

Geena Davis, Media Equalizer

*When little girls and boys watch movies and TV, what ideas do they develop about girls and women? Actor Geena Davis didn't like what she saw, so she took action. She started the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (seejane.org), which works to improve the images of girls and women in children's media. As an actor, Geena is known for playing strong female roles—check out the movie "A League of Their Own" (she's in an all-women baseball league), or the 2005-06 TV series "Commander In Chief," in which she plays the first female U.S. president. Geena shared her activist inspiration with *Daughters*, a NMG sister publication that's now a website (daughters.com) with great advice for parents of girls and girl advocates.*

My eyes were really opened when I started watching preschool television with my daughter when she was about 2 years old. I noticed that there weren't nearly as many female characters as male characters. It seemed that on the majority of young children's programming, even on public television, my daughter and the other children watching didn't see a world like the real one, in which girls and women make up half of the population. And the female characters that did appear were too often covered with bows and jewelry and cared a great deal about their appearance.

I kept watching, and got more and more frustrated. I saw that the majority of TV shows, videos, and movies designed specifically for children—whether the shows were animated, live-action, or puppets—are dominated by male characters and male stories. Studies have shown that in large part we learn our self-worth by seeing ourselves reflected in the culture. What message are we sending to girls and boys? It's just as important to me for my two boys to see girls playing vital roles in the stories they watch. My sons will most likely be husbands and fathers, and I want them to value women as much as I want my daughter to feel valued.

Geena Davis says,
"If girls can see it,
they can be it!"

Read these facts from the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media and do your own research as you watch family movies and TV. Don't forget to check animated animals: How many are girls? How many are boys? Ask questions about the roles girls play.

- Males outnumber females 3 to 1 in family films, even though females make up a little more than half of the population in the United States. This male-female ratio is the same as it was in 1946!
- Females are almost four times as likely as males to be shown in sexy attire and nearly twice as likely as males to be shown with a tiny waistline.
- Females also are underrepresented behind the camera. In a study of more than 1,500 content creators, only 7 percent of directors, 13 percent of writers, and 20 percent of producers were female.

Ana, 14, from Washington, made a film with other girls who left their countries to work in farm fields. See reelgrl.org to see it and more girl-made movies.



Movie Makers: Listen Up!

Girls watch lots of movies, including ones that don't feature girls as main characters, or show girls who aren't very inspirational. And it's fine to like whatever you like. Did you know, though, that many moviemakers still fear that having a girl or woman as a main character will scare off male viewers and lessen profits? Here's what girls said they wanted to see in future movies.

I want FEWER boyfriends, and MORE awesome girl characters! **Zelda, 9, Illinois** . . . Fewer "girly" princesses who only care about how they look. **Ada, 11, Vermont** . . . Put in more imaginary things like different worlds and creatures. **Miasol, 9, North Carolina** . . . Make more comedies that are age-appropriate for me. **Dria, 10, New York** . . . More dragons, unicorns, and other animals and take out the kissing scenes. **Sage, 6, Missouri** . . . Girls in the movies shouldn't have to be picture perfect! Fewer damsels in distress. **Sarah, 11, California** . . . More characters who aren't stereotypes. **Madeline, 12, North Carolina** . . . More girl superheroes—there aren't very many that are popular. Why doesn't that happen more? Movies should inspire people. **Holly, 13, Virginia**