads do not appear in any horror, sci-fi/fantasy, or thriller films.

TABLE 33

Age of Leads by Genre

	50-Plus Leads	Under 50 Leads
Action	11.1%	88.9%
Animation Feature	10.0%	90.0%
Comedy	28.0%	72.0%
Drama	29.4%	70.6%
Horror	0.0%	100.0%
Sci-fi/Fantasy	0.0%	100.0%
Thriller	0.0%	100.0%

ROMANCE AND SEXUALIZATION

When looking at age, characters under 50 and over 50 are portrayed in similar ways that had to do with romance and sexualization.

CAREERS AND LEADERSHIP

Characters who are 50 years and older are significantly more likely than characters under 50 to have an occupation (65.6% compared with 49.8%) and to be leaders (43.6% compared with 27.5%). However, they are equally shown as having a STEM occupation.

PRIMARY MOTIVATIONS

In Table 34, we present how primary motivations of leading characters vary by age; none of these differences are statistically significant. However, no 50-plus characters are motivated by money/fame or love/sex.

TABLE 34

Primary motivators by age in family films in 2023

	50+ Characters	Under 50 Characters
Saving or Protecting Others	50.0%	56.1%
Knowledge/Growth	37.5%	24.4%
Money/Fame	0.0%	7.3%
Love/Sex	0.0%	11.0%
Physique	12.5%	1.2%

Note. Motivators were coded only among leading characters.



Pollyana Ventura/E+ via Getty Images

Recommendations for Improving the On-Screen Representation of Marginalized Identities

Based on the study's findings, we make the following recommendations to enhance representation and authenticity in family films:

- ◆ **Green-light and develop more films rated PG and PG-13 that center on female-driven stories.** Seek to achieve gender parity in films by increasing the share of female characters, especially female leads, in PG and PG-13 films. Doing so will diversify the stories that are told and viewpoints that are seen by broad audiences.
- ◆ **Cast female actors in roles written for men.** Unconscious bias may result in the sheriff, bank manager, construction worker, etc., being written as male. Audition actors of all genders whenever a role written as male doesn't *need* to be male.
- ◆ **Write female characters with interests beyond romance and their physical appearance.** Female characters are often limited to roles defined by objectification, romance, or sexual appeal. Show them instead with interests beyond these stereotypes — such as careers or leadership. This approach teaches children to view ambition and leadership as qualities anyone can embody, regardless of gender. Additionally, according to a recent survey of adolescents, 63.5% express a preference for stories that focus on friendships or platonic relationships.¹⁰

- ◆ **Broaden the range of occupations shown for female and male characters.** Careers in the armed forces, security, law enforcement, and sports are typically masculine-coded; featuring female characters in these roles challenges stereotypes that confine women to traditionally feminine jobs. Likewise, portray more male characters in roles often coded as feminine, such as art or creative fields, to break down limiting expectations for both genders.
- ◆ **Continue to show variation in the types of motivators that leading characters have in film, and keep an equal balance of motivations between male and female characters.** It is a positive finding that male and female characters do not vary in their motivations within their storylines. Stereotypically, female characters' primary motivations would have to do with love, whereas male characters' primary motivations would have to do with saving others. We found a fairly equal distribution within the motivations we analyzed, and we recommend continuing to balance the primary story arcs for male and female characters.
- ◆ **Center more stories on the lives of Latinos, Middle Easterners, and Native people.** Most characters of color in these films are Black or Asian. Other marginalized racial groups are less common — notably Latinx, Middle Eastern and North African, and Native characters. Green-light more stories that star characters of color from these racial or ethnic backgrounds to amplify the diversity of experiences and perspectives represented on screen. By green-lighting these stories, studios can help dismantle stereotypes and provide underrepresented groups with authentic visibility in mainstream entertainment.
- ◆ **Include more disabled characters across lead, notable supporting, and minor roles.** Although disabled people make up 27.2% of the population, only 2.0% of characters in these films are disabled, with representation skewed away from lead and prominent supporting roles. Casting disabled characters across these roles — especially notable supporting and minor ones — can portray their full humanity, showing everyday lives rather than tokenizing disability. This variety underscores that disabled individuals belong in all facets of storytelling.
- ◆ **Diversify LGBTQIA+ stories.** LGBTQIA+ characters are often defined by their romantic or relational storylines. Instead, portray LGBTQIA+ characters in diverse, positive roles, highlighting their careers, ambitions, and leadership skills. By focusing on their contributions and aspirations beyond relationships, media can present fuller, more empowering narratives.

Appendix A: Variables

All variables are tested for reliability among our human expert coders, who undergo a rigorous training process and then run pilot tests on data outside of the sample. All variables included in the report have met standards of interrater reliability.

Gender: Character gender is determined by identification, attire, hairstyle, pronouns, and other context cues. This report assesses differences between men, women, boys, girls, and nonbinary people.

- ◆ **Nonbinary:** Characters are categorized as nonbinary only when confirmed through openly identifying as such, pronouns, or through canonically verifiable character information online.
- ◆ **Trans:** Trans characters are coded as their gender (e.g., a trans woman would be coded as female). All trans and nonbinary characters are also coded as LGBTQIA+.

Race/Ethnicity: Character race can be determined from skin color, maxillofacial features, and context markers within the show (e.g., the race of the character's family or cultural cues). Characters are coded as multiracial only when explicitly confirmed.

- ◆ **Implicit Race:** A character's race is implied when they are styled, written, and/or performed with racialized affectations, or when cultural cues are suggestive of individual races or ethnicities.

LGBTQIA+: LGBTQIA+ characters are identified through context clues such as romantic attachments, styling, props, and dialogue, or through canonically verifiable character information online. Characters in drag are coded as queer. Includes: gay, lesbian, queer/ambiguous, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and asexual.

Characters who are implied to be LGBTQIA+ but are not explicitly stated as such are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Disability: This research is inclusive of physical, cognitive, and communication disabilities. Disabilities that are not visible were coded only when confirmed through dialogue or visual contexts (e.g., a character visiting a support group).

Age: A character's age is estimated by facial features, maturity, and context clues. This report assesses differences between characters ages 50 and older and those under 50.

Fat: We prefer to use the term "fat" as a value-neutral descriptor that is not rooted in harmful medical practices (such as "obese" or "overweight"), nor is it suggestive of being outside of some sort of "norm" or "average" (such as "plus size" or "bigger").

Prominence

We identify the prominence of every character, assigning them to one of four levels: lead/colead, notable supporting, supporting, and minor.

Leads and coleads: The protagonist(s) of the “A” story in the episode is designated as the lead/colead.

Notable supporting: Characters are categorized as “notable supporting” if they make significant contributions to the story and/or are prominently featured but are not the lead. In television, notable supporting actors are usually non-lead members of the cast, recurring characters, and noteworthy guest stars.

Supporting: Supporting characters are those who appear in more than one scene but are not heavily featured.

Minor: Minor characters are those who have speaking roles but appear only briefly.

Characters are not included for analysis if they appear in only one scene and visibly speak one word of dialogue or fewer.

Endnotes

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About the Geena Davis Institute

Since 2004, the Geena Davis Institute has worked to mitigate unconscious bias while creating equality, fostering inclusion and reducing negative stereotyping in entertainment and media. As a global research-based organization, the Institute provides research, direct guidance, and thought leadership aimed at increasing representation of marginalized groups within six identities: gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, disability, age, and body type. Because of its unique history and position, the Institute can help achieve true on-screen equity in a way that few organizations can. Learn more at www.geenadavisinstitute.org.

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