**Spellcheck For Bias: *Tigerbelles***

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 *Tigerbelles* for Lionsgate:

* [Gender](#7rdsrmby8a10)
* [Race/Ethnicity](#km0uzj1c47vm)
* [LGBTQ+](#l5fofjr5yyu7)
* [Disability](#phoxthamc9m4)
* [Age (50+)](#w6ssfbo3nmng)
* [Body Size](#ua15q4ot3gj6)

**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 Tigerbelles, 44 characters met this criterion:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER NAME** | **LINE COUNT** |
| COACH TEMPLE | 475 |
| WILMA | 293 |
| BILLIE | 146 |
| BARBARA | 124 |
| ELEANOR | 99 |
| C.B. | 87 |
| JESSE | 83 |
| CHARLENE | 59 |
| ROBERT | 39 |
| PRESIDENT DAVIS | 35 |
| BLANCHE | 22 |
| ANNOUNCER 1 | 21 |
| ANNOUNCER 2 | 16 |
| ANNOUNCER 3 | 13 |
| CASSIUS CLAY | 11 |
| ITALIAN REPORTER | 10 |
| ED RUDOLPH | 9 |
| WENDELL | 8 |
| PASTOR | 8 |
| EDWINA | 7 |
| MAMA GRACE | 7 |
| NEW ANNOUNCER | 7 |
| BARBARA’S FATHER | 6 |
| WHITE BOY | 5 |
| RIVAL FRAT GUY | 4 |
| LLOYD | 4 |
| TRACK OFFICIAL | 4 |
| RAY CHARLES | 3 |
| OFFICIAL | 3 |
| BARBARA’S MOTHER | 2 |
| MARVIN | 2 |
| MAISIE | 2 |
| DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN | 2 |
| PROFESSOR | 1 |
| LIBRARIAN | 1 |
| TUSKEGEE RUNNER | 1 |
| MC | 1 |
| COACH ABERNATHY | 1 |
| MRS. ENDICOTT | 1 |
| MARY | 1 |
| DRIVER | 1 |
| LITERACY GIRL 1 | 1 |
| LITERACY GIRL 2 | 1 |
| LITERACY GIRL 3 | 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.***

* 17 characters are specified as female.
* The co-leading character is female.
* The script contains 12 character opportunities to increase gender diversity.

Characters by Gender

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **FEMALE CHARACTER** | **MALE CHARACTER** | **GENDER UNSPECIFIED** |
|  | COACH TEMPLE |  |
| WILMA |  |  |
| BILLIE |  |  |
| BARBARA |  |  |
| ELEANOR |  |  |
| C.B. |  |  |
|  | JESSE |  |
| CHARLENE |  |  |
|  | ROBERT |  |
|  | PRESIDENT DAVIS |  |
| BLANCHE |  |  |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 1 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 2 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 3 |
| 3 | CASSIUS CLAY |  |
|  |  | ITALIAN REPORTER |
|  | ED RUDOLPH |  |
|  | WENDELL |  |
|  |  | PASTOR |
| EDWINA |  |  |
| MAMA GRACE |  |  |
|  |  | NEWS ANNOUNCER |
|  | BARBARA’S FATHER |  |
|  | WHITE BOY |  |
|  | RIVAL FRAT GUY |  |
|  | LLOYD |  |
|  |  | TRACK OFFICIAL |
|  | RAY CHARLES |  |
|  |  | OFFICIAL |
| BARBARA’S MOTHER |  |  |
|  | MARVIN |  |
| MAISIE |  |  |
|  | DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN |  |
|  |  | PROFESSOR |
|  |  | LIBRARIAN |
| TUSKEGEE RUNNER |  |  |
|  |  | MC |
|  | COACH ABERNATHY |  |
| MRS. ENDICOTT |  |  |
| MARY |  |  |
|  |  | DRIVER |
| LITERACY GIRL 1 |  |  |
| LITERACY GIRL 2 |  |  |
| LITERACY GIRL 3 |  |  |

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. |

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**Race/Ethnicity Analysis**

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

* 36 characters are specified as characters of color.
* The leading characters are specified as a characters of color.
* The script contains 6 character opportunities to increase racial/ethnic diversity.

