

The Limitations of Empowering Interventions: A Feminist Analysis of Screen Ireland's 'Point of View' Production & Training Scheme

While the 5050x2020 campaign did not achieve gender equality, by 2020, the Irish Film Industry leaders were engaging with equality issues.¹ What has been done to restructure the gendered industry since then? Has Screen Ireland done enough to create a long-term impact on the movement towards equality in the industry?

This essay uses a feminist media studies paradigm and a gendered production studies approach to critically analyse Screen Ireland's POV scheme. Using theories from feminist scholars such as Mulvey, Johnston, and Liddy, along with Newsinger and Eikohf's distinction between transformative and empowering measures, this essay analyses the gendered scheme's benefits and limitations, the composition of creative control, what stories are permitted and portrayed, and the constraints within the patriarchal power structure that shapes media and perceived value.²

In the Irish film industry, women are underrepresented behind the scenes and in front of the camera in key creative roles, crew, and onscreen as protagonists.³ Due to film's significant role in forming public perceptions, key creative roles must be proportionally distributed to influence and shape characters and narratives in cinema.⁴ Mulvey theorises that mainstream cinema depicts the world from a male perspective and views women as a passive

¹ Susan Liddy, "'Open to All and Everybody'?" The Irish Film Board: Accounting for the scarcity of women screenwriters', *Feminist Media Studies*, 16.5 (2016), 901-917 (p. 903), doi:10.1080/14680777.2015.1137961.

² Louise Wallenberg and Jansson Maria, 'On and Off Screen: Women's Work in the Screen Industries', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 28.6 (2021), 1991-1996 (p. 1992) doi:10.1111/gwao.12748.

³ Susan Liddy, 'The Gendered Landscape in the International Film Industry: Continuity and Change', in *Women in the International Film Industry: Policy, Progress and Power*, ed. by Susan Liddy (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 1-18 (p.14).

⁴ Susan Liddy, "'Where Are the Women?'" Exploring perceptions of a gender order in the Irish film industry' in *Women in the Irish Film Industry: Stories and storytellers*, ed. by Susan Liddy, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), pp. 36-47 (p. 37).

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object, i.e., through the male gaze.⁵ Johnston similarly argues that male domination of the film industry manipulates how women are shown in films. Rather than depicting women's realities, they reflect male desires.⁶ Introducing feminist filmmakers into mainstream filmmaking could introduce female desire and fantasy.⁷

In 2015, the 'Waking the Feminists' campaign focused on inequality discourse in the creative industries. While this gained traction, Dr Susan Liddy wrote a letter to The Irish Times criticising the male-dominant Irish Film Industry. She questioned Screen Ireland's ungendered stance and lack of statistics despite years of gender imbalance.⁸

Screen Ireland is the development agency for the national film industry. It is funded with public money and administered through the Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht.⁹ They are a pillar of the industry, a gatekeeper who controls what projects are awarded or denied financial support. Therefore, they influence how contemporary Ireland's diversity is depicted in front of and behind the camera.¹⁰ Until this public protest, Screen Ireland claimed it was 'gender-neutral' and focused on 'project-led decision-making'. Previously, they had not been pressured to consider gender in their policy decisions. In

⁵ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 7th edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 711– 722 (p. 715).

⁶ Karen Hollinger, *Feminist Film Studies* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), pp. 7-10.

⁷ Sue Thornhman, *Passionate Detachments: An Introduction to Feminist Film Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997), p. 30.

⁸ Susan Liddy, 'Women and the Irish film industry', *The Irish Times*, 11 November 2015. <<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/women-and-the-irish-film-industry-1.2424444>> [Accessed 20 October 2024].

⁹ Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, *Creative Arts: Agencies* (Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas, 2020), <<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c86fe-creative-arts-agencies/#screen-ireland>> [Accessed 5 February 2025] (paras. 8 of 15).

¹⁰ Susan Liddy, *Open*, p. 904.

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response to media attention, the agency underwent a radical paradigm shift regarding its values of equality and diversity.¹¹ Screen Ireland's Acting Chair, Dr. Annie Doona, publicly addressed the underrepresentation of women in Irish film. Screen Ireland committed to achieving gender equality with a Six Point Plan and a Gender Equality and Diversity subcommittee to oversee it.¹²

The committee, which has three unlisted members, engages with stakeholders and oversees policies and guidelines for the application process and funding arrangements.¹³ These essential roles and responsibilities are enormous tasks for three individuals. It is concerning that a diversity committee which requires diverse experts for accurate policy recommendations has so few members who are not transparently named.¹⁴

Part of Screen Ireland's plan in response to external pressures was committing to collecting, publishing, and monitoring gender statistics.¹⁵ The reports forced the patriarchal dominance to be exposed. Of the Irish feature films produced between 2011 and 2015, 21% had a female writer, and 18% had a female director.¹⁶ Feature films were revealed to be

¹¹ Páraic Kerrigan, Susan Liddy, and Anne O'Brien, 'Conceptualising change in equality, diversity and inclusion: A case study of the Irish film and television sector', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 26.3 (2023), 336–353 (pp. 343-345) <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/17599/1/AOB_concep.pdf> [Accessed 3 October 2024].

