

I am a retired school teacher and after retiring I did Equality Studies in UCD. I have always had an interest in the media and the power it has to influence thinking in Irish society. I love current affairs and would have listened to radio a lot.

However after retiring I noticed the dominance of men and to that end decided to do a survey in 2010. This was followed by 8 others completed in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 & 2019. Another retired teacher, Dolores Gibbons helped me complete these 8.

I am co-founder of the Countess Markievicz School which is now in its 10 year. In 2016 Ms Sabina Higgins launched a book published by the school titled *A Century of Progress? Irish women reflect*. Dolores & myself wrote up a chapter for the book containing our survey & outlining patterns we noted as we completed the survey.

The link attached contains that chapter & I am submitting to the Citizens' Assembly for consideration.

Warm Regards.

Lucy Keaveney

## MISSING VOICES

### *Women's Voices still adrift on the airwaves.*

Women's voices, experiences and expertise continue to be regarded by news industries as less important than those of men.

-Ross & Carter, *Women and News:*

*A long and Winding Road* (1148)

### **Introduction**

In Ireland, women currently comprise 51% of the population, yet they are marginalised both in politics and in the media. Steps have been taken to address this problem in the political arena with the implementation of gender quotas which were introduced with modest success in the 2016 general election. However, there is no evidence that the corresponding imbalance in the media which sidelines women's voices and opinions is being redressed, particularly in the area of current affairs programming.

Seventy one countries took part in the first Global Media Monitoring Project in 1995. This project examined the role and representation of women in the media and takes place every five years. At that time, only 17% of the people heard or read about in Print/Radio and TV news were female. In 2005, the survey concluded that women were virtually invisible in terms of news and media content. While there has been some progress over the last ten years, findings from the 2015 survey (involving 130 countries) show still only 24% of the voices heard or read about were female. This figure demonstrates very little improvement since the project began in terms of women's visibility and at this rate of progress it will clearly take a very long time to achieve true equality.

To ascertain the situation in Ireland, six week-long surveys have been carried out which tracked the voices of women in current affairs programmes on our three national stations RTÉ1, Newstalk and Today FM. The original concept for these snap surveys - recording women's voices - originated at an International Women Empowering Communication Conference in Bangkok in 1994. In this article we explain areas of concern we observed as we carried out our surveys and we draw attention to other relevant research and points of view. Finally we try to show what is needed to redress gender imbalance in media organisations here.

### **The Irish Context**

The first of these snap surveys was carried out in September 2010. This was followed by a second in March 2012. The third was carried out in October 2013. A fourth survey was conducted in April 2014 while the fifth was conducted over 5 days in June 2015. The most recent survey was carried out during the week beginning 4 April 2016. These were snapshot surveys concentrating on female representation on current affairs programmes, focussing on

the voices of women as heard without reference to the time allotted to their contributions. Women’s presence as guests on panels, interviews with women and reports by women were monitored for all six surveys. The results are outlined in the following table:

### Women’s Voices on the Airwaves 2010-2016

<b>RTE Radio 1</b>	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Morning Ireland	14%	14%	27%	27%	36%	19%
Pat Kenny/ S.O’Rourke	22% (P.K)	31% (P.K)	15%	44%	28%	21%
News At One	N/A	14%	18%	35%	31%	31%
Drive Time	21%	15%	23%	34%	27%	27%
Late Debate	N/A	N/A	15%	34%	20%	17%
Marian Finucane	18%	23%	25%	35%	23%	25%
This Week	N/A	N/A	N/A	12%	20%	16%
Saturday with Claire Byrne	N/A	N/A	N/A	17%	20%	23%

<b>Newstalk</b>	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
NT Breakfast	21%	25%	19%	32%	27%	26%
Lunchtime	N/A	22%	29%	30%	47%	26%
Pat Kenny Show	N/A	N/A	35%	17%	27%	34%
The Right Hook	11%	31%	20%	5%	20%	26%
The Sunday Show	17%	22%	21%	23%	29%	16%

<b>Today FM</b>	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
The Last Word	14%	16%	19%	28%	24%	23%

In our article “Voices of Women - Still missing in 2014,” we credited RTÉ with making progress in the following programmes: *Morning Ireland*, *Today with Seán O’Rourke*, *News at One*, *Drivetime*, *Late Debate* and *Marian Finucane* noting the increased female representation between 2010 and 2014. However, looking at the survey carried out in June 2015 this progress was not sustained with the exception of *Morning Ireland*. The most recent survey carried out in April 2016 confirms that progress made in one year can fall back in a follow up survey. As the table shows, far from making progress, half of the programmes monitored regressed in terms of participation of women while two others remained

unchanged. There is no doubt that the dominance of men on the airwaves is the direct result of the key issues which were part of the public discourse for the week - the formation of government and the Panama papers leak. This is a cause of concern and indicates a need to develop strategies and policies to increase and maintain the presence of women in this area, irrespective of the burning issues of the day

