Women in the International Film Industry

“Being the Director of a program whose goal is to bring more female voices and female-focused stories into mainstream media, this book is sorely needed. My students are always bemoaning how little women are mentioned in the major texts of screenwriting history that they have used in their coursework and they long for books like this that represent the world they will enter and give them the support to make the changes necessary for all artists to succeed at telling a range of stories.”

—Rosanne Welch, Executive Director, Stephens College MFA in TV and Screenwriting

“This is an important collection that helps us to think about and navigate the film industry and its ongoing inequalities. It has international scope, showcasing a range of places, policies and perspectives. And most crucially, it centres the voices and stories of women, both on- and off-screen.”

—Bridget Conor, Senior Lecturer in Culture, Media and Creative Industries, King’s College London

“This project couldn’t be more timely. Liddy’s collection of essays on women in film is geographically all-encompassing, with contributions from across Europe as well as Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria and the United States. Taken together, they reveal how much we hold in common when it comes to addressing gender inequalities. Key questions emerge around the effectiveness of quotas, access to finance, career sustainability, and the power of role models. Most importantly, the writing style is uniformly accessible; arguments are backed up with data, and the message is clear—we can make it happen and we must.”

—Ruth Barton, Head of School of Creative Arts, Trinity College Dublin

“Women in the International Film Industry: Policy, Practice and Power makes an important contribution to our understanding of the scope and scale of gender inequality in the global film industry in the twenty-first century. This vibrant, timely, and comprehensive collection by leading academics draws from a range of disciplinary and methodological approaches to interrogate the ongoing international struggles to document and redress systemic gender inequality throughout the film value chain. The authors offer an advanced analysis of the gendered dynamics of work and labour markets, and the feminist activism and policy frameworks that shape them, that will be of substantial intellectual and practical value to scholars, film professionals, activists, and policy-makers for many generations.”

—Amanda Coles, Deakin University, Australia
“Over the last several years the movement for inclusion in the film industry has gained international momentum and one key to that growth has been research and data. *Women in the International Film Industry: Policy, Practice and Power*, edited by Susan Liddy, is an important tool in the push for equality, organizing real data from across the globe—because change does not happen in a vacuum. These important analyses give the activists in each country the ammunition needed to hold decision makers accountable in the fight for equitable distribution of access and opportunity.”

—Melissa Silverstein, *Founder/Publisher, Women and Hollywood. Co-Founder/Artistic Director, Athena Film Festival. Founder, The Girls Club*
For Fin, Hilary and Yvonne. Each, in your own way, a ‘believing mirror’.
Thank you.

For Joe (Oisin) Liddy, 1932–2020. Gone but still with us in a myriad of ways. May it always be so.
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**Gender Still Matters: Towards Sustainable Progress for Women in Australian Film and Television Industries**

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The Gendered Landscape in the International Film Industry: Continuity and Change

Susan Liddy

INTRODUCTION

This book is a response to the need for a comprehensive collection about women’s struggle for equality in the contemporary international film industry. Despite there being some excellent scholarly work in this area, to date, our information is limited. While knowledge of Hollywood, or Sweden for its trailblazing leadership, is widespread, much less is known about the drive for gender equality in other parts of the world. Chapters in this collection interrogate film industries in seventeen countries worldwide by offering a wide-ranging, critical assessment of practice, policy and progress and by establishing the range and scale of gender inequality and the urgency with which the issues are being addressed. As O’Neill and Domingo observe, social, economic and political conditions vary and “combine in different ways to enable or constrain women’s agency and leadership” (2015, p. 4). Many of the contributors acknowledge and address issues of diversity and inclusion, and undoubtedly, a far greater focus must be directed to intersectionality going forward. However, this collection is primarily about gender equality and focuses on, to quote Natalie Wreyford from her work on female screenwriters,
“the commonalities rather than the differences between women and racial [and other] minorities” (2015, p. 8).

Some contributors present detailed statistical research, others celebrate the women, past and present, whose work is part of film history and more offer snapshots or case studies about issues of particular concern. Approaches vary depending on the level of activism and gender awareness in individual countries. Whether attention is directed to screenwriters, directors, producers, below the line workers, film education, film festivals, the surge of activism that has surfaced in Western societies, the impact of #metoo and Times Up movements, or policy and intervention strategies, to name just a few, contributors offer an evaluation of what is, overwhelmingly, a gendered industry. An appraisal of the response from national funders is also included and ranges from those who are gender blind, or who minimise the existence and extent of gender inequality, to those who theoretically commit to equality but prevaricate on the best measures to implement change to others who have introduced formal gender policies and intervention strategies, with varying results. All are relevant to our understanding of the international landscape and will facilitate comparing and contrasting the pace, rate and effectiveness of change.

Feminist film historians have identified women filmmakers who have made important contributions to film but whose work had previously been overlooked or ignored (e.g., Acker 1993; Stamp 2015). In the same vein, a number of contributors here are mindful of the history of activism—a feminist film activism that is equally important to be cognisant of and track. For instance, gender equality in Sweden is “the culmination of a long struggle” initially driven by women film workers who had organised themselves to make demands in the 1970s (Jansson and Wallenberg). Similarly, a new generation of women directors appeared in Norway at that time gaining that country a “pioneering reputation” (Svane). In the late 1970s, in Germany, the Verband der Filmarbeiterinnen (VeFi: i.e., the association of female film workers) published a manifesto calling for 50% of the means of film production (Prommer and Loist). The 1970s was the “crucial decade” of feminist activism in the US with newly formed women’s committees of industry guilds and organisations like Women in Film (Brannon Donoghue). In Canada, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, artist-driven feminist filmmaking and distribution co-ops and collectives, such as Vancouver Women in Focus (1974–1992), supported women’s work and were advocates for equality (Brinton and McGowan).
In the 1980s, in Finland, a group of feminist film activists screened films directed by women and organised seminars on the issues of the day (Savolainen). Women filmmakers also flourished in the 1970s and 1980s in Australia, supported by the Women’s Film Fund established by the Australian Film Commission (1976–1989). But, between the withdrawal of the women’s funding stream and a feminist backlash, their numbers eventually declined (French). Previous waves of activism have slipped into historical darkness and, soberingly, often “without permanent change” (Cobb and Williams). This collection serves as a reminder that contemporary film activists are part of a new wave of a movement that stretches back well over half a century. It is a testament to current activism that we are united across time and place in the continuation of a struggle for visibility, voice and an equal share of resources.

The Numbers Game

Among the strengths of quantitative research “is its ability to identify the patterns” and provide “a solid evidence base” (Scott 2010, p. 235). The importance of statistics and data monitoring in making gender issues visible in the film industry was a position strongly promoted by the CEO of the Swedish Film Institute (SFI), Anna Serner, a champion for gender equality not only in Sweden but internationally (Swedish Film Institute 2017, p. 19). It is now widely accepted as an imperative first step in tackling the issue. Without it, the extent of women’s marginalisation can be denied or evaded (Liddy 2016). However, this collection does not set out to offer a cohesive, statistical analysis of a gendered film industry as the availability and extent of the data fluctuates widely, according to the extent to which it is made available by national funding agencies, some of whom provide only the most rudimentary data, and the extent to which individual researchers are themselves collating and monitoring national trends. For instance, Nigeria has few official statistics: “such data in very difficult to come by because the country does not keep records of such things” (Utaka). In Portugal, the Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual (ICA) does not gather or provide clear statistics and “data remains untreated” though what information does exist suggests that “even when more films are being produced and supported exclusively by public funding, women remain excluded” (Baptista and Prata).

Yet, many contributors present statistics pertaining to the participation of women in key creative roles: usually defined as writer, director
and producer, what Smith has labelled “the holy trinity” (2009, p. 2). When women occupy these roles, it leads to more female professionals being hired and also has an impact on the number of female characters on screen and the kinds of stories under the spotlight (e.g. Lauzen 2015; Lauzen 2019). But, female directors, particularly, are faced with gender-specific industry challenges and roadblocks resulting in a struggle not only to create, as is evidenced in most of the countries here, but also to distribute their work. Research suggests that the percentage of all theatrical screenings of films directed by women is just 3% across the globe—“opportunities for women to secure like-for-like projects and to therefore gain equitable exposure for their work is seriously constrained” (Verhoeven).

Popular discourse can suggest we are moving inexorably towards equality but the data, when it is made available, can paint a contradictory picture—two steps forward, perhaps, but one step back. In 2016, there was much public debate when film production funding from the Swedish Film Institute reached its goal of funding at least 50% of women writers, directors and producers. There have been fluctuations since then but films supported by the SFI have generally done better in terms of gender equality. In the Swedish film industry, between 2013 and 2017, women were 38% of directors, 34% of screenwriters and 52% of producers though, soberingly, even achieving, or moving towards, numerical equality may not be sufficient to transform working conditions for female film workers (Jansson and Wallenberg).

The picture is similar in Denmark (2011–2014) with women comprising 34% of directors, 34% of screenwriters and 36% of editing roles across the entire film industry and all types of films. On average, every third producer and screenwriter of Finnish feature films was female in the years 2016–2018 but, interestingly, while the share of women directors is 39%, according to the Association of Finnish Film Directors, women directed only 25% of (fiction) features in 2018 and 2019 (Savalainen). Numbers in Norway are a little higher with 33% of women directors receiving public production funding for feature films between 2012 and 2016 while women producers were 42% in the same period. However, 2018 stands head and shoulders above other countries with the share of women directors at 53% though this may be an exceptional surge rather than something that might be sustainable over time. In contrast, in films without public funding, the numbers “are especially grim” (Svane).
Surprisingly, despite Iceland’s impressive record on gender equality, women’s presence in the film industry is “peripheral” with almost no research conducted to ascertain why that might be the case (Bragadóttir). While the total number of films released between 2010 and 2019 increased by 44%, the involvement of women in the industry declined, with the notable exception of women producers, a group that doubled. The growth of Icelandic film, over the last number of years, has not led to greater opportunities for women.

Moving away from the Nordic countries, a decline in the percentages of women in all creative roles is immediately apparent, some tipping below 30% such as—Austria, Germany, Portugal, New Zealand, US, and Poland. At the lower end of the scale, women film directors receive just 12% of public funding in Italy, though the situation is somewhat better with films for television. While comprising only 15% of all writers for the screen, women write 40% of Italian films, though the content is far from progressive, as Luciano and Scarparo discuss in some detail. In the same vein, the UK has been “steadily and disappointingly consistent at between 10 and 13 per cent year on year”, though writers and editors did a little better at 20% and 27%, respectively (Cobb and Williams).

Comparatively, Screen Australia and Screen Ireland appear to have made greater progress in terms of increasing the numbers of female screenwriters, directors and producers being awarded production funding. Screen Australia (SA) funded films were 47% female-led in 2017 and 56% in 2019 (French). But “female-led” may be misleading—since it requires women to comprise only two of the following: writer, director, producer and protagonist. Moreover, in November 2019, an open letter to the SA Board signed by 200 people, mostly Australian academics, denounced their September funding announcement of the same year. Despite SA’s high-profile gender policy, five feature film projects, all written and directed by men, were awarded funding, something that French evaluates in her chapter.

From 2011 to 2017, 21% of female writers and 17% of female directors were attached to Screen Ireland production funded films. But in 2018, SI projects with female directors and screenwriters attached increased to 36% and 45%, respectively, though, of course, a reliable assessment of progress can only be made by tracking the outcome over a number of years. However welcome these increases are, and there is cause for celebration when one translates dry statistics to real women who are finally able to get their projects off the ground, it is unclear whether they are
sustainable. Starkly, as Cobb has noted in relation to the small numbers of UK female directors, “reports that have produced data on multiple years show small ups and downs from year to year. Overall, progress toward gender equality is at best minor and at worst is non-existent” (Cobb 2020, p. 116).

Moving away from writing, directing and producing, some contributors also provide an indication of women’s inclusion in other roles, where data is available. Again, this is neither definitive nor exhaustive but nonetheless points to occupational segregation in film industries across the world. For instance, in Austria, women are minorities in cinematography and soundtrack composing, and across a number of technical areas, ranging anywhere from 4% to 10% with editing faring better at around 25%. “The more technical the jobs are (e.g., lighting, sound and camera), the smaller the share”, broadly true for Germany also (Flicker and Vogelmann/ Prommer and Loist). This is echoed in the UK with cinematographers averaging 7% from 2003 to 2015. In Denmark, women are underrepresented in post-production positions, like editing, colour grading and sound-editing and especially in technical roles making up 10% or under in film, photography, sound and lighting positions but they are 80% of costume designers and “severely overrepresented” in costume, makeup, continuity and casting (Thorsen)—a situation replicated in Germany and in Poland where 80% and 93% (respectively) of costume designers and 87% of makeup artists are women.

Aylett’s work on female directors had previously exploded the myth that there are not enough skilled women available (Aylett [EWA] 2016). This is addressed by a number of contributors who reject such a simplistic explanation and point to structural barriers for women which restrict their ability to enter the industry and/or maintain a career. But for some roles, capacity building is required and education and pre-industry programmes are, according to Banks, “uniquely positioned to educate the next generation of media makers” specifically, in this context, women (2019). Different educational paths can lead to gendered industry roles which are maintained through stereotypes (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2015). While space prohibits a detailed discussion here, the prospect of gendered lives in which the unresolved, and often unvoiced, issues surrounding motherhood, caring, and the demands of the film industry (Liddy and O’Brien, in process), cultural expectations, informal hiring practices, predominantly male film sets and the familiar “labyrinth” (Eagly and Carli 2007) that women can expect to face at various career points may be unpalatable to
young women who do not, in any case, see themselves mirrored in many of the technical industry careers or crafts (Doona 2020; Connolly 2020).

**THE FUNDING GAME**

There are few big budget opportunities for women in US studio films, despite the high-profile exceptions. Instead, in the US, the majority of women directors work primarily in independent productions characterised by lower costs, lower budgets and lower risk. Women directors continue to face “gendered barriers around bankability, risk, and experience” (Brannon Donoghue). This assessment of the US film industry could apply to many film industries worldwide.

Most of the film industries discussed in these chapters are publicly funded and have a gender policy and measures/initiatives in place to promote gender equality. Though their effectiveness varies considerably, without them it is doubtful whether gender inequality would be addressed by the wider industry at all, even with the work of overburdened professional and voluntary groups. Nonetheless, difficulties remain for key creatives accessing public funding and that is true over time and place. Moreover, there are outstanding issues around equality of funding amounts that can get buried in the “good news” stories and the positive gender equality discourses in circulation. With reference to Australia, French argues that statistics indicating women’s increasing share of production titles may work to conceal the fact that they are not getting an equal share of the available funds. An argument that might well be made for Screen Ireland (Liddy) and most of the funders discussed in this collection. Even in the Swedish film industry which we generally think of as somewhat more enlightened, films with a male lead have, on average, a 33% higher budget than films that lead with a female protagonist, and female protagonists are linked not only to lower budgets, but to “fewer screenings, lower PR-budgets and less audience” (Jansson and Wallenberg).

The data for film funding in Austria shows that the amount women received from 2012 to 2016 “shrunk with each stage” between script development funding (28%) and production funding (20%). The more women in a crew, the less funding the project was awarded (Flicker and Vogelmann). In Germany too, all funding tracks—script development, project development, production funding and dissemination, movie release and marketing—are marked by a gender imbalance. Finnish female
directors received only a quarter of the public financing from 2011 to 2015 while Thorsen is concerned that the Danish Film Institute (DFI) “does not illustrate how large the gendered discrepancy actually is in subsidy-portions” focusing, instead, on women’s lower application rate being the primary barrier to gender equality.

Svane suggests that in Norway women are receiving “less of the money than the numbers suggest” because they are being funded for short films and documentaries more readily than features—categories that generally have lower budgets, something that is replicated in Portugal, Poland and the UK, to name just a few. For instance, in the UK, women are more likely to make documentaries with a budget under £0.5 million than any other genre and proportionally more than their male colleagues (Cobb and Williams).

**Quotas, “Fairness” and New Directions**

In an attempt to equalise women’s share of public funding, the introduction of “quotas”, even if that term has not in all cases been used, has been considered in a number of countries. It is often claimed that the SFI operates a quota system, though Serner herself has contradicted that assertion. Quotas, effectively, replace the concept of “equal opportunities” with the concept of equality of *result*. Speaking about quotas in relation to board membership, Humbert et al. argue that there is evidence that quotas “can be a key driver of progress, particularly when associated with hard sanctions” and in contexts that are more gender equal (2019, p. 3).

Despite indications that quotas can help to change the culture French notes, there is “resistance” to quotas in Australia as well as an “active ambivalence to affirmative action” from many stakeholders, based on perceptions of “fairness”. In New Zealand, female filmmakers were advised by the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) that there was “no appetite” for quotas though the NZFC is now aiming for 5050 × 2021/2022, arguably a target not a quota and, according to Evans, one without any clear implementation strategy in place. The broader Danish film industry has “refused to discuss” them while the Danish Film Institute (DFI) has labelled gender quotas “extreme”, thus implicitly supporting the maintenance of the current status quo (Thorsen). In the UK, Cobb and Williams note that quotas are “widely considered illegal under the terms of the 2010 Equality Act [Jarrett, 2011]”).
However, voices are raised here and there proposing we revisit the debate or find alternative ways or achieving the same result. In Germany, a call for a 5050 quota, which originally surfaced in the late 1970s by the Verband der Filmarbeiterinnen, is still “driving discussions, albeit with renewed energy” (Prommer and Loist). Similarly, in Ireland, the Writers Guild of Ireland (WGI), the Screen Directors Guild of Ireland (SDGI) and Women in Film and Television Ireland (WFT) have called for gender quotas to be implemented for a fixed period of time in order to ensure that Screen Ireland’s own gender policy will be successfully embedded in the industry. Importantly, in an Irish context, this is a quota relating to production funding for film titles and makes no demands for equal budgets at this stage. However, when a formal request was put to Screen Ireland in 2019, they declined saying sufficient momentum was in play for now (Liddy).

In 2018, Norway’s Labour Party did propose radical affirmative action when they introduced a bill setting a goal of 5050 representation of men and women. If the goal was not met within three years, any public funding should automatically be split in half. It was met with an insistence that things were “getting better” and did not necessitate such a measure. However, more recently, the Norwegian Film Institute has stated “the ideal is equal share of the money and we will continue to discuss how to make this happen”, which may suggest an intent to tackle the financial disparity (Svane).

Initiatives undertaken by key Canadian funding agencies and the national public broadcaster in 2015–2016 could be classed as either “incentive” or “requirement” with incentive being an encouragement and reward-based approach and requirement stipulating action which must be met to secure funds. The National Film Board, albeit with a comparatively small budget, was the first to embrace the “requirement” approach with impressive results (Brinton and McGowan)—a reminder of the power of consequences.

A new approach in the UK that has been adopted by activists is to pressure the government to include diversity targets for film and television productions with accompanying tax relief (Cobb and Williams). And, in Ireland, new guidelines for the Irish tax incentive scheme for the industry call for “details on gender equality initiatives, diversity and inclusion initiatives” to be included in applications, though this scheme is as yet unproven and it is unclear if, and how, sanctions will apply (Liddy).
Quotas tend to spark controversy and prompt ideological disputes about merit, fairness and quality. In fact, “fairness”, towards women in the film industry, has been in short supply historically and a resistance to quotas can work to support a “privilege-based male status quo” and an uneven playing field (Murray). It may be timely to revisit and review quotas, or similar measures “with teeth”, if public funding is involved and when changes in the industry are painstakingly slow and have a history of stagnation and even reversal. Indeed, Verhoeven, Coate and Zemaityte argue that “male domination of the worlds film industries will not decline until there is a different distribution of film industry’s resources” (2019, p.151).

**Why Don’t They Apply?**

The argument that posits low levels of female applicants to funding bodies as the problem, rather than a systemic problem within the industry itself, has been identified by a number of contributors including Bragadóttir (Iceland), Thorsen (Denmark), Liddy (Ireland), Prommer and Loist (Germany) and Savolainen (Finland) and is also acknowledged as an issue in the work of French (Australia) and Evans (New Zealand). The argument states that projects by male applicants are not favoured for funding but women simply do not submit in enough numbers. Women also form a minority of applicants to the Finnish Film Institute and research is currently being undertaken to ascertain why but previous negative feedback and the difficulty of finding a producer have been mooted. French has also suggested that research would be useful to gain insight into why “decades of official policy and program response […] have not significantly increased female participation”.

In an Irish context, Liddy found that screenwriters and writer/directors implicitly perceive the existence of a gender order. Finding their work routinely sidelined and devalued, they cease to invest in a system perceived to be hostile (2020a, p. 89). This impacts on personal and professional confidence and can result in a disengagement from the process. Reflecting on the situation in Denmark, Thorsen extends this point arguing that the Danish Film Institute places a strong emphasis on the lack of female applicants, without any analysis of the factors that might be deterring women from applying for funding. The data, she argues, does not speak of the litany of previous rejections—“the
reasons for that rejection; the manner in which the applicant has been rejected and how that impacts on future applications” (Thorsen).

In a similar vein, Evans cites producer Kerry Warkia speaking about working with Maori and Asian New Zealand filmmakers “Doors have been closed for so long it’s not just about opening the door, it’s about going out to find [these filmmakers] because they walked away a long time ago” (Evans). Elsewhere, Bragadóttir suggests that in Iceland women’s resistance to applying for film funding has roots in a toxic industry for female workers which only came to light in November 2017, during the #metoo movement. Icelandic women publicised a litany of issues relating to wage inequality, sexual harassment, abuse of power by male supervisors and attempted rape. Bragadóttir’s interviewees acknowledge a changed attitude in the industry since then which may, potentially, translate into a proactive re-engagement.

Rather than immediately placing blame on women for not applying to film funders, it might be more pertinent to ask why, if an organisation is transparent and welcoming, would women not apply and why, when they are trained to work in the film industry, do many of them opt out or get edged out?

**Women on Screen**

Apart from the desirability of women taking up employment in an international film industry, there are other reasons why it is important to have women behind the camera. The greater the number of women in key creative roles, the greater the likelihood of having more female characters; of having less sexualised representations; and of having stories about women’s lives foregrounded, and this point is made by many contributors. However, there can still be a resistance to the inclusion of female protagonists and female story worlds. Writing about the Polish film industry, Gober mourns the loss of the “untold story”—lost to the culture by the “commissioning bias” which fosters conditions unfavourable to women and privileges films with “white, male-driven, narratives”, an argument central to gender equality debates in Poland.

Between 2003 and early 2016, just under 17% of feature films had a female protagonist in New Zealand features though a new gender policy is currently being developed which may see an increase in those statistics. In Norway, in the short period between 2016 and 2018, the number of female protagonists was 36.5%, representing a small decrease. Female
characters are also less visible than men in Finnish films with only one-third of female protagonists in Finnish fictional features between 2004 and 2014 and in Germany, around the same time frame, that figure was just under 17% in feature films. Industry interviewees in Sweden identify concerns within the industry about depicting complex female characters and sidelining male characters in the belief that more male characters make films “mainstream” (Jansson and Walenberg).

As Liddy (Ireland) and Jansson and Wallenberg (Sweden) have discovered, there are still problems with opportunity and visibility for women as they age. Financiers, producers and distributors request more stereotypical portrayals, and likeability and sexual attractiveness are encouraged. Liddy’s work found, in an Irish context, that proactive female sexuality, particularly in older female characters, was not encouraged and female characters were unpicked rigorously by industry executives to ensure audience empathy (2020). However, there has been an impressive increase in the number of female characters in Screen Ireland funded films over the last two years, related, perhaps, to intense public debate and an all-female commissioning team (project managers). The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland also launched a “women’s stories” intitative in 2019 as part of their Sound and Vision 3 funding scheme. This desire for more female stories also emerges in an assessment of Screen Australia’s policies and what French has called “an unmet demand for female stories”.

For Utaka, more women directors would mean more female-driven stories about “women’s issues” in Nollywood. She laments the widespread inclusion of female characters as prostitutes, home breakers, thieves, the diabolical, destroyers of men among other negative roles. Her concerns are echoed by Luciano and Scarapro and their dismay at the one-dimensional portrayal of “scantily clad young women” involved in relationships with powerful older men. In Italy, there are still very few stories in which female characters depart from traditional, stereotypical and highly sexualised representations.

**Contemporary Activism**

While high-profile movements such as #metoo, #OscarsSoWhite and TimesUp have dominated the headlines and impacted in varying ways on many of the industries in this collection, particularly Italy, Iceland, Poland, Sweden, the UK and the US, activism is taking many different shapes and forms. Indeed, there was already a shift taking place in some countries that
predated the impact of the #metoo movement: these include #Waking the Feminists in Ireland, a revolt against male-dominated theatre and the arts and #BlackProtest (#CzarnyProtest) in Poland to protect abortion rights.

In the UK, “a network of activist groups” that include researchers, professional and campaigning bodies, exhibitors and filmmakers have worked together to bring attention to the problem, putting pressure on the film industry and public bodies. A similar situation exists in Ireland with the Writers Guild of Ireland, Screen Directors Guild of Ireland and Women in Film and Television Ireland to the fore of the challenge with advocacy, lobbying and public meetings the preferred approach to date (Liddy). In contrast, in Norway, filmmakers have taken to the streets and marched at the 2018 International Women’s Day parade with a banner proclaiming “We are half of the stories!” illustrating the growing discontent with the continuing underrepresentation of women in the industry.

Across the world, WFT or WFT-like groups, such as FC Gloria in Austria, are lobbying for change and initiating interventions to support female members. The extent to which they are vocal and forthright can vary, depending, arguably, on the composition of members, particularly board members, at any given time. For example, Women in Film Poland “intensified gender equality activism” there and built institutional support for gender equality. Protests and demonstrations have been spreading across the country as women filmmakers mobilised since 2015 (Gober). In contrast, WFT New Zealand did not speak out against the marginalisation of women by the NZ funders until relatively recently, arguably for fear of reprisal in a small country where “quiet words” was the preferred course of action (Evans), while Portugal could be characterised as having a “fragile” but intensifying activism (Baptista and Prata).

In Italy, the Se non ora quando or SNOQ (if not now when) movement saw over a million women from all backgrounds take part in simultaneous rallies all over the country to denounce Berlusconi-gate and challenge women’s representation in the media and their treatment in society. SNOQ continues to keep women’s issues at the forefront of public debate, uncovering inequalities and calling for legislative change. Italy’s own variant of #metoo was #unavoltache (that time that) but it failed to galvanise widespread support. Indeed, allegations of sexual misconduct were sometimes directed at the victims rather than the men who abused their power. Somewhat contentiously, many women activists
in Italy favour collective action which evades naming names and instead calls for major cultural change (Luciano and Scarparo).

**Conclusion**

Wherever you look, with some national variations, women are still underrepresented in film industries as screenwriters, directors, producers, cinematographers, editors and crew. They are less likely to be funded and when they are, the proportion of finances allocated to their projects is less than their male colleagues. The overall picture to emerge here is that of a gender order (Liddy, 2020b) in which women continue to be sidelined, devalued and underfunded with troubling similarities across the world. Researchers paint a picture of continuing exclusion; small incremental achievements and inevitable reversals; a lack of transparency and opaque decision-making; and a resistance to power sharing within the industry. It is no coincidence that as the number of women behind the camera increased in Sweden, so has the critique of the gender equality measures (Jansson and Wallenberg). It does appear, to quote French writing about the Australian film industry in this collection, that in Western industries globally progress is occurring “at a snail’s pace”.

Ultimately, it can be argued that the absence and marginalisation of women in the international film industry is another manifestation of patriarchal power. A discussion of patriarchy can seem outdated—a throwback to second-wave feminism. But, as Higgins writes in *The Guardian* newspaper, “as the #metoo campaign has grown, so has the use of ‘patriarchy’. It has burst its way out of the attic of half-discarded concepts to greet a moment – one of fourth-wave feminist ferment – in which there is a newly urgent need to name what women are still struggling against” (June 22, 2018).

Social media has played a significant role in consciousness-raising and the dissemination of gender research relating to women in the international film industry. Gender blindness has been replaced by a heightened awareness though, of course, awareness does not necessarily lead to action or to long-term structural change. Indeed, Brannon Donoghue assesses the wave of popular feminist activism in the US, so familiar to many of us, and questions whether “hashtag feminism” will actually lead to “measurable policies and tangible means of enforcement”. Cobb and Williams and others echo her reservations and sound a note of caution at the
optimism of some high-profile industry celebrities that “things are chang-
ing” and the industry has fundamentally been altered in terms of power. Gender equality efforts have not fundamentally changed industry norms or affected how gender is portrayed on film, or impacted on “the macho culture” on set (Jansson and Wallenberg).

Women’s global activism has heralded a new focus on gender power relations, discrimination, unconscious bias and structural inequalities, and the impact of these on women’s creative lives. Yet “waves” of activism are very much part of our feminist film history and can serve as a cautionary reminder that we have travelled this road before. Here we are in 2020 with the glass still half full, at best. During euphoric moments of seemingly imminent breakthrough, it might be steadying to remind ourselves that reversals and row-back have also been part of that history and “social change does not proceed without struggle and conflict” (Eagly and Carli, 2007). This is not to inspire hopelessness but to reignite the positive anger needed to maintain the pressure: the “anger of hope” (Chemaly, 2019). More optimistically, consistent and persistent global activism highlights the power of agency and strategic collaboration which functions to keep gender equality and diversity issues to the fore politically. When we work together, we amplify our voices, sharpen our resolve, recommit to common goals and search for new and innovative ways to move forward.

Though an analysis of the gendered impact of COVID-19 is outside the reach of this collection, which was already in process before the onslaught of the global pandemic, it is important to register that it has exacerbated exiting gender inequalities in a number of ways. The so-called triple shift sees women carrying a disproportionate responsibility for paid and unpaid work during the lockdown (Wilson, 2020). Moreover, it has been suggested that COVID-19 is likely to result in an economic recession, “a pink-collar recession” (Ribeiro, 2020) and those in temporary, precarious employment, often women, are “particularly vulnerable to economic shocks with many contracts having been terminated or frozen” (eige.europa.eu). In terms of our focus here, the film and television industries have been decimated with production cancellations, company closures and mounting job losses. This does not bode well for advancing gender equality; for, as Baird notes “equality programmes tend to go backwards after recessions and crises” (cited in Ribeiro, 2020).

So, what does the future hold? “If you look at the history […] the industry changes only when it is absolutely forced to do so”, Martha Lauzen observes. “The real question: are they feeling enough pressure
to change the structures of the filmmaking business to welcome more

Are they, indeed? The research in this collection does not suggest
we are on the cusp of radical change, despite many effective and well-
intentioned interventions. But we must go on and only time will tell.

REFERENCES


Europe
INTRODUCTION

As in most European countries, women in Austria were relegated to the private sphere for a long time, occupied with taking care of the family home and children. This is not entirely a thing of the past: even today, around 77% of men are employed, while only 69% of women are. Around half of employed women work part-time, as opposed to around 11% of men (“Erwerbstätigkeit” 2019). For people with children under 15, the discrepancy is even bigger: 73% of women with children under 15 work part-time, but only 6% of men. This shows that child-rearing is still mostly women’s work in Austria. Additionally, compared to other EU countries, the gender pay gap is particularly big in Austria at 20%, the fifth-worst gap in the EU (“Gender-Statistik” 2019).
The film industry is a very specific field of work that warrants its own analysis. Global and national media industries and film industries show a variety of long-standing gender structures, hegemonic masculinities, and male-dominated gender stereotypes. Florian Krauß and Skadi Loist (2018) recently presented analyses of these industries in German-speaking countries. Research regarding gender ratios in the Austrian film industry does not have a long tradition. Two studies, conducted by FC Gloria and EWA, have broken ground providing selected data pertaining to the Austrian film industry. They are embedded in feminist policy and feminist research on gendered media industries (Loist 2018).

In 2015, FC Gloria, the Austrian network of women in the film industry, analyzed the subsidies given by two relevant institutions and the gender ratios in education. The data proved that most of the public funding is provided to male filmmakers and showed a gap between the numbers of female film students and women professionals in the film industry (“Statistik zum Genderbudgeting” 2015). Seven countries participated in the study on female directors launched by EWA, the European Women’s Audiovisual Network (2006–2013). This investigation demonstrated that women directors are underrepresented in spite of the strong number of female graduates from film schools. The data also proved that films by female directors receive less public funding than those directed by men (EWA 2017).

Based on lobbying measures initiated by FC Gloria, in 2016 the Austrian parliament agreed on a resolution (“Entschließungsantrag” 2016) that called for scientific gender research in the Austrian film industry, particularly to evaluate the allocation of public funding. In further consequence, the Austrian Film Institute (Österreichisches Filminstitut; ÖFI) and Federal Chancellery Division II—Arts and Culture (Bundeskanzleramt (BKA)—Sektion II Kunst und Kultur) contracted the University of Vienna Department of Sociology, notably the authors Eva Flicker (project lead) and Lena Lisa Vogelmann, to realize the first independent and comprehensive study on gender in the Austrian film industry. This was the starting point for the Austrian Film Gender Report 2012–2016 (AFGR). The authors of this article conducted the study between 2017 and 2018.

The instructions and goals of the AFGR were as follows:

- To assess gender-related inequalities,
- To deliver solid data regarding gender ratios in the Austrian film industry over a research period of the previous five years,
The research focus for the AFGR was defined for gender effects within the following four key areas in the film industry:

1. Representation of women off screen (fundings, jobs, payments, etc.),
2. Gender representation on screen,
3. Gender visibility at Austrian film festivals (programming, juries, awards),
4. Gender structures in film education at university level.

The following section will begin with explanatory remarks on the public funding structure of the Austrian film industry, details about the data basis used for the analysis, and methodological reflections on how to measure gender in films. The core part of the text covers selected results from each of the four AFGR focus areas. Finally, measures implemented since 2018 for fairer gender balance are presented and discussed. The conclusions lead to emphasizing the necessity of both further research and political decisions.

**Explanatory Remarks**

Austria’s film industry is based on public funding. As in many other European countries, private film funding has no tradition in Austria. The most relevant funding institutions are nationwide funds, such as Film Industry Support Austria (Filmstandort Austria; FISA), the BKA, and the ÖFI. In addition, the public Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (Österreichischer Rundfunk; ORF) and the Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications (Rundfunk und Telekom RegulierungsGmbH; RTR) fund TV programs (and sometimes film releases). In spite of being a comparatively small country, Austria is organized federally; that is, there are nine states within the country. Each of the states has its own funding program—also for film and art.
In short, the public funding structure in Austria is complex. There are no overarching eligibility criteria that apply to all institutions. To complicate things further, most filmmakers apply to more than one institution for funding. Most of the produced films receive at least some public funding. While all funding is to be accounted for publicly, there is no regulation that ensures such accounting must include gender budgeting or a gendered analysis of public spending. Frequently, “gender” is not even a category among the data, and this practice is changing only slowly.

Data Basis for the AFGR, 2012–2016

The ÖFI collected the data analyzed in the AFGR, with the exception of data regarding the Film Academy Vienna (Institute for Film and Television of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna), which was supplied by the Academy itself. The research team was provided with the collected data for analysis encompassing the 2012–2016 research period. Summarized below, several decisions and selections were to be made for statistical sampling. As data collection was incomplete in some respects, several blind spots remain which could be addressed in a subsequent research project.

With regard to data on public funding, the ÖFI requested all Austrian funding institutions to submit their data on feature-length films (70 minutes or longer) funded between January 1, 2012, and December 31, 2016. Data were collected on close to 1300 film projects, each having received funding for at least one of four different project stages (script development, project development, production, dissemination and marketing). The data referred not only to the amount of funding, but also to the department staff and their calculated fees. Depending on the project stage, up to 16 different departments within the film staff were included in the AFGR. Although most of the analyzed projects were movie projects, we were also able to obtain data on TV projects from the RTR for the period of January 1, 2014, to December 31, 2016.7

One hundred Austrian feature films8 released between January 1, 2012, and December 31, 2016, were analyzed with a standardized questionnaire including approximately 300 items concerning off-screen and on-screen issues. About one-third of the 35 Austrian filmfestivals delivered data on the feature-length films (fictional and documentary) that were programmed between 2012 and 2016, the directors or teams responsible for programming, the juries and prizes awarded. The Film Academy
provided data on gender structures in film education and on students over several levels, ranging from applications to its programs to BA and MA graduations. The data on the teaching staff comprised the permanent staff and full professors over the years 2012–2016.

**Gender Data—How to Measure Gender in Films**

Measuring gender, gender relations, and gender structures evokes theoretical challenges and necessities of actionable research practice. We thus decided to apply a binary statistical logic and wording (women/men, female/male), supplementing it with a third, non-binary, category to the extent to which the data collection also made use of it. Not only did the research project depend on the data that were provided mostly in the male-female binary. Additionally, the aim was to make gendered power relations clearly visible in the spirit of strategic essentialism in research, which reduces gender to the binary in order to make the binary social structures comprehensible. Ultimately, it is a feminist goal to dismantle unjust (binary) gendered structures in the film industry.

To make gender ratios visible, it becomes necessary to analytically gender film, film projects, and teams. The methodological approaches used in the AFGR are described below. Funding is allocated to individual film projects and not to one or more persons. Therefore, arithmetic methods are required to connect gender to a position or to several (key) positions held in the respective film team. Balancing the goal of critical gender analysis and research practicability, three different methods to gender a film were used for the AFGR.

1. **The Swedish Model**

   Developed by the Swedish Film Institute for the analysis of funding allocation, the Swedish Model has garnered international recognition and seen widespread application. The Swedish Model considers three (heads of) departments of a given film project: directors, producers, and scriptwriters. It divides the funding according to the binary genders of the people in these departments (a third of the funding sum for each department), arriving at a total of funding for men and for women. The Swedish Model therefore enables us to analyze how much money in subsidies went to men and how much to women.
2. *The Inclusion Model*

The Inclusion Model was specifically developed for the AFGR. It considers as many heads of departments as possible (which in practice depends on the project stage; up to 16 departments were counted for the AFGR) and calculates the percentage of women among them. The percentages are grouped in quartiles (reflecting the gender equality of 50% men to 50% women and differentiating further):

- films with 0–25% female heads of departments,
- 26–50% female heads of departments,
- 51–75% female heads of departments, and
- 76–100% female heads of departments.

These four groups offer detailed insights into the gender distribution and gendered labor division.\(^9\)

3. *The director’s gender*

In some cases, the director’s gender was used as a stand-in for the film itself. The position of the director was chosen because in public discourse, films are considered director’s projects and products (and not, for example, those of writers or producers).

**Selected Results of the Austrian Film Gender Report, 2012–2016**

In the following, we will cover an overview of selected results.\(^10\)

**Public Funding**

Applications for public funding are offered at various stages of a given film project:\(^11\):

- Script development (level 1 and level 2),
- Project development,
- Production funding,
- Dissemination, movie release, and marketing.
All funding tracks were analyzed for the AFGR, and gender imbalances were identified in all of them.

**Funding Analyses According to the Swedish Model**
Considering the funding tracks script development, project development, and production according to the Swedish Model, the data show that the amount women received shrunk with each stage. Women received 28% of funding (€2,492,732 in total) for script development and 25% of funding (€3,362,463 in total) for project development. In the funding track with the biggest budget, production funding, women received 20% (€106,124,989 in total) (Fig. 1). As data for production funding are available for TV and movies, they demonstrate that TV is more of men’s world than cinema. While 24% of movie production funding (€69,561,464 in total) was awarded to women, only 16% of funding for TV films (€23,460,452 in total) and 8% for TV shows (€15,417,052) were allocated to women.

**Funding Analyses According to the Inclusion Model**
The Inclusion Model yields differentiated insights into women’s representation in film staffs: The projects with less funding proved to be the projects with higher shares of female crew. While 27% of script development funding (€3,588,949 in total) went to projects with a majority of
women as department heads, this was only the case in 18% for project development (€3,471,623 in total) and in 11% for production funding (€107,265,844 in total) (Fig. 2).

The gender ratios in the decision-making juries were imbalanced and most of the members were men. By way of example, 78% of the members on the ÖFI Supervisory Board, responsible for defining the eligibility criteria (among other things), were male. In the project commissions, responsible for enacting the defined criteria and deciding on the projects, 57% were male.

Remuneration in the Film Departments and the Gender Pay Gap

As the data were not sufficiently detailed, the calculations for pay gaps can only be estimated as tentative. Beginning with the total amount of honoraria per department and dividing it as to the shares of women and men in that specific department yielded an approximate gap of payment. The AFGR calculation identified tendencies: Men receive more money than women in the same positions. Given that most departments are paid according to collective bargaining agreements, that gap is nevertheless remarkable.

Overall, 34% of the 2590 people working as heads of departments were women and they were paid only 29% of all fees (€69,000,038).
We present a selection of the departments that were analyzed (Fig. 3). The figures show that the share of women varied widely between departments in terms of traditional gendered job segregation: The more the technical jobs (e.g., lighting, sound, and camera), the smaller the share of women in those departments (0–12%). In turn, the more “social” or “soft” departments (make-up and casting) had the higher share of women (83 and 91%). Editing was seen to be a fairly balanced department with 57% women. The largest gender pay gap was found among directors: The 26% female directors were allocated only 20% of the fees.

The few data presented here are representative of the large number of AFGR statistics on gender effects in funding and remuneration. The

![Fig. 3 Applications for Austrian public funding (movies) in 2012–2016: Gender ratios in departments and fees](image-url)
results of the AFGR undoubtedly disclose a variety of problems: gender segregation, discrimination, and hegemonic male structures that are even more dramatic as all means are provided with public money and by public institutions.

**Austrian Feature Films**

The analysis of 100 Austrian feature films covered a wide variety of issues. We selected two specific issues for this article. First, the Bechdel-Wallace test\textsuperscript{15} is discussed in connection with gender ratios in the film departments. Second, and as an example of the variety of on-screen analyses, the representation of sexualized violence in Austrian feature films between 2012 and 2016 is presented.

**The Bechdel-Wallace Test**

Overall, only 53% of films passed the Bechdel-Wallace test for female characters, whereas 85% passed the reversed version for male characters. Analyses of the pass rates through the lens of the Inclusion Model showed correlations between the gender constellation of characters (Bechdel-Wallace test) and the gender share in the film departments off screen. The higher the share of women as heads of departments, the more films passed the Bechdel-Wallace test for female characters. The same tendency was proven for men in the departments and male characters in the films. In short, the statistical data showed that a greater share of women as heads of departments correlated with the films with more complex portrayals of gendered characters, both female and male (Fig. 4).

Given this correlation between women off screen and characters on screen, the results presented above solidify the relevance of increasing the numbers of women in all departments and especially in the key departments.

**Sexualized Violence On Screen**

Sexualized violence on screen was selected here as a crucial issue in public debates and determined to be relevant for the AFGR long before the #metoo movement arose in international public discourse. The quantitative data on sexualized violence were differentiated with a four-step gradation (escalating violence):
Fig. 4  Austrian feature films in 2012–2016: The Bechdel-Wallace test according to the Inclusion Model

1. Sexualized micro-aggressions (unwanted propositions, intrusiveness, derogatory and/or sexist jokes, catcalling, etc.).
2. Sexual harassment (sexualized micro-aggressions within dependent and hierarchical relationships or positions).
3. Sexualized assault (immediate physical assaults, attacks, and unwanted touching of sexually connoted body parts, including “groping”).
4. Rape (attempted and implemented rape).

It proved to be a topic that is very much present in Austrian feature films: In 68 out of the 100 films, at least one incident of sexualized violence was committed, with a total of 353 incidents. This is a remarkable number considering that the sample contained all genres of films (romances, crime stories, science fiction, children’s films, etc.).
Analyzing not only the quantitative representation of incidents of sexualized violence, but also the genders of the perpetrators and attackees yielded strongly imbalanced gender structures in the films. However, most but not all film incidents occurred in heterosexual settings (Table 1). The table delivers quantitative data on sexualized violence and the gendered structures of film characters. These impressions of the pervasiveness of sexualized violence in Austrian feature films have to be taken cautiously. The crucial qualitative interpretations of how sexualized violence is put on screen are missing, as well as the discussion whether the depiction of perpetrators on screen offers readings of identification to the audience. Austrian film as a cultural phenomenon is internationally famous for being “feel-bad cinema” (Lim 2006) and for presenting uncomfortable social criticism. In the particular issue of sexualized violence, it would be very important to have deeper insight into the visualized intentions and messages associated with those scenes of violence—whether they are affirmative or critical toward gender relations and mediatized stereotypes. Further study is urgently needed to analyze these purely statistical data of 353 incidents with qualitative interpretive methods. First preliminary studies are underway.

**Austrian Film Festivals**

The public visibility of films and the gender effects were analyzed with a survey of Austrian film festivals (presenting both international and Austrian films). Again, the data showed a gender imbalance, assessed by the gender of the director. In the period under investigation from

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**Table 1** Overview of sexualized violence in Austrian feature films, 2012–2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Incidents in 68 films</th>
<th>Male perpetrators (%)</th>
<th>Female perpetrators (%)</th>
<th>Male attackees (%)</th>
<th>Female attackees (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexualized violence (total)</td>
<td>353 (100%)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexualized micro-aggressions</td>
<td>234 (66%)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassments</td>
<td>56 (16%)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexualized assaults</td>
<td>48 (14%)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapes</td>
<td>15 (4%)</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2012 to 2016, the percentage of (national and international) feature-length films by women shifted between 17% (2012) and 25% (2014 and 2015). Overall, 23% of the programmed films were directed by women, 72% by men, 6% by mixed directing teams, and 0.2% films by non-binary directors. Male directors made up the majority in both documentaries (59%) and feature films (81%). The comparatively smaller presence of male directors in documentaries may be associated with less recognition, less media attention, and reduced financial resources allocated to documentaries compared to feature films.

Analyzing prizes and awards at the Austrian festivals, films by female directors proved to be highly successful when compared to their programming rate: 23% films by female directors were programmed at the festivals, yet they received 44% of the jury prizes and 46% of the audience awards. This finding indicates that films by female directors and the films’ quality are held in high esteem among professionals and audiences alike. Analyzing the correlations between jury compositions by gender and the shares of films directed by prize-winning women, we established that the higher the shares of women were in the juries, the higher the shares were of winning films by female directors. It is also remarkable that a quarter of decisions concerning winning films were made by juries with a maximum of 25% women on them, while there was no single jury that had less than 25% men (Fig. 5).

Despite this excellent winning rate, films by female directors were awarded less prize money on average. This difference becomes especially obvious when looking at the highest awards (overall, the prize money ranged between €500 and €21,000; the top three awards ranged between €7,000 and €21,000). On average, films by female directors were awarded €14,500 and those by male directors €18,667 (films by mixed teams of directors were awarded €17,333). This points to the fact that films by female directors tend to win the smaller prizes.

Film Academy Vienna

The recurring gender imbalances in all fields of the Austrian film industry required a look at the young talents and juniors in film education in order to identify where the imbalance begins. The data from the very beginning, the process of application to the university until obtaining one’s Master’s degree at the Film Academy Vienna from 2012 to 2016, showed that: 
36% of 862 applicants were women.
44% of 102 admitted students were women.
41% of the Bachelor students were women.
32% of 78 Bachelor’s degrees were completed by women.
32% of the Master students were women.
47% of 30 Master’s degrees were completed by women.

Why did fewer women apply to the film studies program? One incentive for more female engagement will be presented in the next section. Another interesting result is the discrepancy between applying and admitted women: Were women the better applicants or was the selection made with a certain degree of gender awareness to raise the number of female students? Perhaps this was an effect of both. Gender effects are also relevant by specialization. The gender share in the Bachelor program ranged between 57% female students in Producing and 29% female students in Directing. In the Master’s program, the range was
between 50% female students in Screenwriting and Dramaturgy and 11% of female students in Digital Art and Compositing.

The teachers’ gender balance was analyzed as well. Across all classes and specializations, there were 30% female teachers at the Film Academy. By comparison, merely 10% of the professors were women, i.e., just one female professor in the entire Film Academy. These findings show that female students at the Film Academy Vienna face male domination on both sides—among students and among teachers. Nevertheless, a solid number of young and highly qualified women are accessing the market in the film business.

**Recent Measures and Initiatives Against Gender Inequality in Austria**

For the first time, the AFGR has provided the public with sound data on gender effects in the Austrian film industry—the results are more than unsatisfying from a feminist standpoint in matters of gender inequality and call for a great many initiatives and substantial change in political decisions. Seven recent approaches for gender change in the Austrian film industry are presented in the following.

**The Gender Incentive Applied by the Austrian Film Institute**

The Gender Incentive came into effect on January 1, 2017. There was an internal evaluation based on the AFGR that led to an adaption in 2019 (“Gender Incentive” 2019). The Gender Incentive is based on points awarded for models of good practice. It examines the share of women in a given film project’s departments and awards points for each woman named in the project (heads of department): production (5 points), directing (5 points), writing (5 points), camera (4 points), editing (3 points), sound (3 points), costumes (2 points, this is only counted for feature films), and set design (2 points, only counted for feature films). When the film achieves a certain number of points (11 for feature films, 9 for documentaries), the production company will receive €30,000 for the development of a new project that has to prove a corresponding number of women in the departments (“Gender Incentive 2017/18” 2018). The Gender Incentive is evaluated and tracked regularly to gauge its long-term impact.
“If She Can See It, She Can Be It”—A Competition for Screenplay with Female Characters Beyond Stereotypes

For the fourth time, the Austrian Screenplay Forum (Drehbuchforum) announced an annually awarded prize in 2019 for manifold female characters beyond stereotypes. As a first step, an interdisciplinary jury will select five synopses out of some 80–100 submissions. These five nominees will receive support and coaching to develop more detailed treatments. In a second step, one treatment will win the prize (“If She Can See It” 2018).

FC Gloria Film Prize

In 2018, FC Gloria for the first time awarded four prizes to women in the film business. Each prize was selected by a different female jury:

- Gloria—for outstanding achievements in/with film,
- Gloriette—for an innovative film,
- Gloriosa—for outstanding achievements behind the scenes and/or public attention,
- Louise Fleck Prize\(^\text{20}\)—to a female filmmaker under the age of 40.

In a male-dominated media world and film industry, the FC Gloria Film Prize ceremony is a celebratory event that attracts media attention and honors female film artists (“FC Gloria Filmpreise” 2018).

FC Gloria Mentoring Program

In 2019, FC Gloria issued a call for the eighth round of their mentoring program. The program is aimed at women with about 10 years of professional experience as a filmmaker who are looking for an international expansion of their careers. It connects them with experienced female mentors who not only open their networks to the mentee, but help them to develop a strategy to achieve international success over the course of seven months (“Mentoring Programm 2019/20” 2019).

FC Gloria School Workshops

Members of FC Gloria experienced filmmakers offer lectures and workshops at schools to inform girls and young women about the film study
programs in Austria in an effort to increase their interest in applying at a film university for higher education. More female students in all classes at the film school may hopefully lead to more female graduates and professionals working in the field and to more awareness for a gender fair film industry.

**#we_do Counselling Office for People in the Austrian Film Industry**

In resonance to the #metoo movement, the Austrian Filmmakers Association created the #we_do Counselling Office for filmmakers in 2019, in the sense of “we do care” for gender and work fairness. It aims to be a point of call for all genders working in the film industry—from interns to producers—to help in case of troubles, conflicts, and complaints about working conditions including but not limited to sexual harassment and discrimination, and to offer counseling and support for affected parties. The service is open to people who experienced harassment, discrimination, or bullying themselves, witnessed it against others or would like to learn how to prevent it on their film set.

**Inclusion Rider of Austrian Production Companies**

In 2019, 38 Austrian film production companies signed the Inclusion Rider agreement, inspired by Frances McDormand’s 2018 Oscar acceptance speech. The aim is gender equality in the film industry, increasing shares of women off screen, raising awareness about equality issues with heads of departments, and, given the same qualifications, hiring women preferentially. The agreement also extends to on-screen representation, film scripts avoiding gender stereotypes, women cast in ungendered supporting roles, and films cast should generally be representative for the social field that is portrayed. Finally, the agreement also tackles the gender pay gap, promising to provide equal pay for equal work and increasing measures that make balancing work and family life easier. The inclusion rider is an important declaration of intent but does not provide sanctions in case of disregard.

**Conclusions**

The Austrian Film Gender Report, 2012–2016 (AFGR), is the first comprehensive survey of gender relations in the Austrian film industry.
Four highly relevant areas were investigated: public funding, Austrian feature films, Austrian film festivals, and film education. By applying the well-established Swedish Model and a specifically developed tool, the Inclusion Model, the arising statistical data provide proof of deep gender imbalances.

Most public funding is provided for films produced by men and the gender pay gap devalues women’s work and qualification. The higher the share of female heads of film departments off screen, the more balanced the gendered characters are on screen. Widespread sexualized violence on screen also demonstrates the relevance of the #metoo discourse in Austrian feature films. Despite being fairly underrepresented at Austrian film festivals, female directors’ films are very popular and win nearly half of the prizes awarded by film juries and audiences. Finally, the female students at the Film Academy Vienna are struggling with male-dominated bodies of students/colleagues and teachers. Non-male perspectives are needed in theory and practice to empower female and non-binary students.

Measures that explicitly address these imbalances are slowly emerging in Austria—seven innovative initiatives are presented in this article. Thus, the undeniable data call for political interventions and substantive measures in all areas in order to achieve gender equality and enable women to bring their competencies into the film industry. There is also need for more research. Not only do we need to keep track of the statistical figures. Rather, more qualitative studies are required to reflect how unintended and discriminatory gender effects are created and how the practice of male hegemonic networks can be disrupted efficiently in the future with the goal of fair and diverse media industries, in Austria and elsewhere.

All results, unless stated otherwise, can be referred to with many more statistics in the Austrian Film Gender Report, 2012–2016:


Available online: http://film-gender-report.univie.ac.at/.
Notes

3. Data delivered by Austria’s largest film school, the Film Academy Vienna/Institute for Film and Television of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw).
4. The participating countries were Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the UK.
5. In the following shortened with AFGR.
7. Relevant gender data on TV productions by the ORF were not provided.
8. For the purposes of this paper, feature film is used to denote “fictional films” as opposed to documentaries.
9. In the perspective of intersectionality, the Inclusion Model could also be used for other social categories (e.g., race, disability, age, etc.).
10. See the key results in English and the full report in German http://film-gender-report.univie.ac.at/.
11. The first track is script development, which in turn is provided in two steps. Scripts that were funded on level 1 may apply for funding on level 2 if script development is not yet completed. The second track is project development which includes all activities in preparation for the film production, such as casting and budget planning. The third track is production funding including post-production. Finally, the fourth track is funding for dissemination and marketing, also including movie release and festival participation. Apart from this, funding for vocational training is also provided.
12. No details for working hours, etc.
13. Sixteen percent of 291 producers were women. However, since no gendered data were available as to their fees, we did not include this number in Fig. 3.
14. Directing is usually not paid according to collective labor agreements but rather following negotiations or according to film budget.
15. Alison Bechdel developed the Bechdel-Wallace test together with her friend Liz Wallace and published it in her comic strip Dykes to Watch Out For in 1985. The test has since spread widely as a tool to quickly assess the representation of female characters in films. It is not a measure for feminist film content, but gives impressions on the gender constellations of characters in films by asking a simple tripartite question: (1) Does the film feature two female characters (2) who talk to each other (3) about something other than a male character? A film only passes the
test if all three points are answered in the affirmative. For the AFGR, we adapted the test in two ways: First, we specified that these two characters needed to be named in the film. Second, we also reversed it and asked the question for male characters as well: (1) Does the film feature two named male characters (2) who talk to each other (3) about something other than a female character?

17. Institute for Film and Television of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw).
18. The data may display slight unintended statistical effects because of change of curricula within the surveyed years (Bachelor, Master) and because of low/limited student numbers.
19. These specializations are Screenwriting and Dramaturgy, Camera Technology and Cinematography, Producing, Directing and Editing. Additionally, there is a sixth Master’s program in Digital Art and Compositing. A Ph.D. program in Media and Film Studies is also available.
20. The prize was named in honor of Austrian film pioneer Louise Fleck (1873–1950).

REFERENCES


Where Are the Female Creatives? The Status Quo of the German Screen Industry

Elizabeth Prommer and Skadi Loist

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality in the screen industry has become an increasingly heated topic in Germany over the past couple of years. Several studies conducted in Germany have looked at the role of gender in creative roles in film production (Prommer and Loist 2015, 2016; Hochfeld et al. 2017; Prommer et al. 2017; Loist and Prommer 2019), at the female potential in the industry, at on-screen representation (Prommer and Linke 2019), and the connection between on-screen representation and the gender of director, writer, and producer (Prommer and Linke 2019). This chapter gives an overview and explores the connections between the underrepresentation of women on-screen and in creative roles behind the camera in the German film and television industry. Additionally, it highlights the movements and efforts to address this issue, by providing a short historical description of the activist movement and measures the
industry has taken until 2019 to change the unequal distribution of gender within these industries.

