



Exploring masculinity and femininity in the workplace

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Home

Thesis: Despite the effort of modern era to tackle gender stereotypes, it miserably fails to prevent the formation of gendered organisations due to the convenience of classifying people based on gender

In this website, the above notion is explored through how gender roles are portrayed in the pop culture movie, “The Intern”. By drawing upon academic articles, it aims to analyse the ideas of how women

gender is reflected and reinforced in the popular culture. “The Intern” is a movie about a 70-year-old widower Ben Whittaker (Robert De Niro) who craves to get back into the game after being retired as a “senior intern” at an online

fashion site (Refer to Video 1, below). Jules Ostin (Anne Hathaway) experiences multiple obstacles in the growth of her career, few of which are the glass ceiling, gender characterisation and stereotypical femininity and masculinity. This movie highlights the life of women in leadership in the 21st century and the transformation stages that women have to go through in order to “be in the game”.

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Pooja Sivakumar (28805925)

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Pop Culture

The Intern - Official Trailer [HD]**Video 1: Trailer of the “The Intern”**

A retired 70-year-old widower, Ben (Robert De Niro), is unable to deal with the boredom from his retired life. Hence, he applies to be a senior intern at an online fashion retailer, About the Fit, and gets the position. The CEO and founder of “About the Fit”, Jules Ostin, is a tireless, driven, demanding workaholic. Ben gets the opportunity to work with her directly, but it is a nominal role- as she isn’t intending to give him any work and it’s just for the sake of window dressing that Ben comes to work each day. Ben doesn’t hear from her for a few days. Nevertheless, he makes himself productive, by learning about the technology and by getting to know the ropes, since he helps people in need, Cameron fondly names him Mr Congeniality. Ben notices that Jules’s driver drinks while on job and tells him to step down from his job. Ben takes over. Meanwhile, Cameron discusses with Jules regarding the perspective of the investors, and that they think that “it’s all too fast for About the Fit and a seasoned CEO could handle affairs better and help them keep up with the success”. Throughout the struggle between marital life and professional life of Jules, Ben proves to be quite useful and more than that, he proves a source of support and wisdom. Throughout the movie Jules is seen to have a reclusive nature, as she faces hurdle in her career and a downfall with her marital relationship with Matt.

The downfall of her marriage acts as an indicator of the difference in support men provide compared to women. Although Matt is portrayed as a supportive

husband and a caring father initially, he does become tired of the process of supporting Jules with her career.

This movie stands as an icon to highlight the gender stereotypes which cause the glass ceiling within organisations and hence, the affect of these on the gender interaction.

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Gender stereotypes

The Intern Bed Scene



Video 2: Jules tending to gender stereotypes under duress about her husband's extramarital affair

Gender stereotypes are overgeneralised, preordained beliefs about the paradigms on the appropriate mannerism and attitude a person should uphold during different situations based on their biological sex (Stroker, J., Van Der zvelde, M. and Lammers, J. 2011). In our everyday interactions, gender stereotypes influence our judgements and evaluations such that, ultimately women and men are treated differently. Why are men treated differently to women?

These stereotypes impact each and every aspect of a person's life-from how to dress to political and moral decisions. Whilst stereotypes are useful to classify people and make immediate assumptions, it fails to address the individual characteristics of a person and causes the organisations and at large the society to stagger by underestimating or overestimating the interpersonal resources (such as creativity, compassion and so on) of a specific gender (Acker, J. 1990). The reality is these stereotypes are becoming irrational to the point of absurdity and outdated as the society is evolving (Stroker et al. 2011). However, the evolution of the society and its people are not reflected by organisations as they are guided by executives who follow literature that disdains to credit differences within individuals but rather expects uniformity among all staff- something offered by gender stereotypes.

How gender stereotypes are presented in the movie?

“How in one generation have men gone from guys like Jack Nicholson and Harrison Ford to...” –Jules Ostin

This comical remark by the drunk Jules Ostin referring to the poorly dressed men in front of her reflects how gender stereotypes are reflected in the work culture. Despite serving as the backbone of the company, “About the Fit”, these IT department men are viewed lower than the well-groomed intern, Ben

“Oh, it’s a Chick site”- potential CEO

A snide remark by one of the potential CEO’s because it is run by a female leader and it sells clothes. This is a typical example of how masculinity is hegemonic in certain contexts of the organisational culture. Hence, “About the Fit” was not to his level of importance and he was able to reduce it to a “chick site”.



