



A BALANCING ACT FOR ASIAN REPRESENTATION IN STREAMING

VISIBILITY DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN CULTURAL SPECIFICITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4

INTRODUCTION 7

**HOW ARE ASIAN CHARACTERS
REPRESENTED IN TOP
STREAMING CONTENT?** 13

CONCLUSION 19

APPENDICES 22

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About the Norman Lear Center: The Norman Lear Center is a nonpartisan research and public policy center that studies the social, political, economic, and cultural impact of entertainment. The Lear Center helps bridge the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. Through its scholarship, research and partnerships; its events, publications and outreach to the creative community; and its role in formulating the field of entertainment studies, the Norman Lear Center works to be at the forefront of discussion and practice — and to illuminate and repair the world.



About Gold House: Gold House is the leading cultural ecosystem that unites, invests in, and champions Asian Pacific creators and companies to power tomorrow for all. Our innovative programs and platforms include membership systems and events to fortify relationships among the Asian Pacific community and with other marginalized communities ([#StopAsianHate](#)); first-of-its kind ventures to propel the next generation of top Asian Pacific founders, creatives, and social impact leaders ([Gold House Futures](#), [Gold House Ventures](#)); and industry-leading research, consulting, and marketing to promote authentic and affirming storytelling ([Gold Storybook](#), [Gold Open](#), [Gold List](#), [A100 List](#)).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Census data indicate that 24 million people in the United States identify as Asian, accounting for 7.2% of the population. The Asian American community encompasses people with ancestry from 26 different countries and dozens of distinct ethnic groups, each with its own unique culture and history in the United States. Despite such diversity, Asian Americans are frequently treated as a single monolithic group.

Anti-Asian sentiment and violence have been on the rise in recent years, heightened by the proliferation of misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Decades of research show that scripted entertainment, such as TV or film, plays an important role in shaping attitudes toward historically-marginalized communities, and can even contribute to reducing prejudice. Thus, nuanced and accurate representations of Asian Americans in entertainment are especially needed.

Historically, Asian Americans have been underrepresented across broadcast television, cable, and film. When they do appear, it has often been in stereotypical ways, such as the **model minority** or the **skilled martial arts fighter**. More recently, the percentage of speaking characters in top box-office films who are Asian has risen almost five-fold, from 3.4% in 2007 to 15.9% in 2022. Furthermore, numerous titles have been lauded for nuanced and authentic portrayals that explore the full spectrum of Asian characters' humanity by centering race in the plot or a character's backstory without reducing Asian characters to racial tropes. In the last several years, we've also seen Asians in a variety of roles in which an actor of any race or ethnicity could have been cast.

Data from Nielsen indicate that **streaming content** continues to grow in popularity, but much of the research on the *quality* of Asian representations has focused on theatrical films or linear television. To address both the increase in Asian speaking roles and the gap in research focused on streaming content, the [USC Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project](#) (MIP), in collaboration with [Gold House](#), conducted a content analysis focused on films and TV series distributed on streaming platforms. Given the expansive Asian Pacific diaspora and challenges around capturing depictions of all communities in one report, we focused on East, South, and Southeast Asian characters. There is still a need for research that dives deeper into representations of other communities within the Asian Pacific diaspora, including those from Western Asia, Central Asia, and the Pasifika region.

How are Asian characters represented in scripted streaming content?

We utilized Nielsen ratings data to identify the top 100 titles on streaming platforms in 2022. After excluding unscripted and international titles, as well as content that was released outside of 2022, we identified 347 Asian characters. One third of these were major characters (n=99), meaning they appeared in three or more episodes of the entire TV series or were billed at least sixth in film credits. The remaining two thirds were minor characters (n=248). **Only 6% of all identified Asian characters (n=20) were in leading roles** – defined as those that appeared in at least 80% of the TV season that aired during 2022 or received top two billing places for film.

The remainder of the analysis focused on the 99 major characters (leading and supporting roles) and the 73 titles (TV episodes and films) in which they appeared.

For each of the 73 titles analyzed, we tracked the number of Asian characters and Asian creators in key decision-making roles (writers, directors, or executive producers).

- Each title had an average of **4** Asian characters.
- **4** titles had Asian “ensemble” casts in which more than 30% of the characters were Asian.
- **8** TV episodes and **1** film had at least one Asian writer.
- **6** TV episodes and **1** film had at least one Asian director.
- **10** TV episodes and **1** film had at least one Asian executive producer.
- Titles with at least one Asian creator in a key decision-making role had significantly more Asian characters than those with no Asian creators.

Among the 99 Asian characters we analyzed:

- **82%** of Asian characters were race-agnostic, meaning race either had nothing to do with the character’s storyline, or was referenced only briefly in relation to the character.
- We did not find evidence of many historical tropes about Asians, such as the perpetual foreigner, lotus blossom, or tragic hero.

We found that Asian characters were frequently shown in close proximity to whiteness:

- **42%** of Asian characters had light skin tones.
- **68%** of Asian characters never spoke to another Asian character, despite an average of 4 Asian characters per title.
- 19 Asian women were shown as the love interest of someone else, **53%** of which were white men.

Additionally, we found limited cultural specificity and a lack of cultural breadth and diversity:

- Only **24%** of characters were explicitly identified as having heritage associated with a particular Asian country.
- Only **10%** of characters spoke a foreign language.
- Only **1** character was queer, and there were no trans or non-binary characters.
- Only **13%** of characters were dark-skinned.
- Only **6%** of characters were older than 50.
- Very few (**3**) characters had larger, non-thin body types.

We found some portrayals that were consistent with stereotypes, particularly those portraying Asians as “model minorities,” “martial arts masters,” or “fighters.”

- **44%** of Asian characters with a job were “knowledge workers” who engaged in intellectual work rather than manual or service labor. More than half of these (**54%**) were in the fields of law or science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
- **17%** of characters with a job had “fighting” professions (warrior, assassin, martial arts professional, military officer) and **7%** were specifically associated with Asian martial arts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To promote more nuanced depictions of the Asian Pacific diaspora that highlight the diversity and complexity of such communities, we propose the following recommendations for storytellers and decision makers in the entertainment industry:

- 1 Elevate Asian creators in key decision making roles.**
- 2 Prioritize casting for authenticity. Lean into cultural specificity by incorporating key aspects of the actor’s heritage into the storyline.**
- 3 Tell more stories that transcend race. Cultural specificity does not mean that ethnic identity should define Asian characters.**
- 4 Expand the dimensionality and intersectionality of Asian characters by showing greater diversity in sexual orientation, age, body size, and skin tone.**
- 5 Be cautious of common tropes such as the “model minority” or the “martial arts fighter.”**
- 6 Craft narratives that don’t center around proximity to whiteness or assimilation.**

Eleanor Matsuura as Yumiko in
The Walking Dead



INTRODUCTION

Tyroe Muhafidin as Theo
in *The Rings of Power*

Census data indicate that 24 million people in the United States identify as Asian,¹ accounting for 7.2% of the population.² By 2060, the Asian American population is projected to surpass 46 million.³ This community encompasses people with ancestral origins from 26 countries and dozens of distinct ethnic groups,⁴ each with its own unique culture and history in the United States. More than half of Asians in the U.S. describe themselves by using their ethnic or national origin, either alone or in combination with American (e.g., Korean or Korean American).⁵ Only 28% percent self-identify broadly as Asian or Asian American and even fewer (6%) use regional pan-ethnic labels, such as South Asian or Southeast Asian.⁶ Despite such diversity, Asian Americans are frequently discussed as a single monolithic group.⁷

From Wong Kim Ark's fight to affirm birthright citizenship,⁸ Anna May Wong's contributions to American cinema,⁹ Grace Bogg's leadership in the civil rights movement,¹⁰ and Kamala Harris' election to Vice President, Asian Americans have played a vital role throughout the history of the United States. Yet, three in ten Americans are unable to name a historical event or policy related to Asian Americans.¹¹ Compared to members of other racial categories, Asian Americans are least likely to feel they belong and are accepted in the U.S.¹² As a result, one-in-five Asian Americans say that they have hidden a part of their heritage or culture from others, and this experience is even more common among

