

I found 2018 an incredibly emotional year for Irish women. It was both uplifting and hugely traumatic. The number of women speaking their minds was unprecedented, yet the incidences of misogynistic language used against us were unrelenting. Amidst the centenary celebrations and reflections on our rebellious and war-torn past, women were for sure, acting out a new revolution. If you think I'm referring to the thirty-five women in Dáil Éireann now as opposed to the twenty-five in our previous government, you're wrong. This rising was not in government buildings: it was a rising of women from all walks of life. Women fed up with how our political, judicial, health, education and cultural institutions were treating us. Ireland's abortion rights campaign may have taken 35 years to overturn unjust intervention by the state regarding the reproductive health and well-being of Irish women, but words of both anger and compassion played their role in the mass movement which repealed the 8th amendment to our constitution. The success of that campaign was largely the result of women who had had terminations of pregnancy breaking their silence and sharing their stories. And while I celebrated this new rebellion, I couldn't help but feel saddened and frustrated at the dearth of women being supported to share women's stories for the screen. I couldn't help but feel dismayed by women's invisibility in the recording of our history. It is not that we women lack a past; the crux of the matter is that we are disadvantaged in society and history. As historian, Margaret MacCurtain's argues women's invisibility in history marks all us females, past, present and future with a 'lack of legacy'.

The personal became very political for me in 2018. I had about five weeks of paid work in the entire twelve months. And while a project I had worked on for almost five years, finally made it to production, my frustration stepped up a gear when the production company I had taken the project to, decided I wasn't 'bankable' enough to take on the direction. The feature-length documentary, about a group of women written out of history, was directed by a man I do not know. To make matters worse, another project I'd been working on for three years (about a young female training to become Ireland's first astronaut), could not find funding. It was also a year where I was struggling to finish a 'masters by research' which, ironically was attempting to evaluate where women are placed in the power sphere of Irish film and television production. I have to admit, I found the research depressing as the findings seemed to mirror what was happening in my professional life. After thirty years of hard slog and battles fought and won in the industry I love, I was becoming invisible.

At the time of the commencement of my research (July 2015), data from other film and television industries across Europe, North America and Australia were highlighting a gender imbalance in favour of men in the main creative roles in film production. In each country studied, the lowest female representation was in the role of director. I wanted to see some Irish data as I was becoming increasingly aware of the lack of female directors and screenwriters on Irish films making it to the big screen. I was also interested in finding data on the gender imbalance that exists in the main crew roles like director of photography, production designer and sound recordist. Nine times out of ten these roles were crewed by males on the productions I was working on. So, I went looking for gender statistics on Irish creatives but the data was microscopic, in fact, there was no data whatsoever on the gender balance within crew roles. Apart from Susan Liddy's research on the paucity of female screenwriters being supported by the Irish Film Board, all the Irish research seemed to be qualitative. This was my motivation for taking on the research, a desire to see the figures but unconsciously, I think I was also making a statement. I needed to articulate the growing sense of isolation and non-inclusion that I felt as a female writer/director in the Irish industry. I wanted to say we are here; we need be counted, and as business guru Peter Drucker says, 'If you can't measure it, you can't improve it.'

My research thesis: *'Women in the Power Sphere of Film and Television Production in Ireland: An Analysis'* began life in the Autumn of 2015. Initially, I had intended to study the three main film funding agencies; Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland (formerly Bord Scannan na hÉireann/ Irish Film Board), the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) and the Arts Council of Ireland (ACI) over a 25-year period. From the initial correspondence, and subsequent contact it was established that none of the three agencies kept data on the gender of applications. It became apparent very early on that a fully comprehensive quantitative study of this twenty-five year period in Irish film and television funding would not be possible in the time constraints of the MA (part-time over three years). The scope and amount of information to be sourced and collated was too vast. This practical factor led to a decision to confine the quantitative strategy of the research to a study of one single cultural agency. The research examines data on successful applicants to the principal agency supporting feature film and creative documentary production in Ireland, namely, Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland over a ten-year period (2006-2015). Establishing a methodology to collate and examine the data on the gender of those working behind the camera in Ireland's film industry

was a long and lonely journey. It involved identification of information, classification of that information, and the physical entry of each piece of data onto spreadsheets. I used Excel spreadsheets to gather and sort the data and then a combination of the analytical software packages Tableau and DataDesk to summarise and visualise the datasets. It was a mammoth task and a huge learning curve. To complete the data gathering of the first five years alone, I made 52,480 entries to the data recording spreadsheets. Nevertheless, the coding method used enabled the research to discover not only the gender representation across all successful funding but also identify any trends or changes to that representation over the period studied.

