*Race/Ethnicity in 500 Popular Films: Is the Key to Diversifying Cinematic Content held in the Hand of the Black Director?

Dr. Stacy L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, & Dr. Katherine Pieper

Media Diversity & Social Change Initiative
University of Southern California
twitter: @MDSCInitiative

This analysis examines race/ethnicity on screen and behind the camera across 500 popular films theatrically released in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2012. In terms of on screen depictions, we evaluate every independent speaking character. Over 20,000 speaking characters are coded for apparent race/ ethnicity as well as demographic traits and hypersexuality indicators. We also appraise whether each film has a black director. We highlight 2012 findings in the report and reference over time trends.

Key Findings

Prevalence. Across 100 top-grossing films of 2012, only 10.8% of speaking characters are Black, 4.2% are Hispanic, 5% are Asian, and 3.6% are from other (or mixed race) ethnicities. Just over three-quarters of all speaking characters are White (76.3%). These trends are relatively stable, as little deviation is observed across the 5-year sample.

We also look at the total percentage of Black speaking characters *per film* in 2012. Almost 40% of all 2012 movies portray Black characters as less than 5% of the speaking cast. Only 9% of films show Black characters as 12-14.9% of the cast, which dovetails the 2012 US Census percentage (13.1%). *A full 70% of the 2012 films feature Black characters in a percentage below that of the US Census*.

The percentages of female speaking characters who are Hispanic (33.9%), Black (34.6%), and Asian (34.8%) are greater than the percentages of White females (28.8%) and females from other ethnicities (16.1%). Although we see more women from certain racial/ethnic categories, compared to their male counterparts, females in every group are still under represented.

Portrayal. Hispanic females (41.1%, 39.3%) are more likely to be depicted in sexy attire and partially naked than Black (31.8%, 30.5%) or White females (32.8%, 32.3%). Asian females (15.7%, 15.7%) are far less likely to be sexualized. Domestic roles did not vary for females by race/ethnicity, but differences emerged for males. Hispanic males are more likely to be depicted as fathers and relational partners than males in all other racial/ethnic groups. Black males, on the other hand, are the least likely to be depicted in these roles.

Behind the Camera. Across 565 directors of the top-grossing films from 2007-2012, only 33 (5.8%) are Black. This translates into a ratio of over 16 non Black directors working to every 1 Black director. There are only 2 Black females who directed a film across the 500 movies in the sample. Some of the sample films are helmed by the same individual. Counting directors only once, 22 unique Black directors appear across the 500-film sample.

When a non Black director helms a picture, only 9.9% of the on screen speaking characters are Black. When a Black director is in this leadership role, 52.6% of all speaking characters on screen are Black. This represents a 42.7% increase.

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

*Race/Ethnicity in 500 Popular Films: Is the Key to Diversifying Cinematic Content held in the Hand of the Black Director?

Dr. Stacy L. Smith

Marc Choueiti, & Dr. Katherine Pieper

Media Diversity & Social Change Initiative
Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism
twitter: @MDSCInitiative

This secondary analysis examines race/ethnicity on screen and behind the camera across 500 popular films theatrically released in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2012.[1] In terms of on screen depictions, we evaluate every independent speaking character. A speaking character is any living being on screen that 1) utters one or more words discernibly and independently, or 2) is referred to by name somewhere across the plot.[2] This investigation assesses demographic traits (gender, parental status, romantic relationship) as well as hypersexuality indicators (sexy attire, nudity) for all speaking characters.[3]

Only significant ($p < .05$) and meaningful (5% or greater) differences are reported. Over 20,000 speaking characters are coded for apparent race/ethnicity in this study. We also appraise whether each film has a black director (no/yes). We present four main findings below, highlighting 2012 results and then referencing over time trends on some measures.

#1 Popular Films are Still Washed in White

Of those speaking characters whose race/ethnicity could be ascertained across 100 top-grossing films of 2012, only 10.8% are Black, 4.2% are Hispanic, 5% are Asian, and 3.6% are from other (or mixed race) ethnicities. Just over three-quarters of all speaking characters are White (76.3%). These trends are relatively stable, as little deviation is observed across the 5-year sample (see Table 1). As a point of comparison, a full 44% of movie tickets sold domestically were purchased in 2012 by non Caucasians, according to the MPAA (2013). Twenty-six percent of tickets were sold to Hispanics, 11% to African Americans and 7% to people from other ethnicities. Using these MPAA percentages, Hispanics are the most under represented group on screen, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Apparent Race/Ethnicity of Characters in Top-Grossing Films: 2007-2012

Year	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Other
2007	77.6%	3.3%	13%	3.4%	2.5%
2008	71.2%	4.9%	13.2%	7.1%	3.5%
2009	76.2%	2.8%	14.7%	4.7%	1.5%
2010	77.6%	3.9%	10.3%	5%	3.3%
2012	76.3%	4.2%	10.8%	5%	3.6%

Note: Other is combined to include American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and characters with two or more apparent racial/ethnic origins.

