**Spellcheck For Bias:  *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret***

Geena Davis Institute for Gender in Media

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**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 *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret* for Lionsgate*.*

* [Gender](#bookmark=id.gjdgxs)
* [Race/Ethnicity](#bookmark=id.30j0zll)
* [LGBTQ+](#bookmark=id.1fob9te)
* [Disability](#bookmark=id.3znysh7)
* [Age (50+)](#bookmark=id.2et92p0)
* [Body Size](#bookmark=id.tyjcwt)

**Methodology**

Spellcheck for Bias is based on inventions and software developed at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering. For this report, we analyze characters who spoke 1 line of text or more. In *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*, 30 characters met this criterion:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER NAME** | **LINE COUNT** |
| MARGARET | 390 |
| BARBARA | 234 |
| NANCY | 193 |
| SYLVIA | 132 |
| HERB | 83 |
| MRS. WHEELER | 63 |
| GRETCHEN | 51 |
| MR. BENEDICT | 42 |
| JANIE | 30 |
| LAURA | 22 |
| MOOSE | 17 |
| NORMAN | 13 |
| MARY | 12 |
| PHILIP LEROY | 9 |
| PAUL | 9 |
| FREDDY BARNETT | 9 |
| SALES LADY | 6 |
| NARRATOR | 6 |
| RABBI | 5 |
| MRS. WEBSTER | 4 |
| GUY IN CAR | 3 |
| EVAN | 3 |
| MRS. FISHER | 3 |
| PTA MOTHER | 2 |
| MR. WHEELER | 2 |
| PRIEST | 2 |
| MR. BINAMIN | 2 |
| SALVATION ARMY GUY | 1 |
| MAILMAN | 1 |
| LIBRARIAN | 1 |

Automated coding is combined with expert human coding to generate the quantitative and qualitative analysis below.

**Gender Analysis**

***For comparison, women constitute 51% of the U.S. population.***

* 14 characters are specified as female.
* The leading character is female.
* The script contains 2 character opportunities to increase gender diversity.

Characters by Gender

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **FEMALE CHARACTER** | **MALE CHARACTER** | **GENDER UNSPECIFIED** |
| MARGARET |  |  |
| BARBARA |  |  |
| NANCY |  |  |
| SYLVIA |  |  |
|  | HERB |  |
| MRS. WHEELER |  |  |
| GRETCHEN |  |  |
|  | MR. BENEDICT |  |
| JANIE |  |  |
| LAURA |  |  |
|  | MOOSE |  |
|  | NORMAN |  |
| MARY |  |  |
|  | PHILIP LEROY |  |
|  | PAUL |  |
|  | FREDDY BARNETT |  |
| SALES LADY |  |  |
|  |  | NARRATOR |
|  | RABBI |  |
| MRS. WEBSTER |  |  |
|  | GUY IN CAR |  |
|  | EVAN |  |
| MRS. FISHER |  |  |
| PTA MOTHER |  |  |
|  | MR. WHEELER |  |
|  |  | PRIEST |
|  | MR. BINAMIN |  |
|  | SALVATION ARMY GUY |  |
|  | MAILMAN |  |
| LIBRARIAN |  |  |

The See Jane Test

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



**Race/Ethnicity Analysis**

***For comparison, people of color constitute 38% of the U.S. population.***

* 1 character is specified as a character of color.
* The leading character is specified as white.
* The script contains 22 character opportunities to increase racial/ethnic diversity.

Characters by Race/Ethnicity

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER OF COLOR** | **WHITE CHARACTER** | **RACE/ETHNICITY UNSPECIFIED** |
|  | MARGARET |  |
|  | BARBARA |  |
|  |  | NANCY |
|  |  | SYLVIA |
|  |  | HERB |
|  |  | MRS. WHEELER |
|  | GRETCHEN |  |
|  |  | MR. BENEDICT |
| JANIE |  |  |
|  |  | LAURA |
|  |  | MOOSE |
|  |  | NORMAN |
|  | MARY |  |
|  |  | PHILIP LEROY |
|  | PAUL |  |
|  | FREDDY BARNETT |  |
|  |  | SALES LADY |
|  |  | NARRATOR |
|  | RABBI |  |
|  |  | MRS. WEBSTER |
|  |  | GUY IN CAR |
|  |  | EVAN |
|  |  | MRS. FISHER |
|  |  | PTA MOTHER |
|  |  | MR. WHEELER |
|  |  | PRIEST |
|  |  | MR. BINAMIN |
|  |  | SALVATION ARMY GUY |
|  |  | MAILMAN |
|  |  | LIBRARIAN |

The Sidney Poitier Test

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



**LGBTQ+ Analysis**

***For comparison, LGBTQ+ people comprise 4.5% of the U.S. population.***

* 0 characters are specified as LGBTQ+.
* The leading character is specified as heterosexual.
* The script contains 13 character opportunities to increase LGBTQ+ diversity.

