Authentically Inclusive Representation in Top Movies Remains Important for Audiences

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PREFACE

We collaborated with **13 advocacy partners** working in the entertainment space to rate 2022 titles including: American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Arab Film and Media Institute, Better Life Lab at New America, *Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment (CAPE), *Define American, *Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, *GLAAD, *IllumiNative, Inevitable Foundation, Jed Foundation, MENA Arts Advocacy Coalition (MAAC), Pasifika Entertainment Advancement Komiti (PEAK), and Sanaz Alesafar (Storyline Partners). Additional organizations that rated titles for our 2010-2019 data in previous years included 1in4 Coalition, Muslim Public Affairs Council, National Hispanic Media Coalition, Color of Change.

ABOUT CSS

The Center for Scholars & Storytellers (CSS) at UCLA is the only youth-centered organization that bridges the gap between social science research and media creation to help storytellers better reflect the lived experiences of adolescents. We bring together the academic and creative communities to unlock the power of storytelling to help the next generation thrive and grow. Our primary aim is to support content creators who are working toward changing entrenched cultural narratives around the key issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, mental health, and inequality. CSS is affiliated with UCLA through the faculty appointment of our founder, Dr. Yalda T. Uhls, in the Psychology Department, one of the highest-ranked in the world. We have more than 100 academic collaborators from universities around the world. You can learn more about our work at scholarsandstorytellers.com

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Center for Scholars & Storytellers (CSS) sought to examine Authentically Inclusive Representation (AIR) among top movies as measured by US opening weekend box office earnings. For this project, we collected data on the highest grossing movies released in 2022 and added them to our data from our <u>previous report</u>^a evaluating top movies from 2010-2019 in order **to determine whether our prior findings hold with the addition of more recent data.** The final total sample of movies with AIR scores was made up of 146 titles with 30% of titles from 2022. As in our past study, we asked advocacy organizations to assess these movies for AIR.

AIR calls for a holistic approach to identifying inclusive narratives for storytelling i.e whether the characters and story on-screen reflect genuine aspects of the culture being portrayed (i.e., instead of relying on and reinscribing stereotypes or tropes), as a necessary approach to storytelling in addition to numerical representation. Therefore, this report also **highlights case studies of selected movies to provide holistic insight into titles that scored highly on AIR.** Our findings from this followup highlight the value of continuing this research to understand the full scale of AIR, which we hope to do in the coming year.



Lower AIR?

A large budget film among selected titles rated from 2016-2019 is estimated to lose

\$3222 MILLION

on opening weekend in the US, when rated **below** the norm for AIR.

-AIR 1.0 REPORT

Higher AIR?

For large budget movies among the top movies from 2010-2019, **every point increase** in AIR, box office earnings increased by

\$18.8 MILLION

-AIR 2.0 REPORT

Results show that prior findings hold even with the inclusion of recent 2022 film data such that

- A higher AIR score continues to predict higher box office for large budget movies
- A higher AIR score results in more positive audience and critic ratings for movies

See **pages 5 - 6** for additional details on these main findings.



a. Lazar L, Higginbotham G, Signorelli J, Wang C, Azar, J, & Uhls YT. Driving box office performance through authentically inclusive storytelling. Center for Scholars and Storytellers. 2022. https://tinyurl.com/uclacssair2report
 b. Higginbotham G, Zheng Z, Uhls YT. Beyond checking a box: A lack of authentically inclusive representation has costs at the box office. Center for Scholars and Storytellers. 2020. https://www.scholarsandstorytellers.com/air



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE AIR SCORE

To calculate the AIR score, advocacy organizations were asked to rate the following questions on a scale 1-star to 5-stars, representing a range from Poor-Excellent:

- 1. To what extent did this movie/tv show story or character development avoid problematic or harmful stereotypes/tropes?
 2. To what extent does this movie/TV show representation of characters' culture or group add nuance or complexity to a general audience's understanding of that culture/group?
- **3.** How well did the movie/tv show do, overall, in having authentic and inclusive representation (AIR)?



An overall AIR score was an average of the mean AIR score from each organization that rated a title. Please see **pages 12-13** of the methods section for details on methods and data for this study.







