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Authors	Liddy, Susan
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"Where Are We Now?" Assessing the Gender Equality and Diversity Journey in Irish Screen Industries (2016–21)

Susan Liddy

Abstract: *After a period of unprecedented change, this article provides a snapshot of the Irish screen production sector in 2021 from the perspective of female practitioners, defined here as those who work in production roles, above and below the line, in the screen industries. Between 2016 and 2021 there has been a shift from an industry that was gender blind and unquestioningly male dominated to one in which industry discourse is imbued with the importance of achieving gender equality, diversity and inclusion. A range of targeted initiatives have been implemented to achieve that goal. The key question in this article is whether and to what extent, in 2021, practitioners are now experiencing concrete change on the ground, in their day-to-day working lives. This was explored by means of a series of interviews and questionnaires in which three themes emerged: "continuity and change", "resistance and lip service", and "the road ahead". Ultimately, practitioners do not identify any seismic shifts in the industry, but most acknowledge that there is greater awareness of gender and diversity, and some limited but welcome change has occurred. There is agreement, too, that change is not fully embedded but is fledging and still finding its way.*

Introduction

After a period of unprecedented change, this article provides a snapshot of the Irish screen production sector in 2021 from the perspective of female practitioners, defined here as those who work in production roles, above and below the line, in the screen industries. In a society that, according to the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI), has structurally excluded women, much would seem to have been accomplished around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) over the last number of years ("Parliament" 8). There has been a shift from an industry that was gender blind and unquestioningly male dominated to one in which industry discourse is imbued with the importance of achieving EDI, and a range of targeted initiatives have been implemented to achieve that goal (Liddy, "Open"). During 2020 and 2021, a number of changes occurred nationally and internationally that prompted reflection on the extent to which they had impacted on Irish or Irish-based industry practitioners. A new chair was appointed to Screen Ireland (SI) in 2021, replacing Dr Annie Doona who had held the position for two terms and during whose tenure much of the debate and activism in the industry had occurred. At the same time, several SI board members came to the end of their term of office, resulting in a predominantly new board. The 5050x2020 campaign, initiated by the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) and its CEO Anna Serner, had sought gender parity in the international film industry ("Looking"). It had been a focal point for activists who wanted to embed equality in the Irish screen industries with some urgency (Liddy, "Setting" 10). But the year 2020 passed and the campaign was phased out without full equality being achieved anywhere.

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Figure 1: The 5050X2020 campaign was launched at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016 by Anna Serner, CEO of Swedish Film Institute. For several years it provided a focus for gender equality campaigners in Ireland and across the world. Courtesy of the Swedish Film Institute.

The changes in personnel within SI, the end of both the 5050x2020 campaign for gender equality and Serner's unifying international leadership (she stepped down from her role in the SFI in October 2021) all pointed to a period of transition; a time to take stock. It seems timely and important at this juncture to ascertain what female practitioners, the focus of so much analysis over the past few years, make of the state of the Irish screen sector in 2021. In interviews undertaken with screenwriters and screenwriter-directors in 2017, I concluded that the existence of a gender order was implicitly identified "in the widely held belief that women and their work was not valued and was routinely side-lined" ("Where" 64). The key question in this article is whether, in 2021, practitioners are now experiencing concrete change on the ground in their day-to-day working lives; something that will be explored by means of analysis of a series of interviews and questionnaires. Shining a light on screen content and the composition of the workforce is crucial, given the importance and centrality of the screen industries in our lives. As Louise Wallenberg and Maria Jansson observe, "who is *allowed* to make film and TV and what messages and images are presented and conveyed" is both "politically important and imperative" (1992).

To contextualise this discussion, the role of women in Irish society and culture will first be outlined, with women meaning those who identify as such. It will be followed by a short review of the literature on EDI research and activism both nationally and internationally. An outline of the explicit policy changes that have been introduced in the Irish industry from 2016 to 2021 will follow. Explicit policy changes can be understood as those that claim to address equality and diversity in media industries directly (Newsinger and Eikhof 51). Following that, the methodology employed and the findings arising from the interviews and questionnaires with female practitioners will be presented.