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- 1 Alone or in combination with another race, excluding Pacific Islanders. Source: United States Census Bureau. (2022, April 18). *Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage month: May 2022*. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2022/asian-american-pacific-islander.html>
 - 2 United States Census Bureau. (2021, August 12). *Race and ethnicity in the United States: 2010 census and 2020 census*. <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/race-and-ethnicity-in-the-united-state-2010-and-2020-census.html>
 - 3 Budiman, A., & Ruiz, N.G., (2021, April 29). *Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/#:~:text=The%20single%2Drace%2C%20non%2D,a%2070%25%20increase%20among%20Hispanics>
 - 4 See [Appendix B](#) for the list of countries included in this report.
 - 5 Ruiz, N. G., Noe-Bustamante, L., & Shah, S. (2023, May 8). *Asian identity in the U.S.* Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2023/05/08/asian-identity-in-the-us/>
 - 6 Ruiz, N. G., Noe-Bustamante, L., & Shah, S. (2023, May 8). *Asian identity in the U.S.* Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2023/05/08/asian-identity-in-the-us/>
 - 7 <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/01/us/asian-americans-facts-diversity/index.html>
 - 8 Stanford Libraries. (n.d.). *AAPI individuals rising up: Wong Kim Ark*. <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/riseup/feature/wong-kim-ark>
 - 9 Alexander, K. L., (n.d.). *Anna May Wong (1905-1961)*. National Women's History Museum. <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/anna-may-wong>
 - 10 National Park Service. (2023, July 7). *Grace Lee Boggs*. <https://www.nps.gov/people/grace-lee-boggs.htm>
 - 11 The Asian American Foundation. (2023). *STAATUS index 2023: Attitudes towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*. https://staatus-index.s3.amazonaws.com/2023/STAATUS_Index_2023.pdf
 - 12 The Asian American Foundation. (2023). *STAATUS index 2023: Attitudes towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*. https://staatus-index.s3.amazonaws.com/2023/STAATUS_Index_2023.pdf

younger Asians (39%) or U.S. born Asian Americans (32%).¹³ Across age and immigration status, many Asian Americans cite a lack of understanding towards their community and a fear of discrimination as the motivation for hiding their culture or heritage.¹⁴

THIS COMMUNITY ENCOMPASSES PEOPLE WITH ANCESTRAL ORIGINS FROM 26 COUNTRIES AND DOZENS OF DISTINCT ETHNIC GROUPS, EACH WITH ITS OWN UNIQUE CULTURE AND HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES.

Heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian rhetoric and misinformation have further “othered” and endangered members of these communities. Conspiracy theories claiming that COVID-19 was developed in a lab in Wuhan, China led to phrases like “Wuhan Flu,” “Chinese Flu,” and “Kung Flu.”¹⁵ This rhetoric is associated with a rise in hate crimes targeting Asian Americans¹⁶, which more than doubled between 2020 and 2021, and then quadrupled between 2021 and 2022, an eight-fold increase over 2020 rates.¹⁷ Nearly 8% of these crimes targeted Asian adults over 60.¹⁸

During this time of increased anti-Asian sentiment, nuanced and accurate portrayals of Asian Americans in entertainment are especially important. Decades of research indicate that scripted entertainment, such as TV or film, play an important role in shaping attitudes towards historically-marginalized communities, and can even contribute to reducing prejudice toward members of these groups.¹⁹ As such, media representations that authentically portray the diversity, complexity, and humanity of Asian American communities are essential to challenging harmful and dangerous narratives.

ASIAN REPRESENTATION IN ENTERTAINMENT

Within the top-grossing films, the proportion of speaking characters who are Asian has increased dramatically in recent years. Between 2007 and 2019, this percentage ranged from 3.4% to 8.2%, and increased to 16.2% between 2019 and 2022.²⁰ Despite this increased representation in speaking roles, Asian actors remain underrepresented in

13 Ruiz, N. G., Noe-Bustamante, L., & Shah, S. (2023, May 8). *Asian Americans and life in America*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2023/05/08/asian-americans-and-life-in-america/>

14 Ruiz, N. G., Noe-Bustamante, L., & Shah, S. (2023, May 8). *Asian Americans and life in America*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2023/05/08/asian-americans-and-life-in-america/>

15 Perng, W., & Dhaliwal, S. K. (2022). Anti-Asian racism and COVID-19: How it started, how it is going, and what we can do. *Epidemiology*, 33(3), 379–382. <https://doi.org/10.1097/EDE.0000000000001458>

16 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9168424/>

17 Yam, K. (2022, January 31). *Anti-Asian hate crimes increased 339 percent nationwide last year, report says*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/anti-asian-hate-crimes-increased-339-percent-nationwide-last-year-repo-rcna14282>

18 Takamura, J. C., Browne, C., Jeung, R., Yellow Horse, A. J., Kwok, D., & Howard, D. (2022). Asian American elders: Caught in the crosshairs of a syndemic of racism, misogyny, and ageism during Coronavirus Disease 2019. *The Public Policy and Aging Report*, 32(3), 87–93. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ppar/prac011>

19 Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L., Rosenthal, E. L., & Blakley, J. (2023). *Lights, camera, impact: 20 years of research on the power of entertainment to support narrative change*. USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project. <https://learcenter.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/NormanLearCenter-Narrative-Change-Research-Review.pdf>

20 Smith, S. L., Pieper, K., & Wheeler, S. (2023). *Inequality in 1,600 popular films: Examining portrayals of gender, race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+ & disability from 2007 to 2022*. USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. <https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-inequality-in-1600-popular-films-20230811.pdf>

leading roles in both theatrical (2.3%) and streaming films (2.0%).²¹ Similarly, Asian Americans are underrepresented in leading roles on scripted television.²² Although they make up 7% of the U.S. population, in 2022 these communities accounted for only 3.8% of lead roles on broadcast TV, 3.2% on streaming, and 1.9% on cable.

Data on the intersections between race and other identities are more limited. Qualitative research and press coverage have highlighted the invisibility of Asian characters who are fat,²³ queer,²⁴ or dark-skinned.²⁵ Furthermore, research on portrayals of older adults on television finds that the majority of these characters are white, and only 1.3% are Asian.²⁶

ASIAN STEREOTYPES

Understanding the representation of any community on-screen requires examining not just the *number* of roles, but also the *quality* of depictions. Historically, Asian characters have been portrayed in ways consistent with a number of common stereotypes.

- **The perpetual foreigner:** Asian characters are often depicted as outsiders, or perpetual foreigners, regardless of where they were born.²⁷ Asian Americans' awareness of this stereotype has been associated with feelings of conflict with their identities and a lower sense of belonging to American culture.²⁸
- **The model minority:** Asian Americans are also frequently depicted as model minorities who are hardworking,

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- 21 Lead roles consist of central characters that drive the narrative of a film. Source: Ramón, A., Tran, M., & Hunt, D. (2023). *Hollywood diversity report 2023: Exclusivity in progress*. UCLA Entertainment & Media Research Initiative. <https://socialsciences.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/UCLA-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2023-Film-3-30-2023.pdf>
- 22 Lead roles consist of protagonists whose stories are at the center of a television series. Source: Ramón, A., Tran, M., & Hunt, D. (2022). *Hollywood diversity report 2022: A new, post-pandemic normal?* UCLA Entertainment & Media Research Initiative. <https://socialsciences.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/UCLA-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2022-Television-10-27-2022.pdf>
- 23 We use the term “fat” here, in alignment with fat activists and fat studies researchers, to normalize and destigmatize the term. This reflects a growing recognition that “fat” is not an insult or an inherent problem to be solved. Sources: McPhail, D., & Orsini, M. (2021). Fat acceptance as social justice. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 193(35), E1398–E1399. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.210772>; Kim, H. (2019, April 29). *Where are all the fat Asians?* Medium. <https://medium.com/@haleykim/where-are-all-the-fat-asians-cf9f78d6126f>; McTaggart, N., Meyer, M., Conroy, M., Perez, R., Espinoza, C., Trinh, S., Campos, P., Burrows, E., Virgo, J., Brennan, C., Dolan, I., Ackel, C., & Christensen, S. (2021). *I am not a fetish or model minority: Redefining what it means to be API in the entertainment industry*. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/api-study-2021-8.pdf>
- 24 Gandhi, L. (2021, June 26). *In Hollywood, Asian American stories are rare, but Asian American LGBTQ stories are even rarer*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/hollywood-asian-american-stories-are-rare-asian-american-lgbtq-stories-rcna1270>
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- 26 Smith, S. L., Pieper, K., Choueiti, M., Tofan, A., Depauw, A., & Case, A. (2017). *Seniors on the small screen: Aging in popular television content*. Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative, https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/Seniors_on_the_Small_Screen-Dr_Stacy_L_Smith_9-12-17.pdf
- 27 McTaggart, N., Meyer, M., Conroy, M., Perez, R., Espinoza, C., Trinh, S., Campos, P., Burrows, E., Virgo, J., Brennan, C., Dolan, I., Ackel, C., & Christensen, S. (2021). *I am not a fetish or model minority: Redefining what it means to be API in the entertainment industry*. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/api-study-2021-8.pdf>; Mok, T. A. (1998). Getting the message: Media images and stereotypes and their effect on Asian Americans. *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*, 4(3), 185–202. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.4.3.185>
- 28 Huynh, Q.-L., Devos, T., & Smalarz, L. (2011). Perpetual foreigner in one's own land: Potential implications for identity and psychological adjustment. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 30(2), 133–162. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2011.30.2.133>

successful, educated, or wealthy, often in contrast to other racial or ethnic communities.²⁹ Though seemingly positive, the model minority stereotype places undue pressure on Asian Americans to excel and conform in various aspects of life, from work and school to personal relationships, and obscures the unique experiences faced by different Asian ethnic communities. It can also be used as a rhetorical tool to sow division between historically-marginalized groups.³⁰

Other stereotypes lie at the intersection of race and gender.