Effect of gender stereotype

Although she initially is resilient to the change of CEO and the entire process, she does get involved decently and travels all the way to California to seek for a new candidate.

These evidences clearly display how Jules reinforces the gender stereotypes that gender stereotypes can grossly underestimate or overestimate a person’s capacity and thus disable or enable to progress further in their career. In the real world, women are thought to be better at interpersonal communication but lacks dominance and that their compassion will hinder their ability to take the “right call”.

During times of stress, a side effect of managerial positions, managers tend to fall back on innate decision making based on gendered stereotypes (Acker, 1990). Judgements made based on gender stereotypes lead to the formation of gender bias which creates the glass ceilings within the organisations (Cotter et al., 2001).

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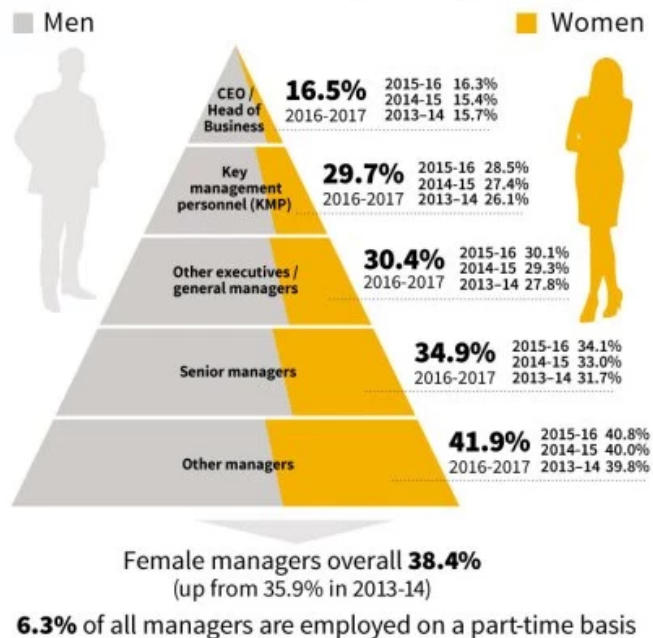
Glass ceiling

“Glass ceiling is the phenomenon in which women disappear as one looks up through the levels of the organisational hierarchy” (Fernandez, R & Campero, S. 2016). Glass ceiling is seen to be more severe at the top of the reward distribution (Cotter, David, Joan, Hermsen, Seth Ovadia and Reeve Vanneman, 2001).

Government statistics show that women only represent 15.4% of CEOs in Australia with 25.1% of organisations having no key female managers at all (Working Gender Equality Agency, 2016).

Fortune Magazine released its 2017 Fortune 500 list, which ranks major U.S. companies by their fiscal 2016 revenues, and 32 of the companies, or 6.4 percent, were run by female CEO's.

Proportion of women by manager category



SOURCE: WORKPLACE GENDER EQUALITY AGENCY

The increased efforts organisations take to promote diversity and inclusion within organisations does not seem to fix the problem of the lack of female leaders. Managers often learn about managing from literature which disdains gender, are hence are unaware of the inherent issues arising from gendered differences within an organisation. Organisational theories pose an idealistic image of the “ideal workers” as presented in the movie “The Intern”. There is a continued masculine outlook dominating contemporary mainstream theory, which then results in lack of female leaders in senior management positions (Mavin, Brians and Waring, 2004). Study conducted by Smith, R, A (2011) hypothesises that there are two different concepts to be taken into consideration that barriers women from progressing in the organisational ladder; which are glass ceiling and glass escalator. It was concluded from his study that the concept of glass escalator is more predominant in the organisations than glass ceilings, due to quotas for women in the workplace, there are women in lower and higher levels of management. However, the proportion of women being hired for the next level of management is much fewer in comparison to the progress men are able to make in their career ladder.

When two different gendered candidates attend an interview with the same qualifications, why does one candidate get a biological advantage over the other

just based on their gender? Kanter's theory highlights that male tokens working in female dominated jobs do not experience the same kind of discrimination women face when they are tokens working in male dominated jobs (Williams, C, 1995). After the screening process in "The Intern", they hire four candidates of which three are male and one is female. This highlights that slowly women are making progress into the organisations, but the glass escalator concept continues to retain the disproportionate numbers of males and females within an organisation. Nevertheless, women are breaking the traditional ceiling and reaching their desired destinations with due sacrifices, but once they reach their destination, do they reinforce the glass ceiling themselves?

