



# Spellcheck for Bias™



***Flat***

Geena Davis Institute for Gender in Media  
November, 2021

## Overview

The purpose of this report is to identify opportunities for content creators to diversify character representations. This report measures representations of six identities in the script *Out of Sight* for NBC Universal:

- [Gender](#)
- [Race/Ethnicity](#)
- [LGBTQIA+](#)
- [Disability](#)
- [Age \(50+\)](#)
- [Body Size](#)

## Methodology

Spellcheck for Bias is a collaboration between the Institute and the University of Southern California's Signal Analysis and Interpretation Laboratory (SAIL) which analyzes scripts and manuscripts to create a breakdown of characters and dialogue. Spellcheck for Bias also incorporates Human Expert Coding to determine the representation of six identities (gender, race, LGBTQIA+, Disabilities, Age 50+ and Body Size). Spellcheck for Bias also provides an analysis of Tropes and Stereotypes and attributes such as racial and gender injustice, violence, and discrimination.

For this report, we analyze characters who spoke 1 line of text or more. In Flat, 46 characters met this criterion:

CHARACTER NAME	LINE COUNT
NOAH	346
JAMES	334
DANI	211
GRACE	142
SANDRA	90
RODNEY	78
DEEPIKA	52
AL	48
ANDRE	31
SNOOTY JUDGE	21
BRUCE	17
OFFICER	14
ROBBIE	13
MRS K	11
ANTHONY	10
PRINCIPAL DONALDSON	10
NYPD OFFICER	10
IRC MAN	9
DR RUTHERFORD	6
SECURITY GUARD	6
STUFFY JUDGE	5
MRS PINGALI	5
MATT BARNES	4
CHRISTINE	4
TOM	4
SHANNON	4

ELLEN	4
MRS DIXON	4
FLIRTY DAD	4
FLIRTY DADS HUSBAND	4
SPORTS DJ	3
BUTTONEDUP JUDGE	3
SUPPORTIVE JUDGE	2
SKIP BAYLESS	2
MR BOB	2
MRS DINGWALL	2
TRAINER	2
FLIRTY MOM	2
REPORTER	2
SLEEPY JUDGE	1
DANTE	1
MOM	1
RUDY	1
SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER	1
LIBRARIAN	1
ANNOUNCER	1

## Gender Analysis

*For comparison, women constitute 51% of the U.S. population and 50.8% of the Latinx population in the U.S.*

- 26% of characters are specified as female.
- None of the characters are specified as Latinx and female.
- The leading characters (Noah and James) are male.
- The script contains 10 character opportunities to increase gender diversity.

### Characters by Gender

FEMALE CHARACTER	MALE CHARACTER	GENDER UNSPECIFIED
	NOAH	
	JAMES	
DANI		
GRACE		
SANDRA		
	RODNEY	
DEEPIKA		
	AL	
	ANDRE	
	SNOOTY JUDGE*	
	BRUCE	
	OFFICER	
	ROBBIE	
MRS K		
	ANTHONY	
PRINCIPAL DONALDSON		
	NYPD OFFICER	
	IRC MAN	
	DR RUTHERFORD	
		SECURITY GUARD

		STUFFY JUDGE
MRS PINGALI		
	MATT BARNES	
CHRISTINE		
	TOM	
	SHANNON	
ELLEN		
MRS DIXON		
	FLIRTY DAD	
	FLIRTY DADS HUSBAND	
		SPORTS DJ
		BUTTONEDUP JUDGE
		SUPPORTIVE JUDGE
	SKIP BAYLESS	
	MR BOB	
MRS DINGWALL		
		TRAINER
FLIRTY MOM		
		REPORTER
		SLEEPY JUDGE
	DANTE	
MOM		
	RUDY	
SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER		
LIBRARIAN		
ANNOUNCER		

## The See Jane Test

In order to pass the See Jane test, a script/manuscript must have:	
✓	At least one prominent character (leading, co-leading, supporting character) who is a woman who;
✓	Is not depicted with gender stereotypes or tropes.

