

# Sports Journalism, Interns and #MeToo – did anything change?

**HEIDI RØSOK-DAHL**

Oslomet

**KRISTIN SKARE ORGERET**

Oslomet

## **Abstract**

Norwegian news media were central actors in the dissemination of information about the #MeToo movement. Simultaneously, the media are made up of institutions and workplaces that are at times characterized by asymmetrical power relations. The aim of this article is to understand how those considered at the bottom of such power relations: young (female) interns in the sports journalism departments, experienced the effects of the #MeToo movement. Addressing the question if #MeToo changed anything, this article emphasizes the importance of combining the position that sexual harassment is not necessarily associated with a specific gender, at the same time recognizing that such harassment has first and foremost been part of a structural suppression of women. The article illustrates how facets of the journalistic culture and the myth of the “male genius” have marginalized those with unequal access to power in sports journalism, but also that the #MeToo movement has the potential to change this.

## **KEYWORDS**

#MeToo #sports journalism #temporality #power #sexual harassment #working conditions

## Introduction

The #MeToo movement gave attention to structural sexual harassment and assault experienced by women worldwide. The campaign started in the USA, October 2017, by actress Alyssa Milano and spread rapidly through hashtag activism, inspiring story-sharing, solidarity with survivors, and challenging a culture of pervasive sexual misconduct and harassment. #MeToo gave new life to the women's movement and especially to the understanding and rectifying of sexual harassment, abuse and assault. In doing so, it galvanized activists around the globe (Clair et al. 2019). The campaign emphasized how asymmetric power relations are central to sexual harassment and quickly resulted in a huge global media coverage, also in the Nordic countries. In the USA, the #MeToo movement revealed many cases of harassment and misconduct towards journalist interns swept under the rug (Gutierrez 2018). In the *USA Today*, Editor Jill Geisler wrote as follows:

Dear Interns: We owe you an apology. Through the years, we presumed we prepared you well for those semesters of on-the-job training. In our "You can do this!" pep talks, we didn't raise the possibility you'd face sexual harassment on the job. And now, as the #MeToo era has dawned, we know what a mistake that was. We've learned that workplace sexual misconduct is about abuse of power. And those with the least power are the most vulnerable. (Geisler 2018)

There is little reason to believe that young Norwegian interns are better off than their colleagues in the USA. A survey conducted by the Norwegian Union of Journalists confirms that there was an overrepresentation of #MeToo episodes among young women in the media, and especially those with temporary contracts (Idås, Orgeret & Backholm 2020). Thus, in this article we propose to put spotlight on the individuals often considered at the very bottom of the journalistic hierarchy – the interns. Taking the gendered aspects of journalism as its starting point, this article is focusing on sports journalism in particular. The background inspires the research question of this article, namely:

## Are young journalist interns experiencing different conditions in the Norwegian sports newsrooms after the #MeToo campaign?

With that question, this article is addressing the changing awareness of sexual harassment in Norwegian media houses. Did #MeToo have an effect on the sports newsrooms in terms of practical planning, information flows, policies or other initiatives in relation to the interns? And how did the interns experience these changes, if any? In order to study these questions, we have carried out qualitative in-depth interviews with a selection of young journalists on short-term contracts in the sports departments of the key media houses in Norway. Before going to our findings and discussions, we will start with an overview of the methods applied and some of the existing research on the gendered nature of journalism as well as on the division of labor in media houses.

### **Methodology and central concepts**

In this article, we are particularly interested in the summer interns in the sports departments of the media houses, as our hypothesis is that female temporary workers may in particular be exposed to harassment in the male-dominated fields of journalism, such as sports journalism. In fact, some of the first #MeToo stories from Norwegian media houses came from sports departments, and therefore, it is interesting to dig deeper into this specific area of journalism.

