



Geena DAVIS

Is Narrowing the **GENDER** Gap

While much of the media chatter in 2016 has revolved around Hollywood's pay gap, Geena Davis has worked to expose an even more startling injustice: A piddly 30 percent of films feature women in speaking roles. Now she's leveraging her namesake institute on gender in media to spark awareness—and action. Her blockbuster moments:

► **Convincing Bigwigs to Fix Scripts**

The center's research has led 68 percent of producers and directors polled to change at least two of their projects. For instance, director Mark Osborne reframed this year's *The Little Prince* so that the iconic story became part of a larger narrative about an ambitious young girl.

► **Giving Female-Driven Projects a Dedicated Forum**

Last year, Geena cofounded the Bentonville Film Festival in Arkansas to showcase work by and about women and minorities. And since these types of projects often struggle for placement in theaters and on TV channels, winners receive guaranteed distribution through AMC Theatres, Lifetime, and Starz so audiences can actually see them.

► **Diversifying Professional Landscapes**

"There's a tremendous lack of female CEOs, congresswomen, law partners, college professors, and board members in the real world, but in fiction it's worse," says Geena. Still, she's confident in the media's ability to help

change that. Her proof? *CSI* and *Bones*. "There are so many female forensic scientist characters [on TV] that interest for women in that career has skyrocketed," she notes. More recently, as a result of data from Geena's institute, 27 percent of participating content makers gave their female characters bigger goals and more high-powered jobs.

► **Normalizing the Idea of a Female POTUS**

Though her show *Commander in Chief* lasted for only one season, Geena says it helped sway Americans' perceptions: "A study showed people were 69 percent more likely to vote for a female presidential candidate after seeing me behind the desk 19 times," she says.

► **Getting Both Genders to Rally**

"We can't do it without [men] caring too," says Geena, who confirms Bradley Cooper has vowed to discuss his earnings with female costars, and J.J. Abrams will read men and women for parts he casts, then make script changes accordingly. —SB

Geena's as-yet-untitled documentary about gender inequality in Hollywood is currently filming and slated for a 2018 release. The third Bentonville Film Festival will take place next May.