Characters by Race/Ethnicity

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER OF COLOR** | **WHITE CHARACTER** | **RACE/ETHNICITY UNSPECIFIED** |
| COACH TEMPLE |  |  |
| WILMA |  |  |
| BILLIE |  |  |
| BARBARA |  |  |
| ELEANOR |  |  |
| C.B. |  |  |
| JESSE |  |  |
| CHARLENE |  |  |
| ROBERT |  |  |
| PRESIDENT DAVIS |  |  |
| BLANCHE |  |  |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 1 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 2 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 3 |
| CASSIUS CLAY |  |  |
|  | ITALIAN REPORTER |  |
| ED RUDOLPH |  |  |
| PASTOR |  |  |
| EDWINA |  |  |
| MAMA GRACE |  |  |
|  |  | NEWS ANNOUNCER |
| BARBARA’S FATHER |  |  |
|  | WHITE BOY |  |
| RIVAL FRAT GUY |  |  |
| LLOYD |  |  |
|  |  | TRACK OFFICIAL |
| RAY CHARLES |  |  |
|  |  | OFFICIAL |
| BARBARA’S MOTHER |  |  |
| MARVIN |  |  |
| MAISIE |  |  |
| DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN |  |  |
| PROFESSOR |  |  |
| LIBRARIAN |  |  |
| TUSKEGEE RUNNER |  |  |
| MC |  |  |
|  | COACH ABERNATHY |  |
| MRS. ENDICOTT |  |  |
| MARY |  |  |
| DRIVER |  |  |
| LITERACY GIRL 1 |  |  |
| LITERACY GIRL 2 |  |  |
| LITERACY GIRL 3 |  |  |

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 co-leading characters are specified as heterosexual.
* The script contains 21 character opportunities to increase LGBTQ+ diversity.

Characters by LGBTQ+ Status

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **LGBTQ+ CHARACTER** | **HETEROSEXUAL CHARACTER** | **SEXUALITY UNSPECIFIED** |
|  | COACH TEMPLE |  |
|  | WILMA |  |
|  | BILLIE |  |
|  | BARBARA |  |
|  |  | ELEANOR |
|  | CB |  |
|  | JESSE |  |
|  |  | CHARLENE |
|  | ROBERT |  |
|  | PRESIDENT DAVIS |  |
|  | BLANCHE |  |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 1 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 2 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 3 |
|  | CASSIUS CLAY |  |
|  |  | ITALIAN REPORTER |
|  | ED RUDOLPH |  |
|  | WENDELL |  |
|  | PASTOR |  |
|  |  | EDWINA |
|  | MAMA GRACE |  |
|  |  | NEWS ANNOUNCER |
|  | BARBARA’S FATHER |  |
|  |  | WHITE BOY |
|  |  | RIVAL FRAT GUY |
|  |  | LLOYD |
|  |  | TRACK OFFICIAL |
|  | RAY CHARLES |  |
|  |  | OFFICIAL |
|  | BARBARA’S MOTHER |  |
|  |  | MARVIN |
|  |  | MAISIE |
|  |  | DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN |
|  |  | PROFESSOR |
|  |  | LIBRARIAN |
|  |  | TUSKEGEE RUNNER |
|  |  | MC |
|  |  | COACH ABERNATHY |
|  | MRS. ENDICOTT |  |
|  | MARY |  |
|  |  | DRIVER |
|  |  | LITERACY GIRL 1 |
|  |  | LITERACY GIRL 2 |
|  |  | LITERACY GIRL 3 |

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. |
|  | 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 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.***

* 2 characters are specified as having a physical disability.
* The co-leading character is shown having a disability (“Wilma”).
* The script contains 38 character opportunities to increase disability diversity.

