

24th Edition

It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the Top Grossing U.S. Films of 2025

by Dr. Martha M. Lauzen

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2025 was a lean year for female protagonists in top grossing films. While movies such as *The Running Man*, *The Working Man*, *Superman*, *Roofman*, *Dog Man*, and *Wolf Man* announced their male perspective, films told from a female point of view were harder to come by last year. Girls and women inhabited animated features (*KPop Demon Hunters*), the dangerous world of John Wick (*Ballerina*), and altered identities (*Freakier Friday*).

Last year, the percentage of top grossing films with female protagonists plummeted, declining from 42% in 2024 to 29% in 2025. 53% of films had male protagonists, and 18% featured ensembles. Looking back almost a decade, 29% of films had female protagonists in 2016. 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 contrast, the following percentages for all speaking characters and major female characters are calculated on over 1,900 characters. As a result, the percentages for characters in speaking roles and major roles are more stable.

The percentage of female characters in speaking roles increased slightly to 38% in 2025, up 1 percentage point from 37% in 2024. The percentage of major female characters declined 3 percentage points, from 39% in 2024 to 36% in 2025.

Women aged 60 and older, such as Jamie Lee Curtis in *Freakier Friday* and Amy Madigan in *Weapons*, were dramatically underrepresented, accounting for just 2% of all major female characters. Men aged 60 and older comprised 8% of all major male characters.

The percentage of major female characters dropped precipitously from 32% in their 30s to 15% in their 40s. In stark contrast, the percentage of major male characters increased as they aged from their 30s (22%) to their 40s (29%). Just 28% of major female characters were 40 and older, whereas 59% of males were 40+.

Overall, 82% of films featured more male than female characters in speaking roles. Only 12% of films had more female than male characters, and 6% of films featured equal numbers of female and male characters.

15% of films featured 0 to 4 female characters in speaking roles, 46% had 5 to 9 females, and 39% had 10 or more females. In contrast, 4% of films featured 0 to 4 male characters in speaking roles, 21% had 5 to 9 males, and 76% had 10 or more males.

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 24th 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 1,900 characters appearing in films in 2025. This report provides historical comparisons from last year with figures dating back to 2002. Overall, this project has considered the representation of more than 32,900 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.

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.