- **Asian women:** Asian women are portrayed as either **submissive objects of desire** (i.e., the lotus blossom) or harsh, emotionally detached, and demanding **“tiger moms”** and **“dragon ladies.”**³¹ Such dehumanization can contribute to oppression of and violence towards Asian women.³²
- **Asian men:** In contrast, Asian men have historically been portrayed as **emasculated, weak, or undesirable**. More recently, portrayals of Asian men as **“Himbos” have emerged.**³³ Contrary to the model minority and emasculated stereotypes, these men are depicted as physically appealing but lacking in intelligence.³⁴

In addition to these common tropes, Asians are frequently stereotyped in a number of different ways. These include portrayals as naturally skilled in **martial arts**,³⁵ members of **organized crime**,³⁶ or **bad drivers.**³⁷ Like other characters from historically-marginalized communities, many play the role of **sidekick** to a prominent white character³⁸ or are cast as **tragic heroes** who are doomed to fail.³⁹

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- 29 McTaggart, N., Meyer, M., Conroy, M., Perez, R., Espinoza, C., Trinh, S., Campos, P., Burrows, E., Virgo, J., Brennan, C., Dolan, I., Ackel, C., & Christensen, S. (2021). *I am not a fetish or model minority: Redefining what it means to be API in the entertainment industry*. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/api-study-2021-8.pdf>;
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- 32 Lang, C., & Cachero, P. (2021, April 7). *How history puts Asian women in America at risk*. Time. <https://time.com/5952819/history-anti-asian-racism-misogyny>;
- Leong, K., & Kuo, K. (2023, July 26). *US has a long history of violence against Asian women*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/us-has-a-long-history-of-violence-against-asian-women-157533>
- 33 The term “Himbo” is a play on the term “Bimbo” and can apply to men of any ethnicity or race. It’s only recently that we’ve seen it applied to Asian men, specifically.
- 34 Lonergan, M. K. (2022, May 9). *Historian’s take*. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/video/what-is-the-asian-himbo-and-why-is-this-character-so-popular-nup3on>
- 35 McTaggart, N., Meyer, M., Conroy, M., Perez, R., Espinoza, C., Trinh, S., Campos, P., Burrows, E., Virgo, J., Brennan, C., Dolan, I., Ackel, C., & Christensen, S. (2021). *I am not a fetish or model minority: Redefining what it means to be API in the entertainment industry*. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/api-study-2021-8.pdf>
- 36 McTaggart, N., Meyer, M., Conroy, M., Perez, R., Espinoza, C., Trinh, S., Campos, P., Burrows, E., Virgo, J., Brennan, C., Dolan, I., Ackel, C., & Christensen, S. (2021). *I am not a fetish or model minority: Redefining what it means to be API in the entertainment industry*. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/api-study-2021-8.pdf>
- 37 Mukkamala, S., & Suyemoto, K. L. (2018). Racialized sexism/sexualized racism: A multimethod study of intersectional experiences of discrimination for Asian American women. *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 9(1), 32–46. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/aap0000104>
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- 39 Wang Yuen, N., Smith, S. L., Pieper, K., Choueiti, M., Yao, K., & Dinh, D. (2021). *The Prevalence and Portrayal of Asian and Pacific Islanders across 1,300 Popular Films*. USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii_aapi-representation-across-films-2021-05-18.pdf

RACE CENTRALITY

Another component of representation includes the centrality of race or ethnicity to the plot of a storyline or the identity of a character. A study of the top-grossing films from 2017 to 2020 found that even among films with Asian characters, Asian cultures were only central to the plot 16.3% of the time.⁴⁰

Race-Central Depictions

Race-central depictions are not uniformly positive or negative. A character's race or ethnicity can be centered in nuanced and authentic ways when it plays an important role in the plot or in understanding their motivations, such as:

- **Devi in *Never Have I Ever*** (2020-2023) is a 17-year-old Indian American high school girl who navigates complexities of adolescence, cultural identity, and the recent loss of her father. Devi is a high-achieving student who embraces risks and makes mistakes. Her coming-of-age story centers on her journey as an Indian girl growing up in the U.S. while navigating her relationship with her immigrant family.
- **Evelyn in *Everything Everywhere All At Once*** (2022) is a Chinese American immigrant running a laundromat while caring for her ailing father and struggling to maintain a close relationship with her American daughter and distant husband. Amidst multiverse adventures and superpowers, Evelyn's story centers on reconciling her choices and understanding her relationships with her daughter, husband, and father.
- **Danny in *Beef*** (2023) is a second-generation Korean American, grappling with financial challenges after his parents returned to Korea when their motel business failed. His motivation to buy his parents a new house in the U.S. and to reunite drives key decisions that lead to a road rage incident and more.
- **Thony in *The Cleaning Lady*** (2022) is a Cambodian doctor who leaves her home in the Philippines to pursue critical medical treatment for her son in the United States. When the American immigration system fails her, she is forced into hiding and left to navigate life as an undocumented worker. Thony is forced to make difficult decisions in order to stay in the country to continue fighting for her son's life.

However, race can also be centered through narrow or harmful tropes and stereotypes, such as the character Long Duk Dong in *Sixteen Candles* (1984). In this film, Dong is an Asian foreign exchange student of ambiguous ethnic identity who is accompanied by the sound of a gong every time he enters a scene. He speaks with an over-the-top accent, is a socially-awkward, unattractive “nerd,” and is emasculated by his much taller love interest.

Race-Agnostic Depictions

In contrast, race-agnostic depictions are those in which a character's race or ethnicity are mentioned only briefly (e.g., Lara Jean in *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*; Eve in *Killing Eve*; Ingrid in *Partner Track*) or not at all (e.g., Diane in *The Night Agent*; Ji-Yoon in *The Chair*). These include, but are not limited to, roles in which an actor of any race or ethnicity could have been cast.

40 McTaggart, N., Meyer, M., Conroy, M., Perez, R., Espinoza, C., Trinh, S., Campos, P., Burrows, E., Virgo, J., Brennan, C., Dolan, I., Ackel, C., & Christensen, S. (2021). *I am not a fetish or model minority: Redefining what it means to be API in the entertainment industry*. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/api-study-2021-8.pdf>

Notably, there is a desire among many Asian American creatives to see more race-agnostic roles that do not pigeonhole Asian characters by their race, ethnicity, or immigrant status.⁴¹ However, advocates also caution against the “white-washing” of Asian roles or characters. **This can occur when a white actor is cast in a role originally written for an Asian actor**, or when a storyline centers on a character’s **proximity to whiteness**, which often appears through Asian characters being depicted as in need of a “white savior,” or in the preferential casting of light-skinned Asians.⁴²

STUDY OVERVIEW

Previous research on Asian representations has focused on either the *quantity* of speaking and lead roles or the *quality* of depictions in theatrical films or linear television. Data from Nielsen indicate that streaming content continues to grow in popularity,⁴³ but little is known about the quality of Asian portrayals in such content. To address this gap, the **USC Norman Lear Center’s Media Impact Project (MIP)** launched a research project in collaboration with **Gold House**, a nonprofit collective of Asian Pacific voices dedicated to promoting more authentic multicultural representation and societal equity. The goal of this research was to systematically measure portrayals of Asian characters in scripted streaming content (TV and films) released in 2022.

Because of the size and diversity of Asian Pacific communities, **we chose to focus on depictions of East, South, and Southeast Asian characters**, rather than attempting to characterize depictions of all communities in one analysis. As such, Central and West Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians were excluded from the sample. We made this decision for several reasons:

- Central and West Asian countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, are also part of the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region. These communities face their own unique issues of underrepresentation and misrepresentation, including stereotypes related to terrorism or political tyranny.⁴⁴
- Many Pacific Islanders advocate for the use of the term “Pasifika” as a way to mark the distinction between their communities and other Asian Americans.⁴⁵ Pacific Islanders are often indigenous to their original lands and therefore have experiences that parallel those of Native American communities, and this unique distinction is often overlooked when treating Asian Pacific communities as a monolith.⁴⁶

We emphasize the need for additional research that dives deeply into representations of other communities within the Asian Pacific diaspora, including those from the MENA and Pasifika regions.

