More like *unseen*

A STUDY OF ACCESSIBILITY AND REPRESENTATION IN DOCUMENTARY FILM

Complete Findings



CMSI | PERSPECTIVE FUND

Part of the Documentary Power Research Institute Series
The Documentary Influence:
A Social Science Investigation
of Film Impact Campaigns

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INCLUSIVE RESEARCH DESIGN COMMITMENTS:
This study's design involved a commitment to centering considerations of accessibility and representation in each stage of the research, including working with a research team inclusive of people with lived experience with a disability and being undocumented. A report of learnings from this research design and approach will be forthcoming. Please contact David Conrad-Pérez, at dconrad@american.edu, for more information.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR MEDIA & SOCIAL IMPACT (CMSI)

The Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI), based at American University's School of Communication, is a creative innovation lab and research center that creates, studies, and showcases media for equity, social change, and social justice. Focusing on independent, documentary, and entertainment media, the Center bridges boundaries between scholars, producers and communication practitioners across media industries, social justice, public policy, and public engagement. The Center produces resources for the field and academic research; creates original media; convenes conferences and events; and works collaboratively to understand and design media that matter.

ABOUT THE DOCUMENTARY POWER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Based at the Center for Media & Social Impact, the Documentary Power Research Institute produces public research and convenes topical conversations to investigate and strengthen the role and power of documentary storytelling in democracy, social change, and justice. With seed funding from the Perspective Fund, the multi-disciplinary Institute grapples with the field's most urgent challenges and works to expand access to timely learnings, needs and tools of documentary-centered research in order to serve academic and practitioner communities interested in the role that documentaries can play in community building and fields of social impact, justice and change. The Institute also spotlights the legacies and present-day work of impact producers, activists, filmmakers, and organizations who are committed to leveraging documentaries for social impact.

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full report on findings

A CLOSER LOOK

SECTION I:

TAKING ACTIONS

Summary Spotlight for Section »

Several interview participants noted how audience members shared an interest in creating meaningful action after the screenings. At one university in Philadelphia, a professor was approached by students who wanted to start an organization for students with disabilities on campus, as a direct result of a film screening. In another screening, in Washington DC, an audience member approached the organizer to say that she felt that she could advocate for herself after seeing so many people with disabilities coming together in community and advocating for themselves.

After a screening in Southern California, another organizer noted how an undocumented audience member with a disability approached her after one screening and said that the film brought him ***"hope that I can exist and thrive in this country."*** As one organizer explained the impact of the film to the undocumented community they work with/for: ***"It goes deep into their recognition that they have the power, they have the power to change and be in community… And it emboldened people who were usually quiet to recognize their power and that it becomes stronger when they're together with others."***

The survey results further reveal a notable desire and interest in taking action among audiences who experienced the film. Most notably, more than any other category, **83%** of surveyed participants who identified with a disability said they were "very likely," "likely," or "already did" take action to improve their situation becuse of the film—compared to just **67** of participants who did not identify with a disability. Similarly, **88%** of participants who identified as undocumented said they were "very likely," "likely," or "already did" take action to improve their situation because of the film—compared to just **70%** of participants who did not identify as undocumented.

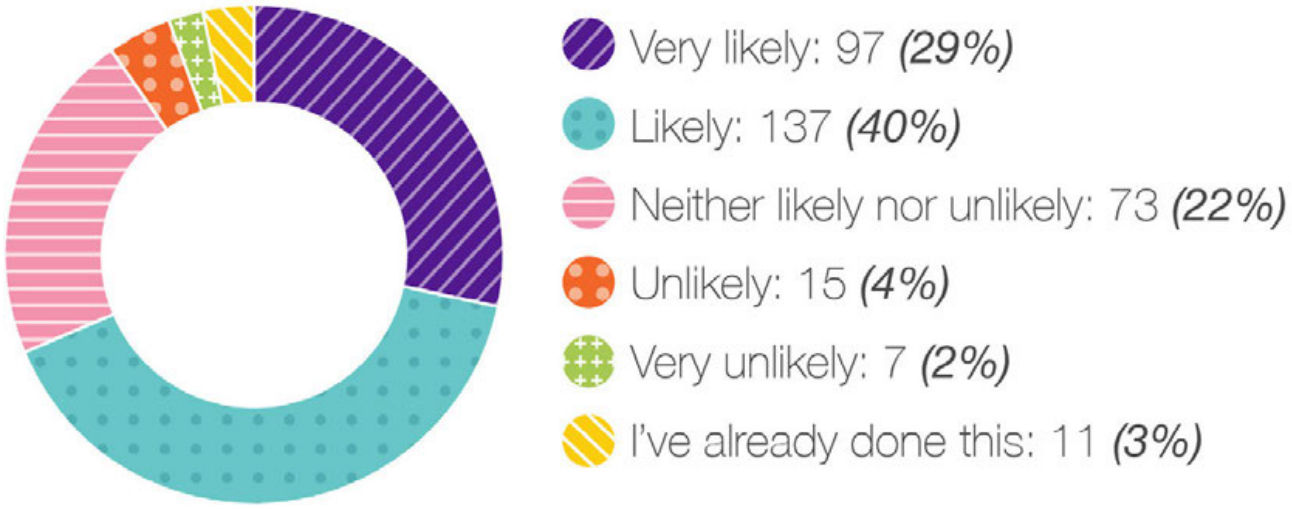
Also of note, while **68%** of audiences said they had already shared their experience or were "very likely" or "likely" to share their own experiences with other people after the film, this was especially true for people who identified with disabilities **(72%)** or as undocumented **(74%).** This finding is particularly revealing since **58%** of undocumented respondents said they "rarely" or "never" speak to people who are not immediate friends or family about their experience.

Further, every person who identified as undocumented **(100%)** said they either had already taken action or were "very likely" or "likely" to take action to improve things for others because of the film (this was the only question that received a unanimous response rate), as did **87%** of all audience members (**89%** of LGBTQIA+ participants, and **90%** of participants who identified with a disability).

This study also found that a majority of audiences across the country felt that seeing the film was so impactful that it was likely to "change their life" **(52%).** Audiences with disabilities felt similarly than those without disabilities **(54% and 52%).** Undocumented audiences **(86%),** however, were twice as likely as those who were not undocumented **(48%)** to say they could see the film changing their lives. This section provides an overview and "closer look" of these and other findings.

The majority of audience respondents (72%) said they will take action to improve their situations after experiencing the film. This was especially true for audiences that identified with a disability (83%) and those who identified as undocumented (88%).

Question: I will take action to improve my own situation. *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

More than any other category, 83% of surveyed participants who identified with a disability said they were "very likely," "likely," or "already did" take action to improve their situation because of the film—compared to just 67% of participants who did not identify with a disability. Similarly, 88.2% of participants who identified as undocumented said they were "very likely," "likely," or "already did" take action to improve their situation because of the film—compared to just 70% of participants who did not identify as undocumented.

Also of interest, the majority of participants, across identities of race and ethnicity, expressed an interest in taking "action" to improve things for themselves and others after the film. There was no meaningful difference in this response by race/ethnicity.

9 Note: All graphs have been rounded-up to the nearest whole number. As such, not all graphs will total 100%.

Question: I will take action to improve my own situation.

Very likely | Likely | Neither likely nor unlikely | Unlikely | Very unlikely | I've already done this

Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



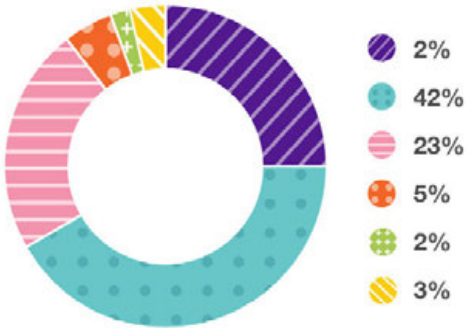
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

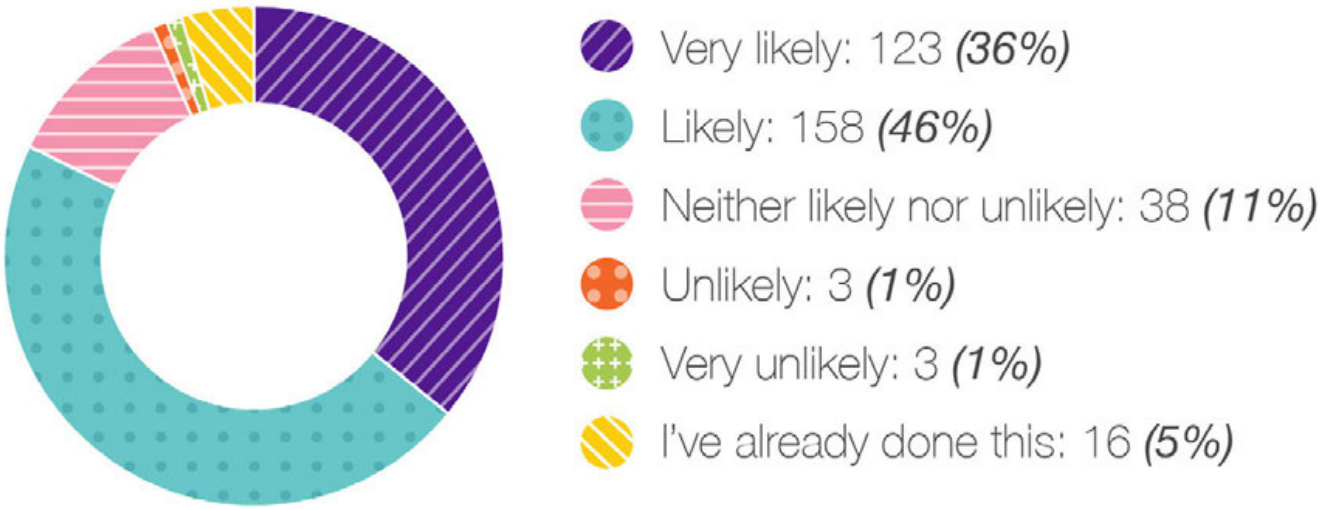


Does not identify as undocumented



Every person who identified as undocumented (100% of respondents) said they will take action to improve things for others because of the film. And 87% of all audience respondents said they will take action to improve things for others because of the film.

Question: I will take action to improve things for others. *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

Every person who identified as undocumented (100%) said they either had already taken action or were "very likely" or "likely" to take action to improve things for others because of the film (this was the only question that received a unanimous response rate), compared to 87% of all audience members and (89% of LGBTQIA+ participants, and 91% of participants who identified with a disability)

Question: I will take action to improve things for others.

Very likely | Likely | Neither likely nor unlikely | Unlikely | Very unlikely | I've already done this

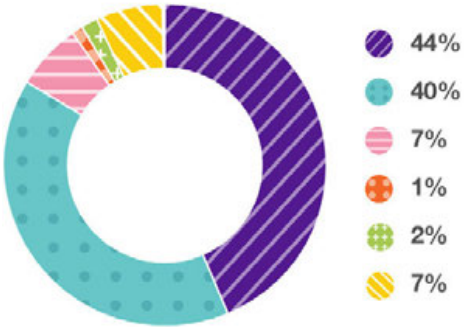
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



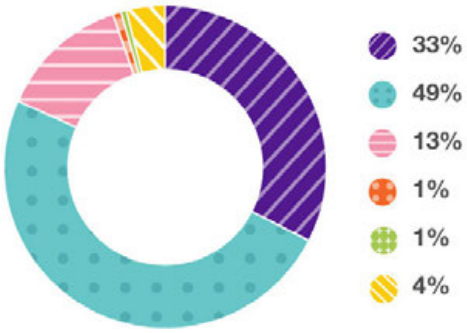
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



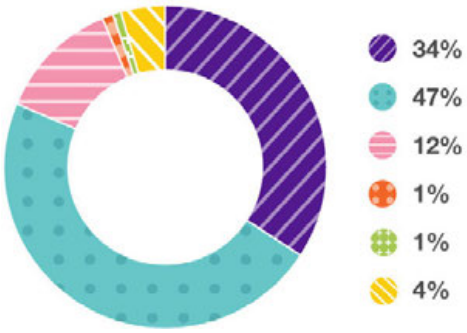
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

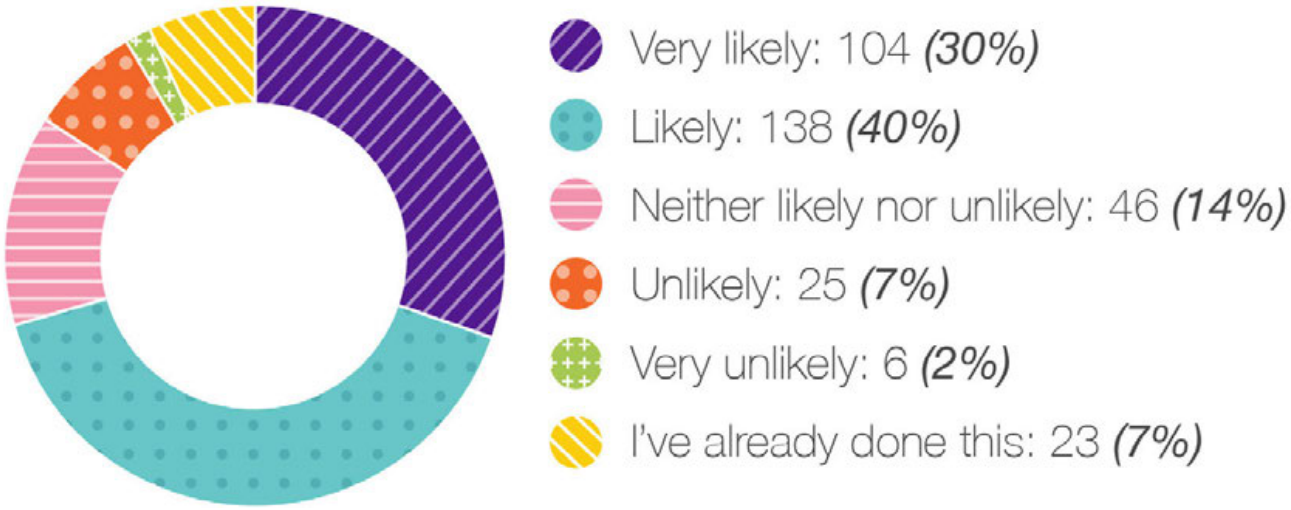


Does not identify as undocumented



77% of respondents said they will talk about the film with other people.

Question: I will talk about this film with other people. *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

While most audience members said they had either already talked about the film with other people or were "very likely" or "likely" to do so (78%), ***about 97% of undocumented audiences (more than any other category) said they already had or expected to share and talk about the film with other people.***

Question: I will talk about this film with other people.

Very likely | Likely | Neither likely nor unlikely | Unlikely | Very unlikely | I've already done this

Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

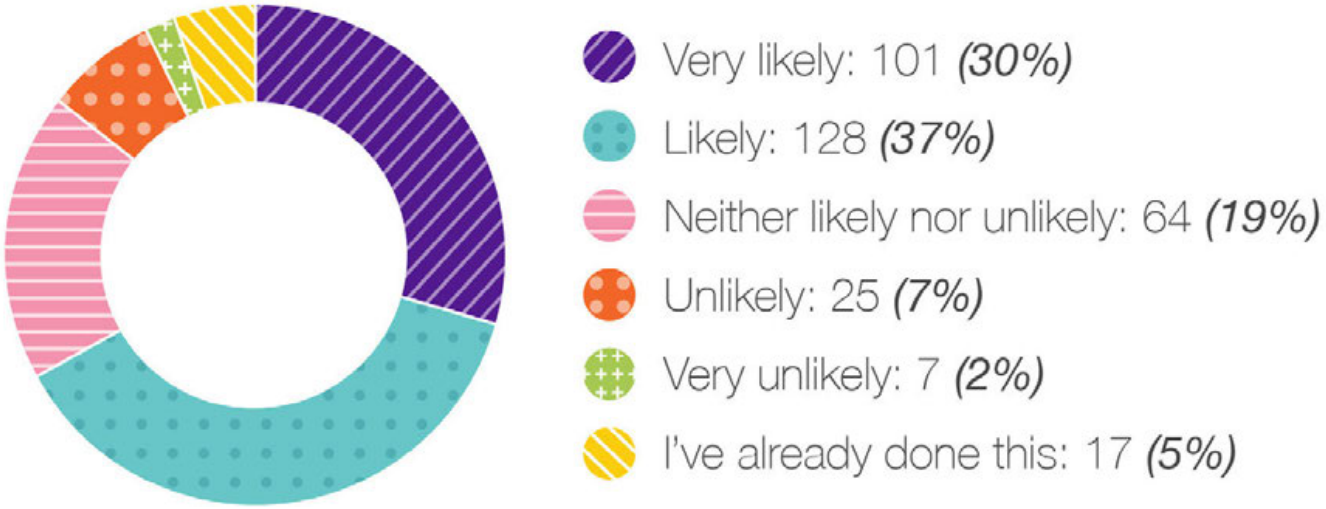


Does not identify as undocumented



About 72% of audience respondents said that they will tell other people to watch the film.

Question: I will tell other people to watch this film. *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

Participants who identified as undocumented (94%) were significantly more likely than audience members without experience being undocumented (70%) ***to say that they had already told other people in their community to watch the film,*** or that they were "very likely" or "likely" to do so.

Question: I will tell other people to watch this film.