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

The gender prevalence in top-grossing 2012 films is examined across racial/ethnic categories.[4] The percentages of female speaking characters who are Hispanic (33.9%), Black (34.6%), and Asian (34.8%) are greater than the percentages of White females (28.8%) and females from other ethnicities (16.1%). Although we see more women from certain racial/ethnic categories, compared to their male counterparts, females in every group are still under represented (see Table 2).

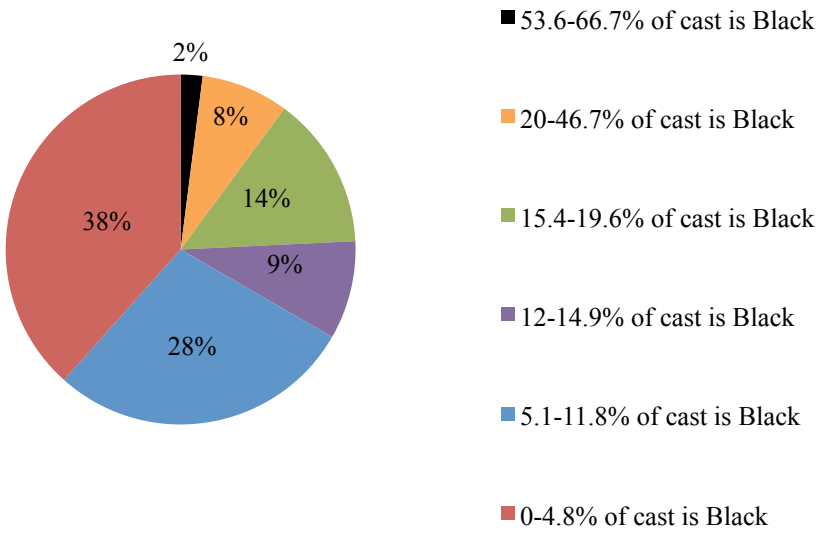
Table 2
Apparent Race/Ethnicity of Males and Females in Top-Grossing Films: 2012

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Other
Males	71.2%	66.1%	65.4%	65.2%	83.9%
Females	28.8%	33.9%	34.6%	34.8%	16.1%
Ratio	2.48 to 1	1.95 to 1	1.89 to 1	1.87 to 1	5.21 to 1

Note: Other is combined to include American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and characters with two or more apparent racial/ethnic origins.

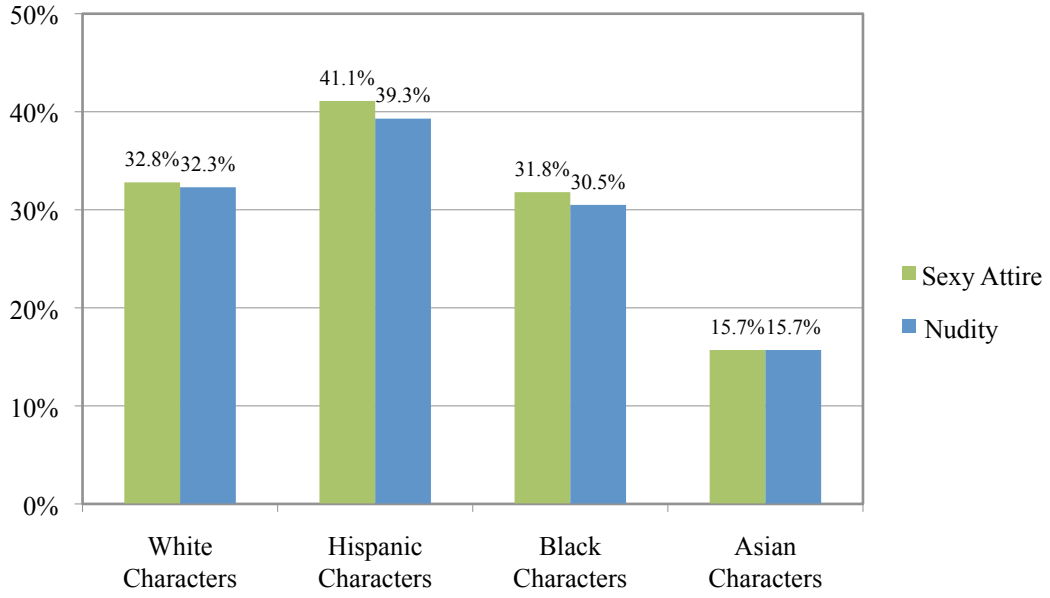
We also look at the percentage of Black speaking characters per film in 2012 (see Figure 1). Almost 40% of all 2012 movies portray Black characters as less than 5% of the speaking cast. Only 9% of films show Black characters as 12-14.9% of the cast, which dovetails the 2012 US Census percentage (13.1%).[5] A full 70% of the 2012 films feature Black characters in a percentage below that of the US Census.

