

WOMEN IN FILM AND TELEVISION ATLANTIC
Presentation by Sharon McGowan
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I am delighted and honoured to be here with you tonight to help celebrate the birth of Women in Film, Television Atlantic. This is a great adventure and, if your experience is like mine, it will be an adventure that you will find to be one of the most rewarding of your career.

In fact, in turning 50 recently (I know it's hard to believe), I was reviewing my will, and in discussing it with two other former presidents of the organization, discovered that we had all decided to leave some of our vast fortunes, such as they are, to Women in Film!

I promise you that building this organization will be incredibly hard work - but I also promise that you will work and bond with amazing people from all aspects of the industry. This just doesn't normally happen in other film industry organizations: transport coordinators normally just don't organize networking brunches with new media producers. And actors don't usually work with editors to set up tours of post production facilities.

And I promise you that you will find yourself doing things you never thought you would or could do. When we started I had never moderated a workshop or panel and had no interest in leading educational workshops – but at our first workshop series on producing, no one else was willing to lead the so-called “boring” sessions on investment or completion bonds. Now I'm an associate professor teaching classes of 75 on a regular basis. I blame Women in Film!

And I promise that you will find yourselves part of a much larger and deeper community than you ever thought possible. You will find yourselves at international markets or festivals talking to someone from Australia, or Sweden or any of the other 37 branches representing over 10,000 members around the world and the minute you discover you are both former board members or volunteers from women in film there will be an instant bond, the shared bond of those who have done “hard time”.

Of course, this can certainly happen in other industry organizations. But perhaps because of the passion we all have for our work and the relatively recent presence of women in any numbers in our industry, it has a special intensity and resonance.

Of course there were women in real numbers in key roles as directors, writers, editors and producers prior to the sound era, when it was a new, experimental and entrepreneurial era. Lois Weber was the highest paid director at Universal from 1912 to 1917 and was as famous as D.W. Griffith at the time. Frances Marion was the most prominent screenwriter then, writing scripts for Norma

Talmadge and Greta Garbo. Canadian director Nell Shipman wrote, directed and starred in several feature films and ran her own production company as did fellow Canadian Mary Pickford.

However, in the 20s and 30s once the movie business became a major economic force and was no longer fresh, new and open to innovation, women were elbowed out and slowly excluded from the corridors of power. They remained in the background in children's films, animation and educational documentaries and did not re-emerge as key players in the mainstream media again until the 1970s.

It was out of this re-emergence that Women in Film was born in 1973 in Los Angeles. The late Tichi Wilkerson Kassel, publisher of The Hollywood Reporter, gathered together a group of women for a "brown bag lunch" in her office in Hollywood. So many women attended, with their sandwiches in the proverbial brown paper bags, that many had to sit on the floor.

The women, mainly producers and writers, discussed the state of women in "the Business", and made plans to increase awareness of the contributions of women to the film and television industries. They said they were tired of men receiving all the credit for accomplishments in the "Biz" and weren't going to be quiet about the endeavours of women anymore. The men had the "good old boy" network – it was time for women to form their own. Thus, Women in Film was born in Los Angeles in 1973.

Soon after, Atlanta followed with their own Women in Film chapter. Then New York, the UK and Canadian chapters in Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto and then Ireland, Germany, France, South Africa, Jamaica, and Nigeria.

This past Saturday, Women in Film and Television Vancouver celebrated our 20th Anniversary. Like the LA Chapter, WIFTV started with a small brown bag series of evening screenings hosted by NFB producer Jennifer Torrance in the mid 1980s. Eventually this group heard about the LA Chapter of Women in Film and some board members from there came to visit. They advised us on how to set up our own branch of Women in Film.

A meeting was scheduled in a large meeting room used by the film industry above the Rent a Wreck car rental company downtown. The call went out and over 200 women from all aspects of the industry showed up, standing against the walls and spilling out onto the parking lot outside. It was exciting and thrilling and we all still talk about it!

Women in Film and Television Vancouver now has a membership of 450, and on Saturday over 250 people attended the sold out Spotlight Awards which mark our anniversary. Many of the women receiving awards and in the audience were founding board members -- and many more were the dedicated board members who came after us.