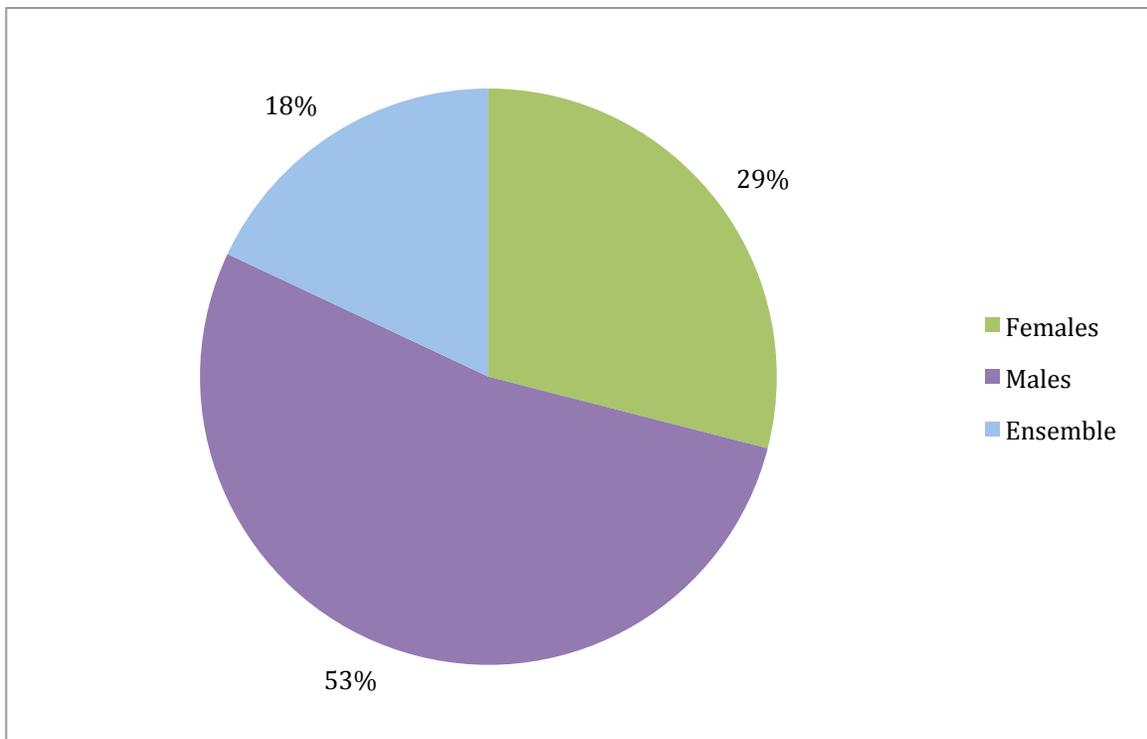
Findings

Representation of Female and Male Characters

The percentage of U.S. top grossing films featuring sole female *protagonists* declined from 42% (41.8%) in 2024 to 29% (28.7%) in 2025. 53% (53.2%) of films featured sole male protagonists (up from 41.8% in 2024), and 18% (18.1%) had ensembles or a combination of male and female protagonists (up from 16.3% in 2024) (see Figure 1). For the purposes of this study, protagonists are the characters from whose perspective the story is told.

Figure 1.

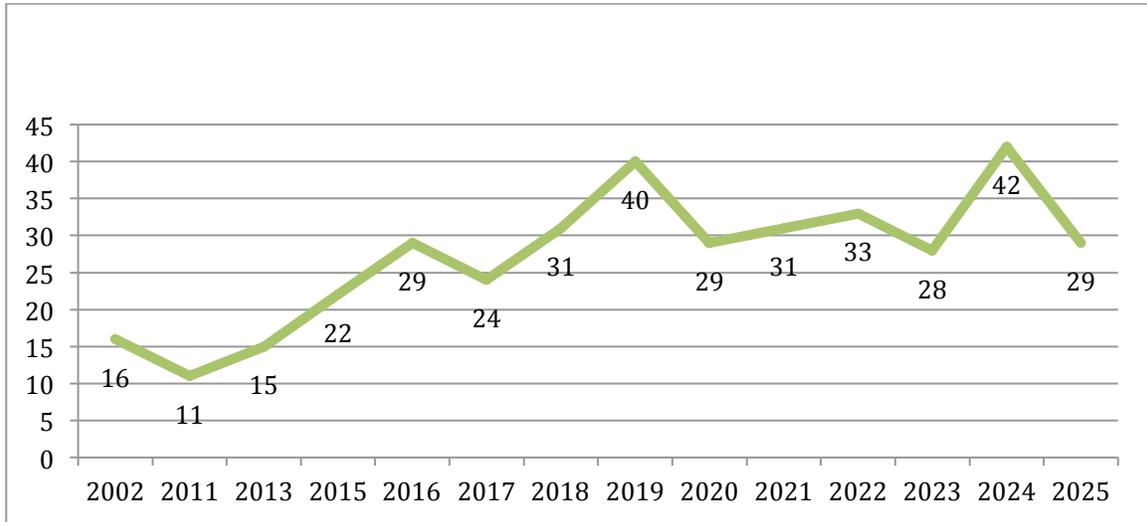
Percentages of Top Grossing Films Featuring Females, Males and Ensembles as Protagonists



The percentage of films with female protagonists in 2025 is equal to the percentage of films with female protagonists almost a decade ago in 2016 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.

