Who watches the MCU? Race, sex, and the role of on-screen diversity

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The chapters in this book show how political themes run through the Marvel Cinematic Universe. From the MCU's ambivalent portrait of government to its forays into the politics of race, gender, class and ableism, political themes are recurrent as explosions, albeit more subtle.

In this chapter, I explore data on the US audience for the MCU. How widely shared is the MCU's corpus of myths? Which groups of people are the most and least familiar with these stories? Do the political themes in the films mirror the audience's views or run at odds with them?

These questions are interesting, first, because the MCU is arguably the best-known work of contemporary fiction in the United States. Second, popular culture is a subject of recurrent controversy in US politics. Examples include debate over athletes kneeling during the national anthem or protests against the casting of white actors to play people of color. Ordinary people participate in those controversies through speech and consumption. An argument about the values that should be transmitted in popular culture easily morphs into a debate over which values sell best.

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Audience data can clarify whether the MCU is vulnerable to political backlash from the left or right. The possibility of backlash is especially interesting given Marvel Studios plans to diversify its casting in phase four of the MCU (Smith 2019). Only two of the 23 MCU films to date – *Black Panther* and *Captain Marvel* – have not been led by a white, male actor (Karim 2018). How will a more varied set of superheroes be greeted by the MCU's existing audience? Could a more diverse cast expand the MCU's audience in the United States?

Who watches the MCU? The stereotype and the reality

Just as the MCU's lead characters are overwhelmingly white men, the stereotypical fan of comic books and superhero movies is young, male, and white. The lead actors are the aspirational version of this presumed audience.

To get more information on the actual demographics of the MCU's US fans, I used the Simmons Insights marketing data produced by Experian. That firm runs quarterly surveys of US adults.[2] The surveys ask about a huge range of products and services. People taking the survey check off recent films they have seen and all of the formats in which they saw these films: in-theater, DVD purchase, DVD rental, streaming, download, or pay-per-view.

In its surveys from 2010 to 2017, Simmons Insights asked US adults about five MCU movies, listed in Table 1. Table 1 also shows the resulting estimates of what percent of US adults

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[2] The sample is of English and Spanish-speaking adults in the US excluding Alaska and Hawaii. Survey respondents are recruited through phone and mail solicitations. Respondents receive cash incentives with initial solicitations, when receiving survey materials, and in response to completed surveys. These cash incentives total to between $15 and $60, with more money paid to harder-to-reach demographics like households without landlines. Respondents are weighted to be representative by ethnicity, presence of a landline, income and geography. The sample size is very large, close to 25,000 respondents in a 12-month survey period. See Experian (2010-2017).

saw each movie in theater and what percent saw each movie in any format. Across the five films, the in-theater MCU audience averaged 11% of US adults and the total audience averaged 17% of adults.[3] For comparison, of all 352 movies Simmons Insights asked about between 2010 and 2017, the most watched was *Avatar.* 19% of US adults saw *Avatar* in theater and 35% saw it in total. On average, the 352 films had an in-theater audience of 3% of adults and a total audience of 8% of adults. Compared to that standard, MCU films have 2 to 5 times larger theatrical audiences and 25% to 150% more viewers across all formats.

Table 1: US adult audience for five MCU films

	Estimated percent of US adults who saw film:	
	In a movie theater	In any format
Iron Man 2	10	16
The Avengers	15	20
Iron Man 3	13	20
Captain America: Civil War	12	17
Doctor Strange	5.5	10
Average	11	17

Of course, MCU films cost a lot more money to make than average movies, are advertised more widely, and are written to be as broadly appealing as possible (Harrison, Carlsen and Škerlavaj, 2019). The apples-to-apples comparison should pit MCU films versus movies that are also pitched to wide audiences and have similar budgets and marketing campaigns (Epstein 2010).

To find a comparison group for the MCU, I looked for films that met four criteria. (1) Live-action films, (2) with a PG or PG-13 rating, and (3) action or adventure as their primary

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[3] The Simmons Insights estimates are similar to data in YouGov (2019).

genre.[4] Finally, (4) the film's reported production budget was $100 million or more

(Boxofficemojo.com, 2020). The least expensive MCU film to date is *Ant-Man,* with a reported

cost of $130 million. All 23 MCU films meet these four criteria.

