



LEEDS  
BECKETT  
UNIVERSITY

---

Citation:

Topic, M and Bruegmann, C (2020) Women Journalists in the UK Press. Other. Leeds Business School.

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/6436/>

Document Version:

Monograph (Published Version)

---

Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on [openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

# WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN THE UK PRESS

Dr Martina Topić

Leeds Business School

Ms Carmen Brueggemann

## THE KEY FINDINGS FROM A QUALITATIVE STUDY

### NEWS

- Masculine Culture
- Blokish Women
- Harrassment
- Career Barriers
- The Queen Bee Syndrome

Cover Design - Christian Goodman



Image taken from: Title: "Thrilling Life Stories for the Masses"  
Shelfmark: "British Library HMNTS 012634.n."  
Volume: 06 Page: 374

Majority of the interviewed women spent more time with their mothers and had female friends. These women mostly tend to prefer women editors and spending more time with other women

in office culture. Women report sexist comments and sexual harassment in newsrooms. Women also report that when a woman does succeed in journalism, her success is often downplayed

with unfounded gossip of sleeping her way to the top. This sexism also leads to career barriers, and many journalists reported that career prospects for women are still not good because they face sexism, prejudice and lack of trust that they can handle the job. Women also report that women have to be like men to succeed, which includes the way they collect news and generally behave where they have to prove they are tough and can handle the pressure of work. Journalists also reported that having to adopt masculine behavioural style

means not showing emotions, with which journalistic works becomes emotional labour too. Interviewees report that the office culture is very much centred on masculine interest due to the prevalence of men in newsrooms. Thus, chats are mostly centred on work issues and sport. Those women who have other women in newsroom report talking about TV, families, food, education, and private life. Banter is also often masculine and interviewees report that men are different, with the exception of LGBT+ men who tend to be more supportive

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to, first and foremost, thank women who agreed to participate in this study. Thank you for donating your time and knowledge of the industry conditions and for sharing your experiences with us. We hope that these findings will be of use to you and that they will be used as a support in advocacy for the improvement of your position.

We would also like to thank Leeds Business School for financial support for this research project.

Finally, Martina would also like to thank Professor Ralph Tench for his continuous support of her women's studies research.

## **Introduction**

The report below is a summary of the results from the research project *Blokes of all Genders? The Experiences of Women Journalists in UK Media*, which was funded by the Leeds Business School as part of the annual internal research grant programme funded by HEFCE. More detailed analyses are currently being prepared as academic papers and these papers include detailed quotes and an in-depth analysis of views expressed by women working in UK journalism.

### **The Rationale for the Study**

For decades, existing research in journalism has been showing that women have merged in newsrooms dominated by male culture (Graber, 1980). This means that news values and the way news are gathered has never changed even though the number of women in the industry has increased (Christmas, 1997; Djerf-Pierre, 2011). Gallagher (2002) noted that women find it difficult to join the 'laddish' behaviour present in newsrooms whereas Mills (2014) argued that newsroom culture is so masculinised that women who stay in journalism and succeed in progressing to senior positions "become so bloke-ified by the macho water in which they swim that many younger women looking up don't see them as role models for the kind of women they might want to become" (p. 17).

The research conducted by Martina Topić (2018) analysed bylines in British national newspapers and explored who writes about sugar and the supermarket industry now when these topics are no longer present only in the so-called feminine sections such as food, lifestyle and health. The findings have shown that once when these topics moved to the news it is men who write about these topics more than women, and these topics are turned into sensationalised hard news. This research, therefore, asked whether women from health, lifestyle and food sections are not bloke-ified enough to write in news section now when their traditional topics are on the public agenda (Topić, 2018). Thus, the existing research recognises the problem of bloke-ified newsrooms and there is some research analysing bylines and who writes in which sections, thus recognising that women are not sufficiently present in news and business sections (Bawdon, 2012; Cochrane, 2011; Topić, 2018).

In this research project, we continued the previous research on the masculine culture of newsrooms and blokish culture of newsrooms with an aim to take previous research on women in journalism forward and explore views and perceptions of British women journalists on their position in the newsroom and the newsroom culture.

## **Method**

We conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with women working in the press, with some interviewed women also writing for magazines. A total of 10 journalists and 10 editors has been recruited, and women who took part in the study come from Leeds, Batley, Huddersfield, Hull, Essex, London, Halifax, York, Barnsley, Newcastle, Devon and Manchester. While the majority of interviewees are based in the north now, the majority of them has worked in London previously and then moved to the north in the later stage of their career (for e.g. when going freelance).

The youngest woman interviewed is 19 years old whereas the oldest one is 67 years old. Women have between six months and 30 years of work experience, thus we have interviewed women who are only starting their career in journalism whilst still studying for a degree as well as veterans with 30 years of experience. The majority of participants, however, have between 13 and 25 years of experience in journalism.

All interviewed women work or have worked in newspapers, and some also work in magazines. One woman worked in newspapers and then at the BBC, thus moving to broadcast journalism in the later stage of her career. Of 20 interviews, three interviewed women are former journalists while remaining 17 still work in journalism, either full-time or freelance.

Interviewees were asked a number of questions pertaining to their experiences of being a woman in the newsroom and a woman journalist, as well as questions on office culture, socialisation process and leadership.

