OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS:
What are G-rated Films Teaching Children About the World of Work?

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media

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To answer the above question, we content analyzed the portrayal of occupations across every first run G-rated film theatrically released between September 5, 2006 and September 7, 2009. A total of 21 films were assessed for job-related verbal references and/or nonverbal behaviors (i.e., references to titles, discussing work activities, wearing a uniform/using a job-related artifact, engaging in an occupational task). Just over 800 speaking characters underwent evaluation, of which 32.6% are female and 67.4% are male. We sought to answer three major questions, which we turn to now. However, the below findings are preliminary and need to be framed as such.

How Frequently are Males and Females Shown Working?

Our findings show a pronounced gender gap in G-rated employment. The percentage of males depicted with an occupation in the context of the plot (57.9%) is higher than that of females (31.6%). Another way to think about these findings is to look at the gender breakdown of those working on-screen. Across the sample, a total of 333 speaking characters are shown in a job-related light. Of these working characters, 268 are males (80.5%) and 65 (19.5%) are females.

These findings are surprising given recent occupational trends in this country. As senior economist Heather Boushey (2009) at the Center for American Progress states, "Women now, for the first time, make up half (49.9 percent as of July 2009) of all workers on U.S. payrolls." Thus, the cinematic world of work lags significantly behind the occupational gains made by American women.

What Types of Jobs Do Male and Female Characters Hold?

To answer this question, we categorized each speaking character with an occupation into one global type. As shown in Figure 1, the most frequently depicted type of job in G-rated films is *blue-collar*. Put differently, 34.8% of all occupations include but are not limited to manual labor or a specialized skill set (e.g., carpenters, wait staff, security guards). A slightly higher percentage of females than males is depicted with blue-collar jobs. The second most frequently shown type of occupation is *professional/specialized* or those usually requiring post-baccalaureate education and/or specialization within a 4-year degree (e.g., educators/teachers, executives, medical fields, scientists). Within gender, the percentage of females shown in professional/specialized fields is marginally higher than the percentage of males shown. Finally, the third most frequently presented occupation is *white-collar*. These types of jobs may or may not require a degree, typically involve deskwork, and often fall within the jurisdiction of administration, management and/or clerical-related activities. Again, within gender, a higher percentage of females than males is shown in white-collar jobs. Conversely, males are more likely than females to be depicted in occupations involving *military/law enforcement* or *arts/entertainment/athletics*.

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Figure 1

Types of Occupations by Gender of Speaking Characters

Category Professional/Specialized	% Males 20.9% (n=56)	% Females 24.6% (n=16)	Total % 21.6% (n=72)
White Collar	10.8% (n=29)	16.9% (n=11)	12% (n=40)
Blue Collar	34.0% (n=91)	38.5% (n=25)	34.8% (n=116)
Royalty	1.9% (n=5)	4.6% (n=3)	2.4% (n=8)
Crime	4.9% (n=13)	0% (n=0)	3.9% (n=13)
Military/Law Enforcer	8.2% (n=22)	1.5% (n=1)	6.9% (n=23)
Arts/Entertainment/Athletics	12.3% (n=33)	7.7% (n=5)	11.4% (n=38)
Servant	1.1% (n=3)	1.5% (n=1)	1.2% (n=4)
Business Owner	4.1% (n=11)	3.1% (n=2)	3.9% (n=13)
Other	1.9% (n=5)	1.5% (n=1)	1.8 (n=6)
Total	n=268	n=65	100% (n=333)

Note: The total % column shows the sample-wide percentage and the number of speaking characters with an occupational category present. The n's are presented to illuminate the total numbers of males and females within each job characterization. Many of the categories in Figure 1 (and their respective definitions) are taken verbatim from Signorielli & Kahlenberg (2001) and were used in Smith et al. (2009).

It should be noted that the percentages reported in the last paragraph and Figure 1 illuminate the percentage of characters within gender that are shown working in a particular field. Another way to think about the numbers in the figure is to focus on the row percentages rather than the column percentages. Looking at the rows, we see males hold the vast majority of jobs (i.e., 78% of all professional specialized occupations and 72.5% of all white-collar jobs are held by males). Given that there are so many more working males in the sample than working females, they dominate most of the employment categorizations.

Are Females Missing from Important Occupational Sectors?

On first blush, the findings in Figure 1 suggest that the percentage of girls and women in professional/specialized careers and white-collar jobs is roughly equivalent to (or higher) than the percentage of boys and men in the same categories. Because of the larger number of male speaking characters, we decided to look at the range of jobs held within these two categories. The analysis shows that females – in comparison to males – have a restricted range of role models in some of the categories listed in Figure 1.

In contrast to their male general audience counterparts, our analysis reveals that not one female is depicted across the 21 films in medical science (e.g., medical doctors, dentists, veterinarians), executive business suites (e.g., CEOs), law (e.g., attorney) or politics. Further, and depicted in Figure 1, almost all of the business owners, military/law enforcers, and criminals coded are male. On a positive note, 6 females (9% of the 65) are portrayed in the hard sciences (e.g., *Horton Hears a Who, Space Chimps*) or as pilots/astronauts (e.g., *Space Chimps, Fly Me to the Moon*). Given that these have been heavily male-dominated work domains, content creators should be applauded for thinking outside the stereotypical box when writing/producing these animated films.

Clearly, the findings show that there is a shortage of diverse and exciting role models for girls and young women.

Exposure to these types of depictions may have negative repercussions for some youth. A meta-analysis of the gender media research shows that repeated viewing of television is positively associated with stereotyping of occupations along gender-linked lines. As such, a heavy diet of stereotypical occupational content in G-rated films may teach and reinforce that girls have fewer employment options than do boys. By the same token, exposure to a varied universe of jobs and activities in G-rated films may open up and expand the occupational possibilities for boys and girls.

A full report of the details surrounding the study is available online at **www.seejane.org**.