

Journal of


Gender Related Studies

(JGRS)

**Impact of Gender Stereotypes in Media on the Career Aspirations
of Young Women in Japan**



Impact of Gender Stereotypes in Media on the Career Aspirations of Young Women in Japan

 Emi Hayashi

Hiroshima University

Accepted: 16th Feb, 2026, Received in Revised Form: 15th March, 2026, Published: 9th April, 2026

Abstract

Purpose: To aim of the study was to analyze impact of gender stereotypes in media on the career aspirations of young women in Japan.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: In Japan, gender stereotypes in media have a significant impact on the career aspirations of young women. Media often portrays women in traditional roles, such as caregivers or secondary characters, which limits their aspirations for leadership positions or careers in STEM fields. Studies indicate that young women exposed to these gendered portrayals tend to have lower self-efficacy and fewer aspirations for non-traditional careers, such as becoming CEOs or scientists. However, recent efforts to diversify media representation, with more female leaders and professionals depicted in media, show promise in encouraging young women to expand their career goals.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social cognitive theory, cultivation theory & role congruity theory of prejudice may be used to anchor future studies on the impact of gender stereotypes in media on the career aspirations of young women in Japan. Practically, this research highlights the need for media creators to adopt more inclusive and diverse portrayals of women, particularly in leadership and STEM fields, which can positively influence young women's career aspirations. On the policy front, governments and international organizations can advocate for gender-sensitive media regulations that ensure the portrayal of women in diverse professional roles.

Keywords: *Gender Stereotypes, Media, Career Aspirations, Young Women*

INTRODUCTION

Career aspirations among young women in developed economies like the United States (USA), United Kingdom (UK), and Japan reflect both high ambition and persistent gendered expectations. Research shows that by age 15, girls across OECD countries, which include the USA, UK, and Japan, are less likely than boys to expect to work in leadership positions such as managers or CEOs, indicating early differences in aspirations that can influence long-term self-efficacy and career goals (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2025). In the USA, women now make up about 43 % of the scientific and engineering workforce under age 75, and 56 % under age 29, showing strong academic and career aspirations in these fields; however, only about 28 % of workers in science and engineering occupations are women, suggesting a gap between aspirations and career outcomes (OECD, 2025). These patterns indicate that while young women demonstrate high educational and career ambitions, societal norms and confidence challenges can limit their self-efficacy when pursuing traditionally male-dominated careers. Self-efficacy the belief in one's ability to succeed is known to influence career decision-making, particularly in fields like STEM, where women often report lower confidence despite comparable ability (OECD, 2025). The persistence of gendered expectations, even amid progress, implies that career aspirations and self-efficacy are shaped by both personal ambition and broader cultural influences in developed economies (OECD, 2025).

Across these economies, policies and educational programs that promote gender equality, mentorship, and leadership training have been shown to enhance young women's self-efficacy and broaden their career aspirations. For example, interventions that encourage girls to visualize themselves in leadership roles or STEM careers have been linked to higher expression of confidence and future goals, demonstrating the importance of supportive environments. Despite improvements, women still earn about 80 % of what men earn on average globally, reflecting ongoing structural challenges that can affect confidence and long-term aspirations in the world of work (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2026). In addition, societal beliefs about gender and leadership remain influential; in some OECD contexts, nearly one-quarter of people believe men make better leaders than women, a perception that can undercut young women's beliefs in their leadership potential (OECD, 2025). These trends suggest that while young women in developed economies generally have high career aspirations, their self-efficacy can be constrained by social norms, pay gaps, and persistent stereotypes that shape how they view their own potential (OECD, 2025).