Figure 1
Percentage of Black Characters per Movie in 100 Top-Grossing Films: 2012



*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

Figure 2
Female Hypersexuality Indicators by Race/Ethnicity: 2012



#2 Characters' Race/Ethnicity and Gender is Associated with Hypersexualization and Domestic Roles

Indicators of sexualization and stereotyping across four racial/ethnic groups (White, Hispanic, Black, Asian) are examined separately for females and males in 2012 films. As Figure 2 shows, Hispanic females (41.1%, 39.3%) are more likely to be depicted in sexy attire (tight and/or revealing clothing) and partially naked (exposing skin between mid chest and high upper thigh) than Black females (31.8%, 30.5%) or White females (32.8%, 32.3%).[6] Asian females (15.7%, 15.7%) are far less likely to be sexualized than their non Asian female counterparts. A slightly different picture emerges for males. Black males (10.9%) are more likely to be shown in sexualized clothing than are Hispanic (2.7%) or Asian (3.8%) males. No differences emerge for male nudity by race/ethnicity (White=9.3%, Hispanic=5.4%, Black=10.9%, Asian=7.5%).

Table 3
Male Domesticated Roles in 2012 Films by Race/Ethnicity

Measures	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
Caregivers	45%	26.7%	83.3%	50%
Partners	54.9%	43.3%	92.3%	50%

Turning to domesticated roles, female race/ethnicity is not associated with caregiver status or relational status.[7] For males, however, both of these variables are related to race/ethnicity (see Table 3). Of those characters that possess enough information for research assistants to evaluate parental status, Hispanic males are more likely to be depicted as fathers than males in all other groups.[8] Asian (50%) males are more likely to be portrayed as caregivers than are White males (45%), who, in turn, are more likely than Black males (26.7%). Focusing on those characters

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

with enough cues to assess relational status, Hispanic males (92.3%) are far more likely to be shown in a romantic relationship than are White (54.9%) or Asian (50%) males. Black males (43.3%) are the least likely to be depicted in a committed relationship.

Table 4
Black Directors by Gender in Top-Grossing Films: 2007-2012

Measures	2007	2008	2009	2010	2012	Total
Black Males	7.1% (*n*=8)	4.5% (*n*=5)	6.3% (*n*=7)	4.6% (*n*=5)	4.9% (*n*=6)	5.5% (*n*=31)
Black Females	0	1.8% (*n*=2)	0	0	0	<1% (*n*=2)
Total # of Directors	112	112	111	109	121	565

Note: The number of Black directors may include the same individual directing more than one movie per year (e.g., Tyler Perry). The top 100 films from 2011 are not included in the investigation.[9]

#3 Few Black Directors Work Behind the Camera

We also evaluate whether the director of every film is Black (see Table 4). Across 565 directors of the top-grossing films from 2007-2012, only 33 (5.8%) are Black (range=5-8 per year). This translates into a ratio of over 16 non Black directors working to every 1 Black director. The overall five year total (5.8%) and yearly percentage are both well below the 2012 Census percentage of Blacks/African Americans in the US (13.1%). There are only 2 Black females who directed a film across the 500 movies in the sample.[10] Some individuals helm more than one film evaluated in the study (e.g., Antoine Fuqua, Tyler Perry, Tim Story). If we remove duplicates, only 22 unique Black directors appear across the 500 film sample (see Table 5).

