

## **The Academic and the Advocate: A foot in both camps**

**Susan Liddy**

**To cite this article:**

Liddy, Susan (2023). The Academic and the Advocate: A foot in both camps, *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy*, 10(1), 11-24.

**Published online:**

October 2023

**Corresponding author:**

Susan Liddy	<i>University of Limerick</i>	Susan.Liddy@mic.ul.ie
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## Abstract

A personal reflection on the challenges and rewards of working as an advocate and an academic, Dr Susan Liddy looks back over her career to date and how she has endeavoured to advance the position of women, including older women, in the Irish screen industry. She discusses the resistance to change she met in the early days of her research and the failure of agencies to take an active approach to advancing women's careers. She outlines the impact her findings have had in this area through media engagement and her realisation that she needed to publish in public-facing outlets and to speak out at public events alongside maintaining a traditional academic profile (with articles in referred journals, as author of industry reports and editor of international collections). She notes the importance of international movements to advocate for gender balance and EDI, and the impact of the #WakingTheFeminists movement locally. Finally, she acknowledges the influence she has been able to wield through her increasing engagement with WFT (Women in Film and Television Ireland) and the importance of knowledge-sharing as a public intellectual and advocate.

**Keywords:** Irish film industry, women filmmakers, ageing, advocacy.

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## The Academic and the Advocate: A foot in both camps

**Susan Liddy**

### Preface from the Editorial Board

In this issue we present an article that has been produced subsequent to our invitation to the writer to reflect on her position as both an academic and an advocate, a space with which those in arts management and cultural policy research often grapple. Susan Liddy's piece offers a thoughtful reflection on experiences as an academic and advocate for gender equality in the screen industries in Ireland. The article is an important intervention in the field of audiovisual industries studies in Ireland and in the consideration of how an academic might operate as an advocate for a marginalised group, such as older female practitioners.

### Introduction

The 'angry feminist' is a familiar stereotype that many women have consciously or unconsciously swerved to avoid. Yet, it was anger, what Chemaly terms 'the anger of hope', that marked the beginning of my work as a researcher and an advocate for gender equality in the Irish screen industries, first on my own and later with individuals and organisations that identified an overwhelmingly male dominated industry and united to challenge it. Prior to 2014, I would have considered myself an unlikely candidate to make public demands about gender equality, diversity

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or anything else. I was not a 'joiner' and had never belonged to organisations, sat on committees or been publicly outspoken about anything. The last few years have seen turmoil and change in the Irish screen industries and it is still extraordinary to me that I became part of it.

As I prepare to formally take over as President of Women in Film and Television International (WIFTI)<sup>j</sup> at a global summit in Helsinki, September 2023, I reflect on my work as an academic and an advocate. The remembrances here are not in strict chronological order or indeed definitive. A piece of this length cannot reference the many colleagues and practitioners I have worked with along the way and omissions should in no way be read as a diminution of anyone's contribution. Importantly, recollecting in this way inevitably results in referencing the bad old days when 'the industry' in Ireland was insensitive to, or less aware of, the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) than it is today. Though significant work still needs to be done it may seem churlish to harken back to the shortcomings of that time when much positive change has occurred in the Irish screen industries in recent years (Liddy, 2022). But I think it is important to remember. Because if we do not consciously remember, we forget. We forget that it is possible to evolve, to be part of and facilitate change and to change ourselves.

There is a widespread belief that 'academia and activism are separate worlds, driven by contrasting aims and imperatives and governed by different rules' (Eschle and Maigushaa 2006, p.119). While some academics occasionally engage in public debate, generally our role is to lecture, theorise, write journal articles and books that may not be widely read but will inform colleagues and students into the future. In contrast, advocates *act*; they campaign, they lobby, they probe, they engage and sometimes they make demands in the here and now. While academics are generally expected to be impartial and to engage with subjects 'objectively', advocates can be driven by passion, personally invested in uncovering an injustice or righting a wrong. At different times I have heard academics discounted as 'only academics' and industry dismissed as 'not having a clue'! As an academic and an advocate for EDI in the screen industries I have found purpose and satisfaction in having a foot in both camps.