¹² Screen Ireland, *Statement from the IFB on Gender Equality Six Point Plan* (2016), <<https://www.screenireland.ie/news-archive/view/2975>> [Accessed 9 December 2024] (para. 1 of 7).

¹³ Screen Ireland, *Gender & Diversity Policy and Key Statements* (2025), <<https://www.screenireland.ie/about/gender>> [Accessed 10 January 2025] (para. 11 of 12).

¹⁴ Páraic Kerrigan, Susan Liddy, and Anne O'Brien, 'Tools and measures for diversity and inclusion in media industries: International best practice and informing policy change in the Irish film and television sector', *European Journal of Communication*, 38.3 (2023), 217–236 (pp. 229-230) <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/17604/1/AOB_tools.pdf> [accessed 3 October 2024].

¹⁵ Screen Ireland, *Gender*, para. 4 of 12.

¹⁶ Screen Ireland, *IFB Gender Statistics 2010-2015** (Dublin: Screen Ireland, 2015) <<https://web.archive.org/web/20160314221311/https://www.irishfilmboard.ie/files/Gender%20Statistics%2010%20-%202015.pdf>> [Accessed 12 December 2024] (p. 2).

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created by and for men.¹⁷ These findings validated the ongoing discourse and women's difficulty breaking into the Irish film industry.

Criticism of Screen Ireland continued due to the action plan's slow process, which did little to incentivise parity in funding applications.¹⁸ Screen Ireland pointed to the lack of female attachments to applications as their next action point. From 2011 to 2015, 16% of writers were female, and 13.6% of directors were women.¹⁹ To show a dedication to progress, Screen Ireland encouraged female talent to apply by introducing a female talent incentive in 2018.²⁰

Newsinger and Eikhof divide interventions to increase workforce diversity into two categories: empowering and transforming interventions.²¹ An example of an empowering intervention is the 'Point of View' (POV) Production & Training Scheme exclusively supported emerging and established female directors and writers. This empowering initiative was in response to the difficulty faced by women in breaking into the film industry due to the short-term, temporary contract employment practices.²² The POV scheme required projects to have a gender-balanced crew, all of whom were able to upskill with training and

¹⁷ Kerrigan, Liddy, and O'Brien, *Conceptualising*, p. 337.

¹⁸ Screen Ireland, 'The IFB to Introduce Ground-Breaking New Funding Initiatives for Female Writers and Directors as part of Ongoing Commitment to Gender Equality in the Irish Film Industry', *Screen Ireland*, 16 July 2017. <<https://www.screenireland.ie/news/the-ifb-to-introduce-ground-breaking-new-funding-initiatives-for-female-wri>> [Accessed 12 December 2024].

¹⁹ Screen Ireland, *IFB Gender Statistics 2010-2015**, p. 3.

²⁰ Roddy Flynn and Tony Tracy, 'Irish Film and Television – 2017', *Estudios Irlandeses: Journal of Irish Studies*, 13 (2018), 238-268 (p. 240) <<https://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/2018/03/irish-film-and-television-2017/>> [Accessed 25 February 2025].

²¹ Jack Newsinger, and Doris Eikhof, 'Explicit and Implicit Diversity Policy in the UK Film and Television Industries', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 17.1 (2020), 47-69 (p. 56), doi:10.3366/jbctv.2020.0507.

²² Kerrigan, Liddy, and O'Brien, *Tools*, p. 232.

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mentorship.²³ Six projects were awarded development funding, which included workshops, mentorship and training. Each of the four selected features was fully funded with a budget of €400,000.²⁴ These features were *You Are Not My Mother* (2021),²⁵ *It Is in Us All* (2022),²⁶ *Lies We Tell* (2023),²⁷ and *Sunlight* (2023).²⁸ The funding initiative implemented diversity and inclusion measures as a requirement within the application process.²⁹

Empowering interventions alter or add to the existing system, providing a limited number of entry routes to the industry.³⁰ Due to the limited number of productions that can be selected, only a very select number of women are given an opportunity to be creative leaders. The POV scheme only assisted the selected four productions and does not encourage systemic change towards gender-balanced crews and women in key creative roles outside the scheme. There was a five-year gap until the next gender-focused funding initiative was announced.³¹

²³ Screen Ireland, 'Six New Female Creative Director/Writer Teams Announced for Trailblazing Screen Ireland POV Funding Scheme', *Screen Ireland*, 19 September 2018. <<https://www.screenireland.ie/news/six-new-female-creative-director-writer-teams-announced-for-trailblazing-sc>> [Accessed 17 February 2025] (paras. 4-7 of 13).

