

23<sup>rd</sup> Edition

## ***It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2024***

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2024 offered one of the richest slates of films featuring female characters in recent memory. These fictional women railed against unsatisfying personal relationships and discriminatory work environments, pushing back hard against a culture that considers them disposable. The females populating these films didn't always triumph, but they fought the good fight and never folded.

For the first time in recent history, the percentage of top grossing films featuring female protagonists equaled the percentage of films with male protagonists in 2024. 42% of films had female protagonists and 42% had male protagonists. 16% of films featured ensembles. However, it is important to note that because this number assesses the top 100 films with female protagonists, small fluctuations alter the number dramatically. In 2023, 28% of top-grossing films were told from a female perspective. In contrast, the percentages for all speaking characters and major female characters are calculated on over 2,000 characters. As a result, the percentages for characters in speaking roles and major roles are more stable.

The percentages of female characters in speaking roles increased only 2 percentage points from 35% in 2023 to 37% in 2024. The percentage of major female characters rose a single percentage point, from 38% in 2023 to 39% in 2024.

While established actresses over 50 played attention-getting roles in 2024 -- including Demi Moore in *The Substance* -- ageism remains an issue. These female characters stand out, but are the exception and not the rule.

The percentage of female characters plummeted from 35% in their 30s to 16% in their 40s. In stark contrast, the percentage of male characters increased as they aged from

their 30s (25%) to their 40s (31%). Just 26% of female characters were 40 and older, whereas 55% of males were 40+. Only 5% of female characters were 60 and older, compared to 9% of male characters.

Overall, fully 72% of films featured more male than female characters in speaking roles. Only 21% of films had more female than male characters, and 7% of films featured equal numbers of female and male characters.

*It's a Man's (Celluloid) World* has monitored portrayals of girls and women in the top 100 domestic grossing films since 2002. It is the longest-running and most comprehensive study of women's representation in film available.

## ***Background***

Now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year, *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World* tracks the representation of female characters appearing in the 100 top grossing films (international films and re-issues omitted). The following summary reports the findings of a content analysis of over 2,000 characters appearing in films in 2024. This report provides historical comparisons from last year with figures dating back to 2002. Overall, this project has considered the representation of more than 31,000 characters over the last two decades.

This report details the percentage of films with female protagonists, as well as the percentages of females portrayed as major characters and speaking characters. It also examines the demographic traits of characters, including race/ethnicity, age, marital status, and occupational status. In addition, the study considers women's roles as leaders. Finally, it examines important relationships between on-screen representations of female characters and the behind-the-scenes employment of women as directors and writers.

For the purposes of this study, *protagonists* are the characters from whose perspective the story is told. *Major characters* appear in more than one scene and are instrumental to the narrative of the story. *Speaking characters* include all major and minor characters. A character is considered a *leader* if they occupy a leadership position in an organization, government or social group, and if their instructions or behaviors are followed by two or more other characters.

Every film was viewed one or more time(s) in its entirety. Every character who was seen speaking at least one line was included in the study. The figures are based on the top grossing films as rated by The Numbers, January 1, 2025.