Very likely | Likely | Neither likely nor unlikely | Unlikely | Very unlikely | I've already done this

Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

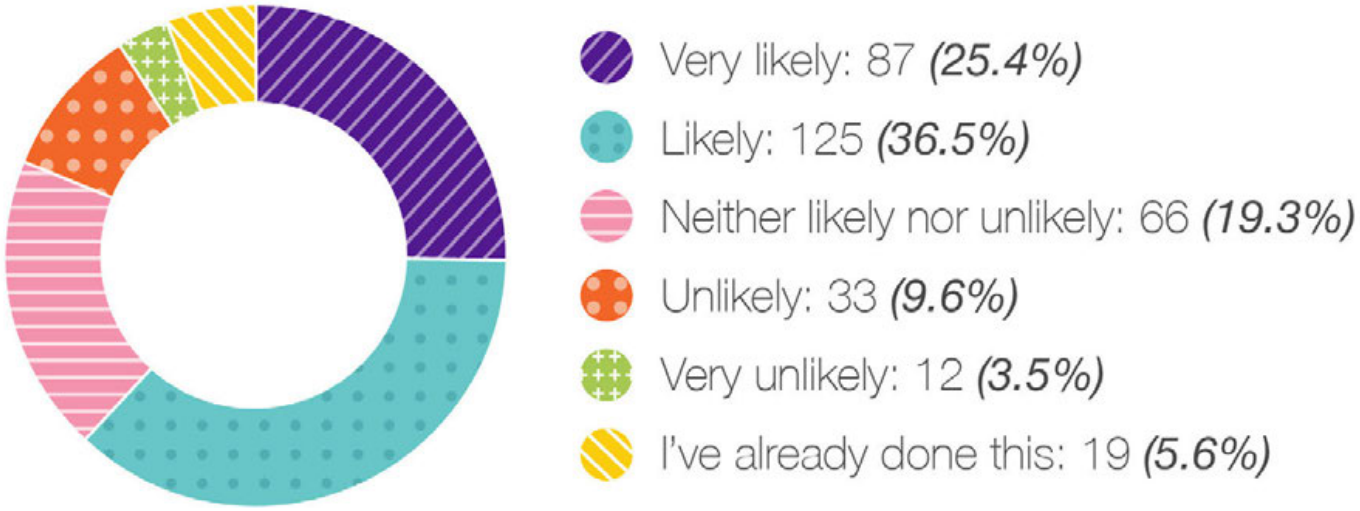


Does not identify as undocumented



About 68% of audience respondents said that they are more likely to share their own experiences with other people after watching the film.

Question: I will share my own experiences with people. *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

While 68% of audiences said they had already shared their experience or were "very likely" or "likely" to share their own experiences with other people after the film, ***this was especially true for people who identified with disabilities (72%) or as undocumented (74%).*** This is especially revealing since 58% of undocumented respondents said they "rarely" or "never" speak to people who are not immediate friends or family about their experience.

Question: I will share my own experiences with people.

Very likely | Likely | Neither likely nor unlikely | Unlikely | Very unlikely | I've already done this

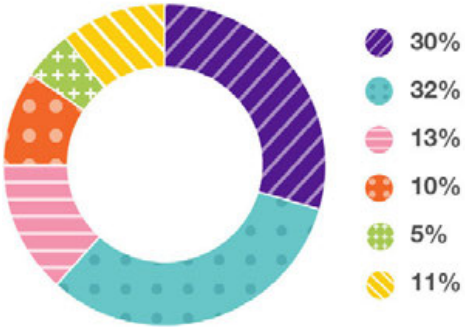
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



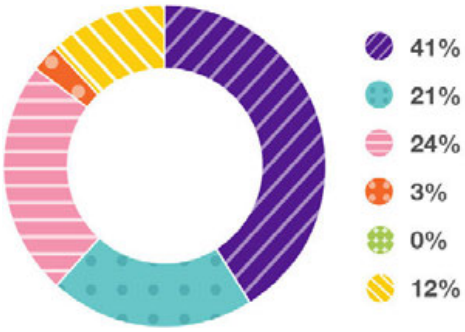
Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

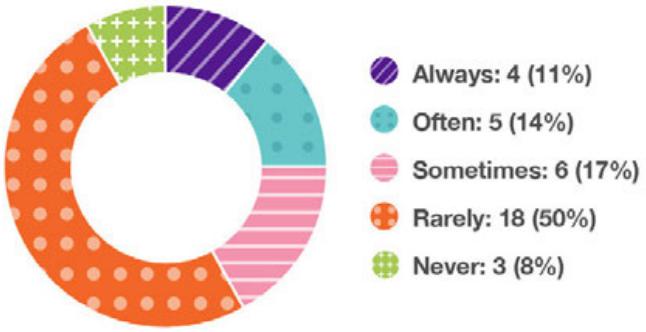


Does not identify as undocumented

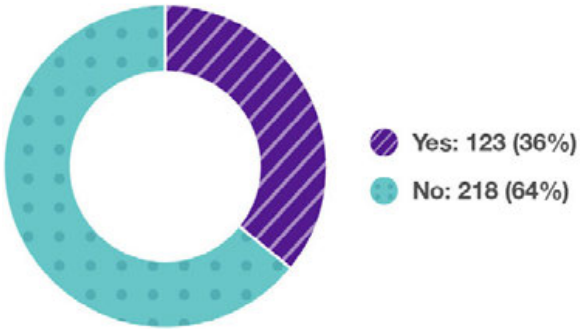


About 68% of audience respondents said that they are more likely to share their own experiences with other people after watching the film.

How frequently have you discussed your undocumented experience with people who are not your immediate friends or family? *(all responses)*



Are you planning or have you already taken any other type of action after the documentary? *(all responses)*

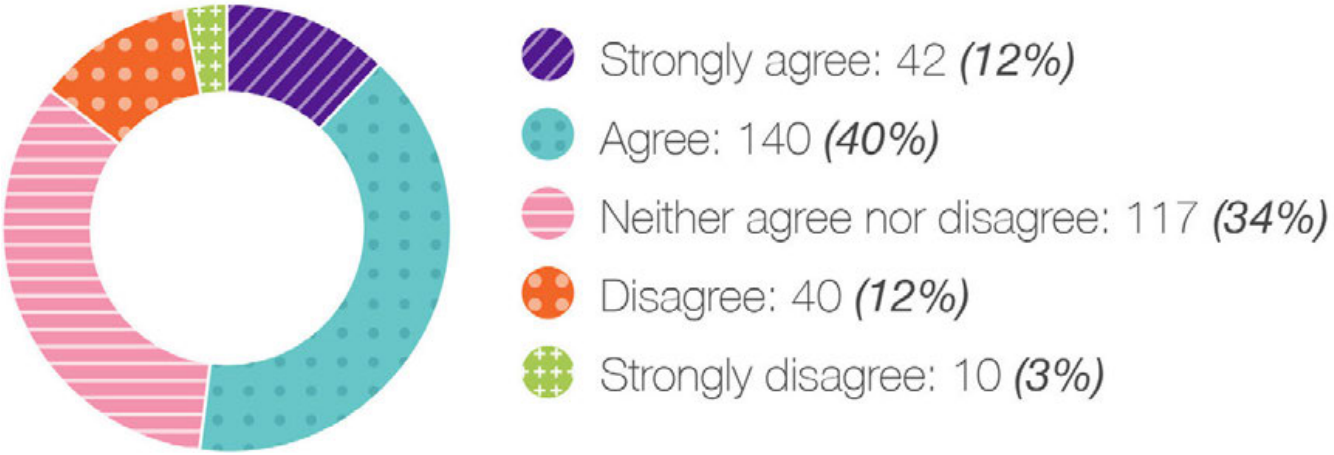


Open-ended question: If you are planning to take an action as a result of participating in this event, please tell us what action you're thinking about taking or what actions you have already taken *(all responses)*

The most commonly named actions shared in written responses by audience participants involved "advocacy and awareness" (44 responses), "personal growth" (23 responses), "education" (18 responses), and "community support" (13 responses).

More than half of the audience respondents (52%) said they could see the experience of seeing the film *unseen* as changing their life.

Question: I could see this film changing my life. *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

While the majority of audiences (52%) felt that the film would change their life, ***slightly more people who identified with a disability (about 54%) felt that the film experience would change their life, and a significant percentage of audiences who identified as undocumented (almost 86%) felt that it would change their life.***

Question: I could see this film changing my life.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

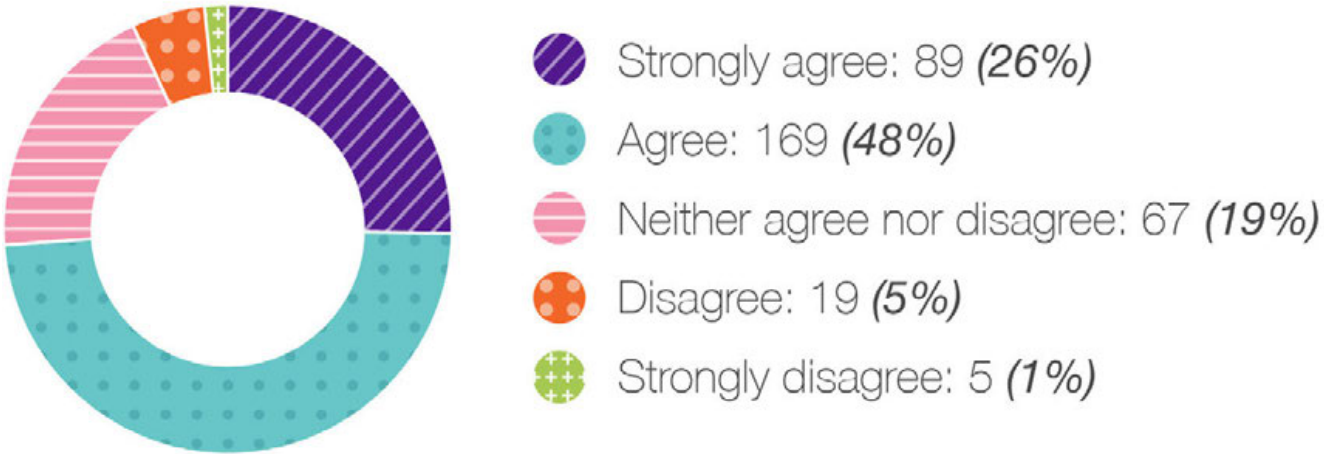


Does not identify as undocumented



Nearly 3 of every 4 respondents (74%) said they will still be thinking of the film several days after watching it.

Question: This is the type of film I still think about several days after watching it. *(all responses)*



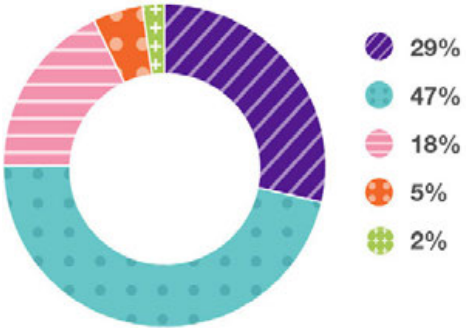
A Closer Look

While a majority of audiences said they be thinking about the film for several days after watching it (74%), ***nearly all respondents who identified as undocumented (89%), more than any other category, said they would be thinking about the film for several days after.***

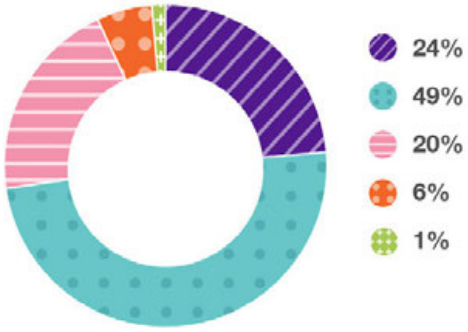
Question: This is the type of film I still think about several days after watching it.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

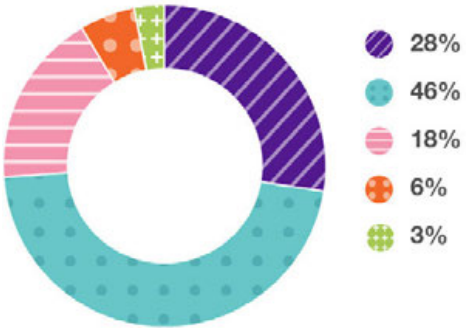
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



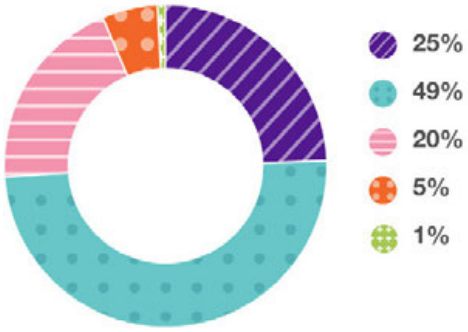
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



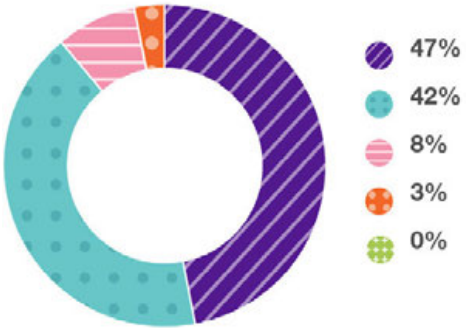
Identifies with a disability



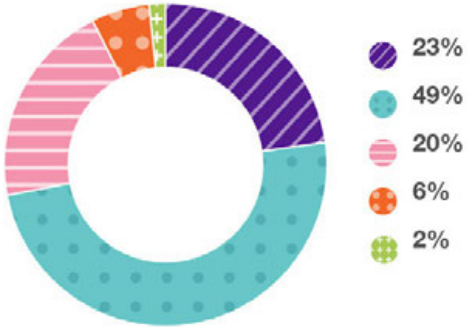
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as undocumented



SECTION II:

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES AND RAISING AWARENESS ON IMPORTANT ISSUES

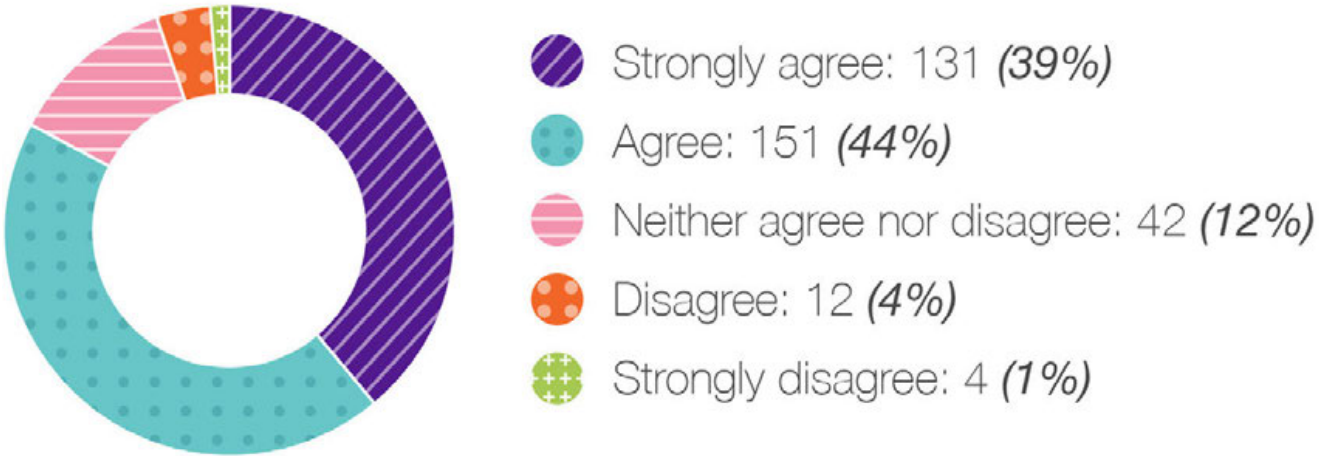
SUMMARY SPOTLIGHT FOR SECTION

Demonstrating the power of film to change perspectives and raise awareness on important social issues, this study found that the film helped change the perspectives of both audiences who did not have shared lived experience with the events and identities featured in the film and those that did have shared lived experience.

This study found that a majority of audience members **(83%),** regardless of their background, felt that the film ***"made me think differently about an important issue."*** More than three-quarters of people with no lived experience being undocumented **(77%)** and those with experience being undocumented **(84%)** feel that the film made them ***"think differently about an important issue."*** Similarly, large percentages of people who did not identify with a disability and those who did identify with a disability feel that the film made them think differently (**84%** and **82%**, respectively). Further, the majority of audience participants **(85%)** felt that the film "made them care more about an important issue," with no significant difference between those who identified with a disability **(84%)** and those who did not **(86%).** This section provides an overview and "closer look" of these and other findings.

83% of audience respondents said the film made them "think differently about an important issue."

