

# White actors featured more than non-white actors on American film posters, finds study

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White actors are featured more frequently and more prominently on posters for American-produced films than non-white actors, despite recent increases in the representation of actors from other ethnic groups,

according to a study published in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*.

Galit Fuhrmann Alpert and colleagues investigated trends in the ethnic diversity of actors featured on over 45,000 posters advertising over 24,000 English-speaking films produced in the U.S. between 1960 and 2021. Actors were assigned to one of four [ethnic groups](#); white, Black, Indian, or Asian using an algorithm trained on the FairFace image dataset, which contains equal numbers of faces assigned to seven ethnic groups; white, Black, Indian, East Asian, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latinx.

The authors observed that while white actors were consistently featured on posters more frequently than Black, Asian, and Indian actors, the percentage of white actors featured decreased from more than 90% in 1960 to 77% in 2020. However, representation of Black, Asian, and Indian actors increased, with the percentage of Black actors featuring on film posters doubling between 2010 and 2021 to 17.5%.

Although the representation of Black, Asian, Indian, and white actors between 2020 and 2021 was similar to the ethnic composition of the US population, the authors identified differences in how actors of different ethnicities were featured on posters. The faces of white actors tended to be 25% larger on average and located closer to the center of posters than those of non-white actors, and non-white actors were more likely to be featured on posters featuring more than six different actors or a non-white leading actor.

Analysis of the cast lists of the films studied revealed that white actors were most represented across all cast positions, Black actors were better represented in lower cast positions and Indian and Asian actors were represented at low levels across all cast positions. Together, these findings could indicate that non-white actors are more likely to be cast in

minor roles or in films with plots related to their ethnicity.

When the authors investigated the genres of film posters on which actors were featured, they found that white actors were the most frequently represented ethnicity across all genres. The team also observed that relative to other ethnicities, Black actors were more likely to appear on posters for crime films, while Asian actors were more likely to appear on posters for action films. This could reflect stereotypical representation of individuals belonging to these ethnic groups.

The findings suggest that while the representation of non-white actors on posters for English-speaking American-produced films has increased in recent decades, white actors still tend to be featured more often and more prominently across a wider range of genres than non-white actors.

**More information:** Galit Fuhrmann Alpert, Ethnic representation analysis of commercial movie posters, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (2024). [DOI: 10.1057/s41599-023-02040-y](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02040-y)

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