Jules, who has broken out of the shell of glass ceiling, underestimates the effort of junior women within her organisation. Becky who has been her personal assistant for nine months and has been working for extended hours to keep up to Jules' schedule does not get appreciated or noticed. Hence, the opportunity to grow is very stagnant for Becky and she does not seem to have any progress in her career direction.

In a study conducted by Faniko, K., Ellemers, N., Derks, B., and Lorenzi-Cioldi, F (2017), a female senior manager stated her opinion regarding gender quotas.

"I'm against gender quotas. I can't understand why we need to roll out the red carpet for young women and to make their life easy while I made a lot of sacrifices for my career success and I didn't have such a privilege." Their study revealed that women make ample of personal sacrifices in order to climb the organisational hierarchy, hence, do not sustain the ease other women receive at present from gender equality schemes (Faniko et al. 2017).

Her personal assistant Becky who has graduated from Penn and has a business degree is never appreciated or "never noticed" by Jules Ostin despite all the relentless efforts she puts in working for "14 hours a day" for the past nine months (Refer to Video 2)

The Intern Movie CLIP - Don't Worry Becky (2015) - Anne Hathaway, Robert De Niro Movi...



Video 2: Ben asked by Jules to assist Becky in managing her work

Those women who break the gender barriers posed by our society and organisations tend to reinforce the same for the junior women.

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Gender Interaction

“Men are the actors, women the emotional support” (Acker, 1990, p. 147)

This statement is a representation of the role women played in the society during the 20th century, which determined the societal norm on how genders interact with each other. Has this changed in today's context? Women have entered the workplace to support themselves and not just an emotional support but the gender interactions that arose in the 20th century failed to recede (Acker, 1990). Gender interactions is the manner in which members of each gender interact with themselves and the opposite gender. It is a vital process in the development of a gendered organisation (Acker, 1990).

How does gender interaction contribute to gendered organisations?

Usually people within an organisation face challenges in accepting the opposite gender's values and beliefs, which then lead to workplace hostilities and sexism (Agars, M. 2004). Similarly, Jules's reclusive nature to perceive the values of other people within the organisation is an indicator of the innate gender bias within individuals.

Although women may not be comfortable around men and vice versa, there is a pressure in the organisational environment to accept the gender stereotypes and change accordingly to be successful (Acker, 1990). It could be concluded from the movie "The Intern" that there is a tendency within organisations that successful women in the higher hierarchy tend to remain in the "out-group" by themselves, while men due to their adaptability form to be the "in-group" (Theory by Jane Elliot, 1968). Women are not willing to work together as a team to break the gender stereotypes and glass ceiling predetermined by the society.

"One of your own out there every day, crashing the glass ceiling of the tech world" – Ben

A small subset of the population of women have the ability to break the glass ceiling and the stereotypes that rules the organisational world, Jules proves to be one among them (Booth, Alison L., Marco Francesconi, and Jeff Frank. 2003). However, her concern of revolutionising the organisation stops at her success. She is not willing to enhance the careers of junior women in her organisation.

Hence, making it impossible to break the cycle of gender stereotypes and glass ceilings, leading to many more gendered organisations being formed day by day (Cotter et al. 2001).

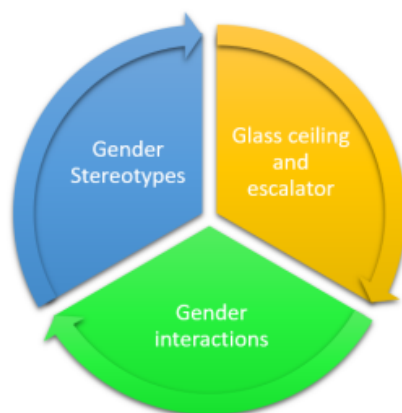


Image 2: The cycle to form gendered organisations (Pooja Sivakumar)

Masculinity and femininity are not biologically fixed, but are socially constructed – Judith Butler

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Link to the movie- “The Intern” (2015)

<https://123moviesc.me/film/the-intern/8JhT>

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