



GIRLS  
GET **EQUAL**

Geena Davis Institute *of* on Gender in Media

# REWRITE HER STORY

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

TECHNICAL REPORT



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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1.1. 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, 18, Canada

### 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

## 1.2. 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 be 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.”* Girl, 17, Canada

## 1.3. 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.”* Young woman, 24, Netherlands

## 2. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study forms the basis of the State of the World Girls Report 2019. This technical report sets out the findings of ongoing research conducted in 2019 by Plan International and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University. The research aimed at understanding and uncovering girls' and young women's perspectives on what leadership means to them; whether they aspire to be leaders and, if so, the processes, enablers and barriers they face in realising their potential as leaders. In addition, in the knowledge that external factors and influences shape both the notion of leadership and aspirations to lead, the study also sought to understand how different forms of media portray leadership, and in particular female leadership, and how this influences the perceptions of girls and young women.

The first part of the research was released in a report and launched at the Women Deliver Conference in June 2019. The research was conducted across 19 countries, involving over 10,000 girls and young women and investigated girls' and young women's aspirations to lead: about what holds them back, what encourages them and what needs to be in place for their aspirations to become reality. The findings show that many girls and young women want to be leaders. They want, too, to be a particular type of leader - compassionate, dedicated to their community, and listening to the needs of others - but they are not encouraged in their ambitions. They are held back by society's limited expectations of what is "appropriate" for them as young women and by a leadership model of authority and hierarchy that they cannot identify with: denied the places and spaces, and the role models, that would enable them to realise their dreams. The study found that the role of families and communities are critical to harnessing the leadership aspirations of girls and young women. The girls and young women said that they are influenced most by their immediate environment and look to their family members and others as role models and supporters and to release them from restrictive stereotyping.

Thus the second part of the research has focused in on examining one particular influence that girls and young women are exposed to in their daily lives – the influence of the media - and how it contributes to underscoring the notion of equality or portraying gender stereotypes, especially in relation to female leadership. Obviously, there are a multitude of media forms and it would be impossible to examine them all, so this study has looked at two in particular: advertising images that girls see on a daily basis and visual entertainment media.

This report therefore brings together the various components of the research as a whole. It does not restate all the findings from the first part of the research, *Taking the Lead: Girls and Young Women on Changing the Face of Leadership*,<sup>1</sup> but discusses those which are relevant for the focus on media as an influence in them wanting to lead in different aspects of their life and their perceptions of female leadership.

In this report, we outline the focus of the research and research questions, introduce the partners and provide a brief outline of key existing global literature on the topic, before going into detail on the methodology. The findings are presented in separate sub-sections to section 5 as each of the components were stand-alone pieces which contribute to the findings which are then discussed as a whole in section 6, before the final section outlines the key recommendations and calls to action that emerge.

### 2.1. Focus of the research

As alluded to above, evidence suggests that during the early years' of adolescence, social norms start to become more rigidly enforced and more personally salient: adolescence often sees girls "leave comparatively free childhoods and are forced down the gendered adult pathways of their local environments" and they learn to modify their expectations according to the requirements and pressures of their local and household environments.<sup>2</sup> A study by Girl Effect found that gender norms in adolescence reinforce "notions of male strength, competence and control while concurrently reinforcing female frailty, vulnerability and need for protection".<sup>3</sup>

Gender norms are learned from immediate contact with parents, peers and the media, which tend to reinforce the status quo and present restrictive gender roles through dialogue, role models and restrictions of opportunities and girls' agency.<sup>4</sup>

This study, while conducted in two interlinked parts, was conceptualised in a way that looked at a series of related research questions that investigate the notion of leadership as perceived by girls and young women and how they perceive the barriers and enablers for female leadership. One specific avenue of enquiry which the study as a whole sought to understand is whether and how role-models and media influence affect girls' aspirations to aspire to lead and or take on leadership roles in their families, communities, jobs and countries.

The high-level research questions for the full study are as follows:

2. What factors encourage and discourage girls' leadership aspirations? - *Definitions of leadership; influences on aspirations and how they change over time; barriers and enablers to setting leadership goals.*
3. How do girls become a leader? - *Perceived and actual pathways to leadership; perceived and actual pros/cons of becoming a leader; characteristics of leadership; catalysts for leadership.*
4. How does media portray leadership? - *Female leaders portrayed in mainstream media, types of leadership style, professional domains where female leaders are featured.*

### **2.1.1. Research questions for the media study**

For the second part of the research, advertisements and the visual entertainment media were chosen as common forms of media which girls and young women, as well a broader society, would be exposed to quite regularly and which could influence perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes. While the investigation looked at broad gender representations in media, it focused in on how female leadership was represented.

The sub-questions that directed the study are:

1. How is gender represented in advertisements that girls and young women see day to day, in particular how is female leadership portrayed?
2. How is gender represented in entertainment media, namely popular films of 2018 and popular television series, in particular how is female leadership portrayed?

## **2.2. Partners**

In 2018, Plan International and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDIGM) forged a unique partnership, drawing together their respective expertise in girls' rights, aspirations of girls and young women, and gender and the media. The research was conceived in June 2018 as a joint project, with Plan International leading on qualitative research components and GDIGM on the survey and media components. The partnership spans both phases of the research – *Taking the Lead: Girls and young women on how to change the face of leadership* - the report launched at Women Deliver 2019 and this report - State of the World Girls Report 2019.

### **2.2.1. Plan International**

Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. The organisation is an independent development and humanitarian organisation working alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. Plan International drives change in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

In 2018, Plan International launched a new global campaign: Girls Get Equal. Girls Get Equal is campaigning in support of girls' power, freedom, representation and leadership. Its vision is a world where girls and young women, in all their diversity, are equally able to make decisions about their own lives and shape the world around them. Plan International is committed to using the findings from this research to feed into advocacy and programming at global, national and local levels in furtherance of the goals of Girls Get Equal.

### **2.2.2. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University**

The mission of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University is to engage, educate, and influence media content creators, marketers, and audiences about the importance of eliminating gender bias and stereotypes in media. To this end, the Institute is dedicated to

intersectional analysis of representations of gender, race, ability, and sexuality. The Geena Davis Institute has amassed the largest body of research on gender prevalence in family entertainment, spanning more than twenty years. The Institute's research serves as the basis for education and outreach programmes that help families, studios, educators and content creators become critical consumers and producers.

## 3. SETTING THE SCENE: MEDIA, GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

On the eve of Beijing+25, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), it is important to note that it was then that 189 UN Member States recognized the central role of media in shifting the gender stereotypes that influence how we think and act. And when talking about gender stereotypes it is useful to remember that stereotypes are regarded as beliefs about a social category, especially those that differentiate genders, and they become problematic when they lead to expectations about one social category over another or restrict opportunities for one social category over another.<sup>5</sup>

The UN Member States made women and media one of 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action and called on media everywhere to make a far greater contribution to women's advancement.<sup>6</sup> They agreed that the number of women in the media must increase, including in decision-making.<sup>7</sup> More should be done to present women as leaders and role models, and to do away with stereotypes.<sup>8</sup> In the context of the original Beijing Platform for Action and its calls on the role of the media, it has been argued that traditional perceptions of the roles of women and men in society must be rethought and that this involves the reorganization of the basic institutions of society - the market, Government and the family - and the media, which helps define what we think and what our place is in society, have a crucial role to play in changing people's perceptions and stereotyped views of the roles of men and women.<sup>9</sup>

But even before the Beijing Platform of Action, how the media portrays women and girls has been an issue for critical discussion. In her seminal work, Gail Tuchman analysed mass media—television, newspapers, magazines—and the advertising they carry to gather support for her argument that, by largely ignoring women or portraying them in stereotypical roles of victim and/or consumer, the mass media symbolically annihilate women.<sup>10</sup> Grau and Zotos, reviewing earlier research on advertising and gender stereotypes, note that historically women have been portrayed in an inferior manner relative to their capabilities and potential, and that advertising also contributes to gender inequality by promoting sexism and distorted body images as valid and acceptable.<sup>11</sup> Writing in 2016, they state that, in general, gender stereotyping in advertising still exists and is prevalent in many countries around the world. However, they suggest that things are changing in recent years: but that the change is in relation to the role of men. To support this they cite examples such as (a) the 2015 Super Bowl, which broadcast advertising from Dove Men Care showing men in much 'softer' roles while interacting with their children and (b) research which found that there were fewer men in the lead role in adverts but increased portrayals of men as fathers, but note that both are small trends.

Tuchman noted that most media portray women, if at all, in traditional roles: homemaker, mother, or, if they are in the paid workforce, jobs of a clerical nature and other positions which are seen as traditionally reserved for women.<sup>12</sup> And, likewise, she determines that there are few, if any, depictions of strong female characters in positions of responsibility or authority, even inside the home. She views this with concern given the role that the mass media may play in shaping young girls' wants, needs, and expectations, and she argues that, given the influence that mass media has on behavior and attitudes, consistent repetition of such themes can be expected to encourage the maintenance of women's subordinate position in society.

Many people and institutions discourage girls from seeking leadership positions by reinforcing retrograde gender stereotypes - parents, peers, teachers, school officials, religious leaders, corporations, voters,



political parties, lawmakers, and others. However, one institution stands out in its ability to shape culture: mass media. As identified by the Beijing Platform for Action and Tuchman, visibility of women leaders in media is a factor in shaping girls' and women's perceptions of leadership. Media is one of the primary ways children learn that ambition is okay for boys, but not for girls. When Weissbourd asked girls in a U.S. high school why they lacked confidence in their leadership abilities, they identified media that denigrates female leadership as influential.<sup>13</sup>

Media does not tell people *what* to think, but it tells people what topics to think *about*, and *how* to think about them by focusing on some aspects and not others.<sup>14</sup> Media shapes perceptions of who can be an authentic leader, and in most cases, this means men.<sup>15</sup> The study of representations of women's leadership in different countries, conducted by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, examined films in the ten more profitable media territories: Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the United Kingdom.<sup>16</sup> Across these ten regions, men dominate media portrayals of corporate (86%), political (91%), religious (100%), academic (71%), and entertainment (84%) leaders. Women are mostly missing in media portrayals of leadership in popular culture.

Press coverage of politics reinforce the idea that leadership is a male domain.<sup>17</sup> Research examining newspaper coverage of the Spanish elections, in France, Italy, Spain and the UK, found that while some coverage celebrates women politicians as standard bearers, others judge them more by their physical appearance or their performance as wives, mothers, and mothers-to-be.<sup>18</sup> Female political candidates receive less media coverage and more negative coverage than their male competitors,<sup>19</sup> and more attention to their personality traits, personal lives, dress, and appearance, all of which signals that female candidates are less serious contenders.<sup>20</sup> Female candidates also receive more coverage questioning their viability than male candidates,<sup>21</sup> and are covered as being less authentic than their male competitors are.<sup>22</sup> Online media have actually increased sexism in public discourse about female candidates.<sup>23</sup> Social media has become a visible forum for individuals to express bigoted beliefs, fueled by anonymity, and as such, it presents a more hostile environment for female candidates who are discussed in more sexist terms than in legacy media.<sup>24</sup>

Noting how the type of studies mentioned above have been conducted in different parts of the world, and that the focus has been that the media have "marginalized women in the public sphere", a study in Uganda looked at how the media represents the position of women as both sources and reporters.<sup>25</sup> The study found, using climate change as a coverage issue since 56 percent of women in Uganda are farmers, that the gender gap in Uganda is highly pronounced, with women as sources ranked third in importance after men and anonymous sources.

A recent global study examined the relationship between media gender bias and the proportion of candidates for the lower chamber of national parliaments who are women.<sup>26</sup> Data on media gender bias came from the Global Media Monitoring Project and data on the proportion of female political candidates came from the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The results show that there is, even when controlling for the number of women in parliament, electoral system, gender quotas, level of human development, level of women's rights, freedom from corruption, and media access, a significant relationship between media gender bias—measured as (i) the share of all news subjects that are women and (ii) the share of all news subjects portrayed in the function of experts who are women—and the proportion of women candidates for parliament: the higher the level of media gender bias, the lower the share of women candidates. The authors argued that sexist portrayals of women in the media stifle ambition among women who, in a less sexist media environment, would be willing to stand as political candidates.

The discussion above has looked at how women and girls are depicted in the media and also how the media deals with female leadership in popular culture and in the area of politics. However, one of the areas that the Beijing Platform called out was that while more women are involved in careers in the communications sector, few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy.<sup>27</sup> Yet there is evidence that employing more women in key positions in film crews leads to better representation of girls and women in film. Numerous studies in the last forty years have identified a link between women in key decision-making roles on the crew and more women in the cast.<sup>28</sup> These studies find that having a woman director and at least one woman on the writing team produces more female leads, more female characters, and more dialogue for female characters. In addition, female directors are especially important when it comes to hiring more women on film casts and crews. A recent study finds that, of the top 500 films of 2018, films with at least one female director employed a greater percentage of women editors, writers, composers, and cinematographers

than films directed by men.<sup>29</sup> When interrogating the reasons behind this, a recent article highlighted the fact that the studio system for approving projects and giving directors financing is secretive; that Hollywood doesn't appear to champion the type of movies female directors prefer to make (personal character driven films that focus on personal lives and human interaction); women directors are given smaller budgets and their movies are generally distributed by independent studios as opposed to the major studios.<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately, the actions identified by the Beijing Platform remain unfulfilled today. However, there may be some progress: a recent online article notes that 16 of the 87 studio films slated for release in 2019 have at least one woman credited as director which is up from just 3 last year, when half of the major studios (Paramount, Sony and Warner Bros.) had no female directors on their wide-release slates.<sup>31</sup> And the Times Up movement has resulted in the launch of *Time's Upx2*, a campaign aiming to double the number of women in leadership and in other spaces where they are underrepresented.<sup>32</sup> This in turn has led to the *4% Challenge*, first mentioned in the Sundance Festival's "Making the (In)visible: Radical Transparency in the Data-Driven Age" panel and which has gained traction through Universal Filmed Entertainment Group being first major studio to take the challenge, meaning that Universal Pictures, Focus Features, and DreamWorks Animation have each committed to announcing a woman-directed project by mid-2020.<sup>33</sup> The Times Up movement is also just one of a number of other advocacy initiatives that are working towards more equity and diversity in media - Women In Film advocates for and advances the careers of women working in the screen industries and The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative is a think tank studying diversity and inclusion in entertainment through original research and sponsored projects and developing targeted, research-based solutions to tackle inequality.<sup>34</sup> The Swedish Film Institute also launched a new initiative for professional women scriptwriters this year.<sup>35</sup> A recent study found less than 30 percent of Sweden's screenwriters are women – only one of Sweden's eight big-budget films in 2018 featured a woman writer. The initiative aims to increase the number of female voices in films and support them to develop and make bigger budget projects.