My introduction to feminism and gender equality developed inside the academy as a mature postgraduate student undertaking a number of degrees. At that time, gender equality was the primary focus. It is only in the last few years that diversity and inclusion have rightly become pressing concerns in the context of the Irish screen industries. My views were originally moulded as a student - by academic argument, debate, research findings, reading lists, guest lecturers and robust chats over coffee – some things do not change! Afterwards, I went on to teach some of those same courses and modules myself at both adult education and university level. But I was also shaped by a brief foray into screenwriting and documentary production (the latter with filmmaker Hilary Dully). I developed an empathy and a visceral understanding of the hopes, dreams and roadblocks facing women practitioners I met along the way. Ultimately, a bond of sorts developed that would inform both my research and advocacy work. Screen production was, and still is, a tough business for everyone, everywhere. For women it was a particularly inhospitable sector and gaining a foothold was an uphill battle, as remains the case today.

## Once upon a time....

Women's struggle for equality in multiple sectors has long been on my radar but it was a while before I turned my attention exclusively to the screen. When reflecting for this piece I suddenly remembered attending an event at the Galway Film Fleadh in the mid-90s and asking the late director Antonia Bird<sup>ii</sup> something along the lines of - why do we make a distinction between directors and *women* directors? We do not say male directors. While I cannot recall her answer, the question chimed with her as it did with others. However, it was not until later, about 2008, when researching the representation of older women in film, that the review of literature reignited concerns about the screen industries specifically. The work of Stacey Smith (2010) and Martha Lauzen (2023), now more widely familiar to many of us as go-to online resources, painted a bleak picture of a gendered landscape in Hollywood and in the US independent film sector. Material published by the UK Film Council and afterwards by the British Film Institute (BFI) substantiated a picture of marginalisation and absence (e.g., Sinclair et al. 2006; BFI 2013). It seemed to me that the situation must be similar in Ireland. I mean ...if you looked around, where were the women? Of course, we had Pat Murphy, Margo Harkin<sup>iii</sup> and others.... I am fearful to list them in case of unintentional omissions! But not a *lot* of others is the point. In fact, in later years it came to light that only 13% of screenwriters of produced Irish films were written by women during the period 1993-2013 (Liddy and O Connell 2015) and a little less than 20% of projects funded by the Irish Film Board were directed by a woman (Flynn and Tracey 2016). The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) did not recognise that there was a problem until 2016<sup>iv</sup> (Liddy 2020b; Kerrigan, Liddy and O'Brien 2021). Yet, in 2014/2015 there were very few voices raised within the industry; no formal statistics kept<sup>v</sup>, no reference to concerns in the annual IFB production catalogues, nothing from the BAI (which has since been disbanded and replaced by Coimisiún na Méan). This is not to say that individual women<sup>vi</sup> and organisations were not angry and dissatisfied with the status quo or were unaware that the Irish film industry was male dominated. But saying so publicly in a concerted, organised way would not be commonplace for a number of years.

How would the IFB account for the maleness of the industry, I wondered? Did they register that the films they were funding did not adequately represent women either in front of or behind the camera? Or was it acknowledged behind closed doors but left well enough alone because it went unchallenged? It struck me that they had probably seldom, if ever, been asked to account for their decisions and the fact that our industry was gendered. With my researcher's hat on, I decided to ask them. In 2014, I was awarded a small amount of funding by my own college, Mary Immaculate College (MIC), in order to undertake interviews with as many of the policy makers and project managers in the IFB as would speak with me<sup>vii</sup>. It was not always a positive experience and, depending on who I was talking to, straightforward answers were not always forthcoming. In many interviews, the 'problem' had to be painstakingly explained by me, with reference to international research, before the discussion could even begin. The IFB took the view that they were 'gender neutral' with one board member declaring 'historically and currently there is no problem' (Liddy, 2016). One welcome exception was my meeting with Dr Annie Doona, from whom I derived a small measure of hope. Doona had knowledge and insight into gender equality issues and appreciated the need for change within the organisation.<sup>viii</sup> However, my appraisal of their overall position was this: the cream rises and the best projects win. If you want to make films, make them;

if you want to write a screenplay, what is stopping you? Information sessions were filled with women, one interviewee pointed out, proof positive that there was no problem!

