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AUTHOR(S)

Louise North

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‘Blokey’ newsrooms still a battleground for female journalists

Louise North

Abstract

This paper reports on the largest survey of female journalists in the Australian news media. The goal was to investigate issues confronting women, including the extent of perceived gender discrimination in promotion, job segregation and working conditions. It is the first quantitative research of its type in 16 years, building on a smaller survey by the Australian media industry union, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). That 1996 report found there was significant gender discrimination in Australian newsrooms and that sexual harassment, in particular, was a systemic problem. This 2012 online survey of 577 female journalists working across all media platforms in metropolitan, regional, rural and suburban news media organisations demonstrates that little has changed. The paper compares and contrasts key data from the 2012 and 1996 surveys to ascertain the challenges still evident for female journalists.

Introduction

In 1996, the Australian media industry union, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), in conjunction with peak international body the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), undertook a groundbreaking survey of women journalists working in the media in Asia. In the country-specific reports, the most significant issues to emerge for female journalists in Australia were equal opportunity in promotion, sexual harassment and childcare (MEAA/IFJ, 1996, p. 14). Other concerns of the 368 respondents across print, broadcast and wire platforms included being pigeon-holed in traditional female reporting roles which were not highly valued in news organisations, and being under-represented in their organisations at every level (MEAA/IFJ, 1996, p. 14). Key data revealed that nearly 23 per cent of respondents had left a job in the media because they felt they were being discriminated against in their promotion chances, and 51.6 per cent had experienced sexual harassment in their workplace, seriously undermining their confidence and affecting their work. The results also indicated opportunities for promotion were affected by childcare responsibilities because there was a perception that women could not undertake the expected overtime or work shifts, regardless of whether they were prepared to do so (MEAA/IFJ, 1996, p. 24).

The report's seven recommendations called upon the MEAA to "acknowledge the special problems faced by women journalists", and generate debate about them (1996, p. 20). Other recommendations included creating a women's committee within the MEAA, lobbying news organisations to practise non-discriminatory policies, devising guidelines about the portrayal of women in news content (similar to a code of ethics), implementing training programs about gender issues, and petitioning the Federal Government to ratify the International Labour Organization's conventions covering the rights of women at work (1996, p. 20). As far as the author is able to ascertain, the union did not implement, or act upon, any of the report's recommendations¹. Even so, the union highlights "equal opportunity and fair working conditions for all" as a key plank in its current overall goals (MEAA, 2011, p. 4). With such a damning assessment of gender discrimination in the Australian news media, it could be reasonably assumed that a follow-up survey would be necessary to assess the changes for women working in the news media, and the challenges that remain. While the MEAA and IFJ have been unable or unwilling to do so, this project seeks to intervene and ask: after 16 years, what has changed for female journalists in Australia? Previous empirical research about Australian female journalists that highlights gender inequity also underpinned the necessity of this quantitative research (see North, 2007; North, 2009; Romano, 2010).

This paper reports on the largest survey of female journalists in the Australian news media. The total of 577 survey responses is eclipsed only by John Henningham's (1998) study of 1068 male and female Australian journalists in 1992. The current survey addresses an absence of research and therefore a major gap in the knowledge of journalism scholars and practitioners about the experiences of female journalists in the news media. This project takes the MEAA/IFJ's 1996 report as its comparison point. Until now, the union report had been the only significant quantitative research that sought to specifically inquire how female journalists in the Australian news media experienced their work and workplaces.

The status of women journalists in Australia

Quantitative research about women journalists in Australia has been confined predominantly to snapshots of their status in newsrooms, rather than their experiences, included in a handful of global reports. I say "snapshots" because one of the most constraining issues for journalism scholars, particularly those investigating gender and workplace issues, is access to data from media organisations. Most research captures only a relatively small sample. For example, in the most recent global survey of women in the news media conducted by the US-based International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) (Byerly, 2011), and of which the author was a regional coordinator, many major media organisations in Australia chose not to provide the vital data that would assist researchers to map women's status. This was the case even though organisations were assured the data would be aggregated, ensuring their confidentiality, and the project was endorsed by the IFJ and other well-regarded industry bodies within Australia and worldwide². The survey did still receive data about almost 2000 media workers in Australia.

