The Effects of Typecasting on Asian and Asian American Actors

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Introduction

In the modern age, we all have our favorite sources of entertainment, such as television shows, movies, and plays. However, while these examples do their due diligence in entertaining their respective audiences, there is an overarching issue surrounding the lack of diversity in theatre and film. Despite the fact that actors should be offered roles based on their talent, type casting is still occurring widely within theatre and film with such limited number of roles, for minorities, to begin with (Bhavnani, R. (2007)). This problem has negatively impacted current and aspiring actors from racial minority groups because they are not able to find work at all, and if they are able to do so, they are often portraying a stereotype (Zhang, Q. (2010)).

Background

A possible cause of this problem is the way we as audience members believe that people should be cast based on the exact description of the character that is provided by the writer, and that no other person can be fit to play the role. The theatre and film industries are already highly competitive, but aspiring Asian and Asian American actors face a much harder challenge to be a part of these industries due to the lack of roles for people coming from this background. There are many notable roles out there which an Asian or Asian American actor could play; however, these roles are often given to actors from a White background. This phenomenon is also known as "whitewashing." Whitewashing in this context refers to the portrayal of Asian characters by white actors. Another form of whitewashing takes place when white actors replace or rewrite limited "Asian" roles.
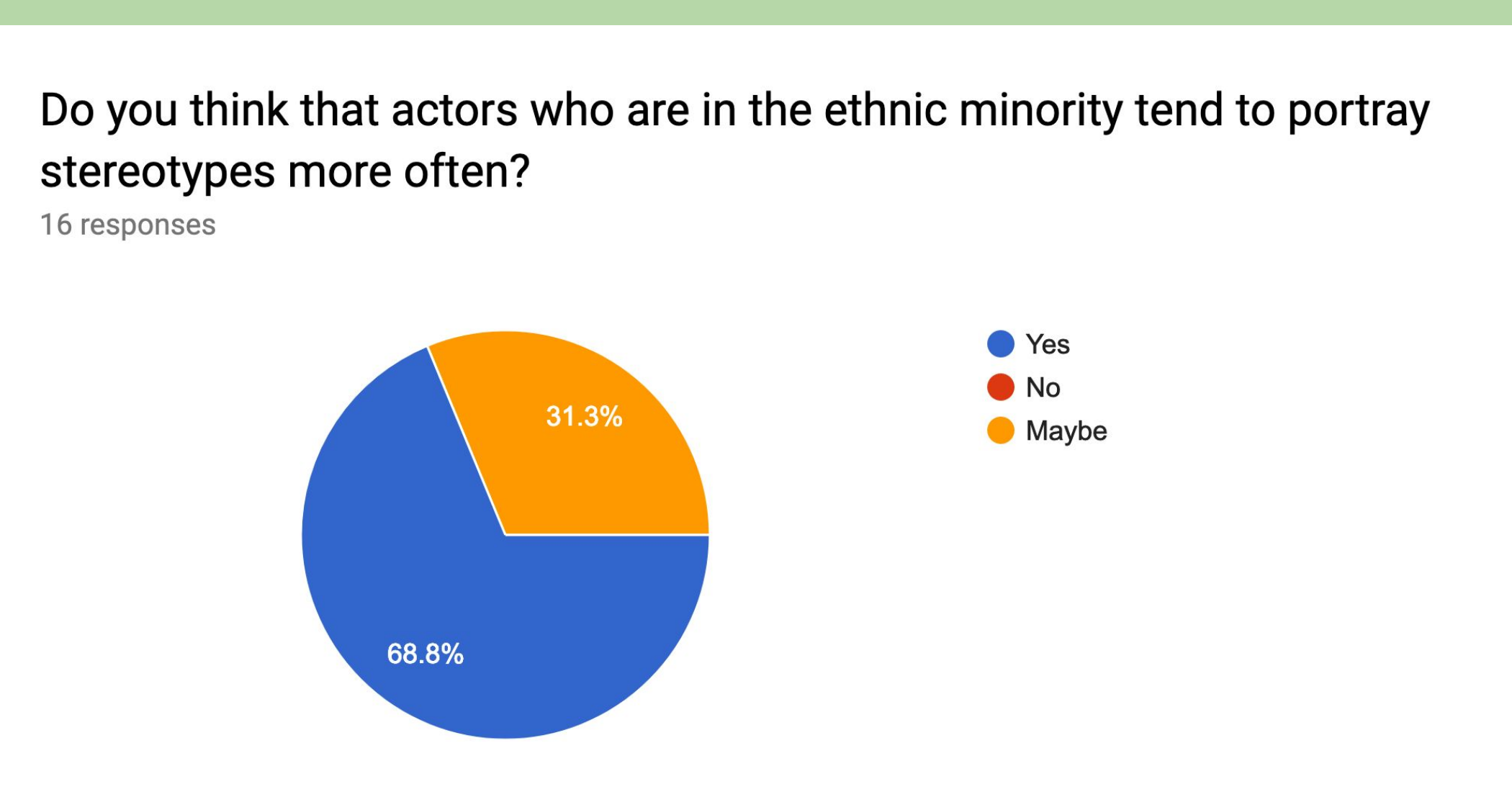
Tilda Swinton's casting in the role of the Ancient One, in the film Doctor Strange, raised controversey after the film's release. The role was a Tibetan monk.
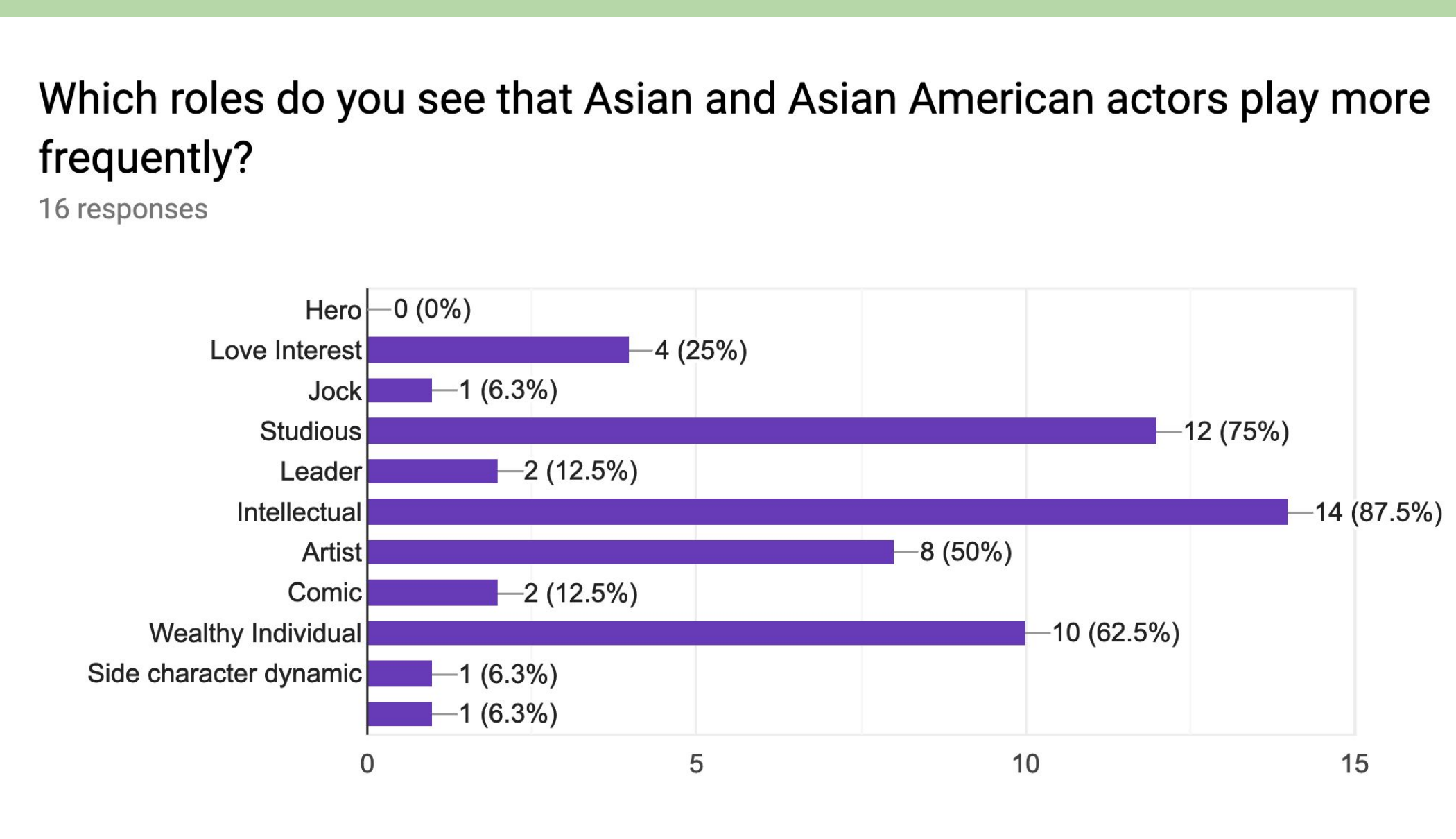
Research Methodologies

