

EDITORIAL

On and Off Screen: Women's Work in the Screen Industries

“On and off screen: Women's work in the screen industries”

1 | INTRODUCTION

Similar to many creative (and other) industries, the film and television industries have for long been permeated by male norms, and by the male worker as the norm. In this context, women workers have always been considered “oddities” – unless they have acted in front of the camera. To a large extent, women have been (and still are) image (Fischer, 1976; Mulvey, 1975). Women's work behind the camera have been counteracted, not least through efforts to exclude them from positions characterized as “creative” or “above-the-line” such as director, producer, and script writer. Further, women have been met with pervading difficulties in allocating finances for their projects and with circumscribed possibilities to have their work screened in the cinema. And although (a few) women are key through their function as “image,” films with a woman protagonist are usually provided with a lesser budget than films with a male lead, and women actors get distinctly less paid than their male counterparts (SFI, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/natalier-behmed/2017/08/22/full-list-the-worlds-highest-paid-actors-and-actresses-2017/?sh=2e1c961f3751>). Let us give an example of the former: in the Swedish film industry, recently hailed worldwide of being one of the most gender equal screening industries, feature films made between 2013 and 2016 differed in terms of budget depending on the whether the protagonist in a film was male or female. Films with a male lead had on average a 33% higher budget than films with a woman lead. In that same period, women feature film directors had on average a budget ranging between 66% and 86% of the budget of films with a man as director (SFI, 2018). The report published in 2018, by the Swedish Film Institute, concluded that: “[films with women in] key functions generally have overall lower budgets than men” (SFI, 2018, p. 17).

Following the international impact that the #Metoo-movement has had and still has, and the recent demands for a 50/50 dispersion between men and women on above-the-line positions in the film industry, gender issues have advanced to the forefront in discussions dealing with the working situation in the film and screen industries. These discussions have appeared in various national contexts in print and social media, as well as in academic work (see, e.g., Jansson et al., 2020; Liddy, 2020; Marghitu, 2018; Meziani & Cabantous, 2020; O'Brien, 2019). It has become obvious that gender inequality pervades all screen industries, large and small, and that women screen workers in different national screen contexts share similar experiences. As film and television production is becoming more and more globalized, with single productions often being the outcome a variety of regional and national industries, finances and competences, working and gendered experiences of being in the industry are also becoming increasingly globalized.

Still, there are regional and local differences in how women screen workers experience their work and career situation and these need to be addressed. There are also various aspects of screen work that remain to be tended to academically. Hence, this special section offers a sample of national and local studies that all investigate how gender and equality work is done in four different contexts. It is our hope that this small sample may inspire not only more studies of national contexts, but also inspire to future cross-national studies.

Before discussing how various academic fields have engaged with the screening industries in terms of work experience and representation, we wish to point out that film and television, as two available media formats reaching large and heterogeneous audiences, constitute two of the most central expressions of our time, and that both contribute to reflect and mold our understanding of society, of others – and of ourselves (de Lauretis, 1987; Dyer, 1993). Questions

about who is *allowed* to make film and TV and what messages and images are presented and conveyed are thus politically important and imperative.

2 | SCREEN WORK IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

The long-standing male dominance in the industry, together with the realization that images *do matter*, has sparked an interest in studying gender in the screen industries. The gender conditions in the film industry have attracted scholarly attention across the variety of disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities, and this special section is a vivid example of this cross-disciplinary scholarship. Three specific, but interrelated fields stand out when it comes to the study of gendered work and inequalities in these industries: production studies, management and life work studies, and studies of women's presence and conditions in screen work.

In management studies and work life research, the early 2000s saw an increased interest in focusing and exploring the working conditions in the screening industries, alongside the growing interest for working experiences in what often referred to as the creative industries (see, e.g., Blair, 2001; Delmestri et al., 2005; Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2009; French, 2020; Jones & Pringle, 2015; Meziani & Cabantous, 2020; Soila-Wadman, 2003; Sørensen & Villadsen, 2014). This strand has also included a certain focus on how film can be used as a tool for instruction on how to exert leadership (see, e.g., Bell & Sinclair, 2016).

