Behind the Ads

Advertising Professionals' Perspectives on Gender Equality in the workplace

shEqual
ADVERTISING EQUALITY

Women's Health
VICTORIA

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Acknowledgement

Women's Health Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we work on, the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and acknowledge their continued Custodianship of these lands and waters. As a state-wide organisation, we also acknowledge and pay our respects to the past and present Elders of Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across Victoria. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and that we are the beneficiaries of stolen land and dispossession, which began over 230 years ago and continues today.

This paper focuses on gendered discrimination in the advertising industry. It looks at this issue through a binary lens, using gender to describe the socially constructed norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy.

This paper doesn't account for the diversity of gender identities that exist in society and the advertising industry. We know that gender diverse people, trans people and intersex people experience discrimination and harassment in society and workplaces, and are excluded from advertising content.

Through shEqual, Women's Health Victoria is committed to improving conditions for ad sector employees and for those in society who don't get to see themselves represented authentically and respectfully in advertising.

This report has been produced for Women's Health Victoria's shEqual project by Empirica Research in partnership with RMIT University.

Contents

Gender equality in advertising

Advertisements have a powerful ability to shape our beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours.

They can prime and reinforce narrow ideas about what it means to be a woman or man, and how women and men are valued in society.[1]

Research shows that advertising has historically under-represented girls and women, as well as sexualised and objectified them and depicted them in stereotyped ways. These representations help perpetuate inequalities based on gender, including significant differences between men and women in everyday life (e.g., level of education, income, employment).

Although there have been some positive developments, **persisting gender inequality and (mis)portrayals in advertising are one of the underlying influences on discrimination and violence against women**.

It is crucial for those involved in the creation of advertisements to be aware of and to take action to prevent the negative outcomes that arise from these portrayals.

1   McKenzie et al., 2019

3 Areas to Promote Gender Equality in Advertising

Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are widely held, over-simplified ideas about a group or individual based on gender.[2]

In advertising, **women** are often depicted as:

- housewives,
- mothers and
- girlfriends,

and associated with:

- appliances,
- furniture and
- products related to health, cleaning, beauty and fashion.[3]

In comparison, **men** are frequently portrayed as:

- powerful,
- independent, and
- in work settings,

and are used to advertise:

- electronic,
- automotive,
- food and beverage, and
- finance and insurance products.[4]

Even from an early age, ads that target children stereotype genders.[5]

Products are colour-coded to indicate their appropriateness for boys or girls to use, and items marketed to girls focus on appearance, nurturing and cooperative play, while those for boys concentrate on competition, dominance, independence, and physical activity.[6]

Although gender stereotyping may seem harmless, rigid gender roles and stereotyped ideas of masculinity and femininity are linked to higher rates of violence against women.[7]

Representation

Women make 70-80% of all purchasing decisions[8] but they appear significantly less than their male counterparts in advertising.[9]

Among the women who are portrayed, the characters are frequently:

- young,
- white,
- able-bodied and
- heterosexual.[10]

These unrealistic representations of women in advertising perpetuate discrimination and disadvantage.[11]

Sexualisation and objectification of women

Sexualisation occurs when a person's value comes only from their sexual appeal or behaviour to the exclusion of other characteristics.[12]

Objectification refers to when a person's body or body parts are reduced to the status of an object that is devoid of thought or feeling.[13]

Some brands argue that sexualised imagery is empowering for women — this is not the case.

The consequences of the sexualisation of girls and women include:

- eating disorders,
- lower self-esteem,
- depression,
- anxiety about appearance, and
- feelings of shame.[14]

Sexual objectification also contributes to harmful gender stereotypes that cause society to view women as less capable and less intelligent and normalise violence against girls and women.[15]

2   Our Watch et al., 2015
3   McKenzie et al., 2019
4   McKenzie et al., 2019
5   Cunningham & Macrae, 2011
6   Bush & Furnham, 2013; Kahlenberg & Hein, 2010; Let Toys Be Toys Campaign, 2015
7   McKenzie et al., 2019

8   Brennan, 2015; Coffee, 2014; Hanan, 2016; Matthes et al., 2016
9   Innovation Group & Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2017
10 e.g., Lloyds Banding Group, 2016; Matthes et al., 2016; Rubie-Davies et al., 2013
11 McKenzie et al., 2019
12 American Psychological Association, 2007
13 Szymanski et al., 2011
14 e.g., Moradi & Huan, 2008; Schaefer & Thompson, 2018
15 McKenzie et al., 2019

Gender and advertising production

More women work in creative agencies than men but women are significantly under-represented in decision-making and creative roles.[16] [17]

Overall
women 64%   35% men

Leadership
women 16%   84% men

Senior Management
women 40%   60% men

Creative and Design
women 29%   71% men
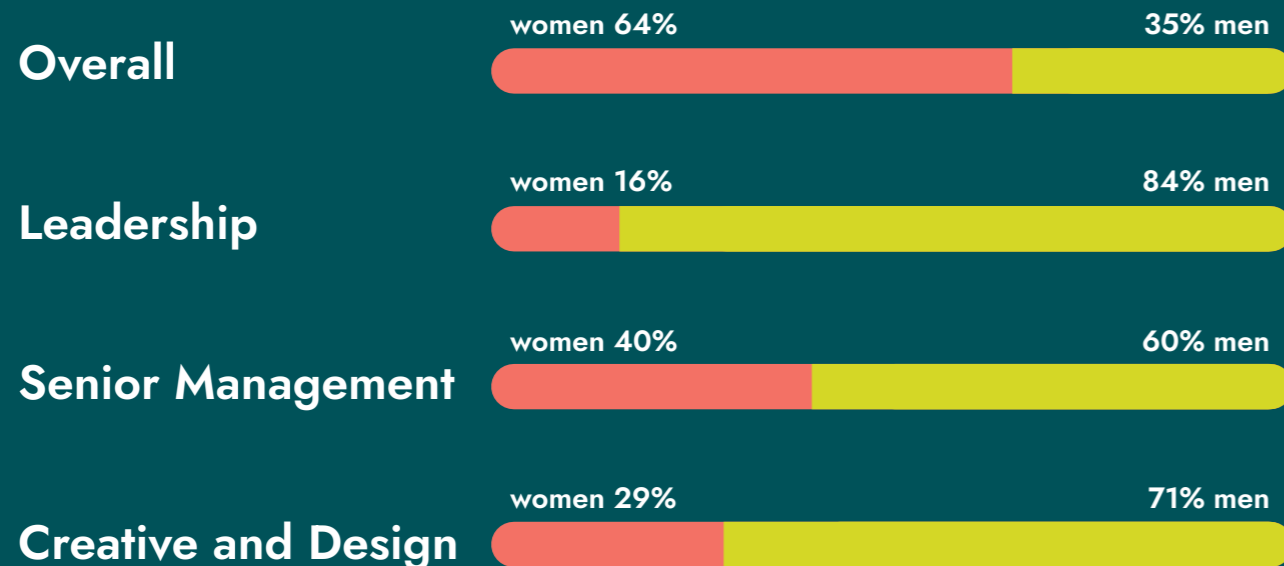
These gender imbalances in the advertising workforce are likely contributing to the narrow range of portrayals in advertising.[18]

Women's experiences of advertising workplaces

45%
of women feel vulnerable in their work because of their gender[19]

6x
more likely to experience gender discrimination than men[20]

1 in 5
employees will leave the industry due to discrimination and exclusion[21]

Having more women in leadership and creative roles does not guarantee more representative advertisements. But, achieving gender parity in the industry **by improving the experience and retention of female talent would help to create more diverse and positive representations in advertising**.

About shEqual

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is a state-wide women's health service. With funding from the Victorian Government, WHV has delivered research on the health impacts of sexist advertising including the connection between sexist ads and violence against women. WHV has engaged the advertising industry, brands, regulators and community members to tackle sexism in advertising.

In 2020, WHV launched 'shEqual', an initiative to champion gender equality in advertising, taking a 'whole of system' approach which recognises the need for action across the advertising industry, government and community.

The shEqual campaign has built a strong presence in the industry — many organisations have already taken action and pledged to stop making ads that fuel gender inequality and a culture of violence.

In 2020, shEqual published the first national framework to champion gender equality in advertising, *Seeing is Believing*, to guide their work. shEqual is also guided by *Safe and Strong*, the Victorian Government's gender equality strategy.

shEqual recognises the power that the advertising industry has to change the narrative and ensure that the ads we see every day are representative, real and empowering, rather than harmful to those who view them.

To help inform and promote this work, in 2021 shEqual commissioned a survey of Australians working in and around the advertising sector that canvassed their awareness and perceptions of gender equality in their workplaces and in the content they commission, create, and distribute.

The shEqual Survey received 598 responses, and the preliminary results of the shEqual Survey were published in late 2021. The *Snapshot Report* provided a comprehensive overview of the diversity of perspectives on gender equality in Australian advertising, the complex interaction between advertising workplaces and content, and the challenges to improving equality in the industry further (shEqual, 2021).

This report provides further analysis of the qualitative data provided by respondents and is informed by existing academic literature around gender equality in Australian advertising.

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16   64% women and 35% men, according to research by Independent Media Agencies of Australia, Al Zaidi, 2022
17   Women make up 16% of leadership, 40% of senior executive and 29% of creative and design positions according to The Agency Circle survey 15 of Australia's biggest creative agencies, Burrowes, 2016
18   McKenzie et al., 2019
19   Burrowes, 2016
20   Advertising Council Australia (2022)
21   Advertising Council Australia (2022)

5 key issues

for gender equality in the Australian advertising industry

A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER EQUALITY

Responses to the survey revealed that across the sector, there is no single agreed-upon definition of what is meant by "gender equality", and that this lack of common understanding is a barrier to progressing action on the issue.

How did the respondents define gender equality?

- Almost half of all respondents interpreted it in relation to **equality of opportunity and access**.
- **Equality of treatment** was the next most common interpretation (in particular, equal pay for the same work).
- Smaller proportions of respondents spoke about **equal rights, equal respect, equal representation, and the absence of discrimination based on gender.**

The nuances and distinctions in interpretation that were shared by participants demonstrates the challenge of promoting and advocating for "gender equality" without accompanying detail and information. People's reactions may be highly variable depending on individual understandings of the concept.

SEXIST WORKPLACE CULTURES

Sexist workplace cultures emerged from the survey responses and analysis as one of the major issues impacting progress towards gender equality in the Australian advertising industry.

Many respondents observed that **sexist workplaces were linked to the creation of sexist advertising**.

There were four main themes through which sexist workplace cultures were discussed —

- longstanding **traditions of gendered divisions of labour**,
- **lack of diverse leadership** being active on gender equality issues,
- **pushback from clients** (actual or anticipated), and
- hostile work environments.

The nature of **hostile work environments** included:

- experiencing or witnessing instances of **harassment or discrimination**, and
- workplace cultures that created numerous **obstacles to speaking up**, such as rigid hierarchies, lack of confidence, and fear of negative formal and social consequences.

UNEQUAL EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS AND SUPPORT

Respondents put forward unequal employment conditions and support as a contributing factor to gender inequality in advertising workplaces, focusing on three main issues:

- the absence of **formal policies to promote gender equality**,
- **pay inequity** and lack of transparency, and
- lack of **family friendly** policies and practices.

With respect to pay inequity, this was more emphatically identified as a problem by female respondents than male; however, male respondents were supportive of the concept of pay equity based on work and role.

SEXIST ADVERTISING CONTENT IS STILL BEING PRODUCED

Respondents pointed to the continued production of sexist advertising content as evidence that gender equality in Australian advertising has yet to be achieved. The factors that were identified as supporting this were:

- **entrenched creative practices**,
- suspicion of the **motives behind gender-equal advertising**, and
- shortcomings in **understanding what equitable representation in advertising actually means**.

Entrenched creative practices were linked with issues related to sexist workplace cultures. Unequal gender representation among agency and client decision-makers (particularly in senior creative roles) was identified as a key factor in the continued creation of sexist content.

Responses also highlighted a spectrum of views on why advertising content was or was not progressing on gender equality. While some perceived advertising as a genuine reflection of society's values (sexist or progressive), others saw improved gender representation in advertising as produced primarily to meet client or customer expectations without agencies making any accompanying internal workplace changes.

The results of the survey further revealed variation in respondents' perceptions of gender stereotyping. While most identified stereotypes as poor practice in advertising, this was seen more from a creative standpoint than with respect to its harms, particularly among male respondents.

Responses also indicated that there is room to improve the understanding that there is more to improving the representation of women than simply increasing the number of women depicted, and that the nuances of how they are portrayed are also important.

THE UNCLEAR ROLE FOR MEN IN DRIVING CHANGE

Male respondents to the shEqual Survey indicated that there is currently a **lack of clarity for men around navigating gender equality issues**, specifically:

- what gender inequality in advertising and workplaces means and the extent to which it is a serious issue, and
- what male allies are expected or 'allowed' to do in support of women and gender equality.

Overall, male respondents demonstrated a different pattern in their answers with respect to perceptions of gender equality issues. Compared with female respondents, they were less convinced of the influence of advertising, particularly in terms of downstream impacts such as the link between gender stereotypes and violence against women. They also identified less strongly with the view that advertising workplace culture influences the content it produces.

Considering the sector itself, men were more inclined to believe that gender equality is a priority in the industry in content and workplaces.

A strong theme among male respondents in relation to supporting gender equality was uncertainty about when and how to do so.

They explained that they were wary of monopolising the conversation as a man speaking on "women's issues" or felt their involvement could exacerbate situations even further, take attention away from women, or even be read as a sexist act in and of itself (causing backlash from women). Other men simply felt that they wouldn't be listened to.

This suggests that even among men who support greater gender equality, there is a real gap in terms of tools, expectations, and modelled behaviour.

PRELIMINARY INSIGHTS FROM THE SHEQUAL SURVEY

You can find more details from the first round of analysis in shEqual's (2021) Snapshot Report

Advertising content and workplace culture are intertwined

The shEqual Survey asked respondents about their perceptions and experiences of gender equality in advertising content and workplace culture separately. However, their responses made clear that these are not independent issues.

67% of respondents said that industry and workplace culture has a "very" or "extremely" strong influence on the advertising content that workplaces produce.

Broad agreement on advertising's ability to influence society

Regardless of their age, gender, or industry perspective, over 90% of respondents agreed that "advertising has a powerful influence on society".

However, **female respondents were more convinced than male respondents of the power and influence of advertising** (64% of female respondents strongly agreeing and 29% somewhat agreeing, in comparison to 49% and 40% of male respondents, respectively).

More female than male respondents recognised the connection between gender stereotyping and violence against women. 77% of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "advertising that sexualises and objectifies women contributes to violence against women", compared with 65% of male respondents.

As Figure 1 illustrates, if advertising content influences society, and if advertising workplace culture influences the advertising content produced, it is reasonable to infer a cyclical relationship.

Figure 1: Cycle of influence between advertising commissioners/creators, advertising content, and society

ADVERTISING CONTENT

Advertising containing gender stereotypes and other problematic portrayals of women reinforces and perpetuates beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that limit the role and value of women within the society in which it is disseminated.

92% of respondents agreed that advertising is a powerful influence on society.

ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

Advertising workplaces that are gender unequal (e.g. low representation of women in senior or creative roles) are likely to commission and create advertising that reflects that gender bias.

SOCIETY

Advertising workplaces are populated by the same members of society who are receiving and influenced by advertising containing gender stereotypes and other problematic portrayals of women.

Wide variety of perspectives on the state of gender equality within the Australian advertising industry

Advertising professionals do not believe gender equality is currently being prioritised in advertising workplaces or content. This view was held by significantly higher proportions of women than men.

Overall less than two in five respondents agreed that the advertising industry prioritises gender equality in advertising content, or as a workplace issue.

There was considerable disagreement between men and women regarding gender equality as a priority for the advertising industry:

54% of male respondents agreed that it is **prioritised as a workplace issue**, while only 29% of female respondents agreed.

47% of male respondents agreed that the industry is **prioritising gender equality in advertising content**, while only 32% of female respondents felt the same way.

Action on gender equality —
What is expected, and who is responsible?

Survey results indicated differing views about the extent and effectiveness of current action on gender equality in advertising, with some respondents perceiving that gender equality initiatives in advertising have been superficial or tokenistic.

In relation to responsibility for addressing gender equality in advertising, most respondents (83%) said agency management should have "a lot of" responsibility, followed by client/brand management at 76%, industry bodies at 75%, and government at 67%.

