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GEENA DAVIS INSTITUTE ON GENDER IN MEDIA RESEARCH:

“Eye Candy Is Not For Kids,” Says Davis

HOLLYWOOD, CA October 5, 2010 – When Oscar-winning actor Geena Davis began watching children’s movies with her young daughter, she noticed it was nearly impossible to find a family film with more than one or two female characters, and without negative images and stereotypes of girls and women. Instead of sitting back, Davis formed the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media to study and quantify gender inequity in children’s entertainment and to use the data to affect change from within the industry.

GDIGM’s latest study, “Gender Disparity On Screen and Behind the Camera in Family Films,” by Stacy L. Smith, PhD and Marc Choueiti, was conducted at USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. The study examined 122 top-grossing domestic family films rated G, PG, PG-13 from 2006-09. “Our latest research shocked us. Zero progress has been made in what is specifically aimed at kids. What children see affects their attitudes toward male and female roles in society. And, as they watch the same shows and movies repeatedly, negative stereotypes are imprinted over and over again. Eye candy is not for kids.” says Davis.

Of the 5,554 speaking characters studied, 71% were male, 29% female. This translates into a ratio of 2.42 males to every 1 female, which has not changed significantly in 20 years. Female characters are more likely to be shown as “eye candy.” A higher percentage of females than males are depicted in sexualized attire (24% vs. 4%) and as physically attractive (14% vs. 3.6%). They are also often portrayed as younger than their male counterparts, reinforcing the idea that youthfulness, beauty, and a sexy demeanor are more important for females than for males. “Eye candy is not for kids.” says Davis.

With constant reinforcement, skewed patterns seem normal and viewers fail to notice the lopsided view of gender. “These portrayals of women and girls become so normal to audiences that they do not see the need for gender parity in entertainment content,” notes Dr. Stacy L. Smith. GDIGM’s Executive Director, Madeline Di Nonno adds, “Gender issues need to be top-of-mind for children’s content creators. Media has gotten a bit better about how race is portrayed in film and TV, but the needle hasn’t moved at all for the biggest section of our population: females. We envision a world where boys and girls share the sandbox equally.”

Although the study found that gender inequities are even more dramatic behind the camera (only 7% of directors, 13% of writers and 20% of producers are female) it was discovered that films with one or more female screenwriters depict 10% more girls and women on screen than do those films with all male screenwriters. “This is encouraging,” says Davis, “It means women can drive change.”

What is the Institute’s antidote? More female characters - shown in non-stereotypical activities - and more women behind-the-scenes. “We just want diverse female characters and more of them. We know that if girls watch female characters in unsteretyped activities, it *heightens* the possibility that girls will seek employment in nontraditional vocations. Boys will come to see it as the norm and not the exception“ continues Davis.

To reach this goal, the Institute and its programming arm See Jane work collaboratively with the studios, networks, and leading content creators using cutting-edge research, and strategic guidance to provide actionable solutions. The Institute also hosts a bi-annual industry think-tank symposium. GDIGM research serves as the basis for educational programs to teach parents, children and educators how to actively and critically view what they are watching.

“I am confident that we are transforming how the industry thinks about gender equality in children’s entertainment,” says Davis. “When entertainment executives see the results of our studies, they are surprised and open-minded to change. They care about the future of our kids too.”

To review the full study go to www.seejane.org

About The Geena Davis Institute On Gender In Media: *Founded in 2004, The Geena Davis Institute On Gender In Media and its programming arm See Jane work with entertainment industry leaders and companies to to improve media images of girls in all aspects of entertainment targeting children 11 and under. Its goal is to transform how the entertainment industry represents girls in its productions, sensitize the industry on gender portrayals, and reduce stereotyping and objectification of females in children's media and entertainment. For more information, please visit www.seejane.org.*

About Geena Davis: *Ms. Davis, an Oscar-winning actor, is partnered with [UNIFEM](#) and was recently appointed by the Governor to serve on the [California Commission on the Status of Women](#). For many years Geena Davis partnered with the [Women's Sports Foundation](#), including ten years as a Trustee, advocating for girls' rights and equal participation in sports. She is on the board of the [The White House Project](#), a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization working to advance women's leadership in business, politics, and media. Geena Davis, frequently addresses national organizations on women's leadership, empowerment, and gender policy.*

Media Contact

Sayles & Winnikoff Communications

Alan Winnikoff
212-725-5200 x111
alan@sayleswinnikoff.com

Jennifer Buglione
212-725-5200 x112
Jennifer@sayleswinnikoff.com