**Overview of the Germany Film Industry**

The German film and television industries are deeply intertwined. Thus, when looking at the audiovisual industry, both sectors need to be taken into account. The German industry differs substantially from the American, French, and British industries; however, it shares similarities with the Austrian and Scandinavian countries (cf. Loist and Prommer 2019; Aylett 2016). Since the German cinema market is primarily limited to German-speaking countries, and international distribution is rarely lucrative, a typical German feature film which is produced for theatrical distribution is financed mainly from government film funding. Funding is also at times secured, in minor part, by television co-production money, with a small portion of this funding made up from a distributor’s guarantee. In total, there are around 360–400 million euros available annually in Germany from federal, regional, and local film funding agencies. These agencies’ funding goals vary from subsidizing commercially successful films, to investments in films with artistic merits, to productions that enhance the regional industry. No German feature film is produced without film funding (in the form of subsidies, loans, or tax refunds), except for a few low-budget or film school productions. Every year there are around 120 to 140 fiction feature films and an additional 100 to 120 documentaries produced for the German market. This limited production output, in turn, limits the number of creatives in the industry who can make a living through film production alone. Consequently, all creatives, directors, producers, writers, and actors, are required to subsidize their income through work in television production. It has become common knowledge that in the German industry, filmmakers can only earn an adequate income to sustain themselves, and a family, through employment in the television sector. Creatives who solely work in feature film production are rare and often need to find an additional income revenue through work in audiovisual advertisements to earn a living.

The German film industry not only does not offer enough work opportunities to make ends meet for creatives working in the industry but also requires the television sector to provide important co-production financing for feature film. The highest portion of co-production money stems from public broadcasters, with two national networks (ARD and ZDF) and nine regional outlets (the so-called third programs). The cinema co-production engagement of commercial television stations is
limited to a handful of films every year. Hence, if change is to be achieved to create gender parity, the television industry is an important focal point.

**Status Quo: The Underrepresentation in Figures**

How many women and men work in the Germany film industry and in what roles? To answer these questions, several studies have been conducted in Germany either driven from an academic perspective (Prommer and Loist 2015; Loist and Prommer 2019), with the participation from film funding organizations (Hochfeld et al. 2017) and with industry groups (Prommer et al. 2017).

The study “Gender and Film” (Hochfeld et al. 2017) was commissioned by the German Federal Film Board (FFA—Filmförderungsanstalt). Data analysis of all German feature and documentary films that screened in cinemas from 2011 to 2015 was conducted to look at the gender of the creative heads of department for directing, screenwriting, producing, cinematography, sound, editing, production design, and costume. It included a total of 1,110 films, of which 721 were fiction films (feature films, children’s films, and animated films) and 389 documentaries. The same study was done for fiction production of the public broadcasters ARD and ZDF in a study called “Gender & Television” (Prommer et al. 2017). In both of these studies, the data analysis showed that women are underrepresented in almost all creative positions and applied to both documentary and feature films. Only in the field of costume design do women dominate the field (80%). Furthermore, 72% of the films were directed exclusively by men. In producing roles, women were represented in 42% of the films. However, if mixed-gender (men and women) teams were not counted, only 14% of the films were produced exclusively by women. In addition, 61% of the scripts were written by men (alone or in an all-male team) and only 23% exclusively by women. The production design sector is well-balanced with women represented in 51% of the films. In the positions for sound and camera, men are represented in over 90% of the films; however, these are also the education programs with the lowest enrollment of women.

If we look exclusively at feature fiction films, the underrepresentation of women becomes even more acute with only 20% of feature fiction films directed by women, 9% produced by women, and only 17% of scripts written by women. The data for the editing department is striking—particularly because this was a sector of the industry that traditionally had a strong representation of women until the 1990s. Additionally, 80% of
alumni in editing are women; however, currently, only 29% of feature films are edited by women.

The most recent data from 2018 shows no increase of female directors in fiction film (22%, Bundesverband Regie 2017, p. 6); thus, no significant change for the directing sector can be detected since 2009. There is also no increase in the share of women in screenwriting (68% exclusively written by men) and production (58% exclusively produced by men) (Prommer 2018).

A longitudinal study focusing on documentary also shows the underrepresentation of women as directors (Langer 2019). Even though the proportion of cinema documentaries directed by women is higher than in the fiction sector (34%), and the share of film funding is even lower, these numbers have not changed over the past few years (24% in 2017) (Langer 2019, p. 12).

This underrepresentation of women is also found in the television sector. In order to study the gender distribution of television professionals in key creative roles in public television, 1.397 fictional television productions from 2011 to 2015 were examined. This included all television feature fiction films, television plays, fictional series, and series of the public broadcasters ARD–Das Erste, ZDF, and the public third channels (see Prommer et al. 2017 for the findings) broadcast during the period. The underrepresentation of women in the creative roles in television is in some cases even greater than in the film sector. For example, only 14% of fictional television programs are directed by women. This underrepresentation is confirmed by the figures in the diversity reports of the German directors’ guild, Bundesverband Regie (BVR). The diversity reports (Bundesverband Regie 2015–2016) show a gradual increase in female directors with broadcasters ARD from 13% in 2014 to 19% in 2016 and ZDF from 9% to 12%. However, the growth is proceeding in small percentage steps, and if the goal is 5050, at this rate parity would only be reached in 2030. Again, the television documentary sector has a greater share of women directing with 25% in 2016 (Langer 2019, p. 26). It is also important to note that women producing documentary and fiction films for television are limited to shorter formats, the longer and more prestigious the programs get, the smaller the portion of women in the directors’ chair (Langer 2019, p. 27; BVR 2018, p. 9).

The proportion of female directors in Germany is similarly low compared to other European countries. Overall, their representation varies between 20% and 25% in the seven European countries surveyed in the “Where are the Women Directors?” report of the European Women’s
Audiovisual (EWA) network (Aylett 2016), making around every fourth film directed by a woman.

**The Female Potential in the German Industry**

It is often pointed out that there are “no good women” to be directors, scriptwriters, or producers in the industry (cf. Loist 2018, p. 144). However, data of film school alumni suggests that there is a greater potential for female filmmakers available, although they cannot sustain a career (Jenke 2015; Slansky 2011; Aylett 2016). For the most recent analysis, data of all alumni of relevant German film schools, film universities, and institutions was collected in 2017 (Hochfeld et al. 2017). This study looked at recent graduates as well as the long-term development of the gender distribution of the alumni of the past 20 years, thereby giving a comprehensive picture of the current and future workforce potential.

A total of around 250 film school graduates leave German film education institutions every year, including 60 to 70 directing alumni. Depending on the major, the portion of female graduates varies greatly. Almost half of the students studying directing, editing, producing, and scriptwriting at almost all film schools are women. Production design is predominantly studied by women, while about 90% of students are male in location sound and sound design, and three-quarters are male in cinematography. If all courses are combined, a total of about 40% of the students at film schools are female across all subjects and consequently, about 60% male (see Fig. 1).

Since the end of the 1990s, there has been an average of 44% female alumni in directing, and about 40–45% of women in production. In the field of editing, scriptwriting, and production design, the proportion of women is in some cases even higher. Women are underrepresented only on the camera and sound courses.

A comparison of the potential of women, i.e., the number of graduates from film schools 15 to 20 years ago to the actual number of women working in the respective positions in the film and television sectors, shows a clear loss of female creative potential (see Fig. 1). Only half of the trained alumni women work in directing, screenwriting and production design, and only a quarter in producing. In the department of sound, the alumni match that of women active in the market. The differences in the area of editing are extreme. This field was mainly studied by women 15 to 20 years ago, but now only a fifth of all films are edited by women, so only a quarter of the potential alumni are used.
Fig. 1  Loss of female potential: A comparison of film school alumni and women working in the German film industry (Data sourced from Hochfeld et al. 2017, p. 28; Prommer et al. 2017, p. 3)

What these numbers demonstrate is that the argument there are “no good women” available in the industry does not hold. Instead, the data shows that there must be severe structural barriers for women during their careers, that either restrict their ability to enter the industry and/or maintain a career, which must be further addressed and considered.

UNDERREPRESENTATION ON SCREEN

In Germany, women are underrepresented in creative positions not only “behind” the camera but also on-screen. The most recent study on gender representation in film and television “Faded out – Women in Film and Television” (Prommer and Linke 2019) is based on a detailed quantitative content analysis of television programs from a representative sample from 2016 and over 800 German-language feature films from 2011 to
2016, and provides a comprehensive picture of the current situation on German screens. This analysis of screen appearance and roles of women and men in fiction, entertainment, news journalism, or documentaries showed: (1) Women are underrepresented in all segments; (2) women are mainly portrayed under the age of 30 and older women disappear from the screens; (3) men explain the world to viewers as experts, game show hosts, journalists, and narrators; (4) children’s TV is far from equal with even the world of imaginary characters almost exclusively male (9:1 male to female animal characters).

The results show women occur less frequently in German audiovisual media. Across all television programs, there are two men to one woman. Only telenovelas and daily soaps represent the actual gender distribution in Germany, i.e., about 51% women and 49% men (Fig. 2). However, soaps account for only 3% of all programs.

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Fig. 2 Gender distribution of leading roles and protagonists in all television genres (German (co)-productions) (Data sourced from Prommer and Linke 2019, pp. 49–50)
Additionally, age plays a role in the representation of women on screen—if there is a woman on screen, it is usually a young woman, and from the age of 30, women gradually disappear from the screen. This applies to all stations (public broadcast as well as private channels) and across all formats and genres. Up to the age of 30, women appear more often in fictional and nonfictional entertainment formats, or about as often as men. However, from their mid-30s the number of women on screen changes; there are two men per woman; and from 50 years of age, there are three men per woman. The same happens in feature films; from mid-30s on, we see two male characters per female character. The most significant difference is in nonfiction entertainment; here, beyond the age of 40, we see four men per woman, beyond the age of 50, there are eight men per woman.

**Interrelation Between Gender in Creative Positions and Women’s Visibility**

The underrepresentation of women on-screen and behind the camera is directly linked. In-depth analysis shows that the gender of the producer and commissioning editor in television productions is crucial to both the gender balance of the creative team and on-screen visibility of women. Not only do female producers work more often with female writers and directors, but they also produce films with more female lead characters.

A review of German fiction television, i.e., television series, television films, and soap operas, demonstrates that a female commissioning editor makes almost three times as many women visible on screen as a male commissioning editor. With a female commissioning editor in charge, we see an average of 1.6 female protagonists and with a male commissioning editor only 0.6 females in leading roles. If a woman writes the script or produces a television program, then we also see significantly more women on screen (Fig. 3).

The gender of the commissioning editor, producer, and screenwriter is therefore significantly related to the visibility of women. Additionally, if a woman directs, slightly more women are protagonists (1.4) than when men direct (1.2). However, due to the small number of women ($n = 38$) directing, the results for directing are statistically not significant. Interestingly, the visibility of women on screen, when women and men work
together, does not adhere to this pattern and results in similar representation issues found in male directors. If a woman decides solely or in a female team only, then decision-making processes are obviously different.

The same effect applies to feature film—men who direct, operate the camera, produce, and write the script use fewer women characters on the screen. Conversely, more women become visible the more women occupy the positions of director, screenwriter, and producer. In German cinema, almost half of all films do not have a female main character (48%), only one-third of all films (34%) do not have a male main character, and there is an average of 0.64 female main characters per film. However, if a woman directs, we see significantly more women with the proportion of women increased from 0.57 to 0.94. If a woman (or a team of women) wrote the script, we see 1.7 times more women than in scripts by male authors. The proportion of women increases by 59%. If a woman or a team of women is producing, then we see 1.3 times more women on the screen. Therefore, the more women who occupy key creative roles behind the camera, the more women we see on the screen as protagonists.
The Ongoing Quota Debate

The underrepresentation of women in the German film industry is by no means a new phenomenon and has not gone unnoticed. In the late 1970s, the Verband der Filmärbeiterinnen (VeFi; i.e., the association of female film workers) published a manifesto calling for 50% of the means for film production (VeFi 1979). Not much has changed in terms of the underrepresentation of women in the screen industry and the key request of the manifesto—a 50:50 quota is still driving discussions, albeit with renewed energy.

Over the past five years, discussions regarding gender parity have picked up. One of the most successful and recognized lobby organizations for gender equality in the screen sector in Germany is Pro Quote Film. This organization, whose main goal is to fight for a quota in film, which derives from a larger umbrella of feminist groups fighting for equality measures working in different fields (e.g., Pro Quote Medien in print journalism), was founded as Pro Quote Regie (Pro Quota Directing) in 2014 by 12 directors and changed its name to Pro Quote Film as it expanded its scope in 2017 to include ten departments (acting, cinematography, composing, costume, directing, editing, producing, production design, script/dramaturgy, sound). Pro Quote Film also strives to further expand to include surrounding sectors, such as exhibition and academia.\footnote{Germany is not known for embracing a quota system despite the persistence of patriarchal structures that discriminate against women. For decades, quotas for women have been discussed as a means of political representation in parties and governmental bodies, on boards of stock-market companies and within the public service sector. The quota discussion is based on the interpretation of paragraph three of the German Constitution, which states that men and women are equal. Hence, political discussions revolved mainly around legal debates. Political debates from the 1980s pushed for an active pursuit of the advancement of equality instead of a mere antidiscrimination stance, which led to discussions of reverse discrimination against men (Hendrix 2019, pp. 2–3). In 1988, the VeFi filed a law suit for gender equality in screen industries with the Constitutional Court, which was denied and did not receive a hearing (Wietstock 2014, p. 488). The most common argument against quotas—also coming from women—is that it should be about the quality of the production, and women should not only be promoted for their gender (cf. Hendrix 2019; Foljanty 2012). This reveals the logic for regulatory...}
quotas embedded in the principle of meritocracy. Women should only be preferred if they have the same qualifications as men. This argument opened up space for a review of the more subtle discrimination hidden in the undervaluing of women’s achievements (Hendrix 2019, p. 3) and explains the common perception that women are just not good enough, not working hard enough or not being committed enough. Additionally, those few who managed to get to the top fear being disqualified as having reached this position due only to affirmative action and a quota system. Despite numerous studies on the systemic discrimination against women in all fields of the economy and society, this meritocratic myth still holds. This is where the significance of studies that count women within the industry came in.

Several quantitative studies, like the overview above, present the status quo of the German screen industry. The Minister of State for Culture and Media, Monika Grütters, commissioned two studies on “Women in Culture and Media” (Schulz et al. 2016; Anheier 2017) and initiated a roundtable on the topic in 2016/2017 bringing together experts and professionals across the field. However, the results of the conversations taking place over the years were disappointing. No quotas were implemented, beyond an already existing legal obligation to have equal jury participation. The only direct outcome was the installation of one position in an advisory office as part of the German Cultural Council (Kulturrat) for three years, which acted as an interface between the ministry and cultural organizations in questions on gender equality, additionally it acted as a place for data updating and monitoring. Thus far, however, data monitoring is still mainly provided by the directors’ guild and Pro Quote Film.

While a quota is not implemented on a political level, some broadcasters started with self-imposed targets. The ARD Degeto, the production unit of the biggest public broadcaster in Germany, announced to strive for a 20% target for women directors in prime-time TV in 2015. Recently, Degeto director Christine Strobl said in a panel discussion she was in favor of a higher target; however, no company statements were made. In 2018, Petra Wille, the director of regional public broadcaster MDR, called for aiming at 40% women directors within the next three years (Grimberg 2018). Other broadcasters are less assertive in announcing targets.
Awareness in the Industry and Initiatives for Change

While the numbers are not yet visibly increasing in terms of women being given the opportunity to direct, produce, and write films in the German screen industry, there are many discussions and conversations going on within the sector.

In 2018, in the wake of the #metoo outcry around the globe, which also affected the German industry, Pro Quote Film was instrumental in founding Themis—a place where creatives can report bullying, discrimination, and sexual assault within the screen and arts sector. Themis is an independent institution across the film, television, and theater sector supported by the Minister of State for Culture and Media, a number of broadcasters, guilds, and unions.³

In addition to the quantitative data, several of the studies also included a qualitative component to try and tackle the structures keeping inequalities in place that are visible from the data. A survey which was part of the European study “Where Are the Women Directors?” (Aylett 2016) asked film professionals in Europe about their perception of gender inequality in the industry. Of the nearly 900 respondents from across Europe, 162 were based in Germany. Of the German respondents, 95% said they think gender inequality exists in the industry, while 84% said the main feature discouraging women from directing is that their leadership is challenged. Further challenges mentioned were the competitive struggle for funding (77%), job instability (69%), and care work (69%) (Prommer and Loist 2016, pp. 10, 22).

These findings were affirmed in the study “Gender and Film” by the German Federal film funder FFA (Hochfeld et al. 2017). Qualitative interviews revealed that the German film industry is considered to be highly gendered. Especially, the positions of director and producer are described by adjectives like “dominant, self-confident and assertive,” directors and producers are considered to likely take risks, be mobile and flexible (Hochfeld et al. 2017, pp. 44–46), attributes which are often ascribed to men rather than women. In the interviews, female directors mentioned the closed networks, stereotypes and biases, and opaque decision-making processes as gatekeeping mechanisms (Hochfeld et al. 2017, p. 56). These are also findings that Deb Verhoeven found in the Australian film industry when analyzing a data set of industry professionals in which 75% of male producers had not worked with any or only one
woman over a ten-year period within their core creative team (Verhoeven and Palmer 2016). Considering the findings that women producers work with more female scriptwriters and directors (Loist and Prommer 2019, pp. 106–107), the industry needs to rethink measures that aim at mentoring women instead of focusing on changing the behaviors of men within the industry.

Another area in which gender inequality in the screen industries has been discussed prominently is the film festival sector. After debates targeting this issue, especially regarding Cannes as the most prestigious film festival in the global industry and notorious for showcasing very few films by women, the French Collectif 5050 devised the “5050x2020 Charter for Parity and Inclusion in Cinema, Audiovisual and Animation Festivals” (2018) and started to lobby with festivals to sign the Programming Pledge for Parity and Inclusion. To date, 56 film festivals, including many A-list festivals like Cannes, Venice, and Toronto, have signed the pledge, thereby committing to compile statistics according to gender, make visible the list of selection committee members, and commit to a transformation schedule to reach parity in these areas (Women and Hollywood 2019).

In February 2019, the Berlin International Film Festival also signed the pledge and offered the first detailed statistics on their programming. The overview showed that the festival chose films by women directors (37%) in a slightly higher proportion than the submission by female directors (32%). However, like most festivals, the more prestigious festival sections show less women-directed films (Competition 35%, Berlinale Special 18%, Panorama 25%) than the more alternative or specialized sections (Generation 50%, Forum Expanded 63%) (Berlinale 2019, pp. 13–14). Under the new directorship which took over the festival in May 2019, it remains to be seen what effect the Gender Parity Pledge will have. The prestigious German documentary and animation film festival, DOK Leipzig, had previously announced a self-imposed 50:50 quota for the German film selection, arguing that this section, in particular, had shown unequal curating. The quota, which has been set as a two-year experiment, thereby helped push a topic for a larger conversation within the German film and documentary scene (DOK Leipzig 2018).
Diversity in Film Education and Storytelling: Tackling the Problem at the Beginning

Considering the gender distribution of film school alumni, women are underrepresented only in a few departments (sound, cinematography, animation) but all face challenges when entering the industry (Jenke 2015; Hochfeld et al. 2017). Hence, the problem of underrepresentation of women in the industry needs to be taken seriously at the level of “pre-industry” as Miranda Banks (2019) has argued. In the joint paper “Together for Gender Equality,” six German film schools present what is already being done and what they can commit to in order to achieve gender equality. The measures address issues of gender discrimination on a structural level, such as equal opportunities, zero tolerance of gender violence and abuse, and in teaching, e.g., a gender-sensitive approach to content development and production (Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf 2018). The initiative also contributes to the implementations of the policy recommendation issued by the Council of Europe (CM/Rec(2017)9).

The MaLisa Foundation—founded by actress Maria Furtwängler and her daughter Elisabeth Furtwängler—initiated the study on “Audiovisual Diversity” (Prommer and Linke 2017, 2019). As an extension of the study results, which were first released in 2017, further detailed analyses were discussed with the participating partners (broadcasters and film funders) during in-house sessions. These detailed conversations often led to further engagement within production houses and broadcasters.

However, many industry conversations still result in a rebuttal of a quota system with the argument that the Arts are free and no one (i.e., funders with a quota system) should interfere with artistic freedom and quality. The discussion should not primarily aim at quotas in the workforce, but there should be a conversation about the quality of the content. Taking this comment seriously, the MaLisa Foundation, Erich Pommer Institute, and the Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf developed a pilot workshop “Beyond Stereotypes: Gender-sensitive Storytelling,” which took place in 2019 together with six partner institutions: the German and Austrian film funders, the production company UFA, the three broadcasters ARD Degeto, ZDF, and SKY. It is an initiative that aims to develop a conversation with industry partners on how to foster awareness on matters of gender stereotypes and gender equality when
developing content and to create helpful tools to assist in this awareness in the everyday work of film and television creatives. The workshop presented existing tools to detect inequalities in storytelling (such as the Bechdel-Wallace test, the Mako Mori test, and the Chaves Perez test) and discussed best-practice examples with producers, commissioning editors, directors, and scriptwriters. Currently, the partners are working on more in-depth workshops that delve deeper into specific topics and case studies to help creatives to connect with their everyday work challenges when it comes to producing less stereotypical storytelling (cf. Freitag 2019; Müller 2019).

As conversations about gender equality continue and more awareness in the industry is achieved, there still remains significant work to be done to raise awareness about issues of diversity and intersectionality. This requires attention to the intersections of gender inequality and structural discrimination based on sexuality, race/ethnicity, dis/ability, age, class, social status, social mobility, and care tasks. Several initiatives and organizations, such as the newly established Queer Media Society, and filmmakers and actors such as Sheri Hagen and Tyron Ricketts, who advocate for the acknowledgment of Black German creatives, as well as Pro Quote Film aim to work together toward achieving a greater diversity in German film and television productions, in front of and behind the camera.

NOTES

3. See https://themis-vertrauensstelle.de/.

REFERENCES


With Eyes Wide Open: Gender Equality in the Polish Film Industry

Greta Gober

INTRODUCTION

The struggle to advance and formalize gender equality in the Polish film industry started quite recently. In 2014, a Polish Female Filmmakers Association (Stowarzyszenie Kobiet Filmowców) was established, followed in 2017 by an informal group of women working in the film industry Women in Film Poland (Kobiety Filmu). Together on social media, these organizations gather approximately five thousand members, indicating that group consciousness has emerged among women associated with the film industry in Poland. Such consciousness is not to be taken for granted in a country which, to this day, struggles with a negative image of collectivism as staged emancipation of women was enforced by the communist propaganda when Poland was a communist satellite state of the Soviet Union (Perkowski and Stegner 2009). Both groups focus on structural inequalities and working conditions that discriminate against women filmmakers in Poland. Women in Film Poland emerged in response to political developments in Poland, protesting against the government’s attempts to subjugate state-supported film production to...
propaganda, but quickly became an explicit and strong voice in the struggle for gender equality in the film industry.

In order to understand how this mobilization came about, between April and May 2019, I interviewed ten representatives of Women in Film Poland, some of whom also belonged to the Polish Female Film-makers Association as these groups complement rather than compete with each other. These women, for whom pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter, represent different professional groups: directors, producers, scriptwriters, editors and educators, and have many years (between 6 and 30 years) of differing work experiences in the film industry. Women were invited to participate in the study through private contacts, closed-social media group and official communication channels. Responses to my invitation were mostly very positive as women felt it was important to share their experiences of being a female in the Polish film industry and explain the reasons behind their activism.

In this chapter, I will first provide a short overview of the state of Poland’s film industry with regard to its gendered structure and distribution of national funds in comparison with other European countries. Next, I will review the initiatives that were organized to support women’s involvement in the film industry. Lastly, I will present the context in which Women in Film Poland was born. This group has intensified gender equality activism which led to the first success in building institutional support for gender equality in the film industry in Poland. The struggle is nevertheless still in the critical phase of awareness-raising. Time will tell what the outcome of the struggle will be.

**Women in the Polish Film Industry**

Recent years have been very successful for women in the Polish film industry. In a Pan-European analysis of films directed by women between 2003 and 2012, Poland was one of the four countries, out of the nineteen analyzed, that saw a positive shift toward more gender equality in the film industry, considering volume of production, numbers of admissions and performance of films by female directors (Talavera Milla 2014, p. 10). One possible reason for this improvement was the introduction, in 2005, of a new Cinematography Act, which changed the conditions for film production in Poland fairly dramatically. The new law freed filmmakers both from the control of the ruling governments and politicians and from the mercy of risk-averse private producers who stayed away from films
considered difficult and/or artistic (Sobolewski 2019, p. 20). A national film institute, Polish Film Institute (PISF), was established as an independent government agency with the mission to finance independent film production. A similar system was functioning in France where, through a tax placed on those who show films at cinemas, on TV and through DVD/video as well as digital sales, public funds are generated that in turn the national film institute uses to support the film industry. PISF is the youngest film institute in Europe and it operates with the smallest budget per capita (Swedish Film Institute 2013, p. 6).

There is no consensus as to whether these changes have resulted in a producer-led film industry in Poland, but in the context of this book, it is interesting to note that women constitute an important part of this new professional group. Considering the membership of two professional film associations: the Polish Filmmakers Association (SFP), which is the oldest and largest professional association in the industry, and Film 1,2 Association, which represents, integrates and supports the community of debut filmmakers, women constitute between 33 and 41% of filmmakers in Poland. However, in the group of producers among the membership of those same two associations, between 41 and 60% are women. The structure of the Polish film industry can only be derived from such membership estimations which were included in a report published in 2018 (Talarczyk 2018), as no official gender statistics exist on the state of the film industry in Poland. Apart from the strong representation of women among the group of producers, women dominated the group of editors (72% in SFP and 83% in Film 1,2), but hadn’t exceeded the threshold of 30% when it comes to directors (27% in SFP and 30% in Film 1,2), screenwriters (29% in SFP and 20% in Film 1,2) and cinematographers (8% in SFP and 25% in Film 1,2).

The question whether the 33% of women in the Polish Filmmakers Association and the 41% of women in the debut filmmakers association Film 1,2 accurately reflect the structure of the Polish film industry seems secondary to the fact that between 2012–2017 women comprised only 14% of the Polish Film Institute Board’s members, only 17% of jury members at the Polish Film Festival, the oldest film event in Europe and the most important feature film festival in the country (Talarczyk 2018), and again only 14%, if one decided to judge the industry by its cover,—Film Magazine cover to be precise. This magazine is published by the Polish Filmmakers Association and it is dedicated exclusively to the Polish film industry. Between 2007 and 2019, Film Magazine had 50 issues with
only 6 covers featuring individual women compared to 37 covers featuring individual men. Of these six only two were dedicated to a female director, both times to Agnieszka Holland. Thus, despite their promotional slogan “everything that matters in the Polish film,” the magazine seems to give a very inaccurate image of the Polish female filmmaker. Apart from the outstanding Agnieszka Holland, the Polish industry has many internationally acclaimed and award-winning female directors and filmmakers who could easily deserve a film magazine cover.³

**Access to Work and Money**

Funding in the form of subsidies and loans, managed by the Polish Film Institute, remains the main source of funding for independent filmmakers in Poland. In 2019, the institute allocated a sum of approximately 34 mln euro to its different operational programs, including project development, film production and international co-production (Film Commission Poland, n.d.). Between 2012 and 2017, the institute supported the production of 180 feature films out of which 28 (15%) were directed by a woman. Such low share of national funding awarded to women was similar to the average share of funding awarded to women in countries included in the European Women’s Audiovisual Network (EWA Network) study; from 2006 to 2013, the European average for Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the UK was 16.1%, with women receiving particularly low shares of national funding to direct films in Italy (10.4%) and the UK (11.3%), and comparatively higher shares in Sweden (27.1%) (EWA 2016b, p. 35). The EWA study additionally found gender inequality in the average awards. During the period under review, the average spend per feature film from the national fund was lower in all countries for female directors than for men. The differential ranged from 6% in Croatia to 34% in Germany (EWA 2016b, pp. 38–39). In Poland, female and male directors seemed to receive similar funding per project once it was granted. Between 2006 and 2017, 14% of feature films were directed by women and they took 13% of the total funding designated for feature film production in that period (Talarczyk 2018). When these findings are contrasted against the proportion of active female directors, it becomes clear that both in Poland and in the majority of countries analyzed in the EWA study (with the exceptions of Austria and Sweden), the average share of national production funding awarded to women falls well below the share of active female directors.
In Poland, that share in the analyzed period was between 27 and 30%, and in the countries included in the EWA study, it was 24%. When the number of women working as second directors and directors’ assistants is considered (74%), it becomes clear that the Polish film industry is divided along the lines of gender stereotypes, with men in the most prestigious positions (directors) and numerous women assisting and helping to organize their work (93% of costume designers, 87% of makeup artists, 60% of stage designers, 47% of set managers and 38% of producers working with the production of feature films between 2006 and 2017 were women) (Talarczyk 2018).

In total, in Poland between 2006 and 2017, women directed 28% of films that received financial support from the national film institute. Their share was lowest among directors of full-length feature films (14%) and higher among short feature films (27%), documentaries (30%) and animation films (30%) (Talarczyk 2018). This tendency was consistent with the barriers EWA Network identified in their study which suggested there was a widespread distrust across Europe in women directors being able to deliver films with higher budgets. Both private investors and public funders judged women’s ability to work with large budgets; 56% of private funders and 31% of public funders agreed that women directors negatively impacted on their funding decision (EWA Network 2016a, p. 2). Similar distrust seemed to work against women in Poland between 2012 and 2017. When the number of applications submitted to the Polish Film Institute and the number of applications approved for funding were analyzed, it became evident that the chances of obtaining funding were higher if the film was to be directed by a man. The average success rate for applications submitted to the institute, including for feature, documentary and animation films, regardless of the directors’ gender, was 33%. When the gender of the director was accounted for, the success rate went up to 35% for male directors and down to 27% for female directors (Talarczyk 2018).

Directors often have to move between cinema and television to sustain their careers. Access to work thus needs to be considered also from the perspective of broadcasting funds. In Poland, between 2000 and 2018, private and public broadcasters commissioned the production of approximately 238 individual fiction series. Together 667 directors were invited to complete that work, and women constituted 13% of them (Swiderska and Bielawska 2018, September). Access to work was identified as the major obstacle women directors faced in the countries included in the
EWA Network study. This was also the main reason why some Polish female directors decided to start the Polish Female Filmmakers Association (PFFA) back in 2014. The Association’s founding document explicitly states the need to undertake pedagogical, social and educational work to level out the playing field between female and male filmmakers in Poland, including ensuring filmmakers access to social security during pregnancy and maternity break and eradicating the gender pay gap that exists in the industry (PFFA, n.d., p. 2). One of the funding members of PFFA said:

At some point we started wondering. How is it that despite successful debuts, despite receiving awards, despite having our work critically acclaimed, we aren’t getting any job offers? Producers are not contacting us asking to work for them? How is it that our male colleagues didn’t stand out when it comes to talents or skills in film school or in our first gigs, but are now doing substantially better than we are? We were still struggling to achieve financial stability that would make our work feel like a profession, rather than a hobby that needs to be continuously supported by parents, husbands or another job. As years went by the only difference we could find was our gender. This is when we decided to join forces (Iwona, personal communication, April 29, 2019).

The establishment of the PFFA, even though to date it only has 53 members registered (and 1800 affiliated via social media), marked the beginning of gender equality activism that challenged the film industry in Poland from 2015 onward.

**Ongoing Struggle for Gender Equality in the Film Industry in Poland**

The first discussion about leveling out the playing field between female and male filmmakers in Poland under the title *Does Cinema Have Gender?* was organized by PFFA in May 2015 during the International Festival of Independent Cinema PKO Off Camera in Krakow. Invited panelists were asked to reflect on the phenomenon of female cinema and on the status of female filmmakers in the film industry in Poland. On their social media page, the organizers wrote that they were opening a discussion that had yet to take place in Poland (PFFA 2015a). In June of that same year, the association co-organized a debate on the status of women directors
during the Youth and Film—34th Koszalin Festival of Film Debuts (PFFA 2015b). This is the oldest festival in Poland, organized since 1973, where young cinematographers and filmmakers are showing their first works. PFFA reached out to the new generation of filmmakers inviting them to reflect on some simple facts. As more women in Poland graduate as film directors than end up working in that role, the panelists were asked what the experience of a debut was like for women filmmakers, what problems they faced, and if their gender was a hindrance to building a strong position in the industry? Agnieszka Wiśniewska, the editor in chief of Political Critique4 and one of the panelists in this discussion, wrote an article after the debate with an intriguing title “More men named Grzegorz than women,” referring to the fact that the main competition of the festival had more films in it made by men named Grzegorz (a popular Polish name), than by women (Wiśniewska 2015). Based on the reactions from the public, Wiśniewska and the other panelists concluded that research was needed to move these discussions forward. A small research grant was designated by Political Critique to conduct a pilot study on the participation of women in the film industry in Poland. This study was carried out in 2016 by Monika Talarczyk and, with its updated version from 2018, remains the only study of its kind available on the Polish film industry. It is also the study referred to throughout this chapter (Talarczyk 2018).

Following Kraków and Koszalin, the next debate Women—Filmmakers was organized in April 2016 by Warsaw Film School during their Script Fiesta Festival, an international event organized since 2012 to promote scriptwriting as a profession. This time the problem of the marginalization of women in the cinema was tackled from the perspective of the untold story. If women were given more chances to tell their stories through film, their sensitivity and different life experiences would enrich our cinema greatly, was the organizers’ argument (Script Fiesta 2016). Similarly, in November 2016, at the International Film Festival Camerimage in Bydgoszcz, a Forum on Diversity in Cinematography was organized to celebrate female cinematographers (Camerimage 2016). In the same vein, with the creative potential of women lost to the film industry in focus in December 2016 in Warsaw, Eurimages, in cooperation with the EWA Network and PFFA, organized a conference Missing Creativity: Gender Equality in the European Film Industry: Focus on Poland and Beyond (Eurimages 2016). These two angles, from which discussions about gender inequality in the Polish film industry were advanced, economic and creative, were also shown to be two sides of the competitive struggle
that women face in Europe, discouraging them from working in the film industry. The economic side of this struggle concerns the financial sustainability of a film career in a male-dominated, risk-averse market. The creative side concerns the diversity of the stories that receive funding, or the problem of “commissioning bias,” which creates conditions unfavorable to women and privileges films with “white, male-driven, narratives” (EWA Network 2016b, p. 47).

When it comes to film, all roads in Poland lead to the most important feature film festival in the country, the Polish Film Festival (FPFF) in Gdynia. The discussion about women’s position in the film industry thus circulated around Poland for almost two years, through Kraków, Koszalin, Warsaw, Bydgoszcz and Warsaw again, before finally in 2016 making its way to Gdynia. When in July 2016 the list of films admitted to the main competition of the 41st FPFF was announced, it emerged that out of 45 films submitted to the main competition 16 were selected; none of which were directed by a woman. A heated polemic started between Michał Oleszczyk, the artistic director of FPFF at that time, and Professor Monika Talarczyk, a Polish film history and women’s cinema researcher, about the celluloid ceiling, commissioning bias and low representation of women on commissioning and funding panels (Talarczyk-Gubała 2016b; Oleszczyk 2016). This discussion eventually moved from the social media to the festival’s site, where during an event, Women in Cinema: How to Make It in a Man’s World?, an important breakthrough happened. For the first time since its inception, the Polish Film Institute took an official stand in the debate on the status of gender equality in the industry. The 41st edition of FPFF ended with representatives of the institute pledging to introduce gender quotas in the regulations guiding their expert committees’ work. As of 2017, these regulations read: “in accordance with the postulate of equal treatment on the grounds of gender, the number of women among the expert committees’ leaders should not be smaller than 35%, unless it is impossible to achieve this level for objective reasons” (PISF 2017, p. 5).

PISF distributes its funding based on an evaluation of each projects’ merits. Applications are assessed by committees of experts who are appointed from among representatives of the Polish film industry. Each committee has two members and one leader, and the evaluation process has two stages. First, each committee makes a democratic recommendation to pass the project to the second stage. Next, leaders representing all committees from the same funding priority (e.g., project development,
script development, production feature film, production documentary film, etc.) select projects recommended for funding. Based on these recommendations, the director of the institute makes the final decision to allocate funding. The role of the expert committees’ leaders is thus very significant. Since between 2012–2017 women constituted only 23% of all leaders (Talarczyk 2018), this change was the first step in building institutional support for the presence of women and a significant achievement in the struggle for gender equality in the film industry in Poland.

**Women in Film Poland**

In October 2017, Women in Film Poland (Kobiety Filmu), an informal group of some three thousand women associated with the film industry, was formed. The group emerged at a specific political moment, when the Polish Ministry of Culture announced its decision to remove Magdalena Sroka from the office of director of the PISF. An open letter condemning this decision as illegal and in breach of the Cinematography Act was signed by representatives of the filmmaking community, including the Polish Documentary Film Directors Guild, Directors Guild of Poland, Polish Producers Alliance, Polish Film Academy, Polish Association of Editors PSM, Polish Society of Cinematographers, Film Association 1,2, Polish Filmmakers Association, Polish Female Filmmakers Association, New Horizons Association as well as the European Film Association. A large manifestation was also organized under the banner “The Institute belongs to the filmmakers, not the politicians,” and Women in Film Poland was officially responsible for organizing it (Wilk 2017). The mobilization of the filmmakers followed a series of massive protests and demonstrations that had been spreading across the country since 2015. After the Law and Justice Party (PiS) won a clear majority in the 2015 parliamentary elections, Poland has been making headlines in international media due to many controversial laws the government passed or was planning to pass. Starting from November 2015, the Committee for the Defense of Democracy (KOD) was formed in response to the supreme court constitutional crisis and led to numerous anti-government demonstrations ("Poland Protests," 2015). In January 2016, journalists led demonstrations to defend the freedom of the media and protest against the government taking over public media ("Polish Media Laws," 2016). In October 2016, a women-led civic uprising, organized under the hashtag #BlackProtest (#CzarnyProtest) to protect abortion rights, led
to the government abandoning previously announced plans of banning abortion rights (Gober and Struzik 2018; “Poland: Behind the Black Protests,” 2017). Thus, when the media headlines proclaimed the government was coming for the cinema (Marmurek 2017), the stakes were already very high. Women in Film (WIF) Poland called on the filmmakers’ community to unite despite differences in the defense of the Polish Film Institute’s independence. In their call to action, they emphasized the role women have so far played in the political crisis the country was experiencing and stressed:

We believe and expect that all representatives of our community will participate in the strategic planning we need to undertake in the face of a real threat – including the often unjustifiably excluded representation of women. As the events of the last two years show, it is women who are the force that can exert real influence on the government’s decisions (Wiśniewska 2017).

Following the demonstration, Women in Film Poland organized and professionally executed a social media campaign under the hashtag #ILovePolishCinema (#KochamPolskieKino) where representatives of the film industry and members of the public declared their appreciation for independent cinema in videos titled Polish Cinema: Our Voice, Our Pride, Our Love, Our Freedom, Our History, Our Heroes (Women in Film Poland 2017). However, the group has also experienced a push back from men who refused to accept women as representatives of the filmmakers’ community. This experience brought the question of why women should always assume secondary and less prestigious positions in this community to the forefront and had Women in Film Poland adopt an explicit position in the struggle for gender equality in the film industry in Poland (Czarnkowska-Listoś 2019, June). Thus, when in 2018 PISF announced the lists of newly appointed expert committees, Women in Film Poland publicly challenged the director for not following through with the institute’s newly adopted regulations. The regulations read that the number of women among the expert committees’ leaders should not be smaller than 35%; yet, on the lists published for 2018, women constituted only 14% of leaders. Women in Film demanded these numbers to be increased (Spór 2018). While the lists approved for 2018 were only slightly improved to 17% of women leaders, in the following year these were raised quite significantly to 50%. Gender parity among expert committees’ leaders seems
to have already paid off. In the first round of applications approved for funding by the new committees, the average success rate for production of feature, documentary and animation films directed by women was significantly improved, from 27% in 2012–2017 to 45% in 2019 (for men it decreased from 35% in 2012–2017 to 32% in 2019). Overall, men were still funded to direct more feature, documentary and animation films than women (15 to 10), but, considering the number of applications, films that were to be directed by women did significantly better, especially in the most prestigious category of feature films. Eight feature films were awarded funding, including four to be directed by women and four by men, while the proportion of applications was eight to nineteen, respectively.

Women in Film Poland has also successfully led the process of getting the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia to sign the “50x50 by 2020” gender equality pledge which was first introduced at the Cannes Film Festival in 2018, followed by Toronto, Venice, Berlin and other international film festivals (5050x2020, n.d.). The pledge is the first step to closing the gender gap among filmmakers, whose work is acknowledged at the festival, by remaining transparent about the gender of directors whose films are submitted; the gender of those whose films are selected for screening; and the gender of all festival decision makers, including members of the Programming Board, Selection Committee, Qualification Committee and the Jury (Women in Film Poland 2018). Poland’s Film Festival in Gdynia was the first national film festival to pledge this commitment and the signing of the pledge took place during a conference organized by Women in Film Poland (“Polish National Film Festival in Gdynia,” 2018). “Our group has revolutionary power” said one of the group’s representatives (Justyna, personal communication, May 5, 2019). Another one added:

We are in a critical moment, which means we must be somehow revolutionary. Otherwise the breakthrough will not happen. We have reached the conclusion that we cannot be treated differently. We want to have real impact and we also want to manage this industry, because we have such competences (EWA, personal communication, May 7, 2019).

Women in Film Poland thus not only attempted the consolidation of the filmmakers’ community in the defense of the Polish Film Institute’s apolitical nature but the emergence of this group also gave the struggle
for gender equality in the film industry in Poland a new force. Women, as I was told, began to open their eyes.

**WITH EYES WIDE OPEN**

During her acceptance speech, at the 65th Berlin International Film Festival in 2015, Małgorzata Szumowska, who took home the Silver Bear for Best Director for her film *Body*, said “I am a director, but also a woman. This is a great combination” (Talarczyk-Gubała 2016a, p. 2). During her speech, at the 68th Berlin International Film Festival in 2018, when she accepted a Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize for her film *Mug*, she said “I am very happy. And I’m especially happy, because I am a female film director. Yeah!” (Lodz Film School 2018). This subtle change of optics in her 3 years apart acceptance speeches, from “I am a director and a woman” to “I am a female director,” reflects very well the type of change that occurred in Poland over these years in the context of gender equality debate. Szumowska herself reflected on and interpreted this change. While the film industry around the world was dealing with the aftermath of the #metoo revolution, women in Poland were still recovering from the #BlackProtest. Szumowska said:

I used to feel that it’s more my responsibility to be an artist. I never think about my responsibility as a ‘female director.’ But over the last couple of months, something has changed a little bit. Because I’m the mother of a 5-year-old daughter, because of everything that’s going on in the world, I’ve started to feel a kind of responsibility I’d never felt before (Hans 2018).

The feeling of responsibility and solidarity with other women in the film industry was not given to many female filmmakers in Poland for years, and most probably, for many it still is not. Voicing gender equality demands was seen as unpopular, old-school and perhaps even embarrassing, and women avoided making such statements out of fear of being branded “a feminist.” Both women who headed the Polish Film Institute, Agnieszka Odorowicz (2005–2015) and Magdalena Sroka (2016–2017), felt it was important to publicly manifest their impartiality from gender equality measures and declare their “blindness to gender” (Talarczyk-Gubała 2016a, p. 3). But from 2016 onward this started to change. A strong need to express solidarity with each other became urgent to many women. Repeatedly in the interviews conducted for this chapter,
representatives of Women in Film Poland used the expression “opening one’s eyes” when talking about the reasons behind their activism. All of the ten women felt, in stark contrast to the “gender blindness” that for many years characterized the Polish film industry, that the fog has lifted. They began consciously building each other’s knowledge about structural inequalities in the industry and gave them political significance. As one of the group’s representatives said, “This group got us to talk about women’s position in this industry, to count, to get acquainted with Monika’s Talarczyk research. Our actions are consciously political because of that” (Anna, personal communication, April 25, 2019). The numerous events organized by the groups’ representatives, some more formal as the above-mentioned conferences and protest actions, some less formal such as networking, informal meetings and discussions in the private social media group, all had the same purpose in mind: to create shared space where knowledge about gender inequality in the film industry could be built and where women could learn about each other’s experience of being a woman in the film industry in Poland. As Weronika concluded “This is our space, where we exchange our experiences. About the past, about the present and we learn how to help each other and open each other’s eyes” (personal communication, April 30, 2019).

**Notes**

1. Women in Film Poland is not a member of the global network of non-profit membership chapters of Women in Film & Television International (WIFTI). As the group intends to remain informal, currently there are no plans to apply for an NGO status or formalize as a chapter of WIFT.

2. Polish Filmmakers Association (SFP) was established in 1996 and in 2018 had 1500 affiliated members. Its primary task is to integrate the film community and protect its interests and a number of sections and circles, which unite representatives of different filmmaking professions, exist within SFP [www.sfp.org.pl].

3. Just to mention Małgorzata Szumowska, Agnieszka Smoczyńska-Konopka, Joanna Kos-Krauze, Katarzyna Klimkiewicz, Aneta Kopacz, Karolina Bielawska, Anna Jadowska, Anna Kazejak, Hanna Polak, Lidia Duda, Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz, Anna Zamecka, Zofia Kowalewska, Dorota Kobiela, Aleksandra Terpińska, Kasia Adamik, Olga Chajdas, Jagoda Szelc, Kinga Dębska, Maria Sadowska, Urszula Antoniak, Dorota Kędzierzawska and many, many more successful female producers, scriptwriters, casting directors, camera operators, composers, film editors, costume designers, set
designers, animators, production managers, makeup artists and actresses, who are part of the Polish film industry today.

4. Political Critique (Polityka Krytyczna) is a daily online newspaper published by a largest Central and Eastern European liberal network of institutions and activists with the same name (www.politicalcritique.org).

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The Road to 5050: Gender Equality and the Irish Film Industry

Susan Liddy

INTRODUCTION
Irish film production “progressed in fits and starts” for much of the twentieth century but women have written, directed, edited and set designed for at least some of that time (O’Connell 2015, p. 410), albeit sporadically and in very small numbers (see also, Edge 2020; Pettitt 2020). However, prior to 2015, the Irish film industry was unproblematically male dominated characterised by occupational segregation, unconscious bias and perceived discrimination, and this situation was primarily unacknowledged and unchallenged (Liddy 2020a). Over the last five years, there has been a significant cultural shift. Within that relatively short space of time, industry discourse has become infused with the importance of gender equality; the need for more women behind the camera in key creative roles, the need for more women’s stories and perspectives on-screen, even if such a position is not universally welcomed and sometimes (mainly privately) deemed to be “going too far”. Public funders have issued quite forthright statements about the importance of achieving gender equality, and gender policies have been formulated and implemented.
This chapter will chart the evolution of the gender equality project in Ireland over that period of time by focusing primarily on the policies and initiatives of Fís Eireann/Screen Ireland (SI), the national development agency for “Irish filmmaking and the film, television and animation industry” (Screen Ireland, About Us) and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), the “regulator of public and commercial broadcasting” (BAI, About Us). Screen Ireland was known as the Irish Film Board (IFB) prior to rebranding on 18 June 2018 but is referred to as SI throughout, for clarity. Additionally, the work of professional and representative bodies such as the Writers Guild of Ireland (WGI), the Screen Directors Guild of Ireland (SDGI) and Women in Film and Television Ireland (WFT) will be considered. However, to provide context, the chapter begins with an overview of women in Irish culture and society.

**Women in Irish Society**

Fine Davis has observed that Ireland’s “transformation in terms of gender role attitude and behaviour” began later than in many other Western countries. Our geographic isolation as an island and the fact that our economic and industrial development did not accelerate until the early 1960s and the strong influence, until relatively recently, of the Roman Catholic Church go some way to explaining our slower development in this regard (Fine-Davis 2015, p. 4). Indeed, despite the fact that there have been many social and cultural changes in Irish society over the last few decades, according to the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI), Irish women remain “disadvantaged in the labour market; [...] women also continue to be hugely underrepresented in the political, economic and administrative systems in Ireland” (2016, p. 5). Looking at the creative arts, it is clear that similar problems exist there. Women’s voices are underrepresented on radio (Walsh et al. 2015), in theatre (Donohue et al. 2016) and in the film industry (Liddy 2016, 2020a, b; Barton 2019; O’Brien 2019). Additionally, a recent study by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) suggests that the division of paid and unpaid work (care work and housework) is heavily gendered in Irish society (Russell et al. 2019, p. ix). Until 2019, the impact of motherhood on Irishwomen’s career trajectory in the audio-visual industry was somewhat sidestepped by those advocating change. The pursuit of broad gender equality policies was prioritised though it is clear that motherhood and caregiving can and does shape women’s involvement, or lack
of involvement, in the industry and is now becoming a significant focus (Liddy and O’Brien, in process).

In many ways, Ireland has broken free from the conservative forces of the past that had such a profound impact on women’s lives; in May 2015, we became the first country to vote in favour of same-sex marriage in a national referendum and the result was a resounding yes. After decades of social conservatism, an overwhelming yes vote in May 2018 paved the way for the provision of abortion services here. A decisive yes vote in the divorce referendum followed in May 2019 which eased restrictions on divorce. Yet, in June 2019, when announcing the establishment of a Citizens Assembly to examine gender equality in Ireland, the Taoiseach (prime minister), Leo Varadkar, observed: “I don’t think anyone can argue for a second, that Ireland is a country in which men and women are equal […] the current rate of progress is too slow” (RTE 2019). Arguably, despite undeniable progress in the Irish film industry, the same argument might reasonably be made.

**Waking the Feminists**

To understand recent advances around gender equality, a review of the period from 2014 to 2015 is important. A number of events coalesced to catapult a debate on gender equality in the film industry into the public arena. These include the questioning of the status quo in public arenas (Liddy 2015a, b); academic research interviews with Screen Ireland personnel exploring (a) how decision-makers rationalised the low numbers of women funded and (b) advocating for the provision of statistical information pertaining to gender and funding (Liddy 2016); the appointment of a number of gender-aware and feminist Screen Ireland Board members including the chair, Dr Annie Doona, and the formation of advocacy groups to put pressure on the funders. However, the most significant challenge to the status quo was the emergence of a national campaign entitled *Waking the Feminists*. In brief, ten plays were chosen for a significant cultural programme called *Waking the Nation* to be performed at the national theatre, the Abbey, to mark the centenary of 1916, an important historical milestone which led to the foundation of the Irish State. Only one of those plays, a monologue for children, was written by a woman, Ali White’s *Me Mollser*.

The anger at that discovery, articulated by freelance set designer Lian Bell, gathered momentum and erupted on social media. It was met with a
cavalier response from the artistic director at the time, Fiach Mac Conghail, who said he made decisions based on who he “admired and wanted to work with” (O’Toole 2017, p. 137). Bell effectively issued a call to arms on November 2015, on her Facebook page: “If all these posts about wanting equality in the arts means something to you, say something. Even if you don’t want to bang a drum. Even if you don’t know what to say. Even if your comment is, I stand with you. Say something” (Quigley 2018, p. 86).

*Waking the Feminists* kick-started an interrogation of Irish women’s place in Irish culture and society and the accompanying imbalance of power. *The Irish Times* carried letters outlining the problem for women not only in theatre (Donohue 2015) but also in film (Liddy 2015b). Demands for gender equality in the film industry gathered momentum rapidly; panel discussions and media analysis carried impassioned and outraged debates. Advocacy groups were formed, and Irish state agencies, Screen Ireland (SI) and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) responded, at different times and in different ways, to these accelerated demands.

**Waking the Irish Film Industry**

Screen Ireland occupies a central position in Irish film-making and functions as a cultural gatekeeper, evaluating projects and awarding funding at development and production stages. Up until 2015, Screen Ireland was calling for “Irish stories” and seeking “Irish creative talent” ignoring the reality that the vast majority of films were about men and written and directed by men (Liddy 2015a). Indeed, at that time Screen Ireland did not gather or publish any statistical information on gender. Liddy found that between 1993 and 2013 only 13% of produced features funded by Screen Ireland had an Irish or Irish-based female screenwriter attached (2015c, p. 423), if co-productions and animated films are included that statistic was 19% for both screenwriters and directors (Tracy and Flynn 2016).

Geraldine Creed assessed all Screen Ireland’s schemes across a ten-year period, 2006–2015, and found the percentage of funded female directors, screenwriters and writer/directors remained steady at 18%, 21% and 22%, respectively, with “no perceptible increase in the gender representation of females in either creative or crew roles on BSE/IFB funded...
productions across the ten-year study” (Creed 2018, p. 178). Interestingly, the only instance of consistent gender parity over that period was the role of producer in Screen Ireland’s short film scheme, which tipped just over 30% (Creed 2018, p. 158). The short film scheme has a significantly lower budget than either documentary or live-action feature film and sidesteps the “risk” equated with female film-makers internationally. Indeed, although a consideration of the monetary value of funding awards is outside the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting Creed’s observation that Screen Ireland’s feature film production funding awards between 2006 and 2015 show “a very low rate of representation for female producers on award amounts of over €750,000” (Creed 2018, p. 155).

The absence of any statistical data on gender from Screen Ireland at this time facilitated the avoidance of gender issues; indeed, the grim reality behind their “gender neutral” approach could not be adequately debated without statistics. “Project-led” development was deemed ungendered in a system that emphasised “quality” (Liddy 2016). In her analysis of the Swedish film industry, Lantz suggested that “quality” could be “gendered to male advantage” as men dominate the decision-making and gatekeeping positions and hence enjoy what she calls “the preferential right of judgement” as to how it should be defined (2007, p. 31). In 2014/2015, there was little acknowledgement in the Irish film industry that quality could be subjective. A neoliberal choice discourse justified the lower numbers of women in the industry; women did not apply in enough numbers and that was their “choice”. Such a position upheld the status quo and contributed to the cycle of female exclusion. Interestingly, application rates are being cited as a problem again in 2020, arguably to rationalise a lower success rate than was hoped for, as I will go on to discuss.

Galvanised by events arising from Waking the Feminists and, arguably, concern about reputational damage in the aftermath of Liddy’s letter to The Irish Times, Screen Ireland issued a statement through the chair, Dr Annie Doona, on 12 November 2015 stating it acknowledged a “major underrepresentation of women exists in Irish film” and went on to lament that women were “not fully represented either in terms of accessing funding for film or in public recognition of their talent” (Clarke 2015). Some weeks later, on 22 December 2015, the Six Point Plan, a gender policy, was unveiled. It included the provision of information; training (including unconscious bias training) and mentorship;
education; and, the jewel in the crown, the inclusion of a 5050 gender funding target over three years. This approach was aimed particularly at increasing the numbers of female screenwriters and writer/directors (Screen Ireland, Gender and Diversity Policy) informed, presumably, by international research suggesting that greater numbers of women in key creative roles have a positive impact on the number of women hired (e.g. Lauzen 2019, p. 6). While Screen Ireland is concerned with broader issues of diversity and inclusion and will be directing greater attention to those issues going forward, its first priority, at least up to mid-2020, has been gender equality—“our focus in ensuring a diversity of voices in Irish film and filmmaking will be on gender” (Screen Ireland, Gender and Diversity Policy). Crucially, the Six Point Plan also undertook to gather and publish statistics relating to applications and funding decisions, despite previous resistance.

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) is the broadcasting regulator in Ireland, funded from the television licence fee. The scheme of relevance to the independent film sector, Sound and Vision, provides funding for television (and radio programmes) with a stipulation that applicants have the support of a broadcaster who will guarantee the funded production will subsequently be screened on national or community-based television. During a colloquium on gender equality in the film industry2 in MIC, Limerick in 2016 it emerged in a presentation by BAI senior policy manager, Stephanie Comey, a supporter of gender equality, that the BAI had been gender blind. For instance, of the 386 television projects funded in the previous five-year period, just 19% had a female director. Moreover, the BAI had little or no ready access to statistical information about how their funding was being distributed until Comey herself undertook to uncover and provide statistics for her presentation (Liddy 2020a).

In the past, the BAI had argued that it was outside their remit to record and monitor gender statistics but after many public debates, internal discussion and meetings with stakeholders the organisation subsequently reviewed its policy and practice. Statistics are now available though they are not as accessible or published as regularly as those of Screen Ireland. In 2017, in its 3-year Statement of Strategy, one of the key strategic objectives under the theme Promoting Diversity and Plurality was to “foster a landscape that is representative of, and accessible to, the diversity of Irish society” (BAI 2017, p. 25). The aim of the BAI, then, was to create a
more diverse media in terms of content and media producers by the end of 2019.