Question: *unseen* made me think differently about an important issue.
(all responses)



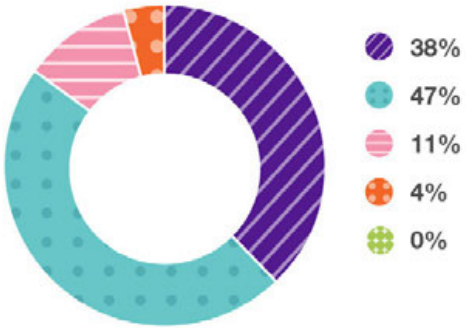
A Closer Look

While a majority of audiences said they be thinking about the film for several days after watching it (74%), ***nearly all respondents who identified as undocumented (89%), more than any other category, said they would be thinking about the film for several days after.***

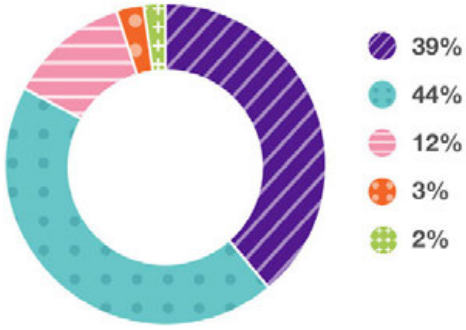
Question: *unseen* made me think differently about an important issue.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

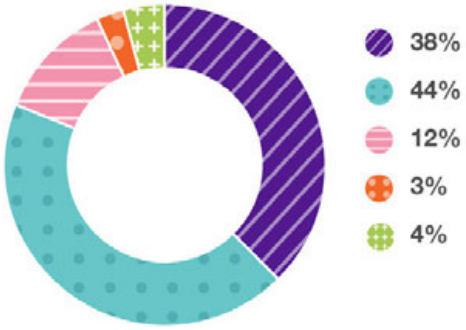
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



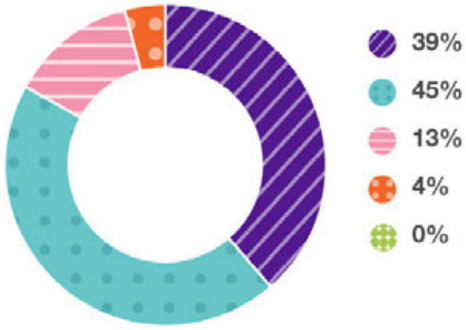
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



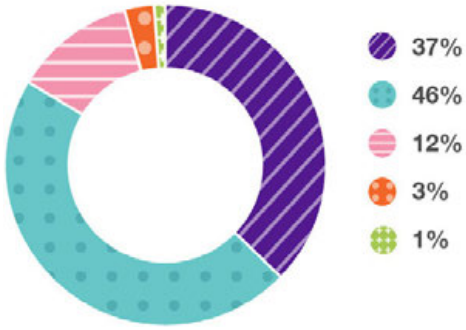
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

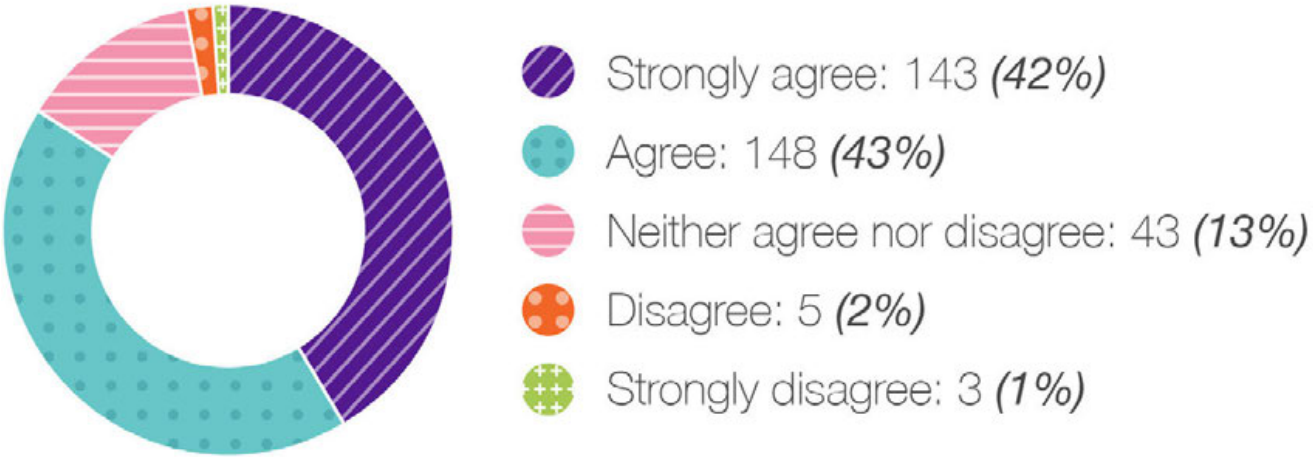


Does not identify as undocumented



85% of audience respondents felt that the film made them "care more about an important issue."

Question: *unseen* made me care more about an important issue.
(all responses)



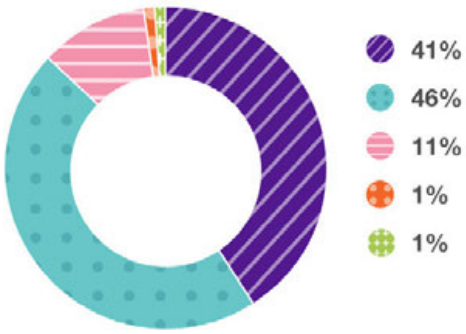
A Closer Look

The majority of audiences (85%) across identities felt that the film ***"made them care more about an important issue."*** This was especially true for audiences who identified as undocumented (91%).

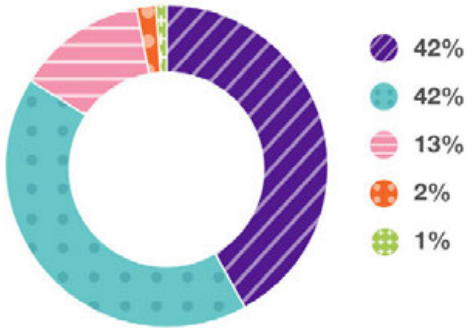
Question: *unseen* made me care more about an important issue.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

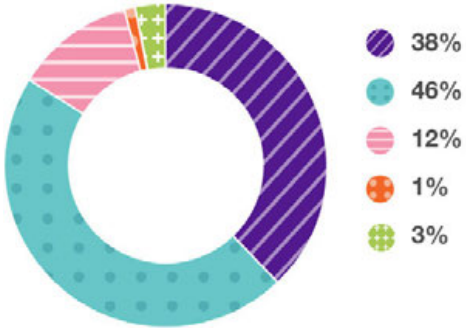
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



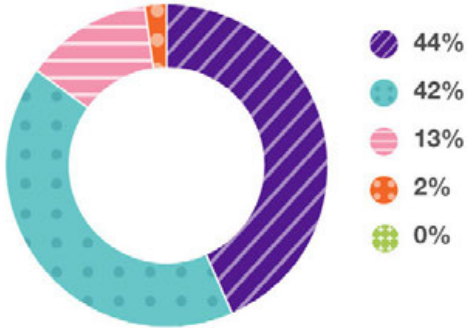
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



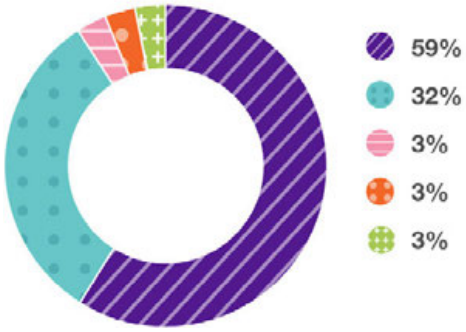
Identifies with a disability



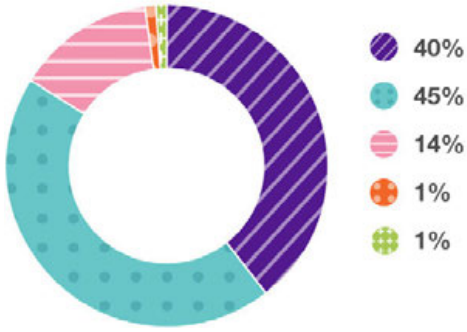
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

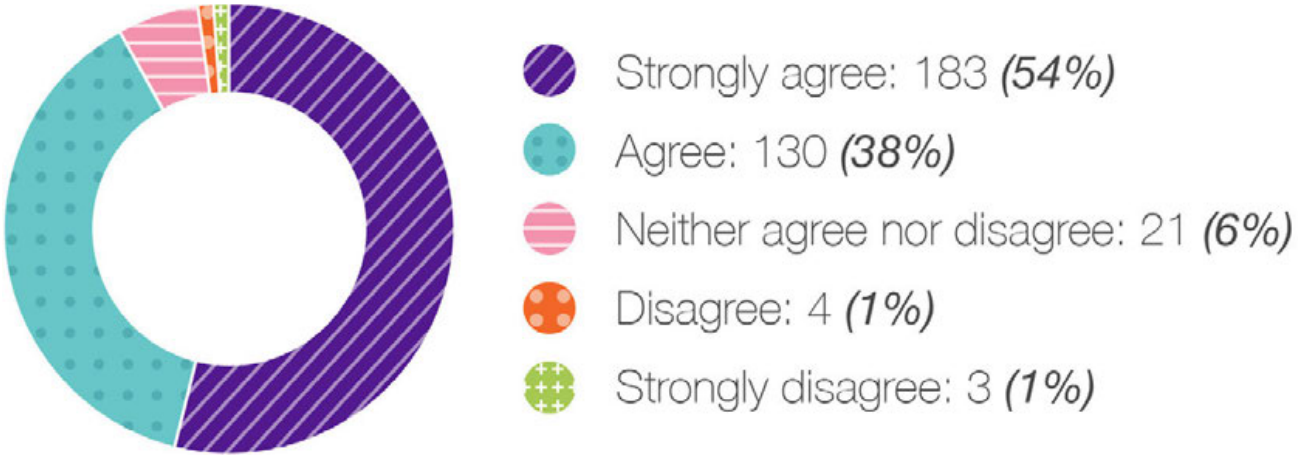


Does not identify as undocumented



92% of audience respondents said the film *unseen* made them more aware of an important issue.

Question: *unseen* made me more aware of an important issue.
(all responses)



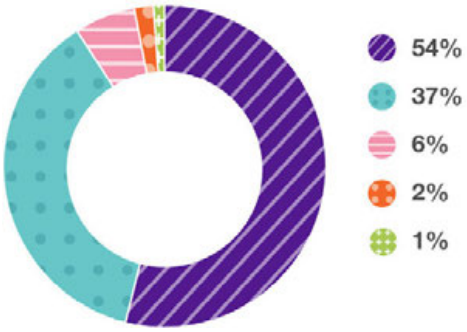
Question: *unseen* made me more aware of an important issue.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

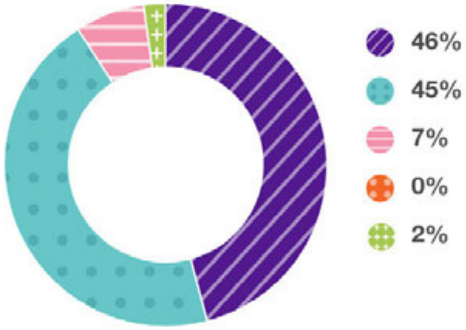
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



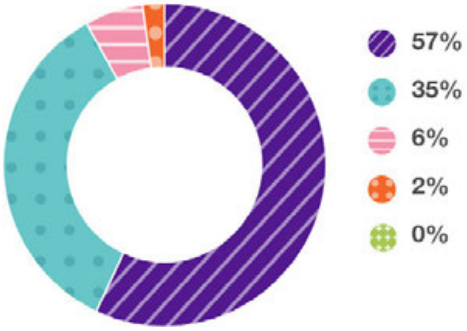
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



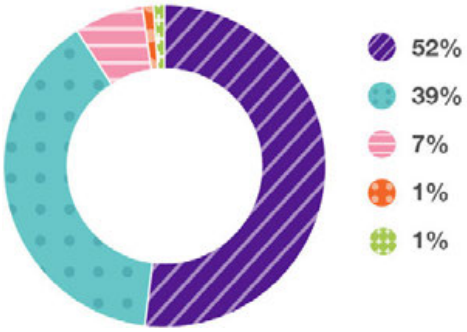
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as undocumented



SECTION III:

NARRATIVE TRANSPORTATION, REPRESENTATION AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF FILM

SUMMARY SPOTLIGHT FOR SECTION

The concept of "narrative transportation" points to the power that storytelling, journalism and media can have in allowing audiences to emotionally connect with the characters and events they see depicted in stories.

Research has demonstrated how the emotional connections formed with stories can be so powerful that audience behaviors, knowledge and beliefs can be significantly influenced as a result of transportive narratives (CMSI, 2018; CMSI, 2021; Green & Brock, 2000; Green, 2021), including influencing audience opinions and understandings on a range of issues, including immigration and housing insecurity (Define American, 2022; CMSI, 2021). And yet there are very few studies which have attempted to explore narrative transportation in the field of documentary film. To address this gap, this study offers several revealing findings.

The accessibility considerations that went into the making of the film allowed audiences to connect with the film in unique ways that interview participants say transcend what is possible in films that don't provide the same type of disability considerations.

As Jenny Cavellero, the accessibility manager at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in Washington DC, put it after a community screening at the library:

"I THINK IT WAS REALLY A FILM EXPERIENCE UNLIKE ANYTHING PEOPLE HAD EXPERIENCED, BECAUSE, I THINK, AND I CAN ONLY SPEAK FOR MYSELF OF COURSE, BUT USUALLY WHEN WE'RE ABLE TO OFFER MORE ACCESSIBLE FILMS, IT'S WITH THINGS LIKE CAPTIONING, IT'S WITH OCCASIONALLY AUDIO DESCRIPTION THAT HAS BEEN ADDED TO A FILM AFTER THE FACT. BUT THIS WAS A FILM WHERE AUDIO WAS THE MEANS OF STORYTELLING FROM THE BEGINNING... AND IT'S NOT TOLD IN A TRADITIONALLY VISUAL WAY WITH AUDIO ADDED. IT WAS LIKE, NO, THIS IS GOING TO BE TOLD BY THE BLIND COMMUNITY AND FOR THE BLIND COMMUNITY. AND PEOPLE RESPONDED REALLY WELL. THEY REALLY ENJOYED IT. I GOT TO CHAT WITH PEOPLE AFTERWARDS AND THEY WERE VERY EXCITED TO EXPERIENCE THE FILM AND ALSO TO HEAR FROM THE FILM CREATORS... I THINK IT TAKES EVEN A CASUAL FILM GOER, IT REALLY DROPS YOU INTO THE EXPERIENCE IN AN IMMERSIVE WAY WHERE WE'RE NOT EXPERIENCING THINGS EXACTLY LIKE PEDRO, BUT WE'RE GETTING TO SEE A LITTLE BIT OF WHAT THAT MIGHT BE LIKE TO NAVIGATE THE WORLD AND ALSO TO NOT HAVE OUR EXPERIENCE AS SIGHTED PEOPLE CATERED TO ALL THE TIME."

Cavellero said she has screened and watched many documentaries about people with disabilities, but she felt that ***unseen*** was "sort of radical as a filmmaking experience" because it clearly put "the experience of the subject and the viewer who might have similar experiences first." Other interview participants also noted the unique value that accessibility considerations —like open audio descriptions—offered to audiences, and how audience members independently raised their appreciation of such filmmaking considerations with them after screenings.

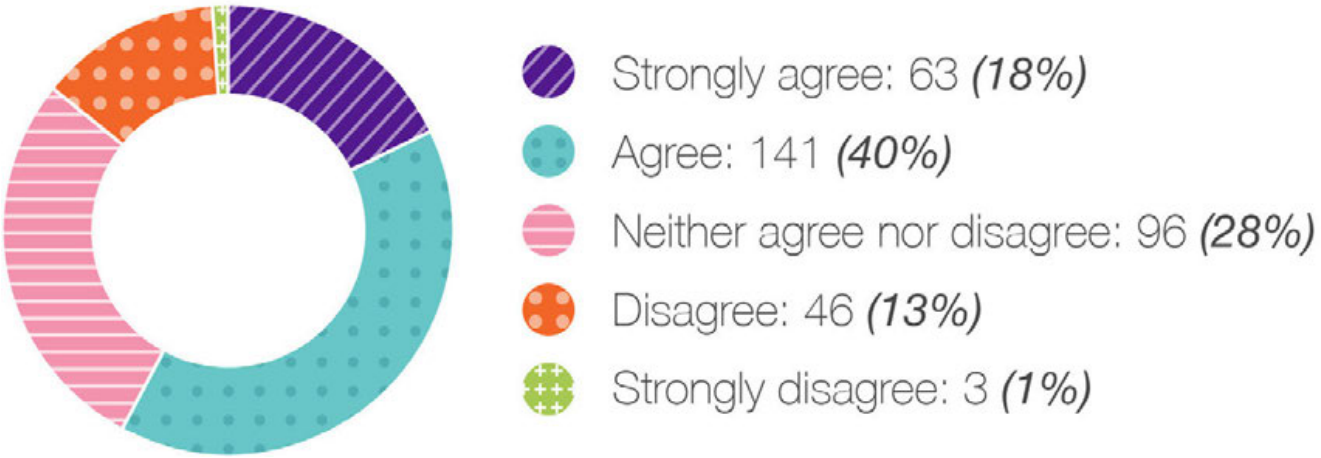
The survey results of this study reveal that an overwhelming majority of audiences said that they felt "transported or immersed" into the world of Pedro during the film. Notably, audiences who identified with a disability or as undocumented were more likely to say that they could "imagine themselves" in the events of the film than audiences who did not identify with these communities, which suggests that the focus and/or style of filmmaking was more immersive for audiences with disabilities and undocumented audiences. Further, while almost half of all audience members identified with Pedro in some way, audiences who identified as undocumented or with a disability were the most likely to identify with Pedro. Almost 90% of undocumented audiences identified with Pedro and about **67%** of audiences with disabilities identified with Pedro. Further, more than 9 in 10 audience participants **(94%)** felt "transported" into the film (across identities). This section provides an overview and "closer look" of these and other findings.

94%

of participants felt "transported" into the film (across identities).

The film was particularly immersive for audiences that identified with the experiences of the main protagonist, but it was also immersive for the majority of audiences of all backgrounds.

