



shEqual

ADVERTISING EQUALITY

The shEqual Survey
Snapshot Report

*Perceptions of gender equality
in Australian advertising*

shEqual acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands and waters across Victoria and pays our respects to their Elders past and present.

We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and that we are beneficiaries of stolen land and dispossession, which began over 200 years ago and continues today.

sh=equal

ADVERTISING EQUALITY

shEqual – Australia’s movement for advertising equality – is the first coordinated effort in Australia to promote gender equality and address the drivers of violence against women in the advertising setting. It’s our mission to raise industry and public awareness about gender (in)equality in advertising, reinforce positive behaviours, and empower people to take action in shaping how women are represented in the stories we tell and consume.

shEqual is led by Women’s Health Victoria (WHV) – a statewide women’s health promotion, advocacy and support service with a history spanning more than 25 years. Proudly independent, feminist and not-for-profit, WHV launched shEqual in 2020 as part of its multi-year project exploring how to prevent and address gender inequality in advertising.

shEqual is the culmination of years of research, advocacy and engagement with the advertising industry. It forms an important part of WHV’s vision of ‘Women living well – healthy, empowered and equal’. shEqual is guided by a national strategic framework, Seeing is Believing, and takes a ‘whole-of-system’ approach to driving change, working across three priority areas: industry culture change; empowering community; and regulation and policy. shEqual collaborates with the advertising industry on research and resource development, events and communications, and delivers tailored training on gender equality for the advertising industry.

Find out more about shEqual: shequal.com.au

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Why gender equality in advertising matters

Advertising has a powerful influence on our beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours. Alongside other forms of media, advertising shapes and reinforces ideas about gender and how people of different genders are valued in our society.

Research shows that advertising has historically underrepresented girls and women, stereotyped portrayals of men and women remain prevalent in Australian advertising, and women and girls are increasingly portrayed in sexualised and objectifying ways. Research shows that these portrayals have harmful impacts, including:

- limiting the roles, aspirations and interests of people of all genders
- damaging girls' and women's physical and mental health
- reducing perceptions of safety among women and girls in public space
- reinforcing the beliefs and attitudes that drive violence against women.

At the same time, available data indicate that advertising workplaces have high rates of gender inequality (including pay discrimination), high rates of sexual harassment and low representation of women in senior (especially creative) roles.

While advertising plays a significant role in perpetuating attitudes and behaviours that harm women's health and equality and drive violence against women, it can also play a transformative role in promoting women's health and equality through the use of diverse, realistic and respectful gender portrayals.

Advertising that promotes gender equality is positively received, particularly by women. Sales lift and purchase intent and brand loyalty improve for brands that show women as more equal, more multidimensional and more authentic. Research has also shown that advertising that challenges gender stereotypes and uses 'progressive' portrayals has more 'brand distinctiveness' making it more memorable and able to stand out for consumers.

Advertising equality is good for business.

For more information about shEqual's research, visit shequal.com.au

About the shEqual Survey

In October 2021, shEqual released a national online survey to better understand attitudes to gender equality in the advertising industry.

Conducted by Empirica Research in collaboration with WHV, the aim of the survey was to explore perspectives on gender inequality in advertising among professionals working in and around the advertising industry, and how gender equality in advertising could be further progressed. The survey examined perceptions of gender (in)equality both in advertising content and in advertising workplaces.

The survey was live for two weeks and was promoted through industry contacts, industry press and social media channels, particularly LinkedIn and Instagram. Additional respondents were sourced from online research panel Dynata. The survey was open to anyone who currently works or has previously worked in Australian advertising in any capacity, including both agency-side and client/brand-side. The survey received nearly 600 viable responses.

The survey examined:

- What gender equality means to advertising professionals and how important it is to them
- Who advertising professionals believe should be responsible for promoting gender equality in advertising and whether they feel those responsible are doing a good job
- What kinds of gender equality initiatives advertising professionals have participated in and whether they feel they were effective
- What action advertising professionals feel needs to be taken to advance gender equality in advertising content, workplaces and the broader industry
- What motivates or stands in the way of action on gender equality in advertising workplaces and content.



About this snapshot report

While the shEqual Survey predominantly comprised closed-ended questions, multiple opportunities were offered for participants to provide free-text, open-ended answers expanding on their opinions and experiences. This resulted in a huge volume of fascinating – and sometimes disturbing – quantitative and qualitative data.

In the interests of making key findings available to industry as soon as possible to support ongoing conversations about – and action on – gender equality, WHV has compiled this Snapshot Report. The Snapshot Report captures preliminary results from the survey, drawing on a summary of survey findings produced by Empirica Research.

