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Introduction

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, there has been increased conversation in the film and TV industries about representation and movement to diversify the talent audiences see on screen. While representation was certainly an issue before March of 2020, the pandemic and heightened awareness of the need for racial and social justice shined a light on the disparities of various underrepresented communities.

Variety Business Intelligence (VBI) is excited to release its first analysis of on-screen representation with its Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) dataset.

This study is unique, not only for the granularity of its highly accurate and respectfully sourced demographic data, but also because it compares how inclusive casting and representation of underrepresented communities on screen changed between the pre-pandemic period and COVID-19 pandemic/George Floyd murder. While there is tremendous work that still needs to be done in regard to justice, inclusion, diversity and equity in entertainment & media (among other arenas), we’re happy to identify some of the progress across projects from the various streamers, networks and studios.

VBI’s JEDI data covers 1.5 million people, and includes ethnicity, country of origin, gender, LGBTQ+ and age. It is the only DEI dataset to identify ethnicities in multiethnic individuals, country of heritage, languages spoken and personal pronouns, among other attributes. The investment made by VBI in the JEDI space is driven by the company’s commitment to supporting a more inclusive and equitable entertainment & media industry through respectful, accurate and unbiased demographic data.

Specific analysis of on-screen representation focuses on the following communities:

- Gender: Female, Male, Nonbinary (Nonbinary is inclusive of gender nonconforming, two-spirit, genderfluid, genderqueer, agender, androgynous, questioning and gender expansive)
- LGBTQ+
- Black
- Asian
- Latin/Hispanic
- Indigenous
- Middle Eastern North African

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Yazge serves as the VP, Head of Research for MRC Data (VBI’s sister music data & research division), where he oversees MRC’s research offerings and leads commercial engagement across endemic music, film, TV and gaming clients as well as brands and agencies. He has 10+ years of research and entertainment marketing experience helping leaders in global entertainment and partnership marketing with their music, film, gaming, fashion, and lifestyle marketing strategies.

Throughout his career he has served as a business resource group lead, diversity & inclusion advocate, and LGBTQ+ research subject matter expert, authoring multiple articles and thought leadership pieces on the power of the LGBTQ+ consumer. He also serves on the board of Queer Capita, an LGBTQ+ music professionals group focused on creating pathways for queer music professionals to grow their careers.
Methodology

- Data was compared for two time periods: pre-pandemic (10/1/18-3/31/20) and “pandemic” (4/1/20-10/1/21)

- The analysis only includes scripted, live action projects. These were broken down into two categories: **episodic** (inclusive of linear TV and digital-only distribution) and **film** (regardless of how released: in-theater or digital)

- The metrics used to quantify diversity include:
  - Number of projects with representation
  - Number of roles
  - For episodic content, both metrics count each season of a given show as a unique project, to account for the investment made in additional content

- This analysis is only focused on series regulars for episodic content and main title cast members for films.

- All classification of talent is based on what each individual has publicly shared or identified as. This includes racial/ethnic heritage, as well as gender and various LGBTQ+ identities. As such, there are some actors who remain uncategorized within the dataset and were excluded from this analysis.

- Nonbinary gender classification is inclusive of: gender nonconforming, two-spirit, genderfluid, genderqueer, agender, androgynous, questioning and gender expansive

- Actors with intersectional identities are included in the counts for each diverse group that they identify as. For example, a multiracial or multiethnic actor who identifies as Black and Latin/Hispanic would be included in the counts for both groups. Further, if that actor identified as LGBTQ+, they would also be included in that count.
Gender Representation

**FILM**
Women’s roles in film projects almost doubled for the time period analyzed, aided by an increase in film production and distribution. Women made up 42.7% of film roles during the pandemic (an increase from 41.6% in the 18 months prior). Films with main title roles for women went from 125 projects to 245 projects across the two time periods. The total number of films released in each 18 month period also increased dramatically from 132 to 252.

**EPISODIC**
Female representation in front of the camera is getting better, with 46.6% of series regular roles held by women (up slightly from 44.5% before the pandemic). Similar to film, there were only 2.1% of episodic projects that didn’t have a female series regular.

While the saying may be “behind every great man is an even greater woman,” women’s visibility in TV and Film is proving that great women stand on their own. Further, progress is being made for actors who don’t identify on the gender binary.

**L WORD: GENERATION Q**
(Showtime)
This show not only showcases a strong female cast, but the importance of intersectionality. Generation Q represents a broad spectrum of the female experience across race and ethnicity as well as the gender and sexuality spectrum.

