Cinema and Society:
Shaping our Worldview Beyond the Lens

Investigation on the Impact
of Gender Representation
in French Films

If she can see it, she can be it™

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media

OAK FOUNDATION

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INTRODUCTION

This study addresses two primary questions. First, how do people of different backgrounds in France view gender representations in entertainment media? Secondly, how do gender representations in media influence the perceptions and aspirations of French people? These questions fill a gap in existing research on media effects. Previous studies have documented gender bias in French media and media effects, but our study is the first to ask everyday French people about gender and media influence.

This study is important because it confirms that media is influential in shaping the hearts and minds of viewers about gender equality. Across the globe, gender gaps persist in health, finance, education, and politics that impede economic growth and social progress.[1] Despite a longstanding push by the United Nations to champion gender equality, progress remains stagnant in media content worldwide. Gender representation in entertainment media matters. Previous research indicates that while media does not tell people what to think, it does tell us what to think about and how to think about it.[2] Media influences what issues people focus on[3] and what options they think are available for social change.[4] Media influence varies by country depending upon the cultural settings and the socio-political environment, which is why this study focuses on one country.

Media especially matters in France where film is funded by the government and intertwined with national identity. Researcher Peter Baxter notes that: "There is probably no other country that keeps film business statistics as extensive and detailed as those recorded by the CNC [Centre nationale du cinéma et de l'image animée]; but then there is probably no other country in which the state is as deeply involved in the day-to-day business of making and showing films, or the condition of the film industry is such a widely discussed gauge of national identity."[5]

In our groundbreaking 2014 research study Gender Bias Without Borders, we analyzed gender representations in popular film in eleven countries and found that filmmakers perpetuate negative attitudes toward women and girls in both developed and developing countries, including France. Women remain underrepresented in film and, when they are featured, their characters tend to reinforce harmful gender stereotypes. Gender gaps on the big screen are often driven by a gender gap behind the scenes. In France, for every one woman who works as a producer, director, writer, or cinematographer, the film industry employs 9.6 males. This ten–to–one ratio is larger than the other counties in the 2014 study, and it translates into an on-screen gender imbalance.
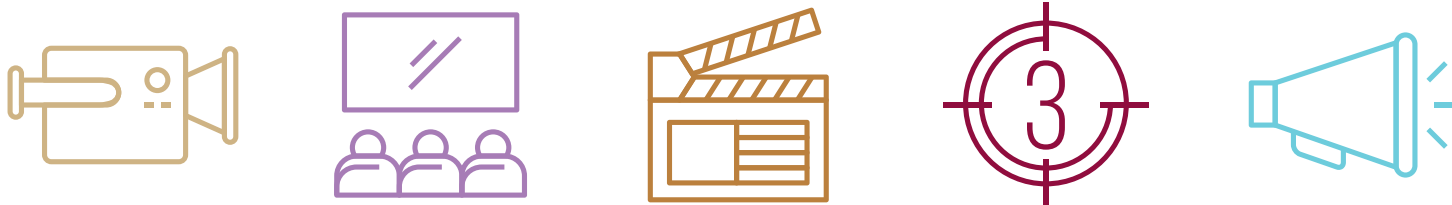
Female characters in French films comprise only 28.7% percent of the total characters. Of the 526 French films analyzed in the 2014 study, not a single film contained a female lead, co-lead, or balanced cast. When women do appear in French cinema, they are rarely shown in powerful positions. Female characters are far less likely than men to be portrayed as employed (74.7% compared to 43.3%). French women composed only 18.8% of the "reel" work force, while French women make up 47.4% of the real workforce. When women are represented in French films, they are often hyper-sexualized. French women are more than twice as likely as men to be portrayed with some nudity (31.3% compared to 14.2%), and three times more likely to appear in revealing clothing (30.6% compared to 10.7%).

For this study, we delve more deeply into our previous findings of gender gaps in French cinema using a research methodology (focus groups) that provides greater detail. More specifically, we analyze how French people of different backgrounds perceive the content of entertainment media, and how they believe it affects their lives. We asked boys, girls, men, and women, in their own words, who their role models are within the entertainment world and why they look up to these people – what is it about their behavior, qualities, lifestyle, and attitude they admire? How is this reflected in their own lives, attitudes, and behavior? We also asked participants what it means to be a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, in their country. What do they think is expected of them? Where do these ideas come from? How, if at all, have they changed over time? How have these expectations affected their choices? How do these expectations affect their perceived opportunities? We honed in on specific scenes from movies to ask how participants relate to the characters and the situation, and whether this reflects normal life in their country.

The findings from this in-depth qualitative study, combined with the 2014 quantitative analysis of French films, provide an illuminating picture of the state of entertainment media in France and its influence on the lives of people in the country.

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STUDY METHODOLOGY

We used focus groups to explore the primary questions of this research. Qualitative focus groups allow for deeper insight into research questions than quantitative survey research because they employ open-ended questions in a group setting where participants can interact with one another. Researchers pose the same questions to each focus group, but participants often take the discussion in new directions that furnish a richer understanding of the research question and generate new themes.