Table 5
Black Directors Working in Top-Grossing Films Between 2007-2012

Philip G. Atwell	Albert Hughes	Peter Ramsey	Damien Dante Wayans
Lee Daniels	Allen Hughes	Tim Story	Sylvain White
Antoine Fuqua	Malcolm D. Lee	David E. Talbert	Preston A. Whitmore II
F. Gary Gray	Tyler Perry	George Tillman Jr.	George C. Wolfe
Sanaa Hamri	Gina Prince-Bythewood	Mark Tonderai	
Anthony Hemingway	Olatunde Osunsanmi	Denzel Washington	

#4 Black Directors <u>May</u> Hold the Key to Diversifying Cinematic Content

Across the 500 film sample, the relationship between director race (Black vs. not Black) and race of character portrayed on screen (Black vs. not Black) is significant (see Figure 3).[11] When a non Black director helms a picture, only 9.9% of the on screen speaking characters are Black. When a Black director is in this leadership role, 52.6% of all speaking characters on screen are Black. This represents a 42.7% increase. It may be the case that Black directors are telling stories populated by characters and themes that resonate with their own cultural experiences.

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

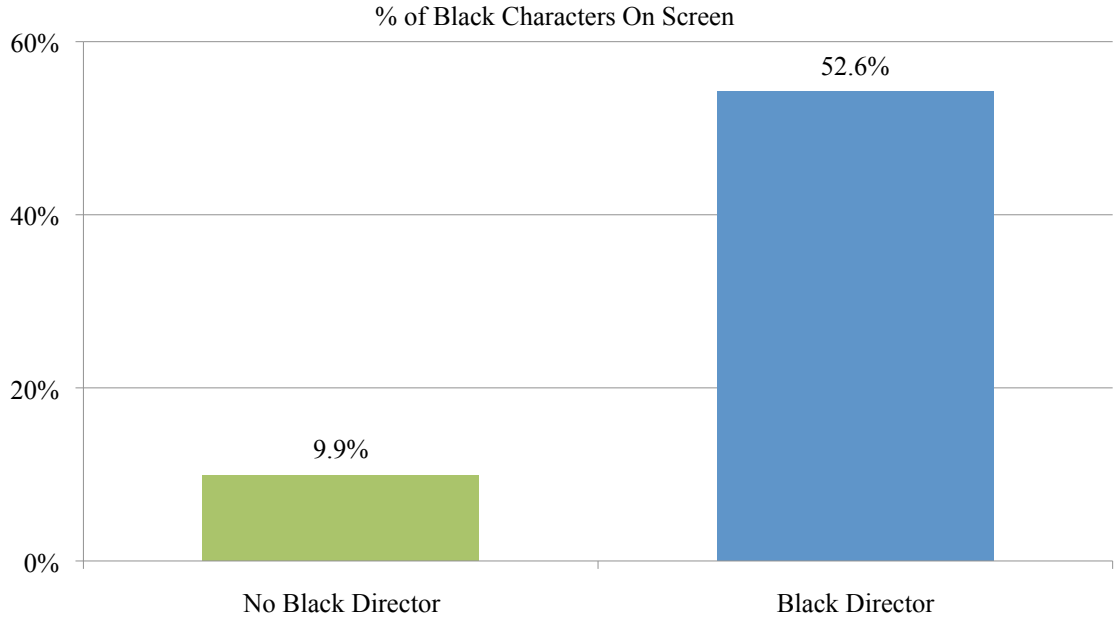
Alternatively, financiers and studios may be more likely to attach a Black director to stories that feature Black characters and storylines.

Conclusion

The results from this analysis show that popular films under represent Black characters and Black directors, in comparison to US Census. Almost 40% of the movies portray Black characters in less than 5% of all speaking roles. Stories involving historic time periods or specific places devoid of diversity can explain *some* of the lack of inclusivity in these movies. However, these types of narratives cannot fully account for the fact that 38% of the 100 top-grossing movies of 2012 feature Black characters at percentages well below the US Census. Clearly, diversifying casts and depicting the US as a multi-racial and multi-ethnic country is not important to many working Hollywood storytellers.

In terms of portrayals, two gendered patterns emerge. First, race/ethnicity is associated with female hypersexualization. Hispanic females are more likely to be shown with exposed skin and in provocative clothing than females in other racial/ethnic categories. Additionally, almost a third of White and Black females are shown in a sexualized light. These patterns suggest that many females in film are still functioning as attractive eye candy, which may contribute to and/or reinforce females' self objectification, body shame, and appearance anxiety.[12] As such, repeated viewing of these types of portrayals may teach younger males and females that women are valued for how their bodies look rather than who they are.