Hence, the sports departments of selected Norwegian media houses were chosen for two main reasons: We wanted to examine specific branches of the media that hire a lot of summer (or winter) interns. And secondly, as sports journalism, by tradition, is considered to be a male-dominated arena (Boyle 2006, Djerf-Pierre & Löfgren-Nilsson 2004), we find it of particular interest to investigate how issues related to sexual harassment are handled in these departments of the media houses. Our use of the concept “sexual harassment” is defined by four elements (Sletteland & Helseth 2018), of which the first one is essential, and the degree of the three following elements will indicate the seriousness of the situation:

1. Lack of mutual consent
2. Unequal power relations

3. Difficult to escape the situation
4. Repetitive behavior

Most of all, this definition sees sexual harassment as a result of the abuse of power. It argues that the most powerful person is considered to have the highest degree of responsibility, and probably that those with least power are the most vulnerable. This is what we want to further examine empirically. Our focus will be on young interns, as studies find that this group has experienced the highest degree of harassment (NJ 2017, Idås, Orgeret & Backholm 2020). In order to address the research question and harvest more knowledge of how young interns are experiencing the very first working step in

their journalistic career, this study builds on semi-structured, qualitative in-depth interviews with a selection of young temporarily employed journalists. One group consists of young journalists who worked in Norwegian media in the summer/winter of 2018, the second group consists of interns who held similar positions in 2016/17, the year before #MeToo. The third group consists of journalists who worked both before and after the #MeToo campaign.

Our discussion is based on the findings from these qualitative in-depth interviews. We carried out a total of 18 qualitative in-depth interviews with former interns of the sports departments of some of the major media houses in Norway. 12 of the interviewees are men, 6 are women. They have all read and signed a form stating that the data will be stored safely, and that their name or workplace will not be mentioned. We present quotes from the interviews, but the origin of the quote, including the actual media house of any particular person, is anonymized. To any young journalist starting their career, this is a crucial circumstance.

The semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide in order that all interviewees would answer the same questions, and at the same time, it enabled us to investigate the distinctiveness of each individual interview. The interviews were conducted over a period from May to June 2019, most of them by both authors of this article, a few by one of us alone. The 18 interviews provided us with interesting data on aspects of the young interns or freelancers' daily lives in Norwegian media institutions.

To identify and approach the people who had been working as summer interns in the sports departments of the major media houses in Norway, we were assisted by professionals responsible for these departments, either editors or people working in the Human Relations departments. We also soon realized that young interns in the sports departments usually have a specific contract covering the winter period, and we chose to extend our selection to include these interns. The majority of the interns interviewed by us were working in the summer/winter of 2017 (before #MeToo) as well as after the winter of 2017, and a small number (three people) only worked as journalists (for the first time) in the summer/winter of 2018, after #MeToo. The interviews were conducted either in person at the Oslo Metropolitan University, or as phone interviews. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and a little more than one hour and were all recorded, transcribed and safely stored.

The main research question that we want to investigate is whether young summer/winter interns did experience significantly different conditions in the sports newsrooms after the #MeToo campaign. We combined a set of questions focusing on any changed routines and how the interns did themselves experience these changes (if any). These questions were combined with a set of very specific questions that were part of the Norwegian Union of Journalists' survey (in appendix). Using semi-structured interviews we were able to follow up on themes that were particularly interesting during the course of the interview, and to get some rather spontaneous answers. Interview data are incorporated in the article both as paraphrases and as direct quotes.

## **The gendered nature of journalism and the division of labor in media production**

In the light of previous research on gender and journalism in the Nordic countries (Djerf-Pierre & Löfgren-Nilsson 2004, Eide & Orgeret 2016, Melin-Higgins 2004), we know that journalism evolved as a male-dominated field and remained as such for a long time. Monica Djerf-Pierre (2007) describes how the field of journalism is defined as the nexus of three overarching social forces – political, economic and professional dynamics – and that the gender order of

the field reflects the relative weight of these forces at any given point in time. According to Djerf-Pierre, an empirical analysis of the field is centered around four main questions: (1) what positions have men and women been given access to during different periods of time, (2) what types of capital have men and women accumulated, (3) how images and perceptions of “good” journalism have become gendered over time and what positions, media and genres of journalism that have been associated with status/prestige as well as to what extent this social status branding is gendered, and (4) to what extent the struggle in the field has been gendered and what strategies and tactics have been employed in that struggle. From this perspective, the question of *who* is in power is important, or as described by Liesbet van Zoonen:

the challenge is to ‘theorize the multiplicity of relations of subordinations’ and to analyse how in these relations of subordination individual and collective identities, such as gender and ethnicity, are being constituted. Gender and power then, although both very much in debate, form the constituents of feminist theory. (van Zoonen 1994: 4)