Women in Irish Society

Irish society has traditionally supported a narrowly defined, home-based role for women and has a long and shameful history of punishing women who transgress, especially sexually (Fine-Davis 1–5). While the NWCI acknowledges significant strides over the last few decades, it is clear that "social and economic deficits" remain ("Submission" 6). There are continuing workplace challenges such as a gender pay gap, horizontal and vertical segregation in the workplace, unreliable and expensive childcare provision and caring duties which fall disproportionately on women's shoulders (Cullen 11), with the pandemic further exacerbating already existing inequalities ("Dáil"). A stark gender imbalance exists in decision making roles, politics and membership of state boards, with concern that women are "facing a very slow pace of change as well as evidence of stagnation and regression" ("Increasing" 6). There has also been growing concern at the rising levels of male violence in Irish society ("Latest News"; "Sustaining"). In January 2022, the murder of Ashling Murphy, a young schoolteacher who was attacked when she went for a run at the end of her working day, caused widespread public outcry and rallies and vigils took place across the country. The Tánaiste (deputy prime minister) Leo Varadkar has stated that men and boys have a responsibility to start a conversation about the country's "epidemic of violence against women" ("Men").

The NWCI has demanded "a massive culture shift" and many have been vociferous in their support ("Vigil"). Over the last number of years, Irish women have been proactive in demanding change on a variety of issues. They were vital players in the successful marriage referendum campaign of 2015 and drove a grassroots movement, Together for Yes. They also won full reproductive rights in 2018 (Cullen and Kordczuk 11). Lisa Fitzpatrick identifies a more "visible and vibrant" women's movement and a "hunger for change" in her assessment of the Irish #MeToo movement and the activism and assertiveness of younger women (82). Are women practitioners in the Irish screen industries satisfied that change is underway and is that "hunger for change" identified by Fitzpatrick in evidence? A brief overview of the evolution of gender equality work in the screen sector and its impact will provide further context. While there has been increasing national and global concern about intersectionality, particularly relating to race, class, disability and sexuality, data are not yet widely available in Ireland and the focus on diversity is just emerging.

Gender Equality and the Screen Industries

International and National Overview

With some national variations, "women are still underrepresented in film industries as screenwriters, directors, producers, cinematographers, editors and crew" (Liddy, "Gendered" 14). Gender inequality in the screen industries results from women's lack of access to key networks and precarious employment conditions (Wallenberg and Jansson 1991-1993.). This has implications for screen content and for employment opportunities in the screen industries. A greater diversity of screenwriters and directors would offer the potential for a wider range of perspectives, stories and characters on screen (Lauzen, "Celluloid Ceiling" 6). Women of colour are particularly underrepresented behind the camera (Cobb and Williams, "Gender Equality" 102; Smith et al., "Inclusion" 11); film crews are overwhelmingly male (Follows, "What") as are post-production and technical roles (Skadegård Thorsen, 115). Women are less likely to be funded and, when they are, it is more often for lower budget projects (Cobb et al. 102; Savolainen 138). They are less likely to direct a second feature (Follows, "Are") and films

directed by women are shown on fewer screens and have a shorter screening window than those directed by men (Verhoeven et al. 135).

Given the under-representation of women's voices on Irish prime-time radio (Walsh et al. 10), and in Irish theatre (O'Toole 136–37), it is perhaps unsurprising that gender was not deemed an issue of concern in film and television for many years. Prior to 2016, the absence of statistical data from Screen Ireland and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) bolstered Screen Ireland's perceived "gender neutral" position and the claim that they were "project-led" and ungendered (Liddy, "Open" 907–11). However, over the past few years, Irish public funders have positioned themselves as advocates for change and supporters of gender equality, formulating policies and devising targeted initiatives. The explicit policy changes that have occurred in the Irish screen industries have been discussed in some detail elsewhere and will not be elaborated on here (Liddy, "Setting" 10–11; "Road" 81–85; O'Brien; Kerrigan et al. 12–15; Liddy et al.). In brief, Screen Ireland's Six Point Plan implemented in 2016 pledged to publish and monitor gender statistics and introduced steps to increase gender equality ("Screen Gender"). Following a slow take-up from female talent, several targeted schemes were introduced such as Enhanced Production Funding (2018) for female talent, which gave additional support of up to €100,000 for female-led features and the POV Production & Training Scheme offering "tailored support" to selected low-budget projects with a budget of €400,000 ("Screen Gender"). Since then, two further schemes have emerged: Spotlight, to develop writing talent from underrepresented voices; and Pathways, a crew development EDI fund to support work placements on productions across crew grades and also above-the-line shadowing. The most recent available statistics from Screen Ireland (2019) indicate a (headcount) increase in the awards being directed to female creatives ("About"). However, the disparity in funding amounts continues. The BAI have also been active in seeking EDI and launched a Gender Action Plan in 2018, adding gender as a focus to its sound and vision round in 2019. Statistics in 2021 saw 69% of successful applications featuring two or more women in key production roles defined as screenwriter, director, producer and director of photography, although concern has been expressed at the lower-than-desirable numbers of women occupying the role of DOP in funded projects.