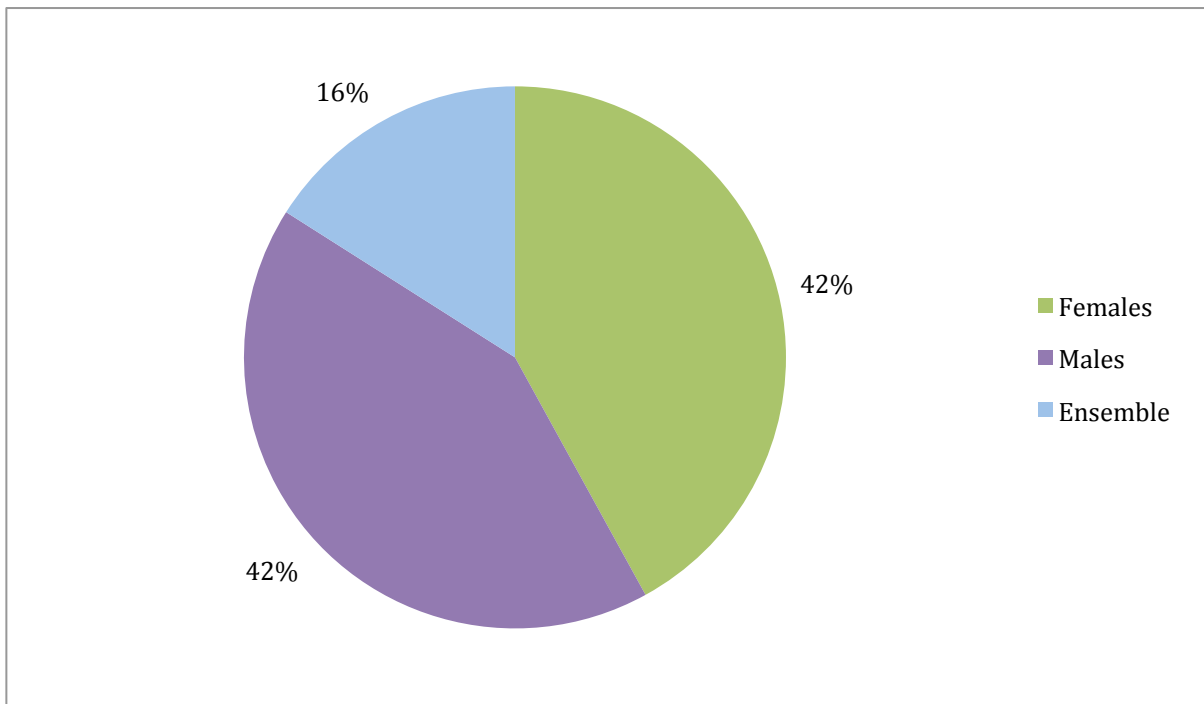
## Findings

### *Representation of Female and Male Characters*

The percentage of U.S. top grossing films featuring sole female *protagonists* increased from 28% (28.3%) in 2023 to 42% (41.8%) in 2024. 42% (41.8%) of films featured sole male protagonists (down from 62.0% in 2023), and 16% (16.3%) had ensembles or a combination of male and female protagonists (up from 9.8% in 2023) (see Figure 1). For the purposes of this study, protagonists are the characters from whose perspective the story is told.

*Figure 1.*

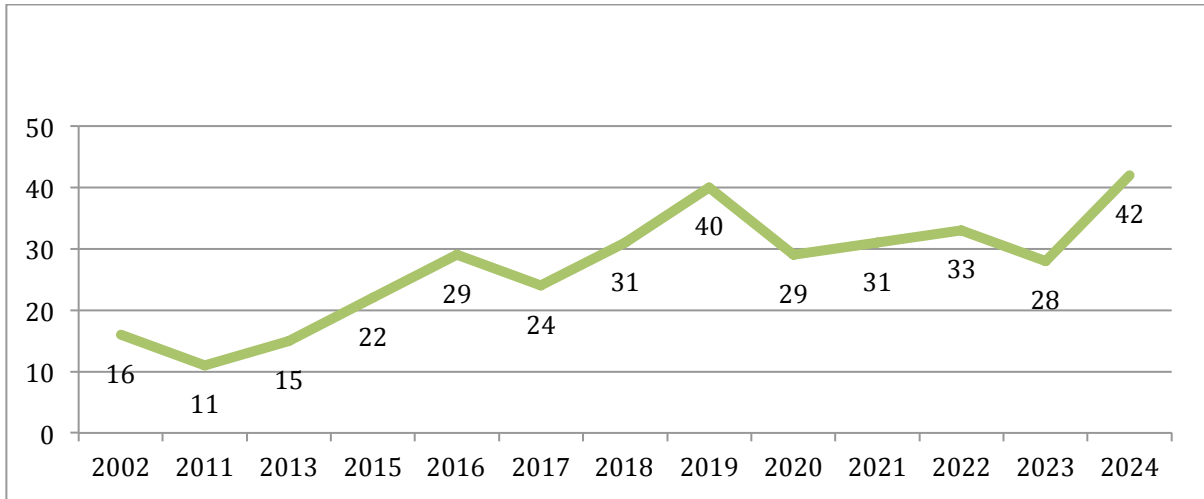
*Percentages of Top Grossing Films Featuring Females, Males and Ensembles as Protagonists*



The percentage of films with female protagonists in 2024 tops the previous high of 40% achieved in 2019 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.