Of the 9 series regulars: 8 were women, 6 were people of color (including someone of Middle Eastern heritage) and four identify as LGBTQ+.
NONBINARY REPRESENTATION

By far and away, the largest gender representation growth came from nonbinary talent in front of the camera. During the pandemic there were 25 episodic projects and 7 films with a nonbinary series regular or main title cast member.

Returning actors like Theo Germaine in Netflix’s *The Politician* as well as Asia Kate Dillon in Showtime’s *Billions* maintained visibility for the nonbinary community. Janelle Monáe had two new projects released during the pandemic, both on Amazon Prime Video: *Homecoming* Season 2 and the film *The Glorias*.

While the % of shows with nonbinary talent remains low, the growth is significant.

3.8% 2.8%

The number of episodic projects with nonbinary talent was up from 2.7% to 3.8%.

The number of films with nonbinary talent more than doubled — now standing at 2.8% (up from 0.8%).
LGBTQ+ Representation

Queer representation on screen has made large strides since the onset of the pandemic — not just in absolute numbers, but also in the spectrum of queer identities of the talent playing these roles.

For the purposes of this analysis, LGBTQ+ representation is measured by queer actors on screen — not queer characters or storylines. While many of these actors are indeed playing LGBTQ+ characters, the numbers below do not include any heterosexual-cisgender actors playing queer roles.

**FILM**

LGBTQ+ representation remains low, but is growing in absolute terms. There were 15 more main cast roles held by queer actors in film during the pandemic, translating to 2.1% of all roles (flat vs pre-pandemic).

The actual number of films with queer actors increased, though that was slightly behind the overall growth in film releases, meaning the percent of films with LGBTQ+ actors dropped slightly to 10.7% (vs 12.9% pre-pandemic).

10.7% percent of all films during the pandemic had LGBTQ+ main title roles

+15 more main cast roles by queer actors during the pandemic

**EPISODIC**

The largest gains and representation for LGBTQ+ talent remain in episodic — which has more than double the number of projects with queer talent. During the pandemic time period, 21.8% of episodic projects had a queer actor in them, up from 19.3% pre-pandemic. This was driven by the fact that while there were 71 fewer seasons released overall in the pandemic, there were 3 more seasons released that had LGBTQ+ talent.

This large representation in shows does not translate to a similar representation in talent, however. During the pandemic, there were 191 roles played by queer actors across 144 different shows — that means 3.6% of series regulars identify as LGBTQ+, modest progress from 3% pre-pandemic.

21.8% percent of episodic seasons during the pandemic had an LGBTQ+ main title role

1:8 On average, for every 1 or 2 LGBTQ+ regulars on any given show, there are 8 heterosexual-cisgender regulars.
**POSE (FX)**

FX’s *POSE* is the major exception to the rule, with one of the largest casts of LGBTQ+ talent. 8 of the 10 series regulars in the series’ final installment identify as LGBTQ+, 4 of whom are openly trans. In addition, the show embraces its intersectional cast and storylines; all of *POSE*’s queer series regulars are people of color. The show’s Michaela Jaé Rodriguez became the first transgender woman to earn an Emmy nomination for her portrayal of Blanca Evangelista.

“As a company that cares deeply about diversity, equity and inclusion, we applaud the work that Variety Business Intelligence has done to create a more inclusive data platform. This data will be used to help the industry better reflect the stories, contributions and work of underrepresented communities and will capture important metrics that have been overlooked across entertainment for far too long.”

- ANDRÉ VARGAS, HEAD OF DATA, CAA

As the landscape of equity and inclusion broadens across categories, leveraging Variety Insight’s recently enhanced DEI data which includes not only expanded options for ethnicity and countries of heritage, but also gender and LGBTQ+ identities is a valuable resource. WarnerMedia looks forward to continued partnership with VBI to be on the forefront of supporting the push towards equitable opportunities for underrepresented communities.

- SAMATA NARRA, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, EQUITY & INCLUSION, WARNERMEDIA
Within film, Black talent grew their visibility with an incremental 168 main title roles during the pandemic. This kept pace with the overall increase in roles due to increased film releases, meaning Black representation remained relatively steady at 21.9% of all main title film roles (compared to 22.5% pre-pandemic).

The number of films released with Black talent increased as well (+74), with 58.7% of all films released during the pandemic having a Black main title role (up from 56.1% pre-pandemic).