64 non-MCU movies in the marketing surveys ticked all four boxes.[5] These films include

titles from the biggest franchises of recent years, including *Harry Potter, Star Wars,* and the *DC*

cinematic universe. The top-billed actor in most of these films was a white man, with exceptions

like *The Hunger Games* and *The Fast and the Furious* movies.

These large budget action/adventure movies had audiences more comparable to the

MCU's. Their theatrical audiences averaged 6% of the adult population and their total audience

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[4] This information was from Fritz (2020), The Internet Movie Database (2020), and The Movie Database (2020).

[5] The competitor films are as follows. Films marked with an asterisk (*) star a white women. Films marked with a dagger (†) star a man of color.
2009: Star Trek, Terminator: Salvation; Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian; Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen; Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince; G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra; Where the Wild Things Are; 2012; Avatar.
2010: Alice in Wonderland*; Clash of the Titans; Robin Hood; Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time; Inception; Salt*; The Other Guys; Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1; The Tourist.
2011: The Green Hornet; Fast Five†; Cowboys & Aliens; The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1*; Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows; Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol.
2012: John Carter; Wrath of the Titans; Men in Black 3†; Skyfall; The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*; The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey.
2013: G.I. Joe: Retaliation†; Oblivion; Star Trek Into Darkness; Fast & Furious 6†; World War Z; Pacific Rim†; The Wolverine; Ender's Game.
2014: RoboCop; Noah; Trancendence; Transformers: Age of Extinction; The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1*; Exodus: Gods and Kings; The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies.
2015: Jupiter Ascending*; Insurgent*; Furious 7†; Fant4stic; The Martian; Spectre; The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2*; Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens.
2016: Gods of Egypt; Allegiant*; Batman v Superman: The Dawn of Justice; The Huntsman: Winter's War; X-Men: Apocalypse; Alice Through the Looking Glass*; Independence Day: Resurgence; Jason Bourne; Suicide Squad†; Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*; Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*.

about 12% of adults. Still, four of the five MCU films in Table 1 out-performed those averages. *Doctor Strange* was the exception.

The marketing data highlights a paradox. The MCU is as widely-known as any other piece of contemporary popular culture. Yet, each MCU film is seen by only a minority of American adults. Compared to the pre-television heyday of Hollywood films, or even entertainment before the internet, US popular culture is highly fragmented (Fritz 2018).

Beating the competition

Which US adults are most and least likely to watch the MCU? Figure 1 show details about the MCU audience by sex and race; the data displayed in the graph are also listed in Table 2. An example of how to read the graph is as follows. The left-most pair of bars shows what percent of adults saw a movie in any format, averaged across movies. The darker bar represents the five MCU movies: 17% of adults saw these films, on average. The lighter-shaded bar is the average share of adults who saw the 64 non-MCU large budget action movies: 12%. The MCU audience among US adults was 40% larger than competing films. The next four pairs of bars show the same MCU-versus-competitors comparison of audience size among women of color, men of color, non-Hispanic white women, and non-Hispanic white men. Within each pair, MCU viewership is the darker bar.

The bar graph shows one pattern that conforms to stereotypes. Men see large budget action/adventure movies, including MCU films, at higher rates than women. That is true of men of color compared to women of color and non-Hispanic white men versus non-Hispanic white women.

Figure 1 also shows that the MCU is out-performing competitor films in every demographic. The rightmost column of Table 2 calculates the size of the MCU's advantage. Across sex and race, the MCU had 20% to 60% larger audiences. The MCU outperformed similar films in the individual racial and ethnic categories classified as people of color. The last rows in Table 2 show this data. About 23% of non-Hispanic Asian-Americans see MCU films, roughly the same rate as Hispanics of any race. The rate of MCU viewership for Black non-Hispanics is 18%. If the MCU is underperforming in any demographic, it is white women. In other market segments, rates of MCU viewership are at least 40% higher than similar movies. By contrast, among white women the MCU "only" outperforms competitors by 20%.