Figure 3
Percentage of Black Characters On Screen by Director Race



Second, domesticated roles vary for male characters by race/ethnicity but not for female characters. In particular, Black males are the least likely to be portrayed as fathers and relational

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

partners in comparison to males in the other racial/ethnic groups. This is a missed opportunity for young Black males to see Black men in caring, domesticated roles in film.

Across the 500 film sample, only 33 Black directors are behind the camera and only two are female. Despite the Civil Rights movement and programs to increase diversity on screen and behind the scenes in Hollywood, the representation of people of color has not changed over the 5 years investigated. Different strategies for change are needed to alter the representational stalemate that is depicted in top-grossing films.

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

Notes

[1.] This investigation is a secondary analysis of a report released on May 13, 2013 focusing on the status of females on screen and behind the camera in top-grossing films. Here, we assess race/ethnicity, which was not covered in the previous report. All of the study's methodology including films sampled, measures used, and reliability reported can be found on Dr. Stacy L. Smith's USC website: http://annenberg.usc.edu/Faculty/Communication%20and%20 Journalism/SmithS.aspx

[2.] The primary unit of analysis for all of our research is the independent speaking character. Groups were only coded when two or more identical or nearly homogeneous characters spoke sequentially on screen, thus making the independence of characters impossible to ascertain. Few characters meet this stringent "group" definition, with only 3 groups coded in 2012.

[3.] All of the study's measures are outlined in our earlier investigation. However, this investigation focuses on race/ethnicity. All available information was used to assess this variable for on screen speaking characters including: physical features, language/accent, knowledge about race/ethnicity included in the plot. There were 8 values for this variable: White, Hispanic, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, Middle Eastern, Other. Coders also used can't tell (e.g., a character speaks but there is a lack of information needed to assign race/ethnicity) and not applicable (e.g., non speaking animals that are named).

[4.] Those individuals whose apparent race/ethnicity was categorized as "can't tell" were not included in this analysis. Differences were associated with characters' a*pparent race/ethnicity* and *biological sex*, X^2 (4,045, 4)=23.59, $p< .05$, V*=.08.

[5.] US Census (2012), see http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/ 00000.html.

[6.] Sexually revealing clothing (SRC) and some nudity are both associated with female characters' race/ethnicity; *SRC*= X^2 (1,152, 3)=10.90, $p< .05$, V*=.10, *nudity*= X^2 (1,152, 3)=10.03, $p< .05$, V*=.09. In terms of *sexually revealing clothing*, a significant association emerged with *male characters' race/ethnicity*, X^2 (2,722, 3)=12.61, $p< .05$, V*=.07. A non significant relationship was observed for *race/ethnicity* by *male characters' nudity*: X^2 (2,722, 3)=3.46, $p>.05$, V*=.04.

[7.] No differences emerged for *females' race/ethnicity* and *parental status* (p=.96) or *relational status* (p=.54).

[8.] Chi-square analyses were significantly associated with *male characters' race/ethnicity* for *parental status* and *relational status*, respectively: X^2 (429, 3)=11.34, $p< .05$, V*=.16; X^2 (440, 3)=9.125, $p< .05$, V*=.14.

[9.] The investigation assessed the top-grossing films from 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012. Thus, the highest grossing domestic movies from 2011 are not included in this analysis. In some cases, double features were included in the top 100 list (2007, 2009). See our prior research report for details on how we handled these films.

[10.] In our earlier report on Black characters and Black directors, a reporting error was detected for 2008 films. Two Black females (Gina Prince-Bythewood, Sanaa Hamri) directed films in 2008, not one.

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

[11.] A significant *character race/ethnicity* by *director race* (Black vs. not Black) was significant, X^2 (20,053, 1)=1,836.94, $p < .05$, phi=.30.

[12.] Aubrey, J. S. (2006). Effects of sexually objectifying media on self-objectification and body surveillance in undergraduates: Results of a 2-year panel study. *Journal of Communication*, *56*(2), 366-386. Harper, B., & Tiggemann, M. (2008). The effect of thin ideal media images on women's self-objectification, mood, and body image. *Sex Roles*, *58*(9-10), 649-657. Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T.A. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *21*, 173-206. Roberts, T.A., & Gettman, J.Y. (2004). Mere exposure: Gender differences in the negative effects of priming a state of self-objectification. *Sex Roles*, *51*(1/2), 17-27.

