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Hollywood disempowers women, Geena Davis tells NEW Executive Leaders Forum

No change in women's representation in family films since 1946

RANCHO PALOS VERDES, Calif. (July 30, 2013) – Hollywood's distorted view of women and girls is preventing women from achieving their full potential, according to actress and media activist Geena Davis, who spoke Thursday at the Network of Executive Women NEW Executive Leaders Forum in Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif.

Noting that females of all ages are grossly misrepresented in movies, television and other media, Davis said women, men, corporations and governments must work together to change the way women are perceived and to cultivate women leaders.

Davis offered the 300 senior executives attending the NEW Forum some startling statistics:

In group scenes, only 17 percent of characters are female. "Apparently, women don't like to 'gather,'" Davis said to laughter. While females are more than half the population of the United States, males outnumber females three to one in family films. Even more staggering, she said: This ratio is the same as it was in 1946.

From 2006 to 2009, not one female character was depicted in G-rated family films in the field of medical science, as a business leader, in law or in politics. In these films, 80.5 percent of all working characters are male and 19.5 percent are female. In the real world, women comprise 50 percent of the workforce, according to Davis.

During her acting career, Davis said she became aware of how few great roles there are for women. "For roles that are there, they don't drive the plot," she noted. "They are someone's girlfriend or they are there for eye candy."

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Her roles in movies such as "Thelma & Louise" (1991) led to a profound interest in the way girls and women are portrayed in the media and cemented her passion to help empower them. "These [acting] experiences have led me down paths that were not part of my master plan," she noted.

Since "Thelma & Louise," Davis said she has chosen roles based on the answer to the question: "What are the women in the audience going to think about my character?" Today, she tries to find projects that allow her to play women in control of her own fate. "If you see me playing the comatose wife of Sean Connery -- and that age gap is about right for Hollywood -- you'll know I'm broke," she said.

Having spent most of her adult life encouraging girls and women to reach their full potential, Davis told the senior leaders in the room, "We can and must leverage the impact that we have."

About the Network of Executive Women

The Network of Executive Women is the consumer products and retail industry's largest diversity organization, with more than 7,000 members representing 700 industry companies. The Network has 92 national sponsors and 20 regional groups in the United States and Canada. It hosts dozens of local events and two national conferences each year. For more information visit www.newonline.org.

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