In addition, there are some examples of how societal institutions have tried to address some of the issues identified. One of these is the EU, where advertising's self-regulatory bodies as well as the European Advertising Standard Alliance began updating their ethical guidelines on gender portrayals following increased complaints by consumers as well as the approval of anti-discrimination laws in several European countries and, in 2008, a EU resolution was adopted on how marketing and advertising affects equality between women and men.<sup>36</sup> Others are more ad hoc, such as the Danish Film Institute, in partnership with the Danish Producers Association, seeking to get a handle on the gender balance of Danish film productions by introducing a so-called self-report form, in which production companies specify the gender balance of their film productions,<sup>37</sup> and the Government of Iceland awarding its Motivational Award for Gender Equality for the first time to a media company - in doing so the jury said, "Sagafilm operates in an industry where men have been more dominant and therefore it is crucial to have the determination to change it. Conscious decisions have been made to promote female directors and scriptwriters. Decisions which affect the company's production, where it can be clearly seen that the gender gap has minimized. The stories that are told reflect this reality better than before." <sup>38</sup> Importantly, the British Film Institute (BFI) – which is a charity that promotes and preserves film and which awards Lottery funding for film production, distribution, education, audience development and market intelligence and research – has a set of Diversity Standards that underpins the award of funds for making films. The Standards encourage equality of opportunity and tackle under-representation in the film industry and are a contractual requirement for projects funded by the BFI.<sup>39</sup> The BFI has also committed to working with all active producers, film organisations and project leaders in the UK, to voluntarily adopt the Standards by 2022, to ensure the sector is representative of the UK, both in terms of its workforce and the content it produces.

But these are exceptions rather than the norm and as the findings from this study will show, so much more needs to be done to make the Beijing Platform actions a reality. And where there has been progress it is very much limited to equality within the media industry for women. The advancements made don't appear to give voice to recognising how the media affects gender stereotyping in society. As this research will show, the media still plays a critical role in shaping girls and young women's aspirations to lead in their families, communities, countries and careers as well as perpetuating the harmful gender stereotypes that act as barriers to girls and young women making their aspirations a reality.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This research sought to answer the research questions using mixed methods – quantitative, qualitative and content analysis - in order to be able to demonstrate the findings from an objective, expert content analysis with the subjective views and perceptions of girls and young women from the quantitative and qualitative research. It was very important to capture the voice and perspective of girls and young women and their own understanding of gender stereotypes in the media; female leadership and how it is portrayed in society and potential pathways and barriers to becoming leaders themselves. However, it was also important to have a global overview of these issues, allowing comparability between different types of countries and contexts. To this end the countries for both the quantitative and qualitative research with girls and young women were selected at random from within regional and income categories. The one common factor is that Plan International has offices in all participating countries. These countries then formed the basis for the content analysis of films.

A mixed method approach – quantitative, qualitative and content analysis - is being applied to the research overall, including (i) findings from a global survey in 19 countries and focus group discussions (FGDs) in a randomly selected sub-set of 5 countries from the first part of the research (ii) expert media content analysis and girls and young women's reflections (photo project), (iii) expert film content analysis and (iv) key informant interviews with a small sample of girls and young women.

**Table 1: Countries in which components of this study took place**

Study component	Countries
Survey	Benin, Canada, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Finland, Honduras, India, Japan, Netherlands, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sweden, Vietnam, Uganda, USA, Zimbabwe.
Focus Group Discussions	Dominican Republic, India, Japan, Senegal, South Sudan
Girls' Photo Project	Dominican Republic, India, Japan, Senegal, South Sudan
Key Informant Interviews	Canada, India, Netherlands, Peru, Senegal, Uganda, Vietnam
Media Content Analysis	Canada, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Germany, Finland, Honduras, India, Japan, Netherlands, Peru, Philippines, Sweden, Vietnam, the U.S.  South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Portugal, Angola, Monaco, Morocco, Tunisia, France, Algeria (as proxies for the African countries in the sample where no box office data was available).

Girls and young women aged 15-24 were the target for the survey, FGDs, photo project and key informant interviews - capturing perspectives across the breadth of different contexts whilst enabling discussions on the complex and nuanced aspects of the research questions. However, for reasons which are undetermined, the survey data included responses from 317 25-year-olds – and therefore the research includes all the survey responses in the analysis. Similarly, the key informant interviews also included one young woman aged 25.

The rest of this section provides an overview of the methodology.

## 4.1. Data collection and analysis

### 4.1.1. Survey and Focus Group Discussions

The target sample for the survey was 500 girls and young women per country, and overall 10,064 responses were received from across the nineteen countries. The survey included 10 closed questions on aspirations to lead, experience of leading, confidence, encouragement, role models and discrimination (see *Taking the Lead*, Annex 2, for the full survey). Five demographic questions were included to allow more in-depth analysis. The survey was delivered through online and SMS modalities using two survey firms, Kantar and Ipsos Public Affairs. In addition, Kantar used two alternative methods of data collection following low response rate from SMS in some countries: Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI).

Twelve FGDs were carried out in each of the five selected countries with, on average, between 6-8 participants aged 15-24 in each – a total of 413 participants across the five countries. In most countries FGDs were carried out in a mixture of urban and rural locations. The FGDs were centred around two key activities: (i) 'body mapping' to understand perspectives on characteristics and experience of a young female leader, and (ii) an activity to gauge the main sources of influence and inspiration in the lives of girls and young women. The FGDs were designed with the intent of understanding how girls and young women themselves perceived leadership in their own contexts. The FGD tool was developed in consultation with young people and adapted for each country context in consultation with local Plan International staff and local researchers during training. Appropriate local researchers were identified to facilitate and lead FGDs after taking part in an intensive, practical training run by Plan International. (The research tool used for the FGDs is included in the report *Taking the Lead*, Annex 3.)

The analysis framework for the survey and the FGDs was designed in order to unpack the key research questions as stated above, recognising that in order for young women to become leaders they need to aspire to and achieve their goals. In doing so they need to overcome the gender norms and structures which limit their vision of the possibilities awaiting them. The research therefore set out to understand whether they aspire to leadership and the common barriers, pathways and enabling factors. The quantitative data from the survey was analysed using SPSS and Stata and the qualitative data was analysed using NVivo. The combined analysis framework presented below represents the top-level coding themes.

Table 2: Top level analysis framework for the survey and FGDs

	Aspirations to leadership	Characteristics and qualities of leadership	Motivations to become leaders	Barriers to leadership	Enablers to leadership	Level of experience of leadership
Quant	X			X	X	X
Qual		X	X	X	X	X

### 4.1.2. Content analysis of top-grossing films

The media content analysis is based on the top ten grossing films in each country studied. Data was located via film box office data through Comscore and Box Office Mojo. It was possible to locate reputable lists of the top ten grossing films in Canada, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Germany, Finland, Honduras, India, Japan, Netherlands, Peru, Philippines, Sweden, Vietnam, and the U.S. However, it was not possible to locate country-specific films lists for the African countries in the sample of countries used for the survey (Benin, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe). As a result, the top ten films from countries that cover each region of the continent were included as a proxy (South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Portugal and Angola, and Monaco, Morocco, Tunisia, and France and Algeria).



Many of the top ten grossing films in each country overlapped with the top-grossing films in other countries, so a total of 56 films were analysed for this report.<sup>i</sup> The final dataset includes 1,859 characters from the top-grossing films. The analysis in this report is based on the 682 leading and supporting characters in the dataset, which excludes minor characters.

Two analytic techniques were used for this content analysis. First, a team of ten researchers coded the content of films in the sample. They were trained on a codebook, then performed a series of tests in order to achieve interrater reliability in terms of percentage agreement and Fleiss's Kappa. Additionally, eighteen films were double-coded to check for consistency, meaning that two coders analysed the same film to ensure reliability.

Secondly, the GD-IQ was used. This is a revolutionary new automatic audio-visual tool— the first of its kind developed specifically to analyse media content. It measures on-screen time by partitioning the movie into face-tracks by tracking the detected faces locally in time. Gender is computed for each face-track separately. Total screen time is then calculated by gender for each film using the track duration. Speaking time is measured by applying automatic speech detection software that classifies the speaker as female or male.

The films analysed are not named: the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University has a policy against naming and shaming film and television production studios for their content.

#### 4.1.3. Girls' photo project

This part of the study involved a content analysis of gender representations in visual advertisements – including on billboards and in magazines – identified and photographed by girls and young women in and around Plan International offices. Thus this component of the study was girl led in that girls chose the media content for analysis and then also analysed the content through the reflection workshops in addition to the expert quantitative analysis of the images. This component took place in five countries (the Dominican Republic, India, Japan, Senegal, and South Sudan); the same five countries as the FGDs, they were selected based on convenience, determined by the location of a Plan International office with programs serving local girls and resources to run this research exercise.

This research component typically took place over three days with groups of 5-10 girls in each country. The first day was allocated for training of girls and young women including on: how to take photographs, the purpose of the exercise and the types of advertisements to capture, basic media literacy, safety and logistics. The second day involved girls and young women moving around in their communities in groups and taking photographs of adverts. The final day involved a reflection workshop, where girls and young women shared their thoughts on the messages the advertisements were conveying and how gender was represented. See Annex 2 for materials used in country for the girls' photo project.

The final dataset includes 205 characters from 108 advertisements across the five different countries. Girls in the Dominican Republic and Senegal gathered more than twice the number of ads as girls in the other countries. Expert analysis was conducted by GDI during April 2019. This was complemented by thematic analysis of girls' and young women's own reflections and interpretations of the advertising images that they photographed.

**Table 3: photographs taken in each country, as percentage of total number of photographs taken**

<b>Advertisements from Each Country</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>(n)</b>
Dominican Republic	37.6%	77
India	11.2%	23
Japan	13.2%	27
Senegal	27.8%	57
South Sudan	10.2%	21

The photo project had a participatory design. It aimed to explore what girls and young women see on a daily basis through their own eyes through looking at the photos they took and their initial analysis and

<sup>i</sup> The total number of top-grossing films was 61, but five films could not be located for analysis, so the final dataset was 56 films.

responses of these photos. One objective of the photo project was to increase media literacy and critical thinking skills of those girls and young women who took part, and some girls reported learning about taking good photos and understanding advertisements better.

#### **4.1.4. Key Informant Interviews with girls and young women**

The purpose of the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) was to provide more depth to complement the statistical analysis of film content: through the introduction of the perceptions of girls and young women. Overall, the KIIs sought to gather girls' and young women's perspectives on how women and men are portrayed in entertainment media in general, and in relation to leadership in particular, asking them to reflect on and explore themes and characters from their favourite visual entertainment media. For the KII tool, refer to Annex 1 of this report.

In total, 13 KIIs were conducted with girls and young women between the ages of 15-25 across seven countries: Canada, India, Netherlands, Peru, Senegal, Uganda, Vietnam. Two respondents were between the ages of 15-17, four were between the ages of 18-20, and seven were between the ages of 21-25. Respondents were identified by focal points at the Plan International office in each of the countries and were involved in existing youth engagement or advocacy programmes and networks.

Interviews took place over two weeks in May 2019 and were conducted remotely in a way identified by the girl or young women as convenient - either over the phone, WhatsApp or Skype. Young female staff working at Plan International Global Hub's Monitoring, Evaluation and Research team conducted the interviews, which typically lasted between 45 minutes – 1 hour. However, where there was simultaneous translation required, the interviews lasted between 1 hour 30 minutes to 2 hours. Where required, translation was provided by female Plan International staff from the Plan International office in that country.

Coding and thematic analysis was conducted on Microsoft Excel. A detailed coding list by theme was developed (including movie genre; main character identity; behaviours and characteristics of characters; portrayal of women and girls in the movie and entertainment media more broadly; power of characters by gender; effect of movie and portrayal of women and girls). These codes were later refined by frequency of occurrence of each theme in order to identify prevalent themes.

The films and TV series chosen by our interviewees do not form part of Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media's content analysis and are named in this report.

## **4.2. Ethics**

Plan International has considerable experience working with and conducting research with children and young people and follow strict protocols on safeguarding and ethics. All processes in this research aligned to Plan International's Framework for Ethical Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning and Global Policy for Safeguarding Children and Young People. In addition, an external ethics check was sought from independent child rights academics who approved all research within the project. In Senegal and South Sudan appropriate national and local ethical approval and permissions were obtained prior to the FGDs commencing.

The firms responsible for survey delivery also followed specific guidelines and international standards on research ethics, including obtaining permission to operate and conduct such surveys in each country. Survey participants were given the option to opt-in after being given details of the survey, and participants under 18 were required to seek parental approval.

For the five countries in which FGDs and the girls' photo project were carried out, informed consent was gathered for all participants prior to the start of data collection, including from parents/guardians for those under eighteen and unmarried. Researchers were trained on informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and safeguarding procedures. Participatory tools for the FGDs and the girls' photo project were designed to minimise risks to participants, avoiding traumatic or sensitive topics and risks of disclosure, and to reduce power dynamics between facilitators and participants. In all FGDs, with the exception of Senegal, research teams were all female; in Senegal, for reasons of capacity, male notetakers were present whilst female researchers led discussions. The girls' photo project and KIIs were also led and facilitated by female researchers

When conducting the KIIs, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the day of the interview, and additionally informed consent from parents/guardians was obtained for those girls under 18. All interviewers for the KIIs were young women and are employed by Plan International Global Hub and have experience of research or interviews with children and young people.

### **4.3. Research Limitations**

There are several limitations that must be considered, stemming from modalities, variations between countries and ethical considerations.

Firstly, due to ethical considerations and challenges with accessing younger children, especially using technology, this research project was only conducted with 15-25-year olds. Therefore, it does not tell us about girls in early adolescence where many critical challenges may be taking place.

The study comprises of different components and aims at shedding light on female leadership: how it is represented in society and how it is perceived by girls and young women. Different methods were used to do this and it was not comprehensive and could be considered as disjointed. None of the findings of representative component parts should be considered as being related to each other as they are all stand alone sets of findings and there were no intended overlaps of study respondents from the different components – if there were any, these were purely accidental.

The survey was only able to reach girls and young women who were literate and had access to technology and therefore would not have reached the most marginalised girls and young women. As a result, the findings are not generalisable across whole populations. Additionally, the survey only asked fifteen short, concise and closed questions which did not allow exploration into the nuances of leadership or follow-up on specific issues. However, these nuances emerged in the qualitative data. Finally, as the survey was administered remotely using online, telephone and SMS modalities, it is not possible to verify that all respondents were definitely female and within the 15-25-year-old age range, although there were requirements to confirm gender and age at the start of the survey.

Recruitment methods for the FGDs varied across countries. In all countries except for Japan, and to varying degrees, participants had access to Plan International programming. In Japan, some participants were youth members of Plan International Japan. These participants are, therefore, likely to have an increased awareness of issues around gender equality. Levels of experience and confidence in facilitation and notetaking skills varied considerably between the researchers engaged as data collectors across all five countries and sometimes within countries. Whilst all FGDs were audio recorded, there was some variation in the quality of the transcriptions and the translations into English. Similarly, when using translation, the original or cultural forms of expression used by a research participant can often be lost in the translation process. Lastly, FGDs are inherently limited when it comes to generalisability based on the small number of participants involved.

For the girls' photo project, there were variations in terms of photographs taken, and consequently the comparability of the photographs. In South Sudan in particular, girls and young women appear to have collected newspaper articles featuring women leaders instead of advertisements. As such, the number of photographs that met the requirements for coding were smaller in South Sudan. The quality of transcripts and notes capturing the girls and young women's discussion during a reflection workshop varied in style, quality and detail; the lack of consistency was taken into account during analysis. Finally, in the Dominican Republic, some of the discussions captured in notes did not reflect the advert they were referring to which made it difficult to capture the nuance or specifics of the discussion.

For the key informant interviews, the girls and young women interviewees were purposively selected by the relevant Plan International office in the country and were all are engaged with Plan International through existing youth engagement programmes. As a result, they all had awareness of gender and gender issues, albeit to different degrees, which is reflected in the data and their responses. The sample size target was 12 key informant interviews as this was deemed feasible given the timing restriction for the study, the varied locations and the number at which 'data saturation' is reached (i.e. little more information is gathered by including further subjects). In reality, 13 girls and young women were interviewed.