After a few particularly grueling interviews in which I was stonewalled and the substance of my argument effectively batted away I found my anger levels rising along with a determination to push ahead. It was then I really understood the anxiety that might prevent individual practitioners from raising their heads above the parapet to even pose questions about exclusion. I recounted my findings in an article for *Feminist Media Studies* (February 2016) and argued that evasion and deflection characterised many of the engagements as did a difficulty in recognising and making sense of entrenched gender patterns. I suspect, given the feedback I received, more industry people read the shorter teaser piece published by *Film Ireland* (20 April, 2015) which I understand was shared on social media during #WakingTheFeminists in November 2015 (I was not on social media myself at that time). #WakingTheFeminists was an explosive grassroots campaign concerning gender inequality in Irish theatre but which quickly spotlighted shortcomings in the arts sector more broadly, including the screen industries. Since then, I have made a concerted effort to write short popular pieces where possible, to convey the nub of an issue in a more engaging and accessible way to a wider audience (Liddy, April, 2015; July, 2020; February, 2021, December, 2021).

After engaging with the IFB in those research interviews, it was clear to me that something was off kilter, but how could it be proven? The simple answer was it could not; there were no statistics to point to gendered funding patterns or anything else. As one project manager from the IFB pointed out to me during a research interview 'I have to take your word for it'. It was infuriating and I committed to redoubling my efforts to push for the provision of statistics as a priority. Not only was there an absence of data but the language to challenge the status quo was not yet in circulation. What did women in the industry think?

My next piece of research, started in late 2015, focused on women screenwriter/directors and their experiences and perceptions of the screen industries with a particular focus on the Irish Film Board (Liddy 2020a). I found there was considerable trepidation about openly challenging or criticising the national funding bodies or the wider industry; a move perceived as being tantamount to self-sabotage. The disquiet, whether likely or imagined, was that you might never get funding if you rocked the boat in public. So, privately, many Irish women screenwriters or writer/directors had watched with cynicism and sometimes quiet rage as male projects blithely dominated our definition of 'Irish film'.

The imposter syndrome choked many women and their disappointment had long been bottled up. However, in this new research I spoke with 55 women screenwriters and writer/directors, working primarily in the film industry, who voiced concern about how 'quality' was defined; the unspoken beliefs about the 'likeability' and marketability of female protagonists; the myth of male genius and much more (Liddy 2020a). These issues had yet to be debated openly in the Irish industry but were emerging in Sweden and elsewhere, most notably through the efforts of the CEO of the Swedish Film Institute, Anna Serner<sup>ix</sup> and researchers such as Anna Wahl<sup>x</sup>. In the Irish interviews, practitioners spoke of their anger; feelings of exclusion; dismissive treatment; the swagger of rising male talent who, it was felt, were cosseted and supported; the internalisation of the perceived smallness and insignificance of female driven narratives and protagonists.

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Why did they tell me all this? They told me, I think, because they knew I had been outspoken about gender equality issues from an early stage and because public debate about the marginalisation of women in the screen industries specifically was overlapping with my research. They also knew I had no 'skin in the game' from an industry perspective. I would not be seeking funding for projects and therefore I had a degree of independence in the sector and was well placed to ask awkward questions and speak on their behalf. I was an ally but also knowledgeable about the issues that impacted a wide range of women who worked in the sector many of whom have contributed to my research over the years. I never experienced a conflict between my academic and advocacy work, I researched what interested and engaged me and many practitioners were aware of my dual role. They may not have read the academic journals or books but they knew I was foregrounding their concerns. Because I was, and remain, involved with a number of different organisations, I have a broad understanding of multiple issues and am familiar with many practitioners across the sector. They continue to engage with the issues by attending panel discussions at film festivals, listening to podcasts, attending dedicated in-person members events and online discussions. From the very start then, it was a relationship based on trust and, I think, mutual respect. What began as a research question in 2014 became something more akin to a shared quest over many years. That early focus put me on a path I would continue upon to this day.