²⁴ Screen Ireland, The IFB to Introduce, paras. 6-10 of 13.

²⁵ *You Are Not My Mother*, dir. by Kate Dolan (Magnolia Pictures, 2021).

²⁶ *It Is in Us All*, dir. by Antonia Campbell-Hughes (Wildcard Distribution, 2022).

²⁷ *Lies We Tell*, dir. by Lisa Mulcahy (Break Out Pictures, 2023).

²⁸ *Sunlight*, dir. by Claire Dix (Wildcard Distribution, 2023).

²⁹ Kerrigan, Liddy, and O'Brien, Tools, p. 230.

³⁰ CAMEo, *Workforce Diversity in the UK Screen Sector: Evidence Review* (Leicester: CAMEo Research Institute, 2018), <www.bfi-workforce-diversity-in-uk-screen-sector-evidence-review-2018-03.pdf> [Accessed 30 January 2025] p. 9.

³¹ Screen Ireland, 'Screen Ireland and Film Fund Luxembourg announce Co-Development Fund for Female and Non-Binary Filmmakers now open', *Screen Ireland*, 23 May 2023. <<https://www.screenireland.ie/news/screen-ireland-and-film-fund-luxembourg-announce-co-development-fund-for-female-and-non-binary-filmmakers-now-open>> [Accessed 19 October 2023].

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Systemic interventions transform structures to remove barriers to equity, often operating at a policy level.³² The POV scheme failed to challenge how creatives are often hired through informal networking.³³ Gender inequality issues begin before the application process with production companies at a networking level, which impacts producers filling out the funding application process. The established male dominance is enforced by homosocial reproduction. Leaders are inclined to select those with desirable traits similar to themselves. As the perceived safe option, they are more likely to be given opportunities and have their potential recognised.³⁴ In this case, it is men choosing men. This requires a systemic change within Screen Ireland's influence to alter the current societal norms.

In European studies, women directors have been shown to increase the representation of women in crews compared to films with exclusively male directors.³⁵ Lauzen's study of Hollywood films had comparable results.³⁶ There is a need for more women in key roles to correct the underrepresentation. However, a female filmmaker network of homosocial reproduction may potentially cause further segregation and fail to solve the issue.³⁷

³² Newsinger and Eikhof, p. 56.

³³ Bridget Conor, Rosalind Gill and Stephanie Taylor, 'Gender and Creative Labour', *Sociological Review*, 63 (2015), 1-22 (p. 10), doi:10.1111/1467-954X.12237.

³⁴ Åsa Berggren et al., "'Screwed from the start": How women perceive opportunities and barriers for building a successful research career', *Frontiers in Education*, 7.80966 (2022), 1-16 (p. 2) doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.809661.

³⁵ Patrizia Simone, *Female professionals in European film production 2023* (Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory, 2023) <<https://rm.coe.int/female-professionals-in-european-film-production-2023-edition-p-simone/1680acfdcb>> [Accessed 22 February 2025] (pp. 101-103).

³⁶ Martha Lauzen, *The Celluloid Ceiling: Employment of Behind-the-Scenes Women on Top Grossing U.S. Films in 2024* (San Diego: Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, 2025), <<https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-Celluloid-Ceiling-Report.pdf>> [Accessed 23 February 2025] (p. 4).

³⁷ Annie Doona, 'Educating Gráinne: The role of education in promoting gender equality in the Irish film industry' in *Women in the Irish Film Industry: Stories and storytellers*, ed. by Susan Liddy, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), pp. 97-108 (p. 103).

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Instead, this requires a societal change. Men must do their part to establish parity, selecting people based on potential and talent rather than a copy of themselves. An example of a transformative change in selecting projects for funding is education and awareness against bias. Unconscious bias has had an immense negative impact on the industry, impacting decision-makers' views of women directors' potential.³⁸ This ubiquitous bias also affects women's self-perceptions, causing doubt in femininity, abilities and strengths.³⁹ Screen Ireland acknowledged in its Six Point Plan that decision-makers must be taught skills regarding diversity and equality issues to select funding applications fairly.⁴⁰ They post simple self-led courses online for the creative sector to create a safe and respectful working environment, tackling bullying and harassment,⁴¹ and addressing unconscious bias in their workers.⁴² Nonetheless, it seems the format of self-guided courses had little impact on the selection process, based on the ongoing fluctuations featured in the 2025 slate; 1 of 14 fiction features feature a female director,⁴³ which is a severe drop-off when compared to the 2024

³⁸ Susan Liddy, *Where Are the Women?*, p. 44.