For this study, ten focus groups were conducted over the course of three days in August 2014 in Paris, France at a professional research facility. The conversations, conducted in French, were translated into English. Each focus group was led by a professionally trained moderator. Moderators were matched by gender for each group to control for potential gender moderator effects.[6]

Each of the ten focus groups included eight participants. Half of the focus groups included only male participants, while the other half included only female participants. They were selected by age group, gender, and parental status in order to compare how different groups perceive gender representations in media and their effects. The following focus groups were recruited for this study:

CHILDREN	TEENS	YOUNG ADULTS	ADULTS	PARENTS
Girls, ages 9 – 11	Teen girls, ages 13 – 16	Women, ages 18 – 24	Women, ages 30 – 44	Mothers of children ages 6 – 9
Boys, ages 9 – 11	Teen boys, ages 13 – 16	Men, ages 18 – 24	Men, ages 30 – 44	Fathers of children ages 6 – 9

We attempted to create focus groups that represent the diversity of urban residents in France in terms of ethnicity, education, and income levels.

Focus group participants only included French people who frequently go to movies and watch television. They self-identified as people who had viewed between one and five French films in the previous twelve months. Participants were also screened for their level of comfort discussing the personal impact of their most recent movie viewing experience to ensure that they would be active contributors in their focus group. People who work in media or market research were excluded from the study given their professional proximity to the research question.

Each focus group started with background questions to get the group talking. Next, the moderators asked about societal gender roles and how they are represented in media. At some point during the session, participants were shown two short clips of scenes from the films "Rien à Declarer" ("Nothing to Declare") and "Un Monstre à Paris" ("Monster in Paris") to spark discussions of gender roles. The scene from "Rien à Declarer" shows a man proposing to a woman in a restaurant after asking for her father's permission. The scene from "Un Monstre à Paris" depicts a fight between two couples and a "bad guy" to inspire discussion about violence in media. These films were selected based on their popularity and their clear depiction of gender roles. Participants were also asked a series of direct questions about media influence. The moderators' script can be found in Appendix A.

This study has several limitations. The first limitation is its focus on film instead of a full array of entertainment media (e.g., television, video games, YouTube videos, books, magazines, etc.). Focus group participants discussed many other forms of media, but they were only asked specific questions about film and television so the findings can only be applied to those mediums.

A second limitation is that a study with 80 focus group participants by definition over-simplifies the experiences of the over 66 million people who reside in France. Focus groups provide detailed information about specific topics, but they are not representative of the larger population from which they are drawn.

A third study limitation is that participants were selected from Paris, a city that is not representative of all dialects and racial groups in France. Paris is the capital and easily the largest city in France, with 10.8 million people, compared to the next largest cities Lyon and Marseille-Aix-en-Provence, each with 1.6 million residents. French is the most dominant language in France and regional dialects are largely in decline, but they do exist and are not represented in this study. When it comes to race, a 2004 study estimates that the French population is 85% white or of European origin, 10% are from North Africa, 3.5% are Black, and 1.5% are Asian.[7] The focus groups included in the study are not representative of the racial composition of the country.

A fourth limitation is that study findings are limited by social desirability, a tendency for participants to respond to questions in a manner that reflects desirable or "good" behavior. Although moderators did their best to minimize this phenomenon, some participants may have given socially desirable answers instead of their honest opinions in order to avoid the appearance of sexism.

FRENCH MEDIA

France has the fourth largest international movie box office with $1.8 billion in annual revenues.[8]
In 2014, French cinema attendance topped 208.97 million (up 7.9% from 2013, and the second
highest attendance record since 1967).[9] French and U.S. films dominate the market fairly equally,
with French films constituting 44.4% of the market share (up 10.6 points from 2013) and U.S. films
taking 45.4%. Comedies and art house films account for the largest share of movie admissions in
France (29.5% and 21.3%, respectively). French films are more popular with senior citizens who
comprise 42.5% of that audience, and American films are more popular with young filmgoers who
comprise 43.2% of that audience.

Cinema is a popular pastime in France. Two thirds of French people go to the movies at least once a year,
and the average moviegoer sees five films a year. One-third of French people attend movies at least once
a month, and women account for 52.6% of French moviegoers.

French people are also regular television consumers. Eight-in-ten (79.8%) watch television on a daily
basis, and 6.1% of watch programming daily on another screen (PC, telephone mobile, tablet). Instant
access to media through internet technology is commonplace now for most participants, but particularly
for young people. While parents and older adults still use DVDs, most teenagers and young adults
stream or download their media via the internet. Many parents prefer TV viewing to film viewing for their
children because strict national laws require television stations to edit out sexual scenes, dialogue, and
excessive violence. Participants in our study report that young French people are frequent users of new
streaming technology devices for entertainment media.

