Association of British Science Writers (ABSW)

Sexism in Science Journalism

Preface

The ABSW is publishing its report into sexism in science journalism to coincide with a panel debate called 'Sexism, Science Writing & Solutions: A Global Perspective' at the World Conference of Science Journalists in Seoul, South Korea 2015. This report was commissioned by the ABSW, in order to find out if its members were experiencing sexism whilst carrying out their work. As you will read members are not immune to professional issues of sexual harassment that affect our entire society.

Thank you to all the contributors who showed courage in their participating and also in telling their stories. The ABSW will continue to carry on this important discussion; please contact us info@absw.org.uk if you would like to be involved. Thanks also to researcher Joan Haran who conducted the interviews and wrote the report.

Connie St Louis

Former President of the ABSW

Tuesday 9 June 2015

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This research into the prevalence of sexism in science journalism was prompted by a number of high profile incidents of sexism and sexual harassment in the broad field of science journalism, including the Bora Zivkovic[1] affair, as well as public and private (in confidence to the former President of the ABSW) disclosures by a number of women science journalists of their experiences of sexism, sometimes compounded by racism. The Association of British Science Writers therefore decided to investigate the prevalence of 'sexism' in the science journalism community, at a moment at which the issue had an extremely high public profile. A questionnaire to benchmark the issue of sexism in science journalism was distributed to the membership of the ABSW and the MJA. The results of this research, conducted by the ABSW, will be reported on separately. Discrimination in employment on the grounds of sex, including sexual harassment, is now covered by the Equality Act 2010 which simplifies and has replaced the large number of Acts and Regulations, which formed the basis of anti-discrimination law such as the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995[2].

Case Study Interviews

An independent researcher (Dr Joan Haran) was commissioned to conduct and analyse a small number of semi-structured qualitative interviews to supplement the quantitative data gathered through the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with 8 women and 2 men. 5 women members responded to direct invitations by email. 4 women and 2 men volunteered to be interviewed on completion of the questionnaire distributed in April 2014. They were followed up and all but one woman volunteer were interviewed. Interviewees included freelancers and those working on permanent contracts, who worked or had worked in a range of media, including national press, specialist scientific press, television and radio and online. Some had also written popular science books. Of those interviewed, five years was the shortest time that had been spent in science journalism and the longest period was more than 30 years. The journalist with the least time as a

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[1] In October 2013, Bora Zivcovic resigned from Scientific American due to accusations of sexual harassment. The initial accusations and Zivcovic's response were widely debated online. Laura Helmuth wrote about this "latest terrible, sad, fascinating scandal in the science blogging world" and the sexist and racist treatment of another female science blogger which prompted the first revelation about Zivcovic, as a consciousness-raising opportunity in Slate: http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2013/10/science_blogging_scandal_bora_zivkovic_and_sexual_harassment.html#return. Connie St Louis wrote about the Zivcovic affair in the *Guardian*: http://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2013/oct/22/sexism-science

[2] http://www.inbrief.co.uk/discrimination-law/equality-act-2010.htm consulted 15 December 2014

science journalist had also worked for five years as a generalist in a TV newsroom before leaving to specialise in science journalism.

The interviews were conducted by phone and ranged in duration from about 30 minutes to about 90 minutes, depending on what was acceptable to the interviewee, and how much they wanted to say on the topic. In addition, some respondents to the questionnaires provided brief narrative answers in addition to the multiple choice questions and those responses will be drawn on in the overview of findings.

Overview of Findings

Out of ten interviewees, two women journalists reported very serious cases of sexual harassment. Another four women mentioned what one of them referred to as nuisance – rather than intimidatory – instances of sexual harassment by sources or by other media professionals, often at conferences or parties. The remaining two women interviewees had not experienced either harassment or sexist treatment. Of the two male journalists interviewed, (both with over 25 years' experience in science journalism) one claimed never to have been aware of sexism in his organisation, while the other was quite adamant that he had observed female science journalists being treated with less respect than their male peers. In fact, he felt that assumptions were typically made that he was more qualified than he was, unlike the women with whom he worked whose qualifications and credentials were typically undervalued. He offered two concrete examples of this lack of respect – both from senior scientific sources. None of the interviewees had experienced any physical sexual assaults, but one respondent to the questionnaire had. She reported being grabbed and kissed by a male colleague while a 'sniggering' female colleague looked on. At the time she was the only journalist in an NHS office, and she left the job soon after this incident.

Areas for Science Journalism to Address

Of course, the term 'sexism' is very inexact. It is used to refer to issues relating to both gender and sexuality, and can encompass a whole host of widely ranging aspects which include inappropriate sexualised 'humour ' in workplace conversations, coercing employees into unwanted sexual relations for fear of threats to their employment, sexual assault and inequitable treatment in hiring, firing and the assignment of work. It wasn't possible to address all of these issues in either the questionnaire or the interviews, but the research conducted in the compressed time available begins to suggest some areas that need to be addressed. These include the following:

1. Prolonged and repeated contact with sources without witnesses, for example in laboratories, hotels, bars – for good journalistic reasons, or due to insufficient attention to risk by employers – leaves women journalists, in particular, vulnerable.

2. Working routines that mean journalists encounter sources away from their place of employment make the problem one for the individual rather than for the Organisation to deal with. There are concerns amongst interviewees that this means that employers can shirk their duty of care to employees, and certainly a desire for clearer procedures to follow.