Only 47% of respondents believed that agency management is doing enough.

Who should take responsibility for gender equality action?

(83%) (47%) Agency management
(76%) (49%) Client/brand management
(75%) (42%) Industry bodies
(67%) (37%) Government

■ Respondents believe they should have a lot of responsibility
■ Respondents believe they are doing enough
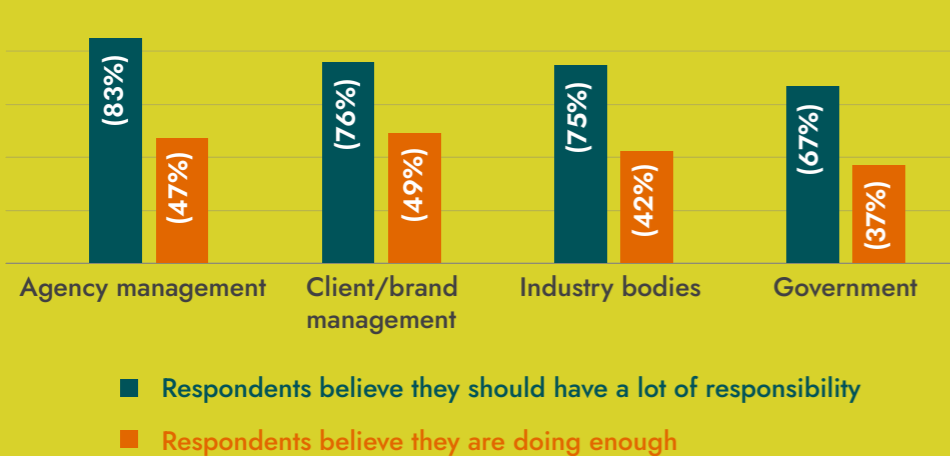
Complex dynamics prevent more people in the industry from speaking up

A significant minority of both women and men expressed concerns about raising gender equality issues at work, but for different reasons.

Women feared or had experienced negative consequences of speaking up while it was common for men to feel like it wasn't their place to do so.

- 38% of female respondents who had hesitated to speak up about **gender equality issues in advertising content** felt worried about negative consequences from doing so (compared with 19% of male respondents in the same position).

- 46% of female respondents who had hesitated to speak up about **gender equality issues in the workplace** felt worried about negative consequences from doing so (compared with 17% of male respondents in the same position).

- More female respondents had **experienced negative consequences as a result of speaking up** about gender equality in content or the workplace — 29% and 30% of female respondents, respectively, compared with 14% and 12% of male respondents.

- For male respondents, the primary barrier to speaking up was a **lack of seniority** or doubting their position or the appropriateness to do so.

Women want more support from men on gender equality

While men were uncertain about speaking up, women in the industry said they want men to support gender equality more actively.

82% of respondents said they would be "very" or "extremely" encouraged to speak up about gender equality issues by witnessing others speaking up, and by more men actively supporting gender equality.

In their open text responses, many female respondents spoke about the **importance of male involvement, education, advocacy and action to achieve real change** in gender equality in Australian advertising.

A desire for concrete action to address gender equality, rather than more talk

Advertising professionals of all genders called for strong action on gender equality, with a focus on transparency and accountability.

- To achieve progress on gender equality in advertising content, respondents believed the strongest impacts would come from **external pressure from clients and brands** (81% said this would be "very" or "extremely" impactful) and from **consumers** (74%), followed by stronger regulation (64%), training (59%) and industry initiatives (58%).

- To improve gender equality within advertising workplaces, the suggested actions perceived to have the greatest impact were **transparent accountability for sexist, bullying or discriminatory behaviour** (82% felt this would be "very" or "extremely" impactful), pay transparency (75%), and **mentoring and support for women in the industry** (75%).

Likely due to their stronger perceptions of gender inequality in the industry, female respondents indicated stronger support for more action-based solutions such as **pay audits** and **reviews of content** and **work processes**.

While setting **gender targets or quotas at senior levels** was the least popular of the suggested actions, it was strongly supported by almost twice as many female respondents than male (62% female compared with 36% male).

There is a high level of support among all advertising professionals for tackling gender pay discrimination. **Ninety-four per cent of female respondents, and 84% of male respondents, said that they would "strongly" or "somewhat" support their employer undertaking a pay audit to identify any gender pay discrimination**.

Lack of family-friendly workplace practices and culture is a major barrier to gender equality in advertising

Throughout the survey, a strong theme emerged from women's responses regarding **the impact that starting a family had had on their career progression**.

Female respondents reported being passed over for professional development and management positions, being demoted on return from parental leave, and seeing their pay suffer.

Both male and female respondents expressed the view that advertising workplace structures and culture (in particular, long and often unpredictable hours) present **a major barrier to work-life balance** — especially juggling family responsibilities — and gender equality in the workplace. Respondents highlighted the i**mportance of parental leave and flexible working arrangements for people of all genders.**

Insights from this survey provide learnings for shEqual and guide their ongoing role in supporting the ad industry.

shEqual can provide training sessions and resources that build capacity of the sector regarding gender equality. They can work with leaders to drive policy and practice changes that promote gender equality in the workplace and in ad content.

shEqual can continue to contribute to the body of research around gender equality in the Australian ad sector, as well as use their history and connections to work with the industry to garner wide reaching action in gender equality.

SCOPING REVIEW

PAST RESEARCH ON GENDER EQUALITY IN ADVERTISING

This scoping review outlines academic research published from 1998 to 2022, primarily from the fields of advertising, marketing, media and communications, and sociology.

The research is broadly international, produced across a range of cultural contexts, including the United States, United Kingdom, France, Greece, Chile and Turkey, as well as covering more global studies.

Academic studies focusing specifically on the Australian context were not available, however insights from comparable regions are broadly translatable. Relevant industry-based Australian research is cited in this review as well as in the Findings and Discussions.

This review provides an overview of some key insights from academic research relating to gender equality and advertising to enrich the analysis of the shEqual survey results.

Gender, advertising workplaces, and impacts on women in advertising

Advertising workplaces are highly gendered and this shapes the culture and practices across the industry.[22]

These working environments are characterised by hierarchical imbalances, with men holding the majority of senior positions[23] and women dominating the lower rungs of advertising organisations.[24] The women who do advance to leadership positions in advertising are more likely to be in accounts management or media — not the creative department[25] — and this is recognised as a global problem.[26]

Indeed, little progress has been made in the past 30 years towards gender equality amongst the upper echelons of the advertising industry's creative ranks, where women are still largely afforded token status.[27]

This is reinforced by the prevalence of male gatekeepers in creative departments,[28] fostering barriers that impede progress and job satisfaction for women, including occupational stereotypes and a lack of female visibility.[29]

Importantly, these gendered dynamics also constrain the recruitment and retention of junior level female talent — despite the fact that women are more likely to graduate from creative advertising, art, and design programs.[30]

In Australia, women represent 56% of creative agency employees, but only 33% of agency leadership positions[31] with a gender pay gap of 25% for creatives and 23% across the industry as a whole, compared with 14% as the national average across all industries.[32]

The COVID-19 pandemic has further negatively impacted women's career progression in the industry or led women to leave or contemplate leaving the industry.[33]

22   Maclaran & Catterall, 2000; Middleton & Turnbull, 2021
23   Alvesson, 1998; Miliopoulou & Kapareliotis, 2021
24   Grow & Deng, 2014
25   Mallia & Windels, 2018
26   Grow et al., 2012
27   Mallia & Windels, 2018
28   Windels & Lee, 2012
29   Grow & Broyles, 2011
30   Ellis, 2021

31   Advertising Council Australia, 2021; Mavens, 2022
32   B&T & HoneyComb, 2019
33   UN Women, 2020, 2021

Masculine advertising workplace cultures influence advertising content

Advertising workplace cultures — especially creative departments — are marked by highly masculine codes and atmospheres.[34] Examples of this include: male power, exclusionary practices, gender-bound hiring and promotion practices, sexual harassment and work/life imbalance frame advertising workplace cultures and negatively impact women working in the industry.[35]

Commonly described as 'machismo',[36] 'fraternity culture',[37] or a 'locker room' environment,[38] the masculine codes and atmospheres characteristic of advertising agencies create deep and enduring gendered inequalities in the workplace for women.[39] Indeed, this culture of hegemonic masculinity is reportedly so pervasive that it persists regardless of how many women are present, or even when the workplace is run by a woman.[40]

Bolstering and maintaining this culture are 'mechanisms of inequality', specifically homogeneity, homosociability and heterosexuality.[41]

Homogeneity refers to the importance of 'fitting in' with colleagues, including styles of management, presentation and dress, but also adhering to the rules of the corporate battlefield such as being highly competitive, political, and prioritizing the "career". This manifests in advertising agencies as demands for 'presenteeism', a lack of work-life balance and prejudice against working parents, especially mothers.[42]

Homosociability includes formal old boys' networks; informal male-dominated social interactions in offices, meetings, hallways, pubs, restaurants and strip clubs; and humour and banter. These result in forms of socialising, socialisation, communication and rituals that include men and exclude women — especially from the most prestigious positions in ad agencies.[43] Notably, homosociability is particularly powerful in constructing and maintaining a gendered labour market.[44]

Heterosexuality covers the role of sexuality, especially heterosexuality at work, and consists of a range of sexualized workplace interactions between women and men. This manifests in various ways, including pervasive sexual harassment[45] and an enduring 'motherhood penalty'[46] that foster unsafe and inequitable workplaces.[47]

For women, negotiating the masculine cultures of advertising workplaces is often fraught. Many women in the industry who have risen to leadership positions report their success as dependent on conforming to the codes established by the masculine culture of the workplace.[48]

These are termed 'faking' behaviours,[49] which women engage in to both fit in and stand out in the highly gendered advertising industry. This includes adopting the male 'voice' in their creative work, acting and sounding like 'one of the boys', and prioritising their careers, either by remaining childless or having a stay-at-home spouse and/or an around-the-clock nanny.[50]

These 'rules' or cultural codes influence all aspects of women's career trajectories from hiring to promotion[51] and can cause internal conflicts, driving women to leave or become disillusioned with the industry.[52]

Indeed, the advertising workplace is often described by women through metaphors of war,[53] namely a combative work environment in which women (especially creatives) are held to impossible standards of masculinity and femininity, with their performance suffering as a result.[54]

One rationale as to why such masculine cultures persist in advertising has been a traditional view of the work as more feminine,[55] with 'soft skills' such as critical thinking, persuasion, interpersonal communication and presentation considered an important component of success in the industry.[56]

This 'feminization' of the work and client relationships has been found to strain men's gender identity, triggering a structuring of workplace gender relations and interactions that function to restore men's feelings of masculinity.[57]

Importantly, these 'locker room' cultures have implications for the work that is produced within agencies,[58] often resulting in the 'hyper-sexism' of ads made with clients' approval.[59]

Creatives develop the type of work that is validated and rewarded by the wider social system, including institutional norms that promote hegemonic masculine discourses and pressure across a range of marketplace actors such as brand clients, media agents, colleagues and other industry professionals.[60]

Advertising workplace cultures also affect the type of work women are supposed to produce, their ability to sell work and the types of assignments they receive.[61]

Indeed, there are 'unspoken rules in the creative game' that impact the work women do, how they do it and the environment in which they work.[62] Specifically, women report their exclusion from working on certain accounts, particularly 'masculine' products, like beer and cars.[63]

This contributes to a 'pink ghetto', in which women are assigned accounts for 'female products', for example menstrual, food and fashion products, which are traditionally excluded from awards and industry praise, and are associated with lower salaries and recognition.[64]

34   Mallia & Windels, 2018; Mensa & Grow, 2021; Nixon, 2003; Stuhlfaut, 2011
35   Mensa and Grow, 2019
36   Mensa & Grow, 2021
37   Grow et al., 2012
38   Gregory, 2009
39   Crewe & Wang, 2018
40   Mallia, 2009; Miliopoulou and Kapareliotis 2021
41   Gregory, 2016
42   Broyles & Grow, 2008; Mallia & Windels, 2018
43   Gregory, 2009
44   Gregory, 2009; Miliopoulou & Kapareliotis, 2021
45   Gurrieri & Hoffman, 2019; The 3% Movement, 2022; Thompson-Whiteside & Turnbull, 2021
46   Miliopoulou & Kapareliotis, 2021
47   Grow & Deng, 2021
48   Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2018; Topić, 2020
49   Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021
50   Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2018
51   Grow & Broyles, 2011
52   Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021
53   Thompson-Whiteside, 2021
54   Grow & Broyles, 2011; Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021; Topić, 2020; Windels & Lee, 2012
55   Alvesson, 1998
56   Windels et al., 2013
57   Alvesson, 1998
58   Mallia & Windels, 2018
59   Gregory, 2009
60   Tuncay Zayer & Coleman, 2015; Windels & Lee, 2012
61   Windels & Mallia, 2015
62   Grow & Broyles, 2011
63   Broyles & Grow, 2008
64   Grow et al., 2012; Mallia, 2009; Miliopoulou & Kapareliotis, 2021

Sexist advertising and its social impacts

The sexist advertising that is produced within these cultures can take a range of forms, including: gender-based discrimination and vilification; gender roles and stereotypes; unrealistic and unhealthy body ideals; sexualisation and objectification; and representations of violence against women.[65]

Discrimination refers to 'unfair or less favourable treatment' and vilification to content which 'humiliates, intimidates or incites hatred, contempt or ridicule'.[66]

Gender roles and stereotypes are extensively used across advertising, including that of the homemaker/housewife, sexual object and decorative object of beauty - with women rarely featured in sporting roles or at work.[67] While the changing role of men is garnering more interest,[68] women continue to be portrayed in traditional or decorative roles[69] and are frequently depicted as subordinate to men.[70]

Sexist advertising content also includes portrayals of unrealistic and unhealthy body ideals and sexualisation and objectification,[71] reinforcing unhealthy beauty standards and norms as well as limited possibilities for women's identities that are constrained to their physicality.

Representations of violence against women — often depicted in shocking or controversial advertising — construct women as sexualised teases to be controlled and conquered. This undermines the status of women, promotes ambiguous and adverse understandings of women's subjectivities and violates their right to be portrayed in a manner that respects their safety.[72]

Compounding these sexist representations in advertising are the 'missing women' in advertisements, namely women who are career-oriented or engaged in non-traditional activities, women of colour, larger bodied and over 40.[73]

Recent findings from the Unstereotype Metric which surveyed women across four countries highlight that ageism remains an issue and minority groups rarely see themselves in advertising.[74]

Sexist advertising influences and drives a range of negative impacts across society that begin in childhood and continue through to adulthood. These include the reinforcement of gender stereotypes that limit choices, opportunities and aspirations, negatively influencing physical and mental health and well-being and attitudes towards and perceptions of women.[75]

In operating in accordance with a male-dominated power structure, such marketing moreover produces the symbolic annihilation of women.[76]

Activist movements to address sexism in advertising and the need for institutional change

In response to the gendered inequalities that pervade both advertising workplaces and the content produced, various activist movements have formed to address sexism and advertising.

Some movements are larger and global, such as TimesUp/Advertising which formed in 2018 to fight against industry-wide patterns of sexual harassment and discrimination[77] and the 3% movement which formed in 2012 to address the under-representation of female creative directors in advertising.[78]

A range of grassroots and feminist collectives have organised — often through social media[79] — to challenge and respond to advertising elites and organizations.[80] This has included consumer based groups set up to challenge the legitimacy of gender stereotyping and the objectification of women in advertising, such as the UK based group 'No More Page 3' (#NMP3).[81]

Internationally and in Australia industry-backed groups and movements have also been organised through social media, including #WomenNotObjects and #SeeHer[82] as well as groups such as Les Lionnes,[83] Creative Equals,[84] the Unstereotype Alliance,[85] and Mad&Women.[86]

In Australia groups such as The Aunties,[87] MIA: Mums in Ads, Fck the Cupcakes,[88] Assisterhood, The Mavens, Never Not International Women's Day,[89] and shEqual have formed since 2020.