41 McTaggart, N., Meyer, M., Conroy, M., Perez, R., Espinoza, C., Trinh, S., Campos, P., Burrows, E., Virgo, J., Brennan, C., Dolan, I., Ackel, C., & Christensen, S. (2021). *I am not a fetish or model minority: Redefining what it means to be API in the entertainment industry*. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/api-study-2021-8.pdf>

42 SeeHer, Gold House. (2022, December 8). API Women Authentic Representation in Storytelling. <https://www.seeher.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/WriteHerRight-API-Guide.pdf>

43 *Streaming claims largest piece of TV viewing pie in July*. Nielsen. (2022, September 1). <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2022/streaming-claims-largest-piece-of-tv-viewing-pie-in-july/>

44 Wang Yuen, N., Chin, C. B., Deo, M.E., Faustina, M.D., Jong-Hwa Lee, J., Milman, N. (2021). *Terrorists & Tyrants: Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) Actors in Prime Time & Streaming Television*. MENA Arts Advocacy Coalition. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6017e06dcbc71f649dae3a80/t/60b8517301914a2e34c46071/1622692223386/Terrorists+and+Tyrants.pdf>

45 Ramirez, M. (2023, January 30). *In Pasifika, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander communities seek identity and Independence*. USA Today. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2023/01/15/pacific-islanders-pasifika-statement-identity-independence/11049428002/>

46 Ramirez, M. (2023, January 30). *In Pasifika, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander communities seek identity and Independence*. USA Today. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2023/01/15/pacific-islanders-pasifika-statement-identity-independence/11049428002/>

HOW ARE ASIAN CHARACTERS REPRESENTED IN TOP STREAMING CONTENT?

Thusitha Jayasundera as Malva Meadowgrass in *The Rings of Power*

What We Did

We began by identifying all Asian characters that appeared in the top 100 television series or films popular on streaming platforms in 2022 — for a total of 347.⁴⁷ Of these, 99 (28.5%) were categorized as major characters, consisting of 20 leading characters (5.8%) and 79 supporting characters (22.8%).

- **Major characters** appeared in three or more episodes over the course of the entire series, including at least one episode in 2022 (for TV characters). For film, they were defined as characters listed within the first six billing places in IMDb credits.
 - **Leading characters** appeared in at least 80% of the 2022 season for television or were billed second or higher in IMDb film credits.
 - **Supporting characters** appeared in less than 80% of the 2022 season for television or were billed among third to sixth in IMDb film credits.

Minor characters (248) were excluded from subsequent analyses, leaving us with a total sample of 99 major Asian characters.

For each of the 99 major Asian characters, we selected the first episode in which they appeared in 2022, for a total of 73 titles:⁴⁸

- 71 TV episodes across 37 series, including 11 acquired series and 26 original series
- 2 films

TITLE-LEVEL VARIABLES

First, we measured relevant characteristics in each of the 73 titles:

- Number of Asian characters and actors
- Number of Asian writers, directors, and executive producers
- Renewal status

⁴⁷ See [Appendix A: Detailed Content Analysis Methodology](#) for more information about the sample selection process.

⁴⁸ In this report, we use “title” to refer to both films and TV episodes as a unit of analysis.

CHARACTER-LEVEL VARIABLES

For the 99 major Asian characters, student coders were rigorously trained to catalog demographics, markers of cultural or ethnic background, and characteristics or behaviors consistent with 12 common stereotypes about Asian people:

- Perpetual foreigner
- Model minority
- Martial arts warrior
- Bad driver
- Tragic hero
- Criminal (organized crime)
- Sidekick
- Lotus blossom
- Tiger mom
- Dragon lady
- Himbo
- Emasculated man

In addition, we determined the race-centrality of each character. We distinguished characters whose race was referenced either briefly or not at all (race-agnostic) from characters whose race was central to their storyline or to understanding their motivation and background (race-central). We also measured whether the character was *defined* by their race to the exclusion of other characteristics and their *proximity to whiteness*: whether the character is romantically involved with a white character, played by a white or multiracial actor, or isolated from other Asian characters.

Finally, we measured several *linguistic variables* in the title dialogue: the number of words spoken by each character, the complexity of their dialogue, and whether they spoke any non-English languages (See [Appendix A](#) for detailed content analysis methodology).

What We Found: Title-Level

- Each title had an average of four Asian characters.
- Only four titles had Asian “ensemble” casts in which more than 30% of the characters were Asian.⁴⁹
- Only eight TV episodes and one film had at least one Asian writer.
- Only six TV episodes and one film had at least one Asian director.
- Only ten TV episodes and one film had at least one Asian executive producer.
- Titles with at least one Asian creator (writer, director, executive producer) had significantly more Asian characters than those that had no Asian creators.⁵⁰

What We Found: Asian Actors

- Of the 99 major characters, virtually all were played by Asian (74%) or multiracial Asian (25%) actors. One animated character, Mr. Kim in *South Park*, was voiced by a white actor.
- Among 20 leading characters, 40% were played by East Asian actors, followed by 30% multiracial Asian, and 20% South Asian.⁵¹
- There were two known instances where multiracial Asian actors played Indigenous characters on *Yellowstone*.

49 These were titles that were in the top 10th percentile regarding Asian representation, where at least 29% of the characters were Asian.

50 $P = 0.01$, $t = 2.76$, $df = 67$, 4.6 vs. 2.8

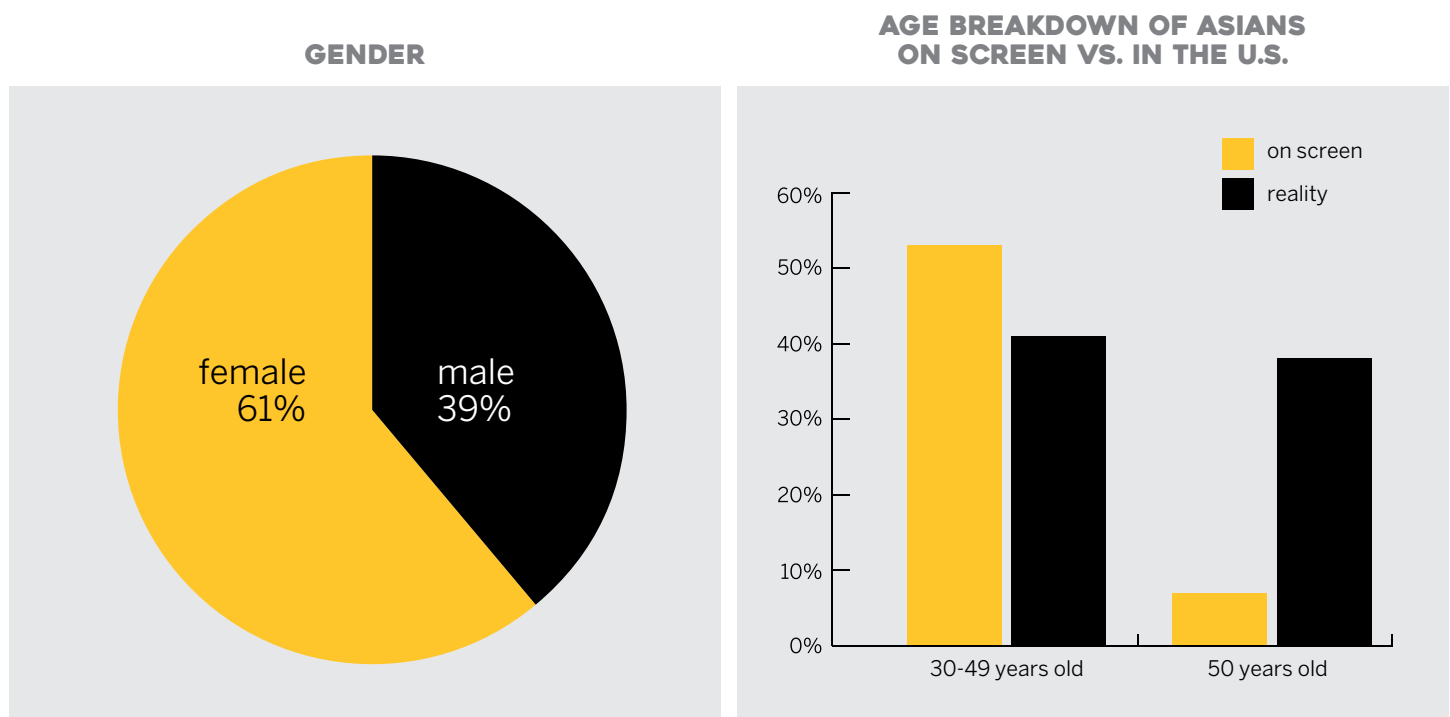
51 One leading character was played by an actor with multiethnic Asian heritage (i.e., two or more Asian ethnicities) and another leading character was played by an actor whose ethnicity was unknown.

What We Found: Character Demographics

Across all 99 major Asian characters, there was little diversity in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, age, body size, or skin tone.

- Only one character was queer, and there were no trans or non-binary characters.⁵²
- Only 6% of Asian characters were older than 50. In reality, 37% of Asians in the U.S. are older than 50.⁵³
- 54% of Asian characters were 30-49 years old. In reality, 41% of Asian Americans are in this age group.
- Very few (3) Asian characters had larger, non-thin body types.⁵⁴
- 47% of female Asian characters were light-skinned, compared to 41% of male Asian characters. Only 13 characters (13%) were dark-skinned.