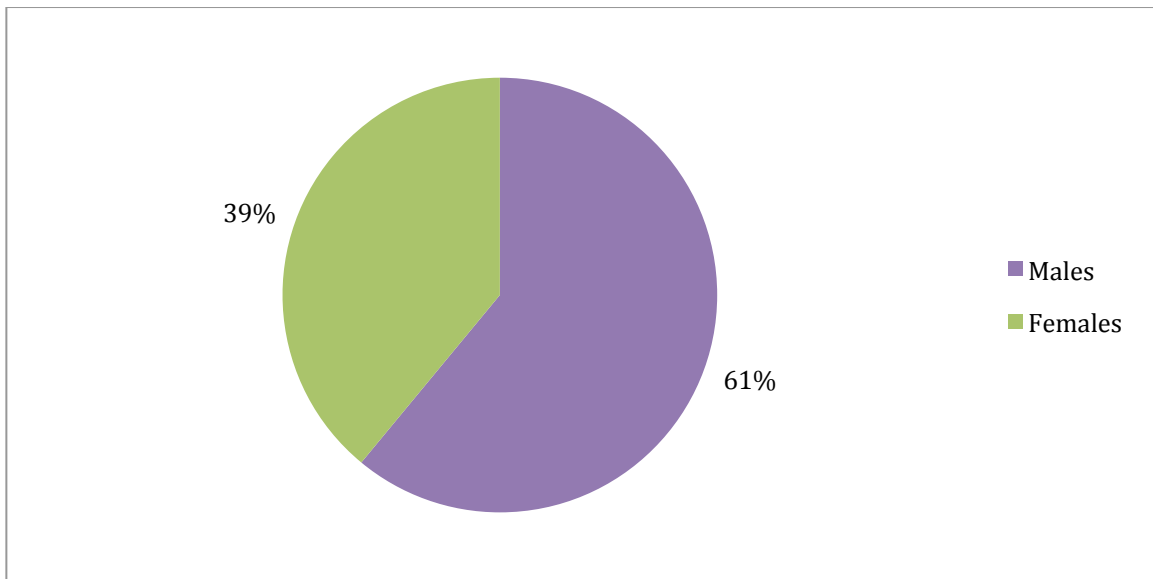
*Historical Comparison of Top Grossing Films with Female Protagonists*



In 2024, females accounted for 39% (38.8%) of *major characters* (see Figure 3), up slightly from 38% (38.0%) in 2023. Males comprised 61% (61.1%) of major characters. For the purposes of this study, major characters appear in more than one scene and are instrumental to the action of the story. There were no nonbinary or transgender characters in major roles.

Figure 3.

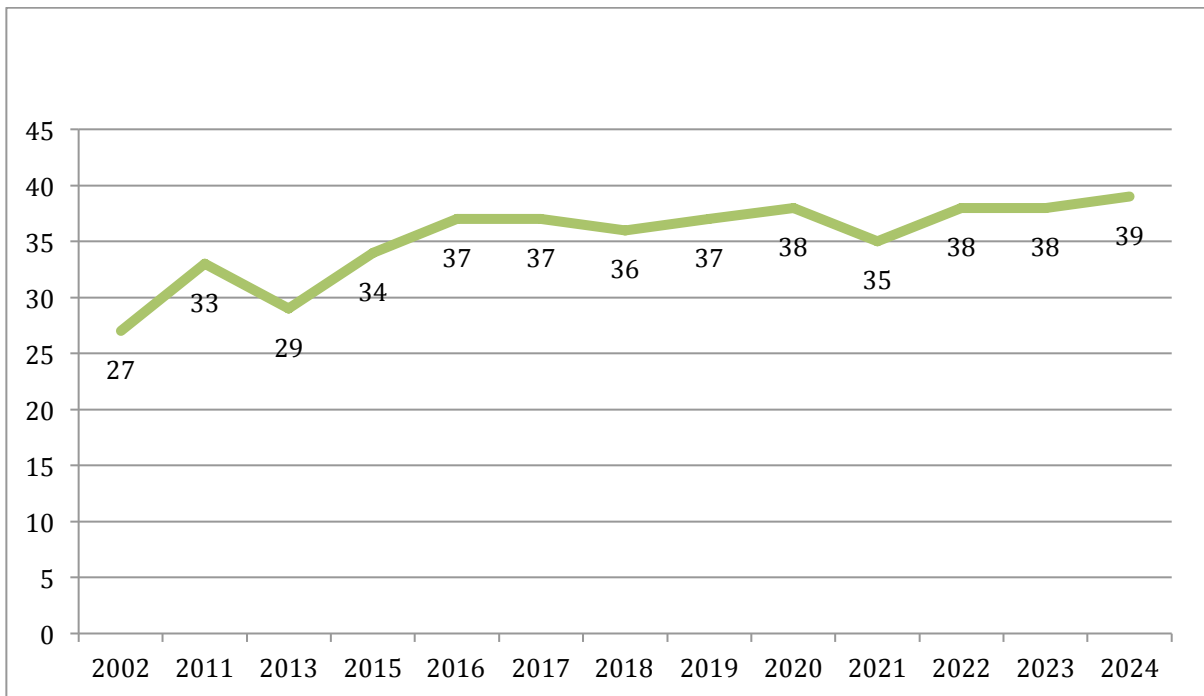
*Percentages of Females and Males as Major Characters in Top Grossing Films*



The percentage of major female characters in 2024 is slightly higher than the 38% achieved in 2020 (see Figure 4), and represents a recent historic high. As the figure illustrates, the percentage of females as major characters has been relatively stable since 2016, increasing or decreasing by 1 to 3 percentage points from year to year.