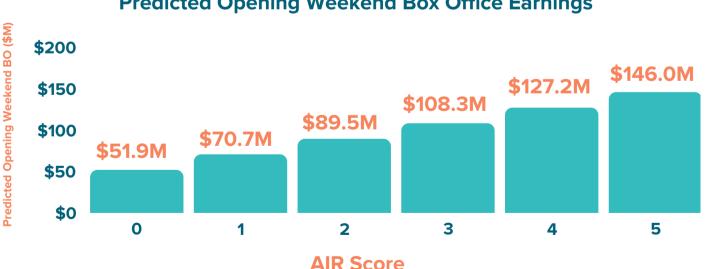
Positive Association between AIR and Opening Weekend Earnings

AIR continues to be profitable for high budget movies.^{a,b}

Every point increase in AIR was significantly associated with an increase in opening weekend box office earnings by an average of \$18.82M for large budget movies among top movies assessed from 2010-2019 and including additional data from 2022.^c

Why is this important?

Research suggests that the US audience is increasingly diverse and leans towards diverse film material. In 2022, people of color were responsible for half or majority of opening weekend domestic box office revenue for 70% of the 10 top films [determined based on global box office].¹ Additionally, our findings highlight the value and potential of inclusive storytelling. Therefore, creating stories that authentically and inclusively reflect the experiences of a growing diverse audience should be the way forward.



Predicted Opening Weekend Box Office Earnings

a. This graph depicts predicted values based on the estimated relationship from the linear regression analysis b. High budget movies are movies with production budgets greater than or equal to \$159M



all movies assessed.

c. New and additional data from 2022 titles made up 40% of data for large budget movies assessed and 30% of data for

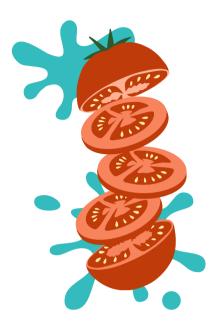


MAIN FINDING #2

Positive Association between AIR and Reviews

2. Audiences and Critics Love AIR.^a

- Every point increase in AIR is significantly associated with a 2.7 point increase in Rotten Tomatoes audience scores on average
- Every point increase in AIR is significantly associated with a 6.4 point increase in Rotten Tomatoes critic review scores on average



! Why is this important?

Prior analysis has found that some critical reviews drive the amount of user engagement, and thereby, box office earnings.² The importance of AIR, therefore, cannot be overstated given that our results point to a positive association between AIR and Rotten Tomatoes review scores.

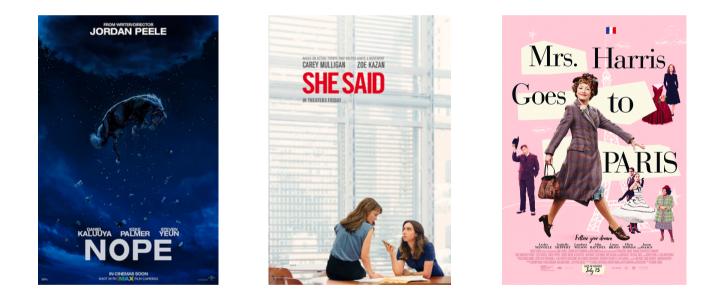




CASE STUDIES

For this year's report, we selected a few standout titles from 2022 that excelled in AIR and had other markers of success. While numerical diversity and inclusion on and off screen are critical. CSS and our partners also believe that the authentic representation of diverse individuals and communities at the story-level is paramount to creating successful films that resonate with today's audience. For each standout, we've highlighted the title's AIR score, box office performance, reviews from the press, and expert opinions from our advocacy partners.

Each of these titles were selected for their different forms of success. 'Nope' is a traditional box office success, 'She Said' received critical acclaim and awards recognition and, Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris, on a smaller budget, performed well with audiences and at the box office.^b



AIR calls for a holistic approach to identifying inclusive narratives for storytelling i.e. whether the characters and story on-screen reflect genuine aspects of the culture being portrayed (i.e., instead of relying on and reinscribing stereotypes or tropes), as a necessary approach to storytelling in addition to numerical representation.