Despite such industry reticence, research clearly indicates that the mainstream news media in Australia are dominated by men at almost every level. Women journalists are typically located en masse in low-paid, low-status positions, struggling to attain real influence in editorial decision-making roles across all media platforms. While many women find jobs in reporting and some become well known for their work, few break through the glass ceiling and reach influential leadership positions (Gallagher, 1995; Byerly, 2011). A stark reminder of women's absence from decision-making roles in the Australian news media – and of the glass ceiling effect that helps to produce it – is found in the gender ratio of editors who lead the nation's 21 metropolitan newspapers. At the time of writing in August 2012, not one woman was entrusted with the editing role in a daily edition, although three currently edit weekend editions³. Similarly, in broadcasting,

women's exclusion from leadership roles is evident. It was 2009 before the publicly funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) appointed its first female director of news, Kate Torney.

There is no doubt, however, that journalism in Australia has shifted considerably from the male bastion it was 60 years ago, when there was just a handful of women who entered the fray. Women's entry into journalism has taken place alongside the emergence of the second-wave feminist movement, government legislation providing mechanisms for equal opportunity and female-dominated university journalism programs. Nevertheless, the news industry in Australia continues to embody a "blokey and ego-driven" culture (North, 2009; Hyland, 2010) that has for the most part ignored systemic and ongoing gender (and race) inequity in its workforce.

Women's participation in journalism in Australia has been relatively static since the early 1990s, and now indicates a downward trend. In 1992, 33 per cent of Australian journalists in Henningham's (1998) oft-cited large-scale study were female; also Schultz (1994) noted that in 1992, 30 per cent of the 247 journalists she surveyed were women. In 1995, Gallagher (p. 18, p. 29) found that at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, women comprised 38.5 per cent of reporters and producers/directors. Brand and Pearson (2001) found that in 2000, 39 per cent of journalists they surveyed were women; and in 2008 Hanusch (2008, p. 101) noted 40 per cent of his survey participants were female. Although 56 per cent of the 117 Australian journalists interviewed in 2010 by Josephi and Richards (2012) were female, Romano (2010, p. 4) found that of 374 stories studied in the Australian media on one day in 2009, only 32 per cent were written or presented by female reporters and newsreaders.

Byerly's most recent report – based on a sample of almost 2000 editorial and administrative staff and with figures provided by six main news organisations in Australia – found that 34.4 per cent of Australian journalists are female (Byerly, 2011, p. 219)⁵, compared with the global figure of 36.1 per cent. Women have long struggled to rise above a third of working journalists, despite the fact female students have dominated Australian university courses for more than 20-25 years (Pearson, 2009).

Jobs in leadership roles remain elusive (and in some cases off limits) for women worldwide, with men occupying the vast majority of management jobs, although more women overall are now securing these positions. To provide some context, in 1995 just 3 per cent of media organisations worldwide were headed by women (Gallagher, 1995). If the figures are broadened to take in the top levels of management (external governing boards and management committees including boards of directors), women's share of the jobs rose to 12 per cent (Gallagher, 1995, p. 47). Byerly's report shows that women's participation in management roles has increased. Women now hold 26 per cent of governing roles and 27 per cent of top management jobs around the globe (Byerly, 2011, p. 9).