Figure 4.

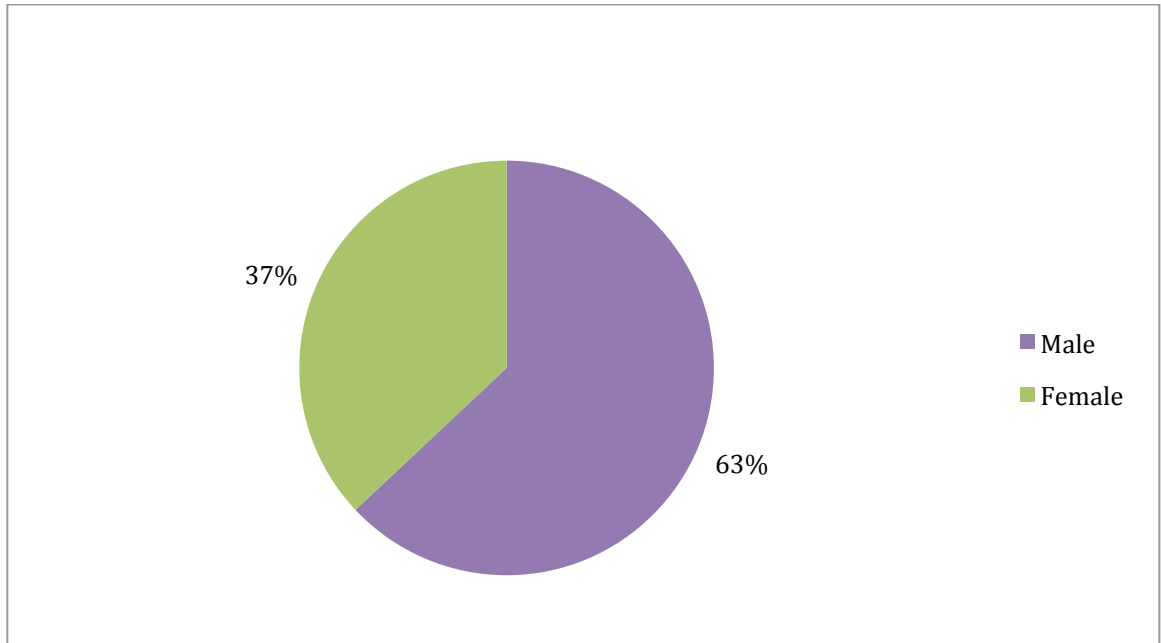
*Historical Comparison of Percentages of Females as Major Characters in Top Grossing Films*



Females made up 37% (36.5%) of all *speaking characters* in 2024, an increase of 2 percentage points from 35% in 2023. Males accounted for 63% (63.4%) of speaking characters (see Figure 5). One character was non-binary.

Figure 5.

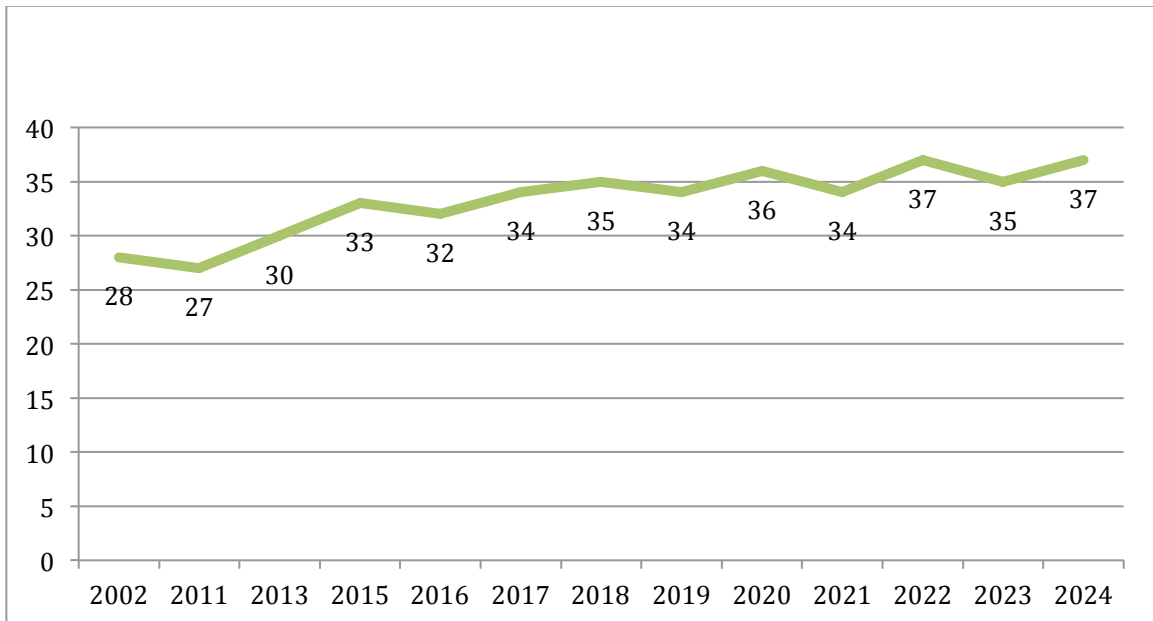
Percentages of Females and Males as Speaking Characters in Top Grossing Films



