

research snapshot

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What Effect Does the Media Have on Women in the Workplace?

What is this research about?

Women are surpassing men in being enrolled in higher education and in the number of jobs held. Yet, men still hold more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of management positions. This effect is called the glass ceiling. It means that women have a hard time getting high ranking jobs. Many factors play into the glass ceiling effect. One known factor is the confidence young women have in getting and retaining management jobs. Young women can gain confidence through a role model. These models are generally people who have achievements, in this case a woman who has gained a high ranking job. The presence of strong role models helps people believe that their goal is obtainable. Thus, the more managerial women role models there are the more likely young women will believe they too can excel in management jobs.

The media has gained a greater effect on young people as there are more forms of media that are accessible in a variety of ways. Research has found that the more media a person engages with the greater impact media can have. Thus, the media has an important role in showcasing or down playing women managers. Movies are widely watched in Canada, making them an influential media source. To find out what effect media has on the persistence of the glass ceiling

What you need to know:

Young people are influenced by what the media presents to them. Role models are also important to young people as they give a basis that reaching specific goals are possible. Thus, how professional and managerial women are presented in films could affect the future work goals of young women.

the researcher reviewed movies with women working towards or in high ranked jobs.

What did the researcher do?

115 films, with 126 characters, were reviewed. Films were limited to those made in North America. Characters were included whether they were in a lead or supporting role. Efforts were made to be sure that the films selected showed the whole career path. This meant there was a wide age range in the characters reviewed. The fields of work in the films were diverse. Films were excluded if jobs focused on work that is typically viewed as women's work, like being a nurse. Most of the characters were White. There were a few films with African-American women. It was rare for films to have women from other cultures and racial groups in managerial jobs.

Review of the films focused on how the characters were depicted, common background themes, and plot devices used for the characters in question. Reviews were analyzed to find themes. Themes were placed into three categories: personal, professional, and relational.

What did the researcher find?

Films generally showed highly ranked women as flawed, such as being unable to balance their work and personal life. It was common for sexual aspects about these characters to be stressed, for example if they were in a relationship. These characters also regularly had dubious work ethics. Overall, high ranking women were portrayed as 'bitchy' and having a lesson to learn, which was a part of the film's plot. The contrast of the lonely working women with happy, married, homemakers was used in some films.

Some positive aspects to the depiction of these characters were: the variety of fields women worked in; the acknowledgment of barriers that women experience on jobs; a few women were shown as multidimensional.

Positive aspects do not make up for the harm in the depictions of women with a high ranking position in films. The themes suggest that women are punished in their family lives for success in their job. These repeated depictions of women undoubtedly affect how people view women in the workplace.

How can you use this research?

The film industry is urged to demonstrate greater social responsibility when it comes to how it depicts women in the work force.

Communities can support alternate ways of promoting strong women role models to defy the

depictions of high ranking women in films.

People can be critical about the films they view, while still enjoying them, to admit the harm caused by depiction of managerial women in films.

About the Researcher

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