

Critic's Choice?

Gender and Race/Ethnicity of Film Reviewers Across 100 Top Films of 2017

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with assistance from

Ariana Case

June 2018

USC Annenberg
Inclusion Initiative

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MOVIE REVIEWERS ARE MAINLY WHITE AND MALE

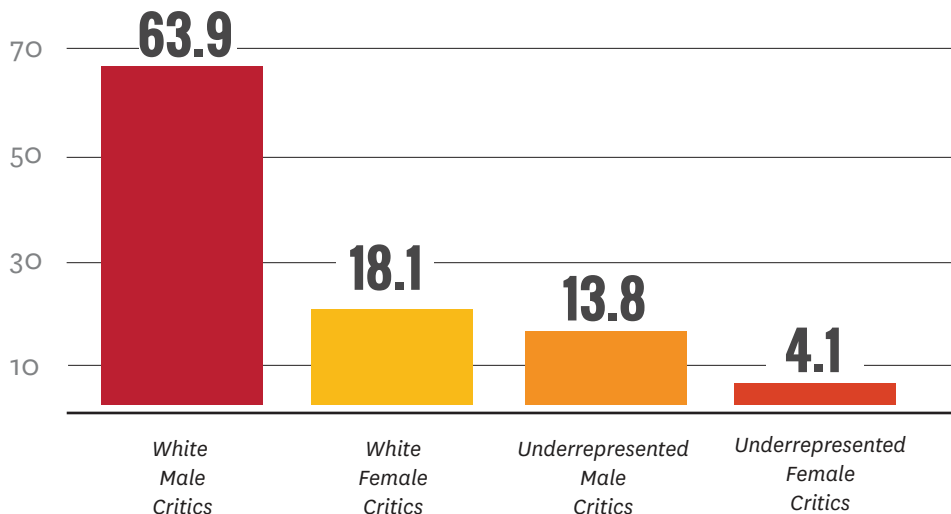
Of the 100 top films in 2017...

	MALES	FEMALES	NOT UNDER-REPRESENTED	UNDER-REPRESENTED
ALL CRITICS	77.8%	22.2%	82%	18%
TOP CRITICS	76%	24%	88.8%	11.2%

WOMEN OF COLOR ARE WRITTEN OFF AS CRITICS

GENDER AND RACE OF FILM REVIEWERS ACROSS THE 100 TOP FILMS OF 2017

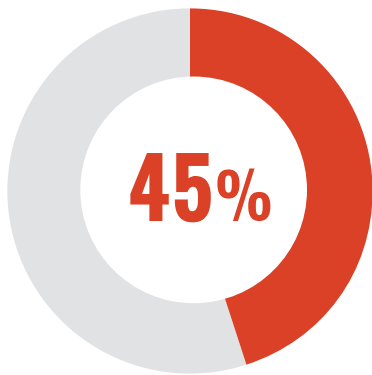
in percentages



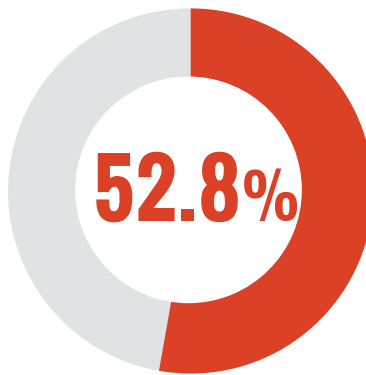
59.8
PERCENTAGE POINT
DECLINE
BETWEEN WHITE MALES
AND FEMALES OF
COLOR WRITING
FILM REVIEWS

INVISIBILITY OF UNDERREPRESENTED WOMEN AS CRITICS

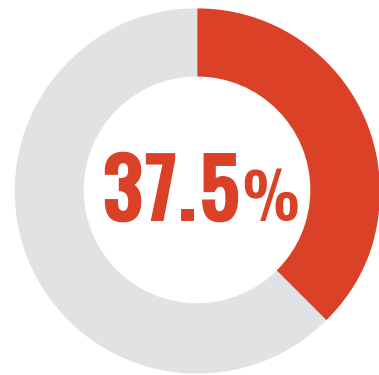
Percentage of films *missing* underrepresented female critics out of...



100 TOP-GROSSING
FILMS



36 FEMALE-DRIVEN
FILMS



24 FILMS WITH
UNDERREPRESENTED LEADS

UNDERREPRESENTED FEMALES ARE OUTNUMBERED AS TOP CRITICS

THE RATIO OF WHITE MALE TOP CRITICS TO
UNDERREPRESENTED FEMALE TOP CRITICS IS NEARLY

27 TO 1

DEMOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES EXIST AMONG CRITICS

Percentage of individual critics across 100 top-grossing films by demographic background



53.2%
ARE
WHITE
MALES



23%
ARE
WHITE
FEMALES



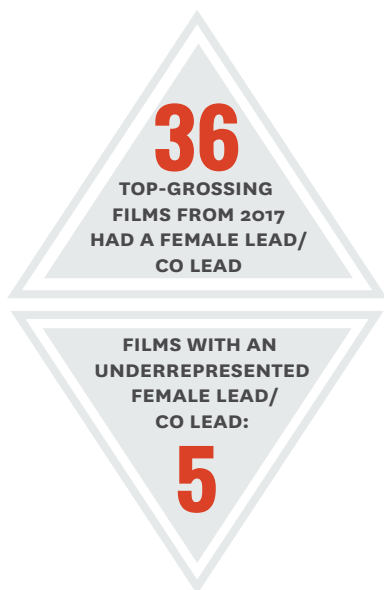
14.8%
ARE
UNDERREPRESENTED
MALES



8.9%
ARE
UNDERREPRESENTED
FEMALES

ARE FEMALE-DRIVEN FILMS REVIEWED BY FEMALE CRITICS?