3. Organisations' attempts to minimize bad publicity associated with claims of sexual discrimination / sexual harassment can leave individuals out on a limb and / or backfire on the organisations through failure to follow documented procedures. This can be very damaging for the employees affected. Dr Jennifer Freyd in the Department of Psychology at the University of Oregon uses the term "Institutional Betrayal" to refer to wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals (e.g. sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution

4. High profiles and accessibility through social media leave journalists vulnerable

5. Harassing behaviour is often incremental and becomes normalized and is psychologically draining and personally undermining. In severe cases it can result in psychological injury.

Sensitivity of Interviews

Although some of the interviewees provided extremely detailed accounts of their experiences of sexism in science journalism, it is not possible to reproduce case studies in full, or to quote extensively from their accounts because of the psychological and legal sensitivity of the issues. Both employers and employees are keenly aware that employees at the centre of 'trouble', even if they are the injured parties, can see lasting damage to their careers. Cases of sexual harassment are rarely pursued through the courts or even dealt with transparently by employers, so the full extent of the problem cannot be reported publicly. This means that the prevalence of sexual harassment can only be estimated, meaning that its severity is open to diminishment, by those who insist on hard data before they will acknowledge that there is a problem. Even where the injured party's account of events is accepted, agreeing to keep quiet about what has gone on can be a condition of continued employment, or necessary to protect future job prospects. However, some of the interviewees were keen to take part in this research because of their concern that their inability to speak publicly about their experiences risked being complicit in other women suffering sexual harassment in future.

From One Extreme to Another

One male interviewee said that he had not been aware of sexist behaviour in the workplace over the course of a long career (25 years) on a national newspaper. A second male interviewee who had worked for over thirty years as a science journalist on general science journals and magazines also said that he had not really been aware of sexism internal to the organisations where he worked, but he had been aware of or witness to it in interactions with scientists, both as sources or as clients of the titles on which he worked. Of the 8 women who were interviewed, however, two reported very serious cases of sexual harassment, one by a journalist within her own organisation and one by somebody who she was dealing with as a source, but who worked in journalism outside her organisation, and pursued a campaign of harassment over several years. The women affected were both in the late twenties to early thirties, productive and successful in their respective fields, and with excellent reputations in the companies for which they worked, prior to the harassment occurring. In both instances, the harassment was compounded by the way that their respective organisations dealt with the reports, particularly as the harassing behaviour was evident to colleagues before the women affected ever raised it as an issue with managers. One of the women continued to work for the organisation even though the resolution of her case was unsatisfactory, and she had to take pains to avoid the harasser as they moved in the same professional circles, whilst one had her employment terminated with a suggestion that her account of the events was untrue. The few colleagues who had shown her any support - including providing her with documentary evidence of the harasser's inappropriate behaviour - were also damaged by the handling of her concerns. These two cases demonstrate how damaging extreme cases of sexual harassment can be, as well as how difficult it is for the individuals experiencing such treatment to raise the issue without suffering additional negative impacts on their career and their general well-being.

Detailed Findings

Recognizing Sexism / Sexual Harassment

The Equality and Human Rights Commission provides a succinct account of the two types of sexual harassment that trespass on employees' rights, which are "unwanted conduct on the grounds of your sex" and "unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature". In the case of the former, they advise employees who are considering taking action that:

> You must be able to show that the treatment is because you are a woman (or a man). An example of this could be if you are being bullied at work and the harasser would not treat somebody of the opposite sex in this way. The conduct does not have to be of a sexual nature for this form of harassment.
>
> The conduct must be done with the purpose of, or have the effect of, violating your dignity, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for you.

In the case of the latter the advice is:

> If the conduct is of a sexual nature, this is unlawful in itself and you do not have to compare yourself to how somebody of the opposite sex would be treated. This could include:
>
> - Comments about the way you look which you find demeaning
> - Indecent remarks
> - Questions about your sex life
> - Sexual demands by a member of your own or the opposite sex
>
> Incidents involving touching and other physical threats are criminal offences and should also be reported to the police.
>
> Again, the conduct must be done with the purpose of, or have the effect of, violating your dignity, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for you.
>
> You will also have a claim for harassment if your employer treats you less favourably because you have rejected, or submitted to, either form of harassment described above.

The most experienced female interviewee in the sample has worked as a science journalist in all media (TV, radio, print, online) for twenty five years and although she was happy that she had reached the top of her profession, she believed that she could have achieved more, earlier in her career, if she had not been subject to sexual discrimination, and she outlined a variety of ways in which she believed she has been treated in a different fashion than her male peers. For example, one particular science journalist post for which she was interviewed went to a male journalist with no specialist science journalism experience when she already had specialist expertise and experience

to offer. She also reported experiences of men attempting to bully and intimidate her, both verbally and through their body language, but she has never been physically attacked.

Some of her observations are supported by another interviewee, who has been a freelance science journalist for over five years, following five previous years as a non-specialist journalist in a TV newsroom. She reported that her decision to go freelance, and to leave the environment of TV newsrooms in favour of specializing as a freelance science journalist was influenced by the power imbalances that she observed between senior editors who were largely white males and younger, diverse journalists. She noted that the importance of 'looks', as well as talent, for journalists who might appear front of camera, in conjunction with gendered power imbalances weighted heavily in favour of men, creates 'an ugly mix that allows sexist exploitation'. On a number of occasions, for example, she overheard male editors talk about female journalists and producers in a crass, sexist manner. She also cited her own experience with a male newsroom boss who kept asking her to make the tea until she walked out on him saying that she would not work with him further if he didn't assign her stories to work on. This proved to be a successful strategy for her, but she emphasized that to act like this puts you at risk, and that she had to be unafraid of losing her job to take such action. She suggested that not all women in a similar position would feel able to do so. In fact, she mentions friends who have been bullied or harassed, and who weren't in a position where they could leave their jobs and therefore felt unable to stand up for themselves. In these instances, she says, the bullying got worse.