These movements offer important ways of disrupting business-as usual and providing alternative narratives, however broader institutional support is still required to drive change.[90]

65 Gurrieri & Hoffman, 2019
66 Australian Association of National Advertisers, 2018
67 Eisend, 2019; Mager & Helgeson, 2011; Matthes et al., 2016
68 Grau & Zotos, 2016
69 Zotos & Tsichla, 2014
70 Mager & Helgeson, 2011
71 Ward, 2016; Zotos & Tsichla, 2014
72 Gurrieri et al., 2016
73 Shinoda et al., 2021
74 Unstereotype Alliance, 2021
75 McKenzie et al., 2019
76 Gurrieri, 2021

77 Lambiase & Bronstein, 2020
78 The 3% Movement, 2022
79 Middleton et al., 2022
80 Middleton & Turnbull, 2021
81 McCarthy & Glozer, 2022
82 Association of National Advertisers, 2022; Gurrieri & Hoffman, 2019
83 Thompson-Whiteside & Turnbull, 2021
84 Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021
85 Advertisers, 2019; UNWomen, 2021
86 UNESCO, 2021
87 The Aunties, 2022
88 Green, 2021
89 shEqual, 2022
90 Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021

HOW THE SHEQUAL SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED AND ANALYSED

PART ONE: METHODOLOGY

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The aim of the shEqual Survey was to explore the awareness and perceptions of gender issues from the perspective of those who work in and around Australia's advertising industry.

This included asking for their thoughts on how gender issues can be remedied and examined issues of gender equality in the workplace and in advertising content.

While gender is not the only dimension through which inequality exists in the advertising industry, it is the dimension that was the focus of the shEqual Survey. Some respondents did provide answers in their own words that considered other areas of equality; however, the questionnaire did not seek to explore and understand these matters explicitly.

Survey objectives

- Measure the **understanding and perceived importance of gender equality** (both broadly and in advertising) among those in and around the industry

- Understand the **beliefs about who is responsible for promoting gender equality** in advertising

- Establish participation in and the perceived effectiveness of different **initiatives that aim to promote gender equality**

- Understand the motivations and barriers to **act and promote equal representation of women** both in the ads created and the workplace

Data collection

How we recruited for the shEqual Survey

Several channels were used to invite respondents to contribute to the ShEqual Survey:

1. shEqual and Empirica Research distributed the survey to their **industry contacts via direct email approach** and requested for contacts to distribute the survey to their own networks.

2. shEqual and Empirica Research also promoted the survey on their **social channels: Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn**.

3. The survey was promoted on the **Campaign Brief website** for the duration of data collection.

4. Respondents were sourced via an **online research panel, Dynata**. This online research panel cohort was included in the data collection methodology to ensure that respondents not already engaged with shEqual and gender equality issues were also included, increasing the balance of views collected in the survey.

Table 1: shEqual Survey respondents by recruitment channel

Recruitment channel	Number of respondents
shEqual supporters EDM	113
shEqual stakeholders — reference group members and key contacts	83
shEqual supporters social	55
shEqual Social Media (Instagram and LinkedIn) — organic and paid ads	40
shEqual website	40
shEqual EDM	2
Total shEqual	**333**
Dynata research panel	164
Total Panel	164
Campaign Brief — Media Release	65
Campaign Brief — Banner Ad	5
Total Campaign Brief	70
Empirica contacts and social media	31
Total Other	**265**
GRAND TOTAL	**598**

Participant demographics

To participate, respondents needed to be currently or previously employed in a role involving either:

- the development, creation, production or distribution of advertising or communications content, or
- the buying or commissioning of advertising or communications content.

These roles were specified to include such associated work as marketing or brand managers, field marketers, media owners, and tech vendors.

Overall, **598 participants** answered enough questions to be included in analysis and reporting and 505 (84%) progressed all the way to the end of the survey.

The analysis in this report is based on the total number of participants answering each question, which decreased throughout the survey. Some questions were only answered by subsets of participants based on their answers to previous questions.

As shown in Table 2, **58% of respondents to the shEqual Survey were female and 41% were male** (1% self-identified or preferred not to disclose their gender). This is close to the gender distribution estimated in other studies of the advertising industry in Australia (the 2021 Advertising Council Australia Salary Survey estimated 56% of advertising workers were female, the 2018 Agency Circle Creative Diversity + Inclusion Survey estimated 59% female).

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents were aged 30 - 49, with the remainder roughly evenly divided between those younger and older.

Reflecting the importance of shEqual's contacts to recruitment efforts, the responses had **a strong representation (81%) from those working or having worked on the 'agency side' of advertising** — those developing, creating, and producing advertising content.

The majority (84%) were **currently involved in the industry**.

Most respondents were based in NSW (55%) and Victoria (31%) with the remaining 14% from other states and territories or overseas.

Eleven per cent identified as being from a **culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) background**, 10% as **LGBTQI+**, 3% as **living with a disability**, and 2% as **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander**.

Table 2: Demographics of shEqual Survey respondents

		n = 598	%
Gender	Female	349	58%
	Male	245	41%
	Self-identified	3	1%
	Undisclosed	1	<1%
Age	18 - 29	111	19%
	30 - 49	394	66%
	50+	93	16%
Perspective	Agency	486	81%
	Client	112	19%
Recency	Currently involved with industry	503	84%
	Previously involved with industry	95	16%
Location	New South Wales	323	55%
	Victoria	179	31%
	Queensland	26	4%
	South Australia	24	4%
	Western Australia	22	4%
	Tasmania	3	1%
	ACT	2	<1%
	Northern Territory	1	<1%
	Outside Australia	15	3%
	Not specified	3	1%
Intersectional Identity	Cutural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)	66	11%
	LGBTQI+	60	10%
	Living with a disability	19	3%
	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	9	2%
	Other	10	2%

Figure 2 below shows the similarities and differences in **age, workplace and type of work** undertaken between male and female participants.

While both genders were weighted more heavily towards young ages, this was much more pronounced among female participants: in fact, **women aged 25 - 39 years were the largest group of respondents at 36%**.

While the number of female and male respondents who reported working for various types of organisations pertaining to advertising was similar, there were notable differences in the types of work they reported doing.

Significantly more female than male respondents reported working or having worked in **client services** (28% of female respondents compared with 17% of male respondents), and a significantly lower number reported doing or having done **creative work** (36% compared with 42%).

The questionnaire

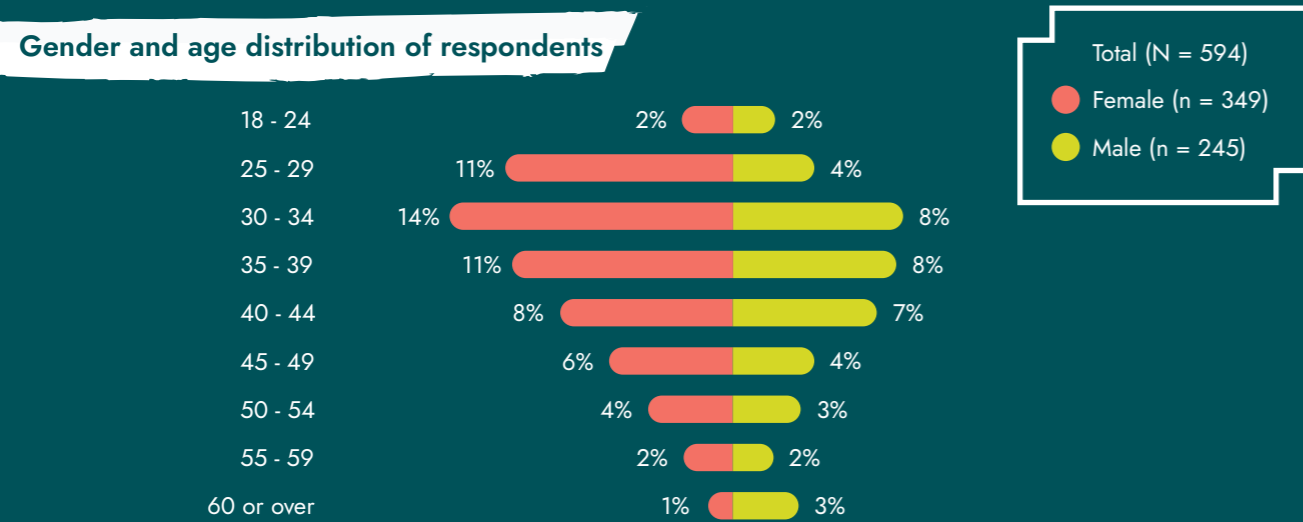The shEqual Survey comprised **42 questions about gender equality in Australian advertising workplaces and content**. The average time taken to complete the survey was 16 minutes.
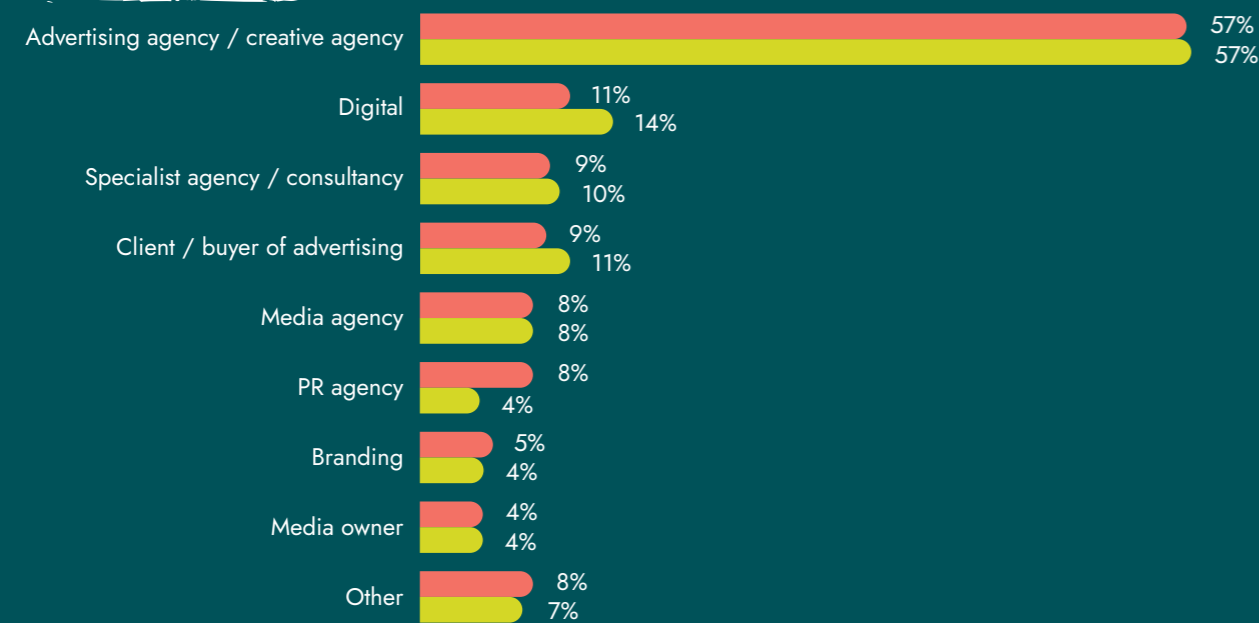
Survey data analysis

The shEqual Survey data was collected using Qualtrics. On completion of fieldwork, data was exported to SPSS for analysis via cross-tabulations. Free text questions were coded manually in Microsoft Excel.

Figure 2: Age, workplace and type of work by gender among shEqual Survey respondents

Gender and age distribution of respondents

Total (N = 594)
● Female (n = 349)
● Male (n = 245)

Age	Female	Male
18 - 24	2%	2%
25 - 29	11%	4%
30 - 34	14%	8%
35 - 39	11%	8%
40 - 44	8%	7%
45 - 49	6%	4%
50 - 54	4%	3%
55 - 59	2%	2%
60 or over	1%	3%

Types of work done by organisation

	Female	Male
Advertising agency / creative agency	57%	57%
Digital	11%	14%
Specialist agency / consultancy	9%	10%
Client / buyer of advertising	9%	11%
Media agency	8%	8%
PR agency	8%	4%
Branding	5%	4%
Media owner	4%	4%
Other	8%	7%

Types of work done by individual

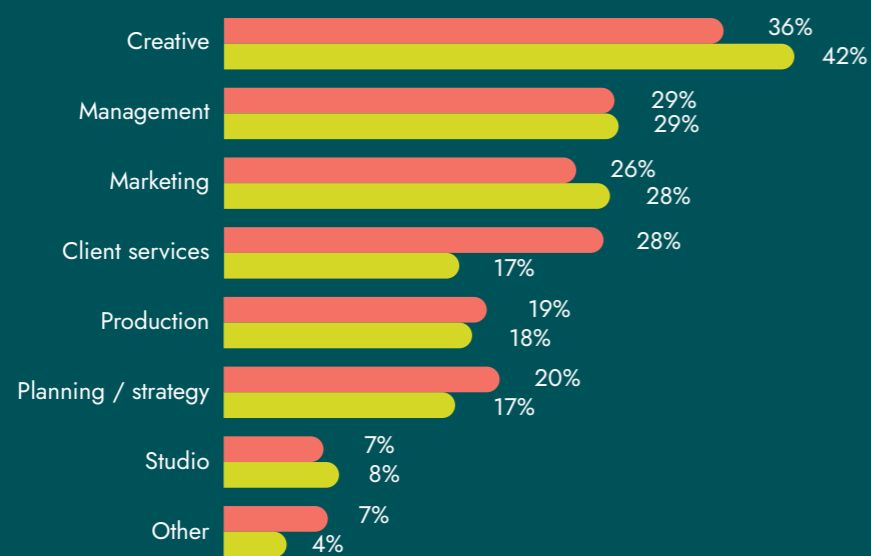|	Female	Male
Creative	36%	42%
Management	29%	29%
Marketing	26%	28%
Client services	28%	17%
Production	19%	18%
Planning / strategy	20%	17%
Studio	7%	8%
Other	7%	4%

Table 3: ShEqual Survey structure

Section 1	Classification questions and demographics
	• Connection to advertising industry and types of roles experienced
	• Age, gender, state/territory, intersectional identity
	• Seniority in industry
Section 2	**Attitudes and beliefs about gender equality in advertising in Australia**
	• Definition/interpretation of gender equality
	• Status of gender equality in Australian advertising workplaces and content
	• Impacts of representation of women in advertising
	• Connection between advertising workplaces and content produced
	• Responsibility for promoting gender equality in Australian advertising — who is responsible and are they doing enough
Section 3	**Experiences with gender equality issues in advertising in Australia**
	• Comfort with bringing up and confronting gender equality issues
	• Participation in activities to promote gender equality, and perceived effectiveness
	• Experience and perception of barriers to speaking up about gender equality in advertising workplaces and content
	• Potential facilitators of speaking up
	• Level of support for hypothetical employer-backed initiatives to promote gender equality
Section 4	**Creating change**
	• Anticipated impact of hypothetical initiatives to improve gender equality in Australian advertising
	• Suggestions of other potentially impactful changes
Section 5	**Final comments and closing**
	• Final comments — an invitation to participants to say anything they liked before exiting the survey
	• End of survey

PART TWO: QUALITATIVE DATA

ANALYSIS OF THE FREE-TEXT RESPONSES

While the shEqual Survey mostly contained closed-ended questions, 10 questions gave participants an opportunity to provide free-text, open-ended answers expanding on their opinions and experiences.

These free-text questions were not compulsory, so the high completion rates throughout the survey point to a highly engaged audience.

The free-text questions are shown in Table 4, along with the number of responses and percentage of total respondents per question.

Table 4: Free text questions and response rates

Question		Eligible to respond	# responses	% of eligible respondents who provided an answer	Average wordcount per respondent answering
Q2.1	The purpose of this survey is to explore attitudes around gender equality in the Australian advertising industry. So, to get started, please tell us what 'gender equality' means to you. This doesn't have to be specific to the advertising industry — we're most interested in your general definition of the term.	598	566	95%	18
Q2.3a	*[IF Q2.2 'agree' that Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue]* Please tell us why you believe that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue: Remember, your responses are anonymous.	229	129	56%	26
Q2.3b	*[IF Q2.2 'disagree' that Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue]* Please tell us why you do not believe that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue: Remember, your responses are anonymous.	234	105	45%	43
Q2.3c	*[IF Q2.2 'agree' that Australian advertising industry prioritises addressing gender equality in advertising content]* Please tell us why you feel that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality in advertising content: Remember, your responses are anonymous.	235	109	46%	23

Question		Eligible to respond	# responses	% of eligible respondents who provided an answer	Average wordcount per respondent answering
Q2.3d	[IF Q2.2 'disagree' that Australian advertising industry prioritises addressing gender equality in advertising content] Please tell us why you do not feel that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality in advertising content: Remember, your responses are anonymous.	226	122	54%	41
Q3.2a	[If Q3.2 'supported a workplace initiative'] What kind of workplace initiatives have you supported?	291	233	80%	12
Q3.6a	[If have had a previous negative experience in Q3.4 OR Q3.5] Please tell us about your negative experience speaking up about gender equality. Your responses are completely confidential.	158	128	81%	38
Q3.6b	[If have felt it wasn't their place in Q3.4 OR Q3.5] Why did you feel that it wasn't your place to speak up about gender equality? Your responses are completely confidential.	212	159	75%	22
Q4.3	What other actions — if any — do you believe are necessary to improve gender equality in advertising?	505	264	52%	23
Q5.1	We know this can be a tricky topic to talk about and to think about, so we really thank you for your time in taking this survey. If you have any other comments or stories to share about gender equality, please type them in here. Otherwise, scroll to the bottom of the screen to submit your survey.	505	100	20%	37

Qualitative analysis methodology

The analysis of the free-text responses was informed by five analytical frameworks relevant to the Australian advertising industry and the survey content. You can find out more about these frameworks in Appendix B.

