

Women in the Victorian Film, Television and Related Industries

Report Snapshot - Lisa French, RMIT

This project investigates the quality of the working lives of Victorian women in the film, television and related industries (including digital media and games), through a survey of 135 people (114 women and 21 men) working in the Victorian audiovisual industries (conducted in November 2010 and collated finally in this report released for International Women's Day 2012). This research examined the participation of women in these industries and has gathered data on areas such as: issues affecting women, the progress of women in various sectors, training, career pathways, employment security and mobility.

Find the link to the survey report here: <http://www.lisa-french.com/research.html>

Some key findings

This survey of the Victorian audiovisual industries 'Women in the Victorian Film, Television and Related Industries' discovered gender issues persist, and more research in this field is warranted. While women have made some gains, for example in the television industry or in achieving management positions, there are still some gender-segregated jobs, or differences in jobs men and women do. The industry is generally poorly remunerated, and there is evidence that as a group women earn less than men. Women still report discrimination. This survey and research undertaken in the field has aimed to provide data so that inequalities can be recognized, something that is urgently required in order to correct inequality, and to put gender back on the table as an issue. A survey of the whole industry is greatly overdue given that the last major Australian survey of the industry was undertaken twenty years ago (Cox, & Laura, 1992 *What Do I Wear for a Hurricane? Women in Australian Film, Television, Video & Radio Industries*), and this survey covers Victoria only.

Trends

- The majority of women agree **attitudes** to women have improved, but only 4% agree the economic situation is better. It was felt that there had been more improvement over the last ten years, as compared with the last five, where there was seen to be less improvement for women in audiovisual industries.
- Survey results indicated **ageism** (under 25, or over 46 age groups) and the trend of an ageing industry (noted in earlier surveys) were also observed in this survey. However, prose comments indicated that people under 40 were more likely to work with someone based on skills and work ethic, and this was slowly causing cultural change.
- There was evidence of an **ageing industry**, a finding supported by the shift in responses relating to family responsibilities (75% of women and 50% of men had no dependents living with them). Family responsibilities, which were a significant issue in previous surveys, are now not a significant issue to gaining jobs (although more women work part-time and more men full-time). From this finding it appears that **younger women with children are not participating** with the industry, and it is important that this group be supported, not just for equity reasons, and in relation to sustainability of audiovisual industries into the future, but because the stories and

creative approaches of this group of women may not be represented in Australian cultural output. The survey also found that **men with children** are more likely to be making more out of their career. There were also indications of a **high level of single parents** in audiovisual industries.

- The survey found that the **industry is generally very poorly remunerated** (41% of women and 33% of men earning \$35K or below), or at least women in it are (given that the majority of the survey respondents were women): 73% of women and 62% of men earn under \$65K.

- There had been little increase in wages in the last five years (so not keeping up with inflation), and the lowest paid worked in technical areas and writing. It was found that women were more likely than men to have earnings below \$65,000 for the 2008/9 financial year. Thirty-eight per cent of men earned above \$66,000, compared to 28% of women. This needs further research given the small number of male respondents completing the survey, but it indicates that **women appear to be earning less** (although television emerged as an area where women were achieving high salaries). The industry has **a lot of self-employed people** (57% of female and 67% of male respondents were self-employed), and a **large amount of time is spent unpaid** on project development.

- Women appear to be having more **success in television** than other parts of the industry, and achieving greater participation in it. The evidence to support this is strong because 41% of those surveyed were from the television sector, where there were numerous advances reported. The success and progress of women in the television sector is evidenced in that:

- women working in television were more optimistic and less likely to believe the industry had deteriorated for women, or report gender as a disadvantage
- women working in television had achieved promotion more often than in other sectors
- those working on serials/series television were more often earning \$75K.

This is a significant shift given that the television sector was reported in earlier surveys to be more difficult for women. Another shift is that the film industry appears to be more difficult for women than was reported in earlier surveys.

- **Issues** found in previous surveys continued to be issues in the current survey, these included stereotyped assumptions being made about abilities (53%); expectations to be 'one of the boys' (24%—and still an issue for men at 10%); exclusion from groups (22%); unequal division of tasks between the sexes (18%).

- **Education and training** was similar across most types of training, except that women were twice as likely to have undertaken postgraduate degrees than men. The greatest participation in training for both men and women was in short or industry training courses. Although most respondents reported that it was networks and not training that was important in the industry, it was found that there were **positive benefits or correlations for those with degrees** (e.g. more often in full-time work; more often applied for, and gained funding; were more likely to work in the most highly remunerated sector of television; and had greater optimism about opportunities).

- While the respondents represent only 114 women in the Victorian industry, this is statistically valid in determining patterns of women's involvement. In terms of **women's participation in audiovisual industries** (see the report pages 21-22), they are not undertaking work such as boom operating or Executive Producing (0%);

they have very little participation as script consultants and assistant directors (1%); in cinematography, script editing and sound they are very few (2%); and even in the top categories for participation there is evidence of male or female dominance—in directing there was a male orientation with only 10% of women compared with 29% of the men surveyed; and in producing it was female orientated with 13% of women to the 10% of men doing this work. This indicates that there are **differences in the jobs men and women do** in audiovisual industries.

- There are **sectors where women’s participation is low** (such as directing), and **high** (such as producing) and this is supported by figures on the Screen Australia web site which also illustrates that women have been increasing participation and success in television; that the number of women directors has declined; and the continuing existence of **female dominated areas** such as production assistant and make-up artist. (See: Screen Australia, 2006, *Proportion of men and women employed in various occupations in selected audiovisual industries, 1996–2006*: statistics compiled by Screen Australia primarily from unpublished data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

<http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/oeoccupxgender.asp>

- **Barriers** to progress for women were reported as sexism, some (non-gender specific) bullying, and even a lack of support (or opposition) from more senior women.

Researcher Information

This research was conducted by Lisa French, who is Associate Professor in Cinema Studies, Media and Communication at RMIT University, and Head of Cinema Studies. She is the co-author of the books *Shining a Light: 50 Years of the Australian Film Institute* (2009) and *Womenvision: Women and the Moving Image in Australia* (2003). Lisa’s PhD and MA research were both interested in gender and Australian film, and she has published widely in these fields in local and international journals. Her film projects include producing the film *Birth of a Film Festival* (2003), a film about the first Melbourne International Film Festival. Her professional history includes a broad range of experiences in screen culture, including three years as the director of the St Kilda Film Festival, and nine years on the board of the national screen culture body, the AFI. She can be contacted at:

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