The same interviewee also felt able to withdraw from consideration for a post as a Science Editor in TV News, when the Managing Editor offered her a post as a 'weather presenter' rather than the one for which she had been invited to apply, shortlisted, interviewed and screen tested. This was an offer that she considered devalued her experience and credentials as an award-winning journalist with a popular science book about to be published. She understood this offer to be discriminatory and it confirmed her in her decision to go freelance, to have freedom from office politics and freedom from her career progression being 'at the whim' of other people.

One female staff science journalist who volunteered to be interviewed via the questionnaire said that following the online discussions around the resignation of the Scientific American blog editor, she realized that you would call some of the experiences that she had had, earlier in her career (15 years in science journalism), sexual harassment. She stressed however that these incidents never occurred in interactions with colleagues within her own Organisation, which she says is a very friendly place to work, and one where your colleagues look out for you. Some of the harassers were other media professionals, and some were scientists. It is arguable, however, that even though these

incidents were not perpetrated by her colleagues that they still took place in the workplace understood broadly. Although her employers cannot apply sanctions to individuals not in their employ, they could put anti-sexual harassment training in place for their own employees as well as mechanisms for reporting and dealing with sexual harassment that employees encounter in the course of their work, rather than leaving it to the individual employee to improvise their responses unsupported.

Source Behaviour and Responses

One of the issues that was reported by interviewees was the fact that the sexism and / or sexual harassment that they experienced in the course of their employment was perpetrated by sources, or journalists working for other employers. In the case of sources, this can place them in the invidious position of having to cultivate relationships for the sake of a story or for ongoing access to particular areas of science that they would prefer to terminate, or at least handle very differently, due to the difficulty of the interpersonal encounters. Alternatively, they can cut off relations with particular individuals which may limit their capacity to report on particular areas of science. Not all journalists interviewed had experienced this as a problem.

One interviewee, currently freelance, who has worked in science journalism reported that she had never experienced any sexism or sexual harassment from sources, although female colleagues had recounted to her their own experiences of sexual harassment by sources and other media professionals. She noted that she suspected that as a very tall, confident woman, she was a less likely target for any overt bullying or sexist behaviour.

However, another interviewee, also a freelance science journalist pointed to the nebulous work areas where science journalism is conducted: conferences; laboratories; coffee shops. These are places and encounters that she thinks of as exclusively work-related, but her experience with a number of scientists with whom she has attempted to maintain professional contact beyond an initial interview is that they take this as an opportunity to pursue an intimate relationship. She reported that she finds this very disappointing as it means that she then has to discontinue the professional relationship.

One particular overseas conference which she attended, in her early 30s, was particularly fraught. As one of a large multidisciplinary team including scientists, she was made anxious by the persistent attentions of a very senior male scientist. She thought that he was lavishing too much attention on her, when there were other more senior team members – both scientists and journalists – who required his attention. One particular incident she reported was when the team went out to dinner together. The evening began with him looking her up and down in a way that made her feel very

uncomfortable when she arrived dressed for dinner. He then sat next to her at the group table and gave her his undivided attention all evening as if they were on a date. She said that this 'intense laser focus' made her want to leave, but she didn't feel able to. She checked her assessment of the situation the following day with a male peer in the team and he confirmed that the scientist appeared to be interested in her, and was known to be inappropriately flirtatious.

At the same conference, another male scientist was texting her photos of women – including one he had taken of her at the conference – and asking her who he should spend the night with. Although she was quite 'on edge' about his texts (to which she didn't respond), as a freelancer, she did not feel able to make a complaint, particularly as the senior female in the team, to whom she reported, had already made comments excusing 'friskiness'.

The behaviour that she reports falls under what the European Commission's code of practice on the Protection of the Dignity of Women and Men at Work defines as sexual harassment, which is "unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, or other conduct based on sex affecting the dignity of men and women at work, which include physical, verbal and nonverbal conduct." Such conduct may be in breach of the Equal Treatment Directive if "it creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating working environment for the recipient". However, journalists whose working environment is typically in laboratories, at conferences or other venues not under the explicit control of their employers are left uncertain as to whether harassment experienced in such venues is something they can bring to the attention of their employers and if so whether they can expect any action to be taken. Provisions in the Equality Act 2010 which made employers liable for third party harassment were abolished in October 2013, but employees can still potentially bring a claim against their employer by arguing that the failure to prevent third-party harassment relating to a particular protected characteristic (e.g. race or sex) in itself amounts to "unwanted conduct" under the general harassment provision in the Equality Act 2010.

However, should an employee seek a resolution in her workplace, rather than the extreme disruption and stress of a legal case, the importance of good anti-harassment policies and regular training of all employees cannot be overstated. In the case of one journalist when she attempted to seek support from her employers about the treatment she was experiencing from a source (who was also a journalist at an unrelated publication), because the harassment took place outside the offices or her publication she was accused by a senior manager of bringing her "private life" into the office, although the problematic encounters all arose in the context of researching a story. In the case of this journalist whose serious sexual harassment occurred in the context of a working relationship begun in the pursuit of a story, she attempted to negotiate the situation informally and individually

for quite some time before she sought support from senior colleagues. She continued to have to have contact with the harasser for some time after she had rebuffed his initial approach, because of his involvement in a high impact story on which she was working. They had significant email contacts about the story and related issues which seemed to be 'fairly innocent'. However he subsequently used this continued contact to set up meetings that purported to be work-related, at which he again made unwanted sexual advances.

