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The Lack of Representation of Mexican Women in Films

Lizbeth Garcia Gonzalez
University of Texas at El Paso

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LIZBETH GARCIA GONZALEZ

Master's Program in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

APPROVED:

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Lou Herman, Ph.D., Chair

_____

Elias Adanu, Ph.D.

_____

Ruth McDonald, MA.

_____
Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Dedication

To my mom and sister, the two people in my life who always encouraged and pushed me to

places I didn't even believe I could go.

THE LACK OF REPRESENTATION OF MEXICAN WOMEN IN FILMS

by

LIZBETH GARCIA GONZALEZ, B.A

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Introduction

My parents, sister and I immigrated from Mexico to the US when I was two years old. Since then, my status has been as an immigrant with Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or DACA. The immigrant experience is tied to our culture and our experiences living in a foreign country that slowly become our home. My experience as an immigrant is influenced by what I learn in school and what I learn from my parents at home. When we came to the US, I was too young to remember what I was leaving behind, but my mom was 25 years old, her whole life up to that point was in Mexico. Like most families, my mom wanted my sister and I to have opportunities that she did not have; to be in a safe country. Growing up I learned both languages, English at school and Spanish at home, my mom encouraged us to always practice both languages, she said it would open more opportunities for us in the US. In a lot of ways, she was right. I am constantly using my Spanish and English, switching between both either at school or at work. When I use my Spanish, it is also a reminder of who I am as a Mexican woman living in the US.

Like most children that immigrate to a foreign country, my experience was knowing everything about the US and only relying on my mom's memories of the country I was from. In return, I helped my parents by translating from English to Spanish and vice versa, especially for my mom's employers, reading medical documents at doctor visits with my mom and sister, and helping my mom by writing documents for her taxes. All of these experiences are still part of my immigrant experience, but it's not just mine. It's an experience that is common in the US with many Americans coming from generations of immigrants. Many of these real-life stories happen with families like mine, hardworking mothers and fathers and children given opportunities they would not have in their place of birth.

According to the 2022 Census, the minority share of the US population was 43.1%, with 19.1% representing Hispanic or Latino origins (US Census Bureau). There were more people in the US who identify as Latino or Hispanic, yet in films released during 2022 there is only 2.3% Latinx leads in films that were underrepresented in theatrical film along with women who identified as Latinx had a alarming distinguished between the White female roles (See Figure 2.1 and 2.2) (Ramón, et.al., 2022). Films are a part of how we view our society and community, they mirror our culture or connect to our experiences, but if a majority of the representation in film does not reflect its society, can they still connect with audiences?

The representation of women in film has been important to me since I first started watching movies. When I was younger, the only roles that resonated with me in film were of strong and independent women. In most cases these roles were only seen in romance or romantic comedies. I would admire how these women were at the center of their story, they shared lived experience that relate to having dreams of pursuing a career, or in most cases finding a partner. Even though I related to these female roles and stories, I did not feel I could relate to their experiences because of the different backgrounds we shared. Many of the women that I would see on screen were predominantly white and were American. As a woman who identifies as Mexican, I did not relate to their white-collar jobs or middle-class problems. None of the women that I would see on screen shared any glimpses of my identity, instead they showed a version that almost seemed like a fantasy. I started looking for films that did share my identity or at least showed stories that reflected my experiences. I started by looking at the films behind Mexican women in leading roles, I started reading who was behind the films I found represented experiences and identities I could relate to on screen. It did not take long to realize that not many stories on screen have representation of Mexican women.

The lack of roles that women have in film is limited, but it is even more difficult to relate to the attempts of representation in film today. According to the Hollywood Diversity Report, "Among White, Black, Latinx, and Native actors, women were underrepresented in the top theatrical films for 2022" leaving only the lead roles to predominately male leads. What I realized is that the casting roles and story plots that represent other identities like those of Mexican women are not commonly seen in film. Instead, some of these roles are defaulted to Mexican actress playing the role of the maid or the Spanish speaking friend. In filmmaking every component is important for the film to be a success, so casting and plot should be a priority when it comes to showing representation. I realized that seeing filmmakers telling stories of representation was one way to connect onscreen with a different perspective of people or even society. Then showing representation of Mexican women would be an opportunity for audiences like me, to find ways of identifying with their stories since it would introduce these characters to audiences that have never seen Mexican women in these roles.

This prompted the following questions that guided my research and discussion throughout this paper:

1. How are women represented in films?

2. What stories in films have shown Mexican representation?

3. What is being done to help with the representation of Mexican women in film?

Women in film are limited with the roles they are cast in, with the reality that behind the scenes there is lack of representation. Especially women of color, with the Hollywood Diversity Report stating, "Only a single theatrical film was written by a woman of color in 2022, and it featured a cast that was majority minority and majority female" therefore not giving enough opportunities to women of color behind the scenes. When I look at the Mexican women who are cast in films,

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they are used in roles that fall under stereotypes or common tropes of their ethnicity. Some of these roles are portrayed misguided with Mexican women as maids or housekeepers, or wear tight clothes, and are fiery or ill-tempered. These tropes show the representation of Mexican women as this trope only, not allowing them to represent who Mexican women truly are outside of these topes or stereotypes.

Mexican women are not just one single story instead it is a variety of versions, I view "La Mujer Mexicana" or the Mexican women as women who embrace their culture either by their nationality or their identity. My mom was born and raised in Mexico, she identifies as Mexican, and although I was born in Mexico and raised in the US, I also still identify as Mexican. Part of the Mexican does not solely rely on nationality, but can also be tied to ancestry. Mexican women who identify with the ethnicity. Hold their culture like traditions or faith in Catholicism, speaking Spanish and sharing values passed down by families. Mexican women represented on screen should reflect these qualities in film, yet from what I found it is still clear that the version being portrayed are based on stereotypes. Instead, I only see versions that connect to someone else's ideas.

Mexican representation in film has been limited, rarely is there a Mexican character as the lead role or center of the story. Stereotypes, a joke or a jab at the culture and ethnicity, of Mexicans have existed in film. For example, some of the earliest portrayals of Mexicans has been using stereotypes based on them speaking broken English and usually working labor jobs like a gardener. These roles are common for many Mexican actors who are type-cast in these roles solely based on their appearance and identity. At times, these stereotypes seem to be the only representation that Mexicans could see in film, removing possibilities of them ever being at the center of any motion picture. Many actors hide or omit this part of their identity, like Lynda

Carter an American actress with Mexican descent from her mother's side. Carter played the lead role as Wonder Women, a prominent female superhero in the 1976 TV series *Wonder Women*. Where she portrayed an Amazonian woman with a sense of justice to catch criminals with her superpowers. But her culture's identity was never a part of Wonder Women's character only her powers as superhero were visible. Instead, the production behind the TV series did not think about including the cultural background of Carter. Here was an opportunity to show a superhero like Wonder Women and to share qualities of her Mexican.

Representation in film is identifying with the characters or the story seen on screen. This can be done with authentic representation using approaches like location, casting, director, plot, content, character variety, and language. When I think about representation, I think about the Marvel films *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings* and *Black Panther*, both are superhero films, but some of portrayals on screen use meaningful representation of their cultures coming from two characters that up to its film were seen as minorities. In 2018, when *Black Panther* premiered, I knew that, for the first time, I would see an African superhero that would showcase both their powers and their identity. After the film was released, I could see how the film affected audiences by seeing African American children that had connections to African roots and who looked like Chadwick Boseman (who portrays Black Panther) dressed up as him for Halloween. Before Black Panther the superheroes that people of color could relate to were overwhelmingly white, take Batman who is a white man and has a wealthy income making it difficult to relate to the character with these unimageable qualities. The success of *Black Panther* with the support by fans and audiences indicated that inclusion is something that films can do more of with the stories they share.

The same success was followed when Marvel took on Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings in 2021, when the film premiered, I was just as excited to see once again how Shang Chi powers and identity would be represented. Just like Black Panther, Shang Chi showed the representation of Asian and Asian Americans focusing specifically on Chinese culture. When I saw the film, it struck me that it centered around family and their connection to their culture. I realized that I connected a lot more with the story of Shang Chi, specifically his background as an immigrant in the US. Even though the plot of the film does not focus on his immigration status, it does allude to a lot of the experiences that immigrants and children of immigrants grew up with in the US. There is a scene where Shang Chi is explaining to his friend that he has two names one that he uses when he speaks English and the other when he speaks his first language Mandarin Chinese. I connected with this scene as someone who would even change the tone of my voice depending on who I was talking to (in English or Spanish). Even though I know Shang Chi is a fictional character, I connected with some of his experiences being an immigrant and seeing through his experiences he managed to find some sense of identity in a country that was foreign to him, but still maintained parts of his culture like the language.

Representation in film allows audiences to relate to the film's story creating a space for them to see themselves in a bigger film and stage. Mexican representation is not common to see, but knowing what representation has done in film is seen in Marvel's highest grossing films like *Black Panther* where audiences have seen the first Black superhero in the biggest franchise along with the representation of Black women and African culture. In this superhero film audiences found ways to relate with the lead character even in a fictional role. They saw themselves be represented because of the casting and the production of the film.

When I started this research and paper, I looked for representation of both female led films and the representation of Mexican women in these films, ultimately identifying that the gap of opportunities for these lead roles was already non-existent for Mexican women. Even though large number of people living in the US identify as Hispanic or Latino, their stories are not reflected in medias like film. The lack of representation of women of color in theatrical films from 2011-2019, and 2022, excluding film releases that were not possible because of Covid-19, women accounted for 38.6 percent of film leads in 2022 compared to the 60.2 percent of people of color who are male, show that the films being made are only representing stories that are resonating with half of their audiences (See Figure 2.3).

Many of the characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) are an icon to fans from the original comic books. Over the course of 10 years well known characters based off the comic books characters have been introduced, with a new modified version of these characters throughout the film projects. Collectively all these characters came together in some of the biggest crossovers in films, the first of these projects was *Avengers* (2012) which brought characters like: Iron Man, Captain America, Black Widow, Hulk, Thor, and Hawkeye, all who are a predominantly White cast and only including one women. Still, Marvel studios has created films that fans have resonated with. The stories portrayed in their films make callbacks to the comics they are based off but also do their best to share different ideas of representation.

The premise of the MCU is simple, bring superheroes to the front of the lines, making them popular based on the existing fanbases from the comic books while building a greater scale in the overall universe of these characters through the films. Marvel Entertainment has shown time and time again their plans to exceed what fans expect beginning with their multiple "phases" that ultimately build to bigger story lines and plots for the MCU franchise. Marvel

Studios has recognized the material they have in the Marvel Universe. The franchise and its executives are constantly working on expanding the universe for their superheroes, making them and other minorities that are underrepresented the perfect place to show films with representation of Mexican women. Superhero films are fueled by action and led by one character's journey, but recently the genre has transformed into storytelling that introduces audiences to their superhero's origins or beginnings, like their identity and ethnicity. For this paper I decided to look at superhero films because of the success of representation on screen and behind the camera work of *Black Panther* and *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings*. In looking at their success I also found that the MCU and Marvel Studios has some female led projects on their platforms, although some of the projects have been briefly introduced, or appear in supporting roles in other film franchises, they still show to be a success in women as lead roles.

The MCU has worked at introducing new and old characters from their source material, they also have taken creative license to change characters. Many of the characters created in the Marvel Comics are outdated, for example in the comic books Shang Chi's sister does not play a supporting role like she does in the film. In the comic book she is exiled and later killed, however in the film she secretly trains like Shang Chi and becomes even stronger than him. Making it possible for Marvel Studios to use the films as a way to reintroduce these characters or even modify them to create a new identity makes them even more relatable to their audiences. Once more justifying how the MCU can be the frontier in providing a platform that introduces Mexican female characters. Take Marvel's *Black Panther* and *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings*, both films started the conversations on representation in film and within the MCU. The film *Black Panther* introduced their first Black superhero, for the first time the MCU would have a character that resonated with audiences. Resonating with a wider audience by including a

minority character as a lead in project like MCU. This representation in film was a first for Marvel Entertainment, and up until Black Panther most of the Marvel films focus on the superhero journey with triumphs and defeats, and predominantly white characters. This representation in film meant that Marvel is ready to tell stories that their audiences could relate to and identify with these fictional characters. With the success of showing representation in film, Marvel Studios is capable of using their source materials (comic books) to demonstrate other cultures and identities like they did for the male superhero's Shang Chi and Black Panther, meaning they are capable of leading projects with representation of Mexican women.

Film has the capabilities of going beyond the story in the script, using representation in film can create more meaningful experiences with the stories we see on screen. Audiences are aware of the films they enjoy when they see some of their culture or identity it represents a part of them in a story. But when the majority of the films available lack the representation or any resemblance of an identity that reflects the audiences, it demonstrates there is a need for more of these films to be seen. In this paper I will be talking about the lack of representation of Mexican women especially in bigger productions like Marvel Entertainment's franchise. Mexican women have largely been left out of these stellar roles, but projects like the Marvel Cinematic Universe can create an opportunity to represent more woman and people of color in their productions. Filmgoers know what representation means, so when they are able to identify themselves on screen it creates a chain reaction.

In film, representation is a vehicle to open discussion of communities and identities that filmgoers see themselves relating to the experiences. These experiences come from stronger ties to communities like culture, locations, and languages. These ties all represent identities and their communities have developed. The word "representation" throughout this paper means seeing or

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identifying yourself in a platform like film or TV to a wider audience. In this paper some of the examples I use are films that have shown some qualities of representation, such as *McFarland USA* and *The Perfect Game*. These films are examples of Mexican representation by sharing location, culture and even language within a minority community. Both films share a connection to the Mexican American and Mexican experiences with *McFarland USA* sharing the generational experience and *The Perfect Game* sharing the realities Mexican origins.