**PASSED**

## Race/Ethnicity Analysis

*For comparison, people of color constitute 39% of the U.S. population. 67.94% of the population of Macon, GA is Black.*

- 24% of characters are specified as characters of color.
- The leading characters are Black.
- The script contains 27 character opportunities to increase racial/ethnic diversity.

### Characters by Race/Ethnicity

CHARACTER OF COLOR	WHITE CHARACTER	RACE/ETHNICITY UNSPECIFIED
NOAH		
JAMES		
	DANI	
GRACE		
SANDRA		
RODNEY		
DEEPIKA		
AL		
	ANDRE*	
	SNOOTY JUDGE*	
		BRUCE
		OFFICER
		ROBBIE
	MRS K*	
		ANTHONY
PRINCIPAL DONALDSON*		
		NYPD OFFICER
		IRC MAN
		DR RUTHERFORD
		SECURITY GUARD

		STUFFY JUDGE
MRS PINGALI*		
		MATT BARNES
		CHRISTINE
	TOM*	
SHANNON		
	ELLEN	
MRS DIXON		
	FLIRTY DAD*	
		FLIRTY DADS HUSBAND
		SPORTS DJ
		BUTTONEDUP JUDGE
		SUPPORTIVE JUDGE
	SKIP BAYLESS	
MR BOB		
		MRS DINGWALL
		TRAINER
FLIRTY MOM		
		REPORTER
		SLEEPY JUDGE
		DANTE
		MOM
		RUDY
		SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER
		LIBRARIAN
		ANNOUNCER



## The Shonda Rhimes Test

In order to pass the Shonda Rhimes test, a script/manuscript must have:	
✓	At least one prominent character (leading, co-leading, supporting character) who is a character of color who;
✓	Is not depicted with race/ethnicity stereotypes or tropes.

**PASSED**

## LGBTQIA+ Analysis

*For comparison, LGBTQIA+ people comprise 5.6% of the U.S. population.*

- 11% of characters are specified as LGBTQIA+.
- No Latinx characters are LGBTQIA+
- The leading characters are unspecified.
- The script contains 36 character opportunities to increase LGBTQIA+ diversity.

### Characters by LGBTQ+ Status

LGBTQIA+ CHARACTER	HETEROSEXUAL CHARACTER	SEXUALITY UNSPECIFIED
	NOAH	
		JAMES
DANI		
	GRACE	
	SANDRA	
	RODNEY	
		DEEPIKA
	AL	
		ANDRE*
		SNOOTY JUDGE*
		BRUCE
		OFFICER
		ROBBIE
MRS K*		
		ANTHONY
		PRINCIPAL DONALDSON*
		NYPD OFFICER
		IRC MAN
		DR RUTHERFORD
		SECURITY GUARD

		STUFFY JUDGE
		MRS PINGALI
		MATT BARNES
		CHRISTINE
		TOM*
		SHANNON
ELLEN		
		MRS DIXON
FLIRTY DAD*		
FLIRTY DADS HUSBAND		
		SPORTS DJ
		BUTTONEDUP JUDGE
		SUPPORTIVE JUDGE
		SKIP BAYLESS
		MR BOB
		MRS DINGWALL
		TRAINER
	FLIRTY MOM	
		REPORTER
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		DANTE
		MOM
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		ANNOUNCER

## The Vito-Russo Test

In order to pass the Vito-Russo test, a script/manuscript must:	
✓	Contain a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer.
✓	That character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity (i.e. they are comprised of the same sort of unique character traits commonly used to differentiate straight/non-transgender characters from one another).
✓	The LGBTQIA+ character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect, meaning they are not there to simply provide colorful commentary, paint urban authenticity, or (perhaps most commonly) set up a punchline.