Van Zoonen’s argument that the present definition of news in general, and sports news in particular, is in its nature closer to a general definition of masculinity, is of particular interest for this article. The gendered nature of sports journalism and how sports media have by tradition marginalized women have been studied by scholars like Marie Hardin and Erin Whiteside (2009), and the harassment and hostility endured by many women in sports departments have drawn attention in recent years (Antunovic 2017, Harrison 2018). Harrison discusses how sports broadcasting maintains a structure in which women remain qualitatively and quantitatively marginalized, partly due to the burden of affective labor which causes women to leave or not fully commit to the industry. The psychosocial implications that women must grapple with because of the industry’s (in)action are serious (Harrison 2018). Furthermore, as gender, age and position within the institution intersect, it is interesting to discuss how these intersections affect the questions of harassment and abuse of power.

In recent years, we have seen an excessive increase in the use of temporary employees in Norwegian media houses (Flaarønning

2018). Many media houses depend on the work of interns, when the regular staff go on leave or holiday. In the sports departments of the media houses, winter interns are also frequently hired for a few months, due to the high sports activity in the winter season. Furthermore, journalist students and others consider an internship a valuable phase in the first steps of their journalistic career. Experiences from internship periods are an important, yet under-examined component of journalism practice. However, numerous studies emphasize the difficulties for journalists who do not have permanent employment (Mathisen 2017, Edström & Ladendorf 2012, Massey & Elmore 2011). The division of labor in media production and how the number of freelance journalists has increased radically (e.g. Edström & Ladendorf 2012) have been given important academic attention. The double-edged nature of short-term work, generating contradicting experiences of autonomy and vulnerability and how temporary journalists often must adjust to the demands of their principals, has been studied (Gollmitzer 2014, Graver Knudsen & Røe Mathisen 2019, Røe Mathisen 2017, Witschge & Nygren 2015). The interns in this study hold a two- to four-month contract, and after expiry they normally have to wait for the next “season” when they can renew it.

As Davis Hesmondhalgh argues, many temporary workers are “aspirant workers, who are seeking working security, recognition, autonomy and the chance to make their own talents and creative abilities central to their working lives” (2015: 11). This clearly goes for the interns we are studying. Internship is often seen as an opportunity to establish a working relationship that may lead to a job offer at a later stage. In Norway, interns are supposed to be paid according to nation-wide established fixed rates, and the challenge of economic exploitation is less present than in many other countries (see e.g. Hesmondhalg 2015). However, the constraints of income insecurity are as tangible as elsewhere, since short-term contracts may complicate economic planning for the future. Furthermore, including a multidimensional approach that combines both gender and age reminds us of how such structures often do not function independently, but must be understood as a whole. Findings show that young women are much more likely to be sexually harassed than their more mature colleagues: “Being female and younger than 29 years of age were reported as factors significantly associated with workplace bullying.” (Freischlag & Faria 2018)

## Did anything change? Information routines

In Norway, the first phase of the #MeToo campaign was considered successful in the way that the media focused first and foremost on the need for structural change and on norms, rather than pointing at and identifying individuals (Orgeret 2019). The campaign started a dialogue on how, especially women, were treated in organizations, but also how sexual harassment organizes gendered discrimination. In Norway, the control of the press is mainly a self-control, and the professional journalist identity is to a large degree associated with the ethical norms that are based on the self-imposed ethical rules, as described in the so-called “Be Cautious” Poster (Vær Varsom Poster - VVP), and the concept of the journalistic media as a social institution with public commitments. The question as to how the media undertook their role as an employer and a possible #MeToo arena is highly relevant.

In order to get more information on the possible changes that #MeToo brought about in the sports departments that we studied, we asked the informants if they received any information from their employer on sexual harassment, and how it should be addressed if experienced. We asked them what kind of introduction the first-timers received when they started in their new position, and if there was any focus on sexual harassment at all. Before the #MeToo wave, there was no – or very little – focus on sexual harassment in intern introductions.