³⁹ National Women's Council of Ireland, *Better Boards, Better Business, Better Society* (Dublin: National Women's Council of Ireland, 2015) <https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Better_Boards_PDF.pdf> [Accessed 27 October 2024] (p. 28).

⁴⁰ Screen Ireland, *Gender* (2025), <<https://www.screenireland.ie/about/gender>> [Accessed 10 January 2025] (para. 4 of 12).

⁴¹ Screen Ireland, *Online Self-led: Tackling Bullying and Harassment at Work* (2025), <<https://www.screenireland.ie/courses/tackling-bullying-and-harassment-in-the-arts-and-creative-sectors>> [Accessed 1 April 2025].

⁴² Screen Ireland, *Online Self-led: Addressing Unconscious Bias: Basic Awareness in the Workplace* (2025), <<https://www.screenireland.ie/courses/addressing-unconscious-bias-basic-awareness-for-the-arts-and-creative-sectors>> [Accessed 1 April 2025].

⁴³ Screen Ireland, 'Screen Ireland Launches its 2025 Slate of Productions with Over 80 Supported Projects', *Screen Ireland*, 22 January 2025. <<https://www.screenireland.ie/news/screen-ireland-launches-its-2025-slate-of-productions-with-over-80-supported-projects>> [Accessed 30 January 2025].

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slate of 6 of 12⁴⁴ or the 2023 slate of 4 of 10.⁴⁵ While in the right direction, progress has been slow, and with gender statistics no longer released to the public annually,⁴⁶ it is impossible to continue tracking. Their commitment diminishes without external pressures focusing on the agency's equality policies. This begs the question of Screen Ireland's commitment— were they responding to high-profile discussions following 'Waking the Feminists'?

The lack of women in the industry continues to be framed as their fault due to a lack of desire and ambition, assuming 'if women want the same opportunities, and they want it enough, they will be hired'.⁴⁷ Portraying the selection process as unbiased effectively overlooks gendered structures and puts the fault on women.⁴⁸ This framing maintains the cycle of women being excluded; women cannot be selected if lacking.⁴⁹

The POV scheme's selection panel, composed of Screen Ireland Project Managers and a Production and Distribution Manager, found a much higher number of female creative talent applying. A high standard of 65 applications competed for six funding awards.⁵⁰ This

⁴⁴ Screen Ireland, *Production Slate: Film and Television 2024* (Dublin: Screen Ireland, 2024), <https://www.screenireland.ie/images/uploads/general/SI_Slate_Catalogue_2024_FINAL01.pdf> [Accessed 30 January 2025].

⁴⁵ Screen Ireland, *Production Slate for Film and Television 2023* (Dublin: Screen Ireland, 2023) <https://www.screenireland.ie/images/uploads/general/SI_Prod_Catalogue_2023.pdf> [Accessed 30 January 2025].

⁴⁶ Screen Ireland, *Gender and Diversity* (2022), <<https://www.screenireland.ie/industry-insights/gender-and-diversity>> [Accessed 18 October 2024].

⁴⁷ Courtney Brannon Donoghue, 'Gendered expectations for female-driven films: risk and rescue narratives around Warner Bros. *Wonder Woman*', *Feminist Media Studies*, 22.3 (2022), 485-501 (p. 491), doi:10.1080/14680777.2019.1636111.

⁴⁸ Newsinger and Eikhof, p. 54.

⁴⁹ Emer O'Toole, 'Waking the Feminists: Re-imagining the space of the national theatre in the era of the Celtic phoenix', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 28.2 (2017), 134-152 (p. 144), doi:10.1080/10436928.2017.1315549.

⁵⁰ Screen Ireland, 'Six New Female Creative Director/Writer Teams Announced for Trailblazing Screen Ireland POV Funding Scheme', *Screen Ireland*, 19 September 2018, <<https://www.screenireland.ie/news/six-new->

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was shocking compared to the 2017 applications, which included only 5 of 34 feature films with women directors.⁵¹ This matches Ryan's theory that women are less likely to seek senior positions within discriminatory environments.⁵² Liddy applied this logic to the low number of women applying for Screen Ireland funding; women were assessing their chances and giving up before trying.⁵³ Women grow disengaged and discouraged⁵⁴ from discriminatory systems that continuously overlook female talent.⁵⁵

Women's lack of confidence and self-doubt is another way the issue of fewer women is framed as their fault. Gill and Orgad argue that the emphasis on confidence effectively avoids a political critique of the cultural issue or organisational structures. It avoids acknowledging patriarchal asymmetric power relations and requires no change from men or the industry.⁵⁶ The lack of confidence reflects their reality of a sexist society: less social

female-creative-director-writer-teams-announced-for-trailblazing-sc> [Accessed 8 December 2024] (paras. 4-7 of 13).

