Scoping Study into the Lack of Women Screenwriters in the UK

A report presented to the UK Film Council

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Foreword from the UK Film Council

On behalf of the UK Film Council, I am pleased to present the findings of this scoping study into the lack of women screenwriters in the UK.

The UK Film Council, as the Government-backed strategic agency for film, has a responsibility to ensure that there is a strong evidence-base to support our activities. Where there are gaps in the research, it is important that we identify these gaps and address them.

There are many myths and theories about the position of women screenwriters in the UK. It may come as no surprise to learn that women are under-represented, but the extent of the imbalance, and the reasons behind it, have never before been examined in any detail. The Institute for Employment Studies has brought together, for the first time, academic research and up-to-date industry data to produce an in-depth, well-conducted report.

The study indicates that inequality is present at all levels of experience, yet it also shows that women write in a range of genres that appeal to a variety of demographic groups. In fact, films written by women were found statistically to be marginally more financially effective at the UK box office. Facts such as these cannot be ignored by an industry that wants to create sustainable success.

We hope that this report will prompt the industry to challenge its preconceptions, and to consider what interventions might be made on behalf of women screenwriters, bearing in mind that the study suggests a lack of awareness of, and/or a resistance to, some forms of support.

The UK Film Council will look at what the implications are for our own organisation, and we look forward to working with fellow members of the industry's Leadership on Diversity Forum, as well as other stakeholders, as we plan the next steps in a long-term strategy to identify and remedy the barriers to the success of women screenwriters.

I would like to extend my thanks to the members of the research steering group for their invaluable contribution and of course to Women in Film and Television for its support of this project.

I hope you enjoy the report and find it as informative and provocative as I did.

Andrew Eaton

Chair, Leadership on Diversity Forum

Deputy Chair, UK Film Council

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Executive Summary

Key Findings

- Women make up 53 per cent of those writing as their main occupation in the population at large, but only 26 percent of those writing for film.
- Women screenwriters are credited on less than 15 per cent of UK films made between 1999 and 2003.
- Between 1990 and 2005 women represented less than one in ten of the BAFTA nominees for best original or adapted screenplay, and represented even fewer winners at just three out of 43 (seven per cent), none of whom were British.
- Films written by women screenwriters are as likely to gain a release as those written by men.
- The box office return for British films with a female screenwriter is \$1.25 per £1 budget, compared with \$1.16 for films with all-male writers.
- Women write a variety of genres, and an equal percentage of films by men and women (just over 30 per cent) are comedies, the most financially successful genre at the UK box office.
- Women represent approximately 40 per cent of participants on industry-accredited screenwriting courses.
- Overall cinema audiences are roughly equally balanced between men and women, and women aged 35 plus - not young men - make up the biggest single part of UK cinema audiences at 18 per cent.

This study has been produced for the UK Film Council and undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies, an independent, not for profit research institute.

This is a scoping study that, for the first time, gathers known literature, industry and education data, and interview feedback specifically on the participation of female screenwriters writing for film in the UK. The key focus of the study is to explore the scale of any imbalance and the possible reasons for it. The research stems from concern raised by the UK Film Council and Women in Film and Television (WFTV)

that there were very few female applicants for the '25 words or less' Development Fund programme and very few women screenwriters generally on UK feature films. Another early indicator of a gender imbalance in the profession came from the smaller number of qualified females applying for Royal Holloway's accredited MA in Feature Film Screenwriting. As a small-scale scoping study, the research was intended, not to find definitive answers to the questions posed, but to highlight priority areas for further research and future action.

The film industry has had a poor record on diversity, including poor representation of minority ethnic and disability groups as well as poor representation of women, in various professions across the value chain, and in content and portrayal. However, key industry organisations are taking action on diversity, acknowledging its importance and recognising the business case for change. Trade associations, unions and other organisations, led by the UK Film Council, have recently signed up to the Equalities Charter for Film, which aims to promote equal opportunities good practice and tackle issues of access, training and representation, both behind the camera and on screen. This report will add to the diversity debate in the industry and act as a springboard to further action, including further research.

While gender is an area that receives huge attention in the discipline of film studies, very little research has been conducted that looks at the experience of female screenwriters. No major studies were identified that have been undertaken in the UK before this piece of work, so the gap in this area of research is enormous. This study has made some steps towards narrowing this gap.

Is there a problem?

Our analysis of the UK data highlights that there is indeed an imbalance in the proportion of women writing for film. Participation data from Skillset and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) indicate that women form a minority in the active screenwriting workforce – whereas they make up 53 per cent of those writing as their main occupation in the population at large, they make up only 38 per cent of those writing for audio visual media other than film, and 26 per cent of those writing for film. Perhaps more worrying is that data show that the proportion of UK films credited with a female screenwriter is only 15 per cent, and the proportion of women screenwriters gaining awards from the industry is lower still, especially for British women. While there is a need for better workforce data collection, on the whole this suggests that a study such as this is long overdue, in mapping the extent of the gender imbalance and providing an evidence base for action.

Does it matter?

While the film industry has begun to move in very recent years towards improving the diversity of its workforce, particularly in relation to race, it is important that it does not overlook issues of gender diversity. In this scoping study we have only begun to examine the relevant data, but what the study points to is a good business argument for improving the representation of women in the screenwriting role. UK data show that women write the sort of films that do well in the UK, that the films they make are as likely to gain a release and that their films are actually dollar for pound marginally more financially effective (box office return for films with a female screenwriter is \$1.25 per £1 budget compared with \$1.16 for films with all-male writers). Women represent a significant section of audiences in the UK, at just over 50 per cent, and for many individual films female audiences are the majority. Increasing representation in the workforce and reflecting the diversity of the UK society may serve to improve the strength of the UK film industry. There is also a case for arguing 'you don't know it until you try it'. By missing out on women screenwriters, the industry may be missing out on a range of new and interesting ideas, stories and storytelling innovation.

Finally, the power of film means that the gender imbalance may have potential social effects, including failure to present women's perspectives on the world and possibly reinforcing gender stereotypes. Moreover there is a legal case for avoiding accusations of sex discrimination.

Why is there a problem?

Most of the limited research on women screenwriters to date simply highlights that there is a problem. Very little has focused on trying to uncover why the gender imbalance exists. This scoping study is unique in that it goes some way towards answering the question 'Why are there so few women screenwriters?'

The data identify an imbalance, but exactly where in the career path does this imbalance emerge? Is it that women are not entering the profession, either because they are selected out or because they select themselves out? Data on the education pipeline suggest that women are no less motivated to study subjects of relevance to a career in screenwriting. However, the data do show that women are slightly outnumbered by men in very specific (accredited) screenwriting courses which are relatively new to the industry. Women make up approximately 40 per cent of participants on these courses. The impact of these courses is yet to be seen, and while we need to bear in mind that there are a number of other entry routes into the profession, this initial analysis suggests that education cannot fully explain the imbalance.

Is it, then, that women screenwriters are unsuccessful in securing work? Our findings from a small number of interviews were in line with some of the key themes in the literature reviewed, which suggest that indirect discrimination may be taking place during the hiring of screenwriters, although it may not be perceived as such by the individuals involved. Since few decision-makers were interviewed in this study, or in previous studies, this issue needs to be explored further. However, the scoping study suggests a number of factors that may be at play here, including the following:

- There is some feeling that barriers stem from the process of getting known in the industry, and that women may be less inclined to capitalise on networks and less comfortable or confident about promoting/selling their work.
- There was some belief that the greater representation of men in the positions of power in the industry means that men are more likely to get selected for a job.
- Another barrier appears to be the reliance on track record, and the reluctance of production companies to take a risk on a new writer. It was believed that instead companies go for what they know and to date this has predominantly been male screenwriters.
- One of the major barriers suggested by the interviews and some areas of the literature relate to commissioners'¹ perceptions of two things: the types of stories that women write; and audience preferences for certain types of films. Put simply, women are seen to be disadvantaged because commissioners, possibly unconsciously, believe that they do not write the sorts of stories that sell.

The latter issue needs further exploration through working with those making the hiring and financing decisions, but is particularly interesting given that it indicates the power of myths. In brief, it was believed that the main audience for films is young men aged 16-24 and that women screenwriters may be disadvantaged because they are seen as less able to write the sort of films, for example action and horror, that sell to this demographic. These beliefs are at odds with our UK data which show, first, that women aged 35 plus make up the biggest single part of UK cinema audiences, at 18 per cent (see page 50); second, that comedy, not action, is the most financially successful film genre, consistently making up one quarter of releases and takings at the UK box office, and third that women, like men, can and do write a broad range of genres, including comedy. Nonetheless these myths or perceptions about women's writing and particularly audience preferences seemed to be pervasive among our sample of interviewees, male and female, and were held by individuals in a range of roles, including some screenwriters. They are therefore powerful, and may indeed obstruct women screenwriters in their ability to secure work.

There was some suggestion that women do not focus enough on the commerciality of the films that they write, which is in line with the data showing that women are slightly less likely than men to write specific genre films and more likely to write 'drama' (58 per cent of films with a female writer are drama films, compared with 37 per cent of those with male writers). It is not clear why this should be an issue for women rather than screenwriters per se but it may well explain why they find it

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In this report the term 'commissioner' is used to indicate those that make the decisions about the hiring of a screenwriter. in most cases this will refer to the producer, but it may also refer to the financier.

difficult to secure paid work, so motivations for writing and writer preferences need to be explored further.

The interviews and limited literature highlighted how the work of a screenwriter is difficult for all concerned, both males and females. However, this study suggests that some of the features of life as a screenwriter can disadvantage women more than men. The issues highlighted in this scoping study include the following:

- Many of the barriers relate to intrinsic features of the job, ie that it is largely unstable and involves erratic working patterns. For some the ability to work from home and to work flexibly was seen as amenable to family life, while others believed that these two features particularly could disadvantage women with or planning children, as they simply cannot afford the time or the money to work in this career.
- Some of the barriers relate to the process of having work criticised. This criticism can take place at the early stages, when a writer has to sell their work, and in the development phase when a script is redrafted a number of times. It appeared from the interviews that women may find this process more difficult than men as they tend to have less confidence in their work and are less tenacious.

There was some speculation among interviewees that the difficult nature of the profession means that a number of women try out screenwriting only to leave subsequently. Some of those we spoke to, including successful screenwriters, had been close to leaving themselves, and others knew of women who had left. Interviewees speculated that many writers seek work or remain working in other media, such as TV and theatre, where job opportunities may be more numerous and regular and/or the writer may have more status and creative control. As well as identifying a number of ways in which writing for other media may be more attractive for women, this study identified how the situation may be better in other countries, such as Australia and New Zealand. There is a view that in these countries there is a strong commitment from government to create a more writer-friendly climate that helps propel the careers of women screenwriters.

Enveloping these difficulties is the perception that little support is available for screen-writers in the UK, male or female. Funding is available for project development but is possibly not well understood. Some screenwriters may not get involved in the funding process as it is seen as irrelevant to the screenwriting role. Moreover, some of the screenwriters we spoke to were critical of, or lacked engagement with the two bodies that do offer help, the UK Film Council and the Writers' Guild, which some felt provided them with little direct support. In both of these cases it appears that screenwriters lacked awareness of the sort of support available through these agencies. There also seemed to be a lack of awareness or enthusiasm for some of the other forums available, perhaps with the exception of The Script Factory.

Recommendations

While the findings from this study are illuminating it is important to note first that they are based on a small sample, and second that they were never intended to provide definitive answers, only highlight priority areas that would benefit from developing a clearer evidence base. It is therefore necessary that a number of further streams of research be conducted to improve understanding of the issues affecting women screenwriters and of where action can best be directed to effect change.

- Recommendation 1: continue to monitor key areas. The UK Film Council data provided for this scoping study were very informative to the debate. We would recommend that the UK Film Council continue to collect and regularly publish data on the industry as a whole and its own funding process, in particular on these issues:
 - a. the relationship between producers, directors and writers, to see whether more women in decision-making roles will enable more women to take up writing roles
 - b. the allocation of public funding, particularly data on the make-up of those contributing to each project, to track changes over time
 - c. the genre of film that women are writing to see if any changes occur, particularly at the individual writer level to see if individuals can or do move from one genre to another.
- Recommendation 2: improve the industry's data collection, both quantitative and qualitative. We also recommend that better data be collected and published to gain a more precise estimate of the situation affecting women screenwriters, including data on:
 - a. the make-up of the current screenwriting sector of the UK film industry value chain, which could be undertaken by Skillset, possibly in partnership with The Writers' Guild and/or WFTV
 - b. the number of women taking up accredited screenwriting courses and progression into the profession, which could include examination of motivations to study, experiences while studying, including perceptions of role models, and subsequent activities of training participants
 - c. the gender pay gap
 - d. the decision-making process in putting together a project team, through collecting data from applicants for public funding.
- Recommendation 3: collect evidence of the key issues affecting women screenwriters highlighted here through more in-depth research with a larger number of writers. Discussions should involve both male and female screenwriters

and writers, from a variety of backgrounds, and at different stages in their careers, to confirm whether these issues highlighted by our small sample really do explain why there are so few screenwriters and which of these have the strongest influence. In particular more research should be conducted with screenwriters to look at the following:

- a. the experience of women writing in other media
- b. the experience of screenwriters who have children
- c. differences in motivations to write among men and women (eg to earn a living, to make a difference, to tell a personal story)
- d. differences in attitudes towards writing in particular genres.
- Recommendation 4: improve understanding of the decision-making process involved in the hiring of a screenwriter, through research with producers and production companies. Resources for the scoping study were limited so few key decision makers, ie those hiring screenwriters, were consulted during this study. Many of the interviewees believed that a major barrier is likely to relate to the decision-making process (and perceptions about female writers) so consultation with decision-makers is needed to explore the influences on the hiring process fully, and whether these have a different impact on women screenwriters than men.
 - a. Research that investigates what individuals and companies look for in a screenwriter is needed and the various stages involved from conceptualising a project to identifying a suitable screenwriter. With sensitive interviewing techniques it will also be informative to explore their perceptions about which films sell, and who is most likely to write these films.
 - b. Similarly, research should be conducted to explore the perceptions of film critics and award givers on the differences between films written by males and females.
- Recommendation 5: explore further what support, if any, would be welcomed by screenwriters. Finally, before designing any future initiatives it is worth understanding what sort of support would be welcomed and recognising that closer dialogue appears to be required between screenwriters and the bodies that currently exist to support them. Further research, which could be in the form of a survey, should be carried out, possibly by the Writers' Guild or WFTV, to find out how screenwriters feel they are currently recognised and supported and how, if at all, they would like this to change. The survey could also canvass the views of more women on initiatives that they feel would help the position of women in the profession.

Next steps

This report has suggested a number of potential barriers that face women in this profession which may explain the lack of women screenwriters. While more research is needed to clarify the nature and extent of the barriers, this scoping study has at least identified that screenwriting is part of the value chain of film which is worthy of further investigation. The first step towards facilitating change is to bring this to the attention of the industry, those who have the power to generate change. The key aim now is to widen the debate to include the relevant organisations, agencies and bodies. The information and findings from this research need to be disseminated across the industry in order to challenge the perceptions and myths about the state of the gender imbalance in the profession, the make up of UK cinema audiences, what sells in cinemas and what women write. The industry also needs to be made more aware of the business, social, ethical and legal reasons why more women should be encouraged into the profession, and the benefits that it may bring not only to screenwriters themselves, but to the industry and society as a whole.

A key finding from this research is the paucity of support and partnership efforts either to improve the position of women in the screenwriting role or to create an environment that supports women hoping to develop their careers in this role. Although the UK Film Council funded this research, we would recommend that future initiatives involve a collaborative effort from all other relevant bodies including Skillset, Women in Film and Television, the Writers' Guild, the accredited universities and institutions that deliver screenwriter skills training and the new Film Business Academy, as well as production companies and screenwriters themselves. This could begin with an agenda for these groups to meet and discuss the findings from this research, how they may be disseminated to raise the profile of the debate, the future research priorities recommended here and how these may be brought about. When the situation is better understood the debate can move on to identify tangible initiatives to help improve the position of women in the screenwriting role. Early work should also focus on developing the business case for hiring more female screenwriters as a strong business argument will provide the best incentive to move the industry forward. The literature, data and opinion presented here begins this process.

The brief

In Autumn 2005, the UK Film Council commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies to conduct a scoping study to begin to answer the question 'Why are there so few female screenwriters working in film?' IES was asked to review the existing literature and statistics on the subject, to conduct exploratory interviews with screenwriters and key industry professionals. The aim of the scoping study was to identify the priority areas for further research, which could be used to examine what interventions might be made by the UK Film Council or other organisations.

As a scoping study, the breadth of the project was wide-ranging and the brief included a number of research questions, as detailed below. Because of lack of previous academic research in this area, it was not possible to look at all the questions in great detail. However, this project did consider the five key areas below, and begin to identify the role of these issues in the experience of female screenwriters in the UK.

- 1. Film data and commercial impact
- What proportion of feature films produced in the period 1999-2003 were credited with female screenwriters? What were their budgets and how successful were they in terms of box office gross, video/DVD revenue and television audiences?
- 2. Projects 'favoured' by female writers
- Is there a correlation between the gender of the writer and the subject matter or genre of the film?
- Is there a discernable female sensibility in film? If so, what is the contribution of the writer, producer and/or director to this sensibility?
- Are proportionally fewer women writing features than write for television, theatre, radio, or journalism and literature? If yes, why?
- Is any one medium easier for women to cross over from?
- 3. Relationships with intermediaries (agents, development executives and producers)

- What affects decisions to work with a writer? If gender can be shown to be a factor, how is it expressed?
- What is the female screenwriter's experience of working with agents, development executives and producers? Is it different from male screenwriters' experience?
- How is the proportion of women working as screenplay literary agents and in development reflected in the number of female writers whose work is commissioned or optioned?
- How do agents choose who they will represent, and where do they find them?
- What relationship do male and female writers have with unions, eg the Writers' Guild, and what impact does this have?
- 4. UK Film Council applications and funding decisions
- How many projects that apply for UK Film Council funding have female writers attached?
- How many projects with female writers have been awarded funding by UK Film Council?
- Why aren't women applying for development funding as often as men?
- What is the female screenwriter's experience of applying for UK Film Council funding? Is it different from male screenwriters' experience?
- What is the UK Film Council's experience of female writers? Does it differ from its experience of male writers?
- 5. Audience's preferences
- Is there a gender difference in the types of films, actors and characters that males and females prefer?
- Can audiences tell when a film has a male or female writer? Does this make any difference?
- What is the social effect of the relatively limited number of films written by women?
- When decisions about which film to see (or buy) are made by couples, groups or families, are women more or less influential than men in how this decision is made? Does this have a positive or negative (or zero) effect on films with female writers?
- How do women as consumers of films compare with men?
- What influences women in their choice of films?
- 6. Training
- Has the teaching of screenwriting at BA and MA level affected the statistics on gender? When might that be visible?

1 Introduction

In Autumn 2005, the UK Film Council (the body set up by the government in 2000 and tasked with stimulating a successful, vibrant film industry), commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to conduct a scoping study to begin to answer the question 'Why are there so few female screenwriters working in film?' The UK Film Council and Women in Film and TV were concerned that there were very few female applicants for the '25 words or less' Development Fund programme and very few women screenwriters generally in UK feature films. They were keen to identify any barriers they might be facing and to consider what interventions might be made by themselves or other organisations. The first step towards answering the question was to conduct a review of existing literature and statistics on the subject and to conduct exploratory interviews with key industry professionals. The aim of the scoping study was to identify the priority areas for further research, which could be used to examine what interventions might be made by the UK Film Council or other organisations. This report presents the findings of this first phase.

This chapter sets some of the context to the research by describing the history of women working in screenwriting and describing the industry, and then clarifies the research objectives and outlines the research methodology used in the study. It also clarifies the definition of 'screenwriter' that is used throughout the report.

1.1 A historical perspective

Women's involvement in the production of motion pictures, including screenwriting, was highly prevalent in the 'golden eras' from 1920-1940. Franke (1994) notes that women were in fact pioneers in many aspects of the film-making business, in this era, and were dominant figures in the studio system claiming directing credits and producing, as well as performing. Changes in the Hollywood studio system led to more vertical integration of these organisations with the knock-on effect of women being sidelined, and 'pushed down the corporate ladder'. After such re-organisations, women tended to be hired into more administratively based roles, with less involvement in the production, direction and creation of the films that they had once

driven. Indeed, Tobias (2000) highlights this point in light of the current demographic mixture in the screenwriting arena:

'As far as many of today's female screenwriters know, right now is the best it's ever been for women in Hollywood. It's a vast improvement over the situation even 20 years ago. What they don't know is that their ideal future, the one in which at least 50 per cent of screenwriters are women, came and went nearly 70 years ago.'

1.2 Research context: the British/UK film sector

The unique nature of the film sector suggests that it can be a challenging sector in which to work. It is characterised by:

- a lack of cohesive focus (fragmented)
- heavy concentration in London and the South
- domination by micro businesses
- heavy reliance on a casualised workforce, particularly in relation to screenwriters
- a high-risk business environment but one that can bring great personal reward, reliance on networks and contacts in securing employment, and a poor record on diversity
- the dominance of the Hollywood product
- a lack of partnership and financial support from broadcasters (although the BBC recently announced plans to work alongside the UK Film Council and potentially double its financial commitment to film).

It is also a sector that is rapidly changing, as identified in previous work by IES (Pollard et al., 2004). The forces at work within the film sector, the arena that screenwriter/screenwriters operate in, include the following:

- consolidation of businesses with some smaller companies moving towards partnerships to survive in the high risk environment
- development of digital technologies which may allow for a greater diversity of programming, and for cheaper films to be made
- increased training opportunities and a greater focus on skills and skill development
- changes to financing (changes to sources of funds and in taxation arrangements) including changes to the tax breaks for production companies.

The position and experience of women in film is beginning to attract attention and action within the industry. The sector is starting to acknowledge its poor record on diversity and to recognise the importance of diversity to business performance and customer base. More and more organisations are putting in place policies addressing

diversity both in their workforce and in their output. This scoping study is therefore timely and pertinent to current thinking within the industry.

1.3 Definition

Throughout this report we have used the term 'screenwriter' for consistency, even though it is used interchangeably in the literature with 'scriptwriter'. Screenwriters produce scripts for film and TV productions. Their tasks may involve choosing themes for written work; researching key subjects; assembling background material and data; planning and organising material; writing, revising and editing; ensuring coherence of style; development of a theme, plot and characterisation; and referencing. The role may involve producing original material from the beginning or adapting other people's work (eg such as turning a book into a screenplay).

Screenwriters need a range of skills. Skillset notes in its 'job profiles' that screenwriters (or scriptwriters) need: an understanding of story structure; to be creative (ie able to produce fresh and original ideas); good communication skills (including excellent understanding of English, grammar and spelling); to be willing to accept criticism; and to be self motivated and able to work to deadlines. They also need to have management, negotiation, and entrepreneurial skills and to have patience and attention to detail.

While the focus of this research was on screenwriters who write for film, it needs to be recognised that there are few pure film screenwriters in the UK. All of the screenwriters we interviewed also wrote for other media, most notably theatre and television. As such it is difficult to capture data on feature film screenwriters specifically. In many of the data sources that exist the definition of 'screenwriter' includes those writing for other media in the audio-visual industries.

1.4 Research objectives

The aim of the research was to begin to answer the question of why there are so few female screenwriters. Given that this was a scoping study, the topics for research were far reaching. Little is known on the issues affecting women screenwriters so, as well as identifying the more obvious barriers of selection and work conditions, the research explored a number of key areas, including:

- film data and commercial impact: the commercial impact of films credited with female screenwriter/screenwriters, and the application for funding and funding success of female writers
- writer preferences: projects 'favoured' by female writers
- relationships with intermediaries: including agents, development executives and producers

- 4 Scoping Study into the Lack of Women Screenwriters in the UK
- **funding**: whether the experience of UK Film Council applications and funding decisions differ for male and female screenwriters
- audience preferences: audience preferences and perceptions
- **education pipeline**: training in screenwriting.

1.5 Methodology

The work started in September 2005 and was completed in February 2006. The research objectives were met through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data across three distinct elements of research:

- **literature review**: identification and review of existing literature to explore key issues and themes, gaps in research and successful methodologies for researching gender issues in film-making
- secondary data analysis: analysis of readily available statistical data to explore success of films credited with female screenwriters, the application for, and successful funding of projects with female writers, and the proportion of women working in film (as writers and other agents) or participating in screenwriting courses
- exploratory interviews: in-depth interviews with a range of male and female screenwriters and other key industry professionals including a development executive, producer, agent, representative of the Writers' Guild and Skillset to understand the key issues and areas for further investigation.