"Technology is much more accessible for them today. They learn a lot quicker."
– Quentin, 33 years old, father of 1

"We cannot live without our mobile, computer." – Louise, 16 years old

*"[I watch] streaming mostly. I don't want to wait, if I wait for the series to be on TV they will take a year
or a year and a half to come out and I can't wait that long!" – Clement, 21 years old*

*"Here in the city today there are smartphones and wi-fi is everywhere. As a kid I never had access to all
that technology… we had three channels on TV!" – Rayan, 38 years old, father of 3*

*"Yeah I don't know how they learned how to use the computer but they know how to go on it
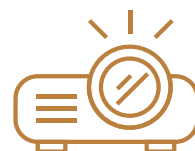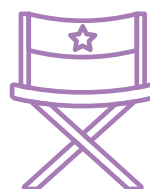all by themselves." – Maxence, 51 years old, father of 1*

FINDINGS

We report our major findings from the ten focus groups in this section. Participants were asked numerous questions, but five primary themes emerged during focus group discussions::

- **Media Preferences**
- **Societal gender roles**
- **Women in media**
- **Violence in media**
- **Social issues in media**

For each of these themes, we describe the most common opinions and verbatim quotes from focus group participants. We only include findings that surfaced in half or more of the ten groups, and we highlight disagreements or differences of opinion within and across groups.
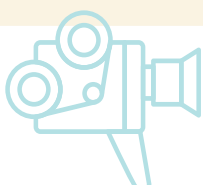
Media Preferences: A Generation Gap

A generation gap emerged in terms of a preference for French films versus U.S. films. With the exception of French comedies, teenagers and young adults prefer U.S. films to French films because they see American films as more exciting and realistic in terms of action scenes. This generational gap matters because it means that young French people are increasingly exposed to U.S. media that has an even greater imbalance of gender representation than French media. Participants notice that French film offers more and better roles for women than U.S. cinema.

"The young generation nowadays don't really like French films. I often ask my students what films they like and it's always American cinema…but French film they do not like because for them, and this is their terms, 'it's boring', 'we don't understand anything', 'the actors are old', 'there is no action going on, there is nothing going on'…there is no action; there are no guns, no flames, no huge special effects."
– Oceane, 32 years old

"When we hear French movie we think to ourselves that it's going to suck." – Mathis, 15 years old

"Apart from comedies, French movies…everybody agrees they are lame." – Maelys, 15 years old

On the other hand, adult participants across age and gender groups prefer French cinema to U.S. movies because they think French films are more intelligent, involve better actors, and rely less on action and special effects to hold the viewer's attention.

"What I really like to watch are movies that move me, that will provoke something in me, either intellectual or an emotion that it brings out in me. French cinema is very good." – Mathilde, 44 years old

"French film has nothing to envy in American film. I would even go further than that and say that, intellectually, French film is much better than American film." – Alexandre, 38 years old

"Unlike American movies, it's always about a very average person…the 'man in the street.' It's the French charm, I guess. French movies: actors are not specifically handsome. They are more like us. They are not real stunners, supermodels… They are normal people, not superheroes." – Anais, 23 years old

"What I like about French films is that they have a storyline whereas with some American productions… are just boom boom boom boom and then no story at all behind all that. I find that there is much variety and less stereotyped than American productions." – Evan, 42 years old

"If I go see a French film the main reason is because it's French, with French actors. The scenario is a lot more realistic than American films. We can relate much better to the films as well."
– Baptiste, 38-years-old, father of 3

Societal Gender Roles: Rapidly Changing

Participants were asked a series of questions about gender roles in France. Young participants were asked about their professional aspirations and whether they expect to face gendered barriers as they move forward in life. Adult participants were asked whether gender roles have changed during their lifetime. Participant opinions clustered around career aspirations, occupational freedom, women's independence, and chores. We address each of these topics below.

FINDING: Career Aspirations

When asked what they aspire to be when they grow up, children and teenage participants generally report traditional career aspirations. Young boys (ages 9 – 11) want to be video game testers, astronauts, professional basketball and football players, and divers, while young girls want to be perfumers, actresses, veterinarians, teachers, and chefs. Teenage boys say they aspire to be athletes, electricians, corporate leaders, real estate agents, environmental activists, and bakers. Teenage girls were less gendered in their aspirations. They want to do a mix of traditionally "feminine" jobs – beautician, musician, dancer – as well as more "masculine" jobs – webmaster and professional athlete.

When asked about whether there are jobs mostly for men or mostly for women, French children and some adults still think in terms of gender stereotypes. Women are seen as nurses, beauticians, and homemakers, while men are seen as construction workers, astronauts, motocross riders, wrestlers, skateboarders, truck drivers, and chefs.

"Astronaut! Because I have never seen a girl in space!" – Leo, 10 years old

"There are jobs that women can't do! Truck driver, ecause it's physical, you have to be strong!" – Lola, 10 years old

"Usually, whenever there's a construction site, it's men who are working. The building industry, it is harder [for women]." – Manon, 9 years old

"Because they're quite physical jobs, it's not a job that a woman wants to do." – Mathis, 15 years old

"Regarding landscape design, we hire more men than women, and even when a woman wants to enter this world, it's a little difficult because it's very manual. Things have to be carried so there is much machismo regarding this subject." – Timeo, 24 years old

Adult participants across groups notice persistent gender gaps in French society, perpetuated by children's toys and the belief that feminine is inferior.