Question: I could imagine myself in the events in this film. *(all responses)*



Question: I could imagine myself in the events in this film.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

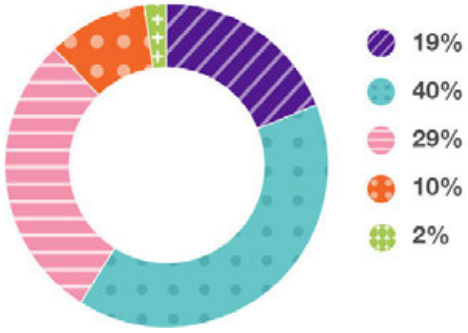
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



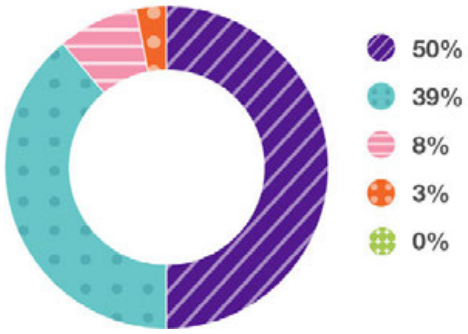
Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

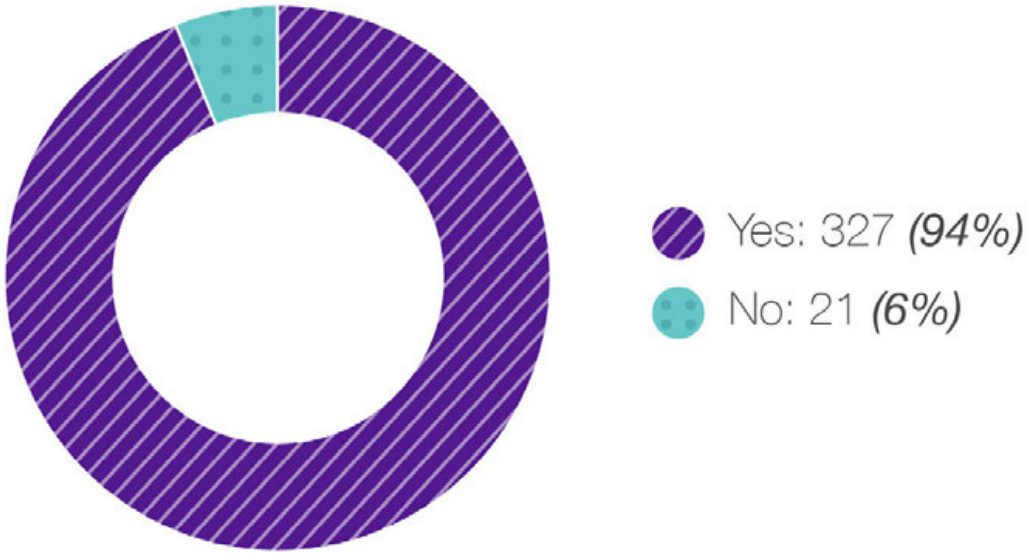


Does not identify as undocumented



94% of audience participants said they felt “transported or immersed into the world of Pedro during the film.”

Question: Did you feel transported or immersed into the world of Pedro during the film? *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

Every person who identified as undocumented felt “transported” into the film, and the majority of participants across categories also **said they the felt “transported” or “immersed” into the film.**

Question: Did you feel transported or immersed into the world of Pedro during the film?

Yes No

Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

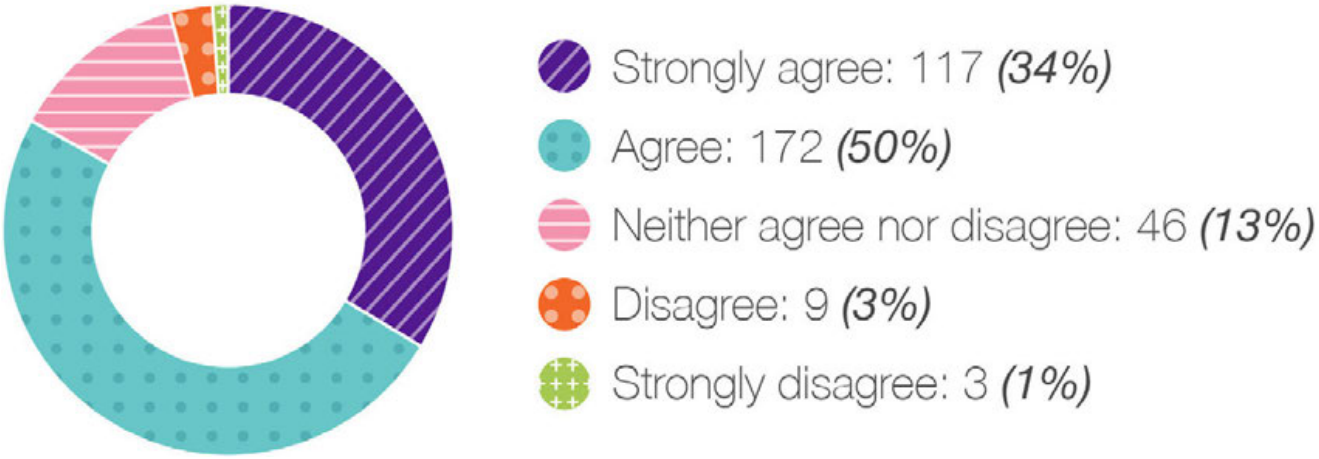


Does not identify as undocumented



84% of audience participants said they were emotionally impacted by the film.

Question: This film impacted me emotionally. *(all responses)*



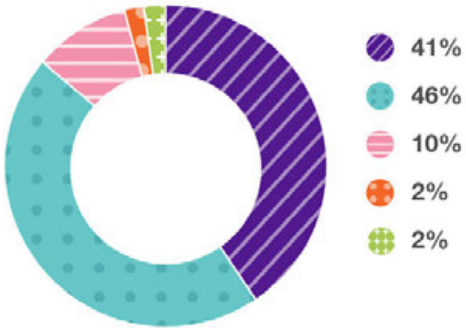
A Closer Look

While the film emotionally impacted all groups, **undocumented audiences reported being the MOST emotionally impacted.**

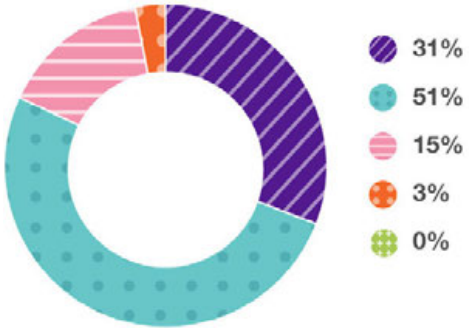
Question: This film impacted me emotionally.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

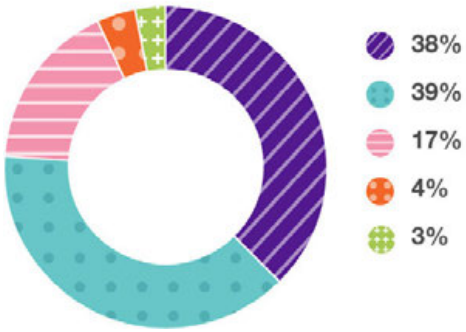
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



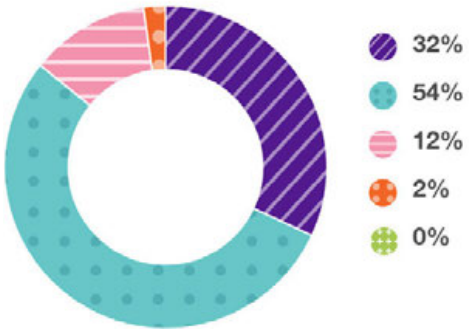
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



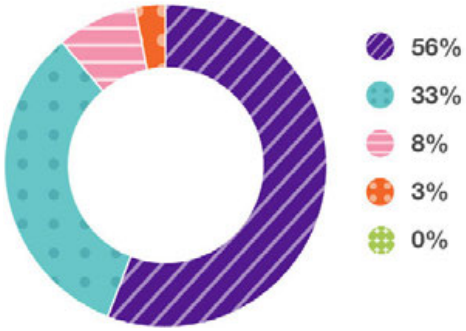
Identifies with a disability



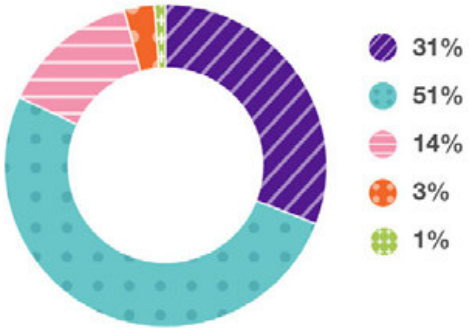
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

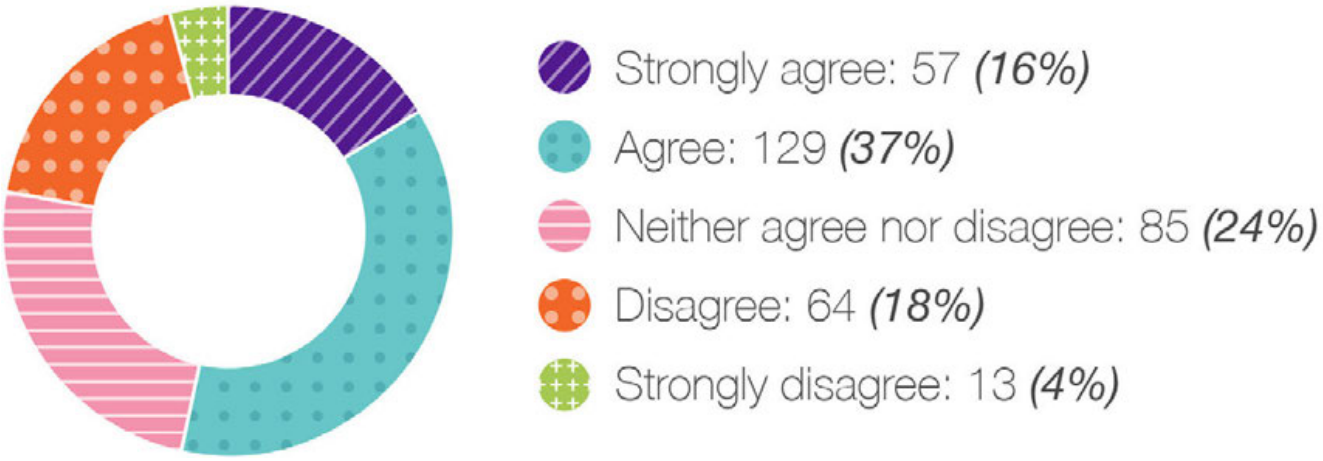


Does not identify as undocumented



54% of audience participants identified with a character in the film.

Question: I Identified with a character in this film. *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

People who identified as undocumented were ***the most likely to identify with a character in the film.***

Question: I Identified with a character in this film.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

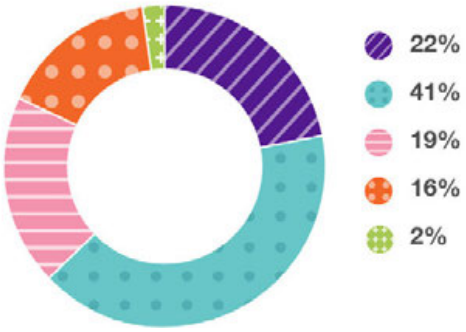
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

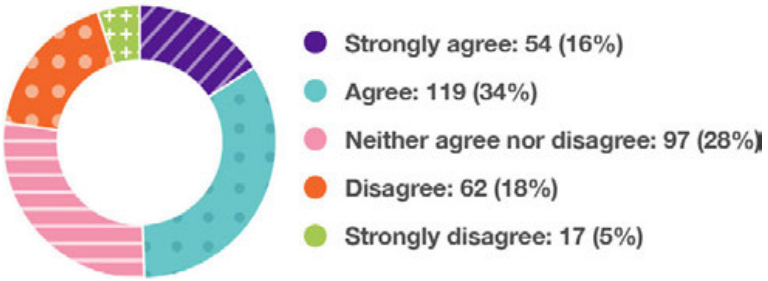


Does not identify as undocumented

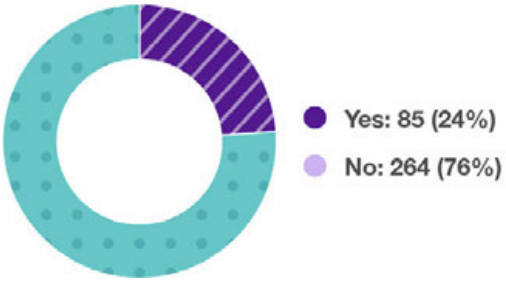


50% of audience participants said they identified with the film's main protagonist (Pedro).

Question: I can identify with Pedro. *(all responses)*



Other related insights: When you were watching the film, did you identify with any other character? *(all responses)*



Open-ended question: Briefly describe the other character you identified with the most and why you identified with them. *(all responses)*

Other than Pedro, the most commonly identified characters that audience respondents noted identifying with were ***Set (22 respondents), Pedro's family (14 respondents) and Pedro's friends (10 respondents).***

A Closer Look

While exactly half of all audience members (50%) identified with Pedro in some way, ***undocumented audiences (89%), audiences with a disability (67%), and LGBTQIA+ audiences (60%) disproportionately shared identifying with Pedro.***

Question: I can identify with Pedro.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

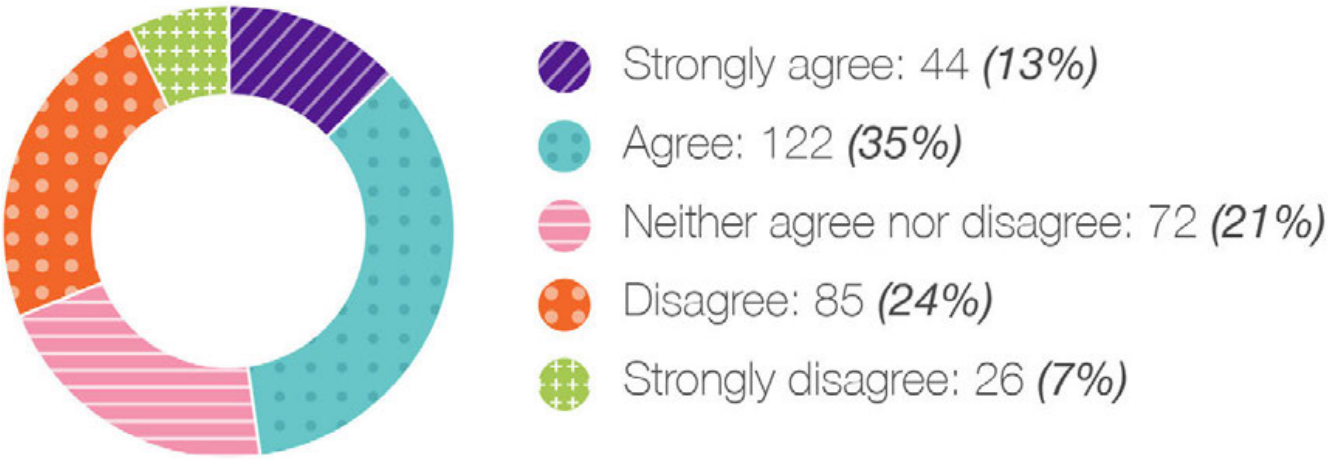


Does not identify as undocumented



About 48% of audience respondents said they face some of the same challenges as Pedro, compared to 84% of undocumented respondents that reported facing the same challenges as Pedro.

Question: I face some of the same challenges as Pedro. *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

While less than half of all audience members (48%) said they face similar challenges to Pedro in their own life, about 83% of all undocumented audiences (vs. 44% documented) and 61% of audiences with disabilities (vs. 42% without disabilities) said they face similar challenges; ***the majority of LGBTQIA+ audiences (55% vs. 42% non-LGBTQIA+) also said they face similar challenges to Pedro.***

Question: I face some of the same challenges as Pedro.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



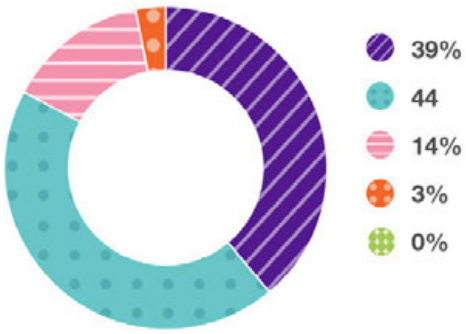
Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

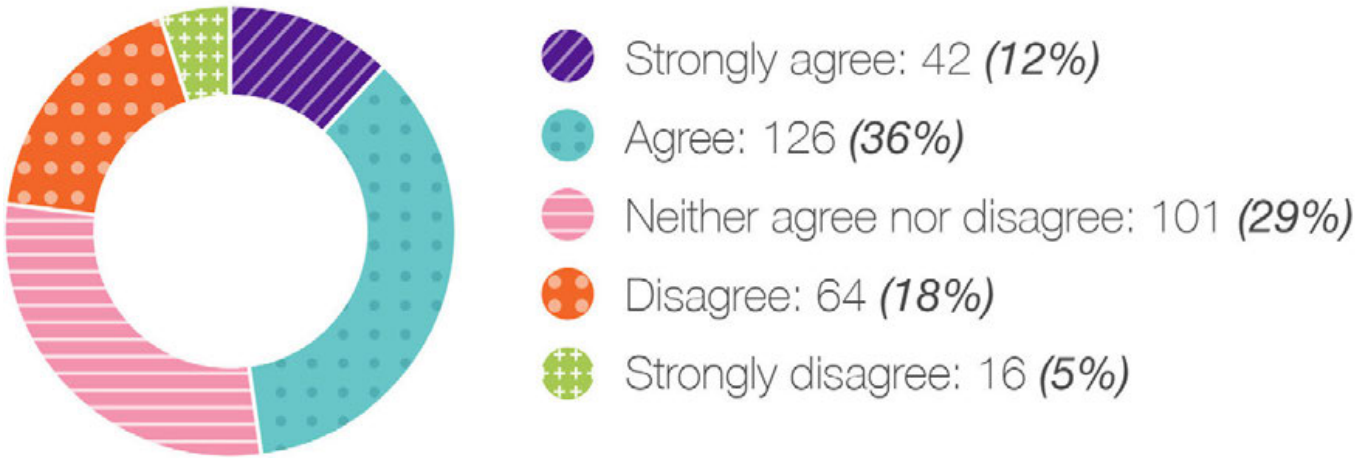


Does not identify as undocumented



48% of audience respondents said the events in the film are relevant to their everyday lives.