Further in-depth analysis will be needed to reflect the richness of the data and do justice to the detailed responses provided by many respondents. WHV anticipates that a more detailed report will be published in 2022.



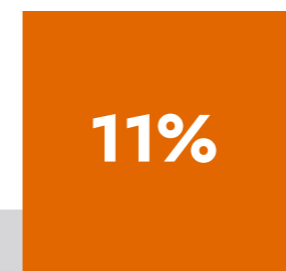
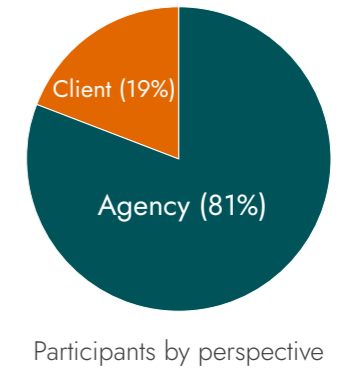
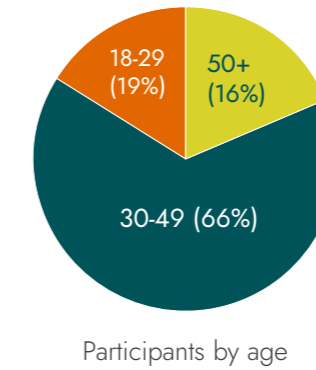
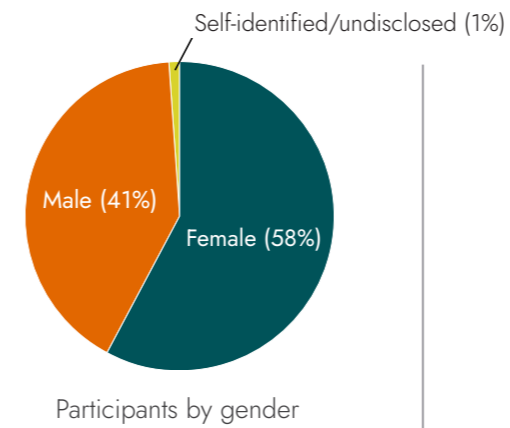
Demographics

598 participants provided sufficient data in the survey to be included in analysis and reporting. As not all participants completed the survey to the end, the number of responses reported on decreases throughout the report.

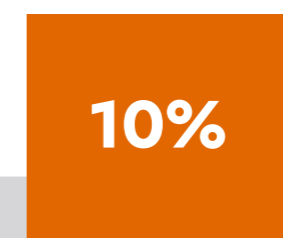
Overall, our participants were:

- Mostly currently working in the advertising industry
- Predominantly bringing experience from working in agencies (as opposed to clients/brands)
- Slightly more likely to be female than male, consistent with the reported gender composition of the industry itself
- Mostly aged between 30-49 years, with women aged 25-39 making up more than a third of respondents
- Located in Sydney or Melbourne

Respondents from minority or marginalised population groups – including people who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse or as having a disability – were under-represented relative to their proportion of the Australian population. This may reflect under-representation of these groups in the industry itself.



Participants who identified as culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD)



Participants who identified as LGBTQI+



Participants who identified as living with a disability



Participants who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Key findings

The survey findings show that gender equality in advertising matters deeply to those who work in the industry. The high number of responses to the survey itself demonstrates the level of interest and engagement in this issue, including among men.

While some progress has been made on gender equality, sexism and gender discrimination continue to be everyday experiences for many women in the advertising industry.

Respondents of all genders believe that not enough action on gender equality is being taken by employers, industry bodies and governments. Respondents want to see greater accountability for those who engage in – or protect those who engage in – sexist and discriminatory behaviours.

Clear gender differences emerge from the findings. Women are more likely than men to believe industry and workplace culture influence advertising content, less likely to believe gender equality is prioritised in Australian advertising, more likely to be concerned about speaking up due to fear of negative consequences, and more likely to support strong initiatives like gender pay transparency and quotas for women at senior levels.

Women are more likely to fear or experience negative consequences from speaking up about gender equality, while some men don't feel it's their place to do so. However, the findings clearly show that women in the industry want men to be more active in their support for gender equality.

The conclusion is unmistakable. The time for talk is over. It is time for bold and strong action on gender equality in Australian advertising.

THE LINK BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORK AND THE WORKPLACE

Finding 1:
Advertising content and workplace culture are perceived as interconnected.

PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

Finding 2:
Advertising professionals do not believe gender equality is currently being prioritised in advertising workplaces or content.

Finding 3:
Women are more concerned about gender equality issues in Australian advertising than men.

Finding 4:
There are different views about the extent and effectiveness of current action on gender equality in advertising, with some perceiving that gender equality initiatives in advertising have been superficial or tokenistic.