⁵¹ Screen Ireland, *2017 Gender Statistics Production & Development Funding* (Dublin: Screen Ireland, 2018) <https://www.screenireland.ie/images/uploads/general/2017_TOTAL_Gender_Statistics_%28Production_Development%29.pdf> [Accessed 12 December 2024] (p. 1).

⁵² Michelle Ryan, 'Addressing workplace gender inequality: Using the evidence to avoid common pitfalls', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 62.1 (2023), 1-11 (p. 4), doi:10.1111/bjso.12606.

⁵³ Susan Liddy, 'The Road to 5050: Gender Equality and the Irish Film Industry' in *Women in the International Film Industry: Policy, Practice and Power*, ed. by Susan Liddy, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 77-95 (p. 91).

⁵⁴ Lisa French, 'Gender then, gender now: surveying women's participation in Australian film and television industries', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 28.2 (2014), 188-200 (pp. 194-196), doi:10.1080/10304312.2014.888040.

⁵⁵ Deborah Jones and Judith Pringle, 'Unmanageable inequalities: sexism in the film industry', *The Sociological Review*, 63.S1 (2015), 37-49 (pp. 46), doi:10.1111/1467-954X.12239.

⁵⁶ Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad, 'Confidence Culture and the Remaking of Feminism', *New Formations*, 91 (2017), 16-34 (pp. 26-30), doi:10.3898/NEWF:91.01.2017.

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power, less pay and less representation in political and cultural life.⁵⁷ Self-doubt grows in their ability and talent as a response to the lack of recognition for their work.⁵⁸

The POV productions positively impacted screen content; it allowed women screenwriters and directors to broaden the range of perspectives, stories, and characters on screen. The four women-led projects are a view of the potential diversity in film content. Three of the four films produced from the scheme feature a female main character. Liddy's previous research backs up this knock-on effect of women behind the camera. Of the films produced between 1993 and 2011, 24% with a male writer and 63% with a female writer had a female protagonist.⁵⁹ This proves Johnston's theory that featuring feminist filmmakers in mainstream filmmaking introduces female desire and fantasy.⁶⁰

However, this positive impact was limited as the films produced from the scheme were not treated as mainstream films, partly due to their budget. The scheme required a full-length feature film to be created with a micro-budget, exemplifying the 'glass cliff' phenomenon; female key creatives are selected for positions with a greater risk of failure and little room for error due to the micro-budget's limitations.⁶¹ The productions required people to work for little pay, and many people could not afford to work for the low rate. The four productions had many overlaps of Heads of Departments and crew. Producer Deirdre Levins of *You Are Not My Mother* acknowledges the scheme's massive pressure with a budget that could compromise the directors' potential, 'they must come out of the block singing or they

⁵⁷ National Women's Council of Ireland, pp. 9-12.

⁵⁸ Jones and Pringle, p. 46.

⁵⁹ Susan Liddy, *Open*, p. 903.

⁶⁰ Thornhman, p. 30.

⁶¹ Donoghue, p. 494.

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won't get a second opportunity'.⁶² Even when Screen Ireland acts to empower women, they constrain equal participation indirectly. The women in key creative roles were limited by micro-budgets, restricting their ability to deliver diverse storytelling that the Irish film industry desperately needs to be introduced to mainstream media. Due to the micro budget, creative compromises were needed. Director Kate Dolan could not afford a Steadicam and due to the limited number of days on set shooting, certain scenes could only be kept in if they were all shot in a single setup.⁶³

They were vulnerable to criticism because of the high potential for sabotaging the productions. Thankfully, the productions took advantage of the creative control that came with a smaller budget and created successful films. Producer Ruth Carter of *Lies We Tell*⁶⁴ and Dolan⁶⁵ acknowledged their freedom when casting to pick the perfect actors over recognisable names in interviews. *Lies We Tell* shot interiors with candlelight, which would have been difficult to persuade executives or investors was the right decision.⁶⁶

A noteworthy factor of the discourse is the fear of women-focused initiatives' vulnerability to ghettoisation. Ghettoisation may result from these small budgets due to the

⁶² 'Producing POV Features with Screen Ireland', *Women in Film and Television Podcast*, Women in Film and Television Ireland, 23 May 2022, online sound recording, Spotify, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2Ua77dGUV3NiaYkM9Lgmz?si=CQOsvO16SASa4s_J1F_WCg> [Accessed 10 December 2024].