Further details of these approaches are available in the Appendix 1 of the report. Brief biographies for each of the interviewees are given in Appendix 2.

1.6 Report structure

The remainder of this report brings together the findings from the three elements of the scoping study. In Chapter 2, we look at whether there really is a problem, and the extent of it, by examining the literature on the area, the statistics that are available and the opinions of those working in the industry, including screenwriters themselves. In Chapter 3 we consider why the problem matters, and why it is worthy of attention. In Chapters 4 to 6 we look at some of the possible reasons for the gender imbalance across the spectrum of a screenwriter's career, from entry point in education, through to securing and doing the work, in chapter 7, we compare the experiences of writing for film with that of writing for other media, and screenwriting in the UK with screenwriting abroad. We look at the availability of support in Chapter 8. In the final chapter we summarise the key issues and present recommendations for moving the research forward and in order to begin to mitigate against some of the disadvantages women screenwriters face.

2 Is There a Problem?

The UK Film Council and Women in Film and Television identified an imbalance in the proportion of male and female screenwriters working on UK distributed feature films. The UK Film Council commissioned IES to begin to explore this imbalance, and undertake a scoping study. As the reality of the situation facing women screenwriters is not understood in great depth, the first stage of the scoping study involved uncovering the extent of the problem through findings from previous research, analysing workforce statistics and asking those working in the industry.

2.1 Literature review

The largest finding from the literature review was that, at present, there is relatively little recent published work in this area, at least within the UK. Several key pieces and texts emerged from the review, but these tended to have been written some time ago, and did not necessarily have a UK focus. Contact with key individuals, including the writers of these pieces, confirmed a distinct lack of research evidence in this area. However, some international literature was found which, although not entirely applicable to the UK, can provide some insights into the experience of women screenwriters.

A number of reports in the USA have looked at the gender balance of writers working for film in Hollywood. In 2001, women accounted for ten per cent of writers working on the top 250 films and eight per cent of writers working on the top 100 films. Eightysix per cent of the top 250 films and 87 per cent of the top 100 films had no female writers. (Lauzen, 2002). Over the past few years the situation has slightly improved, as research in 2004 found women now accounted for 12 per cent of writers working on the top 250 films (Lauzen, 2005). Other research has found that among the 22 largest studio organisations (including TV production) and independent film companies in the US, women represented less than 20 per cent of the writing staff working for ten of them. Nine of these organisation exclusively produce films, which highlights the particular gender imbalance in the film industry (Writers Guild of America West, 2005).

By contrast, women make up a much larger share of employment in screenwriting in Australia. Australian Film Commission (AFC) analysis of Census data shows that in 1996, 50 per cent of screenwriters in Australia were women but by 2001 this had fallen to 39 per cent. This definition, however, covers screenwriters for all audio-visual industries and not film exclusively. Other research by the AFC indicates that women are under-represented in screenwriting for film. They analysed feature film credits from the past 30 years and found that of the 566 writers with a released feature credit, 77 per cent were male and 19 per cent were female (with four per cent unknown), and, of these credited writers, males were more likely than females to have multiple film credits (72 per cent of males had only one credit, compared with 83 per cent of women; and six per cent of the males had four or more credits, while none of the women did).

The international literature also shows that the gender imbalance is reflected in other key areas of the film industry. In the USA between 2001 and 2004 the percentage of women working as directors, executive producers, producers, writers, cinematographers and editors on the top 250 grossing motion pictures in the USA actually dropped from 19 per cent to 16 per cent (Lauzen, 2005). Work by Women in Film and Television Denmark (Knudsend and Rowley) indicates that there was a marked imbalance in all the 'top five positions' in feature film production between 1992 and 2002, but, as the following statistics show, screenwriters feature as one of the professions with the lowest representation of women:

- cinematographers 100 per cent were men
- screenwriters 83 per cent were male, 17 per cent female
- producers 81 per cent were male, 19 per cent female
- directors 80 per cent were male, 20 per cent female
- editors 62 per cent were male, 38 per cent female.

While little research has been conducted in the UK, international research shows a marked imbalance in the number of women working as screenwriters in a number of countries, including the USA, Australia and Denmark. Moreover, this is a situation that does not appear to be improving markedly. The implication for this study is that any problem that does exist for women screenwriters is not exclusive to the UK. However, the very absence of previous research in the UK suggests that the UK film industry has been slow to address or even recognise the issue. This study would appear to be the first in many years, and possibly the first at all, to consider the situation of women working as screenwriters in the UK.

2.2 UK data

Given the lack of research in the UK, it was important that this scoping study conducts its own analysis of UK data, including data on the workforce and on the proportion of UK films that have female screenwriters attached.

2.2.1 Workforce data

It should be noted that many of the available workforce datasets are subject to certain reporting limitations that restrict the ability to disaggregate the data beyond a certain point (as base sizes become too small to be reliable or may breach confidentiality agreements). With some of the datasets, precise identification of categories such as screenwriting was not possible because of the way the data have been captured and recorded. However, it is worth bearing in mind that writers do not always differentiate themselves as writing purely for film or other media, as discussed earlier.

Skillset, the sector skills council for the audio-visual industries, undertakes an annual survey or census of those working in the industry on a specific day. Skillset's Census (2003) of those working in the audio-visual industries indicates that approximately 1,200 people work in screenwriting, and that women make up just over a third of these, at 38 per cent (Skillset, 2005, p.106). This compares to:

- broadcast radio 43 per cent female
- broadcast TV 49 per cent female
- cable and satellite TV 57 per cent female
- corporate production 27 per cent female
- independent production 58 per cent female
- audio-visual industry (as a whole) 38 per cent female.

Thus the gender profile of screenwriters reflects that of the audio-visual industry as a whole. The data from the latest Census unfortunately do not present data for screenwriters separately because of small base sizes, so the proportion of women working in screenwriting cannot be updated. However, it should be noted that the Census does not include the film production workforce, so will not cover individuals working solely for film.

In order to explore working in screenwriting for film more specifically, we need to look to Skillset's Feature Film Production Workforce survey. However, the latest survey (Skillset and UK Film Council, 2005) classifies script development along with production. Women make up the majority of those surveyed in this dual category, at 66 per cent. It is not possible, once again owing to statistical constraints, to look only at script development. However, the film sector's skills development strategy 'The Bigger Picture' provides a preliminary estimate of the numbers and proportion of women in writing roles working in the production of feature films in 2002 and finds that 26 per cent are women (see Skillset and UK Film Council, 2003, p56). This would suggest that the 2005 figures mask the under-representation of women in screenwriting for film.

8

Another way to explore the participation of women as screenwriters is to look at the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS is a national survey carried out on a quarterly basis by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Each quarter approximately 60,000 households (130,000 individuals) are contacted for information on household members' personal circumstances, their work, and their qualifications/education and training. Households (including student halls of residence) are sampled from across the country, and the data collected are weighted to be representative of the UK population as a whole.

The Labour Force Survey data fluctuate substantially between quarters so we have presented current data and a three year average figure. The data indicate generally poor representation of women in relevant creative industries (or sectors), particularly in motion picture and video production. Here, average figures show that women make up just over 30 per cent of the workforce respectively, considerably less than the 46 per cent they represent across all industries.

Looking at the occupation group¹ of authors and writers shows that representation of women in this group is good (53 per cent), and actually higher than across all occupations. However, this group includes other roles, beyond screenwriters, so these figures may be hiding under-representation in specific areas of writing occupations. Roles include: author, creative writer, copy writer, freelance writer, lyric writer, report writer, technical writer and travel writer.

Table 2.1: People of working age currently in employment in specific creative industries (main job)

		Spring 20	05	20	002-2005 a	average
Relevant industries	Male	Female	Base	Male	Female	Base
(92.11) Motion picture, video production	78.2	21.8	26,010	70.3	29.7	26,186
Motion picture and video activities	68.5	31.5	40,951	68.1	31.9	47,771
(92.20) Radio, TV activities	57.0	43.0	86,237	57.2	42.8	89,447
(92.31) Artistic, literary creation etc.	66.0	34.0	94,723	60.1	39.9	99,097
Total (in employment, working age)	54.2	45.8	27,106,411	53.6	46.4	27,638,110

Source: LFS Spring 2005, and Autumn/Summer 2002 to Autumn/Summer 2005

The workforce data indicates some areas of concern. However, as a group, screenwriters are difficult to identify precisely in national data sources. We attempted to look at both occupation and industry to try to capture screenwriting, that involves authors/writers working in motion picture and video production, however the numbers returned were too small to allow statistical analysis under LFS data restrictions (as these no longer become a reliable estimate of the working population).

¹ 'group' is the most disaggregated occupational categorisation that LFS allows

Table 2.2: People of working age currently in employment in specific creative occupations (main job) - by gender

		Spring 20	05	20	02-2005 av	verage
Relevant occupations	Male	Female	Base	Male	Female	Base
(3411) Artists	64.9	35.1	23,604	55.6	44.4	24,670
(3412) Authors, writers	54.6	45.4	51,877	47.4	52.6	51,190
(3413) Actors, entertainers	68.7	31.3	23,976	62.8	37.2	27,724
(3414) Dancers and choreographers	-	-	*	-	-	*
(3415) Musicians	82.2	17.8	20,755	76.9	23.1	24,879
(3416) Arts officers, producers and directors	75.1	24.9	27,226	67.7	32.3	26,652
Artistic and Literary occupations	64.6	35.4	153,336	58. <i>7</i>	41.3	159,108
(3421) Graphic designers	66.9	33.1	81,782	67.6	32.4	82,914
(3422) Product, clothing & related designers	42.9	57.1	61,280	48.4	51.5	54,585
Design Associate Professionals	56.6	43.4	143,062	60.0	40.0	137,499
(3431) Journalists, newspaper & periodical editors	50.3	49.7	44,691	51.4	48.6	54,928
(3432) Broadcasting associate professionals	62.4	37.6	42,928	58.0	42.0	43,363
(3433) Public relations officers	34.1	65.9	27,185	26.4	73.6	27,390
(3434) Photo. & audio-visual equipment operators	78.0	22.0	47,985	77.0	23.0	50,077
Media Associate Professionals	58.9	41.1	162,789	56.4	43.6	175,758
Total (in employment, working age)	54.2	45.8	27,106,411	53.6	46.4	27,639,030

^{*}suppressed as Base less than 10,000

Source: LFS Spring 2005, and Autumn/Summer 2002 to Autumn/Summer 2005

2.2.2 UK film data

The UK Film Council collects data on all UK films, which in some cases include the gender of the individuals involved in the making of the film. Analysis of film data from 1999 to 2003, 646 UK films, indicates that data on the gender of screenwriters are available for the majority of these (85 per cent). For this subgroup of films (numbering 549), only one in seven (14.6 per cent) have a female screenwriter. Looking across the years, the best representation of female screenwriters was in 1999, the proportion dropped substantially in 2000 and 2001, but the situation has improved in the past two years. It is interesting to note first that the proportion of 'unknowns' is quite high (almost one-fifth) from 2000 onwards; and second that the number of films made is generally increasing year on year.

Table 2.3: Proportion of UK Films with female screenwriter - 1999-2003

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	1999-2003
Female screenwriter (%)	19.5	8.9	9.5	17.5	17.7	14.6
Broader female writing input ³ (%)	23.4	14.3	14.3	21.1	18.4	18.0
Base (known)	77	112	105	114	141	549
% unknown	7.2	17.0	16.7	15.6	15.6	15.0

Source: UK Film Council

It is also perhaps worth noting that films where the gender of the screenwriter is unknown have a greater tendency not to gain a theatrical release. For these films, it may be regarded as less of a priority to record data on artistic creation and influences.

Of the UK films between 1999 and 2003, 47 out of 549 films (where gender of director was known) had a female director. This represents less than one in ten (8.6 per cent). However, 33 of these films (70 per cent) had a female writer attached to the project. This is not as promising as it seems, as only in nine of these cases the writer was not also the director (27 per cent).

This relationship between director, producer and writer, can also be explored with UK Film Council data on the most successful (in terms of box office) films. These data indicate that of the top 20 UK films at the UK box office:

- In 2002 only two were credited with a female screenwriter (Bend It Like Beckham, and Anita and Me). Similarly only two had female directors. In one case the director was also the screenwriter. In the other case the screenwriter was the novelist, adapting her work for the screen, and was also an established actor who took a lead role in the film.
- In 2003 there were five films credited with a female screenwriter (Calendar Girls, Veronica Guerin, In America, I Capture the Castle, and Ripley's Game). However, in this year, there was only one female director but again the director was also the screenwriter.

2.2.3 Industry recognition

Data on the nominations and wins of major awards give some indication of the success, or prominence, of female screenwriters. Analysis of information taken from the British Independent Film Awards (BIFA) website finds that, between 1998 and 2005, 13.4 per cent of the nominations for best screenplay were for women. However, no women during this time period won an award for best screenplay. Analysis of information taken from the British Academy of Film and Television Awards (BAFTA) website shows that from 1990 to 2005 women represented less than one in ten of the

Please note that many adaptations of novels written by women are completed by male screenwriters.

nominees for best original or adapted screenplay (only 9.9 per cent), and represented even fewer of the winners (seven per cent). Out of the 43 winners, only three were women: Elaine May (1998); and recently Philippa Boyens and Fran Walsh (both 2003), and none of these were British. Taken together the data show how few women screenwriters are being recognised and celebrated in the industry in the UK.

The situation is slightly different in the USA. Information taken from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscars) website shows a similar lack of recognition for women in that country. However, while the awards are not exclusive to US-based writers, the recognition roughly reflects the proportion of women working on films in this country. Lauzen (2005) found that 12 per cent of writers working on the top 250 films in Hollywood are female. From 1990 (up to 2005) women received just over one in ten of the 224 nominations (11.8 per cent) either for best original or for best adapted screenplay, and were better represented among award winners. There have been eight female winners (18.2 per cent of the awards made), including Callie Khouri (1991), Ruth Prawer Jhabvala (1992), Jane Campion (1993) and Emma Thompson (1995). Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Emma Thompson are the only British winners among this group. In the past three years, women screenwriters have done well at the Oscars. Winners include Philippa Boyens and Fran Walsh (2003), Sofia Coppola (2004) and, at the latest Oscars, Diana Ossana (2005) for best adapted screenplay, alongside her male screenwriting partner. Data on the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (HFPA) Golden Globe awards, show that between 1990 and 2006 few women received nominations for best screenplay for a motion picture (8.2 per cent). However, women appear to be relatively more successful in receiving these awards, representing 17.4 per cent of winners. Winners of Golden Globes include: Callie Khouri (1992), Emma Thompson (1996), Sofia Coppola (2004), and this year, Diana Ossana (2006).

Table 2.4: Nominations and awards made during 1990s and 2000s

Award	Oscar 1990-2005	BIFA 1998-2005*	BAFTA 1990-2005	Golden Globe 1990-2006
Nominees (n)	238	52	212	110
Female nominees (n)	28	7	21	9
Female nominees (%)	11.8	13.5	9.9	8.2
Winners (n)	44	11	43	23
Female winners (n)	8	0	3	4
Female winners (%)	18.2	0	7.0	17.4

^{*}Please note that BIFA was established in 1998 so there are no data previous to this year

Sources: various

Our analysis of UK data shows that this is indeed an area of concern. The workforce data show that a relatively low proportion of women work as screenwriters for film in the UK. Women are working as writers, in fact they form the majority of writers, it is just that they are not writing for film. The film data show that there are relatively few women involved in writing the films that get made and shown in the UK while the

industry awards data show that women screenwriters are receiving very little recognition in the industry. Of course, the latter two findings could reflect the fact that there are few screenwriters to begin with and creates a vicious cycle. However, the proportion making films is lower than the proportion of those that would describe themselves as screenwriters, and the proportion receiving recognition at awards ceremonies is lower still, showing that something more is going on here.

2.3 Interviewee opinion

A key part of the discussions with interviewees centred on the issue of whether there are too few women screenwriters, essentially whether interviewees perceived there to be an imbalance in the number of men and women writing for film and whether this was problematic. The findings were mixed but clearly indicated that this was not something individuals had considered previously in any great detail.

Some of the interviewees were clearly aware of the disproportionate representation of women in the profession compared with other writing professions.

'It's a noticeable drop off when you get to film ... Film is the worst of the bunch in terms of not having many women writers.'

(screenwriter)

One individual described how, in her seven years of working with production companies, she had only worked with two female screenwriters. However, the most notable initial finding from the interviews was that some people were surprised to hear that there are few women screenwriters for film.

'Isn't that a funny thing? Isn't that a funny old thing? I didn't even know that because screenwriters never get to meet each other. I was surprised to hear that.'

(screenwriter)

The surprise was greatest among screenwriters themselves, and was explained by the fact that screenwriters tend to work in isolation and not meet each other. They admitted that they do not necessarily know who their contemporaries are. However, some of those who work with screenwriters also admitted that they had not perceived there to be a problem. On hearing about our research many had been prompted to ask other people in the industry what they thought on the issue and reported that others too were surprised to hear about our research. It appears that while people can describe a lack of women working in this area, they do not think of it as a problem worthy of much attention.

'It is a discernable problem, it is a real problem, but it is not a huge problem.' (key industry professional)

This lack of awareness of the extent of the gender imbalance is not uncommon. McCreadie (2005) also found that women screenwriters can be surprised to hear that they are under-represented. In her interviews with successful screenwriters from

around the world, one female screenwriter, Jay Presson Allen, told her of her incredulity after an interviewer informed her that in the 1960s she was one of only a handful of women screenwriters. It was only when she looked it up for herself that she was able to accept that this was indeed the fact.

Many thought that the lack of women in screenwriting roles mirrors the underrepresentation of women in all industries and professions in the UK. In their eyes it certainly mirrors other professions in the film industry:

'There's a lack of women doing almost everything in the film business, other than in hair and make up.'

(screenwriter)

Some perceived that the representation of women was actually better among screenwriters than other roles in film, most notably directors and producers. This perception is at odds with our statistical analysis of industry data which indicate women are less well represented in screenwriting than in other professions more generally and even within the film industry.

The situation may be improving. Many interviewees reported that the situation was getting better for women, and some of those working with screenwriters reported receiving more specs from women in the past few years. They also believed that gender was perhaps secondary to other areas of diversity that needed improving in the industry, including race and age. This is an interesting finding, given that it does not reflect the UK Film Council's own analysis of race diversity among those applying for and receiving funding for projects. Of the 1,576 applications for production and development funding in 2004/05, ethnicity of the key writer was known for 1,336 of these projects. Of these, 204 were of minority ethnic origin, representing 15.3 per cent. This shows greater representation of ethnic minorities among applicants than in the general UK population (7.9 per cent), according to the Census 2001. The representation of minority ethnic writers was also found to be positive when looking at projects awarded funding. Of the 139 projects awarded in 2004/05, ethnicity of the first writer is known for 88 projects. Of these writers, 10 are from minority ethnic groups (11.5 per cent). While these data are limited, they suggest that at least with respect to UK Film Council funding, the representation of ethnic minority writers is quite good⁴. Other statistics we have shown suggest that, contrary to some popular belief, the gender imbalance among screenwriters in the industry is stark and is still worthy of attention from the UK Film Council and the wider industry.

It should, however, be noted that diversity in terms of representation of different racial and minority ethnic groups is still a major concern in other areas of the industry and in other roles including, for example, independent production companies.

2.4 Summary

Little could be deduced about whether there really is a lack of women screenwriters through a review of the literature, as there is very little research looking at the extent of the gender imbalance among screenwriters in the UK. The only available evidence came from international research, which showed a marked imbalance in the proportion of screenwriters who are female in a number of countries, including the USA, Australia and Denmark, suggesting that the situation is not unique to the UK. Understanding the extent of the problem here required some analysis of UK data. Participation data from Skillset and Labour Force Survey indicate that women form the minority of active screenwriters – while women make up 53 per cent of those writing as their main occupation, they make up 38 per cent of those writing for audiovisual media other than film, and only 26 per cent of those writing for film. However, other UK data show that even smaller proportions of women are writing films that get made in the UK and are receiving recognition for those films. While we need to recognise that some of the workforce data currently available are often imprecise or out of date, on the whole this suggests that there is indeed a problem worthy of attention. Nonetheless, arguably the most pertinent finding from the interviews was that this problem is not recognised by many of those working in the industry. The under-representation of women screenwriters is not at the forefront of the minds of either screenwriters themselves or those that work with them, either because they are not aware of this imbalance or do not perceive it to be a problem. All of these findings have significant implications for future work in this area.

2.4.1 Recommendations

- Gain a more precise estimate of the make-up of the current population of screen-writers for film in the UK. Skillset could provide the UK Film Council with data on the film production workforce that would allow the isolation of screenwriting and the analysis of gender, though these numbers are likely to be small so should be treated as indicative only. Skillset has been involved in partnership work with Equity to look at training and skills issues affecting the performance industry. Similar partnership work with the Writers' Guild or Women in Film and Television may be a useful means of gaining a better understanding of the issues affecting screenwriters.
- Explore the possibility of using alternative means of establishing an estimate for the proportion of working female screenwriters. This could include working with the Writers' Guild, writers agents and production companies.
- The UK Film Council should continue to monitor the relationship between producers, directors and writers; it would appear that the more women there are in decision-making roles, the more likely it is that women will be able to take up writing roles.

- Explore the perceptions of film critics and award givers about the differences between films written by males and females.
- Examine the awareness of, and attitudes to the under-representation of women using a larger sample. The lack of understanding and/or prioritisation of representing of women screenwriters is likely to have great consequences for any efforts to improve the representation of women so is worthy of further research.
- Disseminate the data on the screenwriting sector of the UK film industry value chain more widely to illustrate the size of the under-representation. To ensure that this acts as an incentive to improve representation rather than as a disincentive to women to enter or continue working in the industry, the data should be presented alongside information about any planned activities and actions to target women screenwriters. A rise in the awareness may further act to promote academic interest in this area, which could lead to much needed research.

3 Does it Matter?

As stated in the introduction, the film industry is starting to pay more attention to addressing issues of the diversity of its workforce. However, it is worth considering why this move is necessary. It is particularly important that this argument is clear when discussing gender diversity, since – as the previous section shows – discussions around the under-representation of women are often seen as out of date or old news.

In essence, four different types of arguments can be made to support the case for increasing the representation of women in the screenwriting profession – critically the social case and the business case, followed by the legal case (which is arguably of less pressing relevance to the industry) and the ethical case.

3.1 The social case

The first argument is that a negative social effect may result from the underrepresentation of women writers. Films and TV are likely to be huge shapers of people's sense of reality, and view of the world. As Seger (1996) describes:

'The camera not only reflecting society, but shaping it.'

Seger (1996) found that the lack of female directors, writers and producers has a cyclical effect, as it leads to different portrayals of women onscreen, and provides significantly fewer role models for women to aspire to than for men. Lauzen also highlighted in her 2002 findings that when there are women working behind the scenes on motion pictures in writing, editing, producing and directing roles, the number and importance of female characters is significantly greater than when these roles are held by men. Therefore, the social effect of women's under-representation behind the scenes in writing roles may be that the films that get made lack the female perspective and instead are dominated by a male view of the world.

Even where female characters are used, these may be presented from a male perspective and be stereotypical. In a recent study by the advocacy group Dads and Daughters (Kelly and Smith, 2006) it was found that of 101 animated and live-action children's films examined, only 28 per cent of speaking characters were female, and

just 17 per cent of people in crowd scenes were female. The authors believe that this can be dangerous because stories and images seen by children influence the important developmental task of understanding what it means to be male or female. These films simply are not reflecting the real world, where men and women share the space. A meta-analysis looking at television viewing has shown that exposure to television is a significant and positive predictor of sex-role acceptance and attitudes among both children and adults (Herrett et al., 1996; cited in Kelly and Smith, 2006). The film industry may perpetuate societal stereotypes about gender and fail to reflect the changes that are taking place in society. Redressing this balance is no easy task, but one that requires attention in order to more appropriately align the films viewed with the lives and experiences of their audiences.

Another aspect to the social effect of the under-representation of women in film relates more specifically to screenwriters. If women's perspectives are not shown in the films that get made, then women may not feel attracted to this form of media and chose not to work in it. The gender imbalance can in this way become selfperpetuating. A few of our interviewees agreed how the types of films that get made may put women off joining the profession:

'I wonder how much the whole thing becomes self-generating. They're written by men, therefore they have a certain slant to them that doesn't appeal to women, therefore a female writer is not inspired by them or wants to write them, so maybe it's eating its own tail in that way.'