Percentage of female reviewers by film

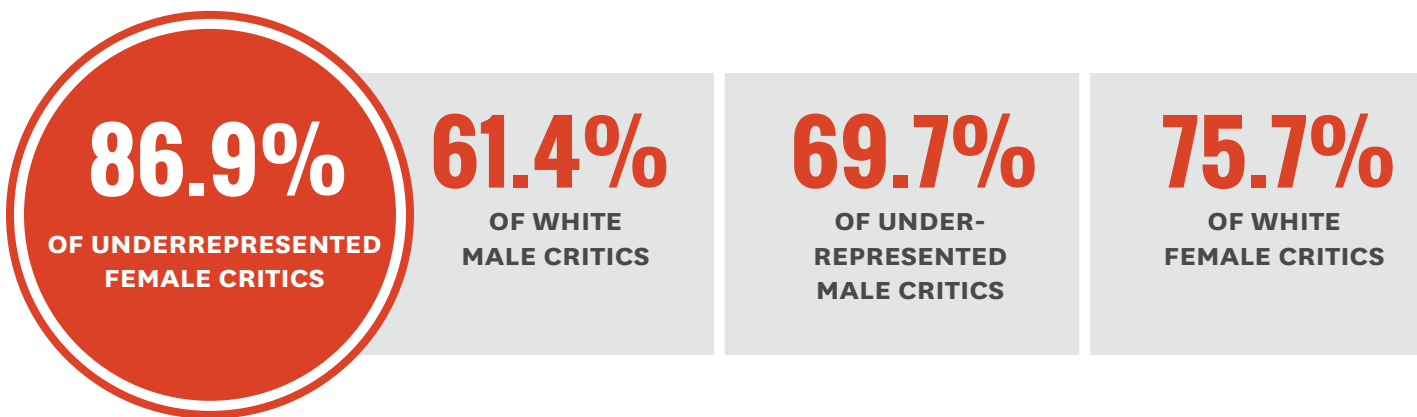


All Critics	% of females	Top Critics	% of females
Everything, Everything	39.8%	My Little Pony: The Movie	63.6%
Girls Trip*	39%	Girls Trip*	61.8%
Pitch Perfect 3	37.3%	Everything, Everything	54.5%
A Bad Moms Christmas	37%	A Bad Moms Christmas	51.9%
Home Again	36.7%	Home Again	44.8%
Leap!	34.6%	Wonder Woman	44.2%
My Little Pony: The Movie*	34.5%	Pitch Perfect 3	42.3%
Rough Night	33.3%	Fifty Shades Darker	40%
Fifty Shades Darker	32.8%	Rough Night	38.2%
Beauty and the Beast	31.6%	Beauty and the Beast	36%
Victoria and Abdul	30.7%	Leap!	35%

*=films with at least 10% underrepresented female reviewers.

UNDERREPRESENTED FEMALES WRITE FEWER FILM REVIEWS

Percentage of critics writing one to 10 film reviews across 100 top-grossing movies...



TAKE ACTION TO IMPROVE INCLUSION AMONG CRITICS



Critic's Choice? Gender and Race/Ethnicity of Film Reviewers Across 100 Top Films of 2017

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The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, the leading global think tank studying issues of inequality in entertainment, assessed the demographic characteristics of film reviewers of popular motion picture content. Using information pulled from Rotten Tomatoes, the aim of this study was to assess the gender and race/ethnicity of reviewers across the 100 top domestic films of 2017. More than 1,600 critics appraised the sample of 100 movies generating over 19,500 reviews. The profile of critics (all, Top) was highlighted by gender and/or race/ethnicity. We also examine the diversity of critics reviewing each movie with female or underrepresented leads at the center. The report concludes with a call for Rotten Tomatoes to address disparities in critics' representation, as well as solutions for intersectional change in the movie criticism space, journalism and film school training, as well as the entertainment industry.

Key Findings

All Critics. Across the 100 top movies of 2017 and 19,559 reviews, male critics authored 77.8% of reviews and female critics authored 22.2%. This translates into a gender ratio of 3.5 male reviewers to every 1 female.

White critics authored 82% of reviews whereas critics from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups authored 18%. This point statistic is substantially below (-20.7 percentage points) U.S. Census, where individuals from underrepresented groups clock in at 38.7% of the population.

Looking at reviews through an intersectional lens, White male critics wrote substantially more reviews (63.9%) than their White female (18.1%) or underrepresented male (13.8%) peers. Underrepresented female critics only wrote 4.1% of the sample. The ratio of White women's reviews to those of their underrepresented female counterparts was 4.4 to 1.

Given that reviewers often evaluate multiple films in the sample, we were also interested in the total number of unique or individual film *critics*. Just over two-thirds of individual critics were males (68.3%) and 31.7% were females. Of those ascertained for race/ethnicity, a full 76.3% of all critics were White and 23.7% were from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds (UR). The majority of all critics were White males (53.2%) followed by White females (23%), UR males (14.8%), and then UR females (8.9%).

The average number of reviews written across the 100 top films varied by critic gender and underrepresented status. On average, White male critics wrote more reviews for this year (14.3) than did underrepresented male critics (11.1) and White female critics (9.4). Underrepresented female critics – on average – only wrote 5.6 reviews.

Not one of the 100 top movies of 2017 had a gender-balanced critics pool reviewing the movie. This is true of both male and female driven story lines. Of those movies with female leads, 69.4% had a critics corps with less than 30% women. *Everything, Everything* had the highest percentage of female critics (39.8%). Only two female-driven films featured women of color reviewing in double-digit percentages: 11.8% of critics reviewing *Girls Trip* were women of color and 10.3% of those reviewing *My Little Pony*.

Focusing on movies with underrepresented leads ($n=24$), not one film featured diverse critics at proportional representation to the U.S. Census. The movie that came the closest was *How to Be a Latin Lover*, with 34.6% underrepresented critics and 15.4% women of color. Most films ($n=15$) had underrepresented critics accounting for less than a fifth of all reviewers. The percentage of women of color reviewing all 24 films with underrepresented leads or co leads was in the single digits, save two movies.

Top Critics. As designated by Rotten Tomatoes, Top critics penned a total of 3,359 reviews across the sample of 100 movies, with 76% written by males and 24% written by females. The gender ratio of male to female Top critics was 3.2 to 1. White critics' reviews (88.8%) also outnumbered those by critics from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (11.2%), where the ratio was 7.9 to 1.

Two-thirds of reviews by Top critics were written by White males (67.3%), with less than one-quarter (21.5%) composed by White women, 8.7% by underrepresented males, and a mere 2.5% by underrepresented females. White male critics were writing top film reviews at a rate of *nearly 27 times* their underrepresented female counterparts.

Females comprised less than a third of all top reviewers (32.8%). Males accounted for over two-thirds of Top critics (67.2%). Of these 290 Top critics, 84.1% were White and 15.9% were from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group. Crossing gender and race/ethnicity revealed that 59.7% of Top critics were White males, 24.5% were White females, 8.3% were underrepresented females, and 7.6% were underrepresented males.

