

It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: On-Screen Representations of Female Characters in the Top 100 Films of 2014

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Females comprised 12% of protagonists featured in the top 100 grossing films of 2014. This represents a decline of 3 percentage points from 2013 and a decline of 4 percentage points from 2002.

Last year, females accounted for 29% of major characters, and 30% of all speaking characters. These figures represent no change from 2013 but slight increases from 2002.

Regarding race and ethnicity, the percentages of Black and Latina female characters declined slightly in 2014, while the percentage of Asian females increased slightly.

Gender stereotypes remained abundant in the top grossing films of 2014. Female characters were younger than their male counterparts. Males were more likely than females to be identified solely by work-related roles and females were more likely than males to be identified solely by personal life-related roles.

Regarding goals, female characters were more likely than male characters to have pro-social goals including supporting and helping others. Male characters were more likely than females to have anti-social goals such as committing

crimes and engaging in physical altercations.

The following summary reports the findings of a content analysis of over 2,300 characters appearing in the top 100 (domestic) grossing films of 2014. The report provides historical comparisons from last year with figures dating back to 2002. Overall, this analysis considers the representation of more than 9,000 characters appearing in approximately 400 films (foreign films omitted).

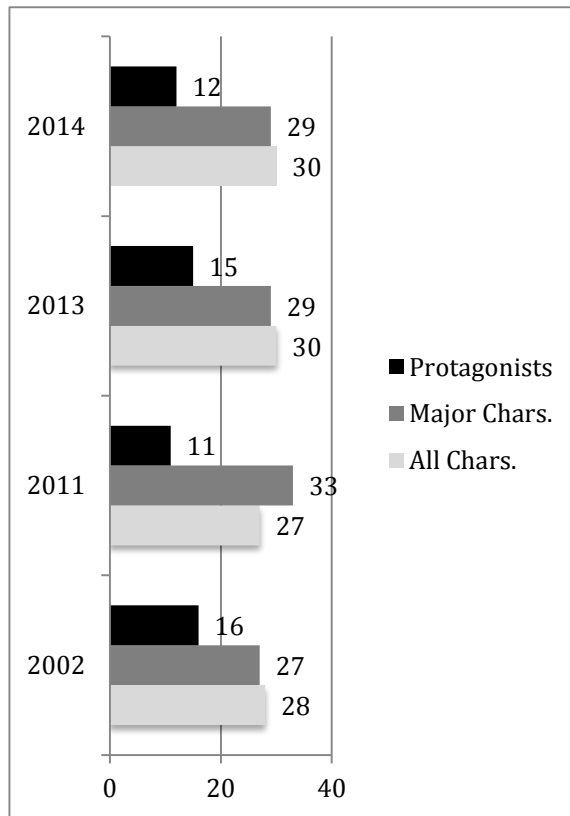
The findings are divided into four major sections. The first section reports the percentages of female and male characters in the top grossing films. The second section details various demographic traits of characters, including age, race/ethnicity, marital status, and occupational status. The third section reports the goals and leadership positions held by characters. The fourth section discusses important relationships between on-screen representations of female characters and behind-the-scenes employment of women as directors and writers.

Findings/Percentages of Female and Male Characters

- Only 12% of all clearly identifiable *protagonists* were female in 2014 (see Figure 1). This represents a decrease of 3 percentage points from 2013 and a decrease of 4 percentage points from 2002. In 2014, 75% of protagonists were male, and 13% were male/female ensembles. For the purposes of this study, protagonists are the characters from whose perspective the story is told.

Figure 1.

Historical Comparison of Percentages of Female Characters as Protagonists, Major Characters, and All Speaking Characters



- Females comprised 29% of *major characters*. This represents no change from 2013, but is an increase of 2 percentage points from 2002. For the purposes of this study, major characters tend to appear in more than one scene and are instrumental to the action of the story.

- Females accounted for 30% of all *speaking characters* (includes major and minor characters) in 2014, even with the figure from 2013, but up 2 percentage points from 2002.

Findings/Demographic Characteristics

- Female characters remain younger than their male counterparts. The majority of female characters were in their 20s (23%) and 30s (30%). The majority of male characters were in their 30s (27%) and 40s (28%).

- Males 40 and over accounted for 53% of all male characters. Females 40 and over comprised 30% of all female characters.

- Whereas the percentage of female characters declined dramatically from their 30s to their 40s (30% to 17%), the percentage of male characters increased slightly, from 27% in their 30s to 28% in their 40s.

- The percentage of male characters in their 50s (18%) is twice that of female characters in their 50s (9%).

- 74% of all female characters were White, 11% were Black, 4% were Latina, 4% were Asian, 3% were other worldly, and 4% were other.

