

Face-ism

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Face-ism or facial prominence is the relative prominence of the face in the portrayal of men and women. Research showed that media tend to feature more on men's face and women's body.

Origin and subsequent studies

The term "face-ism" or "facial prominence" was initially defined by Archer, Iritani, Kimes and Barrios in their five studies of sex differences in facial prominence (Archer, Iritani, Kimes & Barrios, 1983). In their study, facial prominence was measured by a Face-ism index, which is the ratio of two linear measurements, with the distance (in millimeters or any other unit) in a depiction from the top of the head to the lowest visible point of the chin being the numerator and the distance from the top of the head to the lowest visible part of the subject's body the denominator. It was found that across societies and over time, facial prominence of men has been much higher than that of women (Archer et al., 1983).

A plethora of subsequent studies have generated consistent findings and thus helped confirm the pervasive presence of face-ism. For instance, Nigro and his colleagues (1988) observed a prevalent face-ism phenomenon in news magazines and women's magazines of 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, Copeland (1989) documented the face-ism in prime-time television programs. Matthews (2007) provided evidence that face-ism is still present in mainstream printed media as recent as 2004, and showed that men in intellectually focused occupations tend to have higher face-to-body ratios than women in similar professions, while women in physical occupations tend to have higher face-to-body ratios than men in similar professions.

Important aspects of theory

Implication of face-ism

It was found that regardless of gender difference, news photographs featuring high face prominence tend to generate positive ratings in regard of intelligence, ambition and physical appearance than those with low face prominence (Archer et al., 1983).

Similarly, Zuckerman (1986) argued that as a series of mental life dimensions including intelligence, personality, and character are all closely associated with the face and head, higher face-ism of men may convey impressions of greater intelligence, dominance, and control (characteristics associated with masculinity). In contrast, the greater body-ism of women serves to reinforce the stereotypical images of women as decoration of men, or sex objects without any personalities (Hall & Crum, 1994).

Bretl and Cantor (1988) maintained that the perception of authority, credibility, confidence, competence, and even the physical build of an individual can also be affected by face-ism.

Zuckerman and Kieffer's study (1994) suggested that face-ism may not be merely restricted to gender difference but can apply to racial difference as well. For instance, the study revealed that Caucasians have higher face-ism than blacks across different media types.

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