The practice of incorporating quantitative data in research of cultural production has been lacking in Ireland. As I mentioned, there was Liddy's study of screenwriters supported by the Irish Film Board (2005-2013), and I also became aware of a DCU/Huston School of Media research project involving a database of Irish Film but this research was in progress at the time and Dr Roddy Flynn of DCU, explained that they would be confining the research to fiction film production only. Perhaps statistical methods are somehow seen to be incompatible with a philosophical view when it comes to the critical analysis of anything in the world of 'the arts'. How could one possibly measure art or the creation of art with anything as crude as a statistical measure, especially one of gender? Art and its production must be above such a crude measuring tool; it must be judged and analysed for its content alone and not the gender of its creators. In his argument for quantitative analysis within cultural studies, academic and media analyst, David Deacon discusses the tendency of the discipline to shun or avoid methodological and epistemological knowledge. According to Deacon, certain cultural analysts perceive data as somehow 'existing in a vacuum, devoid of deeper, subtler meaning.' Deacon points out that this disengagement can force restrictions and limitations on the entire field of cultural analysis. In his defence of scientific investigation, he argues that cultural theorists should arm themselves with statistics especially when power and authority are being questioned.

I agree with Deacon, being armed with statistics and more crucially having a qualitative lens from which to interpret those statistics puts researchers on a stronger footing for participation in a broader societal debate on why, with a global population that is gender balanced, we still have female underrepresentation in positions of power around the world. This is why I chose a mixed method approach to my research; I did not want to merely record data and visualise the data as statistics, I wanted to analyse the quantitative findings from a philosophical

framework to explore the organisational norms that create and maintain gender imbalance within society in the first place. The theoretical framework I chose was that of power: how it expresses itself in society, how it lends validity to social systems, how it creates realities, and how contextual values of what is deemed valid can render other, just as authentic values, less important. My professional position as a media researcher and filmmaker is not impartial. While admitting subjectivity, I would argue that there are checks and balances in my research; the information gained from the analysis of statistical data addresses the research question ('where *are* women placed in the power sphere of Irish production?) as an objective approach that acts as a counterbalance to personal subjectivity.

The data in my research revealed a gender imbalance in favour of men in the allocation of funding by Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland over the research period. The findings also suggested that low rankings for women, in terms of positions of power within the industry, affect their career progression and that the exclusion of women is not confined to the key creative roles of writer, director and producer. Female underrepresentation also exists across the majority of crew roles on Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland funded films over the period. I will refer to the actual statistics later in this blog, but for the moment I would like to concentrate on discussing the connection between female underrepresentation in this sector and systems of domination, societal perceptions of gender roles and the lack of value attributed to female narratives. As Deacon says, data does not exist in a vacuum.

All communication systems involve forms of power and operations of entitlement and disempowerment; those who get to speak and those who are marginalised or excluded. Analysis of cultural systems can offer important information about society as a whole and its reinforcement of gender roles. Language and thinking are so closely related that it could be reasoned that our values are created by the language we use. '*Words matter.*' Michael D Higgins told us in his presidential acceptance speech last year (Nov 2018), adding '*they can hurt but also heal.*' Yet for Irish women, there seems little healing in words used against them, time and again. '*He only held her down once,*' the defence lawyers argued in rapist Patrick O'Dea's trial (also in Nov 2018). As brave Leona O'Callaghan told the nation (RTÉ's Clare Byrne Show), this was an adult talking about a man who had raped her violently and repeatedly from the age of twelve. Leona asked how the judge and our judicial system could have allowed such a line of defence. 'Aren't sexual relations with a minor illegal in this

country, after all?' Clare Byrne responded with an incredulous shake of her head as she listened to O'Callaghan's experience of being in court. O'Dea got seventeen years for the sexual assault and rape of Leona in 1994/95, but as he is already serving fifteen years for the multiple rapes and sexual assault of another girl, this sentence is to run concurrently. After a four-year legal case that nearly brought her to the brink, Leona O'Callaghan was formidable, courageous and powerful, in both her written witness impact statement and her choice of language in media interviews. On national television late last year, she looked Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan in the eye and asked him 'which rape was the free one?' Flanagan was lost for words.

