REWRITE HER STORY

How film and media stereotypes affect the lives and leadership ambitions of girls and young women

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The world's most popular films still show a world that is run by men, for men. *Rewrite Her Story* finds films are perpetuating harmful stereotypes that prevent girls and young women from fulfilling their potential. Women and girls are rarely presented as leaders, and even when they are in leadership positions they are far more likely than men to be sexually objectified.

This new report is the second phase of a research project looking at female leadership. It focuses on the specific role of media in shaping girls' and young women's ambitions and aspirations to leadership and includes an analysis of 56 top-grossing films in 2018 across 20 countries.

> "I guess media does have a lot of power over our thoughts and how we see the world. I think it plays a significant part in my life."
>
> YOUNG WOMAN, CANADA

About the research: The data was gathered in partnership by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University and Plan International. Analysis of film content in 20 countries was carried out by the Geena Davis Institute using a new automatic audiovisual tool, the **GD-IQ**. The research also includes key informant interviews and focus group discussions with girls and young women across several of the countries where Plan International works.

THE STORIES WE ARE TOLD

The representation of women on screen as secondary to men – often sexualised, and confined to the domestic sphere – has been an issue for decades, and challenged for decades, but little has changed. This research shows the stories we are told and the images that surround us play a critical role in shaping girls' and young women's aspirations. The media can be a force for good but it can also perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes: the research tells us clearly that girls and women, as citizens and certainly as leaders, are still not seen on screen as equal to boys and men.

> "Because usually when we talk about a leader I still come up with a man. I still think about a man. [This idea] It's really popular… people think that men are more powerful." YOUNG WOMAN, 21, VIETNAM

Throughout the research, girls and young women told us that they couldn't find themselves on screen; they look for role models, but they are largely missing. The film content analysis tracked time on screen, the gender of the characters and the portrayal of leadership, and its findings back up the girls' perceptions: on screen time is taken up largely by protagonists who are white and male. The filmmakers, too, are predominantly white and male. Not one of the 56 top-grossing films in 2018 was directed by a woman.

> "When we see women playing secondary roles, young women can think it's normal life to play a secondary role and lose ambition."
>
> YOUNG WOMAN, 23, SENEGAL

RESEARCH FINDINGS

WOMEN LEADERS ARE SEXUALISED AND OBJECTIFIED IN A WAY THAT MEN NEVER ARE.

- Female leaders are four times more likely than male leaders to be shown wearing revealing clothing: 30% compared to 7%.
- Female leaders are nearly twice as likely to be shown as partially nude than male leaders: 15% compared to 8%.
- Characters who are female leaders are four times more likely to be shown completely naked at some point in the film than male leaders: 2% compared to 0.5%.
- Female leaders are more likely to sexually objectified than male leaders: 15% compared to 4%.
- Female leaders are more likely to be sexually harassed than male leaders: 5% compared to 1%.

MALE LEADERS ARE THE NORM

Overall 42% of male, compared to 27% of female characters, are shown on screen as leaders.

- In both films and in advertising women are portrayed at home rather than at work; they are valued for their looks: one interviewee commented that a key message to girls and young women was that, "we have to be pretty."

> "Women and girls in general are taking care of the household and looking nice and sort of like… just doing the basic things that people expect a female to do. I don't really see women doing anything outside the stereotype…"
> **YOUNG WOMAN, 18, CANADA**

GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN NEED ROLE MODELS

- Across all the participating countries, girls and young women strongly believed that when they cannot see women as leaders on screens or cannot identify positive role models, they lose confidence and ambition. They thought this is amplified for women of colour.

> "I think especially for women of colour and for girls of colour I think it's more difficult if you don't have a good example or a strong example [of women in leadership]… you probably would have question marks there about whether you can make it to the top."
> **YOUNG WOMAN, 23, NETHERLANDS**

- Girls and young women also wanted more diversity on screen – to see their own lives reflected in the films and shows they watch.

> "I think when we don't have a lot of representation, then of course you don't have a lot of representation of different types of women because we can hardly get women on screen in the first place so there is not enough time to put other races or personalities in there… As a visible minority I can say that I never saw anyone that was on screen that looked like me."
> **YOUNG WOMAN, 17, CANADA**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To be it, they must see it. Make stories about female leadership visible and normal. Stories need to encourage young women's aspirations and ambitions, not undermine them.

Stop the sexualisation and the objectification of women and girls on screen and ensure content doesn't discriminate or reinforce negative stereotypes and behaviour.

Fund female filmmakers, programme makers and content producers. Invest more time and money in women and girls as storytellers while addressing harassment and discrimination in the workplace to encourage girls and women into key positions in the media industry.

> "We could switch up these stereotypes of the leadership role and how that should look… women can stand up for themselves and take the lead and that could be very inspirational I think for young women to see."
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> **YOUNG WOMAN, 24, NETHERLANDS**