In the presentations and, more importantly, in the spirit of the evening, I saw that in spite of the years that have passed (and the miraculous thing that none of us has aged at all) -- we are all more committed than ever to creating through our film and television work - a world that is inclusive and respectful of women and we remain committed to building and improving the industry that we all love and, in spite of it all, feel grateful to have found our way into.

The evening was hosted by actor Molly Parker, who had flown herself up from LA to be there with us. Molly kicked off the evening by saying that when she started in the industry with her first major role on the feature film, Kissed, by writer/director Lynne Stopkewich, she had thought her career would continue to be like this – creative projects with wonderful women as well as men directors.

However, one of the reasons she had decided to come and host the evening, was that in the 12 years since Kissed, she has worked on a total of over 95 projects including TV episodes. Only 15 of these were written by women and just 6 were directed by women. Not one was shot by a woman. Women have come a long ways, Molly said, but not anywhere near far enough.

So, how far have we come?

In 1988, Women in Film and Television Toronto completed a groundbreaking statistical profile of women in the Canadian film and television industry. This profile revealed that while women had made significant inroads into the industry since the 1970s they only made up 34% of the workforce and they were largely confined to traditionally female areas such as script supervisors, make-up and hair, wardrobe, secretarial, bookkeeping and assistants to the art department.

In these positions, women were also paid less than the men working with them. And, they were not well represented in the influential creative and well paid positions. Less than 14% were producers, directors, writers or editors. In television, women directors commanded projects of less than 7% of the total money invested.

In our recent study of women's participation in the film and television industry in British Columbia (conducted through Service Canada and the BC Institute of Film Professionals), we gathered a snapshot of how things have changed or not for women in the key creative positions since 1988.

First the good news...

Most encouragingly, in British Columbia between 2002-2006 at the NFB, Arts Councils and Rogers Documentary Fund, women directors, writers and producers secured approx. 45% or more of the funding.

The numbers from the Canadian Television Fund regarding TV production in BC during the same period were also encouraging. 45% of the projects funded had female producers, 37% had female directors and 39% had female writers. 35% of funds went to projects with a female producer. The lower number of funds at 35% compared to the higher percentage of female producers (45%) reflects the fact that women were still working on smaller budgets than male producers.

The Gemini Awards, an indicator of the national picture were a little less encouraging, but still promising. In the producer category, women secured 35% of the nominations, in the director category it dropped to 25%.

These figures also correspond to recent statistics gathered in the US. Dr. Martha Lauzon, Professor at San Diego State University in her annual report on the status of women on US television, Boxed In: Women on Screen and Behind the Scenes in the 2007-08 Prime Time Season, revealed that:

Overall, women fared best as producers (37%), followed by writers (23% - 12 points lower than the previous year), creators (22%), executive producers (22%), editors (17%), directors (11%), and directors of photography (1% - a decline of 2 points from the previous season).

It appears women have not yet achieved equity but they have made great strides in television in the key creative positions in both Canada and the US.

How far have we come in the key creative positions on feature films? Now the bad news...

The 1988 Women in Film Toronto report identified that Telefilm investment in feature films directed by women in English Canada was less than 19%. Women producers received 9% of the funding.

In our recent BC study we discovered that of 27 independent feature films produced in British Columbia from 2002-2006, women producers represented 49% - an awesome jump. However, directors represented only 11%, just a 2% jump. And editors represented just 11%, writers 7% and there were 0% of Directors of Photography.

To capture a sense of the national picture, I analyzed Telefilms' 2008 April announcement of English language feature films funded. I found that on the projects funded, women producers represented 31%, directors 27% and writers 19%. Projects led by women directors proportionally secured just 4.4 million (27%) dollars compared to 11.84 million dollars by male directors.

This low representation of women directors and writers in feature filmmaking is also reflected in script development funding decisions. In the October 2007 report

of 93 English language screenplays funded by Telefilms that I analyzed– just 22% were written by women.

At the Genie Awards over 02-06, just 20% of the Best Director nominations were women and 23% of Best Motion Picture (producer nominations) went to women.

In 2008 women directors represented just 26% of films at the Atlantic Festival, 18% at the Toronto International Film Festival, 22% at the Vancouver International Film Festival, 23% at the Montreal World Film Festival, and 34% at the Hot Docs Film Festival.