Parallel to this development is the emergence of production studies, emanating from film and television studies. This field explores film and media as cultural practices of media production, and it does so from a variety of perspectives and with various methods. Of particular pertinence here is the sub-field of feminist production studies. This field engages in studying how “routines and rituals [...], the economic and political forces [...] shape roles, technologies, and the distribution of resources according to cultural and demographic differences” (Mayer et al., 2009, p. 4) in order to understand how “power operates locally through media production to reproduce social hierarchies and inequalities at the level of daily interaction” (Mayer, 2009, p. 15). One of the field's most important contributions here is the critique of the “auteurist” view that films are the “voice” of one single artist, most often the director. Instead, they argue that films are the result of collective work. Departing from this insight, production studies scholars have noted the importance of studying the work that is carried out in the margins, to question the differentiation between “creative” and “craft” professions in film making, and to pay attention to the work done “below-the-line” by workers in the film industry who are seldom credited, but without whose work films would not be produced (see, e.g., Banks, 2009, 2018; Banks et al., 2016; Mayer, 2009, 2011; Mayer et al., 2009).

Alongside these two areas of research, there is a third, and more recent, strand that is dedicated to studying women's presence, analyzing policy measures targeting gender (in)equality along with studying impediments to gender equality in the film industry and women's conditions in a male dominated screening industry. This strand of research comes out of feminist media studies as a rather broad field, encompassing both the humanities and the social sciences. While research in both management studies and productions studies constitute important foundations for any research conducted on gender and screen work, for this special section, it is this third strand that is of most relevance, taken that it embraces and explores both local and the global aspects of women's conditions in the male dominated screening industries. Let us therefore shortly present this strand a bit more – and the issues it has raised – in order to give a contextualization of this special section and its four articles.

3 | WOMEN'S PRESENCE AND CONDITIONS IN SCREEN WORK

Studies of women's presence in the film industry have mapped the number of women behind the camera, sometimes also including an intersectional analysis and identified gendered budget-gaps and other impediments to gender equality (Cobb, 2020; Lauzen, 2019; Liddy, 2020; Smith et al., 2013). Much of this research is conducted in the United

States, discussing the conditions in a film industry that is exclusively driven by private, and most often commercial, stakeholders. In other commercially focused film centers such as Bollywood in India and Nollywood in Nigeria, women behind the screen are reported to be few and the representation of women on screen stereotypical (Mukherjee, 2018; Prakash, 2020; Ukata, 2020). In other contexts, such as Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, where there is public support for film production, gender equality is often proclaimed to be a goal. For instance, the Council of Europe (2015) declared its dedication to gender equality in film production in the so-called Sarajevo-declaration, and according to a mapping carried out by the European Audiovisual Observatory in 2019, 15 EU countries have introduced gender equality measures (EAO, 2019, p. 16).

In a recent anthology collecting evidence from a number of countries, media scholar Susan Liddy concludes that while demands for gender equality has been voiced by women in all contexts, public funding institutions range from those being “gender blind... to those who theoretically commit to equality but prevaricate on the best measures to implement change to others who have introduced formal gender policies and intervention strategies” (Liddy, 2020, p. 2). Scholars have pointed to several problems with gender equality policies and reforms in the film sector: they are often vague and without a plan for implementation (Thorsen, 2020), they only reach those who are involved in projects actually funded by public means (Cobb & Williams, 2020), and they lack intersectional intention and reach (Cobb & Williams, 2020; Thorsen, 2020). Further, when reforms are implemented, problems arise because making films include a range of different stakeholders and parties, which are out of reach of government policies (Jansson, 2016), and because the film industry is entrenched with institutionalized norms and values that is difficult to change and which tend to reduce the effects of policies (Jansson, 2017; Jansson & Wallenberg, 2020).