(screenwriter)

3.2 The business case

The second argument is the business case. Is there a financial argument for hiring women screenwriters? The first strand to consider is the revenue generated by films credited with female screenwriters.

In terms of commercial success, of those films that are released, it would appear that films credited with a male screenwriter do better in the UK. Films with a male screenwriter have an average UK box office of \$3.75m whereas those with a female screenwriter have an average of \$1.96m.5 This pattern is repeated for US box office and all territories box office figures, and t-tests indicate for US and all territories there are significant differences in the mean box office figures according to the presence of a female screenwriter.

As in the table, the UK box office figures are quoted in US dollars to allow direct comparison with US box office and all box office figures.

Table 3.1: Box office takings for UK films with a theatrical release (1999-2003) by gender of screenwriter

	Female screenwriter?				
UK box office (\$)*	No	Yes			
Mean	3,750,659	1,964,444			
Median	75,263	50,290			
Minimum	0	0			
Maximum	116,725,642	36,075,474			
Base	303	48			
US box office (\$)					
Mean	9,106,415	2,384,474			
Median	0	0			
Minimum	0	0			
Maximum	317,575,550	32,543,449			
Base	303	48			
All box office (\$)					
Mean	19,382,444	6,212,601			
Median	859,120	357,516			
Minimum	108	150			
Maximum	669,993,534	86,163,866			
Base	303	48			

Note: only those where gender of screenwriter is known have been analysed

Source: UK Film Council

However, this pattern is heavily influenced by budget, which also differs on films written by males and females. Analysis of UK film data 1999-2003 indicates there is a significant difference in the average (mean) budget of films according to the presence of a female screenwriter. The average budget of a film with a female screenwriter was £4.16m compared with £6.58m for those without.

Table 3.2: Film budget (£) for UK films (1999-2003) by gender of screenwriter

Female Screenwriter?	Mean	Median	Min.	Max.	Base
No	6,575,549	3,261,751	35,316	158,088,721	467
Yes	4,160,361	3,091,626	60,000	15,661,515	80
All (known)	6,222,322	3,219,729	35,316	158,088,721	547

Source: UK Film Council

This relationship is also true for female directors in that films directed by women had on average significantly lower budgets (£3.90m compared with £5.74m).

^{*} Note: UK box office figures are quoted in US dollars to allow direct comparison with US box office and all box office figures

Indeed analysis shows a strong correlation between budget and box office performance. To remove the influence of budget on box office return, it is possible to look at the box office return for every £1 of budget and so assess the financial effectiveness of films with a female screenwriter. Return for films with a female screenwriter is higher at \$1.25 per £1 budget than those found for films with no female screenwriters (\$1.16).

The success of a film at the box office is also an indicator of a writer's success. While women writers are under-represented in the films that get made, analysis of UK film data (1999-2003) indicates there is no significant difference in the proportion of films gaining a theatrical release with a male or a female screenwriter (65 per cent of films without a female screenwriter gained a theatrical release compared with 60 per cent of those with a female screenwriter). As such, while the difference is low the argument for improving the representation of women in the profession is that films written by women are financially effective and are just as likely to gain a theatrical release.

Another strand of the business argument relates to the audience or customer base, and the fact that women make up a large part of it. UK Film Council data on the top films at the UK Box office over the past three years show that overall cinema audiences were found to be roughly equally balanced between men and women, and actually for the top UK films, females in the audience make up the majority. As such women constitute a significant proportion of the customer base for UK films and should not be overlooked. Further data from UK Film Council⁶ show:

- The gender split of the audience for the top 20 UK films at the UK box office in 2002 was roughly equal (50.3 per cent female).
- Women constituted the majority of the audience for the top 20 UK films at the UK box office in 2003 (56 per cent of the audience).
- In 2004, the proportion of women in the audience for the top 20 UK films at the UK box office was 50.9.
- In all three years, the female proportion of the total audience was greater for UK films than for films of wider origin.

Many organisations from across industries are moving to improve their workforce diversity to reflect their customer base. The argument is that those working in an organisation need to reflect their clientele in order to understand their needs and attract them to the business. TV may be leading the way in diversity in the audio-visual industry. For example, the BBC states that it is committed to reflecting the diversity of the UK and to making its services accessible to all. This applies both to the output – TV, radio and online – and the workforce, aiming to be inclusive of those groups who are often under-represented – older people, women, disabled people, people from ethnic minorities, those of all faiths and social classes, lesbians and gay men. The BBC

Top 20 films at the UK box office and Top 20 UK films at UK box office: audience data.

has a number of initiatives in place aimed at finding and developing new creative talent, from BBC Talent to the Writers' Room, that are prioritising diversity. In 2000, the Head of Diversity, Linda Mitchell, argued that:

'Only by being an inclusive organisation will we strike the right tone in our programmes and get the mix right for our audiences.'

(BBC News Release, March 2000)

There is a body of research looking at audience preferences in film, including gender differences in these preferences (as described later in Chapter 5). However, the research is still in its infancy and is a complex area. For example, it is well known that the film genre of 'rom-com' is popular among female viewers, and these are often written by men, most famously Richard Curtis.

Table 3.3: Primary genre of UK films 1997 to 2004

Primary genre	Films (N)	Films (%)
Action	24	4.0
Adventure	14	2.3
Animation	4	0.7
Biography (incl. biopic)	18	3.0
Comedy	159	26.5
Crime	33	5.5
Documentary	21	3.5
Drama	242	40.3
Family	7	1.2
Fantasy	7	1.2
Horror	11	1.8
Music (incl. musical)	4	0.7
Romance	16	2.7
Romantic comedy	2	0.3
Sci fi	2	0.4
Thriller	32	5.3
Travelogue	1	0.2
War	1	0.2
Unknown	2	0.3
Total	598	100

Source: UK Film Council

Much of the work focused on preferences has centred around genre. UK Film Council data show that films with a primary genre of 'drama' constitute two-fifths of all UK films made between 1997 and 2004 (see Table 3.3). Other common genres were 'comedy', 'crime', 'thriller' and 'action'.

UK Film Council data also show the genre⁷ that is most successful in UK cinemas is comedy, which over the past three years has consistently accounted for around a quarter of releases and over a quarter of takings at the box office (31 per cent in 2003, see Table 3.4). Action films also do well at the box office, and in 2003 accounted for 17 per cent of box office takings. Other successful genres are animation, which has grown in recent years and took 14 per cent of the box office in 2004. While drama films make up the largest share of films made, they are relatively less dominant at the box office, taking 11 per cent in 2004.

Table 3.4: Films on release in the UK and Republic of Ireland by genre and year

Top 20 UK Films						
	2002		2	003	2004	
Genre	% Release	% Box office	% Release	% Box office	% Release	% Box office
Action	8.1	12.5	10.9	16.8	7.1	14.6
Adventure	1.4	2.3	2.1	8.3	1.3	1.7
Animated	3.3	9.4	3.3	9	1.3	14
Biopic	1.4	2.2	0.2	0.1	1.6	2.2
Comedy	22.8	26.5	25.3	30.5	23.5	27.2
Crime	4. 1	3.2	5.4	1.7	0.7	0.6
Documentary	3.5	0.3	5	0.7	7.1	1.2
Drama	34.7	8.7	31.7	10	39.5	10.6
Family	1.1	0.1	-	-	1.1	3.6
Fantasy	1.6	14.2	1.2	7.3	1.1	6.1
Horror	3.5	3.5	5.2	4.8	3.8	3.4
Music/dance	1.6	0.1	0.5	2	0.9	1.7
Romance	4.3	0.6	3.8	0.2	2.4	1.4
Sci Fi	3	11.9	1.7	7.1	1.8	7
Thriller	3.3	2.8	3.3	1.6	6. 7	4.7
War	2.4	1.7	0.5	0	0.2	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Nielson EDI, RSU analysis, UKFC Statistical Yearbooks 2002/03, 2003/04 and 2004/05

The UK Film Council data also show slight differences in preferences between males and females indicating what female audiences like and what male audiences like in terms of genre (see Table 3.5). Films with a male dominated audience are most likely to be action, thriller, horror, drama and adventure films – over half of all films with a male-dominated audience are likely to have an action theme. Films with a femaledominated audience are most likely to be drama, comedy and romance films - over

UK Film Council data indicate 'main' genre only.

three quarters of all films with a mainly female audience are likely to have a drama theme. 8

Table 3.5: Multiple response analysis of recorded genres of Top UK films at the UK Box Office in 2001, 2002, and 2003 by audience bias

Primary genre	Female dominated audience (% films)	Male dominated audience (% films)	Total films
Action	0	56.5	13
Adventure	11.5	34.8	11
Biography (incl. biopic)	11.5	13.0	6
Comedy	53.8	26.1	20
Crime	3.8	8.7	3
Drama	76.9	39.1	29
Family	15.4	8.7	6
Fantasy	15.4	13.0	7
Horror	0	39.1	9
Music (incl. musical)	11.5	8.7	5
Mystery	7.7	8.7	4
Romance	42.3	17.4	15
Sci fi	0	21.7	5
Sport	7.7	0	2
Thriller	3.8	47.8	12
War	7.7	13.0	5
Total	26	23	49

Note: if more than 50 per cent of the audience share for a film was found to be female, the film was deemed to have a female-dominated audience

Source: UK Film Council and IMDB

Given what we know about the films that do well and the films that audiences like, it is helpful to see whether women write films in these genres. Analysis of the types of films written by women and made in the UK over the past five years from the International Movies Database (www.imdb.com) shows that women write a variety of genres (see Table 3.6). Of the 99 films with a female writer attached, 97 had genre data and over two-thirds of these films (68 per cent) were described as drama. Other relatively common genres were comedy (31 per cent) and romance (21 per cent). The next most common genre was thrillers (17 per cent) and ten per cent were described as both romance and comedy (ie rom-com). However, very few women were writing biography, crime, action, fantasy, sci fi or horror. While the data suggest that women are not often writing the popular genre of action, our analysis shows that women do

Please note that this analysis has been conducted for indicative purposes only and should be treated with caution because of the small numbers of films involved.

write a variety of genres, including some of those, most notably comedy, that are popular with audiences.

Table 3.6: Multiple response analysis of the genre of films with female writers (British films 1999-2003)

Genres of films with female writers	N	% (cases)
Action	2	2.1
Adventure	9	9.3
Animation	2	2.1
Biography	5	5.2
Comedy	30	30.9
Crime	4	4.1
Documentary	1	1.0
Drama	66	68.0
Family	7	7.2
Fantasy	4	4.1
History	1	1.0
Horror	4	4.1
Music	1	1.0
Musical	3	3.1
Mystery	6	6.2
Romance	20	20.6
Sci fi	2	2.1
Short	4	4.1
Sport	1	1.0
Thriller	16	16.5
Total	97	100

Source: UK Film Council/IMDB

Analysis of UK Film Council data on UK films 1999 to 2003 was conducted to compare the types of projects written by men and women screenwriters.9 However, the analysis shows that the genres that men and women write are not dissimilar (see Table 3.7). Certainly men and women are equally likely to write a comedy. While women are more likely to write drama films, men also write a lot of films in this genre, as drama constitutes over a third of the films written by men over this period.

Please note that the number of projects here is small.

Table 3.7: Primary genre of UK films 1999 to 2003 by presence of female screenwriter (per cent)

Primary genre	No female screenwriters	Female screenwriters
Action	5.1	0
Adventure	1.7	2.8
Animation	1.3	0
Biography (incl. biopic)	2.9	0
Comedy	30.5	30.6
Crime	5.9	2.8
Documentary	0.8	0
Drama	36.9	58.3
Family	0.4	0
Fantasy	1.7	0
Horror	3.0	0
Romance	2.1	2.8
Sci fi	0.4	0
Thriller	6.8	2.8
War	0.4	0
Total Films (where genre and screenwriter gender known)	236	36

Source: UK Film Council

Additional data we have on the genres written by men and women comes from the UK Film Council data on applications for funding. As above, the data for 2004/05 show that there is little difference in the projects applying for UK Film Council support involving male and female writers (see Table 3.8). Indeed male and female writers were equally likely to be involved in film projects with comedy and or drama as its central theme, although projects with male writers as opposed to female writers were marginally more likely involve a horror storyline. They also show that women write a range of genre. However, in all of these sets of data it is important to recognise that they do not identify whether the projects are commissioned or whether they have been initiated by the writer. As such, it remains unclear whether these are projects and genres that men and women chose to write and that they favour, or whether they are projects that men and women tend to be selected for.

Before drawing too many conclusions, it should be noted that the nature of a genre categorisation may depend on who is applying it, whether it is industry bodies or audiences, as these perspectives may not be consistent. What the industry labels one thing may not be received as such by cinema-goers. Some labelling is very precise, eg 'stalker' while others may be very broad and encompass a range of themes, eg 'drama'. Also, it may not be possible to categorise films into one particular genre. The International Movie Database listing of genres indicates that films tend to belong to multiple genres.

Table 3.8: Primary genre of applications made to film projects to the UK Film Council 2004/05 (all funding streams) by presence of female screenwriter

	Applications				
Primary genre	No female screenwriters	Female screenwriters	Don't know		
Action/Adventure	5.8	2.7	1.2		
Adaptation	1.6	1.5	1.8		
Animation	4.7	5.9	1.8		
Buddy movie	0.2	0	0		
Comedy	30.0	31.9	13.4		
Crime	0.7	0.6	0.6		
Documentary	1.6	2.4	5.5		
Drama	20.6	24.2	17.7		
Family	2.5	2.7	1.8		
Horror	19.1	13.9	19.1		
Music	0.3	0.9	0.3		
Mystery	0.7	0	0.7		
Other	0.1	2.7	0.1		
Pilot	0.3	0	0.3		
Rites of passage	0.1	0.3	0.1		
Road movie	0.1	1.5	0.1		
Romance	0.7	2.1	0.7		
Sci fi	0.7	0.6	0.7		
Short	0.3	0.6	33.5		
Teen movie	1.0	0.6	1.2		
Thriller	8.6	5.3	4.9		
War	1.0	0	0.0		
Total Films (where genre and screenwriter gender known)	953	339	164		

Source: UK Film Council GIFTS database

While the discussion of genres is complicated by these issues, all in all our data suggest that women are actually a key constituent of film audiences in the UK, particularly UK films, and that women, like men, can and do write films that appeal to UK audiences. As such there may be an untapped opportunity here for women to write the sort of films (in all genres) that appeal to both male and female audiences. It is therefore worth considering further what audiences want and how best to give it to them.

3.3 Other arguments

The remaining third and fourth arguments include the legal case and the ethical case. The legal case concerns the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the legal obligation of employers not to discriminate against women in their careers, either directly or indirectly, ie in recruitment, development and progression. In cases of discriminatory conduct individuals can present claims against their employer at a tribunal. However, in the film industry legal implications are less clear cut for screenwriters because they work freelance and are contracted rather than 'employed' to work on a project. It is nonetheless worth bearing in mind that accusations of discrimination can be damaging for the reputation of an industry, and may make it less attractive to women more generally.

According to Bielby and Bielby (2002), in the US inequality exists not only in access to work, but also in the gap between men and women's earnings in the screenwriting field. They cite that women who are working in these roles in the USA typically earn 20 per cent less than their male counterparts, a situation that has not changed since the mid 1980s. According to the 2005 Hollywood Writers' Report, undertaken by the Writers' Guild of America West, median earnings for female film writers decreased by 11 per cent from 1996 to 2003. For the most highly paid women screenwriters, pay increased by ten per cent on average, compared with 23 per cent for the same group of male screenwriters. At present no data in the UK are available on this issue, but in future it would be informative to examine whether this form of discrimination is taking place here.

The ethical argument simply follows the line that it is morally a good thing to ensure that there is equal representation and that it is unhealthy to ignore a section of the general population, either directly or indirectly.

3.4 Summary

The previous chapter has revealed that there is a stark imbalance in the proportion of women working as screenwriters for film. This chapter has gone on to describe why this problem should be worthy of concern, and why something should be done about it. While the film industry has moved in recent years towards improving the diversity of its workforce, particularly in relation to race, it is important that it does not overlook issues of gender diversity. The power of film means that the gender imbalance in behind-the-scenes roles may have social effects, including failing to present women's perspectives on the world and possibly reinforcing gender stereotypes. Moreover there is a business argument for improving the representation of women in the screenwriting role. UK data show that they write the sort of films that do well in the UK, that the films they make are as likely to gain a release and that their films are actually more financially effective. Women make up just over half of cinema audiences in the UK and currently the screenwriting sector of the UK film industry value chain

does not reflect the customer base. Increasing representation in the workforce and reflecting the diversity of the UK society can only serve to improve the strength of the UK film industry. Finally, there is potentially a legal case for avoiding charges of sex discrimination.

3.4.1 Recommendations

- Regularly disseminate data on the financial effectiveness of films with female screenwriters. This may encourage stakeholders in decision-making positions to consider of the potential of women in writing roles more favourably.
- Consider collecting and publishing data on the earnings of male and female screenwriters in order to examine any gender disparity. This could be undertaken by Skillset in their workforce surveys.

However, it remains unclear precisely where the imbalance stems from. Are fewer women starting out in the profession or is it that fewer women are succeeding? It also remains unclear what the underlying causes of this imbalance are. The following chapters begin to uncover the possible barriers affecting women, using the interviews with individuals in the industry, the available literature and statistics to illustrate key issues.

Before describing the issues, is important to note that many of the interviewees, including female screenwriters themselves, stressed that they felt unqualified to state with certainty the causes of any imbalance in the number of women screenwriters. Few of the screenwriters themselves felt that they had personally experienced any barriers on account of their gender; and because of their relative isolation, none of those interviewed felt they knew enough other female screenwriters to be able to talk about the experiences of their peers. Often the discussion involved speculating what the issues could be rather than identifying them precisely. As such, the interviewees were worried about making sweeping generalisations, or relying too much on myths.

'There are lots of myths around, but I am not sure whether these are substantiated in fact.' (key industry professional)

However, interviewees, both screenwriters and other stakeholders, were able to describe a number of barriers which they felt were faced by screenwriters of both genders in the UK film industry. What is remarkable is that in spite of the small sample size, the issues raised by our interviewees were very consistent. These were concerned with both the process of securing work, the nature of the work of a screenwriter and the nature of the industry itself. These are explored in the chapters that follow.

4 Education Pipeline

As stated earlier, it is not yet clear where the gender imbalance in the screenwriting sector stems from. Is it that fewer women enter the profession to begin with? It is useful to begin looking at why there are so few female screenwriters by exploring potential for entry. We have therefore examined make-up of those participating in relevant education and training, as this is a possible signifier of interest, motivation or intention to take up a career in screenwriting. It only acts as an indication however, as screenwriting does not depend on any particular qualifications for entry. Screenwriters can potentially come from any educational background. Indeed, the vast majority of the screenwriters we spoke to had not undertaken any training specific to screenwriting. Instead they had entered the profession through a variety of routes, and at a variety of ages. Often screenwriters begin to write for film after a long career of writing for other media, so 'new entrants' may even be in their late 50s or older.

It is hence difficult to rely on education statistics as a pure representation of the entry point to the profession. However, data from Skillset's Feature Film Production Workforce Survey 2005 show that the majority of screenwriters are graduates (65 per cent) so we believe it is useful to look at higher education. There has also been a surge in the number of accredited screenwriting courses in recent years. While the representation of women in these is unlikely to explain why the gender imbalance is so low in the working population today, the growth of these courses means that they may give some indication of the future gender balance among screenwriters in the UK.

4.1 Literature review

There is no UK-based research about gender and screenwriting education and training, and very little international research. The only relevant study discovered was from The National Film School of Denmark which showed gender differences in those studying formally to go into the film industry. In the ten years between 1992 and 2002, only 35 per cent of screenwriting students were female, whereas women constituted a greater share of the students involved in producing, and editing. Over the same period, those making decisions about course entry (the admissions board) tended to be men

(76 per cent). Similarly the teachers of film programmes also tended to be male (79 per cent). This could suggest that the students are studying in a male-dominated environment and consequently seeing fewer female role models to aspire to.

4.2 UK data

There appears to have been no published research on the training of screenwriting students in the UK, beyond general work to identify skills gaps and training needs in the industry (Film Skills Group, 2003). We have therefore brought together a range of data to explore participation of women in relevant training.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is the central source for higher education statistics and has been collecting data since its creation in 1993. It collects five main data sets: student, student first destinations (now destinations of leavers from higher education, DLHE), staff, finance, and the non-credit-bearing course records. The latest data on students in higher education¹⁰ show there to be almost one and three-quarters of a million people (1,723,615) studying at undergraduate level in a university or college in the UK in 2003/04; and a further half a million (523,825) studying at postgraduate level. Of these students 58 per cent of undergraduates and 53 per cent of postgraduates are women. Looking at subjects of relevance to the creative industries and screenwriting, there were:

- 45,590 studying mass communication and documentation (this includes media studies and journalism) – 59.7 per cent of whom were women
- 140,195 studying creative arts and design 60.8 per cent of whom were women
- 58,230 studying English language and literature of which 71.7 per cent were women

The data show that subjects that equip people with qualifications that are obviously relevant to a career in screenwriting are female-dominated.

A special data run was requested from HESA for this report, in order to explore the gender split for students in 2003/04 (latest data) following postgraduate and undergraduate courses in imaginative writing¹¹ and within this, the proportion of women studying scriptwriting¹². The data indicate that women make up the majority of students at taught postgraduate level (MA) and at 'other undergraduate level' (eg foundation degree, Dip HE, HNC or HND) who are studying subjects related to imaginative writing. The gender split is more even when looking at first degree study

¹¹ JACS principal subject, code W800

¹⁰ HESA student data 2005

¹² JACS 4 digit subject, code W810

(BA). However, when focusing on scriptwriting, women form the minority in MA and particularly BA courses.

Table 4.1: Number and proportion of students studying towards HE qualifications in imaginative writing and scriptwriting (2003/04)

Study level	Female %	Male %	Base* (N)
Imaginative writing			
Postgraduate research		••	40
Postgraduate taught	64.2	35.8	730
First degree	53.9	46.1	1,290
Other undergraduate	69.9	30.1	1,930
Scriptwriting			
Postgraduate research	0	0	0
Postgraduate taught	47.0	53.0	100
First degree	39.9	60.1	135
Other undergraduate	62.7	37.3	50

^{*} Base is approximate owing to HESA rounding conventions, however % given is based on precise student numbers. Values represented by '..' have been suppressed because of HESA data protection strategy.

HESA data cover higher education students, that is students on programmes of study for which the level of instruction is above that of level three of the National Qualifications Framework, essentially courses above GCE 'A' level. The data presented above do not cover further education courses. Information on study through FE colleges, through work based learning (WBL) and through adult and community learning (ACL) is collected by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) from individual learner records (ILR). The latest published data for learner numbers from the LSC do not allow screenwriting to be disaggregated from the wider category of visual and performing arts and media. However, the data indicate that women outnumber men by far in FE and ACL in this broad category of visual and performing arts and media.

Table 4.2: Learners (in 000s) on LSC funded FE, WBL and ACL provision in 2003/04 and 2004/05

		2003	3/04	200	4/05
Area of learning	Level	Female	Male	Female	Male
Visual and performing arts and media	WBL	0.2	1.2	0.1	1.0
Visual and performing arts and media	FE	193.0	96.6	186.6	94.6
Visual and performing arts and media	ACL	214.8	59.3	204.0	55.6
All areas	WBL	237.7	298.2	221.3	297.1
All areas	FE	2,487.2	1,667.8	2,496.2	1,710.0
All areas	ACL	705.9	216.8	701.8	213.1

Source: Taken from Table 2, ILR/SFR08, 8 December 2005, Learning and Skills Council

However, an exploration of the qualifications and subject areas covered by the broad category of visual and performing arts and media, suggests that there is only one course that directly focuses on screenwriting skills covered in the LSC data: ABC level 3 double award in film and television screenwriting.

Skillset funds and monitors a range of accredited screenwriting courses across the higher and further education sectors. Currently, there are eight such courses running across seven higher education institutions and these courses include masters, postgraduate diplomas, and undergraduate degrees. HEIs offering these courses include: the University of Bolton, Bournemouth University, Leeds Metropolitan University, London College of Communications (part of the University of Arts, London), National Film and Television School, Royal Holloway University (part of the University of London), and University of East Anglia. It is possible to explore the gender breakdown of participation in these HE courses, across the past few years (see Table 4.3). The figures correspond with those from HESA, indicating that women are outnumbered by men on these courses, making up around two-fifths of the participants.