The downside of this incredible performance is that it raises the possibility the MCU is near a ceiling for its US audience.[6] There is no untapped pool of action/adventure fans for the MCU to capture – it already outperforms similar movies in all demographics.

People of color are the core of the MCU fandom

The big difference between conventional wisdom and the data in Figure 1 is that white men are not the most likely to watch the MCU. In fact, with a 17% viewership rate for MCU films, white

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[6] The MCU's adult audience may grow as children who grew up with the MCU turn 18. Some of those children are already in the Simmons Insights data. For example, an 18-year-old answering questions about *Doctor Strange* in 2016 was 10 when *Iron Man* was released in 2008.

men trail both men of color (24%) and women of color (18%).[7] The MCU's competitors also have higher rates of viewership among people of color than among whites.[8]

Age is one reason people of color see more MCU films than non-Hispanic whites. US whites skew older. Movie audiences, including MCU audiences, skew young. However, people of color watch the MCU at higher rates than non-Hispanic whites in every age cohort.[9]

High rates of viewership mean that both men and women of color account for a bigger portion of the MCU audience than the population in general. People of color are 36% of US adults but about 45% of the MCU's adult audience. Among the youngest adults, people of color are a majority. People of color are 52% of Marvel's 18-24 year-old audience.[10]

Discussions about the lack of diversity in the MCU often imply that expanding diversity on-screen is a tool to win over non-white audiences (e.g., McClintock, 2018). However, that framing misses the fact that people of color are already the MCU's most loyal fans and the most avid consumers of large budget action/adventure movies.

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[7] MCU viewership is likewise higher among Asian-Americans, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic blacks than among non-Hispanic whites.

[8] Other marketing research has found that people of color are over-represented in theatrical audiences for movies. See MPAA (2016), Sage (2016), Shaw (2014a, 2014b).

[9] Among adults 18-24, MCU films drew 29% of people of color and 26% of non-Hispanic whites. In the 25-34 age bracket the corresponding averages are 27% and 22%. Ages 35-44: 25% and 21%. Ages 45-54: 17% and 14%. Ages 55-64: 14% and 9.1%. Ages 65+: 6.3% and 3.5%.

[10] The U.S. Census Bureau (2018) calculates that, in 2018, 46% of the population between 15 and 24 was people of color.