As Figure 6 illustrates, the percentage of female characters in speaking roles has fluctuated up or down by just 1 to 3 percentage points since 2017.

Figure 6.

Historical Comparison of Females as Speaking Characters in Top Grossing Films



72% of films featured more male than female characters. 21% of films had more female than male characters. 7% of films featured equal numbers of female and male characters.

21% of films featured 0 to 4 female characters in speaking roles, 43% had 5 to 9 females, and 36% had 10 or more females. In contrast, 9% of films featured 0 to 4 male characters in speaking roles, 23% had 5 to 9 males, and 67% had 10 or more males.

### *Demographic Characteristics*

16% (15.5%) of female characters in speaking roles were under 20, 23% (23.2%) were in their 20s, 35% (35.2%) were in their 30s, 16% (15.5%) were in their 40s, 6% (6.1%) were in their 50s, and 5% (4.6%) were 60 or older. In contrast, 8% (8.1%) of male characters in speaking roles were under 20, 11% (11.4%) were in their 20s, 25% (24.8%) were in their 30s, 31% (31.3%) were in their 40s, 16% (15.6%) were in their 50s, and 9% (8.9%) were 60 or older (see Figure 7). The nonbinary character was under 20 years old.

Female characters were younger than their male counterparts. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (58%), while the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (56%). Male characters were more likely than females to be 40 or over.

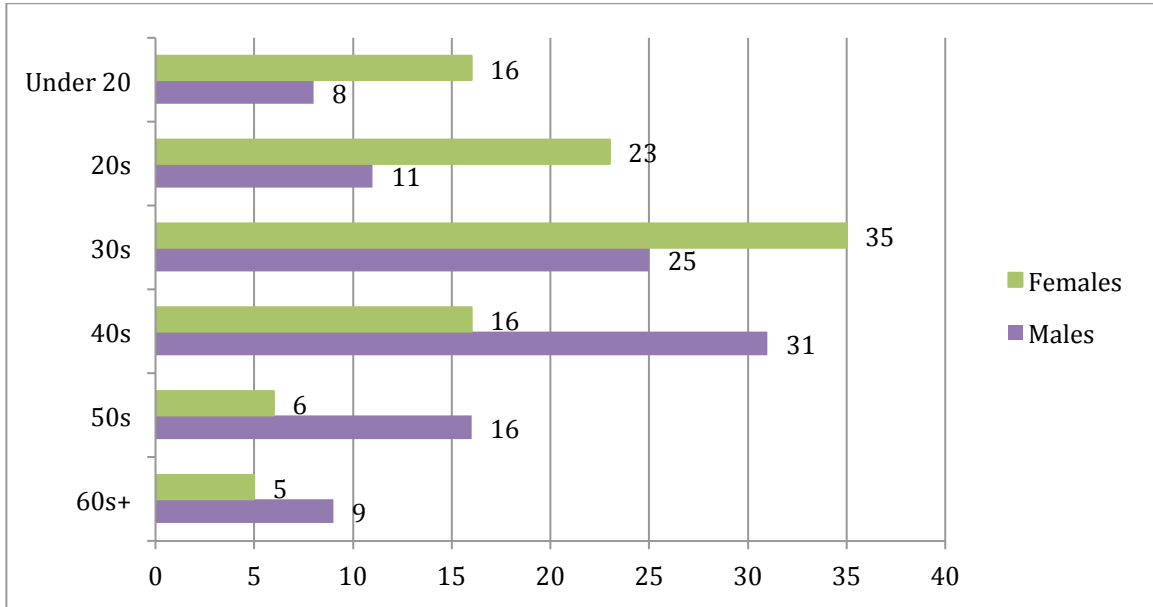
Female characters experienced a precipitous drop from their 30s to their 40s (35% to 16%). The percentage of male characters in their 30s and 40s actually increased from 25% in their 30s to 31% in their 40s. Male characters experienced a more dramatic decline in numbers from their 40s (31%) to their 50s (16%).