For women's participation rates in feature films in the US we refer again to Dr. Martha Lauzon of San Diego State University and her state of the nation report on women in feature films, [The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind the Scenes Employment of Women in the top 250 Films of 2007.](#)

Women accounted for 6% of directors on the Top 250 Films in 2007. This is almost half the percentage of women directors working in 2000 when women accounted for 11% of all directors. Women accounted for 10% of writers, 22% of producers, 17% of editors, and 2% of DOPS.

It is clear that there is much work to be done to increase the numbers of women represented in key creative positions, particularly directing, writing, editing and photography in feature filmmaking.

How have we done in the unionized and technical areas?

The BC research report in 2006 also took an in-depth look at women's participation in the unionized labour sector. BC's unionized sector represents the largest number of workers and the highest proportion of production employment (mainly non-Canadian service productions).

The research revealed that:

- 1) The participation rate of women was 32% in the unionized sector, far lower than the rate of employment of women in BC (47%).
- 2) Within the union labour force approximately 32% of members are female and 68% are male.
- 3) The participation rate of women in entry level (permittee) positions in the largest union (IATSE 891) was less than 25%.
- 4) When each department was analyzed, Women film professionals are seriously under-represented not only in certain occupations, but

particularly at the highest levels of those occupations (i.e. some female camera assistants, but fewer DOPs).

- 5) Women film professionals are highly trained in proportion to their numbers in the industry. Women account for 40% or higher of film students, yet account for only 32% of participants in the labour force.
- 6) Women film professionals represent only 22% of members on elected boards in labour unions and guilds.

Specifically:

Women are significantly over represented in wardrobe (89%), production office (83%), make up (82%), hair (72%), publicity (94%), craft service and first aid (64%), script continuity (96%), and accounting (84%).

Occupations where participation was more evenly balanced included production managers (42%), 2nd and 3rd Ads (46%), art department (44%), editors (41%), props (35%), set decoration (42%) and principal actors and extras (39%).

In many occupations or departments, women are significantly underrepresented: departments with low participation rates for women include special effects (4%), sound (10%), lighting(3%), grip (4%), construction (5%), greens (14%) director (10%), 1st Assistant director (26%), stunt performer (24%), transportation (3%), security (6%), director of photography (3%).

With a quick glance this week, I found it appears the picture is somewhat similar in Atlantic Canada.

In the DGC Atlantic memberships women represent 18% of directors, 16% of picture editors, 50% of First Ads, and 55% of production managers.

In IATSE 667 (camera union), 3% of the directors of photography are women.

In IATSE 849 (technicians union), women are 3% of lighting, 1-6% of the grips depending on the gender of various names, 38% of set dec, and 100% of script supervisors.

It appears that here in the unionized sector, there is also much work to be done before women achieve equity.

Why are we not equal yet?

In working on all the committees that have put together this research and information, I found myself, along with other people in the industry wondering

why things aren't better. Why isn't gender inequity fixed so that we can get on with just doing our work? The answers are complicated.

Those of us over a certain age remember the days of blatant sexism that blocked women from this industry. Women just were not hired for certain jobs, and that was it. In the 1970s my broadcasting teacher told me I had better learn to work behind the scenes, because women announcers would never be accepted by the public. When I began to work in the industry, sexual harassment was frequent and accepted.

Much of this blatant sexism in Canada has decreased because of federal and provincial laws against discrimination, and a CRTC ruling that required broadcasters to put female presenters on the air transformed the airwaves. Legislation against sexual harassment greatly improved the working environment.

However, according to those who study this kind of thing, we are now in an era of *subtle sexism*—or gender bias, where bias against women and their abilities flourishes in small, unspoken ways that are accepted in institutions and society.

Subtle sexism may appear subtle but it has a profound effect. In the United Nations index for overall human development, Canada placed 4th in the world in 2006. When gender disparities were taken into consideration, Canada slid to 83rd of 136 countries.

In addition to being difficult to identify, since we are immersed in it as a society, subtle sexism has the unusual twist of favouring women in terms of perception of their abilities.

In a 1992 study by T.H. Shore of subtle sexism in the assessment of managerial potential, female job performance was rated by women and men consistently higher than male performance. However, when it came to making decisions about promotion or advancement for those same employees, the males—even though they rated lower—were deemed more suitable for promotion or advancement by both women and men.

The study concluded that subtle sexism is not the result of some organized plot of men against women. It is simply a result of the way both sexes are acculturated to think certain things about women.