## **Summary of Results**

### **General Position of Women in the Industry**

- Women report sexist comments and sexual harassment in newsrooms. Women also report that when a woman does succeed in journalism, her success is often downplayed with unfounded gossip of sleeping her way to the top. This sexism also leads to career barriers, and many journalists reported that career prospects for women are still not good because they face sexism, prejudice and lack of trust that they can handle the job. Interestingly, these views are present among all women, which includes women who worked in journalism in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as amongst those who work in journalism today. Thus, the industry seems to be excessively slow to change and while the number of women in journalism has increased and some things have changed, the situation with blokish culture has not changed much.
- Women report that women have to be like men to succeed, which includes the way they collect news and generally behave where they have to prove they are tough and can handle the pressure of work. Journalists also reported that having to adopt masculine behavioural style means not showing emotions, with which journalistic works becomes emotional labour too.
- Long hours, no holidays and no time for private life are seen as the norm for working in journalism. Some women also reported fear of becoming pregnant because of disapproval they would face from editors and also because of the fear they could lose their position.
- Some women also report being forced into women's section even though they were interested in news and have a higher education degree and professional qualifications.

- Women report that the social media has made a negative impact on work in journalism because there is a sense of constant working and an expectation is felt that a journalist will not have a life outside of work.
- Journalists also report that women who do succeed and manage to have families, either have family support or they pay nannies to help them. This is the reason why many women leave journalism or go freelance.
- Those interviewees who work also for magazines report a much more woman-friendly atmosphere in magazines and more understanding from editors.

### **The Office Culture**

- Interviewees report that the office culture is very much centred on masculine interest due to the prevalence of men in newsrooms. Thus, chats are mostly centred on work issues and sport. Those women who have other women in newsroom report talking about TV, families, food, education, and private life, thus showing gendered divisions in social relations. Banter is also often masculine and interviewees report that men are different, with the exception of LGBT+ men who tend to be more supportive, friendly and engage in various topics of conversation and banter.
- Magazine culture seems to be very feminized and women report a friendly, inclusive and ‘cuddly’ culture of magazines where they were able to talk more openly about their private life, interest and also sex.
- Women report exclusion from business decisions and not always being taken seriously when expressing an opinion about an issue. They also reported having to move jobs to get promoted, facing disapproval and feeling they had to work harder to succeed (editors).

### **The Leadership Experiences and Differences between Men and Women**

- Majority of interviewed women spent more time with their mothers and had female friends when growing up. These women mostly tend to prefer women editors and spending more time with other women in newsrooms.
- Women who reported being tomboys report egalitarian preferences of editors and do not have a preference as to working for a male or female editor.
- There is a mixture of feelings amongst women with more feminine socialisation, and a strong tendency for these women to criticise masculine women editors. In other words, women with feminine socialisation tend to prefer to work for other women if they perceive them as feminine whereas they express criticism of masculine women and state they would rather work for a male manager than masculine women.
- The same tendency continues with role models and women see their women managers as role models if they perceive them as feminine in their behaviour and communication skills. The Queen Bee syndrome is also sensed in some responses and women who managed to get to the top embrace masculine characteristics and can be seen as being tougher than men.
- Majority of women editors do not express a preference towards working with any particular gender, thus showing the egalitarian style of leadership and management amongst senior

women. Those who do say they have a preference, show a preference towards working with other women because they find them easier to work with.

- Women self-assess their leadership style as cooperative, supportive, fair, people-oriented and inclusive. The socialisation process is seen as influential on leadership and communication skills.
- Mixed feelings were expressed about behaving differently to be taken seriously.

### References

- Bawdon, F. (2012). "Seen but not heard: how women make front-page news". *Women in Journalism Report*. Accessed 21 December 2016. [http://womeninjournalism.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Seen\\_but\\_not\\_heard.pdf](http://womeninjournalism.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Seen_but_not_heard.pdf)
- Christmas, L. (1997). "Women in Journalism: Chaps of both sexes? – Women decision-makers in newspapers: Do they make a difference?" *Women in Journalism Report*. Accessed 21 December 2016. <http://womeninjournalism.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Chaps-of-both-Sexes.pdf>
- Cochrane, K. (2011). "Why is British public life dominated by men?" *Women in Journalism Report*. Accessed 26 December 2016. <http://womeninjournalism.co.uk/why-is-british-public-life-dominated-by-men/>
- Djerf-Pierre, M. (2011). "The Difference Engine". *Feminist Media Studies* 11(1), 43-51.
- Gallagher, M. (2002). "Women, Media and Democratic Society: In Pursuit of Rights and Freedoms. United Nations: Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)", Expert Group Meeting on 'Participation and access of women to the media, and the impact of media on, and its use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women' (2002). Accessed 22 March 2017. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/media2002/reports/BP1Gallagher.PDF>
- Graber, D. (1980). *Crime News and the Public*. New York: Praeger.
- Mills, E. (2014). "Why do the best jobs go to men?" *British Journalism Review* 25(3), 1-5 (online).
- Topić, M. (2018). Not Bloke-ified enough? Women Journalists, Supermarket Industry and the Debate on Sugar in the British Press (2010-2015). *Newspaper Research Journal* 39(4), 433-442. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0739532918806872>