In Australia, however, the percentage of women in leadership categories is well below the global average, with 20 per cent of women in the governance category and just 10 per cent in top-level management roles (Byerly, 2011, p. 217). Leadership has been understood within most news media organisations (and other male-dominated occupations) as an attribute that "naturally" belongs to men (Torkkola & Ruoho, 2011). The idea that men's "innate" traits and capabilities make them better equipped for journalism than women is often noted in interviews with journalists (North, 2009), and feminist scholars have therefore theorised this as a central reason why women succeed less than men in acquiring jobs in positions of authority. According to Patricia Yancey Martin, when such essentialist frames are evoked, "they depict men's talents and capacities as more *consonant with more valued jobs and opportunities*" (Martin, 1996, p. 201, emphasis in original).

In Australia, gender discrimination in journalism is similar to that reported in other male-dominated professions such as law or medicine (see, for example, Pierce, 1995; Pringle, 1998).

Consequently, some may ask why a continuing analysis of gender inequity in Australian journalism is important if it occurs across many occupations. The answer goes well beyond the rights of women to equal access to all occupations and occupational categories (Gallagher, 1995). The mass media is the major socialising and information agent of our times and digital technology has augmented this influence in countries, like Australia, that have developed media systems. News is now available on demand, anytime, anywhere from a range of traditional news organisations and media platforms – and increasingly citizen journalists on a myriad of electronic devices. That most newsrooms, including those traditional newsrooms that support so-called “new media” or online news sites, remain a hegemonic “blokey” environment (North, 2009) ensures that news is filtered through masculine news values. As British media scholars Karen Ross and Cynthia Carter so poignantly suggest, women’s role as fully participating and informed citizens is at stake:

As such, issues and topics traditionally seen to be particularly relevant to women tend to be pushed to the margins of the news where the implicit assumption is that they are less important than those that interest men. In so doing, men’s views and voices are privileged over women’s, thereby contributing to the ongoing secondary status of women’s participation as citizens. (Ross & Carter, 2011, p. 1148)

Methodology

In February 2012 an email invitation (with three reminders) to participate in an anonymous online survey was sent to female news journalists throughout Australia who worked across all media platforms, cities and regions. The participants were identified through a publicly available media guide (Gee, 2011), websites/broadcasts and newspapers, as well as contacts known to both the author and the project’s research assistant. In total, 1067 email addresses were collated and a formal invitation sent with a Monash Human Research Ethics Committee-approved Explanatory Statement outlining, among other things, the project’s goals and the anonymity guaranteed to participants. The email also asked participants to forward the invitation to other female colleagues who the researchers might have been unable to locate, in particular freelancers, sub-editors and other production staff whose email addresses are rarely publicly available. Consequently, while a definitive number of email recipients cannot be provided, the total was more than 1067. All attempts were made to have the list as representative as possible, including types of news media platforms (newspapers, news websites, wire, commercial and public radio, and commercial and public television) and location of recipients (rural, regional, metropolitan, suburban news outlets across all Australian states and territories) and newsroom positions (reporters, photographers, section editors, online editors, sub-editors, presenters, producers).

A total of 577 surveys were completed through an anonymous online system. By way of context, the total response is larger than other recent niche surveys of Australian journalists, including, for example, Nicholson, Zion and Lowden’s (2011) survey of 166 sports journalists and Hanusch’s (2012) survey of 85 travel journalists. It also surmounts other Australian surveys of both male and female journalists, including Josephi and Richards’ (2012) survey of 117 journalists; Hanusch’s (2008) report on 100 Australian journalists as part of a larger global study; Brand and Pearson’s (2001) survey of 100 journalists; and Schultz’s (1998) survey of 247 journalists in 1992. Despite our efforts in collating a comprehensive list, there are of course more than 1067 female news journalists in Australia, so it is not possible to suggest the survey is representative. It is large and far reaching enough, however, to make some generalisations. One noted limitation, common to media and journalism scholars (see Hanusch, 2012) and evident in this project, is that there is no verified list or accurate known total of the number of female (or male) journalists in the Australian news media. Quinn (2001, p. 135) noted that the 1996 Census listed 14,354 people who said they worked “in journalism and related professions”, with 7455 (or 52 per cent) employed as journalists. A decade later, Grenby et al. (2009, p. 5) found that the 2006 Census