Many media companies made pledges to improve opportunities, resources and visibility for Black employees and content in the wake of George Floyd’s murder. The data shows that many of these pledges are bearing fruit.

Across all racial and ethnic groups, not only does Black talent have the largest visibility and inclusion, Black talent has also seen the most improvement in the number of roles across both film and episodic content during the pandemic.

At a time when the representation of diverse experiences, cultures and voices in entertainment matter more than ever, it is vital to find reliable information on the diversity of talent with accuracy and nuance. Tools like Variety Insight are critical in the push towards more equitable opportunities for underrepresented communities.

KAMALA AVILA-SALMON, HEAD OF INCLUSIVE CONTENT, LIONSGATE

FILM

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58.7%
percent of all films during the pandemic had a Black main title role

EPISODIC

The largest gains for and representation of Black talent remain in episodic content. 465 seasons released during the pandemic had a Black series regular, equating to 70.5% of all seasons (up notably from 65.8% pre-pandemic).

And despite the decrease in the number of both seasons released and subsequently overall fewer roles in episodic content, the number of Black series regular roles grew by 160 roles during the pandemic. This was one of the largest jumps in representation across the entire analysis, bringing the total % of Black roles on TV to 26.2% (up from 21.3% pre-pandemic).

70.5%
percent of all episodic seasons during the pandemic had a Black main title role

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KAMALA AVILA-SALMON, HEAD OF INCLUSIVE CONTENT, LIONSGATE
DEAR WHITE PEOPLE (Lionsgate)

This Lionsgate TV series returned for its third season on Netflix in September this year with 9 series regulars, all of whom come from diverse backgrounds and 8 of whom are Black. Continuing the theme of exploring intersectionality, the series showcases both storylines and talent from various backgrounds (multiracial, LGBTQ+) as they navigate issues of racial justice, bias and the Black experience at the fictional Ivy League school of Winchester University.

HBO: ISSA RAE + MICHAELA COEL

Issa Rae is building her empire at HBO and giving a stage to a large roster of Black talent and stories. On the penultimate season of *Insecure*, 6 of 7 series regulars were Black, and 4 of them were women. And while the scope of our analysis doesn’t include variety format shows, Issa Rae also produced *Black Lady Sketch Show* from creator Robin Thede, which stars 5 Black women across a variety of sketch comedy scenes each season.

On the same network, Michaela Coel’s *I May Destroy You* drew critical acclaim and landed Coel an Emmy for Outstanding Writing. The show boasts 8 Black series regulars.
Asian Representation

Since Crazy Rich Asians, Asian talent has seen remarkable growth in representation across both film and episodic content, including stories and talent that span the diverse spectrum of Asian backgrounds.

**FILM**

It wasn’t just mega-films like Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings that drove Asian visibility in film during the pandemic. The number of films with Asian main title cast more than doubled during the pandemic, standing at a total of 82. That represents 32.5% of all movies released during the pandemic — or 9.4% of all main title film roles.

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**EPISODIC**

Asian representation saw similar progress in episodic content, with 35.9% of seasons released during the pandemic having at least one Asian series regular (up from 33.4% pre-pandemic). And while the overall number of series regulars decreased during the pandemic due to fewer seasons premiering over that time, the % of series regular roles filled by Asian actors was able to hold relatively constant at 6.6% (vs. 6.9% pre-pandemic).

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**NEVER HAVE I EVER** (Netflix)

Netflix’s Never Have I Ever comes from creator Mindy Kaling and centers around the high school experience of a South Asian girl named Devi. In addition to exploring how Devi navigates being the child of two Indian immigrants to the U.S. and copes with the loss of her father at a young age, Never Have I Ever also showcases the diversity of the Asian experience. The show released both of its seasons during the pandemic and has been picked up for a third.

Season Two had 7 series regulars, 5 of whom were of Asian descent.
Latin/Hispanic Representation

During the pandemic, Latin/Hispanic talent saw the largest gains in representation in film, thanks to titles like *Blue Miracle*, *I’m No Longer Here* and *The Suicide Squad*. But despite many strong titles and compelling storylines, Latin/Hispanic representation saw the least amount of progress in episodic content during the pandemic when we compare to other diverse communities.

**FILM**

Led by *In the Heights*, Latin/Hispanic representation in film grew considerably during the pandemic. Compared to pre-pandemic, 44 more films were released with Latin/Hispanic main title cast — bringing the total to 82 films in all during the pandemic or 31.3% of total films during that window.