Since then, of course, we have dismantled many traditional assumptions and now more fully understand the complexities around taste, access, unconscious bias, confidence, and the importance of diversity of voice. But back in 2014 and early 2015 much of that was still in the realm of fantasy and would require a major sea change. Change would eventually come because of a confluence of factors including my first public challenges to the way business was being done as an (outspoken) researcher; the development of organisations or dedicated committees within established organisations with a brief to campaign for gender equality; growing levels of female anger – again, 'the anger of hope'; new IFI board members who seemed more aware of gender equality issues and, over the years, the leadership of Dr Annie Doona (IFB) and Stephanie Comey (BAI) from within their respective organisations. However, I am getting ahead of myself! In 2014 and for most of 2015 the highly charged debates agitating for change that would later characterise public meetings at film festivals, educational institutions and the Irish Film Institute's annual *Spotlight* were few and far between and when they occurred, the tone was tentative and questions were almost deferential at times.

One such meeting at the Galway Film Fleadh in July 2015 was a case in point. A number of statistics had been put together by a member of the IFB executive especially for this panel and she was thanked for taking the time to do so. In essence, the data illustrated that while fewer women applied for funding when they *did* apply the strike rate was not too bad. I stood up that day and in as steady a voice as I could muster explained to a full room that a few statistics gathered to support a point was not actually good enough; statistics should be provided by public funders as a matter of good practice. And the \$64,000,000 question: why was it that women were not applying in greater numbers, what was that about? It has not always been easy raising the difficult questions. Especially in the early days, it could be very nerve-racking and solitary. I often wished it did not have to be me, speaking up. But it had to be someone and there was as yet no tribe, though individual women would pull me aside and offer thanks and encouragement. However, change was afoot. And something powerful was waiting in the wings. The solitary nature of the challenge would not last long.

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## **Waking the feminists - and waking the screen industries!**

'Calling it out' at public events coupled with the kind of research I was undertaking was already probing, challenging and unpicking the very questions that were about to explode not in the screen industries, which was dragging its heels, but in the theatre (see also O'Brien 2015 and O'Toole 2017). The anger that was under the surface was unleashed with the Waking The Feminists movement and accelerated the embryonic change that was starting to blow through the IFB. #WakingTheFeminists asked where were the women in our national theatre? Was it acceptable to work with whoever one liked, irrespective of the staggering gender imbalance in the Abbey Theatre's male dominated centenary programme, *Waking the Nation*? To some extent, these were similar questions to those I had been asking the IFB. On November 11, 2015 *The Irish Times* published a letter in which I suggested that 'a dismal picture of exclusion' was in evidence in the film industry also. Irish women, I argued, may need to cultivate self-belief and defiance since 'biding time and asking nicely does not appear to be working' (Liddy, 2015b).

On November 12 2015, the Abbey Theatre, the national theatre, threw wide its doors for an open meeting on gender equality that facilitated the delivery of personal testimonies by those women who believed they had been marginalised by the theatre. I travelled from Limerick and, like many others, sat on the floor outside the packed-to-capacity auditorium listening to the contributions. During questions I managed to get inside and draw the comparison between women's experiences in the theatre and those in the film industry. Even at that stage, I was involving myself in a much more hands-on way than would be usual for a researcher. In hindsight, I suppose I was already becoming an advocate for gender equality though I was not thinking about it in those terms. But I felt there was power in what I had to say and I knew without fear of contradiction that it was timely and truthful. I was addressing real-world issues about justice and fair play.

The IFB acknowledged that gender inequality was also a problem in the Irish film industry shortly before the Abbey Theatre meeting (Barry 2015). It was privately suggested that my letter to *The Irish Times* had caused a degree of panic in the IFB. There were concerns that the Abbey Theatre exposé could extend to that organisation as well and a hurried statement had been put together. Ultimately, the IFB announced its Six Point Plan to address the existing gender imbalance on December 22, 2015, with a stated aim of achieving 50:50 gender parity in funding<sup>xi</sup>. Interestingly, I noted that in at least two subsequent interviews the IFB attributed their wakeup call solely to the #WakingTheFeminists movement. Not so – the reality had been flagged to them long before that, by a researcher, even if they did not choose to acknowledge it publicly. In any case, the tide had turned. Speaking out, whether in the theatre or the film industry had become more acceptable within a short space of time. Just as well, because the years ahead would entail quite a lot of it.