Table 4.3: Participation in accredited screenwriting courses delivered in HEIs

	Current course (2003/04)	Previous course (2002/03)	Average (past three years)
Total participants	239	217	201
Total (known gender)	209	217	201
Gender			
Female (%)	39.2	41.0	41.0
Male (%)	60.8	59.0	59.0

Source: Skillset

We had also hoped to explore the gender breakdown of the numbers applying, enrolling and also completing courses. However this data is not collected centrally, and within the timeframe of this research it was not possible to collect the information from each individual institution. It would be useful to pursue this in any further research, and indications from the institutions providing courses are that they would be willing to participate.

Skillset also supports a range of non-HE training provision focused on screenwriting through the Film Fund including:

- the Skillset Film Futures bursary scheme, this funds freelancers and employees with some experience in the industry to attend training in priority areas including screenwriting
- Screenwriting Training (including residential courses) to support the career development of existing screenwriters working in the UK film industry and new entrants by funding organisations to deliver screenwriting training.

Providers of the scheme and training include APT films, Moonstone, Lighthouse, Performing Arts Labs Ltd (PAL), NFTS, and The Script Factory.

Table 4.4: Numbers participating in accredited screenwriting courses delivered outside HE in 2004 and 2005; and numbers receiving bursaries

	Total (N)	Female (N)	Female (%)	Male (N)
Beneficiaries of bursary scheme	31	13	41.9	18
Training participants	1421	687	48.3	734

Source: Skillset

These figures indicate that women are only slightly outnumbered by men in training but are less well-represented as beneficiaries of bursaries (see Table 4.4), where again women represent around two-fifths of the participants.

While the data suggests that women are slightly outnumbered by men on the HE accredited screenwriting courses, the gender balance is fairly even on the non-HE courses. Even on the HE accredited courses it is clear that the extent of the gender imbalance does not match that within the workforce, where our best statistics suggest that they represent only around one-quarter.

4.3 Interviewee opinion

Few of the screenwriters we spoke to had undertaken any training specific to screenwriting. Most were qualified to degree level and had completed arts degrees at university, mostly in English and Drama. When asked to recall the gender balance on their courses, most thought they had been evenly balanced or were predominated by women, in line with the UK statistics presented above.

One of the screenwriters had completed a number of courses in screenwriting at several institutions, and was currently studying for an MA. She described how she had taken an introduction to screenwriting course at a London-based institution, two more courses at another institution as well as workshops at the Screenwriters' Workshop. She had found these workshops very useful, as participants received guidance with all stages of screenwriting, eg writing the treatment, first draft, rewrite etc.

'They were really useful because you had constant deadlines and this kept you motivated. And you had a group of people giving you feedback all the time'.

(screenwriter)

On all of these courses she recalled there being a mixture of men and women. Through these courses she was able to meet many female screenwriters who she found to be very determined, committed and disciplined. However, she believed she had probably had more male than female tutors.

A minority of the remaining screenwriters interviewed, while formally 'untrained' in screenwriting themselves, had nonetheless been involved in helping out or teaching on specific screenwriting courses, including an MA course. They gave differing reports of the gender make-up of these courses; one believed they were well balanced, another however recalled a noticeable lack of women, while another thought the courses, some of which were part-time courses, were dominated by 'middle-aged housewives.'

None of the interviewees who were established in the industry referred to their training or education as relevant in helping them in to the profession. Their routes in were instead more vocational. One female screenwriter had spent years writing scripts and passing them to her agent to distribute, another screenwriter entered the profession after establishing himself as a writer in the theatre, while another became a writer after working initially for some years as an editor. In all cases their stories were fairly disconnected from formal screenwriter training. This echoes the findings from McCreadie's 2005 study. Most of the female screenwriters she interviewed of long standing entered the business either through an already-established personal connection or by having a strong reputation in another field and attracting success that way. This highlights how screenwriting courses have not necessarily been a stepping stone into the profession to date, and how the data we present above can only be seen as an indication of the participation of women as writers.

Many of the interviewees, including both screenwriters and other industry professionals, were also unsure how useful specific screenwriting training could be in equipping an individual for the profession, with a number believing they were no use at all. This reflects a general perception in the industry which shows that the new screenwriting courses are not well understood and not particularly well received yet. Even within higher education, screenwriting is only beginning to be seen as a vocational subject rather than a recreational subject. However, many screenwriting courses are still establishing themselves, and their screenwriting students are only just graduating, so their true impact on the careers of screenwriters needs to be looked at over time.

4.4 Summary

There is little research on the impact of education on screenwriting careers, but that which does exists suggests that women starting screenwriting training may lack female role models among either their peers or teachers.

Analysis of UK data show that women are studying what may be considered directly relevant subjects at both HE and FE level, and in many cases they form the majority of students. There may however be an issue in screenwriting at first degree level, including on accredited courses, where women represent only 40 per cent of the student population. However, it must be noted that this is not an insignificant minority. As such the evidence we present suggests that while there is a gender imbalance in the

education pipeline, this does not, itself, fully explain the gender imbalance in the screenwriting sector, or in the films that get made.

However, the data we present is only indicative for a number of reasons. First, there is a need to capture better and more detailed information on the gender split of those participating in dedicated screenwriting courses at all levels, as these relatively new courses become more established. Second, as the biographies of screenwriters show, screenwriting courses are not currently the only route into the profession. Writers established in the profession are likely to have entered through a number of routes. As such this data analysis is only beginning to identify whether fewer women enter the profession via this route, but given that the industry, through Skillset, has endorsed, and therefore have an investment in these accredited courses, they represent a good a place to start. Future research could be conducted to identify the major routes through which men and women get into screenwriting and whether there are any differences in these entry points. Third, courses specific to screenwriting are relatively new. They may provide a better indication of how the balance will be within the sector in the future, rather than a current reflection. They are also only just beginning to attract the attention of HE and the industry, so it will be useful to monitor their impact on the careers of screenwriters over the next few years.

The following chapter goes on to describe the experience of women who do set out on a screenwriting career.

4.4.1 Recommendations

- We recommend that Skillset captures and disseminates data on screenwriting training provision to explore participation of key groups, including women.
- Skillset should explore the possibility of using the proposed tracking study outlined in the 'The Bigger Picture' to examine the motivations to study (including career intentions), experiences while studying (including perceptions of role models) and subsequent activities of training participants to see if male and female motivations and experiences differ.
- Higher education institutions and others should consider the relatively low participation of women in screenwriting on the accredited HE and non-HE courses. Similarly they should consider collecting data on the gender breakdown of the numbers applying for, enrolling on and also completing their screenwriting and other relevant courses. It would also be insightful to examine the gender breakdown among tutors on these courses. All this would need to be undertaken sensitively and with the support of providers.
- Since screenwriting courses are not the only entry points to the occupation, more research should be carried out with screenwriters currently working in the industry to identify the major entry points, both in education and outside, such as

working for other media or working in other roles in the industry, in order to see whether these differ for males and females.

■ It would also be valuable to examine industry opinion of the new emerging screenwriting courses to better understand the likely influence these will have on the credibility and currency of screenwriters working in the industry ie will writers and those who hire writers look to these qualifications to signal 'quality'?

5 Securing Work

The previous chapter and the analysis of study patterns shows that there is little to suggest that education itself is a barrier for women trying to get into screenwriting. While much more research is needed, the evidence so far presented suggests that this part of the process, the education pipeline, cannot fully explain the current situation facing women screenwriters. In this chapter and the following we begin to look at the experience of women working or trying to start out in the profession.

This chapter looks at whether women are as likely to secure work as their male counterparts. Before describing some of the barriers that women may face at this stage in their careers, it is important to describe the process by which a screenwriter gains work because is not straightforward and can take place through a variety of routes. A writer may be approached by a producer, usually via their agent, to work on a commission, or the writer may send a speculative script to a producer in the hope of it raising their interest. When a producer approaches a screenwriter he or she is usually already familiar with their work, either through having read a script or having worked with them before. Similarly most producers will not read speculative scripts from someone they do not already know. The UK Film Council's Development Fund is open to anyone to apply but very few other 'open' avenues exist for newcomers. It can also be very hard to obtain an agent, and most agents will only take someone on after a recommendation from someone in the industry.

Occasionally, screenwriters will be invited to pitch their ideas and in essence compete for a commission. However, this is not a formal process that is open to all. An example of this process is a producer, who has bought the rights to a book, inviting a few known writers to discuss their ideas on a script. Sometimes writers are required to informally submit a short written outline of a submission before gaining the commission, sometimes not. The process of securing work for screenwriters is very fluid, informal and unstructured, and therefore hard to analyse. It is often based on familiarity between writers and decision makers, which may come about through previous work and networking, and of course there is no obligation to give feedback to writers who are not successful.

The findings from our scoping study suggest that direct discrimination is perceived to be rare in the industry. Our screenwriters did not believe they had been disadvantaged simply because they were women. However, it is important to remember that the process of securing work is not very transparent, and the women admitted that they could not be sure of the absence of direct discrimination given that decisions are made behind closed doors. Nonetheless, both the literature and our interviews suggest that the fluid nature of the process of securing work means that women screenwriters may face indirect discrimination. This is partly because of the infrastructure of the industry and widely-held perceptions about female sensibility and what audiences want to see at the movies. These perceptions exert a strong influence and are explored in some detail in this chapter.

5.1 Infrastructure

We begin the chapter with an examination of the literature and interviewee opinion on the influence of infrastructure in the process of securing work and how this may disadvantage women.

5.1.1 Literature review

The literature looking specifically at the experience of women in the screenwriting role is scarce. Much of the research to date about women screenwriters falls in to one of two camps, either considering the history of women in screenwriting or identifying an imbalance through analysis of workforce data (as described in Chapter 2). Very little research has gone further to look at why these inequalities exist and whether female screenwriters face barriers in entering or succeeding in their careers, either in the UK or elsewhere. Bielby and Bielby are considered to be the seminal writers in this area and in 2002 noted two features of the film industry in the USA that could make things difficult for women screenwriters:

- a lack of formal equal opportunities accountability
- the influence of interpersonal ties: 'who you know'.

In their opinion, the lack of equal opportunities procedures may enable subjective stereotypes to affect personnel decisions. Bielby and Bielby go on to emphasise that:

'Subjectivity, immunity from review, stereotypes and cliques are part of the context in which Hollywood executives make decisions about hiring writers for film and television, so frequent charges of discrimination are not surprising.'

They saw that where job selection for 'best fit' is based on who already does the job, selection on the grounds of race, gender and age will continue through new recruitment and commissioning.

Bielby and Bielby also posit the importance of personal connections in the experience of women screenwriters. They argue that since there are higher numbers of men controlling the system, this by default gives preference to males writers. This can in turn contribute to a pattern of 'cumulative disadvantage' where women continue to fall behind both in terms of earnings and opportunities. While there is little evidence to support this proposal, it has been found that motion pictures with female directors were more likely to hire women than films with male directors. (Lauzen, 2005).

Bielby and Bielby (1992) also described how in both the film and the television sectors, the male-dominated and social network-driven nature of the industry is likely to support a 'success breeds success' culture. In the 'clubby' male-dominated world of executives, male writers are insiders. As a result, they are better known and are often perceived as lesser risks than equally successful female writers. New research conducted in the UK has found that men and women network in a very different way in the UK film and television sectors.

Although not based specifically on screenwriters, Blair (cited in 'The Edge' March 2003) found that whereas women networkers in the film industry stress the importance of friendship in networking, male networking behaviour is associated with the formation of weaker ties and more distant and instrumental relationships. The women she studied reported barriers to developing these networks which relate to the fact that women still network predominantly with women. As there are still comparatively few women in senior positions in the industry, it is hard for women to gain the attention of senior industry figures and decision makers.

Some authors therefore have suggested that certain features of the film industry, including the lack of attention to equal opportunities, the dependency on interpersonal ties and the predominance of men, may support the continued gender segregation of women and men. Furthermore, Bielby and Bielby (1992) note that in both the television and motion picture industry, the features of their distinct labour market are highly resistant to change, and therefore:

'dismantling gender barriers is not as simple as identifying and changing official organisational structures and practices'

As yet no research has been conducted to test these hypotheses with respect to screenwriters, so they are based on speculation rather than fact. Nonetheless, in this scoping study we found that similar issues emerged from the interviews with screenwriters and other key industry professionals.

5.1.2 Interviewee opinion

The process of securing work for screenwriters clearly cannot be regarded as the same as the process of applying for a job.

'Nobody knows what the magic formula is, so if somebody makes a decision behind closed doors not to do it, you can't react to that because what is it based on? Nothing. They don't know what the script is going to be like, they don't know what the film would be like. How can they know? They're just trying to save their job. You can't take it personally. You just have to roll with the punches, really.'

(screenwriter)

When it is about making creative decisions it is impossible to define what would be a fair process ... It is such a fluid process, I don't know how you could formalise it.'

(screenwriter)

None of the female screenwriters we spoke to believed that they had been discriminated against on the basis of their gender, and overall they thought that the process of acquiring work is a fair one. Indeed, none of the interviewees (screenwriters or stakeholders) thought it likely that direct discrimination could explain why there are so few credited female screenwriters, although the screenwriters added that they could not be sure because the decision-making process goes on behind closed doors. However, the discussions suggested a number of ways in which women were more likely to be disadvantaged when attempting to secure work.

Networks and self-promotion

Many interviewees described how networks with people in roles beyond screenwriting are very important in getting on in the industry. Some of the writers described how knowing, and being recommended by certain people had helped them get in 'the backdoor':

'Half the time it's because this one knows this one who knows this one. It's got nothing to do with whether the script's good or not.'

(screenwriter)

One screenwriter had previously worked as an editor which she felt helped her progress in her profession:

'I suppose nobody's really been surprised, and gone "Who are you?" because they already knew me.'

(screenwriter)

However, networking was seen by interviewees as an activity that does not really go hand in hand with screenwriting, given the isolated nature of the profession. The interviewees thought that screenwriters can find it difficult to access and capitalise on these networks. Many of the women screenwriters we spoke to described how they detested the sales part of the job, both promoting their own skills and experience and promoting their ideas and writing style.

'I don't like going out there and singing my own praises. It feels awkward.'

(screenwriter)

In line with the literature reviewed, they thought that there are differences between men and women in their experiences of networking. Some believed that men are more comfortable with making connections and self promotion because they have more self-confidence and self-belief when it comes to their work. On the whole some thought that women may be less tenacious, and more likely to give up trying to get into the industry before men.

There is the old generalisation and truism that women are less confident about putting themselves out there.'

(screenwriter)

'I think pushing yourself, putting yourself out there and putting up a confident front, is something that men find easier than women. Other female screenwriters I know, they'll have worked really hard on a script, but then when it comes to selling it, getting it out there, they either won't do it at all or they'll give up completely after the first few rejections. Maybe men are a bit more tenacious and don't give up quite so easily.'

(screenwriter)

'I think women struggle to keep confidence in themselves more than men. And learning how to keep confidence when you are continuously knocked down. I think men are more thick-skinned in that way ... I think women are more crushed by failure.'

(screenwriter)

This small number of interviews suggests that women may have less confidence in their work, which makes it harder for them to get out there and sell it and to keep going when it is rejected. However, dealing with criticism of one's work is a fundamental feature of the screenwriting role, and is even highlighted in the required skills noted by Skillset. For a screenwriter to be successful she will require skills that go beyond the ability to write a good screenplay. As such it is possible that some screenwriters lack awareness of how the industry and relationships with production companies work. This may be particularly true for those who work in other media, where the process of getting known and creative control can be different. These issues are dealt with further in the following chapter where we move on to look at how screenwriters find the process of writing a screenplay, and compare the process of writing for film with other media.

Male decision-makers

Some of the interviewees suspected that the power imbalance in the industry as a whole could affect hiring/commissioning decisions. At present the power is seen as residing almost entirely with men because those in the decision-making roles of directors and producers are still predominantly male.

When you get to the top, the higher levels, who owns the company, who are the producers, who are the main assistants, it's pretty much men across the board ... The whole power balance is really skewed.'

(screenwriter)

'There is no prejudice but this is a business that has an infrastructure created by men.' (key industry professional)

As demonstrated by the literature review, some believed that this leads to indirect discrimination because men are more likely to hire other men. Whereas, women are more likely to hire women. It is important to note that these findings come from a small sample and that the proposition is based on speculation rather than fact. We do not know whether men are more likely to hire men.

However, a few of the interviewees, both screenwriters and key industry professionals, felt that as more women produce and direct this will create an environment that will encourage women to write (in essence creating a snowball effect).

Whether having more (female) producers and directors will make a difference, I'm sure it must make a difference, it would have to. I'd be very surprised if it didn't.'

(screenwriter)

Some other key industry professionals felt the situation was already changing, and that film is now an environment where women are working.

'Women now have someone they can talk to, to act as a mentor. It is no longer the case that you wouldn't know where to start. You can see possibilities, although it is still far from equal.'

(key industry professional)

TV is seen as leading the way for change, since women occupy some of the most senior positions in the industry. Indeed, some suspected that the higher proportion of women producers in the TV industry could account for the greater number of women writing for that media. Again, these kinds of issues need to be confirmed with hard data.

Success breeds success

Because of the significant financial risks involved in making a film, production companies do not like to take any chances. This includes hiring a new screenwriter. Echoing the literature, we heard from a number of the interviewees that in the screenwriting world 'success breeds success'.

'No-one thinks ahead of the game, they always just respond to what's happened. If something's a success they'll go after that.'

(screenwriter)

Those who were responsible for hiring writers told how the track record of a writer is one of the most influential criteria in the hiring decision, and admitted rarely working with new writers. One interviewee described how production companies tend to pick from the same small pool of writers if they can:

'Everyone is chasing the same ten writers.'

(key industry professional)

In essence what this behaviour creates is a situation where those who are established get to write more, those who are mid-range writers get to write less and those who are starting out find it harder and harder to break in (although the extent to which these established writers go on to make films which are successful is not clear). According to one of our interviewees none of these ten popular writers at present are female, so in this way women screenwriters are indirectly disadvantaged as they are not 'on the producers' radars'. One of the screenwriters believed that there is a generational effect, and that some of the favoured writers may have to retire before women can get a look in.

'The change may be happening but it is slow and takes time to trickle down.'

(screenwriter)

However, this focus on established writers cannot explain the whole picture, since first time writers clearly do get used, and yet the gender imbalance remains. In fact one key industry professional thought that the popularity of a select group of writers means that new writers have to be used, since those that are established are always too busy to take on more work. As such, the barrier may relate to the perception of what a successful screenwriter is like, as well as to the *reality*. One screenwriter suggested that the only way for the balance to change dramatically would be if there are some significant successes among a few female screenwriters, as success for an individual leads to further opportunities not only for them but also for others like them.

'I mean, if two or three women screenwriters had the two or three biggest films of the year, you could guarantee that there'd be 100 per cent increase in women writers getting commissioned ... All the industry does basically is think "right, what's been a success" Copy that as quickly as you can, copy it again, copy it again, until it stops being successful then they'll find something else to copy. It's very formulaic. So the more successes there are with distinctive (female) writers, the more they'll start to look for that ... Gender can come into it, in a very simplistic way, because they think what we need is another so and so, and if that so and so is a woman they will look for another woman.'

(screenwriter)

Recent years have seen a number of successful films by female screenwriters, such as 'Calendar Girls', 'Girl with a Pearl Earring', and 'Bend It like Beckham', and yet the number of films with female writers attached has not changed dramatically.

5.2 Female sensibility and audience preferences

This section centres around the influence of perceptions of female sensibility and audience preferences on the experience of female screenwriters.

5.2.1 Literature review

Female sensibility

Seger (2003) talks about how women want to tell different stories in film than men, but how they struggle to do so. From her interviews with 200 women working in film across the world, she heard how women want to tell stories about character, emotions, behaviour and relationships, as opposed to men who tell different stories of action and conflict and heroism. The women she spoke to said that women do not need to and should not tell stories the same way as men. However, she identified that women trying to bring women's perspectives into film are faced with the barrier that women's stories are seen as less commercial, that films with male protagonists are still more highly valued and that there are few examples from the history of film to help them get started.

Bielby and Bielby (2002) meanwhile described how women are disadvantaged in successful screenwriting by the institutional typecasting of their work – that they are only seen as able to write 'female appearing films'. No academic research or quantitative data exist on the prevalence of female typecasting, but as Bielby and Bielby argued in 1996, it is highly likely to lead to cumulative disadvantage of women trying to embark on careers in this field. Women tend to arrive in the screenwriting world by producing cultural or currently fashionable pieces, but in terms of the mainstream market are quickly streamlined into a narrow range of genres. This is perhaps a challenge that male screenwriters face too, yet the effects may not be felt because of the overarching success rates of male screenwriters.

McCreadie (2005), in her interviews with female screenwriters from across the globe, examined how this 'female sensibility' has been defined and questioned whether, in fact, it exists at all. Most of her women writers shied away from the notion of sex differences in relation to writing styles or content, with only a few believing that women's writing is more 'interior', more about personal issues. The only consensus they did reach, with the exception of a few, was that violence in movies did not interest them much and that they did not care much for the big blockbuster action movie.

The limited data we have indicates that the pattern of sex differences in writing content is complex. Films with women writers attached tend to be more clustered around certain genre (particularly 'drama') than those with male writers attached. However, the data also show that women do write a range of film types, including genres such as thrillers.

Despite the reference to 'women's stories' in the literature described above, it is not entirely clear what this means. What defines a 'woman's story' or a 'female appearing film'? Are these the sort of stories that women writers want to tell, or are they the sort of stories that women want to see? Similarly, it is not clear what a 'male story' would be. While there is a category of male-written, action-oriented films containing only

superficial characterisation, there are many male-written films that are characterbased (Million Dollar Baby for example, which features a strong female character). The use of these gender-laden terms can therefore be confusing but nonetheless they appear to be used regularly, for example with sex labels being applied to different categories of film.

Audience preferences

Even if there is such a thing as a female sensibility, is this something that audiences themselves are aware of? No research was identified during the literature review that looked at audience awareness of the writer's gender.

The data presented in Chapter 3 show that some films have male-dominated audiences while others have female-dominated audiences, indicating that women and men may have different preferences for certain films. However, again it is important to stress that this is not black and white. Women do indeed go to see action and horror films as well as rom-coms.

Social Identity Theory (Hogg 1990) purports that:

'People seek out messages which support and reinforce their social identity.' (Fischoff et al. 1998)

In line with this, one would expect males and females to choose different types of films dependent on their themes and content, and congruency with their sense of self. Some of the recent studies looking at differences in gender reactions to films have tended to focus on preferences for certain characters or features of a film, rather than film genre. For example, Fischoff et al. (2002) found that in horror films, both males and females tended to be attracted to the same monsters, and for similar reasons. In contrast, a large international research project on the Lord of the Rings (Barker, 2005) has found that men and women identify with different characters in the film.

The bulk of the academic research around audience preferences for certain film genre dates back to the 1980s. A number of studies during this period showed a consistent difference in the response of men and women to entertainment. Richards and Sheridan (1987, cited in Oliver et al., 1998), for example, used a sample of 550 male and female movie goers to examine the appeal of different movie-genres. They found that men gave highest priority to films focusing on action, crime and sex while women gave highest priority to films centred on romance, history and love stories. The study also highlighted why this preference was made, which was often simply because they thought it made more sense for them to prefer 'masculine' or 'feminine' stories. Other studies have also found differences in responses to film genres, with men being less likely to enjoy sad films (Oliver, 1993, cited in Oliver et al., 1998) and women being less likely to enjoy frightening films (Cantor and Reilly, 1982; Sparks, 1986; Tamborini and Stiff, 1987, cited in Oliver et al., 1998).

A more recent study, however, has shown that the differences in genre preferences are less clear cut. Fischoff (1998) found that male and female film preferences followed distinct patterns, and that differences between the genders were most visible at certain age ranges. Gender differences in favourite film choices were most noticeable in the under 26-years group. Men were significantly less likely to cite a romance than their female counterparts. Of particular interest to men was in what may be considered a 'male' genre (see above, eg action adventure) women were less polarised in their views and equally as likely as men to cite such a film as their favourite. From this, it is proposed by Fischoff that while women tend to prefer certain genres, they are not as limited to gender-specific films as men appear to be in their choices.