Top White male critics wrote—on average—13.1 reviews, which is similar to the average for underrepresented male critics (13.2). White women authored fewer average reviews (10.2), and underrepresented female critics wrote on average just 3.5 reviews across the 100 most popular movies in 2017.

Of female-driven films, only four (11.1%) reached proportional or over representation of top female reviewers. Put differently, women were half or more of the Top critics for four female-driven movies. Four additional films feature 40% or more female reviewers who were Top critics. Nineteen movies with girls and/or women at the center were not reviewed by any Top critic who was an underrepresented female (52.8%)! Looking to stories with underrepresented lead actors, not one movie featured a critic's pool with proportional representation to U.S. Census. The highest proportion of UR critics were found on three films, *Tyler Perry's Boo 2: A Madea Halloween*, *How to be a Latin Lover*, and *Smurfs: The Lost Village*. Nine of the 24 films (37.5%) with underrepresented leads did not have one woman of color reviewing the storyline.

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All Critics

What is the demographic profile of movie critics reviewing the 100 top-grossing films of 2017? To answer this question, we first examined the gender of critics associated with each **review** across the 100 top films. A total of 19,562 reviews were extracted from Rotten Tomatoes in March of 2018 and gender was ascertained for all but three critics. Of these 19,559 reviews, males authored 77.8% ($n=15,216$) and females authored 22.2% ($n=4,343$). This translates into a gender ratio of 3.5 male reviewers to every 1 female (see Table 1). This point statistic is surprisingly low given that females represent roughly half of the U.S. population and buy 50% of the movie tickets in North America.⁴

Table 1
Critics' Demographic Characteristics Across All Film Reviews

Measure	Male Critics	Female Critics	White Critics	UR Critics
% of reviews written by	77.8%	22.2%	82%	18%
Total	15,216	4,343	15,914	3,490
Ratio	3.5 to 1		4.5 to 1	

Turning to race/ethnicity, a total of 19,404 reviews were coded for whether the author was from an underrepresented background. The number is lower than that reported above as 158 reviews were written by critics whose race/ethnicity was not determinable. Of those critics whose race/ethnicity was assessed, a full 82% of all reviews were penned by White authors and 18% were penned by underrepresented authors (see Table 1). This point statistic is substantially below both U.S. Census (-20.7 percentage points), where individuals from underrepresented groups clock in at 38.7% of the population, and the 45% of movie ticket buyers in North America who are from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds.⁵

What is missing from Table 1 is an intersectional analysis of gender **and** underrepresented status of critics' reviews. This is particularly important, as Hollywood routinely marginalizes women of color in a variety of on screen and behind the camera positions.⁶ Table 2 illuminates that this problem extends to critics as well. In comparison to

their peers, underrepresented female critics (4.1%) had the most limited access and opportunity to review popular movies. Not surprisingly, White male critics (63.9%) wrote the most reviews followed by White female critics (18.1%) and UR male critics (13.8%). The ratio of White women's reviews to those of their underrepresented female counterparts was 4.4 to 1.

Table 2
Intersection of Demographic Characteristics of Critics Across All Film Reviews

Measure	Males	Females	Total
White Critics' Reviews	63.9% ($n=12,396$)	18.1% ($n=3,518$)	15,914
UR Critics' Reviews	13.8% ($n=2,685$)	4.1% ($n=805$)	3,490
Total	15,081	4,323	19,404

Given that reviewers often evaluate multiple films in the sample, we were also interested in the total number of unique film *critics*. The total number of reviews in the sample could be attributed to 1,651 individuals. Two of the reviews were written by anonymous contributors and another critic's gender was not ascertainable. After removing these three cases, 1,648 unique critics comprised the sample.

By gender, just over two thirds of the individual critics were males (68.3%, $n=1,125$) and 31.7% were females ($n=523$). For race/ethnicity, a total of 24 critics' underrepresented status could not be determined. Of those ascertained ($n=1,627$), a full 76.3% ($n=1,241$) of all critics were White and 23.7% ($n=386$) were from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics of Individual Film Critics

Measure	Male Critics	Female Critics	White Critics	UR Critics
% of reviews written by	68.3%	31.7%	76.3%	23.7%
Total	1,125	523	1,241	386
Ratio	2.1 to 1		3.2 to 1	

When crossing gender *and* underrepresented status, a familiar story emerges. The majority of all critics were White males (53.2%, $n=866$) followed by White females (23%, $n=375$), UR males (14.8%, $n=241$), and then UR females (8.9%, $n=145$). Clearly, at both the review level and critic level, these findings show that White male critics get and/or take far more opportunities to review popular films than their underrepresented and/or female counterparts.

To examine this more closely, we looked at descriptive statistics (i.e., average number of reviews written, median of review distribution, modal number of reviews) of critics' reviews by demographic attributes. Given that the intersection of gender *and* underrepresented status matters, we present fully crossed findings in Table 4. When compared to underrepresented males and White females, White male critics wrote more reviews – on average – and underrepresented females wrote fewer. The midpoint of the distribution (50th percentile) was 6 reviews for White males, 5 for UR males, 3 for White females, and 2 for UR females. The mode, or the most frequent number of reviews penned by critics across the 100 top films of 2017, was 1! It must be noted that the mode did not differ by gender and/or underrepresented status.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of All Film Reviews by Critics' Demographics

Descriptive Statistics	White Male Critics	UR Male Critics	White Female Critics	UR Female Critics
Average # of reviews written	14.3	11.1	9.4	5.6
Median # of reviews written (50th Percentile)	6	5	3	2
Modal # of reviews written	1	1	1	1
Range of reviews across 100 movies	1-98	1-70	1-79	1-42
Sample Size	<i>n</i> =866	<i>n</i> =241	<i>n</i> =375	<i>n</i> =145

Assessing exactly how many reviews critics write by demographic attributes was tackled next. Table 5 chunks the total number of reviews by critics' gender *and* underrepresented status in increments of 10. Given how few critics wrote prolifically across the 100 top film space, the last row collapses the total number of reviews at greater than 50. As depicted in Table 5, the vast majority of critics only penned between 1 and 10 reviews across the 100 top movies of 2017. A full 87% of underrepresented female critics wrote only 10 or fewer reviews across the most popular films of 2017. The ratio of White male critics to underrepresented female critics writing 41 or more reviews last year across the 100 top movies was 96 to 1.