⁶³ 'Set Talk with POV Writer/Directors Kate Dolan and Antonia Campbell-Hughes', *Women in Film and Television Podcast*, Women in Film and Television Ireland, 23 August 2021, online sound recording, Spotify, <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/4oZEWPIE860BCXzBtgxaVk?si=HuRITrzPQka6CibsNJLjxQ>> [Accessed 16 December 2024].

⁶⁴ 'Lies We Tell - Creative Collaboration with Director Lisa Mulcahy and Producer Ruth Carter', *Women in Film and TV Podcast*, Women in Film and Television Ireland, 12 October 2023, online sound recording, Spotify, <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5cRSEiRijzAf0j8GKrzy4P?si=dDZsxCl7SN-6CQZpqOCnYQ>> [Accessed 16 December 2024].

⁶⁵ Set Talk

⁶⁶ Lies We Tell Podcast

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higher potential for negative stereotypes and bias reaffirmation rather than challenging misconceptions. There is potential for gender-focused schemes to hinder progress inherently. Rather than normalising women's representation, their work is marginalised. Mulvey asserts that this is progressive for creating feminist films; women should reject mainstream filmmaking entirely and remove themselves from the patriarchal structure to instead produce avant-garde productions in a space favouring equality.⁶⁷ This debate is ongoing in sectors with high female participation- whether these separations from mainstream film create a feminist enclave away from the male-dominated space or a 'pink ghetto'. The documentary genre is comparable and acts as a way of seeing the future of gendered schemes. Both documentaries and the scheme have smaller budgets, fewer staff, and less marketing and exhibition.⁶⁸

It raises the question of how beneficial an initiative like this is when gender-balanced productions are marginalised by the scheme rather than a normalised equity of productions.

The scheme, delivered with mentorships and upskilling, implies women are underrepresented in features due their incapability of filmmaking without aid. Talent schemes have been questioned for their assumption that women need assistance and are insufficiently skilled compared with society's ideal middle-class white men.⁶⁹ Canning questions mentoring for its potential to reinforce, or at least fail to challenge, the industry's maternal gender

⁶⁷ Mulvey, pp. 721-722.

⁶⁸ Anne O'Brien, 'Documenting Documentary: Liberated enclave or pink ghetto?', in *Women in the Irish Film Industry: Stories and storytellers*, ed. by Susan Liddy, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), pp. 84-95 (p. 86).

⁶⁹ Newsinger and Eikhof, p. 54.

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stereotypes. The mentorship roles are socially considered feminine due to their framing of nurturing and looking after others.⁷⁰

Despite continuously being given smaller budgets and working with resource scarcity, women-driven films often match the viewer ratings of men's higher-budget features.⁷¹ This means women-driven films provide a better return on investment for budgets. Women represent no greater fiscal risk than men in the director role. It is not an economic or talent-lacking issue; it results from the male gatekeeping system that 'cumulatively act to prevent films by women getting wider exposure'. Of the films screened at country-wide level between 2012 and 2015, 7.5% of films had a female director.⁷² The low-budget scheme did little to improve the distribution and exhibition of female-directed films. For example, *You Are Not My Mother*, and *It Is in Us All*, both had short cinema runs, quickly moved to Netflix and Apple TV, respectively. Their many awards, viewer ratings, and critical acclaim had limited impact on their distribution and exhibition.⁷³

⁷⁰ Laura Canning, 'Irish Production Cultures and Women Filmmakers: Nicky Gogan', in *Women in the Irish Film Industry: Stories and storytellers*, ed. by Susan Liddy, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), pp. 48-58 (p. 55).

⁷¹ Ekaterina Karniouchina et al., 'Women and Minority Film Directors in Hollywood: Performance Implications of Product Development and Distribution Biases', *Journal of Marketing Research*, 60.1 (2023), 25-52 (p. 42), doi.org/10.1177/00222437221100217.

⁷² Verhoeven, Coate, and Zemaityte, p. 146.

⁷³ IMDb, *You Are Not My Mother Awards* (2022), <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10406596/awards/>> [Accessed 5 January 2025].

IMDb, *Lies We Tell Awards* (2024), <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10406410/awards/>> [Accessed 5 January 2025].

IMDb, *It Is in Us All Awards* (2023), <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10406466/awards/>> [Accessed 5 January 2025].