Representation and film are two terms that align with people's perspectives on what they see on screen. While behind the scenes the filmmakers make conscious decisions that represent culture or identity of a specific groups or communities that has not been represented. In some instances, filmmakers use representation as a tool or narrative for the film, particularly if the story centers around an underrepresented group or community. In this sense, representation is used to pull from the story and characters to create the film's identity which then leads to representing parts of a culture or traditions. Films are capable to can even represent an identity that is related to groups that have not been seen on screen before. I will examine film representation in various ways, but throughout this paper it is shown through meaningful representation like, location, casting, director, plot, content, character variety, and language. All of which are factors that are shown through various films.

Since the lack of roles for Mexican women in superhero films is established, I decided to look closely at films that have been successful in representation. Films like *Black Panther, Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings, McFarland USA*, and *The Perfect Game* are all films that have even been recognized by filmgoers for their "authentic" representation. These films were successful for numerous reasons. Some relied on their production teams and writers who related

to the real-life situations that most of the characters went through, with some are based on fictional characters, they manage to still create relatable forms of authentic representation.

In this paper the definitions and the difference between the terms "Hispanic," "Latino," "Mexican," and "Mexican American" will be discussed. Throughout this paper I will also be discussing roles in film that are used for stereotypes and not-for-story-purposes like the "magical negro" trope which is similar to the common roles that many Mexican actors have when reduced to a type of character based on ethnicity.

Recently, DC's film *Blue Beetle* attempted to create a vision of representation for the first Mexican American superhero character on screen. *Blue Beetle* portrays a character, Jamie Reyes, who is the first Mexican American superhero leading a blockbuster film, instead of being type cast into a stereotype of a Mexican American. Yet they did not accomplish complete representation with part of the main character's story being erased. Throughout this paper I discuss how Blue Beetle was meant to be a turning point for representation of Mexicans in film, but ultimately lacked in some authentic representation within the plot and characters in the film.

The film *Blue Be*etle is just one recent example of studios attempting representation with authentic approaches like location, casting, and plot, yet the filmmakers made the decision of removing the location of the superhero's origin which was an essential part of their identity. Although *Blue Beetle* was based on the comic books by the same name, with a background setting of El Paso, Texas a well-known Hispanic borderland city, the main character Jamie Reyes is identified as Mexican American but his story in the film is limited, with part of his character being removed in the film. Throughout this paper *Blue Beetles* provides on attempt of representation in comparison with films who have succussed in incorporating representation.

Film is a medium of expression and creativity, filmmakers and storytellers engineer a production that is seen multiple times by their spectators who watch these films and identify with characters and their backgrounds, but when only one side is represented, it becomes an exclusion of certain stories and representation. Women led roles are still lacking in film. For example the representation of Mexican women in film are told thorough a smaller lens. In film, women are represented in a variety of roles, beginning with the silent era in Hollywood, during their most popular eras in 1930s and 1940s, women in films captured the "female problems" surrounding most notably domestic life and family (Turim, 2008). Latina protagonists are also seen with "female problems" but then had a shift were their stories in film revolve around the theme of women empowerment, such as in films like *Maid in Manhattan* (2002), *I Like it Like That* (1994), and *Real Women Have Curves* (2002), are all female led stories and films which focus on themes of women empowerment in the context of work, family, and romance (Waites, 2008). Women have had different roles in films that mostly reflect their place in society. Later their roles evolved to fit their female audiences who had concerns related to work, family, and romance. Films began to show women as main leads in their films by connecting with the realities of the audience who were mainly women seeing themselves and their problems represented.

During the 1990s, the term "chick flicks" was used to describe films that would appeal to female audiences. Most of these films would be genres of romance or drama. In these films women were either placed in supporting roles or used to showcase their romantic life or their partner (Turim, 2008). Most of these "chick flicks" shared a version of the same female character with the following traits: overwhelmingly young, heterosexual, white, and middle class.

Noticeably, women of color were left out of these roles in these "chick flicks," according to Ferris and Young (2008), "To identify films focused on women of color as chick flicks will strike some viewers and scholars as a move to de-legitimize them or assimilate them into a prevailing white culture" (p.9). Most chick flicks did focus on stories and characters that were predominately white and middle class but, questioning why only those stories are told is the beginning to change chick flicks, or at least modify the genre/category. The roles that women portrayed in these types of films usually defaulted to little to no representation, yet there were roles that would share representation through different tropes.

Other representations of women in film come from the tropes "warrior women" which can also be seen as heroes. They often appear to be equal as their male counterparts (Waites, 2008). In Hollywood the women warriors manage to change some conventions of femineity by showcasing the same or more strength than their male leads. Yet, there are instances where these warrior women are placed in roles to please male viewers, for example Waites (2008) discusses *Lady Lara Croft* (2001) a character based on a popular video game. In the film, she exhibits the excessive masculinity of a male warrior like in Hollywood action films but also embodies traditional femineity with her body being used as a method to seduce or distract the men who prevent her mission. For example, in the film Lara's character persists throughout the film with sexualized framing. Having the camera work seen in the film with partial view of her breasts while she is seducing and restraining her ex-lover. Reducing her character to her sexuality and no other trait but her body and appearance. Even though Lara is mean to be at the center of her film the characteristics portrayed only show that she is strong in certain attempts.

Feminist theorist Laura Mulvey argues that many Hollywood action films tend to view the representation of woman as only visuals that are attractive and serve secondary to the film: "The

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representation of 'woman' in Hollywood film, serves as erotic spectacle for the presumed male viewer; hence she [Lara] is sexualized and defined as passive, consistent with her secondary value or 'to-be-looked-at-ness' in contrast to the male's image as active and powerful" (Waites, 2008, p. 209). Action films tend to only show female characters as a secondary part to the male lead, if women are presented in action films they are typically not seen as the hero either: "typically women, if presented at all in films are secondary, romantic figures that serve to distract and sometimes endanger the male hero" (Waites, 2008, 210). In existing franchises like *Indiana Jones*, overwhelmingly the male protagonist will save the female lead who was in need of saving; these films showcase female characters as the damsel in distress who constantly plays a part in the male hero's struggle.

Superhero films have shown characters in a stronger leadings roles, like the warrior women, there have been films that showed women as strong and independent. Yet, in these superhero films women are in the background or are used as "plan B" instead of leading these films. These superhero films also lack representation starting with women of color specifically Mexican women. With franchises like the MCU, have shown attempts with *Black Widow* (2021) and *Captain Marvel* (2019) showing female leads as superheroes have changed the perspective of female roles in action or superhero roles, but they still lack the representation of women of color.

Representations of Mexican women have been non-existent in film, especially in films from Marvel. Characters like Spider-Man, Iron Man, Captain America, Black Panther, and Thor are some of the most popular in both the comics and in the films produced by Marvel Studios. Notice that all are male characters, even though Marvel Comics have several female superheroes and characters like Captain Marvel, Gamora, Black Widow, and Scarlet Witch, are some of the

female characters that have been given either a spotlight or a solo film. Since the lack of Mexican women in superhero films is clearly non existent, I decided to review films that showed representation of Mexicans while also using successful examples that have proven how representation can be seen in film as part of storytelling.

When discussing representation, it is important to note that I will be focusing on the representation of Mexican women in film. Yet, I will also be addressing terms that relate to other communities in representation, beginning with the difference between the terms Mexican and Mexican American. Some of the films that I will discuss share stories from different sides of representation from stories based on real events to fictional films. Understanding what each terms means is important when discussing the examples of representation of a specific community.

DEFINITIONS—LATINO, HISPANIC, MEXICAN AND MEXICAN AMERICAN & REPRESENTATION

When discussing languages we use the terms Latino, Hispanic, or Mexican American, but they all have a different meaning. Being Latino/a means you are from "countries in Latin America which includes Central America, South America, and the Caribbean" while being Hispanic means you are a Spanish speaking person from Spanish speaking countries like Mexico, Argentina, and Spain (Smith, 2021). Hispanic and Latino/a are both terms that are often used interchangeably, but people who identify with either of these terms also have their own hesitation using them. For instance, the term Hispanic started being used in the 1970s to count communities who did not identify with the "white" category in the US Census. It was then that Public Law 94-311 was passed and mandated that all data be collected of Hispanic people (Smith, 2021). The law defined Hispanics as, "Americans who identify themselves as being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba,

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Central and South America, and other Spanish-speaking countries." As time passed, the term became problematic because it stacked multiple ethnicities and identities in one category (Smith, 2021).

Identities in society have ties with someone's origin or ancestry too. They are how most people represent themselves. It is a connection to their past, their heritage, and their lived experiences that ultimately influence their identity in society. Identities are made up by a person's own background or experiences. Sometimes these lived experiences are related to their ancestry and the lives of their familes. For example, using terms like Latino/a to one person can mean they are from Latin American countries while being Hispanic can mean you are Mexican to others. There are times when Latino/a is used to describe one group and other times where some people use the term Hispanic because they do not identify as Latino. It's clear that both terms describe different ethnicities and groups, but they also represent a group of people who have been marginalized throughout society. At times both of these groups were excluded or frowned upon to identify with either term but now both terms have become a huge part of representation. Particularly in the US, where there are various backgrounds and ethnicities, each see themselves represented in being Latino/a or Hispanic. There are times where it seems that people are more comfortable using the term Latino than Hispanic because of the meaning behind the term "Hispanic" knowing that it was a category created to count how many "others" there are in the US. Even today we jump back and forth with the term Latino/a and Hispanic.

There are more examples on how using terms to describe or identify can be misleading because of the lack of awareness of how the term describes an identity. For example, many times the terms African American and Black are used interchangeably when in reality these two terms mean two different identities like Hispanic and Latino/a. When using the term African American

we are referring to black people born in the US while Black refers to "black people in every continent who are all over the world," as stated by African American Studies professor Celest Watkins- Hayes (Adams, 2020). If we look at a similar example, Asian and Asian American is also share different meaning, with Asian being used to describe a racial category and Asian American as used in the US Census to describe immigrants from Asian countries such as Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (Lee, & Ramakrishnan, 2020). Using these terms are a form of expression of their identity to people who have similar lived experiences withing their culture or their ancestry.

Since there are several factors that can influence someone who identifies with any of the terms (Latino/a or Hispanic), I will be looking closer at these identities from the "lived experiences" that actors or people in the media use to identify in their work or in film. For instance, in this paper, I will be using the term Hispanic when referring to actors/actresses or film articles that discuss representation of Spanish speakers. The term Latino/a will be used when discussing representation of people who do not speak Spanish but are from Latin American origin. Throughout this paper, it is clear that part of identity and how it is viewed in film can come from a place of "authentic representation" based on the lived experiences from the creators.

Authentic representation can also have multiple meanings and definitions but throughout this paper I will be focusing on some of the following approaches: location, casting, director, plot, content, character variety, and language, when discussing the films that been successful or have attempts in using "authentic representation" of Mexicans in film. These films can make these representations when sharing the stories of Mexican characters. For example, *McFarland USA* and *The Perfect Game* are two films that share authentic representation with casting,

location, language, and plot in their films. With *McFarland, USA,* using the location of California where true story is based on along with other approaches like the casting of the film having a diverse distribution of Mexican, Mexican American, and Mexican decent actors. The casting and production of the plot for the film are part of approaching authentic representation in film, by having the conscious choices of where and who is cast.

These approaches are examples of how to view authentic representation in the films used in this paper, many of them relate directly to the Mexican representation that is missing in film. Other films serve as an example of authentic representation for identities like Asian or Asian American like in *Shang Chi and the Legend of 10 Rings* and in *Black Panther*. The approaches that these films take allow for representation to be viewed to a larger audience prompting change in the discussion about the meaning behind these identities and how they can be used to represent peoples that have been excluded in film.

Both ethnicity and identity are part of defining Hispanic or Latino/a as they are part of the bigger definition of what the two terms represent. Ethnicities are defined as a group of people who share a common cultural background or ancestry, while identities are a sense of who a person is, that are based on a person's family, friends, ethnicity, race, culture, and even interests. Identifying as Hispanic or Latino/a comes from understanding their ethnicity and revolving within their identity influenced by internal and external factors. Both terms relate to communities that have been underrepresented and will be used as examples from two different identities that people relate and see themselves in.

For instance, the terms Mexican and Mexican American are different identities, with Mexican being a nationality and Mexican American being an identity. Using the term "Mexican" means that someone identifies as Mexican national while saying "Mexican American" means

Mexican descent but born in America. The way these terms are used, "Latino/a" "Hispanic" "Mexican", and "Mexican American," tell us how people use these terms to talk and show their identity with their location, languages, and culture. For most, their identity comes from knowing where they are from be it themselves or their families, which can lead to them identifying as Hispanic because they speak Spanish, or they can identify as Mexican American because they were born in the US, but their parents are from Mexico.

When I discussing Mexican actors or Mexican representation, this paper examines people who were born in Mexico and identify by their nationality rather than their ethnicity. The term Mexican American will be used to discuss those who use their identity to discuss their representation with the cultures their parents are from.

Using Mexican actors/actresses or stories of Mexican characters to represent a leading role like a superhero have yet to be seen. Still, there are examples of films that have been successful in sharing representation in their lead character. Some of the superhero film productions like Marvel Studios, have successful outcomes when producing films that share representation of identities that were not visible in the past. Take Marvel's material arts superhero Shang Chi who was first introduced in *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings*, the first Asian superhero for Marvel. The film was first released on September 3 as part of Phase Four of the MCU (see Table 1.1) "it grossed over $432 million worldwide, making it the tenth-highest-grossing film of 2021." It success shows that audiences appreciated the film be it for its representation or the superhero genre (IMDb, 2022).