SPEAKING UP ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY

Finding 5:
A significant minority of both women and men have concerns about raising gender equality issues at work, but the reasons differ. Women are more likely to fear or experience negative consequences from speaking up, while some men don't feel it's their place to do so.

Finding 6:
Women in the industry want men to actively support gender equality.

SUPPORT FOR STRONGER ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY

Finding 7:
Advertising professionals of all genders are calling for bold and strong action on gender equality, with a focus on transparency and accountability.

Finding 8:
There is a high level of support among advertising professionals for tackling gender pay discrimination.

Finding 9:
The lack of family-friendly workplace practices and culture is a major barrier to gender equality in advertising.

RESISTANCE TO ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY

Finding 10:
Some people within the industry are resistant to action on gender equality and resistance is displayed in different ways.

IS IT REALLY THAT BAD? YES, FOR SOME IT IS

Finding 11:
While there is a perception that gender equality is improving in the advertising industry, experiences of sexism and gender discrimination remain common.

THE LINK BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORK AND THE WORKPLACE

Finding 1:

Advertising content and workplace culture are perceived as interconnected.

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Advertising content and workplace culture are perceived as interconnected.

While our survey asked respondents about their perceptions and experiences of gender equality in advertising content and in workplace culture separately, their responses made clear that these are not independent issues.

Two-thirds of respondents (67%) said that industry and workplace culture have a very or extremely strong influence on the advertising content that workplace produces. Women and those aged under 40 were more likely to say that workplace culture has a strong influence on the content produced.



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... This has a catalyst effect on decision making, clientele, briefs won, agency hires and the type of representation we see in Ad content.

– Female 25-29 years, Agency

Gender equality in advertising content comes from the diversity of voices that the advertising agency hires. The more diversity and representation within the agency that creates the ads means more prioritisation of these issues.

– Male, 25-29, Agency

The industry is still dominated by a heavy male lens, traditional networks run and operated by men. If women are represented in senior levels they are still at the behest of men running large networks, hiding skeletons and protecting each other's reputations... If we can change the internal culture by understanding and dealing with the history, the people, the culture... the content or work coming out of agencies will be impacted for the better.

– Female 50-54 years, Agency/Client

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.



PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

Finding 2:

Advertising professionals do not believe gender equality is currently being prioritised in advertising workplaces or content.

Finding 3:

Women are more concerned about gender equality issues in Australian advertising than men.

Finding 4:

There are different views about the extent and effectiveness of current action on gender equality in advertising, with some perceiving that gender equality initiatives in advertising have been superficial or tokenistic.

Finding 2:

Advertising professions do not believe gender equality is currently being prioritised in advertising workplaces or content.

Finding 3:

Women are more concerned about gender equality issues in Australian advertising than men.

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

There was a stark disagreement between men and women in the industry regarding its prioritisation of gender equality as a workplace issue: 54% of male respondents agreed that it does, while only 29% of female respondents agreed.

Consistently throughout the survey, **female respondents expressed higher levels of concern about gender equality in advertising than their male counterparts.** Women were less inclined to agree that gender equality is a priority in the industry in either advertising content or workplaces, or that those with power in the industry are doing enough about it. Within their workplaces, fewer women than men reported being comfortable to raise concerns about gender equality, and they were more likely to be concerned about the potential negative consequences of doing so. (Hesitancy about speaking up is explored further below)



... there's a huge issue with leadership and women in senior/exec positions. Men are still running the majority of agencies. There are many agencies with outdated maternity leave policies, sexual harassment is commonplace and women are not being heard and listened to across many agencies.

– Female 25-29 years, Agency/Client

Overall, female respondents were more convinced than male respondents of the power and influence of advertising, and were more likely to recognise the social impacts of gender portrayals in advertising, such as the link between gender stereotypes and violence against women.

Respondents were almost unanimous on the importance of respectful depictions of women in advertising to supporting gender equality, but they were slightly less emphatic in relation to the importance of realistic depictions of a diversity of women engaging in a wide variety of activities. While men and women were consistent on the importance of respectful depictions, men rated realism, diversity, and wide-ranging activities as less important than women.

In order to support gender equality, how important do you believe it is that advertising...

Percentage of respondents who believe it is extremely or very important	Female	Male
Features respectful depictions of women	95%	90%
Features realistic depictions of women	92%	82%
Depicts a diversity of women	92%	82%
Depicts women engaging in a wide variety of activities	93%	83%

Key gender differences in perceptions of gender equality in advertising:



Less than a third of female respondents (29%) agreed that the Australian advertising industry prioritises gender equality as a workplace issue, compared with more than half of male respondents (54%).