Arising from that commitment, a *Gender Action Plan* was published in 2018 with a brief to engage in: “Data collection and publication, supporting research, encouraging the development of gender initiatives internally, and with stakeholders and enhancing accountability processes, including monitoring and reporting” (BAI 2018, p. 2). In order to address the gender imbalance on-screen and behind the camera “strategic assessment criteria now include gender” (Comey 2018). The BAI has, effectively, moved towards a “points system” in the evaluation of projects; those that demonstrate greater gender inclusivity, when all else is equal, will be favoured over those that do not. Not only must the gender of the proposed producer, screenwriter and director be declared at the application stage but, according to Comey, they must later report on the gender of those who actually occupied those key creative roles “in order to draw down the final tranche of payment” (Comey 2018). In April 2020, 36 TV projects were awarded 6.4 million euro by the BAI and more than 80 per cent of the successful projects identified between 1 and 4 women in key creative roles. This should, according to their statement, result in steady percentage increase in women’s representation over the next number of years as they have “sent a strong message [...] about the importance for the BAI of gender equality both on and off the screen” (BAI 2020, p.5)

**Spreading the Word**

Through a combination of advocacy, negotiating with funding organisations and broadcasters, awareness-raising events with the membership and heightening female visibility in the industry, the EAC of the Writers Guild, the Screen Directors Guild and WFT Ireland have pursued gender equality since late 2015. Gender equality has also been the subject of dedicated seminars in third-level institutions (e.g. MIC Limerick, 2016 and 2017); in panel discussions with key decision-makers and practitioners which graced many of the major Irish film festivals; and in *Spotlight*, the Irish Film Institute’s “annual review of the year in Irish film”.

Additionally, the WGI and the SDGI, separately and under the umbrella of the EAC, organised tailored events for female screenwriters and directors, focusing on a range of skills such as networking whether with producers, directors or screenwriters; pitching; developing treatments; preparing funding documents; and introducing fiction and theatre
writers to writing for the screen, all with targeted financial support from the BAI. These interventions were essential when it became clear that, despite the fanfare surrounding Screen Ireland’s Six Point Plan, women screenwriters and writer/directors were not celebrating the new policy in a way that might have been anticipated. Indeed, applications to Screen Ireland were quite slow, and initially, the organisation did not “sell” its policy with any vigour adding to the suspicion that it would not make any fundamental difference to gender equality (Liddy 2020b). To counter those concerns, both guilds also held information meetings for their membership which focused on interrogating the Six Point Plan, and reassuring practitioners that the potential for real change was on the horizon and not simply “more of the same”.

Of particular note was the fact that many women writers in their 40s and older, who had worked through periods when even having a female protagonist in a screenplay was deemed unmarketable, had all but given up after years of rejection. Liddy captures the sense of fatigue, sadness and cynicism in the accounts of many such practitioners who identified an industry in which the perception exists that men have the proverbial inside track; that “lesser talented men have moved up”; and that, unlike women, men “have a right to fail” without sanction (2020b, p. 83). Their perceived relegation to second class, expressed in the devaluing of narratives about women’s lives, the showcasing of the male “star” director, the ubiquitous “boys club” and a gendered organisational culture, has potentially quite damaging consequences for their investment in the Irish film industry (Liddy 2020b, pp. 81–87). As Fels observes, women can often “incrementally lose their early convictions about their abilities and their talents” (2005, p. 254). Over time, they can become more reluctant to articulate that ambition and become demotivated and demoralised. This is not, in many cases, a lack of personal confidence, but a lack of confidence in a system that has long devalued their work and talent.

Gender statistics were eventually provided by Screen Ireland for films produced between 2011 and 2017, and the results largely echoed Creed’s findings for writers and directors revealing that women comprised 21% of screenwriters and 17% of directors though female producers were 59% over that period of time. The disproportionately large numbers of women producers might suggest that many more female-driven projects
would make their way into production than is currently the case. In a US context, Smith, Choueiti, Choi and Pieper have speculated whether: “female producers face strong headwinds advocating for female directors on open directing assignments? Or are they simply not championing other women?” (2019, p. 26). However, in an Irish context, it may signal that female producers do not always inhabit positions of power within the Irish industry, despite the existence of a number of high-profile female-lead production companies. Interestingly, in Creed’s analyses, Screen Ireland’s funding awards for 2006–2015 show the nine production companies with the highest financial awards for feature film production had 14 male producers attached to the projects versus just 4 females (2018, p. 155).

Concern at the relatively low number of applications by female screenwriters and directors prompted Screen Ireland to introduce a range of initiatives to incentivise female creative talent, rolled out in 2018. These include Enhanced Production Funding for Female Talent where up to 100,000 euro in additional funding is available to female-led projects; 50,000 euro for a project with a female writer attached; and 50,000 euro for a female director. For documentary productions, 25,000 euro is available for projects with a female director attached. A second initiative, POV, is a female-led, low-budget, film production and training scheme targeted at female screenwriter/directors. After a six-month development process which includes mentoring and training, four projects were selected for production, with a budget of up to €400K each (Screen Ireland, Gender and Diversity Policy).

There are conflicting responses to this scheme; many argue that it is a good way to facilitate more women to make their first feature, albeit on a low budget. Others contend that it prioritises training for women, yet again; that the funding is far too low and does not even provide a living wage for key creative personnel. In this analysis, the steering of women into low-budget film-making is merely being replicated in this scheme and will unlikely lead to systemic change in the industry: for example Verhoeven et al. suggests that “policies to ‘improve’ women filmmakers through remedial skills training are not the answer and have the effect of suggesting that women themselves are the cause of their own statistical failure” (2019, p. 151). Indeed, it could be argued that at least two of the scheme’s recipients are already too qualified to warrant what might reasonably be deemed an entry level opportunity—an experienced director of television drama and an already produced feature film screenwriter. That said, the success, or otherwise, of these initiatives has yet to
be determined and the outcome will not be known for some time. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the industry has come to a standstill in Ireland, as elsewhere, and it is unclear when these projects will now go into production.

In May 2018, Annie Doona acknowledged that progress was “glacially slow” but new statistics that emerged later that year tentatively pointed to something of a breakthrough. Production funding decisions with female directors attached increased to 36% and with female screenwriters attached rose to 45%. Greater numbers of women were starting to apply, suggestive, perhaps, of a cycle being broken. For instance, funding applications with female directors attached have risen from 15% in 2017 to 31% in 2018 (Screen Ireland, *Gender Statistics*). Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that considerably more work needs to be done to ensure consistency and to definitively embed change. A particular concern is to increase the number of female directors working in the industry, a problem not confined to Ireland, and one that does not appear to relate to pipeline difficulties but, rather, a lack of opportunity; directors need to be hired and gain experience. But film direction is a leadership role and subject to subjective risk assessment in a notoriously risk-averse industry. Leaders, across many sectors, tend to “clone” themselves in their own image “guarding access to power and privilege [...] to their own kind” (Grummell et al. 2009, p. 333) explaining, at least partially, why the number of female directors across the world remains consistently low. Ironically, women-directed films generate no greater financial risk than films directed by men and often deliver greater investment returns (Sun 2016).

Despite the improvement in applications and funding decisions, Screen Ireland’s own gender policy, the Six Point Plan, failed to deliver 5050 by the deadline, December 2018, with the exception of its short film schemes. Celebrating Irish female directors who have moved from shorts to features, Screen Ireland states: “Short film is a crucial proving ground for any director and at the most recent world premiere of Screen Ireland’s short films, over 60% of the short films screening were directed by women” (Screen Ireland 2019). While short films offer a good training ground for women to hone their skills and can be effective in introducing more women into the industry it may be that such support provides “a limited and less risky investment in Irish female talent” (Liddy 2020b, p. 369). Ultimately, to move into features, women need the backing of a
production company and Screen Producers Ireland (SPI) have only tentatively involved themselves in the gender equality debate, something I will return to below.

Another positive outcome is the welcome indication that the resistance to female protagonists, in evidence pre-2014, has successfully been challenged. For example, 69% of films produced in 2017 with Screen Ireland funding had a female protagonist compared with 22% and 36% in 2016 and 2015, respectively (Screen Ireland, Gender Statistics). In the BAI Sound and Vision 3 Broadcasting Funding Scheme 2019, a “women’s stories” initiative was introduced in order to “widen the narrative, present new female characters, real or fictional” (BAI 2019). In its recent assessment of the scheme the BAI noted that while it was too soon to analyse the impact of the scheme it had resulted in approximately 100% of television projects being recommended for funding because of the inclusion of women’s narratives (BAI 2020, p. 2). While the initiative was broadly welcomed the argument has also been made that this is not particularly useful for female practitioners and it will not challenge a male-dominated industry as male teams can also submit projects with female leads.

Quotas to Embed Change?

Because progress is inconsistent and Screen Ireland has not meet its own 5050 target by 2020, there is concern that an important moment in the history of the Irish film industry will be lost. Currently, Screen Ireland is a highly feminised organisation with a recently appointed female CEO, Désirée Finnegan, replacing long-serving predecessor, James Hickey; three female project managers (commissioners); and a board of seven members, of which five are female, including the chair, Dr Annie Doona. However, the Screen Ireland Board serves for just four years. Indeed, Doona will complete her second and final term of office in March 2021. While the gender policy will remain in place irrespective of personnel changes in Screen Ireland, it would be desirable for gender equality to be achieved, in line with SI’s own policy, during the term of office of the sitting board who are well disposed to change.

The Writers Guild and Screen Directors Guild have called for gender quotas to be implemented for a fixed period of time in order to build on the positive work already begun and to ensure that Screen Ireland’s gender policy will be successful. While Doona and other members of the Screen Ireland Board have, over the last couple of years, publicly said
they would not rule out quotas, a public debate during the Galway Film Fleadh in July 2018 threw that position into question. Representatives from both guilds posited the prospect of “managed” quotas (tailored to suit each funding round) which would, for the moment, be measured merely in terms of the numbers of men/women funded, irrespective of the nature of the projects for which they are funded, the amount awarded or the size of the budget.

Orla O’Connor, the director of the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI), and Doona, SI chair, both panellists, adopted opposing positions on this question. O’Connor argued that quotas have the power to actually change the culture but Doona contended that it is better to change the culture first, and bring the industry along. The NWCI has previously (successfully) promoted quotas in relation to political representation arguing “without quotas, the pace of change is too slow. We only have to look at State boards as an example of this: a 40% gender target was set for State boards in 1993, and it has taken a quarter of a century to reach that target without a quota” (O’Connor, 11 March 2019). Pondering on the resistance to quotas as a solution to the under-representation of female artists in Britain in 2018, Kate McMillan argues: “Surely to propose that gender quotas may result in poorer quality work is simply to suggest work by female artists is of a lesser standard?” In any event, Screen Ireland has declined to adopt such a position, at the moment, arguing that there is sufficient momentum currently in play.

**Encouraging Producers to Invest**

Producers occupy a powerful position, some would say too powerful, in the Irish film and television landscape. Creed questions the “unique relationship” producers have with Screen Ireland, obtaining more support than any of the other creative roles and also enjoying greater funding opportunities from the European Commission’s *Media* funding programme (Creed 2018, pp. 157–158). Unlike the WGI and the SDGI, Screen Producers Ireland (SPI) did not adopt a public position supporting gender equality initiatives, and indeed, they did not proactively engage with the process to any great extent though they did organise a half-day diversity event in Dublin on 20 June 2019 to discuss “approaches that have been taken in other countries to support production companies as they introduce diversity policies and initiatives”.7 Yet, for gender equality
to become embedded in the industry the support of production companies is vital, particularly the larger companies. Anecdotally, it is often said that Screen Ireland has practised a softly, softly approach to the “problem” of producers’ lack of engagement, arguably to avoid fracturing relationships with the powerful players. However, as I will go on to discuss, that position may be challenged somewhat going forward.

In terms of ensuring the involvement of the larger production companies, 2019 appears to signal a change of approach from Screen Ireland who now state that with public funding comes responsibility to put “gender equality, diversity, and inclusion are at the heart of their productions”. Whether this will be accompanied by sanctions is unclear. But it was followed, in April 2019, by a statement from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht outlining new guidelines for Section 481, the Irish tax incentive for the film, television and animation industry. Among the requirements in the Skills Development Plan that accompanies the application are “details on gender equality initiatives, diversity and inclusion initiatives together with a sustainability plan”. Some are hopeful that production companies may finally be called to account, since “buy-in” is important if gender equality is ever to become part of the fabric of the industry. It is not clear, however, what exactly will be achieved by this requirement and if it will lead to concrete change or whether it is a well-meaning but poorly thought out attempt to do something? One female producer remarked. “While it’s useful to require an equality policy from anybody in receipt of public funds, the implementation aspect is a very large unknown and I hope the benefits outweigh the costs. I’m unclear as to how much consultation (if any) was done with the producers responsible for implementation to ensure that it’s an effective tool”.

**Conclusion**

In 2018, for the first time, the Irish Government made a long-term commitment to film culture by directing funding of €200 million to SI from 2018 to 2027. Screen Ireland acknowledges that the film and screen industry “is poised to continue to increase and expand the significant economic and social contribution it makes to Irish society” (Screen Ireland 2019, Statistics). Achieving gender equality is particularly important in order to ensure women have an equal presence and a voice in
a burgeoning industry. Over the past four years, there has been a credible shift from a “gender-neutral” position (Liddy 2016) to a proactive engagement with gender equality issues to some effect. However, 5050 gender equality has not been achieved, and there is insufficient data at this stage to be sure whether long-term change will be the outcome. It is positive to note that 2018/2020 saw produced films from a number of female directors’ and screenwriter/directors’ including: Rebecca Daly (Good Favour), Carmel Winters (Float Like a Butterfly), Sinéad O’Shea (A Mother Brings her Son to be Shot) Cathy Brady (Wildfire), Christine Molloy—in partnership with Joe Lawlor—(Rose Plays Julie), Neasa Hardiman (Sea Fever), Aoife Crehan (The Last Right) and Emer Reynolds (Songs for While I’m Away), all of whom Screen Ireland has enthusiastically promoted. However, the welcome emergence of female talent does not necessarily signal a new order. Ireland is a small industry (Screen Ireland funded 21 feature films in 2018) and a reliable assessment of progress can only be made by tracking the outcome over a number of years. However, the recent shortlist for the Irish Film and Television Awards (IFTA), the Irish “oscars”, saw just 1 woman out of 6 nominated for best film script and 2 women out of 7 nominated for best film director arguably suggestive that the broader film industry is not anywhere near 5050.

Despite SI and the BAI being more gender-aware in 2020, and despite their investment in achieving gender equality, considerable work remains to be done. After the panel discussion at the Galway Film Fleadh, 2019, Comey expressed concern about the rate of progress for female directors tweeting: “more action needed for women directors if we want 5050 by 2020”. Some weeks earlier Doona had addressed the vexed question of producers investing in the gender equality process explaining that Screen Ireland is taking a proactive approach with production companies telling them: “if you’re bringing in projects to Screen Ireland where’s your gender policy, where’s your gender plan? I think it’s fair to say that’s been challenging for the industry” (May 30, 2019). Challenging for production companies, it may be, but whether it is challenging enough to shift the balance of power in the Irish film industry is yet to be determined. Screen Ireland has reverted to stating that women are not applying in enough numbers, which may, indeed, be one consideration. However, a proactive funding organisation with a gender policy, gender targets and a time line for achieving those targets may need to explore other avenues to attract female applicants. To expect that women will solve the
problem themselves, as individuals, is to downplay the systemic nature of that problem. Women’s choices and decisions are shaped by prevailing gender inequalities; examples from the corporate world are instructive and suggest that women often have a lower sense of entitlement and are less likely to put themselves forward for positions they know “systematically favour their male colleagues” (Grace et al. 2005, p. 5).

The contribution of professional organisations and representative bodies continues to be significant in terms of advancing gender equality in the industry through advocacy, education and the promotion of female film-makers and their work. The introduction of quotas continues to be a pressing issue for both the WGI and SDGI. Employing a different strategy up to now, WFT Ireland’s primary, but not exclusive, focus relates to increasing the visibility and promotion of Irish screen professionals. However, in a strategic review of the organisation in 2019 members stressed the importance of a ‘watchdog’ role, arguably an indicator of increased politicisation. It was WFT Ireland, in partnership with the French Collectif 5050,12 who initiated the 5050x2020 Charter for Parity and Inclusion in Ireland and 8 Irish film festivals have already signed “pledging” transparency and accountability. As a consequence of endeavours such as these, there is an awareness of gender equality issues circulating within the film community. Perhaps the struggle for gender equality must be fought on a variety of fronts. It has been argued that if the industry is ever to “effectively redistribute power, then change must also occur at scale—from the smallest of habits to the widest of policies” (Verhoeven et al. 2019, p. 136). However, increased awareness does not necessarily translate into action as lessons from other countries have demonstrated; the slow rate of change, the possibility of losing momentum and the likelihood of gender fatigue over time are very real possibilities.

The picture emerging suggests there is some way to travel before gender equality is truly embedded in the Irish film industry; a laudable attempt has been made but power still very much resides in male hands. In 2019, Annie Doona reiterated Screen Ireland’s position saying: “we have vowed to tackle inequality in Irish filmmaking and screen content […] and achieving 5050 gender equality remains our priority.” Despite these fighting words, it is unlikely that Screen Ireland or the BAI will hit 5050 in 2020, particularly post Covid-19 and the challenges facing the industry on so many fronts. If it is achieved, it will be a “head count”
at best. As is the case internationally, the bigger question about parity of funding remains untouched, a battle for another day.

NOTES

1. The author is currently Chair of the EAC of the WGI and Chair of WFT Ireland. Between April 2017 and December 2019, she was chair of a joint EAC representing the WGI and the SDGI. She has been active in working for gender equality as a researcher and an advocate since early 2014.

2. Women in the Irish Film Industry: Moving from the Margins to the Centre, Dr Susan Liddy MIC, Limerick, 2016.


4. See It—Be It! Putting Women in the Picture, EAC, Galway Film Fleadh, 2016; Building Momentum: The Road to Gender Equality, EAC and WFT, Galway Film Fleadh, 2017; Balancing the Industry: The European Perspective, Creative Europe Ireland and WFT Dublin 2017; Accelerating Gender Equality: Time for Quotas? EAC and WFT, Galway Film Fleadh, 2018; The Female Voice, WFT, Still Voices Short Film Festival 2018; Inclusion and Best Practice in the Film Industry, WFT, Cork International Film Festival, November, 2018; Countdown to 5050x2020: Where Are We Now? EAC and WFT, Galway Film Fleadh, July 2019.

5. Check-In on Gender Equality, IFI, Spotlight 2019; A Catch-Up on Gender Equality, IFI, Spotlight, 2018; A Catch-Up on Gender Equity, IFI Spotlight, 2017; Towards Gender Equality, IFI, Spotlight, 2016.


11. Annie Doona, Check-In on Gender Equality, IFI, Spotlight, 2019.

REFERENCES


Gender Equality in British Film-making: Research, Targets, Change

Shelley Cobb and Linda Ruth Williams

**INTRODUCTION**

The history of women’s film-making in the UK is as long as the history of British cinema, but—as in many other national cinemas—women have been under-supported and often forgotten in film history, despite the many and varied achievements, both in the past and in the present, of women film-makers in the UK. The most prolific British woman director of all time, Muriel Box, directed 15 films in the context of a small British ‘studio system’ between 1949 and 1964; the even more prolific Betty Box produced 52 films between 1945 and 1975.¹ These women exemplify the exceptional nature of those who have managed to carve out successful careers against the grain of an industry that has continually marginalised them. The woman with the next biggest number of credits to her name is currently one of the most successful popular directors of British cinema, as well as, increasingly, other platforms (theatre, television): Gurinder Chadha has written and directed 13 films for theatrical release since 1991,
plus four films for television. Indeed, women have marshalled and helmed some of the most successful titles (both critically and in terms of box office) in recent British film history, working as producers, screenwriters and directors (often writer-directors), and though their numbers are few, some of their work has been extremely successful. To cite just a few examples, Phyllida Lloyd’s *The Iron Lady* (2011) has made $115 million to date and garnered its star Meryl Streep her third Oscar, and Lloyd’s first feature *Mamma Mia!* (2008) is one of the most successful British films of all time in terms of box office ($615.7 million, as of publication). The *Bridget Jones* franchise has made over $756 million to date across the three films, all of which were directed by women (Sharon Maguire, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* [2001]; Beeban Kidron *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* [2004]; Sharon Maguire *Bridget Jones’s Baby* [2016]). Made by Working Title on the instigation of the producer Debra Hayward, all the films’ production teams have multiple women. *Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie* (2016) directed by veteran TV comedy director Mandie Fletcher and written by Jennifer Saunders made $37.9 million. Women have also excelled in making some of the most critically applauded but smaller-budgeted auteur films so far in twenty-first-century British cinema. These writer-directors include Clio Barnard—*The Arbour* (2010), *The Selfish Giant* (2013) and *Dark River* (2017); Carol Morley—*Dreams of a Life* (2011), *The Falling* (2014) and *Out of Blue* (2019); Sally Potter—*Orlando* (1992), *The Tango Lesson* (1997) and *The Party* (2017); Jenny Lu, writer and director of *The Receptionist* (2016) and Joanna Hogg—*Unrelated* (2007), *Archipelago* (2010) and *Exhibition* (2013). British women also have been celebrated on the international documentary stage, from Kim Longinotto (*Shinjuku Boys* [1995]; *Rough Aunties* [2008]; *Dreamcatcher* [2015]) to Molly Dineen (*Geri* [1999]; *The Lie of the Land* [2007]; *Being Blacker* [2018]). And women producers working on British productions have been arguably most successful of all, from Debra Hayward (*Les Misérables; Bridget Jones’ Baby; Cats*) to Finola Dwyer (*An Education; Quartet; Brooklyn*) to Elizabeth Karlsen (*Made in Dagenham; Carol; Colette*).

Notwithstanding these huge successes, women continue to be drastically underrepresented and underemployed in the British film industry, but until recently there was limited information quantifying the UK situation accurately—so these impactful names and films give a disingenuous view of gender inequality in British film-making now. Moreover, the film industry is out of step with improvements in the numbers of women in
academia, the law and medicine (Baker 2018), though of course women in these industries continue to suffer from a wage gap, sexual harassment (as well as unfit harassment policies and complaint procedures) and a lack of women in the most senior positions. This chapter will give an accounting of the current state of gender (in)equality in the UK industry by: outlining new research that has clarified the stagnant inequality in the UK film industry; articulating the key role of a network of activist groups (that include researchers, professional and campaigning bodies, exhibitors and film-makers) to bring attention to the problem; putting pressure on the film industry and public bodies; and summarising institutional responses to that pressure since 2016, with a critical analysis of the potential and limits of the British Film Institute’s (BFI) relatively recently implemented diversity and equality targets. It is our contention that in the context of media attention to inequality in the film industry widely, and the emergence of #metoo and Time’s Up movements, the growing pressure for change in British film-making and public funding in relation to gender equality and diversity may well turn out to be one of the defining issues of this period of British film history.

Where Are We Now? Research and Mutual Activism

In 2006, the UK Film Council (UKFC) began publishing data on the gender of directors and screenwriters (Hockenhull 2017). As part of the statistical yearbook produced by the UKFC and now by the BFI (which assumed responsibility for the UKFC’s activities in 2010 when it was closed), the numbers of women directing and writing British films have been available for more than a decade. However, it was not until quantitative research from academics and campaigning bodies appeared in 2016 that the media paid attention to the problem, a consequence of both these organisations’ activities and the changing cultural politics of the 2010s (Cobb 2020). In this section, we give a detailed accounting of our own research on women in the British industry to show how entrenched gender inequality is in UK film-making, situating it in relation to other inequality reports and the mutually supporting actions taken by us and other campaigning groups to pressure the BFI to take the lead in making change.

Our research project Calling the Shots: Women in contemporary UK film culture, which began in 2014, has been studying the work of women
film-makers in Britain, in the context of the contemporary industry’s structures, conventions and inequalities that they negotiate. We set out to establish a baseline of quantitative and qualitative evidence focused on the contemporary UK film industry. British film-making culture provides a nationally distinct but also internationally collaborative and partly publicly funded landscape that underpins the critical and box-office successes mentioned above, as well as an industrial culture in which women find themselves underfunded, underemployed and ignored. Until the publication of multiple UK-focused reports in 2016, the British media and advocacy groups like Women in Film and Television—UK (WFTV-UK) regularly drew on the US-based ‘Celluloid Ceiling’ reports generated by Martha Lauzen’s Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University. This unit has done path-breaking quantitative research on gender inequality in the film industry since the 1990s. However, its focus is on Hollywood as their data is based on the 250 top-grossing films in the USA each year. British films enter the statistical mix only if they do phenomenally well in the States. So, whilst some of the films in the Celluloid Ceiling data were indeed British, the reports’ application to the UK industry was limited and Calling the Shots sought to extend/redress this with a focus on the British situation, driven by our agenda that in order to effect change we need to have a clear, detailed and specific view of the British industry now.

In the UK, it is possible for film-makers to secure development, production and/or distribution funding from bodies such as the British Film Institute, the BBC, Channel Four and some regional funding bodies (e.g. Creative England and Creative Scotland). Usually partial, the funding will be topped up by international co-production packages, private (even personal) funds or studio money. In this context, the fact that taxpayers or lottery money is not being distributed in a way that reflects the profile of the population who provide these public funds has animated discussion around gender and race in film-making for a number of years. We have intervened in these discussions through our production of UK-specific research on women film-makers. For our work, ‘woman filmmaker’ means any woman working as a screenwriter, editor, cinematographer, producer, executive producer and director. In addition to identifying the gender of persons working in these roles, we also include racial identity in order to take into account the role of racism as well as sexism on the employment opportunities for women in film-making (Wreyford and Cobb 2017). Our quantitative research
has found that women’s employment opportunity across all these roles is extremely limited and is worst for those working in the traditionally perceived masculine profession of cinematography, and that women of colour (BAME—Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) are widely and consistently excluded.

To complement this quantitative data analysis, we have also produced qualitative research by interviewing women working in the above six roles. We have then been ‘counting’ women in two ways—numbering them and ‘naming’ them by recording their personal stories and career histories. Naming women through recorded interviews is another way of ‘making them count’ by inserting them in the historical record. Women’s history often gets lost, forgotten and ignored, but these women’s histories will ultimately be archived in the award-winning BECTU History Project, ensuring that their work remains a central part of British film history (Cobb and Williams 2019). Initially, we aimed to interview 50 women to fill gaps in and expand contemporary film history, and, so far, we have interviewed 58. These interviews tell stories of women at all stages of career progression—from early career cinematographer Martyna Knitter to veteran editor Anne V. Coates; from new-generation producer Ivana MacKinnon who has a distinct vision of developing an ethical production house to established producer Debra Hayward who has now teamed up with the prolific producer and her friend Alison Owen; and from the long-established directors such as Sally Potter and Beeban Kidron to the more recent successes of Amma Asante, Sarah Gavron and Hope Dickson Leach, as well as the many who move between feature films, television and even theatre like Philippa Lowthorpe and Susannah White, Sarah Gavron and many others. In our interviews, the women narrate their own histories and stories, and our questions are semi-structured allowing them the space to tell it how they want. We always ask how their gender has affected their career development, though many bring it up of their own accord, and their experiences of sexism, racism and other prejudices they have faced, such as class background and care-giving responsibilities, will further inform our explication of gender inequality in film that we have mapped in our data sets.

To date we have produced fourteen data reports, all of which can be found on our website. There are eight synchronic reports on individual years. Four of those count the women in all six key roles giving a snapshot of the industry for each year. The other four look closely at 2015 with different foci: women and racial categories, low and high budgets, women
working with women and funding category (domestic, co-productions and inward investment). There are six diachronic reports that look at the data from 2003 to 2015. Three look closely at the gender data on individual roles: director, cinematographer and editor. One counts the numbers of women of colour across those years. And the last shows the lack of change in gender disparity between 2003 and 2015. Our report on domestic films, co-productions and films with inward investment found that women are better employed in co-productions than in solely British-funded films. We have identified how women of colour fare in relation to their white sisters, and found that in the four years of 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2015 just 10% of films had at least one woman of colour working in those key roles (so, scandalously, 90% of films had no women of colour in any of these roles). Of the 801 qualifying films of 2015, only 23 films had a black woman in a key role, 12 films had an East Asian woman in a key role, 45 films had a South Asian woman in a key role, whilst 721 films had none. We have also been able to drill down into the data to find out how women fare in lower-budget films (under £0.5 million) making the not-surprising discovery that women are more likely to make documentaries at this budget level than any other genre and, proportionally more than men do. Looking at specific roles, we found that the situation for women directors hardly changed between 2003 and 2015. The best year for British women directors was 2010, when numbers rose to 19%, but two years later, they were back down to 8%, and the overall average is 14%. Cinematographers fared even worse: at their lowest (in 2004) just 1% of cinematographers were women in British qualifying films; the highest number was again in 2010 when numbers rose to 14%, but by the following year this had halved. The overall average for the period of 2003–2015 is just 7%.

Initial interpretations of the unusual rise in numbers in 2010 are that this was the 10th year of the UK Film Council’s work as primary funders, and their distinct diversity remit may have by then had some impact (Hockenhull 2017, p. 50). However, the actual number that corresponds to 19% of women directors for 2010 is 58. In 2012, 8% of directors were women, but that percentage corresponds to 42 women. The 2010 percentage is more than twice as much as that for 2012, but the difference is only 16 individual women. As Cobb has noted elsewhere, ‘women are such a small number of directors on UK films, their fluctuating proportion year on year is more a product of the increase and decrease of the numbers of men than it is of their own ups and downs’ (2020), and even
the small increases in the numbers of women never last. We have also
compared the British situation with Hollywood, because the UK industry
is popularly thought to be more equal place than Hollywood due to
the many independent productions and co-productions, the availability
of public funding and a cultural emphasis on the auteur. However, our
2018 report comparing Celluloid Ceiling figures with Calling the Shots
data shows that Britain is often no better (and can be worse) than Holly-
wood when it comes to employing women in key roles. For example, in
2015, 44% of British films had no women producers, whereas in the 250
top-grossing films in Hollywood in 2017 a rather better 28% of films had
no women producers. In the USA, slightly less than one-third (30%) of
films had no or only one woman in any of the six roles analysed, whereas
in the UK slightly more than half (56%) had no or only one woman in
those roles. On a more positive note, one of the most striking things we
have found is that when one woman is in a key role on a film, it is more
likely that another woman will be in a key role on that film. For films
in production during 2015, 93% of those directed by a woman had a
woman screenwriter. And 74% of films directed by women had at least
one woman producer. In fact, a woman producer on a film meant that all
other roles were more likely to have a woman in them. Fifty per cent of
films with a woman editor had a woman producer, and 61% of films with
a woman cinematographer had a woman producer.

In parallel with women film-makers who work together, as an all-
woman research team, we have also worked alongside and in collabora-
tion with sister organisations that have been involved in gathering and
publishing new information and have been actively using this information
to put pressure on the industry. This loose network of organisations and
individuals has sought to influence and effect change as a supportive band
united by the common view that ingrained inequality is neither sustain-
able nor desirable; nor is it good for an industry which strives to reflect the
diversity of film-goers. The first significant act of bringing these groups
together was when Calling the Shots’ first report and reports by Direc-
tors UK and the European Women’s Audiovisual Network (EWAN) were published and promoted in the media within a few days of each
other in May 2016 (public events for these brought us together and
are discussed below). The Directors UK report Cut Out of the Picture
produced research on women directors in the UK ranging across a career
arc, from their equal numbers in film school to their dwindling partic-
ipation in film-making as they progressed. The report shows a distinct
‘funnelling’ process as women fail to get funding for their first or second features, as they try to combine developing careers with parenthood, and as they experience difficulty getting back onto the career ladder post-parenthood (Follows et al. 2016). The European Women’s Audiovisual Network report Where are the women directors in European film? produced comparative research into directors of independent films in Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the UK which has enabled contextualisation of the British situation alongside comparator nations (EWAN 2016). Most significantly though, what the simultaneous publication of these reports offered was corroborating data that, at least for women directors, the low percentages found by all of us were effectively the same: 11.9%—Directors UK; 11%—European Audiovisual Network; and 13%—Calling the Shots.

In late 2016, Raising Films was founded to campaign for changes in working practices which have hitherto discriminated against working parents, and in 2017, they published Making It Possible (Raising Films 2017), interview-based research that focuses on women’s circumstances as mothers, but extends to fathers and carers in all forms, but especially to those experiencing the ‘double squeeze’ of being film-making parents who are also carers of elderly parents. Their most recent research report We Need to Talk About Caring (Dent and Almenoar 2019) asked 58 questions of 135 respondents, 76% of whom identified as female. The headline data is that 82% of respondents said that the impact of caring had a somewhat or strong negative impact on their screen careers. In response to their findings, they launched the Raising Films Ribbon. The ribbon is awarded to companies, festivals and other groups that put practices into place that support carers in the screen industries. In addition, a wealth of women’s film exhibition organisations in the UK have also been active in showcasing women’s film work, providing training and activism, and acting as public outlets for current research ideas forums for effecting change. These include Women in Film and Television (UK), the Bechdel Test Festival, the Underwire Festival and Bird’s Eye View, and F-Rated all of which Calling the Shots has collaborated with in various ways. The implications of these diverse groups working together, with their combined national and international influence on our thinking, have been significant for recent developments in British film culture around discussions of quota-setting, target-setting and diversity, and this chapter will conclude with a look at recent events and developments that have moved the discussion into action.
The Shifting Sands of Policy and Funding

For women working in the industry, fans, critics and researchers of the film industry, the period from 2014 to the present has been eventful to say the least. None of the *Calling the Shots* research team, nor indeed the Arts and Humanities Research Council who funded us could have anticipated the seismic shifts in perception and awareness of the position of women in film which followed the #metoo and #TimesUp moments in 2017. We do not wish to rehearse and reiterate a ‘progress narrative’, the likes of which is discussed by Everingham et al. (2007) and about which Wreyford (2018) sounds a note of caution. Despite the repeated mantra in the media and sometimes by high-profile women in the industry that ‘things are changing’ accompanied by an insistence that the industry has fundamentally altered its priorities and power balance since the Weinstein moment (Erbland 2018), there is reason to be cautious about long-term change (Cobb and Horeck 2018). Our research into women directors across the period 2003–2015 has found that their numbers have remained steadily and disappointingly consistent at between 10 and 13% year on year, regardless of the ups and downs of the industry, or a woman finally winning the Best Director Oscar (Masters 2010), or various ‘years of the woman in film’ being declared by a self-congratulatory industry, or even Diversity Standards implemented by the BFI (Cobb 2020). Nevertheless, the increased visibility and vocalisation of inequality as a primary concern during these times has provided an interesting context in which to carry out this work.

Two moments exemplify the quickly shifting situation of UK funders in response to public opinion. In 2016, we launched our first data report at the British Film Institute, which looked across our six key roles using data on all in-production films of 2015, which involved identifying a total of 1864 people working on 203 films in productions, and including just 363 women—so the total percentage of personnel working in film that year across our six roles was 80% men and just 20% women. We also identified that in 2015 some 25% of films had *no women whatsoever* working in those key roles. Specifically, only 7% of cinematographers, 13% of directors, 17% of editors, 18% of executive producers, 20% of screenwriters and 27% of producers were women. We also identified how many of these were women of colour, discovering that all women cinematographers in films in production in 2015 were white, whilst only 3 editors, 4 directors, 4 executive producers, 5 screenwriters and 11 producers were
women of colour (these are numbers not percentages). We aimed this data launch at as many people working within the industry as possible and invited an audience which included senior people from the major funding bodies, broadcasters and distributors, as well as film-makers and students. The event was timed to take place before most of the British film and TV industry departed London for the Cannes film festival the next day, and featured a panel of activists and film-makers including Women in Film and TV UK CEO Kate Kinninmont, Bechdel Test Festival founder Corrina Antrobus, independent producer Sarah Curtis, film-maker and Co-Founder of Raising Films Hope Dickson Leach and director Gurinder Chadha. Just days before this, Directors UK had launched its report ‘Cut Out of the Picture - A Study of Gender Inequality Among Film Directors Within the UK Film Industry’, and a week before that the European Women’s Audiovisual Network had launched its report on women directors in Europe at a workshop event that we attended. Members and leaders of both Directors UK and EWAN attended our launch, and the question and answer session after our presentation of the data was lively, with several audience members (some of whom were members of the public and not industry personnel) spoke strongly about the BFI’s need to lead in making change. A few days later, Ben Roberts, Director of the BFI Film Fund, wrote an article for the Guardian titled ‘Female film directors must get equal funding – but they mustn’t be all white’, in which he wrote that the BFI agreed with Directors UK call for a 5050 public funding target by 2020 (Roberts 2016). However, no official targets were announced, and the BFI’s five-year plan BFI 2022, published in November 2016, made no mention of funding targets. A year after the publication of our report, members of Calling the Shots, F-Rated, Raising Films and Directors UK attended an event hosted by WFTV (UK) on actions for improving gender equality in film and television. Many inspiring activists, producers and leaders shared their ideas for and experiences of effective change. However, those of us in attendance were taken aback by a senior representative of the BFI who declared that voluntary change was the Institute’s priority.

And then, the New York Times article that broke the Weinstein scandal appeared on 5 October 2017, and on 11 October 2017, the British Film Institute declared that it would commit to specific targets for gender equality and diversity in key production roles on films with support from the Film Fund (Roberts 2017). No doubt the plans for and the details of the targets had been in development before the Weinstein scandal broke,
but the timing is suggestive of our main point, that this period of film history might well (and we hope does) become known for the activism around gender equality and diversity (even if permanent change is not achieved). The BFI’s targets are for the three roles of director, writer and producer, seeking 50:50 gender balance, 20% BAME film-makers, 9% LGBTQ-identifying film-makers and 7% target for film-makers with disability. According to the BFI, they have ‘long been guided by’ the principles of diversity and inclusion and are simply formalising them by implementing them on top of the Institute’s Diversity Standards which have been in place since 2014 (Roberts 2017). As part of the application process for funding and BFI certification, the Standards require film-makers to demonstrate a diversity and inclusion plan for the production. However, the criteria for inclusion of underrepresented groups are so flexible as to verge on the meaningless as argued by Clive Nwonka (2020) and Cobb (2020), who have clearly shown how women can be easily left out of any successful application. Furthermore, the BFI has yet to release any data on the Standards that would show whether or not they are effective. The decision by the BFI to set targets for the Film Fund, arguably, did not come just from their own diversity standards and inclusion goals. Those activist groups with whom Calling the Shots has collaborated as well as individual film-makers have, as we have seen, previously called for targets for the Film Fund, especially for women directors. So far, as the BFI have presented them to the public, the first and second years of the targets have improved the equitable distribution of funding, with gender equality achieved for directors in 2018 and nearly achieving BAME targets for the production fund. And yet, by keeping race and gender as separate identifying categories, BAME women are missing almost completely and falling through the spaces between gender and race targets (Crenshaw 1993; Cobb 2020). The announcement for the latest data on funding targets makes it clear that the BFI know where they are failing (BFI 2019).

More importantly, though, we must recognise that the Institute can only take a lead for the wider British industry through the example of their diversity and inclusion targets for the 30 or so films they fund each year (quotas are widely considered illegal under the terms of the 2010 Equality Act [Jarrett 2011]). The few hundred British films each year are studio productions, co-productions and independent productions that need other forms of pressure to improve the equality and diversity of their production team. One new approach taken up by activists is to pressure
the government to include diversity targets for film and television productions with tax relief (Butterworth 2018). Led by the activist Marcus Ryder and the actor Lenny Henry and other creative industry workers of colour, this idea has yet to be taken up by the current Tory government, but it is a good example of taking on the industry beyond the limits of the BFI’s influence. The alliance of activist and campaigning groups that, like Calling the Shots, are putting research to work will continue to pressure public bodies and the government to transform the British industry in terms of gender equality and diversity so that it lives up to the standards of the trailblazing women film-makers above. This will have to be a multi-pronged approach, with continuing attention to the BFI’s funding targets and interrogation of the Diversity Standards, but also investigation of other funding sources such as the BBC and Channel 4, as well as wider use of targets for co-productions with Hollywood and other national industries. Film history shows that this fight has been fought before, but those moments have ended without permanent change and even been forgotten by many. One of the most important things researchers, activists and film-makers must continue to do is keep attention on the industry’s progress or lack thereof and to keep up the pressure for lasting change.

Notes

2. BECTU is the British Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union. For more on the history project, go to: https://historyproject.org.uk.
3. All our reports can be found in the Reports section of the Calling the Shots website: https://womencallingtheshots.com.
4. For more information, see: https://www.directors.uk.com/.
5. See https://www.ewawomen.com/ for information about the European Women’s Audiovisual Network.
6. See https://www.raisingfilms.com/about/.
REFERENCES


Gendered Representation in Danish Film

Tess Sophie Skadegård Thorsen

INTRODUCTION
Denmark has long enjoyed global renown for progressive policies on gender equality, boasting high employment rates among women, high representations of women in parliament, and progressive policies on maternity leave and equal pay, achieved through a rich bargaining tradition. Often bunched with that of neighboring countries, Danish gender equality is mostly framed as a consequence of the Scandinavian Welfare Model (Borchorst and Siim 2008).

In their 2008 review of the contemporary state feminism in Denmark, Danish gender researchers Annette Borchorst and Birte Siim illustrate how surface-level conceptions of gender equality served to undermine policy work that effectively minimizes discrimination, particularly through the targeting of gender equality among minority women (Borchorst and Siim 2008). In other words, the ‘success’ of Danish gender equality, understood through relatively high participation of women in the workforce and political representation, serves as a foundation for critiquing immigrant communities for misogyny while overlooking structural forms of discrimination which affect women across race, class, sexuality, and...
more, for instance, including a gender pay gap of 12.8% (Statistics Denmark 2018).

Furthermore, a recent global YouGov survey made international headlines when it found Denmark to be among the least feminist countries in the world, evaluated by a series of measures, including how many Danes consider themselves feminist, how Danes view the #metoo movement, and how Danish women respond to being ‘wolf-whistled’ (Danish women preferred to be ‘wolf-whistled’ over being called feminist) (Orange and Duncan 2019) (Fig. 1).

The noticeable split between, on the one hand, an outward image of gender equality in the Danish welfare state and, on the other, the expressions of antifeminist sentiments within Denmark is particularly explicit in Danish film, media, and television. On the one hand, the most popular and successful examples of Danish export and distribution successes are found in the relatively new genre of television drama entitled Nordic Noir (Agger 2016). Particularly notable for the genre are the strong female leads, which might suggest to international audiences that Danish television is leading the way in terms of gender equality on screen. Meanwhile, this image flickers as soon as we zoom in on gender equality in film, whether behind the cameras or on-screen.

Fig. 1 Headline from The Guardian.com (Accessed May 2019, published 10 May 2019)
Gender equality has been an increasingly central topic in the Danish film industry for the past few years. This emphasis has been propelled, in particular, by the Danish Film Institute’s (DFI) diversity initiatives, the most prominent of which (an initiative on gender) was launched in 2015. Following a critique of their decision not to fund a film with ‘ethnic-minority’ leads, the DFI had begun to map ethnic representation on screen and in the industry, which led firstly to diversity initiatives on ethnicity, and later to mapping and initiatives on gender.4

**Methodology and Chapter Structure**

This chapter analyzes the underlying premises, presumptions, and risks of the Danish approach to gender inequality in film. First, the chapter maps out some of the central numbers on gender equality, based on reports published by the Danish Film Institute. Then, it moves to analyze 2015–2018 data,5 including ethnographic observations on film sets, in editing rooms, at public debates on film representation, and at premieres as well as research interviews conducted with 17 industry professionals, ranging from directors, casters, producers, actors, writers, and more. Through an analysis of sentiment and sense-making in observed industry debates, the chapter looks closer at the discrepancies between gender equality from the point of view of statistics and perceptions of gender equality from the perspectives of film professionals.

This brings about a twofold critique: Firstly, the chapter argues that the Danish film industry is failing women in general, by dismissing discussions about quotas, by underpaying women with grants/funding from the state, and by relying on women to solve issues of discrimination toward them through ‘grassroots’ or self-organized initiatives. Although these practices maintain inequalities of access and pay for women, the second critique points out that in spite of the minimal effort on gender equality, gender representation has still been treated as a more important (and entirely separate) issue from any other form of discrimination—effectively marginalizing all other minority groups (whether they are women, too, or not).

Through a close analysis of publicly available subsidy statistics from the DFI, the chapter argues that there is a large discrepancy in the funding amounts granted by the DFI when split by gender and totaled on an annual basis. Thus far, numbers on gender equality in film subsidies have been reported solely by the DFI (who are responsible for distributing the
funds). As such, the selected forms of reporting (stating average funding portions by gender in separate tables from those stating the number of grant-recipients by gender, for instance) limit transparency with regard to the gendered gap in total subsidies.

Finally, the chapter finds that, in Denmark, gender in film is approached mainly as a ‘single axis’ issue (Cho et al. 2013; Kimberlé Crenshaw 1989; Kimberlé Crenshaw 1991). While various diversity initiatives that are organized and managed by the DFI center on the two categories, ‘gender’ and ‘ethnicity’, the two are mainly viewed as separate issues, and their solutions vary widely. For instance, the efforts on ethnicity include a casting database of ‘ethnic minority’ actors and a mentorship program (both run by the ‘ethnic’ majority in order to ‘help’ the minority), while the initiatives on gender more frequently rely on women in key driving roles, and include working groups to map barriers and a mandatory self-audit for film productions seeking funding. This separation of issues is mirrored in gender debates in Danish film, which do not touch on related topics like gendered racism, and rarely make room for considerations on ‘race’, class, sexuality, ability, and more. The interview data mirrors a construed separation of the two issues, suggesting that there is a widespread understanding of gender and ethnicity as entirely separate issues across the industry. The chapter argues that this ‘single axis’ approach limits the problem-solving capabilities of diversity initiatives such as those launched by the DFI, by neglecting to account for the specific marginalization of people in film who are oppressed along multiple axes at a time.

**Gender and Statistics in Danish Film**

Prompted by a rise in public debates on ethnic representation around 2012, the Danish Film Institute, under orders from the then director Henrik Bo Nielsen, began a dedicated effort to improve diversity and equality. This effort included hiring a project manager to map, track, and publish reports, first on ethnic representation and soon after on gender equality, both on-screen and behind cameras (among crew). In their groundbreaking report from 2016, the DFI mapped out the numbers of women occupying key roles in film production, in audiences, and how often they play central roles on screen.

The report, which mainly analyzed numbers from 2011 to 2014, found that while women make up roughly half of the population (51% if we
only look at those parts of the population who are aged 15-69, and 48% if we evaluate by the percentage of the current workforce), they make up between 43% and 44% of the total Danish film industry, including part-time workers from all aspects of film-work ranging from crew to distribution (Møller et al. 2016). According to the report, the percentage of women was lower in the film industry than in comparative ‘creative industries’, which generally more closely resembled the population. The percentage of women was closer to that of the overall population in distribution-related positions, like sales and marketing, while they were underrepresented in post-production positions, like editing, colorgrading, and sound editing⁶ (Møller et al. 2016). Women were especially underrepresented in technical roles, and made up 10% or under when it came to film photography, sound, and lighting positions. They were also underrepresented in key creative roles, making up 34% of director roles, 34% of writing roles, and 36% of editing roles across the entire film industry and all types of films. The only roles where women were severely overrepresented were in costumes, makeup, continuity, and casting (Møller et al. 2016).

In measurements of gender distributions among audiences, the study found that women made up more than half of the audience for 7 out of 9 genres of film shown in Danish cinemas (only action and adventure had more male audiences). Nonetheless, in Danish films premiering 2012–2014, women made up only 33% of leads in feature films, 40% of secondary characters in feature films, and 33% of central characters in documentaries (Møller et al. 2016). As such, perhaps the most surprising discrepancy uncovered by the report was that while women make up the majority of consumers, they make up a minority of those who make and feature in film, suggesting that representation is even more skewed if held up to audiences than it is when held up to the general population or the workforce.

**The Gender Debate in Danish Film**

The data collection this chapter builds on was conducted from 2015 to 2019. As such, during the course of the data collection both #oscarssowhite and #metoo grew to global fame (see Fig. 2). Both public scandals shed new light on injustices of the film industry and the rings in the water from Hollywood discussions on race, class, and gender as well as sexual harassment and workplace discrimination spread across
the Atlantic, reaching most of the world’s film industries, including the Danish one. Many of the discussions about gendered harassment behind the camera took their point of departure in the Hollywood industry, but would later fall on that very sword, since the challenges, while rooted in similar forms of oppression, invariably differed from the US context as well.7

In observed public debates during this period, discussions often centered on fears of approaches to ‘political correctness’, gender, and race, which could be imported to Denmark from the USA and Sweden. Both countries were frequently discursively framed as very different to Denmark, and their approaches to representational challenges were viewed as a serious threat or danger to ‘creativity’. These fears of ‘political correctness’ were primarily raised by men, including representatives at the DFI; however, they were also repeated by women, some of whom noted a fear of losing credibility if hired through affirmative action. At one event, Henrik Bo Nielsen ensured participants that the DFI would
not apply the same ‘extreme’ measures for gender equality that had been seen in Sweden.  

Bo Nielsen, and by extension the DFI, effectively framed the Swedish Film Institute’s measures of openly considering gender quotas as extreme, while implicitly suggesting a maintenance of the current status quo. Over the past decades, psychological studies have documented how status quo maintenance is linked to the position of the person in question. For instance, Kluwer demonstrated in 1998 that the maintenance of unequal status quos in marriages was more likely to be challenged when husbands were discontent than when wives were, and in 2009, Kay et al. documented ‘injunctification [as] a motivated tendency to construe the current status quo as the most desirable and reasonable state of affairs’ (Kay et al. 2009; Kluwer 1998, p. 421). In other words, Bo Nielsen may, as a representative of one of the key components of the Danish film industry within which this gender inequality occurs, be biased toward a belief that solutions to the ‘gender problem’ are manageable while maintaining the status quo, at least organizationally.

Since 2015, the national discussions in Denmark on gender and #metoo were at a historic high, although the DFI’s diversity initiatives had already been in the works before the onset of the Danish #metoo wave (Fig. 2). This analysis does not claim or wish to offer a comprehensive account of the Danish film professionals’ ideas about representation and gender. Rather, it examines some of the narratives and understandings that shape filmmakers and film professionals’ understandings of gender, as well as the statistics and strategic initiatives championed by the DFI.

**Changing Inequality? The Danish Film Institute’s Gender Equality Initiatives**

The Danish Film Institute’s initiative to measure, track, and report on gender disparities in Danish film was the beginning of more intensive strategic work to improve gender representation on-screen and behind the camera. As a result of the reports indicating inequality of gender representation among crew, the DFI launched an initiative on gender in the early Fall of 2018. One result of the dedicated working groups and dialogue forums (spearheaded by central persons in the industry, the majority of whom were women) was a self-reporting gender audit. This effort was inspired by a couple of producers who had begun to self-audit the gender and pay gaps on their productions, and claimed the process
to be eye-opening: They had discovered that fewer women were hired on their productions than expected, sometimes with lower pay.

Despite the DFI’s role as the executor of state financing for film, the self-audit effort, in line with the overall strategy of the DFI’s initiatives on gender and ethnicity, relies mainly on practitioners in the industry, rather than employees at the DFI, to drive change and manage representation. While the self-reported audit transitioned from voluntary to mandatory at the beginning of 2020, the DFI made it very clear that it is an educational tool, not a managerial one. They do not intend to let the reports impact their subsidy decisions, and they have not yet, at least publicly, claimed that non-compliance with the reporting will have any consequences for applicants. As such, the premise of the self-audit relies on a presumption that professionals will wish to change once confronted with mandatory self-measuring, putting the onus on the industry rather than the state.

This is, perhaps, the key point in which this particular effort diverges from those taken by film institutes in, for instance, Sweden or the UK. The decision to require self-reporting, without consequence, but only for educational purposes is symbolic of the key design behind the DFI’s diversity initiatives. According to the DFI, the idea is that by allowing industry practitioners to design its own solutions to diversity issues, to manage them, and to self-evaluate, the Danish diversity model is intended to involve the industry, and promote bottom-up or grassroots problem-solving. However, although the DFI makes their own funding data available, this approach has yet to account for discrepancies of power and the responsibility of the DFI to make similar changes internally. As such, while requiring that filmmakers and producers report on gender discrepancies when asking for funding, the DFI had yet to make changes following their own 2016 report showing they had no women in top management (Møller et al. 2016).

The self-reporting audit reveals some of the key challenges to the Danish approach to diversity. Whether driven by self-reflection and learning (as is the intent with the self-reporting) or by quotas, rules, and consequences, as we have seen in other places (and as have been suggested by Women in Film and Television (WIFT) and other central women in the industry, but are continually denied as an option by the DFI), there are a few risks in the design of the self-audit, that need addressing. Firstly, the design of the self-audit relies on the presumption that a self-audit will have the same effect on people who are made to audit as it did on people who took the initiative on their own. Secondly,
presuming that it will, a new challenge emerges; what might happen when film producers need or want to change the gender balance of a film. The presumption that bottom-up approaches will solve equality problems in an industry in which the DFI arguably has the most central position in financing illustrates how discussions of gender equality in Denmark lack a critical analysis of power.

Anamik Saha’s work on racial capitalism could explain what is at play in terms of power, when the DFI relies on a self-regulating market premised on knowledge. The expectation that people who self-audit will change behavior as a direct result of increased knowledge illustrates how reluctant the DFI is to instate policy—something that could be seen as an indicator of market logics and neoliberal performativity of non-governance (Saha 2018, pp. 87–95). This points to a central issue at stake in European film financing; while the financing schemes in a country like Denmark, where film is heavily subsidized by the state, might invite a heavier governance of the industry, it is not guaranteed to do so. As the Danish case shows, instead, the Danish film industry, even though it is highly state-subsidized, relies on market logics, expecting that a change in the gender composition will occur on its own, once the industry identifies the economic potential of gender equality.

**Gender and Statistics Revised: The Challenges of Inequality Measurement**

The Danish film industry is highly dependent on the DFI as a central player in funding films through subsidies financed by the state. As such, in the DFI’s efforts to map gender inequalities, they also began a dedicated effort to map and publicize data about their own division of film-funding. The DFI’s funding practices are central to Danish gender equality, and while the raw data regarding these subsidies is publicly available, the DFI’s reports are the most accessible way of viewing and understanding the data.

Perhaps most central to our understanding of gender and equality in subsidies, then, is how data is (re)presented. In the DFI’s gender reports, for instance, one of the central issues is the adherence to gender binaries; all of the reports analyzed based on men/women, effectively excluding or imprecisely describing anyone who might not identify with that binary. Another challenge is the strong emphasis the DFI places on the lack of female applicants, without offering further analysis of what might
be deterring women from applying. The juxtaposition of application numbers versus grant numbers might suggest that the gender imbalance they document in their funding is not of their own doing: It is merely the result of few female applicants. However, as many female interlocutors pointed out in interviews and during observations, the data does not capture all of the many times they have been rejected before, how harshly they are rejected (and on what grounds) and how that impacts application patterns. In addition, as the DFI pointed out in their presentation of the 2016 report, the discrepancy is likely also impacted by years of gender inequality in the Danish film schools, a pattern in which multiple schools have instated more or less official gender quotas to reform.

In the 2016 report, the DFI offers tables illustrating the average grant portions in Danish Kroner divided by type of funding. Later reports exist (providing data from 2017 to 2019), but they do not provide data on average grant portions. DFI’s Figure 9b (here Fig. 3) shows that women scriptwriters who are granted subsidies for script development by the DFI are granted an average portion of 77.651 DKK, while their male counterparts are granted an average portion of 83.130 DKK. 9g illustrates

Fig. 3 From DFI’s 2016 gender report. Two tables which represent the average subsidy portions by gender for the cumulative period of 2010 to first half of 2015 (pp. 9–10 of the report; Møller et al. 2016)
the gap in production subsidies for the men and women directors, illustrating that the average funding portion for women was 3,052,568 DKK while men earned an average subsidy of 3,961,178 DKK, almost a million kroners more than women. In other words, the report illustrates that on average women receive smaller grants than men, both for development and production of film in Denmark, but that the discrepancy is particularly noticeable in production grants.

As established above, a separate figure in the same report indicated that fewer women than men actually receive these subsidies. However, since this figure was presented along with applicant numbers, the emphasis is moved from the actual gendered division of funding from the DFI, to a question of the lack of applications from women. This emphasis positions women at the center of the representational challenge, as both cause and solution to the problem.

Meanwhile, an analysis of the raw subsidy data allows for the design of an alternative examination of inequality. Rather than averaging subsidy portions, one can measure the total amount of subsidies. This gives an accurate depiction of how much money is granted to women and men, respectively. Rather than illustrating an average size of the subsidy portion, which is presented in a separate table than the one showing that fewer women are awarded these funds, particularly in fiction (which has a larger funding proportion than documentary) this alternative analysis simply measures all of the money, any given year, and how much of the money was awarded women.

Carrying out this alternative analysis required the aid of a data analyst who could help write a script (and correct it manually) that understood the implied genders of the names described in the data. Fortunately, with a small industry like the Danish one, it was manageable to identify any names that weren’t legally registered as either male or female in the Danish name registry. Of course, the immediate challenge, then, is that this study contributes, in design, to the DFI’s binary gender division. This is a result, firstly, of the data. Only 4 names did not fall into either the male or female category in the name registry (which also holds names that fit into both categories). The four names in question all belonged to people who self-identify as either men or women. As such, at least according to the data, all recipients of subsidies in the identified categories identify with either men or women gender categories—this could indicate another challenge in terms of gender representation: If this data is correct,
the DFI has yet to fund filmmakers who are openly gender nonconforming or agender through their primary subsidy categories (described below).