There were more male characters than female characters aged 60 and over. 5% of female and 9% of male characters were in their 60s or older.



Figure 7.

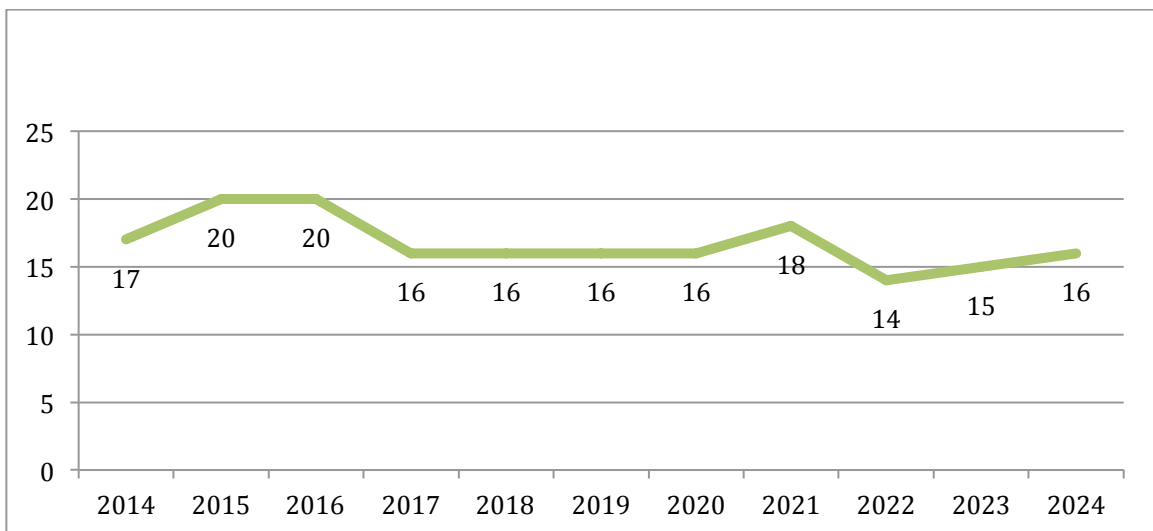
Comparison of Ages for All Speaking Female and Male Characters in Top Grossing Films



The representation of characters in various age cohorts has remained relatively stable over the last decade. For example, the percentage of female characters in their 40s declined from 17% in 2014 to 16% in 2024 (see Figure 8).

Figure 8.