We have plenty of recent examples of survivors of rape being treated in unethical and immoral ways during rape trials. Just as the statistical measurement of gender is deemed crude within 'the arts', it seems our justice system is above ethics and morality. In a 2018 Cork rape trial, the 17- year-old victim's thong was used in, as justice minister Flanagan described 'a full-blooded defence' when the female barrister told the jury '*You have to look at the way she was dressed. She was wearing a thong with a lace front.*' This was not an unusual practice or an isolated case. It is quite common for defence lawyers to demean, objectify and implicate female victims of sexual violence in front of judge, jury and the public (in some jurisdictions). Leona O'Callaghan is fully cognisant that barristers and lawyers are simply following the letter of the law, which incredibly, still allows the use of chauvinistic and sexist language in our courts but as she detailed on television, being in court and hearing a barrister tell that court '*he only held her down once*' felt like she was being raped. All. Over. Again.

There may have been a great leap forward in the last one hundred years, concerning women's liberation and women's organized movements, especially since winning the right to vote (1918), but are women any better off today when the language of the very institutions that are meant to protect and nurture us, constantly demean, objectify and insult us? When the language of our political, judicial, education and health systems, either spoken (by people in positions of power within these institutions) or written in endless reports, remains the primary means by which sexist ideology flourishes in this country. The infamous Belfast rape trial from earlier in 2018 was brimming with sexist ideology and misogynistic language. The young woman at the centre of the allegations was treated very differently to the four men on

trial. The men weren't quizzed about what they were wearing that night; there was no exploration of their body language or eye contact with the opposite sex when the CCTV footage of Ollie's nightclub was shown in court. Its purpose was to indicate that the woman was out to find a male celebrity on the night of the alleged offence. The defence lawyer for the celebrated rugby player, Paddy Jackson went so far as to imply that she was *'not just after Jackson but that any celebrity would do.'* Words matter, they hold power and can profoundly affect the way we perceive ourselves in the world. They can and do hurt. And in the context of serious sexual assault cases, that hurt can and does feel like being raped. All. Over. Again.

Another warrior for justice and survivor of rape, Lavinia Kerwick had powerful words when interviewed on radio late last year and more recently on television. In 1992, Lavinia became the first female victim of rape to waive her anonymity when she went on live radio to talk about the fact that her rapist was allowed to walk free. In describing her experience of the justice system, Lavinia said that her voice was taken from her. The state had a full proof case, a guilty plea from the defendant and a conviction by the jury, yet the judge chose to suspend the sentence to *'give him a chance'*. The conscious and subconscious gender bias of our justice system deemed a young victim of rape less important than her violent rapist and made Lavinia feel like she was being raped. All. Over. Again. There was nowhere for Lavinia to go, she had been silenced. Her rapist was given *'a chance'* while she wasn't even granted permission to speak. Despite developing severe anorexia nervosa as a result of the rape and despite having to walk by her rapist on the way to the bus stop that would bring her to counselling every week, Lavinia never gave up her fight for justice. It is through her sheer perseverance that victim impact statements are allowed in court today. The language of our justice system is so rife with misogyny that we barely understand the impact it has on our psyche or identity. If we accept that our identity and understanding of who we are is influenced and shaped by the systems of communication and institutions of the society we live in, and if those systems and institutions promote, exalt and defend men and in doing so, subordinate or silence women, then it could be argued that the history and culture of that society has very little to offer women.