The translation and interpretation of the key informant interviews necessitated that in Senegal and the Dominican Republic, a translator was present during the interview and they translated simultaneously both the questions and the answers. On several occasions, it became apparent that the translators were summarizing the girls' or young woman's responses rather than translating them word for word. It is therefore important to note that the true meaning and nuance may have been lost in translation.

The focus of the key informant interview tools on movies meant that questions in the tool were centred around gender roles and female underrepresentation in relation to the girls and young women's favourite movie or TV series, and so some responses relate to the movie specifically rather than the media more widely. This has been taken into consideration during analysis and report writing.

Finally, this study acknowledges that there is considerable diversity in the way 'gender' is defined. In developing the methodology and approach to this research, the decision was made that there are significant ethical and safety issues associated with seeking out respondents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other such categories (LGBTIQ+) in the contexts of primary data collection (focus group discussions, key informant interviews and girls' photo project). In the content analysis of top-grossing films of 2018, it was also decided to limit the analysis to the binary definition of 'gender (male or female)', as we felt a separate, more targeted study would be needed to do this type of investigation any justice. However, we have brought in this dimension of individuals with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity as part of the intersectional analysis of portrayals of main characters and characters portrayed as leaders.

## 5. FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the findings per each component of the study. In the next section there will be some analysis and comment on these findings and the implications for the research questions. This section first presents analysis from the survey alongside significant and interesting trends and variations between the five participating countries emerging from the qualitative data (FGDs) in relation to the girls' and young women's views on media and role-models.

What is important to note is that the mixed methods approach undertaken in the research allows for a combination of subjective and objective analysis based on gender and sex. While it is important for Plan International to understand the perceptions of girls and young women, this report also uses content analysis of advertisements and the entertainment media to objectively demonstrate the actual depiction of gender in advertising and film to complement what girls and young women say about the role models that influence them and the media they are exposed to on a daily basis. Therefore the findings below are set out according to the different components of the study, but taken as a whole, all the findings paint a picture of how advertising and film media continue to perpetuate gender inequality and how girls and young women perceive the influence that advertising and film has on them and their perceptions of female leadership.

### 5.1. What girls and young women say about media and role models

As noted above, this report is the second that has emerged from the full study into girls and young women's perceptions of female leadership, including a media analysis of female leadership and its influences. Therefore, some of the data collected for the first report released as part of the study is nonetheless relevant for this study to provide voice to issues on how girls and young women see the importance of role models and the influence the media has on their perceptions of female leadership.

The findings below have emerged from an analysis of the survey in 19 countries and the focus group discussions that were held with girls and young women in five of those 19 countries.

#### 5.1.1. Girls' leadership role models in media

The survey conducted in 19 countries produced the following key findings relevant to this study:

A large majority of girls and young women (82.9%) say they have women leaders they admire as role models in media. Having women leaders as role models in media does not appear to vary by age or marital status but does appear to vary by level of education. Girls with tertiary education (86.9%) are the



most likely to say they have media role models, followed by girls who have completed high school (82.4%), primary school (74.6%). Girls with no schooling are the least likely to say they have media role models (68.4%). A greater percentage of girls with higher social standing (88.8%) than girls of middle (82.3%) or lower (76.9%) social standing say they have media role models who are women leaders.

Having a leadership role model in the media increases the likelihood that a girl or young woman aspires to be a leader in her career or country. Nearly nine-in-ten girls (87.3%) who aspire to be a leader in their career or job have women leaders as media role models, compared to 76.6% who do not aspire to leadership in their career or job. Nine in ten (90.2%) girls who aspire to be a leader in their career or job have a media role model compared to 81.1% of girls who do not have this aspiration.

When girls and young women who participated in the FGDs were asked to name the people who 'influence and inspire them', some named the role models in media. However, it is important to note that media role models were not the most commonly reported category of role models for girls and young women; role models in their family and community were far more frequently reported across all five countries (Dominican Republic, India, Japan, Senegal and South Sudan). In fact, in India and South Sudan there were hardly any references to media role models. However, it appears that, to some extent, media celebrities do influence and inspire girls and young women in the Dominican Republic, Senegal and Japan.

Singers, musicians and pop stars were the media role models most frequently mentioned by respondents. This was particularly prevalent in Japan; for example, one young woman mentioned admiring the Japanese singer, Yuki Kashiwagi, stating: *"I admire her spirit and it's my power source."* A number of female singers were also mentioned by girls and young women in the Dominican Republic and Senegal, including: Isabel Valdez, Rihanna, Jennifer Lopez, Beyoncé, Viviane and Aida Samb.<sup>ii</sup>

TV personalities were the next most commonly reported category of media role models. This category was particularly prevalent in Senegal where the reported role models included Kim Kardashian (an American TV star, entrepreneur and fashion designer) and Marichou (a Senegalese TV star). One young woman in the Dominican Republic also spoke about how Ana Maria Polo, the host of the Telemundo show "Caso Cerrado", inspired her because of the way she helps others.

*"I'd like to be like her. I think she helps everyone who gets on her show to make the right decisions, that's why I admire her."* Young woman, 18-22, Dominican Republic

Female actresses were also mentioned in Japan, Senegal and the Dominican Republic, including Emma Watson, Marilyn Monroe and Hony Estrella, to name a few. YouTubers were mentioned in Japan, and once in India, where a young woman (age 21-24) alludes to the role of a beauty YouTube channel inspiring her to set up her own beauty parlour.

#### **5.1.1.1. The effect of role models on girls and young women**

Although limited, some data from the FGDs offers a glimpse into the effect that role models can have on girls and young women. Girls and young women often reported being inspired by their role model's character traits, achievements or skills. This suggests that role models set a positive example to girls and young women, giving them someone to look up to.

The characteristics that girls and young women reported most admiring in role models were being kind and helping others, treating others equally and with compassion. These characteristics mirror those valued by girls and young women as important in female leaders, as uncovered in first part of this research study, *Taking the Lead*.

*"I really appreciate everything she does for our community. She does everything to advance it. And I would like to be like her when I grow up."* Girl, aged 15-18, Senegal

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<sup>ii</sup> Girls and young women chose to name all role models in this section freely and voluntarily during the FGDs when asked to name people who 'influence and inspire them'.

*"My role model is my mother so she is very important for me. I feel I'm nothing without her support. I want to bring positive changes in my society by getting inspiration from my mother as she is also a social worker."* Young woman, aged 18-20 India

Girls and young women were also inspired by the hard-working and determined nature of their role models, their courage and fighting spirit. For example, a girl from Senegal referred to her female role model as a "fighter", and another from the Dominican Republic expressed admiration for how her mother had raised her children on her own.

*"My mother... she is my role model, she is very hard-working, she raised all her children, us, on her own, working hard, she is still working hard now that we are grown up and she helps us, that's why my mum is my role model."* Young woman, aged 18-22, Dominican Republic

Girls and young women also articulated the way in which their role models helped them to 'grow' and develop. Across all five countries, the emotional support, guidance or encouragement that their role models gave them was described as important, implying the value of having a role model who they knew, either in their family or community, for example.

*"In life one needs a person to give us an example and to tell us "you can do it, do it you can do it" someone to encourage us."* Young woman, aged 15-17, Dominican Republic

*"The teacher in charge of the club was an inspiring person...I felt that I grew as a person through after-class club activities."* Young woman, aged 15-20, Japan

In Senegal, South Sudan and the Dominican Republic, girls and young women also alluded to how their role models help them to build confidence in themselves and their abilities and potential to succeed.

*"My mother; she inspires confidence in one's self, solidarity and love which she instilled in me."* Young woman, aged 17-20, Senegal

The available data also suggests that, to some extent, role models inspired girls and young women's future aspirations and goals. This theme particularly emerged from the FGDs that took place in India.<sup>iii</sup> Ranging from family members who had successful careers, to past and current leaders, girls and young women referred to the importance of role models in inspiring their career ambitions and leadership aspirations.

*"I want to serve my country and want to do work for my country. I'm inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. As even after his death we all admire him."* Girl, aged 15-17, India

This links closely with the inspiration that girls and young women drew from role models who had successfully overcome gender barriers. For example, some girls and young women in Dominican Republic, Senegal, South Sudan and India alluded to how their female role models had gone against the grain in terms of expectations of women. The examples shared by girls and young women included female role models successfully balancing both a career and a family, pursuing a conventionally male career or raising a family on her own.

*"Eva of Pod and Marichou [TV star] because I can see she embodies power by combining social and professional lives and for my future life I do not want to stay at home only to take care of children but ensuring the two. That's why I cited her as a reference."* Young woman, aged 18-22, Senegal

This suggests that role models are important in showing girls that it is possible to be successful in their career and achieve their ambitions, despite society attempting to hold them back. For example, one girl in South Sudan spoke about the positive example that her aunt set to her as a pilot.

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<sup>iii</sup> It is worthwhile noting that India applied a more directed approach in their FGDs than the other four participating countries where girls and young women were first asked to describe future aspirations and then asked who inspired them to have these aspirations.

*"My aunt has aspired me to be a pilot because she is and I have a big hope that I will make it because if others can why not me."* Young woman, aged 21-24, South Sudan

Another theme that emerged, but was less prevalent than those already mentioned, centred around education. In all countries it was mentioned at least once that role models played an important role in girls and young women's education - particularly through encouragement to study and work hard, to stay in school, the importance of education or even providing financial support through paying school fees or other resources such as books and resources.

## 5.2. Film Media Content Analysis

This section of the report presents findings from content analysis of the top-grossing films of 2018. Before discussing the findings, it is important to consider the following key characteristics of these films:

- **Ratings:** One-in-five films (20.4%) were rated PG, meaning they are appropriate for a general audience. Close to half (46.5%) were rated PG-13, meaning they are suitable for people ages 13 and older. One-in-five (18.2%) were rated R, meaning they were suitable for people ages 17 and older. The remaining films in the dataset were not rated.  
**Language:** The vast majority of top-grossing films (80.7%) were English language films. 10.7% of the movies were Hindi language films, while the remainder (8.6%) were Spanish language films.
- **Location of movie production:** The vast majority (68.8%) of the top-grossing films across the globe are produced in the United States, which means that this country has a disproportionate influence in shaping conceptions of women's leadership (and cultural norms more broadly). Bollywood accounted for 10.7% of the top-grossing films in 2018. However it is argued that the dataset is actually a good reflection of global films. Given that we generated our sample somewhat randomly (we selected countries by region), this means our findings are a solid representation of the top-grossing films globally (and not just a function of the fact that a majority were produced in the U.S).

Furthermore, some high-level analysis on the box office and crews for top-grossing films provides further context to the findings. In terms of box office, the top-grossing films of 2018 globally earned an average of \$402 million at the box office. Films with female lead(s) earned less at the global box office than films with male leads (\$253 million compared to \$387 million), while films with male and female co-leads grossed the most (\$764 million).

When analysing the crew of top-grossing films, none of the top-grossing films of 2018 were directed by a woman. One-in-four (24.1%) had at least one female producer, and 10.1% had at least one woman on the writing team. However, contrasting to existing research, for the top-grossing films of 2018, no relationship was found between the presence of women producers or writers and the casting of female leads in the top-grossing films. Similarly, no relationship between the presence of women producers or writers and the percent of female characters in the cast in the top-grossing films.

### 5.2.1. Gender and characters in top-grossing films

Overall, the top-grossing films of 2018 reflect the same gender biases that researchers have documented for decades. Male characters in the top-grossing films outnumber female characters two-to-one (67.1% compared to 32.9%). This varied by location, with the top-grossing films in North America (25.9%) having fewer female speaking characters than the top-grossing films in other regions. When it comes to speaking time, male characters speak twice as often as female characters in the top-grossing films (66.6% compared to 33.3%). In terms of screen time, male characters appear twice as often as female characters (64.2% compared to 35.7%)

Table 4: Percentage of characters by gender

Gender	Overall Percentage (n=1,859)	Films in Africa (n=954)	Films in Europe (n=644)	Films in N. America (n=336)	Films in L. America (n=636)	Films in Asia (n=985)
Male Characters	67.1%	69.3%	70.2%	74.1%	66.7%	69.6%
Female Characters	32.9%	30.7%	29.8%	25.9%	33.3%	30.4%

### 5.2.2. Intersectionality in the top-grossing films

In addressing the rights and empowerment of women and girls, it is important to recognize the complexity of their lives and the range of intersecting barriers they face. Girls and women, like all people, are not defined solely by their age and sex. Each individual can identify with, or be associated with, a range of social categories that overlap and intersect. Unpacking such intersecting identities is key to a more comprehensive understanding of discrimination and exclusion, because a person's experience of exclusion is often greater than the sum of all parts.

Nearly half (46.6%) of the characters in the top-grossing films of 2018 were white/ European descent, the largest ethnic group by a wide margin. The second largest ethnic group was South/Southeast Asian characters (14.0%), followed by Latinx (10.7%) and Black/ African descent (10.6%) characters. Fewer characters were Other Asian (7.4%) or Middle Eastern (1.5%).

By region, the top-grossing films in Asia have more South/Southeast Asian and Other Asian characters than films in other regions. The top-grossing films in North America (62.8%) and Africa (62.1%) have more white characters than films in other regions. Latinx characters are best represented in films in Latin America (18.4%), followed by films in Europe (11.6%) and Asia (7.8%). Few characters in the top films in Africa and North America feature Latinx characters.

Table 5: Percentage of characters by ethnicity, with a regional break down

<b>Ethnicity<sup>iv</sup></b>	<b>Overall Percentage (n=1,859)</b>	<b>Films in Africa (n=954)</b>	<b>Films in Europe (n=644)</b>	<b>Films in N. America (n=336)</b>	<b>Films in L. America (n=636)</b>	<b>Films in Asia (n=985)</b>
South/Southeast Asian	14.0%	1.5%	1.4%	2.7%	0.6%	26.0%
White/ European descent	46.6%	62.1%	54.7%	62.8%	42.3%	39.2%
Latinx	10.7%	2.2%	11.6%	1.2%	18.4%	7.8%
Black/ African descent	10.6%	15.8%	14.8%	19.6%	14.3%	10.5%
Other Asian	7.4%	4.3%	2.3%	2.7%	6.8%	12.6%
Middle Eastern	1.5%	2.8%	--	--	0.2%	0.1%

Most characters in the top-grossing films are in their 30s (25.0%) and 40s (22.2%). Few characters are children (5.3%) or teens (4.4%).

Taking region into account, the top-grossing films in Asia have more characters in their 20s (16.9%) than the top-grossing films in other regions. The top-grossing films in North America (4.8%) and Asia (5.3%) have fewer characters ages 60 and older than the top-grossing films in other regions.

Table 6: Percentage of characters by age, with a regional breakdown

<b>Age<sup>v</sup></b>	<b>Overall Percentage (n=1,859)</b>	<b>Films in Africa (n=954)</b>	<b>Films in Europe (n=644)</b>	<b>Films in N. America (n=336)</b>	<b>Films in L. America (n=636)</b>	<b>Films in Asia (n=985)</b>
Child (0 - 12)	5.3%	4.7%	5.7%	6.5%	6.0%	4.7%
Teen (13 - 19)	4.4%	4.3%	2.0%	2.4%	4.2%	4.3%
20s	15.2%	13.3%	13.2%	12.5%	13.4%	16.9%
30s	25.0%	27.5%	24.8%	29.2%	25.0%	23.2%
40s	22.2%	22.9%	19.4%	24.4%	23.1%	23.9%
50s	10.8%	9.9%	11.6%	8.9%	9.3%	11.7%
60+	6.7%	8.0%	7.5%	4.8%	7.1%	5.3%

<sup>iv</sup> Percentages may not add up to 100% because some characters are another ethnicity or mixed.