In film there are a few examples that stood out that use identities and nationalities as part of their lead character's role. Using an identity like Mexican or Hispanic is rare in film as their roles are usually minimized or used as a comedic trope usually becoming a stereotype. Even

though there are not many roles that have a woman with a Mexican nationality or identity it does not mean that she cannot be seen in other nationality or identities. Take the success of Marvel's two biggest films, *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings* and *Black Panther* had both of their lead characters focused on their identity and nationality in the films. In the films, audiences were exposed to culture and identities from the lead characters, it was also a successful look at authentic representation. The MCU used both of these films to showcase representation for their lead superheroes. Then there are examples like *McFarland, USA* and *The Perfect Game* that are a representations based on real people who identify as Mexican American and Hispanic**.** This paper will discuss the representation that is seen in all four films, with Marvel's *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings* and *Black Panther* The paper looks at the success both films have received and will discuss the success of representation for Asian, Black and African American in the films as well as behind the scenes. In both *McFarland, USA* and *The Perfect Game,* the paper will discuss the attempts that were made to create representation in a limited scope, by discussing the direction of the film using non-Mexican or Hispanics behind the scenes. All the films share representation of identities and how they were used in film as part of the main character's journey or trait.

USING FILMS FROM MARVEL'S SHANG CHI AND THE LEGEND OF THE 10 RINGS (2021) AND BLACK PANTHER (2018)

Cinema that incorporates their respective cultural representation on and off screen does exist. An example of this behind the scenes goes back to Marvel Studios with director Destin Daniel Cretton who directed the first Asian superhero for Marvel, *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Ring*s (2021). Behind the scenes, Destin Daniel Cretton an American filmmaker from Hawaii and has Japanese descent from his mother side, discussed having every aspect of the film be

represented by the actors on screen, "A big part of the casting process was finding actors who I knew would identify with these characters in some way through their lived experience" (Page, 2021). Not only are the actors representing the culture of the story but so are the people behind the scenes starting with Cretton, Asian American filmmaker with Japanese descent; David Callaham, who is an American screenwriter of Chinese descent; and Chinese born, Canadian actor Simu Liu. The variety of Asian backgrounds also speaks to one of the film's purposes. In an interview Cretton mentions the importance of showing the different personalities that Asian and Asian Americans have with the two main characters Shang Chi and Katy depicting their refusal to be something they are not, "For whatever reason, Asian characters in cinema in the past have not captured the variety of personalities that I know in my everyday life. That's what we wanted to try to capture in this movie" (Page, 2021). For the first time there is an Asian superhero led by actors who share the same experiences from the identity, although a fictional story it still shares the real life situations that Asian American lived through.

In another interview with CinemaBlend, Cretton emphasizes the importance of having representation behind the screen, mentioning how vital it was to have their perspective on the film set. Cretton discuss the reasoning behind the benefits of having crew and production members who understood the culture and characters along with the experiences that some shared as a Chinese Americans living in the Bay Area. Opening up discussions on set regarding their different Asian experiences growing up in China or their experience growing up with the Asian culture, everyone understanding how different traditions are just within the Asian community. Cretton mentioned regarding the experience working with production, cast, and crew,

> So we were really I think privileged to have so many different people from all over the
> world working on this movie who could personally relate to each of these characters and

the specificity behind those characters and for me that was one of the biggest parts of this production was having all of these voices on set to say that food is not what he would have on the table or that music is not correct…those types of conversations was really important to this process (CinemaBlend, 2022).

Productions like *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Ring*s (2021) demonstrate that having representation behind the scenes can also elevate the film's perspective while also making sure every part of an identity or culture is shown through a common lens with people behind the scenes that also see themselves in those productions.

In pervious productions, like *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), films had a successful running and were praised for their cast and crew that are represented in the film. In *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), director Jon Chu, discusses in an interview the importance of representation and having films discuss identity and culture, "Representation is showing the world who you are at, at its most intimate levels…Showing your languages, not just actual word languages but the love language of food, the love language of insults, of class in terms of what self-worth is, not just the worth of your car" (Whitten, 2021). Representation can be seen on screen and behind the scenes, regarding representation Jon Chu discussed the importance of sharing those authentic voices and visuals to share Asian representation. The representation of Asians in film was successful in *Crazy Rich Asians* (2019) and *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings* (2021), showing approaches in authentic representation of location, casting, director, plot, content, character variety, and language. In *Crazy Rich Asians* the majority of the film is set in China, Singapore, where the characters are seen eating local food that represents the Chinese cuisine. The same is said about *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings* (2021) except language and plot are a

primary focus. Still both films share one important approach in authentic representation and that is the casting and filmmaking process behind the scenes.

Director Destin Daniel Cretton also shared a similar mindset in *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings* (2021), as he discussed representation through talks with other filmmakers and crew members on set and was constantly talking about dialogue or experiences they would like to see in the film. Both directors Jon Chu and Destin Daniel Cretton discussed the process of making their films and the importance of sharing stories of representation being creative people who also identified with the experiences from the characters in the film.

The success of *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) was the first time an all Asian cast was seen in film since the *Joy Luck Club* (1993), meaning it took 24 years to show this representation on screen. In the same, *Black Panther* (2018) was finding the same success as *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), with their almost all African American cast in the film. The film explores specific themes of identity of being African and African American that both director and co-writer Ryan Coogler, along his co-writer Joe Robert Cole, discussed what it meant to share this perspective in the film,

> So what we wanted to do was contrast that with a reflection of the diaspora. But the diaspora that's the most affected by it. And what you get with that is you get African Americans. You get the African that's not only a product of colonization, but also a product of the worst form of colonization, which is slavery. It was about that clash (Betancourt, 2018).

In that same interview, Coogler discusses the interest of exploring these themes came from his own experience of his parents explaining to him what it meant to be black man in America. Having this perspective led Coogler to showcase those themes in the film, leading to a wide representation of Black and African American actors and actress in the film. Additionally,

women play a vital role in the plot, with actress like Lupita Nyong'o, Letitia Wright and Danai Gurira in essential.

Although *Black Panther* (2018) is a film focused on T'Challa as he returns home to the African nation of Wakanda after the death of his father. Throughout the film T'Challa is grappling with the threat of not being his rightful place as King of Wakanda. With the help of Nakia (played by Lupita Nyong'o) who is a Wakandan Dora Milaje, a team of armed forces that protect and defend Wakanda. Nakia's character is strong, independent, and intelligent and throughout the film she works with T'Challa to help defend his title again the threat of his cousin who also feels intitled to the title of King. To protect Wakanda T'Challa also has the help of his sister Shuri (played by Letitia Wright) who is portrayed as courageous and tech-savvy and the general of Dora Milaje Okoye (played by Danai Gurira). All three female characters were cast in variety of roles with Lupita Nyong'o, Letitia Wright and Danai Gurira representing African decants. Each portrayed strong and independent roles for women that were unconventional and not following any of the stereotypes of Black women in film. Instead audiences saw each of these characters represent more on screen by leading an army like Okoye or being a scientist with the next modern technology like Shuri.

Films like *Black Panther* (2018) have shown that women can be represented in diverse roles, where they can be seen as a superhero lead rather than a supporting role. *Black Panther* (2018) shows representation of women, but it also shares the representation of women of color. In film women tend to have a lesser role, and women of color are likely to have an even smaller role, "among Black, Latinx, Asian, and multiracial theatrical film leads, women either approached or exceeded the numbers for their male counterparts in 2022. Only among White film leads were women significantly outnumbered by men that year" (Hollywood Diversity

Report). Even the smallest representation on screen can change the way audiences interact with the film. In *Black Panther* representation for African Americans shared with audiences who saw themselves represented in a strong role as a warrior or superhero instead of worn-out tropes or stereotypes.

Female representation in *Black Panther* and *Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rings* was visible in their attempts to showcase each lived experienced. Yet there are films like McFarland, USA (2015) and The Perfect Game (2010), that lack the representation of Mexican women but there representation of true stories of Mexican and Hispanics are seen in the film. Still their attempt are limited given by the direction of casting and the director behind the scenes only shared stereotypes and tropes that one already seen when describing Mexican or Hispanic.

USING THE FILMS MCFARLAND, USA (2015) AND THE PERFECT GAME (2010)

Films will fail to account for, or attempt to incorporate, Mexican culture in their story plots, yet there are some films that through their efforts are successful in at least attempting to show representation through language, culture, or location. The ones that do share some representation of Mexican culture like *McFarland, USA* (2015) and *The Perfect Game* (2010), showcase stories that are based on true events. Both films do so by using language and visuals that share traditions in Mexican culture. The film, *The Perfect Game* (2010) is the telling of a true story of a group of young baseball players from Monterrey, Mexico who became the first little league team from Mexico to win The Little League World Series. The film depicts these young boys in Monterrey, Mexico who are discovering the game of baseball with the help of a former baseball player among them who teaches them and trains them in the sport. *The Perfect Game* (2010) was written by W. William Winokur and directed by William Dear, both are non-Mexican so undoubtedly their version of the film is vastly different from the version or experiences of

Mexicans from the retelling of the true events. In a similar way *McFarland, USA* (2015), which is a story based on the true story of a 1987 cross country team from a mainly Latino and Hispanic high school in McFarland California, was directed by Australian director Niki Caro. Both films are stories based on Mexicans or Mexican Americans, but they are told through a lens that does not represent their culture or heritage. Yet they manage to tell stories that are relatable to the experiences of Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

In both films we see how Mexican culture is being represented on screen, with the directors' decisions and views on their version of Mexican culture. Filmmakers behind the scenes also have an influence in the films they make and representation should come from both sides of the filmmaking process. In the film *The Perfect Game* (2010) shows the group of kids praying before each of their games, they even travel with their pastor Padre Esteban, depicting faith and religion as one of the values of many Mexican and Mexican Americans. Similarly in *McFarland, USA* (2015) depicts the kids waking up at dawn to work in an almond field before school and returning to the fields after school. This is the reality that many Mexican and Mexican Americans have had living in California. Both films share the values in Mexican culture by depicting religion or work ethic, and also use dialogue that represents their culture. In *The Perfect Game* (2010), most of the kids speak some Spanish and in *McFarland, USA* (2015) some of the parents talk in Spanish while their kids speak either some English and Spanish or both at the same time—representing the home experience for many Mexican Americans who were likely a second generation. Both films share the different versions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in film by using their language throughout the film.

In *McFarland, USA* (2015), the main takeaway of the film is the fact that these kids are underdogs but despite that they manage to get far in their sport, similar to the background of the

kids in *The Perfect Game* (2010), both are coming from a disadvantage position in their sports, but they overcome those obstacles. In *McFarland, USA* (2015), the teens who join the cross country team from McFarland, California participating in the sport for the first time and going against schools with teams that have strict practice in the sport, have been properly trained, and are well equipped with the appropriate shoes to run. Then in *The Perfect Game* (2010), the kids who are participating have no idea on how to play baseball, they also come from low-income families that work at oil factories and only make ends to the bare minimum never having opportunities to play in sports that often are reserved for families with a stable income. These portals on screen are an example of authentic representation, by showing some of the examples of traditions based on cultures. Having these representation in film can connect with audiences even more when authentic representation is taken into account.

Film reviews of both films mentioned how inspiring these stories are, mentioning how uplifting it is to know they are based on true events. From Vulture, Bilge Ebiri (2015) describes *McFarland, USA* (2015) as an inspiring and uplifting story by stating, "Here's a movie that should be disposable at best, and racially condescending at worst, and yet it sticks with you. It comes by its emotions honestly and wins you over" (para. 1). In a similar way *The Perfect Game* (2010) is described by Leticia Velasquiez (2010), as a film that uses the sport of baseball to discuss faith, "Its not often that at film comes along which baseball is merely a vehicle to inspire hope and not an end in itself" (para. 9). The reviewers for both films found the story relatable even if they did not go through those experience, they found ways to connect with the film. Ultimately representation can not only help those who relate to those experiences but also give others an opportunity to see beyond their own lens or experiences.

A deeper representation of culture comes from films using authentic representation that uses language, culture, and food. Therefore, having authentic representation can have voices that can match those experiences and give a deeper understanding of stories in film. Authentic representation and representation on screen start with having voices behind the scenes that can relate to the stories being portrayed in film. For example, behind the scenes of a film there are rosters of people who work on one project, each are a part of the film. Even with each individual having their own responsibilities having a voice behind the scenes that can speak to representation goes a long way for a film. Filmmaking is already a collaborative process, but having input throughout the filmmaking process, like questing if the film is doing representation justice or is it still lacking in some instances?

The limited view of representation that is seen in *The Perfect Game* and *McFarland, USA* is mainly with language and culture. Having characters from both films speak some Spanish dialogue or showing traditional Mexican food between the scenes. The films is a decent attempt in showcasing representation but it lacks the authentic representation on screen with language, location, or food throughout the film. In some ways it only fills in these factors of authentic representation to fulfil the screen time. Authentic representation is identity and its influence in location, casting, director, plot, content, character variety, and language showing representation through film. Both films also focus on characters that are based on real people who share some of the Mexican American experiences portrayed in the movie. Both films were directed by non-Mexican or non-Mexican Americans but still managed to show at least one side of representation by having the cast deliver some of their lines in Spanish and showing traditional food dishes that many Mexican families can relate to eating. And one of the biggest themes in the film is faith, especially in Mexican cultures and communities Catholicism is part of traditions and beliefs.

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Faith is a part of Mexican culture and in the film the kids are often seen praying before their games and even ask that their priest follow them to their tournaments.