Percentage of Female Characters in Speaking Roles in their 40s Over Time



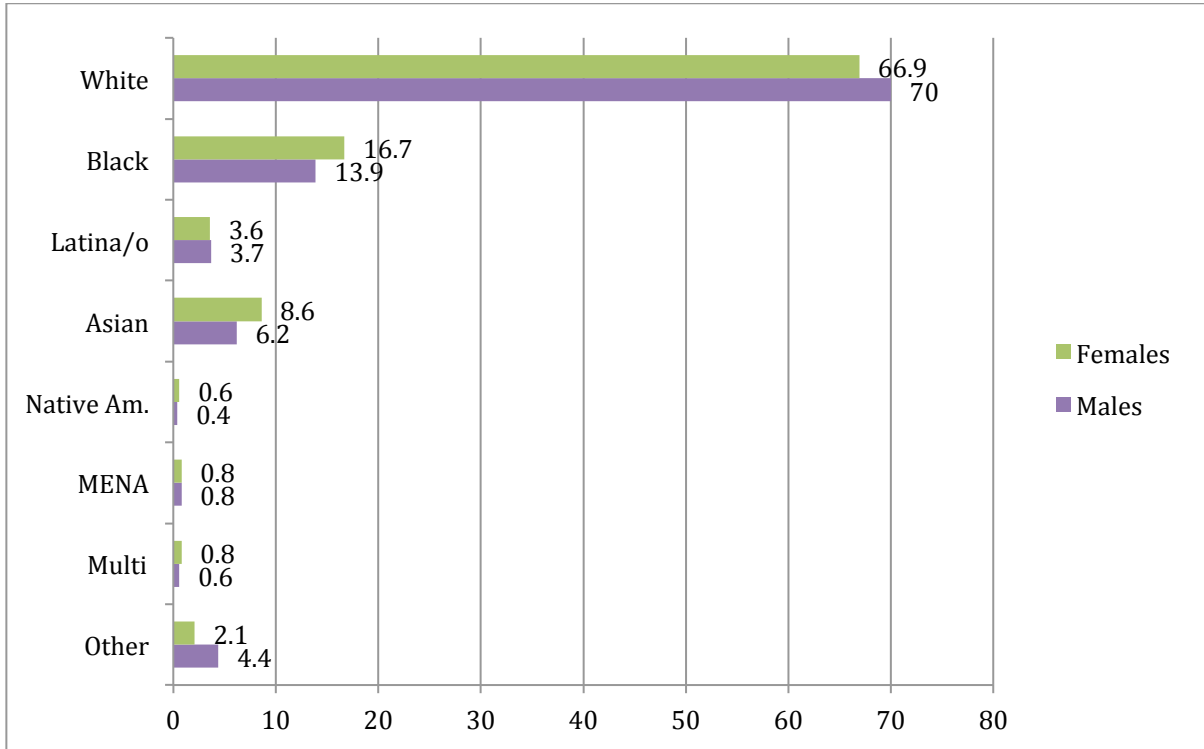
Findings for *major female characters* are similar to the findings for all females in speaking roles. 17% (16.5%) of major female characters were under 20, 26% (26.1%) were in their 20s, 29% (29.1%) were in their 30s, 15% (14.6%) were in their 40s, 8% (7.7%) were in their 50s, and 6% (6.1%) were 60 or older. In contrast, 7% (7.4%) of major male characters were under 20, 14% (13.9%) were in their 20s, 20% (20.3%) were in their 30s, 28% (28.4%) were in their 40s, 19% (19.2%) were in their 50s, and 11% (10.9%) were 60 or older.

Major female characters were younger than major male characters. The percentage of female characters declined dramatically from their 30s (29%) to their 40s (15%). The percentage of major male characters actually increased from 20% in their 30s to 28% in their 40s. Few major characters aged into their 60s or older (6% females, 11% males).

In 2024, 66.9% of female characters in speaking roles were White (up from 56.9% in 2023), 16.7% were Black (up from 15.3% in 2023), 3.6% were Latina (down from 6.3% in 2023), 8.6% were Asian or Asian American (down from 9.2% in 2023), 0.6% were Native American (even with 2023), 0.8% were MENA (up from 0.6% in 2023), 0.8% were of multiple race or ethnicities (up from 0.6% in 2023), 2.1% were of some other race or ethnicity (down from 11.4% in 2023) (see Figure 9). 70.0% of male characters in speaking roles were White (up from 61.5% in 2023), 13.9% were Black (up from 11.6% in 2023), 3.7% were Latino (down from 5.6% in 2023), 6.2% were Asian or Asian American (down from 6.7% in 2023), 0.4% were Native American (down from 0.7%), 0.8% were MENA (down from 2.5% in 2023), 0.6% were of multiple race or ethnicities, and 4.4% were of some other race or ethnicity (down from 11.4% in 2023). The nonbinary character was white.

Figure 9.

Comparison of Race/Ethnicity for All Speaking Female and Male Characters in Top Grossing Films



\*MENA or Middle Eastern/North African characters are from the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

In 2024, 67.3% of *major female characters* were White (up from 54.7% in 2023), 17.4% were Black (up from 16.7% in 2023), 4.3% were Latina (down from 7.6% in 2023), 6.4% were Asian or Asian American (down from 6.7% in 2023), 0.4% were Native American (down from 0.6%), 0.4% were MENA (down from 0.9% in 2023), 1.1% (almost even with 1.2% in 2023) were of multiple races/ethnicities, and 2.8% were some other race or ethnicity (down from 11.6% in 2023). 70.1% of *major male characters* were White (up from 60.0% in 2023), 13.7% were Black (up from 12.4% in 2023), 2.8% were Latino (down from 6.7% in 2023), 5.2% were Asian or Asian American (even with the percentage in 2023), 0.9% were MENA, 0.5% were Native American (approximately even with 0.6% in 2023), 1.2% were of multiple race/ethnicities, and 5.5% were of some other race or ethnicity (down from 12.6% in 2023).

*Female characters in speaking roles* were more likely than male characters to have a known marital status. 45% of female characters but 31% of male characters had a known marital status. Similarly, *major female characters* were more likely than males to have a known marital status (70% females, 40% males).

