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There Are Too Few Positive Media Role Models for Children

by

Deborah Taylor Tate*

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What did we see today? And more importantly, what did our children see today?

Children between 8- and 18-years-old spend upward of 10 hours a day engaging with media, spending more time with media than any other activity except school and sleeping.

I believe this growing media landscape provides a unique and impactful opportunity for content providers to show role models on the screen that reflect the roles we want our children to play in real life. Someone else thinks so, too.

Last week, I met the first female president of the United States. Well, at least my favorite president from the former TV show *Commander in Chief*, Academy Award winning actress, Geena Davis.

The Free State Foundation
P.O. Box 60680, Potomac, MD 20859
info@freestatefoundation.org
www.freestatefoundation.org

Like many of us, Geena spent time watching TV with her little girl and noticed the lack of females in leading roles, or females as CEOs, or women in other top career and leadership positions.

And, like any good commander in chief, Geena decided to actually do something about it.

She founded The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media to spearhead research on statistics of female parts, roles and portrayals. GDIM reports that despite being 50 percent of the U.S. population, in family films and television, male characters outweigh female characters nearly 3:1 with only 27 percent of the speaking characters cast as female.

Many of these characters are not appropriate examples for our children. According to the Girl Scout Research Institute, sexualized messages and images of girls and women not only impact girls, but also result in boys' developing unrealistic and unhealthy expectations. Females were over five times as likely as males to be shown in sexually revealing clothing. And nearly all girls compare themselves to fashion models, with 31 percent admitting to starving themselves or refusing to eat as a strategy to lose weight.

But what's even more powerful than these statistics is the powerful people who are standing up for more positive and healthy images of women and girls cross platform, cross technologies and cross sectors.

Spearheaded by the Girl Scouts of the USA, Geena Davis and I have officially launched an unprecedented partnership with the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Cable and Telecommunication Association and the Creative Coalition to promote healthy, balanced and positive images of women and girls. Together Healthy MEdia: Commission for Positive Images of Women and Girls will host the premier National Discussion on this topic and produce concrete recommendations for media and policy leaders.

I'm proud to co-chair this effort with Geena and partner with the industry leaders, but we need your help in order to be successful.

You can have a big impact with your own family, by helping your child become a savvy media consumer, discussing strong female role models, and underscoring healthy eating and active lifestyles.

And let your voice be heard. Proctor and Gamble could not find enough family friendly programming for their advertising budget, so they are now producing "Family Movie Nights" which you can purchase at Walmart. Dove and Vanity Fair use real women in their advertisements. And many other companies and partners are working toward "Healthy MEdia" images in their own programming, ads and stories.

We want all content providers — from screen writers to music video produces and everyone in between — to realize that when their advertisers and their viewers want positive, healthy programming for all our children, it is not only the right decision, but also good for business.

We all want content that shows strong and successful role models for our children, so hopefully one day we will have a female president not only on TV, but in the White House as well.

*Deborah Taylor Tate is a Distinguished Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Free State Foundation and a former Federal Communications Commissioner. She is co-chair of Healthy MEdia: Commission for Positives Images of Women and Girls. The Free State Foundation is a nonpartisan Section 501(c)(3) free market-oriented think tank in Rockville, Maryland.