Scholars investigating women's conditions in the film industry have for a long time indicated that the way the industry is organized both formally and informally benefits white men. The sexual division of labor in the organization is manifested in women being found on positions such as script supervisors, costume designers, and make-up artists, as well as in various below-the-line positions. Many below-the-line professions are dominated by men, and the female dominated positions such as the ones mentioned above, tend to have lower status (Banks, 2009). Scholars have also noted differences in status among above-the-line professions. For instance, while male directors and scriptwriters are considered to be able to “carry” a movie, women directors and scriptwriters are not considered to do so (Bielby & Bielby, 1996, Eikhof and Cole in this issue). The trope of the male genius has been discussed as a hindrance to gender equality in several studies (see, e.g., Lantz, 2007; Marghitu, 2018; Regev, 2016; Schatz, 1988; and by Jansson et al. in this special section). Studies have also looked into how other features of the way the film industry is organized affects gender and concluded that the outcome of networking differs substantially to the favor of men (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012). Moreover, mothering duties limits women's possibilities in an industry where long days and extremely intense periods of work away from home are considered to be the normal procedure (Liddy, 2017; Liddy & O'Brien, 2021; O'Brien, 2015, 2019; Wing-Fai et al., 2015; Wreyford, 2013).

Considering all these past (and recent) studies, there is no doubt that the screening industries – as production sites and as workplaces – are of definite interest to scholars within different disciplines. This special section aims at addressing some of the issues that recent scholarship has touched upon and tried to tackle, and it does so from four different national and cultural contexts. At the center of all four articles included in the section is the analysis of women's conditions in the screening industries, including their experiences of working and trying to get by – and of how these industries continue to foster the notion of women film workers as “oddities” in an industry that continues to uphold the idea of the genius as male. Let us now turn to the four articles included in this special section.

4 | THE ARTICLES

In our first article, “The price of motherhood in the Irish film and television industries,” media scholars Susan Liddy and Anne O'Brien discuss the continuous problems that surround motherhood and screen work, finding in their material evidence that there is a systemic bias against mothers, not only as women, but also as women and *mothers*, and that

mothers have internalized the marginalization that comes from their maternal status. They have also found that many mothers adapted ways that would help them to sustain their working lives, but they were rarely supported in those adaptations by the screen production industry.

In “‘Almost a European, but not quite’: Experiences of Female Employees in the Lithuanian Film Industry from the Postcolonial Point of View,” authors Lina Kaminskaite and Jelena Salaj discuss how the women filmmakers experience their conditions in a film industry that is still marked by the transformation of Lithuania from being part of the Soviet union to becoming a country which is a member of the EU. They argue that the Lithuanian film industry is characterized by being in a postcolonial state. While the opening up of Lithuania has meant new possibilities for women film workers, it has also presented difficulties and the negotiation of new identities and new mode of film production.

Doris Ruth Eikhof and Amanda Cole focus on how women are considered a risk in film production and how this leads to precarious conditions for women in the industry. In their article named, “On the basis of risk: Screen directors and gender inequality,” they use the intersectional risk theory to understand how gender inequality is related to risk management practices in the screen industry. Studying two specific gender equality initiatives in the Canadian film industry, they show how risk management is gendered, and they argue that risk plays an important part in decision making in the industry. By understanding how risk is gendered, they argue, it is possible to change the processes that decides how risk is understood.

The last article included in this special section departs from the much-debated aspect of film production, namely the final saying over a film's final format. In “The Final Cut,” authors Maria Jansson, Frantzeska Papadopoulou, Ingrid Stigsdotter, and Louise Wallenberg discuss how the relationship between film director and producer serve to reproduce gendered relations that position the male creator and producer as norm – even in contexts where both director and producer are women. Departing from a series of interviews made with mostly women working in these two professions, the authors show how these two above-the-line professions are still governed by the *malestream* and that they tend to be constructed in relation to masculinity. Clearly, even in a country like Sweden, often hailed for its equality work, the gender equality measures that are undertaken are not sufficient to come to grips with gender inequalities and the male norm.