Even though representation of Mexican and Mexican Americans can be seen in some films, they are represented from a lens that is limited to their experiences. In an interview Niki Caro, she mentions that for her, the film has a universal theme that anyone could follow and relate to what is ultimately an underdog story (Radish, 2015). As a director, she does not mention the cultural background of each of the characters in the film, instead she stresses the reasons behind wanting to spend time developing each character's story individually since ultimately these characters are based on real people. At first glance, *McFarland, USA* (2015) can fall under the "white savior" trope where you have a white person "saving" a group of misfits who can only be saved by this specific white person. Yet, the film avoids this by having its focus primarily on the kids—which was the idea that director Niki Caro wanted for the film. For example, a storyline in the films shows one of the kids with a black eye, not because of domestic abuse, but because he was preventing his father from hurting his hand from punching the wall; if he hurts his hand he can't work in the fields or feed his family (Ebiri, 2015). In contrast *The Perfect Game* (2010), is centered around baseball and faith and religion. One scene in the film that portrays this is when the kids are in the US but their priest, who has been traveling with them could no longer attend since he did not have the right paperwork. The kids then demand to have a prayer before their game by a priest before they start the game refusing to start without a prayer. The director William Dear, who worked on similar baseball themed films like, *Angels in the Outfield* (1994), *The Sandlot: Heading Home* (2007), and *A Mile in His Shoes* (2011), demonstrates a balance between the representation of Mexican culture and baseball.

Both filmmakers made attempts to share the true events the films are based on, they focused on some of the facts behind the stories and used the material to the best of their abilities to attempt authentic representation of the people these stories are based on. Even though both films make valid attempts to showcase these stories of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, the lack of true representation is still missing, because of their limited experience or lack of any Mexican and Mexican American backgrounds. These films only share the filmmakers limited lens on this community, their attempt in representation is valid given that they did succeeded by being authentic to the people the characters are based on, still the film was only successful in showing authentic representation because it was based on a real story with real people behind these characters.

Once representation in film shifts to a fictional story the opportunities to share authentic representation should be without restrictions. Yet, when the film Blue Beetle was announced the project seemed to be taking a different direction with the representation of a Mexican hero. From the direction of the film removing aspects that could have helped with sharing the approaches of authentic representation, starting with location having the film be set in a fictional city instead of staying true to the story it was based off. Although Blue Beetle is a fictional film about a superhero, what it represents is the first Mexican American superhero shown on screen; but, its attempt to show representation falls short because of the decisions from the filmmakers.

USING THE FILM DC'S BLUE BEETLE

Representation on screen and behind the scenes has shown that films can become an essential part of storytelling and a vehicle to showcases films that filmgoers tell. In recent projects like *Blue Beetle* (2023), a superhero based on the comic book from DC Universe, Jamie Reyes a Mexican American kid from a border city of El Paso, Texas encounters an alien scarab

that transforms into a battle suit. Reyes debuted as the first Latino superhero, showing representation of Mexican American culture. Puerto Rican filmmaker Angel Manuel Soto and screenplay writer Garett Dunnet-Alcocer have stated that, "we intend to keep the movie as authentic as possible. Not the hallmark, cookie-cutter Latinos. They wanted the audience to feel like they could relate to each character" (Khalili, 2023). Blue Beetle is not the only Mexican American superhero that is on screen. Recently, in *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022), 14-year-old Latinx superhero America Chavez played the role of a time traveler who teams up with Dr. Strange (Barco, 2022). Yet, representation can only go so far. These superheroes are mainly male led and even though there are female led superheroes, women still lack the representation on bigger screens. Recently there has been some inclusive casting for Latinas in superhero roles, like Colombian-American Sasha Calle who is the new Supergirl in the upcoming *Flash* movie, another Colombian Rachel Zegler who portrays a goddess with superpowers in *Shazam! Fury of the Gods* (2023), but unlike America Chavez their characters do not identify as Latina or include their heritage (Barco, 2022). Similar to how Mexican American actress Lynda Carter played Wonder Woman's in the 1970s, who instead portrayed a character from a mythical land called Amazonia (Barco, 2022).

DC's film, *Blue Beetle* (2023), is a film that attempted to create a vision of representation for the first Mexican American character on screen. Yet, they did not accomplish complete meaningful representation with part of the main character's story being erased. The filmmakers made the decision of removing the location of the superhero's origin which was is essential part of their identity. Blue Beetle is based on the comic books by the same name, with a background setting of El Paso, Texas, a well-known Hispanic borderland city. The main character, Jamie Reyes, is identified as Mexican American, but his story in the film is limited. Throughout this

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paper Blue Beetles provides examples of attempts with representation in comparison with films who have succussed in incorporating representation.

Even though on screen the actors portraying these superheroes identify as Latino/a or Hispanic, their stories are not seen on screen authentically. When *Blue Beetle* (2023), was first announced many hoped that the film would be an opportunity for many Mexican and Mexican Americans to see themselves be represented on a bigger screen. Yet, when the first look of the film arrived, it showed a different hometown location for Jamie Reyes (Blue Beetle). Instead directors decided to use a fictional city called "Palmera City," which as described by Anthony R. Ramirez's "Blue Beetle and the Missing City: El Paso," "looks like Puerto Rico of the future." Director Angel Manuel Soto and cinematographer Pawel Pogorzelski visited El Paso, Texas (where Reyes's character is from) before the film was in production, they visited iconic locations of El Paso, and in an interview with KISS El Paso (2022). Mention what elements of El Paso they would include in the film stating, "Manuel Soto admitted that the film would not shoot many scenes in El Paso, but the director wanted to get a better understanding of El Paso's community and vibe." The filmmakers decided that instead of using the location of Jamie Reyes hometown they would use the "vibe" of the city, ultimately creating a fictionalized city for the superhero.

Blue Beetle (2023) could have been an opportunity for the filmmakers to share the unique culture of El Paso, as Anthony R. Ramirez (2023) article mentions about the change of location and what opportunities it could have brought on screen, "The film could have highlighted the life of a Mexican American teen living in the borderlands of El Paso. Blue Beetle could have used El Paso as a backdrop—and key shaper of supereroic actions and human interactions—to highlight various positive aspects of the border while tackling complex issues along the border." The

representation of Mexican and Mexican Americans are hidden behind a fictional character giving them a fictional birthplace or language. This has also led to Mexican and Mexican American women who have been missing from the superhero genre. There are some women in the Marvel Cinematic Universe like Black Widow and Scarlet Witch who not only have agency in the film but play a vital part of the franchise. There are characters like America Chavez that are promising to showcase women who are Mexican American, not only their culture but their identity as a woman in Mexican culture.

Mexican Women and Culture Representation in Film

In film, Mexican culture has been seen through a few lenes from stereotypes to real people, from stories that inspired and influenced *The Perfect Game* (2010) and *McFarland, USA* (2015), they all shared their own view of Mexican culture from language and heritage. In *The Perfect Game* (2010) there is a scene where the kids are at a dinner pouring chocolate syrup on their fried chicken, showing the viewers that they are making "mole," a Mexican dish of chocolate and pepper sauce to marinate the chicken. In *McFarland, USA* (2015) the values that many Mexican Americans share are seen in the film when one of the main story leads in the films involves the politics with one of the team members family—their values are reminiscent of those Mexican Americans field workers that are desperate to make a living even if the struggle is unbearable (Ebiri, 2015). Although both films share some characteristics of Mexican culture, the discussion of both films revert to the stories told in the film rather than discussing the representation in film.

Representation of Mexican culture has been a small feature in films, they are either a fragment of a character's story, or it is a relevant factor of their identity. Still, they are not fully represented, or their voices are not taken into account while producing the film. In Marvel's

*Shang Chi and the Legend of the 10 Ring*s (2021), director Destin Daniel Cretton worked with a cast and crew that could identify with the character Shang Chi. This then led to a variety of context for the film. In a similar projects, *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), director Jon Chu, and *Black Panther* (2018), Ryan Coogler had similar ideas when creating the direction of their films. By including representation behind the scenes, the storytelling of these films becomes more than a superhero film. In a test screen of Shang *Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rin*gs (2021), Crettion mentions the experience of hearing feedback from someone who he did not expect who was white and ex-military man but still found a way to connect with Shang Chi's character, "to have somebody completely from a completely different part of the world a very different cultural upbringing connect with Shang Chi at that level, it was surprising but it was also the hope that we all had for this character…it's not only for our community but it's also to show people not from our community that we all have so many things in common" (CinemaBlend, 2022). Representation can be used as a tool to tell the stories that represent the characters and also to demonstrate who these characters are beyond their identity and culture. In films like, *Black Panther* (2018) and more recently Shang *Chi and the Legend of the 10 Rin*gs (2021) all shared success in representation of Asians and African Americans. Many critics praised the productions for not only telling a superhero stories story but for also sharing representation on screen and behind the scenes.

The same representation can be seen with Mexican women in film, most notable in productions like Marvel Studios who have shown their capability to assemble teams that can showcase these stories of representation. Most recently some of the newer projects of Marvel that include Mexican American women being represented like America Chavez, a new character that was introduced in *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022). Although it is a

great step forward for Marvel to start showing character like America Chavez, it is notably the only character that has been shown any promise of Mexican women being represented in Marvel films. On screen it is not uncommon to see women be type-cast in a small number of roles like a mother or daughter as the most common. It is unusual to see women lead roles of superheroes. Still, it is not an indicator that women cannot take on these roles but rather a problem to address with filmmakers and movie executives.

Women have lacked lead roles in films, its notable to see that many of the box office hits in theaters are led by men. While women of color fall short in the roles they portray in films as lead roles. According to the Hollywood Diversity Report 2023, "about 2.2 out of 10 lead actors in theatrical films are people of color," while also stating that women accounted for only 38.6 percent of film leads in 2022 compared to the 60.2 percent that male leads took—once again affirming that the opportunities for lead roles are more likely to be open for male actors than women. The lack of women being represented in film indicate a gap in the film industry, but also the lack of Mexican women being represented on screen. Even though the Hollywood Diversity Report 2023 does not account for how many women of color took on lead roles in theatrical films, it does state that the majority of leads in films are white, while at least 2.3 percent are Latinx, 2.3 percent Asian, and 8.0 were Black—demonstrating that the gap of women in lead roles also comes down to the lack of representation of women of color like Mexican women.

The lack of representation of Mexican women in film goes beyond what we see on screen. Mexican women lacking lead roles is one side of the problem since the opportunities for women behind the scenes are even smaller. In the Hollywood Diversity Report 2023, only 1.5 out of 10 directors are women, and within those margins only 1.7 out of 10 directors were people of color, once again showing that the lack of people of color behind the scenes and women.

Women not being represented in film indicates that Hollywood and the film industry do not take into account more roles for women or people of color, instead only focus on the bigger margins that include male lead actors and white directors and writers.

When there is a lack of women representation on screen and behind the scenes, women cannot see themselves be represented on both sides of the film industry. Creating opportunities for women and women of color to take one these roles should be straightforward and something that is expected from the film industry to provide, instead of having women work twice as hard to prove they have a variety of skills in the filmmaking process. For example, actress, producer, and director America Ferrera has worked in television and film for most of her life. Ferrera has been in notable films like, *Real Women have Curves*, *The Dry Land*, and as a leading role in TV shows like *Ugly Betty* and *Superstore*. In an interview with Latinx Films (2022), Ferrera mentioned that she decided to take on a director role in her show *Superstore* because she realized she could inspire other women and women of color to do the same. Reflecting on the realities that many do not take those opportunities themselves, "It made me think that if I feel this way, what does that mean for so many other young women and people of color who also have internalized the message that they don't belong in this position." She later discussed that many of these roles on screen and behind the scenes are decided by the people who own the networks or have created this system.

This system which is has been created by mostly white executives, ultimately has lead to what content that is shown on screen. Part of this solution is to define the roles in production that will lead to identifying who is qualified in producing and creating films. The idea is to change the way studios build productions, having staff and crew members that can connect with the film

can create an environment where ideas and experiences can be used for the film and to create a stronger connection with the audiences.

THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE HISTORY

Before the beginning of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), Marvel Entertainment has produced several high grossing films that are box office hits time and time again. In 2005, Marvel Entertainment began by forming a business deal with Paramount, an exclusive deal that helped Marvel Entertainment start their film distribution with a separate fund and company. According to Fritz and Harris (2005), with new resources Marvel Entertainment was ready to start producing films by also securing the movie rights of 10 comic book characters including Captain America. The once small company started only producing licensing of their characters for toys and merchandise to create a media franchise with several films and TV shows like the MCU (Fritz & Harris, 2005).

As the goals of Marvel Entertainment continued to grow, their then small subsidiary company Marvel Studios was beginning to produce films with comic book characters. In 2009, the Walt Disney Company purchased Marvel Entertainment, and at the time their partnership meant that they would be aligned but not necessarily interfering with individual projects (Vejvoda, 2009). Over the years, Marvel Studios and Marvel Entertainment have created about 10 films based on the characters from the comic books. The goal for the productions were to create films that audiences would want to see based on what they knew from the characters.

In 2015, Marvel Studios integrated withWalt Disney Studios, once again growing their already well-known brand and films. Between 2016 and 2019, Marvel Studios was on track for their "phases" or plans for their film projects (See Figure 2). With only 10 years, Marvel Studios was making top grossing films that showed in their domestic gross an impressive overview of

what now encompasses the success of Marvel Studio films. After Marvel Studios became part of Walt Disney Studios the direction of their partnership prepared several projects that expanded from film to TV shows. Some of the top 5 grossing films of Marvel included: *The Avengers* (2012), *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), *Avengers Infinity War* (2018), *Spiderman No Way Home* (2021), *Avengers Age of Ultron* (2015), with the highest grossing film Avengers: Endgame (2019) with a $858,373,000 domestic box office revenue.

After the integration of Marvel Studios, Walt Disney Studios, continued to grow their films and projects with streaming services and a new direction in their films. Recently they have shown their own attempt of representation in film by premiering films like *Coco* (2017), *Encanto* (2021) and *Luca* (2021). Walt Disney Studios realized that a lot of the families and audiences viewing their films have changed over the years especially knowing already how diverse the US audiences are, with Contreras (2022) stating,

> The image of a typical American family has changed drastically over the last few decades, resulting in diverse households and communities. Today, many families across Latin America are racially diverse, which "Encanto" accurately represents. The Madrigals are one of the few multiracial Hispanic families featured in an animated movie, creating another beautiful element through which biracial children can feel represented (para. 6).