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The scheme's impact cannot be directly analysed. However, the statistics showed that in 2020, 19% of funding applications for Irish features had a female director attached,⁷⁴ which went up by 4% in 2021⁷⁵ and another 2% in 2022.⁷⁶ This incredibly slow progression may be vulnerable to losing momentum, as seen from the 2025 slate.⁷⁷ Even with the fluctuating slow increase, women receive lower funding, as the POV scheme exemplifies. Larger funds continue to select male-driven stories, while funding for women has tended to go towards lower-budget projects.⁷⁸ Short film schemes have continued to this day and considerably increased the number of short films funded featuring female filmmakers.⁷⁹ However, this baby step is 'providing a limited and less risky investment in Irish female talent'. This celebrated achievement fails to tackle the deeper structural issues, a scapegoat to avoid increasing fiction features led by female talent.⁸⁰

The prioritisation of gender equality is further questionable when analysing the 2025-2029 Screen Ireland Strategic Plan. It demonstrates favour for encouraging Irish language

⁷⁴ Screen Ireland, *Statistics 2020* (Dublin: Screen Ireland, 2020), <https://www.screenireland.ie/images/uploads/general/Statistics_2020.pdf> [Accessed 12 December 2024] (p. 7).

⁷⁵ Screen Ireland, *Statistics 2021* (Dublin: Screen Ireland, 2021), <https://www.screenireland.ie/images/uploads/general/Statistics_2021_Draft_5.pdf> [Accessed 12 December 2024] p. 9.

⁷⁶ Screen Ireland, *Statistics 2022* (Dublin: Screen Ireland, 2022), <https://www.screenireland.ie/images/uploads/general/Statistics_2022_17.5.24.pdf> [Accessed 12 December 2024] p. 6.

⁷⁷ Screen Ireland, *Slate Catalogue 2025* (2025), <<https://www.screenireland.ie/slate-catalogue-2025>> [Accessed 1 April 2025].

⁷⁸ Páraic Kerrigan, Susan Liddy, and Anne O' Brien, Auditing Gender and Diversity Change in Irish Media Sectors (Dublin: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, 2021), <https://www.bai.ie/en/media/sites/2/dlm_uploads/2021/07/Auditing-Gender-Diversity-Change.pdf> [Accessed 18 February 2025].

⁷⁹ Screen Ireland, *Gender*, para. 5 of 12.

⁸⁰ Susan Liddy, 'Concluding Remarks: The Road Ahead' in *Women in the Irish Film Industry: Stories and storytellers*, ed. by Susan Liddy, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), pp. 190-193 (p. 191).

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screen content while treating inclusivity as a nice word not backed up by formal equality action. The plan treats the Irish language very differently, with concrete promises. Under storytelling, Screen Ireland plans to ringfence funding for the Irish language in all categories of screen content-⁸¹ something considered too extreme to implement to improve equality.⁸² The plan sidelines equality in the Talent and Skills sections, implying that key action lies there.

Upskilling and talent development, a questionably beneficial aspect of the POV scheme, is now the focus of the agency's empowering initiatives. Screen Ireland continues to imply through this policy that the lack of workforce diversity is the fault of deficiencies from under-represented groups.⁸³ This ignores the clear presence of capable women, as seen from the numbers applying to the POV scheme. It is another attempt to avoid acknowledging patriarchal asymmetric power relations in the industry. An oversupply of women's talent will not solve gender inequality. Verhoeven, Coate, and Zemaityte criticise these policies that do not consider and are doomed to reiterate the down-the-line gatekeeping in the industry, where men dominate the lucrative aspects of the business, and women continue to be sidelined.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Screen Ireland, *Strategic Plan 2025-2029* (2025), <<https://www.screenireland.ie/strategic-plan-2025-2029/#home>> [Accessed 1 April 2025].

⁸² 'Gender Parity in the Industry Panel: Countdown to 50/50 by 2020', *Women in Film and TV Podcast*, Women in Film and Television Ireland, 20 January 2020, online sound recording, Spotify, <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2FDH6Ws4YbqMzQym3crMwh?si=JkofOKS1RLusVxO2XmRcvA>> [Accessed 3 January 2025].

⁸³ Newsinger and Eikhof, pp. 65-66.

⁸⁴ Deb Verhoeven, Bronwyn Coate, and Vejune Zemaityte. 'Gender in the Global Film Industry: Beyond #MeToo and #MeThree', *Media Industries*, 6.1 (2019), 135–155 (p. 147), doi:10.3998/mij.15031809.0006.108.

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Progression to creating more features is also not as simple as overcoming the entry barriers. Due to the nature of the industry, having directed a feature film does not ensure further opportunities,⁸⁵ which is a systemic problem that empowering initiatives will not fix. Women in Europe were less likely to direct more than one feature between 2013 and 2022.⁸⁶ When asked about her future work, Kate Dolan acknowledged that getting another feature would be no easier, 'every film is hard to get made... your eighth one is just as hard to make sometimes as your first'.⁸⁷

While recognising the progress made by initiatives like the POV scheme, it is essential to critically analyse the diversity policies contextually to fully grasp the agency's limitations.⁸⁸

In the UK, productions must meet two of four regulatory Diversity Standards to receive funding from the British Film Institute.⁸⁹ Screen Ireland requires production companies receiving funding to have diversity, equity, and inclusion policies but do not have explicit diversity standards.⁹⁰ Most of their policies are light changes that do not enforce

⁸⁵ Set Talk

⁸⁶ Simone, p. 18.