Taken together the four articles shed light on different aspects of the film industry. The evidence provided from the different countries indicate that there are many similarities in the challenges that women in the film industry face. However, there are also differences depending on context. The article about Lithuania shows the importance of situating the film industry in a historical and political context. O'Brian and Liddy show in their article, the importance of understanding the specific context of how child care and the welfare state play out in order to capture women's conditions in film and television work. Eikhof and Cole's article demonstrates the necessity of applying an intersectional approach in order to also see differences in conditions between women, even if they work in the same industry and the same country. The article on Sweden, finally, looks deeper into how specific gender equality policies targeting the film industry plays out, and what problems remain, after having been implemented for almost 20 years. We believe that this special section is one step toward a deeper understanding of how gender shapes the working conditions in the film industry, and hope that it will inspire further research that takes a wider, more inclusive and possibly also more comparative grip on women screen worker's experiences and work conditions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond under Grant no. P17-0079:1.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and/or its supplementary materials.

ORCID

Louise Wallenberg  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8389-5908>

Maria Jansson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7336-8015>

Louise Wallenberg¹ 

Maria Jansson² 

¹Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

²School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden

Correspondence

Louise Wallenberg, Department of Media Studies, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden.

Email: louise.wallenberg@ims.su.se

REFERENCES

- Banks, M. J., Conon, B., & Mayer, V. (Eds.). (2016). *Production studies, the sequel!*. Routledge.
- Banks, M. (2009). Gender below-the-line: Defining feminist production studies. In V. Mayer, M. J. Banks, & J. T. Caldwell (Eds.), *Production studies: Cultural studies of media industries* (pp. 87–98). Routledge.
- Banks, M. (2018). Production studies. *Feminist Media Histories*, 4(2), 157–161.
- Bell, E., & Sinclair, A. (2016). Re-envisioning leadership through the feminine imaginary in film and television. In C. Steyaert, T. Beyes, & M. Parker (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to management education*. Routledge.
- Bielby, D., & Bielby, W. (1996). Women and men in film. Gender inequality among writers in an unstructured labor market. *Work and Organization*, 19, 366–489.
- Blair, H. (2001). "You're only as good as your last job": The labour process in the British film industry. *Work, Employment and Society*, 15(1), 149–169.
- Cobb, S. (2020). What about the men: Gender inequality data and the rhetoric of inclusion in the US and UK film industries. *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 17, 112–135.
- Cobb, S., & Williams, L. R. (2020). Gender equality in British film-making: Research, targets, change. In *Women in the international film industry* (pp. 97–110). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Council of Europe. (2015). *Sarajevo conference declaration: Women in today's European film industry: Gender matters. Can we do better?* https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016807509e6
- de Lauretis, T. (1987). *Technologies of gender*. Indiana UP.
- Delmestri, G., Montanari, F., & Usai, A. (2005). Reputation and strength of ties in predicting commercial success and artistic merit of independents in the Italian feature film industry. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(5), 975–1002.
- Dyer, R. (1993). *The matter of Images*. Routledge.
- EAO. (2019). *Mapping of film and audiovisual public funding criteria in the EU*. European Audiovisual Observatory.
- Ebbers, J. J., & Wijnberg, N. M. (2009). Latent organizations in the film industry. *Human Relations*, 62(7), 987–1009.
- Fischer, L. (1976). The image of woman as image. The optical politics of "Dames". *Film Quarterly*, 30(1), 2–11.
- French, L. (2020). Gender still matters: Towards sustainable progress for women in Australian film and television industries. In *Women in the international film industry* (pp. 271–291). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grugulis, I., & Stoyanova, D. (2012). Social capital and networks in film and TV: Jobs for the boys. *Communication*, 33(10), 1311–1331.
- Jansson, M. (2016). The quality of gender equality: Gender quotas and Swedish film policy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 25(2), 218–231. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1248952>
- Jansson, M. (2017). Gender equality in Swedish film policy: Radical interpretations and "unruly" women. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 24(4), 336–350. <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/1350506817692387>
- Jansson, M., Papadopoulou, F., Stigsdotter, I., & Wallenberg, L. (2020). Studying women in Swedish film production: Methodological considerations. *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*, 10(2), 207–214.
- Jansson, M., & Wallenberg, L. (2020). Experiencing male dominance in Swedish film production. In S. Liddy (Ed.), *Women in the international film industry: Policy, practice and power*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jones, D., & Pringle, J. K. (2015). Unmanageable inequalities: Sexism in the film industry. *The Sociological Review*, 63(S1), 37–49.
- Lantz, J. (2007). *Om kvalitet: Synen på kvalitetsbegreppet inom filmbranschen*. Wifit Sverige.
- Lauzen, M. M. (2019). Where are the film directors (who happen to be women)? *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 29, 310–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509201003601167>