*Sources for movie images in footnotes on pages 8-10.

a. Writers Guild of American West. Screenwriter and playwright Rebecca Lenkiewicz to receive WGAW'S 2023 Paul Selvin award for She Said. Published February 23, 2023. https://www.wga.org/news-events/news/press/screenwriter-and-playwright-rebecca-lenkiewicz-to-receive-wgaw-2023-paul-selvin-award-for-she-said b. Villei M. 'Mrs. Harris Goes To Paris' brings in \$1.9 Million at weekend box office. Collider. Published July 17, 2022. https://collider.com/mrs-harris-goes-to-paris-1 million-weekend-box-office/



CASE STUDY

Nope

$\star \star \star \star \star$

"A man and his sister discover something sinister in the skies above their California horse ranch, while the owner of a nearby theme park tries to profit from the mysterious, otherworldly phenomenon."³

AIR SCORE: 4.92

Budget: ~68M Opening Weekend: ~44M Domestic: ~123M Global: ~171M Distributor: Universal Pictures Streaming: Amazon Prime Video^a

"This film has a diverse cast and breaks stereotypes by putting them in roles that we don't typically see (horse trainers for Hollywood). The film discusses sexist deceased father, who excluded his daughter for the same knowledge and hobbies as her brother. The two black protagonists are strong, aware (and frustrated) with racism, and assumes equal power. The sister is witty and charismatic, while the brother is somber but hardworking."

Better Life Lab

"Jordan Peele's film often portrays people of color strongly, centering specifically on Black characters. In NOPE, two major supporting characters are of Asian descent played by Steven Yeun (Korean American) and Brandon Peresa (half Filipino). These actors get to play characters outside tropes and even as supporting characters are portrayed prominently with nuance and importances. Yeun's Ricky "Jupe" Park is a former child star (likely a nod to Ke Huy Quan) as well as a cowboy which is out of the norm. Like Daniel Kaluuya and Keke Palmer's characters, it is likely a nod to the fact that actors of color don't normally get to play these roles despite the fact that the Wild West was really diverse"

CAPE (Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment)

"It was refreshing to see an Asian American character like Ricky 'Jupe' Park in a multidimensional role -- as a former child star, as an antagonist, and as a ranch owner who dons Americana cowboy regalia. 'Nope' did a great job at having diversity and authentic representation that never felt forced. For example, the character of Angel was portrayed by an actor who identifies as Puerto Rican and Filipino, even though the character wasn't originally written as such. Jordan Peele re-wrote the part after seeing the actor's audition and this is a great example of inclusion in a way that's seamless and natural." **Define American**

"Nope's Review: Hell Yes...

Every genre Peele invokes is a flytrap for social meanings, and you can't watch this cowboys-and-aliens monster movie without entertaining some deep thoughts about race, ecology, labor, and the toxic, enchanting power of modern popular culture."

A.O Scott for the New York Times⁴

"How Jordan Peele's Nope addresses the fight for Black legacy in Hollywood

The land of opportunity? Not quite... It's a rejection of modern Hollywood, re-addressing the balance for voices who wouldn't typically get a say in the Hollywood machine, to star or be authors of the narrative." **Kelechi Ehenulo for Digital Spy**⁵

This movie was rated by Define American, Better Life Lab at New America, CAPE (Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment), and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media



Movie Image Source: Nope. IMDb. Accessed December 7, 2023. <u>https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10954984/</u>. a. Title is currently streaming or was streaming at one point in time on Amazon Prime Video: Holder R. Where to watch Nope. *Screen Rant*. Published March 14, 2023. <u>https://screenrant.com/where-to-watch-nope/</u>



CASE STUDY

She Said





"Two-time Academy Award® nominee Carey Mulligan (Promising Young Woman, An Education) and Zoe Kazan (The Plot Against America limited series, The Big Sick) star as New York Times reporters Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor, who together broke one of the most important stories in a generation--a story that helped propel the #Metoo movement, shattered decades of silence around the subject of sexual assault in Hollywood and altered American culture forever."⁶

AIR SCORE: 5

Budget: ~32M Opening Weekend: ~2M Domestic: ~5M Global: ~13M Distributor: Universal Pictures Streaming: Peacock^a

"'She Said' Review: A Quiet Thriller That Speaks Volumes...