The programme which improved most in 2015 was *Newstalk Lunchtime* presented by Jonathan Healy. His programme went from a low of 22% in 2012 to 47% in 2015. However in the most recent survey this programme slipped back to 26%, a figure which is worse than the 2013 survey. The 2015 survey was carried out during the week when Catherine Murphy was prominent in the Dáil on the IBRC inquiry. It was also the week of the resignation of Sepp Blatter as President of FIFA. This particular scandal, as well as dominating sports reports, also made its way into current affairs and was robustly debated from a male perspective only.

On Tuesday, 3 June 2015, Kathy Sheridan wrote in the Irish Times about sexism in sport in general and in FIFA in particular. She quoted sexist comments made by Blatter at board meetings which were not challenged by fellow board members. She also quoted a figure from a UK study which showed that: “two thirds of women working in British football had experienced sexism.” If the author had been invited on to one of these programmes to tease out the issues cited in her article, this would have widened the debate around the gender issues that FIFA and other sporting organisations need to address. However it appears that the male anchors and their backroom teams are so steeped in the prevailing macho culture that they could only see the issue from a male perspective.

The most recent survey was carried out during the talks for the formation of the next government and also the Panama Papers revelations. *Morning Ireland*, over the course of the week had just one woman commenting on the formation of the government with no women commenting on the financial scandal. *Drivetime* had two female politicians and their political correspondent commenting on government formation over the five days while one female academic was also interviewed. The only female voice commenting on the tax avoidance scandal was heard on the *News at One* programme. A similar pattern was also noted on the other two stations. These are prime example of how our radio stations are stereotyping women.

In September 2012 journalist and commentator Alison O'Connor, as part of an academic thesis, met and interviewed some of the “gatekeepers” (producers and editors) in a survey she carried out focussing on *Morning Ireland*. From those discussions she concluded:

It appeared to this researcher that they were aware the issue of gender balance was something that had not been adequately addressed by their organisation but they did not wish to be quoted on the record criticising this policy.

Another feature noticed in our media monitoring is that of the ‘token female’ being a regular feature of programmes such as *The Late Debate*, *The Marian Finucane Programme* and

*Saturday with Claire Byrne*. The problem with this, apart from it being tokenistic, is that women are often shouted down and their voices drowned out especially during heated debate. This constant interrupting is frustrating to listen to and the one woman is often the very last to be invited into the discussion. Male presenters frequently interrupt, as do male guests. Indeed getting a woman into the studio or on to a panel is no guarantee that her voice will be heard. In many cases the woman is just there to tick the gender box. This demonstrates the urgent need for gender equality training. Male guests, who are usually on friendly terms with the presenter because of the frequency with which they appear, generally get longer speaking times. This pattern was also observed in the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) *Hearing Women's Voices?* This was a detailed study of the under-representation of women in Irish current affairs programmes at peak listening times which was launched in November 2015.

A pattern emerged during the surveys showing that the gender balance deteriorated on Fridays. In 2010 *Morning Ireland* interviewed their highest number of men for the week on Friday 17 September with a ratio of 14 men to 1 woman. That same day *Drivetime* interviewed 17 men and 1 woman. On Friday 2 March 2012 *Morning Ireland* had 11 men and 1 woman, while on that same day *Pat Kenny* had his highest number of male guests (9 men and 2 women). In the 2015 survey Sean O'Rourke interviewed 12 men and 1 woman on Friday 5 June. On that same day, *Drivetime* had 12 men and just 1 woman. In the 2016 survey Seán O'Rourke interviewed 12 men and 5 women on Friday 8 April while Jonathan Healy interviewed 8 men and no women. Bobby Kerr, who was standing in for Pat Kenny interviewed 7 men and 1 woman.

## **Presenters**

Similarly the dominance of male presenters on Fridays was also noted.

In September 2014 Una Mullally wrote about the "glass ceiling" for women in broadcasting:

Anyone familiar with Marconi House on Digges Lane in Dublin, which houses Newstalk, TodayFM and TFXM, will notice that one of its design features is an actual glass ceiling - perhaps a message to women looking to get on air."

