**Spellcheck For Bias:** *Firestarter*

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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 *Firestarter* for Universal Pictures/Blumhouse:

* [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 five lines of text or more. In *Firestarter*, 16 characters met this criterion:

| **CHARACTER NAME** | **LINE COUNT** |
| --- | --- |
| Andy | 324 |
| Charlie | 220 |
| Vicky | 106 |
| Unseen Man | 20 |
| Wanless | 24 |
| Darla | 13 |
| Gavin | 6 |
| Ms. Gardner | 22 |
| Principal Lewis | 12 |
| Captain Hollister | 184 |
| Rainbird | 44 |
| Dwayne | 19 |
| Dwayne’s Wife | 6 |
| Irv | 98 |
| Sheriff Perry | 17 |
| Agent Jules | 26 |

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.***

* Female characters make up 37% of the prominent characters with a specified gender.
* The leading character is male (“Andy”) and the co-leading character is female (“Charlie”),
* There are no character opportunities for greater gender diversity.

Characters by Gender

| **FEMALE CHARACTER** | **MALE CHARACTER** | **GENDER UNSPECIFIED** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Andy |  |
| Charlie |  |  |
| Vicky |  |  |
|  | Unseen Man |  |
|  | Wanless |  |
| Darla |  |  |
|  | Gavin |  |
| Ms. Gardner |  |  |
|  | Principal Lewis |  |
| Captain Hollister |  |  |
|  | Rainbird |  |
|  | Dwayne |  |
| Dwayne’s Wife |  |  |
|  | Irv |  |
|  | Sheriff Perry |  |
|  | Agent Jules |  |

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.***

* 50% of characters with race specified are characters of color.
* The leading characters are not specified (“Andy”) and (“Charlie”).
* There are 14 character opportunities for greater racial diversity.
* Character of color (“Rainbird”) is depicted with several indigenous tropes and stereotypes, and is dehumanized throughout the script--being described as a “monster” and “animal”. This character of color is also described with clear parallels to Frankenstein (science experiment gone wrong, large scars, ‘giant’ (in stature), danger to young girl).

Characters by Race/Ethnicity

| **CHARACTER OF COLOR** | **WHITE CHARACTER** | **RACE/ETHNICITY UNSPECIFIED** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Andy |
|  |  | Charlie |
|  | Vicky |  |
|  |  | Unseen Man |
|  |  | Wanless |
|  |  | Darla |
|  |  | Gavin |
|  |  | Ms. Gardner |
|  |  | Principal Lewis |
|  |  | Captain Hollister |
| Rainbird |  |  |
|  |  | Dwayne |
|  |  | Dwayne’s wife |
|  |  | Irv |
|  |  | Sheriff Perry |
|  |  | Agent Jules |

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; |
| **NO** | Is not depicted with race/ethnicity stereotypes or tropes. |



**LGBTQ+ Analysis**

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

* None of the characters are specified as LGBTQ+.
* There are 9 character opportunities for sexual orientation diversity.

Characters by LGBTQ+ Status

| **LGBTQ+ CHARACTER** | **HETEROSEXUAL CHARACTER** | **SEXUALITY UNSPECIFIED** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Andy |  |
|  |  | Charlie |
|  | Vicky |  |
|  |  | Unseen Man |
|  |  | Wanless |
|  | Darla |  |
|  |  | Gavin |
|  |  | Ms. Gardner |
|  |  | Principal Lewis |
|  |  | Captain Hollister |
|  |  | Rainbird |
|  | Dwayne |  |
|  | Dwayne’s wife |  |
|  | Irv |  |
|  |  | Sheriff Perry |
|  | Agent Jules |  |

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.***

* None of the characters are specified as having a disability.
* There are 16 character opportunities to improve disability representations.