**PASSED**

## Disability Analysis

*For comparison, people with disabilities constitute 19% of the U.S. population.*

- 2% of characters are specified as having a physical, cognitive, or communication disability.
- The leading character is unspecified.
- The script contains 45 character opportunities to increase disability diversity.

### Characters by Disability Status

CHARACTER WITH DISABILITY	CHARACTER WITHOUT DISABILITY	DISABILITY STATUS UNSPECIFIED
		NOAH
		JAMES
		DANI
		GRACE
SANDRA		
		RODNEY
		DEEPIKA
		AL
		ANDRE*
		SNOOTY JUDGE*
		BRUCE
		OFFICER
		ROBBIE
		MRS K*
		ANTHONY
		PRINCIPAL DONALDSON*
		NYPD OFFICER
		IRC MAN
		DR RUTHERFORD

		SECURITY GUARD
		STUFFY JUDGE
		MRS PINGALI
		MATT BARNES
		CHRISTINE
		TOM*
		SHANNON
		ELLEN
		MRS DIXON
		FLIRTY DAD*
		FLIRTY DADS HUSBAND
		SPORTS DJ
		BUTTONEDUP JUDGE
		SUPPORTIVE JUDGE
		SKIP BAYLESS
		MR BOB
		MRS DINGWALL
		TRAINER
		FLIRTY MOM
		REPORTER
		SLEEPY JUDGE
		DANTE
		MOM
		RUDY
		SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER
		LIBRARIAN
		ANNOUNCER

## The Marlee Matlin Test

In order to pass the Marlee Matlin test, a script/manuscript must have:	
✓	At least one prominent character (leading, co-leading, supporting character) with a physical, cognitive, or communication disability who;
✗	Is not depicted with disability stereotypes or tropes.



Sandra is written with the ableist stereotype “DEPENDENT”

## Age (50+) Analysis

*For comparison, people ages 50+ constitute 34% of the U.S. population.*

- 17% of characters are specified as ages 50+.
- The leading characters are under 50.
- The script contains 27 character opportunities to increase age diversity.

### Characters by Age

CHARACTER 50+	CHARACTER UNDER 50	AGE UNSPECIFIED
	NOAH	
	JAMES	
	DANI	
		GRACE
SANDRA		
RODNEY*		
	DEEPIKA	
		AL
	ANDRE*	
SNOOTY JUDGE*		
		BRUCE
		OFFICER
	ROBBIE	
	MRS K*	
	ANTHONY	
PRINCIPAL DONALDSON*		
		NYPD OFFICER
		IRC MAN
		DR RUTHERFORD
		SECURITY GUARD
		STUFFY JUDGE



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		MRS PINGALI
		MATT BARNES
		CHRISTINE
TOM*		
SHANNON		
ELLEN		
		MRS DIXON
	FLIRTY DAD*	
		FLIRTY DADS HUSBAND
		SPORTS DJ
		BUTTONEDUP JUDGE
		SUPPORTIVE JUDGE
SKIP BAYLESS		
		MR BOB
		MRS DINGWALL
		TRAINER
	FLIRTY MOM*	
		REPORTER
		SLEEPY JUDGE
	DANTE	
		MOM
		RUDY
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		LIBRARIAN
		ANNOUNCER

\*described as a 'type' that would suggest this character is a particular identity



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## The Betty White Test

In order to pass the Betty White test, a script/manuscript must have:	
✓	At least one prominent character (leading, co-leading, supporting character) who is 50+ who;
✗	Is not depicted with age stereotypes or tropes.



Inability to understand technology and dependence are common age-related stereotypes. Her initial interaction with James, in which she suggests climbing him like a jungle gym (pp., 30), reflects the hypersexualized “CREEPY GRANDMA” trope - an older adult female character who makes inappropriate comments or advances toward younger men.

## Body Size Analysis

*For comparison, people with large body types constitute 39% of the U.S. population.*

- 9% characters are specified as having a large body type.
- No Latinx characters are specified as having a large body type.
- The leading characters are average.
- The script contains 34 character opportunities to increase body type diversity.