Papadopoulos (2001) believes that audience research is limited in its usefulness because 'the tastes of modern audiences are not predictable'. He states that 'sure-fire' hits almost always miss their target and cites examples of recent surprise successes from foreign films including Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and Life is Beautiful. From this he warns that second guessing the audience is risky especially when the audience itself does not know what it wants. At any rate audience preferences may change.

The literature described above shows that the thinking around female sensibility linked to audience preferences is muddled. There is talk of 'women's films' but it is not clear whether it refers to women's preferences to write certain films, or to women's preferences to watch certain films. Furthermore, there is little evidence in either case to show that there is a great gender divide in these areas. The data we presented earlier show that women can and do write a range of genres, which, on the whole, are not very different to those written by men – certainly there is more similarity than there is difference. Also, the research on audience preferences is not clear cut, with some studies showing little difference between the sexes in the types of films they prefer. Where difference is reported, it is sometimes attributed to fitting in with societal expectations rather than genuine preference. As such talking about 'women's stories' per se is not particularly useful to this debate.

However, given that these issues around so-called 'women's stories' are purported to present a major barrier for women screenwriters in the literature, it was important to discuss these themes of female sensibility and audience preferences with our interviewees. Do screenwriters and other industry professionals believe in female sensibility? Do they think there is a preference for certain genres amongst certain audiences? Do these influence the types of films women screenwriters write, and is this through choice or expectation?

5.2.2 Interviewee opinion

Female sensibility

When interviewees were asked whether they truly believed in a female sensibility most did not like to ascribe to any difference between male and female responsiveness or writing styles, and thought that on the whole men and women are equally qualified to write about any subject matter. However, one of the stakeholder interviewees described that she receives a number of specs from females and how these tend to be more character-led, relationship-based pieces. Further discussions with the screenwriters and other key industry professionals also revealed that a number of the interviewees did perceive that male and female writers differ in the stories they tell and the way they tell them, as the following quotations demonstrate:

Your different perspectives to story, male and female perspectives, they are different, you are coming from a different angle. Women have a particular point of view.'

(screenwriter)

'A lot of female writers and directors will choose certain subject matters over others. You're not going to see a lot of sci-fi's or thrillers written by women. You're going to see more comedies and dramas with the softer touch. You get certain nuances with female writers.' (screenwriter)

It would appear then that perceptions about differences between male and female writers do exist here. The last of these quotations is very interesting given that there are high profile examples of women who have excelled in writing thrillers for other media, eg Lynda La Plante for TV and Patricia Highsmith for literature. In actual fact more than one of the female screenwriters we spoke to had written a so-called 'male' genre film. Indeed one female writer was particularly keen to have her horror film made, to go against the norm.

'I would love that film to get made, because I don't think a woman writer has ever written a thriller in this country that's got made. You know, we always tend to get pigeon-holed with the "rom-coms" or the light comedies."

(screenwriter)

The interviewees were also asked whether they believe these perceptions around female sensibility play a role in the experience of female screenwriters. In some instances, 'female sensibility' was perceived to work in women's favour. One male screenwriter described how he actively seeks out a female sensibility in his work:

'This may be completely wrong but I think women think about things a bit more than men. I think men go for the instant hit all the time. They want that kind of computer-game instant gratification. Whereas if you give a woman a computer game, she'd get very bored very quickly. She'd want a bit more than that. She'd want another layer to it. Consequently, a female sensibility is much more interesting for me as a writer because you can delve a bit deeper. You don't just have to write the car crash.'

(screenwriter)

One stakeholder described that a production company had deliberately sought a female writer after they found that the male writer on a project was not 'getting it right'. The film project was an adaptation of a novel by a woman and it was felt that the female characters should have the strongest voices. The piece was also highly emotional, and focused on a woman recovering from the grief over the death of a child so the company thought the film would benefit from having a female writer. Similarly, a female screenwriter described how she had been deliberately sought for a film because they wanted the female voice to be strong and thought a woman would be better at this. However, she recognised that the opposite could happen, that there might be times when being a woman sets her at a disadvantage.

'So presumably there are books out there that are all about a man that don't get to me because they think no woman would understand this.'

(screenwriter)

Audience preferences

Despite beliefs that there may be slight differences, the interviewees certainly believed that audiences would not be able to tell the gender of a writer from the feel or content of the film. This is partly because in their view the difference is so slight, but also because the collaborative nature of film-making and the influence of a wide range of people on the sensibility of the film means that there is no single 'voice':

'The whole idea that there will be a single voice and you'll be able to tell, and that the director has such an impact on a film that you'll be able to tell even whether they're a man or a woman isn't true because they're such collaborative efforts. And the editor is hugely important ... and I think that's a very male interpretation of the whole thing, the whole idea of the auteur, the great kind of father figure of the art work, it's just not true.'

(screenwriter)

However, in line with Seger's argument, there was lots of speculation from both screenwriters and the other key industry professionals that the perception of 'female sensibility' could obstruct women screenwriters because it means that they are not seen as able or willing to write films that audiences want to see.

'There are so many stories about cops and robbers and heroes and war, and they do form the majority of films. They are male subjects and maybe people feel that men can write them better.'

(screenwriter)

"Well, 16-24 year old males are the main audience, so how are we going to get them? Well, we've got to have a lead that's good-looking and likeable ... ". It's so boring! But those are the parameters and if you don't like it, you should do it, because that's the business.'

(screenwriter)

It is important to stress that very few decision makers were interviewed in this scoping study, so it is impossible to say whether those hiring screenwriters really do hold these views. It can also be very difficult to get at people's prejudices and beliefs in qualitative research, without using sophisticated research techniques. However, the most interesting aspect of these opinions is that they are at odds with the data we hold on both the make up of the audience in the UK and the types of UK films that sell in the cinemas. A number of the interviewees felt that there is a clear bias towards certain types of films in the UK as indicated by market research. They believed that the popular genres in the UK include action and horror and more latterly 'gangster' films; and that the industry is interested in making 'male' films to suit the major audience demographic of teenage boys.

'My understanding is that LA caters for teenage boys, and we take our cues from that. So that means films with dudes being cool with guns and violence. And dramas with women are perhaps seen as being less commercially viable.'

(screenwriter)

'So those genres that appeal to that vast chunk of the market are for young men and therefore tend to be written by men as well. Action writers tend to be men, war film writers tend to be men. Comedy tends to be men.'

(screenwriter)

We know from the data presented that this is not the reality here in the UK, at least with respect to UK cinema audiences. We do not have data on the success or preferences of films in relation to DVD or TV screenings, so more research could be conducted to look into these. However, our box office data show that while action films do well, the most successful genres are comedy and animation, and overall the audience of the top films in the UK has a slight female majority. Also, this notion that it is teenagers who make up the biggest part of the audience is unfounded. Data from the Cinema Advertising Association (Table 5.1 below) shows that in 2005, males aged 15-24 made up just 12 per cent of the UK cinema audiences. Actually males who were 35 plus made up a bigger share, at 15 per cent, while the biggest single group was women aged 35 plus, who made up 18 per cent of the UK audiences.

Table 5.1: Proportion of cinema audiences in 2005 by age and gender (per cent)

Age	Male %	Female %
4 to 14	11	12
15 to 24	12	11
25 to 34	12	9
35 plus	15	18
All ages	50	50

Source: CAA, 2006

Nonetheless, these perceptions about the audience, which our data would suggest are myths, were remarkably consistent and came up a number of times in the interviews. Some interviewees believed that the marketing information they had heard may relate to the US market and therefore not be relevant here.

'Could this be one of the reasons why the British Film Industry struggles so much, because it is attempting to fit into genres the same as America. We ape the American industry in this country, and we're not Americans. We're not like that. I think we've got more European sensibilities.'

(screenwriter)

Still on the whole this perception was very strong and many seemed to accept the myths as 'truths'. One interviewee, when informed that the cinema audience data in the UK show otherwise, could not believe that it was right. He genuinely believed that the predominance of the teenage boys shown by market research must be correct, since distribution companies 'pay lots of money for this sort of research'. However, he accepted that the status quo could be challenged.

'There's a sense that by giving them what you say they want you're actually defining what it is they want in the first place. And that could be challenged and that could be broken down ... The industry could challenge that perception of the audience and find new audiences ... '

(screenwriter)

Similarly he perceived that the male dominance in the film industry could mean that women's stories just are not seen as important, rather than there genuinely being a lack of a market for them.

'Perhaps because there is still such a heavy male presence in the upper echelons of the producing and directing world, the other half of humanity's experience just isn't yet perceived as important or something.'

(screenwriter)

Commerciality

In relation to this issue of audience preferences, a number of our interviewees believed that women are likely to be disadvantaged because the types of films they write are seen as less commercially-viable.

A number of the interviewees believed that if a treatment or script deals specifically with female characters or is aimed at a female audience, it can be harder to get it accepted and achieve financial backing, as these stories are seen as less commerciallyviable. A number of the women told how they would like to write films about strong women but do not believe they would get made.

'One of the problems would be that if women wanted to write more female-based stories about women's issues then there would be less of a market for them, there would be less interest in those sorts of stories.'

(screenwriter)

Another perceived problem is that female-led stories are more rare in the world of film, an industry that because of the huge investments involved, makes heavy use of reference points or established markets. As such, female-centred films are seen as more risky because they are less common.

'There are so few templates for female-oriented films, other than romantic comedies.'

(screenwriter)

'If you come up with a female-centred story, it better be bloody good, because it's not going to get such an easy reception, not because the people as individuals are going to be against it, but because it's less well-trodden ground, the archetypes aren't there.'

(screenwriter)

Quite apart from the issue of female sensibility, there was the suggestion among some of the interviewees that women screenwriters may actually disadvantage themselves because they do not focus enough on the commerciality of a film.

Writers leave their commercial interest at the door and become the auteur when they write for a film. Even though they may understand the industry, they don't seem to think about this when they write a screenplay. Instead they write what they want to write, rather than what will get a director's interest or get financed. It is really important to understand the industry, to identify a market and to write for this market. Writers should not write so many dramas or personal stories – they should try more/different genres. I would still love to see a woman write and a woman direct a Bond film.'13

(key industry professional)

In the past women have pigeon-holed themselves, been too narrow in what they want to write about. Having a tendency towards drama for example, writing about their own experiences.'

(key industry professional)

One industry stakeholder regularly receives scripts from writers and perceived that men were more prepared to have a crack at writing commercial films. Certainly most of the women we spoke to were all adamant about writing what they want to write, rather than thinking strictly in terms of what will sell.

'I don't write to sell the way some people do. I just can't write that way. I just go where the road takes me in terms of what I like to do.'

(screenwriter)

However, the following quotation from a stakeholder over the sort of films that women need to be writing or prepared to write is again at odds with our data on the top-performing genres at the UK box office, further emphasising that there is some misunderstanding over the types of films that really sell:

¹³ A woman has had writing credits for a Bond movie: Johanna Harwood was involved in the first two Bond films - 'Dr No' and 'From Russia with Love'. However, there have been no credited female screenwriters on Bond films since 1963.

'Some genres tend to be masculine – thriller, horror etc and there are few women writing this or showing an interest or understanding of it. They need to be able to talk about it, pitch ideas around it, and be working with it.'

(key industry professional)

As our data analysis shows, comedy films are the most successful at the UK box office, not horror or thriller, and a number of women write in this genre. Nonetheless, this issue of commerciality is worth exploring further, particularly since these findings are based on a small sample of screenwriters, most of whom were writing for the independent sector.

5.3 Summary

The literature and interviews both suggest that women screenwriters may be indirectly disadvantaged in relation to male screenwriters in their ability to secure work. Barriers can stem from the process of getting known in the industry; some of the screenwriters we interviewed believed that women feel less inclined to capitalise on networks and less comfortable or confident about promoting/selling their work. This may relate to the higher proportion of men already present in these networks. Certainly there was some belief that the greater representation of men in the positions of power in the industry means that men are more likely to get selected for a job, although this needs to be backed up with more research. A genuine barrier appears to be the reliance on track record, and the reluctance of production companies to take a risk on a new writer, which was mentioned by those working for production companies as well as screenwriters, albeit a small number. Companies tend to go for what they know has been successful in the past and the 'top writers' (that to date have predominantly been male).

The interviews identified a number of unfounded myths that abound in the industry about the types of films that women write, the gender distribution of the audience and the types of films that do well. There is the belief that audiences are dominated by teenage boys, and that the films that do best are those that appeal to this group, ie action or horror films. There is also the perception that women write certain types of films that do not fit in with this dominant market. However, all of the data we have presented in the earlier chapter are at odds with these perceptions because they show that the films that women write do appeal to audiences in the UK, over half of which are female. The data also show that the situation is not black and white - audiences are not exclusively male or female and women do not exclusively write certain genres.

Nonetheless the myths described in this scoping study may be very powerful. The interviewees believed that one of the barriers that women may face is that decision makers do not think their films will sell. Of course, this research has not examined the perceptions or hiring decisions of those producing or financing films, so this would need to be looked at in further research. However, if these opinions are as pervasive across the industry as these interviews would suggest then it is quite likely that they play a role. Any major initiatives should start by challenging these myths.

Discussion of 'women's films' was not limited to our interviews, this also came up a number of times in the literature. Often the concept appears muddled, hinting at both women's preferences to write and women's preferences to watch. These are quite possibly separate issues, and need to be thought about independently in order for their role in the experience of women screenwriters to be more clearly understood.

Another theme to emerge from the interviews is that women do not focus enough on the commerciality of their films. This is certainly worth testing further with a larger group of women screenwriters.

5.3.1 Recommendations:

- Broaden the research to cover women writing more commercial films as well as those working in the independent sector.
- Explore influences on the decision-making processes of producers and development executives, particularly the role of genre.
- Gather industry stakeholder feedback to develop a writers' top ten for a range of genres; continue to monitor these lists to examine the representation of women and to track changes ie writers changing genre, or emergence of new writers.
- Explore any differences in the motivations to write among men and women (eg to earn a living, to make a difference, to tell a personal story), and attitudes towards writing particular genres.
- Explore understanding of commerciality, and the influence this has on the subject matter of screenplays.
- Explore the ease of writing for different genres in a range of media including, film, TV, theatre and novels – and look at whether there is a genre/gender split in the writers and audiences of these other media.
- Conduct more research on audience preferences, including looking at audiences of DVDs and TV film screenings, to identify whether audiences can tell the gender of the writer, and to explore why people chose to watch certain genres.
- Monitor the genre of films that women are writing to see if any changes occur, particularly at the individual-writer level to see if individuals can/do move genre.
- Explore ways to examine the work of female screenwriters that is not taken up by producers, are women writing other genres such as horror, action and sci-fi but not securing work on these types of projects?

There is also an implication for addressing some of these issues, to consider the value of targeted initiatives and training for women screenwriters in developing networks and the confidence to market their work. This is explored more fully in the final chapter.

6 Nature of the Profession

Interviewees indicated that difficulties do not end when a screenwriter is commissioned or attached to a project, indeed the process of writing a screenplay for a production company can be very challenging, both professionally and personally. This chapter looks at how the process of working as a screenwriter may dissuade women from either starting in the profession or cause them to leave.

6.1.1 Literature review

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the film industry in the UK is acknowledged to be a difficult place to work, partly because of the difficulties of accessing finance and the dominance of micro businesses. Skillset's Feature Film Production Workforce Survey 2005 provides a picture of the working environment for those working in production and script development as *focused and intense*, with individuals:

- tending to work on a relatively small number of feature film projects (51 per cent of respondents had worked on only one or two film projects in past two years)
- input on each project tending to last for a substantial number of weeks (at least 31 weeks for about a third of respondents)
- working at least 11 hours a day on average (68 per cent)
- working at various stages of filmmaking, for at least a quarter the work carries on from development through to post production (but main involvement is preproduction and production)
- also working on other audio-visual productions, most commonly TV programmes (41 per cent) and film shorts (26 per cent)
- tending to experience some unemployment, the majority (61 per cent) had been unemployed at some point in the past year
- key method of recruitment is to be approached by a producer or director (40 per cent).

While the challenges are faced by both males and females, it is possible that many of these difficulties or barriers have a different impact on men than on women.

Bielby and Bielby (2002) noted that there are several factors that sociologists have identified as creating and sustaining segregation and gender bias in the workplace. These are not specific to one industry, but perhaps provide some insight into the types of barriers faced by women screenwriters. One factor the authors describe is related to job design and task allocation. While they believe that typecasting is a common problem for women and that there are features of the industry that make it difficult for women to secure work (as discussed in the previous chapter) they say that the nature of the work within the motion picture industry, where a writer may not be bound to a single employer or specific working hours, would seem amenable to modern lives of women.

By contrast, our interviewees described how the nature of the profession can present a barrier to women, particularly women with children.

6.2 Interviewee opinion

Before describing the issues affecting women, it is important to highlight how the profession was seen as a difficult one for all concerned, both male and female.

'It is not just women who are having a hard time – everyone is ... If anyone is sensible, they wouldn't go in to scriptwriting.'

(key industry professional)

'Never mind why more women don't do it, I don't know why anybody does it.'

(screenwriter)

6.2.1 Small and conservative industry

The interviews revealed the industry is regarded as difficult mainly because of two of its key features – that it is small and risk averse.

Small industry

Interviewees felt that a major problem, which affects everyone trying to work in film (including screenwriters), is the fact that the industry in the UK is very small. The UK Film Council's Statistical Yearbook 2004/05 shows that the top 20 UK films grossed £176.3 million at the UK box office in 2004. While this is up 45 per cent on the previous year, it only represents 20 per cent of the total, indicating that the UK is still dominated by the Hollywood product. There simply are not many films being made in this country, and yet there are lots of people wanting to work in the industry so the demand for work far outweighs the supply.

'There are not enough films being made here. The reality of film financing in the UK means we can only support a few films.'

(screenwriter)

'The stats are against you. The chances are that unless you are very lucky or very talented you won't earn a living.'

(key industry professional)

Many of the screenwriters we spoke to described finding it incredibly difficult to get enough work to earn a decent living.

'In one way it's very, very hard, because there is so little being made and so little money. Lots of people are chasing the same pot of money, and you're reliant on so many things outside your control and your talent. So for me, they're the barriers. No-one's said, "You're too old, too young, too male, too stupid, too London", or whatever.'

(screenwriter)

They described how very few people are able to support themselves through screenwriting jobs alone and therefore tend to write for other media including theatre and television. In this way they almost felt that our research question was a bit misplaced, as they considered there was no such thing as a pure 'screenwriter' in the UK, let alone a female one.

Risk-averse industry

As well as small, the UK film industry was described as very cautious and risk averse. This will have an impact on the experience of screenwriters hired by such companies as it affects all the different stages of the filmmaking process: deciding what film to make, deciding who to get to write it (both discussed earlier), and developing the project.

Many of the interviewees described experiencing 'development hell', often reworking a script for long periods of time, without any guarantee that the script will ever get made into a film. Some of those working in production companies estimated that of every ten scripts they develop, ie that have a screenwriter attached, only two will ever get made. Many of our sample of screenwriters had films that had been in 'development hell' for a number of years. Some writers had succeeded in so far as they had gained a lot of further work but still had not had a single one of their films made.

This has obvious consequences financially, as credited screenwriters receive a principal artist fee on top of their commission fee if a film is made. It can also be disheartening for a writer. A number described how you need to be prepared to 'put up with this as it is part and parcel' of the business:

'You must really love the process, because the results are so uncertain.'

'Sitting in a room writing a script has to be enough because everything is so precarious and potentially disappointing.'

(screenwriter)

'To do it, you've got to be in love with the process, not the product. It's not just about getting stuff made all the time. There's so little product, that unless you enjoy the process there's really no point in doing it.'

(screenwriter)

None of these barriers were perceived by the interviewees to be gender-specific. However, it is important to mention these contextual factors as the discussions with interviewees highlighted a number of ways in which these features of the work of a screenwriter may disadvantage women more than men. It is an uncertain, unstable and, for some, financially unrewarding job for both males and females; but the key issue is whether it is more challenging for women than it is for men, and whether women respond differently to these difficulties.

Some issues around the nature of the profession have perhaps a more obvious impact on women: the complex working relationships; the lack of job security particularly for those with a family; and the erratic pattern of working, as well as dealing with criticism. These are dealt with in this chapter. The next chapter then goes on to make a comparison of writing for other media and comparisons with the experiences of screenwriters abroad.

6.2.2 Working relationships

An integral feature of the film industry is the need for representation and financial backing in order to get a film made. For screenwriters this involves agents, to provide credibility with and access to decision makers. As noted above, once a commission has been secured there often follows a long period of script development, which can involve close working with other key individuals, such as development executives and producers.

Given the importance of these relationships, screenwriters were asked about their experiences of working with development executives, agents and producers; and also the latter groups were asked about their working relationships with screenwriters. All screenwriters described how working relationships are a very important part of their work given the extent of collaboration involved and that these relationships are developed over time. They also described the importance of trust in working relationships. Trust gives writers the confidence that they will be taken seriously and also gives them the freedom to be able to make mistakes (and learn from them).

'Career progression is that I gradually know more people that I can work for over and over again.'

'I need to be able to look you in the eye and say "you really want this project do you?" You want me to spend a year working my socks off to make it happen. Because if you just want it for your development slate because you need to have this number of projects and they need to show these characteristics then let's not do it.'

(screenwriter)

You need to be able to trust them creatively, so that you can discuss things, and have bad ideas in front of people and not feel that you'll be judged and laughed at.'

(screenwriter)

You need a creative supportive environment to give you the confidence to take risks, to allow you to feel liberated, protected and challenged all at once.'

(key industry professional)

Given that the industry is currently dominated by men it was interesting to examine whether the dynamics of male-female and same-sex working relationships may explain why there are so few women working in screenwriting.

Generally interviewees did not believe there were any differences for screenwriters between working with male and female development executives, producers or agents. Any differences noticed were down to individual characteristics rather than gender. However, interviewees felt working relationships may be affected by gender for women in other, more power-based, roles such as director and producer roles. In these latter roles, a woman may find her working relationships with both women and men much more challenging.

'I think people find a female producer shouting at people less palatable than if it's a man doing it. A woman doing it is a bitch.'

(screenwriter)

Yet interviewees did describe instances where gender had been an issue in their working relationships with others. For example, one female screenwriter described going to a meeting at a production company where you could 'smell the testosterone' and how this put her off working with them.

Indeed some interviewees expressed a preference for working with either men or women. Some of the female screenwriters thought they would like to work with women more, and that the presence of other women in the process of film-making could be helpful and pleasant, somewhat nurturing.

'There's a comfort level when you're with your kind, so to speak. I'd say things go a bit deeper. The meetings I've had here with women, they go on longer, we've had more to say to each other, we talk about things other than film. I think they get me a bit more. I'd say meetings with men tend to be a bit more "bottom-liney", especially in development, a bit more simplistic. Again, it depends on the man.'

Another writer felt that the intensely collaborative work between a director and writer could make different-sex relationships difficult and the journey 'a little tricky to navigate' so as a woman, she preferred working with other women:

'There's the sex thing to get out of the way, frankly. There are just those divides that exist between the genders. It's just not as straightforward.'

(screenwriter)

She also believed that men may prefer working with women as they typically find women less threatening whereas male partners may involve 'a bit of horn-locking'. This was affirmed by one of the male screenwriters who thought that he probably preferred working with female agents because they tend to be maternal with him.

However, one female screenwriter had had a negative experience of working with women, precisely because the other woman had been too 'nurturing'. In describing her relationship with a former agent she said:

'It was too much like a woman thing. It was very personal. It was like working for your mother. It was too much, I couldn't handle it. I wanted it to be much more professional ... There's a thing that women do where you have to be loyal, you have to be caring, you have to be friends, even though it's a career thing ... Men don't do that. It's much more clear cut. It's much easier to deal with in a professional level.'

(screenwriter)

From their stories it seems that the polarisation of woman as 'nurturer' and male as 'creator' is still held out in many working relationships in the UK film industry today.

'In the decades of film flourishing, women have been cast in the archetype of desire – the actress. Or the nurturer now – the producer or the agent. The primary creative power has been traditionally with men, and I think that's still very much the case.'

(screenwriter)

This myth may indeed disadvantage women screenwriters' careers, and the careers of other women in the industry and enforce job segregation along gendered lines.

6.2.3 Lack of job security

Work in the film industry is neither constant nor guaranteed, even for those who have a track record of screenwriting credits. Screenwriters described how they constantly need to think about their next piece of work, and frequently experience long periods without work.

'There is no champagne moment. You're always worried about the next stage, about whether people will like things once they are made and give you more work.'