Question: Events in the film are relevant to my everyday life. *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

While less than half of respondents (48%) said they felt the film was relevant to their everyday life, ***the majority of audiences who identified as undocumented (81% vs 44%) and/or with a disability (54% vs 46%) felt that the content was relevant to their everyday life.***

Question: Events in the film are relevant to my everyday life.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



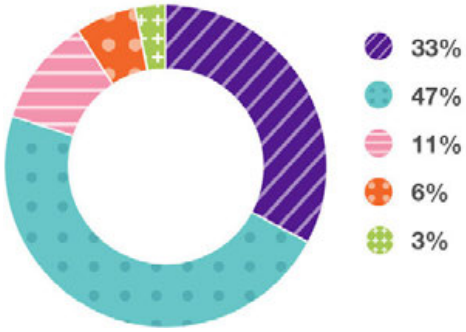
Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as undocumented



More on representation

Slightly more than half (53%) of all participants identified with a character in the film. Participants who identified as Asian American or Pacific Islander (59%) or Latinx (63%) were significantly more likely to identify with a character in the film than other participant groups. Similarly, participants who identified as Latinx (58%) were significantly more likely than any other participant group to identify with Pedro. White/Caucasian audiences were significantly less likely than participants who did not identify as White/Caucasian to say they "identified with a character in this film" (38% vs. 61%), "can identify with Pedro" (37% vs. 56%), and "face some of the same challenges as Pedro" (32% vs. 55%).



SECTION IV:

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND MODELING POSITIVE CHANGEMAKERS

SUMMARY SPOTLIGHT FOR SECTION

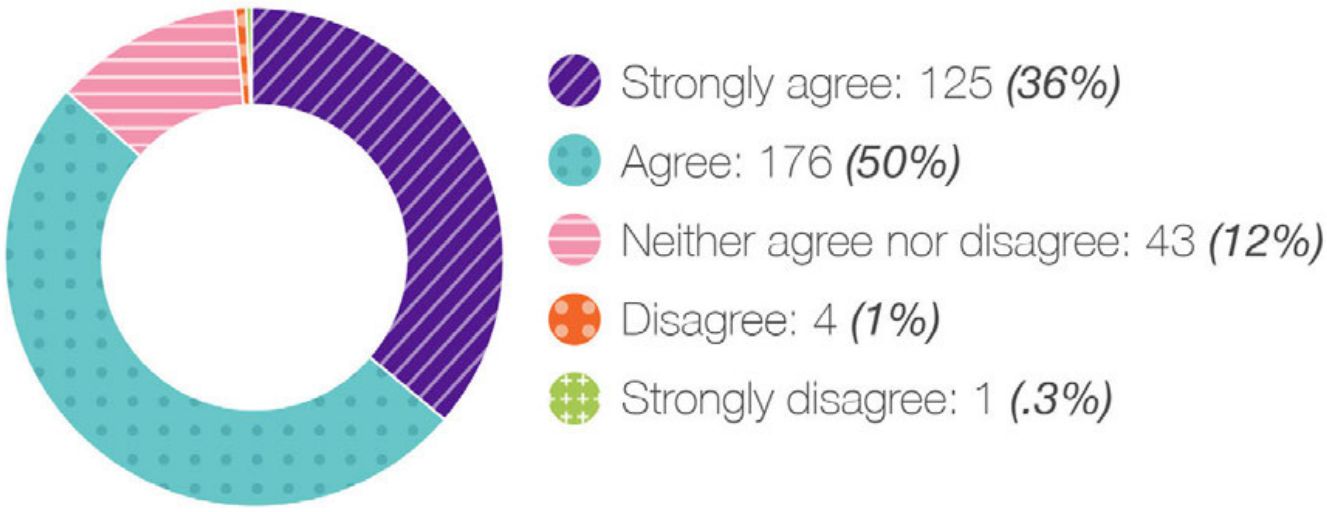
Interviews with screening partners, especially at colleges and universities, illustrate the significance of small group discussions following film screenings. In a screening at Swarthmore College, in Pennsylvania, which was organized through a partnership of student and university groups, organizers say that small group meetings between students and the filmmaker and main protagonist (Pedro) allowed for significant experience sharing and generative conversations. The conversations covered issues of mental health, disability, and the undocumented experience and helped students to open-up about their experiences and seek a wider community of support.

"It was amazing; It was one of my favorite events that we've ever had," said one university organizer after the event, who also pointed to how the screening helped them to better understand the potential of film events on campus. ***"This was a tremendous learning opportunity for me…This was a chance just to learn a lot about how the mechanics of this work and even on our small campus learn about how does it work to try to have this kind of event. So it was a new learning opportunity for me at least…I was really, really pleased with and moved by how meaningful the smaller group discussions were."*** Similar expressions were shared by organizers from other screenings across the country. In Southern California, for instance, a national organization found the after-film conversations to be so meaningful and helpful to community members that they are in the process of coordinating six more screenings.

Further, the survey results reveal a general consensus among audiences that Pedro represented a positive role model in overcoming social challenges. The majority of all audiences (across categories) liked how Pedro handled challenges **(86%),** with no significant difference between undocumented **(92%)** and documented **(87%)** audiences. The majority of all audiences shared that they wanted to be more like Pedro **(70%).** This section provides an overview and "closer look" of these and other findings.

86% of audience respondents liked the way Pedro handled challenges

Question: I like the way Pedro handles challenges. *(all responses)*



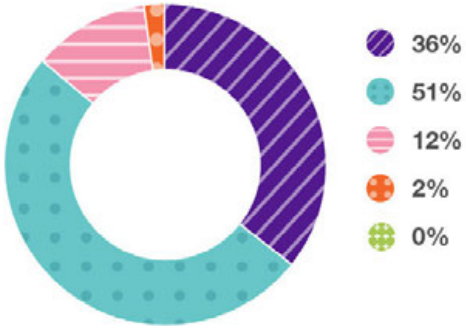
A Closer Look

The majority of audiences (across categories) ***felt that Pedro handled challenges well.***

Question: I like the way Pedro handles challenges.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

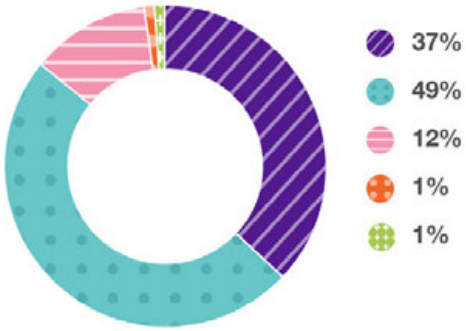
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



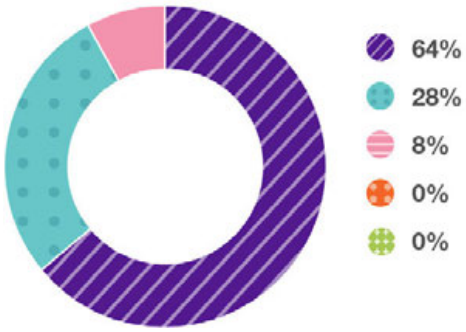
Identifies with a disability



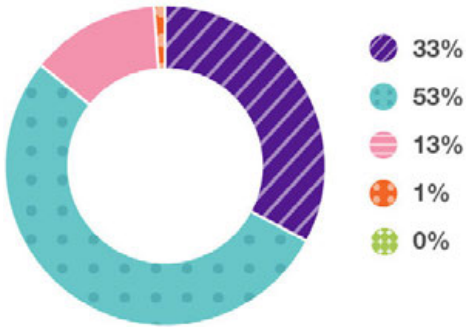
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented

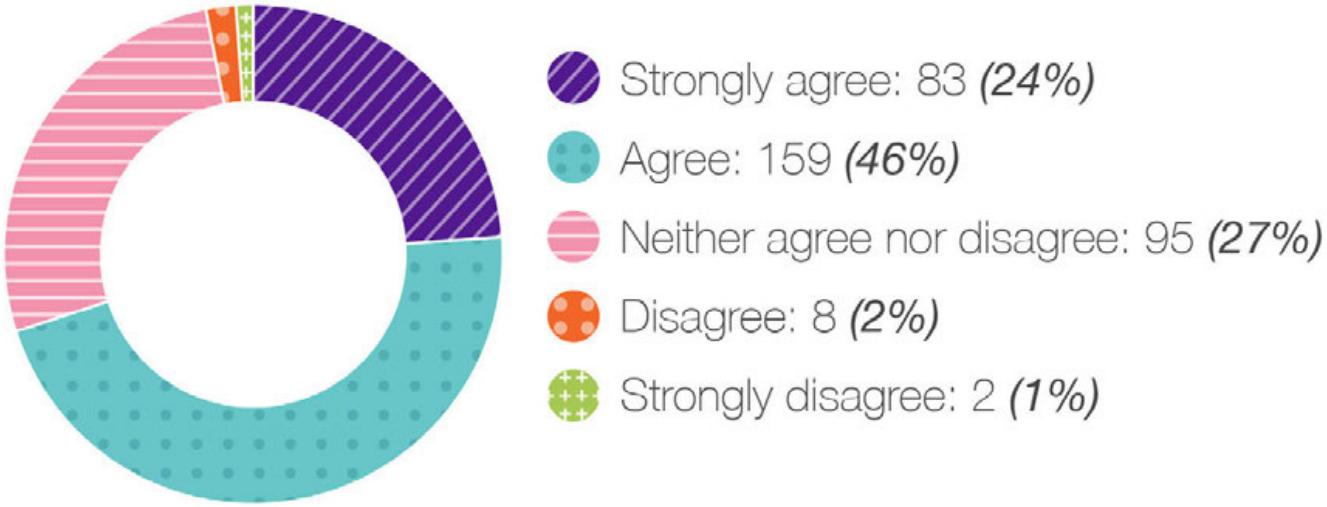


Does not identify as undocumented



About 70% of audience respondents said they would like to be more like Pedro.

Question: I would like to be more like Pedro. *(all responses)*



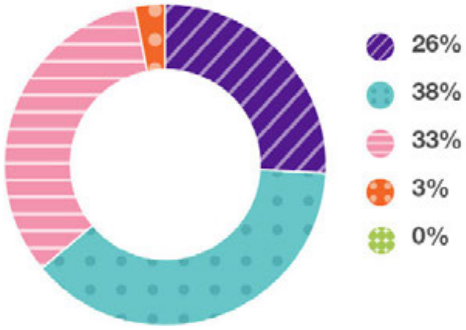
A Closer Look

The majority of all audiences shared that they wanted to be more like Pedro (70%). There appeared to be a tendency for audiences ***who identified as undocumented to say they wanted to be more like Pedro (83% compared to 68% for documented audiences).***

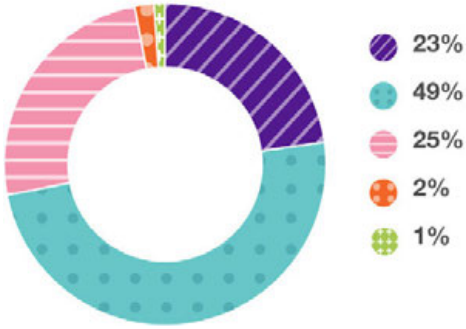
Question: I would like to be more like Pedro.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

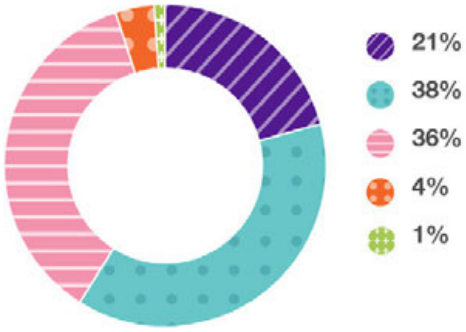
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



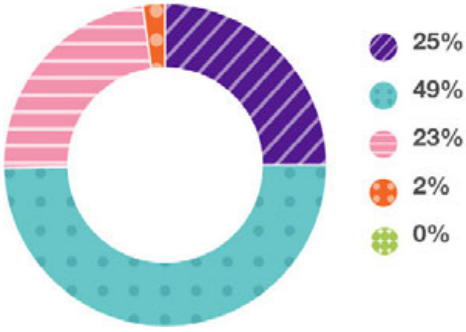
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



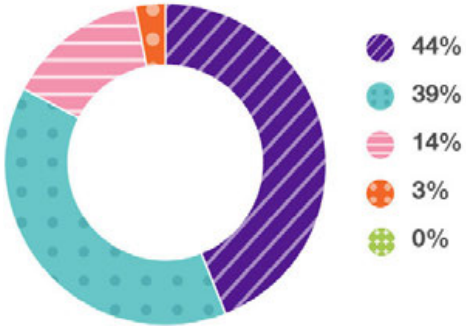
Identifies with a disability



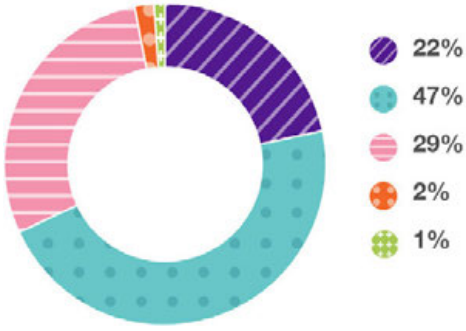
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as undocumented



SECTION V:

EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE DURING FILM

SUMMARY SPOTLIGHT FOR SECTION

When Set and the film team were in the final stages of finishing the film, Qudsiya Naqui, who served for a time as an impact producer on the film, hosted a test screening with her CUNY law students, some of whom had life experience being undocumented. After the screening, in a conversation with Set and Pedro for her podcast, she said: "As a teacher, it was so amazing to bring this resource, really, this story, into the classroom full of students, who come from immigrant families, [and who] have similar experiences to both of you who really identified with everything you were talking about and just seeing the emotional response and seeing how this room of law students in a law school class, which is supposed to be the epitome of a competitive environment, really feel seen on an emotional, physical sort of level and respond and just feel joy and sadness and all the emotions all at once and that was such a beautiful thing to see."

This experience noted by Qudsiya was reflected in screenings across the country. For instance, other screening partners shared that they felt "an overwhelming sense of community in the room" after screening the film and talking about it with the audience. One screening participant said that "the most touching art of the film" was a poem that is shared at the end of the film, which the participant said helped them feel the "emotional" connection between the protagonist and the director: "that was the most powerful point in the film, I think right when they connected, and we could feel that connection." These perspectives are reinforced by the survey findings.

Among the survey insights on emotional responses to the film, one of the most powerful findings is likely found in a question around hopefulness. When asked if the film made them more hopeful, a significant majority of audiences (83%) felt that the film made them feel more hopeful about the future, with **94%** of undocumented audiences feeling that the film made them "more hopeful."

Further, a closer look at the emotional disparities experienced across groups reveals a clear picture: the film ***unseen*** inspired a significantly greater emotional experience for audiences who identified as undocumented. While the study found that these groups were the most likely to strongly feel both "positive" and "negative" emotions, the most-cited emotions across groups were among the positive emotions. For instance, a majority of audiences **(97%)** experienced the emotion of "happiness"

to some degree during the film, but this emotion was experienced more "deeply" by audiences who identified as undocumented more than any other participant.

Across audiences, "optimism" was the most commonly and strongly experienced emotion (with **62%** of audience participants reporting strongly experiencing optimism during the film, meaning **62%** of audience participants rated their experience level of the emotion as 4 or 5—out of 5), but it was particularly felt in audiences that identified as undocumented. Audience participants were almost twice as likely to report feeling optimism "deeply" during the film if they identified as undocumented **(42% vs 23%),** and they were significantly more likely to report experiencing this emotion in some way during the film if they identified as undocumented (all participants who identified as undocumented reported feeling this emotion to some degree during the film).

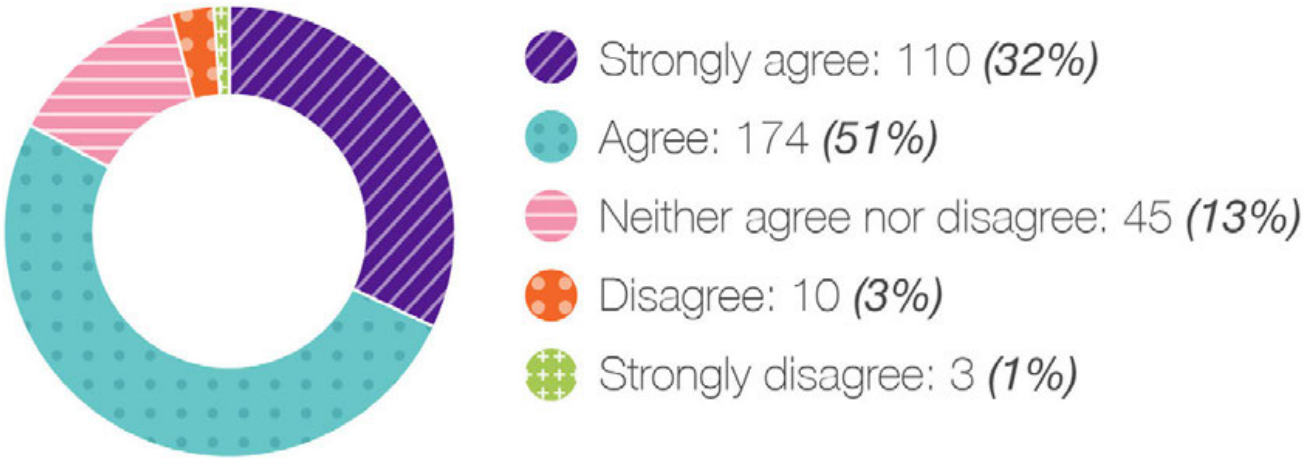
Similarly, while about **44%** of audiences reported strongly experiencing a sense of "pride" during the film, this emotion was more likely to be experienced strongly by audiences who identified as undocumented **(71%)** vs. undocumented **(41%).** Of all the emotions, "pride" was the emotion experienced most "deeply" by audiences who identified as undocumented **(51% vs 17%).** Interestingly, catharsis was an emotion experienced strongly by nearly half of all audiences **(45%).**

This section provides an overview and "closer look" of these and other findings.

83% of audience respondents said that the film *unseen* made them feel "hopeful" about an important issue.