Table 5
Frequency of Film Critics Reviews by Gender & Underrepresented Status

Number of Reviews	White Male Critics	UR Male Critics	White Female Critics	UR Female Critics
1-10 Reviews	61.4% (<i>n</i> =532)	69.7% (<i>n</i> =168)	75.7% (<i>n</i> =284)	86.9% (<i>n</i> =126)
11-20 Reviews	14% (<i>n</i> =121)	11.2% (<i>n</i> =27)	10.4% (<i>n</i> =39)	7.6% (<i>n</i> =11)
21-30 Reviews	8.2% (<i>n</i> =71)	7.5% (<i>n</i> =18)	6.4% (<i>n</i> =24)	2.8% (<i>n</i> =4)
31-40 Reviews	5.3% (<i>n</i> =46)	6.2% (<i>n</i> =15)	2.4% (<i>n</i> =9)	2.1% (<i>n</i> =3)
41-50 Reviews	4.6% (<i>n</i> =40)	2.1% (<i>n</i> =5)	1.3% (<i>n</i> =5)	<1% (<i>n</i> =1)
>50 Reviews	6.5% (<i>n</i> =56)	3.3% (<i>n</i> =8)	3.7% (<i>n</i> =14)	0
Total	866	241	375	145

Up until this point, we have simply looked at critics overall demographic trends. Now, we pair attributes of critics with the content of the 100 top films of 2017. First, we examined the number and percentage of female critics reviewing movies with female leads. A female driven movie was one with a girl or woman as the lead/co lead or an ensemble cast with females accounting for 50% or more of the principal actors. A total of 36 out of 100 movies met this criteria. For these films, we then looked at the number and percentage of female critics as well as the proportion of critics that were women of color.

A few trends emerged which are shown in Appendix B. First, not one female driven film in the sample featured a gender balanced critics' pool. Matter of fact, the highest percentage of female critics reviewing a film was 39.8% (*Everything, Everything*). Second, the majority of movies (69.4%) with girls or women at the center only featured critics' corps with less than 30% women. Third, only two of the female driven films featured female critics of color in double digit percentages. To illustrate, in *Girls Trip*, women of color comprised 11.8% of the total critics' pool and *My Little Pony* 10.3%. Similar to earlier analyses, female critics from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups are not given the same access and opportunity to review as their White female peers.

Now, we turn our attention to movies with underrepresented leads. Using the same approach as above, a total of 24 movies featured a racial/ethnic lead or co lead driving the story or an ensemble cast with 40% or more actors from an underrepresented background. It should be noted that all leading actors – not characters – were evaluated for race/ethnicity. This also included voice over performers in animated content (Demi Lovato in *Smurfs: The Lost Village*). As shown in Appendix C, not one film featured critics at proportional representation to the U.S. Census (38.7%). The film with the highest percentage of underrepresented critics (34.6%) and women of color (15.4%) was *How to Be a Latin Lover*. Most films ($n=15$) had UR critics account for less than a fifth of all reviewers. The percentage of women of color reviewing all films with underrepresented leads or co leads was in the single digits, save two.

In sum, the world of film criticism is highly skewed when it comes to gender and underrepresented status of reviewers across the 100 top movies of 2017. White male critics outperform their peers on every measure, even when it comes to female centric fare and storylines with underrepresented leads and co leads. While these patterns pertain to all reviews across the 100 top movies, the question remains as to whether the demographic profile is better or worse among “Top” critics. This is the focus of the next section of the paper.

Top Critics

In addition to all critics, we were interested in the demographic profile of Top critics, as designated by Rotten Tomatoes, reviewing the 100 most profitable films of 2017. Top critics penned a total of 3,359 reviews, with 76% ($n=2,553$) written by males and 24% ($n=806$) written by females (see Table 8). The gender ratio of male to female Top critics was 3.2 to 1. White critics’ reviews (88.8%) also outnumbered those by critics from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (11.2%), where the ratio was 7.9 to 1.

Table 8
Top Critics’ Demographic Characteristics Across Film Reviews

Measure	Male Critics	Female Critics	White Critics	UR Critics
% of reviews written by	76%	24%	88.8%	11.2%
Total	2,553	806	2,984	375
Ratio	3.2 to 1		7.9 to 1	

An intersectional lens was once again applied to this analysis, by examining the influence of both gender and race on review frequency. Two-thirds of reviews by Top critics were written by White males (67.3%), with less than one-quarter (21.5%) composed by White women, 8.7% by underrepresented males, and a mere 2.5% by underrepresented females. White male critics were writing reviews of top films at a rate of *nearly 27 times* their underrepresented female counterparts. See Table 9.

Table 9
Intersection of Demographic Characteristics of Top Critics Across Film Reviews

Measure	Males	Females	Total
White Critics’ Reviews	67.3% ($n=2,262$)	21.5% ($n=722$)	2,984
UR Critics’ Reviews	8.7% ($n=291$)	2.5% ($n=84$)	375
Total	2,553	806	3,359

The reviews can be attributed to a total pool of 290 Top critics. As shown in Table 10, females comprised less than a third of all top reviewers (32.8%, $n=95$). Males accounted for over two-thirds of Top critics (67.2%, $n=195$). Of these 290 Top critics, 84.1% ($n=244$) were White and 15.9% ($n=46$) were from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group. Crossing gender and race/ethnicity revealed that 59.7% ($n=173$) of Top critics were White males, 24.5% ($n=71$) were White females, 8.3% were underrepresented females ($n=24$), and 7.6% ($n=22$) were underrepresented males.

Table 10
Demographic Characteristics of Individual Top Critics

Measure	Male Critics	Female Critics	White Critics	UR Critics
% of reviews written by	67.2%	32.8%	84.1%	15.9%
Total	195	95	244	46
Ratio	2.1 to 1		5.3 to 1	

Beyond frequency, we also examined several measures related to how often Top critics authored film reviews. First, we examined the average number of reviews written by Top critics. Gender was related to the average frequency of reviews and did not deviate from the patterns observed above with all critics. Top White male critics wrote -- on average -- 13.1 reviews, which is similar to the average for underrepresented male critics. White women authored fewer average reviews (10.2), and underrepresented female critics wrote on average just 3.5 reviews across the 100 most popular movies in 2017. Table 11 also reveals the range of reviews crafted by Top critics across demographic categories.