Only around a third of female respondents (32%) agreed that the Australian advertising industry prioritises addressing gender equality in advertising content, compared with nearly half of male respondents (47%).



The vast majority (86%) of female respondents agreed that, in general, men are paid more than women in similar roles in the advertising industry, compared with 56% of male respondents.



Nearly three-quarters of female respondents (72%) agreed that gender stereotypes in advertising contribute to violence against women, compared with 58% of male respondents.



Around two-thirds of female respondents believe that agency management and industry bodies are doing less than they should to promote gender equality in advertising content (62% agency management; 66% industry bodies), compared with less than half of men (39% agency management; 44% industry bodies).



Nearly half of female respondents reported that they would have concerns about speaking up about a gender equality issue in the workplace due to fear of negative consequences (46%), compared with around one-sixth of men (17%).

Finding 4:

There are different views about the extent and effectiveness of current action on gender equality in advertising, with some perceiving that gender equality initiatives in advertising have been superficial or tokenistic.

Those who felt gender equality is not prioritised in the industry most commonly referred to:

- the over-representation of men in senior positions in the industry,
- experiences of misogynistic or sexist workplaces, and
- pay discrepancies.

Other reasons they felt gender equality was not prioritised included:

- workplace structures and expectations that discriminate against or are unfavourable towards women (such as poor work-life balance, lack of parental leave and childcare),
- advertising content that is still sexist, and
- a perception that it is 'all talk, no action'.



I've never worked at an agency without a gender pay gap, [with] an equal number of females in the leadership teams or without stories of misogyny.
– Female 30-34 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 [are] 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 30-34 years, Agency/Client

Those who felt that the industry is prioritising workplace gender equality had a different view, citing:

- the high level of attention to and discussion of the issue,
- hiring practices that focus on talent rather than gender, race etc, and
- a perception that there is equality of opportunity in the industry.



I believe that the industry has finally woken up to its responsibility to reflect the diversity of our society. We have an outside influence on how Australian society sees itself and I believe as an industry we have made positive steps in accepting our responsibilities as culture shapers.
– Female 34-39 years, PR Agency

However, **there was also a strong perception among this group that prioritisation of gender equality is often a form of virtue signalling:** that it is expected of the industry and workplaces and is a form of self-promotion.



I've been asked to represent as a part of an all female team on a project about women in sport but in the meantime behind the scenes it was three men overseeing everything and making the executive decisions. But then we were to be the face and pose as a female front, pretty disgusting in my opinion...
– Female 35-39 years, Agency/Client

It's a mix of two reasons: One reason is that some believe this is important and influences the work we do and pushes our society and industry forward. The other reason, and many agencies do this: is to be seen as being progressive without actually understanding its importance.

– Male 30-34 years, Agency/Client

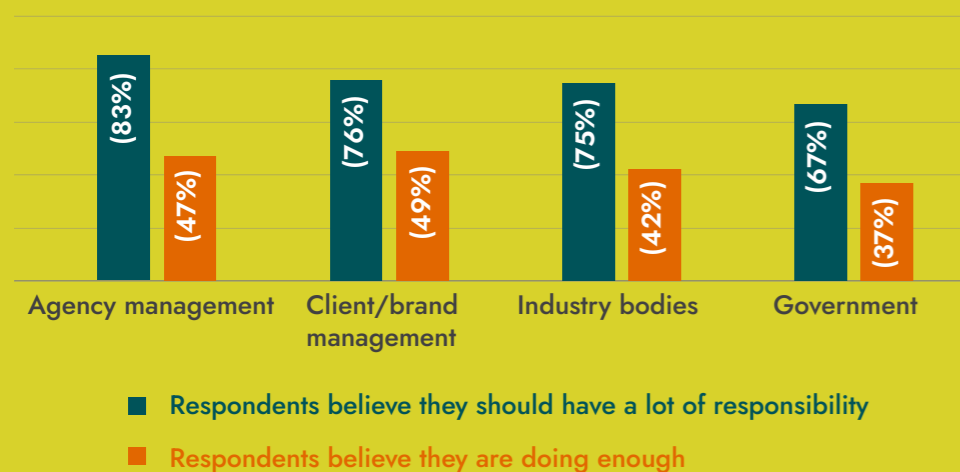
The Australian industry does a lot of 'talking' but no action. Take the UK and their requirements for all agencies to provide annual reports on their gender pay gaps -why has this not been championed here? ... All up, having worked globally and come back to Australia recently, I'm appalled at how behind we are, and how the men in this industry are flaunting their 'equality stance' when I know for a fact they are some of the worst offenders.