Markers of Change?

Increased funding for female-led projects is not the only change discernible in the Irish screen industries, although perhaps understandably, it is often perceived as the only relevant barometer. Two examples are instructive here: firstly, the launch of Raising Films Ireland in August 2020, which opened up a debate around parenthood and caring in the industry. Secondly, the heightened and widespread level of discussion and debate around EDI issues which has been ongoing since 2016. Such discussions have become integral to many industry events and film festivals, something that has accelerated with the move online since the first lockdown in Ireland in 2020.

Raising Films Ireland (RFI) is a not-for-profit organisation "that aims to challenge at a structural level the demands the film and television industry makes on parents and careers" ("What"). It was launched in August 2020 and its Board comprises representatives from a variety of stakeholders to ensure that the industry is represented at the widest level. RFI commissioned a report, funded by Screen Ireland's Stakeholders Fund, to explore the Irish experience. "The Pursuit of Change" survey was distributed throughout the sector in the summer of 2021 and the ensuing report was formally launched on 2 March 2022 during the Dublin International Film Festival (Liddy and O'Brien). James Newsinger and Doris Eikhof

described RFI as a transforming intervention in the UK because it seeks to "change sector practices and processes in ways that make gender, ethnicity, class or physical ability less relevant for accessing opportunity" (56).

Industry debate and engagement is also in greater evidence than ever before, with many events funded by Screen Ireland for the wider screen sector through the aforementioned Screen Stakeholders Funding Scheme. Similarly, BAI Network Funding supports various learning and development activities by selected industry networks and aims to foster a media landscape "that is representative of, and accessible to, the diversity of Irish society" ("BAI"). Equality, diversity and inclusion is one of the seven priority themes for SI and many stakeholders have been funded to deliver masterclasses, workshops, seminars, webinars and panel discussions resulting in a plethora of debates on a variety of EDI issues. These include "Equality, She Wrote" (Writers' Guild of Ireland); "Women and Ageing On-Screen: What's the Story" (Women in Film and Television Ireland) and "Diversity on Screen" (Bow Street Academy for Screen Acting). In a similar vein "Spotlight", the annual review of the Irish film industry by the Irish Film Institute (IFI), includes various issues around EDI. Three panels over as many weeks looked at developments in the Irish industry and at possible solutions in other jurisdictions: "'If She Can See It, She Can Be It': In Conversation with Madeline Di Nonno and Marian Quinn", "Nothing Succeeds Like Access" and "To Inclusivity and Beyond".



Figure 2: Eight Irish film festivals sign pledge for gender parity and inclusion in festivals. Pictured left to right: Aoife O'Toole (Director Dublin Feminist Film Festival), Ronan O'Toole (Director Still Voices Short Film Festival), Dr Susan Liddy (Chair of Women in Film & Television Ireland), Fiona Clark (Producer & CEO Cork Film Festival), John Rice (Co-Founder & Director Animation Dingle) and Gráinne Humphreys (Festival Director Dublin International Film Festival). Photo: Leon Farrell Photocall Ireland. Copyright WFT Ireland.

Women in Film and Television, in partnership with the French Collectif 5050, led the 5050x2020 Charter for Parity and Inclusion in Ireland with most of the country's biggest film festivals pledging transparency and accountability ("8"). There is an increased awareness of gender equality and diversity issues within the film community, with many festivals including debates on gender equality and diversity such as: "Spotlight on Crew" at the 2020 Cork International Film Festival and "Gender and Class in the Irish Screen Industries: Double Trouble?" during the 2021 Galway Film Fleadh. However, the question remains: does an increased level of debate, widespread awareness of gender equality and diversity issues, and the funding of events to highlight shortcomings in the industry point to a significant cultural shift? Does increased awareness inevitably lead to action and change? Or is it, at its core, all talk? To gain further insight into these issues, interviews with industry professionals will follow, after the methodology is outlined below.

Methodology

This research is situated within a feminist media studies paradigm and uses a gendered production studies approach that questions the patriarchal power structures that are exercised through the practices, culture and traditions that shape media content in gendered ways (Banks 157). Modern power is based primarily on the "internalization of gendered norms and acted out routinely in the texts and talk of everyday life"; "an invisible power though 'misrecognized' as such" and perceived as "legitimate and natural" (Lazar 148). Data gathering was conducted between September 2020 and August 2021 with a purposive snowball sample of thirty-three women.