"When I take my kids to do their activities, my boy does karate with just boys and the girls do classical ballet with other girls, and in the toy shops, there are still aisles for the boys toys and another for the girls. So I don't find that it changed that much actually." – Nina, 41 years old, mother of 3

"If we go to 'Toys R us' to buy toys, there is the pink lane for girls with stuff like kitchens, cleaning up, ironing, and playing with dolls so they can take care of their younger brothers, and then there are the young boys with action man and all that stuff. When I was 4, I had a Barbie truck, and well, I was lucky that, well I think it was lucky, to grow up in a family that was not gender biased and when you enter society it's 'girls can't carry things' and 'a secretary must be a woman' and 'no a boy can't babysit'. It's all these things like 'you do this like a girl' or 'you must act like a guy'." – Matheo, 20 years old

"I think we keep being marked as girls, for instance. Our mothers fought so we have access to many things; our grandmothers too – voting rights etc. – and yet, we still have this difference, boys are blue, girls are rose, but sorry! I don't like pink. OK, I have some pink here…Or also expressions like 'you strike like a girl'… Well, no, I don't "strike like a girl"; I do krav-maga, I do way better than you and I'm a girl…
All of these expressions are negative… "Don't behave like a girl"… I behave like a girl because I'm a girl, why should I behave like a dude? It exasperates me." – Juliette, 21 years old

FINDING: Occupational Freedom

Adult participants agree that women have more occupational freedom than in the past. They report many positive changes in gender progress in the workplace in recent decades.

"I see progress, for sure, nothing compared with the time of our grandmothers." – Louna, 24 years old

"It's quite nice being a girl in this country because I can do anything at my age." – Lola, 10 years old

"In the past, man had more power and today it's 50/50." – Anna, 36 years old, mother of 2

"There was also truck driver, but nowadays – I watched a TV report about that – there are more and more female truck drivers. It is very good. It demonstrates that we are women, it is our passion."
– Juliette, 21 years old

"I have a friend in my class whose mom is an architect! And her dad doesn't work!"
– Jade, 8 years old

Despite this new occupational freedom, teenage girls and adults across age and gender groups see a persistent wage and leadership gap between men and women in the workforce. They attribute this to lingering gender discrimination.

"Discrimination is a reality: I used to work for a recruiting agency and I can tell you, many employers ask us over the phone for 'no woman' or 'no young woman' because they could have babies. It's for real, and it does happen." – Clemence, 23 years old

"When it comes to the professional world, I think then there are inequities, women are not given the same salary and it's harder for them to be given a post that has some responsibility and all that, there is a huge disparity there." – Yanis, 21 years old

"In terms of getting promoted, salary [is an issue for women]." – Louise, 16 years old

"Last time, I was reading a study about salaries differences. The difference is not that huge, but still, there is a difference and it's not normal." – Lina, 24 years old

"In certain situations, for example at work it can be frustrating sometimes to have women in certain posts having more responsibility. Some men can't accept that." – Marie, 32 years old

FINDING: Independent Women

Adult participants of both genders report that women have become more independent in their lives more generally.

"In everything I do, I'm way more independent. Another example, I'll struggle opening a can, but it will be MY fight and MY can, I won't ask for help, even if it gets ugly. We want to prove to ourselves that we can." – Lisa, 21 years old

"The woman's identity has evolved. She is no longer defined by her role as mother or as a wife. They are independent for much longer and there seems to be more and more women in the cinema that are 30 and extremely active, that go out and have a way of life that is very similar to that of men. They are freer. This is also a chance for women." – Paul, 42 years old

"Regarding their professional posts, they have much more responsibility and they work as much as and sometimes even more than men and they are more and more independent." – Marie, 32 years old

"We don't have to put up with things as much anymore professionally or in a relationship." – Jeanne, 41 years old

"Women are a lot more independent now, they work a lot more than they used to." – Mohamed, 32 years old, father of 2

"Regarding work, I know that I earn more today than my partner." – Alicia, 37 years old, mother of 1

Male and female participants in the adult groups (30 – 44) think that older men are stressed about rapid changes in gender relations in French society because they no longer know exactly what women want from them.

"As women are now more independent they have become more demanding as well. Nowadays, a woman that is 30/35 years old is active. She has her independence and her apartment so she is more demanding regarding her romantic relationships today." – Paul, 42 years old

"They no longer need the same type of man like they did a few years ago in fact. The expectations of a girlfriend with her boyfriend and a wife and her husband are different today. There is no longer an instruction manual to how things should be." – Alexandre, 38 years old

"I think that men have become more insecure because women no longer depend on them. Women are financially self-sufficient and we have our own apartment, we don't need a man to live, and I think they no longer know what role they are meant to have actually." – Oceane, 32 years old

"It must be harder for men actually because they have more difficulty finding their place." – Marie, 32 years old

FINDING: Equality at Home…Sort Of
When asked whether they perform household chores, a traditionally feminized task, a gender gap did not appear. Both male and female participants in the children and teen groups report that they complete about the same amount of chores.