### Characters by Body Size

CHARACTER WITH LARGE BODY TYPE	CHARACTER WITH SMALL/MEDIUM BODY TYPE	BODY SIZE UNSPECIFIED
	NOAH	
	JAMES	
		DANI
		GRACE
SANDRA		
		RODNEY
	DEEPIKA	
	AL	
	ANDRE*	
	SNOOTY JUDGE*	
		BRUCE
		OFFICER
ROBBIE		
MRS K*		
		ANTHONY
PRINCIPAL DONALDSON*		
		NYPD OFFICER
		IRC MAN

		DR RUTHERFORD
		SECURITY GUARD
		STUFFY JUDGE
		MRS PINGALI
		MATT BARNES
		CHRISTINE
	TOM*	
		SHANNON
		ELLEN
		MRS DIXON
	FLIRTY DAD*	
		FLIRTY DADS HUSBAND
		SPORTS DJ
		BUTTONEDUP JUDGE
		SUPPORTIVE JUDGE
		SKIP BAYLESS
		MR BOB
		MRS DINGWALL
		TRAINER
		FLIRTY MOM
		REPORTER
		SLEEPY JUDGE
		DANTE
		MOM
		RUDY
		SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER
		LIBRARIAN
		ANNOUNCER

## The Lizzo Test

In order to pass the Lizzo test, a script/manuscript must have:	
✓	At least one prominent character (leading, co-leading, supporting character) with a large body type who;
✓	Is not depicted with size stereotypes or tropes.

**PASSED**

## Intersectional Analysis

	Female Character	Character of Color	LGBTQIA+ Character	Character with a Disability	Character 50+	Character with Large Body Type
Female Character		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Character of Color	YES		NO	YES	YES	YES
LGBTQIA+ Character	YES	NO		NO	NO	NO
Character with a Disability	YES	YES	NO		YES	YES
Character 50+	YES	YES	NO	YES		YES
Character with Large Body Type	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	

## Positive Aspects

- The story focuses on a Black kid with a special talent for science and science communication. Over the course of the film Noah learns that although his understanding of science is quite advanced for a 13-year old, his knowledge of the social and political context surrounding science, its applications, and outcomes, is limited.
- Defies the 'single mother' stereotype for Black women
- Andre, a character of color, is a caring and concerned father
- Grace holds an estimate from the hospital, showing the cost of healthcare and its disproportionate impact on low income People of Color
- Noah, a character of color has a supportive family, which shows importance of support from community and resources (pp., 83)

## Potential Pitfalls

### Pitfalls Related to Gender

- Female characters are somewhat underdeveloped; all storylines for female characters revolve around male characters.
- Male and female characters tend to have gender-stereotypic professions - most of the security and law enforcement professionals are male. The teacher, librarian, nurse, and principal are female, etc.
- Dani faces some old-fashioned sexism in the workplace, including resistance from James, who complains that he's "gonna be the only guy with a lady agent." James is resistant to her ideas. She is also undermined by her boss at work, with her boss stating "isn't he a little young for you" (pp., 21) when she pursues a male client.
  - While this is meant to read as a commentary on sexism in the workplace, the message gets lost because she is subject to more subtle gender-based stereotypes and plotlines (see below):
    - Dani strikes a bargain with her bosses for the opportunity to pursue a deal with James, meaning that if she succeeds she will be paid less for her work than her male counterparts.
    - Dani has to prove herself over and over with qualifications (has a law degree, passed exam twice, is quizzed at work (pp., 22), and recites CV in multiple scenes:
      - "I have passed the certification exam-- twice" (pp., 21)
  - "I've negotiated thousands of endorsements and managed PR campaigns
  - "I've negotiated fifty-sevion million dollars in revenue" (pp., 25)