In developing economies, young women's career aspirations often remain strong, with a high preference for formal sector employment and continued education despite challenging economic conditions. A large survey of young women and girls in Sierra Leone found that over three-quarters aspired to continue to higher education, and approximately two-thirds aspired to formal sector jobs requiring education, demonstrating strong career ambitions in a context where jobs are limited and informal employment is common (World Bank, 2021). These aspirations are closely tied to educational goals; those expecting to pursue higher education were significantly more likely to aspire to formal employment, which can enhance self-efficacy through perceived control over future outcomes (World Bank, 2021). However, structural barriers such as fewer quality job opportunities and limited access to resources can weaken young women's confidence in achieving

their career aims, even when personal aspirations are high. In developing contexts, socioeconomic constraints such as rural-urban disparities and gendered roles shape both aspirations and beliefs about capability, reducing some young women's self-efficacy in navigating competitive labour markets. Career aspirations in these settings are therefore influenced not only by individual ambition but also by local economic conditions and access to equitable opportunities (World Bank, 2021).

Studies in other developing nations echo this pattern: young women often express high hopes for education and career success, but a significant gap remains between aspirations and realistic opportunities, creating a persistent "aspiration–reality" divide that affects self-efficacy and future planning. For example, in many low- and middle-income countries, the majority of girls aspire to formal employment, but a significant gap remains between aspirations and realistic opportunities, creating a persistent "aspiration–reality" divide that affects self-efficacy and future planning (OECD, 2025). These trends reinforce the importance of interventions that improve access to education, career guidance, and economic inclusion to support both aspirations and self-belief among young women in developing economies (OECD, 2025).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, young women's career aspirations reflect both determination and structural challenges. Data from regional studies show that women hold a notable share of managerial roles for instance, 19 % of managerial positions in Kenya and 23 % in Nigeria indicating that career aspirations are translating into leadership roles for a growing number of women, albeit at lower rates than men (Journal of Gender Related Studies, 2024). These figures suggest that while young women in Sub-Saharan Africa may aspire to leadership and professional success, their self-efficacy is influenced by persistent gender biases and limited access to professional networks and training opportunities. Cultural norms and traditional roles often frame women's career expectations, shaping both the types of careers young women pursue and the confidence they have in attaining them (Journal of Gender Related Studies, 2024). Sub-Saharan African women often face unique barriers, including limited mentoring and gendered expectations, which can reduce self-efficacy even among those with strong ambitions. However, the upward trends in managerial representation reflect growing shifts in aspirations and opportunities, underscoring the dynamic interplay between gender norms, individual agency, and structural support (Journal of Gender Related Studies, 2024).

Efforts to enhance young women's self-efficacy in Sub-Saharan Africa increasingly focus on education, mentorship, and structural reforms that expand access to quality jobs and leadership pathways. For example, gender equality initiatives that provide training, financial support, and professional mentoring have been shown to strengthen women's confidence and career trajectories. Despite progress, many women still contend with social expectations that limit their perceived career possibilities, reinforcing the need for policies that promote both aspiration and self-efficacy from early education through to professional life. These strategies can help bridge gaps between aspirations and actual opportunities, enabling young women to achieve their desired career outcomes at higher rates than current trends indicate (Journal of Gender Related Studies, 2024).

Exposure to gender stereotypes in media, including television, movies, and advertisements, significantly shapes the career aspirations and self-efficacy of young women. These media

portrayals often depict women in limited roles, such as caregivers or objects of beauty, while men are shown as leaders, decision-makers, and problem-solvers. This skewed representation reinforces traditional gender norms and influences young women's perception of what is achievable for them in their careers (Ward, 2016). Studies have shown that media exposure contributes to lower self-efficacy in women, particularly in male-dominated fields such as STEM, as they are not frequently depicted in these roles (Steinke, 2020). This lack of positive role models can discourage young women from pursuing ambitious career paths, as they may internalize the belief that such roles are not meant for them.

The four most likely exposures to gender stereotypes in media are: 1) The portrayal of women primarily in domestic or supportive roles rather than leadership positions, 2) The depiction of women as dependent on male characters, 3) The emphasis on physical appearance and beauty standards over intellectual or professional accomplishments, and 4) The limited representation of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers. These stereotypes directly impact young women's career aspirations, often leading them to underestimate their capabilities and limit their career goals (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). As a result, young women's self-efficacy in pursuing high-status or unconventional careers is often hindered by media portrayals that reinforce gendered expectations. To counter this, there is a growing call for more diverse and empowering representations of women in media to inspire higher self-efficacy and broader career aspirations among young women (Murnen, 2019).