"I vacuum every weekend. And also to remove the trash bags, fetching the letters." - Leo, 10 years old

"I help by cleaning up the house; I help cooking and other things." – Manon, 9 years old

"Cleaning… Walking out the dog…. I don't know… Things like that, but it only takes 10 minutes to do." – Arthur, 17 years old

"Cooking, yes." – Zoe, 16 years old

"Cooking no, some housework yes." – Eva, 13 years old

Adult women say that, while the distribution of parenting and housework is better than is used to be, they still feel primarily responsible for caring for the home. Furthermore, they feel they have to hold men accountable to holding up their share of the work.

"Men are more involved with the children, and they are even often the motor to having children. I find that they speak more often about children than before." – Charlotte, 30 years old

"The roles have definitely changed. Before the mom would always be taking care of the kids, working part-time in order to be with the kids, but now that role can be done by either parent." – Gabin, 48 years old, father of 1

"Typically I never cook, it's always him that does that, but bringing in the money is more me than him. We share responsibilities." – Anna, 36 years old, mother of 2

"I think we now have a better chores distribution; he cooks, I clean up, yet it's not natural for him. They still need to be pushed a little, even if they try to do some work." – Clemence, 23 years old

Women in Media: Fewer "Damsels in Distress"

Participants across focus groups are critical of the ways in which women are portrayed in French entertainment media. They report that female roles are mostly secondary to male roles, that women are shown as supporting or background characters that are incidental to the plot. And when women do appear, they are shown as less intelligent and as sexual objects. However, participants agree that female characters are more empowered than in the past. We describe each of these themes in turn.

FINDING: Women are Marginalized in Media

Participants across age groups notice that women play mostly secondary characters in support of male leads.

"More often the main roles are men, there is hardly ever a movie that revolves around a female character. It's more often a masculine character that is accompanied by a woman or another man. The main role is masculine and he is always very tough and has big guns and all that so it's also the western culture and with globalization and capitalism we try to make people dream of adolescent fantasy of the body builder man and the very beautiful women." – Mael, 18 years old

"There is always the male role that is macho and the woman is behind him."
– Lana, 33 years old, mother of 3

"In action movies, it's not women who count. It's the action of the movie. It's about all that the guy has to do and he does what he wants. He's right." – Tom, 16 years old

"In action movies, men have relationships with many different women. Just for a night, I mean."
– Mathis, 15 years old

"Men represented as bad boys and all muscley and women are bird brained." – Yanis, 21 years old

"The main role is generally the man and the whole movie revolves around him including the female characters." – Noemie, 38 years old

"I find that women are very little on a main role, I have difficulty finding movies where women play the main role. Before we used to have many films with Catherine Deneuve and Carole Bouquet in a main role, but nowadays, there isn't really much." – Nina, 41 years old, mother of 3

Adults across focus groups also tend to see French film offering more and better roles for women than American cinema.

"French movies have less stereotypes than American movies regarding occupations. I find we are more balanced that way. We have less of the all-powerful male and the very beautiful woman." – Mael, 18 years old

"I watch a lot of cinema, foreign and American in particular, and I find that women's roles in French movies are more impacting. At least that is what I found to be true." – Charlotte, 30 years old

FINDING: Women are Often Sexualized

Participants across age groups say that women are often presented as sex objects in film. Young adult men and women (18-24) are especially critical of this common depiction of women.

"Even when they have a woman that is warrior of sorts, she is still represented as very sexy."
– Yanis, 21 years old

"When the woman is stereotyped, like a stupid bimbo, let's say it doesn't help the woman's cause."
– Lisa, 21 years old

"Yes they always have big breasts and stuff, certain stereotypes." – Maxime, 21 years old

"When in movies, they think it's needed to show more female flesh than man flesh, and then for kids, it becomes normal to see young woman with just panty and bra while, no, it shouldn't be normal. It's something they do so guys watch the movie." – Juliette, 21 years old

FINDING: *Fewer "Damsels in Distress"*

Participants across focus groups report that the situation is getting better for women in French entertainment media. They find that fewer characters are presented as "damsels in distress" waiting to be rescued and female characters are more independent and action-oriented in films today than in the past.