(screenwriter)

'After my film was made I thought OK my life's gonna change, I've made a film it's been successful. But for a year I didn't have any work. A whole year. I had to remortgage my

flat. So the year after I said yes to everything and everything happened. So the last two years it's been crazy.'

(screenwriter)

As such there is severe financial insecurity in the profession.

'To work in film, you have to be in it for the long-haul. It is not overnight. It can take years to develop a career in film, whatever role you choose.'

(key industry professional)

'I think it's just a real struggle to be a writer in film. It's hard. It's unreliable. You have to have nerves of steel and incredible patience ... You have to be constantly thinking ahead. You always have to be thinking, 'What next?', as you don't want there to be three or four months of no money. You have to live with constant financial and professional uncertainty." (screenwriter)

'You live with a certain fear, and a certain financial insecurity.'

(screenwriter)

'That may be the single strongest barrier. That you can't make a living doing this job.' (screenwriter)

'It is difficult finding the space to write something that will get you noticed, difficult finding the time to make it your main job and take yourself seriously.'

(key industry professional)

This financial insecurity affects both male and female screenwriters but may have a different impact on women, on their ability to look after a family. Indeed, many of the screenwriters speculated that the lack of job security in the screenwriting profession makes it too unreliable for someone with children.

'I'm very conscious that I'd like to have reached a certain stage in my career before having children for example, because to go back to it after having children, if I haven't had any success by that point, I don't know how I could justify going on with it because if you're not earning any money from it, you can't carry on if you've got children to support. It is hugely time-consuming and you have to give up a lot in order to pursue it. I would have thought that its one of the reasons why there are fewer female screenwriters.'

(screenwriter)

'For a woman who has to earn a living and has kids or dependents, I can imagine that working in film would be incredibly difficult because it's unreliable. TV writing is so much safer, and in some ways more rewarding because you get the accolades at the end of the day." (screenwriter)

'The difference between your personal choices and your career is a really key one. Women who have kids have time out and time out can be quite fatal. You don't have a guaranteed slot waiting for you to come back into like people in employment do. There is a constant fear of "if I drop out for a while, will I ever get back in?"

6.2.4 Erratic pattern of working

The lack of financial security is not the only difficulty for screenwriters with dependent children, the pattern of working can also be detrimental to family life. It can be difficult for screenwriters to control their workload, and with the very real threat of periods without work, they may feel they cannot be complacent about getting paid to write and have to 'grab it when it's there', which means they can become somewhat overloaded.

'It's hard to pace yourself as a writer and when things are going well and your work is well thought of it's very easy to take on too much.'

(screenwriter)

Similarly, when work is available it can demand long working hours to meet deadlines, and this can be difficult to fit-in with other commitments and responsibilities such as child care which often have to be planned in advance. Some of the women interviewed speculated about the difficulties of concentrating on both children and work when working from home, and struggling to find the time to write.

'You can't suddenly say to the producer, "From now on I just want to work two days a week."'

(screenwriter)

'It is tricky because it is not a nine to five job ... You need the headspace.' (key industry professional)

'You need to be in that world. You can't just do it for one hour. So maybe that would be hard for a woman with kids. You need to be able to have at least four hours a day.'

(screenwriter)

As a consequence, some women described how female screenwriters need to make a choice between writing or having a family:

'I want to do this more than any of that, and I know that I cannot do this if I have that. Other people might tell you differently, but me personally, I couldn't raise kids and write scripts.'

(screenwriter)

'I think if you're starting out at the time you're thinking of having kids, I think there's quite a stark choice to be made there. My first two years of writing, I lived like a hermit. When you're starting out, you have to give it everything. It's a huge mountain to climb, writing a film script, and you become monastic. And as a woman, if you've got kids, how do you become monastic?'

(screenwriter)

It is also possible that women screenwriters with families are less able to spare the time to network, which the previous section shows is important in this field, although this was not mentioned by any of the screenwriters interviewed.

One of the male screenwriters we interviewed also had children. He described how he shares the parental duties with his partner, who is also a screenwriter. However, most of the interviewees agreed that balancing family commitments and work is probably harder for women than for men.

'It can be difficult for men too, as both men and women have to provide for their families, but when you hear about a male screenwriter who has four kids and is churning out projects, you just know there is a mother there somewhere who is caring for those kids. How many female screenwriters do you hear about who've got four kids and who are churning out projects? It's probably impossible to achieve. I think this is a key difference. In that sense I envy men, in that they get to have wives who'll look after the domestic stuff and the kids.' (screenwriter)

'I don't know whether maybe men find it easier to just focus on it and abandon other areas of their lives, like spending time with friends or on relationships. I think probably women want more of a balanced life, so perhaps they don't pursue it quite as hard.'

(screenwriter)

'It's fine if your wife's at home putting the kids to bed, but what are you supposed to do if you are the wife.'

(screenwriter)

Yet not all women felt screenwriting and family life were incompatible. Two of the female screenwriters we spoke to had their own children and said that the job is very conducive to family life. It was certainly thought to be more conducive than other professions in the film industry, such as directing, which require you to be away from home for long periods of time on location.

'I think the work environment's wonderful because it's entirely at my own choosing. I get up in the morning and I go to work and then my children come home and I'm here.'

(screenwriter)

'I would have thought screenwriting actually, of all the jobs in the film industry was one that suited women really well, because of the family life situation.'

(screenwriter)

It is unclear therefore to what extent a screenwriting career is amenable to family life. Of course the fit between work and family is likely to depend on other circumstances, such as whether there is a partner, the ability of a partner to help with childcare and the financial circumstances of the family (eg whether childcare can be afforded). This sort of information was not sought in the interviews. However, it was clear that the backgrounds of our screenwriters were varied. Unlike McCreadie's interviewees, not all of the screenwriters we spoke to were from privileged backgrounds.

6.2.5 Dealing with criticism

For many the development process was seen as personally very challenging. It can be very time consuming and collaborative, and involve numerous reworking of drafts. In essence a writer needs to be able to accept criticism and rejection of their work (again, as reinforced by Skillset in its 'job profiles', described earlier). This, as indicated by our interviewees, can be a very painful experience.

'Writing is a bit like being an actor. I think you're quite fragile.'

(screenwriter)

The writers all agreed that while personality is not important when it comes to the writing itself, there are certain personal qualities that will help a writer to cope during the development phase, most importantly self-belief and tenacity. A few wondered whether women find this development process harder than men, both because they try harder to please those they work with and because they have less self-confidence. One female screenwriter described how she used to cry during her meetings with others.

'You know, there were times during the process where I'd wear sunglasses so I could cry in the meeting. They do rip your stuff apart!'

(screenwriter)

Some said that they found it an unwelcome aspect of the job.

'There's this thing that you're good at, but all the other side that you have to take on is quite difficult and I'm not sure if I'm willing to take it on all the time. Just the battle, the politics, all that kind of thing. I'm interested in the work, but you have to take on the politics.'

(screenwriter)

Similarly, a stakeholder working for a production company talked of a new female writer needing more handholding than her male writers.

More than one of the interviewees mentioned that many of the female screenwriters they know have a background in acting, which they believe helps with their selfconfidence.

A few of the interviewees wondered whether societal expectations make it harder for women to stand up for themselves in these work situations.

'I do think men have it easier, plain and simple, in lots of ways, because women tend to take the more polite route and if they don't they're a bitch. With all those connotations that we all get labelled with, I think men do get it easier because there is no emotion.'

6.2.6 Are women prepared to put up with it?

The sections above show that there are a number of features of the screenwriting profession that are challenging, for both men and women. However, the interviews with screenwriters also suggested ways in which these features disadvantage women more than men, particularly those with children. Many of these are based on speculation so this issue needs to be explored further with a larger sample of women writers. However, it is worth noting that some of the women described how they had been close to giving up on the profession because of the difficulties they encounter.

'If this is what it's going to be like I don't want to do it. I just can't, I won't do it. I may as well stack shelves in a supermarket. Because it's meaningless. It didn't feel it was going anywhere.'

(screenwriter)

Another interviewee described how she knew two women who had tried their hand at screenwriting and then given up. One worked in theatre and tried to move into film but got fed up with the development process. Similarly the other woman gave up because she could not stand the 'development hell'.

'I think the opportunities are there, I just think it's a question of how much you want it and how much you want to go after it.'

(screenwriter)

While this suggests that women are entering the profession and then subsequently leaving, much more research is needed to show this with any certainty.

6.3 Summary

The very nature of the film industry may have a different and more negative impact on women in, or thinking of taking up, screenwriting roles. There is very little existing research to evidence this. However, the small number of interviews we completed revealed a variety of features of the profession that may disadvantage women more than men.

Good working relationships are vital in the film industry. Some women may find it difficult to take on the creative screenwriter role rather than a supporting role (eg agent, development executive). Some women welcomed the thought of working with more women, both agents, development executives and producers.

The small number of films made each year and the general risk-aversion of decisionmakers coupled with the large number of individuals wanting to work in the industry, means that work and workload are not consistent. For screenwriters the lack of financial security or job control may help to explain why there are so few women, as many thought that these features made it unworkable as a profession for a woman with children. It is interesting that those who actually had children found the working conditions amenable to family life. However, our sample is very small so it would be

interesting to explore these issues with more women in a larger study so we can examine the influence of external sources of financial support and security in the ability to take up and sustain a career in screenwriting (ie the influence of privilege).

The process of developing a screenplay is very challenging for the screenwriter, both professionally and personally. It involves uncertainty that the product will ever get made, dealing with criticism of your work and loss of creative control. While writing ability is clearly important, self-belief and tenacity are also key to surviving the development phase. There is some suggestion in our interviews that women find the process harder than men, and may become discouraged.

Given these cumulative barriers, many thought that writers may seek opportunities in other media, such as TV, where job opportunities may be more numerous and regular and where the writer is afforded more status. This issue of writing for other media is dealt with more fully in the following chapter. One interviewee simply thought that women were more 'sensible' in their decisions not to take up screenwriting.

'The reason they do not go into the industry is because they are more realistic and responsible about their other responsibilities.'

(key industry professional)

It would be interesting in a larger piece of research to find out whether it is true that women start in the profession but are more likely than men to give up, and whether this is before securing work or even once work has been acquired.

6.3.1 Recommendations

- Explore attitudes to working with women, and towards initiatives to encourage more women into the industry in other roles (such as agents, financiers, producers and directors).
- Conduct more research focused on how the nature of the screenwriter's work affects men and women differently, as very little has been done to date. Explore attitudes to risk and financial instability (characteristics of the profession), particularly among male and female screenwriters with children and those with different socio-economic backgrounds. Also explore attitudes to working long hours. Is film seen as allowing a sensible work-life balance, and how does it compare with working in other media?
- Explore reasons for leaving the film industry among female screenwriters, including those known to have moved into other media.
- Track the early experiences of new entrants to the profession/industry.
- Explore whether women would value support to deal with the development phase, and how this could best be provided (eg peer support or wider industry mentoring).

7 Comparisons with Writing for Other Media and Writing Abroad

The freelance working environment for writers for film are not all that different to those for writers of other media, such as writers of novels and theatre. Why then should it impact on the proportion of women working in film and not other media, especially literature in which women fare well? Similarly, if the process of securing work and working conditions is influential as suggested, it would be useful to see whether the experience of screenwriters is different in other countries where the processes and conditions may be different. This chapter looks at comparisons of the experiences of writing for other media and writing abroad in separate sections.

7.1 Writing for other media

We have not presented data to compare the prevalence of women working in other media as that is beyond the remit of this study. However, it is known anecdotally that the gender imbalance found in film is more stark than found in other media, such as TV. Our efforts were therefore concentrated on identifying from the literature and the interviews some of the possible reasons why.

7.1.1 Literature review

Some researchers have compared the experiences of women working for film with working for TV in the USA. In 1992, Bielby and Bielby looked at gender differences in US based television writers, and the impact that could be seen in rates of employment, earnings, and future prospects. The overall picture is relatively similar to that faced by women writers in the film industry, though slightly better employment shares can be seen for women. While the two industries share common ground in the experiences of women, Bielby and Bielby (1996) describe that there are some differences which impact on the nature of the disadvantage experienced by women writers. First, the levels of ambiguity, risk and uncertainty facing producers in feature films are arguably substantially greater in the film industry than in television, which might mean that

they are more likely to imitate prior successful projects and rely on rules of thumb that tend to typecast women writers. Second, the level of uncertainty facing writers is greater in film, as there are fewer writing opportunities to begin with. Third there are fewer women working in the higher ranks in the film industry, compared with the television industry, who may be more inclined to hire women writers.

Bielby and Bielby go on to speculate that these differences, along with some others, mean that the nature of the disadvantage experienced by women is different: women working in the television industry face what is known as 'continuous disadvantage' whereby they are disadvantaged relative to men throughout their careers, regardless of their previous accomplishments in the industry; whereas those writing for film face 'cumulative disadvantage' whereby they begin their careers with more or less similar opportunities to men, but encounter a 'glass ceiling', falling further and further behind their male counterparts over time. This cumulative disadvantage was identified through an analysis of the earnings of over 4,000 screenwriters, which showed the gender gap in earnings growing as men and women move through their careers. While their research is based on the US, it should be noted that these features also distinguish the film and television industries in the UK.

In a more recent study with screenwriters from around the world, McCreadie (2005) found that some were moving into the more open and 'creative' venue of television, where they say they have more control over their work. No research was found which compared the experiences with women writing for literature or theatre.

7.1.2 Interviewee opinion

A number of the interviewees had views on why women are better represented in writing professions other than film. It is important to stress again that these issues are based on speculation from a small sample of interviews. However, many interviewees were working in a range of media and were able to make direct comparisons with these.

Many of the screenwriters we spoke to told how they had learned quickly about the influence of genre in film. For example, one of the female screenwriters described how her first film was a 'comedy-period-horror'. Even though lots of people thought it was a great script she believes it did not get made because no-one knew how to sell it.

'It's like being in a weird limbo. Having written so many films and not had one made \dots I wonder is that because it was original, because it just wasn't the same enough?'

(screenwriter)

Some of the interviewees thought this could explain why women tend to do better in other media, such as theatre where there is less of a focus on genre and in literature where the so-called 'female' genres of 'romance' and 'historical' are known as high volume sellers.

'I think film is bound by genre, a lot more than theatre. When you're writing a play nobody asks what genre is this. And it's the first question with film. Because of the way the film industry works where it kind of starts with marketing and works backwards to creativity. Whereas in the theatre you work with somebody's creative spark and then you work out how to sell it.'

(screenwriter)

Some interviewees conjectured that TV as a medium is perhaps much more conducive to stories told by women because series are better for drawing out characters. We also heard that in TV, while the writing is more controlled, and writers are more limited in terms of the format of the writing and the scheduling, there are more opportunities for writers to try out different ideas. One stakeholder thought that TV was a good arena for writers to try out different approaches and genres, and felt that it provides good experience and training ground for people to develop their writing 'professionalism'. Examples of women writing for TV in genres outside of the so-called 'female' norm include: Paula Milne (Second Sight, The Politician's Wife), Lizzy Mickery (Messiah), and Abi Morgan (Sex Traffic).

A number of writers also described that the major difference between the industries centred around working conditions. Some had also written for TV and described how this is much more reliable for providing a steady flow of work. As noted in the previous chapter this may be particularly important for women with children.

'I think it's because it's a steady job. You get commissioned, you know you've got a programme going out in a year's time, you know that it's gonna happen. You get paid a certain amount and it's much more predictable.'

(screenwriter)

'TV offers more money, more opportunities, regular work and a career path. This is not really the case with film. Although film does have its own rewards and benefit.'

(key industry professional)

'TV has a massive hunger for stories. It provides writers with the ability to keep working. (key industry professional)

The other major difference is the status of the writer. Interviewees felt that film screenwriters are treated as if they are 'ten a penny' and would even be replaced on a film if it is decided that they are no longer suitable for the job. Some interviewees believed that screenwriters, whatever their gender, are not treated very well.

'Writers are treated like shit, all the glamour is around the director and actors.'

'I've never felt my sex to be a barrier. I find being a writer a barrier half the time because, especially in LA, you're so low on the totem pole. It seems so unfair that you come with the script that is going to be on film, and they treat you like you are so dispensable. It's unbelievable! You know, you're doing the work, and they just don't even consider paying you. I can't think of a bigger barrier than that!'

(screenwriter)

Often the writer will have little creative control on a film project and instead the project will be led by either the producer or director. This was seen to be completely different to other writing media. In theatre, for example, the writer is seen as the primary artist.

'The text is sacred, as the playwright you do it and have a say but as a screenwriter you deliver and then bugger off."

(screenwriter)

One female screenwriter described how creative control on a project can far outweigh the financial rewards, which is why she prefers working for the theatre.

'I have made very little money from my theatre work, but you do it for that freedom. That freedom is like food, like artistic food ... I could not just be a full-time screenwriter. It's the difference between doing that craft job and doing something where you're totally an artist. As a screenwriter you almost feel embarrassed to call yourself an artist. Your status is quite different.'

(screenwriter)

Similarly, the interviewees thought that the status of a writer is greater in TV which may explain why there are also more women working in this media. As described above, the TV industry was felt to be an environment where writers have more freedom to try out different ideas. One stakeholder described that she felt people try television after an unrewarding experience in film.

'After taking a course, people try film and have a poor experience and so move into TV. They then stay in TV for some time and emerge, say, ten years later.'

(key industry professional)

Finally, as mentioned earlier, TV was seen by some of our interviewees as leading the way for change, since women occupy some of the most senior positions in the industry. Indeed, some suspected that the higher proportion of women producers in the TV industry could account for the greater number of women writing for that media, although this would need to be substantiated with hard data.

It would appear from our interviews with screenwriters and other key industry professionals that the cumulative difficulties in writing for film may outweigh those faced in other media, partly because of the financial insecurity and the lack of creative control. It is worth noting also that one woman thought that this aspect of the industry did not need to be accepted, and that the position of screenwriters could change. Much more research however is needed to look into these issues further.

7.2 Writing abroad

In Chapter 2 we identified a body of literature looking at the representation of women screenwriters in other countries. In brief the literature reported a poor representation in the US and a better representation in Australia. In this chapter we begin to look at some of the potential reasons for the discrepancies.

7.2.1 Literature review

Research has just begun to make comparisons between the experiences of screenwriters in different countries. In her interviews with screenwriters from all over the globe, McCreadie (2005) learned how distinct features of the industry in other countries may improve the situation for women in the profession.

While in the US the industry receives negligible direct public funding, in Australia and New Zealand the governments contribute a significant proportion to film funding. For example the Australian Film Commission received nearly \$30 million from the Australian government between 1997 and 1998. According to McCreadie (2005), there is strong commitment in these countries to propelling women into the industry. She describes how there is a newly successful wave of women screenwriters and film makers in New Zealand, who are backed by the government, eg Niki Caro (Whale Rider), Philippa Boyens and Fran Walsh (both Lord Of The Rings). In fact, in New Zealand 38 per cent of the films written are written by women. McCreadie also notes that women's film festivals are an annual staple in Australia and New Zealand, while in New York there have only been two such festivals to date (although it is unclear whether she has included all women's festivals, including those aimed at ethnic minority women).

Seger (2003) notes that women from all countries seem to face the same problems in the screenwriting arena, and the wider motion picture production industry. This source notes that although still under-represented, women in the film industries of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada tend to fare slightly better that their counterparts in the US, UK and Europe. Echoing McCreadie, Seger speculates that reasons for this more noticeable success lie in funding procedures, and the fact that in these nations:

'The women's movement and the film industry blossomed at the same time.'

(Seger 2003)

7.2.2 Interviewee opinion

The screenwriters we interviewed had very limited experience of working outside of the UK. They suspected, but did not know for sure, that the experience was no easier elsewhere.

7.3 Summary

The literature and interviews suggest that there may be differences in the experiences of writing for other media, which may explain why the gender imbalance is greater in film than elsewhere. Firstly there is more of a focus on genre and commerciality, which, given the issues described earlier about perceptions around female sensibility and audience preferences, may make it harder to write for this media (particularly for women). Also, particularly in comparison with TV, there are fewer opportunities for writing, which means it is more financially unstable and may make it harder for women with children and/or limited other means of financial support. Finally, the status of the writer is relatively low in film compared with other media. This can make the process of writing difficult, and for some people less fulfilling personally. Our study also identified how the experience of writing is different in other countries. While there was some suggestion that it can be difficult in the US, it is perceived to be easier in countries such as Australia and New Zealand. In these countries there is a strong commitment from government to support and propel women into the profession. These issues of public funding and support are dealt with more fully in the following chapter.

7.3.1 Recommendations

- Conduct more research in the UK with a larger sample of women writers who write for other media, including both those that also write for film (who can therefore make personal comparisons between these experiences) and those that write exclusively for other media (who may be able to identify what is attractive/unattractive about the film industry).
- Conduct more research with women writers who have experience of working abroad, for example working in Hollywood, to compare experiences.

8 Support

The screenwriting world is seen as a challenging one. The chapters so far suggest that it may be particularly challenging for women. It is interesting therefore to examine what use is made of any support currently available, in particular funding or support from forums such as the trade associations and the UK Film Council itself (as the lead agency for film) in order to identify whether more can be done. Also it is interesting to gain stakeholders' and screenwriters' perspectives on how to support women in screenwriting through direct and indirect action.

8.1 Public funding

As mentioned in the previous chapter, two authors in this field, Seger (2003) and McCreadie (2005) have highlighted the role of government funding in helping the position of women, and have used this to explain why women screenwriters fare less well in Europe, the UK and the US than in other countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

The UK Film Council was concerned about the uptake of funding by female screenwriters, as the development funds administered by the Council could act as a vehicle to promote diversity and inclusion. In this section we examine UK Film Council data alongside literature and interviewees' opinions on the value of funding to a screenwriter's career.

It should be noted that the UK Film Council is taking action to change. They are undertaking work to continue to increase the transparency and objectivity of decision making in their funding decisions, to support under-represented groups through the funding process, and to try to influence the way the wider industry operates on diversity issues as demonstrated by their recent internal consultancy 'Making Diversity Real'.

8.1.1 Data on UK Film Council submissions

Data from the UK Film Council give details of the applications for various of its funds: the New Cinema Fund, Development Fund, and Premiere Fund.

- The New Cinema Fund supports work of any genre but work that has largely secured its principal creative team and that has the potential to secure a UK theatrical release. It supports short film-making and also low budget projects but its key focus is supporting feature film. The funding team is committed to progressing diversity and so look for films that demonstrate diversity.
- The Premiere Fund provides support for the creative process and business role of project development of feature films. It aims to involve European producers but focuses on investing in popular commercially viable feature films. The funding team is also committed to promoting diversity and fund under-represented film-makers.
- The Development Fund is committed to developing new talent and new projects and is successful in attracting applications that feature diversity in content and project team. The fund supports single projects and slate deals, and provides targeted funds to raise the quality of screenplays from the UK. These funds include the '25 words or less' scheme which offers up to 12 writers a year a fixed sum to develop the first draft of an original script in a particular given genre. Most recently these genres have included: comedy of manners, stalker, and fighting the system.

The three funds have similar application forms for single projects which collect information on the writer, they also have an optional monitoring section which captures information on the gender, ethnicity and disability of the creative team (ie writers, producers and directors).

The UK Film Council data for 2004/05 show that only about one in five projects (21.9 per cent) is known to have a female writer attached. Projects applying for Development funding are marginally more likely to have female writers (24.4 per cent) than either New Cinema or Premiere fund applications (14.3 and 19.5 per cent respectively). However, comparative data on writer gender for slate and super slate funding (through the Development stream) was not collected in 2004/05. More recent data (part-year) would suggest that women are still in the minority, representing one quarter of the writers attached to these projects. New Cinema fund applications (shorts and low budget) also have very little data on writers ie for virtually all applications the gender of writer(s) is unknown.

Overall, fewer projects applying for funding had female producers than had female writers attached, only 18.9 per cent. However for the vast majority (62 per cent) of applications, the gender of producer(s) is unknown. New Cinema and Premiere production fund applications look to have much better representation of female producers than applications for the development fund but as much of the data are unknown it is difficult to be confident of these findings. The monitoring situation is

likely to improve as recent work within the UK Film Council has acknowledged the need for attach greater priority to obtaining completion of diversity questions in the application process.