Figure 1: US adult audience for MCU versus similar large budget action/adventure films
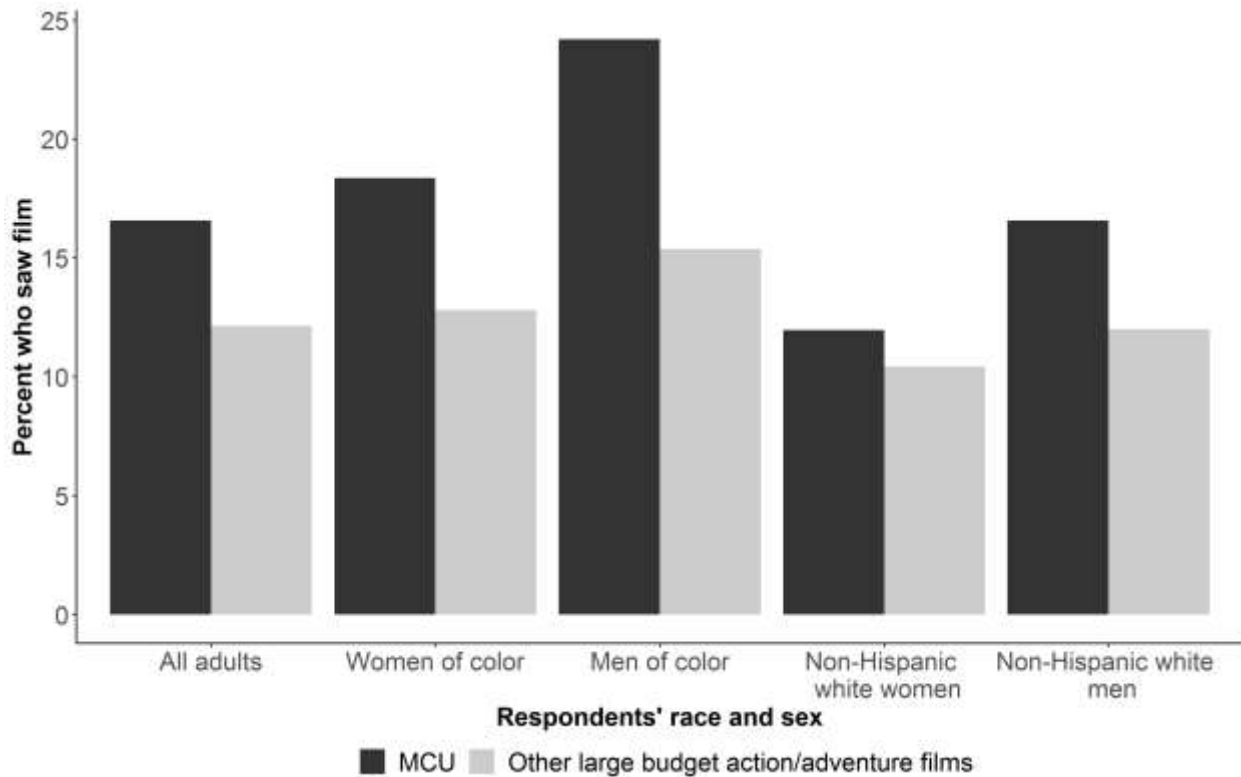
Table 2: US adult audience for MCU versus similar large budget action/adventure films

	Estimated percent of US adults who saw film:		
	MCU films	Similar films	MCU versus similar films
All adults	17	12	+42%
People of color	21	14	+50%
Women of color	18	13	+38%
Men of color	24	15	+60%
Non-Hispanic whites	14	11	+27%
Non-Hispanic white women	12	10	+20%
Non-Hispanic white men	17	12	+42%
Non-Hispanic Asian-American women	20	15	+33%
Non-Hispanic Asian-American men	26	16	+63%
Non-Hispanic black women	15	11	+36%
Non-Hispanic black men	21	14	+50%
Hispanic women, any race	20	13	+54%

Hispanic men, any race	25	16	+56%

Which kids are watching the MCU?

For Marvel Studios, the most valuable cohort of all is arguably children who will consume themed toys, games, books, clothing, and other merchandise. Although my marketing surveys do not ask about children's viewing habits, we can investigate what adults living with children are watching.

Living with a kid increases the chances of an adult seeing an MCU movie. As Table 3 shows, men and women in every racial category see MCU films more often if they live in a household with at least one child.[11] For people of color, average MCU viewership is about 18% among adults who don't live with children but 24% among adults who do. About 12% of non-Hispanic whites without children at home see MCU films, compared to 19% of those who do live with a child. Again, MCU films are more popular among people of color, even taking into account whether someone lives with children.

Table 3: US adult audience for MCU by race, sex, and number of children in household

	Estimated percent of US adults who saw film:	
	Zero children at home	One or more children at home
All adults	14	21
People of color	18	24
Women of color	15	21
Men of color	22	27
Non-Hispanic whites	12	19
Non-Hispanic white women	10	17

[11] This category includes people who live with underage siblings, step-children, grandchildren, and so forth. On the other hand, the category does not include people whose biological children are grown or do not live with them.

People of color are also slightly more likely to live with at least one child. 34% have a kid in their home, versus 30% of non-Hispanic whites. Combined with higher rates of watching the MCU, people of color are the slim majority (51%) of MCU-watching adults who live with children. It is likely that children of color are also a majority or near-majority of the MCU's under-18 audience.

Could there be a white conservative backlash against the MCU?

