

Is the representation of women in the media changing?

Learning objective:

Give your personal responses and convey emotion during a discussion



Women in the media

The representation of women in the media is undergoing a significant transformation, portraying women of various races, ages and body types more realistically. A growing number of women behind the scenes in the media, such as directors, producers and social media influencers, empower women to voice their own perspectives. This evolution is pivotal in promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. International Women's Day is an opportunity to reflect on progress that has been made, but also to discuss what further steps need to be taken.



1. In groups discuss the questions.

1. In the last 24 hours, what different types of media have you interacted with?
2. Did you notice anything about the way in which women were represented?

2. Read the quotes and discuss in groups.

1. What different challenges do the women in the film industry refer to?
2. How do you feel about what they say?

There are things that are really disappointing about being an actress in Hollywood that surprise me all the time. I do think that there's a lot of pressure on women to be 'ageless'.

Maggie Gyllenhaal, American actor

I felt driven to write about women the way we really are, as opposed to some man's idea of what women are like – because the reality is that most women are still written by men.

Candace Bushnell, American author and producer

I started questioning gender-based assumptions when at eight I was confused at being called 'bossy' because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents, but the boys were not.

Emma Watson, UK actor, model and activist

3. Read about the Bechdel Test. In pairs, discuss the questions.

1. Use the checklist to talk about the representation of women in a film you watched recently.
2. Do you think this is a valid way of testing a film?
3. What might some of its limitations be?

Bechdel Test (BECK-duhl-tesst) *noun*

The Bechdel Test (also known as the Bechdel-Wallace Test) is a simple measure to check the representation of women in film and other media. To pass the test, the film must meet three requirements:

1. have at least two named female characters
2. the female characters talk to each other
3. the female characters have a conversation about something other than a man.

The test was first created in 1985 by cartoonist Alison Bechdel who used it in a comic strip as a simple, fun measure of the lack of female representation on screen. Twenty years later, critics started to use it to consider gender representation in films and other media such as video games, TV shows and plays. It isn't a measure of a movie's quality (many top movies actually fail it!), but it can be useful to point out how the industry as a whole exhibits a high degree of sexism and the lack of opportunity for female actors.

4. Read and discuss the magazine article.

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1. The article mentions three Disney films that pass the Bechdel Test. What is it that these films do that ones in the past often failed to do?
2. To what extent do you agree that children's films are key to creating gender equality in the next generation? Give reasons.
3. Have you seen any films recently which have tried to break gender stereotypes? What did they do?

5. Look again at the article. Copy the table and record useful phrases you find for talking about the representation or lack of representation of women in the media.

Things we want media to do	Things we don't want media to do
set realistic standards	reinforce gender stereotypes portray unrealistic body types

Effective communication

When discussing topics that you feel strongly about and which affect you personally, you will want to show emotion such as anger, frustration, disappointment, enthusiasm or sympathy. Adjusting your speech (tone, pitch, volume, intonation) can help you convey how you feel and engage your listeners on a deeper level.



6. Two friends are talking about a TV show they watch set in a hospital. Read what they say with emotion.



This show really annoys me! It just reinforces gender stereotypes that women are nurses and men are doctors.

And the doctors speak to the nurses really slowly.

They also portray unrealistic body types. Everyone in the show is six feet tall and thin. How crazy is that!

What a disappointment! They should have at least one female doctor to inspire women.

That's ridiculous!

What a shame! It's such a popular show. It's not great representation.

7. Look at the photos and react to what you see. Comment and share views about it.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

In pairs or small groups, choose and discuss the questions, sharing your own experiences and emotions.

1. Thinking back to your childhood, how much did the representation of women in the media influence your ambitions, opinions and choices?
2. Are we seeing positive changes in the representation of women in media, or are women still facing resistance and challenges within the industry?
3. To what extent has any change in the representation of women changed your feelings, opinions and choices now?
4. In what way do you think the representation of women in the media will change in the next ten years?
5. Can you think of any examples where stereotypes have been challenged or broken by the media (e.g. TV series, film, advert) in your country?
6. Are the efforts towards diversity and inclusion in the media industry genuine, or are they merely gestures to keep the public happy?
7. How can people (consumers of the media) avoid being manipulated by the media and not internalise the messages being conveyed about girls and women?
8. What is the importance, for you and for others, of having more women in media production roles (like directors, writers, etc.)?
9. Can you name some positive female role models in today's media? What makes them positive?
10. Do women in media have a moral obligation to use their platforms for advocacy and social change, or is it unfair to expect them to carry the burden of representation?

Remember!
Note down any new vocabulary you learned during the discussion.



'I want to give women a space to feel their own strength and tell their stories. That is power.' – Beyoncé