

Let's talk about sexism in journalism with Roberta Cavaglià

Hi, everyone. I'm Roberta Cavaglià. My pronouns are she, her, and I'm an Italian freelance journalist based in Barcelona, Spain.

Can you tell us about the investigation about sexism in journalism school?

From February to October 2024, Francesca Candioli, Stefania Prandi and I interviewed more than 200 students and sources who over the last 10 years had attended one of the 10 journalism school recognized by the "Ordine Nazionale dei giornalisti", which is a body that regulates journalism profession and its members in Italy.

And what we discovered is that that um sexism is really common in journalism schools.

Um, half of the respondents that we interviewed stated that they have witnessed or were aware of sexual and verbal harassment, attempted sexual violence, stalking, blackmailing, gender discrimination, and half of our sources described in detail uh the kind of abuses that they experience, and they also send us names and screenshots and email emails and documents about it.

So according to the students, these abusive behaviours were carried out by teachers, tutors, and also colleagues inside and outside journalism schools and as well by other journalists during the internships. But none of the people we heard and reported to the police what they had suffered. So we were really concerned about this finding.

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because initially our idea was to investigate into newsrooms, but then we contacted some sources, and they told us that also in general in schools they had suffered sexual harassment.

So it's really concerning that it starts in an educational space and then it continues during their work career and essentially it's because harassment is key to keep women outside of the public space and in the case of female journalists it also prevents them from telling stories about other women or other social minorities and we also researched and found out that there is only one national research about harassment in journalism and it was published in 2019, I think.

And it found that 85% of women journalists working in the newsroom said that they had been sexually harassed at least once during their career and almost 3% had been raped and 8% had experienced attempted sexual assault. And that's what we are investigating now with another investigation that it's coming out next year.

Why should we be concerned about sexism in journalism?

Sexual harassment is in the fabric of our media system and but it's really hard to talk about it. Uh, because for women consequences can be really terrible and they are um afraid of losing their jobs, really precarious jobs, because some had to pay for very expensive journalism school in order to get after years of unpaid training these jobs.

And they are also afraid that no one will believe them and essentially, they are afraid of lose everything of losing everything and be humiliated. We call it sexual harassment, but it's not about sex. Uh, it's not about desire. It's about power. And some people have the power to do everything they want to women's bodies and minds.

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Um, and we as society don't do enough to prevent that. Um, so sexual harassment is not shameful uh as it should be. It's not a stain on someone and it's instead it's just, you know, business as usual.

And um this, as I said before, has a huge impact on the media we consume, which is mostly controlled by old white old white heterosexual men and so, how can we even think or talk about media pluralism when our new terms are not inclusive or diverse, starting for from women which are just half of the world's population.

And why are you so passionate about?

I'm passionate about it because I think it's really unjust and I mostly part of my work is about injustice and this is it affects me it affects the people I know and in Italy we're not really good we are not really pioneers in fighting gender-based violence instead I have another example which is Spain is really at the front of the European effort to fight gender-based violence and I really find it striking because they have so much in common you know Italy and Spain they are so culturally and geographically close but they are so far apart when we think about gender-based violence.

So I think that I'm passionate about it because I want to see more Spain in Italy and less Italy in Italy and when we talk about gender-based it's violence.

What is the biggest challenge facing feminist today?

I think that we are facing a huge backlash from the MeToo era. I think that nobody really cares anymore about sexual harassment in the workplace or at school or really anywhere because it's not mainstream anymore. It seems like the problem has been solved with you know D&I policies etc. But it's not but still there is no you know drive to talk about it more.

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It seems that we have other problems but we haven't solved it so I don't think that we can move forward.

What will be the next challenges maybe in 10 years? It will be different?

Well, I hope so. Um, I see some other challenge challenges that are really, you know, important for me and I hope that they will be solved in 10 years, but I don't know about that.

And these challenges I'm talking about are these really strong internal divisions within feminism. So we have intersectional feminists, and we have trans-exclusionary movements, and we also have pro-sex work and abolitionist movements.

And this is really important because these are as led in Spain, for example, to organize separate protests. And this dilutes our collective power, I think. And also, I think that European feminists should also be able to embrace the demands that come from the environment mental movement and from the post-colonial movement and you know present as a united front with them.

Three women who, in your opinion, inspires the feminist movement or the feminist history

They are not well known, uh, but they have a really fascinating history. So I'm talking about Maria Isabel Barrero, uh, Maria Teresa Orta, Maria Veguilla Costa, uh, which had three Portuguese writers, also known as the Three Marias.

And in 1972, they published a book called New Portuguese Letters. And so it was before the Portuguese Revolution or the Carnation Revolution. They were They wrote this book

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together. We don't know which one wrote what. Um, but it was a huge success and also a huge problem for them.

Uh, because it was a masterpiece but it was quickly banned by sensors because it was described as pornographic and offensive to public morals world because it also talked about, you know, female pleasure. So, they were the three Maries were arrested and imprisoned, but before being arrested and imprisoned, they managed to smuggle a copy of their book to France.

Um, this book arrived in the hands of Simone de Beauvoir and French women's liberation movement. So, the book became internationally famous. They became internationally famous. And following the Carnation revolution, the trial was terminated and the authors were pardoned and their book *New Portuguese Letter* is a contemporary masterpiece in, you know, Portuguese feminism.

Is there anything else that you want to say that we haven't asked you about?

Um, I think we should keep an eye on Spain. You know, I'm repetitive, but you know, for years the government has been really pioneering in laws against gender-based violence.

And I hope and I think uh it will continue to be so in the future. So maybe Spain is a bit underrated, but when it comes to gender-based violence, we should really keep an eye on this country.

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