The marketing surveys clarify why Marvel Studios is planning to diversify its casting. The children and young adults watching the MCU are as likely to be people of color as non-Hispanic whites. Marvel Studios has already been under scrutiny for a lack of diversity. For example, in *Doctor Strange* the character of The Ancient One is played by Tilda Swinton, a white British actress. This character is an Asian man in the comics. Some critics accused Marvel Studios of "whitewashing" the story. Both the studio and the director felt obligated to address the charge (Kyriazis 2016).

On the other hand, more diverse casting has also spurred backlash. In the last decade, opposition to diversity in popular culture has become very visible in online fandom and social media (Field 2018). Anti-diversity commentators reject the idea that representation in popular culture has inherent value. They further argue that popular culture increasingly demeans whites, men, heterosexuals, and other traditionally high-status groups. With respect to movie franchises like the MCU, these critics are suspicious of any efforts to diversify the characters in terms of

sex, race, sexual orientation, or other departures from the source material. Critics claim these changes come at the expense of storytelling and artistic quality and slight the fans loyal to the characters in their white, heterosexual, and male avatars.

A small number of internet commentators make a living expounding this viewpoint in monetized YouTube videos, merchandise, crowdfunding, and fee-for-subscription media. A larger number of people engage in online anti-diversity trolling as a hobby. Campaigns of harassment are an annoyance and, at times, a danger to other fans, creators, and artists (Neiwert 2017). Marvel Studios is sufficiently aware of this subculture that its public relations obliquely address its concerns – for example, Marvel's reassurances that diversity will not be "forced" (Smith 2019).

High profile past incidents of anti-diversity lobbying against the MCU are the calls for a boycott of *Captain Marvel* and a trolling campaign that led to James Gunn being fired as director of the third *Guardians of the Galaxy* film. Of course, the boycott did not prevent *Captain Marvel* from being a box office success. James Gunn was eventually rehired.

One reason trolls have not had a bigger impact on the MCU is that its fans are spread across the spectrum of political ideology. Table 4 shows rates of MCU viewership according to how respondents describe their political outlook: liberal, moderate, or conservative. I have also separated respondents by sex and race because anti-diversity campaigns express the ideals of racial and gender conservatism. Also, whites and people of color do not necessarily use the same yardsticks to measure liberal versus conservative (Jefferson 2020).

Table 4: US adult audience for the MCU by race, sex, and political ideology

	Estimated percent of US adults who saw MCU film:			
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	Liberals cf. conservatives
All adults	19	17	15	+27%
People of color	24	22	20	+20%
Women of color	21	19	14	+50%
Men of color	28	25	23	+22%
Non-Hispanic whites	16	15	14	+14%
Non-Hispanic white women	14	12	11	+27%
Non-Hispanic white men	17	17	16	+6%

Among all adults, MCU viewership falls slightly as respondents move politically to the right. About 19% of liberals see MCU films, compared to 17% of moderates, and 15% of conservatives. The pattern holds among men of color, women of color, and non-Hispanic whites. Non-Hispanic white men stand out. In this market segment, liberals, moderates, and conservatives all watch the MCU about the same amount.

Table 4 shows that the MCU's viewership is quite distributed by race, sex, and ideology. As a result, the franchise is less reliant on conservative whites than some of its competitors. On average, 22% of an MCU film's audience is non-Hispanic white conservatives, ranging from 19% of the audience for *Captain America: Civil War* to 23% of the audience for *The Avengers*. Male, white conservatives are an even smaller fraction of the MCU audience: 8% to 16%. For perspective, *Star Wars* is an example of a franchise that is more reliant on white conservatives. 28% of the *Star Wars: Episode VII* audience was white conservatives, as was 29% of the *Rogue*

One audience.[12] That contrast may be one reason that the *Star Wars* franchise does not have a public plan for diversifying its casting analogous to the MCU's phase four.

How audiences respond to diverse casting

Self-identified conservatives may not be the only fans who are alienated by a more diverse MCU – white identity politics cuts across the traditional labels of liberal and conservative (Jardina 2019). Can marketing data tell us anything about how the sex or race of actors influences the success of a movie? Do men avoid movies headlined by women? Do people see more movies starring someone of their ethnicity?