We did receive quite a lot of various training, on writing programs, editing. There was nothing on sexual harassment. Nothing. (Interviewee, female)

One young woman remembered that when she arrived at the sports department for an internship before #MeToo, she was introduced by a woman who told her to say, if “anything unacceptable” should happen to her. In situations where (one or more) male colleagues were known to be a problem in terms of unwanted sexual attention, the norm seemed to be to tell the young female intern “to watch out”. In this way, it was the responsibility of each individual female to avoid any circumstances that could lead to unpleasant sit-

uations. The unacceptable was thereby accepted, indirectly. #MeToo introduced a definite change in the way the interns were met by their workplace:

The following summer, things had changed. Definitely. All the summer interns were informed in a plenary meeting. If anything happened to us or others, the smallest thing, we were to tell. (Interviewee, female)

When the interns arrived the first summer after #MeToo, there was this big thing with the bosses telling about the zero tolerance of sexual harassment, and whom to report to if anything happened. That was all well, it is really good to inform the newcomers. However, I feel that some of the old men here should have received that same speech, too. (Interviewee, female)

When the summer weeks came, there was a full training in what #MeToo meant. A “Be very cautious” poster was introduced as part of the introduction course. The editorial staff was told: – If anybody sees or hears anything. Do tell. (Interviewee, male)

“Be very cautious” refers to the standard ethical code of the Norwegian press – the “Be cautious poster” mentioned above and focused on sexual harassment. Other informants told us that some people found the “Be very cautious” poster on the walls of the media house somewhat ridiculous, and quite a few laughed about it. We also asked whether there were any other ways the informants had noticed a particular focus on fighting sexual harassment at the workplace after #MeToo.

Well, yes, in a way. We recently had an early summer party organized by the press club (a division of the Labour Union). They have now put a stop to the free bar, because of fear of #MeToo. (Interviewee, female)

A central finding is that it has become much more common to inform the new journalist interns about sexual harassment and the routines to follow when reporting unacceptable behavior. However, the informants told us that they received little information about the

procedures that followed any such reporting. This goes in line with the general tendencies in society, when how to handle sexual harassment reporting was a burning issue, also in high-profile cases on political top level (Sletteland & Orgeret 2019, 2020).

## **The myth of “the male genius” in the sports departments**

The most severe incidents of sexual harassment in the sports departments happened in settings that involved alcohol consumption in work-related situations. The informants argued that the sports departments were different than other news departments, as coverage of championships both abroad and nationwide, often far away from the everyday workplace, involved long working hours often followed by drinks among colleagues in a less formal setting. At the same time, they also found that studying the situation of the interns in the sports departments could add important information about the most vulnerable individuals on the journalistic ladder, and hence about the journalistic field as such. Before #MeToo, stories about male colleagues telling dirty jokes, commenting on the bodies of female colleagues or even touching their breasts or other parts of the body at any such events or work-related parties were frequent in the sports departments.

It was seen as humorous. Nobody thought about asking the one who was harassed whether she was ok with it. It was more a supporting pat on the guy's shoulder. There has been a radical change. It would never happen that openly today. (Interviewee, male)

Several informants stressed that silent acceptance of any pestering was not taken for granted anymore. In this way, #MeToo implied a radical change in terms of acceptance.

The question of *who* is able to speak and be heard is highly relevant here. In addition to the fact that you did not have to accept being bullied anymore, our interviewees also told us that people would listen to those who reported it in a new and different way. It was easier to be taken seriously when reporting on misbehavior, and the “male genius” types could not take their protected status for granted anymore.

However, this did not mean that sexual harassment had completely disappeared in the sports departments. In one of the media houses where we carried out several interviews, almost all informants mentioned one particular recent case that happened at a party with the employees of the sports department when a male senior employee openly harassed a young female intern. Several of the other informants who witnessed the incident felt that the superiors did not do enough after this particular episode.