The sample included primarily above-the-line workers—screenwriters, directors and producers—with fewer below-the-line workers encompassing DOPs, editors, costume, production design, camera, stunt co-ordination, mirroring the gender imbalance in the industry. All respondents engaged in screen production at varying levels of experience and seniority. The data was derived in a number of ways to facilitate the restrictions in place arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, and the preferences and availability of respondents. These included semi-structured interviews which were conducted via Zoom; a questionnaire emailed to respondents in some cases, and a number of telephone interviews. This is a qualitative piece of work and questions were open ended and engaged with practitioners about their perceptions of gains for women and diverse groups in the light of six years of activism and the implementation of a range of policies to promote equality and diversity resulting in discursive responses.

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and anonymised. Confidentiality was assured to ensure they were free to speak openly without fear of repercussions in their working lives. Given that the Irish screen sector is small and the number of female practitioners smaller still, any information that might reveal the identity of participants, such as age, industry experience and location, was removed. Transcriptions were coded for concepts derived from the literature and additional codes were generated through repeated use by the respondents. Codes were clustered together to generate themes, which were analysed to create the findings outlined below. Neither theoretical nor empirical generalisations about gender in the Irish screen production sector can be made from a small-scale Irish-based study and no claims are made in that regard. However, studies such as this do provide opportunities to produce important exemplars, generate practical context-dependent knowledge and have merit in their proximity to studied realities (Flyvbjerg 224). What is offered is an in-depth qualitative reflection of practitioners' experiences working in the Irish film and television industries.

Plus ça change…?

An analysis of the responses by industry practitioners to changes in the Irish screen industries from 2016 to 2021 identified three themes that are discussed below: "continuity and change", "resistance and lip service" and "the road ahead".

Continuity and Change

Many respondents acknowledge that some change has indeed occurred and that there has been, in this analysis, a welcome shift towards gender equality and a spotlight on diversity in more recent times. There is broad agreement that there is a more "positive" climate with one screenwriter-director suggesting that "women would be perceived as being equally capable as men working in the industry now" (Participant 1). Similarly, another director is supportive of what she perceives as a challenge to the status quo and the long-standing internalisation of the director as male: "I see a lot of eyes being awakened to the possibilities of having women at the helm and I feel it's increasing our diversity of stories and seeing a multitude of new and unique perspectives" (Participant 2). However, others regarded the changes as tentative such as this screenwriter "still a long way to go—maybe too early to tell" (Participant 3). Echoing that point is this assessment by a director who is cognisant of still untapped possibilities, particularly in television: "a lot done, a lot more to do" (Participant 5). Responses were welcoming of change, although it is fragile despite the international reality that for more than quarter of a century the inequitable conditions for women in global film industries "have barely deviated despite the development and application of a range of equity policies" (Verhoeven et al. 2.) However, over the past three years, statistics from Screen Ireland and the BAI point to greater numbers of women in key creative roles, albeit coming from an extraordinarily low base, which may account for cautious positivity. Arguably, some responses to changes in the screen industries are being assessed, both explicitly and implicitly, through the lens of a progress narrative (Everingham et al.).

Women working in technical roles still see a gendered chasm in the industry in contrast to some of the observations referenced above. As this editor sees it: "A good indicator of where the industry is at is counting the number of female directors who approach me (editor) to work with them. It is still approx. 90% male directors" (Participant 6). A director of photography (DOP) reflects on the presumption, supported by US research (Lauzen, "Celluloid Ceiling" 8–9), that when women are in key creative roles, they will hire other women: "I know the funding has focused on female writers, directors and producers because it's assumed that they will automatically bring female crew in. But that doesn't always happen and crew have been forgotten to a large extent" (Participant 7). The difference in the accounts of screenwriters, directors and producers and women occupying below-the-line roles is indicative of the fact that women remain minorities in many of those positions across the industry, both in Ireland and elsewhere. Gender can affect educational opportunities, role allocation and entry routes for women in creative work (Gill), and opportunities can be determined, in part, by gender stereotypes (Hesmondhalgh and Baker). To date, there is little or no data available in Ireland, a problem that has been the source of much industry discussion in recent months in interviews with senior management in the Irish screen sector (Kerrigan et al. 42).