EMOTION: HOPEFUL

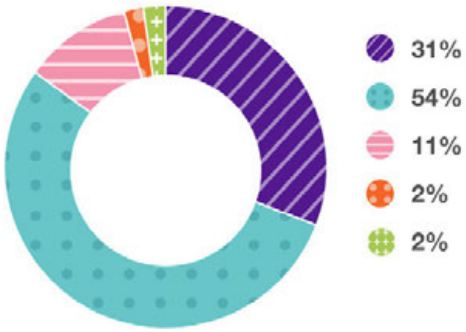
Question: *unseen* made me feel "hopeful" about an important issue.
(all responses)



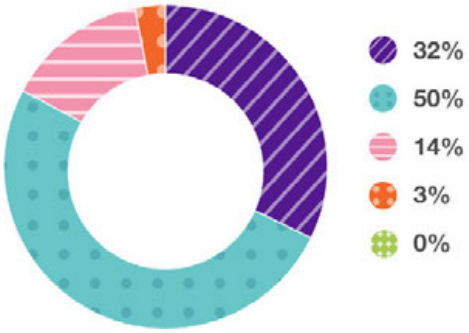
Question: *unseen* made me feel "hopeful" about an important issue.

Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

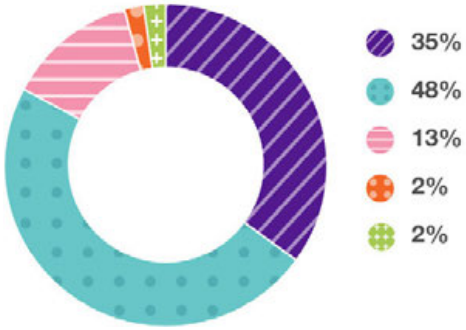
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



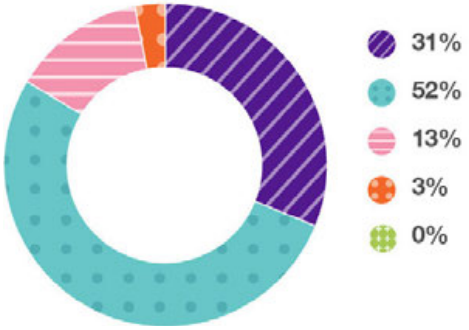
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



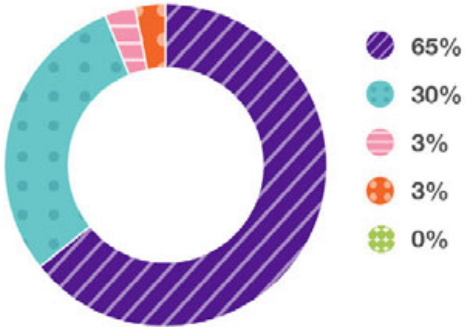
Identifies with a disability



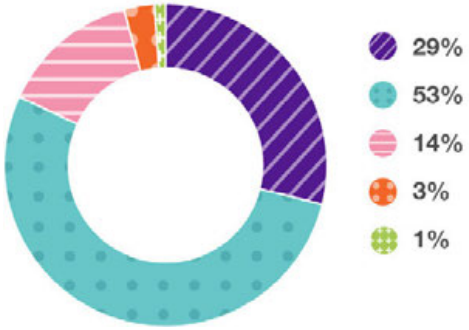
Does not identify with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



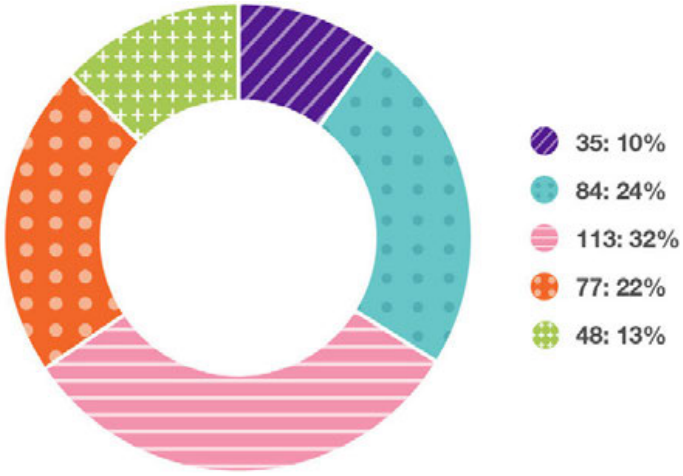
Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: ANGER

5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "anger" during the film? *(all responses)*



Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



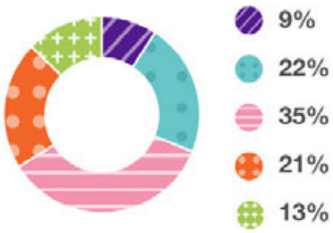
Identifies as undocumented



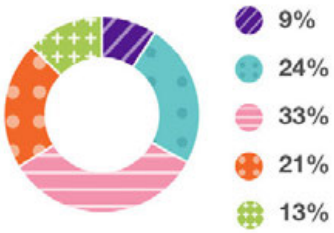
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



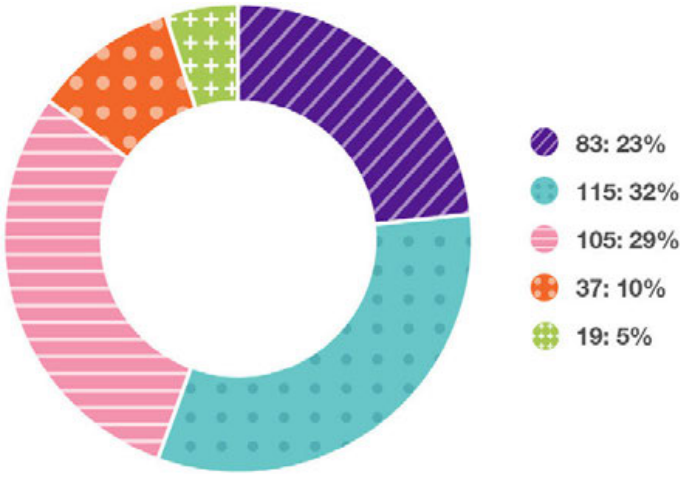
Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: SADNESS

5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "sadness" during the film? *(all responses)*



Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



Does not identify as undocumented

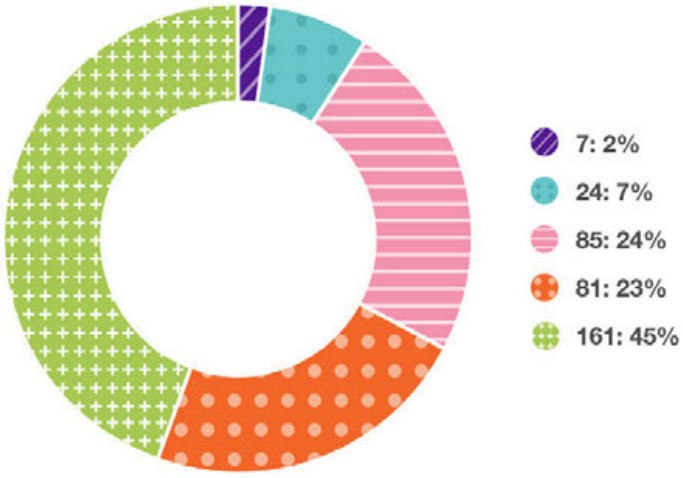


EMOTION: DISGUST

5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "disgust" during the film? *(all responses)*

"Disgust" was the least experienced emotion among audiences – and it was felt "deeply" by ***only 2% of audiences.***



Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



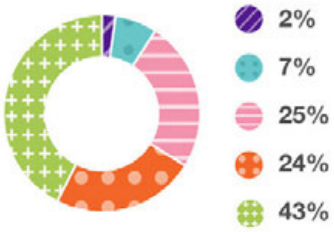
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



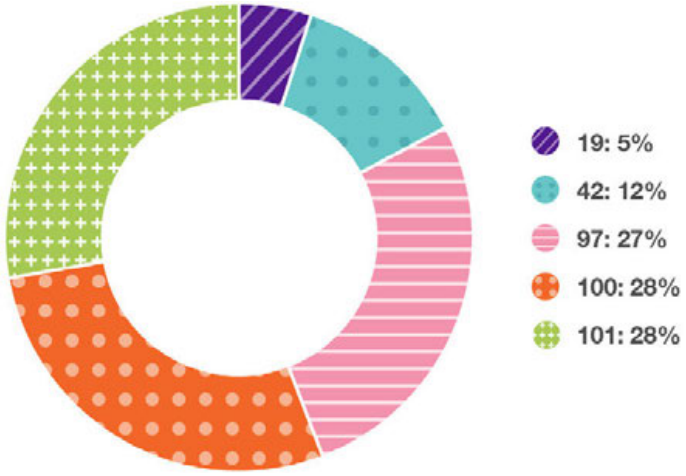
Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: FEAR

5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "fear" during the film? *(all responses)*



Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



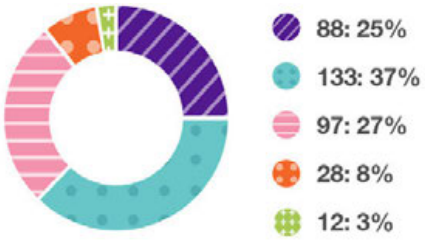
Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: OPTIMISM

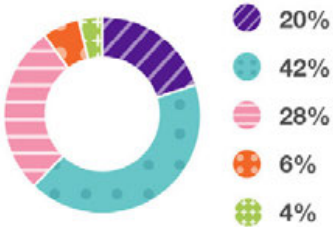
5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "optimism" during the film? *(all responses)*



Optimism was the most strongly experienced emotion across audiences, but it was particularly felt in audiences that identified as undocumented. The majority of audience respondents **(62%)** reported strongly experiencing the emotion of "optimism" during the film (rating it a 4 or 5), but this emotion was experienced most frequently and strongly among audiences who were undocumented. Undocumented audience participants were almost twice as likely to report feeling optimism "deeply" during the film when compared to audience participants who did not have experience being undocumented **(42% vs 23%),** and they were significantly more likely to report experiencing this emotion in some way during the film **(86% vs 59%).**

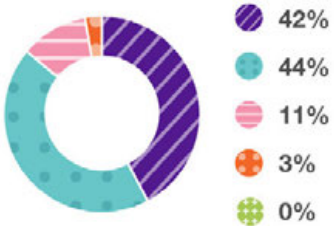
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



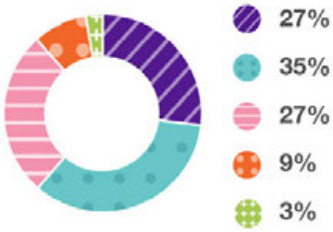
Identifies with a disability



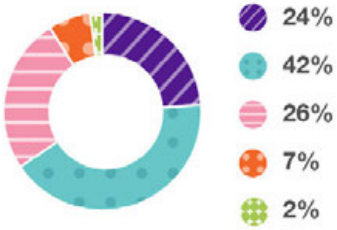
Identifies as undocumented



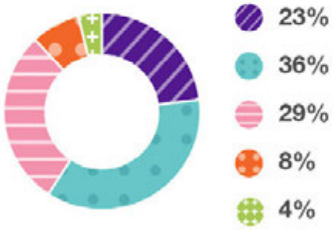
Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



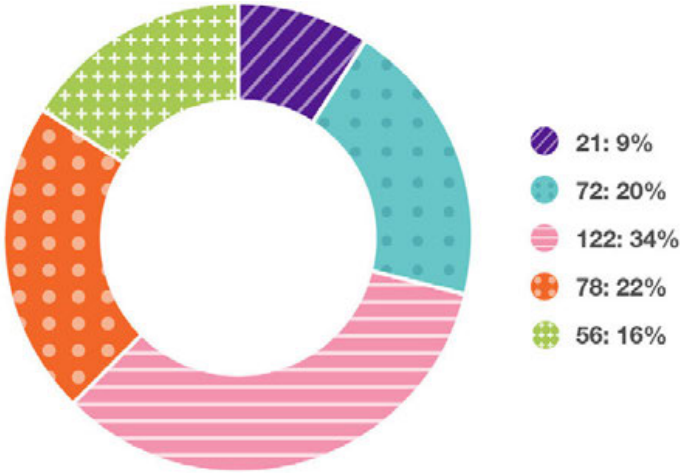
Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: ANXIETY

5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "anxiety" during the film? *(all responses)*



Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: EMBARRASSMENT

5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "embarrassment" during the film? *(all responses)*



Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: HAPPINESS

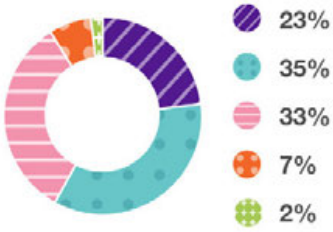
5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "happiness" during the film? *(all responses)*

The emotion of happiness was experienced by ***every audience participant who identified as undocumented.*** It was also experienced more "deeply" by participants who identified as undocumented than any other participant.



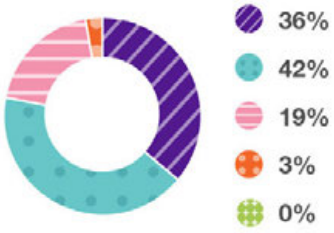
Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



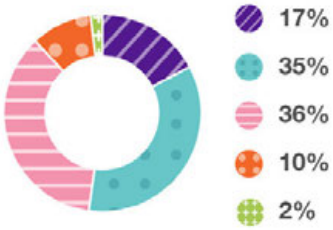
Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: PRIDE

5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "pride" during the film? *(all responses)*

While about 91% of audiences reported experiencing a sense of "pride" during the film, this emotion was most likely to be experienced by audiences ***who identified as undocumented (94%).*** Of all the emotions, "pride" was the emotion experienced most "deeply" by audiences who identified as undocumented (51% vs 17%).



Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



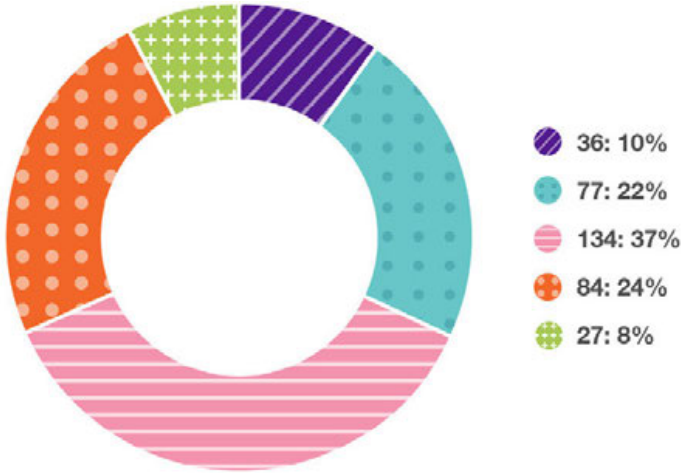
Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: EXCITEMENT

5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "excitement" during the film? *(all responses)*



Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



Does not identify with a disability



Does not identify as undocumented



EMOTION: CATHARSIS

5: I felt this emotion deeply | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1: I did not experience this emotion at all

Question: To what extent did you experience "catharsis" – or "a helpful emotional release" – during the film?
(all responses)



Catharsis was an emotion experienced strongly by ***nearly half of all audiences.***

Identifies as LGBTQIA+



Identifies with a disability



Identifies as undocumented



Does not identify as LGBTQIA+



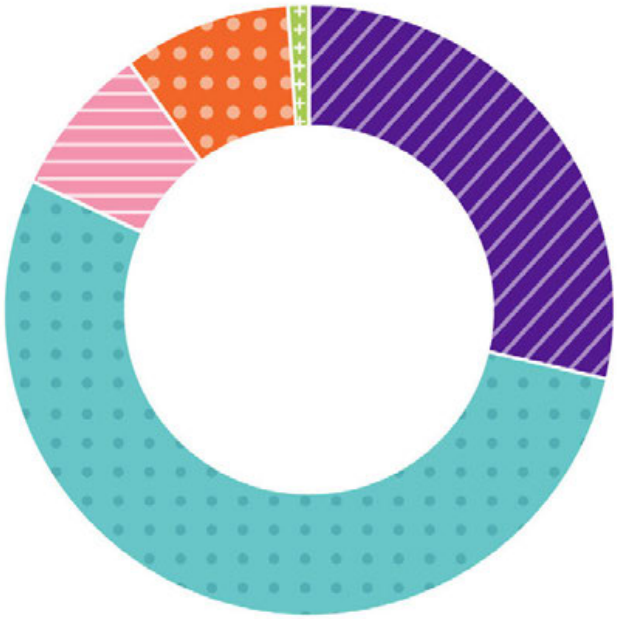
Does not identify with a disability



Does not identify as undocumented



Question: How entertaining was *unseen*? *(all responses)*



- Very entertaining: 99 *(29%)*
- Entertaining: 187 *(54%)*
- Neither entertaining nor unentertaining: 27 *(8%)*
- Somewhat entertaining: 30 *(9%)*
- Not entertaining at all: 3 *(1%)*

SECTION VI:

AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVES ON DOCUMENTARIES

SUMMARY SPOTLIGHT FOR SECTION

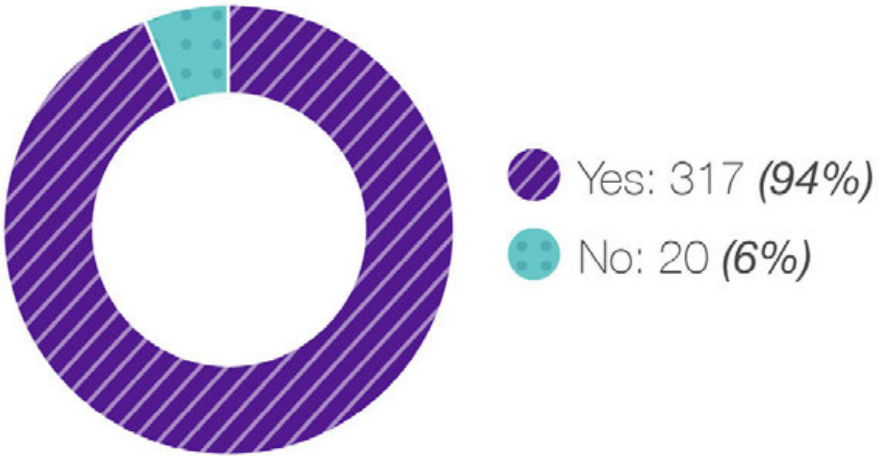
While almost 1 in 2 people who identify with a disability (45%) say that "they strongly agree" that "many people with disability enjoy movies," only about 1 in 4 people (29%) without a disability believe this to be true. Similarly, while 73% of all respondents "strongly agree" or "agree" that "many people with disabilities enjoy movies," significantly more people who identify with a disability (79%) believe this than people who do not (69%).