<sup>v</sup> Percentages may not add up to 100% because some characters had multiple ages in the film or are robots or animals, so age does not apply.



When it comes to characters with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in the top-grossing films of 2018, very few characters are portrayed as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or queer. Only 1% of characters are portrayed as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or queer in the top-grossing films.

**Table 7: Percentage of characters with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity**

Diverse sexual orientation and gender identity	Overall Percentage (n=1,859)
Lesbian	0.1%
Gay	0.4%
Bi-sexual	0.2%
Queer	0.3%

### 5.2.3. Genres of top-grossing films

Overall, 39.8% of the top-grossing films across the globe in 2018 are action/disaster films. Comedies and social dramas came in a distant second, 15.9% and 15.5%, respectively.

In terms of breakdown by region, more of the top-grossing films in North America (81.3%) are action/disaster than films in other regions. Comedies (18.9%) are more popular in Latin American than other regions. Social dramas (24.6%) are more popular in Asia than other regions. Fantasy films (15.4%) are more popular in Europe than other regions. Finally, adventure films are more popular in Africa (10.3%) and Latin America (10.7%) than other regions.

**Table 8: Percentage of films by genre, with a regional breakdown**

Genre	Overall Percentage (n=1,859)	Films in Africa (n=954)	Films in Europe (n=644)	Films in N. America (n=336)	Films in L. America (n=636)	Films in Asia (n=985)
Action/Disaster	39.8%	51.3%	44.9%	81.3%	56.9%	48.3%
Comedy	15.9%	11.6%	8.9%	8.3%	18.9%	3.8%
Social Drama	15.5%	4.8%	4.7%	--	--	24.6%
Fantasy	7%	3.2%	15.4%	--	5.0%	10.1%
Adventure	6.9%	10.3%	5.9%	--	10.7%	3.0%
Detective/Courtroom Drama	4.0%	--	6.4%	--	--	3.5%
Thriller	3.1%	6.1%	--	--	5.0%	3.2%
Romance	3.0%	5.8%	8.5%	--	--	--
Horror	2.9%	3.2%	--	--	3.5%	--
Coming Of Age Drama	1.9%	3.7%	5.4%	10.4%	--	3.6%

### 5.2.4. Objectification of female characters

Overall, analysis shows that female characters are more likely than male characters to be sexually objectified in the top-grossing films of 2018:

- Female characters are far more likely to be shown in revealing clothing than male characters (26.1% compared to 7.2%).
- Female characters are also more likely to be partially or fully nude than male characters (14.6% compared to 8.7%).
- Female characters are more likely to be visually objectified than male characters (9.3% compared to 4.8%).
- Female characters are far more likely to be verbally objectified than male characters (9.7% compared to 2.0%).

### 5.2.5. Portrayals of workplace leaders

Findings from the media content analysis show that men are more likely to be shown as leaders in the workplace<sup>vi</sup> than women (31.5% compared to 18.8%). However, when female leaders are portrayed, there are some differences in their portrayals compared to male leaders:

- Female leaders are more likely to be portrayed as hard working – defined as having a responsible and diligent work ethic - than male leaders in the workplace (90.9% compared to 75.5%).
- More female leaders are shown as smart than male leaders in the workplace (81.1% compared to 69.0%).
- Female leadership in the workplace is more likely to be shown as effective – defined as producing desired and intended results - than male leadership in the workplace (20.8% compared to 15.3%).
- Female leaders in the workplace are shown as more “likeable” – defined as the degree to which a person is liked by others - than male leaders in the workplace (57.4% compared to 49.3%).
- Linked to this, female leaders are portrayed as more respected – defined as the degree to which a person elicits feelings of deep admiration for their abilities, qualities, or achievements - than male leaders in the workplace (78.7% compared to 70.1%).
- Male and female leaders in the workplace are equally likely to be shown as achieving a healthy work-life balance.
- Finally, 4.9% of female leaders are shown as experiencing sexual harassment compared to 0.7% of male leaders, in their career or job.

### 5.2.6. Portrayals of country leaders

Men and women are equally likely to be shown as leaders in their country<sup>vii</sup> (4.6% and 4.0%, respectively). When comparing the portrayals of female and male country leaders, the following findings emerged:

- Female leaders in their country are more likely to be portrayed as hard working than male leaders (100% compared to 76.2%).
- More female leaders are shown as smart than male leaders in their country (88.9% compared to 76.2%).
- Male leaders in their country are shown as more effective than female leaders (57.1% compared to 44.4%).
- Female leaders in their country are shown as more “likeable” than male leaders in their country (77.8% compared to 61.9%).
- Male leaders in their country are portrayed as more respected than female leaders (76.2% compared to 66.7%).
- Male and female leaders in their country are equally likely to be shown as achieving a healthy work-life balance.
- No male or female leaders in their country are shown as experiencing sexual harassment.

Few characters in film are shown as leaders in their countries, and this does not vary by gender. However, female country leaders are shown as harder working, smarter, and more “likeable” than male leaders. Male country leaders are shown as more effective and more respected than female country leaders. Sexual harassment is not shown as a condition for women’s leadership at a national level.

### 5.2.7. Portrayals of community leaders

Male characters are more likely to be shown as leaders in their community<sup>viii</sup> than female characters (13.1% compared to 7.2%). When comparing female and male community leaders, the following findings emerged:

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<sup>vi</sup> A character is considered to be a workplace leader if others followed his or her behaviour and/or directives in their (non-political) career or job. This does not apply to formal political positions such as Prime Minister or member of Congress (which is captured in the next section).

<sup>vii</sup> A character is considered to be a leader if others followed his or her behaviour and/or directives in a political job, such as Prime Minister or member of congress, or other national leaders.

<sup>viii</sup> A character is considered to be a leader if others followed his or her behaviour and/or directives in a community leadership position (e.g., mayor, city council member) or an informal position (e.g., community organizer).

- Female leaders in their community are more likely to be portrayed as hard working than male leaders (93.8% compared to 83.1%).
- More female leaders in their community are shown as smart than male leaders (87.5% compared to 74.1%).
- Female leaders in their community are shown as more effective than male leaders (81.3% compared to 74.6%).
- Female leaders in their community are shown as more “likeable” than male leaders (93.8% compared to 74.1%).
- Female leaders in their community are portrayed as more respected than male leaders (87.5% compared to 72.9%).
- Male and female leaders in their community are equally likely to be shown as achieving a healthy work-life balance.  
1.7% male community leaders are portrayed as experiencing sexual harassment, while 6.3% of female community leaders experience sexual harassment.

Overall, analysis suggests that male characters are more likely to be shown as community leaders in the top-grossing films, but female characters in these positions are shown in a more positive light. Female community leaders are shown as harder working, smarter, more effective, more “likeable,” and more respected than male community leaders. Sexual harassment is shown as a condition of women’s leadership at the community level.

### 5.2.8. Portrayals of Family Leaders

Women are more likely to be shown as leaders in the family<sup>ix</sup> than men (17.9% compared to 13.1%). When comparing portrayals of male and female leaders:

- Female leaders in their family are more likely to be portrayed as hard working than male leaders (72.5% compared to 64.4%).
- Male and female leaders are equally likely to be shown as smart in their family leadership role.
- Female leaders in their family are shown as more effective than male leaders (67.6% compared to 62.1%).
- Female leaders in their family are shown as more “likeable” than male leaders (85.0% compared to 67.2%).
- Female leaders in their family are equally likely to be respected as male leaders.  
No male leaders in their family are portrayed as experiencing sexual harassment, but 4.7% of female leaders as shown as experiencing this in their family leadership role.

Portrayals of family leadership fit with cultural stereotypes of women as primary caregivers. More female characters are shown as leaders in their family, and they are also shown as harder working, more effective, and more “likeable.”

### 5.2.9. Overall leadership portrayals

Overall, 37.1% of characters in the top-grossing films are portrayed as leaders in their workplace, community, or country. The gender analysis in this section centres on portrayals of the 253 characters who are shown as leaders in at least one of these capacities.

- Male characters are more likely to be shown as leaders than female characters (42.1% compared to 26.9%).
- Overall, more female leaders are shown as hard working than male leaders (83.1% compared to 72.8%).
- More female leaders are shown as intelligent than male leaders (81.4% compared to 61.9%).
- Female leaders are far more likely than male leaders to be shown wearing revealing clothing (30.0% compared to 7.3%).
- Female leaders are nearly twice as likely to be shown as partially nude than male leaders (15.0% compared to 8.4%).

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<sup>ix</sup> A character is considered to be a leader if others followed his or her behaviour and/or directives in their family.

- Characters who are female leaders are more likely to be shown as fully nude at some point in the film than male leaders (1.7% compared to 0.5%).
- Female leaders are more likely to sexually objectified<sup>x</sup> using camera angles than male leaders (15.0% compared to 4.2%).
- Female leaders are more likely to verbally objectified<sup>xi</sup> by other characters than male leaders (13.3% compared to 1.6%).
- Female leaders are more likely to be sexually harassed than male leaders (5.1% compared to 1.1%).<sup>xii</sup>

When it comes to overall leadership portrayals, male characters are more likely to be shown as leaders than female characters. This sends the message that leadership is primarily a male domain. And while female leaders are generally shown in a more positive light than male leaders (with the exception of national leaders), female leaders are far more likely to be sexually objectified. Female leaders are more likely to be shown in revealing clothing, partially or fully nude, and objectified with camera angles and by other characters. Female leaders are also far more likely to be sexually harassed than male leaders, which implies that sexual harassment is a condition of women's leadership.

#### 5.2.10. Intersectional Analysis of Female Leaders

The remainder of this section centres on portrayals of the 60 female characters who are shown as leaders in their job or career, country, or community.

##### 5.2.10.1. Ethnicity

About half (48.3%) of the female leaders in the top-grossing films globally are white/ European descent. Very few female leaders are Latinx (8.3%) or South/Southeast Asian (5.0%). None of the female leaders in the top-grossing films of 2018 are Middle Eastern women.

Table 9: Percentage of female leaders, by ethnicity

Ethnicity of Female Leaders	Percentage
South/Southeast Asian	5.0%
White/ European descent	48.3%
Latinx	8.3%
Black/ African descent	16.7%
Other Asian	13.3%
Middle Eastern	--
Other/ Mixed	8.4%

##### 5.2.10.2. Age

When it comes to age, almost no female leaders in the top-grossing films are children (1.7%) or teen girls (1.7%). About one-in-three female leaders in the top-grossing films is in her 20s (30.0%) or 30s (28.3%). Very few female leaders are in their 50s or older (10.0%).

Table 10: Percentage of female leaders, by age

Age of Female Leaders	Overall Percentage
Child (0 - 12)	1.7%
Teen (13 - 19)	1.7%
20s	30.0%
30s	28.3%
40s	20.0%
50s	8.3%
60+	1.7%

<sup>x</sup> Sexual objectification is the act of treating a person as an instrument of sexual pleasure. Objectification more broadly means treating a person as a commodity or an object without regard to their personality or dignity.

<sup>xi</sup> Verbal sexual objectification can come in many forms, including cat calling and comments a character makes about another character's appearance to a third party.

<sup>xii</sup> Despite the analysis for workplace, community and country showing that there was no male sexual harassment, this finding shows that 1.1% of male leaders are likely to be sexually harassed. The difference in calculation is a function of a) combining two questions (on verbal harassment and sexual harassment), and b) rounding down.

### 5.2.10.3. Diverse sexual orientation and gender identity

Only one of the 60 female leaders in the top-grossing films of 2018 is portrayed as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or queer —a bi-sexual woman.

Table 11: Percentage of female leaders with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity

Diverse sexual orientation and gender identity	Overall Percentage
Lesbian	--
Gay	--
Bi-sexual	1.7%
Queer	--

## 5.3. Key Informant Interviews

This section complements media content analysis by providing insights into entertainment media and its representation of gender and female leaders – including films and TV series – from the perspective of 13 girls and young women from seven countries.

### 5.3.1. The importance of entertainment media

All thirteen girls and young women interviewed for this component of the study mentioned that TV series are the type of entertainment media they are most likely to access. A few of the interviewees mentioned accessing TV series through streaming sites such as Netflix.

Evidence from the interviews suggests that girls and young women engage with entertainment media regularly. The majority of girls and young women reported accessing entertainment media every day, and the remaining interviewees reported that they access it at least twice a week.

All girls and young women, except for one, said that entertainment media was important to them. For example, some girls and young women described how entertainment media helps them to relax after a day at school or work and can lift their mood. Other interviewees referred to the role of entertainment media in providing them with access to information, with one young woman recognising the power that media holds in shaping worldviews.

*“I guess like media does have a lot of power over our thoughts and like, how we see the world. So I think it plays like a significant part of my life.”* Young woman, 18, Canada

All girls and young woman across all seven participating countries said that entertainment media has a significant impact on the lives of young people in their society. They often spoke about how young people find role models in entertainment media, and over a third of the interviewees said young people liked to mimic what these role models do on screen in terms of actions, behaviours or beauty and image, for example.

*“Here in Senegal young people are looking very often at programmes and TV series. It’s a part of their life, they make some role models through these series.”* Young woman, 23, Senegal

*“I think there is a big influence, youngsters can see what’s happening all over the world in terms of beauty standards and how you should behave or not and I think a lot of youngsters see things that they directly try to copy and therefore very influential I think.”* Young woman, 24, Netherlands

### 5.3.2. What girls and young women see in the chosen movies

Girls and young women were asked to name a movie that they know well, like or would consider their favourite movie, to discuss in the interview. In some instances, girls and young women opted instead to name a TV show. It should be noted that not all films/TV series mentioned were necessarily considered the interviewee’s favourite; on a couple of occasions, we expect that girls and young women named films/TV series that made an impression on them.



Table 12: Movies/TV shows chosen by girls and young women for discussion during interviews

Film	Release date(s) <sup>xiii</sup>	Film or TV series
A Walk to Remember	2002	Film
Beauty and the Beast	2017	Film
Brimstone	2016	Film
Fifty Shades of Grey	2015	Film
Harry Potter	2001 - 2011	Films
Her Private Life	2019	TV series
Jane the Virgin	2014-2019	TV series
Maitresse d'un Homme Marié	Unknown	TV series
Summer Forever	2015	Film
Ten Things I Hate About You	1999	Film
The Avengers	2018	Film
The Perks of Being a Wallflower	2012	Film
Vikram Vedha	2017	Film

### 5.3.2.1. Popular genres

Over half of the girls and young women interviewed identified their chosen film or TV show as romance themed. After this, choices were varied with drama slightly ahead of others as the next most commonly identified genre.

### 5.3.2.2. Main characters, gender and social identity

Most of the films chosen by girls and young women included both male and female main characters. Of all the main characters mentioned by girls and young women, just over half were men, which could be attributed in part to the popularity of the romance genre. In fact, the female main character was frequently reported to be depicted as the 'romantic interest' of the man. This was alluded to by over half of the interviewees in the following films: Perks of Being a Wallflower, Her Private Life, Ten Things I Hate About You, Beauty and the Beast, Fifty Shades of Grey, A Walk to Remember and Jane the Virgin.