Advocacy groups were quickly formed such as the combined Equality Action Committee (EAC) of the Writers' Guild of Ireland (WGI) and the Screen Directors Guild (SDGI)<sup>xii</sup> and Women in Film and Television Ireland (WFTI) which has been organising behind the scenes<sup>xiii</sup>. I started working with Li Gill, Lauren Mackenzie and Marian Quinn in the EAC, at Quinn's suggestion, together with the respective executive directors David Kavanagh and Birch Hamilton. I was subsequently invited to join the board of the WGI, becoming chair of its Equality Committee; a position I still hold today, working with the current WGI chair, Jennifer Davidson. After #WakingTheFeminists there was a frenzy of activity within the EAC: strategy meetings, meetings with representatives from the

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national funding bodies; 'town hall' meetings designed to take the temperature of guild members and facilitate the articulation of grievances and demands. Policy changes and funding initiatives were pored over and debated within the guilds and in many public arenas. The EAC was, I think it is fair to say, particularly vigorous in its approach and even drafted a proposal for the implementation of gender quotas which was the subject of one particularly energetic debate at the Galway Film Fleadh. Indeed, the Fleadh's 'gender panel' became a flagship collaborative event between the WFT and WGI over the years and housed many rousing debates on a range of topical issues around gender equality in the screen industries.

The years following #WakingTheFeminists, then, were ones of challenge, accusation, denial and public debate about women in Irish society and culture and what steps were needed to embed lasting change and reimagine the screen industries. Soundbites from international research became a resource, cited to support or challenge arguments and feed into advocacy. My own research continued, based on shared concerns and subsequent publications gave a certain legitimacy to the more practical work being carried out on the boards. As Broom puts it, this double identity 'positioned me to serve as an interpreter between the two, a bridge to help them hear and understand one another' (2020, p.1). Gender equality was to the fore of attention with wider concerns around a lack of diversity acknowledged but parked until the gender question had been more comprehensively addressed. With the support of colleagues in the Department of Media and Communications in MIC, Limerick I organised two colloquia over two years to monitor the industry landscape: *Women in the Irish Film Industry: Moving from the Margins to the Centre* in March 2016<sup>xiv</sup> and *New Horizons: Women in the Irish Film Industry in March 2017*<sup>xv</sup>. We welcomed an influx of Irish and international industry contributors: screenwriters, directors, producers, commissioners, development executives, crew and representatives from the IFB, BAI, RTÉ, TG4 WGI, WFT, SDGI and Creative England<sup>xvi</sup> to name just a few. Practitioners gave voice to sadness and despair about lost opportunities, unspoken norms and barriers that had shaped the industry and their working lives while funders and commissioners weighed up what might be done. Among the more well-known guests from outside Ireland were Melissa Silverstein (Women and Hollywood) and Anna Serner, CEO of the Swedish Film Industry (SFI).

Serner arguably made the strongest impact in Ireland during these years and promoted the concept of 5050X2020, i.e., that by 2020 a 50:50 gender balance could and should be achieved. The campaign was launched at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2016 by Serner herself on behalf of the SFI. It seems strange to say now that it was radical to hear it so emphatically stated: women should aspire to full equality in the screen industries. From the start, Serner had vigorously promoted the collection and publication of statistics declaring that it was critical in order to monitor the rate and pace of change; something that had become my battle cry too although an IFB executive dismissed my demands as being 'all right for Sweden' ...but (subtext) not for Ireland! There was not enough funding, the argument went, the process would be too cumbersome, applicants would not want it, and so on. Here was an example of the many things that were deemed out of the question only to become quite feasible, and indeed desirable within a very short space of time. A lesson to all of us who are invested in change. Eventually, of course, Screen Ireland (the IFB was renamed and given a wider remit on 18 June, 2018)<sup>xvii</sup> and the BAI (until its dissolution on March 15, 2023) went on to collect and publish gender statistics though, to date, data on ethnicity, class, age etc. are, unfortunately, not captured. In 2023, the BAI Chief Executive,