- Dani overcomes sexism by just working harder, which supports the meritocratic myth - the idea that people can overcome systemic discrimination through effort and determination alone.
- Grace and Dani (as well as other female characters) often play maternal / babysitter roles, repeatedly encouraging two immature male characters to be more mature and reconcile their differences
  - See also, the Librarian “it’s not nice to make fun of people who aren’t as smart as you” (pp., 40)
- Mrs. Pingali is described as wearing a doctor’s coat, but is not referred to by the title “Dr.” She’s depicted as somewhat cold and oblivious to her daughter’s needs for validation due to work distractions, which reflects “THE BUSY CAREER WOMAN” trope. This trope speaks to cultural doubts about women’s ability to effectively balance work and family. She outsources emotional support to an academic advisor, Dr. Rutherford, who provides constant affirmation (and is referred to by his title).
- Sandra only gets up and gets dressed to meet a man she is attracted to. If she goes out without the possibility of seeing a man, she is wearing a bathrobe (e.g., when Sandra takes Noah to the park). This reinforces the idea that women’s appearance is centered around the male gaze.

### Pitfalls Related to Race

- African-Americans are sometimes stereotyped as being “POOR PARENTAL FIGURES”. James’s father Roy is characterized this way - as an absent father looking to financially exploit his son. Al and Grace are not explicitly characterized this way, though Al is often absent from Noah’s life given the nature of his work and Grace is often absent due to her work schedule. While Sandra provides some supervision, Noah has eldercare responsibilities as a consequence of his parents’ absence.
- After the science fair, James and Noah get into a physical altercation. While it’s written in a light-hearted way, it’s important to think about how this fight between an adult man and a 13-year old boy relates to stereotypes about “BLACK MALE VIOLENCE”. Both characters struggle to control their tempers throughout, and often insult others, which may speak to cognate stereotypes about “IMPULSIVENESS” and “UNCONTROLLABLE TEMPER”.
- The plot hinges on the idea that James’s comments about systemic racism are taken out of context and misinterpreted as anti-science sentiment. Given the visibility of protest against racism and police violence in professional sports and professional basketball specifically, this seems unlikely. There’s no reference to these high-profile protests, athlete activism, or BLM in the script - viewers will likely engage with the film through the lens of these real-world events.



- Similarly, there is nothing connecting science skepticism to the rising polarization in attitudes toward science and scientists surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a connection made between distrust in medical professionals and the Tuskegee experiments. Sandra a Black woman doesn't trust doctors "they've tried to kill me before and they'll do it again" (pp., 26)
  - Makes a joke of African-American distrust of medical community and overly centralizes the Tuskagee experiment for present injustices in our healthcare system that have led to widespread distrust of doctors in Black community<sup>1</sup>
- We suspect Deepika Pingali is intended to be cast as South Asian. This may affirm stereotypes about South Asians as "NERDY", with special competence in STEM fields. She's also stereotypically "CUT-THROAT" - "telling" on Noah to secure her victory. Because care is taken to challenge stereotypes about race and scientific interest / competence throughout the script, we wanted to point out that this character reinforces these stereotypes
- Noah's scientific "role models" are all white - there's no discussion of the scientific contributions of People of Color. Consider adding WEB Dubois or Jonathan Kozol
- Recommendation: develop commentary on prison industrial complex, racism and policing, and race and inequality in a more robust way. These topics come up with limited reflection and read more as 'box checking'. Furthermore, James' involvement in his own community, despite being passionate about racism and inequality is inconsistent (and almost absent until he is forced to go to his old middle school's science fair).
- **White Savior Narrative**
  - Dani, a white woman, saves the career of an irrational and 'out of control Black man'
    - Dani states "I'm going to work outside of the box to fix your shot AND your image. I will make you an All-Star and a household name again" (pp., 25)
  - Grace, a woman of color, goes to Dani, a white woman and states: "I need you to protect him...I need you to promise you'll take care of him"; she responds, "I'll look after Noah like he's the number one draft pick" (pp., 84)
- **Supports meritocratic myth**
  - Without any explanation as to why Noah is hyper-intelligent, the audience will be led to believe that these skills are innate rather than learned. This diminishes the significance of the commentary on inequality and education, because it shows a world separated into those that are 'naturally intelligent' and deserving of opportunities (e.g., going to Berkeley)