One obstacle to answering these questions is that Hollywood movies, especially expensive franchise movies, are overwhelmingly led by white male actors. That is true of 90% of MCU movies to date. The non-MCU large budget action/adventure movies I have marketing data on are somewhat more diverse. 60% were headed by white men, 20% were headlined by a white woman, and 10% had a man of color as the lead actor. None were led by a woman of color.

The seven films starring men of color do not represent all racial or ethnic groups. Three star Vin Diesel, who is multiracial.[13] Two films are led by Will Smith, an African-American; one by Idris Elba, who is British-Sierra Leonean; and one by Dwayne Johnson, who is black and Pacific Islander. Arguably, these leading men provide the most representation to non-Hispanic blacks. All four men have at least one black parent.

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[12] White, non-Hispanic conservative men were 17% of the *Star Wars: Episode VII* audience and 19% of the *Rogue One* audience. The franchise least reliant on white conservatives is *The Fast and Furious*. The fifth, sixth and seventh movies in that series drew between 14 and 16% of their audience from white conservatives and 9%-10% from white, male conservatives.

[13] Vin Diesel has not publicized all details of his ancestry. *Multi-Facial* (Bijelonic 1999) describes his experience auditioning for acting roles as a person of ambiguous ethnicity.

A further problem in the data I have is repeated entries from a few franchises. The twelve films starring white women include repeat entries from four franchises: Twilight, Hunger Games, Divergent, and Disney's live-action Alice in Wonderland. Three of seven films led by men of color are installments of *The Fast and the Furious.* Within these franchise pairs and trio, the lead actor is the same. The director, the writers, or both are constant. Idiosyncrasies in how audiences feel about these particular artists and stories have more weight in the data because of repeated entries in the same franchise.

A final caveat concerns diversity off-screen. A major difference between the films led by white women in my data and the films led by men of color is that the former group had more diversity behind the camera. 10 of the 12 movies starring white women are based on source material and/or a screenplay by a white woman. White men wrote the screenplay for six of the seven movies starring a man of color and wrote all of the source material.[14]

The most-watched movies are led by white women

With those caveats in place, Figure 2 shows viewership of big budget action/adventure movies according to whether the lead actor was a white man, a white woman, or a man of color. The left-most trio of bars gives estimated average viewership among all adults, the next trio is estimates for women of color, then men of color, then white women and finally white men. Table 5 shows the same data and provides additional disaggregation.

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[14] Guillermo del Toro – a Mexican national – directed and co-wrote the screenplay for *Pacific Rim*.