The analysis was conducted separately for 4 categories, in order to give a comparative overview to the selected two figures, 9b and 9g from the DFI (see Fig. 3). As such, the following 4 figures (Figs. 4, 5, 6, and 7) are examples of how the ways in which numbers are presented impact our assertions of the gender discrepancy and the DFI’s role in the discrepancy. The discrepancy seems smaller if inequalities are divided into two separate categories: one of the number of filmmakers receiving subsidies by gender (Møller et al. 2016, p. 7) and another illustrating the average amount of funding by gender (Fig. 3). If, instead, numbers are compiled by total allocated funds by gender, the inequality in funding is clear.

Figure 4 describes the directors who received subsidies as part of the ‘konsulentordningen’. I chose to divide the funds by the two larger subsidy categories the DFI employs for fiction film: ‘konsulentordningen’ and ‘markedsordningen’. Konsulentordningen refers to the subsidies that are designated through rotating consultants, who typically come from the film industry themselves. This ensures that the subsidy system remains closely intertwined and somewhat self-controlled by the industry. The other subsidy category, marksordsdningen, is based on the marketability
Fig. 5  Director Markedsordningen. Total funds allocated to directors and for production per year for men and women, awarded in the category ‘markedsordning’

Fig. 6  Manus Konsulentordningen. Total funds allocated to manuscript writers per year grouped between men and women, awarded in the category ‘konsulentordning’ (Due to inconsistencies in the data from the Danish Film Institute, funds for manuscript development awarded to the movie ‘Pigen fra Planen’ (2018) are not included in the figure as the field ‘Manusforfatter’ (scriptwriter) was left empty)
Manus Markedsordningen. Total funds allocated to manuscript writers per year grouped for men and women, awarded in the category ‘markedsordning’ of film. It is run by the DFI, based on research into financial viability of films, and often funds large-scale mainstream films with a wide appeal, like comedies and romance.

While the different subsidy systems were not specified in the 2016 report from the DFI, the choice to divide data according to these systems might increase transparency about which parts of the subsidy system are most successful in funding women. Further, the data might hint at how gender relates to the artistic and experimental films that are often funded through the consultants, versus the mainstream films that are funded in the market-driven subsidy system ‘markedsordningen’.

For instance, it seems no female directors were deemed marketable by the DFI’s ‘markedsordning’ in 2016, meanwhile women were awarded some portions of funding in every measured year by the consultants of ‘konsulentordningen’. This would suggest that in the hands of the film industry representatives working as ‘consultants’ women are awarded some funds (but not nearly as many as men), while the funds that are entirely governed by the DFI’s market analyses one given year excluded women entirely, and generally paid men more (Figs. 5, 6 and 7).

As a general rule, it is not useful to make claims about tendencies with data-sets as limited as these. As such, while Figs. 5, 6, and 7 might seem to suggest that women are achieving an increasing percentage of the funding, this increase could easily be considered anecdotal. However,
the tables above do illustrate that the subsidy disparity by gender applies both to the mainstream films, funded by *markedsordningen*, and to the films funded by *konsulentordningen* and that the disparity occurs every recorded year, although to varying degree. Meanwhile, perhaps most importantly, Figs. 4, 5, 6, and 7 illustrate how conducting a slightly different analysis on a similar data-set can render a representation of numbers that makes gender inequality much clearer.

Had these types of analyses been represented in the DFI reports, perhaps it would have been easier to grasp just how skewed subsidies are by gender, or at least what the consequences are of a lower average subsidy portion when combined with fewer women recipients.

**Intersectionality and on Gender in Film in Denmark: Women First**

Upon the launch of their dedicated effort to map, track, and report on gender disparities in film, the DFI hosted several events and debates on gender between 2016 and 2017. During one of these events, representatives from Women in Film and Television Denmark (WIFT DK) played a central role. WIFT DK is the most prominent activist group on gender equality in Danish film at present. The discussion had centered on women as an underrepresented minority. For the following Q&A, a few women in the audience questioned the use of the term ‘minority’ in reference to women, and some representatives of WIFT agreed: Women are not a minority; they make up half of the population. In extension of this WIFT DK does not use the term ‘minority’ on their webpage, nor do they reference women in connection with any other marginalized group. When expanding on this, it became clear that the WIFT DK representatives and other members of the audience were concerned that the term minority connoted that there are fewer women, thus undermining a presumed right to equal representation.

Arguing that an underrepresented group deserves representation because of their numerical size, risks inferring that women are deserving of equality and equity only because they make up around half the population. This can be seen as a competitive argument for ignoring other minority groups, or at least for prioritizing women, essentially furthering the marginalization of minorities who are oppressed along other (sometimes multiple) axes than gender, as well as agender, gender
nonconforming, and other gender minorities sometimes not considered or self-identified as women.

During these discussions, it became clear that the separatist thinking was considered a strategic advantage when arguing for gender equality (between cis-men and cis-women, that is), because it preempts a central argument that was brought forth in the earlier debates on ‘ethnic’ representation; that Danish film should not represent groups that make up ‘too’ small parts of the audiences and populations to be ‘viable’. In such instances, the argument for separatism was founded in the fear that an intersectional or solidarity-based approach might water down or muddle the strong numerical argument women had for equality. Meanwhile, the separatist approach to diversity activism overlooks that gender-based oppression is not necessarily the singular most prominent or challenging form of exclusion many women face. For instance, women in my study often viewed their own oppressions as layered and linked to their identities as racial, religious, or sexual minorities. While privileging gender might be intended as a useful tool to push the conversation on equality forward, it presumes that equality and fairness would be premised on the ‘market share’ of any given group, and as such risks further marginalization of film professionals who are marginalized in more than one way.

The risk of marginalization was brought up in a discussion between two industry professionals at very different levels of Danish film. A woman filmmaker, occupying a powerful position in the Danish film industry, had advocated for the self-reporting and was excited at the DFI’s launch of the effort. A low-grade technician in film, a man, who occupies a much less influential position, asked her which jobs would be the first to be swapped in efforts to heighten the self-reported score for gender balance. What the technician illustrated with his question is the key challenge to diversity and representation initiatives that are driven by a self-governance principle, like the DFIs Danish model; they neglect to recognize that it might require a lot of knowledge about a given topic to govern it well. Because the effort is not managed by the DFI, and because there are no consequences to people for whether they actually change gender representation, no less how they do so, those who might opt to change the balance could choose to make the changes at ‘the bottom’ of the ‘food chain’ in film, further marginalizing groups who are likely already vulnerable in terms of class, education, and background. As such, people who are marginalized across multiple axes of oppression, but who are not women, would effectively be vulnerable to replacement.
by women, if that is the only measure the Danish film industry applies in their audits. As such, hypothetically, a man who was racially, educationally, religiously, and sexually minoritized and disabled, for instance, would only count as a man in these audits, and could easily be replaced by a woman who was more privileged and held more power in every other aspect than gender.

**Conclusion**

While Denmark is often viewed as a progressive nation with regard to gender equality, this notion only captures half the story. Initiatives for, and measurements of, gender and equality in Danish film are tinged with challenges of binary thinking, gender-essentialist separatism, and single-axis analyses (or what could be called anti-intersectionality). As such, the key vulnerability of the most central gender initiative, the self-audit, is its risk of further marginalization of other groups, in efforts to meet a desired number of women. In other words, the Danish film industry is making efforts to map, track, and encourage changes to gender inequality, but only between men and women. These gender initiatives do not account or make room for anyone outside of the binary, nor do they anticipate the racial and classed impacts they might have on marginalized groups.

The separatist and binary hierarchization of groups in Danish film might benefit from what Patricia Hill Collins calls transversal politics. ‘Transversal politics requires rejecting the binary thinking that has been so central to oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation. Under such models, one must be one thing or the other—Black women are poor either because they are Black or because they are women. One is either a racist or an antiracist individual, a sexist person or not, an oppressor group or oppressed one. In contrast, transversal politics requires both/and thinking’ (Patricia Hill Collins 2002 [1990], 245–246). Transversal politics require us to recognize that as long as the goal remains an equal sharing of power between men and women, the structure will continue to reproduce oppression (regardless of gender) of any other (and smaller) group. Without transversal politics of representation, a new system may well be more equal between men and women, but might otherwise reproduce every other form of neoliberaally driven oppression that the industry sees now.

Finally, the reports from the DFI are marked by statistical choices that do not illustrate how large the gendered discrepancy actually is in subsidy
portions, and instead position application patterns as the key barrier to
gender equality. An alternative analysis of the divisions of subsidies by
gender illustrates that what was perhaps one of the most important gender
gaps in Danish film had largely gone unnoticed: the gap in total subsidies.

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for charting the differences in total subsidies by gender.

Notes

1. In 2017, the employment rate was 71.5% among women aged 16–64,
compared to 75.6% among men according to statistics of Denmark.
2. 2 out of 5 members of parliament are women as of the 2019 election,
and at present, Denmark has its second female head of state.
3. A popular television genre at the intersection of crime, drama, and politics,
with an eerily cold Scandinavian aesthetic, and export successes like The
Killing, The Bridge, and Borgen.
4. Organizations like WIFT (Women in Film and Television) as well as
prominent feminist filmmakers have pushed this agenda since before the
DFI initiatives began, but interviews with the DFI and industry profes-
sionals point to the ethnicity initiative as a primary starting point for
debates on gender.
6. Described in the report as ‘activities, conducted after the production of
film, video, and tv-programmes’.
7. The emphasis on Hollywood here reflects the frequent parallels and
comparisons made by Danish industry creatives between Denmark and the
USA. Discussions of gender and representation are of course not exclu-
sive to recent movements in Hollywood nor to US American or European
research.
8. Although Sweden’s measures for gender equality go further than the
Danish ones, they are often framed in Danish discourse as more extreme
than is actually the case. In practice, discussions of whether or not the
Swedish Film Institute actually have quotas in place for gender ended up
distracting from discussions of what the DFI was doing about gender.
9. The widespread public focus and debate around #metoo included a series
of revelations around a famous Danish producer, who had inappropriately
hazed interns and new employees of his film company (he was ultimately
demoted on paper, but still holds a powerful position in Danish film) as
well as a theatre-piece based around readings of #metoo stories from the
Danish media and film industries. It is very likely that the #metoo discus-
sions energized and drove forward the industry engagement around the
DFI’s initiatives. A broader survey of sexual harassment and discrimina-
tion in Danish film achieved funding from industry organizations in 2019
and is set to publish results in 2020.

10. In an interview with a representative from the DFI, they described three
results of the reports: (1) a new study of gender equality conducted by
the DFI, (2) “initiatives” for “changing practice” and finally, (3) the self-
audit described in this section (Anonymized DFI rep., 34 min into the
interview).

11. The Swedish and British institutes have taken more proactive stances
on representational requirements as part of funding, including dedicated
funding for women in Sweden. Other industries in Denmark have success-
fully circumvented the outlawing of quotas (as discrimination of men),
by instituting quota-like goals at top management levels. Noticeably, the
directorial level of the Danish Film Institute was 100% men as of their last
report.

12. Interviewees working with funding (with the exception of employees at
the DFI) insisted that the DFI was the most central agent in Danish
funding, or at minimum a key player in determining whether a film can
be produced in Denmark.

13. Statistics from the Danish film schools and film programs suggest that they
are nearing gender equality, and most schools are taking active measures
to do so (Møller et al. 2016).

14. Bear in mind, my data is from 2014 to 2018, while the DFI report
analyzed earlier data (2010–2015 or 2012–2014). Nonetheless, given that
my data is more recent, one could expect that it showed less discrepancy
between genders, as a result of the gender focus since 2016. When my
analysis instead shows a continued (and more transparent) gender gap,
deeply newer data, it furthers the argument that not enough had been
done about gender equality, particularly in terms of funding from the
DFI.

15. WIFT DK is a branch of the international organization WIFT, which
works to increase the presence of women on-screen and behind the camera
in Danish film and media. WIFT is a key player in the Danish debate on
gender inequality, hosting and attending most (if not all) events on the
matter.

16. While intersectional organizations that approach gender, racialization, and
‘ethnicity’ in creative industries are slowly forming in Denmark, none of
them were prominent enough to have a visible presence (nor were they
included/invited) in the observed debates and public meetings on gender
representation hosted by the DFI. The Union, Minoritetsrapporten,
and Ansvarlig Presse are key organizations with a visibly intersectional approach to on-screen representation.

17. This example is a compiled k-anonymized (Sweeney 2002) example derived from netnographic (Kozinets 2015) research and observations at public debates.

**References**


To Change or Not to Change? Women and Gender Equality in the Finnish Film Industry

Tarja Savolainen

In Finland, gender equality is often characterised as a European and Finnish basic value (e.g. National Institute for Health and Welfare, Sukupuoltentasa-arvo) and it is broadly believed that gender equality has already been achieved (Nieminen and Attila 2018, p. 20). The early suffrage and electoral rights for women (achieved in 1906) and the nearly equal employment rate of women (68.5%) and men (70.7%) (National Institution for Health and Welfare, Työllisyys ja työttömyys) are perhaps the most repeated clichés to prove this. However, for example, women are still the minority in top decision-making positions. In spring 2019, women reached a new record in the parliament elections. Their share is now 46.5%. In the municipal sector, one-fifth of the mayors are women (The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health), and in the financial sector, women account for 28% of the managers of listed companies (Pietiläinen et al. 2015, p. 47). In media, the majority of the journalists are women, but, for example, the share of female editors-in-chief is only about one-third in the most popular newspapers (Marttinen 2018). Thus, although women participate in working life and society broadly, they are not equally represented in the top positions of the society. In addition, deep gender
segregation in labour markets and education, violence against women, women’s lower salaries and small pensions as well as limited reproductive rights are examples of issues which still need attention.

Finnish feminism can be characterised as state feminism which means that women have preferred to act in political parties and governmental institutions rather than in nongovernmental organisations. They have attempted to gain an equal footing with men in terms of legislation and governmental gender equality policies (Julkunen 2010, pp. 93–96). The governmental gender equality policies have traditionally focused on labour questions (Kantola et al. 2012, p. 15) and have not emphasised cultural questions so much. For example, the fact that female artists still comprise the minority in film, architecture and music (Rensujeff 2015) has received less attention until recently. However, gender equality mainstreaming, which means that gender equality policies cover all areas of society, is the policy of today.

In this chapter, I will analyse women’s involvement in the film industry. Firstly, I will give some context to the discussion about gender equality in the Finnish film industry by taking a brief look at Finnish film-making, audience numbers and gender preferences.

Finland is a small country (5.5 million inhabitants) which has limited domestic film markets and whose films are internationally rather unknown. However, the production volume is within the European average and it has increased in the last decade (Talavera Milla 2017, pp. 16–17). Domestic films are very popular in Finland; both among theatre and television audiences (Elokuvavuosi 2017, p. 2; 2018, pp. 16–17, 21; Statistics Finland/Film, 1–2). In the years 2011–2018, there were between 30 and 41 new domestic releases annually. The number of fictional features was 20–31 and the number of feature-length documentaries was 6–14 per year. In last few years, the share of domestic premiers has been nearly one-fifth. While interest in Finnish films has declined somewhat over the last few years, the domestic market share of admissions was 24% while the total number of cinema admissions was 8.1 million in 2018.

The aim of this chapter is to offer an overview of gender equality in the Finnish film industry. The starting point is that a new, more active phase concerning gender and gender equality has emerged in the Finnish film field in recent years. Such developments will be analysed later in the
chapter. The new phase is characterised by strengthened public dis- cussions as well as social activities and policies around gender equality in the Finnish film industry.

**Every Fourth Feature is Directed by a Woman**

Despite women’s preference for cinema-going, female characters are clearly less visible than men in Finnish films. An analysis of fifteen most popular fictional features in years 2013–2017 showed that female protagonists occupied only one-third of the main roles and these female characters had hardly any autonomous positions. Only four of the films passed the Bechdel test (Havu 2018). The dearth of female characters has a long history in Finnish film (Kunnas 2015). An analysis of Finnish fictional features between 2004 and 2014 showed that only one-third of the protagonists were female (Kunnas 2015). Further, according to the analysis of the broadcasting company Yle, women have also formed only one-third of all characters in fictional features since the beginning of the Finnish film industry in 1907 (Pesonen 2017). In 2018, the Film Foundation reported that the share of female protagonists was 38% (Elokuvavuosi 2018). However, the results are misleading; the Film Foundation had merely chosen the four first names from the cast list of each film on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) to the analysis, and reported them as protagonists, which is not necessarily the case (P. Peltonen, e-mail, January 16, 2019, and April 24, 2019).

The first fictional feature directed by a woman was released in Finland in 1936 (Savolainen 2002); for many years after that women directed only occasionally. The proportion of female directors had been quite steady, at about one-fifth, since the 1990s (Leskinen 2009, p. 21; Savolainen 2017, p. 32) when women directors established their position in the Finnish film industry (Mitchell 2005). Nowadays, the share of female directors is 39%, according to the Association of Finnish Film Directors (Savolainen 2017, p.33). However, women directed only every fourth fictional feature in Finland in 2018 and in 2019 (Elokuvavuosi 2018, p. 13; Finnish Film Foundation, Kotimaisten elokuvien katsojaluvut 2019; Finnish Film Foundation, Tulevat elokuvateatteriens-i-luat). There are no analyses of female directors’ engagement in different genres available but it seems that women have directed mainly comedies as well as youth and children’s movies. For example, women did not direct a single piece of so-called serious drama in the year 2018 (Elokuvavuosi 2018, pp. 10–11). In 2017,
only one film which was not classified as comedy-drama was directed by a woman (Elokuvavuosi 2017, pp. 11–12).

Women are slightly more likely to be employed as producers and scriptwriters than directors in Finland. On average every third producer and scriptwriter of Finnish feature films was female in years 2016–2018 (Elokuvavuosi 2016, p. 18; 2017, p. 13; 2018, p. 12). Like the share of directors, the share of female producers has been quite stable since the end of 1990s (Leskinen 2009, pp. 21–22). Instead, the proportion of female scriptwriters seems to have risen a bit in last few years (Elokuvavuosi 2018, p. 12). Female producers and scriptwriters form a slight majority with 55% in their professional organisations (Savolainen 2017, p. 33). Thus, there are plenty of female practitioners in the film field but they are not given the opportunity to make films.

Due to the deficiencies of educational statistics, it is not possible to compare precisely the numbers of female film-makers with the figures of film professionals who graduated from film schools. It is estimated that women have formed about half of the film students (Savolainen 2017, p. 33). For example, the proportion of the enrolled female film students was 45% at the University of Art and Design (currently Aalto University) between 2005–2010 (Toivonen 2011, p. 10). Aalto University has traditionally been the main institution educating film-makers but the universities of applied sciences have also educated professionals for film and television industries since the 1990s. Aalto University is still the only institution offering university-level education for film professionals.

Raija Talvio (2016, pp. 31–32) has analysed debuting film directors. According to her, most of the women (85%) who directed their first fictional feature in 2005–2014 had a formal education in film-making while only less than 60% of men had a film school background. In addition, the debutant male directors were clearly younger than the women. It seems that film education is a necessary step for women before film directing and they have to be patient enough to wait for their chance for years. Instead, men can direct without film education and they can do so very much earlier in their career.

THE MAIN FINANCIERS: THE FILM FOUNDATION AND THE BROADCASTING COMPANY YLE

The Finnish Film Foundation and the national broadcasting company, Yle, are the main financiers of Finnish film. The Film Foundation is a
private foundation. It receives funding from lottery income which is allocated by the government. The foundation supports and promotes the Finnish film industry by funding professional film production and the exhibition and distribution of films. The Foundation is also responsible for the cultural export of Finnish film and provides support for the international promotion of Finnish films. It operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The foundation supports film and television production by allowing different forms of funding (Finnish Film Foundation). In 2019, The Film Foundation supported Finnish film and television production by about 25 million euros (Finnish Film Foundation, Press release February 19, 2019).

The drama section of the broadcasting company Yle finances film plans either partially by buying rights to broadcast films or it orders and buys productions from independent companies directly. It also has productions of its own. Yle is funded by tax which is collected from the citizens; 2.5% of a person’s income. The maximum tax is 163 euros per year. Economically, Yle is not a big financier. In 2016–2018, the drama section of Yle used about 16 million euros per year to finance or buy external productions (E. Astala, e-mail, April 29, 2019). However, it has a key role due to its position as the only non-commercial television company in Finland. In practice, all the films need a distribution contract with a television company to collect enough financing for production costs. Film-makers prefer to co-operate with Yle while it gives chances to make less commercial films and it even offers better financing.

Both in the Film Foundation and Yle, decisions to finance films are based on the estimations of the film plans which include, among other things, a manuscript, a production plan, a budget and financing contracts. The film commissioners estimate the film plans in the Film Foundation and the producers and a commissioner, who is also the head of the film team, estimate the plans in Yle. At the moment, the role of the film commissioners of the Film Foundation is to introduce the draft decisions to the board which makes the final decision. In Yle, the head of the film team introduces the draft decisions to the managers and signs the contracts. This means that the commissioners of the Film Foundation and the producers and the head of the film team in Yle are key decision makers for funding. The managing director of the Film Foundation has an important role in Finnish film policies more generally. The Film Foundation and Yle make their decisions independently.
Only two female managing directors have directed the Finnish Film Foundation since it was founded in 1969. Marianne Möller directed in 1992–1995 and Irina Krohn had two five-year periods in 2006–2016. Krohn conducted several administrative reforms during her directorship and she also nominated the first female film commissioner, Kaisu Isto, for long fiction films in 2008. This improved women’s opportunities (see Toivonen 2011) and four long fictions directed by women were released already in 2009. Krohn also improved the collection of gender statistics. The Finnish film kept on increasing its popularity on national markets and the volume of the production grew. In spite of the positive development, the rules of the Film Foundation were renewed before Krohn was chosen for her second period. According to the new rules, the managing director could be employed only for two periods. Obviously, the commercially oriented film-makers were against her because she had reformed the support rules. On Krohn’s second period in 2011–2016, Finnish film maintained its popularity and high production volume. Thus, the first female film commissioner for long fiction films was nominated in the Finnish Film Foundation only in 2008. Since then, there have been two commissioners for long fictions; one female and one male. There is also one female and one male commissioner estimating documentary and short film projects (see Leskinen 2009, pp. 28–30). In January 2019, a new position for a commissioner to evaluate the applications for scriptwriting scholarships was opened and a female expert, Kaisu Isto, was nominated to the position. She acted as the first female film commissioner from 2008–2012. Thus, the key roles of the Film Foundation have also been opened to women, and the situation looks more balanced from the viewpoint of gender equality now.

So far, there has been only one female producer in Yle’s Finnish-speaking film team and she has evaluated short films. All the other genres, i.e. documentary films, long fictions and drama series, have been evaluated by male producers. In addition, there has been a female drama expert who has consulted producers when needed. In Yle, the producers and the commissioner are employed for permanent positions which means that the same producers evaluate productions for years, even for decades. Some female film-makers have also criticised this quite recently (Virtanen 2019). Due to that, Yle engaged in a public debate about its film policies in February 2019 (Yle February 15, 2019). It committed to improving gender balance in its products, and it seems that the producers will work more as a team. Otherwise, there are no signs of radical changes in its
evaluation practices. At the moment, Yle is recruiting a new producer for a five year period. Her/his task is to evaluate fictional features together with the commissioner (Yle recruitment March 20, 2019). Thus, in spite of the positive developments for gender equality, men still make up the majority pertaining to film and television commissions in Yle.

**Feminist Film Activism**

Feminist film movement saw the daylight in Finland only very recently when Women in Film and Television Finland (WIFT) was founded in 2014. Before that, there were only a few signs of feminist activism among film-makers and audiences. For example, in the 1980s, a group of feminist activists showed films directed by women, organised seminars and wrote a book on women and film (Niemi et al. 1990). In 2001, a women’s film festival called A Woman or an Artichoke? was launched in Helsinki.

The purpose of WIFT Finland is, among other things, to promote professional opportunities for its members, to improve their achievements and networking possibilities and to affect the development of film, television and moving images production from the viewpoint of gender equality. It also aims to improve the visibility of female film-makers. The association has organised seminars, published statements and comments and shown women’s films. It has generated activities and public discussions not only in the field of film but also more broadly in society. The association has an office in Helsinki and it has employed officers. At the moment, it is running a mentoring project to develop the careers of audio-visual professionals and a project which aims to support scriptwriters to compose their first feature film or television serial. WIFT Finland also participates in the European Womarts project the purpose of which is to increase the visibility of female artists and their work. Further, it co-operates actively with four other Nordic WIFT associations. The association receives operating subsidy from the Ministry of Culture and Education, and its projects are financed, for example, by the European Union, Norwegian and Swedish film institutes, Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme, governmental Arts Promotion Centre Taike and private foundations (WIFT). Moreover, WIFT Finland has been an initiator of several publications. It initiated a report on the public financing of Finnish film (Savolainen 2017), and its members have been active in the #metoo movement which, in turn, has resulted, for example, in a report on sexual harassment (Paanetoja 2018) and a book on the
movement itself in Finland (Lindén ja työryhmä 2018). In addition to
the activities of WIFT Finland and its members, there has been other
feminist activism in the field of film recently. For example, several lectures
on women and film were organised in Helsinki in autumn 2018.

**One-Fourth of the Public Financing to Women**

The report on public financing of Finnish film (Savolainen 2017) was
published in summer 2017. In the report, the task was to find out
the women’s share of public film financing. It was known that women
directed less films and applied for financing more rarely, but their share
of film financing was not known. The report indicated that the films
of female directors received only one-fourth of the public financing in
years 2011–2015. Public financing referred to the funds allocated by the
government to the organisations financing domestic films and television
series.

About 150 million euros of public financing were analysed in the
research3. The share of the Finnish Film Foundation was about two-thirds
(93 million euros) of the analysed sum while the share of the national
broadcasting company, Yle, was about one-third (46 million euros). The
share of three other financing organisations was about 11 million euros.
These organisations financed film production by granting support for
films and television series and/or, on a much smaller scale, by giving
grants to individual film artists (Savolainen 2017, p. 22).

When women’s share of the public film financing (24%) was propor-
tioned to the women’s share of film artists (43%) and to the number
of women educated to the film branch (evaluated to be about a half),
the situation was still very unbalanced from women’s point of view
(Savolainen 2017, p. 87). Further, the analysis showed that women and
men got grants for scriptwriting from the Finnish Film Foundation in
the same proportion as they had applied. However, women’s scholarships
were on average a bit smaller than men’s. In addition, women formed a
minority among applicants (Savolainen 2017, pp. 37–39).

The analysis indicated that films directed by men got more production
support granted by the Film Foundation. The share of female-directed
films that received production support (including so-called 5050 produc-
tion support\(^4\)) was smaller (24.6%) than their share of the applications
(29%) and of the positive support decisions (32%). However, female-
directed fictional features got on average more production support per
film than male-directed films, if 5050 support was excluded from the analysis. Probably a film financing experiment, which was in process, resulted in several films with exceptionally tiny budgets being produced. For some reason, these films were directed by men. Women directed middle budget films with 1.4–1.8 million euros (Savolainen 2017, pp. 41–48). According to the Film Foundation, female-directed films have received production support in proportion to their applications (Elokuvavuosi 2018, p. 12). Female film-makers do not apply for financing as often as their male colleagues. The Film Foundation has started a research project which aims to discover the reasons for that (Finnish Film Foundation, Operational strategy 2019, p. 8). The female film-makers have pointed out that women might have difficulty finding a production company for their projects. Or, for example, negative feedback during the application process may demotivate female film-makers who then abandon their applications.

The drama section of the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation, Yle, financed external film and television productions by about 46 million euros in 2011–2015. Male-directed films and television series got 79% of the amount while female-directed films got only 18%. All the productions, which YLE had ordered from independent companies, were male directed. However, both female and male scriptwriters and producers were employed in these television series (Savolainen 2017, pp. 62–63).

The Promotion Centre for Audiovisual Culture funded short films, documentaries and animation by about 4 million euros in the analysed period. The funding was divided quite equally between both genders. The Nordic Film and Television Fund committed about 4.5 million euros for Finnish films and television series in 2012–2015. Films directed by men got 82% of that sum. Films directed by Finnish women got funding in proportion to their share of the Finnish films. The Arts Promotion Centre Taike allowed about 2.4 million euros to film artists as scholarships between 2013–2015. Male artists got 62% of the amount. The share of female film artists was about the same as their proportion of film artists in Finland (Savolainen 2017, pp. 68–80). Further, the study (Savolainen 2017) indicated that the financing organisations do not report at all, or not accurately enough, how funds are allocated to women and men. One of the main suggestions was to create a database which enables monitoring of public film funding and evaluation of gender equality.
FINNISH #metoo

The discussion around the financing had barely calmed down when the debate on sexual harassment and inappropriate treatment in audio-visual production started. The international #metoo movement began in Finland only a few days after the USA when a director–actress told about her harassment experiences in the main newspaper and said that she was collecting other women’s experiences on the subject (Kanerva 2017). Afterwards, several actresses and other film professionals wanted to tell about their experiences and name the offenders. The media was keen to publish the names of the (famous) victims and their harassment experiences. However, it did not want to publish the names of the offenders. #metoo activists did not support the publication of victims’ names but not the offenders, although the media was very curious to know. In January 2018, the national broadcasting company Yle unveiled the name of a well-known old male professor and film director and reported that he had harassed women for years (Rigatelli 2018a). He had, for example, suggested group sex for film school applicants. In March 2018, Yle unveiled another name and told how a very well-known and successful male director humiliates and bullies actresses (Rigatelli 2018b).

It seems on the surface that the Finnish #metoo movement has been quite moderate. Until now, no other names of offenders have been published and only one actor has been convicted for a rape. However, the #metoo movement has received a lot of publicity, and sexual harassment is a widely known problem in Finnish society now. The experiences of #metoo activists with the media, offenders, solicitors and with men who want to support offenders have been quite strange and heavy. The activists published a book in which they report on the events (Lindén ja työryhmä 2018). The activists felt that the media protected male offenders while it did not want to publish their names. According to the activists, offenders have pressed and intimidated the activists and tried to find grounds to get them sued for defamation. The solicitors of some offenders have contacted activists. Women have also been subjected to police interviews. As a result, some women have withdrawn from activism (Lindén 2018, pp. 46–58). The offenders have managed to keep their positions in the film industry by using exceptional methods. From the viewpoint of the activists, it seems that the Finnish media has supported offenders at least partly due to the financial relations between the media and film industries (Lindén 2018, p. 55). Also, a strange phenomenon has taken place...
while men who are not known to be offenders have supported offenders and bullied #metoo activists. It must be noted that the position of actors and actresses is especially weak in Finnish film productions while film producers and the union of the actors do not have a collective agreement on labour conditions (Finnish Association of Actors and Actresses 2019). Because of that, every actor has to negotiate the salary for every film.

**The Report on Sexual Harassment**

Due to the #metoo movement and public discussions on sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour in the film industry, the Ministry of Education and Culture initiated a survey on working conditions and harassment in audio-visual production (Paanetoja 2018). The survey was sent to 91 production companies but only 20 of them answered. The report was based mainly on interviews and discussions with a large number of film and theatre professionals. It was published in September 2018 and it indicated that there are many problems in the working conditions of audio-visual production.

The study found out that there were film production companies which did not take care of their legal obligations to secure a working environment free from harassment and other inappropriate treatment. It was also discovered that it was not always clear that the person who is responsible for artistic ambitions in the production might also be responsible for employer’s practical responsibilities. Further, the obligations of the Act of Parity (2014) were often quite unknown among film-makers. In some cases, not enough attention was paid to preventive actions. Furthermore, the report indicated that the legislation needed revision and specification. The analysis also revealed shortcomings in the operating culture and structure of the film industry (Paanetoja 2018, pp. 89–119).

The report proposed to develop internal operations in the industry, to make clear the responsibilities, obligations and rights and to strengthen confidential cooperation. It also made suggestions for developing legislation and new operating models and practices. Further, the report proposed drawing up ethical guidelines for the industry, establishing an ethics body and improving familiarity with the legal obligations in terms of training and sharing good practices. The target groups of the suggested measures were the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish Film Foundation, production companies, cinemas, educational institutions and labour market organisations (Paanetoja 2018, pp. 159–174).
Policies of the Film Foundation

The Film Foundation also reacted to #metoo. It published Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Film and Television Industries on its web pages already during the #metoo campaign in January 2018 (Finnish Film Foundation, Guidelines). The guidelines were created together with the association of producers and other organisations of film and television industries. They are targeted to all parts of the film and television production processes. In addition, The Film Foundation published a strategy for developing labour protection in film production in September 2018 (Finnish Film Foundation, Policy programme). Further, the organisations of the film industry are preparing education for film professionals on their legal responsibilities.

In autumn 2018, the Film Foundation published a general strategy for the Finnish film production for years 2019–2023 (Finnish Film Foundation, Strategy). The strategy was strongly criticised because it does not pay attention to gender equality explicitly and does not establish it as one of its objectives (WIFT Finland 2018). In addition, it is in keeping with the objectives of EURIMAGES of which Finland is a member and which has embraced the aim of achieving equal distribution of co-production funding between women and men by the year 2020 (EURIMAGES). The Finnish strategy speaks only about “equality” and “parity” in a general way and in this way reinforces its old views on the natural development of gender equality when more female film-makers will be educated (Vanha-Majamaa 2017). As mentioned, for years the proportion of female students has been nearly half in Finnish film schools but still women form a minority in film productions. The attitudes of the management of the Finnish Film Foundation towards gender equality have clearly differed from its Nordic counterparts which see gender equality as a central objective to develop (Danish Film Institute, Norwegian Film Institute, Swedish Film Institute). The purpose, to deny the significance of gender, was also manifested in the idea of The Parity Forum which was organised by the Film Foundation in 2018 and which approached gender inequality as equal to the problems of, for example, disabled people and language minorities (Finnish Film Foundation, Press release November 17, 2017). However, it seems that the foundation has undergone a change in attitude after that. The operational strategy for the year 2019 emphasises gender equality in a new way and it even promises to find out ways to raise women’s proportion among film support applicants (Finnish Film
Foundation, Operational strategy 2019). I believe that this change of strategy is a result of the new film act which requires the Foundation to act more like a public authority and take more seriously governmental policies concerning, for example, gender equality.

As mentioned, in Finland, the emphasis of the governmental gender equality policies has traditionally been more directed to labour questions. Although film-makers are part of that labour, there are aspects, such as freelancing, which might exclude film-makers from certain law-based regulations. For example, organisations permanently employing less than thirty people are not required to have a gender equality plan. The organisations with more employees have to monitor the gender balance regularly and devise a plan on how to reach equality between women and men (Act on Equality between Women and Men, Ombudsman for Equality).

Conclusions

Women have established positions in the Finnish film industry although their proportion is low in film productions and their proportion of film financing is also low. As directors, they seem to have especially limited possibilities to direct serious drama, and on the screen, women more often perform in secondary roles. In addition, there are serious problems concerning the physical integrity of actresses. The problems and omissions of the film world have only come to light in Finland a few years ago. The most active actor to improve gender equality in film has been the filmmakers’ own association WIFT Finland and its members. The Ministry of Education and Culture has taken responsibility for its part in the problems of financing and sexual harassment in film productions. Further, the Film Foundation has been forced to speak and act for gender equality and the national broadcasting company, Yle, has promised to improve the chances of female film-makers to make more films. In spite of all the positive policies, it is unfortunately evident that there is a lot of resistance to gender equality in the Finnish film and television industry and it is too early to evaluate whether the future of female film-makers will be better than their history in Finland.
Notes

1. This article is part of my project Women and Finnish Film Industry which has received funding from The Finnish Cultural Foundation. I also want to thank Professor Raija Talvio who kindly commented my text.
2. In Yle, there is also a Swedish-speaking unit which produces programmes for the Swedish-speaking population of about 280,000 people.
3. The actual number of public financing was somewhat higher. The analysed sum does not include the total amount of the money used to finance Finnish films by these organisations in years 2011–2015 while the research material was limited for different reasons.
4. The 5050 support was granted to production companies which had collected half of the film’s costs from other sources before applying for support from the foundation.

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From Edith Carlmar to Iram Haq: Women in the Norwegian Film Industry

Anette Svane

INTRODUCTION

Norway is one of the best countries in the world when it comes to gender equality, ranking in second place only behind Iceland in the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report. The film industry, however, is and has always been dominated by men, and change in this field has been quite slow—at least until the last decade. Operating in a small country, with 5.3 million inhabitants in 2019, the industry is dependent on public funding, and it is through public policies and measures that initiatives towards gender equality have been implemented. In this chapter, I will try to shed some light on the development of gender equality within the Norwegian film industry.

I will begin the chapter with a brief historical summary in order to create a better understanding of the Norwegian film industry and its role as an early gender equality “pioneer”. I will then give an outline of more recent developments from the 2000s and onwards, with a special emphasis on the period between 2010 and 2019. Finally, I will provide an outline of both statistics on representation in the industry and the measures and initiatives implemented.

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In addition to this, I will highlight some of the women who have broken the barriers, to showcase that we have always had, and still have, many excellent women filmmakers in Norway. I have chosen to place a special emphasis on the director because of their position as artistic leaders and as I will show they are lagging slightly behind their producer counterparts. Many, if not most, women directors also write their own screenplays, and many have a wide range of experience with different roles within film production. To highlight the role of the woman director, therefore, feels fitting when outlining the development of gender equality within the Norwegian film industry.

THE FIRST WAVES OF NORWEGIAN WOMEN DIRECTORS

In the earlier days of film, women directors were few and far between in the Norwegian film industry and, until the 1950s, they were almost non-existent. Alfilda Hovdan has recently been reclaimed as most likely the first woman director in the country; she directed three short films in 1931 and was among the very first sound film directors (Hanche, n.d.). The more well-known Edith Carlmar was the first Norwegian woman to direct a feature film, and she is described as “one of the most prominent directors in the postwar era” by film historian Gunnar Iversen (2011, p. 169). In her career, she directed 10 feature films—many of them commercial successes—between the years of 1949 and 1959 as well as a range of short films. Her debut feature *Death is a caress* (1949) was a controversial and, at the time, shocking film noir which depicted the passionate relationship between a mechanic and a socialite. The next woman to direct a feature film was Solvejg Eriksen, and with *Cecilia* (1954), she was the first Norwegian filmmaker to address the issue of gay identity (Kvalvik, n.d.).

Coinciding with the international focus on women’s rights in the 1970s, a new generation of women directors started appearing in Norway. Anja Breien was the next woman to direct a feature film with her 1971 film *Rape*, and four years later, she got her definitive breakthrough with the success of *Wives* in the “International Women’s Year” of 1975. *Wives* was inspired by the film *Husbands* (Cassavettes 1970) and features three women who decide to go on a week-long bender together, leaving husbands, children and all the responsibilities that came with being a woman behind. With its semi-improvisational style and humorous play on gender roles, *Wives* became a commercial success and a Norwegian
classic. In addition to making nine feature films, Breien has also directed several short films, many of them documentaries.

Nicole Macé directed two feature films in the 1970s: *3* (1971) and *The Guardians* (1978). She was a writer, director and editor which in a lot of her work concerned herself with ideas surrounding the role of the woman, gender, tradition and morality (Holtar, n.d.). Vibeke Løkkeberg’s debut feature *The Revelation* from 1977 also broke with expectations of female characters on film, and with its unconventional depiction of nudity and female sexuality, the film became quite controversial, as did Løkkeberg herself. Løkkeberg’s biggest success is *Betrayal* (1981), a film set in the post-war era following the seven-year-old girl Kamilla and her observations of a broken family. In addition to Breien, Macé and Løkkeberg women directors such as Laila Mikkelsen and Kikki Engelbrektsen started to make their mark with films in this period. The work of all these women did not go unnoticed internationally, and at the time, Norway was seen as a pioneer when it came to gender equality in the film industry (Iversen 2011, p. 231; Lian 2017). The year 1981 was also called “the year of the girl” (”*jenteåret*”) due to the fact that several of the critically acclaimed films were made by women (Iversen 2011; Lian 2015, 2017).

Even though women directors were starting to become a part of the film industry, their male counterparts were still in the overwhelming majority. Vigdis Lian points out that even though filmmakers such as Breien, Løkkeberg, Macé and Mikkelsen made their debut films in this period and many of them were well received and spurred a lot of interest, only 15% of films in the period between 1975 and 1989 were made by women (2015, p. 12). Gunnar Iversen also emphasizes that despite the success of these filmmakers, women still struggled in a male-dominated industry, in the years following 1981 (2011, p. 231). Norway’s earlier international reputation as a role model for gender equality in the industry might then be due to a few significant women gaining a lot of attention rather than having actual gender equality in any sense. Still, there is no denying the relative importance of the ones who came first.

**What the Numbers Say**

In the 1990s, women slowly continued to make up ground, and Vigdis Lian argues that the decade was especially good for women filmmakers because of, among other things, what she calls an “almost gender-blind film discourse” (2017). Women were filmmakers, not women filmmakers,
and their sex was rarely thematized in interviews and film reviews, according to Lian. Breien, Løkkeberg and Mikkelsen continued making films and were joined by a cohort of women filmmakers who made their debut films in the mid-1980s, such as Berit Nesheim, Eva Isaksen, Eva Dahr and Unni Straume. Liv Ullmann, Torunn Lian and Vibeke Idsøe started to make their mark around the mid-1990s. The overall share of women filmmakers slowly improved, amounting to 22% of the films in the years between 1994 and 2003 (Lian 2015).

In 2006, the report What the Numbers say (Tallenes tale) hit the film industry (Berentsen and Sørensen 2006). One of its major findings was that women only held 20% of key creative positions (director, screenwriter or producer) in the industry based on numbers between 2001 and 2006. This was one of the first detailed official reports covering gender equality in the film industry, and it contributed to the then Labour Party-led government setting a goal of reaching 40% women in key positions by 2010 (Stortinget 2007). In order to reach the goal, moderate affirmative action was to be implemented in public funding by the Norwegian film institute. A special emphasis was put on talent and mentoring schemes, while market-valued films were given “bonus points” for having women in several key positions. The 40% goal was not met within the time frame.

Three years later, the Norwegian film industry council (Bransjerådet) launched another report called Make use of all the talents! (Ta alle talentene i bruk!) which stated that women still only held 20% of key positions (2010). The report suggested stronger measures to ensure better representation of women, such as increased funding for films with female protagonists, in addition to an increased use of scholarships and mentoring schemes. The council also suggested adding lead protagonists as the fourth key position when accounting for the women’s share.

Increasing the share of women to 40% by 2010 would in practice mean doubling the share of women in the industry in four years, which was both ambitious and a bit unrealistic. However, the measures taken might have had an effect as the numbers have increased noticeably since then. If seen as a whole within all key positions and categories of funding, the representation of women had increased to 35% in the years between 2010 and 2016 (NFI 2016b). These numbers, although indicating a substantial improvement, can be somewhat misleading. The funding for short films, documentaries and development funding had a share of around 40% women in key positions in the period, whereas production funding for feature film had a 30% share (NFI 2017b). When looking at funding
for feature films considered by market value, the share of women was at 21% between 2012 and 2016, with 2016 standing out as a low point with a share of only 13% women (NFI 2017b). The market-valued films have larger budgets than films valued by artistic merits. In addition, women also get funding for short films and documentaries more than fiction features and these are also categories of films that generally have lower budgets. Women are thus receiving even less of the money than the numbers suggest.

In addition, the representation of women in key positions is not evenly distributed, with representation among producers higher than representation among directors. For example, when looking at the number of women directors who received production funding for feature films between 2012 and 2016, the share was 33% whereas women producers amounted to 42% in the same period (NFI 2016a). At the project development stage, directors had a 36% share whereas the share among producers was 47%. The share among screenwriters amounted to 40% in the same period. In 2017 and 2018, the difference was smaller, and 2018 stands out with the share of women directors slightly higher than the share of producers: respectively, 53% and 49% (NFI 2018a; NFI 2019). 2018 was as we will see below an exception in more ways than one, and it is too early at this point to say whether this indicates actual change. Regardless of this, the numbers from the past decade show a marked difference in the representation of women between directors and producers, even if both are still underrepresented.

The representation of women also declines significantly when looking at their share among cinema premieres (averaging around 25 films per year): a 29% share between 2011 and 2016 with women directors amounting to 25% (NFI 2016a). And it has not improved in the years since: in the short period between 2017 and the first half of 2019, women have only directed 21% of Norwegian films shown at the cinema (Filmweb 2017a, b; NFI 2019; Rushprint 2019). It is important to emphasize here that when counting cinema premiere films, this includes the minority of films without public funding. When looking solely at films without public funding, the share of women in key positions was a staggering 14% for the period between 2011 and 2016 (NFI 2016a). This points to the importance of public funding when trying to achieve gender equality in the industry and might indicate that the gender equality measures implemented through public funding programmes have had an effect even if they have yet to fully reach their intended goal.
Looking at all three key positions in the years between 2017 and the first half of 2019, 2017 had the lowest share of women since 2011, with a 35% total in all categories of funding (NFI 2018a). The women’s share in cinema premieres that year was 31%. 2018 marked a significant increase: a 51% women’s share within funding, with especially the funding for feature film standing out with its 53%, an increase of 18 percentage points from the previous year (NFI 2019). The share among cinema premieres was also a bit higher than in 2017 with 33%. In the first half of 2019, there were only six Norwegian cinema premieres (a lower number than previous years), where women in key positions amounted to a 25% share (Rushprint 2019).

Moving to on-screen representation of women protagonists, Ingvild Bjerkeland and Johanne Kielland Servoll’s report from 2016 concluded with a women’s share of 40% between 2011 and 2015 (2016). There was, however, a big difference in the categories of film, where children and youth films were contributing to higher numbers. In films for adults, women amounted to 38% of lead characters with 62% being male. In adult features with only one lead character, there were almost twice as many lead male characters as women. In addition, out of the 18 films with a lead woman character 75% of them were in the drama genre, whereas 30% of the male leads were in that genre. Male leads generally exist in a range of different genres and films, unlike women who are often confined to specific types of films. The Norwegian film institute first included statistics of film protagonists’ sex to their reports in 2016, and the numbers show that in the short period between 2016 and 2018 the numbers had actually decreased a bit, with women lead characters amounting to 36.5% (NFI 2018a, 2019). In the first half of 2019, one out of six films had a female lead, and she shared it with a male lead as well (Rushprint 2019).

In sum, the 2010s have seen a significant increase of the women’s share in key positions in the industry but averaging around 35–40% still means that women are underrepresented. This is underscored by the fact that women are granted even less money than the numbers would suggest, and to a large degree work within categories of film with lower budgets and less attention. Women directors are also underrepresented among the three key positions, especially when compared to their producer counterparts. In addition, the women’s share in cinema premieres is significantly lower than in funding, which, among other things, tell us that public initiatives are crucial for gender equality.
INITIATIVES AND MEASURES

What political and industry measures have been taken to change the inequality that still exists? As previously mentioned, the government set a goal of a women’s share of 40% in 2006 which in turn led to moderate affirmative action implemented by the Norwegian film Institute. In 2013, the government changed, and so did the official recommendation of a 40% women’s share. This was, however, introduced again in 2015 by Parliament, and the measures of moderate affirmative action were strengthened. This demonstrates the concrete effects of who is elected to office, and the 2013–2021 conservative governments have generally tended towards a hands-off approach with regard to media and arts policy. In the last few years, several filmmakers and opposition party politicians have become impatient and have argued for more radical actions.

In 2018, the Labour Party introduced a bill setting a goal of 50-50 representation of men and women with the added measure that if the goal is not met within three years, any public funding should be automatically split in half resulting in radical affirmative action (Stortinget 2018). This has been met with resistance from the conservative government, with the Minister of culture stating to the media that the Labour Party was trying to discredit the “good work” which was being done by the industry and that the women’s share “has gotten better” (Grande 2019). The industry itself is also split in the public discourse: leading producers in both production companies and the producer’s union have been sceptical of more radical measures (Grindem 2018; Urfjell 2018). Meanwhile, several women filmmakers took to the street at the 2018 International Women’s Day March, walking with the banner “We are half of the stories!” This was the first time that filmmakers had their own banner at the march, and it shows growing impatience with the under-representation of women in the industry. Two days before the march one of the initiators, Sigrun Norderval wrote in an online newspaper: “we were supposed to wait for gender equality to arrive in 2010. Now it is 2018 and we have waited long enough!” (2018).

The Norwegian film institute arranged a seminar regarding measures for gender equality in 2016, and shortly after they released an action plan for the period between 2016 and 2020, with an updated goal of a 50% women’s share instead of the previous 40% goal (NFI 2017a). Among other things they introduced moderate affirmative actions for the market-valued feature film for the first time and a goal of a 50% women’s
share in all development funding and talent schemes. In 2018, they also commented on the proposal of more radical measures such as splitting the money 50/50 would be difficult to implement in practice, but “the ideal is equal share of the money and we will continue to discuss how to make this happen” (NFI 2018b). It is also worth mentioning that even though the Norwegian film industry has been slow in terms of gender equality, it has been even slower with regard to the perspectives of other marginalized voices. In 2018, the film institute finally launched an action plan for inclusivity and representation in Norwegian film for the period between 2019 and 2023, with a stated goal of diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, national minorities, sexual orientation, indigenous people and disabilities (NFI 2018c). This was a long-time coming, and it will hopefully contribute to further raised consciousness regarding the importance of diverse representation and perspectives.

**Contemporary Women Directors**

Whereas women in the earlier days of film were so few that it was easy to almost name them all, the number of women filmmakers has increased considerably the last twenty years or so. Hundreds of women are now making their mark in the industry, both within the low-budget and short film segment, as well as within feature films and longer documentaries. What is striking, however, is how few women are directing feature films. Few directors get to make feature films in Norway, regardless of sex, but as shown by the statistics above there is still a significant difference between men and women, with male directors in 2/3 of feature films awarded production funding. This is further enhanced by the fact that women directed less than 25% of films premiering at the cinema.

Despite these statistics, the sheer number of remarkable women who make film in is still a reason for optimism, and in the following, I want to highlight some of the many prominent contemporary Norwegian women directors. This will include some of the few women who have directed multiple feature films over the past decades, as well as a (in no way comprehensive) selection of notable directors working in other genres and categories of film. The selection attempts to give an overview of the range of current Norwegian women directors and showcase their diversity, in terms of personal background, the themes they explore and their
approach to film form. In so doing I hope, among other things, to showcase that the problem of underrepresentation certainly does not stem from a lack of highly skilled women filmmakers.

With four-feature films under her belt, Sara Johnsen is among the few women to direct several feature films since the year 2000. Johnsen has enjoyed huge critical success; her debut feature film Kissed by winter from 2005 was the Norwegian Academy Award nominee that year; and it was also nominated to the Nordic Council Film Prize. Her next feature, the comedy-drama Upperdog (2009), did even better: it won the Film critics award and was nominated to 8 Amanda awards winning 5 of them including the prize for best director. Three years later, Johnsen gained international attention with the controversial All that matters is past (2012) which premiered at Toronto international film festival. The film centres around a love triangle and it both shocked and delighted several critics including John DeFore, from The Hollywood Reporter, who stated that “Norwegian helmer Sara Johnsen should register on the cinephile radar with this thoughtfully allegorical drama” (2012). Several critics pointed to Johnsen’s specific vision and ambition, some suggesting that the film fortified her position as an important Norwegian auteur (Vestmo 2012).

Former actress Iram Haq has also made an impact with her two feature films since 2013. As a daughter of Pakistani immigrants, her films centre around culture clashes and girls and women who struggle with balancing the expectations from the Norwegian society and their families. Her debut feature film I am yours (2013) portrays the life of the single mother Mina (played by Amrita Acharia), and her struggles with finding love as well as her relationship with her Pakistani family. The film was nominated for several awards and became the Academy Award nominee of Norway in 2014. Her 2018 film What will people say was a huge success and marked Haq’s major international breakthrough as a filmmaker. The film follows 16-year-old Nisha (played by Maria Mozeldom) who leads a double life; at home, she is a perfect Pakistani daughter, but when she is with her friends she behaves like an ordinary Norwegian teenage girl. When her father finds her in bed with a boy, she is kidnapped to Pakistan and forced to live there with relatives. The film premiered at Toronto international film festival, was critically acclaimed and won several awards among them the Amanda awards for both best film and best director. As people with immigrant backgrounds seldom make films in Norway, Iram Haq and
her films break important ground for women, women immigrants and immigrants in general.

Anne Sewitsky, another successful four-feature director, first made her mark with the short film *Oh my god* (2008) which won the award for best short film at Berlin international film festival. Her debut feature *Happy, happy* (2010) was the first Norwegian film to win a Sundance award, and it was nominated to several other awards. Her next feature film was the children’s film *Totally true love* (2011) that was both a critical and commercial success. Since then she has been involved in several TV series and, in 2018, she directed *The white swan*, a woman-led historical drama about the figure skater Sonja Henie.

Where Johnsen, Haq and Sewitsky are notable exceptions, having made several feature films, women are having more success within the documentary format. One of the most influential and successful Norwegian documentary directors is Margreth Olin, who since her breakthrough with the short documentary *Uncle Reidar* in 1997 has made several short documentaries, one fiction feature and six feature-length documentaries—many of them with cinema distribution. She has covered a range of societal issues and institutions in her documentaries, among them the critically acclaimed observational documentary *Childhood* (2017) where she followed kids in a kindergarten for a full year highlighting the pedagogic importance of play.

Another significant Norwegian voice within documentary filmmaking is Deeyah Khan, born from a Pakistani father and Afghan mother, who had to leave Norway at the age of 17 due to threats from extremists within the Muslim community. She moved to London and has since then worked extensively with human rights issues in addition to making four award-winning documentaries highlighting the issues with extremism—both religious extremism in her debut film *Banaz: a love story* (2012) and right-wing extremism in her newest documentary *White right: meeting the enemy* (2017). In 2010, Khan started the independent media and arts production company called Fuuse and it is through this company that she has produced and directed these documentaries. In her own words: “only through creating more inclusive dialogue across, and within, cultures and communities can we hope to foster understanding. Only through fearlessly confronting complex, controversial topics can we hope to challenge prejudice” (Fuuse 2019). Khan was named inaugural UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Artistic Freedom and Creativity in 2016.

Documentary director Solveig Melkeraaen is another notable woman who has made several acclaimed documentaries since the early 2000s. She
may be most known for her personal documentary on mental health, *Good girl* (2014), a portrayal of her own struggles with depression. Aslaug Holm, who started out in the 1990s, has also been very successful in these past few years, enjoying her biggest success as a documentary filmmaker so far with *Brothers* in 2015, with which she was the first Norwegian ever to win the main prize at Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival. Another highly regarded filmmaker who has been in the industry for a long time is Karoline Frogner, who has made several short and feature-length documentaries. In her films, she has often concerned herself with the plight of women, refugees and issues of war and human rights. In *Due to the War: The Widows of Rwanda* (2010), for example, she focuses on the women who had to rebuild the society again after the genocide in Rwanda. Frogner was in 2014 one of very few women to receive a state-sponsored artistic scholarship which guarantees an income until retirement.

Women are also significant contributors to artistic short films, low-budget films and films that transcend boundaries between categories and genres. Jorunn Myklebust Syversen graduated from Bergen National academy of art and design in 2005, went on to make several video installations and short films before releasing the critically acclaimed feature film *The tree feller* in 2017. Her second feature film *Disco* starring Josefine Frida Pettersen, famous for her role in the teen-drama SKAM, premiered at Toronto international film festival in September 2019. Also from an art academy background is Ane Hjort Guttu, who has made her mark with several poetic short films, video installations and essay films. In addition to making art, she is also working as a curator and writer and is Professor of Contemporary Art at the National Academy of the Arts in Oslo. Marien Halle, Bodil Furu, Ellen Ugelstad and Itonje Søimer Guttormsen are also among the many noteworthy filmmakers in this category.

Animator and director Torill Kove, now living in Canada, has also enjoyed tremendous success with her short animation films, being short listed for an Academy Award three times and winning the award with *The Danish Poet* (2006). The film was a co-production between Norway and Canada starring actress and filmmaker Liv Ullmann as narrator. Kove has also made a feature-length animation film based on the famous children’s books written by Gunilla Bergström, *Hocus Pocus Alfie Atkins* (2013). Another notable animator is Anita Killi, who runs the animation studio Trollfilm AS from her family farm. Her most famous film is *Angry man* from 2009, a short animation film about a young boy and how he deals with his violent father. The film was nominated for, and won, many
awards, among them both the audience award and the award for best animation at Clermont-Ferrand international short film festival.

**Conclusion**

As I hope to have shown, there are numerous highly skilled women filmmakers in Norway, and they operate across a wide range of categories and genres. From Edith Carlmar and her daring *Death is a caress* in 1949, via Anja Breien’s play on gender roles in *Wives* in 1975, to the thought-provoking films of Iram Haq in the 2010s, women filmmakers have broken barriers in a historically male-dominated industry for a long time and continue to do so.

The 2010s have seen a significant increase of women in key positions, which must in large part be attributed to political initiatives and measures from both Parliament and the Norwegian Film Institute. However, women are still underrepresented, especially directors within high-budget and market-valued feature films. When looking at films without public funding, the numbers are especially grim, which suggests that public initiatives are crucial to achieving gender equality within the industry.