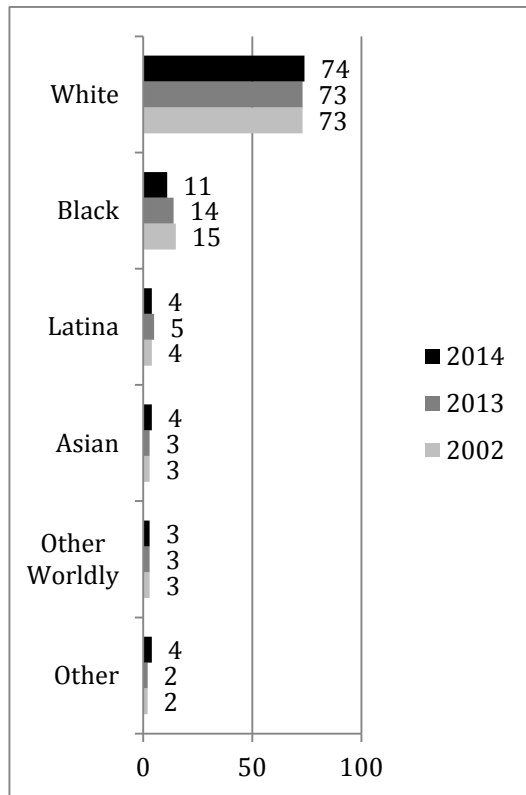
Moviegoers were almost as likely to see another-worldly female as they were to see a Latina or Asian female character (see Figure 2).

- 11% of all female characters were Black in 2014, down 3 percentage points from 2013 and down 4 percentage points from 2002.

- 4% of all female characters were Latina in 2014, down 1 percentage point from 2013, and even with the figure from 2002.

Figure 2.

Historical Comparison of Race/Ethnicity of Female Characters



- 4% of all female characters were Asian in 2014, up 1 percentage point from 2013 and 2002.

- Male characters were more likely than female characters to have an unknown marital status. 59% of male characters but 46% of female characters had an unknown marital status.

- A higher proportion of male than female characters had an identifiable occupational status. 85% of male characters but only 75% of female characters had an identifiable job/occupation.

- A substantially larger portion of male than female characters were seen in their

work setting actually working (59% vs. 41%).

- Male characters were more likely than females to be identified only by a work-related role, such as doctor or business executive (61% of males vs. 34% of females). In contrast, female characters were more likely than males to be identified only by a personal life-related role such as wife or mother (58% of females vs. 31% of males). Male and female characters were equally likely to be identified in dual work-related *and* personal life-related roles (8% of females and males).

Findings/Goals and Leadership

- Overall, 85% of speaking characters had an identifiable goal. Female characters were more likely than males to have pro-social goals. 89% of female characters but 77% of males had pro-social goals such as supporting or helping other characters. Male characters were more likely than females to have anti-social goals such as criminal behavior or engaging in physical altercations. 23% of male characters but only 11% of females had anti-social goals.

- Overall, 13% of characters were leaders. For the purposes of this study, leaders were those individuals occupying a formal leadership position in an organization, government or group and whose instructions and/or behaviors were followed by two or more other characters. Of those characters, a larger proportion of male characters (16%) than female characters (5%) were portrayed as leaders.

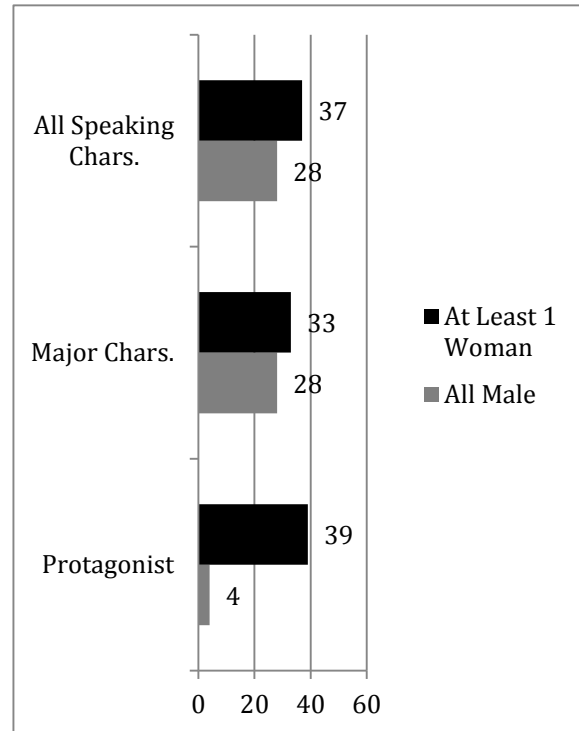
- Broken down by type of leader, males comprised 96% of criminal leaders, 89% of business leaders, 89% of military and government agency leaders, 82% of political leaders, and 81% of scientific/intellectual leaders.

*Findings/Behind-the-Scenes
Employment and On-Screen
Representation*

- In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 37% of *all speaking characters*. In films with exclusively male directors and writers, females accounted for 28% of all speaking characters (see Figure 3).
- In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 33% of *major characters*. In films with exclusively male directors and writers, females accounted for 28% of major characters.
- In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 39% of *protagonists*, males 35% of protagonists, and male/female ensembles 26% of protagonists. In films with exclusively male directors and writers, females accounted for 4% of protagonists, males 87% of protagonists, and male/female ensembles 9% of protagonists.

Figure 3.

Comparison of Representation of Female Characters in Films with At Least One Woman Director and/or Writer and Exclusively Male Directors and Writers



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