

Make It Happen



Linda Fischer

"Make It Happen" est un film qui offre des alternatives aux récompenses habituelles pour l'attitude passive des femmes. L'auteure décrit trois modes de récompenses: Récompenser les femmes parce qu'elles sont jolies et gentilles, les récompenser pour travailler dans les emplois qui leur sont traditionnellement réservés, les récompenser pour leur rôle de mère. Tout cela crée une réaction qui empêche les femmes d'évoluer.

From conception to copyright, the film *Make It Happen* was coordinated by the Status of Women

Committee of the Toronto Board of Education but many of the usual characteristics of committee creations are absent. The film has a strong, coherent theme and is directed at young women. It does not talk down or preach, yet it has a unique message for them and for their teachers and guidance counsellors.

Tired of the media messages which give the impression that sex-role stereotyping is either primarily correctable by changing the explicitly taught value system (parents, schools, and TV are most to blame)

or disappearing as women are "liberated," the committee looked for a way to show that socialization is also more indirect. Although one can still hear parents telling girls not to do certain things (play with cars, for example) because "girls don't do that," a more potent and invisible message might be what they (and others) implicitly encourage girls to do, without attaching a "girl" label to the action.

Three reward patterns isolated for exploration in the film had a tongue-in-cheek working title of "When Is a Pat on the Head a Stab in the Back?" Each was looked at from the point of view of its effect on the decisions of individual women and consequently the cumulative effect of tens of thousands of decisions by individual women. If pervasive enough, alternative decisions and alternative reward patterns will presumably lead to profound changes in the sex-division of labour in the labour force. Women would branch out to a wider variety of occupations and occupy a wider range of jobs in the hierarchy. *Make It Happen* emphasizes the alternatives, the paths chosen by women who ignore the pervasive, traditional pats on the head.

Even now, despite some changes in women's attitudes toward work outside the home and long-term career planning, most girls and women are opting for jobs with limited potential, low salaries, and low pensions, jobs traditionally held by women. Three reward patterns which encourage many women to continue in "women's jobs" are outlined in the film.

Reward pattern number one starts very early, when girls are valued for being pretty, nice, good, and feminine. For many, this comes easily and they grow up to be women who regularly opt for activities that continue to elicit this type of praise; the result may be "approval addiction." A person with approval addiction is unlikely to be a risk taker, for risk taking has no appeal when s/he can get positive reinforcement for traditional behaviour.

It starts when you're a tiny child
And learning about living
Everyone loves the little girl
Who's quiet, sweet, and giving,
Be as pretty as you can,
Cause soon you'll have to trap a man,
And daddy loves the cake you cooked!

You're hooked, you're hooked.*

The women in the film have not been hooked or, if they were, they have managed to become unhooked. Hilary Salter chose to be a carpenter because she loves the work. Sybil Bowan owns medical laboratories, while Kristine Marinangeli has transferred from a secretarial position to a job on the path to stationary engineer.

Corrinne Spiegel took exception to reward pattern number one. At the age when other girls were choosing to get married or follow stereotypical careers, Corrinne decided neither route was what she wanted. She looked around for a training program which would give her what she wanted — responsibility and an excellent salary. After carefully choosing an insurance-company training program, she is now a successful stockbroker.

Reward pattern number two occurs after women have entered traditional occupations. They become the assistants, the helpers, the secretaries — the supporting cast. Often overqualified for the jobs, women do them with ease and the approval addiction is fed. It is hard even for women with career aspirations and professional training to take the risks necessary for promotions.

You still believe your'e going to be supported
By Prince Charming,
Statistics show you'll work for forty years,
Now, that's alarming!
And you don't plan a great career,
He'll have that, you'll just cheer,
Well that's the thing that you were taught,
You're caught, you're caught.*

Elizabeth Braaksma is an exception. She tired of her unchallenging secretarial job and obtained on-the-job training to become a systems assurance analyst. Norma Greenfield, who was a secretary before she married, trained for her position as an executive systems analyst while her children were in school. She now offers support and solid

... Reward pattern number one starts early.

Be pretty, nice, good, and feminine...

Break the addiction to the smile of approval,
Shake the addiction to the pat on the head,
You know that there is more to go for,
You can try for respect instead.
Respect — for playing in the big leagues,
Respect — in the community,
Respect — for doing what you can do
And earning a decent salary.*

advice to Elizabeth.

Janet Ray took the traditional route of becoming a teacher. Her later risk-taking behaviour came from other sources. Repeated applications for a vice-principalship in Toronto preceded her eventual success. "I applied a number of times to be a vice-principal. When they call you up and tell you, 'Sorry, we're not giving you this promotion,' you have to sit down, rebuild, and tell yourself, 'I can do it. Next

time I will get the job.' And try again." She is evaluated by her colleagues as an excellent vice-principal.

Reward pattern number three applies to all married women who have children. *Make It Happen* focusses on the effect on those who work outside the home. Motherhood feels good to many women. But when employed mothers take much more responsibility for children and housekeeping than employed fathers, these men have an advantage in the labour force. So many women take time off to raise children or work part time for a while that their careers lose momentum. The net effect is that more men reach their goals and earn much higher salaries than equally qualified women.

It takes two to have a child and
two should do the raising,
But old tradition lingers on so
long, it's really quite amazing.
A man is never forced to choose
between the kids and union
dues,
A woman has to take a stand,
demand — more than a hand.

Helen Meyer and Fred Langan care equally for daughter Kate. Although their daycare solution (a babysitter in their own home) is not an option for all people for financial reasons, they represent a family with a commitment to individual



Photo: Bev Pearl

... Women who opt to elicit praise become addicted to approval...

work patterns as well as strong family bonds.

The cumulative effect of many women's making alternative choices is going to be (a) women working at a much wider range of jobs and careers, (b) women occupying more positions of power and responsibility, and (c) women earning salaries equal to those earned by men. Instead of falling backward into success or stagnation, girls and women are encouraged to take positive action to *Make It Happen*. It is recognized by the

makers of *Make It Happen* that the message in the film is necessary but not sufficient for changes to occur. Male-dominant hierarchies and macho atmospheres at all levels close many women out. Lack of information on how the system works and the inaccessibility of that information are powerful class and sex barriers. The double hurdle is beyond almost all who might want to move into higher status, higher-paying occupations. Sometimes a clerical job is one of the few stepping stones to upward mobility if

one can afford to retrain on a clerical salary.

These and other structural changes which take collective action and strong public pressure are the subjects of several more films.

* From the song "Make It Happen" by Nancy White. Used by permission, Multinan Inc.

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