Table 11
Descriptive Statistics of Film Reviews by Top Critics' Demographics

Measures	White Male Critics	UR Male Critics	White Female Critics	UR Female Critics
Average # of reviews written	13.1	13.2	10.2	3.5
Median # of reviews written (50th Percentile)	5	2.5	5	1.5
Modal # of reviews written	1	1	1	1
Range	1-76	1-69	1-74	1-28
Sample Size	$n=173$	$n=22$	$n=71$	$n=24$

We also examined how many reviews each Top critic wrote across the sample by gender and underrepresented status. As shown in Table 12, underrepresented female Top critics were far more likely than any other group to author 10 or fewer top-grossing movie reviews across the 100 most popular films of 2017. White females were more likely than other groups to write 11 to 20 reviews. Few differences emerged across the rest of the sample, with one exception. The individuals most likely to write 50 or more reviews were White males.

Table 12
Frequency of Film Reviews by Top Critics' Demographics

Number of Reviews	White Male Critics	UR Male Critics	White Female Critics	UR Female Critics
1-10 Reviews	66.5% (n=115)	68.2% (n=15)	67.6% (n=48)	95.8% (n=23)
11-20 Reviews	9.2% (n=16)	4.5% (n=1)	16.9% (n=12)	0
21-30 Reviews	10.4% (n=18)	9.1% (n=2)	9.9% (n=7)	4.2% (n=1)
31-40 Reviews	4.6% (n=8)	9.1% (n=2)	2.8% (n=2)	0
41-50 Reviews	2.3% (n=4)	4.5% (n=1)	1.4% (n=1)	0
>50 Reviews	6.9% (n=12)	4.5% (n=1)	1.4% (n=1)	0
Total	173	22	71	24

To understand the assignments Top critics receive, we again examined the proportion of female top reviewers for each movie with a female lead or co-lead, or with an ensemble cast of which was at least 50% female across the sample. Appendix B reveals that four of the 36 films (11.1%) reach proportional or over representation of top female reviewers. Four additional films feature 40% or more female reviewers who were Top critics. These findings differ from the results regarding all reviews, where no film had proportional representation of female reviewers. Turning to the proportion of women of color reviewing female-driven movies, the picture becomes bleaker. The highest proportion and number of females of color among Top critics was for the film *Girls Trip* (11.8%, n=4). Nineteen movies were not reviewed by any Top critics who were underrepresented females!

Turning to films driven by actors from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (see Appendix C), not one movie featured critics at proportional representation to U.S. Census (~40%). The three films with the highest percentage of underrepresented critics were *Tyler Perry's Boo 2: A Madea Halloween* (28.6%), *How to be a Latin Lover* (25%), and *Smurfs: The Lost Village* (25%). Nine of the 24 films (37.5%) with underrepresented leads did not have one woman of color reviewing the storyline.

The results from this section reveal that among the Top critics designated by Rotten Tomatoes, women and people of color were outnumbered. In particular, women of color—and their perspectives on popular films—were rare. Just 84 reviews across the 100 top-grossing movies were authored by underrepresented women, and only 24 women of color were designated as Top critics. While these results mirror those for all critics, the position that Top critics hold as cultural influencers means that the ideas, voices, and reactions of women and people of color are seldom part of the conversation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the gender and underrepresented status of film critics across the 100 top-grossing movies of 2017. In this section, we review the major findings from the study and offer recommendations for change.

Movie Critics are Overwhelmingly Male and White

On screen and behind the camera in film, Hollywood is predominantly “pale and male.”⁷ The findings in the current study reveal that this is true of film critics as well. Over three-quarters (77.8%) of all film reviews for the top 100 movies of 2017 were written by male critics, and 82% were authored by White individuals. In contrast, 22.2% of reviews were composed by females and 18% by underrepresented critics. In total, White male critics

crafted nearly two-thirds (63.9%) of all the film reviews in our sample (compared to 18.1% by White females, 13.8% by underrepresented males, and 4.1% by underrepresented females) and represented 53.2% of the more than 1,600 individual critics we evaluated. These findings were mirrored among the Top critics in our sample, where the ratio of White male reviewers to underrepresented female reviewers was nearly 27 to 1.

The consequences of this skewed representation must be considered—what are the ramifications of having cultural storytelling produced and evaluated largely by individuals from the same demographic group? How does this perpetuate a worldview that may not be shared by the more diverse ticket-buying audience at the box office? While these questions cannot be answered in this study, they highlight the necessity of further work to understand how critical reviews differ based on the reviewers' demographic background.

Women of Color are Written Off as Critics

Women of color authored 4.1% of all film reviews across the 100 most popular movies of 2017, and a mere 2.5% of film reviews as Top critics. These women accounted for 8.9% of all individual critics, and 8.3% of Top critics. The dearth of underrepresented women is startling in its own right, but more so when considering the invisibility of women and girls of color on screen in film. We would expect that female reviewers from underrepresented backgrounds would be more likely to notice the absence or misrepresentation of women of color on screen. Yet, the very critics who might be attuned to these issues rarely review films—even films with women of color in leading roles. Understanding the barriers to access for underrepresented female critics and opening opportunities for their reviews to be included in review aggregators is essential to ensuring their voices are part of the conversation.

Female-Driven Films Lack Female Critics' Perspective

Of the 36 female-driven stories in the sample of 100 movies, not one featured proportional representation of women across all reviews. Looking more closely at Top critics, just four female-driven films featured 50% or more female reviewers. Not one underrepresented female Top critic reviewed nineteen of the 36 films with a female lead—this is over half of the female-driven films in the sample. These findings extend to underrepresented critics, as no films with leading characters from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds featured proportional representation of underrepresented reviewers. Once again, we would anticipate that stories built around underrepresented and/or female leads would be most likely to be reviewed by critics from these groups. While reviewers from various demographic backgrounds should have opportunities to review *all* films, their perspectives may be uniquely valuable to readers who care about the portrayal of women and people of color. When reviewers call attention to disparities in representation and stereotyping in storytelling alongside issues of craft, they alert audiences, storytellers, and studios to perennial problems in film. As the U.S. population grows more diverse, these audiences are crucial to studios' revenue. Ensuring equal access and opportunity in the review process is a key aspect of bringing change to the film industry itself.

Recommendations

Although the current level of representation among critics is skewed in favor of White males, the situation is not beyond change. One important method of creating change is for groups to set target inclusion goals and then work to meet them over two, four, or six years. Based on U.S. population figures⁸ the target inclusion goals for different groups are presented below. We will refer to this as the 30/30/20/20 plan, for convenience.