While the number of film roles is far from parity for Latin/Hispanic actors, the industry made significant progress at closing that gap during the pandemic. 8.7% of all main title film roles were filled by Latin/Hispanic talent, up from 5.6% pre-pandemic.

**EPISODIC**

Unlike other diverse communities, Latin/Hispanic representation did not see the same growth in representation in episodic content. The total number of series regular roles played by Latin/Hispanic actors decreased by 85 during the pandemic, but declined slowly enough to maintain the 7.2% share of overall roles.

Similarly, the percent of seasons that premiered with Latin/Hispanic series regulars during the pandemic also fell (33% vs 37.1% pre-pandemic).
IN THE HEIGHTS
(Warner)

Lin-Manuel Miranda’s film adaptation of the Broadway musical In the Heights was one of the several films Warner Bros. released simultaneously on HBO Max day-and-date with the theatrical release. It was also one of the most Latin/Hispanic casts during the pandemic.

9 out of 10 main title cast were Latin/Hispanic in In the Heights.

LOVE, VICTOR
(Hulu)

On the episodic side, Hulu’s Love, Victor had two seasons during the pandemic — both of which featured the five members of the fictional Salazar family as seriesregulars. The show follows central character Victor, who comes of age as a gay high school student with a Latin/Hispanic household. Hulu has confirmed that Love, Victor will return for a third season.
Indigenous Representation

**FILM**
The number of films released with Indigenous main title cast nearly doubled during the pandemic, bringing the total number to 26 films or 10.3% of the total released during that time frame. Meanwhile, the number of main title roles played by people with Indigenous backgrounds more than doubled, bringing the total to 39, or 2.2% of total main title film roles during the pandemic.

**EPISODIC**
Indigenous talent made progress on the episodic side as well, albeit more modest — likely due to higher overall representation in the medium to begin with. While the overall number of seasons that premiered decreased during the pandemic, the number of seasons with Indigenous series regulars remained stable, with the total number sitting at 69 or 8% of total seasons. Similarly, the number of series regulars increased by 1 role, bringing the total to 96 roles or 1.8% of the total series regular roles during the pandemic.

**RESERVATION DOGS (FX)**
Released in August of this year, *Reservation Dogs* is the latest show from Taika Waititi and creative partner Sterlin Harjo. The show has an entirely Indigenous cast of series regulars, with 4 in total: Paulina Alexis, Lane Factor, Devery Jacobs and D’Pharoah Woon-a-Tai. Of the main cast, all 4 are Indigenous.
Middle Eastern/North African Representation

FILM
Representation for Middle Eastern and North African talent in film saw modest growth, bringing the total to 13 movies or 5.2% of films released during that time frame. While the percentage of roles is not as high (1.3% — up from 1.2%), the number of main title roles doubled as film releases increased — resulting in 23 roles in films released during the pandemic.

**5.2%** percent of all films during the pandemic had a Middle Eastern/North African main title role

RAMY (Hulu)
From creator and star Ramy Youssef, *Ramy* follows a first-generation American Muslim living in New Jersey. Youssef was nominated for two Emmys, and received a Golden Globe for his portrayal in season one; the show also won a Peabody in 2020. Unlike historical depictions of Middle Eastern characters, *Ramy* depicts an Egyptian family struggling with everyday issues like relationships and careers, as opposed to centering the narratives of Middle Eastern characters on U.S. military intervention or terrorism.

**8%** percent of all episodic seasons during the pandemic had a Middle Eastern/North African main title role

**Of the show’s 9 series regulars, 6 are of Middle Eastern descent**

**EPISODIC**
Like most other ethnic groups, Middle Eastern/North African talent has better representation in episodic projects. 8% of all seasons that premiered during the pandemic had at least one series regular of Middle Eastern/North African descent (down slightly from 9.3%) — for a total of 53 seasons. The number of series regular roles dropped slightly to 1.4%, down from 1.6% pre-pandemic.
Variety Business Intelligence (VBI) is the leading data licensing and business solutions provider serving the entertainment industry’s top streamers, networks and studios. VBI oversees a suite of research, production & development tools including Variety Insight, Vscore and Variety Archives. VBI also provides API access that allows seamless integration of its data into customer applications and internal systems. Beyond providing best-in-class metadata to the entertainment industry, VBI is the most trusted source for justice, equity, diversity and inclusion demographic data for 1.5 million people, as well as environmental sustainability engagement by top talent.