⁸⁷ 'Breaking in: A Live Panel Podcast from WFT & WGI', *Women in Film and TV Podcast*, Women in Film and TV Ireland, 17 May 2022, online sound recording, Spotify, <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5UVRx4pp6BJmjzhjo4MMIY?si=4lj8doy9TBiTPgV4afHz-Q>> [Accessed 28 December 2024].

⁸⁸ Susan Liddy, *Concluding*, p. 190.

⁸⁹ British Film Institute, *BFI Diversity Standards Criteria* (2025), <<https://www.bfi.org.uk/inclusion-film-industry/bfi-diversity-standards/diversity-standards-criteria>> [Accessed 28 December 2024].

⁹⁰ Screen Ireland, *Screen Ireland Sustainability Plan* (2022), <https://www.screenireland.ie/images/uploads/general/Screen_Ireland_Sustainability_Plan_Final.pdf> [Accessed 1 April 2025] p. 34.

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systemic change. Empowering initiatives that do not tackle the gendered structures of production and employment in the industry have limited efficacy.⁹¹ These policies work within the postfeminist focus on individualism, choice, and empowerment.⁹² They fail to disrupt the system, which Gill implies is purposely 'capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy friendly'.⁹³

The implications of the POV scheme's work towards equality, which are limited and constrained within the gendered system and societal structures, show the inadequacy of explicit diversity initiatives. Gendered gatekeeping structures are recognised as 'implicit' policies or industry standards.⁹⁴ The informality of recruitment and gendered networking challenges,⁹⁵ which shape the male gaze applied to media content and staff expectations, have yet to be outright addressed through policy.⁹⁶ Screen Ireland's policies, indirectly or by omission, constrain equal participation and enforce rather than challenge societal systemic barriers.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Doris Eikhof and Chris Warhurst, 'The promised land? Why social inequalities are systemic in the creative industries', *Employee Relations*, 35.5 (2013), 495–508 (p. 504), doi:10.1108/ER-08-2012-0061.

⁹² Rosalind Gill, 'Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10.2 (2007), 147-166 (p. 149), doi:10.1177/1367549407075898.

⁹³ Rosalind Gill, 'The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility Ten Years On', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20.6 (2017), 606–626 (p. 618), doi:10.1177/1367549417733003.

⁹⁴ Newsinger and Eikhof, pp. 65-66.

⁹⁵ Connor, Gill and Taylor, pp. 8-10.

⁹⁶ Anne O'Brien, 'Producing Television and Reproducing Gender', *Television & New Media*, 16.3 (2015), 259-274 (p. 261), doi:10.1177/1527476414557952.

⁹⁷ Newsinger and Eikhof, pp. 65-66.

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Merit and risk selections have failed to achieve parity after almost ten years of diversity policies. Proactive measures that change the gendered industry are required.⁹⁸ Screen Ireland's initiatives primarily focus on empowering interventions over transformational ones, further investing in problematic production models.

With concern for the slow progress potentially leading to loss of momentum or gender fatigue, voluntary bodies- The Writers Guild, the Screen Directors Guild, and Women in Film and Television-⁹⁹ call for industry-level quotas, urging a focus on reforming biased funding awards.¹⁰⁰ Managed quotas slowly introduced could accelerate progress and embed change culturally. The current surface-level diversity policies require translation into action. Writer and politician Lynn Ruane noted this cultural level pushback as it emerged, referring to it as 'manufactured care'. Rather than creating an inclusive system, there is a 'surface level language to make everyone in the room look like they are included, but there is still the invisible force that is happening behind the scenes that will work hard to keep you out'.¹⁰¹ Their resistance to systemic change and focus on empowering initiatives will continue to result in women being discouraged and disengaged from Screen Ireland's systemic barriers.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Verhoeven, Coate, and Zemaityte, p. 140.

⁹⁹ 'S01E14: Should the Film Industry in Ireland Introduce Gender Quotas?', *Galway Film Podcast*, Galway Film Fleadh, 7 December 2018, online sound recording, Spotify, <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/07YVBMdiAsuyzIQJ1TeKA5?si=22debbbf8bba4438>> [Accessed 20 February 2025].

¹⁰⁰ Páraic Kerrigan, Susan Liddy, and Anne O'Brien, *Tools*, p. 230.

¹⁰¹ Breaking in

¹⁰² Susan Liddy, *Where Are the Women?*, p. 47.

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