

The Importance of Representation

By Lila Norris

With everything going on in this year's election, a movie about strong women, was just what our community needed. This past week, the Martha's Vineyard Film Center in Vineyard Haven offered a showing of *Queen of Katwe*, free to all Vineyard youth. The movie stars Madina Nalwanga as Phiona, a young Ugandan girl who masters the game of chess, and uses her skill to escape poverty.

Queen of Katwe is especially noteworthy as a Disney movie, starring a young woman in distress who doesn't have any romantic interests. This is a great example of Disney following in the footsteps of many large companies working to empower young women.

Throughout the movie, Phiona's mother Nakku played by Lupita Nyong'o continuously refuses romantic advances, and chooses to raise her four children as a single mother, something nearly unheard of in rural Uganda. While this comes with its challenges, Nakku holds her head high, and always finds a way to persevere.

The importance of representing strong women in the media is something that is often unfortunately underestimated. Today, more and more young girls are striving to realize their potential, whether it be academically, artistically, athletically, or things that may seem as small as a game of chess. The fact is, girls are drastically shaking the phrase "it's a man's world".

A study done at the University of Pennsylvania by senior data scientist Dr. Randy Olson showed that the percent of women receiving degrees in majors largely considered male-dominant professions, such as engineering and agriculture has radically increased in the last forty years.

The most important thing that we as a society can do, is continue to nurture the "anything-is-possible" mentality in young girls. In my opinion there is no better way than through movies and books telling the story of strong young girls just like Phiona.

This past week, many island youth took advantage of the opportunity to see *Queen of Katwe*. Many were positively affected including Martha's Vineyard Youth Leadership Initiative senior Camilla Prata who said the movie was "Very inspiring" and that "Through determination and hard work [Phiona] was able to push through and overcome obstacles in order to achieve her goal." A huge thank you to the Martha's Vineyard Film Center for this great opportunity to be inspired by an amazing story.