A film with Latino representation like *Encanto* (2021) shows new elements of representation in ways that audiences could relate to the experiences of the characters. Animation has proven to be successful with Walt Disney Studios, as their films have been a vessel to discuss topic of representation and create environments where people can view characters that they relate to even if they are a drawing or animation.

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Additionaly, Marvel Studios was also producing films with representation like *Black Panther* (2019), for the first time Marvel was showing their characters in a light that their audiences could relate to even if they were a fictional character. Once again showing the capabilities that Marvel Studios has and their position to create even more films that can show representation of minority groups.

FILM AND REPRESENTATION

In film, representation plays an essential part in sharing different perspectives of communities or groups that have not been seen before. Having a positive outcome to sharing more stories that show an meaningful representation means that more stories should demonstrate representation. By using culture, language, location, or food that speaks to representation. Simply having a casting of actors/actress that share a similar background or ethnicity can be enough to show representation of identities of the characters they portray. Some examples of representation in film come from Marvel's successful *Black Panther,* and in recent projects like the character Blue Beetle with a film and TV series *Young Justice*. Meaningful representation was first seen in Black Panther, although a fictional character audiences were pleased with the first African American superhero in the spotlight. In the case of *Blue Beetle*, it was DC's attempt of representing their first Hispanic superhero. Both films are examples of representation and how it is viewed within the film industry in front and behind the scenes.

Representation in film can often not be seen as much, sometimes could means having a character be portrayed by a non-white actors and other times it means showing a specific culture and tradition. In film, representation can also be used to highlight underrepresented people who have not been seen in film before. Film then gives filmmakers an opportunity to share these stories and voices. In 2019, an example of film and representation was Marvel's *Black Panther*,

the first feature film to introduce an African American superhero. Once the film was in theaters, it received high praise from moviegoers and fans. For the first time many saw themselves in the character of T'Challa or Black Panther. The film focused on African American culture, even if the story was fictional, it proved that representation can impact the story, and can also show how representation affects moviegoers.

Representation is a key element that Marvel's *Black Panther* director Ryan Coogler kept in mind during the pre and postproduction of the film. Coogler is a fan of the comic books but his own filmography focuses on the stories of African Americans. Coogler's biggest accolades include *Fruitvale Station* (2013), *Creed* (2015), and *Judas and the Black Messiah* (2021). They all feature primarily African American representation and focus on those experiences. An example of how Coogler and the production team wanted to maintain the origins of T'Challa, was by having the Wakandan language, based on the Xhosa language, one of the official languages from South Africa and Zimbabwe. Language is a form of representation especially for people who have connections to countries like South Africa or Zimbabwe. In 2018, Namhla Mbawuli, a musician and native isiXosas speaker, told The New York Times while discussing the film *Black Panther's* decision to include the native language, "As black Americans, your origins are from Africa," she said, "So, you have every right to want to feel part of that in whatever way or form and I think that this [*Black Panther*] is a good example of that" (Eligon, 2018). Representation does mean using culture as a characteristic, but its bigger purpose is to help people feel seen in a much wider way.

Having representation in mind, the production behind *Black Panther* also knew that they needed to choose the right person to tell the story and also have a cast that could represent what the film meant. *Black Panther* is the first Marvel Studios production with a primarily African

American cast, with actors like the late Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan, and Mexican-Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong'o. When discussing the film and its production before its release, both Lupita Nyong'o and Chadwick Boseman spoke about what the film meant to each of them. In separate interviews they discussed how the film meant an opportunity for younger audiences to see themselves be represented along with anyone else, feeling a sense of representation. As Lupita stated, "I think we all see ourselves better when we can see ourselves in someone else" and later stating, "I certainly didn't have this representation coming up that's one of the things that drives me as an actress…to tell stories about people that look like me." Representation starts with first having stories that can bring actors and actress into the roles that are meaningful to who they are and identify as (Good Morning America, 2018). In a similar response, Boseman told a young fan during an interview why it was important that there be a movie like *Black Panther* that represents Black heroes, "Its important because I didn't have this [*Black Panther*] growing up. I just know what its gonna mean to you when you see it, that it can give you a certain type of confidence when you walk through the world," Once again, demonstrating that representation does not stop after casting or premiering the film, it stays and creates moments like these for discussion (Good Morning America, 2018). Both actors mention the importance of what it means to be represented on a platform like Marvel, discussing how much change it can bring to storytellers and to people who see themselves in a film like *Black Panther.*

Chadwick Boseman and Lupita Nyong'o discussed why representation mattered in film. In some ways film is accessible to telling stories of underrepresented communities who haven't had the opportunity or the productions behind the scenes that advocated for these voices and stories. Representation goes beyond talking about being underrepresented, it also means that taking narratives and stories that anyone can related to based on their own experiences. Boseman

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and Nyong'o discussed in their interview about not having this type of representation in film for them while coming up in the industry. It speaks to a bigger idea that even the actors who decide to take on a role could be doing so to push more stories that can show representation on screen.

Stories that show representation are a gateway to discussions of what we want to see in film. There are instances where film becomes a mirror of what society is doing, having everyone's story be represented in turn becomes a lens of how we see other cultures or communities. Film can be used as a medium of entertainment, but it can also be used to add discussion of who we want to see be represented in a wider sense. Often, these stories can be used to represent the people on screen but also those who are behind the scenes. Films and movie making has always been a collaboration of various fields, within the diverse group of people behind the scenes also comes opportunities for sharing representation. Storytelling and filmmaking have been an outlet to share different voices and experiences when they are later seen in front of a wider audience, more people feel seen or represented. Still, some of these experiences and stories have not been seen in film even after in 2020. The total economic output of U.S. Latinos reached $2.8 trillion surpassing the GDP of U.K. and India (Contreras, 2022). Even though Latinos in the U.S. have shown their impact in the economic growth they are and the fact that the group represents nearly one-fifth (20%) of the total U.S. population, they continue to be underrepresented in film and media (Fischer, 2022).

A report by Sara Fischer (2022) looked at representation of Latinos in shows and films. In 2022 Latinos represented only 3.1% of lead actors in TV shows and only 1.5% of TV showrunners, and 1.3% of directors were Latino. In film, Latinos represented 5.2% of lead actors, 3.5% of screenwriters, and 2.6% of directors (Fischer, 2022). Hollywood often praises themselves on the progress they are making with representation in film and TV, but the data

shows that Latinos represent 9.29% of streaming shows compared to 19% of the US population (Fischer, 2022). According to the report from Fischer (2022), Latinos have not made the same progress that Black Americans have with being represented; 16.2% in streaming shows compared to the 13.6% of US population and with Asian Americans being represented with 11.18% of steaming shows compared to 6.1% of the US population according to Nielsen cited report in (Fischer, 2022).

With the US population having a large community identified as Latinos, their interest in entertainment aligns with seeing themselves represented in film and TV. The film industry has lacked the opportunities of Latino or Hispanic characters to be in the spotlight of the film, instead they are represented in secondary or in most cases background characters and actors. Film is a media where representation is seen on a bigger scale, representation in film is relating to the experiences in the story being portrayed but also seeing culture and identity portrayed in a media that everyone can view.

EXAMPLES OF REPRESENTATIONS IN FILM OF BLACK & AFRICAN AMERICANS

A common trope of African Americans is the "magical negro" which refers to good hearted Black women or man who is always there to help the white character during a crisis (Cusic, 2021). In film and literature, the trope has become a way to represent Black men and women. Before *Black Panther* was released, the roles that Black women and men portrayed were limited to tropes like the magical negro. Cusic (2021) analyzed *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Green Mile* and *Ghost*, using the play and films to showcase ways that these medias have used the magical negro trope.

The magical negro is a trope created by white creators who want to portray the ideal Black person. In her study Cusic (2021) discusses the first appearance of the trope in the

play/novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), where the character Uncle Tom's stereotype is described as "a Black person who is docile, moral, religious and forgiving." Cusic (2021) continues to discuss how "Uncle Tom's" are often those who "love and adore the white man." In the play/novel Tom is slave and devoted Christian who St. Clare and his family take in because of his heroic act of saving his daughter Eve. Even after helping their family, Tom never is worthy of his freedom and seems unbothered by it. Once again, Cusic (2021) references an article "The Power of Black Magic," (Glenn and Cunningham) who cite Entman and Rojecki that defined the purpose for the magical Negro: "(a) to assist the character, (b) to help him or her discover and utilize his or her spirituality, and (c) to offer a type of 'folk wisdom' used to resolve the character's dilemma." All of these purposes are presented in Uncle Tom's character, demonstrating that this trope has created a character that other creators use to represent Black men in plays or novels and could later transfer to film and TV.

Part of representation comes from the ideas and intentions by the creators who are the ones that are tasked with creating films or media that people will feel seen. Creators have their own vision for a project, sometimes it can mean the direction of the film or the setting of the location, but when creating work that is meant to help represent a group or community it's important to not lose the idea of what representations means. The magical negro trope is an example of white creators who decided that representing a community like African Americans came from a single idea and stereotype.

With *Uncle Tom* (1852), Cusic (2021) discusses the representation of Black men, although in the play/novel Tom isn't seen as a villain or evil he instead is shown to be a caring man who looks after St. Clare's daughter. In other instances like *The Green Mile* (1999), a film about a Black man (John Coffey) who is put on death row for the rape and murder of two girls is

shown as a literal magical Negro. In the film, John Coffey has magical albitites to heal and is also an emphatic person which is only discovered by the white corrections officer Paul Edgcombe. Cusic (2021) makes the argument that the film only shows how Coffey is potrayed as doing anything to help others but himself even getting out of death row, and after his death the audience is supposed to feel sympathy for the corrections officer's guilt of knowing that Coffey was innocent. Once again, Cusic (2021) makes the argument that there was no need to have Coffey die on death row his character could have been saved stating,

> However, Coffey did not have to die. The white creators behind this film chose to let him die. And why? Just like Uncle Tom chooses to be beaten to the brink of death by his master at the end of the play rather than escape, Coffey chose to die rather than escape from jail, even after Edgecombe offers to help him escape. Both Tom and Coffey fit into the melodramatic theme of Black suffering in exchange for white sympathy (para. 18).

Once again Cusic (2021) makes an important argument, the power and influence that creators have in film and literature with the magical negro trope that has caused years of misrepresentation of Black people. Intentionally the creators of films like *The Green Mile* (1999) want audiences to see that both the white man and the magical negro are not at fault but instead it is the world that is unforgiving—even though in the film it is clear that the guilt that the corrections officer has is valid and justified.

A striking point that Cusic (2021) states about the effects of having tropes like the magical negro can cause a negative perspective that in turn is what we all see in representation of Black people,

> Because both Black and white audiences are used to this depiction of Black people in the media. The magical Negro narrative had become an accepted one. For audiences to

accept and love the Black man, he must be magical. This begs to question, what makes

audiences love the Black woman? The magical Negro is not just confined to the male

body (para. 20).

The magical Negro is not limited to just a Black male characters, but it can also be seen in the

way Black women are represented. As discussed before, Black Panther is one of the strongest

films to showcases African Americans and also shows strong and leadership in Black women, a

trait that has been missing in film.

In her final remarks, Cusic (2021) states that the magical Negro "is not a superpower for

Blackness. It is a tool for whiteness." The magical Negro continues to be used within film and

TV, and has shown to demonstrate stereotypes of African Americans. Instead of showing

unrealistic representations of African Americans, Cusic (2021) urges that creators should instead

focus more on Black superheroes. Having Black superheroes are one way to remove the magical

Negro trope and replace them with a powerful narrative that can show characters that are created

for their own benefit and not for white people and their problems.

Tropes have a way of affecting how we continue to tell stories in film and media,

especially with the creators that are tasked with sharing these stories, but also being able to

meaningfully represent them. In an interview with Xolo Maridueña, the journalist Angelique

Jackson (2023), discusses how DC studios co-chiefs James Gunn and Peter Safran explained that

the role of Jamie Reyes "called for a deftness in unbelievably funny physical comedy." Similar

to how most Mexican characters are portrayed already in film. For example, one of the most

notable Mexican actors who has shown physical comedy as part of their character is Eugenio

Derbez. Some of Derbez's most notable characters in Hollywood are from *Jack and Jill* (2011),

How to be a Latin Lover (2017), and *Overboard* (2018), in every character he portrays in these

films he is doing some type of physical comedy. In Mexico Eugenio Derbez is a well-known comedian and filmmaker, he made waves in the 90s with his comedy sketch shows and later comedy shows. On Mexican television his characters were seen as comedic and fun, but his portrayals of these characters overlapped once he moved to US audiences. Physical comedy is not necessarily a trait that is part of a trope for Mexicans, but it does overlap with how Mexicans have been represented in film. If they aren't doing physical comedy, the way they speak can also be part of their trait. This trait is not solely associated with a specific trope, but it does speak to the traits that Mexican characters are seen as comedic or comic relief.

EXAMPLE OF MEXICAN REPRESENTATION USING DC'S FILM BLUE BEETLE

The superhero known as Jamie Reyes made his first appearance in 2006 as the first Mexican American to hold the Blue Beetle suit making him the third person to have the suit with Blue Beetle being introduced in 1939. Jamie Reyes story is unique compared to the other two characters who wore the Blue Beetle suit. For one, he was Hispanic and from a smaller town. In the comic books, Jamie and his friends find the scarab that is ultimately the source of the Blue Beetle suit. Still, having Jamie wear the Blue Beetle suit meant a new representation for the superhero. For the first time a Hispanic character whose last name is also "Reyes" would be fighting crime as the hero. Blue Beetle's comic book laid the foundation that would open possibilities for even bigger projects.

