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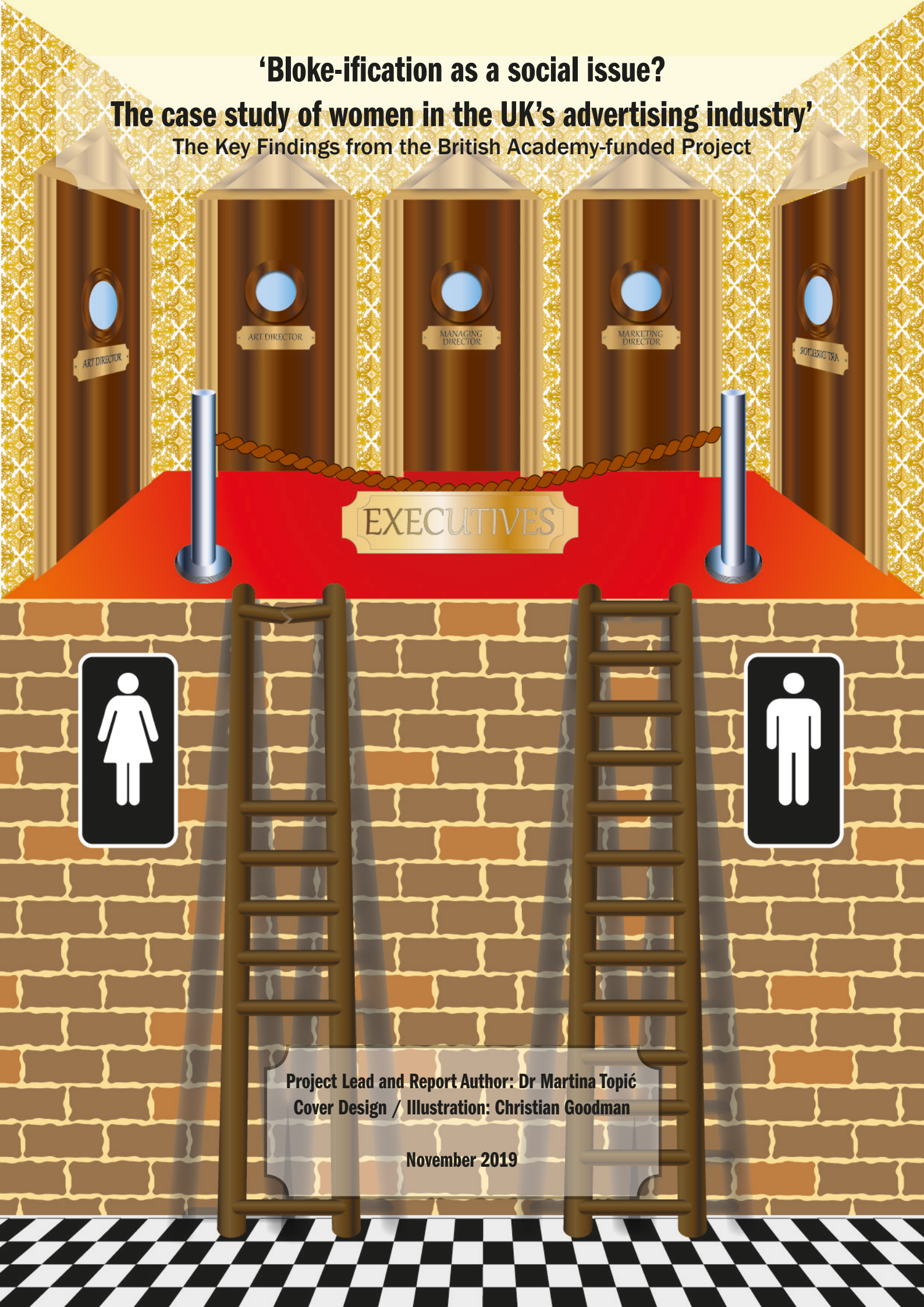
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‘Bloke-ification as a social issue?’