FIGURE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS OF MAJOR ASIAN CHARACTERS



What We Found: Stereotypes⁵⁵

The Perpetual Foreigner: We found little evidence of Asian characters portrayed as foreign in our sample.

- Only three Asian characters did not speak any English.
- 31% of Asian characters spoke with an accent.

⁵² For variables that appear infrequently, measures of reliability are not appropriate. Therefore we were unable to calculate reliability on this item.

⁵³ Ruiz, N. G., Noe-Bustamante, L., & Shah, S. (2023, May 8). *Appendix: Demographic profile of Asian American adults*. Pew Research Center Race & Ethnicity. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2023/05/08/asian-american-identity-appendix-demographic-profile-of-asian-american-adults/>

⁵⁴ For variables that appear infrequently, measures of reliability are not appropriate. Therefore we were unable to calculate reliability on this item.

⁵⁵ Results regarding the sidekick and dragon lady stereotypes are excluded from this report due to inadequate reliability of relevant measures.

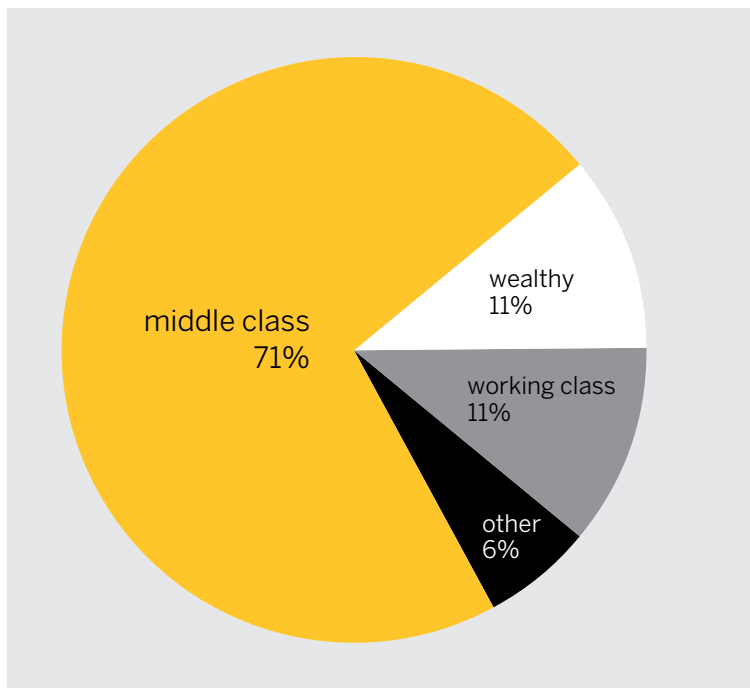
- Only 24% of characters were explicitly associated with a particular Asian country, and 7% were children of immigrants.⁵⁶

44% WERE “KNOWLEDGE WORKERS” WHO ENGAGED IN INTELLECTUAL WORK RATHER THAN MANUAL OR SERVICE LABOR.

The Model Minority: Of 64 Asian characters with a job, 44% were “knowledge workers” who engaged in intellectual work rather than manual or service labor. More than half of these were in the fields of law or STEM.⁵⁷

- The vast majority of Asian characters (81%) were depicted as sympathetic “good guys.”⁵⁸
- 83% of characters were either middle class or wealthy, and only 11% of characters were portrayed as working class.
- Among adult characters with evident jobs, 21% were in a profession that requires an advanced degree.
- As measured by language complexity, Asian characters were portrayed as no more or less intelligent than the average character, speaking at a sixth-grade reading level.
- No Asian characters had apparent mental health or addiction issues.⁵⁹

FIGURE 2: CHARACTER SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



⁵⁶ For variables that appear infrequently, measures of reliability are not appropriate. Therefore we were unable to calculate reliability on this item.

⁵⁷ Characters with a job in the fields of STEM include 10 in the field of medicine, one in technology and one in science/engineering.

⁵⁸ Because reliability was marginal for this item ($\alpha = .55$), this finding should be interpreted with caution.

⁵⁹ For variables that appear infrequently, measures of reliability are not appropriate. Therefore we were unable to calculate reliability on this item.

Additional qualitative analysis revealed at least **ten characters displayed elements of the model minority trope**.

These characters were depicted as:

- Hard working, ambitious, determined, or competitive
- Well-behaved, responsible, and reliable
- In high status professions like doctors and lawyers

The Lotus Blossom: Female characters largely disrupted historic stereotypes about Asian women as quiet and passive.

- Women accounted for 61% of all major Asian characters and 75% of leading roles.
- Asian women spoke nearly twice as much dialogue as Asian men (217 and 115 words per episode, respectively), though much of the difference was attributable to *Turning Red*.
- Excluding *Turning Red*, Asian women accounted for 3.0% of episode dialogue in comparison to Asian men, who accounted for 2.6% of episode dialogue.

The Emasculated Asian Man: Consistent with this stereotype, only one in four Asian men were in romantic relationships, and Asian women were more likely to date white men.

- 26% of Asian men were portrayed in romantic relationships compared to 32% of Asian women.
- Of 19 Asian women who were in evident romantic relationships or were the love interest of another character, only four were involved with Asian men (21%).

The Martial Arts Fighter: Nearly one in five Asian characters (17%) had “fighting” professions like warrior, assassin, or martial arts professional.

- 7% of characters were specifically associated with Asian martial arts.
- Men were more likely than women to be violent (21% of men and 13% of women), *and men were also more likely than women to be victims of violence* (28% of men and 8% of women).
- Three characters were part of an organized crime group.⁶⁰

Other stereotypes were rare or not present at all.

- While four Asian characters were shown driving, only one was shown driving recklessly.⁶¹
- We did not find evidence of characters who exemplified the himbo or tragic hero.

What We Found: Race-Centrality

The majority of Asian characters had race-agnostic roles.

- 82% of characters were *race-agnostic* — that is, race either had nothing to do with the character's storyline or was referenced only briefly in relation to the character.
- Light- and medium-skinned Asian characters were more likely to be race-agnostic (84%) than dark-skinned Asian characters (69%).

⁶⁰ Because reliability was marginal for this item, this finding should be interpreted with caution.

⁶¹ For variables that appear infrequently, measures of reliability are not appropriate. Therefore we were unable to calculate reliability on this item.

- Supporting characters were also more likely to be race agnostic (94%) than leading characters (85%).
- Very few characters were defined by their race or characterized by Asian identity to the exclusion of other characteristics.

Proximity to whiteness: The majority of Asian characters never spoke to another Asian character.

- 42% of characters had light skin tones.
- Although 15% of the characters in each episode were Asian, two in three characters never spoke to another Asian character.
- 19 Asian women were in evident romantic relationships or were the love interest of another character, 53% of which were white men.

At the same time, Asian characters largely lacked cultural or ethnic specificity.

- Less than half (45%) of characters had names typically associated with Asian heritage.
- 10% of characters spoke in a foreign language, including Laotian (2), Korean (2), Hindi (2), Cantonese (2), Mandarin (1), and Japanese (1).
- Only 24% of characters were explicitly identified as having ethnic origins from a particular Asian country.
 - Of these, 46% were East Asian (11), 29% were South Asian (7), and 25% were Southeast Asian (6).
 - This included characters associated with China (7), India (6), Laos (5), Korea (3), Pakistan (1), Philippines (1) and Japan (1).

FIGURE 3: CHARACTER ETHNICITY



Reggie Lee as Angelo Soto in *The Lincoln Lawyer*

CONCLUSION

Asian representation in film and television has historically been both limited and stereotypical. However, less is known about how Asians are represented in the most popular scripted **streaming content**. This study was an attempt to quantify the quality of these depictions.

ASIAN REPRESENTATION

Our findings show progress with regards to casting Asian characters outside of tokenized or stereotypical roles. Among 99 major Asian characters, we saw little evidence of many historical tropes and stereotypes (the lotus blossom, the perpetual foreigner) while others were entirely absent (the himbo, the bad driver). This may be due, in part, to our focus on major characters. Because major characters have more time on-screen throughout the duration of a TV series or film, they likely have more elaborate backstories and character arcs. Minor characters, on the other hand, may be more susceptible to reductive stereotypes or tropes.

The majority of characters were **race-agnostic** (82%), meaning race or ethnicity was mentioned only briefly or not at all. These include roles in which an actor of any ethnicity could have been cast. However, not all Asian characters were equally likely to be depicted in these roles. Light- and medium-skinned characters were more likely to be race-agnostic, whereas portrayals of darker-skinned Asians were more likely to center race.

Despite progress, our results also indicate that there is a meaningful risk of casting Asian actors in roles that emphasize proximity to whiteness rather than authentic **cultural specificity**.

Nearly eight in ten characters had ambiguous ethnic origins, with only one in four explicitly associated with a particular Asian country. Asian characters were also shown in **close proximity to whiteness**, with two in three never speaking to another Asian character.

