

Testimony of Geena Davis

WOMEN AND TECHNOLOGY: INCREASING OPPORTUNITY AND DRIVING INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Thank you Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel, I'm honored to be invited to testify at this hearing on "WOMEN AND TECHNOLOGY: INCREASING OPPORTUNITY AND DRIVING INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT". The efforts of the Committee to ensure that women and girls are included and have the same opportunities as men and boys around the world is critical, especially when it comes to access to the Internet.

I have spent most of my adult life advocating for women and girls as a trustee for the Women's Sports Foundation, as chair of the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, as a partner with UN Women and as ITU Special Envoy for Women and Girls in ICTs. The empowerment of women and girls is an issue I'm extremely passionate about, and is why I founded my institute which studies gender in children's media to help women and girls to be seen and heard across the globe.

Technology is having a huge impact on my community, the entertainment industry, in terms of how content creators are using digital platforms to not only serve as the gateway for delivering movies and television programming, but also for the creation of new ways of building global communities.

And, the Internet is having profound impact on how the world engages with Media, and can provide endless opportunities to empower women and girls and influence a systemic cultural shift by improving how they're portrayed and represented. These are the tools that will ultimately raise the value of women and girls in society.

My research Institute has sponsored the largest body of research on gender images in children's media ever done, and we work side-by-side with the leading content creators to dramatically improve how women and girls are represented in media targeting children 11 and under.

Our study on the careers of female characters in Prime Time and Children's TV and Family Films, conducted by Dr. Stacy Smith, Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism, shows that women and girls are missing from critical occupational sectors such as STEM. Out of nearly 6,000 speaking characters in Family Films, males hold 84% of all STEM jobs. This calculates into a ratio of 5 male STEM characters to every one female STEM character.

No female leads or co leads are shown with STEM careers. Looking across the categories of computer science and engineering, the ratio of males to females in these arenas is 14.25 to one! And in Television, characters with STEM jobs are 79% male and 21% female.

The vast gender inequality in media aimed at children is of significant importance as TV and movie images can wield enormous influence on how cultures perceive the value of women and girls and in establishing societal norms. Improving these perceptions can be the real game changer in achieving greater empowerment and participation of girls and women in the technology sector.

My Institute's tagline is "If they can see it, they can be it."

Technology has tremendous potential to transform women and girls' lives, whether it be through STEM career choices or by access to services such as e-health, e-education, e-commerce, e-banking and other applications and devices that can help girls and women address their day-to-day challenges.

We need to vastly improve the gender digital divide: ITU data suggests that there were 200 million fewer women online than men at the end of 2013; and over 1.7 billion women do not own a mobile phone.

We need to bridge the opportunities gap: women earned only 18% of USA computer science degrees; and women make up less than 20% of the U.S. ICT workforce, and only 30% of the European ICT workforce. This cannot stand, given the predicted skills shortfall in the ICT sector of at least two million jobs globally by 2020.

Encouraging women and girls to pursue careers in Tech is critical to closing the economic gender gap. Studies from the ITU have demonstrated that companies that have a gender balance of women in high-level leadership positions and on corporate boards have shown improved financial results.

Women and girls will seek the skills to pursue these career opportunities *if they can see* other women in these roles and be inspired by them. The lack of real-world female role models in Tech careers means that it is imperative to have fictional characters in the science, technology, engineering and math fields in the entertainment media aimed at children.

Technology, and particularly broadband, will be absolutely crucial for achieving all 17 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and all three pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social inclusion and environmental protection – need Technology as key catalysts.

We have the opportunity to ensure that women and girls are fully included in the expansion of the digital world, and that their voices and presence are shaping the agenda of meeting SDG-5, which addresses 'Gender Equality'.

Access to digital technology will be key to meeting this goal, by providing women with the means to educate themselves and their children; to improve their own health and the health of their families and communities; start their own businesses; keep themselves safe; and innovate to build and shape the future they want.

Because I'm privileged enough to live in this country, and as a mother of three children, I can encourage them to engage in any type of interest that they may want to pursue. I want to see a world where all children have the same possibilities and opportunities as my children. A world where woman and girls are valued equally to men and boys and have the freedom to pursue and achieve their dreams.

Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel, once again thank you for this opportunity to testify.