The analysis process step-by-step

1. Complete a scoping review of existing academic literature about gender equality in the advertising industry.

2. Review the themes that emerged from the initial analysis of the free-text questions in the shEqual Survey.

3. Use a selection of analytical frameworks to enrich analysis of the advertising workplace, advertising content and gendered inequalities. The frameworks were chosen by considering the Scoping Review, the available data and shEqual's goals for the report. A description of each framework is found in Appendix B.

4. Coding of the target questions using the frameworks to guide and inform the analysis:

   a. The data was exported to Excel, where the responses to each question were read in full.

   b. For each question, responses were then hand-coded in Excel, considering each response in relation to relevant concepts underscoring the analytical frameworks.

5. Once the coding in Excel was complete, the data was uploaded to Qualtrics for further analysis.

6. The research team conceptualised and refined higher order themes based on their interpretations of the themes emerging from the responses and the themes identified in the framework-based coding.

7. The thematic analysis identified key issues for the next phase of analysis, using the quantitative and qualitative results to determine the findings of the analysis.

8. Finally, the findings are further explored in relation to the academic research in the Discussion Points. These discussions also identify the significance and contributions of the data to understanding gender equality in advertising. From this, the conclusions and recommendations for actions are drawn.

Selecting questions for analysis

Six questions were selected for analysis after considering the Scoping Review, shEqual's primary objectives for the report, and available data.

These questions were chosen because they addressed fundamental aspects of gender inequality issues in Australian advertising:

- interpretations of gender equality itself,
- perspectives on factors influencing gender in/equality in advertising workplaces and content,
- perspectives on how gender in/equality is manifested in advertising workplaces and content, and
- challenges to making progress on the issue.

Note on selected quotes in Findings and Discussion

Where quotes are displayed, the age and gender of respondents has been indicated, as well as whether they are speaking from the perspective of advertising development/creation/production ('agency'), or commissioning advertising ('client').

If a respondent indicated that they have experience working on both sides of advertising, they are attributed as 'agency/client' or 'client/agency' depending on the area in which they reported having the most experience.

Some of the quotes displayed have been cleaned to correct obvious spelling or grammatical errors.

Edited quotes are marked with an * at the end of their attribution.

Table 5: Free-text questions selected for additional analysis

	Question
1	Q2.1 What does gender equality mean to you?
2	Q2.3a Please tell us why you believe that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue.
3	Q2.3b Please tell us why you do not believe that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue.
4	Q2.3c Please tell us why you feel that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality in advertising content.
5	Q2.3d Please tell us why you do not feel that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality in advertising content.
6	Q3.6b Why did you feel that it wasn't your place to speak up about gender equality?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER EQUALITY

"We need a clearer narrative on what gender equality means. Is it equality in the classical sense - equal opportunity. Or is it equity - equal outcomes. This is where it gets complicated and messy and political, but it's important to explore. I feel like the two things can become conflated, and prevent me from being part of the solution at times"

Male 25-29 years, agency

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to **describe what gender equality meant to them**. Their responses were categorised according to how they discussed gender equality. This allowed common themes and definitions to emerge and be measured. A response could be assigned to more than one category if it covered multiple themes.

The majority of responses focused on personal interpretations and definitions of concepts surrounding equality: of opportunity, of treatment, of rights, of respect, and of representation.

A minority discussed equality as the absence of inequality or discrimination.

In general, the various interpretations of gender equality were expressed by a similar number of female and male respondents.

Nearly all respondents (566) answered this question. Almost half of respondents (46%) talked about gender equality in terms of **equality of opportunity and access**.

Many stated that people should be considered for the same roles and the same career progression regardless of gender. This interpretation was least common among men aged 50 and older.

About a quarter of responses (26%) talked about gender equality in relation to **equality of treatment**.

Equal pay/reward for the same work, was specifically mentioned by a further 27% of respondents, more often by female respondents than male (34% vs 17%).

Other 'types' of equality mentioned by respondents included **equal rights** (14%), **equal respect** (9%) and **equal representation** (7% overall, but more commonly mentioned by younger than older respondents).

A small number of responses framed equality in terms of the **absence** of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping based on gender; or referenced **fairness**.

Some responses simply provided variations on the statement that **'everyone is equal'**, without elaborating any further. This style of response was particularly common among older male respondents (27% of those aged 50

or older), compared with only 12% of similarly-aged female respondents, and only 6% of male respondents between the ages of 18 — 34.

Lastly, rather than providing a definition of gender equality, some responses detailed people's perceptions of the issue. This included explaining why gender equality is or is not an issue, what they believe underpins gender inequality, or what is necessary for it to be overcome.

Gender equality held a range of different meanings for participants, as the quote above shows. However, equal opportunity for all genders was the most common interpretation of gender equality. The implications of these findings are explored in the Discussion.

What does gender equality mean to you?

46%
equality of opportunity and access

27%
equal pay or reward for the same work

26%
equality of treatment

14%
equal rights

9%
equal respect

7%
equal representation

Issue One - Discussion Points

It is not surprising that respondents hold a variety of views about **what gender equality means**.

Existing academic research highlights that **gender equality is not openly discussed or practised in the advertising industry** and the results from the ShEqual Survey added further detail to this issue, revealing how ineffective discussions in the workplace are when it comes to gender equality.

- *Equal opportunity* was the most common interpretation of gender equality by advertising practitioners. This is reflected in academic research into the formation and growth of **activist movements across the advertising industry**. These movements seek to promote equal opportunities for women, advocating for women as creative directors, as working mothers or through initiatives such as support and mentoring systems.

- The dismissive and minimising definitions of gender equality, often given by men, is a reflection of the **masculine codes and atmospheres** that exist in Australia's adverting agencies. These workplaces manifest gendered inequalities in the advertising industry.

- There is **a need for better gender training across the advertising industry t**o ensure that a common language and effective understanding of gender (in)equality in advertising practice and workplace cultures can be fostered.

  This training would enable **norms, practices and structures that are barriers to gender equality in the sector to be identified**, and allow for a **clearer and more consistent understanding of gender equality**. Additionally, this will equip advertising practitioners with the **tools and strategies needed to promote gender equality across the industry**.

ISSUE TWO

SEXIST WORKPLACE CULTURES

"For as long as I've been in the industry, I've felt a power imbalance. The industry's most senior people tend to be men who have been around for decades. They are stuck in their ways and often hire brains/individuals who look/think/act like them (i.e., themselves). More often than not, these men are mediocre in their craft, however this doesn't affect their power on the industry itself. This has a catalyst effect on decision making, clientele, briefs won, agency hires and the type of representation we see in Ad content. This trickles down to agency structures and the work. All you need to do is look at the number of men in senior/exec positions vs. women in the Aus Ad Industry, or the amount of male CDs [Creative Directors]/ECDs [Executive Creative Directors]/Directors vs female CDs/ECDs/Directors. It's not that women aren't better — it's that they start in their respective careers 5 steps behind and with a disadvantage. Privilege runs ripe if you are a male of a certain stature in the Ad Industry. The cycle continues to cycle."

Female 18-34 years-agency*

When asked about **sexism in advertising workplaces** respondents' talked about four main themes:

- gendered division of labour,
- lack of diverse leadership,
- pushback from clients, and
- hostile work environments.

Many responses pointed out that sexist workplaces were intrinsic to the production of sexist advertising — highlighting the connection between advertising workplaces and content.

Gendered division of labour

A significant skew towards women in account management roles, and towards men in management and creative roles was found in many industry studies of the Australian and international advertising sector.

- The Advertising Council of Australia's annual Salary Survey for 2021 found that although the industry is 56% female, management roles are only 33% female.[91]

- The Agency Circle Creative Diversity + Inclusion survey results for 2018 found that account management roles were 71% female, while creative and design roles were only 38% female, and Chair/CEO/MD roles were only 29% female.[92]

This gender imbalance, in seniority and roles, was brought up by survey respondents when discussing how it impacts workplace cultures and advertising content.

Common observations included:

Women tend to be relegated to accounts and more administrative duties, whilst men make up the majority of leadership and creative teams, which are more valued within the industry.

"Most agencies are run by men in upper management roles, with women kept in supporting roles. There is also a much smaller percentage of women in creative and digital roles and it takes the other women in agencies to fight for a better gender balance when considering new hires."

Female 35-54 years, agency/client

The lack of women on creative and leadership teams means tired gender tropes and derogatory portrayals of women go unchecked.

"There is no accountability to [create more gender equal ads], and because sadly most of the creators of our advertising content are men who knowingly or not reflect their own beliefs and experiences into the communications they create."

Female 35-54 years, agency*

Engrained sexist workplace cultures make it difficult to challenge sexist content.

"It's a male dominated industry, a lot of "that's how it's always been" mentality."

Female 18-34 years, agency*

"Boys club" cultures create, reinforce and protect gender inequality in the workplace.

"Because it is still a 'boys' club at the top. All of the holding groups have male CEOs, the media owners have male CEOs and whilst they all talk about gender equality it either feels very tokenistic or they take it too far."

Female 40-44 years, client/agency*

91   Advertising Council Australia, 2021
92   Green, 2019

Lack of diverse leadership

"The Australian advertising industry does not place a priority on gender equality in boardrooms, so it cannot prioritise gender equality in advertising content because those people are not in the room making decisions. Until there is directed effort from all media/creative agencies to have gender equality in senior lead/executive teams at a minimum, we will not see this. It's laughable to think ad agencies prioritise gender equality by ensuring casting call outs have quotas in ads. Don't look at the ads, look at the senior leadership teams. That's where the power, influence and control of the narrative sits. Advertising is pale, male and stale. Do a textual analysis on trade publications like Mumbrella and see how many white men are featured on the homepage every day. The industry status quo is still directed by white men and men's voices are platformed much more than anyone else's."

Female 18-34 years, agency

"The statistics don't lie - especially at the top. When it is men making the decisions, however best intentioned they may ever be, it won't always be the decision that benefits women. The industry somehow went through 'me too' without a single scalp. I have worked in agencies where the leaders (who are still leaders) routinely harass, make comments and even implement hiring policies based on looks. They joke about it, they are predatory and they downright criminal in their conduct. But the industry doesn't hold them to account; the press don't cover it and it is up to the women to raise the flag; not the men. There are people in charge of agencies who get named champions of change… but go into business with men who are found to be grooming juniors."

Male 18-34 years, agency/client

Throughout the shEqual Survey, respondents made it clear that they see leadership — within agencies and across the industry — as a crucial factor in addressing sexism in advertising workplaces and in the content they produce.

Women were consistently harsher judges of agency and industry leadership than men.

The responses pointed to the lack of diversity and representation in leadership teams as a serious obstacle to producing more gender equal advertising content.

Like-minded and male-dominated teams were seen as ignorant of stereotypes and sexist tropes, unable to appreciate their impact, or unwilling to take on board different perspectives.

"All decision makers at the top are typically white men. They don't care. They don't prioritise women leadership and campaigns suffer as a result as the final decision is made from a male gaze."

Female 18-34 years, agency/client

"Look, it [the industry] is trying to [prioritise gender equality in the workplace], but overall it is often still run by white men who cannot relate to issues women have faced in the industry."

Female 40-44 years, agency

Many respondents viewed **leadership failures** as the main reason that gender equality was not a priority in the workplace, **either through inaction, or as active contributors to the problem**. This connection was made almost exclusively by female respondents.

"Every agency I have had the misfortune to work at in Australia appears to be run either by gently sexist and ignorant men or profoundly arrogant, aggressive and abusive men. There is a laddy culture in this country that pervades the industry and it stinks. From the way men in senior positions behave towards, make jokes about and describe women, to the frankly egregious pandering that goes on to men in power- thankfully I am not from this country and thankfully I am going to leave. Australia is stuck in the dark ages."

Female 35-54 years, agency

Pushback from clients

"I was asked by a client "but if we don't put a mum in a kitchen shot in the ad, how will women know they're supposed to buy our cheese?"

Female 35-54 years, agency

The need to satisfy clients presents a specific industry challenge to achieving gender equality in both workplaces and content.

Respondents believed that clients may be reluctant to take a chance on new and diverse talent, preferring to work with more established and familiar teams. These attitudes can mean limited opportunities or career progression for a greater diversity of creative talent.

"I have been told to my face that people/clients do not want to take a risk on "unique" or "fresh" voices - rather they prefer to use similar talent they have always used, and have the "unique" or "fresh" voices doing grunt work that they can just piggy back off of and call their own."

18-34 years, agency

In terms of content, respondents spoke about the challenges of creating gender-equal advertising when it conflicts with a client's worldview and demands.

Ad executives in charge of a project were also viewed as prioritising client expectations and comfort over producing gender equal content.

"Agencies bend over backwards to please clients or to improve their public image. This is often at the expense of staff. Often women suffer."

Female 18-34 years, agency

While much less common, a few respondents mentioned clients having a **positive influence on gender equality in advertising content**.

"From my experience in producing commercials and my observation of ads that came out, I do get to hear a lot of companies that want there to be equality in advertising. i.e., clients will often stipulate to us that there has to be diversity in their ads (across gender, race, age, etc.) and a lot of our clients want to make ads that promote equality. This is not to say that all brands and all advertisers are the same, but thankfully this is my experience."

Male 30-34 years, agency*

Hostile work environments

Hostile work environments were identified as a significant contributor to sexism in advertising workplaces.

The main themes in respondents' comments on this topic included:

- harassment and discrimination,
- lack of constructive workplace conversations about gender, and
- workplace cultures that discourage speaking up.

Everyday instances of harassment and discrimination

Through the survey, respondents shared instances of **harassment, sexual assault, sexist remarks, and sexist joking in their everyday work experiences** as evidence to support their view that gender equality in advertising workplaces is not a priority for the sector.

"The industry does not address sexual assault, harassment or bullying that takes place in every inch and corner of the agencies."

Female 18-34 years, agency/client

"If you want more people to ride bikes you build bike paths. The industry needs to be a safer space before any work can be done to improve equality. The foundations in many businesses are just rotten. Equality is currently a gimmick to be exploited, you'll have strong female leaders but then they'll turn a blind eye to a senior manager being inappropriate. Toxic behaviours are brushed off as "it's just advertising". How can we have gender equality when these businesses often lack basic respect. Why speak up when serious misconduct isn't even taken seriously?"

Female 30-34 years, agency/client

On the other side, for those fortunate enough to have only good personal experiences in relation to gender equality and discrimination, this could be reason enough to believe that their experience was the norm.

"I've not worked in agencies that discriminate."

Male 35-54 years, agency/client

"I think the ad industry is probably one of the best industries that has been progressive in terms of gender equality. The make-up of the companies I have worked for have either had an equal amount of both women and men in roles or a skew towards women. I think hiring practices that hire based on talent and experience are the reason for this"

Male 25-29 years, client*

Ineffective conversations within workplaces

In the survey, participants were asked to indicate if they had ever **participated in a range of activities around gender equality**.

The list of sample activities provided included the following (although participants could also report other activities if they chose):

- Participation in a workplace discussion about gender equality
- Support of a workplace initiative about gender equality
- Attendance at an event (in person or online) about gender equality
- Posting something on social media about gender equality

For each activity they had engaged with, participants were asked to indicate how comfortable they had felt taking part, and how effective they felt the activity had been in terms of promoting gender equality.