She attempted to give the harasser the 'benefit of the doubt' and to make it easy and non-embarrassing for him to back off from his unwanted sexual advances, made inappropriately in the course of what was a professional relationship. However, his continued pursuit was such that she advised her employer that she could not edit the story through which they had met because of potential concerns about conflict of interest due to his behaviour. Rather than taking her concerns seriously, the senior colleague to whom she spoke suggested that she should be flattered by his interest. She made it very clear to this colleague that she was not flattered and the attention was unwanted.

She continued, however, to try to avoid the necessity of having to take any formal action and to nip the harassment in the bud by making it clear verbally to the harasser that she was not interested in any kind of sexual relationship and that she wished to keep their relationship professional. This led to an escalation of the harassment with text and email messages that vacillated between explicit threats that he would damage her career and apologies and declarations of sexual attraction. He also continued to telephone her at work where she took his calls within hearing of her line manager who also became concerned about the behaviour. At this point the manager and the journalist took their concerns to the company's HR department, but owing to staff absences little progress was made.

Other Media Professionals' Behaviour and Responses

The two most serious cases of sexual harassment reported by interviewees were perpetrated by other media professionals, one a person in a position of power within the interviewee's own organisation and one a journalist from another organisation who was acting as a source on a high profile story. Both of these cases fell very clearly into the domain of what is commonly understood as sexual harassment; extended campaigns of inappropriate sexualized behaviour harnessed to implicit and explicit threats to the careers of the interviewees. In the case of the journalist who was harassed by a colleague, about thirty years her senior, one of the most damaging aspects, in her opinion, is that she had not anticipated the lengths to which he would go when she was in a

situation structurally unsupported by colleagues. Having worked with him over several years, she had understood him to be inappropriately flirtatious - in a manner that she associated with a significant fraction of older men - making unwanted suggestions about her clothing when they were alone in the office, and inviting her to sit on his knee in a staff meeting; he laughed these off as jokes when no response was forthcoming. His behaviour was similar to behaviour that she experienced at conferences where senior male scientists took advantage of the opportunity to push boundaries with younger female reporters, which also made her uncomfortable. However, when she was in a position at work that isolated her from her colleagues over an extended period, the harasser took the opportunity to make a much more overt bid for sexual favours. He linked this bid to threats about her reputation that made her fearful for her career, as he exerted a lot if influence in the main office of the organisation, and she believed that he would have made it very hard for her to have more than a peripheral job in the future.

Although this journalist felt largely unsupported by any colleagues 'with real power', she recognised that the hierarchical nature of the particular journalism institution for which she worked meant that more junior colleagues feared for their own careers should they support her in reporting his behaviour. Nonetheless, she indicates that her younger male colleagues were just as shocked as she was by their older colleague's behaviour, and that in fact it was one of them who was the first to ask her if she was OK – making her realise that none of the more senior members of editorial staff had shown any concern for her well-being. She suggests that more senior journalists – of both sexes – are habituated to working in a sexist environment, and thought that she should just have kept quiet, whereas younger journalists (under 35), 'guys as well as girls' have fairly equitable gender values.

However, other more routinized versions of sexism and sexual harassment were also reported by interviewees. For example, one journalist reported that the sexism she experienced in the workplace before she went freelance was in the assumptions of senior male colleagues that she was unlikely to be serious about her career, as she would get married and have children. She recounts a conversation with an older male colleague about advancing her career. He told her that she could make Senior Editor if she really pushed but that such roles were more for women who don't want to get married and have a family. This assumption of a particular status quo teamed with the assumption that she was going down a particular track (marriage and family) infuriated her as she was very serious about her career. However, she did note that three of the Senior Editors in this

Organisation were unmarried and without children, so she recognized that structurally her male colleague might have a point. She suggested that equality and egalitarianism in science and science journalism was a veneer as the power dynamics of the field are still weighted in favour of men. Although she hadn't personally experienced what she called "brash, macho, sexism", she suggested that contemporary sexism was more insidious in the form of attitudes and assumptions about women being less serious about work.

Other gendered stereotypes were also reported. For example, the most senior female journalist interviewed reported that a persistent issue was that, when working in radio, she often missed out on covering the most prestigious stories and was offered the rationale that her voice wasn't sufficiently authoritative to do national news stories. She points out that this is generally code for 'not male'. She adds that women who have done well in radio do tend to have deeper voices, and that this has become less of an issue for her as she gets older and her own voice has deepened. Discrimination with regard to 'authority' even happened when she had researched a story and written the script for the package. This led, on occasions, to the invidious situation in which the male journalist to whom a story had been passed over asked her to explain the science to him, and even asked to use her script, with the credit for the work then going to him. This, as she points out reinforces the link between authority and masculinity, even if the male journalists were a similar age to her with similar or less experience and qualifications.

In addition to gendered stereotyping that resulted in unfavourable work allocation this journalist also reported her experiences of bullying and intimidation by a male presenter who turned up at a live broadcast where she was standing in for him and stood outside the sound booth staring at her throughout the broadcast. He behaved similarly badly at an outside broadcast, deliberately carrying on a loud conversation while she was addressing the audience. She also points out that she was asked to do things in the workplace that were never asked of men that she worked with, such as unnecessarily adjusting a man's lapel mic, just so that he could get close to her. One of the most egregious events that she recalled was being asked by a female producer, early in her career to give a male presenter with whom she was working a hug. She refused and the producer insisted, saying that the presenter would not go on with the show if she didn't hug him. She refused again and later complained, and was told that this presenter's behaviour was notorious and that women needed to look out for him.

