Re-presenting women executives: Valorization and devalorization in US business press

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Abstract
Perceived compatibility between requirements of managerial work and attributes of women is believed important to the advancement and success of women, and research demonstrates continued ambivalence about women executives. The question of how images of women executives are disseminated, reproducing or contesting negative characterizations, has received little attention. The research reported here focuses on US business press as a cultural carrier disseminating images of women executives. Critical discourse analysis examined 27 front page Wall Street Journal accounts of 22 women executives in the year following Carly Fiorina’s appointment to head Hewlett-Packard; 20 front page accounts of 24 men executives were used as comparison. Prominently featured articles on women executives provide fractured images of women as executives: while some accounts are positive, other portrayals reinforce negative perceptions of women’s competence and likeability as executives and concerns about the social order. Similar issues are not raised in coverage of male executives. Author gender does not seem to affect the portrayal.

Keywords
Top management | Women | Gender | Career development | Media

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Women are over-represented in support functions like administration, while men tend to be concentrated in operations, profit and loss, and research and development—all viewed as critical experiences for CEO and board-level positions. In 2020, 40% of human resources directors are women, compared to 17% of chief marketing officers and 16% of chief information officers. The proportion of women in senior leadership differs by region. 17.1% of CEOs/Heads of Business, India Has the Third-Lowest Global Representation of Women Managers, Ahead of Only South Korea and Japan. In 2019, women held only 8% of management roles, 9% of business management roles, and were only 2% of CEOs in India.