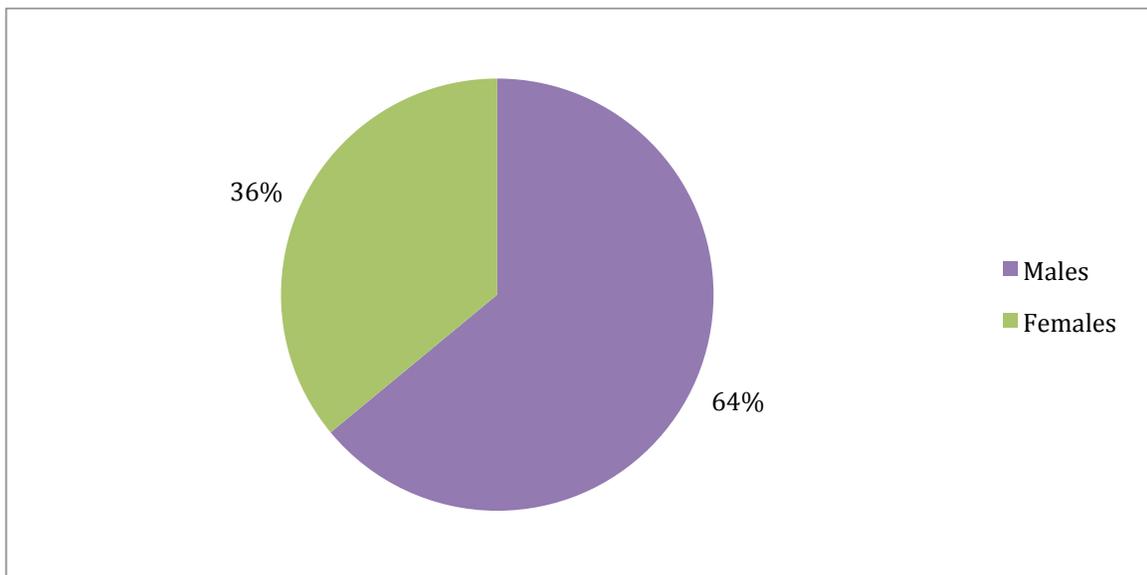
Historical Comparison of Top Grossing Films with Female Protagonists



In 2025, females accounted for 36% (35.9%) of *major characters* (see Figure 3), down 3 percentage points from 39% (38.8%) in 2024. Males comprised 64% (64.1%) 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.

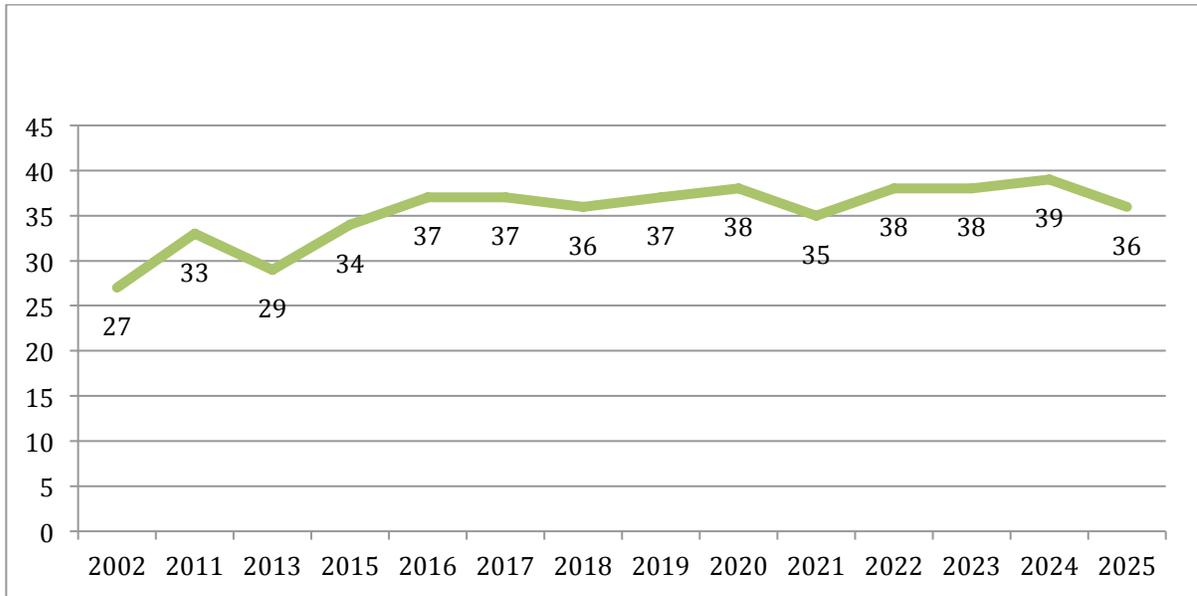
Percentages of Females and Males as Major Characters in Top Grossing Films



The percentage of major female characters in 2025 is even with the percentage in 2018 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4.