While forged in the mold of other films about investigative reporting, like "Spotlight," "All the President's Men" and "The Post," "She Said" privileges female experience. It follows its journalists home more extensively than those earlier films did, accentuating their identities as women and mothers"

Alexis Soloski for The New York Times⁷

"I loved the way the two-parent families in this show just showed men as equal parents without discussing or making a big deal of it. The women were strong and independent but also the parents of young children; showed post-partum ambivalence as well" **Better Life Lab**

"This film showed a number of different characters that experienced unwanted sexual advances and their varied ways of coping, adding nuance to the understanding of victim's experiences." Jed Foundation

" 'She Said' disrupts the Woodward and Bernstein vision of journalism in favor of a new generation... "All the President's Men" painted a White, male vision of who reports big stories. "She Said" helps update the narrative..."She Said" is a big screen reminder that women can be American heroes, too." Errin Haines for The 19th⁸

This movie was rated by Better Life Lab at New America, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media, and the Jed Foundation

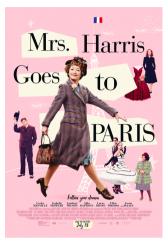


Movie Image Source: She Said. IMDb. Accessed December 7, 2023. <u>https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11198810</u>. a. Title is currently streaming or was streaming at one point in time on Peacock: Echebiri M. 'She Said' to begin streaming on Peacock next year. *Collider*. Published December 30, 2022. <u>https://collider.com/where-is-she-said-</u> movie-streaming/



CASE STUDY

Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris





"In partnership with the House of Dior, MRS. HARRIS GOES TO PARIS tells the story of a widowed cleaning lady in 1950s London who falls madly in love with a couture Dior dress, and decides that she must have one of her own. After she works, starves and gambles to raise the funds to pursue her dream, she embarks on an adventure to Paris which will change not only her own outlook, but the very future of the House of Dior." ⁹ **AIR SCORE: 5**

Budget: ~13M Opening Weekend: ~2M Domestic: ~10M Global: ~30M Distributor: Focus Features Streaming: Amazon Prime Video^a

"I loved the film's portrayal of older women -- including an older Black woman -- with agency, reclaimed dignity, and joy at the end" Better Life Lab

"Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris Is the Summer Vacation We Need...

Manville shrewdly draws a working class hero who is neither supernaturally good nor saintly in her humble penury. She's just a regular lady who wishes to do an irregular thing, and so she does."

Richard Lawson for Vanity Fair ¹⁰

"Lesley Manville charms in light soufflé...

"Manville makes what could have been an easy working class archetype feel like a genuine person, securing our upmost investment as she edges closer to securing her dream dress." **Benjamin Lee for The Guardian**¹¹

This movie was rated by Better Life Lab at New America



CONCLUSION



Overall, our movie findings emphasize the benefits of AIR. For large budget movies, data points to substantial opening weekend box office earnings for movies with higher AIR scores, which suggests that AIR in high budget movies may be another driver of success that positively sets apart titles with high AIR for additional box office success, in comparison to other titles that may have similar robust production and marketing budgets. Additionally, AIR is also positively associated with audience and critic review scores. Finally, our qualitative data also highlights the importance of realistic yet nuanced portrayals of intersectional identities as markers of good AIR.

Given these findings, potential steps to work towards authentically inclusive content include:

Greater investment in creators and directors from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Research suggests that from 2011 -2019 and then in 2022, the share of the top theatrical films with a minority

 director has been between 10-20% while the share of white directors has remained between 80-90%. These disparities exist for women (4-15%) compared to men as well.¹² This shows there is so much room for improvement as minority creators continue to be underrepresented in top content.

Storytellers can partner with advocacy organizations in the entertainment space who have deep expertise and experience with the topic or community of interest. Additionally, storytellers can do much more to include the community it seeks to represent throughout the creative process, i.e. filming in the communities you are creating content about, staffing members of the community in every creative department, and providing immersive cultural education experiences for all creative staff.

Consider using available resources that provide guides and tips for improving diverse storytelling
 including our <u>CSS Tip Sheets</u> or the <u>CAA Full Story Initiative Toolkit</u> as well as the variety of resources that may be available through various advocacy organizations.