Gender equality in the film industry cannot then be separated from gender equality in society as a whole. As women face discrimination in the workplace elsewhere (see, e.g., Rice 2017), it is more probable than not that this is also the case within the film world. A more comprehensive awareness of these issues is finally starting to appear at a policy level, through NFI’s 2019–2023 action plan where they place focus on how unconscious discrimination and prejudice factor into various processes in film production (NFI 2018c). In addition, there has been an increased focus on recruiting and maintaining young female talents through talent schemes and similar measures. These kinds of initiatives are important and demonstrate a willingness to approach the issue structurally and work towards long-term change. The many highly successful Norwegian women filmmakers—some of whom are highlighted in this chapter—can hopefully also serve as role models for future generations.

I end this chapter then on a cautiously optimistic note. When the 2006 report *What the numbers* say hit the industry, many were shocked that one of the most gender-equal countries in the world could have such a male-dominated film industry. Since then, the number of women in key positions has almost doubled. That does not mean that we are there yet and given the already high number of talented women filmmakers
working today it is striking how slow progress has been in the most prestigious and well-funded parts of the industry. It remains crucial, then, to keep up the pressure and that politicians and filmmakers alike continue to highlight the issue and make it part of the agenda.

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Experiencing Male Dominance in Swedish Film Production

Maria Jansson and Louise Wallenberg

INTRODUCTION

Sweden as a film nation has attracted international attention for its recent success in increasing the number of female directors, scriptwriters and producers.\(^1\) The efforts undertaken by the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) on the matter of gender equality, most notably the goal of a 5050 distribution, reached a peak in 2016 when film productions supported by public funding reached the goal of at least 50% women in all these positions. This peak must be interpreted as the culmination of a long struggle for gender equality, initially driven by women film workers who have organized since the 1970s, and since 2000 promoted by government issued policies. Despite reaching the 5050 quota, several scandals regarding discrimination have occurred recently. In that same peak year, 2016, SF Studios—one of the major film-producing companies in Sweden, and with a history dating back to the late 1910s—was shaken by a series of revelations of overt sexism (Boger 2016). And similar to many other countries

\(^1\) The efforts undertaken by the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) on the matter of gender equality, most notably the goal of a 5050 distribution, reached a peak in 2016 when film productions supported by public funding reached the goal of at least 50% women in all these positions. This peak must be interpreted as the culmination of a long struggle for gender equality, initially driven by women film workers who have organized since the 1970s, and since 2000 promoted by government issued policies. Despite reaching the 5050 quota, several scandals regarding discrimination have occurred recently. In that same peak year, 2016, SF Studios—one of the major film-producing companies in Sweden, and with a history dating back to the late 1910s—was shaken by a series of revelations of overt sexism (Boger 2016). And similar to many other countries

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(see, e.g., Rich 2018; Cobb and Horeck 2018; Sørensen 2018), the #metoo movement in Sweden would soon disclose the extent of sexual harassment in the film and TV industries. These events display a lacuna in the gender equality efforts and suggest that gender equality in numbers may not be enough to transform the working conditions of women film workers to the extent that is often assumed.

However, the long tradition of government-initiated gender equality measures and a well-established public discourse on gender equality, along with high numbers of women behind the camera, make the Swedish film industry an ideal case for a novel approach to studying gender equality: to analyze women’s experiences of working in a film industry where gender equality efforts have been implemented.

Previous studies of gender equality in the film industry have contributed with various quantitative measures of the number of women in different positions, as well as differences between women and men regarding budget size, ticket sales, quality of networks, etc. (see, e.g., Bielby and Bielby 1996; Grugulis and Stoyanova 2012; Smith et al. 2013; Lauzen 2019). Other studies have focused on impediments to gender equality such as conflicts with women’s care work and the dominance of men in decision-making positions (Sørensen 2010; Mark 2006). However, little is known about how gender equality measures actually affect women’s everyday experiences in the film industry. Based on in-depth interviews with women film workers, this chapter takes an overarching grip on the current state of gender equality in the Swedish film industry. We depart from the theoretical assumption that rules and norms governing the film industry, including those connected to gender equality reforms (Jansson 2016, 2017), provide an institutional context within which film workers have to navigate in their work. The aim of our chapter is to investigate how women film workers experience their day-to-day practice in an industry where gender equality has been promoted for almost 20 years. We are interested in knowing what institutional arrangements give rise to opportunities or problems, and in what way women’s experiences give rise to counterstrategies and resistance.

**Gender and the Swedish Film Industry**

Government support has provided an important contribution to the funding of film productions since 1963 when a film support scheme (“Filmavtalet”) was introduced. In 2000, the government tasked the
Swedish Film Institute to promote gender equality, and in 2006, a formal goal of an equal share of women and men on the key creative roles of director, scriptwriter and producers was set. Despite the fact that this goal was inserted in an agreement signed by representatives of the film industry, several industry stakeholders considered it to be in conflict with already existing objectives to produce quality film that reached a considerable number of ticket buyers. Media coverage reveals how some industry representatives and journalists have argued that gender equality is counterproductive to producing quality film (see, e.g., Nordström 2015). Others argue that women film workers have to stop whining and do their thing instead of leaning on gender-specific benefits (see, e.g., Sigander 2010). The CEO of the Film Institute, Anna Serner, has been targeted in media for promoting “quotas” before quality, and editorials have argued that her gender “stalinism” endangers the arms-length principle in cultural policy (see, e.g., Helmersson 2018). To conclude, as the number of women behind the camera has increased in Sweden, so has the critique of the gender equality measures. In this context, it is interesting to note that the first three among the top ten Swedish films in the Swedish Film Institute’s quality ranking since 2007 have a woman as director: Amanda Kernell’s Sami Blood/Sameblod (2016), Anna Hodell’s The Reunion/Återträffen (2013) and Lisa Aschan’s She Monkeys/Apfilmorna (2011) (SFI 2019).

While being contested, the gender equality reform has led to an increase of women behind the camera in the three key creative roles: director, scriptwriter and producer. In feature-length fiction, the average share of women directors and scriptwriters in 1996–1999 was 20% and producers 16% (SFI 2008), and in 2013–2017, the average share of women was 38% directors, 34% scriptwriters and 52% producers. The figures vary over the years, and the share of directors hit an all-time low of 7% in 2012 and an all-time high in 2017 with 40% women directors in all feature-length fiction film releases (SFI 2018; see also Fig. 1). Films with production support from the Swedish Film Institute have generally done better in terms of share of women behind the camera than films without such support. In absolute numbers, feature-length film releases in Sweden have varied between 40 and 50 per year since 2000, including both fiction and documentaries, which means that in the peak year of 2017, 10 out of 25 fiction films had a woman director, and in 2012, only 2 out of 30 fiction films had a woman director.
Regarding budgets, feature-length fiction films with women directors between 2013 and 2016 had on average a budget ranging between 66 and 86% of the budget for films with a man as director. For documentaries, a slightly different pattern emerges where films with women directors sometimes have larger budgets than those with men directors, and films with women directors range from 72 to 115% of the budgets for films with men directors (SFI 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016a). However, on average, the Swedish Film Institute concludes: “In all key functions women generally have overall lower budgets than men” (SFI 2018, p. 17). Most significantly, the largest effect on difference in budgets depends on the gender of the main protagonist: films with a male lead have on average a 33% higher budget than films with a woman lead.

Films with women in any key creative role have also significantly lower budgets for launching which means that women’s films are distributed in fewer cinema theaters and hence attract fewer ticket buyers. The distribution of films with female directors is more likely to be made by distributors focusing on so-called quality film, like the non-for-profit distributor Folkets Bio, who has a large share of films with women directors and women protagonists (Jansson and Bivald 2013; SFI 2018).
Institutions and Experiences

In order to analyze women’s experiences and how they are related to film policy, we turn to feminist institutionalism. Institutional theory defines institutions as formal and informal rules, norms and praxis that govern an organization or a field, in our case the Swedish film industry. Feminist institutionalism is used to understand how norms and rules affect gender relations, and how they change, most commonly due to gender equality reforms (Krook and Mackay 2010). A basic assumption in feminist institutional theory is that all institutions and organizations are gendered. This is to say that gender equality reforms do not create gender relations; rather, they aim to change already established gender relations and patterns (see, e.g., Mackay 2014).

In a previous study, Jansson has pointed to concerns regarding the design of Swedish gender equality reforms, for instance that they were limited to targeting an increase in the number of women, arguing that this would also affect working conditions and the content of films, and that the reforms were not anchored among the stakeholders in the industry (Jansson 2016). In addition, rather than transforming policy, gender equality was added to previously existing norms. These factors have affected the possibilities for the reforms to reshape gender relations, as they increased their “nested newness,” i.e., the risk of being trumped by other values or routines (Skeije and Teigen 2003; Mackay 2014). The reforms have also produced dilemmas and paradoxes which women film workers have been forced to handle. For instance, individual women are often portrayed as tokens of gender equality, or seen as representatives of their gender, rather than as individual filmmakers (Jansson 2017). This means that women constantly have to deal with how to work in, relate to, and navigate an industry that is formed by long-standing male dominance, but at the same time is constructed as gender equal.

To explore the ways women experience this situation, we have interviewed 21 women active in the film industry in various positions: directors, scriptwriters, actors, producers and continuity supervisors. The interviews took place either at our office at the Department of Media Studies, conveniently located in Filmhuset, which is a well-known venue for all Swedish film workers (and where the Swedish Film Institute is seated), or at a venue chosen by the interviewee. The interviews lasted on average around one hour and 15 minutes, but they varied between
50 minutes and three hours. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. All interviews were made in Swedish, and we are responsible for the translation of the quotes used in this text. To provide background and context, we use public record material as well as policy documents and statistics from the Swedish Film Institute.

Allowing the experiences of women film workers to be the starting point for an analysis of the Swedish film industry means that we let their everyday observations set our agenda, and that we theorize their experiences in order to understand how the current institutional setup is reflected in their day-to-day lives (see Smith 1987). Working with the interviews, we realized that many of the women were—explicitly or implicitly—telling us about strategies they had developed. These strategies were based on previous experiences and an acquired “sense” of how the film industry works. Hence, identifying strategies could be used to understand how different official and unofficial institutions, i.e., norms, rules and regulations, play out in gendered ways.

Below, we present three themes that were frequently addressed in the interviews. The first theme deals with the interviewees’ experiences of portraying a female protagonist; the second theme deals with gendered experiences from being on the set; and the third theme deals with experiences of funding film production.

**Negotiating Female Protagonists**

The interviewed women experience a constant questioning of why they want to focus on women in their films. A senior interviewee tells a story about how the first CEO of the Swedish Film Institute, Harry Schein, resented her first film, because “who would want to see a film about two ladies in their 60s?” As the film went on to win a price at the Cannes festival (1977), and was sold to fourteen countries overnight, Schein had to swallow his pride and host a reception. Another director tells us about how she was criticized for excluding male characters from her film. This was her first film, featuring four young women of different ethnicities in key roles. While there are two male characters, the protagonist’s intimate relationships are all with other women. As the film was being discussed with financers and producers, the question was if it should be marketed as an “all-women” film, and the male characters removed, or if more men should be added to make the film more mainstream. Her choice to keep the two men was conscious, but nevertheless provocative: “There
are men, but apparently not enough,” she tells us, yet, for her, “this film didn’t need any more men.”

Adding to the problem of making films about women, many of the interviewees tell stories about getting comments on the way they wanted to portray their female characters. While they strived to make their women protagonists into complex individuals, financiers, producers and distributors would question their decisions and request more stereotypical portrayals. One director tells us how she had been involved in strenuous discussions regarding the female protagonist in her most recent film, and concludes:

Well, generally, women characters are being questioned so much more, but that is because men have a much bigger register of accepted behaviors and expressions. It is very much about the woman being likeable, someone [a man] has to be interested in her. Likeability also spilled over in the choice of actor: the producer emphasized the importance of her being sexually attractive, and here, our interviewee had to give in. Yet, during the discussions about the script and the character development, she met a lot of resistance regarding the female protagonist’s sexual history: “They just couldn’t take that the protagonist had had four abortions, it was as if that was completely unthinkable for a ballet dancer.” Another director describes how her protagonist was not considered credible when yelling at her boss, and how depictions of female friendship had to follow a specific script to be considered reasonable.

A director/scriptwriter who has made some 20 films encountered a related, but different, problem. In her most recent film, she uses a female voice-over who speaks to and interacts with the male character. When applying for EU funding, the committee dismissed her application with the argument that “the [female] voiceover was provocative and bossy, and they felt sorry for the poor man who was controlled by this voice.” This suggests that a female character is expected to be portrayed as submissive (or at least relatively subjected) to the male characters on screen, and to depict (or in this case use a voice of) a woman that breaks with current conventions makes it more difficult to finance the film.

Several of the interviewees work to avoid sexualizing and objectifying female characters and talk about how they want to create a safe space for women actors. They need to feel comfortable during shooting and
once the film is being screened. Such care not to sexualize women may, however, be understood as making the film less attractive. As the director who applied for EU funding was told when applying for funding from the French Film Institute, the film did not “visually exploit the fact that one of the characters was a prostitute. I didn’t show her naked in the film.”

There seem to be certain fixed notions about how women on screen must be presented in order to pass as credible and likeable. Representations of women are circumscribed by a (hetero)normative mind-set that dictates that female characters must be emotionally credible and submissive, or at least subjected, in relation to men on screen. A female protagonist also has to be desirable and sexually available for the male character. More than 40 years after the first wave of feminist film criticism unpacked the sexist and misogynist stereotyping governing mainstream cinema (Rosen 1973; Haskell 1974; Mulvey 1975), women protagonists are still being circumscribed and delimited under the umbrella of female likeability. Women on screen have to be likeable because financers and producers believe that this is what the audience wants. Regarding the norms for portraying women, gender equality efforts have so far fallen short. Wanting to depict complex female characters is obviously still difficult.

On the Set

A quite different topic is how women experience the production site. Long hours on the set are difficult to combine with caring for children, and one of the directors had decided to work shorter days in order to make life more reasonable. She was a single mother when she made one of her films and it just was not possible to work long hours. However, the decision to cut hours had economic consequences: “And then, how can we afford that? Well, let’s take out some shots to make it cheaper. We can use more black frames instead!” This solution was in line with the aesthetics she used and was a creative way to make ends meet in the private sphere and on the set. However, it is also an example of how women resist complying with established norms.

As to the work environment on site, a former director, now involved in film education, tells us that the film set is (still) a “playground for the chaps,” and several of the interviewees speak of different kinds of unwanted sexual attention. For a director, as for all professions demanding authority, sexual attention is problematic, not only for being
unwanted, but also because it undermines authority, control and agency, since the construction of heterosexual relations renders women as objects and as subjected to men. In her book Ravinen (2007), director Lisa Ohlin writes about the way her authority was questioned on set, as for example, via deep sighs, rolling eyes, but also, of how one actor once grabbed his “package” when receiving instructions from her. We understand these examples as demonstrations to restore male superiority on a set led by a woman. This kind of behavior is discussed in several interviews and is often explained in terms of the actors’ vulnerability on the set. Actors are exposed to intense visibility and they know that large audiences may see the result. In addition, they are often being corrected by the director and others, leading to repeated takes. This renders them vulnerable and is thus interpreted as a mitigating circumstance when talking about (male) actors (harassing) behavior toward their colleagues in the crew. However, cross-read with dominant ideas about men as being in charge and as holders of the gaze, the descriptions of vulnerability reveal how male actors on a film set with a woman in charge are deprived of core masculinity features. Hence, challenging women directors’ authority can be understood as a way to reclaim masculinity.

The many strategies developed and deployed by women to counter challenges to their authority reveal how constructions of femininity are opposed to authority, and how attributes of femininity such as pleasantness and emotionality must be hidden: “I try to be grumpy, not to smile,” says one director. She tells us that presenting herself as unavailable is an effective way of making people follow her lead. The same director says that she can get very emotional at times when a scene turns out well, and that she then asks her cinematographer to step in to talk to the crew. She does not want them to see how affected she is, because that would put her authority at risk. These strategies are examples of hiding behaviors that may be interpreted as feminine and thus as signs of weakness. Other strategies make use of the current constructions of gender norms. For instance, one of the interviewees says that she allows men to think they are in charge, when they actually are not: “I may find ways to make them think that it was their idea.” This strategy seemingly contradicts the idea of authority, while it demonstrates the need to be pragmatic in order to make the crew do as you want.

A third category of strategies is to speak up and explicitly address anticipated or experienced problems, and one example is the publication of the book, Ravinen, quoted above. Another example is the director who tells
us that she has decided to make a “list of rules to follow” to be distributed to the crew for her next film project. This, she says, is a measure of prevention. Hence, she expects to encounter certain problems and chooses to formulate and make her expectations explicit to the crew by distributing the list. To explicitly address work environment problems, in a book or by a list, is also an effort to change and resist the norms developed as a result of a long-standing male dominance.

**Funding**

While stories about how to depict women and how to navigate on the set are quite similar among the interviewees, the topic of funding displays more varied experiences. Several interviews address the question of economic survival. “You have to work a lot for free,” one filmmaker says, pinpointing an experience shared by many. How to get by, and to support children, is a constant worry, and many interviewees have jobs on the side. A different, but equally important, problem is to garner funds to finance film projects. A director, who has been making low-budget films since the early 1970s, puts it in clear text when she says: “It is getting the dough that is the problem!”

One interviewee tells us that she has “… produced films by the credit card model … that is, I always had a new film in the loop in order to pay for the previous one.” She also discusses how policy and technical development have changed film economy: “In the 1970s, we owned our own companies and had control over our resources.” According to her, the dependency on financiers has increased, a fact that also affects what kind of films will be produced. The relation between funders and filmmakers is also discussed in terms of budget size. Everyone seems to agree that the smaller the budget, the greater the freedom: “It is a low budget film … they have not put in so much money, so they are not allowed to decide that much.” Another director, working with larger budgets, corroborates this belief when she tells us about how the producer of her most recent film withheld information about the finances, which made it difficult for her to adjust the film to the budget, while still maintaining her own artistic voice.

These examples indicate that funding is closely related to the way that projects are run. In some projects, the director has participated in everything from fundraising and script writing to post-production and distribution. However, we have also interviewed directors who have
mainly worked in big productions headed by large production companies. These directors are contacted when a script and funding already exists. One of these, a director who has made several feature films, tells us that her part in fundraising is to sit in on meetings with the Swedish Film Institute to “assure them that the film will be realized with quality.” Her name and experience contribute to sealing the deal with the Swedish Film Institute.

Most women involved in raising money pinpoint how this is complicated, but we have noted a difference where the more senior women seem to have a particularly difficult time to get money to do their next film. Several of them have encountered the argument that they are not granted money because the film they want to do is just a repetition, accusing them of doing the same film over and over again. Some interviewees bring up ageism and believe that it is because of them now being “old women [hags],” that they are being excluded. They have been successful as directors, making several critically acclaimed films, and some have also occupied important positions (e.g., as commissioner at the Swedish Film Institute), yet they are now “precluded.” Several of our senior interviewees have worked with public service TV (SVT) and relied on them for funding, but now, they say, “SVT is not interested.” These experiences reflect a number of the organizational changes that have occurred during the last couple of decades: the increased importance of commercial values at the expense of critical documentaries and art film; the fact that larger production companies have consolidated their presence by buying smaller companies, a process that also has been endorsed by Swedish film policy (Jansson and Bivald 2013); and the status between TV and film has changed in favor of television. As one of our interviewees argues, nowadays the big money is in TV series and that: “television is the new male bastion, most TV-series have male conceptual directors.” In addition, the gender equality measures have often favored younger talents.

Combined, these changes favor a specific type of content, which requires a specific type of filmmaker: “you must be able to tell stories like The Wire or Bron (The Bridge), i.e. the sellable stuff.” In an environment where films with women as protagonists or directors are not considered to attract large audiences, these developments erode the funding possibilities for women who insist on producing critical documentaries or more artistic films. As the Swedish Film Institute to an extent focuses on new, young talents, senior women have an even harder time.
Concluding Remarks

This chapter has discussed the experiences of women film workers in Sweden, often described as the most gender equal film industry in the world. The aim was to explore the relation between women’s experiences and the institutional context as well as to identify women’s counterstrategies and resistance. In this section, we want to summarize by highlighting the links between the three themes—the female protagonist, experiences on the set and funding—and relate our results to the three gender equality goals: increased share of women behind the camera; portraying women and women’s stories on screen; and improving women’s working conditions in the film industry. We also want to address the counterstrategies and resistance deployed by the women we have interviewed.

The interviewees’ experiences reflect different developments in the film industry that have produced an institutional environment, which promotes a specific kind of film as well as a certain type of filmmakers (see also Neale 1981). As this chapter has shown, the women filmmakers who wish to portray women in complex and new ways, and counter to current conventions, experience problems. In addition, a female protagonist is linked to lower budgets, fewer screenings, lower PR budgets and less audience. Further, most of the interviewed women have experienced their authority on the set being challenged because of their gender. Often-times, the challenges are expressed through sexualized demonstrations, used to reclaim male supremacy. The vulnerability of women’s authority on the set increases due to changes in the power relations in the industry as large production companies and distributors have gained greater power. These general changes are also reflected in the gender equality work, for instance, in the recent efforts to have more women in key creative roles in film projects with the largest budgets (SFI 2016b). However, our interviews indicate that larger budgets mean circumscribed artistic control and lesser possibilities to break conventions. Hence, including women in more commercial productions will potentially increase the numbers of women behind the camera, but will not necessarily show women’s experiences and change the representations of gender on screen, nor will it automatically lead to better working conditions for women.

The gender equality efforts, as such, are also challenged by the developments in the industry. First, larger and stronger production companies, in combination with television’s increasing power, make the position of the Swedish Film Institute relatively weaker. This in turn impedes the
organization’s possibilities to enforce gender equality reforms. Second, gender equality efforts have so far not been able to change the norms in the industry regarding how gender should be portrayed on film, nor to change the macho culture on the set. However, the Swedish Film Institute and its gender equality work have been able to increase the number of women behind the camera. Additionally, gender equality measures have contributed to the development of small “pockets” in film production where women filmmakers are able to develop new narratives and new ways of displaying gender on screen. In these productions, women have also the possibility to set their own terms for how they want to make films.

The difficulties that women filmmakers encounter when wanting to represent gender differently indicate that they challenge current norms and conventions regarding how gender should be portrayed. So, too, do the strategies they deploy for creating a reasonable work environment on the set. Some of these strategies are developed for mere survival, and others are explicitly forward aiming. All of them hold the potential for change. Speaking up and addressing problems is one important strategy for change. Adjusting work hours to personal needs, rather than budgetary restrictions, runs counter to ideals of flexibility and the idealization of long working hours on the set as necessary for the artistic process. Arguing that running out of money means putting in more black frames in the film rather than working more hours without pay is a way to make harsh reality meet aesthetic development. However, resisting current norms has a price. Defying established ways to portray women causes problems with funding and voicing problems and injustices may lead to being ignored and excluded from new projects. Senior women who insist on working with films containing critical messages, or tell stories based on their own experiences, are continuously being rejected for not conforming to new ideals. However, we would like to argue that it is exactly in all of these unruly practices, undertaken by women who continue to struggle, that the hope for gender equality rests.

Note
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Iceland is renowned for gender equality and with good reason. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, president from 1980 to 1996, was the world’s first female president. When elected prime minister in 2009, Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir became the world’s first openly lesbian head of government. The current prime minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, is one of the youngest women to lead a European country. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), Iceland is the “world’s most gender-equal country,” ranking at number one for the tenth consecutive year by the end of 2018 (WEF 2018, viii). WEF appraises various social, political and economic factors, including equal access to health care and education, potential for economic independence, education, political representation and individual well-being. Iceland did especially well in political empowerment and wage equality for similar work, ranking at number one globally, as well as showing good results in matters such as economic participation and opportunity (WEF 2018, 121). These results, heartening as they are, need to be understood historically and would seem to be, in part at least, the legacy of social-democratic reforms undertaken in the wake of the Second World War, which aligned Iceland’s social and political position with what has
come to be known as the “Nordic welfare state”—a conclusion supported by the fact that four of the five highest-performing countries in the index are Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland (WEF 2018, 27).

Since the first edition of the WEF index in 2006, Iceland has continuously remained one of the fastest-improving countries in the world. Yet, in spite of these achievements in gender equality, women’s presence in the film industry is peripheral. The first Icelandic feature-length narrative film, *Milli fjalls og fjöru* (*Between Mountain and Shore*, Loftur Guðmundsson), premiered in 1949, and by the end of 2019, the total number of Icelandic features having received theatrical distribution came to 209, not an unimpressive number for a nation whose population was barely 140,000 in 1949 and had risen to just over 360,000 in the last quarter of 2019.

When it comes to the current state of the Icelandic film industry, looking at the total filmic output from 1949 to 2019 in isolation can be somewhat misleading. It needs to be kept in mind that the new millennium has seen a virtual explosion in most areas of film production, while also being a period of unprecedented success. Icelandic films are exported abroad; we have raised the profile of the country as the site of a fairly vibrant national cinema; Icelandic films are welcomed in festivals; and individual films regularly gain distribution across Europe, something that was a rare occurrence in the previous periods.

However, according to a report published by Statistics Iceland in 2018, men had directed 90% of the 191 films released by the end of 2017, meaning that female directors were only responsible for one-tenth of the nation’s cinematic output (Tíundu hverri 2018). If the films released in 2018 and 2019 are taken into account—i.e., the period since the report was published—these numbers do not change. The growth of the Icelandic film industry in the past two decades has not translated into more opportunities for women. Indeed, the numbers show that in the midst of the most productive and successful period in Icelandic film history, the productivity of women in the industry is declining.

In what follows, a brief overview of Icelandic film history will be provided with an emphasis on women’s position within it, as a response to the lack of academic writing on the subject. For reasons of brevity, this section will focus primarily on female directors. The literature on Icelandic filmmaking and film history is limited, to be sure, but there is a notable lack of discussion of films by women in historical overviews of Icelandic cinema, which tend to emphasize the lack of films by Icelandic women rather than the important contributions made by them. The
historical context will facilitate the examination of women’s place within the industry, which will be followed by a review of the measures that have been and continue to be taken to increase gender equality in the film industry.

It is important to note that almost no research has been conducted hitherto on women in the Icelandic film industry. Thus, in preparation for this chapter, interviews were conducted with women filmmakers, WIFT in Iceland and the Icelandic Film Centre, in addition to contacting the census office, the Ministry of Education and the head of the Film Studies Department at the University of Iceland, in order to answer the many questions that arose. In order to be able to give as clear a picture as possible of women’s involvement in the industry, each of the 209 films made in Iceland since 1949 was tracked down on the two most extensive databases available on Icelandic filmmaking. The name and position of each woman recorded as contributing to each production was listed. The statistics provided in what follows are limited to the information available on these databases.1

**A Brief Overview of Icelandic Film Herstory**

In order to understand the position of women in the Icelandic film industry, it is important to situate them historically within the field. Icelandic film history can be divided into two different periods, before and after the founding of the Icelandic Film Fund (IFF) in 1978. The fund was intended to protect Icelandic culture through the subsidization of film production—at this point, a consensus had been reached about the importance of Icelandic cinema for the national identity and the necessity for films shot in Iceland, in Icelandic, and taking Icelandic society and history as its subject matter. This was a significant moment for Icelandic filmmakers, who were now able to devote themselves to making films to a far greater extent (Norðfjörð 2015, pp. 309–310). The responsibilities of the IFF were taken on by the Icelandic Film Centre when it was founded in 2003, which, in addition to being the sole source of institutional funding for Icelandic filmmakers domestically, also has the role of promoting Icelandic films abroad, as well as supporting domestic film festivals, courses and workshops, with the goal of building up Icelandic film culture (About the Icelandic Film Centre). At least one feature-length film has been made each year after 1980 and sometimes as many as
seven, with the yearly average growing still higher in the new millennium (Tíundu hverri 2018).

Before the establishment of the IFF, Icelandic filmmaking was a struggling industry, when it wasn’t non-existent. Considering that national cinema had its beginnings at the turn of the twentieth century in the USA and many European countries—among them some of Iceland’s Nordic neighbors—Icelandic filmmaking had a late start. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, foreign filmmakers visited the country several times, producing so-called scenics or travelogues, capturing the somewhat exotic scenery and the Icelandic people on film. These types of documentary films became even more popular in the 1920s and 1930s, and it was during those decades that Icelanders joined the ranks of these documentary filmmakers (Norðfjörð 2005, pp. 33–34). During the Second World War, foreign film crews stopped frequenting the country, and after Iceland gained its independence from Denmark in 1944, Icelandic documentarians dominated the industry.

While countries like Sweden and Denmark had started making full-length narrative films in 1913, the first Icelandic narrative film was released in 1949, and five more were made over the course of the 1950s. Subsequently, there was a dramatic decrease in the production of feature-length films, as the 1960s and 1970s yielded only two narrative features, one in each decade. The only film directed by an Icelandic woman during this early period was Svala Hannesdóttir’s Ágirnd (Greed, 1952), and, until recently, almost no one seems to have been aware that this film was directed by Hannesdóttir, who also co-wrote the pantomime it was based on. The reason is a long-standing tradition of attributing it to its cinematographer, Óskar Gíslason, who also edited and produced the film. Unlike Gíslason, who was also the period’s most prolific director, Hannesdóttir, a theater actress, did not make any other films before or after Ágirnd premiered in Reykjavík on December 6, 1952. Her film did, however, make some waves.

After its opening weekend, screenings of this highly expressionistic film were suspended following accusations of blasphemy and moral corruption. This was a rare occurrence, and the only known example of a film screening being stopped in Iceland in the period (Tómasdóttir 2018, p. 112). What caused the controversy was the film’s sensational subject matter—primarily its depiction of a priest stealing a necklace from a woman’s dead body and hiding it in a bible. After Ágirnd had been scrutinized by representatives of the police, the Ministry of Culture and the
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Ministry of Education, the screenings continued, despite “the detestable mind-set” apparent in the film’s obscene portrayal of the pastor, as was reported in a newspaper article published on December 9, 1952. That the film is based on a story by a young Icelandic girl “beggars belief,” the article’s author adds, referring to Hannesdóttir (Glæpakvikmyndin 1952, pp. 1, 7).

Although Ágirnd is only thirty-five minutes long and thus does not qualify as a feature-length film, it is worth noting that exactly thirty years passed until an Icelandic woman directed another narrative film. The first feature-length film by a woman premiered in Reykjavík over Easter Holidays in 1982. Icelandic artist Róska wrote and co-directed the film Sóley, also known as The Hidden People of the Shadowy Rocks, along with her husband, Manrico Pavolettoni. The 107-minute feature never seemed to gain a proper foothold in Icelandic film history, rarely being screened after its initial theatrical run and never being released on a home viewing format, but it is presently being restored by Róska’s family in collaboration with the Icelandic Film Museum. Sóley is, in many ways, a traditional Icelandic film, in that it draws upon folktales and myths, and takes place in the Icelandic wilderness. It portrays Iceland in former times, with its hardships and lawlessness, codes of honor and supernatural beings. To an extent, this historical setting aligns Róska’s film with some of the more prevalent themes dealt with in Icelandic films in the two decades following the founding of IFF.

In addition to Róska, four female directors emerged in the 1980s, each of them making one film. Three of those were produced by Umbi, a production company founded by Guðný Halldórsvík in 1983, as she was writing the script to its first production, Skilaboð til Söndru (A Message to Sandra, 1983), a comedy directed by Kristín Pálsdóttir. Another female-directed film was released later that year, Kristín Jóhannespólsdóttir’s Á hjara veraldar (Rainbow’s End), a surrealist film that could be compared to Ágirnd due to its stylized acting and theatrical style. Statistically, 1983 was an excellent year for female directors in Iceland, who directed 50% of the feature-length narrative films released in that year, which only amounted to a total number of four.

Historically, however, 1986 turned out to be a more important year for female filmmakers because of Pórhildur Porleifsdóttir’s Stella í Orlofi (Icelandic Shock Station), a film that struck a chord with the nation and still stands as one of the most popular and frequently quoted films in Icelandic film history. Stella í orlofi was the first Icelandic film about

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a woman to be written, directed and produced by women. A perfect example of the comedy of errors, the film’s farcical plot, powerful female protagonist and appeal to the whole family drew (and continues to draw) a much larger audience than the other films directed by women over the course of the decade—films that were more serious, either containing more adult material or handling its subject matter in a more poetic fashion. Finally, after producing and writing the script to both Skilaböð til Söndru and Stella í orlofi, Halldórsdóttir directed Kristnihald undir jökli (Under the Glacier) in 1989, an adaptation of a novel by her father, Nobel Prize-winning author, Halldór Laxness.

Two of these directors did not go on making movies in the 1990s, while Róskà, a radical-leftist and militantly feminist artist, made documentaries throughout the 1980s. She focused on painting and visual art until she passed away in 1996, then only fifty-six years old. Þorleifsdóttir left the film industry for a political career after directing Stella í orlofi and represented the Women’s List in parliament from 1987 to 1991, before becoming the artistic director of the Reykjavik City Theatre. In the 1990s, Halldórsdóttir went on to both write and direct Karlakórininn Hekla (The Men’s Choir, 1992), another much-beloved comedy. That same year, Jóhannesdóttir made her second feature, Svo á jörðu sem á himni (As in Heaven, 1992), before abandoning filmmaking for a career in the theater. 1992 turned out to be an important year in the history of women’s filmmaking in Iceland. On the one hand, four female-directed films were released, while only two films by Icelandic male directors premiered that year, a ratio that has not been seen since. On the other, Ásdís Thoroddsen’s debut, Ingalò (Ingalo, 1992), was selected for the prestigious Semaine de la critique at Cannes and did very well on the festival circuit, was screened at twenty-eight festivals in sixteen countries, and bought for television in France, Germany and India, among other countries (Ingaló).

Despite it being statistically the most equal decade for women in Icelandic filmmaking, only two more films directed by women were released before the millennium. Thoroddsen directed Draumadísir (Dream Hunters, 1996), which turned out to be her last narrative film, despite Ingaló’s success. Ungfrúin góða og húsið (Honour of the House), Halldórsdóttir’s third film, followed in 1999, a period piece based on another of her father’s works. Halldórsdóttir made two more films over the next decade. In 2002, she wrote and directed a sequel to Stella í
orlofi, titled Stella í framboði (Stella for Office), and her final film to date Vedramót (The Quiet Storm) premiered in 2007.

Out of the four female directors who emerged on the scene during the 2000s, three went on to make more than one film. The Icelandic-French director and screenwriter Sólveig Anspach had an impressive career as a director of both narrative films and documentaries, which took off in France in the 1990s and sadly ended in 2015, when she passed away at age 54. Her first Icelandic-French feature film, Stormvíðri (Stormy Weather, 2003), was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in the Un Certain Regard section in 2003 and her next feature, the comedy Skrapp út (Back Soon), followed in 2008. Silja Hauksdóttir’s debut, the romantic comedy Dis (Dis), premiered in 2004. Her second feature, Agnes Joy, followed fifteen years later, in 2019. Valdís Óskarsdóttir, who has had a very successful career as a film editor since the eighties, directed two comedies during this first decade of the new millennium, Sveitabrúðkaup (Country Wedding, 2008) and Kóngavegur (King’s Road, 2010).

The five years following the release of Kóngavegur saw a drastic decrease in Icelandic films directed by women. With the exception of one feature co-directed by a woman in 2011, no female-directed films premiered in Iceland until in 2016, when Anspach’s final film, Sundáhrifin (aka L’effet aquatique) (The Together Project), was released posthumously. The film received a standing ovation at its world premiere in the Director’s Fortnight section at Cannes and was awarded the SACD Prize at the festival. Since 2016, four Icelandic female directors have made their debuts and one her second feature, directing five of the twenty-three features released in the years 2017–2019. In 2017, two films centering on the familiar Icelandic topic of the “problem” child were released. These films draw on the tradition, prevalent for the greater part of the twentieth century, of sending children who either had difficulties at home, or were themselves difficult, to the countryside, in the hope that the fresh air and proximity to nature would help them grow into strong, capable adults. While both films share an affinity with the supernatural, the directors approach this topic distinctively, with Guðrún Ragnarsdóttir’s drama Sumarbörn (Summer Children) appealing to younger audiences while Ása Helga Hjörleifsdóttir’s literary adaptation Svanurinn (The Swan) is more lyrical in its rendering of a young girl’s inner world.

Two of the three films by women released since 2018 deal with issues of immigration and racism, albeit in extremely different ways. Ásthildur
Kjartansdóttir’s Tryggð (Deposit, 2019) deals with the limits of compassion and tolerance toward illegal immigrants using allegory, while Ísold Uggadóttir takes a social-realist approach in her debut, Andið eðlilega (And Breathe Normally, 2018), a drama centered on queer female protagonists and the refugee crisis, which has become all-too-prevalent in modern Western societies. Uggadóttir, who has been active in the film industry since 2006, received the directing award for Andið eðlilega in the category World Cinema Dramatic at the Sundance Film Festival in 2018.

Hauksdóttir’s Agnes Joy (2019), the last female-directed feature released by the end of the 2010s, comments on racism as well, since Agnes Joy, a teenage girl adopted by an Icelandic family from the Philippines, is presumed to be a foreign prostitute by a man encountering her with her older boyfriend. However, this comedy-drama centers on difficult family relations, emphasizing the strained relationship between the Agnes and her mother, who is trapped in small town and a loveless marriage, as both of them fall for the philandering actor who lives next door.

WHERE ARE ALL THE WOMEN? THE FILM INDUSTRY FOLLOWING THE FINANCIAL COLLAPSE

Since the beginning of feature film production in Iceland in 1949, women have directed or co-directed 28 films, as compared to the 189 films directed or co-directed by men, making women roughly one out of ten directors of feature-length films. While 2011 was the most prolific year in Icelandic film history in terms of titles released, with ten films premiering domestically, only one of those ten films was co-directed by a woman. Contrary to what might be expected, women directors have statistically directed fewer films in the second decade of the new millennium than they did in previous years. The 1990s stands as the most bounteous decade for female feature filmmakers, with women directing 20% of all feature films, while women directed merely 6% of the total feature films premiering in 2010–2017 (Tíundu hverri 2018).

The reasons for this decline in films by female directors might become clearer in the coming decades, but at this point one cause seems most probable: the financial collapse that occurred in Iceland in 2008. A report published in 2011 by Velferðarvaktin, an independent observer entrusted by the government with monitoring and analyzing the impact of the financial collapse, notes research showing that during economic
crises women experience more difficulty regaining employment than males (Bjarnadóttir and Árnadóttir 2011, p. 50). The report shows that while males became unemployed at a faster rate following the economic collapse, they had more success regaining employment than women who lost their job during the crisis once the economy stabilized (Bjarnadóttir and Árnadóttir 2011, p. 47).

In effort to decrease unemployment following the collapse, the Icelandic government allocated resources to generating work for its citizens. As noted in the 2011 report by Velferðarvaktin, the jobs created were primarily within male-dominated industries, such as the construction industry, but one of the measures taken involved increasing tax reimbursements in the film industry. This is a major reason for the growth that occurred within the Icelandic film industry in the years following the economic crash. In those years, sixty-two films by male directors were released, one of which was co-directed by a woman. The average number of films directed or co-directed by women went down to one every two years, with only one film by a female director and one co-directed by a woman being released in the seven-year period between 2009 and 2016. While the total number of films by male directors released between 2009 and 2019 is eighty-four, women directed or co-directed eight films during the period.

It is important to take into consideration the fact that women have always occupied a marginal place within the Icelandic film industry. However, the incremental growth that could be seen from 1980 to 2009 came to halt following the economic crash. This can be seen in the overall presence of women in the industry. Although the increase in the number of women in the film industry has never been equal to the expansion of the industry itself, each decade between 1980 and 2009 has brought an increase in the number of women working within the different areas women have traditionally occupied within the Icelandic film industry: that of assistant director, line producer, production manager, script supervisor, film editor as well as the various positions in the art department; hair and makeup, costume design, production design, art direction, set decoration, set dresser and props.

The total production of films in the 1980s amounted to twenty-eight feature films, five were directed by women, nine had a female assistant director, seven were edited by women and the number of women active in the hair and makeup departments was ten, seventeen women worked in the costume department, and eleven were script supervisors. In the
1990s, the films released increased by 18% while the increase in female-directed films amounted to 20%. There was an 89% increase in films with a female assistant director and a 40% increase in films written by women, which now amounted to seven out of a total of thirty-three films. The number of female script supervisors, now a total of seventeen, increased by 55% while women working in hair and makeup departments tripled and women production designers increased in number by two to seven.

The 2000s brought a 70% increase in film output, a total of fifty-six films, with a 50% increase in films directed by women. The number of films with a female assistant director continued to increase by 47%, the number of female scriptwriters tripled, and the number of films edited by women went up from six in the 1990s to seventeen. This indicates that while the overall filmic output rose considerably over the last couple of decades, women’s involvement in the industry rose as well, at least incrementally, in tandem. Unfortunately, this increase of women working in film has slowed down, and in many cases reversed, in the course of the 2010s.

While there continues to be a general lack of women working in the more technical aspects of the film industry—for example, there is only one female sound mixer in Iceland and women have been in charge of the cinematography of only three Icelandic films since 1980—some of the country’s most renowned editors are women who have also been successful abroad. Elísabet Ronaldsdóttir has edited works as diverse as the popular Icelandic television series Ófærð (Trapped, Baltasar Kormákur, 2015–) and the US film Atomic Blonde (David Leitch, 2017), and Valdís Óskarsdóttir has edited films such as the Danish Festen (The Celebration, Thomas Vinterberg, 1998) and Michel Gondry’s The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004). The greatest increase in 2000–2009 can be seen in the number of female producers, which rose from three to twenty, the number of films produced by women increasing sixfold.

Although the total number of films released in 2010–2019 increased by 55%, rising from fifty-six to eighty-seven, the number of women involved in the industry declined, with the notable exception of women producers, who have more than doubled in number from the previous decade. Women-directed films declined by more than 22%, with a 30% decrease in the number of assistant directors active in the industry. Films written by women dropped by 15% while the number of women script supervisors dropped by 25%, amounting to fifteen—a figure surpassed
in the 1990s—and the number of female line producers and production managers dropped by 30%.

Although the reason for the recent decrease in women’s involvement in filmmaking can, at least in part, be understood in the context of the country’s financial collapse in 2009 and the subsequent strengthening of the network of male dominance, there is still the matter of the marginality of women in the industry in the decades prior, despite the many successful steps taken toward gender equality in other realms of society. In the interviews conducted for this article, the Icelandic film industry was often characterized as male-centric—in hospitable, even hostile, to women in positions of power. It is at any rate clear that women filmmakers, even if initially successful, have found it difficult to sustain careers within the industry. Kristín Jóhannesdóttir made two feature films in the 1980s and 1990s before abandoning filmmaking for a career as a theater director, and despite Ingaló’s success at home and abroad, Ásdís Thoroddsen only made one subsequent narrative film. Even the most successful and prolific of Icelandic women directors, Guðný Halldórsdóttir has not made a film since 2007, despite repeated attempts to get projects off the ground.

While the short-lived careers of female directors and the lack of women in most of the key positions in the industry was enough to raise concern about the career sustainability for women in Icelandic film production, the recent #metoo-movement has shown beyond the shadow of a doubt that women are not treated equally in the film industry. The next chapter will explore the biggest problems within the industry as well as the institutional and governmental actions undertaken and planned to make female presence in the industry more viable.

**Getting Women Involved**

In an interview published in 2015, Laufey Guðjónsdóttir, director of the Icelandic Film Centre, discusses the lack of women applicants applying for funding from the Centre, which is the sole source of institutional funding for Icelandic filmmakers domestically. Noting that “the main problem […] is not that projects by male applicants are selected over the projects of women,” but female application is lower. Despite that, Guðjónsdóttir points out, women actually have a higher success rate when it comes to funding decisions (Guðmundsdóttir 2015). The IFC’s website provides statistics for the years 2013–2018 showing that women amount to a mere 20% of all applicants and that the approval rate for those years is
almost 70% for female directors, as opposed to 30% for male directors. According to IFC statistics provided for the year 2018, female directors enjoyed an 83% success rate when applying for production grants for narrative features, female screenwriters had a success rate of 75%, and women producers had a 60% success rate for feature-length films. However, applications by women only made up a little less than 30% of the applications received in 2018 (Gender Equality—Facts and Figures).

These statistics need to be understood in the context of the information that surfaced during the #metoo-movement. In November 2017, sixty-two stories by women in film and the performing arts were published, along with a statement signed by 583 industry women demanding that the government, theaters and production companies respond to the situation with changes in work processes and implementing a contingency plan (#tjaldið fellur #metoo #höfum hátt 2017). The experiences related by women in film involved wage inequality, sexual harassment, abuse of power by male supervisors and attempts of rape. The only direct consequence of these revelations can be seen in the dismissal of an instructor employed at the Icelandic Film School, the institution that was most frequently mentioned in the #metoo-stories shared by women in film industry as a site of inappropriate behavior, sexual harassment and sexism (Jóhannsson and Kjartansdóttir 2017). The indirect consequence, mentioned by many of those interviewed for this article, among them the IFC, is a changed attitude within the industry as well as society at large. However, this changed mind-set has yet to be translated into actual change for women in the industry.

The IFC has responded to the problem of a lack of women in film through change in policy. Every three to four years, the Icelandic government and the main filmmaking bodies make an agreement on general film policy, covering the total amount of state financial support for filmmaking for the relevant period. In the current agreement, valid for 2016–2019, “a special emphasis has been made on increasing the participation of women in key roles of film making” (Gender Equality—Facts and Figures). In its capacity as the main provider of financial support for Icelandic films, the IFC has encouraged its consultants to “keep in mind the criteria laid down in the Bechdel test, and to consider whether the script content of the projects they are evaluating promotes well-rounded, three-dimensional female characters” (Gender Equality). Applicants are asked to consider the Bechdel test criteria as well, before submitting their projects. Another method the Icelandic Film Centre has introduced, in an effort to ensure
the fair treatment of female applicants, is to have the initial evaluation of applications anonymous, removing the applicant’s name and other identifiable information from the documents given to consultants.

WIFT Iceland shares the IFC’s concerns about lack of female applicants and has responded to it with the only initiative currently in place to encourage women to enter the film industry, a program called “Girls Shoot.” The incentive for the Girls Shoot initiative was a 2015 report made by the Ministry of Education, which found that teenage boys dominated video clubs in high schools and that the vast majority of the films made by the boys were male-centered, only including girls in supporting roles, where they were objectified or sexualized by the boys who took creative control.7

In 2015, Dögg Mósesdóttir, then the director of WIFT Iceland, along with filmmaker Ása Helga Hjörleifsdóttir, organized the first Girls Shoot summer course, held in collaboration with the Icelandic Film School and Reykjavik International Film Festival (RIFF). Sixteen girls completed the course, making six short films that were screened at RIFF in October 2015 (Stuttmyndir stelpna 2015).8 The youngest group of girls participating in Girls Shoot is thirteen to fifteen years old, and courses are held for age groups up to thirty. The courses cover the basics of filmmaking: scriptwriting, directing, production, cinematography, editing and other technical aspects of finalizing a short film. A workshop for female filmmakers from the Nordic countries was held in October 2019 in collaboration with the Northern Wave International Short Film Festival, with participants from Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, ages eighteen to thirty. Its main objective was to provide training in different aspects of filmmaking, as well as to join the participants with mentors from the participating countries, who will give them continuing support in future endeavors. The workshop, which is supported by Nordbuk, is intended to “create a strong network of young Nordic female filmmakers” (Nordic Girls Shoot in Iceland).

The most important change now underway is an attempt to change the Regulation on the Icelandic Film Fund, set by the Ministry of Culture and Education, to allocate a specific percentage of the funding available to female filmmakers. Since the IFC’s consultants evaluate grant applications “according to time-tested, objective criteria used industry-wide,” the Ministry needs to implement these changes to empower women within the industry, although some leeway has been given by a 2016
amendment to the Regulation, which states: “The evaluation of applications must also take into account the degree to which a grant would create more equal opportunities for women and men in the film industry” (Regulation on the Icelandic Film Fund, Article 3). In 2017, the Icelandic Film Centre introduced proposals to the Icelandic Ministry of Culture that involves providing films directed, written or produced by women an additional twenty percent in funds. “Full funding” for a feature film is 120 million ISK, which entails that full funding for a “female project” would be increased to 144 million ISK. Because the development and production of movies are time-consuming, it is proposed that women be allotted this twenty percent increase over male-dominated projects for at least three to four years, at which point the success of the initiative would be assessed (Minnisblað 2017).9

In summary, although women filmmakers have played an important role in Icelandic filmmaking since Róska made Sóley in 1982, their presence has been and remains much too peripheral. There seems, however, to be growing awareness of this fact and the need for gender-based intervention to promote women’s participation in the industry, at both the grassroots level and governmental one.

NOTES

1. The databases used were Kvikmyndavefurinn (kvikmyndavefurinn.is)—a site maintained by the Icelandic Film Centre—and IMDbPro (pro.imdb.com). This survey is limited to local women in the film industry. Though Icelandic names are easily recognizable, the method used to determine whom to consider “local” or “Icelandic” was searching for each name not obviously Icelandic in the national registry, the telephone directory and Íslandinabók (e. The Book of Icelanders), the online genealogical database created by the biotechnology company deCODE genetics (islandinabok.is).

3. This statistic is based on the 2018 report by Statistics Iceland, updated with the total number of Icelandic films that premiered in 2018 and 2019.

4. The reasons for the relatively strong position of women during the 1990s are unknown. The only explanation given in the interviews I conducted with female directors active during the period was that these women came of age in the 1970s and early 1980s, a time characterized by radical feminism in Iceland, such as the founding of “Rauðsokkahreyfingin” (e. “Redstockings Movement”) in 1970, which fought for equality in the workplace, the right to abortion and child care, among other things, as well as the founding of “The Women’s List” in 1983, which increased the presence of women in parliament. These female directors described being heavily influenced by the fight for gender equality during the period, which sent the message that women could take on any role traditionally preserved for men.

5. These statistics are based on the total number of Icelandic feature-length films that had opened domestically by the end of 2017, which amounted to 191 films. This statistic does not change with including 2018 and 2019, since during those years eighteen Icelandic films have entered theaters, three of which were directed by women.

6. The Bechdel Test, originating from Alison Bechdel’s comic strip Dykes to Watch Out For, can be used to measure the representation of women in fiction. To pass the test, a film needs to have at least two female characters, who have names and talk to each other about something other than a man.

7. A survey was made in 2015 by Rakel Magnúsdóttir, for her MA thesis in gender studies at the University of Iceland, where it was found that boys make up 91% of high school/college video clubs. Teenage boys are considered more qualified to occupy key positions in making these videos due to gendered qualities they possess.

8. Also initiated in 2015 was another project similar to Stelpur rokka, called Stelpur filma (e. “Girls Film”). The course was organized by the city of Reykjavík and held in the fall of 2019. Sixty-six thirteen- and fourteen-year-old girls participated in the course, which only ran for that one year.

9. The response received from the Ministry of Culture and Education, when contacted in preparation for this article, stated that these proposals were under consideration and might be incorporated into the Regulation on the Icelandic Film Fund in the near future.

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Women in the Italian Film Industry: Against All Odds

Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo

Following the example of the Cannes, Locarno, and Sarajevo festivals, in 2018, the Venice Film Festival signed a pledge promising greater transparency in its selection process and gender parity in the organisation’s managerial structures (Vivarelli 2018). Encouragingly, the film festival’s commissions and the juries in 2018 were about 50–50 male-female (Vivarelli 2018). Yet, as in the previous year, the 2018 festival selected only one woman-directed film to screen in its main competition.

The festival’s president, Alberto Barbera, defended the selection process arguing that “Putting another film in the main competition just because it’s made by a woman, […] that would be really offensive for the director”. Moreover, he stated he would rather resign than be “forced to select a film only because it’s made by a woman and not on the basis of the quality of the film itself” (Anderson 2018). Significantly, as Ariston Anderson points out, the 2018 Toronto Film Festival, which also claims to select and showcase only quality films, featured a large

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number of films directed by women. These included the latest works by Claire Denis, Nicole Sara Colangelo, Nicole Holofcener, Elizabeth Chomko, Patricia Rozema, Stella Meghie, Marielle Heller, Nadine Labaki, Mia Hansen-Love, and Eva Husson (Anderson 2018). Similarly, the 2019 Berlin Film Festival included seven films directed by women out of a total of seventeen in the official competition.

Although the 2019 Cannes Film Festival did not fare much better than the 2018 Venice Festival, featuring twelve films directed by women of the forty-seven films screened, with four of those films selected to compete for the Palme d’Or, the Venice Festival highlights the entrenched male-dominated culture that governs the Italian film industry. In this chapter, we provide an overview of the position of women in the Italian film industry, drawing connections between the pervasive political and social attitudes that denigrate women and the challenges women face in telling their stories on screen.

The systematic degradation of women translates into daily spectacle on Italian television and featured heavily in the political success of former Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi. Ten years ago, Lorella Zanardo’s documentary Il corpo delle donne (Women’s bodies 2009) launched a blistering critique of the role afforded to women on television as that of the young showgirl who has little to say and much flesh to show. In a book written one year after the release of her documentary, Zanardo comments:

I thought of Italians sitting in front of the TV. I asked myself how they must feel, constantly exposed to erotic stimuli: couples that mated in front of the screen stimulated by constant close-ups of enormous breasts, adolescents stimulated by provocative showgirls on afternoon television programs. (p. 31)\(^1\)

Zanardo’s critique of television’s blatant objectification of women’s bodies and female sexuality coincided with the so-called Berlusconi-gate. In 2009, the longest-serving post-war prime minister was accused of engaging in sexual activities with underage prostitutes. It was subsequently revealed that the then seventy-four-year-old regularly hosted lavish dinners that became known as “Bunga Bunga” parties in which young women allegedly engaged in sex games with Berlusconi and his friends. He was also accused of abusing his prime ministerial powers by pressuring police in Milan to release from custody underage prostitute and nightclub dancer Karima el-Mahroug, also known as Ruby Rubacuori. In
2013, Berlusconi was found guilty of paying for sex with the prostitute and for abuse of office (Davies 2013) but the sentence was overturned on appeal in 2014.

The allegations of underage sexual relations involving Berlusconi and accounts of his dinner parties were originally voiced by his then-wife, Veronica Lario, and by former prostitute Veronica D’Addario (Domini-janni 2014). It is in the wake of the women’s testimony that the *Se non ora quando* (SNOQ, If not now when) movement began on 13 February 2011. On that day, more than a million women of different ages, classes, political allegiances, and religious beliefs took part in simultaneous rallies all over Italy. They came together to reclaim their dignity publicly and to challenge their representation in the media and their treatment in society. This groundswell of protest seemed to be answering the call to arms voiced by Lorella Zanardo’s concluding statements in her 2009 documentary: “Why don’t we react? Why don’t we present our version of the truth? Why do we accept humiliation over and over again? Why don’t we reclaim our rights? What are we afraid of?” Indeed, since then, SNOQ has taken up the challenge of keeping women’s issues at the forefront of public debate, uncovering inequities and calling for legislative changes. SNOQ’s online presence has spread to social network sites, forums, and blogs including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, thereby expanding the spaces for debate and reflection. It was the first women’s organisation in Italy to have an iPhone and iPad application.

Despite the SNOQ movement, the long reign of Silvio Berlusconi as politician and media mogul validated the systematic sexual objectification of women in Italian society and in its cinema. Twenty years of Berlusconi’s political dominance witnessed the gradual consolidation of production and distribution into the television duopoly of the state-owned RAI Cinema and Medusa Film, headed by Berlusconi’s daughter. The lack of access to independent and differentiated producers has stifled creativity and made it difficult for filmmakers to make innovative films (De Vincenti 2009). Furthermore, the closure of art-house cinemas and the widespread dominance of multiplexes in Italy have reinforced mainstream Italian film producers’ preference for the homogenisation of cinematic styles, narratives, and aesthetics. Mainstream aesthetics often rely on storylines about beautiful, scantily clad young women involved in relationships with older men who are powerful while not necessarily attractive.