In the article Mullally focussed on the dominance of men in presentation across the three national stations (RTE, Newstalk and Today FM) concluding that: "There are basically no opinionated - not to mention even vaguely adversarial women presenting primetime weekday shows

In 2015 we also monitored the figures for female presenters in RTÉ Figures for *Morning Ireland* for April and May 2015 showed that men presented 73% of the time while women only presented 27% with a trend of two males presenting on Fridays. Likewise Áine Lawlor and Richard Crowley were co-presenters of the *News at One* programme. However, this programme was hosted by both Richard Crowley and Jonathan Clinch for 72% of the time

over 43 days in April and May 2015, while Áine Lawlor presented 28% of the programmes. All the Friday programmes were presented by Richard Crowley. Also weekday current affairs presenters on Newstalk and Today FM are male i.e Ivan Yates, Chris Donoghue, Pat Kenny, Jonathan Healy, George Hook, and Matt Cooper.

Matt Cooper who presents *The Last Word* responded to the NWCi submission in an article in *The Irish Examiner* Friday 13 April 2012. This programme, which runs from 4.30-7pm, was the only programme monitored on Today FM. He robustly defended the policy they had on his programme for selecting guests. Over the six surveys this programme increased its presence of women from 14% in 2010 peaking at 28% in 2014 but slipping back to 23% in the latest survey. He was critical of the fact that he gave a lengthy interview to a female psychologist over three weeks and he was not credited with this. The survey was carried out over one of those weeks:

When it comes to the news and current affairs of the day we try to get relevant participants on air, not commentators. Our criteria are that the person we ask to contribute should be involved in such a way to present relevant information and, if necessary, engage in debate. It is only when we fail to get principals that we fall back on commentators and then we try to achieve a 50/50 balance.

He also cited the number of women in the backroom team missing the point that it was male dominance of voices in presentation and contributions which we were surveying.

## **Programme Guests**

Another pattern we have noticed over the six surveys is that all three stations draw on the same pool of Dublin journalists and broadcasters for expert opinion. “Public service broadcasting is not well served by the narrow pool of Dublin journalists, economists, lobbyists and PR people who are invited on to panels in all stations.” Journalist Rónán Lynch commented in *Village Magazine*, November 2014.

Broadcasters are obliged to represent diversity of voices from different geographical regions and backgrounds ... all too often radio hosts reflexively turn to authoritative –sounding experts and commentators drawn from Ireland’s elite effectively narrowing public discourse and closing down debate.

In the July/August edition of *Village Magazine* 2014 he gives a breakdown of guests on the *Marian Finucane Show*, both by profession and gender, which was monitored over the course of one year. Journalists/broadcasters were the highest profession represented with a figure of 74. Politicians were represented on the programme on 26 occasions; PR professionals 28;

legal professionals 26; academics 25 and business people 18. Charities, security analysts, doctors, actors/ writers and economists were in single figures

In December 2011 journalist and blogger, Gerard Cunningham, listed the names of 24 men and 7 women who feature regularly as panellists, across all three stations:

Fine people all of them but here's the thing. I've heard each one of them so many times on panel discussions, talking about everything from the latest euro-crisis to the mysteries of twitter, that I can pretty much predict their opinions on the topic of your choice ... and every time they share their now-predictable worldviews, they do a little bit to limit everyone else's worldview too.

This opinion confirms our observations that programme makers across all three stations rely on a very narrow range of sources - most of whom are white, middle-class, middle-aged professional men. It does take an effort to seek out a broader range of people with opinions – there are a lot of young women (and young men) out there who are more than capable of discussing the issues of the day on these current affairs programmes.

In 2012, Mark Tighe (*The Sunday Times*) raised the question of where it is most of these panellists actually come from and he concluded: “Journalists from the Irish Times accounted for almost half of the €120,000 that RTÉ paid its 10 most-used external correspondents in the past 3 years”. This article was written as a result of a freedom of information request submitted by Éamon Ó Cuiv who also noted that “the same faces” were used repeatedly with “a huge concentration on Irish Times reporters.” Ó Cuiv stated:

The payments aren't the biggest issue, it's the frequency with which some organisations and journalists are used. Does regional spread, gender balance and a variety of views come into it? Or are we getting a concentration of views around the value system of one or two media outlets.

To date neither of these questions has been answered.

## **Solutions**

The results of the 2010 and 2012 surveys became part of a NWCi submission to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) on fairness and accountability in news and current affairs. However, when the BAI delivered their report, they said that they had no jurisdiction over stations when it came to gender balance. During the 2015 Marriage Referendum it ruled that balance must be maintained between the Yes and No sides and found against Derek Mooney for breaching this balance in an interview he carried out on his then *Mooney goes Wild* programme on RTE1. Stations ensure that political balance is maintained in their current affairs programme and the BAI can also rule on this. Is there a very narrow interpretation of what constitutes ‘Fairness, Objectivity, and Impartiality’ in news and current affairs with gender balance being the major casualty?

