

TOOLKIT: GDI Film Study 2024

DECEMBER 2024



This toolkit points industry leaders in entertainment and media to recommendations on how to improve the representation of gender, race, LGBTQIA+, disability, body size, and age in family films. The full report, “GDI Film Study 2024: Women Take the Lead in \$20-\$50M Film Budgets” analyzes the representation of those identities in 82 films released in 2023, focusing on those rated G, PG, and PG-13 with budgets over \$10 million USD. The findings highlight the need for ongoing commitment to inclusion—particularly as the industry recovers from pandemic-related disruptions and labor strikes—to ensure lasting, meaningful representation in future film productions.

Research Insights

GENDER

- ◆ 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 3) e about something other than a man.
- ◆ Overall, female characters are just 37.8% of all characters on screen in the films analyzed.
- ◆ Just 35.3% of leads are female characters.
- ◆ 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%).

RACE

- ◆ White characters make up 59.5% of all characters, while characters of color make up 40.5%. 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 female leads, 64.5% are white and 35.5% are people of color
- ◆ Among films with a budget over \$100 million, 40.7% of leads are people of color.

LGBTQIA+

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

DISABILITY

- ◆ Only 2.0% of characters in films from 2023 have a cognitive, learning, behavioral, or physical disability, far below the share of people in the U.S. who have a disability.
- ◆ Just 1.0% of leads have a disability.

BODY SIZE

- ◆ Only 6.5% of characters in films from 2023 are fat.
- ◆ Just 2.0% of leads are fat.

50-PLUS

- ◆ 18.7% of characters in films from 2023 are 50-plus.
- ◆ 15.8% of leads are 50-plus.

Recommendations

Increase representation of female, POC, disabled, fat, LGBTQIA+, and 50-plus characters.

Most of our findings show that representations of female, nonwhite, disabled, fat LGBTQIA+, and 50-plus identities in popular films still fall short when compared their demographic shares in the U.S. population. It is important to develop and produce films with a higher proportion of characters from marginalized groups, especially in leading and supporting roles.

Avoid tokenizing or stereotypical depictions of characters.

When creating roles for characters from marginalized groups, ensure they are integral to the plot, have meaningful character development, and have a wide array of roles and motivations (e.g., leadership, authority, and professions). Avoid reverting to age-old stereotypes and tropes that reinforce harmful representations of marginalized groups.

Encourage behind-the-scenes representation.

Behind-the-scenes representation is essential to creating authentic and compelling characters. Encourage the development of a diverse workplace to reflect the stories that are being told on screen by creating mentorship programs and funding opportunities for marginalized groups.

Incentivize projects and films led by diverse creators.

Create financial and professional incentives to prioritize projects from a wide array of media creators on and off screen.

Reduce objectification, dehumanization, and sexualization.

Focus on creating well-rounded characters who play important roles in the story and are valued for positive or nuanced traits. Avoid representing characters with marginalized identities as static characters who are mostly dehumanized and sexualized in their roles in the story.

Educate workers behind the scenes.

Utilize diversity, equity, and inclusion training in the workplace to create deeper understandings of inequality, stereotypes, and tropes on and off screen. Seek experts on these subjects to provide necessary context and materials to such sensitive topics.

Create deep female relationships on screen.

Beyond creating more meaningful roles for individual female characters, develop meaningful relationships between female characters on screen. Start by evaluating your film with the Bechdel Test.

Support research and data-driven decision-making.

Fund efforts like the “GDI Film Report” report to create data-driven assessments of on-screen representation. This work provides a landscape of representation in the industry as well as has the power to hold industry leaders accountable to the annual state of representation.

Celebrate diverse stories.

Using awards, press, and commercial power, promote stories told from diverse perspectives or by media creators from marginalized communities.

Develop partnerships.

Partner with organizations like the Geena Davis Institute that are focused on on-screen equity, to promote balanced and authentic storytelling.

Questions and considerations

POSITIONALITY

How does your social identity—for example, your gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, body size, and ability—shape your perspective? How does that perspective influence the work you produce? Reflect on how your identity and experience might affect your interpretation of stories that inspire you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF BIAS

Acknowledge that you may have biases and preconceived notions that impact your work. These biases can be related to societal norms, stereotypes, or personal experiences. While many of these biases may be unconscious, take frequent moments to reflect on your work and ensure you have done your best to avoid accidental bias. Reflexivity involves being open and honest about these biases. It is also helpful to get feedback from others who might see an unconscious bias you might have missed. Acknowledging these biases in both the writing and casting process is especially important.

POWER DYNAMICS

Consider power dynamics during the writing process. It is important to create an environment where all people in the writers' room—from well-seasoned writers to writers just cutting their teeth—feel comfortable speaking up about issues of representation without the fear of negative repercussions. There should be recognition of power imbalances in the workplace between writers and how such imbalances can impact the story.

NARRATIVE CHOICES

Reflexivity can influence the types of stories that are told and how they are framed. Create a writers' room that is committed to interrogating these fundamental aspects of storytelling.

TRANSPARENCY

Reflexivity promotes transparency. Consider including a reflexive section when crafting stories in the writers' room, discussing positionality, biases, and how those might have influenced the content's narrative and research processes. Make this an integral part of the writing process.

Questions and considerations

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Strive to minimize harm, respect the autonomy and agency of persons you're telling stories about, and consider the potential consequences of your narrative for marginalized communities. Consider looking for outside guidance to ensure that you are not causing harm in your representations of marginalized identities.

MAKING SPACE AND SPEAKING

When writing dialogue for characters, consider which on-screen identities are given the most speaking time and which are given the least. It is important that marginalized communities are shown on screen, and it is also important that they are given the opportunity to speak during their screen time.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Acknowledge that individuals have multiple intersecting identities. Consider how your own intersecting identities influence the types of stories you tell. People are made of multitudes—and characters should be as well. When mapping out characters in the writing process, include identifying what makes the character intersectional.

CONSIDER DISABILITY

Our research showed very low representations of disabled characters despite how large of a disabled population there is in the U.S. It is evident that there must be more inclusion of disabled people on screen, meaning there should be a focus on including disabled characters as well as disabled actors. When casting disabled actors, it is also essential that sets are made to be accessible for disabled.