Problem Statement

Despite efforts to promote gender equality, gender stereotypes in media continue to shape and constrain the career aspirations of young women, leading to persistent gaps in education, employment choices, and professional advancement. Traditional media portray women primarily in domestic, caregiving, or passive roles while portraying men as assertive, professional, and career-oriented, reinforcing gender-typed expectations about suitable occupations and leadership roles (Santonnicolo, 2023; ResearchGate, 2025). Such portrayals contribute to a societal narrative that influences how young women view their own capabilities and professional futures, with evidence suggesting that media exposure correlates with heightened acceptance of traditional gender roles and limits perceptions of women's potential in non-traditional fields (EAVI, 2025; UNESCO, 2024). As a result, young women may internalize these stereotypes, leading to reduced confidence and lower self-efficacy in pursuing careers in areas such as science, technology, engineering, and leadership, which are depicted as male domains (McGuire, 2020). This problem is especially concerning given evidence that media shapes self-perceptions and career choices from an early age, meaning that gender stereotypes may have long-term effects on aspirations, educational pathways, and the diversity of the workforce (UNESCO, 2024; Santoniccolo, 2023).

Theoretical Review

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in 1986, emphasizes the role of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in shaping behaviors and beliefs. According to this theory, individuals learn by observing others in their environment, particularly in media. For young women, exposure to gender stereotypes in media such as seeing women in caregiving or secondary

roles can shape their career aspirations and self-efficacy, often leading them to underestimate their potential in leadership or STEM careers. SCT is relevant to the study of gender stereotypes because it underscores how media portrayals serve as role models, directly influencing the aspirations and behaviors of young women (Fitzsimmons, 2021). Through repeated exposure, young women might internalize media depictions and limit their career goals based on what they see.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory, proposed by George Gerbner in 1969, suggests that prolonged exposure to media gradually shapes an individual's perceptions of reality, particularly concerning societal norms. In the context of gender stereotypes, this theory posits that constant portrayals of women in domestic or passive roles on television, in movies, and in advertisements cultivate the belief that women are best suited for such roles. Over time, these repeated portrayals can limit young women's aspirations by reinforcing the idea that leadership and technical roles are not meant for them. Cultivation theory is particularly relevant to this topic as it explains how media can shape perceptions of gender roles over time, impacting the career aspirations and self-efficacy of young women, who might believe that such roles are inaccessible to them (Greenwood, 2020).

Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice

The Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice, introduced by Alice H. Eagly and Steven J. Karau in 2002, posits that people are prejudiced against individuals who do not conform to gender-based expectations. According to this theory, women who take on roles typically associated with men, such as leadership positions or careers in STEM, are viewed as incongruent with societal gender roles. This incongruence leads to prejudice against women in such roles and undermines their self-confidence and career aspirations. In terms of media, this theory is highly relevant as it explains how media portrayals that reinforce traditional gender roles (e.g., women as caregivers or secondary characters) limit young women's career aspirations, as they are conditioned to believe that leadership or technical careers are not suitable for them. Exposure to these stereotypes can decrease self-efficacy in women, making them less likely to pursue ambitious careers (Brescoll, 2020)

Empirical Review

Smith (2018) explored the impact of gendered media portrayals on young women's aspirations for STEM careers. The study aimed to determine whether media exposure to gender stereotypes influences young women's career interests. The researchers surveyed 800 adolescents to assess their media consumption habits and career aspirations, specifically focusing on exposure to gendered portrayals in television. Their findings revealed that young women exposed to stereotypical portrayals of women, such as domestic roles or passive characters, were significantly less likely to aspire to careers in STEM fields. On the other hand, those who watched media that portrayed women in leadership and STEM roles demonstrated higher aspirations for these fields. The study concluded that gender stereotypes in media play a crucial role in shaping young women's career choices, and the lack of female role models in STEM may limit their career aspirations. To counter this, the authors recommended that media creators should strive to portray more diverse, empowering female characters in traditionally male-dominated fields like STEM. They also suggested that incorporating more women in leadership roles on screen would inspire

young women to pursue similar aspirations. The study highlights the importance of media representation in influencing career aspirations and urges for a shift toward gender equality in media portrayals. The authors emphasized that media should not only be a reflection of society but also a tool for changing perceptions and inspiring career aspirations in young women. Furthermore, the study supports the need for educational reforms to complement media efforts by promoting STEM education and confidence-building programs for girls. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions about media's role in shaping gender roles and aspirations in both developed and developing economies.