Dr Tom Clonan provided us with a good insight into the prevailing macho culture in Irish current affairs programmes in an RTÉ documentary broadcast in 2015. Retired army officer Clonan, who became a whistleblower on bullying of women in the army, said on The Media Programme (RTÉ 1) on 19 April 2015 that:

The military would be constructed as a very hyper masculine environment with a very robust canteen kind of culture in it...the research I conducted revealed unacceptably high levels of discrimination, harassment and particularly bullying and sexual violence against women in the army.

In his role as Security Correspondent he has been on many programmes across the media. On his encounter with the culture within Irish media he found:

that many workplace settings within the media would make the army's eyes water in terms of the masculine, casual sexism and quite a lot of bullying in this environment.... I have been contacted by female journalists in Ireland who have repeated similar stories of harassment, sexual harassment and bullying...I think there is a requirement for major investigation and further analysis in order to remove those obstacles.

There was no follow up debate on the points made by Tom Clonan. He wasn't invited on to any panel to substantiate his allegations. This would have been an ideal opportunity for Irish media to debate the macho culture so starkly outlined by him. On that same programme Alison O'Connor made reference to the fact that at media news conferences 80%-90% of people who set the agenda for the day's news are men:

"It's the macho culture to stay late and be seen to stay late... if you have an exclusively male environment, if decisions are taken at a level where it is testosterone driven with no oestrogen feeding in, then, the balance is all wrong".

In her Irish Times article 20 September 2012, journalist Laura Slattery wrote that at an evening news conference "a typical ratio of men to women is 15:1. When there are two women present, I count it as *a good day for the sisters*." At a TV 50 event in Cork, in September 2012, the panel was asked what plans RTÉ had to address the gender imbalance problem over the following years. Panellist Steve Carson replied:

"I agree there are not enough women on air. I don't buy the argument that it's hard to find women. Well, doing hard things is what we're all paid for."

That it is difficult to find women is an argument which has been used too often by senior management to excuse the inexcusable. Another defence RTÉ, Newstalk and Today FM management have used in the past was to point to the high numbers of females behind the scenes - females engaged in editing, research and production. This is a weak argument and is

not a good enough explanation for the absence of women's voices on the airwaves. A mindset and culture exists in the higher echelons of all three national stations resulting in the marginalisation of women's voices on current affairs debates.

The Gender Equality Task Force Progress Report to the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) was published on Tuesday, 23 June 2015. Initially it made a number of recommendations to address the lack of women at senior levels in the university. This included the appointment of a Vice-President for Equality and Diversity and also that all senior management should go through 'unconscious bias' training. The final draft of the report which is soon to be published indicates that it will recommend that mandatory gender quotas be introduced to bring a 50:50 balance for senior posts at the university. The figures from our surveys show that the recommendations need to apply more widely as NUIG is not the only offender - just the one which was challenged and forced to address the issue.

In a documentary titled 'Leading Women' broadcast on Newstalk in 2014 Angie Mezzetti, former RTE newsreader and documentary producer, says that global companies such as Microsoft, Google, PWC and Accenture are now focussing on unconscious bias training to understand the obstacles preventing women from progressing in larger numbers into leadership roles in their companies. They have made gender equality "not just a nice thing to have but a key business agenda item" She interviewed Dr. Melrona Kirrane, Dublin City University Business School, who stated:

It all starts with stereotyping. When you see somebody that you think belongs to a certain category...you ascribe a whole load of traits that go with that category to that person, simply because it reduces cognitive load...they are generalisations and they utterly blind us to the individual and we fail to see their unique characteristics.

In her study of 11 episodes of Prime Time during the 2011 General Election, Maynooth University lecturer, Dr Anne O'Brien found that "women's engagement with politics was gendered through processes of numeric underrepresentation, gendered visual practices, the use of predominantly male sources and by structuring the content of women's contribution to political debate". She found that filming of outside broadcasts, looking for the opinion of the public "showed that women were absent from the dominantly masculine public spaces where the report was filmed, such as a cattle mart, GAA grounds and a pub. In the report, the women interviewed were located at a housing estate and at a rowing club. Visually the reports carried 86 shots of men and only 29 shots of women.