Blue Beetle would later have an animated show from Cartoon Network's *Young Justice* in 2012. Although in the TV series Blue Beetle's Jamie Reyes played a recuring character, his portrayal was aligned to what the comic books had originally presented. Throughout the show Jamie's hometown, El Paso, is shown whenever his character is introduced. In various occasions, there are glimpses to landmarks and important locations that are familiar to anyone who has ever

lived or been to El Paso. The show shares a meaningful representation of Jamie Reyes based on the comic books. This shows that meaningful representation can come from the smallest details and still play true to the storytelling. For some time now Blue Beetle was a "known" character to some and even had meaning to those that felt that related to the experiences of a Mexican American kid from El Paso. Even though his city is only a part of Jamie's character it represents an identity that is often not in the spotlight.

Reyes story starts in his hometown when Jamie and his friends find the scarab that ultimately latches onto his back and gives him the powers of Blue Beetle. When the film for Blue Beetle was announced one could assume that most of the materials used for the movie would come from its original content from the comic books. In the comic books the origins of Jamie Reyes all come from his family and his city, in *Multicultural Comics: From Zap to Blue Beetle*, show that Jamie's name and even his Blue Beetle suit can all speak to his identity as a Mexican American character different from others in the DC universe (Risner, & Royal, 2010).

Some characteristics of Blue Beetle stem from his mask resembling the ones Mexican wrestlers use, a unique form of entertainment that many Mexican Americans grow up watching with wrestlers taking on a different identity based on their mask while never reveling who they really are. Then, his name "Jamie" indicates his identity of Mexican American with anyone pronouncing his name in English or in Spanish (Risner & Royal, 2010). A lot of the language also becomes a characteristics of Jamie in the comic books, with his parents refereeing to him as "mi hijo" or even how Jamie addresses his friends like using "chica." Not to mention that the comic books also address topics that relate to Jamie's city like Latino gangs, assimilation issues withing some Latina/o families, nativism among U.S. citizens, and the militarization and politics of the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez border (Risner & Royal, 2010). The Blue Beetle comic book

focuses on Jamie Reyes not just as a superhero but also as a Mexican American which is why several people feel represented with his character.

Moving forward, Jamie Reyes would have his story and background shared across a bigger screen and a wider audience. This was the start of the right direction for representation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. In 2022 the film project based on the comic book character was announced, so the anticipation for the new project was seen with high expectations. Yet, the trailer for the film was released in early 2023, and showed that Jamie Reyes was living in a fictional city instead of El Paso the comic book was based on.

Jamie Reyes, is one of the few DC characters that has a light hearted life for the most part before he becomes Blue Beetle. What makes Jamie Reyes different from the other superheroes in DC is he has parents that influence his identity along with his own personal journey to his identity. As a character, Jamie Reyes represents a story that many Mexicans and Mexican Americans can relate to. He has expectations from his family who have given everything for him along with his new found responsibilities as the Blue Beetle. In the comics, Jamie Reyes is similar to other superheroes roles; he wants to protect those that he cares about. The difference is that he grew up having a support system and values to his own culture that influence his character and personality, in contrast to many other DC characters that lack any cultural identity in their roles.

With the release of *Blue Beetle* in 2023 the excitement to see the first Mexican superhero be represented in film meant that finally there would be someone who would reflect the stories of many more Latinos and Mexicans. Before its production, director Angle Manuel Soto and cinematographer Pawel Pogorzelski visited El Paso, the city where Jamie Reyes is originally from, when asked if they would include El Paso in the film Manuel Soto admitted that the film

would not shoot many scenes in El Paso, but he wanted to better understand El Paso's

community and vibe (Ramirez, 2023). In return the film does not depict El Paso, Texas, instead

showcases a fictional city called Palmera City which looks like Puerto Rico of the future

according to Ramirez's (2023) article on "Blue Beetle and the Missing City: El Paso." By not

having *Blue Beetle* (2023) be set in El Paso it missed out on what the film could have been and

could have meant for El Pasons and Mexican Americans. As stated by Ramirez (2023),

discussing what the film could have done with the storytelling using El Paso as the background

to the character, "The film could have highlighted the life of a Mexican American teen living in

the borderlands of El Paso…Blue Beetle could have used El Paso as a backdrop—and key shaper

of superheroic actions and human interactions to highlight various positive aspects of the border

while tacking complex issues along the border" (para. 10). The film had the opportunity to share

some of the unique aspects of El Paso, Texas a borderland city between Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

Borderland cities like El Paso are rarely seen in film unless they are presented in a

negative light, for example *Bordertown* (2007), a film about a reporter who travels to Mexico to

investigate the unsolved murders of women in factories. Although the film is based on several

true stories from the female homicides or femicides that occurred in Ciudad Juárez, it depicts a

city in the borderland as dangerous. While based on true events, being next to a borderland city

like Juárez is not the only story. Part of what makes El Paso unique is having two cultures

combined. Having both the experiences of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez sharing Mexican and

American traditions is an important part of the story. For example the fact that you can find

Mexican candy in El Paso's corner stores or having endless restaurants of traditional Mexican

food while still having a fair share of American fast-food options is a large part of the borderland

culture.

When the film *Blue Beetle* (2023) removed El Paso, it took the opportunity to explore the border as a character and instead decided to present the first Mexican American character living in a futuristic city. Having removed El Paso from Jamie Reyes was once again doing what many other films have done to people of color, white washing. In this case, the filmmakers whitewashed the location. The location of the film may seem like a small detail that could be irrelevant, but with Blue Beetle's Jamie Reyes in the comic books his hometown is his whole character, where he comes from is part of his story and origin. Removing the location in the film became a way of transforming the character and only leaving certain aspects of Jamie Reyes, erasing par of his Mexican heritage and culture.

Even without its representation of El Paso, the film does not take away what *Blue Beetle* and Jamie Reyes represent to communities like El Paso and Mexicans who have not seen themselves be represented in popular culture and media. Films like *Blue Beetle* are leading the way for more stories that share representation on screen. It's the beginning of what we hope means more stories of Mexicans being the lead in blockbuster films. Yet when you erase part of the narrative like a location from the story it creates issues of meaningful representation, by "El Paso is important, and its representation should be validated. There is a wealth of stories that can be told and need to be told of a superhero withing the DC Comics Universe from the borderlands" (Ramirez, 2023). Sharing our stories are equally important since not many have been represented on screen, instead they are seen as extras or background people.

The live action film of *Blue Beetle* (2023) was initially pitched as a step forward in representation with a character like Jamie Reyes. The production of the film had also cast Xolo Maridueña, American actor with Mexican, Cuban, and Ecuadorian heritage, who has also portrayed roles with Mexican or Latino identities. Mexicans and Mexican Americans could see

themselves represented in a character like this because Maridueña shared their identity by sharing their language and culture. Jamie Reyes was the representation of not only someone of color but the fact that he was a Mexican superhero in a platform like DC comics meant that it was possible to aim higher in the roles that Mexican actors have in film. By having actor, Xolo Maridueña cast as Blue Beetle means that the production behind the film was aware of the impact of the role, which meant casting someone who could relate to Jamie Reyes experience. It meant that whoever wore the suit would represent those who watched the film by seeing themselves in Maridueña.

The filmmakers of *Blue Beetle* (2023) were conscious of what the film would mean for representation. Having this as the first superhero to be represented as Mexican American or Hispanic. It also made sense since he has been representing Mexican characters throughout his acting career. Casting Maridueña as Jamie Reyes demonstrated that the filmmakers were aware who they believed could fill the role based on their pervious roles and their own representation with their ethnicity. Although the filmmakers knew they wanted to do justice to what Jamie Reyes represented, they cast someone who could align with some of the experiences from Jamie but failed to fully represent the character within his community.

Xolo Maridueña discussed in an interview with "Variety" what the project of Blue Beetle meant by having the first Latino superhero lead a film for DC cinematic universe (Jackson, 2023). He discusses how being part of the film was important because for the first time we would be seeing Jamie Reyes as the protagonist in a larger project rather than TV cameos or appearances. Maridueña also discussed that having filmmakers like Angle Manuel Soto and screen writer Gareth Dunnet-Alcocer who have similar experiences to Jamie Reyes,

They knew the story they're trying to tell because they've lived it and experienced it firsthand…Once that soil was really healthy, it couldn't help but feel natural and inherent the rest of the way because it was an unspoken thing (para.8).

Even though Maridueña mentions that both the director and screen writer of the film relate to the experiences that Jamie Reyes went through its not represented in the film when parts of the character are missing. Representation can mean having a character that looks like you, it can also mean sharing similar experiences with culture or even location. Being represented comes from different aspects of "being seen" which can mean seeing part of a culture or identity represented, in this case on screen within film or media.

Many Mexican and Mexican Americans have been cast as a secondary or even background characters in films, or other times they are cast in stereotype roles like "chola #1" or "gang member 1," and in some cases their roles are only the surface of their identities and share sections of their culture that people reference. Having characters that represent a community in negative light by using stereotypes like gang members, and only seen in a secondary roles, affects how representation is presented on screen. These characters create a misrepresentation of a community and can cause people from that same community to feel like they will only ever be seen in those roles, especially if it's on a screen or media like film. Having representation in film is crucial to how representation can work effectively. Representation can come from first seeing yourself be represented in a larger scale like a superhero film. Once people see themselves it becomes possible to view similar works that strive for more representation.

When the filmmakers decided to remove the location and hometown of Jamie Reyes it meant changing the character completely. He no longer represented two communities, but instead was a version of what the filmmakers found convenient for the story. The decision to

remove the location could have been logistics with the city of El Paso or the filmmaker's decision to take creative license for the character which meant changing his hometown. Yet, other superhero's hometown are not removed completely from their film adaptations. For example, Marvel Comics uses the city of New York for several of their superheroes like Spider-Man, Daredevil, The Fantastic Four, and the Avengers. In Ramirez's article "Blue Beetle and the Missing City: El Paso" (2023), mentions how New York is associated heavily with Spider-Man, they both are related and coexist within every adaptation in film. Similar to what Blue Beetle's story and origin could have been like if he was associated with El Paso stating, "Blue Beetle in many ways El Paso's Spider-Man and without a doubt, El Pasoans would have embraced the character within the film," New York is a part of Spider-Man's origin and even the location becomes a character of its own within the films. Having Blue Beetle not set in El Paso meant that Jamie Reyes would not be the same character because he is missing a part of himself. Reyes no longer represents two cultures or has a unique background. Instead, now Jamie Reyes represents a limited version of his culture and experiences since he is no longer from El Paso and instead shares only the surface of his identity.

REPRESENTATION OF MEXICAN WOMEN IN FILM

The lack of representation of Mexican women in film is well documented and is close to nonexistent. Even though there are a couple of films that do provide a spotlight for Mexican women they are not dominating the film industry along with women also lacking a lead role in films. Mexican women are not the only ethnicity or identity that is missing from film projects but also Latinas. People of color and women have both lacked a permanent place in the film industry lacking opportunities. The Hollywood Diversity Report 2023 states "In the end, women and people of color have to be exceptional to survive in the industry, while White men are afforded

many more opportunities to thrive" (p. 57). In 2023, the Hollywood Diversity Report showed data that concluded there is a lack of women leading roles along with opportunities for people of color, the reality is that both are not seen on screen (see Figure 2.1) (Ramón, Tran, & Hunt, 2023). In recent years, slowly there have been a few projects, be it films or TV shows that show representation either with the cast on screen or the stories being represented.

One of the examples of representing Latino stories came earlier in 2002 with the film *Real Women have Curves* with lead actress America Ferrera who has often credited the film for being her first lead role, but also for what the film represented. America Ferrera has been in the industry for 21 years, her first feature film was portraying a young Mexican American girl named Ana. When discussing the film during a Ted Talk, Ferrera talks about identity and representation while taking on the role of Ana and her backstory, "Ana in *Real Women Have Curves* was a brown, poor, fat Latina. I had never seen anyone like her, anyone like me, existing in the center of her own life story" (Ted Talk, 2019). Ferrera also mentions why it was important to take on the role and what she felt occurred once the film was released. Discussing how she felt that the film was going to change how we saw Mexican Women and Latinos being represented in film,

> I saw firsthand that people actually did want to see stories about people like me. And that
> my unrealistic expectations to see myself authentically represented in the culture were
> other people's expectations, too. *Real Women Have Curves* was a critical, cultural, and
> financial success. "Great," I thought, "We did it! We proved our stories have value.
> Things are going to change now (Ted Talk, 2019).

Although a success, the film has proven that these stories matter and people do want to see them. Yet, it did not cause the effect that Ferrera had hoped by seeing more films with representation in

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Hollywood. In 2006, Ferrera grew in her career when she later took on the lead role of Betty Suarez, in *Ugly Betty*. The success of the show led to her first Emmy award along with being the first Latina actress awarded an Emmy in the lead actress category. In her Ted Talk, Ferrera addresses the frustration of being the only Latina since her award to have accomplished this, "That is not a point of pride. That is a point of deep frustration. Not because awards prove our worth, but because who we see thriving in the world teaches us how to see ourselves, how to think about our own value, how to dream about our futures." Ferrera's frustration comes from realizing that not much has changed since she has taken these roles (Ted Talk, 2019). Since her Ted Talk, only up until 2022 there has been two Latinos nominated for the same award as Ferrera, with Pedro Pascal being nominated for Best Lead Actor in Drama series and Jena Ortega being nominated Best Lead Actress in Comedy series.