This issue of particular media professionals being notorious for sexually harassing behaviour came up in several interviews. It is disturbing that there is a culture where particular individuals are known for predatory behaviour yet are not subject to any disciplinary action whilst their potential

targets are expected to take evasive action. Events which blur the boundary between work and socializing such as parties which bring science journalists and scientist together were reported as being occasions where casual sexism and sexual harassment take place. One female journalist gave the example of an incident which took place at such a party. A male TV presenter said "Your tits look fantastic," to which she responded by laughing with embarrassment and walking away. She reported that: "It is only afterwards you get really mad and think as a science journalist I should be able to come up with something better in response".

How to Report / Complain

The issue of reporting or complaining about sexual discrimination or harassment is extremely fraught, because many who experience what they characterize as relatively minor incidents pragmatically decide that the stress attached to raising the issue explicitly, particularly when they lack confidence in any remedy, is potentially more harmful than what they have already experienced. One interviewee who has worked in the same Organisation for eleven years notes that in the offices of the publications for which she has worked, if she had experienced sexual harassment from a colleague that there is clarity about how you could report it and to whom and a clear sequence of events to go through to resolve a complaint. However, she says that in the experiences that she has had, because the offender has been a third party, external to the employing Organisation: "you feel like you're left on your own". In addition, as already noted, there is also the sense that potential complainants are the public face of their organisations and therefore need to be mindful of the organisations' reputations, which can be disempowering in situations where outside a work context they might rebuff harassers much more frankly and assertively. In fact, she points out, there are some broadcast journalists who are notorious for sexually harassing behaviour, and young women journalists have typically been warned who they are and cautioned to avoid them, placing the onus on the women to evade the "leches", rather than on changing the behaviour of the perpetrators.

In the case of the two interviewees who experienced the most severe cases of sexual harassment their experiences are the antithesis of the best practice recommended by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. For reasons of anonymity, it is not possible to provide the detail of their experiences, but one had to fight extremely hard to have her complaint taken seriously and felt that her Organisation took action against the harasser only when his actions threatened to damage the organisation's reputation. This is despite the fact that she had made extensive efforts to resolve the situation on her own through clear verbal statements to the harasser that his attention was unwanted. The other lost her job because her account of the harassment and of her initial attempt to report the behaviour differed to that of the harasser's and to those colleagues who had instructed

her to be quiet about the harassment, although she pointed out that the transcript of the meeting at which she was questioned about her allegations bore little relationship to what she actually said, and was any event conducted in a hostile and bullying fashion. She believes that her only option for keeping her job was to keep quiet, but that, had she done so, few would have believed that her future career advancement had nothing to do with the preferment of the harasser. She infers that suspicions about the possibility that women who had worked with the harasser had gone on to be successful because of questionable relationships with him may have led some potential female supporters of her case to keep their distance.

In the case of freelance journalists, one reported that there is no obvious complaint route, when subjected to sexual harassment by sources or other media professionals, particularly if you want to maintain your professional reputation as somebody who is good to work with. Her perception was that there is really no interim measure between doing nothing and initiating legal action, and that the latter would only be appropriate in a really serious case of sexual harassment. But she adds that if you went this route you would be labelled as a troublemaker with damaging consequences for your career. Even when she was a staff journalist it didn't occur to her to complain formally about sexist comments – they are just 'one of those things'. Another freelance journalist pointed out that she was aware when a staff journalist that at least one of the organisations for which she worked had an anti-sexual harassment policy as part of their Human Resources procedures and she was made aware of it at induction. However, she had no knowledge of whether and how it had been used. The most experienced journalist said that in most instances of sexual discrimination or harassment, she and other women colleagues wouldn't complain or discuss this with management, they would just keep "plugging away". However, unlike many women, this female journalist did complain about the intimidation that she and another women journalist experienced from one male journalist. Although he was spoken to about his behaviour, he claimed that his intention had not been to intimidate and no further action was taken. Nor did his behaviour change. This interviewee points out that when freelance journalists are involved it can be difficult for an Organisation to take action.

Organisational Responses to Sexism and / or Harassment

The freelance journalist who had formerly worked for two large generalist science publications - as a news writer and features editor - reported that both publications had very open and supporting cultures. She had neither experienced nor witnessed institutional sexism, and said that occasional 'sub-optimal' management was not gendered. She believed that senior men who are anti-sexist can set the culture for the Organisation and cited a particular male senior editor who had done that in

one of the publications for which she worked. In addition she noted that the specialist science magazine for which she formerly worked had been supportive to women returners, enabling them to continue successful careers after having had children. However, she also noted that some women journalists "have had to go part-time" once they became parents, and that this was never the case for male journalists who became parents, in her experience. She also suggested that other work regimes might have a bearing on whether Organisational cultures are more relaxed – such as the difference between weekly and daily publications.

Discussing the issue of harassment off-site and at conferences, one staff journalist reported that most often there will only be one person from a magazine who is going off to a particular conference or on a facility visit, so there are no colleagues to turn to at the time if the behaviour of a source or another media professional provokes discomfort or more serious concern. She noted that in the case of a serious physical sexual assault there is a clear procedure to follow, with company emergency numbers and that she could also contact her editor or editor in chief on their mobile phones. However, when the harassment is verbal, even if it is persistent for the duration of a conference, she says that: "you take it on the chin, and just joke about it and try to diminish it". However, she felt now that if such a situation arose again she would be able to talk about it with her editor and editor in chief and they would take it seriously. She is not so confident about the parent Organisation however. She points out that she is careful about where she interviews people now, particularly at the conferences that are held in large hotels. She won't meet people in hotel rooms, and will conduct interviews in public places, even though recording should ideally be done somewhere quiet.