One camera operator reflects on the continuing male composition of crew and the difficulty women face gaining a foothold: "A lot of time you don't get the experience because you don't have the experience and it's a vicious circle. A lot of the men get their opportunities because they have friends. They have those connections" (Participant 9). These observations

resonate with the work of Deb Verhoeven, Bronwyn Coate and Vejune Zemaityte, who argue, when discussing female directors, that the screen industries are so heavily networked that who you know is crucial to how you progress and demonstrates "homophily at industrial scale" (137). Motherhood and caring duties can also shape women's participation in the Irish screen industries and beyond (Liddy and O'Brien 197), and difficulties can be exacerbated for on-set workers. This point is raised by a professional in the costume department who observes that mothers, especially of small children, face additional barriers when they want to enter the industry as trainees: "The trainee wage is not matching childcare costs. I've gone to the line producer or production manager and asked if we can go up a bit because […] they can't afford the childcare. And it's like, 'No. We'll find other people'. It's money. It's always money" (Participant 10).

Respondents acknowledge that gender equality behind the camera is only half the story. There is also reference to on-screen representation and what some practitioners saw as a desire for increasingly diverse storytelling. There is an excitement among practitioners that some scripts, being developed and produced, are reflecting a landscape not seen previously. This editor says: "I can see more interesting projects are being developed with a feminist/disability/LGTB focus. And they are becoming more frequent. I am personally excited about this—new stories, new voices" (Participant 11). Similarly, this script development consultant observes that the projects being developed "are telling stories about women that have not been told before, and they sometimes prioritise finding a female director to help tell those stories too" (Participant 6). This forward motion is not shared by everyone, and some respondents point to continuing creative gaps and the tendency for producers to revert to the tried and trusted when seeking new projects.

This screenwriter-director insists that "we should also consider disabilities and other minorities when it comes to equality" (Participant 5). There is concern expressed about ageism and an awareness that many women over forty still struggle to gain access and are not being embraced by the new schemes on offer by public funding bodies. This screenwriter is clear that talent is ageless: "New and emerging is not necessarily 'young' talent either. Writers begin their careers at all stages of life, something the industry barely acknowledges nor supports" (Participant 3). This point is also made by another actor-screenwriter-director: "It's not great for mid–later career women whose work has been overlooked for years not necessarily because of its quality but because of structural bias" (Participant 14). Kulich and Ryan's work on women and leadership resonates here as they argue that structural bias and stereotyping can coalesce to create a subtle, almost invisible barrier that impacts on women's careers "leading to very different work experiences and outcomes for women and men" (2). Awareness levels about an unequal industry and the reasons for that state of affairs have soared as this producer notes that the informal bias in favour of female-driven companies and projects has been useful: "there's more consciousness around sexism. […] but awareness hasn't equalled commensurate change" (Participant 4). Reflecting on changes in leadership in organisations, Anna Wahl and others reflect that "gender awareness, particularly among men, does not automatically imply a willingness to work for change" (3).

Initiatives and Budgets

Newsinger and Eikhof distinguish between two types of initiatives to diversify the workforce: empowering interventions that enhance the individual's capacity to participate and transforming interventions aimed at changing exclusionary practices and processes (56). Empowering interventions such as training schemes or mentorship programmes, including

those identified below, can provide individuals from underrepresented groups with entry routes to the industry ("Workforce" 9). They can be positive at an individual level but they do not address "systemic challenges to workforce diversity in the screen sector" (46). In contrast, transforming interventions seek to "transform sectoral practices, to remove barriers to equal participation and often operate at a policy level within individual organisations"' (Newsinger and Eikhof 56). Examples might be the inclusion of childcare costs within production budgets or the provision of on-set childcare (Liddy and O'Brien, "Negotiating").

Screen Ireland's enhanced production funding, the POV training scheme and, to a lesser extent, schemes funded by the BAI are referenced by respondents who, for the most part, cautiously welcome such initiatives. This director, speaking about the enhanced production funding, is confident that money talks: "I think the €50,000 carrot has definitely increased the phone calls by 100% to women directors to be considered for new projects" (Participant 2). BAI funding enabled one screenwriter to access opportunities that might otherwise not have been available: "I personally have benefitted from BAI schemes focusing on women. I have secured contracts with producers through some BAI schemes and developed my work through others" (Participant 15). While POV was acknowledged as having some merit in counteracting unconscious bias, there was disquiet that it represented yet another poorly resourced scheme designed to train rather than fund women, as this screenwriter humorously notes: "What I WOULDN'T do is introduce more bloody mentoring schemes and training courses for 'de wimmin'. Those schemes are procrastination/delaying tactics to prevent women from just MAKING THE WORK" (Participant 16). Such schemes are often underpinned by the presumption that certain social groups are deficient compared with the industry ideal of "the middle-class, white, male, non-disabled worker" (Newsinger and Eikhof 1). As this respondent implicitly identifies, despite their usefulness for individual women, empowering interventions such as this are unlikely to lead to structural change.