put the number of “journalists and related professionals” at 18,704. Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data show 8033 people employed in the category of “journalist” in print, radio and television platforms (ABS, 2008). These figures, however, can be no more than a rough guide because they run counter to all rigorous academic work about, for example, the number of female journalists in Australia. Grenby et al. (2009, p. 4), drawing on the Census data, suggest that “for first time in Australian history, women outnumbered men in ‘journalism and related occupations’ with 8941 men and 9763 women. If one is to be more specific and add only the main journalistic categories, the 2006 Census lists 3997 female journalists in print, radio and television and 4036 male journalists (ABS, 2008). As previously noted, none of these figures can be substantiated by any academic research, which consistently has women constituting a little more than a third of the Australian journalism workforce.

The survey consisted of a series of questions related to working conditions, job segregation, recruitment, promotion and sexual harassment, and generally followed questions posed in the 1996 MEAA/IFJ survey. The current survey, however, revised and updated some questions, adding some and deleting a section of union-specific questions. The survey took between 10 and 15 minutes to complete. A number of questions also provided for written responses, allowing respondents’ experiences or comments to be recorded in relation to key questions. Those findings will be analysed and published separately in later work.

Findings

Overall, there has been little change in the experiences of female journalists in Australia since the 1996 MEAA/IFJ survey. The majority of respondents still experience sexual harassment by a male colleague or senior male manager. Most also struggle to be promoted – hampered by the fact that most say reviews of work and promotional opportunities are decided by the editor or another senior figure who are usually male (rather than interview panels). Surprisingly, the top ranked response to the question “how many times have you received a promotion from your current employer” was “never” (28.3 per cent). Respondents also agree that men overwhelmingly dominate senior decision-making ranks in their organisations, that journalism is incompatible with women who care for children, and that there are still news stories that are traditionally allocated to male reporters and not available to women, which arguably stymies their promotion opportunities. I am not, however, suggesting that all female journalists share this lived experience: some do not, and some happily tackle the masculine environment (see, for example, Simons, 2007, p. 269). Similarly, I do not want to imply that female journalists are, or have been, passive recipients of gender bias. I have written elsewhere (North, 2009) of some women’s strong resistance, legally and otherwise, to discriminatory behaviour, as well as the varied strategies that many employ to thrive in (or survive) hegemonically masculine cultures.

Characteristics

Most respondents in the 2012 survey are from the metropolitan print news media (43.8 per cent), metropolitan television (13.8 per cent), and rural and regional print news media⁶ (12 per cent). The majority work for Fairfax Media (30.8 per cent), News Limited (29.6 per cent) and the ABC (21.4 per cent). There are respondents from all states and territories, with the majority working in Victoria (29.4 per cent), NSW (28.8 per cent) and Queensland (14.5 per cent).

The age distribution is relatively evenly spread, with the majority of respondents aged 25-29 (21.2 per cent), 30-34 (14.5 per cent) and 40-44 (14.4 per cent). At either end of the spectrum there are 10 per cent aged 18-25 and 9.6 per cent aged 50-55. A small proportion is from non-English speaking backgrounds (7.5 per cent), and virtually none identify as Aboriginal or Torres

Strait Islander (0.5 per cent). Most work full-time (77.3 per cent) and just 27.2 per cent of respondents care for a child under the age of 15. The majority earn between \$A50,000 and \$A90,000 per annum (52.3 per cent), and 87.6 per cent have a university degree or other tertiary education, up from 75.8 per cent in 1996. Although previous research provides no gender comparison in relation to education, it is interesting to note the rise in the professionalisation of the industry. Henningham’s (1993) study of male and female journalists in Australia showed that in 1992 just 39 per cent had a tertiary degree or diploma, while Pearson et al. (2001) found 66 per cent of the 100 journalists surveyed possessed a degree, and in 2008 Hanusch found 74 per cent of his respondents were tertiary educated. Consequently, it may be possible to suggest that female journalists in Australia currently have a higher level of tertiary education than their male colleagues. There is, however, no direct relationship between gross yearly income and level of education (Table 1).