From her own experience, Ferrera has talked about why sharing stories and experiences that reflect real people can bring a level of authentic-ness that is sometimes missing from the bigger films seen on screen. Ferrera expresses how she has seen what powerful voices and experiences can do in a platform as big as a movie theater, "I have witnessed the power our voices have when they can access presence in the culture. I've seen it. I've lived it, we've all seen it. In entertainment, in politics, in business, in social change. We cannot deny it -- presence creates possibility" (Ted Talk, 2019). Ferrera emphasizes how representation can create changes to an already complicated film system. Films are a form of entertainment, but they are also a vehicle for bigger discussions from opinions that we might share, to ones we may disagree, but the biggest impact that film shares is the power to show representation. Being represented can come from seeing culture and traditions and how we see genders being represented.

In films, women are often used for their beauty and charisma. Only recently have we seen a variety of women be represented in stronger lead roles like the one of superheroes. Before its release, Black Panther's Chadwick Boseman talked about the highlight of the film was the representation of Black women in the film. Boseman expressed how the film shared a variety of talented Black women like Lupita Nyong'o, Danai Gurira, Letitia Wright, and Angela Bassett who each portray a unique version of a strong African women. In an interview, Boseman stated that part of *Black Panther's* biggest accolade is the representation of Black women stating, "What's amazing to me is the women in this film just because they are all so different. *Wonder Women* was great but to extend the conversation of Black superhero women, and superheroes movies there is not just one image to look at they all are very different and have different type of beauty and strength it will be fascinating to see that" (Good Morning America, 2019). Before *Black Panther* there was a specific stereotype of Black women along with only certain roles for Black women, similar to how Mexican women and Latinas are placed in one mold when it comes to roles they portray in media and film.

Women being represented in film has increased and their roles have become protagonist and at the center of the plot, "In 2022, 33% of films featured female protagonists, up 2 percentage points from 31% in 2021" (Lauzen, 2023). With women being represented in film it opens discussions of women of color being represented in film, especially Mexican women who have not been seen in lead roles. The lack of representation of Mexican women in film has served as a reminder that the stories are not important or do not deserve to be told—is the message shared by not representing Mexican women in bigger film productions like Marvel.

Over the years, Marvel has grown into a massive film production, they have showed representation of African American and Asian Americans with *Black Panther* introducing their

first Black superhero and *Shang Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* introducing the first Asian superhero. Both films had success in representation with many fans and critics applauding Marvel for their support of representation. Representation on screen is exactly what audiences or filmgoers want to see in the films and shows they view in fact diverse audiences in particular want diverse content. As the Hollywood Diversity Report 2023 states, "The more diverse offerings in streaming applied even more to diverse audiences who faithfully tuned in to films with casts that were at least 30 percent minority" (p.57). Knowing that audiences want to see diverse casts and narratives should also be an indicator for the film industry to allow these opportunities for women and people of color. In film, women have led films in several different stories and narratives, but leading roles are not as common to those of male lead roles, the same can also be said for people of color like Latinos.

Conclusion

Meaningful representation has seen several versions and outcomes in film and media. In some cases films have lacked the representation when they rely on stereotypes, and others have been successful in demonstrating representation by sharing meaningful experiences based on meaningful representation. Some examples of Mexican representation come from films that are based on real people like *The Perfect Game* and *McFarland USA*. Both films are based on true stories of Mexican and Mexican American, the themes surrounding these films are sports, but they still manage to attempt representation. Both films share some characteristics of meaningful representation with language, food, and culture.

While both films share true stories based on real people, would the films have been any different had its production team been Mexican or Mexican American? Perhaps the films would have been different if the filmmakers had been people who identified as Mexican or Mexican

Americans. They could have brought their own experiences to the film. For example, language could have been the vehicle to tell these stories, given that both are primarily in English. Part of representation in film starts by sharing location, language and culture and both films share a minimum effort of showcasing this by having the actors speak Spanish in some dialogue or depicting parts of their identity with religion like the Catholics saint the Virgin Mary, using the cross pendent or even doing the sign of the cross. Yet these features in the film can only go so far. Both films try their best to showcase Mexican culture and even though they have accomplish telling these true events and giving a voice to these unknown stories, they still lack a deeper representation of culture.

While the film *The Perfect Game* focuses on the culture of its characters, using Spanish phrases like "padre" when the team players talk to their pastor and even the names of the players show its relation to their Mexican roots. With names like: Norberto Villarreal, Gerardo Gonzalez, Fidel Ruiz and Mario Ontiveros to name a few. Names are also indicate that the players are Hispanic or come from Spanish speakers even though the film is placed in Mexico. To filmgoers, just knowing their names before the setting can tell more about the characters' identities. These are only some attempts that the film takes, but ultimately is not credited to the filmmakers since the characters are based on real people.

Similar to *The Perfect Game*, the also true story of *McFarland USA* uses several characteristics to show representation of Mexican Americans. For one they show a real struggle that many sons of immigrants face in California with most of them having to work with their parents in the fields picking crops. The film tackles the real experiences that many Mexican Americans in California face, especially children who have immigrant parents. In *McFarland USA,* the filmmakers used the point of view of the teens' coach who has no knowledge on the

experiences of his own team until he requires two team members for cross country but cannot compete unless their father approves. The father of the team members is hesitant to approve because he is also his childrens' boss in the fields and needs them to pick up crops therefor their coach takes on their place in the fields to see their father's point. With that experience, the coach realizes the realities that his team faces considering where they live and their own identities in school. Yet, the film is using real experiences from the members of the team that the film is based on. It only shows a version of authentic representation based on true accounts but no indication of truly authenticity from the filmmakers.

The success of the films can be credited in part to the filmmakers for showing these stories and representation, but the reality is that these films would not have been made if not for the real people they were based on. Representation in film does not solely need to be based on true stories, it is possible to create fictional characters that can show meaningful representation. With productions like Marvel Studios that have been successful with showing authentic representation with fictional characters like Black Panther or King T'challa and Shang Chi have proven that even being placed in fictional worlds they manage to share authentic representation. The genre of Superhero films is a fictional setting in film that creates the possibilities of being inclusive with the characters being portrayed. Especially, with a production like Marvel Studios that is already well known to create a platform for stories of representation.

Representation in film will come a long way when collaborating on screen and behind the scenes. Film has always been a media of collaboration, no script can ever be a film without its director, producers, cinematographers, actors, writers etc. Making a film is not about one voice but multiple. Of course, the bigger picture of making a film involves money and movie executives who are the gatekeepers of a film being made. Film executives are the ones who make

the decisions. In the past the common misconception has been that audiences do not want to see diverse narratives. These misconceptions are changing, at least now most studios like Marvel are aware that audiences do want to see diverse films that share a variety of narratives, especially if there are films that are diverse all around (on screen and behind the scenes).

When the film *Blue Beetle* was announced, the idea was that for the first time there would be a Hispanic or Mexican American superhero, who many would relate to the character and its backstory. The film was anticipated for its release, but when the trailer showed a setting that was unfamiliar to character's origins the excitement for the film turned into criticism. In the trailer release it showed a Jamie Reyes that was not from El Paso instead a fictional city called "Palmera City," and although Blue Beetle's suit was shown with its authentic suit from the comic book, it still did not give a version of the character that everyone expected.

It was DC's attempt for representation in film by having a superhero like Jamie Reyes be the lead of an action movie, but instead of showing representation the trailer only showed a margin of what representing a Mexican character on screen. The hometown of Jamie Reyes was an important element to showcase because of its unique background. The city of El Paso shares two communities as a border city. Cuidad Juarez and El Paso are connected geographically and socially, with El Paso having most of its population commute to Juarez and vice versa. The two cities also share language and culture with El Paso's community also speaking Spanish and identifying as Mexican. With a unique background like this, it's impossible to think why the producers and directors of *Blue Beetle* opted out of showcasing the authentic background of their superhero. The filmmakers behind *Blue Beetle* decided that the location of the character could be replaced while keeping the story and representation that everyone (fans) wanted for Jamie Reyes.

Replacing the location of *Blue Beetle* changed the character completely by now having a different experience than what was told in the comics and what was already expected from a character that came for a real place like El Paso. Although the film is meant to be fiction the location of El Paso is real, when content like comic books and its creators use real locations with an intention behind their characters. In the case of Jamie Reyes, who later becomes Blue Beetle, his whole identity in the comic books is based on where his family is from and his own hometown. When filmmakers decide to choose what to keep from the original material it begs the question who should be behind projects like these that require knowledge in representation. Projects with stories of representation should also require the same diligence that any other film provides especially when demonstrating meaningful representation.

Representation in film can come across with different perspectives, especially if the filmmakers do not relate or find meaning behind the representation on screen. Filmmaking is part of the solution in being inclusive starting with the productions behind the stories being told through film. Knowing that the representation on screen, meaning the lack of Mexican actresses, is apparent looking behind the scenes, is the place to start identifying where filmmakers who share the same experiences of the stories of representation will be included. Film productions require the assistance of several people, its urgent to review who is working behind the scenes to share these stories.

In recent years films have more than one platform, from a theatrical release in theaters to a streaming release from various platforms. Before films were only released in theaters where people would wait to see the film release for the first time. While currently films have another platform like streaming releases where the time or place does not matter. Even with the changes of how films are viewed, it is noticeable that women are still not behind the director's chair even

in theatrical releases, "Meanwhile, among all racial/ethnic groups except Black directors, women lagged behind their male counterparts as directors in top theatrical releases" (see Figure 2.4 and 2.5) (Ramón, Tran & Hunt, p. 28). A platform like theatrical release is still a bigger platform than streaming since it opens a wider audience anywhere in the world with a movie theater. Yet, a streaming platform also has its own benefits like being accessible to anyone with access to a phone or internet, and in several cases, it might be more affordable than a film.

The Hollywood Diversity report is an important document that looks at both film and television, identifying the diversity in the entertainment industry. The report is transferred to the Entertainment and Media Research Initiative in the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (IRLE) at UCLA, with Director Dr. Ana-Christina Ramón who also manages the report. Recently published, "The 2023 Hollywood Diversity Report: Part 1 Film" looks at both theatrical and streaming films released during the 2020 and 2021 calendar years. A lot of what the report identified shows that streaming offered more opportunities for women both on screen and off screen as actresses and directors. Still, the report indicates that there is still a discrepancy between the opportunities that white male directors have compared to people of color and female directors. The report indicates that change hasn't been made, but at least there is an opportunity for the industry to start thinking of change based on what has been reported and seen in films and TV shows.

Part of the filmmaking process involves serval people behind the scenes that work together to produce a script to a motion picture. A huge part of the filmmaking process involves the director, they are the people who are tasked with leading the film from its early stage in the script to its release. In the Hollywood Diversity Report 2023, they mention "Compared to 2019, a slightly larger share of theatrical films was directed by a person of color in 2022, while a

smaller share was directed by a woman" (Ramón, Tran & Hunt, p. 28). Even though there is a noticeable change in films being directed by people of color, women are still not represented behind the scenes. Without having women represented behind the scenes, like directing, there is less of an opportunity for full representation of everyone, not just people of color. From the beginning, filmmaking starts with a story and later is developed into different sections like casting roles and producing. At the top, the needs for representation is the task of creating an environment that is accepting of these stories that center around representation.

Many independent labs work with screenwriters, directors, and filmmakers who identify as an underrepresented group. Most of these labs are organized by a group of people who come from underrepresented groups as well. They create programs that can provide a platform for these inspiring filmmakers. In 2022 filmmakers they were involved with The Sidney Poitier New American Film School, worked on creating a lab for Latino filmmaking and representation in film (ASU, "Genius grant fellows to launch Latino filmmaking lab at ASU's Poitier Film School"). The pair have also stated that part of creating a lab and a space for Latino filmmakers open an opportunity of learning for a specific community that might never had this opportunity before. Learning environments can provide a space of growth that can nurture future filmmakers who identify as part of an underrepresented group.

Proving opportunities for directors and screenwriters who come from an underrepresented group can go so far. Beginning with programs that can foster a discipline and understanding of storytelling through visuals can lead to larger scale of opportunities. Considering that the gap of female directors in film is not nearly at the level that male directors, continuing programs, or labs that offer a platform solely to a specific communities can provide

the film industry with projects that share an authentic representation perspective in the stories they tell.