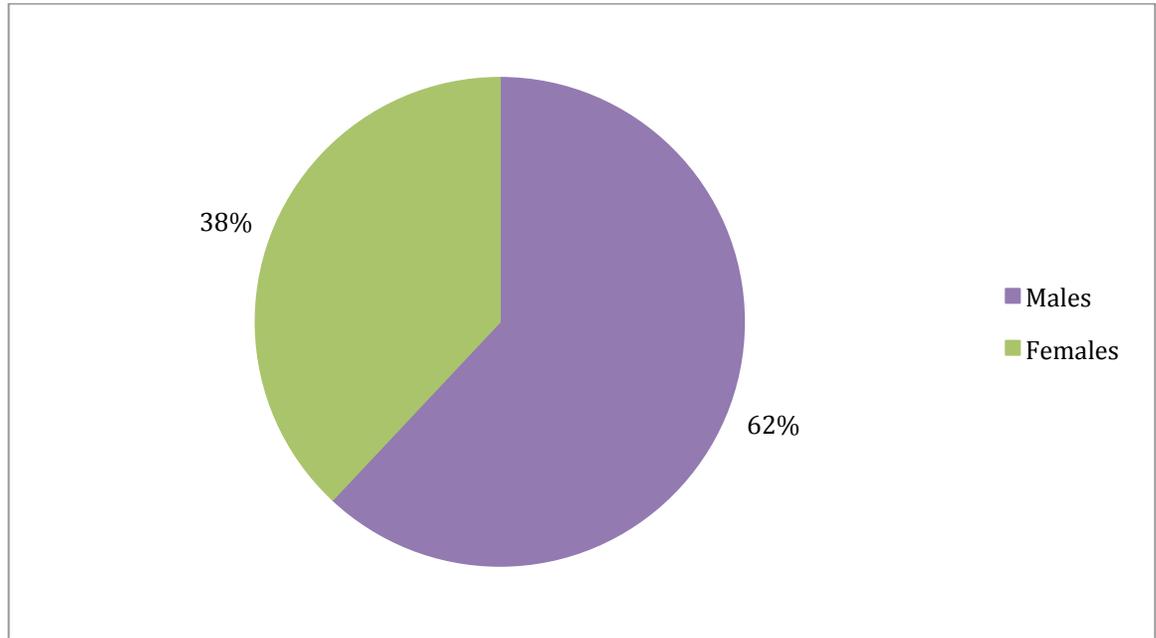
Historical Comparison of Percentages of Females as Major Characters in Top Grossing Films



Females made up 38% (37.5%) of all *speaking characters* in 2025, an increase of 1 percentage point from 37% (36.5%) in 2024. Males accounted for 62% (62.4%) of speaking characters, down 1 percentage point from 63% (63.4%) in 2024 (see Figure 5). One character was nonbinary and one character was transgender.

Figure 5.

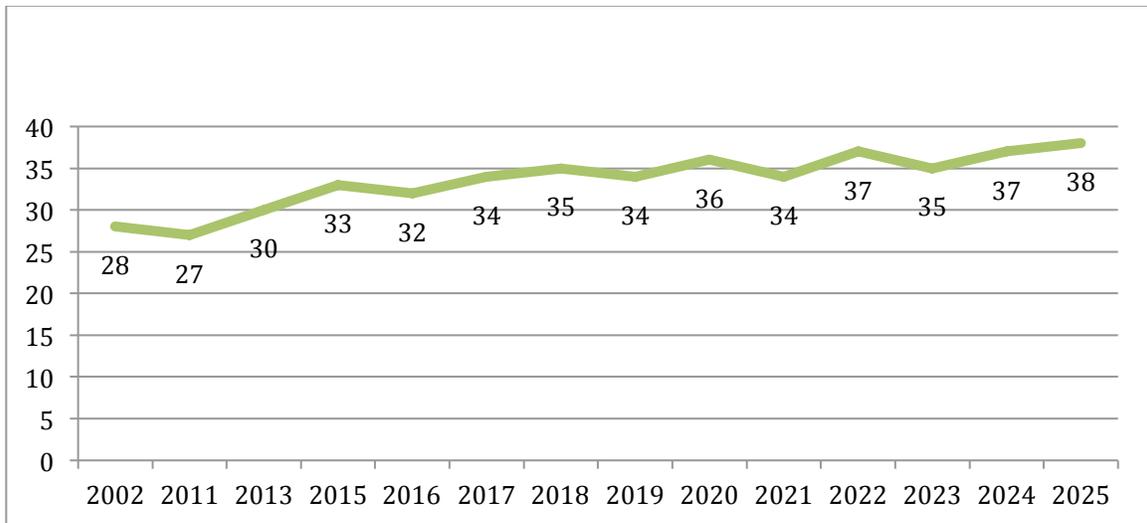
Percentages of Females and Males as Speaking Characters in Top Grossing Films



As Figure 6 illustrates, the percentage of female characters in speaking roles reached a historic high in 2025.