When such a serious case happens, it should have consequences. We were several young interns who didn't think it was ok. (Interviewee, female)

As the incident happened openly, several colleagues reported it to the managers in the sports department. Quite a few of the whistleblowers were disappointed that the incident seemed to have little actual consequence for the harasser and that he was still working with the same topic areas or 'beats' as they are called.

It happens every six months with new interns. Even the bosses saw it. "Oh God, him again. Will he never change?" However, he is still there. (Interviewee, male)

It turned out that if the harasser was a person with a high standing in the sports department, it was much harder to be heard when speaking up about aggressive behavior. This may be associated with the protection of the so-called "artistic genius", which in the sports departments is often linked to journalistic and/or commercial success and echoes experiences from other parts of the media field when the myth of an artistic and commercial genius was often used to excuse abusive behavior. Former Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein is an obvious – but not unique – example. "Genius is power", Aditi Kini argues and continues:

It is unquantifiable, uncontainable, and like beauty, exists in the eyes of the beholder. Genius enhances access—sexual, social, economic, political. It is a collective agreement—or, in many cases, a collective lie—that grants boundless latitude to those we anoint with the title. But genius is also an indelibly gendered currency used

by men—almost always men—of means and success to purchase license. The lie of genius is inextricable from the lie of meritocracy: Culture dictates that these men have risen to fame and success because of their unstoppable genius. (Kini 2018)

The interviewees told about abusive men who were admired in the sports departments because of their journalistic successes. Such veneration may both foster and excuse a “culture of toxic masculinity” (Kini 2018, NYT 2017), and will continue as long as colleagues and surroundings believe that their professional contributions outweigh their individual transgressions. The #MeToo campaign introduced more awareness of how the protection of the successes of the “male genius” may happen at the expense of the humanity and potential of the people who were silenced, erased and preyed upon. The essence of our findings is that there has been a noticeable change of mind-sets since #MeToo happened, and we find a significant difference between the experiences of the pre #MeToo interns and the post #MeToo interns. However, as long as the workplaces do not take their statutory responsibility as an employer seriously, it is still possible for some powerful actors to misbehave, and in such situations, the temporary employees are particularly vulnerable.

## **Working as an intern**

When asked whether the first meeting with the sports department lived up to their expectations, some of the interns answered: Yes. However, quite a few described the atmosphere in the sports department as “more brutal” than they expected. For most of the interviewees, this was their very first meeting with journalism outside the school setting.

It was somewhat rougher than what I expected. The climate was harsher. This might sound naïve. I knew it would be a tough and demanding job, that people had high expectations, and still it was much tougher. (Interviewee, male)

All the informants expressed that in general, to complain or report on work-related issues, either #MeToo-related or other, is far more

demanding for a temporary employee than for someone with a permanent position. One informant told us:

You quickly realize the performance culture. You have to perform very well! I was one of very few female summer interns and that involved even higher expectations of me. I had to deliver. Prove that I could learn. I felt I did not get as much help or training as the boys did. It was a pressure that made me feel a little uncomfortable, but I thought – well, this is how it is. It is a shame in fact. You don't want to complain. You shut up and do your best. (Interviewee, female)

Several informants said that rather than experiencing a culture of harassment they experienced a culture of favoritism and sexism. A “boys' culture”, in which it was hard to be included as a woman.

It seemed like a men's club. They were sitting in big groups talking. About the nude picture of a local star. About masturbation. That kind of thing. It was very unprofessional. Inappropriate. (Interviewee, female)

Some felt that the culture was changing and argued that the typical “sports department macho culture” dated a few years back. Others described how the macho behavior often included the abuse of power in general.

It was loud and ostentatious. Extreme. With a high temperature in the room. To some it seemed almost like a sport yelling at young interns when they made a mistake. (Interviewee, male)

Also, several of the young male interns described such harassment experiences and how difficult it was to raise their voice against it. In general, it was a problem to complain or even to present documentation of overtime work. The feeling of vulnerability was shared across genders.