Overall, the reported participation in workplace discussions about gender equality was similar among female and male respondents (both 59%), however, views on the effectiveness of such discussions differed by gender.

Only 35% of female respondents who had participated in workplace discussions about gender equality rated them as "very" or "extremely" effective, and 34% rated them as "not at all" or "only slightly" effective (compared with 56% and 13% of male respondents, respectively).

This divide raises questions about the different experiences and expectations of women and men around gender equality initiatives in the industry.

Throughout the survey there was consistent feedback from female respondents that while there might be many initiatives and activities, there was still little of the concrete action they felt was required to effect real change.

Workplace cultures that make it challenging to speak up

The organisational structures and employment practices that are common in the Australian advertising industry are contributing to the complex situations that individuals need to navigate when confronted with instances of gender inequality.

In the shEqual Survey, participants who indicated that they had ever hesitated to speak up about a gender equality issue were asked to explain their reasons for their hesitation.

Their responses, as well as stories told in answer to other questions, illustrate the challenges arising from:

- imbalances of power, authority, or experience,
- lack of clear policies and support for action, and
- learned helplessness knowing that nothing has been done in previous similar circumstances.

"I lacked confidence in my position of influence. I lacked confidence in my ability to properly articulate myself in a helpful way. I lacked confidence in my understanding of such a nuanced issue."

Male 18-34 years, agency/client

Organisational structures make the pathway to action opaque and lonely

"So many times I've felt too uncomfortable to raise an issue about something a senior member of my department has joked about, and I feel if I don't 'laugh along' I'll be viewed as a prude and it may impact my role - in the sense of work received but also from a social standpoint"

Female 25-29 years, agency/client*

Respondents indicated a variety of reasons why someone witnessing or experiencing a gender-related issue may struggle to decide if they have a responsibility to say something, and if so, what and to whom.

Organisational hierarchies meant that younger and more junior employees felt that they could not speak up — they felt intimidated, feared reprimand, or were not allowed to speak to more senior people.

"Because we were juniors stuck in a strict hierarchy and unable to speak up about our senior level managers."

Female 18-34 years, agency/client

"As a young person in the industry it is difficult to stand up to senior figures and call them out on discriminatory behaviour."

Male 18-34 years, agency

Even in organisations with less strictly enforced hierarchies, deferring to authority and experience was referenced as a complicating factor when making a decision to speak up. The following themes were evident in responses:

Shouldn't it be on someone more senior to address it?

"Felt like it should be management driving these conversations, not me"

Female 18-34 years, agency

Nobody else is saying anything — maybe I'm misinterpreting things?

"Because there are other more senior female employees who would surely be speaking up about it, if it were an issue. Just the feeling of 'someone else would surely have mentioned it already if it mattered'. Also being a new employee and not feeling like I had the full picture yet."

Female 18-34 years, agency

Will anyone even listen to me?

"My role wasn't senior enough or positioned to make a difference"

Male 18-34 years, agency

Freelancers and contractors not employed by an organisation had additional complexity in these scenarios.

"As a freelancer I run the risk of losing work in some instances if I speak out too loudly and strongly."

Female 35-54 years, agency

It was also clear from the responses that without clear policies and procedures in the industry and in workplaces there is a serious structural barrier to people speaking up about issues that concern them. This leaves employees fumbling alone in the dark.

53% of female respondents and 27% of male respondents said they would be "extremely" encouraged to speak up in their workplace about gender equality in advertising if their employer had policies and/or initiatives in support of gender equality.

46% of female respondents and 28% of male respondents felt the same about the industry having such policies and/or initiatives.

"Not my place" — men's uncertainty about speaking up

When male respondents explained why they hesitated to speak up in the face of gender equality matters, a common theme was that **many men find themselves paralysed through not knowing what the 'right' thing is to do or say given their gender** (see also Issue Five).

"I'm a middle aged, white man. Sometimes I feel like taking action might be seen as knight in shining armour/hero complex - saving the girl in need - which in of itself, is sexist and contributes to gender inequality."

Male 35-54 years, agency*

"I am a man and did not want to take oxygen away from a woman who could say the same thing (It is my place to support the person speaking up, not necessarily be the one to speak up.)"

Male 18-34 years, agency/client*

"As a male I often just want to let things play out unless very serious, as if I support an issue I am 'championed' without permission and if I contradict I am seen as contrarian. There are rarely structures in place that I feel I can raise issues without increasing my risk profile."

Male 18-34 years, agency/client

These scenarios show how important it is for organisations to have **clearly articulated standards of acceptable and unacceptable conduct, and defined lines of communication and processes when encountering unacceptable conduct**.

It is also clear that within the hierarchical nature of advertising, junior male employees look to their more experienced and/or female colleagues for guidance, or to speak out on gender issues.

"They were more senior females in the room"

Male 30-34 years, client/agency

"Particularly as a junior staff member, and as a male, I didn't think I had a place in those conversations."

Male 30-34 years, agency

It appears that some of the hesitancy men feel about speaking up may also stem from their own perceived lack of knowledge or experience of gender inequality.

These feelings mean they lack the confidence to support any debate that may arise when they speak up.

"Because I lack the experience and perspective from someone in the minority group. Therefore, I feel that I don't have the right to speak on behalf of them."

Male 25-29 years, agency/client

"I didn't feel like I knew enough about the issue to talk to other people about it. If I didn't 100% understand the issue and why it affected females so much I didn't want to get anything wrong when talking about it and upset someone."

Male 30-34 years, agency

"I feel like maybe I don't fully understand the situation with enough rigour to really try and make a statement."

Male 35-54 years, agency

"I feel that if I was challenged on my assertion, I don't know enough to defend the claim, or would be the one who stopped the momentum of a campaign happening."

Male 18-34 years, agency/client

Fear of formal or informal reprisals

Females were the clear majority of respondents to report that they had hesitated to speak up when witnessing an issue relating to gender equality in advertising due to fear of negative consequences.

Their concerns included negative formal consequences (like **losing out on future work, losing their job, being looked over for promotions or missing out on raises**) and social consequences (**being labelled "difficult" or a "feminist"**).

"Fear of senior leadership (both male and female) judging me for being an instigator / troublemaker with speaking up about inequalities. Have found similar issues with discussions around race in Australian work environments."

Female 18-34 years, agency/client*

"Being gaslighted (told I am exaggerating a genuine problem), eye rolling, general denial of the issue. Being labelled as a 'feminist', being lampooned or ridiculed, being called a lesbian, being avoided/overlooked/ discriminated against after being labelled as a 'troublemaker'."

Female 50-54 years, agency

These findings reinforce the many difficulties faced by women (and men) going against the status quo in the advertising industry. They risk being ridiculed for making a fuss, getting a reputation for being difficult, and missing out on future opportunities.

The formal and social consequences described above prevent women from having influence. Holding women back from promotions limits their professional power. Branding them with a negative reputation and excluding them from discussion also prevents them from having influence.

This **alienation prevents women from making the kinds of social connections that usually help career advancement** — like mentoring relationships and networking — meaning social consequences can compound the impact of formal consequences.

"Because creative agencies are hierarchical and a political minefield - say the wrong thing, get the eye rolls from senior leadership teams and then you're branded as the "angry feminist" and taken off jobs."

Female 18-34 years, agency/client*

"Advertising is a volatile industry - troublemakers get the boot, or worse still get talked about in the industry as "painful." It's scary to speak your mind - safer to stay quiet."

Female 35-54 years, agency

"In many previous companies, I have often been shunned or labelled as a 'lefty' or a 'snowflake' for raising internal company issues relating to gender diversity."

Male 35-54 years, agency*

Social consequences in particular were linked to organisational culture. Some said that they would receive **backlash for standing up against the "boys club"**, while others simply stated it would be too intimidating to contradict their agency's culture.

"Because I work with a lot of men and they would make fun of me but I did speak up."

Female 18-34 years, agency/client*

"If the majority of the group felt differently, I felt out of place purely for being in the minority and not having enough weight behind my opinion."

Female 18-34 years, agency

"As a young female in a male dominated office, it felt incredibly intimidating to speak out about gender equality."

Female 35-54 years-, agency

"From previous experience I've been told to stay in my lane and have had repeated experience of being ignored. There is such a strong sense of perceived community and culture that there is fear of being labelled a bad seed or black sheep if management or the community is challenged."

Male 35-54 years, agency

Learned helplessness was a poignant theme that emerged from respondents' reflections on the barriers that they faced when considering speaking out in relation to organisational culture and the anticipated consequences.

A few people, most of whom were women, reported that their efforts would be futile, having **witnessed other people's efforts be dismissed in the past or having been dismissed themselves**.

"Others were doing it and had bad experiences."

Female 55+ years, client/agency

"The business made it clear that I would get nowhere."

Female 35-54 years, agency

"Told I needed to understand that that is the way it is."

Male 35-54 years, client/agency

Issue Two - Discussion Points

The key markers of sexist workplace cultures identified throughout the ShEqual Survey are echoed in academic research about the advertising industry around the globe.

- A **gendered division of labour** that relegates women mainly to account management roles and shuts them out of creative roles is an issue both in Australia and internationally.

  Both ShEqual Survey respondents and academic research noted that this 'boys club' has real consequences for both the types of creative decisions made and the subsequent portrayals depicted in advertising content.

- A **lack of diverse leadership** is likewise an issue both in Australia and globally, with existing research highlighting this as a longstanding and persisting problem.[93]

- Two other issues related to sexist workplace cultures that were identified in the survey responses also appear in academic research — **hostile work environments** and **pushback from clients**. Existing research argues that these two issues foster advertising workplace cultures dominanted by masculinity that impedes women's career progression.

- Issues pertaining to **discrimination, sexual harassment and assault** are persistent and evident in both the ShEqual Survey results and academic research about the industry worldwide. Both sets of evidence show that it is women who are routinely subject to these behaviours and men who largely have very different perceptions of the state of gender equality in the advertising industry.

- **Workplace cultures that make it challenging to speak up** reinforce these problematic dynamics. This is especially the case if **client demands are prioritised,** leading to conflicts with gender equal content being produced or the creation of diverse teams.

These problems can be addressed by:

- **Clear workplace policies and procedures** that are reinforced through **bystander interventions and training** at the organisational level. This is imperative in building **safe, respectful and inclusive advertising workplaces**.

- Identifying the conditions that place women at risk of these behaviours and implementing changes in workplace practices and cultures.

- Making visible the ways in which **victim-survivors can report problems** and **transparency as to how compliance and accountability will be actioned** in the workplace is crucial.

- Initiatives that support the **development of women's careers in the industry** — including programs and work-life supports for women as well as addressing structural workplace biases and barriers — are crucial to fostering a more gender balanced workforce in the advertising industry.

ISSUE THREE

UNEQUAL EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS AND SUPPORT

Respondents nominated unequal employment conditions and support as a factor contributing to gender inequality in advertising workplaces, highlighting three main issues:

- formal policies to promote gender equality,
- pay inequity and lack of transparency, and
- lack of family friendly policies and practices.

Formal policies to support gender equality

Formal policies can be an important means of addressing gender inequality in the workplace. They cover areas such as:

- Supporting the **training** of (more) women for roles they are traditionally underrepresented in (i.e., creating a larger pipeline of female creative talent coming into the industry in the first place)
- Supporting the **hiring** of (more) women
- Supporting the **promotion** of (more) women
- **Pay** equity / transparency
- **Parental leave**
- Dealing with instances of **harassment or bullying** (including clear reporting structures)
- Reviewing gender issues in **content**
- **Education** on gender equality issues

Respondents held mixed views about whether formal policies to support gender equality in advertising workplaces are in place.

For some the existence of such policies was used to justify their belief that the industry is prioritising gender equality in content and workplaces.

"There are many initiatives currently across Australia focusing on this issue. And in my personal experience the advertising industry is adhering to/ upholding Australia's gender equality laws more so than other industries."

Male 18-34 years, agency/client

Others called out the absence of such policies as both evidence of gender inequality, and a lack of will to address it.

Survey responses discussing the absence of formal policies to support gender equality (and the impacts of this absence) were almost twice as common as those mentioning their existence.

When explaining their view that the Australian advertising industry does not prioritise gender equality as a workplace issue, **a significantly higher number of female than male respondents pointed to the absence of supportive employment conditions**.

"From my experience, I haven't seen many initiatives from the agencies I've worked at (apart from my current agency) that hold this as a priority. Nobody really talks about it and most agencies I've worked at have mainly had men in senior positions, and I've also seen men get promoted quicker. I even found out the other SAM [Senior Account Manager] on the exact same account was making 10k a year more than me. I pulled them up on it and I got a raise."

Female 35-54 years, agency*

The respondents indicated that the existence of formal policies from their employer or industry would help them feel encouraged to speak about gender equality.

53% of female respondents and 27% of male respondents said they would be extremely encouraged to speak up in their workplace about gender equality in advertising by their employer having policies and/or initiatives in support of gender equality.

46% of female respondents and 28% of male respondents felt the same about the industry having such policies and/or initiatives.[94]

90%
supportive of their employer providing training on gender equality

89%
supportive of their employer reviewing work processes to ensure they are gender equitable

88%
supportive of their employer reviewing content for potential gender equality issues

Levels of support were consistent between female and male respondents showing that, regardless of gender, people have a desire for their employers to do the right thing.

Pay inequity and lack of transparency

"Having worked previously for an advertising agency, my own experience demonstrated to me that I was simply not seen as an equal. With regards to pay, with regards to my opinion being heard. They enjoyed the high margins I delivered, but when I decided to leave based on being grossly underpaid they offered me an $80K pay rise."

Female 35-54 years, agency*

Pay equity occurs when men and women receive **equal remuneration** (including salary, discretionary pay, allowances, performance payments, merit payments, bonus payments and superannuation) **for work of equal or comparable value**.[95]

In practice, this means men and women performing the same work are paid the same amount, and men and women performing different work of equal or comparable value are also paid the same amount. Unequal pay is one of the main contributors to the broader gender pay gap.

In responses to the shEqual Survey, female respondents saw more issues with pay equity in the Australian advertising industry than male respondents:

59% of female respondents "strongly" agreed that, "In general, I think men are paid more than women in similar roles in my industry", and another 27% "somewhat" agreed. In contrast, only 16% and 39% of male respondents "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed, respectively.

"The pay gap is obvious and vast."

Female 18-34 years, agency

"Pay transparency is a big one - it's in my contract that I can't talk about how much I get paid."

Female 25-29 years, agency/client

Despite this discrepancy, **a large majority of respondents of both genders indicated strong support for tackling inequity in pay between genders**:

94% of female respondents, and 84% of male respondents, said that they would "strongly" or "somewhat" support their employer undertaking a pay audit to identify any gender pay discrimination.

While support for pay equity was high from respondents of both genders, female respondents were most convinced of the **potential for pay transparency to have a positive impact** on gender equality in their workplaces:

83% of female respondents felt that pay transparency would be "very" or "extremely" impactful on improving gender equality in advertising workplaces, compared with only 64% of male respondents.

"It's already been covered, but pay transparency!!! I'm currently getting paid less than my male counterpart and it's frustrating that I'm not allowed to discuss it. Why do we need to keep salaries such a secret?"

Female 18-34 years, agency/client

"Pay transparency for all. This is NOT just a gender issue but a major issue for everyone. In the complex world of advertising two people with the same job title can add different amounts of value — however as workers we should all be united and on the same page as to what each other earns. It gives power to the workers based not just on their gender but on their value within the organisation."

Male 18-34 years, agency/client

However, even if pay equity is achieved within the industry, the difference in gender representation in higher and lower paid roles means that the overall gender pay gap in the industry remains (illustrated in Figure 3).

