

Institution: University of Southampton		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: 27-03 Calling the Shots: pushing for gender equality in the British film industry		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 – 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Shelley Cobb Prof Linda Ruth Williams Dr Natalie Wreyford	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor Professor Research Fellow	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: April 2008 – present January 1994 – September 2017 September 2015 – August 2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: May 2016 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research at the University of Southampton into the numbers of women working in the British film industry and the collection of their career stories injected quantitative and qualitative evidence into debates about equality and diversity in the screen industries. It engaged the film industry through related public institutions and organisations, working professionals, filmmaking educators and film production students. This work increased awareness of the reality of gender inequality and its intersection with ethnicity within the industry, facilitated discussion of these issues, and advocated for and contributed to policy change. Key outcomes included the use of the project data by the British Film Institute (BFI) as evidence and support for new equality and diversity policies. The research helped many individual filmmakers to make the case for tackling gender inequality in their own roles and to influence others in this highly collaborative industry. Media attention to the project increased the public visibility of these issues, tying them to wider debates about equality while challenging the cinema and film-loving public to recognise the barriers facing women filmmakers and to think of ways they might better support them.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research largely emerged from the AHRC-funded project '<i>Calling the Shots: women and contemporary film culture in the UK, 2000-2015</i>' (£589,710.31, September 2014 – August 2018), of which Dr Shelley Cobb was the Principal Investigator. The project produced two main strands of primary research: data collection of the numbers of women working in six key production roles (director, writer, producer, exec-producer, cinematographer, and editor) on all British qualifying films from 2003 to 2015; and a set of recorded interviews with women filmmakers working on UK films.</p> <p>Though women's film authorship had been a key issue for early feminist film studies and theory, interest in this area had waned due to academic developments in gender studies and a cultural backlash to feminism. Cobb's book <i>Adaptation, Authorship and Contemporary Women Filmmakers</i> was an early contributor to the resurgence in research on women and film authorship in the contemporary period [3.1]. Cobb's research argues for the feminist significance of films made by women, whether those films are explicitly feminist in their politics or not, in an industry where male directors dominate (and consequently reap the critical and/or commercial benefits of their advantage) [3.1 & 3.4]. The gender imbalance in the industry is replicated in the scholarly film canon, film history, and film studies' methodological approaches to film production and reception, as Cobb's research regularly shows [3.1, 3.2, 3.3 & 3.4].</p> <p>The reality of gender bias in these two contexts – where very few women get to make films and then those that do are largely left out of canonical film histories – were the impetus for 'Calling the Shots'. An initial version of the project that collected gender data on British films for the years 2009-2010, funded by the University of Southampton, showed that gender inequality in the UK industry was indeed a problem: fewer than 20% of key filmmaking roles were held by women [3.6].</p> <p>The first data report made publicly available was published in May 2016. It is a detailed account of the exclusion of women in the British film industry. Of all the films in production during 2015, 25% had no women in any of the six roles, and women made up only 20% of all the workers in those roles for that year. Women producers are the largest group at only 27%. Screenwriters were 20% women, editors were 17% women, directors were 13% women and</p>		

cinematographers were only 7% women. The report also showed BAME women were doubly discriminated against, as they accounted for only 1-2% of each role, except for cinematographers where there were *no* BAME women [3.2 & 3.6]. Eight additional reports have been completed [3.7]. The report on BAME women shows that 90% of all British films in a four-year period had no women of colour in any key role. The research comparing films with small budgets (<£0.5m) versus those with high budgets (>£30m) shows a tendency for numbers of women to decrease as budgets increase; not one film in the higher budget category had a woman cinematographer. In the context of Brexit, the research shows that co-productions (films funded by both the UK and at least one other nation) have more than twice as many women directors than all domestic and inward investment (usually US-funded) films. Two reports were shared at the 2018 Cannes film festival. One showed that, effectively, no improvement in gender inequality had been made between the years 2003 and 2015. The other gave a comparison of our data with data on American films and clearly showed that the British film industry is not any better at gender equality than Hollywood [3.6]. All of Cobb's and Calling the Shots' research makes it undeniably clear that women are widely and consistently excluded from key creative roles in the British film industry.

The research team interviewed 59 women working in the six key creative roles in the datasets. The qualitative research in the interviews adds detail to the macro-view of the quantitative research [3.2]. They offer evidence of the gendered barriers individuals have experienced, from sexual harassment, to loss of job while pregnant, to inappropriate questions about childcare, to comments about not needing any more women or persons of colour [3.3 & 3.5]. Alongside the quantitative data, the oral histories offer evidence of success and women's ideas about how to combat sexism in the UK film industry, which include on-set crèches, budget line-items for childcare, having a female producer lead hiring and more [3.3]. Collectively, the interviews help to correct the bias toward men in scholarly film history and offer an example of an alternative methodology for researching and understanding women's film authorship [3.3]. These oral histories of women filmmakers construct a detailed account of the significance of women's work and experiences in twenty-first-century British filmmaking. The interviews will be housed in perpetuity in the British Entertainment History Project (upon deposit in late 2021), run by the British Broadcasting Entertainment Communications and Theatre Union (BECTU). The addition of the interviews will increase the numbers of women in the UK's largest collection of oral histories with professionals in the film and television industries from 17% to 25%.