Table 8.1: Number and proportion of projects applying for funding with female writers attached (2004-05)

Fund	Female (n)	Female (%)	Male	Unknown	Base
Development	142	27.2	347	33	522
Development genre ¹⁴	144	24.8	407	30	581
Development slate	0	0	0	28	28
Development super slate	0	0	0	42	42
All Development	286	24.4	754	133	1173
New Cinema	49	17.7	170	58	277
New Cinema - low budget feature	0	0	0	17	17
New Cinema shorts	1	1.8	3	52	56
All New Cinema	50	14.3	173	127	350
Premiere production	24	19.5	89	10	123
Total	360	21.9	1,016	270	1,646

Source: UK Film Council GIFTS database

Table 8.2: Number and proportion of projects applying for funding with female producers attached (2004-2005)

Fund	Female (n)	Female (%)	Male	Unknown	Base
Development	127	24.3	173	222	522
·	127	24.3	1/3	ZZZ	JZZ
Development genre ¹⁵	_	_	_	_	_
Development slate	0	0	0	28	28
Development super slate	0	0	0	42	42
All Development	127	21.5	173	292	592
New Cinema	115	41.5	83	79	277
New Cinema - low budget feature	0	0	0	17	17
New Cinema shorts	7	12.5	1	48	56
All New Cinema	122	34.9	84	144	350
Premiere production	62	50.4	50	11	123
Total	311	18.9	307	1,028	1,646

Source: UK Film Council GIFTS database

 $^{^{14}\,\,}$ Please note that development genre refers to the '25 words or less' scheme.

¹⁵ Producers are not involved in the '25 words or less' scheme.

Only one in 20 applications (4.7 per cent) to the various funds has a female director. The proportion of cases with no information about the gender of the director (71 per cent) means this finding should be treated with caution. For many of the fund projects, particularly the development funds, applications are made before the director is identified.

Table 8.3: Number and proportion of projects applying for funding with female directors attached (2004-2005)

Fund	Female (n)	Female (%)	Male	Unknown	Base
Development	27	5.2	138	357	522
Development genre ¹⁶	0	0	0	581	581
Development slate	0	0	0	28	28
Development super slate	0	0	0	42	42
All Development	27	2.3	138	1,008	1,173
New Cinema	37	13.4	169	71	277
New Cinema - low budget feature	0	0	0	17	17
New Cinema shorts	1	1.8	3	52	56
All New Cinema	38	10.9	172	140	350
Premiere production	12	9.8	93	18	123
Total	77	4.7	403	1,166	1,646

Source: UK Film Council GIFTS database

Of the applications known to have a female producer attached (a total of 311), over a quarter of these (27.3 per cent) also had a female writer. This compares to only 16.6 per cent of projects with a male producer. Similarly, of the applications known to have a female director attached (77 in total), three-fifths (59.7 per cent) had a female writer which compares with 15.1 per cent of projects with a male director. However, there may be some overlap with women undertaking dual roles (ie director and writer). It was not possible to explore this within the dataset.

UK Film Council data also give details of the projects receiving various funds. These are consistent with findings for fund applications in that only about one in five projects (19.3 per cent) is known to have a female writer attached. Projects receiving Premiere production funds are marginally more likely to have female writers (30.8 per cent) than either recipients of Development or New Cinema funds (24.4 and 6.4 per cent respectively). However, once again data on the writers of recipients of New Cinema funds (particularly funding of shorts) are limited, so these findings should be treated with caution. Overall what the data show is that the low proportion of films receiving funds with female screenwriters attached reflects the low proportion of such films applying for funding.

¹⁶ Directors are not involved in the '25 words or less' scheme.

Table 8.4: Number and proportion of projects receiving funding with female writers attached (2004-2005)

Fund	Female (n)	Female (%)	No female	Unknown	Base
Development	20	27.4	45	8	73
Development genre	2	33.3	4	0	6
Development slate	0	0	0	4	4
Development super slate	0	0	0	7	7
All Development	22	24.4	49	19	90
New Cinema	2	12.5	9	5	16
New Cinema shorts	1	3.2	1	29	31
All New Cinema	3	6.4	10	34	47
Premiere production	4	30.8	4	5	13
Total	29	19.3	63	58	150

Source: UK Film Council GIFTS database

Table 8.5: Post completion monitoring data - proportion of projects feeling fairly or very satisfied with each aspect

Funding stream	Development	New Cinema	Premiere
Application process			
Clarity of application process	84	77	90
Quality of pre-application advice	84	77	90
Turnaround time on funding decision	69	69	70
Quality information provided during assessment	77	53	80
Advice and support given during film lifecycle			
Treatment	47	_	_
Script development	58	_	_
Pre-production	_	46	80
Financing	_	62	80
Production (shooting)	_	61	80
Post production	_	61	90
Base (number of projects providing information)			

Note: only four female screenwriters were part of the 61 projects providing information

Source: UK Film Council

8.1.2 Interviewee opinion

Interviewees were asked whether they had been involved in applying for funding from any source and only one interviewee had any direct experience of this. However interviewees did provide their opinions on funding and the funding process, particularly in relation to the UK Film Council. Indeed, one of the interviewees was

critical of the UK Film Council's funding process, feeling that the Council tended to support the same people time and time again:

They give money to the same people and people they know. People are disappointed by the films they put money into.'

(screenwriter)

Some of the writers had direct experience of working with the UK Film Council but tended to be negative about these interactions. Indeed, the UK Film Council was perceived as not being 'writer friendly' – essentially lacking understanding of the reality of screenwriting.

'They don't try to help you to make films. They are the worst for having development meetings in which they say let's talk about this more next week as if you don't have things to do or money to make.'

(screenwriter)

It is important to remember that the finances available from the UK Film Council represent a minority of the funding available in the industry, and that the UK Film Council's remit is wider than just supporting screenwriters. While some interviewees had had some interaction with the UK Film Council, few of the screenwriters, male or female, had personally been involved in acquiring any funding for their work. Some felt that securing funding was the role of the producer rather than the screenwriter, and that the screenwriter has no role to play. This clearly shows that some screenwriters lack awareness of how the public funding process works, and the types of funds available to screenwriters.

However, one screenwriter had been involved in the UK Film Council funding process and was positive about it. She felt that decisions had been clear and fair (when successful and when rejected) but that the decision-making process was a little slow:

'At least when you know, no is a no. But when you have this process of going on that I object to. Just make the decision and let's not waste anyone's time.'

(screenwriter)

8.2 Forums

The interviews with the screenwriters suggested that the profession is very isolating and that screenwriters rarely meet each other.

'I just don't know many screenwriters. There aren't forums for us to meet in.'

(screenwriter)

'You don't get invited to nearly as many seminars or screenings, and I think those are crucial places to meet and hobnob.'

The trouble with screenwriters is we're so isolated we don't meet each other. We don't gossip, we don't know the industry like other people who work in it does. There's this big thing going on that screenwriters are not part of.'

(screenwriter)

As such, the screenwriters were asked whether they have used any forums to help them in their careers. Interestingly, few of the screenwriters used any forums at all to gain support. The quotations above would suggest that there is a perception that there are few available. However, this is not true as there are a number of trade unions, educational and identity-based forums around that offer support.

8.2.1 Writers' Guild

The Writers' Guild of Great Britain is a trade union, affiliated to the TUC, representing professional writers in television, radio, theatre, film, books and new media. Established in 1958, they work to ensure that writers are properly paid and accredited. They also offer representation in disputes, provide advice and put on events for members.

A few of the screenwriters we spoke to were members of the Writers' Guild. One member described how useful a trade union is for screenwriters.

'I think it's very important that it's there ... Having a union that will support you is a very important thing if you are a single freelance worker. You're in the most weak and useless situation. And writers are notoriously bad at organising or doing anything so having a union is really important.'

(screenwriter)

The Writers' Guild is made up of a number of committees dedicated to considering the needs of writers in the different media. One of these is the Film Committee, which looks at the needs of screenwriters. While the Guild has a disability committee, it has no specific activity directed towards women, preferring instead to concentrate activity and support on the entirety of their membership. However, whether a women's group is needed or indeed wanted by screenwriters or other writers is unclear, as discussed in the following section.

Data from the Writers' Guild on the breakdown of its membership indicate that women are generally outnumbered by men in this professional organisation, making up 40 per cent of the overall membership. When looking at those members who write for film, women are less well represented. Only 31 per cent of this group are women. However, this is roughly proportionate to the numbers working in this profession.

Table 8.6: Writers Guild membership - breakdown by gender

Category	Male	Female	Total	Female %
Overall	1,310	882	2,192	40
Full members	857	435	1,292	34
Candidate members	296	237	533	44
Full members (writing for film)	257	114	371	31

Source: Writers Guild, 2006

Another screenwriter we interviewed described how the Guild had been very useful when she needed assistance from the legal department with optioning a contract. However, she was unsure of the value of continuing to be a member. Compared with the Writers' Guild of America, she saw it as much smaller and less powerful. A few of the other screenwriters who were not members shared this sentiment.

The power of the Writers' Guild of America within the US film industry is emphasised in the work of McCredie (2005), with the example of the watershed win achieved by Mathison, a female screenwriter who created 'ET', and the WGA against Universal Studios. The Directors' Guild of America is another influential union in the US which puts a lot of emphasis on keeping track of membership, including monitoring the equality and diversity issues that affect its members.

It is difficult to make comparisons between the WGGB with those in the US for a number of reasons; partly because the WGGB represents writers from a greater range of industries, not solely screenwriters, and also because in the US there is a 'closed shop', which means that when commissioned for a film, screenwriters are required to be members of the Guild as the studios and other distributories are signatories to it. This inevitably does mean that the WGGB is smaller and less well resourced financially than its American counterparts. However, it is interesting that when some interviewees made this comparison between the US Guilds and the WGGB, they did not appear to be aware of some of the similar work that the WGGB is involved in, such as credit arbitration. It is therefore worth considering how the union communicates and publicises the support it currently provides to screenwriters.

It is important to note that these findings are based on a small sample of writers, so more research is recommended to fully flesh out screenwriter views and expectations of the Writers' Guild here in the UK, looking at what other areas of support may be favoured by all screenwriters, and particularly the female ones.

8.2.2 Other forums

There are a number of educational forums, such as The Script Factory. Some of our interviewees (generally those less well established in their careers) were drawn from The Script Factory membership, and this group had positive things to say about the

work that The Script Factory does, which includes setting up screenings, events, talks, and retreats:

'It's just a nice way to meet like-minded people and see films.'

(screenwriter)

However, there was indication from some of the writers that, because of the competitive nature of securing work, interventions around mutual support may not always be welcomed.

Another group is Women in Film and Television, which is a forum specifically for women in the industry, but this was rarely mentioned by interviewees. A number of the women stated that they would be reluctant to get involved in anything that focuses too much on gender as they did not want to be accused of getting in on the 'gender ticket'.

'I don't want to get in on the equal opportunities ticket. Forget the female, take that away from my job title, I'm a writer and I expect to be treated the same. I will not accept it.' (screenwriter)

This feeling is in line with the developing politics of equality, which exists not just in film but throughout society. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is a perception that issues of inequality of gender are old news, that they have already been dealt with, while issues of race and disability are now the key concerns. The findings from the literature and the interviews suggest that women would benefit from networking opportunities, but in fact women may feel increasingly uncomfortable about being banded together as women. They may be nervous about attaching themselves to any equalities initiative as they wonder why we need to continue to address issues of gender. Our data analysis shows that there is a stark gender imbalance in this profession and as such that Women in Film and Television could have an important role to play, but it will need to bear in mind the potential difficulties that women may have in affiliating themselves with any interventions that have a gender focus.

8.3 Direct or indirect action

Generally interviewees felt that the gender balance in the film industry was improving over time – change could happen and was happening. The major influences were seen as the shifting demographic of those with power in the industry. As more women take on roles of producer or director, it is believed that more women screenwriters will be hired. This could have a trickle down effect but it would be very slow.

Few had any ideas that would help this gradual process of positive change, and the screenwriters themselves were not sure whether any deliberate interventions would be appropriate.

'It's such a strange business that I don't think anybody could do anything to make things change. You couldn't achieve positive discrimination, for example. I mean, I don't know

what the figures are, but say 100 scripts written in a year, two get made, and one gets shown. That eye of the needle is so tiny anyway, that you could have 99 of those scripts written by women, and you'd still only have one get made. That's got nothing to do with them being women, it's go to do with whether or not they could attach the right style to get the finance to make it made. And if Tom Cruise will do the film, you're away, and if he won't, then you're not. I don't think anybody would really care if it was written by a man or a woman at that point.'

(screenwriter)

Indeed, one interviewee thought it would be dangerous to introduce any 'positive action' policies into the film industry:

'It struggles so much as it is, any additional structures could destroy it.' (key industry professional)

Whereas another female screenwriter was even unsure that she necessarily wanted the balance to improve.

'I think that's a very strange thing to want to happen. I don't want more women screenwriters, I just want better writers. I'm not sure why you would want more women in screenwriting. You want to have great writers, and you want it to be irrelevant what they are.' (screenwriter)

An intervention such as providing support for female screenwriters appeared to be more acceptable. Such support could include the opportunity to meet other screenwriters, male or female. For some (the less well established writers), this support is already provided through The Script Factory. However, as mentioned previously, there may be resistance from some writers to any support groups that focus too much on equal opportunities or 'positive action', and the culture of secrecy in the screenwriting profession in the UK may make some writers reluctant to support their competitors.

There was some agreement that it might help all screenwriters to be better informed about the difficulties of working in this industry. It was felt that if women understand the difficulties in the beginning they may be better prepared to deal with these and more willing to persevere. However improving understanding of the realities of screenwriting may dissuade women from entering the profession.

Our screenwriters described how writers tend to be very naïve in the beginning and how it can take a long time to understand the process.

'I think I'm a little bit less naïve than I was at the beginning. I think at the beginning if a producer came and said we love this script I'd think oh that's it, gonna be made into a film and be euphoric but I know now it's a much, much harder road than you think it is ... You realise that all those things that you think mean it will be made, that they love the script, that they've secured the money, that they've got the star, none of those things mean it's going to happen.'

One interviewee stated that one of the reasons production companies avoid working with new writers is because they believe they will be less able to cope with the process. The UK Film Council's '25 words or less' scheme was regarded as a positive initiative, as it mirrors the development process - providing writers with the opportunity to have their work scrutinised and challenged by a script editor. This gives them a good insight into the reality of the world of screenwriting. There was a feeling that universities and training providers could be doing more to inform their students about the difficulties involved in the profession.

'People spend lots of time and money on courses and software and books on screenwriting without any real sense of how difficult it is going to be.'

(key industry professional)

8.4 Summary

In 2004/2005 roughly one in five film projects applying for UK Film Council funding was known to have a female screenwriter, and again, just under one in five projects receiving funds had a female screenwriter. The proportion of successful projects with a female screenwriter attached reflect the proportion of applications, suggesting at first glance that the awarding process is fair. However, it is nonetheless smaller than the estimates found for women working as screenwriters, suggesting that more could be done to encourage women into the funding process.

The role of the screenwriter can be isolating and there appears to be little support available for screenwriters per se, let alone female screenwriters, and that which is available has not been very well received.

Screenwriters were unsure what could be done to change the situation for women in the profession, given the fragile nature of the industry and the inability to formalise some of what is taken to represent good practice on equality and diversity in other sectors. Some thought it would be useful for women screenwriters to get together more often, but some were reluctant to help their peers. One thing they thought would help would be to have more schemes like the '25 words or less' scheme which show those trying to get into screenwriting the reality of development. However, an important finding to be aware of is that many of the screenwriters did not wish to be associated with any 'positive action' initiatives. They were concerned that this could mean that they receive work because they are women, when they only want to be judged on the quality of their work.

8.4.1 Recommendations

 UK Film Council should continue to monitor the funding situation over the next few years, and capture as much data as possible on the make-up of those contributing to each project, through encouraging completion of all aspects of the funding application forms.

- Explore the potential for the fund application process to act as a vehicle to capture further data on the decision-making process about the story (genres, original versus adapted screenplay) and about putting together the project team, from the perspective of the applicants.
- The Writers' Guild and Women in Film and Television may like to consider entering into closer dialogue with screenwriters working in film, both members and non-members, in order to identify what their needs are and what form of support would be valued. This may also provide an avenue for publicising the support they currently provide and, if established, would provide a valuable forum to research and disseminate issues around female screenwriting.
- Explore the perception of UK Film Council among writers. The UK Film Council may need to examine the tone and nature of their interactions with writers to ensure they are seen as approachable and open to new talent, and supportive of women as an under-represented group. Much of the information presented by the Council stresses diversity in terms of disability and particularly ethnicity, and this may give the impression that for the Council gender representation is no longer a matter of concern.
- The UK Film Council should place more emphasis on non gender-specific schemes such as '25 words or less' scheme which reflect the realities of work as a screenwriter.
- Universities and other institutions should consider how well their courses communicate the realities of the screenwriting profession to their students and equip them with the necessary skills to cope.

9 Conclusions

In the previous chapters we have uncovered a number of challenges faced by women writing for film. In this final chapter we summarise the findings from the research, and provide recommendations for further research and initiatives to improve the position of women in screenwriting.

9.1 Summary

While gender is an area that receives huge attention in the discipline of film studies, very little research has been conducted looking at the experience of women as screenwriters. No major studies were identified that have been undertaken in the UK so the gap in this area of research is enormous. This study has taken some steps towards narrowing this gap.

9.1.1 Is there a problem?

Our analysis of the UK data highlights how there is indeed an imbalance in the proportion of women writing for film. Participation data from Skillset and LFS indicate that women form a minority of the active screenwriters in the UK – while they make up 53 per cent of those writing as their main occupation, they make up only 38 per cent of those writing for audio-visual media other than film, and 26 per cent of those writing for film. Perhaps more worrying is that data show that the proportion of UK films credited with a female screenwriter is even lower, and the proportion of women screenwriters gaining awards from the industry is lower still, especially for British women. While there is a need for better workforce data collection on the whole this suggests that a study such as this is long overdue, in mapping the extent of the imbalance and providing an evidence base for action.

9.1.2 Does it matter?

While in recent years the film industry has begun to move towards improving the diversity of its workforce, particularly in relation to race, it is important that it does

not overlook issues of gender diversity. There is a good business argument for improving the representation of women in the screenwriting role. UK data show that women write the sorts of films that do well in the UK, that the films they make are as likely to gain a release and that their films are actually more financially effective. Women represent a significant section of audiences in the UK. Increasing representation in the workforce and reflecting the diversity of the UK society may serve to improve the strength of the UK film industry. The power of film also means that the gender imbalance may have social effects, including failing to present women's perspectives on the world and possibly reinforcing gender stereotypes. Moreover it is ethically wrong to ignore the under-representation of women and there is a legal case for avoiding charges of sex discrimination.

9.1.3 Why is there a problem?

Most of the limited research to date on women screenwriters simply looks to highlight that there is a problem. Very little has focused on trying to uncover why the gender imbalance exists. While some authors posit the potential barriers facing women in the profession only a couple of researchers have conducted interviews with women screenwriters to find out first hand about their experiences, and none of this has been carried out in the UK. This scoping study is unique in that it goes some way towards answering the question 'Why are there so few women screenwriters?' However, the findings, which are summarised below, are partly based on a small sample and need to be explored further in future research.

The data identify an imbalance, but exactly where in the career path does this imbalance emerge? Is it that women are not entering the profession? Data on the educational pipeline suggest women are no less motivated to study subjects of relevance to a career in screenwriting than men. However the data do show that women are outnumbered by men in very specific (or accredited) screenwriting courses (which are relatively new to the industry). Women make up approximately 40 per cent of participants on these courses. While the impact of these courses is yet to be seen, and while we need to bear in mind that there are a number of other entry routes into the profession, this initial analysis suggests that education, and a lack of motivation to get into screenwriting per se do not fully explain why there are so few female screenwriters.

Is it then that women screenwriters are not being successful in securing work? Our findings from the interviews were in line with some of the key themes in the literature which suggest that indirect discrimination may be taking place during the hiring of screenwriters. Since few decision makers were interviewed in this study, or in previous studies, this issue needs to be explored further. However, the scoping study suggests that aspects of the infrastructure and perceptions about the industry disadvantage women when seeking work. There is some feeling that barriers stem from the process of getting known in the industry, and that women feel less inclined to capitalise on networks and less comfortable or confident about promoting/selling

their work. This may relate to the higher proportion of men already present in these networks. Certainly there was some belief that the greater representation of men in the positions of power in the industry means that men are more likely to get selected for a job. Another barrier appears to be the reliance on track record, and the reluctance of production companies to take a risk on a new writer. It was believed that instead companies go for what they know and to date this has predominantly been male screenwriters.

One of the major barriers suggested by the interviews and some areas of the literature relate to commissioners' perceptions about two things: the types of stories that women write; and audience preferences for certain types of films. Put simply, women are seen to be disadvantaged because commissioners, possibly unconsciously, believe that they do not write the sorts of stories that sell. In the course of this scoping study we were only able to speak to a couple of individuals involved in hiring decisions so there is no hard evidence to back up this proposition yet. This will need to be explored in future research.

However, these perceptions of women's writing and particularly audience preferences seemed to be pervasive in our sample, and were held by people in a range of roles, including some screenwriters. They are therefore powerful, and may indeed obstruct women screenwriters in their ability to secure work. Furthermore, they appear to represent myths, since the proposition that only action and horror sell and that the audience is dominated by teenage boys is at odds with what we have found using UK Film Council data on cinema audiences. There is very little evidence to suggest that women are not able to write for this audience, as other data analysed show that they do write a broad range of genres. There was some suggestion that women do not focus enough on the commerciality of films that they write, and do not write in terms of genre. This may well explain why they find it difficult to secure work, and therefore also needs to be explored further.

The interviews and limited literature highlighted that the work of a screenwriter is difficult for all concerned, whether male or female. However, this study suggests that some of the features of life as a screenwriter can disadvantage women more than men. Many of the barriers relate to intrinsic features of the job, ie that it is largely unstable and involves erratic working patterns. For some, the opportunity to work from home and to work flexibly was seen as amenable to family life, while others believed that these two features particularly could disadvantage women with or planning children, as they could not afford the time or the money to work in this career.

Some of the barriers relate to the process of having work subject to criticism. This can be at the early stages, when a writer has to sell their work, and in the development phase when a script is redrafted a number of times. It appeared from the interviews that women tend to find this process more difficult than men as they may have less confidence in their work and are less tenacious.

While further research is needed, some of the interviewees speculated that the difficult nature of the profession means that a number of women try out screenwriting only to leave subsequently. Some of those we spoke to, including successful screenwriters, had been close to leaving themselves, and others had friends who had left. It was speculated that many writers therefore seek or continue to work in other media, such as TV and theatre, where job opportunities may be more numerous and regular and/or the writer may have more status and creative control. As well as identifying a number of ways in which writing for other media may be more attractive for women, this study identified how the situation may be better in other countries, such as Australia and New Zealand. There is a view that in these countries, where government funding for film is relatively high, there is a strong commitment to create a more writer-friendly climate that helps propel the careers of women screenwriters.

Enveloping these difficulties is the perception that little direct support is available for screenwriters in the UK, male or female. Public funding is available but is possibly not well understood. Some screenwriters may not get involved in securing finance as it is seen as not relevant to the screenwriting role. Moreover, some of the screenwriters we spoke to were critical or lacked engagement with the two bodies that do offer help, the UK Film Council and the Writers' Guild, which they felt provided them with little direct support – either individually or on their behalf as a pressure group (to effect change). In the case of both of these agencies it may be that they lacked awareness of the sort of support available. There also seemed to be a lack of awareness or enthusiasm for some of the other forums available, perhaps with the exception of The Script Factory.

9.2 Recommendations

In the previous chapters we have uncovered a number of challenges faced by women writing for film. While our findings are illuminating it is important to stress again that this is a scoping study and is small in scale. We have learned a lot, but our findings need to be tested by further research. There may be a lot more to discover. Throughout the report we have recommended a number of streams for future research. Broadly these involve continuing and extending the work that we have begun here. Some of the key areas for further research are discussed below.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the UK Film Council continue to collect and monitor data to see whether any changes occur in the participation and work of women screenwriters.

The UK Film Council data provided for this scoping study were very informative to the debate. The UK Film Council should continue to monitor the following:

the relationship between producers, directors and writers, to see whether when more women are able to take on decision-making roles it will enable other women to fill writing roles

- the funding situation, aiming to capture as much data on the make-up of those contributing to each project, to see whether any improvements are made
- the genre of film that women are writing to see if any changes occur, particularly at the individual writer level to see if individuals can/do move genre.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that data collection be improved and extended.