This suggests that people who identify with a disability are more interested in film than assumed by people who don't identify with a disability. This finding provides further evidence to research that asserts that the disability community is more interested in film and documentaries than the industry currently acknowledges.

Further this study also found that a significant majority of all audiences (94%) felt that it was meaningful to know that the filmmaker and main character had real life experience with a disability or being undocumented. This section provides an overview and "closer look" of these and other findings.

94% of audience respondents said they felt it was meaningful to know that the filmmaker and main character had real life experience with a disability or being undocumented

Question: Is it meaningful for you to know that the filmmaker and main character of the film have real life experiences with disability or being undocumented? *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

Across categories, the vast majority of respondents (more than 94%) felt that it was ***meaningful to know that the filmmaker and main character of the film had real life experiences with disability or being undocumented.***

Question: Is it meaningful for you to know that the filmmaker and main character of the film have real life experiences with disability or being undocumented?



Open-ended Question: Why is it meaningful for you to know that the filmmaker and main character of the film have real life experiences with disability or being undocumented? *(all responses-coded)*

The most commonly shared written responses explaining why survey participants felt it was meaningful to know that the filmmaker and main character of the film had real life experiences with disability or being undocumented involved: "authenticity and realism" **(83 responses)**, "lived experience and perspective" **(64 responses),** "emotional impact and connection **(43 responses),** "relatability and identification" **(32 responses),** "representation and visibility" **(24 responses).**

73% of respondents believe that "many people with disabilities enjoy movies," but significantly more people who identify with a disability (79%) believe this than people who do not (69%).

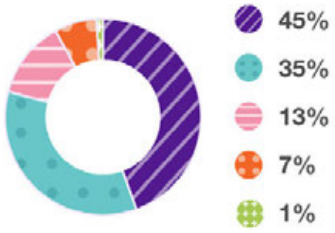
Question: Do you agree or disagree with the statement: "Many people with disabilities enjoy movies"? *(all responses)*



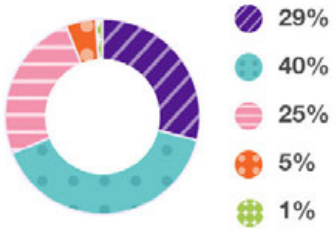
A Closer Look

While almost 1 in 2 people who identify with a disability (45%) say that "they strongly agree" that "many people with disability enjoy movies," only about 1 in 4 people (29%) without a disability believe this to be true. Similarly, while 73% of all respondents "strongly agree" or "agree" that "many people with disabilities enjoy movies," significantly more people who identify with a disability (79%) believe this than people who do not (69%).

Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Nearly half of all respondents (47%) prefer to watch movies at home rather than at a theater (27%).

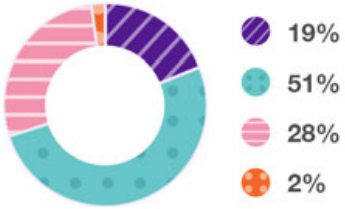
Question: Do you prefer to go to the theater for movies or to experience movies at home? *(all responses)*



A Closer Look

Across categories, there was consensus that respondents ***prefer to watch movies at home rather than at a theater.***

Identifies with a disability



Does not identify with a disability



Open-ended Question: Please explain the reason for your preference about where you watch movies? *(all responses)*



- Accessibility Issues: 24 *(7%)*
- Comfort and Convenience: 105 *(29%)*
- Cost and Financial Considerations: 28 *(8%)*
- Immersive Experience: 64 *(18%)*
- Mood and Situational Preferences: 43 *(12%)*
- No Preference: 12 *(3%)*
- Other: 14 *(4%)*
- Social Factors: 41 *(11%)*

A Closer Look

The primary reason given for why respondents shared their preference of where to watch movies depended on “comfort and convenience” (29%). However, “social factors” and “accessibility issues” were the primary motivating reasons behind how about ***1 in 5 (18%) people noted their preference for where to watch films.***



research design

ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

In response to vital calls for more inclusive research practices, especially on research which centers people with disabilities, this study's approach was grounded in the recruitment, leadership and inclusion of researchers who have lived experience with a disability or being undocumented. This research team was central in shaping the research questions, design and analysis of this research.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH TEAM AND CONTRIBUTIONS ARE LISTED BELOW:

CMSI

- Caty Borum: principal investigator and director of CMSI
- David Conrad-Pérez: lead author, researcher and research coordinator
- Paula Weissman: survey/quantitative research specialist
- Aras Coskuntuncel: researcher and lead on in-depth interviews

unseen Film Team (research design, translation and coordination support):

- Set Hernandez: provided coordination support with film screening organizers—and provided accuracy and accessibility reviews of research materials
- Conchita Hernández Legorreta: provided support on accessibility of survey design, review of research questions and research design materials, and other research design support activities
- Ana Portnoy Brimmer: provided coordination support with film screening organizers, provided accuracy and accessibility reviews of research materials, and provided Spanish translation and other research design/coordination support.

Additional research support and consultation from:

- Maggie Bowman: Provided research guidance, reviews, and research support on the final design and release of the report.
- Mustafa Rfat: Provided research expertise, reviews, and research support on all stages of research design and analysis.
- RJ Ronquillo: provided expertise and reviews of research design materials.
- Alma Leyva: provided expertise and reviews of research design materials.

Futher guidance and support was provided by representatives from the following organizations (through either in-depth interviews or written consultation)

- MLK Library Washington DC
- National Association of Social Workers
- National Federation of the Blind-Colorado Chapter
- National Federation of the Blind
- CUNY Brooklyn's Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute
- Pilipino Workers Center of Los Angeles
- Cerritos College in California
- Arlington Public Library
- Swarthmore College
- Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR)
- Temple University
- University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
- Downtown Community Television Center (DCTV)
- Make the Road NY
- NY State Youth Leadership Council
- Center for People With Disabilities
- City College of New York (CCNY)
- Disability Rights California

RESEARCH DESIGN: LITERATURE REVIEW

"AS AN UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT MYSELF, I HAVE COME TO NOTICE THAT MANY IMMIGRATION-RELATED FILMS DO NOT CATER TO UNDOCUMENTED AUDIENCES. INSTEAD, THEY'RE MADE FOR THE "CITIZEN GAZE," AS UNDOCUMENTED POET YOSIMAR REYES PONDERS. IN THE SAME WAY, FILMS ABOUT BLIND PEOPLE RARELY CATER TO BLIND AUDIENCES. PEDRO HAS TOLD ME HE CAN'T EVEN WATCH MANY OF THEM BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS. EVEN WHEN THEY DO, THEY SOUND ROTE, OFTEN DEVOID OF LYRICISM."
- SET HERNANDEZ, DIRECTOR OF *UNSEEN*

Research about documentaries and media too often focuses on the content and production processes of media while overlooking how the people and communities they feature experience it after production (Conrad-Pérez, et al, 2022). As a result, when asked about impact, filmmakers often resort to counting attendance numbers and retelling anecdotal stories shared with them after screenings (CMSI, Beyond the Impact Report, 2024); while meaningful, neither method carries significant weight of representativeness or empirical rigor. And, yet, such data are vital. Far more than appeasing academic curiosity, demonstrating how particular communities experience a documentary film is imperative in helping funders, distributors, filmmakers, and communities to not only better understand the social importance of film, but it is also integral to raising industry-wide attention and positive change in the direction of greater resources and support for films and impact work that aim to do more than entertain and that provide valuable engagement with underrepresented communities and issues. And within the limited scope of audience-related work that has been done in the field of documentary film, there are two groups of audiences that have barely received any attention: audience members with disabilities and undocumented audiences. There is no study yet known to the authors—within or outside of the fields of media and documentary studies—that looks at the intersection of how undocumented immigrant audiences with disabilities experience documentary film.

When research has focused on issues of media representation of communities with disabilities and undocumented immigrants, the findings are alarming. The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, for instance, looked at the top 100 grossing movies and found that only 2.7% of film characters were portrayed with any kind of disability, and only 2.5% of characters over the past 10 years had been depicted with a disability. This is despite the reality that more than 25% of people in the country have a disability. The study also found that only about 1.6% of films available on Netflix—during 2021, the year of the study's analysis—have a character with a disability depicted in their main cast (Smith, et al., 2023). The findings are similar in areas of television. In a December 2022 review of available television programs by Neilsen, they found that just 4.1% (7,556 of 183,089) of television programs included any reference to disability in any of their episodes (Nielsen, 2022). In addition, in a Nielsen survey of viewer attitudes from the same year, they found that nearly 50% of surveyed people with a disability "feel their identity group is underrepresented on TV"; meaning that people with a disability are 34% more likely than the general population to feel they are under-represented on screen (Nielsen, 2022).

Further, the findings of a study by the Norman Lear Center and Define American (2022), which looked at media representation of immigrant characters with a disability, parallel those of the broader Nielsen and Annenberg Initiative research. Their research found that out of 167 immigrant characters who were identified among 79 popular scripted television series in the United States, only five (about 3%) of the immigrant characters on screen were portrayed with a disability (Define American, 2022). Further, the study found that when undocumented immigrants are represented they are disproportionately linked with themes of criminalization (Define American, 2022).

When it comes to shifting focus away from the screen and toward how undocumented immigrant audience members with disabilities are experiencing films and media, even less is known.

Studies focused on audiences with disabilities and film have tended to focus primarily on the importance of audio description in making films more accessible (Aspevig & Pedersen, 2011; Caro & Rojo López, 2014; van der Heijden, 2007; Walczak & Fryer, 2017), rather than a greater interrogation of why documentaries and films are of interest – and could be of power – to communities with disabilities. And these studies are important. Research around audio description has been crucial to the further development and expansion of the practice. For instance, research has demonstrated that more enhanced and creative descriptions of camera work, actions, and characters, for instance, prompt higher levels of "presence" and a more "immersive viewing experience" for audiences with vision loss (Walczak & Fryer, 2017), which in turn has helped to legitimize and support its use. Such studies have also supported new research and the film industry to go beyond older understandings and outdated "best practices" in the area of audio descriptions, which previously assumed that descriptions should be as "impartial as possible" (Rai, et al., 2010, p. 8). Instead, more recent work has noted the importance of treating audio description with the same level of creativity and cinematic engagement efforts as the rest of a film (Hernandez, 2024), and it has helped to more broadly recognize the efficacy and importance of expanding such accessibility investments and storytelling work. As Set Hernandez notes in an article for *Documentary Magazine*, accessibility should be seen as more an opportunity for filmmakers, rather than a technical challenge.

> ***Accessibility has really become an opportunity, not a challenge, for me to welcome more people to check out our film and expand my audience. It's also allowed me to further sharpen my skill sets and resourcefully tackle creative questions related to our film—and learn how that can enhance accessibility.***
>
> ***Could it be that filmmakers are sometimes unenthusiastic about accessibility because we think of it too much as a technical issue—in the same bucket as the conform or deliverables? I argue that accessibility is actually an aesthetic matter too. If filmmakers spend years developing our stylistic approach for a project, perhaps it's time to integrate accessibility within the same creative processes where we ideate the visual language and soundscape of our films. (Hernandez, 2024, Documentary Magazine)***

In summary, work around audio description has been imperative in pushing for much needed improvements in audio description work within the film and documentary industries. And, yet, at the same time, researchers and filmmakers alike argue that much still needs to be done in the arena of audio description and in identifying new ways to make documentaries more accessible and engaging for audiences with disabilities.

STUDIES FOCUSED ON AUDIENCES WITH DISABILITIES AND FILM HAVE TENDED TO FOCUS PRIMARILY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF AUDIO DESCRIPTION IN MAKING FILMS MORE ACCESSIBLE.

ON DOCUMENTARY AND DISABILITY: GOING BEYOND AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Beginning around the late 1980s, audio description—a general term to describe the work of media makers to make visual media more accessible to blind and low vision people—started to be offered to audiences. As Georgina Kleege (2016) noted, the service was offered as a complete afterthought of the film itself and far from standardized: "The blind audience wore headsets provided by the theater, and a describer was positioned backstage or in the sound booth, from where he or she broadcast brief descriptions about the actors' movements, gestures, facial expressions, and costumes during the natural pauses between the characters' speeches" (p. 89). Given that few theaters actually had headsets or someone to provide the audio description service, it was far from a widely accessible service. Around the same time, audio descriptions started to be recorded in advance and available for film and TV programs, alongside closed captioning. And while technological advances have transformed the world of film and television since the 1980s, the general service of audio description around film, including documentary films, has seen relatively little progress from these early days (Butler, 2019). Much of the media content that receives audio description today, like in the 1980s, can be understood as reflecting a relative codification of what Kleege notes as the "problematic assumptions about what blind people can understand and should know about visual phenomena" (Kleeg, 2016, p. 90). Further, the work of audio description and media for/about blind audiences has also largely escaped scrutiny. Consequently, Kleege (2016) noted a "kind of tacit acceptance" has been allowed to permeate industry standards and wider academic and public understandings which wrongly holds "that the foundational assumptions behind the practice are sound and unproblematic" (p. 90). Kleege, who is blind, asserted that the practice is anything but sound and unproblematic, and a more inclusive culture around audio description is needed to meet the needs of blind audience members who wish to experience more than a limited dialogue translation of a film, and who wish to experience the more illuminating aspects of film, including temporal and spatial shifts between scenes and the physical description details of the people on screen, for instance, and to provide a level of detail that could make the audio description integral to the film itself and something that audiences who are not blind could enjoy. In a call to action, Kleege notes:

> ***"I imagine a future where filmmakers, screenwriters, and actors collaborate on an audio description track that is more in keeping with the film's aesthetics, and film scholars and critics contribute descriptive commentary that enriches anyone's viewing experience. In other words, I hope that audio description can be elevated from its current status as a segregated accommodation outside the general public's awareness and launched into the new media—a literary/interpretive form with infinite possibilities" (p. 100).***

Beyond audio description, there are examples of work that has explored the potential of magnification in film—featuring specific areas of on-screen action—for low-vision audiences (Goldstein, Woods, & Peli, 2007), and on captions for deaf and hard of hearing audiences (Butler, 2019). Butler's study (2019) involved focus group discussions with deaf and hard of hearing students to gather their perspectives on captions. The study highlighted major concerns for deaf and hard of hearing viewers, including the need for advocacy, preferences for caption formatting, and the importance of captions in accessing real-time videos, online content, and other media. These insights underscore the significance of captions in public, educational, and social/cultural spaces, emphasizing how captions benefit both DHH and hearing viewers. However, there remains limited research in this area. There have been no systematic investigations that have sought to broadly explore how the blind and low-vision audiences experience or find meaning in documentaries about them or any other issue. This gap in research is significant because it means that the field lacks comprehensive insights into the emotional, cognitive, and social impacts of documentaries on these audiences. Understanding how blind and low-vision viewers engage with documentary content, interpret visual and narrative elements, and relate these experiences to their own lives is crucial for developing more inclusive and effective media. Such research could inform better practices in filmmaking, ensuring that documentaries are not only accessible but also resonate deeply with all audience members, including those with vision loss.

ON-SCREEN EXPERIENCES AND REPRESENTATION OF UNDOCUMENTED AND IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES ON AND OFF-SCREEN

Similar to the lack of research around how audience members with disabilities experience documentaries, no study has specifically centered how immigrant and undocumented immigrant audiences experience films that are made by/about them. Although immigrant representation in film and television has been studied, the findings are alarmingly similar—and as concerning—as the previous section's findings around the lack of disability-related media research and accurate representation. Research has found that immigrants are grossly underrepresented in film and television within the United States (Define American, 2022). And when they are represented, undocumented immigrants are over-represented (reflecting 64% of immigrant characters on screen) and are disproportionately associated with crime and incarceration (Define American, 2018; Define American, 2022). Given the grossly inaccurate portrayals of immigrants in television and film, it is increasingly important for researchers to conduct critically needed research about the true experiences and concerns among undocumented and immigrant communities in the United States. Without such research, it is difficult for urgently needed industry change to find traction.

Table 1. Definitions of Undocumented, Refugee, and Asylum

Undocumented Immigrants	Broadly defined to include all immigrants "who reside in the United States without legal status." This includes individuals who: Entered Without Inspection, Entered with Legal Status but Overstayed, Have or Previously Had Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Are Currently in the Process of Legalizing, and Vulnerable Immigrants. *(https://immigrantsrising.org/resource/defining-undocumented)*
Refugees	Generally defined to include all immigrants who reside "outside of their country" and "who are unable or unwilling to return home because they fear serious harm." *(https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum)*
Asylum Seekers	Generally defined to include all immigrants who: meet the definition of refugee, are already in the United States or are seeking admission at a port of entry, and who complete a mandatory government filing process. *(https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum)*
Humanitarian parole	Humanitarian parole is a discretionary tool that allows certain individuals to enter the U.S. and temporarily stay without an immigrant or non-immigrant visa. A petitioner can apply based on humanitarian or significant public benefit reasons. *(https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian_parole)*
Temporary Protected Status	A temporary government protection granted to eligible foreign-born individuals who are unable to return home safely due to condition or circumstances preventing their country from adequately handling the return. *(https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status)*

OFF-SCREEN HEALTH ACCESS/SERVICES/OUTCOMES/ EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED, IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITIES WITH DISABILITIES

One of the central themes of the film ***unseen*** is centered around Pedro's experience trying to better understand and navigate the challenges of health access and social services as an undocumented person with a disability. This theme is the focus of much research and is an area overdue for wider public and academic attention.