Figure 6.

Historical Comparison of Females as Speaking Characters in Top Grossing Films



82% (82.3%) of films featured more male than female characters. 12% (11.7%) of films had more female than male characters. 6% (5.8%) of films featured equal numbers of female and male characters.

15% (14.6%) of films featured 0 to 4 female characters in speaking roles, 46% (46.4%) had 5 to 9 females, and 39% (39%) had 10 or more females. In contrast, 4% (3.7%) of films featured 0 to 4 male characters in speaking roles, 21% (20.8%) had 5 to 9 males, and 76% (75.5%) had 10 or more males.

Demographic Characteristics

14% (13.8%) of female characters in speaking roles were under 20, 20% (20.3%) were in their 20s, 39% (39.0%) were in their 30s, 15% (15.4%) were in their 40s, 7% (7.0%) were in their 50s, and 5% (4.6%) were 60 or older. In contrast, 6% (6.3%) of male characters in speaking roles were under 20, 9% (9.4%) were in their 20s, 25% (24.6%) were in their 30s, 36% (35.8%) were in their 40s, 16% (15.8%) were in their 50s, and 8% (8.2%) were 60 or older (see Figure 7). The nonbinary character was under 20 years old. The transgender character was in their 30s.

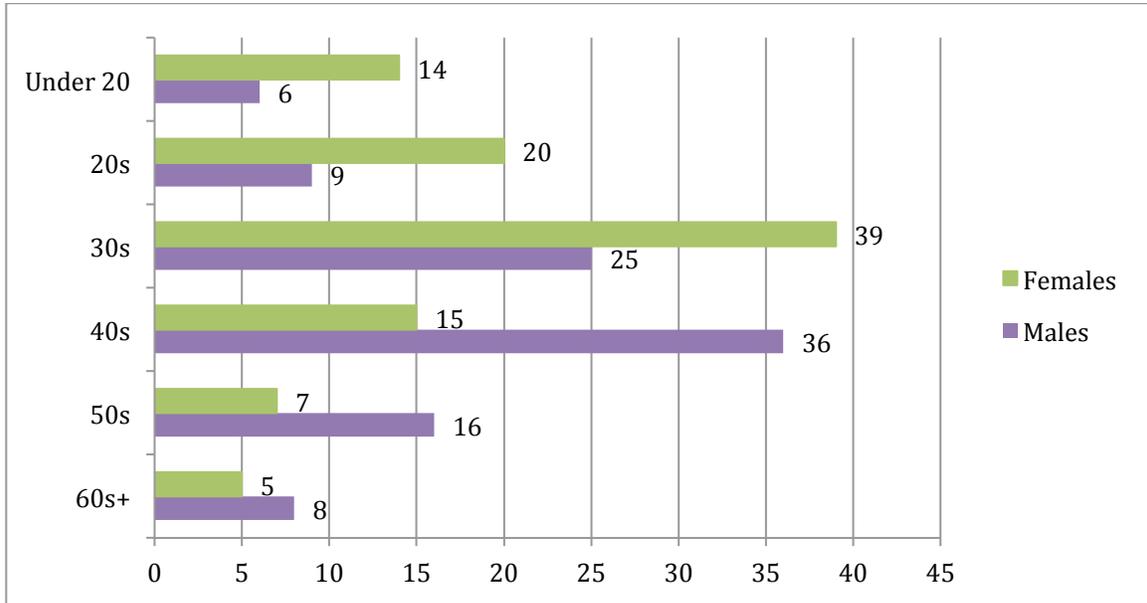
Female characters were younger than their male counterparts. The majority of female characters were in their 20s and 30s (59%), while the majority of male characters were in their 30s and 40s (60%). Male characters were more likely than females to be 40 or over (60% vs. 27%).