There is a need to gain a more precise estimate of the situation affecting women screenwriters so some new methods of data collection are also required. In particular, more data are needed on the following:

- Make-up of the current workforce in the UK. Skillset could provide data to the UK Film Council on the Film Production workforce that would allow the isolation of screenwriting and the analysis of gender, though these numbers are likely to be small so should be treated as indicative only. We also recommend exploring the possibility of using alternative means of establishing an estimate for the proportion of working female screenwriters, this could include working with the Writers Guild, writers agents and production companies. Skillset has been involved in partnership work with Equity to look at training and skills issues affecting the performance industry. Similar partnership work with the Writers' Guild or Women in Film and Television may be a useful means of gaining a better understanding of the issues affecting screenwriters.
- Number of women taking up screenwriting courses and progression into the profession. We recommend that Skillset capture and disseminate data on screenwriting training provision to explore participation of key groups including women. Skillset should also explore the possibility of using the proposed tracking study outlined in the 'The Bigger Picture' (Skillset and UK Film Council, 2003) to examine the motivations to study, experiences while studying, including perceptions of role models, and subsequent activities of training participants to see if male and female motivations and experiences differ. It would also be useful to work with HEIs and tutors to explore the relatively low participation of women on accredited HE and non-HE courses, and to collect and analyse the data they hold on proportion of women applying, enrolling and also completing courses.
- **Gender pay gap**. At present it is not possible to examine whether there is a gender pay gap among screenwriters. Consideration should be given to the collection of data on the earnings of male and female screenwriters. This could be undertaken by Skillset in their workforce surveys.
- The decision-making process in putting together a project team. The UK Film Council should explore the potential for the fund application process to act as a vehicle to capture further data on the decision-making process about the story

(genres, original versus adapted screenplay) and about putting together the project

Recommendation 3: We recommend conducting further research with a larger number of writers.

Our interviews with screenwriters and other key industry professionals revealed a number of potential barriers affecting women in this profession. The barriers described were consistent across the interviewees and tended to tie in with the literature. However, the literature in this area is sparse and the interviews were based on a very small sample of only 13 individuals, many of the whom were speculating the issues rather than basing them on personal experience. It is important that any future research would involve discussions with a larger number of screenwriters and writers, both male and female, from a greater range of backgrounds, and at different stages in their careers to confirm whether these issues really do explain why there are so few screenwriters. The research with writers should focus on the following areas:

- The experience of women writing for other media. It would be helpful to speak to women working in other media, especially TV, to identify whether they face less barriers in these sectors. It would also be interesting to speak to women who have left film for other media to identify the reasons why, and see whether there really is an issue of women entering film but giving up. Similarly it would be interesting to speak to women who have left the film industry and writing altogether to find out the influences on their decision to leave, and when in their writing career this came about. However, reaching this group of leavers is likely to be difficult outside a large-scale tracking study.
- The experience of screenwriters who have children. Explore attitudes to risk and financial instability (characteristics of working in the industry) in both male and female screenwriters with children. Is film seen as allowing a sensible work-life balance, and how does it compare with working in other media?
- Differences in motivations to writing among men and women. Investigate whether people write to earn a living, to make a difference or to tell a personal story, for example.
- Differences in attitudes towards writing particular genres. How do men and women feel about writing for 'masculine' genres (such as action, thriller, horror) and 'feminine' genres (such as drama, romance), and films that are commercial?

Recommendation 4: We recommend conducting more research with decisionmakers, in particular producers and production companies.

As a scoping study, resources were limited so only a few key decision makers were consulted during the study, ie those hiring screenwriters. Our small sample was deliberately skewed to include more screenwriters than other key industry

professionals. Many of the interviewees believed that a major barrier is likely to relate to the decision-making process (and perceptions about female writers) and therefore recommended that producers and production companies should be a focus for further research.

Research is needed with these individuals and companies to understand what they look for in a screenwriter and the various stages involved from conceptualising a project to identifying a suitable screenwriter. With sensitive interviewing techniques it will also be informative to explore their perceptions about which films sell, and who is most likely to write these films. Similarly, research should be conducted to explore the perceptions of film critics and award givers on the differences between films written by males and females.

Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, there was agreement among our interviewees that the research with screenwriters and other key industry professionals should be qualitative. The issues are complex and often overlapping so a survey would not be appropriate. Interviews and focus groups would provide a much better approach for teasing out the issues. The enthusiasm of all those involved in this study, including the female screenwriters, suggests that it would not be particularly difficult securing participation for a much larger study. However, those in key roles in the industry have very busy schedules so may need to be consulted individually rather than in groups.

Recommendation 5: We recommend further research to explore what support, if any, would be welcomed by screenwriters.

Finally, before designing any future initiatives it is worth exploring further what sort of support would be welcomed. Closer dialogue is required between screenwriters and the bodies that currently exist to support them. The Writers' Guild and WFTV may like to consider conducting research both within their own membership and with other screenwriters, possibly through a survey, in order to:

Explore further what sort of support would be welcomed. Further research should be carried out to find out how screenwriters feel they are currently recognised and supported and how, if at all, they would like this to change. The survey could also canvass the views of more women on initiatives that they feel would help the position of women in the profession.

Similarly, the UK Film Council may want to explore the perception of UK Film Council among writers. The UK Film Council may need to examine the tone and nature of their interactions with writers to ensure they are seen as approachable and open to new talent.

9.3 Next steps

While more research is needed to clarify the nature and extent of the barriers, action can begin to take place to work to mitigate these. Many of the barriers described relate to the nature of the film industry in the UK. The financial risks involved in making a film here means that many production companies prefer not to take risks and instead go for what they know has worked in the past. However, the history of film across the globe is short and the references are limited. Unfortunately for women, those that exist to date are predominantly male, either in terms of the subject matter or in the gender of the writer. While on the outset this would suggest that any initiatives will be limited in their ability to change the position of women, we believe that much more could be done by: encouraging decision-makers to be more conscious of their decisions; equipping women with the skills to survive in the profession; raising the profile of women screenwriters; and highlighting the extent of the under-representation of women and the need (business and social cases) for improving representation.

However, the first step towards facilitating change is to bring the debate to the attention of the industry, those who have the power to actualise change. More needs to be done to raise awareness of the lack of women writing for film and the potential implications of this. There is clearly a willingness to change and tackle problems in the industry, as indicated strongly by the commissioning of this research. There is also perception that things are changing for the better over time. However, many of those we spoke to did not believe the imbalance was great or that it presented a problem worthy of much attention. They felt in a way that gender has been dealt with and it is now time to look at race and disability. Part of the battle therefore is keeping gender on the agenda. Any quickly introduced initiatives could be met with resistance from the industry as they are perceived as being driven from a desire to 'tick the equal opportunities boxes' rather than out of a genuine desire to improve the position of women in screenwriting, so people need to be more aware of the extent of the problem.

The key aim now is to widen the debate to include the relevant organisations, agencies and bodies. The information and findings from this research need to be disseminated across the industry in order to challenge the perceptions about the state of the gender imbalance in the profession, the make up of UK cinema audiences, what sells in cinemas and what women write. The industry needs to be made aware of the business, social, ethical and legal reasons why more women should be encouraged into the profession, and the benefits that it may bring not only to screenwriters themselves, but to the industry and society as a whole.

A major finding from this research was the lack of support and partnership efforts to improve the position of women in the screenwriting role. Although the UK Film Council was the client for this report, we recommend that future initiatives involve a collaborative effort from all other relevant bodies, including Skillset, Women in Film and Television, the Writers' Guild, the accredited universities and institutions that

deliver screenwriter skills training and the new Film Business Academy, as well as production companies and screenwriters. The collaboration could begin with an agenda for these groups to meet and discuss the findings from this research, how they may be disseminated to raise the profile of the debate, the future research priorities and how these may be actioned. When the situation is better understood the debate can move on to identify tangible initiatives to help improve the position of women in the screenwriting role. Early work should also focus on developing the business case for hiring more female screenwriters as a strong business argument will provide the best incentive for the industry moving forward. The literature, data and opinion presented here begins this process.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

Literature review

This stage of the scoping study involved a wide literature and information search, and utilised a number of methods and contacts. Searches for recent and current literature used bibliographic databases and specialist web-based search engines and included a range of academic disciplines and practice areas. The aim of the literature review was to focus on UK sources, but early searches indicated that literature from overseas may provide added value to the research themes.

The following databases were used:

- Web of Knowledge: a web-based bibliographic database of academic publications
- Eduserve Athens, including Ingenta Full Text, Emerald, and IBSS
- Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts: a web-based indexing and abstracting tool covering a range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, economics, politics, and education
- Google Scholar: a web-based search engine that searches a subset of the main Google index, open repositories, and the websites of academic publishers, professional societies, pre-print repositories, and universities
- Questia Online Library.

Searches were also carried out using the University of Sussex library catalogue and resources available in the IES library. These included looking at sources such as:

- Journal of Women's Studies
- Journal of Applied Social Psychology
- Film Quarterly
- Film Journal International

- Quarterly Journal of Film Radio and Television
- Sight and Sound
- Written By (US based Screenwriter's publication)
- ScreenWriter
- Scope (online journal)
- The Guardian Unlimited
- The Independent Arts
- BBC Writers' Room

Search terms

The terms used in the literature searches were derived from the research aims of the study and included combinations of the following:

- women, gender, male
- motion picture audio visual
- screenwriters, writing, editing
- women, directors, producers, development executives
- audience preference, female sensibility
- literary agents, development executives, producers, Writers' Guild
- box office returns, television audience, success
- funding, commissioning
- media studies, film studies, television studies, journalism, creative writing, scriptwriting, imaginative writing.

Literature found using these search terms was used as a starting point for further investigation and citation searches were carried out using articles that are felt to be of particular relevance.

Several key contacts were made during the literature search process. These included prominent writers, statisticians and academics from the UK, USA, and Australia, as well as organisations who seek to support screenwriters. These contacts provided significant insight and avenues for exploration, as well as promoting interest in the research project.

Analysis of data

This stage provided contextual quantitative information about the size and nature of women's participation in screenwriting, and their relative success in the industry. The data used were mostly supplied by the UK Film Council, but student data (from HESA, LSC, and other training providers) and employment data (LFS from ONS, and Skillset Workforce data) were also analysed. Excel and SPSS were used to explore these data.

The key questions explored with the data included:

- proportion of writers working in film who are female
- proportion of feature films credited with female screenwriters (1999 to 2003)
- budget of films credited with female screenwriters
- box office gross of output credited with female screenwriters
- proportion of female writers working in television, theatre, radio, journalism and literature (ie sector)
- proportion of women working as literary agents and as development executives (ie occupation)
- proportion of female members of the Writers Guild (and other relevant trade associations)
- proportion of projects applying for UK Film Council funding which have female writers attached (and extent to which gender of key members of project teams is known)
- proportion of projects receiving UK Film Council funding with female writers attached
- trends in proportion of women studying screenwriting at BA and MA level.

Exploratory interviews

This stage involved 13 interviews with a range of screenwriters and other key industry professionals. All the contacts were suggested by the UK Film Council and were intended to provide a mix of experiences and opinions. The response to requests for participation was very positive. Most of the individuals contacted were keen to take part and saw this as an interesting area of study. The Script Factory contacted its members on our behalf asking for participation. The response from them was overwhelming, so after selecting two for interview, the remainder were invited to email some thoughts on the issues affecting them as screenwriters and other women in the profession. Two comprehensive emails were received.

Screenwriter interviews

The eight interviews with screenwriters included two with male screenwriters. The rationale for including male writers was to allow us to understand whether the barriers are gender-specific, or whether the barriers relate to other issues such as age, finance etc. Within the sample of writers, we spoke to people with a range of tenures including: writers who are experienced in the profession (with more than one film produced); writers who are mid-range in their experience (with one film produced); and writers who have recently joined the industry (working in the industry but with no films made). The aim of this was to understand the full range of experiences of women who are both established and setting out in the industry. We also spoke to a couple of writers who are trying to break into the industry, who were sought through The Script Factory. As well as writing for film, all of the writers had experience of writing in other media, including theatre and television. The interviews focused, not only on the experience of writing for film, but on comparisons between writing for different media, to try to explore why the gender balance is worse for film than for other sectors.

The interviews each took around one hour to complete and were conducted face to face, mostly in screenwriters' homes, to allow for the sensitive nature of some of the subject matter. The aim of the interviews was to understand fully the range of barriers facing women screenwriters. The discussion guides were designed in consultation with the UK Film Council and covered the following topics:

- background, including current projects, the process of acquiring work, and brief education, career development and work history
- **key areas of success** and how success is defined
- working with others including male/female agents, development executives and producers
- funding, where sought and experiences of applying for
- barriers experienced in career, both personally and of friends/colleagues, and whether these are common to male and female screenwriters or other areas of the industry/other writing media
- childcare and eldercare issues
- international comparisons of the experience of screenwriting, if applicable
- audience preferences, including whether they believe in female sensibility, that audiences can identify the gender of the writer, the preference for male and female films
- **support**, views on what is currently available to female screenwriters, and what more could be done to improve the position for women in the profession

■ **future research**, views on what research is needed to further understanding in this area and how to best capture the views of female screenwriters (including ideas on building a database of contacts)

Other key industry professional interviews

The interviews with other key industry professionals included a development executive, producer, agent, representative from Skillset and representative from the Writers' Guild. These interviews were around 30-45 minutes in length and were conducted on the telephone. The aim of these interviews was to understand the experience that other professionals in the industry have of working with female writers, and any perceived differences to working with male writers. The key industry professionals were also asked for details on how they decide who to work with in order to understand the processes of writer selection. As with the screenwriters themselves, more general views on the barriers facing female screenwriters, the support available and on audience perceptions were sought from these key industry professionals.

Appendix 2: Biographies of interviewees

Screenwriters

Anthea Anke

Originally from the United States, but now London based, Anthea Anke has been writing screenplays for the past six years. With several options under her belt, her focus up until now has been on feature films, specifically in the comedy genre. She is a member of The Script Factory.

■ Moira Buffini

Moira's career started in acting. She then moved into playwriting, and since 1992 has written eight plays which have made it to the stage, some of which have toured around the UK and abroad. Her most recent commission, Dinner, for the National Theatre, was nominated for the Olivier Award for best comedy. She has two feature film commissions in progress for UK production companies, 'Gabriel', an adaptation of her 1997 play, for Passion Pictures, and 'Northern Soul', for Prospect Entertainment. She is currently working on a film for Mandate Pictures, based in the US.

Crispin Cole

Following a career in the music business playing in various pop bands Cris has now been writing professionally for 12 years. In that time he has written comedies for the BBC (Twisted Tales, Embassy) and dramas for ITV (The Bill, Night and Day). He currently has two comedy-drama series in development with Channel 4 (Half) and the BBC (Insecurity). He is also working on a screenplay for the UK Film Council (24 Exp.) and has two feature films in pre-production, one in the UK (Pelican Blood) and one in Canada (Kin).

■ Laurence Coriat

Laurence wrote Michael Winterbottom's Wonderland which was selected in competition at Cannes in 1999 and won Best British Independent Film Award the same year as well as being nominated for a BAFTA. She co-wrote Sandra Goldbacher's Me Without You selected in competition at Venice 2001. She continues writing for directors while developing her own projects to direct. Her two shorts Being Bad and Holiday have taken her to festivals around the world. Her directorial debut will be Panic Beach which was selected for the Sundance scriptwriter Lab 2002. Laurence also works as a script mentor on the MA screenwriting at the London Film school. She has been an adviser on several Moonstone script labs. She is currently working with Michael Winterbottom on his next film, Genova, going into production in the summer.

■ Olivia Hetreed

After a successful career as a film editor in documentaries, drama and film, Olivia Hetreed moved to the other end of the process with scriptwriting. Girl with a Pearl Earring, starring Colin Firth and Scarlett Johansson, was a worldwide success and was nominated for Oscars and BAFTAs including Best Adapted Screenplay. Recent work includes The Canterbury Tales for the BBC and Zero for Radio Four. She is currently writing a TV series for the BBC and a feature film for Ecosse Films.

■ Katy Segrove

Katy Segrove is a screenwriter with a background in TV production. She has been writing for a number of years and currently has a feature film in development with London based Fahrenheit Films and Canadian production company Shaw Productions. She wrote several sketches on the ITV series Shoot the Writers and was one of the 2004 winners. Following this she wrote and developed a number of comedy ideas with the five other winners. She is currently undertaking an MA in screenwriting at the London College of Communication.

Peter Straughan

Peter began his career writing for the stage and has written several award winning plays including Bones which premiered in 1999 at Live Theatre in Newcastle, and Noir which premiered in 2002 at Newcastle playhouse, and which he has recently adapted for the screen. Peter's latest writing commissions include an adaptation of Toby Young's novel How To Lose Friends and Alienate People for producer Steve Woolley and Film Four, and most recently Men Who Stare at Goats – an adaptation of the book by Jon Ronson for Ruby Films/BBC Films. Peter's first produced feature is Sixty Six, an original screenplay which Paul Weiland has directed for Working Title, which will be released theatrically later this year.

■ Juliette Towhidi

Juliette Towhidi started her career as a Reuters journalist and then a script editor (for director Roman Polanksi and France's Studio Canal Plus among others) before turning to writing full-time. She originated and co-wrote the hit film Calendar Girls, starring Helen Mirren and Julie Walters, and is currently developing various feature

film projects, including Balkan-set film noir thriller Arizona and an adaptation of Clare Sambrook's novel Hide and Seek, both for BBC Films, and the magic realist story Nightflying, about a family of women with the gift of flight, for Boda Films.

Other key industry professionals

■ Jenne Casarotto

London-based Casarotto Ramsay & Associates Ltd was created in 1991 through the merger of the Casarotto client list with legendary theatre agency, Margaret Ramsay Ltd. Today, Casarotto Ramsay boasts an extraordinary stable of artists, estates and film rights worldwide. Jenne's personal clients include a variety of celebrated writers and filmmakers, many of whom she has worked alongside since their feature film debuts. Her clients include John Crowley, Stephen Frears, Terry Gilliam, Francois Girard, Tony Grisoni, Sir David Hare, Christopher Hampton, Nick Hornby, Neil Jordan, Richard Loncraine, Don Macpherson, John Madden, Shane Meadows, Neal Purvis and Robert Wade, Lynne Ramsay, Shawn Slovo and Iain Softley. Jenne also handles all dramatic rights for the estates of Roald Dahl, Tennessee Williams and H G Wells.

Judy Counihan

Judy Counihan is Director of Film at Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the audiovisual industries. An experienced film and television producer, Judy is responsible for leading the implementation of 'A Bigger Future', the UK Film Skills Strategy. Her career spans 18 years, winning the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Picture twice, most recently for No Man's Land in 2001 and for Antonia's Line in 1995. She also produced the Oscar nominated Before the Rain which won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and the Independent Spirit Award. Born in London, Judy graduated from Essex University with a degree in Art History. Her early career was in commercials and music promos before she moved to the US, where she worked with AmFAR – the American foundation for AIDS research producing a series of films for PBS (Public Service Broadcasting). Her TV drama credits include executive producer of Bella and the Boys (BBC 2004); Goodbye Mr Chips (ITV1 2002); and Falling Apart (Channel 4 2002). She has been a Tutor at the Film Business School and the National Film & Television School and is a member of PACT.

■ Julian Friedmann

Julian Friedmann has worked in film for a number of years. He currently holds a number of prominent positions in the field including Editor of Scriptwriter Magazine and Executive Council Member of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, where he is Director of Film. Julian has experience of the educational arena of screenwriting having designed the MA in TV Scriptwriting at De Montfort University and as the author of How to Make Money Scriptwriting (Intellect Books). He is the Director of his own London literary agency, Blake Friedmann.

■ Sophie Meyer

Sophie Meyer is Head of Development at Fragile Films/Ealing Studios. Since joining the company in 2004 she has overseen the projects on the development slate and worked on Oliver Parker's Fade to Black and Jonny Campbell's Alien Autopsy, which Fragile produced with Qwerty Films. She is working on the upcoming production slate for 2006 including Stephan Elliot's Easy Virtue, Steve Surjik's I Want Candy and a re-make of St Trinians. Previously Sophie was Head of Development UK at Mission Pictures where she worked on a slate of projects including Danny Boyle's Millions. Before that she worked in development at Intermedia and British Screen.

Tessa Ross

Tessa became the Head of FilmFour and Channel4 Drama in December 2002. Before this, she held the post of Head of Drama at Channel4, a position she held from October 2000. Tessa came to Channel4 from the BBC's Independent Commissioning Group where she was Head of Drama from 1993-2000. Tessa is a governor of the National Film and Television School.

■ Jeremy Thomas

Cinema has always been a part of Jeremy Thomas' life. As soon as he left school he went to work in various positions, ending up in the cutting rooms working on films such as The Harder They Come, Family Life and The Golden Voyage of Sinbad, and worked through the ranks to become a film editor for Ken Loach on A Misfortune. After editing Philippe Mora's Brother Can You Spare a Dime, he produced his first film Mad Dog Morgan in 1974 in Australia. He then returned to England to produce Jerzy Skolimowski's The Shout which won the Grand Prix de Jury at the Cannes Film Festival. In 1986 Jeremy produced Bernardo Bertolucci's epic, The Last Emperor, an independently financed project that was three years in the making. A commercial and critical triumph, the film swept the board at the 1987 Academy Awards, garnering an outstanding nine Oscars including 'Best Picture'. Since The Last Emperor, Thomas has completed many films including David Cronenberg's films of William S. Burroughs' Naked Lunch and J.G. Ballard's Crash. In 1997 he directed All The Little Animals, , which was in the official selection at the Cannes Film Festival. Other recent credits include Phillip Noyce's Rabbit-Proof Fence, and he is currently working on Richard Linklater's Fast Food Nation.

He was Chairman of the British Film Institute from August 1992 until December 1997 and has been the recipient of many awards throughout the world, including the Michael Balcon British Academy Achievement Award. He has been President of the jury at Tokyo, San Sebastian, Berlin Film Festival and Cannes (Un Certain Regard) and has also served on the main jury at Cannes. He was made a Life Fellow of the British Film Institute in 2000.

The Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in human resource issues. It works closely with employers in the manufacturing, service and public sectors, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For over 35 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets and human resource planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation which has over 60 multidisciplinary staff and international associates. IES expertise is available to all organisations through research, consultancy, publications and the Internet.

IES aims to help bring about sustainable improvements in employment policy and human resource management. IES achieves this by increasing the understanding and improving the practice of key decision makers in policy bodies and employing organisations.

UK Film Council

The UK Film Council was established by the government in 2000 as the lead agency for film in the UK ensuring that the economic, cultural and educational aspects of film are effectively represented at home and abroad. The Council supports:

- **Creativity** encouraging the development of new talent, skills and creative and technological innovation in UK film, and assisting new and established film makers to produce successful and distinctive British films.
- Enterprise supporting the creation and growth of sustainable businesses in the film sector, providing access to finance, and helping the UK film industry compete successfully in the domestic and global market place.
- Imagination promoting education, and an appreciation and enjoyment of cinema, by giving UK audiences access to the widest range of UK and international cinema, and by supporting film culture and heritage.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the individuals who shared their personal experiences and their views on the issues affecting women as screenwriters, through participating in interviews or responding to emails.

Screenwriters:

- Anthea Anke
- Nancy Boulicault
- Moira Buffini
- Crispin Cole
- Laurence Coriat
- Lucy Hay
- Olivia Hetreed
- Katy Segrove
- Peter Straughan
- Juliette Towhidi

Other key industry professionals:

- Jenne Casarotto (Partner, Casarotto Ramsay & Associates)
- Judy Counihan (Director of Film, Skillset)
- Julian Friedmann (Director of Film, Writers' Guild, and Partner at Blake Friedmann Literary Agency)
- Sophie Meyer (Head of Development, Fragile Films)
- Tessa Ross (Head of FilmFour)
- Jeremy Thomas (Producer, Recorded Picture Company)

We would also like to thank the many academics, researchers and lecturers who were contacted in relation to this research for their contributions and Josh Towb of The Script Factory for his help in contacting their members.

Our thanks also go to the members of the research steering group for their support and helpful comments: Marcia Williams, David Steele, Natalie Wreyford, and Niyi Akeju at the UK Film Council, and Susan Rogers from Royal Holloway, University of London and Women in Film and Television. Thanks too to Louisa Cousins of UK Film Council, Izzy Budd of HESA, Garry Broom of LSC, and Rachael Duke, Colleen Giles, Catherine

Godward, and Carrie Wootten at Skillset for their help with the data. Finally, thanks to Katherine Mann and Denise Hassany at IES for their help with the interviews and the report.