Arguably, such widespread acceptance of relationships between young women and older men has played a role in the public response to Italian
actress Asia Argento’s accusation of sexual abuse by Harvey Weinstein voiced in her interview with Ronan Farrow for the New Yorker. While her accusation, along with that of many other victims of sexual abuse by the powerful Hollywood figure, spawned the #metoo movement, received public support, and featured prominently in the United States in reputable mainstream media outlets such as the New York Times, the New Yorker, the Washington Post, and The Nation, in Italy, the response was very different. Expressing scepticism as to the veracity of Argento’s allegations, the editor of Italy’s conservative daily Libero, Vittorio Feltri, commented that: “First, these women give it away […]. Then, twenty years later, they repent and denounce the alleged rapist. And if they gave it away in exchange for a part in a movie, that’s a form of prostitution” (Poggioli 2018). Similar sentiments were shared by feminists who questioned Argento for coming out with her story so many years after the fact, implying that she was partly to blame for agreeing to meet him in a hotel room (Brancolini 2018). Not all public response, however, was critical of Argento. Giulia Blasi, a journalist for Italian Radio One together with members of a Facebook group that was created in support of Argento, came up with the hashtag #quellavoltache (“that time that”) as the Italian equivalent to #metoo (Brancolini 2018). The movement generated 20,000 tweets and online discussions in its first week but then went relatively silent (Brancolini).²

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the media abuse Argento suffered, very few Italian women came forward with their own stories, and very few men have been named in sexual harassment cases. The first to be accused was film director and Oscar winner Giuseppe Tornatore. Italian television showgirl, Miriana Trevisan, accused him of groping, an accusation which he denied. Well-known Italian actresses such as Monica Bellucci and Margherita Buy who had collaborated with Tornatore came out in strong support of the director and the accusations were not taken seriously. Later that year, the Italian TV show Le Iene reported that more than ten women accused the screenwriter, producer, and film director Fausto Brizzi of sexual misconduct. Interestingly, the Italian press criticised the TV show for making the allegations public and sided with the director who received significant media sympathy. Brizzi’s name was initially removed from the posters for his then-recently released Poveri ma ricchissimi (Poor yet very rich). He denied the allegations, the film went on to play in Italian theatres, and the controversy died down quickly (Poggioli 2018; Siri 2017).
Unlike similar cases in the United States, these examples demonstrate that in Italy allegations of sexual misconduct triggered a backlash against the accusers and turned the alleged molesters into victims. As screenwriter Francesca Marciano reports: “The press is not giving voice to the women. It’s just giving voice to the men and the men who defend the men and the women who defend the men. The culture of support for women is non-existent” (Poggioli 2018). Similarly, writer and journalist Tiziana Ferrario explains that Italian women are reluctant to name perpetrators or file complaints not only because the press will not stand beside them, “but also because there aren’t mechanisms to protect women who make complaints” (Brancolini 2018). In fact, as one of the journalists who broke the Brizzi story purports, such silence and non-naming recall the Mafia code of silence (omertà) of protecting one’s own (Dino Giarrusso in Brancolini 2018). Such reluctance to name, according to feminist journalist and philosopher Dominijanni, runs counter to the real strength of the #metoo movement. For Dominijanni, the movement makes an important political statement precisely because women’s voices should be heard and not silenced, in a show of collective solidarity (Dominijanni 2018).

A number of industry-related events in 2018 have demonstrated the tendency among Italian women involved in the film industry to favour forms of collective solidarity which avoid the naming of particular individuals, calling instead for major cultural changes. Solidarity has come in another form in Italy, one that insists on calling for cultural change in an industry as notoriously sexist as the Italian film industry. An open letter signed by 124 women who work in the film industry titled Dissenso comune (Common dissent: from the women of the entertainment world to all women) was published in the daily La Repubblica on 11 February 2018. The letter vigorously denounced sexual misconduct, which the signatories define as a condition that prevails across all sectors of society. Claiming it is a systemic problem, they called for the system as a whole to be changed rather than individuals blamed. Argento refused to sign the letter explaining in a tweet that she disagreed with the choice to avoid “naming any names” (Huffington Post 2018). Trevisan also tweeted rather cynically that the women who signed the Dissenso comune letter acted dishonestly because in her view not naming was also a way to reinforce the system and the real reason the signatories refused to name perpetrators was because they feared losing their jobs (Huffington Post 2018). Yet for some of the signatories, like director Laura Bispuri, the
value of the letter is to be found in its stated recognition of the enormous and multifaceted levels of abuse experienced by women in all aspects of Italian society, beyond the film industry. In fact, in Italy, a woman is murdered every three days by a current or former partner. The country has one of the highest numbers of femicide cases in Europe (Burba and Bona 2017).

In another highly visible event, the David Di Donatello Awards, the Italian equivalent of the Oscars, actress Paola Cortellesi recited a monologue highlighting the linguistic forms of nouns in Italian that stereotype and degrade women. Other prominent women from the industry also joined her on stage to recite common phrases that are invariably used to cast doubt on the testimony of victims of sexual violence and also blame them for blemishing the reputations of their abusers. Yet, despite the feminist theme in line with other award ceremonies around the world, and the rhetoric and the protestations against social and cultural discrimination, there was no mention at the Italian awards of actual women, such as Asia Argento, who had the courage to denounce and name the perpetrators.

Positioning herself in the debate, award-winning Italian filmmaker Alina Marazzi states that whereas it is important to “speak up” and to support those who come forward with their stories, “another kind of work also needs to be done” and this type of work “would take much longer” (Holmqvist 2019). It is hoped, as Marazzi suggests, that the work of filmmakers can help in “creating consciousness, awareness and also sharing with the younger generation” (Holmqvist 2019). Change will, indeed, take a long time. According to the 2018 World Economic Forum, at the current rate it would take 202 years to close the economic gender gap globally (p. 51). The same report rated Italy at 118th place (out of 149 countries) for women’s economic participation and opportunity.

Influenced by broader discussions concerning gender inequality in the workplace, both outside and within Italy, in 2016 the Italian Society of Authors and Publishers commissioned the organisation DEA (Donne e Audiovisivo, Women and the Audiovisual Industry) to write a report, known as the Gap&Ciak report, focusing specifically on women working in the Italian film industry. The report identifies a number of factors that impact on women in the industry: hiring discrimination, lower pay, precarious work conditions, difficulty in accessing decision-making positions of higher prestige, lower budget allocations, and the underrepresentation in key creative roles (DEA 2016).
The findings of the report confirm our previous findings (Luciano and Scarparo 2013) that Italian women directors are less likely to attract funding or to gain the confidence of producers. According to the DEA report, 12% of films directed by women receive public funding. Women fare better with accessing production funding from the Italian Broadcasting Corporation (RAI, equivalent of the British BBC) which in 2016 produced a total of 21% of films directed by women. Access to mainstream distribution remains a problem, with only 9% of films directed by women shown in mainstream cinemas across the Italian Peninsula (DEA 2016). Underrepresentation in the industry overall has also not changed: with women representing only 6% of directors of photography, less than 10% of sound technicians, and 6% of soundtrack composers (DEA 2016). Women are, nevertheless, over-represented in more traditionally “feminine” roles such as casting, costume design, and make-up artistry. Merely 15.6% of public funding was allocated to women for their first or second film, whereas only 8.9% was available for their third film. These numbers suggest that Italy is very far from reaching the goals set out by the 5050 x 2020 campaign launched in 2016 by the Swedish Film Institute and the Cannes Film Festival. Indeed, unlike funding bodies such as Eurimages, the British Film Institute, Screen Australia, Screen Ireland, and Telefilm Canada, the Italian equivalent of these organisations did not make a formal pledge to aim to provide 50% of their funding to films directed by women by 2020.

The Italian award-winning director of photography and camera operator, Maura Morales Bergmann, spoke about the prevailing deep-seated prejudice against women’s capacity to carry out certain roles and recounted that her ability to succeed was invariably considered dependent on her physical strength rather than her professional skills as cinematographer. As a camera operator, Morales Bergmann often lugged heavy equipment but never complained because complaints would have been interpreted as a sign of professional weakness. She attributes her difficulty in finding work as a cinematographer also to the producers’ lack of confidence that a woman would be able to successfully deal with directors, coordinate publicists, and manage (male) camera operators (Luciano and Scarparo 2013, p. 186). Similarly, actress-turned-director Silvia Ferreri explains the problem that transgressing boundaries of established gender roles pose for the woman director in Italy:
The cinema is really the place where Italian male chauvinism is at its peak. In Italian cinema, it’s crazy for a woman. For me it was 10,000 times worse because I came to the cinema from acting. The Italian idea is woman, actress, zero intelligence, you want to be a director? Be an actress, you’re cute, you’re even good at it, why do you want to write, why do you want to direct? I find it incredibly difficult to relate to the institution, to the people, to men. (Luciano and Scarparo 2013, p. 185)

Women scriptwriters face a similar dilemma despite the fact that they are comparatively better represented in the industry in Italy where they account for 15% of all scriptwriters yet are involved in writing about 40% of Italian films overall. The growing presence of women scriptwriters in Italy ought to provide a conduit for the creation of women-centred plots and, more significantly, for the proliferation of credible female characters, but the woman screenwriter’s interest in articulating a female point of view and understanding of the world often clashes with the demands of producers and her own conscious or subconscious censoring of that interest. Screenwriter Francesca Manieri attributes her difficulty in creating female characters to the industry’s propagation of the “neutral” spectator, who is, in fact, male (Luciano and Scarparo 2013, p. 187). Gloria Malatesta also comments that “the female style is inevitably disguised because the chain of command is male” (Luciano and Scarparo 2013, p. 188). As she explains, a screenwriter’s script is always subject to the scrutiny and revisions of the producer and of the director, who determine whether the aesthetic projected in the script is appropriate and conforms to their vision.

Since the industry does not have many directors or producers who favour a more nuanced, female-centred aesthetic, there are still very few stories and female characters that depart from the traditional and, often, stereotypical representation of women on screen. Voicing her frustration with this situation, in a recent interview, the versatile actress who played the leading roles in Silvio Soldini’s uncharacteristically female-centred films, Licia Maglietta, states: “I no longer work in cinema because no one, not even the female screenwriters, are writing scripts with interesting roles for women characters. Once you turn fifty, you are lucky if you get to play the grandmother” (Urbani 2017). Similarly, in an interview in 2019, filmmaker Gioia Raparelli laments the absence of stories told by women and the fact that women have never been able to express themselves adequately. According to Raparelli, going to see films directed by
women is an important political act, because if women’s films do well at the box office producers may well choose to fund more of them (2019).

Notwithstanding the challenges, contemporary women directors with varying degrees of self-reflexivity have created a place for women’s stories in an attempt to reframe the male-centred aesthetic and perspective of Italian cinema. Working across a range of cinematic genres, filmmakers such as Alina Marazzi, Susanna Nichiarelli, Costanza Quatriglio, Laura Bispuri, Alice Rohrwacher, Anna Negri, and Maria Sole Tognazzi have joined the ranks of women directors who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s such as Cristina Comencini, Francesca Comencini, Roberta Torre, Wilma Labate, Francesca Archibugi, Antonietta De Lillo, and Marina Spada. Other filmmakers such as Valeria Golino, Valeria Bruno Tedeschi, and Emma Dante have come to directing from established careers in acting or theatre in order to bring female stories and female perspectives to the screen. In their films, these filmmakers engage with current social and cinematic issues such as immigration, economic crises, and organised crime as well as exploring more specifically the representation of the mother–daughter relationship, women’s stories and history, and gender and sexual identities. Capturing the mood of the 124 women who signed the Dissenso comune letter previously discussed as well as the views of the filmmakers named above, Laura Bispuri, whose two films, Vergine giurata (Sworn virgin 2016) and Figlia mia (Daughter of mine, 2018), were screened at the Berlin Film Festival, declared: “It’s the moment to take the situation in hand and we want to do it, the cinema is a small part of a bigger discussion, but it has to do with people’s imaginary and so it is important” (Lippi 2018).

The documentary has been the preferred cinematic genre for Italian women filmmakers. For many, the choice to make documentaries results from the need to reconcile personal goals and aspirations with the pragmatic necessity to find production money and distributors. For some, such as Alina Marazzi, the documentary has allowed them to bring to the screen films that might otherwise never have been financed or produced due to the overtly “personal” nature of the issues addressed (Luciano and Scarpato 2010). For others, such as Costanza Quatriglio, the documentary has made it possible to pursue a provocative, political style of filmmaking many times removed from that which informs television (Bertozzi 2008, p. 297). In their promotion of a new aesthetics, these filmmakers are pushing the boundaries of “realistic” representation...
in an effort to provide new perspectives on contemporary Italy, particularly on social issues such as immigration, unemployment, and disability. Quatriglio, however, points out that, although the documentary has been at the forefront of cinematic freedom and experimentation in Italian cinema, it is often less a choice than a necessity for women directors. This is because they are not entrusted with managing large budgets and are therefore not able to secure funding for fiction films that require greater financial investment (Quatriglio 2019).

Not willing to compromise on their artistic vision, filmmakers such as award-winning Antonietta De Lillo have started their own production and distribution companies. In addition, the technological revolution of recent years and the ever-expanding capacity of the Internet have allowed for the implementation of creative responses, such as crowd-sourcing. In Italy, Marina Spada was the first director to resort to crowd-sourcing as a means for resourcing her first feature film, *Forza cani* (Go dogs, 2002). Always wishing to experiment with cinematic language, technologies (digital camerawork, the web, and social networks), and distribution, De Lillo produced Italy’s first crowd-sourced, “participatory” documentaries *Il pranzo di natale* (The Christmas lunch, 2011) and *Oggi insieme domani anche* (Together, today and tomorrow, 2013). Both films draw on contributions by amateurs and professionals that include home movies and archival footage. These films are in turn edited by De Lillo to produce composite works that engage with cultural and social rituals in flux.

Notwithstanding their shared concerns, most Italian women filmmakers do not readily accept the label of “women” filmmakers. Yet, periodically in the last decade, female directors and other women in the Italian film industry have come together in public fora to discuss the challenges that women in particular face in creating, producing, and distributing their films (fora held in Rome at the Libreria del Cinema in 2010 and at the Cinema Farnese in 2013). While these gatherings have offered opportunities for fruitful debates that have pointed to the need for women to work together, they have been isolated events that have not led to major changes. More recently as a result of the research undertaken by the DEA group, the Gap&Ciak report has provided concrete policy recommendations to improve the conditions and enhance opportunities for women in the Italian film industry.

The report proposes policy recommendations and strategies in a number of areas, to be carried out by political institutions, lawmakers, and employers. The report calls for gender parity in the hiring of teaching
staff and in the admission of students to Italy’s film schools, particularly in areas in which women have been historically disadvantaged. The recommendations also call for a more equal distribution of public financing and increased presence of women on all commissions that evaluate and assign public funds. It also recommends that all publicly funded projects should offer flexible working conditions to account for care-giving obligations. Furthermore, the report points to the pressing need to attribute greater visibility to women’s contributions to the audio-visual industry, both through archives that highlight the role of women in the past and databases that would account for the contribution and the roles women are playing in the present. The archives would ensure that contributions women have made to the film industry are not forgotten, and would also provide examples of positive role models. The database of all women currently working in the industry, moreover, would ensure there is an up-to-date list of active female professionals that production companies could tap into.

Mentoring programs would also play a crucial role in Italy where historically the film industry has relied heavily on nepotism. The report suggests that the mentoring process should begin in film school where a seasoned professional could be assigned to guide students in their projects and assist them in establishing networks that would prove valuable in their development of future projects. The mentoring should continue post-study, following the various phases of the women’s careers. Finally, the Gap&Ciak report advocates for “positive discrimination”, which means investing in women and creating opportunities for the marketing and promotion of their work (DEA 2016).

The report was publicly discussed in January 2019 at a conference that marked the end of the three-year DEA project. While as stated above the situation has not changed much in recent years, the Director of the Cinema section of the Ministry of Culture, Iole Ginnattasio, stated that through the introduction of the 2019 Legge Cinema (Law on Cinema) the government has already taken steps to increase opportunities for women, including providing financial incentives for projects that include female directors or a significant number of female actors. Drawing attention to new trends in the sector, Producer Riccardo Tozzi pointed to the growing influence of women in the world of television series and digital streaming platforms. According to Tozzi, there is a growing presence of women with decision-making powers working for Netflix or Amazon who...
seem to opt for stories in which women have important roles both in front of and behind the camera (DEA 2019).

Despite the optimism expressed over the opportunities for women and their representation in television series, Milly Buonanno, author of Italian TV Drama & Beyond. Stories from the Soil, Stories from the Sea, identifies a number of challenges. Most of the Italian series are under-resourced and are produced by mainstream television channels rather than by specialised networks. As a result, they tend to be outmoded and unsophisticated in their representations. In contrast to female characters in American and British TV series, she states “our characters lack depth” (2015). Nonetheless, the growing involvement in television series of noted film screenwriters and actors who formerly shunned the small screen may signal a positive sign for the future. The opportunities afforded to women on the small screen through digital streaming platforms such as Netflix have enticed De Lillo to start plans for her first TV series based on a book she has already identified, representing Naples from the 1970s to the present through the stories of young people who love music (DEA 2019).

Responding to the findings of the Gap&Ciak report, filmmaker Anne Riitta Ciccone (representing the collective of filmmakers, Centoautori) drew attention to the fact that having women in positions of power is not sufficient, citing a personal example of how she had been denied the direction of a television series because the woman in charge felt that the “pulse and blood” of the series could only come from a male director (DEA 2019). Screenwriter Giulia Steigerwalt (representing Dissenso comune) expressed concern that the question of sexual harassment and abuse in Italy continues to be ignored and that women’s bodies are still seen and represented through the male gaze (DEA 2019).

Filmmaker Susanna Nichiarelli, in an interview for the DEA project, pointed to how the situation of women in the film industry and of directors in particular is symptomatic of a wider problematic that has to do with the perception of women in Italian society. Women in the film industry are in a “subordinate position”, in that they have been taught to “know their place” and that their “place is beneath more talented men”. As she states, directors are people in charge of large projects through which they articulate their own vision, their dreams, and worldviews. In so doing, they presume to have something important to say, and in many cases, women either lack such presumption or the courage to assert their vision. The fact that, as Nichiarelli points out, only one in twenty women
applying to the country’s most prominent film school chooses to specialise in directing is problematic for the future of a female aesthetic. Indeed, only with more women directors will we be able to achieve equality of access to funding, production, distribution, and presence at prestigious film festivals. In her view, cultural change is urgently needed, whereby girls and women can be brought up believing that their dreams and views of the world are worth telling and that they are authorised to tell them (Nichiarelli 2019).

These women’s comments echo the findings of our 2013 study. First, access to the film industry for women is still difficult. Second, the roles assigned to women demonstrate a reluctance to move beyond stereotyping. Third, Italian cinema, by and large, struggles to articulate nuanced perspectives and aesthetics that are capable of interpreting the complexities and concerns of contemporary women. To some extent, as discussed, this is largely the result of the humiliating models of femininity that prevail in the Italian media and are sanctioned by politicians and lawmakers. The imperative to challenge and change these models is crucial to a rethinking of cinema and of Italian society at large. As we await much-needed cultural change, legislative reforms, access to funding, mentoring programs, the growing presence of women’s films at festivals, and new digital streaming platforms that are also changing viewing habits provide hope that women filmmakers will find new spaces in which to tell their stories and that they will continue to find new ways to make their films against all odds.

**Notes**

1. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Italian to English are our own.
2. Other activist initiatives and collectives calling for changes in the treatment of women in the film industry and campaigning against violence against women include #Carodivario, Cagne sciolte, #Nonunadimeno, Equilibrista.
3. Bertozzi notes that unlike the state television of other European countries the RAI lacks a documentary production division where independent documentary projects can be evaluated on their own merits and not on the prevailing politics of the organisation (2008, p. 297).
References


Gender Struggles in the Portuguese Film Industry

Carla Baptista and Ana Prata

INTRODUCTION

The struggle for gender equality in the film industry in Portugal sits at the intersection of several conflicting processes. In Portugal, filmmakers are highly dependent on state funding, but decisions on funding are not made by movie-industry experts. Like most state-funded sectors, film production was hit badly by the economic crisis and there was an overall political disinvestment in the cultural sector in the last few years.

The Portuguese movie industry is small, underfunded, and with institutionalized male dominance. The environment shifts from a hostile to benevolent sexism, combined with historical and cultural fragile activism regarding gender equality. Added to that, there is also some degree of network closure and gender segregation that tends to exclude women from several areas of the industry. Nonetheless, there have been signs of a shift that even predates the impact of the #metoo Movement the movie industry. Portugal has a center-left government coalition that has elected a progressive Secretary of State of Citizenship and Equality (the

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state branch for women’s issues). This branch has implemented strategies of intervention focusing on the promotion of cinema made by women and gender identity issues. Moreover, there is an increasing vitality in identity politics activism, which has been more inclusive of women and minorities.

The overall presence of Portuguese women in the labor market is high, but gender inequality still exists in many aspects of society, mostly in the political arena and in gender violence. There is, nonetheless, at the governmental level a National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination that addresses the main areas of intervention for gender equality, but no specific strategy targets the film industry.

In this chapter, we propose to assess the current film industry landscape focusing on its main features, gender equality issues and policies, the women and LGTBQ-centered activism within this industry, and how processes like the economic crisis have contributed to how the film industry has evolved in Portugal.

**Overview of the Portuguese Film Industry**

The Portuguese film industry might look like an industry, but it is not. Portugal produces on average ten feature films per year (Faulkner and Liz 2016, p. 2; Kourelou et al. 2014, p. 135), and the Portuguese film sector lacks scale, profitability, and the autonomy to be considered an economically sustainable activity. Most of all, it misses what defines an industry: a market. According to the Portuguese Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual (ICA), the most-watched national film in 2019 was *Variações*, a biopic about António Variações, a famous Portuguese pop-rock singer from the 1980s, with a total of 275,910 viewers and directed by João Maia. Only a movie from 2016, *The Song of Lisbon*, a remake by Pedro from the 1940s, was a comparable success reaching 187,103 ticket buyers.

The Portuguese film industry lacks profitability, since the “vast majority of successful Portuguese movies never recoup their production costs” (Kourelou et al. 2014, p. 136). Box-office hits are rare, and since women direct only a small portion of all films, successes for women filmmakers are rare. There are three main exceptions to this, the most recent movie by director Patrícia Sequeira, entitled *SNU*, a story about the romance of Snu Abecassis and the former Portuguese Prime Minister Sá Carneiro, which was the second most-watched national movie of the year. The other main exception is also a Patrícia Sequeira’s movie, the *Jogo de
Damas (8th out of the top 10 films of 2016), and finally, the extraordinary box-office success—Capitães de Abril (2000), an international co-production directed by Maria de Medeiros, that reached a record audience of around 110,000. It is within this context of rare successes and very few viewers that we need to understand the position and the challenges with funding, production, and distribution that women filmmakers face in the Portuguese film industry.

**Funding**

In Portugal, the *Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual* (ICA) is the main body supervising and funding cinema and the overall field is highly dependent on ICA’s public funding. In 2018, ICA managed 19 million euros to support the production of films, but also distribution and exhibition. The last revision of the Cinema Law in 2018\(^5\) resulted in a contested discussion involving funding amounts and allowance procedures. The current legal framework reinforces ICA’s power in appointing the members of selective boards that evaluate projects applying for state funding. These regulations mention that the ICA must consult with SECA, an advisory body formed by representatives of producers, artists, film technicians, and television and telecommunications operators. The intent was for ICA to have more control over the selection committees of SECA, allowing them to select a more diverse group of jury members. Although this move was not made with the purpose of introducing more gender equality, it might have led to more women on the jury. Nonetheless, ICA has struggled to find enough women that would meet the mandatory qualifying criteria of being “personalities of recognized merit” in the field. Instead of the former six men, SECA now has 5 men and 2 women; thus, parity still does not exist. The composition of the juries is a key point for a more inclusive policy. From 2017 to 2019, the representation of women in all the selection committees was below 40%. But maybe the most striking aspect of this data is how the gender composition of juries varies considerably depending on the competition. Data from ICA for 2019 shows that while women make up about 40% of jurors on most competitions (two out of five jurors), in certain categories, such as “Short Films Animation,” women are 80% of jurors, but funds allocated to “Finishing Cinematographic Works,” women were 20% of that selection committee.

Portugal is part of the Gender Equality Working Group of the European Program Eurimages\(^6\) since 2012. There is institutional awareness
regarding the need for gender equality, but the fragility of gender activism in the cinema sector and ICA’s own struggles with a minimal functioning budget is preventing actions to be taken. The only concrete measure in place is a potential increase of 10% of funding when there is a majority of female authors in eligible projects. One challenge for assessing results of these policies is that ICA does not gather or provide any clear statistics and data remains untreated.

One main strategic goal of the recent film policy has been internationalization, signaled by more funding put into co-productions, organization of festivals, and an overall strategy to attract foreign film productions. Films are increasingly valued through their potential to interrelate with and catalyze other economic sectors, such as tourism. The competitions are divided into two major areas: the cinema and the audiovisual and multimedia programs. The first one supports the production of short and feature films, documentaries, and animation projects (cinema program); the second one involves a partnership with public television, RTP, to regularly produce fiction and documentary series only to be shown on television (audiovisual program).

**The Audiovisual Program**

The role of public television has become increasingly important and reflects the need to diversify the sources of funding and meet the general cultural policy values, such as to promote the Portuguese language and reach a broader public. But gender inequality remains significant in the audiovisual program, where the number of projects presented by women filmmakers is incredibly low (Fig. 1). According to the 2018 ICA catalogue, of the six fiction series produced by RTP and ICA released last year, only one was directed by a woman. As for documentary series, the only one released was a co-authorship (male and female directors).

In 2019, ICA foresees 5 fiction series and 4 documentary series to be completed, none involving a female director. The data shows that even when more films are being produced and supported exclusively by public funding, women remain excluded. The situation is paradoxical since the audiovisual program was designed to bring more diversity to the sector, following the adoption of a National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018–2030 (ENIND). This policy binds the public television (RTP) to promote gender equality and non-discrimination, and they monitor gender policies in terms of recruitment and salaries;
Fig. 1  Percentage of films directed by women supported under the audiovisual program (Source ICA 2018 Catalogue)

however, they seem to conveniently neglect who is at the helm in programming and directing.

**THE CINEMA PROGRAM**

The context of film production in Portugal is marked by resource scarcity and state dependence. The number of national films being produced has been increasing since 2013, but only now is matching the levels prior to the 2008 crisis. There were significant cuts in the provision of public funding for cultural activities, which initiated a long-lasting cycle of cultural disinvestment.

The film sector was particularly hit by the *Troika*\(^10\) austerity measures (implemented from 2011 to 2014), causing a collapse in the institutional network supporting film production. Since then, the industry seems to have somewhat bounced back, the number of national films distributed, mostly features, has increased from 34 (in 2013) to 38 (in 2017), and the market share has ranged between 5.7% in 2013 and 10.2%. By contrast, the market share in terms of admissions is decreasing, from 3.4% in 2013 to 2.6% in 2017. Because of its singularity and diversity in terms of genres, the label “Portuguese cinema” is, as a film historian puts it, “in permanent...
invention” (Baptista 2008). Two of its most defining characteristics are its unpopularity and the precariousness of its economic structures. Of a total of 101 production companies registered with ICA in 2018, only 22 were helmed by women and 8 represent co-gendered productions. Most of them have less than 4 permanent employees, reflecting the smaller scale of these production companies.

Another significant aspect is the cross-generational tendency for female directors to produce their own projects. The most successful women filmmakers all run their own production houses. This includes examples of the more senior filmmakers, such as Rita Azevedo Gomes, to those that are mid-career (Teresa Villaverde, Catarina Mourão, Catarina Alves Costa, Patricia Sequeira, Raquel Freire, Rosa Coutinho Cabral), to the youngest (Leonor Teles). This director/producer model is an adequate response to how the industry is structured, since it fits well with low-budget productions. Nevertheless, it is also contributing to feminine cinema remaining in a cycle of economic and creative segmentation. This model tends not to expand beyond their own production inner circle. Even though their movies get to be released, they still lack the competitiveness of being supported by an external source.

Portugal is seeing an upward trend in national film releases since the end of the economic crisis (Fig. 2). Nonetheless, less than half of the films that were funded do not see the light of day. A movie release is a “privilege” usually given to feature films and a few documentaries. The discrepancy between the film production and the film distribution market is significant and particularly impacts female authors. Women filmmakers proportionally do more documentaries and short films, vis-à-vis, feature films, but that work often lays outside commercial circuits and it is often shown to the public only in niche festivals. The exclusion from commercial screens perpetuates the cycle of invisibility of women and affects their ability to be recognized artistically and their chances to work regularly, because commercial success and awards in film festivals are valued under ICA regulations to improve authors’ eligibility in future applications.

In 2018, the only female project that received several awards in film festivals was the co-production *Zama* by Argentine film director Lucrecia Martel. The other female projects that won awards at international competitions were all short films and documentaries. At the 2019 Cannes festival, Portugal had six films selected for competition, including two short films by female directors. In feature films, women were not
Fig. 2 National film releases

represented leading a young female director, Margarida Leitão, author of several award documentaries and short films, to assert in an informal conversation that “If it’s not low budget, then it’s not for me.”

WOMEN IN THE FILM INDUSTRY

When researching the Portuguese film industry and the role of women in it, one of its most striking aspects is the overall lack of research in this field. Studies regarding the country’s film industry are few and far between, although they tend to focus on a myriad of themes ranging from nationalism, identity, memory, colonialism, economic crisis, archives, etc. (Baptista 2008; Cunha 2016, 2018; Pereira 2016; Kourelou et al. 2014; Faulkner and Liz 2016; Gubern 2005). A more extensive assessment of gender and industry careers was made in 2004 under the project Culture-Biz (2005). In this seminal study, the authors signaled how difficult it was to collect data since it was so dispersed and had to be gathered from many different sources, such as the Ministry of Labor, the National Institute of Statistics (INE), and the limited information collected manually from the production credits published in the cinema annual catalogues. Some data
was collected for 2011 and 2013, resulting from a collaboration between the Eurimages Gender Group and ICA, and headed by researcher Teresa Martinho; however, we still lack statistical data on most indicators.12

Within the few studies on Portuguese film, those that address women, either as a central theme or as part of the industry, tend to be even more rare. As Faulkner and Liz argue, there are few films in Portugal “made by a woman and about women (and) the question of gender in Portuguese film and TV is yet to be fully explored” (2016, p. 2). An exception to this is Pereira’s work (Pereira 2012a, b, 2016) and her interview with Portuguese film director, Claudia Tomaz, one of the most interesting representatives of a new generation of Portuguese filmmakers (Pereira 2012a). Tomaz’s uniqueness as a director is that she decided to bypass the traditional forms of distribution, creating online platforms for the production and display of her films. This allowed Tomaz to communicate more directly with audiences, challenging how the film industry is structured, and being an innovator.

Portugal was for many years one of the few countries in Europe that had no film festival featuring movies directed exclusively by women. This happened despite having several examples of thematic festivals, such as DocLisboa (documentaries), Fantasporto (horror), QueerLisboa (LGTBQ), and the IndieLisboa (small-budget, independent). While the country still lacks a true nationally based women’s film festival, the “Mediterranean Looks - Feminine Cinema” is unique in showcasing the work of women filmmakers from Portugal and other Mediterranean countries.

The presence of women “behind the cameras” as film directors started in Portugal as early as 1946 with the work of Barbara Virginia. Her feature film, Tres dias sem Deus, was even shown that same year at the Cannes Film Festival. Nevertheless, Virginia remained the only example of a woman director throughout the dictatorship. In 1976, a co-directing project by Margarida Cordeiro and Antonio Reis entitled, Tras-os-Montes, was the second feature film involving a woman director. Since then, more than fifty feature films13 have been directed by women in Portugal (Pereira 2012b, p. 178). This is a rich history, but one that should not mask the context of overcoming the invisibility that both male and female Portuguese film directors endure, given the constraints of lacking a real market and a sustained funding institution. Pereira goes even a little further alluding to women’s “double invisibility,” since women have had much less visibility than their male counterparts.
Few researchers have tackled issues about the different ways women directors are present, represented, and visible in funding, production, distribution, international competitions, or festivals. Pereira in her most recent book (2016) addresses some of these issues. Pereira alludes to some of the contradictions inherent to our understanding of the role of women in filmmaking, both historically and also more recently.

To speak of Portuguese cinema in the feminine is to analyze a brief but interesting history of women who have reversed the traditional role of ‘actress filmed by a director’, but instead took the lead behind the cameras. On the other hand, it also implies circumventing a certain ‘invisibility’ that constrains all contemporary Portuguese filmmakers... an added difficulty that could be called as ‘double invisibility’. (Pereira 2016, p. 175)

While women have directed more movies in the last few years than in previous decades, a comparison with male filmmakers over time still demonstrates significant gender inequality in filmmaking. A 2005 study coordinated by Gomes, Lourenço, and Martinho on gender in the film profession in Portugal shows that between 2001 and 2003 only 20% of the Portuguese feature films were made by women filmmakers, although for documentaries, the numbers were around 30%. Another indicator that characterizes women filmmakers is the percentage of women that only directed one movie. Of a total of eighteen women filmmakers, eight of them (44%) only directed one movie. This is an indicator of how established women are in the industry, and almost half of women directors only had the experience of doing one film.

The data from ICA aggregates both majority- and minority-led national productions, and those tend to overestimate the presence of women filmmakers, compared to data that just accounts for majority-led national productions.

As we can see from Table 1, women are far from achieving gender parity in filmmaking. Data shows that while there has been some improvement in the last decades, the economic crisis had a significant impact both on the Portuguese film industry and on gender parity, which decreased from 27 to 14%. Film output is one of the main indicators to measure the vitality of the film industry. During the southern European economic crisis (2008–2014), cinema was one of the main sectors that suffered from a decrease in funding due to the implementation of austerity measures and
Table 1  Percentage of feature films directed by women in Portugal funded by ICA\textsuperscript{a}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By year and decade</th>
<th>% of films directed by women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980–1989</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990–1999</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–2009</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2013</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014–2017</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a}Data was compiled from multiple sources, but unfortunately, we are missing data from 2010. The data organized by decade was gathered by Pereira (2016, p. 199), data from 2011 to 2013 was presented at Eurimages Study Group on Gender and Equality Meeting in Lisbon by Teresa Martinho (3/9/2015), and the last part of the data, from 2014 to 2017, we collected from the ICA catalogues relating to that period.

an overall decline in the number of films produced. In Portugal, the cuts were unprecedented:

After the implementation of a so-called rescue package, severe cuts across a number of sectors ensued; culture, including film, were no exception. The new government, elected in June 2011, just two months after the bailout was agreed, dismantled the ministry of culture and suspended all public funding for the audio-visual sector (…). The blanket suspension of funding was an unprecedented measure in a sector that had received large sums of state support since 1971. (Kourelou et al. 2014, p. 135)

One of the direct consequences of these measures can be seen in the interruption of the upward trend in film outputs, which had been rising since the early 2000s and abruptly decreased by 2011. After “year zero,”\textsuperscript{17} by 2013, the number of national film productions was down to about one-third of what they had been in the past (Kourelou et al. 2014, p. 136). However, the full picture is not all gloomy, since the data that we have been referencing concerns only projects that had public funding through ICA. Data connected to film distribution, for example, paints a more favorable picture, with the number of Portuguese films released in the country actually going up from 23 films (in 2010 and 2011) to 26 films (in 2012) (Kourelou et al. 2014, p. 136).\textsuperscript{18} Paradoxically, the economic crisis years were also times when internationally both Portuguese films and filmmakers were being recognized and getting awards, but most of those recognitions were attributed to male filmmakers and their movies.
As Kourelou et al. point out, “To a certain extent, the crisis does not have a strong impact on the film sector because Portuguese cinema was already, or has always been, in crisis” (2014, p. 137). However, one of the direct impacts of the crisis, with implications for gender equality, is that the economic crisis created an environment of less funding for all, which led to less women directing feature films (than before the crisis) and channeling women’s work more to documentaries and short films.

Underrepresentation and professionalization seem to intersect in a complex way, since women are less visible in leadership positions such as directing feature films or major production companies but gain visibility in some sectors of the industry (occupation segregation).

According to an assessment of the different roles in the film industry published in 2005, women were dominant in functions closest to actors (wardrobe and costumes, makeup and hairdressing) and underrepresented in those closest to machinery and technology (direction, photography, sound, lighting, etc.). In 2005, women were close to parity in editing, art direction, and production (although female production companies are smaller). There was an update in 2015, based not on aggregated data (cinema and television), showing a certain degree of continuity, but also some changes, namely an increase in the presence of women in other creative roles. We used the summary of the production credits to assess the representation of women in six key creative roles from 2014 to 2018. Our research confirms some of these upward trends found already in 2015 (Fig. 3).  

- The presence of women in the more technical occupations, like photography and sound, has increased slightly in the last three years. However, the representation of women in direction, particularly in feature films, has shown far less growth. Women directed 30% of documentaries, but for feature films the number is still 23%.  

Women are doing far less feature films than documentaries and short films, and this is not just about creative choice. Figure 4 shows the percentage of films directed by women and how women have mostly made strides in the documentary genre, while in other genres, feature films, short films, and animation, their numbers are stagnant. Thus, we
Fig. 3 Women in feature films (2016–2018) (Source Production credits published in ICA catalogues 2016–2018)

Fig. 4 Percentage of films directed by women supported under ICA (Source ICA 2018 Catalogue)
conclude based on the more recent data that there is still an overall under-
representation of women in the film sector and gender parity is far from 
sight.

**Activism “from Above”?**

While the picture regarding the presence of women in the film industry 
is a bleak one, the activism happening in the country to promote, give 
visibility, empower, and create awareness of women, gender, and sexuality 
issues through film is not negligible. This activism has been very diversi-
fied and could be understood mostly at two levels: on the one hand, as 
an expression that originates from the institutional level, and on the other 
hand, as connected to more of a grassroots/identity politics activism.

One of the main players at the institutional level is Eurimages, a 
cultural support fund of the Council of Europe. As part of their gender 
equality strategy, the Eurimages has embraced achieving equal distribu-
tion of co-production funding (5050) between women and men by the 
year 2020. While at the European Union level with Eurimages there seem 
to exist both a plan and vision to increase more gender equality in the 
industry, it is not clear how much of that trickles down to the national 
level.

A brief overview of the ICA website shows that there are no clear 
gender policies, plans, or strategies being implemented by this insti-
tute. As we mentioned before, the only measure targeting an increase 
of women’s involvement includes an increase of 10% of funding for 
projects that include more than 50% of female authors (directing, screen-
plays, production, etc.). Besides this specific measure, implemented in 
2016, there is no other state funding attached to gender equality poli-
cies. In fact, a content analysis of the 2017 and 2018 Activity Plans 
shows that of the eight strategic goals none are devoted to women or 
to improve the presence of women in projects, productions, or festivals. 
The #metoo agenda or even the Eurimages strategic plan has not been 
formally incorporated into ICA’s plans.

One point of interest is to understand the process of how Eurimag-
ages connects to national bodies, such as ICA. Eurimages has been 
collecting data on the participation of women in the industry with the 
aim of producing not just statistics, but also presenting proposals at 
the European level for member states to pay more attention to the
issue and implement gender equality policies. In March 2015, the Cine-
mateca\textsuperscript{21} hosted an international meeting promoted by the Eurimages, on gender equality in cinema in Europe, and particularly in Portugal. This meeting included several women protagonists of the Portuguese cinema, producers, directors, researchers, journalists, as well as representatives from ICA. In the meeting, statistical data presented pointed in the direction of a need for a greater presence of women, in areas such as production and direction. One of the most interesting discussions documented is that Cinemateca director José Manuel Costa stated that “Women came late to top places [in film], but they currently hold important positions,” but for Pandora Cunha Telles, a female producer, the situation is different; she argued that there are “more women working, but there are fewer in decision-making positions.” This producer also defended quotas for the participation of women in Portuguese cinema and lamented that women tend to “have less financial support from the ICA.”\textsuperscript{22} So far, there has been some acknowledgment of ICA and other representatives in the industry to be more inclusive of women, but so far the “gender talk” has not yet translated to gender policies or been reflected in “gender budgets.”

The other central player at the institutional level is the \textit{Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality} (CIG). This is the national governmental body responsible for the promotion and defense of gender equality within the country. The CIG has been involved in several activities that are gender-related, such as film festivals, recognizing female artists, award competitions, campaigns, and international forums, among other initiatives. Some examples of those are the festival “Mediterranean Looks - Feminine Cinema,” which had the institutional partnership of the CIG. The festival shows films from different Mediterranean countries revealing the social and cultural diversity of these places through films made by women directors. Likewise, the CIG has also been involved directly (or indirectly) in promoting a film series “Identity and Gender,” displaying several classic and contemporary works, which serve as examples of transgression of dominant gender and sexuality codes and customs. The role of the CIG has been more about promoting what has been done already within the film industry by Portuguese women, and giving visibility to productions that are less mainstream, than pressure how funding is allocated or how women are represented in the sector.

The other dimension is less institutional and much more based on grassroots activism. This is connected to some emerging projects mainly
focused on documentaries and with a collective drive and a more diverse orientation, both in terms of gender, but also ethnicity. These projects are becoming interesting labs for alternative production and distribution paths, and funding sources. But their economic fragility and volatility prevent a serious questioning of the perennial gender struggles of this particular labor market and do not challenge the status quo.

Organizations that are active in promoting women filmmakers (national and international ones), LGBTQ directors and themes, and an Afro-centered cinema are very diversified and their work deserves more research attention. Some examples are briefly illustrated here but are not intended to encompass the whole field.

**The XX Element Project—Cultural Association**

Created in 2016 with the goal of promoting the artistic works carried out by women, enrich cultural, civic, and social development through a gendered lens, while emphasizing women’s rights and gender equality. The association intends to create privileged spaces of dissemination of these works, and their main focus is to do it through cinema. One of their major projects was the Porto Femme—International Film Festival (2018) dedicated to women directors, as well as the organization of other women cinema series.23

**Umar**

The Alternative Women’s Union and Response (UMAR) is a women’s association formed in 1976. Today, the association has a socially committed feminism and commitment to awaken a feminist consciousness in Portuguese society. Cinema is one of the main ways in which they are creating this awareness. Some examples are workshop series, such as “The Feminine Look: a new cinematographic language,” transversely examining the concept of a female look in filmmaking.24

**Nêga Produções**

Máira Zenun and the Nêga Produções organized an International Film Festival in Cova da Moura. The intent was to exhibit films from various African countries, from Ghana to Angola or Mozambique, but also from Brazil and Portugal. According to the organizers, “the idea was to create
a space for us blacks, and for less commercial works." The festival was produced in the “guerrilla base” with all the material borrowed and zero costs for the showing.25

These three examples are only a small sliver of a constellation of organizations producing activities on filmmaking that appear to be both an alternative and a parallel universe to ICA and the traditional productions and distribution channels. How much effective social change and alternative ways of funding, production, and distribution can these organizations create is still not clear, but one conclusion seems easy to make, they are more flexible and much more gender and ethnically inclusive than the institutional channels have been.

Conclusion

Assessing the state of gender equality in Portugal’s film industry is not a linear process. There are many distinct and conflicting processes contributing to where we find women today in the industry: from a historical legacy of representation in some key creative roles (occupation segregation) but not others (directing); from the impact of the economic crisis in defunding the sector but also creating systemic resilience and alternative routes for production and distribution; from the institutional role of Eurimages in actively promoting gender equality policies in the industry, to the more passive or negligent role of ICA, and their lack of clear data on the topic and the “invisibility cycle” that tends to exclude women more than men (from juries, from competitions, from the Audiovisual program, from exhibiting their work, etc.). Also important to consider are processes of collaboration that have existed between the CIG and many other organizations. Some of these organizations are also working more independently to promote and support women’s involvement and visibility in the industry, while at the same creating alternative ways to imagine what Portuguese cinema could look like.

Notes

1. The employment rate of the resident population aged 20–64 on 2016 was 62.4% for women and 68.3% for men. Source: http://cite.gov.pt/pt/destaques/complementosDestqs2/Flash8.pdf.
2. Portugal has four state-funded university programs in cinema (undergraduate film school programs), and of those four, two have master’s
and Ph.D. programs. There is also one private university undergraduate program. In 2002, women were 32.1% of students in film schools, but no data was collected after that since this was not the focus of this chapter.


4. The last film appearing in the top 10 national productions of that year was The Ornithologist, an art-essay LGBTQ film by João Pedro Rodrigues with 4,110 viewers.


6. Eurimages was established in 1989 as a cultural support fund of the Council of Europe. Of the 47 member states of the organization, 37 currently participate in Eurimages, plus Canada as an associate member.

7. A source we will be using extensively for statistical data concerning the number of national films supported and released. Annual publication containing statistical data about the films produced and released in the previous year, access through the link http://www.ica-ip.pt/fotos/downloads/ica_catalogodigital2018_36405ae32e0ab0bf5.pdf.


10. Due to the state of bankruptcy declared in 2011, the country was financially bailed out by the troika, which includes the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

11. Usually, the feature films are released but a good portion of funding goes to documentaries, animation, and short films, which do not have a commercial distribution circuit.

12. More on this study will be presented later in this paper.

13. Since the turn of the century, several new directors have emerged, namely Catarina Ruivo, Claudia Tomaz, and Raquel Freire, following other directors that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Monique Rutler, Solveig Nordlund, Margarida Gil, and Teresa Villaverde (Pereira 2012b, p. 178).


16. Up to 2016, only a handful of women had directed three or more movies. Those are Teresa Villaverde, Solveig Nordlund, Margarida Gil, Rita Azevedo Gomes, Rosa Coutinho Cabral, Margarida Cordeiro, and Monique Rutler (Pereira 2016, p. 197).
17. When funding ceased in 2012, journalist Alexandra Lucas Coelho drew a comparison to 1955, a ‘year zero’ when no movies were produced in the country. While there were still some movies being made in 2012, it was a very bleak year due to the ceasing of all public funding, which seemed very much reminiscent of 1955. Accessed May 27, 2019, https://www.publico.pt/2012/10/06/culturaipsilon/noticia/2012-e-o-ano-zero-do-cinema-portugues-1566121.

18. These numbers indicate just first releases.

19. We used the ICA annual catalogues as the main source. The numbers include all formats and co-productions, referring to the films completed in the previous year and expected to be concluded during the next year. The numbers are different from the film projects submitted and eligible also annually for ICA funding. Sound was added to the Eurimages reference list mentioned above from 2014 to 2017. We followed the Eurimages methodology published in the 2017 Gender Brochure. Source: https://rm.coe.int/eurimages-strategy-for-gender-equ ality-in-the-european-film-industry-2/1680732870.

20. See Fig. 5 (Appendix).

21. The Cinemateca Portuguesa-Museu do Cinema is the national body, supervised by the Minister of Culture, whose mission is the safeguarding and dissemination of the Portuguese cinematographic heritage. Source: http://www.cinemateca.pt/Cinemateca/Apresentacao.aspx.

22. Source: https://www.rtp.pt/cinemax/?t=As-mulheres-no-cinema-portug ues.rtp&article=12031&visual=2&layout=8&tm=36#.


**APPENDIX**

See Figs. 5 and 6.
Fig. 5  Graph showing women in documentary 2016–2018 (Source: Production credits published in ICA catalogues 2016–2018)

Fig. 6  Graph showing women in short fiction films 2016–2018 (Source: Production credits published in ICA catalogues 2016–2018)
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North America
Hollywood and Gender Equity Debates in the #metoo Time’s Up Era

Courtney Brannon Donoghue

Introduction

Captain Marvel, Disney’s first female-driven superhero film starring Brie Larson, premiered in theaters worldwide in March 2019. Co-directed and co-written by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, the film broke theatrical box office records ranking not only as the highest grossing film with a female director but also one of the biggest opening weekends of any major studio to date (Box Office Mojo). In many ways, Captain Marvel reflects dominant institutional practices and priorities of the Conglomerate Hollywood era. Janet Wasko describes the commercial studio system as driven by an “industrial, capitalist structure” (Wasko 2003, p. 4), whereas ownership structures and production cultures differ from many film industries with state-supported public models featured in this collection. Global conglomerate parents own the major studios—Disney/Fox, Warner Bros., Paramount, Sony, Universal—which invest heavily in the commercial blockbuster model of building tentpole franchises and cinematic universes that expand widely over windows and platforms.

Significantly, Captain Marvel was also produced and distributed during a transformative moment when global conversations about
widespread gender inequity amplified the shockingly small number of women hired to direct big-budget blockbusters in general. Until Patty Jenkins directed *Wonder Woman* (2017) and Ava DuVernay directed *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018), Kathryn Bigelow was the only woman hired for a studio project, *K-19: Widowmaker* (2002), with a production budget over $100 million (Erbland 2016). In 2019, Bigelow is still the only woman to ever win an Academy Award for Best Director. Even as studios hired women to direct what would result in high-grossing commercial films in the 2000s and 2010s from *Twilight* (2008, dir. Catherine Hardwicke) to *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015, dir. Sam Taylor-Johnson), jobs were largely limited to female-targeted films with smaller budgets and less marketing resources. As the first female-driven blockbuster in the ever-expanding and lucrative Marvel Cinematic Universe, like Jenkins with Warner Bros./DC’s *Wonder Woman*, Boden moved into the director’s chair of the hypermasculine world of superhero movies. Both filmmakers, given a rare opportunity to direct a high stakes commercial project centered on an empowered female protagonist, broke a precedence—the so-called blockbuster glass ceiling.

After a series of revelations in the mid-2010s brought widespread attention to gendered wage and employment gaps as well as toxic industry cultures, the filmmaking community today sits at a crossroads. This chapter explores these current debates, how gender disparities limit above-the-line workers, and the growing initiatives to foster more inclusive and inequitable industry cultures in Hollywood. The first section offers a historical overview of the silent era and how a male-dominated studio system evolved over time to marginalize women filmmakers. The next section outlines a culmination of events—Sony hack, US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission investigation, #metoo movement—between 2014 and 2017 that dramatically raised public awareness and connected women working in the global film industry. As a result, the final section explores a series of collective initiatives and A-list talent employing the visibility of awards speeches, red carpets, and #hashtag activism.

In considering trade publications, industry events, and social media campaigns, a complex industrial culture emerges deeply rooted in systemic gender inequity, rampant misconduct, and deep structural biases. In this rapidly shifting climate, individual and collective efforts vary with responses ranging from critical calls for actions to studio PR spin for
optics. This chapter by no means attempts to offer an expansive assessment of the post-#metoo industry landscape. Instead, I am interested in how industry gatekeepers and A-list talent address structural issues by harnessing the visibility of live broadcast events and calling on the individual power of top-tier executives and talent to take responsibility. What results is a wave of industry-wide awareness that ignites visible popular feminist activism yet still places the burden to develop and implement equitable policy initiatives back on the individual women fighting for structural change.

**Women in the Hollywood Studio System: A Modest Historical Overview**

In rewinding back to Hollywood’s younger years, women worked in almost all sectors of filmmaking by 1909. Films were cheap to make and production roles were not clearly defined. The number of women filmmakers peaked between 1918 and 1922—directing 44 feature films, heading more than 20 production companies, and writing hundreds of produced scripts (Mahar 2006, p. 2; Hallett 2013). Lois Weber emerged as one of the most commercially successful writer-directors alongside peers D. W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille (Stamp 2015, p. 3). A wave of corporate consolidation in the late 1920s resulted in a group of vertically integrated studios known as the Big Five (20th Century Fox, RKO, Paramount, Warner Bros., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) and Little Three (Columbia, Universal, United Artists). With ever-expanding budgets and financial stakes, the women who helped to build this emerging industry, or those interested in becoming filmmakers, were largely marginalized as a result.

Women were not completely absent from the Hollywood Classical period (1930s–1960s). Powerful stars—Carole Lombard, Constance Bennett, Bette Davis—leveraged their status into lucrative producing deals (Carman 2016; Smyth 2018). A handful of women worked as directors, producers, and writers—for example, Dorothy Arzner, producer and writer Virginia Van Upp, writer Anita Loos, actress and director Ida Lupino—actively worked for the major studios. Most women working inside the studio system as this time worked in feminized administrative and clerical roles and occupied entire studio departments. Erin Hill describes how the low-skilled, low-paid clerical and service work of janitors, teachers, nurses, secretaries, and assistants was classified as
“women’s work,’ which was—by definition—insignificant, tedious, low status, and non-creative” (2016, p. 5). Women’s film work was not visible nor considered as valuable as the more creative and technical work of men.

Beginning in the 1960s, a younger generation of (white male) executives took over during a transformative political, economic, and cultural climate as the studios came under new ownership. As more women entered the American workplace, female workers slowly climbed studio rankings from entry-level creative positions. Writers Joan Tewkesbury, Leigh Brackett, and Jay Presson Allen each contributed decade-defining studio screenplays. As production coordinators, casting directors, and junior development executives, known as “d-girls,” more women sat in creative meetings, took notes, and contributed to the development and production process, yet were still firmly rooted in traditional feminine administrative work (McDonnell 1987).

Maya Montañez Smukler identifies the 1970s as a “crucial decade” of feminist activism resulting in newly formed women’s committees of industry’s guilds and organizations like Women in Film (2019, p. 2). Between 1967 and 1980, sixteen women directed commercial feature films in the studio or independent sectors. With *A New Leaf* (1971), comedian, actress, and screenwriter Elaine May became the first woman to direct a film for Paramount since Dorothy Arzner in 1932. Smukler argues this strategic hiring was largely a public relations move allowing Paramount “to economize on paying for talent but also to exploit her skills and position in the industry because she was a first-time director and a woman” (p. 81). May helmed three more features until the disastrous release of *Ishtar* (1987) for Columbia Pictures ended her directing career.

A few women slowly began to break into the executive suite. Twentieth Century Fox promoted Sherry Lansing as the first female president in 1980 followed by Columbia hiring Dawn Steel in 1987 (Smukler 2019). The first notable group of (almost exclusively white) women directing studio films coincided with growing university film programs including Amy Heckerling and Martha Coolidge (NYU), Penelope Spheeris (UCLA), and Kathryn Bigelow (Columbia). Other paths to the studio director’s chair included screen star power (Barbra Streisand, Penny Marshall, Jodie Foster) or successful screenwriting credits (Nora Ephron and Nancy Meyers). These female-led studio projects were largely limited to family-oriented comedies or lighter female-targeted
films deemed chick flics. Bigelow, who directed mostly male-driven action films, was a significant exception at that point.

Female studio writers and directors were almost all exclusively white during this period as women of color were largely excluded from studio hiring lists. Suzanne de Passe became the first person of color to receive an Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay in 1972 for the Billie Holiday biopic *Lady Sings the Blues*. Euzhan Palcy, the first black woman to direct a studio film, struggled to follow-up *A Dry White Season* (1989). She reflected on meetings with executives: “They would not touch my [own] stories because they were about black people. They kept saying to me — to my face, but very nicely, not to insult me — that ‘black is not bankable’” (Gottlieb 2019). Palcy, like so many of her peers over the following decades, eventually moved to television in order to tell female-driven stories about the black experience.

By the 1990s, female screenwriters Leslie Dixon, Callie Khoury, Susannah Grant, and Linda Woolverton penned screenplays for studio projects from commercial comedies to animated features. Even as filmmakers Gina Prince-Bythewood, Karyn Kusama, Kimberly Peirce, Cheryl Dunye, and Sofia Coppola emerged from the 1990s and 2000s independent boom, women continued to face gendered barriers around bankability, risk, and experience. For many, financing a second or third film became harder and took an average of five years or more. The majority of women directors mostly worked, and still largely do, in an independent production space characterized by lower costs, less resources, and a smaller risk factor. Christina Lane argues “because distributors and marketing departments often perceive [female genre] films to be less likely to succeed in comparison to big-budget movies or male indie fare, they often fail to put the necessary resources into independent women’s films before they leave gate” (Lane 2004, p. 204). Even when independent films directed by women find critical and financial success, it is still difficult to move from first to second feature as many male peers seamlessly managed during this period.

The few directors who do make the transition from indie to studio work are held to higher standards than their male peers to succeed. For those women who make the leap, and whose studio projects do not meet box office expectations or labeled difficult to work with, are sent to “movie jail” and categorized as too risky to hire (Knott 2014). Journalist Rebecca Keegan labels gendered expectations of failure as the “*Ishtar Effect,*” due to the notorious overspending and box office failure ending
May’s directing career. In contrast, the bankable status of male stars, Warren Beatty and Dustin Hoffman, remained intact as they continued to work for decades (Keegan 2015b). Another much-cited example of movie jail is Karyn Kusama. After her critically acclaimed Sundance Film Festival debut Girlfight (2000), Paramount hired Kusama to direct sci-fi action Aeon Flux (2005). Blamed for its critical and financial failure, she reflects in retrospect: “I’m very conscious of how frequently great artists in film who are male and are also generally called ‘big personalities’ get to fail” (Vary 2016).

Even a track record of box office success offers no guarantees. Despite having directed six studio features, writer-director Nancy Meyers recounts the nearly impossible challenge of women securing financing for big-budget projects:

> Big movies are reserved for the guys, no one says it, but that’s the way it is, right? Is it something about turning over $70 million to a woman or $50 million or $30 million or $150 million? … Let’s not assume women don’t want in on those kinds of movies. Women can direct dinosaurs. Believe me. (Larocca 2015)

Despite a string of star-driven films, Meyers still struggles to get her female-driven films made. She recalls “very frustrating and disheartening” meetings over many years to secure financing for The Intern (2015) (Larocca 2015).

**Pressure Points: 2015–2017**

A sea swell of revelations regarding unequal opportunities, access, and advancement for women working in Hollywood arrived after a series of events in the mid-2010s. First, the fall 2014 cyberbreach of Sony Picture Entertainment’s internal network resulted in leaked company documents. Significantly, the leak exposed corporate communications and documents that confirmed what women in Hollywood quietly assumed about a widespread gender wage gap. For example, one spreadsheet revealed the salaries for the top-earning studio employees. Of the 17 executives making a million dollars or more, only one was a woman—Amy Pascal, Co-Chairman SPE and President of the Motion Pictures Group (Frizell 2014; Wrap staff 2015). Another widely reported document confirmed Jennifer
Lawrence and Amy Adams made significantly less than their male co-stars Christian Bale, Bradley Cooper, and Jeremy Renner for the David O. Russell directed film *American Hustle* (2013). In response to news of the leaked salaries, Lawrence released an essay for the online publication *Lenny Letter* asking “Why Do I Make Less Than My Male Co-Stars?” (2015). As a PR disaster for Sony, the hack revealed embarrassing communications and sensitive documents that backed up many of the industry’s open secrets—how women working in front of and behind the camera are not hired or compensated at the same rates as their male peers. Ultimately, long-time SPE head Amy Pascal was the only executive fired after the hack fall out. One of the most powerful women in Hollywood at the time, many see her forced exit as Sony making their top female executive the scapegoat for the studio’s mishandling.