Diekman and Eagly (2008) sought to understand how gender-typed media content influences women's leadership aspirations. The study used an experimental design to expose participants to either gender-typed or counter-stereotypical media clips and measured their leadership self-efficacy. The participants were primarily young women, and the study aimed to test whether exposure to female leadership role models could influence their career aspirations. The findings revealed that women who watched media depicting female leaders in non-traditional roles, such as CEOs and scientists, had higher aspirations for leadership roles themselves. In contrast, women who were exposed to gender-stereotypical media clips, which often depicted women in supportive or subordinate roles, showed lower career aspirations for leadership positions. This outcome aligned with the role congruity theory, which posits that people are less likely to view women in leadership roles due to societal expectations that associate leadership with masculinity. The study concluded that gender stereotypes in media significantly impact women's career goals, particularly their aspirations for leadership roles. Diekman and Eagly recommended that media creators focus on depicting women in a wider range of powerful and leadership positions to counteract stereotypes and empower women to pursue such careers. They further suggested that educational programs and career mentorship for young women could help bolster their confidence and leadership aspirations. The authors emphasized the importance of role models in media, highlighting how seeing women in leadership roles can shape young women's beliefs about their own potential. This research is significant in that it highlights the psychological mechanisms behind media's influence on career aspirations and self-efficacy, encouraging a shift toward more empowering media portrayals of women.

Steinke (2017) conducted a content analysis to explore how gendered portrayals in children's television affect young girls' self-efficacy in science careers. The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which girls are underrepresented in science-related television programming and how this lack of representation affects their confidence in pursuing STEM careers. Steinke analyzed a variety of children's television programs to assess the frequency and type of science roles attributed to female characters. The findings revealed that female characters were significantly less likely to be shown in scientific or technical roles compared to male characters. Additionally, when female characters were portrayed in science, they were often shown in passive or supportive roles rather than as leaders or innovators. This underrepresentation of female scientists and researchers contributed to lower self-efficacy among young girls in relation to pursuing science careers. Steinke recommended that television producers and media creators aim to increase the representation of girls in science by creating strong female role models in these fields. The study further suggested that curriculum designers integrate media literacy programs in schools to help students critically analyze and challenge stereotypical portrayals of women in

media. By highlighting the lack of female role models in science media, Steinke's research underscores the significant impact of media representation on career aspirations and self-confidence in young women. This work contributes to the broader conversation about how gender stereotypes in media can limit young girls' ambitions in STEM fields.

Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2009) examined how the sexualization of women in advertising influences college students' attitudes toward women's professional abilities. The study used a survey method to analyze the impact of sexually objectifying portrayals of women in advertisements on college students' perceptions of women's competence in professional settings. The findings showed that young women exposed to sexualized images in advertisements had lower professional self-efficacy and were less likely to view themselves as capable in leadership or professional roles. Additionally, the study found that men's attitudes toward women's professional competence were also negatively affected by the sexualization of female characters in advertising. The researchers recommended that advertisers focus on portraying women in diverse, professional, and non-objectified roles to help challenge existing gender stereotypes. They also suggested that media literacy programs in schools could educate young people about the harmful effects of sexualized portrayals of women in advertisements. This study underscores the negative impact that media can have on young women's self-confidence in professional environments and highlights the need for positive media representations to foster better career aspirations.