"When it comes to the female role, they are more independent, resourceful, and have a more positive role." – Valentin, 31 years old, father of 2

"It's mostly an egalitarian situation. Each one does the same thing to save themselves. First it's a woman that saves them, and then the opposite, I like it, and it's nice." – Noemie, 38 years old

"Sometimes, I like when the woman takes over. There is something I like, it's the fact that, at least at the beginning, the girl takes the initiative while the man is set back, he is afraid to see her shot, so the situation is somewhat reversed; and then we see the girl attacking with her umbrella, so she is in the foreground, and active, replacing the man." – Anais, 23 years old

"Angelina Jolie when she plays a manly role, because she uses more often weapons, etc. than any other actress. She is really tough compared to the others. She has 'men' ways, and that's what I like." – Maelys, 15 years old

"Powerful woman characters. I'm not necessarily fond of the weapon/violence aspect, but I like when she is superior." – Louise, 16 years old

"It reminds me of 'Rebelle' (Brave) in which a girl takes the initiative, chooses her destiny. These girls are not passive, they act." – Juliette, 21 years old

Violence in Media: Boys Like It, Girls Don't

A stark gender gap emerged when participants were asked about violence in French cinema. Young boys and male teenage participants say they prefer violence in their entertainment media.

"I like action movies. Something that moves where there are fights!" – Theo, 16 years old

"I would say the more 'barbaric' the better!" – Tom, 16 years old

"This is what we come to see anyhow. When you go see a horror movie, you want to see horror!"
– Arthur, 17 years old

"This kind of movie relaxes me, everything is exploding, you don't understand anything that is going on you just don't think of anything, this relaxes me, this relaxes me more than a comedy. When they are fighting and exploding everywhere." – Noah, 20 years old

When asked to name their favorite movie characters, teenage boys and young men (18 – 24) say they like male heroes who engage in justified violence.

"Well, in the movie 'Rocky,' because when the movie starts, he's finished and he takes care of his family, but there are different plots in the movie. I like him because he's determined. Because he wants to reach his goal and he doesn't give up. He trains. He's at 100%." – Ethan, 15 years old

"Walter White in 'Breaking Bad,' because to me, he's a true hero. He's a genius. He's not a role model, but real quick, the storyline is that he has cancer and he's a physics teacher and he becomes a methamphetamine dealer in order to take care of his family before he dies. So I think that's respectable even though it hurts other people. You shouldn't try to follow his example, but still I think it's a beautiful act." – Arthur, 17 years old

"I don't know the name of the character but it's in the TV series 'Arrow.' He's a righter of wrongs, he brings justice. He fights against a group that kills civilians and he tries to stop them." – Raphael, 13 years old

"He exercises justice himself. Ultimately, he takes the matter in his own hands and fights for a good cause. At first this character made me think of Robin Hood except it doesn't talk about the rich and the poor."
– Arthur, 17 years old

"The guy from 'Taken!' cause he's a badass! Let's say that he's agile! He takes care of things and he can get himself out of any situation! That's what I like! Because he's resourceful. 'Dexter' because he kills people who get away with serious crimes. He's a good guy because he brings justice. Because he's a righter of wrongs. He has a moral goal. It means that nobody goes unpunished." – Tom, 16 years old

"I like a character in the 'Person of Interest' series. The main role because he doesn't care about anything. He's a cold-blooded killer and he doesn't have any conscience. Sometimes he fights against 6 people at the same time and still wins. He's fearless, and in the end, it's in order to save people." – Mathis, 15 years old

"In 'Drive,' [Ryan] Gosling has such monstrous charisma, always cold blooded, always in control. When there are certain scenes that are quite hard core, he remains calm and serene and just walks way calmly from things like nothing happened. I like this attitude, it's not like I want to do the same stuff he does but I find that keeping oneself under control is something important. So in a way, he inspires me."
– Mael, 18 years old

Girls and women of all ages say they do not like to see violence, blood, gore, and death in entertainment media.

"The blood splashes everywhere. It's too violent." – Clemence, 23 years old

"I don't like to see people die." – Lea, 10 years old

"It's just horrible! Blood, heads off, blood everywhere. It's super violent." – Louna, 24 years old

"I like horror movies, this kind of things, but what I cannot stand when it comes to blood and gore... cutting humans into pieces. It makes me feel very uncomfortable." – Lisa, 21 years old

"The blood. I don't like seeing that." – Oceane, 32 years old

"Stabbing is violent. I can't even watch someone being stabbed." – Pauline, age 35, mother of 2

Children say that they are not allowed to watch violent entertainment media. Mothers and fathers confirm that they restrict their young children from viewing violent media because parents are concerned that this will upset or influence their kids.

"We're not allowed to see it because people get killed, but we don't even see the blood. It's only because we can hear gunshots. I'm allowed to see things like that but when we see murders and such, I'm not allowed." – Jade, 8 years old

"I can't watch it whenever there's too much action." – Camille, 11 years old

"I'm not allowed to see movies that are too violent." – Lola, 10 years old

"It has these big fight scenes, there is blood everywhere and they fight to the death. It's a cartoon, but they go too far. I turn it off immediately!" – Lily, 39 years old, mother of 3

Social Issues in Media: Turn Your Brain Off vs. Expanding Consciousness

Participants are divided on the question of whether entertainment media is an appropriate forum to address social issues. Some participants across age groups say they just want to be entertained when they watch movies or television.