The following year the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sent letters to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, and Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs calling for a federal investigation of the Hollywood studios’ discriminatory hiring practices. Written by Melissa Goodman, director of the LGBT, Gender and Reproductive Justice Project at the ACLU of Southern California, and Ariela Migdal, the 2015 letter resulted in shockwaves throughout the film industry. Based on extensive enquiry, and ignited by film director Maria Giese, the ACLU interviewed 50 women and reviewed employment data (Keegan 2015a). In their letter to the EEOC, the ACLU cited inequitable employment numbers for women and asked for “an investigation into systemic failure to hire women directors in violation of Title VII at all levels of the film and television industry” (ACLU 2015).¹ In return, the EEOC launched their own nearly two-year investigation interviewing women directors that received extensive press coverage. In 2017, the federal commission concluded their investigation. The EEOC as a result of their findings reportedly began settlement talks with the major studios, yet would not officially comment on their findings or release the report (Robb 2017). As quoted in *Women in Hollywood*, Goodman responded: “EEOC charges are, by definition, secret so we are not in a position to confirm that the EEOC has issued commissioners charges against every major studio. What I can say is that, if this news is true, it would not surprise me and we are elated by this historic action” (Women in Hollywood 2017). As part of the investigation, the Director’s Guild of America (DGA) pushed for studios to adopt more inclusive hiring practices similar
to the National Football League’s (NFL) “Rooney Rule” requiring candidates of color to be included when interviewing for heading coaching positions (Proxmire 2008).

On the one hand, this is not the first time a major investigation revealed systemic gender equity across the industry. After the studios refused to adopt recommended policies to hire more women and directors of color, the DGA filed a lawsuit against Columbia and Warner Bros. for employment discrimination in 1983 due to the tireless work of the guild’s Women’s Committee. A judge dismissed the lawsuit in 1985 and employment numbers remained nearly stagnant for decades (Mills 1986). On the other hand, critical press coverage since 2015, including The Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter and others, increasingly reported on gender inequities in studio hiring and career advancement. In Keegan’s article, “Is 2015 the tipping point for women and minorities in Hollywood?”, she writes:

There’s no doubt this has been a year of constant pressure on the entertainment industry, from within and without, and from governmental and market forces, on the issues of race and gender. There are those who say we’ve been here before, that diversity is like a wave that periodically hits the shores of Hollywood only to recede. (2015c)

Industry-wide awareness gradually increased with press coverage of employment disparities for women working above-the-line. Keegan, like many journalists, activists, and academics in succeeding years, questioned if long-term, systemic change would follow the industry’s slow consciousness raising moment following the EEOC investigation.

Another significant shock came after investigative reports published in October 2017. Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey’s New York Times and Ronan Farrow’s New Yorker articles exposed former Miramax and Weinstein Company executive Harvey Weinstein’s decades of sexual misconduct and abuse (2017; 2017). The first-hand accounts revealed a powerful executive who intimidated, coerced, and harassed female film professionals from A-list actresses to assistants. As a result, women in the entertainment industries collectively began to organize across social media. Expanding #metoo movement founded by Tarana Burke in 2006, the hashtag became a rallying cry for survivors in this movement (Garcia 2017). Women across Hollywood and the entertainment industries began speaking up and recounting devastating experiences of predatory behavior
and workplace misconduct by bosses and co-workers. A snowball effect occurred as more accused men in powerful positions were called out—Amazon executive Roy Price, actor Kevin Spacey, Pixar studio head John Lasseter, CBS executive Leslie Moonves to name a few—and exposed larger systemic patterns at the rotten core of the Hollywood boy’s club.

Even with these revelations, the Hollywood studio system failed to make equitable hiring an institutional strategy prior to 2018. Women still hold only a small percentage of above-the-line positions on feature film projects, whether studio or indie financed. In the annual study “The Celluloid Ceiling,” Martha Lauzen reveals female film professionals made up only 20% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 250 domestic grossing films in 2018. Women comprised 26% of producers for these films in contrast to directors (8%), writers (16%), editors (21%), and cinematographers (4%). In looking at the top 100 grossing films between 1980 and 2018, female directors increased from one percent (1980) to two percent (2010) to four percent (2018) (Lauzen 2019). For below-the-line positions, women still hold the majority of lower-level positions like production coordinator and script supervisors as opposed to their male peers in higher status and better-paid jobs like assistant director (Ng 2018).

When looking at individual company employment records in the report “Inclusion in the Director’s Chair?”, Stacey L. Smith, Marc Choueiti, and Katherine Pieper classify all six major studios as “not inclusive” of female writers and directors. Of more than 100 feature films distributed theatrically in 2014, filmed entertainment divisions 21st Century Fox (4% female directors; 13% female writers) and NBC Universal (9% female directors; 9% female writers) ranked highest in equitable gender representation despite illustrating shockingly low inclusivity. The higher you rise up the Hollywood corporate ladder, the employment gap follows (2019). Very few women occupy the so-called C-suite of Chief Officer positions for the Big 7 (21st Century Fox, NBC Universal, Walt Disney, Sony, Lionsgate-Summit, Time Warner, Paramount). Of the 95 media executives running these entertainment groups in January 2018, 82.1% were men and 17.9% women, with only four held by women of color. Gender inclusivity peaks at the Executive Vice-President, Senior Vice-President, and Vice-President levels, which was made up of 41.2% women (Smith et al. 2019, pp. 8–9). The numbers across the line and all sectors are simply staggering and even more dismal considering how white women
are hired and paid at significantly higher rates than women of color. The
gender inequity that historically characterizes employment and promotion
in the studio system points to industry-wide glass ceiling denying so many
women opportunities and access.

**Visible Activism: Organizing and Initiatives**

Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy assigned responsibility for industry
gatekeepers to address toxic industry cultures only days after the Wein-
stein stories’ release in fall 2017. During her speech at the *Elle* Women in Hollywood event, Kennedy asserted: “the organizations that consti-
tute the American film industry—the studios, the unions, the guilds and
the talent agencies—should immediately convene a commission charged
with the task of developing new, industry-wide protections against sexual
harassment and abuse” (THR staff 2017). Not surprisingly, considering
the studios’ historic approach of self-regulation and internal oversight for
implementing the Production Code to global anti-piracy efforts, a group
of studio executives announced the Commission on Sexual Harassment
and Advancing Equality in the Workplace in December 2017. Led by
Anita Hill, professor of social policy, law and women’s studies at Brandeis
University, the Commission worked to raise a $1–5 million budget from
network, studio, guild, and talent agency contributions. What may be
most striking is the Commission’s formation highlights just how deeply
ingrained the abuses of power and privilege are after workplace miscon-
duct allegations surfaced about founding members CBS’ Leslie Moonves
and Warner Bros. Kevin Tsujihara leading to their respective resignations
(Sun 2017; Robb 2018).

One of the most publicly visible responses to #metoo came on New
Year’s Day in 2018 when a group of Hollywood A-list talent, including
Oprah Winfrey, Salma Hayek, Reese Witherspoon, Shonda Rhimes, and
America Ferrera, introduced Time’s Up. In response to public support
for the female farmworkers of Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, hundreds
of women working in the entertainment industries signed an open letter
appearing in the English-language *New York Times* and Spanish-language
*La Opinión* as full-page ads (Time’s Up 2018). According to the official
Web site, Time’s Up works for:

> safe, fair and dignified work for women of all kinds. We want women
from the factory floor to the floor of the Stock Exchange, from child care
centers to C-suites, from farm fields to the tech field, to be united by a shared sense of safety, fairness and dignity as they work and as we all shift the paradigm of workplace culture. Powered by women, our TIME’S UP™ programming addresses the systemic inequality and injustice in the workplace that have kept underrepresented groups from reaching their full potential. (Time’s Up website 2018)

The organization raised donations for a legal defense fund reaching over $22 million in its first year. The defense fund supports cases of workplace sexual harassment as well as survivor support, mentorship initiatives, and policy activism for industries beyond Hollywood.

Time’s Up members quickly utilized public-facing tactics including red carpet activism. The 2018 Golden Globe ceremony broadcast occurred in the same month as the Time’s Up announcement. In order to seize momentum, actors and industry creatives attending the ceremony wore black dresses and suits and some asked designers to donate their fee to the Time’s Up legal fund. Female activists accompanied a handful of A-list actresses to meet press on the red carpet such as Michelle Williams with #metoo founder Tarana Burke and Meryl Streep with director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance Ai-jen Poo (Moore 2018; Buckley 2018). Caitlin Lawson identifies the “increasingly prominent and (at least performatively) activist nature of celebrity feminism” at highly publicized awards shows that employ red carpet publicity and extend to social media #hashtag activism with the #Timesup social media campaign (Lawson 2018, p. 78).

This strategy of celebrity activism continued during the 2018 awards season with Frances McDormand’s acceptance speech at the Academy Awards. When accepting her Best Actress Oscar for *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017), she asked female nominees in each category to stand in the audience:

Look around [at these women], ladies and gentlemen, because we all have stories to tell and projects we need to be financed. Don’t talk to us about it at the parties tonight. Invite us into your office in a couple days, or you can come to ours, whatever suits you best, and we’ll tell you all about them. I have two words to leave with you tonight, ladies and gentlemen: ‘inclusion rider’. (Kosin 2018)

McDormand used her speech to foreground two approaches for addressing gender inequity that garnered broad public attention. First,
she challenged powerful institutional players, namely gatekeepers at major studios and production companies, to finance more female-driven stories starting one project at time. Second, in the closing comment that spread wildly in subsequent press coverage, she identifies legal contracts as a strategy toward equitable hiring. Matt Warren describes an inclusion rider as a “clause built into contracts of high-profile talent (actors, producers, directors, etc.) that stipulate greater rates of inclusion of [women, POC, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities] both in front of and behind the camera” (Warren 2018). In other words, by implementing a rider with employment contracts, above-the-line individuals with bankable credits can leverage their position during negotiations to ensure quotas for inclusive hiring with above-the-line and below-the-line roles. In subsequent months, while debates surrounding these riders continue, only a handful of top-tier talent pledged to employ inclusion riders to increase employment for women and people of color, including actors Michael B. Jordan, Regina King, and Captain Marvel herself Brie Larson (Buckley 2019).

However, critical pushback against the riders strategy followed. In a New York Times opinion piece, criminal defense and civil rights lawyer Rebecca Chapman warns inclusion riders may only offer a “cosmetic fix” during one-off negotiations. This tactic shifts “the burden of equality, essentially requiring that the very parties who the riders are claiming to protect (the marginalized and disempowered—the silenced) do the work of enforcement” (Chapman 2018). What Chapman argues is that professionals of color are too often burdened with monitoring or reporting how well inclusion policies are enforced in ways their white colleagues are not. Early calls for inclusion riders failed to address the layered nature of power dynamics in the entertainment industries where negotiations and collaborations bring together industry professionals with varying degrees of industry capital, leverage, and experience. Particularly when the majority of those in power are still white men, the burden of employing legal initiatives and employment policy falls on the individuals who need protection the most.

In a more recent attempt to pressure studios to hire more female directors, Time’s Up introduced the “4 Percent Challenge” at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. The campaign, amplified further as a Twitter hashtag, asked major studios to pledge to hire one women director in the next 18 months. Universal, Paramount, and Warner Bros. signed on whereas other studios either released company diversity policies already in place or pointed to upcoming production slates as Disney
did (Kilday 2019). The immediate response reflects what Sarah Banet-Weiser describes as “the rising visibility of safely affirmational feminism … mainstreaming of feminism may, in fact, limit its impact, as if seeing or purchasing feminism and contributing to its visibility is the same thing as doing something — something that might effectively change the patriarchal structure of our society” (2018). In other words, increased visibility may call more increased attention to gender inequities but often offers little in terms of long-term structural solutions. She argues, this type of “popular feminism engages in a feedback loop, where it is more popular when it is more visible … but simply becoming visible does not usher in sweeping change. Visibility is at best a tool for social change, not an end” (2018). The oversight and implementation of equitable hiring policies still falls upon willing industry players to volunteer and uphold with little guidance on best practices or achievable outcomes with no industry standard in place (Lee 2019; Banks and Lieb 2019). Too much of the burden to create sustainable change rests on the shoulders of individual professionals or single film projects to tackle larger, structural issues impact women the film industry such as hiring practices, on-set culture, traditionally gendered job roles, microaggressions, misconduct, and harassment that span far across all industry sectors.

**Conclusion**

During the mid-2010s, the global filmmaking community witnessed a pivotal moment of pressure around gender equity, diversity, and inclusion as these debates and policy efforts are taking place in a number of local industries. In the American film industry, how labor, leadership, and creative vision are valued in front of and behind the camera is not equitable nor inclusive, particularly for creative workers who have been historically marginalized or denied access to commercial filmmaking pipelines and opportunities. The specific industrial structures, practices, and cultures invested in maintaining gendered notions of bankability and viability that shape production and distribution process must continue to be called into question. The #metoo and Time’s Up movements grew from a heavy focus in the beginning on disgraced men fallen from power to shifting the strategy to red carpets and award show speeches aimed at increasing public and press attention toward women’s labor issues in the film industry.
What are the long-term impacts, or stickiness, of recent movements discussed in this chapter? Will studio and top-tier gatekeeper commitments move from supportive PR campaigns and affirmation feminist pledges to measurable policies and tangible means of enforcement? At best, these efforts may result in short-term results for individual projects yet, at this point, until they are widely adopted and enforced, the inconsistent response from the Hollywood studios does not yet indicate the potential for lasting industry-wide systemic change. The studio system evolved over a century, and it will take time to dismantle widespread disparities and biases that are deeply rooted in business practices and corporate cultures. An industry-wide intersectional approach must tackle all levels from the C-suite to the crew, by moving beyond a belief that top-tier creatives will bring trickle-down equity to the rest of the industry. The new wave of Hollywood’s popular feminism needs time to develop beyond #hashtag activism. The highly visible and viral nature of this public-facing strategy operates to shame industry gatekeepers into action and is a promising place to start, but there is still a long journey ahead.

Notes

1. Title VII refers to the 1964 Civil Rights Act that states: “It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer … to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.” See American Association of University Women for more information: https://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/legal-resources/health-at-work/title-vii/.


References


Gender Advocacy in Canadian Film and Television: Are Women Finally Breaking Through?

Susan Brinton and Sharon McGowan

Canada, with a population of 37 million and geographically spread across five time zones, is listed among the global leaders in women’s equality. The McKinsey Global Institute in 2017 (Bonin et al. 2017) ranked Canada in the top 10 of 95 countries based on a review of 15 equality indicators in work and society. However, the institute reports that progress in Canada has stalled over the past 20 years. Data on many indicators has shown little improvement, and at current rates, gender gaps could take 30–180 years to close.

After winning a federal election in 2015, and appointing for the first time a gender-balanced cabinet, a new Liberal Party government declared closing the gender gap to be a priority. This public commitment, combined with the renewed global feminist movement and #metoo, has resulted in a surge of support in Canada for initiatives to promote gender equality in our industry. Women, especially women of colour and Indigenous women, remain seriously underrepresented, but there have been

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some promising improvements in the past few years. In 2017, in television, women’s share of the total writing, directing and cinematography contracts rose to 28%, an increase of 11% from 2014. But only 1.8% of those contracts went to women of colour and none to Indigenous women. In feature film, the improvement is much smaller. In 2017, just 25% of the total writing, directing and cinematography contracts went to women, an improvement of only 5% from 2014, with 4% going to women of colour and 1% to Indigenous women (Women in View 2019).

As experienced industry professionals, we have been involved with most aspects of Canada’s film and television industry over the past forty years. As women, we have been affected by the industry’s inequality. As Board members of Women in Film and Television Vancouver (WIFT Vancouver), a not-for-profit society, and as Co-Chairs of its Advocacy Committee, we have been intimately involved in lobbying for change. We have found that examining the key sources of public production funding in Canada and lobbying for changes to government policies that control them is crucial to advancing gender equality in the industry.

In this chapter, we will present a brief history of the progress that has been made in our industry, with a summary of what is happening now and challenges for the future.

**The Key Organizations in Canada**

Most Canadian content films and television programmes are financed by independent producers accessing a combination of federal and provincial government funds, private or public broadcaster licenses and/or distributor advances for a specific production. Government funding takes the form of equity investment, broadcast licenses, non-repayable grants or rebates on labour costs through tax credits.

The main government agencies and organizations that drive the production industry, in Canada’s two official languages (French and English) and Aboriginal languages, are the National Film Board (NFB), Canada’s public producer of mainly documentaries; Telefilm Canada (Telefilm), which supports Canadian feature films; and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC/Société Radio-Canada), Canada’s national public broadcaster. Across the country, provincial government agencies also provide funding to film and television production.

In the private sector, Canada’s broadcasting market is dominated by five companies (Bell Media, Shaw Media, Quebecor, Rogers Media
The other large player in Canadian television production is the Canada Media Fund (CMF), a national public–private television and digital media funding organization. CMF funding comes from a mandatory contribution of 5% of revenues from Canadian private broadcast distributors, matched by government funding of no less than $100 million annually. Broadcasters are allocated production funding envelopes by the CMF, and Canadian television producers must have a licensing commitment from a broadcaster to apply for and access these CMF funding envelopes. The vast majority of Canadian funded programming is produced for the television market, which in 2017–2018 exceeded $3 billion, of which $2.6 billion was television production (CMPA 2019).

Broadcasters in Canada are regulated by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), an administrative tribunal whose mandate is set out in the Broadcasting Act (Government of Canada 1991). The NFB and Telefilm receive policy direction from the federal Ministry of Canadian Heritage.

**Activism on Gender in Canada’s Screen Industries**

Canada has a long history of women working for equality in the screen industries. Recent progress is supported by the political zeitgeist but is also the result of committed work by women and allies across the country over the past 45 years.

In 1974, in response to the activism of Kathleen Shannon and other women working at the National Film Board, the NFB established the world’s first publicly funded feminist film production unit. Under Shannon’s leadership, Studio D gained international respect and accolades for its outstanding films, including three Academy Awards.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several artist-driven feminist filmmaking and distribution co-ops and collectives, such as Vancouver Women in Focus (1974–1992), were founded to support women’s work and advocate for equality in the industry at large. While women were still a small minority in the film industry in all positions, some major breakthroughs were made during this time. *Madeleine Is…* (1971), the first Canadian feature film directed by a woman, Sylvia Spring, was based on a short film she had made for the NFB. Spring later became a major contributor to a National Task Force on sex-role stereotyping in the
media (Barrie and CRTC 1982), which led to new regulations improving the portrayal of women in programmes produced or commissioned by Canada’s broadcasters.

As more women entered the industry during the 1970s and 1980s, the non-profit professional organization Women in Film and Television (WIFT) established autonomous chapters across Canada: in Toronto (1984), Vancouver (1989), Montreal (1991), Alberta (1998) and Atlantic Canada (2007). The organizations worked to promote, educate and advocate for gender equality in the industry, using varied strategies appropriate to their region. In the early decades, WIFT groups focused on professional development, networking and promoting the talents of women in film and television, rather than lobbying or direct activism. Many believed women only needed to develop their talents and skills, and promote them to the industry, in order to thrive. There was also a sense that in an industry that relied on collegiality and word of mouth for opportunities and information, speaking out directly about discrimination or systemic barriers would endanger careers or funding. At the end of the decade, in 1989, the St. John’s International Women’s Film Festival was founded. Now one of the world’s longest-running women’s film festivals, it provided an important platform for discussions of women’s position in the film industry.

In 1996, the NFB closed Studio D in a wave of budget cuts, amid an industry perception that increasing numbers of women entering film and television meant gender equality was well on its way, and a separate, feminist unit at the NFB was no longer needed.

By 2004, in response to anecdotal information contesting women’s advancement, WIFT Vancouver began informally tracking national industry data, working from government screen agency annual reports, press releases and crew lists. The research found a persistent pattern of severe inequality in leadership positions and funding. Realizing the need for detailed and credible data to effectively lobby for change, two past presidents of WIFT Vancouver generated funding and launched two research studies on women’s participation in the film and television labour force of British Columbia, Canada’s second largest production centre. The studies (Ference Weicker & Company 2005; Cari Green & Associates 2006) confirmed significant gender inequality at all levels in BC’s industry, in both hiring and production funding. They also revealed that women were graduating at the same rate as men from publicly funded film schools, and that women working in the industry were consistently
more highly trained than their male counterparts. Women working in the
industry were concentrated in entry-level positions and were securing a
fragment of available financing in a rapidly expanding industry.

In 2008, another study (Descarries and Garneau 2008), this time
focusing on Quebec women directors, was released by Réalizatrices
Équitables, a not-for-profit association in Quebec. It showed the situa-
tion was the same for women directors in the Canadian French-language
market in relation to training and access to funding.

These provincially focused studies pointed to an urgent need for more
comprehensive gender data on a national level. In 2008, Women in View,
a new national not-for-profit organization was founded to collect data and
advocate for gender equality and inclusion, and to support the develop-
ment of a national network around the issues that emerged. In 2012,
Women in View released its first national statistical study on 130 Cana-
dian films released in 2010 and 2011 showing women directors heading
only 17% of the films made through Canadian public funding agencies
and women writers heading only 21%.

Another industry organization, CUES (Canadian Unions for Equality
on Screen), a coalition of women’s committees from the national film
unions and guilds, then released a detailed national report on women’s
employment patterns in Canadian film and television (Coles 2013).
Again, serious and persistent inequalities were documented.

Amid the gathering of all this vitally important research, Anna Serner,
CEO of the Swedish Film Institute (SFI), announced the SFI’s commit-
ment to “50/50 by 2020”—equal support for projects directed by men
and women—in all its funding to feature film projects. Serner was the
first leader of a national government agency to take such a public stance
and to develop a system and criteria to work towards this goal. The SFI
commitment showed the world that gender parity in film and television
production could and should be the responsibility of government agencies
handling the purse strings for production.

Unfortunately, the timing was poor in Canada. From 2008 to 2015,
the Conservative Party was in power federally and was not supportive of
women or the arts. The government was defunding many organizations
and initiatives involved in culture and women’s rights. In spite of all the
credible data proving there was an entrenched systemic problem in the
Canadian industry, appeals to government funding agencies to address
gender inequality fell on deaf ears.
In 2014, building on the rising awareness growing out of the release of such data, Women in View and the St. John’s International Women’s Film Festival hosted a historic summit of key women’s media groups in Canada, representing over 40,000 people. Summit participants ratified a list of seven recommendations for systemic and structural changes needed to create gender equality in our industry. These recommendations were designed to ensure all government funding to the Canadian industry was distributed to men and women equally, and all government policies and agencies driving and regulating the industry should ensure equality and inclusion in funding, employment and on-screen representation. The recommendations also demanded that data on gender and inclusion be collected by government organizations funding film and television projects, and that the data be available to the public on a regular and timely basis (Women in View 2015).

The political climate was still unwelcoming, however, and the St. John’s Summit on Women in Media and its recommendations received only cursory notice in the press and minimal response from public funding agencies and policymakers.

**A Changing Environment**

In October 2015, the Conservative government was defeated and the Liberal Party took power in Canada, appointing a gender-balanced Cabinet for the first time, thereby drawing attention to the importance of promoting gender equality in Canadian society. With renewed optimism, the women’s groups from the St. John’s Summit re-approached funding agencies and policymakers across the country.

The National Film Board was the first government institution to make a move. When WIFT Vancouver presented the latest Women in View research and St. John’s Summit recommendations to the NFB’s Film Commissioner, Claude Joli-Coeur, he initiated an internal review on gender equality in NFB funding. Joli-Coeur subsequently committed the organization in March 2016 to a policy of equality in the number of women directors and in the percentage of funding for projects directed by women. Joli-Coeur stated, “There have been good years and lean years for women’s filmmaking at the NFB. No more. Today, I’m making a firm, ongoing commitment to full gender parity, which I hope will help to lead the way for the industry as a whole” (National Film Board 2016).
The NFB commitment to address gender inequality at the policy level made international headlines. One month later, under intense pressure from the precedent set by the NFB commitment and from lobbying by women’s groups across the country, Telefilm and the CMF announced their commitment to finding solutions to the lack of gender parity in the audio-visual industry (Telefilm 2016). The CBC followed with an announcement in June 2016 that at least half of its new prime-time drama series would be directed by women (CBC 2016).

Helping to push the agenda further in 2016 and 2017, the Canadian union and guild organization CUES released yet another study, focusing on women directors, noting that gender inequality in the film and television production industry was a systemic problem that affected women but was not one created by women. Consequently, solutions to such an issue of considerable economic and social significance would require an industry-wide effort (Coles 2016). The Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA) released a report on women and leadership in the Canadian screen industries, finding in its research that the majority of stakeholders expressed frustration that voluntary targets have simply not worked and that it is time for incentives to be linked to financial benefit (Duopoly 2017).

**Focus on the Private Broadcasters**

The authors of this chapter, as the Advocacy Co-Chairs of WIFT Vancouver, next turned our attention to the policies governing the Canadian broadcasting sector. In November 2016, when the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) held public hearings reviewing Canadian broadcaster performance, we filed a formal submission and flew to Ottawa to appear in person in front of the Commissioners. Our goal was to motivate the CRTC to act in its capacity as the federal regulator to address gender inequality in Canadian television programming.

We presented the data from Women in View’s 2015 report, highlighting the major gender inequalities in leadership positions on the programmes Canadian broadcasters were commissioning. We pointed out that, according to the *Broadcasting Act* (1991), the Canadian broadcasting system should:
• 3 d (iii) through its programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operations, serve the needs and interests, and reflect the circumstances and aspirations, of Canadian men, women and children, including equal rights, the linguistic duality and multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society and the special place of aboriginal peoples within that society.

We took issue with the CRTC’s own approach to gender equality over the past two decades, stating:

There is a widely held assumption that, left to its own devices, the industry will naturally produce a gender-balanced workforce. History has shown that assumption to be incorrect and it’s now clear that government, at both the federal and provincial levels, will have to take a leadership role to ensure that change occurs. (CRTC 2016)

WIFT Vancouver asked the CRTC to require Canadian broadcasters to commit to three-year plans for reaching gender equality in key creative positions by 2020. In response to our submission, the CRTC formally acknowledged its responsibility to the issue (CRTC 2017), held a national summit to review gender equality in Canadian television programming in December 2018, and in 2019, implemented new policies for regulating gender equality in creative leadership positions of the programming commissioned by the private broadcasters. This was a landmark decision in Canadian television policy (CRTC 2019).

**Initiatives to Increase and Support Women’s Involvement**

Major initiatives undertaken by key Canadian funding agencies and the national public broadcaster since 2015–2016 have approached improving gender equality in different ways, but their methods could be classified as either an “incentive” or a “requirement”, or, more colloquially, a “carrot or a stick”. In this context, an “incentive” is usually a bonus offered that encourages the industry to make a shift by rewarding it in some (monetary) way. A “requirement” is a clear target that must be met to secure funding or benefits. The industry in general would prefer no restrictions on accessing government funding, but an incentive is more favourably viewed as it is perceived as less disruptive to the status quo.
Other stakeholders, including WIFT Vancouver, argue that from a public policy perspective all government funds should have a requirement to be distributed in a representative fashion.

**National Film Board**

The NFB took the “requirement” approach, assigning their producers to achieve gender equality in their choice of directors and in the budgets they assigned to those directors. As a result, in March 2019, the NFB announced it had achieved parity for the fiscal year 2018–2019: 48% of NFB works that year were directed by women, 38% by men and 14% by mixed teams, with 44% of the NFB production budget allocated to works directed by women and 15% to works directed by mixed teams (NFB 2019).

The NFB also expanded its commitment in 2017 to include equality in the positions of writer, editor, cinematographer and music composer. Results for 2017–2018 show writing contracts at 47% women (from 27% in the previous year), editing at 38% (from 24%), cinematography at 13% (from 12%) and composer at 4% (down from 13%) (NFB 2019).

Of all the funding agencies mentioned, the NFB has the smallest budget for production ($36 million) and has autonomy in making decisions about projects, so it is likely to meet its goals by 2020 in writing and editing categories. Achieving equality for cinematographers and composers will take longer due to the low numbers of women currently working in these areas. In support of its commitment to equity in hiring, the NFB opened a talent bank where emerging women cinematographers and composers can upload their portfolios for consideration by NFB producers and directors.

**Telefilm Canada**

Telefilm took an “incentive” approach to gender equality. It announced that Telefilm would encourage and favour projects with women in key creative roles but would not alter the structure of its funding models or establish hard requirements for internal decision-making on its approximately $70 million annual production fund. Using this approach, Telefilm aimed to achieve a balanced production portfolio (at all budget levels) by 2020 in each of the key roles of director, writer and producer.
The results have been mixed. For Telefilm projects funded during the 2018–2019 fiscal year, there was an increase in funding for projects with women in at least one key role (director, producer or screenwriter), in terms of both dollars and volume. However, projects with a women director in the higher budget category saw an increase of only five percentage points, up from 18 to 23% of total available funding. For women writers in the higher production budget category, the increase was up from 21 to 34% (Telefilm 2019).

For the role of producer, parity (or parity zone—within 40 to 60%) was reached in all areas, with 61% of all projects having a female lead producer, up from 48% the previous year (Telefilm 2019). This is not surprising, however, given that producing is a role where women have made the strongest advances in the independent Canadian production model. Producers in this system are essentially hiring and taking a risk on themselves when developing a project.

It is clear that with its modest “incentive” approach, Telefilm is unlikely to reach its goals of a balanced production portfolio (at all budget levels) and gender equality in the key roles of director and writer by 2020. To address this issue, the three women’s media organizations most actively consulting with Telefilm on this issue—WIFT Vancouver, Réalizatrices Équitables and Women in View—made a joint request to Telefilm in August 2019 to intensify the incentives they offer and make structural changes to their financing models.

**Canada Media Fund**

The Canada Media Fund took the “requirement” approach when it implemented new gender equality initiatives in 2017–2018. CMF required broadcasters to meet gender targets that would increase year over year or face losing some of their allocated funding. This included requiring that broadcasters target 25% of their commissioned programmes in 2017 (in $ terms) on projects that employed a requisite number of women in the key positions: producer, writer, showrunner and director (or a combination thereof). In 2018–2019, the target was increased to 35%, and in 2019–2020, the target is 50% and the minimum requirement is 35% (Canada Media Fund 2017).

The CMF announced that during 2018–2019, its guideline changes resulted in broadcasters reaching or exceeding the first-year gender targets. Among the large broadcasters with production envelopes, 90%
exceeded the 25% minimum spending on projects with women in key positions and hit the 35% target in 2018–2019 (Canada Media Fund 2019).

In specific roles and percentages, in its report for 2018–2019, the CMF announced it had reached gender balance in the producer’s role with the exception of French-language drama which was at 37% women producers. Women writers in all categories made up over 40% in all language and genre categories except for French drama (39%) and French variety and performing arts (23%). However, none of the genre categories met parity for directors, although English-language drama series saw a 13% increase in female directors to 39%, French drama was at 18% and English and French variety and performing arts programming was at 13% women directors.

The CMF’s requirement strategy has been very effective over a relatively short period of time in raising the overall percentage of women in leadership positions. However, increasing the number of women directors in all categories remains an issue that needs to be addressed more strongly.

*Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*

The CBC took a “requirement” approach in 2016, insisting on the hiring of 50% women directors on its new major television series. As a result, the CBC reported an overall jump in programmes directed by women for 2017 from 22 to 37%. Of this number, 7% were women of colour and none were Indigenous women (Women in View 2019).

In the CBC’s September 2019 report to the CRTC, the public broadcaster announced it had surpassed its goal of gender parity across its commissioned programmes and that during the 2018/19 broadcast year across all original English and French scripted and unscripted shows, the public broadcaster supported 62% female-led projects where the majority of the key creative roles of producer, director, writer and showrunner were held by women.

The CBC measures put in place in 2016 clearly had a dramatic impact on women directors, and women’s media groups are challenging the CBC to expand its gender equality commitment to other key creative positions.
Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission

The CRTC took both a “requirement” and “incentive” approach. As mentioned earlier, in August 2019 the Commission implemented a rigorous new reporting structure for Canadian private broadcasters, requiring them to collect and annually publish data on the numbers of women producers, directors, writers, cinematographers and editors as well as lead performers employed on the programmes they commission. The CRTC also required Canadian broadcasters to submit detailed plans for voluntarily reaching gender parity in these positions. As a result of these rulings, the major Canadian private broadcasters committed in September 2019 to achieving gender parity by 2025 in key creative roles for their Canadian commissioned programmes.

These actions and decisions by the CRTC were major historic wins for women working in the Canadian industry. Of paramount importance, the Commission used the requirement approach to finally unlocked access to private broadcaster data on gender allowing for further scrutiny and advocacy on gender equality in Canadian broadcaster programming, in front and behind the camera. However, the CRTC’s request for voluntary plans from the Canadian broadcasters can only be considered a very weak incentive, as there are no stated benefits or consequences for failure to achieve results.

Moving Forward

In our work to date, Canadian women activists in the screen industries have targeted equality initiatives for key behind-the-scenes positions in film and television production (specifically writers, directors and producers). We need to continue the momentum we have created and must continue expanding our efforts to advocate for equality for women crew members and performers, and to increase inclusion and representation of women of colour and Indigenous women throughout the Canadian industry.

To advance these goals, we at WIFT Vancouver have turned our attention to the federal and provincial tax credits (rebates) on labour that are currently provided to the film and television production industry in Canada. These rebates are available for both Canadian and foreign location service (FLS) production and total billions of dollars of government subsidy to the industry each year. We believe that incorporating
gender equality and inclusion requirements or incentives within this tax credit system would have a positive impact on all levels of the Canadian industry’s workforce.

This is a sensitive issue, with film unions and studios serving the large foreign location service industry in particular, fearful that changes to the tax credit system might disrupt the stability of an industry that has become an economic powerhouse in Canada. However, the industry is on a growth trajectory overall, and we believe the time could not be better for measures that expand and diversify the workforce. We are focusing our efforts first on the provincial tax credit system, and once implemented, we will work with other stakeholders across the country to reform and modernize the federal tax credits.

In all of this advocacy work, one of the greatest risks we face is that posed by political and economic change. Both federally and provincially, gains can be lost when governments change or when economic conditions change, as funding for arts and women always seem easy targets for cuts. Another challenge we face is the risk of burnout. Much of the lobbying and advocacy is unpaid labour by volunteers who are also working full-time in the industry. With the need to be vigilant, monitor progress and continue to call funders, broadcasters and regulatory agencies to account, we are all working at full capacity.

To counter these challenges, we are strengthening our alliances across the country and internationally. The five Canadian WIFT chapters have recently come together as WIFT Canada to speak with one voice at the national level. We are also working more closely with the equality and inclusion committees and advocates in other parts of the Canadian industry, such as the unions, guilds and film festivals. WIFT Vancouver also serves on the Board of Directors of WIFT International.

**Conclusion**

The relative success of advocacy efforts in Canada over the past four years has been the result of several factors coming together at the right time, in a climate conducive to change. Detailed gender data provided unequivocal evidence of the seriousness of the problem of gender inequality in Canada’s industry. Anna Serner’s leadership at the Swedish Film Institute challenged public agencies around the world to take responsibility for gender equality in their funding structures. The St. John’s Summit brought together a powerful national women’s coalition. The new federal
government in 2015 had the first gender-balanced cabinet and a self-described feminist prime minister. Canada’s film and television industry is heavily subsidized by the government, making it subject to public scrutiny and lobbying through official channels. The commitment of the National Film Board galvanized other funders, since the NFB, as a government producer, had the power to make changes swiftly and used this freedom to take the lead. #metoo brought increased worldwide attention to the prevalence of gender inequality in the film and television industry. Experienced Canadian women were able to volunteer their time, energy and resources to this advocacy work.

Because these crucial factors came together at the right time, advocates for gender equality in Canada’s screen industries have moved from being lone voices in the wilderness to become part of a growing and powerful Canadian and international alliance working for change.

REFERENCES


Australia and New Zealand
Gender Still Matters: Towards Sustainable Progress for Women in Australian Film and Television Industries

Lisa French

INTRODUCTION

Women have been a significant force in Australian moving image industries as shapers of its content, working in every field of production and across all genres and into emerging digital formats. They have been highly successful and visible within the country and internationally. This has been achieved despite women being the minority participants in almost all fields, especially in key craft areas such as feature film directing and cinematography, but also participation is low in technical areas. In response to this situation, in 2015, the federal government screen agency, Screen Australia, established the Gender Matters policy initiative. This chapter examines women in the Australian film and television industry with specific reference to Gender Matters. The rationale for the policy is contextualised within a historical and contemporary snapshot of gender equality in the national film and television industry. It examines the approach, touching on the implications of this policy on the practice of female screen professionals. Strategies and the impact of the initiative
on the working conditions of women are examined along with the challenges, opportunities and future recommendations to achieve sustainable progress for women towards gender equality.

**THE AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY CONTEXT**

i. Women in Australian film historically

There were numerous female Australian film pioneers in the silent era\(^2\), but from the early 1930s through to the 1970s very few women worked in the screen industry and, indeed, the industry itself produced few films during that period (known as “the interval”). With the instituting of government funding for film and television production in Australia (established by the Gorton government in 1969), and the rise of feminism in the 1970s, women began to gain some access. Through the 1970s and 1980s, there was a proliferation of women’s organisations involved in production and exhibition.\(^5\) These groups were devoted principally to the production of short films (in all genres) and mobilised training, screenings and ran distribution networks. A key support for women was the Australian Film Commission’s “Women’s Film Fund”, set up in 1976 and disbanded in 1989. Throughout the 1970s to the early 1990s, women were increasing their numerical participation in the industry and initiatives for women created a perception outside of Australia, which was fed by women’s success as they entered the mainstream, as a place that nurtures and supports female practitioners (French 2019, p. 168). However, with the withdrawal of specific funds to promote women, and the general cultural backlash against feminism, women’s numerical progress slowed from the later 1990s.

ii. Women in contemporary Australian film and television

From the late 1990s, and the first two decades of the 2000s, women in Australian screen industries achieved significant success, despite being a minority. In a variety of crafts, they were highly visible on the international stage, many winning international accolades such as American Academy Awards, for example, actors Cate Blanchett and Nicole Kidman, writer-director Jane Campion (*The Piano*) and production designer Catherine Martin (*Moulin Rouge!, Australia*)—a person who has won
four Academy Awards, more than any other Australian. International recognition has been achieved by women in a range of other key creative roles that include producer Jan Chapman (*The Piano, Lantana*), editor Jill Bilcock (*Moulin Rouge!, Romeo & Juliet*) and screenwriter Laura Jones (*The Portrait of a Lady, Brick Lane*).

In television, women have come to the fore, increasing their participation behind the scenes and also on the screen at a greater rate than in feature film. Contemporary Australian television has seen a flood of shows with women in the central roles: *Offspring, Janet King, Love Child, Redfern Now, A Place to Call Home, Dance Academy* and *Anzac Girls*, *Wentworth, Top of the Lake, The Kettering Incident, Miss Fisher’s Murder Mysteries* and *Total Control*. Screen Australia has observed that television:

> tends to do much better than features in its representation of women on screen, where many long-running series feature strong female protagonists. However, this gender diversity is less marked behind the camera. Multiplatform content tends to show tremendous diversity of content and content creators, as do short films and ‘entry level’ opportunities. However, many women fail to make the leap from emerging practitioner to sustained careers and positions of influence, which leads to under-representation. (Screen Australia 2015, p. 2)

Despite the already mentioned perception that women flourish in Australia, the reality on the ground is that although women are visible and highly successful, their participation in the Australian industry is generally the same as that in other Western nations, and despite a history of policy initiatives, progress has been very slow. Their success is masking that they are not achieving equal participation. Women’s involvement is represented in the following graphs. The numerical participation has hardly been moving in recent years, particularly in the area of directing. Screen Australia’s data (see Table 1) can be understood as representative of female participation in the Australian industry, although historically, Screen Australia funded titles have been slightly more likely to have women in key creative roles than the Australian slate (Screen Australia 2013). The social context in Australia is that women are slightly more than 50% of the population and 46% of the workforce (Screen Australia 2015, p. 4), and there is a push for more women on company boards and in political parties, so gender is on the agenda in the country. The data for the proportion of key creative roles filled by women shows that
### Table 1  Headcount table: Gender of key creative roles: 2016/17–2018/19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Screen Australia Production applications</th>
<th>Female producers</th>
<th>Male producers</th>
<th>Female directors</th>
<th>Male directors</th>
<th>Female writers</th>
<th>Male writers</th>
<th>All female key creative roles</th>
<th>All male key creative roles</th>
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<td>111</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>303</td>
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</table>

Notes
Data for “All applications: 2018/19 TV Drama Writers” and associated data in “All applications” were corrected on 22/08/19. Please note this correction does not affect data for funded titles and does not affect any other data released by Screen Australia on 21/08/19.
Data analyses the gender of each writing, producing and directing credit. Individuals with more than one credit are counted for each credit.
Creative team roles are at the time of application and do not represent any subsequent revisions.
Changes in the funding status of an application, e.g. due to revocation, are updated retrospectively.
For two-stage application approval processes (EOI/LOI), the approval is only counted once if it occurred in the same financial year.
Applications are grouped according to Screen Australia production funding programs: all documentary applications are grouped together regardless of distribution.
Figures include Screen Australia initiatives administered by third parties.
Producer Equity Program (PEP) documentary projects are excluded as they do not undergo creative assessment.
Application dataset is more expansive than the 2015 report Gender Matters: Women in the Australian Screen Industry, so is not directly comparable.
Data excludes one initiative where gender data was not collected and one application where the sole key creative chose not to disclose their gender.
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successful production applications are up for women across all creative roles with directing behind other fields for percentage participation, and the roles where women are over 50% are the same as the historical picture: producing and in documentary. Women are showing good participation rates in TV and online drama. The data for the gender of key creative roles illustrates there are 19 “all female key creative roles” compared to 29 with “all male key creative roles” in funded feature drama 2018/19, indicating around one-third more all male productions; other genres are more equal, with women slightly less except for documentary, which is generally higher. All female teams are higher in documentary (130 funded compared with 107 all male), and the total successful funding applications for women are on an upward trajectory (Fig. 1).

iii. Key challenges for women in Australian moving image industries

The industry itself has systematic barriers to female involvement that have historically and currently excluded women (e.g. unconscious bias, male/female-dominated fields, sexual harassment and non-inclusive professional networks). Ana Tiwary, Program Director for Women in Film and Television (WIFT, Australia), outlined the challenges facing women in Australia broadly into three categories: (1) systematic issues, including issues such as work environments that are not family-friendly, lack of role models, low numbers of women in some fields and women’s films being viewed as niche; (2) sociocultural issues, such as lack of work/family balance, expectations that women are primary carers and silence on sexism; and (3) financial issues, including pay disparity and precarious work with women more highly represented in part-time work (Pearson 2011).

There are several other challenges for women in Australia: sustainability, career development, the dominance of male gatekeepers, lack of access to financial capital, a history of masculine representation and getting a first break in the industry. Sustainability has been an ongoing challenge for those working in the Australian industry, particularly women, and film and television careers are frequently precarious. As stated, despite decades of official policy and programme responses to the gender gap by Australian state and federal film agencies, women’s representation in screen industries has not substantially increased.
Screen producer Sue Maslin, who is also on the Gender Matters Taskforce, has observed that a key challenge is “taking ownership of our careers and developing leadership strategies”. She has cited the issue of women having a “lack of confidence and lack of strategic engagement with tools such as mentoring, networking, sponsoring, goal setting, persuasion and negotiation skills etcetera […] often leave women pursuing a reactive rather than a proactive course in career development” (Maslin 2019). Screen Australia’s Gender Matters, along with other industry initiatives, such as the Natalie Miller Fellowship (led by Maslin as president), has been aiming to redress this with specific career development initiatives.

Systems and structures work to support the status quo and these work against women in the industry. Increasing the visibility of these systematic issues is likely to improve the chance that change will be enacted. One of these is that the majority of those controlling the greenlighting stages for finance and programming of screen content are male. Consequently, in a commercial sense, no matter how many new projects are developed by women, a small cohort of mostly male gatekeepers decides which projects are made and screened. Conscious and unconscious bias comes into play when these decisions are made, particularly in a risk-averse environment. Women’s stories continue to be in the minority despite evidence of “their success proportionally at the box office and audience numbers” (Maslin 2019). An example of such success is The Dressmaker, produced by Sue Maslin in 2015. It took more than twenty million dollars at the Australian box office and is number 13 in the top 100 all-time Australian films on 11 January 2019 (Screen Australia 2019). Rachel Griffith’s debut film as director, Ride Like a Girl (2019), was the highest grossing film in Australia for 2019 (taking A$1.7 million in the opening weekend and at the time of writing, was at A$10 million for the first month in its Australian release). Runaway successes, such as these, work to break down resistance from gatekeepers and reinforce the value of female-centred stories developed by majority female teams. But in order for change to occur, male gatekeepers will have to genuinely commit to change in order to create pathways for work developed by women and take action on gender inequality. The Gender Matters Taskforce has run a number of social mixers in different states with this aim at the centre, with influential men in the industry being asked to participate, commit to and support that agenda.
Another structural issue of concern for women is access to capital. Much of the wealth in the screen industry is sequestered by male-dominated enterprises, male-run distribution and exhibition businesses, and male-driven production companies. It takes enormous investment in research and development to get screen content into production. According to Maslin, female producers must either have access to loan finance, significant retained earnings or a wealthy partner to fund their costs and overheads. Women with children and dependents are even further disadvantaged. Many women film-makers by necessity move in and out of freelance and part-time work, which slows down their capacity to develop a track record and work consistently. Accumulation of debt is one key reason why so many women leave the industry on a periodic or permanent basis (Maslin 2019).

According to the Deputy Chair of Screen Australia and of the Gender Matters Taskforce, Deanne Weir, “we are still finding it hard to admit that gender inequality, and structural barriers to the participation of women exist within our society let alone our industry” (Weir 2019). Australian culture is male dominated and the moving image outputs, have not given what Australians call “a fair go” for women. The country’s film and television industry has been dominated by “sporting heroes and larrikins as our cultural icons, across all cultural representation including screen, leaving little space for women” (Weir 2019). Redressing the imbalance within a history of male-dominated representation is difficult, particularly given the issue of gatekeepers, but the creation of more and more stories about and by women is one way to attempt to create a shift in that representational history.

Across all sectors of the industry, a significant issue is to get an initial foothold in order to gain entry. According to Jo Bladen, former General Manager, Disney Studios Australia and New Zealand, the most important challenge for any female in the film industry (either on the creative or on the business side) is “to be given that first opportunity – to write, direct, shadow, mentor, step up, [to occupy a] new role or just have a go – when men sit in the key positions and they continue to favour who and what they know, then it’s hard for a female to get the chance to prove themselves. We need to break the cycle” (Bladen 2019). This requires a change in both mindset and practice. There is resistance to new participants in general and it can be particularly difficult in Australian television where networks favour working repeatedly with the same key teams, particularly
directors (and women make up only a minority of directors). Directors have to get through a lot of material under high pressure in short time frames, and meeting budgets requires capacity to do this; it is a risk, meaning deploying newcomers is less likely. The Australian Directors Guild (ADG) has been funded by Gender Matters to run television attachments, but to date, although women are gaining valuable experience and contacts, there does not so far appear to be evidence that these are translating into ongoing work.

iv. Actions required to redress inequality

Leadership with a commitment to gender equality is essential to achieve change. Leadership in all sectors of the industry, and from both men and women, is necessary to achieve equality for women. Australian federal and state funding bodies have all endeavoured to provide it with initiatives. However, a broader approach is necessary with a range of strategies that will interact, since policy can only be regarded as one prong. So, leaders have a significant role to play in ensuring change, particularly of values and mindset. What leaders do, say and prioritise matters. Deanne Weir has called for “feminist leadership”. According to Weir, feminist leaders can be women or men and are characterised by “a conscious recognition of the problems and challenges caused by gender inequality, and they are constantly striving to address this inequality through both what they do and how they do it” (Weir 2018).

“Gender Matters”

Women in the moving image industry in Australia have not achieved equal participation, and the rates of their access to the industry have hardly increased in decades. In 2015, Screen Australia identified a number of issues, finding that “the level of women’s participation in this industry continues to track along at the low percentages we saw in the 1970s. … that the imbalance is most notable in traditional film” (Screen Australia, n.d. a). Screen Australia has also noted an unmet demand for female stories (2015, p. 13). In response to this issue, in 2015, Screen Australia established the Gender Matters initiative and Gender Matters Taskforce, a five-million-dollar strategy to address gender imbalance in the screen industry. This recognised the issue of the Australian screen industry’s
underutilisation of female talent in key creative roles as having resulted in a lack of diversity in screen stories and a failure to make the most of the nation’s creative potential through using all the available creative talent. The Gender Matters policy intervention had a focus on project development and career progress for women; it aimed to: “create sustainable and self-generating careers that will be used to support women to build a range and breadth of skills in this industry for the long term” (Screen Australia, n.d. a).

i. The Gender Matters five-point plan

The first phase of Gender Matters was a five-point plan. The key performance indicator was to ensure Screen Australia production funding is targeted to creative teams (writer, producer, director and for drama, protagonist) who were represented as at least 50% female by the end of the financial year 2018/19 (as a three-year average achieved by June 2019). Screen Australia has been at pains to say it is not a quota. Politically, quotas are problematic and hugely unpopular; as Kate Stary has observed in her report on diversity quotas on Australian boards, mandatory quotas are “the most criticised and contested of all forms of government intervention, yet also the most successful in gaining female participation on listed companies’ boards” (Stary 2015, p. 3). Screen Australia has also pointed out that the agency’s production funding is open to all (e.g. men are not excluded and can be part of projects funded by Gender Matters) and funding is always awarded on merit. On top of the resistance to quotas, there is an active ambivalence to affirmative action from many stakeholders because it could be seen as working against equity (fairness) principles. There is also a phenomenon of resistance to gender equality (men and women receiving the same status, opportunity, access, rights and value). The Victorian Government produced a 2018 report (Vic Health 2018) specifically to deal with this resistance (a backlash resulting from challenging long-held social norms). This deeply ingrained resistance (and bias) is also an issue for achieving gender equality in film and television industries.

The five-point plan was refreshed in 2018, with names of initiatives changing. The first part of the plan was assessment criteria changes. From December 2015, a specific mention of gender and cultural diversity was added to the assessment criteria on all Screen Australia funding guidelines
(not just Gender Matters initiatives). Moreover, it was expressly stated that the gender and cultural diversity of the team may also influence funding decisions.

The second strategy was an “Enterprise Women” initiative (now called “Brilliant Careers”), which was business career support. The choice of language in the policy wording reflected a shift in the key values through the stated recognition of the value to business of diversity, as well as its importance to Australian storytelling. It framed the aspiration to achieve increased female participation as integrated and drawing on people, projects and businesses to realise change that will be sustainable:

Screen Australia recognises the importance and value of women in the screen industry, both to business and as storytellers. We also recognise that in order to make a real difference to women’s participation in the industry, there needs to be a holistic integrated approach to people, projects and business … [We aim to be] sustaining and self-generating … [and] strategic about the “big picture”. (Screen Australia, n.d. c)

The third strategy was the “Women’s Story Fund” (now called “Brilliant Stories”). It supported female-led dramas that satisfied what was called the “Three Tick Test” (which also allowed men to be part of the teams). The “Three Tick Test” required three of the key creative team, those “above the line”, to be female:7 one tick for producer, director, writer and lead female protagonist, and two ticks for a writer/director (Screen Australia, n.d. b). Eligible drama projects spanned film, television and online, with the expectation that “a number would go into production, and/or the development experience may propel the creative teams into other work” (Screen Australia, n.d. a).

The fourth approach was attachments for women (which expanded in 2017/18 to become the “Inclusive Attachment Scheme”, an initiative available to above or below the line crew and of two weeks or more at award rates). As well as attachments, there was a requirement that film budgets of greater than A$500,000 required a paid attachment for a woman. The condition for funded television drama productions was that there must be one female director on an extended series with more than one filming block. The fifth tier was titled “Distribution guarantee support” (now called “Better Deals”). It was for the marketing of Australian films with significant female content. And, finally, alongside
the five-tier approach was the establishment of a “Gender Matters Task-force”, drawn from 17 female leaders across the screen industry, including senior industry representatives from distribution, exhibition, the guilds and broadcasters.

At the conclusion of the first three years of the initiative, Screen Australia announced that the target had been exceeded: “56% of projects receiving production funding having at least half of the key creative roles occupied by women, based on a three-year average. The KPI was set in December 2015, originally aiming for 50%” (Screen Australia, 21 August 2019). Screen Australia set a new Gender Matters KPI, to have 50% of the key creatives (directors, writers and producers) across all projects that receive Screen Australia development and production funding to be women, across a three-year average (2019/20 to 2021/22). Gender Matters Chair, Joanna Werner, noted the systematic change evidenced whilst cautiously noting that it is not the finish line for gender parity and there is still a lot to do, especially for writers and directors (Screen Australia, 21 August 2019).

ii. A critical overview of Gender Matters

Although Gender Matters was “widely welcomed” in Australia (Neill 2017), there was a range of critical receptions or issues that could be seen as a concern with the strategy. On the one hand, there has been commentary in the media and publishing across all industries that approaches that offer training or development are based on an idea of “fixing women” (see, for example, Catherine Fox’s book Stop Fixing Women). This could be applied to Gender Matters, e.g. the claim that initiatives are missing the actual problem, which is that fairer workplaces need to be built. The Gender Matters strategy was, however, established because of a recognition that there are systematic issues in the industry. It has promoted, and continues to promote, leadership for change and resourcing women, because something had to be done and changing male entitlement or the status quo will require more than one strategy (as stated, a whole of industry commitment and also time will be required).

A significant concern for all industry-facing gender initiatives is that decades of official policy and programme responses designed to increase women’s participation both on screen and off screen have not significantly increased female participation. In some cases, it has declined; for example,
a comparison between the Screen Australia figures 07/2011–06/2017 and those in 1991 (Cox and Laura 1992, p. 10) found that women were 22% of feature film directors in 1991 but today are only 16%. Screen Australia or Gender Matters cannot be held responsible for the slow pace of change (as just one strategy) but research that provides information on the conditions that enable the status quo to continue and to find out why these initiatives are only motivating small shifts would be valuable. However, as will be discussed later, the initiative itself has enabled some progress and it has had a small impact that is envisaged will increase over time.

A Screen Australia press release on 6 August 2017 reported the progress of Gender Matters in relation to its key KPI of 50% production funding to female-led creative teams was at 47% successful applications. In 2015/16, it was 22%, and in 2016/17, it went up to 39%. Therefore, progress towards the KPI has been achieved. What this data showed was that Screen Australia titles that received production funding were 47% female-led projects. However; they did not receive 47% of the money (just the titles funded). Screen Australia’s rationale was that otherwise the large size of some budgets might skew the figures. There are two possible criticisms that might be levelled: firstly, it is arguable that this hides the fact that women are not getting a fair share of the money—something observed in a recent Swedish report (Swedish Film Institute 2018). The second possible criticism here is that it is creating a more positive picture than the reality on the ground because the applied definition of “female led” is that two of the following are women: writer, director, producer and protagonist, and potentially that means that it could be largely producer and protagonist, not making a dint where the problem is most significant: writers and directors. In addition, Gender Matters substantially focuses on above-the-line personnel. However, there is evidence that an increase in women above the line, in producing, directing and writing, directly results in more women on crews below the line (Maslin 2015). Screen Australia recognises this and commenced work on below the line crew in 2019 (Screen Australia, 15 May 2019).