Table 13
Target Inclusion Goals for Critics

	White Male Critics	White Female Critics	UR Male Critics	UR Female Critics
Current Representation	63.9%	18.1%	13.8%	4.1%
Goal based on U.S. Population	30.1%	31%	19.1%	19.8%

In addition to setting goals, several entities can take concrete steps to implement solutions to increase the number of female and underrepresented critics. Here, we review those groups and the possible methods they could use to address the lack of women and people of color working as film reviewers.

Film Review Aggregator Sites

Sites such as Rotten Tomatoes, Metacritic, and other aggregators can address disparities in critic representation in a two primary ways. First, they can ensure parity in the critics they include in their rating summaries. Each site has an approval process whereby critics and reviews are included in the aggregated ratings. By examining the individuals the site approves, administrators and editorial directors can ensure balance in the overall ratings they provide. While Rotten Tomatoes may already attempt to include more women or people of color in their process,⁹ engaging in further efforts to court those writers to post to the site and including their thoughts in the average rating or “Tomatometer” is imperative.

Another option for sites is provide consumers with information regarding how many reviews for a film were authored by women and/or people of color, or even other communities (e.g., LGBTQIA, individuals with disabilities). Taking this step would reveal to site visitors whether the overall rating reflects a balanced viewpoint or skews toward White and/or male voices. This would allow consumers to understand how reviewer perceptions might influence how films are scored—especially films with female or underrepresented lead characters—and decide whether to view the movie as a result.

Professional Film Critics

Exact statistics on the workforce of critical reviewers are unclear and for women range from 55.3% of employed “news analysts, reporters, and correspondents” per the Bureau of Labor Statistics¹⁰ to 39.1% of the journalism workforce, according to a 2017 ASNE study.¹¹ Neither source provides specific demographics of individuals working specifically as reviewers or critics. Moreover, online news or film sites may not be included in these figures. To fully understand the diversity of the critics’ workforce, more information is needed. For instance, notable critics’ societies or associations could provide data on their membership. These groups could also consider how demographics, sexuality, or other factors could affect reviews, and provide insight to members on issues of inclusion. Critics’ societies should investigate the path that individuals take to become critics, and how that may limit the participation of women and/or people of color from participating in the field. Outlets that publish reviews could examine their own review staff and determine whether they employ a balanced review team and assign film reviews in an equitable manner. Another solution is for external groups to provide resources that can promote fairness in critic assignments. For example, TIME’S UP is working on a tool to increase access for underrepresented critics and entertainment journalists. Thus, before reviews are posted on an aggregated site, news entities and critics societies can work to ensure that women and people of color have equal access to opportunities to publish their views.

Educational Institutions

Understanding the pipeline for new reviewers is crucial. One place to begin investigating how reviewers come to work for various publications is to look to the education process. For critics, this means examining both journalism and film schools. These institutions should investigate the enrollment of women and/or people of color in their programs, and make strides to increase the numbers as needed. Anecdotally, film schools in particular may have proportional enrollment with regard to gender.¹² Schools can identify outstanding students from these communities and engage resources in the form of scholarships, internships, and mentorships to support young potential critics. Moreover, instruction in both journalism and film schools should cover a variety of perspectives to offer the next generation of critics a window into film criticism that does not replicate a White or male-centric view of the field. Educating future critics around issues of diversity and representation is also vital, as these individuals can use their platform to draw attention to ongoing disparities on screen and behind the camera.

Entertainment Industry Practitioners

The consequences of online review aggregators for box office performance have been hotly debated in the popular press, particularly in 2017.¹³ The entertainment industry is both dependent on the existence of these sites and controls reviewer access to their films. Studios and distributors can strive for proportional representation of reviewers who access their content before a film's theatrical debut. They can also look outside the critics represented on Rotten Tomatoes or Metacritic to help cultivate new voices and new perspectives. Sites like CherryPicks offer reviews that focus on female critics in specific. Companies could work with this and similar sites to identify and invite females and/or people of color to review movies. By changing who has access to pre-release screenings, entertainment companies can help create change in the profile of who reviews their films. This also applies to film festivals and other events where films are evaluated. Ensuring that critics have equal access to these venues is a crucial way to expand the voices and perspectives commenting on entertainment. As the demographics of box office attendees continue to shift, entertainment companies can act to ensure that reviewers keep pace.

Limitations & Future Research

As with all research investigations, a few limitations must be noted. First, the demographic measures in the study are limited. The measure of underrepresented status in this study was that of *apparent* race/ethnicity, as judgments regarding underrepresented status were made by research team members. These individuals have been trained to assess racial/ethnic status as part of ongoing research work at the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, and in previous studies, we have illuminated that judgments about race/ethnicity are highly correlated ($r=.90$) with actual racial/ethnic information.¹⁴ Moreover, two full-time research staff from underrepresented backgrounds confirmed judgments to ensure accuracy. Future studies would benefit from access to authenticated information provided by critics on their racial/ethnic background, and potentially other demographic indicators that might influence their reviews. Beyond race/ethnicity, critic age, sexuality, and disability status were not evaluated. Our research reveals that on screen and behind the camera, these traits may influence who is able to work.¹⁵ These factors might also influence the nature of reviews and would be instructive to measure in future investigations.

A second limitation is that the study focused only on reviews posted on Rotten Tomatoes. As a review aggregator, Rotten Tomatoes captures most, but not necessarily all, of the universe of potential film reviews. Additionally, a small number of reviews were added after data collection was completed. Thus, current information displayed on

the site may not reflect what was captured for this study. Further, Rotten Tomatoes updates the critics whose work is posted on the site; the pool of critics whose work is included in this study may change in future years, or be different from those who were accredited in prior years. An over time comparison would be instructive to understand how Rotten Tomatoes' critics fluctuate from year to year.

Finally, the study focused only on the most popular films of 2017. This sample reflects our desire to examine films that will be seen by a large proportion of the population and which provide significant revenue to studios and distributors. It is possible, however, that critical reviews of less popular movies may feature a more balanced corps of critics. Researchers should investigate whether reviews of less profitable movies or those screening at festivals draw a higher proportion of female or underrepresented critics.

Beyond this report, additional questions must be answered. Initially, we must understand how review scores differ by gender and/or race/ethnicity of the critic. This will provide a window into how overall ratings for films may be influenced by the demographics of the critics' pool. A sentiment analysis of review content may also be worthwhile, to reveal how critics' language may vary by film and align with positive or negative trends. Sentiment analysis could also demonstrate how review aggregation sites group reviews into different categories and where flaws exist. Accompanying a study of this kind, research should focus on the relationship between critical reviews and box office performance, with a particular emphasis on the demographic breakdown of reviewers and how this might influence not only the overall rating of a film, but ultimately how a film performs when it is reviewed by individuals whose identity may align with or against a movie's protagonist. Our goal is to pursue investigations of this nature, with the intent of publishing our first investigation in the fall of 2018.