Female characters experienced a precipitous drop from their 30s to their 40s (39% to 15%). The percentage of male characters in their 30s and 40s actually increased from 25% in their 30s to 36% in their 40s. Male characters experienced a dramatic decline in numbers from their 40s (36%) to their 50s (16%).

There were more male characters than female characters aged 60 and over. 5% of female and 8% of male characters were in their 60s or older.

Figure 7.

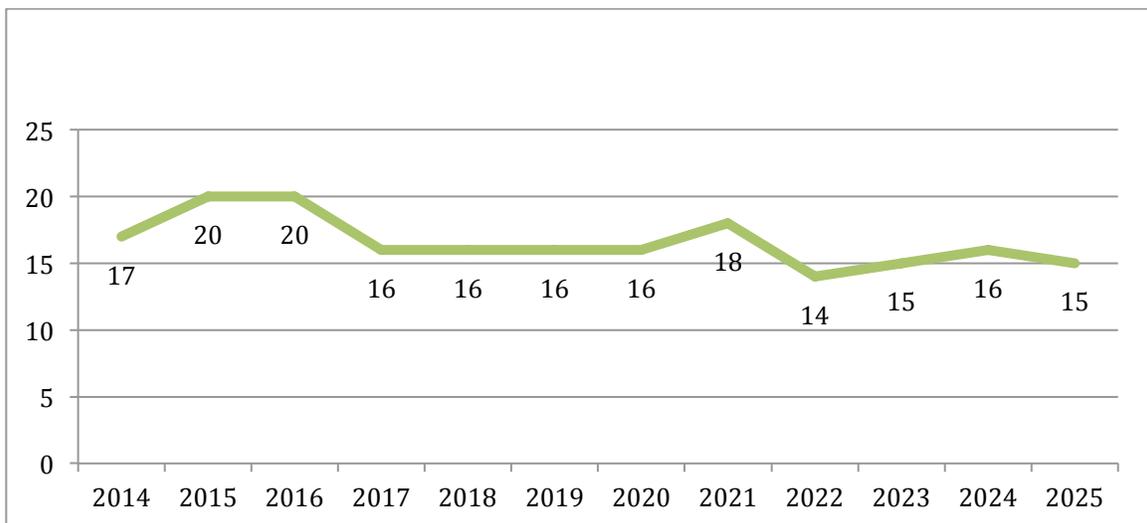
Comparison of Ages for All Speaking Female and Male Characters in Top Grossing Films



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 15% in 2025 (see Figure 8).

Figure 8.

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



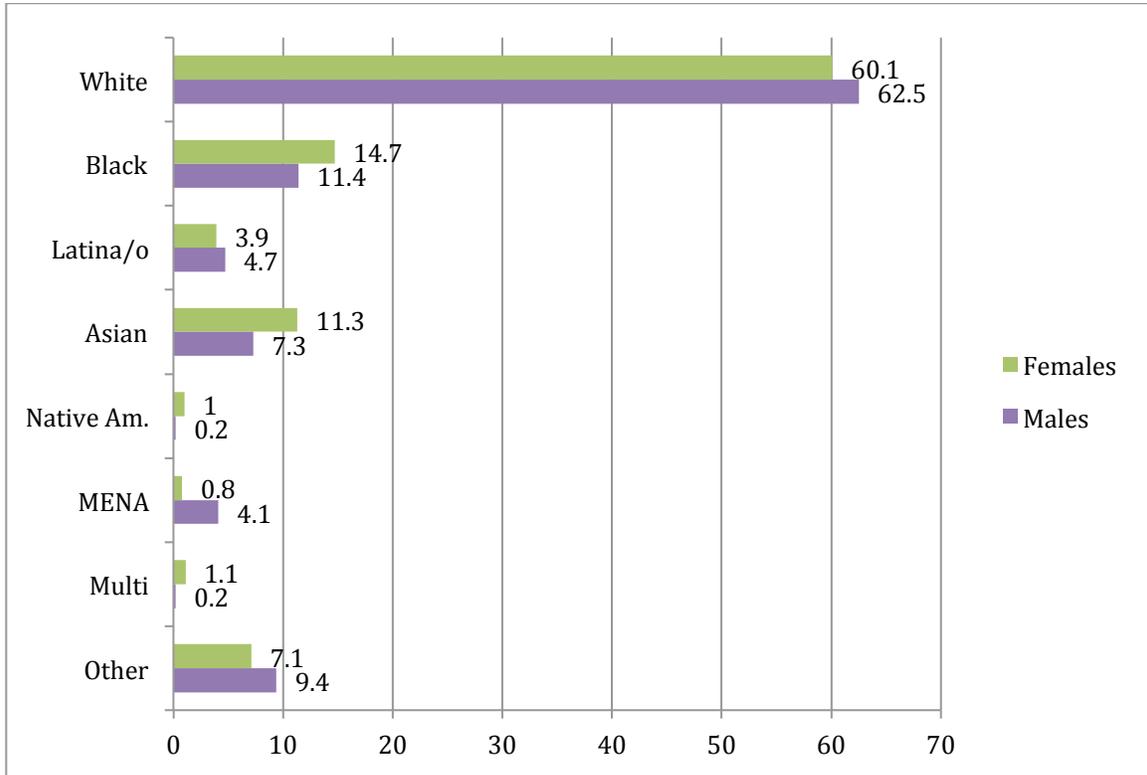
Findings for *major female characters* are similar to the findings for all females in speaking roles. 13% (13.3%) of major female characters were under 20, 28% (27.5%) were in their 20s, 32% (31.7%) were in their 30s, 15% (15.1%) were in their 40s, 10% (10.1%) were in their 50s, and 2% (2.3%) were 60 or older. In contrast, 7% (6.8%) of major male characters were under 20, 12% (12.2%) were in their 20s, 22% (22.3%) were in their 30s, 29% (29.4%) were in their 40s, 21% (21.1%) were in their 50s, and 8% (8.1%) were 60 or older.