Characters by LGBTQ+ Status

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **LGBTQ+ CHARACTER** | **HETEROSEXUAL CHARACTER** | **SEXUALITY UNSPECIFIED** |
|  | MARGARET |  |
|  | BARBARA |  |
|  | NANCY |  |
|  | SYLVIA |  |
|  | HERB |  |
|  | MRS. WHEELER |  |
|  | GRETCHEN |  |
|  |  | MR. BENEDICT |
|  | JANIE |  |
|  | LAURA |  |
|  | MOOSE |  |
|  | NORMAN |  |
|  | MARY |  |
|  | PHILIP LEROY |  |
|  | PAUL |  |
|  |  | FREDDY BARNETT |
|  |  | SALES LADY |
|  |  | NARRATOR |
|  |  | RABBI |
|  |  | MRS. WEBSTER |
|  |  | GUY IN CAR |
|  | EVAN |  |
|  |  | MRS. FISHER |
|  |  | PTA MOTHER |
|  | MR. WHEELER |  |
|  |  | PRIEST |
|  | MR. BINAMIN |  |
|  |  | SALVATION ARMY GUY |
|  |  | MAILMAN |
|  |  | LIBRARIAN |

The Vito-Russo Test

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **In order to pass the Vito-Russo test, a script/manuscript must:** | |
| **NO** | Contain a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer. |
| **NO** | 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). |
| **NO** | The LGBTQ 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. |



**Disability Analysis**

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

* 0 characters are specified as having a physical, cognitive, or communication disability.
* The leading character is not shown having a disability.
* The script contains 30 character opportunities to increase disability diversity.

Characters by Disability Status

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER WITH DISABILITY** | **CHARACTER WITHOUT DISABILITY** | **DISABILITY STATUS UNSPECIFIED** |
|  |  | MARGARET |
|  |  | BARBARA |
|  |  | NANCY |
|  |  | SYLVIA |
|  |  | HERB |
|  |  | MRS. WHEELER |
|  |  | GRETCHEN |
|  |  | MR. BENEDICT |
|  |  | JANIE |
|  |  | LAURA |
|  |  | MOOSE |
|  |  | NORMAN |
|  |  | MARY |
|  |  | PHILIP LEROY |
|  |  | PAUL |
|  |  | FREDDY BARNETT |
|  |  | SALES LADY |
|  |  | NARRATOR |
|  |  | RABBI |
|  |  | MRS. WEBSTER |
|  |  | GUY IN CAR |
|  |  | EVAN |
|  |  | MRS. FISHER |
|  |  | PTA MOTHER |
|  |  | MRS. WHEELER |
|  |  | PRIEST |
|  |  | MR. BINAMIN |
|  |  | SALVATION ARMY GUY |
|  |  | MAILMAN |
|  |  | LIBRARIAN |

The Marlee Matlin Test

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **In order to pass the Marlee Matlin test, a script/manuscript must have:** | |
| **NO** | At least one prominent character (leading, co-leading, supporting character) with a physical, cognitive, or communication disability who; |
| **NO** | Is not depicted with disability stereotypes or tropes. |



**Age (50+) Analysis**

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

* 7 characters are specified as ages 50+.
* The leading character is under 50.
* The script contains 7 character opportunities to increase age diversity.

Characters by Age

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER 50+** | **CHARACTER UNDER 50** | **AGE UNSPECIFIED** |
|  | MARGARET |  |
|  | BARBARA |  |
|  | NANCY |  |
| SYLVIA |  |  |
|  | HERB |  |
|  | MRS. WHEELER |  |
|  | GRETCHEN |  |
|  | MR. BENEDICT |  |
|  | JANIE |  |
|  | LAURA |  |
|  | MOOSE |  |
|  | NORMAN |  |
| MARY |  |  |
|  | PHILIP LEROY |  |
| PAUL |  |  |
|  | FREDDY BARNETT |  |
| SALES LADY |  |  |
|  |  | NARRATOR |
|  |  | RABBI |
| MRS. WEBSTER |  |  |
|  |  | GUY IN CAR |
|  | EVAN |  |
|  | MRS. FISHER |  |
|  |  | PTA MOTHER |
|  | MR. WHEELER |  |
|  |  | PRIEST |
| MR. BINAMIN |  |  |
|  |  | SALVATION ARMY GUY |
|  |  | MAILMAN |
| LIBRARIAN |  |  |

The Betty White Test

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



**Body Size Analysis**

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

* 3 characters are specified as having a large body type.
* The leading character is not specified as having a large body type.
* The script contains 25 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** |
|  | MARGARET |  |
|  |  | BARBARA |
|  |  | NANCY |
|  |  | SYLVIA |
|  |  | HERB |
|  |  | MRS. WHEELER |
| GRETCHEN |  |  |
|  |  | MR. BENEDICT |
|  | JANIE |  |
|  |  | LAURA |
|  |  | MOOSE |
|  |  | NORMAN |
|  |  | MARY |
|  |  | PHILIP LEROY |
|  |  | PAUL |
|  |  | FREDDY BARNETT |
| SALES LADY |  |  |
|  |  | NARRATOR |
|  |  | RABBI |
|  |  | MRS. WEBSTER |
|  |  | GUY IN CAR |
| EVAN |  |  |
|  |  | MRS. FISHER |
|  |  | PTA MOTHER |
|  |  | MR. WHEELER |
|  |  | PRIEST |
|  |  | MR. BENAMIN |
|  |  | SALVATION ARMY GUY |
|  |  | MAILMAN |
|  |  | LIBRARIAN |

