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Five myths about career women

Perceptions are far from the truth. Women can have children and be good bosses

**Daisy Buchanan**

theguardian.com, Monday 27 October 2014 16.52 GMT

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Times have changed: Dolly Parton in *Nine to Five*. Photograph: Sportsphoto Ltd/Allstar

One of my favourite film settings is the 1980s office. In [Working Girl](#), [Nine to Five](#), [The Secret of my Success](#), [Broadcast News](#), and [When Harry Met Sally](#), we see a succession of smart women starting to achieve in the workplace. They all have beige power suits, enormous hair, and family and friends who hint, loudly and unsubtly, that everything might be better if their lives involved more marriage and children and less exposure to photocopier toner.

However, new research published in the [Economic Journal](#) suggests that our concept of the childless career woman is pure Hollywood fantasy. Professional women are having more children than ever. In the US, among women with advanced degrees, the [birth rate is up by 50%](#). Researchers Moshe Hazan and Hosny Zoabi are of the opinion that this is straightforward

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economics: when you're a high earner, you can afford to run a house, pay for childcare and, presumably, stuff your suits with premium-brand shoulder pads. But for a long time, it was thought that women were, to paraphrase historian Lucy Worsley, [educating themselves out of the reproductive function](#).

The concept of the "career woman" itself is an odd one, because it implies that earning money is a choice and a novelty, not a necessity. But Hazan and Zoabi's research shows that our perception of working women is far from the truth. Here are some other myths about women and work that don't actually hold true:

Working mothers are less productive than women without children

Some employers are [suspicious of mothers](#), presumably because they know that when you're responsible for the welfare of a human being, you start to have a threatening perspective on the usefulness of a three-hour meeting in order to approve a corporate hashtag. Yet researchers from the [University of Zurich](#) found that working mothers tended to [outperform their child-free colleagues](#), and those with two or more children performed better than those with only one child. Mums get stuff done.

Working women leave it too late to have children and their fertility 'falls off a cliff'

Earlier this year, Kirstie Allsopp said we needed to be honest with young women about having a baby, then working on their career, because "[nature is not a feminist](#)" and if women wait until they're financially settled, it will be too late for them. But Hanzan and Zobia's research turns this idea on its head, and new findings show that [more than half of all babies are being born to mothers over 30](#). Our understanding of health is ever improving, and we know how to look after ourselves in order to promote fertility. Egg freezing, while controversial, is becoming an increasingly viable option.

Women are bad bosses

In a [Gallup poll](#) last year, 40% of women and 29% of men said they would prefer a male boss to a female one. The [Ban Bossy](#) campaign addresses the assertion that women in positions of power are seen in a negative way. However, research has found that [venture capital firms that invest in women](#) led companies that outperform those that don't. Women in charge get results in the workplace – perhaps because they know they have to work harder to gain the respect

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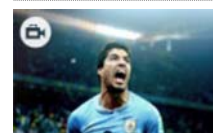
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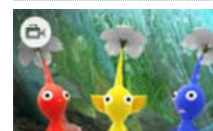
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their male counterparts are automatically afforded.

Working women are bad mothers

On average, women tend to spend an hour a day of quality time with their children, whereas in 1974, when there were far fewer women in the workplace, the figure was only 15 minutes. [Researchers from the universities of London and Seville](#) believe modern mothers are doing more for their children's cognitive development than ever before. A study published in the New York Times showed working mothers were [less likely to experience sadness, anger and diagnosed depression](#). That has to be good news for them and for their children.

They like to define themselves as 'career women'

Some women choose to work. Some also have a family. Some don't. Some women have to work in order to support their family. Some women want to work but find childcare costs make it so prohibitive that it makes more sense for them to stay at home. Women are too sophisticated to be defined as either mothers or not-mothers, working or not working – perhaps because we know our state of being is unlikely to remain static.



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PrakashShah

27 October 2014 5:03pm

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6 PEOPLE, 12 COMMENTS



wavypeasandgravy

27 October 2014 5:06pm

"Five myths about career women" ... that no-one with an IQ of more than 80 has entertained for about 30 years. There's a reason those office stereotypes belong in the 80s. This article belongs with them.

117



MalDeDebarquement

wavypeasandgravy

27 October 2014 5:11pm

Sadly, lots of people I know (mostly women) believe in this idea about fertility "falling off a cliff" after 30, even though it has been thoroughly debunked. They not only believe in it, they are completely gripped with anxiety because of it. Really I think this is a recent phenomenon, the result of waves of rubbish in the media designed to whip people up into hysteria. Sad, but true.

31



wavypeasandgravy

MalDeDebarquement

27 October 2014 5:16pm

The women I know who are around thirty don't think of themselves as mere vessels for baby-making so take 'fertility calendar' issues in their stride.

While feminist writers make up myths so they can disprove them, everybody else, men and women are just getting on with things. And we're doing grand thank you.

38

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6 PEOPLE, 7 COMMENTS



oommph

27 October 2014 5:10pm

I think it is is very clear the old stereotypes are not true.

If mothers are not "career women" now, they are very much the group hooked into employment. And also "mother" in this context tends to mean "...of dependent-age child(ren)" not the many mothers of 30 year olds who are still in employment.

The other way of saying that is that being childfree is how to make sure you do not need to bother much with employment, never mind bother with daft stuff like "productivity", especially after a while. The childfree women in my family and around me tend to steer well clear of all that - while the mothers are all employed.

Twas ever thus, mothers have always had to work to earn money.

2



thaumaturge

oommph

27 October 2014 5:50pm

25

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