Table 1: Yearly income and level of education

Income		Degree or tertiary education
less than \$50,000	(n=94)	93.6
\$50-70,000	(n=148)	89.2
\$70-90,000	(n=134)	84.3
\$90,110,000	(n=87)	89.6
more than \$110,000	(n=74)	81.1

In sum, the typical female journalist who responded to this survey works full-time for a metropolitan newspaper, is aged between 25 and 29, has a university degree, has no children and earns between \$50,000 and \$90,000 a year.

Sexual harassment

The most staggering finding from the 2012 survey is that more female journalists experienced sexual harassment⁷ than noted by respondents in the 1996 survey (Table 2). In nearly all instances the harassment was by a male colleague or a male in a senior position (Table 3).

Table 2: Experienced sexual harassment

	Yes	No	Unsure
Current study, 2012 (n=531)	57.3	40.1	2.6
MEAA/IFJ study, 1996 (n=356)	51.6	44.3	0.8

Note: not all survey respondents answered this question

Table 3: Harassment was perpetrated by (%)

	2012 study (n=295)	1996 study (n=n/a)
Male colleague	52.2	52.8
Female colleague	0.7	0.5
Male manager or male in senior position	46.1	39.4
Female manager or female in senior position	1.0	n/a
Other	n/a	7.3

The survey statistics also reflect the personal and professional ramifications for those who had experienced sexual harassment. The results were similar across the two surveys despite the 16-year gap. The majority felt that the harassment had undermined their confidence and affected their work significantly (14.2 per cent, compared with 14.6 per cent in 1996); or a bit (45.5 per cent, compared with 54.2 per cent in 1996). Respondents in both surveys said most sexual harassment involved objectionable remarks or behaviour (Table 4).

Table 4: Type of sexual harassment (%)

	2012 (n=298)	1996 (n=n/a)
Objectionable remarks/behaviour	74.8	60.0
Obscene remarks/behaviour	15.4	32.0
Inappropriate physical contact	7.7	n/a
Inappropriate use of technology to transmit objectionable content	2.0	n/a*

Column totals <100 per cent because 1996 survey included this question with “outcome of incidents”. See report p. 39.

Sexual harassment is often considered an issue of the past, mired in a feminist agenda that, as popular media would have it, is no longer relevant in an era of perceived empowerment and agency for women. Yet, in this survey the majority who have experienced sexual harassment say it has occurred within the past five years (53.3 per cent). This overwhelmingly indicates that sexual harassment is an ongoing, systemic problem that remains part of the work culture in media organisations in Australia today. All major media organisations have similar high levels of women who experience harassment, although the commercial television sector seems to rate higher than newspaper-based companies such as News Ltd and Fairfax, or the public broadcaster. The lower number of respondents in the commercial TV sector, however, makes a definitive claim difficult (Table 5).

Table 5: Sexual harassment experienced by respondents in major news groups

News groups	2012 study	
News Ltd	(n=140)	56.4
Fairfax	(n=148)	56.8
ABC	(n=104)	57.7
Commercial TV (Ch 7,9,10)	(n=37)	64.9

Perhaps one reason why sexual harassment goes unaddressed and remains largely hidden is that 87.2 per cent of respondents who experienced it chose not to report the incident(s). Just 12.8 per cent of women who experienced harassment had made a formal complaint (compared with 13.2 per cent in 1996). The reasons offered for not making a complaint vary, but for the most part remain as they did in 1996. Respondents saw no benefit in doing so, fear victimisation, or thought they could best handle the situation themselves. Both surveys indicate that many respondents believe sexual harassment is an accepted part of their organisation’s culture and tolerated in the workplace. Women of all ages in the 2012 survey had experienced sexual harassment, with the largest number in the 40-44 age group (Table 6). The majority of those in the 18-39 age brackets indicate that the harassment occurred within the preceding five years.