Figure 2: US audience for large budget action/adventure movies by race and sex of lead actor
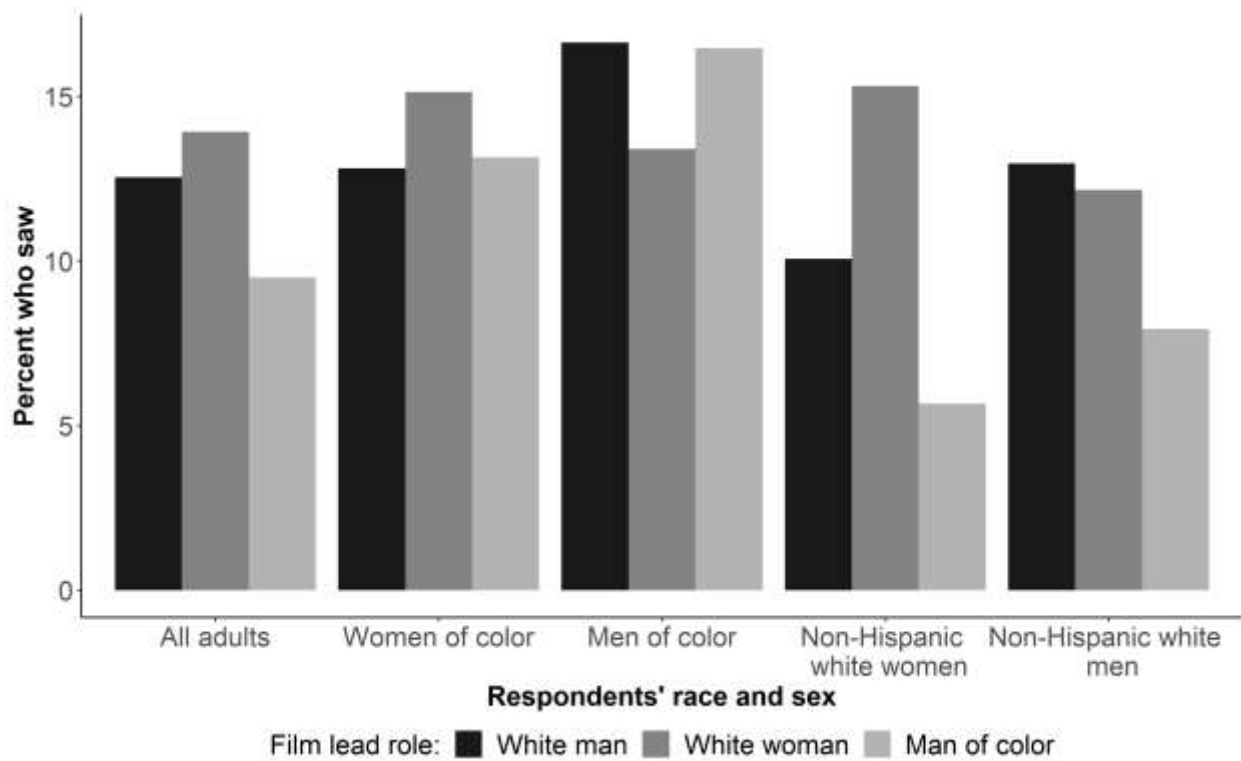
Table 5: US adult audience for large budget action/adventure movies by race and sex of lead actor

	Estimated percent of US adults who saw film starring:		
	White man	White woman	Man of color
All adults	13	14	9.5
People of color	15	14	15
Women of color	13	15	13
Men of color	17	12	16
Non-Hispanic whites	11	14	7
Non-Hispanic white women	10	15	6
Non-Hispanic white men	13	12	8
Adults living with 1+ children	15	18	12
Non-Hispanic Asian-American women	16	17	9.5

Non-Hispanic Asian-American men	19	13	9.4
Non-Hispanic black women	11	13	14
Non-Hispanic black men	14	12	18
Hispanic women, any race	13	16	14
Hispanic men, any race	17	14	17

The films with the highest average viewership were led by white female actresses. These films had an average viewership of 14% of adults, compared to 13% for films led by white men and 9.5% for movies starring men of color.

It is also true that women are more likely to see films headed by women and men are more likely to see films headlined by men. Among women of color, films led by a white woman had slightly more viewership (15%) than films led by white men (13%). White women were much more likely to see films led by white women compared to white men: viewership jumped 50% from an audience of 10% of white women to 15%.

At the same time, movies starring women lost some viewership among men. An average of 17% of men of color saw movies led by white men. Just 12% saw movies led by white women. Interestingly, white men went to see movies starring white men and white women at about the same frequency: 13% versus 12%.

Pulling these numbers together, films starring white women fared well because large gains among white women and smaller gains among women of color more than made up for losses among men of color. These movies also benefitted from having little drop-off in viewing among white men.

Table 5 includes additional data on adults living with children. 18% of adults in that category saw films starring white women, beating out the 15% who saw movies starring white

men. This pattern reflects the fact that adults who live with children are disproportionately female. It is likely that children are also watching large budget movies led by women at high rates.

Marvel Studios is on solid commercial ground with its upcoming vehicles for white heroines. Data also suggests a film starring a woman of color might perform better than conventional wisdom holds. The movie could benefit from the double boost of drawing both adult women and the children they live with.

What draws new audiences?

Movies led by white men and white women had similarly sized audiences. The seven movies starring a man of color had less viewership. Movies led by white men had an average audience of 13% of adults. Just 9.5% of adults saw films led by men of color. [15] A key reason for that drop-off is that non-Hispanic whites were less likely to see these movies. Among both white men and white women, the audience for movies led by men of color was 40% smaller than the audience for movies with white male stars.