– Female 35-39 years, Agency/Client

In relation to who should be taking responsibility for addressing gender equality in advertising:

- **Agency management** was seen as having the greatest responsibility, with 83% of respondents saying agency management should have a lot of responsibility (perhaps reflecting the fact that around 4 out of 5 respondents were from agencies), but less than half (47%) feel they are doing enough.
- Three-quarters of respondents (76%) think **client/brand management** should have a lot of responsibility, but only half think they are doing enough (49%).
- Three-quarters of respondents (75%) believe **industry bodies** should have a lot of responsibility, but only 42% think they are doing enough.
- Two-thirds of respondents (67%) believe **government** should have a lot of responsibility for addressing gender equality in advertising, but only 37% of respondents think government is doing enough.

Who should take responsibility for gender equality action?



SPEAKING UP ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY

Finding 5:

A significant minority of both women and men have concerns about raising gender equality issues at work, but the reasons differ.

Women are more likely to fear or experience negative consequences from speaking up, while some men don't feel it's their place to do so.

Finding 6:

Women in the industry want men to actively support gender equality.

Finding 5:

A significant minority of both women and men have concerns about raising gender equality issues at work, but the reasons differ.

Women are more likely to fear or experience negative consequences from speaking up, while some men don't feel it's their place to do so.

Respondents were asked why they may have hesitated to speak up about a gender equality issue in their workplace or advertising content. Their answers indicate that the strongest barriers are a fear of negative consequences and a lack of confidence in their position.

Fear of negative consequences arising from speaking up about gender equality issues was cited far more frequently by female than male respondents.

- 38% of female respondents felt worried about negative consequences from speaking up about gender equality issues in advertising content (compared with 19% of males), and
- nearly half the female respondents (46%) cited fear of negative consequences as a reason for not speaking up about gender equality issues in the workplace (compared with 17% of men).

Female respondents were also more likely than males to have experienced negative consequences because of speaking up about gender equality. **Nearly one in three female respondents had experienced negative consequences because of speaking up about a gender equality issue in advertising content or the workplace** (29% and 30% respectively) compared with 14% and 12% of males respectively.

Actual and perceived consequences for speaking up included:

- the concerns raised being dismissed in the moment,
- being viewed as difficult,
- being subject to ridicule and sexist and derogatory comments, and
- being overlooked for work opportunities or promotions.

Some respondents reported being abused, bullied or threatened as a result of speaking up.



Being completely shut down by my male boss when I was a junior in front of the team who were all men. They laughed.

– Female 35-39 years, Agency

Dismissed by senior management (who were male), ignored, passed up [for] opportunities as I was considered too vocal – a troublemaker.

– Female 40-44 years, Client/Agency

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



Male respondents described different reasons for hesitating to speak up about gender inequality. In addition to not feeling they were senior enough to do so, they reported:

- being unsure about speaking up because they did not want to speak for the women involved,
- because women present were not saying anything, and
- because they felt they didn't have a good enough understanding of the issues to be able to support their argument if they encountered pushback.



As a middle-aged white male in a senior position... I'm seen as part of the problem. I get that [I'm] 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 polarise 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

It is my place to support the person speaking up, not necessarily being the one to speak up.

– Male 30-34 years, Agency/Client.

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 itself is sexist and contributes to gender inequality.

– Male 40-44 years, Agency

Women... should be and feel free to speak about it and their lived experiences... it's not my place to comment. It is my place to speak about it from the male perspective e.g. paternal leave etc but that's not often talked about. That's not a value judgement or whinge just how it is.

– Male 35-39 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 25-29 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 30-34 years, Agency (freelance)

Finding 6:

Women in the industry want men to actively support gender equality.

When asked about actions that would encourage employees to speak up about gender equality issues in advertising, the actions rated as the most encouraging related to social norms around speaking up. **82% of respondents said they would be very or extremely encouraged by witnessing others speaking up, and by more men actively supporting gender equality.**

While men reported that they didn't feel it was their place to speak up on gender equality, many female respondents spoke (in their free text responses) about the importance of male involvement, education, advocacy and action to achieve real change in gender equality in Australian advertising.



Women are still being asked to organise events, workgroups and training for each other and the workplace. It piles up on top of everything else we have to do... the (already heavy) mental load is increased rather than decreased. When men start planning and putting in the effort to work on gender equality, we might get somewhere. It's not just women's work to fight for equality.

– Female 40-44 years, Agency

If men stopped objectifying and taking advantage of young women. If comments stopped being made about our bodies or asking how "wild" we get after a few drinks. If men stopped staring at us, cutting us off and creating spaces where only hetero-cis-male related conversations could take place. This would be a great start.

– Female 25-29 years, Agency/Client

Education of men specifically to help them understand the need for temporary affirmative actions to help readdress balance in the workplace.