Major female characters were younger than major male characters. The percentage of female characters declined dramatically from their 30s (32%) to their 40s (15%). The percentage of major male characters actually increased from 22% in their 30s to 29% in their 40s. Major male characters were more likely to be 60 and older (8%) than major female characters (2%).

In 2025, 60.1% of female characters in speaking roles were White (down from 66.9% in 2024), 14.7% were Black (down from 16.7% in 2024), 3.9% were Latina (up very slightly from 3.6% in 2024), 11.3% were Asian or Asian American (up from 8.6% in 2024), 1.0% were Native American (up very slightly from 0.6% in 2024), 0.8% were MENA (even with 2024), 7.1% were of some other group such as aliens or robots (up from 2.1% in 2024), and 1.1% were individuals of mixed race or ethnicity (up very slightly from 0.8% in 2024) (see Figure 9). 62.5% of male characters in speaking roles were White (down from 70.0% in 2024), 11.4% were Black (down from 13.9% in 2024), 4.7% were Latino (up from 3.7% in 2024), 7.3% were Asian or Asian American (up from 6.2% in 2024), 0.2% were Native American (down very slightly from 0.4% in 2024), 4.1% were MENA (up from 0.8% in 2024), 9.4% were of some other group (up from 4.4% in 2024), and 0.2% were individuals of mixed race or ethnicity. The nonbinary and transgender character were 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 2025, 58.7% of *major female characters* were White (down from 67.3% in 2024), 13.6% were Black (down from 17.4% in 2024), 2.7% were Latina (down from 4.3% in 2024), 10.6% were Asian or Asian American (up from 6.4% in 2024), 0.4% were Native American (even with 2024), 0.8% were MENA (up very slightly from 0.4% in 2024), 10.9% were of some other group (up from 2.8% in 2024), and 2.3% (up from 1.1% in 2024) were of mixed race or ethnicity. 64.3% of *major male characters* were White (down from 70.1% in 2024), 10.8% were Black (down from 13.7% in 2024), 4.2% were Latino (up from 2.8% in 2024), 6.2% were Asian or Asian American (up from 5.2% in 2024), 0.4% were Native American (down very slightly from 0.5% in 2024), 2.3% were MENA, 11.4% were of some other group (up from 5.5% in 2024), and 0.2% were of mixed race or ethnicity (down from 1.2% in 2024).

Female characters in speaking roles were more likely than male characters to have a known marital status. 46% of female characters but 35% of male characters had a known marital status. Similarly, *major female characters* were more likely than males to have a known marital status (76% females, 60% males).