In Feb 2017, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women urged Ireland to include specific gender equality language in the Irish Constitution, (Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937). The UN committee stressed that the highly gendered language

of Article 41.2.1 relating to state recognition that; '*by her life within the home, woman gives the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved*' was one of the roots of the low participation of Irish women in political and public life. Indeed, the National Women's Council of Ireland believes that women are still living '*under the shadow of the 1937 constitution's sexist and reductionist language and philosophy*'. So where is the long sought after referendum to get rid of this sexist language in our constitution? In recent times, we've implemented gender quotas for political candidates (the Electoral Amendment and Political Funding Act 2012), held referenda on extending marriage rights to same-sex couples, on the age rule for presidential candidates, on abortion rights and on deleting the offence of blasphemy contained in our Constitution but somehow, we cannot quite find it in our hearts or minds to grant equal standing to over 50% of our population in the wording of our constitution. It seems that attempts to rectify this sexist wording keep getting pushed to the back of the queue despite the fact that various governments have been examining, debating and writing reports on the issue since 1993.

Yet is it any surprise that this gendered language remains in the constitution of our country when consecutive governments have shown little regard for women. And while recent protests at the treatment of rape victims by our courts have been highlighted in the media, let's not forget that it is sixteen years since the first ever report on Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) was commissioned. And that report was not instigated by the government but by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. And that report was not funded by the government but by a private foundation (Atlantic Philanthropies). Heavily influenced by the Catholic Church, the choice of language in article 41.2 of our constitution meant that Ireland not only became a Republic in 1937 but a repressive state that sought to keep women either tied to a kitchen sink without access to birth control, or locked up in Magdalene Laundries for having children out of wedlock (oftentimes the result of rape or/and incest) or incarcerated in mental institutions for not obeying their husbands or fathers. And if women were lucky enough to escape marriage or incarceration they were still vilified and shamed by being labelled as dreaded 'spinsters'. Condemned to a life of singledom, 'loneliness, 'infertility' or 'frigidity'. On the other hand, to describe a man as a *bachelor* somehow bestows upon him possibilities, hopes and the freedom of the world. Ceausescu's totalitarian Romania was in the ha'penny place compared to De Valera's anti-female Ireland. An Ireland where babies were wrestled from their rightful mothers and sold or given away to 'better Catholic families', where women who confided in doctors and priests about beatings and rapes were

told to go back to the very husbands who had tortured and abused them. An Ireland of cruelty and sexual, physical and emotional repression against women in the name of religion and misogyny. Incredibly, over eighty years later, the sexist language referring to women's role as exclusively that of child bearer and homemaker is still in our constitution. The sad state of affairs is that we are nowhere near a *'Republic of equality, of shared vulnerabilities and of collective capacities'* and yes, Michael D *'words matter, words can hurt'*. And boy have the words of our chauvinistic constitution, our unjust judicial system, our un-caring health system, and gender biased education system hurt generation after generation of women in this country.

Dr Gabriel Scally, who conducted the report into the recent CervicalCheck scandal described one consultant's language to family members of a woman who had died as a result of a misdiagnosis as having *'verged on misogyny'*. In disclosure meetings with the family, the consultant spoke *'several times about the late woman's smoking habit and also told them that nuns don't get cervical cancer.'* There are many examples of this kind of misogynistic claptrap in our health system, and our workplaces are rife with sexist comments. Recent media attention focusing on sexual harassment, rape and misogyny in the worlds of politics, academia, media and film have brought gender imparity to the fore. In the film industry, Harvey Weinstein, Woody Allen, Roman Polanski and Lars von Triers are a few of the high-profile cases of sexual harassment. These men have one thing in common: positions of power and privilege in an industry that thrives on demeaning and belittling women. Yet the global hashtag movements of Me Too and Time's Up have given women back their words and their power to speak out about sexual harassment, misogyny and non-disclosure agreements. Here in Ireland, we have had our own high profile, sexual harassment case against film and television producer and former director of the Gate Theatre, Michael Colgan. A 2018 report by the Workplace Relations Committee commissioned by the Gate Theatre noted how some of Colgan's inappropriate behaviours included threats, physical contact, profane language *'at times calling women c...s'* and belittling female staff with personal questions and remarks about their appearance. According to author and linguist Dale Spender, linguistic chauvinism, whether blatant or subtle *'supports the case patriarchy lays out: that the male is the superior sex.'* It is clear from the Workplace Relations Committee report that Colgan saw himself as superior and above judgement. One Irish Times writer described the report as confirming *'what most people in Irish theatre have long known, ... Colgan ran the institution as a personal fiefdom for decades, with little oversight from his board of directors.'*