Those losses among white audiences were not offset by an increase in viewership among people of color. Women of color saw films led by white men and men of color at the same rate:

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[15] I considered whether this pattern was the result of the unique business strategy of *The Fast and the Furious* franchise. It earns a much higher share of its revenue outside the US than other ongoing franchises (Dawson 2017). Since US audiences are less important for these films, perhaps they are not advertised much domestically. However, the three installments of *The Fast and the Furious* are among the best performing films led by men of color. They outdraw other films led by men of color in every demographic in my data, including non-Hispanic whites.

13%. Among men of color, viewership of films led by men of color was 16%, slightly below the 17% rate of viewership for movies starring white men.

At the bottom of Table 5, viewership is presented according to a more detailed racial breakdown. The movies starring actors of color provide the most representation to black Americans. The black audience for these films was larger than the audience for similar films starring white men. 18% of black, non-Hispanic men saw the seven movies led by men of color, which is a 29% increase over the average for films with white male stars. Black, non-Hispanic women's viewership was 14%, up from 11% (+27%). Hispanic men and women saw movies led by white men and men of color at roughly the same rate. Among non-Hispanic Asian-Americans, however, viewership for the seven films starring a man of color was below the average for films with a white male star. 16% of Asian-American women and 19% of Asian-American men saw large budget films with white male stars. Those rates fell to 9.5% and 9.4% for the movies starring men of color.

The boost that black/multi-racial black leads had from black audiences is small compared to the increased audience of white women for movies starring white actresses. Why? One factor may be that people of color are already the most likely to see large budget action/adventure movies. It is difficult to increase viewership when enthusiasm is already so high. However, that reasoning wouldn't account for the success of *Black Panther,* which benefitted from a huge increase in African-American theater-going (McClintock 2018).

Behind camera diversity is one difference between *Black Panther* and the movies starring men of color in my data. As noted above, only one of the seven films had a person of color as a director or writer. By contrast, *Black Panther* was directed by African-American filmmaker

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Ryan Coogler, who co-wrote the script with Joe Robert Cole, who is also African American. Some diversity behind the camera also characterized most of the films starring white women in my data. 10 of the 12 had source material and/or a screenplay written by a woman. The MCU's *Captain Marvel* is another example of a hugely successful film with a white woman as the star and women on the directing and writing team.[16]

Other chapters in this volume show how *Black Panther* and *Captain Marvel* use themes related to race and gender to differentiate themselves from other MCU installments. In other words, these films use their non-traditional lead to tell a non-standard story. Arguably, the same cannot be said for the small set of films in my data that were led by men of color. For example, swapping a white actor for Will Smith in *Men in Black 3* or *Suicide Squad* would be straightforward. In both, Smith plays a character that was white in the source material. I suspect these seven movies—starring men of color but written and directed by white men—did not stray enough from genre conventions to win new audiences. Without interest from people who do not usually see large budget action/adventure movies, the films did not offset lost viewership among non-Hispanic whites and Asian-Americans.

As noted earlier, the MCU's audience includes everyone who sees large budget action/adventure movies and then some. Expanding its US audience – with or without diversifying its casting – would require winning over even more people who are not consistent fans of the genre. The evidence from other franchises suggests behind camera diversity is just as important for appealing to new audiences as diversity in casting.

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[16] Anna Boden directed *Captain Marvel.* Boden has a writing credit on the movie along with Ryan Fleck, Geneva Robertson-Dworet, Nicole Perlman, and Meg LeFauve.

Move over, fanboys

More than any other movie franchise, the MCU draws a large, diverse, and frequent audience for its storytelling. The scope of that audience makes the politics of the MCU important.

Marvel Studio's plans to diversify its casting will no doubt stir up some internet trolling and may even shrink the MCU's white audience. However, the more diverse cast will bring the superheroes into line with the composition of the MCU's existing US fan base. Contrary to stereotypes, adult fans are about evenly split between non-Hispanic whites and people of color. The latter segment will expand as the youngest MCU viewers grow up.

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