- Liddy, S., & O'Brien, A. (Eds.). (2021). *Media work, mothers and motherhood: Negotiating the international audio-visual industry*. Routledge.
- Liddy, S. (2017). In her own voice: Reflections on the Irish film industry and beyond. *Gender and the Screenplay: Processes, Practices, Perspectives, Networking Knowledge Special Issue*, 10(2), 19–31.
- Liddy, S. (Ed.). (2020). *Women in the international film industry: Policy, practice and power*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marghitu, S. (2018). "It's just art": Auteur apologism in the post-Weinstein era. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(3), 491–494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1456158>
- Mayer, V., Banks, M. J., & Caldwell, J. T. (Eds.). (2009). *Production studies: Cultural studies of media industries*. Routledge.
- Mayer, V. (2009). Bringing the social back in: Studies of production cultures and social theory. In V. Mayer, M. J. Banks, & J. T. Caldwell (Eds.), *Production studies* (pp. 14–24). Routledge.
- Mayer, V. (2011). *Below the line: Producers and production studies in the new television economy*. Duke University Press.
- Meziani, N., & Cabantous, L. (2020). Acting intuition into sense: How film crews make sense with embodied ways of knowing. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(7), 1384–1419.
- Mukherjee, A. (2018). Representational politics in Bollywood sports movies of the 21st century: Empowering women through counter cinema. *PostScriptum: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literary Studies*, III, 65–80.
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6–18.
- O'Brien, A. (2015). Producing television and reproducing gender. *Television & New Media*, 16(3), 259–274.
- O'Brien, A. (2019). *Women, inequality and media work*. Routledge.
- Prakash, M. (2020). Women in Indian cinema. In K. Ross (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of gender, media, and communication* (pp. 1–5). Wiley and Sons.
- Regev, R. (2016). Hollywood works: How creativity became labour in the studio system. *Enterprise and Society*, 17(3), 591–617. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2015.89>
- Schatz, T. (1988). *The genius of the system: Hollywood filmmaking in the studio era*. Pantheon Book.
- Smith, S. L., Choueiti, M., Scofield, E., & Pieper, K. (2013). *Gender inequality in 500 popular films: Examining on-screen portrayals and behind the scenes employment patterns in motion pictures released between 2007 and 2012*. Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, University of Southern California.
- Soila-Wadman, M. 2003. *Kapitulationens estetik: Organisering och ledarskap i filmprojekt*. Philosophical dissertation, Stockholm University.
- Sörensen, B., & Villadsen, K. (2014). The naked manager: The ethical practice of an anti-establishment boss. *Organization*, 22(2), 251–268.
- Swedish Film Institute (SFI). (2018). *The money issue. Gender equality report 2018*. <https://www.filminstitutet.se/globalassets/2-fa-kunskap-om-film/analys-och-statistik/publications/other-publications/sfi-gender-equality-report-2018-lowres.pdf>
- Thorsen, T. S. S. (2020). Gendered representation in Danish film. In *Women in the international film industry* (pp. 111–130). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ukata, A. A. (2020). Women and representations in Nollywood: Questions of production and direction. In *Women in the international film industry* (pp. 315–330). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wing-Fai, L., Gill, R., & Randle, K. (2015). Getting in, getting on, getting out? Women as career scramblers in the UK film and television industries. *The Sociological Review*, 63, 50–65.
- Wreyford, N. (2013). The real cost of childcare: Motherhood and project-based creative labour in the UK film industry. *Studies in the Maternal*, 5(2), 1–22.