The language we use is also crucial to the debate on gender parity, as it is evidence of environments and social structures that create and maintain gender imbalance. And that's where the numbers come in. In Ireland, certain job types are still highly gendered, with males comprising 91% of workers in skilled trades while females account for 84% of workers in the caring, leisure and other low-wage services. CSO data from 2016 also revealed that 98% of us looking after home/family are women and that this traditionally gendered role still holds little financial or career 'value'. This gender disparity persists despite the increase in Irish women attaining third level qualifications and the CSO noted that *'particular areas of concern for women in Ireland are 'child poverty, the gender pay gap (14% in 2014), and the gender pension gap (36% in 2013)'*. In Dáil Éireann women comprise only 22% of all deputies. Similarly, women represent just 22% of the STEM enterprise sector. Senior counsels are at 6% female representation (yet over 50% of solicitors are women). Managerial and leadership roles across the business sector record a 14% representation by females and despite women making up 34% of surgical trainees only 7% of our consultant surgeons are women.

The representation of women in senior academic posts in our universities is so low that the government have been forced to instigate positive discrimination by funding women- only posts in an attempt to reach the Higher Education Authority quota of 40% female professorships by 2024. There is also a major imbalance in favour of men in Irish sport both on and off the field but especially at board and senior management level. So how come the myth of perceived equality came to be accepted as a 'truth' when factual data clearly demonstrates that gender imbalance is not a minor but a major problem in Irish society. The truth is that the myth of female emancipation or women's liberation suits patriarchy, as it serves to make us women believe that we are free when in fact, we are still enslaved by the shackles of unequal pay, the responsibility of home/childcare, lack of opportunities in career progression and the threat of sexual violence. We not only live in a society where chauvinistic language is commonplace; we also live in an unequal 'man-made' culture.

And if the data on low female representation isn't bad enough, nowadays we have to contend with a backlash against feminism. 'Feminist', (a simple word to describe anyone who believes in rights and opportunities for women that are equal to those of men), has somehow

become a dirty word. Feminists have spawned into feminazis, man-haters, anti-feminine moaners and whingers. The writer and feminist, bell hooks defines a type of 'faux feminism' popular in the world of successful female executives who lay the blame of gender imbalance solely at the feet of their sisters. Take the 'lean in' theory created by Facebook executive, Sheryl Sandberg. Sandberg urges women to achieve their full potential in the workplace by 'leaning in' to the role of executive rather than shying away from it. The fundamental problem with Sandberg's theory of female deficiency is that it excuses men of any blame. At the risk of repetition, 98% of us looking after the home and rearing Ireland's next generation are women. Irish men lean on us while Irish children stand on our shoulders and yet we are still treated as if we are a minority. Many workplaces where gender imbalance exists, put forward the argument that women lack the confidence to assert themselves in leadership roles. I would counter that confidence is not a personality trait; it is a skill that is acquired along with other life skills. If gender stereotypes and operations of male privilege and power block opportunities for women, this is not a deficiency in women, but rather a direct result of discrimination against our gender.

Perhaps even the way we tackle the problem of gender inequality, is itself, highly gendered. Linguist, Dale Spender observes that within social science and the humanities, the hypothesis, in terms of gender research, has been: that a lack of women in specific fields equates to a fault in the women themselves, and she wonders why researchers are reticent to ask, *'whether sexism in language is a result of women's exclusion.'* This exploration of gender imbalance by asking questions that are *'not conceptualised in terms of deficiency'* could be taken by historians who often defend women's invisibility by pointing to the fact that written records of women's lives are difficult to find and therefore not documented by national archives or other public offices. When history books omit mention of women, the vicious circle of female invisibility is passed on to new generations and women are, therefore, denied not only recognition in Irish history but the possibility of becoming role models for new generations of women. It is not possible for women to draw strength from a sisterhood of knowledge as history does not record our accomplishments, and cultural forms of story-telling deem many women who do achieve positions of power to be monsters. In essence, we must begin to discuss and acknowledge the cultural baggage that women carry to help us understand why it is that gender imparity still exists in the 21st century. When patriarchy relies on the subordination of women how on earth would it not exist?

