A history of women in advertising

By [Keshia Patchiappen](#)   24 Aug 2018

In a highly transformative and evolving industry, the South African advertising landscape is not as representative as one would expect from such a progressive and diverse nation. Marketing in South Africa still demonstrates an imbalanced gender dynamic.

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A study that the Advertising Women of New York commissioned in 2016 into a number of women in the industry shows that in an industry where 45% of the workplace is female, a mere 3% of directorship is held by women. Today, only 2.4% of women are CEOs and Only 9.2% of women hold chairperson positions. Women in leadership positions remain a minority within an industry that does not lack female representation: 50% of graduates studying marketing degrees are women.

Despite there being no shortage of women in the industry, there doesn't seem to be nearly enough in leadership roles. We need to see women that are authentic, we need to see women that are empowered, and we need to see women that are progressive because our girls need to see not only that what is possible, they've got to see what they need to become.

Lack of black women in creative leadership positions

It seems that the advertising industry has no trouble attracting women to the field, it is retaining them that is the problem. Women in creative roles appear to leave the industry in the middle of their careers, a move which is primarily attributed to having children. While many women return to agency, taking a break often hinders the opportunity to progress in their careers. Further to this, women are challenged with work-life balance in ways that their male counterparts are not. One can argue that taking on the dual roles of motherhood and career woman shifts the focus from a dedicated climb up the career ladder.

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While the representation of women in advertising agencies, in general, is a bone of contention, the diversity of women in

this field is much to be desired. There is a pervasive lack of black women in creative leadership positions or founding their own agencies in comparison to the increasing amount of white women and black women in the same position.

> " *The focus needs to shift: diversity is not solely about the number of women in leadership roles, but rather consider that a wide array of cultures, races and ethnicities are represented within agencies. Ultimately, diversity results in creativity, innovation and progressive concepts; agencies will reap the rewards of an exceptional offering from an entirely inclusive workforce. Diversity does not lower the bar. Diversity raises it.* "

It is essential to have strong female leaders in advertising agencies to inspire and motivate other women. We must celebrate women of colour who hold positions of prominence in the industry. It is important to understand what the female workforce would need to help them stay in the industry - this could mean child care assistance, de-stigmatising flexi-time and correcting salary inequalities. At the end of the day, it is about creating an environment that empowers women and allows them the courage and self-confidence to flourish within their roles, as creatives and leaders.

ABOUT KESHIA PATCHIAPPEN

With over 11 years of experience in both the communication and digital realms, Keshia has the learning required to give clients the edge in the highly competitive market of corporate communications. Keshia has worked for global communications agencies such as Ogilvy and GGi, and lists amongst the clients she has represented Engineering counsel of South Africa, SANOFI, Kellogg's, Ford Motors, TGR Attorneys. Her experience covers automotive, construction, consumer and corporate brands.
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