3. References to the research

3.1 Cobb, Shelley (2015) *Adaptation, Authorship and Contemporary Women Filmmakers* London: Palgrave Macmillan. Listed in REF2.

3.2 Wreyford, Natalie and Shelley Cobb (2017) 'Data and Responsibility: Towards a Feminist Methodology for Producing Historical Data in the Contemporary UK Film Industry', *Feminist Media Histories*, vol. 3, no. 3. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2017.3.3.107>

3.3 Cobb, Shelley and Linda Ruth Williams (2020) 'Histories of Now: Listening to Women in British Film', *Women's History Review*, vol. 29, no. 5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2019.1703542>

3.4 Cobb, Shelley (2020) 'Gender Equality, Data Collection and Diversity in British Film', *Journal of British Film and Television*, vol. 17, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.3366/jbctv.2020.0510>

3.5 Cobb, Shelley and Natalie Wreyford (forthcoming March 2021) 'Black Women in British Film Production', *Black British Cinema*, eds. Clive Nwonka and Anamik Saha (Boston: MIT Press). Available on request.

3.6 All reports can be found at: <https://womencallingtheshots.com/reports-and-publications/>. All are co-authored by Shelley Cobb, Linda Ruth Williams, and Natalie Wreyford.

Grants

AHRC Research Grant 'Calling the Shots: women and contemporary film culture in the UK, 2000-2015' (£589,710.31) September 2014 – August 2018

4. Details of the impact

a) Influencing British Film Policy

'Calling the Shots' (CtS) has sought to engage the British Film industry with the findings of the project from its inception. Indeed, the British Film Institute and Women in Film and Television – UK, were key project partners throughout.

The publication of the project datasets raised awareness of continuing inequalities and facilitated discussion of these within the industry. The launch of our first dataset at **BFI Southbank** in May 2016, was open to the public and invitations were sent to 30 key industry executives, producers, filmmakers, guild leaders, union leaders and activists. CtS first presented their data on gender behind the scenes on British films made in 2015 and then had five special guests respond, ending with an open Q&A. The panel guests were: Lizzie Francke of the BFI Film Fund, producer Sarah Curtis (*Mrs. Brown, Run Fat Boy Run*), director Hope Dickson Leach (BFI-funded *The Levelling*), critic and Bechdel Test Fest founder Corrinna Antrobus, Kate Kinninmont, CEO of WFTV-UK and director Gurinder Chadha (*Bend It Like Beckham*). Attendees included: Amanda Neville, CEO of the BFI; Robbie Allen, Senior Screen Exec for Creative Scotland; Celine Haddad, Head of Creative England; Nichola Martin, BBC Films Development Exec., Iain Softely, chair of Directors UK; Eva Yates, Film 4 commissioning executive. Audience members were asked the question *how did the event change your views about women working in film?* Responses included: 'I don't feel so isolated in the struggles'; 'It has reinforced my feelings that there may be hope but that change is too slow'; 'Views not changed but enthused by the energy and the useful ways to make change'; 'I think I've become used to being the only one or one of the only women on shoots, so in a way I didn't understand just how unequal the stats are. It just makes me more determined'; 'It was very enlightening. I appreciated the depth of discussion'. The data shared at this event was reported in *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Screen International*, *The Telegraph*, and *Sight and Sound* [5.1]. Three days after this event, a *Guardian* article written by BFI Film Fund director, Ben Roberts, was published in which he directly quoted the data from CtS and then wrote, 'When statistics this stark are published, action is needed' [5.2].

However, Head of Diversity Jennifer Smith and Inclusion Executive Melanie Hoyes note in their testimonial, 'there is some aversion to EDI [Equality Diversity and Inclusion] targets in film funding throughout the industry' [5.4]. Targets are not easily implemented as there is debate as to their legality under the 2010 Equality Act. As such, the BFI Diversity and Inclusion office had to persuade the institute's executives and lawyers of the need for and value of a target policy. The research from CtS was instrumental in achieving this, as they testify: 'The Inclusion division has used Cobb's research...to support changes we have made to increase gender equality and diversity in behind-the-scenes roles for films funded by the Institute...Cobb's research helped us make our case that [EDI targets] are an important way to begin to rectify longstanding and severe underrepresentation in the film industry' [5.4]. In 2018, Ben Roberts announced the BFI's new gender and diversity targets for directors, writers, and producers of films supported by their Film Fund. These targets included a 50-50 gender balance in supported filmmakers, 20% target for BAME filmmakers, 9% target for LGBTQ-identifying filmmakers, 7% target for filmmakers with a disability. These were underpinned by a commitment to monitor and report decisions annually across the writers, directors and producers of supported projects in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability [5.3]. CtS research was instrumental in making this new policy a reality and 'has been a game changer after years of trying to get execs and leaders in the industry to see that the British film industry has a gender problem (Kate Kinninmont, CEO of WFTV-UK) [5.7].

