Gender Disparity On Screen and Behind the Camera in Family Films: An Executive Summary

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This study examines gender in family films rated G, PG, or PG-13. Theatrical release of the films occurred between September 5th, 2006 and September 7th, 2009 in the United States and/or Canada. For G-rated films in the sample, all English language fictional narratives (*n*=22) released across a three year time frame are content analyzed. For PG and PG-13 movies, the 50 top-grossing movies based on domestic box office revenue within rating are assessed. Thus, a total of 122 films released by 18 different distributors are examined for gender portrayals in this investigation. The major unit of analysis is the speaking character. Every discernable speaking character is evaluated for demographic variables and appearance markers. Below, four key findings are overviewed (see executive report for complete details on the study).

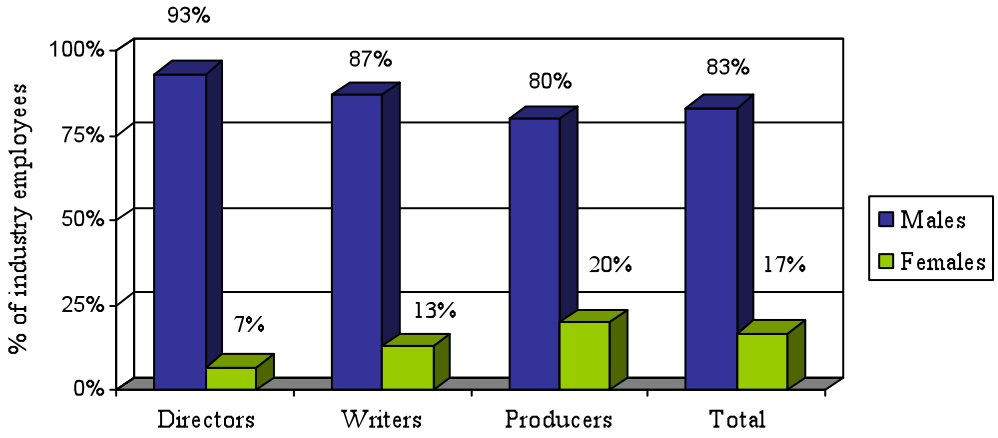
Key Findings

#1 Females are a Scarce Resource in Family Films

A total of 5,554 distinct speaking characters appeared across the sample, with 29.2% female and 70.8% male. Put differently, 2.42 males are depicted to every 1 female. MPAA rating is statistically but trivially (less than 5%) associated with gender. Of all speaking characters, 32.4% are female in G-rated films, 30% are female in PG-rated films, and 27.7% are female in PG13-rated films. These percentages suggest that females are still under represented in motion pictures, despite comprising over 50% of the U.S. population.

Besides on screen, females also are infrequent behind the camera (see Figure 1). We noted the gender of every director, writer, and producer across the 122 films. Across 1,565 content creators, only 7% of directors, 13% of writers, and 20% of producers are female. This translates into 4.88 males working behind-the-scenes (b-t-s) to every one female. Clearly, our on screen and behind the camera results show females are scarce in family films.

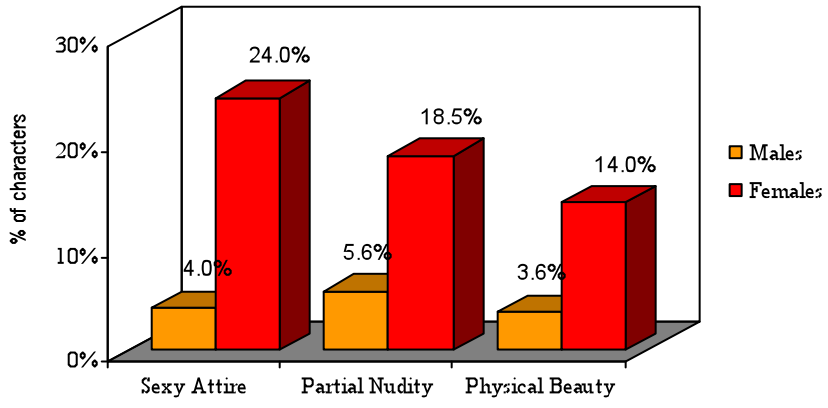
Figure 1
Occupational Title by Biological Sex