– Male 40-44 years, Client/Agency

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



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... 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 (freelance)

Other actions proposed in the survey would also encourage respondents to speak up:

- 79% of respondents would be very or extremely encouraged by their **employer having policies or initiatives** to support gender equality
- 78% would be very or extremely encouraged by their **industry having policies or initiatives** to support gender equality
- 70% would be very or extremely encouraged by having **research** to back up their position
- 68% would be very or extremely encouraged by having **tools and resources** to support gender equality in the ads they are making.



SUPPORT FOR STRONGER ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY

Finding 7:

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

Finding 8:

There is a high level of support among advertising professionals for tackling gender pay discrimination.

Finding 9:

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

Finding 7:

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

59% of respondents said that they had participated in a workplace discussion about gender equality, and 54% said they had supported workplace initiatives on gender equality. Slightly fewer had attended events about gender equality or posted on the topic on social media (both 46%). The majority of participants felt comfortable participating in these activities, but did not consider them particularly effective in promoting gender equality. Female respondents rated participating in workplace discussions about gender equality as significantly less effective than male respondents. 35% of female respondents rated this as very or extremely effective, compared with 56% of male respondents.

In terms of future action, respondents felt that progress on gender equality in **advertising content** would be most strongly influenced by external pressure from clients and brands (81% said this would be very or extremely impactful) and from consumers (74% said this would be very or extremely impactful). Stronger regulation (64%), training (59%) and industry initiatives (58%) were in the second tier of impactful action.



The Australian Advertising industry has talked about this for so long it's hard to believe anything will ever change. The leaders respond to four things – money, clients (reviews, winning, or losing clients), awards, publicity (name and shame). Make any change directly linked to that and you might see a difference.

– Female 45-49 years, Agency

I think the advertising industry needs to be government regulated. The industry needs to be held to account given the substantial impact it has on society... In addition to this... mandatory training, induction and programs would assist in combatting the issue for all employees. That includes senior employees.

– Female 25-29 years, Client/Agency

To improve gender equality within **advertising workplaces**, the suggested actions that were perceived as having the greatest impact were:

- transparent accountability for sexist, bullying or discriminatory behaviour (82% said this would be very or extremely impactful),
- pay transparency (75% believed this would be very or extremely impactful), and
- mentoring and support for women in the industry (75% believed this would be very or extremely impactful).

These three actions were rated as substantially more impactful than workplace or industry initiatives (65% and 59% respectively) or more training about gender equality (63%), although there was still strong support for the latter actions.



Men who discriminate against women don't lose their jobs. Don't get called out for it – even by their female colleagues in management. That culture of protecting those at the top, even when they do the wrong thing, happens in agencies, in industry publications, with recruiters, etc. Accountability and transparency are huge issues that won't be solved until the self-serving stop protecting those who let gender inequality flourish.

– Female 35-39 years, Agency

Likely driven by their stronger perception of gender inequality in the advertising industry, female respondents indicated stronger support for more action-based solutions by employers: pay audits and reviews of content and work processes were all strongly supported by significantly higher proportions of female than male respondents.

While setting gender targets or quotas at senior levels was the least popular of the suggested actions overall, it was strongly supported by almost twice as high a proportion of females as males (62% of females compared with 36% of males).



I do not believe employers should factor gender into their hiring. It should always be about experience and talent not gender or filling a quota. Having said that I feel that opportunities should be available to all genders to gain experience and increase talent – something I think the industry is good at and [I] have never seen any training or events that have excluded women. In fact I have seen more events pop up that are female only...

– Male 25-29 years, Client

Support for potential employer actions to promote gender equality in advertising	Female	Male	Gap (female % - male %)
Would be strongly supportive of their employer undertaking a pay audit to identify any gender pay discriminations	83%	68%	+15%
Would be strongly supportive of their employer reviewing content for potential gender equality issues	76%	59%	+17%
Would be strongly supportive of their employer reviewing work processes to ensure they are gender equitable (e.g., gender equal creative/pitch teams, casting, etc.)	76%	64%	+12%
Would be strongly supportive of their employer providing tools and resources to support inclusion of gender equality in your work	72%	67%	+5%
Would be strongly supportive of their employer providing training on gender equality	71%	64%	+7%
Would be strongly supportive of their employer not working with/for clients with a poor record on gender equality	68%	59%	+9%
Would be strongly supportive of their employer setting targets or quotas for gender representation at senior levels	62%	36%	+26%



What else could make a difference?