Characters by Disability Status

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER WITH DISABILITY** | **CHARACTER WITHOUT DISABILITY** | **DISABILITY STATUS UNSPECIFIED** |
|  | COACH TEMPLE |  |
| WILMA |  |  |
|  | BILLIE |  |
|  | BARBARA |  |
|  | ELEANOR |  |
|  |  | C.B. |
|  |  | JESSE |
|  |  | CHARLENE |
|  |  | ROBERT |
|  |  | PRESIDENT DAVIS |
|  |  | BLANCHE |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 1 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 2 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 3 |
|  | CASSIUS CLAY |  |
|  |  | ITALIAN REPORTER |
|  |  | ED RUDOLPH |
|  |  | WENDELL |
|  |  | PASTOR |
|  |  | EDWINA |
|  |  | MAMA GRACE |
|  |  | NEWS ANNOUNCER |
|  |  | BARBARA'S FATHER |
|  |  | WHITE BOY |
|  |  | RIVAL FRAT GUY |
|  |  | LLOYD |
|  |  | TRACK OFFICIAL |
| RAY CHARLES |  |  |
|  |  | OFFICIAL |
|  |  | BARBARA’S MOTHER |
|  |  | MARVIN |
|  |  | MAISIE |
|  |  | DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN |
|  |  | PROFESSOR |
|  |  | LIBRARIAN |
|  |  | TUSKEGEE RUNNER |
|  |  | MC |
|  |  | COACH ABERNATHY |
|  |  | MRS. ENDICOTT |
|  |  | MARY |
|  |  | DRIVER |
|  |  | LITERACY GIRL 1 |
|  |  | LITERACY GIRL 2 |
|  |  | LITERACY GIRL 3 |

The Marlee Matlin Test

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



**Age (50+) Analysis**

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

* 5 characters are specified as ages 50+.
* The leading characters are under 50 (“Coach Temple”, “Wilma”).
* The script contains 14 character opportunities to increase age diversity.

Characters by Age

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CHARACTER 50+** | **CHARACTER UNDER 50** | **AGE UNSPECIFIED** |
|  | COACH TEMPLE |  |
|  | WILMA |  |
|  | BILLIE |  |
|  | BARBARA |  |
|  | ELEANOR |  |
|  | CB |  |
|  | JESSE |  |
|  | CHARLENE |  |
|  | ROBERT |  |
| PRESIDENT DAVIS |  |  |
|  | BLANCHE |  |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 1 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 2 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 3 |
|  | CASSIUS CLAY |  |
|  |  | ITALIAN REPORTER |
| ED RUDOLPH |  |  |
|  | WENDELL |  |
|  |  | PASTOR |
|  | EDWINA |  |
| MAMA GRACE |  |  |
|  |  | NEWS ANNOUNCER |
|  | BARBARA’S FATHER |  |
|  | WHITE BOY |  |
|  | RIVAL FRAT GUY |  |
|  | LLOYD |  |
|  |  | TRACK OFFICIAL |
|  | RAY CHARLES |  |
|  |  | OFFICIAL |
|  | BARBARA’S MOTHER |  |
|  | MARVIN |  |
|  | MAISIE |  |
|  |  | DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN |
|  |  | PROFESSOR |
|  |  | LIBRARIAN |
|  | TUSKEGEE RUNNER |  |
|  |  | MC |
| COACH ABERNATHY |  |  |
| MRS. ENDICOTT |  |  |
|  |  | MARY |
|  |  | DRIVER |
|  | LITERACY GIRL 1 |  |
|  | LITERACY GIRL 2 |  |
|  | LITERACY GIRL 3 |  |

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.***

* 1 character specified as having a large body type.
* The co-leading character is specified as not specified as having a large body type (“Wilma”). The other co-lead’s body type is unspecified (“Coach Temple”).
* The script contains 37 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** |
|  |  | COACH TEMPLE |
|  | WILMA |  |
|  | BILLIE |  |
|  | BARBARA |  |
|  | ELEANOR |  |
|  | CB |  |
|  |  | JESSE |
|  |  | CHARLENE |
|  |  | ROBERT |
|  |  | PRESIDENT DAVIS |
|  |  | BLANCHE |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 1 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 2 |
|  |  | ANNOUNCER 3 |
|  |  | CASSIUS CLAY |
|  |  | ITALIAN REPORTER |
|  |  | ED RUDOLPH |
|  |  | WENDELL |
|  |  | PASTOR |
|  |  | EDWINA |
| MAMA GRACE |  |  |
|  |  | NEWS ANNOUNCER |
|  |  | BARBARA'S FATHER |
|  |  | WHITE BOY |
|  |  | RIVAL FRAT GUY |
|  |  | LLOYD |
|  |  | TRACK OFFICIAL |
|  | RAY CHARLES |  |
|  |  | OFFICIAL |
|  |  | BARBARA’S MOTHER |
|  |  | MARVIN |
|  |  | MAISIE |
|  |  | DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN |
|  |  | PROFESSOR |
|  |  | LIBRARIAN |
|  |  | TUSKEGEE RUNNER |
|  |  | MC |
|  |  | COACH ABERNATHY |
|  |  | MRS. ENDICOTT |
|  |  | MARY |
|  |  | DRIVER |
|  |  | LITERACY GIRL 1 |
|  |  | LITERACY GIRL 2 |
|  |  | LITERACY GIRL 3 |