As recently as December 2017, historian Diarmuid Ferriter called for women to be given an esteemed place in the centenary acknowledgements of the United Kingdom's Representation of the People Act, 1918. The elections of that year (1918), saw Irish woman, Constance Markievicz become the first woman to be elected to the House of Commons and the first female member of parliament in Europe. This act, which granted all women who owned property (over the age of thirty), the right to vote has been described by Ferriter as '*one of the most significant developments of the last century.*' Yet, as Ferriter also acknowledges, Irish society's treatment of women like Markievicz was to '*dehumanise and dismiss them.*' Indeed, the revered Irish writer, Sean O'Faolain dissed Markievicz as a woman rallying to the side of men to gain notoriety and publicity when as her friend and fellow activist, Helena Molony pointed out (in her witness statement to the Bureau of Military History), state that she was simply '*working as a man might have worked, for the freedom of Ireland.*' The fight for equality for Irish women is a constant struggle; history shows us that our rights have not been granted automatically; they have always, always, always been fought for.

And the beauty in dynamics of power relations is that there is always, always, always the power to resist. As I mentioned in the opening paragraph, Irish women are beginning to find their voice. And their words matter. In November 2015 women in Irish theatre rose up and criticised the Abbey theatre's centenary celebration program for the 1916 Easter Rising. The program, dubbed '*Waking the Nation*' included ten newly commissioned works, just one written by a woman. The then director of the Abbey, Fiach Mac Conghail, shrugged his shoulders '*Them's the breaks.*' He said to the women who had dared complain. These words angered women in Irish theatre, and it was like a tonic to see their anger, feel their rage. They seized on the name of the program itself, adapted it for protest and took to social media. # *Waking the Feminists* was born. In less than two weeks, the women mobilised a movement using Twitter and Facebook to get their message out to the wider arts community. The response was astounding and was the women's timing.

In a cultural context, the implications of just who is shaping a nation's narratives go beyond theatre; it includes all art forms and communications media. Media outlets all over the world covered the # *Waking the Feminists* protest, and after years of being silenced, women in other arts disciplines felt vindicated. Again, this is where numbers count. As early as 2010/11 data from Europe, North America and Australia revealed that the number of female creatives

working within film and television industries across the world was declining. Irish academics working in the field of film theory and individual filmmakers, like myself, began lobbying for data on a gender breakdown of the allocation of funding by state film agencies in Ireland. No such data existed. The principal agency supporting feature film and creative documentary production in Ireland, namely, Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland (formerly Bord Scannan na hÉireann/ Irish Film Board) had no information available on the gender of all applicants versus those receiving support. The current and then, CEO, James Hickey went on record to state that it was not the responsibility of the agency to either, maintain a record of the gender of applicants or promote equality in the allocation of funding. Indeed, one board member of Screen Ireland went so far as to tell researcher and academic, Dr Susan Liddy that before she asked the question about gender parity, it hadn't existed as a problem *'therefore she was the one creating the problem.'* Again, these words hurt, especially women who are grossly underrepresented in the funding process and therefore denied the possibility of making a living in an industry they have given their lives to. It was also stressed to Liddy that projects were selected by 'quality' and not gender yet as Liddy so astutely points out: *'That the concept of quality could be subjective is not acknowledged by any of the respondents.'*

The turning point came on Nov 12th 2015, when # *Waking the Feminists* went viral – as a direct result of this Screen Ireland (then called the Irish Film Board), felt the pressure to release a statement acknowledging that women working across all areas of film were underrepresented *'in terms of accessing funding for film* and *'in public recognition of their talent.'* Words count. This was the first public acknowledgement by a state agency that women's voices were not being heard in the arena of state film funding. As a result of the protest by #*Waking the Feminists* and the subsequent demands of women working in film, Screen Ireland finally released gender data in January 2016, together with a statement on the introduction of 'targets' to tackle the gender imbalance within three years. In projects awarded production funding for 2010-2015, female writers had 19% representation while female directors had 17% representation. Female producers accounted for 48% of successful producers on projects granted funding. However, the gender statistics published utilised the classification of certain productions as 'female' when there was at least one female producer on a project. This method of data analysis implies higher rates of female participation even though there may have been several male creatives in the same role attached to the same project. A more accurate count of successful applications would ensure that each producer,

writer, director and writer/director are counted separately. This would ensure that percentages are based on the overall figures and not on the less accurate 'female-led project' method.