Girls and young women revealed a bit about other aspects of the main characters' identities. Social standing was mentioned in nine out of the 13 movies/TV shows. However, this was mentioned in basic terms and was not described as central to the plot. Often, social standing was part of a wider romantic storyline – for example, the girl or boy was from a poor background whilst the other was rich.

*“So, it’s basically about a female character who comes from a much poorer family and so she sort of works to build her own life and she falls in love with like reading and a lot of other things while growing up... the Beast... I think grew up pretty privileged.”* Young woman, 18, Canada (Beauty and the Beast)

Some girls and young woman remarked on the lack of ethnic diversity in the main characters, an issue they also observed more broadly in entertainment media, as will be described further in section 5.3.6.

### 5.3.2.3. Gender stereotypes of men and women in the chosen film/TV series

Girls and young women were asked to describe the main characteristics and behaviours of the characters they identified in their chosen movie/TV series. When asked to reflect on whether these characteristics were 'gender stereotypical', there was a mixed response: eight characters were reported to reflect stereotypical behaviours, whereas nine were reported to not reflect stereotypical behaviours.<sup>xiv</sup> Six of the interviewees were conflicted before deciding on their response, and discussed how their characters displayed both gender stereotypical and non-stereotypical behaviours.

<sup>xiii</sup> Source: IMDB, <https://www.imdb.com/>

<sup>xiv</sup> The number of characters described in each interview varied, with most interviewees describing characteristics of two characters, whereas in some instances interviewees only described one character, and others three.

The majority of girls and young women who spoke about male characters said that they did reflect male stereotypes. This included being powerful and more successful in their careers than the female character.

*"When he was investigating the case<sup>xv</sup> he would never, take a step back but he wants his wife to take her step back....That shows that he has superiority over her... It shows masculine behaviour, he shows authority over his wife. She needs to compromise upon her career but he does not."* Young woman, 20, India (Vikram Vedha)

Three interviewees also spoke about male characters asserting authority over others and women, often in an aggressive way.

*"So I think in the beginning, he is quite aggressive...I guess it's sort of the stereotypical portrayal of men in a lot of entertainment that they sort of have power over the people around them especially protagonist and that they sort of have the ability to do whatever they want."* Young woman, 18, Canada (Beauty and the Beast)

On the other hand, most interviewees said that their chosen female characters were a positive representation of women, citing characteristics such as being intelligent, determined, confident and courageous, strong and fierce. They concluded that, for the most part, these female characters acted in ways different to society's expectations of women or the usual representation of women in entertainment media.

*"Hermione is determined, she's intelligent and smart and for me she is not acting like what the society wants the girls or women to act."* Young woman, 22, Senegal (Harry Potter)

*"She's really confident in herself. She gets a little bit angry when she is faced with people who are kind of ignorant or patronising and misogynistic....I think they've done a really good job of making a female character who has her own personality and her own characteristics that don't necessarily fit with how we usually see women."* Girl, 17, Canada (Ten Things I Hate About You)

*"When I think of typical female behaviours, or at least what others think about it, it is very 'girly' and sometimes making the personality of the character a bit more 'stupid'?... But in this movie she has this shorter hair like this pixie cut thing, and she is quite clever and she is witty. So I would say that she has a different personality than a typical female character in movies, at least romantic movies."* Young woman, 25, Netherlands (The Perks of Being A Wallflower)

However, there were still a number of female characters reported to reflect gender stereotypical behaviours or traits, which included being obedient, caring and respectful. Interviewees also reflected on the appearance and image of their female characters, often remarking that they adhered to stereotypically feminine appearances, wearing dresses and makeup.

*"Her main characteristic is that she's really good to other people and she has good behaviour... especially to her boss."* Young woman, 21, Vietnam (Her Private Life)

*"The youngest one, she is really focused, staying on top of things, organised, caring...and the grandmother is also caring I think... It's kind of like a girl's thing, a women's thing to care... So in that sense, it is kind of a stereotypical portrait of women. In appearance, they are really female with dresses and make up stuff like that."* Young woman, 23, Netherlands (Jane the Virgin)

Interestingly, whilst most interviewees said that whilst female characters demonstrated non-gender stereotypical behaviour, their image and external appearance were often conforming to societal constructs of beauty and femininity. This included being "pretty", having a body that "every woman would like to have" and being "slim", as demonstrated in the two quotes below.

*"So the character's name is Black Widow and well, she has, you know, the body structure that supposedly every woman would like to have. She has fair skin, green eyes and she has red hair."*

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<sup>xv</sup> This related to a crime movie in which the main character is an investigator.

*Well, she is definitely not very feminine. Especially when she gets involved in the battle because she is very... fierce and like she fights like she was any other guy, and so that is not typically very feminine.”* Girl, 17, Peru (The Avengers)

*“But one characteristic I think that is like is quite different is probably the fact that she’s brave and like continues to do things that people aren’t a 100% accepting of. And she doesn’t like conform to everyone else’s belief. Yeah, I do think that her appearance is like pretty stereotypical with the brown hair... And like a slim body and all of that.”* Young woman, 18, Canada (Beauty and the Beast)

#### **5.3.2.4. Powerholders in the film**

When asked to reflect on who held ‘the power’ in the movie, the majority of the girls and young women responded that the female characters were powerholders; and if they did not hold power at the beginning of the movie, they will have gained power at the end. Some girls remarked that both men and women had power in their films, and that this was positive and negative depending on the character they had chosen.

*“She shows she doesn’t need a man in her life. She wants to be powerful. She has a good job, her work is not typical in Senegal for woman also, it is work for men because she is in construction of houses.”* Young woman, 23, Senegal

One young woman also linked power to social class and background.

*“It is pretty evident that both characters have an upper social class, they have power and they have money.”* Girl, 17, Peru (The Avengers)

#### **5.3.3. Portrayals of women and girls in entertainment media more broadly**

Whilst most interviewees believed that the overall portrayal of the main female characters in their favourite movie was positive, they did not think this was generally true for entertainment media more broadly. The majority of girls and young women reported negative portrayals of women and girls in movies/TV shows – both those movies/TV shows they discussed and movies/TV shows more generally in their context. They spoke about how women are often portrayed in traditional roles, such as in nurturing or caring positions, taking care of the household.

*“Women and girls in general in the movie are sort of....taking care of the household and looking nice and sort of like...just doing the basic things that people expect a female to do. Like I don’t really see women doing anything outside like the stereotype...”* Young woman, 18, Canada

Interviewees also reported how the storyline of the female lead character was often linked to ‘finding love’.

*“Yes, in all the movies that I have seen that I have watched... when it comes to a girl or female character its always about her love life story or love story or something related to her marriage.”* Young woman, 21, Vietnam

Finally, two interviewees from Uganda also remarked that women were often perceived as weak in movies, needing help from men and boys to achieve a goal or objective.

*“Yeah, they often show women in that kind of perspective. Because all the movies I see the girls need help from the male or the boys. And girls don’t end up achieving, but boys end up achieving what they want in the movies.”* Young woman, 19, Uganda

*“It’s really negative. I think it’s negative cause I believe we girls, we don’t need help from the males as they think...And actually here in Uganda we have a saying that behind every successful man, there is a woman. People just put us behind.”* Young woman, 19, Uganda

#### **5.3.4. Underrepresentation of women in leadership roles**

Most of the girls and young women interviewed recognised that women are underrepresented in entertainment media, across the world and in their context. Firstly, interviewees remarked on the lack of women in leading roles in movies, with the main characters often given to men. When women and girls

are given prominent roles in movies, they are often secondary to the man, lack depth of character or were the romantic interest of the man, according to some interviewees.

*"It's a rarity to find a movie where it's an all-female cast or mostly female cast, usually the women are just additions and for the most part as a romantic interest. They can easily be taken out of the movie and the movie will do just fine."* Girl, 17, Canada

Five interviewees also said that female characters are not shown, or very rarely shown, as leaders or in leadership positions in entertainment media.

*"Yeah! Men are in most leadership posts than women. Let me say, even other movies that I watch, it's very hard to watch a movie saying that the president....is a woman, he's a man! So, I think men are taking charge."* Young woman, 19, Uganda

*"Like they don't show women in leadership, and they don't show women as role models like they just show them as sort of the followers of men, in a sense."* Young woman, 18, Canada

However, according to one interviewee, when women were shown in leadership positions, they were portrayed in a negative light and were not positive role models.

*"I can't think of any movies where women are in leadership positions and that's seen as a positive thing... There is this movie when [female character] is in this leadership position because she is the CEO of an editing firm or a publishing firm but she is seen as uptight and controlling. She is portrayed really in this negative light when she is in a leadership position."* Girl, 17, Canada

Girls and young women were read out a statement about the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Hollywood movies during the interview.<sup>xvi</sup> When asked whether the statistics surprised them, a number of interviewees remarked that it didn't because the lack of women in leadership positions that they saw in movies or TV was also reflected in the world around them. In reality, they see few women in politics or as CEOs of companies, for example.

*"Well, not really, because it's also like what we see in like the real world today as well. Like right now, there... females aren't in the top leadership positions almost like anywhere in the world, and like... even female representation in politics is much lower than men, and I think that sort of translates onto our like entertainment. And I think it creates like this vicious cycle."* Young woman, 18, Canada

In particular, a number of interviewees expressed how entertainment media mirrors the reality of societal and gender norms and expectations of men as capable leaders, discrimination against women in leadership and the denial of leadership opportunities for women and girls.

*"I think also in society, there is still the idea that men are more capable of being leaders and the media touches upon that."* Young woman, 23, Netherlands

*"Actually, that's how it has been. I've been seeing this all the way from my childhood, seeing that women are not given the opportunity to speak."* Young woman, 19, Uganda

*"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

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<sup>xvi</sup> The statement read was as follows: "We know from previous research that women and girls in movies (and media more broadly) are less likely to be shown in leadership roles than men and boys. Research in America showed that, in Hollywood movies in 2018, audiences were almost twice as likely to see male characters as female characters. The same research found that women and girls characters comprised 26% of leaders, while males accounted for 74% of leaders." Source: Women and Hollywood, '2018 Statistics', Women and Hollywood [website], <https://womenandhollywood.com/resources/statistics/2018-statistics/>, accessed 16 July 2019.

*“Yes, it is bit surprising. But then it is the same if you take the point of India, always males are very confident with their things where the females are being put down.”* Young woman, 20, India

According to one interviewee, when women were given leading positions in movies, which went against such gender norms, there was a backlash from the general public that the characters were bad leaders and had negative leadership traits, such as being “controlling”; yet, if the same character was given to a man, the same criticisms would not be given, according to one interviewee.

*“So, in Captain Marvel... it came out recently and its one of the first superhero movies where it's just a female other than 'Wonder Woman' and she really has this quality of character and she's incredible and it's a role model for so many girls. [But] Everyone is talking about how she is controlling, and other people are saying her character is too much but when we have these male characters in those position of power and they are applauded... These are the characters we like to see in men on film but when they are portrayed in women we get uncomfortable.”* Girl, 17, Canada

#### **5.3.5. Objectification of women**

Some women and girls also described the sexual objectification of women that they saw in films – both the films that they named and the entertainment media more broadly. For example, one young woman from Uganda discussed how the female main character in *Fifty Shades of Grey* is reduced to a sexual object and a possession of the male character. She also discussed how the female character was more likely to be shown fully nude, which aligns with analysis of the top-grossing films of 2018 presented in section 5.2.4.

*“They never showed Mr Grey's nakedness and they showed Anna's nakedness. And... actually that shows that women have been observed to be presented as objects of sex.”* Young woman, 22, Uganda (*Fifty Shades of Grey*)

Other girls and young women from Canada and the Netherlands also discussed sexual objectification of women in entertainment media, with scenes where men objectify women, whether through staring or catcalling, more subtly repeated throughout films and TV series and other forms of entertainment media.

*“Like a lot of the times we see like men objectifying women in [TV] shows... like we often see women walking and a man watching her as she walks away, that's a like a very common scene we see in movies and shows... and things like that sort of just adds to the discrimination and this like unequal power balance.”* Young woman, 18, Canada

#### **5.3.6. Lack of diversity on screen**

Young women and girls reported seeing a real lack of diversity on their screens, even when women are included in prominent roles. This particularly centred around ethnicity, with some girls and young women referring to predominantly white casts and leading roles. This was mentioned explicitly by the two girls interviewed in Canada and two girls in the Netherlands.

*“I think when we don't have a lot of representation, then of course 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.”* Girl, 17, Canada

*“Especially because of the lack of differences in race... all three [characters] they are white and it's this coming of age movie. I think, I also read an article on this so I'm a bit biased but a lot of these coming of age movies are about white young people.”* Young woman, 25, Netherlands (*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*)

Other girls and young women referred to the lack of diversity in terms of social standing and background with most characters they saw on screens coming from middle-class or privileged backgrounds. One interviewee also remarked about the lack of diversity in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity.



*"I think people with different backgrounds [they] could do that better... Because we know people come from rich backgrounds, people come from poor backgrounds... So if you pull these people together you can get a real thing."* Young woman, 19, Uganda

*"Almost all the main characters there is one black woman character but I think other than that, all female and male characters are white. They are all typically or conventionally attractive, all quite skinny. They all have their own cars and everything so they are all stereotypical I guess middle class white and straight."* Girl, 17, Canada (Ten Things I Hate About You)

### **5.3.7. The effect of portrayals and underrepresentation on girls and young women**

The majority of the interviewees said the way women and girls were portrayed in their chosen movie or TV show had a positive effect on them, with a few describing the main characters personalities and traits as particularly inspiring for them in their lives. Only two interviewees from Peru and Vietnam described their chosen movies as having a negative effect on them.

*"When I was younger some of my friends called me Hermione... I think that by reading it [Harry Potter] when I was a kid and watching the movie it influenced my personality... First by being ambitious, to say to myself ok that I do not want to be like a woman or like a girl who does what boys want her to do but that people see me as a human."* Young woman, 22, Senegal

*"Actually this movie inspired me a lot. First, the girls came from a different background, they had a strong relationship, that friendship... They could help each other to see that the other one succeed and see that no one is left out."* Young woman, 19, Uganda (Summer Forever)

However, a few interviewees spoke about movies and TV series in general and the negative effect that harmful stereotypes and the underrepresentation of women had on them and their aspirations and ambitions and their behaviour.

*"Entertainment media in general, because of the different TV programmes that I used to watch in the past and the way women and girls are portrayed... I am sort of in the process of overcoming the effect of those stereotypes and focusing more on my own values and my own personal aspirations."* Girl, 17, Peru

A number of girls and young women also reflected on the possible harmful effects on young women more generally in their society. Across participating countries, girls and young women strongly believed that when women and girls cannot see women as leaders on screens or cannot identify positive role models, they become convinced that they are not fit for leadership roles and therefore should not aspire to be leaders. They can lose confidence and ambition.

*"I think it might have negative impact on young women, because they may think they are not really a good fit for leadership roles, for example. And they may think that they don't need to try hard in their career and just live a normal life and just stay at home and take care of their children. They don't need to have like big ambition or something like that."* Young woman, 21, Vietnam

*"Because they don't typically see women in those positions and so they can't even imagine themselves to be in such a position."* Young woman, 18, Canada

*"Definitely there's an impact because indirectly the movies are telling women that they are not able to take leadership roles in the same way that men can."* Girl, 17, Peru

*"When we see women playing second role, young women can think its normal life to play a second role and lose ambition."* Young woman, 23, Senegal

*"Of course, it hurts me 'cause... if I can act as a leader, I won't stand out to do it 'cause I know it is just for men, not for women. So that affects me. I'll have to sit back and watch men doing it, yet I can also do it."* Young woman, 22, Uganda

Two young women also spoke about how this effect is amplified for women from ethnic minority groups. According to these interviewees, in the rare cases that women are shown in leadership positions, it is often white women, leaving girls and young women from ethnic minority groups without leadership role models – further undermining their ambitions or confidence to lead.