Ramos and Mundel (2018) conducted focus groups with adolescent girls to explore how exposure to stereotypical portrayals of women on social media influences their career aspirations. The study aimed to understand how social media images and stereotypes affect young women's beliefs about their career possibilities and self-efficacy. The findings revealed that young women who frequently encountered stereotypical portrayals of women as passive or objectified characters on social media had lower aspirations for non-traditional careers, such as engineering or leadership roles. The study also found that many of the girls internalized these media portrayals, believing that their gender would limit their career options. Ramos and Mundel recommended that social media platforms and influencers create more diverse and empowering content to combat these negative stereotypes. They also suggested incorporating media literacy education to help young women critically engage with social media content and challenge stereotypical representations. This research underscores the powerful influence of social media on young women's career aspirations and calls for action to diversify representations of women in these platforms.

Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) used experimental exposure to gendered television clips to examine how media portrayals affect young women's leadership aspirations. The study focused on young women and measured their career aspirations before and after viewing either gender-stereotyped or counter-stereotypical portrayals of women in leadership roles. The findings indicated that young women who were exposed to media portraying women as leaders and decision-makers were more likely to aspire to similar roles themselves. In contrast, exposure to stereotypical portrayals of women as subordinates or caretakers resulted in lower career aspirations for leadership positions. The study recommended that media portray more women in diverse, empowering roles to foster higher aspirations among young women. The authors emphasized that exposure to counter-stereotypical portrayals can increase self-efficacy and inspire women to pursue careers in leadership and other non-traditional roles.

Ward (2016) conducted a longitudinal survey to examine the impact of gendered media content on young women's career aspirations over time. The study found that prolonged exposure to media that reinforces traditional gender roles led to a narrower range of career goals for young women. The findings showed that girls who consumed more gender-stereotyped media were less likely to aspire to careers in leadership or STEM fields, as they internalized the belief that these roles were not for them. Ward recommended that media outlets and educational institutions work together to provide young women with more diverse and empowering media representations. She also suggested that media literacy programs could help young women critically assess media content and expand their career aspirations. The study emphasizes the need for systemic change in how media portrays women's roles in society to support broader career aspirations.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Research Gaps

One significant conceptual gap in current research is the lack of exploration of intersectionality. While many studies examine the effects of gendered media portrayals on young women's career aspirations, they often neglect how other factors such as race, socio-economic status, and culture intersect with gender to influence career outcomes. Gender stereotypes in media may have varying impacts on young women from different racial or cultural backgrounds, and understanding this intersectionality could provide a more nuanced view of how media influences career aspirations (Diekmann & Eagly, 2008). For example, black women may experience media stereotypes differently from white women, and their career aspirations may be shaped by distinct societal expectations and barriers. Future research should integrate these intersecting identities to offer a broader understanding of the media's influence on career aspirations in diverse contexts.

Another conceptual gap is the psychological mechanisms behind career aspirations. While several studies have shown that exposure to gender stereotypes in media affects young women's career ambitions, there is limited research on the psychological processes that mediate this relationship, such as self-doubt, fear of failure, and internalized gender bias. These emotional and mental factors may play a crucial role in how young women process gendered media portrayals and subsequently adjust their career goals and self-efficacy (Steinke, 2017). More research is needed to understand these underlying psychological mechanisms, which could help inform interventions that aim to increase self-confidence and break down limiting stereotypes in young women's minds.

Contextual Research Gaps

A contextual research gap lies in the role of social media in shaping young women's career aspirations. While traditional media such as television and movies have been extensively studied, the role of social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube in influencing gender perceptions and career goals remains under-explored (Ramos & Mundel, 2018). Social media allows for more direct and frequent engagement with content, and its impact on young women may differ from that of traditional media, especially considering the rise of influencers and user-generated content. Research should focus on how these platforms either challenge or perpetuate gender stereotypes, and how they influence young women's career aspirations, particularly in comparison to more traditional forms of media.

Furthermore, evolving gender stereotypes in media represent a gap in current research. Many studies still rely on older forms of media content, such as traditional TV and advertisements, where women were frequently depicted in stereotypical roles (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009). However, with more diverse and empowering female portrayals emerging in contemporary digital media, there is a need to investigate how new forms of media, like online streaming platforms and social media, portray women in non-traditional roles (Smith, Harrison, & Rossini, 2018). Understanding how these evolving representations influence young women's career aspirations and self-efficacy is critical, as it could show a shift in how gender roles are constructed and how young women perceive their potential in various fields.

