Title:

A model for inclusivity in blockbuster franchises? Analysing diversity and representation in the Fast and the Furious series

Authors:

Pete Jones – University of Melbourne

Joshua Gulam – Liverpool Hope University

Eithne Quinn – University of Manchester

Abstract:

*The Fast and the Furious* franchise provides a fascinating nexus for thinking about diversity and representation in blockbuster Hollywood cinema. In a landscape where on- and off-screen diversity in Hollywood continues to lag behind the diversity of the US population, it is significant that a series centred on a multiethnic cast and in which seven of the nine feature films have been directed by people of colour is also one of the highest grossing cinematic franchises of all time globally. Indeed, a significant element of the series’ success has been its ability to capitalise on international markets despite lacking the historical brand recognition of other blockbuster franchises. Thus, the series represents a unique model of how diverse and inclusive casting can be matched with commercial success. This chapter aims to unpack and evaluate this model for blockbuster diversity in the context of both the trends in action cinema more broadly as well as the narratives of the films themselves. This will be done in three main parts. First, we will review the critical and scholarly discussions and claims that the franchise has provoked concerning the “utopic multiculturalism” (Beltrán 2005) depicted through its multiracial casting and narratives. We will then present a content analysis of the films in the franchise in order to gain an empirical sense of the actual diversity of the narrative world, and contextualise this analysis in light of industry benchmark figures and wider trends in on- and off-screen diversity. Finally, we will take a closer look at how race and gender are negotiated in the films in order to unpack the race and gender politics of the series, focusing on key themes such as racelessness, masculinity and homosociality. Through these different avenues of exploration, the chapter will provide a robust analysis of diversity and representation the series in light of key critical claims that are often made about it but have not received much scholarly attention.

Bio

Pete Jones is currently based in the University of Melbourne’s Complex Human Data Hub as a visiting academic. He recently submitted his doctoral thesis on using relational methods to analyse the marginalisation of women in Hollywood film narratives to the University of Manchester. His research centres on gender and popular cinema, and on the development of empirical tools for evaluating the dynamics of narrative texts.