Table 6: Age and time period of those who experienced sexual harassment

2012 survey		Experienced harassment	in last five years
18-24 years old	(n=52)	38.5	94.1
25-29	(n=114)	51.8	85.2
30-34	(n=77)	50.6	73.8
35-39	(n= 66)	60.6	53.7
40-44	(n=78)	73.1	28.1
50-55	(n=49)	55.1	20.8
56 and over	(n=27)	70.4	15.8

Promotional opportunities

It is generally accepted that the longer an employee works in an organisation, the more likely they are to receive a promotion. Yet a significant number of those who had worked for the same organisation for between six and eight years (23.3 per cent) had never received a promotion. Overall, in 2012 half (50.5 per cent) of 547 respondents who answered this question had never received a promotion (28.3 per cent), or had received a promotion just once (22.2 per cent) from their current employer.

Table 7: Never promoted by current employer

Years of service with current employer		2012 study	1996 study
under 12mths	(n=48)	89.4	n/a
1-2 yrs	(n=64)	56.3	33.3
2-4 yrs	(n=85)	31.8	35.8
4-6 yrs	(n=75)	13.4	13.2
6-8 yrs	(n=44)	23.3	6.0
8-10 yrs	(n=41)	12.2	8.6
10-15 yrs	(n=95)	9.7	21.7
15-20 yrs	(n=51)	13.7	12.5
20-30 yrs	(n=39)	18.9	n/a
30 or more yrs	(n= 5)	0.0	n/a

Overall, the number of female journalists who have never been promoted has increased since the 1996 survey. This is regardless of how long they have worked for their current employer (Table 7). This is the case even though the majority of respondents had worked for their current employer for between four and 20 years (55.9 per cent), with the largest percentage having worked for the current employer for 10-15 years (17.4 per cent). In most respondents' newsrooms, promotional opportunities are decided by the editor alone with no formal performance review based on objective criteria (52.4 per cent). The fact that 35.5 per cent of respondents are now employed on individually negotiated contracts (a question not included in the 1996 survey, when individual contracts were in their infancy), compared with 64.5 per cent on award (MEAA, ABC, and so on), indicates not only the decreasing influence of the industry union but also that pay inequity remains largely hidden and therefore more difficult to address.

Despite these figures, more respondents (57.9 per cent) than in 1996 think that women have equal opportunity for promotion in the workplace (compared with 44.8 per cent in 1996). Even so, there was a high level of ambivalence, with 42.1 per cent unsure or definite that women did not have equal opportunity for promotion. On a brighter note, the number of respondents who said they had left a job in the media because they felt they were being discriminated against in their promotion chances has almost halved in 16 years. In 1996, 23 per cent (n=78) of respondents said they had left a job, compared with 13.7 per cent (n=75) in 2012.

Male domination in decision-making roles

Overall, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that men and women are not equally represented in senior/decision-making levels in their newsrooms (66.7 per cent). Gender inequity in the top editorial positions was most evident in metropolitan newspapers, followed by regional/rural newspapers and metropolitan television. In stark contrast, the majority of respondents who worked in regional and rural radio suggested women and men were equally represented in decision making roles in their organisations (63.2 per cent) (Table 8).

Table 8: Are men and women equally represented in senior/decision-making roles in your organisation?