#2 Females in Family Films Often Serve as Eye Candy

As depicted in Figure 2, a higher percentage of females (24%) than males (4%) are shown in sexy, tight, or alluring attire. Females are more likely than their male counterparts to be beautiful (14% vs. 3.6%) and portrayed with some exposed skin between the mid chest and upper thigh regions (18.5% vs. 5.6%). Though not depicted, waist size is also related to gender with a higher percentage of females than males shown with a small waist (22.9% vs. 4.5%). As we have noted in our other reports, this leaves females with "little room for a womb or any other internal organs." The percentage of characters with a large chest (males=15.3%, females= 12.6%) or an unrealistic body ideal (males=2.9%, females=7.5%) varies significantly -- but not meaningfully (less than 5%) -- with gender. Surely, our results show that females' curb appeal is more important than their male counterparts'.

Figure 2
Appearance Indicators by Character Gender



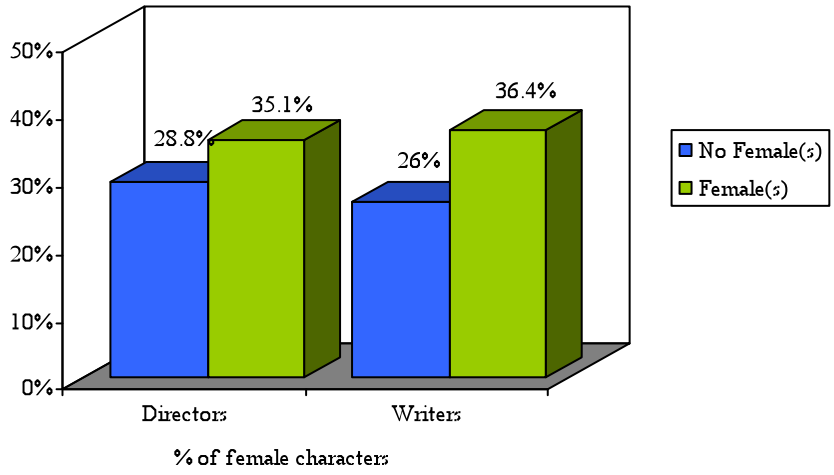
Besides appearance, another stereotypical pattern pertaining to gender emerged. In terms of age, a higher percentage of females than males are depicted under 21 (20.5% vs. 12.5%) and between

21-39 years of age (54.3% vs. 49.3%). This trend reverses for characters 40 to 64 years old, with a higher percentage of males (33.7%) than females (20.2%) shown in this chronological bandwidth. Together, the age and appearance findings reinforce that cinematic females are valued more than cinematic males for their looks, youthfulness, and sexy demeanor.

#3 Women Working Behind-the-Scenes Matter in Family Films

We assessed whether the gender of content creators working behind-the-scenes (b-t-s) is related to on screen portrayals of character gender. In other words, this section addresses whether females working behind the camera are associated with the number of females working in front of the camera. Our findings show they do. As depicted in Figure 3, a higher percentage of girls/women are shown on screen when one or more females are involved directing or writing films. In fact, a 10% difference is observed for on screen girls/women when one or more females are involved in the writing process. A significant but trivial (less than 5%) association is observed for producer gender and character gender. In comparison to the percentage of females on screen in films with only male producers (26.3%), the percentage of females on screen when one or more women produce films is 29.9%.

Figure 3
Percent of Female Characters by Presence of Female(s) Behind-the-Scenes



These findings are somewhat consistent with our other research on popular motion picture content and Academy Award® Best Picture Nominated films. Overall, the results suggest that b-t-s females may be advocating for and/or casting more on screen girls/women than b-t-s males. It may also be the case that studios are more comfortable allocating "female-oriented" stories and scripts to female writers and directors.