<sup>1</sup><https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/03/23/974059870/stop-blaming-tuskege-e-critics-say-its-not-an-excuse-for-current-medical-racism>



Prep, receiving favor from elites) and those who do not. Showing these skills are learned is important to dispelling the notion that the 'poors' suffering is a signifier of a personal failure/responsibility (and therefore the 'losers' are not entitled to/worthy of equal treatment)--rather than structural arrangements that lock certain groups in a subordinate position

- Despite having several scenes commenting on structural racism and mass incarceration, James panders to this myth at times. He blames his father for his own failures (despite his father having been incarcerated, with limited resources and job opportunities) and refuses to help his father because 'his father does not deserve it', James fully funds Noah's education because he has proved his worth to him, and is uninterested in expressing support for causes related to systematic racism other than refusing some endorsement deals or starting an independent organization created for the 'select individuals' who are as 'naturally' intelligent as Noah (Ballers for Scholars).
- Some lines which reinforce the myth:
  - You did more than any of those kids with half the resources" (pp., 83)
  - "Life isn't fair. Never has been, never will be. But we have to keep trying" (pp., 71)
  - Noah insults people's intelligence throughout the film, e.g.: moron (pp., 2), idiot (pp., 6), dumb/dummy (pp., 4), stupid (pp., 5), imbecile (pp., 1), etc. At times, Noah is elitist in his insults geared toward James never finishing college, "he's got the IQ of a sponge" etc.
  - Deepika is also elitist, referring to her advisor Dr. Rutherford as "just an adjunct, useless" and suggests that if he worked faster, he'd be tenured by now. (Adjunct faculty aren't tenure stream)

### Pitfalls Related to Age and Body / Size

- Sandra is a larger-bodied character who is depicted stereotypically as "UNHEALTHY" and "FOOD-OBSESSED" At times, her character reflects "THE BIG EATER" trope - this character with a large body type is shown as constantly eating, always being hungry, offering to finish others' food, and eating copious amounts. For example, after being hospitalized as a consequence of eating too much candy, she asks for a pudding cup and is denied one because she's already eaten three.

- Sandra's age is a factor here as well - she's depicted as technologically challenged (i.e., doesn't understand how her insulin pump works) and as highly dependent on others (e.g., Noah is expected to come home from school to monitor her eating and glucose levels. When he's 45 minutes late one evening, she immediately has a health crisis and is hospitalized).
  - Inability to understand technology and dependence are common age-related stereotypes. Her initial interaction with James, in which she suggests climbing him like a jungle gym (pp., 30), reflects the hypersexualized "CREEPY GRANDMA" trope - an older adult female character who makes inappropriate comments or advances toward younger men.
- Mrs. K's character contains elements of "THE COMIC RELIEF" trope. This character with a large body type exists primarily for comic relief. Mrs. K's body size is inferred from the casting note. She's described as enthusiastic and incompetent.
- Robby, another larger-bodied character (described as husky), is portrayed as unintelligent. His science fair project is a stick, suggesting his lack of intelligence is the butt of a joke

### Pitfalls Related to Class

- Depicting working class persons in a constant state of despair and as an environment which is hollowed-out and empty may be considered reductive by audiences. While resources are not as abundant in working class neighborhoods, the realities of poverty are far more complex than those depicted in the script.
  - Underfunded schools are filled with caring teachers who work with limited resources, only portraying a disengaged teacher who smokes in front of children stigmatizes the profession and overlooks systematic bias in the allocation of resources to poor districts which are disproportionately composed of students of color