b) Affecting Change in the Wider Industry

The impact of CtS research on the BFI's gender equality and diversity targets has been reinforced by work with other film industry-related organizations and individual filmmakers. Project partner, **Women in Film and Television UK**, has used CtS research to influence key decision-makers in the British film industry. In May 2018, the CtS team presented new data at **Cannes Film Festival** networking events hosted by WFTV-UK. At their luncheon event for independent women film producers based in the UK, on one of Cannes' famed yachts, the team presented evidence that: a) women work in significantly higher proportions on co-production British films than on domestic ones, and b) the proportion of women producers reached over 40% on films with a budget of less than £0.5million, significantly higher than the 27% of women producers on all British films. Women producers have recounted that these reports made them newly aware that they were not 50% of the workforce as they had thought, and that there were still barriers to work on bigger-budget films [5.5]. The CtS team also shared with them data that shows that when a woman producer is on a film from the beginning, that film is more likely to

have a woman director, writer, editor and cinematographer than a film with only men producers. After both the BFI and Cannes events, women producers and directors reported that this research has encouraged them to seek out other women to fulfil key creative roles on their projects. Sarah Curtis, producer of films like *Mansfield Park* (1991) and *Ophelia* (2018) attests that CtS's 'shocking figures on BAME representation gave me real pause for thought and forced me to question whether I had done and was doing enough to seek out employees from underrepresented groups. I will be actively addressing this on my next production' [5.5]. Hope Dickson Leach, writer-director of *The Levelling* (2016) says that 'I often feel responsible for hiring women in HOD roles, and this report made me see why doing that is so essential'. Furthermore, she says the report empowered her to challenge others and to 'speak out on why men need to hire women – as we alone can't shift the numbers' [5.6].

The second event at Cannes hosted by WFTV-UK was the evening networking social in the British industry tent, at which the team presented their data comparing the UK industry with Hollywood. Tickets sold out before the festival started. The CtS team presented their research showing that the UK industry fails at including women just like Hollywood does. They demonstrated with their data that the percentage of women in British filmmaking is either lower or higher by only a few points than in the bigger-budget films made across the Atlantic. Kate Kinninmont, CEO of WFTV-UK, in her testimonial says 'Their hard data broke a myth...that UK filmmaking must be better at equality, inclusion and diversity than Hollywood and it opened the eyes of many influential industry insiders who expressed their astonishment at the figures and their desire to make our industry better' [5.7]. News outlets from across the British Isles ran stories on these reports, including *The Glasgow Herald*, *The Belfast Telegraph*, *Itv.com*, the *Independent.IE.* and *The Evening Express* [5.8]

CtS also held three events geared toward film production students to get them thinking about equality and diversity before entering the industry. At the University of Winchester (Feb 2016), Cobb presented the datasets and clips from the interviews discussing their career progression to film production students. These were followed by a film screening and discussion with Kate Kinninmont (CEO of WFTV-UK) and Rebecca Brand (director of *Credible*, *Likeable*, *Superstar*, *Role Model*). This event resulted in young women seeing women filmmakers as effecting change: 'This film has shown me that people are doing something and I feel more hopeful', 'also realising how filmmaking is so effective in presenting a message', 'the talk was inspiring and made me want to go further and change the industry', 'I feel so much more inspired to go forward and pursue a career'. Cobb and Williams gave a presentation at the London Film School (Mar 2019) that elicited students' ideas on how to change the industry: 'identify films that make an effort to include women', 'policy level changes and regulations', 'quotas and grassroots initiatives', 'a rebate for films with women directors'. The final event at London College of Communication (Apr 2019) asked the students to think about what are 'the biggest reasons for inequality'? They said: 'sticking to what's comfortable', 'internalised sexism', 'women are not seen as strong, intelligent, as capable as men', 'men don't fight for change because it benefits them'. And their responses, to 'what other kinds of information would you like' was repeatedly a version of 'data on different countries' or of more data on other marginalised identities (e.g. trans-persons, sexuality, disability) suggesting that the research got them thinking about how deep and wide the problem is. [5.9]

c) Shifting Public Opinion

CtS was a voice in public discussions at a time of increased focus on inequality in the UK, as well as US, European and other film industries. The launch of CtS's first data report at the BFI Southbank on 10 May 2016 was organised with the BFI's education department. The event was open to the public as well as industry workers, and the 100-capacity room sold out in two days. Attendees said: 'It reinforced my perceptions but with evidence', 'As an educationalist I am shocked by the endemic prejudice in the film industry'; 'All women's lives are negatively influenced by the lack of women filmmakers' [5.10]. Cobb published an article, 'Why research on women filmmakers matters to us all', for the widely-read *Women and Hollywood* site the day before the event, and media coverage (noted above) extended the reach of the published data and related discussions.