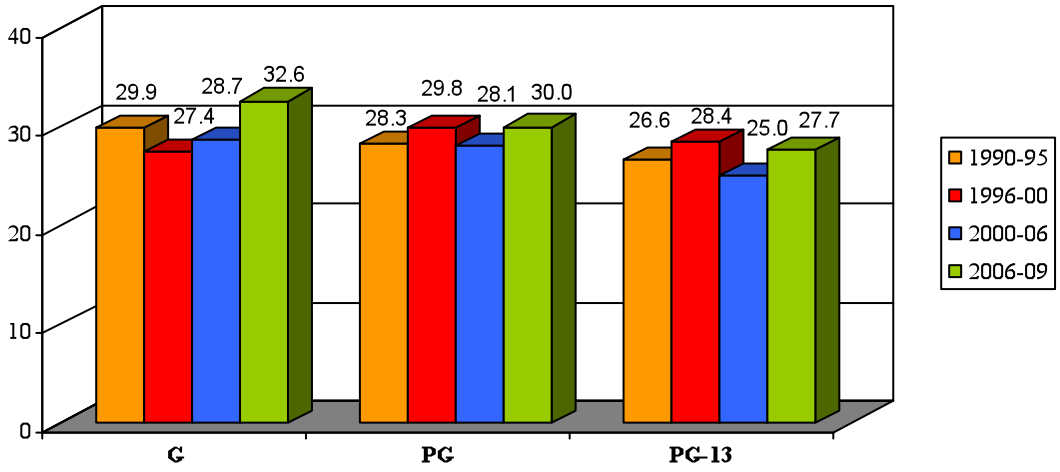
#4 Little Change in Gender Prevalence Across 20 Years of Family Films

In an earlier study, we examined gender roles in 300 top-grossing G, PG, and PG-13 films theatrically released from January 1st 1990 to September 4th 2006. By combining the current

data set with the previous one and doing some additional coding, we are able to assess trends in the distribution of gender in roughly 20 years of G, PG, and PG-13 films.

Our analysis of 150 G-rated films shows that very little change has taken place across almost twenty years. As noted in Figure 4, the percentage of females in 2006-09 is only 2.7% higher than the percentage of females in 1990-95 films! Also shown in Figure 4, little deviation in the percentage of females in film occurred across popular PG and PG-13 movies. Despite the United States being declared recently "*A Woman's Nation*," our findings show that the "reel" world of cinematic content – particularly in family films -- is still nothing more than a boy's club.

Firgure 4
Percentage of Female Characters by Release Date and Rating



Note: A total of 150 G, 148 PG, and 150 PG-13 films are included by rating in Figure 4 analyses. Only females are reported, though males figured into the analyses. No documentaries, re-releases, or foreign films are included in Figure 4 calculations (see final report for complete details). Prior to our analysis, we categorized movies by rating into one of four time periods based on release date: 1990-1995, 1996-2000, 2001 to 9/4/2006, and 9/5/2006 to 9/7/2009. Gender analyses were conducted within rating.

Conclusion

The aim of this content analysis was to assess gender portrayals in family films. Our findings can be summarized in three claims:

> #1 Hollywood family films involve lights, camera, and a lack of female action. This is true on screen as well as behind the camera.
>
> #2 Contrary to popular belief, there seems to be relatively little change in the percentage of females in family films across roughly 20 years.
>
> #3 Females working behind the camera are associated with films that depict a higher percentage of female characters.

The dearth of females on screen and/or behind the camera may have an effect on younger audiences. A steady diet of viewing these types of depictions may send the message that girls are less valuable and capable than boys. With time and repeated exposure, young viewers may adopt or even fail to notice the lop-sided view of gender in film. Even worse, heavy viewing of these skewed patterns may become so normal to audiences that they do not see the need for gender parity in the media or industry change. Future research should explore these potential linkages and the role cinematic content plays in young viewers' development.