Indeed, as this director observes, ghettoisation may be the unforeseen result as negative stereotypes and bias may actually be reaffirmed rather than challenged: "I fear that women directors and producers are under immense pressure to create a film with huge bureaucracy on a tiny budget, meaning most of the money won't end up on the screen" (Participant 17). Hence, even initiatives introduced by well-meaning advocates can effectively sabotage women and run the risk of exposing them to unreasonable levels of scrutiny and censure. Another screenwriter-director agrees:

> Female directors are being asked to deliver a full-length feature film to very high standards on a fraction of a feature film budget which I think is putting huge pressure on them. It might be better if the budget reflected the scale of the project—either more short film opportunities for more directors with a good budget of say 100,000 euro each rather than less opportunities and a budget that makes it a huge challenge if not next to impossible to deliver a high-quality film. (Participant 1)

Verhoeven also notes that the screen industry's solutions thus far—development funding and mentoring— "lean in" and a special fund for women working with women is just not working (qtd. in Kelly). It is a point echoed by this screenwriter-director who rejects what she perceives to be "the persistent illusion" that women require training and experience and that there is a problem with the talent pipeline. "There is a considerable problem with opportunity. [W]hereby men are assessed on the basis of potential, women on the basis of experience" (Participant 8). Smaller budgets are another pressure point for the majority of interviewees. The discrepancy in the size of budgets allocated to female and male led projects

is not confined to Ireland (Liddy, "Gendered" 7–8). Even where a headcount suggests great strides in equality, women filmmakers are unlikely to be getting an equal share of available funds. Interviewees are highly sensitive to this issue as the following sceptical observation from a screenwriter-director illustrates: "I feel there is a very capped glass ceiling when it comes to funding. Sure, entry level schemes are vaguely equal at present, but when it comes to funding, women, and especially women telling women's stories, the bigger funds always go to masculine/male-driven stories" (Participant 18). A camera operator agrees but returns the focus to crew: "The transition into higher end production should also be considered. Is female talent given the same opportunities to excel to the next level, to work with that bigger budget and crew?" (Participant 19).

However, this editor identifies some positives in the POV and short film schemes. Despite lower budgets she is hopeful that more finance will manifest in time: "I can see that there were really strong, female-led teams selected for POV […] there has been a surge in short films by female-led teams but I hope that this pushes into longer form projects with bigger budgets" (Participant 6). Unfortunately, US research would suggest that an inevitable transition to well-resourced features is unlikely and "a fiscal cliff exists for female directors" as they move into feature film storytelling (Smith et al. 8). In Ireland, change has been slower for directors than for screenwriters or producers. The variance in budget and the preponderance of male film directors can be understood with reference to assumptions about leadership and the widespread belief that women are a riskier proposition than men.

Resistance and Lip Service

Despite acknowledging a more optimistic climate, many practitioners identify resistance and lip service under the surface; neither of which are unique to the Irish industry. Even in Sweden, celebrated for gender equality, there are signs of resistance: "[A]s the number of women behind the camera has increased in Sweden, so has the critique of the gender equality measures" (Jansson and Wallenberg 165). An undercurrent of hostility from male colleagues and professionals emerges in many accounts here, even if it sometimes lurks behind a humorous facade. For instance, this screenwriter-director observes that the country's three major production companies have not engaged with female talent to any great extent:

> A producer confided in me recently that he now has the perfect "polite excuse" for male directors he doesn't want to hire. He simply tells them (and I quote), "Sorry mate, I've been told I have to hire a woman." Needless [*sic*], the said producer then does not necessarily hire a woman, but he has protected his old boy network from harm. (Participant 8)

The identification of a so-called boys' club also emerges in this account from an actor-screenwriter who touches on issues of class: "Decisions are based largely on mates, mates giving mates money to make things. How can women get funded when they don't know these people, who are largely from upper-to-middleclass backgrounds too" (Participant 13). Class advantage permeates the screen industries and is widely recognised as a serious impediment in UK research where "men from privileged backgrounds are five times more likely to work in a creative occupation than working-class women" (Wreyford et al. 35). Yet, this editor notes: "I have received comments about how difficult it is for a white man or straight person to get funding now because of 'all the box ticking that is going on'. A male colleague once said to me that the reason why he didn't get funding was because he was 'chromosomally challenged'. I got the funding, he didn't" (Participant 6).