Film critics represent a unique portion of the entertainment ecosystem. Their reactions to storytelling may reflect popular thought, be highly idiosyncratic, and may even be contradictory. However, in the age of review aggregators and advance ticketing, reviewers may also have an outsized influence on audience behavior. This study reveals that the reviewers themselves bear only a slight resemblance to the demographics of ticket buyers. How widely critical opinions and appraisals deviate from audience reactions based on these demographic indicators remains to be answered. For now, it is clear that while the position of critics in entertainment is unique, the lack of women and people of color in the ranks of reviewers is no different than in the rest of Hollywood.

Acknowledgements

Our work is made possible by the generous support of our funders, including The Annenberg Foundation, The Pritzker Pucker Family Foundation, The Harnisch Foundation, The Jacquelyn & Gregory Zehner Foundation and individuals including Julie Parker Benello, Barbara Bridges, Ann Lovell, and Suzanne Lerner. We are also deeply appreciative of our Board of Advisors for their ongoing support.

Several individuals lent their insight to this project. Thank you to Brie Larson, Lindsay Galin, Tessa Thompson, Franklin Leonard, Angela Robinson, Alex Kondracke, and Priya Swaminathan for your thoughtful contributions. We are also grateful to Leah Fischman for her valuable assistance throughout the project. Our colleagues at USC Annenberg also deserve special mention for their help: Emily Cavalcanti, Mike Mauro, and Rachelle Martin. Angel Choi provided crucial assistance with data collection, for which we are appreciative. Lastly, we work with a marvelous team of research assistants who enable us to complete projects like this one. Thank you to the team, listed below.

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Footnotes

1. The list of top 100 domestic films of 2017 was retrieved from Box Office Mojo on March 27th, 2018. <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2017&p=.htm>

2. The 100 top-grossing films of 2017 had 19,562 reviews on Rotten Tomatoes on March 27th, 2018. Subsequent queries of the data revealed that Rotten Tomatoes updates (adds and subtracts) critic reviews for films, months after release. Therefore, retrieving the data on a different date may yield different results, albeit minimal.

Rotten Tomatoes approves critics whose reviews appear in a source with substantial circulation or site visits (online, print, broadcast) and individual critics who are actively reviewing content, have demonstrated tenure as a critic, and in some cases those who are members in a critics society. Reviewers may also be approved on an individual editorial basis. For the specifications regarding critic approval, see: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/help_desk/critics.

Apart from all approved critics, Rotten Tomatoes also designates a subset of reviewers as "Top" critics, which appears to derive from the publication or reviewers' influence or readership. At the time of this publication, Rotten Tomatoes did not list this criteria on its website. Other authors have provided insight. For more information, see Hickey, W. (2016, December 6). *When Should You Buy Into A Movie's Hype?* FiveThirtyEight.com. Available: <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/when-should-you-buy-into-a-movies-hype/>. Hughes, M. (2017, April 25). *How does Rotten Tomatoes work and how can one become a top critic?* Quora.com and featured on HuffingtonPost.com: <https://www.quora.com/How-does-Rotten-Tomatoes-work-and-how-can-one-become-a-top-critic/answer/Mark-Hughes-1>.

For *Sex* of review authors, 3 critics were excluded. Two of these authors were anonymous and we were unable to ascertain one critic's gender. This brings the total number of reviews associated with gender to 19,559. The 19,562 reviews were authored by 1,651 critics. After excluding the same 3 critics above, the total number of male and female critics reduces to 1,648. This latter number was used in all analyses.

Members of the research team searched each critic for online images, photos, and videos. In a first pass of the data, student researchers evaluated the gender and the apparent race/ethnicity critics. In situations where an image was not retrieved, a search was done for gendered pronoun use or references illuminating the critic's sex. Of the 1,651 critics, we were unable to confirm 14 for gender. For 11 of the 14 we used <http://www.babynames.com> to assign a sex based on the first name of the critic.

In terms of *Race/Ethnicity*, trained student researchers inferred each critics' race/ethnicity using at least one clear photo of the individual critic. In a second round of checking, all judgments for *Sex* and *Race/Ethnicity* were scrutinized and checked by one of the study's authors and the lead project assistant at the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. Both of these individuals are from underrepresented backgrounds. Names of critics and images of their family members were used to assist in categorization. Of the 1,651 critics, the race/ethnicity of 25 critics was not ascertained due to lack of information (three of which were unable to be ascertained for gender as mentioned earlier and 22 additional). These 25 critics authored 158 reviews (.8% of total), thereby making the total number of reviews and authors analyzed for Race/Ethnicity 19,404 - the number used in analyses for this measure.

Once *race/ethnicity* was determined using our standard measure (*White/Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Mixed Race/Other*), we then collapsed the variable into two levels: underrepresented vs. not underrepresented (White). This binary measure was used in all analyses.

Twenty-six reviews were co-authored by two critics. The majority ($n=24$) were by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat for *Spirituality and Practice*. Joi Childs and Caron LeNoir paired up for *Black Girl Nerds* a single time across this sample of films and Kaitlyn Tiffany and Lizzie Plaugic co-wrote one film's review for *The Verge*.

3. For our annual examination of the 100 top-grossing films per year, we look at the protagonist (female vs not, underrepresented vs not) of each film. At the time of this report, all 2017 top films have been evaluated but not finalized.

Using preliminary data as a starting point, the study authors and fellows at the Initiative scrutinized the leads of each film to determine if the film was led by a female or a character from an underrepresented racial/ethnic group. Films were watched in full or in part to confirm the story's protagonist(s) and categorized as having a Female Lead (or Co Lead) vs Not, and again as having an Underrepresented Lead (or Co Lead) vs Not. Films with more than two characters leading the story were considered a female/underrepresented lead if roughly half or more of the protagonists fit each category. Ensemble casts had to have 40% of the primary actors driving the story to qualify as an ensemble underrepresented lead. This point statistic was derived from U.S. Census and box office attendance patterns from MPAA (2018).