Celine Craig, (now Broadcasting Commissioner of Coimisiún na Méan) urged the new organisation 'to build on the BAI's work in this regard and to develop a Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) Strategy'. All in all, a far cry from the situation in 2014 when many people perceived statistics, gender policies and targeted initiatives as somewhat ludicrous demands.

When I joined the WFT Ireland board it was chaired by co-founder, Rachel Lysaght, and I became chair myself in 2018, a role I still occupy today. Later again, in 2020, I joined the board of the newly formed Raising Films Ireland, the Irish chapter of the advocacy and support group for parents and carers<sup>xviii</sup>. In April of the same year, preparations were in place to launch the first edition of the Catalyst International Film Festival in Limerick which I founded to prioritise 'diverse stories/diverse storytellers'. Within days of the inaugural event, lockdown sent us scurrying online! Happily, we survived and concluded our 4<sup>th</sup> edition in 2023. An awareness of EDI and a commitment to change is core to the festival, of which I am director, and we work hard to prioritise the work of unrepresented groups and forge alliances and partnerships with invested communities.<sup>xix</sup> As is probably evident by now, for me research and advocacy are inexorably entwined, I could not conceive of one without the other. I became as invested in the formation and implementation of policy and the immediacy of industry debate as I was in the journal articles, the industry specific reports I co-authored and the cross-cultural research that comprised my edited collections.

### **Research and knowledge sharing**

My research relates to the screen industries and includes work on EDI policies and practices; the representation of older women; parenting and caring; women in non-traditional industry roles; women's contribution to the screen sector as practitioners and advocates; and, currently, dignity at work in the screen industries<sup>xx</sup>. Research topics can often be pursued because areas of concern emerge in discussions with practitioners or are identified by observing behaviour, patterns, or absences. To play a part in a number of different organisations is to be exposed to, and familiar with, a wide range of concerns. I am often asked how I can 'take on' so much but while the focus of my research differs from project to project, there are many interesting overlaps across different parts of the sector. Indeed, the work of colleagues in edited collections I have been involved in has demonstrated a commonality in much of women's experience across borders which has been instructive and will hopefully provide a grounding for my role in WIFTI in the years ahead (Liddy 2023; Liddy 2020b).

Disseminating research findings in a form that will resonate with people is important to me and I have written a number of popular pieces about the issues that have formed the basis of my research. This should not be equated with 'dumbing down' but rather exploring how research can relate to the everyday and to the world we live in. This can occur in a number of ways: through panel discussions, interviews, webinars, online coffee chats, special events, masterclasses or workshops. Such events raise awareness, increase visibility and can also inform lobbying whether for resources or the provision of dedicated initiatives. I have been involved as panelist or moderator in a number of such events for the Irish Film Institute (IFI), WFT, WGI, and a range of film festivals across the country. The topics are wide ranging and can include invited researchers or industry professionals with specific expertise in the subject under discussion, side by side practitioners from Ireland or beyond. Academics and professional contributors have included: Professor Dave O'Brien, Dr Clive Nwonka, Dr Josephine Dolan, Melanie Hoyes (Head of Inclusion, British Film Institute) and Marcus Ryder CEO UK's Film and TV Charity (forthcoming position) who

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have joined discussions around class, race, gender or age in various debates I have contributed to over the last couple of years (Brooke, O'Brien & Taylor 2020; Dolan, 2017; Nwonka 2021); Ryder and Henry, 2021).

