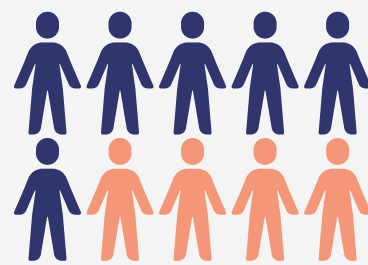


IT'S ALL ABOUT THE Main Character

Women are increasingly getting roles in movies as independent main characters, but who is being represented?

INTRODUCTION

Netflix is without a doubt one of the go-to streaming platforms of teens and young adults currently, and has been for several years. With the ever-present demand for young-adult media, whether it be movies that are book adaptations, or a new series to binge-watch with friends, there is no shortage of young adult movies and T.V. shows on Netflix. But what there is a shortage of are representations of women of color as main characters. Women overall are underrepresented in the media compared to men, but more often than not, when there is a leading female character present, they are white. Considering what a confusing and difficult time young adulthood can be, it is just as important to see representation of not just women, but women with ranging ethnicities, sexualities, and disabilities on the screen as it is for children and adults.

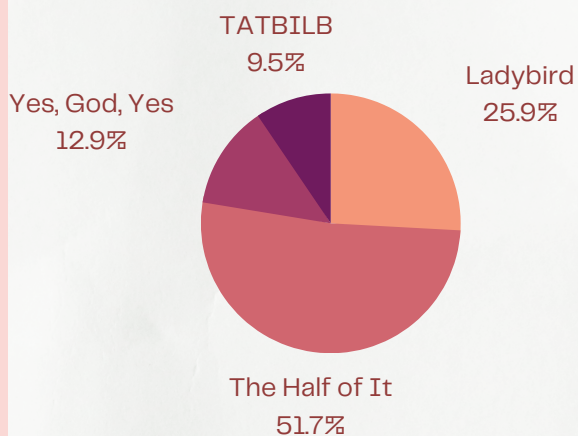


Methods

In order to see what kind of representation Netflix has for young adults specifically, I used Esquire's list of "The Best Teen Movies On Netflix" and took notes on the type of representation there was among the main characters of five movies randomly selected from the list. The movies selected were "Ladybird", "The Half of It", "Yes, God, Yes", "To All The Boys I've Loved Before" (TATBILB), and "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" (TPoBaW). In order to represent my findings in a quantitative way, I created a point system that applied to each movie. For each film that showcased one of the top three main characters listed by IMDb.com as a woman of color earned five points, and the lesser main characters who were women of color earned three points. An additional two points were given to each female character who represented the LGBTQ+ community or the disabled community. I took note of male main characters who represented males of color, belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, or the disabled community and those characters were taken into consideration but ultimately were left out of the data since this analysis is focused specifically on women's representation.

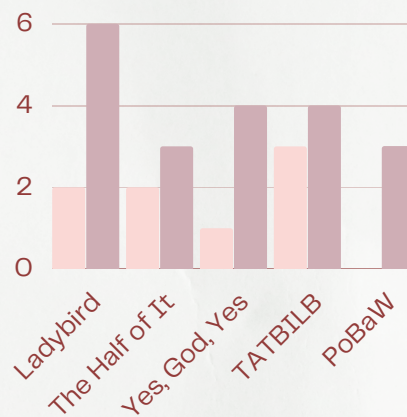
0.1%

Out of 20 characters total across the 5 films, only 3 characters earned 5+ points, which is less than 1% of the characters analyzed.



Percentage of representation in each movie based on points earned out of 20 characters total

Only 1 film had main characters where more than 50% were women of color and represented other minority communities



Number of women of color represented in each film compared to total number of main characters

Only "To All The Boys I've Loved Before" had three non-white main female characters, the most out of all five films

Results

At the end of this analysis, I found that most films earned at least three points— in exception to "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" which earned zero in terms of having no main non-white female characters. Of the five films, only one film featured non-white female main characters that represented over 50% of the main characters in that film. And, out of 20 main characters recognized in my notes, only three earned five points for being main characters that were women of color (3/20 characters, or .15% of the top main characters of each of the five movies). Overall, the scores of each movie based on my point system are as follows from least to greatest: "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" (0 points), "Yes, God, Yes" (3 points), "Ladybird" (6 points), "To All The Boys I've Loved Before" (11 points), and "The Half of It" (12 points).

DISCUSSION

Looking at the results, it's clear that there is still a lack of representation for women of color in young-adult movies. Progress is being made in terms of seeing non-white characters, but the amount that are female is still well outnumbered by white characters and males. Of course, this analysis was limited in that only five young-adult movies that are on Netflix were analyzed, but the numbers that resulted are shocking. This analysis serves as just a sample of the young-adult movies available, so I'd be concerned to see how it translates on a larger scale. Reflecting on the scores of each movie according to my point system, "The Half of It" earned the most points for having two of the three lead main characters be non-white women, Ellie, who is Asian American, and Aster who is Hispanic/Latina. Ellie also represented the LGBTQ+ community, while it is left uncertain what Aster's sexual identity was. Lesbians, by comparison to gay men, are less represented, and when they are they are usually white characters, so Ellie's character proved to disrupt this pattern in the film. "To All The Boys I've Loved Before" scored next highest according to my point system by representing three Asian-American sisters, Laura-Jean, Margot, and Kitty, as some of the main characters. Although the nationality and ethnicity of Ellie and Aster in "The Half of It" played an important role in the identity of its main characters, ethnicity played a smaller role in "TATBILB". The representation of the characters in the two films took different directions; ethnicity in "The Half of It" was a defining part of the characters' development as they grew through the challenges of living in a mainly white community throughout the film, it seemed that the role ethnicity played in "TATBILB" was just about representing that the main characters don't have to be white. Both films starred Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders, and for the most part, they were represented in less-stereotypical ways. Although both the lead female characters of the two films were presented as somewhat "nerdy" and smart by having them be interested in writing and reading, they were also represented as being independent, brave, able to stick up for themselves, and were able to be sexual without being sexualized by the film. Aster was also presented in a non-stereotypical way in that despite her being the love interest of two different characters in the film, she is not sexualized by them or presented in a promiscuous way. The other two movies that earned points were "Ladybird" and "Yes, God, Yes" which each had characters that made the list for main characters but were not recognized as leading characters by IMDb, to which they could only earn three points based on my point system. "Ladybird" featured two friends of the main character that were Jewish (Julie) and Israeli (Jenna). Both friends had more minor parts in which they served to support their friend, the lead female. Jenna is sexualized more than Julie is and is the "popular" girl whereas Julie is a "theater kid". Lastly, "Yes, God, Yes" had one character that earned three points, Nina, whose exact ethnicity is not revealed in the film. Her character portrays a "good girl" Christian camp counselor who is caught by the main character, Alice (a white female) to be less innocent and pure as she leads people to believe when Alice catches her being intimate with Nina's boyfriend. This sexual behavior ends up becoming a defining part of her role in the eyes of Alice for the rest of the movie and somewhat fulfills the stereotype that women of color are sexualized and promiscuous.