Quite apart from concerns with the small numbers of women in technical and crew roles, this screenwriter-director points to other issues, about which little is currently known, describing the set as "male supremacist, the atmosphere and power structures on set remain unchanged" (Participant 8)—a reminder that the on-set culture of media production is predominantly masculinist. Research on the wider arts sector identified "harmful behaviours that undermine people's right to dignity at work" in the arts sector generally ("Speak" 80). While working as a production assistant, this woman took issue with male conduct on set: "I have found men hoard the roles and equipment, talking down or alienating women on set in a way that does not happen when the HOD [Head of Department] roles are reversed. I found myself being talked down to and berated by the older men working sound and camera in a way I know they wouldn't have done if I was a man" (Participant 28). A similar experience was recounted by an actor-screenwriter-director: "On my own funded short the male producer was horrendous in his behaviour to me. I was constantly undermined by him […] to crew and to others beyond the film itself [...] He can do this because he knows we all hold ingrained negative beliefs about women, most especially about women in authority" (Participant 29).

These accounts suggest that even a relatively modest shift in funding allocation in tandem with the circulation of discourses of equality and diversity can provoke an anxious reaction in some men. And, as Shelley Cobb argues, the goals of equality and diversity will likely require "white, middle-class, male film-makers to be subject to a much lower chance of receiving funding and finding employment than has been the case in the past" (113). Verhoeven agrees and points out that the problem is men won't work with women and we must fundamentally review our focus. For Verhoeven, until the patriarchy is reshaped and the "gender offenders" removed so that the focus shifts to men's role in the industry's bias there will be no progress (2017).

Although space prohibits a detailed discussion here, suspicions of cronyism, a lack of transparency and nepotism also permeate interviews. Interestingly, a mistrust of the power of producers coexists with a belief that some producers are keen to change the industry. This screenwriter-director believes the industry is skewed in favour of those with money and power, and not artists. In this analysis, producers are the ultimate gatekeepers, "they make the main decisions on budget and crew, and decide which projects they are going to push for [...] [T]here are so many different voices, that aren't 'in with the crowd'" (Participant 18). That said, some other responses are more optimistic and tell of producers scrambling to get the gender balance required to get projects over the line: "actively trying to create creative and technical teams that feature as many women as men" (Participant 22). This stunt coordinator agrees: "the producers, they're really feminist jobs. […] I know for a fact that I was employed because I'm female".

However, that assessment is not shared across the board and some question whether producers are only supporting equality and diversity for immediate financial gain. Two female directors have similar experiences in that regard: "I have experienced some positive change in terms of being asked to come onboard projects because I am a woman. However, it can feel like lip service as many of these projects have not come to fruition" (Participant 23). Similarly, this screenwriter-director observes: "there was a lot of talk about wanting a female director [...] but they didn't want any input into developing the characters and relationships […] the content was still totally based on a male perspective" (Participant 1). Wahl and others found that gender equality initiatives in organisations prompt resistance particularly from men. "Men's resistance can be understood as logical from a power perspective—they earn more, do less unpaid work

in the home and have higher status in society. So, men often interpret gender equality as something they stand to lose by" (9).

The Road Ahead

Respondents also reflected on the most effective means to accelerate a change process that has already begun. Suggestions include a combination of interventions such as more mentoring, more schemes for first-time filmmakers and filmmakers from hitherto underrepresented groups, financial incentives for production companies to work with female practitioners, more support for female crew, networking opportunities, and a reappraisal of the selection criteria for Screen Ireland and BAI funding, including raising the funding amounts being awarded to female applicants. Building women's confidence also emerged as important in multiple accounts. Lack of confidence is often held up as a reason why women do not advance in the screen industries. For instance, an actor-screenwriter-director observes the gradual grinding down of women's self-belief: "I think more could be done to explore the effects of inequality and to build confidence in women, so they can begin to claim what's theirs. Rejection is part and parcel of this industry, yet women have been disproportionally affected by this because of structural and systemic sexism" (Participant 14). This screenwriter-director agrees: "I'd like to see more events focused solely on confidence. What's your weak point? Do you need to practise pitching? You don't know how to write a treatment? Right, let's fix that and help you practise" (Participant 30).

All of these are, of course, important to individual practitioners, although arguably they do not challenge the system itself. They are empowering rather than transformative measures. With few successful women to emulate and an industry that made no effort to be inclusive until it was forced to do so, a focus on confidence is understandable as a way for women to exercise some control over their lives.

However, Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad argue that the relentless emphasis on confidence effectively avoids a political critique of a culture that induces self-doubt or lack of confidence in women specifically (26). Focusing on women's confidence issues is safe in a sense because it does not represent a challenge to "the patriarchal gaze and asymmetric power relations; its value is partly that it is attractive to—and requires no change on the part of—men" (30). Endorsing Gill and Orgad's analysis, this screenwriter-director bemoans the difficulties facing women who do have confidence: "You have to still play the part of a particular 'female filmmaker' […] That has been the main issue on the ground as I struggle to move from short form to longer features. 'She is difficult' when I see myself as confidently knowing what my voice is and holding firm on choices I make" (Participant 24).

A number of practitioners identify power as crucial to understanding how the system works and implicitly see transforming interventions as the key to lasting, systemic change. Such interventions to increase workforce diversity are aimed at changing exclusionary practices and processes and can be controversial in the screen industries as policy interventions require "uneasy coalitions of stakeholders and the forging of alliances to implement and run" such initiatives (Newsinger and Eikhof 57). Yet these respondents call for the introduction of quotas to challenge an inherently flawed system. This screenwriter reflects: "The power imbalance between writers and producers has to change if we want to achieve 5050. And honestly, I'm not sure how we do that without some kind of system of quotas […] if I was in power, I would insist that for every application with a male writer a producer makes, they have to make a matching one with a female writer" (Participant 26). She is supported in this more

uncompromising analysis by a producer who is similarly adamant that quotas are the only way to topple the status quo: "Quotas can be employed on a tiered basis—and I dispute that we no longer have the mass, I think it's the effort required to source them that is still lacking" (Participant 4). This screenwriter-director echoes these more sobering assessments with a bleak appraisal of the screen industries in 2021: "Progress has been minimal. We have not notably changed the power asymmetries in Irish screen drama" (Participant 8).

Conclusion

The accounts of practitioners do not identify any seismic shifts in the screen industries, but most acknowledge that there is greater awareness of the importance of gender equality and diversity and some (welcome) change has occurred during the period 2016–21. There is agreement, too, that change is not fully embedded but is fledging and still finding its way. Most of the initiatives put in place over the last six years and, indeed, most of the solutions proposed can be defined primarily as empowering initiatives with a focus on alterations or additions to the existing system (Newsinger and Eikhof 52). Some women assess recent change through "a progress narrative" lens, implicitly accepting that the industry is evolving, and the bad old days will eventually be left behind for good if they can only hold out (Everingham et al. 420). Others are conscious of the gulf that still exists between male and female practitioners regarding career opportunities and funding and the necessity of more decisive action that will redistribute resources more equitably. This is a position in line with the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, a group representative of the Irish population, which called for "ambitious, not incremental, change" to ensure institutions, including cultural institutions, are more representative in terms of gender balance and representation of minorities (9). To date, this "ambitious" change is not in evidence in the Irish screen industries, the response of which could better be described as cautious, piecemeal and not accompanied by an overarching vision. This actor-screenwriter-director poetically captures the fragility of the times:

> It's still is a "new/trendy" thing to have a female director/writer/DOP etc. People are aware that boxes are being "ticked". When it's still sitting on our consciousness like that, floating on the surface, like empty plastic bottles on water, then you know it hasn't really got that far. Gender equality, and accepting it, has not seeped into our bones yet and so any good work may likely be undone very easily. (Participant 29)

Researching organisational management Anna Wahl and others reflect on change and the way in which it so often provokes resistance and lip service (11). One interpretation is that it represents a new form of resistance to change. Another is that it is "an essential part of the change process, where talk must precede action by a certain time margin" (11). That said, there is an argument that increased awareness in any organisation generally puts the issue on the agenda, and with awareness comes "a language for describing and questioning the present gender order" (Wahl et al. 2003). Indeed, Pia Hook suggests that a discrepancy between words and action can be interpreted as both a resistance to change and an integral part of the change process where awareness precedes action (Hook qtd. in Wahl et al.).

> So, where are we now?
> The Irish jury is still out.

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Susan Liddy lectures in the Department of Media and Communication Studies, MIC, University of Limerick, Ireland. She has published on various aspects of the Irish and international screen industries; motherhood and caring; and representations of women and ageing. She is Chair of WFT Ireland, a Board member of WFT International, the Writers Guild of Ireland, Raising Films Ireland and has recently joined the Board of the Irish Film Institute (IFI). She is also the founder and director of Catalyst international Film Festival in Limerick, a festival that prioritises films and filmmakers from underrepresented groups.