The absence and marginalisation of women as they age has been the subject of increased scrutiny internationally and has been a key focus for WFT Ireland for the last couple of years. WFT has introduced its members to the main issues thrown up by research, both my own and that of international colleagues (Liddy 2023). It has created greater visibility and appreciation of older practitioners and has empowered the WFT board to approach funders with concrete suggestions on how to support this group. Some of the other public discussions my colleagues and I have been directly involved with include: *In her own voice: a celebration of Irish women filmmakers* (Cork International Film Festival, 2020); *Gender and class in the Irish screen industries: double trouble?* (Galway Film Fleadh, 2021); *Women and Ageing on Screen: What's the Story?* (WFT Online, 2021); *TG4 AND WFT: Talking Crew* (WFT Online, 2021) *The D&I is Cast - Diversity & Inclusion in Film and TV* (Irish Film Institute, Spotlight 2022); *Autism and Making Films: Can neurodiversity enrich the industry?* (WFT Online, 2022); *Who Cares: Parenting, Caring and the Film Industry* (WFT, WGI and RFI (Raising Films Ireland) at the Galway Film Fleadh, July 2022) and *Greater Later? Building Sustainable Careers* (WFT, Dublin, July, 2023).

Research is probably less likely to be read in the form of academic articles by most WFT members and is more likely to resonate when it is incorporated into debate, where knowledge about knowledge is the goal and the outcome. All WFT Ireland discussions are available as podcasts for members and attract a consistent listenership long after the event has ended. WFT Ireland has grown from strength to strength and has built partnerships and formed allies across the sector. For instance, we partner with the Irish Film Institute (I have been a board member since 2022) to produce our annual Short Film Showcase to promote and support Irish female screen talent; we are an articulate presence at educational, professional and industry panels and events; we contribute to industry debates at film festivals in Ireland and abroad; we engage in research projects and disseminate the research findings; we lobby on issues of concern to members; we undertake online and in person interviews with established and emerging practitioners, we run masterclasses and workshops. In short WFT has become a formidable presence in the Irish screen industries.

### **On the road to..... god-knows-where!**

A detailed assessment of the current state of the industry is not appropriate or warranted here. To date, no seismic shifts have been identified by industry practitioners though there is widespread acknowledgment that much has been achieved (Liddy 2022). As I have discussed elsewhere, there has been a cultural shift in an industry that was gender blind and male dominated to one in which the discourse is imbued with the importance of achieving equality, diversity and inclusion. However, it is clear that a lot more work needs to be done before the screen industries are truly diverse, something that so many of us long to see. We are also aware that some industry roles such as DOP (Directors of Photography) and crew generally have not benefitted to the same extent as screenwriters, directors and producers – and there are still outstanding issues for mid-

career and more established practitioners in those fields. WFT, the WGI and others continue to make representations on their behalf and to question the gendered nature of many industry roles.

Over the years, many of the organisations that I have a longstanding involvement with have continued to engage with senior members of Screen Ireland, the BAI, and now Coimisiún na Méan who, for the most part, are willing to make themselves available for meetings when it is formally requested, which is very welcome. WFT Ireland, for instance, to name just one, receives financial support from both bodies for the provision of events and initiatives which ensure we can thrive and support our growing membership. However, it is perhaps unfortunate that it is no longer as easy for *practitioners* to come into direct personal contact with personnel from either body. For instance, Screen Ireland's project managers and executives are arguably less accessible and less visible in public arenas than they were at the height of the campaigning years.

The ongoing creation and monitoring of policies is crucial, as is the provision of in- depth statistical information. They are safeguards to ensure that change is embedded despite the passage of time or possible shifts in personnel. However, that being said, policies are implemented by people; and gusto and enthusiasm can wax and wane. Research tells us that dynamic leadership is crucial if we are to continue to propel ourselves and others towards change. Visionary leadership can and does make a difference, by inspiring and motivating and that is not confined to national funding bodies (Liddy et al. 2022). None of us working for change in the sector can become complacent because without sustained focus and a sense of urgency equality, diversity and inclusion will not be embedded, regardless of policies and all the initiatives in the world, and we will be the poorer for it.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Women in Film and Television International (WIFTI) is a global network of chapters and partners across six continents all working for the same goal: gender balance in the screen industries. The three pillars that inspire the work of WIFTI are: connection, knowledge and visibility. The first network was Women in Film (WIF) established in Los Angeles in the 1970s as a reaction to male dominance in the film industry.