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Appendix A
Sample of the Top 100 Grossing Films of 2017

1	Star Wars: The Last Jedi	34	Blade Runner 2049	67	The Star
2	Beauty and the Beast	35	John Wick: Chapter Two	68	Ghost in the Shell (2017)
3	Wonder Woman	36	The Emoji Movie	69	King Arthur: Legend of the Sword
4	Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle	37	Power Rangers (2017)	70	Jigsaw
5	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2	38	Ferdinand	71	American Assassin
6	Spider-Man: Homecoming	39	The Post	72	The Foreigner
7	It	40	The Mummy (2017)	73	Everything, Everything
8	Thor: Ragnarok	41	The Hitman's Bodyguard	74	Wind River
9	Despicable Me 3	42	Alien: Covenant	75	Geostorm
10	Justice League	43	Captain Underpants: The First Epic Movie	76	Monster Trucks
11	Logan	44	A Bad Moms Christmas	77	Fist Fight
12	The Fate of the Furious	45	A Dog's Purpose	78	How to be a Latin Lover
13	Coco	46	The Shape of Water	79	Kidnap (2017)
14	Dunkirk	47	The LEGO Ninjago Movie	80	Underworld: Blood Wars
15	Get Out	48	Baywatch	81	The Mountain Between Us
16	The LEGO Batman Movie	49	The Shack	82	Life (2017)
17	The Boss Baby	50	Darkest Hour	83	I, Tonya
18	Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales	51	Happy Death Day	84	Hostiles
19	The Greatest Showman	52	Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri	85	Molly's Game
20	Kong: Skull Island	53	Atomic Blonde	86	The Nut Job 2: Nutty by Nature
21	Cars 3	54	American Made	87	Rings
22	War for the Planet of the Apes	55	The Dark Tower	88	Logan Lucky
23	Split	56	Lady Bird	89	Home Again
24	Wonder	57	Tyler Perry's Boo 2! A Madea Halloween	90	Resident Evil: The Final Chapter
25	Transformers: The Last Knight	58	Snatched	91	The House
26	Girls Trip	59	The Great Wall	92	All the Money in the World
27	Fifty Shades Darker	60	Smurfs: The Lost Village	93	Gifted
28	Baby Driver	61	Going in Style (2017)	94	Downsizing
29	Pitch Perfect 3	62	All Eyez on Me	95	The Bye Bye Man
30	Daddy's Home 2	63	xXx: The Return of Xander Cage	96	Victoria and Abdul
31	Murder on the Orient Express (2017)	64	47 Meters Down	97	Rough Night
32	Annabelle: Creation	65	The Big Sick	98	My Little Pony: The Movie
33	Kingsman: The Golden Circle	66	Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets	99	Leap!
				100	The Disaster Artist

Appendix B
Percentage of Female Critics Reviewing Female-Driven Films

#	Film Title	All Critics		Top Critics	
		# of Critics	% Female	# of Critics	% Female
1	Everything, Everything	98	39.8%	22	54.5%
2	Girls Trip	136	39%	34	61.8%
3	Pitch Perfect 3	118	37.3%	26	42.3%
4	A Bad Moms Christmas	108	37%	27	51.9%
5	Home Again	120	36.7%	29	44.8%
6	Leap!	52	34.6%	20	35%
7	My Little Pony: The Movie	58	34.5%	11	63.6%
8	Rough Night	147	33.3%	34	38.2%
9	Fifty Shades Darker	177	32.8%	40	40%
10	Beauty and the Beast	320	31.6%	50	36%
11	Victoria and Abdul	176	30.7%	35	20%
12	Lady Bird	309	29.5%	48	33.3%
13	Snatched	198	28.8%	43	32.6%
14	Wonder Woman	374	28.1%	52	44.2%
15	I, Tonya	302	26.8%	47	29.8%
16	The House	74	25.7%	14	21.4%
17	Molly's Game	242	25.2%	39	25.6%
18	The Mountain Between Us	152	25%	37	27%
19	Happy Death Day	119	24.4%	18	22.2%
20	47 Meters Down	137	24.1%	21	14.3%
21	The Shape of Water	345	24.1%	47	14.9%
22	Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri	318	23%	50	28%
23	Atomic Blonde	280	22.9%	40	30%
24	The Post	321	21.2%	43	18.6%
25	Split	253	20.9%	47	25.5%
26	Ghost in the Shell	248	20.6%	40	27.5%
27	Smurfs: The Lost Village	85	20%	16	18.7%
28	Alien: Covenant	331	19%	48	18.7%
29	Kidnap	81	18.5%	23	17.4%
30	Annabelle: Creation	158	18.3%	24	29.2%
31	Valerian & the City of a Thousand Planets	246	17.5%	43	18.6%
32	All the Money in the World	207	17.4%	40	15%
33	Rings	100	17%	19	21.1%
34	Underworld: Blood Wars	86	16.3%	12	8.3%
35	Resident Evil: The Final Chapter	91	14.3%	12	16.7%
36	Tyler Perry's Boo 2! A Madea Halloween	16	12.5%	7	14.3%

Appendix C
Percentage of Underrepresented Critics Reviewing Films w/UR Leads & Co Leads

#	Film Title	All Critics		Top Critics	
		# of Critics	% UR	# of Critics	% UR
1	How to Be a Latin Lover	26	34.6%	8	25%
2	Girls Trip	136	23.5%	34	17.7%
3	Coco	274	23%	45	11.1%
4	Smurfs: The Lost Village	85	22.3%	16	25%
5	Kidnap	81	22.2%	23	21.7%
6	Baywatch	214	22%	45	17.8%
7	All Eyez on Me	81	21%	17	23.5%
8	xXx: The Return of Xander Cage	121	20.7%	23	8.7%
9	Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle	184	20.7%	35	5.7%
10	Star Wars: The Last Jedi	371	19.4%	51	15.7%
11	Tyler Perry's Boo 2! A Madea Halloween	16	18.7%	7	28.6%
12	The Mountain Between Us	152	18.4%	37	5.4%
13	The Foreigner	98	18.4%	23	8.7%
14	The Dark Tower	228	18%	35	5.7%
15	Get Out	304	17.8%	52	11.5%
16	The Fate of the Furious	259	17.8%	46	15.2%
17	Victoria and Abdul	176	17.6%	35	8.6%
18	Captain Underpants: The First Epic Movie	117	17.1%	25	16%
19	The Big Sick	253	17%	42	11.9%
20	John Wick: Chapter Two	224	16.1%	40	12.5%
21	Everything, Everything	98	15.3%	22	4.5%
22	Split	253	15%	47	6.4%
23	The Star	47	14.9%	9	22.2%
24	The Hitman's Bodyguard	187	13.9%	32	9.4%