Figure 3: Compounding of pay equity and gender role disparity issues in advertising

Gender pay gap in same role

Overall industry gender pay gap

Gender skew in senior or higher paid roles
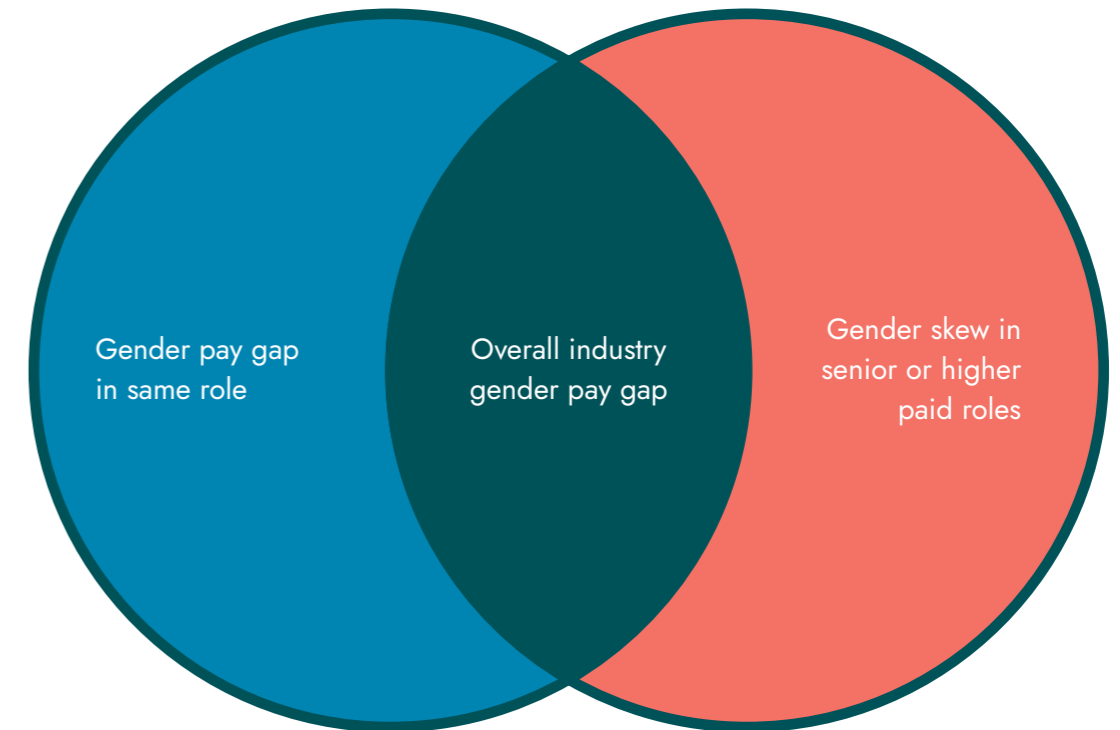
Lack of family friendly policies and practices

The stigma associated with parenthood and incompatibility of family life with the hours expected of advertising workers were raised by respondents as significant factors contributing to gender inequality in advertising workplaces.

The key observations shared were:

Leadership can be reluctant to invest training and responsibility in a woman they expect to "lose" to pregnancy and motherhood, meaning women are passed over for opportunities, career development and promotions.

"Being told I wasn't going to be invested in via training because I was about to 'fuck off soon' (on maternity leave). Having a male hired in a senior role to replace me just before I went on maternity leave."

Female 30-34 years, agency/client

Mothers returning to advertising workplaces can be passed over for more responsibilities due to the anticipation or expectation that they will not be able to manage them now that they have a family to look after.

"After returning to work after having my second baby they gave my role away - yet expected me to mentor the person they promoted into my old position. They did not ask me if I'd like my old role back or if I'd be happy or mentor the person taking my position that I'm perfectly capable of doing myself. I have been demoted back down into a production position after proving myself as a manager and process implementation specialist for more than five years."

Female 35-39 years, agency

The working culture of advertising (competitive, fast-paced, long hours) can eventually force mothers to have to choose between a career in advertising and their family.

"Working within the creative department there is an expectation for long hours, proactive work working long pitches and unrealistic deadlines. This work culture already sets an unrealistic requirement for those with families, which disproportionately impacts women. So regardless of hires and promotions, unless this is addressed it will always be an impediment to equality."

Male 35-54 years, agency/client

The overall effect of such stigma and inflexible work is to reduce the number of women in the industry who can advance into senior or leadership roles in agencies.

"Women rule the industry up to the age where they leave to have kids. The biggest thing that can be done to change things and deliver greater equality is to make it easier for women to return to the workplace. When we have more female leaders then we will have a better approach. Easy right :)"

Male 55-59 years, agency/client

Issue Three - Discussion Points

The **lack of formal policies promoting gender equality** — or, if available, their implementation — in advertising agencies is noted as a problem both in the ShEqual Survey and existing academic research.

Both sets of evidence reveal concerns that should such policies be introduced, they may simply create a façade of fairness without translating into real change.

- Academic research highlights that many diversity and inclusion policies are founded on a male model of organising and may reinforce rather than address the persistent gendered inequalities in the workplace. This (inadvertently) promotes the unburdened, always-on male advertising executive as the model of success.[96]

- Two employment conditions identified in the ShEqual Survey — **pay inequity** and the 'motherhood penalty' resulting from **a lack of family friendly policies and practices** — are likewise identified in academic research as issues that mark the advertising industry across the world.

- Existing research highlights that the absence of human resource functions across many agencies — especially those small and mid-size — exacerbates the persistence of these issues.[97]

- Sector level **data on pay gaps and retention of women after career interruptions for caring responsibilities is needed** to highlight the extent of these issues in the Australian context.

- At the organisation level, greater transparency and access to pay data is needed to make any inequities visible so they can be addressed.

- Bolstering **family friendly work environments**, for people of any gender, is imperative to ensure caring responsibilities can be more effectively balanced and considered alongside responsibilities in the workplace.

- Changes to agency culture, accommodations to ways of working and greater role model visibility by leaders is needed to **address the perceived incompatibility of family life and success** in the advertising industry.

96   see Crewe and Wang 2018
97   see Miliopoulou & Kapareliotis, 2021

ISSUE FOUR

SEXIST ADVERTISING CONTENT IS STILL BEING PRODUCED

One way that respondents interpreted the state of gender equality in Australian advertising was through discussion of the content they are seeing, and how this has been changing over time.

There were three main themes underpinning this issue:

- entrenched creative practices,
- suspicion of the motives behind gender-equal advertising, and
- lack of literacy about what equitable representation really is.

Entrenched creative practices

The biased decision-making structures in advertising organisations and among clients, particularly in senior creative roles, was frequently pointed out by respondents as a key factor in the continued production of sexist advertising content.

Regrettably, **half of all respondents (51%) agreed with the statement "the saying 'sex sells' is often true"**, with this view more common among male than female respondents (57% agreeing compared with 47%), and older than younger respondents (56% of those 40 or older compared with 48% of those younger).

"Ads are generally created by male-dominated creative departments led by men in most instances. Unconscious bias plays a huge role in recruitment of creatives which leads to this inequality. Account management aren't generally empowered to make comments on gender representation in ads. There's also a male skew in production companies (especially directors) which affects gender/diversity under-representation in treatments. Only occasionally gender equality is called out by clients but it'd be nice if there wasn't an inherent issue to look out for in the first place. Clients should be concerned with how their brand is represented, not gender and diversity representation."

Female 40-44 years, client

"I objected to a series of press ads which portrayed a lithe young woman inspecting properties when I considered that these women were in a minority and an older and wiser looking lady would have been more applicable to the situation. The response was as you previously stated "sex sells" and I was aggressively overruled."

Male 55+ years, agency

Suspicion of the motives behind gender-equal advertising

While most respondents admitted that gender equality in advertising has become somewhat more representative and diverse over time, there were diverging views about the advertising industry's place in this change.

Some argued that the industry is simply moving with the times, reflecting a more equal society.

However, others felt that the industry may be producing advertising that reflects a more equal society, but not bringing advertising workplace cultures along.

These people suspect the advertisers are only doing as much as they have to in order to appease the public, without necessarily embracing the shift themselves.

"Equality is prioritised in public-facing ways. I might be cynical but it feels like everybody wants to do what is required to create an image of being forward-thinking and progressive whilst in reality it is often a largely self-serving exercise."

Male 18-34 years, agency

"Agencies are rewarded for ads that virtue signal and win awards by making "Gender Equality ads". There should be greater attention on the internal misogyny and huge barriers for internal mobility."

Female 18-34 years, agency/client

This suspicion is accompanied by a second view, more commonly expressed by women than men, that **Australia as a society does not value gender equality, and sexist advertising is a product of advertisers seeking to relate to a sexist audience**.

"Australian advertising exists under a white-dominated patriarchal society, so naturally, its structures are passed down into the advertising industry. I feel it's difficult to attempt to fix one without acknowledging the systems it lives and operates within."

Female 25-29 years, agency

"Ads use tropes to speed up communication in a short space of time. The dumb bloke is the easiest shorthand for comedy. Also, middle Australia is a bit behind the 8-ball as far as being progressive. I ain't saying it's right, it just is."

Male 35-54 years, agency

Lack of literacy around what equitable representation really is

The responses to questions about **representative portrayals in advertising content** revealed a need for deeper education on these complex topics, particularly with respect to the definitions, manifestations and impacts of stereotyping and representation.

Stereotyping is 'bad' — but do people really understand why?

To support the view that gender equality is not prioritised in advertising content in Australia, people would often bring up **the persistence of stereotypes and reductive gendered tropes**. This was raised more commonly by female than male respondents.

"Just look around - we keep seeing the same old tropes in advertising again and again- the sexy woman, the dumb dad, the competent family woman, the eye-rolling teenage daughter…"

Female 35-54 years, agency

While most references to stereotypes were strongly negative, a small number of respondents spoke about the progress they felt they had witnessed, claiming that gender stereotyping was at least less common than it used to be.

"It has improved markedly over the past 35 years - in the 70s everything was very sexist - bikini clad women selling products - now it is all about dignity and respect."

<div align="right">Male 55-59 years, client/agency</div>

The free text questions about advertising content and stereotyping showed that it is **generally agreed that it is a 'bad thing' for advertising to contain gender stereotypes**.

However, responses to other questions in the survey suggest there may not be such a strong understanding of exactly **why** that is.

Female and male respondents shared high levels of agreement that both *advertising containing gender stereotypes*, and *advertising that sexualises and objectifies women*, can contribute to **poor body image, and poor mental health**.

However, it was only *advertising that sexualises and objectifies women* that was similarly associated with contributing to **violence against women**.

The perceived connection between gender stereotypes and violence against women was less strong — particularly so among male respondents.

This finding points to a need for improved communication with those working in advertising to:

- Provide clear and evidence-based **support for those seeking to challenge the use of gender stereotypes**, and
- Make those who are unaware of these linkages understand that **objections to gender stereotyping are based on more than just 'political correctness'**.

What does representation of women look like to men?

85% of all respondents agreed that "better representation of all genders makes better ads".

Among respondents who mentioned diversity and representation in advertising content, those who talked about **seeing more women, a greater diversity of women, and more diversity of people in general in ads** tended to be male rather than female.

In comparison, those arguing that they **see insufficient representation of women, and insufficient diversity of women**, tended to be female.

"Ads seldom feature people that identify as non-binary/trans. Ads seldom feature people that don't fit a particular stereotype of woman (i.e. young and attractive / housewife) or men (the 'bloke')."

<div align="right">Female 35-54 years, agency</div>

Respondents were asked **how important they thought different ways of depicting women are to supporting gender equality**.

Overall levels of agreement about the importance of various ways of depiction were high, they were slightly lower among male respondents compared with female respondents. Similar proportions of female and male respondents said that it was "very" or "extremely" important to feature respectful depictions of women (95% and 92%, respectively):

Depicting women engaging in a **wide variety of activities** was "very" or "extremely" important
men 83%
women 93%

Realistic depictions of women were "very" or "extremely" important
men 82%
women 92%

Depicting a **diversity of women** was "very" or "extremely" important
men 82%
women 92%

These differences suggest that there may be a lack of nuance among some men in understanding **the range of ways in which women can be omitted from content, and what it means to be truly representative in depictions of women**.

Issue Four - Discussion Points

It is a well-established finding in academic research on gender and advertising that **a lack of diversity and female representation in creative teams underpins the production of sexist advertising content**. These entrenched creative practices were also highlighted in the ShEqual Survey results.

- The ShEqual Survey results spotlight the need for education to improve **literacy about equitable representation in advertising**. However, previous research indicates that significant challenges to this are posed by agency cultures. In these agencies, the moral responsibility to make ethical decisions regarding gender portrayals is often absent or relegated in the face of client demands[98].

  This signals not only how important it is to make creative departments safer spaces for women to contribute to creative processes but also for all advertising practitioners to call out or question sexist representations.

- Changes are needed on the client end to ensure equal representation occurs both in the creative supply chain and the outputs produced.

- The longstanding debate in academic research as to whether **advertising mirrors broader society or shapes it as a powerful cultural vehicle**[99] was evident in the ShEqual Survey responses.

- The question of whether producing more gender equal advertising is simply a promotional vehicle for the industry itself in the guise of **'woke washing'** (suspicion of the motives behind gender-equal advertising) is raised across both sets of evidence[100].

- Pushback by consumer collectives in the form of activism — whether critique, negative word-of-mouth or boycotts — is likely the impetus that is needed to call into question the authenticity of such campaigns and whether corporate practices behind the scenes reflect the same ethics and social change.

- Making these practices and conversations transparent via social media would play an important role in driving the marketplace changes needed to make the advertising industry accountable.

98   see Tuncay Zayer & Coleman, 2015; also Issue Two
99   Holbrook 1987; Pollay 1986, 1987
100   see Middleton and Turnbull 2021

ISSUE FIVE

THE UNCLEAR ROLE FOR MEN IN DRIVING CHANGE

The large number of male respondents to the shEqual Survey (245, or 41%) provides a rich vein of insight into how men in the Australian advertising industry are navigating the changes associated with increasing focus on gender equality in content and workplaces.

Two key insights arising from their responses are:

- compared with women, men appeared less attuned to the severity and nuances of issues associated with gender equality in advertising, and

- there is a lack of clarity for men around these issues, specifically: what gender inequality in advertising and workplaces means and the extent to which it is a serious issue, and what male allies are expected or 'allowed' to do in support of women and gender equality.
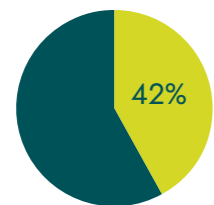
Respondent gender demographics
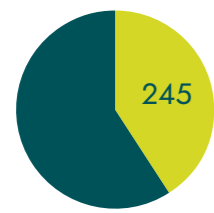
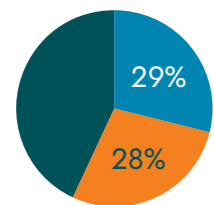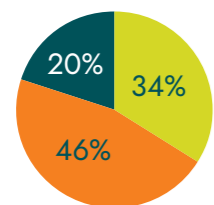**Respondents who identified as male**
(out of a total of 598)

245

Male **Female**
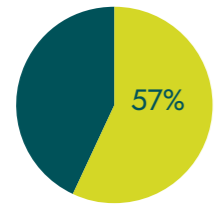
Currently working in or most recently worked in advertising or creative agencies
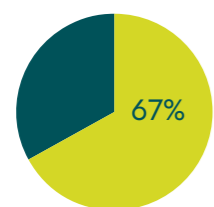
57% 57%

Experience in creative

42% 36%

Experience in management and marketing

29% 28% 29% 26%

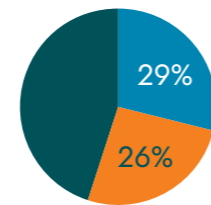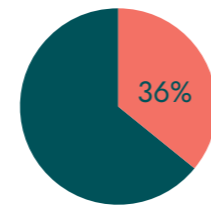**Age demographics**

● < 35 ● 35 - 49 ● 50 >

20% 34% 46% 12% 45% 43%

Describe their experience as 'senior'

67% 57%
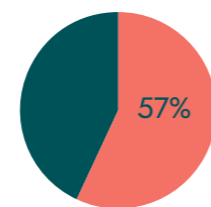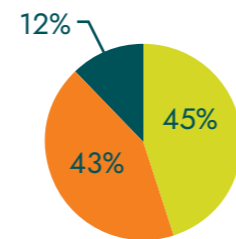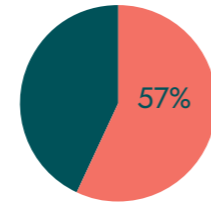
Divergence between female and male perspectives on gender inequality

Throughout the survey, male respondents consistently appeared less aware of the severity of issues associated with gender inequality in advertising than their female counterparts.

Overall, **men were less convinced of the power and influence of advertising**, particularly in terms of downstream impacts such as the link between gender stereotypes and violence against women.

They were also **less certain of advertising workplace culture influencing the content it produces** (58% seeing a "very" or "extremely" strong influence compared with 72% of female respondents).