Respondents		Yes	No
Print metro	(n=231)	18.2	81.8
Print regional/rural	(n =64)	31.3	68.8
Television metro	(n=70)	34.3	65.7
Television regional/rural	(n=13)	46.2	53.8
Radio metro	(n=41)	58.5	41.5
Radio regional/rural	(n=38)	63.2	36.8

Nevertheless, even though most respondents said women are not equally represented in decision-making roles, just under half (49 per cent) agreed women journalists did have access and opportunities to be promoted to those positions. Interestingly, this is in contrast to a clear majority of respondents in 1996 who believed women did have access to managerial positions (60 per cent). In 2012, 36.4 per cent said women did not have access (29.8 per cent in 1996), while a significant number were unsure (14.7 per cent and 8.7 per cent in 1996). Table 9 indicates that those in metropolitan print media are more likely than those in other media platforms to believe that female journalists are not given equal opportunity to secure managerial positions.

Table 9: Are women journalists given access and opportunities to be promoted to all types of managerial positions in the newsroom?

Respondents		Yes	No	Unsure
Print metropolitan	(n=234)	42.7	44.0	13.2
Print regional rural	(n=63)	47.6	34.9	17.5
Television metro	(n=70)	52.1	35.2	12.7
Television regional/rural	(n=13)	69.2	23.1	7.7
Radio metro	(n=41)	48.8	29.3	22.0
Radio regional/rural	(n=38)	60.5	18.4	21.1

Job segregation

Another key finding of the 1996 report was that the majority of respondents (57.3 per cent) believed there were news areas traditionally allocated to female reporters. The report notes that female reporters were pigeon-holed in traditionally female areas including women’s issues and fashion, health, the arts, entertainment and education, which are invariably perceived to be less important in the organisation in comparison with highly valued areas such as politics and sports. In 2012, a lower percentage but still a majority (50.6 per cent) believe this to still be the case. In terms of what rounds the 500 respondents predominantly worked in, most said general news (55.4 per cent) or features (36.6 per cent), followed by politics (33.2 per cent) and arts (22.6 per cent) in the multiple choice question. This appears to be a significant and positive shift from 1996 when just 11.2 per cent said they worked in the broad grouping of “commerce, business, economics, politics, press gallery, foreign affairs, industrial relations, technology”; 31.6 per cent in general news; and 24.4 per cent in the “entertainment, fashion, women’s issues, arts, health, education, consumer affairs” grouping. Respondents in 2012 did, however, firmly agree that there are news areas that are traditionally allocated to male reporters (60.1 per cent, also down from 65.2 per cent in 1996).

Childcare

The number of women in journalism who do not have children remains similar over the 16 years since the 1996 survey. Most respondents (72.8 per cent) do not have children under the age of 15 (compared with 74.9 per cent in 1996). Most (64.9 per cent) said workplace arrangements were too inflexible to accommodate women with childcare responsibilities, closely followed in the multiple-response question by those (63.4 per cent) who also noted a lack of on-site childcare facilities that make it difficult for women to work overtime or shiftwork, even if they are prepared to do so. The number of respondents with children who had left a job in journalism because of pregnancy-related reasons or child-minding has almost halved from the 1996 data – 38.7 per cent to 20.2 per cent. This is perhaps due to the increased availability of commercial childcare and government childcare subsidies. Cox (2007) notes that commercial childcare was funded from 1990, and policy changes after 1996 encouraged the expansion of market providers. The expanded offerings of paid maternity leave by major news organisations and most recently the Federal Government's paid parental leave scheme have also assisted female journalists.

Conclusion

The industry, and its weakened union the MEAA, must confront an uncomfortable truth – that gender bias is ongoing in its industry and experienced by the majority of surveyed female journalists in Australia. This discrimination is at all levels of seniority across all media platforms, and in rural, regional and metropolitan areas. The largest survey of female journalists in Australia has found that little has changed for female journalists since the first major investigation 16 years ago. Sexual harassment is still rife, and promotional opportunities are a concern for most respondents, as is the ongoing problem of job segregation and the numerical domination of men in decision-making roles. As was the case in the 1996 survey, most female journalists are childless, suggesting they continue to consider childcaring and journalism to be incompatible.