The journalist who remained in post following severe sexual harassment felt that the organisational response to her complaint caused additional harm as company procedures impeded her ability to state her case and shut her out of deliberations when her harasser responded to her rejection of his advances by raising an unfounded complaint about her professional conduct with her employer. This complaint was handled summarily and inappropriately without involving the journalist in any discussions about the merit of the complaint which she was in a position to refute. On learning this, she volunteered to provide this evidence as well as evidence of the campaign of harassment, but senior editorial staff rebuffed her attempts, framing the harassment as her 'private life' which should not be brought into the office. At this point, the journalist sought support from the NUJ and insisted that a meeting be convened at which she could put her case to the Legal and HR departments of her organisation. The journalist points to a culture of a 'stiff upper lip' within her organisation, and her understandable distress at both the harassment and the lack of concern shown by her senior colleagues was framed as excessive emotion and unprofessional conduct. When the

meeting which she had requested was finally convened, she found herself agreeing not to take any further action about the complaint, although she was worried that this made her complicit in her own harassment.

The journalist who lost her job in the wake of sexual harassment had also refrained from making a made a formal complaint before she revealed her experiences in the course of an enquiry into issues to do with gender and employment initiated independently by her company. In fact she had been explicitly instructed by her editor to put the incidents behind her, several months previously, during the second conversation that she had with him about her harassment. Although she is aware that she could have 'gone around' her boss to make her complaint, she lacked confidence that the company would handle her complaint impartially given that her harrasser's behaviour was an open secret. However, having been assured that anything she said in the context of the enquiry would not impact negatively on her employment at the company, and having volunteered to give an account of her experiences on this understanding, she was then questioned extremely aggressively by four senior managers and presented with a transcript of the encounter that she says bore very little relationship to what was actually said. Having given her account she was contacted by the organisation's editor-in-chief and informed that she must take part in a formal complaints process. This journalist reports that she was, in effect, caught in the crossfire of multiple formal complaints, with senior managers protecting their own positions through misrepresenting their handling of her informal complaints, to the benefit of her harrasser. She says that it was like 'a car crash in slow motion' with the events from reporting to her dismissal taking over many months, and her role in the proceedings being misrepresented to other colleagues, compounding the reputational damage she had suffered through the sexual harassment.

Impacts

The impacts of sexism and sexual harassment – as well as of inadequate or inappropriate responses by employers – for science journalists vary enormously. For example, the decision to work as a freelance journalist can be influenced by the desire to avoid sexist workplace cultures. Career progression can be stalled or completely derailed by sexism, sexual harassment or the failure of employers to deal with sexism or sexual harassment. Science journalists can experience serious emotional distress and damage to their psychological well-being which extends far beyond an initial incident or series of incidents, leaving one interviewee so distraught that she contemplated giving up journalism completely and, at her most distressed, considering suicide. Even relatively 'minor' incidences of sexual harassment can leave journalists feeling uncomfortable and thwarted by their perceived inability to stand up for themselves. Another interviewee (freelance journalist) pointed out that there was an inability – by men and women who had not experienced sexual discrimination

or harassment – to understand that a strong, articulate female journalist could lack the confidence to speak up about such problems if they experienced them. But she points out that lots of people know about the "men behaving badly", and there is no supportive way to seek any redress of the situation.

One female journalist who has worked for eleven years at the same general science publication described the discomfort of feeling that you must be polite in these circumstances – such as when sources make unwanted advances in the course of interviews or at conferences – but afterwards wondering "Why didn't I just turn around and say you're harassing me and please leave me alone, you're making me feel really uncomfortable?" However, she answered herself by saying: "It's only because you're at work and you're representing your company and you don't want to be seen to be causing trouble. You just try to keep if professional, keep it polite, and keep your distance".

As suggested in the opening paragraph, however, impacts can be even more serious than the lingering discomfort, self-doubt and sense of injustice and impotence that some interviewees report. The journalist whose serious case of sexual harassment was initially mishandled by her employers, but taken more seriously once the publication itself was threatened by the harasser's behaviour, continued to work for the organisation but she felt that damage had been done to her career because she was seen as 'trouble' even though she was not the instigator of events. Counselling was mentioned at some point in proceedings, as something that could be provided by the employer, but was never actually forthcoming. In fact, her distress at the inappropriate way her complaint was handled was used in an appraisal as evidence of inappropriate emotional behaviour in the workplace and used to deny her a pay rise, so she experienced economic harm in addition to the harm to her sense of personal security, emotional well-being and general reputation.

As discussed above, one interviewee lost her job in the fall-out of complaining about the harassment that she experienced. Further, the psychological stress that she experienced due to the harassment and the inappropriate management response left her extremely depressed and made it very difficult for her to pursue freelance working after her dismissal, although she did persevere. She felt that she had lost her dignity, as well as her faith in journalism and trust in those about her, and for that reason, amongst others, she decided not to go to the union.

The most senior female journalist in the sample, although happy with the professional success she has achieved believes that she could have been just as successful much earlier if she didn't have the additional burden of having to deal with constant sexist putdowns earlier in her career, on top of those instances in which male journalists had privileged access to the more prestigious stories.

Although she feels that the end result is that she is tougher, she says that dealing with the emotional repercussions of unfair and sometimes abusive treatment is exhausting.