As one group of researchers recently argued, there is growing evidence that immigrant health and health care access is ***"shaped by immigrant policies that determine their rights, protections, and access to resources and the extent to which they are targeted by policing or deportation based on citizenship/legal status and other immigration-related social categories" (De Trinidad Young, et all, 2024).*** Other research has found similar provisions that exclude undocumented immigrants from accessing social services in several other policies, as well, including Medicare, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Affordable Care Act which both have clauses that actively exclude undocumented immigrants from accessing the provisions of these laws, due to their strict availability only to US citizens and permanent residents. Given such exclusions, there are increasing calls for research around the experience of undocumented people that better reflect the nuances and multiple identities that intersect within it. Any attempt to better understand the undocumented experience of undocumented immigrants—especially around issues related to health, social services, and social access—should recognize these nuances and diversity of experiences and identities. For instance, there are added layers of experiences and challenges for those who are undocumented and who also have a disability or are undocumented and also queer. Intentional systemic exclusion from economic mobility, education, and health care, among other things, greatly impacts health outcomes.

Health outcomes for undocumented immigrants are impacted by social determinants of health. Facing significant systemic and social barriers, the health outcomes and accessibility for undocumented immigrants and their communities are impacted in a multitude of negative ways (Moynihan, et al., 2021, Yearby, 2020). While experiences differ by state, undocumented immigrants face health access challenges that include: constant policing and self-policing, deportation, uncertainty of basic rights (including education access, economic status, status in the county), mental health, language barriers, lack of social preparedness (including people not knowing how to work with undocumented populations) (Lopez, et al., 2020). Further, healthcare access for undocumented people is impacted despite policy efforts such as such as California's Health for All, a public campaign created by The California Endowment as a public call to action for a statewide solution to provide health insurance for those who are uninsured, documented or undocumented. The fear of political and public charge—a decision by immigration officials as to whether a person applying for a visa or green card is likely to become dependent on the government for financial support—still creates fear within immigrant communities.

Researchers have recently highlighted the importance of better understanding and featuring the ways that immigrant communities are adapting and working to overcome social barriers to mainstream healthcare access (including documented status, English language skills, and cost) through a range of cultural resources, strategies and alternative healthcare spaces (Chen et al, 2021, Madden, 2015). One study highlighted how Mexican American communities, for instance, use community clinics, flea markets, and Mexican pharmacies to overcome exclusion barriers (Madden, 2015). However, the experiences of undocumented migrants with disabilities remain a largely overlooked area, even within recent research on immigrant healthcare experiences.

To help provide more comprehensive research in the area of healthcare access, one community of researchers and community members, called the "Building Community, Raising All Immigrant Voices for Health Equity" (BRAVE) study group, is conducting research and community engagements to uplift immigrant voices, build communities, foster better understandings of immigrant experiences, and inform improved health policy interventions through research. To provide an example of its forthcoming work, the BRAVE National Sexual Reproductive Health Study, funded by National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, explores how social, political, and economic experiences related to immigration status affect how Asian immigrant women seek out and receive sexual and reproductive healthcare. Partnering with community organizations, the BRAVE Study will significantly contribute to understandings of the mechanisms and protective factors that moderate immigration status and use of sexual and reproductive healthcare and to the identification of novel community, social, and policy-level interventions that can improve the sexual and reproductive health of Asian immigrant women (Ronquillo, personal communication, 2024). Similarly, another recent study (De Trinidad Young, et al., 2024) examined the findings of the Research on Immigrant Health and State Policy (RIGHTS) Study, conducted from

2018 to 2020 using a population-based survey of Asian and Latinx immigrants in California (N = 2010). The study explored health care and social services, education, labor/employment, and immigration enforcement policies and found that "the consequences of immigrant policies harm health through both cumulative exposure to and intersections of exclusions across policy sectors Labor/employment and immigration enforcement policies, specifically, likely drive health inequities within immigrant populations: (De Trinidad Young, et all, 2024). This finding indicates that more research that better understands the experiences and challenges of undocumented and immigrant communities is increasingly supported by concerned researchers across the United States (De Trinidad Young, et al., 2023; Lee, et al, 2024; Sudhinaraset, et al, 2023).

The experiences of people with disabilities are similar, as a range of societal and policy factors create little discussed barriers to health and social services access, much of which has not received sufficient attention by researchers or policymakers. Nationwide, people who identify with a disability are twice as likely to be unemployed than people without a disability (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024), due to a host of reasons, including discriminatory hiring practices and the intricacies of social service laws and services, which can penalize people for working by limiting or removing their benefits. Similarly, studies have shown that people who identify as blind or low-vision are more than twice as likely to say they had "an unmet health need because of cost", and about 7% less likely to have health insurance, than those who don't identify with a disability. And recent research around persistent disability stigma, has also shown that a large percentage of people with low vision or partial blindness do not seek health services, or outwardly identify with having a disability, due to fear or stigma (Choi, et al., 2024). All of these factors point toward the need for greater research and understanding around the experience of communities with disabilities, especially in connection to access to vital—and available—social and health services.

NATIONWIDE, PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFY WITH A DISABILITY ARE TWICE AS LIKELY TO BE UNEMPLOYED THAN PEOPLE WITHOUT A DISABILITY.

ON DOCUMENTARY AND REPRESENTATION BEHIND THE CAMERA

Working within long-standing traditions of community activism and organizing, documentary storytellers often center real-life stories of people and communities for purposes that include: "building community solidarity, raising awareness of crucial social issues and inequities, correcting damaging historical narratives, monitoring the public landscape for neglected social problems, mobilizing communities and activists against injustice and strengthening civil society through meaningful partnerships with community-based organizations" (Conrad-Pérez, et al, 2023). And, yet, research has called into question the degree to which documentaries are reflecting a diversity of communities and experiences in who is behind the camera and who ends up on screen (Borum, Weismann, Conrad-Pérez, 2022; Childress & Driver, 2022; Driver, 2020).

In a 2022 study, the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) looked at the demographics of credited directors and primary on-screen protagonists for 1,232 documentary films—reflecting every film that was available to stream across several platforms at the time of the study—multiple areas of urgently needed change were identified (CMSI, Lens Reflected Study, 2022). Among its findings, the study provided revealing data about the degree to which BIPOC filmmakers are underrepresented on screen and behind the camera: while 81% of directors were White, and 78% of films included white-only film teams, only 19% of films were by a BIPOC creator, and just 7% of credited documentary directors were BIPOC women. The study also highlighted how one of the major consequences of this lack of BIPOC representation among filmmaking teams is leading to limited and harmful portraits of key social issues and realities on screen; for instance, the study found that white filmmakers are far less likely to acknowledge the realities of racism in their films, compared to BIPOC and racially diverse film teams.

As a result of research like the Lens Reflected study, and other recent studies by organizations like Color Congress (Color Congress, 2024) and Distribution Advocates (Distribution Advocates, 2023)—which are also taking evidence- and date-based approaches to raising alarm bells of persistent inequities in the documentary industry and are amplifing calls for transparency—important conversations are being advanced around the changes that need to take place to ensure greater representation. However, even within these streams of critical research, a persistent gap has remained in work and attention focused around representation of disabled, undocumented, and immigrant filmmakers. In the most recent version of the "State of the Documentary Field" survey (CMSI, State of the Documentary Field Study, 2020), which is inclusive of about 1,000 documentary film professionals around the world and is the most comprehensive study of the demographics of the documentary field, the study found that only 5% of surveyed film professionals identify with a disability—far less than national and global averages. But no additional questions were asked in the survey about the experiences of disabled filmmakers or what type of disability they identify with, and there is no other study that has come close to providing a comprehensive portrait of filmmaker demographics with disability as an included identity. Further, there has yet to be a single comprehensive study that has looked at the immigrant status of filmmakers, nor has there been a single study that has endeavored to identify how many immigrant or undocumented filmmakers identify with a disability.

While some of the circumstances contributing to the lack of research around disability and undocumented status are due to the sensitive nature of collecting information, especially around issues of immigrant status, an extensive gap of knowledge and understanding regarding the state of the field for undocumented and disabled filmmakers has been allowed to persist as a result of this lack of industry and research attention. Other disability advocates have also pointed out how a lack of representation of people with lived experience with disabilities on research teams is also likely contributing to the lack of meaningful research in this area (Naqui, 2024). Without data to galvanize further industry-wide change, inequitable practices and a lack of adequate representation persist.

Recent research about the lack of accessibility at film festivals and industry events only further underscores this reality. As Amanda Upson, Interim Executive Director of the organization Filmmakers with Disabilities (FWD-Doc), recently put it:

> ***"By failing to include disabled filmmakers, the entertainment industry is depriving itself artistically and financially. Not only does this eliminate the point of view of [an estimated] 20% of the world's population, but it also has quantifiable business ramifications" (FWD-Doc, 2023).***

Between July 22, 2022 and November 20, 2023, the FWD-Doc organization surveyed 353 respondents about their accessibility experiences at 75 film festivals and film events internationally. Ultimately, the study found that 73% of disabled respondents said that they experienced some form of inaccessibility during their film festival experience, 93% of reported-on festivals scored below the median, and 77% of respondents said that they "Somewhat Disagree" or "Disagree" to the question: "Live Captions were available for the panels and Q&As (in-person)" (FWD-Doc, 2023).

RESEARCH DESIGN: ON METHODOLOGY AND INCLUSIVE DESIGN

BY CENTERING UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES, THIS RESEARCH ENDEAVORS TO BRING OVERDUE ATTENTION TO A COMMUNITY THAT IS TOO OFTEN OVERLOOKED BY RESEARCH AND TO ADVOCATE FOR ADDITIONAL WORK AND ATTENTION TO BE GIVEN TO THIS COMMUNITY OF FILMMAKERS AND AUDIENCES. **TO DO THIS, THE STUDY INVESTIGATES THE INFLUENCE OF A RECENT FILM, *UNSEEN*, WHICH FEATURES AN OPENLY UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANT WITH A DISABILITY AS ITS MAIN PROTAGONIST.**

INCLUSIVE RESEARCH DESIGN PROCESS

There are four considerations of inclusive research design, informed by preliminary interviews and a review of the literature around conducting research with people with disabilities, that serve as the formative values and starting point for this research study's design:

- ***Recruit a diverse research team of people with lived experience with a disability and/or being undocumented.***
- ***Ensure accessibility considerations are central to the design and implementation of the survey and research instruments.***
- ***Ensure appropriate language and translation is used throughout the process by working with a diverse research team that is mindful of these considerations.***
- ***Properly pay/compensate research team members who contribute to this research and work on responsive timelines that serve the needs and priorities of the research team in order to ensure as full participation as possible.***

With these considerations motivating the design process of this research, the research design process can be explored through six steps.

First, preliminary interviews were conducted with the ***unseen*** film team, to learn of any early concerns and priorities of the film team and its impact planning. This step was central to ensuring that the research was responsive to both the needs and interests of the film team, alongside the independent research team behind this study. These early conversations also established open communication with the film team so that their expertise and experience could inform the research at every step of its journey.

Second, the research team spoke with relevant organizations that work in the space of disability and immigrant rights in order to gain a preliminary perspective of their interests in the film and in the issues it centers. These early conversations helped the researchers to identify keywords and issues for further exploration in a literature review.

Third, an experienced research team with lived experience and expertise in being undocumented and/or having a disability was recruited. These accomplished researchers were identified through referrals from the ***unseen*** film team and following interviews with each researcher. Each researcher who was recruited for the research team had demonstrated track-records of publishing academic and/or public-facing work in the areas of this research.

Fourth, an extensive literature review was conducted by the research team using the following key words and intersections of interest:

Intersections/Broad Categories of Interest

- Intersection of undocumented and disabled experiences
- Inclusive of most recent research about the issues, challenges, and experiences concerning these intersecting communities
- Special attention to social determinants of health issues and of health access/services
- Special attention to policy issues
- Special attention to social work and social program services and issues
- Intersection of documentary and media research with undocumented audiences—i.e. any studies on films/media focused on undocumented issues and people? Any studies on how undocumented people are experiencing media and documentaries about them?
- Intersection of documentary and media research with audiences with disabilities
- Same questions as above—with special attention to blind and low-vision audiences
- Research on best practices for conducting research with undocumented audiences
- Research on best practices for conducting research with people with disabilities (special focus on blind and low vision communities)

Select Keywords (inclusive of but not limited to these words)

- Audience Research
- Disability audience(s)
- Undocumented audience(s)
- Media
- Documentary
- Disability
- Blind
- Low-vision
- Health Access
- Undocumented
- Accessibility

Fifth, following the literature review and preliminary interviews, a set of key questions (including overall research, survey, and focus group questions) were identified.

Finally, before data collection began, a process of question prioritization and accessible survey design ensured that the survey was pre-tested and reviewed for accessibility considerations by the research and ***unseen*** film teams.

RESEARCH SURVEY CONSIDERATIONS

According to the 2021 American Community Survey, more than eight million people in the United States are blind or have low vision and many more are deaf, have limited manual dexterity, or have cognitive or speech disabilities that affect how they access surveys, websites and apps. And while there has been very little research on the accessibility of research design practices for blind and low-vision people within diverse communities, much can be learned from the existing work on the importance of how positionality can create richer analysis, better data collection, and more inclusive analysis of research topics (Chen, et al., 2021), along with calls-to-action from researchers, people with disabilities, and allied organizations that specifically advocate for improved research practices and studies in areas of disability access.

A survey of seventy-nine researchers who work with people with disabilities from diverse ethnic backgrounds identified the most common challenges in the area of disability community-focused research as being the lack of available resources and best practices (Ritzler, et al, 2008). Further, much of the research that explores accessibility in survey design for people with disabilities focuses primarily on people with learning disabilities, with far less attention to communities who are blind or low-vision. And what research does exist provides primary focus to English speaking audiences (Farnsworth, 2020).

This lack of accessibility extends far beyond research, with technological tools and platforms commonly being designed without adequate consideration of the Disabled community. One of the seminal reports on digital inclusion collected data from 398 participants with disabilities who shared information about the daily tasks they perform using websites and mobile apps, how often they encounter barriers, and the impacts of those barriers as well as the barriers they encounter with video programming. The results indicated that blind, low vision, and deafblind people face pervasive challenges in the digital environment when seeking goods and services from businesses using websites and mobile apps. As stated in the report:

"In the study, a majority of the participants reported facing access barriers at least some of the time while using websites and apps for important activities like shopping, applying for jobs, or interacting with schools. These access barriers limit independence, influence consumer decision making, and lead to frustration, exclusion, and lost productivity. Businesses, technology vendors, government agencies, schools, and service providers must make their websites and applications fully accessible to people with disabilities." (AFB, 2023, p. 3).

All of these studies point toward the importance of ensuring that survey tools and digital research methods are inclusive of considerations among disabled audiences, and the importance of using equitable research processes that seek to offer more inclusive methods in doing research with communities with disabilities.

Primary audience of interest for this study:

- *undocumented migrants with disabilities in the United States (with special attention to blind/low-vision audiences)*

Research methods:

- *Post-screening survey with audience members (in select screenings)*
- *Post-screening groups discussion with audiences members (in select screenings)*
- *In-depth interviews with film team and participating organizations*

MORE ON METHOD

We employed a qualitative descriptive design, which is ideal for situations where knowledge of a phenomenon is limited (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Sandelowski, 2000). This approach allowed us to explore participants' experiences while viewing the film. To recruit participants, we utilized a snowball sampling technique, ensuring diversity by focusing on individuals from various nationalities and ethnicities. For data collection, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews, each ranging from 30 to 90 minutes in duration.

For data analysis, we used Conventional Content Analysis as outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). First, the data were translated and transcribed into English. The first author read all transcripts multiple times to achieve immersion and gain a holistic understanding of the content. Second, using NVivo software, the transcripts were read word by word, and exact phrases that captured key thoughts or concepts were highlighted. Third, initial codes were generated by labeling meaningful units of text, staying close to participants' language. Fourth, similar codes were grouped into categories based on conceptual similarity. Fifth, categories were organized into themes and subthemes using a hierarchical structure to reflect broader patterns. Finally, themes were defined and refined through an iterative process involving ongoing review of the data. For reporting the findings, representative excerpts (exemplars) were selected to illustrate each category and theme.

For quantitative data analysis, we used descriptive statistics, specifically calculating frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency (such as means and medians), and measures of variability (such as standard deviation). Therefore, when interpreting the findings, it is important to recognize that the results are summarized at the descriptive level and do not involve inferential statistical testing.

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ADDITIONAL RELEVANT STUDIES THAT WERE CONSULTED

- Dreams deferred: Contextualizing the health and psychosocial needs of undocumented Asian and Pacific Islander young adults in Northern California (https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28527372/)
- The association between Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, health access, and mental health: the role of discrimination, medical mistrust, and stigma (https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33276705/)
- Differences in Barriers to Healthcare and Discrimination in Healthcare Settings Among Undocumented Immigrants by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Status (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10903-022-01346-4)
- The Influence of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals on Undocumented Asian and Pacific Islander Young Adults: Through a Social Determinants of Health Lens (https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X17300514)
- Association between immigration enforcement encounters and COVID-19 testing and delays in care: a cross-sectional study of undocumented young adult immigrants in california (https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-13994-0)
- Deferred depression? Mediation analysis of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and immigration enforcement among Undocumented Asian and Pacific Islander student (https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352827321002834)
- Persistent effects of legal status on healthcare access and outcomes: findings from a state-wide representative cross-sectional survey in California (https://bmjpublichealth.bmj.com/content/2/1/e000800)

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A STUDY OF ACCESSIBILITY AND REPRESENTATION IN DOCUMENTARY FILM



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