"We like to watch movies to forget about our lives and experience something else."
– Jeanne, 41 years old

"Actually, that is the kind of movie that I don't like at all! For me, it is far too touchy feely, too moralizing, too cliché. I don't like it to be too scholarly and with a moral in the end."
– Paul, 42 years old

"I like the action, and there's usually no message." – Jules, 15 years old

A larger number of participants across age and gender groups prefer media with social messages such as environmentalism, global economies, healthcare, ethnic divisions, poverty, and gender inequality.

"I like to know what's going on around the planet and we have everything when they have nothing. I'd like to be the main character of 'Le Grand Bleu,' the one who swims with dolphins, the one who goes deep into the ocean to clean it." – Jade, 8 years old

"You learn [from a show] about globalization, people that die so I have my clothes, and it's very moving and makes me think about it. When you see prices like €2, €3, obviously it is scandalous outsourcing, so no, I wouldn't buy it." – Clara, 16 years old

"There is a beautiful movie, 'Le Scaphandre et le papillon.' I loved it. Since my parents work at a hospital, they are very interested about healthcare topics. Besides, my mother has a disease which is never really discussed by the media, so I like this sort of movie." – Lisa, 21 years old

"I like showing that show to my kids to help them realize how fortunate they are to live where they live and to have the food, shelter, and clothing that they do. It opens their eyes. My kids know now that there are really kids out there who are starving, and that they should finish their plates!"
– Alexis, 32 years old, father of 2

"I saw one on Gypsies, for example, and in the poor income suburbs and in the difficult schools, etc. here in France. All these were realistic and very interesting!" – Sacha, 46 years old

"I saw a film a few weeks ago which was called 'Le procès de Viviane Amsalem' and it really made me think about woman and the conditions they live in Israel. This was about a woman that was entirely dependent on her husband. This film really marked me." – Nolan, age 37

"I am quite sensitive to the stories about the Black community. The older I get, the more interested I become, and it shows how these women suffered in silence and they managed to be liberated in the end, so I really liked it." – Oceane, 32 years old

"[Poverty] is a subject that is real so it can help those that are going through it."
– Alexandre, 38 years old

"We can have a serious subject but if they blend in some humor with it that's a guaranteed success. For example, 'Les Aventures de Rabbi Jacob' is a film that talks about a serious subject like race, but with humor." – Valentin, 31 years old, father of 2

"'Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au bon dieu' was pretty funny. It made fun of racist clichés. It's something that we talk about quite often." – Mathis, 15 years old

"It mainly showed how racist some people's thoughts are." – Charlotte, 30 years old

Teenage girls and adult women say they appreciate French media content about stalking and sexual violence because it raises awareness about the dangers of their environment and how to avoid such situations.

"In series we see that too, and also rapes, phones snatching. It also happens to me! In the subway. I was shocked." – Maelys, 15 years old

"[These programs teach us] to be careful. It warns us about danger." – Clara, 16 years old

"Yes, it can cause some anxiety, but it's good to be informed and know what is going on otherwise we wouldn't watch it." – Celia, 36 years old

CONCLUSION

Focus group discussions centered on five primary themes: media preferences, societal gender roles, women in media, violence in media, and social issues in media. We summarize the major findings for each theme below.

Media Preferences: A Generation Gap

With the exception of French comedies, teenagers and young adults prefer U.S. films to French films because they think of American films as more exciting and realistic in terms of action scenes. Adults on the other hand prefer French films for their intelligence, acting quality, and storylines.

Societal Gender Roles: Rapidly Changing

Young focus group participants report gendered aspirations in terms of ideal career paths, and teenage girls and adults across age and gender groups say that women face persistent wage and leadership gaps in the workforce.

Older male and female participants say that the French workforce is far less gendered than when they were young. Adult participants of both genders say women have become more independent in their lives than previous generations of French women. Adult participants also think French society has a long way to go because media and toys continue to promote the idea that boys should devalue traditionally feminine values and activities.

When it comes to household chores, young participants of both genders report that they work in the household. Adult women say that, while distribution of parenting and housework is better than is used to be, they still feel primarily responsible for caring for the home.

Adult male and female participants notice that some older men are stressed about rapid changes in gender relations in France because it leaves them confused about how to best relate to women in relationships and the workplace.

Women in Media: Fewer "Damsels in Distress"

Participants across focus groups are critical of the ways in which women are portrayed in French entertainment media. They report that female roles are mostly secondary to male roles and, when they are shown, female characters are often hyper-sexualized. Adults across focus groups also tend to see French film offering more and better roles for women than U.S. cinema.

Participants across focus groups report that the situation is getting better for women in French entertainment media. They find that fewer characters are presented as "damsels in distress" waiting to be rescued. More French and U.S. films today show women as independent and able to take care of themselves compared to films of the past.

Violence in Media: Boys Prefer It, Girls Don't

A stark gender gap emerges when participants were asked about violence in French cinema. Young boys and male teenage participants say they prefer violence in entertainment media. Their favorite characters are male heroes who engage in justified violence. Girls and women of all ages say they do not like to see violence, blood, gore, and death in entertainment media.