*“I guess for women of colour that’s even more difficult to find a good example, so I think especially for women of colour and for girls of colour I think that’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 if you can make it to the top.”* Young woman, 23, Netherlands

*“I’ve yet to see someone that looks like me on screen. So I think that is a harmful narrative, that young girls are growing up never seeing themselves on TV and I kind of wonder am I even allowed or am I even seen as someone who is attractive not only in terms of looks but in terms of personality... It could be a harmful narrative that could shape how a girl’s character grows at the time.”* Girl, 17, Canada

Some interviewees also spoke about the role that movies have in affecting what girls and boys perceive as normal gender roles which, after repeatedly being exposed to such messages over time, will ultimately their behaviour and confidence.

*“Cause, after seeing, like, girls are seen in cooking, are seen in farming.... And the men are seen in big pictures. It means that even a young girl will grow up saying that actually... I’m to be a cleaner, I’m to be in a kitchen!”* Young woman, 19, Uganda

*“They [media] influence a lot on how our society functions and after they can influence boys and girls. First for the young women and girls and for all the women it kind of makes them having a lack of confidence and also thinking that all the stereotypes they are having in their life are true and unconsciously they will accept [them].”* Young woman, 22, Senegal

*“But in the end if through all the years you watch a lot of movies and shows about women who start a family and who are looking for a man and want to marry. And all the guys are watching movies where the guy has to be a hero and has to save others, yes, in the end I think that has an effect on people... So that you think in these stereotypical ideas about how a man should be and how a woman should be. And I think that also has an effect, in the end on behavior.”* Young woman, 25, Netherlands

One interviewee also discussed how media portrayals of women can make women and girls believe that their value lies mostly in their appearance and societal constructs of beauty, often exacerbated by certain ‘influencers’.

*“Little girls that are fourteen or fifteen maybe that are receiving that message, it is really something that is shocking I think... If that’s the portrait that young girls are getting nowadays, you have to be perfect, do sport, to look good.”* Young woman, 23, Netherlands

One interviewee from India was also concerned harmful impacts of portrayals when women are under-valued or abused on screen. According to this young woman, when this behaviour is observed by young people in society, they think that it is acceptable, fostering a negative environment for the protection of women and girls in which violence is normalized.

*“When it comes to topics like the protection of the women its [entertainment media] is impacting in a negative way the youth are being depicted to easily tease the girls, to make fun of them.”* Young woman, 20, India

#### **5.3.8. The change girls and young women want to see**

Girls and young women interviewed were quick to express the changes they wanted to see in movies/TV shows. They recognised the power of media and had a number of recommendations.

*“As I said at the beginning, we often underestimate the impact that movie and films and shows have on our culture as a whole. I think that if we tap into that, it’s a wonderful resource where we*

*can really portray these different characters because they exist. They do exist and to portray them on TV and the big screen is really allowing people to see themselves and to accept who they are and to not be afraid of being their true self and not having to hide themselves.”* Girl, 17, Canada

*“These little changes I think are going to make a big change in the end and its up to us to kind of unleash and make those changes a reality.”* Girl, 17, Canada

Firstly, interviewees reported wanting to see women as lead roles in movies/TV series. Five interviewees said that they wanted to see more female actresses taking leading roles on screen, and roles which did not centre around the storyline of a man.

*“When we give the roles, we can show woman and give them the first role, not every time the second role.”* Young woman, 23, Senegal

*“Women should be also be given the right to act that bigger part in the movie.”* Young woman, 19, Uganda

*“So, I definitely think that there should be more female leads in movies rather than them acting as sort of like the backbone for the male characters.”* Young woman, 18, Canada

But it is not enough for more women to be in a leading role or a leading character. A number of interviewees also wanted them to be shown as leaders and to hold power.

*“I want like more shows focused on women and like how women are doing things to help society and help the people around them, because most shows do focus on men in like many different leadership positions or non-leadership positions, how they sort of like make their way and like become successful.”* Young woman, 18, Canada

*“We could switch up these stereotypes of the leadership role and how that should look and I think indeed it’s quite a good example in the movie that I described in how women can stand up for themselves and take the lead and that could be very inspirational I think for young women to see.”* Young woman, 24, Netherlands

*“When we do movies, we can try to show their power, not every time here, looking like flowers in the movies.”* Young woman, 23, Senegal

The first quote, from an interviewee from Canada, describes a model of leadership that aligns with Plan International’s definitions of leadership from the new research *Taking the Lead*. This young woman suggests that she wants to see movies which show leaders helping and developing her society and others around them, rather than more masculine leadership traits.

Interviewees also wanted to see more diversity in the entertainment media in terms of ethnicity and social background, both in terms of more diversity in the cast but also behind the scenes, recognizing that positive representation of women starts with the film crews and staff.

*“I would definitely go for more of a diverse cast and really tapping in more into the character’s backgrounds and giving the women characters more screen time where its not centred around the guys and romantic involvement.”* Girl, 17, Canada

*“I think there is a lot of work for people who are directing films but basically it starts there, it starts at the writing tables and at the media companies... Make sure that there is a diverse group of people that you get your ideas from. I think that helps because you get different perspectives, that’s basically what I think needs to change but that is of course the underlying power structure and that is not easy to do.”* Young woman, 23, Netherlands

Girls and young women also said that they wanted movies to show the female character’s storyline in more depth. This centred around women having more independence from men in movies and not having to rely on men for help.

*“Make sure that its more about strong women and independent women and that they can make it on their own.” Young woman, 23, Netherlands*

*“If I can do then I think the film directors, they should also focus on the careers of the girls, they should also focus not only about their love story, their families and their marriage story, but also their dream, their ambition and their career too.” Young woman, 21, Vietnam*

*“I recently watched ‘Ladybird’ directed by Greta Gerwig, such a beautiful film and I really hope to just continue to keep watching films like that of girlhood or womanhood, where its not just all about male characters or male fantasies.” Girl, 17, Canada*

A couple of interviewees also mentioned how they would differently portray men and masculinity; they referred to how they would include men and boys in characters who are able to explore their emotions and don’t necessarily fit into the stereotype of an ‘action hero’.

*“I think for the most part they [men] are portrayed as these kinds of the strong guys that don’t have any flaws in a sense that they are kind of seen as perfect as well. They do have to fit into this harmful negative as well, this toxic masculinity... You don’t really have a lot of movies about guys where there is a chance to explore their emotions or being seen in ways that aren’t this huge action guy or something like that.” Girl, 17, Canada*

*“About the male, I think they should be portrayed in a more emotional way, like usually the film is not focused about their emotion. So, I think we should let them to express more emotion.” Young woman, 21, Vietnam*

#### 5.4. Girls’ Photo Project

Up to this point, this report has explored visual entertainment media and the messages it conveys with regards to gender and female leadership. This section presents findings on advertising media that surrounds girls and young women in their communities in terms of the media messages that they are exposed to gender norms, expectations and stereotypes.

As alluded to by one young woman from Japan in the quote below, advertisements have a role in telling girls and young women what society expects from them.

*“Advertisements reflect society. This means that society is strange, rather than advertisements are strange. Advertisements tell us what today’s society expects from us. Advertisements are the mirrors of society because those that do not reflect reality are meaningless. Advertisements tell us what society expects from women.” Young woman, Japan*

##### 5.4.1. Using images of women and girls to ‘sell’ products

Findings from the girls’ photo project revealed that women were more likely than men to be ‘major characters’<sup>xvii</sup> in the adverts identified by participants (see table 13), though this may have been a result of the selection method.

Table 13: Character prominence by gender

Character Prominence	Major Characters	Minor Characters	Background Characters	(n)
Men	72.0%	12.0%	16.0%	50
Women	87.7%	8.4%	3.9%	155

However, young women’s reflections on the process also highlighted how much more likely women were to be featured in adverts than men.

<sup>xvii</sup> Major character simply means that they were prominent in the advert and does not relate to portrayals of leadership or gender norms (this will be explored further later in this section).

*"Most ads had women and not men [...] Because women stand out more than men."* Young woman, Dominican Republic

*"I have learned that most product are advertised using girl's pictures."* Young woman, South Sudan

Young women in all five countries were quick to assess that, overall, the adverts they saw demonstrated that the bodies of women and girls were being used to sell products, even where the image of a woman bore no relation to the product being sold.

*"I have learned that girls are used in adverts for their physical appearance."* Young woman, South Sudan



*"The girl is ready to put forward her beauty not her personality and her human qualities."* Young woman, Senegal

*"They use us like sexual merchandise."* Young woman, Dominican Republic

*"It had a strong influence on me, in that she is promoting her product, she was promoting her own body."* Young woman, Dominican Republic

*"Girls are used as commodity or brand in advertisements."* Young woman, India

**Table 14: Girls reflections on specific photographs**

Photo of advert	Country	Girls' and young women's reflections
	Senegal	<i>"It's a phone advertisement but there's a woman next to you as if you think of it as an object of attraction."</i>
	India	<i>"This is a shop of plastic goods and cosmetic products but attractive female model with modern dress and heavy jewellery is shown which is not at all related to the products advertised [...] Model is wearing off shoulder dress which is totally mismatched and unrelated to the product advertised."</i>

The quantitative analysis also uncovered high levels of character sexualisation and nudity of females (see table 15). One-in-five women in these ads are sexualized, while none of the men are sexualized. Women



are three times more likely than men to be shown with partial nudity (e.g., shirtless, with cleavage) in these ads.

**Table 15: Character sexualisation and nudity**

Gender	Character sexualisation (as % of gender)	Character nudity (as % of gender)
Male (n=50)	0.0%	4.0%
Female (n=155)	18.1%	13.5%

### 5.4.2. Ideals of beauty

When asked by a facilitator ‘what do the advertising media tell us?’, one young woman responded: *“That we have to be pretty. And what we should look like.”* Across all five participating countries, young women echoed this sentiment and identified a number of features of the ‘ideal woman’ as portrayed in the adverts they took photographs of, which was unrealistic and does not reflect diversity or reality. These were remarkably similar across each of the countries:

#### 5.4.2.1. Slim or thin

Girls and young women in the Dominican Republic and Japan identified how the images of women in adverts portrayed women as slim or thin.

*“Facilitator: What image does it convey to us?”*

*Participant: Skinny with straight hair.*

*Participant: But if she had been chubby, it would have been much better.*

*Participant: Most of the women in these images are thin.”*

Dominican Republic

*“This ad can be associated with a size of mannequins. In other countries, most mannequins have a standard and healthy figure. However, the mannequins in Japan seem to get slimmer and slimmed. It shows that Japanese society desire slim women. Japanese society expects women to stay slim and this ad depicts such notion.”* Young woman, Japan

#### 5.4.2.2. Light skinned

Across all five countries – Dominican Republic, Japan, South Sudan, Senegal and India –girls who participated in the photo project discussed how adverts depicted women as having light skin.

*“Facilitator: She has a perfect body, a perfect body according to whom?”*

*Participant: According to them.*

*Participant: You have to be light-skinned, thin, with long hair.”*

Dominican Republic

*“Fairness is main concern as in our society people think fair complexion is superior to black or dark complexion. Through this advertisement, media wants to show that fairness is important.”* Young woman, India

*“Media wants to show that girls should always be beautiful and fair. The advertisement shows that glorious and fair skin leads to happiness.”* Young woman, India

*“A woman with fair skin and long black hair is men’s ideal.”* Young woman, Japan

#### 5.4.2.3. Other beauty ideals

Girls and young touched also mentioned other beauty ideals that are emphasised in the adverts. This included:

- Being hairless: *“Being hairy is related to masculinity whereas hairless and smooth skin is related to femininity, and female model is used in the advertisement showing her legs.”* Young woman, India
- Being youthful: *“The ad [for contact lenses] tries to overlap images of childishness, cuteness and immaturity with a young woman.”* Young woman, Japan

- Chastity: when describing the advert in image 1 where a young woman is featured in an advert for abstinence, one young woman from Senegal remarked that the advert was saying “as if men should not abstain.”

Image 1: Advert on abstinence in Senegal



#### 5.4.3. Men as more intelligent

When it comes to character traits, men are three times as likely to be shown as smart than women in these ads, as shown in table 16.

Table 16: Character traits

Character Shown as Smart	Percentage	(n)
Male	18.0%	50
Female	5.2%	155

The young women and girls also reflected on the fact that, despite there being no dialogue in the advertisements, men are still portrayed men as more intelligent than women.

*“A mermaid represents the beauty of the woman, to attract customers he uses the image of the woman without reference to his intelligence.”* Young woman, Senegal

*“According to what I can see, the woman and the man are united. And they... as they call the people back there tall, the women down there look a bit gossipy.”* Young woman, Dominican Republic

#### 5.4.4. Women undertaking domestic or family tasks as opposed to working

Quantitative analysis shows that advertisements photographed by girls and young women appear to reinforce gender stereotypes when it comes to character location. Women are more likely to be shown in the kitchen, while men are more likely to be shown in an office or outdoor setting.

Table 17: Location of characters shown to be working

Character Location	Kitchen	Office	Outdoors	(n)
Male	0.0%	6.0%	22.0%	50
Female	4.5%	1.9%	15.6%	155

Representations in these ads also reinforce stereotypes about work. As shown in Table 18, men are three times more likely to be shown working than women.


Table 18: Characters shown working

Character Shown Working	Percentage	(n)
Male	30.0%	50
Female	10.3%	155

This is echoed by qualitative analysis of girls and young women's perceptions of messages portrayed in advertisements. A number of girls and young women across the Dominican Republic, Senegal and India remarked on how women were often shown in relation to domestic tasks or products, such as washing machines, or in traditional roles, such as in the household or caring for others.

*"A woman next to household appliances what can be interpreted by the fact that they want to show that the place of the woman is at home, take care of household chores."* Young woman, Senegal

**Table 19: Advertisements depicting gender roles**

Photo of advert	Country	Girls' reflections
	Dominican Republic	<p>Facilitator: <i>Are we looking after her by giving her a fridge and a stove? What does this image tell you about respecting your mother?</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>That we should buy electro-domestic products for our mums. That's what it means.</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>I have to give her a present; it doesn't matter how big or small, so that she feels happy and pleased with what I am going to give her.</i></p> <p>Facilitator: <i>Why not a washing machine?</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>It's for everyone in the house to use; it has to be for her, that we give it to her</i></p> <p>Facilitator: <i>Why don't we give our father a washing machine?</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>Because women do those domestic tasks.</i></p>

However, where advertisements did show women as working, participants in Japan perceived them to be sexist.

*"The term 'working mothers' is disturbing. There is no such term as 'working fathers', so working mothers makes women who work look special."* Young woman, Japan

This theme was echoed by participants in the Dominican Republic, who reported wanting more adverts showing men in supportive roles and taking care of the family, in order to demonstrate to young women that taking care of the family is not the sole responsibility of women.