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My new role as President of WIFTI will run in parallel with my existing role as WFT Ireland chair.

<sup>ii</sup>Antonia Bird (1951-2013) was an English producer and director. Her work includes *Priest* (1994), *Face* (1997) and *Care* (2000). Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000944/>.

<sup>iii</sup>Pat Murphy is an Irish filmmaker who has made films including *Maeve* (1982), *Anne Devlin* (1984), *Nora* (2000) and *Tana Bana* (2015). Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0614584/>.

Margo Harkin is an Irish producer and director. Her work includes *Mother Ireland* (1988), *Hush-a-Bye Baby* (1990), *Stolen* (2022). Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0363096/>.

<sup>iv</sup>Stephanie Comey, in preparation for a presentation at an MIC colloquium in 2016, first uncovered and shared BAI gender statistics on funding.

<sup>v</sup>The Zebbies Report 2007-2008 (WGI) did attempt to gather statistics over twelve months and found women less likely to be funded to develop a feature film script. Available at: <http://www.iftn.ie/news/?act1=record&only=1&aid=73&rid=4282407&tpl=archnews&force=1>.

<sup>vi</sup>Marian Quinn had held a number of informal coffee gatherings at film festivals, for instance, during which women could discuss issues of concern to them in the industry.

<sup>vii</sup> MIC is also known as Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

<sup>viii</sup> Dr Annie Doona was appointed to the IFB board in January 2013 and served as acting chair after the untimely death of Bill O'Herlihy in 2013. She was subsequently appointed as chair and served in that capacity until March 2021.

<sup>ix</sup> e.g. *The Money Issue* (2018) Swedish Film Institute. Available at:

[https://www.filminstitutet.se/globalassets/\\_dokument/sfi-gender-equality-report-2018---lowres.pdf](https://www.filminstitutet.se/globalassets/_dokument/sfi-gender-equality-report-2018---lowres.pdf).

<sup>x</sup> Wahl, Anna & Holgersson, Charlotte & Höök, Pia & Linghag, Sophie & Regnö, Klara. (2003). *The Reproduction and Change of Male Dominance in Positions of Power*. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anna-Wahl>.

<sup>xi</sup> Available at: <https://www.screenireland.ie/about/gender>.

<sup>xii</sup> Each guild would eventually form its own equality committee.

<sup>xiii</sup> According to Rachel Lysaght the first committee members who worked to establish WFT in Ireland were Lindsay Campbell, Neasa Hardiman, Katie Holly, Aoife Kelleher, Emer Reynolds, Grainne Lynch, Kate McColgan, Ailish McElmeel, Lesley McKimm and Kathy Rose O'Brien.

<sup>xiv</sup> Available at: <https://filmireland.net/2016/03/09/women-in-the-irish-film-industry-moving-from-the-margins-to-the-centre-2/>.

<sup>xv</sup> Available at: <https://wft.ie/new-horizons-calls-for-gender-quotas/>.

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<sup>xvi</sup> IFB - Irish Film Board; BAI-Broadcasting Authority of Ireland; RTÉ- Raidió Teilifís Éireann; TG4 – the Irish language television channel; WGI- Writers Guild of Ireland; WFT – Women in Film and Television; SDGI- Screen Directors Guild of Ireland.

<sup>xvii</sup> The organization underwent a name change and a broadening of its remit and the Irish Film Board (IFB) become Fís Éireann/ Screen Ireland on June 18, 2018.

<sup>xviii</sup> Liddy, Susan. and O ‘Brien, Anne. (2022) *The Pursuit of Change: Issues Affecting Parents and Carers in Ireland’s Screen Industries*.

<sup>xix</sup> Available at: [www.Catalystinternationalfilmfestival.com](http://www.Catalystinternationalfilmfestival.com).

<sup>xx</sup> This current research project will form the basis of an industry report funded by the Screen Ireland Stakeholder Funding Scheme on behalf of WFT Ireland. My co-author of this ongoing work is Dr Fergal Rhatigan with additional support from Olwen Dawe and Dr. Ciara L. Murphy.