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; |
| **NO** | 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** | **YES** | **YES** | **YES** |
| **LGBTQ+ Character** | **NO** | **NO** |  | **NO** | **NO** | **NO** |
| **Character with a Disability** | **YES** | **YES** | **NO** |  | **NO** | **NO** |
| **Character 50+** | **YES** | **YES** | **NO** | **NO** |  | **YES** |
| **Character with Large Body Type** | **YES** | **YES** | **NO** | **NO** | **YES** |  |

**Positive Aspects**

* This story centers on characters of color, celebrates Black achievement, and tells this story without overly relying on stereotypes and tropes.
* Tigerbelles is set against the backdrop of the segregated South and it exposes the injustice of Jim Crow in a very thoughtful way.
* This script features a leading female character of color with a physical disability (Wilma). She overcomes struggles as a young mother, student, and an athlete without depending on tropes and stereotypes.
* This script features Black characters in positions of power and authority; as scholars and doctors.
* The story focuses on a team effort (rather than individual) among women of color, as well as the efforts and contributions of the Black community (men and women) that lead to the Tigerbelles’ historic achievements at the Olympics.

**Potential Pitfalls**

* **Potential Racism**: Mama Grace is written with the size-based Mama Hen Trope— a large body type who is a nurturing mother figure for all those around her— which originates from The Mammy trope that dominated early Hollywood. This may be a challenge to address since this story is based on real life, but worth consideration given the origins of this trope and the comfort it gives some white viewers to see Black women as nurturing and in service to others.
* **Potential Sexism**: The script has a prominent theme that female athletes are supposed to be sexually appealing—that their value derives from their appearance and their athleticism. Female sports advocates have long been [critical of this](http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/587/the-medias-sexualization-of-female-athletes-a-bad-call-for-the-modern-game) because it sets up a double standard for female athletes and sends the message to little girls that, despite their incredible physical feats and accomplishments, they have to be sexually appealing. Here are some of the ways this script reinforces this gender cliché for female athletes:
  + Coach’s admonishment that “You are ladies first, students second, and athletes third. I expect for you to be foxes not oxes.”
  + The script later confirms that the Tigerbelles “are definitely in the foxes category” as they turn heads at the Tuskegee meet.
  + The runners chanting “foxes not oxes.”
  + The scene where the marching band is checking out their butts is particularly gratuitous and reinforces the idea that female athletes are sex objects first and athletes second.
  + The first thing Cassius Clay says to Wilma is “you’re just as pretty as in your pictures.”

There is a tough balance to be struck here in that Black women, and especially Black women athletes, are commonly stereotypes as masculine and unattractive in entertainment media. Showing these athletes as beautiful in every way is also a positive, but there’s a fine line here between not presenting Black women as hyper-masculine and not sexually objectifying Black women athletes.

* **Potential Sexism/Racism:** Billie is depicted as [The Jezebel Trope](https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/jezebel/) – a seductive, worldly, promiscuous, and lewd Black woman. Is there a way to complicate these aspects of Billie?
* **Potential Ageism**: The comment, “Yeah, but we just got beat by some menopausal women” (referring to women in their 20s) is ageist and could be replaced by “has beens” or “washed up” something similar.
* **Potential Sizeism:** several scenes feature body shaming, fatphobic language, including “tubby”, “bubble butt” (22), “you’re one cookie away” (14), “My hips starting to get as big as BJs” (111). Is there a way to talk about their bodies being properly athletic as opposed to properly thin?