Respondents were asked to make their own suggestions for what is needed to help improve gender equality in Australian advertising. In addition to reiterating the actions outlined above (such as pay transparency and education), their suggestions include:

- more open dialogue about gender equality issues
- non-discriminatory hiring practices (for example, 'blind' recruitment)
- changes to workplace structures to support women (for example, improved parental leave and flexible work practices)
- changes to defamation law to enable women to speak out about their experiences in the industry, and
- 'naming and shaming' companies with poor records on gender equality.



This [gender equality] needs to be a metric the board and c-suite are measured by, right next to profit metrics. That way, it will filter down and deliberate steps will be taken.

– Male 35-39 years, Agency/Client

Remove the NDAs [Non-Disclosure Agreements] around any settled claims that relate to harassment, sexual assault or gender related settlements/cases. Name and shame the worst agencies.

– Male 50-54 years, Agency

Equal parental leave. More women in leadership. Faster action to protect women in the workplace. Quotas for hiring and project teams. Men making room for women. A change in the dialogue – there aren't 'sexists' and 'regular' people. Everyone is sexist – which is why we all need to work together and work on ourselves to get less sexist.

– Female 35-39 years, Agency

Finding 8:

There is a high level of support among advertising professionals for tackling gender pay discrimination.

As noted above, gender pay discrimination in the advertising industry was more strongly perceived by female 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 a further 27% somewhat agreed. By contrast, only 16% and 39% of male respondents strongly or somewhat agreed.

Despite gender pay discrimination being more strongly perceived by female respondents, both female and male respondents indicated high levels of support for tackling this problem. 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 was strong for both male and female respondents, female respondents were more 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 in improving gender equality in advertising workplaces, compared with 64% of male respondents.**



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

Transparency. In terms of pay gaps, I would be very interested to know the employment statistics of all genders and positions. The only way to identify if there is a problem is to see the data on this and identify the reasons for why...
– Male 25-29 years, Client

Finding 9:

The 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 on their career progression. Female respondents reported being passed over for professional development and management positions, being demoted on return, 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 importance of parental leave and flexible working arrangements for people of all genders.



The pace and workload of agency is often untenable for pregnant women or women returning from maternity, or those who are primary caregivers at home. Again, the pace and expectations within the industry can leave women feeling disadvantaged or left behind after maternity leave.
– Female 25-29 years, Agency/Client

When I had my first baby, my boss responded with ‘I didn’t think you were the [mothering] type’. 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...
– Female 35-39 years, Agency

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

Equal parental leave. Encouraging fathers to take 6 months off when their new baby is born will a) remove the stigma around women going on maternity leave, b) allow fathers to be fully present with their families, to contribute more than just a pay check and c) make a truly equal playing field so women aren’t seen as a liability and men aren’t seen as useless with their kids.
– Female 40-44 years, Agency

RESISTANCE TO ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY

Finding 10:

Some people within the industry are resistant to action on gender equality and resistance is displayed in different ways.

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While a minority of survey respondents directly expressed resistance to gender equality, more common were responses describing interactions in which respondents had encountered resistance.

VicHealth's 2018 framework for analysing resistance to gender equality initiatives, **(En)countering resistance**, can be used to characterise examples of resistance from respondents across the spectrum from more passive forms of resistance (denial) through to more active forms of resistance (backlash).

A particular theme from many of these respondents related to perceptions of disadvantage to men due to what they felt were hiring practices based on affirmative action. Respondents talked about the importance of hiring and promoting based on talent or merit rather than gender, and questioned why a qualified male should miss out on a job because of the 'need' to hire a woman.



... I agree that things should be equal but just trying to enforce it because there aren't enough x in x industry is bullshit. Why if a woman and a man go for a job should the man suffer if he is deemed a better candidate by having to be left behind due to equality?...

– Male 30-34 years, Agency



DENIAL

Denial of the problem or the credibility of the case for change; Blame the victims

Told I was reading too much into it or not 'getting the idea'. Without someone else in the room who could see what I see or understand my opinion it is hard to make the point feel real.

– Female 30-34 years, Agency/Client

In my opinion gender equality is the most overrated and ridiculously politically correct issue of our time. You obviously wanted different answers to this survey, I rest my case.

– Male 30-34 years, Agency/Client

DISAVOWAL

Refusal to recognise responsibility

To stop this being a crusade for women and for it to encourage a pragmatic assessment of ability and suitability to task and role. Equality of opportunity is critical rather than equality of outcome... Advertising needs to reflect rather than lead society or brands will fail to resonate with mass mainstream audiences... Real people and authentic behaviours should prevail. Gender equality can't be forced on the masses it needs to be nurtured rather than shoved down their throat.

– Male 60+ years, Client/Agency

INACTION

Refusal to implement a change initiative

Being told it's not the right time to discuss better parental leave because the all male [Senior Leadership Team] were busy/stressed.