With respect to the sector itself, **men were more inclined to believe that gender equality is a priority in the industry** in either content (47% of male respondents agreeing compared with 32% of female respondents) or workplaces (54% of male respondents agreeing compared with 29% of female respondents), or that senior bodies in the industry are doing enough about it (56% compared with 34%).

Within their workplaces, they reported being **more comfortable than women to raise concerns about gender equality** and were less likely to express concerns about potential negative consequences of doing so (17% compared with 46% of female respondents).

Likely because men are not as convinced of the issues around gender equality, their responses demonstrated less support than female respondents for more **action-based solutions by employers** such as:

· pay audits (68% strongly supportive compared with 83% of female respondents),

· reviews of content (59% compared with 76%), and

· reviews of work processes (64% compared with 76%).

Male responses also showed **substantially lower levels of support for actions such as setting gender targets or quotas at senior levels** (36% of male respondents were strongly supportive compared with 62% of female respondents).

Even male supporters of gender equality are uncertain about what to say and how to act

"Thank you for this, it's got me to reflect on what I am doing and helped me realise I am not doing enough to support and make real change. I am 100% responsible and accountable here, as we all are, to making changes. Great work, thank you."

Male 35-39 years, agency/client

While some male respondents indicated resistance towards ShEqual's mission, more were **supportive of the principles behind ShEqual's work and of employer-led actions to address gender inequality**. However, men also indicated that they **lacked the confidence and the tools to act on that support in a personal capacity**.[101]

As noted in Issue Three, similar proportions of male compared with female respondents expressed support for the idea of their employer:

- Undertaking a **pay audit** to identify any gender pay discrimination (94% female, 84% male)
- Providing **tools and resources to support inclusion of gender equality in their work** (92% female, 88% male)
- Providing **training** on gender equality (93% female, 86% male)
- Reviewing **work processes** to ensure they are gender equitable (92% female, 83% male)
- Reviewing **content** for potential gender equality issues (92% female, 83% male)
- Not working with/for **clients with a poor record on gender equality** (84% female, 81% male)

The overall levels of support (either "strongly" or "somewhat" supportive) were similar between genders, however, female respondents were more heavily skewed towards "strong" support, while male respondents were skewed towards being "somewhat" supportive.

Despite having similar levels of support for employer-led gender equality initiatives, **men's and women's views differed on the role of men in advocating on the issue**.

A consistent theme throughout responses was a desire expressed by female respondents for men in the industry to do more to help normalise conversations around gender equality issues — to take some of the load off the impacted women already speaking up, and to raise the general standard of conversation and education around gender equality across the sector.

57% of female respondents (compared with only 31% of male respondents) said that they would be "extremely" **encouraged to speak up in their workplace about gender equality in advertising if more men were actively supporting gender equality**.

"In nothing you have suggested have you suggested that the men in the industry in particular are educated and informed on what it feels like not to be seen. Not to be visible. Not to be represented. This cannot be solved with incentives, or mentoring women over in the corner. We need men, powerful men to get involved and champion this. We need them to do the work- to look into their hearts and minds to understand the lived reality of being female. Just like as white people we need to read things like white fragility and think about our privilege. As do the privileged fortunate white men who run this industry need to be taken to one side and schooled in what they cannot see- their own privilege. And if they don't get it, or worse, won't get it- then get out."

Female 35-39 years, agency (freelancer)

"Making men part of the conversation. Having loud and proud advocates who are male. Helping everyone better understand how to speak up no matter your level of seniority or having safe ways to do it for junior members."

Female 35-39 years, agency

101   see also Issue Three: Unequal Employment Conditions and Support

A further indication of the gap between women and men in the industry in terms of conversations about gender equality is their relative **tendency to post on social media about the topic**.

Similar numbers of female and male respondents reported having **participated in workplace discussions** on gender equality, **supporting workplace initiatives** about gender equality, and **attending events** about gender equality.

However, only 32% of male respondents said they had ever **posted something on social media** about gender equality compared with 55% of female respondents.

Unfortunately, the results of the shEqual Survey indicate that even the best-intentioned men are struggling with this.

While women more often than men said they had hesitated to speak up about gender equality issues due to fear of consequences, men more commonly hesitated because they didn't feel it was their place to do so.

Men explained that they were wary of **monopolising the conversation** as a man speaking on "women's issues" or felt their i**nvolvement could exacerbate the situation** even further, **take attention away from women**, or even be read as a **sexist act** in and of itself (causing backlash from women). Other men simply felt that they wouldn't be listened to.

This suggests that even among men who support greater gender equality, there is **a real gap in terms of tools, expectations and modelled behaviour**.

"As a middle-aged white male in a senior position, it means that I'm seen as part of the problem. I get that I am in a powerful position to advocate on these issues, but the mixed — often vitriolic — reaction against men (from men and women). Means that someone of my gender speaking out can polarize and exacerbate the problem. I've been told and read that it was men's role to shut up and listen. I've been told and read that it's our responsibility to stand up and be heard. From what I've seen when men speak up, I've decided listening is the best approach from me at this stage."

Male 45-49 years, agency/client*

"As a man, I feel conflicted about speaking up as I want to speak up on gender issues if I feel strongly about something tangible that I could make a difference with, but I also question whether doing so is problematic in itself — am I taking the place of a person who is directly affected, and therefore it should come from them and not me?"

Male 35-39 years, agency

"Men weren't invited to speak, either explicitly or implicitly through the narrative and language used around the issue. I was also conscious that I didn't want to centre myself in the situation, as it was about women and not me."

Male 25-29 years, agency

"It's stupid, but again, I'm the only man in a team of women, And I do speak up and speak often in my personal and professional life, but at times there are moments where it's better to let someone else step up where their voice might have more weight. Or there are moments where my experience doesn't really hold enough weight. I'm pretty conscious of a barrier some people have when it comes to people speaking up about equality issues, which is "not feeling that they are the right person to speak up"."

Male 18-24 years, agency*

Many female respondents expressed frustration and impatience at the **lack of male progress on acknowledging and understanding the nature of gender inequality in Australian advertising**. It is a reality that must be confronted to continue to build momentum for change in the industry.

Issue Five - Discussion Points

That women and men working in advertising hold **divergent views on issues associated with gender equality** in the workplace is reflected in both academic research and the ShEqual Survey results.

This reinforces longstanding calls for unconscious bias training in the advertising workplace to ensure all are attuned to such issues and understand their arising consequences.

- The shEqual Survey results revealed **men's uncertainties or confidence in speaking out against sexist behaviours**, and signal the need for bystander interventions and allyship training at the organisational level, as recommended in Issue Four.

- **The exhaustion experienced by women about gender equality issues in the advertising industry persists**, and is reflected in the voices of respondents to the ShEqual Survey and academic research on women's experiences in advertising across the world.

- Ensuring that men in the industry are both willing and able to take a stand and advocate for gender equality in the workplace is imperative in driving the change needed to address the issues canvassed throughout this report.

- Men will play a significant role in dismantling the masculine codes and behaviours, for example, disrupting teams that are like-minded, male-dominated and 'pink ghettos'. These teams characterise advertising workplace cultures and the inequalities that persist within.

- Grassroots and local activist and advocacy movements across the industry could likewise play a crucial role in driving both the impetus and capacity for such change.

CONCLUSION

In October 2021, shEqual surveyed almost 600 advertising industry professionals. Based on their responses, this report explored their perceptions of a range of systemic and interconnected issues that are not only present in the Australian advertising industry but also contribute to gender (in)equality in its workplaces and the content it produces.

The key findings are as follows:

There is a lack of commonly agreed-upon language within the industry with which to discuss gender equality.

As a result, not only is the overarching term 'gender equality' subject to many different interpretations, but there are also varying levels of understanding of the interrelated concepts (such as the gender pay gap, or equitable representation), and of various mechanisms that create barriers to or facilitate gender equality.

These diffuse and varied conceptions of gender equality are important to understand in order to bring different parties in the industry together to discuss the impact, potential solutions, and compounding issues that exist in the advertising workplace and advertising content.

The sexist workplaces and organisational structures and cultures recognised in academic research literature, are also issues within the Australian context.

Persistent gendered divisions of labour keep decision-making roles and leadership positions weighted towards male perspectives and limit the opportunities for female voices to have input in creative and organisational decision-making. This can be an issue on both the agency and client side of the equation.

These structures can contribute to hostile work environments in which instances of sexual harassment and discrimination can go unacknowledged or unaddressed.

There are employment conditions within the advertising sector that present barriers to promoting greater gender equality, particularly pay inequity and lack of family friendly policies and practices.

There is an absence of formal policies within the industry to support gender equality. Without these policies a range of barriers to gender equality in the workplace go unaddressed, including:

- pay equity and transparency,

- improving parental leave,

- education and training on gender equality,

- support to train, hire and promote more women, and

- managing and addressing instances of harassment or discrimination in the workplace.

Sexist organisational structures and cultures, and the associated employment practices mentioned above, impact on the extent to which sexist advertising is still being produced.

It is possible for gender progressive advertising to be created by agencies with sexist structures and cultures, but this can create tension between the image projected by the content produced and the knowledge or perception of the organisation behind it.

Responses to the survey suggested that as well as the structural and cultural factors at play, an additional challenge is a lack of literacy around equitable representation in advertising — not only what it requires to truly be equitable, but why it is important, and that the negative impacts of inequitable representation and stereotyping are not only creatively lazy but have the potential to be culturally harmful.

Responses to the survey by male participants demonstrated the difference in perceptions of gender equality between genders.

Responses also highlighted that many men in the industry feel uncertain about how to engage productively and positively on these issues, often because they feel they do not have sufficient understanding of the issues, or that it is not appropriate for them to speak on these issues due to their gender.

A common refrain from female respondents was that they wanted more active support from men in the industry. This indicates a clear gap needs to be filled to continue to progress gender equality issues in the industry.

If more men are to speak up, they must be provided with the tools to help them do so:

- educational tools to help them understand the nature of the issue (in particular, that gender inequality is a complex system with deep roots), and

- supporting structures to clarify how they are 'allowed' and expected to engage.

The survey has contributed important data and insights into gendered perspectives around gender equality in advertising, particularly on men's engagement with gender equality. This includes their actions, concerns, perceptions of privilege, and resistance. Men's voices and perspectives in the present gender equality movement is an emerging area of research globally and in Australia.

The shEqual Survey has also provided comparative data on male and female perspectives on gender equality issues and areas for action.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Education, training and resources

These areas were highlighted as particularly important to improve industry-wide engagement with gender equality.

The following actions are geared towards building the understanding of individuals, however if rolled out across a workplace these education and training initiatives can influence workplace culture and its structures. They can also change how gender equality is understood and practised across the workplace and industry:

- Facilitate an **industry-wide, common understanding of gender equality and its associated concepts** — this could be supported by workshops or seminars, instructional videos, or fact sheets

- **Equitable representation in advertising**: what it is and why it matters — again, workshops or seminars would be of use, but perhaps of greater day-to-day value would be fact sheets and checklists that could be used during production

- **Unconscious bias training** is recommended to help bridge the gap in perceptions of gender equality issues between men and women

- **Bystander intervention training** is recommended to address the challenges identified by the survey results when it comes to people working in the industry speaking up in the face of gender issues

- **Allyship training** is recommended to assist men in the industry to better understand how to support gender equality matters

What can shEqual do?

shEqual can develop and deliver education, training and resources that builds the capacity of the sector regarding gender equality. This includes training that builds the knowledge, skills and confidence about gender equality in ad content and in ad workplaces, and resources that support and enhance positive practice. They can also connect the industry to reputable education, training and consultancy providers regarding the prevention of gendered based violence and gender equity in the workplace.

shEqual can also help facilitate leadership support for gender equality by engaging with sector leaders through events, forums and other learning opportunities.

Further research

To continue demonstrating the scale and impact of gender inequality in the industry, further research is suggested to gather data on the following areas:

- Sector level data on **pay equity**
- Sector level data on the **retention of women after career interruptions due to caring responsibilities**
- Further research exploring the **perspective of men in the advertising industry**
- Further research exploring the **perspective of the 'client-side'** — those commissioning advertising — to understand more about their expectations, motivations, and barriers to promoting gender progressive advertising

What can shEqual do?

There could be opportunities for shEqual to commission or fund research into any of these areas, to contribute to the body of research still emerging in Australia.

There is also an opportunity for shEqual to conduct further analysis of the qualitative data from the shEqual Survey data that relates to the spectrum of resistance to gender equality. Insights on resistance may help to inform messaging and actions to progress gender equality actions, and develop engagement strategies.

Changes in advertising workplaces

The findings of this report indicate several areas where changes implemented within organisations would support progress on gender equality:

- Transparency on and access to **pay data**
- Implementation of **family-friendly working environments** (for all genders)
- **Transparent policies** for reporting instances of sexist harassment within workplaces.

Many organisations working in the advertising industry are small businesses, without formal HR departments. This presents a significant challenge to such businesses in terms of implementing formal policies to support gender equality, or to manage instances of discrimination or harassment.

One way to combat this particular issue would be the creation of an industry-level body, the function of which would be to provide advice, guidance and resources for managing and implementing suitable policies, and to provide services for handling reporting of issues if required.

What can shEqual do?

While shEqual cannot create policy for the industry or workplaces, they can advocate for policy and practice change and connect ad workplaces with best practice policies, tools and resources.

shEqual can use their history and industry connections to motivate wide reaching action across the sector. This includes supporting grassroots platforms and industry champions working to address gender inequality in ad workplaces.

Where there are challenges in pursuing any of these agendas due to a lack of data, shEqual may also be able to provide support via funding or commissioning research that will address important knowledge gaps

APPENDIX A: SHEQUAL SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

13730 Gender Equality in Advertising

SHEQUAL — V6 20 October 2021

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey and supporting gender equality in the advertising industry.

The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. All of your responses will be completely confidential and will not be identifiable or attributed to you in any way.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Empirica Research at: melb@empiricaresearch.com.au

To verify Empirica's credentials you may call the Australian Market Research Industry's Surveyline on 1300 364 830.

For more information on the shEqual project and previous research on gender equality in advertising please go to www.shequal.com.au

Demographics and Screening

Before we get started, we just need to ask a few questions about your connection to the Australian advertising industry.

Q1.1a	Which of the following best describes your work in the advertising industry in Australia in relation to **developing, creating, or producing advertising or communications** content?

Single response.

Currently work in the **development/creation/production** of advertising/ communication content in Australia

Previously worked in the **development/creation/production** of advertising/communication content in Australia

Have never worked in the **development/creation/production** of advertising/communication content in Australia

Q1.1b	Which of the following best describes your work in the advertising industry in Australia in relation to **buying/commissioning advertising or communications content** (i.e., working as a marketing or brand manager who commissions ads)?

Single response.

Currently work in the **buying/commissioning of advertising or communications content** in Australia

Previously worked in the **buying/commissioning of advertising or communications content** in Australia

Have never worked in the **buying/commissioning of advertising or communications content** in Australia

SCREEN OUT MESSAGE IF ANSWERED NEVER TO BOTH Q1.1A AND Q1.1B:

Thank you for your interest in this survey. Unfortunately, the focus of the survey is on the Australian advertising industry, and as such, we are only looking to hear from people who have worked in and around the industry.

IF RESPONDENT CHOOSES 'CURRENTLY' OR 'PREVIOUSLY' AT BOTH Q1.1A AND Q1.1B

Q1.1c	In which of your current/previous roles do you have the most experience?

Single response.

Development/creation/production of advertising/communication content

Buying/commissioning of advertising or communications content

SURVEY MESSAGE IF ONLY ONE AREA IS CURRENT:

Thanks! For the rest of the survey, we would like you to focus your responses on your current workplace and role in relation to *your focus area*.

SURVEY MESSAGE IF BOTH AREAS ARE CURRENT OR BOTH AREAS ARE PREVIOUS:

Thanks! For the rest of the survey, we would like you to focus your responses on your experiences in relation to *your focus area*.

Q1.2	[IF CURRENTLY] Which of the following best describes the **type of organisation** you work for?
	[IF PREVIOUSLY] Which of the following best describes the **type of organisation** you worked for while you were in or around the Australian advertising industry?
	Please select all that apply.

Multiple response.