Walking the Line / Crossing the Line

Interviewees make references to boundaries being pushed and the treading of delicate lines, but the working routines of science journalists mean that boundaries are disputable. Sexual harassment in the workplace is popularly imagined to happen in a bounded arena such as an office, a hospital or a factory, where victim and perpetrator fit into clearly defined employment hierarchies and negotiate the same buildings on a daily basis. In the case of the interviewees however, the multi-sited nature of 'the workplace' which includes, for example, attendance at scientific conferences held in large hotels – often outside the UK, meeting sources in bars or restaurants, not to mention their accessibility through social media, the boundaries are much more blurred. Different organisations have differing levels of sensitivity to the vulnerability of employees who are working "off site" and the lack of clarity about when and where the working day takes place can mean that colleagues and management can deflect responsibility for taking action (or inaction) from the employing organisation onto an individual who experiences harassment in the course of their work, but not obviously at their notional base of employment. One of the interviewees suffered from such deflection until her harasser escalated his campaign against her and began involving her organisation in his attacks on her professional reputation. At this point, both appreciating the extremes of his behaviour and wishing to deal with the threat to the organisation's reputation, they appointed lawyers to contest his claims. The journalist appointed her own lawyer on the advice of both the NUJ and her organisation's lawyers, as the latter's role is to protect the organisation, not the individual employee.

Female interviewees displayed a high-level of awareness about their own relationship to sexism. For example, one female freelance science journalist noted that she has to be self-conscious about her own behaviour with regard to sexism. She pointed out that it is much easier to reach male scientists to interview as they are much more visible, and is concerned that she has fallen into this trap in the past. She believes that it is important that she makes the extra effort to locate female scientists. Another female freelancer was explicit that flirtatiousness was not part of her professional demeanour. However, she has had interviewees make unsolicited remarks about how attractive she is. She finds fielding such comments off-putting in the course of an interview, but reports that she has made the decision that she would rather field such comments than avoid them by dressing in a manner calculated to be unattractive. She says that she does not torture herself wondering if she got a story because somebody liked how she looks. However, she is very careful to avoid 'compromising

situations'. Conversely, another female journalist volunteered that she had, on occasion, flirted with people to get stories or comments, and that this makes the situation "a bit grey and a bit murky". However, she said: "There do seem to be certain lines that you have to draw, and people have crossed them, I feel". She believed that her own behaviour had not crossed those lines.

Reevaluating Organisational Culture

A number of interviewees reported independently on particular individuals whose sexually harassing behaviour was an open secret as well as particular contexts where that behaviour was more likely to occur, such as parties where scientists and science journalists mingle. Some interviewees also reported on informal advice about avoiding the problematic individuals. However, one interviewee also reported that since the Scientific American incidents, as well as the publicity about Saville and Operation Yewtree, there has been a lot of discussion in her Organisation about the need for culture change, although no actions had been taken as yet. She felt that the particular title for which she works takes the issues of sexism and sexual harassment seriously, but that the parent Organisation is less concerned. The discussions about culture change have happened both between individuals and at more collective levels. For example, she reported that a male senior editor had recognized that warning young women about potential harassers to avoid– as he had done in the past – was the wrong way to approach the situation, and that he should have taken action about the harassing behaviour. He had also asked for feedback on his own behaviour from the interviewee in the context of a relationship of mutual trust, as he had concerns that what – as an older man - he thinks is acceptable behaviour – for example putting his arm around the back of a chair when he speaks to a female journalist – may be interpreted as harassment by a more junior colleague. Another discussion within her publication was about younger women having a mentor. In discussion with a friend/colleague who still works at one of her previous employers, she learnt that that Organisation's HR manual does have a procedure in place for employees who are harassed off-site. The interviewee was keen to see something similar implemented at her own Organisation, and was supported in this by a staff council representative, but had been unsuccessful in getting this taken up due to lack of concern from representatives at other publications in the parent company. This interviewee was cautiously optimistic about the possibility for positive change.

However, one of the female freelance journalists interviewed was much less optimistic. She suggested that at this particular moment when there is a dwindling job market for science journalists, and a generally poor economic climate that the conditions are even less favourable for making any complaints about ill-treatment at work. She believed that this was particularly the case with smaller publications which run very lean on staff. She noted, further, that she was "continually bumping up against people who don't think that there are any problems at all with sexual

discrimination or harassment". Another female freelancer noted that as she understood being a freelance journalist to offer her freedom from sexist workplace cultures, she was initially surprised by the Scientific American controversy as she understood the world of blogging to be much less structured and institutionalized, than, for example, a TV newsroom. However, she had reflected that wherever there is a power imbalance the possibility of its abuse exists. On a more positive note, she believed that the incident and the conversations that it sparked brought to light the fact that science journalism is not a cosy enclave free of sexism.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

In even the small sample of science journalists interviewed for this piece of research, experiences of sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace ranged from a complete lack of awareness of its occurrence, through mundane discomfort and inconvenience, to changes in work routines – or workplaces in the case of those women who opted for freelance employment to avoid institutional power relations – and significant psychological and emotional distress and damage to career, including the loss of employment. This research was not intended to capture a statistically representative sample, but as Popovich and Warren point out "there is now no doubt that sexual harassment is an important issue in any Organisational setting". The report does not aim to suggest that science journalism is uniquely problematic – or unproblematic – with regard to sexism or sexual harassment. Rather science journalism is just part of a larger social issue. However, the particular working routines of science journalists, including their interactions with sources who have high status and social power mean that the specificity of the context of risks of sexism and sexual harassment must to be taken into account in the way that organisations deal with it. Although the Third Party Harassment Provisions in the Equality Act 2010 have been repealed, an employee could still argue, for example, that being placed in a situation where the employee is subjected to third party harassment amounts to direct or indirect discrimination.[3] However, it is clear from the interviews conducted that legal action is a last resort and one that most experiencing sexism or sexual harassment would prefer to avoid, in favour of a resolution that enables them to carry on doing their job without harassment. And, in the case of freelance journalists, one interviewee suggests that there is really no interim measure between doing nothing and initiating legal action, and that the latter would only be appropriate in a really serious case of sexual harassment.