CULTURAL SPECIFICITY CAN BE AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR COMBATting MONOLITHIC PERCEPTIONS OF THESE GROUPS AND FOR DEPICTING AUTHENTIC ASIAN CHARACTERS WHO ARE FULLY REALIZED, MULTIDIMENSIONAL INDIVIDUALS.

Such depictions obscure the diversity of Asian communities, and cultural specificity can be an important tool for combatting monolithic perceptions of these groups and for depicting authentic Asian characters who are fully realized, multidimensional individuals. Rather than erasing markers of race or ethnic identity altogether, many hope to see greater balance, such that Asian characters are represented with the full breadth and diversity of experience – whether in race-central roles, race-agnostic ones, or the spectrum in between. As sociologist and Asian American representation expert Nancy Wang Yuen explains:

*“In my interviews with Asian-American actors, many expressed a desire to play roles written for ‘white girls’ because those tend to avoid stereotypes. [. . .] **But the choice between either playing a stereotype or playing roles with no cultural specificity shortchanges Asian-American actors.** I want to see a variety of identity expressions that represent the full breadth of the Asian-American experience.”*⁶²

Despite the absence of some historical tropes, other stereotypes like the **model minority**, the **emasculated man**, and the **martial arts fighter** remained common. In addition, there was **little to no diversity** in terms of sexual orientation, skin tone, age, or body size. Because of this lack of intersectional representation, Asian Americans from multiple marginalized identities rarely see themselves on screen, including those who identify as LGBTQ+, are older adults, have darker skin tones, or navigate the world in larger bodies.

A CALL FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

There are several considerations around this research that warrant emphasis. First, it is critical that additional research examines representation of other members of the Asian Pacific community who are a part of the Middle Eastern/North Africa and Pasifika regions. Grouping all of these ethnicities together contributes to the erasure of unique challenges faced by different communities.

Second, 2023 has continued to usher in a wave of new Asian stories in entertainment and a \$2.5 billion commitment to supporting such content from Netflix.⁶³ Most of the recent research examining the representation of Asians in popular U.S. content has focused exclusively on American-produced content. Given the increasingly global nature of streaming platforms, growing popularity of Asian-language content, and increasing commitment to these international markets from major streaming platforms, future research examining Asian representation should include TV and film content produced outside of the U.S.

Lastly, our findings in this report are specific to **major** Asian characters. Additional research is needed to examine minor characters, who may be more likely to revert to historical tropes or stereotypes. Thus, the findings in this report may undercount the prevalence of potentially problematic depictions. This also underscores the need to examine depictions within Asian-led content that may fall outside of the top 100 titles.

62 Ting, J. A. (2018, May 2). *The rise of the Asian mean girl*. Teen Vogue. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/asian-mean-girls>

63 Kim, S. (2023, June 22). *Netflix explains how it plans to spend \$2.5 billion on South Korean content*. Time. <https://time.com/6289170/netflix-invests-south-korea-content-k-dramas/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

To promote more nuanced depictions of the Asian Pacific diaspora that highlight the diversity and complexity of such communities, we propose the following recommendations for storytellers and decision makers in the entertainment industry:

- 1 Elevate Asian creators in key decision making roles.**
- 2 Prioritize casting for authenticity. Lean into cultural specificity by incorporating key aspects of the actor's heritage into the storyline.**
- 3 Tell more stories that transcend race. Cultural specificity does not mean that ethnic identity should define Asian characters.**
- 4 Expand the dimensionality and intersectionality of Asian characters by showing greater diversity in sexual orientation, age, body size, and skin tone.**
- 5 Be cautious of common tropes such as the “model minority” or the “martial arts fighter.”**
- 6 Craft narratives that don't center around proximity to whiteness or assimilation.**



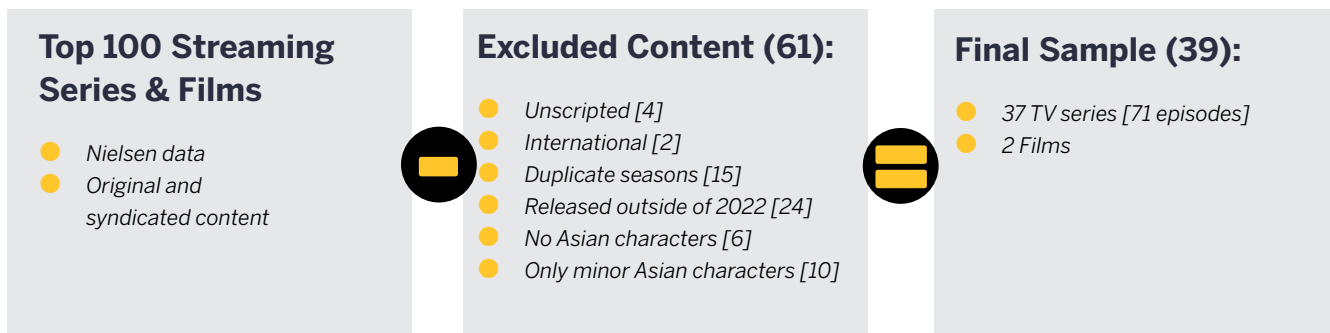
Justin H. Min as Ben Hargreeves
in *The Umbrella Academy*

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: DETAILED CONTENT ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Sample Selection

FIGURE 4.
GRAPHIC SHOWING EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR CONTENT USED TO GENERATE FINAL SAMPLE



STEP 1: SELECTING SERIES AND FILMS

We started with a list of the top 100 streaming shows and films from 2022, including both original and syndicated content, acquired from Nielsen. From this initial list, we excluded:

- Unscripted content [4 series]
- International series or films (produced outside of the U.S.) [2]
- Series or films released outside of the 2022 calendar year [24]
- Series or films that did not feature any apparently Asian actors or characters [6]
- Duplicate series (TV shows that had multiple seasons charting in the top 100 in 2022) [15]

This reduced our sample to 49 series and films.

Karen Fukuhara as Kimiko Miyashiro in *The Boys*

STEP 2: FINDING ASIAN CHARACTERS USING ACTOR RACE/ETHNICITY

Using IMDb, two researchers reviewed the cast lists for these 49 series and films and recorded any actors⁶⁴ that appeared to be Asian or Asian in combination with another race (“multiracial”). Asian was defined as including those of East, South, or Southeast Asian heritage. Actors of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (NHPI) and Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) heritage were not included.⁶⁵

For live action series or films (the vast majority of our sample), we considered the actor’s race to be a *proxy* for the character’s race or ethnicity.⁶⁶ That is, characters were considered to be Asian if played by an Asian or multiracial Asian actor. For animated content only (two TV series and one film), we included characters perceived to be Asian, regardless of the voice actor’s race or ethnicity.

Determinations of Asian heritage were made by considering a number of factors, including:

- Actor or character names
- IMDb pictures and biographies
- Secondary online research on actor or character race/ethnicity (e.g., Wikipedia, actor interviews, blog posts, fandom wikis, etc).⁶⁷

Using this procedure, we identified a total of 347 Asian characters.

STEP 3: LIMITING THE SAMPLE TO MAJOR ASIAN CHARACTERS

For our systematic content analysis, we limited the sample to *major* Asian characters. These were defined as:

- For TV: Characters who appeared in three or more episodes over the course of the entire series, including at least one episode in 2022.
- For films: Characters listed within the first six billing places in IMDb credits.

The exclusion of minor Asian characters eliminated another 10 series or films that apparently did not feature any major Asian characters.⁶⁸ This process resulted in a final sample of 99 major Asian characters from 39 of the top 100 scripted streaming series and films in 2022 (see Figure 1).

64 Uncredited actors were excluded from this analysis.

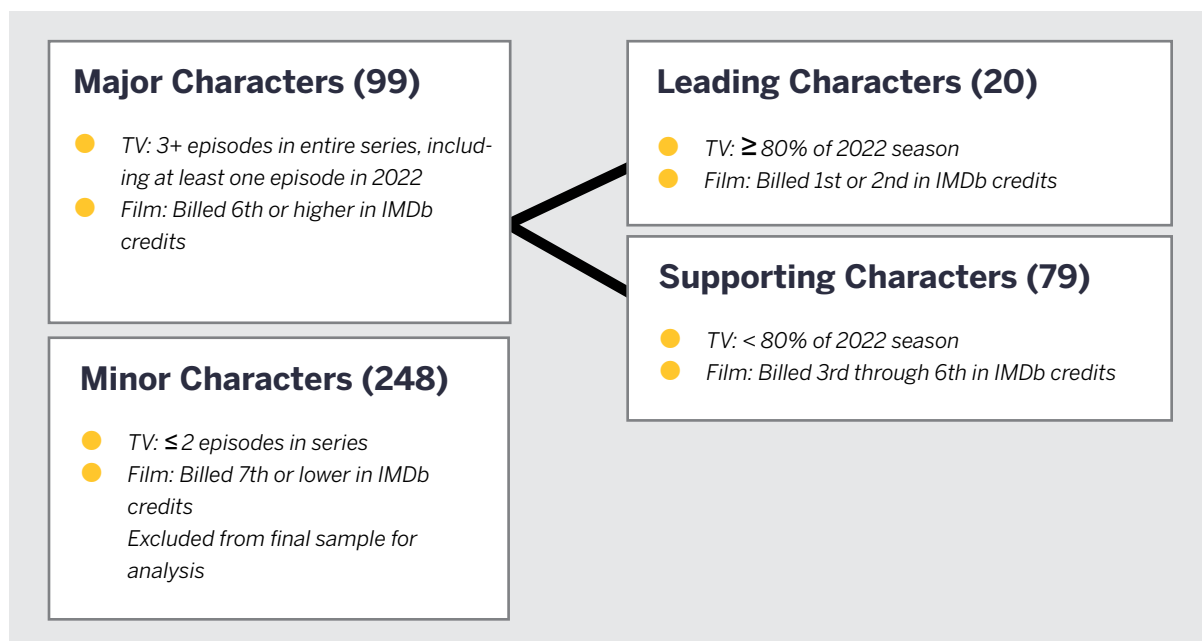
65 See [Appendix B](#) for the list of Asian regions and countries.