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

Acknowledgements

We would be remiss not to mention individuals that helped facilitate the completion of this report. Special thanks go to Drs. Larry Gross and Ernest Wilson. We are also indebted to the continued support of the individuals in the following ASCJ posts: Business Office, Communication Director's Office, Dean's Suite, and ASC Technology and Facilities. Of course, the heart and soul of this research process is our amazing team of current and former students. We are tremendously grateful for Ashley Prescott, whose dedication to the team, eagerness to help, and good humor were always priceless. Our veteran "staff" was exceptional, with a particular nod to the sustained and meticulous efforts of Ariana Case, Stephanie Gall, Rosan Hsu, Yu-Ting "Tingers" Liu, Eliza Scofield, and Mojo Tuheen. It goes without saying that we could not have completed this project without the help of the 66 USC undergraduates listed below. You are the best!

Undergraduate Research Team

Marisa Andrade	Kayla Nazdam
Adriana Arango	Charlotte Ness
Lionel Batoba	Luis Nevarez, Jr.
Sarah Block	Janet Ocampo
Douglas Borchert	Jun Ho Park
Jessamy Carter	Katie Phan
Ariana Case	Christopher Pousson
Mitchell ‘Mitch’ Cavender	Tanya Prouty
Shian Ann Chia	Janna Prowell
Natalie Cohen	Lily Puglisi
Samantha Dickens	Michael Ramires
Eleanor Doran	Billy J. Ramos
Kathryn Durkee	Vanessa Rivero
Karim Elachkar	Jane Rhodes
Landy Eng, Jr.	William Robinson
Jordan Gary	Alexander Rose
Natalie Genini	Jonathan Rowe
Jennifer Gamez	Jordan Schroer
Kevin Graf	Elizabeth Scofield
Brianna Guttman	Lauren Shapiro
Jennifer Hang	Hannah Sloan
Sawyer Harris	Alexa Smith
Rachel Ho	Erica Smith
Jo-Shan ‘Rosan’ Hsu	Alexandra Steadman
Grace Huang	Vanessa Tan
Aimee ‘Jordan’ Jefferson	Sareen Tavidian
Katrina Karl	Grace Tran
Grace Kim	Mahjabin ‘Mojo’ Tuheen
Yu-Ting Liu	Viviann Ur
Andrea Lowitz	Samuel Weiser
Nicolas McManus	Cody Wilder
Saira Mirza	Jaclyn Wu
Amy Muramoto	Youli Zheng

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013

Appendix B
List of 2012 Films in the Sample

Marvel's The Avengers	Think Like a Man	Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Dog Days
The Dark Knight Rises	The Campaign	Sinister
The Hunger Games	The Expendables 2	Beauty and the Beast (3D)
Skyfall	Wrath of the Titans	Savages (2012)
The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey	Jack Reacher	The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel
The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2	Dark Shadows	Moonrise Kingdom
The Amazing Spider-Man	Parental Guidance	Here Comes the Boom
Brave	John Carter	Red Dawn (2012)
Ted	Act of Valor	The Three Stooges
Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted	This Is 40	Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace (3D)
Dr. Seuss' The Lorax	Contraband	Resident Evil: Retribution
Wreck-It Ralph	Looper	The Cabin in the Woods
Lincoln	Tyler Perry's Madea's Witness Protection	What to Expect When You're Expecting
MIB 3	Battleship	Finding Nemo (3D)
Django Unchained	Pitch Perfect	End of Watch
Ice Age: Continental Drift	Mirror Mirror	Rock of Ages
Snow White and the Huntsman	Chronicle (2012)	Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter
Les Miserables (2012)	Hope Springs	Lawless
Hotel Transylvania	Underworld Awakening	The Guilt Trip
Taken 2	The Lucky One	That's My Boy
21 Jump Street	The Dictator	Trouble with the Curve
Argo	Total Recall (2012)	The Watch
Silver Linings Playbook	Titanic (3D)	Frankenweenie
Prometheus	American Reunion	Step Up Revolution
Safe House	ParaNorman	Tyler Perry's Good Deeds
The Vow	This Means War	Monsters, Inc. (3D)
Life of Pi	Project X	House at the End of The Street
Magic Mike	The Woman in Black	The Pirates! Band of Misfits
The Bourne Legacy	Paranormal Activity 4	Joyful Noise
Journey 2: The Mysterious Island	The Devil Inside	The Five-Year Engagement
Rise of the Guardians	The Odd Life of Timothy Green	Cloud Atlas
Zero Dark Thirty	Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance	One For the Money
Flight	The Grey	
	Red Tails	
	The Possession	

*Funded by Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism © Dr. Stacy L. Smith 2013