

Counter-stereotypical female role models encourage gender pay parity

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The gender pay gap is significantly lower in US states where counter-stereotypical female role models are more popular, reveals research from Mannheim Business School.

Researchers Mengqiao Du and Alexandra Niessen-Ruenzi from Mannheim, and Vidhi Chhaochharia from University of Miami, found this is because admiration for counter-stereotypical female role models is associated with women making decisions that improve their earning potential.

Such decisions include entering male-dominated occupations such as STEM, taking on higher ranked positions, seeking higher education qualifications, and waiting until later in life to have a first child.

To define a counter-stereotypical female role model, the researchers categorised 247 women who were identified as admirable by respondents to 46 Gallup surveys conducted from 1951-2014 based on their primary occupation.

They compared this to their analysis of answers to questions about gender differences in the General Social Survey, as well as labour market information taken from the Current Population Survey, which helped them measure state-level gender norms over time.

According to the authors, women admired for their roles in male-dominated industries, including as politicians, writers or journalists, businesswomen, astronauts, scientists, athletes, or activists are counter-stereotypical role models.

The researchers found that less than 20 percent of people in the US identified counter-stereotypical female role models as admirable in 1950, but this rose to 50 percent in 2014. They discovered that counter-stereotypical female role models became more popular than stereotypical female role models in the 1980s.

Dr Niessen-Ruenzi, says;

“Counter-stereotypical female role models influence women’s choices in addition to gender norms and may be considered as a starting point for future changes of gender norms at the state level if the fraction of people admiring them significantly increases. This means at some point, female role models in politics, science, or related fields may not be counter-stereotypical anymore, but will reflect the new normal.”

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