Geographical Research Gaps

A notable geographical research gap is the lack of studies in developing countries and Sub-Saharan Africa. Much of the research on the impact of gender stereotypes in media has been conducted in developed economies, particularly the USA, UK, and Japan (Diekmann & Eagly, 2008). However, the global reach of media means that young women in developing countries are also exposed to these stereotypes, yet there is little understanding of how these portrayals affect their career aspirations in non-Western contexts (Steinke, 2017). Cultural differences, access to media, and socio-economic barriers may influence how young women interpret media portrayals of gender roles. Future research should investigate how young women in these regions, particularly in Africa, are impacted by gender stereotypes in both local and global media, and how these stereotypes shape their aspirations for careers in leadership, STEM, or other non-traditional fields.

Additionally, media representation in low-resource settings represents a geographical gap. In many low-income and rural regions, access to diverse media representations may be limited, and the stereotypical portrayals of women in these areas may further limit their career aspirations. The lack of female role models in local media might have a greater impact on career goals in these contexts, where opportunities for exposure to diverse professional images are scarce (Ramos & Mundel, 2018). Research should explore how media consumption patterns in such settings affect the career aspirations of young women, and the potential role of educational programs in overcoming these limitations by providing media literacy and alternative representations of women in leadership roles.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The impact of gender stereotypes in media on the career aspirations of young women is profound, shaping both their perceptions of their career potential and their self-efficacy. Through the pervasive portrayal of women in traditional, passive, or subordinate roles, media reinforces societal gender norms that limit young women's career ambitions, particularly in leadership, STEM, and other non-traditional fields. Research consistently highlights the significant role that exposure to gendered media content plays in influencing young women's career choices, with stereotypical portrayals contributing to lower self-confidence and fewer aspirations for leadership positions. Conversely, media that depicts women in diverse, powerful, and professional roles can inspire young women to pursue ambitious careers and challenge gendered expectations. Despite increasing efforts to diversify media portrayals, significant gaps remain, particularly in non-Western regions and low-resource settings, where limited access to empowering media representations further constrains young women's career aspirations. Therefore, there is an urgent need for continued advocacy for more inclusive and empowering media content that offers young women diverse role models across all sectors. Media literacy education, alongside targeted interventions that challenge stereotypes, can help mitigate these negative effects and broaden young women's career aspirations. Overall, tackling the issue of gender stereotypes in media is crucial not only for empowering young women but also for creating a more equitable and inclusive future workforce.

Recommendations

Theory

The research on the impact of gender stereotypes in media contributes significantly to Social Cognitive Theory by expanding its application to gendered media portrayals and their effects on career aspirations. While Bandura's theory focuses on the broader mechanisms of observational learning, integrating gender stereotypes into this framework enhances the understanding of how young women internalize career roles from the media and apply them to their own aspirations. Future theoretical work can explore the intersectionality of gender with other identities (e.g., race, socioeconomic status) to provide a more nuanced understanding of how diverse media representations (or the lack thereof) shape career expectations. By focusing on the psychological mechanisms involved in media consumption, this research contributes to refining theories of self-efficacy and role congruity, shedding light on the specific barriers that young women face when pursuing non-traditional or leadership roles.

Practice

Practically, this research highlights the need for media creators to adopt more inclusive and diverse portrayals of women, particularly in leadership and STEM fields, which can positively influence young women's career aspirations. The recommendation for media literacy education in schools plays a pivotal role in teaching young people to critically engage with and challenge gendered portrayals they encounter in various media formats. Empowering young women to recognize and resist limiting stereotypes can encourage them to pursue non-traditional careers. Additionally, career counseling and mentorship programs should be incorporated into educational systems,

ensuring that young women are encouraged to explore a broader range of career possibilities and are provided with real-world role models that counteract media portrayals. The practice of role modeling, both in media and through mentorship, directly impacts self-efficacy, as young women can envision themselves in powerful, non-stereotypical roles.