How else to explain why, at the Hot Docs forum I attended four years ago, of the 31 projects being pitched (which meant they already had some broadcaster commitments) only 9 (29%) were directed by women and only 1 of the 31 featured a story about a female character? Yet when I brought this up to many people, including other attendees and the organizers, no one had noticed.

And how else to explain that last week in Quebec, SODEC, the provincial funding agency, announced proudly they were supporting, in conjunction with Telefilm Canada, a group of 9 feature films that “demonstrated a remarkable diversity”—yet not one of these was directed by a woman and no one appears to have noticed.

At least they didn't notice until a recent open letter from the director's association made the situation public and newspapers last week picked up the story, igniting a storm of controversy.

What can we do about it?

In Vancouver, we have decided that we need to continue the good work of education, professional development, networking and the celebration of women's accomplishments that Women in Film and Television has been doing for all these years. This has yielded great results and has helped the industry as well as women move forward.

But Women in Film and Television Vancouver has decided that we also need to put significant energy into lobbying for lasting structural changes that will ensure equity for women at all levels of the industry – both in job opportunities and a fair share of the funding. There isn't an industry organization in this country that doesn't spend a good third to half of its energy lobbying and making its point of view heard in every forum. We have been negligent on this front but not anymore.

To help generate the next wave of change, WIFTV have started an Advocacy Committee and will be working with sister branches across Canada, the Status of Women Canada, Heritage Canada and the CRTC, as well as our provincial and national industry lobbying organizations such as the Motion Picture Production Industry Association and the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association. Working together, we will begin asking some hard questions and looking for solutions.

We will be asking why, in the light of the low numbers we've reviewed, none of the many government agencies, and government-subsidized broadcasters responsible for granting billions in taxpayer money to film projects over the last decade has a transparent gender equity policy or gender equity monitoring process or has developed programs to identify and overcome barriers to gender equity?

Why aren't Telefilm Canada and other agencies required to report annually to Status of Women Canada? Telefilm is required to report to Multiculturalism Canada.

And why can't these agencies establish gender equity policies and programs similar to those initiated by Scottish Screen and others that are appearing around the world in relation to public funding and gender equity in screen-based media?

And why can't broadcasters supported by public money put in place policies and programs to ensure gender equity similar to those developed in the U.K. by the BBC around creating diversity within the industry?

And why isn't there a gender breakdown on the enormous sums of tax credits issued in this country? Tax credits now represent the lion's share of public subsidy to the film and television industry and yet allocation by gender is not even monitored. As someone who has filed for various tax credits, and the extraordinary amount of documentation that goes along with this, I can't believe it such a thing would be difficult to generate.

And why can't incentives be created through the tax credits to reward companies for hiring women in all positions, both above and below the line? Such incentives already exist in the form of regional tax credit bonuses for companies shooting outside of metropolitan areas or for companies providing training positions for new filmmakers.

And these ideas are recession-proof. They don't ask for more money, just an equitable piece of the pie.

There is support for such activities from the highest levels of the Canadian government. In their official response to the 2006 Status of Women Report tabled in the House of Commons, the federal government, represented by Member of Parliament Bev Oda, committed to *"ensure the completion of a thorough analysis of proposed policies and programs, including the application of Gender Based Analysis and the inclusion of gender considerations."*

This means to me that these agencies and programs should be doing the things we are asking.

We feel it is time to make good on this promise and in Vancouver we see it as our mission to help make this happen.

We've found that as we've begun focusing on these kinds of issues, we have begun to attract more senior level industry women back to active involvement with WIFTV. The added advocacy focus seems to be revitalizing our organization and its membership. Four past presidents are now serving on the board and several others have become extremely active on a Task Force advising the board and supporting their efforts.

This direction may not be where your newly formed WIFTA would prefer to focus its energies. Every chapter is very different, focusing on different projects and

goals depending on the needs of the women in the area and the needs of the industry. Whatever you decide to do, we will be happy to support you!

You are forming at a terrifically challenging time with the US economy and following it, the Canadian economy in crisis and the rapid pace of change in every level of the industry due to digital technologies. But this means it is also at a time of great opportunity to participate in guiding responses to these changes and to ensure that your concerns and vision for the future of women in this industry are included.

Thank you for inviting me to this important evening and congratulations!