We do not dare to tell things the same way as people who are securely employed would. I'm just a substitute. Will I be seen as “trouble” if I tell this? As a result, you become very insecure. (Interviewee, female)

As long as you know it is so easy for them to get rid of you, I guess many are reluctant to speak out. We live a little on the edge. You have to be careful. (Interviewee, male)

In recent years, the use of temporary employees in sports journalism has exploded (Flaarønning 2018), and several of our informants felt that the media houses tend to take advantage of the system to exploit staff without a permanent position. Some described the situation of not being a full-fledged member of the department as “exhausting” and “disconcerting”.

### **From the individual to the structural?**

Most of our informants worked as interns both before and after the introduction of #MeToo. All of them agreed that some things have indeed changed after the #MeToo campaign.

My experience is that there is more awareness of sexual harassment. Maybe the sports department is special, there are a lot of men, making a bit fun of the #MeToo campaign, but these things are, as I see it, clearly on the “ok” side of it. (Interviewee, male)

Several of the informants spoke about what they referred to as a “shift in generations”, and many expressed that they felt real change was happening. Some also described how the campaign had served as a “wake-up call”.

It was very good that the #MeToo campaign came about. I feel like I hadn't thought that way before. It led to a kind of change in how I saw things. (Interviewee, female)

From the interviews, we observe a clear change from a phase pre #MeToo when it was more common to make the individual (young) woman responsible for not being harassed. In particular when travelling to cover sports events, young women reporters could be taken aside by an elderly colleague and told to watch out for a specific sen-

ior male colleague. One example shows how these experiences were routine and normalized – here shared with us by an informant:

– I just want to warn you about him. He is a little pushy. You know. We all know that he is a bad guy who chases young interns. That's just the way he is. (Interviewee, female)

Several young women informed how they were nervous about travelling with one or two particular male colleagues. However, they did not dare to turn down the chance to travel, because they felt that it would then seem like they were not really interested in the job. Vohlídalová (2015) links the lack of awareness of and reactions to sexual harassment to a gender ideology that actively legitimates sexual harassment. She argues that an example of legitimation may be the tendency to trivialize and belittle sexual harassment and its impact on targets, to prevent forms of behavior that are legally defined as being sexual harassment being defined as such. This is further reflected in the tendency to shift the solution of sexual harassment from the institutional (i.e. organization action) to the individual level. After the influx of #MeToo, it is to a much larger degree seen as the duty of the media institution as an employer to prevent sexual harassment instead of the burden of each individual. The campaign has, at least partly, brought sexual harassment from an individual to a structural level, and this is crucial if institutions and societies are to fight against it in an efficient manner that does not suppress those who are harassed. Although the general impression is that the situation has improved when it comes to routines within the media houses, there are still a lot of interns that do not feel comfortable with whistleblowing/reporting episodes to their superiors.

## Who left?

In addition to the emotional toll it takes on individuals, abuse of power and sexual harassment also limits women's participation in the media industry or imbues this participation with a sense of fear and intimidation, as editor Moira Wyton reminds us (in Cohen 2018). Abuse of power and sexual harassment are costly affairs, also to the media institutions, and even detrimental to societies in general, as

the result may be that some important voices and perspectives are lost. This is the perspective of Reut Cohen:

While an individual incident might not have lasting repercussions, experiencing a pattern of harassment over years has likely prompted many women to reconsider their careers, if not abandon the industry entirely. Was a life in media worth it? I wondered if there were other aspiring journalists who shared my anxieties. Had these scandals made them reconsider their career plans? (Cohen 2018)

Often, it is difficult to study ‘what is not there,’ and challenging to get the views and stories of those who decided to leave, or decided not to continue a career that was just starting. In our material, one young woman did in fact leave the sports department:

I left the sports department. That was nothing for me, regarding the atmosphere that ruled. I am not a typical tomboy. I did not like it at all. Sports journalism is just not very tempting anymore. (Interviewee, female)

Karianne Solbrække, chief editor of TV 2, the biggest commercial broadcaster in Norway, was very outspoken when confronted with the fact that several employees were fired in the sports department of TV 2 in 2017:

– I realize that I become so furious about the fact that pitiful men have kept going for so many years without anyone reacting. That is the problem, that a few idiots have been able to ravage without anyone interfering. They have taken advantage of their power and position to destroy young female interns. (VG 2017).