66 Since actor race is used as a proxy for character race/ethnicity, occasionally characters appeared in our sample that were not written as Asian in the show’s universe. For example, there were two actresses of multiracial Asian heritage that were cast as indigenous characters on the TV series, *Yellowstone*.

67 This process was informed by the theoretical framework of “street race,” which refers to how one believes they are perceived and racialized by other Americans. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5800755>

68 For TV, minor characters were defined as appearing in two or fewer episodes over the course of the entire series. For film, minor characters were those billed 7th or lower in IMDb credits. Minor characters were not included in the final character sample for analysis.

FIGURE 5.
CHART SHOWING MAJOR VS. MINOR CHARACTERS & LEADING VS. SUPPORTING DISTINCTIONS



STEP 4: TITLE SELECTION

We selected the first episode from the 2022 season in which each of our characters had a speaking role. This resulted in a sample of 73 unique titles, 71 of which were television episodes and two of which were films.

Coding Procedure

CODER TRAINING AND INTERRATER RELIABILITY

We trained five undergraduate and graduate student coders from the University of Southern California to watch 73 identified titles (71 TV episodes and 2 films) and analyze 99 major characters for relevant variables. Coding followed a two-month training period that included several rounds of testing and refining the codebook (see Table 2) and the coding procedures.

Next, we assigned 10% of the sample (10 characters) to be double-coded by two coders to establish interrater reliability. Items that achieved adequate reliability were retained in the codebook unchanged. Once the codebook was finalized, the remaining 89 characters were divided among coders. Eleven additional characters were randomly selected for double-coding. The total of 21 double-coded characters were used for final reliability calculations. Unless otherwise noted, items that achieved inadequate reliability are not included in this report.

SKIN TONE

Skin tone was coded by identifying the CMYK color code of the actor's average skin color, as determined by sampling

a portion of the actor's naturally-lit neck skin on their primary IMDb photo. The "K" value of this actor's pigment ("key" or black) was compared to a rubric developed for a scientific study about bias against dark-skinned Asian people.⁶⁹ Actor's with a K value greater than 38% were categorized as having "dark" skin, while those with a K value less than 25% were categorized as having "light" skin, and those with K values in between 25% and 38% (inclusive) had "medium" skin.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Student interns obtained closed captioning transcripts for the selected episodes from the *Norman Lear Center Script Database*, which includes more than 168,000 TV episodes and films. They separated the dialogue of selected Asian characters from the episode transcript and compiled character dialogue in a separate document. The dialogue of characters was then subjected to additional analysis to code for word count, syllables per word, and words per sentence.

- The Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level for each character was calculated using syllables per word and words per sentence as independent variables.
- The word count of each coded character was divided by the total word count of the episode to calculate the percentage of the episode's dialogue spoken by the character.
- The number of speaking characters was estimated by counting the total number of characters on the IMDb page for the episode (not including characters listed under the "Rest of cast listed alphabetically" heading, which were classified as extras or characters without speaking roles).

The **Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level** and **percentage of episode dialogue** for each analyzed Asian character were then compared to those of the average character, calculated by dividing the total words by the number of speaking characters.

TABLE 1: STREAMING SERVICES INCLUDED IN NIELSEN DATA

CBS	Vudu	Pureflix	AMC
iTunes	HBO Max	Tubi	Comedy Central
NBC	TBS	AdultSwim	The CW
Netflix	Hulu	ABC	Nick
Paramount Plus	Peacock	Disney Plus	Discovery Plus
Pluto TV	Crackle	Starz	
History	IMDb TV	Showtime	

69 See Chen, J. M., & Francis-Tan, A. (2022). Setting the tone: An investigation of skin color bias in Asia. *Race and Social Problems*, 14(2), 150-169.

TABLE 2: ANALYZED SERIES, EPISODES, AND CHARACTERS

Character Name	Title	Episode	Film or TV (original vs. acquired)
Abby	<i>Turning Red</i>	NA	Film
Alina Park	<i>The Blacklist</i>	S9E1	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Alvin Aquino	<i>The Lincoln Lawyer</i>	S1E9	TV episode (streaming original series)
Angelo Soto	<i>The Lincoln Lawyer</i>	S1E7	TV episode (streaming original series)
Anika	<i>The Boys</i>	S3E5	TV episode (streaming original series)
Anouke Sinthasomphone	<i>Dahmer</i>	S1E5	TV episode (streaming original series)
Avery	<i>Yellowstone</i>	S4E6	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Avik San	<i>The Gray Man</i>	NA	Film
Azia Celestino	<i>Law & Order: SVU</i>	S23E2	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Ben Hargreeves	<i>The Umbrella Academy</i>	S3E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Charlene "Charlie" Hubble	<i>Reacher</i>	S1E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Chase Sikorski	<i>Inventing Anna</i>	S1E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Cheryl Hamlin	<i>Better Call Saul</i>	S6E6	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Chozen Toguchi	<i>Cobra Kai</i>	S5E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Cinta Kaz	<i>Andor</i>	S1E4	TV episode (streaming original series)
Crazy Saetang	<i>The Terminal List</i>	S1E6	TV episode (streaming original series)
Dara Miglani	<i>Law & Order: SVU</i>	S23E19	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Devon Lee	<i>Cobra Kai</i>	S5E6	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Dr. Aria Gupta	<i>Manifest</i>	S4E8	TV episode (streaming original series)
Dr. Ashmani	<i>Dead to Me</i>	S3E4	TV episode (streaming original series)
Dr. Benson Kwan	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	S19E1	TV episode (streaming acquired series)

Character Name	Title	Episode	Film or TV (original vs. acquired)
Dr. Howie Young	<i>Sweet Magnolias</i>	S2E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Dr. Mabel Tseng	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	S18E2	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Dr. Michelle Lin	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	S18E10	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Dr. Mika Yasuda	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	S19E1	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Dr. Reza Khan	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	S18E4	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Drea Mikami	<i>Manifest</i>	S4E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Edwina Sharma	<i>Bridgerton</i>	S2E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Erica	<i>Grace and Frankie</i>	S7E6	TV episode (streaming original series)
Ethan Spiller	<i>The White Lotus</i>	S2E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Etienne	<i>Emily in Paris</i>	S3E1	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Fate Maiden	<i>The Sandman</i>	S1E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Fate Mother	<i>The Sandman</i>	S1E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Fennec Shand	<i>The Book of Boba Fett</i>	S1E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Fifth Brother	<i>Obi-Wan Kenobi</i>	S1E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Gia	<i>All American</i>	S5E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Grace Wharton	<i>Sweet Magnolias</i>	S2E5	TV episode (streaming original series)
Haja Estree	<i>Obi-Wan Kenobi</i>	S1E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Henry Kim	<i>Manifest</i>	S4E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Hubert Wong	<i>The Simpsons</i>	S34E9	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Jaymee	<i>All American</i>	S4E7	TV episode (streaming original series)
Jedi Youngling	<i>Obi-Wan Kenobi</i>	S1E1	TV episode (streaming original series)

Character Name	Title	Episode	Film or TV (original vs. acquired)
Jin	<i>Turning Red</i>	NA	Film
Jo	<i>Better Call Saul</i>	S6E2	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Josh Wallace	<i>In the Dark</i>	S4E1	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Karen	<i>Dead To Me</i>	S3E7	TV episode (streaming original series)
Kathani 'Kate' Sharma	<i>Bridgerton</i>	S2E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Katie Buranek	<i>The Terminal List</i>	S1E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Kim Da-Eun	<i>Cobra Kai</i>	S5E6	TV episode (streaming original series)
Kimiko Miyashiro	<i>The Boys</i>	S3E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Konerak Sinthasomphone	<i>Dahmer</i>	S1E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Kyler Park	<i>Cobra Kai</i>	S5E4	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Lady Eaton	<i>Bridgerton</i>	S2E7	TV episode (streaming original series)
Lady Mary Sharma	<i>Bridgerton</i>	S2E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Lila Pitts	<i>The Umbrella Academy</i>	S3E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Lily	<i>Sweet Magnolias</i>	S2E5	TV episode (streaming original series)
Lucy Hubble	<i>Reacher</i>	S1E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Malva	<i>The Rings of Power</i>	S1E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Mei	<i>The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel</i>	S4E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Mei	<i>The Walking Dead</i>	S11E10	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Meilin (Mei-mei) Lee	<i>Turning Red</i>	NA	Film
Mindy Chen	<i>Emily In Paris</i>	S3E1	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Ming	<i>Turning Red</i>	NA	Film

