



CENTER FOR  
SCHOLARS &  
STORYTELLERS

20 Year in  
23 Review



Dr. Yalda T. Uhls, MBA, PhD

## A Message From Our Founder

2023 was a year of growth and transition at the Center for Scholars & Storytellers (CSS). We expanded our team and sharpened our focus on adolescence through three program strategies: **Research, Convenings and Youth Engagement**. I'm excited to share our progress on each of these in the pages that follow. In a challenging year for media—defined by consolidation, contraction and strikes—we learned to be flexible and plan around uncertainty.

2023 was also the year our message truly went global. In October, our **2023 Teens & Screens Report** made headlines in **32 countries on 4 continents!** Adolescents told us they want to see more people like themselves in movies and other media, and they want to see those characters navigating a much broader range of relationships. The buzz the report created carried over into our **3rd annual Teens & Screens Summit** the following day. I am so proud of the extraordinarily diverse group of young activists, influencers and media professionals we brought together to explore the intersections of **adolescent development, mental health and representation**.

## Teens & Screens 2023 Video



## 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

Countries Reached: 32

Storytellers Reached:

1,000+

Press Stories: 1,214

Research & Toolkit

Downloads: 3,200

Media Impressions:

2.1 Billion

## A FULL CIRCLE MOMENT

Teens participating in our Youth Media Representation (YMR) program this year helped shape the questions for the 2023 Teens & Screens Report.

As the findings made their way into every type of media outlet (e.g., Yalda appeared on Larry Mantle's show on L.A. public radio), screenwriters and media executives reached out to learn more.

**In fact, one major studio invited the YMR teens to speak to their entire team, and even paid them to do it!**

This story provides powerful proof of concept. CSS supports adolescents by lifting their voices to storytellers, and, in doing so, we help storytellers realize the enormous value in reflecting the authentic, lived experience of adolescents.

## Teens & Screens 2023 PRESS COVERAGE

*VARIETY*



Entertainment WEEKLY

*THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER*

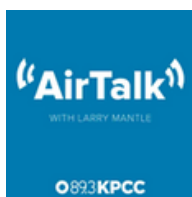
DEADLINE

The Guardian

Los Angeles Times



USA TODAY



JIMMY Kimmel LIVE!

NEW YORK POST

the ONION

# RESEARCH

CSS translates research findings into tip sheets, toolkits, and other user-friendly formats that help storytellers better represent the lived experiences of adolescents.



## Teens & Screens 2023

This annual survey, made possible by **Funders for Adolescent Science Translation (FAST)**, asks American teens what topics they want to see on-screen and which media platforms feel more authentic to them.

## Teens Speak Out Research Snapshot: Social Media Regulation

In an effort to bridge the divide between adults and younger generations on the issue of social media and adolescent mental health, we conducted our first **Teens Speak Out Research Snapshot** to capture the valuable insights of young people on three major policy developments: **Utah's parental consent regulations for social media usage, Montana's TikTok ban, and the Surgeon General's advisory on social media.**

"I don't think that it should be banned for everybody. I think that our parents should take the time to teach us things that get harmless and things not to do, but I don't think social media should be banned as a whole because it has a lot of positive things, although it has negatives too, but if we are taught at a young age the difference between good and bad and what not to do and what to do I think it would be OK."

– Male, 14, Bronx NY

**CHILDREN'S MEDIA  
ASSOCIATION**

Teen Mental Health:  
The Researchers  
& Scientist

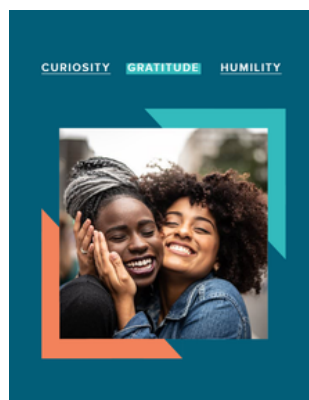
**MENTAL HEALTH  
AMERICA  
CONFERENCE**

NEXT GEN PREVENTION | POLICY INSTITUTE  
JUNE 8, 2023  
WASHINGTON, DC

Tweens, Teens  
and Technology

**SXSW**

Shaping Narratives  
that Help Young  
People Thrive



## Character Strengths In Adolescent Programming - Toolkit for Storytellers

This **John Templeton Foundation**-funded toolkit shows storytellers how to include character strengths like **humility, gratitude, and curiosity** in their stories to help nurture them in young viewers. Character strengths like these are critical for adolescent development as they foster self-awareness, positive relationships, and a deeper understanding of the world, contributing to overall social and emotional growth.

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## First-Time Directors Report

This report examines first-time and experienced directors that helmed the top performing live-action films from 2010-2021, with a particular focus on directors from underrepresented groups. Our findings indicate biases that are preventing women and people of color from finding widespread and long-lasting success as directors in Hollywood. Made possible with funding from **Lionsgate**.

# VARIETY

First-Time Directors Still Have Limited Opportunities in Hollywood, New UCLA Study Reports (EXCLUSIVE)

By Jazz Tangcay



Michael C. Rodriguez for Variety

## AIR 2.5 Report

**Authentically Inclusive Representation (AIR)** continues to be profitable for high budget movies. As with AIR 2.0, every point increase in AIR was significantly associated with an increase in opening weekend box office earnings by an average of \$18.82M. CSS produced the report in collaboration with **Creative Artists Agency (CAA)**, **Nielsen** and **13 advocacy organizations**.