CtS also presented data at events tailored to cinema loving public audiences and aspiring professionals, both locally and nationally. These included a presentation of our initial data and interviews at University of Southampton's Intl Women's week (Mar 2015); a life-long learning day

at the University of Southampton on Women and British Cinema; as well as members of the public who attended the events at the University of Winchester and the BFI. Feedback (150 respondents) across these events shows that 94% of respondents rated the event either 5 or 4 (where 5 = 'excellent') and 94% said the event made them want to watch more films by women. The events were particularly good at changing the public's perception of gender inequality in filmmaking. They commented: "The numbers are even more dire than expected. It makes me respect women's dedication even more"; "I'm shocked by the endemic prejudice that exists in the film industry"; "I knew it was a small amount, but never such low numbers. The gender divide in terms of treatment is most perturbing"; "Statistics are an eye-opener. [I am] shocked at how bad it is"; "This has made me realise the importance of supporting women filmmakers in ways I had not thought of before." [5.10]

d) Advocating Industry Reform

CtS has not only sought to influence change in the industry but also to advocate for reforming it. The research has been used by other groups to pressure the industry to alter its work culture to improve EDI, and Cobb receives regular requests for her expertise. Hope Dickson Leach testifies that 'as a co-founder of campaigning community Raising Films, the data and research provided in the report has been essential in shaping our approach and making our case for changing the support available for parent and carer filmmakers (most of whom are women). It also showed us how crucial data and analysis is in making change' [5.6]. Cobb has become a member of the Media Reform Coalition upon request of the group's representative for the British Entertainment Cinematographic and Theatre Union to broaden their scope beyond news and current events. The CtS data reports were used in an evidence review on the issue of equality and diversity submitted to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport by Dr Dave O'Brien after a call for consultation on the effects of COVID lockdown and restrictions on the film and television industry. COVID restrictions are an ongoing issue for the industry, and Cobb and Wreyford were commissioned by the Film and TV Charity to write a report detailing evidence of the impact of COVID on the film and television workforce to help them develop their COVID-19 Recovery Fund that distributed £2million. CtS data was at the heart of the report, which the CEO says 'help[ed] us understand the intersectional interplay of different axes of marginalisation in the industry...and has enabled us to design a fund which will support people most likely to suffer the negative impact of the crisis on their careers'. [5.11]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Media report on dataset launch May 2016, including: *The Guardian* (10 May 2016), *The Independent* (10 May 2016), *Screen International* (10 May 2016), *The Telegraph* (29 July 2016), *Sight and Sound* (updated 22 June 2018).

5.2 Roberts, Ben. (May 2015) 'Female Film Directors Must Get Equal Funding – But They Mustn't Be All White', *Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2016/may/13/female-film-directors-must-get-equal-funding-but-they-mustnt-all-be-white>

5.3 Roberts, Ben (11 October 2017), 'How and why we're changing the film fund', *BFI Network News*, 11 October: <https://network.bfi.org.uk/news-and-features/industry-insights/bfi-s-ben-roberts-how-and-why-we-re-changing-film-fund>

5.4 Testimonial letter from BFI, Head of Diversity Jennifer Smith and Inclusion Executive Melanie Hoyes (project partner).

5.5 Testimonial letter from producer Sarah Curtis (*Mrs. Brown*, *Run Fat Boy Run*).

5.6 Testimonial letter from director Hope Dickson Leach (award-winning, BFI-funded, *The Levelling* and founding member of Raising Films).

5.7 Testimonial letter from Kate Kinninmont, MBE (former CEO of WFTV-UK).

5.8 Cannes media report 2018: *Herald* [Glasgow, Scotland] (14 May 2016), *Herald* [Glasgow, Scotland] (16 May 2018), *Belfast Telegraph Online* (15 May 2018), *ITV.com* (16 May 2018), *Independent* (15 May 2018), *Evening Express* (16 May 2018).

5.9 Collated feedback from student facing events.

5.10 Collated feedback from public events.

5.11 Testimonial letter from Rachel Hillman, Director of Grants and Programmes, Film and TV Charity.