The case study of women in the UK’s advertising industry’

The Key Findings from the British Academy-funded Project



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Cover Design / Illustration: Christian Goodman**

November 2019



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Introduction

The report below is a summary of results from the British Academy funded project *'Bloke-ification as a social issue? The case study of women in the UK's advertising industry'*. The project was funded within the small grants scheme SRG18R1\181033.

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 the UK's advertising industry.

The Rationale for the Project

While the media often portrays the advertising industry in the UK through post-feminist lenses of all battles being won and women being respected and equal, empirical research tells a different story (Crewe & Wang, 2018). According to the latest available data, 49.5% of employees in UK's advertising industry are women, with women forming 56.7% of the workforce among junior roles; however, "the more senior the roles, the fewer women found" (The UK Digital and Creative Sector: Talent Insights Report 2017, p. 10).

The latest research on the advertising industry in the City of London also revealed that women suffer because of anti-social working hours and lack of parental policies, which affect women more than men, due to expectation that women will be caregivers. In addition, some women simply want to be with children and finish work at 5 pm, which makes career progression even more difficult (for a details analysis see Crewe & Wang, 2018).

This leads to the issue of bloke-ification, which I have previously explored in my research on women in the British press. According to the bloke-ification framework, which I have started to develop in my research on women in journalism, women are seen as able to succeed in the profession only if they are bloke-ified, because newsrooms are still seen as a place for blokes (Mills, 2014; Topić, 2018). This naturally hinders career progression, because the journalistic culture is so masculinised that women "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" (Mills, 2014, p. 18).

Just like in the case of media where women face exclusions because newsrooms are still a 'place for blokes' (Topić, 2018; Mills, 2014), women in advertising face the problem of so-called '(homo)sociality and space' (Crewe & Wang, 2018, p. 12). There are men on top who are oriented towards other men "within a patriarchal gender order", and this practice includes "homo-sociality as formal and informal means of communication, including male networking, bonding, joking and dress codes" (ibid, p. 13). This means that there is something like an 'old boys' networks in the advertising industry, which naturally constructs hierarchies and affects promotions (ibid).

Therefore, in this research project, I explored the position of women working in the advertising industry from several angles. Firstly, I looked at their perceptions on the work environment and equality of opportunities, expectations from women, whether women feel treated differently for being women, whether they ever felt discriminated, whether they have ever been excluded from business decisions, etc. Secondly, I looked at the office culture by exploring sexist comments, gender banter and social interactions. Thirdly, I looked at leadership styles and thus exploring how women lead (for those with managerial positions) and their expectations of leadership as

well as experiences with being led by males and females (for employees). For women who are employees without managerial duties and who have female managers, I asked about their leadership styles and whether they feel they can identify with their female manager whilst women in managerial positions were asked whether they think their staff members can identify with them as to what kind of woman they may want to become in the future. Fourthly, I looked at early experiences and thus asked who they spent time with when they were growing up, who were they hanging out with, as well as communication and upbringing they experienced when growing up. This was done to establish a link between early experiences, leadership styles and expectations from the work environment.

A total of 41 women from London, Leeds, Wakefield, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Rickmansworth and Reading were interviewed. In addition, one woman from Cardiff, one from Belfast and one from Edinburgh were also interviewed.

The work experience of participants ranges from one month to 34 years in the industry, with the majority of interviewed women having between one and five years of experience and 11-20 years of experience. The interviewed women were British, Bulgarian, Cypriot, German, Australian, Ukrainian, Italian, Canadian, French and Dutch, however, British women were predominantly recruited.

The project was divided to three key areas of inquiry, **the office culture** (exploring issues such as banter, social relationships at work, office conversations, dress code, exclusion from business decisions, office environment and promotions), **general views of women and their position in the industry** (exploring issues such as equality in promotions, views on their position in the industry, disapproval in the organizational environment, sexism and the position of working mothers), **the north-south divide** which emerged after 10th interview, and **the leadership differences** (exploring issues such as leadership styles of male and female managers, role models, own leadership preferences and self-assessment, and early socialisation experiences and its link with leadership).