A conspicuous criticism appeared in the form of an open letter to the Screen Australia Board. Signed by mostly Australian academics, it was published in the online industry journal Screenhub on 1 November 2019. The letter was largely a response to one round of funding announcements (September 2019). In this round of five feature film projects, all were written and directed by men; “forty percent of the feature film projects
exclusively employ men in the key creative roles of producer, writer and director”, “the ratio of support for men to women in these key creative roles is 2:1”; and also, the “Documentary Producer program has all but two writer or director roles going to men across seven funded projects”. The conclusion was that the agency had failed to fulfil its mandate, policies and progress towards gender parity. As the letter notes, “[t]he Corporate Plan commits to a numerical target for gender equity”. On page 6, it states that “between 2019/20 and 2022/23, at least 50% of the writing, producing and directing roles in projects that receive Screen Australia development and production funding will be filled by women”. Further, it is stated that this target is not met. However, it should be noted that whilst the agency should be held accountable for individual rounds (especially when the gender equity outcomes are this low), the policy is the target for the next five years and not for any single funding round: “a single slate announcement cannot accurately represent overall funding trends” (Screen Australia, 1 November 2019). The correspondence demands that a “lack of transparency” be reversed, noting that “the underlying data on which Screen Australia’s gender targets are based is not publicly available”. As a publicly funded agency, it is reasonable that data is transparent and available. The imbalance noted in the communication is the reason for the establishment of the Gender Matters initiative in 2015, and progress is going to take time. It is going to require shifts across the industry which is characterised by an increasingly risk-averse marketplace. The article headline noted a “Gender Matters Fail” but the letter itself was related to Screen Australia funding activities, rather than the actual Gender Matters programme (the incremental success of which is not noted in the correspondence, which it does not directly deal with that initiative). As director Samantha Lang observed in her email to the Gender Matters Taskforce (31/10/19):

In my view - beyond data - Gender Matters has given Australian women filmmakers more confidence, agency and access than they’ve had in the two decades preceding. It will take at least 5 years for this real change to be properly recognized. This task force is an influencer but we cannot change everything that’s wrong with an archaic structure that itself is in the middle of mass disruption.
iii. Key outcomes of Gender Matters

Whilst there are always limitations and criticisms of any initiative, Gender Matters has achieved some impact and it is regarded as a beginning rather than having an ending (which is why it has been refreshed and the work of the Taskforce continues). Women have reported “soft” results, such as the visibility of gendered programmes making women feel more supported and therefore more confident. This has been evidenced in an increase in women or female teams applying to screen agencies for funding. The initiative has necessarily driven or shifted behaviour with the requirement to work with women causing men to look to achieve a gender balance in creative teams (or for the need for better balance to be foregrounded in the planning of projects). Therefore, this policy has had a notable impact on the practice of male screen professionals whilst impacting women’s practice through broadening collaborative opportunities—noting that to date it has been more often women themselves who have created the most opportunities for other women and who take the risk on other women (Maslin 2015). The initiative has created momentum to lobby for women and created greater visibility of their achievements. It has also given impetus to the development of resources, such as a widely used sexual harassment code of conduct (Screen Australia 2018). A huge slate of projects has gone through development, and it is anticipated that some will be progressed, new creative partnerships established and greater experience gained. The career initiatives have improved skills and better-resourced women, and have critically focused on sustainability and business knowledge whilst creating opportunities for women within various industry contexts.

Overall within the Australian screen industry, initiatives such as Gender Matters, along with others, have worked towards a cultural change and a shift in values. This is aided by a range of broader movements for change and for the development of gender-aware environments, including #me too, a growing international interest in female-driven stories and government agencies pursuing gender equality policy (e.g. in Sweden, Canada, Ireland and Britain). At Screen Australia, it has included changes in Screen Australia funding programmes across the board (e.g. the attachments for women programmes were seen as so successful that they were introduced for all Screen Australia funded productions), and also nurtured proactivity towards female teams. Former Screen Australia Chief Operating Officer, Fiona Cameron, said the new criteria:
changed the way we now run our decision meetings. Our staff are looking at every single creative attached to an application, and the team makeup is overtly part of the funding decision … Where two applications are comparable … if one creative team is demonstrably more inclusive, we will fund that project. (Neill 2017)

This underlines diversity standards and bolsters adherence to them. It is also reinforcing the value of diversity for a vital and distinctive content creation industry. In a culture where the stories have been substantially masculine, it represents an important shift for advocates of gender equality. There has been an impact of the initiative upon screen culture, by which I mean all of the activities within a screen community, and it has been shaping production, consumption, reception, analysis and discussion. Gender has been foregrounded, audience interest in stories about and by women recognised, and gender discussions have fed analysis and discussion.

Conclusion

Women in Australian film and television are highly visible but momentum in their participation across many fields continues to be at a snail’s pace. This is the case in Western industries globally. There is evidence that initiatives to achieve gender equality, such as Gender Matters, have some impact and make a small difference. As a strategy, Gender Matters has been particularly valuable to assist women to develop tactical agility, aiming to resource them to navigate the structures of the industry, to connect with the screen practitioner herself in ways to assist her to determine how best to navigate programmes, plan a career, gain skills and increase networks. But for Gender Matters and other policy initiatives, success will need a whole-of-industry, long-term, multipronged focus to promote cultural change in order to achieve sustainability.

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NOTES

1. Due to space, the discussion is only in relation to film and television and not the auxiliary audio-visual production areas.
2. Lottie Lyell, Kate Howarde, Annette Kellerman, McDonagh Sisters, Mary Malon and Juliette de La Ruze.
3. These groups included: the Sydney Women’s Film Group (formed in 1972), the Feminist Film Workers (1970s–1980s), the Melbourne Women’s Film Group (established in 1973), Reel Women (1979–1983) and the Women’s Film Unit (1984 in Sydney and 1984/5 in Melbourne). The Australian Film Commission is the antecedent of Screen Australia.
4. The Natalie Miller Foundation is for potential female leaders in the screen industry and provides financial assistance for professional development (e.g. attachments, internships, secondments, travel, leadership courses).
5. For example, state government initiatives include: the South Australian Film Corporation launched a suite of initiatives in 2016 under the banner “Gender Agenda”. In 2017, Film Victoria followed, stating that in the next five years the agency aims to achieve at least 50% of writers, directors and producers employed across all film and television productions they fund being women with other initiatives in games and to increase female participation, particularly in areas where women are under-represented (Film Victoria 2017, p. 12).
6. Screen Australia has recognised that diversity more broadly is also important, not just gender diversity. From 2016, the agency was undertaking research which had a particular focus on areas where diversity on screen is lacking, particularly in television drama where a dearth of representation of people with disabilities and LGBTQI representation was noted.
7. All crew not listed here are regarded as “below the line”; they are all the other pre-production, production or post-production crew.
8. Screen Australia proposed “Gender, Diversity and New Talent” actions can be seen online (Screen Australia, 1 November 2019).

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Aotearoa New Zealand: A Tale of Two Nations

Marian Evans

INTRODUCTION

From outside Aotearoa (New Zealand, population about 4.8 million), our women directors’ contributions to international dramatic feature film-making may seem outstanding. Jane Campion, the only woman to win Cannes’ Palme d’Or, is a New Zealander. Merata Mita (1942–2010), whose Mauri (1988) screened in the “Venice Classics” in 2019, made an outstanding contribution to indigenous film-making worldwide, now documented in Merata: How Mum Decolonised the Screen, being distributed by Ava DuVernay’s Array. Peter Jackson’s co-writers and producers are women, Fran Walsh and Phillippa Boyens. Niki Caro directed Whale rider, and her Mulan (2020) is forthcoming. Within Aotearoa, other veterans are also treasured: Gaylene Preston, one of the country’s three film-making “Dames” (with Jane Campion and Fran Walsh) and Andrea Bosshard who makes drama and documentaries, and documentarians Pietra Brettkelly and Leanne Pooley.

But statistics show that, as elsewhere, there are gender problems and positive change is slow. This chapter surveys the political, social and cultural contexts within which New Zealand women film-makers work. These include the country’s bi-cultural history as a colonised nation,
now with significant multicultural elements; the government agencies responsible for supporting film-making especially the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC); and information available from research and women practitioners themselves, as experts on their working lives. It then argues that some of the most significant advances of recent years have been created by practitioners, many of them multihyphenates: writers/directors/producers/actors intent on creating their own narratives and supporting other women to do the same, often with minimal resources; and that Māori women’s film-making practices provide powerful models in global terms. Documentaries fall outside this chapter’s ambit, because of their traditionally lower costs and women directors’ historically higher participation.

**The Political and Social Context**

New Zealand women directors’ fine record in local and international feature film-making may seem logical, because in 1893 New Zealand women were first in the world to achieve suffrage. The country has many active women’s organisations and individual women are prominent in public life. Half the Supreme Court’s six members are women as is the Chief Justice. Since 1990, when the first woman was appointed Governor-General (the vice-regal representative of New Zealand’s monarch, Queen Elizabeth II), women have filled the position in equal numbers. In Parliament, 38% of members are women and working mothers represent about 28.5% of all working women. Furthermore, Jacinda Ardern, the third woman prime minister, has been acclaimed internationally, thanks to her effective response to a terrorist’s massacre of Muslims at prayer in early 2019, followed several months later by an innovative “Wellbeing Budget”, which valued the well-being of citizens as much as the nation’s economic well-being. This budget provided for record investments in programmes to reduce the persistently high rates of domestic violence, child poverty, poor mental health and homelessness (Ainge Roy 2019).

But these shining gender optics are compromised by other factors that adversely affect the general well-being of all who identify as women and women’s participation in dramatic feature film-making in particular. Abortion is still a crime in 2019 although legislation to change that is underway, after many decades of activism. New Zealand women currently earn on average 9% less than men, too, and the average difference between women and men artists’ total personal income—across all media—is 21%
with the average difference between their earnings from creative work at 45% (Creative New Zealand and New Zealand on Air 2019, p. 21).\(^1\) Other adverse factors can be inferred from the Wellbeing Budget’s priorities. But arguably the most significant is the intersection of gender with the history of New Zealand’s colonisation by Great Britain. Māori and the British Crown signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 but the “respectful and equal constitutional relationship” that Te Tiriti o Waitangi promised did not occur (Mutu and Jackson 2016, p. 12). Māori lost their sovereignty in the British colonisation that followed and the shattering consequences of this continues to be felt, although some reparations have been made. Māori women today have a larger gender pay gap than Pākehā women, a higher rate of incarceration and a lower life expectancy. They also spend more time caring for others in their household and do more voluntary and community work than women from other ethnic groups (Ministry for Women 2020).

Concurrent wider racism, highlighted in the 2019 massacre, also affects the opportunities and incomes of Asian women, who earn only a little more than Māori women on an hourly basis, and Pasifika women, who earn the least of all (Coalition for Equal Value, Equal Pay 2018). The feature film statistics reflect how these collective social and economic factors affect many women’s capacity to engage in any kind of arts practice unless they have a “safety net”, especially in the challenging and highly competitive environment of film-making.

**Statistics**

From 2003–2017 in Aotearoa, features directed by women were numerically small. Men wrote 79% and directed 84% of all New Zealand narrative features that had a single director, including telefeatures. If mixed gender teams are included, individual men still wrote 69% and directed 80%. Between 2003 and early 2016, just under 17% of feature films had a female protagonist and 7.5% had a female protagonist and were written and directed by women (Evans 2017b).

The statistics were worse for Māori women (from 15% of the population), Pasifika (indigenous to other Pacific nations, from 7% of the population) and Asian New Zealanders (from 12%)—who may belong to all three groups and also be of Pākehā (non-indigenous/white) descent—and those women whose stories arise from their intersecting membership of any minority.
Māori stories have had significant critical and commercial success; seven of the ten all-time top-grossing New Zealand feature films domestically are by and/or about Māori (NZFC 2019b). But no Māori woman directed a dramatic feature between *Mauri* and *Waru* (2017), a portmanteau film with nine writers and directors, although many Māori women have contributed as producers, writers and television writers and directors. Increasingly, Māori women also participate at a global level, thanks to major festivals like Sundance, imagineNative, Toronto and Berlin and strong relationships with indigenous film-makers elsewhere, who often travel to the annual Māoriland Festival. Vai (2019), also a portmanteau, is the first feature from Pasifika women since Sima Urale directed *Apron Strings* (2007) written by Shuchi Kothari, an Asian New Zealander, and Dianne Taylor. The first feature written and directed by an Asian New Zealander was Rosanne Liang’s *My wedding and other secrets* (2011). Kerry Warkia, as producer of *Waru, Vai* and the forthcoming *Kainga* by Asian women, has stated: “Doors have been closed for so long that it’s not just about opening the door, it’s about going out to find [these filmmakers] because they walked away a long time ago” (Maddox 2019, para. 37).

Gender and ethnic imbalances are reinforced within the larger industry. In 2018, the NZFC allocated $108 million from the government-funded Screen Production Grant initiative, an incentive designed to attract big-budget international film productions and thus support economic growth, create jobs and offer local practitioners the opportunity to upskill (NZFC 2019a). From this, 98% went to international features directed by men and 97% to features with white directors. When these grants are combined with much smaller Screen Production Grants allocated to mid-budget productions from New Zealand and some co-productions, 94% of the amount disbursed went to films directed by men (Evans 2019, paras. 29, 52).

**Research into Women and the New Zealand Film Industry**

Research into gender and the New Zealand film industry, including international and local productions, has pointed to “a preponderance of temporary, intermittent and precarious jobs; long hours and bulimic patterns of working” (Gill and Pratt 2008, p. 14; Conor 2015, p. 30). In New Zealand, many women film workers have been adversely affected
by such conditions on international projects, where they have sometimes been referred to as “Mexicans with cell phones” (Stuff 2010, para. 5) and employed as contract workers rather than employees under the controversial “Hobbit Law”, about to be replaced by a law that provides a fairer environment (Ward-Lealand 2020).

There are other, gender-specific, issues. Handy and Rowlands argue that female production workers pay a particularly high price for the informal nature of hiring processes and their lack of access to prestigious social networks (Handy and Rowlands 2014, p. 28). Without these contacts, women may eventually become, objectively, less skilled candidates. Within the industry, they often sacrifice other areas of their lives for their careers and become even more career focused. This then compounds problems in the non-work areas of their lives (Rowlands 2009, pp. 115–118; Handy and Rowlands 2014, pp. 31–32). There is also, Jones and Pringle claim, a “widespread refusal to acknowledge inequalities: where they do exist, widespread and consistent statistical claims are combatted by lists of token women, by deep-seated belief in talent as the decider” (2015, p. 46).

There is no research into the many individuals who, often very highly skilled because of work on international projects, choose to work on local productions for deferred payments or as volunteers; women and men in this category contributed to three of the four features written and directed by women and released in 2019.

For people of Māori descent, the social capital required to participate in the industry is inseparable from cultural capital and “community-based ways to … achieve mainstream success, and simultaneously serve the Māori community” (Henry 2012, pp. 127, 135). This cultural capital is distinguished by its emphasis on the interrelationship of all things and caring for these relationships. Mutu and Jackson, reporting on nationwide discussions about Te Tiriti, found that Māori are:

… acutely aware of the frailty of relationships, especially when political or economic interests collide, but they also trust that both tikanga [values and practices developed over time that are deeply embedded in the social context] and Te Tiriti were grounded in the belief that personal and collective relationships were “te mea nui” [the important thing] (Mutu and Jackson, p. 74).
Elsewhere, Jackson has acknowledged that “recognising the importance of relationships...has to recognise the place of women ...the place of disabled people, and gay people, because they are all relations” (Jackson 2017, para. 23).

In this culture, gender balance derives from a cultural blueprint where Māori cosmogony “established the interrelationship of all living things and was founded on the principle of balance, including balance between men and women” (Mikaere 2017, p. 137).

Against this background, Māori women leaders in the film industry practice “differently”. Rachel Wolfgramm and multihyphenate Ella Henry found that, unlike non-Māori participants in the research project they were part of, who focused largely on “the job” and how their screen work supported and advanced their work and individual career trajectories, Māori women were embedded in the community and drew strength from their collective social identity. They were committed to visual sovereignty, determined “to gain the right to tell their stories in their own voices with passion and authenticity...their leadership struggles [were] interwoven in histories of colonisation and the struggle for political, social and economic justice” (Wolfgramm and Henry 2015, p. 275).

In this context, the discrimination and negative stereotyping that many Māori encounter in the industry did not dissuade them from building careers there, though international projects “often did not provide the same level of satisfaction as working on a small Māori film or television production...despite the low budgets and precarious nature of the work” (Wolfgramm and Henry 2015, p. 282).

Human rights issues aside, gender equity policies and practices within the government agencies are crucial because they are the preferred and often only source of relevant income for women who want to make features.

**Government Funding Agencies and Gender**

The primary funder of feature film-making, the NZFC, has some assistance from its sister broadcasting agencies NZOA and Te Mangai Paho (TMP) which also fund drama for other platforms. TMP, NZOA and NZFC were each established by statute (Broadcasting Act 1989; NZFC Act 1978).

Of the two minor feature film funders, NZOA’s mandate is required to “reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture” by promoting
broadcasting programmes about New Zealand and Māori language and culture. Its Rautaki Māori strategy complements the work of TMP, which has primary responsibility for Māori language programme funding. NZOA also has to provide for the interests of women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, and minorities in the community including ethnic minorities and encourage broadcasts that reflect the diverse religious and ethical beliefs of New Zealanders.

NZOA also “invest[s] in authentic New Zealand stories and songs. This is public media content that reflects our cultural identity, which in turn helps build social cohesion, inclusion and connection” (NZOA 2019b). About half of its funding goes to its Scripted Strategy, for telefeatures, television drama and web series and feature films primarily funded by the NZFC. Its Scripted Roadmap references its cultural remit and assessment includes consideration of whether the project will support and reflect “gender equality both on screen and within the production crew” (NZOA 2019c, p. 1).

NZOA produces an annual Diversity Report. It shows an increase of women directors of drama over four years, from 11% to 20% to 34% to 46% in 2019 (NZOA 2019a, p. 3). In response to an Official Information Act request, NZOA provided information showing that just over half (53%) of the Māori, Pasifika and/or Asian drama directors were women, and 33% of the women directors were Māori, Pasifika and/or Asian. NZOA also acknowledged that some of the increase in women directors of drama is due to leadership from producers like South Pacific Pictures’ Kelly Martin, who committed her organisation to changing the gender balance among its directors of television drama. It further acknowledged that 86% of scripted funding went towards projects predominantly directed by men and 14% to projects directed by women. By inference, this was probably because NZOA-funded low-budget scripted web series had a director ratio of 30% men and 70% women. The NZOA “will consider this issue for future reports” (personal communication NZOA, July 11, 2019).

TMP promotes Māori language and Māori culture and sometimes funds dramatic feature films and short films alongside programmes and content across multiple platforms. One recent example is Becs Arahanga’s Hinekura, set in the 1600s, about a girl who gets her period for the first time, selected by Jane Campion as a finalist in the Best New Zealand Shorts competition at the 2019 New Zealand International Film Festival.
TMP has no explicit gender equity policy that targets women writers and directors.

The NZFC’s film-making mandate is “to encourage and … participate and assist in the making, promotion, distribution, and exhibition of films” when it defines a film has having “significant New Zealand content” (NZFC Act 1978). A range of factors can be considered in deciding on “New Zealand content”. But the organisation’s wide discretion and opaque decision-making processes help it sustain its conscious and unconscious biases, just like biases in the wider industry, where depending on “networking” as a basis for a successful job search rests on a belief that establishing that candidates for work are “good” is somehow a simple, transparent and objective process, without bias (Jones and Pringle, p. 39). Because of this, film-makers fear to speak publicly about perceived injustices, in case they compromise their opportunities for funding, although some may achieve concessions through “quiet words” (personal communications various film-makers 2006–2019).

For women with intersectional identities, the definition of “New Zealand content” can be particularly problematic. According to multi-hyphenate Shuchi Kothari:

…justifying ‘New Zealandness’ is really painful. I’m a Kiwi-Indian…this hyphenated person. Both places carry the other place… For some stories you get “Yeah, but how can you make this work for all New Zealanders?” Whereas for other stories you may get, “Yeah, but what’s Asian about this? We’d like you to use your voice”. As an Asian do you always have to perform your Asianness? Who decides how Asian something really is? [What] does ‘all New Zealanders’ mean? (personal communication, August 6, 2018).

New initiatives are largely dependent on the commitment and interests of recent and current chief executives and the governing board.

Among these initiatives is Te Rautaki Māori, the latest in a series of attempts to build relationships with Māori and provide them with the resources they are entitled to under Te Tiriti. While welcomed, this may not be enough for Māori film-makers, dedicated both to achieving mainstream success and to serving Māori and global indigenous communities. Acknowledging that she and her projects have substantially benefitted from NZFC funding, multi-hyphenate Ainsley Gardiner has enlarged on its limitations: “The power is never ours. That’s a problem because the story
belongs to us. So, there are changes needed in how ownership is dealt with...We need our own money because we’ve always been entrepreneurs. Our story is a hot commodity and always has been. So, we should retain all of the elements ourselves — and also see all of the benefits” (Husband 2018, paras. 55–59). To ensure that the profit from indigenous stories stays with their storytellers, she wants a global indigenous film fund, with those storytellers at the development table, the financing table, the distribution table and the sales table.

Finally, the NZFC has a somewhat ad hoc gender policy dating from 2015 and added to in 2017.

**The NZFC’s Gender Policies**

For more than a decade, Jane Campion has used her international platform to make many media statements about gender equity in film-making. For instance, in 2009, she stated: “I think women should be given 50 per cent of the films to make...It’ll change the world overnight...It’s human rights, I want equality” (metrowebukmetro 2009, paras. 17–19). Then, at the end of 2014, she was appointed to the governmental Screen Advisory Board, where her focus was on gender equality (Evans 2014). Early in 2015, it was revealed that she had visited the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) and was “bringing an action plan to both New Zealand and Australia” (Byrnes 2015, para. 18).

An NZFC Board paper, *Towards Gender Equality*, confirms her involvement in the organisation’s proposed plan of action “to address the challenge of gender equality in above the line roles in the New Zealand film industry”. The plan included a strategy of working with industry organisations and acknowledged others active on the issue including Women in Film and Television New Zealand (WIFTNZ) and Ngā Aho Whakaari, the Māori guild, both funded by the NZFC (NZFC 2014b, pp. 6, 9).

The NZFC had known of “the gender problem” since at least 2008 when, shortly before the then chief executive, Dr Ruth Harley, moved on to head Screen Australia, she acknowledged that it existed in the organisation’s feature film development programme (Evans 2009, p. 167–171). I had also made a presentation of my research into the gender imbalance in allocation of feature film development funding to WIFTNZ. But Harley’s successor, Graeme Mason, did not formulate a gender policy; any “quiet words” from guilds or others were acted on only after Dave
Gibson became chief executive in 2014. Furthermore, until late in 2015, probably through fear of the consequences for them as individuals seeking or receiving funding, not a single film-maker or organisation publicly supported Jane Campion’s views in the media. In a country that values “a fair go”, public debate might have drawn further support from women’s organisations in the wider community and a more robust policy.

International best practice for state funding bodies, as developed by the SFI and refined by Eurimages, exists within a clearly articulated human rights framework and includes rigorous monitoring of data and the systematic sharing of the findings (Eurimages 2017). The SFI’s best practice model further provides three fixed criteria for “quality”—relevance, originality and craft—that assessors must use in deciding whether a project’s quality will ensure that taxpayer money will reach the Swedish audience, with “relevance” indicating an element of urgency (TIFF Originals 2017).

But, when announced in 2015, the NZFC policy lacked a formal framework and had a single, weak, overarching principle: “We are committed to increasing awareness of gender equality in the New Zealand screen industry” (NZFC 2019c). Most of the policy was based on a mistaken belief that women film-makers were in deficit and needed more skills and encouragement although the reality was, and is, that any deficit tends to be within the organisation’s structure, where women’s storytelling has not fared well. This is partly because, as Dame Fran Walsh noted recently, it wants what has worked before, “which doesn’t allow much room for original storytelling in both form and content” (Brooks 2019, para. 22).

Neither the original policy nor its update in 2017 made an attempt to develop greater rigour and transparency about the NZFC’s decision-making, along the lines of the Swedish model. This omission allowed any biases to continue to flourish within the organisation.

But despite its shortcomings, the gender policy arguably had some positive effects. Statistics published in 2014, about women’s applications and their success in the NZFC’s feature film development programme (NZFC 2014a), showed that over the previous five years 25%–31% of applications and 17%–31% of successful applications came from projects written by individual women writers. Where directors were already attached to a project application, 5%–12% of them were women; women directors were attached to 8%–17% of successful applications. The proportion of applications and successful applications from individual women
writers has remained steady since then and in the latest year is 21% and 27%, respectively. But the proportion of applications and successful applications with women directors attached has much increased from 2016 to between 19% and 24% for applications and 21%–26% for successful applications (personal communication NZFC August 9, 2019).

A few months after the 2015 gender policy was announced, multihyphenate Chelsea Winstanley made a very public statement, at the annual Big Screen Symposium. True to the Māori concept of gender balance, she said, while participating in a panel with other Māori film-makers Briar Grace-Smith and Libby Hakaraia: “The NZFC should make a commitment to funding as many female filmmakers as male…We should all be challenging the NZFC to support gender equality in the film industry” (Evans 2015, para. 19). In global terms, this simple declaration was by now a common one. But—as noted—not in New Zealand, and it may have encouraged other film-makers to have more assertive “quiet words”, although they were still silent outside industry contexts. According to documents accessed through the Official Information Act, a year later CEO Dave Gibson presented the board with a letter from a group of women directors requesting a quota for feature film investments on the basis of gender. The board asked him to respond in writing “pointing out recent [undetailed] advances in this area and advising that at this stage there was no appetite for a quota” (personal communication NZFC August 9, 2019). When WIFTNZ made a similar request three months later, the board asked Gibson to consider it when setting out the next financial year’s strategic direction (personal communication NZFC, August 9, 2019). WIFTNZ engaged with its membership and then with the other major guilds which each formally supported its position (personal communication WIFTNZ, August 14, 2019). As a result, some 2017 additions to the policy were made. They included an aim: by 2021/2022 50% of feature film investment-in-equity offers for production funding would be for projects with women directors attached. However, the policy provided no plan for achieving this.

In early 2018, a new CEO joined the NZFC, Annabelle Sheehan, and in that year’s annual report, both she and Dame Kerry Prendergast, Chair of the NZFC Board, emphasised their intention to establish gender equity across all feature film funding, justified by the commercial and creative opportunities that come from diversity. In the same year, production funding was offered to three women-directed films in development at the NZFC, to celebrate the 125th anniversary of women’s suffrage, and the nine women who wrote and directed Waru each received a one-off grant equivalent to a year’s salary, under one of the new Te Rautaki Māori
initiatives. By 2019, the organisation was working on a new policy that would advance equity and inclusion in its funding practices.

**Women Practitioner Initiatives**

Over the last decade, women film-makers have responded to the systemic problems with problem-solving strategies that do not involve the government funders. Often, like Māori, they are motivated by a “struggle for visual sovereignty...[and] the right to tell their stories in their own voices with passion and authenticity” (Wolfgramm and Henry 2015, p. 275), even when they are not Māori. Unquestionably, these initiatives advance women film-makers’ interests by providing richer community, more safety throughout the industry and a critical mass of inclusive, authentic content.

Some create support organisations to provide film-makers with services that complement those already available through WIFTNZ. Wellington’s Emerging Women Filmmakers Network designs programmes to fill a gap for young and emerging women (Evans 2018). The Screen Women’s Action Group, following #metoo, consulted widely with women in the screen industries through a survey that attracted high participation. It then accessed resources to address sexual harassment within the industry as a whole, with some reference to bullying, which is endemic (Screen Women’s Action Group 2020).

Others engage with academia, where scholarships and student allowances provide safety nets for developing new creative work that might otherwise be unsupported in a flawed system; their theses’ exegeses also provide “insider” insights that feed into the local industry. This research includes Ella Henry’s study of emancipatory Māori entrepreneurship in screen production (2012); Marian Evans’ exploration of the feature development process at the NZFC (2009); Louise Hutt’s feminist examination of web series as an antidote to discrimination (2018); Dorthe Scheffmann’s development and production of the NZFC-funded feature *Vermilion* (2018) with an inquiry into the feminine and development of a feminist manifesto (2011 and forthcoming); and Ghazaleh Golbakhsh’s forthcoming feature and study of women-centred films made in the Anglosphere by first- or second-generation Iranian women (personal communication July 23, 2019).

Many women respond to institutional bias by creating projects that are close to their hearts and possible to produce without institutional support.
Until 2019, most of these became web series. These can be made intermittently, when hard-won resources are available and with the help of casts and crews who volunteer or take a deferred payment option, and distributed globally to an online audience, supported by skilled use of social media.

Among them are numerous series directed by Roseanne Liang, which have transformed Asian women’s on-screen representation in New Zealand. Hanelle Harris’ Baby Mama’s Club and Jessica Hansell’s Aroha Bridge did the same with diverse Māori and Pasifika characters, Ness Simons’ Pot Luck and The Candle Wasters’ Happy Playland with lesbians. Waru began as a web series and morphed into an NZFC-funded feature made within carefully chosen parameters (Waru 2019).

The majority of web series are not funded by NZOA. Even when they are, their writers and directors are dependent on safety nets to be able to continue. One typical web series maker told me: “[The web series] has occupied my life for over two years now and I have not had any income from it despite the NZOA funding” (Evans 2017a para. 72).

From NZOA’s perspective, this problem needs attention:

Scripted content such as web series has been made for much lower budgets by motivated production teams. These projects have provided content diversity, ‘proof of concept’ for potentially larger projects, and production credits for some less experienced personnel. This ultra-low-budget approach is not sustainable from a business or career perspective, and there is increasing pressure from producers for more sustainable funding for online scripted content (NZOA 2019c, p. 5).

In 2019, only one NZFC-funded film written and directed by women was released, Vai. But three more came from enterprising film-makers building on web series experience: Casey Zilbert’s Hang Time is about masculinity; Nikki Si’ulepa’s Same But Different, a lesbian love story; and Bea Joblin’s Births Deaths and Marriages about a suburban Irish family in the 1990s. (Zilbert’s and Joblin’s work received a small amount of NZFC funding, for distribution and finishing funds, respectively.) All four films were accomplished, entertaining and above all “relevant” in the SFI sense.

When Births Deaths and Marriages debuted at the NZ International Film Festival, the volunteer cast and crew filled the stage at the end of the screening and provided a vivid reminder of the generous investment that collectively they had made.
MAORI WOMEN

Māori women, inspired by Merata Mita and others, have consistently engaged with practices that combine mainstream success with serving the Māori community and advancing its interests. These practices embrace vital elements and practices from Māori cultural capital, including gender balance; inclusivity; prioritising relationships and family well-being; and providing those new to the industry with support and guidance.

An organisational example is the Māoriland Hub, a charitable trust founded in 2014 by multihyphenate Libby Hakaraia and producer Tainui Stephens. Based within a Māori community, it offers a warm welcome for everyone, inclusion of children is taken for granted and there are multiple programmes that empower young people as screen storytellers. Its myriad screen-related activities include the ever-growing Māoriland annual film festival, where women direct at least half the films, selected from indigenous film-making around the world.

Within the feature film-making context, Ainsley Gardiner produced Taika Waititi’s Boy (2010)—which achieved the second-highest-ever gross for a New Zealand film at the local box office—while keeping everyone healthy, welcoming family members and providing child care:

I’ve always had this idea that making films should feel like being at school camp or a family reunion where every aspect of being is catered to. Eating well, sleeping well, being with good people…With Boy, my goal was to develop a way of working and shooting that suited people’s families…So people were welcome to bring their spouses and children. We had a daycare set up. I had my own kids there, with Tammy and Mum (Barry 2010, paras. 17 and 39).

The positive critical and economic outcome for the project demonstrated this approach’s efficacy. Brown Sugar Apple Grunt had similar practices on Waru, where Gardiner was one of the nine writers/directors with 17 children between them and there were never any limitations on bringing those children onto set (Whelan 2017). Gardiner and her co-producer Georgina Conder continued to refine this model on other successful projects, like The Breaker Upperers (2018), co-written and -directed by Jackie van Beek and Madeline Sami, where the producers and other crew also job-shared, often so they could manage their caring responsibilities (Yamato 2019, paras. 20–24).
Co-writing and co-directing also characterise Waru, Vai and the forthcoming Kainga, and Cousins, to be co-directed by writer Briar Grace-Smith and Gardiner. This practice is only partly because of family responsibilities. It is also part of the cultural emphasis on the collective, shared by Māori and Pasifika women. Vai’s Marina Alofagia McCartney powerfully articulated this idea at the Berlinale earlier this year, in direct reference to the Pacific, Te Moana Nui a Kiwa: “To me, [Vai] is the opposite of the auteur theory, where the director is the author. Because we’re all [including Vai’s producers] authors...This really is the true nature of the collective. This is Moana cinema” (Berlinale NATIVe 2019).

“Moana cinema” practices can revolutionise film-making: they offer inspiration for those who want to enhance women’s well-being in the global film industry.

**Conclusion**

Aotearoa New Zealand has struggled towards achieving gender equity in its funding of women’s film-making through the NZFC, albeit with some success. As the NZFC works towards a new gender policy, highly motivated women who seek community and safety and want to develop new representations of their worlds have led change, through providing a critical mass of diverse narratives. Māori women film-makers’ “different” film-making practices also present successful models. If the new policy offers an appropriate “best practice” framework, the organisation will be in a good place to ensure that NZ’s film-making reputation will continue to grow, based on inclusion.

**Notes**

1. Intersectional and film worker-specific figures are unavailable.
2. For example, in 2019, Ainsley Gardiner received NZFC funding for a co-production with Cree/Métis film-maker Danis Goulet.
3. New Zealand Film Commission Act s17(1)(a); s18(1).
4. The NZFC’s policy did include a commitment to publishing statistics on women in the screen industry, based on advice from the Chair of the British Film Commission (New Zealand Film Commission 2014b, p. 9), though this has not been sustained.
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Nigeria
Women and Representations in Nollywood: Questions of Production and Direction

Agatha Ada Ukata

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian film industry, popularly christened Nollywood, had its debut toward the late 1980s with Ade Ajiboye’s Soso Meji (1988) and early 1990s with interesting films like Kenneth Nnebue’s Living in Bondage (1992) and Glamour Girls (1993). The latter two films which were done in video format arguably rekindled the film industry in Nigeria after many years of irregular production. This is because the old and more expensive method of celluloid film production had stopped owing to the downturn in the economy brought about by the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) which had made it very difficult for Nigerian filmmakers to purchase filmmaking equipment (Ukata 2015, p. 3). It is important to note that those who would have been forced out of filmmaking altogether got a new lease of life due to the introduction of video production because the video method of film production was a far cheaper way of making films than the celluloid method.

However, it also encouraged nonprofessionals to get involved in film production because it was much easier to shoot films using the video

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production method and the involvement of nonprofessionals, in turn, also created new problems for the industry. This is because while it is easy to shoot a video using this method, the quality of the video production was generally poor. The industry is equally bedeviled with the issue of piracy of films, which makes it difficult for filmmakers to recoup their investment. The issue of piracy and the resultant losses sustained has also adversely affected film production because producers found it very difficult to secure funding for their films from the usual funders, who were mostly Alaba and Onitsha market businessmen. Until recently, the government has not been involved in providing funding for film production but some efforts have now been made to create loan avenues for film producers. There should have been good structures set up by government to enable the film industry to thrive apart from the regulatory agency the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB). The board, through its former Director-General, Emeka Mba, argued for Nollywood to establish structures that can address some of the challenges outlined above. Additionally, there have been calls for the involvement of more women at every level on Nollywood filmmaking.

Furthermore, with the inception of the video film format, the storylines have sometimes generated concern with undeveloped plots and badly constructed characters. In particular, storylines in films dealing with women have sometimes cast women in very bad light with representations very far from “reality” depicting the majority of female characters as prostitutes, home breakers, thieves, diabolical, destroyers of men among other negative roles. The worst offending films in this regard can be said to be *Glamour Girls* and its rejoinder, *Italian Connection*.

This chapter seeks to inquire why more women are not involved in filmmaking in Nollywood. It further asks whether the one-dimensional roles women play in Nollywood videos can change to reflect a greater range of characters reflective of women in the “real world”? What can be done to get more women involved in filmmaking in Nollywood? These questions are relevant especially given the massive economic contribution that Nollywood is making to enhance the Nigerian economy. “Nigeria produces an average of 50 movies each week and makes some $590 million each year” (Brady 2016).
Effects of Gender Biases, Inequality, and Stereotypes on Nollywood

The issue of gender inequality in Nigeria is strong, and it is embedded in the stereotypes that have made women play second fiddle role in almost everything within Nigerian society. The mother umbrella organization that fights for women’s rights in Nigeria is the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) and its sister agency, Women in Nigeria (WIN). These organizations still have a lot to do in order to bring about gender equality. Arising from the various women’s conferences like Beijing Women Conference 1995 (and the three earlier ones also convened by United Nations (UN), 1975 Mexico City, 1980 Copenhagen, and Nairobi 1985), Nigeria was among the 189 countries that adopted the resolutions to empower and create room for gender equality. However, that has still not been achieved. The Beijing Conference’s 12-point agenda included: women in power and decision making and women in the economy, among others, but it has not really impacted much on Nigerian women. Even now, more work is still required to realize these agenda points in countries like Nigeria.

There are few official statistics available to measure women’s involvement in public life. However, we do know that, politically, women are not making any significant progress in terms of gender equality. For instance, in 2015, 7 women won elections for the Nigerian Senate. Four years later, in the 2019 elections, only 7 women won out of a total of 109 seats (6.42%). In the House of Representatives, in 2015, 22 women were elected into the 360-seat assembly. In 2019, the number of women elected to the House of Representatives had reduced to 11 (3.05%). Also, in 2019, there is no female governor and only 4 women deputy governors. Despite former President Goodluck Jonathan’s goal of ensuring that women occupied 35% of the political offices while he was in power, women still lag significantly behind in terms of the number of political offices they hold. This has caused the former Benue State governor’s wife, Dooshima Suswam, to describe Jonathan’s 35% affirmation as a “mirage.” Thus, Suswam concludes that “African customs and traditions have steadfast beliefs, especially when it comes to issues bordering on gender differentiation. Nigeria seems to be holding firmly to that more than other African countries” (Ajijah 2013). Indeed, Nigeria also lags behind other African countries in terms of women’s representation in parliament; South Africa had 44% of the seats in parliament held by
women, while in Rwanda women occupy 61% of the seats in parliament (World Bank 2018). Although Nigerian women have not recorded significant progress in gender parity in politics when compared to other African countries, they have nonetheless made some modest gains. As Chioma Gabriel affirms:

The place of the Nigerian Woman has ceased to be in the kitchen and the other room alone. Her role has expanded to other places […] Development has made it possible for women to participate in those activities which were exclusive reserved of the men. (Gabriel 2019, p. 20)

The aviation industry has also broken new ground. For instance, the Nigerian airline, Air Peace, on July 5, 2018, celebrated an all-woman Captain and Crew. This was a very welcome development and signaled the fact that women were not only venturing into male-dominated jobs but also building confidence to take on these new roles. However, more initiatives like that of Air Peace are needed if Nigeria is to successfully break the stereotypical gender imbalance in the workforce. Also, the cultural ideologies that limit women from venturing into occupations hitherto reserved for men need to fought head on in order to achieve gender equality.

**INITIATIVES TO INCREASE NUMBERS OF WOMEN IN FILMMAKING**

The efforts of the late Amaka Igwe in bringing more women into filmmaking are very commendable. Through her formation of a women’s group, “Amaka’s Kin,” which started in the early 2000s and continued until her demise on April 28, 2014, Amaka Igwe established an initiative to help uncover and nurture female talent in scriptwriting, editing, film effects, directing, and production. This initiative benefited many women and the pledge of those who benefited from the program to sustain it is Amaka Igwe’s legacy; these women filmmakers’ support greater female involvement in Nollywood. This is because, before this initiative, a good number of the women who are now involved in all aspects of filmmaking were working as actresses and only a few of them had ventured into film production. Because of their association with the “Amaka’s Kin” group, some of them have now become more involved in scriptwriting, and this is having a positive impact in terms of the quality of the scripts being written. Others have become directors, producers, or are combining two
or more aspects of film production. Some are even combining all these roles, including acting, to ensure that their storylines are strong and well interpreted.

It would have been helpful to have data available relating to the impact specifically of Amaka Igwe’s initiative on women or women filmmakers and their impact on Nollywood. But, as it is the case generally in Nigeria, such data is very difficult to come by because the country does not keep records of such things. Therefore, all one can ascertain is that many women have already benefited from Amaka Igwe’s initiative and similar efforts to support and encourage women filmmakers. As Tope Oshin Ogun asserts: “Until recently there were very few strong female parts […]. Women were usually there to cause the downfall of the hero. That’s changing. For me, any project I develop has to have strong females or a female protagonist. Because I’m drawing on what Amaka did” (Irish Times 2016).

Women’s involvement in filmmaking is still a reflection of the society in terms of how Nigerian women lack the sociocultural, political, and economic environment, and good role models who can encourage them to get more involved in Nollywood. Though the situation is changing slowly, there is a need to quicken the process. In many ways, Nigerian women are latecomers: If more women start developing an interest in the fast-growing Nollywood industry, they can grow and discover that opportunities are available to them. For instance, if women get involved in filmmaking as scriptwriters, actresses, and editors, among other roles, they can develop their passion for the industry and become more involved with film production and directing.

During a conversation this writer recently had with veteran filmmaker, Tunde Kelani, he lauded the contribution Femi Odugbemi of MultiChoice is making through the Talent Factory initiative that is offering intensive training for young filmmakers especially women. The MultiChoice initiative is hosted in three countries and is:

An education programme that develops emerging TV and film talent in Africa, through an accredited 12-month immersion programme including both theory and hands-on experience in cinematography, editing, audio production and storytelling. It is the first academy of its kind, spanning three regions and 13 countries across Africa. Sixty deserving young,
talented candidates who want to work — and innovate — in film and television production get the chance to hone their skills alongside industry greats. (MultiChoice 2019)

The MultiChoice program is “offered through accredited regional MTF Academies based in Kenya (for East Africa), Nigeria (for West Africa) and Zambia (for Southern Africa) in partnership with respected local academic institutions” (MultiChoice 2019).

Kelani also sees this initiative as a development that can help increase women’s participation in filmmaking since, according to him, many of the participants, the first to graduate on October 1, 2019, are women. He further suggests that “an all women initiative to produce film through yearly funding, which should be strictly for women to access funds, would go a long way to encourage women involvement in film production” (Kelani 2019).

Esther Whyte, a multiple award-winning Nigerian teen actress, TV host, and film producer, states that the major aim of her upcoming TV show will be “to discover, display and empower talented teenagers” (2019, p. 49). Whyte, then, will serve as a role model for other girls in the same way, she attests, as she was inspired by others. “Ini Edo, Taraji P Henson, Genevieve Nnaji and Halle Berry” are “amazing ladies who inspire me a lot.” It would be generally agreed that women need role models to proselytize them to join organizations and enter the film industry, for that matter.

Another initiative that women can benefit from is the Nollywood and Bollywood collaborations, which have started with the film series Deception, directed by Uduak Obong (2019). Deception is a film series tailored toward the Zee World Bollywood film series indicative of an initiative that Bollywood is sharing with other countries’ film industries, including Nigeria, and will attract more viewership to Nollywood in the same way the Zee World attracts Nigerian audiences. It is hoped that more and more initiatives like this would go a long way to enhancing the quality and content of Nigerian film. It is imperative that more women get involved and do not sit on the fence because today’s world is competitive and the film industry is developing and offers growing economic possibilities for women and men. Rigorous efforts should be made by women to counter the cultural stereotypes, which have hitherto relegated them to the background, making them perpetual latecomers to new ventures.
Women in the Nollywood Film Industry

At the inception of Nollywood, very few women filmmakers were involved. Among them were Lady Apostle Helen Ukpabio and Professor Foluke Ogunleye. The latter “is a teacher, filmmaker, producer, director, actress and writer with a specialization in Theatre and Media Studies. She has directed and produced such films as *The Solid Rock* (1993), *The Broken Hedge* (1997), *Born to Live* (2000), and *Heaven’s Gate* (2007)” (Ogunleye 2014), while the former, a minister of God, and president and founder of the Liberty Gospel Church, with headquarters in Calabar, Nigeria, has made an impact by using film to propagate the gospel. She serves as producer, scriptwriter, and actress of the Liberty Films, some of which, like *End of the Wicked, From Grace to Grass, I Was Wrong*, and *Rapture*, among others, have received good academic critical reviews. Ukpabio’s film *I was Wrong* (2004), as I noted elsewhere, tries to create a balance in representation:

Her ability to address the representation of women in more diverse and balanced terms shows that if more women were to follow her exemplary leadership and role as producer, negative images of women within the Christian genre and mainstream video films could take a positive turn. Therefore, apart from the call for more women to be involved in film production, Nigerian Christian video film producers and directors need to be very sensitive to this issue and factor it into their scripts and productions to avoid causing women to acquire the erroneous perception of being the incarnations of evil in the society. (Ukata 2015, p. 94)

The genre notwithstanding, the duo of Ukpabio and Ogunleye dared to enter into a male-dominated industry.

Progressively, women have started making their entry into the Nollywood film industry with more scriptwriters, producers, and directors with a litany of names such Mo Abudu, Emem Isong, Ruth Kadiri, Mary Remmy Njoku, Omoni Oboli, Funke Akindele, Uche Jombo, Stephenie Okereke Linus, and Rita Dominic, among others as producers. Among the directors are Kemi Adetiba, Omoni Oboli, Tope Oshin, Emem Isong, Genevieve Nnaji, Mildred Okwo, and Stephine Okereke Linus. But the number of female directors is negligible considering the overwhelming number of men in the industry.

It is necessary that women producers are not discouraged from making films because of the lack of funds. Though somewhat difficult, sourcing
film funding is not a herculean task by any means and women producers should not shy away from trying to get funding or financial assistance for their films. The more women are able to take the time to successfully source film funding, the more up-and-coming women producers will know that it is possible. And if people see the seriousness women exhibit in their productions, it would help to create the way for incoming women in film production to access funds too. Emem Isong’s position below further highlights the issue of film funding:

The truth is that the challenge for women behind the scenes is shockingly universal. However, I feel that because our budgets are not so high, women can easily conquer this challenge in Nollywood, unlike in Hollywood and Bollywood. With their enormous budgets you have more to deal with before you are trusted with the budgets to get to work. But with a few million, that can even be borrowed from family or friends, a female filmmaker in Nollywood can make a film and prove herself. (Amobi et al. 2018)

The words of Isong above serve as encouragement for more women to consider filmmaking. This is especially true of those who hitherto saw film production as an impossible profession due to the high cost of producing films. This emphasizes why Chidumga Izuzu (2018) affirms “Isong paved the way for several female filmmakers, proving that ladies can direct, produce and write scripts”.

The present role which Isong is playing is very similar to that played by the late Amaka Igwe, because she has a passion for encouraging and mentoring young people (particularly women) to become directors, scriptwriters, and actors. This is just like Amaka Igwe who herself helped to support many up-and-coming women in filmmaking. Furthermore, Amaka Igwe also contributed tremendously to the growth of the film industry in Nigeria and maintained good standards and quality even when other filmmakers did not care so much about quality and were busy chasing film profit. This is partly why she is celebrated and why she has won accolades and earned many awards, such as the Member of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (MFR), which was awarded to her by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

It is therefore not surprising that Genevieve Nnaji’s debut as director of LionHeart (2018) paid tribute to the late Amaka Igwe. There is a need for more women directors and producers to emulate what she did
by encouraging young women to be involved in filmmaking. If the films are of good standard and quality, then they will be recognized and appreciated just like Genevieve Nnaji’s film, *LionHeart*, is being celebrated and is part of a landmark deal with Netflix. As Victor Akande aptly points out regarding *LionHeart*:

Each time a Nigerian film is showcased at international film festivals with the kind of prescreening fanfare that LionHeart received, I sit on the edge, anxiously waiting to smack exaggerated PR to size…but LionHeart speaks for itself, its class, without pretending to be something else. (Akande 2018)

The intervention of Netflix is already having a positive impact on the distribution of Nollywood films because it is helping to reduce piracy. But this method of streaming films online has its own peculiar limitations because it requires Internet connectivity, which is still a big problem for many viewers in Nigeria and in many other African countries.

**Nollywood, Women, and Representing Women’s Issues**

Nevertheless, the question that this paper asks is whether or not the growing entry of women into Nollywood is making any positive impact. Arguably, some of the women producers and directors are using a wide range of topical concerns that border on women’s need to address certain areas that society hitherto has been silent about, especially as it concerns the girl-child and women generally. For instance, *Dry* (2015) which Stephanie Okereke Linus produced and directed, gave her the platform to showcase girl-child pregnancies, which in most cases results from rape or the girls being given out early for marriage. The film raised the issue of how underage pregnancies sometimes result in the pregnant girls developing fistula disease (a health condition that makes them pass out urine and stool involuntarily), because the girls are not mature enough for motherhood.

There was a recent documentary that showed many girls and women suffering from vaginal fistula being given corrective surgery at the Mercy Hospital, Anua (a Catholic Missionary Hospital), in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. One would imagine that Nigeria in the twenty-first century should have outlived the practice of parents giving out their daughters for marriage before they are mature enough, but more worrisome is the
fact that poverty and greed are causing parents to continue to engage in this practice.

This is where films like Dry create public awareness by sensitizing both the parents and the girl-child to the dangers and health implications of certain choices they make and to help them change their perception about early girl-child marriage. The film Dry also highlights the fact that oftentimes the male perpetrators of the rape incidents are shielded from prosecution and it condemns this. Dry further speaks to the myths surrounding men with HIV/AIDS thinking that making love to virgins and small girls will cure their HIV/AIDS, which is unfounded.

Similarly, Isong’s films such as Political Control, Private Sin, Promise Me Forever, Masterstroke, Critical Decision, Reloaded, Games Women Play, Behind Closed Doors and many more address women’s issues. Ukata (2015, p. 82) expounds on the value of Masterstroke:

Masterstroke does not follow the dominant patriarchal tenets that insist on excluding women from the exercise of power in the political sphere and it privileges a heroine, Simba Richards, in its narrative. She is portrayed as a single woman who challenges the social expectations that women should confine themselves to the kitchen and not the public arena as she vies for a seat in the State House of Assembly in her constituency. Her portrayal fits into Dina Sherzer’s (2000:58) analysis of a female director, Moufida Tlatli’s, iconographic creation of all-round admirable characters.

Thus, Simba Richards “conveys a powerful feminist message which is effective because she positions the spectators strategically” (Ukata 2015, p. 82). Simba’s depiction in a leadership role validates the feminist calls for more of such artistic creations. This contrasts with the storylines that male filmmakers create. Arguably, most male Nollywood filmmakers create women in outrageous femme fatal images that do not help to educate real women out there in the society.

Films such as Dry and Masterstrokes have paved the way, based on their favorable portrayal of women, for society to begin to view women in a positive light. This is in line with Chichi Aniagolu-Okoye’s (2006, p. 5) admonishments that “cinema is the window through which others view people,” thus showing that films should help to correct negative practices trailing the society and provide a vehicle for giving women a new image of self-worth, pride, positive aspirations, and values. If many other women’s films take on concerns that enhance women’s portrayals in positive ways,
then more of the ill depictions of women will be addressed. Remarkably, some of the films mentioned above which were produced and directed by women, are beginning to do this.

**Education for Film**

It should be noted that receiving specialized training in filmmaking can go a long way to improving women and girls’ competence in the art of film production and film directing. This will also further improve the quality of films produced in Nigeria. According to an outstanding Nollywood actor, Bob-Manuel Udokwu:

> There are lots of challenges, we also need to evolve a system of training and retraining our talents. A lot of higher institutions offer certificate and diploma courses in Theatre Arts. It is a practical base to lay a good foundation to grow. If you have a degree in another discipline, you should take one year off to go to some of these institutions and enroll for professional grooming. (Nwankwo 2016)

Most female filmmakers have some training in filmmaking. Even those who studied other courses have gone on to train in filmmaking to enhance their competence. For instance, in addition to their previous degrees, Ajoke Sylva went to Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in London, while Stephanie Okereke Linus went to the New York Film Academy to study film directing. Most Nigerian universities and polytechnics do have departments of film study and drama which provide good training avenues to help to train girls and women in filmmaking.

For instance, one of my students at the American University of Nigeria, studying Multimedia and Communications, shared with me her experience at the Royal Arts Academy, Lagos, owned by Emen Isong, where she spent her 2018 summer holidays studying in the film school. She lauded the hands-on training she got there and said it helped to prepare her for a possible career in filmmaking. But the question to ask is how many people out there, in Nigerian society, know the tremendous benefits provided by having a degree in Communication and Multimedia? And, how many youths, especially women, will key into these training avenues to hone their skills and to help to bridge the gap between female and male film producers? Indeed, how many women out there can also go further to spend their spare time and money to specifically enroll in a
film program (like my student did) to develop themselves in the art of filmmaking? The fact is that there are many institutions, both in Nigeria and abroad, that provide excellent training in filmmaking and, if properly utilized, could qualitatively improve the knowledge and know-how of many people, particularly women, who desire to enter into the filmmaking business. It is hoped that those aspiring to enter the filmmaking business would think it wise to at least first avail themselves of these opportunities as this will greatly enhance the quality of the films they produce.

Funds and Structures for Filmmaking and the Question of Quality

Many of the issues of Nollywood filmmaking are not gender specific but general to women and men filmmakers. Over the years, Nigerian films have been judged using many different criteria. Some have felt that the quality of films produced in Nigeria was poor and they have advocated for a significant improvement in the quality if the film producers wish to have more following. Others have criticized the content and storyline depth of the films and asked for more elaborate development research work to be done beforehand to more properly develop the content and storyline. And another set of critics have been dissatisfied with the aesthetics of the film and have advocated the need for some improvement in the aesthetic quality of the film. The response that one often hears as to why some of the Nigerian films suffer from some of the above defects is that there is lack of funds, lack of government assistance, lack of well-developed film studios, and epileptic electricity supply (which forces filmmakers to use generators that in turn produce an unwanted humming sound in the background which adversely affects the finished product).

As had been pointed out earlier, the issue of lack of adequate funding greatly affects the number of women who can actively be involved in Nollywood filmmaking. Emem Isong’s experience with filmmaking, as earlier noted, makes it clear that filmmaking in Nigeria, when compared with other places like Hollywood and Bollywood, is not expensive enough to keep potential filmmakers from venturing into it. However, filmmaking still requires an amount of money that could be considered by some as prohibitive. Luckily, it appears that help could be on the way because some Nigerian banks are beginning to extend loan facilities to filmmakers. For instance, on the issue of sourcing funds and its relationship
with producing quality work, the prominent drama producer, Bolanle Austen-Peters, points out:

We would like to continue doing more productions of better quality which is why we are investing a lot on infrastructure in terms of equipment, especially with the support of Access Bank. (Austen-Peters 2014)

Accessing good funding and sponsorship is an issue which affects filmmakers and distributors alike. Though it can be argued that men have a slightly easier chance of getting funding than women, the issue of accessing funding affects both men and women. An example which highlights this issue is that of Chief Gabriel Okoye, a film distributor. According to Benjamin Nkoku (2019, p. 27) talking about Chief Gabriel Okoye, “the popular distributor five years ago established the biggest media distribution company for intellectual property in Africa. He was one of the beneficiaries of the Bank of Industries (BOI) intervention fund for developing the creative industry. But, unfortunately, the dream crashed following the activities of pirates who wrecked his company, in addition to a lack of proper funding to sustain the project.” According to him, the Bank of Industry (BOI) funds, which should have helped to improve and overhaul his film distribution network, was, in the end, not fully disbursed to financially support the film distributorship company, resulting in the abandonment of the project.

The role that good tools and equipment play in enhancing the quality of production speaks to the lengths that filmmakers interested in producing high-quality films will go to ensure that they achieve that objective. Granted, getting funds for filmmaking is not very easy in any film industry but it behooves filmmakers to do their utmost to secure bank loans and other types of sponsorship to enable them to produce good-quality films. Furthermore, that the Bank of Industry (a government-owned bank) through its “NollyFunds” (which is the bank’s funding source particularly targeting Nollywood) is helping to provide funding to Nollywood film producers and is, overall, a good development which can help filmmakers, particularly women, to access the much-needed funds to assist them with filmmaking (and this is notwithstanding the less than satisfactory experience which Chief Okoye had with this bank and which is mentioned above).

It should be noted that films made by women and men that are adjudged as having poor depth and quality have been criticized equally
by film critics. For instance, *Fifty* (2015), a film produced by two female producers, Oshin Ogun and Mo Abudu, has been criticized by A. Iwual as having incomplete subplots and depth and advised that the film “could have been better if more attention had been paid to plot, casting and/or make-up plus character development. Be that as it may, it is a hilarious movie” (Iwual 2016). Fidelis Duker (2019), a veteran filmmaker and founder of the Abuja International Film Festival, explains what he looks for in film scripts when he says, “I want to have scripts that are deep in content to be able to compete more favourably, and make waves, internationally.”

**Conclusion**

There is a need for more women to venture into filmmaking and to create a niche for themselves by paying attention to the fundamentals of filmmaking. That way their films will be more successful and they can potentially generate significant revenue as a result. They can borrow a leaf from the filmmaker, Omoni Oboli, whose film *Wives on Strike* was a hit at the box office, “grossing 15 million naira in three days and completing its cinema run with 71 million naira, which earned it a spot as - at time of press - the 8th highest grossing Nollywood movie ever” (Iwual 2016). Such success should give up-and-coming women filmmakers some hope that they too can receive significant revenues from films if they take the time to produce good-quality films. As already noted above, the issue of difficulty in accessing funding for filmmaking can be surmounted given the fact that Nigerian banks are now willing to extend filmmakers some loan facilities to make films. This is a development which, it is hoped, will encourage more women to seriously consider going into the film business. This chapter has offered a glimpse into women and their role in Nollywood filmmaking because there is very little statistical or analytical information available on the subject; this is why I have offered a general overview here.

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