### **Conclusion:**

After completing the six surveys it is evident that policies, training and mentoring are needed to change the tired existing formats and to reflect the diversity of voices which should be heard on the airwaves. All media organisations need to provide pathways for women until 50/50 parity is achieved. It is unacceptable that any public broadcaster could function without having a robust gender equality policy permeating the whole work force from Managing Directors down to new trainees. The stations should immediately introduce

training for all presenters and have guidelines for all guests invited on to current affairs programmes.

If a task force has recommended unconscious bias training for NUIG management and if global companies are providing training in it for their workforce surely then our media outlets in radio and TV should also be aware of the need for training to improve gender balance at all levels of their organisations but particularly for presenters and panellists. One suggestion could be replacing an absent presenter with a female, giving her an opportunity to train in and become familiar with the role, rather than bringing in yet another male which tends to be current practice.

A *Guardian* editorial published 7 November 2014 stated that:

“The BBC has a special duty, through the universality of the licence fee, to lead the way. It has identified gender equality as a priority ... What we see matters to all of us; equality cannot be left to chance”.

In the Irish context RTÉ has that same “special duty” to lead the way because it is also the recipient of the Irish licence fee. Like the BBC RTÉ and the other two stations have a lot to do.

There has been a big increase recently in the popularity of local radio. According to Rónán Lynch *Village Magazine*, 19 August 2014:

When Community radio stations run training courses, they teach journalists to talk to the ‘people on the ground’ recognising that the voices of ordinary people are rarely heard on national radio unless they have suddenly become newsworthy because they’ve been the victim of a crime. The community radio approach is not found on national radio, as professional training teaches journalists to seek out authoritative voices, particularly people who speak for others: politicians, fellow journalists, and spokespeople for causes or movements ... it’s an almost unconscious pattern of privileging upper-middle-class voices.

With the introduction of gender quotas we have seen a modest rise in the representation of women in Dáil Éireann. Our low representation in the past is certainly one of the consequences of what Una Mullally often refers to as the “intentional sexual bias that sidelines women’s voices on the airwaves”. Political parties have been forced to address this issue by the introduction of quotas as outlined by lecturer and researcher Dr. Fiona Buckley in an article she published on 10 September 2013. Thanks to the gender quotas which were imposed for the recent election the female representation in the Dáil has now reached 22%. It is well beyond time for media decision makers and managers to seriously address the issue of “missing voices” in current affairs programming. As Tom Clonan concluded in his *Media Show* on RTÉ 1 on 19 April 2015:

It's incumbent on the NUJ and all the media organisations that they put in place very clear and explicit policies, goals and objectives that are measurable with regard to the participation and promotion of women and female voices at all levels of our media.

Change will not come without the culture being challenged by an appointed authority. Perhaps the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland should have a much wider remit and a key role in all of this. As Aidan White, General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists (1987-2011) said: "Fair gender portrayal is a professional and ethical aspiration, similar to respect for accuracy, fairness and honesty." There is a moral imperative for management to address the issue of gender balance in current affairs so that 'fair' gender representation becomes a reality. This has not happened and so a body such as the BAI should have a stronger role in monitoring and regulating in order to ensure gender equality policies are drawn up and implemented on the national airwaves.

Referring to the dominance of males in current affairs panels on Sunday 6 September 2015, Booker Prize winner, Anne Enright said on the *Sunday with Miriam* programme that:

"They (men) are so busy jostling with each other and putting each other on pedestals and knocking each other off pedestals that they don't have time to notice women ... You might want to undo the sense of hierarchy that we love so much which is so masculine"

Finally we feel that quotas are urgently needed to address the unconscious bias problem and the poor representation and the stereotyping of women in the media. The BAI should have a role in setting guideline for the introduction of quotas and, as with the implementation of the political quotas, sanctions should be imposed if programme makers fail to meet set targets. Journalist Alison O Connor has strong feelings on the absence of female voices on the airwaves. She has also come to the conclusion that gender quotas are needed to bring equality to the airwaves. In her *Irish Examiner* article 13 November 2015 she wrote:

My pride has taken a back seat on the issue of gender quotas and if legislation and penalties are what is needed to ensure that women get heard on the airwaves or have their plays staged in our National Theatre, or indeed their say in our boardrooms, well then let's bring them on.<sup>25</sup>

Getting women's voices and opinions heard on the airwaves, on a par with men, must be a priority. We shouldn't have to wait for another six years for change to occur. We have highlighted the problem with the underrepresentation and stereotyping of women. It is now time for radical change, policy formation, new thinking, and unconscious bias training in order to achieve fairness for women on the airwaves. The research is there and the time has come for action.

