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Female Journalists in New Zealand Daily Newspapers:

From Early Career to Gender Gap in Editorship

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in
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Abstract

This thesis looks at the gender power imbalance in New Zealand newspaper journalism. The balance between male and female journalists in news media has been under the research spotlight for almost four decades. Earlier New Zealand studies showed female journalists lagged well behind their male colleagues in jobs, pay, and seniority. More recent studies, however, concluded that women dominate journalism, meaning the majority of employees were women. Despite the large number of female journalists in the industry, a different picture emerged from detailed studies, particularly of the daily newspaper industry, which suggest women are relegated to lower career levels, and are almost invisible at the editorial and executive level. The same imbalance is well-documented in overseas studies of daily newspaper industries. However, the studies do not identify specific reasons to explain it.

The vexing question of WHY women seem to be scarce at the top level of daily newspaper journalism led to my interest in examining the state of female journalists in New Zealand’s daily newspaper industry. Previous research overseas identified a specific culture in journalism newsrooms, a hegemonically masculine culture that seems to transcend national borders. The global nature of the journalism culture was a testing point for my study, and the conclusions indicate New Zealand is similar to other countries in supporting a daily newspaper culture that presents ingrained barriers for women to climb the career ladder.

My study firstly identified the gender imbalance in authorship of metropolitan newspaper news articles; secondly, examined what factors influence young journalists to remain in or depart daily newspaper careers; and thirdly explored the barriers and enticers for female
journalists going into management careers. This is the first study of those rare female journalists who do become daily newspaper editors, with in-depth interviews of all nine women who have been daily newspaper editors from 2000 through 2009. The interviews are buttressed with interviews of highly-skilled and experienced female journalists who remained long-term in the industry, but shunned the top position of editor. The interviews also include two male executives who were responsible for hiring and promoting editors.

This study is also the first to examine the other side – New Zealand female journalists who left the industry. An attitudinal survey of early-career journalists revealed that there is a large group of female journalists who exit newspaper jobs early in their career and some of their reasons for departure are due to the gendered nature of the newsroom culture.

This study concludes with recommendations to industry to help retain female journalists. These recommendations are based on three models developed by this research: the Funnel Shaped Career Path model that describes female journalists’ career flow in newspaper journalism, the Glass Bubble model based on the enticers for female journalists to leave the industry early in their career, and the Collegial Wilderness model that demonstrates a major barrier for female journalists to remain as an editor long term.
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