Data and Findings

Do you think that actors who are in the ethnic minority tend to portray stereotypes more often?
16 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

68.8%
31.3%

The figure above shows that there is an overwhelming majority of people who believe that actors who are in the ethnic minority tend to portray stereotypes more often than actors who are not in the ethnic minority.

Which roles do you see that Asian and Asian American actors play more frequently?
16 responses

- Hero — 0 (0%)
- Love Interest — 4 (25%)
- Jock — 1 (6.3%)
- Studious — 12 (75%)
- Leader — 2 (12.5%)
- Intellectual — 14 (87.5%)
- Artist — 8 (50%)
- Comic — 2 (12.5%)
- Wealthy Individual — 10 (62.5%)
- Side character dynamic — 1 (6.3%)
- — 1 (6.3%)

This bar graph shows the responses to the the question asking participants which roles they felt Asian and Asian American actors portrayed more frequently. Graphically, it shows the spectrum on which Asian and Asian American actors mostly portray Intellectuals and rarely portray the protagonist.

Conclusion

Asian and Asian American presence in film, theatre, and television has historically and currently remained quite low. The responses from the survey showed a high correlation between the research question and the participants perspective on this issue. The one exception was the 62.5% of the participants who believed that Asian and Asian American actors portrayed Wealthy characters. The recent release of the film Crazy Rich Asians was the reason given by most participants for why they believed Asian and Asian American actors portray WWealthy individual characters. On the opposite end of the spectrum, 12.5% of the participants believed that Asian and Asian American actors portrayed the role of a Leader, 6.3% of the participants believed that Asian and Asian American actors portrayed the role of a Jock, and 0% of the participants believed that Asian and Asian American actors portrayed the role of the Hero or Protagonist. This large spectrum also indicates that Asian and Asian American actors are typecast frequently and are rarely offered or cast in any roles outside of a studious or intellectual character.

Implications and Next Steps

I hope that through this research project, I am able to heighten the awareness of this ongoing social issue and reach a broader audience. One of the main goals of the film, theatre, and television industries is to generate revenue based on the demands of consumers. If more people are aware of this issue, it will not take a long time for the people in the industry to realise that changes have to be made.

Acknowledgments/References

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