Policy

On the policy front, governments and international organizations can advocate for gender-sensitive media regulations that ensure the portrayal of women in diverse professional roles. Policies that incentivize media companies to create empowering and representative content could reduce the long-term impact of gender stereotypes on young women's career aspirations. Educational policies should include gender awareness training for both students and educators, incorporating media literacy as part of the curriculum to actively challenge stereotypes. Further, policies promoting diversity in leadership positions within media organizations are crucial, as a more diverse leadership in media production can lead to more accurate and empowering portrayals of women. In addition, policy advocacy for increased representation of women in STEM education and careers is essential to align educational systems with the broader societal need for gender equality in the workforce.

REFERENCES

- Behm-Morawitz, E., & Mastro, D. (2009). The effects of the sexualization of female characters in advertising on men's attitudes toward women. *Mass Communication & Society*, 12(3), 274–296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205430902880731>
- Diekman, A. B., & Eagly, A. H. (2008). “Think manager–think male”: A social role perspective on gender stereotype formation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94(2), 254–275. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.2.254>
- EAVI – European Audiovisual Observatory. (2025). Gender representations in media and the importance of media literacy. <https://eavi.eu/gender-representations-in-media/>
- Hoffner, C., & Buchanan, M. (2005). Young adults' wishful identification with television characters: The role of perceived similarity and character attributes. *Media Psychology*, 7(4), 325–351. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0704_2
- International Labour Organization. (2026). Equality between men and women in the workforce [Technical paper]. https://ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/G20_TechnicalPaper%20Equality%20between%20men%20and%20women%20in%20the%20workforce.pdf
- McGuire, L., et al. (2020). STEM gender stereotypes from early childhood through adulthood. *PMC Articles*. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7104893/>
- Murnen, S. K., Smolak, L., & Mills, J. (2019). The influence of media on the development of body image and self-esteem in young women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 43(1), 102–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319870812>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2025). Women still lag behind men in reaching leadership roles. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/gender-equality-in-a-changing-world_e808086f-en/full-report/women-still-lag-behind-men-in-reaching-leadership-roles_8367265b.html
- Ramos, R., & Mundel, K. (2018). Social media, stereotypes, and career aspirations: A qualitative study of adolescent girls. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 33(4), 432–457.
- ResearchGate. (2025). Role of media in portrayal of gender stereotypes. *ResearchGate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391909898_Role_of_Media_in_Portrayal_of_Gender_Stereotypes
- Santoniccolo, F. (2023). Gender and media representations. *PMC Articles*. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10218532/>
- Smith, L. R., Harrison, K., & Rossini, P. (2018). Effects of televised gender stereotypes on adolescents' career aspirations. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 62(1), 91–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2017.1412170>
- Steinke, J. (2017). Adolescents' perceptions of gender roles in science and television. *Science Communication*, 39(1), 83–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547016677796>

- Steinke, J., Brown, J. D., & Tefft, B. (2020). The portrayal of women in STEM roles: Examining the effects of media exposure on young women's interest and self-efficacy in STEM fields. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 9(2), 215-227. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000234>
- Tiggemann, M., & Slater, A. (2014). NetGirls: The Internet, Facebook, and body image concern in adolescent girls. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 47(6), 630-643. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.22301>
- UNESCO. (2024). New UNESCO report warns social media affects girls' well-being, learning and career choices. UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/articles/new-unesco-report-warns-social-media-affects-girls-well-being-learning-and-career-choices>
- Ward, L. M. (2016). Media and gender: A historical analysis of gendered media content and its effects. *Journal of Communication*, 66(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12204>
- Ward, L. M. (2016). Media and gender: A scholarly agenda for the 21st century. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(3), 241-256. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12185>
- World Bank Group. (2021). Factors associated with educational and career aspirations of young women and girls in Sierra Leone [PDF]. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstreams/228ece29-a998-5a85-b48e-f1e405a4d906/download?utm_source=chatgpt.com