Key Findings

The Office Culture

- Interviewed women report exclusion from business decisions. For example, women feel they are not being “listened to enough” and this includes situations when they are being an expert in the room.
- Some women report being asked to do menial stuff well beyond their expertise and qualification levels and not being taken seriously even when they are in a managerial position and should be included in the decision-making process.
- When it comes to banter in offices, the majority of interviewees agreed that there is a difference in the way banter works between men and women. While some women are feeling comfortable with masculine banter, some reported feeling uncomfortable.
- In some cases, male managers make fun of #metoo movement, which made one woman left feeling uncomfortable and this is linked with a masculine office culture that many women reported.
- Women report having to move jobs to get promoted and, in some cases, this caused problems of changing jobs too often.

- The majority of women who hold a senior position said they feel they had to work harder than men to get promoted and one interviewed woman said she is not sure (only two said no). Some women recognised, however, that men are better in pushing harder when they want something.

The North-South divide

- When it comes to views and perceptions of women about their position in the advertising industry, a meaningful distinction emerged with women from the north of England reporting less concern with their work environment as opposed to women based in the south of England.
- Whilst the majority of women reported experiencing sexism, women in the south tend to express more serious concerns than women in the north.
- Women in London frequently stated that they hear sexism on a daily basis in their advertising offices whereas women in the north stated they cannot remember something but they vaguely remember something happened in the past, thus signalling that things might be changing in the north of England at least.
- In the south, women also tend to express concerns about disapproval from male colleagues and male managers, in some cases also by citing abusive language.
- In the north, some concerns are expressed by working mothers who do not always feel supported in juggling parental and working responsibilities. In the south, women often say they cannot combine motherhood and work due to long work hours and lack of understanding from managers.
- In the north, women express positive feelings about equality of opportunities in their careers whereas women in the south (London in particular) are less optimistic.

The Leadership experiences and differences between men and women

- Women who have female managers tend to describe more relaxed working conditions and say they do not feel they need to behave in a certain way to be taken seriously whereas women who have male managers are often saying they are more cautious and sometimes not taken seriously.
- Working mothers express concerns over male managers by emphasizing that their female managers tend to understand them better.
- The majority of women say they prefer female managers. Exceptions are those women who have worked for female managers who they describe using masculine characteristics of leadership.
- Women tend to see their female managers as role models, again except for those women who had female managers, whom they describe using masculine characteristics of leadership.
- Early socialisation process influences communication style and leadership characteristics, e.g. women who have spent more time with their mothers or playing with girls as children tend to be a softer leader than those who have spent more time with boys and who self-identify as tomboys.

- The early socialisation process also affects communication skills, and women who have spent more time with girls when growing up tend to self-identify as considerate communicators whereas more tomboy-oriented women tend to self-identify as direct (or brutally direct in several cases)
- Women who spent more time with girls when growing up also seem to be more relationship-building oriented and tend to cherish empowerment and an individual and respectful approach towards managing staff.
- When assessing leadership skills of their bosses, women tend to assess their male managers mostly as lacking emotions and sensitivity to people whereas women with female managers tend to assess their managers as sensitive to people and their needs.
- Women in managerial positions tend to describe their own leadership style as soft, supportive, collaborative, inclusive and empathetic.
- Women in managerial positions tend to express very egalitarian views on prospective employees and say they want the best person for the position regardless of their gender.
- Women who demonstrate more masculine behavioural and communication patterns, tend to prefer to work with men whilst the majority of women who demonstrate feminine characteristics have no preference.
- Women who demonstrate feminine behavioural and communication characteristics trust that other women can identify with them as to what kind of women they may want to become in the future.
- Women who demonstrate more masculine behavioural and communication characteristics frequently believe that other women cannot identify with them.
- When assessing own leadership style, women in managerial positions do not label themselves as aggressive but sensitive to people, and frequently emotional.

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