## **Men being harassed – still a taboo?**

After years of increasing awareness of the importance of moving away from narrow, stereotyped gender categories (van Zoonen 1994, Eide & Orgeret 2016), some have expressed a fear that media’s #MeToo coverage would return to an essentialist type of coverage in which

men are represented as active and violent agents, whereas women are passive, vulnerable victims. The vast majority of the #MeToo cases support this statement, as they are about women being harassed by men. However, it is important to bear in mind that the definition of sexual harassment we make use of here is gender neutral and does not exclude the possibility of women harassing men or of same-sex harassment. In interviews, some young male interns also informed that they experienced episodes that were “unpleasant”. Interestingly, they were often reluctant to categorize it as a “#MeToo case” on the spot. Looking back, several of our male interviewees realized that the unpleasant experiences were in fact related to sexual harassment. Here the questions from the Norwegian Union of Journalists’ survey (NJ 2017 and appendix) were very useful. Taking the interviewees through the list of questions, some of them realized that they were exposed to behavior they experienced as annoying and unasked for.

There was this get-together with another division and a woman who used to work with me introduced me jokingly to some of her colleagues: “He is a real #MeToo man, watch out for him!” I hardly knew her. And then she left the room. I should have said No! I did not. It was not ok. (Interviewee, male)

There are complex reasons why women and men relate differently to sexual harassment. Traditionally, the fear of rape is always ruminating in the back of a woman’s head; in many cultures she is taught at a very young age to take precautions in order to avoid acts of violence or harassment (Sletteland & Helseth 2018). The young male interns made it clear during the interviews that there is little general awareness of the possibility that men may feel harassed in our society, and some expressed the lack of language or of possible patterns of reaction when men are sexually harassed. As one young male intern put it: “Being a man you have very little choice, but to laugh at it”.

I had an experience at a party with colleagues from several media houses. I was dancing with a woman who worked at another place. She put her hands in my crotch. There was a lot of alcohol involved. I might have been a part of it, too. (...) I got a kind of acceptance, however, for the fact that what she had done was not ok (...) I did

not exactly feel harassed. But if this would have happened every time I went to a party with this person, well, maybe something should have been done about it. And I would definitely have seen this differently if the person was my superior. (Interviewee, male)

Our informants revealed a few examples of incidents when young male interns had experienced “unpleasant episodes” that, looking back, may have been in the category of sexual harassment. However, while young female interns had been given a tool to address issues of sexual harassment through the #MeToo campaign, young men seemed to be in a very early phase of discovering the language and words used to address it, what they described as “unpleasant” or just “not ok”.

In the discussions about the impact of #MeToo, some expressed fear that putting spotlight on the few incidents when men are harassed or pressured, it could take the attention away from the importance of the entire #MeToo campaign. This echoes what has been described as the #MeToo movement’s absolute aim: “making the world safer for women by ensuring women are free from sexual harassment, abuse, assault and rape” (Burnett 2018). Many feminists were strong supporters of the #MeToo movement, precisely because it seemed to provide a strong antidote to centuries of dismissal of women’s voicing of existing discrimination, inequality, sexual harassment, and even sexual violence towards women. At the same time, many of them also objected to viewing women “as so fragile and vulnerable in their professional identity that they need to be protected from simple compliments for their appearance” (Monroe 2019). It makes sense to see the #MeToo movement as a complex and multifaceted entity including points of tension. Arguments associated with how the experiences of LGBTQIA communities have been largely obscured by the #MeToo campaign (see e.g. Ison 2019) are relevant here. To move forward in these discussions we find the powerful statement of Wencke Mühleisen fruitful:

It is true that harassment and sexual assault have no race, no class, no religion or nationality, but it has in fact a gender that is strongly overrepresented. (Mühleisen 2018)

Furthermore an important point to take further is the fact that sexual harassment is first of all a type of power abuse that may hit anybody independently of gender.