While the news media often shine a light on gender inequity in other occupations, they have failed to investigate their own gender bias issues. Media managers have long known about the blokey culture of their organisations: ABC managing director Mark Scott and former *Age* editor Andrew Jaspán, for example, have previously and publicly acknowledged the problem. Scott has suggested that women's under-representation in the senior ranks *is* a concern. "What we are doing is creating an environment that is less blokey and provides more of an opportunity for women," he was reported as saying in 2004 (in Catalano, 2004, p. 22). It is unclear, however, what measures he has taken to challenge this entrenched culture. Jaspán, too, acknowledged that "quite often newspapers are run by men with very much a male-oriented agenda" (in Catalano, 2004, p. 22), admitting that at a micro level, gender bias exists. Meanwhile, the largest media group in Australia, News Ltd, appears to turn a blind eye; former News Ltd boss John Hartigan has been quoted as suggesting that there were no problems for women in journalism (see Jackson, 2003, p. B3).

While the overall picture presented here is one of ongoing systemic gender discrimination, it should not be read as totally negative. More than 55 female journalists who received an invitation to participate contacted me personally to thank me for the opportunity to say something of their experiences. It has, at the very least, provided a voice for many women's working experiences.

We are, of course, left with the question of what can be done to address the ongoing problems experienced by most female journalists in this survey. The industry union, the MEAA, appears not to consider women's concerns as central to its task. The industry itself is primarily focused on its shifting role with consumers and changing business models to manage the impact of digital technology on the consumption and production of news.

Is the education of aspiring journalists, then, central to a more equitable future for female journalists? As several studies have indicated, the majority of people who secure jobs in the industry now have degrees, most in journalism and communications, yet all except a handful currently graduate without specific knowledge of gender issues in journalism and in the newsroom (North, 2010). I have discussed elsewhere the value of educating aspiring journalists about gender issues (North, 2010). However, there is only one university that offers a specific unit about gender and journalism issues to undergraduate journalism students in Australia⁸. If the answer were simple, we might say knowledge could empower a new generation of journalists, where informed men and women work together for change. No doubt gender inequity is a complex debate that crosses cultural and social attitudes, stereotypes and personal obstacles. Yet if the industry is unwilling to act, then as educators we need to respond.

Notes

1. MEAA federal secretary Christopher Warren replied to an email request for information about the union's actions to the 1996 recommendations. He noted the recommendations "were not specific to Australia but, again, were general recommendations as guidance for journalist associations and unions in very different stages of development. If anything, they were more targeted at those countries where the circumstances for women journalists were significantly worse than they were (or are) in Australia."
2. Including the American Society of News Editors, Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, Center for Independent Journalism, the Australian Press Council, American Society of Magazine Editors, Press Institute of India and the South Asian Policy Analysis Network.
3. Megan Lloyd, *Sunday Mail*, Adelaide; Judith Whelan, the Saturday edition of *The Sydney Morning Herald*; and Margaret Easterbrook, the *Saturday Age*.
4. The first wave of Australian feminism during the late 19th century was focused on women's suffrage and consequently women's access to parliaments and other political activities. The second wave of Australian feminism was concerned with challenging legal and social barriers.
5. This figure was arrived at by averaging the statistics for workers in the following four journalistic categories of Byerly's study: senior management, middle management, senior level and junior level professionals.
6. Magazine journalists were not included in this survey (as they were in the MEAA/IFJ survey).
7. The Australian Human Rights Commission defines sexual harassment as "an unwelcome sexual advance, unwelcome request for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which, in the circumstances, a reasonable person, aware of those circumstances, would anticipate the possibility that the person would feel offended, humiliated or intimidated." (AHRC, 2012)
8. Monash University's, Gender, Race and Journalism unit, co-ordinated and taught by the author and in its first year (2011) a recipient of a Faculty Citation for advancing diversity and equity education in journalism.

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Author

Louise North is a senior lecturer in journalism at Monash University in Victoria.