– Female 30-34 years, Agency/Client

APPEASEMENT

Efforts to placate or pacify those advocating for change in order to limit its impact

Told to be practical. Patronisingly placated with "we want to but not this project/client/time"... or "we want to but it's so hard/there [are] just no women"... aggressively told we don't need quotas because the "right person always gets the job".

– Female 35-39 years, Agency

APPROPRIATION

Simulating change while covertly undermining it

We hear they are "desperate" for women directors but only a few are deemed as worthy so "we tried them and they were unavailable."

– Female 50-54 years, Agency

CO-OPTION

Using the language of progressive frameworks and goals for reactionary ends

Speaking up and being told there are other issues like gay and other minorities worse off.

– Female 30-34 years, Agency

BACKLASH

Aggressive, attacking response

If you think there is an issue, you are [an] uneducated poorly informed snowflake with ten cats.

– Male, 45-49 years, Agency

IS IT REALLY THAT BAD? YES, FOR SOME IT IS

Finding 11:

While there is a perception that gender equality is improving in the advertising industry, experiences of sexism and gender discrimination remain common.

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While there is a perception that gender equality is improving in the advertising industry, experiences of sexism and gender discrimination remain common.

Reading through some of the survey results, you could come away with the impression that the industry is in a good place – better than it was – with some agencies taking gender equality seriously and some people even questioning why we're still talking about gender.



I think that the industry is getting its head around this issue in recent years and making a concerted effort to improve. Also, female representation in senior roles is increasing, which is helping the industry to evolve.

– Male 50-54 years, Agency

The industry is not perfect by any means but I think they are handling gender equality pretty well.

– Female 40-44 years, Agency



But this is not the whole story. **Many women in the industry still experience sexism and gender discrimination on a day-to-day basis. Survey respondents shared many stories from lewd jokes to pregnancy discrimination to sexual assault.** So, if there is any question as to whether it is really that bad, the answer is unfortunately that for many women, yes, it is.

Specific examples of sexism and gender discrimination described by respondents included:

- Being told they would not be invested in with training because they were only going to “fuck off soon” on parental leave
- Hiding their pregnancies until the last minute to avoid discrimination
- Being removed from the management team upon their return from parental leave as they “no longer have time for the responsibility”
- Being demoted after returning from parental leave
- Male colleagues “joking” that they’ve become a “real bitch” since having kids
- Being introduced to clients as the “token female”
- Male counterparts of similar role and experience being paid more
- Having their ideas ignored, only for a male colleague to present the same idea later to acclaim
- Being called “difficult”, a “troublemaker” or “bitch” for speaking up, and then being criticised as not being assertive enough for not speaking up
- Being sexually harassed at work

In many of these stories, respondents reported having attempted to take these issues to their managers or HR departments, only to find they were not taken seriously, and no action was taken.

One respondent also related the experience of a colleague who was sexually assaulted by her boss in what was described as part of a workplace bet to see who would “fuck her first”.

Where to from here?

Our preliminary analysis of the survey responses suggests that, while some progress has been made, there is a strong perception that gender inequality remains pervasive in the Australian advertising industry. Sexism and gender discrimination continue to be everyday experiences for many women in the industry. And there is a clear view that not enough action is being taken by employers, industry bodies and governments.

The survey findings suggest tangible actions and initiatives to promote gender equality in advertising, such as gender pay audits and workplace practices supportive of parental leave and flexible work arrangements for people of all genders, would have the support of those working in the industry.

The survey findings also provide a useful guide for future action on gender equality in the advertising industry. For example, bridging the gap between the lack of confidence expressed by some men about speaking up and the appeal from women for men to ‘step up’ on gender equality is a promising focus area for further exploration and engagement.

WHV intends to undertake further analysis of this rich dataset with a view to publishing a more detailed report in 2022, as well as identifying any gaps in our understanding of gender equality in advertising warranting further research.



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

Advertising equality is good for everyone, but we need everyone on board.



Get equal by taking the pledge and get involved by visiting our website and following us on social media.

 shequal.com.au  [@shequal_au](https://www.instagram.com/shequal_au)  [shEqual](https://www.linkedin.com/company/shequal)

shEqual training

Gender Equality in Advertising

Build your understanding of the health impacts of gender inequality in advertising, and the benefits of authentic and diverse portrayals of all genders.

For more information contact training@whv.org.au

Gender Equality in the Advertising Workplace

Learn about unconscious bias, barriers to gender equality and managing resistance to change, as well as tools to promote gender equality in the workplace.

For more information contact training@whv.org.au

Founding partners and reference group members



shEqual is an initiative led by Women's Health Victoria and is supported by the Victorian Government and Respect Victoria.