Recommendations

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (formerly the Equal Opportunities Commission) provides detailed guidance to both employers and employees about their rights and responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act brings together more than 116 separate pieces of legislation, including the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Race Relations Act 1976 into one Act.[4] Copies of the legislation and of the Employment: Statutory Code of Practice can be downloaded from the website of the Equality and Human Rights Commission: www.equalityhumanrights.com. The website also provides access to detailed guidance for Managers

[3] http://www.sourcingfocus.com/site/blogentry/7917/ accessed 15 December 2014

[4] http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/legislation/equality-act-2010/what-equality-act

from the Equal Opportunities Commission[5] (the predecessor of the Equality and Human Rights Commission) about how to deal with sexual harassment following changes to its legal definition on 1 October 2005. Advice is provided on the organisation's responsibilities regarding the prevention of harassment as well as guidelines and rationales for the implementation of informal and formal procedures for investigating and handling sexual harassment. These guidelines make it clear that it is the responsibility of managers to determine whether informal or formal procedures are the most appropriate in particular circumstances, and that this may on occasion require overriding the complainant's wishes. However, the interviewee whose wishes were overridden in this fashion points out that, if these procedures are carried out by the employer there is the risk that they default to a box-ticking exercise and fail to take any real account of the harms suffered by the employee, or worse—that formal procedures may be instigated strategically by defensive employers seeking to discredit a victim. She suggests that the only way to ensure that formal procedures are carried out fairly is for an independent party to conduct them, even though this goes beyond what the law requires, else there is a risk that the employer's interests will be prioritised with the potential for further 'between the lines' intimidation of the victim and manipulation of the process.

An Annex to this publication mentioned above also sets out a detailed framework for effective measures for preventing sexual harassment. The key principles are as follows: Have an effective and well communicated policy; train all staff and managers on the policy and their responsibilities under it; make sexual harassment a disciplinary offence; monitor the policy and its success regularly; develop clear procedures for investigating complaints confidentially and compassionately without delay; train staff who will be investigating complains to handle them sensitively and in accordance with the procedures; provide support as necessary for the complainant, the alleged harasser and managers handling the complaint. A further annex also provides further suggestions regarding reintegration of the complainant, the (alleged) harasser, and any witnesses. Just this brief overview demonstrates that dealing with this particular aspect of sexism in the workplace is complex and sensitive and highly dependent on the competence and integrity of those responsible for implementing the procedure.

The guidelines suggest that training on sexual harassment and the organisation's policy regarding it should be repeated at least annually, but preferably more often, as well as offered to new starters. It was not at all clear from interviews that this was standard practice in science journalism. The ABSW should act on behalf of its members to encourage all employers in the sector to provide sexual harassment training annually or more often. The Organisation could also take advice from

[5] *Sexual Harassment: Managers' Questions Answered*, Detailed Guidance from the Equal Opportunities Commission, March 2006.

both the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the NUJ about developing an industry standard sexual harassment policy so that employees could expect that similar procedures will be in place in any of the workplaces that they encounter.

The EOC guidelines suggest that an effective and well communicated policy “indicates the range and types of behaviour that can constitute sexual harassment and explain clearly that it is unlawful” and that “In addition to dealing the most easily recognisable forms of harassment, the policy should address issues such as potentially offensive posters / calendars; inappropriate use of email and internet sites; potentially offensive office banter; and behaviour at work-related social functions”. This research has suggested that employers need to be aware of the risk of sexual harassment to their employees at a number of key sites, such as laboratories, conferences and industry social functions. The ABSW should recommend to industry employers that their harassment policies should include procedures for making and dealing with complaints relating to such sites. It should also recommend to industry employers that they are proactive in exploring whether harassment procedures are in place at these key sites and what measures are in place to enable their employees to have complaints dealt with quickly and effectively.

Issues relating to sexual discrimination and harassment have had a very high profile over the last couple of years, such as the scandal associated with Scientific American that prompted the industry self-examination that led to the commissioning of this research, and campaigns such as the Everyday Sexism Project in the UK and the US Campus Rape Prevention campaigns, promise to keep such issues in the public eye for some time to come. However, such campaigns can also lead to pushback and denial, so it is important that the ABSW’s approach to issues of sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace focuses on the specificities of the experiences of their members. As already mentioned, the small sample of interviewees does include two female journalists who reported serious cases of serious sexual harassment, as well as three who reported gendered stereotyping, sexist assumptions or sexist treatment in the workplace, but it also included two female journalists who had never experienced or witnessed sexism in their organisations and who reported on supportive workplaces with anti-sexist cultures. Of the two male journalists interviewed, neither had experienced or witnessed sexism amongst their direct colleagues, although one acknowledged he had witnessed sexist behaviour towards female science journalists by the scientists who they interviewed. In their work on “Institutional Betrayal”, Smith and Freyd discuss the ways in which individuals who identify strongly with an institution may demonstrate a protective unawareness of the ways in which that institution facilitates or fails to prevent abuse of its members. They are writing about institutions such as schools, churches, military and government which have turned a blind eye to sexual abuse or sexual harassment. Scientific journals or science journalism writ large

may not be understood as institutions in quite the same way, but it is worth considering the extent to which identifying with the norms of this profession might militate against being aware of sexual harassment. In an arena where rationality, intellectual rigour and particular standards of professional comportment are prized, is the penalty to be paid for drawing attention to sexuality and abuses of power too high for some journalists to pay? If this is the case it is even more imperative that the ABSW stress that having in place guidelines to prevent sexual harassment – as well as other forms of direct and indirect discrimination – and communicating them effectively and repeatedly, is the way to associate science journalism with anti-sexism.