Opportunities to enlarge this study and to meaningfully partner with a vast array of advocacy organizations with this research would allow for even more nuanced scores for a vast array of movie and tv titles that would enable continuous tracking and analysis of the benefits of AIR for movie and tv success.





METHODS

Step 1: Survey - Tagging Titles and Assigning Themes

For our 2022 data, between April and May 2023, CSS implemented a survey with a list of the top 100 movies as well as their respective images and synopsis. Using the survey platform Alchemer,^a we asked a panel of respondents across the United States to indicate whether they had seen each movie listed and to identify which representation topics they would associate with the titles following a list of representation topics provided. Our CSS Lab members also rated titles as well using Qualtrics.^b We assigned each title to representation topics based on the responses of survey participants who indicated that they had watched that movie. Titles were assigned to one or more advocacy organizations based on this. The representation topics for this analysis included: Asian and Asian American, Black and African American, Disability, Immigration, Indigenous and Native Peoples, LGBTQ+, Mental and Emotional Health, Middle East and North Africa, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Women's Representation and Equity. Please see the <u>AIR 2.0 report</u>,^c for the methodology, tags and tagging process for our 2010-2019 data.

Step 2: Measurement of AIR

Advocacy groups rated each question on a scale from 1-star to 5-stars, representing a range from Poor-Excellent.

- To what extent did this movie/tv show story or character development avoid problematic or
- 1. harmful stereotypes/tropes?
- **2.** To what extent does this movie/TV show representation of characters' culture or group add nuance or complexity to a general audience's understanding of that culture/group?
- 3. How well did the movie/tv show do, overall, in having authentic and inclusive representation (AIR)?

An AIR score was the average of the scores of the three questions above. If more than one representative from the same advocacy group scored the title, the average score for each question was assessed before the final group AIR score was calculated. The overall AIR score was the average of all of the final group AIR scores that a title received from one or more groups. All scores where organizations indicated that they were unable to evaluate a title were excluded from 2022 data. Please see the <u>AIR 2.0 report</u>^c for additional details on AIR score assessments for 2010-2019 data.





METHODS

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were performed with the Statistical Software, R Studio.^a A continuous measure of AIR was utilized for all analysis in this followup.

Strengths:

- AIR provides an opportunity to move beyond representation only in numbers and towards Authentically Inclusive Representation in storytelling and in the quality of narratives.
- AIR provides a well rounded assessment, particularly if the title receives an assessment from more than one group given that a movie may contain multiple storylines.

Lessons learned:

- Our methods of tagging titles may have been limited in approach such that some relevant titles may not have reached the appropriate advocacy organizations.
- We could have benefited from additional assessments from additional groups on other topics to elevate the holistic nature of each title's AIR score. This was limited by the number of organizations that we were able to connect with.
- Given that analysis spanned several years, data was collected at different time points
- While our initial sample was 1100 movies, we only obtained data for 146 titles as a result of what advocacy groups were able to evaluate.

Data Sources:

2022 Movie data utilized in this report was provided by CAA or collated by the CSS Team from the following sources: *Luminate (formerly Variety Insight)*^c*IMDb Pro*,^d*Rotten Tomatoes*.^e Please see the <u>AIR 2.0 report</u>^b for the additional details on additional data sources as well as methodology for titles from 2010-2019 included in this analysis.

Definitions:

Opening Weekend Box Office: First 3-Day box office earnings **Large Budget Film:** A movie with a production budget greater than or equal to \$159M **Critic and Audience Review Scores:** Rotten Tomatoes Critic Scores and Audience Scores

e. Fandango. Rotten Tomatoes. Accessed 2023. https://www.rottentomatoes.com/





RESOURCES

For more information on diversity and inclusion work at The Center for Scholars & Storytellers, visit <u>www.scholarsandstorytellers.com/representation-</u> <u>diversity-inclusion</u>



For insights on how you can improve Authentic Inclusive Representation for Race in content, download our tip sheet at <u>https://www.scholarsandstorytellers.com/tip-sheets</u>.

For more information about the methods or details about this study, please contact us at <u>info@scholarsandstorytellers.com</u>



If you are a creator or executive looking for specific community and/or issue-specific guidance in your storytelling, please download the Full Story Initiative Toolkit here:

www.fullstoryinitiative.com/initiativeToolkit





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