Characters by Disability Status

| **CHARACTER WITH DISABILITY** | **CHARACTER WITHOUT DISABILITY** | **DISABILITY STATUS UNSPECIFIED** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Andy |
|  |  | Charlie |
|  |  | Vicky |
|  |  | Unseen Man |
|  |  | Wanless |
|  |  | Darla |
|  |  | Gavin |
|  |  | Ms. Gardner |
|  |  | Principal Lewis |
|  |  | Captain Hollister |
|  |  | Rainbird |
|  |  | Dwayne |
|  |  | Dwayne’s wife |
|  |  | Irv |
|  |  | Sheriff Perry |
|  |  | Agent Jules |

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; |
|  | Is not depicted with disability stereotypes or tropes. |



**Age (50+) Analysis**

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

* 25% of the characters are specified as over 50.
* The leading characters are under 50 (“Charlie”) and (“Andy”).
* There are 5 character opportunities to improve age representations

Characters by Age

| **CHARACTER 50+** | **CHARACTER UNDER 50** | **AGE UNSPECIFIED** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Andy |  |
|  | Charlie |  |
|  | Vicky |  |
|  |  | Unseen Man |
| Wanless |  |  |
| Darla |  |  |
|  | Gavin |  |
|  | Ms. Gardner |  |
| Principal Lewis |  |  |
|  | Captain Hollister |  |
|  |  | Rainbird |
|  | Dwayne |  |
|  |  | Dwayne’s wife |
| Irv |  |  |
|  |  | Sheriff Perry |
|  |  | Agent Jules |

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.***

* 12% of characters are specified as having a large body type.
* The leading characters’ body types are unspecified (“Andy” and “Charlie”).
* There are 14 character opportunities to improve representations of characters with large body types.

Characters by Body Size

| **CHARACTER WITH LARGE BODY TYPE** | **CHARACTER WITH SMALL/MEDIUM BODY TYPE** | **BODY SIZE UNSPECIFIED** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Andy |
|  |  | Charlie |
|  |  | Vicky |
|  |  | Unseen Man |
|  |  | Wanless |
| Darla |  |  |
|  |  | Gavin |
|  |  | Ms. Gardner |
|  |  | Principal Lewis |
|  |  | Captain Hollister |
| Rainbird |  |  |
|  |  | Dwayne |
|  |  | Dwayne’s wife |
|  |  | Irv |
|  |  | Sheriff Perry |
|  |  | Agent Jules |

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

**General Positives**

* Male character (“Andy”) shows emotions and is a loving father.
* Female lead (“Charlie”) takes part in most action scenes and is a powerful force in the script.
* Humanizes criminals when Andy explains not all fugitives are bad people.

**General Negatives**

* Body shaming scenes: Darla, a larger bodied character, is meant to imagine how happy she would be if she were thin (11-12); Minor character (“chubby guy”) fat shamed when someone jokes “I think your diet is broke” (87).
* Character of color (“Rainbird”) described as a “monster” (107), “nightmare come to life”, and “animal” (95). This character also embodies several indigenous stereotypes and tropes (braids; Stoic Indian (78); Native Guide (64); Savage (95; 107)).
* Ageism: Two 50+ characters (“Wanless” and “Irv”) are described as “feeble”, “sickly” (51), “slow”(69), and “ungainly” (69).

**Additional Thoughts**

* If “Unseen Man”, “Wanless”, and background scientists are cast as white (and male), they will match the “white man in lab coat trope”.
* Minor disabled character (Essi), if depicted as a ‘horrific’ sight (62) to behold may fit the “freak” trope for character with disabilities.
* Andy (father of Charlie) gets nervous when Charlie (pre-teen daughter) describes her body changing and asks her to speak with her mother about such things--rather than normalizing female biology across gender.
* If Charlie and Andy are cast as white, a potentially racist storyline may follow: a “monstrous” character of color (Rainbird) will kill a white woman (Vicky), hunt and track a young white female character (Charlie), while a white male (Andy) will be protecting that white female from that character of color.