A larger percentage of *male than female characters in speaking roles* had an identifiable occupation. 75% of male characters but 63%% of female characters had an identifiable job or occupation. Similarly, *major male characters* were more likely than major females to have an identifiable occupation (78% males, 67% females).

A larger percentage of *male than female characters in speaking roles* were seen at work, actually working (67% of males, 56% of females). Similarly, a larger percentage of *major male than female characters* were seen at work, actually working (71% males, 60% females).

These findings confirm that foundational gender stereotypes remain in the top grossing films of 2025. 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.

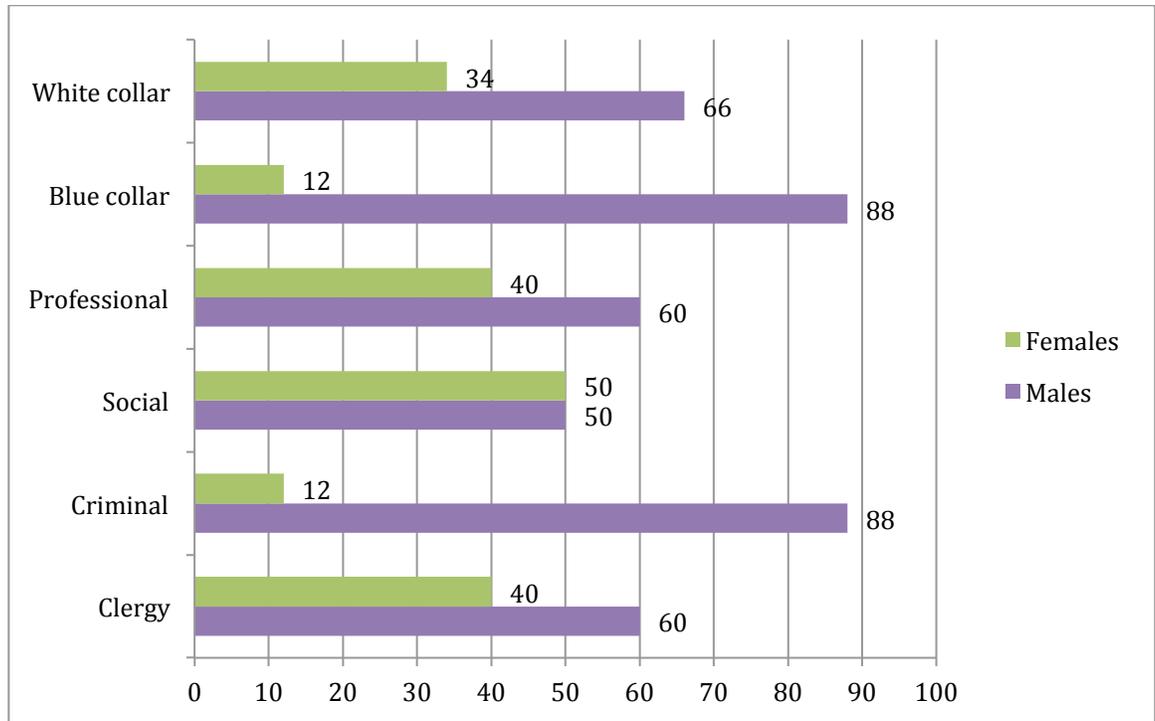
Portrayals as Leaders

18% of major characters were portrayed as leaders. Overall, 62% of leaders were male and 38% 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, 66% of white collar leaders were male and 34% were female. 88% of blue collar leaders were male and 12% were female. 60% of leaders among professionals were males and 40% were females. 50% of leaders in social groups were male and 50% were female. 88% of leaders of criminal groups were male and 12% were female. 60% of clergy and spiritual leaders were male and 40% were female (see Figure 10).

Figure 10.

Female and Male Leaders in Major Roles



Behind-the-Scenes Employment and On-Screen Representation

Films with at least one woman director were more likely than films with exclusively male directors to feature higher percentages of females as protagonists, in major roles, and as speaking characters.

In films with at least one woman director, females comprised 90% of protagonists. In films with exclusively male directors and/or writers, females accounted for 21% of protagonists.

In films with at least one woman director, females comprised 55% of major characters. In films with exclusively male directors, females accounted for 34% of major characters.

In films with at least one woman director, females comprised 48% of all speaking characters. In films with exclusively male directors, females accounted for 36% of all speaking characters.