*"Males should also be used as a supportive model to show equality in family."* Young woman, Dominican Republic

Another advert that was perceived to be sexist was an advert selling beer in Senegal. According to the young women and girls who participated in the girls' photo project, the advert confined a woman to the place of a waitress, excluding her as a consumer.

*"Beer is a man's drink, the woman is confined to the place of a waitress and not a consumer."* Young woman, Senegal

#### **5.4.5. Portrayals of leadership**

Quantitative analysis shows that men are significantly more likely to be shown as leaders than women in the adverts identified. When it comes to types of leadership, five women were shown as leaders in their

careers, four were shown as leaders in their country, and no women were shown as leaders in their community or family.

**Table 20: characters depicted as leaders**

Character Is a Leader	Percentage	(n)
Male	6.0%	50
Female	3.9%	155


Similarly, qualitative data also suggests that women are less likely to be shown as leaders in advertisements than men. Girls and young women emphasised how adverts can reinforce the notion that leadership is reserved for men.

*“Males are always dominating in business as names of only males are displayed on boards.”* Young woman, India

*“Some advertisements show women taking leadership, but most of them show women being a good wife and mother and being passive.”* Young woman, Japan

*“They have not considered women in a top job position with a bank.”* Young woman, South Sudan

**Table 21: Advert in Senegal portraying male power**

Photo of advert	Country	Girls' reflections
	Senegal	<i>“When one speaks about power one thinks of the man. Power = man.”</i>

#### 5.4.6. The effect of media messages on girls and young women

Qualitative analysis of the girls' and young women's reflections across five countries provides an insight into the potential effect that advertisements and the way in which they depict gender roles and leadership affects girls and young women.

Firstly, advertising media can create unrealistic expectations on what beauty is, and influence what girls and young women think they should look like in order to be perceived as beautiful than others. This links to low self-esteem and low levels of confidence. This emerged during discussions in Japan and the Dominican Republic.

*“Participant: I would like my body to look like that.”*

*Facilitator: Ah, yes? Do you think it looks good?*

*Participant: Yes, it looks good and I wish my body was like that.”*

Dominican Republic

*“We'd like to be like her, to look like her if we wore those clothes. That's why we have to keep our bodies in good shape.”* Young woman, Dominican Republic

*“Japanese women tend to assimilate with others and act in a group, so they try to fit themselves into the image made by advertisements.”* Young woman, Japan

Participants in South Sudan described how advertising media can make women doubt their abilities to lead and therefore dissuading them from pursuing leadership opportunities.

*“Women can also take top leadership position such as the general secretary of the bank, though most of them doubt themselves that they can do it.”* Young woman, South Sudan

Complementing this, some girls and young women in the Dominican Republic commented on how when advertisements show women in leadership positions, it encourages and inspires them, making them believe that women have the potential to be leaders.

*“Facilitator: Look at this one, what do you feel about this image?”*

*Participant: It means women are superpowerful....*

*Participant: I identify with it.*

*Facilitator: In this case do you feel she could be a leader?*

*Participant: Yes.”*

Dominican Republic

*“It’s positive because it makes you feel strength. Sometimes I feel like...wow, because I’d like to be like that.”* Young woman, Dominican Republic

Finally, some girls and young women allude to the positive effect that advertisements have when they portray women as equal to men. This also implies that local advertising media in Japan more often includes gender stereotypes than global media.

*“It depends on the kind of media they check. People who like overseas media become more conscious of gender equality and feel that domestic media is strange. If they only check domestic media, they are often influenced by the idea that a woman should be a good wife and mother.”*

Young woman, Japan

Table 22: Advert in India

Photograph of advertisement	Country	Girls’ and young women’s reflections
	India	<p>Participant: <i>It is an advertisement where both men and women are shown</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>It shows women having due equality as they deserve</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>The women in the advertisement look confident as they walk side by side with men</i></p> <p>Participant: <i>The clothes, the females are wearing, are defying the dress codes imposed on women generally in our country (like wearing a saree, salwar kameez, etc.)</i></p>

## 6. ANALYTICAL THEMES

This section seeks to highlight some of the more salient points that emerge from the four component parts of this study, recognising that the ways in which data has been gathered and analysed and the type of media discussed all vary to some extent and were collected in different stages and with different study respondents. Nonetheless some key themes have emerged which are common to one or more of the constituent parts of the study



## **6.1. The scale of media influence on girls and young women**

The scale of media influence on society is well-researched and well-known: media wields a significant influence on how we think and define our place in society.<sup>40</sup> Entertainment media is powerful, with 54 of the 56 top-grossing films of 2018 that were analysed in this study earning a staggering \$21,691,475,835 at the box office last year. It is highly westernized and U.S. centric; most of the top-grossing films of 2018 were produced in the United States. Yet these movies and the messages they convey have a global reach: this study sought to analyse the top 10 movies in 19 countries and what was found was that these were almost always the same, with some exceptions – there was huge overlap which demonstrates the universality of many of the movies. In addition, a number of girls and young women who were interviewed – from Uganda to Peru to the Netherlands – named their favourite films as ones which were produced in the United States. This study therefore lends some credence to the argument that there is a disproportionate amount of influence emerging from the US film industry which shapes girls' and young women's perceptions of leadership in countries from across the globe and from all walks of life. However, as mentioned previously, because of the random sample of locations, it appears that US films have that disproportionate influence globally.

The voices of the girls and young women who participated in this research echo this evidence on the influence of media. Girls and young women who were interviewed emphasized the importance of entertainment media to them and other young people in their societies, reporting that they generally engage with it – whether through watching a movie or a TV series – on a daily basis. They also said that children and young people look up to and are inspired by the role models they identify in characters on their screens, seeking to mimic their actions, behaviours and appearance. Yet the influence of media discussed in this study does not only lie with the films or TV series that young people watch. Media messages surround girls and young women as they go about their everyday lives through advertisements which, according to one young woman who participated in the girls' photo project, tells them what society expects of them. Overall, media – both advertising media and entertainment media – were reported to have an influence on girls' and young women's perceptions of the world around them, and could shape the way in which they think, act, and perceive and value themselves, and how they see female leadership.

## **6.2. Gender discrimination and gender stereotypes still dominate**

The findings from this study present no major surprises. They reassert what research has long uncovered: gender bias pervades the media, in advertising and on screen. Despite the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 calling for the media sector to include more women,<sup>41</sup> analysis of the film crews for 2018's top-grossing films create a disheartening picture. Of all the top-grossing films of 2018 identified, none were directed by a woman. Only one-in-four (24.1%) of the top-grossing films had at least one female producer, and only one-in-ten (10.1%) had at least one woman on the writing team. It is, therefore, possibly not surprising that the top-grossing films of 2018 significantly under-represented women: men dominated character distribution, outnumbering women two to one. They also dominated speaking time and screen time, with audiences twice as likely to see men appear and talk on their screens.

Whilst a small qualitative sample, findings from interviews with girls and young women shed light on the implications of media portrayals of women and female leadership. What girls and young women reported seeing when women were shown on screen is concerning: they spoke about how female characters often display stereotypical behaviour, including being 'weak' or in 'need of help' from men to achieve their goals, less intelligent and capable than them. In fact, according to some young women and girls, women's roles in visual entertainment media are often defined in relation to a man; girls and young women reported that women are portrayed as a male character's romantic interest or are supporting characters whose objective is to help a man. These portrayals of women contrast sharply with portrayals of men, who are often shown as shown as superior, powerful, strong and assertive, often in successful careers. Girls and young women who participated in the photo project also uncovered stereotypical depictions of women in advertising media, with women frequently shown to be undertaking domestic tasks or caring for others, whilst men were more likely to be shown at work.

It is interesting to note, however, that despite such frequently reported stereotypes, many girls and young women who were interviewed considered that the main female characters in a movie or TV series that they liked, or considered their favourite, were a positive representation of women. They described how these female characters went against the grain and defied the gender stereotypes they often see in entertainment media. A number of female leads in these movies or TV series were described as

courageous, ambitious, intelligent, strong and fierce. It is encouraging that girls and young women can tell the difference between characters which are positive role-models and those who perpetuate gender stereotypes. Though it must be mentioned that these were the girls and young women who participated in the key informant interviews and therefore had already had exposure to gender equality programming with Plan International.

Interviewees still remarked, however, that even if these female characters did not display gender stereotypical behaviour, they almost always abided by society's constructs of beauty. Girls and young women frequently said that these female characters still wore 'girly' clothes, dresses and makeup, and were nearly always 'slim' and 'beautiful'. This is a pattern also emerging in the advertising media. In their analysis of advertisements, girls and young women who participated in the photo project emphasised how advertisements were mostly placing primary importance on women's appearance, telling them that 'they have to be pretty'. In this way, entertainment media appears to value a woman's beauty over her intelligence or leadership, with a narrow and unrealistic expectations of appearance and beauty.

### **6.3. Media portrayals of female leadership send mixed messages**

Findings from this research support previous research that women are missing from media portrayals of leadership.<sup>42</sup> In the top-grossing films of 2018, men are more likely to be shown as a leader in the workplace, community or country. In this way, these top-grossing films reinforce an already prevalent notion that leadership is a man's domain. Girls and young women who were interviewed support these findings. They thought that women were, generally, more likely to be shown in traditional roles than to be shown as leaders in the films they discussed. This pattern holds true for advertising media across five countries, with men being far more likely to be depicted as leaders in advertisements. Most of the interviewees weren't surprised by the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles; they see this underrepresentation and discrimination against women in leadership in reality, with their societies upholding gender norms around leadership as a male domain and stereotypes of women as ineffective leaders.

However, this research has uncovered some (albeit not extensive) evidence which suggests some progress. When women were shown in leadership positions in their career or community in the top-grossing films of 2018, they were often shown in a positive light: they were more likely to be shown as hard-working, intelligent, effective, likeable and respected than male leaders. However, this was not the case when leaders were depicted at a national level or in political leadership positions; male leaders at the national level were shown on entertainment media to be more effective and more respected than women, reinforcing the notion that men are more fit and capable to take up roles in politics and political leadership than women.

What's more, girls' and young women's opinions did not mirror this progress when women were shown as leaders, whether in their community, workplace or country. Although the sample size of the thirteen girls and young women interviewed is small, some girls and young women reported that when women were shown in leadership positions, they were shown as bad or ineffective leaders.

Whilst some progress might be seen in terms of women in leadership on screens, there is shockingly little diversity or inclusivity. Of 60 female characters shown as leaders in their job or career, country or community in the top-grossing films of 2018, half were white. Female leaders from other ethnicities were significantly underrepresented, with no middle eastern women depicted. And only one female leader with a diverse sexual orientation and gender identity was shown – a bi-sexual woman. This lack of diversity on screens left an impression on girls and young women themselves: when discussing this lack of diversity with girls and young women, they expressed concern that women and girls from minority groups are unable to see their lives or their realities reflected on screens and are not able to identify positive role models.

### **6.4. Sexual objectification in 2019...**

The content analysis of the movies and the photos showed that sexual objectification of women is still rife. This is deeply troubling for many reasons. The number of women's marches over the last few years, the #metoo movement and the specific SDG on gender equality have all marked a growing consciousness of how (at long last) we need to move on from gender stereotypes and finally assign the equal rights that girls and women have been due for many years in terms of multiple international UN Conventions.

While one would expect equal representation of women in the media, a realist approach would probably acknowledge this is not yet attainable. However, the one thing that is attainable is stopping portraying women as 'sex objects' for the gratification of men or other powerful women.

Even if women in leadership are shown in a positive light, GDI's analysis shows that female leaders are more likely than male leaders to be sexually objectified or sexually harassed in the top-grossing films of 2018. This pattern of sexual objectification of women in leadership roles mirrors the wider and repeated sexual objectification of women in entertainment media highlighted by some girls and young women who were interviewed for this study. Similarly, advertising media has high levels of sexualization or nudity of female characters. Despite progress in leadership portrayals, the fact that women are far more likely to be sexually objectified or harassed than men on screens implies that this is a precondition to female leadership, and that leadership is a hostile environment for a woman. This echoes findings from *Taking the Lead*, where 92.6% of girls and young women who participated in the survey thought that female leaders face unwanted physical contact. Taken together, the sexual objectification and harassment of female leaders shown on screen and on adverts could act as a deterrent to women and girls for pursuing leadership positions.

### **6.5. Media role models and media impact**

A survey with around 10,000 girls and young women as part of the first phase of this research study told us that a large majority of girls and young women (82.9%) from all walks of life and across the globe have women leaders they admire as role models in the media. This survey also told us that having leadership role model in the media significantly increases the likelihood that a girl or young woman aspires to be a leader in her career or country. We also know from our previous research, *Taking the Lead*, having a role model can have a positive effect; it can inspire girls and young women, help them to grow and believe in themselves.

Girls and young women who we spoke to for this research also told us what they thought the consequences were when girls and young women could not find positive role models in media. According to some interviewees, when women are absent from depictions of leadership on screen, or when ethnic minorities or LGBTIQ+ women are not visible as leaders, girls' and young women's ambitions and aspirations for leadership are inhibited: being unable to find positive female role models on screens, young women and girls who consume media messages are led to believe that they are not fit for leadership positions. Some interviewees thought that this would be amplified for girls and young women from minority groups who are far less likely to see ethnic minority or LGBTIQ+ women portrayed as leaders. When they see female characters frequently portrayed as the romantic interest with emphasis placed on their appearance, girls and young women can be led to think that they should prioritise their appearance and focus on finding 'love', rather than pursuing leadership roles.

Yet, it was not all doom and gloom. Despite being constantly surrounded by restricting media messages about what society expects of them, girls and young women did report seeing some positive role models on their screens and in advertising. When girls and young women spoke about a film or TV series that they liked or identified as their favourite, they often reported female characters who were strong and fierce, courageous and smart and defied gender stereotypes. And some advertisements do show women in positive a positive light, equal to men and not in stereotypical roles.

### **6.6. Perception versus reality**

The research deliberately sought to elicit the voices, thoughts and perceptions of girls and young women about female leadership portrayed in the media, gender and media, and media role models. But the research also deliberately sought a purely quantitative analysis of the content of media portrayals of gender and female leadership. What emerged was girls and young women expressing a desire to be treated equally, portrayed equally and to be leaders in all aspects on their lives – family, community, country and career. So too, they look for positive role models for support in doing so and expect to find these in the media. What actually emerged from the objective content analysis of media is a picture of male dominated media, men holding the power and men still being portrayed as leaders. Most of the time.

Some positive findings can be found in the way in which female leaders are shown as hard-working and effective; the fact that girls and young women do identify role models they can identify with and the fact that one of the biggest grossing films of 2018 featured three strong women leaders. However, this is all

tempered by the fact that this appears to be the exception rather than the norm. The norm is still male dominated.

### **6.7. The change girls and young women want to see**

The thirteen girls and young women that were interviewed as part of this research expressed the importance of making changes to the entertainment media landscape. In particular, they would change the gender stereotypical way in which women and girls are often portrayed in films and TV series. But this was not enough; they wanted more female characters on their screens to be shown in leadership positions and wielding power. They were disheartened by seeing women only as the romantic interest of a man. Instead, they wanted to see these female characters' own storyline explored in more depth, independent of the male characters. Young women and girls also called for greater diversity of character and situation, referring to 'too many straight, white, rich people' on their screens. Others also wanted more diversity behind the scenes in the film production and writing teams.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1. Calls to action**

Grounded in the findings of this study and the voices of girls and young women, three overarching recommendations are made:

1. 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.
2. Stop the sexualization and the objectification of women and girls on screen and ensure that content doesn't discriminate or reinforce negative stereotypes and behaviour.
3. 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.