Table 1.1 Marvel's 'Phases'

Phase (years)	Films
Phase 1 (2008- 2012)	Iron Man The Incredible Hulk Iron Man 2 Thor Captain America: The First Avenger The Avengers
Phase 2 (2013 - 2015)	Iron Man 3 Thor: The Dark World Captain America: The Winter Soldier Guardians of the Galaxy Avengers: Age of Ultron Ant-Man
Phase 3 (2016 - 2019)	Captain America: Civil War Doctor Strange Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 2 Spider-Man: Homecoming Thor: Ragnarok Black Panther Avengers: Infinity War Ant-Man and the Wasp Captain Marvel Avengers: Endgame Spider-Man: Far From Home
Phase 4 (2021 - 2022)	WandaVision The Falcon and the Winter Soldier Black Widow Loki season 1 What If...? Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings Eternals Hawkeye Spider-Man: No Way Home Moon Knight Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness Ms Marvel Thor: Love and Thunder She-Hulk: Attorney At Law Werewolf By Night Black Panther: Wakanda Forever The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special

Phase 5 (2023 - 2025)	Ant-Man and The Wasp: Quantumania
	Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 3
	Secret Invasion
	Loki season 2
	The Marvels
	What If...? season 2
	Echo
	Deadpool 3
	Agatha: Darkhold Diaries
	Daredevil: Born Again
	Captain America: New World Order
	Ironheart

Figure 1.1 Marvel's Grossing Films

Marvel's Top Grossing Films

Legend: Total Domestic Gross (blue), Worldwide Gross (orange)

Films: Avengers End Game (2019), Avengers Infinity War (2018), Spiderman No Way Home (2021), The Avengers (2012), Avengers Age of Ultron (2015)
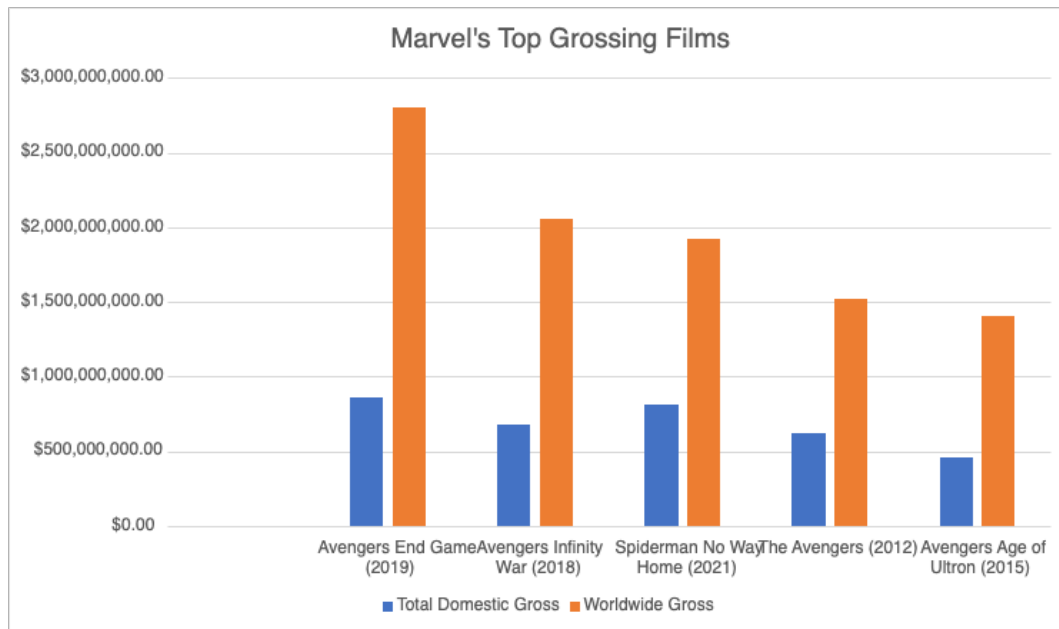
Figure 2.1 Theriacal Film Lead Counts
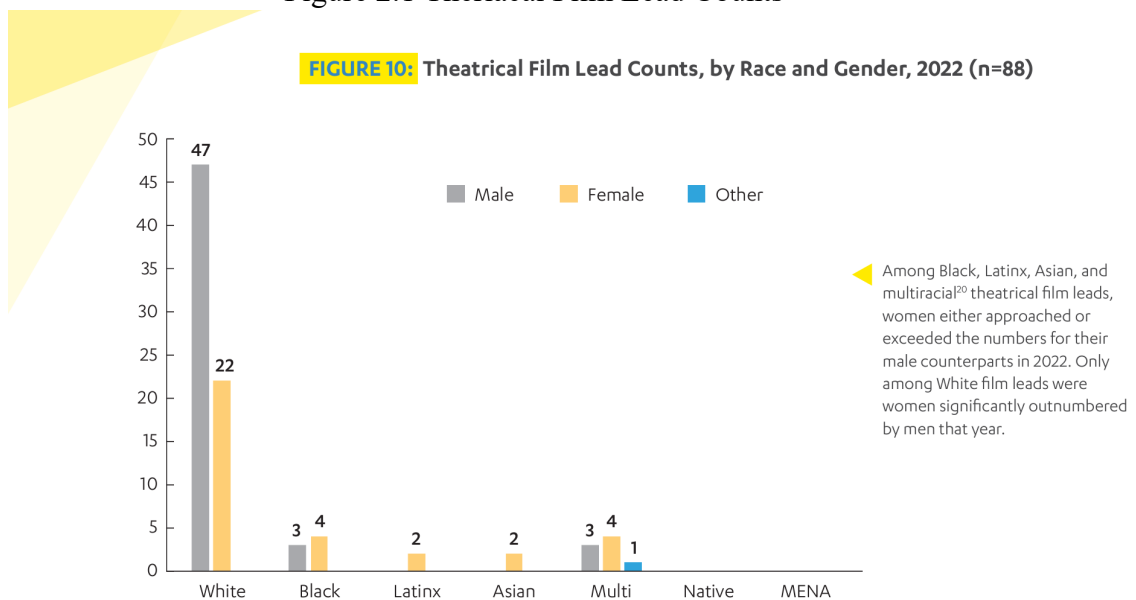
FIGURE 10: Theatrical Film Lead Counts, by Race and Gender, 2022 (n=88)

Legend: Male, Female, Other

White: 47, 22; Black: 3, 4; Latinx: 2; Asian: 2; Multi: 3, 4, 1; Native; MENA

Among Black, Latinx, Asian, and multiracial[20] theatrical film leads, women either approached or exceeded the numbers for their male counterparts in 2022. Only among White film leads were women significantly outnumbered by men that year.

Figure 2.2 Theriacal Film Actor Counts

Among White,[23] Black,[24] Latinx,[25] and Native actors, women were underrepresented in the top theatrical films for 2022. By contrast, among Asian,[26] multiracial,[27] and MENA actors, women either approached parity with their male counterparts or exceeded it in this employment arena in 2022.
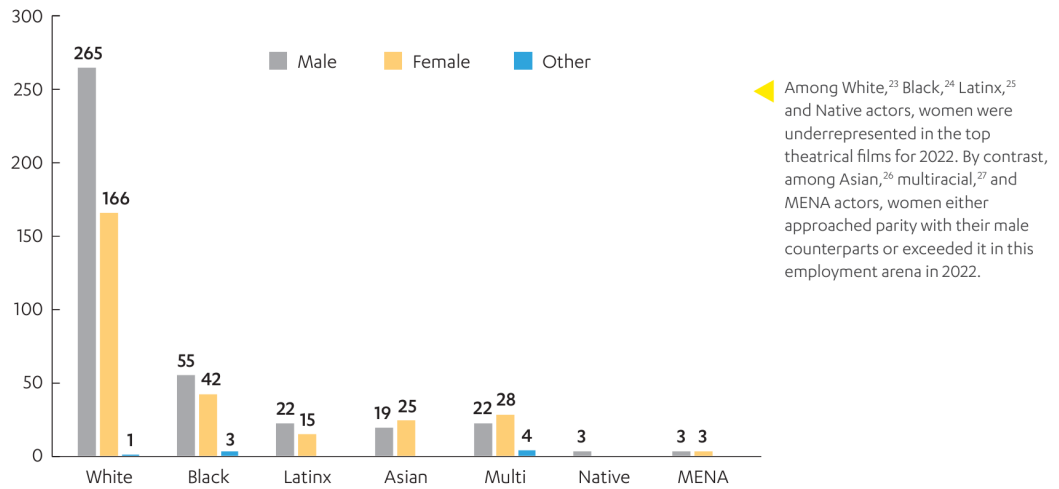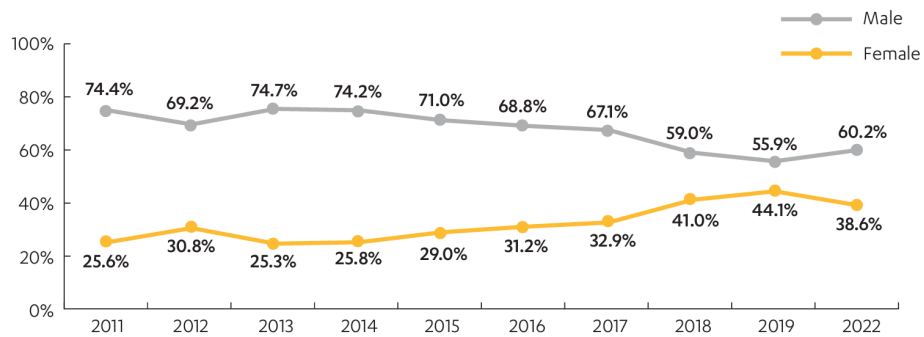
Figure 2.3 Lead Actor Gender, Theatrical Films

FIGURE 3: Lead Actor Gender, Theatrical Films, 2011 - 2019, 2022
(n=172, 172, 174, 163, 168, 173, 167, 139, 145, 88)

Like people of color, women's share of top theatrical film leads has taken a step backward despite enormous gains over the course of this report series. Women accounted for 38.6 percent of film leads in 2022, a more than five-percentage-point decrease from the 44.1 percent figure evident in 2019. Female lead actors would have to increase their share by more than 11 percentage points to reach proportionate representation.

Figure 2.4 Director Race, Theatrical Films

Director Gender, Theatrical Films, 2011 - 2019, 2022
(n=172, 167, 174, 163, 168, 174, 167, 140, 146, 89)
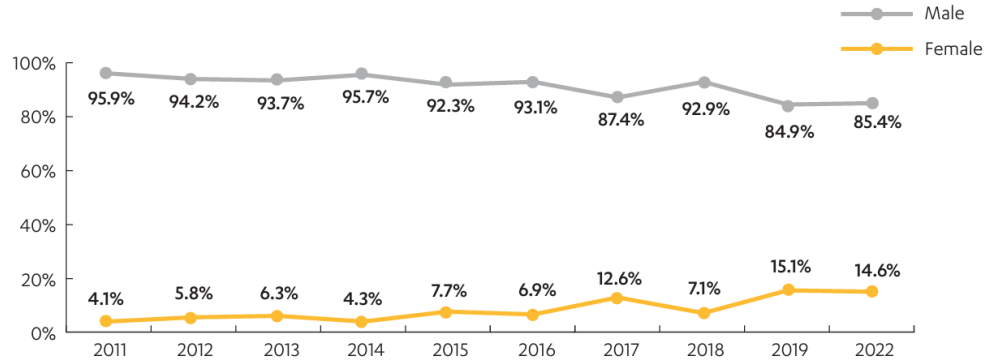
Women claimed 14.6 percent of director positions of top theatrical films in 2022,
down slightly from 15.1 percent in 2019. Between 2011, the first year examined
in this report series, and 2022, women's share of directors increased more than
threefold — from 4.1 percent to 14.6 percent. Nevertheless, women remained
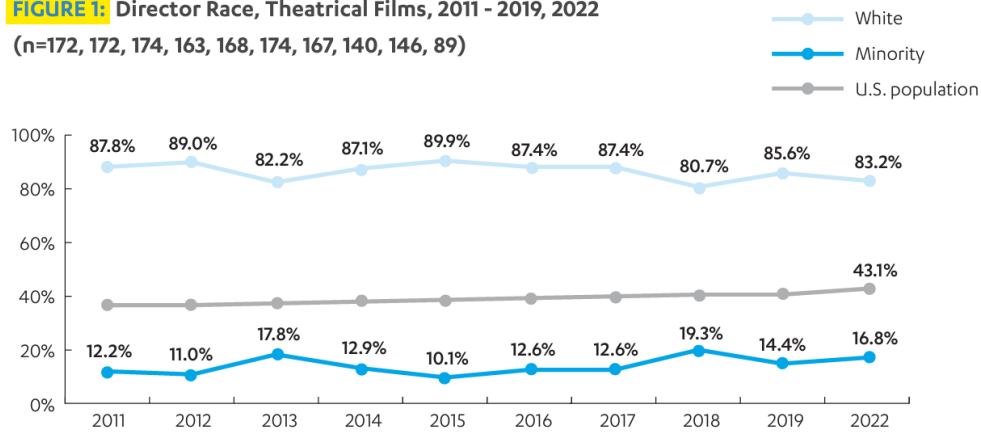underrepresented by a factor of more than 3 to 1 in this employment arena in 2022.

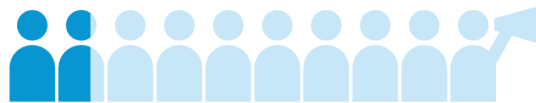Only **1.5 out of 10** theatrical film directors are women

Figure 2.5 Director Gender, Theatrical Films

Legend:
- White
- Minority
- U.S. population

White: 87.8%, 89.0%, 82.2%, 87.1%, 89.9%, 87.4%, 87.4%, 80.7%, 85.6%, 83.2%

Minority: 12.2%, 11.0%, 17.8%, 12.9%, 10.1%, 12.6%, 12.6%, 19.3%, 14.4%, 16.8%

U.S. population: 43.1%

Years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2022

In 2022, 16.8 percent of the year's top theatrical films were directed by a person of color, up from 14.4 percent in 2019. This figure was only 4.6 percentage points higher than the group's 2011 share (12.2 percent). People of color would have to more than double their 2022 share to reach proportionate representation among theatrical film directors (43.1 percent).

Only **1.7 out of 10** theatrical film directors are people of color

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Vita

Lizbeth Garcia Gonzalez attended The University of Texas at El Paso where she received her bachelor's in creative writing with a minor in rhetoric and writing in 2021. During her undergraduate degree she worked at the University Writing Center as a consultant, where she worked one-on-one with students and helped them with their writing while also leaning about the pedagogy behind teaching writing. There she developed an interest in writing outside of creative fields. Then in 2022 she started her master's program in rhetoric and writing studies, where she found an interest in digital rhetoric beginning with film. She then worked with the writing center as an assistant director, where she organized committees within the center like Publishing, helping create a blog by the consultants working there and Workshops where consultants would present, she would help organize presentations schedule on writing topics.

Working with former executive director of nonprofit organization that works to help women and nonbinary filmmakers by providing grants and film festivals. She worked with Femme Frontera's former executive director Angie Tures where they met to discuss ideas and possible projects that Femme Frontera can use as part of their fundraising and grant writing applications. One of the projects that Lizbeth helped developing was organizing and taking part in interviewing other nonprofit organizations. Her interest in film and rhetoric started to develop into a bigger interest and the motivation behind her future studies and discussion about film and representation.

Contact Information: lizbeethgarrcia23@gmail.com