BRIC FOUNDATION

**BRIC 2023 SUMMIT:  
Visualizing a New  
Landscape for Artists**

**HRTS**  
CELEBRATING 75 YEARS

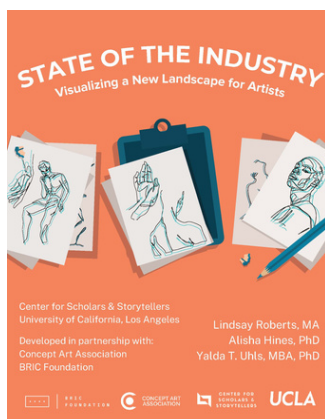
**4th DE&I Innovation  
Conversation**

**SRA** Society for Research  
on Adolescence

**Science & Storytelling:  
How to Make Impact  
with Research**

## State of the Industry: Visualizing a New Landscape for Artists

CSS partnered with the **BRIC Foundation** and the **Concept Art Association (CAA)** to explore the race/ethnicity and gender identity of concept and visual development artists across animated movies, animated, television series, live-action movies, live-action television series, and gaming. The report sheds light on the state of diversity and representation among these artists and provides recommendations for further progress to advance equity and inclusion in these industries.





# CONVENINGS

CSS brings researchers, storytellers and young people together to promote more authentic and inclusive representation and support adolescent mental health.



## 2023 Teens & Screens Summit

This invite-only event gathered media executives, social media personalities, teen researchers and young activists in conversation about how adolescents' on-screen experiences can contribute to narrative and cultural change. Panels focused on creating content from a research-informed perspective, emphasizing authentically inclusive representation (AIR) and meeting teens and young adults where they are: on screens.



## FAST Creative Collaboration Think Tanks

Our **FAST-funded Think Tanks** are a media industry hub, where content creators, adolescents, researchers and community members form small, highly collaborative workgroups and produce industry-ready products that center adolescent mental health—a critical issue that intersects powerfully with questions of diversity, equity and inclusion. This year, a cohort of 4 FAST Fellows (graduate student researchers) took on the following topics selected through the course of two Think Tanks: Peer Relationships Online and IRL (In Real Life); Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Access and Education; Gun Violence and School Shootings; and Help Seeking Behavior.

"I enjoyed the interactive surveys and the real world examples of cultural appropriation and the speakers were all fantastic, with a wealth of knowledge to share in a digestible way."

**-Activision Workshop  
Participant**

## Media Impact Workshops

This year, more than **1,000 storytellers** developing content for youth across a range of media platforms participated in 14 workshops CSS designed and led for organizations like **YouTube, Activision** and **Disney**. Topics included Mental Health in Kids' Media, LGBTQ+ Identities, Gender Identities & Expression, and Cultural Appropriation in Media & Gaming. We are particularly excited that this work led to CSS being asked to join the **Activision Inclusion Council** for 2024.

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

CSS empowers youth to question the narrative conventions that shape US culture and become active participants in the storytelling process.

## Youth Media Representation (YMR)

YMR is a two-phase training program for adolescents built on three pillars: **Research**, **Expression**, and **Public Engagement**. The intensive summer phase focuses on Research. Participants have opportunities to select and collaborate on projects related to media and mental health. They meet as a virtual cohort twice per week and learn how to shape research questions and collect the relevant data. Then, we help them analyze and report their findings.

The school-year phase focuses on Expression and Public Engagement, supporting teens to share their viewpoints and findings through digital media, public speaking and direct contact with content creators who create stories for and about youth. **Supported by a grant from SpringPoint Partners, YMR is the only program we know of that enables teens to read scripts in development and offer feedback directly to their writers and producers.**

## Summer 2023 YMR Research Projects

### [Social Media & Drug Prevention](#)

### [The Impact of Beauty Advertisements in Social Media on Teen Body Image](#)

### [TikTok Has Its Positives; Here's How to Utilize Them](#)

### [Manic Pixie Dream Girls' Impact on Teen Mental Health](#)

### [How Teens Perceive Characters In Films](#)

"I wanted to let you know about a project I started called **Read and Write to Unite**, which focuses on sharing a positive and accurate representation of MENASA [Middle East, North Africa, South Asia] culture through children's literature! **Without [YMR], I don't think I would have realized how much power youth has on making a change in their communities.**

So thank you. :)"



Sarina Marzbani,  
YMR Teen

# APPRECIATION

I look forward to continuing to get all of your incredible data. It is truly guiding the work we are doing on the ground.

**Luis Vasquez, Co-Founder, Rainbow Labs**

"I really have been impressed with CSS' attention to their audience, and to crafting research based tools that are specific to the needs of the storytellers. And I think that's to be applauded."

**Dr. Bradley Bond, Professor in the Department of Communication  
University of San Diego**

"I've loved attending the events. All the events I've attended have felt incredibly well-attended and informative and inspiring."

**Jamila Hunter, President, Macro TV Studios**

**Thank you to the many generous sponsors who supported our 3rd Annual Summit:**

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**Paramount**

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Inclusion

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PICTURES**

**THE GOTHAM GROUP**

**Jim Henson**  
THE JIM HENSON COMPANY

**UCLA** School of  
Theater, Film & Television

**CENTER FOR  
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## CENTER FOR SCHOLARS & STORYTELLERS

### HOW

CSS works with leading social scientists to develop **research insights and tools** that are useful for content creators crafting authentic and inclusive stories for youth (ages 10-25).

### WHO

We work with a **wide range of organizations** from traditional media, tech and gaming, consumer products, public health and education.

### WHY

When content is created from a research-informed perspective, it can **deliver strong financial returns** and support the health and well-being of the next generation.