#### **National governments must:**

- Partner with media bodies and civil society to run public campaigns that promote and increase the number of women leaders and the visibility of women's leadership in the media industries, sending the clear message that women and girls belong in all spaces and places of power.
- Reaffirm and accelerate action on existing commitments pertaining to girls and women, the media and equal representation as outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. There is still much more work to be done: ending the use of degrading and inferior portrayals of women and girls; promoting gender equality and women's leadership, and increasing the participation of women in decision-making spaces within media industries.
- Introduce, monitor and enforce legislation around anti-gender discrimination, harassment and diversity in the workplace, to address why it is often a hostile environment for women. Encourage content creators to depict the workplace as a positive place for women and female leadership.
- Make funding to public and private media bodies dependent on the uptake of diversity standards, as with the British Film Institute in the UK, and encourage more funding be earmarked to the creation of content that celebrates diversity, promotes gender equality and encourages younger voices in storytelling.
- Understand the role of education in preparing girls and young women to have future careers as leaders and storytellers in media industries by ensuring subjects such as the creative arts and media literacy are part of national curricula in schools and in non-formal settings. Also invest in educational materials that do not promote gender stereotypes but show girls and women in positions of authority.
- Work with media bodies to drive increased and diverse representation within production teams including apprenticeship and mentoring schemes.

**Media bodies and organisations, including regulators, funders, commissioners and film and television productions companies, must:**

- Set diversity and inclusion targets and key actions that drive increased and diverse representation both on screen and behind it, including apprenticeship and mentoring schemes for younger women.
- Endorse and support champions within the media industry, especially those who are seen as role models by girls, young women and other marginalised groups, to influence wider recognition of representation issues in the industry and public arena.
- Take up self-regulatory measures such as gender audits and codes of conduct on all productions in order to: address discrimination and harassment in the workplace; the lack of diversity in crew, cast and script; the negative portrayals of women leaders, and the sexual objectification of women and girls, within scripts and other media content.
- Create awards and other incentives to share best practice in fostering women's leadership in the media industries and celebrate women storytellers from a diversity of backgrounds
- Regularly consult with girls and young women as consumers in order to produce the different stories they are asking to see on platforms that are accessible and favoured by them.
- Ensure that films and other entertainment content produced and directed by women have production and marketing budgets equal to those of male filmmakers and creators.

**Individual champions – filmmakers, talent, executives, producers, activists and politicians must:**

- Be the role model girls need: scrutinise scripts, speak out at industry and political events and, where they have the power, publicly make diversity and gender equality a condition of their involvement in a media production.

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## 9. ANNEX 1: KII TOOL

### Objectives

The KIIs should respond to the following research question:

- **How does media portray leadership?**
  - *Female leaders portrayed in mainstream media, types of leadership style, professional domains where female leaders are featured*

The purpose of the KII is to provide depth to the statistical analysis of media content, and to make that content more relatable. Overall, the KII seeks to gather young people's perspective on how women and men are portrayed in fictional media in general, and in relation to leadership in particular, by having them reflect on their favourite entertainment media (movie, TV programme, radio programme).

### Topics of research

Existing tools and analysis frameworks focus on the following topics:

- Portrayal of male and female traits and behaviours / gender performances (inc. subversion of gender stereotypes)
- Portrayal of other identity aspects - social class, age, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, and disability

- Role and occupation of male/ female characters, including leadership positions (e.g. leadership as male?)
- Sexual objectification of women; choice of clothing and images of body
- Levels of autonomy of male/ female characters, goal/purpose vs passive/ rescued
- Effects of the media messages (positive or negative) on the viewer or society more broadly – extent to which it influences their perception of themselves, others or the world in general; extent to which it influenced their behaviour

The KII covers those topics to the extent feasible, though in some cases questions are asked specifically on these topics but rather left for the respondent to raise them if they deem it relevant. The KII is organised around:

- a) Reflection on a respondents' movie of choice
- b) Reflection on role and influence of movies more generally

## Questions

[read out introductory statement and informed consent process, as required]

We are conducting a piece of research on how entertainment media portray women and girls, particularly in relation to leadership. We are looking at xx number of movies from 19 countries to find out how women and girls are shown on screen.

We want to talk to you today about a movie, TV programme or radio programme you really like, and about the male and female characters that are in it.

- 1) How important is entertainment media to you?
  - a. How often do you access entertainment media (movies, TV programmes or radio programmes)?
  - b. What kind of role do you think entertainment media has on young people in your society? What kind of entertainment media are they most likely to access?
- 2) What is your favourite movie (*prompt: or a movie you like and know well*)?
  - a. What genre is the movie?<sup>xviii</sup>
  - b. Where is it set? (*prompt for country, urban/rural location*)
  - c. Can you summarise in a couple of sentences what it is about?
- 3) Who are the main character/s in [your movie]? (*ideally hone in on 1-2 primary characters*).
  - a. What is their role in the movie? How do they relate to each other?
  - b. Are they male or female?
  - c. Approximately what kind of age are they? [*prompt: a child, a teenager, a young adult, middle aged, elderly*]
  - d. Do we learn anything else about their identity in the movie? [*prompt: social class, sexual orientation, race / ethnicity, religion, disability*]
- 4) In your opinion, which characters hold the power in the movie?
  - a. Are they male or female? How old are they?
  - b. Are they from a majority or minority group (in terms of social class, sexual orientation, race / ethnicity, religion, disability)?
  - c. What is the nature of the power? Is it power that's used positively or negatively?
- 5) Thinking about [primary character 1, from q2], can you tell me:
  - a. What are the main characteristics or behaviours of that character? Would you say these are stereotypically [male/female] behaviours<sup>xix</sup>? Why / why not? [*prompt: actions or words, appearance, job/role*]

<sup>xviii</sup> IMDB genres: Action; Adventure; Animation; Biography; Comedy; Crime; Documentary; Drama; Family; Fantasy; Film Noir; History; Horror; Musical; Mystery; Romance; Sci-Fi; Short; Sport; Superhero; Thriller; War; Western

<sup>xix</sup> Stereotypical male traits and behaviour could include: assertiveness, being in control, aggression, an emphasis on physical strength, and sexual promiscuity. Stereotypical female traits and behaviors could include passivity, an emphasis on being pleasing, gentleness, dependence, and an emphasis on caring and empathy.

- b. Do you think [other aspects of their identity – insert as appropriate from 2.d] affect the way they behaviour in the movie or the role they have?
  - c. Do they have a goal or objective in the movie? Do they achieve that goal or objective? What motivates the character?
- 6) *[optional question, if female character hasn't been discussed in question 5]* Thinking about [primary character 2] what can you tell me about their character?
  - a. Would you say the character behaves in a conventionally [male/female] way<sup>xx</sup>? Why / why not? *[prompt: actions or words, appearance, job/role]*
  - b. Do you think [other aspects of their identity – insert as appropriate from 2.d] affect the way they behaviour in the movie or the role they have?
  - c. Do they have a goal or objective in the movie? Do they achieve that goal or objective? Is that goal or objective for themselves or for others?
- 7) Can you share your thoughts on how women and girls are portrayed in the movie?
  - a. Is it mostly positive or negative in your opinion? Why do you think that?
  - b. If you could remake the movie to be more inclusive, how would you do it?
  - c. Do you think this is often the way women and girls are portrayed in movies, or is this movie doing something different? Please explain.
- 8) Do you think this movie had any effect on you? In what ways? *[prompt: in terms of your perception of women/girls/boys/men, your behaviour, your aspirations?]*

We know from previous research that women and girls in movies (and media more broadly) are less likely to be shown in leadership roles than men and boys. Research in America showed that, in Hollywood movies in 2018, audiences were almost twice as likely to see male characters as female characters. The same research found that women and girls characters comprised 26% of leaders, while males accounted for 74% of leaders.<sup>xxi</sup>

- 9) Do these findings surprise you? Why or why not?
  - a. [Do you think it would be similar for the movies you watch (/made in your context)]
- 10) Do you think the underrepresentation of women and girls has any effect on young men and women like you? In what ways? *[prompt: in terms of perceptions, attitudes, behaviour, aspirations, representation]*
- 11) Do you think there should be any changes in how women and girls or men and boys are portrayed in movies? What should be changed and why?

## 10. ANNEX 2: GIRLS' PHOTO PROJECT TOOL

This research is a joint initiative between Plan International and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. Every country participating in the qualitative research is also participating in the photo research. The purpose of the photo research is to capture images that girls and women see in the world around them. These photographs will then be sent to researchers in America to analyze. Thank you for helping us with the research – your work is very important!

The number of girls participating in the project in each country: we suggest a group of no more than 10 and not less than 5.

The photo research will take up to 3 days (but does not necessarily need to be 3 *consecutive* days).

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<sup>xx</sup> Stereotypical male traits and behaviour could include: assertiveness, being in control, aggression, an emphasis on physical strength, and sexual promiscuity. Stereotypical female traits and behaviors could include passivity, an emphasis on being pleasing, gentleness, dependence, and an emphasis on caring and empathy.

<sup>xxi</sup> <https://womenandhollywood.com/resources/statistics/2018-statistics/>

## Day 1: Introduction to media literacy

### NOTES FOR FACILITATORS:

- You use the information below to introduce and discuss the concept of media and influence with girls participating in the group. This section on Media Literacy can be used in conjunction with the PowerPoint presentation
- Please use and adapt this information and questions for your country's context. Some of the information might not be relevant, in which case it is okay not to use it.

Where do children and adolescents learn about the world around them? How do children and adolescents learn what is expected, normative, or appropriate, particularly when it comes to gender? While parents, friends, communities and schools are often acknowledged as influencing the lives of children and young people, media can also play an important role.

What are media effects? (*According to research in the USA*)

- A large body of interdisciplinary research demonstrates that media affects the beliefs and behaviors of its viewers.
- There are many theories about why media content shapes our thoughts and behaviors; in general, researchers have found that the more media people consume the more they tend to adopt the beliefs and behaviors depicted in media.
- People more readily adopt the beliefs and behaviors of media characters with whom they can relate; in other words, girls are more influenced by depictions of other girls, and boys are more likely to imitate the beliefs and behaviors of boys in the media.
- Viewers more readily endorse the beliefs and behaviors depicted in media if they perceive the content as realistic.

Why should we care about media effects?

- Girls and women are vastly underrepresented, occupying only 28% of speaking roles in family films and 31% of speaking roles in children's programming. This underrepresentation reinforces the notion that boys and men are of more importance.
- Depictions of girls and women are typically hyper-feminine and stereotypical. For example, women are shown engaging in domestic chores, such as cleaning or cooking.
- Girls and women in the media are often sexually objectified, or valued for their appearance and sex appeal rather than their intelligence or personality. Examples of sexualization include depicting only pieces of women's bodies (e.g., breasts or buttocks) or depicting women as literal objects (e.g., a woman on all fours being used as a table).
- Together, stereotypical and sexually objectified images send a message to viewers about the appropriate roles for women in society.
- Research has found that girls who consume more media are more likely to endorse stereotypical ideas about women and are more likely to view themselves as sexual objects. Media has also been associated with girls' body dissatisfaction and dieting behaviors, lowered self-efficacy, lowered leadership aspirations, academic underperformance, and stereotypically feminine career aspirations.

What is Media Literacy and how can it help?

- **Media literacy is defined as the "ability to identify different types of media and understand the messages they're sending."** Thus, media literacy allows consumers to acknowledge, question, and even challenge the kinds of messages they receive from the media.
- Media literacy includes asking: who created this media content, for what reason(s), and for what audience?
- Media literacy gives media consumers tools for understanding how media (both print and screen) shapes viewers' knowledge and opinions about the world.

### Questions for participants

1. Why is media important? How does it influence how you see the world?
2. What are media effects?



3. How are girls typically shown in movies and TV? How are they shown in ways that are different from boys?

## Day 2: Data collection training / instructions

### Overview

The purpose is to gather photos of advertisements that you see in your everyday life. When we say 'advertisements' we mean advertisements in *printed* form, for example advertisements on billboards, in shop windows, in newspapers. You can take pictures of adverts that feature women or men or both. Your photos will then be sent to researchers in the United States who will analyze each of your images.

*Thank you for your help with our research – your work is very important!*

### Instructions

- Participants will head out in groups of two and three to take photos of advertisements.
- Each member of the group will take five photos of advertisements.
- Each member of your group should take photos of different advertisements, not the same advertisements.
- Make sure you are being safe when you take photos – following safety rules provided by Plan International staff.

## Day 3: Data analysis workshop

### **NOTES FOR FACILIATORS:**

- Either at the beginning or before the analysis workshop, the photos taken by the girls need to be uploaded onto a plan computer. During this workshop the participants need to be able to view the photos they have taken – if possible, print the photos too.
- The discussion questions below are suggestions. Please adapt for your context. You do not need to ask every question.
- Please take brief notes of the discussion and send the translated notes back to Plan GH by **29 March 2019**.
- If the girls want to provide written responses to the questions that is okay too, but it is not necessary.
- After the discussion the photos should be sent to Plan GH who will send the photos to the Geena Davis Institute – we will provide you with instructions of where and how to send the files.

1. What was your experience collecting photos of ads? What did you learn from this experience?
2. How many women are in the ads you collected?
3. What are some of the things you notice about the women in the ads you collected?
  - How do they look?
  - How are they dressed?
  - What types of activities are they doing in the ads?
  - Are they shown in a leadership position?
4. What messages are these ads sending about how women should look? Do? Think? Behave?
5. If women are featured, are they doing activities we expect women to do? If men are featured, are they doing activities we expect men to do?

6. Consider how the advert uses language. Does the advert provide factual information? Or does the advert appeal to particular emotions or desires? Or does the advert do both? Think about how the languages uses techniques (for example humour).
7. In what ways does the advertisement attempt to influence the consumer into buying the particular product?

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**GIRLS  
GET EQUAL**

Geena Davis Institute *for* Gender in Media

## PARTNERS

This report is based on research produced by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University and Plan International.

The mission of the **Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media** is to engage, educate, and influence media content creators, marketers and audiences about the critical need to eliminate gender bias and negative stereotypes in media. To this end, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media has pioneered the field of research on gender inequity in media and has been dedicated to conducting intersectional analysis of representations of gender, race, ability and sexuality. It has amassed the largest body of research on gender prevalence in family entertainment, spanning more than 20 years. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media's research serves as the basis for education and outreach programmes that help families, studios, educators and content creators become critical consumers and producers.

**Plan International** is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We strive for a just world, working together with children, young people, supporters and partners. Using our reach, experience and knowledge, Plan International drives changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels. We are independent of governments, religions and political parties. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children and we are active in more than 75 countries.

**Girls Get Equal:** Plan International has been campaigning for girls' rights for over a decade and the current Girls Get Equal campaign aims to ensure girls and young women have power over their own lives and can help shape the world around them. Promoting young female leadership is central to the Girls Get Equal campaign. While this includes access to formal positions of power and authority, such as increasing the numbers of young women and girls in decision-making roles in public life, it also looks beyond this. The campaign seeks to redefine leadership to better reflect how girls, young women and young advocates and activists are choosing to lead: working with them to ensure that leadership is feminist, gender transformative and inclusive. It means not reinforcing a narrow male-defined set of leadership skills and behaviours or replicating the male-dominated power and leadership structures that currently exist. Throughout the campaign there will be ongoing research, partnering with girls and young women to fully understand what it means to them to be a leader.

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