A larger percentage of *male than female characters in speaking roles* had an identifiable occupation. 62% of male characters but 38% of female characters had an identifiable job or occupation. Similarly, *major male characters* were more likely than major females to have an identifiable occupation (75% males, 64% females).

A larger percentage of *male than female characters in speaking roles* were seen at work, actually working (65% of males, 54% of females). Similarly, a larger percentage of *major male than female characters* were seen at work, actually working (68% males, 55% females).

These findings confirm that foundational gender stereotypes remain in the top grossing films of 2024. Female characters are more likely to be identified in relation to males, whereas males are more likely than females to be identified by what they do.

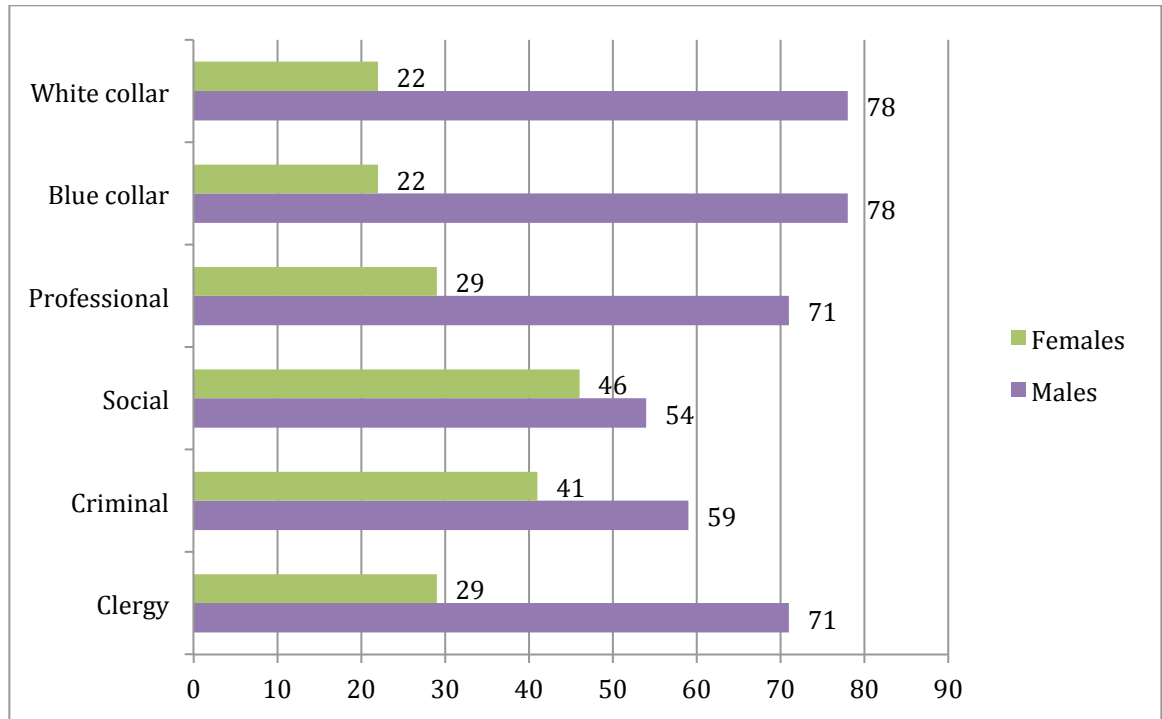
### *Portrayals as Leaders*

17% of major characters were portrayed as leaders. 63% of leaders were male and 37% were female. For the purposes of this study, a character was considered a leader if they occupied a leadership position in an organization, government or social group and if their instructions or behaviors were followed by two or more other characters.

By type of leader, 78% of white collar leaders were male and 22% were female. 78% of blue collar leaders were male and 22% were female. 71% of leaders among professionals were males and 29% were females. 54% of leaders in social groups were male and 46% were female. 59% of leaders of criminal groups were male and 41% were female. 71% of clergy and spiritual leaders were male and 29% were female (see Figure 10).

Figure 10.

*Female and Male Leaders in Speaking Roles*



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

Films with at least one woman director and/or writer were more likely than films with no women in these roles to feature higher percentages of females as protagonists, in major roles, and as speaking characters.

In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 81% of protagonists. In films with exclusively male directors and/or writers, females accounted for 33% of protagonists.

In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 56% of major characters. In films with exclusively male directors and/or writers, females accounted for 35% of major characters.

In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 51% of all speaking characters. In films with exclusively male directors and/or writers, females accounted for 33% of all speaking characters.