In the spring of 2016, Neil Jordan declared that the film industry was the most sexist in the world (IT, Fri 18th April). *'You don't have to have a big swinging dick to be a director, you just have to have some intelligence and a visual sense.'* He said. Unfortunately, the reality is that it helps a whole lot to *'have a big swinging dick to be a director.'* My own research into the allocation of funding by Screen Ireland over the decade 2006-2015, reveals a major gender imbalance in favour of men. Female directors represented just 18% of successful applications over the ten years, with female screenwriters at 21% and female writer/directors at 22%. This mirrors international research, and I would argue that it is not a coincidence that the majority of film directors hired on feature films across the globe are male, it is a result of the society we live in and our mental image of those who wield power within that society. In a patriarchal society, as historian Mary Beard notes *'our mental and cultural template for a powerful person remains resolutely male whatever the improvements on the ground.'*

As state earlier, my research data suggested that low rankings for women in the industry affected their career progression and that women's exclusion was not confined to the key creative roles of writer, director and producer. Female underrepresentation existed across the majority of crew roles on Screen Ireland funded films over the ten years studied. The scale of the disparity in crew roles was much starker than in the roles of writer, director and producer. The lowest female representation was in the roles of composer (7%), director of photography (9%) and sound mixer (3%). Conversely, there was low male representation in the roles of hair and makeup (3%), and costume designer (6%). Much like the language of our constitution, it seems our film industry operates on a highly gendered system of crewing with women excluded from traditional male roles and vice versa. Perhaps more significantly, there was no perceptible increase in the gender representation of females in either creative or crew roles over the ten years studied. Depressingly, this mirrors the UK and international findings.

While the mindset of the Screen Ireland agency has changed dramatically in the period of my research, this change did not come about from within the organisation. Change was instigated from the outside by women demanding equal representation as they have done throughout history. Targets, action plans and gender quotas are never 'simply granted', they are fought

for. Moreover, the agency's tendency to blame women for the fact that they do not apply for funding in the same numbers as men is far too simplistic a defence for the low numbers of women funded. It points up an absolute lack of awareness of firstly, the existence of gender bias and secondly, its causes. While the omission of women from creative and crew roles has implications for their participation in an important cultural field, I would argue that the low number of women applying to and succeeding in attaining funding from Screen Ireland is connected to traditional work practices and screen content portraying the world from a male point of view. Women's exclusion and low representation in the industry has more to do with gender stereotypes and societal perceptions of film practitioners as male than it has with low numbers of female creatives or any deficiency on the part of those females. Unfortunately, the highly gendered nature of roles within the film and television industry is a complex problem and the low numbers of females in positions of power in our behind-the-screen narratives may take longer to fix than the suggested three years. Screen Ireland is not (as some might think from certain industry reports), a Hollywood studio free to run solely as a commercial and market-driven entity, it is a state film agency in receipt of taxpayer's money. It has a responsibility therefore, to take leadership in nurturing a fairer, more transparent system of inclusivity, diversity and gender balance in the allocation of its funding.

Although there has been little or no study of gender balance behind-the-camera in the Irish television industry, feminist researcher, Anne O'Brien concludes that questions on the subject of gender inequality can lead to interviewees defending the status quo as a protection strategy for future employment: *'they claim that they cannot challenge the gender bias they face because they rely on reputation and social connections to sustain their careers.'* In the context of television production, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) is the biggest single funding agency for television production here, yet four years ago when I contacted them (2015) about my research, their ignorance of gender issues within the industry was astounding. Similar to Screen Ireland they did not have a gender policy at the time and maintained that it was not their responsibility to keep an account of the gender of individuals applying for funding. While I welcome the publication of the BAI's *Gender Action Plan* (April 2018) and see it as a positive step, significant research into the representation of women in the allocation of BAI funding needs to be undertaken as a priority. Back in 2015, it was revealing to observe that an organisation funding a group called 'Women on Air,' (a group of professional radio journalists and commentators conducting research into the underrepresentation of women's voices on Irish radio), seemed unaware of the

underrepresentation of women in the mediums of film and television production.