## **Conclusion: #MeToo – a turning point?**

#MeToo has been called the most important thing for gender equality since the women's right to vote. In Norway, the movement has breathed new life into the 22 year-old ban on sexual harassment and has driven the support for those experiencing such abuse of power at their workplace. Intense discussions on what the reactions of an employer or organization to abuse of power should be, and whether the changes that #MeToo introduced are viable, are still going on in the Nordic countries. A central objective of the #MeToo campaign was to achieve social change by highlighting the fact that sexual harassment and assault are still well-known phenomena to be addressed. Two and a half years after the introduction of #MeToo in Norway, we find that certain changes have occurred in the sports departments of Norwegian media houses. Given the relatively early stage of the movement, it is difficult at this point to draw any definitive conclusions on its 'success'. However, it is clear that the introduction of #MeToo in Norway has started a change in the mindset of the sports departments and other newsrooms and led to a situation that sexual harassment is now more and more seen as abuse of power, as it truly is. Furthermore, #MeToo initiated changes within the sports newsrooms in terms of practical planning and information flows. We found that it has become much more common to inform young journalist interns about sexual harassment and the routines to follow when reporting unacceptable behavior, increased control over the alcohol consumption in work-related settings as well as an increased awareness of not just silently accept or approve of a distressing situation. After the introduction of #MeToo, there is a wider tendency to see it as the duty of the media institution as an employer to prevent sexual harassment. Our findings support that the campaign has helped to see sexual harassment as a structural problem rather than the responsibility of each individual.

According to Djerf-Pierre's (2007) view of the gender order of the journalistic field as a reflection of the relative weight of various

forces, we saw how #MeToo brought forward questions of *who* is able to speak and be heard. Our analysis of the most vulnerable individuals in a news organization points at a continuous need to consider unwanted sexual attention and sexual harassment as a problem of the entire workplace culture, and not just of each individual. Our empirical findings show the constraints that young women in the sports media were forced to endure, as well as structural underpinnings that gain from asymmetrical power relations. Even in Norway, one of the most gender egalitarian countries in the world (UNDP 2020), temporary workers in news departments needed to develop “thick skin” in order to survive. On the face of it, our overview suggests that the #MeToo campaign has introduced a change in our awareness of sexual harassment. Yet, the interviews pay testimony to how revolutionary it still is in our society to take care of the vulnerable part first, and also that being vulnerable is not necessarily associated with gender. If the signs of a changing mindset in the news departments really mean that norms are changing, and that what was silently accepted before is no longer accepted, it can be seen as a bona fide improvement of the journalistic culture. Paraphrasing Mahatma Gandhi who said that a society's greatness is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable members, we argue that the reactions to the situation of interns in the sports departments may be seen as a pointer to the present circumstances of equal rights, also in more general terms in Norwegian news rooms.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The #MeToo campaign started as early as 2006 when US citizen Tarana Burke introduced the slogan “me too” to raise awareness of sexual abuse and solidarity among vulnerable women in poor neighborhoods. However, not many people heard of the campaign in the rest of the world, until the fall of 2017.
- <sup>2</sup> In fact, some of the interns worked during winter as well, however the majority were hired during the summer.

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## APPENDIX

### Questions from the Norwegian Union of Journalists' survey (somewhat modified to fit our purpose):

Have you been subjected to sexual harassment or abuse at work or in the course of your work or in other contexts where colleagues were gathered?

Did you witness other temps being subjected to sexual harassment or abuse?

Who was the harasser?

Have you been exposed to any of the following? Yes/Yes, more than once/No

Unwanted comments about your body, clothes, style?

Unwanted comments with sexual content?

Pictures or films of a sexual nature, that you did not want to see?

The spread of sexual rumors about you?

Sexually charged staring or other unwanted eye contact?

Unwanted phone calls or messages with sexual content?

Unwanted sexually charged physical contact?

Unwanted sexual approaches?

Requests for sexual services with promise of reward?

Requests for sexual services with threats of punishment?

Sexual assault, attempted rape or rape?

**HEIDI RØSOK-DAHL**

Assistant Professor

Department of Journalism and Media Studies

OsloMet

Postboks 4, St. Olavs plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway

heidro@oslomet.no

**KRISTIN SKARE ORGERET**

Professor, Dr. Art.

Department of Journalism and Media Studies

OsloMet

Postboks 4, St. Olavs plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway

kristin.orgeret@oslomet.no