Character Name	Title	Episode	Film or TV (original vs. acquired)
Monica Dutton	<i>Yellowstone</i>	S4E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Mr. Kim	<i>South Park</i>	S25E3	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Mrs. Nguyen	<i>Better Call Saul</i>	S6E4	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Mysaria	<i>House of the Dragon</i>	S1E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Nathaniel	<i>Cobra Kai</i>	S5E10	TV episode (streaming original series)
Nick Blaine	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	S5E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Nina Lin	<i>Only Murders in the Building</i>	S2E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Nisha Singh	<i>Law & Order: SVU</i>	S24E4	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Nurse Marilu	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	S19E6	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Officer Eric Tran	<i>Law & Order: SVU</i>	S23E7	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Pastor Wayne	<i>Dead to Me</i>	S3E4	TV episode (streaming original series)
Priya	<i>Turning Red</i>	NA	Film
Quarter	<i>Pieces of Her</i>	S1E6	TV episode (streaming original series)
Rav Singh	<i>Law & Order: SVU</i>	S24E4	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Saanvi Bahl	<i>Manifest</i>	S4E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Salman Paak	<i>Andor</i>	S1E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Sayamone Sinthasomphone	<i>Dahmer</i>	S1E7	TV episode (streaming original series)
Somdy Sinthasomphone	<i>Dahmer</i>	S1E5	TV episode (streaming original series)
Somsack Sinthasomphone	<i>Dahmer</i>	S1E5	TV episode (streaming original series)
Southone Sinthasomphone	<i>Dahmer</i>	S1E5	TV episode (streaming original series)
Stephanie (Shira)	<i>The Walking Dead</i>	S11E11	TV episode (streaming acquired series)

Character Name	Title	Episode	Film or TV (original vs. acquired)
Sully	<i>Obi-Wan Kenobi</i>	S1E4	TV episode (streaming original series)
Superfan Grant	<i>Only Murders in the Building</i>	S2E5	TV episode (streaming original series)
Suzanne Brewer	<i>The Gray Man</i>	NA	Film
Tala Durith	<i>Obi-Wan Kenobi</i>	S1E3	TV episode (streaming original series)
Tally Hubble	<i>Reacher</i>	S1E2	TV episode (streaming original series)
Tanya Cruz	<i>The Lincoln Lawyer</i>	S1e5	TV episode (streaming original series)
Theo	<i>The Rings of Power</i>	S1E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Three	<i>Stranger Things</i>	S4E6	TV episode (streaming original series)
Tomi	<i>The Walking Dead</i>	S11E10	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Tyler	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	S5E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Tyler Green	<i>Criminal Minds</i>	S16E3	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Vicky	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	S5E1	TV episode (streaming original series)
Viola Goto	<i>Better Call Saul</i>	S6E5	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Wujing	<i>The Blacklist</i>	S9E22	TV episode (streaming acquired series)
Yumiko	<i>The Walking Dead</i>	S11E1	TV episode (streaming acquired series)

Victoria Sawal as Tyler in
The Handmaid's Tale

TABLE 3: CONTENT ANALYSIS CODEBOOK AND RELIABILITY

Episode Item	Description	Alpha
Words Per Sentence	What is the words per sentence ratio of the episode?	0.92
Syllables Per Word	What is the syllables per word ratio of the episode?	0.90
Period Piece	When does this episode primarily take place?	0.67
Word Count	What is the word count of the transcript for this episode?	0.99
Asian Writers	How many Asian writers worked on this episode?	0.91
Asian EP's	How many Asian executive producers worked on this episode?	0.91
Asian Directors	How many Asian directors worked on this episode?	0.91
Asian characters	How many Asian characters are in this episode?	0.91
Character Item	Description	Alpha
Queer	Is there clear evidence that communicates to the audience that this character is lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or queer?	NA
Trans	Is there clear evidence that suggests to the audience that this is a trans character? (M to F, or F to M)	NA
Non-binary	Is there clear evidence that suggests to the audience that this is a non-binary character?	NA
Age	What is the age the character is primarily shown to be?	0.65
Skinny	Is this character thin/skinny?	NA
Skin Tone	What is the apparent skin tone of this character?	0.67
Role Size	What is the role size of this character?	1.00
Speaks English	Does this character speak English at any point?	0.65
Speaks With Accent	Does this character mostly speak with a non-US accent?	0.78
Nationality	Is this character associated with at least one country or nationality other than the United States?	0.65
Child Of Immigrant	Do we learn that this character's parent(s) was/were born somewhere other than the US?	NA
Valence/Sympathetic	Is this character positively or negatively valenced?	0.55
Class	How would you characterize this character's socio-economic status?	0.64

Job	Does this episode provide any indicators of the character's occupation, or lack thereof?	0.70
Education Status	Do we learn anything about this character's educational achievements?	0.78
Words Per Sentence	What is the words per sentence ratio of this character?	0.91
Syllables Per Word	Character's average syllables per word:	0.91
Mental Health	Is this character referred to as having a mental health condition?	NA
Addict	Is this character referred to as having an addiction to a controlled substance?	NA
Gender	What is the apparent gender identity of the character?	0.91
Word Count C	How many words does this character speak in the episode?	0.91
Relationship Status/Love Interest	Is this character in a romantic relationship with or love interest of another character?	1.00
Martial Arts	Does this character disclose or demonstrate any firsthand experience with Asian martial arts?	1.00
Violence	Do we see this character commit any act of physical violence?	0.70
Victim	Is this character shown to be a victim of physical violence?	1.00
Mafia	Is there any evidence suggesting that this character belongs to an organized crime group?	0.50
Talks To Another Asian Character	Does this character ever speak to another Asian character?	1.00
Driving Mistakes	Is this character shown making any driving mistakes?	NA
Tiger Mom	Does this character definitively capture the "tiger mom" stereotype?	NA
Himbo	Does this character definitively capture the "himbo" stereotype?	NA
Tragic Hero	Does this character definitively capture the "tragic hero" stereotype?	NA
Dies During Episode	Does this character die over the course of the episode?	NA
Race Centrality	What characterizes the character's centrality of race/ethnicity in the episode?	0.65
Race Defined	Is the character defined by Asian identity to the exclusion of other characteristics?	0.65
Asian Name	Does this character have a name typically associated with an Asian culture?	0.88
Foreign Language/Terms	Does this character use any non-English language?	1.00

APPENDIX B: NATIONALITIES INCLUDED

The following list of countries and regions was determined using information publicly available from the Office of Immigration Statistics⁷⁰ and in consultation with Gold House. This list excludes MENA and Pasifika countries.

TABLE 4: COUNTRIES INCLUDED IN DETERMINATION OF ASIAN ACTORS

Country	Regional Categorization	Country	Regional Categorization
Bangladesh	South Asia	Malaysia	Southeast Asia
Bhutan	South Asia	Maldives	South Asia
Brunei	Southeast Asia	Mongolia	East Asia
Burma	Southeast Asia	Nepal	South Asia
Cambodia	Southeast Asia	North Korea	East Asia
China	East Asia	Pakistan	South Asia
East Timor	Southeast Asia	Philippines	Southeast Asia
Hong Kong	East Asian	Singapore	Southeast Asia
India	South Asia	South Korea	East Asia
Indonesia	Southeast Asia	Sri Lanka	South Asia
Japan	East Asia	Taiwan	East Asia
Laos	Southeast Asia	Thailand	Southeast Asia
Macau	East Asia	Vietnam	Southeast Asia

70 **Geographic regions.** Geographic Regions | Homeland Security. (2022, October 26). <https://www.dhs.gov/geographic-regions>



Ritu Arya as Lila Pitts in
The Umbrella Academy

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On the cover (clockwise): Rosalie Chiang as Meilin (voice) in *Turning Red*; Will Sharpe as Ethan Spiller in *The White Lotus*; Yuji Okumoto as Chozen Toguchi in *Cobra Kai*; Harry Shum Jr. as Benson Kwan in *Grey's Anatomy*; Parveen Kaur as Saanvi Bahl in *Manifest*; Ashley Jini Park as Mindy Chen in *Emily in Paris*; and Katrina Rosita as Tanya Cruz in *The Lincoln Lawyer*.