







My Abstract for that conference:

How the Big Bang Theory Portrays Women in STEM Fields

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Today, the demand for women in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields has exploded. The United States government is providing numerous incentives for female students to enter STEM. However, the media influences people in many spheres of life and can be used to encourage or discourage STEM careers. My research centers on whether episodes of the science-heavy comedy show The Big Bang Theory portray women in STEM fields in a positive or negative light (compared with how this show depicted men in STEM fields). I watched and analyzed seasons one, four and seven of this comedy, choosing these three seasons because they provide a suitable timeline for the development of characters on the show. I defined positive and negative portrayals, and recorded results per episode for both men and women. Positive portrayals are defined as positive comments and situations regarding a character’s relationship with STEM. Negative portrayals are defined as stereotypical gender roles or offensive “nerd” stereotypes of STEM participants. The results were analyzed statistically (analysis of variance and post-hoc analysis), and I found that, in relation to STEM, The Big Bang Theory represented women more negatively than men. This was due to the highly clichéd female characters it depicted and the various insults to the female blonde character’s intelligence. The larger implications of this study are that the entertainment industry can produce shows that represent a female’s relationship with STEM positively (if there is public pressure to do so). Women can help increase innovation in STEM by bringing to the field their varied life experiences and creative ideas. Increasing the amount of women in these fields is a worthwhile goal that should be pursued with every tool at our disposal, including entertainment media.