Advertising agency / creative agency	
Client / buyer of advertising	
Media owner	
Media agency	
Specialist agency/consultancy	
PR agency	
Branding	
Digital	
I am/was a freelancer	
Other (please specify)	Free response

Q1.3	[IF CURRENTLY] Which of the following best describes the **type of work** you do within your organisation?
	[IF PREVIOUSLY] Which of the following best describes the **type of work** you did while you were in or around the Australian advertising industry?
	Please select all that apply

Multiple response.

Creative	Don't show to client side
Marketing	
Production	Don't show to client side
Studio	Don't show to client side
Client Services	Don't show to client side
Management	
Planning / strategy	Don't show to client side
Other (please specify)	Free response

| Q1.4 | [IF CURRENTLY] How long have you worked in or around the advertising industry? |
| | [IF PREVIOUSLY] How long did you work in or around the Australian advertising industry? |

Single response.

Less than a year
1 -< 2 years
2 -< 5 years
5 -< 10 years
10 -< 15 years
15 -< 20 years
20 years or more

Q1.5   [IF CURRENTLY] And how would you describe your role in terms of seniority?

[IF PREVIOUSLY] And how would you describe the most senior role that you achieved while working in or around the Australian advertising industry?

Single response.

Junior	
Middle	
Senior	
Other (please specify)	Free response

Q1.6   [IF PREVIOUSLY at BOTH Q1.1A AND Q1.1B] Could you briefly tell us why you left the industry?

Free response.

And now just a few questions about you more specifically.

Q1.7   What is your gender?

Single response.

Female	
Male	
Self-identified	Free response
Prefer not to say	

Q1.8   What is your age?

Single response.

Under 18	Screen out
18 - 24	
25 - 29	
30 - 34	
35 - 39	
40 - 44	
45 - 49	
50 - 54	
55 - 59	
60 or over	

Q1.9   Do you identify with any of the following groups?

Please select as many as apply.

Multiple response. Randomise.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)	
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	
LGBTQI+	
Living with a disability	
Another group (please tell us)	Free response
None of the above	Exclusive response
Prefer not to answer	Exclusive response

Q1.10   Where do you currently live?

Single response.

Australia	
New Zealand	Screen out for panel
Europe	Screen out for panel
North America	Screen out for panel
South America	Screen out for panel
Asia	Screen out for panel
Africa	Screen out for panel
Prefer not to say	Not shown for panel

IF LIVE IN AUSTRALIA

Q1.11   What state or territory do you live in?

Single response.

New South Wales	
ACT	
Victoria	
Queensland	
Western Australia	
South Australia	
Tasmania	
Northern Territory	
Prefer not to say	Not shown for panel

Q1.12   Do you live…?

Single response.

A capital city or its surrounding suburbs
A large city, but not a state capital
A regional/country area

Gender equality in advertising industry

Q2.1   The purpose of this survey is to explore attitudes around gender equality in the Australian advertising industry.

So, to get started, **please tell us what 'gender equality' means to you**. This doesn't have to be specific to the advertising industry — we're most interested in your general definition of the term.

Free response.

Q2.2   How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to **advertising**?

Please select one response per row.

Randomise order.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Everyone has a role to play in influencing the ads we create and commission	1	2	3	4	5
DISPLAY TO 'CURRENT' ONLY It's important to me to feel proud of the ads my workplace makes/commissions [vary wording depending on whether respondent is agency or client]	1	2	3	4	5
DISPLAY TO 'CURRENT' ONLY I always feel proud of the ads my workplace makes/commissions	1	2	3	4	5
Better representation of all genders makes better ads	1	2	3	4	5
Advertising is a powerful influence on society	1	2	3	4	5
The Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue	1	2	3	4	5
The Australian advertising industry prioritises addressing gender equality in advertising content	1	2	3	4	5
The saying "sex sells" is often true	1	2	3	4	5

RESPONDENTS TO ANSWER EITHER Q2.3a/b OR Q2.3c/d — will be randomly assigned to expand on ONE ISSUE

IF Q2.2 'agree' that Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue:

| Q2.3a | Please tell us why you believe that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue: |
| | Remember, your responses are anonymous. |

Free response.

IF Q2.2 'disagree' that Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue:

| Q2.3b | Please tell us why you **do not believe** that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue: |
| | Remember, your responses are anonymous. |

Free response.

IF Q2.2 'agree' that Australian advertising industry prioritises addressing gender equality in advertising content:

| Q2.3c | Please tell us why you feel that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality in advertising content: |
| | Remember, your responses are anonymous. |

Free response.

IF Q2.2 'disagree' that Australian advertising industry prioritises addressing gender equality in advertising content:

| Q2.3d | Please tell us why you **do not feel** that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality in advertising content: |
| | Remember, your responses are anonymous. |

Free response.

| Q2.4 | **In order to support gender equality**, how **important** do you believe it is that advertising… |
| | Please select one response per row. |

Randomise order.

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
Features **respectful** depictions of women	1	2	3	4	5
Features **realistic** depictions of women	1	2	3	4	5
Depicts women engaging in a wide **variety of activities**	1	2	3	4	5
Depicts a **diversity** of women	1	2	3	4	5

| Q2.5 | How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to **advertising**? |
| | Please select one response per row. |

Randomise order.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Advertising containing **gender stereotypes** of women contributes to poor body image in women	1	2	3	4	5
Advertising containing **gender stereotypes** of women contributes to violence against women	1	2	3	4	5
Advertising containing **gender stereotypes** of women contributes to poor mental health in women	1	2	3	4	5
Advertising that **sexualises and objectifies** women contributes to poor body image in women	1	2	3	4	5
Advertising that **sexualises and objectifies** women contributes to violence against women	1	2	3	4	5
Advertising that **sexualises and objectifies** women contributes to poor mental health in women	1	2	3	4	5

RANDOMISE DISPLAY ORDER OF THE FOLLOWING LINKS — ALL RESPONDENTS WILL SEE BOTH QUESTIONS:

- **The specific workplace culture** influences the advertising content produced
- **The general advertising industry culture** influences the advertising content produced

Q2.6	How strongly do you believe that ${lm://Field/link}?

Single response.

Not at all strongly
Slightly strongly
Moderately strongly
Very strongly
Extremely strongly

Q2.7a	What level of responsibility do you believe each of these parties **should** have for promoting gender equality in advertising content in Australia? Please select one response per row.

Randomise order.

	None	A little	A lot
Agency employees	1	2	3
Agency management	1	2	3
Industry bodies	1	2	3
Client management	1	2	3
Client employees	1	2	3
Consumers	1	2	3
Government	1	2	3

DISPLAY IF AT LEAST ONE ITEM AT Q2.7A IS > NONE

Q2.7a	And how much responsibility do you believe they are each **currently taking on** to promote gender equality in advertising content in Australia? Please select one response per row.

Randomise order. Display only those that are NOT none at Q2.7a

	None	A little	A lot
Agency employees	1	2	3
Agency management	1	2	3
Industry bodies	1	2	3
Client management	1	2	3
Client employees	1	2	3
Consumers	1	2	3
Government	1	2	3

Gender equality in your work

Now we would like to ask you about your experiences with gender equality issues while working in and around the advertising industry. Some questions will relate to gender issues in the workplace (e.g., gender pay gaps, etc) and some questions will relate to gender issues in advertising content (e.g., stereotypes in creative concepts).

DISPLAY Q3.1 TO 'CURRENT' ONLY

Q3.1 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your work in and around the Australian advertising industry?

Please select one response per row.

Randomise order.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
My current role gives me the opportunity to promote gender equality **in my workplace**	1	2	3	4	5
My current role gives me the opportunity to promote gender equality **in advertising content**	1	2	3	4	5
I would feel comfortable raising concerns at work about an issue involving gender equality **in the workplace**	1	2	3	4	5
I would feel comfortable raising concerns at work about gender equality **in advertising content**	1	2	3	4	5
In general, I think men are paid more than women in similar roles in my industry	1	2	3	4	5

Q3.1b How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement in relation to your work in and around the Australian advertising industry?

In general, I think men are paid more than women in similar roles in my industry.

Single response.

| Not at all strongly |
| Slightly strongly |
| Moderately strongly |
| Very strongly |
| Extremely strongly |

Q3.2 Have you ever participated in any of the following activities around gender equality?

Randomise. Multiple Choice.

Attended an event (in-person or online) about gender equality	
Participated in a workplace discussion about gender equality	
Supported a workplace initiative about gender equality	
Posting something on social media about gender equality	
Something else (please tell us what)	Free response
Never participated in any activities relating to gender equality	Exclusive response

IF Q3.2 'supported a workplace initiative'

Q3.2a What kind of workplace initiatives have you supported?

Free response.

If any listed items selected at Q3.2

Q3.3a How **comfortable** did you feel about this activity/each of these activities?

Randomise order. Display only selected items from Q3.2.

	Very uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Very comfortable
Attending events about gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Participating in workplace discussions about gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Supporting workplace initiatives about gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Posting something on social media about gender equality	1	2	3	4	5

If any listed items selected at Q3.2

Q3.3a How **effective** did you feel this activity/each of these activities was in terms of promoting gender equality?

Randomise order. Display only selected items from Q3.2.

	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Very effective	Extremely effective
Attending events about gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Participating in workplace discussions about gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Supporting workplace initiatives about gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Posting something on social media about gender equality	1	2	3	4	5

RANDOMISE ORDER OF Q3.4 AND Q3.5

Q3.4 Here is a list of possible reasons why someone might not speak up at work about **a concern relating to gender equality in advertising content**.

Have any of these reasons ever applied to you?

Multiple response. Randomise in groups.

Experience / confidence

Feeling that you didn't have enough experience to do so	
Feeling that your role wasn't senior enough to do so	
Feeling that you were in a minority on the issue (e.g., the only one of your gender or ethnicity)	
Feeling that it wasn't your place to do so	Probe in follow-up
Feeling that it wasn't serious enough to speak up about	

Consequences

Having had a previous negative experience speaking up	Probe in follow-up
Worried that there would be negative consequences if I spoke up	

Others

Other (please specify)	Free response
Nothing has ever made me hesitate to speak about gender equality in advertising	Exclusive response
I have never felt the need to speak about gender equality in advertising	Exclusive response

Q3.5 Here is a list of possible reasons why someone might not speak up at work about **a concern relating to gender equality in their workplace**.

Have any of these reasons ever applied to you?

Multiple response. Randomise in groups.

Experience / confidence

Feeling that you didn't have enough experience to do so	
Feeling that your role wasn't senior enough to do so	
Feeling that you were in a minority on the issue (e.g., the only one of your gender or ethnicity)	
Feeling that it wasn't your place to do so	Probe in follow-up
Feeling that it wasn't serious enough to speak up about	

Consequences

Having had a previous negative experience speaking up	Probe in follow-up
Worried that there would be negative consequences if I spoke up	

Others

Other (please specify)	Free response
Nothing has ever made me hesitate to speak about gender equality in advertising	Exclusive response
I have never felt the need to speak about gender equality in advertising	Exclusive response

If have had a previous negative experience in Q3.4 OR Q3.5

Q3.6a Please tell us about your **negative experience** speaking up about gender equality.

Your responses are completely confidential.

Free response.

If have felt it wasn't their place in Q3.4 OR Q3.5

Q3.6b Why did you feel that it wasn't your place to speak up about gender equality?

Your responses are completely confidential.

Free response.

Q3.7 How much would the following **encourage you** to speak up in your workplace about gender equality in advertising?

Please select one response per row.

Randomise order.

	Not at all encouraging	Slightly encouraging	Moderately encouraging	Very encouraging	Extremely encouraging
Witnessing others speaking up about gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Having research to back up my position	1	2	3	4	5
More men actively supporting gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
My **employer** having policies and/or initiatives in support of gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
My **industry** having policies and/or initiatives in support of gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Having tools and resources to support gender equality in the ads I am making	1	2	3	4	5

Q3.8 How would you feel about **your employer** taking the following actions to support gender equality?

Please select one response per row.

Randomise order.

	Strongly oppose	Somewhat oppose	Neither support nor oppose	Somewhat support	Strongly support	Not applicable
Undertaking a pay audit to identify any gender pay discrimination	1	2	3	4	5	99
Setting targets or quotas for gender representation at senior levels	1	2	3	4	5	99
Not working with/for clients with a poor record on gender equality [only display to agency side]	1	2	3	4	5	99
Not working with/for agencies with a poor record on gender equality [only display to client side]	1	2	3	4	5	99
Reviewing content for potential gender equality issues	1	2	3	4	5	99
Providing training on gender equality	1	2	3	4	5	99
Providing tools and resources to support inclusion of gender equality in your work	1	2	3	4	5	99
Reviewing work processes to ensure they are gender equitable (e.g., gender equal creative/ pitch teams, casting, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	99

Impacting gender equality in advertising

Now we would like to get your thoughts on what might help improve gender equality in advertising in Australia.

Q4.1 How much impact do you think the following kinds of initiatives could have on **improving gender equality in advertising content in Australia**?

Please select one response per row.

Randomise order.

	Not impactful at all	Slightly impactful	Moderately impactful	Very impaactful	Extremely impactful
Awards recognising gender equality in advertising	1	2	3	4	5
Pressure from brands / clients	1	2	3	4	5
More men actively supporting gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Pressure from consumers / the public	1	2	3	4	5
Stronger regulation of advertising content	1	2	3	4	5
Training and professional development on gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Industry based initiatives (e.g., action by Advertising Council Australia, Australian Association of National Advertisers or Media Federation of Australia)	1	2	3	4	5

Q4.2 How much impact do you think the following kinds of initiatives could have on **improving gender equality in advertising workplaces in Australia**?

Please select one response per row.

Randomise order.

	Not impactful at all	Slightly impactful	Moderately impactful	Very impaactful	Extremely impactful
Training and professional development on gender equality	1	2	3	4	5
Industry based initiatives (e.g., action by Advertising Council Australia, Australian Association of National Advertisers or Media Federation of Australia)	1	2	3	4	5
Workplace based initiatives (e.g., policies and procedures, quotas, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Mentoring and support for women in the industry	1	2	3	4	5
Transparent accountability for sexist, bullying, or discriminatory behaviour	1	2	3	4	5
Pay transparency	1	2	3	4	5

Q4.3 What other actions — if any — do you believe are necessary to improve gender equality in advertising?

Free response.

End

Q5.1 We know this can be a tricky topic to talk about and to think about, so we really thank you for your time in taking this survey.

If you have any other comments or stories to share about gender equality, please type them in here. Otherwise, scroll to the bottom of the screen to submit your survey.

Free response.

END SCREEN

Thank you for your time and contribution to this research. These research questions were designed and authorised by Empirica Research on behalf of shEqual.

APPENDIX B: THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

The analytical frameworks detailed in Table 6 were chosen because they were identified as having significant overlap and relevance to the questions covered by the shEqual Survey.

The purpose of the frameworks was to provide an orienting lens to guide the qualitative analysis, ensuring that the final higher-order themes maintained focus on the objectives of the research and were aligned with key theories and concepts from relevant extant research.

The first two frameworks are more directly applicable to understanding gender inequality within advertising workplaces, while the latter two pertain more to advertising content. However, the connections between advertising workplaces, the content they produce and the society that content influences, means that the factors impacting on one sphere are unlikely to be completely irrelevant to the other.

Table 6: Analytical frameworks in relation to advertising workplaces or content

Framework Author (Year)	Primary influence / application	Description
Barriers to achieving intersectional equality Woods et al. (2022)	Workplaces and content	This framework maps an approach for organisations to build coalitions and capabilities across four dimensions of organizational disparities (procedural, discursive, material, and affective) to achieve intersectional equality.
Bystander Dynamics Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly (2005)	Workplaces (but relevant to why people may stand by in relation to an issue with content)	The Bystander Dynamics framework presents an alternative mechanism to target reporting for controlling sexual harassment—observer intervention. A taxonomy of intervention types and factors promoting and inhibiting observer intervention are mapped.
Patriarchal marketing Gurrieri (2021)	Content	Patriarchal marketing describes marketing that operates in accordance with a male-dominated power structure, in turn dominating, oppressing and exploiting women. This produces the symbolic annihilation of women through three effects: trivialisation of the complexities of women's lives, omission of those outside of the hegemonic feminine idea, and condemnation of women's corporeality.
Mirror vs Mold Holbrook (1987) and Pollay (1986, 1987)	Content	The 'mirror' vs 'mold' debate positions a tension that advertising either reflects values that already exist and are dominant in society or alternatively can mold and shape the values of audiences and have significant social impacts.

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