The Cooper Test

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



**Intersectional Analysis**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Female Character** | **Character of Color** | **LGBTQ+ Character** | **Character with a Disability** | **Character 50+** | **Character with Large Body Type** |
| **Female Character** |  | **YES** | **NO** | **NO** | **YES** | **YES** |
| **Character of Color** | **YES** |  | **NO** | **NO** | **NO** | **NO** |
| **LGBTQ+ Character** | **NO** | **NO** |  | **NO** | **NO** | **NO** |
| **Character with a Disability** | **NO** | **NO** | **NO** |  | **NO** | **NO** |
| **Character 50+** | **YES** | **NO** | **NO** | **NO** |  | **YES** |
| **Character with Large Body Type** | **YES** | **NO** | **NO** | **NO** | **YES** |  |

**Positive Aspects**

* This script is notable for its numerous prominent female characters, including many with other marginalized identities.
* The script also has a significant number of characters over the age of 50, many who defy ageist stereotypes about being non-sexual or unattractive. For example, Sylvia is a positive representation of women 50+, leading a life of adventure and romance.
* The topic of menstruation is treated with grace and authenticity, discussed in positive terms throughout the script as a goal rather than a taboo.
* The script shines an authentic light into real struggles of kids growing up in inter-faith households and families that are torn apart by anti-semitism.

**Potential Pitfalls**

* Potential Sexism: The script paints an honest picture of girlhood and the struggles that puberty brings, but many of the female characters are written as appearance-obsessed and boy-obsessed in ways that are limiting to their character development. While a lot of these storylines serve the plot (and the authenticity of the book this script is based on), there are a handful of moments that appear to be excessively stereotypical (e.g., when Nancy says “It’s another one of my experiments. I put on different kinds to see how I look best so when 8th grade rolls around, I’ll be ready," and when the girls pretend to “run in sexy-slow-motion like a girl from a movie, ‘look at me I’m a model’”).
* Potential Sexism: Many female characters are described in objectifying terms and sexualized throughout the script (e.g., Nancy’s mother is described as “tan with big breasts,” another character is referred to as having “good-sized bosoms”). This becomes especially problematic when the audience is asked to sexualize teenage girls. Laura, an 11 year old girl in Margaret's class, is described as "an attractive woman" who "looks at least 16 thanks to her height and early boobs." She is accused of going behind the A&P and letting boys feel her up. In another instance, the girls find a playboy and end up reading about “Hillary Brite," a naked 19 year old with big boobs.
* Potential Homophobia/Heteronormativity: At the top of the script, Margaret’s grandma makes it clear she expects her to date a jewish boy-- consider swapping out boyfriend to a gender-neutral term like "partner" or “significant other" to retain the joke without the assumption of heterosexuality. Similarly, there is an assumption that the whole friend group is straight when Nancy asks, "what if we all keep a notebook of the boys we like?" Consider changing to, “what if we keep a notebook of all of our crushes.”
* Potential Ageism: While many of the characters over 50 are written as prominent and defy ageist stereotypes, there are a few times where the script reinforces limiting notions about older adults. Sylvia is portrayed as the “lonely” stereotype, Margaret and Janie make fun of an old woman sleeping in church, and many of the older characters are described as frumpy (e.g., “a boxy gray suit” “orthopedic shoes,” and a character who “vigorously cleans her nostrils with a handkerchief.”).
* Potential Sizeism: When Margaret and Sylvia are served a comically huge chocolate parfait, Sylvia responds by saying "thank god I did 10 minutes of aerobics two weeks ago." Even though this comment was in jest, it reinforces harmful relationships between food and exercise, teaching girls that exercise is necessary to enjoy unhealthy food.”
* Potential Sexism: Throughout the script, Margaret’s mother embodies the Maternal stereotype and Happy Housewife Trope. She is fixated on being a good mother and wife, as though that is her purpose (e.g., how she signs up for all the committees in the PTA, apologizes for not cooking or decorating the house, does PTA tasks while watching cooking shows "hoping to learn something” etc.)
* Potential Transphobia: Looking at the textbook drawing of a penis, Gretchen asks "Do you think Philip Leroy looks like that?" and Nancy responds "He's male, isn't he?" -- this comment unnecessarily reifies the gender binary, connecting one’s genitals to their gender.
* Potential Sizeism: If Norman is cast as large body type, avoid writing his charcter as comically clumsy or undesirable. For example, “when he spins the bottle "all the girls get nervous, hoping it doesn't land on them."
* Potential Racism: The script uses the term “gypped.”