Children say that kids are not allowed to watch violent entertainment media. Mothers and fathers confirm that they restrict their young children from violent media.

Social Issues in Media: Entertainment Versus Education

Participants disagree about whether entertainment media should include pressing social issues. Some participants across groups say they just want to be entertained when they watch French media, while a larger number say they want to see social messages in entertainment media.

Participants think that French entertainment media should address many pressing social issues, include environmentalism, global economies, healthcare, ethnic divisions, poverty, and gender inequality. Female respondents appreciate depictions of sexual violence because it raises awareness about this problem.

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR GUIDE
GLOBAL GENDER IN MEDIA IMPACT STUDY
Discussion Guide

WARM UP	10 MINS

EXPLAIN THE PROCESS:
Moderator introduction. Explain two-way mirror, recording, etc. There are no right or wrong answers. We want your honest opinions. Very important to be open/honest with your feelings.

FOR PARENTS GROUPS ONLY:
What are the ages and genders of your children? (Each parent should consider their child(ren) when answering questions, with the focus being on their daughters.)

RESPONDENT WARMUP:
I'd like to find out everyone's name, age and what are some of the things you like to do for fun (movies, television, games, books, live shows, etc.)!

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR/MOVIES   40 MINS

Rotate order of questions across the different groups

What do you feel is expected of you in different roles in your life? (As a student, in your family, in your community, religion, etc.) Are expectations different depending on the role?

SAMPLE OF QUESTIONS TO PROBE:

Do you have chores? What types of chores do you do?

Do you read books? What types of books do you read?

What are some of the characters like in those books?

How important is education? Is it important for everyone to receive an education?

If not, who is education not important for?

What occupation would you ideally like to have?

(CHILDREN: What do you want to be/do when you grow up?)

Do you feel there are any obstacles to having that career/job? What are they?

Are only certain people suited for certain jobs?
For example, when you think of a nurse, who do you picture? What does that person look like?
How about for a police officer? For a teacher?

Where do you get the idea of what a nurse, police officer, teacher looks like
– experience, books, movies, TV shows?

FOR PARENTS, GENERAL ONLY:

Do you feel there are any obstacles to goals or dreams that you want to achieve?
If so, what are those obstacles and are they able to be overcome?

PROBE

Thinking over the course of your lifetime, how have gender roles changed?

How have they remained the same?

Has the fact that you are a [man/boy, woman/girl] impacted your life positively and/or negatively?

In what ways?

MOVIE SCENES   40 MINS

Moderator NOTE:

These scenes are meant to open up a discussion about gender roles. The focus of this section is to get the respondents to discuss their feelings about the characters' behavior and if/how the situation the characters are in relates to their own lives.

I'd now like to show you a scene from a movie. It doesn't matter if you've seen the movie before or not. Make sure you watch carefully because we'll be talking about what you thought afterwards.

Scene #1- MALE/FEMALE INTERACTION SCENE

How do you feel about the characters in the scene?

PROBE

What specifically did you like/not like about the interaction the characters had?

Do you relate to any of the characters?

What do you think about their appearances?

Do you think that any of the characters should have responded differently in the situation?

Why?

I'd now like to show you another scene from a movie. Again, it doesn't matter if you've seen the movie before or not. Make sure you watch carefully because we'll be talking about what you thought afterwards.

Scene #2- DOMESTIC RELATIONS SCENE

What are your thoughts/feelings about this scene?

Describe the relationship between the characters.

PROBE

Are the characters/relationships believable?

Do you relate to any of the characters?

How do you feel about the situation they are in?

Did you find anything in either of the scenes you just saw disturbing?

Did anything in either scene make you uncomfortable?

What do you think about each character's behavior in these scenes?

MOVIE SCENES CONTINUED   40 MINS

PROBE FOR EACH CHARACTER:

Is it clear why they are responding in the way in which they are?

Are their reactions appropriate given the situation they are in?

In what ways are they appropriate/not appropriate?

What would be a more appropriate response?

IMPACT OF MEDIA   30 MINS

For General and Parents ONLY

What is the role, if any, of local media - specifically movies and television - in shaping attitudes and ideas about gender roles within your society?

What should their role be?

What is the impact of locally-made entertainment?

Is it generally positive/negative?

How does locally-made entertainment (movies and television) impact men and women in society?

Is it different based on whether they are a man or a woman? If so, in what ways?

In what ways, if any, do you think that locally-made entertainment has an impact on children?

On their ideals of the world? Is it typically a positive or negative impact?

In what ways?

Now we want to talk about local media's impact on health issues.
Are there any movies or television shows you've seen that discussed a health issue that you found particularly interesting or informative?

What are your general thoughts about these types of issues being included in movies or television shows?

Have you ever sought out more information for a health issue based on something you saw in a movie or television show?

Have you ever shared information you saw in a movie or television show on a health related topic with others?

Have you viewed a movie or show specifically because it dealt with a health issue that was important to you?

WRAP UP   5 MINS

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

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If she can see it, she can be it™