Moreover, the responsibility and obligation to female inclusiveness should pertain to all bodies and institutions involved in research and training within the sector. In the course of my own research, I discovered too many reports that omitted any detail on issues of gender imbalance. Often, when these industry and government reports do refer to gender imbalance, it is included as a minor detail, at times condensed into one single sentence. The Audiovisual strategy report commissioned by Screen Ireland and the BAI in 2017 only refers to gender as an inclusion in its recommendations for the undertaking of a detailed census, stating that: *'Gender, disability, and other diversity measures should be included.'* While I sincerely welcome the recommendation of an industry-wide census with the inclusion of issues on diversity and disability, I find it worrying that, despite over three years of industry debate, reflection, and action on gender inequality, women are still treated as a minority. The findings of my research demonstrate clearly that the issue of underrepresentation of women within the sector is a major, not a minor problem and should be treated as such.

There is an obligation, therefore, for state-funded agencies to not only maintain gender statistics but to train their staff to be more aware of conscious and unconscious gender bias. In the last two years, Screen Ireland has developed and advertised two pro-active funding schemes to encourage established producers to work with female talent, yet these schemes fall far short of rectifying the low allocation of funding to female creatives. Both schemes afford more power to the producer team than the other creative roles, yet the data from my research shows that the majority of successful Irish producers are male. Both schemes fail to understand the absolute necessity of empowering existing female film creatives by affording them direct funding. It is essential that female film creatives are in control of the means of production and that the content they produce is not shaped or influenced by producers who have themselves a vested interest in maintaining the status quo of a male-led industry promoting on-screen content from a male gaze (even when that content has a strong female protagonist). Why, in an Ireland where women comprise half the population and 53% of the cinema-going audience, is low female representation in such an important cultural field accepted? Words matter and numbers count, and Bill Gates reminds us of how vital statistics can be: *'I have been struck again and again by how important measurement is to improving*

the human condition.' A deeper understanding of the gender imbalance that exists in the industry and in the allocation of funding is needed.

Gender data is a crucial tool in changing an imbalanced system. It can be used to instigate positive, pro-active schemes and programs which encourage parity. What is needed regarding research is more analysis of the factors that exclude women, to look at the issue of underrepresentation from the point of view of those being excluded. The global hashtag movements of Me Too and Time's Up and the Irish Waking the Feminists and Repeal the 8th movements are evidence of resistance to oppression based on knowledge and data that had formerly been withheld through fear of retribution, non-employment or restrictions to access on information or knowledge. On International Women's Day 2016, # *Waking the Feminists* took to the stage in New York City. They called for women in theatre around the world to demand equality. Women in the film industry in Ireland must work together as women working in theatre have done. Female writers, directors and producers must support female directors of photography, production designers, composers and sound mixers. Their proclamation should insist that Irish film-funding agencies maintain continuous and transparent gender data on the allocation of funding. Film schools and industry courses must be aware of how gender bias operates and understand that narratives from a female point of view deserve just as much encouragement and support as those from a male perspective. The danger in ignoring the imbalance is that women will increasingly become invisible in the key creative roles of narrative storytelling in Irish cinema.

The realisation that our words matter and can be heard is empowering. Armed with data on gender imbalance Irish women can stop internalising the blame. Data and quantitative research do not exist in a vacuum, it lives and it breaths and helps us recognise that our exclusion is one of the effects of patriarchy not of deficiency within us. We are witnessing a big swinging # rising of collective female consciousness with new heroes like the women caught up in the CervicalCheck scandal, like the women waiving their anonymity in rape trials, like the women taking to social media to highlight homelessness, sexual and physical abuse or those talking about the pain and trauma of their abortion experiences, like the women fighting for medical intervention, drugs and diagnosis for their sick children, like the survivors of our cruel Magdalene laundries – these are the stories we need to be telling and from a female point of view. We need our politicians to get their finger out and address the

highly gendered language in our constitution; we need our justice system and deeply misogynistic laws to be seriously overhauled concerning the treatment of women in cases of serious sexual assault. We need to address the inequality between men and women in our labour force and get rid of the obstacles that women face in terms of career progression and pay rises. And we need to compensate an older generation of women who were harmed, silenced and shamed by misogyny because words are still hurting women in Ireland when they should be healing.